ON THE SYNTAX OF VERB-VERB CONSTRUCTIONS IN MALAYALAM

Abstract

The aim of this research is the classification of three types of Verb-Verb Constructions (V-VCs) identified in the Malayalam Multi Verb Constructions (MVCs) paradigm. This dissertation builds on the inspiring paper by Aboh (2009) on the Serial Verb Constructions (SVCs), where he argues that V1 and V2 belong to two different domains at the clause structure. V2 merges as the head of the lexical field and V1 is realized as the head of the functional field. In this study, we look at some of the general properties of the Malayalam data for the V-VCs under the rubric of MVCs. Three shades of the constructions are identified in Malayalam; Non-contiguous, Intervened and Contiguous, exemplified in (1-3).

(1) Non-contiguous

amma coOR uNTaaki kazhiccu
mother rice prepare-Compl eat-Past
'The mother ate the rice' (or, 'Mother cooked and ate rice')

(2) Intervened

amma kaththi eTuththo appam muRiccu
mother knife-Inst take-Compl bread-Acc cut-Past
'The mother cut the bread with a knife' (or, 'Mother took a knife (and) cut the bread')

(3) Contiguous

kukkaR poTTiththeRiccu
cooker break.throw off-Past
'The cooker burst'

Prima facie, it appears that these constructions resonate with the general classification in the MVCs. The Non-contiguous constructions appear to be similar to Consecutive Constructions (ConCs), the Intervened Constructions to Covert Coordinations (CCs) and the Contiguous Constructions to Serial Verb Constructions (SVCs). However, some data suggest that the verbs in these constructions together indicate a single event, a property exhibited only by SVCs in the MVC group, and not
by ConC or CC. Then the crucial question is whether these constructions are instances of the three closely related types of MVCs of the V-VC type or they are three different instances of SVCs. In order to confirm that these constructions are indeed SVCs, we analyze the generally observed properties of these constructions such as wordhood, and eventuality in Chapter 3, and we subject them to the standard syntactic tests of SVC-hood in Chapter 4.

It is noted that there is an asymmetry between the verbs in the Malayalam data, as one of them is the main verb and the other/s are additional verbs. The main VP is lexically complete and bears all the grammatical and semantic weight. The additional VP, on the other hand, is grammatically and semantically defective, and hence, it is functional. We also observed that the whole construction takes a single specification for grammatical values such as tense/aspect, polarity, modality, etc., which is marked mostly only on the main verb. None of the three constructions show any clear instance of internal argument sharing, though external argument sharing is fairly evident. However, they strongly indicate single eventuality and monoclausality; two undisputed, defining features of SVCs. The 'single-event reading' generated by the Contiguous type of construction is homogeneous while that by Non-contiguous and Intervened are heterogeneous. This difference is attributed to an optional reanalysis of the VP1 in Non-contiguous and Intervened types. The V1 which starts out as lexical with theta and case marking properties later undergoes a reanalysis into functional. The data provide ample evidence for the claim that they are not instances of covert coordination, too.

Based on these data and the discussions that follow, I propose that the Non-Contiguous, the Intervened, and the Contiguous constructions are the three types of SVCs in Malayalam. It is shown that SVCs in Malayalam can be conclusively defined as monoclausal constructions with a sequence of verbs (or VPs) with no overt marker of syntactic dependency or association between them. Though the internal arguments are not shared, the verbs in the construction do share the external argument, underscoring the monoclausality.