Croatian Serial Verbs: A Formal Analysis

We propose a novel analysis of the multi-word construction in Croatian (Cr) seen in (1), subsuming it under the broader category of serial verb constructions (SVC). We first show that, while Cr SVC closely resembles the coordinate construction (CC) in (2):

(1) *Odi   kupi   novine.*
   goIMP2.sg. buyIMP2.sg. newspapers

(2) *Odi   i kupi   novine*
   goIMP2.sg. and buyIMP2.sg. newspapers

Cr SVCs show various properties that contrast with CCs, and group them with more widely studied SVCs, e.g. in Austronesian or West African languages, see Aikhenvald 2018. SVCs are defined as sequences of verbs with no marker of syntactic dependency that denote a single event and reflect a mono-clausal structure (Aikhenvald & Dixon 2006, Foley 2010, a.o.).

Cr SVCs have no linker between verbs in (1), compared to CCs (2) with the coordinator *i*=and. Other tests show SVCs to be also mono-eventive and mono-clausal (vs the bi-clausal CC): SVCs only allow a single subject, (3); no separate modification of the verbs in SVCs, only modification as a whole, (4); only SVCs allow clitic climbing, (5); no separate negation of verbs in SVCs, (6):

(3) a. *Odi kupi / *kupite*(2.pl.) *novine.*   [SVC]
     b. *Odi i kupi/ kupite novine.*   [CC]

(4) a. **Odi van*(=outside) *kupi novine tamo*(=over there). [SVC]
     b. *Odi van i kupi novine tamo.*   [CC]

(5) a. *Odi mi*(=me.Cl.dat.) *kupi novine.*   [SVC]
     b. *Odi (*mi) i kupi (mi) novine*.   [CC]

(6) a. **Odi ne*(neg.) *zadržavaj(=tarry about.IMP2.sg.) se*(refl.).   [SVC]
     b. *Odi i ne zadržavaj se.*   [CC]

In all of these areas, Cr SVCs exhibit the properties of their cross-linguistic SVC counterparts, thus justifying their analysis as true SVCs and the use of the SVC label.

We also show that Cr SVCs pattern with other anaphoric constructions in Cr, namely infinitives (Inf) and control subjunctives (CS). We offer a comprehensive syntactic analysis of the three types of constructions, showing them to contain a defective structure lacking an embedded CP, explaining both their syntactic (mono-clausal) and their semantic (mono-eventive) properties. We also account for some nuanced contrasts between SVCs and Inf/CS whereby the two verbs in SVCs form a more closely-knit unit: SVCs, but not Inf and CS, are syntactically contiguous and temporally proximate. Inf and CS thus contain some parts of left-periphery structure (modal and temporal structural layer [Cinque 1999]), but SVCs are reduced only to the verbal layer as in (7).

(7) [vP [Asp$_{Inc}$ *go*[VP *buy*]]]

SVC structure thus corresponds to a verb shell, as in causatives (e.g. *I made him do it*). The leftmost verb is functional and semantically impoverished, occupying the aspectual head Asp-Inc(eptive), where "Inc" indicates initiation of the action. This functional verb selects the lexical verb in the thematic V position, which corresponds to the head of SVC. Thus, Cr data shows that SVCs are a distinct type of multi-verb construction, and not simply an elided coordinate structure or a subtype of anaphoric clausal subordination.

References

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