

On the origin of VO in Berbice Dutch Creole

Ever since the introduction of Bickertons language bioprogram (Bickerton 1981, 1984) creole studies are guided by the question of to what extent creole languages reflect UG default settings and to what extent they reflect properties of their mother languages. In this paper we will address one of the longest standing questions in creole studies: why is Guyanese creole language Berbice Dutch (BD, hereafter) a VO language, whereas both its substrate languages (Eastern Ijo languages, most notably Kalabari) and its superstrate (Dutch) are OV (see Robertson (1979, 1993), Kouwenberg (1992))? We will argue that the VO emergence in BD directly results from the grammatical structure of Kalabari and 17th century Dutch and therefore counts as an argument against the universalist claim that BD word order must result from a UG default setting. **2.** According to Muysken (1983: 886) BD provides: “[p]erhaps the strongest evidence thus far that the creole SVO order does not simply result from the contributing languages, but is typical of language genesis in general.” This view has been adopted by Roberts (1999) who applies this to the genesis of BD by arguing that BD, being a creole language, must be VO in spite of its OV environment. He takes thus BD, to show “just how marked” OV is, thereby aiming to support Kayne (1995)’s universal SVO hypothesis: even a creole language whose parent languages are all OV still exhibits VO. But the claim that all creole languages exhibit VO is too strong. Den Besten (2002) has shown that e.g. Cape Dutch, a Dutch-Khoekhoe based creole with only OV parent languages, has remained OV as well, thus providing a counter argument against Muysken’s generalization. **3.** However, also non-universalist accounts for BD’s VO status have been proposed. Kouwenberg (1992) rejects the universalist hypothesis and argues instead that BD is the result of a process of ‘linguistic negotiation’ i.e. the willingness of both sub- and superstrate speakers to compromise linguistically to advance intelligibility, which resulted in the adoption of structures speakers in this setting perceived as common to all contact languages. Since Dutch exhibited V2 patterns, leading to abundant SVO surface structures, and according to Kouwenberg Kalabari allowed auxiliary fronting, the new language should also be able to place the verb in a position preceding the object, and as a result of ‘linguistic negotiation’ BD then would become VO. But this analysis suffers from several problems. First, the assumption that Kalabari exhibits abundant superficial SVO is incorrect since what Kouwenberg takes to be finite verb movement in Kalabari, actually involves base generated TMA particles. Kouwenberg assumes that in strings such as (1) *ine* (‘be able’) is an auxiliary that moved from sentence final to the second position. However, a typical property of these elements is that they must be uninflected. Inflected Kalabari verbs may never occupy C° (Jenewari (1977)).

- (1) *ine ine ofunguru ba-aa* **Kalabari**
 3PL.S able rat.O kill-NEG ‘They can’t kill rats’

Also, the analysis that Dutch applies overwhelming surface SVO is at least doubtful (in spite of its main clause V-to-C property, causing SVO surface structures) as evidence for SOV is still massively present. Finally, Kouwenbergs reasoning does not provide an explanation for the fact that the Dutch shifted from SOV to a counter intuitive SVO. Knowing hierarchical relations on slave plantations, it is highly unlikely that the Dutch would not have disregarded SVO overgeneralizations as infantile jabbars of their primitive slaves, who were apparently unable to learn something as sophisticated as a European language. **4.** Lightfoot (2006) emphasizes the possibility that due to the tangle of the contact situation, proof for SOV was obscured and speakers’ input consisted solely of SVO evidence. To support this claim Lightfoot points to the postverbal position of the negative marker, a standard signpost for verbal movement (see (2)) (cf. Zeijlstra (2004)). In Kalabari however, the negative element is clitically attached to the verb, as shown in (3).

- (2) *ik zie_i het niet t_i* **Dutch**
 1SG.NOM see.1SG 3SG.N NEG ‘I don’t see it’

- (3) *i* *mu-φ=a?* **Kalabari**
 2SG go-FAC=NEG 'Didn't you go?'

Since BD adopted this feature from Kalabari, it obscured one instance of SOV evidence, as the negative particle no longer was capable of marking verbal movement. Thus, according to Lightfoot, BD contained less and less elements signalling Dutch underlying SOV structure, leading to an overgeneralization of SVO by both L1 and L2 Kalabari speakers learning Dutch. However, negation is only one of many signposts of underlying VO. Many other instances have remained: verbs with a separable particle and strings with more than one verb (both of which abundantly present in Dutch) leave clear V-traces, as do most adverbials, which outscope vP). It is highly unlikely for all of these instances to have been obscured (let alone instances of subordinate clauses, which are always SOV in Dutch). In addition, Lightfoot's proposal runs into the same difficulties as Kouwenbergs, in that it does not account for the Dutch adopting a counter intuitive SVO structure. **5.** In this paper we argue that despite the fact that the Dutch spoken on the plantations contained direct or indirect evidence for an underlying SOV structure, this did not trigger Kalabari speakers to analyze Dutch as an SOV language. This is mainly due to two causes: first, Kalabari, as discussed above, does not exhibit a V2 property, contrary to what has traditionally been assumed (all instances of what seems to be finite verbs in C° are actually TMA markers), causing these speakers to misinterpret their Dutch input and overgeneralize its surface SVO quality; second, until the 18th century Dutch allowed VO leakages of all kind (up to 30-40%), as recent data by Cloutier (2008: 44) have indicated. The downfall of VO leakages, a by-effect of the decline of Middle Dutch morphological case marking, did not end before the rise of BD. Now, BD VO status follows immediately: first Kalabari had no movement causing SVO in their native language. Since Kalabari had no way of recognizing the V2 property, they must have misinterpreted Dutch SVO surface strings and subsequently overgeneralized SVO to all sentence types. Additional input then, did not lead Kalabari speakers to reject their initial SVO hypothesis and adopt a more complex SOV+V2 hypothesis as the SVO overgeneralizations were in compliance with the existing Dutch VO leakages. The linguistic environment caused the Dutch to gradually increase their VO leakages, in turn confirming Kalabari's SVO hypothesis. This resolves the objections with regard to Lightfoot and Kouwenberg's analyses, namely why Dutch planters adopted counter intuitive SVO in depth orderings. This opened up the way for the next generation to interpret this linguistic input as SVO with exceptional leakage to SOV. With the loss of syntactic flexibility, finally, word order for BD was set on SVO.

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