

Multiverb-constructions – is there a continuum?

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slides at [http://kiluvonprince.de/
multi-verb-constructions-is-there-a-continuum/](http://kiluvonprince.de/multi-verb-constructions-is-there-a-continuum/)

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Workshop: Multi Verb Constructions: Semantic, Syntactic and
Typological Perspectives

Structure of the talk

① Background

Intro

The range of phenomena

② Where we are now

Proposed definitions

The problem with clauses

The problem with events

③ Where we may have to go

Correlations

④ Conclusion

The upshot

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- The main challenge for the latter position is to find a set of criteria that meaningfully distinguish between different types of MVCs.
- However, the definition of meaningful features has to be informed by systematic typological surveying.
- So far, this is missing from all existing approaches.

Phenomena: Overview

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- Pivot structures (*she saw them sing*)
- Clause chains (*every morning, she feeds the cat, gets the mail, (and) walks to work; veni, vidi, vici*)

Multi-verb constructions and their differences

Serial verb constructions have been perceived as notoriously hard to define.

*The task of harmonizing a general account of verb serialization is a very major one which is hardly begun.
(Durie, 1997)*

Defining SVCs

Stewart (1998)

In other words, SVCs may be provisionally defined as a single clause in which two or more finite verbs occur without any marker of coordination or subordination, sharing a single structural (and semantic) subject and a single object.

→ Does not rule out all clause chaining structures.

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- monoclausality is not trivial to define;
- predicate-argument relations also do not hold between parts of a clause chain.
- Haspelmath (2016), like Foley (2010) dismisses events as a defining factor, for bad reasons.
- In languages where clause-chaining is not necessarily signaled by specific morphology, differentiating it from serial verbs may be impossible without the notion of events.

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Diagnosing clause boundaries

- Haspelmath (2016) uses negation as the defining notion for monoclausality.
- He suggests that you can not negate part of a clause, you always have to negate the entire clause.
- → if you can negate a verb in a MVC independently, it's not a SVC.

Negation and clauses

However, we know that negation can be narrow: parts of a clause can be negated while the rest is asserted.

- (1) She gave the number not to the police (but to the medics).
→ She gave the number to someone.
- (2) The letter arrived here not yesterday (but the day before).
→ The letter arrived here.
- (3) Not long after the election, society began to disintegrate.

Negation and SVCs

There are cases of structures with narrow negation that are hard to test for monoclausality, as in the following example from Daakaka:

- (4) *to* *i* *meerin* *bwilya* *mwe* *syo-tase* *tamake*
 NEG.REAL COP long.time rail REAL take-again mask

na *ti* *minyes*
 COMP DIST different

“It did not take long until the rail had taken another mask.”
 (4558)

Negation in clausal chains?

In clausal chains, negation of only one clause can sound odd and may be ungrammatical in some languages.

- (5) Hannah brushed her teeth, washed her face, ?didn't clip her nails, (and) went to bed.
- (6) Petra fuhr ihren Laptop runter, packte ihn ?nicht in die Tasche, (und) ging zur Tür.

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Adverbial modification: Eckardt (1998: 19)

Two events e_1 and e_2 are distinct if a modifier α is true for one but not the other, and if this difference with respect to α is due to different parameters being specified by α for event e_1 and e_2 .

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- Despite that impression, monoclausality is far from co-extensive with single-eventhood.
- Some of the examples that Haspelmath (2016) quotes as prototypical SVCs may violate the single-eventhood criterion.

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- The same event may be referred to by separate sentences:
 - (10) She finally managed to complete the research proposal. It had taken her half a year.
 - (11) This year, they hosted their Christmas party at home. It was a blast.

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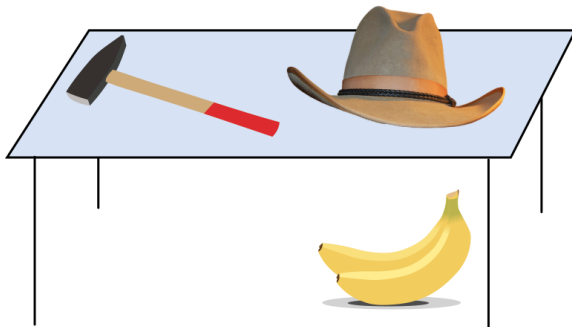
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- However, in practice, certain configurations of events are often expressed by single lexemes cross-linguistically, while others never are.
- I assume that wordhood can be a test for conceptualization as single events or objects.
 - If a particular configuration of events is referred to by a single lexeme, a single, complex word or an SVC, it is conceptualized as a single event.
 - If a particular configuration of objects is referred to by a single lexeme, a single, complex word or a nominal compound, it is conceptualized as a single object.

Wordhood

Certain configurations of events/ objects are often expressed by single lexemes cross-linguistically, while some others never are, and some only in specific cultures.



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Wordhood: *do in.search.of*

Alamblak:

- (12) *miyt ritm muh-hambray-an-m*
 tree insects climb-search.for-1SG-3PL
 “I climbed the tree to get insects” (Bruce, 1988: 29),
 described as **sequential verbal compound** by Aikhenvald
 (2007), but as SVC by others.

Daakaka:

- (13) *kuli mwe ko-pyakilye*
 dog REAL race-RES.FIND
 “The dog was hunting and looking for it” (2013)

Wordhood: *cook eat?*

Dagaare (Gur):

- (14) *ò dà sé lá nénè òò*
 3SG PST roast FOC meat eat
 “He roasted meat and ate it.” (Hiraiwa & Bodomo,
 2008: 796)

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- It would be interesting to see whether the above characterization exhausts this pattern;
- and whether the same meaning is expressed by bound morphology in related or neighboring languages.

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- Therefore, if the same meaning that is expressed by an SVC in one language is expressed by a single word in another one, this supports the idea that this meaning can readily be conceptualized as a single event.
- At the same time, it would be interesting to learn more about areal lexification patterns.

The dilemma

More serious large-scale cross-linguistic work presupposes conceptual clarity, and this has often be lacking in the literature ...

(Haspelmath, 2016: 2)

- But any meaningful definition also has to be informed by large-scale cross-linguistic work.
- So far, theoretical definitions fail to provide conceptual clarity, because they tend to be myopic about the range of phenomena concerned.



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When taking stock of defining features, one should focus on prototypical cases of each kind before taking into account more marginal cases.

Correlations between form and function

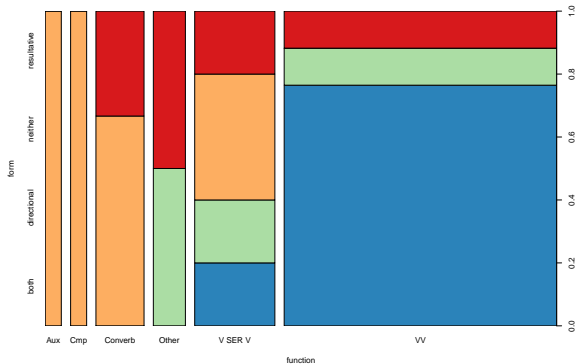


Figure: Based on a sample of 29 structures from 27 languages; red: only resultative; orange: neither; green: only directional; blue: both;

Correlations between form and function

- Serial verb constructions usually encode directionals, resultatives or both.
- Other MVCs do often NOT encode those meanings.
- In defining SVCs as opposed to other MVCs, it would be good to focus on directional and resultatives first.

Geographic distribution of MVCs

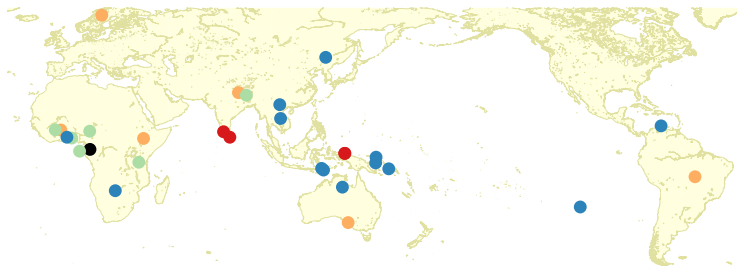


Figure: Distribution of MVCs according to function. Red: only resultative; orange: neither; green: only directional; blue: both;

Adverbial SVCs

- (15) a. *tan mu kuu~kuu mwe yas*
 ground REAL REDUP~move REAL strong
 'the ground was shaking strongly' (sto25:111)
- b. *Yan wuoswa, ya=m kuowilye ka ya=p*
 on some 3P=REAL know MOD.COMP 3P=POT
bivili yan apyang tevy-an ka we
 smoke(VTR) on fire side.of-3S.POSS MOD.COMP POT
gaó wa maga.
 dry POT fast
 'Sometimes, they might place it over a fire to make it dry fast.' (exp20:6)

Distribution of adverbial and resultative SVCs in Oceania

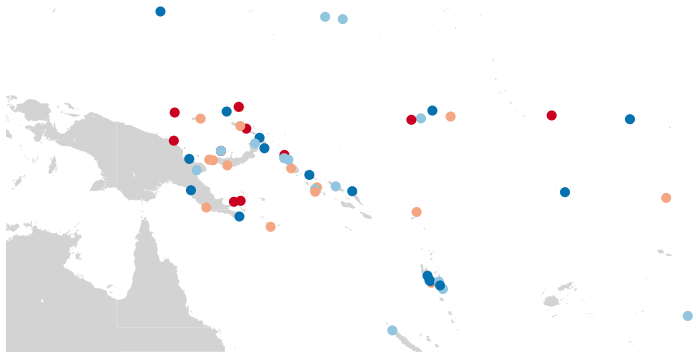


Figure: SVCs in Oceanic (data from Verkerk & Frostad 2013). Dark red: neither adverbial nor resultative (11); light red: only resultative (19); light blue: only adverbial (17); dark blue: both (19).

Correlates of MVCs

- It's long been noted that MVCs are not distributed evenly across languages.
- There are a variety of possible factors that might determine the distribution of SVCs in contrast to other MVCs
 - Language family (Austronesian, Sino-Tibetan, Hmong-Mien, Atlantic-Congo)
 - Region (South-east Asia, Oceania, West Africa)
 - Morphological profile (more towards the analytic/ isolating part of the spectrum)

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 - how widespread which structures are
 - how MVCs correlate with each other
 - how MVCs correlate with area/ family/ morphological profile
- It's time to start doing this.

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Yet another set of proposed features

	Separable	Wordhood	Symmetry	Manner
Auxiliaries	-	+	-	-
Light verbs	-	+	-	-
Serial verbs	-	+/-	+/-	-
Pivot structures	-	-	+/-	+
Converbs	-	-	+	+
Clause chains	+	-	+	+

Table: Separable: individual verbs can be clearly separated without a semantic change; Wordhood: the same meaning is encoded by clearly single words in some languages; Symmetry: both verbs are drawn from a large class of verbs; Manner: both verbs can be modified by contradicting manner adverbials.

Separability

The meaning of an SVC verb sequences changes when they are clearly separated into different clauses.

(16) *mwe saa (*te) disi nge vyan yen buluwu*
 REAL pull (DISC) draw.back 3S go in hole
 “it retreated into the hole”

(17) *ma ane webir (a/ te) mw=i towo ten*
 REAL eat taro (but/DISC) REAL=COP big very
 a. “she ate a lot of taro”
 b. “she ate taro, but it was too much”

(cf. Enfield, 2008)

What about argument sharing?

Argument sharing is often cited as a crucial property of SVCs, but it applies in similar ways to most MVCs.