

Word order variation in Grassfields Bantu

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This paper examines word order variation in Grassfields Bantu. Word order variation is a syntactic phenomenon whereby there is a reversal of the canonical word order pattern of a language. Although this phenomenon offers interesting research possibilities in the case of Grassfields Bantu languages, its treatment has not received adequate attention. This is in the sense that most accounts have stopped short of discussing the interplay between the phonological, syntactic and discourse processes here-involved. The basic assumption attributed to the concept of word order variation in linguistics stems from the consideration that the standard location of a category will be maintained unless there are reasons to do otherwise.

*This paper investigates word order variation in three Grassfields Bantu Languages of Cameroon. It discusses this phenomenon not on the basis of isolated grammaticality judgments, but as a series of choices defining a preferential ranking among a set of word order possibilities available in these languages, as manifested in *wh*-questions, focus constructions and passivization. It also examines the interplay between syntactic, phonological and discourse factors in such constructions.*