

1. General remarks

Linguistic theorizing and its accompanying discourse is not too distant from Foucault's concept of discourse and power relations; although the dependency of linguistic theory on European languages (and in fact mostly Indo-European languages) is still taken for granted it is, quite often, almost immediately lamented on. This makes work on grammatical topics which are not attested in these still privileged languages unusual and serial verb constructions (further SVC) are no exception. The topic and concept SVC, which was first introduced in African linguistics in the 1970s and has been incorporated in the description of other languages later, is by no means a central topic in either functional or typological linguistics, though it has attracted a number of studies in the last 10-15 years. In the MA thesis under review, Adam Pospíšil investigates V+V constructions in Egyptian Arabic (further EA) in order to see whether SVC can be identified in this variety of Arabic. The topic is certainly justified for several reasons. First, Arabic spoken in Africa is located on the continent where SVC were first described and language contact with languages employing SVC have been postulated (a point mentioned in the thesis by Adam Pospíšil). Second, Arabic, although a language with a long written history, a large number of speakers and a strong philological research tradition is usually and regrettably under-represented in general and most certainly in functionally oriented linguistics.¹ In this concern, the thesis submitted by Adam Pospíšil is most certainly very welcome and his courage to bridge typologically oriented linguistics with the study of Egyptian Arabic (which has a rich philological tradition which the author has successfully incorporated into his thesis) must be strongly emphasized. Finally, the courage to write and submit a thesis in a language different from his native language needs to be emphasized and positively highlighted as this choice is not self-explicit.²

2. Structural comments

As I am not familiar with formal and stylistic requirements at *Univerzita Karlova* I concentrate here on the structure excluding front and back matters as well as the apparatus. The main body is the text of the thesis containing 5 chapters equaling 64 pages (page 8-72); chapter 1 – Introduction; chapter 2 – Overview of existing literature and research; chapter 3 – Properties of SVC as a grammatical category; chapter 4 – Data analysis; chapter 5 – Conclusions. Somehow surprisingly, the list of references is very short (74-75) and, in principle, it would fit on one page. A second surprise concerning the list of references is the absence of any reference to scholarship in Arabic; the list of references contains literature in English, German and Czech with a clear bias towards general linguistic literature; several of the references actually point to and/or mention unpublished presentations, an unpublished MA Thesis from *Univerzita Karlova* and unpublished PhD theses though further references whether they are electronically available or not, is not retrievable. As for the references, this section is most certainly symptomatic for sloppy work, often encountered in student works (including theses on BA and MA level); e. g., the reference to Brustad 2000 is not complete (page 74); Several times Adam Pospíšil makes wrong references to his two central sources Aikhenvald and Haspelmath on which his theoretical framework relies.³ A decisive reference is missing in footnote 25 on page 22 concerning Eisele. Although these shortcomings are formal

1 An authoritative monograph from a generative perspective such as Aoun et al (2010) is perhaps the most visible manifestation in recent years.

2 Needless to say that I am most grateful for this choice of language. After all, reading an MA thesis in English is easier than reading a thesis in Czech. As I submitted my MA thesis in English without any formal training in academic writing in a different language, I won't comment on language and/or stylistics.

3 Aikhenvald (2009) instead of (2006) on page 22 and 23; Haspelmath (2016) cited as (2009) on page 24. Further, although Pospíšil constantly refers to Aikhenvald, he is actually referring to the whole volume and NOT to the typological introduction to the volume compiled by Aikhenvald which thereby remains without a correct reference.

which do not disturb argumentation, these mistakes are astonishing as Adam Pospíšil had only one page of references to take care of.

Concerning the structure of the thesis, I have to report three formal shortcomings. First, given that chapter 4 contains the main and central bulk of information, the fact that the EA verbs are not translated in the headings is annoying. Second, a fairly prominent problem, first appearing in chapter 3, but typical for chapter 4 concerns the author's structuring of argumentation. The way chosen by Adam Pospíšil is to discuss first all instances theoretically; instead of offering the data straight away following each and every line of argumentation, the data is subsumed in the end of every subsection. From the perspective of the reader, especially a reader without any skills in EA who needs to be informed and eventually convinced, this way of presenting data is both annoying and ultimately tiring; constantly one needs to go back and forth within each section to consult the example under discussion. I invite every member of the committee to look through the longer sections 4.2.1.1. and 4.2.1.4. as this should make my point understandable at ease. Third, whereas three verbs *ʔām*, *Gih* and *rāḥ* are fortunate enough to be discussed in the same chapter immediately after their presentation, the rest of the verbs are not discussed in chapter 4, but in the conclusions in chapter 5. For me, chapter 5 is by no means a concluding one but the central result of the thesis and should have been expanded. After all, here, the author argues that EA appears to lack SVC, based on the principles extracted from Haspelmath (2016). Chapter 5 should have been called something like – “Does EA have SVC?” and would have benefited from some two or three additional pages of argumentation; as elsewhere in the thesis, the arguments brought forward in chapter 5 are presented too densely. After this, a concluding chapter 6 subsuming the rest of chapter 5 would have made the text conceptually more readable.

3. Remarks containing content

The question central to Adam Pospíšil's thesis can be boiled down to the following: does EA indeed have SVC? I did not understand this implicated question until I had read the thesis for the first time because I assumed that EA has SVC due to the header of the thesis: “Serial Verb constructions in Arabic”; instead, I constantly wondered why Adam Pospíšil tried to identify verbs which would allow to appear in SVC until I found the central point on page 70 in the beginning of the chapter erroneously labeled “Conclusions”. This central question appears far too late and should have been verbalized in the beginning, and in this concern I would like to ask the author for additional clarification why he had chosen to postpone this question until the very end. For reasons of clarity I want to quote the passage in full, because this passage holds the quintessential and only instance of theoretical criticism on my behalf on which I will elaborate on below:

“In accordance with my expectations, the EA-specific working notion as proposed in (3) in 3.2.2.1, yielded a quite rich class of verbs which can appear as base verbs in such SVCs. Unsurprisingly, it comprises many verbs of motion or posture, which are known to have acquired a more abstract function when combined with another verb. As such, these verbs have been usually treated as a kind of auxiliaries in literature. At the same time, since my working SVC notion was defined very loosely and did not rely on any semantic criteria, this class also encompasses a number of other verbs with more complex semantics, four of which I have included in my analysis, while others might still be waiting to be spotted and accounted for.” (Pospíšil 2017: 70)

Given that here, Adam Pospíšil mentions that he investigated V + V constructions in order to identify potential SVC constructions, one is puzzled why he did not address other V + V constructions in chapter 2 and/or 3 to delimit SVC in EA from other instances of complex predicates. However, one needs to be fair here because Adam Pospíšil cannot be blamed for this; after all Haspelmath (2016), whose article provided the central framework, did not address complex predication either. However, it is here that Adam Pospíšil is entering the murky area of complex

predication, something which he mentions *en passant* and which I want to quote again: “Unsurprisingly, it comprises many verbs of motion or posture, which are known to have acquired a more abstract function when combined with another verb. As such, these verbs have been usually treated as a kind of auxiliaries in literature” (Pospíšil 2017: 70). Although this thesis is a MA thesis with obvious restrictions of space, at least a short attempt why and how SVC could differ from other instances of complex predication such as “light verb” and/or “auxiliary constructions” could have been thought of. For this, a recent collection of papers (Amberber & Baker & Harvey 2010) should have been consulted more properly. Although the author quotes one important paper from this volume (Foley 2010), two papers of potentially high relevance targeting another Semitic language – Amharic – and adjacent Cushitic and Omotic languages appear in this volume (Amha 2010; Amberber 2010). Both papers focus on complex predication, light verb and auxiliary verb constructions. The reason why I consider these papers important (regardless of the fact that they were written from an LFG perspective) will be demonstrated below with four random examples. As for several Turkic languages and especially those of Southern Siberia, verbs of posture are frequently used in auxiliary constructions. Such complex predicates do not pass the test for SVC in Aikhenvald (2006: 45-46). This is worthwhile to mention, because Haspelmath (2016: 303) accuses Aikhenvald’s approach for being too wide which would include auxiliary constructions. However, for both, the following example would not count as SVC, a position which I support:

1) Tuvin (Turkic), own material

- a. *sen tur-ar sen*
 2SG stand.PTCP.FUT 2SG
 ‘You are standing.’
- b. *meeŋ aki-m suur-da čurta-p tur-ar*
 1SG.GEN older.brother-PX.1SG village-DAT live-CON stand-PTCP.FUT
 ‘My elder brother lives in the village.’

Whereas example (1b) is clearly an auxiliary construction, the situation in (2) is no longer as clear. Standard Turkological accounts claim that ‘to give’ is another auxiliary. In an adjacent linguistic area (South Asia) ‘to give’ is analyzed as a light verb as in Urdu (3), a category distinct from both auxiliaries and serial verbs (see e.g. Butt 2010). Compare the following:

2) Tuvin (Turkic)

- a. *men senjee nom-nu beer men*
 1SG 2SG.DAT book-ACC give.PTCP.PRS 1SG
 ‘I give you a book.’⁴
- b. *öpija ünge-i ber-di*
 baby crawl-CON give-PSTII.3SG
 ‘The baby started to crawl.’

3) Urdu (Indo-Aryan)

- naadyaa-ne yassiin-ko paodaa kaṭ-ne dii-yaa*
 Nadya.F.SG-ERG Yassin-INST plant.M.NOM cut-INF give-PERF.M.SG
 ‘Nadya let Yassin cut the plant.’ (Butt 2010: 51)

Still, ‘to give’ can equally be encountered in typical SVC (Haspelmath 2016: 295):

4) Keo (Central Malayo-Polynesian)

- Ja’o kéma dapu ti’i ’ine.*
 1SG build kitchen give mum
 ‘I built a kitchen for mum.’ (Lit. ‘I built a kitchen (I) gave (it) to mum.’)

4 The long vowel is regular due to contraction from *ber-er* to *beer*.

No doubt, all three constructions are instances of complex predicates which share a decisive formal syntactic property namely monoclausality (on formal and less formal approaches to this problem see e.g. Baker & Harvey 2010, Butt 2010). Whereas Aikhenvald 2006: 27, 48, 52) classifies Indo-Aryan light verb constructions as SVC though not discussing them in any detail, Haspelmath's stand (2016) remains unclear to the reviewer as light verb constructions are not mentioned/discussed.⁵

The short ad-hoc compilation of examples is merely intended to shed light on a problem which was excluded by Adam Pospíšil, though apparently not on purpose because it has been excluded in Haspelmath's approach as well. However, if the author of *Serial Verb Constructions in Arabic* intends to continue with this topic for an eventual PhD dissertation, then I would urge him and his future supervisors to delimit SVC from other complex predicates straight in the beginning.⁶ Fortunately, it appears that Adam Pospíšil is conscious of this problem:

*“Eventually, we can see a rather surprising result – the only constructions that seem to fall within this particular comparative concept [SVC, F.S.] are the constructions *daḥal* 'enter'+ *verbum dicendi* and *ba c at* 'send' + *verbum dicendi*. [...] . I believe that this construction is also prone to pass for an SVC in Haspelmath's terms, since I expect it to only allow for negation marking on the first verb.”* (Pospíšil 2017: 71)

“As for constructions with the other verbs which I studied, namely those marking phasal or aspectual distinctions, they mostly failed to meet the monoclausality requirement, either for being proven to allow for the two verbs to be negated separately, or simply for the lack of negated examples. One might then prefer to account for them as aspectual or phasal auxiliaries of some sort. In such case, one would probably synchronically consider each of the verbs when used in a multi-verb construction as a separate lexeme, unrelated beyond its form to the independently used verb. Yet such account would be arbitrary to a great extent, for I believe that, as is the case with many grammaticalisation phenomena, the different occurrences rather occupy a scale between plausibly lexical usage of the verbs to completely grammaticalised phasal auxiliaries, or merely information structure markers.” (Pospíšil 2017: 72).

A second point of criticism whose relevance is closer to the original aims of the thesis concerns negation and its relevance. A crucial point of Haspelmath's 'comparative concept of SVC' relies on the parameter negation in order to identify monoclausality. This argument was taken over by Adam Pospíšil and assigned a central role (e.g. Pospíšil 2017: 24, 71). Although the author mentions several times that he had problems finding examples with negation, the few examples attested in the data are irrelevant from both the typological and (as I preliminary assume), the Arabistic perspective. With the absence of a short excursion on negation which I would have expected to appear in section 3.2.1. (The verbal morphosyntax of Egyptian Arabic), all observations concerning negation are “hanging in the air” as they cannot be related to standard strategies of negation in EA. The typological reader is left wondering whether negation behaves as elsewhere in the sphere of verbal predication or whether negation differs. Although section 3.2.1. is very short, the discussion was sufficient to understand the principles of predicate formation; another page on negation strategies would have been sufficient.

Summing up the arguments brought forward, the missing delimitation of SVC in relation to other instances of complex predication, Adam Pospíšil cannot be blamed as this has not been attempted by Haspelmath and as a matter of fact, neither by Aikhenvald. On the other side, the decision not to

5 I speculate that Haspelmath's approach would not classify them as SVC similar to the arguments brought forward on Finnish colorative constructions (Haspelmath 2016: 304), as the infinitive marker is a linking element.

6 The typological position should, however, not be given up, because there exists a distinctive and potentially meaningful cross-linguistic pattern; after all, there appears to be a small set of verbs which are encountered in these functions over and over again, regardless of genetic affiliation and/or areal considerations.

sketch negation in detail, although it plays a central role in Haspelmath's argumentation and in the thesis, remains a clear shortcoming.

4. Final evaluation

Summing up my review of Adam Pospíšil's MA thesis, I come to following conclusions. First, the content of the thesis is original, new and regardless of the criticism uttered above of very high quality. It demonstrates the author's capability to fuse general linguistic approaches with more philologically oriented approaches. Instead of applying Haspelmath's approach blindly, Adam Pospíšil discusses prior approaches to SVC in both typology and in the study of EA and tries to relate and position himself in this terrain. Here, the philological qualities became visible, because prior descriptions are not disregarded. Although the author did not succeed in identifying SVC in EA to the degree as he perhaps had wished, the outcome of his thesis shows that prior accounts which have subsumed complex predicates as "complex verb phrases" is stable. What could be assigned the status of SVC needs a fine-graded discussion which Adam Pospíšil has successfully attempted. Pospíšil's thesis has shown that SVC do not play a central strategy in complex predication in EA and remain marginal.

Due to the fact that Adam Pospíšil relied on Haspelmath's approach to SVC, the central shortcomings in section 3 are not to blame on him; the comments on light verbs were added to show that complex predication is more than just SVC. This leaves the unsatisfying description of negation (negation in general vs. negation of potential SVC-like predication patterns) as the only major shortcoming of this thesis. To this, I have to add the unfortunate structure of the thesis and the occasionally tiring way of presenting and discussion accumulated data as a formal complaint. Regardless of these shortcomings, the thesis is of very high quality and I suggest to grade Adam Pospíšil's thesis 'very good'.

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Potential questions for the discussion:

1) How much data was extracted for the investigation underlying this thesis? And how did the author discuss problematic examples with native speakers? The thesis remains unfortunately uninformative on this topic.

2) Which example(s) in the thesis does the author consider to be the most prototypical SVC-like? Further, how do other accounts classify similar examples? How would the author convince a supporter of the “complex verb phrase” idea, especially a conservative one, without interest in typology?

3) The fact that most of the verbs encountered in SVC, light verb constructions and auxiliary constructions tend to come from a small set of verbs which are attested in genetically different languages is certainly not a coincidence. This means that verbs which appear in these circumstances are multifunctional and semantically polysemic. Butt (2010) has argued that for light verb constructions in Indo-Aryan (‘give’), semantic erosion is not attested which is a decisive argument against their status as auxiliaries; therefore, these verbs are called light verbs (following Otto Jespersen’s idea concerning construction-like syntagma of the kind ‘to take a nap’ or ‘to take a drink’). If one takes complex predication to a different level such a lexicography, one stands in front of a problem whether one deals with subsenses of a verb or with independent lexemes. Are SVC-like verbs mentioned in EA dictionaries and are there examples for them? If yes, how are lexicographically covered? If they are not covered, how would you prefer to cover them!

4) The author claims the following on page 22-23:

“I will not commit to any of the competing accounts of headedness and will rather propose the following elementary scheme for the preliminary EA-specific SVCs, introducing the term base verb and target verb:

[base verb] + [target verb]

This respects the above definition in (3) in that it does not postulate an a priori syntactical hierarchy between the verbs, but at the same time it implies that the two slots differ in terms of their semantic contribution to the construction as a whole. I naturally conceive of the base verb as corresponding to the preverbal in Woidich's (2006) account and the minor verb in the asymmetrical SVCs as used by Aikhenvald (2009), and thus contributing the more grammatical, abstract meaning. Conversely, the target verb is roughly equivalent to the main (lexical) verb and the major verb, respectively, in the two contexts. As for terminology, when referring to the simple fact that a particular target verb appears in an SVC after a base verb, I decided to stick to the term “embedding”, thus saying that “the target verb is embedded by the base verb”, in spite of the fact that this term is usually used to refer to a relation of subordination. Yet in my approach, I do not make any a priori claims about such relation, as stated above.”

a. Due to dense writing and the lack of examples, this section is not entirely clear. First, I would like to know what “preverbials” are in Woidisch’s account.

b. Second, I still need to be convinced why [base verb] + [target verb] should be considered a better label. The terms themselves suggest a dependency relation where [base] is a head, although a dependency relation is formally opposed by Adam Pospíšil.

c. Here and elsewhere, the term subordination appears to be problematic and one wonders whether the concept of “co-subordination” as advocated by RRG would be a fitting concept.