Pashto Syntax

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1 Introduction

Pashto is an Indo-European language that is classified into the East-Iranian branch. The estimated number of speakers is 49,600,000 according to (Eberhard et al., 2021). This paper focuses on the Northeast dialect which is spoken in Pakistan and provides brief explanations about the syntax of the dialect. The basic order of Pashto is SOV as explained in Section 2. Section 3 describes interrogative sentences. In *wh*-questions, *wh*-phrases appear in-situ, and no intonation rise while yes-no questions are marked by it. The last section focuses on negation and complex sentences. Both types show the movement of heads or phrases. Even though the basic order of sentences is SOV, complex sentences have SVO order to prevent two verbs from being next to each other.

2 Basic Word Ordering

This section will briefly summarize the basic word ordering of Pashto grammar. David & Brugman (2014) described that Pashto word order is   head-final, that is, the complementizer mostly precedes the head of a phrase. This goes for both noun phrases and verb phrases.

First, for determiner phrases (noun phrase)the head noun is placed at the phrase final position. The modifiers are not allowed to follow the head noun with the exception of the postpositional phrase. The basic word ordering for the noun phrase is determiner, numeral, adjective, noun, and postpositional phrase, as shown in (1a). However, note that the ordering of the modifiers are flexible, that is, the determiner phrase allows them to be scrambled as long as they do not violate the following restrictions: the modifiers except for postpositional phrase must precede the noun, and the demonstrative cannot follow the adjective unless the emphasis is on the adjective. (1b) and (1c) is the possible alternative word order of (1a).

(1) a.
da	dwa	χat	kitabuna	meɾumano	baɾake
Det.	Num.	Adj.	Noun.	Noun.	PP.
these	two	big	books	guests	about

'These two big books about guests'

   b.
da	χat	dwa	kitabuna	meɾumano	baɾake
Det.	Adj.	Num.	Noun.	Noun.	PP.
these	big	two	books	guests	about

   c.
dwa	da	χat	kitabuna	meɾumano	baɾake
Num.	Det.	Adj.	Noun.	Noun.	PP.
two	these	big	books	guests	about

The verb phrase is also head-final We could observe this head-final structure from a simple sentence in (2), where the adverb modifying the verb precedes the head verb. In (2), the head verb is in the phrase final position of the object DP.

(2)
də	buti	ʃa: ta	**jo**	**pere**	**pətde**
Det.	Noun.	PP.	**Det.**	**Noun.**	**Verb.**
a	tree	behind	**the**	**ghost**	**hiding**

'It is behind the tree that the ghost is hiding'

Given the phrase word order, we can put these two phrase structures together, which gives us simple declarative sentences in (3).

(3)   Lakka   mudam perian   βini
         Lakka   always ghost   seeing
         'Lakka is always seeing ghosts.'

    The Pashto grammar has the SOV (subject, object, verb) structure. The below is the syntax tree for (3), which assumes that the object DP *perian* is a complement of VP.

(4)
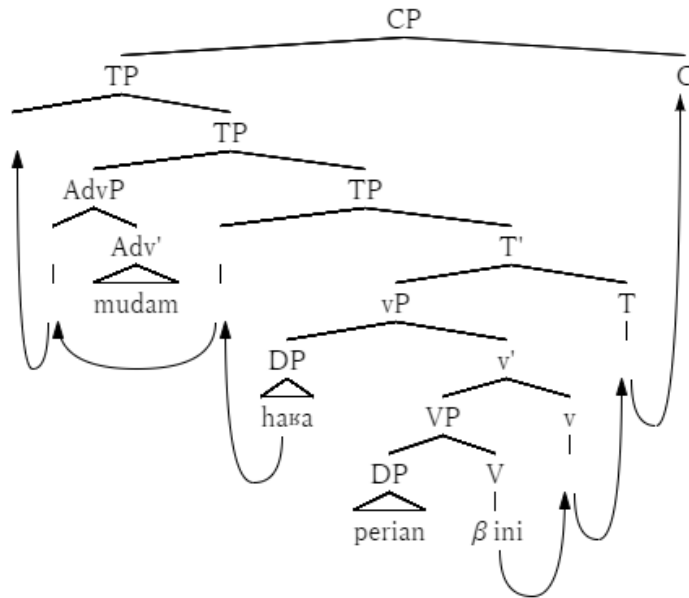
3 Interrogative Sentences

    Declarative and interrogative sentences have the same word order in Pashto. Yes-no questions are formed with rising intonation whereas *wh*-questions utilize *wh*-phrases to compose interrogative sentences.

3.1 *Yes/No Questions*   When yes-no interrogative sentences are produced, the pitch track is raised toward the sentence fina, as shown in (5)l[8].

(5)   a.   haʁa   japane   dei
                he   Japanse   be
                'He is Japanese.'

        b.   haʁa   japane   dei ↗
                he   Japanese   be (with rising intonation)
                'Is he Japanese?'

3.2 *Wh-questions*   When *wh*-questions are formed, *wh*-phrases appear in-situ. Interrogative sentences with *what*, *where*, and *how* are shown in the following subsection.

3.2.1 *What*   [sə] 'what' usually appears with [siz] 'thing' in interrogative sentences.

(6)   a.   da   tika   di
                this   grilled meat   be
                'This is chicken.'

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[8] *na ya* 'or not' is added at a sentence-final position in a casual text-based conversation to make it clear whether sentences are interrogative or not.

b.   da   sə   siz   dei?
this   what   thing   be
'What is this?'

3.2.2 *Where*   The question to ask *where* has the form h [kom zigi] 'which place.'

(7)   a.   taso   də   kom   zigi   ie
you   particle   which   place   be
'Where are you from?'

[də] is a particle that represents a relationship between an object and a particular word, such as a noun, in the sentence (David & Brugman, 2014). The function of the particle is similar to the determiner or possessive in English. In (7), it functions as a possessive marker that connects *you* and *place*. Therefore, the literal meaning of the sentences is 'Which place do you belong to?'

3.2.3 *How*

(8)   a.   da   də   sumra   baja   da?
this   particle   how much   price   be?
'How much is it?'

When the amount of money is asked, in addition to 'how much price', the particle [də] is also used to show the relationship between *this* and *price*. The literal meaning of the sentence is 'what is the price that belongs to this?'.

From (6) and (7), it is shown that in Pashto, when creating an interrogative sentence for *how* and *where*, the interrogative word is placed before the object. In addition, the particle [də] is required before the interrogative word.

4 Negation

Negation is formed in Pashto by the insertion of the negative particle *na* before the verb. This is supported by previous research as seen in David and Brugman (2014) as well as elicited data from our consultant. Thus, as Pashto is an SOV language, this means that the negation will always follow the object. In terms of the tree diagram, we can look at the following sentence (9) for further clarification.

(9)   a.   wos   haʁa   nor   peɾian   na   βini
now   she   more   ghosts   neg.   see
'Now she doesn't see ghosts anymore.'

According to the research in Rivero (1991), Long Head Movement (LHM) in English-type languages does not see negation c-command Tense and that either the verb or auxiliary head moves into the negative head under the negative phrase, become one complex unit, and then continue LHM until the reaches the complementizer head. With this in mind, we can therefore expect the verb to move under each head, forming a complex unit as it moves towards the complementizer head with the negation and the Tense marker. However, as the root of verb for [βini] 'see' is unclear, the whole word has been included at the verb, but keep in mind that the Tense marker is under the Tense head and that the verb obtains tense after being negated and not before. The syntax tree illustrating (9) and LHM is represented in (10).

(10)
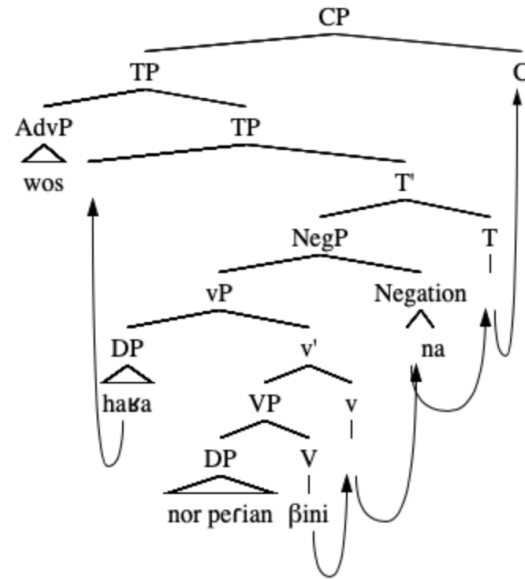
5 Complex Clauses

The complex clauses in Pashto are formed by having the embedded clause move to the spec of CP₁ to avoid the double verb formation. As already mentioned, Pashto is an SOV language, which means that the verb comes last. However, in complex sentences like that of (11a), this becomes problematic as the two verbs end up next to each other, as seen in *(11b).

(11)   a.
dʒon	χia	wo	tʃe	mariam	də	buti	ʃa.	ta	peɾe	olido
John	think	past	that	Mariam	possesive	tree	back	behind	ghost	saw

'John thought that Mariam saw a ghost behind a tree.'

   b.
dʒon.	tʃe	mariam	də	buti	ʃa	ta	peɾe	**olido**	**χial**	wo
John.	that	Mariam	possesive	tree	back	behind	ghost	**saw**	**think**	past

Intended: 'John **thought** that Mariam **saw** a ghost behind a tree.'

Thus, in order to avoid this formation, the embedded clause is moved to the spec of CP₁, rendering an SVO structure in the main clause of complex structures while the embedded clause retains the SOV formation. The tree (12) shows the movement of (11a).

(12)
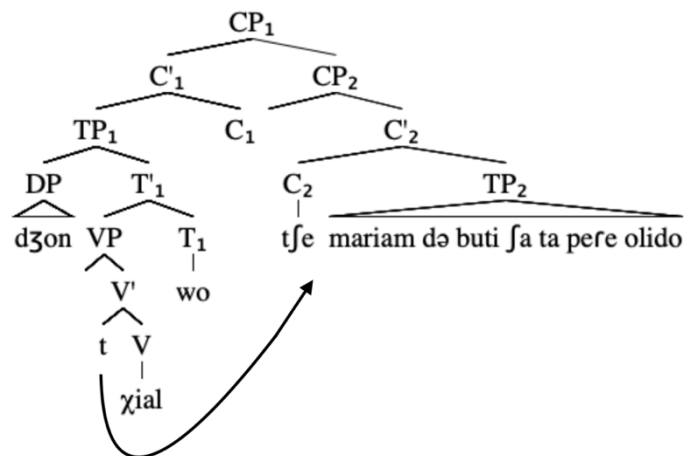
Additionally, we must also assume that Pashto has two types of CP, one that has the alignment on the left and the other where it is on the right. These two forms are illustrated in (13). Through these two forms, we can explain how complex sentences are formed in Pashto.
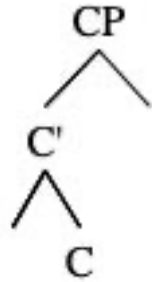
(13)   a.   b.

6 Conclusion

The above sections have described the syntactic grammar of Pashto. Section 2 first introduces the basic word ordering in Pashto, that is, the head-final phrasal structure and the SOV structure of the declarative sentences. Followingly, Section 3 describes the interrogative sentences, which are yes-no questions (section 3.1) and *wh*-questions (Section 3.2). Then, Section 4 explains the negation in Pashto, where the negative marker *na* is inserted before the verb. Lastly, Section 5 summarizes the formation of complex clauses. Although the description summarizes some of the basic word-ordering rules, in order to analyze further, we need to collect more data.

7 References

David, A. B., & Brugman, C. M. (2014). *Descriptive grammar of Pashto and its dialects*. De Gruyter Mouton.

Eberhard, D. M., Simons, G. F., & Fenning, C. D. (Eds.). (2021) *Wthnologue* (24th ed.). http://www.ethnologue.com

Rivero, M. L. (1991). Long head movement and nagation: Serbo-Croatian vs. Slovak and Czech. *The Linguistic Review 8,* 319-351.