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Serialization across Modalities

Many languages exhibit mono-clausal constructions containing multiple verbs which share tense, aspect, mood, and polarity interpretations. These constructions have been called serial verb constructions and clause chains, among other things, and normally express complex events or strings of events. Curiously, languages fitting this profile often also use verbs to serve grammatical functions, such as introducing arguments to events.

Existing syntactic and typological literature has analyzed this information in one of two ways: either this is evidence of a uniform structure that underlies all languages (e.g. Carstens 2002) or evidence that vastly different structures may converge upon certain patterns (e.g. Jayaseelan 2004). I argue against both views: it is neither possible that all serializing languages share one underlying structure, nor is it likely that these patterns emerge without some degree of underlying commonality in the structure. I propose a typological model in which different concatenation principles (Veenstra and Muysken 2017) may combine XPs containing verbs in a given language, but these XPs are always by nature structurally small. I show that this can capture many of the patterns which otherwise remain elusive across serializing languages.