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; monoclausal; absence of linking element; single eventhood; shared TAM, polarity, negation, intonation, and arguments

The case study focuses on five isolating Papuan languages: Teiwa, Kamang, Imonda, Maybrat, and One, and examines three-participant serial verbs that express events of giving or benefaction

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 two monotransitive verbs

Broadly the study investigates how these languages' SVCs fulfill Cleary-Kemp's (2015) crosslinguistic definition of SVCs, specifically her main verbhood criteria

Theoretical Problem

SVCs are problematic for our common notions of syntactic and semantic composition:

- ❖ SVCs involve two or more lexical verbs functioning as a single predicate within a single clause
- ❖ SVCs seem to be multi-headed (see Koro example)

Multiple explanations for SVCs have led to variation and inconsistency across analyses, as argued by e.g.:

- ❖ Haspelmath (2016), who attributes the lack of consensus to treating SVCs as natural kinds rather than comparative concepts, leading to the term 'SVC' being applied to formally distinct phenomena
- ❖ Cleary-Kemp (2015), who criticizes the overuse of the term 'SVC' in the descriptive literature and advocates for a restrictive definition of the phenomena

Proposal

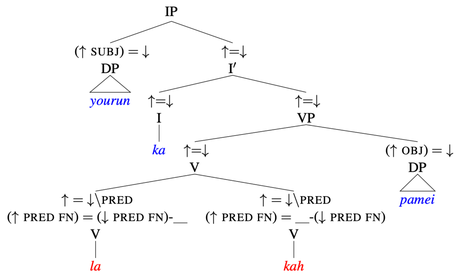
Putative "serial verb constructions" are three distinct natural classes:

- ❖ Class (A) are constructions with two verbs functioning as a single predicate
- ❖ Class (B) constructions are covertly coordinated Vs or VPs
- ❖ Class (C) constructions are monoclausal constructions with functional items such as light verbs or auxiliaries that arise via grammaticalization of a verb

Class (A) Serial Verb Constructions	Class (B) Asyndetic Coordinated V&VPs	Class (C) Grammaticalized Multi-Headed Predicates
Mavea, Koro, Paamese	*Maybrat, One*	*Kamang, Teiwa, Imonda*
2(+) lexical verbs	2(+) lexical verbs	1 lexical + fx morpheme OR 2(+) light verbs
1 event	2(+) events	1 event
Asymmetric object extraction possible	No asymmetric object extraction possible	Asymmetric object extraction possible
No connective, pause, or linker possible	Connective, pause, or linker possible	No connective, pause, or linker possible
Same subject, Same object	Same subject; Different objects	Same subject, Same object
Single TAM, intonation, negation	Different TAM, intonation, negation possible	Single TAM, intonation, negation

Analysis

Class (A): Two lexical verbs functioning as a single predicate. PREDs of this type are composed via predicate decomposition. The *Restriction* operator (\ ) allows the f-s of two verbs to share all attributes besides their PRED values: Uniqueness is not violated. The attribute *FN* (_) combines the PREDs by outputting only their named functions. In Koro, two lexical verbs *la* 'go' and *kah* 'find' are serialized to create the complex predicate 'go-find <SUBJ,OBJ>' with a monotransitive argument structure.

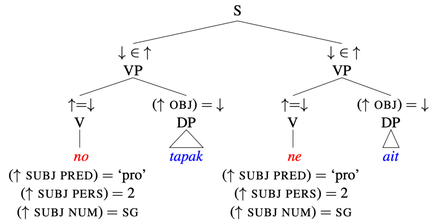


$$\begin{bmatrix} \text{PRED} & \text{'go-find <SUBJ,OBJ>'} \\ \text{MOOD} & \text{IRR} \\ \text{SUBJ} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{PRED} & \text{'pro'} \\ \text{NUM} & \text{PL} \\ \text{PERS} & 1 \\ \text{EXCL} & + \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{OBJ} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{PRED} & \text{'betelnut'} \\ \text{NUM} & \text{SG} \\ \text{PERS} & 3 \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix}$$

Class (A) Asymmetric SVC in Koro

yourun k-a la kah pamei
1PL.EXCL IRR-NON.SG go.to:ANDAT find betelnut
'We are going to go and look for betelnut'
(Cleary-Kemp 2015:6.38)

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

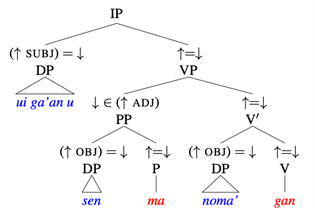


$$\left\{ \begin{bmatrix} \text{PRED} & \text{'take <SUBJ,OBJ>'} \\ \text{TENSE} & \text{PRES} \\ \text{SUBJ} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{PRED} & \text{'pro'} \\ \text{NUM} & \text{SG} \\ \text{PERS} & 2 \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{OBJ} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{PRED} & \text{'tobacco'} \\ \text{NUM} & \text{SG} \\ \text{PERS} & 3 \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix}, \begin{bmatrix} \text{PRED} & \text{'give <SUBJ,OBJ>'} \\ \text{TENSE} & \text{PRES} \\ \text{SUBJ} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{PRED} & \text{'pro'} \\ \text{NUM} & \text{SG} \\ \text{PERS} & 2 \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{OBJ} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{PRED} & \text{'him'} \\ \text{NUM} & \text{SG} \\ \text{PERS} & 3 \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix} \right\}$$

Class (B) Asyndetic Coordinated VPs in Maybrat

N-o tapak n-e ait
2-take tobacco 2-give 3SG.M
'Take the tobacco and give (it) to him' (Dol 2007:218)

Class (C): One lexical verb plus a grammatical head that introduces the third argument. Teiwa lacks ditransitive roots, to express events where X gives Y to Z, the maximally monotransitive verb 'give <SUBJ,OBJ>' requires the presence of the preposition 'come <OBJ>' to introduce the (optional) displaced theme.



$$\begin{bmatrix} \text{PRED} & \text{'give <SUBJ,OBJ>'} \\ \text{TENSE} & \text{PST} \\ \text{SUBJ} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{PRED} & \text{'person'} \\ \text{NUM} & \text{SG} \\ \text{PERS} & 3 \\ \text{DIST} & + \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{OBJ} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{PRED} & \text{'my.father'} \\ \text{NUM} & \text{SG} \\ \text{PERS} & 3 \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{ADJ} & \left\{ \begin{bmatrix} \text{PRED} & \text{'come <OBJ>'} \\ \text{OBJ} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{PRED} & \text{'money'} \\ \text{NUM} & \text{SG} \\ \text{PERS} & 3 \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix} \right\} \end{bmatrix}$$

Class (C) Light Verb Construction in Teiwa

Ui ga'an u sen ma n-oma' g-an
person 3SG DIST money come 1SG-father 3SG-give
'That person gave money to my father' (Klamer 2010:42)

Further Research

Three classes were identified: Class (A) SVCs, Class (B) asyndetic 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) and monoverbal clauses with adjuncts (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 (Moi)
- ❖ These constructions are better described as role-marking uses of the verb 'give', autobenefactive constructions, or valency-increasing processes

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

References

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