The Interrogative Serial Verb Construction in Kavalan

The present paper discusses the syntax of interrogative verbs in Kavalan, a nearly extinct Austronesian language spoken in eastern Taiwan. Hagège (2008) defines interrogative verbs as wh-words that denote not only an interrogative meaning but also a verbal meaning. The following example from Kavalan illustrates the use of the wh-word *naquni* 'do.how' as a verb.

(1) **naquni**-an-numi=pa
     do.how-PV-2PL.ERG=FUT
     'How will you do it?'

Such interrogative verbs have the same morphological and syntactic distributions as other typical verbs in this language. They can take pronominal agreement, e.g. *-numi* '2PL.ERG', and also voice markers, e.g. the patience voice marker *–an* in (1), which is a crucial diagnostic for verbs in this language. They are typologically and syntactically interesting in a number of ways.

First, interrogative verbs in Kavalan can co-occur with a lexical verb to form Interrogative Serial Verb Construction (Interrogative SVC), where the interrogative verb is the main verb while the lexical verb is its complement, as shown in example (2) below.

(2) **pasani**-an-su   m-azas   ya   kelisiw-ta
     V.to.where-PV-2SG.ERG AV-take   ABS   money-1IPL.GEN
     'Where did you take our money?'

The lexical verb in such questions must be inflected for agent voice *m-*. It cannot take the patient voice marker *-an*, as shown below.

(3) *pasani-an-su   azas-an   ya   kelisiw-ta
     V.to.where-PV-2SG.ERG take-PV   ABS   money-1IPL.GEN
     'Where did you take our money?'

This AV-restriction on the lexical verb indicates that the lexical verb in this construction is defective and does not act like a full-fledged main verb, typical of verbal complements in SVCs.

The Interrogative SVC in Kavalan can shed light on the syntactic structure of SVC in general in that it supports Collins's (1997) VP-shell analysis for SVC, where the second verb heads its own projection with an empty category *pro* controlled by the theme argument of the first verb. Collins's analysis captures the fact that the interrogative verb and the lexical verb in an Interrogative SVC share the same theme argument. The lexical verb heads the second vP in this structure and can thus take its own voice marker. Moreover, the restriction that the lexical verb in Interrogative SVC can only take the agent voice marker can be explained by the selectional restriction between the head, i.e. the interrogative verb, and its complement.

The Interrogative SVC also has significant theoretical implications for how a wh-feature on C can be checked. Interrogative verbs contain features of both a verb and an interrogative, which together motivate their movement. This paper argues that interrogative verbs in Kavalan undergo head movement and adjoin to C to check the wh-feature on C instead of phrasal movement to Spec, CP. This supports Davis and Sawai's (2001) proposal and suggests that languages can utilize not only Spec-Head agreement but also Head-Head Configuration for wh-feature checking.

References

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