

Southern Min Post-verbal Negation¹

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1. Introduction

In this paper, we examine the structure of Southern Min (SM) post-verbal negation. Contra Wang (2008), we analyze postverbal negation as an instance of a Serial Verb Construction (SVC), rather than a Resultative Verb Construction (RVC), based on a comparison between the behavior of RVCs and SVCs in SM. In Section 1, we discuss previous analyses of postverbal negation. Section 2 provides an overview of the diagnostics of RVC and SVC constructions in SM. We then apply the diagnostics to *bo* in Section 3 and argue that SM postverbal negation is an instance of SVC, rather than RVC. Section 4 concludes the paper.

1.1 Background on negation in SM

There are five negative elements in SM: *bo*, *buei*, *m-1*, *m-2* and *be*. Most of these negatives are associated with aspectual or modality properties (see Table 1). For instance, *be* is associated with modality. *Bo* and *buei* are aspectual. *M-1* is a volitional negator, while *m-2* is a pure negator. Only *bo* can still behave like a verb, although it is used to mark perfective when it co-occurs with a verb.

	verb	aspect	modality
<i>bo</i>	√	√	×
<i>buei</i>	×	√	×
<i>be</i>	×	×	√
<i>m-1</i>	×	×	√
<i>m-2</i>	×	×	×

Table 1. The categorial status of negative words in SM (adapted from Yang 2009)

1.2 SM postverbal negation

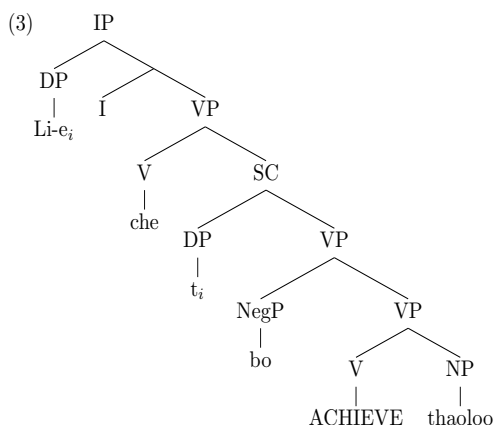
SM has a phenomenon of so-called postverbal negation. This is shown in (1), where the negative word *bo* follows the verb *che* ‘find’. This order is unexpected in a language that lacks V to I movement. Moreover, the V-Neg order in SM is often associated with a different semantics than the more expected Neg-V order. For instance, in (2), where *bo* precedes the verb (as expected), the sentence cannot be associated with a volitional interpretation, unlike (1). (Examples from Wang 2008.)

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² Names are arranged alphabetically.

- (1) Li-e che bo thaoloo. (2) Li-e bo che thaoloo.
Li-e find not.exist job Li-e neg find job
 ‘Li-e couldn’t find a job.’ ‘Li-e didn’t apply for a job.’

Huang (2003) and Wang (2008) both analyze post-verbal negation as a Resultative Verb Construction (RVC). Yet, their analyses differ slightly. Treating *bo* as a second verb, Huang analyzes the verb together with *bo* as an RVC: $V_1 + bo(=V_2)$, whereas Wang’s analysis treats *bo* as an adjunct to the lower VP (where V_2 is a null ACHIEVE head) (3).



Neither analysis is convincing. Without much explanation, Huang suggests resultative compounding is the underlying structure for postverbal *bo* sentences. Wang claims that the NegP occupies a position in a subordinate clause, adjunct to the VP of a null ACHIEVE V head. Her analysis is problematic in that not all negatives can occupy this “postverbal” position. If *bo* can adjoin to the lower VP (with a null head ACHIEVE), the prediction is that any negative should also be able to adjoin to the lower VP. However, this is not borne out by the data: not all negatives can occupy postverbal position. Only *bo* is grammatical in this construction (4). Instead, the only other negative (*be*) that can follow V_1 must also be followed by V_2 (5). That is, *be* requires a supporting V_2 head to follow it.

- (4) *Li-e che {m-1, m-2, buei, be} thaoloo.
Li-e find neg job
 Intended: ‘Li-e didn’t want to/hasn’t/couldn’t find/found a job.’
- (5) a. *Li-e che {m-1, m-2, buei} tioh thaoloo.
Li-e find neg achieve job
 Intended: ‘Li-e didn’t want to/hasn’t/couldn’t find/found a job.’
- b. Li-e che be tioh thaoloo.
Li-e find not.able achieve job
 ‘Li-e couldn’t find a job.’

2. RVC and SVC

The structure in question involves two verbs: V_1 and V_2 , which together can be either a SVC or a RVC. How can we decide between these two analyses? To answer this question, we first

provide semantic and syntactic differences between SVC and RVC (Table 2). We then apply the diagnostics to *bo* in Section 3.

RVCs	SVCs
V ₂ is the result of V ₁	V ₂ is not the result of V ₁
involves an entailment of completion	doesn't involve an entailment of completion
V ₂ is dependent on V ₁	V ₂ is not dependent on V ₁

Table 2. Characteristics of RVCs vs. SVCs (diagnostics from Zhang 1991)

2.1 RVCs

In RVCs, V₂ is always the result of V₁ (6). Additionally, there is always an entailment of completion associated with RVCs (7).

- (6) Li-e jia ba a.
Li-e eat full assert
 'Li-e is full.'

- (7) #Li-e jai ba a mgo a buei jia ba.
Li-e eat full assert but yet not.yet eat full
 Intended: 'Li-e is full but he's not finished eating.'

In RVCs, V₂ is always dependent on V₁. That is, V₂ cannot occur on its own (8).

- (8) *Li-e ba a.
Li-e full assert
 Intended: 'Li-e is full.'

2.2 SVCs

SVCs behave very differently from RVCs. Firstly, V₂ is not the result of V₁. In (9), V₂ *be* 'buy' is not necessarily a result of *khi* 'go'.

- (9) Li-e khi be phio.
Li-e go buy ticket
 'Li-e went to buy a/the ticket.'

Secondly, there is no entailment of completion associated with SVCs (10).

- (10) Li-e khi be phio mgo a buei be tloh.
Li-e go buy ticket but yet not.yet buy achieve
 'Li-e went to buy a/the ticket but he hasn't bought it yet.'

Finally, V₂ is not dependent on V₁ in a SVC. That is, V₂ can occur as a main verb, as with *be* in (11).

- (11) Li-e u be phio.
Li-e ASP buy ticket.
 'L-e bought a/the ticket.'

