

“Serial” *na* in Tok Pisin*

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0 Preamble

This paper is about the Tok Pisin (TP) noncoordinative use of *na* as in the following examples (PRO = proform for Subject; HB = habitual modal verb):

- (1) *Yu stap we na yu kam?*
you be where NA you come
'Where did you come from?'
- (2) *Em i mekim wanem na yu gat sik?*
he PRO do what NA you get sick
'What did he do [to you] that you got sick?'
- (3) *Nogut yu hariap tasol na yu mekim nating*
don't you hurry only NA you do in:vain
'Don't do this hurriedly, or it'll be no use your doing it.'
- (4) *Watpo na skol fi i save go antap tru?*
Why NA school fee PRO HB go high very
'Why does tuition have to be raised all the time?'

In the majority of texts (typically over 80%), *na* in TP is 'and', as a coordinative conjunction linking both clauses and phrases, pretty much as does *and* in English. Here

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follow a few examples, taken from letters to the Editor in the TP-language weekly *Wantok* (POSS = possessive marker):

- (5) *Ol i save stap nating na pinisim mani bilong ol pipel.*
 they PRO HB be idle and spend money POSS the people
 ‘They [the politicians] will do nothing and spend the taxpayers’ money.’
- (6) *Ol spakman i save pairap na tu mekim planti nois.*
 the drunk PRO HB get:angry and too make much noise
 ‘The drunks will then get angry and make a racket.’
- (7) *Na dispela i no gutpela tumas.*
 and this PRO not good very
 ‘And that’s definitely not okay.’

Examples (1) through (4), then, illustrate a noncoordinative use of *na*. I call this TP *na* “serial” *na*, for reasons I will explain below.

0.1 Coordinative *na* in English and TP

Many languages have a particle (or “conjunction”) roughly corresponding to English *and*—though some languages (mainly of the OV type) do not. Japanese is an example of the latter (it has a particle coordinating phrases, but none for coordinating clauses), and so, more relevantly for my topic, are a number of vernaculars in Papua New Guinea.

The ‘and’-type coordinator like English *and* and TP coordinative *na* joins clauses with a freedom of pragmatic readings far exceeding what is marked grammatically or coded semantically.

Let me make the point of the “pragmatic” freedom of readings of ‘and’ coordination with some examples from English, following some ideas proposed by Traugott (1986). While “symmetric” coordination is possible (as in *Jack made his phone calls and Anne cooked supper*, in which coordinates may be reversed in order), a more typical use of *and* seems to be “asymmetric” (*Jack fell and broke his arm*). It is more especially the asymmetric type that is open to what I call “pragmatic” readings: for example, “consecutive” (*Jack broke his arm because of the fall*) or “concessive” (*Jack was working out on a padded floor and nevertheless he broke his arm when he fell*). There seems to be no semantic basis for such a freedom of readings, which rather seem to depend on Grice’s “conversational implicatures”—whether or not those are reflected in context. I must

be brief on what may count as “semantic”. For example, ‘and’-coordination seems prototypically to favor chronological iconicity (Jack fell and **then** broke his arm), and such iconicity I would call “semantic”—coded by sequential order. But whether readings are concessive or consecutive or purposive (*He went to the pool and swam*), they are not “semantic” unless and until they get “grammaticized” (on which see Traugott 1986 for many details)—this, however, does not seem to be the case with English *and*.

The point to be made here is that TP paratactic *na* seems to have the same freedom of pragmatic readings. Data showing this are so copious that just one example may suffice, which I take from a copy of *Wantok* next to me (4-10 May, ‘89, page 5): *Haus lotu I wok long bagarap nau na ol pipel i wok long stretim gen* ‘The church is falling apart now and the people are repairing it.’ The obvious reading is the “consecutive” one (the state the church is in leads the people to repair it), and it happens to be the reading in context. But a concessive reading would be readily possible: if the people normally don’t mind their churches falling apart, then their repairing it would be in spite of what they would normally do. Again, there is nothing “semantic” about such readings, and there seems to be no sign that particular readings of (coordinative) *na* are getting grammaticized.

One could, of course, argue a “grammaticized” use of *na* in a construction like (1) through (4) above, where the *na* reading is (exclusively) “consecutive”; as such, however, it would be a subordinative rather than a coordinative use of *na*. Such an analysis is tempting, since across languages we see many examples of subordinative use of (originally) coordinative conjunctions—as in the subordinative use of English *so* for *so that*. Such a “subordinativization” is unknown, however, for English *and*, and *prima facie* interpretation as such for *na* has other arguments going against it, as I shall show below. Rather, *na* as used in constructions like those of (1) through (4) is not, I suggest, to be considered as “interclausal” at all (whether coordinative or subordinative), but as “interverbal”, or “serial”, in what is one clause, if “clause” is understood as simple rather than composite informationally.

0.2 The origin of *na*

Na is routinely discussed in all studies of TP known to me as (coordinative) ‘and’ only. Franklin 1980 deals with *na* specifically (in environments having or lacking the

“Predicate marker” *i*) but does not discuss the “serial” use of it. The origin of *na* seems obscure. Earlier texts (and one of the earliest recordings; Tom Dutton, p.c.) had *nau* (also spelled *nao*) for both *na* and *o* ‘or’ (Mühlhäusler, p.c.); for the latter even in recent TP booklets I find *no* (which is, of course, also ‘not’); *no* is regular Bislama for ‘or’. For ‘and’ in TP both Murphy 1943 and Schebesta and Meiser 1945 have only the form *na*, without any sign that there was then also a “serial” use of it. In Solomon Islands Pijin texts found in Keesing 1988 (*passim*, e.g. 216-26) coordinative *ana* (also ‘*anaa*) is ‘and’ but it is not of high text frequency (in those samples), and is never “serial”. Bislama has no *na* and uses *mo* for ‘and’, which, however, is never used “serially” (Terry Crowley, p.c.; Jeff Siegel, p.c.).

Serial *na*, then, seems to be exclusive to TP. It is very common, and even regional Englishes calque on it. In Milne Bay English, for example, one finds *Why and I trick you?* ‘Why would I tell you lies?’; see Yarupawa (1966:50), who calls it “intrusive ‘and’”.

0.3 Data

My data are what I hear and read. The written sources comprise self-help books of various kinds (for home-building, animal husbandry, agriculture, and the like); the *Wantok* letters referred to above; and also the translation of the New Testament (NT) and of the Psalms (i.e., the latest version before the 1989 translation of the entire Bible). Being a translation, this part of the corpus would perhaps be regarded as a bit “suspect”. However, I have come to abandon my own initial skepsis in this regard for a variety of reasons. Biblical TP is by common consent excellent TP; also, its grammar (including its *na* grammar) is highly uniform with the grammar of original texts in TP. Furthermore, since Bible texts function almost weekly as texts listened to in worship services for a huge sector of the population, it has a “standardizing” influence. More practically, for my own purposes it has been easy to work with NT texts, because of the concordance to it and to the Psalms (Ramsey 1984) (with only one drawback for the *na* researcher: *na* itself is not listed).

1 “Serial” *na* in nonpolar questions

The first type of serial *na* use I turn to now is exemplified in nonpolar (i.e., WH-) questions of the type *Yu stap we na you kam?*, example (1). If such a question were ana-

lyzed with *na* as “coordinative”, the first clause would be a question and the second a declarative. In fact, of course, the whole construction is one question (that is, informationally a simple interrogative unit) and *na* links their parts in a way which is perhaps more appropriately called “serial” than “coordinative”.

Unlike polar (or Yes/No) questions, nonpolar questions are, in the nature of the case, backgrounded against a factual assumption common to speaker and hearer (or assumed to be that by the speaker). Thus ‘{Why/where/how/[etc.]} P?’ has whatever is expressed by P stand for that factual assumption: ‘Why did you do X?’ presupposes that you did X. In English, the nonpolar interrogative is adverbial and involves no verb, and the P-assumption is verbal. In the TP sentence type *Yu stap we na you kam?* both parts are verbal, and *na* links them. The result is one clause, not two.

One-clause verb serialization is well-known, from a great many languages. As proposed by Givón 1990, one may distinguish various kinds of such serializations, and it seems helpful to list them briefly here. One group serves case role marking and thus marks (for example) a patient (‘take-stick-break’ for ‘break stick’), or a locative (‘walk-go-market’ for ‘walk to market’), or a benefactive (‘work-give’, for ‘work for’), or an instrumental (‘take-knife-cut’ for ‘cut with knife’). Other categories mentioned by Givón are: colexicalization (‘cut-split’, for ‘chop’), deictic directionality (‘walk-he-go’, for ‘walk away’), tense-aspect (‘work-he-stay’, for ‘be working’) and evidential-epistemic marking (‘they-say’ or ‘I think’ + V).—Some of these, especially tense-aspect and deictic directionality are found in serialized form in TP also, but without involving *na*.

What I am proposing is that to this list be added, as attested by TP, nonpolar interrogatives like ‘why?’, ‘where?’, and the like; they may and often do take verbal form. They do so necessarily only where such interrogatives cannot take adverbial form in TP (thus ‘from where?’ is not expressible as **long we?*); in many other cases, they do so optionally. Note that the verbal form of nonpolar interrogatives is readily possible also in English, as in *How (does it) come (about) (that) P?*, but then P is subordinated to that verbal form, either in finite form (*How did it come about that you arrived early?*) or in nonfinite, but embedded, form (*What does one do to succeed?*). Thus English has no verb serialization strategy to combine verbal nonpolar interrogatives with the expression of concomitant P assumptions.

Here are some examples of serialization involving *na* in nonpolar questions, repeating (1) as (9) and (2) as (13) (FUT = future):

- (8) *Yu gat wanem namba na *(yu) mekim dispela wok?*
 you have what authority NA you do this work
 ‘With what authority do you do these things?’ (Mt. 21:23)
- (9) *Yu stap we na *(yu) kam?*
 you be where NA you come
 ‘Where did you come from?’
- (10) *Yu husat na *(yu) bikmaus long God?*
 you who NA you answer:back to God
 ‘Who are you to answer God back?’ (Rom. 9:20)
- (11) *Bai yu mekim wanem na kopra i kamap gutpela?*
 FUT you do what NA copra PRO become good
 ‘What do you do to get the copra in good condition?’
- (12) *Dispela man em i husat na *(i) tekewe sin?*
 this man he PRO who NA PRO remove sin
 ‘Who is this man that he forgives sins?’ (Lk 9:9)
- (13) *Em i mekim wanem na yu gat sik?*
 he PRO do what NA you get sick
 ‘What did he do [to you] that you got sick?’

Note that *na* in all of these is “consecutive” in meaning (stretching that notion a bit perhaps for (2)), and none of the other possible readings characteristic of coordinative *na*, as described in section 0.2, apply here. Also, coreferential deletion (in same-Subject (8), (9), (10), and (12)) is either not possible or possible only preserving the PRO-form *i*. This argument is the more convincing since coordinating *na* is certainly possible to link (two or more) nonpolar questions; consider:

- (14) *Husat i helpim mi na (i) sakim ol man i save mekim rong?*
 who PRO help me AND PRO defeat PL man PRO HAB do evil
 ‘Who stood up for me against the wicked and defeated evildoers?’ (Psalm 94:16).

- (15) *Husat inap long sanap na winim dispela?*
 who can to stand AND win this
 'Who can stand up against it (and win)?'
- (16) *Bilong wanem Pita i kam hia na (i) bikmausim yu?*
 For what Peter PRO come here AND PRO shout:at yu
 'Why does Peter come here and shout at you?'

In these examples, *na* simply coordinates two nonpolar questions, with the possibility of coreferentially deleting the Subject and even its PRO-form after *na*. (Gapping seems readily possible also.)

2 Serial *na* in negative constructions

While serialized nonpolar questions are a particularly clear example of how *na* is serial rather than coordinative, negative constructions involving *na* are much less clear-cut, and I have so far not been able to come up with satisfactory generalizations. It is natural to think of negative constructions in this connection because what they have in common with questions is scope. This is not the place to go into the complications of negative scope in English stopping at or extending beyond *and*. My first impression is that such extension of scope holds mainly for constructions where *and* (colexically) serializes verbs, not (reduced) clauses (*We won't sit down and do this*), a point I will return to in section 5. Also, negative scope extends (unsurprisingly) beyond *and* where *and* coordinates downstairs verbs (*We don't want to visit them and be ignored*). For the rest, I believe the freedom of pragmatic reading of coordinative *and* complicates any study of *and* as a stopper or extender of negative scope, and such a study should probably take account of longer stretches of discourse as well.

I suggest that pretty much the same would hold for *na* in negations in TP. The following, taken from the Bible translation, has *na* linking downstairs verbs, with a negated upstairs verb, so that negative scope does not stop at *na*:

- (17) *Mi no inap kirap na givim samting long yu.*
 I not be:able rise AND give something to you
 'I cannot get up and give you anything.' (Lk. 11:7)

- (18) *Ol i no inap brukim baret na *(i) kam long mipela.*
 they PRO not be:able cross chasm NA PRO come to us:EXCL
 ‘They cannot cross over and come to us.’ (Lk. 16:26)
- (19) *Ol i no inap i go bek long matmat moa na *(i) sting.*
 they PRO not be:able PRO go back to grave more NA PRO decay
 ‘They cannot go back to the grave any more and decay.’

The upstairs verb is *inap*; that English is structured like TP is shown by the presence of *anything* in the gloss of (17), which would have to be *something* if outside negative scope. (TP uses *samting* also in negative constructions.) Note that, in (17), the PRO-form *i* does not precede *givim*. My own inclination would be to consider *kirap na givim* as colexically serialized, quite apart from their being downstairs sisters: *kirap na givim* would then be something like an inchoative marker of *givim*; hence there would be no *i*, whereas there is in (18) and (19).

Note the interlinear for *na* in (17), i.e., ‘and’, while I have kept (a noncommittal) ‘NA’ in (18) and (19). Heuristically I would consider *na* in (18) and (19) as serializing, not colexically (as in (17)), and not in virtue of the verbs on either side being downstairs sisters, but because of the “consecutive” nature of the link, to the exclusion, it seems, of other readings. The test to this interpretation would be what would happen if the relation between downstairs sister verbs were “concessive”; consider:

- (20) *Ol i no ken wok mani stret na *(i) kisin kaikai tu.*
 they PRO not can work money only AND get food too
 ‘They cannot work for pay only and then get food as well.’

(*Wok mani stret* means ‘to work for pay’, but *stret*, i.e., without any fringe benefits.) Note that the *na* relation in (20) has a concessive reading—in other words, *na* must be coordinative. The test is that *i* is out in (20), whereas it is obligatory in (18) and (19).

I would propose, then, that *na* in (18) and (19) is not coordinative, but serializing in much the same way as in (1) through (6), though in different grammatical organization. Contrastively, it has no parallel in English *and*, so that that very conjunction in the above glosses is misleading.

In TP, negative imperatives of the type *nogut yu* ‘don’t (you)’ may have scope extending beyond *na*, but there is ample indication that (unless *nogut* is repeated after *na*), *na* is serial rather than coordinative. Consider (21) (= (3), above):

- (21) *Nogut yu hariap tasol na *(yu) mekim nating.*
 don’t you hurry only NA you do in:vain
 ‘Don’t do this hurriedly, or it’ll be no use your doing it.’

Note that *na* is open only to consecutive reading; significantly, the consecutive reading follows from *hariap*—not from its negation; and that (as in (8) through (13)), *yu* after *na* is mandatory even though coreferential with the previous *yu*. Also, free “pragmatic” readings of conjoined negative imperatives would require repetition of *nogut*, as in:

- (22) *Nogut yu toktok kwiktaim tumas na *(nogut) yu pasim maus tasol.*
 don’t speak soon very and close mouth only
 ‘Don’t speak out too soon and don’t just be silent either.’

Without the second *nogut*, (22) would be meaningless—which shows that in *nogut*-imperatives negative scope stops at (coordinative) *na*.

I may bring up at this point a few examples about which my language helpers differ in evaluation of wellformedness (on the readings given). Consider:

- (23) *Em i tulet pinis (*//) na em i meri bilong yu nau.*
 it PRO too:late PERF NA she PRO wife POSS you now
 ‘It is too late now for her to become your wife.’
 (*‘It is too late and/for she is your wife now’)

- (24) *Em i tulet pinis (*//) na yu go long Mosbi nau.*
 you go to (Port) Moresby now
 ‘It is too late for you to go to Moresby now.’
 (*‘It is too late and/for you go to Port Moresby’)

Example (23) is taken from Mühlhäusler 1985:380, with the gloss given as given here. Mühlhäusler gives (23) to discuss *pinis*, not *na*, and no context is given. Most speakers I have consulted reject the sentence on the reading given, some accept it (with some hesitation) on the asterisked reading. Two speakers, however, had a quite remarkable *Aha Erlebnis* too spontaneous and sudden to be ascribed to a desire on their part to say what

they might think I wanted to hear, and fully accepted both (23) and (24), after having rejected both at first. Some further probing convinced me that a pause before *na* is out, and that *na* can have no stress of any kind.

Whatever the ultimate verdict on such data, the part before *na* is covertly negative—which is why I have included these data here.

3 Serial *na* in “bracketed” constructions

I may add here a few examples of *na* in apparent violation of “bracketing” rules; that is, in subordinated constructions (ANT = anterior past):

(25) *Papa i grisim mi na *(mi) go.*
 father PRO persuade I NA I go
 ‘Father talked me into going.’

(26) *Em i helpim Papa, em i bin salim mi na *(mi) kam.*
 he PRO help Father who PRO ANT send I NA I come
 ‘He helps the Father, who sent me (here).’ (Mark 9:37)

In (25), *na mi go* may be called “bracketed” in that it depends on the manipulative verb *grisim*. Many such causatives have Object + *i* + Verb (although I believe *grisim* is not one of them) for their complements, such that the Object is also Subject of the downstairs verb. That is in fact a normal construction with *salim* (*Mi salim em i go* ‘I sent him [there]’ is perfectly wellformed; the directional-deictic complement is preferred with *salim*, which may also mean ‘to sell’); yet in (26) we find the *na* construction. I am inclined to see as the motivation for the *na* construction in (26) the tendency to avoid *i* after *mi*—on this, see Verhaar forthcoming. But whatever the pressure in favor of the *na* construction instead of Object + *i* + Verb, the point is that *na* is possible here, without any coordinative properties, grammaticized or not.

Note that, in (26), *na* on a coordinative reading would be out seeing that its use is also in a “bracketed” construction: a relative clause. The antecedent is *Papa*, and the Subject in the relative clause is coreferential with it, while the *mi* Subject after *na* is not. Consider also the following:

- (27) *Mama i karim mi na mi kam long graun.*
 mother PRO give:birth:to I NA I come to world
 'I was born into the world' (John 18:37).
- (28) *Mama i karim mi na mi man bilong Rom.*
 NA I man of Rome.
 'I was born a Roman citizen.'

Coordinative reading of (27) and (28) is probably not impossible, but it would require very special contexts. When one considers, however, what these sentences are supposed to be a translation of (no matter whether the translators worked with Greek or English), it seems much more straightforward to interpret *na* as serial—here is certainly one case where “translationese” reading of the original has its virtues.

4 Type Olsem (wanem) *na*

Interrogative *olsem wanem na* ‘why?’ and declarative *olsem na* ‘therefore’ is of high text frequency in the TP data I have. (In a sample of 400 sentences from the Wantok letters collection, the expression *olsem (wanem) na* or some variation of it is found in 10% of them; example (33) is taken from that collection.) I would consider these as nonverbal forms of what appears verbally in data as in 1. Consider:

- (29) *Olsem wanem na yu kam long mi?*
 thus/as what NA you come to me
 ‘Why do you come to me?’ (Mt. 3:14)
- (30) *Olsem wanem na i no inap long wokim haus?*
 thus/as what NA PRO not can to make house
 ‘Why cannot he build a house?’
- (31) *Olsem wanem na jas i no save long dispela samting?*
 thus/as what NA judge PRO not know about this thing
 ‘How did it come about that the judge did not know about this?’
- (32) *Olsem na em i no baim kot.*
 thus NA he PRO not pay court
 ‘(And) so (it came about that) he did not pay the fine [imposed by the court].’

- (33) *Olsem na gavman i mas tingting long stretim Mosbi.*
 thus NA government PRO must think to clean:up Moresby
 '(And) so the government should decide to clean up Port Moresby.'

Na is clearly "consecutive" here and not open to any other readings for which straightforward coordination normally provides scope.

What holds for *olsem wanem na?* we find also in *watpo na*:

- (34) *Watpo na mama i karim mi man!*
 why NA mother PRO bear me man
 'Why did I have to born a male!'

(Example (34) is a jocular complaint by male boarding students who long for home, seeing that girls normally stay in the village.) *Watpo?* is not just an new anglicized competitor for *olsem wanem?*; rather, *watpo?* expresses exasperation and suggests that there is no answer to the nonpolar interrogative (cf., English adspeak: *Why pay more?*). Note that in (34) the *na* structure has been preserved.

5 Why "serial"?

The term "serial" for noncoordinative *na* seems fairly obvious for the constructions discussed in 1. Instead of a WH-expression plus (presupposed) P we have two verbal constructions joined by *na*, a construction straightforwardly parallel to the other serialization types mentioned in 1. In the interrogative and inferential constructions discussed in 4, the construction would be different in that the part before *na* is nonverbal but could still be called "serial" from the point of view of informational organization. An inevitable question which would arise, however, is whether this *na* construction could not as well be considered as calqued upon clause-chaining, amply testified in a large number of languages in the New Guinea region, in the "switch-reference" (SR) system. A third question arising would be: why not simply consider noncoordinative *na* as subordinative?

The latter possibility has been suggested to me by several critics of earlier versions of this paper. Could *na* as a subordinator be older than as a coordinator? As noted in 0.2, the history of *na* is not clear. Is there an older Austronesian subordinating "ligature" (used to link attributes, including relative clauses, to their heads) of the form *na* and

cognate forms, such that it became a conjunction afterwards? The Indonesian ligature (and relativizer) *yang* certainly functions as “coordinative” ‘and’ in recent informal samples (see Verhaar 1983). I have not researched these points but someone should. Synchronically for present-day TP, however, there seems to be little support for the subordinative hypothesis. A ‘where were you so that you came’ for example (1) seems a strained reading. In (23) and (24), consecutiveness would relate to nothing in the part preceding *na*; and no “consecutiveness” would apply, in (28), to *mama i karim mi*. In other examples, a “consecutive” reading would, it is true, be straightforward, but consecutive structures need not necessarily be subordinative.

I have little to say on the “clause-chaining” interpretation of noncoordinative *na*, except that it seems an obvious possibility, given the SR system found in so many of the substrates of TP. Both same-subject (SS) and different-subject (DS) constructions occur joined by *na*. In the SR system, we find a “marking” clause and a “reference” clause. Under the SR system, *na* would have to count as “marking” the previous verb, since it is intonationally always tied to what precedes it. On the other hand, *na* does not distinguish SS and DS: only the latter is marked, simply by an overt Subject. As Haiman (1983:xii) reports, the only restriction on the relation between chained clauses is that the reference clause is never subordinate to the marking clause. Thus, whatever the merits of seeing the noncoordinative *na* constructions as calqued on clause chaining, it would clash with the subordination hypothesis.

My suggestion here is simply to have “serial” as an appropriate name, because it is compatible with the SR system—should that prove to be relevant—since that system, too, is “serial” in some straightforward sense.

6 Colexical serialization

As noted above, “colexical” serialization virtually makes one verb of the close linking of two. The type does not have a high functional load in English, but those that there are are of high text frequency: *to go and see*; *to sit down and discuss*; and the like. The first verb, in English, is what may be called a “postural” verb, expressing, that is, a bodily posture, or some other verb of bodily behavior, including locomotive verbs like *to go*. The verb is semantically bleached and on the way to grammaticization, approaching auxiliary status for verbal aspect. But the colexicalizing strategy is more

productive than that, at least in English, and also syntactically more complicated and has scope for stylistic inventiveness. Consider:

- (35) John would never hit a pedestrian *(and drive on).
 (36) Why did you have to go *(and break the vase)?
 (37) If you don't lay off, I'll put on my coat *(and leave).
 (38) Do you mean to sit there *(and tell me you don't know)?

Note the parenthesized parts as obligatory. In (35), the idea is not that John would never hit a pedestrian but that he would never drive on if he did. In (36), the question is not about why the addressee left, and a reply to it would give only one reason, not two. Similarly, to retort to (38) by saying "No to the first, yes to the second" would serve only some purpose of (grammatical) "punning".

It is interesting to note that English has colexifying serial *and* for structures of a type which abounds in TP substrate languages but is hardly ever found in TP and to the extent that it is has no *na*. Colexifying serialization in TP just chains the verbs together: *Mi go kaikai* 'I am going to eat'; *Yumi go lukim ol pukpuk* 'Let's go look at the crocodiles'. It seems that *go* is the only eligible verb to start the series. It is true that there are constructions *stap* + V (e.g., *Mipela stap singsing* 'We are dancing'), but that would be a different serialization type, i.e., for Aspect (durative).

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