A Syntactic Analysis of Persian Multi-Verb Constructions

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The present paper surveys the phenomenon of serial verb constructions (SVCs), and investigates the existence of SVCs in Persian under the theoretical framework developed by Aikhelvand (2006). The question of why, how, and to what extent Persian multi-verb constructions are different from SVCs are taken into account extensively in current study. SVCs are characterized by a succession of verbs and their complements (if any) in a mono-clausal construction with one subject and one tense value that are not separated by any overt marker of coordination or subordination. In Persian, we come across several constructions in which two or more finite verbs stand next to each other without being connected. These verb sequence constructions are highly productive, and seem to be structurally similar to SVCs as exemplified below:

-Xunæ-ro foruxt tæmâm şod ræft
House-ACC sell-PAST-3SG finish become-PAST-3SG go-PAST-3SG
"He sold the house. [Pragmatically inferred meaning: "He sold the house and it is completely done."]"

At first sight, Persian verb sequences appear to be similar to SVCs. However, these constructions cannot be considered on a par with SVCs, for the following reasons: a) they are usually restricted in their mood, polarity, tense, and aspect choices. In contrast productive SVCs are hardly ever restricted in this way. b) They are limited to just a few verbs; most often a few verbs of motion and posture like "to go", "to come", "to sit", and, and etc. c) They are often restricted to certain registers: for instance, Persian verb sequences are considered very colloquial. In contrast, productively serializing languages cannot be tokens of a certain style or register. d) Their behavior regarding insertion of a conjunction or a dependency marker between components is not consistent. In most occurrences, there is no meaning shift, but in a few cases, the meaning is semantically odd or different. e) The single event expressed by verb sequences is not composed of several sub-events. The overall results drawn from the comparative investigation of serial verb constructions in serializing languages and Persian verb strings throughout the paper are positively compatible and consistent with the study's hypothesis which reveals that Persian verb strings do not fit into the typology of Serial verb constructions. They are superficially similar to SVCs, but they are distinct according to the parameters and formal properties provided by Aikhelvand (2006).

This study argues that Persian verb sequences are acknowledged as containing one verb from a relatively large, open, or unrestricted class, and one or more verbs from a semantically restricted, closed class. They denote a single event described by the verb from the non-restricted class. The verbs from a closed class provide a modificational specification which is often a motion or posture verb expressing direction, or imparting a tense-aspect meaning to the whole constructions. The verbs from the closed class tend to get grammaticalized. Therefore, Persian multi-verb constructions are assumed as the result of minor verb grammaticalization. In fact, they are placed in grammaticalization cline between lexical verbs and auxiliary verbs, and tend to behave like auxiliary verbs as they get grammaticalized. Such constructions are not discussed in Persian literature under a certain term. They can be called quasi-auxiliary verbs in terms of Quirk (1985). Following Quirk et al, Csato(2001) discussed them in Turkic constructions as double verb constructions which are syntactically similar to Persian multi-verb constructions.
References:


