An Afro-Asiatic perspective on the definition of Serial Verb Constructions

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Introduction

- Afro-Asiatic family as important laboratory of diversity & change
- Both diachronic and synchronic dimensions in available data
- This allows us to observe borderline cases that test our definitions
- Non-concatenative morphology is especially challenging
- SVCs similar to other multi-verb constructions, properties overlap
- Most common cross-linguistic types represented in Afro-Asiatic

1. Serial Verb Constructions

(Ross et al. 2019; Ross forthcoming)

- SVCs found in about 125 languages in sample of 252

[Compositional ranking definition based on traditional use of the family]

SVCs are:
- two or more juxtaposed verbs
- with no marker of dependency or linking element
- expressing a single event in a single clause
- with shared values for Tense-Aspect-Moodality and negation
- and shared arguments (subject and/or object)

 vont-often difficult to categorize

2. Multi-verb constructions in Afro-Asiatic

A broad overview of the family:

- Semitic: widespread pseudocoordination (Ross 2016, f.c.), as in (2.1)
- Emergence of SVCs in some modern colloquial varieties (Section 3)
- Ethiopian Semitic: converses in multi-verb sequences, as in (2.2)
  (2.1) Egyptian Arabic

(2.2) Amharic (Amha & Dimmendaal 2006a:412)
  kör-d tænaggărå

(2.3) Chadic: typical SVCs attested in several languages in the West Africa region where SVCs are common (Frazzingeri 2016, Lovestrand f.c.)
- Cushitic: converses (dependent-marked verb forms) are typical in multi-verb constructions (Amha & Dimmendaal 2006a)
- A particularly unusual mixed type is found in Dullay (Section 6)
- Omotic: converses similar to Cushitic (Amha & Dimmendaal 2006b)
- Berber: clause chaining with default aorist non-initial verbs (Section 5)
- Egyptian: an apparent drift toward SVC-like constructions (Section 4)

3. Grammaticalization in Colloquial Arabic

- SVCs reported variously for colloquial Arabic varieties, but descriptions sparse across dialects and definitions inconsistent; classification controversial
- They are not found in Modern Standard Arabic or Classical Arabic
- Apparently developing in parallel in the modern colloquial varieties

  Research questions:
- Are these genuine SVCs? In which varieties are they found?
- What is the source of grammaticalization?
- Is there one source for SVCs in various logogenes?

- One source for grammaticalization may be omission of we ‘and’ in pseudocoordination (verbal hendiadys) constructions, as in (2.1)
- However, another likely influence is the imperfective complement construction, which is sometimes considered a type of SVC:

  (3.1) Jordanian Arabic (Ouali & Al Bukhari 2016:174)
  3rd Singular IMPF
  ṭavād j-fi
  sīl:PRF.3.SG.M
  ‘He kept talking.’

- This type is excluded by definition: verbs must exhibit a single tense/aspect
- Either parallel inflection on both, or one inflected and the other in a bare form; for more on this see in Section 3.3.3.
- Given that the Arabic verbal system has no true bare form, even tough the imperfective may behave as if it is, the definition does not apply

  IMPF-IMPF examples are actually ambiguous between SVCs and the type in (3.1)
  The true test for SVCs in Arabic varieties then is PRF-PRF examples

  This distribution is found in Egyptian Arabic (Abdel-Massih et al. 1979: 272-4)

- Therefore, at least some Arabic varieties have genuine SVCs, but among a network of related constructions, with some complexities related to inflection

  The distribution across Arabic varieties is left for future research

- Additionally, not yet known different semantic types pattern similarly

Gamiel & Mar’i (2015) report rare/missing omitted ve ‘and’ in Modern Hebrew

4. Egyptian & Coptic Multi-Verb Phrases

- Over its nearly 5,000 year history, Egyptian/Coptic drifts toward SVC-like forms
- Not a typical ‘serializing’ language, limited range of types and usage
- Grammaticalization of this type is recurrent as if it wants to be serializing

- Unfortunately data is quite limited due to lack of colloquial/spoken corpora
- Genuine instances of verifiable SVCs are difficult to pin down, but are several relevant cases (Reintjes 1995, 1997, Grossman 2000, p.c.)

  (4.1) Egyptian (Reintjes 1995:90)
  a-er-nu stand:PRF embrace:PRF-PRF other kj
  PST-3SG.F-finish PST-3SG.F-die
  ‘Then one embraced the other.’

  Perhaps these are more like Agreeing Verb Constructions (Hock & Ross 2016)
- the form of SVCs but not necessarily the same structure/function

5. Berber Clause-Chaining

- Notice in Section 3.3 that Arabic is considered to have SVCs only when they are fully productive across the tense/aspect paradigm

  Arabic tends to be chaining when discourse involve multiple tenses (Faruq, 1990; Ross f.c.)
- Berber exhibits a ‘chained-aorist’ construction: an initial fully inflected verb followed by one or more aorists (e.g. Bentolila 1981:151-71)
  Fund in most or all Berber languages (Mauri 2017a,b)

  - Belkadi (2013:144-6) discusses this within the range of aorist functions

  Mauri (2017a,b) discusses this construction from a typological perspective

  - The sharing order is unusual for time dependent (head-initial)

- Typically bidialectal, but sometimes apparently tighter relationships:

  (5.1) Ayt Atta Tarnazight (Mauri 2017a:213)
  t-新京t t-新京t
  3SG.F:PRF=3SG.F,ACC F-DPST-mule:PRF 3SG.F-die:PRF
  ‘He met her. She died.’

- Given that the aorist acts as a sort of default, even ‘bare’ verbal inflection, could this construction meet the SVC criteria?
- The ‘aorist’ is not a tense/aspect form (vs. imperfective & perfective) and may be the base for other inflections (Belkadi 2013, Mauri 2017a,b)

- But can root-and-pattern morphology even have bare forms?

6. Dullay para-hypothetic verb sequences

- The Dullay dialect continuum features an unusual para-hypothetic mixed construction with a dependent verb plus an independent-word conjunction functioning together to link verbs (Ross 2016)
- This is a complex mixed pseudocoordination and convex strategy
- Found in several varieties of Dullay/Gawwada/Ale (Ambør et al. 1980, Tosco 2008, Yoshino 2016) and Tsamakko (Sava 2005):

  (6.1) Dullay (Ambør et al. 1980:123)
  akāla pa kāla go:IMP and askr:2SG:DEP
  ‘Go and ask!’

Summary & Outlook:

- Afro-Asiatic provides a wide range of variation and borderline cases

- SVCs and similar constructions can appear or change rapidly

- ‘Serial Verb Constructions’ unnecessarily limited in form & function

- Broader category Multi-Verb Predicates recommended to account for variation in form but unite similar functions (Ross 2017, f.c.)

- Extensive research recommended on variation in colloquial varieties

References:


