

## Serial Verb Constructions\*

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### 0. Introduction

It is a curious fact in linguistics that terms sometimes gain even wide currency without there being available anything more than a vague and intuitive idea of the phenomena they are meant to cover. A typical case in point is the term *serial verb construction* (SVC), which has been around at least since Stewart (1963), preceded by Voorhoeve's (1957) coinage *verbal chain*. Welmers (1973:366-380) devotes 14 large pages to SVCs without providing anything like a definition, as he himself explicitly admits (p.366):

Serialization has attracted the attention of a number of graduate students in linguistics in recent years, and several unpublished papers have been written on the subject from the viewpoint of transformational-generative grammar. All of the writers agree that an adequate treatment is perhaps impossible within the framework of current grammatical models. None of the writers has been entirely satisfied with his own treatment of the subject. I will not presume to suggest a competing treatment, but will outline the data from some languages in as clear and systematic a way as possible.

Since 1973, the situation has not essentially changed, though several attempts have been made at getting closer to a proper definition of SVCs, the most notable being Sebba (1987). In fact, the situation with SVCs is not all that different from what is found with *ideophones*, the sound-symbolic forms frequently found in African and other languages. Welmers, again, writes (1973:459-60):

Unfortunately, when it comes to talking about ideophones, for almost every student of African languages — including conspicuously the present author — the "Peter Principle" begins to apply: we are rapidly reaching the level of our own incompetence. Everyone seems to recognize that some words are ideophones, but no one finds it easy to define an ideophone with any precision.

It is the purpose of the present paper, with all due respect, to show Welmers wrong on the issue of how to define SVCs. I believe that SVCs are readily definable once a couple of universal and one or two language-specific classes of phenomena have been recognized and combined. The SVCs then simply "fall out" of the analysis, as is sometimes said nowadays. All they have in the way of universal idiosyncrasy will consist in possible restrictions that may appear to hold for the co-occurring of the, otherwise universal, factors involved. SVCs will thus appear to be a *syndrome*, rather than the sort of half-mysterious (and possibly "primitive") phenomenon they seem to have been thought to be in many works.

The main difficulty lies in the fact that one of the universal classes of phenomena needed to define SVCs, the phenomena of what I have chosen to term *pseudocomplementation*, has so far, to my knowledge, not been discussed at all in the literature. Part of my effort will, therefore, consist in the

\* This paper is the third in a series of papers on the subject of defining serial verb constructions. It was preceded by Seuren (to appear a) and (to appear b). In each successive version I try to take better account of the facts while, at the same time, refining the theoretical notions involved, in particular the notion of pseudocomplementation. I am indebted to the participants of the Ohio State University Miniconference on Serial Verbs, held in May 1990, for their valuable input in the way of data and thoughts. In this respect I may single out Eric Schüller, whose knowledge of and ideas about SVCs have stimulated me considerably.

description and elucidation of the facts of pseudocomplementation. Other than that, the analysis of SVCs as proposed here is relatively independent of the particular syntactic theory one prefers to adopt, as long as the theory in question recognizes, or leaves room for the recognition of, the phenomena at hand.

As regards SVCs, another principle than the Peter Principle has been at work there as well. This is the, let us say, Me Too Principle. No sooner had the term been introduced than serial verb constructions were spotted left right and center, even in well-known European languages that had never be thought to possess such an exotic feature. Inevitably, therefore, on pain of not being able to do anything at all, a decision had to be taken as to where to draw the line for the phenomena to be recognized as SVCs. One guiding principle, in drawing that line, was to stay as close as possible to the original phenomena that attracted the descriptive linguists' attention and made them set apart, though for the time being only on impressionistic grounds, the category of serial verb constructions. On the other hand, however, it was necessary to let oneself be guided by the analysis itself. If the clarity and distinctness of the analysis was enhanced by the exclusion or inclusion of certain doubtful or marginal cases, they were, as the case was, excluded or included. Specifically excluded were cases of lexicalized compound verbs like the English *go get*, or of the *go-and-V* type, or the (antiquated) French *saisir revendiquer*, *saisir gager* (both "impound"), *virer tourner* ("turn (a ship)"),<sup>1</sup> or the Mauritian Creole verbal compounds (calqued on the French pattern, no doubt) *mâze bwaz* ("eat and drink"), *marse ale* ("go on foot"), *mâze dormi* ("eat and go to bed"), *ale vini* ("come and go"), *galupe vini* ("come running"), *bate rôte* ("beat up mutually", literally "beat and give back"). These are not to be reckoned to be cases of SVC, or else this paper must be deemed to have failed to achieve its purpose.

The centrally relevant phenomena for SVCs are typically found in certain groups of languages in certain restricted geographical areas, notably the Kwa languages spoken in parts of West Africa,<sup>2</sup> most of the Caribbean Creole languages,<sup>3</sup> many East and South-East Asian languages, in particular Chinese and the Khmer group, and, it seems, in some languages of Papua New Guinea, including the Creole language Tok Pisin. Other languages and language groups have been mentioned as possessing SVCs, but the criterion of unity and clarity of the analysis to be presented stamps most of the instances quoted from those as unconvincing or at least unhelpful. The more so since, as will be shown, the decision, given some particular example, of whether or not one has to do with a SVC will have to depend in part on more general features of the language in question.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A few modern French verbs came into being through this process of verbal compounding, such as *bousculer* ("knock over") from *bouter culer*, or *galvauder* ("botch", "compromise"), from *galer vauder*. I am indebted to Guy Hazael-Massieux for the information on the French verbal compounds.

<sup>2</sup> McWhorter (1990) discusses eleven Kwa languages and concludes (p.7): "I have found that the Kwa languages demonstrate a remarkable uniformity in their SVC systems."

<sup>3</sup> McWhorter (1990:12) mentions Haitian, Krio, Gullah, Jamaican and Guyanese as Caribbean Creoles with a wide range of SVCs. He might have added *Sranan* and *Saramaccan*. As Caribbean Creoles with a limited range of SVCs, i.e. without a TAKE SVC, he mentions *Negerhollands* and *Papiamentu*. Trinidadian should also be mentioned here (Lise Winer, p.c.). Outside the Caribbean limited SVCs are found in the Gulf of Guinea Creoles and Tok Pisin (McWhorter, ib.). No SVCs are found in Philippine Creole Spanish, Hawaiian Creole English, Senegal Creole English, and the Indian Ocean French-based Creoles of Réunion, Mauritius and the Seychelles.

<sup>4</sup> Bickerton (1989) insists that Seychellois has SVCs, but see my reply (to appear b), where I argue that Bickerton's analysis looks tenable only if the notion of SVC is stretched to the point that it will allow

1. Some representative data

The following are typical cases of SVC (the serial verbs are italicized), as they have been observed in the literature:

- |       |                                                                                                                              |                                    |
|-------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| (1)a. | nws muab riam <i>hlais</i> gaij<br>3sg. take-in-hand knife slice meat<br>"He cut the meat with a knife"                      | White Hmong (Schiller 1990a)       |
| b.    | mi teki a nefe koti a brede<br>I take the knife cut the bread<br>"I cut the bread with a knife"                              | Sranan (Sebba 1987:25)             |
| c.    | Koku pote kyab <i>ale</i> nã mãle<br>Koku bring crab go in market<br>"Koku brought a crab to the market"                     | Haitian Creole (Lefebvre 1986:290) |
| d.    | Kòkú sò àsò yí àxì m'è.<br>Koku bring crab go market in<br>"Koku brought a crab to the market"                               | Fon (Lefebvre 1986:290)            |
| e.    | mi hari mi bruku <i>go</i> te na mi kindi<br>I pull my trousers go till LOC my knee<br>"I pulled my trousers up to my knees" | Sranan (Voorhoeve 1975)            |
| f.    | Sùk ʔaw máy <i>maa</i> blãn<br>Sook take wood come house<br>"Sook brought the wood home"                                     | Thai (Schiller 1990a)              |
| g.    | Kofi nyan di <i>ganya</i> <i>kabé</i><br>Kofi eat the chicken finish<br>"Kofi has eaten the chicken already"                 | Saramaccan (Byrne 1987:219)        |
| h.    | a bigi <i>pasá</i> di mii<br>3sg.tall surpass the child<br>"He is taller than the child"                                     | Saramaccan (Byrne 1987:225)        |
| i.    | Kofi bay soni <i>da</i> di mujee<br>Kofi buy something give the woman<br>"Kofi bought something for the woman"               | Saramaccan (Byrne (1987:180)       |
| j.    | wǒ <i>gèi</i> nǐ zuò chǎo fàn<br>I give you make fried rice<br>"I'll make fried rice for you"                                | Chinese (Li & Thompson 1974:271)   |
| k.    | Kofi fringi a tiki <i>fadon</i> <i>naki</i> Amba<br>Kofi fling the stick fall knock Amba<br>"Kofi threw the stick at Amba"   | Sranan (Sebba 1987:129)            |
| l.    | mi bribi <i>taki</i> yu fufuru en<br>I believe say you steal 3sg.<br>"I believe that you stole it"                           | Sranan                             |

In none of these cases does there seem to be any sign of a tense or aspect marker. In fact, the null marking in these cases is sometimes to be interpreted as a present, as in (1h), and sometimes as a simple past, as is seen from the glosses. When there is an overt tense and/or aspect marking, different patterns are observed. The construction most commonly found in serializing languages is a marking of the commanding main verb ( $V_1$ ) for tense and/or aspect while the serial verb ( $V_n$ ) is left bare, as in (2a), where the PAST morpheme *bi* is to be interpreted as a pluperfect, or (2b), with the combination of PAST and DURATIVE:

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one to identify SVCs in languages that have never (and for good reasons) struck linguists as being of the serializing kind. Bickerton fails, moreover, to offer any kind of structural analysis of SVCs.

- (2)a. a bi tsá di meliki go na di konde  
 he PAST carry the milk go LOC the village  
 "He had taken the milk to the village" Saramaccan (Byrne 1987:209)
- b. dowwatra ben e dropu fadon  
 dewdrops PAST DUR drip fall down  
 "Dewdrops were dripping down" Sranan (Seuren 1981:1072)

One does, however, also find languages where the tense/aspect marking of the main verb  $V_1$  is, or may be, copied for  $V_s$ . This form of tense/aspect spreading is demonstrated in (3a-c):

- (3)a. a bi féfi di wosu bi kabá  
 he PAST paint the house PAST finish  
 "He had painted the house already" Saramaccan (Byrne 1990a)
- b. mí a kplɔ e a yi afe  
 we FUT take him FUT go home  
 "We shall take him home" Ewe (McWhorter 1990:11)
- c. mi a fa sekan e twa  
 I PERF take knife PERF cut  
 "I have cut with a knife" Akan (Byrne 1990a)
- d. wó sɔ ná ati po na gli a  
 they take HAB stick beat HAB wall the  
 "They usually strike the wall with a stick" Gengbe (Lewis 1990)

Occasionally one comes across languages that allow the tense/aspect marking to be attached to  $V_s$ , while  $V_1$  remains bare. This phenomenon of 'overshooting' is demonstrated in the sentences of (4):

- (4)a. a féfi di wosu bi kabá  
 he paint the house PAST finish  
 "He had painted the house already" Saramaccan (Byrne 1990a)
- b. a tɛi di góni bi súti di pingó  
 he take the gun PAST shoot the pig  
 "He had shot the pig with the gun" Saramaccan (Byrne 1990a)
- c. ɔde adare not tɔwá nehɔ  
 he take machete the cut-PAST himself  
 "He cut himself with the machete" Akan (Schiller 1990a)<sup>5</sup>

It is clear anyhow, and accepted by all authors on the subject, that the semantics of SVCs does not provide them with a separate tense/aspect marking. Whatever may appear in surface sentences as tense/aspect marking on  $V_s$  is copied from  $V_1$ , whereby  $V_1$  may even lose its original markings.

In some languages one also finds, usually optionally, subject spreading, i.e. a pronominal take-up of the main subject with  $V_s$ , sometimes combined with the copying of tense/aspect markings:<sup>6</sup>

- (5)a. mi he noko mi há kɛ  
 I buy something I give her  
 "I bought something for her" Gã (McWhorter 1990:11)
- b. me guaré me báá mposanó  
 I swim-PAST I come-PAST shore  
 "I swam to the shore" Akan (McWhorter 1990:11)
- c. me yéè adwuma me máá Amma  
 I do-PAST work I give-PAST Amma  
 "I worked for Amma" Akan (Schachter 1974:260)

<sup>5</sup> In Akan the PAST tense is signalled by a low-high sequence of tones on the verb.

<sup>6</sup> Sebba (1987:86-7) proposes that the defining criteria for SVCs should include the condition that "they have only one overtly expressed (syntactic) subject". It is clear that this is too restrictive.

- d. a bi tei peni (a) (b) sikifi di lete  
he PAST take pen (he) (PAST) write the letter  
"He had written the letter with a pen"

Saramaccan (Byrne 1990b)

That this is mechanical and thus semantically irrelevant spreading, and not a reflex of an element in the semantic structure underlying the surface sentence appears clearly from the remarkable Akan sentence (the Akuapem dialect) quoted by Schachter (1974:258):

- (6) me de aburaw mi gu msu m  
I take corn I flow water in  
"I pour corn into the water"

What makes this sentence remarkable is the fact that the copied subject *mi* is clearly not the semantic subject of the  $V_s$  *gu*. The semantic subject of *gu* can only be *aburaw* (which is the grammatical object of *de*) since it is the corn that is said to end up in the water, not the speaker. Moreover, Schachter observes, the verb *gu* requires a mass or plural subject, much like the English verb *disperse*, so that \**mi gu msu-m* is ungrammatical as a sentence on its own. There can be no doubt that the copied subject is semantically spurious, and must thus be the result of a mechanical syntactic process of copying.

Moreover, as Schachter observes (1974:266), serial constructions in Akan require a copying of the negation when the main verb is negated, negation being marked by a homorganic nasal prefix. This negation copying is again semantically irrelevant, and clearly the result of some purely syntactic process:

- (7) Kofi n-ye adwuma m-ma Amma  
Kofi not do work not give Amma  
"Kofi does not work for Amma"

Apparently, therefore, SVCs are semantically bare. They do not have their own tense or aspect, nor can they have a negation of their own. Their subjects are, moreover, controlled by, i.e. display (constant or variable) coreferentiality with, either the subject or the direct object of  $V_1$ . The fact that serial verbs occasionally occur with tense/aspect markers, with an overt pronominal subject, or with a negation is to be attributed to purely syntactic, and thus semantically irrelevant, spreading (copying). It is realized, of course, that spreading phenomena are extremely frequent in all kinds of languages, regardless of whether they have SVCs. (Thus, for example, negation copying is rampant in certain dialects of English, such as Cockney or New York Black English. Subject copying is found in most Flemish dialects of Dutch.) SVCs, moreover, generally lack any kind of overt complementizer.

In general terms one can say that the semantic function of SVCs consists in indicating concomitant circumstance, result or purpose. It has been frequently observed, however, that within these general semantic categories there are certain typical uses for SVCs. Thus there is the TAKE-class, functioning mainly as an instrumental, exemplified in (1a,b), (3c,e), (4b,d) and (5d). Then there is the GIVE-class, fulfilling the role of either a dative or a benefactive, as in (1i,j), (5a,c), or (7). There is a typical SURPASS-class, as in (1h), fulfilling the role of a comparative. Often SVCs serve to signal an 'aktionsart' of the main verb, as in (1g), (3a) or (4a), where a verb meaning "finish" is used to indicate that the action denoted by  $V_1$  is over. Another common category of SVCs is the SAY-class, as in (1l), where  $V_s$  does the work done by the subordinating conjunction *that* in English. Very widespread is the GO/COME-class, as in (1c-f), (2a), (3b) or (5b), where the SVCs fulfil the role of directional adjuncts. More generally, this class occurs with some  $V_s$  of motion or placement, as in (1k), (2b), or (6).

How these different types of SVC are distributed over the serializing languages of the world is still largely unknown, due mainly to the great practical difficulties involved in obtaining correct and systematic data on languages that are often hardly accessible to Western linguists. We will, therefore, have to make do, for the moment, with global impressions. There is, however, at least one striking fact, in that the Kwa language Akan as well as the Surinam Creole language Saramaccan seem to have a special predilection for both optional and obligatory forms of copying of tense/aspect markers, including 'overshooting' as in (4), and syntactic main subjects. (Akan also copies the negation, for which no evidence has been found in Saramaccan.) If this correspondence is statistically relevant, as it seems to be, it provides a forceful argument in favor of a Kwa substrate for this construction in Saramaccan. This is borne out further by Price (1976), who concludes, on the basis of both detailed historical-demographical data and cultural and linguistic indications (pp.33-5), that the bulk of the Surinamese Saramaka tribe, consisting of runaway slaves (Maroons), originated from the coastal region between the river Volta in the West and present-day Lagos in the East, i.e. Kwa territory. Such a conclusion would contradict Bickerton's universalist thesis (1981:117-32) that SVCs in Creole languages are not derived from substrates but from an innate language faculty ('bioprogram'). Cp. also note 8 below.

SVCs are found mostly in SVO (=NP-VP) languages. They do, however, also occur in languages of other basic word order types, such as VSO and SOV. An SOV example from the Kwa language Ijo is (8):

- (8) erf edein bɛ ɔkɔ bɔ mi  
 he knife the take come PAST  
 "He brought the knife" Ijo (McWhorter 1990:8)

Schiller (1990b) provides more examples from SOV languages. (9a) is from Yi, a Tibeto-Burman language related to Chinese and of predominantly SOV order. (9b) is from Lahu, a related SOV language.

(9c) is from Barai (Papua New Guinea).

- (9a) ŋa je b'e t'ɾ sia tɿv kɿ  
 my mother clothes put trunk inside-be at  
 "My mother put the clothes in the trunk" Yi (Schiller 1990b:8)
- b. ŋà ɔ-e vɔʔ-qá thàʔ ta-qɔ ɔ-qhɔ kə ta ve yò  
 my mother clothes OBJ box inside put PT PT PT  
 "My mother put the clothes in the trunk" Lahu (Schiller 1990b:8)
- c. fu bureda ije sime abe ufu  
 3sg bread the knife take cut  
 "He cuts the bread with a knife" Barai (Schiller 1990b:7)

SVCs seem to occur only rarely in VSO languages. Ravla, a Mon-Khmer language of the Wa group, is one:

- (10a) ti me ho taw lik me pin kè-en  
 take you go send letter you accompany to-here  
 "Go, take the letter and come back" Ravla (Schiller 1990b:5)
- b. ti me b pin kè-en  
 take you it accompany to-here  
 "Bring it here" Ravla (Drage 1907:61)

The precise structural analysis of SVCs in SOV and VSO languages will be discussed below.

## 2. Pseudocomplementation.

In order to understand verb serialization it is necessary to devote some attention to the phenomenon of what will be called here *pseudocomplementation*, a phenomenon found in many if not all languages of the world in different guises. We speak of pseudocomplementation when we have to do with a clausal or sentential structure, an embedded S, which is treated syntactically as if it were a normal S-complement (subject-S or object-S), whereas its semantic role is not that of an S-complement but, rather, one of concomitant, resultative or purposive circumstance or event. A pseudocomplement is a supposititious sentential complement foisted on the syntax of a verb which either does not require such a complement semantically, or, if it does, does not allow for it on grounds of lexico-grammatical restrictions.

English allows for pseudocomplementation with the verb *go* as  $V_1$ , as in:

(11) John went fishing

The gerund *fishing* is treated syntactically in such a sentence as though it were the result of an embedded object clause, as in:

(12) John likes fishing

but semantically it can hardly be an object clause to the intransitive verb *go*. Pseudocomplementation, with object-controlled subject deletion, is found frequently in English (and many other languages) with adjectives as  $V_2$ , as is shown in the following sentences:

(13)a. John hammered the nail flat  
b. I laughed myself silly

If the adjectives *flat* and *silly* are treated as predicates labeled "V" in semantically analytic representations, and if we mark the relation of coreferentiality between the controlling higher NP and the deleted lower subject by means of a subscript  $x$ , then (13a,b) have an underlying predicate-argument structure  $S_1[V_1 - \text{Subject} - \text{Object}_x - S_2[V_2 - \text{NP}\{x\}]]$ , where the embedded  $S_2$  occupies the position of an object-controlled object clause, precisely as in, for example:

(14) I helped the man walk

However, in (14) the embedded  $S_2[V_2\{\text{walk}\} - \text{NP}\{x\}]$  is a proper semantic argument to the verb *help*, since one cannot help a person unless it is with something that person is trying to achieve. This is different with (11) and (13a,b), since one can go, hammer a nail or laugh without it having to be the case that, respectively, one goes with a purpose, the nail undergoes a change of form or position, or the person laughing gets in some mental state other than the one associated with the laughing. It is, of course, possible that one goes with a purpose, etc., and that possibility has been grammaticalized in English in the form of embedded Ss that are treated syntactically according to the normal rules of clausal complementation.

Pseudocomplementation is common in Dutch with the intransitive main verbs *gaan* ("go"), *staan* ("stand"), *zitten* ("sit"), *lopen* ("walk") and *liggen* ("lie"), which treat their pseudocomplements exactly like other verbs treat their real complements, i.e. by application of the rule of Predicate Raising, which incorporates the lower  $V_2$  with the main  $V_1$  into a verbal cluster that takes the argument terms of both the main clause  $S_1$  and the subordinate clause  $S_2$  as its argument terms, in the order in which they

occur. Dutch thus has sentences like (15a,b), where (15a) is a case of semantically genuine complementation and (15b) of pseudocomplementation:

- (15)a. Karel heeft Hans een verhaal willen vertellen  
Karel has Hans a story want tell  
"Karel has wanted to tell Hans a story"
- b. Karel heeft Hans een verhaal lopen vertellen  
Karel has Hans a story walk tell  
"Karel has told Hans a story while walking"

Both sentences have the underlying predicate-argument structure  $S_1[V_1 - NP(Karel)_x] - S_2[v(\text{vertellen}) - NP(x) - NP(Hans) - NP(\text{een verhaal})]$ , with *willen* ("want") as  $V_1$  in (15a) and *lopen* ("walk") as  $V_1$  in (15b).

It must be realized that argument structure can be a dicy thing. Roughly one might say that a genuine argument term to a predicate fills a word-specific relation place without which the corresponding notion is not fully defined. This excludes parameters of place, space, direction, time, etc., which are category-specific, not word-specific. It includes object parameters for e.g. *eat, drink, throw, activate, build, write, send, full of, tile of, etc. etc.*, regardless of whether such predicates take an obligatory or an optional overt object term. Given a certain margin of choice, it may include the precise minimal sleeping place with *sleep in/on*, in so far as *sleep* denotes the typical daily recurring human activity of lying down and curling up, normally for the night, but it excludes larger locations, which are category-specific. Hence the possibility of a passive in (16a) but not in (16b):

- (16)a. This bed has been slept in.  
b. ! This town has been slept in.

It includes the nonliteral object of a verb like *go over*, but excludes its literal object, as appears, again, from the passive:

- (17)a. The matter was gone over in five minutes.  
b. ! The bridge was gone over in five minutes.

This criterion is admittedly not watertight. Yet it provides some guidance in what is, on the whole, a difficult area. It should be noticed that this criterion, as given here, does not imply that a predicate *must* have an argument place for relation places without which the corresponding notion is not fully defined. It is, in fact, quite common for predicates not to be allowed grammatically to take an argument term for a position that is required semantically. In English, for example, as in many other languages, *must* expressing obligation and *may* expressing permission require semantically, or notionally, an obliging or enabling source, no matter how vague or general. Yet the grammar of English does not provide the means for expressing that relation place. If one wants to say that Harry must leave early because his wife obliges him to, there is no argument place available for the wife. This is not so in all languages. Dutch and Low German, for example, put that argument term in the grammatical mould of a preposition phrase with the preposition *van/von* ("of"), as in the Dutch sentence:<sup>7</sup>

- (18) Ik mag van de baas vroeg weggaan  
I may of the boss early away-go  
"The boss has allowed me to leave early"

<sup>7</sup> See Kraak (1968) for a discussion of this point.



In a way one might say that the argument structure of deontic *must* and *may* in English is 'defective', since it does not allow for an argument term that is required semantically. Analogously, languages sometimes do not or not wholeheartedly allow for the grammatically standardized expression of datives or benefactives by means of a nominal argument place, or, typically also, for the grammatically standardized expression of an embedded object proposition by means of a subordinate clause with or without a complementizer. Such languages tend to allow for a simple nominal expression of a dative or benefactive only with one or two prototypical verbs, such as a verb meaning "give" for datives and benefactives, and a verb meaning "say" for object clauses. In such cases the speakers of the language in question, in their quest for ways of circumventing the syntactic limitations imposed by it, will tend to develop standardized circumlocutions. Serializing languages do so, in general, by means of pseudocomplementation, resulting in SVCs.

A case in point is Saramaccan, which does have a grammatically defined position for dative with many verbs but not all. Verbs of giving, paying and the like take normal datives, expressed as bare NPs before the direct object. Verbs of saying and telling, however, do not, or preferably not, take datives and take SVCs instead, constructed with the verb *da* ("give"). Benefactives, on the other hand, are always expressed by means of a serial construction with *da*. The following examples, taken from Byrne (1987:186-9), will illustrate this:

- (19)a. a da/paka di womi di moni  
he give/pay the man the money  
"He gave/paid the man the money"
- b. a da/paka di moni da di womi  
he give/pay the money give the man  
"He gave/paid the money for the benefit/on behalf of the man"
- (20)a. Magda konda di oto da di basi  
Magda tell the story to the boss  
"Magda told the story to the boss"

A similar situation occurs when a language either lacks specific prepositions or has them but in free variation with SVCs (due, perhaps, to different historical sources for the language). Sranan, for example, lacks an instrumental preposition and uses TAKE serials. Saramaccan, however, does have an instrumental preposition *ku* ("with"), which also serves as the comitative "with", but still uses TAKE serials for instrumentals in what appears to be free variation (McWhorter 1990:17). One thus finds both of the following:

- (21)a. a koti di gbamba ku faka  
he cut the meat with knife  
"He cut the meat with a knife"
- b. a tei di faka koti di gbamba  
he take the knife cut the meat  
"He cut the meat with the knife"<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> It struck me that Saramaccan examples with *ku* tend to occur in the literature with an indefinite prepositional object, as in (21a), whereas with a definite object the TAKE serial seems to be preferred, as in (21b). This would, again, parallel Akan (cp. Lord 1982:293), where GIVE serials are obligatory with definite, and optional with indefinite, objects, the latter allowing also for a "normal" dative.

Sometimes one finds that a language has a general preposition, for example for locative relations, which is then further specified by means of a SVC. The Sranan sentence (22) illustrates this. The general locative preposition *na* is further specified by both *ini* ("inside" and the serial verb *puru* ("pull"), which signals separation:

- (22) a man hari a ston puru na ini a olo  
the man drag the stone pull LOC in the hole  
"The man pulled the stone from inside the hole" cp. Sebba (1987:122)

A lack of grammaticalized comparative constructions is likewise regularly compensated for by means of SVCs. Many languages lack a separate grammatical construction for the expression of comparative inequality (Stassen 1985). Typically then, when they have or allow for SVCs, a serial construction is used to express the comparative notion, as was demonstrated above in (1h).

In all such SVC-cases the pseudocomplement 'stands in' for what may be regarded as a missing term in the semantically defective argument structure of some predicate (verb), or it has the function fulfilled by a preposition or some grammatical category in other languages. The prototypical predicates of *giving, taking, surpassing* or *saying* are then typically thrown in as  $V_s$ , and thus quickly acquire some conventionalized or grammaticalized status for precisely those cases where they perform their 'stand-in' function. For example, equivalents of *give* as  $V_s$  in a pseudocomplement tend to be re-analysed after some time as prepositions introducing indirect objects (McWhorter 1989). Equivalents of *say* as  $V_s$  tend to become subordinating complementizers (Lord 1976), and TAKE verbs (as  $V_1$ ) instrumentals or objects (Lord 1982). Some serializing languages (cp. Welmers 1973:376 for Yoruba and Nupe) have special forms for certain verbs that are standardly, i.e. with some degree of grammaticalization, used in SVCs.

SVCs are considered to be, syntactically at least, cases of S-complementation, treated according to the syntactic rules for S-complementation that the language in question has at its disposal anyway. It must be stressed that they are 'loose' or supernumerary adjuncts, even in cases where they fulfill a 'stand-in' function. Thus, for example, although the semantics of *bribi* ("believe") obviously does allow for an embedded object-S, the pseudocomplement in (11) is not *that* object-S, since what I, in that sentence, say I believe is not that I say that you stole it but, simply, that you stole it. Not until the  $V_s$  *taki* ("say") is re-analysed as a complementizer can the Sranan verb *bribi* be described lexically as an object-S taking verb. Analogously for datives, benefactives, comparatives, instrumentals and the like.

At this point the question naturally presents itself of whether other types of pseudocomplement are to be found in natural languages than just the bare tenseless, negationless S-embeddings encountered so far. Given the global and historical vastness of language, any answer to this question has by necessity to be incomplete and provisional. The best provisional answer that can be given here is that only bare S-complements have been attested as sentential (clausal) pseudocomplements. That is, no cases have come to light so far of tensed clausal pseudocomplements, let alone of finite subordinate clauses functioning as pseudocomplements. One might thus feel encouraged to venture positing a language universal to the effect that *clausal pseudocomplements must be bare*.

Whether there are non-clausal but purely nominal pseudocomplements is another matter. Many languages have uses for their accusative cases that suggest a phenomenon of pseudo-object-NP. Classical

Greek, for example (Kühner & Gerth 1955:303) has ἄλγος τὴν κεφαλῆν (lit.: I am suffering pain with regard to my head: "I've got a headache"). Later Latin has the same, derived from Greek (Kühner & Stegmann 1955:287): *doleo capui* (same meaning). Not unlike the Greek and Latin examples one finds in Swahili<sup>9</sup> cases like *ni-me-vunjika mguu* (lit.: I am broken with regard to my leg: "I've got a broken leg"), or *bustani ime haribika maua* (lit.: garden is destroyed with regard to flowers: "the flowers in the garden are destroyed"). Whether such cases ought to be described as forms of nominal pseudocomplementation is a question I shall leave unanswered here.

### 3. Getting closer to a definition

SVCs are thus, it seems, instances of pseudocomplementation. But, as has already been made clear, that property is, though a necessary, far from a sufficient condition for SVC status. Let us therefore continue and try to add further criteria, on the basis of the kind of data discussed, in the hope that we end up eventually with a necessary and sufficient set of conditions.

Some further criteria readily suggest themselves. First, SVCs must contain real *surface verbs*, not adjectives, adverbial particles or what not, as  $V_s$ . When, as (according to Welmers just quoted) in Yoruba and Nupe, certain verbs are, so to speak, reserved for SVCs, they must be shown to possess genuine verbal status on independent grounds. Without surface verbal status there are no SVCs, or at least, one does not get the kind of phenomena that struck earlier descriptive linguists as particularly serial.

Then, as has frequently been observed, SVCs *lack any overt complementizer*. Sebba, for example, writes (1987:86): "To summarise the accepted criteria then, serial verb constructions have at least the following properties: ... They contain two or more verbs without overt markers of coordination or subordination." The material selected above as being representative for the intuitive notion of SVCs clearly brings out this criterion.

It should be noted that, in the present analysis, a marker of coordination should not be expected, since all SVCs are considered to be (pseudo)complements, and therefore by definition subordinate to the main verb, even though SVCs expressing concomitant circumstance are sometimes best translated as a coordinated structure. The distinction drawn by Sebba (1987:109-133) between coordinate and subordinate SVCs seems to be argued for more abundantly than stringently. Our counterargument is simple. We do not need that distinction, since an analysis in terms of subordinate pseudocomplement structure seems sufficient for all cases. Therefore, we will do without coordinated serial verb constructions.

Furthermore, as has already been implied, the subject of the putative  $V_s$  must have been deleted under conditions of (constant or variable) coreference with the commanding higher subject or object. We speak of *controlled subject deletion*. (The higher subject, but not the object, may, in rare cases, be copied subsequently for the  $V_s$ , as was shown in (6) above.) This is confirmed by cases with more than one SVC: each successive  $V_s$  has its deleted subject controlled by the subject or object of its immediately

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<sup>9</sup> I am grateful to Carol Myers-Scotton and Stephen Adéwolé for this information.



construction, must occupy the position normally reserved for objects, or else, if that position is internal, for extraposed object-Ss. The pseudocomplement-S must, moreover, appear intact in surface structure, apart from a deleted or copied subject. This rules out, for example, the Dutch sentence (15b) as a case of serialization, since there, as has been said, the verb of the pseudocomplement has been clustered with the main verb by the rule of Predicate Raising, so that the embedded pseudocomplement-S does not survive intact in surface structure. It also, and for the same reason, rules out Sebba's example:

- (26) Kofi naki kiri Amba  
 Kofi hit kill Amba  
 "Kofi struck Amba dead" Sebba (1987:93)

Lastly, SVCs must be *bare S-complements*. That is, the embedded S-structure contains just a lexical verb and its argument terms (the subject term deletable and controlled by a higher subject or object term), without any higher operators such as negation, tense, quantifiers, modalities and the like.

The criteria that have been provided so far seem to get us pretty close to a proper delimitation of SVC phenomena. They clearly weed out a number of cases that have been taken for SVCs but where the embedded S is simply an ordinary object-S and no pseudocomplement. For example, Bickerton (1989:165-6) presents the following Seychellois Creole sentences as cases of serialization:

- (27)a. Mō dir per vini  
 I tell priest come  
 "I told the priest to come"
- b. i ti dir mwā vin ed li netway lakaz  
 he PAST tell me come help him clean house  
 "He told me to come and help him clean the house"

It will be clear, however, that (27a) is a case of normal object-complementation: Seychellois *dir*, like English *tell*, takes a semantically genuine object-S. The same applies to  $\nu p$ {*vin ed li*} and  $\nu p$ {*netway lakaz*}: both represent clearly genuine object-clauses to, respectively, *dir* ("tell") and *ed*<<*e*> ("help"). Only the verb *ed* ("help") represents a pseudocomplement. It is, however, clustered with *vin* into one V-node, by the rule of Predicate Raising, as appears from the dropping of the final vowel *-e*,<sup>11</sup> and can therefore not be a serial verb.<sup>12</sup>

Sebba (1987:55-6) discusses:

- (28) Kofi meki a/en go na wowoyo  
 Kofi make he/him go LOC market  
 "Kofi made him go to the market"

and correctly identifies *go* as the verb of a genuine object-S,<sup>13</sup> and thus not of a serial construction. He suggests (1987:80-1) that, at least for some speakers, *meki* is not a serial verb in other constructions, such as (29a,b), but has been re-analysed as a conjunction meaning "so that", criticizing Voorhoeve (1975), who takes them to be instances of serialization:

- (29)a. alen fadon meki den prani gro  
 rain fall make the plants grow  
 "Rain falls so that the crops grow" Sebba (1987:56)

<sup>11</sup> See Seuren (1990) for a detailed analysis of Predicate Raising and Subject Raising constructions in Mauritian Creole, which is virtually identical with Seychellois Creole.

<sup>12</sup> See also Seuren (to appear b) for a discussion of these cases.

<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, the semantic subject of *go* occurs both as an uninflected, i.e. nominative pronoun (*a*), and as an inflected accusative pronoun (*en*).

- b. Kofi dray a plat meki yu yere  
Kofi turn the record make you hear  
"Kofi played the record for you to hear"                      Sebba (1987:79)

His argument is based on the sentences (30a,b), which he constructed for the purpose:

- (30)a. Kwaku no e naki Mary meki a siki  
Kwaku not PRES hit Mary make her sick  
b. Kwaku no e naki Mary meki a breyti  
Kwaku not PRES hit Mary make her happy

If, he says, *meki* is a serial verb, the sentences must mean, respectively, "Kwaku is not [hitting Mary and making her sick/happy]". But if *meki* is a conjunction the scope of the negation can be altered so that the sentences can then mean "Kwaku is not hitting Mary, — so that she is sick/happy". In either case one of the readings will be pragmatically implausible, and he then asked his two informants whether the sentence with *siki* or the one with *breyti* was more plausible. Not surprisingly, he failed to get a coherent result. It is a matter of experience that shooting artificial sentences at informants in a situation where they have to reflect and report on their own language (activities not favored by most informants) more often than not yields poor results or no results at all. In this case subtle distinctions of logical scope are involved, in connection, most probably, with intonational distinctions, making the enterprise even more hazardous than it normally is. Although one cannot rule out the possibility that *meki* has been re-analysed, for some speakers, as a conjunction, better methods are required to establish whether this is so. In any case, *meki* is in no way unique, in this respect, since re-analysis has been reported widely for other common serial verbs, as has been noted above. We shall, therefore, treat *meki* on a par with the other cases of possible re-analysis, and proceed on the assumption that *meki* in (29a,b) is indeed used as a serial verb, as long as no evidence to the contrary comes to light.

We are, however, not quite there yet. We have no criterion yet to exclude, in particular, verbal constructions with a verb meaning "go" as  $V_1$ , followed by an embedded bare S-complement with subject-deletion and no other cyclic rule, as in (11) above. Such constructions are rife in a vast number of languages that are otherwise under no suspicion of allowing for serial verbs. English has, besides sentences like (11), also imperatives of the form *go get your book*. French has, for example, *elle est allée boire* ("she has gone drinking"), and Italian likewise: *è andata bere*. Further examples can be given at will. Such cases must be ruled out, or else, it is felt, we miss out on what SVCs really are and all sorts of languages that are clearly not of the serializing type must then be thought to have SVCs.

One may, of course, be liberal and say that English, French, Italian and all those other languages have just the GO class of SVC but not the many other typical SVC classes found in what we call the serializing languages and which make us call them that. Maybe so, yet there is a further point that deserves attention anyway and which we do not want to miss out on. The point is that where we hit upon what we wish to consider SVCs these SVCs are not lexically governed by the higher  $V_1$ . That is, the higher  $V$  is not subcategorized for taking pseudocomplements. SVCs occur to a large extent freely as "loose" adjuncts to higher Ss, restricted by general considerations of semantic and/or pragmatic appropriateness, and perhaps also by other factors, but not by lexical argument structure. This is not so for the GO constructions just mentioned. The kind of S-complementation found with *go* is not allowed

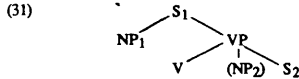
with most other verbs of going: \**he walked fishing* is clearly ungrammatical. Analogously for the pseudocomplementation phenomena with other verbs in Dutch, as illustrated in (15b), for example. Here it is the higher V that enables pseudocomplementation. In genuine serializing languages SVCs are never governed that way by their higher V. There, more often than not, the class of verbs that can occur as  $V_s$  is restricted, not the class of verbs that can occur as  $V_1$ . It is, therefore, necessary to have a wider look at the subcategorization facts of the language in question before one can decide for some isolated example whether it is a SVC or not.

Even so, however, as has been observed by virtually all concerned, SVCs tend to gravitate towards certain stereotypes: there is, as has been shown, the typical DATIVE and/or BENEFACTIVE class, the CAUSATIVE class, the MOVE class, the PURPOSIVE class, the COMPARATIVE class, the THAT-class, and a few others, where the serial verb expresses the notions involved. Very typical is also the TAKE class as exemplified in (1a,b), (3c), (4b,c), (5d) and (21b). This differs, at least in the examples quoted, from the others just mentioned in that here the verb expressing the notion of taking is  $V_1$ , not  $V_s$ . Here, too, the SVC is a "loose" adjunct, but the fact that it occurs with a higher V meaning "take" is, though somehow stereotypical, clearly not a result of the lexical argument structure of the "take" verb. Whether the TAKE verb is also  $V_1$ , and thus not  $V_s$ , in cases like (8) and (9c), which have the basic SOV order, will be discussed in section 4.

In general, our tentative conclusion is that SVCs are typically characterized by the fact that they are forms of un governed pseudocomplementation of bare Ss, without any complementizer, with their subject deleted under conditions of higher subject or higher object control without any further cyclic rule being operative, and manifesting themselves as VPs with a real V in surface structure. They, moreover, come in typical categories of use (whose distribution over the various serializing languages or language families is, however, still relatively unclear). The phenomenon of serialization is thus seen to be a *syndrome* of features and phenomena found in many if not all languages of the world and whose typical combination gives rise to the typicality that made earlier linguists distinguish a separate category of SVCs. If this analysis is correct, it takes the bottom out of any theory, such as Bickerton's (1981) "Bioprogram theory", that interprets SVCs as an element in its own right in "Universal Grammar" underlying the grammars of all natural languages. Under the analysis presented here there is no separate universal category of "serial verb construction", just a syndrome of a number of other factors that are likely to be, one way or another, language-universal. This syndrome has certain stereotypical features which, being features of a syndrome, cannot themselves be elements in "Universal Grammar". What might explain these stereotypical features is still largely unclear, a *state of affairs* to be expected given the low level of our knowledge of questions regarding the functionality versus the modularity of putative linguistic universals. In any case, whichever way the balance goes between functionality and modularity, the stereotypical features of SVCs in the languages of the world will in all likelihood be explained as by-products ("epiphenomena") of whatever their functional or modular basis will turn out to be.

#### 4. SVCs in VSO and SOV languages

As has been said, the vast majority of serializing languages have basic SVO order, i.e. the basic structure of their sentences is NP-VP. Here the derivation of SVCs is simple. If one takes the NP-VP structure to be also the syntactically underlying structure, SVCs originate from an embedded pseudocomplement-S, as is demonstrated in (31), where S<sub>2</sub> is the pseudocomplement:



The subject of S<sub>2</sub> undergoes deletion under control by the higher subject NP<sub>1</sub> or, if it's there, the higher object NP<sub>2</sub>. All that has to be assumed is that an S that loses its subject is demoted to VP-status, so that S<sub>2</sub> becomes VP after the deletion of its subject. Different theories may account for such facts differently, but the net result will be the same. In my theory of Semantic Syntax, for example, the underlying constituent order for NP-VP languages is not NP-VP but VSO (essentially as proposed in McCawley (1970)). A separate routine, induced by the finite tense operator, changes this into NP-VP (see, e.g. Seuren 1985:128-30). However, whether one prefers this or the underlying NP-VP theory (in whatever variety), the pseudocomplement-S is always attached to the far right, after any genuine object arguments of the main verb.

How does this work for languages with different basic word order patterns, in particular SOV and VSO languages?<sup>14</sup> The examples (8) and (9a-c) provided above, taken from Schiller (1990b) and McWhorter (1990) give an idea of what putative SVCs look like in SOV languages. We shall repeat them here, with another example from Ijo added:

- (8) eri edein bɛ̀ àkɔ̀ bó mi  
 he knife the take come PAST  
 "He brought the knife" Ijo (McWhorter 1990:8)
- (32) eri opúru-mo àkɛ̀ tɔ̀bɔ̀tɔ̀ pɛ̀rɛ̀-mi  
 he crayfish take boy give PAST  
 "He gave a crayfish to the boy" Ijo (McWhorter 1990:8)
- (9c) fu bureda ije sime abe ufu  
 3sg bread the knife take cut  
 "He cuts the bread with a knife" Barai (Schiller 1990b:7)

In attempting to analyse these sentences we must realize, to begin with, that we are trivially hampered by an elementary lack of knowledge of the languages concerned. All we can do in cases of the sort is look carefully at the sentences in question and propose an analysis that seems reasonable in the light of both the available facts and the available theory. With this enormous proviso we may perhaps venture the following.

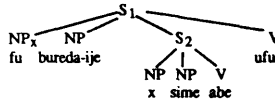
The first thing to be noticed is that the Barai sentence (9c) differs structurally from the two Ijo sentences. The Barai sentence seems to show fairly unequivocally that the sequence corresponding to [knife - take] is embedded in the matrix structure [he - bread-the [knife - take] - cut]. This means that, other than in typical TAKE serials, the TAKE verb is the V<sub>g</sub>, and not the main verb V<sub>1</sub>. It does not seem

<sup>14</sup> Data on the relatively few languages with other basic word order patterns are so scarce and, often, unreliable, that there is little point in discussing them in this context. See also Schiller (1990b).



possible, or at any rate highly contrived, to analyse the sentence in such a way that the TAKE verb is the main verb and *ufu* ("cut") the serial verb (as in most of the cases quoted above), since then the SVC would have been cut up into two discontinuous parts, which strikes one as improbable. The simplest analysis is now to let (9c) correspond to an underlying structure as in (33), where  $S_2$  is the pseudocomplement acting as a SVC. (Any tense operator is assumed to take scope over  $S_1$  and thus to command  $S_1$ .)

(33)



The deletion of the lower subject NP[x] under control by the higher subject now turns  $S_2$  into an embedded VP, and, barring any tense processing (which does not seem to have any overt effect in this case), sentence (9c) results.

The semantics of the Ijo sentence (32) makes it clear that the main verb must be *aki* ("take"). We thus have here a GIVE serial construction. It follows that *pri-mi* ("gave") is the  $V_s$ , even though it carries the PAST tense (a case of 'overshooting'). In the absence of further data it is hard to say whether the position occupied by the SVC corresponding to [boy - give-PAST] in the surface structure of (32) is the 'original' syntactic position normally assigned to embedded object clauses or the result of extraposition from an 'original' internal position before or after *opuru-mo* ("crayfish"). In any case, with or without extraposition, the analysis of SVCs as given above seems to apply without too many complications.

By analogy we say that in the other Ijo sentence (8) *aku* ("take") is the main verb and *bo-mi* ("came") the serial verb, carrying the tense marker as a result of 'overshooting'. If this is correct, (8) is not an instance of the class of TAKE serials but of the class of GO (COME) serials. This again would suggest, given observed regular patterns in GO serials, that subject deletion in the SVC of (8) is object-controlled so that the knife is said to come hither. Clearly, such conclusions must be tested against further material. So far, however, nothing indicates that the overall analysis provided here of SVCs should not effortlessly apply to these cases.

Interestingly, the Yi sentence (9a) and the Lahu sentence (9b), both repeated here, differ in their treatment of their SVCs in that the former extraposes the pseudocomplement-S, whereas the latter does not. In both cases the subject of the SVC is deleted under higher object control:

- (9a) *ŋa je b'e t'v sia tsv kuu*  
 my mother clothes put trunk inside-be at  
 "My mother put the clothes in the trunk" Yi (Schiller 1990b:8)
- b. *ŋa ɔ-e vɔʔ-qá tháʔ ta-qɔ ɔ-gho ka ta ve yò*  
 my mother clothes OBJ box inside put PT PT PT  
 "My mother put the clothes in the trunk" Lahu (Schiller 1990b:8)

Finally, let us consider the sentences (10a,b) (repeated here for convenience), from Raviá, the only VSO language spotted so far that may qualify as a serializing language.

- (10)a. ti me ho taw lik me pin kè-en  
 take you go send letter you accompany to-here  
 "Go, take the letter and come back"

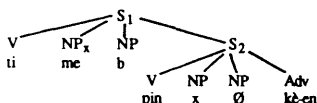
Ravúa (Schiller 1990:5)

- b. ti me b pin kè-en  
 take you it accompany to-here  
 "Bring it here"

Ravúa (Dragé 1907:61)

If it is assumed that Ravúa is indeed a serializing language, which clearly is the more interesting and challenging assumption, then, at first sight, sentence (10b) poses no problems. It looks as if it can be derived simply from an underlying VSO structure, with the SVC added as a supernumerary object-S:

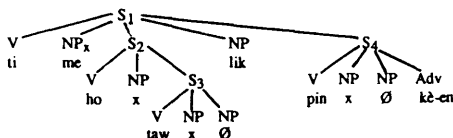
(34)



After deletion of the lower subject NP(x), controlled by the higher subject *me*, and with a zero anaphoric lower object, the sentence is there.

(10a), however, is less simple. It looks, in terms of the present analysis, as if it contains two parallel SVCs, one corresponding to [go - send], containing "send" again as an embedded serial verb under "go", and one corresponding to [accompany - to-here]. Whereas in (10b) the higher object ("it") precedes the only SVC there is, here the higher object ("letter") follows the first SVC [go - send] and precedes the second [accompany - to-here]. Given our total lack of knowledge of the ways constituents may be shifted about by, presumably late, rules in Ravúa, it is difficult to put forward a reasonable explanation of these facts. But let us make the simplest possible assumption, given the few facts at our disposal, and say that in the event of more than one SVC a genuine nominal object-NP will stand between the two. Under this assumption, the underlying structure of (10a) will be something like (35), with S<sub>2</sub> and S<sub>4</sub> as the two parallel embedded pseudocomplement-Ss:

(35)



If the same procedures as were assumed for (10b) are applied here, sentence (10a) results but without the second occurrence of *me* ("you"). Clearly, if that second occurrence of the main subject is to be accounted for some (late) copying rule must be assumed that will repeat the main subject before the second SVC. This rule may perhaps be thought to be reinforced by the fact that the subject deletion in S<sub>4</sub> is controlled by the higher subject *me*, and not by the higher object *lik*. Without the copying of *me* there might be a risk of *lik* controlling the subject deletion in S<sub>4</sub>.

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This concludes our discussion of the status and definition of serial verb constructions. It seems that, on the basis of the limited evidence available, certain general principles are beginning to delineate

themselves. The central notion is that of surface verbs without an overt complementizer in bare pseudocomplementation, often 'standing in' for defective lexical argument structure or fulfilling certain standard semantic functions for which the grammar of the language has not so far developed standardized categories, combined with the criterion that no cyclic rules of complementation have been applied other than controlled subject deletion. On top of this, certain stereotypical categories of use have been recognized by most authors on the subject. All this together makes for a typical syndrome in natural language, which has received the name of serial verb constructions.

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