

## **Shawnee Word Order and Discourse Function**

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As in other Algonquian languages, Shawnee verb inflections encode animacy, person and number of both object and subject. In principle, this allows the relative word order of verbs and their related noun phrases to vary freely. To examine this more closely, we computed the relative word order of verbs and their related noun phrases (subject, object, complement) from a database of mainly narrative texts collected in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, comprising 90,000 word tokens. We supplemented this data with a smaller corpus of contemporary spoken Shawnee in dialog format. In conjunct clauses, noun phrases almost always followed the verb; this was expected. However, noun phrases were also significantly more likely to follow the related verb in independent clauses. The function of the noun phrase -- subject or object -- was not a predictor of position: in independent order, subject noun phrases were as likely to precede the verb as were object noun phrases. The more interesting question is what factor accounts for deviations from the dominant verb-noun order. The deviant cases appear to be governed largely by discourse considerations of information value and narrative coherence. Thus a locative noun bearing significant new information often precedes, rather than follows, a generalized verb of motion. Likewise, in the case of a topic shift in which the subject noun identifies a new actor, the subject noun is more likely to precede its verb than to follow it. As these conditions are discourse features, they are not strictly governed by sentence-level syntax but are subject to the speaker's intent and judgment.