Three-Participant Serial Verbs in LFG: A Papuan Case Study

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Background

Geographical distribution of SVCs: West Africa, Southeast Asia, New Guinea, Oceania, Central and South America

Common formal properties of SVCs: independent verbs; monosyllable; absence of linking element; single eventhood; shared TAM, polarity, negation, interaction, and arguments

The case study focuses on five isolating Papuan languages: Texas, Kamang, Imonde, Mapnok, and One, and examines three-participant serial verbs that express events of giving or benefitting

Majority of the languages in the study have core-type SVCs, which is common in Papuan languages that lack ditransitive predicates, so three-participant events are expressed by juxtaposing a monomorphemic verb

Broadly the study investigates how these languages’ SVCs fulfill Kemp-Kemp’s (2015) cross-linguistic definition of SVC, specifically her main verification criteria

Analysis

Class (A): Two lexical verbs functioning as a single predicate. PREDS of this type are composed via predicate decomposition. The Restriction operator (\(\mathcal{R}\)) allows the 1s of two verbs to share all attributes besides their PRED values. Uniformity is not stated. The attribute (\(\mathcal{A}\)) combines the PREDS by outputting only their named functions. In (4), two lexical verbs to ‘go’ and ‘head’ ‘find’ are serialized to create the complex predicate ‘go-find’ <SUBJOB> with a monomorphemic argument structure

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{PRED} & \quad \text{<go-Find>} \\
\text{MOOD} & \quad \text{DUR} \\
\text{SUBJ} & \quad \text{IPR} \quad \text{PRD} \quad \text{FND} \\
\text{OBJ} & \quad \text{FT} \quad \text{NEM} \quad \text{BEN}
\end{align*}
\]

Class (B): Two lexical verbs, each with their objects, are juxtaposed. The category of the coordination will vary within this class. In Mapnok, two maximally monomorphemic verbs are juxtaposed to express a three-participant event. Typically, the subject is the only shared argument

Proposal

Putting “serial verb constructions” are three distinct nominal classes:

Class (A) are constructions with two verbs functioning as a single predicate

Class (B) constructions are two-coordinate or two verbs

Class (C) constructions are maximal constructions with functional items such as light verbs or auxiliaries that arise via grammaticalization of a verb

Further Research

Three classes were identified: Class (A) SVCs, Class (B) asymmetric coordination, and Class (C) grammaticalized multi-headed predicates. I distinguish these constructions as different phenomena

SVCs necessarily involve multiple verbs within a single clause Class (A)

Existing theories can address biclausal constructions (Class (B) monomorphemic predicates, biclausal coordination patterns (Class (C))

The Papuan data primarily belong to Class (B) and (C), lacking properties of Class (A)

Class (A) constructions are composed via predicate decomposition; Class (B) and (C) have established solutions

SVC-like constructions in other languages within my corpus, two patterns are observed:

Languages that grammaticalize ‘give’ and other verbs into valency-operators, indicating a benefactive argument (Thai, Huon languages, Cantonese, Wari, Oro Win)

A series of functional items following a lexical verb indicating a transfer relation (MoC)

These constructions are better described as role-marking uses of the verb ‘give’, autotelic benefactive constructions, or valency-increasing processes

Moving forward we should emphasize fine-grained synchronic analyses, prioridade data classification, and closely capture the content (i.e., necessary & jointly sufficient conditions) of linguistic terms using theory

References


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