

STILL NO SERIALS IN SESELWA
A REPLY TO “SESELWA SERIALIZATION AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE”
BY DEREK BICKERTON

Pieter A. M. Seuren
University of Nijmegen

0. *Introduction*

No one will deny Derek Bickerton his share of pluck. It showed in 1981, when he challenged the linguistic world with his daring bioprogram hypothesis. He has since been massively criticized, chided, strafed, called names and what not, and only rarely been praised. Yet he has provoked an avalanche of lively and fruitful debate, and the overall effect on the field of creole linguistics has clearly been beneficial.

Now, one of the main planks in his platform is the claim that all creole languages possess serial verb constructions, so that verb serialization must be considered a feature of the innate human language faculty, the bioprogram, as it manifests itself directly in a language, unhampered by culture or history. The problem, however, is that there is at least one class of creole languages, the French-based Creoles of the Indian Ocean, which seem to lack serial verbs, and B's critics have not failed to point this out. Clearly, if this is so, the bioprogram hypothesis as presented by B is in serious jeopardy. So, with his characteristic determination, he packs his suitcase and is off to the Seychelles and Mauritius, to prove that he is right. I think this is admirable.

But has he proved it? In his paper “Seselwa serialization and its significance,” printed in JPCL 4:2 (Bickerton 1989:155–83), he claims he has and presents his evidence. The title of this reply shows that I do not believe he has established his case. Let me give my reasons. In summary, I have problems with his data, his diagnosis of serial verbs, and with his linguistic

analyses. These aspects will be dealt with below, in that order.

In order to stand on somewhat firmer ground, I have interviewed a Seychellois family that have lived in Holland (as political refugees) since 1986, showing them B's Seselwa data. The members of the family who were interviewed were the father (age 45), the mother (somewhat younger), and two sons, of age 14 and 16, respectively. The mother taught Seselwa at elementary school level back in the Seychelles. The father was also in the teaching profession. I had one extended interview jointly with the four members of the family. I showed them all of B's Seselwa sentences, but without his glosses. As I showed them each written sentence, I read it aloud in my best Seselwa, under an unstructured intonation contour. My first question in each case was: "What does this mean?" More often than not there were immediate and simultaneous protests at the sentences presented. In those cases I would say: "Never mind the sentence, but what does it mean?" In some cases, a different version of the sentence with what they took to be that meaning was produced (usually some form of coordination). In other cases I had to give them B's gloss, after which I asked: "How would you express this?" The results of this interview will be specified below. They can be regarded as a spot-check of B's data.

1. *Bickerton's Seselwa Data*

Virtually all of B's data was drawn from a collection of recently recorded oral narratives kept in the National Archives of the Seychelles. The narratives, B informs us, were partially transcribed, and the original transcription was carefully checked against the recording. He specifies the ages of the respective speakers, all of a very advanced age and ranging from seventy-four to ninety-six at the time of the recording. B warns us that his material is, therefore, likely to represent a conservative variety of the language. Yet he has checked his crucial sentences with contemporary speakers, and found sufficient support to uphold his thesis that serial verbs are rife even in present-day Seselwa. He finally assures us, in global terms, that "the sentences cited ... were produced without any internal pause and under a single intonation contour" (1989:156).

On the whole, linguists are not models of methodological purity when it comes to collecting data. This is inevitably so, because it is far from clear what a proper methodology would consist of. Moreover, the "field" is not a laboratory, and it is difficult enough to elicit the data one needs; and ask-

ing for grammaticality judgments (which, as has been made clear, I have avoided doing with my Seychellois informants) is in itself a hazardous business. Data attested in literary works or, *faute de mieux*, in carefully composed texts is generally preferable, but not always easy to come by. Moreover, one is usually restricted by limitations of time and facilities. So we do what is possible. And I am sure that is what B did. Yet, can we be confident that he has really been impartial enough to allow for the possibility of alternative transcriptions and analyses? What, one wonders, was the quality of the phonetics of those speakers of such advanced age? How many younger speakers were interviewed? How were they interviewed? What were the percentages of acceptance or rejection, and how were they distributed over parameters of age, education, socio-economical status, and the like? B gives his readers vague and impressionistic indications of these matters, and that is, in all likelihood, the best he could do, given the practical limitations of his study. Yet the questions remain, and the results of my spot-check are not encouraging. Let us first consider a question regarding the transcriptions.

When I submitted B's Seselwa sentences to my four informants, there was one frequently recurring pattern in their responses: what is interpreted by B as serialization was often interpreted by them as coordination, and they would, if necessary, modify the sentence so that it became more clearly a coordinated structure. In some of these sentences the phonology is such that it would have been difficult to decide, on hearing the recording, whether the coordinating conjunction ê ('and', pronounced as nasalized low [ɛ]) was or was not present. It must be noted that there is, historically and even to some extent synchronically, a tendency for stressed word-final vowels to undergo nasalization in Seselwa. This sometimes affects also the final *-e* of a verb. These cases were (I give B's numbering after the oblique stroke; ê is added in parentheses):

- (1/15) Lulu n prâ papa n ale <ê> n mâze.
 wolf PERF take daddy PERF go <and> PERF eat
 'Wolf has taken daddy, gone, and eaten [him].'
- (2/30) Ban pirog in sove <ê> in ale.
 ThePL boat PERF escape <and> PERF go
 'The fishing boats got away.'
- (3/34) I fer zot dite <ê> met pare.
 she make them tea <and> put ready
 'She made them tea and put [it] ready.'

- (4/35) I rase griye <ê> don nu pu nu mâze.
 he pull cook <and> give us for eat
 'He pulled [it] up, cooked [it], and gave [it] us to eat.'
- (5/36b) Zot in tyôbo en zwazo n griye <ê> n mâze.
 they PERF catch a bird PERF cook <and> PERF eat
 'They've caught a bird, cooked and eaten it.'
- (6/46) Pirog i ale i al serse <ê> i amenê.
 boat it go it go seek <and> it bring
 'The fishing boat went, searched, and brought [them].'
- (7/48) I fer sô dite <ê> i don li.
 she make his tea <and> she gave him
 'She made his tea and she gave [it] to him.'

My informants were all adamant that *ê* should be considered to be present in (1)–(5). In (6) and (7) they expressed a preference for *ê*, but accepted the sentences without it. They did not accept these sentences, however, without both *ê* and the second *i*. If the second *i* was omitted, *ê* became necessary, as in (3/34).

B's (18)

- (8/18) Zot amenê vin zet isi don ban blâ isi.
 they bring come put here give thePL white here
 They brought them here to give them to the whites here.

was met with perplexity by my informants. After some discussion, they proposed that the best minimal improvement would be as in (9):

- (9) Zot amenê ê vin zet isi pu don ban blâ isi.

with the conjunction *ê* inserted after *amenê* and the purposive complementizer *pu* before *don*.

B is at pains to analyze the occurrences of *i* in (6) and the second occurrence of *i* in (7) as a (nonpast) tense particle. This was vehemently denied by my informants, who insisted that all occurrences of *i* were pronominal, thus confirming the resumptive pronoun analysis. B rightly notes that under this analysis sentences like (6) or (7) stand no chance of being interpreted as having serial verbs: the resumptive pronoun analysis leaves no choice but to regard (6) and (7) as coordinated, and not as serialized structures. In his comments on (6/46), B rejects the coordination analysis on the following grounds:

- (a) The particle *i* is a tense marker (and hence not pronominal), copied for the serials ν [*al serse*] and *amenê*.
- (b) There is no overt marker of subordination or coordination.
- (c) There is no overt object going with *serse* or *amenê*, although these verbs subcategorize for one.
- (d) There is “no change or break in the intonation contour such as would normally be found in conjoined clauses.”

As regards argument (a), we have already seen that this does not tally with my informants' native intuition. We shall see below, section 3, that it is not a very good analysis for other reasons as well. Argument (b) begs the question: it must at least be considered possible that there was an *ê* between *serse* and *i amenê*, and even if there was not, the sentence can still be interpreted as an asyndetic coordination. Argument (c) is based on B's criterion (2d): serial verbs take zero anaphoric objects. We shall come back to this in section 2, but here we can notice straightaway that, whether this criterion is or is not correct, it is of no use here, since null pronouns are apparently common in Seselwa anyway. Consider, e.g., sentence (4), B's (35), where the main verb *rase* (from French *arracher*), which is also subcategorized for an object NP, lacks one. And this verb can in no way be interpreted as serial, since it is a main verb. Likewise for B's sentence (18), given as (8/18) above, where the main verb *amenê* has a null object pronoun instead of overt *zot* ('them'). Moreover, in (6/46) itself, the tacit object pronoun of *amenê* is in no way anaphoric to any prior NP in the sentence, so that B's criterion (2d) does not apply. (I am using the term “anaphoric” here in the normal, not the GB, sense.) It is apparently quite possible for pronominal object NPs not to have an overt phonological form, independently of whether or not we have serials. Argument (d) can be ruled out on the grounds that it is perfectly normal for coordinated structures to receive one global unbroken intonation contour. It may be true, as B says, that intonational breaks are normally found in conjoined clauses. But it certainly is at least equally normal for such breaks not to occur. In conjunctions that express subsequent events, such intonational breaks are even somewhat abnormal, an enveloping contour being much more normal. (The reader may try reading out loud a sentence like: *He took the money and gave it to his wife.*) Pending our discussion of *i*, not much appears to remain of B's argument for serialization in sentence (6). By extrapolation, there is also little justification for the assumption of serials in the sentences (1)–(5) and (7).

How about the other data adduced by B in his paper? Regarding his sentences (3) and (4), my informants were in full agreement:

- (10/3) Prâ u seo al sers dilo.
take your bucket go seek water
'Take your bucket and go get water.'
- (11/4) *Mo ti prâ mô seo al sers dilo.
I PAST take my bucket go seek water
'I took my bucket and went for water.'

(10/3) was considered fully acceptable, but interpreted as a coordinate structure. When I asked the father if he would put in any punctuation marks, he immediately put a comma after *seo*. (11/14), on the other hand, was rejected, as it was by most of B's informants. Clearly, this rejection is consistent with the analysis of (10/3) as a conjunction: if *ti + prâ* is a verbal island, $\sqrt{[ti\ prâ]}$, then Conjunction Reduction would not be allowed to cut into it, and *ti* would have to be repeated in the second conjunct. In fact, my informants corrected (11/4) into the properly coordinated sentence:

- (12) Mo ti prâ mô seo e mo ti al sers dilo.

The following of B's sentences were not liked, the version with inserted *ê* being clearly preferred:

- (13/7) Zot prâ balye koko <ê> bat Kazer.
they take broom coconut and beat Kaiser
'They took a coconut broom and beat the Kaiser.'
- (14/8) Zâfâ prâ zepeng nuris <ê> pik sô lamê.
child take pin nurse <and> prick his hand
'The child took a safety pin and pricked his hand.'
- (15/12) Zot ti prâ balye koko <ê> ti bat Kazer.
- (16/20) Mô frer ti tir larzâ <ê> ti don mwâ.
my brother PAST pull money <and> PAST give me
'My brother pulled out money and gave it to me.'

Additionally for B's (14), the object pronoun *zot* was considered indispensable:

- (17/14) I prâ sa de ti lisyê <ê> tuy <zot>.
he take the two little dogs <and> kill <them>
'He took the two little dogs and killed them.'

The father observed, in this case, that the imperative form would be all right:

- (18) Prâ sa de ti lisyê tuye.
 'Take those two little dogs and kill them.'

But he still interpreted this as a conjunction. Apparently, asyndetic coordination (with zero object pronoun) is more acceptable in Seselwa imperatives than in assertions; cf. example (10/3). One notices also that asyndetic coordination is also relatively acceptable in assertions expressing events in immediate succession, provided *i* is used and repeated with the second conjunct. This became apparent when we discussed (7/48) above. It appears again with B's (49), (50), (51):

- (19/49) I prâ sa ban depuy i met âba sô blêket.
 he take thePL feather he put below his blanket
 'He took the feathers and put them below his blanket.'
- (20/50) I tom ater i dormi.
 he fall down he sleep
 'He fell down unconscious.'
- (21/51) Apre i prâ sô semê i ale.
 after he take his way he go
 'After that, he left.'

These sentences were considered acceptable, though the versions with inserted *ê* were also accepted, if not preferred.¹ B's (33) and (34) were rejected by my informants; they were corrected into versions with either *ê*, or *i*, or *ê i* inserted:

- (22/33) Ban madam prezâ i tir zot sapo <ê/i/ê i>
 thePL woman then they pull their hat <and they>
 bat lamê.
 clap hand
 'The women then took off their hats and clapped.'
- (23/34) I fer zot dite <ê/i/ê i> met pare.
 she make their tea <and she> put ready
 'She prepared their tea.'

What is going on here is not clear to me right now. Perhaps it is the expression of a rapid succession of events that favors asyndesis, but I have no explanation for the connection with *i*. In any case, no matter how we interpret *i*, no compelling reason has been provided so far for not treating cases like (19–21) as conjunctions. In a moment, when we discuss *i*, we shall see that, instead, there are compelling reasons for treating them indeed as conjunctions.

Similar asyndetic coordination is found in B's (26) and (27):

(24/26) Premye fiy i dir ek sô ser — i koze i
 first girl she say to her sister — she talk she
 dir: "Alor..."

say well

'The first girl said to her sister — she said: "Well..."'

(25/27) Dezyem ser i repon i dir: "Mwanpli."
 second sister she reply she say me neither

'The second sister replied: "Me neither."'

On the assumption, which I will substantiate below, that *i* is the (resumptive) third person pronoun '(she)he/it/they', these sentences are common or garden variety examples of a folksy narrative style: "Then she said to her sister, she told her, she said, 'Well...'"

In one case (apart from (8/18) quoted above), B's (40), my informants insisted that the complementizer *pu* ('for to') should be inserted:

(26/40) I ti âvoy mwâ al apel dokter <pu> vin get
 he PAST send me go call doctor <for to> come see
 mô ti frer.

my little brother

'He sent me to call the doctor to see my little brother.'

This case has a certain importance in that it is one of the very few instances, together with (8/18), in B's material which are really suggestive of serialization, provided the material is sound. It cannot be interpreted as an (asyndetic) coordination, and the tacit (deleted) subject of *vin* is controlled by the preceding object *dokter*, not, as in practically all of B's other cases, by the higher subject. We shall see in section 2 that a serial interpretation of such cases (i.e., without *pu*) depends crucially on the lexical selection restrictions that make such a construction possible. That is, if (26/40) is grammatical for certain speakers, as B says it is, these speakers' variety of Seselwa will have to be investigated further for the restrictions that are valid for this kind of construction. Isolated examples may be suggestive of serialization, but a definitive diagnosis will depend on how they are embedded in the language as a whole. Unfortunately, (26/40) is, apparently, not part of B's recorded corpus; rather, it was made up and tested with a number of informants. And, again unfortunately, B provides no details regarding the number of informants involved and his methods of testing the sentence. My own spot-check was negative for this sentence. No sooner had I finished reading the

sentence than the mother exclaimed: “*Pu vin get mô ti frer!*,” thus correcting the sentence, and the other three agreed wholeheartedly. Yet I am prepared to give B the benefit of at least my doubt, and treat (26/40) as an acceptable Seselwa sentence. We shall come back to this case in section 2.

2. *The Diagnosis of Serial Verbs*

B notes, correctly, that serial constructions have so far not been defined at all (or have been badly defined) in the literature. Yet, in order to establish whether or not Seselwa has serials, one had better define them properly. Therefore, B provides a definition, or at least a set of diagnostic criteria, in one single paragraph and four notes. For B, sentences with serial verbs must meet the following conditions:

- (a) They contain more than one verb, but only one overt subject.
- (b) They contain no overt markers of coordination or subordination.
- (c) Either the first verb only is tensed, or all verbs carry the same tense as the first verb.
- (d) If a noun phrase occurs more than once, its second occurrence will be in the form of a zero element.
- (e) The entire structure is uttered without any of the pauses, changes of pitch, or other supra-segmental phenomena normally associated with sentences that contain more than one clause.

Four endnotes are added. The first one, note 3, is a comment to (a), to the effect that Byrne (1987) has reported serial constructions with an overt subject. B expresses himself in favor of considering such cases, also found in Seselwa, as being serials, yet will not insist on that here: for the paper at hand he will stick to (a) as it stands. The second, note 4, attached to (c), also refers to Byrne (1987), where Saramaccan sentences are reported with different tense/aspect markers in different clauses. B is prepared to regard these as cases of “null conjunction,” i.e., asyndesis. Note 5, the third one, is an apology for criterion (d). This criterion, B says, “has been frequently noted but seldom discussed.” He promises a full treatment in an as yet unavailable manuscript. Note 6, the last one, is given after (e), and is a cavalier reference to the question of the constituent status of serial constructions, a topic not touched upon anywhere else in the paper.

It should be observed that when one sets out to define serials, what one does is, in a sense, make explicit, and thus formalize, a pretheoretic, intuiti-

tive notion formed by descriptive linguists some thirty years ago, when they hit upon serials in several specific areas, in particular, China, West Africa, and the Caribbean. B's claim that serials are a creole universal is based upon that intuitive notion. Consequently, when the claim is tested, one should try to define serials in such a way that the definition stays as close as possible to the original intuitive notion that was prompted by the well-known characteristic phenomena observed by our older colleagues in the areas concerned. It is in this light that I shall now discuss B's attempt at defining serials.

Let me reply to the notes first, whereby note 6 can be ignored, it being too summary to deserve further comment. As regards note 3, it is fortunate that B does not follow Byrne in this respect. To allow serials to have overt subjects is totally at variance with the original intuitive notion of serials mentioned in the preceding paragraph. If overt subject clauses are let in as serials, we are no longer discussing the claim made in B's bioprogram hypothesis, but something quite different. Note 4 needs no comment other than that it is not clear why B stops short of also permitting serials with tenses different from the main verbs, having already declared himself prepared to allow for serials with an overt subject. But we need not harp on it, since in this paper B stays on the safe side.

Note 5 lacks conviction, and criterion (d) thus remains doubtful. Sebba (1987) gives many examples in Sranan of constructions with overt objects, such as:

- (27) Kofi naki Amba kiri en.
 Kofi hit Amba kill her
 Kofi hit Amba and killed her. (p. 92)

He prefers to treat such cases as asyndetic coordinations rather than serials, but, like B, fails to give reasons. Nevertheless, he does not include it in his list of criteria (1987:86–7) for serial verbs. One may guess that B has included such a condition in order to rule out English and other European languages as possible candidates for serial constructions. But then one wonders why one should insist on zero object anaphors and not, or not so much, on zero subjects (cf. his note 3). Clearly, if the absence of null anaphoric pronouns were the only reason why, e.g., English is not a serializing language, the dividing line would be so paper thin as to be unrealistic. In any case, the question of whether or not (d) applies as a defining criterion does not arise since, as we have seen, Seselwa also has

zero pronouns as arguments to main verbs, as shown in connection with (4/35), (8/18), and (6/46) above. Moreover, B himself accepts as a serial complement *vin ed li* ('to come and help him') in his (39), quoted below as (32/39), where the overt pronoun *li* is coreferential with the main subject *i*. It seems sensible, therefore, to ignore criterion (d) from here on.

The other criteria clearly echo Sebba (1987:86–7), to which B fails to refer. There is, however, a difference from Sebba's criteria, in that — disregarding (d) — the latter are more restrictive on central points than the ones B gives here. Sebba does not give B's criterion (e), but, as has already been pointed out, this intonational criterion is of little use since sentences containing embedded infinitivals, and often even overt conjunctions, simply do not have "pauses, changes of pitch, or other suprasegmental phenomena normally associated with" them. But leaving the criteria (d) and (e) aside, one sees that Sebba has, in addition, the following conditions not given by B:

- (f) "The actions expressed by the verbs are either simultaneous or consecutive, and all verbs are interpreted as having the same tense."
- (g) "Negation, whether marked once or more than once, applies to the whole string."
- (h) "Either: the semantic subject of V_i is the subject of V_{i+1} , or: the object of V_i is the semantic subject of V_{i+1} ."

The conditions (f)–(h) are no doubt correct and realistic: serials express concomitant circumstances, purpose or result; they cannot stand under their own negation operator; and their tacit subject can be controlled by either the subject or the object of the higher verb.

What is interesting is that, even with his more restrictive set of conditions, Sebba complains (1987:87):

Unfortunately, this set of six criteria does not uniquely define a universal phenomena which we can call "serial verbs." For example, there are constructions in English which appear to satisfy all these criteria, yet few would want to call English a "serializing" language; and if there are such constructions in English, they may exist in languages which have been labelled as "serializing," so that "serial verbs" may in the end turn out to be no more than familiar English constructions in an exotic disguise, mere artifacts of a different way of doing morphology or syntax.

What Sebba means is that an English sentence like

- (28) John saw Bill tame the horse.

would qualify as containing the serial construction *tame the horse* if his criteria, as given in Sebba (1987:86–7), were considered to be not only necessary but also sufficient. The same applies to B's criteria, if one disregards the marginal condition (d). Accordingly, we may conclude that the criteria provided by B do not suffice to diagnose serials: they are far too lax. It is hardly surprising that B finds it relatively easy to diagnose serial verbs in Seselwa: If — apart from condition (d) — English qualifies for serialization, then why not Seselwa? In other words, further criteria are needed.

In Seuren (to appear-a) and, in particular, Seuren (to appear-b) I have made an attempt at providing defining conditions for verb serialization, apart from those given by Sebba. These amount to the following:

- (29) a. A serial verb occurs in a so-called *ungoverned pseudocomplement*.
 b. This pseudocomplement is *lexically bare*.
 c. The predicate of the pseudocomplement must be a *surface verb*.
 d. The pseudocomplement undergoes no other syntactic treatment than *Secondary Subject Deletion*.

These conditions require some comment. The phrase *lexically bare* is meant to express the fact that serial complements take no separate tense and no separate negation. Condition (29c) is obvious, but has to be stated in light of examples such as *He cut his face open*, where *open* is a pseudocomplement but would never qualify as a serial. When we speak of *Secondary Subject Deletion*, or SSD, all that is meant is that serials have a tacit subject which is controlled by the higher subject or by the higher object. Criterion (29d) entails that serial complements remain untouched by any sentential complementation rule in the language other than SSD.

More directly important now is condition (29a). By *pseudocomplement* is meant a sentential complement placed under a governing verb whose lexical meaning requires no sentential complementation. Verbs like *help* or *let* take a *proper* complement, since it is impossible to help, or let, someone without there being something with which one helps that person, or which one lets that person do or be. But verbs like English *go* or *come* can take a pseudocomplement, as in (30a); not, however, other verbs of movement, like *walk*, as is demonstrated in (30b):

- (30) a. Angus went fishing in his car.
 b. *Angus walked fishing in his car.

Pseudocomplementation is found in many if not all languages. Dutch, for example, has sentences corresponding to “he sits/walks/lies/stands to eat” meaning “he is eating while sitting/walking/lying/standing.” The complement that corresponds to *to eat* is treated as if it were a normal complement, as in e.g., “he wants to eat.” It is characteristic for English, Dutch, and most (or all) other European languages that pseudocomplementation is allowed only under certain higher governing verbs, as is demonstrated in (30). Such verbs are listed in the lexicon as allowing for (certain types of) pseudocomplements. This form of pseudocomplementation is called *governed pseudocomplementation*. Other languages, on the contrary, have *ungoverned pseudocomplementation*, that is, the possibility of adding a pseudocomplement wherever that seems semantically appropriate, irrespective of the higher governing verb — although in those languages there tend to be restrictions on the kind of verb that goes into the pseudocomplement (cf. Sebba 1987:162–209).² What is found characteristically in serializing languages is precisely *ungoverned pseudocomplementation*. This in itself is a good reason for not classifying the European languages as being of the serializing type.

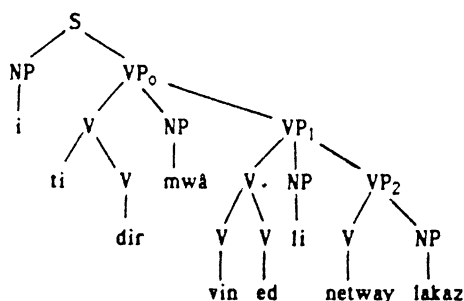
It is also useful in deciding for some of the examples presented by B whether they are cases of serialization. This applies in particular to his (38)–(40). (40) has already been quoted above as (26/40), and is repeated here for convenience, but without *pu*; the other two are as in (31/38) and (32/39), respectively:

- (31/38) Mo dir per vini.
 I say priest come
 ‘I told the priest to come.’
- (32/39) I ti dir mwâ vin ed li netway lakaz.
 he PAST say me come help him clean house
 ‘He told me to come and help him clean the house.’
- (26/40) I ti âvoy mwâ al apel dokter vin get mō ti
 he PAST send me go call doctor come see my little
 frer.
 brother.
 ‘He sent me to call the doctor to see my little brother.’

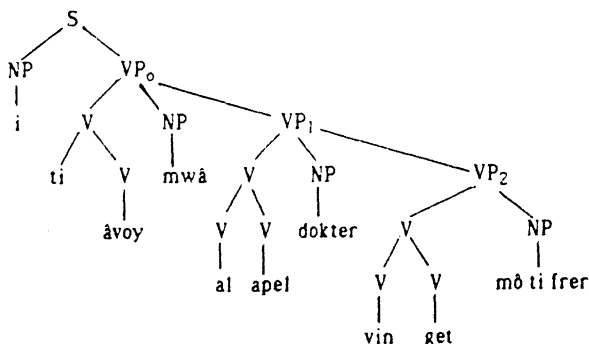
First the verbal clusters \surd [vin ed], \surd [al apel], and \surd [vin get]: These cannot be

cases of serialization of the second verb under the first verb in each cluster. Although what we have here is pseudocomplementation (each second verb is a pseudocomplement to each first verb), this is clearly *governed*, and not *ungoverned* pseudocomplementation. Moreover, the absence of the final vowel in the first verbs (*al<e>*, *vin<i>*) shows that these verbs are VP-internal and thus not followed by an embedded VP. This is clearly the result of Predicate Raising, as described in Seuren (1986) and a few other places. Such clusters have the structure $[_v[_{al}[_{v}[_{ape}]]]$, which is atypical for serial constructions, as is stated in my condition (29d) above. Fortunately, B does not claim that these clusters contain their second verbs as serials under their first verbs. All he says about such sentences is that (32/39) and (26/40) are “much more complex constructions” of the type exemplified by (31/38).

Yet, (31/38) is obviously not a case of serialization, because the complement *vini* is clearly an ordinary object-complement to the governing verb *dir*, and not a pseudocomplement. Analogously, $_{vp}[_{vl}[_{vin} ed] li]$ in (32/39) is, though an embedded VP, not a serial construction, but a proper object-complement to *dir*. And, again analogously, the VP *netway lakaz* in the same sentence is not a serial either, but, again, a proper object-complement to *ed<e>* (‘help’). Sentence (32/39) contains no serial verb at all, and has, in rough terms, the surface structure:



The analysis of (26/40) (without the purposive complementizer *pu*, which was required by my informants) proceeds in much the same way, except that the final VP *vin get mô ti frer* is unlikely to be a proper complement to its higher verb *apel<e>* (‘call’), and much more likely to be a pseudocomplement. The surface structure of (26/40) is very much like that of (32/39):



In order to decide now if the VP_2 is a serial construction under *apel*⟨e⟩, we must find out whether it is a case of governed pseudocomplementation or of ungoverned pseudocomplementation. All other conditions are fulfilled: VP_2 is, and cannot but be, lexically bare; it contains the surface verb *vin*⟨i⟩, and no other rule than SSD has applied. The answer thus depends on whether condition (29a) is also fulfilled. In order to test this, one will have to check if the same construction can be used with any other semantically appropriate verb besides *apel*⟨e⟩. I have not investigated the matter, but my guess is that the result will be negative, so that we have here again governed pseudocomplementation, and not the ungoverned variety.

Sentence (8/18), also repeated here for convenience:

- (8/18) Zot amenê vin zet isi don ban blâ isi.
 they bring come put here give thePL white here
 'They brought them here to give them to the whites here.'

contains the cluster $\sqrt{[vin\ zet]}$ under *amenê*. As has been said above, this sentence was met with perplexity by my informants. Given the vehement reaction of all four informants, who failed to understand what the sentence was supposed to mean, I am reluctant to accept it as it stands. And my trust in this sentence is not enhanced either by B's information that it is taken from an oral narrative by a ninety-six year old speaker. I am inclined to conjecture an occurrence of *ê* before *vin* (hardly a conjecture after the final *-ê* of *amenê*), and *ê* or, rather, *pu* before *don*: cf. (9) above. If, however, this sentence is not amended and left as it is given by B, it is best interpreted as a threefold asyndetic coordination, i.e., as *Zot amenê, vin zet isi,*

don ban blâ isi. The lack of convincing evidence for serialization in the language in general would favor this interpretation. Yet it remains curious that my informants rejected this sentence so emphatically.

B's (29)

(35/29) Prezâ seren i tôle vini.
 then red cardinal they fall come
 'Then the red cardinals descended (in great numbers).'

was accepted by my informants after some hesitation. But once it was accepted, they liked it a great deal, the expression *tôle vini* being regarded as perhaps a little far-fetched but certainly very suggestive of the cloud of birds descending on the rice crop, as it is told in the story, which my informants also knew. There is no reason, however, to see a serial here. The Indian Ocean Creoles allow for the formation of lexicalized compound verbs, patterned after (antiquated) French examples like *saisir récupérer* ('impound', lit. 'grab-salvage'). A small number of French verbs originated this way,³ such as *bousculer* ('knock over') from *bouter-culer*, or *galvauder* ('botch', 'bungle') from *galer-vauder*. They are numerous in Mauritian Creole: *mâze bwar* ('eat 'n drink'), *mâze dormi* ('eat and go to bed'), *marse ale* ('go on foot'), *bate råde* ('beat up mutually', lit. 'beat give back'), and so on. Such compound verbs are a lexical phenomenon; they have nothing to do with serial verbs, as appears from the impossibility of, e.g.

(36) *I ti mâz sô dipê dormi.
 he PAST eat his bread sleep
 'He ate his bread and slept.'

in either Mauritian Creole or Seselwa. It would seem that my informants' hesitation before they accepted (35/29) may well be attributed to the fact that the combination *tôle vini* is not firmly lexicalized in the language, yet recognizable as a variation on the verb composition theme, and a possible candidate for full lexicalization.

3. *Analysis and Interpretation*

In discussing the data in section 1, and the definition of serial verbs in section 2, we have already provided an analysis and interpretation for a great deal of the material. So far, we have not encountered any decisive evidence for serialization in Seselwa. Even accepting the data presented by B, we can effortlessly interpret his alleged serial constructions as (asyndetic)

coordinations. One indispensable element in B's argument is the interpretation of *i* as a (nonpast) tense particle — for if this *i* is regarded as a (resumptive) third person pronoun, the sentences (6/46), (7/48), (19/49), (20/50), (21/51), (24/26), and (25/27) *cannot* be interpreted as serial constructions (unless, of course, serials with overt subjects are allowed, as is suggested in B's note 3; we have seen, however, that this would take us a very long way indeed from what is commonly understood as being a serial verb). Moreover, by extrapolation, the sentences (1/15), (2/30), (5/36b), (15/12), and (16/20) would fall as well, based as they are on tense/aspect-copying for serials. This would, in its turn, fatally weaken the argument for those cases, such as (8/18), (10/13), (13/7), (14/8), (17/14), (22/33), (23/34), and (31/38), where no tense/aspect particle appears. The remaining cases would not make much of a database any more, one fears. So let us now look at the "mysterious" *i*.

One may observe first that B's assignment of tense/aspect-copying to what he sees as Seselwa serials is not very solidly based anyway. If such copying exists for serials in Seselwa, why, one wonders, is it absent in, e.g., (3/34) (which contrasts starkly with (7/48)), (17/14), and (22/33)? In particular, why should there be no copying of the undoubted tense particle *ti* in (26/40) and (32/39)? Clearly, if *i* is interpreted as the third person pronoun, there is no problem for the *i*-cases in the coordinating interpretation, since Conjunction Reduction is naturally taken to be free to cut out later occurrences of *i*, or to leave them in. And as regards the *ti*-cases, i.e., (32/39) and (26/40), we have seen that the former cannot be a case of serialization anyway on the grounds that the two possible candidates are both proper object-complements, while the latter requires further research. (B attributes the ungrammatical copying of *ti* in

(37/41) *I ti anvoy mwâ ti al apel dokter.

to the object-control of the subject deletion of *al apel*. This is unnecessary, however, since *al apel* is not a serial but a proper complement.)

B's case for tense/aspect-copying is not reinforced by his treatment, in his section 2.5, of the Seselwa complex complementizer *pudir*, which is clearly derived from the purposive preposition-complementizer *pu* followed by the verb *dir* ('say'). The following are among his examples:

(38/19b) I dir (ek) li pudir mo pe vini.
 he say (to) him that I CONT come
 'He told him that I was coming.'

- (39/22) Pa bezwê kwar pudir en zwazo i pon tulezur.
 not need believe that a bird it lay every day
 'No need to think that birds lay eggs every day.'
- (40/24) Mo ti kone pudir i fer rom.
 I PAST know that he make rum
 'I knew that he made rum.'

Although in his glosses B provides *pu-* with a question mark, this reservation is specious. For how else is *pudir* to be derived than from the purpose complementizer *pu* plus *dir*? B wants to interpret *pudir* as a serial of the kind commonly found in the Caribbean Creoles, where some verb of saying is used serially to introduce a *that*-clause. For him to maintain this, he must reject the obvious derivation just given, which, he admits, rules out a serial interpretation on account of the complementizer. And he must produce an alternative analysis where *pu-* is no longer a complementizer. His proposal is that this *pu-* be considered as an irrealis marker and thus fall within the tense/aspect marking system. Then, magically, "on the assumption that (for most speakers) Seselwa serials must be marked for tense, mood, or aspect, such a marker would be required by the grammar." One wonders, of course, why so suddenly serials now carry their own tense/mood/aspect operators, while they had been assumed so far only to *copy* the tense/aspect markers from the main verb (in some cases at least!). B's answer to this question, which is to be found in the last two paragraphs of his section 2.5, is, unfortunately, too far-fetched and contorted to be taken seriously. B himself would have torn such an argument to pieces, or, perhaps, as is done here, pass it by.

But let us revert to B's more moderate ways of assigning tense/aspect markers to his alleged serials, in particular to his analysis of the "mysterious" *i* in his section 3. The common view is that this *i* is pronominal. It is a third person subject pronoun and, in principle, singular, the plural 'they' being *zot*. It also occurs, probably optionally, as a resumptive pronoun after any nonpronominal subject, in which case it can be singular or plural. This, by the way, is not what B says. According to him, *i* is *obligatory* after a nonpronominal subject-NP (after an "R-expression," as he puts it, following Chomsky's quaint terminology), if there is no other marker of tense or aspect. But his own sentence (14/8), given above, belies this condition.

Yet the condition is essential for B's analysis, in which *i* is a nonpast tense marker, except when used as an overt pronominal subject. This

analysis is based on the claim that *i* is in complementary distribution with other markers of tense or aspect. According to B,

i never co-occurs with any marker of tense or aspect in basilectal texts, while basilectal (and some nonbasilectal) informants reject any sentence in which these morphemes do co-occur. If a morpheme is in complementary distribution with other morphemes, one assumes, pending evidence to the contrary, that all the morphemes in question form a homogeneous set sharing some particular function (such as, in this case, the marking of tense or aspect).

His “clinching evidence” comes from impersonal existential sentences, and is exemplified in the following cases:

- (41/44) a. I anã de liv isi.
 have two book here
 ‘There are/He has two books here.’
- b. Ti anã de liv isi.
 PAST have two book here
 ‘There were two books here.’
- c. I ti anã de liv isi.
 he PAST have two books here
 ‘He had two books here.’
- (42/45) *Anã de liv isi.
 have two book here

Bickerton’s argument now runs as follows:

(44b) shows that the existential subject is a zero form. If this is so, then the *i* in (44a) must represent two distinct functions. If the sentence bears a possessive meaning, *i* is indeed the third-person pronoun subject. However, if the sentence bears an existential meaning, *i* cannot be the subject, and it cannot be a reprise marker, since there is no R-expression subject. We can only conclude that the *ilti* opposition in (44a) and (44b) indicates the opposition between past and nonpast tenses — in other words, that *i* in the existential version of (44a) is a nonpast tense marker. Since (45) is ungrammatical, we can further conclude that a tense marker (as in (44a)) is required to license zero subjects in finite sentences.

Let me first make clear that my informants concur entirely with B’s findings on the (un)grammaticality and possible meanings of the four sentences involved, but not at all with B’s claim that *i* never co-occurs with other tense markers. The informants accepted without ripple or ruffle the following variants on B’s sentences:

- (43) I ti fer sô dite i ti don li.
 she PAST make his tea she PAST give him
 'She made his tea and gave it him.'
 (cf. (7/48))
- (44) I ti prâ sa ban depuy i ti met âba sô blêket.
 he PAST take the PL feather he PAST put below his blanket
 'He took the feathers and put them below his blanket.'
 (cf. (19/49))
- (45) I ti prâ sô semê i ti ale.
 he PAST take his way he PAST go
 'He left and went off.'
 (cf. (21/51))
- (46) Ban madam prezâ i ti tir zot sapo i ti
 thePL woman then they PAST pull their hat they PAST
 bat lamê.
 clap hand
 'The women then took off their hats and clapped.'
 (cf. (22/33))

This clearly contradicts B's claim, but perhaps my speakers were not "basilectal" enough. Still, although I doubt the validity of B's restriction of his analysis to the "basilect" (he would then have to restrict his whole analysis of the cases he regards as serials to the basilect, given its crucial dependence on his analysis of *i*), I shall, again, allow him the benefit of the doubt, and take his data and claims at face value. What then counts is B's argument as quoted in full above.

This argument depends crucially on its first sentence: "(44b) shows that the existential subject is a zero form." If this were a valid statement, one might as well say that, for example, (3/34) shows that *i* is a pronoun. What (44b) shows (accepting that *ti* is, as elsewhere, the PAST marker) is that in (44b) the existential subject is a zero form. The relevance of (44b) for (44a) is at most suggestive: the default assumption would be that the existential subject is likewise zero in (44a). But this default assumption can be overruled. It might be that *i* in (44a) is a dummy needed to fill the subject slot before the main verb and is directly derived from the French model of this construction: *il y en a*. Or, to put the objection differently, while B insists on the unity of the existential subject form in Seselwa and splits the functions of *i*, one might as well split the phonological realization of the existential subject and maintain the unity of *i*. This alternative possibility is not

mentioned at all by B. But it should have been, because: (a) it is a viable alternative analysis, and (b) existential constructions are world-wide favorites for lexical, syntactic, and morphological idiosyncrasies. In fact, the case for *i* as a resumptive pronoun is much stronger: *i* precedes the negation *pa* ('not'), whereas TMA particles follow *pa*, as appears from, e.g., *Pirog i pa parti* versus *Pirog (i) pa ti parti* ('the boat did not leave'). The evidence of (41/44) and (42/45) does not appear so very clinching after all.

I conclude that B's analysis of *i* has little going for it. It is contradicted on essential points by my informants. It is not based on a compelling argument. And it is implausible on general linguistic grounds. All that has been shown beyond doubt is that a Seselwa sentence cannot begin with *anâ* ('there is/are').

4. Conclusion

I shall not comment on the later parts of B's paper, since these are largely based on, and flow from, the thesis, defended in the earlier sections, that Seselwa has plenty of serial verbs. Insofar as the later arguments depend on this thesis, they become merely academic; and to the extent that they do not, they are beyond the ephemeral purpose of this paper. What I believe I have established is that, despite Bickerton's ardor and zeal to find serials in the Indian Ocean, there is still no cogent reason for us to accept that they exist. What we find is a fair bit of asyndesis, but no serials.

NOTES

1) In the case of (20/50) it was felt that with *ê* the sentence would mean 'he fell down and slept', whereas without *ê* the meaning given, i.e., 'he fell down unconscious', would be more likely. Note, moreover, that (21/51), which does not come from the National Archives recordings used by Bickerton but from Bollée (1977:112), is another instance of phonological masking of the conjunction *ê*, as in (1)–(7) above: *Apré i prâ sô semê <ê> i ale*.

2) On this point of selection restrictions on serials Bickerton does not seem to be consistent. At the beginning of his section 2.6 he expresses a preference for not regarding constructions where the verb of motion comes first as serial. Yet barely a page later, at the beginning of section 2.7, we read: "There is good reason to suppose that serialization is a syntactic phenomenon into which any verb can potentially enter in any position, subject only to semantic or pragmatic constraints."

3) I am indebted to Guy Hazaël-Massieux for this information.

REFERENCES

- Bickerton, Derek. 1981. *Roots of language*. Ann Arbor, MI: Karoma.
- . 1989. Seselwa serialization and its significance. *JPCL* 4. 155–83.
- Bollée, Annegret. 1977. *Le créole français des Seychelles*. Tübingen: Niemeyer.
- Byrne, Francis. 1987. *Grammatical relations in a radical creole*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Sebba, Mark. 1987. *The syntax of serial verbs. An investigation into serialisation in Sranan and other languages*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Seuren, Pieter A. M. 1986. Predicate raising and semantic transparency in Mauritian Creole. *Akten des 2. Essener Kolloquium über "Kreolsprachen und Sprachkontakte,"* ed. by Norbert Boretzky, Werner Enninger, and Thomas Stolz, 203–29. Bochum: Brockmeyer.
- . to appear-a. Pseudocomplementation and serial verbs. *The joy of grammar. A Festschrift for James D. McCawley*, ed. by Diane Brentari, Gary Larson, and Lynn MacLeod. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . to appear-b. The definition of serial verbs. *The development structures of creole languages. A Festschrift for Derek Bickerton*, ed. by Francis Byrne and Thom Huebner. Amsterdam: Benjamins.