
Some formal perspectives on the analysis of Serial Verbs

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We present a formal analysis of SVCs in terms of adjunction, reflecting the circumstance that a verb in an SVC rarely takes the ensuing VP as its complement. The analysis will be shown to only minimally contrast with analyses of ‘equi’ infinitival constructions and directional constructions in languages like Norwegian and English. We illustrate the approach for Ga, a Kwa language spoken in the Accra area of Ghana. We draw on the inventory of SVCs from the resource *GaVal* (Dakubu 2009, Hellan & Dakubu 2010, Hellan 2023), which, with parameters of argument sharing, TAM sharing, valence and roles of arguments of partaking verbs, and situation type ascribed to the whole SVC, count nearly 200 types of SVCs.

Some types of two-verb SVCs ought to be analyzed in terms of complement-taking, given syntactic and semantic dependencies between the verbs. With examples from Ga and Akan, we illustrate an approach based on selection and unification of semantic features, through an analytic strategy where the meaning specifications of the verbs ‘merge’ to form a unitary semantic specification, in many cases with one verb representing TAM-like features and the other a lexical content.

It remains open whether a unification analysis of verb contents can be used in an SVC for a narrative where a person buys a live chicken, kills it, cooks it and eats it, here the lexical semantic features of the verbs may be partly incompatible. On a higher level, though, departing from Durie’s (1997) suggestion that SVCs often reflect socio-cultural established event patterns, one could explore notions like ‘frames’ as in Minsky (1974), whereby member VPs of a ‘narrative’ SVC could be construed as fitting into given ‘frames’, and attempt analytic strategies of unification at such a ‘frame’ level.

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