

From SOV to SVO: the case of Modern Eastern Armenian

1 Introduction

In this article I address the issue concerning the change of word order from verb final to verb middle, i.e., from SOV to SVO, in Modern Eastern Armenian, the Armenian language spoken in the Republic of Armenia. This change is taking place now and according to my analysis, is not completed yet. The general theoretical question concerns the driving forces of such evolution. I will show that Verb Second phenomena play an important role in this particular case, together with the crucial contribution of the information structure of the sentence. Moreover, it will also emerge that in order to allow for a different word order to surface, several factors *conspire* to the final result, among which the morphosyntactic properties of the Armenian verb.

2 Armenian and word order typology: state of the art

The word order status of Modern Eastern Armenian (henceforth, MEA) is controversial. WALS (Dryer, and Haspelmath, 2013) classifies it as a language *with no dominant order*, whereas in the same Atlas, Western Armenian is classified as a SOV language. I will not consider here the issues concerning the similarities and differences between the two Armenian languages, which however are quite considerable – especially with respect to the morphosyntactic properties of the verbal forms – because it would lie outside the scope of this research.¹ As I said above, Eastern Armenian is the national language of the Republic of Armenia, whereas Western Armenian is spoken throughout the Armenian diaspora, i.e., the communities of Armenians outside Armenia. Given that these communities were established in different times during a

¹ In Western Armenian, for instance, the indicative is mostly constituted by synthetic forms, whereas in MEA most indicative forms are periphrastic. An exception in MEA is given by the aorist, which however has some quite special aspectual and temporal properties, as discussed in Giorgi and Haroutyunian (2014; see also Donabedian 2016). See also the discussion in sections 2-4.

very long-time span – ca. 1700 years – Western Armenian can be more accurately considered as a constellation of languages, even if a so-called *standard* might be emerging, mostly due to the mass-media's pervasive role in society and education. In what follows, I briefly review the literature concerning word order in the Armenian language(s) across the centuries and then focus on the properties of MEA.

As a first consideration, it is important to point out that the order OV vs VO from a typological point of view, correlates with a series of word ordering properties, having to do with the general parametrical distinction *head-first* vs *head-final*. Head-first languages usually have prepositions, postnominal adjectives – or at least they admit some adjectives to appear post-nominally (see, Giorgi and Longobardi 1991, Cinque 2010) – and postnominal genitives. They also exhibit the order auxiliary-participle and copula-predicate. The reverse is true of head-final languages. Namely, *coherent* languages have postpositions, prenominal genitives and adjectives, and exhibit the order participle-auxiliary and predicate-copula. In totally coherent languages, sentential complements of the verb precede the head, and analogously as far relative clauses are concerned, which appear on the left of the head N. The placement of sentential complements, however, in a pre-V or pre-N position is realized only in a subset of head-final languages, such as for instance Japanese, which is a very coherent language from the point of view of word order. As a matter of fact, even in languages quite consistently head-final, sentential complements often appear on the right of the head, as is the case of MEA. Otherwise MEA is an almost totally coherent head-final language.²

According to several scholars, word order in Armenian underwent significant changes from classical through middle and finally modern Armenian. In classical Armenian – approximately V-XII cent. – most scholars argue that the basic word order was SVO. See for instance the discussion in Donabedian (2013), Aliffi, (20014), Faghiri and Samvelian (2020), Samvelian, Faghiri, (2022), Faghiri, Samvelian and Khursudhian (2022). However, even at this early stage, Faghiri Samvelian and Khursudhian (2022) and Aliffi (2014) point out that the order participle-auxiliary and predicate-copula was the predominant one.³ According to Faghiri, Samvelian and

² These typological data can be checked on the WALS, which provides quite an extensive survey. The reason why sentential complements and relative clauses are the most resistant to obey the general head-final parameter is not clear and is an object of much debate, which I will not address here.

³ Aliffi (2014) also argues that in Classical Armenian word order tends to express a *pragmatic* function, meaning that word order might change in accordance with informational factors. As I show in the following discussion, this is exactly the point I am going to develop with respect

Khursudhian (2022), moreover, in the middle stage – approximately XII-XVI cen. – this order becomes the usual one as far as the placement of the auxiliaries goes, and the orders Gen-Noun and Adjective-Noun begin to surface. Hence, from these studies, the Armenian language actually turns out as mostly characterizable as head final across the centuries as far as the placement of the verb is concerned – given that it often follows the participle and the copula. However, word order with respect to heads other than V is not clearly coherent with this choice and in a consistent number of cases, the object follows the verb.

An interesting argument in favor of OV order in modern Armenian is provided by idioms, which exhibit this order, as in the following examples (from Faghiri and Samvelian, 2020, ex 9a-b):

- (1) dagay mtel
(lit: coffin enter) ‘to die’
- (2) layn sirt unenal
(lit. large heart have) ‘to be lenient’

Consider also the following example, from Samvelian, Faghiri, and Khursudhian (2022, ex.15a):

- (3) zef arnel ‘to make fun of’ (lit. ‘hand take’):
Na mez zef ē arn-um
(s)he we.DAT hand be.AUX.3SG take-IPFV
‘(S)he is making fun of us.’

They point out the SVO order would be unacceptable with the idiomatic reading and has only the literal interpretation, i.e., *she takes the hand*. From Samvelian, Faghiri, and Khursudhian (2022, ex.15b):

- (4) * Na mez arn-um ē zef
(s)he us take-IPFV be.AUX.3SG hand
(intended) ‘(S)he is making fun of us.’

to MEA, emphasizing the role of information structure for determining V2 order. This consideration might point to the conclusion that perhaps Classical Armenian might have V2 properties, even if only limited to some contextual environments.

This observation strongly supports the view of a basic OV order in MEA.

As it will clearly emerge from the following discussion, however, it is very difficult to characterize a language as OV or VO in absence of a theoretical framework and this is especially true for languages exhibiting Verb Second properties. It is in fact a well-established hypothesis in the generative framework that in these languages the surface position of the inflected verb is a derived one and is not always exactly the same in all languages – for instance some V2 languages also allow Verb Third and others do not – or in all sentences of the same language – for instance, in German subordinate clauses introduced by a complementizer the temporalized verb appears clause-finally, i.e., O-V-AUX, and not in second position. This is the reason why German in the typological literature is often considered, as in WALS, a language with no dominant order. In the generative framework German is simply characterized as a Verb-final language with V2.

Faghiri and Samvelian (2020), address the issue in MEA from a quantitative point of view, considering data from a large corpus of Armenian. They collect 900 examples including periphrastic present tense and the synthetic aorist verbal form.⁴ They find that in a considerable number of cases the direct object follows the verb. However, as will be illustrated in the following sections, in MEA informational factors are of the utmost importance in determining word order, whereas they play only a secondary role in their work. Faghiri and Samvelian (2020) discuss the criteria for identifying the unmarked order. They claim that the unmarked order is provided by the most common one, i.e., the order exhibiting the highest frequency in a corpus. This criterion is opposed to the one I will discuss below, namely that the orders produced in out-of-the-blue sentences – i.e., in sentences uttered to open a conversation in absence of previous content – count as unmarked ones. In this sense, it is possible to have more than one *unmarked* order in a given language. Furthermore, in the case of V2 languages such as German, an SVO order is indeed a possible out-of-the-blue order, even if, as pointed out above, according to the generative view developed starting from the ‘80s it is a derived order,

⁴ For further discussion, see also Faghiri, Samvelian and Khursudhian (2022) and Faghiri and Samvelian (2020). Samvelian, Faghiri, and Khursudhian (2022) also address the issue from an experimental point of view based on eye-tracking results. See also Donabedian (2010), the author mostly addresses issues having to do with the interpretation of bare nouns, but she also considers the properties of word order in (Western) Armenian as well.

German being an SOV language.⁵ Concluding, given the considerations above, the characterization of a language as SVO or SOV might be *tout court* misleading in the case of a V2 language and a more fine-grained analysis is required.

3 The issue

As discussed above, MEA is described in the literature and in reference grammars and in technical literature as a Subject-Object-Verb language, where the clitic auxiliary follows the participle, as in the following example, discussed in Giorgi and Haroutyunian (2020):⁶

(5) Siran-ə salor-ə **ker-el ē**

Siran-ART plum-ART eat-PRF.PTCP AUX.3SG

‘Siran has eaten the plum’

The word order given in example (5) is informationally neutral, hence available in out-of-the-blue sentences and can be used to open a conversation. In this case, the entire clause is in focus, as shown by the fact that it is a good answer to the question “*What’s happening?*”. This kind of reading is dubbed *sentence focus* and will briefly discuss again in section 4 below.

Native speakers, however, also accept the SVO order, which by most of them is considered *colloquial*, without detecting any significant informational difference between the two:⁷

⁵ I do not mention here the very vast literature on this particular issue. I refer the reader to Holmberg (2015) and reference cited there for further discussion. Note also that German is not a coherent head-final language, given that it has preposition and pre-nominal determiners.

⁶ See also, Dum Tragtut (2002, 2009). For the transliteration of the Armenian examples, following Giorgi and Haroutyunian (2020), I adopt the system based on the works of the linguists Heinrich Hübschmann and Antoine Meillet as referenced in Hübschmann and Meillet (1913, p.8-9).

⁷ All the native speakers – 6 speakers (3 female, 3, male age 18 - 65) – accepted both word orders. They were also asked the following question when confronted with sentence (2): “*When would you use this sentence, instead of the other one?*”. The answer invariably was: “*When talking to my family/friends*”. When asked whether they would use it in written language, the answer was invariably “*No*”. All the speakers consulted were native speakers of MEA, from Yerevan, the capital city of the Republic of Armenia. As briefly discussed in section XX a more

(6) Siran-ə **ker-el ē** salor-ə

Siran-ART eat-PRF.PTCP AUX.3SG plum-ART

‘Siran has eaten the plum’

Note that in both these examples, the auxiliary follows the participle. MEA, as discussed above, is a head final language, therefore the order participle > auxiliary is the one coherent with this consideration. Moreover, the verbal forms of the indicative, present tense included, are always periphrastical, except for the aorist, meaning that they are constituted by an invariant participle – i.e., no person, gender and number inflection on the participle – and an inflected auxiliary – where the features appearing on the inflected auxiliary are tense, person and number. The auxiliary is always a form of the verb *be*, whereas there are 6 different types of participles, each specialized for a particular tense and aspect combination.⁸ Most importantly for the proposal outlined here, the auxiliary is a clitic, in that it never bears word stress.

The issue addressed in this article concerns the availability in the same language, with no informational differences, of the two orders provided above.

I will argue that in MEA there are two coexisting grammars: a conservative one – SOV – and an innovative one – SVO.⁹ I will show that the fundamental properties of MEA allowing the innovation are on one side, the peculiar morphological status of the verbal inflection, and on the other, the existence of information-triggered V2, with the availability of V3 (V4 etc.) orders.

4 Focus and V2

rigorous check should be conducted with a Likert scale, investigating samples of different age and educational level. This is left for future research.

⁸ The inflected verbal system of MEA includes an indicative mood, as well as a subjunctive. It distinguishes a perfective and an imperfective aspect. See Giorgi and Haroutyunian (2014) on perfectivity and the aorist in MEA and Donabedian (2010) on Western Armenian. I am not going to consider these issues any further in this work, because they lie outside the scope of this work.

⁹ I would rather consider the present SVO order as an innovation, rather than a residual of the past, given that, as pointed out in section 1, it looks like Armenian might have had strong V-final properties across the centuries. Moreover, it could also be that at several times in its historical development, multiple grammars might have coexisted in the same language, perhaps distinguishing different registers. Further investigation is indeed necessary on this point.

Giorgi and Haroutyunian (2016, 2018, 2019) discussed word order in MEA in relationship with the information structure typical of this language. In this work I capitalize on their conclusions, which I am going to summarize in what follows.

As pointed out above, in examples (5) and (6) the auxiliary is cliticized onto the participle. In certain cases, however, it can be cliticized onto other phrases, such as for instance a subject or an object, as in the following examples:¹⁰

(7) Siran-n ē salor-ə **ker-el**

Siran-ART AUX.3SG plum-ART eat-PRF.PTCP

‘Siran-foc has eaten the plum’

Siran in this sentence is focalized, as shown by the fact that (7) can be used for correcting an information, deemed incorrect by the speaker, introduced in the previous discourse, as for instance in the following sentence (from Giorgi and Haroutyunian, 2019, ex.3):

(8) Speaker A: Mariam-ə salor-ə **ker-el** ē

Mariam-ART plum-ART eat-PRF.PTCP AUX.3S

‘Mariam has eaten the plum.’

Speaker A might introduce *Mariam* as a subject and speaker B might correct A by means of sentence (7), hence, *Siran* in this case is a corrective/contrastive focus. The same holds for the object, as in the following example (from Giorgi and Haroutyunian, 2019, ex.6):

(9) Speaker B: Salor-n ē Siran-ə **ker-el**

Plum-ART AUX.3SG Siran-ART eat-PRF.PTCP

‘Siran has eaten the plum-foc.’

In this case the focused phrase is *the plum*, which might be used for correcting an assertion such as *Siran ate the apple*. An adverb can be focused as well, as in following sentence (from Giorgi and Haroutyunian, 2019, ex.10):

¹⁰ As remarked above, in MEA there are six different types of participles. In the examples provided in the text the perfective participle is used. To facilitate the reading of the examples, I use bold characters to mark the relevant verbal forms.

- (10) Yerek ē Siran-ə salor-ə **ker-el**
 Yesterday AUX.3SG Siran-ART plum-ART eat-PRF.PTCP
 ‘Yesterday-foc Siran has eaten the plum.’

Finally, the participle can also be focused (from Giorgi and Haroutyunian, 2019, ex.8):

- (11) **Ker-el** ē Siran-ə salor-ə
 eat-PRF.PTCP AUX.3SG Siran-ART plum-ART
 ‘Siran has eaten-foc the plum.’

Example (11) can be used to correct a previous assertion, such as for instance *Siran peeled the plum*, by substituting the participle with another one, in this case *kerel* (eat).

Giorgi and Haroutyunian (2020) also discussed the fact that *wh* operators trigger the same order as focus, in that the auxiliary must immediately follow the *wh* (see also Tamrazian 1991, 1994):

- (12) Inč‘ ē Sirane **kerel**?
 What has Siran eaten?
 (13) Inč‘ mirg ē Sirane **kerel**?
 Which fruit has Siran eaten?
 (14) * Inč‘ Sirann ē **kerel**?
 What Siran has eaten ?
 (15) * Inč‘ Sirane **kerel** ē?
 What Siran eaten has?

This is expected, since it has long been observed – see Chomsky (1976, 1977) – that *wh* and focus exhibit a similar pattern in many languages.¹¹ Note also that in Armenian *wh* and Focus cannot coexist, at least in the left periphery, as is the case in other languages as well, for instance in Italian.¹²

Giorgi and Haroutyunian (2016, 2018, 2020) argue that the word order illustrated above can be understood hypothesizing the existence in MEA of a strategy of *informational V2*, following

¹¹ Whether the *wh* item and focus compete for the same position or not, is still object of debate in generative grammar.

¹² But see Bocci, Saito and Rizzi (2018) and Cruschina (2021) for a discussion of this point.

the well-known V2 typology found in other languages, such as for instance the Germanic ones (cf. Holmberg 2015). In other words, in Armenian the strategy for marking focus is provided by the presence of the inflected verb in the left periphery in the head FOC, and the focused projection occupies its Specifier position. This focus-marking word order is exhibited also in sentences featuring a synthetic verbal form, such as the aorist. In out of the blue assertions, the aorist appears in clause final position:

- (16) Mariam-ə hyut'-ə **xm-ec'** (from Giorgi and Haroutyunian, 2020, ex.25)
 Mariam-ART juice-ART drink-AOR.3SG
 'Mariam drank the juice.'

In order to focus a phrase, the inflected verb moves in V2 position, adjacent to the focused phrase. In the following example, the object is focused:

- (17) T'ey-ə **xm-ec'** Mariam-ə (from Giorgi and Haroutyunian, 2020, ex.26)
 tea-ART drink-AOR.3SG Mariam-ART
 'Mariam drank tea-foc.'

The sentence in (17) can be used to correct an assertion such as *Mariam drank orange juice*, where *tea* is focused to correct *orange juice*.

With interrogative phrases, adjacency of the inflected verb with the *wh* item must be met as well:

- (18) Ov ker-av salor-ə? (from Giorgi and Haroutyunian, 2019, ex.29)
 Who eat-AOR.3SG plum-ART
 'Who ate the plum?'

If the V2 order is not realized, the sentence is ungrammatical:

- (19) *Ov salor-ə ker-av? (from Giorgi and Haroutyunian, 2020, ex.30)
 Who plum-ART eat-AOR.3SG
 'Who ate the plum?'

Note that the existence of V2 due to informational reasons, namely focus-marking, is not just a property of MEA, in that it can be found in other oriental Indo-European languages as well, such as for instance Kashmiri.¹³

There are two considerations which will be particularly relevant for the proposal outlined here. The first one concerns the intonation associated to these sentences – further analysis is indeed necessary – but according to a preliminary analysis, there is no emphatic intonation associated with the focused phrase, in the case of a periphrastic verb, i.e., in structures such as (11) and (13)-(15). An emphatic stress is used only with sentence (17), where the aorist appears.

The other important observation is that information focus is marked in the same way, i.e., by means of the V2 strategy. In Italian and other languages information focus is realized in the verbal projection, therefore in a low structural position (see Belletti 2009, 2012, 2014), whereas in Armenian the V2 pattern is extended to all sorts of focus. Consider for instance the pattern found with question-answering (from Giorgi and Haroutyunian 2020, exx. 33-35).

- (20) Ov ker-av salor-ə?
 Who eat-AOR.3SG plum-ART?
 ‘Who ate the plum?’
- (21) Siran-ə **ker-av** salor-ə
 Siran-ART eat-AOR.3SG plum-ART
 ‘Siran ate the plum.’
- (22) *Siran-ə salor-ə **ker-av**
 Siran-ART plum-ART eat-AOR.3SG
 ‘Siran ate the plum.’

The question in (20) is about the external argument of the eating. The ungrammaticality of the answer in (22), as opposed to (21) shows that V2 is required in this case as well.¹⁴

5 Verb third

¹³ On Kashmiri, see Manetta (2011), Bhatt (2009), Whali and Koul (1997). For a brief discussion of the relevance of the analysis of Kashmiri for MEA, see Giorgi and Haroutyunian (2016).

¹⁴ Example (22) is a possible word order, as illustrated above, but it cannot be used for answering to the question in (20).

As discussed in Holmberg (2015), V3 structures across languages are available provided that the phrases preceding the focused one are base generated in the left periphery and interpreted as given. In MEA V3 orders are indeed possible. Consider the following examples (from Giorgi and Haroutyunian, 2020, ex.45-47, where the auxiliary appears in bold characters):

- (23) Siran-ə salor-n ē ker-el
 Siran-ART plum-ART AUX.3SG eat- PRF.PTCP
 ‘Siran has eaten the plum-foc.’
- (24) Salor-ə Siran-n ē ker-el
 Plum-ART Siran- ART AUX.3SG eat- PRF.PTCP
 ‘Siran-foc has eaten the plum.’
- (25) Yerek salor-n ē Siran-ə ker-el
 Yesterday plum- ART AUX.3SG Siran-ART eat- PRF.PTCP
 ‘Yesterday Siran has eaten the plum-foc.’

In these cases, the interpretation of the phrase preceding the verb is obligatorily a focused one. The V2 pattern is the same given above: every phrase – subject, object, indirect object, participle and adverbial – can precede the inflected verb, and when this happens it is focused. The phrase preceding focus is interpreted as a topic. Following various analysis of the pre-focus positions – cf. among the others Cinque (1990), Frascarelli (2000), Giorgi (2015, 2018), Benincà and Poletto (2004) – it is reasonable to hypothesize that in MEA the items in V3 positions are to be assimilated to Clitic Left Dislocated phrases, hence base generated in the left periphery and interpreted as given.¹⁵ Moreover, in pre-focus position more than one topic is possible:

- (26) Yerek Siran-ə salor-n ē ker-el
 Yesterday Siran-ART plum- ART AUX.3SG eat- PRF.PTCP
 ‘Yesterday Siran has eaten the plum-foc.’

¹⁵ Giorgi (2014, 2015, 2018) proposes that pre-focal left-peripheral clitic left dislocated phrases are indeed to be assimilated to parentheticals on the basis of syntactic and prosodical arguments – it is well-known (cf. Dehé and Kavalova 2006) that prosodic features are important characteristics of parentheticals. It is not clear however, to what extent Giorgi’s proposal can be taken to hold for MEA as well, because of the lack of a systematic analysis of MEA’s prosodic properties. This issue is left to future investigation.

In this sentence, both *yerek* (yesterday) and *Siran* are to be interpreted as topics.

Notice now that, as pointed out above, the participle can be focused as well, as in example (11) above, repeated here for simplicity:

- (27) Ker-el ē Siran-ə salor-ə
 eat-PRF.PTCP AUX.3SG Siran-ART plum-ART
 ‘Siran has eaten-foc the plum.’

In this case as well, it is possible to have a V3 order, as for instance in the following case:

- (28) Siran-ə ker-el ē salor-ə
 Siran-ART eat-PRF.PTCP AUX.3SG plum-ART
 ‘Siran has eaten-foc the plum.’

In example (28), the subject *Siran* appears in pre-focus position. This is exactly the word order given in example (6), namely the SVO order often adopted by native speakers as an alternative to SOV. In the next section I am going to propose a hypothesis to deal with this issue.

Note finally that indefinites trigger a *low* V2 word order, i.e., as proposed in Giorgi and Haroutyunian (2020), when an indefinite appears in the sentence, the auxiliary must follow, as illustrated in the following examples (from Giorgi and Haroutyunian, 2020, exx. 97-98):¹⁶

- (29) Siran-ə (mi) salor ē **ker-el**
 Siran-ART a plum AUX.3SG eat-PRF.PTCP
 ‘Siran has eaten a plum.’
- (30) *Siran-ə (mi) salor **ker-el ē**
 Siran-ART a plum eat-PRF.PTCP AUX.3SG
 ‘Siran has eaten a plum.’

Note that example (29) is similar to V3 structure. As shown by the ungrammaticality of example (30), the order Participle+Aux is ungrammatical. Interestingly, as the authors point out, this word order is a typical child error, and it is often produced in *motherese* speech. I will get back

¹⁶ The indefinite Noun can or cannot be introduced by an indefinite determiner such as *mi*, lit: *one*.

to this issue in the next section.

When an aorist is present, the order in (31) obtains, which is indistinguishable from the order with definites:

- (31) Siran-ə (mi) salor **ker-av**
Siran-ART a plum eat-AOR
'Siran ate a plum.'

If in the sentence a focused phrase appears, the focus *wins* over the indefinite, as shown in the following sentences (from Giorgi and Haroutyunian, 2020, exx. 99-100):

- (32) Siran-n ē (mi) salor **ker-el**
Siran-ART AUX.3SG a plum eat-PRF.PTCP
'Siran-foc has eaten a plum.'
- (33) Siran-ə (mi) salor ē **ker-el**
Siran-ART a plum AUX.3SG eat-PRF.PTCP
'Siran has eaten a plum.' / *'Siran-foc has eaten a plum.'

Example (33) is grammatical, but it cannot be interpreted with the subject *Siran* in focus.

6 The hypothesis

Let me summarize the main points outlined so far:

- MEA exhibits V2 word order driven by informational properties of the context, in that the fronted phrase is interpreted as a Focus.
- In MEA *all* focus types are marked by means of the clitic auxiliary *be* in second position. Hence, corrective, contrastive focus and information focus as well are obtained in this way.
- Focus marking is not accompanied by a special emphatic intonation (further study required).
- Most verbal forms, present tense included, are formed by a non-inflected participle and an inflected auxiliary clitic.
- V3 is also available, provided that the pre-focus phrase is interpreted as a topic.

As discussed above, I take the order *Subject – Object – Participle – Auxiliary* to be an unmarked one. Moreover, the participle can be focused as any other phrase. In this case, it appears in first position, followed by the clitic auxiliary, determining the following word order:

(34) Participle(foc) Aux Subject Object

a V3 order is possible as well, when the first phrase is base-generated as a topic. Hence the focused participle in (34) can be preceded by a subject in V3 position, giving rise to the following sequence:

(35) Subject(topic) Participle(foc) Aux Object

The order in (35) is important to get to SVO order. Both in (35) and in SVO languages, in fact, subjects are usually interpreted as topics, as amply discussed in the literature.¹⁷ Hence, in (35) the subject does not necessarily bear a special discourse function, even if the participle is overtly marked as focus. Moreover, in this string, the verbal *complex* follows the subject, as in SVO languages.

The next step is the reanalysis of the clitic auxiliary as verbal morphology, as in (31):

(36) Subject inflected-Verb Object

According to (36), the auxiliary ceases to mark a discourse function and simply becomes part of the verbal form. In other words, the auxiliary in this case loses its ability to act as a focalizer and consequently, the participle cannot be interpreted as a Focus. This final step enables the *innovative*, non-informationally marked order SVO to arise.

Note that the incorporation of reduced forms of the auxiliary verb is a very common process across languages. For instance, in Romance, the development of several inflected verbal forms originates from an incorporated auxiliary. Fleischman (1982) argues that this happens in the case of the Romance synthetic future. In the case of the future, according to Fleischman (1982), the Latin synthetic form *cantabo*, (I will sing) was replaced by a periphrastic form constituted by the infinitive – *cantare* (to sing) – plus the indicative present tense of the verb *habere* (to have), *habeo* (I have), hence *cantare habeo*; this form then synthesized, giving rise to the

¹⁷ MEA is a pro-drop language. For a discussion of the relationships between *pro* and the lexical subject, see among the many others Rizzi (2005, 2018). I will not address this issue in this work.

various Romance forms, for instance to the French (*je*) *chanterai*, Spanish *cantarè*, and Italian *canterò*. Interestingly, the Latin future verbal form itself – *cantabo* (I will sing) – is to be traced back to a periphrastic construction, where the auxiliary *be* has been incorporated: **cantabhwo*.¹⁸

Analogously, as discussed in Maiden (2018), the contemporary forms of Romance conditionals – as for instance Spanish *cantaría* and Italian *canterebbe*, (he would sing) – are derived from incorporation in the infinitive *cantare* (to sing), of the imperfect form of the Latin verb *habere* (to have), *habebat*, in Spanish, and the perfect, *habuit*, in Italian. This process is possible also because the verbal form the auxiliary incorporates into is an invariant one, and consequently no phi-features appear in between the lexical verb and the inflectional morpheme. Importantly, this is the case both in Latin, where an infinitive appears, and in MEA where an invariant participle is present.

Therefore, the crucial step required to obtain the SVO order can be stated as follows:

- (37) Reanalysis of the clitic auxiliary as verbal morphology.

The syntax of the sentence with focus on the participle, however, is very different from the syntax of the unfocused SVO one, in that the verbal complex is not in the left periphery, but in the lower layer of the structure. Consider examples (6) again, reproduced here for simplicity:

- (38) Siran-ə **ker-el ē** salor-ə
 Siran-ART eat-PRF.PTCP AUX.3SG plum-ART
 ‘Siran has eaten the plum’

This sentence is in principle ambiguous between the SOV and SVO. The focused interpretation of the participle corresponds to the following structure:

- (39) [TOP-P Siran-ə [FOC-P kerel [ē_{FOC} [TP salor-ə]]]]

Whereas the structure of the SVO sentence is the following one:

¹⁸ This is the case for the first and second Latin conjugations, the third and the fourth conjugation adopt a form derived from a subjunctive, as in the case of *dicam* (I will say). This issue will not be further pursued here since it lies outside the scope of this investigation.

(40) [TP Siran-ə [T⁺ kerel-ē [VP salor-ə]]]

In (40) the complex V+Aux is realized in the T projection and the whole structure is shifted downwards with respect to the V2 structure.

Recall also that in the preceding section I discussed the position of the auxiliary with respect to an indefinite nominal expression. The hypothesis developed by Giorgi and Haroutyunian (2020) is that the indefinite and the inflected verb are moved to the low left periphery, i.e., to the left periphery of the vP.¹⁹ However, the ungrammatical order given in (30), repeated here for simplicity, is perceived as *motherese*, that is it can be *grammatical* in a peculiar register:

(41) *Siran-ə (mi) salor **ker-el ē**
 Siran-ART a plum eat-PRF.PTCP AUX.3SG
 ‘Siran has eaten a plum.’

As also noted in section 4, with the aorist, no detectable difference would arise with the normal unmarked order, cf. example (31), repeated here as (42):

(42) Siran-ə (mi) salor **ker-av**
 Siran-ART a plum eat-AOR
 ‘Siran ate a plum.’

My proposal is that even in this case there is a reanalysis of the sequence Participle-auxiliary as V+ inflection. When reanalyzed as an inflected verb, *ker-el ē* would be structurally identical to *ker-av*, i.e., the aorist. Note in fact that a violation of directionality would be quite abnormous even in *motherese*. For instance, no Italian mom, to my knowledge, would ever produce a post-nominal determiner: *cane il dorme* (dog the sleeps), instead of a pre-nominal one, as in *il cane dorme* (the dog sleeps). Hence, this piece of evidence can be considered relevant to hypothesis suggested here, providing an additional argument in favor of the existence of a double grammar in MEA.

¹⁹ We follow in this the proposals by Belletti (2009, 2012, 2014) and Poletto (2014). The *low* left periphery seems to be relevant in other cases as well, such as for instance the properties and distribution of *speaker-oriented* adverbials, such as epistemic as *probably* and evaluative as *fortunately*, see Giorgi (2016).

Concluding remarks

Summarizing the analysis above, it can be concluded that in this case there is a conspiracy of several factors determining the emergence of the SVO grammar beside the SOV one: the presence of informational V2, together with the availability of V3, the predominantly periphrastic nature of the indicative verbal forms and the clitic nature of the auxiliary. None of these properties taken singularly would be able to justify the shifting from one order to the other, but once considered together, the arising of an SVO grammar becomes fairly natural.²⁰ One might ask how advanced the shifting process is. The answer to this question should certainly require further investigation, but let me propose some remarks to this extent. As illustrated above – cf. exx (17) and (18) – the aorist appears in second position as well to mark focus, and a reanalyzed synthetic verbal form should appear there as well. Hence, the SVO order in principle is ambiguous because the subject could either be a normal subject or a focus, in a V2 sentence. The only way to disambiguate would be to relay on intonation, using an emphatic focus intonation in V2 structures. It would be interesting therefore to check what speakers actually do to focus the subject, i.e., they could either resorting to the normal V2, moving only the auxiliary, or adopting an emphatic stress to mark focus. In the former case, the strategy adopted would be the conservative one, whereas the presence of the latter would point to a more advanced stage toward a coherent SVO grammar. This might be an interesting topic for future research on this issue.

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²⁰ According to my informants, the SVO order is common among the youngest generation especially in the capital Yerevan, following a pattern typical of grammatical innovations. Interesting minimal morphological changes affect the auxiliary/verbal inflection in this case.

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