# Compound Verb Construction

Compound verb construction is a grammatical construct that is found in almost all Indian languages and it is also attested in many South-east Asian languages.

There are, of course, lots of parameterizations that have been put forward in order to account for the CVC in all these languages.

However, the literature is full of confusing and over-lapping terminologies such as 'complex predicate', 'serial-verb construction' and 'Explicator compound-verb construction' etc.

Not that we are not happy with these classification, but for pedagogical purposes, we want to differentiate between 'serial-verb construction' and 'compound-verb construction' in this class.

The name 'Explicator compound-verb construction' was given by Masica (1979) in his book titled "*Defining a linguistic area: South Asia*', and later the researchers have dropped the term 'Explicator' and thus we have 'Compound-verb construction' is used as a generic term to refer to a linguistic category which is very important for many languages in the world.

Let's first make the distinction between 'Serial-verb construction' and 'Compound-verb construction' clear and then we will discuss about the 'CVC'.

Serial Verb Construction:

| 1. | vəh | kəyi | gʰə̃ntỗ-se | kɑm | **kərtɑ** | **čəlɑ** | **jɑ** | **rɑhɑ** | **hɛ** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | he-3MS-Nom | many | hours-from | work | do-3MS | walk-3MS | go | stay-3MS | be-Pres |
| | 'He has been keep on going (working) for many hours'. | | | | | | | | |

As we can see in the example given above that there is a serialization of verbs that has been done in the sentence.

So, different verbs, which are serially connected to each other, give the overall semantics of the sentence. This is one of the distinctions of CVC and SVC.

In CVC, the meaning is given by V1 while in SVC the meaning comes from almost all the verbs.

If we examine the marking of the morpho-syntactic features of the subject, we see that they are marked on more than one verb.

This is another ground to treat this kind of constructions different from '**compound-verb**' where the meaning is contributed from more than one verb and morpho-syntactic markers also appear on more than one verb, and thus be called '**Serial verb construction**'.

The distinction is blurred and modern literature on 'complex predicate' doesn't really maintain this distinction between the two, but I believe that we, at the early stage of learning linguistics, at least must know the distinction between the two!

Compound Verb Construction:

| 2. | məntri-ji | kʊrsi-pər | bɛʈʰ | gəye | =[ bɛʈʰe ] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | minister-3MS-Hon | chair-Loc | sit-V$_1$ | go-V$_2$-3MS-Hon-Pst | |
| | 'The minister sat (down) on the chair'. | | | | |

There are many linguistic features that differentiate the 'CVC' from 'SVC', however, the most salient one is the semantics.

Except two exceptions ('dena', 'give' and 'lena', 'take') all CVC in Hindi has to have the re-placeability of the compound verb with the main verb or V1.

This is what has been shown in example (2) that the compound verb [bɛʈʰ+ gəye] must be replaceable with **[ bɛʈʰe ]**.

So, this is the most salient and foremost requirement for calling any combination of two verbs together which have been 'compounded' together to formulate a 'compound verb'.

Let us learn about different terminologies that are used for describing the compound verb construction as a phenomenon.

The V1 in a CVC is know as a 'polar verb' in a sense of being 'pivotal' for the purpose of the semantics of CVC.

Compound Verb Construction:

| 2. | məntri-ji | kʊrsi-pər | bɛʈʰ | gəye | =[ bɛʈʰe ] |
|----|-----------|-----------|------|------|-----------|
| | minister-3MS-Hon | chair-Loc | sit-V₁ | go-V₂-3MS-Hon-Pst | |
| | 'The minister sat (down) on the chair'. | | | | |

The V2 of a compound verb is known as  a 'vector' verb in a sense that '…a linguistic element that carries and **transmit 'X' FOR 'Y'.**

This is the reason that Masica (1979) has called the V2 of a CVC as an 'explicator' verb in a sense that it explicates or transmits the meaning of V1, so, V2 is a vector/transmitter/explicator.

**Hook, P. E. (1974)** *The Compound Verb in Hindi*. **Ann Arbor, Michigan: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies.**

(Hook 2001, 1991, 1974; Das 2006, 2013; 2015;2016; Butt 2010, 1995; Koul 2006; Singh 1997, Masica 1991; Abbi and Gopalakrishnan 1991; Kulsum 2014; Sharma, 1994 etc.)

Anyone who publishes anything about 'compound verb' s/he has to read and follow Hook's (1974) core description of compound verb.

His work may not have taken up every aspect of 'compound verb' in detail, but it has not left any aspect of CVC untouched!

So, there are lots of suggestions, changes, better understanding and thus expansion of the description of CVC  in almost five decades.

**The Linguistic prerequisites of Compound verb (Hindi)**

- *Semantic prerequisite:*

- *The meaning of the $V_1$ must be replaceable with that of the compound verb in Hindi and other related languages. This rule has some aberration or exception with just two $V_2$ or Vector verbs i.e. 'lena', 'take' and 'dena', 'give' in Hindi.*

- *Morphological prerequisite:*

- *The first verbal element i.e. $V_1$ must be in the root-form or a form that remains fixed, and in case of an inflection, it should not show agreement with the subject or the object in the sentence. We have proofs for this rule of compound verb construction in one of the prominent research works with examples from more than ten major varieties of Hindi and also in some other dominant languages in India such as Marathi, Nepali and Punjabi (Das 2006).*

- *So, even though Hook(1974) doesn't mention these prerequisites, these* **prerequisites** *are very essential for a fine sense of understanding the phenomenon i.e. CVC !*

- *Syntactic prerequisite:*

*The ± transitivity of the vector verb decides the syntactic (structural) transitivity of the compound verb construction. This rule is very important to understand for the placement of the ergative marker '-ne' in CVC in Hindi and other ergative (full or split) languages in India.*

**Time for examples and analysis:**

## Semantic and morphological prerequisites of CV:

| Compound Verb | | Simple Verb |
|---|---|---|
| **Polar verb** | **Vector verb** | replaceable with Polar verb |
| *pəɽʰna* 'to read' | *lena* 'to take' | = pəɽʰna |
| mɛ̃-ne  yəh kɪtab  pəɽʰ  li<br>I-1MS-Erg this book  read-$V_1$ take-$V_2$-Pst-3FS<br>'I read this book.' | | mɛ̃-ne  yəh kɪtab  pəɽʰi<br>I-1MS-Erg this book  read-Pst-3FS<br>'I read this book.' |

1.

This example from Hindi explains both semantic and morphological prerequisites (i.e. the V1 in the root-form). But what about the other forms meaning V1 in a fixed form!

CVC in kʰoɽʈʰɑ (Angika)

| Compound Verb | | Simple Verb |
|---|---|---|
| **Polar verb** | **Vector verb** | replaceable with Polar verb |
| pəɽʰel 'to read' | lɪɣel 'to take' | = pəɽʰel, 'to read' |
| hamɛ̃    ɪ  kɪtəbba pəɽʰ-i  lelɪye<br>I-1MS-Erg this book  read-$V_1$ take-$V_2$-Pst-3FS<br>'I read this book.' | | hamɛ̃    ɪ kɪtəbba    pəɽʰ-lɪye<br>I-1MS-Erg this book  read-Pst-3FS<br>'I read this book.' |

## Time for examples and analysis:
## CVC in Ahirani (Marathi)

| Compound Verb | | Simple Verb |
|---|---|---|
| **Polar verb** | **Vector verb** | replaceable with Polar verb |
| wačanə 'to read' | ṭakanə 'to drop' | = wačanə, 'to read' |
| mi hai pʊstək wač-ɪ ṭakɪ še<br>I-1MS-Erg this book-M read-V₁ drop-V₂-Pst-MS<br>'I read this book.' | | mi hai pʊstək wačɪlše<br>I-1MS-Erg this book-M read-Pst-MS<br>'I read this book.' |

I assume that Marathi will have similar 'stem-forming morpheme' with V1 in the formation of the CVC.

## CVC in Bangla:

| Compound Verb | | Simple Verb |
|---|---|---|
| **Polar verb** | **Vector verb** | replaceable with Polar verb |
| sɑjabe 'to decorate' | debe 'to give' | =sɑjbe, 'to decorate' |
| ritu ɑmɑ-r gʰɔr šajɪy-e di-lo<br>Ritu-3FS-Nom I-Gen house decorate-V₁ give-V₂-Pst-3S<br>'Ritu decorated my house' | | ritu ɑmɑ-r gʰɔr šaja-lo<br>Ritu-3S-Nom I-Gen house decorate-Pst-3S<br>'Ritu decorated my house.' |

**The Syntactic prerequisite of Compound Verb Construction:**

*The ± transitivity of the vector verb decides the syntactic (structural) transitivity of the compound verb construction. This rule is very important to understand for the placement of the ergative marker '-ne' in compound verb construction in Hindi and other split-ergative languages.* Let's see the examples:

| a. | ləɽke-ne | sɑri | roṭɪyã̌ | kʰɑ-yĩ̌ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | boy-3MS-Nom | all-F | bread-3FPl | eat-pst-3FPl |
| | 'The boy ate all the breads' | | | |

However, let's see CVC of different types of the same sentence:

| b. | ləɽke-ne | sɑri | roṭɪyã̌ | kʰɑ | lĩ̌ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | boy-3MS-Nom | all-F | bread-3F | eat-$V_1$ | take-$V_2$-Pst-3FPl |
| | 'The boy ate all the breads' | | | | |

**Let's see the effect if V2 is intransitive:**

| c. | ləɽkɑ | sɑri | roṭɪyã̌ | kʰɑ | gəyɑ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | boy-3MS-Nom | all-F | bread-3FPl | eat-$V_1$ | go-$V_2$-past-3MPl |
| | 'The boy ate all the breads' | | | | |

Let's also see the counter effect, meaning the V1 is intransitive and the V2 is transitive and this will make the CVC syntactically [+transitive] but it will still remain [-transitive] semantically ☹

**The Syntactic prerequisite of Compound Verb Construction:**

*The ± transitivity of the vector verb decides the syntactic (structural) transitivity of the compound verb construction. This rule is very important to understand for the placement of the ergative marker '-ne' in compound verb construction in Hindi and other split-ergative languages.* Let's see the examples:

| d. | lərki-ne | səb-ke samne | čʰik | dɪya |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | girl-3FS-Erg | all-Gen-front | sneeze-V$_1$ | give-V$_2$-pst-3MS |
| | 'The girl sneezed in front of everyone'. | | | |

Let us see one more example of counter-effect, before we say something important:

| e. | mɛ̃-ne | kəm | pani-se/-mɛ̃ | hi | nəha | lɪya |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | I-1MS-Erg | little | water-Inst/Loc | Emph | bethe-V1 | take-V2-Pst-Defl-Agr |
| | 'I bathed in little water only'. | | | | | |

Have you hear of 'Un-ergative' and 'Un-accusative' verbs? I am sure you must have, and what is told about them?

Let's see what is told about these types of verbs and we will then explain these concpets in much better way and in far more convincing manner!

# 'Un-ergative' and 'Un-accusative' verbs :

a.  vP  (Unaccusative)
```
        vP
        |
        v'
       /  \
      v   VP
         /  \
        V   NP
```

a. NP [$_{VP}$ V] *unergative*   Kate dances.
b. [$_{VP}$ V NP] *unaccusative* Kate fell.

b.  vP  (Unergative)
```
        vP
       /  \
      NP   v'
          /  \
         v   VP
              |
              V
```

| | |
|---|---|
| a. The river froze *solid*. | Unaccusative |
| b. The bottle broke *open / into pieces*. | Unaccusative |
| c. *Dora shouted *hoarse*. | Unergative |
| d. Dora shouted herself *hoarse*. | Unergative |
| e. The dog barked [$_{sc}$ *him awake*] | Unergative |
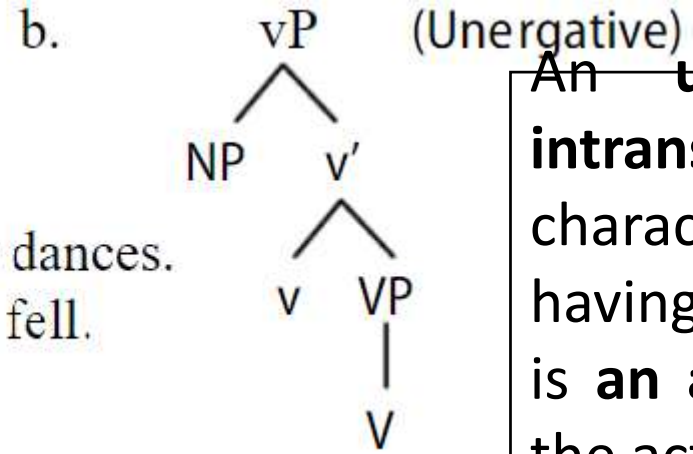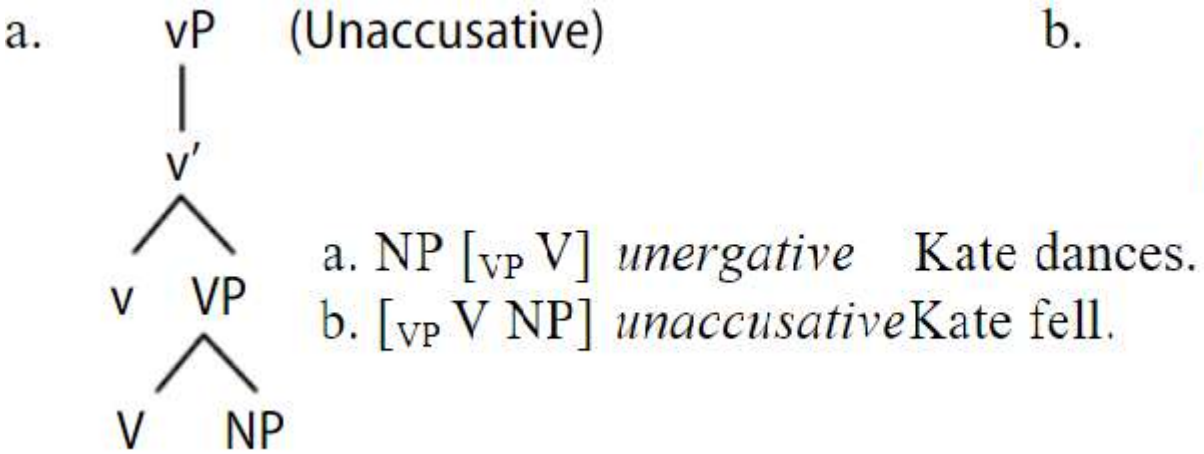
An **un-ergative verb is an intransitive verb** that is characterized semantically by having **a subject argument** which is **an agent** that actively initiates the action expressed by the verb. For example, in English, **talk** and **resign** in a sentence "You talk and you resign" are un-ergative verbs, since they are intransitive (one does not say "you talk someone"). 'You talk to someone' is different!

However, **fall** and **die** in a sentence "They fell and died" are un-accusative verbs, since usually they are not responsible for falling or dying but still the verb is intransitive, meaning it is comprehensively used without a direct object. (They cannot "fall something" or "die someone")

# 'Un-ergative' and 'Un-accusative' verbs : our take on the issue!

Ur-ergative verbs in Indian context should be those verbs (in split-ergative languages with grammatical gender) which meet all the requirements to place an ergative case with the subject such as +Tran. ; +Past simple or +Perfective aspect, yet something happens at the syntactic-level and the licensing of 'ergative case' is not possible.

So, the compound verbs where V1 is +transitive, and the V2 carries all other required morphology such as +Past simple or +Perfective aspect, but just because V2 is a -transitive verb, the ergative case can't be given to the subject in the sentence.

So, a combination of compound verbs with [cvc V1(+tran) + V2 (-tran) ] are 'un-ergative verbs.

The mirror image of above CVC where [ cvc V1(-tran) + V2(+tran)] is an example of un-accusative verb.

What does an 'un-accusative verb' demand? The verb is transitive but since the object of the verb functions as a subject, there is no argument to receive the accusative case. For example, a). The boy opened the door.  b) The door opened.

Here, the sentence  (a) has a transitive verb and (b) has an un-accusative verb on the line of given explanation just above the sentence.

# 'Un-ergative' and 'Un-accusative' verbs : our take on the issue!

Let's re-examine the following sentences:

| d. | lər̥ki-ne | səb-ke sɑmne | čʰik | dɪyɑ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | girl-3FS-Erg | all-Gen-front | sneeze-V$_1$ | give-V$_2$-pst-3MS |
| | 'The girl sneezed in front of everyone'. | | | |

And other one too:

| e. | mɛ̃-ne | kəm | pɑni-se/-mɛ̃ | hi | nəhɑ | lɪyɑ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | I-1MS-Erg | little | water-Inst/Loc | Emph | bethe-V1 | take-V2-Pst-Defl-Agr |
| | 'I bathed in little water only'. | | | | | |

What are the linguistic highlights of these sentences with regard to their semantic and syntactic properties?

1. The compound verbs syntactically become transitive by the virtue of V2[+tran] and thus they are able to license an ergative case to the subject in both the cases.

2. However, they are semantically still intransitive and thus we can't have an accusative case-marked direct object. The DO is not possible in an intransitive sentence.

3. Thus, the compound verbs with [cvc V1[-tran] + V2[+tran]] will qualify as an un-accusative verbs because we can't have a direct object in an intransitive sentence. ☺