
Multiple event marking in the Seri verbal paradigm

Jérémy Pasquereau

Patricia Cabredo Hofherr

Surrey Morphology Group (U. Surrey), U.K. UMR 7023 CNRS / U. Paris 8, France

The present study examines verbal morphology in Seri. Seri verbs have dedicated verb stems marking multiple events for singular and plural subjects respectively. We examine the semantics of multiple event forms to establish whether they express the same semantic category across sg and pl subject stems. We show that both sg and pl subject forms mark event plurality, but sg subject MULT-forms clearly differ from pl subject MULT-forms for older speakers: sg subject MULT-forms require distribution of multiple events in time, while the pl subject MULT-forms are distributive allowing simultaneous construals of the event multiplicity. Younger speakers tend to refuse contexts with clearly simultaneous construals. This suggests that the system is moving from two MULT-forms (a singular subject iterative and a plural subject distributive stem) to a system where both subject numbers have an essentially iterative MULT-form.

1 Introduction

Seri verbs generally have four forms whose morphology is not straight-forwardly predictable (1): there are many different exponents with a range of allomorphs, moreover even when different verbs share the same exponents, they often do not have the same function (Marlett, 2016; Baerman, 2016). Each verb expresses subject number agreement in a way that is not tied to specific exponents: two forms for singular subject and two for plural subject. Thus the Seri verbal inflectional system shows pervasive many-to-many mappings between form and function. Despite this lack of morphological homogeneity, subject number agreement reveals a homogeneous subject-number category across verbs.

- (1) No one-to-one mapping between suffix form and function

Meaning	SG subject		PL subject	
intercept	-zactim	-zacatim	-zacatoj	-zacatam
lap up	-oaala	-oaalatim	-oaalatam	-oaalatoj
fall	-poc	-poc ^{ti} m	-poclim	-pocalam
unfasten	-aafp	-aafip ^{to} j	-atoofip ^{to} j	-atoofipolca

Within each subject number value, there is another distinction. Cabredo, Pasquereau & O'Meara (2019) (CPO) argue that the distinction is between a neutral form and a form marking event multiplicity (glossed MULT-forms). Prior work suggests that, like subject number, despite the morphological heterogeneity, this additional distinction also corresponds to a single feature (Marlett, 2016), i.e. a paradigm with subject number cross-cutting event multiplicity (2).

- (2) Same-paradigm hypothesis: MULT.sg and MULT.pl are part of the same paradigm

run	Cat. 2: multiplicity		
		NEUTRAL	MULT
Cat. 1: subject number	SG	panzx	panozxim
	PL	pancojc	pancoxlca

However, given the complex morphology of Seri, this is not a trivial assumption. In this study, we compare SgSubj and PlSubj MULT-forms and show that for older speakers, event multiplicity is not homogeneous across subject number corresponding to a paradigm like (3).

Younger speakers' judgements indicate that they are levelling the paradigm to a single feature with consistent semantics across subject number like (2).

- (3) Different-paradigms hypothesis: MULT.sg and MULT.pl do not express the same feature

run		NEUTRAL	MULT-1	MULT-2
Cat. 1: subject number	SG	panzx	panozxim	
	PL	pancojc		pancoxica

We proceed as follows. In section 2, we examine the meaning of SgSubj MULT-forms. Section 3 then compares the SgSubj MULT-forms with PlSubj MULT-forms. Section 4 concludes.

2 Meaning of SgSubj MULT-forms

CPO show that SgSubj MULT-forms require a multiplicity of events. For instance, (4) is false in context A but true in context B.

- (4) Context A: Yesterday, I went to Puerto Libertad and came back once.
Context B: Yesterday, I went to Puerto Libertad several times.

Moxima, Xpanohax conhayatim.
yesterday Puerto_Libertad 3IO.DIR.1SBJ.RLYO.go.MULT

Yesterday, I went to Puerto Libertad (several times).^[EDSEI21OCT2018DRPM, elicitation]

In addition, SgSubj MULT-forms behave like pluractionals in other languages in two respects: the number of events cannot be counted by a cardinal numeral (CPO ex 19), and they do not multiply indefinites (CPO ex 21). Following CPO 2018 we conclude that SgSubj MULT-forms in Seri lexicalise a pluractional operator. Note, however, that Seri SgSubj MULT-forms are possible in contexts in which only two telic events take place (5). In this Seri SgSubj MULT-forms differ from other pluractional markers that do not allow contexts with a precise cardinality of events (cf. Van Geenhoven (2005) on the atelicity requirement of West Greenlandic pluractionals).

- (5) Context: I hugged two children once one after the other.

Xicaquiziil coi isoj cohyapxazl/ cohyapxazalim.
children DEF.PL 3POS.body 3IO.1SBJ.RLYO.cover 3IO.1.RLYO.cover.MULT

I hugged the children (lit. I covered the children's body).^[EDSEI23NOV2017DRPM, elicitation]

3 Comparison SgSubj MULT-forms vs PlSubj MULT-forms

CPO explicitly assume that SgSubj and PlSubj MULT-forms belong to a single category across the verbal paradigm and base their argumentation on SgSubj MULT-forms. As the present study examines precisely this assumption of a single category for SgSubj and PlSubj MULT-forms, we now proceed in two steps. First, we examine whether the arguments given in the previous section for SgSubj MULT-forms carry over to PlSubj MULT-forms, concluding that PlSubj mult-forms mark event-plurality, too (section 3.1). However, as is well-known, markers of event plurality are not a semantically homogeneous class (Dressler (1968); Yu (2003); Laca (2006) a.o.). In a second step we therefore compare the event pluralities marked by SgSubj MULT-forms with the event-pluralities marked by PlSubj MULT-forms (section 3.2). We show that there are systematic differences between SgSubj and PlSubj MULT-forms concerning simultaneous distribution over arguments. (For space reasons we only exemplify some diagnostics here).

3.1 Applying object number and aspect diagnostics to PlSubj mult-forms

Like SgSubj MULT forms, PlSubj MULT forms require an event plurality, are not compatible with cardinals counting events (6a) and do not multiply indefinite singulars (6b).

- (6) a. Icatoomec hino coofin tintica xicacaziil quih sahmees pac
week 1POS.to NMLZ.SBJ.happen MED.AW child.PL DEF orange INDEF.PL
ihexej / #ihexejam isnaap yoozoj.
INF.TRNS.buy.PL INF.TRNS.buy.MULT.PL RLYO.6.times
Last week, the children bought oranges 6 times. [EDSEIFLD3POST, elicitation]
- b. Context: Workers came to the village. Each man built his own house over the first few months.
#Ctamcö coi haaco z iyaaizilca
man.PL DEF.PL ABS.house INDEF.SG 3;3.RLYO.make.MULT.PL
The men built a house. SC: it sounds like they built one house together

We conclude that Seri PlSubj MULT-forms, too, are pluractional forms.

3.2 Distributive dependencies: SgSubj mult-forms vs. PlSubj mult-forms

Given that SgSubj and PlSubj MULT-forms behave as markers of event plurality, we now address the question whether they lexicalise the *same* pluractional marker by examining the distributive dependencies SgSubj and PlSubj MULT-forms allow.

The SgSubj MULT-form of the verb *hant quitox* ‘drag’ is not licensed by distribution over the object (7a) with simultaneous events, contrasting with the PlSubj MULT-form (7b). While for older speakers distribution over the object is sufficient to license the PlSubj MULT-form, younger speakers show variation and clearly prefer contexts imposing an iterative construal (i.e. suitcase-dragging events taking place one after the other).

- (7) a. Context: At 2pm today, I saw Juan pulling his 3 suitcases behind him with 3 ropes.
#Juan quih xiica an ihyaacalca quih hant iyootoxim.
Juan DEF suitcases DEF down 3;3.RLYO.drag.MULT.SG
Juan dragged the suitcases. [Questionnaire6FT3, elicitation]
- b. Context: At 2pm today, I saw Juan, Isaac and Manuel each pulling one suitcase.
Xicacaziil quih xiica an ihyaacalcoj quih hant iyootyaxlca.
child.PL DEF suitcases DEF down 3;3.RLYO.drag.MULT.PL
The boys dragged the suitcases. (40 +: true, 40-: variation)

As in (7b), all older speakers accept distribution of the multiplicity of events required by the PlSubj MULT-form *cöcatooquelam* ‘cross (intr)’ over the plural subject without distribution over time (8), whereas younger speakers’ judgements are more varied (sometimes they reject the truth of the example in the context, sometimes they accept it commenting that it would be better with distribution over time as well).

- (8) Context: The women crossed the brook together, once. ([QuestionnaireFT3, elicitation])

Cmajiic quih hant ipzx com imac cöyattooquelam.
woman.PL DEF brook DEF.SG.lying 3POSS.middle 3IO.cross.MULT.PL

The women crossed the brook. (40 +: true, SC: because there’s several, 40-: false)

These examples show that older speakers allow simultaneous construals for multiple events with PlSubj while younger speakers prefer iterative construals for SgSubj and PlSubj mult-forms (distribution in time).

The hypothesis that the preference for distribution in time is an innovation finds additional support in the meaning of certain lexicalised phrases which can still be analyzed as being composed of a MULT-form. For instance, the phrase meaning *gray whale* contains the MULT-form of the verb ‘be white’. We hypothesise that at the time the phrase was lexicalised, the MULT-form was licensed by spatial distribution (the property of being white being predicated of spatially-distinct parts of the whale).

- (9) Ziix cooxapoj (Marlett, 2016)
thing SBJ.NMLZ.white.MULT
Gray whale (lit. whale that is spotted with white/ white here and there)

4 Conclusion

SgSubj and PlSubj MULT-forms in Seri are pluractional forms: they can only be used in contexts that convey a multiplicity of events. However, for older speakers, SgSubj and PlSubj MULT-forms do not have the same semantics: SgSubj MULT-forms are iterative requiring distribution over time whereas PlSubj MULT-forms are distributives, allowing distribution over time, locations or arguments. Younger speakers, in contrast, are associating the pluractional component of SgSubj and PlSubj MULT-forms to a uniform semantics of iterativity. The difference between older and younger speakers w.r.t. (7) and (8) can be interpreted as reflecting a linguistic change whereby for older speakers, distribution over the object/intr. subject argument (without obligatory distribution over time) is enough to license PlSubj MULT-forms suggesting that SgSubj and PlSubj do not belong in the same paradigm (cf. 3), while younger speakers prefer a uniform semantics of distribution in time for SgSubj and PlSubj MULT-forms consolidating the forms into an orthogonal paradigm (from two MULT-categories in (3) to one MULT-category in (2)) by interpreting SgSubj and PlSubj MULT-forms as expressing a single category of iterative pluractionality. Thus Seri exemplifies the development of a single cross-classifying feature value from two independent features.

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