Constituent Order in Language and Thought:
A Field-based Cognitive Neuroscientific Approach
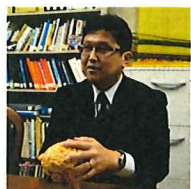
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In many flexible word order languages, sentences with a transitive verb (V) in which the subject (S) precedes the object (O) (SO word order = SOV, SVO, VSO) are reported to be "preferred" over those in which the opposite occurs (OS word order = OSV, OVS, VOS). For example, SO sentences are easier to process and are produced more frequently than OS sentences in Finnish, Japanese, Sinhalese, and others. This empirical evidence of the preference for SO word order, however, is not conclusive, because it comes exclusively from SO languages, i.e., languages in which SO is the syntactically simplest word order. It is therefore necessary to study OS languages to investigate whether or not the same preference holds. In this talk, I will report on several experiments my colleagues and I have conducted, to this end, on Kaqchikel (Mayan, Guatemala) and Seediq (Austronesian, Taiwan), whose syntactically basic word order is VOS.

Koizumi Masatoshi is Professor of Linguistics and Brain Science at Tohoku University, Japan. He received his B.A. from the International Christian University, M.A. from Ohio State University, and Ph.D. from Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His research interests are in grammatical theory and neuro-cognition of language. He is the author of *Phrase Structure in Minimalist Syntax, Bun-no Kozō [Clausal Architecture]*, and numerous journal articles in *Language, Linguistic Inquiry, Frontiers in Psychology, Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience*, and so on. He is currently working on a field-based cognitive neuroscientific study of the sentence and discourse processing of OS languages, such Truku Seediq.