1. Introduction

Facts
- Serial Verb Constructions (SVCs) occur in many languages, e.g., SOV Japanese (and Korean), and even English, e.g., come/go see, go fly a kite, pray tell (Zwicky 1990).
- According to Akahenvald (2018:249), SVCs are found in more than two-thirds (most) of the world’s languages.
- Japanese SVCs are productive, compositional and non-compositional (idiomatic) meanings are possible across both transitive and intransitive verb types.
- Cf. the Compound Verb Lexicon, Nishiyama 2008 and references therein.
- SVC verbs share argument structure.
- SVCs with an aspectual V2, e.g. tabe-oueru ‘eat-finish’, don’t share argument structure.

Reconciling Serial Verbs with Labeling and Theta Theory*

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Japanese SVCs are productive, compositional and non-
identical inscriptions -

(4) a. John thought the cat got Bill’s tongue. [idiomatic]

• Chomsky (1975, 2021) indicates that there is a verb-complement relation between Bill and the verbal complex persuade-to-leave.

• Evidence for verbal complexes is related to “heavy selectional restrictions” (Chomsky 1975:505). Persuade, combined with its complement, determines verb-object selectional restrictions.

(5) I persuaded him to bleed/hear/be happy.

• The position of Bill is also motivated by binding facts. Binding of the object (IA) is possible.

(6) I persuaded myself to leave.

• Passivation of Bill is possible.

(7) Bill was persuaded to leave. Modify Labeling Theory as follows.

(8) XP, YP] has label Z if YP is a verbal complex Z

• In Fig. 5, persuade-to-leave is a verbal complex that can label and takes Bill as a complement.

• Similarly, in Fig. 6, the verbal complex osi-taous ‘push-toppable’ labels and takes Taro as a complement.

• {Bill, persuade-to-leave} and {Taro, osi-taous} are successfully labeled as {XP, Y} structures.

Figures

Figure 1: Transitive vP

Figure 2: Transitive v’P

Figure 3: SVC structure

(1) Mari-ga Taro-o osi-taous-ka
M-Nom T-Acc push-toppable-Pst ‘Man topped Taro by pushing him.’ (Adapted from Nishiyama 1998:185)

Figure 4: Persuade Double-complement structure

(2) John persuaded Bill to leave. (Chomsky 2021:24)

• Persuade takes two complements (Chomsky 1975, 2021)

• Bill

• Bill to leave

• There are two separate NPs Bill, which each get a separate theta-role.

(3) John persuaded Bill that he should leave.

• Idioms

(4) a. John thought the cat got Bill’s tongue. [idiomatic]

b. John persuaded the cat to get Bill’s tongue. [non-idiomatic]

(see Radford 2009 for similar examples)

2. Proposal

FormCopy (FC) establish a copy relation between two (o-
commanding) identical inscriptions via Minimal Search (adapted from Chomsky 2021).

Labeling Theory (Chomsky 2013, 2015):

a. (X, YP] Label = X

b. (XP, YP] + Label = shared F

c. (XP, YP] + Unlabeled (without shared features)

d. (XP, Z, [idt YP]]) Label of Z is the label of YP

Proposal

• Suppose SVCs are formed by (Theta) Merge only.

• An alternative proposal, use FormSet (Chomsky, In press).

• Merge: Combine X and Y to form object (X, Y), X & Y Combine from Workspaze, or Y a term of X (Chomsky 2001, etc.).

• Theta Merge builds theta configurations (External Merge, Duality of Semantics) (Chomsky 2007, 2021).

• Argument sharing between theta configurations made possible by FormCopy.

Labeling Success

Persuade to leave

we

bill

Figure 5: verbal complex persuade-to-leave

Two transitive verbs combine

• The verbs are stacked

• FormCopy applies:

(1)Bill, Bill)

(2)Bill, Bill)

Labeling Failure

Figure 6: SVC osi-taous

Figure 7: SVC structure

Persuade to leave

we

bill

bill

(1)Bill, Bill

(2)Bill, Bill

(3)Bill, Bill

3. Conclusions

• We overcome problems inherent in standard analyses which rely on ad hoc lexical or syntactic processes that alter the thematic structures of verbs.

• Kageyama (1993) proposes that SVCs such as osi-taous ‘push-toppable’ are formed in the lexicon, which requires special, i.e., construction-particular, versions of V1 and V2 theta-configurations, complicating the theory.

• Both Nishiyama (1998) and Saito (2016) propose syntactic analyses in which a transitive SVC has a single EA-θ position.

• Nishiyama proposes a separate IA-θ position with PRO as the lower IA.

• [EA, [IA, (PRO, V1, V2), Tr(ν-active)]

• Saito proposes a V1-V2 verb complex that jointly selects for an IA, [IA, V1, V2].

• We propose that verbs retain their original argument structure in SVCs. This accords with the optimal conditions of the Minimalist Program, the Strong Minimalist Thesis (Chomsky 2000, 2001).

• The Strong Minimalist Thesis (SMT) (Chomsky 2000, 2001, and subsequent work) states that language makes optimal use of the new functionality enabled by some minor rewriting of the brain.

• We provide evidence that our analysis is on the right track because the same syntax processes seem to apply in the English compound-predicate case as in the Japanese SVC.

• Remaining questions:


- Is this the simplest possible theory to account for SVCs?
- Pershaps.

- Why don’t all languages have SVCs?

References:


Chomsky, Noam. 2013, Possible number of languages. Its 10:109, Jilg: 12-10:03.


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This FormCopy analysis also applies straightforwardly for:
- transitive-intransitive SVCS: tuki-sasaru ‘poke-get stuck’
- intransitive-intransitive SVCS like yoi-tubus ‘get drunk-crush’ ‘get wasted’

We note some further parallels between persuade-to-leave and osi-taous:
- [Persuasion is possible with SVCs.

(9) Taro-ga Mari-ni osi-taous-ka Taro was pushed down by Mary.

• Binding of object (IA) is also possible.

(10) Ken-ga zibun-zin-o ari-kiyo-tera Ken purified himself.

Theoretical frameworks and evidence:

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