

## A formal analysis of Croatian serial verbs

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### 1. Introduction

Croatian (Cr) contains multi-verb constructions of the type exemplified in (1), featuring two imperative verbs which function as a single unit.

- (1) a. *Odi kupi novine!*  
 go2sg.imp buy2sg.imp newspapers  
 ‘Go buy newspapers!’
- b. *Dodi vidi ovu sliku!*  
 come2sg.imp see2sg.imp this picture  
 ‘Come see this picture.’

Similar constructions can be found in other Balkan languages, such as Modern Greek (2), definitely (2a) and maybe (2b), as well as non-Balkan languages (e.g. English [3]).

- (2) a. *Ela pes mu!*  
 come.2sg.imp say.2sg.imp me.gen  
 ‘Come tell me!’
- b. *Ja kita!*  
 hey look.2sg.imp  
 ‘Hey look!’
- (3) a. *Come see this!*  
 b. *Go get me a Coke!*

We argue that Cr constructions such as those in (1) fall within the broader cross-linguistic typology of *Serial Verb Constructions* (SVC). SVCs are constructions consisting of two (or more) verbs, without any marker of syntactic dependency between them, which together function as a single syntactic, semantic and prosodic unit. The verbs within an SVC thus form a single predicate, denote a single event, and project a mono-clausal structure (Aikhenvald 2006, 2018).

### 2. Cross-linguistic properties of SVCs

SVCs have been observed in a number of typologically diverse languages, most prominently in the isolating languages of West Africa (such as Igbo [4]) and South-East Asia (such as Tetun Dili [5] and Taba [6]).

- (4) *Ó ti-gbù-rù nwóké áhù.* (Igbo; Lord 1975: 28)  
 he beat-kill-past man that  
 ‘He beat that man to death.’

- (5) *Tuda bola mai.* (Tetun Dili; Hajek 2006: 243)  
 throw ball come  
 ‘Throw the ball over here.’
- (6) *n-babas welik n-mot do* (Taba; Bowden 2001: 297)  
 3sg.-bite pig 3sg.-die real.  
 ‘It bit the pig dead.’

SVCs across languages were found to exhibit (more or less consistently) the following properties (Zwicky 1990, Comrie 1995, Aikhenvald 2018):

- (i) SVCs consist of two (or more) verbs without any syntactic link or marker of dependency between them;
- (ii) each verb contained within an SVC can also function as the sole verb in the clause;
- (iii) SVCs function as a single predicate and thus denote a single event;
- (iv) SVCs occur within a single clause (i.e. mono-clausal structure);
- (v) verbs within an SVC share at least one core argument (object or subject);
- (vi) SVCs can inflect across tenses and other grammatical categories.

Cr constructions of the type exemplified in (1) will be shown to exhibit the bulk of the properties in (i-vi), thus justifying the use of the SVC label in this language as well:

### 3. SVCs vs coordinate clauses in Cr:

Firstly, the verbs contained within a Cr SVC can also function as the sole predicate within the clause (in accordance with the SVC criterion in [ii]):

- (7) *Odi kupi novine.*  
 go2sg.imp buy2sg.imp newspapers  
 ‘Go buy newspapers.’
- (8) a. *Odi van.*  
 go2sg.imp. outside  
 b. *Kupi novine.*  
 buy2sg.imp newspapers

As for the criterion in (i), i.e. no syntactic link between verbs within an SVC, it could be argued that the SVC-type clause in (7) is syntactically equivalent to the coordinate clause (CC) in (9), the only difference being that the coordinator *i* ‘and’ is silent in the former case and phonetically realized in the latter.

- (9) *Odi i kupi novine.*  
 go2sg.imp and buy2sg.imp newspapers  
 ‘Go and buy newspapers.’

Nevertheless, we show that (7) and (9) constitute distinct grammatical entities (despite their surface similarity): (9) exhibits properties typical of CCs, i.e. bi-clausal structure and bi-eventive interpretation, whereas (7) exhibits the characteristics typical of SVCs, i.e. mono-clausal structure and single event interpretation.



- b. *Odi* (*\*mi*) *i* *kupi* *mi* *novine.*  
 go2sg.imp to-me-cl. and buy2sg.imp to-me-cl. newspapers  
 ‘Go (and) buy me newspapers.’

(13-14) thus show us that Cr SVCs, unlike CCs, constitute mono-clausal structures (SVC criterion in [iv]).

#### 4. Parallels between SVCs and other anaphoric clause structures in Cr: Formal analysis

The anaphoric properties observed in Cr SVCs in 3 are largely shared by infinitives (15a) and control subjunctives (15b) (the latter being more typical of Serbian).

- (15) a. *Odi* *kupi* *novine.* [SVC]  
 go2sg.imp buy2sg.imp newspapers  
 b. *Odi* *kupiti* *novine.* [Inf]  
 go2sg.imp buy-inf newspapers  
 c. *Odi* *da kupiš* *novine.* [C-Subj]  
 go2sg.imp subj. buy2.sg newspapers

All of these clauses are compatible with a single subject only (as shown by the use of indices in [16]).

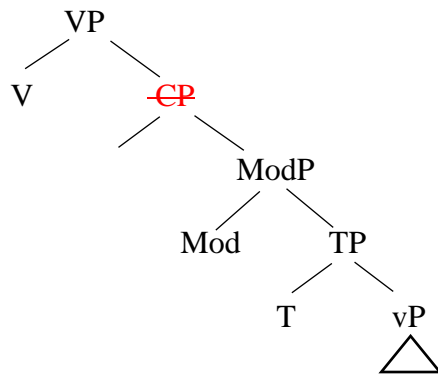
- (16) a. *Odi<sub>i</sub>* *kupi<sub>i</sub>* *novine.* [SVC]  
 go2sg.imp buy2sg.imp newspapers  
 b. *Odi<sub>i</sub>* *kupiti<sub>i/\*j</sub>* *novine.* [Inf]  
 go2sg.imp buy-inf newspapers  
 c. *Odi<sub>i</sub>* *da kupiš<sub>i</sub> / \* kupite<sub>j</sub>* *novine.* [C-Subj]  
 go2sg.imp subj. buy2.sg buy2.pl newspapers  
 d. *Ivan<sub>i</sub> mora<sub>i</sub> / počinje<sub>i</sub> radi<sub>i/\*j</sub>.* [Inf]  
 Ivan must3sg. begin3sg. work-inf.  
 e. *Ivan<sub>i</sub> mora<sub>i</sub> / počinje<sub>i</sub> da radi<sub>i</sub> / \* rade<sub>j</sub>.* [C-Subj]  
 Ivan must3sg. begin3sg. subj work3sg. work3pl.  
 ‘Ivan must/is beginning to work.’

Clauses such as those in (16) are also incompatible with separate spatio-temporal marking:

- (17) a. \* *Ivan je jučer morao/počeo raditi sutra.* [Inf]  
 Ivan is yesterday had-to began work-inf tomorrow  
 b. \* *Ivan je jučer morao/počeo da radi sutra.* [C-SUBJ]  
 Ivan is yesterday had-to began subj work3sg. tomorrow  
 c. \* *Odi jučer kupi novine sutra.* [SVC]  
 go2sg.imp yesterday buy2sg.imp newspapers tomorrow

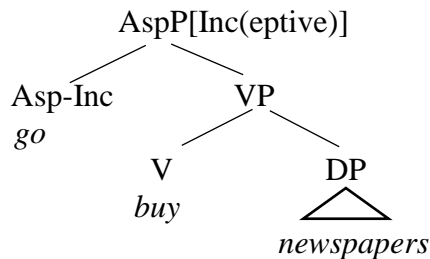
These data (among others) show us that Cr infinitives and control subjunctives pattern with SVCs in that they project a mono-clausal structure and denote a single event. From a formal standpoint, these clauses constitute a single CP domain (i.e. matrix CP), while the embedded CP is truncated from the structure.

(18) Cr SVC/Inf/C-Subj



Cr SVCs are structurally smallest and most syntactically integrated out of all these complements- both verbs are generated within the lowest vP/AspP structure:

(19) Cr SVC



*Asp-Inceptive* encodes the temporal immediacy of the action, hence the acceptability contrast in (20):

- (20) a. *Odi kupi novine odmah.*  
 go2.sg.imp buy2sg.imp newspapers immediately  
 ‘Go buy newspapers immediately.’
- b. \* *Odi kupi novine sutra / sljedeći tjedan.*  
 go2sg.imp. buy2sg.imp newspapers tomorrow next week  
 ‘Go buy newspapers tomorrow/next week.’
- vs.
- c. *Kupi novine sutra / sljedeći tjedan.*  
 buy2sg.imp newspapers tomorrow next week  
 ‘Buy newspapers tomorrow/next week.’

## 5. Conclusion

Cr SVCs share the bulk of the properties observed with their cross-linguistic counterparts. They also pattern with other anaphoric control structures found in Cr (i.e. infinitives and control subjunctives).

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