

Dany Adone (University of Cologne)

Verb Chains in Creole and Sign Languages

A close look at both Creole languages and Sign languages (emergent and established ones) reveals striking similarities between these two groups of languages (Adone 2012). Among the similarities, we find verb chains, also known as serial verb constructions, that will be discussed in this paper. For the purpose of this paper, I will focus on two emergent sign languages such as Nicaragua Sign Language (henceforth NSL) (cf. Senghas 1995; Kegl et al. 1999; Kegl 2008 among others.) and Mauritian Sign Language (henceforth MSL) (Gébert and Adone 2006; Adone 2007) as these languages are very young languages.

In the first part of the paper, I will provide some theoretical background on the definition, form and functions of verb chains. I then focus on the verb chains found in NSL and MSL and in Creole languages. Senghas and Kegl (1997) who examined the development of word order in ISN, show that the first generation of signers has a rigid word order with the two verbs and the two arguments are rigidly interleaved as in N1V1N2V2 pattern (e.g. MAN PUSH WOMAN FALL). In contrast, the second generation of signers initiates patterns, such as N1N2V1V2 (MAN WOMAN PUSH FALL) or N1V1V2N2 (MAN PUSH FALL WOMAN). These patterns illustrate that signers in the first generation have SVSV, while second generation signers prefer both SOVV and SVVO patterns. Similar patterns have also been established in the development of MSL, with a preference for the SVV(O) pattern in the younger generations compared with previous generations. I discuss these two patterns in light of developmental patterns in the formation of verb chain. This pairing up of the verbs to form a single unit or event is also attested in first language acquisition and home sign data, thus providing additional evidence for the universality of these patterns. In the third part of the paper, I discuss the implications of these findings for language creation, especially in terms of universal principles and mechanisms available to adults and children.

References

- Adone, D. 2007. *From gestures to Mauritian Sign Language*. Paper presented at the Current Issues in Sign Language Research Conference, University of Cologne, Germany.
- Gébert, Alain and Dany Adone. 2006. *A dictionary and grammar of Mauritian sign language*. Vacoas, République de Maurice: Editions Le Printemps.
- Kegl, J. 2008. The Case of Signed Languages in the Context of Pidgin and Creole Studies. In Singler, J. and Kouwenberg, S. (eds.), *The Handbook of Pidgin and Creole Studies*. London: Blackwell's Publishers. pp. 491–511.
- Kegl, J., A. Senghas and M. Coppola. 1999. Creation through contact: Sign language emergence and sign language change in Nicaragua In M. DeGraff, (Ed.), *Language Creation and Language Change: Creolization, Diachrony, and Development*. Cambridge MIT Press, 179-237.

Senghas, Ann. 1995. *Children's Contribution to the Birth of Nicaraguan Sign Language*.
Ph.D. dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.