

Are there serial verb constructions in Sandawe?

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1. *Serial verb constructions*

The category of *serial verb construction* (SVC) is often defined in terms of prototypical features. In semantic terms, SVCs typically ‘encode one event, or several subevents closely linked together, or even several events in sequence which may be conceptualized as connected to each other’ (Aikhenvald, 2003: 17). In formal terms, an SVC can be described as a ‘mono-clausal structure in which two or more verbs are juxtaposed (without connectives)’ (Payne, 1999: 3). Tense/aspect/mood marking tends to be found on the first verb only and therefore all the verbs in an SVC share the same tense, aspect and mood. Internal arguments may be shared by the verbs in an SVC and the first verb only is subject marked. The subject of the second verb must be a core participant, such as the subject or an object, of the first verb.

In the next section, a particular *multiple verb construction* (MVC) in Sandawe, a Khoisan language spoken in central Tanzania, is introduced and exemplified. The functional and formal features of this construction are then illustrated and discussed in relation to the prototypical features of an SVC. The concluding section addresses the issue of whether the Sandawe MVC under discussion should be analysed as an SVC or as another type of construction.

2. *The phenomenon in Sandawe*

The following sentence¹ is an example of the MVC to be discussed here:

- (1)² t^híměǎ †
 cook-1.pl. RPGN-& sweep
 ‘We cooked and swept’

The first verb is inflected with a realis person, gender and number morpheme (RPGN). In Sandawe, realis PGN morphemes are used in sentences which are affirmative and have a present or past time reference. Irrealis PGN morphemes are used in affirmative sentences with a future time reference and in negative sentences. PGN morphemes in Sandawe identify the person, gender and number of the subject (see Eaton, 2002 and 2003 for a fuller description of the Sandawe inflectional system).

In example (1), the first verb is also suffixed with the connective morpheme / [˘]/, which is represented by ‘&’ in the morpheme by morpheme gloss. This morpheme is also used to coordinate nouns. The second verb in the example above is uninflected

¹ The language informant for the research presented here was Nestori Michaeli of Magambua. I would like to record here my thanks to him and also to the participants of the 7th LASU conference for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper. In addition, I would like to thank Judith Collins of the University of Wales Institute in Cardiff for providing me with a copy of the Aikhenvald (2003) article.

² Standard IPA symbols are used in the transcription of the Sandawe examples. The following tone markings are used:

á high à low ǎ rising â falling

In this paper, morphemes are given with their basic tone patterns. For an explanation of morphophonological and tonal changes and a description of Sandawe phonology, see Hunziker and Hunziker (in preparation).

and therefore its tone pattern is neutralised to an all low toned pattern, as shown by the symbol 1⁺.³

2.1 Function

The MVC in Sandawe is commonly used to join two verbs which then retain their literal meanings, as in the following example:

- (2) |^hímé-sà-^{z̃} 1^hèmé
 sing-3.f.sg. RPGN-& sweep
 ‘She sang and swept’

The two actions of verbs joined in this way can be understood as occurring simultaneously or successively, depending on pragmatic and contextual factors. In the absence of a context, the example above is ambiguous in this respect since the actions of singing and sweeping can be performed simultaneously or successively by one person.

If the two actions are to be interpreted as occurring successively, the action of the verb which is suffixed with the connective morpheme is understood to occur before the action of the other verb. The relative order of the two verbs is irrelevant, as illustrated by the next two examples:

- (3) hǎ:gâ-sà-^{z̃} 1^hímé
 get up-3f.sg. RPGN-& cook

³ This tone pattern neutralisation of uninflected verbs does not occur when a verb follows an all low toned word or when a verb with the tonal melody HL follows a word-final high tone (as in (5) below).

‘She got up and cooked’

- (4) hǎ:gâ-sà t^hímé-[~]
 leave-3f.sg. RPGN cook-&
 ‘She cooked and (then) left’

The verb /hǎ:gâ/ can mean ‘wake up’, ‘get up’ or ‘leave (a place)’, depending on the context of its use. In example (3), the most natural interpretation for this verb is ‘get up’, but the sentence may also be understood as ‘She woke up and cooked’ or ‘She left and cooked’. Whichever meaning is understood, the placement of the connective morpheme makes it clear that the action expressed by /hǎ:gâ/ takes place before the action of cooking.

The only pragmatically plausible interpretation for example (4) is the one given above. Since the action expressed by /hǎ:gâ/ happens after the action of cooking, this verb is understood as meaning ‘leave (a place)’ and not ‘wake up’ or ‘get up’.

These findings do not support the position put forward by Elderkin (1989: 140). He claims that when the connective morpheme is suffixed to the first of two verbs, the actions expressed by the verbs are understood to take place successively, whereas the suffixation of the morpheme to the second of two verbs indicates simultaneity. Elderkin also found that ‘very occasionally’, the connective morpheme is suffixed to both verbs, indicating ‘their distinct, but complementary nature’ (1989: 138, 140). The informant who provided the data under discussion in this paper did not accept

sentences in which two verbs were suffixed with the connective morpheme unless a third verb was added, as in the following example:

- (5) $l^h\grave{e}m\acute{e}-s\grave{a}-\acute{z}$ $t^h\acute{i}m\acute{e}-\acute{z}$ $h\acute{i}k\grave{'}\grave{i}$
 sweep-3f.sg. RPGN-& cook-& go
 ‘She swept, cooked and went’ (*lit.* ‘She swept and cooked and went’)

The use of the MVC described so far does not meet the functional criteria associated with an SVC. Recall that an SVC typically describes a single event or several connected events. As the examples above show, the Sandawe MVC may be used to describe a sequence of unconnected events.⁴

However, the MVC in Sandawe is also used to express what can be conceptualised as a single event or a series of connected events. One example of this is the use of the verb /íé/, meaning ‘stay’, to express progressive aspect:

- (6) $t^h\hat{a}-\grave{a}$ $\acute{i}\acute{e}-\acute{z}$
 run-3m.sg. RPGN stay-&
 ‘He is running’ (*lit.* ‘He stays and runs’)

The verb ‘stay’ has clearly lost its literal meaning in this example as it is used with a motion verb. Example (6) can also be understood in its literal sense, but this is not the natural interpretation.

⁴ See Aikhenvald (2003: 14-18) for a discussion on how SVCs in various languages may only be used to describe multiple events when these events are conceptually linked.

Completive aspect may also be expressed by an MVC:

- (7) t^hímé-sà-^z t^hlèmsé
cook-3f.sg. RPGN-& finish
'She finished cooking' (*lit. 'She cooked and finished'*)

If the connective morpheme is placed on the verb 'finish', the action of this verb is understood to have taken place before the action of cooking, resulting in a more literal interpretation:

- (8) t^hímé-sà t^hlèmsé-^z
cook-3f.sg. RPGN finish-&
'She finished (something) and (then) cooked'

A further use of the MVC in Sandawe can be observed in motion verbs. Not all motion verbs in the language include the meaning component of *locomotion*, or movement to a place. The verb /hénté/, meaning 'limp', is one of these non-locomotive verbs, as can be seen by the next example, which is ungrammatical:

- (9) * t^hě:-tâ-nà-à hénté
tree-at-to⁵-3m.sg. RPGN limp
'He limped to the tree'

⁵ /tâ/ and /nà/, glossed here as 'at' and 'to', are postpositions.

In order to express the meaning ‘he limped to the tree’, an MVC using /hénté/ and a locomotive verb, such as /hík’ì/, meaning ‘go’, is used:

- (10) t^hě:-tâ-nà-à hénté-^z hík’ì
 tree-at-to-3m.sg. RPGN limp-& go
 ‘He limped to the tree’ (*lit. ‘To the tree, he limped and went’*)

It is possible to add the verb /íé/, meaning ‘stay’, to the previous example and thus convey progressive aspect:

- (11) t^hě:-tâ-nà-à hénté-^z íé-^z hík’ì
 tree-at-to-3m.sg. RPGN limp-& stay-& go
 ‘He is limping to the tree’
 (*lit. ‘To the tree, he limps and stays and goes’*)

Here three verbs are used to express a single event.⁶

In summary, we have seen two main uses of the MVC in Sandawe. Firstly, there is what can be described as the *symmetrical* use, in which each verb is of equal semantic status (Aikhenvald, 2003: 31). This use of the MVC does not meet the functional criteria associated with an SVC since in Sandawe there is no requirement that the individual events described by the verb series be conceptually linked in any way. Secondly, there is the *asymmetrical* use of the MVC in Sandawe, in which there is a distinction between a verb which contributes the main semantic content and one

⁶ The order of the three verbs is flexible, but the distribution of the connective morphemes must be as shown to express the meaning given.

which modifies the construction as a whole with respect to a specification such as aspect (Aikhenvald, 2003: 30). In this use of the MVC, progressive aspect can be contributed by the verb ‘stay’, completive aspect by ‘finish’ and locomotion by ‘go’. In these asymmetrical uses, the MVC closely resembles the prototypical SVC in functional terms.

2.2 Form

In Sandawe MVCs, the connective morpheme suffixes to the final vowel of the verb stem, after any PGN morphemes. If an uninflected verb is suffixed with the connective morpheme, the rule of verb tone pattern neutralisation is not applied. Uninflected verbs which are not suffixed with the connective morpheme in MVCs do undergo the rule of tone pattern neutralisation.

A realis sentence with a single verb may contain more than one PGN morpheme, providing certain constituent order conditions are met (see Elderkin, 1989: 106; Kagaya, 1990: 3-5):

- (12)
1. An uninflected verb must not precede the first inflected constituent of a sentence.
 2. An inflected verb must not be preceded by another inflected constituent.

The research conducted for this paper shows that these conditions do not satisfactorily describe what is grammatical in MVCs. The table below illustrates the pattern for a two word MVC such as the following:

- (13) t^hâ-sà íé-^z
run-3f.sg. RPGN stay-&
V-PGN V-&
‘She is running’

<i>Grammatical</i>		<i>Ungrammatical</i>	
V-PGN	V-&	*V	V-&-PGN
V-PGN	V-&-PGN	*V-&-PGN	V-PGN
V-&-PGN	V	*V-&	V-PGN
		*V	V-&
		*V-&	V

Table 1 Grammaticality of PGN distribution in MVCs

The first restriction, as given in (12) above, is followed without exception in MVCs, but the second incorrectly predicts that the pattern ‘V-PGN V-&-PGN’ is ungrammatical. In order to capture the asymmetry in the second line of the table above, the following restriction must be formulated:

- (14) 3. In MVCs, an inflected verb which is also suffixed with the connective morpheme may be preceded by another inflected constituent if the sequence of inflected constituents begins with an inflected verb which is not suffixed with the connective morpheme.

This restriction also satisfactorily describes the grammaticality of MVCs including other constituents, such as a subject or object NP.

We can see from the three restrictions that the verb not suffixed with the connective morpheme behaves the same as a verb in a single verb construction as it follows both of the first two restrictions without exception. In contrast, the verb suffixed with the connective morpheme follows the first of the two restrictions, but not the second. Thus V acts like a true verb, whereas V-& falls between the categories of verb and non-verb in this respect.

A further distinction between V and V-& can be seen in the irrealis, where V must be inflected with the PGN morpheme and V-& cannot be:

(15) ʔòmé-ì íé-^z
cultivate-3m.sg. IPGN stay-&
‘He will be cultivating’

(16) íé-^z t^hímé-tfù
stay-& cook-3f.sg. IPGN neg.
‘She was not cooking’

V-& therefore behaves like a non-verb in the irrealis with respect to inflection.

Kagaya (1994) comes to a slightly different conclusion concerning the behaviour of verbs in the MVC. His informant did not allow the pattern ‘V-PGN V-&-PGN’, which was considered acceptable by the informant who provided the data for this paper. Kagaya therefore found no difference between the two verbs in an MVC, with respect to inflection. Both verbs behaved the same as a verb in a single verb construction. As

in the data presented here, Kagaya found that in the irrealis, only the verb not suffixed with the connective morpheme could be suffixed with the PGN morpheme. He concludes that V-& belongs with verbs in the realis and non-verbs in the irrealis, thus occupying a ‘unique location in terms of syntax’ (1994: 185).

The formal features of the Sandawe MVC discussed so far do not clearly fit the prototype of an SVC. Firstly, the connective morpheme /ɛ̃/ is obligatorily present in the Sandawe MVC and SVCs do not normally have overt conjunctions. Secondly, SVCs typically only have tense/aspect/mood and subject marking on the first verb in the series. This is not true of Sandawe as the realis PGN morpheme may be suffixed to either or both of two verbs in an MVC, providing certain constituent order restrictions are met. If a constituent preceding the verbs is inflected, neither verb is inflected with a PGN morpheme. In an irrealis MVC, only the verb which is not suffixed with the connective morpheme may be inflected, regardless of the relative order of the verbs involved. However, inflectional criteria can be problematic in the categorising of syntactic phenomena in Sandawe since the inflectional system of the language is highly unusual.

Leaving aside the two differences mentioned above, the MVC in Sandawe does exhibit some formal similarity with an SVC, as can be seen from the next example:

- (17) ɪ̀ɛ̀mɛ́-tʃù íɛ̃-ɛ̃
 sweep-3f.sg. IPGN neg. stay-&
 ‘She was not sweeping’

This sentence cannot mean ‘she stayed and did not cook’ and therefore the negative morpheme has scope over both verbs. The inflectional marking on one verb in the MVC applies to all the verbs in the construction. This is also true of an SVC.

Similarly, like SVCs, the second verb in a Sandawe MVC cannot have a subject which is not a core participant of the first verb. The following sentence is therefore ungrammatical:

- (18) * t^hímé-sà-[¿] |^hèmé-s
 cook-3f.sg. RPGN-& sweep-1sg. RPGN
 ‘She cooked and I swept’

This can be seen as an argument for the interpretation of the MVC in Sandawe as a mono-clausal structure, although further research into clause structure in the language would be necessary to support this position.

The connective morpheme can be used to coordinate verbs or VPs, as can be seen in the following two examples:

- (19) útê-ì |^hèmé-[¿] †xwànté
 yesterday-2sg. RPGN sweep-& cook (ugali⁷)
 ‘You swept and cooked (ugali) yesterday’

- (20) útê-ì |^hèmé-[¿] n![!]é:-ì †xwànté
 yesterday-2sg. RPGN sweep-& today-2sg. RPGN cook (ugali)

⁷ Ugalí (Swahili) is a kind of stiff maize flour porridge.

‘You swept yesterday and cooked (ugali) today’

In the first of these two examples, the two verbs are coordinated by the connective morpheme and the adverb has scope over both verbs. In the second example, each adverb only has scope over the immediately following verb and the connective morpheme coordinates the two VPs, each of which consists of an adverb and a verb.

An MVC may include an object which is the argument of both verbs, as in the next example:

- (21) sómbá-sà t^hímé-^z mántfâ
fish-3f.sg. RPGN cook-& eat
‘She cooked and ate the fish’

A possible, though pragmatically unlikely, alternative interpretation for this sentence is, ‘she cooked the fish and ate (something else)’. By this interpretation, the object is only an argument of the immediately following verb. Pragmatics plays a role in disambiguating sentences of this kind, as can be seen from the following example:

- (22) sómbá-sà t^hímé-^z ʋ^hèmé
fish-3f.sg. RPGN cook-& sweep
‘She cooked the fish and swept’

Here the most natural interpretation is for the object to be understood as the argument of the immediately following verb only. However, it is also possible for the sentence

to be interpreted with the meaning 'she cooked and swept the fish'. The different possible interpretations of the previous two examples show how the connective morpheme can be used to coordinate both verbs and VPs consisting of a verb and an object.

3. *Conclusion*

We have seen in the preceding discussion how the MVC in Sandawe fulfils two main functions. Firstly, it can be used in a symmetrical way to express multiple events, with each verb in the construction referring to a single, complete event. Secondly, it can be used in an asymmetrical way to combine different meaning components in the expression of a single event. In this second function, the MVC closely resembles the prototypical SVC.

On functional criteria, a case can therefore be made for analysing the MVC in Sandawe as an SVC when it is used in its asymmetrical function, but not when it is used in its symmetrical function. However, we must remember that regardless of its function, the MVC in Sandawe does not differ in terms of its form. It would therefore be misleading to use two labels for what is simply the same formal construction being used in different ways. Using the label SVC for the construction as a whole would also be misleading as when it is used in its symmetrical function the MVC does not meet functional SVC criteria.

There are two formal ways in which the MVC in Sandawe differs from the prototypical SVC. Firstly, subject marking and tense/aspect/mood marking usually

only occur on one verb in an SVC, but in Sandawe, the realis PGN morpheme may be suffixed to either or both of two verbs in an MVC. Secondly, the MVC includes an obligatory coordinating conjunction, the connective morpheme /-^z/. SVCs typically do not have connectives.

It can be argued that the first of these differences may be discarded as unimportant since the Sandawe realis inflection system as a whole is highly unusual. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, when more than one verb in an MVC is inflected, the same inflectional morpheme must be used on all constituents. That is, the scope of the inflection extends over the whole construction. It is not possible for the verbs in an MVC to differ in tense, for example. A further important similarity between an SVC and the Sandawe MVC is that the second verb in a Sandawe MVC cannot have a subject which is not a core participant of the first verb. As mentioned in the previous section, this is arguably evidence for the mono-clausal nature of the Sandawe MVC.

Bearing in mind all the similarities and differences cited above, it is proposed here that the Sandawe construction under discussion not be categorised as an SVC. In particular, two main differences between the construction and the prototypical SVC can be put forward as evidence for the position taken: the lack of a requirement that multiple events expressed by the MVC be conceptually connected and the obligatory presence of the connective morpheme.

As an alternative label, I propose the term *coordinate verb construction* (CVC) to refer to the construction under discussion. The use of the word ‘coordinate’ seems appropriate as the coordinating conjunction is a key feature of the construction.

However, it should be noted that its use might be taken to imply that the verbs involved in a CVC are of equal status. When the construction is used symmetrically, the verbs involved can be described as being of equal functional status. However, in the asymmetrical use of the MVC, there is a clear functional distinction between verbs which contribute the main semantic content and those which, for example, contribute aspectual information. In terms of formal status, the data discussed above shows how the verb which is not suffixed with the connective morpheme acts as a true verb in both the realis and the irrealis, whereas the behaviour of the verb which is suffixed with this morpheme can be described as only partly verb-like in the realis and not at all verb-like in the irrealis.

The title of this paper poses the question as to whether there are serial verb constructions in Sandawe. It has been argued that the particular multiple verb construction examined here should not be categorised as a serial verb construction, but rather as a coordinate verb construction. The title question can therefore be answered in the negative on the basis of the evidence we have at hand. However, it should be noted that the connective morpheme /^z/, which is used in the CVC, appears to be derived from the older forms /hĩ/ (in the Eastern dialect of Sandawe) and /nĩ/ (in the Western dialect of Sandawe), which are sometimes still heard instead of /^z/. It seems therefore possible that over time the connective morpheme may be reduced to zero, leaving the CVC without any overt connectives and thus providing the way for a reanalysis of the Sandawe CVC as an SVC.

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