

Categoriality and selection in multi-verb constructions

Malayalam (Dravidian) seems to have a system of adjoining verb phrases (or something similar) to other verbs to express multiple consecutive or overlapping events. The verbs in these adjuncts have been called serial verbs (Jayaseelan 2004), converbs (Haspelmath 2016), conjunctive participles (Swenson 2016), etc. Interestingly, the language also exhibits superficially similar constructions in which a verbal lexeme does not express any event but can still adjoin to a verb. In such cases, the verbal lexemes seem to function similarly to adpositions; that is, they assign a relation to an NP and modify a verb. This is surprising because Malayalam does not have canonical adpositions: there is no syntactic category that selects an NP/DP and adjoins to hosts of different categories, as in English. Rather, it seems to have a class of predicates that select NP complements and adjoin only to verbs. Existing work has treated these predicates as adpositions, but without any explanation of this restriction.

For this talk, I want to entertain a scenario in which all kinds of category-selection (including host-selection) are arrived at via language-specific filters on the output of Merge. In such a system, Merge itself is not triggered by anything, and applies freely between any two categories. The output of Merge is then filtered to be legible at the interfaces. To test the implications of this idea, I propose an account for the Malayalam adjunct data that makes assuming a separate adpositional category unnecessary. I will close with some general discussion of where this kind of filtering would minimally have to apply for such a system to be viable.