

In defense of
events

Kilu von Prince

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In defense of events

as a defining category for serial verb constructions

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05. 06. 2015

The phenomenon

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Òbòlò (Durie, 1997: 301):

- (1) *è mí n-sà ògè í-fieě k ánăm*
I 1s-use knife 1s-cut meat [sic]
'I cut the meat with a knife.'

Sranan (Baker, 1989: 516):

- (2) *Kofi naki Amba kiri*
Kofi hit Amba kill
'Kofi struck Amba dead.'

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Events and the typology of SVCs

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There are two main approaches to the classification of SVCs:

- One relies on semantic as well as morphosyntactic factors (Comrie, 1995; Durie, 1997; Aikhenvald & Dixon, 2006);
- One relies primarily on formal morphosyntactic criteria (marking of TAM, polarity, arguments) (Baker, 1989; Muysken & Veenstra, 2005);

Aikhenvald (2006)

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SVCs ...

- ① ...are conceptualized as a **single event**;
- ② ...are monoclausal;
- ③ ...share the same TAM and polarity (TAMP) value;
- ④ ...may share core and other arguments;

Aikhenvald (2006)

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SVCs have...

- 1 only one grammatical subject;
- 2 at most one grammatical object;
- 3 one specification for tense/aspect;
- 4 only one possible negator;
- 5 no intervening coordinating or subordinating conjunction;
- 6 no intervening pause;

Muysken & Veenstra (2005)

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Morpho-syntax vs. semantics

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I would like to propose that

- 1 single-eventhood is both necessary and sufficient to define SVCs.
- 2 all formal features derive from the single-event-requirement.

The challenge

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...in our view not much progress can be made in understanding SVCs while one proceeds in any analysis with unexamined, vague, and undefined concepts like event, simple and multiple, and monoclausality.

(Foley, 2010: 79)

Structure of the talk

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The argument by Foley (2010)

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- Events are harder to identify than objects.
 - Verbs are semantically more complex than nouns.
 - Verbal notions show greater variation in whether they are encoded by one or by several lexemes compared to nouns.
 - We can (only) learn about basic concepts by looking at mono-morphemic lexical roots cross-linguistically.
- We do not have clear criteria for identifying events.

The argument by Foley (2010)

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? Events are harder to identify than objects.

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? We can (only) learn about basic concepts by looking at mono-morphemic lexical roots cross-linguistically.

→ We do not have clear criteria for identifying events.

Assumption: events more vague than objects – an example

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- (3) *arm-n kay*
water-OBL canoe.VIII.SG
ŋaŋk-ak-mpi-wut-ŋa-i
IMP.DL-push-SEQ-put.in-IMP-VIII.SG.O
'You two push the canoe down into the water!'

(Yimas, Foley 2010: 80)

Assumption: events more complex than objects – pushing a canoe into the water

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In the prototypical case, ak-mpi-wul- 'push down (into the water)' refers to one (or more commonly, multiple) actor(s) causing a canoe to move linearly along the ground away from the high ground of the riverbank toward the lower level of the river itself, so that it descends down the edge of the riverbank and comes to float on the water of the river.

(Foley, 2010: 82)

Assumption: events more vague than objects

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As we can see from this description, the action is anything but simple (as are most events denoted by a verb root in a language), so on what grounds can we call this a single event?

(Foley, 2010: 82)

Events and objects: Zacks & Tversky (2001: 5f.)

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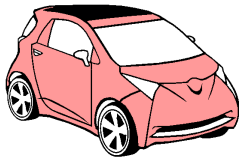
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Objects have parts with particular spatial configurations. A car has parts such as doors, windows, an engine, wheels, and seats. These parts in turn can be divided into subparts. For example, a seat generally consists of a bench, a back, a seatbelt, and a headrest. ...

Events and objects: Zacks & Tversky (2001: 5f.)

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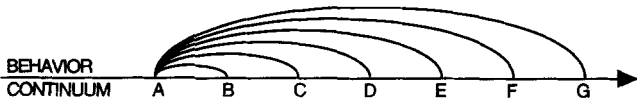
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A TO B: STEPPING DOWN FROM THE CURB

A TO C: CROSSING STREET

A TO D: WALKING TO SCHOOL

A TO E: WORKING TO "PASS" FROM THE THIRD GRADE

A TO F: GETTING AN EDUCATION

A TO G: CLIMBING TO THE TOP IN LIFE

...Like objects, events can be viewed as being organized into partonomic hierarchies, reflecting relations between parts and subparts.

Observation: same meaning, expressions of different complexities

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(4) *namot numpran na-mpu-tu-t*
man.PL pig.SG.3SG O-3PL.A-kill-PERF
'The men killed the pig.' (Yimas)

(5) *kolapa i-lapa bola uni*
boy3SG R-hit pig dead
'The boy killed the pig.' (Numbami, from Bradshaw 1993)

(6) *rutki-yak-minik-*
slash-cut.open-die
'kill (by slashing)' (Watam)

(Foley, 2010: 84f.)

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Assumption: Multiple lexemes → multiple events

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But do we really want to claim that the event structure of 'kill' is as different as these four types suggest?

...

Whatever the semantic structure of 'kill' is, it is the same in all four languages, and in none of them is it a simple event.

(Foley, 2010: 90)

Assumption: Multiple lexemes → multiple events

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- The notion of events may not be trivial – but it is no more vague or complex than the notion of objects.
- The same process can be described as a single event or as a series of events.
- A sequence of verbs may give a more specific description of an event than a single lexeme – it does not imply the event is more complex.

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Adverbial modification

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(7) The sphere rotated (e_1) and, at the very same time, got warmer. (e_2)

(8) The sphere rotated quickly.

(9) The sphere heated up slowly.

(Eckardt 1998: 19, from Davidson 1969: 306)

Testing eventhood with adverbial modification

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Adverbial modification

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 .

(Eckardt, 1998: 19)

Adverbial modification: use same sentence!

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(10) She killed the fish with a blow to the head.

(11) The blow was quick.

(12) The fish died slowly.

(13)?She killed the fish slowly with a quick blow to the head.

(14) She killed the fish quickly with a slow smile.

Adverbial modification: use same sentence!

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Argument-introducing

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(15) *A tjá sondí kó dá dí Faánsi sèmbè*
3SG carry thing come give DET French man
'He presented something to the Frenchman.' (Saramaccan;
Muysken & Veenstra, 2005: 244)

(16) *ú kpá kíyzéé mǒng ówl*
3SG take knife cut meat
'He cut the meat with a knife' (Vagala, Pike 1967: 4, citet
from Durie 1997: 305)

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- (17) *ye=m kuo seling me yen buluwu*
3PC=REAL run go.down come in hole
'they ran down into the lavabed' (Daakaka, von Prince
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Resultative

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(18) *min ma ŋ(a)-argi-r minik-ri*

3PL 3SG FOC-shoot-R die-PAST

‘They shot him to death’ (Watam, Foley 2010: 86)

(19) *Yōuyōu kù-fán le Tāotāo le*

Y. cry-be.vexed PFV T. COS

‘Youyou cried and as a result Taotao became impatient.’

(Mandarin Chinese, Li 1998: 292)

» [Jump to adverbials](#)

Resultative

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» Jump to adverbials

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(20) *obẹ náà dùn tó*
stew the **sweet enough**
'the stew is sweet enough' (Yoruba Sebba 1987: 15)

(21) *àmìttò cwè kàttò rwòt*
1s.want.PROG **fat exceed** king
'I want to be fatter than the king.' (Lango, Aikhenvald
2006: 5)

Aspectual

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(22) *Mi jabí dí dóo kabá.*

1S **open** DET door **finish**

'I have finished opening the door.' (Saramaccan, Muysken
& Veenstra 2005)

Quantifying

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- (23) *vyanten mwe gene sye mwe pwis seaaten ne*
person REAL do thing REAL **be.numerous** very with
ding
mat
'People do many things with mats.' (Daakaka, von Prince
2015)

Adverbial

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(24) *é-fo nu wò-didi*

3s-**strike** mouth 3s-**become.long**

'She/he talked long.' (Ewe, Ameka 2006)

(25) *woya wa-yonggo aiya i-mungga*

1s 1s-**see** 2s 3s-**precede**

'I saw you first.' (Numbami, Bradshaw 1993: 152)

▶ Jump to clausal SVCs

Purposive, causative

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- (26) *míyt ritm muh-hambray-an-m*
tree insects climb-search.for-1SG-3PL
'I climbed the tree to get insects.' (Alamblak, Bruce 1988: 29,
from Durie 1997: 305)
- (27) *Dí tjúba tá kái mbéi hen uwíi munjá tooná kó bé.*
DET rain ASP fall make 3s hair wet turn come red
'It is raining so that her hair becomes wet and turns red.'
(Saramaccan, Muysken & Veenstra 2005)

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(28) *A súti hen fulá pása gó náki dí sitónu*

3s shoot 3s pierce pass go hit DET wall

‘He shot him and the bullet went through him and into the wall.’ (Saramaccan, Muysken & Veenstra 2005)

(29) *mparykat ya-n-park-mpi-kapik-mpi-wark-t*

branch.v.PL v.PL.O-3.SG.A-split-SEQ-break-SEQ-tie-PERF

‘He split the branches, broke them and tied them [sic] together.’ (Yimas, Foley 2010: 93)

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all events denoted by the verb roots in the SVC must be done by the same actor (3.SG.A) and happen to the same object (mparŋkat 'branches'), and any time delay between the sequential events must be relatively fleeting. Any spatial or temporal modifiers must hold of all events denoted by the verb roots in the SVC.

(Foley, 2010: 95)

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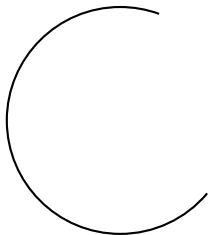
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- Typically, each predicate in a SVC has the same TAMP value.
- Given the single-event requirement, this is hardly surprising.
- However, the same event may have different parts of which only some are realized:
John was drawing a circle
∄ John drew a circle
 $\exists e.\mathbf{draw}(j)(e), \mathbf{BECOME}(\mathbf{circle}(x)(e))$

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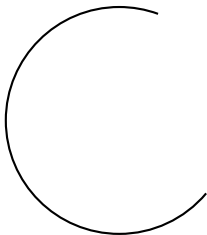
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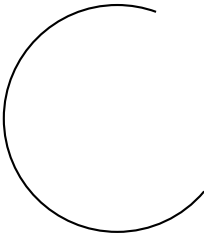
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John was drawing a circle
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Disagreeing TAMP features in SVCs

- (30) *mwe pyaos vyan we tumtum=ane ar=an na apyang*
REAL row go POT be.right=TRANS LOC=DEF COMP fire
en=te bwe daa me ar=an
DEF=MED CONT shine come LOC=DEF
‘he was rowing straight to the place from which the fire
was shining’
(Daakaka, sto24:19)

- (31) *yang dawó mwe téé=ane sisye na mu buo wa*
fly blowfly **REAL look=TRANS** thing COMP REAL stink POT
ge myane barar tuswa na ka ra=p tiye
be.like with pig one COMP MOD.REL 1P.IN=POT kill
‘the blowfly looks for smelly things like for example a pig
which we’d kill’ (Daakaka, sto24:19)

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(32) Jones buttered the toast in the bathroom with the knife at midnight.

Davidsonian analysis

$\exists e$ [BUTTER(e , jones, the toast) & IN(e , the bathroom) & INSTR(e , the knife) & AT(e , midnight)]

Neo-Davidsonian: Thematic roles as properties of events

$\exists e$ [BUTTER(e) & AGENT(e , jones) & PATIENT(e , the toast) & IN(e , the bathroom) & INSTR(e , the knife) & AT(e , midnight)]

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Neo-Davidsonian: Thematic roles as properties of events

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- Stative verbs, nouns etc. should not have event arguments (Katz, 2000);
- Problematic ontology of thematic roles (Dowty, 1992; Bayer, 1997);
- Logical deficiencies (Bierwisch, 2005);
- No differentiation between a verb's lexical arguments and adverbial modifiers (Bierwisch, 2005);
- What about events that are at the same time agents or similar (*the explosion killed her*)?

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The neo-Davidsonian approach makes the following prediction:

Events and thematic roles

If two verbs V1 and V2 require a certain individual or object to play distinct thematic roles R1 and R2 in the events denoted by the verbs, then the events denoted by V1 and V2 must be distinct.

(Eckardt, 1998: 23)

▶▶ Jump to conclusions

Other potential consequences

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- **mono-clausality;**
- cause-effect interpretation of resultatives;
- temporal interpretation;

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- mono-clausality;
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- mono-clausality;
- cause-effect interpretation of resultatives;
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- We may be able to learn a lot about SVCs by investigating their event structure.
- We may also learn a lot about events by investigating SVCs.

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- We may be able to learn a lot about SVCs by investigating their event structure.
- We may also learn a lot about events by investigating SVCs.

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Thank you!

Assumption: verbs more complex than nouns

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Whatever is denoted by verbs – actions, states, processes – they do not have perceptual properties of separability and spatial-temporal continuity [...] that lie behind the meanings of nouns.

(Foley, 2010: 82)

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While nouns like dog are often analysed in formal semantics as predicates with an argument structure, the arguments are the individual or set of individuals which belong to the class defined by the noun. The situation with verbs denoting events, like kill, is very different; the members of its argument structure are the doer and undergoer of the event denoted by the verb, not an individual or even set of individuals of the event type denoted by it.

(Foley, 2010: 83)

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A pre-Neo-Davidsonian view:

dog

$\lambda x.$ **dog**(*x*)

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A pre-Neo-Davidsonian view:

<i>dog</i>	$\lambda x.\mathbf{dog}(x)$
<i>president</i>	$\lambda x\lambda t.\mathbf{president}(x)(t)$
<i>sleep</i>	$\lambda x\lambda t\lambda e.\mathbf{sleep}(x)(t)(e)$

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<i>president</i>	$\lambda x\lambda t.\mathbf{president}(x)(t)$
<i>sleep</i>	$\lambda x\lambda t\lambda e.\mathbf{sleep}(x)(t)(e)$
<i>teacher</i>	$\lambda x\lambda y\lambda t.\mathbf{teacher}(y)(x)(t)$
<i>kill</i>	$\lambda x\lambda t\lambda e\lambda y.\mathbf{kill}(y)(x)(t)(e)$

Typology by Li & Thompson (1981) (from Paul, 2008)

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- (33) *Tā tiāntiān chàng gē xiě xìn.*
3SG REDUP-day sing song write letter
'Every day she sings songs and writes letters.'
- (34) *Tā fǒurèn tāzuò-cuò-le.*
3SG deny 3SG do-err-PERF
'S/he denies that s/he was wrong.'
- (35) *Wǒ quàn tā xué yīxué.*
1SG advise 3SG study medicine
'I advised him/her to study medicine.'
- (36) *Tā chǎo-le yī-ge cài tèbié hǎochī.*
1SG fry-PERF 1-CL dish especially delicious
'He has prepared a dish which is particularly delicious.'

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