

The background features abstract, overlapping green geometric shapes in various shades, including light lime green, medium green, and dark forest green. These shapes are primarily located on the left and right sides of the frame, creating a modern, layered effect. The central area is white, providing a clean space for the text.

More Than Their Parts: Linking Actions and Creating New Senses Through Serial Verb Constructions

Serial Verb Constructions (SVCs)

- ▶ Definitions
- ▶ Semantic Functions: Examples from natlangs
- ▶ Lexicalization and grammaticalization
- ▶ Uses in conlanging

Where are SVCs found?

- ▶ SVCs common in:
 - ▶ Papuan languages (+ Austronesian languages influenced by them)
 - ▶ Western African languages (Niger-Congo, e.g. Ewe, Yoruba)
 - ▶ Southeast Asian languages
 - ▶ Creoles
 - ▶ Amazonian languages

Serial Verb Constructions: Definitions

- ▶ What are they?
- ▶ Essentials:
 - ▶ Monoclausal sets of two or more verbs acting as a single predicate
 - ▶ No connecting morphology (no morphology relating to subordination, coordination, clause chaining, etc.)
- ▶ Otherwise...

Serial Verb Constructions: Definitions

- ▶ Other considerations
 - ▶ Negation: typically only marked once more SVC
 - ▶ Often precedes V1
 - ▶ Scope over entire construction
 - ▶ TAM: same for both verbs
 - ▶ Usually share at least one argument
 - ▶ Both verbs often combine to present one instance of “eventhood”
 - ▶ Conceptualization as a single event (may correlate with prosodic and gestural properties of monoverbal clauses)

Functions

- ▶ SVCs are used to organize discourse, package information, and represent complex events (Kluge 2023:11)
- ▶ Different semantic notions and functions include:
 - ▶ Cause & effect
 - ▶ Change-of-state
 - ▶ Degree relations
 - ▶ Instrumentals
 - ▶ Motion & direction
 - ▶ Benefactives
 - ▶ Causatives
 - ▶ Passives
 - ▶ Sequential actions
 - ▶ Simultaneous actions
 - ▶ Temporal extensions

Cause & Effect

- ▶ Papuan Malay (Austronesian)

de bilang saya tong baku **pukul mati**

3sg say 1sg 1pl recp hit die

‘he said to me, “we’re beating each other dead”’

Change-of-state

- ▶ Papuan Malay (Austronesian)

de jadi herang

3sg become feel.surprised(.about)

‘She became surprised’

Degree relations

- ▶ Nzema (Niger-Congo: Southern Bia (Kwa))

Manza **súkòkà** kpàlé **télà** ɔ nli
Manza **learn** well **exceed** her mother
'Manza learns better than her mother'

Instrumentals

► Nzema:

Kaku và-lé akuma bú -lè egyane ne
Kaku **take**-pst axe **cut**-pst tree det”
‘Kaku cut the tree with the axe’

Motion and Direction

► Olutec (Mixe-Zoque)

te:ja-naʔw ta=yopop-kaʔ -i
big.tile-aug erg=pile -descend-incd
'They are piling big tiles down there'

Benefactives (valency increasing)

- ▶ Saramaccan (English-Portuguese Creole)

Kófi bi **bái** dí búku **dá** dí muyé
Kofi pst **buy** the book **give** the woman
'Kofi had bought the woman the book'

Causatives (valency increasing)

- ▶ Tariana (Arawakan)

du -enipe -nuku **dura** du -hña -pidana
3sg.f-children-top 3sg.f.order 3sg.f-order-pst
'She ordered her children to eat'

Passives (valency decreasing)

- ▶ Kristang (Malayo-Portuguese Creole)

aké pesi ja toka kumí di gatu
that fish perf touch eat source cat
'That fish got eaten by the cat'

Sequential Actions

► Ewe (Niger-Congo (Kwa))

Áma â -ɖa nú ɖu
Ama pot-cook food eat
'Ama will cook and eat'

Simultaneous Actions

- ▶ Kayah Li (Sino-Tibetan (Karen))

ne hē nìdā mē kā mā
2sg come listen look com imp
'Come listen and look!'

Temporal Extensions

- ▶ Papuan Malay

tong tinggal jalang sampe tong cape
1pl stay walk reach 1pl be.tired
'We kept walking all the way until we were tired'

Grammaticalization of SVCs: Locatives

- ▶ In Goemai (Afro-Asiatic (Chadic)), some directional/motional SVCs have grammaticalized one verb in the construction into a locative particle

de ji **doe** kat ni yi
so log **come/here** find her that
'So he finds her here'

- ▶ *Doe* has gone from a verb to a locative particle (no longer otherwise behaves as a verb)

Grammaticalization of SVCs: Aspect

- ▶ In Cantonese, some *aspects* are derived from a verb in grammaticalized SVCs

Progressive:

ngo⁵ hai²dou⁶ zyu²-faan⁶
I be.here cook-rice
'I'm cooking rice'

Grammaticalization of SVCs: Complementizers

- ▶ The complementizer *waa*⁶ is a grammaticalized ‘say’ that previously formed SVCs with other verbs:

keoi⁵ tung⁴ ngo⁵ gong² waa⁶ m⁴ dak¹haan⁴
3sg with me talk ‘say’/that not available
‘He told me (that) he wasn’t free’

Grammaticalization of SVCs: Evidentiality

- ▶ In some Arawakan Tucanoan languages (e.g. Tariana) have developed evidential markers that may be derived from former SVC components
- ▶ Final verbs ‘see’ (for visual evidentiality) and ‘hear’ (non-visual evidentiality)

Lexicalization

- ▶ SVCs can become lexicalized too
- ▶ Non-compositional meaning (i.e. “more than the sum of their parts”)
- ▶ Meanings become idiomatized and non-literal

Lexicalization

► Igbo:

kà-sá (say-spread.open) ‘spread rumors’

cè-fù (think-be.lost) ‘forget’

sò-gbú-ká (follow-cut/kill-exceed) ‘worry to death’

Lexicalization

- ▶ Kalam (Trans-New-Guinea Phylum:

yn ag (burn make.sound) ‘ignore, start up (an engine)’

ag ñ (make.sound perceive) ‘ask’

Lexicalization

- ▶ Yoruba

pa run (hit crush) ‘destroy’

rí gbà (see take) ‘receive’

Lexicalization

► Tariana

yawi di-ñha (be.jaguar 3sg-eat) ‘enter into an aggressive shamanic trance’

-sata -hima (greet hear) ‘ask’

Lexicalization

- ▶ Oro Nao (Chapacuran (Wari'), Brazil)

xiram pa' (press.down kill) 'feel sorry for someone'

Uses in Conlanging

- ▶ How are SVCs useful in conlanging?
- ▶ Enhance any grammatical or discourse design by creating unique ways of phrasing that ensures avoidance of accidental relexing habits
- ▶ Allow you to avoid having to create unique lexical bases for every new verbal concept
 - ▶ Instead of having a new verb for “to assume”, you could have an SVC composed of “to take say know” lexicalized for this concept

Tosi SVCs

sīn tī lur ad i
man **drink swallow** juice obj
'The man drinks and swallows the juice'

mīni nox ōr
boy **punch.down weep**
'The boy is overwhelmed by grief'

xer won xis mel yās i
girl **take give** woman boat obj
'the girl requisitions the boat for/on behalf of the woman'

Grammaticalization of SVCs from mother to daughter language

- ▶ Grammaticalized SVCs can be used in diachronic changes between a mother and daughter language
- ▶ Old Rílin has several SVC constructions that became grammaticalized as derivational prefixes in Rílin

Grammaticalization of SVCs from mother to daughter language

- ▶ Old Rílin *mōh-* (hide) + [verb] construction was grammaticalized as a morpheme *mó-* in Rílin, meaning ‘unexpected or unknown (thing)’ (applied first to verbs but now extended to nouns)
- ▶ SVC: *khas-* ‘push’ + [verb] construction → causative prefix *xa-* in modern Rílin

Conlanging with SVCs

- ▶ Make phrasing and grammar rich by using SVCs
- ▶ Avoid having to create (and remember!) new lexical bases—just use an SVC!
- ▶ You can even further lexicalize those
- ▶ Spice up your diachronic depth with SVC origins for grammatical morphemes
- ▶ Increase the *grammatical* complexity of changes from Proto → Modern language (not only the phonology)

Ngab Won Mē Sil!

(throw take joy listen) =

Thank you!