

Multiverb constructions in a West African areal typological perspective

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1.0 Issues in the analysis of multi-verb constructions (MVCs)

A decade or so ago, Carol Lord (1993:1) opened her book on serial verb constructions focusing especially on West African languages as follows:

The label “serial verb” has been applied to a range of linguistic constructions in a variety of languages. Generalizations about a set of verb phrase sequences in one language do not necessarily apply to superficially similar constructions in another language. Within a single language, one group of serial verb constructions may show a certain property, while another group may not. This situation has encouraged a blossoming of claims and counterclaims about serial verb constructions.

Lord implies by this that there are some spurious serial verb constructions (SVC) out there. She also intimates that there are various types of serial verb constructions in a single language. Moreover, she suggests that there is cross-linguistic variation such that the properties of SVCs in one language may not map whole sale onto those of another language. One of the problems that has exercised the minds of many analysts concerns the distinction between SVCs proper and other verb sequence constructions even in one language. As Creissels (2000:240) put it (cf. Delplanque 1998):

... there is most of the time no obvious distinction between serial verbs and verb sequences in which each verb constitutes a distinct predicate, in particular consecutive constructions (i.e. constructions in which two or more successive clauses represent successive events...). Unfortunately in many descriptions of African languages, any more or less “exotic” verb sequences (i.e. any sequence of verbs that does not exhibit every characteristic of the sequence of verbs found in European languages) is loosely termed ‘serial verbs’. In Africa, uncontroversial cases of serial verbs are found mainly in Kwa languages (e.g. Ewe) and in Benue-Congo languages previously classified as Eastern Kwa (e.g. Yoruba).

My aim in this paper is to take a step back and examine the properties of multiverb sequences in the languages on the West African coast, mainly “Old” Kwa languages,¹ especially Akan, Ewe, Likpe, Fon and Yoruba, in which “uncontroversial” cases of serial verb constructions have been found and to propose ways and means of distinguishing between the various multi-verb constructions. In addition, I want to explore the variation within and across the languages that we find with respect to the constraints that have been proposed for SVCs, such as argument sharing constraints, tense-aspect-mood constraint, negation constraint and illocutionary force constraint. I

¹ “Old” Kwa is the designation for Greenberg’s Kwa family of languages. It encompasses the groups that he subdivided into Western Kwa, now considered (New) Kwa and Eastern Kwa which are now classified as Benue Congo (see Stewart 1989).

argue that the variations we find can be explained with respect to the linguistic type profile of the individual languages. For instance, Likpe (a Ghana-Togo Mountain language) being a subject cross-referencing language employs concordial marking strategy on subsequent VPs in an SVC. Moreover, I suggest that the kinds of SVCs we find in these “Old” Kwa languages constitute an areal type. For instance, I show that the possibility of focusing or questioning individual components of SVCs in these languages can be seen as an areal feature. However, the languages vary according to its instantiation depending on the types of focusing and questioning strategies they deploy.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. First, I provide a working definition of MVCs and describe the features of the different types: consecutive constructions (section 2.2), overlapping constructions including other forms of covert coordination (section 2.3) and serial verb constructions (section 2.4). Section 3 focuses on that variation that we find among the languages with respect to some SVC features: subject marking (section 3.1), the realisation of the object (section 3.2), tense-aspect-modality marking (section 3.3), negation (section 3.4) and verb focusing (section 3.5). Section 4 concludes the paper.

2.0 Multi-verb constructions

Apart from various verb sequence constructions not showing surface distinctions leading to some constructions being mistaken for others, progress in the analysis and typology of multi verb sequences has also been hampered by the fact that the different types of multi verb constructions are functionally similar. In addition, on the basis of their function they have been assimilated to constructions in which two or more elements jointly constitute the predicate of a single clause. Such constructions have been labeled complex predicates (see e.g. Alsina et al. 1997, Bodomomo 1997, Schultze-Berndt 2003). The definition proposed here of MVCs excludes certain kinds of complex predicates. It excludes those structures in which each constituent element is not a verb that can be used as a predicate in simple clauses. Thus it excludes verb particle constructions, verb plus noun constructions, some light verb constructions in which one of the elements is not a verb or cannot function on its own as a verb (see Butt 2003). Functionally, however, some of these structures share properties with items that I am calling MVCs. In particular, it appears that languages that productively use such structures have closed verb classes. That is, they do not have productive means of forming new verbs. For instance, the Australian language Jaminjung has about 35 inflecting verbs; Kallam, a Papuan language, has 100 verbs to mention some of the non-African languages. Ewe, for example, has about 600 verbs. In addition the “complex predicates” tend to be used to express similar functional meanings; aspect, associated motion, associated posture, manner, cause-result etc. (cf. Durie 1997)

In spite of these similarities I do not adopt a complex predicate terminology in what follows. I assume, as a working definition, that a multi-verb construction is a sequence of verbs or verb phrases and their complements

- without any marker of syntactic dependency
- typically, at least one argument is common to all the verbs in a sequence (with various constraints on their expression)
- the VPs in the sequence are seen as related

- the individual verbs can function as independent verbs in simple clauses (in the same form).

In the rest of the section, I demonstrate that the gamut of constructions that fall within the definition of MVCs are of various types: consecutive constructions, overlapping and covert coordination constructions and serial verb constructions. The features of each of these types are described.

2.1 Consecutive constructions

Consecutive constructions have been identified and distinguished from verb compounding and SVCs in languages like Fe'fe' and Igbo (Hyman 1971, Lord 2003). Essentially, consecutive constructions are made up of two or more verbal clauses and together they represent related states of affairs which may be successive, simultaneous or alternating in time. One can distinguish different types of these clauses. In one type, the different components of the construction exhibit properties of independent clauses and they may be just juxtaposed or linked by a connector. In Ewe for instance, the subject of each component clause is obligatorily expressed, but there need not be any shared arguments between the clauses in the construction, as example (1) illustrates.

(1) A kindergarten teacher speaking to her pupils

ame síáa ame né míá ŋkú né mí-dó gbe dǎ
 person INT person JUSS close eye CONSEC 1PL-put voice DIR
 'Everybody should close their eyes and lets pray' (AKOE0703)

In (1) the referents of the subject of the first clause are included in the subject of the second clause and that is the only overlap in arguments. The consecutive connector can be omitted.

The individual clauses can be marked for different aspect and modality values as in (2) where the VP in the first clause is marked for the progressive and the subsequent one for the potential. Incidentally in this structure the referents of the subject arguments of the clauses are not the same.

(2) **Mi-nɔ yi-yi-mí má-vá**
 2PL-be.at:NPRES RED-go 1SG:POT-come
 'You be going (and) I will come (i.e. follow)'

Furthermore, unlike in Ewe SVCs as we shall see below, each component of the consecutive construction in Ewe can be independently negated as in (3), where the second clause alone is in the negative, but not the first.

(3) **tu-i né me-mé o**
 2SG-grind-3SG CONSEC 3SG:NEG-fine NEG
 'Grind it and let it not be too fine'

These features distinguish the consecutive constructions in Ewe from other MVCs and also point to the fact that each component in such a structure constitutes a clause on its own.

Another type is where it is not immediately obvious whether we are dealing with multiclausal structures as in Ewe or with a more tightly knit structure. In this type the VPs in the construction typically have the same subject and the subsequent VPs are marked in some way to signal sequentiality to or dependence on the first VP.. For instance, in Igbo (Lord 2003) constructions described as consecutive, all verbs or verb phrases have the same subject. If this is not the case then the referent of the non-initial subject is included in the reference of the first. The first verb is marked for various tense aspect values and non-initial verbs are marked by tone patterns and affixes. For example,

- (4) **á gà-rà m̀ áhýá gá-á órú**
 PREF go-PAST 1SG market go-CONSEC farm
 (a) ‘I went to the farm via the market’
 (b) ‘I went to the market and then also to the farm’ (with an intonation break before the second verb)

Lord (2003) notes that a single intonation unit is used for related events and an intonation break indicates separate events. This is the reason why there could be two readings of the string in (4) above. In fact, where there is an intonation break it is possible for the subsequent verb to have its own subject expressed although its referent is somehow included in that of the first verb as in (5).

- (5) **ànyị là-rà ụlọ, òkóyè èsì-é n̄rị**
 3PL return-PAST house Okoye cook-CONSEC food
 ‘They went home and Okoye cooked (food)’

Negation seems to be marked once on the first verb in these constructions in Igbo.

In a consecutive construction then, a sequence of VPs are optionally linked by a connector and the VPs constitute predications by themselves with markers showing the relationship of dependence or sequentiality with respect to the first VP.

2.2 Overlapping constructions and covert coordination

Unlike consecutive constructions, there is no overt linker between the components of overlapping constructions. These tend to be biclausal. A prototypical instantiation of these constructions is one in which the subject of the second clause is co-referential with the object of the first clause. A construction of this kind translates as for example: ‘Call the girls they responded’.

In Ewe the main features of this construction are the following (see Duthie 1996, Ameka 2003, to appear):

- a) it consists of two clauses juxtaposed to each other without any overt connector
- b) the subject argument of each clause must be obligatorily expressed;
- c) the subject argument of the second clause is coreferential with
 - either a non-subject argument of the first clause as in (6);

- (6) **É-ɖa nú ná mí míé-ɖu**
 3SG-cook thing DAT 1PL 1PL-eat
 ‘She cooked for us and we ate’

- or with the situation characterised by the first clause (example (7));
- (7) **É-fo-m wò-sē**
 3SG-strike-1SG 3SG-become.hard

- ‘S/he hit me it was hard’, i.e. ‘S/he hit me hard’
 - or it indexes the spatio-temporal features of the situation represented in the first clause (example (8));
- (8) An overheard conversation (August 2003). Two people discussing their attendance at Old Students Association meetings and one says:
- Me-de é-didi**
 1SG-reach 3SG.IMPERS-be.far
 ‘I have been (to these meetings) it is a long time now’
- d) each clause can be independently negated as in (9);
- (9) **É-yó-m nye-mé-tɔ o**
 3SG-call-1SG 1SG-NEG-respond NEG
 ‘He/She called me, I did not respond’
- e) each clause can be marked for its aspect and modality values, however they should share the same temporal frame or time value;
- f) the individual verbs in the clauses can function as independent verbs in simple mono-verbal clauses.

These constructions can be thought of as a kind of covert coordination since they cannot have any overt linker involving different subjects. The subject of both clauses can be the same. In such cases, the second occurrence can be omitted. A hallmark of such structures is that a prosodic break is possible between the VP constituents as is the case in the Edo example in (10) (Ogie 2003), or the Ewe example in (11).

- (10) **Òzó dé ízè , rri òré**
 EDO NAME buy rice eat it
 ‘Ozo bought rice and ate it’

- (11) **wó-a-ɖa te á-gba-e nyuie ...**
 EWE 3PL-IRR-cook yam IRR-break-3SG well
 ‘They should cook yam (and) mash it well ...’ (Nyaku 1997b:2)

An important difference between these covert VP coordination structures and SVCs for example is that if the VPs have the same referentially identical object, its subsequent occurrence is signaled by an anaphoric pronoun as in (10) and (11) above. We now turn to SVCs.

2.3 Serial verb constructions

Serial verb constructions in the West African littoral languages can be defined as a sequence of two or more VPs (including any complements and adjuncts);

- a) without any marker of syntactic dependency,
- b) the VPs in the sequence are construed as occurring within the same temporal frame,
- c) the VPs share the same mood (e.g. imperative),
- d) the VPs can be formally marked for different aspect and modality categories,
- e) the individual verbs can function as independent verbs in simple clauses (in the same form),
- f) all VPs in the series share the same syntactic subject with variation on its expression across the languages,

- g) VPs cannot be formally independently negated,
- h) the verbs can be individually focused or questioned,
- i) the VPs in the series together with their arguments and adjuncts constitute a monoclausal construction

The verbs in the construction form distinct grammatical and phonological words. There is no limit on the number of VPs that can constitute a SVC, except for restrictions on production and comprehension.

Some of these points can be illustrated with Christaller's (1875) examples. Thus in (12) the first VP has an adjunct and the second has a locative object. Both verbs are marked for the past.

(12) **Ye-sɔre-e ntém kɔ-ɔ fie**
 TWI 1PL-rise-PAST quickly go-PAST home
 'We arose [got up FKA] quickly (and) went home'

(13) **Wo-te hɔ́ re-su**
 TWI 3PL-sit there PROG-cry
 'They sit there weep = weeping'

In (13), however, the two verbs are marked for different but semantically compatible aspect values. The first verb is marked for the stative and the second for the progressive. The other features like negation, focusing, questioning etc. are discussed in later sections in relation to the variation one finds across the languages. In the next section we present a summary of multiverb constructions and some possible outcomes of their diachronic development.

2.4 MVCs and grammaticalisation and lexicalisation

All the MVCs can serve as vehicles for lexicalisation where verbs or VPs involved develop into fixed collocations or verb plus satellite constructions. For instance in some languages of Cote d'Ivoire, e.g., Attie or Baule the verbs translated as 'buy' and 'eat' colexicalise the concept of 'sell' (Bogny 2003). In Ewe, some verbal concepts are expressed by verb plus satellite constructions which are the outcome of the lexicalisation of MVCs. By satellite I mean a constituent that is a sister to a verb and is itself not a verb (after Talmy 2000). For example, in Ewe, the verbal concept of 'taste (active experience)' is expressed using the verb **ɖɔ́** 'cover' and a satellite in a heterosemic relation with a perception verb, namely, **kpɔ́** 'SEE' or **se** 'HEAR'.

Similarly, verbs grammaticalise into functional markers such as aspectuals, modals, prepositions etc. via MVCs. For instance, in many of the languages e.g Gbe and also Ga and Dangme, preverb markers are grammaticalised verbs. In Ewe, for example, the verb **kpɔ́** 'see' apart from functioning as a satellite, as noted above, has also grammaticalised into an adverbial that marks experiential perfective aspect via a consecutive construction, and as a preverb contra expectation modal marker via an SVC structure (cf Heine et al 1991). While the grammaticalisation of these verbs does not involve phonological erosion of segments, one can demonstrate that the verb forms and the grammaticalised forms have different properties. For instance, as a verb, the form

kpɔ in Ewe cannot be triplicated. However, as an experiential perfective marker it can, especially when one wants to emphasise negative experience as in (14).

- (14) **Nye-mé-se-e** **kpɔ-kpɔɔ-kpɔ** **o**
 1SG-NEG-hear-3SG TRIP-TRIP-PFV NEG
 ‘I have never, never heard it’

In Edo also, for instance, the grammaticalisation of some verbs as adverbials via multiverb constructions involves a vowel lengthening and tonal change. Thus the verb **fɔ** ‘finish’ has an adverbial counterpart **fɔ́** ‘finished’ (Ogie 2003).

The various types of MVCs and their outcomes are summarised in Fig1. In the subsequent sections, the variation in the features of SVCs that we find across the languages of the West African coast are discussed.

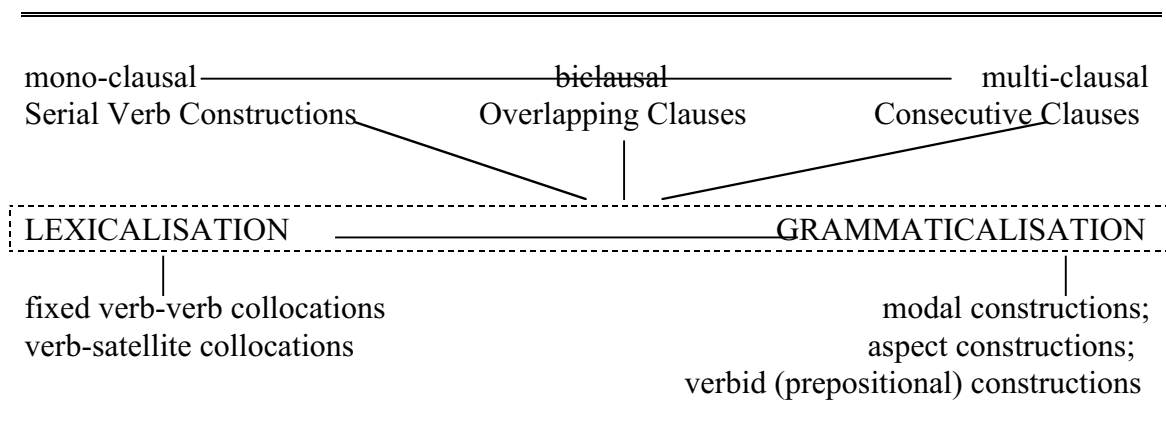


Fig 1: Multiverb constructions

3.0 Morpho-syntactic microvariation in MVCs

Just as the West African littoral languages differ in the features of consecutive constructions and covert coordination so are there variations among them with respect to serial verb constructions. The main features of SVCs we will consider are (i) the constraints on the expression of subjects (section 3.1); (ii) the distribution and realisation of objects (section 3.2); (iii) the constraints on the marking of aspect and modality (section 3.3); (iv) variation in the realisation of the negation constraint (section 3.4) and (v) the possibility of questioning and focusing of verbs in SVCs (section 3.5). It will become evident that the languages have different motivations for imposing one or the other constraint on the constituents of SVCs. For instance, in Akan a human object is obligatorily expressed with each verb if it is shared to counter-balance the null object feature of Akan. By contrast, Ewe does not have null objects and therefore the realisation of shared objects is null. However, there are other conditions under which such objects may surface in Ewe as will be discussed in section 3.2. We begin in the next section with subjects.

3.1 Constraints on the expression of subject argument

In terms of the subject sharing constraint, there are three ways in which the subjects of VPs in an SVC can relate to one another: (i) all the VPs in the SVC share the same

referential subject; (ii) the participant which is realised as the subject of a subsequent VP is linked to a non-subject function of a preceding VP, i.e. there is a switch function for a common participant; (iii) the subject argument of a non-initial VP is an accumulation of participants of preceding VPs. The languages differ with respect to how these different types are realised.

3.1.1 Variation in the expression of shared subject

When the VPs share the same subject, there are two major strategies that the languages employ. One strategy is the one in which the subject argument is expressed only once with the first VP. The other strategy is where there is concordial marking of the subject argument on subsequent verbs by subject pronominal forms. In this case the subject on the first VP can be either pronominal or a nominal phrase. The languages divide into three groups.

The first group are those languages in which there is only one type of SVC in which the shared subject is expressed only once with the first VP. This is the situation in the Gbe languages (e.g. Ewe, Fon, Gen), Yoruba and also Attie. Example (15) from Ewe illustrates this (cf Agbedor 1994). The subject argument is realised as a proper noun and expressed with the first VP in the series and there is no marking on the non-initial verbs of the subject. The verbs in the series are underlined.

- (15) **éye Nɔwɔmko fɔ kábá dó dzo hé- dó tsi dzo dzí**
 EWE and NAME rise early set fire ITIVE-put water fire surface
le ná Sélɔm Agbeko
 be.at GIVE NAME NAME
 ‘and Nɔwɔmko got up early set fire heated water and bathed Selɔm Agbeko’
 (Hlomatsi 1995:18)

The second group of languages are those in which the subject argument is fully expressed with the first VP in the series (either nominally or pronominally) and the non-initial verbs have a concordial marker- a subject pronominal prefix that refers back to the shared subject argument. Languages belonging to this group include the Ghana-Togo Mountain languages like Likpe, and Adioukrou (see Bogny 2003). Example (16) from Likpe illustrates this type.

- (16) a **ú-fi o-fiamó o-klé lí-si**
 LIKPE 3SG-take CM-headkerchief 3SG-tie CM-head
 ‘She has used a headkerchief to wrap around her head’
- b **o-kpâ mǎ sí ɔ-fi wǎ dí-yó**
 CM-dog DET sit 3SG-be near 3SG CM-room
 ‘The dog is sitting near its house’

In (16a) the subject is realised as a pronominal on both verbs in the SVC. In (16b) however, the subject is expressed as a determined NP (‘the dog’) on the first verb and there is a pronominal marking of the subject on the second verb that agrees with the NP subject of the first VP.

The third group is made up of a number of languages which have a mixture of the two strategies, leading to two types of SVCs as far as subject marking is concerned. In

these languages there are SVCs in which the subject is expressed only once with the first verb. In addition there are SVCs in which the non-initial VPs have a pronominal concordial marker. Languages belonging to this group include Akan, Ga and Nawuri – a Guang language spoken in eastern Ghana (Casali 1995). Dakubu (2004) suggests that the difference between the two types of constructions in Ga is that the SVCs without the concordial marking on subsequent verbs reflect “a higher degree of semantic unification” than the SVCs that have such a marking. In other words there is a motivated degree of tightness between the components of the SVC related to the presence or absence of linguistic expression. There is the need for more investigation of the differences between the types of constructions in the languages that have them. In fact, for Akan, Christaller (1875) suggests that the distinction between the two types of subject marking SVCs is based on the person of the subject. He observed that “When the subject is the pronoun of the 1. pers. sing., it is prefixed to every single verb” (p. 144). This is the difference between (17a) and (17b) taken from Christaller (1875:144).

- (17) a **O-guaré baa mpoa nó**
 TWI 3SG-swim come-PAST shore DEF
 ‘He swam to the shore’ (interlinear glosses added FKA)
- b **Me-guaré me-ba-e**
 1SG-swim 1SG-come-PAST
 ‘I swam hither’

However, Osam (p.c. June 2003) points out that the concordial marking of subjects on subsequent verbs in Akan is not restricted to 1st person SVCs. The issue needs further investigation. A further question with respect to Akan is the way in which the subject marking typology interacts with other typologies of SVCs that have been proposed, such as the integrated vs. the so-called chaining types (Osam 1994, 2004; Hellan et al. 2003).

3.1.2 Diversity in switch function constructions

One context in which the grammatical function of participants of VPs in an SVC may be switched is in the expression of cause-effect relations. The languages differ in how these are coded. In addition there are a number of constructions with similar functions which sometimes get confused. All the languages seem to have a distinction between what might be called a multiclausal periphrastic causative construction and a cause-effect SVC. The former can look like an SVC on the surface but it is not. The main clause of such a construction typically contains a ‘give’ or ‘cause’ type verb. And the argument that overlaps the two clauses is expressed only once and is typically realised as the subject of the dependent clause. Hence the structures are different subject structures which disqualifies them as SVCs. There is a debate as to whether sentences like those in (18) from Akan are SVCs or not. As far as I can determine from the properties they have they are periphrastic causatives with an initial verb **ma** ‘make’ that takes a complement clause but this clause is not introduced by a complementiser.

- (18) a **Esi ma-a Kofi dzi-i edziban no**
 FANTE Esi make-COMPL Kofi eat-COMPL food DEF
 ‘Esi made Kofi eat the food’.

- b **Esi ma-a o-dzi-i edziban no**
 Esi make-COMPL 3SG SUBJ-eat-COMPL food DEF
 ‘Esi made him eat the food’. (Osam 1994: 198 –200)

It is clear that the subject of the verb **ma** ‘make’ in these sentences is not the subject of the second VP nor is it included in the subject of VP2. The question arises as to what the grammatical function of the NP between the two VPs is, that is the function of Kofi in (18a) and of **o** ‘3SG.SUBJ’. The answer is partially provided by the latter form. It is the subject pronominal form and therefore not the object of the verb, The whole clause is a complement to the higher verb. This construction is therefore not an SVC.

The interpretation of cause-effect SVCs is, however, less straightforward. In many cases the subject of VP1 can be interpreted as the subject of the whole SVC as in (19). It is also possible, of course, to interpret the object of VP1 as the effector of VP2.

- (19) **Kofi tow-w bobaa bɔ-ɔ Esi**
 FANTE Kofi throw-COMPL stone hit-COMPL Esi
 ‘Kofi threw a stone at (to hit) Esi’.

While the VPs in (19) can be interpreted as having a shared subject expressed with the first verb, the VPs in (20) cannot easily be interpreted as having the same semantic subject. The unmarked interpretation of (20) is that the ball but not Kofi entered the room (see Bodomo 1997 for further discussion).

- (20) **Kofi bɔ-ɔ bɔl no kɔ-ɔ dan no mu**
 Akan NAME strike-PAST ball DEF go-PAST room DEF containing.region
 ‘Kofi hit the ball into the room’

The sentence in (20) is the kind of structure that has been characterised as pivotal constructions in the Chinese literature since Chao (1968). In such structures, the participant that functions as the object of V1, functions as the effector as it were of V2 and it is not typically marked.

In Attie, a Kwa language of Ivory Coast for example, however, it is possible to show the switch function in such pivotal constructions for some verbs. Compare the following sentences.

- (21) a **ò vɪ kɛ tsà la**
 ATTIE 3SG.PERF push.PERF 3SG.OBJ touch.PERF LOC
 ‘He pushed him and he fell’
 b **bà vɪ kɛ tsà la**
 3PL.PERF push.PERF 3SG.OBJ touch.PERF LOC
 ‘They pushed him and he fell’
 c **ò vɪ bá tʃà la**
 3SG.PERF push.PERF 3PL.OBJ touch.PERF LOC
 ‘He pushed them and they fell’ (adapted from Bogny 2003)

In these examples, V2 undergoes consonant mutation depending on the number of the understood subject. In (21b) the subject of V1 is plural but the object is singular. If V2 had the same subject as V1 we would have expected the plural form as in (21c). Similarly, in (21c) given the form of V2 we understand that it has a plural

subject representing the participants that function as object of V1. However V1 has a singular subject. These pieces of evidence lead to the conclusion that the two verbs do not share the same subject but they do share a core argument and there is a switch in the function of this argument, from its role as object of V1 to its role as subject or effector of V2.

While the Akan and Attie pivotal constructions are arguably SVCs, in some languages constructions involving such switch function are explicitly marked as different from SVCs. One such language is Likpe. In Likpe a switch in function of a participant that functions as the object of a preceding verb and the effector of a subsequent verb is explicitly indicated by the use of appropriate dependent anaphoric pronouns. In (22b) the participant that is understood as causing a cut in the pumpkin is the knife which is the second object or theme argument of the three place predicate ‘put’ because it is marked on the subsequent verb by the anaphoric pronominal which agrees with the class of the knife. In (22a) however the verbs are all marked for the same subject using the appropriate subject pronoun form.

- (22) a **ú-fi háma ɔ-sɔ a-klotiabí nyā-mə o-bia-sə**
 LIKPE 3SG-take hammer 3SG-hit CMPL-bananaAGR-DET 3SG-spoil-CAUS
 ‘he hit the banana with a hammer and spoiled it’ (NOT and he spoiled it)
- b **ú-təkə le-bɔ nə-mə le-siabi lé-fo le-fabé**
 3SG-put CM-pumpkin AGR-DET CM-knife ANAPH-do CM-wound
 ‘He put the knife on the watermelon and it was wounded a little’

Thus (22a) is an SVC while (22b) is not.

A similar situation obtains in Ewe where three different construction types are distinguished in this domain. First there is the periphrastic causative construction as in (23a). There are two pieces of evidence that indicate that it is a multiclausal structure. The form of the subject pronoun on V2 (**wò** 3SG) (see Ameka 2002) is that of the dependent series. Furthermore, the dependent clause can be optionally introduced by the complementiser **bé** ‘QT’. For these reasons (23a) is not an SVC but a multiclausal structure. (23b), by contrast is an SVC with the same subject for all the verbs in the series. In fact the verbs also share an object realised as 3SG. V2 **fú** ‘hit’ is a three place verb with two objects.

- (23) a **Kofí ná (bé) wò-ɖu nú-á** (Complement/embedded clause)
 Kofí give COMP 3SG-eat thing-DEF
 ‘Kofí made him/her eat the thing’
- b **Kofí fo-e fú anyí** (SVC)
 Kofí strike-3SG hit ground
 ‘Kofí struck him/her down’
- c **Kofí fo-e wò-dze anyí** (Overlapping clause)
 Kofí strike-3SG 3SG-contact ground
 ‘Kofí struck him/her s/he fall down’

The third sentence (23c) is a biclausal overlapping construction (Ameka 2003). It is the structure that involves a topic switch where the participant that functions as object in the first clause is the same participant that functions as the subject in the second clause. Being biclausal it is not an SVC and it is different from the pivotal construction described above in terms of the requirement that the arguments that overlap have to be

overtly expressed. Such a structure is also different from structures involving cumulative subjects to which we now turn.

3.1.3 Cumulative subject serialization

In some SVCs, the participants involved in VP1 where they are linked to different syntactic roles typically as subject and object are understood as performing the state of affairs characterized in subsequent VP (VP2). The instantiation of such constructions varies from language to language. In Akan, according to Osam 1994 (see also Osam 2004) this is associated with structures in which the first verb is **nye** ‘accompany’ as in (24).

- (24) a **Kofi nye Ama ba-a fie**
 AKAN Kofi accompany Ama come-COMPL home
 ‘Ama accompanied Kofi home’/ ‘Kofi came home with Ama’.
- b **Kofi nye banyin no twitwa-a ndua no**
 Kofi accompany man DEF cut-COMPL trees DEF
 ‘Kofi cut the trees together with the man’

In Ewe where the subject and object arguments are together involved in the bringing about of the situation characterised by the subsequent verb an optional marker **-i** may occur cliticised on to the subsequent verb or its arguments if any (cf Lewis 1985 who called this form SERIAL **-i**; Ansre 1966 called it the redundant object marker; Collins 1993 - an empty category case assigner). I consider this marker a predication marker (see Ameka 2005 for justification).

There are three subtypes of SVCs in Ewe in which the marker occurs: First, it occurs in constructions in which the subject and object of the first verb are collectively involved in carrying out VP2 as in (25a). In this case it could be argued that the **-i** marker is used to signal that the referent of the object of VP1 is also an effector of the sub-event in VP2. The **-i** marking could be seen as making explicit that the object of VP1, which is not shared by VP2 in this case, is involved in the realisation of the sub-event as well. A counterpart of the SVC structure in (25a) is the overlapping clause construction in (25b) which is explicit about the coreference between the referent of the object in the first clause (or VP1) and the subject of the second clause (or VP2). Sentences (25a) and (25b) contrast in the interpretation of participants involved in VP2. For (25a) both the participant coded as subject and the participant coded as object of the first verb phrase are concomitantly participating in the realisation of the state of affairs expressed in VP2. That is, both the caller and the children gathered together. In (25b), on the other hand, only the children called gathered together. The caller is not part of it.

- (25) a **É-yó deví-á-wó fo fú-i** (SVC)
 3SG-call child-DEF-PL hit bone-PRED
 ‘S/He called the children together’
- b **É-yó deví-á-wó wó-fo fú** (Overlapping Clause)
 3SG-call child-DEF-PL 3PL-hit bone
 ‘S/He called the children they gathered together’

A second type of construction in which the marker **-i** is optionally found is where the object of the first verb phrase denotes an NP that is an accompaniment to the subject argument in carrying out VP2. Such an accompaniment can be a true instrument or it

can be an emotion, a state or a condition as in (26). In example (26), VP1 and VP2 express the emotional condition of the subject participant in carrying out VP3 and VP4

- | | | | | | | | |
|------|----------------|---------------|-------------------|-------------|-----------------|-----------|------------------|
| | | V1 | | V2 | | | |
| (26) | srɔ̃-wo | tsí | dzódzódzóe | tsó | ɲkúbiã | | |
| | spouse-2SG | stay | IDEO | take | eye-red | | |
| | | | V3 | | V4 | | |
| | kplé | adɔtsi | bloblobo | nɔ | di-wo-mí | vá | gbɔ-nye-e |
| | COM | tear | IDEO | be.at:NPRES | seek-2SG-PROG | come | place-1SG-PRED |
- ‘Your spouse was restlessly looking for you at my place fixated in tears’ (Ayeke 1989 [3817])

A third type of serial verb construction in which the predication marker appears is one which could be characterized as a case of accompanied motion. That is, the subject of the SVC is accompanied by the object of VP1 and together they undertake a motion event represented in VP2. The examples typically involve cases of guided conveyance. In this context it seems that the *-i* marker signals that the VP2 component of the SVC pertains to the object of VP1 as well.

- (27) a **É-ku** **tsi** **vɛ**
 3SG-scoop water come:PRED
 ‘S/He fetched water (and) brought it’
- b **Kofi** **kplɔ** **afénɔ-a** **dzó-e** **yi** **ɣayɛ-fé** **áǰé**
 NAME lead madam-DEF leave-PRED go hidden-place INDEF
 ‘Kofi lead the woman away to a hide-out’ (Hlɔmatsi 1995 [718])

It is clear from the discussion that as far as the realisation of subject arguments in SVCs are concerned the West African languages show variation, nevertheless the different types of systems seem clear. In the next section we turn to the variation that these languages display with respect to the constraints on the expression of the object argument in SVCs.

3.2 Constraints on object sharing and expression

while many analysts have assumed that object sharing is criterial for the defining SVCs (see e.g. Baker 1989, Collins 1997), evidence from some West African languages (and many other serialising languages) suggests that structures with multiple objects display properties of SVCs (see e.g. Aikhenvald and Dixon (eds) to appear, Crowley 2003). Associated with the so-called shared object constraint is the claim that the shared object is expressed overtly only once in an SVC. There is variation in among the west African languages in the instantiation of such structures. In all the languages when there is identity between the objects of the verbs in the series, barring other considerations (see below), then it is expressed only once with the first verb and the subsequent realization is null. Thus in (28a) and (28b) the object is expressed only once in both the Ewe and Akan examples.

(28) a **Áma ku te ɖa ɖu**
 EWE NAME dig yam cook eat
 ‘Ama dug up yams cooked (them) (and) ate’

b **Áma tu-u bayere noa-e di-i**
 AKAN NAME dig-PAST yam cook-PAST eat-PAST
 ‘Ama dug up yams cooked (them and) ate’ (cf. Agyeman 2003:5)

However, the motivations for the non-realisation of the shared object in sentences like those in (28) in Ewe and Akan differ. In Akan, such a shared object is realised as null as in (28b) when it is non-animate, due to a general null object typological feature of the language (see e.g Saah 1992, 2002). An animate shared object has to be expressed with the subsequent verb in the series as in (29a).

(29) a **Kofi bɔ-ɔ Ama ku-u *(no)**
 AKAN NAME. strike-PAST Ama kill-PAST 3SG
 ‘Kofi hit Ama and killed her’ (Campbell 1996)

b **Kofi fo Kwami wu**
 EWE Kofi strike Kwami kill
 ‘Kofi hit Kwami and killed him’

As is evident from the sentence in (29b) which is a direct translation of the Akan sentence in (29a) into Ewe, the shared object is expressed only once in the SVC. However, there are situations in Ewe also where the object that is shared is identical in form and its referent shared yet the second instance has to be overtly expressed because of collocational and semantic factors in Ewe. In example (30) below even though the referent and form of the shared object are identical, it is expressed with each verb this is because if it is left out after the second object the sentence would have a different meaning. Thus **wó-no aha kú** ‘They drank alcohol die’ means they drank to death, unlike what the sentence means when the object is expressed with each verb.

(30) **éye wò- ná wò-no aha hé-kú aha**
 EWE and 3SG give 3SG-drink alcohol ITIVE-die alcohol
 ‘[He called one of the soldiers into his room]
 and made him drink alcohol and he got dead drunk’

Another situation in which objects are expressed with each verb in Ewe is when they may share the same form but have different referents. In example (31) the form **nú** ‘thing’ which is object of **no** ‘drink’ refers to ‘drink’ while the same form **nú** ‘thing’, object of **ɖu** ‘eat’ refers to food.

(31) ... **wó-no nú ɖu nú vásédé zātifé ké**
 EWE 3PL-drink thing eat thing until midnight very
 ‘They drank and ate until midnight’ (Nyaku 1997a:28)

Even though the object is shared and the form is the same because they have different referents, the instantiation of the construction behaves more like a multiple object construction where each verb has its own object. For example, **É-fú du do go** (3sg-move.limbs course exit outside) ‘S/he ran out’.

3.3 Variation in the marking of aspect and modality

The languages show variation in the realization of tense, aspect and modality values in an SVC structure. In those languages that mark tense on the verb, e.g. Akan, Ga and Likpe, there is variation as to whether each verb is marked for tense or not. In Akan for instance, if the verbs share the same tense for example, the PAST, both verbs are overtly marked for it as shown in example (28b) above. By contrast in Likpe, tense is only overtly marked on the first verb in the series as illustrated in (32).

- (32) **moo-ya ka-mó n-tə be-kpéfi bá-mó**
 LIKPE 1SG:FUT-buy CM-rice 1SG-give CMPL-child AGR-DET
 ‘I will buy rice for the children’

In the domain of deictic marking on the verbs in a series, a contrast of the same kind manifests itself. It seems that in Akan, both verbs in a series must be marked for the same deictic or directional value as in (33).

- (33) a **ɔ-ba-(e) be-fa-e**
 AKAN 3SG-come-PAST VENT-take-PAST
 He came to take it
 b. **ɔ-kɔ-(e) kɔ-fa-e**
 3SG-go-PAST ITIVE-take-PAST
 He went to take it (Adapted from Boadi 2000)

In Ewe, however, both verbs need not be marked with by the same directional preverb only the subsequent verb can thus be marked with such a preverb as is in (34) where **ɖa** ‘ALTRILOCAL’ is used

- (34) **Aféáfá yi ɖa-yó-e**
 EWE NAME go ALTRI-call-3SG
 ‘Afeafa went to call him’ (Obianim 1990 [5030])

Furthermore, verbs in the series need not be marked for the same aspect or modality value in any of the West African littoral languages that I am aware of. In Ewe for instance, one of the VPs can be in the aorist and the other the progressive as in (35a). Similarly, in Akan the first VP can be in the so-called stative and the second one, the progressive as in (35b).

- (35) a **Wó-dze klo le gbe dó-m ɖá**
 EWE 3PL-contct knee be.at:PRES voice put-PROG DIR
 ‘They came to be in a kneeling position and are praying’
 b. **Kwasi da hɔ re-di-di**
 AKAN NAME STAT:lie there PROG-RED-eat
 ‘Kwasi is lying there eating’

The languages also fall in two broad types when we consider the way in which negation is marked in SVCs. This is the topic of the next section

3.4 Variation in the marking of negation

An often cited constraint on verbs in SVCs is that they share the same polarity value. There are however two levels on which such a statement does not represent the empirical facts in the West African littoral languages. On the level of surface marking, the languages differ as to whether each VP in the series is marked overtly for negation. Likpe and Akan are similar in that negation is marked as a pro-clitic on the verb in both languages. However in an Akan SVC each verb in the series is marked with a negation marker (cf. Dolphyne 1987) while in a Likpe SVC, negation is marked only on the first verb. Compare (36a) and (36b).

- (36) a **Ama a-m-ma Kofi dɔkono a-n-di a-n-da**
 AKAN NAME PERF-NEG-give NAME kenkey PERF-NEG-eat PERF-NEG-sleep
 ‘Ama didn't give Kofi kenkey (he) didn't eat and didn't go to bed’
- b **Sáka mæ̀n-fi mɔ sófi o-nya-n-sé**
 LIKPE NAME SCR:NEG-take 1SG shovel 3SG-lose-LIG-CAUS
 ‘Saka did not use my shovel and lose it’

It appears that a factor that might play a role in whether a language marks negation morphologically on each verb in an SVC or not, could be the nature of the scope of the negation marker. While the pattern of marking in Akan has been described as a case of copying, it may be that the scope of the negator in Akan is over a VP and not over the whole clause. This is why each verb needs to be marked. In Likpe, however, it appears that the scope of the negator is over the clause hence it is marked only once in an SVC, which is a monoclausal structure after all.

In Ewe and other Gbe languages with a bipartite negation marker, negative marking occurs only once in an SVC with the first part occurring before the first VP and the second part occurring at the end of the clause but before any utterance final particles such as the propositional question marker as shown in (37): The bipartite negation marker is a clausal negator therefore occurs only once in the clause

- (37) **Wó-mé-kɔ sɔ o**
 EWE 3PL-NEG-become.tall equal NEG
 ‘They are not the same height’

In Ewe SVCs, even though the first part of the negation marker **mé** is placed before VP1, it can have scope over either VP1, as in (38a) or VP2, as in (38b), or both (see Ameka to appear and Ameka and Essegbey to appear).

- (38) a **dɛví-a mé-ɖa fufu ɖu o. É-fle mɔ́lu ɖu**
 child-DEF NEG-cook fufu eat NEG 3SG-buy rice eat
 ‘The child didn't cook fufu and ate. It bought rice and ate’
- b **dɛví-a mé-ɖa fufu ɖu o. É-ɖa-e dzrá**
 child-DEF NEG-cook fufu eat NEG 3SG-cook-3SG sell
 ‘The child didn't cook fufu and ate. It cooked it and sold it’
- c **dɛví-a mé-ɖa fufu ɖu o. É-dze kókó no**
 child-DEF NEG-cook fufu eat NEG 3SG-buy porridge drink
 ‘The child didn't cook fufu and eat. She bought porridge and drank’

The scope properties of the negation demonstrated in (38) suggest that both verbs function as heads within a single construction which are co-dependent both semantically and syntactically.

3.5 Verb focusing in SVCs

Given the kind of co-dependence that has just been demonstrated of Verbs or VPs in an SVC, it would not have been expected that individual verbs or VPs in a series can be focused. In fact this has been cited in the literature as a possible defining feature of SVCs (cf. Aikhenvald to appear). In the West African littoral languages, verbs and VPs which are components of an SVC can be individually or collectively focused. However, the languages differ in which components of the SVC they allow to be focused. I illustrate the variation in this domain with data from Yoruba, spoken in Nigeria, Benin and Togo, based on Lawal (1993) and Fon, spoken in Benin, based on Lefebvre and Brousseau (2002).

A common feature of West African languages is that they have distinct morpho-syntactic mechanisms for verb focusing (Ameka 1992, Hyman and Watters 1994, Bearth 1999). In general, there are two strategies: in one case, a copy of the verb is fronted and marked with a focus particle (see the Fon examples below). In the other type, a nominalised form of the verb is placed in core clause initial position and marked with a focus particle (see the Yoruba examples below). The same mechanisms are deployed in SVC verb focusing as well.

In both Yoruba (Yoruboid, Benue-Congo) and Fon (Gbe, Kwa) the initial verb in an SVC may be focused as shown in (39b) and (40b) based on (39a) and (40a) respectively (see Lawal 1993: 90 for the Yoruba and Lefebvre and Brousseau 2002: 406-7 for Fon).

(39) a **O sáré lo ilé**
 YORUBA He ran go home
 ‘He ran home’

b **Sísáré ló sáré lo ilé**
 RunningFOC:he ran go home
 ‘Running home is what he did’

(40) a. **Kòkú sọ àsón ọ yi axi m̀è**
 FON NAME take crab DEF go market in
 ‘Koku brought the crab to the market’

b **Sọ ẁè Kòkú sọ àsón ọ yi axi m̀è**
 take it.s Koku take crab DEF go market in
 ‘It is bringing the crab to the market that Koku did’ (as opposed to e.g. selling it) (Lefebvre and Brousseau 2002:407 ex 24a)²

² I have maintained the glosses and translations in the sources in these examples. For instance, the form **ẁè** glossed by Lefebvre and Brousseau as ‘it.is’ I would have glossed as FOC. I would also have translated a sentence like (40b) as ‘TAKE Koku took the crab to the market’ rather than as a cleft construction. It is also not clear to me that this construction is necessarily contrastive in its import as the comment by the authors suggest.

Note that in Yoruba, a nominalised form of the verb derived by reduplication, is fronted and marked for focus. In Fon, on the other hand, a copy of the verb is fronted and focus marked.

For the second verb in an SVC, there is some variation. In Yoruba it is not possible to focus on the second verb alone as illustrated in (41).

(41) ***lilo ló sáré lo ilé**
 YORUBA Going FOC-he ran go home

In Fon also focusing of the second V(P) as in 42 is judged to be acceptable by some speakers and rejected by others:

(42) ok/* **Yi wè Kòkú sọ àsón ́ yi axi m̀̀**
 go it.is Koku take crab DEF go market in
 ‘It is bringing the crab to the market that Koku did’ (as opposed to e.g. selling it) (Lefebvre and Brousseau 2002:407 ex 24b)

While Fon speakers seem to be divided on the acceptability or otherwise of focusing of the second verb alone in an SVC, there seems to be unanimity among them with regard to the total unacceptability of structures in which both verbs in an SVC are fronted for focus as the unacceptability of 43 illustrates.

(43) * **sọ yi wè Kòkú sọ àsón ́ yi axi m̀̀**
 FON take go it.is Koku take crab DEF go market in

By contrast, while the second verb alone cannot be focused in an SVC, it is acceptable to focus both verbs and VPs. In fact there are two modes for doing this. One involves the nominalization of the two verbs by reduplicating the first and adjoining the second to it as in (44a). A second structure involves the nominalization of the two VPs in the SVC. In (44b), the first VP is made up of just a verb which is nominalised by reduplication and the second VP as a whole is adjoined to it. This derived structure is placed in clause initial position and marked for focus.

(44) a **Sísáré lo ló sáré lo ilé**
 YORUBA Running go FOC-he ran go home
 ‘Running home is what he did’

b **Sísáré lo ilé ló sáré lo ilé**
 Running go home FOC-he ran go home
 ‘Running home is what he did’

Perhaps the difference between Yoruba and Fon with respect to the possibility of focusing of verbs in an SVC relates to the contrast in strategies for verb focusing in both languages. Yoruba employs nominalisation and it is therefore possible to nominalise the verbs or the predicate as a whole. Fon, on the other hand, uses verb copy which, it would appear, is a strategy that does not favour focusing of both verbs in an SVC. It appears here again that different properties of SVCs in the individual languages are intimately linked to the typological profiles of the individual languages.

4. Conclusion

While it is true that there are undisputed cases of serial verb constructions in the languages of the West African littoral, the languages vary with respect to the instantiation and manifestation of the features of these constructions. I have demonstrated in this paper that serial verb constructions are but one type of multiverb constructions that we find in these languages. Consecutive constructions, covert coordination or juxtaposed clauses are some other types, each with their distinct properties. A major argument advanced throughout the paper is that characteristics of the construction types that are found in individual languages correlate with the overall typological profile of the language. Furthermore it is suggested that multiverb constructions seem to be prevalent in languages which have a closed class of verbs.

Concerning serial verb constructions in particular, I have shown that the West African languages vary with respect to how several of their defining properties are articulated. First, the marking of the shared subject argument across the verbs in the series provides a parameter for typologising the languages in the area along the following lines: (i) languages that mark the subject only once in the SVC, e.g. Ewe and other Gbe languages; (ii) languages that mark the same subject on each of the verbs in the series, e.g. Likpe; and (iii) languages that have both types of SVCs, i.e. subject marked once in the clause vs. subject recapitulated with each verb, e.g. Ga. Moreover, the languages differ with respect to how cumulative subjects are marked in structures of the kind involving accompanied motion or guided conveyance. There are languages like Attie where the second verb is marked for switch subject by a pronominal form that corefers to the object of the previous verb. Other languages like Ewe indicate the switch function by the use of a predication marker, presenting the subsequent VP as a kind of predication also on the object of the preceding VP (see Ameka 2005).

For the way in which objects are expressed in an SVC, I have pointed out that all the languages have structures in which the shared object is expressed only once in the SVC. However, some of the languages have multiple realisations of shared objects due to semantic reasons. Thus in Akan, a shared animate object must be realised with each verb in the series, albeit the subsequent realizations are anaphoric to the first expression, to counter the null inanimate object property of the language. In other languages, for instance Ewe, objects which are formally identical must be overtly expressed if they are not referentially the same.

All the languages mark aspect and modality on each verb. However, there is no requirement that the verbs share the same forms or values. They only have to be semantically compatible. Thus one finds SVCs in which one verb may be marked for Habitual and the other for the Imperfective or one marked for aorist or stative and the other for the Progressive etc. This situation may have arisen partly because the languages in the area tend to be aspect and modality prominent languages rather than tense-prominent ones (cf. Bhatt 1999).

Negation marking in the SVC also divides the languages into two groups: those in which the negator occurs on each verb, e.g. Akan, and those in which the negative operator occurs only once e.g. Likpe. There is variation also in terms of possibilities of focusing verbs in and SVC. All the languages can focus the initial verb in an SVC. However, the languages vary as to whether they allow a subsequent verb alone to be focused. Fon seems to allow it to some extent but Yoruba doesn't. The languages also vary as to whether all the verbs can be focused in one construction. Fon does not permit it but Yoruba does. I have suggested that the variation can be explained to some extent

by differences in typological properties of the individual languages. There is the need for more investigations along these lines to discover the correlations between typological portraits of languages and the characteristics of the multiverb constructions that they have.

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Abbreviations and data sources

The following abbreviations are used in interlinear glosses:

AGR = agreement; ALTRI = altrilocal; ANAPH = anaphoric; CAUS = causative; COM = comitative; COMP = complementiser; CM = noun class marker; COMPL = completive; CONSEC = consecutive marker/linker; DAT = dative; DEF = definiteness marker; DIR = directional particle; FOC = focus; FUT = future; HAB = habitual; IDEO = ideophone; IMP = imperative; INDEF = indefinite marker; ITIVE = itive preverb; IMPERS = impersonal; INT = intensifier; JUSS = jussive; LIG = ligature; LOC = locative; NEG = negative; NPRES = non-present; OBJ = object; PAST = past; PERF = perfect; PFV = perfective; PL = plural; POT = potential; PRED = predication marker; PREF = prefix; PRES = present; PROG = progressive;; RED = reduplicative; REL = relative marker; REP = repetitive; SCR = subject cross-reference marker; SG = singular; STAT = stative; TRIP = triplicative; VENT = ventive; 1 = first person; 2 = second person; 3 = third person

Sources of the examples from the various languages are indicated as appropriate. Data on Likpe comes from the author's own field notes. Ewe examples are drawn from various types of texts. Those taken from written literary texts like novels etc are indicated as such. There are two modes of citing the source. If the example is taken from a paper text, it is indicated by the author date and page number system. If the example comes from my electronic data base then the author is indicated plus the line number of the example in the concordance.

