Orientation Serial Verbs
and the Proto-Sogeram Verb Phrase

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Outline

• Sogeram languages
• Sogeram verb serialization
• Orientation SVCs
• Correspondences
  • Phonology
  • Semantic scope
  • Prosody
• Arbitrariness
• Conclusion
The Sogeram languages

Intro • SVCs • Orientation • Form • Scope • Prosody • Arbitrariness • Conclusion
The Sogeram family

- Ten languages (Daniels 2016, 2017)


- Between 8 (Mand, Kursav) and 3,000 (Mum, Gants) speakers

- 2,500 to 3,000 years old?
Verb serialization in Proto-Sogeram

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Proto-Sogeram serial verbs

• It is possible to reconstruct a few SVCs to Proto-Sogeram
• These all shared the same form
  • A series of uninflected verbs
  • The final verb had all the morphology
  • The verbs all had the same subject
    • (Except in the causative SVC)

Gants

*Node* yak *aba* gw-ek.
woman 1SG.OBJ speak give-3SG.IPST
‘My wife told me.’
Proto-Sogeram serial verbs

- Aspectual SVCs
  - The last verb could have aspectual meaning

Gants

Node God kia miŋa kid-ek.

woman God speech get walk-3SG.IPST

‘The woman holds (i.e., follows) God’s talk.’
Proto-Sogeram serial verbs

- Manner SVCs
  - The first verb expressed the manner of the second

Kursav

\textit{Va-da ka-ka guro, midim \textit{aba}}

\textit{say-ss MD-TOP speech before speak u-b-ua.}

$3\text{SG.OBJ-give-1SG.NFUT}$

‘I said that and I told him this stuff before.’
Proto-Sogeram serial verbs

• Causative SVCs
  • The first verb caused the second

Manat

Ñañña  tak  ai-n = a,  mihra-n
food  only  come-2/3.ss = LNK  take.much-2/3.ss
igu-ña-md = a.
give-eat-2SG.IMP = EXCL

‘Please come take all this food and give it out.’
Proto-Sogeram serial verbs

• SVCs were not limited to two verbs; they could be combined

• $V_{\text{MANNER}} V_{\text{LEXICAL}} V_{\text{ASPECTUAL}}$

Kursav

*Itu kra ne kevi-d-o.*
tobacco burn consume throw-HAB-3PL

‘They used to smoke tobacco.’
Orientation
serial verbs

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Orientation serial verbs

- The first verb is intransitive
  - Usually a verb of posture or motion
  - It orients the subject towards the rest of the action

- In other SVCs, all verbs are adjacent

- In orientation SVCs, the first verb precedes objects and adjuncts

Gants

Aŋa  asiko  miŋa-m-ek.

‘He went and got ginger.’
Orientation serial verbs

- Something similar to the Gants construction existed in Proto-Sogeram

- We’ll look at reflexes in
  - Gants
  - Sirva
  - Magɨ
  - Apali
  - Manat
Gants orientation verbs

- In Gants, serial verbs that precede the object are interpreted intransitively.

Ya *aba node* *miŋa-da* …
1SG speak woman get-SS
‘I talked and I got my wife, and …’
Gants orientation verbs

- The most common verbs in this position are motion verbs

*Aya*  asiko  koimo  go-da  bir  aŋa-m-ek.
*come*  ginger  SPEC  give-SS  TOP  go-FPST-3SG
‘He came and gave her some ginger and left.’

*Yako*  kokoda  tai  mañ  taka-da  ...
*go.up*  up.there  tree  seed  remove-ss
‘He went up and was picking fruit up there and …’
Gants orientation verbs

- Having an overt object is not a requirement for verbs to have this interpretation

Gants

*Pusket*  *ajja*  *mig-re-re* ...

cat  *go*  sleep-DS.SIM-3SG

‘While the cat went and slept …’
Sirva motion verbs

• In Sirva, motion verbs can occur without affixes early in the clause, before the object

ν-ra …
say-ss

“Trouble may come and mess up my home,” he said, and...
Sirva motion verbs

- There can be multiple motion verbs

Sirva

$Be \ kav \ kida \ pi \ puza, \ tik = iñ \ hasa$

3SG just walk come shaft piece = LI FOC

gu-rub-ii ...
give-PL-3.DS

‘They used to just walk over and offer just a spear shaft, and ...

...’
Magi serial verbs

- All Magi SVCs consist of an unaffixed verb preceding any objects or adjuncts.

Magi Kundɨ kɨpɨ Sande ga, abi yaka=nɨŋ morning get.up Sunday TOP woman 1SG.POSS = ACC.

ab-is-iŋ.
speak-FPST-1SG
‘I got up on Sunday morning and spoke to my wife.’
Magi serial verbs

• Here’s a motion verb:

Magi

*Maban mugu, ka-niŋ kiti kiti ...
Mawan go.down MD-LOC stay.ss stay.ss
‘I went down to Mawan and stayed there and …’*
Apali immediate sequential

- Apali has a construction that Wade calls “immediate sequential same subject” (1989: 70)

- A bare verb is used with an inflected verb “to indicate that two activities follow each other immediately in time” (Wade 1989: 70)

- This is a productive construction that isn’t limited to motion verbs, or even intransitive verbs.
Apalì immediate sequential

Apalì

Kili iha hulin iha laha hulin hivi
tree cut plant.type cut tear plant.type LI

hah-avi-la-li.
tie-PL-HAB-3.FPST

‘They cut a tree, break down hulin plants and tie it with them.’

(Wade n.d.)
Apali immediate sequential

- But motion verbs are very frequent in this construction

Apali

*Iaku*  *vaŋaŋ*  *vi-ci* …
*go.up*  *string.bag*  *get-3SG.DS*

‘She got up and got the string bag and …’

(Wade n.d.)
Manat quasi-verb *hid*

- Manat has a particle which doesn't take morphology but which can predicate much like a verb: *hid* ‘move’

Manat Ara-n ta-n bɨ *hid*.

‘He said that, left, and went away.’
Manat quasi-verb *hid*

- *Hid* can also occur in a verbal clause and add motion semantics

Manat  

*Hid*  nadi  añīña  kai  ini-*n*  
move  woman  two  LOC  ND-ACC

*gu-r-m-id.*  
give-HAB-PST-3SG.HIS

‘He used to go give it to the two women.’
Manat quasi-verb *hid*

- It can also take some limited verbal morphology, such as the reduplicative nominalizing suffix

Manat

\textit{Ini-ba} \textit{hid}~\textit{ihid} \textit{rih-id} \textit{ar-ura-ma-g.}

ND-LOC move~NMLZ do-3SG.IPST say-PL-PST-3.FAR

“‘She’s wandering around here,” they said.’
Summary

• In several languages, bare verbs (or verb-like particles) can occur before the object

• They are often intransitive, usually verbs of motion, and they orient the subject with respect to the activity in the rest of the clause
Summary

- Gants: \([V_{\text{INTR}} \ (\text{OBJ}) \ V-\text{INFL}]\)
- Magi: \([V_{\text{INTR}} \ (\text{OBJ}) \ V-\text{INFL}]\)
- Sirva: \([V_{\text{MOTION}} \ (\text{OBJ}) \ V-\text{INFL}]\)
- Apali: \([V \ (\text{OBJ}) \ V-\text{INFL}]\)
- Manat: \([hid \ (\text{OBJ}) \ V-\text{INFL}]\)
Phonological correspondence

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Phonological correspondence

• The orientation SVCs in Apali, Magi, and Gants also share a phonological correspondence

• Some Proto-Sogeram verbs had a different stem shape when they bore suffixes vs when they didn’t

• The un-suffixed form always adds a stem-final *a
Phonological correspondence

- Gants ai- ‘come’ is aya when serialized
  - From Proto-Sogeram *aya and *fai-

Gants

* Aya * nil * epra * miŋa-da=n ...
* come * nail * buy * get-SS=LNK

‘I came and bought nails and …’
Phonological correspondence

• The regular Magî reflex of final *a is /ɨ/
  • Here’s miti ‘leave’, from Proto-Sogeram *mîta

Magî
Yî panda miti yakite-s-iŋ.
1sg one leave come.up-FPST-1sg.IPST
‘I alone left and came up (here).’
Phonological correspondence

- *Migua* in Apali is from Proto-Sogeram *migwa~*migw-

Apali

*Migua*  *hehilaŋ  lifi-ci ...

*go.down*  *fish  do-3SG.DS*

‘It went down, became a fish and …’

(Wade n.d.)
Phonological correspondence

- Gants: [V-a (OBJ) V-INFL]
- Magi: [V-i (OBJ) V-INFL]
- Apali: [V-a (OBJ) V-INFL]
Semantic scope

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Semantic scope

- Some verbal operators do not have scope over both verbs in this construction
- We’ll look at negation and illocutionary force
The unaffixed verb can have a different negation value in Gants.

Gants

\(Tri \text{ aklok } ca \text{ ma } ga-da \text{ aba-m-ek.}\)

three o’clock \text{ stay}\ \text{NEG}\ \text{perceive-ss}\ \text{speak-FPST-3SG}

‘He stayed (until) three o’clock and didn’t see (him) and spoke.’
Scope of negation

• The unaffixed verb can have a different negation value in Apali

Apali

Iga ma suhu-i.
see NEG defecate-3SG.IPST

‘She saw it and did not defecate.’

(Wade 1989: 72)
Scope of negation

- The unaffixed verb can have a different negation value in Apali

Apali

*M-ega* suhu-i.

NEG-see defecate-3SG.IPST

‘She did not see it and (so) defecated.’

(Wade 1989: 72)
Scope of illocutionary force

• The unaffixed verb seems like it can have a different illocutionary force in Gants

Gants
Sikasika *tago miŋa kineb keniŋ yak ko*
debris step get house inside 1SG.OBJ DEF
*ma ai-p-raŋ.*
NEG come-IMP-2PL
‘Don’t track dirt inside my house!’
Scope of illocutionary force

- The unaffixed verb can have a different illocutionary force in Apali

Apali

*Iga* suhu-minaŋ.

*see* defecate-2SG.PROH

‘You see it and don’t you defecate.’

(Wade 1989: 71)
Scope of verbal operators

- Manat *hid* can predicate on its own, so it can have its own values for polarity and illocutionary force
Summary

- These serialized verbs have the same subject
- They don’t share objects
- They can differ in polarity and illocutionary force
- I analyze them as coordinated verb phrases within a single clause
  - This doesn’t gel with everyone’s definition of serial verb (e.g. Aikhenvald 2006)
  - But it’s a useful definition for the Sogeram data
Summary

Clause

Subject

Verb phrase

Verb phrase

Verb phrase

Verb phrase

Transitivity [ – ]
Ill. force [ ]
Polarity [ ]

Transitivity [ ]
Ill. force [ ]
Polarity [ ]
Prosodic evidence

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Prosodic evidence

• There is some suggestive prosodic evidence from Manat
  • But it’s only from Manat, so it’s not conclusive

• Manat lost final *a from prosodic units (Daniels & Brooks to appear)
  • It did not lose it word-finally

• The quasi-verb *hɨd is descended from Proto-Sogeram *kɨda ‘walk’
  • *k > h word-initially is a regular sound change
  • *a > Ø suggests this word used to be at the right edge of a prosodic unit
Prosodic evidence

Manat
Akai hid mikiñ kai migu-ma-g.
okay move fishing.net LOC go.down-PST-3SG.FAR
‘Okay, he went down into the fishing net.’
Prosodic evidence

- If we assume that prosodic structure aligns at least partially with syntactic structure
  - And that’s not a trivial assumption

- Then we can interpret this as additional evidence that the first verb was at the right edge of a syntactic constituent
  - This is compatible with the “coordinated verb phrases” analysis

- This structure would have been in place at the Proto-Greater West Sogeram stage, when *a was lost
Arbitrariness and reconstruction

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Arbitrariness

- There is a problem with this scenario
- Comparative reconstruction relies on a certain degree of diachronic stability
- This stability is ensured by the arbitrary nature of linguistic signs
- When signs are not arbitrary, they change, or fail to change, in unpredictable ways
Arbitrariness

- Proto-Oceanic *kokorako ‘chicken’
  - “A pattern of consonants occurs which could represent [Proto-Oceanic] *k-k-r-k, though the vowels are not consistent and one or other of the consonants may not appear. … *k in this term is never lenited (to y, ñ etc) in the many languages where this is a regular change.” (Clark 2011:284)
- When the shape of the sign is motivated, that motivation can interfere with transmission

Figure 6.1  *Gallus gallus*, Red Jungle Fowl
Arbitrariness

• This has not always been appreciated

• Some say arbitrariness is only required for the establishment of genetic relatedness, and is therefore only necessary in lexical reconstruction
  • “… the demand for an arbitrary link between form and meaning is unwarranted in syntactic reconstruction.” (Barðdal & Smitherman 2013: 27)

• Others misunderstand the relevance of arbitrariness by contrasting it with non-compositionality, instead of iconicity (Barðdal & Eythórsson 2012: 367)
Arbitrariness

  • This has diachronic consequences

• We need to be concerned about two kinds

• Forms go closer together if their meanings go closer together
  • This has been called ‘conceptual distance’ (Haiman 1983); ‘iconicity of distance’ (Newmeyer 1992, Croft 2008); ‘iconicity of contiguity’ (Haskelmath 2008a, b)

• Syntactic structure resembles event structure
  • This has been called ‘iconicity of sequence’ (Haiman 1980, Haspelmath 2008a; cf. Greenberg 1966: 103)
Arbitrariness

- Both kinds of iconicity interact with orientation SVCs
  - Iconicity of sequence
    - Applies less when V1 is a posture verb
    - If V1 is a motion verb it would be expected to come first
  - Iconicity of distance
    - Orientation verbs occur next to the subject, which is their only argument
    - If they occurred after the object, with other verbs, this would also separate the transitive verb from its object
Arbitrariness

• Proto-Sogeram could have had:

\*[S OBJ $V_{\text{INTR}}$ $V_{\text{TR}}$]

• And then reshaped that because of iconicity

• How can we safeguard against this in our reconstructions?
  • I have three ideas
Proposals

1. Incorporate iconicity as a directional tendency in our methodology
   - Directionality is crucial to comparative reconstruction
   - But iconicity has seldom been considered as a possible motivating factor

2. Reconstruct syntactic constructions that contain arbitrary material
   - This can be phonological material
     - Like the final $a\sim i$ correspondence
   - Or arbitrary sequences of non-phonological signs

3. Be humbler when you’re dealing with potentially iconic structures
Conclusion

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## Conclusion

- Proto-Sogeram probably had a serial verb construction
  
  \[
  \text{\* [V_{ORIENTATION} VP]}
  \]

- But the existence of this construction in multiple daughter languages could also be the result of parallel development motivated by iconicity.

- We should recognize this possibility and treat this reconstruction as less secure.

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Thank you!
References


Daniels, Don. 2017. Gants is a Sogeram language. Language and Linguistics in Melanesia 35. 82–93.


