

Chapter 2. Basic Features

1 Introduction

Generally, word order, headedness, morphological typology, and pro-drop shed light on how grammatical information is structurally encoded in human languages and on how much of that information must be overtly expressed. Word order and headedness (i.e., left- or right-headed) reveal how phrases are organized and how syntactic relations such as selection and modification are established, while cross-linguistic variation in these domains helps identify both language-specific parameters and universal constraints. Morphological typology ranges from analytic (e.g., isolating) to synthetic systems (e.g., fusional / inflectional, agglutinative, polysynthetic, and oligosynthetic), capturing how languages distribute grammatical information across words and morphemes and revealing systematic variation in morphological complexity. Pro-drop phenomena, in turn, highlight the interaction between syntax, morphology, and discourse, showing how rich agreement or particular structural configurations can license the omission of subjects without loss of interpretability.

2 Word order

Word order refers to the linear arrangement of the subject (S), verb (V), and object (O) in one language. Languages differ systematically in their basic or unmarked word order (e.g., SVO, SOV, VSO, VOS, OVS, OSV), and these patterns affect how grammatical relations are identified and how information is structured in a clause.

Catalan is fundamentally an SVO language, as shown in (1).

- (1) Jo tinc un gat.
 1SG.NOM have.1SG.PRE INDF.M.SG cat.M.SG
 'I have a cat.'

When the object is topicalized, an OV(S) order is preferred, as shown in (2).

- (2) El gat, el tinc jo.
 DEF.M.SG cat.M.SG 3SG.ACC.M.SG have.1SG.PRE 1SG.NOM
 'As for the cat, I have it.'

For embedded clauses, the SVO order is also applied.

- (3) Tinc un gat que menja poc.
 have.1SG.PRE INDF.M.SG cat.M.SG COMP eat.3SG.PRE little
 'I have a cat that eats little.'

See more information about word order at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Word_order.

3 Left-headed

Catalan is basically a left-headed language, that is, the head comes before its complement. See (4) for NP (noun phrase), VP (verb phrase), and PP (preposition phrase) for examples. This is also reflected within embedded clauses like (3), in the sense that the modified noun comes before the clause that modifies it.

- (4) a. gat negre
 cat.M.SG black.M.SG
 'black cat'

- b. **menjar pa**
eat.INF bread.M.SG
'eat bread'
- c. **a casa**
LOC house.F.SG
'at home'

However, APs (adjective phrases) are generally right-headed, as shown in (5).

- (5) **molt maco**
very cute.M.SG
'very cute'

4 Synthetic and fusional / inflectional

Catalan is synthetic in the sense that it often uses inflections to express grammatical relationships rather than relying heavily on word order or auxiliary verbs. It is fusional or inflectional because a single morpheme (i.e., *portmanteau*) can encode different grammatical information (e.g., tense, person, number) at the same time. These features can be reflected within verbs (6), adjectives (7), and nouns (8), etc.

- (6) a. **parl-em**
speak-1SG.PRE
'(we) speak'
 - b. **cant-ava**
sing-3SG.PST.IMPF
'(he/she) was sing / (he/she) used to sing'
 - c. **far-é**
do-1SG.FUT
'(I) will do'
- (7) a. **alt-es**
tall-F.PL
'tall'
- b. **feliç-os**
happy-M.PL
'happy'
- (8) a. **gat-s**
cat-M.PL
'cats'
- b. **cas-es**
house-F.PL
'houses'

See more information about morphological typology at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morphological_typology.

5 Pro-drop

Catalan is a pro-drop language, in the sense that the subject pronoun can often be omitted because the verb conjugation provides enough information to infer the subject, as shown in

(9).

- (9) a. Parl-em català.
 speak-1SG.PRE Catalan
 'We speak Catalan.'
- b. Vul-l menjar.
 want-1SG.PRE eat.INF
 'I want to eat.'
- c. Estudi-a molt.
 study-3SG.PRE much
 '(S)he studies a lot.'

See more information about pro-drop language at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pro-drop_language.