

Malayalam doesn't need adpositions

The case of vP-adjunction

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Background

- Many languages have a tendency to **chain together verbal predicates** to express an event or string of events with shared TAM interpretations, often called *serialization* or *clause-chaining*.
- Serializing languages often use **verbal lexemes** to **introduce arguments** e.g. lexemes roughly meaning 'take' introducing an instrument as in (1).

- (1) a. *Sétù zé kpò l̥ xò Kǝjò*
S. take stick DET hit Kojo
'Setu hit Kojo with the stick.'
(Gungbe, Aboh 2009: 16)
- b. *avaṇ katti koṇṭũ appam muṛiccu*
3SG.M knife take.STEM bread cut.PST
'He cut the bread with a knife.'
(Malayalam, Jayaseelan 2004: 70)

- In either example, no 'take' event is interpreted → 'take' is not a lexical verb here.

- Problem:** it is known that (1a–b) don't have the same structure.

→ 'Take' in Gungbe merges **in the clausal spine** (2a) (Aboh 2009).

→ 'Take' in Malayalam merges **in an adjunct** to the main verb (2b) (Jayaseelan 2004).

- (2) a. 
- b. 

- Aboh (2009) argues that 'take' in (2a) is a **light verb** in the functional domain of the main verb 'hit'; Jayaseelan (2004) suggests that 'take' in (2b) is an **adposition** modifying 'cut.'

→ Most adposition-like predicates are syncretic with verbs in Malayalam (Asher & Kumari 1997).

- My main claim:** 'take' in (2b) and similar predicates in Malayalam are syntactically **also light verbs**, in that they lexicalize a fragment of the structure of a lexical verb.

→ In fact, **Malayalam doesn't have true adpositions** — no syntactic category in the language has the distribution of adpositions in languages like English.

vP-adjunction

- Multi-event serialization in Malayalam looks similar to the light verb case in (1b).
- It involves the adjunction of a complex structure to the main verb (Jayaseelan 2004).
- For example, compare how 'take' expresses **its own event** in (3), compared to (1b).

- (3) *avaṇ veyil koṇṭũ purattũ naṭannu*
3SG.M sunlight take.STEM outside walk.PST
≈ 'He walked outside and took in sunlight.'

- Unlike light verbs, these structures are large enough to merge internal and external arguments.
- They are not independently marked for absolute tense, viewpoint aspect, or mood, and generally require obligatory subject control.
- The only structure we have evidence for is vP**, and not AspP, TP, etc. (Swenson 2016, pace Jayaseelan 2004).
- If we assume that **vP is the adjoining category**, we can **capture the behaviour of both eventive verbs and light verbs**, and rule out constructions expected under an adposition analysis.

Two kinds of c-selection

- Base assumption:** syntactic concatenation is always mediated by properties of participating elements → **Merge is licensed(triggered) by features** specific to an input element.

- Syntactic objects generally c-select their arguments, but adjuncts seem to c-select hosts, so let's assume **two kinds of features** to deal with this:

- (4) a. [**•F•**] means 'if you merge with an object with the feature [F], project your other features onto the output element' (see Heck & Müller 2007).
- b. [**◦F◦**] means 'if you merge with an object with the feature [F], project its features onto the output element' (see Zyman 2023).

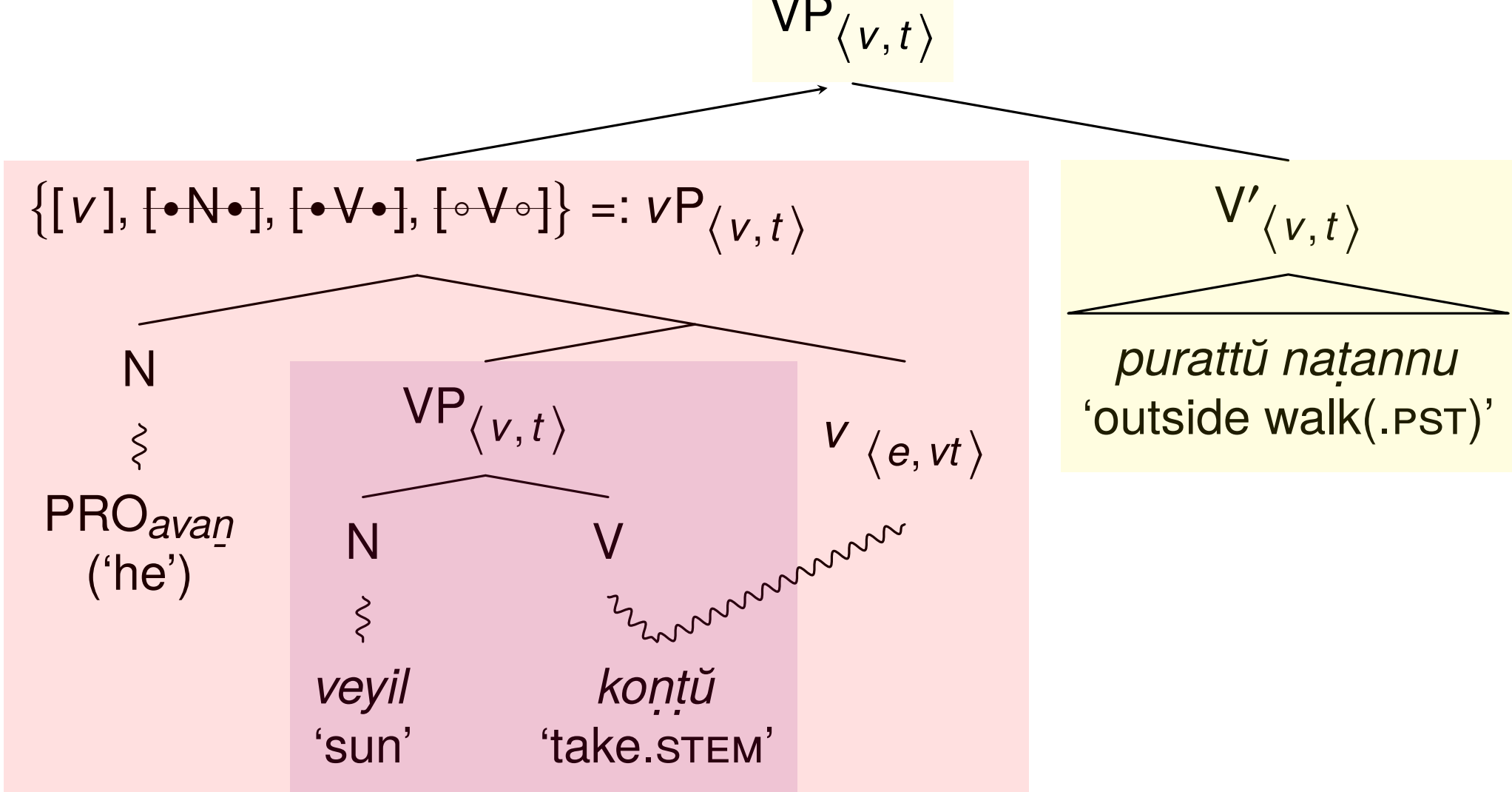
- Additional assumption:** feature checking can fail, i.e. [**•F•**] or [**◦F◦**] may remain unchecked in a derivation without causing a crash (Preminger 2014, Longenbaugh 2019, Newman 2021).
- Note that overgeneration must be constrained by s-selection, l-selection, etc.

- To capture the behaviour in (3), we need to define *v* in Malayalam as {[*v*], [**•N•**], [**•V•**], [**◦V◦**]}

- With these assumptions, an adpositional category defined as {[P], [**•N•**], [**◦V◦**]} is **already redundant!** Now, we can generate both (1b) and (3).

Form and function

- Let's see how this works. A transitive eventive adjunct vP as in (3) would look like (5).

- (5) 

- Here, **three features are discharged**:

→ [**•V•**] licenses Merge of a lexical VP.

→ [**•N•**] licenses Merge of an external argument.

→ [**◦V◦**] allows vP to adjoin to the main verb.

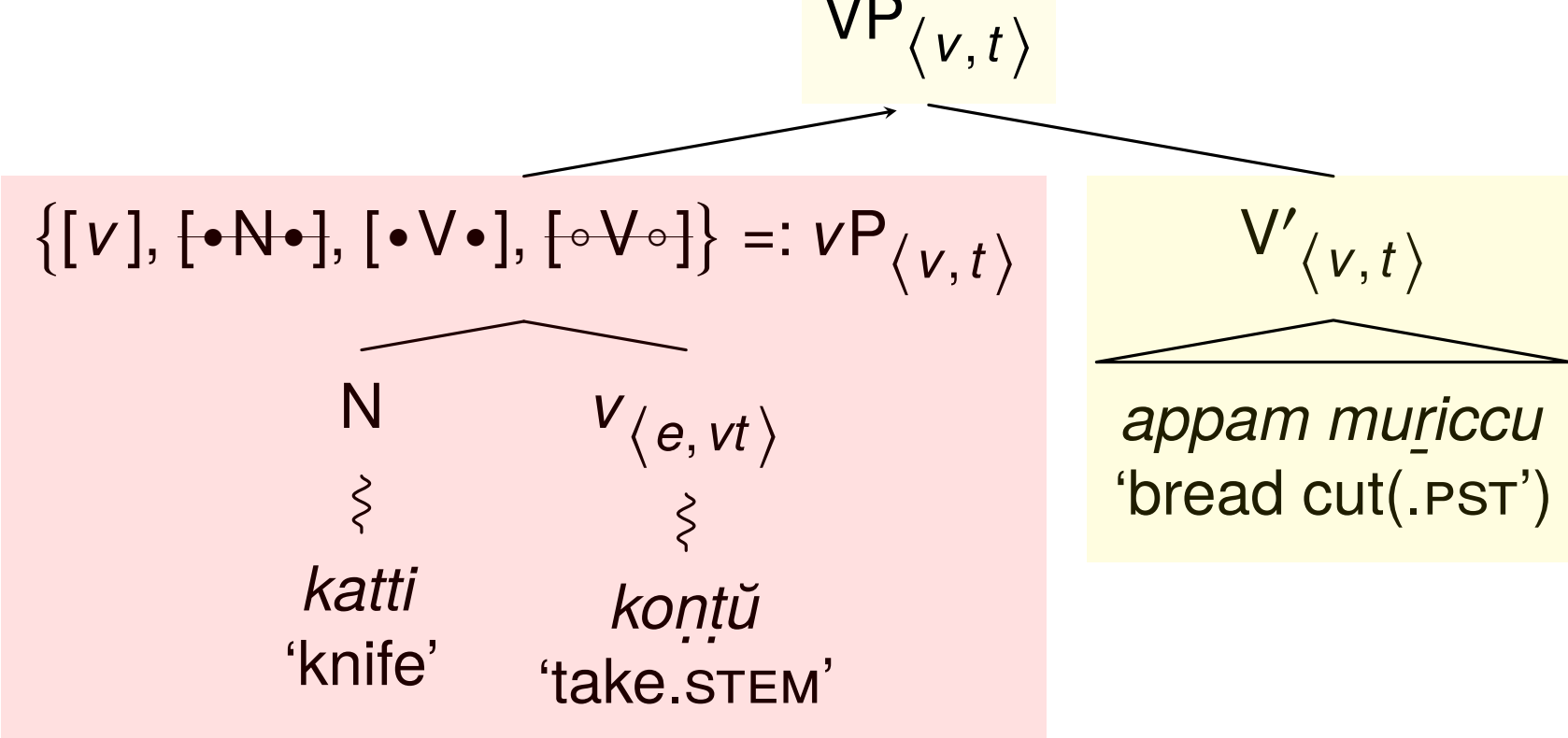
- I assume that the lexical verb *koṇṭũ* spans both *v* and *V* in this case.

- Eventive adjunct vPs combine with the main verb at LF via **predicate modification** (see also Privoznov 2021).

- Light verbs have **the same structure**, but **without the lexical VP**, i.e. *v* fails to discharge [**•V•**].

- Here, *koṇṭũ* trivially spans *v* → light verbs may be analyzed as '**underassociated**' variants of lexical verbs (Ramchand 2008).

- No 'take' event is expressed, because **there is no V° that introduces an event at LF**.

- (6) 

- Once again, vP combines with the main verb at LF using predicate modification.

- In (6), 'knife' is **not in an argument position**, so *v* would not assign it an (external) θ -role.

- It instead assigns it a relation as a VP-modifying adposition might.

- In other words, the difference in interpretation can be reduced to the **failure to apply Event Identification** at LF (Kratzer 1996).

Adjuncts are choosy

- Eventive vPs **only adjoin to verbs** to generate serialization (not nouns, adjectives, etc.), so the **prediction** is that non-eventive vPs have the **same restriction** in Malayalam.

- This is borne out! Argument-introducing predicates systematically **cannot adjoin to non-verbs**:

- (7) a. *avar Gāndhi-ye paṭṭi samsāriccu*
3PL Gandhi-ACC adhere.STEM speak.PST
'They spoke about Gandhi.'
- b. **eṇṇikkū Gāndhi-ye paṭṭi pustakam iṣṭappettu*
1SG.DAT Gandhi-ACC adhere.STEM book like.PST
'I liked the book about Gandhi.'

- paṭṭi* trivially spans *v*, and [**◦V◦**] is *v*'s only host-selectional feature in Malayalam.

- Languages with true adpositions** (e.g. English, Hebrew, Russian) have more **flexibility**, corresponding to a larger set of host-selectional features, e.g. {[**◦N◦**], [**◦V◦**], [**◦A◦**]}

- Therefore, argument-introducing predicates in Malayalam are **fundamentally different from adpositions** in terms of distribution.

Conclusions

- So the argument-introducing vP is rather inflexible in Malayalam. It just has a **special property** that allows it to **adjoin to verbs** in the syntax.

- Syntactically, it always serves to provide space to merge an NP.

- Semantically, vPs in adjuncts serve to relate an argument to an event, whether that event is introduced by a VP it dominates, or the main verb.

- v* in an adjunct is always of **the same semantic type**: $\langle e, vt \rangle$; this contrasts with the canonical P, which actually must be **more semantically flexible** to modify different kinds of hosts.

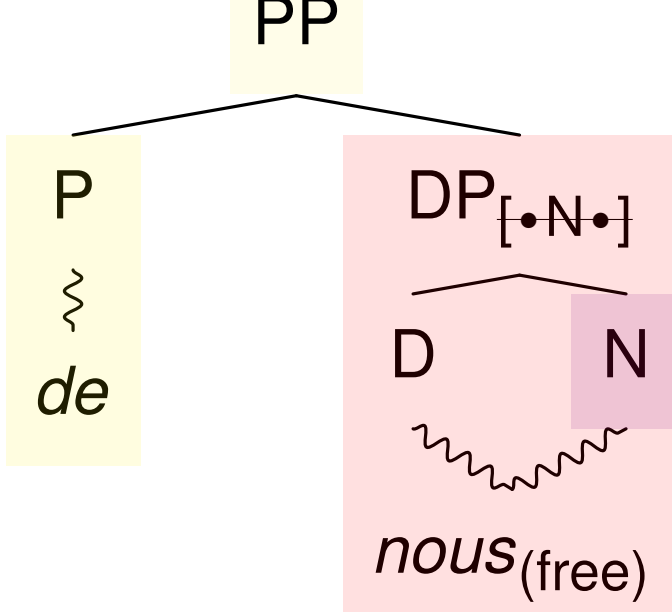
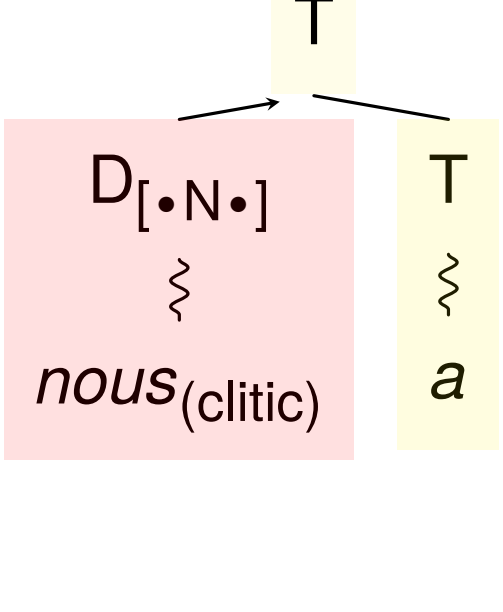
Extensions to other phenomena

- The underlying intuition pursued here, that a **fragment of a larger canonical structure** may be lexicalized by certain lexical items, may be extended to other phenomena.

- This can capture the difference in syntactic size between **free and clitic forms of pronouns which are syncretic** in many languages, e.g. French in (8).

- (8) a. *Elle a parlé de nous*
3SG.F.NOM AUX.3SG speak.PFV.PTCP of 1PL
'She talked about us.'
- b. *Elle nous=a parlé*
3SG.F.NOM 1PL=AUX.3SG speak.PFV.PTCP
'She talked to us.'

- Pronouns like *nous* in (8a) has been analyzed as a NP-less D° head (see Laenzlinger 1993, Roberts 2010, i.a.), while in (8b) it is a full DP. The same kind of analysis may apply:

- (9) a. 
- b. 

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