

Event integration in verb serialization of Tsou

Gujing Lin

A serial verb construction (SVC henceforth) is often said to express a single event (Durie 1997, Brill 2004, Aikhenvald 2006, Bisang 2009, to name a few). Nevertheless, precisely what falls under the characterization of a single event remains an area of open debate. A recent treatment by Baker & Harvey (2010) has advocated to dissociate single eventhood from the definitions of SVCs after a careful exploration of the combinatorial possibilities of verbs, arguing that SVCs do not involve integration of event information contained within the participating verbs and therefore should be dealt with under the category of multiple events.

This study sets out to investigate three valency-changing SVCs of the Formosan language Tsou, where verbs bearing non-agreeing voice morphology are strung together, as illustrated in (1). While the succession of a NON-ACTOR-VOICE (NAV henceforth) first verb and an ACTOR-VOICE (AV henceforth) second verb could be taken as evidence to Baker & Harvey's claim for the lack of integration between serialized verbs, this paper argues that the combinatorial possibilities of verbs in these SVCs actually reflect the semantic conditions to bind the event properties contained within the serialized verbs into a joint, integrated whole, contra Baker & Harvey (2010), and the non-concordant voice marking jointly attests to the requirement for event integration.

- (1) os='o yon-i oevoi 'o hopo
NAV.REAL=1SG stay-LV sleep.AV PIVOT room
'I slept in the room.' (LV-AV)

We show that a valency-changing SVC of Tsou is only well-formed if the participating verbs do not clash in lexical aspectual properties crucial to the Vendler-Dowty style of situation aspect classes. Specifically, it is the NAV first verb, the one taken from a restricted class, which determines the aspectual properties of telicity and duration for the joint event and therefore the types of AV second verbs to combine with, for a serial structure is only well-formed when the participating verbs share common aspectual specifications. In example (1), the combination of *yon-i oevoi* 'stay-sleep' is acceptable as both verbs denote an eventuality that progresses in time but does not have a natural endpoint. Contrasting with the acceptability of (1) is the ungrammaticality of (2). This serialization is not possible with the two verbs clashing in both telicity and duration—the first verb *yon-i* 'stay' depicts an open-ended, durational process, whereas the second verb *mcoi* 'die', an achievement verb, denotes a point-like change of state which is over as soon as it has started. By looking into the lexical aspectual properties contained in the serialized verbs, this study is able to account for the difference of (1) and (2).

- (2) *o=si yon-i mcoi 'o hopo
NAV.REAL=3SG stay-LV die.AV PIVOT room
intended 'He died in the room.' (LV-AV)

Aside from limits on the combinatorial possibilities of verbs, the non-concordant voice marking on serialized verbs, where the first verb always occurs in NAV forms but the second verb must occur in the AV form, also attests to the requirement of aspectual congruence. In example (3) is the combination of the activity verb *titha* 'use' and the accomplishment verb *bon#* 'eat',

where the two verbs both depict a dynamic process but differ in their denotation of how the process may come to an end. As an activity verb, ‘use’ lexically denotes an atelic process which lacks a natural endpoint, but the accomplishment verb ‘eat’ alternates between telic and atelic uses across its AV/NAV contrast. When occurring in the AV form *bon#*, ‘eat’ is associated with a non-specific/indefinite patient nominal (the underlined non-pivot phrase ‘rice’ in (3)) and denotes a process which lacks a specified stopping point. Serialization of the AV form *bon#* ‘eat’ with the activity verb *titha* ‘use’ thus yields congruence in aspectual classifications. Such congruence, however, is not seen in (4), when ‘use’ serializes with the PATIENT-VOICE form of ‘eat’, as this particular voice form is syntactically associated with a specific/definite patient (the underlined pivot phrase ‘rice’ in (4)) and depicts a process with a specified endpoint—the eating event is understood to reach a stopping point when a specified amount of rice has been consumed. By looking into the lexical aspectual properties encoded in the denotations of serialized verbs, we therefore come to an explanation for the difference between examples such as (3) and (4), and such a lexical aspectual analysis evinces that aspectual congruence and event integration are central to the non-concordant voice marking and the combinatorial possibilities of verbs in Tsou SVCs.

(3) os='o tith-a *bon#* to naveu 'o takupingi
 NAV.REAL=1SG use-PV eat.AV NONPIVOT rice PIVOT bowl
 ‘I used the bowl to eat rice.’

(4) *os='o tith-a *an-a* 'o naveu to takupingi
 NAV.REAL=1SG use-PV eat-PV PIVOT rice NONPIVOT bowl
 intended ‘I used a bowl to eat the rice.’

References

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