

THE IMPORTANCE OF SERIAL VERB CONSTRUCTIONS

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Abstract: Serial verb construction is known as a serialization of verbs in which two or more verbs or verb phrases are connected with each other within a single clause. The verbs in the series must share some grammatical properties such as tense, aspect and polarity. This article gives an overview about the importance of SVCs identifying some examples in many different spoken languages from all around the world.

Key words: serial verb constructions, serialization, verb stacking, clause combining.

The serial verb construction, also known as (verb) serialization or verb stacking, relates to the grammatical arrangement of words in the sentences twining two or more verbs or verb phrases in a single clause. It is a common feature of many African, Asian and New Guinean languages. Serial verb constructions are often described as coding a single event; they can also be used to indicate concurrent or causally-related events. Despite the by now infinite literature on serial verb constructions, there are still arguments and hesitations about the exact definition and meaning of serial verb constructions.

The term serial verb, notes Paul Kroeger, ‘has been used by different authors in slightly different ways, and linguists sometimes disagree about whether a particular construction in a given language is ‘really’ a serial verb or not” (Analyzing Syntax. 2004)

In English grammar, serial verbs are verbs that appear together in a single verb phrase without a marker of coordination or subordination.

e.g., "How do you breathe? How do you dream? No one knows. But you *come see* me. Anytime. Mother Abigail is what they call me. I'm the oldest woman in these parts, I guess, and I still make m'own biscuit. You *come see* me anytime." (Stephen King, *The Stand*. Doubleday, 1978)

"Cassie, *run go fetch* that shirt for Meely." (Ken Wells, *Meely LaBauve*. Random House, 2000)

"Who will play with Jane? See the cat. It goes meow-meow. Come and play. *Come play* with Jane." (Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970)

"I *hear tell* lotta white folks up dere don't hold with slavery and sets us folk free." (Alex Haley, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*. Doubleday, 1976)

"Some speakers find these [serial verb constructions] marginal, but they are well attested in both the BNC [British National Corpus] and the COCA [Corpus of Contemporary American English].

Serial verbs can also occur in other constructions where a bare verb form is appropriate:

She's the professor I want to *go see*.

Don't make me *come get* you!

They will *come see* me tomorrow.

Serial verbs are clearly monoclausal However, there is other semantic and structural evidence that they are not compound verbs.

Structurally, unlike verb-verb compounds, serial verbs do not occur in any forms other than the bare form (which, of course, is also the imperative). Verb-verb compounds and serial verbs are two constructions that combine verbs into very 'tight' grammatical constructions. They can be considered 'verb-combining' rather than 'clause-combining' constructions, since the result is a single clause." (Thomas E. Payne, *Understanding English Grammar: A Linguistic Introduction*. Cambridge University Press, 2011)

The phenomenon of serial verbs was first identified for Akan in Christaller 1875 (cited under Monographs and Grammars) as "syntactic combinations of verbs" used to express "many verbal notions that are expressed with a simple verb in English and other European and Asiatic languages". The term *serial verb* was first used in Balmer and Grant 1929, p. 115–128 (cited under Monographs and Grammars), and then reintroduced in Stewart 1963 (cited under General Articles). Serial verbs have been the focus of the studies of languages of West Africa, Mainland Southeast Asia, and Creoles since the early 1960s. Their general investigation is intertwined with research on individual languages and areas and reflects the history of different theoretical approaches.

Serial verbs normally signify actions that are closely connected and can be considered to be part of the same event. They may be actions taking place simultaneously, or one may represent the cause, purpose or result of the other. In most cases, the serial verbs in a sequence are understood to share the same subject. Serial verb constructions, or serial verbs, are sequences of verbs without any overt marker of coordination, subordination, or syntactic dependency of any sort. Serial verbs are monoclausal constructions describing what is conceptualized as a single event. They share prosodic properties with monoverbal constructions. A serial verb has one tense, aspect, mood, modality, and evidentiality value, that is, for example, one component cannot refer to past and another to present. Its components cannot be negated or questioned separately from the whole construction. Each component must be able to occur on its own, as the main verb of a clause.

In 1853, Riis became the first linguist to attempt a description of serialization, there has, of course, been much progress. That progress has primarily been in the field of descriptive linguistics. As more linguists become aware of the variety of ways that verbs might relate to each other in a clause, descriptions of serialization have become more common and more detailed. There have been a significant amount of insightful typological generalizations about serialization and similar structures, as well as some key discoveries concerning the diachrony of serialization. The two main goals of this article were to show that new approaches and innovations are created as scientists' interests in this field increases, and to give a little insight into this field.

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