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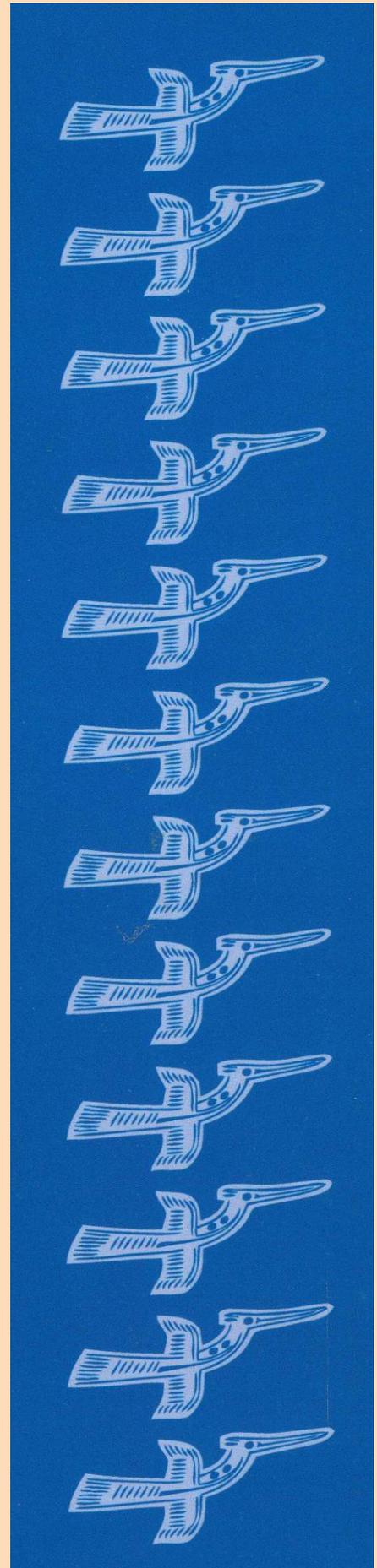
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# Another look at serial verb constructions in Khmer

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## Abstract

Serial verb constructions (SVCs) are a widely recognized areal feature of Mainland Southeast Asia (MSEA) and Austroasiatic languages in particular. Yet discussions of SVCs in Khmer have often been limited to sporadic data in papers on SVCs in general (Schiller 1989; Clark 1989; Mikami 1981; Clark 1992; Durie 1997). The two most extensive treatments of SVCs in Khmer per se (Wilawan 1993, 1995; Sak-Humphry 2005) find theory-internal grounds to deny that the language has SVCs. The more recent study of Haiman (2011) asserts that Khmer does have SVCs but includes in its discussion completive or “success verb” constructions which function differently from structures recognized cross-linguistically as SVCs. Here, I apply the “characteristic and diagnostic features of SVCs” from Kroeger (2004) and Durie (1997) to putative SVCs in Khmer, taking monoclausality as the most important characteristic of SVCs. I use the binding behavior of the bimorphemic reflexive pronoun *kluən-æŋ* to demonstrate that the sentences in question do indeed constitute single clauses comprising multiple verb phrases without coordination or subordination that share core arguments, refer to a single complex event, and must agree in polarity and tense-aspect-modality (TAM). It is concluded that Khmer does have SVCs as rigorously defined by the criteria above.

**Keywords:** syntax, serial verb constructions, reflexive pronouns

**ISO 639-3 language codes:** khm

## 1. Introduction

In this paper, it is argued that certain Khmer verbal constructions that have been variously accepted into and excluded from the category of serial verb constructions (SVCs) do in fact merit that label. The types of sentences under consideration can be subclassified in terms of both their semantics and syntax.

Semantically, the constructions in question coincide well with the several general meanings of SVCs outlined in Kroeger (2004:227–229) and Seuren (1990:18). Such constructions in Khmer serve to express: instrument (1a), recipient (1b), beneficiary (1c), goal of motion (1d), result of action (1e), purpose (1f), and manner (1g).

(1a) *sokh jɔ:k kambət ka:t sac*  
Sokh take knife cut meat  
'Sokh cut the meat with a knife.'

(1b) *kɲom tɨŋ siəwphəw ɲəoj Bill*  
1SG buy book give Bill  
'I bought a book for Bill.' (Spruiell 1988:252)

(1c) *baək bəŋɲuəc ɲəoj kɲom pha:ŋ*  
open window give 1SG also  
'Open the window for me, will you?' (Huffman, Promchan & Lambert 1970:139)

<sup>1</sup> I wish to gratefully acknowledge the crucial participation of four Khmer native-speaker consultants in this project. MS is a male Buddhist monk in his twenties who had lived in the United States for only eighteen months at the time I worked with him. RS is a forty-something male who has lived in the U.S since he was in his early teens. JS is RS's wife who had just arrived in the U.S. from Cambodia a month or so prior to our first session together. RS's mother (MR) is approximately in her seventies and has lived in the U.S. for a little more than thirty years. All speakers are completely fluent and literate in Khmer, their first language and mother tongue. Special thanks also go to the editors of *Mon-Khmer Studies* and the anonymous referee for able assistance and many insightful comments and suggestions.

- (1d) *knom caol ba:l təw la:n*  
1SG throw ball go car  
'I throw the ball at the car.' (Spruiell 1988:252)
- (1e) *knom wiej ckae slap*  
1SG beat dog die  
'I struck the dog dead' (Mikami 1981:110)
- (1f) *koət təw Waikiki roəm ciəmuəj jə:ŋ*  
3SG go Waikiki dance with 1PL  
'He goes to Waikiki to dance with us.' (Sak-Humphry 1995:181)
- (1g) *viə ba:n mək lau:p sdap niw kra:om pteəh*  
1SG PST come sneak listen be.at beneath house  
'He came and listened secretly from beneath the house.' (Haiman 2011:217)

Syntactically, these constructions can be subclassified into four types, depending on what direct arguments or terms are shared among the constituent verbs. **Table 1** presents a summary of the four syntactic types with their basic word orders and constituents.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 1:** Khmer SVC types by syntax

SVC Type	Verb Types		Word Order
	V1	V2	
SHARED AGENT	TR	TR	A V1 T <sub>1</sub> V2 T <sub>2</sub>
SHARED THEME	TR	INTR	A V1 T=T V2
SHARED AGENT & SHARED THEME	TR	TR	A V1 T V2 A V1 V2 T
PIVOT	TR	INTR	A V1 T=A V2

Examples of each of the basic syntactic types are provided in (2): shared agent (2a), shared theme (2b), shared agent and shared theme (2c-d), and pivot (2e).

- (2a) *koət jək kandiəw ka:t srow*  
3SG take sickle cut rice.plant  
'He/she takes the sickle to cut the rice plant.' (Sak-Humphry 1995:189)
- (2b) *knom wiej kəw bajk*  
1SG hit glass break  
'I hit the glass and it broke.'
- (2c) *ko:n baoh sɔmʔa:t pteəh*  
child sweep clean<sub>CAUS</sub> house  
'The child sweeps the house clean.' (Schiller 1989:408–409)
- (2d) *ba:ŋ jək kasaet ʔa:n*  
older.brother take newspaper read  
'The older brother took the newspaper to read it.' (Wilawan 1995:61)
- (2e) *wiə noəm kme:ŋ-kme:ŋ ruət lə: phnum*  
3SG take child-child run on mountain  
'He/she takes the children to run on the mountain.' (Sak-Humphry 1995:191)

The interactions between these semantic and syntactic subclassification are complex, with no one-to-one correspondence between semantic and syntactic type. There are, however, some interesting correlations to note. Possible Khmer SVCs of the instrumental semantic type (1a) tend

<sup>2</sup> In **Table 1**, the term Pivot is used in the sense of Chao (1968:124–125). I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer for pointing this fact out to me. Haiman (2011:277) and Bisang (1992:438) both use the term to describe what I have here designated as “shared theme” as well. Note that this use of “pivot” is entirely separate from the use of the term “pivot” to designate the epistemic source or point of view parameter in discussions of logophoricity and long-distance reflexives (Sells 1987). Abbreviations throughout this paper conform to the Leipzig Glossing Rules with the addition of T designating “theme”.

to be of the shared agent syntactic type (2a). Beneficiary constructions (1c) tend likewise to be of the shared agent type, since the verb *ɣəoj* ‘give’ has no semantic theme argument. Recipient constructions (1b), on the other hand, tend to be of the shared agent & shared theme syntactic type, insofar as the usual understanding of the verb *ɣəoj* ‘give’ in such cases is as a three-place predicate with the agent and theme of the initial verb (V1) and its own secondary or indirect object, the recipient. Goal-of-motion constructions (1d) tend to be of the shared theme (2b-c) or shared agent (2a) syntactic types, while result-of-action constructions (1e) usually belong to the shared theme category alone. Purpose constructions (1f) tend to belong to the shared agent or pivot (2e) syntactic types, while manner constructions (1g) usually belong to the shared agent type alone.

As pointed out by a referee, possible SVC constructions in which one of the verbs belongs to a (semantically and grammatically) restricted class (Aikhenvald’s (2006:3, 30, 35) asymmetrical-type constructions) tend more quickly toward grammaticalization. In the case of the Khmer examples in (1), the beneficiary/recipient, and goal semantic types (1b-d), where the second verb in the series (V2) is almost always *ɣəoj* ‘give’ (recipient/beneficiary) or *təw* ‘go’/*mɔ:k* ‘come’/*dɔl* ‘arrive’ (goal), respectively, are more likely than the result, purpose, and manner types to represent stages where V2 is shading off into an adposition rather than being a true lexical verb. The instrumental type (1a), where V1 is usually either *ɣɔ:k* ‘take’ or *praə* ‘use’, may also be approaching such grammaticalized status. Grammaticalization, or the lack thereof, however, is an epiphenomenon of SVCs and not a diagnostic property for their description and definition.

The use of the term SVC in the linguistic literature has been notoriously variable. Arguments for what constitutes a valid SVC here are made on the basis of the application of a rigorous set of “diagnostic and characteristic features of SVCs” taken from Kroeger (2004:229–230), itself derived in large part from Durie (1997).<sup>3</sup> The most crucial of these characteristics is monoclausality. In order to qualify as an SVC, a given construction must first satisfy the necessary condition of comprising a single clause without coordination or subordination.

Monoclausality is demonstrated for a subset of the possible SVCs in Khmer in (1) and (2) by appealing to the binding behaviour of the bimorphemic reflexive pronoun *kluən-æŋ*, ‘body-self’. As one of two reflexive pronouns in the language, *kluən-æŋ* is both clause-bounded and subject-oriented: that is, it must take as its antecedent the subject noun phrase (NP) of its own minimal clause and is therefore restricted to non-subject grammatical relations (i.e. object or genitive). Together with extraction tests to rule out coordination and subordination, this bimorphemic reflexive can thus serve as an effective delimiter of clause boundaries.<sup>4</sup> The subtypes of putative SVCs for which monoclausality is demonstrated in this way are the semantic types of instrument (1a) and purpose (1f). These subtypes are chosen because they are less likely to involve issues of grammaticalization and more likely to be interpretable as being biclausal than many of the other subtypes. Thus, if monoclausality can be demonstrated even for these constructions, then, a fortiori, it is to be expected to apply to constructions in which one of the two verbs has grammaticalized to a greater or lesser degree. It is additionally shown that verbal constructions like those in (1) and (2) display the remainder of the key diagnostic and characteristic features of SVCs as well, namely direct argument sharing, reference to single (complex) events, and agreement in polarity and TAM.

The structure of the paper is as follows. Section 2 describes in detail the problem the study seeks to address. The section begins by considering the peculiar diversity of opinion regarding the existence of SVCs in Khmer vis-à-vis the typological and areal commonality of SVCs in Mainland Southeast Asia (MSEA). Arguments are presented against two extensive investigations of SVCs in Khmer in particular which have concluded, largely on theory-internal grounds, that all subsequent verbs (V2) in putative SVCs are non-finite complements of V1. Three specific contentions support

<sup>3</sup> NB: Slightly similar lists of diagnostic criteria can be found in Aikhenvald (2006:4–21) and Bisang (2009:794). It should be noted, however, that Aikhenvald (2006:8) allows for negators in SVCs that negate only part of the construction and do not scope over both (or all) verbs equally; the present approach does not

<sup>4</sup> The other reflexive pronoun, the monomorphemic *kluən* ‘body’, is a long-distance reflexive that may occur in subject, object, or genitive grammatical roles within embedded clauses, coindexed with the matrix subject (Fisher 1985; 1988). This breakdown of reflexive pronouns into bimorphemic local and monomorphemic long-distance varieties is found in many languages throughout the world (Reinhart & Reuland 1993:658).

this position. First, extraction tests such as those performed by Sak-Humphry (1995) show only that the constituent verbs in a putative Khmer SVC are not “islands” for extraction by the Coordination Structure Constraint proposed by Ross (1967) and hence are not coordinate. Second, the inability to cleft and topicalize the entire V2 phrase out of these constructions suggests that it is not a complete constituent and is therefore not likely a subordinate clause. Third, tests showing that V2 cannot be independently negated and that overt coreferential subject NPs among the verbs in putative SVCs are not permitted are consistent with (indeed anticipated by) an SVC analysis. Section 2 also considers the need for terminological precision in applying the term SVC. Much of the confusion in the literature on SVCs in Khmer results from imprecise definitions of the category of SVC, lumping explicitly biclausal complement constructions in with properly monoclausal SVCs. A strict set of criteria is needed in order to be able to carve out a theoretical space in which to uniquely and exhaustively designate a given construction as an SVC and not have some other, less controversial categorical label apply equally well or even better. Section 3 lays out the proposed solution to the problem sketched in Section 2. Subsection 3.1 demonstrates the clause-bounded behavior of the bimorphemic reflexive *kluən-æŋ* and applies it as a diagnostic test to demonstrate monoclausality for SVCs. Subsection 3.2 looks at the evidence of extraction tests to show that the constructions in (1) and (2) do not involve either coordination, whether overt or covert, or subordination. Subsection 3.3 demonstrates that the verbal constructions must additionally agree in polarity and TAM, thus fully satisfying the diagnostic and characteristic features of SVCs.

Evidence adduced throughout the paper includes both published data from previous grammars and articles dating from 1915 to 2011 (Maspero 1915; Huffman, Promchan & Lambert 1970; Spruiell 1988; Meyer 1992; Wilawan 1995; Smyth 2008; Haiman 2011) as well as critical new data elicited from four native speakers living in Dallas, TX.

## 2. The Problem

SVCs are robustly represented among the languages of MSEA. In fact, they are widely regarded as an areal feature (Clark 1989; Clark 1992; Migliazza 1996; Aikhenvald & Dixon 2006). **Table 2** presents just a sampling of languages across the major families of MSEA for which SVCs, by one definition or another, have been documented. As can be surmised from the table, Austroasiatic languages particularly abound in SVC behavior.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 2:** SVCs in MSEA

Austroasiatic	Tai	Miao-Yao	Tibeto-Burman
<i>Chrau</i> (Thomas 1971)	<i>Standard Thai</i> (Iwasaki & Ingkaphirom 2005; Rangkupan 2007)	<i>White Hmong</i> (Jarkey 1991)	<i>Pwo Karen</i> (Kato 2003)
<i>Jeh</i> (Gradin 1976)	<i>Black Tai</i> (Fippinger 1975)		<i>Kayah Li</i> (Solnit 1997)
<i>Kammu</i> (Holmer 2005) <i>Semelai</i> (Kruspe 2004)	<i>Nung</i> (Saul & Wilson 1980) <i>Lao</i> (Enfield 2007)		
<i>Vietnamese</i> (Mikami 1981; Thompson 1984; Sophana 1997)			

Yet, when we turn our attention to standard Cambodian, or Khmer, one of only two Austroasiatic languages with official status as a national language (the other being Vietnamese), the question of whether SVCs exist in the language seems vexed and open. Khmer surfaces in the literature on SVCs principally in the context of larger discussions of SVCs as a general phenomenon. Various authors cite example sentences from Khmer involving what are labelled as SVCs as though the language constituted a standard exemplar of SVC behaviour. Little to no

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Seuren (1990:15): “The centrally relevant phenomena for SVCs are typically found in certain groups of languages in certain restricted geographical areas, notably the Kwa languages spoken in parts of West Africa, most of the Caribbean Creole languages, many East and South-East Asian languages, in particular Chinese and the Khmer group, and, it seems, some languages of Papua New Guinea, including the Creole language Tok Pisin” [emphasis mine].

discussion is usually offered. **Table 3** presents a sampling from some of the available general SVC literature of the frequency of Khmer examples used to illustrate SVC behaviour.

**Table 3:** Khmer example sentences in SVC literature

- (Clark 1989): 1 Khmer example
- (Clark 1992): 4 Khmer examples
- (Durie 1997): 1 Khmer example (quoted from Jacob 1968)
- (Mikami 1981): >10 Khmer examples
- (Schiller 1989): 8 Khmer examples

Mikami (1981) stands out in this list as something of an exception. His article explicitly contrasts the behaviour of apparent SVCs in Vietnamese and Khmer. Accordingly, it provides a relative wealth of example sentences. However, Mikami's discussion is vitiated by his imprecise application of the label "serial verb construction" to a series of complex sentences that include sentential and verb-phrase (VP) complementation and relative clause constructions. In addition, the native Khmer consultants I worked with rejected many of Mikami's example sentences as either wholly ungrammatical or at least pragmatically odd.<sup>6</sup> These faults render the article problematic as an assessment of SVCs in Khmer.<sup>7</sup>

More perplexing still, two in extenso treatments of Khmer SVC behaviour per se, Wilawan (1992; 1995) and Sak-Humphry (1995), outright deny that the language makes use of any construction that can be labelled an SVC while being simultaneously distinguished from a non-finite complement clause. That is, both scholars argue that since the Khmer constructions in (1) and (2) above cannot contain two overt NPs that refer to the same argument without forcing an interpretation of the whole utterance as comprising two paratactically arranged full sentences, V2 must be construed as non-finite and thus subordinate to V1 in a kind of complement clause.<sup>8</sup> This conclusion is made all the more striking for the fact that the two scholars who share it also subscribe to the same theoretical orientation and both earned doctorates at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa under the supervision of the late Stanley Starosta, originator of the grammatical theory known as Lexicase Dependency Grammar. The fact that Wilawan (1992; 1995) and Sak-Humphry (1995) both apply a Lexicase analysis to the topic of SVCs in Khmer, I maintain, helps explain their conclusions on the topic of SVCs in Khmer.

As its name suggests, the Lexicase framework is a dependency grammar that has, at its heart, the dependency relation: "Every word in a sentence is the head of its own construction, and every lexical item in a sentence but one, the main verb (or non-verbal predicator), is dependent on one and only one other lexical item, its REGENT" (Starosta 1988:104). Already, one can see how this approach is likely to founder when dealing with a topic like SVCs, which have so exercised theoretical syntacticians precisely because they appear to involve multiple verbs that are syntactic sisters within a single clause. However, Starosta's Lexicase theory also defines the concepts "finite" and "non-finite" as applied to verbs in terms of the disallowance of overt coreferential subjects within the minimal clause (Starosta 1988:68; Wilawan 1992:1243). It is likely this a priori theoretical consideration that motivates both Sak-Humphry and Wilawan to conclude that V2 in a putative SVC must necessarily be non-finite and dependent upon V1 as regent. Wilawan (1995:55) writes:

<sup>6</sup> E.g. Mikami (1981:106) example (12c): #/\**knom ba:n koət təw psa: ʔəoj* (intended meaning: 'I got him to go to the market for me').

<sup>7</sup> The work of Bisang (1992; 2009) also stands out in the literature for its treatment of Khmer data in discussions of SVCs across SE Asia. However, Bisang's discussions have paid more attention to the concept of single eventhood and parameters for its description independent of cultural factors than to a detailed analysis of monoclausality as it relates to SVCs in Khmer, such as is presented here.

<sup>8</sup> Sak-Humphrey (1995:201): "This paper enables me to examine the relationships between the head of the construction and its dependents in a sentence that has more than two verbs with no coordination or subordination marker (including the completive constructions) which were called by others as serial verb constructions. Thus, there is no difference between the serial verb construction and the non-finite subordination construction." Wilawan (1995:66): "No distinct 'serial verb construction proper' was found to be justified. Instead, the V2 in these series is analyzed as a non-finite complement verb which is a subordination dependent [sic] of a main verb, as shown by its syntactic characteristics."

All of the previous analyses of the SVCP [serial verb construction proper] explicitly or apparently agree that only the first verb in SVCPs allows an overt subject noun phrase. From the dependency analysis point of view, this third characteristic of SVCPs implies that only the first verb in a series is a finite verb, while the rest are non-finite.

Sak-Humphry (1995:180) concurs, noting simply: “[I]f an overt subject cannot be inserted, then the V2 is a non-finite verb” and “[the verb] is non-finite if we cannot add the subject in the second position and still have a single sentence.” In a language like Khmer, where zero anaphora is the rule rather than the exception (Haiman 2011:199), this assumption can lead to significant problems.<sup>9</sup> It also presupposes that what has been recognized as a key feature of SVCs cross-linguistically, viz. obligatory non-coreference of overt NPs, is an indicator of non-finiteness. Yet it is precisely because V2 cannot take an overt subject NP coreferential with the argument of the subject NP of V1 that these constructions are suspicious for being SVCs in the first place.<sup>10</sup>

To make matters worse, in his recent reference grammar of Khmer, Haiman (2011) contradicts the view of both Wilawan and Sak-Humphry in asserting that the language does in fact have SVCs. However, Haiman’s discussion of the phenomena suffers from the same imprecision in terminology as Mikami’s. Haiman includes in his category of SVCs resultative and so-called “success verb” constructions<sup>11</sup> that behave quite differently from the types of sentences under consideration here (Haiman 2011:271).<sup>12</sup>

Another look at SVCs in Khmer is clearly called for, one that avoids both the pitfalls of imprecision in usage of the label SVC to designate a particular sub-category of multi-verb construction in the language and theory-internal a priori assumptions that force us to presuppose simple answers to the very complex theoretical questions posed by SVCs to begin with.

### 3. The Proposed Solution

The first step in proposing a solution to the problem outlined above is to clear up precisely what is meant by the term SVC. In order to accomplish this, the “diagnostic and characteristic features of SVCs” discussed in Kroeger (2004:229–230) and given in **Table 4** below are adopted.

<sup>9</sup> E.g. As Wilawan (1995:61–62, n. 12) notes, sentences like (i) present a real problem for Lexicase theory. Here, the conjunction *haəj* ‘and’ links what is, from a Lexicase perspective, a finite clause with a non-finite clause. Assuming that coordination should conjoin only grammatically equivalent constructions (Starosta 1988:248), coordinations like this one should not be possible. As a result of her theoretical commitment, Wilawan is forced to posit a structure that she calls “non-finite coordination,” which has the unique asymmetrical property of coordinating two verbs of unequal finiteness and requiring that their relative order be fixed.

(i) *kɲom tɨw bɔːŋ haəj tɨw psaː phaːŋ*  
1SG go bank and go market also

‘I go to the bank and then [I] also go to the market.’ (Ehrman & Sos 1972:73)

<sup>10</sup> To be completely fair, there was a prior tradition in the literature of trying to fit SVCs into the complementation mold. Seuren (1990:20) refers to SVCs as an example of “pseudocomplementation”: that is, they involve embedded sentences that function as sentential complements but with the semantic roles of of “concomitant, resultative, purposive circumstance or event.” Fisher (1988:31) uses a test similar to Sak-Humphry’s to distinguish between infinitival and sentential complements. We shall have more to say about her examples below.

<sup>11</sup> NB: Haiman’s use of the terms “resultative” and “success” seem rather interchangeable and, as he acknowledges (Haiman 2011:271) both answer to Huffman et al.’s (1970:187–188) category of “completive verbs”.

<sup>12</sup> For specific examples of how these categories of verbal behaviour differ from putative SVCs, see section 3.2 below. Perhaps the relative imprecision of Haiman’s use of the designation SVC is to be expected given comments elsewhere in his book that seem to indicate a certain hostility to overly fine terminological distinctions in the grammatical description: “In fact, the suspicion that all of the present taxonomy of AV [auxiliary verb], MV [main verb], and SV [serial verb] is an extended example of ethnocentric grammatical pedantry is a salutary one...” (Haiman 2011:280); “Rigor has no place in Khmer grammar” (Haiman 2011:354).

**Table 4:** Diagnostic and characteristic features of SVCs

1. A prototypical SVC contains two or more morphologically independent verbs within the same clause, neither of which is an auxiliary verb.
2. There are no conjunctions or subordination intervening or separating them.
3. The serial verbs belong to the same intonation contour, with no pause separating them.
4. The entire SVC refers to a single (possibly complex) event.
5. A prototypical SVC contains only one specification for tense, aspect, modality, negation, etc. These features may be redundantly marked on more than one verb.
6. The verbs share at least one semantic argument.
7. There is no co-reference among direct arguments: a true SVC does not contain two overt NPs referring to the same argument.
8. A prototypical SVC contains only one grammatical subject.

As has been widely noted (Seuren 1990:14; Lord 1993:2; Anderson 2010:12), verb serialization is less a universal category and more a syndrome of features and phenomena. Thus a functional-contructional approach like that which Anderson (2010:1) takes to auxiliary verb constructions is necessitated for dealing with SVCs as well: functional in that the object of study comprises a continuum of multi-verb constructions that operate over a certain range of functional domains and constructional in that we are concerned with the formal encoding of these functions in morphosyntax at the construction level. Nonetheless, in order to preserve the validity of cross-linguistic comparisons of SVCs, some kind of agreed-upon standard of definition or set of featural requirements is needed. The list in **Table 4** is designed to fill just such a need.

This list comprises a highly restrictive set of criteria for judging potential SVCs. Such restrictiveness is necessary in order to ensure that whatever constructions bear the label SVC cannot simultaneously belong to any other terminological category, such as Sak-Humphry's (1995) non-finite complement or even Seuren's (1990) "pseudocomplementation." In this way, the theoretical integrity of the class SVC is preserved.

No evidence will be presented here concerning the third, phonological criterion in **Table 4**; the reader is asked to take for granted that constructions like those in (1) and (2) are not spoken with significant pauses between the constituent verbs. The astute reader will also have noticed that the constructions contained in the category labelled "Pivot" in **Table 1** and example (2) above violate feature 8 from **Table 4** in that the theme of V1 is simultaneously interpreted as being the subject of V2, yielding two different grammatical subjects across the SVC as a whole. This is the only respect in which the putative Khmer SVCs surveyed here fall short of prototypicality for SVCs.<sup>13</sup>

### 3.1 Monoclausality in Khmer SVCs

Monoclausality is a necessary condition for identifying a given construction as an SVC. It is not, however, a sufficient condition, as coordination of VPs is still possible within a single clause. Moreover, obligatory control can mean that a reflexive pronoun takes as its antecedent an implicit subject-controller within its same minimal clause (such as PRO). Thus, in establishing the monoclausality of possible SVCs in Khmer, care must be taken not only to locate probable clause boundaries, but also to rule out covert coordination of VPs and subordination of non-finite clauses with empty/null subjects.

<sup>13</sup> It should be noted, however, that Anderson (2010:12) labels as "classic" serializing combinations both SVCs of the same-subject 'take come' > 'bring' type and those of the switch-subject 'hit die' > 'kill' type.

Subsection 3.1.1 below shows how the binding facts of the bimorphemic reflexive pronoun *kluən-æŋ* can be used to help locate clause boundaries in Khmer sentences. Subsection 3.1.2 then tackles the problem of ruling out covert coordination in possible SVCs by showing that suspected SVCs are not islands for extraction in the way that coordinate structures are. Subsection 3.1.3 likewise rules out interpretations of the V2 phrase as a non-finite complement by showing that it cannot be extracted and is therefore most likely not a complete constituent. Since subordinate clauses are not likely to comprise sub-minimal constituents, we can rule out the possible effects of a null subject like PRO on reflexive binding.

### 3.1.1 Locating clause boundaries

Like its bimorphemic counterpart in English, the Khmer bimorphemic reflexive *kluən-æŋ* is clause-bounded (i.e. it must find its antecedent within its own minimal clause). Unlike the English reflexive, however, Khmer *kluən-æŋ* is subject-oriented. Non-reflexive pronouns cannot take an antecedent within their same minimal clause if they function as direct arguments. As possessors, they can occur in the same minimal clause with their antecedents but, if third person (3P), are anti-subject oriented. These facts are demonstrated in (3).

- (3a) *Mora* *wiej* *Sokh* *nīw* *pteah* *kluən-æŋ*  
 Mora hit Sokh be.at house self  
 ‘Mora hit Sokh at his own [i.e. Mora’s / \*Sokh’s / \*some other person’s] house.’
- (3b) *Mora* *wiej* *Sokh* *nīw* *pteah* *koət*  
 Mora hit Sokh be.at house 3sg  
 ‘Mora hit Sokh at his [i.e. \*Mora’s / Sokh’s / some other person’s] house.’
- (3c) *#knom* *baŋ* *Mora* *səmlap* *koət*  
 1SG shoot Mora kill 3SG  
 #‘I shoot Mora [and] kill him [i.e. another person]’

Example (3a) shows that *kluən-æŋ* takes an antecedent within its own clause but is oriented toward the subject of the clause and not the other possible antecedent: the object, Sokh. Example (3b) demonstrates that a possessor non-reflexive pronoun can take its antecedent within the minimal clause, or it may refer outside of the clause. If the former, however, the pronoun must refer back to the object, Sokh, and not the subject, Mora, due to its anti-subject orientation. Finally, (3c) shows that if a non-reflexive pronoun is a direct argument within the clause, it must refer to some individual outside of the clause, which, in this case, gives rise to the pragmatically odd meaning that the subject of the sentence, I, shot Mora but, in so doing, killed some unnamed third party.

In (4), we observe the expected behaviour of *kluən-æŋ* in sentences comprising two clauses. The bimorphemic reflexive cannot refer outside of the downstairs clause. The non-reflexive pronoun, however, must refer outside of its same clause.

- (4a) *Mora* *prap* *Sokh* *tha:* *nīəŋ* *sra-ləŋ* *kluən-æŋ*  
 Mora tell Sokh say girl love self  
 ‘Mora tells Sokh that the girl loves herself / \*Mora / \*Sokh.’
- (4b) *Mora* *prap* *Sokh* *tha:* *nīəŋ* *sra-ləŋ* *koət*  
 Mora tell Sokh say girl love 3SG  
 ‘Mora tells Sokh that the girl loves him [i.e. Mora / Sokh / someone else].’
- (4c) *knom* *twə:* *ʔəoj* *koət* *səmlap* *kluən-æŋ*  
 1SG make give 3SG kill self  
 ‘I make him kill himself / \*me.’
- (4d) *knom* *twə:* *ʔəoj* *koət* *səmlap* *koət*  
 1SG make give 3SG kill 3SG  
 ‘I make him kill him [i.e. another person].’

In (4a), *kluən-æŋ* can only take as its antecedent the girl, subject of the sentential complement; neither actor from the matrix clause is eligible. In (4b), on the other hand, the non-reflexive gender-neutral 3P pronoun *koət* can refer to either actor from the matrix clause or to some third party, but

not to the girl within its same minimal clause. Examples (4c) and (4d) demonstrate identical distinctions with a different matrix predicate and complementizer.

Turning to the behaviour of *kluən-æŋ* with suspected SVCs, we observe that, despite the presence of intervening verbs, the reflexive nonetheless takes as its antecedent the subject of V1 (5a). The non-reflexive pronoun must refer to someone outside of the sentence (5b).

(5a) *Sokh ban sɔmlap kluən-æŋ*  
Sokh shoot CAUS.die self  
'Sokh shoots and kills himself.'

(5b) *Sokh ban sɔmlap koət*  
Sokh shoot CAUS.die 3SG  
'Sokh shoots and kills him [i.e. someone else].'

Even with more elaborate constructions, involving additional intervening verbs, this essential behaviour of reflexive *kluən-æŋ* versus non-reflexive *koət* is maintained. For example, in sentences of the shared agent type, where each verb in the construction takes its own unique object, many Khmer speakers prefer to insert "extra" directional verbs like *mɔ:k* 'come' and *tɨw* 'go' before V2 (6). When asked explicitly who or what were the subjects of the inserted directional verbs, consultants responded that they interpreted the subject of V1 as supplying the subjects for both the directional verbs and V2.

(6a) *Sokh jɔ:k kambət (tɨw) sɔmlap kluən-æŋ*  
Sokh take knife (go) CAUS.die self  
'Sokh takes the knife to (go) kill himself.'

(6b) *Sokh jɔ:k kəmpɰlɔ:ŋ (tɨw) ban koət*  
Sokh take gun (go) shoot 3SG  
'Sokh takes the gun to (go) shoot him [i.e. someone else].'

The examples in (7) present still more elaborate structures, while demonstrating the same reflexive binding facts.

(7a) *Mora prap Sokh tha: kru:-pɛ:t tɨw tɨŋ ce:k ɲam niw pteah kluən-æŋ*  
Mora tell Sokh say doctor go buy banana eat be.at house self  
'Mora tells Sokh that the doctor is going to buy bananas to eat in his (own) [i.e. the doctor's / \*Mora's / \*Sokh's] home.'

(7b) *ɲnom noəm kru:-pɛ:t tɨw tɨŋ ce:k ɲam niw pteah kluən-æŋ*  
1sg take doctor go buy banana eat be.at house self  
'I take the doctor to go buy bananas and eat them in my / \*the doctor's house.'

(7c) *Mora prap Sokh tha: ɲnom noəm kru:-pɛ:t tɨw tɨŋ ce:k ɲam*  
Mora tell Sokh say 1sg take doctor go buy banana eat  
*niw pteah kluən-æŋ*  
be.at house self  
'Mora tells Sokh that I take the doctor to go buy bananas and eat them in my / \*the doctor's / \*Mora's / \*Sokh's house.'

In (7a), four lexical verbs intervene between the reflexive *kluən-æŋ* and the subject of the embedded clause, *kru:-pɛ:t* 'doctor'. Two of these verbs have their own individual complements (*tɨŋ ce:k* 'buy bananas' and *niw pteah* 'be.at house'). Nevertheless, the reflexive still takes as its unambiguous antecedent the subject of V1, doctor. In (7b), five lexical verbs intervene, three with their own complements (including *noəm kru:-pɛ:t* 'take doctor'). Even so, the antecedent of the reflexive remains the subject of V1. Sentence (7c) does nothing more than embed (7b) inside the frame from (7a), where the 1P subject of the embedded clause continues to supply the unambiguous antecedent for the reflexive pronoun at the end of the sentence.

The evidence from the binding behavior of the bimorphemic reflexive pronoun *kluən-æŋ* suggests, at least initially, that the various verbs in the kinds of possible SVCs under consideration all fall within the same minimal clause. It still remains, however, to rule out definitively covert VP coordination as well as subordinated complementation structures of the sort discussed by Sak-Humphry (1995) and Wilawan (1992; 1995).

### 3.1.2 Ruling out coordination

In her (1995) article, Sak-Humphry performs a series of extraction tests, demonstrating that the nominal complements of either of the verbs in a putative SVC can be fronted for topicalization or focus. Sak-Humphry explains the purpose of her tests as being to determine that the nominal complements of the verbs in a multi-verb construction are in fact nouns and the heads of their own NPs. This practice is necessitated, as she sees it, by claims attributed to unnamed analysts in the SVC literature to the effect that: 1) SVCs do not take nominal complements; 2) the V2s are not verbs at all, but adverbs; and 3) the combination of V1 and V2 is a compound verb (Sak-Humphry 1995:182). Though space does not permit a repetition of all of her examples, I have given a representative sample of the tests Sak-Humphrey applies in (8) and (9). Since an NP in Khmer must be definite in order to be topicalized, the examples of topicalization in (8) all involve the addition of the demonstrative *nih* ‘this’ following the fronted, topicalized NP. The focus-cleft constructions in (9) consist of the fronted focal element immediately preceded by the focus-marking word *ki:* and followed by the relativizer *dael*.

- (8a) *siəwphəw nih kme:ŋ mə:k psa: tɨn*  
 book DEM child come market buy  
 ‘These books the child comes to the market to buy.’ (Sak-Humphry 2005:186)
- (8b) *sro:w nih Sokh jɔ:k kandiəw ka:t*  
 rice.plant DEM Sokh take sickle cut  
 ‘This rice plant Sokh takes the sickle to cut.’ (Sak-Humphry 2005:190)
- (8c) *kme:ŋkme:ŋ nih wiə noəm ruət lə: phnum*  
 children.children DEM 3SG take run up mountain  
 ‘These children, he took [them] walking on the mountain.’ (Sak-Humphry 2005:193)
- (9a) *ki: siəwphəw dael kme:ŋ mə:k psa: tɨn*  
 FOC book REL child come market buy  
 ‘It is the books that the child comes to the market to buy.’ (Sak-Humphry 2005:187)
- (9b) *ki: kandiəw dael Sokh jɔ:k ka:t sro:w*  
 FOC sickle REL Sokh take cut rice.plant  
 ‘It is the sickle which he takes to cut the rice plant.’ (Sak-Humphry 2005:191)
- (9c) *ki: kme:ŋkme:ŋ nih dael wiə noəm da:ə lə: phnum*  
 FOC children.children DEM REL 3SG take walk up mountain  
 ‘It is these children whom he took walking on the mountain.’ (Sak-Humphry 2005:193)

These tests do serve to counter the three positions on multi-verb constructions that Sak-Humphry specifically militates against. What they show even more clearly, though, is that the domains of the two verbs are not “islands” for extraction in the sense proposed by Ross (1967). If the two VPs were coordinate, their respective NP complements would not be able to be extracted, as is shown in (10).

- (10a) \*The girl he hit and kicked the boy. / \*The girl he hit the boy and kicked.  
 (10b) \*It is the girl he hit and kicked the boy. / \*It is the girl he hit the boy and kicked.

Because such extractions are possible with the putative Khmer SVCs, we can conclude that they do not involve covert coordination.

### 3.1.3 Ruling out subordination

Sak-Humphry (1995) additionally notes at various points in her discussion that what she considers to be in each case the dependent non-finite clause cannot itself be extracted for focus (1995:184) or topicalization (1995:183). Though she asserts this fact to be true, she does not actually give ungrammatical examples. The sentences in (11) supply the missing negative examples.

- (11a) \**tɨn siəwphəw nih kme:ŋ mə:k psa:*  
 buy book DEM child come market  
 Intended meaning: ‘To buy these books, the child comes to the market.’

- (11b) \**ki:*     *tɨŋ*           *siəwphəw daɛl*     *kme:ŋ*     *mɔ:k*     *psa:*  
 FOC    buy           book       REL     child     come     market  
 Intended meaning: ‘It is to buy books that the child comes to the market.’

Sak-Humphry intends this fact to confirm that the V2s are non-finite subordinate clauses dependent on the main or regent V1s, though, I admit, the precise rationale behind such a claim remains unclear to me. Sak-Humphry’s tests are actually similar to the facts Roberts (2012:219–220) cites in support of the conclusion that certain non-finite clauses in English multi-verb constructions are *not* subordinate. In making this claim, Roberts is summarizing an argument from Van Valin & LaPolla (1997:469–471) that certain non-finite complement clauses cannot be passivized or focused (12-13) in the way that other expressly subordinated clauses can (14). Presumably, the tacit assumption behind Robert’s claim is that the clausal complements in question occupy the object position in their matrix clauses and must, therefore, have some of the properties of regular nominal (i.e. direct object) complements. Similarly, in Khmer we can show that certain expressly subordinated clauses can be focused, as in (15). Since we cannot similarly topicalize or focus V2 phrases from putative SVCs, as shown in (11) above, then, following Robert’s logic, we might be tempted to conclude that these facts provide some evidence against considering V2 part of a subordinate clause.

(12a) Mary stopped crying.

(12b) \*Crying was stopped by Mary.

(12c) \*It was crying that Mary stopped.

(13a) Sam helped run the tournament.

(13b) \*Run the tournament was helped by Sam.

(13c) \*It was run the tournament that Sam helped.

(14) To do our best is demanded of us all.

- (15a) *seckdej ka:*     *ciə*       *cambɔ:ŋ*     *rəbɔh*     *neak*     *damnaeu ki:*     *hawh*  
 matter   NMLZ   COP     principal   GEN     person   travel   FOC     fly  
*haəu ptoal ko:l daw kantae lawn kantae ləʔɔ:*  
 fly     direct   destination     goal     get     fast     get     good  
 ‘The main concern of the traveler is (this): to get to his destination, the quicker, the better.’ (Haiman 2011:247)

- (15b) *daɛl kɲom dəŋ nuh ki: tha: niəŋ nuŋ mɔ:k*  
 REL   ISG   know   DEM   FOC   COMP   girl   FUT   come  
 ‘What I know is this: she will come.’ (Haiman 2011:248)

Indeed, what the extraction tests in (11) show most clearly is that the V2 phrases which could not be topicalized or clefted must not constitute complete constituents, because only complete constituents (i.e. full NPs, PPs, VPs, etc.) are usually available for topicalization and clefting (Kroeger 2004:27–29). Thus, the V2 phrases most likely cannot constitute complete clauses unto themselves.

To further underscore this conclusion, we can contrast this behavior with that of a true non-finite complement clause for a control predicate like *cəŋ* ‘want’. Predicates like ‘want’ can take open complement constructions that look superficially much like potential SVCs in Khmer. As shown in example (16), when the subject of the complement is the same as the subject of *cəŋ* itself, an overt coreferential subject NP is not allowed. On the other hand, predicates like ‘think’ and ‘say’ that take a sentential complement following the complementizer *tha:* ‘say’ permit subsequent verbs to appear with or without such overt coreferential subjects.

- (16) *Sina<sub>i</sub> prap tha: (wiə<sub>i</sub>) cəŋ (\*wiə<sub>i</sub>) tiw psa:*  
 Sina say COMP 3SG want 3SG go market  
 ‘Sina says that he wants to go to the market.’ (Fisher 1988:31)

Fisher (1988:31) uses these facts as evidence to support a claim that same-subject uses of *cəŋ* take a necessarily infinitival complement with null subject PRO.

The verb *cəŋ* ‘want’ may also occur with sentential complements and a complementizer (the verb *ʔəoj* ‘give’), but only when the subject of the complement is distinct from that of *cəŋ* (switch-subject). Since this construction is immediately recognizable for the biclausal structure that it is and is thus not superficially similar to potential SVCs, it need not concern us here.

As is demonstrated in (17), the surface form of a same-subject sentence with *cəŋ* appears at first much like the shared agent-shared theme type of potential SVCs given in **Table 1** and (2c) above.

- (17) *kɲom* *cəŋ* *niʔjiej* *piəsa:* *khmae*  
 1SG want speak language Khmer  
 ‘I want to speak Khmer.’

Its behavior with reflexive pronouns is also similar, as shown in (18).

- (18) *kɲom* *cəŋ* *səmlap* *kluən-əŋ*  
 1SG want CAUS.die self  
 ‘I want to kill myself.’

However, tests attempting to extract the V2 phrase from these sentences produce different results from those obtained for other apparent SVCs.

- (19a) *ʔki:* *səmlap* *kluən-əŋ* *dael* *kɲom* *cəŋ*  
 COP CAUS.die self REL 1SG want  
 Intended meaning: ‘It is to kill myself that I want.’
- (19b) *ka:* *dael* *kɲom* *cəŋ* *ki:* *səmlap* *kluən-əŋ*  
 NMLZ REL 1SG want COP CAUS.die self  
 ‘What I want is to kill myself.’

Whereas the focus cleft in (19a) was generally judged as dubious by consultants, the pseudo-cleft in (19b), where the focused element occurs at the end, still preceeded by the focus-marker *ki:*, proved acceptable. This evidence would seem to suggest that, in fact, the V2 phrase constitutes a complete constituent here (VP2) with an implicit subject controlled by the subject of V1, *kɲom* ‘1SG’. Hence, Fisher’s (1988) analysis is most likely correct: same-subject uses of *cəŋ* take open or infinitival complements whose null subject (PRO) is controlled by the subject of *cəŋ* itself. This behavior stands in stark contrast to that of potential SVCs, which do not allow extraction of the V2 phrase because it is a sub-minimal constituent and, therefore, not a subordinate clause.

### 3.2 Ruling out auxiliary verbs

Anderson (2010:11–12) observes that SVCs have provided one of the major historical sources for auxiliary verb formation. Through a process of grammaticalization, either V1 or V2 in an SVC becomes specialized and develops functional semantics. While Anderson (2010:13) argues that there is no hard-and-fast line of demarcation between a serialized verb that is in the process of grammaticalizing and an auxiliary verb (indeed a period of ambiguity is to be expected over the course of the transition), he inclines toward an auxiliary verb analysis when the functional semantics become the default interpretation. Kuteva (2001:1–2) similarly notes that once the lexical meaning of a verb has been entirely supplanted by a grammatical-functional semantics, the process of grammaticalization to an auxiliary verb is complete.

The resultative or “success” verb constructions Haiman (2011:271) includes within his category of SVC are potential candidates for being auxiliary verbs.<sup>14</sup> These two constructions differ from the potential SVCs under consideration in two chief respects. First, resultative and success verb constructions in Khmer permit, and indeed require, independent negation of the second (i.e. resultative/success) verb (V2) (20a-b) (Huffman 1967:171). While negation of the success verb *ba:n* ‘be able’ effectively scopes over the entire sequence, since negating one’s ability to do X necessarily entails that one does not do X, other cases make it clear that the interposed negator often scopes only over V2 (20c-d). In (20c), the subject is definitely looking for his wallet; the negation comes into play only in denying the success of the search. In (20d), the subject is listening

<sup>14</sup> The referee points out, however, that resultative and success verb constructions in Khmer are subject to lexical restrictions and are thus not as productive as either auxiliary verbs or SVCs.

but simply unable to hear. Each of these sentences can also be expanded into an overtly biclausal structure by interposing the conjunction *bontæ* ‘but’ between V1 and the negator-V2 pair (20e-g). This move makes the conative semantics of V1 even more explicit.

- (20a) *knom niʔjiej piəsa: khmae min ba:n te*  
 1SG speak language Khmer NEG be.ble NEG  
 ‘I cannot speak Khmer.’
- (20b) \**knom min niʔjiej piəsa: khmae ba:n te*  
 1SG NEG speak language Khmer be.able NEG
- (20c) *knom rək ka:bup min khəj*  
 think look.for wallet NEG see  
 ‘I can’t find (lit. look for, don’t find) [my] wallet.’ (adapted from Bisang 2009:800)
- (20d) *knom sdap min lu: te*  
 1SG listen NEG hear NEG  
 ‘I can’t hear [you] (lit. listen, not hear).’ (Smyth 2008:107)
- (20e) *knom niʔjiej piəsa: khmae bontæ min ba:n lə:*  
 1SG speak language Khmer but NEG be.ble good  
 ‘I [try to] speak Khmer, but cannot [speak it] well.’
- (20f) *knom rək ka:bup bontæ min khəj*  
 think look.for wallet but NEG see  
 ‘I looked for [my] wallet, but didn’t find [it].’
- (20g) *knom sdap bontæ min lu:*  
 1SG listen but NEG hear  
 ‘I [try to] listen but don’t hear.’

The second key distinction between resultative and success verb constructions and SVCs in Khmer is that the semantics of resultative and success verb structures are often not compositional (21), while SVCs not only often have entirely compositional semantics but also usually require iconic word order, such that the order of actions described matches the order of operations in the external world.<sup>15</sup>

- (21a) *mə:l min khəj*  
 look NEG see  
 ‘did not see’ (Maspero 1915:408)
- (21b) *sdap min lu:*  
 listen NEG hear  
 ‘did not hear’ (Haiman 2011:291)
- (21c) *kit min khəj*  
 think NEG see  
 ‘did not figure out’ (Huffman, Promchan & Lambert 1970:187)
- (21d) *ho:p kaət*  
 eat be.born  
 ‘managed to eat’ (Haiman 2011:71)

Perhaps a better example of an auxiliary verb for the present purposes would be *trəw*. This verb can still be used on its own with the full lexical meaning of ‘to hit’, but it also functions as an auxiliary verb in two constructions that bear superficial similarity to potential SVCs. As an auxiliary, *trəw* may serve to indicate epistemic/deontic modality much as ‘must’ does in English. Alternatively, it may be used in passive-like structures, where it indicates that the subject has undergone the action of the subsequent V2. In this latter use, *trəw* may either take an infinitival open complement VP2 without overt subject, or it may take an entire sentential complement without complementizer. In this latter case, VP2 will have its own overt subject NP, expressing the

<sup>15</sup> But see Durie (1997:322–323) for a discussion of lexicalization of SVC combinations.

agent of the action. The agent of the action may also be expressed as the object of the preposition *daoj* ‘by’. Both of these auxiliary verb uses of *trəw* may occur together with potential SVCs.

- (22a) *nisət trəw mɔ:k sa:la: riən*  
 student must come school study  
 ‘The student must come to school and study.’
- (22b) *nisət (min) trəw (\*min) mɔ:k sa:la: riən te*  
 student NEG must NEG come school study NEG  
 ‘The student must not come to school and study.’
- (23a) *kambət trəw jɔ:k ka:t sac \*(daoj bɔ:ŋ)*  
 knife undergo take cut meat (by older.brother)  
 ‘The knife was taken to cut the meat by older brother.’
- (23b) *sac trəw ke: jɔ:k kambət ka:t*  
 meat undergo 3PL take knife cut  
 ‘The meat was cut by them with a knife.’

Example (22a) demonstrates the modal use of auxiliary *trəw* with a potential SVC in V2 position. Example (22b) shows that, as we shall see for SVCs as well, modal *trəw* cannot be left outside of the bracketing negation: that is, both the auxiliary and any subsequent verb must agree in polarity. Thus, example (22) serves to illustrate the surface similarity between uses of modal *trəw* and the SVC structures under consideration.

Example (23) shows the passive-marking use of *trəw*. In (23a), the agent is expressed as an obligatory prepositional adjunct; in (23b), on the other hand, the agent remains in situ within the sentential complement. This distinctive behavior, coupled with the more-or-less completely grammatical/functional meaning of *trəw* in these sentences clearly sets it and similar auxiliary verbs apart from the kinds of potential SVCs surveyed above. Nevertheless, in keeping with the functional-constructional approach taken here, each potential candidate for auxiliary verb versus serialized verb status will have to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

### 3.3 Polarity agreement across SVCs

Along with her extensive extraction tests, Sak-Humphry (2005) also performs a negation test on the multi-verb constructions she examines in order to determine whether V2 can be negated separately from V1 (24). The Khmer negative involves an obligatory preverbal adverb (*min*, *ʔat*, *pum*) and an optional sentence-final bracketing element (*te:*). On the basis of the fact that V2 cannot be separately negated, Sak-Humphry concludes that it must be non-finite and dependent upon V1 as a main verb, which must bear any negation for the construction as a whole (2005:182).

- (24a) *\*wiə ɔŋkuj min jum kra:om da:əmchə: te:*  
 3SG sit NEG cry under tree NEG  
 \*‘She sits not crying under the tree.’ (Sak-Humphry 2005:182)
- (24b) *wiə min ɔŋkuj jum kra:om da:əmchə: te:*  
 3SG NEG sit cry under tree NEG  
 ‘She does not sit crying under the tree.’ (Sak-Humphry 2005:181)

The behavior of the negative in (24) is quite similar to that observed in (22b) for the modal auxiliary verb *trəw*. It is also similar to the way the negative interacts with the control predicate *cəŋ*, as shown in (25) below. Recall that it has previously been argued that this verb takes an open complement with null subject PRO whenever the controllee and controller have the same referent.

- (25) *kɲom min cəŋ (\*min) sɔmlap kluən-æŋ te:*  
 1SG NEG want NEG CAUS.die self NEG  
 ‘I don’t want to kill myself.’

These negation facts, however, are also consistent with (indeed anticipated by) an interpretation of these structures as SVCs. Kroeger (2004:230) writes: “One clear indication that the two serialized verbs express a single event is that we cannot negate one verb while still asserting the truth of the other.” As was seen in (21) above, the separate negatability of resultative and success verbs is one of the two chief factors differentiating those structures from the putative

SVCs in Khmer. The fact that V1 and V2 cannot be separately negated in example (24) can therefore be taken as an indication that the sentence in fact contains a true SVC.

### 3.4 TAM agreement across SVCs

It is well known from the extensive literature on SVCs that tense and/or aspect marking usually must be uniform across both verbs in the construction (Kroeger 2004:230; Durie 1997:291). This characteristic holds true for the Khmer multi-verb constructions under consideration as well. In Khmer, future tense is marked by what Haiman (2011:263) calls the “dedicated auxiliary verb” *nij*. It occurs directly in front of the verb it inflects and, in a multi-verb construction, can occur on V1 alone or on both V1 and V2; irrespective of how many times *nij* shows up, however, the tense value for both verbs is necessarily the same: future. By contrast, the perfective aspect marker *haaj*, which is itself a grammaticalized verb meaning ‘to finish’,<sup>16</sup> follows the verb it inflects and can only occur at the end of both verbs in a multi-verb construction. In fact, *haaj* usually occurs at the end of its clause or sentence, which means that if the verb is transitive or has some oblique complement, the aspect marker will follow that element. The examples in (26a-e) below demonstrate the interaction of probable SVCs with these two tense/aspect markers. Example (26f) uses the auxiliary verb *trəw* ‘must’ to demonstrate that the various verbs in a potential Khmer SVC must also agree in modality.

- (26a) *kɲom nij jɔ:k kambət (nij) ka:t sac*  
 1SG FUT take knife (FUT) cut meat  
 ‘I will take the knife and cut meat.’
- (26b) *kɲom jɔ:k kambət ka:t sac haaj*  
 1SG take knife cut meat PFV  
 ‘I took the knife and cut meat.’
- (26c) *kɲom trəw jɔ:k kambət ka:t sac*  
 1SG must take knife cut meat  
 ‘I must take the knife and cut meat.’
- (26d) *\*kɲom jɔ:k kambət haaj ka:t sac*  
 1SG take knife PFV cut meat  
 \*‘I took the knife [and] cut meat [now].’
- (26e) *\*kɲom jɔ:k kambət nij ka:t sac*  
 1SG take knife FUT cut meat  
 \*‘I took the knife, wil cut meat.’
- (26f) *\*kɲom jɔ:k kambət trəw ka:t sac*  
 1SG take knife must cut meat  
 Intended: ‘I must take the knife and cut meat.’

Just as with the argument from negation above, the fact that the various verbs in these potential SVCs must agree in tense/aspect and modality could be taken as evidence for either a non-finite complement clause analysis or an SVC analysis. When viewed in the context of the arguments for monclausality presented above, however, these facts clearly favor an SVC analysis for the present data.

### 3.5 Single-event interpretation of SVCs

In many ways, the oft-cited requirement that the various verbs in an SVC express actions that are construed in the minds of speakers as component parts of a single, complex event is the least satisfactory of the characteristic and diagnostic features of SVCs. This criterion is unsatisfactory for two main reasons. First, the notion of “single event” is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to define; attempts to draw a clear line of demarcation between component parts of a single complex event and separate, sequential actions involve inevitable arbitrariness (Senft 2004:53–54; Anderson 2010:12). Secondly, as Durie (1997:326–330) and Jarkey (1991:169–170)

<sup>16</sup> As pointed out by the reviewer, independent uses of *haaj* as a lexical verb are rare in Khmer, though Haiman (2011:186) reports it does occur in the idiom *kɲom təw haaj* (literally ‘I go finish’), meaning something like *I can do everything* or *You know me*.

have both noted, different languages impose different requirements on what can constitute a single, complex event. That is, the concept of “single event” is culturally bound. Jarkey’s example from White Hmong illustrates this point particularly well. She discusses the three example sentences given in (27) below.

(27a) *nws dhia tshov qeej*  
3SG dance blow bamboo.pipes  
‘He dances playing the pipes.’

(27b) \**nws dhia mloog nkauj*  
3SG dance listen song  
‘He dances and listens to music.’

(27c) *nws dhia thiab mloog nkauj*  
3SG dance and listen song  
‘He dances (while) listening to music.’ (Jarkey 1991:169–170)

Speakers of White Hmong interpret (27a) as a perfectly acceptable SVC. (27b), on the other hand, they reject as ungrammatical, despite the fact that the underlying grammatical structure is identical to (27a) in every way. The only acceptable way to express the concept aimed for in (27b) is by using a conjoined clause, as in (27c). To speakers of White Hmong, the actions of listening to music and dancing are not culturally compatible with a single-event interpretation. Playing the bamboo pipes and dancing, however, are conceived of as two component parts of a natural, complex single event and are, therefore, acceptable inside an SVC.

While acknowledging the dangerous slipperiness of the concept, then, we can nevertheless present a striking example from Khmer of a reflex of the kind of single-event interpretation usually associated with SVCs. The SVC example in (28a) below was felt by native speakers to depict normal, expected student behavior with regards to showing obedience to a teacher. No specific instance of an actual command is presupposed, whence the translation with a bare plural in English: ‘commands’. The sentence merely describes the expected cultural norm of student obedience to their teacher. The coordinate structure in (28b), on the other hand, emphasizes a temporal discontinuity between the two conjuncts.<sup>17</sup> Consultants explained that (28b) would presuppose a situation in which the teacher had issued a specific order, which the students first heard and then subsequently followed.

(28a) *nisət sdap tam bəŋkoəp kru:-bəŋriən*  
student listen follow command teacher-CAUS.learn  
‘The students obey [their] teacher’s commands.’ [SVC]

(28b) *nisət sdap haəj-niŋ tam bəŋkoəp kru:-bəŋriən*  
student listen and follow command teacher-CAUS.learn  
‘The students listened and then obeyed [their] teacher’s command.’ [not an SVC]

Though the acceptability of a given sequence of verbs as depicting a “single event” is often culture-specific and hard to define, the contrast portrayed in (28) is precisely what we would expect to find when dealing with an SVC.

#### 4. Conclusion

The main contribution of the present paper has been to put the examination of SVCs in Khmer on firmer methodological footing and to further our understanding of both Khmer grammar and the general parameters and wider typology of SVCs. It has been argued that Khmer is a typical example of languages of both its family and larger linguistic area in having a robust class of SVCs that express instrument, beneficiary, recipient, goal, purpose, manner of motion, and result. It has been shown that previous explorations of potential SVCs in Khmer by Wilawan (1992; 1995) and

<sup>17</sup> In this way, the conjunction *haəj-niŋ*, which intriguingly contains the word *niŋ* that can also function as a future-tense auxiliary verb, appears to have the same capacity to determine the temporal parameters of single eventhood as the time adverbials, temporal clauses, and tense marking that Bohnemeyer et al. (2007) note are constitutive of the “macro-event property” they use to diagnose whether apparently separate sub-events are packaged under the same “macro-event” or not (cf. Bisang 2009:803–805).

Sak-Humphry (1995), which concluded that Khmer SVCs were biclausal structures with non-finite complement clauses, were responding more to the specific, theory-internal concerns and assumptions of Lexicase Dependency Grammar than to the independent facts of the language. Once the binding facts of the clause-bounded bimorphemic reflexive pronoun *kluən-æŋ* are combined with data showing that the nominal complements of both V1 and V2 can be extracted for topicalization and focus, while the V2 phrase cannot be similarly extracted, the overwhelming conclusion is that potential SVCs of the type surveyed here are, in fact, monoclausal. Combining this insight with the additional facts that such constructions must have single values for polarity and TAM across all of their constituent verbs and do not tolerate overt coreferential NPs for direct arguments additionally strengthens the case for an SVC analysis. Finally, while the criterion is itself somewhat nebulous, there is nonetheless evidence from native speaker intuition that these SVCs encode single complex events. It is thus demonstrated that the structures in question display all of the “characteristic and diagnostic features of SVCs” detailed in Kroeger (2004), among the most rigorous and restrictive descriptions of what constitutes an SVC in the available literature.

One issue for further study will be to probe the upper extent of verb serialization in the language. Khmer is known to permit concatenations of up to 10 separate verbs.<sup>18</sup> The question is whether the language makes a distinction between “compact” SVCs of the sort detailed here and much longer (and possibly less coherent) “narrative” SVCs similar to those which Pawley (2008) has described for the Papuan language Kalam.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., Ehrman and Sos (1972:25).

<sup>19</sup> A similar distinction is found in Van Staden and Reesink (2002; Foley 2004:132) between “component” and “narrative” serialization.

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