

“Say”-chains, not “say”-complementation

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Overview. A long line of research has investigated the status of complementizers derived from the verb “say”. Koopman & Sportiche (1989) argue that the “say” COMP in Abe projects a VP, Messick (2017) ties properties of logophoricity and indexical shift to special properties of these verbal complementizers, while Kratzer (2016) argues that a “say” COMP is covertly present in English. More recent analyses have argued that “say” COMPs, whether overt or covert, are transitive and introduce a propositional internal argument, while communication verbs (e.g. scream, sigh, whisper) are intransitive (Kratzer 2016; Özyildiz et al. 2019). This paper focuses on Avatime (SVO; Kwa; Ghana), where we argue that there is a single light verb “say” that occurs in two distinct syntactic configurations. In one configuration, “say” indicates (roughly) the manner of saying (*say_{ext}*). In the second configuration, “say” introduces quotative material or propositional content (*say_{cont}*). When *say_{cont}* occurs as the lowest verb in a serial construction, it yields the impression that “say” is a complementizer:

- (1) Kofi [_{VP1} a-kpè òzilò] [_{VP2} sɪ e-boe tava mɛ] [_{VP2} sɪ Ayape a-sè]
 Kofi 3SG-make yell say CL.pl-word two me say Ayape 3SG-leave
 “Kofi yelled two words to me (that) Ayape left.”
 lit. Kofi yelled, he said two words to me, (he) said Ayape left.”

We argue that Avatime provides corroborating cross-linguistic evidence for the analysis in Grimshaw (2015). Specifically, Avatime *si* “say” is an underspecified verb, that can either compose with other verbs to give more specific meaning (e.g. *akpe ozilo* “yell”) as in (1), or strictly indicates the transfer of content on its own (as in (4) below). We provide evidence that “say” in both configurations is a transitive verb that introduces different kinds of arguments. We argue that the mechanism that conjoins these VPs is a serial verb construction.

Prior Literature. Kratzer (2016) draws upon data similar to (1) from Gungbe (Aboh 2010), where it is proposed that this “say” element is present, but unpronounced in languages like English. The verb denoting manner of communication is treated as intransitive, while the “say” modal element introduces the propositional internal argument.

- (2) [[[say]]] = $\lambda p \lambda s \forall w (w \in f_{\text{content}}(s) \rightarrow \exists s' (s' \leq w \ \& \ p(s')))$
 (3) [[sigh]] = λs sighing (s)

These clauses are composed via predicate modification, which yields (roughly) the interpretation that there exists a sighing event that expresses the content of (proposition) p.

Grimshaw (2015) provides discussion of another abstract “say” element, where the verb “say” is the overt realization of a light verb SAY that otherwise composes with other verbs to indicate discourse role (e.g. *ask* or *assert*), say-by-means verbs (e.g. *mutter* or *grunt*), and say-with attitude verbs (e.g. *complain* or *gripe*). She argues that SAY requires an agent, a “linguistic material” argument, and admits a goal/addressee. It is further argued that SAY+V is pronounced as V (SAY+scream -> [scream]).

The final ingredient integrated into the present analysis is serialization. Many analyses of serial verb constructions would be sufficient for present purposes. Avatime SVCs show essentially the same properties discussed in Collins (1997) and Hiraiwa in Bodomo (2008), where these multi-verb constructions are instances of multiple VPs introduced under a single T⁰, where there is a single subject and often other shared arguments, although we assume an analysis by which these structures are roughly vP clause chains (similar to Hale, 1991).

Data. The verb *si* ‘say’ can function as a main verb (*say_{cont}*) that introduces a clausal complement and requires an animate agent:

- (4) Kofí/*ke-plekpa si Ayápe a-se. “Kofi said that Ayape left.”
 Kofi/CL-book say Ayape 3SG-leave * “The book said that Ayape left.”

The structure projected by *si* (*say_{cont}*) is very small and it cannot introduce an addressee (5) or take manner modification (6):

- (5) Kofí { *mε } si { *mε } Ayápe a-se. “Kofi said (*to me) that Ayape left.”
 Kofi me say me Ayape 3SG-leave
 (6) Kofí { *ni osikpekpe } si { *ni osikpekpe } Ayápe a-se “Kofi said that Ayape left.”
 Kofi with loudness say with loudness Ayape 3SG-left

In order to introduce an addressee (7) or indicate the manner of the speech (8), a structurally higher, additional instance of “say”, *say_{ext}*, is obligatory. In that case, *say_{cont}*, occurs as the final verb in a series:

- (7) **Be**-kpe ozilo **si** mε **si** Ayápe a-se “They shouted to me that Ayape left.”
 3PL-put shout *say_{ext}* me *say_{cont}* Ayape 3SG-leave
 (8) **Be**-si ni osikpekpe **sì** Ayápe a-se. “They said loudly Ayape left.”
 3PL-say_{ext}- with loudness *say_{cont}* Ayape 3SG-leave

Serial verb constructions in Avatime are characterized by, for example, the presence of a subject agreement marker only on the first verb (Defina 2013). This is exactly what is found in (7) where only *kpe* ‘put’ and in (8), where only the first instance of *si* ‘say_{ext}’ have subject marking.

Analysis. Avatime suggests that the analysis in Grimshaw is correct, because it overtly displays two different syntactic configurations in which the light verb *say* occurs. Every instance of *si* “say” projects a VP structure, however, these introduce different kinds of arguments. The entire serial verb construction is embedded under a single T⁰, hence the presence of only one subject agreement marker (just as with all serial constructions in the language). In addition, as with ordinary serial verb constructions, each clause is related and shares some content; in this case, each describes a different piece of information about the same “saying/yelling/screaming event”.

- (9) Kofíj a- [vP [t_j] [vP₁ kpe ozilo] [vP₂ sì e-boe tava mε] [vP₃ sì Ayápe a-se] Kofi
 Kofi 3SG.PFV put yell *say_{ext}* CL-word two me *say_{cont}* Ayape 3SG-leave
 “Kofi yelled the two words to me that Ayape left.”

As has been described for serialization in many other languages, each verb/clause within a serial verb construction is related in some way to the following verb/clause. This relationship can be causal, temporal, resultative, etc. In this particular case, the first argument specifies the manner, which determines each of the arguments introduced by the light verb *si* “say” in each of the other clauses. Also similar to serialization, each of the clauses in (9) is a predicate of the same event (i.e. each clause serves as a sub-event of the macro-event formed by the entire sequence). In other words, there is a yelling event, which consisted of (yelling) two words where “I” was the addressee, and the two words being yelled delivered the content to me that “Ayape left”. Furthermore, the strict ordering of events is tied to the possible relations in serial verb constructions, where manner is first (highest) followed by the physical description of the articulated/externalized sound, culminating in the definition of the content being carried by the physical properties of the event.