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4. CONVERBS

Converbs as against other strategies

The major storyline consideration in Ethiopian SOV languages which are represented is the matter of the storyline scheme status of various kinds of "gerunds" (non-final verbs) as opposed to final verbs in chaining structures. Some Nilotic languages, of which Luwo of Sudan is representative, have strict VSO structures. The function of consecutive tenses in various VSO and SVO languages is then considered along with the consideration of storyline schemes in SVO languages which do not have special consecutive tenses. A general parallelism of the medial and final clauses in SOV languages to initial and consecutive clauses in VSO and SVO languages is noted. Several further parallelisms and differences among SOV, VSO, and SVO languages are noted.

Map Amha and Dimmendaal (2006)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oromo</td>
<td>Consecutive</td>
<td>Gragg 1976,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amharic</td>
<td>Constructive mood</td>
<td>Isenberg 1842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amharic</td>
<td>Short imperfect</td>
<td>Cotterell 1964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amharic, Argobba</td>
<td>Conjuctive verbs</td>
<td>Hudson 1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hadiyya, Oromo Serial verbs</td>
<td>Sim 1989, Griefenow-Mewis and Tamene 1997</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hadiyya</td>
<td>Medial verbs</td>
<td>Sim 1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burji, Gedo, Sidamo</td>
<td>Dependent verbs</td>
<td>Wedekind 1990</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Maba (Maban, Nilo-Saharan)

- (20) sol n abdu lke ri m n ld gam ga k
  sultan Abdulkerim son of Djame when mak kagine r
  Mecca from

- taranu da r tongur-na karan
  he came land Toundjour-GEN come:CNV
  ioko n tuguno
  seen:CNV he returned
  ‘When Sultan Abdulkerim Ould Djame came from Mecca, he went to explore the land of the Toundjour and returned.’
In their survey of the Maban group, Tucker and Bryan (1966: 197) again use the term “participle” (formed by way of a suffix –\( V_n \) in the Maban group) in their description of this syntactic phenomenon. The authors also point out (p. 204) that “[w]here several Verbs are involved, the Participle…is used for all except the last.” An example from Bura Mabang, where the ‘ing’ in the interlinear glossing, retained from Tucker and Bryan, marks off converbs:
Interestingly, Tucker and Bryan draw attention towards typologically similar constructions in Nilo-Saharan groups such as Barya, Kunama, as well as to the Cushitic language Bilin (p. 589) and the Semitic language Amharic; clearly, then, the authors were fully aware of the fact that similar strategies are found in these other languages.

See also the description of Beria (Saharan, Nilo-Saharan):

Hetzron (1975a: 113) summarizes the origin and the distribution of the converb construction in Ethio-Semitic languages.

- A number of features common to ALL the Ethiopian Semitic languages but not found elsewhere in Semitic are probably all due to the early influence of Cushitic and argue for monogenesis. Some features are not found in all the languages, but they are found in representatives of each branch while not in the closest relatives of these. Such a feature is the use, employing a Semitic form according to a Cushitic pattern (i.e. calqued on Cushitic), of the converb (gerund) instead of sentence coordination. The converbial constructions are common in all the Ethiopian Semitic languages and were already so in Ge’ez, but the original converbial forms (based on the Semitic pattern (sābirāi)-) are found today (in addition to Ge’ez) in Tigrinya, (but not in Tigre), Amharic, Argobba and, with a limited application, in central and western Gurage (with a modified pattern ƙibirti-) and Gafat.
Hetzron (1972: 99-100) identifies three ‘major functions’ for the above converb forms in Amharic. According to this author, each of the three functions is distinctively signalled by word-final pitch/stress.

- **Consecutive**, where the action of the converb takes place prior to the event expressed in the next verb. In this function, the final syllable of the converb has ‘high pitch stress’.

  - (12a) *k’om-ó tänaggårá*
    - get up-3msg:CNV speak:3msg:PAST
    - ‘He got up and talked’

  - (12b) *bält-ô bedá*
    - eat-3msg:CNV go:3msg:PAST
    - ‘He ate and went’
Serial, where a chain of actions, each marked by a converb, takes place, constituting one activity and the final verb is the conclusion of the activity. In this function, the final syllable of the converb has ‘rising stress’.

(13) bārr-u-n  kāft-´ó  ē-bet
    door-DEF-ACC  open-3msg:CNV  LOC-house
    ĝabt´-ō
    enter-3msg:CNV

īk`aw`ūn  azzāgajt-´ó  bet-u-n
    goods.DEF-ACC  arrange-3msg:CNV  house-DEF-ACC

t`ārg-´ó  bedā
    sweep-3msg:CNV  go:3msg:PAST

‘He opened the door, entered the house, arranged the things, swept the house, and left’
This prosodic distinction on the intonational-phrase-final syllable, however, does not appear to be made by all native speakers, according to our information.

Coextensive, where there is no subsequent relation. In this function, the converb does not carry special stress. Three sub-functions are included under the coextensive: 1) the actions of the converb and the final verb occur simultaneously (and the converb is a stative verb), as in ex. (14); 2) the contents of the two verbs (converb and final) make up one verbal meaning, as in (15); 3) the use of the converb is governed by the lexical nature the subsequent verb, as in (16):
(14) *k’om-o*  
*get up*-3msg:CNV  
‘he talked standing’

* tännaggära  
* speak:3msg:PAST*  

(15) *tämällis-o*  
*return*-3msg:CNV  
‘he went back [=returning]”

* bedä  
* go:3msg:PAST*  

(16) *t’ät’t’it-o*  
*drink*-3msg:CNV  
‘he finished drinking’

* c’ärräsä  
* finish:3msg:PAST*
Issues:

- Same subject / different subject
- When does a speaker of a language using converses decide to start a new sentence?
Omotic (Afroasiatic)


(4) a. ṭiẓí mís’-ó tik’-áʔʔo ṭáá-d-é-ne
   3MSG:NOM tree-ABS cut-CNv2 left-PF-A:DCL
   ‘He left, having cut the wood’

b. ta ṭíndá tük-ó burk’-if-̥í
   1SG:GEN mother-NOM coffee-ABS boil-CAUS-CNv1
   káts-ó kats-í ṭas-ó ṭéell-é-ne
   food-ABS cook-CNv1 people-ABS call-PF-A:DCL
   ‘My mother made coffee and she prepared food and invited the
   people (who were working on the farm into the house)’

c. ṭiẓí mís’-ó tik-èm núuní makiin-aa
   3MSG:NOM wood-ABS cut-CNv3 1SG:NOM car-LOC
   c’aan-é-ne
   load-PF-A:DCL
   ‘He having cut the wood, we loaded it on the car’
83. bōʔʔ-a karr-ó-na naʔʔ-ómma ked-áʔʔo ?e[kk-i
w.animal-NOM horn-ABS-INST child-DIM:ABS carry-CNV₂ take-CNV₂
bāf[k-āza · kan-éll-ā bérra bérra bāf[k-i bāf[k-i
run-TEMP₁ dog-F-NOM in_front in_front run-CNV₁ run-CNV₁
gá-ánte mági kéeemm-at-s-idda mukk-áʔʔo iika
say-IPF-SIMUL cliff:ABS huge-M-LOC come-CNV₂ there
mágg-a zib-áʔʔo bōʔʔ-at-sí maʔ-i ?áád-áza
cliff-LOC throw-CNV₂ w.animal-M:NOM return-CNV₁ go-TEMP₁
iika lűú mágg-ó gidd-ó-idda naʔʔ-ómmá
there down cliff:DF-ABS interior-ABS-LOC child-DIM:NOM
?ágitsi loom-í bak’anná-ppa mek’k-i dáf-báʔʔo
backwards fall-CNV₁ neck:ABS-ABL break-CNV₁ err-CNV₂
dan-éll-ó-na wolla bāfʔ-í sūkk-ó pínk’-é-ne
dog-F-ABS-INST together run-CNV₁ across-ABS cross-PF-A:DCL

‘The wild animal ran with the little boy on its horns. The dog also ran in
front of it. And then they reached the edge of a big cliff. The wild animal threw
the little boy there, over the cliff and went away. Down in the ravine, the little
boy fell backwards, almost breaking his neck. Then he and the dog crossed the
cliff running.’

(lit. ‘The wild animal having carried the little boy with its horn, when it is
running, while the dog also is running in front (of the wild animal), having
reached the edge of a big cliff, there, having thrown (the boy) in the big cliff
when the wild animal went back, there, down inside the ravine the little boy
having fallen backwards, his neck almost broken, (he) together with the dog
crossed to the other side’
)
When to start a new sentence in a language with converbs: The Omotic picture.

Cross-linguistically, languages commonly distinguish between indicative (or Declarative), imperative, and interrogative mood on the verb as speech acts, as pointed out in the typological survey by König and Siemund (2007).

Lyons [1968: 307] points out that interrogative sentences "... are not traditionally regarded as modal, because in most languages ... the syntactic distinction between declarative and interrogative sentences is not associated with a difference of verbal inflexion or the selection of a particular auxiliary, but with the employment of various interrogative particles or pronouns, with a difference of word-order, or with intonation, together with the 'indicative mood'." Lyons presents the label 'indicative mood' as a snarling quote, because "[s]imple declarative sentences ... are, strictly speaking, non-modal ('unmarked' for mood). If, however, a particular language has a set of one or more grammatical devices for 'marking' sentences according to the speaker's commitment with respect to the factual status of what he is saying (his emphatic certainty, his uncertainty or doubt, etc.), it is customary to refer to the 'unmarked' sentences also (by courtesy as it were) as being 'in a certain mood'; and the traditional term for this 'unmarked' mood is indicative (or declarative)." [Lyons 1968: 307].

Declarative affirmative in Maale (data from Amha 2001):

1. ያሮስ እኔArguments በወን መስረት
   person-MOVOM yesterday come-PERF-A.OCL
   'the man came yesterday'

Declarative mirative:

2. ካን ለን-
   INT this-A.VOM give-PERF-MIR
   'oh, this one has given (talking of a three-year-old
   mango tree)'

Declarative mirative:
Declarative verbal (as a modal distinction expressing an increased intensity of the truth of a proposition):

[3] Ḑekki
  Ḑake-VIR
  'yes, I will certainly take'

Modality marking in Maafe also interacts with evidential marking, as with the Declarative imperative:

[4] Ḑain Ḑe:kki
  Ḑe:ko-VINM  Ḑe:kki-NEW-DCL.
  there is flour in [the house] down there'

The strategies for Declarative mood marking contrast with (polar) Interrogative mood marking in Maafe, which is characterized by the absence of mood marking, as is common for Omotic.

  Ḑetsi-M-NOM maa:kk:i come-PERF-Q
  'did the man come?'

The functional linguist Halliday (1994a:xxvii) has made an interesting observation in this respect:

"The basic opposition, in grammars of the second half of the twentieth century, is not that between 'structuralist' and 'generative' as set out in the public debates of the 1960s. There are many variables in the way grammars are written, and any clustering of these is bound to distort the picture; but the more fundamental opposition is between those that are primarily syntagmatic in orientation (by and large the formal grammars, with their roots in logic and philosophy), and those that are primarily paradigmatic (by and large the functional ones, with their roots in rhetoric and ethnography)... The latter interpret language as a network of relations, with structures coming in as the realisation of these relationships; they tend to emphasize variables among different languages, to take semantics as the foundation (hence the grammar is natural), and so to be organized around the text, or discourse."
The “black hole” of Omotic languages

Mood is frequently coded on verbs cross-linguistically, presumably because of the close interaction between the expression of the state of affairs through this syntactic category and the way this state of affairs is to be understood, i.e. the illocutionary force involved with a specific utterance.

Omotic languages are particularly interesting from a typological point of view in that the formal expression of illocutionary as well as the perlocutionary dimension conflate or converge on the verb. Hellethal (2010), for example, shows for Sheko that the verb-final slot is used to mark Irrealis, Realis, Optative, but also semantic notions like Viewpoint, Implicative, Imminence, or Obvious. An example of the latter from Sheko (Hellethal 2010: 311).

\(6\)  \(bə3 = á-kn\)

work=3M:SG-KNOWN

‘it works’
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typological properties</th>
<th>Omotic, in particular Omot cluster</th>
<th>[former] Nile-Saharan extension of the &quot;Ethiopian&quot; convergence area along northern Sudan into Chad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case marking</td>
<td>Yes, extensive</td>
<td>Yes, but not always as extensive as in Omotic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verb-final</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adverbs</td>
<td>Precede the main clause and are marked with a clause-final conjunction</td>
<td>Precede or follow main clause, often with clause-initial conjunction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverbial clauses</td>
<td>Precede the main clause and are marked with a clause-final conjunction</td>
<td>Precede or follow main clause, often with clause-initial conjunction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marking Recursionary force (attitude, evidentiality etc.)</td>
<td>Typically on final constituent (i.e. verb) of a clause</td>
<td>Usually marked with separate particles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References


Benchnon (Rapold 2006, 2008)
(see pdf-file on CD)

Medial verbs as against converbs

- Rapold distinguishes between two types of dependent, non-argumental and non-adnominal verb forms:
  - Converbs do not carry person-sensitive markers (and thereby are less finite), and are subordinate.
  - Medial verbs carry person-sensitive markers, and are cosubordinate.

- Neither converbs nor medial verbs are marked for mood in Bench. As pointed out by Rapold (2008: 177), it is not possible in Bench to combine a clause with a medial verb with a main clause containing a verb expressing interrogative mood
  **Kargu sold his car, and what did he buy?**
### Table 1: Uses of the term "converb"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>verb form</th>
<th>+dependent, -argumental, -adnominal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+embedded</td>
<td>-embedded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+finite</td>
<td>-finite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-finite</td>
<td>+finite</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **subordinate "mood"**
  - narrow
  - conv verb
  - medial verb
  - cosubordinate "mood"

- **broad conv verb 1 (L1)**
  - broad con-
  - verb 2 (L2)

- **broader conv verb (XL)**

- **broadest conv verb (XXL)**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>function</th>
<th>same subject</th>
<th>different subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>form</td>
<td>-ī</td>
<td>-ā</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gloss</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gender</td>
<td>masculine</td>
<td>feminine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(8) \( \text{hān-}k'\-f [īts yīst-āg-ūc] \text{dōd-ī} \text{bōd-ī} \)  
\( \text{go-FS-m 3hon be.located-BE-M country-NOM.m road-LOC} \)  
\( \text{tūm-m... get.dark-DS} \)  

'...they went and it got dark where they were, on the road...'
Verbal compounding as an instance of “self-organizing principles” in languages.

The important role of “self-organizing principles in languages”
A process, where the organization of a system spontaneously increases without this increase being controlled by an external system (e.g. the environment) is known as “self-organization” in the natural sciences.

Verbal compounding as a widespread lexical property of languages with converbs
Adjacency

- Subject (A, S) coreferential

- Object of the two verbs identical (and preceding the first verb)
Table 1. Inflection in main verbs and converses in Omotic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Omotic</th>
<th>Converb</th>
<th>Main verb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wolaitta</td>
<td>gender + number</td>
<td>person, gender, number, aspect, mood, polarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aari (Eastern Omotic)</td>
<td>person + number</td>
<td>person, number, tense, aspect, mood, polarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bench (= Gimira)</td>
<td>tense, aspect, person + gender</td>
<td>person, gender, tense, aspect, mood, polarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maale</td>
<td>no marking for tense, aspect,</td>
<td>aspect, mood, polarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>person, or gender; one marker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>for S or A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If both converb and main verb are transitive and share an object, the object occurs before the converb (8a); otherwise, each transitive verb is preceded by its own object noun, as in (9).

(8) (a) ?i maay-úwa meec’c’-iði mič’c’-iisi
    3msg:nom cloth-m:abs wash-convb hang-3msg:perv
    ‘Having washed the cloth, he hung it up’

(b) *?i meec’c’-iði maay-úwa mič’c’-iisi
    3msg:nom wash-convb cloth-m:abs hang-3msg:perv
(9) ?i maay-úwa meec’c’-iidí keettáa
3msg:nom cloth-m:abs wash-convb house:abs
fít-eesi
sweep-3msg:imperv
‘(After) having washed the cloth, he sweeps the house’
(10) (a) hage    sûre    néná    bak’k’i    ?oik’-iisi
      this:M    trousers:nom  2sg:abs    slap:convb    hold:3msg:perv
      ‘These trousers are too tight for you’

(b) ?i    ba    keett-áa    baizz-í    ?ekk-iisi
      3msg:nom    log:pn    house:m:abs    sell:convb    take:3msg:perv
      ‘He sold his house’
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lexical meaning</th>
<th>Constructional meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>give up</td>
<td>immediacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spend the night</td>
<td>duration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disappear</td>
<td>counterexpectation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>see</td>
<td>adversive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>remove something,</td>
<td>irreversible state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>forbid</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>take, receive</td>
<td>partitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>know</td>
<td>experiential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>say</td>
<td>decisive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>die</td>
<td>extreme degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>insist, persist</td>
<td>continuity of negatively perceived state, e.g. pain, noise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>follow</td>
<td>continuity/progress of positively evaluated action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>remove oneself</td>
<td>irreversible state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spend the day</td>
<td>duration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spend the season/year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>look at, examine</td>
<td>adversive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sit down</td>
<td>precedence, preparedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>descend</td>
<td>suddenness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kill</td>
<td>extreme degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>put down</td>
<td>precedence, preparedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>be finished</td>
<td>near-complete action</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(15) k’efée-kka  gam?-énna-n  soh-uwá-ra  
wing-INC  be.late-NEG:IMPERV-DS:CONVB  place-ABS-INST  
pat’-í  ?agg-iisi  
be.cured-CONVB  give.up-3MSG:PERV  
‘The wing too got cured immediately’  

(16) ?issí  gallassi  túmu  maah-éé  na?-áá-yyo  
one  day  true:GEN  leopard: NOM  child-M:ABS-DAT  
sintá-n  kiý-í  ?agg-iisi  
face-LOC  go.out-CONVB  give.up-3MSG:PERV  
‘One day a real leopard suddenly appeared before the boy’
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Converb</th>
<th>Main verb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>baizz-</td>
<td>m- sell and squander (lit. sell-eat)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>baizz-</td>
<td>ekk- sell (lit. sell-take)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bak’k’-</td>
<td>oik’- be too tight (lit. slap-hold)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k’at’t’-</td>
<td>zaar- capture a person by misleading him/her (lit. twist-return)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How does a speaker “decide” when to start a new sentence?
„Whenever a distinct illocutionary force is involved.“

Neither converbs nor medial verbs are marked for mood in Bench. As pointed out by Rapold (2008: 177), it is not possible in Bench to combine a clause with a medial verb with a main clause containing a verb expressing interrogative mood

**‘Kargu sold his car, and what did he buy?’**

- Declarative (formally marked; universally rare)
- Interrogative
- Jussive (Imperative, Optative, Hortative)

- Dependent verbs (converbs, medialverbs) combined with main verbs (marked for mood) in a proto-typical Omotic language express macro-events involving an identical modality statement or illocutinary force.
Some final conclusions:

- What language typology may be about these days
- “Instead of asking “what’s possible?”, more and more typologists ask “what’s where why?” Asking “what’s where” targets universal preferences as much as geographical or genealogical skewing, and results in probabilistic theories stated over sampled distributions. Asking “why” is based on the premises that (a) typological distributions are historically grown and (b) that they are interrelated with other distributions.”
- Propagating Greenberg’s method of dynamic comparison (intragenetic comparison, intergenetic comparison.
Explaining typological similarities between languages:

- Genetic inheritance
- Areal contact
- Self-organizing principles (language-internal interaction of subsystems)
Thank you for your kind interest!