

SERIALIZATION IN MAINLAND SOUTHEAST ASIA

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0 Introduction. There is a strong tendency in Mainland Southeast Asia, particularly in casual spoken language, to express ideas in a serial manner, to spin ideas as it were from a reel, with a minimum of interruptive elements. One could easily say that the languages of Mainland Southeast Asia are *serializing languages* in that semantically different but like-functioning coordinate elements within a single framework tend to occur serially, without such markers as conjunctions or embedding prepositions or nouns. I will explore this notion in three units of grammar: predicates with concatenated verbs, noun phrases with multiple noun modifiers, and coordinate clauses. With particular reference to serial verbs I will claim that serialization of verbs is significant only when it is not predictable from features of lexical items but nevertheless pervades language usage.¹

I will use here only a few of the languages:² Austroasiatic: Vietnamese, Khmer, Chrau, Jeh; Tai: Bangkok Thai, Black Tai, Nung; Hmong-Mien (Miao-Yao): White Hmong.

The languages in the "core" Mainland Southeast Asia area have a basic Subject - Verb - Object (-Indirect Object / Locative) and Noun-Modifier word order.

1 Zero NP anaphora. One of the characteristics of Mainland Southeast Asia which enhances the aforementioned reeling quality is the prevalence of zero noun phrase anaphora, most especially in informal conversation. The noun phrases most commonly elided are subjects and objects, especially the latter. Zero anaphora are optional omissions in the context of discourse. Obligatory non-presence of noun phrases which are implied by coreferentiality and predicted in the features of lexical items cannot properly be termed zero anaphora since "zero anaphora" implies that non-zero anaphoric reference may be present. Examples of zero subject (ØS) and object (ØO) noun phrases follow.³

- (1.1) Áo chị đẹp quá! (Chị) mua ØØ ở đâu vậy?
 Viet blouse sister pretty very sister buy at where so
 Dạ, ØS mua ØØ ở đường Lê-Lợi.
 POLITE buy at street Le Loi
 'Your blouse is very pretty, where did you buy it ?'
 'I bought it in LeLoi Street.'
- (1.2) Ab, kuv ntsia ØØ mas ØS tsis yog ØØ tiag na.
 Hmg oh! I look-at (he) then (he) not be (husband) truly not-so?
 'No, it doesn't look like him to me.'
 ('I stare at *him* (again) and *he's* surely not *your husband* ?')
- (1.3) ØS yàak pay sùu khǝŋ mǎy ØS yàak (ØV ØV ØØ).
 Thai want go buy thing QUES want
 'Do you want to go shopping?' 'Yes, I want to (go buy things).'
- (1.4) ØS ngám chóng бат ma ØS tɛo páy.
 Nung just then when come again go
 'He had just come, when he went again.'
- (1.5) Qou, kñom qət yɔk ØØ mɔk tee!
 Khm oh I notCOLLOQ take hither EMPH
 'Oh! I didn't bring *one* (a mat)!'
 ØS cuəl qəŋrɨŋ muəy tɨw!
 rent hammock one go(ahead)
 'You can just rent a hammock.'
- (1.6) Ảnh sǎng ØØ lǔh pām ØØ.
 Chrau I send out beat
 'I'll send *it* (the hammer) out to pound *you*.'

Under certain circumstances, non-subject/object NP's can also become zero anaphoric, particularly benefactives, as in (1.7)-(1.8), but also comitatives, as in (1.9).⁴ Such omissions may be sufficiently idiomatic for benefactive and comitative adverbs to have been derived from their respective prepositions so that here zero anaphora is not synchronically involved.

- (1.7) Để bác Thi mua ØØ cho ØB.
 Viet leave uncle Thi buy for
 'Let old Mr Thi buy *it* for *you*.'

(1.8) Têc khòi hểht ØØ hừ ØB.
 Nung let servant do for
 'Let me do it for you.'

(1.9) Ib tug qhua tuaj, kuv tsis paub nrog ØC tham.
 Hmg one person outsider come I not know with chat
 'When a visitor comes, I don't know how to talk with him/her.'

Of course it is to be assumed that not every one of these languages is equally inclined toward zero-anaphoric noun phrases, or for that matter to any of the processes of serialization discussed here. To determine in what hierarchy the languages stand, however, is not easy. This is because the phenomena of NP zero anaphora and serialization of unmarked constituents are characteristic of informal language of the sort that is not readily available in print and is often denied or rejected by native speakers in response to query.⁵

2 Serial verbs. Serial verbs have been much discussed for many languages of the world and are widely recognized as characteristic of the languages of Mainland Southeast Asia. Serial verb constructions have been defined, when they have been defined at all, with varying degrees of precision. Most definitions and descriptions are fairly loose, allowing different kinds of constructions to be considered as having serial verbs if there is more than one verb in a sentence. I attempt here to define serial verbs in such a precise way that to say a clause is a serial verb construction is to make a significant statement.

2.1 Constraints on serial verbs. I will define a serial verb construction as one in which

1) concatenated verbs represent coordinate statements referring to related events and expressed as a single proposition, i.e. with a single finite verb and where each participant occurs overtly only once.;

2) a serializing verb is not predictable in the feature matrix of the finite (main) verb or of other verbs with which it serializes;

3) the subject of a serializing verb is coreferential with the subject of the finite verb but is never present in the construction (as stated in 1), i.e., a serializing verb is nonfinite;

4) the non-finite serial verbs are in a coordinate relationship with the finite verb and with each other if there is more than one serializing verb, but no coordinating marker is present;

5) an inner argument -- Patient object, Locus (inner locative or dative), inner Correspondent -- may intervene between serial verbs. When the same object is implied by more than one serial verb, it occurs only once (again, as in 1), the occurrence being not necessarily with the first transitive verb but depending on particular language preferences;

6) the time of a serial verb is either after or simultaneous with the time of the preceding verb.

In Mainland Southeast Asian languages the first verb of a verb series is the head of the serial construction, i.e. the head of the proposition, the one finite verb in the series.

I differ with many others (e.g. Jarkey In Prep: Sec.2) on what comprises serial verbs. Whereas I feel that serial verbs must share a nominative NP, Jarkey (and others) allow as serial verbs concatenated verbs which share any core argument NP (if not the nominative NP, usually a complement argument, for example, an NP which is the object of the first verb but the subject of the "serializing" verb). That is, she allows as a serial verb one whose presence is predictable from the features of the first verb. If serialization is significant as a phenomenon, it is because it is not predictable in features of lexical items. Serialization of items predicted by sister constituents is not especially notable; persistent serialization not lexically predictable is worthy of note.

Thus, by criterion 2, a verb which requires a complement, such as the first verb in (2.1), is not part of a serial verb construction. (All the verbs in (2.1) are considered by Thepkanjana (1986:81) to be serial verbs.) Also, the second verb in (2.2) (from Thepkanjana 1986:27) may not serialize with the first verb by criterion 2: predictability, by criterion 3: having a different subject from the succeeding verb, and by criterion 1: being in a superordinate not a coordinate relationship with the succeeding verb.

- (2.1) *Surii* *chšɔp* *pay* *duu* *năŋ.*
 Thai Suri like go look movie
 'Suri likes to go to a movie.'

- (2.2) *Surii hây chăñ pay duu năñ.*
 Thai Suri give I go look movie
 'Suri let me go to the movie.'

2.2 Serial verb constructions. Following are some examples of sentences with serial verbs. The verb series in the Vietnamese sentence in (2.3) is within a relative clause.⁶

- (2.3) *Người đi ăn chơi hôm-qua là bạn thân anh t*
 Viet person go eat play yesterday be friend intimate brother I
 'The person who went amusing himself / eating for fun yesterday is a close friend of my older brother's.'

- (2.4) *Nws muab tso ua neeskaum peb duas.*
 Hmg 3SG take put make twenty three dollar
 'She put the price at twentythree dollars.'

- (2.5) *Éht vahn páy kfhñ hố ma.*
 Nung one day go eat beg come
 'Every day they went begging and returned.'

- (2.6) *...puə¹ tçan² hɣw³ kon⁴ muə⁴ sap² ʔau¹.*
 BlkTai ruler then cause person go fetch take
 'Then the ruler dispatched people to go fetch him.'

- (2.7) *Kee nǝm-khiə tiw niyiyə leen niw knoŋ ptěəh-baay.*
 Khm they together go talk enjoy at inside house food
 'They went off to the kitchen together to chat.'

- (2.8) *Chaq nẻh nỏq lủh saq sa nẻh cồ ji candul.*
 Chrau evil-spirit 3SG that come-out go eat 3SG who sick stomach
 'That evil spirit comes out and goes to eat people who have stomach-aches.'

The following sentences have negativized serial verbs. In (2.9) (from TCNN:12) the third verb of the series is negativized. The intervention of negative does not, by my definition, interfere with the third verb's serial status. Negatives in verb series in these languages tend to apply across all succeeding verbs. The Thai sentence in (2.10) (from Chanawangsa 1986:122) has serialized stative verbs, the last a V-N-V-N idiomatic expression meaning 'pleasant to the eye

pleasant to the heart'. The negative operates on the two verbs following it but not on the preceding verb.

- (2.9) *Hôm-nay tao đi cày không thấy đâu nữa.*
 Viet today I FAMILIAR go plow not see where further
 'Today I went to plow and didn't see it any more at all.'

- (2.10) *Nám-phú baang hềng thóthá mây gaam tông-taa-tông-cay*
 Thai fountain some CLSF clumsy not pretty pleasant
 'Some of the water fountains are clumsy and unpleasant to the eyes.'

The Vietnamese sentence in (2.11) has an imperative negative which operates across the full series of verbs. In (2.12) (from Huffman 1970:259) the imperative negative operates only on the immediately succeeding verb 'forget'. However, the verb 'forget', like the modal verbs, has an inherent embedded clause; i.e., it subordinates the succeeding verbs and therefore is not part of the verb series.

- (2.11) *Em đừng đi qua Thu nói-chuyện chơi.*
 Viet young-sib don't go across Thu converse take-leisure
 'Don't go visiting over at Thu's!'

- (2.12) *But kom plic kat pkaa klah yook tiw daq thou.*
 Khm Bouth don't forget cut flower some take go put vase.
 'Bouth, don't you forget to cut some flowers and put them in a vase.'

The sentences in (2.11) - (2.12) have noun phrases intervening in their verb series. The noun phrase of the first verb in (2.11) is an inner locative phrase (a core locative argument inherent in its locomotion verb), as are those of the first verbs in (2.13) and in (2.14) (from David Thomas 1971:175). The most common noun phrase to intervene in verb series is the object of the preceding verb, as in (2.12) above and in the two cases in (2.15) (from Chanawangsa 1986:81) and in (2.16) (from Saul & Wilson 1980:15).

- (2.13) *Hai thằng về nhà không cái chum đem ra...*
 Viet two fellow return house 2-carry thing jar carry out
 'The two fellows returned home, lifted the jar and carried it out...'

- (2.14) *Nễh hao chơ pịq pai-vunh.*
 Chrau 3SG climb tree pick gourd
 'He climbed the tree to pick gourds.'

- (2.15) ... *kèp khruaŋ-muu... hòp krapăw pay hăa-kin...*
 Thai pack tool carry suitcase go search-eat
 '[They would] pack their tools and carry their suitcases [abroad] to make a living.'

- (2.16) *Áu mahn này páy slũ dô kihn ma.*
 Nung take PLUR this go buy thing eat come/hither
 'Take these and go buy things to eat.'

Although in many of the languages it is customary for a common object of a series of verbs to occur after the first verb, it is possible, perhaps customary, in Jeh to have the common object of a series of transitive verbs occur after the last verb, as in (2.17) and (2.18) (from Gradin 1976b:52 and 53).

- (2.17) *Ĕn 'yaă òk taweng (lòi) dak.*
 Jeh 3SG take dump throw away water
 'He took the water and threw it away.'

- (2.18) *Ĕn loh chiêu reng rŭp bŭh cha chŏl 'wăn.*
 Jeh 3SG exit go search catch roast eat pig they
 'He went out & found & caught somebody's pig and roasted and ate it.'

Verb serialization is well documented for many languages of the world. Little has been said about serialization in other realms of syntax. I will explore here two more likely cases of serialization.

3 Serialization of noun attribution. Nouns in Mainland Southeast Asian languages may be modified by other nouns, noun phrases, stative verbs (as adjectives), other verbs, prepositional phrases, and relative clauses. These usually follow the modified noun as descriptive modifiers. Such modification is frequently serialized, i.e. without linkers of any kind. This is particularly noticeable with relative clauses, which can usually occur without relative pronouns or other relative clause markers. However, it should be noted that relative clauses in Bangkok Thai customarily have the relator noun *thŭi* as a relative clause marker.

The Vietnamese sentence in (3.1) has serialized attribution in both its noun phrases. The subject noun phrase has an adjective followed by a relative clause whose logical subject is coreferential with the head noun; in the second noun phrase, it is the object of the relative clause which is coreferential with the head

noun. (The relevant noun phrases are in brackets with the head noun in bold print.) More examples follow.⁷

- (3.1) **[Ông già cắt tóc ngoài đường]**
 Viet man old cut hair outside road
thích kể lại [chuyện người-ta đang bàn-tán].
 like tell again story people in-process discuss
 'The old man who cuts hair out on the street likes to repeat the talk that is currently going around.'
- (3.2) **Kuv tau-txais [koj tsab-ntawv koj sau... rau kuv tias...].**
 Hmg I receive you letter you write to I that
 'I received your letter that you wrote to me regarding...'
- (3.3) ... **[kh]wɔŋ nám nâw nám mǝn]**
 Thai canal water rotten water smelly
 'those canals with polluted or bad smelling water'
- (3.4) **Sau¹ pai¹ a:p², mi⁴ [kon⁴ ʔo⁶ pai⁶ bɔŋ² sau¹] bau² ?**
 BlkTai they go bathe exist person big go watch they QUES
 'If they went bathing, is there an adult who has gone to watch them?'
- (3.5) **[Lu^{ʔ5} jɪŋ⁴ la:³ puə¹] pai¹ ʔa:p² ka:⁴ nam⁶.**
 BlkTai child female youngest-child ruler go bathe at water
 'The youngest-child daughter of the ruler went bathing in the river.'
- (3.6) **Niŋ kəmpǔəŋ-thom miən [qəndouŋ-rae yɔk daek, spǔən,...]**
 Khm at KampongThom have mine take iron copper
 'In Kamp.Thom there are mines from which they get iron, copper,...'

P. Cohen (1976:150) says that Jeh relative clauses do not contain a relative pronoun. Note in (3.7) (from N.Cohen 1976:155) the zero anaphoric benefactive (outer Correspondent) NP, marked by 'for' and coreferential with the main clause subject.

- (3.7) **Yǎ bu... cha [kotao Y-Chei sak dòh].**
 Jeh Grandma then eat sugarcane Y-Chei skin give[for]
 'Grandma then ate the sugar cane Y-Chei had skinned for her.'

The languages of this area seem to have fewer constraints on marking relative clauses than many other languages,⁸ as can be seen in the language examples above, whether the relativized noun is coreferential with the subject or the object of the relative clause, and relative clauses tend to occur serially.

4 Serial clauses. The notion of serialization can be carried further, that is, outside the clause. It may be possible to speak of serial clauses; i.e. clauses not joined by conjunctions. I will discuss two kinds of concatenated clauses, one with subordinate first clause and one with conjoined independent serial clauses.

4.1 Subordinate first clauses. Although lexical markers may be used to explicitly mark preposed subordinate clauses, very frequently such clauses are marked only by preceding the main clause and can be said to be serialized with the main clause. Following are examples of conditional clauses which occur serially with the main clause. Clause breaks are indicated by ">", a mark which does not necessarily signal a pause. The source cited (Fippinger 1975:142) gives a comma between clauses in (4.8); I have retained it in case the comma indicates a pause break.⁹

(4.1) *Chị đi xem phim > cho tôi biết nhé.*
 Viet sister go see film give I know is-it-alright
 'If you're going to the movies, let me know. Alright?'

(4.2) *Bà muốn cháu đi chợ > cháu đi liền.*
 Viet grandmother want grandchild go market gr'child go at-once
 'If you want me to go to the market, grandmother, I'll go at once.'

(4.3) *Thiab neb kho tag > nyiaj npaum li cas?*
 Hmg and 2DL repair finish money to total as how
 'And having repaired it, how much did it cost you?'

(4.4) *Koj tsis paub qhov twg > koj xa mus rau kuv.*
 Hmg you not know phrase which you send away to I
 'If there's any phrase you don't know, write me (and I'll help you).'

(4.5) *Lu^{ʔ5} ɲin⁴ > muən⁵ la:i¹*
 BlkTai child hear happy very
 'I'm very happy to hear that: Hearing that, I'm very happy.'

(4.6) *Nhahng lư > tá cọi kình.*
 Nung still remain grandfather shall eat
 'If there is anything left, then grandfather will eat.'

- (4.7) *Kñom mian luy > kñom tiw.*
 Khm I have money I go
 'If/When/Because I have money, I'll go.'

- (4.8) *Y-Lay dei wa tih wa, > ẽn bloh rơgày tan mok.*
 Jeh Y-Lay not yet big yet 3SG PAST skillful weave blanket
 'Even tho' Y-L isn't big yet, she is already skilled at weaving blankets.'

4.2 Serial independent clauses. Serialized clauses are most common when the first clause is a subordinate clause, but it is also possible for two closely associated but grammatically independent clauses to occur juxtaposed without lexical markers. In general, the first clause provides backgrounding for the main proposition of the second clause, although in some cases the clauses state sequential parts of an event. I suggest that such juxtaposed independent clauses may be a form of serialization.

Following are examples of serial independent clauses. The Nung sentence (from Saul and Wilson 1980:101) gives sequential parts of an event. (The Hmong sentence is from Bertrais 1979:543, the Black Tai sentence from Fippinger 1975:145.)

- (4.9) *Chúng nghe rõ cả đầu đuôi > lấy làm tức-giận...*
 Viet PL hear clear all head tail take do furious
 'They heard clearly everything from beginning to end; they became furious and...'

- (4.10) *Peb noj tsuag-tsuag > peb yuav xuas.*
 Hmg we eat quick-quick we will flee
 '(Let's) eat quickly and we'll escape.'

- (4.11) *...ta:l huɣ⁵ ʔɔʔ² > kep² lai³ nuoi² ma:ʔ².*
 BlkTai eye clear go-out pick-up can CLF fruit
 'The eye cleared up and he was able to pick up the piece of fruit.'

- (4.12) *Muhn ɬo ɔc ɕháng thúhn... > ɬo khau hơn...*
 Nung 3rdSg again go-out inside yard again enter house
 'He again went out into the yard to..., and again entered the house...'

N. Cohen (1976:154-5) says of Jeh that simple juxtaposition of two conjoined clauses is statistically far more frequent than is the presence of a conjunction. ((4.13) is from p.161.)

(4.13) *Boō jah kip, > ěn dei jah konei.*
 Jeh grandfather get turtle 3SG not get rat
 'Grandfather got a turtle but he didn't get a rat.'

5 Some general observations. The foregoing data gives strong support for the notion of serialization being extended beyond verb serialization into other grammatical processes, such as serialized noun phrase attribution and concatenated clauses.

One may ask some questions regarding serialization. One question involves the nature of serialization within individual languages. It is reasonable to hypothesize that the tendency for serialization is stronger in some languages than in others. Also, it is clear that certain types of serialization occur more easily than others. For example, certain types of verbs and combinations of verbs serialize more readily than others and serialization involving preposed subordinate clauses, which is very common, seems to occur much more frequently than the serialization of two independent clauses.

Finally, what impact does increased education and a greater tendency to language consciousness have on use of serial constituents? An important factor in occurrence of serialization in all its forms is the social factor, that is, the formality of speech style. Zero anaphora and serialization are most commonly found in natural "unconscious" speech, where the participants are immediately concerned with communication rather than form, and in informal narration, as for example, in the Vietnamese folk tale from which sentences have been taken for this study. It is in more formal and 'conscious' speech and generally in writing that noun phrases are more carefully included and serialization is blocked by such lexical linkers as conjunctions, relative pronouns, and embedding prepositions and nouns, the use of which seems to have an element of propriety in speakers' minds.

NOTES

1 To discussions with Nerida Jarkey, both verbal and written, I owe much clarification in my thinking with respect to serial verbs, although Nerida cannot be held responsible for my own conclusions. Stanley Starosta read an earlier version of the paper and gave many helpful comments, especially adding significantly to my thinking on serial verbs. I am indebted to

Anthony Diller and Preecha Juntanamalaga for consultation on Bangkok Thai data and to Phuong Tonthat, Lo Giang Tran and Long Nguyen for helpful advice on Vietnamese for earlier work. I am grateful to many persons over time who have helped me with Hmong, but especially my teacher Vangkoua Cheurtong, Neng Chue Yang, Tong Vang, Youa Vang, Sai Xiong, Youa Yang and more currently Chu Lee.

2 I have used the standard orthography for Vietnamese, the romanized orthography developed in Laos for Hmong (see Smalley 1976), the romanized orthography used in Huffman 1970 for Khmer, and one romanized version of Thai. The orthographies for other languages are those used in the references cited. In general, diacritics represent tones in Vietnamese, Nung, and Thai:

á	high/high rising	à	low
ø	mid/mid high, level	â	falling (Thai)
ă ă	mid rising	ạ	low (with glottal)
ã	mid rising (with glottal)		
ä, ê, â, ê, ô	Vowels (Vtn, Chrau, Nung);	à	falling intonation (Chrau)

The Hmong Romanized Popular Alphabet uses VV for Vng (the only final consonant in White Hmong) and consonant symbols word finally for tones:

-b	high level	-g	low falling breathy
-j	high falling	-s	low
-v	mid rising	-m	low with final glottal
ø	mid level	-d	low rising

3 The Hmong sentence is from Johnson 1985:398, the Thai sentence is from Chanawangsa 1986:96, the Nung sentence from Saul & Wilson 1980:44, the Khmer sentence from Huffman 1970:184, and the Chrau sentence is from Dorothy Thomas 1978:264.

4 The Nung benefactive sentence is from Saul & Wilson 1980:20; the Hmong comitative sentence is from Bertrais 1979:447.

5 Tony Diller (personal communication) tells of recording natural Thai conversation, but when the recordings were transcribed by Thai speakers they "corrected" the recorded version, adding conjunctions, prepositions, referents, etc., to make the language "correct Thai".

Furthermore, writers of descriptive grammars tend to be more concerned with items and their arrangement when present than with possible absence of constituents.

6 The Nung sentence is from Saul & Wilson 1980:22, the Black Tai sentence from Fippinger 1975:144, the Khmer sentence from Huffman 1970:276, and the Chrau sentence from Dorothy Thomas 1978:273.

7 The Thai phrase is from Chanawangsa 1986:124, the Black Tai sentences are from Fippinger 1975:139 & 160, and the Khmer sentence is from Huffman 1970:368.

8 Bangkok Thai is probably an exception in this.

9 The Nung sentence is from Saul & Wilson 1980:104, the Khmer from Ehrman 1972:29, and the Jeh from N. Cohen 1976:159.

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