

Serial Verb Construction In Yoruba

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Abstract

The universal feature of serial verb (SV) is a fact even in languages like Pidgin and Creole. It has been adjudged to be a characteristic of the Benue-Congo languages. Various proposals have been put up to account for this phenomenon. Some assert that its existence and productivity is in inverse relation to the functional yield of the inflectional categories in the verb and / or of prepositions in individual languages. The objective of this paper is to present a critical examination of the phenomenon of serial verb construction in Yoruba with a view to correcting certain misconceptions and misleading issues highlighted in the earlier account of serial verb construction and causative constructions in Yoruba at least for theoretical implications. We present data to confirm that in Yoruba, (spoken in Nigeria) reanalysis of verb is ill-motivated as a working hypothesis depending, as it were, solely on cross-linguistic analogy and translation. Using descriptive method of analysis, the paper discovers that serial verb construction in Yoruba is not classifiable into just same-subject and causative types as earlier observed. Besides, some causative verbs other than five earlier listed as shown in the paper may also be first verb of a serial verb construction and with identical semantic and syntactic consequences as those earlier five verbs. In addition, the resulting serial verb construction in each case is not always analysable to show that the object of the first verb is at the same time the logical subject of the verb

1. Introduction

This paper acknowledges the scholarly works of some African linguists (like Awobuluyi, Bamgbose, Givon, Yusuf, Lord, Oyekunle etc.) whose contributions have challenged and sensitised our consciousness of the complexity of the syntactic form referred to as serial verb (SV), especially the manifestation of this grammatical concept in most of the New Benue-Congo languages. Omachonu (2005:13) Verb phrase serialisation or serial verb construction is known by other names in the literature as serial verb construction (Bamgbose, 1972: 28; 1980: 2-4; Stewart, 1963, Lord, 1974: 195-204), serial verbs (Stahlke, 1970), verbs in series (Welmers, 1930), string of verbs (Ansre 1966), verb serialization (Givón, 1974: 55-57; Yusuf, 1992: 67-69; 1997: 38; 1980: 43-44), splitting verb, (Awobuluyi, 1971: 151-154; Yusuf, 1972: 120; 1973: 42-43). Serial verb, as it is usual with other phenomena, has attracted varied definitions from scholars and or researchers. But we shall reconsider only a few of such definitions here since they appear to be saying the same thing in different words. In other words, a careful examination of the definitions

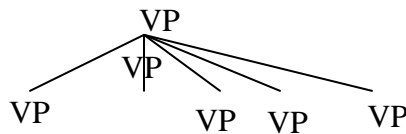
reveals a unified account or attempt at characterising the syntactic structure of this kind of construction in languages.

- (i) ‘a row of verbs one after the other...(in which) the verbs stand next to each other without being connected (Westermann 1974:79-80)’
- (ii) ‘strings of verbs or verb phrases run together to form what appears to be a single expanded verb phrase (Yusuf 1980:37)’
- (iii) ‘a serial verb construction is a string of verbs or verb phrases within a single clause that express simultaneous or immediately consecutive actions, have a single grammatical subject, have no connective markings and are marked or understood as having the same grammatical categories, such as aspect, modality, negativity or positivity, and tense (SIL International 2004)’The recognition of SVCs in most of the languages in which they occur is based on a combination of formal and semantic properties or criteria. Aikhenvald (2006:1) integrates a considerable number of these properties into her definition of SVC thus:
- (iv) A serial verb construction (SVC) is a sequence of verbs which act together as a single predicate, without any overt marker of coordination, subordination, or syntactic dependency of any sort. Serial verb constructions describe what is conceptualized as a single event. They are monoclausal; their intonational properties are the same as those of a monoverbal clause, and they have just one tense, aspect, and polarity value. SVCs may also share core and other arguments. Each component of an SVC must be able to occur on its own. Within an SVC, the individual verbs may have same or different transitivity values.

This definition appears to be a more comprehensive one in the literature because it consolidates the extant terminological consensus among scholars (See Zwicky 1990, Givón 1991, Durie 1997, Andrews & Manning 1999, Stewart 2001) based on their language-specific as well as crosslinguistic investigations of SVCs.

A structure of serial verbs can be given as

And a tree structure as: $VP \longrightarrow VP (VP^n)$



Although these definitions outlined above are such a unified attempt at describing the syntactic surface structure of serial verb construction in languages, the last account (iii) has gone beyond mere syntactic surface structure characterisation. This it does by providing us with an account of its grammatical categories as well.

Suffice it to say that with these definitions, the reader has a clearer idea of the appearance of this kind of construction. And it was in the light of this understanding that Yusuf (1997: 38) proposed a rewrite Phrase Structure Rule for serial verbs as:

$NP \rightarrow VP (VP^n)$

The superscript ⁽ⁿ⁾ means we may have any number of VPs: two, three, four, in fact ad infinitum. For instance, the schemata above can generate serial verb constructions in Yoruba with series of verbs in a single sentence or construction.

The phenomenon has been a subject of interest among linguists for some time (since Christaller 1875). Thus, many grammatical descriptions of serial verb constructions have appeared in the literature. So far, three major phases of the investigations on SVCS in languages have emerged:

Phase 1: 1875 to early 1960s – As part of the pedagogical issues on the grammar and initial description of some languages (Christaller 1875, Balmer & Grant 1929, Westermann 1930, Westermann & Bryan 1952, Stewart 1963 and others).

Phase 2: Late 1960s to the 1990s – theorizing on the defining features, syntactic sources of SVCs and application of relevant theories to the syntactic representation of SVCs (Boadi 1968, Awobuluyi 1967, 1971, 1973, Bamgbose 1973, 1974, 1982, Schachter 1974, Baker 1989, Agbedor 1994, very many others).

Phase 3: Late 1990s to the present – Semantics of SVCs, demarcation between SVCs and other verb sequence constructions, comparative studies, typological and cross-linguistic investigations of SVCs (Schiller 1990, Lord 1993, Bearth 1999, Baker & Stewart 2002, Ameka 2005, 2006, Aikhenvald & Dixon (eds.) 2006, Bisang 2009 and very many others).

A historical account of the studies on SVCs would reveal a period of one hundred and thirty six (136) years of continued relevance and sustained interest. The question is why this sustained interest? In my informed opinion, interest in serial verb constructions (SVCs) persists because of the intricacies and the multi-dimensional nature of the issues surrounding the phenomenon in languages and the cross-linguistic variations identified with such constructions. As Lord (1993) rightly observes, there are various types of serial verb constructions even in a single language and there are cross-linguistic variations such that the properties of SVCs in one language may not map whole sale onto those of another language (See also Ameka 2005). Consequently, the descriptions of SVCs, in many instances, had appeared not quite adequate either because of the intricacies of the constructions or the tendency on the part of the researcher to address or concentrate on only one particular problem or a few of such problems in a language or across languages. Hence, the questions concerning the nature of verb serialization in languages arise again and again like the phoenix birds from the flames.

All these studies bear important relevance to the study of the phenomenon in the Yoruba language under consideration. A close observation of data from Yoruba leads one to conclude, however, that the scope of serial verb in the language is quite extensive than has been hitherto discussed and admitted. In particular, and as will be shown below immediately, the data argue that if one eschews translation (say into English), there is little ground for attempting the hypothesis of syntactic reanalysis (as complementizers) for certain verbs which take either sentential or verbal complementation (Lord 1974:195-198; Awobuluyi 1978:27). This is so because the data and syntactic analysis, as a matter of fact support their consideration as verbs participating in serial verb constructions. Such

verbs include *pé* ‘say’ and of course, the so-called causative verbs *dá*, *fì*, and *mú* as in (1), (2), (3) and (4):

1. ó sò pé kòṣeémání ní owó. ‘he said that money/wealth is a necessity’ he tell say necessary focus money
2. olùkò dá àwọn akékòó rẹ ní ọkàn le. ‘the teacher reassured his student’ teacher make them learner his (prep) heart firm (lit: ‘teacher make the heart of his learner firm’)
3. ọrò nàà kò fì mí ní ara ba ilẹ̀ ‘the matter continues to give me anxiety’ matter the Neg (caus) me (prep) body reach ground (lit: ‘the matter does not allow my body to rest easy’)
4. wàháà Ọlá mú mi se ọgá mi ‘Ọlá’s affairs made me offend my boss’ trouble Ọlá take me offend my master.

Besides, serial verb construction (SVC henceforth) in Yoruba is not classifiable into just same-subject type and causative type as, again, Lord (1976:180) has pointed out, observing that “both same subject and causative readings are possible for any serial construction.” It must be as a matter of fact be acknowledged, however, that the identification of these two kinds indeed denotes an advancement over the earlier views, especially on the semantics of SVCs.

Furthermore, data which allow only one conclusion will be given: namely, that every verb in a characteristic VSC series may be best seen as dominated by one VP notwithstanding the logical relationships which could be inferred from among the NP’s of the sentence, or of the functional relation between the verbs and the NP’s in the same sentence construction. This conclusion is borne out of two observations. One, that the same syntactic and morphological constraints which apply to single verb in mono-verbal constructions apply to each string of verbs in a SVC as though to be just a single functional entity. Two, that no justifying, explicit and convincing argument can be advanced for deriving Yoruba SVC’s from underlying coordinate structure or from structures with embedded sentences. To be sure, there exist near equivalences between coordinate structure and structures with embedded sentences on one hand, and SVC’s on the other. There are still a number of problems remaining, however, in determining, first, for instance, what coordinate structures consist of in the language, and second the transformational rules for deriving the desired surface structures, doing so not necessarily without changing meaning, which in virtually all the cases examined appears inevitable, but without proposing unjustifiable transformations and still preserving recoverability.

The following is a summary of findings arising from on-going inquiry on the verb serialisation construction in New Benue-Congo languages with particular reference to Yoruba.

2. Facts From Inquiry On Serial Verb Construction In New Benue-Congo Languages Using Yoruba As A Reference

2.1. Verbs of Saying

2.1.1. ‘*pé*’ as a verb Verb of saying is a verb that introduces a complement in a sentence construction. Say verb in Benue-Congo languages take ‘say’ which can introduce verbatim quotation and complement for reported speech as show in the examples in the

data. Example (5) below is a typical diagnostic frame which has led analysts to conclude that *pé* ‘say’ and synonymous verbs in a number of languages (Lord 1976:185) have undergone a reanalysis (as shown in examples below 5) and that *pé* is a complementizer of the same category as ‘*that*’ in English, ‘*que*’ in French, ‘*qué*’ in Spanish, ‘*dass*’ in German, and so on:

- 5
- a. Adé sò pé ẹ lọ ‘Ade said that you went’
Ade say () you(pl.) go
 - b. Adé wí pé ẹ wá ‘Ade said you came’
Ade say () you(pl.) come
 - c. Ade sọyè pé ẹ sùn ‘Ade remembered that you slept’
Ade remember () you (pl.) sleep
 - d. Ade rò pé òun ó rí wa lónà ‘Ade thought that he would find us on the way’

Ade think () he(Olu) will see us at home

First, consider that when another verb *ní* ‘say’ is used as the only verb of the matrix sentence, as in (6), *pé* may not need to appear:

6. Ade ní ẹ mò ‘Ade said you know’
Ade say you know

Sentences such as (6) suggest to Lord (1974:198), surprisingly, only that the cycle of reanalysis of another verb of saying is underway in Yoruba. Speakers, as she argues, resort to the use of *ní* in order to put a brake on the proliferation of verbs of saying, as in (7) below in which each verb except the first has been reanalyzed as complementizer.

7. ó sò wí pé ẹ mò ‘he said that you know’
he say say () you(sg.) know

The explicit account, which we would like to suggest, lies in other directions, namely that sentences such as (7) above are SVCs in which in standard Yoruba (SY i.e the speech variety that is used for literary and educational purposes and which facilitates interdialectal communication) a string consisting solely of verbs of saying is used for explicitness just as a speaker may or may not choose to use the SVC for achieving the same effect as in (8) below:

- 8
- a. Ade mú óunjẹ ta mí lọrẹ ‘Ade gave me food as a present’
Ade take food strike me (as) gift
 - b. Ade fún mí ni óunjẹ ‘Ade gave me with food’
Ade give me (prep) food

In (8) above, sentence (a) is a SVC, (b) is not. Both are otherwise constructions which involve verbs which take necessarily the prepositional phrase involving Oyekunle’s (2010:5-7) particle *ní*.

2.1.1.1. Thus, one may suggest that in SY the verb *sọ*, *wí*, *pé* and *ní* may be used individually or in a combination of two or more in a sentence without actually any change of meaning as shown in examples (5a & b above) and 9 below:

- 9
- a. Ade ní pé ẹ mò ‘Olu said that you(pl.) knew’
Ade say () you know
 - b. Ade sò wí pé ẹ mò
 - c. Ade sò wí pé ní ẹ mò

Interestingly enough, (10a & b) mean exactly the same as each of the foregoing.

10. a. Ade ní ẹ̀ mò ‘Ade said you that you knew’
Ade say you know

b. Ade pé ẹ̀ mò ‘Ade said you knew’

From the foregoing as enunciated in (10b), we must provide an explicit explanation for the supposed reanalysis hypothesis, because if *pé* is a complementizer and (10b) means the same as (5a), (5b), (9a-c), and (10a), then (10b) has no verb. Tone plays a significant role in Yoruba. It performs both grammatical and lexical functions. It could be observed from the data that the verbs of saying usually carry a high tone. This distinguishes them from other verbs of similar written forms. As we can see, no plausible, properly motivated transformational rule is in sight for deriving (10b) from (10a), from (9c), or from any other of the preceding sentence forms.

2.1.1.2. Consider again the following facts: ‘fò, sọ, wí, pé, ní’ are all fairly synonymous, all translatable as ‘say’, and may be used as in (11):

- 11 a. i. Akin fò ẹ̀dè tí a kò gbó
Akin speak language which we not hear
‘Akin spoke a language which we did not understand’
- ii. Akin fò tán ó pẹ̀hìndà ‘Akin having spoken, took off’
Akin speak finish he turn (his) back
- b. Akin sọ ìtàn ‘Akin told a story’
Akin tell story
- c. i. Akin wí ẹ̀jọ́ bí ọ̀pẹ̀ẹ̀rẹ̀ ‘Akin complains like grumbler’
Akin talk case manner of parrot
- i. Akin wí ohun tí o ní kí ó wí ‘Akin say what you ordered him to say’
Akin say thing which you say (INTRO) he say
- d. i. a kò pé a kò lọ ‘we did not say we won’t go’
we not ‘say’ we NEG go
- ii. ó pé ọ̀n tí dé ‘he said he had arrived’
he say he (perf) come
- e. i. mo ní n kò lọ ‘I say that I do not go’
I say I NEG go
- ii. Akin ní ọ̀n ọ̀ lọ ‘Akin said he (Akin) did not go’
Akin say he(Akin) (Neg) go

From the sentences in (11), the verbs in question subcategorise minimally as follows in SY:

- fò : [+ (NP)]
sọ : [+ NP]
wí : [+..... NP]
pé : [+..... S]
ní : [+..... S]

This explains why *pé* and *ní* may either precede or follow each other when combined in any sentence construction. Thus *so*, *wí*, *ní* may precede *pé* as above in (5) and (9), while *pé* itself may precede *ní* as in (9c) above.

2.1.1.3. Consider also the sentence construction in (12) below, in which different verbs and even nominal constructions take *pé*:

12a. Indirect connative constructions

tiraka 'try'
lákàkà 'struggle'
pàrẹ́ọ́ 'lie'
bẹ́ 'beg, implore'
rán(sẹ́) 'send, commission'

- i. Akin gbiyànjú pé kí òun bá wa 'Akin tried to overtake us'
Akin try () (comp) he(Akin) overtake us'

INTRO

b. Value

dára '(be) good'
yẹ '(be) fitting'
burú '(be) bad'
sàn '(be) better'
wù 'to please'

- i. O dára pé kí á jọ lọ 'it is good that we go together'
It good () (comp) we rally go
(INTRO)

c. Result

dára
dùn

- i. ó dún pé a jọ lọ 'it is interesting that we go together'
it sweet () we rally go

d. saying, reporting, thinking, emotion

rántí 'remember'
bínú 'be annoyed'
rò 'think'
sọ (ní, wí) 'say'

- i. ọ́gá bínú pé wọn kò dé lásikò 'the boss is angry that they did not arrive on time'

boss anger () they Neg arrive on time

e. comparison

jọ (bí ẹni) seems (manner of someone)
dà (bí ẹni) appear (manner of someone)

- i. ó jọ bí ẹni pé òjò fẹ́ẹ̀ rọ̀
it seem manner (of)one () rain wants fall

- ii. Ó dà bí ẹni pé mo ti pàdé rẹ̀ rí

- It appears manner (of) one () I Perf meet you see
- f. concession
- i. bí ó tilẹ̀ jé pé ó gùn kò tó o
 manner it from round be () it long Neg reach it
 ‘although it is long it does not reach it’
- g. cause/reason

- nitori (ni ti ori) ‘on account of’, ‘for reason of’
 on of head
 àsán ‘reason of’
- i. àsán pé John jẹ̀ bàbá rẹ̀ kò jẹ̀ kí a sinmi
 reason of () John be father his Neg allow (comp) we rest
 INTRO

‘just because John happens to be his father he is getting on our nerves’

In (12a) and (b), *pé* may be deleted but never *kí* because it introduces the embedded clause of intention. In such constructions, *pé*, if considered as complementizer, would have no obvious identifiable function. In this regard, compare (13), also a connative construction, in which *pé* serves as the only verb, where the third person singular pronoun obligatorily gets deleted before the negative marker *kò*.

13. a şişẹ̀ bí ẹ̀rú kò pé kí á ní owó
 One work like (manner of) slave Neg say (comp) one has money
 ‘working like a slave does not guarantee affluence’

Sentence (12e) is explicit about what one might consider to be the underlying subject of *pé* in all cases in which it complements other verbs, namely, *eni* ‘one, someone’. However, in the case of (12e) like every other such similar cases, it is quite impossible to ascribe anything but the verbal status to *pé*.

In (12f), *eni* is presumed deleted between *jẹ̀* and *pé* as underlying subject of the clause in which *pé* is verb. The said clause *eni pé ó gùn* ‘one says it is long’, is complement to *jẹ̀* which never occurs without a complement.

Sentence (12g) offers a curious case. One, in formal or slow speech, an extra vowel on mid tone is heard following the last vowel of *àsán* or *nitori* and before *pé*, indicating that what follows functions as genitive NP, and the entire construction introduced by *nitori* and *àsán* must therefore be considered a sentential PP or an NP with the following structure:

Prep + NP + genitive markers (GM) + NP...

Thus (14) can be assigned the following structure

- Prep NP GM [pé].....
 Np Np
14. ní torí ì pé Akin jẹ̀ omọ ọba...
 on of-head of () Akin be child (of) king
 ‘on account of the fact that Akin is a prince’

Now a relative clause introducer, may be substituted for *pé* in examples (14) and (12g) above without a change of meaning; but then the genitive marker does not appear, thus underscoring the determiner role of the resulting *tí*-clause transformationally extraposed or moved to the complement position, from putative underlying structures such as example (15) suggest that *pé* may be considered a complementizer derived from the reanalysed verb *pé*.

- 15a. pé kí á jọ lọ dára ‘that we go together is good’
 () (comp) we rally go good
 b. pé a jọ lọ dára ‘that we went together is good’

But consider that in SY only NP may function as subject or object, may be conjoined with *àti...àti* ‘both...and’, may precede or follow the focus marker *ni*, or may serve as head of a relative construction. It turns out that sentences are found in each of these positions, and without any sign of nominalization whatsoever, as in examples (13) above repeated below and (16):

- a ṣiṣé bí ẹrú]...
 Np subj.
- 16.a. àti Akin wá àti Akin kò wá a ó bá baba dé ilé
 and Akin come and Akin Neg come we will accompany father reach home
 ‘whether Akin comes or not, we will go all the way to the father’s house’
- b. ìtàn yen yà mí lénu ni mo sè tètè dé
 story that surprise me in mouth (Focus) I make quick arrive
 ‘the issue surprised me that I arrived quickly’
- c. ayọ ọ ìyá mí ni a rà, a kò rà mí
 joy Gen mother my (Focus) we buy we Neg buy me
 ‘the joy of a free-born child of a slave-mother’
- d. gbé omo wá kí mí owó ní ná ẹni
 carry child come greet me money (it is) spend one
 ‘bring the baby to see me, that costs nothing but money’
- e. ná omo mí dè mí kò dé inú ọlọmọ
 beat child my await me Neg reach heart child owne
 ‘no parent can be taken seriously when he says “beat my child when I am away (if he misbehaves)” ’

It is not surprising, therefore, that the verb *pé*, with or without the underlying subject *eni*, may introduce sentences all functioning as NP.

3. Causative Construction

Lord (1974:199) has argued convincingly that the Yoruba causative construction is a VSC. But she also claims in the same work as cited above that, ‘both same subject and causative readings are possible for any serial construction...’. In this section further data will be provided to buttress her argument that the causative construction is a SVC and to show that causative construction as SVC covers cases which she herself least suspect or which she denies outright.

On the other hand, data will also be provided to nullify or invalidate her suggestion in the above claim, as we understand it, namely, that causative construction is always and necessarily a SVC in which the NP2 object of the first verb is also the logical verb of the second verb. Example (4) repeated below is one of such constructions:

. wàhálà Qlá mú mi se ògá mi ‘Qlá’s affairs made me offend my boss’
trouble Qlá take me offend master my
NP1 V1 NP2 V2 NP3

One observation which immediately casts doubt on Lord’s claim is that other causative verbs than the five (*mú, dá, sọ, fi and se*) listed by Awobuluyi (1972:120; 1978:28) and examined by Adeoye (2009:18) may be first verbs of a SVC and with identical semantic and syntactic consequences as these five verbs. What is more, the resulting SVC in each case is not always analysable or paraphrased to show that the object of the first verb is at the same time the logical subject of the verb. Thus in (17), *jíjẹ ẹran or ijẹ ẹran* ‘the fact of eating the meet’, but not *ẹran* ‘meat’ alone, is the logical or surface subject of *dun* ‘to cause to experience pain or loss’.

17. wón jẹ ẹran yẹn dun mí ‘they ate the meet and brought me to grief by so doing’

they eat meat that pain me

Nor is it the case that all serial verb constructions in Yoruba can be given a causative reading in any of the senses meant by Lord (1974: 195-204). Thus, there is no obvious way in which any sentence in (18) can be given the so-called “causative reading”

- 18 a. ó ga pin ‘he has stopped growing tall’
he/it tall stop
b. ó pón rà ‘it has ripened to the point of rotting’
he ripen rot
c. ó sọrọ tán ‘he has stopped talking’
he talk finish
d. Bólá ra ẹran jẹ ‘Bola buys meat for eating’
Bola buy meat eat

On the other hand, here is a real sense in which most of the so-called splitting verbs (which Lord makes no mention of) are fixed causative SVCs in which either the first causative verb (causative is used here strictly to refer to any verb in a string which refers to the event leading to the effect represented in a later verb) or the second (the effect) verb no longer occurs by itself in a sentence, although its meaning can always be deduced from the SVCs in which it participates, particularly when the usage is transitive:

- 19a. pamó ‘hide, clean’
paré ‘clean’
patì ‘abandon’
papọ ‘bring together’
padé ‘close’
b. àwọn alágbàse pa isẹ oko mi tì láìparí
they labourers (caus) work farm my aside without finishing
‘the labourers abandoned my farm work without finishing it’

Finally, it is not the case that the so-called causative verbs *dá*, *fí*, and *mú* are as restricted as Lord (1974:197), Awobuluyi (1978:26-28), and Adoke (2011) claim. Lord (1974:200), for one, claims first that all three, particularly *dá*, take few verbal complements, co-occur with limited number of nouns, and participate in strictly idiomatic expressions, especially in constructions providing no clue to independent usages. She argues further that *fí* is grammaticalised and that, besides, it does not inflect, does not take object pronouns, and is semantically generalised. She suggests lastly that *mú* takes the *kí*-clause as complement. Let us examine these claims.

With respect to *dé*, (20) provides a few examples, by no means exhaustive, which call into question the first set of claims:

- (20a.) dá ojú tì ‘put to shame’
 (causative) eye shame
- b. dá èrù bà ‘to strike fear into someone’
 (causative) fear strike
- c. dá ààbò bò ‘to protect’
 (causative) protection cover
- d. dá ara yá ‘to exercise; to cheer up’
 (causative) body quick

These expressions are no more idiomatic than non-SVC’s in (20e):

- e. i. ojú tì mí ‘I am ashamed’
 eye fall me
- ii. èrù bà mí ‘I am afraid’
 fear strike me
- iii. ara mi yá ‘I am in good health’
 body my (be) quick

Or, than similar but otherwise ordinary SVC’s in (20f) and *dá* constructions with prepositional phrase as complement in (20g):

- f.i. mú èsè dúró ‘cause to stand firm’
 feet stop
- ii. dá èsè dúró ‘to stop’
 feet stop
- iii. dá sí ‘to spare’
 exist
- iv. dá kojá ‘to traverse’
 (to) cross
- g.i. dá ní àrè ‘to acquit’
 (caus) prep justice
- ii. dá ní èbọ ‘to prescribe sacrifice to’
 (caus) prep sacrifice
- iii. dá ní oró ‘to inflict pain/loss’

With respect to *fí*, (see the analysis above) it is not clear precisely in which sense it can be said to have been grammaticalised. First, it commutes not only with *dá*, but also with other verbs such as *dà*, *gbé*, *jé* (*kí*), *mú* as in 21

- 21a. dà bò ‘use to cover’
turn cover
- b. gbé lé ‘put upon’ (to cause to be upon)
carry (be on top)
- c. mú je ‘eat up’ (to cause to be eaten)
take eat
- d. jé kí enú kò ‘come to an agreement’
make (comp) mouth meet

To the extent that it makes sense to say that the Yoruba verbs inflect, no verb inflects more than *fí*, *dá*, or *mú* in that they take all preverbs that the first verb in a SVC takes. And *fí* takes the object pronoun which, as is the case with virtually the totality of Yoruba verbs which take NP object complement, may delete just in case it represents an old piece of information in the discourse. Since pronouns most often presuppose an earlier anaphoric element in the discourse, it optionally deletes after *fí*, too. Thus, one may have (i) or (ii) of (22a) but always (b).

- 22 a. i. *fí* *í* *hàn* *mí* ‘show it to me’
(caus) it appear me
- b. i. *mo* *fí* *wón* *sílè* ‘I leave them alone’
I (caus) them to ground
- i. *Fi* *wón* *hàn* *mí* ‘show them to me’
make them appear (to) me

With respect to the claim of semantic generalization, *fí* possesses this attribute to no greater extent than verbs such as *gbé* and *se*, as in (23a,b):

- 23a. i. *bá* *wo* *ni* *o* *se* *rí* *í?* ‘how did you happen to see it?’
manner which (focus) you () see it
- ii. *bá* *wo* *ni* *ó* *tí* *rí* *í?* ‘how did you happen to see it?’
- b.i. *ajá* *mi* *gbé* *eegun* *mì* ‘my dog swallowed a piece of bone’
dog my () bone swallow
- ii. *níbo* *ni* *o* *gbé* *rí* *í?* ‘where did you happen to see it?’
where (focus) you () see it
- c. *níbo* *ni* *o* *tí* *rí* *í?* ‘where did you happen to see it?’

Se and *gbé* are normally glossed ‘do’ and ‘dwell/carry’ respectively. Such substitute with the directional locative *tí*: thus *se* in (23ai) and *gbé* in (23bii) without a change in the meaning of the two sentences concerned. Notice that SVC reading would be considered uniquely appropriate for both *se* and *gbé* in (23), and any consideration for the reanalysis hypothesis would be excluded. We hold, therefore, that only unrestricted SVC reading has any motivation for *mú*, *fí* or *dá*. This conclusion is made more compelling by cases in which these verbs do not occur as the first in a verbal series as in (24):

24. a. *ọbá* *rán* *mi* *fí* *àáké* *gé* *igi* ‘the king sent me to cut the tree with axe’

king send me use axe cut tree

b. òbá rán mi mú wọn gé igi 'the king sent me to force them to cut the tree'
king send me make them cut tree

c. òbá rán mi dá àwọn pàràkòyí yẹn dúrò 'the king sent me to stop that caravan'
king send me make them caravan that stop

Summary of Findings and Conclusion

We have seen that a serial verb is a type of construction for a sequence of verbs or verb phrases within a clause or sequence of clauses in which the syntactic relationship between the items is left unmarked. The verbs share a semantic argument, but there is no conjunction or inflection to mark co-ordination or subordination. The data above show the range of semantic concepts which can be expressed by means of the SVC in Yoruba. For instance, *pé* 'say' and synonymous verbs in a number of languages (Lord 1976:185) have undergone a reanalysis as shown in the paper. Also, in SY the verb *sọ*, *wí*, *pé* and *ní* may be used individually or in a combination of two or more in a sentence without actually any change of meaning as shown in the analysis. *Pé* may be deleted but never *kí* because it introduces the embedded clause of intention. In such constructions, *pé*, if considered as complementizer, would have no obvious identifiable function. Data were provided to buttress Lord's argument that the causative construction is a SVC and to show that causative construction as SVC covers cases which she herself least suspect or which she denies outright. Nevertheless, it does not mean that any or all of these concepts cannot be expressed by means of other syntactic constructions; and reality of this probability has, in our view, given grounds for the plethora of hypotheses on underlying structures for the SVC. The grammar of Yoruba imposes certain constraints and processes on the category VP, and these same set of constraints and processes apply to any given series of verbs and their complements in a particular VSC, and not independently to any constituent of such a series.

The paper discovers that serial verb construction in Yoruba is not classifiable into just same-subject and causative types as earlier observed. Besides, some causative verbs other than five earlier listed as shown in the paper may also be first verb of a serial verb construction and with identical semantic and syntactic consequences as those earlier five verbs. In addition, the resulting serial verb construction in each case is not always analysable to show that the object of the first verb is at the same time the logical subject of the verb.

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