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A grammar of Mundabli : a Bantoid (Yemne-Kimbi) language of Cameroon

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CHAPTER 9

Serial verb constructions and verbal adverbs

This chapter presents a first inventory of Mundabli serial verb constructions (in the following referred to as SVCs). It also treats verbal adverbs,¹ which, like verbs, form part of the verbal core but are considered adverbials.

Serial verb constructions are split up into asymmetrical and symmetrical SVCs. The bulk of SVCs in Mundabli are asymmetrical but symmetrical SVCs are also attested. An integral part of my analysis are so-called coverbs. My use of the term ‘coverb’ is adopted from Lovegren (2013: footnote 3, 215). It describes any verb which forms part of a serial verb construction. The term ‘major coverb’ thus refers to the ‘major verb’ of an asymmetrical SVC, i.e. the verb from a semantically unrestricted class which determines the semantic core of the asymmetrical SVC, and ‘minor coverb’ refers to the verb from a semantically restricted class which modifies the major coverb. Thus a ‘coverb’ in this sense is simply a verb which forms part of a serial verb construction. An asymmetrical SVC consists of one major coverb and one or more minor coverbs. The major coverb comes from a semantically unrestricted class and determines the semantics of the whole construction. The minor coverb comes from a semantically restricted class. It semantically modifies the major coverb. Minor coverbs have a fixed place with respect to the major coverb. Depending on whether they precede or follow the major coverb, they may be referred to as right- or left-modifying coverbs. With one exception, minor coverbs in Mundabli are right-modifying. Symmetrical SVCs consist of two or more verbs from a semantically unrestricted class. Both together make up the semantics of the whole symmetric SVC. While the order of verbs in symmetrical SVCs is iconic,

¹Kießling (2011: 241) refers to these verbal adverbs as ‘hybrid adverbials’.

the order in asymmetrical SVCs may also be counter-iconic. While asymmetrical SVCs indicate simultaneity of event-components, symmetrical SVCs rather tend to express sequentiality. For detailed definitions, see Aikhenvald (2006: 21-22) and Kießling (2011: 30-36).²

Verbal adverbs are also treated here because they form part of the verbal core and resemble verbs in this respect. It is very likely that they are historically derived from minor coverbs in asymmetrical SVCs. They generally occur at the end of the verbal core, and in one case at the beginning - with nothing (except another hybrid adverbial) separating the two. Grammatically they differ from verbs in at least two respects: first, they cannot occur on their own, and second they usually do not fit into any of the three verb tone classes, although there are unclear cases. Kießling (2011: 241) suggests a number of other tests for verbal adverbs. The application of these tests to Mundabli would surely be an interesting future project, but practical restrictions prevent their application in the current study.

The remainder of this chapter contains a description of asymmetrical SVCs (§9.1) and symmetrical SVCs (§9.2), a description of the expression of grammatical categories in SVCs (§9.3.2) and a description of verbal adverbs (§9.4). Within the SVC sections SVCs are organized according to their semantic function. Asymmetrical SVCs are listed by the relevant coverb. In the examples in this chapter, relevant serial verb constructions are enclosed in square brackets. Within these SVCs, verbs of interest (to be specified in the relevant section) are underlined.

9.1 Asymmetrical SVCs

Asymmetrical serial verb constructions consist of one verb from a relatively large, open, or otherwise unrestricted class and one or more verbs from a semantically or grammatically restricted (or closed) class. Thus, an asymmetrical SVC may contain several minor coverbs. Their order is discussed in the relevant sections. However, the current description focusses mainly on asymmetrical SVCs with two verbs.

In Mundabli, the verb from the restricted class, i.e. the minor coverb, generally follows the verb from the unrestricted class, i.e. the major coverb, except for the causative construction whose unusual order may be due to its recent origin in a bi-clausal construction. Thus, minor coverbs are generally right-modifying. Semantic categories expressed by asymmetrical SVCs in Mundabli are motion (§9.1.1), aspectuality or aspect-related meanings (§9.1.2), valency (§9.1.3) and manner (§9.1.4).

²Kießling (2011) presents a detailed description and analysis of serial verb constructions in Isu (West-Ring), a closely related language spoken in the close vicinity of Mundabli. This chapter profits a lot from this work, as the structures of the two languages are extremely similar and of course, Kießling (2011) treats the topic at a depth which cannot be achieved in a general descriptive grammar.

9.1.1 Motion

One of the semantic fields expressed by asymmetrical SVCs in Mundabli is motion. As Aikhenvald (2006: 22) points out, this semantic field, which she refers to as “direction and orientation”, “is extremely common in most productively serializing languages”. Motion is understood to include deictic orientation (§9.1.1.1) and path (§9.1.1.2). Manner of motion is not usually expressed by coverbs in Mundabli because, on the one hand, many motion verbs conflate motion and manner and, on the other hand, manner is commonly expressed by clause-final manner adverbs like **ǎ m̄m̄**~**m̄m̄** in (279). See §10.1 for more on manner adverbs.

(279) gbó ɲǎí à wé m̄ǎ ǎ m̄m̄~m̄m̄
 CL3/7a.body CL3;1SG.POSS P2 pain(c) 1SG ADVLZ one~RED

‘My body was hurting me very much.’

9.1.1.1 Deictic orientation

The motion verbs **tǎú** ‘come’ and **ǎn** ‘go’ are used as right-modifying coverbs and express spatial deixis, i.e. movement to or away from the deictic center. In this function, they co-occur with path verbs like ‘go up’, ‘go down’, ‘return’, etc., with verbs expressing a transfer of custody, such as ‘take’, ‘give’, ‘sell’ etc., and with speech verbs like ‘say’, ‘ask’, ‘call’, etc. in the function of a major coverb.

The verb **tǎú** ‘come’ encodes movement towards the deictic center when it is used as a right-modifying coverb in an asymmetrical SVC, as e.g. in (280)-(282). The right-modifying coverb is usually pronounced **ǎú**, starting with a fricative rather than an affricate. This pronunciation is only attested in the coverb and not when ‘come’ is used as a main verb. However, when pronounced carefully, the minor coverb may also be pronounced **tǎú**. Otherwise, the form of the verb is the same, whether it is used as minor coverb or as independent verb.

(280) *after*, à m̄ǎ [tǎn ǎú] yán ɲǎm̄
 after 2SG CONSEC cut(b) come(b) CL3/7a.leave CL1/2.plantain

‘After that, you collect plantain leaves.’

- (281) n = lyǎ ná f-án, n = dā wú wō yē
 1SG = go_to_bush(a).IPFV AS PROX-here 1SG=F1.NEG hear(b) NEG COMP
 bēn fǒ [mù fǔ] kpē tsyě w-ēn
 CL2PL P1 take(a) come(b) CL3.pot CL1.father.2POSS CL1-2PL.POSS
 w-ó wú-kwě w-ó yē bēn lā níŋ dọ tǐn
 CL3-DET CL3-home CL3-DET COMP 2PL do(a) CL7.thing certain there
 mī
 in

‘As I am going to the bush, I don’t want to hear that you have taken your father’s traditional pot in order to do something inside.’

- (282) wù [kē tǐn], wù dzě ní lā yē
 CL1 return(c) come(b) CL1 say(b) CL1.mother.3SG/PL.POSS DAT COMP

‘She returned and said to her mother:’

In (280), the use of the minor coverb ‘come’ implies that the banana leaves are cut off in order to be kept rather than dropped or thrown away. In (281), ‘come’ is used as minor coverb to convey the meaning ‘bring’ rather than ‘take (away)’, and in (282), the child returns into the house (to the deictic center) after having briefly gone outside behind the house to look for her sister.

An example of the use of tǐn ‘come’ as single core verb is (283). Here, the verb ‘come’ surfaces in its imperfective form.

- (283) tǐlā mwóm dzé hǎyì, dzē gbàn ŋgī lā yē
 T. M. say(b) INTERJ say(b) CL1.in-law CL1.1SG.POSS DAT COMP
 n = tó tǐn
 1SG=FOC come(b).IPFV

‘[...] Tela Mwom said: Tell my in-law that I am coming!’

The use of the right-modifying coverb gǎn ‘go’ conveys direction of movement away from the deictic center, as, e.g. in (284) - (286).

- (284) [kwó gǎn] tó mī
 enter(c) go(a) there in

‘Go in there!’

- (285) dyǎ [yé gàn] tǐn, wù sé ǎ mọ~mọ
 D. climb(c) go(a) there CL1 be_hot(c) ADVLZ one~RED

‘Dya goes up there, he is really hot.’³

³‘Dya’ is the short form for ‘Dieudonné’.

- (286) wù [bí gān] gbō kún
 CL1 exit(b) go(a) CL3.house house_backside.LOC

‘She went outside behind the house.’

The use of the right-modifying coverb ‘go’ in (284)-(286) shows that the subject in each of these examples moves away from the deictic center.

Examples of ‘go’ as a main verb are found in (287) and (288).

- (287) wān w-ō bí, wù gān gbō kún
 CL1.child CL1-DET exit(b) CL1 go(a) CL3.house behind_house.LOC

‘The child went out. She went behind the house.’

- (288) yē gān, kwó kǔ mī
 COMP go(a) enter(c) CL7/8.forest in

‘[It said]: go into the forest!’

The verbs in (288) are interrupted by a pause and are therefore interpreted as independent verbs rather than parts of an SVC.

The right-modifying coverbs ‘come’ and ‘go’ may also be used when the major coverb is a verb of speech, like e.g. ‘call’ or ‘say’ in (289) and (290). These examples illustrate very well how discourse participants are assigned to the deictic center or not. Each of these examples contains two asymmetrical SVCs, each of which has a different subject, the first forming part of the deictic center while the second does not. Accordingly, in both examples, the right-modifying coverb of the first asymmetrical SVC is ‘go’, and that of the second is ‘come’.

- (289) à [bòŋ gàn] kpé (é), wù [dzé
 2SG call(a).IPFV go(a).IPFV CL1.woman INTERJ CL1 say(b).IPFV
 tʃú] wá lā yē (o)
 come(b).IPFV 2SG.PP DAT COMP INTERJ

‘You call a woman, [and] she will tell you that [...]’

- (290) bī mī [dzé gàn] bǔ lā, yē nǐm nǐ ā
 1PL CONSEC speak(b) go(a) CL2PP DAT COMP sit(a) IMP.PL COM
 mō kwé (e), bǔ [dzé ʃú]
 CL1.man CL3/7a.home_village INTERJ CL2 speak(b) come(b).IPFV
 bí lā yē, nóm kwé ā
 1PL.PP DAT COMP CL2.husbands CL3/7a.home_village NEG
 fyá tí wō bī
 give(b).IPFV surprisingly NEG 1PL

‘We are telling them: Stay and get married to a local man! They are telling us: The local men do not give us [anything].’

The deictic center in (289) is the addressee. The addressee’s call “goes” out to a woman, while her answer “comes” back to the addressee. In (290), the use of the deictic coverbs establishes the speaker and those he refers to by the first person plural pronoun *bī* as the deictic center.

The verbs ‘come’ and ‘go’ are also found in initial position in SVCs, such as in (291) and (292). One logical option would be that ‘come’ and ‘go’ are variable minor coverbs which may be either right- or left-modifying. However, this is unlikely, because minor coverbs in Mundabli are generally right-modifying. Andeed, when these verbs occur at the left edge of the verbal core, they do not semantically modify the other verbs within the SVC like minor coverbs in asymmetrical SVCs do, and like ‘come’ and ‘go’ do when they are at the right edge of the verbal core. Instead, the SVCs in this case have a sequential or purposive reading, which suggests that we are dealing with symmetrical serial verb constructions. Thus, the movement verb ‘go’, in this case, represents the initial coverb of a symmetric serial verb construction (see §9.2) rather than a left-modifying coverb in an asymmetrical SVC.

- (291) *yē* [gǎn tsē] *mī ā* ntsǝm *mū-ŋ-gē~ŋ-gē* à
 COMP go(a) search(a) 1SG COM CL6-soil CL6-N-be_red~RED 2SG
mī [tʃú fǝ] *ndá lā*
 CONSEC come(b) give(b) 1SG.DAT DAT

‘[She said]: go and search for some red soil for me, and then you come and give [it] to me!’

- (292) *bǝ* [gān mū] [jú] *kpè*
 CL2 go(a) take(a) come(b) CL3.pot

‘They went to take the pot.’

Example (291) contains two SVCs. One starts with ‘go’, and the other with ‘come’. Both can have a sequential or purposive reading. In (292) the verb-core initial verb ‘go’ co-occurs within one SVC with the verb-core final right-modifying coverb ‘come’. According to the current analysis, this SVC consists of an asymmetrical SVC ‘take - come’ which is nested it on a larger symmetrical SVC. This analysis is supported by the fact that the verb-core initial verb ‘go’ co-occurs within one SVC with the verb-core final right-modifying coverb ‘come’. This supports the current analysis of verb core-initial deictic motion verbs as major coverbs of symmetrical SVCs rather than left-modifying minor coverbs of asymmetrical SVCs, because, having a deictic function, ‘come’ and ‘go’, which are antonyms, cannot co-occur as minor coverbs within the same asymmetrical SVC. For more on symmetrical SVCs, see §9.2.

9.1.1.2 Path

Path is encoded by asymmetrical SVCs employing motion verbs as right-modifying coverbs. Types of path expressed by asymmetrical SVCs are vertical di-

rection, goal-bounded path and source-bounded path. Path verbs are often clustered, i.e. several path verbs co-occur as minor coverbs in an asymmetrical SVC. The order of these clusters is fixed (at least to a certain extent). Path coverbs always occur in the following order: GOAL - SOURCE - VERTICAL, as can be seen in (307).

Vertical Direction Vertical direction is encoded by the right-modifying coverbs *yó* ‘ascend’ ((293)-(294)) and *fi* ‘descend’⁴ ((295)-(297)).

- (293) à mī [wú bí yó] mú
2SG CONSEC drain(c) exit(b) go_up(c) CL6

‘You then take it [the corn] out and drain it [...].’

- (294) kó mū gé à [tũ fi bì yó] f̄
COND CL6 settle(b) 2SG scoop(b) pass(b) exit(b) go_up(c) CL3.head
w-ó
CL3-DET

‘When it has settled, you remove the head.’

- (295) wān w-ō [tsí bí fi] dō w-ó
CL1.child CL1-DET spit(b) exit(b) go_down(a) CL3.bean(s) CL3-DET
wú dzǎ
CL1PP mouth.LOC

‘The child spit the bean out of her mouth.’

- (296) wù [gí fi] tē kí gbō
CL1 put(b) go_down(a) CL7/8.walking_stick CL7;3SG.POSS CL3.house
sē
house_front.LOC

‘Then she put her traveling stick down in front of the house.’

- (297) kó wù [kpō fi] gū w-ó tʃóŋ,
when CL1 light(a) go_down(a) CL3/7.fire CL3-DET CL1/2.fireplace
ní wū [tén bí fi] fi-ŋgī
CL1.mother CL1.CL1POSS drip(c) exit(b) go_down(a) CL6.water
sé
CL3/7a.attic

‘When she lit the fire in the fire place, her mother let a little bit of water drip down from the attic.’

⁴The verbs *yó* ‘ascend’ and *fi* ‘descend’ are glossed in the examples as ‘go_up’ and ‘go_down’, respectively.

The coverbs encode the vertical direction of the action described by the main verb. The extent to which the encoding of vertical direction is obligatory is still unclear. The path coverbs **yó** ‘ascend’ and **ʃɪ** ‘descend’ are often preceded by a goal or source bounded coverb such as **bí** ‘exit’ or **kwó** ‘enter’, as in (293), (294) and (295).

Examples of **yó** ‘ascend’ and **ʃɪ** ‘go_down’ as main verbs are found in (298) and (299), respectively.

- (298) à dǐ yó í dʒɔ b-én mī
2SG F1 go_up(c) LOC CL8a.bridge CL8a-DEM.PROX in

‘You will go up on this bridge.’

- (299) Dyǎ sé yē, ká wù kán dǒ nìŋ ŋgō
D. be_hot(c) COMP COND CL1 hold(c) stay(b) CL7.thing upon
ní kǎ ʃí
CL1.mother.3POSS F2 descend(a)

‘Dya is very determined. If he continues like that, his mother will come down.’⁵

The minor coverb **ʃɪ** ‘descend’ may also co-occur with non-movement verbs, such as the major coverbs ‘ask’, ‘show’ and ‘call’ in examples (300)-(302).

- (300) ní [bú ʃí] tí wú lā, yē mī
CL1/2.mother ask(b) go_down(a) surprisingly CL1PP DAT COMP 1SG
wān, ɲwóm w-ā dǐ tí nā (o)
CL1.child CL1.husband CL1-2SG.POSS be(b) surprisingly where INTERJ

‘Her mother will ask her: My child, where is your husband?’

- (301) n = dǐ [tsó ʃí] dʒí dè nō wān
1SG = F1 show(a) go_down(a) CL3.road CL9.place SUBORD CL1.child
w-ā dǐ f-ó
CL1-2SG.POSS be(b) PROX-REL

‘I will show you the way to where your child is.’

- (302) wù [gān [bōŋ ʃí]] dzǒŋǎ tǐlā mwóm
CL1- go(a) call(a) go_down(a) again T. M.

‘She went again to call Tela Mwom.’

What exactly the coverb contributes to the overall meaning is unclear. In (300) and (301), **ʃɪ** may be translatable as something like ‘reveal’. In (302), **ʃɪ** is used either because she is calling down to Tela Mwóm⁶ or because she is calling him to come down from where he is.

⁵In the given context, ‘hot’ means something along the lines of ‘eager, determined’.

⁶Tela Mwóm is in the bush, which is usually lower than the village, as villages are often situated on hilltops.

Goal-bounded path As stated in Kießling (2011: 112), “[g]oal bounded path verbs incorporate reference to an endpoint of the motion [...]”. Attested goal-bounded path coverbs are **kwó** ‘enter’ and **ké** ‘return’.

The verb **kwó** ‘enter’ denotes movement into a container and acts as the antonym of **bí** ‘exit’. As minor coverb in asymmetrical SVCs, **kwó** ‘enter’ adds its meaning of ‘movement into a hollow object’ to the meaning of the core-verb, as in (305), (303) and (304).

- (303) wān kpé w-ṽ wù kè dī w-ṽ
 CL1.child CL1.woman CL1-DET CL1 P3 be(b) CL1-REL
 bwé~bwé wù kè móm w-ṽ byàn, wù mū
 CL1.toddler~RED CL1 P3 suck(b) CL1-REL CL3/7a.breast CL1 take(a)
 dṽ w-ṽ, wù [báj kwó] wú dzáé
 CL3.beans CL3-DET CL1 lock(b) enter(c) CL1PP CL7.mouth

‘The baby girl, who was nursing, took the bean and put [it] into her mouth.’

- (304) ká à dzyē kpē mú à mī mū jú
 COND 2SG cook(a) complete(a/c?) CL6 2SG CONSEC take(a) come(b)
 ŋkā mū-nkōn mós à mī [nōŋ
 CL6.corn_beer CL6-strong_corn_beer CL6-DET 2SG CONSEC add(a?)
 kwó jɪ tʃín ŋgós
 enter(c) go_down(a) there upon

‘When you have completed cooking, you then take the strong corn beer and you mix it in there.’

- (305) tsām b-ṽ [tʃú kwó] gbá, tsú
 CL7/8.python CL8-DET come(b) enter(c) house.LOC hit(b)
 kpé w-ṽ áná tsú wù áná tsú wù áná,
 CL1.woman CL1-DET like_that hit(b) CL1 like_that hit(b) CL1 like_that
 lyím wù, kù wù
 wrap_around(b) CL1 tie(a) CL1

‘The pythons came into the house, they beat the woman like that, beat her like that, beat her like that, wrapped around her and tied her.’

All attested SVCs with the minor coverb **kwó** ‘enter’ take a locative object, i.e. a locative phrase consisting of a noun plus a postposition, or the locative form of a noun, as in (305), just like the independent verb. An example of the independent use of **kwó** ‘enter’ is in (306).

- (306) wù kwó gbá
 CL1 enter(c) house.LOC

‘She entered the house.’

The verb **ké** ‘return’ denotes movement back to a place which was visited earlier. It is used as a minor coverb in an asymmetrical SVC when movement back to a certain location is involved, as in (307) and may also be used when an event or action is repeated, as in (308).⁷

- (307) ká mū bí sǐ yí-ndē or yī-kpōn, à
 COND CL6 germinate(b) CL9/10.day CL10-four or CL10-five 2SG
 mī [mū ké bí yá] mú, ā mī gwō
 CONSEC take(a) return(c) exit(b) go_up(c) CL6 2SG CONSEC grind(a)

‘After germinating for four or five days, you then take it out again and grind [it].’

- (308) bǐ yíŋ yá gbō, bǐ [yíŋ kē yá]
 CL2 build(c) go_up(c) CL3.house CL2 build(c) return(c) go_up(c)
 t-ǎ tǐ tǎ
 DIST-there up DIST-DET

‘They build the house upwards. They build and go up again, up there.’

In example (308), the speaker explains how, in Europe, houses have several floors. In this case, **tǎ tǐ tǎ** ‘up there’ refers to Europe.

The verb ‘return’ is attested as major coverb, as e.g. in (309) and as independent verb in elicited sentences.

- (309) wù [ké tǐú], wù dzé ní lā yē
 CL1 return(c) come(b) CL1 say(b) mother.3SG/PL.POSS DAT COMP

‘She returned and told her mother: ...’

In (309), **ké** heads an asymmetric verb construction. The girl, who had left the house and gone behind it, returns into the house, and thus into the deictic center. This explains the use of the minor coverb **tǐú**.

Source-bounded path Source-bounded path coverbs incorporate a reference to the initial point of a motion. The source-bounded path coverbs attested in Mundabli are **bí** ‘exit’ and **tǎ** ‘away, off’.

The verb **bí** ‘exit’ denotes movement out of a container. It is commonly used as path-specifying coverb, as e.g. in (310)-(313).

- (310) wān wō [tsí bí jī] dō w-ǎ
 CL1.child CL1-DET spit(b) exit(b) go_down(a) CL3.bean(s) CL3-DET
 wú dzé
 CL1PP CL7.mouth

‘The child spit out the bean from her mouth.’

⁷While a repeated action or event may be marked by the minor coverb **ké** ‘return’, it is more commonly expressed by the hybrid adverbial **dzǎŋá** ‘again’; see §9.4.1.4.

- (311) dō [gbū bí ʃi] wú-mwó
 CL3.beans fall(a) exit(b) go_down(a) CL3-one

‘One of the beans fell down.’

- (312) ká wù kpā ʃi gū w-ó tʃóŋ,
 when CL1 light(a) go_down(a) CL3-7a.fire CL3-DET CL1/2.fireplace
 ní wū [tén bí ʃi] fi-ŋgī
 CL1.mother CL1;3SG.POSS drip(c) exit(b) go_down(a) CL6-water
 sé
 CL3/7a.attic

‘When she lit the fire in the fire place, her mother let a little bit of water drop down from the attic.’

- (313) ká mū bí sǐ yí-ndē or yī-kpōn
 COND CL6 germinate(b).COND CL9/10.day CL10-four or CL10-five
 à mī [mū ké bí yó] mú ā mī
 2SG CONSEC take(a) return(c) exit(b) go_up(c) CL6 2SG CONSEC
 gwō
 grind(a)

‘After germinating for four or five days, you then remove it and grind.’

In all these examples, **bí** is understood in its literal sense as movement out of a container. Note also that, in all these examples, ‘exit’ co-occurs with a vertical coverb (see 9.1.1.2).

The coverb **bí** ‘exit’ can also be used in a figurative sense, as in (314) and (315).

- (314) ká wù [nī bí] wú ŋgō tʃín, dè nō wù
 COND CL1 shake(a) exit(b) CL1PP upon there CL9.place SUBORD CL1
 kè dī f-ó, kpé w-ō gbá, gbā
 P3 be(b) PROX-REL CL1.woman CL1-DET house.LOC CL3/7a.body
 wú sé, gbā wú yē
 CL3;3SG.POSS be_hot(c) CL3/7a.body CL3;3SG.POSS start(a)
 n-sē
 INF-be.hot(c)

‘When he shook his body where he was, the woman in the house felt hot, she started feeling hot.’ (lit.:...the woman in the house, her body was hot, her body started being hot.)

- (315) ǎnā wù kè [fǒ bī gān] áná, kpé w-̄
 like_that CL1 P3 tell(a) exit(b) go(a) like_that CL1.WOMAN CL1-DET
 kpī mǎ ŋ-kpī-n
 die(b) only INF-die(b)-INF

‘Immediately when she was reporting like that, the woman died on the spot.’

In (314), **bí** is used together with the major coverb **bī** ‘shake’. The exact function of **bí** here is unclear. In (315), where **bí** co-occurs with the major coverb **fǒ** ‘tell’, it probably means something like ‘reveal’.

An example of **bí** ‘exit’ as an independent verb is found in (316)

- (316) w-̄ wān bǐ, wù gān mù jǔ
 CL1-DET CL1.child exit(b) CL1 go(a) take(a) come(b)
 kpú bǎ gbè
 CL3/7a.wooden_pot 3PL.POSS house.LOC

‘Each child went out and brought a wooden pot from the house.’

The verb **tǔ** which means ‘kick’ when used as an independent verb, functions as a sort of centrifugal marker when used as a right-modifying coverb in an asymmetrical SVC. In this case, it is translatable as something along the lines of ‘away, off’, see e.g. (317) and (318).

- (317) wù búŋ tē k-ó, wù [yō tǔ]
 CL1 pick(b) CL7.walking_stick CL7-DET CL1 throw(a) away(b)

‘Then she picked up the stick and threw [it] away [from herself].’

- (318) yē wù kwó gbá, wù dē bē kè [jyā tǔ]
 COMP CL1 enter(c) house.LOC CL1 see(a) IMPERS P3 sweep(a) away(b)
 gbō wú
 CL3.house CL3;3SG.POSS

‘When she was about to enter the house, she saw [that] someone had swept her house.’

In (317), the centrifugal meaning is straightforward. In (318), the coverb illustrates the dirt being swept away. It seems that some kind of movement away from the body is implied. The same coverb **tǔ** is commonly used in a non-literal sense, meaning something like ‘cease to exist’ or ‘be(come) useless’, as in (319) and (320), respectively.

- (319) wù dzé āy, n=dǐ yó tǐn sé, n=gān
 CL1 say(b) INTERJ 1SG=F1 go_up(c) there CL3/7a.attic 1SG=go(a)
 dā nǐn kī [lǎ nīm tō]
 see(a) CL7.thing CL7 make(a).IPFV stop_burning(c).IPFV away(b).IPFV
 k-ś gū w-ś
 CL7-REL CL3/7a.fire CL3-DET

‘She said: Shiish! I will go up into the attic and find out myself what is putting out the fire.’ (lit.: ‘[...] the thing which is putting out the fire.’)

- (320) but bī mí kán mbē kī-dǐn á bō-dǐwē bǐ
 but 1PL CONSEC have(c) CL2.people ADJVZ-?? ADVLZ CL2-many CL2
 nǐn b-ś yē bǐ [lā bō tǐ] ndǐm
 want(c) CL2-REL SUBORD CL2 do(a) be_bad(a) away(b) CL8.things
 b-ǐ
 CL8-1PL.POSS

‘But we have so many people who are hating us, who want to spoil our things.’

In (319), the coverb **tǐ** accompanies the major verb **nīm** ‘stop burning’; in (320), it implies that the things referred to will be useless once they have been spoiled. The function of **tǐ** ‘kick, away’ resembles that of **fǐ** ‘pass’, which is often translatable as ‘disappear’ or ‘cease to exist’ (see below). I cannot provide a spontaneous example of the independent use of **tǐ** ‘kick’, but it is attested in elicitation.

Center-bounded path Center-bounded path coverbs integrate a reference point along their path which is neither its beginning nor its end (Kießling 2011: 150). Center-bounded path verbs in Mundabli are **fǐ** ‘pass’, **tsǐ** ‘surpass’ (but is only attested in combination with **fǐ**) and **dǎn** ‘cross’.

The semantics of the verb **fǐ** ‘pass’ are somewhat blurred when the verb is used as a minor coverb; see (329). The coverb can often be translated as ‘disappear’ or ‘cease to exist’, as in (321) and (322).

- (321) ǐ nsǎlā mī wān mī [lē fǐ]
 LOC CL1/2.afternoon 1SG CL1.child CONSEC get_lost(a) pass(b)

‘And in the afternoon, my child went missing.’

- (322) sǐ yì-mwò áná mbē bǎ-tǐ [bǐ fǐ
 CL9/10.day CL9-one like_that CL2.people CL2-three exit(b) pass(b)
 gàn]
 go(a)

‘On one day, three people pass away.’

In (321), the use of **fi** implies that the child is gone. The same holds for (322). The same coverb is also used in a figurative sense, implying that something is ‘lost’, i.e. that it is either gone or useless beyond repair, as in (323) and (324).

- (323) m̀ n̄ ñ=k̀ m̄ w-̄ wān wū
 CL1.man SUBORD 1SG=P3 marry(a) CL1-REL CL1.child CL1.CL1POSS
 k̀ [f̄l̄ f̄]
 P3 be_blind(a?) pass(b)

‘The man whose daughter I married was blind.’

- (324) ndʒɔmyin (n̄) ẁ k̀ j̄ b-ɔ̄ yē wū yī k̀
 CL8.food SUBORD CL1 P3 want(a) CL8-REL COMP CL1 eat(b) P3
 [b̄ f̄]
 be(come)_bad(a) pass(b)

‘The food which he wanted to eat was spoiled.’

The minor coverb **fi** is also used to express comparative, as in (325) and (326).

- (325) bī dzé g̀n b̄ lā yē, [t̄ f̄] ā
 1PL speak(b) go(a) CL2PP DAT COMP be_smart(b) pass(b) COM
 yū y-ā (ò)
 CL9/10.buttock CL9-2SG.POSS INTERJ

‘We always tell them that they should be more careful with their sex-life.’

- (326) p̄t̄ dzé yē ẁ ā fyá w̄ fi-mb̄í
 P. say(b) COMP CL1 NEG give(b).IPFV NEG CL19-palm_wine
 f-ɔ̄ mí lā, yē fī [s̄] f̄]
 CL19-DET 1SG.PP DAT COMP CL19 be_small(a) pass(b)

‘Peter said that he is not giving me that bit of wine, that it is too little.’

The verb **ts̄** ‘surpass’ is only attested together with **fi**, which suggests that **ts̄ fi** is a fixed expression rather than a combination of verbal adverb and verb. In combination with the coverb **fi** ‘pass’, **ts̄** expresses comparative semantics, see e.g. (327).

- (327) gb̄ ŋḡ [ḡ ts̄ f̄] gb̄
 CL3.house CL3;1SG.POSS be_fat(b) surpass(b) pass(b) CL3.house
 w-á lā
 CL3-2SG.POSS DAT

◊‘My house is bigger than yours.’

- (328) wù [yám tsǎ fǎ]
 CL1 sing(c) surpass(b) pass(b)

◊‘She sings most [of all].’

An example for the independent use of fǎ ‘pass’ is found in (329).

- (329) nǐ = tǎyé dè nǎo wù fǎ f-ǎ
 1SG = know(c) CL9.place SUBORD CL1 pass(b) PROX-REL

‘I know the place which she had passed [through].’

The right-modifying minor coverb **dàn** ‘cross’ may specify the direction of a movement verb, as in (330).

- (330) wù fǎ ā [ŋ-wē dàn]
 CL1 be_occupied(b) COM INF-smuggle(c) cross(a)

◊‘He is crossing secretly.’

Like fǎ ‘pass’, the coverb **dàn** ‘cross’ may also express comparative semantics (331).

- (331) kpī tǎm y-ǎ f-ǎ à [lī dàn
 CL9/10.death Tsham CL10-DET PROX-DET P2 be_strong(a) cross(a)
 bǐ], hēy
 exit(b) INTERJ

‘Death in Tsham is really strong, hey!’

An elicited example of the independent use of **dàn** ‘cross’ is found in (332).

- (332) mǎ w-ǎ fǎ ā n-dàn mbōŋ ǐ
 CL1.person CL1-DET be_occupied(b) COM INF-cross(a) CL1/2.river LOC
 dʒǎ mǐ
 CL8a.bridge in

◊‘The man is crossing the river via the bridge.’

9.1.2 Aspectuality or aspect-related

Asymmetrical serial verb constructions in Mundabli may also encode aspectuality or aspect-related meanings, which is cross-linguistically common for asymmetrical SVCs (Aikhenvald 2006: 23). Among the meanings expressed by asymmetrical SVCs are continuative (§9.1.2.1), completive (§9.1.2.2) and persistent (§9.1.2.3). Just like in other languages, posture verbs (‘stay’, ‘sit’) and verbs of termination (‘finish’) surface as coverbs in the relevant constructions (Aikhenvald 2006: 23).

9.1.2.1 **dǒ** ‘stay, remain’

When it is used as a right-modifying coverb in an ASVC, the verb **dǒ** ‘stay, remain’ conveys continuative semantics, meaning roughly ‘to keep on doing something’, as in (333) (repeated here from (299)) and (334).

- (333) dyǎ sé yē, ká wù [kán dǒ] nìŋ ɲgɔ̃
 D. be_hot(c) COMP COND CL1 hold(c) stay(b) CL7.thing upon
 ní kǎ jí
 CL1.mother.3POSS F2 descend(a)

‘Dya is very determined. If he keeps on like this, his mother will come down.’

- (334) m = [bí yá dǒ] ɲwén sùtēē tʃin ɲwén, kě
 1SG = exit(b) go_up(c) stay(b) now so_much there now even
 n = ká yá bí b̀ t-ǎ wū t-ǎ
 1SG = P3 go_up(c) exit(b) FRUST DIST-there CL1? DIST-DET

‘I’ve gotten up and stayed here for so long today, I did not even reach up there.’

Examples of **dǒ** ‘stay’ as a main verb are found in (335) and (336) .

- (335) wān w-ǎ mī dǒ ǎ wǎm
 CL1.child CL1-DET CONSEC stay(b) ADVLZ alive?

‘The child stayed alive.’

- (336) dō kī-dzɔ̃ŋ
 stay(b) ADVLZ-good(b)

‘Stay well!’

The phrase in (336) is a greeting often used upon departure.

9.1.2.2 **mē** ‘finish’

The verb **mē** ‘finish’, when used as a right-modifying coverb, expresses completive aspect, as in (337)-(340). As Aikhenvald: 23 points out, this is cross-linguistically common for coverbs with similar semantics (Aikhenvald 2006: 23).

- (337) yē n = [ɲwǎm mē] ɲām b-ǎ
 COMP 1SG = stir(b) finish(a) CL8.fufu CL8-DET

‘[Tell her] that I’ve finished stirring the fufu!’

- (338) bǎ yí dō w-ǎ, bǎ yí bǎ yí bǎ yí bǎ
 CL2 eat(b) CL3.beans CL3-DET CL2 eat(b) CL2 eat(b) CL2 eat(b) CL2
 yí, bǎ [yí mē]
 eat(b) CL2 eat(b) finish(a)

‘They ate the beans. They ate and ate and ate until they had finished.’

- (339) ká à [wǒŋ mē], ká m̄ = mú, m̄ n = tsò
 COND 2SG squish(a) finish(a) COND 1SG = drink(b) 1SG 1SG = show(a)
 dè nā wān w-ǎ kà fī f-ǎ
 place SUBORD CL1.child CL1-DET P3 PASS(b) PROX-REL

‘After you have finished squishing, after I have drunk, I will show you where your child has gone.’

- (340) yē gbìŋ dǐ [kó yí mē] bēn
 COMP CL9.leopard F1 catch(b) eat(b) finish(a) 2PL

‘[...] that the leopard will catch and eat all of you.’

The use of this coverb implies that the action described by the main verb is not carried on, i.e. it is either completed or interrupted. The verb *mē* ‘finish’ is also attested as an intransitive main verb.

9.1.2.3 *nīm* ‘sit’

The right-modifying coverb *nīm* ‘sit’ when used as a main verb, conveys persistent meaning, i.e. it shows that an action has been ongoing for a while and is still ongoing at the time of reference, as e.g. in (341) and (342).

- (341) wù [kū nīm mē] ŋ-kò
 CL1 cry(a) sit(a) only INF-cry(a)

‘She was still only crying.’

- (342) à [là nīm] mān
 2SG do(a).IPFV sit(a).IPFV what

‘What are you still doing [here]?’

Examples of *nīm* as a main verb are (343) and (344).

- (343) bǎ nīm sítěee, bǎ tǐú ŋwén nswēn
 3PL sit(a) extensively 3PL come(b) now CL2.friends

‘They stayed [together] for a long time, they now have become friends.’

- (344) à mī [nīm̩ fɪ] bá dè nē bō
 2SG CONSEC sit(a) go_down(a) exactly CL9.place SUBORD IMPERS
 kpā f-ɔ̄ gū, ā fi-ŋgī wá kân
 light_fire(a) PROX-REL CL3/7.fire COM CL19-water 2SG.PP hands.LOC

‘Then (you will) sit down exactly where they make fire, with a bit of water in your hand.’

While in example (343), *nīm* is the only verb, in (344), it forms the major verb of an asymmetrical SVC.

9.1.3 Valency

9.1.3.1 Causative SVCs with *l̩* ‘do, make’

The only attested verb of causation in causative SVCs is *l̩* ‘do, make’, which means that the initial coverb of a causative SVCs is extremely restricted. The second coverb in a causative SVC with *l̩* ‘make’ is always intransitive; see e.g. (345)-(347). Causation of transitive verbs is expressed by multi-clausal constructions; see (350).

- (345) why wù [l̩ bwān] mī yē
 why CL1 make(a) be_wounded(a) 1SG QUOT.Q

‘Why has he injured me?’

- (346) kwé b-én ñà t-án sé
 CL7/8.rat CL8-DEM.PROX boast(a) DIST-here CL3/7a.attic
 t-ání, n = dǝ [l̩ kpí mé] kwé
 DIST-this_way 1SG = F1 make(a) die(b) finish(a) CL7/8.rat
 b-én t-án sé ō
 CL8-DEM.PROX DIST-here CL3/7a.attic EMPH

‘These rats which are showing off in this attic - I will kill all of them!’

- (347) ŋgī m-ɔ̄ [l̩ níim tó] gū
 CL6.water CL6-DET make(a) stop_burning(c) away(c) CL3.fire
 w-ɔ̄ yà
 CL3-DET INTERJ

‘The water will put out the fire.’

The verb *l̩* ‘do, make’ in causative asymmetrical SVCs represents the only attested case of a left-modifying coverb.

The verb ‘do, make’ is also attested as an independent main verb; see e.g. (348), which contains the imperfective form of the verb.

- (348) kpé w-ēn, à kǎ lǎ mǎn
 CL1.WOMAN CL1-DEM.PROX 2SG HAB do(a).IPFV what

‘Woman, what are you doing?’

As already pointed out, causation may also be expressed by a multi-clause construction involving the verb lǎ ‘make’ in the first clause, see e.g. (349) and (350).

- (349) wǎn w-ēn, dǐ wà nō à lǎ w-ō nō mī
 CL1.child CL1-DEM.PROX be(b) 2SG SUBORD 2SG do(a) CL1-REL AS 1SG
 wǎn w-ō lē f-án gbō
 CL1.child CL1-DET get_lost(a).IPFV PROX-here CL3.house
 kúŋ
 backside_of_house.LOC

‘Child, you are the one who made my child get lost behind this house.’

- (350) mī wǎn kǎ lǎ mī n = tsǔ wù
 1SG CL1.child P3 make(a) 1SG 1SG = beat(b) CL1SG

‘My child_i made me beat her_j.’

In (349), cause and effect clauses are linked by the connective **nō** which translates roughly as ‘as’. In (350), cause and effect clauses are simply juxtaposed to each other. In the latter example, a multi-clause construction is the only possible solution because the effect verb **tsǔ** is transitive and causative SVCs only allow intransitive second verbs. However, the use of a multi-clause construction is also possible when the second verb is intransitive.

9.1.4 Manner

Manner may be expressed by clause-final manner adverbs (see §10.1) or by manner SVCs. Manner SVCs involve minor coverbs which describe the way in which the action referred to by the main verb is performed. However, adverbs are much more common. Only a very restricted inventory of manners can be expressed by manner SVCs. These are described in the current section.

9.1.4.1 dzǐ ‘travel; aimlessly’

The use of the right-modifying coverb **dzǐ** ‘travel’ implies that something is done aimlessly, as in (351)-(353).

- (351) bì bú gǎn bǎ lǎ, yē bēn [lǎ dzǐ]
 1PL ask(b) go(a) CL2PP DAT COMP 2PL do(a).IPFV walk_around(b).IPFV
 tí mǎn
 surprisingly what

‘We are asking them: What are you doing [aimlessly]?’

- (352) bǒ fò tǐú bí lā yē bǒ [tsè
 CL2 tell(a).IPFV come(b).IPFV 1PL.PP DAT COMP CL2 search(a)
 dzǐ gàn] kǒǒ
 walk_around(b) go(a) CL3/7a.money

‘They are telling us that they are searching around for money.’

- (353) Pě kǎ sé gán mǒ w-ǒ yē
 Petrus P3;HAB insult(c).IPFV go(a).IPFV CL1.man CL1-DET COMP
 mē mǒ w-ǒ kǎ nàm tǐyé wǒ ná wù
 NCS.QUOT.Q CL1.man CL1-DET HAB work(a) know(c) NEG AS CL1
 [tán dzǐ] tsǐ yē
 buy(b) travel(b) CL7/8.banana QUOT.Q

‘Petrus was insulting the man [asking] whether the man doesn’t know how to work as he [aimlessly] buys banana?’

In all these examples, the coverb **dzǐ** adds a meaning of aimlessness to the meaning of the major verb. The verb **dzǐ** ‘travel’ is also frequently used as main verb, as in (354).

- (354) bǒ dzǐ mǎ mǔntù mǐ mǔntù mǐ
 CL2 travel(b).IPFV only CL7/8.car in CL7/8.car in

‘They only ever travel by car.’

9.1.4.2 bǎn ‘be clean; be white; shine; clearly’

The verb **bǎn**, which may mean ‘shine’, ‘be white’ or ‘be clean’ when used as a main verb, means as much as ‘clearly, really’ when used as right-modifying coverb in an asymmetrical SVC; see e.g. (355). and (356). It can also have evidential meaning, as in (356).

- (355) n = [gān dē bǎn] níŋ kī lǎ jīm
 1SG = go(a) see(a) be_clean(b) CL7.thing CL7 do(a).IPFV exit(c)
 tō k-ǒ gū w-ǒ
 away(b) CL7-REL CL3/7.fire CL3-DET

‘I will go to see clearly what is putting out this my fire.’

- (356) yē ní = [níŋ bǎn] yē n = dē wú lǎ
 COMP 1SG = want(c) be_clean(b) COMP 1SG = see(a) CL1PP DAT

‘[She said]: I really want to see him.’

The verb **bǎn** ‘clean; white’ is also used as a main verb, as e.g. in (357).

- (357) dzǔ nō bǔ kə lǎ kpī y-ǔ tō k-ǔ
 CL9.goat REL CL2 P3 make(a) die(b) CL9-REL CL7/8.day CL7-DET
 ŋgō kə bān áná búbúbúbū
 upon P3 be_white(b) like_that IDEO

◊‘The goat which was killed on that day was completely white.’

9.2 Symmetrical SVCs

Following Aikhenvald (2006: 22), a serial verb construction is classified as a symmetrical serial verb construction (or symmetrical SVC) if all its components come from unrestricted classes. Unlike in asymmetrical SVCs, the order of components in symmetrical SVCs tends to be iconic, reflecting the temporal sequence of subevents. As Aikhenvald points out, symmetrical serial verb constructions are not ‘headed’ in the way asymmetrical ones are: all their components have equal status in that none of them determines the semantic or syntactic properties of the construction as a whole. A symmetrical SVC may contain an embedded asymmetrical SVC, as in (358), (359) or (360). Note that, in this case, the symmetrical SVC, strictly speaking, contains verbs from a restricted class, namely the minor coverbs in the embedded asymmetric SVCs. In Mundabli, symmetrical SVCs are rare as compared to asymmetrical SVCs. Only sequential events are expressed by symmetrical SVCs (§9.2.1). Fixed expressions which have the structure of symmetrical SVCs are described in §9.2.2.

Boundaries of symmetrical SVCs and embedded asymmetrical SVCs in the examples in this section are marked by square brackets. In asymmetrical SVCs, the major coverb is underlined.

9.2.1 Sequential events

Symmetrical serial verb constructions in Mundabli generally encode sequential events, i.e. they refer to a sequence of actions; see e.g. (358)-(360). In some cases, such as in (358), they may also have a purpose reading.

- (358) yē gbìŋ dǐ [kó [yí mÉ]] bēn, [...]
 COMP CL9.leopard F1 catch(b) eat(b) finish(a) 2PL

‘...that the leopard will catch and eat all of you, [...]’

- (359) m̄, bā kà tēm kǐ áná, bā mī [tēm
 yes IMPERS P1 shoot(b) CL7 like_that IMPERS CONSEC shoot(b)
 [[kwé fú]] ā fi-wān fí ǎ
 return_from_bush(c) come(b) COM CL19-child CL19;3SG.POSS ADVLZ
 fi-bwé
 CL19-infant

‘Yes. They shot it [the baboon] like that. They shot it and returned home with its little baby.’

- (360) ā n=t[yé wō, ń=kà nǎm yīŋ, ń=kà
 NEG 1SG=KNOW(c) NEG 1SG=P3 sit(a) CL1/2.bush 1SG=P3
 [[kwé fú] dā] mū n-dā-n, ń=kà
 return_from_bush(c) come(b) see(a) CL18 INF-see(a)-INF 1SG=P3
 tsí t-ó yīŋ, m=mī
 spend_night(b) DIST-DET CL1/2.bush 1SG=CONSEC
 [[kwé fú] dā] mù n-dā-n
 return_from_bush(c) come(b) see(a) CL18 INF-see(a)-INF

‘I don’t know. I stayed in the bush. I came home just to see them. I used to sleep there in the bush, and I came home just to see them.’

The symmetrical SVCs in (358) and (359) consist of major coverbs (**kó** ‘catch’ and **tēm** ‘shoot’, respectively)⁸ followed by asymmetrical SVCs with right-modifying coverbs (**yí mé** ‘eat - finish’ and **kwé fú** ‘return home from the bush - come’, respectively). In (360), the asymmetrical SVC **kwé fú** ‘return home from the bush - come’, also with a right-modifying coverb, precedes the second major coverb **dā** ‘see’.

9.2.2 Fixed expressions

This section deals with fixed expressions which have their origin in lexicalized symmetrical serial verb constructions. The verbs that make up these SVCs frequently co-occur. I am aware that it is problematic to assume that these are all symmetric SVCs. When one of the verbs does not occur on its own, it is hard to determine whether the whole SVC is symmetrical or not. I classify them here as symmetric SVCs because none of the verbs they consist of belongs to a closed class; however, the criteria which distinguish asymmetric from symmetric SVCs are somewhat problematic. The fixed expressions are listed in (361)-(364). In the headings they are provided without tone.

⁸In this paragraph, verbs are given with the tone patterns they bear in the relevant examples.

(361) **nīm kóm** ‘wait’:

Pě dzé yē bī [nīm kóm] áyān, yē m̀̀
 Petrus say(b) COMP 1PL sit(a) wait(?) like_that COMP CL1.person
 ɲàm, dʒɪbrì jē wū tāŋ tsɪ́
 CL9.animal Gabriel want(a) CL1 buy(b) CL7/8.banana

‘Pe said that we should wait, that animal man, Gabriel, wants to buy banana.’

(362) **fōŋ mu** ‘help’:

hě, yē gbàm [fōŋ mū] mī
 INTERJ COMP CL7.God ?? take(a) 1SG.NPBV

‘Hey! God has helped me.’

(363) **bi ya** ‘get up’:

bī à [bī yá] ntōntō yē bī lō
 1PL P2 exit(b) go_up(c) CL1/2.morning COMP 1PL go_to_bush(a)
 fwě́n
 clear(b)

‘We got up in the morning in order to go to the bush and clear [the field].’

(364) **bɔŋ wu** ‘pray’:

ká ŋ=ká kán kpɔ́ á wū-dʒwē first níŋ
 COND 1SG=COND have(c) CL3.money ADVLZ CL3-much first CL7.thing
 ŋ=ká lá k-ɔ́ kí dǐ yē ŋ=ká [bɔŋ wú]
 1SG=F2 do(a) CL7-REL CL7 be(b) COMP 1SG=F2 call(a) hear(b)
 gbàm
 CL7a.God

‘If I had a lot of money, the first thing I would do, I would pray to God.’

Fixed expressions derived from SVCs may contain verbs which are not attested on their own, such as **kóm** in (361) and **fōŋ** in (362). However, it may also be the case that all verbs within a fixed expression are attested on their own, as in (363) and (364). In any case, the meaning of a fixed expression cannot be readily derived from the meaning of their parts. The meaning of **bi ya** in (363), for example, is ‘get up’, not just ‘go out upwards’.

9.3 Expression of grammatical categories in SVCs

While some grammatical categories are only expressed once for the entire SVC, others are marked on each verb individually. Some categories also involve a combination of both.

9.3.1 Tone and mood in SVCs

Under certain circumstances, verbs which occur in non-initial position within a sequence of verbs may undergo sandhi phenomena. In particular, this is the case for imperative Class A verbs. For a detailed description of tone sandhi in imperatives, see §3.2.2.4. Declarative verbs are not subject to tone sandhi - at least not perfective verbs in the present/immediate past tense (p0). Other tenses and imperfective verbs have not been checked for tone sandhi. The tone pattern of perfective verbs in p0 declaratives is not altered when they occur within a sequence of verbs (see §8.5.1.8 for an overview of perfective verb tone patterns). Only phonetic effects can be observed, which are caused by adjacent tones and phrase boundaries (low tone spread is described in §3.4.2 and phrase-final vs. non-final tone patterns are described in §3.2.2.2). Due to a process referred to as low tone spread, perfective Class B verbs, which bear a superhigh tone in their canonical form, bear a rising tone when they are preceded by a low tone subject or by a Class A verb. In the case of Class A verbs, their position influences their tonal realization.

9.3.2 Perfective/imperfective aspect marking in SVCs

Verbs within an SVC may be perfective or imperfective. Perfective verbs, which represent the unmarked case, take the canonical stem form and are not explicitly marked in the gloss. In the unmarked case, all verbs within an SVC are in the perfective, as in (365). In imperfective aspect SVCs, the imperfective is marked on all verbs within SVC by specific tonal patterns, as in (366), and often by ablaut as well, as in the second verb in sequence in (366). For more on tone changes and ablaut in imperfective verbs, see §3.2.2.3 and §3.3.5, respectively.

(365) wù [tsē dā] wān wū b̀̀
 CL1 search(a) see(a) CL1.child CL1;3SG.POSS FRUST

‘She did not find her child.’

(366) wù kǎ [tsé dyá] b̀̀ tsú b-ó
 CL1 P3.HAB search(a).IPFV see(a).IPFV FRUST CL7/8.banana CL8-DET

‘He was searching for the bananas but couldn’t find them.’

It is unclear whether aspect may also switch from imperfective to perfective (or the other way around) within an SVC, as reported for Isu (Kießling 2011: 77-79).

9.3.3 Tense and polarity in SVCs

Tense is marked by a preverbal segmental tense marker (§8.2.1) and by specific verb tone patterns (§8.5.1.1). In the case of SVCs, a preverbal segmental tense marker precedes the complete verbal core, as in (367), and all verbs within the SVC take the appropriate tone pattern. Verbs within an SVC cannot take different tense markers.

(367) yē gb̩ɲ d̩ kó yí mé bēn, [...]
 COMP CL9.leopard F1 catch(b) eat(b) finish(a) 2PL

‘...that the leopard will catch and eat all of you, [...]’

Polarity is marked by the discontinuative marker *ā ... wō*, which embraces the verbal core. In the case of serial verb constructions, the marker *ā* precedes the initial element of the verbal core, which may be either the first verb of the sequence or a verb-core-initial adverbial. The marker *wō* follows the verbal core. To the best of my knowledge, verbs within SVCs cannot be individually marked for polarity. Thus, all verbs within an SVC take the same polarity value.

(368) t̩m ǎ bí-lō fán ā bóm m̩
 CL7/8.palm_village ADVLZ CL8-all here NEG agree(c).IPFV take(a).IPFV
 wō m̩ k̩ k̩-m̩
 NEG 1SG.NPVB even CL7-one

‘None of the villages here agree with me – not a single one.’

9.3.4 Nominalization in SVCs

When SVCs are nominalized, only the first verb in the sequence takes a segmental marker. SVCs in infinitive constructions and in the ability construction are treated in §9.3.4.1 and §9.3.4.2.

9.3.4.1 Infinitive constructions involving SVCs

When an SVC occurs in the infinitive, as e.g. in the progressive construction⁹ in (369), the segmental infinitive marker is affixed to the first verb of the sequence. All verbs within the SVC take the tone patterns characteristic for infinitives; see Table 8.9 in §8.4.1 for an overview of infinitive verb tone patterns.

⁹For more on progressive constructions, see §8.4.1.3.

- (369) wù fǎ ā [n-kyē kwō ʃi]
 CL1.PVB be_occupied(b) COM INF-look(c) enter(c) go_down(a)
 níŋ wù lē k-ʃ kǐ
 CL7.thing CL1.PVB make(a).IPFV CL7-DET CL7.NPVB

‘It [the owl] was looking down on what he [the child] was doing.’

9.3.4.2 Ability constructions involving SVCs

In the ability construction (see §8.4.2), the first verb of a verb sequence also hosts the nominalizing prefix characteristic of the ability construction, as in (370). All verbs of the sequence bear the tone pattern characteristic for nominalized verbs in ability constructions.

- (370) mǎ kpǎ ŋgī lō nī ʃi,
 CS.QUOT CL1.wife CL1;1SG.POSS go_to_bush(a) leave(a) pass(b)
 mǎ ā n=dǐ wō [kǎ-gān mū] ǎ mí ndzēn
 CS.QUOT NEG 1SG=be(b) NEG ABIL-go(a) take(a) ADVLZ 1SG alone

‘[I said]: my wife has gone to the bush, [I said] that I cannot go and take [the corn] on my own.’

9.4 Verbal adverbs

Verbal adverbs form part of the verbal core, as in (371), as opposed to manner adverbs (see §10.1) and adverbial clauses, which are generally found at the end of an utterance. The verbal adverb **mě** ‘only’ in (371) occurs at the right edge of the verbal core, preceding the post-core negative marker **wō**. In (371), the proximate future (F1) marker **dǐ** and the pre-core negative marker **ā** are fused. The inner brackets mark the boundaries of the verbal core, the outer brackets mark those of the verbal complex.

- (371) n = [dǎ [yí mǎ] wō] nām
 1SG = F1;NEG eat(b) only NEG CL8.fufu

◊‘I will not only eat fufu.’

Table 9.1 contains a non-exhaustive list of verbal adverbs. While the great majority occur at the right edge of the verbal core, I also found one verbal adverb which occurs in core-initial position. First the verb-core-final verbal adverbs are treated (§9.4.1), and then the verb-core-initial adverb **sén** (§9.4.2).

In analogy with Kießling’s (2011) analysis of what he refers to as ‘hybrid adverbials’¹⁰ in Isu (West-Ring), I assume that at least part of the verbal adverbs have their origin in the minor coverbs which they have developed out of

¹⁰I use the term ‘verbal adverbs’ for the equivalent of Kießling’s ‘hybrid adverbials’ in Mundabli in order to stress their similarity to verbs.

simplex (perfective)	position
tí ‘surprisingly’	core-final
fúbǎ, bǎ ‘also’	core-final
mě ‘only’	core-final
dzǎǎ, dzǎ ‘again’	core-final
bǎ ‘exactly’	core-final
tá ‘only’	core-final
sén ‘then, subsequently’	core-initial

Table 9.1: Verbal adverbs

through grammaticalization. However, this assumption is highly speculative with regard to Mundabli.¹¹

In order for a verb-like word which forms part of a complex verbal core to be assigned to the group of verbal adverbs rather than being analyzed as coverb in an asymmetrical SVC, it must meet at least one of the following two criteria:¹² The first criterion concerns the tonal pattern of the verb. While verb stems inflect tonally, depending on their tense/mood/aspect, adverbials do not exhibit comparable tone changes. The second criterion is syntactic independence, i.e. the ability to occur without another verb. Unlike adverbials, verbs can stand alone, as the main and only verb of a clause.

I have chosen to apply two criteria rather than just one, because neither criterion suffices on its own. Although they are analyzed as verbs, I have no evidence that some of the coverbs listed in the previous sections are attested as independent main verbs. On the other hand, coverbs of tone class *c* do not inflect tonally and thus do not pass the test for tonal inflection. The distinction between coverbs and verbal adverbs is not always clear-cut. More detailed research would probably result in a more fine-grained distinction, although a fuzzy boundary between the two is likely to remain (see Kießling (2011: 241) for a comparable situation in the Ring languages).

The remainder of this section describes verb-core-final (§9.4.1) and verb-core-initial adverbials (§9.4.2).

9.4.1 Verb-core-final verbal adverbs

As Table 9.1 shows, the majority of verbal adverbs occur in verb-core final position. The current section treats the listed verb-core final verbal adverbs in turn. They are listed by form and semantics.

¹¹For a detailed account of the origin of verbal adverbs or ‘hybrid adverbials’ in Isu, which this assumption is based on, see Kießling (2011: 241).

¹²An additional criterion for verbal status may be the existence of perfective forms involving ablaut as described in §8.1.3. However, for the current study, the two listed criteria should be sufficient.

9.4.1.1 **tí** ‘surprisingly’

While the verbal adverb **tí** bears a high tone and is thus tonally not distinguishable from a verb of the tonal class *c*, **tí** does not exist as an independent verb and is therefore analyzed as an adverbial. In all attested examples, i.e. (372)-(375), **tí** occurs at the end of the verbal core. In (375), it further precedes the postverbal negation marker **wō**. The adverb **tí** is used to express astonishment or counter-expectancy.

- (372) mī wān [gàn fí **tí**] nā, mī wān [gàn
1SG CL1.child go(a) pass(b) surprisingly where 1SG CL1.child go(a)
fí **tí** nā
pass(b) surprisingly where

‘Where is my child going? Where is my child going?’

- (373) bī bú gàn wú lā, yē nǐ, à [gwàn
1PL ask(b) go(a) CL1PP DAT COMP CL1/2.mother 2SG be_sick(a)
tí mān yē
surprisingly what QUOT.Q

‘We ask her: mother, why are you ill?’

- (374) bì bú gàn bǒ lā, yē bēn [lè dzí
1PL ask(b) go(a) CL2PP DAT COMP 2PL do(a).IPFV walk_around(b).IPFV
tí mān
surprisingly what

‘We are asking them: What are you doing [aimlessly]?’

- (375) bǒ dzé fú bí lā yē, ɲwóm
CL2 speak(b) come(b).IPFV 1PL.PP DAT COMP CL2.husbands
kwé ā [fyá **tí**] wō bī
CL3/7a.home_village NEG give(b).IPFV surprisingly NEG 1PL

‘They are telling us: The local men do not give us [anything].’

9.4.1.2 **fúbǒ**, **bǒ** ‘also’

The adverb **fúbǒ** (see (376)-(378)) translates as ‘also’. It has a tone pattern which does not fit in with any of the verb tone classes. Its tone pattern never changes either, unlike those of verbs of Class A and B. This and the fact that it is not attested as an independent verb support its status as an adverb.

- (376) lònᵛ b-ᵛ yí nìm tí bí (e), bī
 CL8.suffering CL8-that eat(b).IPFV sit(a) surprisingly CL8 INTERJ CL8
 [yí fúbǔ] bī (o)
 eat(b).IPFV also 1PL INTERJ

‘Suffering is eating them up and it is also eating us up.’¹³

- (377) à kyé wān ně yū (e),
 2SG look(c) CL1.child CL1/2.mother;2SG.POSS CL9/10.buttock INTERJ
 m̀ dzō [kyé fúbǔ] á yū
 CL1.person CL1.other look(c) also 2SG.PP CL9/10.buttock

‘If you look at your siblings buttocks, somebody will also look at your buttocks.’ (meaning: “If you talk against your brother or your sister, somebody will also talk against you.”)

- (378) tó k̀ dī tĩ wū k̀ [kwé fúbǔ],
 there P3 be(b) CL1.father CL1.POSS P1 return_from_bush(c) also
 tĩ wū [tʃú tsú bǔ] wān w-ᵛ
 CL1.father CL1.POSS come(b) beat(b) also CL1.child CL1-DET

‘When her father had also returned from the bush, her father came and also beat the child.’

The first syllable of the adverbial may be dropped so that the adverb is shortened to **bǔ**, see e.g. (378).

9.4.1.3 mě ‘only’

The adverb **mě** translates into English as ‘only’ or ‘just’. Although it is segmentally identical with the verb **mē** ‘finish’, I do not think that the two are related. Whereas the verb **mē** ‘finish’ exhibits the characteristic tonal inflections of a Class A verb, the adverb **mě** ‘only’ always retains the same tone pattern. Furthermore, **mě** ‘only’ is not attested as main verb. Therefore, it is analyzed as an adverb.

- (379) bǔ [dzí mě] múntù mī múntù mī
 CL2 travel(b).IPFV only CL7/8.car in CL7/8.car in

‘They only ever travel by car.’

- (380) à [mū mū mě] ngī
 2SG take(a) drink(b) only CL6.water

‘You should only drink water.’

¹³The Class 8 pronoun is used to refer to groups of people in an abusive way.

- (381) n = [dā mǎ] Pé kà kwō gbá áná mwàṅ
 1SG = see(a) only Petrus P3 enter(c) house.LOC like_that IDEO

‘I just saw Pe entering into the house’

9.4.1.4 dzǒṅǎ~dzōṅ ‘again’

The adverb **dzǒṅǎ~dzōṅ** (see (382)-(384)) marks repetition of an action that has been carried out earlier and can be translated into English as ‘again’. It does not fulfill the test for syntactic independence as it always co-occurs with another verb. It also always has the same tone pattern, which consists of a superhigh tone on both syllables (rather than a high tone, like a Class c verb). Therefore, it clearly qualifies as an adverb rather than a verb.

- (382) wù [gān bōṅ jí dzǒṅǎ] tǐlà mwóm
 CL1 go(a) call(a) go_down(a) again Tela Mwom

‘She went to call Tela Mwom again.’

- (383) bǎ [gān mū jú dzǒṅǎ] kpè
 CL2 go(a) take(a) come(b) again CL3.pot

‘They went again to take a pot.’

- (384) dō w-ó [fí fí dzǒṅǎ]
 CL3.beans CL3-DET fill/be_full(c) pass(b) again

‘The beans were again more than the pot.’

Note that this adverb has an alternative monosyllabic form **dzōṅ**, which bears a mid tone, instead of a superhigh tone like the bisyllabic form; see (385)-(386).

- (385) à [ǎ [dzē dzōṅ]
 2SG PROHIB say(b) again

‘Don’t say [that] again!’

- (386) dǐ kì-mān nō à [yē kē dzōṅ] k-ó kǐ í
 be(b) CL7-what SUBORD 2SG start(a) return(c) again CL7-REL CL7 LOC
 t-ǎn mī
 DIST-here in

‘What is it that you are starting again in here?’

It is still unclear what exactly determines the choice between the bisyllabic and the monosyllabic form of the adverbial and why the tonal patterns of the two are different.

9.4.1.5 **bǎ** ‘exactly’

The adverb **bǎ** (see (387)-(389)) roughly translates into English as ‘exactly’. It always bears a superhigh tone, whereas verbs of Class c always bear a high tone. Verbs of other classes change their tonal pattern. Furthermore, **bǎ** never stands alone but always accompanies a verb. In all examples, it occurs at the end of the verbal core.

- (387) à mī [nìm fì bǎ] dè nō bō
 2SG CONSEC sit(a) go_down(a) exactly CL9.place SUBORD IMPERS
 kpā f-ś gū, ā fi-ŋgī wá
 light_fire(a) PROX-REL CL3/7a.fire COM CL19-CL6.water 2SG.PP
 kàn
 hands.LOC

‘Then (you will) sit down exactly where they make fire, with a bit of water in your hand.’

- (388) kpé w-ēn, [dǐ bǎ] mǎn à mwē k-ś
 CL1.woman CL1-DEM.PROX be(b) exactly what 2SG be_sad(a) CL7-REL
 tō ǎ bí-lō yē
 CL7/8.day ADVLZ CL8-all QUOT.Q

‘Woman, why are you sad every day?’ (literally: This woman, what exactly is it that you grieve everyday?)

- (389) n = tó kà mú fū, m = [bí yā bǎ]
 1SG = VER.FOC P3 take(a) come(b) 1SG = exit(b) go_up(c) exactly
 tʃí, n = tú yā ŋgī m-ś
 on_top 1SG = SCOOP(b) go_up(c) CL19.water CL19-DET
 sūŋ mī
 CL9/10.calabash in

‘I then brought, I got up, really up, I carried up the water in a bowl.’

9.4.1.6 **tá** ‘really’

The adverbial **tá** roughly translates as ‘really’. It bears a high tone just like a Class c verb. However, it cannot occur without another verb, which gives reason to believe that it has adverbial status. Examples for the use of **tá** are found in (390) and (391).

- (390) bēn nén lán *because* bēn níŋ yē bēn [yī tá]
 2PL maybe be_happy(c) because 2PL want(c) COMP 2PL eat(b) really
 ǎ bēn ndzēn
 ADVLZ 2PL.PP alone

‘Maybe you guys are happy because you just want to eat alone.’

- (391) bī mí nìm fǎnǐ (ē), bī dzé nìm tí mǎ
 1PL CONSEC sit(a) here? INTERJ 1PL speak(b) sit(a) surprisingly only
 yē, lùŋ bó [dǐ tá mǎ] yěŋ lā, bī kwó
 COMP CL8.suffering CL8-DET be(b) really only Y. DAT CL8 enter(c)
 fúbǎ bí ŋgō
 also 1PL.PP upon

‘And we are sitting here, saying that only Yain is suffering, but the suffering has also attacked some of us.’

In (390), **tá** stands at the right edge of the verbal core, while in (391), it is followed by the verbal adverb **mǎ** ‘only’.

9.4.2 The verb core-initial adverb **sén** ‘then’

My data contain only one verbal adverb which stands at the beginning rather than at the end of the verbal core, namely **sén** ‘then’ (see (392)-(394)). The adverbial **sén** translates into English as ‘then, subsequently’. It always bears a high tone and, on first glance, it would appear to be a verb of tone class c. However, it cannot stand on its own without a subsequent verb and is therefore analyzed as an adverb.

- (392) n = [sén bú] má à, dǐ níŋ dóm à fǎ plan
 1SG = then ask(b) CS.QUOT Q, be(b) CL7.thing some 2SG P1 plan
 ē
 QUOT.Q

‘I then asked [him]: Is it something that you planned?’

- (393) m-mù-n nō mǎnfrè kè mǔ fī bī w-ō
 INF-take(a)-INF SUBORD M. P3 take(a) pass(b) exit(b) CL1-REL
 t[ǎm w-ó ɲwén, dǎn ā ntúŋ [sén tǐú kó] pǎ
 CL3/7a.axe CL3-DET now D. COM N. then come(b) hold(c) P.
 ɲwén
 now

‘Just as Manfred took out the axe now, Dan of Ntung then came and held Pe, now.’

- (394) w-ō time nō kpō ŋgī [sén tǐú
 CL1-DEM CL1/2.time SUBORD CL1.wife CL1;1SG.POSS then come(b)
 kó kǎn kwō mǎ] mī sām ɲwén áná
 catch(b) hold(c) enter(c) only 1SG heart/middle.LOC now like_that

‘That was the time that my wife came and held me in the middle now, like this.’