Serial verbs in Naro

Budazni Mogara[1]

Abstract

This paper examines various compounds in Naro to show that the distribution of the word order is the same for both verbal compounds and serial verbs; that is, the order of the verbs cannot be reversed for either of the two. However, while there is a constraint in languages with verbal compounds, in that the verbs are always adjacent to each other, in Naro there is no such constraint where person gender and number markers, particle, past tense, and direct object can intervene between the verbs. This is what made me believe that Naro has serial verbs and not verbal compounds. The analysis adopted in this paper leans on the Minimalist Approach (Chomsky 1995) where categories move for feature checking purposes. A Multiple Verb Movement Analysis of verbal compounds, an important topic in current syntax research, is used and shows that all verbs must raise overtly and adjoin to v 'light verb'. Moreover it is shown that V1 raises and adjoins to v first since it is closer to v than V2.

Keywords: Naro, serial verbs, verbal compounds, minimalist approach, multiple verb movement analysis.

1.   Senior Lecturer, Department of African Languages and Literature, University of Botswana E-mail: gabanab@mopipi.ub.bw

Introduction

In this paper, I examine various aspects of verbal compounds in Naro, (A Central Khoesan language). Although previous studies were conducted on this language, no study to date has focused on serial verbs. However, a study conducted on ǂHoan by Collins (2002) on Multiple Verb Movement covered verbal compounds in detail. The paper purports to answer the following questions:

(1) How are serial verbs formed in Naro?

(2) What is the relationship between serial verb constructions and verbal compounds?

In most cases, the same verbs that are used to form SVCs can be used to form verbal compounds. This paper is structured as follows: I first provide background information on Naro. I then provide a brief background on serial verbs and verbal compounds. Then I discuss the theoretical framework and the methodology used for data collection and analysis before I move on to discuss the types of serial verbs found in Naro. Finaly I provide an analysis of serial verbs and draw conclusions from the data.

Background information on Naro

Naro is a Khoesan language spoken around the Ghanzi area of Botswana. It is related to Dxana and Dcui as well as to other Central Khoesan languages. Several varieties of Naro are spoken here, including a variety called Ts'ao, which some call Big Naro, and a variety called Goo, and a variety that has some Nama words in it. Around 1890, the Ghanzi Farm Block was created and the Naro had to share their land with many white farmers. They lived partly as workers on the farms and partly as hunter-gatherers. Since then many groups of Bakgalagadi and Batawana have arrived in the area, initially as subsistence herders and later as workers on the farms. According to Visser (1994), there are close to six thousand Naro speakers in Botswana. On the other hand, Hasselbring estimates that there are about eight thousand Naro speakers in the Ghanzi district (Hasselbring 1996:7). Whichever figure is most correct, we can conclude that Naro is one of the major Khoesan languages. The Naro people are estimated to constitute ten percent of the Khoesan speaking people in Botswana. They have been in contact with commercial cattle ranchers for longer than any existing Kalahari people, but they retain much of their culture, even in the interior of the cattle ranching area.

Today Naro probably attracts few new speakers from other non-

Khoesan groups, but among the Khoesan languages, it is clear that Naro is one of the strongest Khoesan languages. It is used as lingua franca among other Khoesan speakers in the Ghanzi area (Visser 1994:28). I have opted to use Visser's spelling convention for all Naro examples. There are several characteristics of this language that are worth commenting on; these include the syllable structure, the word order, pronoun system, tense marking system, tone and the role played by gender in the grammar of the language and these are discussed in the sub-sections that follow.

Syllable structure

In Naro, the following syllable structures occur:

CVCV	‖aba	'be angry'
CVV	!áà	'long'
CVC	|ám	'sun' (Visser 1998)

Naro has a five vowel system /i e a o u/ and these vowels can be plain, pressed or nasalized, or both pressed and nasalized (Visser 1995; Anderson 1997). It has five oral, three nasalized and two pharyngealised vowels. According to Visser, the set of five oral vowels corresponds to the set of three nasalized vowels. When the vowels are nasalized, there is no contrast between high and mid front vowels and back vowels as shown in the examples below.

tc'ẽe (want) and not *tc'ĩi* (want)

tc'õó (eat) and not *tc'ũu* (eat)

Word order

Naro is an SOV language and the SOV order is obvious when both the subject and the object consist of full noun phrases as shown below;

(1) gămba   ko   nqábé   ba   qũ Anderson & Janson (1997:160)
     lion   pgn   asp   giraffe   pgn   kill
    'the lion is killing a giraffe'

Găm 'lion' is followed by '*ba*'. '*Ba*' is a morpheme indicating that the noun '*gam*' is masculine; '*sa*' marks the feminine gender. The morpheme '*ko*' is a particle that indicates tense and/or aspect, and it is usually placed after the subject. As the following examples illustrate, this SOV word order may be changed when the subject consists of a pronoun. In Naro, the object is placed before the subject pronouns as shown below.

(2) a. tshàa-r ko tsãágu
        water-1sg asp boil
        'I'm boiling water'
     b. péré sa ta-ko tc'õó Visser (1997:17)
        bread pgn we-asp eat
        'we are eating bread'

In sum, Naro appears to be a typical SOV language. The only surprising fact about Naro as an SOV language is that it is possible to have tense/aspect- markers together with the person gender number- affixes placed before the verb. The expectation is that these morphemes are placed after the verb instead. However, the word orders we find in negative sentences conform to the expected order in SOV languages.

The examples below illustrate this point:
(3) a. kõe tama tsi-(a)
        play not you-(part)
        'you are not playing'
     b. kõe tama ra
        play neg 1sg
        'I am not playing'

Thus, to make a verbal phrase negative, the negative marker '*tama'* is used. This is normally placed after the verb.

Tone

Tone is distinctive in Naro and it is carried by vowels and the consonant /m/. The meaning of words is sometimes distinguished by tone only. Three tonemes can be distinguished and they are High, Mid and Low. The examples below from Visser (1995) show the tonal differences.

(4). **cám** 'sun', **càm** 'morama-root', **cam** 'cut', **dùù** 'eland', **suu** 'pot', **káá** 'suitcase', **qaa** 'seek'.

The meanings of the words in (4) above are distinguished by the tone marking.

Person, gender and number markers

There are three genders recognized in this language: feminine, masculine and common gender. These are illustrated in examples in (5) below.

(5) a**.** *khóèba* 'man'
     b. khóèsa 'woman'
     c. *khóène* 'people'

The masculine and feminine suffixes –*ba* (example 5.a.) and –*sa* (example 5.b.) signify more than just 'maleness' and 'femaleness': the

masculine suffix conveys the notions of strength, tallness or slenderness, while the feminine suffix adds the notions of smallness, weakness or roundness. The same thing applies to objects; those that are long and/or strong are male while those that are round and/or weak are female.

Serial verbs

In many SVO serializing languages, the object of the first verb occupies the normal 'object' position, immediately after the verb. A noun phrase situated between two verbs of a serial construction 'doubles' as object of V1 and subject of V2 (Sebba 1995:365). What this means is that the subject precedes the verb while the object follows the verb. As noted by Sebba, in some languages serial verbs appear to be verbal compounds which function like simple transitive or intransitive verbs depending on whether or not one of the components is transitive (1995:370). Just as in verbal compounds, sometimes V1 indicates *cause* and V2 *result* as will be illustrated later in the paper. In other languages serialization increases the number of arguments by providing what linguists call dummy *verbs* which can take direct objects. For more information on serial verbs, see Collins (1997) and Sebba (1995). Now let us look briefly at compounds.

Compounding derives new words by combining two (rarely more) other words or stems. According to Selkirk (1982), compounds are defined as complex lexical items composed entirely of forms that can occur in isolation; i.e. of free forms. Thus *ice-cream* is a compound, consisting of the free morphemes *ice* and *cream*, whereas *leafy* for instance is not, since one of its constituents –*y*, does not occur in isolation (i.e. it is a bound morpheme).

As mentioned earlier, the paper discusses serial verb constructions (SVCs) and attempts to answer the following research question: What is the relationship between Serial verbs and verbal compounds? One notices that in most cases, the same verbs that are used to form SVCs can be used to form verbal compounds (eg. 'pour','put', 'lift', 'raise'). This parallelism strongly suggests that verbal compounds are derived by verb movement from underlying structures that are similar to SVCs (Collins 2002:5). But first we need to define a serial verb construction.

"A serial verb construction is a succession of verbs and their complements (if any) with one subject and one tense value that are not separated by any overt marker of coordination or subordination" (Collins 2002:3). The main difference between the two lies in the word order. In a verbal compound, the verbs are adjacent and cannot

be separated whereas in a serial verb construction the verbs are not necessarily adjacent, which implies that they can be separated by adding some elements in between them as shown in the examples below.

(6)   a. dcãò ghùi > lift up (ǂHoan)
        b. dcãò-a ghùi > lift up (Naro)

In example (6b), a particle appears between the two verbs.

Having given the definitions of serial verbs and verbal compounds, now I briefly state the types found in Naro. Naro has serial verb constructions. The evidence is that most of the verbs in Naro are not necessarily adjacent. That is, a direct object, person, gender, and number marker, past tense particles and an adverb can appear between the two verbs. I argue that in cases where the verbs are adjacent, it is only by accident and, as such this does not mean that these are verbal compounds.

Theoretical framework

As mentioned earlier, the theory adopted in this paper is the Multiple Verb Movement Analysis which states that all verbs must raise overtly and adjoin to v. This theory has many implications as indicated by Collins (2000). It has direct implications for the form of the serialization parameter. It also has implications for the locality conditions found on verb movement. I show that in multiple verb movement, each instance of verb movement undergoes Local Move (Chomsky 2000) and that the trace of verb movement is invisible for the Minimal Link Condition (α can raise to target K only if there is no legitimate operation Move β targeting K, where β is closer to K).

Here, I outline the syntactic assumptions of my analysis of multiple verb movement namely: the assumptions about SVCs and the locality conditions on movement. I argue that transitive verbs like 'pour' and unaccusative verbs like 'leave' head VPs that are dominated by vP. This implies that there are two types of light verbs v: a transitive v (which introduces an external argument and assigns accusative case) and an unaccusative v (which does not introduce an external argument and assigns no accusative case). The analysis accounts for the fact that all verbs in Naro must raise overtly and adjoin to v. I argue that since V1 is closer to v than V2 in serial verb constructions in Naro, V1 raises and adjoins to v before V2 in order to produce a meaningful grammatical structure. Below, I discuss the method of data collection used in my study.

Data collection

The data discussed in this paper were collected in 2009 during the months of June/July when the researcher went on a field work excursion to the Ghanzi area. The data were collected in the village of D'Kar using six different informants; three females and three males aged between 28 and 35. All the informants come from and live in D'Kar. All six have been to school and can speak Setswana, the national language, and English, the language used in education, fairly fluently. This made the data collection process much easier as I could communicate easily with the informants using either Setswana or English. The data were collected in the form of a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was structured in a question and answer form and so the informants worked in pairs with one asking the questions and the other answering the questions. For example, for any given verb type, say a verb such as 'pour', one of the informants would ask questions such as '1) 'Who poured the water into the pot? 2) What did Qasa pour? In responding to these questions, informants were required to use both full lexical categories e.g. nouns as well as pronouns in their responses. For example the two responses to question (1) above would be a) Qasa poured the water into the pot, and b) She poured the water into the pot. Since my objective was to find out how serial verbs are constructed in Naro and their behaviour towards other elements within a sentence, I created sentences that would elicit responses involving different verb types, which are intransitive, transitive and ditransitive. Notice that this method of data collection is rather artificial because the data are collected out of context. However, the method allows the investigator to focus on the aspects of language that are of interest at the time of investigation. Perhaps what one can do in the future is to collect one or two stories, tape record them, transcribe them and look for relevant grammatical aspects in these in order to corroborate or refute my findings.

Naro serial verbs

In this section I give some of the serial verbs found in Naro and use them in sentences as illustrated in the following examples:

V1 is transitive and V2 is intransitive

The type of serial verbs where V1 is transitive and V2 is intransitive is extremely limited. Consider the following examples:

(7) a.   dcãò ghùi > lift up

   b.   dcãò-a-r   gha   ghùi   i   (Naro)
        grab-part-pgn   will   raise   1sg
         'I will lift it up'

   c.   dcãò-a-r   gha   ghùi (xábú)   i   (Naro)
        grab-part-pgn   will   raise (rise)   1sg
        'I will lift it up'

   d.   ma tca !'ae kankan ya   (ǂHoan)
        1sg fut grab raise   it
        ' I will lift it up'

   e.   ma   tca   !'ae   kankan(*kyu) ya
        1sg   fut   grab   raise (*rise) 3sg
        'I will lift it up'

The data in (7b) and (7c) show that in a serial verb construction, a
particle, a pgn marker and a tense marker can appear between the two
verbs while (7d) shows that in a verbal compound, the verbs have to be
adjacent to each other and nothing should come between the two verbs.

V1 is Intransitive

(8) a. ncãa-r   ko qanega   xgõà   hàà   ka-r   ko   gàm   ba
        bóò(Naro)
         pst-pgn   cont   still   jog   come   rel-pgn cont   lion   3sg
         see
         ' while he was coming jogging he saw a lion'

   b. cóá bako   nxàì   kóné-s   koe   guu   a   (Naro)
        child 3sg   part   jump   car-pgn from   leave   part
        'the child is jumping from the car'

   c. Molepolole   koe-r ko   qgóé   síí (Naro)
         Molepolole to-pgn cont run   go
         ' I am running to Molepolole'

The data in (8) shows that V1 specifies an action or manner of motion
and V2 specifies a direction.

I adopt Collins analysis that V2 heads a VP that is the complement of
V1. The underlying structure of (8a) therefore is given in (9).

(9)
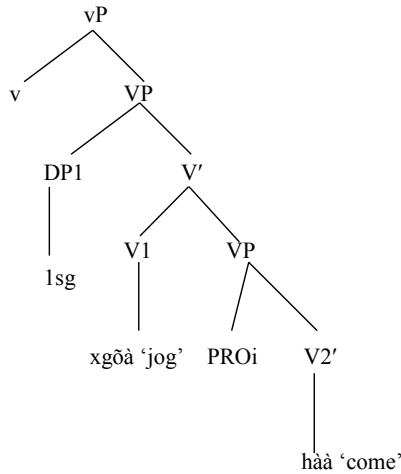
The derivation of the example in (8a) proceeds as follows:

(10) a. v   'jog'   'come' (underlying structure)
      b.'jog'-v   t'jog'   'come' (V1 moves by the MLC)
      c.'jog'-'come'-v   t'jog'   t'come' (Local Move)

(11) Minimal Link Condition
    α can raise to target K only if there is no legitimate operation Move
    β targeting K. (Chomsky 1995:296).

(12) Local Move
    Let X have a selection feature F, and let Y satisfy F. Then Y move
    to the   closest possible position to X (Chomsky 2000:136-137).

V1 is transitive and V2 is transitive

(13) a. ntcãa   tcãà **>** pour into
        pour   put
     b. tshàa   ne-r   ncàà ntcãa tcãà   suu sa   q'oo kóe
        water   1sg-pgn adv pour   put pot pgn   inside in
      'I am pouring water into the pot'

The order of verbs in the above serial verbs cannot be reversed.
     c.*ncàà-r tshàa-n tcãà ntcãa suu q'oo   kóe
        adv-pgn water-1sg put pour pot inside in

The construction in (13b-c), involves verb movement, so that the
structure [IP…..V1 V2 NP….] is derived from an underlying structure
such as [IP….V1 NP V2….] by movement that adjoins both V1 and V2
to the light verb v (see Chomsky 1995, Collins 1997b). Evidence for
the verb movement analysis is provided by the parallelism that is found
between serial verb constructions and verbal compounds. The analysis

accounts for the fact that the order of the verbs cannot be reversed.

(14) a. xhài-a   úú > pull

   pull-part   take

   b. Titi   ba   ko   xgài   ba xhài(-a)   úú Jeff-m   koe

   Titi   3sg   cont   broom 3sg pull(-part) take   Jeff-pgn to

   'Titi is pulling the broom to Jeff'

   c. *Titi   ba   ko   xgài   ba úú   xhài(-a)   Jeff-m   koe

   Titi   3sg   cont   broom 3sg take   pull(-part)   Jeff-pgn to

   'Titi is pulling the broom to Jeff'

   d. xg'ám-a tcãà > drive

   beat-part put

   e. cóá   ba ko   piri xg'ám(-a)   tc'ãà xãò

   boy 3sg cont goats beat(-part)   put kraal

   ' the boy is driving the goats into the kraal'

   f. *cóá ba piri   tc'ãà xg'ám(-a) xãò

   boy 3sg goats   put beat(-part) kraal

   ' the boy is not driving the goats into the kraal'

The data in (14c) and (14f) show that the order of the verbs cannot be reversed in a serial verb construction.

I assume that the following examples (where V2 specifies a result, instead of a direction) can be given a similar analysis.

(15) a. ncãa-r xg'ám(-a) cg'õo ne (Naro)

   pst-pgn beat(-part) kill 1sg

   'I beat them dead'

   b. ma n ≠a'am(-a) k'oa n!ui kho'en

   1sg hit(-part) break ostrich egg

   ' I smashed the ostrich egg'

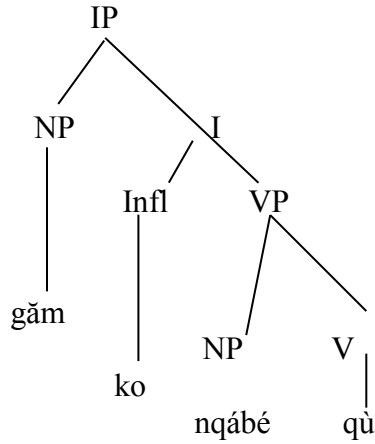In examples (15a) and (15b), one can clearly see that a particle can appear between the two verbs.

Structural Analysis

The analysis will rely on Chomsky's basic outline of minimalism.
I will start by providing structures for simple sentences. Consider again the following sentences;

(16). gǎm   ba   ko   nqábé qũ

   lion   3sg   asp   giraffe kill
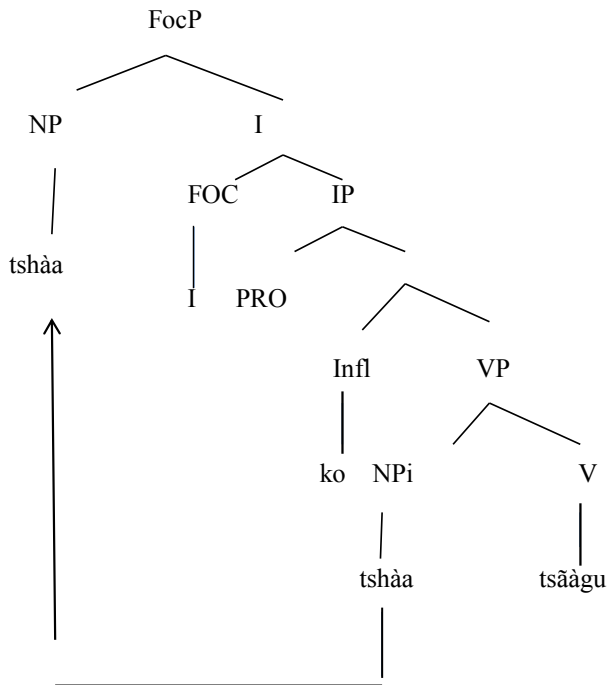
   'the lion is killing a giraffe'

The structure of the above sentence will look like the one below;

(17)

```
                          IP
                      /        \
                    NP          I
                    |         /    \
                    |       Infl     VP
                    |        |      /   \
                   găm       |    NP      V
                             |    |       |
                            ko  nqábé    qù
```

(18) tshàa-r ko   tsãàgu
      water-1sg   asp   boil
      'I am boiling the water'

(19)

```
                        FocP
                    /          \
                  NP            I
                  |          /    \
                  |        FOC      IP
                tshàa       |      /   \
                  ↑         I PRO      ...
                  |                 Infl     VP
                  |                  |      /   \
                  |                 ko  NPi      V
                  |                      |       |
                  |                    tshàa   tsãàgu
                  |_____|
```

Now consider again the following sentences;

(20)a. tshàa   ne-r   ncàà ntcãa tcãã suu sa q'oo kóe
       water 1sg-pgn adv pour put   pot pgn inside in
       'I am pouring water into the pot'

247

As remarked earlier, one fact that needs to be explained is why the order of the verbs cannot be reversed.

(21)*tshàa ne-r ncàà tcãà ntcãã suu q'oo kóe
    water 1sg-pgn adv put pour pot inside in

Below we have the underlying structure (22) for (20)

(22)
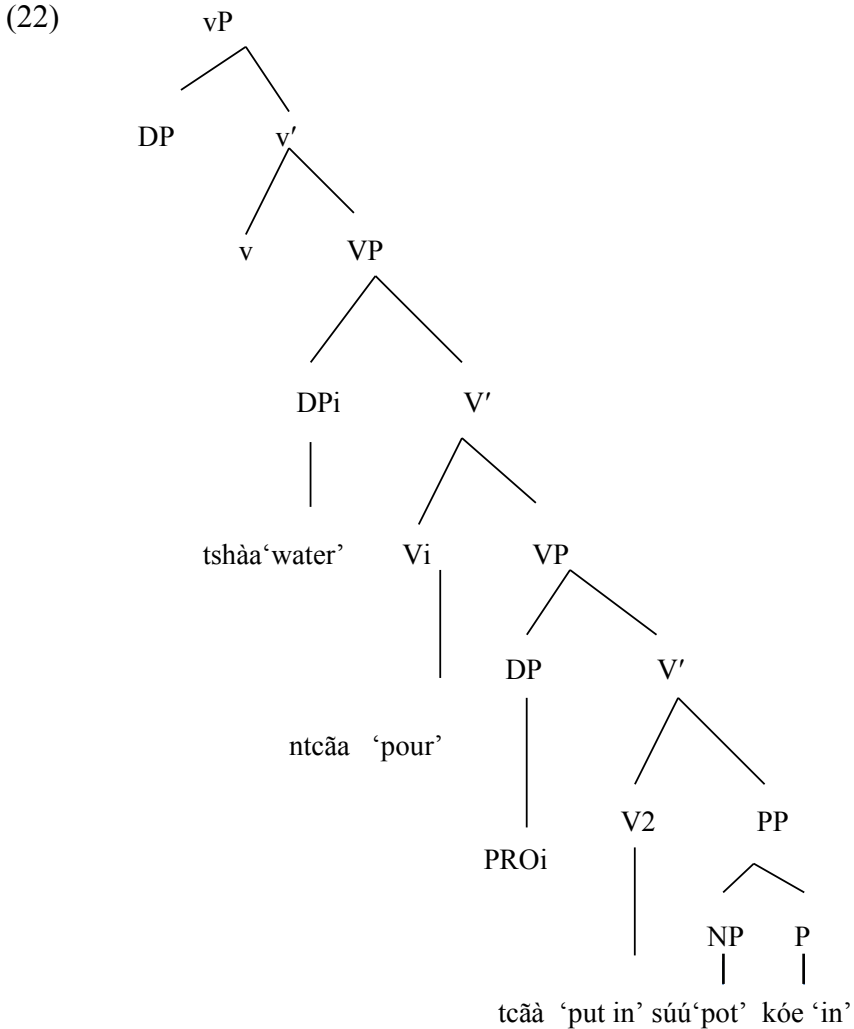
According to Collins (2005), v is [+multiple] (meaning it can licence multiple verbs) and all verbs must raise overtly and adjoin to v. But then the question is: which verb – V1 or V2- raises to v first? Since V1 is closer to v than V2, the MLC (repeated here) dictates that V1 (*ntcãa* 'pour') raises and adjoins to v before V2 in order to produce a meaningful grammatical structure.

(23) Minimal Link Condition

α can raise to target K only if there is no legitimate operation Move β targeting   K, where β is closer to K.

In the examples at hand, K is v and α is V1.The movement of V1 is shown in (24). The next step is for V2 (*tcãà* 'put') to raise and adjoin to v.

(24)
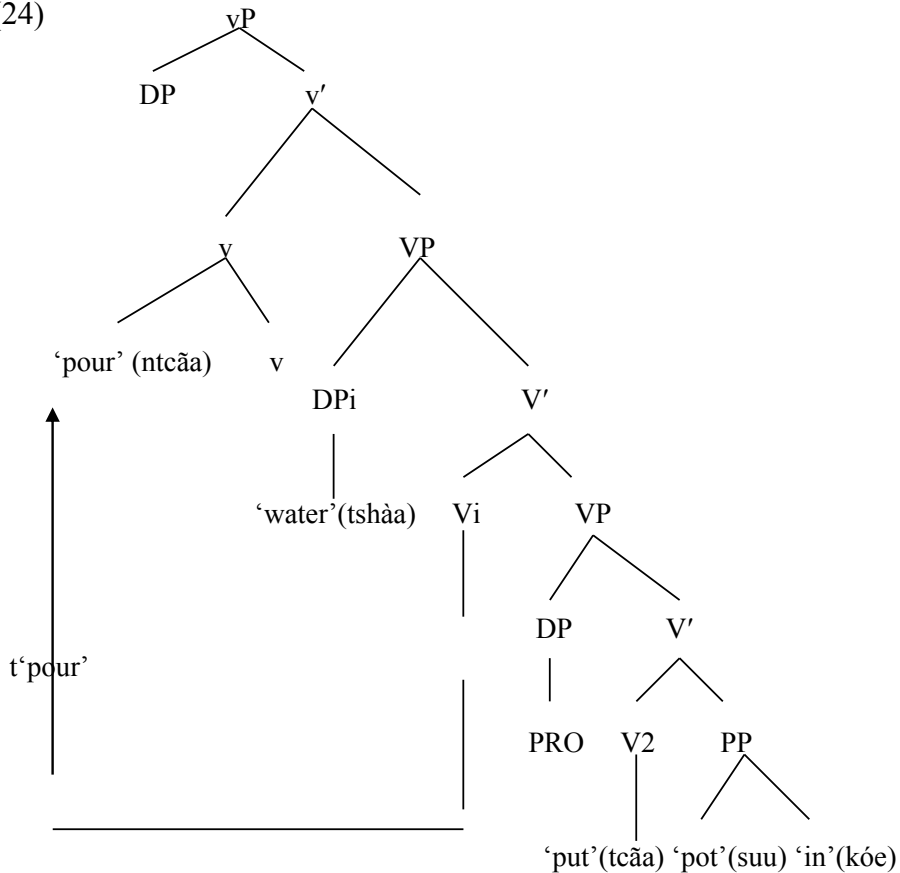
(25)   a. [v V2 [v V1 v]]   (outer adjunction of V2 to v)
        b. [v V1[v V2 v]]   (inner adjunction of V2 to v)

The structure in (25a) represents the unacceptable word order in (21). The structure in (25b) represents the acceptable word order in (20). Local Move (12) entails that V2 must adjoin to a position as close as possible to v. Looking at the examples in (25), V2 is closer to v in (25b) than it is in (25a). When V2 undergoes movement, the structure in (25b) is formed and it is illustrated in (26).

(26).
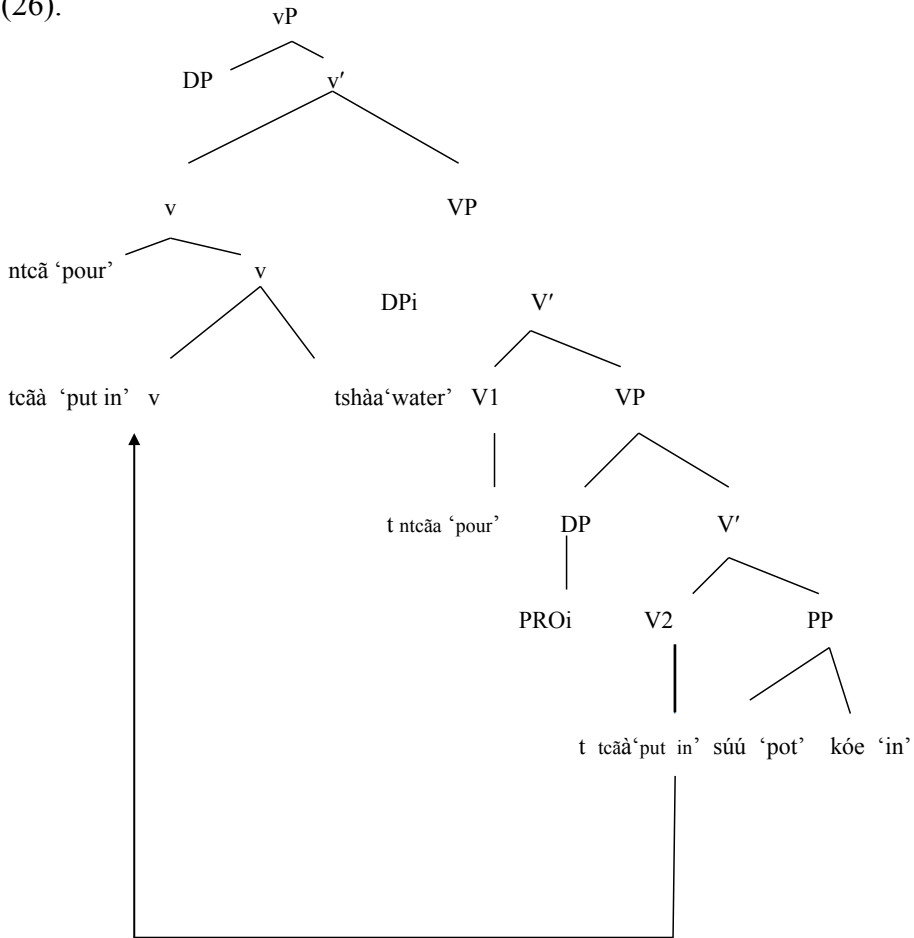
Since all the verbs are adjoined to v as indicated above, it is not surprising that they are adjacent and share one tense/aspect/ voice marker. From the evidence above, the following generalizations about verb movement are needed to derive the correct word order as indicated in (25b). As observed by Collins (2002), verbs always adjoin to the left; the trace of a verb does not block verb movement and a verb always adjoins as close as possible to v (Local Move).The other sentences can also be analyzed in the same way as the one above.

Conclusion

In Naro, the verbs that belong to one group such as intransitive + transitive, transitive +transitive verbs are placed together. I have argued that the type of serial verbs where V1 is transitive and V2 is intransitive also exist in Naro. One interesting difference that I found between serial verbs and verbal compounds is that, for the verbal compounds,

for instance, in languages like ǂHoan, the verb *kyu* 'rise' does not occur as V2 when V1 is transitive whereas it can in a serial verb construction in Naro. In languages with verbal compounds there is a constraint that the verbs should always be adjacent as shown in examples (6a &7d) while in Naro that is not the case as indicated in examples (6b, 7b & 7c). This is the reason why I concluded that Naro has serial verbs instead of verbal compounds. I also argued that cases where the verbs have to be adjacent in Naro are accidental, but this does not mean that those are verbal compounds. In Naro, a person, gender and number marker; an object, past tense, an adverb and a particle can appear between the two verbs as shown in examples (7b, c, 8b, 14b, e, 15a etc.). This provides additional evidence that Naro has serial verbs instead of verbal compounds. It seems that in all cases it is possible to add the particle (-*a)* between the verbs in a serial verb construction in Naro as shown in examples (6b, 7,8,13, 14 and 15).

Notes

1. The viability of their continued existence as a cultural group depends on their ability to determine their lifestyles. To a large measure, they have been able to do this because they are the majority population in the Ghanzi farms and areas to the immediate south. As with so many other Bushman groups, their future probably lies in animal husbandry. Their land is too poor for large-scale cultivation (Barnard 1992:155).

2. See also Nishiyama 1998, Cummings 2001, and Gruber and Collins 1997:149, where verbal compounds are derived from underlying structures similar to serial verb constructions (on the basis of widely differing sets of assumptions).

References

Anderson, L.G, and Janson T. (1997). *Languages in Botswana*. Gaborone: Longman Botswana.

Baker, M. (1989). Object sharing in serial verb construction. *Linguistic Inquiry* 20,513-553.

Baker, M., and Osamuyimen, T.S. (2001). *A Serial Verb Construction without Constructions*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press.

Chomsky, N. (1995). *The Minimalist Program*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Collins, C. (1995). *Serial Verb Construction and the Theory of Multiple Feature Checking*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell UniversityPress

Collins, C. (1997a). Argument sharing in serial verb constructions. *Linguistic Inquiry,* 28, 461-497.

Collins, C. (2001). Aspects of plurality in ǂHoan. *Language*, 77(3),

456-476.

Collins, C. (2002). Multiple verb movement in ǂHoan. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 33(1), 1-29.

Hasselbring, S. (1995). *A Sociolinguistic Survey of the Languages of Gantsi District*. Gaborone: Tassals Publishing.

Selkik, E. (1982). *The Syntax of Words*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Visser, H. and Visser C. (1995). Naro in a quarter of an hour. MS. Ghanzi, Botswana.

Visser, H. (2001). *Naro-English, English-Naro Dictionary*. MS. Ghanzi, Botswana.

Visser, H. (2003). *Naro Syntax*. MS. Ghanzi, Botswana.

Visser, H. (2003). *Naro Morphology*. MS. Ghanzi, Botswana.