

Serial Verb Constructions in Hmong: resultative and consequentialials

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Recent work in serial verb constructions (SVCs) casts them as complex predicates (Baker, 1989; Collins, 2002; Stewart, 2001). We propose that two classes of SVCs exist in Hmong: resultative and consequential. The states and events associated with each construction impact the syntactic structure. For a resultative SVC—composed of a transitive verb followed by an unaccusative verb—its object undergoes a change of state. The unaccusative verb represents the object’s new state, and the transitive verb represents the manner of the change. The unaccusative verb’s object is *PRO* following Collins (2002), which is co-referenced with the transitive verb’s object. Only one overt object exists for a resultative SVC. Two transitive verbs—sharing the same subject—constitute consequential SVCs. *pro* represents the empty category for a consequential SVC, following Stewart (2001). For the resultative SVC (1), the covert object *PRO* merges as the unaccusative verb’s complement. *PRO* is bound to its antecedent—the object of the transitive verb. In the consequential SVC (2), the empty category *pro* also merges as the second transitive verb’s object, but it is free from its antecedent. We propose that these empty categories distinguish between the syntactic and thematic structure of Hmong SVCs. Furthermore, C-selectional features represent the assigned θ -roles for each verb in the SVC.

This presentation focuses on the syntactic structure of Hmong SVCs. The proposed analysis follows a generative framework, particularly the MP (Chomsky, 1995), and previous work in GB theory (Chomsky, 1981). We motivate parameters for Hmong SVCs based on SVC analyses given by Stewart (2001) and Collins (1997). We demonstrate how the principles Merge, Move, and Checking build the syntactic structure. The operation Merge builds syntactic structure based on lexical properties inherent to each construction. Thus the proposal we give for Merge and its selectional categories is based on both syntactic and semantic features. For example, unaccusative verbs serve as change of state predicates for resultative constructions, which is visible in the syntax for Merge. We also propose that the head of *vP* checks strong features motivating movement of verbal constituents based on Collins’s (2002) version of Local Move. This predicts the proper order for movement of constituents in these two constructions. Finally, Checking of aspectual features is strong in Hmong and considered here as part our analysis.

We propose that aspect and tense are integral to the syntactic structure of Hmong, and serve as functional projections in the clause. Tense in Hmong is not overt. Aspect, however, is represented as an overt functional projection. Aspectual markers for completion and attainment are functional words (Li, 1991). We include Control, negation, and Case assignment as part of our analysis. Control and negation provide evidence in Hmong for the empty categories in (1) and (2). Assignment of accusative Case motivates the different syntactic structures proposed for resultative and consequential SVCs.

Our analysis adds to future work on other languages with SVCs regarding empty categories. We suspect extending such an analysis to verb-verb compounds in Mandarin and Japanese will elucidate similarities in their syntactic structure and semantic interpretation.

References

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Data sentences

- (1) Pov ntaus kuv lub taubhau_i mob PRO_i heev.
Pao hit 1SG CLF head suffer MODIFIER
'Pao hit my head giving me a headache.'
- (2) Pov tau khaws txivntseej_i noj pro_i.
Pao ASPECT gather chestnuts eat
'Pao gathered chestnuts to eat.'