Serialization in Complex Predicates in MalakMalak

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LSA Annual Meeting, Portland, January 8-11, 2015

1. Introduction. This paper provides an analysis of the unique complex predicate system in MalakMalak, a non-Pama-Nyungan Daly language spoken in Northern Australia. While complex verbs are well attested in Australian languages and elsewhere, in MalakMalak two systems of multi-verb constructions combine in a typologically very rare setup: First, complex predicates consist of an uninflecting open-classed coverb (e.g. *ka* in (1) and an inflecting verb (IV) belonging to a closed class of only six verbs (*yida*). Second, coverbs combine in serial constructions (*kubuk karrarr dat tyed*) as part of a complex predicate with up to four coverbs encoding multiple or single events. This overlap provides a unique opportunity to examine shared and distinctive features of the two types of constructions within one language. I argue for an analysis of MalakMalak's complex predicates' argument structure in terms of argument unification (Bowern, 2010) of coverb and IV jointly contributing to the semantic and syntactic properties of the complex predicate. Similar observations have been made for other Australian languages such as Jaminjung (Schultze-Berndt, 2000), Wagiman (Wilson, 1999), Wambaya Nordlinger (2010) and Bardi (Bowern, 2010).

(1) kubuk karrarr dat tyed yuyu yanak, ka yida=ke
swim move.up look stand 3SG.masc.stand.PST one come 3SG.masc.go.PST=FOC
'he swam up and looked for the river once, then he came here'[1]

In serial coverb constructions, the constituents may encode a single (*kubuk karrarr* 'swim up') or a series of events (*kubuk karrarr - dat tyed* 'swim up THEN look for'). They are usually iconically ordered and the IV's pronominal and tense properties match the entire expression. Semantically, however, the IV either contributes only to the coverb(s) directly preceding it, or classifies the eintire event. If a coverb attaches the aspectual continuous suffix *-ma*, or the participial suffix *-eli*, it is always the last part of the serial coverb construction. Similar processes have been observed for serial verb constructions in Kalam (Pawley and Lane, 1998).

(2) waya **derret-eli** wutu fix-im-ap
go.still mess.up-PART 3PL.sit.PST fix-TR-up
'they are already messed up, they need fixing' (Birk 1974)

The vast majority of verbal predicates in MalakMalak are complex predicates (58%). Furthermore, coverbs in MalakMalak often occur without IVs (22%). A correlation between the ability of coverbs to be semi-independent predicates and serialization (25% of serial constructions are without IVs) has been observed by Bowern (2010) for other Australian CP languages.

*I would like to gratefully acknowledge financial support from the Franklin Research Grant of the American Philosophical Society, the Endangered Languages Documentation Program IPF0189, and the NSF BSC 1360800. I would like to specifically thank Biddy Yingguny Lindsey, Frances Mijat, Rita Pirak, Rita McGregor, Rosie Mary Magdalene Kabat, Barbara Tenblin, Michael Kunbuk, Don White, and Edward Andrews for generously sharing their knowledge of MalakMalak with me. Additional thanks go to Rob Lindsey and the late Joye Maddison for supporting my work with the MalakMalak people in every respect.

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[1]Unless otherwise indicated, all examples are from original fieldwork on MalakMalak(Hoffmann, 2013).

Furthermore, types of complex predicates in Australia range from independent and phrasal, such as Warlpiri and Jaminjung (Schultze-Berndt, 2000), to languages where the two components are entirely fused and the IV has become unanalyzable, Gooniyandi (McGregor, 2002). Malak-Malak is situated between the two types - as has been observed for Ngan'gityemerri (Reid, 2003, 2011) and Mangarrayi (Merlan, 1982) with many phrasal-type constructions as in 2), but also fused complex predicates such as *pengudung* = *pi* + *engudung* 'move.1SG.incl.go.PRS' and tightly compounded coverbs (*tity-pi* 'go.out-move'). This suggests that lexicalization and grammaticalization processes observed for serial verb as well as complex predicate languages are currently taking place in MalakMalak. I argue that the system is developing into a serial verb language with either tightly fused IVs or no IVs at all.

2. The interplay of two multi-verb constructions. Serial verb constructions (SVCs) share many features with complex predicates. "A complex predicate involves (a) two or more predicational elements, (b) which jointly predicate, and (c) occur wihin a monoclausal structure (i.e. there is a single subject)" (Butt, 2010, 48). An SVC, on the other hand, "is a sequence of verbs which act together as a single predicate, without any overt marker of coordination, subordination, or syntactic dependency of any other sort. Serial verb constructions describe what is conceptualized as a single event. They are monoclausal; their intonational properties are the same as those of a monoverbal clause, and they have just one tense, aspect, and polarity value. SVCs may also share core and other arguments. Each component of an SVC must be able to occur on its own. Within an SVC, the individual verbs may have same, or different, transitivity values" (Aikhenvald, 2006, 1).

2.1. WORD CLASS STATUS OF COVERBS. A major differentiating characteristics of these two multi-verb constructions, is that each component of an SVC belongs to the same open word class. In MalakMalak, there is ample evidence, that coverbs constitute a word class distinct from inflecting verbs or adverbs. As mentioned above, only coverbs may attach the aspectual suffixes *-ma* and *-eli/-ali*. They are usually independent phonological words which receive their own primary stress, as the IV does. However, monosyllabic coverbs with IVs may cliticize to form a single word as in (3), subject to semantic and phonological restrictions.

(3) *yur+errdyue*

ngurrngut **yuryue** powarr=ye
sleep lie.(1PL.incl).lie.PRS night=FOC

'we sleep during the night' (Birk, 1974)

There are many semantically compositional complex predicates such as (4). However, some coverb-IV pairs have highly idiomatic reading as in (5).

(4) tarraty wirrk yiminy wurru yur bawu
kill.PL finish/die/kill 3SG.masc.do.PUNCT 3PL.OBJ lie.down right
'he killed everybody, now they lie down'

(5) kag nga-many pam yiminy-wurru=we
far 1SG-ABL put.down 3SG.masc.do.PST-3PL.OBJ=FOC
'my uncle helped to have them born' (Birk, 1974)

Furthermore, in SVCs all verbs may occur as independent predicates and take verbal inflections (if the language has verbal inflection at all) as well as forming part of a serial verb construction. While it has been observed for other complex predicate forming languages in Australia such as Jaminjung, that the use of coverbs as semi-independent predicates is restricted to highly contextualized genres, this is not the case for MalakMalak. Consequently, the ability to form and wide-spread use of independent coverbs such as (6) in MalakMalak may have led directly to the extensive use of serial coverb constructions in the language. However, only 25% of the time, serial coverbs occur WITH an inflecting verb (75%) (1).

(6) tyity pap yuwarra
have/take rush.PL go.away
'we all ran away'

2.2. FUNCTIONS OF SERIAL (CO)VERB CONSTRUCTIONS. Givón (1991, 54-55) identifies the main functional types of serial verb constructions as (a) co-lexicalization (7), (b) tense-aspect marking (8), (c) case-role marking (9), (d) deictic-directional marking, and (e) evidentiality-epistemic marking. MalakMalak's serial coverb constructions take most of these functions and also form causatives (10).

(7) akana lak nuende algitybi **lak men** **ngelk**
NEG eat 3SG.fem.go.PRS young.man eat stomach fill.up
'the woman can't eat that, the boy is full now - lit. *ate his stomach full*' (Birk, 1974)

(8) yunu **tyin-ang** pak
3SG.masc.sit.PST bottom-give sit
'he sat down (there) forever/he stayed'

(9) tity **pi** warrad dek nunu pak
come.out move walk camp 3SG.fem.sit.PST sit
'she came out, walked to the camp and sat down' (Birk, 1974)

(10) elinyirr-**ang** yide-nu
be.frightened-give 3SG.go.PRS-3SG.OBJ
'he frightens him (lit. *he gives a fright to him*)'

There are, however, with regards to the stance verbs, also many examples of serial verb constructions that show a connection between 'affixal' and the 'lexical' functions as in (11) and where they are clearly serialized with their full lexical meaning

(11) miri purrarr **tyed** pak nunu=wa
sun go.around stand sit 3SG.fem.sit.PST=COMP
'(he's waiting until) the sun has gone around (to about 3pm)'

3. Conclusions. On closer inspection, the distinctions discussed for serial verb vs. complex predicates may not be quite so large: There are serial verb languages such as Kalam (Pawley and Lane, 1998), which only have a closed class of semantically general verbs. These are combined with one another in serial verb constructions, as well as with words from other word classes as complex predicates. As a result, it has been suggested (Durie, 1997; Sebba, 1987; Pawley and

Lane, 1998) that at least one position in serial verb constructions is restricted to a finite set of verbs in most or all serial verb languages (Schultze-Berndt, 2000, 549). This would make serial verb languages much more similar to CP languages in Australia where one position is restricted to a closed class of IVs except that these IVs in addition form a distinct lexical category.
MalakMalak serial coverb constructions combine features and functions of two different multi-verb constructions. Many, but not all, serial CPs occur without IVs; and phrasal and bound CPs exist alongside one another. However, bound CP constructions are outnumbered by far by serial coverb constructions in discourse which suggests a development into a serializing direction; contrary to what has been observed for the related Daly language Ngang'ityemerri where phrasal have developed into bound CPs (Reid, 2003).

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