



**HAL**  
open science

# Compound Verbs and Modalities of Process in Yulu (Central Sudanic)

Pascal Boyeldieu

► **To cite this version:**

Pascal Boyeldieu. Compound Verbs and Modalities of Process in Yulu (Central Sudanic). M. Reh & D.L. Payne. Advances in Nilo-Saharan Linguistics. Proceedings of the 8th Nilo-Saharan Linguistics Colloquium, University of Hamburg, August 22-25, 2001, Rüdiger Köppe, p. 25-39, 2007, Nilo-Saharan 22. halshs-00331316

**HAL Id: halshs-00331316**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00331316>**

Submitted on 17 Dec 2008

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Boyeldieu Pascal, 2007, Compound Verbs and Modalities of Process in Yulu (Central Sudanic), *Advances in Nilo-Saharan Linguistics. Proceedings of the 8th Nilo-Saharan Linguistics Colloquium, University of Hamburg, August 22-25, 2001* (M. Reh & D.L. Payne eds), Köln, Rüdiger Köppe Verlag (Nilo-Saharan 22), 25-39.

## **Compound Verbs and Modalities of Process in Yulu (Central Sudanic)**

Pascal Boyeldieu (CNRS, France)

### **1. Introduction**

Yulu is a Central Sudanic language (Bongo-Bagirmi group) which is spoken by small communities traditionally settled both in the Central African Republic (Préfecture de la Vakaga) and the Republic of the Sudan (Bahr-el Ghazal and Southern Darfur Provinces).

Yulu discourse exhibits a fair number of verb clusters which constitute a striking feature of the language and raise some questions concerning their syntactic status. Such a grouping is illustrated in example (1) below. (The illustration is taken from an animal story: the mud wasp and the hare go for a walk, the rain comes, the mud wasp hides in hare's nose and now in order to check whether the rain has stopped...)

- (1) *àmäadá ìyā.lítà.láayá jàa-ngè dè sāmà*  
 mud wasp bends.bring out.lets come head-its of nose  
*gōomā*  
 hare  
 ‘the mud wasp bends its head out of hare's nose’

The cluster is made up of the three following verbs: *ìyā* ‘bend (head)’, *lítà* ‘let go/come out’, which does not exist as an isolated verb but looks like a transitive regularly-derived verb from *ìtā* ‘go/come out’, and *láayá* ‘let come’ which again, although never isolated, looks like a derived transitive from *àayā* ‘come’.

As will be argued below, such clusters do not allow insertion of any morpheme and act as single, although structurally complex, predicates with respect to the arguments they share as a whole. They are usually composed of two, three or even four verbs and are rather common in the texts (about three clusters for every four single verbs) as the following table shows:

(counts from the tale [Tumengeer and the frog])

single verbs	clusters of			total
	2 verbs	3 verbs	4 verbs	
117	65	20	3	117 // 88

The aim of this paper is twofold:

(i) I will expound the main morphosyntactic features of these complex forms, which I call compound verbs, and situate them within a more general typology of serial verbs;<sup>1</sup>

(ii) I will show that within this common formal pattern, certain component verbs tend to behave in specific ways which clearly indicate trends toward lexicalization and grammaticalization.

## 2. The structure of verbs

Apart from a very few monosyllabic exceptions, Yulu verb stems have a (C)V(:)Cə pattern. The main patterns are illustrated in (2):<sup>2</sup>

(2)	VCə	àlā	‘swallow’
	V:Cə	ūubà	‘get, find’
	CVCə	rùsá	‘pound’
	CV:Cə	ndéédâ	‘hide’

1. I am very grateful to Roger Blench, Matthew Dryer, Orin Gensler and Mechthild Reh for drawing my attention to the situation of Kalam (Pawley, 1993) and a more general view of serial verbs (Foley and Van Valin, 1984). Matthew Dryer very kindly provided me with several references on this topic.

2. Yulu is a tone language with four relevant levels: high (*á*), mid (*ā*), low (*à*) and extra-low (*ã*).

The usual structure of the verb word is made up of the following morphemes:

(i) segmental subject person marker (e.g. *m-/m̄* ‘I’, *j-/j̄* ‘we’, *n-/n̄* ‘Logophoric’), which may be null ( $\emptyset$  ‘thou/you’, ‘(s)he/they’ and nominal subject);

(ii) (OPTIONAL) verbal dependency marker (e.g. *g-/ḡ* ‘Conditional’, *k-/k̄* ‘Relativizer’, *t-/t̄* ‘Dependent’);

(iii) verb stem (some marked by two alternating tone patterns according to the subject);<sup>3</sup>

(iv) (OPTIONAL) verbal plural marker (*-k̄*)

This common pattern is illustrated by examples in (3) below:<sup>4</sup>

- (3) *m-úub̄* ‘I find’  
I-find
- ūub̄* ‘(s)he finds’  
(s)he/they+find
- ūub̄-k̄* ‘they find’  
(s)he/they+find-PL
- ...n̄-t-ūub̄* ‘[...says that] ...himself/herself finds’  
...LOG-DEP-find
- ...n̄-t-ūub̄-k̄* ‘[...say that] ...themselves find’  
...LOG-DEP-find-PL

No other morpheme of any kind can appear within this frame, i.e., between the personal marker or the dependency marker and the verb stem, or between the verb stem and the plural marker. The

3. This is a typical feature of Bongo-Bagirmi languages. It allows differentiation between 2d and 3d person for which the segmental marker is null, e.g., *m-úub̄* {I-find} ‘I find’, *úub̄* {thou/you+find} ‘you find’, *ūub̄* {(s)he/they+find} ‘(s)he finds’, *l̄aḡ ūub̄* {somebody find} ‘somebody finds’.

4. The following abbreviations are used throughout the examples: COMPL Completed, DEP Dependent, IMMSUCC Immediate Successive, INTENS Intensive, Intrans. Intransitive, LOG Logophoric, NEG Negation, PL Plural, PL.SUBJ. plural subject, PROGR Progressive, RESULT Resultative, Trans. Transitive.

Negative *c̄* and the Resultative (near/far) *'tè/'tà* appear after the Plural, if any, as in (4):

- (4) *ūuβà-kē*                      *c̄*                      ‘they didn't find’  
 (s)he/they+find-PL    NEG  
*ūuβà-kē*                      *'tà*              *njàʔá*  
 (s)he/they+find-PL    RESULT    rope  
 ‘they have found the rope’

### 3. Compound verbs

In case of compounding, the two (or more) verb stems are tightly bound together. If the second component is a consonant-initial stem, each component keeps its segmental identity. As a notational convention, the stems are separated by a dot in such a case, as in (5):

- (5) *njàamá* + *láʔà*              =      *njàamá.láʔà*  
 ‘sit’              ‘cool’                      ‘rest (one's body)’

If the second component is a vowel-initial verb, neighboring vowels overlap: only the tone of the first component's last vowel and the quality of the second component's first vowel are preserved. In this case, the compound is written as a single word, as in (6):

- (6) *njàamá* + *àʔā*              =      *njàamáʔā*  
 ‘sit’              ‘breathe’                      ‘rest, take a rest’

In every case, only the tonal alternation –if any– of the first verb is preserved, while the tone pattern of the following verb(s), which may be partly lost, becomes invariable. Example (7) illustrates the tonal behavior of different kinds of compounds; single and compound verbs are indicated with their two alternating patterns (tone 1/tone 2):

- (7) *àzā/āzā* + *nzìgà/nzīgà*              =      *àzā.nzìgà/āzā.nzīgà*  
 ‘sweep’              ‘be clean’                      ‘sweep clean’  
*njàamá/njáamá* + *láʔà/láʔà*              =      *njàamá.láʔà/njáamá.láʔà*  
 ‘sit’                      ‘cool’                      ‘rest (one's body)’

*njàamá/njáamá* + *àlā/ālā* = *njàamálā/njáamálā*  
 ‘sit’ ‘breathe’ ‘rest, take a rest’

Beside possible segmental overlapping and tonal invariance, the strong cohesion of the compound verb is shown by the facts that it does not allow insertion of any morpheme, and it behaves as a single unit relative to the morphemes (i), (ii) and (iv) introduced in Section 2, which appear only once with the compound cluster, as shown in example (8):<sup>5</sup>

- (8) ...*nā-tà-njàamá.lálà-kē* *cō* *yáà-tè*  
 ...LOG-DEP-sit.cool-PL NEG body-their  
 ‘[...say that] ...themselves do not rest (their body)’
- ...*nā-tà-njàamá.lálà-kē* *’tā* *yáà-tè*  
 ...LOG-DEP-sit.cool-PL RESULT body-their  
 ‘[...say that] ...themselves have rested (their body)’

Though structurally complex, the compound verb also behaves as a single predicate relative to the arguments of the clause, which the compound governs as a whole. Thus in (1) above, not only the subject *āmāadā* ‘mud wasp’ but also the object *jāa-ngè* ‘its head’ and even the circumstantial *dā sāmā gōomā* ‘out of hare's nose’ have to be viewed as arguments of the whole predicate *iyā.lítà.láyá* ‘bends out’ (lit. ‘bends.brings out.lets come’); there is no reason to consider that there is a preferential link between any argument and any single component of the compound verb. A decisive point in this respect is that compound verbs tend to observe concord of the transitive/intransitive nature of their components. Specific derivatives are possibly built for that purpose, as in example (1) where *.lítà* ‘let go/come out’ and *.láyá* ‘let come’ are derived from *itā* ‘go/come out’ and *àayā* ‘come’, respectively, in order to conform to the transitivity of *iyā* ‘bend

5. Yulu infinitives are derived by prefixing *l-* to vowel-initial verbs only, e.g. *ūumā* ‘penetrate’ > *l-ūumā* ‘to penetrate’, *àayā* ‘come’ > *l-àayā* ‘to come’. In case of compounding, the infinitive prefix likewise appears on the first verb only, e.g. *ūumàayā* ‘penetrate towards’ > *l-ūumàayā* ‘to penetrate towards’.

(head)'.<sup>6</sup> Such a concord rule has already been observed for serial verbs in other languages (e.g. in Paamese for nuclear serial verbs (Crowley, 1987:63) and in Nêlêmwa (Bril, n.d.), both Oceanic languages).

In a chapter dedicated to *Juncture and operators*, Foley and Van Valin (1984:187-197) establish a distinction between *core serial verbs*, where several verbs share no more than one of the *core arguments* (subject or object), and *nuclear serial verbs*, where verbs share all the same arguments (both *core* and *peripheral*, like benefactive, comitative, circumstantial, etc.), thus constituting a single *nucleus*. In that sense, Yulu compound verbs clearly belong to the second type, i.e. nuclear serial verbs.<sup>7</sup>

Why, then, speak of *compound verbs* in Yulu? Originally I spontaneously made that choice by contrast with the general situation of serial verbs in West African languages, which seem to be most frequently of the *core juncture* type.<sup>8</sup> Now it has to be justified relative to other languages where scholars make a distinction between *nuclear serial verbs* and *verb compounding*.

Such a distinction is made by Crowley (1987) for Paamese, an Oceanic language. Crowley argues that besides core serial verbs and nuclear serial verbs, Paamese also has some instances of compound verbs. These differ from nuclear serial verbs by the fact that they behave like single words and do not follow the phonological boundary rules for stress, vowel reduction and desyllabification (Crowley, 1987:60). But in fact he does not give

---

6. Transitivity concord is not absolute however. In *njàamó.lá?ð yáà-ngè* 'he rests (his body)' for instance (cf. (7) and (8)), *yáà-ngè* 'his body' can definitely be seen as an argument (object) of the transitive *lá?ð* 'cool' but one could hardly view it as an argument of *njàamó* 'sit'. It seems that the concord principle affects mainly the non-initial components (see section 4 and the Appendix).

7. Interestingly, Foley and Van Valin (1984:193) emphasize the strong correlation between nuclear serial verbs and languages of the SOV type (see also Crowley, 1987:42), which is not the case of Yulu.

8. See Bonvini (1992) for a general discussion of serial verbs in African languages.

any example of compounding and rather insists on the similarities (semantic unpredictability of the whole, functional restriction of the second member) between the two types of constructions, so that it is not entirely clear whether compound verbs could not be considered as a peculiar instance of nuclear serial verbs.

A similar kind of distinction is made by Aikhenvald (1999) concerning Tariana, a North Arawak language of Amazonia. Aikhenvald refers to the typology of Durie (1997) who distinguishes four types of verb sequencing according to the features  $\pm$  *contiguous* (i.e. arguments may/may not appear within the verb sequence) and  $\pm$  *incorporating* (i.e. the verb sequence forms/does not form a single phonological word). Thus Tariana has sequences of the contiguous, non-incorporating type, which the author labels serial verbs, and sequences of the contiguous, incorporating type, which she considers as compound verbs.<sup>9</sup>

The test of phonological unity (one vs. several words) seems, then, to be the ultimate criterion for recognizing compound verbs; but this is not easy to apply in Yulu. Beside the fact that Yulu does not seem to have any kind of stress or prosodic feature that clearly marks word boundaries, verb clusters behave differently according to their component phonological structures, as has been mentioned: verbs preserve their phonological identity if the second component is consonant-initial but undergo overlapping of vowel quality and tone if the second component is vowel-initial. The difference is clearly not of a syntactic/semantic nature and it would be nonsense to differentiate two types of structures according to these behaviors, the more so because both of them may occur in the same cluster. For example, (9) shows groupings of three components (square brackets indicate phonological overlapping):

- (9)  $\dot{\epsilon}\epsilon\eta\dot{\lambda}.nd\bar{\epsilon}k\bar{a}y\bar{\epsilon}$                     ‘come back’  
           rise.[turn.come]

---

9. This is a rather quick and partial account of Crowley's and Aikhenvald's papers, which both present many more and deeper insights into the structure and semantics of the relevant languages.



ɔnɛ̃ɛb̃.ndɛ̃k̃            ‘go behind somewhere for flirting’  
[go for flirt.pass away].turn

Maybe there is another way to approach the problem. Serial verbs are usually defined as «refer[ring] to subparts of a single overall event» (Crowley, 1987:38). In an article about Kalam, a language of Papua New Guinea which commonly combines several verbs (up to nine) in series, Pawley (1993:111) speaks of «sub-events that are routine components of an event». In some sense it seems to me that Yulu verb clusters do not refer so much to sub-events as to simultaneous aspects or modalities of a single process which therefore are not necessarily iconically ordered. Durie (1997:304, 310) suggests a likely universal constraint for motion verbs to come first in verb series. But this is not the case in Yulu where *specialized components*, including motion verbs, always appear in non-initial position, as will be argued below (see also example (1) above).<sup>10</sup> This could be taken as evidence for viewing Yulu verb clusters as compound verbs rather than serial verbs.

Whatever the labelling, it should be emphasized that verb compounding in Yulu is a living and productive process and that it apparently constitutes the only means of combining verbs in the same clause.

Now despite its morphological unity, verb compounding exhibits various kinds of functional statuses according to the nature and behaviour of its components. These different aspects are the topic of the next section.

#### 4. Trends in verb compounding

Whereas initial components of compound verbs are always of the same nature, non-initial ones exhibit features which authorize a distinction between what I will call *non-specialized* and *specialized*

---

10. Santandrea (1970:76) speaks of «reversed association» in such Yulu cases.

*final components*.<sup>11</sup> The division is not of a clear-cut nature but is rather a matter of degree ; some components clearly belong to the second set, while others have a less clear position.<sup>12</sup>

In the case of non-specialized final components, each verb in the compound form is chosen out of what seems to be the whole range of verbal units. Such final components clearly exist elsewhere as single verbs and do not exhibit any higher frequency in compoundings. Examples of such «free» compounding are given in (10) below:

(10)	<i>àacà</i>	+	<i>àaŋà</i>	=	<i>àacàaŋà</i>
	‘smell (good or bad)’		‘be nice (to any sense)’		‘smell good’
	<i>séelà</i>	+	<i>bābā</i>	=	<i>séelà.bābā</i>
	‘touch’		‘go in the dark’		‘feel with the fingers without seeing’
	<i>èedā</i>	+	<i>nābā</i>	=	<i>èedā.nābā</i>
	‘see, look at’		‘watch for, spy upon’		‘look at with a bad purpose’
	<i>ndòodā</i>	+	<i>ùlā</i>	=	<i>ndòodùlā</i>
	‘lie’		‘die’		‘sleep (soundly)’
	<i>jòŋà</i>	+	<i>rénjā</i>	=	<i>jòŋà.rénjā</i>
	‘bite’		‘break’		‘crunch, eat and grind’

In the specialized type of compounding, the final components exhibit a somewhat higher frequency in compounds and therefore seem to be chosen out of a restricted range of verbs. I have identified about forty verbs –some of them appearing in transitive/intransitive pairs– which play a specific role in verb compounding

---

11. For convenience, I will from now on speak of final (rather than non-initial) components. Specialized final components are not necessarily final *stricto sensu* but if they are not, then they are always followed by another specialized final component (see example (1) again, where both *.lītā* ‘let go/come out’ and *.lāayá* ‘let come’ are considered as «specialized final components»).

12. My corpus is rather narrow, consisting of verb lists and a few dozen pages of texts. A wider collection of discourse would certainly throw more light on the nature of these final components.

and may be grouped under the main semantic headings of «orientation/motion», «aspect/duration/aktionsart» and «quality/quantity» (see Appendix). Furthermore, these specialized members may share one or all of the features in (i) through (iii) below.

(i) They may not be attested as single verbs elsewhere, or at least not in one of the two transitive/intransitive paired forms. The latter is the case of *àayā* ‘come’ which appears as a specialized final component under the two forms *.aayā/°.láayá*<sup>13</sup> ‘coming/letting come’ (see example (1) above) while *\*láayá* does not exist as a single verb.<sup>14</sup> Other final components occur exclusively in compounds, in which case their semantic characterization may be problematic ; see illustrations in (11):

(11)	<i>jèetá</i>	+	°. <i>jōodā</i>	=	<i>jèetá.jōodā</i>
	‘work’		‘doing again’		‘(do a) work again’
	<i>àadā</i>	+	°. <i>ródā</i>	=	<i>àadā.ródā</i>
	‘say’		‘doing well, properly’		‘say/explain properly’
	<i>ì?ā</i>	+	°. <i>lí</i>	=	<i>ì?ā.lí</i>
	‘give’		‘doing for, towards (?)’		‘give, bring’
	<i>èekā</i>	+	°. <i>ecā</i>	=	<i>èekècā</i>
	‘take, seize’		‘keeping (?)’		‘take with oneself (?)’
	<i>ècā</i>	+	°. <i>ebā</i>	=	<i>ècēbā</i>
	‘close, shut’		‘?’		‘close, shut’
	<i>ìgā</i>	+	°. <i>ambā</i>	=	<i>ìgāmbā</i>
	‘dig, drive in earth’		‘?’		‘dig, drive in earth’

Indeed, at least four of these components (°.*ebā*, °.*ecā*, °.*edā* and °.*ambā*) recursively appear in compounding with only slight –if

13. The exponent in °.*láayá* indicates that this form is not attested as a single verb but only occurs as a final specialized component in compounding.

14. Even if they do not occur as single verbs, transitive/intransitive derivatives are built on patterns which are regularly attested for single verbs. These derivational structures are mainly of two types : (i) prefixing *l-* to form transitive verbs (e.g. *ènjā* ‘be finished’ > *lénjā* ‘finish’) and (ii) alternating C-/NC- initial consonants with a loss of valence (e.g. *kómá* ‘bring together’ > *ngōmā* ‘meet (each other)’, *tálā* ‘teach (2 objects)’ > *ndálā* ‘learn (1 object)’).

any– differences of meaning. They act as more or less desemantized frozen derivatives and thus constitute evidence for lexicalization. Let us consider some other illustrations of °.ebə in (12):

- (12) *ägə* and *ägəbə*  
 ‘bar up, fence up’ ‘bar, forbid’
- āgə* and *āgəbə*  
 ‘not allow, not want to give’ idem
- ədə* and *ədəbə*  
 ‘look at, see’ ‘look at, watch for, take care of’
- əkə* and *əkəbə*  
 ‘take, seize’ ‘take and keep (?)’
- ələ* and *ələbə*  
 ‘(trans)plant; stop, shut up’ ‘stop, shut up’
- sōbə* and *sōbəbə*  
 ‘pinch, wedge’ idem
- ūdə* and *ūdəbə*  
 ‘leave, abandon’ ‘put’

(ii) They may undergo certain phonemic alterations, like loss of internal or even initial consonant, or shortening of long vowel:

- (13) *ɛɽə* > *.ɛɽə/°.léɽə~°.léɛ~°.lé*  
 ‘go, depart, walk’ ‘going/letting go’
- itə/litə* > *.itə/.litə~°.ítə*  
 ‘go out/let go out’ ‘going out/letting go out’
- ūubə* > *°.uubə~°.ubə*  
 ‘get, find’ ‘getting, finding’
- əezə* > *.eezə~°.ezə/°.léezə~°.léè~°.lé*  
 ‘move, change place’ ‘changing/letting change place, state (Completed)’

(iii) They may undergo semantic shift from "process" values to values which are more of an aspectual or qualitative nature. Correlatively, they tend to be combinable with large ranges of verbs and act, in fact, as verbal markers of aspect or quality. This is the case with the following three verbs:

a) *èzə̀* ‘move, change place’ occurs as a specialized final component under the forms *.e(e)zə̀/°.lézə̀~°.lé(è)* with a value that may refer to motion (‘changing place/letting change place’), but most frequently it refers to ‘completed action/ changing of state’:

- (14) *èzə̀* ‘he has gone’  
 (s)he/they+go.COMPL
- ngēcēzə̀* ‘it is (has) coagulated’  
 it+coagulate.COMPL
- də̀wə̀zə̀* ‘it is (has become) hard’  
 it+become hard.COMPL
- būsə̀ ə̀osə̀.léè* *ə̀jə̀* ‘the dog (completely) ate the meat’  
 dog eat.COMPL meat
- ófə̀.léè* *vūkə̀*  
 thou/you+kill.COMPL fire  
 ‘put the fire out! (in a complete, definitive manner)’

b) *ə̀zə̀* ‘suffer, feel pain’ acts as an Intensive with the meaning of ‘being/doing a lot, extremely’, under the forms *.ə̀zə̀/°.lɔ̀zə̀* :

- (15) *ə̀pə̀zə̀* ‘(s)he cries a lot’  
 (s)he/they+cry.INTENS
- lilɔ̀zə̀* ‘it is very sweet’  
 it+be sweet.INTENS
- njà́.bànə̀zə̀* *də̀ ráajə̀*  
 (s)he/they+sit.spend time.INTENS in Raga  
 ‘(s)he stayed/lived a long time in Raga’
- kēmə̀.lɔ̀zə̀* ‘fear a lot’  
 fear.INTENS
- túuwə̀.lɔ̀zə̀* ‘make suffer a lot’  
 make suffer.INTENS

It even can be combined with itself (*ə̀zə̀* ‘suffer’ + *.ə̀zə̀* ‘Intensive’), as shown in (16):

- (16) *ə̀zə̀zə̀* ‘he suffered a lot’  
 (s)he/they+suffer.INTENS.COMPL

c) The specialized form  $^{\circ}.l\bar{5}\bar{w}k\bar{a}$ , which does not appear as a single verb, occurs in compounds after different (action?) verbs with the general meaning of an Immediate Successive ('do simply, directly, without delay, without warning, etc.'). See examples in (17):

- (17)  $\dot{e}e\eta\dot{a}.l\bar{5}\bar{w}k\bar{a}y\bar{a}$  'he immediately comes'  
 (s)he/they+rise.IMMSUCC.come  
 ... $\dot{j}\bar{o}o\dot{d}\dot{a}.l\bar{5}\bar{w}k\bar{a}$ ... '...(and) asks all of a sudden...'  
 (s)he/they+ask.IMMSUCC  
 $\dot{e}ek\dot{a}.l\bar{5}\bar{w}k\bar{a}$   $m\acute{o}t\dot{a}$   $\ddot{a}ab\acute{\partial}-n\dot{a}$   $\ddot{a}b\ddot{a}-k\ddot{a}q\eta\acute{\partial}-c\acute{e}$   
 he+take.IMMSUCC horse father-his the-white-this  
 $\eta\dot{d}\bar{w}ng\acute{\partial}.l\bar{5}\bar{w}k\bar{a}$   $\dot{a}ar\dot{a}.l\bar{5}\bar{w}k\bar{a}$ ...  
 he+climb.IMMSUCC he+sing.IMMSUCC...  
 'he take's his father's horse, the white one, (immediately)  
 climbs on it and (immediately) sings...'

These three verbs clearly indicate an advanced degree of grammaticalization since they tend to operate as markers which may, potentially at least, be combined with every verb in the language. A last case has to be mentioned here which clearly represents the highest degree of grammaticalization. The Progressive  $-\ddot{a}$ , which appears suffixed to the verb *before* the Plural  $-k\bar{e}$ , most probably must be identified with the Attributive  $\ddot{a}/\bar{a}$  'be' that may be considered as a defective or irregular verb. Illustrations of the Attributive and Progressive are given in examples (18) and (19), respectively:

- (18) Attributive:  
 $m-\bar{a}$   $k\dot{a}nj$  {I-be small} 'I am small'  
 $\ddot{a}$   $k\dot{a}nj$  {(s)he/they+be small} '(s)he is small'  
 $\ddot{a}-k\bar{e}$   $k\dot{a}nj$  {(s)he/they+be-PL small} 'they are small'  
 $\ddot{a}-k\bar{e}$   $d\ddot{a}g\dot{i}it$  {(s)he/they+be-PL here} 'they are here'  
 $\ddot{a}-k\bar{e}$   $k\acute{\partial}$   $b\bar{o}or\acute{\partial}$  'they have a goat'  
 (s)he/they+be-PL with goat  
 (19) Progressive:  
 $\dot{o}ol\bar{a}$  {(s)he/they+live} '(s)he lives'  
 $\dot{o}ol\bar{a}$  {(s)he/they+live+PROGR} '(s)he is living'

*òolā-kē* {(s)he/they+live-PL} 'they live'  
*òolā`-kē* {(s)he/they+live+PROGR-PL} 'they are living'

It thus appears that Yulu, which has a relatively small set of «pure» dependency markers (Conditional, Relativizer and Dependent, see above section 2), in fact takes advantage of the verb compounding frame to select new units of an aspectual or qualitative value. These new units potentially, if not already, act as grammatical morphemes and contribute to organizing the verb system as a whole.

## 5. Conclusion

A striking feature of Yulu consists of sequencing verbs in a tight structure that I labelled «compound verbs» in preference to «(nuclear) serial verbs». Within this structure a few dozen non-initial verbs act as specialized components and exhibit tendencies toward lexicalization and grammaticalization, thus leading to a potential reinterpretation of their syntactic status.

However, Yulu is not the only language showing verb sequencing in this part of the world. Indeed, two related languages from the Bongo-Bagirmi group, Gula (northern Central African Republic) and Modo (southwestern Sudan), exhibit similar, though not identical, structures.

Gula has two types of «suites verbales» (Nougayrol, 1999:130-133). In the first type, person markers appear before each verb, as in (20):<sup>15</sup>

(20) *má-tódò m-ów̄ vé* 'I live far away'  
 I-sleep I-be far indeed

In the second, more frequent type, verbs are more tightly bound and the person marker appears only once. See example (21):

---

15. I have made some readjustments in my presentation of Nougayrol's examples.

- (21) *z-ūndā.ùpà-gē dēb̄ kédē d̄ò kèlé*  
 we-put.leave-PL person one on encampment  
 ‘let's leave somebody on the encampment!’

In the latter type, Gula behaves rather like Yulu (aside from other characteristics which I will not discuss in detail here; briefly, Gula requires verbo-nominal (i.e. infinitive) prefixes before each verb, while Yulu does not; see note 5).

Modo has verbs of the VCV, VCVCV and VCVCVCV type (Andersen, 1981; Persson and Persson, 1991). Persson and Persson (1991:9) give illustrations of what they call transitive and plural VC- derivational prefixes, shown in (22):

- (22) intransitive > transitive  
*èyí* ‘be cool’ > *ìyéyì* ‘make cool’  
*ápà* ‘be sharp’ > *ìkápà* ‘make sharp’  
 singular subject > plural subject  
*àkpà* ‘be long’ > *ìdákpá* idem (PL.SUBJ)  
*òbò* ‘be wide’ > *ùdòbò* idem (PL.SUBJ)

But several examples selected from the Perssons' dictionary show that other semantic similarities can also be detected in the long member of such verb pairs. Compare, for instance, similar *final* portions in each pair in (23):

- (23) *ára* ‘have the consistency of thin liquid’  
*ítàrà* ‘clarify water, filter through cloth or basket’  
*áwú* ‘breathe’  
*ìndàwú* ‘rest, relax’  
*òrò* ‘stop, stand’  
*ùdòrò* ‘be straight, correct, cause to stop or stand’

as well as similar *initial* portions in each pair in (24):

- (24) *ólómá* ‘sit, live, be accustomed to, do habitually’  
*òlóbò* ‘sit and wait for’  
*ùpí* ‘twist, unlock, drive a car’  
*ùpìrì* ‘twist’



<i>úpépi</i>	‘peel, shell’
<i>ùpépe</i>	‘peel, take the last bit of’

Most probably a fair number of the VCVCV and VCVCVCV type Modo verbs result from lexicalization of an earlier verb serializing or compounding structure applied to former VCV type verbs.

Yulu, Gula and Modo should obviously be compared with respect to the history of the Bongo-Bagirmi languages. They bear witness of the existence of verb sequencing in the languages of central Africa, a fact which apparently has not been mentioned before.

### Appendix: Main specialized final components

(Components not attested as single verbs are marked with the exponent °. In cases of strong semantic shift, the meaning of the single verb is indicated in square brackets)

#### «ORIENTATION/MOTION»

<i>.aayā/°.láayá</i>	‘coming, arriving (towards the place of action, the speaker...) (Intrans./Trans.)’
<i>.εɾā/°.léɾá~°.lé(ε)</i>	‘departing, going away, from (here/there) (Intrans./Trans.)’
<i>.aamā/°.láamā</i>	‘coming from (Intrans./Trans.)’
<i>.uumā/°.lúumā</i>	‘entering, penetrating (Intrans./Trans.)’
<i>.itā/°.lítā~°.ítā</i>	‘going, coming out (Intrans./Trans.)’
<i>.júkà</i>	[‘cut, break’ >] ‘crossing, going over’
<i>°.tíyà</i>	‘rising, bringing up’
<i>.kómá/°.ngómā</i>	‘bringing together, collecting (Trans./Intrans.)’
<i>.tíiyá</i>	‘scattering, dividing’
<i>°.líi</i>	‘coming from (?), from far away (?), for the sake of (?), towards (?)’
<i>.e(e)zā/°.léezā~°.lé(è)</i>	[‘move, change place’ >] ‘changing place, with changing of state, <i>Completed</i> (Intrans./Trans.)’

#### «ASPECT/DURATION/AKTIONSART»

<i>°.tóowá/°.ndóowá</i>	‘do/be partially, halfway, in an incomplete manner (Trans./Intrans.)’
<i>°.jōodā</i>	‘do again, repeat’
<i>°.tíubā</i>	‘do again, remake, go on doing (something insufficient, incomplete)’

.e(e)kà	[‘take, seize’ >] ‘seizing, perceiving, <i>Perfective (?)</i> ’
.lɔɔɔ	[‘stay, remain, stop’ >] ‘temporarily, for a while, in the meantime’
°.lòowá	[‘be daylight’ >] ‘until sunrise, all the night long’
°.lócá	[‘fall’ >] ‘letting fall down, until sunset, all the day long’
.téká/°.ndēkā	[‘turn’ >] ‘again, at one's turn, by return, at the reverse (Trans./Intrans.)’
°.tíi	‘succeeding to each other (?)’
.túmà	‘finishing, achieving, doing until end’
.anà	[‘stay, remain’ >] ‘in a permanent way, for good, leaving in the state (?)’
.u(u)ɓà	‘finding, getting’
°.tíibà	‘going on (?)’
.tóná	[‘start, begin’ >] ‘(do) as first, being the first (to do)’
°.tīcā/°.ndīcā	‘(do) the last, at the end, for the last time, late, too late (Trans./Intrans. ?)’
°.lɔɔkā	‘simply, directly, without delay, <i>Immediate Successive</i> ’

Not strictly verbal:

-ä [Attributive ‘be’ >] ‘*Progressive*’

#### «QUALITY/QUANTITY»

°.lépà	[‘be good, nice’ >] ‘well, correctly, nicely’
°.rɔɔdà	‘well, correctly, properly’
°.dɔɔŋà	[‘be strong, firm’ >] ‘(do something) firmly’
°.ɔɔɔ/°.lɔɔɔ	[‘suffer, feel pain’ >] ‘a lot, extremely, excessively, <i>Intensive</i> (Intrans./Trans.)’

#### OTHER VALUES (?)

°.gāyá	‘know (how to)’
.igà/.lígà	‘disappearing, getting lost (Intrans./Trans.)’
.ndèká	‘playing, for fun’
.yòopá	‘slandering, despising’
.mbóozà	‘boring, piercing (?)’
.njàamá	‘sitting down (?)’
.njɔɔjá	‘offering the first-fruits, inaugurating’

#### UNIDENTIFIED FINAL COMPONENTS

°.ebà	‘?’ (Perfection of process ?)
°.ecā	‘?’ (‘keeping’ ?)
°.edà	‘?’
°.ambā	‘?’ (Making transitive ?)

## References

- Aikhenvald, Alexandra Y. 1999. Serial constructions and verb compounding, evidence from Tariana (North Arawak). *Studies in Language* 23-3:469-498.
- Andersen, Torben. 1981. *A Grammar of Modo, A Preliminary Sketch*. University of Aalborg (Denmark).
- Bonvini, Emilio. 1992. La construction sérielle: une structure cognitive? L'exemple du kasim (Burkina Faso). *Linguistique Africaine* 8:7-53.
- Boyeldieu, Pascal. 1987. *Les langues fer et yulu du nord centrafricain, Esquisses descriptives et lexiques*. Paris: Geuthner.
- Bril, Isabelle. n.d. Construction sérielle et dépendance. Paper presented at the 3ème Colloque Européen de Linguistique Océanienne (CNRS, Villejuif, 9-10 march 2001).
- Crowley, Terry. 1987. Serial verbs in Paamese. *Studies in Language* 11-1:35-84.
- Durie, Mark. 1997. Grammatical structures in verb serialization. In *Complex Predicates*, ed. by Alex Alsina, Joan Bresnan, and Peter Sells. Stanford, CA: Center for the Study of Language and Information, 289-354.
- Foley, William and Robert D. Van Valin, Jr. 1984. *Functional Syntax and Universal Grammar*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nougayrol, Pierre. 1999. *Les parlers gula, Centrafrique, Soudan, Tchad, Grammaire et lexique*. Paris: CNRS Editions.
- Pawley, Andrew. 1993. A language which defies description by ordinary means. In *The Role of Theory in Language Description*, ed. by William A. Foley. Berlin-New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 87-129.
- Persson Andrew M. and Janet R. Persson. 1991. *Modo-English Dictionary with Grammar*. Nairobi: SIL.
- Santandrea, Stefano. 1970. *Brief Grammar Outlines of the Yulu and Kara Languages*. Bologna: Editrice Nigrizia (Museum Combonianum 25).