That the order of proper noun and common noun, when co-occurring, (partially) correlates with the order of the genitive with respect to the N (hence with the VO/OV order) is recognized in Greenberg (1966,88). See his Universal 23, given in (1):

(1) If in apposition the proper noun usually precedes the common noun, then the language is one in which the governing noun precedes its dependent genitive. With much better than chance frequency, if the common noun usually precedes the proper noun, the dependent genitive precedes its governing noun.

In other terms: proper noun > common noun implies N > Gen and (with much better than chance frequency) common noun > proper noun implies Gen > N.

Curiously, the correlation appears to be just the opposite. In his note 19, Greenberg gives the list of languages for which he has some data on common noun/proper noun orders: “Languages with common noun-proper noun are Greek, Guarani, Italian, Malay, Serbian, Swahili, Thai, Welsh, Zapotec. Those with proper noun-common noun are Basque, Burmese, Burushaski, Finnish, Norwegian, Nubian and Turkish”.

The former are largely N > Gen (VO) languages and the latter Gen > N (mostly OV) languages. The inadvertent reversal of the correlation on Greenberg’s part was observed in Bennett (1979) (also see Elisa Roma’s comment in the Konstanz Universals Archive, no.9 http://typo.uni-konstanz.de/archive/).
It is in fact the case that many head-initial languages and head-final languages display a mirror-image order of the two. I only consider here a subset of the different kinds of proper noun/common noun pairs (titles of address, names of places, calendar time appellations, and a few others), but this suffices to make the point. See the case of Hebrew (VSO) and that of Japanese (SOV) in (2):


year/number be-šnat 1950 (in-year 1950) 1950 nen (1950 year)
hour/number be-ša’a 8 (at-hour 8) hati zi (8 hour)
month/name be-xodeš may (in-month May) zyuu gatu ‘(lit.) ten month’ (the month of October)
title/name profesor xomski Chomsky kyoozyu
street/name rexov gordon (street Gordon) Asakusa doori (Asakusa street)
city/name ba-ir xeyfa (in.the-city Haifa) Chiba si (Chiba city)
mountain/name har miron (mount Miron) Fuji yama (Fuji mountain)
island/name iyey fokland (islands Falkland) Tori sima (Tori island)
river/name nehar ha-yarden (river the-Jordan) Edo gawa (Edo river)
colour/name mexonit be-ceva adom (car in-colour red) Ki iroi kuruma ((lit.) yellow colour car)
letter/name ha-ot kaf (the-letter “k”) “k” to yuu roomazi ((lit.) k called letter)

Consideration of the relative order of common noun and proper noun in SVO languages shows that they are not as homogeneous a group as one might think. I illustrate it here with the following SVO languages: Chinese, Norwegian, Bulgarian, English, Greek, and Italian (also indicating the relative position of the Genitive and Noun, which, as already noted in Greenberg’s (1966\textsuperscript{2},89), appears to be related to some extent). Each of these languages happens to behave differently from the others.\textsuperscript{1}

\textsuperscript{1} Here and below the proper noun > common noun orders typical of OV languages are given in bold. Interestingly, VO Chinese, Norwegian, Bulgarian and English display more head-final pairs in the proper noun/common noun order than OV German. Cf. (3)a and b and (4)a-b with Im Jahre 1950, Um 8 Uhr, (Im Mai Monat)/Im Monat Mai,
(3)a. **Chinese**² (GN)                                b. **Norwegian** (Øystein Nilsen p.c.) (GN/NG)³

year/number   yi-jiu-wu-ling nian (1-9-5-0 year)      år 1950
hour/number   ba dian (zhong) (8 point (clock))      klokken åtte (clock.the 8)
month/name    wu yue (five month ‘month of May)     Mai måned (May month)
title/name    Qiaomusiji jiaoshou                  Professor Chomsky
street/name   Huaer jie (Wall street)               Lovisenberggata (Lovisenberg street)
city/name     Beijing shi (Beijing city)            Oslo by/byen Oslo
mountain/name Zhumu Langma feng                   Galdhøpiggen (Galdhø (pointed) mountain)
island/name   Huaite dao (White island)            Senjaøya/ øya Senja
river/name    Yangzi jiang                        Viggaelva/elva Vigga (the river Vigga)
colour/name   hong (yan)se (red colour)             en rødfarget bil (a red-coloured car)
letter/name   “k” zi                               “k” bokstaven/bokstaven “k”(“k” letter.def)

(4)a. **Bulgarian** (Iliyana Krapova p.c.)(GN/NG)  b. **English** (GN/NG)⁴

year/number   v 1950 godina (in 1950 year)         (in the) year 1950
hour/number   v osem časa (at 8 hour)              (at) 8 o’clock
month/name    v mai mesets/mesets mai             (in the) month of May
title/name    profesor Čomski                      Professor Chomsky
street/name   ulitsa Rakovski                     Wall street

Maximilianstrasse, In der Stadt Berlin, Der Cervino Berg /der Berg Cervino, Die Insel Rügen, Der Fluss Rhein, Ein rot farbiges Auto, Buchstabe “k”.

² For the Chinese data I am indebted to Candice Chi Hang Cheung, Francesca del Gobbo and Chi Fung Lam.
³ To judge from Tsunoda (1992), closely related Swedish may conform more to the common noun > proper noun order of head-initial languages.
city/name grad Sofia/Sofia-grad (the) city of Boston/New York city
mountain/name Pirin planina/planinata Pirin Mount Auburn/Auburn Mountain
island/name ostrov Corsica isle of Wight/Ellis island
river/name reka Maritsa (the) river Mississippi/Mississippi river
colour/name kola tsvjat červen/červen tsvjat a red color car (Kayne 2005, 289)
letter/name bukva “k” the letter “k”

(5)a. Greek (Arhonto Terzi, p.c.)(NG(GN))
year/number to (etos) 1950 l’anno 1950 (the year 1950)
hour/number okto (i ora) le ore 8 (lit. the hours 8)
month/name o minas Maios/o Maios minas il mese di maggio (the month of May)
title/name (o) kathigitis Chomsky (il) professor Chomsky
street/name i odos Kolokotroni via Garibaldi
city/name i poli tu Londinu la città del Cairo (the city of the Cairo)
mountain/name to oros Olibos (il) monte Grappa (Mount Grappa)
island/name to nisi tis Mitilinis l’isola di Wight (the isle of Wight)
river/name o Ilisos potamos/o potamos Ilisos (il) fiume Po (the river Po)
colour/name Ena aftokinito kokinu xromatos una macchina (di) color rosso (a car (of) color red)
letter/name to grama “k” (la) lettera “k”

Incidentally, proper nouns are possibly always specifiers of a common noun, whether overt or silent (Kayne 2007, Appendix). Confirming evidence comes from certain agreement facts, which become understandable if a silent head is postulated that controls the agreement: città ‘city (fem.sing.)’ in (6)a (cf. Cinque 2008, fn. 11); lettera ‘letter (fem.sing.)’ in (17)b; and ore (fem.pl.) and ora ‘hour (fem. sing.)’ in (17)c:
(6)a Il Cairo (CITTA’) è stata, e resta, il centro più importante del mondo arabo.

The (masc.sg.) Cairo (masc.sg.) (‘city (fem.sg.)’) has been (fem.sg.), and remains, the most important center of the Arab world.

b la “o”, la ”k”, etc. (scilicet LETTERA ‘letter (fem.sg.’))

the (fem.sg.) “o”, “k”

c Sono le una (i.e., Sono le ORE una ORA)⁵

(Lit.) are the (fem.pl.) one (fem.sg.) ‘it is one o’clock’

The moral we can draw even from this minute correlation pair (the order proper noun/common noun and the head-initiality vs. the head-finality of a certain language) is that reference to SVO languages as if they made up a consistent word order type may be seriously misguided (as evidenced by other facts as well – cf. Cinque in press).

References


⁵ See Kayne (2003). Also see the perfectly corresponding case in Modern Greek (Arhonto Terzi, p.c.), where the first plural article becomes understandable if there is a silent ORES ‘hours’:

(i) s-tis [okto i ora] ORES

at-the (fem.pl.acc.) [eight the (fem.nom) hour (fem.nom)] HOURS (fem.pl.acc.)

When ‘street’ is missing, Bulgarian has the name of the street in the feminine, presumably agreeing with ulitsa (fem.):

v ulitsa Rakovski (in Rakovski street) vs. v Rakovska (Iliyana Krapova, p.c.).


http://homepages.nyu.edu/~pi276/irwin_miniconference07_handout.pdf


