

Basic serial verb constructions in Thai

semantics, syntax

Kiyoko Takahashi

Kanda University of International Studies

kiyoko@kanda.kuis.ac.jp

This study aims to provide a comprehensive classification of complex events expressed by basic serial verb constructions in Thai. ‘Basic serial verb constructions (in short, BSVCs)’ are defined as constructions in which two verb phrases are serialized with no overt linker (Chuwicha 1993). The two verbs in the constructions must denote a certain substantial situation (action, process, change, state, emotion, and so on) and share at least one nominal argument, which may or may not be explicitly expressed, as exemplified below.

- | | | | |
|------|--|------|--|
| (1a) | paa t`ek
throw be broken
(He) threw (it) and (it) was broken. | (1b) | pay th`uŋ
go arrive
(He) went away and reached (there). |
| (2) | y`aaŋ kin
roast eat
(He) roasted (it) to eat. | | |
| (3) | no`on ?`aan
lie read
(He) read lying. | | |
| (4) | y`aak pay
want go
(He) wanted to go. | | |

I posit two most important dimensions for classifying complex events expressed by Thai BSVCs:

- A. Temporal relation between two events represented by the two verb phrases:
Consecutive vs. Simultaneous
- B. The degree of assertiveness (factuality) of each of the two constituents:
Assertive (Factual) vs. Nonassertive (Nonfactual)

Previous studies on Thai serial verb constructions (Chuwicha 1993, Diller 2006, Kessakul 2005, Kölver 1984, Muansuwan 2002, Sereechoensatit 1984, Sudmuk 2005, Thepkanjana 1986, 2006, Wilawan 1993, *inter alia*) mainly consider the former temporal dimension leaving the latter modal dimension untouched. The latter modal dimension is directly related to Gestalt distinction between coordination and subordination, namely ‘Complex Figure’ vs. ‘Figure-Ground’ constructions (Croft 2001). The combination of two assertive constituents forms a coordination-like Complex Figure construction, while the combination of an assertive constituent and a nonassertive constituent forms a subordination-like Figure-Ground construction. In other words, the degree of unity of the two constituents of a BSVC is determined by a modal factor with respect to assertiveness.

In terms of the two dimensions A and B above, complex events expressed by Thai BSVCs are classified into four main types:

- Type I. Complex event of natural consequence (consecutive, coordination-like), e.g. (1)
- Type II. Complex event of purposive activity (consecutive, subordination-like), e.g. (2)
- Type III. Complex event with two facets (simultaneous, coordination-like), e.g. (3)
- Type IV. Complex event integrated (simultaneous, subordination-like), e.g. (4)

In this study I argue that ‘restrictedness of the membership of a verb class (Aikhenvald 2006)’ and ‘agentivity in verb-meaning’ are not crucial factors for the classification of complex events expressed by Thai BSVCs.

<References>

- Aikhenvald, Alexandra Y. 2006. Serial verb constructions in typological perspective. In Aikhenvald, Alexandra Y. and R. W. Dixon (eds.) *Serial Verb Constructions: A Cross-linguistic Typology*, 1-68. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chuwicha, Yajai. 1993. *Clausehood in Serial Verb Constructions in Thai*. Ph.D. dissertation, Chulalongkorn University.
- Croft, William. 2001. *Radical Construction Grammar: Syntactic Theory in Typological Perspective*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Diller, A. V. N. 2006. Thai serial verbs: Cohesion and culture. In Aikhenvald, Alexandra Y. and R. W. Dixon (eds.) *Serial Verb Constructions: A Cross-linguistic Typology*, 160-177. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kessakul, Ruetaivan. 2005. *The Semantic Structure of Motion Expressions in Thai*. Ph.D. dissertation, Tokyo University.
- Kölver, Ulrike. 1984. Local prepositions and serial verb constructions in Thai. In *Arbeiten des Kölner Universalien-Projekts*, Nr.56. Cologne, Universität zu Köln, Institut für Sprachwissenschaft.
- Muansuwan, Nuttanart. 2002. *Verb Complexes in Thai*. Ph.D. dissertation, The State University of New York at Buffalo.
- Sereechoensatit, Tasanee. 1984. *Conjunct Verbs and Verbs-in-Series in Thai*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
- Sudmuk, Cholthicha. 2005. *The Syntax and Semantics of Serial Verb Constructions in Thai*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas at Austin.
- Thepkanjana, Kingkarn. 1986. *Serial Verb Constructions in Thai*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan.
- Thepkanjana, Kingkarn. 2006. Properties of events expressed by serial verb constructions in Thai. Paper presented at the 11th Biennial Rice Symposium: Intertheoretical Approaches to Complex Verb Constructions, Rice University, Texas, March 16-18, 2006.
- Wilawan, Supriya. 1993. *A Reanalysis of So-called Serial Verb Constructions in Thai, Khmer, Mandarin, and Yoruba*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Hawaii at Manoa.