

Poeticity and Word Order in Old Tamil

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Abstract

Scholars disagree regarding the basic word order of ancient Tamil, despite the availability of an impressive body of textual evidence extending back to the second century B.C. Some assert that the SOV order of Modern Tamil dates back to the earliest attested stages of the language, while others take the presence of "inverted" VS order in the oldest texts as evidence that the order of the principal parts of the Old Tamil sentence was relatively free. The problem centers on the authenticity of the textual evidence: Most is in verse and obeys conventions of poetic meter. How representative is the word order of Old Tamil verse of that of the standard colloquial language of the time?

In this chapter I analyze word order in Old Tamil texts dating from the second century B.C. to the sixth century A.D., controlling for genre. The analysis shows that word order is conditioned by the degree of poeticity of the text: verse texts in Old Tamil are less verb-final than prose texts, and of the verse texts, those whose purpose is primarily aesthetic show greater word-order variation than more informative genres such as epic narrative and treatises on grammar. A further result is that represented dialogue in verse epics, which exhibits independent properties of colloquial speech, is strongly verb-final. On the basis of these findings, I propose that verb-finality (specifically, SOV) was the norm in ancient standard colloquial Tamil, and that this norm was violated in poetry for aesthetic effect. Further support for the verb-finality of Old Tamil is adduced from the language's preference for head-final constituent order, from the predominance of SOV-compatible orders in finite clauses, and from the fact that subordinate clauses are invariably verb-final in texts of all types.

In addition to shedding empirical light on a central question in historical Tamil syntax, these findings illustrate the necessity of distinguishing among genres and between ordinary and poetic language more generally in analyzing the word order of older languages.

1. Introduction¹

Modern Tamil is often cited as a prototypical example of a strictly verb-final and harmoniously head-final language of Greenberg's (1966) Type XXIII.² However, the word order of Old Tamil is disputed. By Old Tamil, I refer to the language of the period dating from the earliest attested texts in Tamil script, around the second century B.C., through the Sangam or 'Classical' age ending around the sixth century A.D.³ This period, and especially the latter part of it, is often considered the "golden age" of Tamil literature and culture, and a large body of texts has been preserved which dates from this time.

Two conflicting claims have been made regarding word order in the earliest recorded stages of the Tamil language. The first is that Old Tamil, like modern Tamil and other modern Dravidian languages, had a basic word order of S(subject) O(object) V(verb). This claim is advanced explicitly by Zvelebil (1989a),⁴ as well as being implicit in the claim that Indo-Aryan languages spoken in the north of India have evolved to become more verb-final under the influence of Dravidian languages spoken in the south (Chatterjee 1926; Lehmann 1978; cf. Hock 1984).

In opposition to this is the claim that Old Tamil had "free" or variable word order. This position is advanced by Andronov (1991), who, citing a quantitative text-based study by Arunachalam (1967), claims that in second and third century texts, "the subject is found in postpredicate position two times oftener than in pre-predicate position" (93). Moreover,

"[p]oetic inversion alone cannot explain the frequency of the occurrence of the subject after the predicate" (Arunachalam 1967:473), most probably, this phenomenon should testify to a relatively free order of the principle parts of the sentence in the ancient language. (Andronov 1991:93)

Arunachalam's reference to "poetic inversion" alludes to the fact that the Sangam texts he analyzed, like most Old Tamil texts, were written in verse. His claims, if true, suggest that Tamil has evolved over time from a free to a rigid word order language.⁵

My goal in this chapter is to resolve the apparent paradox posed by the two conflicting claims, by analyzing Old Tamil word order in both poetic and prose texts, and in a variety of genres of poetic text, since verse was used for a wide range of communicative functions in the Sangam period. Specifically, I wish to determine the effects, if any, of genre on word order in Old Tamil, and if genre-based variation is found, to address its implications for the task of assigning a basic word order to the language as a whole. The results show that word order is conditioned by the poeticality of the text: verse texts in Old Tamil are less verb-final than prose texts, and of the verse texts, those whose purpose is primarily aesthetic show greater word-order variation than more informative genres such as treatises on grammar and epic narrative. On the basis of these findings and on distributional and syntactic evidence, I propose that SOV was the norm in Old Tamil, a norm that appears to have been conventionally violated in poetry for aesthetic effect.

The immediately following section lays the theoretical background for the study, defining key concepts from previous research on word order and word-order variation. Section 3 describes the Old Tamil texts analyzed in the present study, and the methods used to analyze them. Results of a frequency analysis are presented for finite clauses in §4.1 and for non-finite clauses in §4.2, and additional evidence in support of SOV order is adduced from the headedness of other syntactic phrase types in §4.3. The discussion then confronts the task of explaining deviation from SOV order in the text samples: the (pragmatic) effect of information status of postposed elements is evaluated in §5.1, and genre effects are considered in §5.2. Section 6 discusses the theoretical and methodological implications of genre-based word order variation, and §7 summarizes the results of the investigation.

2. Background

2.1 Basic Word Order

A central question guiding this research is what the basic word order of Old Tamil is, or indeed, if Old Tamil can be said to have had a basic word order at all. Basic word order is defined by Greenberg (1966:43) as "the relative order of subject, verb and object in declarative sentences with nominal subject and object"; Givón (1984:187) restricts the definition further to "main, declara-

tive, affirmative, active clauses". Beyond the obvious necessity of finding transitive clauses with overt subject and object arguments, Mithun (1987) lists the following criteria that have been proposed to identify the basic word order type of a language:

1. statistical frequency
2. pragmatic neutrality
3. grammatical unmarkedness
4. relative order within pairs
5. descriptive simplicity
6. the "ambiguity test"

According to the criterion of *statistical frequency*, the order that occurs most frequently in naturally-occurring text can be taken to be the basic order of the language (Hawkins 1983). This criterion raises the issue of what constitutes a representative sample of the language, and in particular, what types of text the sample should contain. If different text types have different word order tendencies (see §2.3 below), the nature of the corpus becomes critical. A further issue is how frequently an order must occur in order to qualify as the "dominant" (in Greenberg's terms) order. Languages undergoing word order change and languages which order O before S (Payne 1997) are two examples of cases where significant variation tends to be found; in such cases, even if one order predominates statistically, it may not be helpful to assign a basic word order to the language on this basis (Mithun 1987).

The second criterion, *pragmatic neutrality*, takes as basic the order of constituents in pragmatically unmarked clauses. Pullum (1977) has proposed that discourse-initial clauses are the most pragmatically neutral, in that they presuppose no preceding context. However, discourse-initial clauses are typically highly marked in other ways, as Mithun points out (for example, opening clauses in narrative often introduce a main participant by means of a special presentative construction that involves word order inversion; see Herring & Paolillo (1995) for examples of this phenomenon in Sinhala and Modern Tamil). A more discourse-sensitive definition has been proposed by Payne (1997), who suggests that the least pragmatically-marked clauses can be identified by eliminating, in addition to dependent, question, and negative clauses: 1) paragraph-initial clauses, 2) clauses that introduce participants, and 3) clearly contrastive clauses. Such pragmatically-marked clauses often tend to be grammatically marked as well, by means of specialized morphosyntax

(as for example in presentative and cleft constructions in many languages), and thus would also be eliminated according to the third criterion, *grammatical unmarkedness* (Hawkins 1983).

The criterion of *relative order within pairs* allows the analyst to infer the relative order of S, O, and V on the basis of paired orderings of S and V (e.g. in intransitive clauses) and O and V (e.g. in clauses with no explicit subject). This practice is often necessary given the scarcity of clauses containing two explicit arguments in naturally-occurring discourse, especially in informal speech (Du Bois 1987; Lambrecht 1981; Mithun 1987). Of course, considering only such pairs does not provide direct evidence of the relative order of S and O. However, as Payne notes, "most languages can be classified as 'verb-initial', 'verb-medial' or 'verb-final' even if the relative orders of [S] and [O] are indeterminate" (1997:77).

The final two criteria have been proposed in analyses of word order in the generative syntax tradition. McCawley (1970) proposed that the basic order is that which allows for the simplest overall syntactic description, or *descriptive simplicity*. More marked alternative orders can then be derived from the basic order by moving constituents out of their normal position; this is the assumption underlying the analysis of "right-dislocation" and "left-dislocation" as formal syntactic operations. Mithun credits Chomsky (1965) with devising the *ambiguity test* as a means for determining unmarked constituent structure. According to this test, the word order preferred by native speakers in potentially ambiguous sentences is taken to be basic. Of course, this latter diagnostic is of limited use in analyzing an ancient language which has no living speakers to supply native intuitions. However, the other five criteria will be brought to bear to varying degrees in attempting to determine the basic word order of Old Tamil.

For typologically-oriented linguists, the identification of a language's basic word order has predictive as well as descriptive utility. According to Greenberg's (1966) implicational universals, main clause constituent order, and especially the relative order of O and V, tends to correlate with constituent order in other phrase types, as well as with the placement of question particles, question words and bound affixes. While such correlations are far from absolute, languages tend to gravitate toward one or the other of two harmonious types in which the head element in all phrases is either initial, or final.⁶ Thus a harmonious language of the OV type has postpositions, orders possessors before possessed nouns, adjectives and relative clauses before their head

nouns, and auxiliaries after semantically main verbs — all head-final characteristics. Such a language, if it is consistent or harmonious in its head-finality, also places question particles sentence-finally, question words (WH-words) sentence-initially or elsewhere, and makes use of suffixes rather than prefixes (Greenberg 1966). Correlational tendencies of this sort may be used to infer the relative order of O and V when the latter is not readily apparent, as will be argued for Old Tamil in §4.3 below.

Despite its proven utility for a number of languages, the notion of a basic word order based on syntactic relations has come under criticism for allegedly incorporating an Indo-European bias. Not all languages have grammatical categories of subject and object: Some organize case distinctions in terms of agent and patient, and others code ergativity by isolating the transitive subject and grouping together transitive objects and intransitive subjects in an absolutive category. Payne (1997) further raises the possibility that the placement of nominals in some languages may not code argument relations at all, but rather pragmatic or semantic distinctions such as definiteness/indefiniteness, given/new, animate/inanimate, abstract/concrete, big/small, etc.

Difficulties also arise in identifying a basic order in some non-Indo-European languages which appear to allow free placement of elements in the clause. Payne (1997) suggests that this may be the case for fully 15% of the world's languages, i.e. those that are left over after SVO, SOV and VSO languages are taken into account. (Note that what the remaining — VOS, OVS, OSV — types have in common is that O precedes S.) Thus Mithun (1987) claims that although the three languages in her study — Coos (Oregon), Cayuga (Iroquoian) and Ngandi (Australian aboriginal) — all exhibit a slight statistical preference for OVS order, all possible orders are grammatical and natural to the speakers of the languages. Mithun terms such languages "pragmatically-based", as opposed to "syntactically-based", and suggests that only the latter type has a clear basic word order. Applying these notions to Old Tamil, we may paraphrase Zvelebil's view as asserting that Old Tamil was a "syntactically-based" language with a basic SOV order. Andronov and Arunachalam's claims, in contrast, are consistent with the view that Old Tamil was a "pragmatically-based" language for which the notion of a basic word order was irrelevant.

2.2 Word Order Variation

Another challenge for the analysis of basic word order is accounting for word

order variation more generally. While some languages adhere to a fairly strict (or "rigid") order of subject, object and verb, others have a more variable word order (Givón 1984; Kim 1988; Mithun 1987). Modern Tamil, Japanese, Korean and Turkish have been claimed to be examples of the "rigid" type (Kim 1988). The variable type can itself be divided into two sub-types: "flexible" languages which nonetheless preserve a basic word order, such as Sinhala (Herring & Paolillo 1995), and "free" word order languages for which no basic order can be discerned, such as Coos, Cayuga and Ngandi (Mithun 1987).

What accounts for word order variation? Functional grammarians have observed that variation is often motivated by discourse-pragmatic considerations, for example, speakers' desire to signal the distinction between given and new, topical and non-topical, and continuous and disruptive information (Givón 1984). In the present study, I consider the first of these distinctions, that between given and new information, or *information status*. According to Chafe (1987), a referent is given information if it can be assumed to be activated in the mind of the hearer at the time it is uttered, for example, because it was mentioned in the immediately preceding discourse. New information is that which is activated in the mind of the hearer when it is mentioned for the first time.⁷

A preference for locating given and new nominal arguments in particular positions in the clause, presumably to accord them greater or lesser prominence, has been claimed to motivate word order variation in numerous languages, including in languages without a clear syntactically-defined basic order. In the "free" (or "pragmatically-based") word order languages Mithun (1987) examined, she found that new or otherwise "newsworthy" information typically precedes given information; a similar tendency has also been noted in VS languages such as Ojibwa (Tomlin and Rhodes 1979) and Biblical Hebrew (Givón 1984). Yet other languages order given information before new (Mathesius 1929 and Firbas 1964 for English and Czech; Li & Thompson 1975 for Mandarin), although the ability to move new information rightwards in the clause may be blocked by the finite verb in strict verb-final languages (Kim 1988; Herring 1990).⁸

Information status may also shed light on degree of word order flexibility. In a comparison of Modern Tamil, a strict SOV language, and Modern Sinhala, a flexible SOV language, Herring and Paolillo (1995) found that postverbal elements in Sinhala are more often new, focused and thematically important referents than in Tamil, where postposing is largely restricted to

thematically and intonationally backgrounded afterthoughts.⁹ The freedom to violate the verb-final constraint appears to relate to the nature of what can be postposed, with more flexible SOV languages allowing a fuller range of information types in clause-final position than more rigid SOV languages.

It should also be noted that some ordering variants seem to be common to all languages, regardless of their basic word order. Thus all known languages tend to signal radical or unexpected shifts of topic by placing the shifted topical referent at the beginning of the utterance, regardless of the usual position of topical nominals in the language (Herring 1990).¹⁰ This has the effect of orienting the listener to the new topic before any information is asserted of it, and appears to be motivated by a desire to avoid misunderstanding in communication. Similarly, all languages allow 'afterthought' postposing, or adding elements on to an otherwise grammatically and intonationally complete utterance, although this practice is restricted in some languages to informal speech. Postposed 'afterthoughts' are found even in otherwise strict verb-final languages such as Japanese (Fujii 1991; Kuno 1978), Korean (Kim & Shin 1992), Modern Tamil (Herring 1994), and Turkish (Erguvanli 1984). The basic motivation for this phenomenon appears to be a concern on the part of the speaker that the hearer has enough information with which to interpret the utterance correctly; if the speaker feels after reaching the end of a grammatical string that not enough has been said, or that a referent is potentially ambiguous, she may append one or more clarifying elements.¹¹

In §5.1, information status is invoked as a possible explanation for word order variation in Old Tamil, and to assess the language's degree of word order flexibility.

2.3 *Word Order and Genre*

A concept that figures crucially in the present study is textual genre. I use the word genre broadly to include Longacre's (1983/1996) four "basic text types" (narrative, procedural, hortatory, expository) and major sub-types within them (e.g. epic, recipe, sermon, linguistics article), with the addition of conversational dialogue as a distinct genre. I also include under the rubric of genre the cross-cutting distinction of whether a text is poetic, i.e. written in verse with the aesthetics of language use foregrounded, or non-poetic, which in the present analysis includes not only prose texts but also those verse texts in which the referential content is foregrounded (cf. Jakobson 1960). Genres may be de-

fined functionally in terms of their communicative purpose, whether it be to instruct, persuade, explain, entertain, arouse emotion, etc., and formally in terms of the linguistic conventions associated with their use (Swales 1990).

Genre differences are of special concern to scholars of older languages because of the issues of textual authenticity they raise. Thus Jamison (1991) finds a difference in word order in dialogue portions of Vedic Sanskrit texts compared with the expository prose in which they are embedded, and interprets this to mean that dialogue is the most natural or authentic Vedic data; prose is held to obey artificial constraints. Hock (1984; This volume) agrees that there are differences between the two genres, but has the opposite assessment of which is most "natural": because prose is more consistently verb-final, while dialogue, like the poetic Rig-Veda, has more variable word order, he takes prose to be less stylistically marked. The question of authenticity is revisited at greater length in §6.

Epic narrative is another genre that displays characteristic word order patterns in a number of languages. There appears to have been a general tendency for early Indo-European languages to favor verb-initial clauses in narrative to a greater extent than in non-narrative genres (Heusler 1931 for Old Icelandic; Hopper 1979 for Old English; Starwalt 1997 for Koiné Greek;¹² cf. also Hock, This volume, for several varieties of Sanskrit). Since for some older languages the majority of texts studied are narrative, a failure to take the special characteristics of narrative word order into account could result in inappropriately generalizing one pattern to describe the language as a whole.

In the face of the evidence for genre-based variability, Hock (This volume) argues for including diverse genres and sub-genres when analyzing the morphosyntax of older languages, not with the idea that they will necessarily converge on or reinforce a single analysis, but rather so that the full range of variation can be brought under the scope of grammatical description. For Hock, the diverse genres should include verse as well as prose texts. Here he argues against those who would exclude poetic texts as data for study of syntactic (and especially word order) phenomena on the grounds that they exhibit unconstrained variability, or "poetic license". Yet in the process, he dismisses, improbably, the likelihood that poetry might exhibit genre-specific syntactic features of its own:

There can be no doubt that many early Indo-European poetic texts exhibit the effects of some aspects of 'poetic license'. Most of these effects, however, are limited to phonology and morphology, where variant forms, often archaic,

but sometimes hyper-archaic, are employed 'metri causa' [...] Clear effects of 'poetic license' are much rarer in the area of syntax (Hock, This volume, p.168-169).

This view can be contrasted with that of Jakobson (1968), who includes grammar (along with sound, meaning and lexicon) as a linguistic means that can be manipulated and focused on to signal the "poetic function" of language. The present study takes it as a matter for empirical investigation whether syntax (in this case, word order) in Old Tamil poetry differs from that in Old Tamil prose.

Yet "poetry" is not a single genre, especially if the term is used to describe all works composed and recorded in verse in older languages. Nor do only verse texts manifest the poetic function. Jakobson posits a continuum between the poetic and the referential (or 'ordinary language') functional poles, where poetic is characterized by a focus on the aesthetics of language, and referential is characterized by a focus on its ideational content. Between these two extremes lie a number of transitional genres, with 'scientific writing', 'journalistic prose' and 'legal discourse' falling out towards the referential end, and 'literary prose' falling near the poetic end. Even among (versified) poetic genres, differences are found: "Epic poetry, focussed on the third person, strongly involves the referential function of language; the lyric, oriented toward the first person, is intimately linked with the emotive function" (Jakobson 1960:357). Hock, too, places lyrical poetry in a special category, one more likely to exhibit 'poetic license':

Clear effects of 'poetic license' are much rarer in the area of syntax, except perhaps for the lyric poetry (odes, elegies, and other poems expressing personal thoughts and emotions) of Greek and Latin, and to a lesser degree, of Classical Sanskrit, in which word order freedom appears to be carried to excess. (Hock, This volume, p.169)

On the basis of these observations, a prediction might be advanced that poetic genres, whether written in prose or verse, will be more likely to exhibit word order variation than referential genres, whether in prose or verse, and moreover, that different degrees of word order variability will be found corresponding to the relative degree of poeticality of a text. As §5.2 will show, this prediction proves to be correct in the case of Old Tamil.

2.4 *Word Order in South Asian Languages*

Tamil is part of a South Asian linguistic Sprachbund which includes languages of the Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Tibeto-Burman and Munda families. In particular, the Indo-Aryan languages of the north and the Dravidian languages of the south have had a long history of mutual influence, and exhibit many shared linguistic features (Emeneau 1956; Masica 1976; Hock 1984). These include, in the modern languages, a basic SOV word order.

The common wisdom holds that verb-finality was originally more pronounced in Dravidian languages, with Indo-Aryan languages having developed an increasing tendency towards verb-final and head-final syntax through contact with Dravidian (Chatterjee 1926 for Bengali; Lehmann 1978 for Sinhalese; see also references in Hock, This volume). For example, Lehmann writes:

The opposite direction of change can be observed for Sinhalese, from VO to OV. Like Sanskrit it had developed toward an ambivalent language around the beginning of our era, with many SVO characteristics. Thereupon, heavily influenced by the neighboring Dravidian languages [i.e. Tamil and Malayalam — SCH], it changed to its virtually consistent OV patterning of today. (1978:39)

Without denying the strong influence that Dravidian has exerted on Sinhalese grammar (see e.g. Gair 1986; Herring 1993), it must be noted that Modern Sinhala, like other Indo-Aryan languages (King & Ramchand 1994), retains considerable word order flexibility, counter to Lehmann's assertion that it manifests "virtually consistent OV patterning". In a text-based comparison of word order in Modern Sinhala and Modern Tamil narrative, Herring and Paolillo (1995) found that only 76% of main clauses in Sinhala were verb-final, compared with 96% in Tamil. There is also a difference in what can appear post-verbally in the two languages: Tamil postposings are mostly semi-conventionalized afterthoughts, while Sinhala allows the postposing of focused nominals, as well as quotes and clausal complements. Head-initial tendencies of this sort are even more pronounced in Hindi and other Indo-Aryan languages located further to the north. Thus the claim that verb-finality in South Asia can be traced to Dravidian influence has some initial plausibility.

Unfortunately, little research has been carried out on the syntax of Old Dravidian in general, and on word order in particular, that can be taken to support or refute such claims. Zvelebil's (1989a) and Andronov's (1991)

comments on Old Tamil word order are relatively brief, and are not illustrated with textual examples. The thesis by Arunachalam (1967; cited by Andronov) is a more promising source, since it is alleged to contain text counts, but the work is not generally available outside of India.¹³ Moreover, what claims have been made about Old Tamil word order are contradictory, as noted in §1. There is thus a critical need for text-based empirical research on Old Tamil word order, both for its own sake, and for the sake of evaluating the influence Dravidian word order may have had on other South Asian languages. Such research should seek not only to identify the basic word order of Old Tamil, but should also be sensitive to the possibility of pragmatic- and genre-based variation. In the following sections, I report on an investigation designed to address these needs.

3. Data and Methodology

A corpus was constructed for the purposes of this study containing samples of the oldest available Tamil texts. Table 1 below lists the text samples in approximate chronological order, along with a brief description of each.

Table 1. *Description of texts in corpus*

Text	Description	Date
Tolkāppiyam eḷuttatikāram	treatise on OT phonology	2nd c. BC
Tolkāppiyam collatikāram	treatise on OT morphosyntax	2nd c. BC
Puraṇānūru	collection of heroic poems	1st-3rd c. AD
Kuruntokai	collection of love poems	1st-3rd c. AD
Cilappitakāram	epic narrative	2nd-6th c. AD
Paḷḷankōvil inscription	land-grant inscription	550 AD

In creating the corpus, an effort was made to include a variety of textual genres. Tolkāppiyam is a grammatical treatise in three parts (phonology, morphosyntax and theory of literature), Puraṇānūru and Kuruntokai are anthologies of lyric poetry, Cilappitakāram is a narrative epic containing dialogue segments, and the Paḷḷankōvil inscription is a public record of the gift of property from a king to a citizen.¹⁴

At the same time, the corpus is subject to certain limitations. Of the six texts sampled, only the last is in prose; the others were written in verse, according to the metrical and rhyming conventions of the Classical Tamil

literary tradition (see Zvelebil 1989b). Prose writing did not emerge as a literary genre until the tenth or eleventh century, when it became the preferred mode for scholarly commentary on older poetic texts. Although land-grant inscriptions must have been common in the earlier period, the Paḷḷankōvil inscription is the oldest intelligible and clearly datable such text of any length to be preserved. Similarly, Tolkāppiyam is the oldest extant Tamil grammar and Cilappitakāram is the oldest extant Tamil narrative; both are unique for the period. Thus text selection was limited in some cases by availability. In contrast, the heroic and love poems taken from the Puraṇānūru and Kuruntokai collections are representative of a much larger corpus of poetic texts.

With the exception of the inscription, which was analyzed in its entirety, portions were selected for analysis from each of the texts, for a total of 872 lines of text.¹⁵ Where a choice was available, I selected portions which I knew to contain word order variation; in that sense, the corpus is biased in favor of variable word order. This was done so as to allow variant patterns every opportunity to emerge. For the same reason, I did not originally exclude any clauses from the analysis on syntactic grounds, and non-finite clauses were also subjected to analysis, albeit separately.

A basic constituent analysis was performed for each text sample, resulting in the identification of a total of 266 finite clauses and 491 non-finite clauses. A finite clause was defined as any clause containing a finite verb or non-verbal predicate.¹⁶ Non-finite clauses include adverbial, infinitive and nominalized clauses. On the basis of the constituent analysis, frequency counts of word order patterns were made, the results of which are presented below.

4. Evidence for a Basic Word Order in Old Tamil

4.1 Finite Clauses

How variable is Old Tamil word order? Frequency counts reveal that 37% of all finite clauses in the corpus have one or more elements appearing after the finite predicate, in contrast to Modern Tamil, which according to one study has only 4% non-verb-final clauses (Herring & Paolillo 1995). At first glance, therefore, Old Tamil word order appears to be highly variable. Postverbal elements include nominal arguments, oblique nominals, adverbials, non-finite

clauses, and quote complements. Examples of non-verb-final finite clauses are given in (1)–(7). (In the examples, finite predicates are italicized, and postverbal elements are bolded.)

- (1) LOC Vtr LOC
 (1) *ōr* *perum* *patiyuḷ* *paṭṭēm*; *paṭṭa* *patiyil*
 one large town-in enter-P-1PL entered town-LOC
 O Vtr S
paṭātatu *oru* *vārttai* *iṭṭaṇar* *ūrār*.¹⁷ [Cil.]
 unjust one word put-P-3PL townspeople
 'We entered a large town; in the town (we) had entered **the townspeople** said unjust things'.

- (2) S Vtr LOC
 (2) *iṭu* *piṇam* *tiṇrum* *iṭākinippēy* *vānki*, *maṭi* *akattu*
 bury corpse eat-F:AJP I.demoness receive-AVP belly LOC
 Vtr O
iṭṭāl *makavai*. [Cil.]
 put-P-3SG:FEM child-ACC
 'The demoness Idakini, who eats buried corpses, having received (it), put **the child** in her belly'.

- (3) S Adv O
 (3) *marritu* *viṇamāṇ* *kuṭumi* *innāvākap* *piṇar* *maṇ*
 victory greatness.have K. sweet-NEG-ADV others.land
 Vtr O Vtr IO
koṇṭ- *iṇiya* *ceyti* *nin* *nārvalar*
 take-AVP sweet.things do-PR-2SG your suppliants
mukattē. [Pur.]
 face-OBL-EMPH
 'O Kudumi who has the greatness of victories, you take the land of others cruelly, [yet] you give sweet things **to your suppliants**'.

- (4) S Vtr INST
 (4) *paratatti* *cenratu* *narapayan* *āṇattiyāl*. [Inscr.]
 P. go-P-3SG:NEUT N. order-INST
 'Paradatti [place name] was made **by the executorship of Narabhayan**'.

- O Vtr
 (5) *nannan* *naṇu.mā* *koṇru*, *nāṭṭir* *pōkiya*
 N. fragrant.mango kill-AVP land-LOC go-P:AJP
 S
onru *molik* *kōcar* *pōla* *vaṇ* *kaṭ* *cūlcciyum*
 one.word K. like hard-hearted deliberation
 Vtr ADV
vēṇṭumār *ciritē*. [Kur.]
 be.necessary a.little-EMPH
 'Like the Kōsar [warriors] who took an oath, felled [king] Nannan's fragrant mango tree and overran his land, hard-hearted scheming is also needed **a little**'.

- S Vtr S Vtr
 (6) *orrumey* *tirintu* *ṇakāram* *ākum*
 consonant change-AVP 'n'.sound become-F-3SG:NEUT
 INF
terkoṭu *puṇaruṇ* *kālai* *yāna*. [Tol. - phon.]
 'terku'-with join-F:AJP time be-INF
 'The consonant ['r'] changes and becomes 'n' **when combining with the word 'terku'**'.

- V S O
 (7) *"eḷḷunar* *pōlum* *ivar* *en.pūṇ* *kōtaiyai*;
 mock-3PL like this.they my.flower garland-ACC
 S Vtr
muḷḷuṭaik *kāṭṭin* *mutu* *nari* *āka*" [Cil. - quote]
 thorn.have forest-OBL old jackal be-OPT
 "These people would mock **my flower garland** (=the heroine); may they become old jackals in a thorn forest!"

Example (1) has the order OVS, example (2) is SVO, example (3) is SOVX, examples (4), (5) and (6) are SVX (with X being an oblique nominal in the first, an adverb in the second, and an infinitival clause in the last), and (7) has the order VSO. Virtually every possible order of the major clausal constituents S, O, and V is attested in the corpus, and non-verb-final clauses are found in every text. Moreover, word order variation cannot be explained in terms of syntactic reflexes of interrogation, negation, etc., as all of these examples involve main, declarative, affirmative, active clauses.

Despite this initial evidence, however, I submit that underlying its apparent word order variability, Old Tamil has a single dominant word order, namely SOV. The evidence for this claim is presented in detail in what follows.

The first clues that point to a basic SOV order arise when one examines the frequencies of different orderings attested in the finite clauses in the corpus. These are given in Table 2 (for all finite clauses) and Table 3 (for only those clauses with two or more explicit nominal arguments).¹⁸ Non-verb-final orders are bolded. (For an explanation of abbreviations used in the tables and the glosses in the examples, see end of chapter.)

Table 2. Breakdown of word orders in finite clauses (N=266)

S Vtr	17.7%	Vtr S	.8%
O Vtr	15.0%	Vtr O	.8%
S pred	12.0%	Vtr X S	.8%
S O Vtr	7.1%	O Vtr X X	.8%
S Vtr X	5.6%	S Vq Q	.8%
Vtr S	4.5%	Q Vq X	.8%
X Vtr	4.1%	S LOCpred	.8%
S pred X	3.8%	Opred Vtr O	.8%
S O Vtr X	3.4%	Vtr	.4%
O Vtr S	2.6%	X Vtr	.4%
O Vtr X	2.3%	Vtr X	.4%
pred S	2.3%	Vtr S X	.4%
S Vtr	1.9%	Vtr X O	.4%
S Vtr O	1.9%	Vtr S O	.4%
Vtr X	1.5%	pred	.4%
O S Vtr	1.5%	Q S Vq	.4%
O Vtr S X	1.1%	Q Vq	.4%
Q Vq S	1.1%	S Vq	.4%
Vtr	.8%		

Table 3. Breakdown of word orders in finite clauses with two or more arguments (N=48)

SOV	39.6%	58.4% SOV(X)
SOVX	18.8%	
OVS	14.6%	20.9% OVS(X)
OVSX	6.3%	
SVO	10.4%	
OSV	8.3%	
VSO	2.1%	
VOS	0%	

In a totally free word order language, in principle, no single order would occur significantly more often than any other. However, in Old Tamil, the overwhelming majority — 80% — of clauses reported in Table 2 are consistent with SOV order, if all combinations that do not explicitly contradict a given order are counted as consistent with it. This percentage contrasts with only 42% for clauses consistent with the next most frequent order, OVS.

This reasoning makes use of the method of comparing relative order within pairs of constituents, for example, the order of S and V, and O and V. For those clauses with an explicit S, 80% have the order SV (or S pred) compared with 20% VS order. For clauses containing an explicit O, 89% are OV, while only 11% are VO. From the statistical tendency for both S and O to occur pre-verbally, we may infer that the preferred basic order of Old Tamil was either SOV or OSV.

Direct evidence that the basic order was SOV, rather than OSV, emerges from a consideration of clauses in which both S and O appear. Fully 18% (N=48) of finite clauses in the corpus contain both an explicit subject and an explicit direct object, and such clauses strongly favor SOV. The single most common order is strict SOV, and the next most common order is SOVX. Combined, SOV(X) clauses outnumber OVS(X) clauses, the next most common type, by a ratio of nearly three to one. OSV clauses, in turn, are relatively rare, accounting for only 8% of two-argument clauses. This is somewhat surprising, since in Modern Tamil and other strict SOV languages, the relative order of S and O is generally considered to be less constrained than the ability of either argument to appear after the finite verb.

In Old Tamil, it is the S argument that is most highly mobile, and its preferred alternative site, after clause-initial position, is postverbal. However, although subject-verb inversion is not uncommon in the corpus (20%), it is nowhere near so common as to support Andronov's (1991) claim that in second and third century texts, "the subject is found in postpredicate position two times oftener than in pre-predicate position" (p.93). Even when the two texts from the lyrical poetry anthologies — the texts most likely to resemble the Sangam texts analyzed by Arunachalam (1967) — are isolated from the corpus and considered separately, the distribution of SV and VS is still 63% and 37%, respectively — nearly twice as many pre-verbal as postverbal subjects. And when the grammatical texts in the corpus are considered separately (according to his title, Arunachalam looked at both Sangam poetry and the Tolkāppiam grammar), the disparity in favor of pre-verbal S is even more

pronounced: 88% SV versus 12% VS, a ratio of over seven to one. This distribution of word order patterns, rather than suggesting a language with "free" word order, points to a basic SOV order which allows postposing, especially of the grammatical subject, to clause-final position.

4.2 Non-Finite Clauses

How could previous counts of Old Tamil word order have produced such dramatically different results? One possibility is that other analyses may have taken into consideration non-finite as well as finite clauses. Non-finite clauses can skew calculations of basic word order if they exhibit a different order, for example, one that is older or otherwise more conservative. To test for the possibility that non-finite clauses have a different word order from finite clauses in Old Tamil, I counted major constituent order patterns in subordinate and embedded clauses containing a non-finite predicate in a portion of the corpus.¹⁹ Table 4 gives a breakdown of the non-finite clause types analyzed.

Table 4. Non-finite clause types (N=170)

clause type	% non-finite clauses
adverbial participle (AVP)	45
infinitive (INF)	24
adjectival participle (AJP)	12
conditional (COND)	11
verbal noun (VN)	6
participial noun (PN)	2
Total	100%

The following examples illustrate an adjectival participle (in a relative clause construction) and an adverbial participle clause (ex. 8), and two parallel infinitive clauses (ex. 9). Note that the infinitives convey the meaning of simultaneous activity.

- (8) [[O Vtr] S] Vtr
 iṭu piṇam tinrum iṭākinippēy vānki.
 bury corpse eat-F:AJP I.demoness receive-AVP [Cil.]
 'The demoness Idakini [who eats buried corpses]] having received (it), (she put the child in her belly).'

- (9) S O Vtr
 pāṇar tāmarai malaiya-vum
 bards lotus put.ON-INF-and
 S SOC
 pulavar pūṇūtal yānaiyoṭu punai
 poets spot.forehead elephant-with ornament
 O Vtr
 tēr paṇṇa-vum,
 chariot prepare-INF-and [Cil.]
 'As bards put on lotuses, and poets readied ornamented chariots along with elephants with decorated foreheads, (Kovalan and Madhavi got dressed to go out)...'

The word order in these examples is OVtr, SVtr, and SOV (twice). Fully 98% of non-finite clauses in the sample are consistent with SOV order; there are only four exceptions to this trend. Table 5 gives the breakdown of word order patterns for all non-finite clauses, and Table 6 gives the breakdown for non-finite clauses containing both an overt subject and object.

Table 5. Breakdown of word orders in non-finite clauses (N=170)

O Vtr	31.8%
S Vtr	30.6%
X Vtr	15.9%
S O Vtr	10.0%
X Vtr	2.9%
Q Vq	2.9%
S pred	2.4%
Vtr	1.2%
O S Vtr	.6%
pred S	.6%
Vq S	.6%
Vtr S X	.6%

Table 6. Breakdown of word orders in non-finite clauses with two or more arguments (N=18)

SOV	94.4%
OSV	5.6%

Non-finite clauses in Old Tamil exhibit less word order variation (compare the number of variants in Tables 2 and 5 with those in Tables 3 and 6) and a higher degree of verb-finality than finite clauses. Indeed, SOV order is virtually

absolute for non-finite clauses. The four exceptions in Table 5 all involve movement of the subject out of its canonical clause-initial position, once to immediate pre-verbal position, and three times postverbally. One very unusual example, given as (10) below, has two postposed elements.

	Vtr	ADV	S	
(10)	varutti	vāṇ.rōyvu	arrē	kāman [Kur.]
	hurt-AVP	sky.scraping	like-EMPH	love
	'Love hurts (me) — [it's so big it's] as if it scrapes heaven itself'.			

In the context of the poem in which it occurs, (10) must be translated as a finite clause, in that there is no finite predicate to which it is logically subordinate. The fact that this example functions syntactically as a finite clause, despite the verb being in a non-finite (adverbial participle) form, may explain why it exhibits a word order that is acceptable for finite clauses, but highly unusual for non-finite clauses.

Does word order in non-finite clauses in Old Tamil differ from that in finite clauses? Yes, in that the former allows for less variation; no, in that both types of clause manifest a basic SOV order. The fact that non-finite word order is a stricter version of finite word order may be taken as additional evidence for the basic order that both share. Clearly, if one were to include non-finite clauses in an analysis of Old Tamil word order, it would not make the result more variable; quite the contrary. Moreover, given that subordinate clause order tends to be conservative (Givón 1984; Hock 1986; Matsuda 1997),²⁰ these findings suggest that SOV order extends back into the prehistory of the Tamil language.

4.3 Headedness of Phrases

Additional evidence that Old Tamil was an SOV language comes from a consideration of word order in phrases. Old Tamil is harmoniously head-final, as is the case for Type XXIII languages more generally (Greenberg 1966). That is, nouns follow modifiers of all types, including determiners, possessives, numerals, quantifiers, adjectives and relative clauses; auxiliaries follow verbs; question particles occur sentence-finally; and the language has postpositions, rather than prepositions.²¹ These characteristics are illustrated with examples from the corpus in (11)–(18) below.

	DET	N		DET	NUM	N
(11)	in	ṇilam		in	nāṅk	ellai
	this	land		this	four	boundary
	'this land'			'these four boundaries'		
	QUANT	N		QUANT	N	
(12)	ellā	moliyum		paṇ	mīṇ	
	all	word-and		many	fish	
	'all the words'			'many fish'		
	POSS	N		POSS	N	
(13)	niṇ	tevvar		kaṭarrin	ellai	
	2SG-OBL	enemy		forest-OBL	boundary	
	'your enemies'			'the boundary of the forest'		
	ADJ	N		NUM	ADJ	N
(14)	paḷan	kuṭi		iru	karum	puruvam
	old	clan		two	black	eyebrow
	'old clan'			'two black eyebrows'		
	RC	N		RC	N	
(15)	kaṅcu	mey pāl		teyvam	cuṭṭiya	peyarnilaik kiḷavi
	calf	graze desert		divine	denote-P:AJP	noun word
	'desert where calves graze'			'noun words which denote the divine'		
	V	AUX		V	AUX	
(16)	niṭṭitt(u)	irātu		cūl	tara	
	extend-AVP	be-NEG:IMP		surround	give-INF	
	'Do not delay!'			'(with servants) surrounding (him)'		
	(lit. 'Do not be delaying!')					
	S			S	pred	Qs
(17)	tannaiyum	attanum		pulaviya	tevaṇ-ō	
	mother-and	father-and		sulking	use-Qs	
	V	Qs		'What's the use of sulking?'		
	allar-ō					
	NEG-3RSP-Qs					
	'Isn't he (like) mother and father (to us)?'					

- | | | | | |
|-----------|---------------------|----------|-----------------------------|-------|
| [NP Po] | [NP Po] | [[NP Po] | NP] | Po |
| (18) onru | mutal ettan iruti | marali | yanna kalirru | micai |
| one | first eight ending | death | like elephant on | |
| | 'from one to eight' | | 'on an elephant like death' | |

The presence of harmonious head-finality in the above phrase types suggests that the order of O and V is likely to be head-final as well, even without the independent evidence of this presented in the previous sections. Strictly speaking, head-finality does not say anything about the position of S; logically, an OV language could be SOV, OSV, or OVS, and some VO languages exhibit head-final characteristics as well (Greenberg 1966). However, few VO languages are thoroughly head-final in all but the order of object and verb, and of the OV orders, SOV is attested overwhelmingly more often in currently known languages than the OS variants, which are rare. While headedness alone is insufficient evidence on which to base an SOV analysis, the evidence of head-finality combined with a statistical preference for SOV and SOV-compatible orders reinforces the conclusion that Old Tamil had SOV order. The consistency of the head-final pattern may also be taken to suggest stability over time, if we assume that mixed headedness in phrases reflects historical residue of an older order or indicates a change in progress. Consistent head-finality, conversely, would suggest that the same basic order — in this case, OV — had been in place without competition for some time.

5. Word Order Variation in Old Tamil

In §4, I presented several different kinds of evidence that Old Tamil had a basic SOV word order. Given this evidence, it does not seem appropriate to characterize the language's word order as "free", as proposed by Arunachalam (1967) and Andronov (1991). At the same time, however, fully 20% of all clauses in the corpus are inconsistent with SOV order, and 37% violate strict verb-finality by having one or more elements appear to the right of the finite predicate. This high degree of word order variability suggests that Old Tamil was not a "strict" word order language either; rather its word order should be characterized as "flexible".²²

However, here again, I wish to suggest that this appearance is misleading, and that contrary to the evidence of the corpus taken as an undifferentiated whole, the ordinary language in use in the Sangam period was relatively strict

in its SOV order. To demonstrate this point, I first attempt to account for word order variation in the corpus in terms of the pragmatics of information status, and then show that more revealing patterns emerge when textual genre is considered. These patterns indicate that adherence to basic word order differs according to genre, and that only in poetic genres is it highly variable.

5.1 Information Status

Why does Old Tamil place constituents after the finite predicate, in violation of its basic SOV order? One possible reason may be to signal the pragmatic status of information as given or new, backgrounded or salient.

In order to test this hypothesis, I classified each postverbal element in the corpus as containing information that is either GIVEN, ACCESSIBLE or NEW (following Chafe 1987) in terms of what the speaker could reasonably expect a hearer to access at that point in the text. Elements were classified as GIVEN if they had been previously mentioned in the text in the last 20 lines. Elements were classified as ACCESSIBLE either if they had not been mentioned for some time, or if they were inferable from some other recent mention (see note 4). NEW elements were considered to be those introduced into the discourse for the first time, and not otherwise accessible. Examples of each information status are given in (1), (2) and (4), repeated below as (19)–(21).²³

- (19) itu piṇam tinrum iṭākinippēy vānki, maṭi
bury corpse eat-F:AVP Idemoness receive-AVP belly
akattu iṭṭāḷ **makavai.**
LOC put-P-3SG:FEM child-ACC
'The demoness Idakini, who eats buried corpses, having received
(it), put **the child** in her belly'.
- (20) ōr perum patiṇṭi paṭṭem; paṭṭa patiṇṭi paṭātatu
one large town-in enter-P-1PL entered town-LOC unjust
oru vārtai iṭṭanar **ūrār.**
one word put-P-3PL townspeople
'We entered a large town; in the town we had entered **the towns-
people** said unjust things'.
- (21) paratatti cenratu **narapayan āpattiyāl.**
P. go-P-3SG:NEUT N. order-INST
'Paradatti [place name] was made **by the executorship of Narab-
hayan**'.

In (19), the noun *makavai* 'child-ACC' is given information, the child's death having been described in the previous sentence. In (20), the *ūrār* 'townspeople' have not been mentioned previously, but their existence is accessible from the earlier mention of *patiyul* 'in the town'. Finally, the instrumental nominal in (21) is new information which has not been mentioned before and cannot be inferred from other information in the text. The results of counting the information status of each postverbal element for the corpus as a whole are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7. Information status of postverbal elements (N=101)

GIVEN	21.8%
ACCESSIBLE	25.7%
NEW	52.5%

There is a surprisingly even distribution of the three information statuses in postverbal position, especially if 'given' and 'accessible' are grouped together (47.5%), in contrast with 'new' (52.5%), as having a greater likelihood of being backgrounded or de-emphasized. The lack of a consistent information status for postverbal elements suggests that what determines word order variation in Old Tamil does not involve pragmatic information status in any direct way.

A more revealing picture begins to emerge when information status is considered separately for each of the six texts in the corpus. These results are displayed in Table 8.

Table 8. Information status of postverbal elements by text (N=101)²⁴

	grammar- phonol.	grammar- morph.	heroic poetry	love poetry	epic narr.	inscript.
GIVEN	40%	16.7%	25.0%	9.1%	24.5%	0%
ACCESSIBLE	0%	8.3%	37.5%	31.2%	30.6%	0%
NEW	60%	75.0%	37.5%	59.1%	44.9%	100%
	N=10	N=12	N=8	N=21	N=49	N=1

From Table 8 we can see that both texts from the grammatical treatise have mostly new information in postverbal position, and little or no accessible information. This distribution is consistent with their nature as sources of explicit technical information — a high proportion of all mentions are new in

the texts overall, and little is assumed to be accessible to the reader from previous knowledge. Conversely, both texts in the Sangam poetry tradition contain many accessible postposed referents, consistent with the tendency for such texts to refer to a conventional set of participants (in the case of heroic poetry, the king or warrior being praised, his enemies, his armies, his ministers, his bards, etc.; in the case of love poetry, the female heroine, her lover, her best friend, her mother, etc.). Still, however, with the exception of the inscription (which contains only a single instance of postposing), none of the texts shows a strong preference for postposing either given-accessible information or new information to the exclusion of the other type.

We approach such a situation, however, if we separate out postverbal elements in dialogue portions of the epic narrative from those in non-dialogue, or narrative, portions of the same text. By dialogue, I mean quoted utterances that are explicitly attributed, usually by means of a quote formula containing a verb of saying, to a character in the narrative. This comparison is shown in Table 9.

Table 9. Breakdown of information status of postverbal elements in epic narrative

	non-dialogue	dialogue
GIVEN	17.2%	35.0%
ACCESSIBLE	20.7%	45.0%
NEW	62.1%	20.0%
	N=29	N=20

Compared with non-dialogue portions of the text, dialogue portions contain more than twice as many given and accessible elements in postverbal position, for a total of 80% given-accessible as compared with only 20% new. What remains in the narrative proper is a distribution similar to that of the other non-dialogue genres, while the distribution of information in dialogue is distinct from all of the others, especially in its avoidance of postposed new elements.

This distribution tells us something, albeit indirectly, about degree of verb finality. According to the results in Table 9, Old Tamil non-dialogue texts resemble Modern Sinhala in the pragmatics of what can occur in postverbal position, in the sense that both given and new information is postposed. However, Old Tamil dialogue resembles Modern Tamil in that if something appears following the finite verb, it is most likely to be given or accessible information. In Modern Tamil, such postposings often function as redundant

or partially-redundant "afterthoughts", as in the following example from an informal oral narrative cited in Herring (1994):

- (22) a. *avan kañcā vēra annaikki*
 he ganja moreover that.day
kuṭiccirukkān.
 smoke-PERF-PR-3SG:M
- b. *kañcā ellām pōṭuvān avan.* [ModT oral narr.]
 ganja all put-F-3SG:M that.he
 'He'd smoked ganja too that day. (He) did ganja and all (that kind of stuff), he'.

Modern Tamil sentence (22b) is strikingly similar in both structure and function to the Old Tamil sentence of quoted dialogue in (23) below.

- (23) "nayanta kātalin nalkuvan ivan" ena
 desire-P:AJP love-OBL favor-F-3SG:M this.he say-INF
 vayantamālai vaṭivil tōnri, [Cil.]
 V. form-LOC appear-AVP
 "'Out of the desire (he) felt (for Madhavi), (he) will favor (me with sexual relations), he". So thinking (lit. 'saying'), she appeared in the form of Vasantha Malai, and..."

To the extent that dialogue in the verse epic represents the actual spoken language of the time,²⁵ these results suggest that ordinary conversation in Old Tamil obeyed similar word order constraints to those of modern Tamil. These constraints are consistent with a relatively strict, rather than a flexible, SOV order.

5.2 Genre

In the previous section, evidence regarding degree of strictness of SOV order was inferred from the status of information in postverbal position in different textual genres. This section presents direct evidence of a correlation between word order flexibility and genre. Table 10 shows the percentage of finite clauses that adhere to strict verb-finality in each text in the corpus; in addition, the values for epic 'dialogue' and 'non-dialogue' are separated out and included in parentheses.

Table 10. Percentage of verb-final finite clauses by text

	% verb-final	total finite clauses
(epic non-dialogue)	(42.0%)	(N=50)
love poetry	50.0%	N=34
heroic poetry	53.3%	N=15
grammar - morphology	55.6%	N=27
grammar - phonology	56.5%	N=23
epic narrative	65.5%	N=148
(epic dialogue)	(77.6%)	(N=98)
land grant inscription	94.7%	N=19
Total corpus	avg. = 63.2%	N=266

We can now see clearly what we previously only suspected, namely, that the dialogue and non-dialogue portions of the epic differ in their degree of verb-finality. Consistent with the restrictions on type of information that can be postposed, dialogue is much more strictly verb-final. More strict yet is the only prose text in the corpus, the land grant inscription. These two samples most closely resemble 'ordinary' language use, where 'ordinary' is defined in contrast with 'literary' or 'poetic'. At the other extreme, that of word-order flexibility, is lyrical poetry, where the purpose of the communication is to foreground the aesthetics of language use.

The distribution of verb-finality across texts and genres suggests a continuum of poeticality from most to least poetic, correlating with a continuum of greater to lesser word order flexibility. The pattern of variation in Table 10 was found to be statistically significant using a χ^2 test of independence ($p < .0001$). The relative contribution of each genre to the χ value, as measured by the deviance from expected values, is shown in Figure 1.²⁶ An arrow representing the poeticality continuum has been superimposed above the x-axis to account for the ordering of genres that emerges as a result of this analysis. In the display in Figure 1, the deviance value for the inscription is slightly less than that for dialogue, due to the larger size (hence greater statistical reliability) of the dialogue sample. Similarly, the large size of the epic non-dialogue sample relative to the lyric and grammar samples results in a larger deviance for the former, although the proportions of non-verb-finality of the three genres are not very different. Even allowing for adjustments due to sample size, however, the overall pattern is essentially the same as that in Table 10.

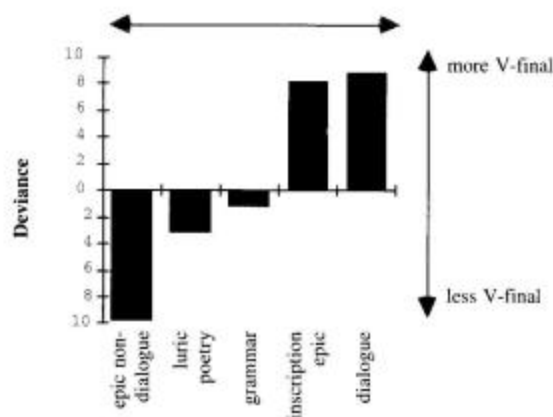


Figure 1. Verb-finality by genre (deviance relative to expected values in χ^2 test)

The notion that degree of poeticity of a text relates to word order flexibility in Old Tamil explains why prose is more verb-final than verse, why dialogue is more verb-final than any other verse genre, and why grammar is more verb-final than lyric poetry.²⁷ Prose is by definition less poetic than verse texts, which follow conventions of rhyme and meter which call attention to the form of language, rather than to its referential content (Jakobson 1968). Dialogue implicitly references ordinary conversational language — the spontaneous, unplanned speech of ordinary people, in contrast with the crafted phrases of poets — and is accordingly low on the poeticity continuum as well. Finally, grammar is high in referential content, so much so that it is surprising that the grammatical treatise falls as high on the poeticity continuum in terms of word order variation as it does. The explanation for this may reside in the fact that the *Tolkāppiyam* grammar was written to provide normative guidelines for poetic compositions, and thus was closely tied to the Old Tamil poetic tradition.

More puzzling is the position at the extreme of word order flexibility of the non-dialogue portions of the epic. This position suggests that epic narration ought to be highly poetic as well, and certainly it is crafted, yet narrative as a whole, with its logical sequence of events, is more highly referential than love poetry or poems eulogizing a warrior king, which tend to be formulaic in

content. One possible explanation for this apparent paradox would point out that the composite epic — with dialogue and non-dialogue portions combined — falls higher on the verb-finality continuum in Table 10 than either lyrical poetry or the grammatical treatise, and that this position is more in line with what the referentiality of the epic genre would predict. It may be that in order to achieve the desired composite effect, the author offset the relative rigidity of word order in the dialogue with greater word order flexibility in the narration proper.²⁸ Alternatively, such flexibility may serve narrative discourse functions not captured by the principles of information status or poeticity considered here. I leave this possibility as a topic for further study.

Why should word order flexibility convey the meaning of 'poeticity'? After all, poetry is traditionally characterized by structural parallelism — rhyme, meter, and grammar all repeat in regular patterns. At the same time, poetry exploits markedness expectations, and a language's basic word order is, by definition, unmarked. It may be that violations of verb-finality in Old Tamil are motivated by the urge toward "antigrammaticality" noted by Jakobson:

The obligatory character of the grammatical processes and concepts constrains the poet to reckon with them; either he strives for symmetry and sticks to these simple, repeatable (...) patterns (...), or he may cope with them, while longing for an "organic chaos". (...) The rhyme technique is "either grammatical or antigrammatical" but never agrammatical, and the same may be applied as well to poets' grammar. (1968, p.132)

In a general sense, this amounts to claiming that violations of verb-finality, and especially, orders in which more than one constituent appears after the finite verb, are 'poetic' precisely because they are violations of a grammatical rule; they are surprising, unexpected. This general explanation does not rule out the possibility that word order inversions also fulfill more specific poetic functions, for example, as recurrent "figures of grammar" that highlight components of meaning, or as support for metrical divisions of a poem into smaller stanzas. Word order patterns may also differ according to the placement of rhyme, which, depending on the meter, may occur line initially, line finally, or in the consonantal codas of first accented syllables (Zvelebil 1989b). Exactly what motivated an Old Tamil poet to make use of "free" word order in any given poem remains to be determined; we may note, however, that such usage cannot be attributed to "metrical considerations" in any simple way, since quoted dialogue in the epic also obeys verse conventions.

6. Discussion

The discovery that Old Tamil word order varies by genre immediately calls into question previous claims regarding the language's basic word order (or lack thereof) that were not based on research that takes genre into account. More generally, the Old Tamil findings show that poeticality is a parameter of text that can have a significant impact on the outcome of linguistic analysis: the syntax of poetry is not necessarily the syntax of non-poetic language.

These findings raise two important questions, one theoretical and the other methodological. The theoretical question concerns the nature of the object of grammatical description. What is it, exactly, that we are describing when we claim to describe "the word order" of a language? Most theoretical traditions assume that a language has a single grammar, rather than different grammars for different text types,²⁹ and that the grammar is invariant and rule-governed, at least at some level of abstraction.³⁰ In contrast, the evidence of the existence of different word orders in different textual genres appears to challenge the notion of a unified grammar that can be captured by a single statement or rule. Furthermore, if one text type is privileged as more "natural" or "basic" than others for purposes of word order analysis, that choice needs to be justified. As discussed in §2.3, arguments have been advanced for taking different text types (e.g. conversation, narrative, expository prose) as most basic, but the arguments seem to be determined more by the particular interests of individual researchers than by any principled, generally-agreed upon criteria.³¹

Fortunately, in the case of Old Tamil, the evidence from a variety of text types all points in the same direction, towards a basic SOV order. However, we must add to this the qualification that deviation from the basic order can occur, conditioned by the degree of poeticality of the text. This analysis satisfies the criterion of descriptive simplicity presented in §2.1, in that it posits a single, underlying order from which other attested orders can be derived by means of a systematic principle. Yet the analysis is not overly abstract, since SOV order is statistically predominant in main clauses, and near-categorical in subordinate clauses, in all of the genres analyzed.

The existence of genre-based variation also raises a methodological question: How can we analyze the word order of an older language, given the need to take a variety of different textual genres into account in order to be sure that our analysis is not biased towards a particular genre? Such a large-

scale investigation takes time, and more importantly, requires a range of data that simply may not be available in older languages for which we only have limited textual records.³² Under such circumstances, a general analysis of word order may be a practical impossibility; the analyst may be limited to describing the data available. When, in addition, the only available texts are in translation, in poetic verse, or otherwise open to doubt as to their authenticity, the problem may seem to take on overwhelming proportions.

Old Tamil, with its numerous textual records dating back to the 2nd century B.C., allows for a comparative, genre-based analysis. However, even with this rich data source, the kind of corpus one can construct to analyze Old Tamil word order is limited in comparison with modern languages. First, no direct evidence of the spoken language exists; colloquial (what Britto 1986 terms "authentic") usage — spontaneous language use in natural or real-life situations — must be inferred from fictional dialogue and alleged verbatim reports. Second, the oldest texts are written in verse, and most of these are lyrical poems; non-poetic texts are rare and tend to be brief. Accordingly, the results in the present study for dialogue and prose genres need to be interpreted with caution, since the evidence for these genres is less robust than for poetic genres.

Are poetic texts "inauthentic"? For Britto, all language use "in which one uses language before a passive audience, takes on a role, or uses artificial means of communication" such as writing instruments belongs to the "inauthentic" domain (p.298). This view can be contrasted with the view that the text types which dominate at a particular point in a language's history are the most authentic for the culture (Gregersen & Pedersen, *This volume*). Sangam poetry enjoyed great prestige in classical Tamil Nadu, and the poetic anthologies were culturally statusful texts, so much so that Sangam conventions continue to influence literary sensibilities up to the present day, including in "high" registers of spoken language such as political speeches (Britto 1986). Both on practical grounds of text availability, and principled grounds of text status, therefore, the analyst of Old Tamil is compelled to analyze poetry as a source of data. The present study has demonstrated that such analysis can be fruitful in the study of word order, provided that one controls for genre as a conditioning factor on word order variation.

7. Summary and Conclusion

This chapter set out to determine the word order of Old Tamil, and in the process, to resolve two conflicting claims that had previously been made about it. Considerable evidence was presented which, taken together, points to a basic SOV order. This evidence includes a statistical predominance of SOV and SOV-compatible orders in both main and subordinate clauses, and head-finality in phrases more generally. In contrast, the second most common order, OVS, is less than half as frequent in finite clauses, and virtually unattested in non-finite clauses. No other order occurs frequently enough to be a viable candidate for basic order. A descriptive generalization was proposed that accounts for both the predominance of SOV and the secondary OVS pattern: Old Tamil had a basic SOV order, but allowed postposing of elements, especially the grammatical subject, to the end of the clause.

In the second part of the analysis, I showed that the degree to which postposing occurs depends on textual genre, and specifically on the degree of poeticality of a text. Verb-finality in Old Tamil is associated with colloquial, plain, or informative speech, in contrast with non-verb-finality, which functions as a marker of poetic style. To a lesser extent, poeticality also determines the nature of what is postposed — 'ordinary' dialogue generally allows only given, background information to be postposed, whereas in poetic texts, important new information may also occur clause-finally.

On the basis of these findings, I conclude, along with Zvelebil (1989a) but contra Andronov (1991) and Arunachalam (1967), that the basic word order of Old Tamil was SOV. However, I add to Zvelebil's characterization that this order varied systematically by genre. Taken together, the evidence suggests that, rather than having undergone a change in word order from a free or variable language to SOV, SOV order has been a relatively stable feature of the Tamil language for more than 2,000 years.

List of Abbreviations

ACC	accusative case
ADJ	adjective
ADV	adverbial
AJP	adjectival participle (used in relative clause formation)
AUX	auxiliary
AVP	adverbial participle
DET	determiner
EMPH	emphatic
F	future tense
FEM	feminine gender
INF	infinitive
INST	instrumental case
intr	intransitive
IO	indirect object
LOC	locative
LOCpred	predicate locative
M	masculine gender
NEG	negation
NEUT	neuter gender
NP	noun phrase
NUM	numeral
O	direct object
OBL	oblique case
OPT	optative
OT	Old Tamil
P	past tense
PERF	perfect
PL	plural
Po	postposition
POSS	possessor
PR	present tense
pred	predicate nominal
Q	quote
Qs	question marker
QUANT	quantifier
RC	relative clause
RSP	respectful
S	subject
SG	singular
SOC	sociative
tr	transitive
V	verb; in SOV, used to refer to the clausal predicate more generally
Vq	verb that takes a quote complement
X	non-argument clausal constituent

Notes

1. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the 1993 International Conference on Historical Linguistics at UCLA, and the 1994 South Asian Languages Analysis Roundtable at the University of Pennsylvania. The author wishes to thank John Paolillo for helpful comments on the written version and for assistance with the chi-squared analysis. Comments and suggestions from E. Annamalai, Robert Longacre, and Ervin Starwalt are also gratefully acknowledged.
2. See e.g. Kim (1988).
3. Older inscriptions have been discovered which are thought to be in Tamil, but they are written in Brahmi script (Zvelebil 1989a:51).
4. Zvelebil (1989a:42–43) writes as follows:
[A] very few fundamental syntactic traits valid for all Dravidian languages can possibly be accepted by all Dravidianists irrespective of their personal preferences and theoretical allegiance and bias; and since these are so typical and general, such features could point towards a Proto-Dravidian syntax. 1) The basic order of surface structures is regularly Subject-Object-Verb (if not disturbed by stylistic or emphatic shifts) (...)
5. Andronov's claim that Old Tamil had free word order should not be confused with the notion of "free word order languages" as advanced by some contemporary generative syntacticians. According to the latter, Modern Tamil, despite its strong statistical preference for SOV order, is a "free word order language" in the sense that "different orders are devoid of any grammatical significance" (Annamalai 1996:3). In contrast, Andronov's claim (and Arunachalam's before him) is statistically based: no single word order is used significantly more often than any other, and therefore the word order of Old Tamil should be considered "free".
6. In Greenberg's (1966) classification of 139 languages and languages families into 24 "basic order types", 48% fall into just three types: harmoniously head-initial VSO, harmoniously head-initial SVO, and harmoniously head-final SOV. An additional 27% deviate from harmonious headedness by only one of Greenberg's four features.
7. Chafe also identifies a third status, that of 'accessible' information. Accessible information includes referents introduced earlier in the discourse but which have since lapsed into semi-active status due to the passage of time and/or competition for attention from intervening referents. Also included in this category is information accessible by inference from other referents previously introduced (cf. 'inferables' in Prince 1981). However, few studies have explicitly considered the effects of 'accessible' status on word order pragmatics.
8. For a cross-linguistic attempt to correlate the preferred order of given and new information with a language's basic word order, specifically, with the relative order of S and V, see Herring (1990).
9. See Herring (1994), however, for some exceptions to this trend. Interestingly, postposed 'new' information in Modern Tamil occurs only in traditional oral epic performances, and has a literary or archaic flavor. This is consistent with the analysis advanced in the present

chapter that 'new' information postposing was a poetic feature in the older language.

10. Fronting of shifted topics was found in all 33 languages in the genetically- and typologically-diverse corpus analyzed in Herring (1990).
11. Other, more controversial, pragmatic word order "universals" have been proposed as well. For example, Hetzron (1975) claims that in all languages, new referents in presentative constructions tend to be placed at the end of the sentence, and Givón (1984) claims that contrastively focused referents tend to appear at sentence beginnings. However, numerous counterexamples can readily be found to both claims (see e.g. Herring 1990).
12. Ervin Starwalt, in an unpublished paper, reports that in narrative portions of the book of John in Koine Greek, 70% of finite clauses have VS order, compared with only 30% SV. In hortatory texts in the book of John and the book of Peter, the pattern is reversed: 71% are SV, and 29% are VS.
13. My efforts to obtain a copy of the thesis by writing to Annamalai University — where, according to the reference cited by Andronov (1991), the research was carried out — were also unsuccessful.
14. In analyzing these texts, I have benefited from translations and translation assistance by a number of scholars and teachers: Zvelebil (1975, 1978) for *Tolkāppiyam* and Zvelebil (1964) for the *Paḷḷankōvil* inscription, George Hart for the *Puraṇānūru* poems, Martha Selby for the *Kuruntokai* poems, and the late K. Paramasivam for guidance in translating the *Cilappitakāram* epic.
15. The precise contents of each selection are as follows: *Tolkāppiyam* *eluttatikāram*, 43 lines (Ch.9, verses 421–440); *Tolkāppiyam* *collatikāram*, 45 lines (Ch.1, verses 1–22); *Puraṇānūru*, 79 lines (poems 11–15); *Kuruntokai*, 74 lines (poems 19, 60, 61, 73, 93, 97, 101, 102, 107, 196, 272, 349, and 354); *Cilappitakāram*, 586 lines (narrative sections from chapters 1–7, 9–11, and 15 of Book 1); and *Paḷḷankōvil* inscription, 45 lines (entire inscription).
16. For the purposes of this analysis, finite verbs were identified on the basis of the presence of tense marking and subject agreement, with the exception of certain defective verbs which were classified as finite, even though lacking in tense inflection, on the basis of their grammatical function as clausal predicates.
17. In the Tamil transliteration, a macron over a vowel indicates length, a macron over a nasal indicates the velar nasal, underdots indicate retroflex consonants, and underlines indicate alveolar consonants, except in the case of the retroflex continuant *l*.
18. In these and other summaries of word order patterns, pre-verbal X constituents (non-argument nominals, adverbials, and non-finite clauses) were excluded from consideration, except if the clause includes no other non-predicate constituent. This was done to reduce the number of patterns to those most likely to be relevant to the present analysis.
19. The sample analyzed included the first 51 non-finite clauses in the narrative epic, and all non-finite clauses in the shorter text samples.
20. Thus Hock observes that in Old English,

[i]t took several centuries before the word order of the main clause was obligatorily extended to dependent clauses. This relative *resistance to*

change is consonant with a widely noted tendency for dependent clauses to be more 'conservative' than main clauses in syntactic change. (1986:332; emphasis in original)

21. Zvelebil also makes this observation for Old Tamil and for Proto-Dravidian in general. For Old Tamil: "that which is dependent precedes that on which it depends or which governs it" (1962:13). For Proto-Dravidian: "As a rule, modifier always precedes the modified; hence adjectives, genitives, relative participles, and clauses always go before nouns, adverbs before verbs, converbs before finite verbs, etc." (1989a:43).
22. Zvelebil (1962) notes this flexibility as well. On the basis of an analysis of the *Nāṭṭinai*, an anthology of lyrical Sangam poetry, he concludes that Old Tamil word order is basically SOP[redicate]; however, "this order is not at all obligatory and we often find the order V,O or S,P,O or even P,O,S" (p.13).
23. Each of these examples represents a pragmatically unmarked discourse situation, in the sense of Payne (1997). None are episode-initial, contrastive, or introduce important new referents. Although (21) mentions a referent for the first time, this referent is not thematically important.
24. The number of tokens of postverbal elements for each text differs slightly from the number of clauses with postverbal elements, in that some such clauses have more than one element after the finite predicate. For the purpose of this measure, the information status of each element was coded and counted separately. For the epic narrative, only the first 49 tokens (out of 98) were included.
25. Independent evidence that quoted dialogue in the epic is closer to colloquial than to poetic language includes a tendency for quotes to contain shorter sentences and a higher density of finite predicates than non-dialogue portions of the epic. Non-dialogue portions, in contrast, may contain "sentences" of 40 or more lines with only a single finite predicate; in translation, these must be broken up into several finite clauses.
26. The two types of lyrical poetry and the two types of grammar texts have been combined in the χ^2 analysis in order to increase the sample size for each genre.
27. The difference between the lyrical poetry and the grammar is not statistically significant, however, due to the size of the text samples.
28. The notion that each text projects a "composite effect" of poeticity in terms of its degree of non-V-finality must also take into account the density of finite clauses. The *Cilappitakāram* epic uses finite clauses sparingly, such that even though half of all such clauses are non-V-final, a reader or listener only encounters a non-V-final clause once every 16 or 17 lines of text on average, compared with once every 4 or 5 lines in the lyrical poems. For every finite clause in the epic sample, moreover, there are three non-finite clauses on average, all of which have SOV order. (The ratio of finite to non-finite clauses varies in the other verse texts in the sample, averaging roughly 1:1.5.) Thus in terms of the ratio of V-final to V-non-final clauses, the epic would appear more consistently SOV to the reader or listener — and therefore less poetic — than the lyrical or grammar genres.
29. But cf. Longacre (1995), who proposes a "discourse modular grammar" to account for grammatical variation across text types in Biblical Hebrew.

30. But cf. Hopper (1987), who contrasts this notion of grammar — what he calls "a-priori grammar" — with the notion of grammar as variable and "emergent".
31. For example, both Jamison's (1991) proposal of dialogue and Hock's (This volume) proposal of expository prose as "natural" text types for the purpose of describing Vedic Sanskrit word order are predicated on the observation that these types exhibit less word order variation than other types. However, this reasoning is circular if the goal of analysis is to determine basic word order.
32. An extreme example of this problem is Gothic, the bulk of the evidence for which is attested in a single 4th century translation of the Greek Bible (Lehmann 1973).

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Suppressed Assertion and the Functions of the Final-Attributive in Prose and Poetry of Heian Japanese*

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Abstract

In Late Old Japanese, or the language of the Heian Period (circa ninth through twelfth century A.D.), the Attributive form of inflectional words may be found at the end of a sentence/poem in place of the canonical Conclusive form. The Attributive form always appears when the sentence/poem contains a focus particle (this phenomenon is known as *kakari-musubi*, and referred to in this chapter as Focus Concord), but it may also appear even when no such particle is present. This latter use of the Attributive form is referred to as *rentai-shuushi*, here termed the Final-Attributive. In later developments in the Japanese language, the sentence final Attributive form eventually completely replaced the true Conclusive form, resulting in the restructuring of the paradigm of inflectional words and reducing the number of verbal conjugation types.

When the regular Conclusive and the Final-Attributive sentences co-existed, the latter type was associated with at least three distinct functions: (a) background information, (b) exclamation, and (c) weak conjecture. What is significant about the polysemy of the Final-Attributive is the distribution of functions across different genres of texts. That is, in the context of prose, function (a) above operates, and in the context of poetry, functions (b) and (c) emerge.

In this chapter, I show that all three functions are consequences of a single functional feature of the Attributive form used in the Final-Attributive, which I identify as "suppressed assertion". I argue that the feature "suppressed