

# The development of auxiliary verb constructions in Vatlongos (Southeast Ambrym, Vanuatu)

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Vatlongos, an Oceanic Austronesian language of Vanuatu, has unusual lexically-headed auxiliary verb constructions (AVCs) (Anderson 2006) that are not found in closely related Paamese (Crowley 1982; 1987) or other languages of Ambrym (Krifka 2011; Von Prince 2012; Franjeh 2012). This paper describes their behaviour and functions based on detailed elicitation with five speakers and a 45,000-word corpus of spontaneous texts. It then outlines a probable path of development from non-contiguous serial verb constructions (SVCs) based on their synchronic functional overlap, evidence from Paamese (Crowley 1982; 1987; 2002), examples from the late 1960s (Parker 1968; 1970), and the integration of the Bislama loanword *mas* ‘must’ (Crowley 2004) into both SVCs and AVCs.

There are three main auxiliary verb lexemes in Vatlongos. A handful of other verbs appear in AVCs though much less frequently. Three are lexemes related to the meaning of ‘stay’ and convey the same aspectual category as *ti*: *tit* ‘just stay’, *ta* ‘stay (inanimate)’ and *tat* ‘just stay (inanimate)’. The other is the Bislama loanword *mas* ‘must’, marking obligation.

Aux	Lexical origin	Grammatical meaning	Frequency
ti	‘stay’	Habitual, progressive	~1/70 words
ha	‘go’	Prior motion – away	~1/100 words
mei	‘come’	Prior motion – toward Inchoative	~1/170 words

While the aspectual meanings of habitual, progressive and inchoative are commonly expressed by auxiliaries cross-linguistically (Anderson 2006), including the category of prior motion is more controversial. However, this paper will show that within Vatlongos, auxiliary verbs are a specific syntactic strategy that can be distinguished from two kinds of serial verb constructions. While the strategy is most closely associated with the aspectual categories of habitual and progressive, it has come to be used for prior motion meanings which are very frequently overtly expressed in the language and therefore prone to grammaticalization.

The auxiliary verbs occur before the verb and after any subject noun phrase (1), and can be analysed as heading the IP. Adverbs expressing relative time can intervene between the auxiliary and the verb (2).

(1) *xamim di mu-ga-ni taxeak?*  
 2PL CONT.NFUT 2PL.NFUT-eat.NFUT.OBJ now  
 ‘Are you eating now?’ [20141127c\_x01s043\_12]

(2) *xametel di tamu mata-pat*  
 1PC.EXCL CONT.NFUT still 1PC.EXCL.NFUT-sleep  
 ‘We were still sleeping.’ [20141116b\_c01m\_05]

The major difference between AVCs and SVCs is the morphological form of the auxiliary. Unlike in SVCs, an auxiliary verb cannot take any verbal prefixes. However, both *ti* and *ha* derive from lexical verbs that undergo verb-initial consonant mutation (Crowley 1991), and as auxiliaries they undergo a simplified pattern of mutation. Unlike their lexical equivalents, they do not reflect the polarity of the clause and the stem frequently does not inflect to distinguish prior from non-future. *Mei* on the other hand is derived from a regular lexical verb, and therefore is invariant in all TAM environments. The lexical verb in the clause is fully inflected and takes affixes, therefore Vatlongos AVCs are LEX-headed (Anderson 2006).

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| <p>(3) <i>xi ha i-has-i</i><br/>         3SG GO 3SG.DFUT-hit-3OBJ<br/>         ‘he’d go and hit it.’<br/>         [20170222d_n01s152_29]</p>                       | <p>(4) <i>Xalu ba lu-mol.</i><br/>         3DL GO.NFUT 3DL.NFUT-weed<br/>         ‘They went and weeded.’<br/>         [20141027a_n01m001_31]</p> |
| <p>(5) <i>moletin xil va la-pat</i><br/>         person PL GO.IFUT 3PL.IFUT-sleep<br/>         ‘people are about to sleep’<br/>         [20150226a_n01s098_04]</p> | <p>(6) <i>ma na-sohuk</i><br/>         GO.IFUT.1SG 1SG.IFUT-fish<br/>         ‘I’ll go and fish.’<br/>         [20141215a_p01s061_07]</p>         |

Multiple auxiliaries can be used in one AVC, with this fixed order: *mei* ‘come’ > *ha* ‘go’ > *ti* ‘habitual/progressive’. This can be summarised as prior motion preceding aspect, while the directional auxiliaries are ordered iconically, as in SVCs. The order of ‘go’ before ‘come’ is not possible because this would not be a single coherent path for prior motion.

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| <p>(7) <i>ba di la-pol-ni kekeh</i><br/>         GO.NFUT CONT.NFUT 3PL.NFUT-make-TR pudding<br/>         ‘They go and make pudding.’ [20141208a_n01m045_35]</p> |
| <p>(8) <i>mei ha hur-i</i><br/>         COME GO IMP.SG.take-3OBJ<br/>         ‘Come and go get it.’ [20141220d_n01s082_08]</p>                                  |

This paper will argue that these AVCs have developed from SVCs, but that the lexemes are at different stages of development as auxiliaries.

The habitual and progressive auxiliary *ti* seems to have emerged first and now only appears in AVCs, and never SVCs. Parker’s 1970 dictionary lists *ti* as an auxiliary but also shows an inflected example in an SVC, which is not found in the contemporary corpus and is judged ungrammatical by speakers today. Paamese uses a lexeme meaning ‘stay’ in SVCs to express these aspectual categories (Crowley 1987; 2002), further evidence that these functions were expressed by SVCs in an earlier variety of the language.

*Ha* ‘go’ and *mei* ‘come’ seem to have been used in AVCs later, with just a handful of possible examples in Parker’s work, which are restricted to imperative and future TAM environments. Synchronically, they are still used in SVCs to express both prior motion and the inchoative. Interestingly the Bislama loan word *mas* ‘must’, which was probably borrowed in the latter half of the twentieth century, is used in both SVCs and AVCs, showing that these are closely related strategies for speakers.