

# PA1.1 – Serial verb constructions in spoken and sign languages

Student: Gautam Ottur

Supervisors: Hedde Zeijlstra, Markus Steinbach

Ext./Th.Com.: Cornelia Loos (Hamburg)

## I. The form-meaning mismatch

- Serial verb constructions (SVCs): multiple VPs in one clause without linking elements.
- (1)  $\text{HELP}_3 \text{ SUPPORT}_3$  [German Sign Language, DGS]  
'It helps and supports them.'
- Sometimes only one verb in an SVC expresses an event, with the others being redundant (a 1:0 mismatch).
- (2)  $\text{ñāñ vātil turannū tar-ām}$  [Malayalam]  
I door open give-POT  
'I will open the door for you.'
- Verbs in SVCs follow similar linear orders, regardless of whether the language is head-initial or -final.
- Previous claim: this is evidence of universality in the underlying head-directionality of syntactic phrases [1].

### Empirical questions

- When is agreement/displacement between arguments in Malayalam and DGS SVCs and outside structure (dis)allowed?
- How do multi-event structures compare structurally to those with single-event (mismatched) meanings?

### Theoretical questions

- To what extent are the syntactic processes that allow for SVCs to be built uniform or non-uniform across serializing languages?
- If they are (dis)similar, what does this tell us about how syntactic structure is built generally?

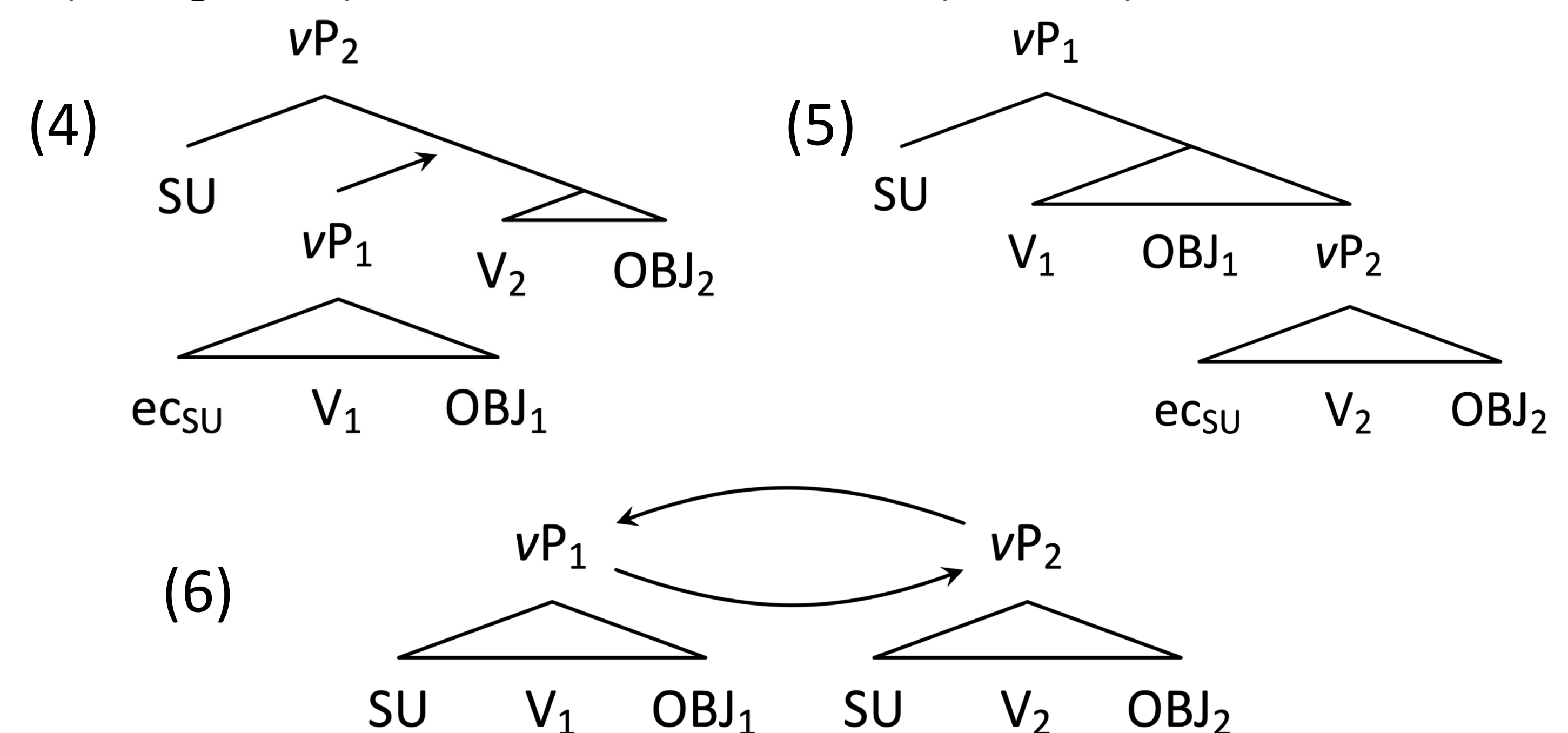
## II. Methodology and hypotheses

- Methods:
  - Corpus research on DGS: Hamburg Korpus [2]
  - Acceptability judgements with Malayalam native speakers
- Similar patterns in linear order and single-event readings in SVCs is hypothesized to not be due to a uniform syntactic structure.
- SVC conventionalization is common because (i) no linking elements need to be reanalyzed and (ii) the conventionalized structure is already syntactically available.

## III. Results and discussion

- Languages differ in whether they allow dependencies into VPs in SVCs.
- Languages like Gungbe allow extraction from all VPs in a series, Malayalam only allows extraction from the final VP (shown in 3).
- (3)  $[\text{ent}_{*i/j}] = \text{āññ Rāman } \text{—}_i \text{ oṭiccū } \text{—}_j \text{ iṭicc-atū}$   
what=is R. drive hit-NMLZ  
'What did Raman hit while driving (a car)?'  
\* 'What was Raman driving when he crashed?'
- DGS has agreement dependencies into all VPs in the series, but in an ATB fashion.
- In Malayalam, redundant serial verbs are actually pseudo-adpositions or applicative markers, while in DGS, the redundant predicates show verbal agreement, same as lexical verbs.

- Single-event structures** may be the same structures as multi-event SVCs (VPs which trigger pragmatic inferences), or different ones (e.g. defective VPs which do not express events)
- SVCs use different **concatenation principles** [3] across languages: adjunction (Malayalam, 4), complementation (Gungbe, 5) [4], and coordination (DGS, 6).



## IV. Consequences and follow-up questions

- VPs in SVCs have various syntactic-semantic relationships; languages do not converge on one of these.
- Single-event SVCs spell out independently existing structures in the relevant languages.
- Non-syntactic factors trigger redundancies, but syntax supports them — is this attested in other phenomena?**

## References

[1] Carstens, V. (2002). Antisymmetry and word order in serial constructions. *Language*, 78(1), 3–50. [2] Konrad, R., et al. (2020). *MEINE DGS – annotiert. Öffentliches Korpus der Deutschen Gebärdensprache, 3. Release / MY DGS – annotated. Public Corpus of German Sign Language, 3rd release*. Universität Hamburg [3] Veenstra, T., & Muysken, P. (2017). Serial Verb Constructions. In M. Everaert & H. C. van Riemsdijk (Eds.), *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Syntax, Second Edition* (pp. 1–51). John Wiley & Sons, Inc. [4] Aboh, E. O. (2009). Clause structure and verb series. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 40(1), 1–33.