

Word Order in Malagasy Imperatives  
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Malagasy is a rigid VOS language. In imperatives however, in addition to the expected VOS order, VSO is readily permitted (Dez 1990, Koopman 2006). This paper investigates the syntax of this non canonical word order. It proposes that, despite appearances, the post-verbal subject is not a subject at all but a vocative. Semantic, syntactic, and morphological characteristics of Malagasy vocatives support this claim. The paper argues against two alternatives: a scrambling analysis that derives VSO from the canonical VOS via rightward scrambling, and a predicate-internal subject analysis which derives VSO by leaving the subject in its base position. Both alternatives are shown to be empirically and conceptually inferior to the vocative analysis. At least with respect to subject positioning, then, imperatives are not different from non-imperative clauses in Malagasy. This conclusion is in line with work on imperative syntax in other languages (Potsdam 1998 for English and Koopman 2007 for Dutch) arguing that imperative clause structure should differ from that of other clause types only in principled ways.