

REVIEW ARTICLE

SOAPS AND SERIALS

Serial verbs: Grammatical, comparative and cognitive approaches. (Studies in the Sciences of Language Series, no. 8.) Edited by Claire Lefebvre. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1991. Pp. viii, 210. Paper, \$50.00.

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Serial verbs are “in,” or so it seems, in theoretical linguistics. The interest was sparked off mainly by recent work in African as well as in Caribbean Creole languages, where serial verbs are common, and, though to a lesser extent, by the observation of similar phenomena in the languages of China and surrounding areas. In general, not much theoretical ink is spilled over African languages or creole languages, but of late quite a few theoretical linguists have been prepared to make a gallant exception for serial verb constructions (SVCs). The book under review is a product of this trend. It contains six papers, all of which were originally presented at the Second Niger-Congo Syntax and Semantics Workshop, held at MIT in April 1988. According to the editor’s preface, “[t]he papers in this volume offer several analyses of verb serialization written within various theoretical frameworks: grammatical, comparative and cognitive/functional.” In fact, the first paper, by Ken Hale, is comparative in nature, as would be expected. The second, third, fourth, and sixth paper are grammatical, written by, respectively, Claire Lefebvre, Mark Baker, Yafei Li, and Richard Larson, all firmly in the GB camp. The fifth paper, by Talmy Givón, is the cognitive/functional contribution.

The first and most obvious problem with SVCs is their definition, and the second problem is that of their structural description. Serial verbs have been officially known since the 1950s, when Voorhoeve (1957) noted them in Sranan, calling them “verbal chains.” The term “serial verb” is attributed to Stewart (1963), who observed the phenomenon in Twi. Welmers (1973:366–80) devoted 14 pages to SVCs, noting that they were still unde-

fined. This has not changed in the meantime: SVCs are still only an impressionistic category, without a clear definition in terms of any theory of grammar. As a result, no unambiguous structural description is available. Different linguists assign different structures to what they see as SVCs.

The prototypical SVCs fall into a small number of categories. First, one finds the so-called *take*-serials (sometimes, too narrowly, called instrumental serials), where V_1 is a causative movement verb and V_2 a verb of movement or transfer, as in the following examples:

- (1) Kòkú só àsṣ̀ yì àxì.
Koku take crab go market
'Koku took the crab to the market.' Fon (Lefebvre, 39)
- (2) Kòkú zé flásé hélé Àsíbá.
Koku take French teach Asiba
'Koku taught French to Asiba.' Fon (Lefebvre, 39)
- (3) Roy trowé a batra frey na abrasey.
Roy threw the bottle fly to other-side
'Roy threw the bottle across.' (Sranan)

The V_2 of these so-called *take*-serials is often translated into European languages by means of a preposition or an adverb of direction. A typical subcategory is that of the so-called *give*-serials, where the V_2 is a verb of giving. The common translation of these into European languages is by means of a dative or prepositional phrase with 'to' or 'for', or their equivalents:

- (4) Kòkú só àsṣ̀ ná Àsíbá.
Koku take crab give Asiba
'Koku gave the crab to Asiba.' Fon (Lefebvre, 39)
- (5) Kofiye yε-ε adwuma ma-a Amma.
Kofi do-Past work give-Past Amma
'Kofi worked for Amma.' Akan (Schiller 1990:42)

Intransitive verbs of movement also occur as V_1 , as is demonstrated in:

- (6) Mary go na wowoyo bay krosi.
Mary go LOC market buy clothes
'Mary went to market and bought clothes.'
Sranan (Sebba 1987:100)

- (7) Dowwatraben e dropu fadon.
 dewdrops PAST DUR drip fall down
 'Dewdrops were dripping down.' Sranan (Seuren 1981:1072)
- (8) Me guare-ε me bá-à mpoaanó.
 I swim-PAST I come-PAST shore
 'I swam to the shore.' Akan (McWhorter 1992:41)

Another typical category is formed by the *surpass*-serials, where V_2 is a verb with the meaning 'surpass' and V_1 indicates a degree of some sort:

- (9) A bigi pasá di mii.
 (s)he tall surpass the child
 '(S)he is taller than the child.' Saramaccan (Byrne 1987:225)
- (10) Eifeltoren hey pasá.
 Eifel Tower high surpass
 'The Eifel Tower is (so much) higher.'
 Sranan (Voorhoeve & Lichtveld 1975:204)

Then one finds the *finish*-serials, especially in the Surinamese and Guyanese Creoles. (The Sranan form is *kabá*, from Portuguese *acabão*, whereas *don*, from English *done*, is found in Guyana.) Here, V_2 is a verb meaning 'finish', whereas V_1 is unrestricted. V_2 normally translates as a perfect tense or as an adverb meaning 'already', or a combination of the two:

- (11) Yu dyonko nofo kabá.
 you doze enough finish
 'You've dozed enough already.'
 Sranan (Voorhoeve & Lichtveld 1975:186)
- (12) Kofi nyan di ganya kabá.
 Kofi eat the chicken finish
 'Kofi has eaten the chicken already.'
 Saramaccan (Byrne 1987:225)

A further typical group is the *say*-serials, where a verb meaning 'say' functions as a *that*-complementizer after verbs of saying, believing, thinking:

- (13) Mi bribi taki you fufuru en.
 I believe say you steal it
 'I believe that you stole it.' Sranan (Seuren 1990:16)

Besides these typical or prototypical categories, there are “free” serials, i.e., serial verb constructions that do not seem to fall into any of the above categories, such as:

- (14) Kofi naki Amba kiri (en).
 Kofi hit Amba kill (him)
 ‘Kofi struck Amba dead.’ Sranan (Sebba 1987:92,104)

The examples (1)–(14) give some impression of what SVCs are like. Their definition is quite another matter. Schiller (1990) discusses some attempts at coming to a definition, and shows them failing. It is, for example, a widespread misconception that the successive verbs in an SVC should have the same semantic subject. Example (3), given above, shows that object control is equally possible, at least in Sranan and related creoles. Individual languages may of course differ in this respect. Another inadequate criterion is provided by Hale (8): “serialization corresponds to single, composite events.” Givón (140) repeats this: “[it is] the use of more than one verb ... that codes what seems to be, at least *prima facie*, a simple *single event*.” Likewise Larson (191) thinks that “serial predicates ... are understood to define a single event.” Yet we have examples like (6) above, or:

- (15) Bólá sè ẹran tà.
 Bola cook meat sell
 ‘Bola cooked some meat and sold it.’ Yoruba (Baker, 84)

Many authors want to make a distinction between coordinating and subordinating SVCs (Sebba 1987:85ff., Schiller 1990:39). In Schiller’s view, Sebba provides “strong evidence” for this distinction, based on extraction phenomena. According to Sebba, a WH-question corresponding to (6) is ungrammatical, whereas (17) is all right:

- (16) *sortu krosi Mary go na wowoyo bay Ø?
 which clothes Mary go to market buy
 ‘What sort of clothes did Mary go to market to buy?’
 Sranan (Sebba 1987:101)
- (17) san Kofi teki a nefe koti Ø?
 what Kofi take the knife cut
 ‘What did Kofi cut with the knife?’ Sranan (Sebba 1987:101)

Yet judgments do not agree on this issue. Yafei Li (105) provides (17) with a bracketed asterisk, relying on Jansen, Koopman, & Muysken (1978) and,

apparently, implying that (17) is infelicitous. In any case, whatever the status of (17), there does not seem to be a significant difference in acceptability between it and (16) if the phrase *sortu krosi* ('what kind of clothes?') is replaced with simple *san* ('what?'). The evidence does not seem to be so strong after all. Hale distinguishes, in the languages he discusses, between a coordinating construction, which he calls "clause chaining," and a "true" serial construction, which he prefers to see as subordinating, though the surface forms are identical (26).

In short, the study of SVCs is beset with ideas that lack sufficient support in those data that represent undoubted and prototypical SVCs, and the book under review is, as has been shown, no exception. Nevertheless, a certain number of sound generalizations has been made as well; these help to characterize the phenomenon of SVCs. First, trivially, an SVC consists of at least two verb forms, V_1, \dots, V_n , each V_m ($1 < m \leq n$) being a "serial verb." Constructions with more than one serial verb are not uncommon, as appears, for example, from:

- (18) Kofi fringi a tiki fadon naki Amba.
 Kofi fling the stick fall-down knock Amba
 'Kofi threw the stick and hit Amba.' Sranan (Sebba 1987:129)

where both *fadon* 'fall' and *naki* 'hit' are serial verbs. This allows us to formulate the Genuine Verb Condition (GVC) (Seuren 1990:24):

- C1 *For a construction to be classified as an SVC it is necessary for V_m to be recognized as a verb.*

Schiller (1990:42) mentions the Tense-Aspect Simultaneity Condition (TASC):

- C2 *The serialized constituents involved may only bear a single value for tense or aspect operators.*

The serial verb is thus added or embedded without any tense or aspect of its own. It simply inherits these from V_1 , as a consequence of which spreading (copying) may occur. The same goes for other logical operators: a serial verb never stands directly under a negation operator, nor can it be the exclusive scope of a quantifier. In Seuren's terms (1990), a serial verb is the predicate of a *bare S* in the Semantic Analysis of the sentence.

Schiller (1990:43), moreover, formulates the Unsunderability Condition:

- C3 *No conjunctive particle can appear in, or be inserted between, the serialized constituents without altering the meaning of the sentence.*

This feature of SVCs may be less obvious, but it has been noted by almost all researchers and is, like the previous two, normally accepted as a defining characteristic.

A further uncontroversial feature of SVCs is that serial verbs occur without a subject NP of their own. Let us speak of the Tacit Subject Condition (TSC):

- C4 *A serial verb always occurs with either an empty subject position or a subject position filled by a pronominal copy of the main subject.*

Many serializing languages show spreading of tense/aspect morphemes and other elements. One occasionally finds constructions that look like SCVs in every respect except that they have tense and/or aspect particles, obligatorily or optionally. Since these are, however, always dependent on, or are copied from V_1 , there seems to be no reason to deny them the status of SVC. This is shown in (5) above, taken from the Kwa language Akan, a language which, as we shall see in a moment, stands out for its tendency to let semantically prominent elements spread, that is be copied, later on in the sentence. A Saramaccan example is provided by Byrne:

- (19) A bi féfi di wosu **bi** kabá.
 he PAST paint the house PAST finish
 'He had painted the house already.'

Saramaccan (Byrne 1990:152)

This can be accounted for by assuming a spreading rule which copies (optionally in Saramaccan) the tense/aspect markers of V_1 , reassigning them to the serial verb or verbs in the same sentence. Such an assumption derives further support from the fact, also noted by Byrne, that Akan has a morpheme *e-* which, in Byrne's words (1990:162), is "a reduced form of the copy," or, if one wishes, a variable for the uptake of whatever tense/aspect morphemes go with V_1 . The following two sentences illustrate this process:

- (20) M' a- fa sekan **e-** twa.
 I PERF take knife PERF cut
 'I have cut with a knife.'

Akan (Byrne 1990:162)

- (21) Me-ba- fa sekan **e-** twa.
 I FUT take knife FUT cut
 'I shall cut with a knife.' Akan (Byrne 1990:162)

Negation can be copied as well, as is demonstrated in (22), where the second occurrence of the prefixed nasal ('not') is semantically vacuous:

- (22) Kofi n- ye adwuma **m-** ma Amma.
 Kofi not do work not give Amma
 'Kofi does not work for Amma.' Akan (Schachter 1974:266)

Even subject copying occurs, at least for pronominal subjects (again, most examples quoted in the literature are from Akan, which does seem fond of spreading). Sentence (8) above was an example, containing tense/aspect copying in addition to subject copying. A further example is:

- (23) Me ye-ε adwuma **me** ma-a Amma.
 I do-PAST work I give-PAST Amma
 'I worked for Amma.' Akan (Schachter 1974:260)

Interestingly, when the semantic subject of an SVC is object-controlled, and grammatical Subject Copying occurs (which will have to be ordered anyway after the process whereby the semantic SVC subject acquires its empty status), then one may expect to find sentences displaying an overt grammatical pronominal subject with the serial verb which is not the semantic subject. And, indeed, Schachter provides us with a splendid example:

- (24) Me de aburow **mi** gu msu- m.
 I take corn I flow water in
 'I pour corn into the water.' Akan (Schachter 1974:258)

As Schachter observes, the semantic subject of *gu* 'flow' can only be *aburow* 'corn', which is the grammatical object of *de* 'take'; it is the corn that is said to end up in the water (to be washed), not the speaker. In fact, says Schachter, *gu* does not even allow for a subject term denoting a single individual. Like English *disperse*, for example, it requires either a plural or a mass noun in subject position. Observations like these strongly support an analysis in terms of spreading.

A further necessary feature of SVCs, noticed so far only in Seuren (1990), is the fact that SVCs are treated, in the serializing languages, as though they were normal embedded object clauses of V_1 , even though V_1 does not seem to lend itself semantically to accepting object clauses. I have

used the term *pseudocomplementation* to refer to this phenomenon. Pseudocomplementation is a fairly widespread phenomenon in all kinds of languages. English has, for example,

(25) Harold went **fishing**.

which does not mean 'Harold went while fishing', nor 'Harold went in order to fish', as the sentence implies that Harold actually engaged in the activity of fishing. What this sentence does express is the succession of two actions: going and fishing. The way this is expressed is by means of an object complement embedding, even though the verb *go* does not of itself take a sentential or clausal object complement. Larson (193-9) notices the parallel, too, calling attention to English sentences such as:

- (26) a. Lloyd struck Horace **dead**.
 b. Carol rubbed her finger **raw**.
 c. Lloyd called us **in**.

where *dead*, *raw*, and *in*, respectively, are object-controlled "supernumerary" complements. They could be taken to function as serial verbs if only they had been verbs. What these pseudocomplements express is typically what SVCs also express: concomitant circumstance, and succession of events or consequence, whereby the order of the predicates involved mirrors the temporal order of the events related (iconicity). Constructions such as those in (25) or (26) are lexically restricted in English, as appears from the ungrammaticality of, for example:

(27) *you have kicked the vase broken

Dutch is richer in pseudocomplements than English. The Dutch translation of (27), for example, is perfectly grammatical:

- (28) Je hebt de vaas stuk gestoten.
 you have the vase broken kicked
 'You have broken the vase by kicking it.'

Moreover, Dutch allows for pseudocomplements with the verbs *wezen* 'be', *gaan* 'go', *zitten* 'sit', *liggen* 'lie', *staan* 'stand', and *lopen* 'walk', which treat their sentential pseudocomplements in exactly the way other verbs treat their normal, canonical sentential complements. Moreover, the meanings of these pseudocomplement-taking verbs undergo considerable "bleaching." A sentence like:

- (29) Hij zit ons al twee jaar om de tuin te leiden.
 he sit us already two years around the garden to lead
 'He has been leading us up the garden path for two years already.'

no longer bears any implication that the person spoken about has been *sitting* for two years. Interestingly, Dutch pseudocomplements have to be, or represent, *bare Ss*, that is, *Ss* without any complementizer and without their own tense, negation, or other logical or modal operators. Note that the structure of this Dutch sentence is entirely isomorphic with, for example, that of:

- (30) Hij probeert ons al twee jaar om de tuin te
 he tries us already two years around the garden to
 leiden.
 lead
 'He has been trying to lead us up the garden path for two years
 already.'

where the part 'lead us up the garden path' is a canonical sentential object-complement to *proberen* 'try'. There is now a widespread consensus among linguists of different persuasions and creeds that such sentential object-complements in Dutch undergo subject deletion (or whatever process one prefers to assume for the subject-controlled or object-controlled absence of an overt grammatical subject of the lower verb) in the embedded object clause, followed by a process whereby the lower verb is united with the higher verb into a single complex V-node (a process which I have always called Predicate Raising). Successive cyclic application of the latter process leads to what is known as "the Dutch Construction," that is a cluster of NPs on the left and a cluster of infinitives on the right, with crossing dependencies. The point here is that, in Dutch, canonical complements are treated in exactly the same way as pseudocomplements.

Since it does seem that all prototypical SVC-cases involve pseudocomplementation, let us formulate the Pseudocomplement Condition:

C5 *An SVC is or represents a sentential pseudocomplement.*

The conditions C1–C5, however, are, though necessary, not sufficient: they would brand Dutch as a serializing language, which one does not feel it is. A further criterion is needed to set off SVCs as the typical syndrome that has been recognized as such, excluding, for example, Dutch. That criterion seems to be the following:

- C6 *Apart from subject deletion (or silent subject), SVCs do not undergo any further syntactic treatment.*

They remain, therefore, in position as a VP embedded under the higher (main) VP. This rules out Dutch as a serializing language, since Dutch has the further rule of Predicate Raising.

What does the book under review have to contribute to the debate about the status and the correct analysis of SVCs? The first paper, by Ken Hale, deals with what he calls “verb sequencing constructions” in Misumalpan (a group of two SOV Indian languages, Miskitu and Sumu, spoken on the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua and Honduras). Verb sequencing in these languages consists, in Hale’s view, of three “distinct, but morphologically related, construction types,” that is clause chaining, complementation, and serialization (2). Grammatically and morphologically, clause chaining and serialization seem to form one single class. They are distinguished largely on semantic grounds, in a particular “cohesion of events” (26), which, as we have seen, is a false lead. The grammatical characteristics of the data are, however, less reminiscent of SVCs than of participial constructions, as Hale himself indicates by his use of the category label “participle.” Languages with participial constructions often show a distinction between “proximate” participials, and “obviative” or “absolute” participials. The subject deletion of “proximate” participials is controlled by an argument of the main verb, which is mostly the subject, although, occasionally, as in Latin, other arguments may likewise control this deletion. In the case of the “obviative” or “absolute” participials, no subject deletion occurs (cf. English *This being so, we shall have to refuse your offer*). This distinction is also found in Misumalpan, where Hale calls some, mainly obviative, cases “clause chaining” and other, mainly proximate, cases (i.e., with subject deletion) “serialization.” Sometimes his analysis leads him to assume an overlap, or ambiguity, as in the obviative case:

- (31) Witin ai pruk- an kauhw-ri.
 he me strike-OBV:3 fall-PAST:1
 (a) ‘He hit me and I fell down.’
 (b) ‘He knocked me down.’ Miskitu (Hale, 26)

The (a) version represents, in Hale’s view, the clause chaining reading, while (b) gives the serial reading. In terms of participial constructions one would say that this sentence contains an absolute participial (‘him hitting me, I fell down’) and corresponds to ‘as he hit me I fell down’ in more

proper English. The listener is free to assume as close a “cohesion” between the two events as he wishes.

With all due respect for this eminent linguist, it does seem that Hale has not seriously considered the question of whether and why the more event-cohesive cases should be considered instances of serialization. In fact, Hale presents his contribution as “an initial gesture in bringing these important Central American languages into the discussion of this aspect of grammar” (2). This may be considered kind towards the speakers and students of these languages, but perhaps not so useful if what we need most is a clear idea of what SVCs are.

The second contribution is by the editor of the book, Claire Lefebvre, on *take*-serials in the Kwa language Fon. In her view, *take*-serials are the result of the merging of the Predicate Argument Structure (PAS) of the *take*-verb with that of the V_2 , which has to be a verb of movement. Whereas the *take*-verb has the PAS [x cause [y undergo change of location]], and a verb meaning ‘go’ has the PAS [y undergo change of location to z], the serialized product of the merging operation is [x cause [y undergo change of location to z]] (59–60). This process takes place in the lexicon, not in the syntax. Lefebvre does not, or anyway not clearly, pronounce on the issue of the generality of this analysis. On p. 37 we read: “I propose that serialization is basically lexical. I show that *Take* serial constructions analyzed in this paper are projected into the syntax from the lexicon.” But in footnote 1, attached to this quote, she says: “Note that this proposal does not necessarily extend to other types of serial construction” (76). In other words, to the extent that Hale’s analysis was too wide, the analysis offered by Lefebvre is, or risks being, too narrow.

A difficulty with this approach seems to be precisely the lexical merging process. In *give*-serials, for example, such as (4) and (5) above, the verb for *give* is itself a causative: [x cause [y undergo change of location (possession) to z]]. In the spirit of Lefebvre’s proposal one expects the *take*-verb to be absorbed in its entirety by the verb for *give*. The same goes for a case like (2) above, discussed several times in the paper. The word-by-word translations offered for this sentence differ a little through the paper. On p. 39 we read “Koku take French (be) study Asiba,” but on pp. 59 and 61 it is “Koku take French teach Asiba.” And on p. 73 again, in a separate “Discussion” section added especially for this question, *só ... hélé* is glossed as ‘take ... learn’, with the PAS [x cause [y undergo change of location (... knowledge of) z]]. The question is: does *hélé* mean ‘teach’ or ‘learn’?

Lefebvre does not give an unequivocal answer. On p. 57, where the PASSES of the Fon verbs *ná* 'give' and *hélé* (now glossed as 'teach') are given, these verbs are presented as some kind of passives: [y undergo change of location (come into possession of) z], and [y undergo change of location (come into knowledge of) z], respectively. One notes, of course, that the latter is appropriate for, for example, "Latin is being taught," but does not fit the verb *learn*. Thus, there seems to be a fundamental unclarity with respect to the internal analysis of these verbs, and hence a fundamental unclarity as regards the nature of Lefebvre's proposal. What the precise facts are in Fon is a matter I cannot pronounce on.

Another difficulty with this account is the multitude of assumptions required for it to work, and the limited range of cases covered. In his comparison of Lefebvre's analysis with that proposed by Baker, Larson (193-4) comments quite rightly that

Baker's proposal appears to yield a more constrained approach to verb serialization, appealing to no extra processes (such as conflation) and little specific lexical information in accounting for the basic phenomenon. It is of course a separate question as to whether such an account is empirically adequate for the range of serializations.

Mark Baker's contribution, "On the relation of serialization to verb extensions," is written with great clarity and considerable insight, a pleasure to read, despite the flaws I believe I can detect (and despite my thorough aversion to the theoretical framework he espouses). He concentrates on the similarities between *take/use*-serials and *give*-serials on the one hand, and morphologically complex verb forms ("verb extensions") expressing the same instrumental or dative meaning as the SVCs in question on the other. He compares, in particular, the serializing Kwa language Yoruba with the Bantu languages Kinyarwanda and Chichewa. He refers (81) approvingly to Givón (1971),

who argued in a generative semantics framework that Bantu and Kwa have similar underlying structures; the difference between the two was that "predicate raising" takes place in Bantu but not in Kwa. I will argue that this insight, in an updated Government-Binding theory version, is essentially correct.

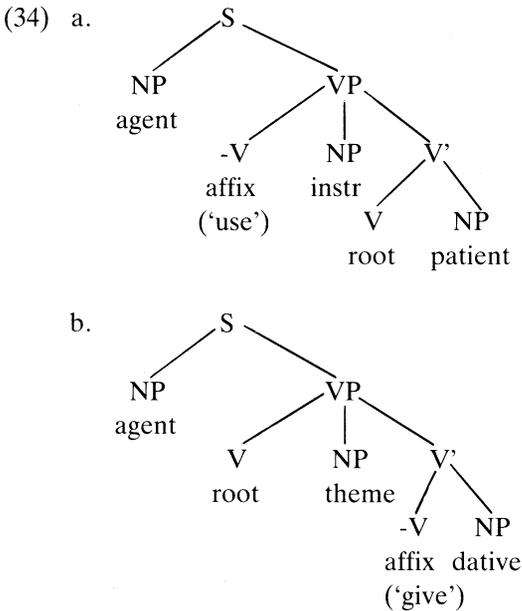
Baker thus appears to be in sympathy with the view expressed above about Dutch: if it were not for the fact that Dutch submits its pseudocomplements to Predicate Raising, Dutch would have been a serializing language. The problem with Bantu, however, is that the Predicate Raising

analysis does not seem to work. Let us, therefore, have a closer look.

Baker compares, in particular, the following pairs of sentences (79–81):

- (32) a. Olè fi òbẹ́ gún ọ̀ba.
 thief use knife stab chief
 ‘The thief stabbed the chief with a knife.’ (Yoruba)
- b. Umugabo a- ra- andik- iish- a
 man SP(=SUBJ.PREFIX)-PRES- write- INSTR-IND
 íbárúwa íkárámu.
 letter pen
 ‘The man is writing the letter with a pen.’ (Kinyarwanda)
- (33) a. Bàbá fi ẹ̀wù fún ọ̀ba.
 Baba take gown give chief
 ‘Baba gave the gown to the chief.’ (Yoruba)
- b. Yohani y- oher- er- eje Maria íbárúwa.
 John SP-send- APPL-ASP Maria letter
 ‘John sent Mary a letter.’ (Kinyarwanda)

The following structures are taken to underlie (32a,b) and (33a,b), respectively (94–5):



Clearly, the (a)-sentences fit this pattern without trouble: 'thief use knife stab chief' fits (34a), and 'Baba take gown give chief' fits (34b). (Note that the structures [34a,b] correspond to what is to be expected if SVCs are regarded as pseudocomplements with a deleted subject.) Not so, however, with the (b)-sentences. In Baker's analysis, the V directly under VP attracts ("incorporates") the lower V (= Predicate Raising). The problem is, simply, that this results in an incorrect word order. Application of the process to (32b) and (33b) gives, respectively, 'man [write-instr] pen letter' and 'John [send-give] letter Maria', instead of the correct 'man [write-instr] letter pen' and 'John [send-give] Maria letter'. Surprisingly, Baker remains silent on this issue. Unless a principled and well-motivated rule system is presented that accounts for the inverted order of the NPs in question, the analysis must be considered unsuccessful.

Baker concentrates his effort on two differences between instrumental and dative constructions in Chichewa. Apparently, Chichewa dative constructions do not allow: (a) pronominal prefixing (cliticization) of a concomitant direct object, only of the indirect object, and (b) direct object omission with transitive verbs (83). Thus, 'Mavuto molded it for the children' and 'the farmer is carving for the zebras' are judged ungrammatical in Chichewa if translated the way the sentences 'Mavuto molded the pot for them' and 'the farmer is carving with an adze' are. For many linguists, such facts would be of minor importance in the light of the general questions concerning SVCs, especially since pronominal cliticization processes are notorious for resisting principled theoretical treatment (cf. the endless literature on the irregular *lui* and *leur* in French), and so little is known anyway about the conditions for direct object omission. But in the MIT tradition, what appear to be minor facts are quickly given great prominence and impressive theoretical constructs are based upon them, often modifying established orthodoxy. Baker shares, to some extent (but less than most others), this somewhat feverish tendency, concentrating on case assignment procedures, θ -roles, unaccusatives, and what not, in order to account for the fact that the lower V in tree diagrams like (34a) or (34b) can have a direct object relation with respect to the higher V.

I hope I can be forgiven for being more than a little skeptical with regard to current MIT method and substance. The microscopic view is too often coupled with a lack of factual accuracy. In this case, one is forced to say that not only do the main features of the analysis appear to be flawed, as has just been demonstrated, but the apparently crucial condition for the

direct object relation in question is also weakly supported. The condition is, in Baker's view (87–8), that an intransitive lower V (V_2) after a transitive higher V (V_1) should be “unaccusative”. As additional confirmation, Baker quotes Sebba (1987:41), who, in Baker's words (88),

gives the following as a list of the intransitive verbs that can follow a transitive verb in an SVC in Sranan, a Caribbean creole language:

<i>tanapu</i>	'stand'	<i>kon</i>	'become'
<i>kba</i>	'finish'	<i>komoto</i>	'come out of, exit'
<i>komopo</i>	'come from'	<i>fadon</i>	'fall'
<i>opo</i>	'arise'	<i>gwe</i>	'go-away'
<i>didon</i>	'lie (down)'	<i>waka</i>	'walk'
<i>kon</i>	'come'	<i>go</i>	'go'

While no independent evidence for the unaccusativity of these verbs in Sranan or Yoruba is available, it is striking that they all correspond to clear unaccusatives in (say) Italian.

A note attached to this passage says (100):

The only Sranan exception is *waka* 'walk', for which Sebba cites only one, possibly idiomatic example (p. 45). The literature on Yoruba ... cites a large number of potential counterexamples, but there is evidence that they are not true serial verb constructions; see Baker (1989) for discussion.

But when we look at Sebba (1987:41), we find that the list in question is not presented as “a list of intransitive verbs that can follow a transitive verb,” but as a list of “fixed” V_2 , that is of V_2 “which occur again and again in the same position, establishing a paradigm in which one verb ... occurs with a variety of verbs occupying the other ‘slot’” (1987:40). Besides these paradigmatic “fixed” verbs, “free” verbs are also observed, but less frequently. (The salient “fixed” V_2 -cases are the ones that are most prone to bleaching and subsequent syntactic reanalysis.) From this, it follows immediately that the occurrence of *waka* 'walk' as V_2 is not a fixed idiom, but rather allows for “a variety of verbs occupying the other ‘slot’,” as is indeed borne out by observation.¹ Therefore, Sranan *waka* appears neither unique in being an exception to Baker's unaccusative criterion nor idiomatic. Moreover, Baker's article (1989), referred to for arguments in support of the view that the “potential counterexamples” in Yoruba are not “true” SVCs, turns out to be inconclusive (Baker 1989:546–9). It is based on subjective intuitions and on the distinction between “subordinate” and “coordinate” SVCs, which is, as we have seen, not only weakly supported by facts but also troublesome for Baker's own analysis.

In the next contribution, “On deriving serial verb constructions,” Yafei

Li does not beat about the bush. He heads straight for the central issue: what are SVCs and how do we get them from the rule systems that generate natural language sentences? He proceeds at a brisk canter, but roughshod. Li characterizes serializing languages by means of the conditions C1, C2, C3, mentioned above, adding, moreover, the condition that the order of the verbs involved reflect temporal order (iconicity), and, somewhat mystifyingly, the condition that “extractions out of such VPs are often possible.” As regards iconicity, Larson observes correctly (196, 209) that it may well pose problems for serializing SOV languages that do not extrapose V_2 , so that V_2 is followed by V_1 , and iconicity seems jeopardized. The last condition does not appear to be of much help. Li would thus seem to cast his net too wide, which becomes apparent when he discusses Korean, Turkish, English, German, and other causative constructions, as well as participials in Miskito. Causatives take real complements, not pseudocomplements, and no causative cases are found among the prototypical serial data that formed the starting point of the investigation. If causatives are considered to serialize, then why not verbs of perception and belief, in short all verbs that take sentential complements? (For participials, see the observations made above regarding Hale’s analysis of the Misumalpan data.)

Li’s analysis is based on a presumed prelexical or internal lexical analysis of a verb like *cut*, which may or may not incorporate an instrumental notion “MEANS.” This notion “MEANS” is analyzed as MEANS(X, Y), where “X and Y are variables over event-denoting notions” (105). *Cut* is analyzed either as CUT(x, y), with x and y standing for the cutting subject and the object cut, respectively, or as MEANS(X, CUT(x, y)), that is with incorporation of an instrumental predicate. No ink is spilled over subtle questions such as the satisfaction conditions of the presumed predicate MEANS: one would like to see exactly what relation between events is expressed by this predicate. I for one have been unable to provide it with anything like a plausible meaning. Nor is it made clear how his lexical analysis is cast into syntactic form. The idea here is, apparently (106), that if MEANS is not incorporated into the verb *cut*, we get a serial verb construction. Given the total lack of empirical and theoretical underpinning, it is perhaps best to ignore Li’s proposal until it is presented in a more convincing form.

Talmy Givón’s contribution, “Some substantive issues concerning verb serialization: Grammatical vs. cognitive packaging,” really is a report on a correlative study of the frequency of what Givón takes to be serial verbs in

texts and in the distribution of pauses in Tok Pisin, Kalam, and Tairora. Tok Pisin is, of course, the creole national language of Papua New Guinea, and Kalam and Tairora are indigenous SOV-languages of the New Guinea Highlands. A first, “ostensive” (?) definition of SVCs is given on p. 138: “An event/state that one language codes as a simple clause with a single verb, is coded in another [i.e., the serializing — PAMS] language as a complex clause with two or more verbs.” Then, on p. 140, an “alternative definition” is proposed: “The use of more than one verb in a *single clause* that codes what seems to be, at least *prima facie*, a simple *single event*” (italics original). The laxity of these definitions shows up when serial verbs in Tok Pisin are divided into three types on p. 147: (a) simple SVCs, i.e., probably legitimate SVCs with ‘come’, ‘go’, ‘stop’, or ‘finish’ as V₂; (b) causative SVCs; and (c) relative clause constructions. Interesting though Givón’s findings may be, they deserve no place here as they do not single out anything like a well-defined class of SVCs. His notion of SVCs is far too wide. Givón’s results may be relevant in a study on pause occurrences in relation to subordinate clauses and semiclauses; however, to drag in SVCs seems tendentious. But then, as I said in the opening sentence, serial verbs are “in.”

The last paper, “Some issues in verb serialization” by Richard Larson, starts out with a collection of prototypical cases of verb serialization, a much-needed exercise, given the widespread practice, also found in the book under review, of more or less wildly extrapolating to other kinds of phenomena, although these are perfectly well understood and analyzed without any notion of serialization. Larson also gives an indication of what kinds of (surface) structure are commonly assigned to SVCs, distinguishing between linearly coordinated, hierarchically adjoined, and complement SVCs (187), without, however, committing himself as yet as to what he considers the correct structure. Then follows a mild and very friendly discussion and comparison of the contributions put in by the five other authors in the book, doubtless reflecting a duty kindly performed during the conference at which the papers were presented. Some of the points made above are also made by Larson in this section, though he prefers to stay silent on the inevitable conclusions. Finally, there is a section where Larson presents some of his own ideas about serialization. This last section (198–207) I found the most rewarding of the entire book — a not unusual experience with books that show the signs of an intellectual struggle.

Larson first draws a parallel between SVCs and the well-known phenomena of secondary predication in English and other European lan-

guages, giving examples such as (26a–c) above.² On the basis of this parallel, he proposes (205–6):

The structural and semantic analogies observed above suggest that verb serialization might actually be a form of secondary predication similar to what is found in English. This in turn suggests an interesting view of what the difference between serial and nonserial languages really amounts to. Notice first that while secondary predicates come in a variety of categories in English, one predicate category is conspicuously missing: VP. Simple verb phrases never serve as secondary predicates, no matter what their semantics...

The point of contrast here seems clear-cut: assuming serial constructions to be a form of secondary predication, the chief difference between a “serializing language” like Yoruba and a “nonserializing language” like English reduces to a matter of what secondary predicate categories are allowed.

Accordingly, Larson assigns SVCs the structural position and properties of complement object clauses with subject-deletion controlled by either the higher subject or the higher object. The whole is cast in terms of GB-grammar, which, in my judgment, is quite unnecessary and probably counter-productive in the end. But the basic idea is precisely what was proposed above and also in Seuren (1990, 1991): SVCs are subordinate complements. Whether they are called “secondary” or “pseudo-,” or whether this insight is presented in terms of GB-grammar or Semantic Syntax, is neither here nor there. We have here the basis for a proper structural account of SVCs. Obviously, it cannot be the last word on SVCs. A great deal still has yet to be sorted out, and important new insights are still to be discovered. But it’s a good beginning.

NOTES

1) The example given by Sebba (1987:45) is an instance of literary Sranan produced in the '60s:

Mofoneti kowru tyari mi dyodyo **waka** na mindri den krin worku.
 mouth-night cold carry my ghost **walk** LOC middle thePL clean clouds
 ‘The cold of nightfall carries my spirit **around** among the holy clouds’.

(Sebba’s mistranslation of *worku* as ‘works’ has been corrected; ‘work’ translates as *wroko* in Sranan.)

2) In Seuren (1990:20) similar examples are given, and for the same reason:

- (i) John hammered the nail flat.
- (ii) I laughed myself silly.

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