
SERIAL CONSTRUCTIONS IN THE KENYANG LANGUAGE

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Abstract

Serial Verb Constructions (SVCs) are widely attested syntactic phenomenon in the languages of West Africa, Creole languages, Languages of South East Asia, Amazonia, Oceania and New Guinea. Serial Verb Constructions (SVCs) are not restricting to languages of a typological profile. They are widespread clearly recognizable robust grammatical constructions found in nearly one-third of the Languages of the world. The phenomenon of verb serialization obviously has a syntactic side. A series of two or more verbs enter into grammatical relations with each other and with other constituents of the sentence in particular ways. But the serial verbs are related to each other; if they are coordinated "small sentence, embedded predicates or heads of double or triple ups. Though what might be considered as a typical serial construction consists of a sequence of two or more verbs acting together like a single verb, different languages present a number of variations on this theme. The properties regularly found with serial construction can be seen both as key characteristics of the unity of verbal series or as consequences of this unity. Kenyang like many other African Languages has what is call serial verb constructions and they can be found in both simple and complex sentences. This paper describes the structure of this phenomenon in Kenyang; a Bantu Language spoken in the South West Region of Cameroon. The structural approach is adopted in the data presentation to highlight some of the cross-linguistic universals on Serial Verb Constructions (SVCs) in order to properly characterised the linguistic features in Kenyang.

Keywords: Serial Verbs, Tense Sequence, Consecutive Series, Cumulative Series

Introduction

The serial verb Construction, also known as (verb) serialization or verb stacking is a syntactic phenomenon where by two or more verb phrases are strung together in a single Clause. It is a Common feature of many African, Asia, and New Guinea languages. Serial verb constructions are often described as coding a single event. They are complex verbal constructions in which two or more constructions of the same type occur in a series. They are also constructions in which events occur in a series. A historical account of the Studies on SVC would

reveal a period of 136 years of Continuous relevance and sustained Interest. The question is why this sustained Interest? *Interests on Serial Verb Constructions (SVC) persist because of the Intricacies and multi-dimensional nature of the Issues surrounding the phenomenon in languages, and the Cross-linguistic Variations such that the properties of SVC on languages may not map whole sale onto those of another language* (Lord 1993, Ameka 2005).

There are three major phases in the history of Serial verb Constructions on languages. Although instances of SVCs (a *sequence of verbs which appear in what seems to be a single clause*) had been reported by Christaller (1975) and Westermann (1907, 1930) in Twi and Ewa, Niger-Congo). For Languages in West Africa; the term "Serial verb Constructions" was first introduced by Balmer & Grant (1929) and then reintroduced by Stewart (1963). Even though a few alternative names for the phenomenon in the literature, "Serial verb constructions" and "Serial verbs" have gained more general acceptance. The description of SVC in many Instances had appeared not quite adequate either because of the Intricate of the Contractions 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 question concerning the nature of verb serialization in languages arises again and again.

There are three major phases of the Investigations on SVCs In languages from 1875 to early 1960s. Apart of the pedagogical issues on the grammatical and Initial descriptions of some languages (Christaller 1975, Balms and Grants 1929; Westermann 1907, 1930; Word 1952, Westerman and Bryan 1952:I, Steward 1963 and others. *Theorizing on the defining features, syntactic sources of SVC and application of relevant theories to the syntactic representations of SVCs* (Boadi 1968, 2000, Bambose 1973, the three major phases of research in SVC sustained Interest in SVC (2).

From the mid 1990 to present day semantics of SVC demarcations between SVC and other verb sequence constructions comparative studies typological and cross-linguistic Investigation of the SVC (Schiller 1990, Lord 1993, Bearth 1999, Baker 2002, Ameka 2005, 2006, Bisang 2009 and very many others. Some of the characteristics include:

- First and foremost, they devote something that is conceptualised as a single event. From this fact, follows that they can often be translated by a single mono verbal clause.
- Serial constructions also share tense, aspects, modality, and polarity and have a single morphological realisation of these operators, attached to the last verb.

- They "share" also at least one and possibly more arguments. One verb cannot be said to be embedded in the other or be a complement of it.
- They take only one subject. Many serial languages have a structure where the object of the first verb is also the subject of the second verb.
- They have a strong tendency to lexicalise the meaning of the complex, so that the whole lexicalised complex becomes a lexicalised item.

Thus the goal of the present Study is to give a more comprehensive description of SVC in the Kenyang language both in scope and depth of analysis. To do this, we have divided this article into three sections. The first section treats the structure of serial constructions in relation to Kenyang, while section two is centered on the tense sequence. Section three presents the conclusion

The Structure of Serial Construction in Relation to Kenyang

Kenyang has the SVO Structure. Kenyang like many African languages has what is often called serial constructions. They can be found in sentences with two or more clauses; examples of these constructions are seen below

V1 V2

tSòŋ aÀ n- dɔ̀k ε-síjè bè kú nyá

S.m fut+ go market to buy meat

"He will go to the market buy meat"

V1 V 2

ǎ ɾɔ̀ ôŋ mbú εtɔ̀k bè kú èβɔ̀

S.m go past town and bought a bag

"He went to the town and bought a bag"

V1 V 2

wɔ̀ fjè ndèn bè só á-mèm εrúŋá

You put clothes to wash loc -in bucket

"You put clothes to wash in a bucket"

Since serial constructions are used to describe what is conceptualised as a single event, it contains different pieces of information lexicalised in different verbs. Here, we have noticed that the examples above present the same situation. We also realise that the subordinate clause follows the main clause and it has two events in each construction.

wɔ̀ fʲɛ̀ ndɛ̀n (first event) that of putting dresses

"You put dresses in a bucket"

bɛ̀ sṹ ámèm èru ɲá (second event) that of washing in the bucket

"to wash in the bucket"

We have also seen that in all the sentences above, the verbs are related to each other because the idea in the second clause completes that of the first. In the first example above, [r ɔ̀ŋ èsĩ̀òj] is explaining the framing event while [kwú nyá] have a support function and it is the subordinate clause. Also important is the fact that the event denoted by the verbs constitute a whole "Single event". Lord 1993:80 says "The order of verb in a serial construction typically is pragmatically ironic with respect to time". That is to say in a complex event, the first verb will express an event temporally preceding the event of the second verb. Examples are seen below in the Kenyang language.

In example I above the phrase [r ɔ̀ŋ èsĩ̀òj] "go to the market" is preceding [kwú nyá] "buy meat"

In example II [r ɔ̀ŋ èsĩ̀òj] "go to market" is preceding [kwú ɛ̀βá´] "buy a bag"

In example (3) [r ɔ̀ŋ èòká´tì] "go to school" is proceeding, and the situation continuous up till example 7.

If we want to look at their temporal preceding, we will realise that the verbs in V1 comes first because logically we go to the market first before buying whatever we want to buy. It is the same with example 2 and 3. For in example 2, one must go to the market before buying a bag. In example three, one must go to school first before learning to speak English. Still on our examples on page 46 above, we also noticed the first of the two verbs labelled V₁ can be analysed as a complex macro event on its own right. It contains both the event of "going to" in the verb root and the event of forward movement from the ground in the derivational suffix [bɛ̀] "to".

These events are then rounded up with the conjunction [nɛ̀] "and" before going to the event in the next clause.

Let us look at the example below.

tSòŋ w- ó kwú nɛ̀ ó βúɾɛ̀È βɔ̀ tSán nts^wi byò
fut you sm buy and keep bowls maize ten.

"You will/shall buy and store ten bowls of maize"

From the example above, the final verb of the chain [Búε] "store" is a verb of mixed distribution. It occurs twice in a single verb clause. We can represent [Búε] keep/store as first conflating a mid level morpheme with other semantic materials. The buying is not caused by the preceding event, but it is enabled by it. This chain is thus temporally sequenced; the buying must occur before the putting away can take place. But the two events are viewed as closely connected by the fact that two verbs are adjacent with "and" interacting between them. V_1 thus expresses the co-event of enablement in relating to the framing event of motion. Let us look at another example below.

Bo ètɔ̀k bá sɔ̀t bɔ̀ áwu' èkèt mɔ̀
 People village they take them there house chief
 "The people of the village brought them to the chief's house".

We thus have in the example above, a case of induced agency. Somebody is made to carry out the action of moving to a location by the action of somebody else, although being together with this other agent. The formerly transitive verbs [rɔ̀] "go" together with the intransitive verb [sɔ̀t] (take) add up to a chain of caused motion. We realize that the whole chain has become transitive with a syntactic direct object in its normal position after the verb complex.

Serial Construction with more than Two Clauses

Moving now to an analysis of these longer chains, we use the same framework as before and specifically, we will find the same main structure of the chains as we have found already in sentences with 2-clauses. This means a set of framing events and a first position co-event. The examples below can best explain.

nsĩôk á sèp à aÀmem mboòk, Agbor á rèm ne eyú dó`k ko'
 amfa'j enó`k
 monkey S.m down in hole Agbor S.m wisper go climb up
 tree
 "The monkey descended into the hole, Agbor whispered to the monkey; go climb up the tree".

The examples above, present three chains, two with two verbs and one with three. We also realise that the sentences above describe what is conceptualised as a single event; but contains different pieces of information lexicalised in different verbs. This is typical of serial constructions.

Example II

B̀̀ wí a-ôβen βαò se' nsí baô ʋòò nè baô rí ηí εpoôk νε' nteòm ε εταô
yaôp νε nõse' nsí νε

Children his sm that sm grand sm see and sm know where staff father their
grand has

kwε`n κε bá βíkí jáη bε ʋatí yí

fall but s.m neg want to tell him

"His grand children have seen and know, they saw the place grand father's staff
went and fell into, they did not want to tell him".

We notice that several important features of Kenyang serial construction are illustrated in the example II above. First that they occur both in main clauses and in embedded clauses, second that chains occur in both Intransitive and transitive clauses.

Tense Sequence in Serial Sentences

The term "tense sequence" is used here to refer to the tenses which are found in the successive clauses of serial sentences. In discussing these sequences it is necessary to differentiate between a consecutive series and a non consecutive or cumulative series.

Consecutive Series

As earlier said, the Consecutive series indicate a series of events regarded as occurring consecutively in time, in contrast with the cumulative series which indicates simply a number of facts supplementing each other without any consecutive implication in time. The consecutive series is by far the most common type of serial sentences with a past-sequence consecutive series being the type of sequence used typically in narrative and sometimes referred to as a narrative series.

Past Sequence

Past sequences are illustrated by the following example, most of which are relative past. In the first clause, as well as in the subsequent clauses.

Example

b ̀̀ wí bá jèt b á r ̀̀ η ba' tw ̀̀ nè nenye , ετα' ya' p á
nye`a' jwí,a' soò a' mó' wí κε`

Children his s.m run s.m go s.m come with food father their s.m eat wash
hand his then

yí βε `yí a' chí ma' ηa' k

he say he s.m is happy

"The children ran and brought food; the father ate and was filled, washed his hands, and said, he was happy".

From examples 1 and 2 above, one discovers that the consecutive past sequence, presents events that occur consecutively, that is one after the other. In example one, we realise that the events are presented successively. The bringing of the food comes first and then eating next washing of hands and finally being happy which is the last stage. From the third examples above, we also noticed that first indicates what was taking place before and immediately after the event.

Non Past-Sequence

Non past-sequence, in which the subjunctive is used in each subsequent clause are illustrated by the following examples which have the future in past clause.

tS òḡ ñ-òd òk m-βúre ñò-ñgó' mòbá'ya' yí aò chí nò-ta'ta'ḡ
fut go tomorrow see if he sm is well well

"Tomorrow I will go and see if she is well.

From the examples above, we noticed that the non past sequence expresses actions which are possibility rather than facts.

Cumulative Series

In a Cumulative series, the sequence of tense described in the section above does not operate and both forms normally belong to the same tense. In such a series, the verbal elements indicate simply a number of facts supplementing each other without any implication of consecutiveness in time. The tense involved is normally the past and the future.

Example in the past

è tS òḡ w ò kí mè emaka'j, w ò t òḡ mè` è yu' mu' wó chí
Today you make surprise me you show me kind person you is
"Today you surprised me, you showed me your real self.

Future

tS òḡ boô ba' nyè bá nyú
fut people S.m eat s.m drint

ba' tSókó ba' na' ḡtí
they sit s.m gossip
"they sad and gossip"

- 1) ba' tSókó ba' ka'
 they sit s.m accept
 "they sad and accepted"

A succession of two imperative forms can also be treated as a cumulative series although the semantic contrast between this and a consecutive series containing imperative (+) subjunctive is not always very strong. Examples are seen below. From the examples below, one can observe that the first verb is a motion verb.

Tw ò/á yágá

Come/ arrive

56) Tw ò ts ò k ò

Come sit

"Come and sit down"

57) d ò k fèp n ò k ò

Go blow hab

"go and keep blowing"

Conclusion

SVCs are clearly recognizable and highly productive grammatical Constructions in Kenyang. They are different from other closely related multi-verb Constructions. They serve to convey a broad range of semantic notions which are culturally recognizable actualities by people. The productiveness of SVC in Kenyang correlates with the scarcity of conjunctions and prepositions in the language. In this paper, we studied serial constructions in sentences. In the introductory part, we presented the literature review and the history of this construction type and tried to explain what serial constructions are. We equally gave characteristics of serial constructions. In section one; we explained using examples in Kenyang with sentences of two and more clauses. We also discovered that several important features in Kenyang serial constructions occur both in the main clauses and in the embedded clauses and that chains occurs in both transitive and intransitive clauses.

In section two, we discussed tense Sequence in serial sentences bringing out the differences between the cumulative and the consecutive series. We discovered also that with the cumulative series, the tense involved is normally the past and the future or subjunctive. Finally the last section was the conclusion.

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References to this paper should be made as follows: Mbu Martha Njui (2016), *Serial Constructions in the Kenyang Language*. *J. of Arts and Contemporary Society*, Vol. 8, No. 1, Pp. 44 - 54.
