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# 13

## Serial verbs in Waanyi and its neighbours

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### 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

This study describes combinations of lexical verbs found within a single clause in the Waanyi language, traditionally spoken on country watered by the upper Nicholson River stretching from the Northern Territory into Queensland.<sup>2</sup> It focuses on *three* types of verb combination which form a complex predicate:

- a manner of motion verb combines with a directed motion (or ‘path’) verb as in (1a)<sup>3</sup>
- a transitive ‘impact’ verb combines with a causative change-of-state verb to specify the nature of the causing event, as in (1b)
- an event-measuring verb has scope over the event denoted by the verb it combines with, as in (1c)

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<sup>1</sup> Luise Hercus’s five decades of devotion to the documentation and analysis of Australia’s Indigenous languages and cultures serve as a model of best fieldwork practice and inspiration to other field linguists. Luise encouraged me to work with one of the last fluent speakers of Waanyi, Roy Seccin Kamarrangi, to jointly document his language and thus add to the previous records made by Hugh Belfrage, Gavan Breen, Elwyn Flint, Luise Hercus, Sandra Keen, Charles Osborne and others. I was privileged to be accompanied by Luise on my first Waanyi recording session at Cunnamulla Qld in 2000 when we interviewed Mr Seccin and his younger brother Archie Dick Kamarrangi.

<sup>2</sup> The fieldwork during which most of the data referred to in this study was collected was partially funded by a number of ARC small grants administered by The University of Queensland and through financial support from Waanyi Nation Inc.

<sup>3</sup> For the distinction between ‘manner of motion’ and ‘directed motion’ or ‘path’ verbs, see Talmy (1985). For abbreviations used in the glosses see footnote 10.

- (1) (a) **Babaa**=nurri                      **kajalaba**                      kingkarri,                      bala-wurru.  
fly=13.PL.NOM                      ascend                      up\_high                      sky-ALLAT  
‘We flew up high, into the sky.’
- (b) **Karrbijbi**=nyulu                      **kadi-kadi-yi-mbi**.  
cut=3SG.NOM                      small-small-VB-CAUS  
‘He cut it to pieces.’ (GB)
- (c) **Kudumanjaa**=yalu                      **bakarrijbi** nana                      kanba,                      kunbarrki-i.  
continue=3PL.NOM                      burn                      that                      grass                      firestick-ERG  
‘They kept on setting fire to that grass – with a firestick.’

Serial verb constructions (SVC), while not widely reported in Australian languages, or perhaps under-reported, have been documented in both Pama-Nyungan (e.g. Goddard 1988), and in non-Pama-Nyungan languages, (e.g. Reid 2002). Of direct relevance to this study, SVCs have been documented as somewhat peripheral constructions in other languages traditionally spoken in the southern Gulf of Carpentaria area with which Waanyi shares a common border. These include its closest genetic relative Garrwa (Mushin 2012), the Mirndi language Wambaya (Nordlinger 1998, 2014), and the Tangkic language Yukulta (Keen 1983).<sup>4</sup> They have also been documented in the Pama-Nyungan language Kalkutungu (Blake 1979), traditionally spoken to the south of the Yukulta area.<sup>5</sup>

This paper describes syntactic, morphological and semantic properties of Waanyi SVCs which are distinguished from a range of other constructions in which a verbal constituent in a dependent clause modifies the ‘main’ clause. The Waanyi SVCs are briefly compared with those in neighbouring languages.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: background information about Waanyi clause structure and verbal morphology is given in Section 2. Waanyi SVCs are examined in Section 3 and are compared with bi-clausal constructions, in which a finite clause is modified by a dependent verbal clause. In Section 4, Waanyi SVCs are compared with their counterparts in neighbouring languages. Concluding remarks are presented in Section 5.

<sup>4</sup> The genetic affiliation of Waanyi and Garrwa is disputed. On the basis of a comparative examination of pronouns and other grammatical morphemes, they have been classified by Blake (1988) and by Harvey (2009) as Pama-Nyungan. However, Blake (1988: 40) notes that these languages are alone in having pronouns of both Pama-Nyungan and non-Pama-Nyungan origin. Blake (1990) revised his classification of Waanyi and Garrwa as non-Pama-Nyungan mainly on the basis of their pronominal forms, thus concurring with Wurm (1972) and O’Grady, Voegelin & Voegelin (1966) who classified these languages as non-Pama-Nyungan. The mixed nature of morphological markers in Garrwa and Waanyi is reflected in O’Grady’s (1979) classification of them, along with the Tangkic languages, as non-nuclear Pama-Nyungan.

<sup>5</sup> It is possible that similar constructions exist in neighbouring Warluwarric (Pama-Nyungan) languages, but I have not researched relevant data.

## 2. Overview of Waanyi clause structure and verbal morphology<sup>6</sup>

As in many Australian languages, word order in Waanyi clauses is relatively free, principally determined by discourse factors. The clause-initial position is associated with focus. It hosts *Wh*-question words, modal particles or markers of clausal negation. A determiner phrase (DP) in clause-initial position is associated with special focus. In the absence of a focused constituent, the predicate, verbal or nominal, occupies this position (Laughren et al. 2005). Nominative and/or accusative pronouns encliticise to the clause-initial constituent. These encliticised pronouns have the same form as their ‘free’ counterparts and may co-exist with the latter as dislocated topics, or focused constituents. Waanyi also has a set of reflexive/reciprocal pronouns which mark subject features, and which also encliticise to the clause-initial constituent.

Waanyi verbs inflect for mood. I will refer to a verb’s citation form as ‘indicative’, which contrasts with its imperative, irrealis, and evitative ‘lest’ forms.<sup>7</sup> There are also non-finite forms (see 3.2.1). Finite verbal inflections for four common verbs are shown in Table 1.<sup>8</sup>

Table 1: Some Waanyi verbal paradigms

Mood	‘see’	‘hit’	‘go’	‘sit’
Indicative	naj-ba	da-ba	jila-a / jila-ba	jungku
Imperative	naj-a	da-j-a	jila-nji	jungku-mu
Evitative	naj-aya	da-j-aya	(not recorded)	(not recorded)
Irrealis	naj-kanyi	da-j-kanyi	jila-kanyi	jungku-wanyi

Unlike its closest relative, Garrwa, in which both tense and aspect morphemes combine with the verb or with the bound pronouns (Breen 2003; Mushin 2012), Waanyi lacks tense or aspect marking.<sup>9</sup> Thus in the absence of contextual information, a clause with an indicative verb may denote a past, present, or even future event.

Waanyi verbs fall into distinct conjugations based on the set of suffixes which mark the modal distinctions as shown in Table 1. The *-jbV* vs *-mbV* inflection marks an inchoative (intransitive) versus causative (transitive) contrast for many verbs, e.g. *lalu-jbu* ‘rise’ ~ *lalu-mbu* ‘raise’, *warraku-jbu* ‘be(come) mad’ ~

<sup>6</sup> Unless indicated, all Waanyi examples are from the author’s recordings and field notes of the speech of the late Roy Seccin Kamarrangi collected between 2000 and 2005. Data sourced from Gavan Breen’s field notes are indicated as (GB). Data from Elwyn Flint’s Waanyi recordings made at Doomadgee in 1966 are noted as ‘Flint’ followed by the speaker group and tape identification assigned by Flint.

<sup>7</sup> The indicative verb form is glossed as ‘realis’ by Breen (2003).

<sup>8</sup> See Belfrage (2003) and Breen (2003) for fuller documentation of Waanyi verbal inflections.

<sup>9</sup> A possible exception is the contrast between the unmarked nominative pronoun and a form to which *-ji* is suffixed, e.g. *ngawu* ‘1SG.NOM’ contrasts with *ngawiji* (cf. Wambaya *ngawurniji* ‘1SG.NOM’) in examples which suggest that the latter may signal a past event, however, its use in this context is not obligatory.

*warraku-mbu* ‘make mad’. The inchoative ending *-jbV* can be further analysed as consisting of a verbalising morpheme *-j* followed by the suffix *-bV* which marks the indicative form of many verbs. However, many transitive verbs have an ‘intransitive’ indicative form ending in *-jbV*, e.g. *bijbi* ‘bite’, *najba* ‘see, look’, *banyajba* ‘pass someone/thing’. Some transitive verbs have variant seemingly interchangeable transitive and intransitive forms, e.g. *rangki-jbi* ~ *rangki-mbi* ‘shoot’, although individual speakers show a preference for one form over the other. This variability extends to the event-measuring verbs in Table 4 discussed in 3.4. While the indicative form of many verbs consists of a stem to which *-bV* is suffixed, the indicative form of other verbs corresponds to the root form, e.g. *jungku* ‘be, sit, stay’, *kanungku* ‘move close to’, *jayi* ‘move away from’.

Waanyi also has compound verbs made up of an inflecting verb stem to which an invariant modifying morpheme, or preverb, is prefixed, e.g. compound verbs built on the inflecting verb *najba* ‘look, see’ include *kawa-najba* ‘find’, *kuku-najba* ‘observe’, *kuna-najba* ‘spy on’, *kunda-najba* ‘keep look out’. These behave as a single constituent, allowing no other material between the preverbal morpheme and the inflecting verb.

### 3. Mono-clausal SVCs and bi-clausal modification

#### 3.1 Serial motion verbs<sup>10</sup>

Cross-linguistically, languages in which SVCs are pervasive may combine a verb denoting a *manner of motion* with one denoting *directed motion* or *change of location* as illustrated in:

- (2) (a) Tyebari (Senufo – Côte d’Ivoire)  
 Dεεε      fε                      fodi.  
 Hyena      run.PF                      exit.PF  
 ‘Hyena ran out.’ (Laughren 1976: 874 #5)

- (b) Korean  
 John-i      pang-ey              ttweui-e      tul-e              o-ass-ta.  
 J-s              room-LOC              run-CON      enter-CON      come-PST-DCL  
 ‘John came running into the room.’ (Choi & Bowerman 1992: 88 #2)

<sup>10</sup> In glossing examples, indicative verb forms are not glossed as such. The abbreviations are: 1 = first person, 2 = second person, 3 = third person, acc = accusative, allat = allative, anaph = anaphor, ap = anti-passive, con = connective, cont = continuous, cs = changed state, dat = dative, dlc = declarative, du = dual, erg = ergative, ess = essive, evit = evitative, fac = factitive, fut = future, hab = habitual, irr = irrealis, loc = locative, neg = negative, nom = nominative, npst = non-past tense, o = object, pf = perfective aspect, pl = plural, pot = potential mood, priv = privative, prog = progressive, prs = present tense, prtc = participial, pst = past tense, purp = purposive, r = realis, refl = reflexive, s = subject, sg = singular, vb = verbalizer.

- (c) Taba (Austronesian — West New Guinea)  
 T=han t=ronda po-pe Ploili.  
 12PL=go 12PL=stroll down-ESS Peleri  
 ‘We went strolling in Peleri.’ (Bowden 2008: 85 #34)

In (2a-c) the order of the verbs is fixed; a different ordering of verbs (if grammatical) expresses a different meaning, and the verbs are strictly adjacent. As seen in (1a), Waanyi also combines verbs from these two classes, but, as will be shown, these verbs do not form a single syntactic phrase nor is their order fixed. Partial sets of Waanyi motion verbs of both types are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Some Waanyi motion verbs

Manner of motion verbs		Directed motion verbs	
baba	‘move through air: <b>fly</b> ’	barulajba	‘move past: <b>pass</b> ’
bilikijaa	‘move in water: <b>swim</b> ’	jarrijbi	‘move into: <b>enter</b> ’
bulubarrba	‘move rapidly up and down: <b>hop, jump</b> ’	jayi	‘move away from: <b>depart</b> ’
burrbijbi	‘move speedily: <b>run</b> ’	kajalaba	‘move upwards: <b>climb</b> ’
damarrijbi	‘move in permanent contact with surface: <b>slide</b> ’	kanungku	‘move towards: <b>approach</b> ’
jilaba	‘move along path in characteristic manner: <b>come, go, walk</b> ’	kulijibi	‘move downwards: <b>descend</b> ’
ngajangaja	‘move with great speed: <b>hasten</b> ’	wabudala	‘move across the path of: <b>cross</b> ’
wikijbi	‘move with belly facing/ touching ground: <b>crawl</b> ’	walimi	‘move out of: <b>exit</b> ’
wububu	‘move with great speed: <b>hasten</b> ’	wanbiya	‘move to lower place: <b>descend, land</b> ’

A comparison of the sentences in (3) shows that the verbs (bolded) do not form a single syntactic constituent. In (3a, 3c) the manner of motion verb *babaa* ‘fly’ is clause-initial preceding the encliticised subject pronoun, while the directed motion verb, *kajalaba* ‘ascend’ in (3a) and *jayi* ‘move away from’ in (3c), follows the subject pronoun. In (3b) both verbs follow the subject pronoun encliticised to the modal particle *ja*.

- (3) (a) **Babaa**=nurri    **kajalaba**    kingkarri,    bala-wurru.  
 fly=13PL.NOM    climb    up    sky-ALLAT

‘We fly/flew upwards up into the sky.’

- (b) Ja=ninji    **baba**    **barulajba**.  
 fut=2SG.NOM    fly    pass

‘You will fly by us.’

- (c) **Babaa**=nyulu    **jayi**.  
 fly=3SG.NOM    move\_away

‘It (bird) flies away.’

In (3a-c) the manner of motion verb *babaa* ‘fly’ precedes the directed motion verb, but this order is not obligatory; in (4) the order of verb types is reversed. That these verbs do not form a single constituent is further borne out by their inability to both occupy the clause-initial position as in (4c, 4d).

- (4) (a) Barulajba=nyulu    burrbijbi.  
 pass\_by=3SG.NOM    move\_fast

- (b) Burrbijbi=nyulu    barulajba.  
 ‘He raced past.’

- (c) \*Burbijbi    barulajba=nyulu.

- (d) \*Barulajba    burrbijbi=nyulu.

In (3) and (4), both verbs are in their indicative form which operates as a semantically unmarked finite form. A question which naturally arises is whether one of the verbs in these serial constructions is the ‘main’ inflected verb while the other has a modifying ‘adverbial’ role, and if so, how is this demonstrated? Given the variation in the positions in which the Waanyi verbs in (3) and (4) are realized, it is challenging to find syntactic clues which distinguish the function of each verb. The search for morphological clues also fails to provide conclusive evidence. In (5a) only the directed motion verb is inflected as irrealis, while the manner of motion verb is in its indicative form. In (5b) both verbs are in their indicative form.

- (5) (a) Kanungku-kanyi=nyulu      jilaba  
 approach-IRR=3SG.NOM      move  
 ‘He might (wants to/must/will) come up close (to us).’
- (b) Kanungku=nyulu      jilaba.  
 approach=3SG.NOM      move  
 ‘He’s coming up close (to me).’

The sentence in (5a) is one of two examples in the Waanyi corpus of a SVC with a verb in a non-indicative form (see also (12) below), hence it is impossible to say with any certainty whether it is always the directed motion verb which bears the clausal inflection, or whether it is the first verb in the sequence which is thus inflected, irrespective of its type. However, the irrealis mood has scope over both verbs in (5a), since (5a) is true irrespective of whether movement occurs, whereas in (5b) the proposition is false in the absence of movement.

## 3.2 Biclausal modification

The mono-clausal SVCs in (1) and (3-5) differ from bi-clausal constructions in which the verb in a dependent clause modifies an element of the main clause. Three distinct types of modifying dependent clause can be identified: non-finite verbal phrases headed by a post-position, coordinated clauses, and reduced coordinated clauses.

### 3.2.1 Post-positional verbal phrases

In (6) and (7) a dependent non-finite verbal predicate embedded in a post-position phrase modifies the matrix finite clause. The choice of post-position indicates the controller of the null subject of the non-finite clause. In (6) and (7) the presence of the locative post-position *-nV* signals that the understood subject of the verb it governs is obligatorily co-referent with the subject of the matrix clause.<sup>11</sup>

- (6) (a) Banyajba=nyulu      ngamba-lanya      **jila-ji-ni.**  
 pass=3SG.NOM      12PL-ACC      moving-VB-LOC  
 ‘He went past us.’ (Lit. He past us, moving.)
- (b) Wabudala=nyulu      burrbijbi,      **warraku-ji-ni.**  
 pass=3SG.NOM      move\_fast      be\_mindless-VB-LOC  
 ‘He sped past, without thinking (to look out for us).’

<sup>11</sup> The vowel in the locative suffix, symbolized as ‘V’, harmonizes with the stem final vowel.

- (c) **Baba-na**=nyulu      jilaba.  
 fly-loc=3SG.NOM      go  
 ‘It was flying.’ (Lit. flying it go)

The finite ‘main’ clause in (6a) contains a single transitive lexical verb *banyajba* ‘pass something by’ whereas in (6b) the main finite clause contains a SVC with two intransitive motion verbs: *wabudala* ‘pass by’ and *burrbijibi* ‘move fast’. The finite clause in (6c) also contains an intransitive verb *jilaba* ‘go/come’. These finite clauses are modified by the non-finite locative-headed clause which either follows (6a, 6b) or precedes (6c) the finite clause. In (6a, 6c), the locative-headed verb is intonationally integrated into the main clause, whereas in (6b) it is separated from the main clause by a pause.<sup>12</sup>

The overt object of a transitive verb in a locative phrase is also expressed within a locative-marked phrase as in (7); *kamukamu* ‘grog’, the logical object of the non-finite verb *ngara-ki-ni*, hosts the locative suffix *-nu*.

- (7)      Warrakujbu=yalu,              ngara-ki-ni,      **kamukamu-nu**.  
 crazy\_be(come)=3PL.NOM      drink-VB-LOC      grog-LOC  
 ‘They go mad drinking grog.’

### 3.2.2 Coordinated clauses

SVCs also differ from juxtaposed coordinated finite clauses. Although Waanyi has a coordinating particle, juxtaposition is the normal way of expressing union, whether between clauses or nominal phrases, as in:<sup>13</sup>

- (8)      (a)      **Jilaba**=nyulu,      banyajba=nyulu=ngaan.  
                  go=3SG.NOM      pass=3SG.NOM      =1SG.ACC  
                  ‘He’s going, he’s passing me.’  
                  (b)      **Nanganja**=nyulu,      janaki,      mudamudajibi=nangka,      duka.  
                  get=3SG.NOM      rope      tie\_around=3SG.REFL      neck  
                  ‘He got a rope (and) tied it around his neck.’

In (8a, 8b) the events denoted by each clause are semantically linked and the order of clauses is iconic of these semantic relationships: ‘passing’ in (8a) presupposes ‘going’, while in (8b) ‘rope-getting’ must precede ‘rope-tying’. Coordinated clauses are separated by a pause as indicated by the comma between the clauses in (8a, 8b).

<sup>12</sup> This intonational dislocation is very typical in Waanyi, even for nominal expressions of a verb’s arguments, as shown by the pause preceding the object DP in both clauses in (8b).

<sup>13</sup> The coordinating particle *banga* illustrated in (24) expresses inclusive ‘or’, while juxtaposition of constituents is used to express ‘and’.

### 2.2.3 Reduced coordination

In analysing Wambaya, Nordlinger (2014: 275) distinguishes SVCs from ‘reduced coordination’ constructions in which a verb, which may be accompanied by non-subject DPs, is adjoined to a clause following a pause. In similar Waanyi constructions this pause may be accompanied by sentence-final intonation, represented here by a semi-colon.

- (9)           **Da-jaya**=ngawu=ninya;       jadiyadiyimbi   barrku-u.  
hit-EVIT=1SG.NOM=2SG.ACC   flog                   club-ERG

‘Lest I hit you – beat (you) up with a fighting club.’

The first verb in (9), *dajaya*, bears the evitative mood inflection, whereas the second verb *jadi-yadi-yi-mbi* in its indicative form specifies the nature of the hitting threatened in the preceding clause. The coordinated clause lacks any overt subject or object marking and ‘shares’ its understood subject and object with that of the inflected verb in the preceding clause. It is also in the scope of the evitative mood. Unlike the verbs in a SVC which may be in either order, the reduced coordination structure is always post-posed to the main clause.

### 3.3 Cause-effect serialisation

Waanyi also forms a SVC by combining a causative change-of-state verb with a verb which specifies the nature of the causing event. The latter is typically an ‘impact’ verb denoting an action which involves contact between the subject and object, typically mediated by some instrument wielded by the subject. Both verbs are transitive. This construction can be viewed as a transitive counterpart of the intransitive motion verb SVC in that semantically the ‘impact’ verb specifies the *manner* of the causing action, while the other verb denotes a *change* in the state or location of the object. Verbs of each type, *impact* versus *cause change-of-state*, are listed in Table 3.

Table 3: *Impact and change-of-state verbs*

Impact verbs		Cause change-of-state verbs	
bi-j-bi	‘bite’	burra-da-ba	‘knock down’
da-ba	‘hit’	danyala-mba	‘smash open’
dayi	‘chop’	kadi-kadi-yi-mbi	‘make into bits’
jidi-mbi	‘squeeze’	kudan-ba	‘kill’
kali-j-bi	‘pierce’	kunkula-ba	‘slit open, gash’
karrbi-j-bi	‘cut’	rami-j-bi	‘break’
namany-ba	‘weigh on’	rami-ra-mba	‘shatter’
rangki-j-bi/rangki-mbi	‘hit with missile’		

Cause-effect SVCs are illustrated in (10).

- (10) (a) **Karrbijbi=nyulu kadi-kadi-yi-mbi.**  
 cut=3SG.NOM small-small-VB-CAUS  
 ‘He cut (it) to pieces.’ (GB)
- (b) **Karrbijbi=nyulu kangkarinya-a, karrbijbi kunkulaba.**  
 cut=3SG.NOM knife-ERG cut split\_open  
 ‘He cut (him) with a knife – cut (him) open.’
- (c) **Karrbijbi=nungka nayi bambularra ramijbi.**  
 cut=12.NOM this tail break\_off  
 ‘We cut off its tail.’ (lit. We cut this tail broke\_off.)
- (d) **Kalijbi=yalu burra-daba, yarraman, mukura-a.**  
 pierce=3PL.NOM down-hit horse spear-ERG  
 ‘They brought down the horse by spearing it.’
- (e) **Daba=nurri ramijbi, na-ngkani wuliwuli-i.**  
 hit=13PL.NOM break this-ERG round\_stone-ERG  
 ‘We hit it and broke a bit off with this small round stone.’  
 (Describing flaking core to make stone knives.)

In (10a-e) both verbs are in their indicative form. In (10b) the first clause contains only the impact verb *karrbijbi* ‘cut’, to which the reduced clause made up of both verbs forming the SVC is added. In all SVCs in (10) the impact verb precedes the change-of-state verb. In (10a-e) the impact verb is clause-initial, hosting the subject pronoun. The ordering of the verbs appears to be iconic, with the ‘causing action’ verb preceding the ‘resultant state’ verb. This seemingly contrasts with the free order in the motion verb SVC discussed in 3.1. However, in (11a-f) in which the causative change of state verb *kudanba* ‘kill’ combines with an impact verb, either order is attested.<sup>14</sup> The impact verb precedes the change-of-state verb in (11a, 11b, 11e), but the order is reversed in (11c, 11d, 11f).

<sup>14</sup> In both Waanyi and Garrwa the standard way of referring to a person’s death is by using the verb *janybijbi* ‘throw away’ in a reflexive clause. In Waanyi, causative *kudanba* is also used in a reflexive clause to express the same concept, i.e., ‘to die’. This use of both verbs is illustrated in (i), in which the ergative case-marking on the subject DP indicates a transitive subject.

- (i) **Janybijbi=nangka, kudanba=nangka, na-ngkani wululuku-u.**  
 throw=3SG.REFL kill=3SG.REFL 3SG-ERG old\_man-ERG  
 ‘This old man, he passed away, he died.’

- (11) (a) **Namanyba**=nyulu=niyanya, mangkanyi-i, **kudanba**.  
 pin\_down=3SG.NOM=12ACC body-ERG kill

‘He pinned us down with his body (to) kill (us).’

- (b) Mayi=ninya **bijbi** **kudanba**.  
 pot=2SG.ACC bite kill

‘It might bite and kill you.’

- (c) **Kudanba**=nyulu **bijbi** ngamba-lanya, miya-a kijibaji-i.  
 kill=3SG.NOM bite 12PL-ACC snake-ERG cheeky-ERG

‘A dangerous snake can bite and kill us.’

- (d) **Kudanba**=ngawu **rangkijsi**, burra-daba.  
 dead=1SG.NOM strike down-hit

‘I struck and killed (it), knocked it down.’

- (e) Mayi=yalu ngamba-lanya **daba** **kudanba** kunda-a,  
 POT=3PL.NOM 12PL-ACC hit dead stick-ERG

kalijbi mukura-a.

pierce spear-ERG

‘They might hit and kill us with sticks, (or) spear (us).’

- (f) **Kudanba**=ngawu **jidimbi**.

kill=1SG.NOM squeeze

‘I squeezed it to death.’

In (12) the transitive change-of-state verb *kudanba* ‘kill’ is in the scope of the irrealis mood-marked transitive verb *jarr-kanyi* ‘eat-IRR’, which in this context expresses desire or intention.<sup>15</sup> Both verbs form a complex predicate and ‘share’ the pronominal subject and bound object, expressed by the reflexive enclitic =*ngaka*.

<sup>15</sup> The sentence in (12) refers to a failed suicide attempt.

- (12) **Jarr-kanyi**=nangka **kudanba** warraku-ji-ni.  
 eat-IRR=3SG.REFL kill deranged-VB-LOC

‘He wanted to kill himself, being deranged.’

In the mono-clausal SVCs in (3)-(5) both verbs are intransitive, while in (10)-(12) both verbs are transitive, thus it would seem that one of the constraints on SVCs is that both verbs must be of the same transitivity type. This differs from what is observed in bi-clausal sentences of the type seen in (6) and (7) in which the transitivity of a verb is not constrained by that of the verb in the accompanying clause.

### 3.4 SVCs with an event-measuring verb

SVCs may also contain a verb which measures out the event denoted by the other verb. The event-measuring verbs are listed in Table 4.

Table 4: Event-measuring verbs

dawurru-mbu/ dawurru-jbu	‘finish, complete, do completely’
kanji-mbi/ kanji-jbi	‘finish, complete, do completely’
kudumanjaa	‘continue to do, keep on doing’
kudaanyu	‘continue to do, keep on doing’
yunngu-mbu/ yunngu-jbu	‘be no more; cease to be; go for good’

The verbs in Table 4 combine with other lexical verbs to form a SVC. Apart from *kudumanjaa* and *kudaanyu*, these verbs can also be used as the sole verb in a clause – sometimes with a more specialized or contextually-determined meaning.

#### 3.4.1 *Kudumanja(a)* and *kudaanyu* ‘continue’

In (13) *kudumanja(a)* ‘continue (to act on)’ combines with a transitive lexical verb. As in the SVCs discussed thus far, the relative order of the event-measuring verb and the other verb is variable, with respect to both its position within the clause, and to the other verb.

- (13) (a) Kudumanjaa=yalu bakarrijbi nana kanba kunburrki-i.  
 continue=3PL.NOM burn that grass firestick-ERG

‘They kept on setting fire to that grass – with a firestick.’

- (b) Kudumanjaa=nyulu kurrijbi jamba=n  
 continue=3SG.NOM dig ground  
 ‘It (goanna) kept on digging the ground.’

- (c) Kurrijbi=nyulu jamba kudumanjaa.  
 dig=3SG.NOM ground continue  
 ‘It (goanna) kept on digging the ground.’

- (d) Nana-ngkani yingka-a wawurra-a,  
 that-ERG one-ERG child-ERG  
  
 daba=nyulu kudumanjaa kunda-a.  
 hit=3SG.NOM continue stick-ERG  
 ‘That same child, he kept on hitting (it) with a stick.’

The variant form *kudaanyu* in (14) also combines with a transitive verb, either following it as in (14a) or preceding it as in (14b).

- (14) (a) Marijbi=nyulu kudaanyu.  
 seize=3SG.NOM continue  
 ‘He’s still holding on (won’t let go).’  
  
 (b) Kudaanyu=ngawu jidimbi duka.  
 continue=1SG.NOM squeeze neck  
 ‘I’ll keep on wringing its neck (won’t let go).’

It is not clear what determines the choice of *kudaanyu* over *kudumanjaa*. It is possible that *kudaanyu* is *not* a verb, but its sentence-initial position in (14b) suggests that it is.

### 3.4.2 *Dawurrumbu* ‘do all, complete’

As the sole verb in a clause, *dawurrumbu* can be glossed as ‘do all of, finish, complete, use up, get to end of’. In (15) *dawurru-mbu* is clearly transitive, quantifying over its object *nayi yanyi* ‘this language/word’.

- (15)            Dawurrumbu=nungka        nayi    yanyi=n.  
                   finish=12.NOM                this    language

‘We’ve finished this language (work).’ (i.e. done all of it)

The second coordinated clause in (16), consisting only of the event-measuring verb and the enclitic subject pronoun, adds to the information in the preceding clause.

- (16)            Budangu=nurri        waliji-anyi.        Dawurrumbu=nurri.  
                   NEG=13PL.NOM        meat-DAT            finish=13PL.NOM

‘We have no meat. We’ve used (it) up.’

In (15) and (16) *dawurrumbu* quantifies over the object of its clause. In (17)–(20), it combines with a verb to form a SVC, and quantifies over that verb and its object, suggesting an underlying structure in which the lexical verb phrase is governed by the quantifier-verb phrase, irrespective of their surface order.

- (17) (a) Dawurrumbu=ngaka.

complete=1SG.REFL

‘I’ll do it to myself **completely**.’ (i.e., I’ll make myself disappear.)  
 ≠ ‘I’ll finish myself.’

- (b) Makaraba=ngaka                bulinya-a            dawurrumbu.  
                   cover=1SG.REFL                weed-ERG            complete

‘I’ll **cover** myself **all over** with weeds.’

In the reflexive sentence in (17a) *dawurrumbu* has scope over an understood event involving a change of state in the speaker. In (17b), spoken immediately after (17a), the nature of this event and its result is overtly expressed by use of the transitive verb *makaraba* ‘cover’ that combines with *dawurrumbu* which measures the ‘cover me’ event. The ‘covering’ event is complete when the verb’s object is totally covered. Similarly in (18a) the event is complete when *all* the water is drunk, and in (18b) when *all* the barramundi has been eaten.

- (18) (a) Ngaraba=ngawu    dawurrumbu    wanami    ngajirriji.  
 drink=1SG.NOM    finish    water    cold  
 ‘I’ve drunk up all the cold water.’

- (b) Jarrba=yalu    dawurrumbu.  
 eat=3PL.NOM    finish  
 ‘They ate (it) all up.’

A comparison of the relative order of verbs in (18) and (19) shows that either verb may be in clause-initial position.

- (19)    Dawurrumbu=yalu    jarrba.  
 use\_up=3PL.NOM    eat  
 ‘They ate (it) right up/they ate (it) all.’

Examples of *dawurrumbu* combining with another verb are also found in Breen’s field notes. In (20) a complete understanding of the language, i.e. of *all* the language is asserted.

- (20)    Manku=ninji    yanyi=n=barri    walim<sup>17</sup>    dawurrumbu.  
 know=2SG.NOM    language-CS    ?    finish  
 ‘You know (hear) the language right through now.’ (GB)

Like *kudumanjaa/kudaanyu*, *dawurrumbu* has scope over a transitive verb and its object in all examples of its use in a SVC.

### 3.4.3 *Kanji-jbi/kanji-mbi* ‘finish, do all of’

Waanyi *kanji-jbi* ~ *kanji-mbi* is cognate with the Wambaya verb *ganji-mi* ‘finish’ (Nordlinger 1998, 2014), and seemingly synonymous with *dawurru-jbu* ~ *dawurru-mbu*. As mentioned in Section 2, there is often a mismatch between a verb’s form and its syntactic function with respect to transitivity. This event-measuring verb has both intransitive and transitive forms, which seem to be used interchangeably. The transitive use of the intransitive form *kanjijbi* is illustrated in (21) where the verb has scope over the accomplishment measured by the direct object.

<sup>16</sup> Meaning of *walim* is unknown; possibly *walimi* ‘emerge from / exit’.

- (21) Budangku=yalu nana wanba, barraku, kanjijbi.  
 NEG=3PL.NOM that house, building, finish.  
 ‘They haven’t finished (building) that house, (that) building.’

In (22a, 22b), the intransitive form *kanjijbi* is used in combination with a transitive verb.

- (22) (a) Wayi=barri=ninji kanjijbi dabarraba mama=n.  
 INTERROG=CS=2SG.NOM finish cook veg.food  
 ‘Have you finished cooking the damper yet?’ (GB)
- (b) Budangku=yalu mirramba, kanjijbi.  
 NEG=3PL.NOM make finish.  
 ‘They haven’t made (it), finished (making it).’

The event-measuring verb in (22a) precedes the accomplishment verb *dabarraba* ‘cook’. In (22b) the verbs are in the reverse order, and there is a pause (marked by the comma) between the accomplishment verb *mirramba* and the event-measuring verb *kanjijbi*. However, both verbs are in the scope of negation expressed by clause-initial *budangku* just as both verbs in (22a) are in the scope of the interrogative *wayi*.

In (23) both event-measuring verbs are used, each as the sole verb in its clause, an example of clause coordination in which both sentences refer to the same situation, one in which the speaker has no more boomerangs. The causative/transitive form *kanji-mbi* is used, although it has the same semantic and syntactic properties as the inchoative form *kanji-jbi* used in (21) and (22), and in (24).

- (23) Dawurrumbu=ngawu. Kanjimbi=ngawu, budangku=n=barri  
 totally\_do=1SG.NOM use\_up=1SG.NOM NEG=CS  
 ‘I’ve finished (with them). I’ve used (them) up – none (left) now.’

As an independent transitive verb, *kanji-jbi* has the meaning ‘waste, get rid of, make disappear’ in (24) which refers to a situation in which a child is throwing his food away to a dog instead of eating it himself.

- (24) Mama banga waliji=n, kanjijbi=nyulu.  
 veg.food and meat=CS waste=3SG.NOM  
 ‘The vegetables and meat, he’s wasting (them).’

Interestingly, *kanjijbi* in (25) is used as an intransitive inchoative verb with scope over the subject *nyulu* which refers to a fire which has burned out.

- (25) Kanjijbi=barri=nyulu. Kanjijbi =nyulu, jawurra=n.  
 finish=CS=3SG.NOM finish=3SG.NOM coals

‘It’s finished now. It’s finished – (there’s just) coals.’

As Waanyi verbs are typically strictly intransitive or transitive in their syntactic and semantic behaviour, if not their morphological form, the variation in syntactic transitivity shown by *kanjijbi* is rather exceptional.

### 3.4.4 *Yunngu-jbu, yunngu-mbu* ‘go for good; be permanently absent’

This verb quantifies over an act of displacement, signaling the permanent absence of the theme argument from an original location. Again, intransitive and transitive forms of this verb seem to be used interchangeably in intransitive clauses. This verb is frequently translated into local English as ‘altogether’. In (26) the imperative form of this verb is the sole verb in a clause coordinated with the preceding clause. The motion verbs in the initial clause form a SVC, with both in the indicative form. The independence of the second clause is marked by the fact that the event-measuring verb is inflected as imperative, and is followed by the subject enclitic pronoun. Irrespective of the form of the verbs in these clauses, both clauses have a directive function.

- (26) Barranyi=ninji jilaba. Yunngu-mu=ninji.  
 move\_away=2SG.NOM go go\_for\_good-IMP=2SG.NOM

‘You go away, (and) stay away for good.’

The sentences in (27a, 27b), spoken in an uninterrupted sequence in relation to the situation referred to in (26), exemplify a typical Waanyi expressive device in which the same message is delivered by repeating a sentence by varying the word order. In (27a) and (27b), different forms of the same verbs are also used. In (27a) the intransitive motion verb *jilaba* is combined with the event measuring verb in its intransitive (or ‘inchoative’) form, *yunngu-jbu*. In (27b) the transitive ‘causative’ form of the event-measuring verb is used, while an alternative indicative form of the motion verb is used, in which the root-final vowel is lengthened.

- (27) (a) **Jilaba**=ninji yunngu-jbu.  
 go=2SG.NOM go\_for\_good-INTR

‘You are going for good.’

- (b) Yunngu-mbu=ninji **jila-a**.  
 go\_for\_good-TR=2SG.NOM GO-IND

‘You’ll go away for good.’

That the combination of the causative verb form *yunngu-mbu* with an intransitive motion verb in (27b) is not an idiosyncratic utterance by one speaker is borne out by (28) recorded by Breen from a different speaker, many years prior to my recording of (27b).

- (28) Jilaba      nana      wanami      yunngumbu=barri.  
go            that      water      go\_for\_good=cs

‘Those clouds (=water) have gone altogether.’ (GB)

Indeed there are further examples of this causative verb form combining with intransitive motion verbs as in (29a-c) which also attest to the interchangeability of the order in which the verbs are spoken – either one able to occupy the clause initial position.

- (29) (a) Yunngumbu =ngawu      burrbijbi.  
go\_for\_good=1SG.NOM      move\_fast

Budangu=ngawu      kanga-a.  
NEG=1SG.NOM      return-IND

‘I ran away for good. I didn’t return.’

- (b) Kalij-kanyi=ngawu      wadaba.      Bari-mbi=ngawu      wadaba.  
spear-IRR=1SG.NOM      goanna      bad-CAUS=SG.NOM      goanna

Burbijbi=nyulu      “yunngumbu.<sup>18</sup>  
move\_fast=3SG.NOM      go\_for\_good

‘I wanted to spear the goanna. (But) I missed (spearing) the goanna. It ran away for good (where I couldn’t find it).’

- (c) Yunngumbu=nyulu      “burbijbi      nana      wadaba,      waliji=n.  
go\_for\_good=3SG.NOM      move\_fast      that      goanna      animal

‘It ran off for good, that goanna – (that) animal.’

In the Waanyi corpus, the inchoative/intransitive form is most commonly found with *kanji-* while it is the causative form of *yunngu-* which is more frequent. As with the other event-measuring verbs in Table 4, it is not clear what determines the choice of verb form.

Both verbs in a SVC are tightly integrated into a single clause, although they may appear in a variety of positions in the clause, and in either order. Either verb may appear in the clause-initial position where it hosts the subject enclitic pronoun, or may occur in the immediate post-enclitic subject position where it may be given special prominence by the attribution of unusually strong stress on its initial syllable, as observed in (29b, c). Both verbs may also follow the

<sup>17</sup> A particularly strong stress on *yunngumbu* in (29b) and on the motion verb *burbijbi* in (29c) is indicated by (“).

enclitic subject pronoun as in (22a). This variability in the placement of verbs in a Waanyi SVC corresponds with what Nordlinger (2014) has observed in similar SVCs in neighbouring Wambaya.

#### 4. Serial verbs as an areal feature

As mentioned in Section 1, Waanyi is not alone among the southern Gulf of Carpentaria languages in allowing more than one lexical verb within a single clause. Furthermore this feature cuts across genetic boundaries. SVCs are used to express a range of semantic relations including those examined in the previous sections. SVCs combining manner of motion and directed motion/change of location verbs are attested in Garrwa, Yukulta and Wambaya, combinations of impact and cause-change-of-state verbs in Garrwa, Kalkutungu, Wambaya and Yukulta, and combinations of lexical verb with an event-measuring verb in Kalkutungu and Wambaya.

Some additional verb combinations, unattested in the Waanyi corpus, are found in some of these languages. In both Wambaya and Yukulta the cause-change-of-state verb based on the root meaning ‘good’ combines with another verb to positively evaluate the situation denoted by that other verb. This usage is typically translated as ‘properly’ in regional varieties of Aboriginal English. In both languages, this verb either modifies an intransitive, (30a) and (31a), or transitive verb, (30b) and (31b), on condition the intransitive verb has an agentive subject.

##### (30) Yukulta

(a) Marntuwarra=ma=yingk-a    mirra-la-tya    wirrka-tya.

boy=FOC=INTR.NPRES-R            good-CAUS-VB            dance-VB

‘The boy used to dance well.’ (Keen 1983: 84 #98)

(b) Kuya=yi=ka=nt-i            tanta wangalka    mirra-la-tha    nguti?

Q=2SG.S=TR=NPRS-IRR this    boomerang    good-CAUS-VB    throw

‘Can you throw this boomerang well?’ (Keen 1983: 84 #99)

##### (31) Wambaya

(a) Ngarl-wa                    guriny-mi!

talk-FUT                    make\_good-FAC

‘Talk properly!’ (Nordlinger 1998: 194 #7-117)

(b) Angbardi-j-ba            gun-u                    guriny-mi.

build-VB-FUT            3SG.M.A-FUT            make\_good-FAC

‘He’s going to build (them) properly.’ (Nordlinger 2014: 269 #19)

Although Waanyi has a ‘make good’ verb *mirra-mba* based on the same root as the Yukulta verb in (30a, 30b), as well as a synonym *kunyma-mba*, there is no example in the Waanyi corpus of either verb in a SVC in which it modifies, or evaluates, an accompanying verb. However, in both Waanyi and Wambaya, the verb meaning ‘to make bad’ is used either as the sole verb in a clause or in combination with another verb to signal the failure to bring about the intended result of some action, either implied contextually, or referred to by the other verb in the same clause. The Waanyi and Wambaya sentences in (32) differ from ones in which negation has wide scope over a clause such that both a causing action and its intended result are negated; the ‘make bad’ verb only negates the intended result, not the action denoted by the other verb. Sentences (32a, 32b) refer to actions in which a missile is launched at a target it fails to strike.

(32) (a) Waanyi

Bariyi-mbi=yalu rangkijbi.  
 bad-caus=3PL.NOM hit\_with\_missile  
 ‘They missed striking (him).’

(b) Wambaya

Bagi-mi irr-a yurndu.  
 spoil-NFUT 3PL.S-PST hit\_with\_missile  
 ‘They missed striking him.’ (Nordlinger 2014: 269 #21)

Also absent from the Waanyi corpus is a SVC in which a ‘stance’ verb (e.g. ‘sit’, ‘lie’, ‘stand’) combines with another intransitive verb. In Yukulta (Keen 1983: 265 #19), Kalkutungu (Blake 1979: 109 #6.14) and Wambaya (Nordlinger 2014: 270-271), a lexical verb denoting a state of being or physical configuration combines with a more general stance verb. In Garrwa, the general stance verb *jungku* ‘sit, be, stay’ combines with a transitive or intransitive verb, and has an aspectual function forcing an unbounded or progressive reading of the situation denoted by the non-stance verb (Mushin 2012: 299).<sup>18</sup>

## 5. Concluding Remarks

Waanyi can integrate two lexical verbs into a clause to form a SVC which denotes a complex predicate. Each verb denotes a different aspect of a single event, the most frequent combinations being that of a manner of motion verb with a directed motion/change of location verb, an impact verb with a causative change-of-state verb, and an event-measuring verb with scope over the other

<sup>18</sup> For a wider discussion of the aspectual function of stance verbs in SVCs in Australian languages see Reid (2002).

verbal predicate. In all three types of SVC, both verbs must be of the same transitivity type, although not necessarily of the same transitivity-marking morphological form.

Waanyi verbs in a SVC do not form a single phrasal constituent; they may be discontinuous and may be realized in either order, in a range of clausal positions. In the admittedly limited data examined, both verbs in a SVC may be in the neutral indicative form, distinguished from the other finite inflected forms: imperative, evitative and irrealis. Alternatively, one verb may be in a non-indicative modal form while the other remains in the indicative form. On the basis of the data available it is not possible to know whether this is the only grammatical combination of verb forms. Nor is it possible to deduce what licenses the choice of verb to be realized in a non-indicative form: its type or position in the clause. However the marked inflection has scope over both verbs in the SVC.

Cutting across genetic boundaries, similar SVCs occur in neighbouring languages. While SVCs in these other languages share features of Waanyi SVCs, differences are also found. For example, the combination of two motion verbs seems to be restricted in Wambaya to cases where one is the unmarked 'go' verb *yarru*, and the act of 'going' precedes the action denoted by the other verb, rather than being contemporaneous with the event/state denoted by the other verb. In the Yukulta and Kalkutungu examples, the verbs in an SVC are adjacent and are marked for the same inflectional value.

It is difficult to know whether the peripheral nature of SVCs in these other languages, as noted by Nordlinger (2014) in relation to Wambaya, and Mushin (2012) in relation to Garrwa, is an accurate assessment of their status, or whether it is an artifact of their documentation, given the absence in most cases of extensive oral texts, mainly due to the fact that these languages were documented at a time when they were highly endangered and were no longer being used as the principal language of communication in the speakers' communities. Of the Gulf languages surveyed in this study, only Garrwa is still spoken, although its status is endangered.

This study merely touches the surface of this aspect of Waanyi grammar, but hopefully it points to some directions a deeper examination of SVCs in this and other Australian languages might take.

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