Serial Verbs in Wambaya

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Abstract

Australian languages are traditionally not thought of as having serial verb constructions (although cf. Goddard 1988, Wilkins 1988), and are therefore rarely discussed in the extensive typological and theoretical literature on verb serialisation. However, in recent work Laughren (2009, 2012) has reported on the existence of serial verb constructions in Waanyi, a non-Pama-Nyungan language of northern Australia. In this paper I show that serial verb constructions are also present in Wambaya, another non-Pama-Nyungan language which shares some areal and lexical similarities with Waanyi. I show that the serial verbs in Wambaya exhibit many of the key morphosyntactic and semantic properties described as characteristic for serial verb constructions in the literature (e.g. Sebba 1987, Durie 1997, Aikhenvald 2006a). A particularly interesting property of Wambaya serial verb constructions, and one that is highly unusual cross-linguistically, is that the verbs need not be ordered iconically. I suggest that this anti-iconic ordering may be related to Wambaya's nonconfigurational clausal structure and its free word order possibilities, highlighting the need for consideration of the full typological range of language structures in the analysis of verb serialisation cross-linguistically.

1. Introduction[1]

Australian Aboriginal languages do not generally feature in discussions of verb serialisation cross-linguistically. This is despite the fact that many Australian

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languages appear to have some serial verb constructions, although they are not always referred to as such in the descriptive literature (e.g. Austin 1981, Dixon (1972, 1977), Donaldson 1980, Evans 1995, Goddard 1988, Wilkins 1988, Reid 2002).[2] However, in recent work Laughren (2009, 2012) has reported on the existence of serial verb constructions in Waanyi, a non-Pama-Nyungan language of northern Australia. In this paper I show that serial verb constructions are also present in Wambaya (Nordlinger 1998a), another non-Pama-Nyungan language which, although not closely related to Waanyi, shares some areal and lexical similarities. I show that these Wambaya constructions have all of the properties and characteristics associated with classic verb serialization in the literature (e.g. Foley & Van Valin 1984, Foley & Olson 1985, Crowley 1987, Sebba 1987, Durie 1997, Aikhenvald & Dixon 2006), in addition to some interesting and unexpected anti-iconic ordering possibilities. These typologically unusual ordering possibilities are interesting in light of the free word order that is characteristic of Wambaya nonconfigurational syntax (e.g. Nordlinger 1998b), highlighting the importance of considering the full typological range of language structures in the analysis of verb serialisation cross-linguistically.

2.   Wambaya overview

Wambaya is a non-Pama-Nyungan language originally spoken in the Barkly Tablelands region of the Northern Territory of Australia. It belongs to the Mirndi group (see Green & Nordlinger (2004), Harvey, Green & Nordlinger (2006) and Harvey (2009) for discussion), and is most closely related to Gudanji, Binbinka and Ngarnka, and also to Jingulu (Pensalfini 2003, 2011). It is no longer spoken fluently

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[2] Meakins (2010) also discusses serial verb constructions in the mixed language Gurindji Kriol, which she argues have arisen in the mixed language through the influence of complex predicates in Gurindji on a restricted serial verb construction in Kriol.

on a daily basis, and there are now very few fluent speakers left. The majority of Wambaya people live in the towns of Borroloola, Tennant Creek and Elliott in the Northern Territory. My fieldwork on the language was undertaken over a seven-year period from 1991-1998, during which time I worked with many of the last first-language speakers of Wambaya, all of whom have now passed away. A grammatical description resulting from this fieldwork is provided in Nordlinger (1998a).

Although it is non-Pama-Nyungan, Wambaya is unusual for these languages in being almost completely suffixing and largely dependent-marking, and thus, on the surface, looks typologically similar to Warlpiri and other Pama-Nyungan languages. Like Warlpiri (Hale 1982, Simpson 1991), Wambaya has a second position auxiliary, obligatory in all finite verbal clauses, containing subject and object bound pronouns and markers of tense, aspect, mood and direction. The structure of this auxiliary is given in (1):

(1)   SUBJ - (OBJ) - TAM (+ assoc. motion/direction)

As is clear from (1), the Wambaya auxiliary is simply a bundle of grammatical affixes, and contains no synchronic verb root. All of the lexical verbal content in the clause is provided by a (largely) uninflected main verb. Word order is grammatically free (i.e. pragmatically-determined) – the only strict word order constraint in a simple clause is that the auxiliary must be in second position, either following the first word (2-4) or the first NP constituent (5):[3]

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[3] All examples are taken from my own fieldnotes on Wambaya, and many are also included in Nordlinger (1998a). The following abbreviations are used: A 'transitive subject', ACC 'accusative case', ALL 'allative case', AWY 'direction away', CAUS 'causative', DAT 'dative case', DU 'dual',

(2) *Larlagbi* **g-a** *galyurringini-nmanji.*

enter 3.SG.S-PST water.I-ALL

'He got into the water.'

(3) *Wara-nmanji* **gini-ngg-a** *yardi* *bulinja.*

face.IV-ALL 3.SG.M.A-RR-NF put algae.IV(ACC)

'He put algae on his face.'

(4) *Nganki* **ngiy-a** *lurrgbanyi* *wardangarringa-ni* *alaji*

this.SG.II.ERG 3.SG.F.A-PST grab moon.II-ERG boy.I(ACC)

'The moon grabbed (her) child.'

(5) *Naniyawulu* *nagawulu* *baraj-bulu*

that.II.DU.NOM female.II.DU.NOM old.person-DU(NOM)

wurlu-n *duwa.*

3.DU.S-PROG get.up

ERG 'ergative (same case as LOC)', EXC 'exclusive', F 'feminine', FAC 'factitive', FUT 'future

tense', HAB 'habitual aspect', I 'Noun class I, masculine', II 'Noun class II, feminine', III 'Noun class

III, vegetable', IMP 'imperative', INC 'inclusive', INF 'infinitive suffix', IV 'Noun class IV, neuter',

LOC 'locative/ergative/instrumental case', M 'masculine', NF 'non-future tense', NOM 'nominative

case', NPST 'non-past tense', O 'object', OBL 'oblique function', OP 'object-promoting suffix', PL

'plural', PRES 'present tense', PROG '(present) progressive', PST 'past tense', RDP 'reduplicated',

RR 'reflexive/reciprocal', S 'intransitive subject', SG 'singular', TH 'thematic consonant', TWD

'Those two old women are getting up.'

As evident in the above examples, verbs in Wambaya carry very little inflection. Verbs have only two (finite) forms: the *-ba* form, which occurs in positive future tense clauses and in imperative clauses, and the unmarked form (also the citation form), which occurs in all other contexts.[4] The synchronic combination of a (largely) uninflected main verb together with a non-lexical auxiliary in Wambaya appears to have developed out of an original verb-classifying construction containing an uninflected coverb and inflected main verb, similar to that found in Jaminjung (Schultze-Berndt 2000). The vestigal remnants of the original main verb are now found in Wambaya only in the directional marking in the auxiliary, which is discussed in some detail in Nordlinger (2001). These directional markers have, in fact, two functions: with motion predicates they encode direction ('towards' or 'away'), as in (6). With non-motion verbs they encoded associated motion ('come and X' or 'go and X') as in (7).

(6a) ***Gannga*** *mirnd-**amany.***

'motion towards'. Further explanation and discussion of the grammatical analysis assumed here can be found in Nordlinger (1998a).

[4] Regular verbs belong to one of two phonologically determined verb classes which differ slightly in the forms of their unmarked inflections and in the nature of the stem to which the *-ba* suffix attaches. Vowel-final verb roots (e.g. *daguma-* 'hit') add a thematic consonant *-j-* before the *-ba* inflection (*dagumaj-ba* 'hit-FUT/IMP') and remain uninflected in the unmarked form (*daguma* 'hit'). Consonant-final verb roots, on other hand (e.g. *ngaj-* 'see'), have no thematic consonant in the future/imperative (e.g. *ngaj-ba* 'see-FUT/IMP') and take the unmarked inflection *-bi* (*ngajbi* 'see').

return   1.DU.INC.S-PST.TWD

'We two (inclusive) came back.'

(6b) **Gannga**   mirnd-**any**.

return   1.DU.INC.S-PST.AWY

'We two (inclusive) went back.'

(7) *Bungmanyi-ni*   *gin-**amany***   *yanybi*.

old.man-ERG   3.SG.M.A-PST.TWD get

'The old man came and got her.'

As well as having grammatically free word order, Wambaya also allows

discontinuous constituents (for example, the ergative subject in (4)) and null

anaphora, having all the classic hallmarks of nonconfigurationality (e.g. Hale 1983,

see also Nordlinger 1998b). Usually the verb either precedes (2) or follows (3-5) the

auxiliary, but as shown in (8), they too can be discontiguous:

(8) "*Injannga*   *ini*   *julaji*   ***gi-n***

where.from   this.I.SG.NOM bird.I(NOM) 3.SG.S-PROG

ngarra   ***bardbi***?"

1.SG.OBL   run

"Where did this bird come to me from?"

Nouns are inflected for case (nominative (S), ergative (A) and accusative (O), as well as semantic cases), number (dual and plural) and four noun classes – masculine (Class I), feminine (Class II), vegetable (Class III) and neuter (Class IV). All nominal marking is done by suffix. A more detailed grammatical description of Wambaya can be found in Nordlinger (1998a), with discussion of its nonconfigurational structure and theoretical implications in Nordlinger (1998b).

3. Serial Verbs in Wambaya

The typical Wambaya clause does not involve verb serialisation, but rather is headed jointly by a single lexical verb and a grammatical auxiliary, as shown in examples such as (2) to (8) above. Indeed, serial verb constructions are only briefly discussed in the grammatical description (Nordlinger 1998a:194-195). However, closer examination of the data reveals a number of finite clauses in Wambaya discourse that contain more than one verb, neither of which is marked for subordination or coordination in any way. Consider the following examples, in which the verbs are given in bold.

(9) **Gaj-ba**   *ng-u*   **ganjimi**   *manganyma*   *mama*.
   eat-FUT   1.SG.A-FUT   finish   tucker.III(ACC)   this.III(ACC)
   'I'm going to eat all of this tucker.'

(10) **Barngala**   *gi-n*   **mirra**.
   sit.with.legs.crossed   3.SG.S-PROG   sit
   'He's sitting with his legs crossed.'

(11) **Gulugbi** *ng-u*   *ngawurniji*   **yarru**.

sleep   1.SG.S-FUT   1.SG.NOM   go

'I'm going off to sleep. '

(12) **Daguma** *ng-u*   **barlaj-ardi**.

hit   1.SG.A-FUT   be.unconscious-CAUS

'I'll kill him by hitting.'

These multi-verb constructions satisfy the general definitions of serial verbs given in the literature (e.g. Foley & Van Valin 1984, Foley & Olson 1985, Crowley 1987, Sebba 1987, Durie 1997, Aikhenvald 2006a). Aikhenvald (2006a:1) for example, defines a serial verb construction (SVC) as "a sequence of verbs which act together as a single predicate, without any overt marker or coordination, subordination, or syntactic dependency of any other sort". Thus SVCs are monoclausal; they describe something that is conceptualised as a single event; they share a single tense, aspect, mood and polarity value; have the intonational properties of a single clause, and share at least one argument (e.g. Durie 1997, Aikhenvald 2006a and other references cited above).

These properties can all be shown to hold of the Wambaya SVCs exemplified in (9)-(12) above. Firstly, each verb in these multi-verb constructions is capable of functioning as a main verb in its own right: appearing as the sole verbal predicate in a clause, and inflecting for verbal inflectional categories such as future tense (see (16)-(17) below). Furthermore, these multi-verb constructions are clearly distinct from both subordinate and coordinate constructions. Verbs in (non-finite) subordinate clause constructions carry special morphological marking which specifies the temporal relationship between the subordinate and main clauses, and may also

indicate whether or not the two verbs have the same subject. The LOC case *–ni* in (13) indicates that the subject of the subordinate clause is the same as that of the main clause, while the use of the infinitive suffix *–barda* in (14) marks the subordinate clause subject as co-referential with the main clause object (see Nordlinger 1998a: 212ff for discussion).

(13) [**Ngarli-ni**]   *irri-ng-a*   *ngurra*   *abajabaja-mi.*

     talk-LOC   3.PL.A-1.O-NF   1.PL.INC.ACC   crazy-FAC

     'They make us confused (when they're) talking.'

(14) *Nganki*   *ngiy-a*   *lurrgbanyi* *wardangarringa-ni*

     this.II.SG.ERG   3.SG.F.A-PST grab   moon.II-ERG

     alaji   [**gulug-barda**].

     child.I(ACC)   sleep-INF

     'The moon grabbed her sleeping child.'

Coordinate constructions (and also finite subordinate clauses, see Nordlinger (2006)) do not contain any morphological marking of coordination (15), yet can still be distinguished from the SVCs in (9-12) by the fact that each clause must also contain its own auxiliary (although cf. 'reduced coordinations' discussed in §4 below).

(15) *Balamurru*   *gun-u*   *banjarri-j-ba,* *dudiyarri-j-ba*

     spear.IV(ACC)   3.SG.M.A-FUT throw-TH-FUT spear-TH-FUT

     gunu-ny-u.

     3.SG.M.A-2.O-FUT

     'He's going to throw the spear and spear you.'

SVCs in Wambaya also share a single tense, aspect, modality (TAM) value, which follows from the fact that the clause must contain only one auxiliary (which is the primary locus for TAM marking). There is a minimal amount of TAM marking on the verb – showing just a future/imperative vs. unmarked distinction, as discussed in §2. In future tense SVCs, it is possible for just one (16) or both (17) of the verbs to carry future tense marking, with no difference in the TAM value for the clause as a whole.

(16) ***Gaj-ba***   *ng-u*   ***ganjimi***   *manganyma*   *mama.*

eat-FUT   1.SG.A-FUT   finish   tucker.III(ACC)   this.III(ACC)

'I'm going to eat all of this tucker.'

(17) ***Ngarl-wa***   *ngurru*   ***ganjima.***

speak-FUT   1.PL.INC.S(NPST)   finish.FUT

'We'll finish talking completely (i.e. fill up the tape).'

As is typical for verb serialising languages (e.g. Durie 1997, Aikhenvald 2006a) SVCs in Wambaya fall into a number of different semantics types, each with different structural properties. These include adverbial (manner) constructions (§3.1), positional constructions (§3.2), motion constructions (§3.3), and cause-effect constructions (§3.4). We can also distinguish these true SVCs from reduced coordinate constructions (also called 'coordinate serialisation' (Sebba 1987)), as discussed in §4.

3.1   Adverbial manner constructions

In adverbial manner SVCs one verb functions to specify the manner in which the action described by the other verb is carried out. These construction types are relatively common in Australian languages (e.g. Dyirbal (Dixon 1972), Yidiny (Dixon 1977), Arrernte (Wilkins 1988), Kayardild (Evans 1995)).

In Aikhenvald's (2006a) terms, these are asymmetrical SVCs, since one verb – the minor verb – is taken from a semantically restricted set of verbs, including *gurinymi* 'make good', *ganjimi* 'finish' and *bagimi* 'spoil, ruin, make bad'. Examples include:

(18) **Gaj-ba**   *ng-u*   **ganjimi**   *manganyma*   *mama.*

eat-FUT   1.SG.A-FUT   finish   tucker.III(ACC)   this.III(ACC)

'I'm going to eat all of this tucker.'

(19) **Angbardi-j-ba**   *gun-u*   **gurinymi**

build-TH-FUT   3.SG.M.A-FUT   make.good

'He's going to build (the houses) properly.'

(20) **Warima** *ng-a*   *marrajana*   **yardugami**.

hold   1.SG.A-PST   pillow.IV(ACC)   make.strong

'I held the pillow tightly.'

As in the above examples, there is a strong tendency for the major, more semantically specific, verb to precede the manner verb in these constructions, although there may be other elements in between them. This ordering is not obligatory, however, as shown by the following example in which the manner verb is sentence-initial.

(21) **Bagimi** *irr-a* **yurndu**.

     spoil   3.PL.A-PST   hit.with.missile

     'They missed him (with the spear).'

Being serial verb constructions, these clauses must contain a single TAM value. However, there is a fair amount of inconsistency in the data as to how this is realised morphologically: i.e. whether both verbs must carry the same TAM inflection, or whether the TAM marking can appear just on the main verb while the other remains in the unmarked (non-future tense) form. Examples (18) and (19) above illustrate the latter pattern of marking. In these future-tense examples the first verbs (*gajba* and *agbardijba*, respectively) are marked for future tense while the manner verbs remain unmarked. In the following examples, however, both verbs are inflected:

(22) **Ngarl-wa** **gurinyma**!

     speak-FUT   make.good.FUT

     'Speak properly!'

(23) **Ngarl-wa** *ngurru* **ganjima.**

     speak-FUT   1.PL.INC.S(NPST)   finish.FUT

     'We'll finish talking completely (i.e. fill up the tape).'

Speakers claim that there is no difference in meaning between these two possibilities, and so I will assume that they are simply alternatives.

3.2   *Positional constructions*

In this type of asymmetrical verb serialisation, one verb functions to further specify the semantics of a positional verb, one of *mirra* 'sit', *gulugbi* 'sleep, lie down', *garranbi* 'stand'. In terms of function, these serial constructions could be considered a subtype of adverbial manner constructions discussed in §3.1. However, these constructions differ from those in §3.1 in that they always have the manner verb *before* the positional verb, while adverbial manner constructions most commonly have the opposite order with the manner verb coming second.[5]

(24) **Gardurru** *nyi* **mirra.**
sit.with.outstretched.legs 2.SG.S(PRES) sit
'You're sitting with your legs out straight.'

(25) **Darridarri** *irri-n* **mirra/garranbi.**
be.in.a.line 3.PL.S-PROG sit/stand
'They're sitting/standing in a line.'

(26) **Barngala** *gi-n* **mirra**.
sit.with.legs.crossed 3.SG.S-PROG sit
'He's sitting with his legs crossed.'

(27) **Jirrbali** *gi-n* *naniyaga* **gulugbi**.
be.bellyup 3.SG.S-PROG that.II.SG.NOM sleep
'She's sleeping belly-up.'

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[5] However, as noted by a reviewer, in both cases the more semantically specific verb tends to precede the less semantically specific verb so in that respect the two types show the same pattern.

As with all verbs in SVCs, the manner verb can be shown to be truly a verb in its own right by the fact that it (i) can occur as the main predicate in a clause containing an auxiliary (28), and (ii) can take the future/imperative inflection (29). I have not been able to determine what semantic difference there is (if any) between examples like (28), in which the more specific verb functions as the sole predicate of the sentence, and equivalent serial constructions like (26).

(28) ***Barngala***   *gi-n*   *nana.*

sit.with.legs.crossed   3.SG.S-PROG this.II.SG.NOM

'She's sitting with her legs crossed.'

(29) ***Barngali-j-ba***   *giliyaga!*

sit.with.legs.crossed-TH-FUT   there

'Sit down there with your legs crossed!'

3.3   Motion constructions

Cross-linguistically, the most common type of serial verb construction involves one of the intransitive motion verbs 'come' and 'go' (Foley & Olson 1985:41, Crowley 2002:44). In Wambaya, such serial constructions are relatively infrequent, presumably due to the existence of the directional marking on the auxiliary (see §2), but they are nonetheless found – all with the motion verb *yarru* 'go/come'.

(30) ***Gulugbi*** *ng-u*   *ngawurniji*   ***yarru****.*

sleep   1.SG.S-FUT   1.SG.NOM   go

'I'm going off to sleep.'

(31) **Yarru**   *ngurl-aji*   **lingba-lingba**.

go   1.DU.EXC.S-HAB.PST   swim-RDP

'We used to go off to swim.'

(32) *Gayini*   *g-a*   **yarru** *ginkanyi*   **nanganangali**?

who.I(NOM)   3.SG.S-PST   go   this.way   sneak

'Who went sneaking off this way?'

(33) **Ganinggiji**   *gi-n*   **yarru**!

be.close   3.SG.S-PROG   go

'He's coming close!'

The two verbs in these serial constructions can appear in either order (compare (30) and (31)), and the order need not reflect the order of (sub-)events (e.g. (30)), although it usually does. This reverse-ordering is unusual cross-linguistically, with Durie (1997:335) asserting that "[a] motion verb occurs in the position dictated by temporal sequencing of sub-events." It is interesting to note that the Waanyi motion serial verb constructions discussed by Laughren (2009) also allow both ordering possibilities for verbs. I return to a discussion of word order in Wambaya serial verb constructions in section §5 below.

It is interesting to consider how the semantics of these motion serial constructions relates to the use of directional affixes discussed in §2. In fact, the motion serial verb constructions show a similar semantic contrast to the directional affixes: when combined with another motion verb, as in (32), the resulting semantics is one of simultaneous motion; a single event. When combined with a non-motion verb, on the

other hand, the resulting combination usually encodes a sequential motion event, as in (31).

Thus, while motion verb serializations are clearly structurally distinct from associated motion constructions encoded with directional affixes, since they involve two lexical verbs (in addition to the auxiliary), the semantics of the constructions share strong similarities (see Nordlinger 2010 for detailed discussion and analysis). Indeed, serial verb constructions such as (32) and (33) above can always be paraphrased with an associated motion construction, as in (32') and (33'):

(32') *Gayini*   *g-**amany***   *ginkanyi*   ***nanganangali***?

who.I(NOM)   3.SG.S-PST.TWD   this.way   sneak

'Who snuck off this way?'

(33') ***Ganinggiji***   *g-**ulama**!*

be.close   3.SG.S-NPST.TWD

'He's coming close!'

As far as I can determine, the only semantic difference between (32') and (33') and their SVC equivalents is that the associated motion constructions explicitly encode deixis (i.e. motion away vs. motion towards), whereas *yarru* in the serial verb constructions is deixis-neutral, leaving the direction of motion to be determined from the context.

There is one example in the corpus in which a motion SVC is combined with a direction marker in the auxiliary, showing that it is also possible to combine the two constructions:

(34) *Di-didija*   *wurl-any*   *yarru*.

RDP-hold.on.hip   3.DU.S-PST.AWY   go

'They went away carrying (their children) on their hips.'

3.4   Cause-effect constructions

In this type of serial verb construction, one verb focuses on the causing deed (e.g.

'hit') and the other on the effect (e.g. 'make unconscious'), as shown in the following

examples. Object NPs, when expressed, often come between the two verbs (e.g. (37),

(39)), as can other complements (38), although this is not a requirement (cf. (44)).

(35) **Daguma** *ng-u*   **barlaj-ardi**.

hit   1.SG.A-FUT   be.unconscious-CAUS

'I'll kill him by hitting (I'll hit and kill him).'

(36) **Daguma** *gin-a*   **guruburr-ardi**.

hit   3.SG.M.A-PST   be.faint-CAUS

'He knocked him out by hitting him.'

(37) **Warima** *ng-a*   *yana*   **jinbarrardi**

hold   1.SG.A-PST   this.IV.SG.ACC   squash

'I squashed it in my hand (by holding it).'

(38) **Nawu**   *ng-u*   *narunguji-ni*   **bujurrijanymi**

step.on   1.SG.A-FUT   car.IV-LOC   mangle

'I ran over and mangled it with the car.'

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(39) **Nyanyayumi**   *naniyaga*   **dulanmi-j-ba**!

      shake.s'thing   that.II.SG.ACC   waken-TH-FUT

      'Shake her awake!'

(40) **Dawu-j-ba**   *gunu-ny-u*   **gurda-jirrimi**

      bite-TH-FUT   3.SG.M.A-2.O-FUT   sick-CAUS

      'He'll poison you by biting (i.e. a snake).'

(41) *Yanybi*   *ngirr-aji,*   **didija**   *ngirr-aji*

      get   1.PL.EXC.A-HAB.PST   carry   1.PL.EXC.A-HAB.PST

      yabu   *magi-nmanji.*

      take   camp.IV-ALL

      'We'd get (them), we'd carry them to camp (lit. we'd take them to

      camp by carrying).'

Cause-effect serial verb constructions in Wambaya are characterised by a strong transitivity-matching requirement (see also Tariana (Aikhenvald 2006b)).[6] This is shown clearly by the fact that intransitive verbs must be causativised when co-occurring in a cause-effect SVC with a transitive verb such as *daguma* 'hit', but not with an intransitive verb such as *bardgu* 'fall':

(42) **Daguma** *ng-u*   **barlaj-ardi**. / ***barlaji**

      hit   1.SG.A-FUT   be.unconscious-CAUS / be.unconscious

      'I'll kill him by hitting.'

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[6] A similar phenomenon in Rawang has been referred to by LaPolla (2008) as 'transitivity harmony'.

(43) ***Daguma*** *gin-a* ***barlaj-ardi,*** ***bardgu*** *g-a*

hit　　　　3.SG.M.A-PST be.unconscious-CAUS　fall　　3.SG.S-PST

barlaji*.*

be.unconscious

'He hit and killed him and he fell down dead.'

As a result of this transitivity matching, the two verbs in Wambaya cause-effect SVCs always share the same arguments. Interestingly, such transitivity matching is not commonly reported in the general serial verb literature (although cf. Aikhenvald (2006b)), but does seem to be relatively common in serial verb constructions in Australian languages (see §5 for discussion).

The following text excerpt highlights the use of a cause-effect SVC to emphasise a construal as a single complex event.[7] In the first line the speaker introduces two events 'hitting himself' and 'breaking his arm' as coordinated clauses. These two actions are fairly significant in the story, however, as the main protagonist (the *Barnanggi*) continues to jump on different parts of the *Jabiru* causing the *Jabiru* to break his own limbs by hitting at the *Barnanggi*. Once the two events have been presented in the coordinate sentence, an SVC is then used to reinforce the single event of breaking by hitting, as shown in the final clause in (44).

(44) ***Daguma*** *gini-ngg-a,* ***ngujari*** *gini-ngg-a.*

hit　　　　3.SG.M.A-RR-NF　　break　3.SG.M.A-RR-NF

'He (Jabiru) hit himself and broke his (arm).'

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[7] This text is a traditional dreamtime story about the *Barnanggi* (a small bird, perhaps a Hobby) and the Jabiru. The full story is provided in Nordlinger (1998a: 233-239).

Dirragbi   *g-a*   *gunya-nmanji.*

jump   3.SG.S-PST   other.IV-ALL

'He (*Barnanggi*) jumped on the other (arm).'

Daguma   *gini-ngg-a*   **ngujari**   *jarlu.*

hit   3.SG.M.A-RR-NF   break   arm.IV(NOM)

'He (*Jabiru)* hit (and) broke his arm.'

Cause-effect serial verb constructions cross-linguistically require iconic ordering of verbs such that the verb expressing causation precedes the verb of result (e.g. Durie 1997:306, Aikhenvald 2006a:16); the order of the verbs therefore reflects the real-world order of the sub-events. While this is true in many of the Wambaya cause-effect SVCs, such as those given in (35)-(41) above, it appears to be only a tendency in Wambaya, not a requirement. Examples such as the following show that it is also possible to find anti-iconic orderings of verbs in cause-effect serial verb constructions.

(45)   **Guruburr-ardi**   *ngu-ny-u*   **daguma**.

      be.faint-CAUS   1.SG.A-2.O-FUT   hit

      'I'm going to knock you out (by hitting).'

(46)   **Barlaj-ardi**   *ngu-ny-u*   **daguma**.

      be.unconscious-CAUS   1.SG.A-2.O-FUT   hit

      'I'm going to kill you (by hitting).'

(47) *Ngaba*   *nguy-u*   *irra*   **ngarl-ulumi**   *damangg*

    THEN   3.SG.F.A-FUT   3.PL.ACC talk-CAUS   head

    daguma.

    hit

    'Then someone allows them to talk by hitting their head.'[8]

(48) **Yugu-yugu-lumi**   *gin-a*   *irra*   **bard-babu**.

    RDP-cry-CAUS   3.SG.M.A-PST   3.PL.ACC   run-OP

    'He made them cry by taking off with them.'

Such anti-iconic orderings of cause-effect serial verb constructions appear to be rare

cross-linguistically, and are not reported for other languages in the extensive verb

serialisation literature. In Wambaya, however, they appear to function to highlight the

'singleness' of the event being described, as evidenced by the fact that this ordering is

more likely when the two sub-events are 'non-obviously' related (as in 'hit' and

'cause to talk' in (47) or 'make cry' and 'run away with' in (48)). I will return to this

issue in §5 after discussing 'reduced coordinations' in the next section.

4 Reduced coordination

All of the SVC types discussed above involve classic serialisation (also called 'tight'

serialisation (Goddard 1988), 'subordinate serialisation' (Sebba 1987), or nuclear

serialisation (Foley & Olson 1985)), in which two verbs are joined together to create a

complex predicate, with a single set of arguments. This type of serialisation is often

contrasted in the literature with 'loose' (Goddard 1988), 'coordinate' (Sebba 1987) or 'core' (Foley & Olson 1985) serialisation, which is used to express a series of consecutive, but related, events and thus is closer to straight coordination than tight serialisation is. In Wambaya we also find a construction of this type, which I refer to as 'reduced coordination' to distinguish it from the true serialisation constructions discussed in §3. Consider the following examples:

(49) *Gayinini-ni gin-a*   **wurrudbanyi** *irra,*   **ginganj-ardi.**
    what.I-ERG 3.SG.M.A-PST pull   3.PL.ACC drown-CAUS
    'Something pulled them (under the water) (and) drowned (them).'

(50) **Gulugbi** *g-a,*   **yandu** *yangaji*   *nanga*   *naj-barda.*
    sleep   3.SG.S-PST mind   meat.I(ACC) 3.SG.M.OBL burn-INF
    'He slept, (and) looked after his meat that was cooking.'

In the reduced coordination construction, a full finite clause is followed immediately by a verb and (possibly) non-subject arguments, but crucially *no auxiliary* (which is what distinguishes these from true coordinations, as illustrated in (15)). While they may appear similar to the SVC constructions on the surface, reduced coordinations

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[8] The speaker here is describing the traditional practice surrounding young women's first menstruation. The young women would need to spend a period of time in silence after which an older female relative would tap them on the head signalling that they could speak again.

have the following properties which distinguish them from the tight serialisation structures discussed in §3.[9]

(i) they are characterised by a brief pause before the second verb, represented by a comma in examples (whereas tight SVCs have no pause);[10]

(ii) each verb may have its own non-subject arguments (e.g. (51)) (whereas all arguments are shared in a tight SVC);

(iii) the order between the verbs *must* reflect the temporal sequencing of events (whereas tight SVCs allow anti-iconic orders);

(iv) although most of these constructions involve two verbs, it is also possible for them to contain (at least) three (e.g. (53)) (whereas tight SVCs only ever involve two verbs).

(v) these constructions denote a sequence of closely related events, rather than a single complex event (whereas tight SVCs highlight the 'single' nature of the event).

(51) **Nguya**　　*ngirr-aji*　　　　　　　*jamba,*　　　　　**wugbardi**
　　　 dig　　　 1.PL.EXC.A-HAB.PST　ground.IV(ACC)　cook

　　　 mayinanji.
　　　 goanna.I(ACC)

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[9] The related language Jingulu also appears to have reduced coordinate constructions (Rob Pensalfini, pers. comm., also 2003, 2011), but differs from Wambaya in not also having true serial verb constructions.

[10] I agree with Crowley (2002) that such arguments from intonation and prosody hold little weight if proper prosodic analysis has not been undertaken (and, in this case, it hasn't). However, even to the phonetically-naïve ear, there is a perceptible pause between the verbs in loose serialisation structures which is not there in the tight serial constructions I discuss in §3.

'We'd dig (a hole in) the ground and cook the goanna.'

(52) ***Work-ngali***   *ngirr-aji*   *marndanga-nka,*

work-xx[11]   1.PL.EXC.S-HAB.PST   white.woman.II-DAT

'We were working for the white woman:

wagardbi   *danya,*   ***banngarr-ardi****.*

wash   clothes.IV(ACC)   dry-CAUS

(we'd) wash clothes, dry (them).'

Although these constructions appear similar to what have been referred to as 'loose' (Goddard 1988), 'coordinate' (Sebba 1987) or 'core' (Foley & Olson 1985) serialisation in the literature, I refer to them as 'reduced coordinations', which is clearly where their origins lie (Foley & Olson 1985, Andrews & Manning 1999).[12] However, they can be clearly distinguished from regular coordinate constructions as in (15) by the fact that the two verbs are more closely linked, sharing the same subject, tense, aspect and mood, and the second clause is not a full clause as it does not contain an auxiliary.[13]

Furthermore, these reduced coordinations differ from SVCs in that they *must* reflect iconic ordering: the order of verbs within the construction *must* reflect the

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[11] I cannot identify the function of this suffix; it doesn't appear in any other examples in my corpus.

[12] Furthermore, as a reviewer points out, the presence of a prosodic break in these constructions suggests that they are biclausal, as opposed to true SVCs (although the absence of a proper prosodic analysis of Wambaya clauses means that this claim can be considered only tentative).

[13]In the Foley & Van Valin (1984) framework (also Van Valin & La Polla 1997) these can be thought of as being core junctures with co-subordinate nexus.

temporal ordering of the sub-events. Thus, in contrast to the tight serialisation in (46), repeated here as (53), with its anti-iconic ordering of verbs, we can find reduced coordinations, as in (54). Crucially, however, the verbs in (54) cannot appear in the opposite (anti-iconic) order without a change in meaning, as indicated in (55).

(53) ***Barlaj-ardi***   *ngu-ny-u*   ***daguma***.
be.unconscious-CAUS   1.SG.A-2.O-FUT   hit
'I'm going to kill you (by hitting).'

(54) ***Daguma*** *ngu-ny-u,*   ***barlaj-ardi***.
hit   1.SG.A-2.O-FUT   be.unconscious-CAUS
'I'm going to hit you, and kill you.'

(55) *****Barlaj-ardi***   *ngu-ny-u,*   ***daguma***.
be.unconscious-CAUS   1.SG.A-2.O-FUT   hit
(Could only mean 'I'm going to kill you and hit you'.)

This contrast is shown again in (56), in which we find a tight serialisation and a reduced coordination involving the same verbs, in a text about the enforced removal of children from their parents (known in Australia as 'the Stolen Generation'). In the first line, we have a tight serialisation expressing the single complex event 'cause to cry by running off with', in which the verbs are presented in anti-iconic order. This is then elaborated on by the speaker; she highlights the removal of children in the next clause, and in the final clause presents the two subevents as a reduced coordination, this time with the verbs in iconic order.

(56) **Yugu-yugu-lumi**   *gin-a*   *irra*   **bard-babu**.

RDP-cry-CAUS   3.SG.M.A-PST   3.PL.ACC   run-OP

'He made them cry by taking off with them.'

Lunggadi-ni   *gin-a*   *irra*   *bard-babu.*

policeman.I-ERG 3.SG.M.A-PST   3.PL.ACC run-OP

'The policeman took off with them.'

Ngirnii   *gin-a*   *irra*   **bard-babu**

south   3.SG.M.A-PST   3.PL.ACC   run-OP

bulyingi-rdarra, **yugu-yugu-lumi**.

youth-GROUP   RDP-cry-CAUS

'He took off south with all the young boys, and made them cry.'

As demonstrated in (56), the semantic difference between these two construction lies
in the presentation of the event as either a single complex event (serialisation) or a
series of closely related sub-events (reduced coordination). The text fragment in (56)
shows that the speaker can shift their presentational perspective across these two
options for discourse purposes.

5. Wambaya serial verbs and linguistic typology

In the above discussion we have seen that Wambaya serial verb constructions, despite
being relatively 'peripheral' in the grammatical structure of the language, nonetheless
exhibit many properties characteristic of classic serial verb constructions cross-
linguistically. Wambaya SVCs satisfy all of the standard definitions of serialisation in
the literature, show a range of semantic types (including motion, adverbial, postural,

cause-effect), and can be distinguished from other types of clause-combining including subordination, coordination, and reduced coordination constructions on semantic and structural grounds.

Foley & Olson (1985:41ff) present the following implicational hierarchy of SVC types, arguing that if a language has an SVC type to the right of the hierarchy it will necessarily have types to the left as well.

motion > postural/active intrans. > stative/process intrans. > transitive

In the above discussion we have seen that Wambaya has all of these types, including cause-effect serialisation with transitive verbs. As far as I am aware, this range of SVC types has not been reported for other Australian languages, which generally appear just to have types to the left of the hierarchy (if at all) (e.g. motion SVCs in Waanyi (Laughren 2009), motion and postural in Diyari (Austin 1981:98)); or involve marking one of the verbs as subordinate (Goddard 1988), or as a modifier (Wilkins 1988).

Cause-effect SVCs in Wambaya have a strong transitivity-matching requirement. While this is commonly reported for multiple verb sequences in Australian languages (e.g. Dyirbal (Dixon 1972), Yidiny (Dixon 1977), Ngiyambaa (Donaldson 1980)), it is not a common feature of serialising languages cross-linguistically (although cf. Aikhenvald 2006b). Evans (1995:303) suggests that the transitivity matching commonly found in Australian languages may be due to their morphological ergativity, since otherwise the verbs would conflict in the case assigned to the (shared) subject. While this may indeed be an explanation for its occurrence amongst ergative Australian languages, it appears that such transitivity matching, although not frequent, is also found in other (non-ergative) languages

cross-linguistically, such as Tariana (Andrews & Manning 1999, Aikhenvald 2006b) and Japanese (Sotaro Kita, pers. comm.), so may exist independently of morphological ergativity cross-linguistically.

The most strikingly unusual feature of Wambaya SVCs is the anti-iconic ordering possibilities found with both motion and cause-effect SVCs. Such ordering has not been reported for other languages in the literature, and in fact is generally assumed not to be possible. Durie (1997: 306), for example, states categorically that "In *cause-effect serialization*, the verb indicating a causing deed … comes first, before the verb of effect" (see also Durie (1997: 310) and Aikhenvald (2006a:29)).

However, other work on verb serialization has generally involved languages with fixed word order. As Schiller notes (1990:403) "...serialization is most commonly found in languages which are consistent with regard to the ordering of heads and complements." Wambaya, on the other hand, is a nonconfigurational language with very free word order within the clause, and including the serial verb constructions, as we have seen. Indeed, given the free word order possibilities, the lack of coordination marking, and the existence of reduced coordination constructions in the language, it may be that anti-iconic ordering is employed to strongly highlight the fact that two verbs are to be interpreted as describing a single event. This is supported by the fact that anti-iconic ordering is particularly likely to be used when the two verbs express events that may not be obviously related in the real world (such as 'hit' and 'make talk' in (47)). Anti-iconicity may therefore be enabled by the pragmatically-determined word order of Wambaya, which allows word order to be conditioned by such things as focus and prominence, and appears to provide an important tool for distinguishing a serial verb construction from other possible construction types in the language. Its cross-linguistic rarity, therefore, may be due to the small number of languages with both verb serialisation and grammatically free

word order, rather than a restriction on anti-iconic ordering in serial verb constructions *per se*.

6. Conclusion

Serial verb constructions in Wambaya present a number of implications for language typology and linguistic theory. Australian languages are generally not considered in the discussions of verb serialisation cross-linguistically, yet the existence of a range of serial verb constructions types in Wambaya, when added to growing evidence of serial verb constructions in other Australian languages also (e.g. Goddard 1988, Evans 1995, and Laughren's (2009) recent work on Waanyi), reminds us that languages may have serial verb constructions even if they are not central to a language's core grammatical structure. Furthermore, the nonconfigurational syntax of a language like Wambaya makes it an interesting test-case for the interaction of serial verb constructions with other aspects of the grammatical system. Indeed, the Wambaya data has revealed the possibility of anti-iconic ordering in motion and cause-effect serial verb constructions, a possibility not previously allowed for in the cross-linguistic literature. I have suggested that it is the nonconfigurational syntactic structure of Wambaya, which allows for pragmatically-conditioned word order, that leads to the word order freedom within its serial verb constructions; a possibility not available for languages with stricter word ordering constraints. While evidence from other nonconfigurational languages with serial verb constructions is needed to fully establish this correlation, the existence of serial verb constructions in Wambaya, with their anti-iconic ordering properties, reminds us of the importance of considering the full range of linguistic structural diversity in our quest for typological generalisations about construction types.

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