Is Tenetehára a head-final over head-initial language?

**Introduction:** Tenetehára is a language spoken by two indigenous groups: the Tembé and the Guajajára. The Tembé group lives on the border of the states of Maranhão and Pará, while the Guajajára group lives in the state of Maranhão, in the northern region of Brazil. The Tenetehára language belongs to the Tupí-Guaraní family, Tupí Stock. The main goal of this paper is to show that Tenetehára SVO-Aux⁰/T⁰/Asp⁰ clauses present a counterexample to the Final-over-Final Constraint (FOFC). One of Biberauer, Holmberg, and Roberts' (2014) claims is that the VO-Aux order is not attested to in the world’s languages. According to this view, the alleged absence of the SVO-Aux/Tense order is one piece of empirical evidence that led Biberauer, Holmberg, and Roberts (henceforth BHR), to state the Final-over-Final Constraint (= FOFC), as follows:

(1) The Final-over-Final Constraint (FOFC)
If $\alpha$ is a head-initial phrase and $\beta$ is a phrase immediately dominating $\alpha$, then $\beta$ must be head-initial. If $\alpha$ is a head-final phrase, and $\beta$ is a phrase immediately dominating $\alpha$, then $\beta$ can be head-initial or head-final.

However, the Tenetehára sentences below clearly indicate that a head-final T⁰/Asp⁰/Aux⁰ can c-select a head-initial vP, as follows:

(2) *ma’e pe Zuze w-enu tazahu ra’e?*
what at John 3-hear big pig IPAST
“Where has John heard the big pig?”

(3) *a’e ae u-mu-me‘u-putar wa-n-emiapo-kwer nehe.*
he EMP 3-CAUS-speak-want 3PL-RP -make-PAST FUT
“He will tell what they have made.”

(4) *awa w-ekar tapi’ir ð-iko*
man 3-look for tapir 3-be
“The man is looking for tapir.”

Based on the data above, the major objective of this talk is to determine whether Tenetehára allows a head-final over head-initial structure or not.

**Theoretical assumptions:** Under BHR’s theory, FOFC relies on the way in which movement is triggered. They propose that it is triggered by a general movement-triggering feature. They use ^ (caret) as a symbol for this feature. ^ is to be a purely formal, arbitrary diacritic. In itself, it has no semantic content, and no connection to phonological or morphological properties beyond simply causing movement. In line with this, Holmberg, Biberauer and Roberts (2015) propose that “a head H may or may not have ^ associated with its categorical feature [+V] or [-V]. In the absence of ^ (the unmarked case), H is linearized to the left of its sister. With ^, H is linearized to the right of its sister.” The core of their proposal is that FOFC “is an effect of locality of selection between heads, and violations of FOFC are ruled out by Relativized Minimality.”

**The proposal:** Notice that the contexts shown in (2) to (4) above clearly suggest that initial over final constituents are possible in Tenetehar. This in turn confirms that this is a mixed headed language in that it exhibits both head-initial and head-final functional projections. For instance, when CPs are of the head-initial type, the word order is C⁰-[SVO]-Tense, with the [SVO] predicate remaining between the complementizer and the tense markers, as shown in the data in (2). Interestingly, the fact that the C-SVO-Aux/Tense order is allowed signals that
Tentehar allows the head-final over head-initial possibility, a parametric option that is banned by FOFC. In sum, the disharmonic head-final over head-initial structures exemplified in the data (2) to (4) pose a serious problem to FOFC. Strong evidence in favor of this comes from the fact that the tense particles are systematically placed after the v-VP complex, thereby having a fixed position in the clause. This indicates that (i) they are not sentential adverbs, since they cannot occupy other syntactic positions as in (5) and (6) and (ii) they cannot be omitted from the sentence, as in (7).

(5) *nehe   a'e ae    u-mu-me'u-putar  wa-n-emiapo-kwer
(6)   *a'e ae  nehe u-mu-me'u-putar  wa-n-emiapo-kwer
(7)    *a'e ae   u-mu-me'u-putar  wa-n-emiapo-kwer

Based on the empirical data above, one may assume that these final particles are syntactic heads, base-generated in the head T⁰/Aux⁰/Asp⁰. Given Kayne’s antisymmetrical theory, in which all movement occurs to the left, and given the internal subject hypothesis, one can postulate that the SVO-Tense order is derived from the basic order [Tense [SVO]]. Therefore, to derive the conclusion that T⁰ is truly head-initial in these constructions, I will assume that the predicate, represented by the v-VP complex, moves to the specifier of TP. This then leads us to conclude that they are really heading the functional projection Asp/TP. The derivation depicted in the syntactic tree below aims to demonstrate this analysis.

(8)

In sum, the Tenetehára constructions examined thus far do not conform to the claim that configurations instantiating the head-final over head-initial are not found in the world’s languages. As such, Tenetehára SVO-Aux/SVO-Tense/SVO-Asp orders violate the constraint in (1), since the vP, selected by the final auxiliaries, is clearly head initial. Hence, I will argue that the reason why Tenetehára violates (1) has to do with the fact that, whereas the superordinate heads T⁰, Aux⁰, Asp⁰ trigger movement of its complement, the complement of this same head does not trigger the raising of its complement. This means that Tentehar allows a tree where the head T⁰ has the feature ^, whereas the functional head v⁰ down the spine of the sentence does not. One thus concludes that Tentehára allows a head-final over head-initial structure, which, in turn, shows that FOFC cannot be seen as a principle of the Universal Grammar.

References

