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Book Review

Roland Kießling with the assistance of Bong Marcellus Wung, *Verbal serialisation in Isu (West-Ring) – a Grassfields language of Cameroon* (Grammatische Analysen afrikanischer Sprachen 39). Köln: Köppe, 2011. xii + 325 pages, ISBN 978-3-89645-555-0, EUR 39.80.

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Two broad traditions have emerged in the serial verb literature, not necessarily in conflict. One has focused on the hierarchical syntactic representation of serial verb constructions (SVCs) within a mostly generativist framework, whereas the other has focused on what meanings SVCs are used to express, situated within a more functionalist approach. Tying these two approaches together is the goal of establishing clear criteria for classifying different types of SVCs, as compared to other types of multi-verb constructions. Kießling's in-depth investigation of verb serialization in Isu can be placed squarely in the latter tradition, and is a welcome and valuable contribution. We have found this monograph to be well-organized, thoroughly argued, extremely well-exemplified, and quite theoretically intriguing. This book should be of most interest to those with areal and typological investment in Cameroon and West Africa, but it also provides an invaluable case study for theoretical syntacticians and semanticists, as well as cognitive linguists (particularly its discussions of metaphorical extension).

The main goal of this book is to present the first in-depth investigation of serialization in Isu, a language of the Ring subgroup of the Grassfields Bantu family, spoken by approximately 10,000 people in northwestern Cameroon. Isu is part of what can be understood as a West Ring dialect continuum, which includes Aghem, Bu, Kuk, Weh, and Zoa, only the first of which has received extensive documentation prior to the author's work on Isu (especially Anderson 1979; Hyman 1979a, b; Watters 1979). This West Ring continuum has lost much of the inherited verbal derivational and inflectional morphology, displaying an analytic syntax more in line with more westerly located languages of the Kwa-type. Part of the challenge of the present work is to describe and catalogue the expressive capability of verb serialization in Isu in the absence of the polysyn-thetic verbal head-marking found in Bantu languages spoken further East. An

example of a typical SVC is provided in (1) involving four serialized verbs with
no overt linkage marker other than surface concatenation.

(1) ú   *⁺tú*   *ŋí*   *tswí*   *dzɔ́ŋí*   tsə́   sɔ̀ʔɔ̀   á⁺nə́   ⁺mwí
     3SG.P3 escape enter   descend   return   IMM   also   to   6a.water
             V₁   V₂   V₃   V₄
     á⁺nə́ tsə̌m   ⁺k-ə́
     to   7.deep.pool   7-D1
     'She also dived back into the water of the deep.' (p. 44)

Kießling's study provides a comprehensive and thickly descriptive account of a
wide range of such serial constructions, their structure and interpretation.

    The work is organized into seven main chapters, as well as an introduction,
a conclusion commenting on "a West Ring type of serialisation", and a refer-
ence appendix of Isu coverbs and (hybrid) adverbials, sorted alphabetically for
easy navigation. Following the introduction, Chapter 2 ("Serial verb construc-
tions vs. other multi-verb constructions") presents a detailed description of
what distinguishes serial verb constructions in Isu from other multi-verb
constructions, including coordination, subordination, and conjoined clause
constructions. Though coordination and subordination should be straightfor-
ward to the reader (being clauses introduced with unambiguous markers of
coordination and subordination), conjoined clause constructions are more
idiosyncratic to Isu grammar. This type of construction involves two clauses,
the first of which has full grammatical marking, and the second of which
consists of only a subject marker at the left edge of the clause and the verb,
permitting no additional grammatical markers. Kießling (p. 12) presents an
excellent summary of diagnostics used to differentiate these different types of
multi-verb constructions. Diagnostic summaries like these are found through-
out this book, which we found to be extremely helpful references to return to
while reading.

    In Chapters 3 ("Types of serial verb constructions"), 4 ("Symmetrical serial
verb constructions"), and 5 ("Asymmetrical serial verb constructions"), Kießling
expands upon how SVCs are differentiated from one another and from conjoined
clause constructions. Two main types of serial verb constructions are intro-
duced: symmetrical SVCs (a.k.a. clause chaining/core layer serialization) and
asymmetrical SVCs (a.k.a. integrated/nuclear layer serialization). Kießling (p. 32)
provides a minimal pair roughly expressing the same situation, showing the
distinction between asymmetrical SVCs, symmetrical SVCs, and conjoined
clause constructions, shown in (2).

(2)   a. Asymmetrical SVC

       ntwà   mə́   bvɔ̀   wìy
       9.pot P1.FOC fall crack
                    V_1 V_2
       'The pot has fallen and got a crack/crushed.' (p. 32)

    b. Symmetrical SVC

       ntwà   mə́   bvɔ̀   tswí   wɔ̀, wíy   diáŋí   yə̂
       9.pot P1.FOC fall descend CPT crack pass.through CFG
                   V_1 V_2
       'The pot has fallen down hither and crushed also.' (p. 32)

    c. Conjoined clause construction

       [*ntwà$_i$ kì   bvɔ̀   tswí   wɔ̀   ŋwɔ̀*] [*ĭ$_i$ wíy   diáŋə́   yə*]
       9.pot   F1   fall descend CPT CF   9   crack pass.through CFG
             V_1 V_2
       'The pot will fall down hither and crush also.' (p. 32)

In (2a, b), both serialization constructions appear with no overt subject marker coreferential with the structural subject *ntwà* 'pot', in contrast to (2c) whose second clause begins with the coreferential subject marker *ì*. Further, in the symmetrical SVC in (2b) each verb appears with its own directional adverbials: V_1 with the centripetal directional adverbial *wɔ̀*, and V_2 with the centrifugal directional adverbial *yə̀*. In contrast, in the asymmetrical SVC in (2a), such dual adverbial occurrence is not found and is not possible.

Kießling (p. 30) succinctly summarizes properties such as these which differentiate types of multi-verb constructions. Asymmetrical SVCs are primarily distinguished from symmetrical SVCs in (i) being monophrasal, (ii) having only one verb come from a semantically open set, (iii) obligatorily sharing grammatical properties between the serialized verbs (e.g., temporal setting, modality, aspectual value, negation, arguments, adverbials, among others), and (iv) word order facts of the verbs and direct object. In asymmetrical SVCs, the verb from the semantically open set is referred to as the "core verb", whereas the modificational verb is referred to as the "coverb". In general, the sharing of grammatical properties in symmetrical SVCs is possible though not obligatory, whereas in asymmetrical SVCs this sharing is obligatory. With respect to event structure, asymmetrical SVCs emphasize the simultaneity of event-components, whereas symmetrical SVCs – like conjoined clause constructions – emphasize sequentiality of its event-components.

Further, one can note in (2a) above that the verbs are adjacent, a structure not found in (2b, c). This is a strict feature of asymmetrical SVCs, which Kießling

understands as "verbal bunching" (p. 23) or "verbal attraction" of V₂ to a single verbal field (i.e., the "predicational frame") (p. 295). An example of an asymmetrical SVC with four verbs bunched together was provided in (2). Verbal bunching in asymmetrical SVCs occurs irrespective of the valency and selectional relationships of the verbs to any objects within the clause. For example, when the intransitive verb *fyí* 'exit, go out' is used as a coverb, it appears adjacent to the core verb *nìy* 'take' within the predicational frame, and appears before the direct object. This shows that verbal bunching takes place even though intransitive *fyí* does not form such a configuration with an object in non-SVC environments.

(3) ú   nìy   fyí   bə̀   dìy
     3SG.P3   take.PF   go.out.PF   hither   Diy
              V_Transitive V_Intransitive   O
     'He brought out Diy.' (p. 47)

From other serial verb languages (e.g., Edo, Esan, Yoruba, Dagaare, Ewe), one might expect the intransitive verb to remain outside of the predicational frame, which is not the case in Isu.

One extremely interesting fact emerges from these verb bunching phenomena. Although intransitive verbs are incorporated without modifying the valency of the entire predicational frame, this is not so for all transitive verbs incorporated, e.g., the transitive verb *ná* 'keep' shown in (4).

(4) a. *mə́ nû   wɔ̀*
        1SG hide   O.2SG
        'I have hidden (something) from [you]_SOURCE' (p. 174)
     b. *mə́ nû   ná   wɔ̀*
        1SG hide   keep   O.2SG
        'I have hidden [you]_PATIENT' (p. 174)

When the core verb *nù* 'hide' appears on its own, it assigns a source role to its direct object (4a), expressing 'hiding FROM someone'. However, when the terminative coverb *ná* 'keep' is incorporated and appears with the core verb *nù*, this verbal complex expresses 'hiding someone' in which the direct object receives a patient role interpretation assigned from the coverb *ná* (4b). These facts show the ability of coverbs to manipulate the predicational frame as a whole, and "override" specifications of the core verbs. These and other examples illustrate the complexity of the interaction between argument structure and semantic role assignment with the different types of asymmetrical SVCs.

In contrast to asymmetrical SVCs, symmetrical SVCs display a more limited type of verbal bunching, shown in (5).

(5)   a. [...VOV...] order – symmetrical serialization with intervening direct object
       Tsâŋ-Kây wíy ⁺mbám zùw kwè fwú nə̀ və́b   k-íy kə̂ kém-ə́
       Tsang-Kay kill 9.cobra skin cook chew and 7.bone 7-OF NEG break-IPF
              V   O   V   V   V
       'Tsang-Kay killed a cobra, skinned (it), cooked (it), ate (it) without a bone getting broken.' (p. 39)
   b. [...VVO...] order – verb bunching
       ù   kì   nìy   tʊ́m-ə́   ùvə́b   áwɔ̀ wè
       3SG F1 take[:*L] send-IPF[:*L] 8.bones to   3SG
                  V   V   O
       'He will take the bones and send (them) to him.' (p. 40)
   c. *[...VVVVO...] order – verbal concatenation size restrictions
       *Tsâŋ-Kây kì wíy zùw kwè fwú   ⁺mbám
       Tsang-Kay F1 kill skin cook chew 9.cobra
       [Intended meaning:] 'Tsang-Kay will kill, skin, cook, and eat the cobra.' (pp. 40–41)

The symmetrical SVC in (5a) conveys a series of distinct events with no verbal bunching in the pre-object field.[1] However, (5b) shows that when only two verbs occur which share the same semantic object, they may exhibit verbal bunching. This appears to be restricted only to two verbs, though precise claims about the size and content of verbal bunching with symmetrical SVCs are not made explicit. The example in (5c) shows that four verbs cannot bunch in the predicational frame with symmetrical SVCs. A full diagram of the syntactic order of elements within asymmetrical SVCs is provided later in Chapter 8 (p. 285).

While Chapter 4 is short, covering basic criteria of symmetrical SVCs (much of which we have already covered), Chapter 5 describes asymmetrical SVCs at some length. As previously mentioned, the asymmetrical SVC is composed of a core verb and one (or more) modificational coverbs. Coverbs often have undergone semantic extension from their non-coverb use, e.g., *ɲ̀ə̀* 'give' > beneficiary

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1 Although the three postobject verbs appear adjacent, they are not understood as "verb bunching" because one can append each verb with the deleted coreferential object *mbám* 'cobra', i.e., ... *wíy* ⁺ *mbám, zùw mbàm, kwè mbàm* ... '... killed a cobra, skinned a cobra, cooked a cobra ... ' (shown in ex. (39b) on pp. 39–40).

marking, *táw* 'become strong' > manner, number, and duration intensification, among others. The majority of this chapter is dedicated to how grammatical categories are marked on verbs within asymmetrical SVCs forming two main types: single-marking and concordant-marking of grammatical categories. These two types are detailed in a table on p. 52.

In the single-marking pattern, the grammatical category is only overtly marked on one of the verbs; the other verb or verbs surface unmarked. Grammatical categories which involve single-marking pattern include person, tense, mood/modality, negation, focalization, nominalization, and number. In contrast, concordant marker involves a grammatical category which is overtly marked on all verbs within the SVC. This pattern occurs with aspect, subordination, and some mood marking. Two examples are provided in (6).

(6)   a. Single-marking – immediate future (F1) tense marker *kǐ*

   ù   *kì* *byíɲə́* [*kì] *mià?à* [*kì] *tswí*   *wɔ̀* *àtái*   *fə́*⁺
   3SG F1 roll.IPF [*F1] throw.IPF [*F1] descend CPT 6.stones here
   'He will roll down stones this way.' (p. 56)

   b. Concordant marking – terminal floating *L tone expressing imperfective aspect

   ù   *kì* *té*   ⁺*ɲí-ə*   ⁺*twsí*   ⁺*dzɔ́ŋə́*
   3SG F1 escape.IPF[:*L] enter-IPF[:*L] descend.IPF[:*L] return.IPF[:*L]
   ⁺*tsə́ ŋwɔ*
   IMM CF
   'She will dive back to escape.' (pp. 76–77)

In (6b), imperfective aspect is indicated by a terminal floating L tone on each verb. Imperfective aspect can also be marked segmentally through affixes (suffixes and infixes) and/or through internal vowel changes. In general, grammatical categories expressed through changes to the tonal or segmental shape of the verb display concordant marking whereas grammatical categories expressed through independent grammatical words/clitics display single marking, a curious fact not sufficiently addressed.

Chapter 6 discusses an additional multi-verb construction "Verbal compounds". We found the treatment of this construction type less fully developed, and oddly placed in the otherwise excellent organization of this book. The short discussion of verbal compounds as a distinct category remains unconvincing, the main criteria separating them from asymmetrical SVCs being that one verb of the verbal compound does not clearly behave as a minor verb, and that verb compounds form idiomatic meanings, e.g., *tə́m* 'shoot' + *ɲí* 'eat' > *tə́m-ɲí* 'win'. However, there is no discussion of distinct syntactic or morphological restrictions

which might suggest a distinct representation or categorization, and in particular it is not clear to us why idiomaticity should warrant a separate classification. In addition, the use of the term "compound" is puzzling for two reasons. First, it does not align with other semantic and syntactic treatments of compounds elsewhere in the Africanist literature, e.g., Lord's (1975) study of Igbo verb compounds. Second, the term "compound" suggests to us a tight syntactic unit with a single syntactic head; however Kießling shows that syntactic contiguity "is no defining criterion" as the verbal compound may be split up by a coverb *fórí* 'increase' (pp. 88–89).

Chapter 7 ("The coverbs") is dedicated to describing the semantic function of the many dozens of coverbs used as minor, modifying verbs within an asymmetrical SVC. This is perhaps the strongest chapter in terms of its detailed coverage and organizational logic and clarity. It is also the densest chapter which will be excellent for the West Africanist linguist and act as an authoritative reference guide for other interested parties. These coverbs are classified into five distinct types:

  (i)   motion (e.g., *zù* 'go');
  (ii)   aspectuality (e.g., *mài* 'finish');
  (iii) valency-altering (e.g., *zíŋŋí* 'do, make');
  (iv)   result (e.g., *pfɔ́* 'die');
  (v)   manner (e.g., *fwórí* 'do in wilful and evil intention for pleasure').

In going through this chapter, one is struck with the breadth of expressivity of these coverbs, conveying concepts such as deictic orientation and path, separation, inchoation, initiation, intention, immediacy, intensification, iteration, comparison, termination, completion, as well as conveying more subtle semantic nuances, e.g., *mwàmì* 'touch repeatedly', *zálí* 'pass the day', and *twɔ̀ʔ* 'take a closer look (at)'.

Another striking aspect of these coverbs is that they are not unified within a dedicated syntactic position. Certain coverbs appear before the core verb and some after it; a list given in the Appendix provides the syntactic position of individual coverbs. This issue is one of many treated in Chapter 8 ("Grammaticalisation"), the last substantive chapter of the book before the conclusion and index. There are numerous topics discussed in this chapter, some of which could have stood as chapters in their own right, divided into three main sections: (i) the development of a new word class "hybrid adverbials" from coverbs, (ii) syntactic patterns of SVCs and their historical development, and (iii) the semantic extensions exhibited by coverbs from their autonomous core verb meaning.

Kießling identifies two types of "hybrid adverbials" – types A and B – and lays out properties associated with this grammaticalized word class (pp. 239–240)

which differentiate them from verbs (and also other non-hybrid adverbials). These include the loss of (i) the capacity to act as an autonomous verb, (ii) the capacity to act as the single base of nominalization by the class 5 prefix *i-*, and (iii) morphological aspectual distinction, as well as different tonal properties. Like the previous chapter on coverbs, much of the discussion of this section is dedicated to contextualizing and exemplifying these hybrid adverbials in detail.

The next two sections of Chapter 8 are more analytic in nature. In Chapter 8.2, Kießling lays out syntactic generalizations associated with asymmetrical SVCs, including very helpful templatic schemas of coverb and hybrid adverbial positions (pp. 285–286). He then goes on to put forward a historical scenario which can account for these present syntactic construction types, though this is more of a sketch than a fully developed theory (p. 294). In Chapter 8.3, Kießling provides a more developed analysis of the processes of semantic extension involved in the modificational use of coverbs and hybrid adverbials, "extracting general conclusions regarding the relationship of metaphor and metonymy" (p. 238). Some of these extensions are more or less straightforward, for example path adverbials denoting 'up' have spatial and temporal extension, whereas adverbials denoting 'down' extend to meanings of intensification, concentration, and punctiliarity. In other cases, however, a more telescopic analysis is required to account for the extensions, e.g., the verb *fyí* 'exit' extending to mean 'do intensively, excessively' (p. 144) and the verb *diáŋí* 'pass through' extending to 'immediately, without delay' (p. 167). This section will surely be of interest to more cognitively oriented linguists interested in the metaphorical capability of language in aiding and refining meaning targets.

Although the strengths pointed out outweigh any weaknesses, we feel it would have been beneficial to readers, especially those unfamiliar with this language family and typological profile of the area, if there had been a short chapter providing more background information on Isu morphology and syntax. In the initial stages of reading, we were left with questions such as what the differences are between verbal "monoclausality' and "monophrasality", what the conditions are governing the alternating SVOX and SOVX word orders, whether it is possible to drop the subject (conditions of pro-drop), what the distribution and use of logophoric pronouns is, among others. We are happy to note that Kießling will continue and develop larger grammatical studies of Isu and the rest of West Ring, which should address these matters in a single document (Kießling in preparation).

Further, Kießling makes multiple claims that specific syntactic constructions follow iconic principles in line with the semantics and cognitive organization of the events involved (in particular, on pp. 10, 198, 228, 284–285). One strong claim is that syntactic "tightness" reflects event cohesion, noting that "serialisation, clause conjoining, coordination and subordination might be viewed as

distinct points in a scale of syntactic tightness which is an iconic reflection of semantic tightness", with "SVCs represent[ing] the extreme of maximal conceptual tightness or compactness" (p. 10) given that they are not linked with any over linker. This is in contrast with subordination and coordination which "represent a maximally loose association of events", and conjoined clause constructions which "tak[e] an intermediary position" (p. 10).

However, concepts underlying this statement such as "tightness" and "intermediary position" would need to be explored in detail if iconicity were to serve as an explanation rather than a correlation, perhaps by drawing upon advances in syntax/semantics interface studies. In any case, a full explanation of the syntactic patterns in this work will likely require additional mechanisms and explanatory principles. Kießling himself points to a number of places in which violations of iconicity exist, e.g., with coverbs such as *màʔà* 'throw" and *fórí* 'increase' (p. 48). An issue he does not discuss is whether examples of verbal bunching in symmetrical SVCs violate iconicity principles, such as (5b) above. Here, the two verbs are associated with distinct events which presumably would warrant distinct syntactic units, yet they appear within a single tight syntactic unit reflected by their verbal bunching. Examples such as these illustrate that although iconicity is surely relevant to understanding syntactic patterns, principles of iconicity need to be refined so as to not over- or under-generate the grammar.

To conclude, we would like to touch upon a few places we recommend for future study. One is comparison with Aghem verbal constructions. As in Isu, Aghem displays serial verbs and verbal bunching, with real morphological and phonological repercussions such as tonal changes (Hyman 2001). For example, (7a) shows a serial verb construction involving two verbs *nì* 'take' and *kìa* 'cut' separated by an object. When this serial verb construction appears in a subordination context, the first verb receives a subordination HL tone pattern (a pattern also found in Isu – e.g., ex. (95a) on p. 79). When the serial verbs appear with an intervening object, only the first verb receives this HL tone pattern (7b); the second verb *kìa* maintains its underlying /L/tone. However, when both verbs appear adjacent with no intervening object, then both of the verbs appear with the HL tone pattern (7c), similar to the pattern described for Isu (p. 79).

(7)   Comparison with Aghem: Tonal patterns of verbs
    a. *ò   mɔ̀ nì   fìñí   kìa fìnwín*
       s/he P1   take 19.knife cut 19.bird
       'S/he took the knife and cut the bird.'
    b. *wìzín   wìlà ò   mɔ̀ nî   ñí   fɔ́   kìa fì-nwín*
       woman REL s/he P1 take knife 19.DET cut bird
       'the woman who took the knife and cut the bird'

c. *ñí   fílà   ò   mɔ̀ nî   kĩa nwín ⁺fɔ́*
   knife 19.ʀᴇʟ s/he ᴘ1   take cut bird 19.det
   'the knife that s/he took and cut the bird'

Further, in some cases in Aghem a verb's segmental shape can be altered depending on context. For example, in (8) the verb /dzɔ̀mlɔ̀/'groan' can be realized without modification (8a), or realized with its second syllable reduced to a syllabic nasal in this context before a verb (8b). Other contexts allow this segmental shape change, as well.

(8)   a. *ò   mɔ̀ dzɔ̀mlɔ̀ tsìghà tìbvú*
         3ꜱɢ ᴘ1 groan   pass   dogs
         'S/he groaned more than the dogs.'
      b. *ò   mɔ̀ dzɔ̀mǹ tsìghà tìbvú*
         3ꜱɢ ᴘ1 groan pass   dogs
         'S/he groaned more than the dogs.'

Given the close relationship between Aghem and Isu, we believe it would be worthwhile to further explore the different phonological shapes of verbs in a comparative light, particularly as it relates to verb serialization and other multi-verb constructions.

Finally, although this study is generally theory-neutral, we believe that syntacticians of different stripes will find it a very informative case study, presenting a great wealth of empirical data worth examining to refine their own theories. Research in the last two decades, e.g., Collins (1997), Hiraiwa & Bodomo (2008), Aboh (2009), and earlier work in Baker (1989), have produced a number of substantial proposals regarding the syntactic structural correlates of serialization. We believe that syntacticians whose research interests intersect with such concerns would be benefited by incorporating Isu and West Ring into these discussions. Of particular theoretical interest is the verbal bunching phenomenon, which may be gauged with respect to specific syntactic operations, e.g., verb movement, head movement, or postsyntactic phonological operations, etc. Verbal bunching in SVCs is also found in other African languages, such as !Xun (Kx'a family, i.e., a "Khoisan" language; König 2010) and Degema (Edoid branch of Benue-Congo; Kari 2003a, b, 2004), showing the need for larger comparative syntactic studies. If we also acknowledge some of the theoretically interesting semantic issues which this study presents (e.g., the definiteness effect on objects in conjoined clause constructions vs. SVCs; p. 25), Isu grammar presents a number of challenging phenomena which the interested reader can incorporate into wider theoretical debates.

Abbreviations: 1/3 = 1st/3rd person; CF = clause focus; CFG = centrifugal; CPT = centripetal; D1 = proximal demonstrative; DET = determiner; F1 = hodiernal (near) future; FOC = focus; IMM = immediacy marker; IPF = imperfective; *L = floating low tone; NEG = negative; o or O = object; OF = out-of-focus marker; P1 = immediate past; P3 = distant past; PF = perfective; REL = relativizer; S = subject; SG = singular; V = verb; X = adjunct. "Numbers refer to person when followed by singular, plural, inclusive, exclusive or logophoric. Otherwise, they refer to noun classes" (p. x).

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