
Ewe Serial Verb Constructions in their Grammatical Context

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1. Preliminaries

Serial verb constructions (SVCs) have long been recognized in West African languages (e.g. Christaller 1875; Westermann 1907, 1930) and have been investigated in various frameworks (e.g. Bodomo 2002; Dechaine 1993). Nevertheless, there is very little understanding of their place in the overall grammatical architecture of individual languages (Delplanque 1998). This chapter seeks to describe the features of SVCs in Ewe and to situate them in the grammatical profile of the language. Although Ewe is said to have ‘uncontroversial cases’ of SVCs (Creissels 2000: 240), there is some confusion concerning which structures fall under SVCs (Lord 1993: 2; Collins 1997; Agbedor 1994). Another aim of the chapter is therefore to clarify, for Ewe, the relationship between SVC *stricto sensu* and other multiverb constructions whose functional equivalents may be SVCs in other languages.¹

The chapter is structured as follows: first, I introduce the Ewe language and its relevant features. In §2, SVCs are distinguished from other multiverb constructions. Section 3 focuses on some functional types of SVCs. Section 4 comments on the absence of asymmetrical SVCs in Ewe due to grammaticalization. Section 5 discusses the constraints on aspect, modality, negation, focus, and question in SVCs. I claim that the possibility of each of these categories having scope over individual VPs suggests that Ewe SVCs are multi-headed structures. Section 6 concludes the chapter.

¹ I am grateful to Sasha Aikhenvald, Bob Dixon, and James Essegbey for comments on an earlier version of the paper. Ewe data are drawn and various sources: spontaneous narrations based on Frog story picture book, video clips of staged events (Cut&Break) developed by the Language and Cognition Group at the Max Planck Institute, Nijmegen, and written texts of folktales (Nyaku 1997a, 1997b), expository Ghana Degbe Dowófe (n.d.), and fictional narratives (Obianim 1990). Examples from texts that are from the electronic database, such as Obianim, are referred to by the line example in the concordance. Other examples are referred to using the author, date, and page number system. Some examples are constructed based on my native speaker intuitions and checked with other speakers. I am grateful to all the native speakers who assisted in the generation and testing of the Ewe material.

1.1. EWE: A GRAMMATICAL PROFILE

Ewe is a Gbe (Kwa, Niger-Congo) language (Capo 1991; Duthie 1996) spoken in southeastern Ghana across to southern Togo and just across the Togo–Benin border, by about 2½ million people in West Africa. Ewe is a tone language. It is isolating with agglutinative features and constituent order marks grammatical relations. It has AVO and SV order and syntax. It is an aspect prominent language and does not have grammatical tense.

Major word classes include nominal, adjectival, adverbial, and verb. Minor ones include quantifier, intensifier, determiners (including demonstratives), utterance particles, interjections, postpositions, and connectives. Some minor classes are the outcome of grammaticalization processes of verbs via multiverb constructions, for example prepositions, and preverbs (Heine and Reh 1983; Heine et al. 1991; Lord 1993).

The nominal, adjectival, and adverbial classes are open and are constantly augmented through affixation, compounding, reduplication, triplication, etc. (Ameka 1999; Ofori 2002). In contrast to these classes, ‘there are no productive morphological processes for the formation of new verbs’ (Ameka 1994: 57). Verbs belong to a closed class of about 600 items. ‘[V]erbal specialisation, largely a matter of derivational morphology in many languages, is primarily a syntactic phenomenon’ (Clements 1972: 240). SVCs are one of these syntactic phenomena. The most important ones are listed below, arranged in descending order from multi-clausal to phrasal structures:

- verb plus clausal complement (for WANT, SAY, KNOW, THINK, SEE, HEAR, DO, CAUSE, etc. type verbs,
- multiverb constructions (MVCs): consecutive, overlapping (Duthie 1996; Ameka 2003), and SVC;
- auxiliary verb constructions for modality (e.g. the capability *nyá* ‘KNOW’ construction, the ‘NOT YET’ *kpɔ̃* ‘SEE’ construction, etc. (Ameka 1991),
- periphrastic verb plus aspect phrase complement constructions (e.g. progressive and prospective (Ameka and Dakubu forthcoming),
- verb plus satellite constructions (e.g. *se (X) dǎ* ‘hear (X) in the distance’, i.e. listen (to X), *kplɔ X dǎ* ‘lead X TOWARDS’, i.e. follow X,
- verb plus obligatory complement collocations (e.g. *fú tsi* ‘move.limbs water’ i.e. swim, *fa aví* ‘emit cry’; Essegbey 1999).

1.2. TRANSITIVITY AND ARGUMENT TYPES

About one third of the verb roots in the lexicon are intransitive. Almost all of these are ambitransitive. Examples are: *gba* ‘break’, *fɔ̃* ‘rise’, *tá* ‘crawl’, *dzo* ‘move. above.ground’. For example, *Kofí dzo* ‘Kofí flew’; *Kofí dzo kpɔ̃-á* ‘Kofí jumped the fence’. When most of these verbs occur in transitive structures, the S argument can either surface as A or O. For only a handful, for example *kú* ‘die’, is the S argument realized as A.

A majority of Ewe verbs take obligatory complements. The complement functions as a direct argument of the verb. There is a balance between the semantic specificity or generality of the verb vis-à-vis that of the complement (Essegbey 1999). Some verbs with general semantics (e.g. *fú* 'move.limbs') require complements with specific semantics (e.g. *tsi* 'water'). Few verbs (e.g. *fi* 'steal') require a cognate object to reiterate their semantics without which they cannot form a grammatical expression. Other verbs require a complement that is a basic level term (e.g. *ɔu nú* 'eat thing').

In addition, contrary to the widespread assumption that serializing languages do not have trivalent verbs (Dimmendaal 2001: 384; Nylander 1997), Ewe has several types (Ameka forthcoming). The first group are the prototypical three-place verbs like *ná* 'give', *tsyé* 'donate', and *fíá* 'teach/show'. These verbs occur in the THEME GOAL as well as the GOAL THEME double object constructions.

- (1) (a) Kofí fíá akónta ɔeví-á-wó [THEME GOAL]
 NAME teach arithmetic child-DEF-PL
 'Kofi taught arithmetic (to) the children'
 (b) Kofí fíá ɔeví-á-wó akónta [GOAL THEME]
 NAME teach child-DEF-PL arithmetic
 'Kofi taught the children arithmetic'

The other three-place verbs occur only in the THEME GOAL construction. One group of these are the obligatory complement verbs that require a further complement, such as *te nú Z* 'deny Z something', and *xlõ nú Z* 'advise Z'.

- (2) dadá-á te núɔuɔu-i
 mother-DEF drag food-3sg
 'The mother denied her/him food'

Causative verbs like *dó* 'put', *da* 'throw', and *wɔ* 'do, make' can all take three arguments. A *wɔ* 'do' ditransitive construction has an adversative reading, as in (3).

- (3) e-wɔ nú-m
 3sg-do thing-1sg
 'She did something bad to me'

In addition, certain factive verbs (e.g. *kpa* 'carve', *gbi* 'weave', *tiá* 'elect') and verbs of perception and cognition (e.g. *kpɔ́* 'see', *bu* 'think') take nominal 'object complements' (Amuzu 1993: 61–72). Such complements are optionally marked by a predication marker *-i*.

- (4) Ama kpɔ́ srɔ̃a ga-tɔ́-e
 NAME see spouse-DEF money-owner-i
 'Ama saw her husband as a rich person' (Amuzu 1993: 61)

The predication marker *-i* is also used in certain types of SVCs to mark the concomitant nature of the subevents (§2.1).

1.3. ARGUMENT MARKING AND REALIZATION

All relevant core arguments, even if recoverable, must be overtly expressed in the clause or sentence. Many notions which are intransitive in most other languages, for example, ‘run’, ‘swim’, are coded as transitives. Apart from constituent order which distinguishes between the core arguments in a clause, the A/S is distinguished from the non-subject relations by the form of pronominal clitics used to express such arguments. Grammatical relations can be configurationally described with respect to the verb thus:

NP/PostP -	V-	NP/PostP -	NP/PostP -	Other
Subject (A/S)		Object 1	Object 2	

Obliques are introduced by prepositions: *ná* for DATive, *dé* for ALLative, and *kplé* for instruments. The subject must be expressed once in each clause including imperative constructions. The various argument marking possibilities are illustrated with the primarily transitive verb *dze* ‘contact’ but which can occur intransitively, ditransitively, and with various oblique arguments.

- (5) (a) *xeví-á dze*
bird-DEF contacted
‘The bird landed’
- (b) *Kofi dze dɔ*
NAME contacted illness
‘Kofi fell ill’
- (c) *Kofi dze xɔ́lɔ́ Ami kplé dzidzɔ*
NAME contacted friend NAME COMIT happiness
‘Kofi befriended Ami in joy’
- (d) *È-dze ná tóhehe*
2sg-contacted DAT punishment
‘You deserve punishment’
- (e) *Kofi dze dé mɔ́ tó*
NAME contacted ALL way edge
‘Kofi stepped aside by the edge of the road’

1.4. VERB CATEGORIES AND VERB MARKERS

A verbal clause in Ewe must be marked for one of the grammatical categories in Figure 1. Speakers are forced to select a value on the realis/irrealis continuum for every verb in a clause including the copula. Each of the categories is mutually exclusive.

The verb cluster consists of the verb and preverb markers with different co-occurrence possibilities. Table 1 shows the order of occurrence and examples of

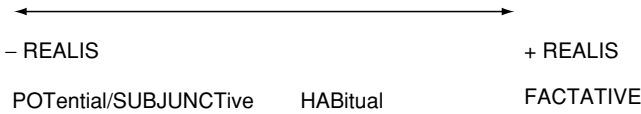


FIGURE 1. Obligatory categories of the Ewe verb on a realis continuum

the elements that fill the slots. The verb cluster in (6) comprises five preverbs (italicized) and the verb. Several preverbs have developed from verbs or VPs.

(6) *wó-a-ga-nyá té.ɲú vá-fle abólo háfi*
 3pl-POT-REPET-CERT can VENT-buy bread before
 ‘They could have come again to buy bread’

Negation is marked by a bipartite morpheme *mé...o*: *mé* immediately precedes the verb cluster while *o* occurs at the end of the clause before any utterance final particles.

2. Serial verb constructions

An SVC in Ewe is a sequence of two or more verb phrases (including any complements and adjuncts):

- without any marker of syntactic dependency;
- the VPs in the sequence are construed as occurring within the same temporal frame;
- the VPs share the same mood (e.g. imperative);
- the VPs can be formally marked for different aspect and modality categories;
- the individual verbs can function as independent verbs in simple clauses (in the same form);
- same syntactic subject for all VPs in the series but expressed only once before VP₁;

TABLE 1. Ewe pre-verb markers

Pre-verb markers						Verb	
MODal/ IRRealis	ASP	DIRectional	MODal	MODal	VENTIVE	V-root	V-suffix
<i>(l)a</i> ‘POTential’	<i>ga</i> ‘REPetitive’	<i>hé</i> ‘TIVE’	<i>nyá</i> ‘CERTainty’	<i>gbé</i> ‘JUST’	<i>vá</i> ‘eventually’		Ø ‘aorist’
<i>(n)á</i> ‘SUBJUNCTive’		<i>ɖa</i> ‘ALTRI- LOCAL’	<i>nyá</i> ‘INVersion’	<i>kpɔ</i> ‘counter- expectation’			<i>-(n)a</i> ‘HABitual’
<i>né</i> ‘jussive’				<i>té ɲú</i> ‘can’			
				<i>katse</i> ‘dare’			
				<i>xa</i> ‘in vain’			
				<i>ká</i> ‘break off’			

- monoclausal construction;
- VPs cannot be formally independently negated;
- the verbs can be individually focused or questioned.

The verbs in the construction form distinct grammatical and phonological words. There is no limit on the number of VPs that can constitute an SVC, except for restrictions on production and comprehension. Thus in (7a), a spontaneous narration, based on a wordless picture book (Mayer 1969), the narrator uses four verbs. Two of these are independently marked by preverbs with directional semantics. When four or more VPs constitute an SVC, they tend to describe composite events whose subcomponents may be represented by groups of VPs. For instance, the last two VPs in the series in (7a) represent a subevent unlike the other two, which represent a subevent each. Hence such long series of VPs tend to have some internal grouping, but this is not a case of SVCs within SVCs because the groups of VPs together constitute one SVC.

- (7) (a) *éyata* [é-dzo hé-vá-dze anyígbá
therefore 3sg-move.above. ITIVE-VENT- ground
ground contact
hé-tsó atukpá lá zi dǐ]
ITIVE-take bottle DEF press down
- (b) *éye* [wò-wó hé-kaka]
and 3sg-explode ITIVE-scatter
'Therefore he jumped onto the ground and smashed the bottle on
the ground and it exploded and scattered [before he was relieved]'
(Frog Story, p. 6)

The clauses in (7a) and (7b) are conjoined by *éye* 'and' forming a sentence, but each clause consists of an SVC. The sentence illustrates several SVC features. First, that verbs with different or the same transitivity value can occur in an SVC (see also Hellwig, this volume). Thus, in (7a) the first verb is intransitive while the other three verbs are transitive, whereas in (7b) both verbs are intransitive. Second, that the verbs need not share object arguments. The second verb *dze* 'contact' in (7a) has its own object which it does not share with any other verb. Third, when the referent of the shared object is the same, it is expressed only once with the first of the verbs. This is the case with *atukpá lá* 'the bottle' which is shared by the third and fourth verbs in the SVC in (7a). Finally, all the verbs in the series have one subject which is expressed only once, and all the verbs in both (7a) and (7b) have the same temporal and aspectual value, that is, the aorist.

2.1. SVCS AND OTHER MULTIVERB CONSTRUCTIONS (MVCs)

SVCs are different from other MVCs—the overlapping and the consecutive clause—in varied ways. These differences are summarized in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Multiverb constructions in Ewe

Features	Consecutive clauses	Overlapping clause	Serial Verb Construction
Material occurs between verbs	yes	yes	yes
Each verb can surface with its own non-subject argument	yes	yes	yes
Each verb can have different aspect and/or modal marking	yes	yes	yes
Each VP can be independently focused or questioned	yes	yes	yes
Each verb can have different mood marking	yes	yes	no
Is subject of each verb same?	same or different	different	same
Subject argument of each verb can be overtly expressed	yes (must be)	yes (must be)	no
Each verb can be independently negated	yes	yes	no
Connectives can occur	yes (-/+ <i>né</i> CONSEC)	no	no
How many clauses	multi-	bi-	mono-

One area of difference is in subject expressions. All VPs in an SVC share the same subject or the referent of the subject arguments includes an identical participant. They do not involve syntactic function switch. Overlapping clauses do (see 8b). However, SVCs can have cumulative subjects, or rather the subject and object of VP₁ together carry out the state of affairs in VP₂. Hence called concomitant subject. This is optionally signalled by the predication marker *-i* (Ameka 2003; Collins 1993, 1997; Lewis n.d. 1985; Clements 1972; Ansre 1966b). Such cumulative subject structures are of three kinds:

(i) Constructions in which the subject and object of first VP are collectively involved in carrying out VP₂:

(8) (a) [é-yɔ̃ ɖɛví-á-wó fɔ fú-i] (SVC)
 3sg-call child-DEF-PL hit bone-i
 ‘She called the children together’

(b) [é-yɔ̃ ɖɛví-á-wó wó-fɔ fú] (Overlapping Clause)
 3sg-call child-DEF-PL 3pl-hit bone
 ‘She called the children they gathered together’

In (8b), an overlapping clause, the switch in topic is explicitly indicated by the use of the pronoun *wó* ‘3pl’ which is co-referential with the object of the first VP. In (8a), however, there is only one syntactic subject marked on VP₁ and the *-i* marker signalling that the participants involved in VP₁ carried out VP₂. There is no indication of a switch function, only an addition.

(ii) The object of the first verb denotes a condition or state of the subject in carrying out VP2. Typically, such structures involve the ‘take’ verb as V1 with the object NP denoting an emotion, a condition, or an instrument.

- (9) [wó-t_sɔ́ vevé-sese le gbefá d_e-m-i bé...
 3pl-take pain-feeling be.at:PRES announcement remove-PROG-i QUOT
 ‘they announce with great pain that...’ (funeral announcement formula)

(iii) The subject of VP1 is accompanied by the object of VP1 and together they undertake a motion event represented in VP2.

- (10) [é-ku tsi vɛ]
 3sg-scoop water come:i
 ‘She fetched water (and) brought it’

The concomitant subject SVCs involve the co-participation of the referents of the linguistically expressed subject and object of VP1 in the performance of the subsequent subevent(s). They are different from overlapping clauses where the second subject is different from the first and is co-referential with a non-subject argument of the first clause, as illustrated in (8b). Where a cumulative subject involves the referent of one of the arguments of a first clause and another participant which is not linguistically expressed in the context, then a consecutive construction is used, as in (11).

- (11) [vǎ (né) mí-dzɔ́]
 2sg:come CONSEC 1pl-leave
 ‘You come and let’s go’

The subject of VP2 in (11) refers to the speaker who is not linguistically expressed in the first clause and the addressee who is expressed as the subject of the first imperative clause. Although a kind of cumulative subject, one of the participants is not linguistically involved in the first clause.

A related difference between SVCs and other MVCs is that the VPs in the former must have the same mood (as opposed to modality). The VPs in the overlapping and consecutive clauses need not share the same mood. Thus, while the utterances in (12) are commonly heard from mothers to children in the morning, (12a) is an SVC with both verbs in the imperative while (12b) is a consecutive clause with the first VP in the imperative and the second in the subjunctive. Notice that the subject is expressed only once in the SVC unlike in the consecutive construction.

- (12) (a) [ku tsi kɔ́ ŋkú.me]
 2sg:scoop water wash face
 ‘Fetch water and wash your face’
 (b) [ku tsi né na-kɔ́ ŋkú.me]
 2sg:scoop water CONSEC 2sg:SUBJN-wash face
 ‘Fetch water and wash your face’

The three MVCs, SVCs, overlapping constructions, and consecutive constructions, are similar in the treatment of objects. When the referents of the object argument are identical, it is expressed only once with the first VP in all these structures, as is the case with ‘the bottle’ in (7a) for SVC, and ‘work’ in (13a) for the overlapping clause, and the 3sg pronoun in (13b) for the consecutive.

- (13) (a) [núfiálá ná dɔ suku-ví-á-wó wó-wɔ]
 teacher give work school-child-DEF-PL 3pl-do
 ‘Teacher gave work to the pupils (and) they did (it)’
- (b) [wɔ-e né mí-kpɔ́]
 2sg:do-3sg CONSEC 1pl-see
 ‘Do it lets see’

One difference between the consecutive and overlapping constructions, on the one hand, and the SVC, on the other, is that the former are multi-clausal while the latter is mono-clausal. Consequently, one would not normally expect multiple objects in SVCs while they are expected in other MVCs. Multiple objects do arise in SVCs, however, for various reasons. One of these is the presence of obligatory, and especially inherent complements in the language. If two or more verbs each with its own inherent complement form an SVC then a multiple object SVC emerges (12a). Multiple objects also surface in an SVC when the objects have the same form but different referents, as in (14), where *nú* ‘thing’ in the first VP refers to ‘drink’ and in the second to ‘food’.

- (14) [... wó-no nú du nú] *vásédé zātifé ké*
 3pl-drink thing eat thing until midnight very
 ‘... they drank and ate until midnight’ (Nyaku 1997a: 28)

In some cases, both the form and reference of the objects in the VPs in an SVC may be the same, but because the collocations yield different interpretations, the various instances of the object have to be expressed, as in (15).

- (15) *éye wò-ná* [wò-no aha *hé-kú* aha]
 and 3sg-give 3sg-drink drink ITIVE-die drink
 ‘and made him drink alcohol and he got dead drunk’

If the second instance of *aha* ‘drink’ were not present in (15), the sentence would mean something different, namely, that he drank to death, that is, he drank and died.

Unlike the instances of multiple object SVCs discussed so far, it seems that when the object argument is shared and the referent is identical, yet it is expressed with the second VP and in pronominal form, then we are dealing with a juxtaposition of VPs rather than SVCs, as in (16).

- (16) *wò-a-ná* [*wó-a-ɖa* te *á-gba-e* nyuie]
 3sg-IRR-give 3pl-IRR-cook yam IRR-break-3sg well
 ‘He should let them cook yam (and) mash it well’ (Nyaku 1997b: 2)

In (16) the two VPs in the MVC, *d̩a* ‘cook’ and *gba* ‘break’ have the same subject and share the same modality marking as well as the same object. However, the object is recapitulated on the second VP with a pronoun. This suggests two VPs in juxtaposition rather than in union, as is the case with SVCs. A piece of evidence in support of this comes from prosody: the prosodic break between the two VPs in (16) can be longer than that between the VPs in an SVC. Secondly, it is possible to modify each VP in (16) with a different time adverbial, for example, ‘they should cook the yam today and mash it well next week’, suggesting that they do not necessarily share the same temporal frame and therefore are not SVCs. Thus SVCs can have multiple objects, but where VPs share the same object and this object is overtly expressed with each VP, and the subsequent ones are realized in the form of pronouns, then such sequences of VPs are not SVCs.

The juxtaposed VPs in Ewe resemble consecutive constructions in Igbo which have the same subject and single intonation unit for related events (Lord 2003). However, in Ewe such same subject juxtaposed VP constructions, with the subject expressed only once, are different from consecutive constructions. In Ewe, consecutives (see Table 2) are multi-clausal structures with the intonation contour of one information unit. Moreover, unlike SVCs, the subject is obligatorily expressed with each verb in sequence and there are no constraints on which arguments should be shared. Each verb can be independently negated and there is an optional use of the connector *né* ‘CONSEC’. Examples (12b) and (13b) illustrate same and different subject consecutive constructions respectively. Example (17) shows that the VPs in a consecutive clause need not be marked for the same aspect or modality value.

- (17) *mi-nɔ* *yi-yi-m̩* *má-vá*
 2pl-be.at:NPRES REDUP-go-PROG 1sg:IRR-come
 ‘You be going (and) I will come (i.e. follow)’

The overlapping clause is different from both the SVC and the consecutive in requiring that the subject of the subsequent verb be coreferential with a non-subject argument of the first verb or with the situation characterized by the first verb. For the former, the subject of VP2 is realized as a personal pronoun as in (13a). For the latter, where the subsequent subject represents an event argument, the anaphoric elements *wò* ‘3sg’, *é* ‘3sg impersonal’, *étefé* ‘its.place’, and *égbe* ‘today’, are used; see (18).

- (18) (a) [*é-fo* *nu* *wò-didi*]
 3sg-strike mouth 3sg-become.long
 ‘S/he talked (it was) long’ (i.e. ‘his/her talking was long’)
- (b) [*é-fo* *nu* *é-didi*]
 3sg-strike mouth 3sg:IMPERS-become.long
 ‘S/he talked it was a long time’ (It is a long time since she talked.)

- (c) [é-fò nu égbé didi]
 3sg-strike mouth today become.long
 ‘S/he talked a long time ago’ (The time of her speaking is distant
 from today.)
- (d) [é-fò nu é-tefé didi]
 3sg-strike mouth 3sg:IMPERS-place become.long
 ‘S/he talked (its place and time) is distant’

As the glosses suggest, the form of the subject of the second clause indexes specific features of the first clause. Although a dependent personal pronoun can refer to the whole state of affairs of the first clause, as in (18a), and the impersonal pronoun must do so, as in (18b), the meanings they convey are different: in (18a) the second clause describes the duration of the event of the first clause, while in (18b) it characterizes the time of its occurrence with respect to some contextually-given reference time. The temporal noun ‘today’, as in (18c), also locates the time of occurrence of the event of the first clause, but it does so deictically by reference to ‘today’. Finally, the situational anaphor in (18d) indexes the spatio-temporal features of the state of affairs in the first clause. Interestingly, in multiverb structures of this kind in Oceania where the subject of the second VP is an event argument, it is invariably represented as an impersonal pronoun (Crowley 2002; Aikhenvald, Chapter 1, this volume). From an Ewe point of view, these structures are not SVCs because they involve switch-function and behave more like overlapping clauses. They may perform functions similar to SVCs, however (Ameka 2003).

Two variables determine the functions of overlapping clauses in Ewe: the form of the subject in the second clause and the semantics of the VP of the second clause. The second clause can have a sequential relation with the first when the subject of the second clause is a personal pronoun, as in (13a). Following from this sequential relation, a result interpretation can be derived in context for such sentences.

When the verb in the first clause is an immediate perception verb, for example *se* ‘hear’ or *kpɔ̃* ‘see’, then the second clause functions as its clausal complement, as in (19). In such cases, the situations characterized in the two clauses occur simultaneously.

- (19) bé [mé-kpɔ̃ abei ádéké
 QUOT 3sg:NEG-see fox INDEF
 [wò-vá tó é-fé kɔ̃fé-á me yi o máhã]
 3sg-VENT pass 3sg-POSS cottage-DEF inside go NEG UFP
 ‘[asking emphatically] whether she has not seen any fox pass through
 her cottage’ (Folktale)

The second clause of the overlapping construction (OVC) in (19) is an SVC since each part of an OVC is a clause in its own right; the occurrence of an SVC as a part of an OVC confirms its mono-clausal status.

When the 3sg personal pronoun *wò* represents the subject of the second clause and refers to the VP or the situation characterized in the first clause, the second clause, depending on its verb, could describe the manner in which the event was carried out, as in (18a). It could also express an evaluative stance of the speaker with respect to the situation in the first clause. However, the subject of the second clause can be represented by a situational anaphor *-é* '3sg IMPERS', *égbe* 'today', or *étefé* 'its.place'. In that case, the second clause refers to the time or location of the situation in the first clause.

From a cross-linguistic perspective, it is unusual for a language to provide different anaphors for the subject position in different-subject multiverb constructions such as the Ewe overlapping constructions, each with its own possible interpretation(s). In similar constructions in Oceanic languages, as noted above, the subject of the second verb is always an impersonal pronominal, regardless of its intended antecedent. One question about such constructions has been whether those that express manner, time, and location form a single class, or should be distinguished (Aikhenvald, Chapter 1, this volume). The Ewe evidence suggests that when the subject of the second clause is realized as the dependent pronoun *wò*, there is no formal distinction between these functions; but when it is realized as a situational anaphor, then the second clause can only express time and/or location, consistent with the semantics of the anaphors.

3. Some functional types of SVCs

Ewe has mainly symmetrical SVCs. As for the overlapping clause, the functions of SVCs depend on the semantics of the verbs that combine in them. Several SVCs are used to express a sequence of related activities. For instance, cook eat, get up fetch water, wash face, sweep house, etc. which are all culturally recognizable activities defined as things one does in the morning, for example. Some of these can have resultative or cause–effect readings depending on their contingency or dependence on one another.

One functional type of SVC involves a HANDLING verb such as *tsɔ́* 'take', *zá* 'use', or *kɔ́* 'take, raise'. The NP complement of these verbs typically expresses manner, condition, or state of the subject in carrying out the subsequent events, as in (9). It can also be interpreted as having an instrumental or accompaniment role as in (7a). The verbs *tsɔ́* 'take' and *kɔ́* 'take, raise' are grammaticalizing as sequential modal markers that occur on a VP to indicate finality as in the description of the chopping of wood with an axe in (20).

- (20) [e-*kɔ́* fíá *kɔ́* *dzá* ati-a]
 3sg-raise axe TAKE hack stick-DEF
 'He used an axe and hacked the wood'

The subevents of an SVC can be carried out in the same place or in different places. The latter, multi-scene SVCs à la Pawley and Lane (1998), are signalled by marking the subsequent verb with a directional preverb *ɔa* ‘ALTRILOCAL’, as in (21).

- (21) [Aféáfá yì ɔa-yɔ́-e]
 NAME go ALTRILOCAL-call-3sg
 ‘Afeafa went to call him’ (Obianim 1990 [5030])

The preverb indicates that the state of affairs in VP2 was carried out in a place different from where VP1 was initiated.

SVCs are also used to express comparison. In Ewe these do not just involve the verb *wú* ‘exceed/surpass’, motion verbs like *gbɔ* ‘come.back’ and *tó* ‘pass’ are also used. The number of entities being compared determines the interpretation of the degree.

- (22) [É-tsi gbɔ nɔví-á ɲú]
 3sg-grow cone.back sibling-DEF skin
 ‘He has grown more than his brother/sister’

For similarity and equality in comparison the verb *sɔ* ‘fit, equal’ or motion verbs like *de* ‘reach’ are used in SVC.

- (23) [Wó-kɔ́ sɔ]
 3pl-become.tall equal
 ‘They are the same height’

Associated posture is also expressed using SVCs. Typically, VP1 describes the position assumed by the subject for carrying out VP2, as in (24).

- (24) [Míé-le klo dzí le kúkú de-m̃]
 1pl-be.at:PRES knee upper.surface be.at:PRES hat remove-PROG
 ‘We are on our knees begging’

SVCs describing motion events, with various ordering constraints on the component VPs, constitute another functional type. For instance, a MANNER VP precedes a direction one, as in (27).

4. SVCs and grammaticalization

Asymmetrical SVCs are virtually absent in Ewe. The meanings expressed by such structures in other languages are signalled by forms that have grammaticalized or lexicalized from verbs, for example, the aspectual, modality, and directional preverbs. It has been generally assumed that SVCs are the vehicle for such development (Ansre 1966a; Heine and Reh 1983; Heine et al. 1991; Lord 1993). However, other MVCs have also served as vehicles. In fact, as shown in Figure 2, each of the MVC types can serve as a vehicle for lexicalization and/or grammaticalization.

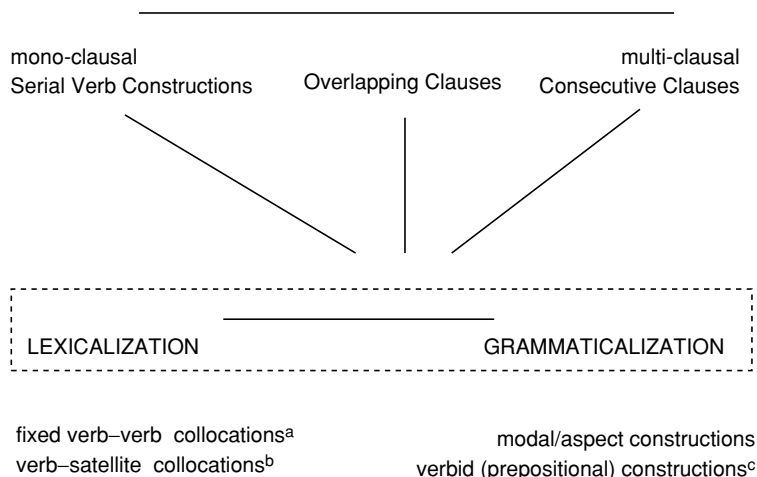


FIGURE 2. Multiverb constructions and their offspring

^a For example, 'believe' is expressed by a verb-verb collocation in many West African languages: Ewe *xɔ* 'get' *se* 'hear'; Akan *gye* 'get' *di* 'eat'.

^b A satellite (Talmy 2000) is a sister to the verb; together they colexicalize a verbal meaning. Satellites in productively serializing languages tend to be erstwhile verbs. For example, 'taste', transitive, is expressed by the verb *dʒ* 'wear' and the satellite *kpɔ̃* 'experience' which has evolved from the verb *kpɔ̃*, 'see'.

^c Ansre (1966a) introduced the term 'verbid' to designate forms that have grammaticalized from verbs without any change in phonological form but have impaired morphosyntactic capacity. These are similar to coversbs in Chinese languages and have prepositional functions marking constituents that have locative, dative, allative, etc. functions in a clause.

In Ewe, three aspectual adverbial particles, *kpɔ̃* 'experiential', *vɔ* 'completive', and *sɛ* 'terminative', have grammaticalized from the 'see', 'finish', and 'stop' verbs respectively without any change in phonological form. Each of these has employed one MVC for the development: the experiential through the consecutive, the completive via the overlapping clause, and the terminative through the SVC (Ameka 1988). Furthermore, a verb satellite *kpɔ̃* through habitual collocation with some verbs has become lexicalized with them. For example: *dó X kpɔ̃* 'lit: put X see, that is, test/examine X', *te X kpɔ̃* 'lit. drag X see, that is, tempt X', etc.

5. Marking of categories in SVCs

5.1. ASPECT AND MODALITY

Each VP in an Ewe SVC is marked for its own aspect and modality. The VPs may be marked for the same categories, for example, progressive, habitual, aorist, potential, etc. However, the VPs can be marked for different categories as well, provided that they are semantically compatible. In (24) VP1 is in the aorist expressing a state and VP2 is in the progressive indicating an ongoing activity.

Similarly in (25), VP₁ and VP₂ are in the aorist interpreted as past, while VP₃ is marked for the habitual interpreted as current motion. The aorist is the unmarked form of the verb which signals that the state of affairs denoted by the verb occurred before the reference time; it is a fact, hence called factative (Welmers 1973: 346). Thus an inchoative verb in the aorist indicates that the change of state it encodes has occurred before now and the post state is current; hence, it is translated as present in English. For an active verb, however, the aorist indicates that the activity it encodes has occurred before the reference time, hence translated as past into English, for example.

- (25) Daa Ámaví trɔ́ tsó asi me
 TITLE NAME turn come.from market containing.region.of
yi-na dé afé me
 go-HAB ALL home containing.region.of
 ‘Madam Amavi was returning from the market and going home’
 (Ghana Degbe Dowɔfe no date: 3)

The prospective and the potential (26a) and the potential and the aorist (26b) are also compatible but must occur in that order.

- (26) (a) Áma le nú dá gé á-dú
 NAME be.at:PRES thing cook PROSP POT-eat
 ‘Ama will cook and eat’
 (b) Áma â-dá nú dú
 NAME POT-cook thing eat
 ‘Ama will cook and eat’

5.2. NEGATION

Unlike aspect and modality which pertain to the VP, negation is marked once in the clause by the discontinuous morphemes *mé...o*. *Mé* occurs immediately before the verb while *o* occurs at the end of the sentence. In SVCs, even though *mé* is placed before VP₁, it can have scope over either VP₁, as in (27a), VP₂, as in (27b), or both, as in (27c) (Ameka and Essegbey forthcoming).

- (27) (a) [dɛví-a mé-tá yí xɔ-a me o]
 child-DEF NEG-crawl go room-DEF containing.region.of NEG.
 [É-fú dú yí]
 3sg-move.limb course go
 ‘The child didn’t crawl into the room. It ran in’
 (b) [dɛví-a mé-tá yí xɔ-a me o]
 child-DEF NEG-crawl go room-DEF containing.region.of NEG.
 [É-ta dó]
 3sg-crawl exit
 ‘The child didn’t crawl into the room. It crawled out’

- (c) [dɛví-a mé-tá yí xɔ-a me o]
 child-DEF NEG-crawl go room-DEF containing.region.of NEG.
 [É-fú du dɔ]
 3SG move.limb course exit
 ‘The child didn’t crawl into the room. It ran out’

The scope properties of the negation demonstrated in (27) suggest that both verbs function as heads within a single construction which are co-dependent both semantically and syntactically. When there is clear evidence of syntactic dependency, the negative morpheme can only have scope over the clause in which it occurs, as in (28):

- (28) dɛví-a mé-tá háfi yi xɔ-a me o
 child-DEF NEG-crawl before go room-DEF containing.region.of NEG.
 ‘The child didn’t crawl before going into the room.’

This sentence entails that the child went into the room, thereby showing that the only verb that is negated is *tá* ‘crawl’. This is in spite of the occurrence of *o* ‘NEG’ at the end of the sentence. What this shows is that where there is syntactic evidence of a dependency, negation can only have scope over the verb to which *mé-* is attached.

5.3. QUESTIONS AND FOCUS

Propositional questions are marked by utterance final particles *a* ‘QP’ and *dé* ‘conducive’ (Ameka 1998). Like negation, even though these question markers occur at the end of the sentence, for an SVC their scope could involve only one VP. Thus a question like (29a) can be answered by ‘yes, she did cook and eat’ or ‘no, she didn’t cook and didn’t eat’ where the scope of the question is over both VPs. However, it can also be answered with either (29b), implying question scope over VP₂, or (29c), implying question scope over VP₁.

- (29) (a) [É-dɔ nú-á dɔ-a]
 3sg-cook thing-DEF eat-QP
 ‘Did she cook the food and eat?’
 (b) É-flɛ nú dɔ
 3sg-buy thing eat
 ‘She bought the food and ate’
 (c) É-dɔ nú-á dzrá
 3sg-cook thing-DEF sell
 ‘She cooked the food and sold it’

This behaviour further confirms the idea that the VP components in an SVC are of equal status and yet co-dependent on each other.

While components of SVCs cannot be individually marked for propositional questions, they can, however, be individually questioned using the content question strategy. Content questions are signalled by the interrogative determiner *ka* used to modify a nominal. To question a VP or a happening, the phrase *nú ka* ‘what’ and the function verb *wɔ* ‘do’ are employed. The VPs forming the SVC in (29a) can each be questioned, as in (30a) and (30b).

- (30) (a) [Nú ka wò-da nú-á kɔ́ wɔ]
 thing INTER 3sg-cook thing-DEF TAKE do
 ‘What did she cook the food and do?’
 (b) [Nú ka wò-wɔ du]
 thing INTER 3sg-do eat
 ‘What did she do to eat?’

In fact, SVC components can also be questioned echoically, in which case the question phrase is not clause initial as in (30a–b) but rather occurs in the place of the VP, as in (31) still based on (29a).

- (31) É-da nú-á kɔ́ wɔ nú ka
 3sg-cook thing-DEF TAKE do thing INTER
 ‘She cooked and did what with it?’

Example (31) could be uttered when an interlocutor did not perceive what was first said and questions the part that was not understood.

Similarly, a component VP of an SVC can be focused. In some Ewe dialects, VP focus is achieved by merely preposing a copy of the verb to the clause. The verb stays in its usual position, as in the SVC in (32).

- (32) sí [wò-sí dzɔ́]
 flee 3sg flee leave
 ‘Fled she fled away’

Although limited in Ewe, this pattern of verb focusing is widespread in West African languages like Fon (Lefebvre and Brousseau 2002) and Yoruba (Lawal 1993). In these languages, too, components of SVCs can be focused in this way.

A pan-Ewe verb focusing strategy, which is also common in West Africa, is the preposing of a nominalized form of the verb, derived mainly by reduplication, to the clause. In (33) the preposed nominalized verb is modified.

- (33) fo-fo gá ádɛ́ [wò-fo da-a wu]
 REDUP-hit big INDEF 3sg-hit snake-DEF kill
 ‘A huge beating he hit the snake and killed it’

Focusing and questioning individual SVC components in Ewe, and in other West African languages, is a manifestation of the equipollent nature of the constructions in these languages.

5.4. NOMINALIZING SVCs

SVCs are nominalized the way mono-verbal clauses are. Such a nominalization involves marking the subject as the possessor, then the VP is nominalized either by reduplication alone, if there is no complement, or by permutation of the VO order and reduplication of the verb, if there is a complement. The rest of the clause is adjoined to this nominalized VP (Duthie 1996; Ofori 2002). A ditransitive clause like *É-fíá Dzama sukuvíáwó le fe si vá yi me* 'He taught German to the pupils in the year that passed' is nominalized as *éfé Dzama fíáfíá sukuvíáwó le fe si vá yi me* 'His German teaching to the pupils in the year that passed'. Similarly, in an SVC, the first VP is nominalized and the rest of the clause is added. The nominalization of the SVC in (33) yields *É-fé da-a fofo wu* 'His snake hitting and killing'. This nominalization process for SVCs is further evidence of their monoclausal status and it distinguishes them from overlapping and consecutive constructions which are multi-clausal.

6. Conclusion

SVCs are rather widespread in Ewe discourse. Depending on the genre, 50–70 per cent of clauses in a text may be SVCs. However, SVCs are but one type of MVCs which form part of the strategies employed to articulate verbal functions in the language. SVCs in Ewe, however, exhibit characteristics which are sometimes said to be impossible either in SVCs or in languages that possess them. For instance, Ewe has a good array of three-place predicates and three participant constructions—a function which is expected to be covered by SVCs (Ameka forthcoming). Furthermore, negation and propositional question markers have structural scope over the whole SVC; however, the pragmatic scope may just be over one of the SVC components. Moreover, as in some other West African languages, individual components of SVCs can be focused or questioned. Some of these properties of SVCs follow from the typological profile of Ewe, and I maintain that we cannot understand the nature of SVCs unless we link the various features to the linguistic type properties of the languages in which we find them.

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