

# THE CLASSIFICATION OF YORUBA SERIAL VERB CONSTRUCTIONS

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This paper deals with the classification of serial verbal constructions in Yoruba. Past classifications have been unsuccessful because they have not been supported by enough syntactic and semantic evidence. A detailed and analytical treatment of Yoruba verbal constructions takes this into account.

Cette communication traite du classement des verbes à série en Yoruba. Elle examine les efforts de classement antérieurs et impute leur caractère peu efficace au manque de données syntaxiques et sémantiques suffisantes. C'est ainsi que l'auteur fait une analyse détaillée des verbes construits par série en yoruba tout en tenant compte des besoins signalés plus haut.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

There are several difficult questions connected with the classification of Serial Verbal Constructions (SVC). First the notion of serial verb itself has not been elaborated explicitly enough. This problem is clearly highlighted in Judy Wingered's (1977:452) definition of serial verbs:

Serial verbs, sometimes characterised as agglutinations, verbal juxtapositions, splitting verbs and co-verbs, subsuming the functional roles of preposition, case marker, adverbial, comparative, conjunction and including labels such as 'verbid' and 'modifying verb'.

Below are examples of SVCs in Yoruba:

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|--|--|
| 1. <b>ó fi àdà gbé iho</b><br>he with cutlass dug hole<br>'He dug the hole with a cutlass' | 2. <b>ó bá mi gbé ẹ̀rù</b><br>he for me carried load<br>'He carried the load for me' |
| 3. <b>ó sàré wọ yara</b><br>he be fast enter room<br>'He entered the room quickly'         | 4. <b>ó se isu jẹ</b><br>he cooked yam ate<br>'He cooked yam and ate it'             |
| 5. <b>ó dubúfẹ̀ sùn</b><br>he lay down sleep<br>'He laid down and slept'                   |  |

The difficulty is to determine what constructions qualify as serial verbs. Some linguists distinguish between serial verbs and splitting verbs (Awobuluyi, 1972), while others do not. Some distinguish between Serial Verbal Constructions (eg. Lord, 1974), while others (eg. Oyelaran, 1983) do not. Such lack of agreement constitutes a serious obstacle not only for an explicit description, but also for a broader empirical study of the SVC.

Another problem is that no one classification can yet be said to account for the full range of SVC types, particularly when one turns to a wider range of data. The problem can be seen in the tendency for the list of classes to grow with each new contribution to the literature.

Related to the above is the lack of justification of the classes set up i.e. often no overt syntactic and semantic criteria are given to justify the different groupings of

Serial Verb Constructions. In most cases, it is assumed that the labels are self-explanatory.

Under such circumstances the various studies on the classification of Serial Verbal Constructions will often be accepted with scepticism. We believe that in order for a particular classification to be established it must be based on explicit semantic and syntactic criteria. This will help minimise multiplying the number of classes to encompass all possible conceptual distinctions.

It is therefore urgent to find workable definitions for this notion as well as operative criteria for distinguishing first between Serial Verbal Constructions (SVC) and non-Serial Verbal Constructions (non-SVC), and secondly, between the various classes or sub-types of SVCs. In this paper<sup>1</sup> we are concerned with the latter, i.e. finding criteria for distinguishing the various classes of SVC.

## 2. RECENT CLASSIFICATIONS

We shall look at three previous studies which deal with the classification of SVCs.

### 2.1 BAMGBOŞE

In Yoruba the first is that of Bamgboşe (1982:4,6). He classifies SVCs into three sub-types as follows:

- (i) A coordinate type where each verb retains its lexical meaning; the meaning of the complex sentence is the sum of the simple meanings.
- (ii) A modifying type in which one of the verbs modifies the meaning of the other, usually losing part of its verbal status in the process.
- (iii) A complex type involving the decomposition into serial components of a concept which, in non-serialising languages, is usually rendered by a simple lexical item.

Bamgboşe's classification, however, does not give a complete account of the syntax and semantics of SVCs in Yoruba. Consider the following:

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|--|--|
| 6a. <b>Màmá rán Bólá lọ ojàob.</b><br>Mother sent Bola go market<br>'Mother sent Bola to the market' | b. <b>Bólá sáré lọ ojà</b><br>Bola ran go market<br>'Bola ran to the market' |
|--|--|

According to Bamgboşe's classification, the two sentences belong to different groups - 6a belongs to group (iii), the complex SVC, while 6b belongs to group (ii), the modifying SVC. Yet if we look at the two sentences closely, we see that they have something in common, namely, that they both contain the directional verb *lọ* which translates roughly into the English preposition 'to'; i.e. the second verb of both sentences is equivalent in function to the English preposition 'to'. But grouping them into two different groups fails to recognise this common characteristic.

Consider another example.

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|--|--|
| 7. <b>Bólá wọ ilé sùn</b><br>Bola enter room sleep | 8. <b>Bólá se ore dáràn</b><br>Bola did good got trouble |
|--|--|

By Bamgboşe's criteria, both sentences belong to type (i), the coordinative type where each verb retains its lexical meaning. But looking at the sentences closely, we see that

<sup>1</sup> The author wishes to acknowledge an anonymous reviewer for his useful comments.

there is a difference between them: 7. is a purposive construction while 8. is resultative. Thus they belong to different semantic classes. Grouping them together obliterates this fact. More examples of this nature can be found. We need much finer distinctions than Bamgboṣe has given if we are to describe both the syntax and the semantics of the SVC.

## 2.2 OYELARAN

The second study is that of Oyelaran (1982). He has more SVC classes than Bamgboṣe - about 14. But he has failed to provide any explicit semantic and syntactic criteria for the semantic classes he set up. He apparently assumes that these are obvious or deducible from the labels, i.e. the classes are self-explanatory. But this is far from the truth.

Consider for instance his class 'Respect'. It is not clear what formal semantic criterion or relation is involved here. Clearly this type of classification is not very useful. Even in those cases where the semantic labels are understood, it is sometimes difficult to see why some sentences are placed under certain labels. Items listed under some labels do not appear to have anything in common; if they do, this is not clearly brought out in the study - the reader is left guessing.

## 2.3 EKUNDAYO

Lastly, we look at Ekundayo's (1983) classification. Ekundayo presents a classification which departs from that of the traditional literature. He classifies SVCs according to the linear order of the verbs in the series. He proposes three major divisions for serial verbs based on their position in the sentence. The divisions are 'Initial verbs', 'Central verbs', and 'Terminal verbs'. Initial verbs, according to Ekundayo, function either as tense or aspectual markers, or as 'adverbial' or 'supporting element', while Central verbs are 'responsible for the main verbal syntactic and semantic functions such as selectional restrictions.' Terminal verbs, on the other hand, have deictic or limiting functions. Although this approach for classifying SVCs has limitations, in the sense that it does not properly capture the semantic differences that exist among the different SVCs, nevertheless the work represents a serious attempt at positional categorisation.

Below we present a classification which we believe takes into account all the above. Some of the classes set up here may seem to be obvious, and cannot fail to have been noticed by others. Yet we have not found enough attention paid to them, particularly in the context of detailed analytical and descriptive treatment. The treatment here goes beyond partial hints and analyses.

### 3. SERIAL VERBAL CONSTRUCTIONS AS ADVERBIAL PHRASES

SVCs are best regarded as adverbial phrases. In order to justify this claim it is first necessary to understand what the SVC is.

One of the most complete semantic descriptions of the SVC is given by Carol Lord (1974):

'a construction in which the verbs all refer to subparts or aspects of a single overall event. The action or state denoted by the second verb is in terms of the real world an outgrowth of the action denoted by the first verb--the second verb represents a further development, consequence, result, goal or culmination of the action by the first verb.'

It appears from the above that we have a minimum two-verb construction in which one verb modifies the other as an adverb modifies a verb or a preposition.

Adverbial clauses are described in the grammar as dependent clauses. Like other dependent clauses special devices are used to mark them. One of the commonest devices used to mark adverbial notions is the use of grammatical morphemes with lexical content, such as English 'when' and 'before' as in the example below.

9a. 'He ate before he slept'

9b. 'He left when they arrived'

Some languages use special verb forms to mark adverbials. One special device used by Yoruba and probably other Kwa languages to express adverbial notions is the SVC.

Syntactically, the SVC contains a dependent clause. This is reflected in its tense and aspect marking. The two verbs must take the same tense/aspect markers. Secondly, the verbs tend to share arguments. For instance, both verbs may have the same subject or the object of the first verb may at the same time function as the subject of the second verb. These characteristics are exemplified in 10. and 11. respectively.

10. **Ayọ sáré lọ ilé**  
Ayo ran went home

11. **Ayọ ti Bólá subú**  
Ayo pushed Bola fell  
'Ayo pushed Bola to fall'

A further justification of the adverbial status of the SVC comes from the various semantic notions associated with the construction (George Isaac, 1976; Oyelaran, 1982; Lord, 1973 among others). The following are examples:

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|------|---|--------------|
| 12a. | <b>ó fi kọkọrọ si ilẹ̀kùn</b><br>he with key open door<br>'He opened the door with the key' | Instrumental |
| 12b. | <b>ó bá Bólá gbé erù</b><br>he for Bola carry load<br>'He carried the load for Bola'        | Benefactive  |
| 12c. | <b>ó sáré lọ ilé</b><br>he ran go home<br>'He went home quickly'                            | Manner       |
| 12d. | <b>ó ra búřédi jẹ</b><br>he bought bread eat<br>'He bought bread and ate'                   | Purpose      |

The above semantic roles identified with SVCs correspond to the semantic roles traditionally associated with adverbs.

Below we examine the various structural types of SVCs found in Yoruba. Our classes and labels will be essentially semantic since adverbs are generally categorised with respect to the semantic roles which they play in the sentence.

#### 4. THE CLASSES OF SERIAL VERBAL CONSTRUCTION IN YORUBA

Yoruba SVCs can be divided into two main groups. The first is the group in which one of the verbs cannot function as an independent verb in a sentence. This group of SVCs constitutes a small class which we shall call the Prepositional SVCs. In the second group of SVCs consisting of several classes, both verbs can function as independent verbs in a sentence. We shall call this group Self-standing SVCs. First we shall look at the Prepositional SVCs.

##### 4.1 THE PREPOSITIONAL SVC

These are SVCs in which one of the two verbs functions as a non-verbal grammatical element. That is, one of the two verbs has lost its verbal content and functions as a preposition indicating the relationship between two substantives. These verbs do not denote state or action, but behave like function words. See examples 13. to 16. below. The relevant items are underlined.

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|---|--|
| <p>13. <u>ó</u> <u>fi</u> <u>kòkòrò</u> <u>ti</u> <u>ilèkùn</u><br/>         he use key close door<br/>         'He locked the door with a key'</p> | <p>14. <u>ó</u> <u>jeun</u> <u>pèlú</u> <u>Bólá</u><br/>         he ate together Bola<br/>         'He ate with Bola'</p>  |
| <p>15. <u>ó</u> <u>bá</u> <u>Bòlà</u> <u>gbé</u> <u>erù</u><br/>         he for Bola carry load<br/>         'He carried the load for Bola'</p>     | <p>16. <u>ó</u> <u>ra</u> <u>mòtò</u> <u>fún</u> <u>iyàwó</u> <u>rè</u><br/>         he bought car give wife his<br/>         'He bought a car for his wife'</p> |
| <p>17. <u>ó</u> <u>sọ</u> <u>erù</u> <u>ka</u> <u>ilẹ̀</u><br/>         he put down load on floor<br/>         'He put the load on the floor'</p>   |  |

In 13. fi has an instrumental function. It shows the relationship between the noun kòkòrò 'key' and the verb sí 'open' with regards to the noun ilèkùn 'door'. Fí points to the means by which some activity or some state of affairs is brought about. In 14. pèlú denotes the relationship of accompaniment, while Bá in 15. and fún in 16. denote the relationship of the benefactive. In 12. ka denotes location. Most of these items have been reanalysed as prepositions by some linguists (Givon, 1975; Awobuluyi, 1978). Clearly these items do not function as true verbs in these constructions, but function rather as prepositions.

In prepositional SVCs both verbs have the same logical subject, i.e. the subject of the first verb is also the subject of the second verb. Another distinguishing characteristic of this group of SVCs is that the construction cannot be broken into simple sentences. Thus it is not possible to have the following:

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|--|---|
| <p>13b. *<u>Ayọ</u> <u>fi</u> <u>kòkòrò</u>; <u>Ayọ</u> <u>ti</u> <u>ilèkùn</u><br/>         Ayo use key; Ayo close door</p> | <p>15b. *<u>Ayọ</u> <u>bá</u> <u>Bólá</u>; <u>Ayọ</u> <u>gbé</u> <u>erù</u><br/>         Ayo for Bola; Ayo carry load</p> |
|--|---|

Contrast the above with the following SVC:

- 16a. Ayọ sáré jáde

16. can be broken down into two meaningful simpler sentences (although the result brings about a distortion of the original meaning).

- 16b. **Ayọ sáré; Ayọ jáde**  
Ayo ran; Ayo went out

It has been noted by some linguists that serial verbs do not occur in any order. Awobuluyi writes:

‘The order in which verbs occur in serial verbal sentences is significant. In some cases a reversal of that order brings about a change in meaning. In other cases, a reversal of the order produces nonsensical utterances’.

Awobuluyi here seems to be referring to ungrammatical sentences arising from a reversal of the order of the verbs. Reversing the order of words in a prepositional SVC results in syntactic ill-formedness. We illustrate this below:

- 17b. **\*Ayọ ti ilèkùn fi kòkòró**  
Ayo closed door with key

This sentence is ill-formed because instruments precede the verb in Yoruba.

#### 4.2 THE SELF-STANDING SVC

The self-standing SVCs have been the subject of much controversy, both in terms of their source analysis and classification. As mentioned earlier, they appear to be analysable into two or more distinct sentences, and this has prompted linguists to postulate a multisentential source for them. Self-standing SVCs can be classified into seven main classes, namely:

- (a) Locative/Directional Constructions
- (b) Manner Constructions
- (c) Purposive Constructions
- (d) Resultative Constructions
- (e) Circumstantial Constructions
- (f) Comparative Constructions
- (g) Temporaneity Constructions.

##### 4.2.1 Locative/Directional Constructions

Examples of such sentences are:

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|---|---|
| <p>22. <b>Ayọ ju iwé mọ kólá</b><br/>Ayo threw book stick Kola<br/>‘Ayo threw the book at Kola’</p>                 | <p>23. <b>Ayọ sunkún lọ ilé</b><br/>Ayo cried go home<br/>‘Ayo cried on the way home’</p>   |
| <p>24. <b>Ayọ mú iwe lọ ilé</b><br/>Ayo took book went home<br/>‘Ayo took the book home’</p>                        | <p>25. <b>Ayọ sin Bólá dé ojà</b><br/>Ayo accompany Bola reach market<br/>‘Ayo accompanied Bola to the market’</p>  |
| <p>26. <b>Ayọ gbé oúnje tẹlẹ Bólá</b><br/>Ayo carried food follow Bola<br/>‘Ayo carried the food after/to Bola’</p> | <p>27. <b>Bólá wa ègbón rẹ lọ ekó</b><br/>Bola search elder sister/brother her go<br/>Lagos<br/>‘Bola went to search for her elder<br/>sister/brother in Lagos’</p> |

Some of the sentences above have been described variously in the literature and their classification has been a subject of debate. For instance, 24. and 25. have been described as ‘modifying’ SVC, by Bamgbose (1973), while Awobuluyi (1973) described

them as 'linking' SVC. Meanwhile, sentences like 26. have been described as purpose clauses (Oyelaran, 1982). However, analyses like these seem to us to be in certain respects inadequate. Bamgbose's analysis, for instance, is not explicit enough. For example, it raises questions concerning the direction of modification. This problem unfortunately is not dealt with in his analysis. A similar weakness applies to Awobuluyi's arguments which are based on paraphrase relationships. For these reasons we reject the terms modifying and linking SVC, for example like 24. and 25.

Looking carefully at the constructions 22. to 27., we see that they all share a common characteristic which is that one of the two verbs in each sentence is a locative verb. The SVCs contain verbs (underlined) which express direction or location. In 22. the verb *mọ* 'stick' indicates the location where Ayo threw the book. In 23., *lo* 'go' indicates the direction of the action of crying.

In 24. the verb *lo* again indicates the direction of the action, while in 25., 26., and 27. the verbs *de*, *tele*, and *lo* also indicate the location or direction of the action respectively.

The locative verbs which characterise this construction do not occur in the initial position. They are always preceded by other verbs which indicate the main action or event. The verb of the main event is usually a verb of action. Locative/Directional constructions differ according to the type of complement they can take. Locative verbs such as *lo*, *wa*, and *de*, for instance, take only complements that refer to a place, while those containing verbs like *tẹ́lẹ́* and *mọ* take complements that refer to a person or thing. The examples 22. to 27. illustrate this. The locative verbs also differ with regards to whether the complement is obligatory or optional. With verbs like *wa* and *lo* the complement is an optional element, whereas it is obligatory with the verbs *dé*, *mọ* and *tẹ́lẹ́*. For example:

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|---|---|
| 28. <i>Ayọ sáré lo</i><br>Ayo ran go<br>'Ayo ran away'  | 29. * <i>Ayọ ju iwé mọ</i><br>Ayo throw book stick<br>'Ayo threw the book at' |
| 30. * <i>Ayọ sin Bólá dé</i><br>Ayo accompanied Bola reach  | 31. * <i>Ayọ gbé óúnjẹ tẹ́lẹ́</i><br>Ayo took food follow                     |
| 32. <i>Ayọ wa ègbón rẹ lo</i><br>Ayo search elder sister/brother her go<br>'Ayo went in search of her elder sister/brother' |   |

Note, however, that with the verb *dé*, the obligatoriness of the complement depends on whether or not the movement is towards the speaker or away from the speaker. If the movement is towards the speaker, then *dé* may not take a complement. Examples are:

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| 33. <i>ó gbé é dé</i><br>he carry it come<br>'He has brought it' | 34. <i>ó ra óúnjẹ náà dé</i><br>he brought food the come<br>'He has bought the food and brought it' |
|--|---|

The locative verb may not be followed by an object NP when there is no need to express the particular setting/location of the event or when the location is already given in a previous context. However, the notional direction is still implied or is latent even though the sentence contains no overt NP denoting the location.

In view of the above, we adopt the term Locative/ Directional, instead of Linking, Modifying or Purpose for this class of SVC, as this term better characterises the

construction. Although these locative verbs perform prepositional-like functions we do not classify them as prepositions since they can themselves be followed by prepositions. For instance the verbs *lọ* and *wa* can be followed by the preposition *si* 'at'. This is illustrated below:

35. **Ayọ mú iwé wá sí ilé**  
Ayo took book come to house
36. **Ayọ sáré lọ sí iléwé**  
Ayo ran go to school  
'Ayo ran to school'

This indicates that these verbs have not lost their verbal status. They are therefore not prepositions.

What distinguishes Locative/Directional constructions in Yoruba from similar sentences in other languages is that Yoruba uses verbs while other languages like English use prepositions to indicate direction. Other examples in this class area:

37. **Bólá ru isu dé ilé** 'Bola carried the yam right to the house'  
Bola carried yam reach home
38. **Mámá rán Bólá lọ ojà** 'Mother sent Bola to the market'  
Mama sent Bola went market
39. **ó fa omọ rẹ wá ilé** 'He dragged his child to the house'  
he dragged child her came home

#### 4.2.2 Manner Constructions

Examples of sentences in this class are:

40. **ó sáré rìn**  
he go fast walk  
'He walked quickly'
41. **ó sáré jẹun**  
he go fast eat  
'He ate quickly'
42. **Ayọ òbáḽẹ ki bàbá**  
Ayo prostrated greet Father  
'Ayo greeted Father with a prostration'
43. **ó rọra tí ilẹ̀kùn**  
he careful closed door  
'He carefully closed the door'

As the name suggests, these sentences express the manner in which an action or process is carried out or perceived. The first verb usually describes the manner while the second indicates the main action or process. For instance, in 40. the verb *sáré* describes the character of walking; in 42. *òbáḽẹ* describes the nature of the greeting (one can greet without prostrating), while in 43. *rọra* describes the manner in which the door was closed.

The main distinguishing feature of this class of SVC is that the sentence can be questioned by substituting one of the verbs with the manner interrogative word *báwo* 'how'. Thus only manner SVCs can serve as natural answers to manner interrogative sentences. The normal interrogative sentences that would elicit sentences 40. to 43. are:

- 40b. **báwo ni ó se rìn?**  
how FOC he PRT walk  
'How did he walk?'
- 41b. **báwo ni ó se jẹun?**  
how FOC he PRT eat  
'How did he eat?'
- 42b. **báwo ni ó se ki Bàbá?**  
how FOC he PRT greet Father  
'How did he greet Father?'
- 43b. **báwo ni ó se tí ilẹ̀kùn?**  
how FOC he PRT close door  
'How did he close the door?'

The sentences 40a., 41a., 42a., and 43a. become questions by substituting the first verb with the manner interrogative **báwo** yielding 40b., 41b., 42b., and 43b. respectively.

As a matter of fact none of the verbs in 40. to 43. can be replaced with any other interrogative word apart from **báwo** 'how'. This is illustrated in the ungrammatical sentences below:

40c. \***kíni ó (se) rìn?**  
what he (PRT) walk

41c. \***kíni ó (se) jẹun?**  
what he (PRT) eat

42c. \***kíni ó se ki ọba?**  
what he (PRT) greet king

Could we also substitute the second verb in this construction with **báwo**? The examples below show that although the resulting sentence is acceptable, it is regarded as an unnatural question in relation to sentences 40. to 43., perhaps, because they do not provide a natural answer.

40d. **báwo ni ó se sáré**  
how FOC he PRT, run  
'How did he run?'

41d. **báwo ni ó se jẹun**  
how FOC he PRT, eat

42d. **báwo ni ó se ọ̀bálẹ̀**  
how FOC he PRT, prostrate

43d. **báwo ni ó se rọra**  
how FOC he PRT, careful

From the above, it is clear that it is the first verb in these constructions that express the manner. In other words, the first verb expresses the manner in which an activity was carried out while the second verb describes the main event.

#### 4.2.3. Purposive Constructions

Purposive constructions are used to denote purpose. Various types of sentences fall into this class. Examples are:

44a. **ó wọ ilé sùn**  
he entered house sleep  
'He went into the house to sleep'

45a. **ó ẹ̀dẹ̀ lọ**  
he stood go  
'He stood up and went'

46a. **ẹ múra kọ ẹ̀dè ọ̀yìn bó**  
you(pl) prepare learn language  
whiteman  
'Get prepared to learn the whiteman's language'

47a. **wọ̀n rán Bọ́lá pe Ayo**  
they sent Bola call Ayo  
'They sent Bola to call Ayo'

48a. **ó ra ọ̀unjẹ̀ jẹ**  
he bought food ate

'He bought food and ate'

In Purposive constructions it is the second verb that denotes the purpose, as the examples above show. Purposive constructions differ from manner constructions in the sense that they do not permit questioning by **báwo** 'how'. Thus 49. and 50. would not be the appropriate questioning of 44. and 45. respectively:

49. \***báwo ni ó se sùn**  
how be he PRT sleep

50. \***báwo ni ó se lọ?**  
how be he PRT go

This applies to the other sentences as well. One characteristic of Purposive constructions is that they can be expanded by the use of the complementiser *láti*, which is equivalent to the English infinitive without any obvious change in meaning.

- 44b. *ó wọ ilé láti sù* 'He entered the house in order to sleep'  
 he entered house in order to sleep
- 45b. *ó òdè láti lọ* he stood in order to go  
 'He stood up in order to go'
- 46b. *wón rán Bólá láti pe Ayo* they sent Bola in order (for him) to  
 call Ayo

There is no difference between the (a) sentences and the (b) sentences, except that in the (a) sentences the action of the second verb has already taken place whereas in the (b) counterpart the action has not yet been accomplished.

#### 4.2.4 Resultative Constructions

Another class of SVCs is the Resultative construction. Examples of these expressions are:

51. *mo se ore dáràn*  
 I do good get trouble  
 'I did good and got into trouble'
52. *Ayo jẹ èbà yó*  
 Ayo ate eba full  
 'Ayo ate eba and was full'
53. *ebí pa á kú*  
 hunger kill him die  
 'Hunger killed him'
54. *ó ti Bólá subú*  
 he pushed Bola fell  
 'He pushed Bola down'
55. *wón mu otí yó* 'They drank wine and were intoxicated'  
 they drank wine full

The characteristic of this construction is that the second verb always denotes the result or consequence of the action of the previous verb or verb phrase. In 51., for instance, the verb *dáràn* 'get trouble' represents the result of the first VP *se ore* 'do good'; in 52., *yó* 'be full' is the result of *jẹ èbà* 'eat eba'; in 53., the result of the action of *pa* 'kill' is *ku* 'die', while in 54. the result of the action of *ti* 'push' is *subú* 'fall'.

In this sense, Resultative constructions differ from Locative, Purposive and Manner SVCs. None of the others can be interpreted in this manner. For instance, consider the Purposive expression below. We cannot say the result of the verb *wọ* is *sun*.

56. *ó wọ ilé sùn* 'He went into the house to sleep'  
 he enter house sleep

This kind of semantic interpretation where the second verb denotes the result of the action of the first verb is only applicable to Resultative Constructions, and not to all SVC types as has sometimes been implied (Lord, 1974).

#### 4.2.5 Circumstantial Constructions

The term circumstantial is borrowed from Oyelaran (1982). However, we must note that some of the expressions to which the term is applied here occur under different classificatory labels in Oyelaran.

Circumstantial refers to the circumstance or context under which a given state of affairs or event occurs. Thus in circumstantial constructions the focus is on the circumstance under which the action takes place. One of the verbs usually denotes

the action or main event while the other verb provides the context or circumstance under which the action takes place. For example:

57. **ó nà mí lẹ**  
he beat me went  
'He beat me while going'
58. **Bólá jóko kàwé**  
Bola sat ate  
'Bola ate sitting down'  
'Bola ate while sitting down'
59. **Bólá dúró jẹun**  
Bola stood up ate  
'Bola stood up while eating'  
'Bola ate standing up'
60. **Bólá ń jẹun rìn**  
Bola PROG eat walk  
'Bola ate while walking'

There is one test which can be used to identify Circumstantial constructions. This is the insertion of the phrase *nígba tí* which literally means 'at the time'. It is equivalent to English 'while' and it explicitly indicates that an action or event took place under some context or circumstance. Thus the above sentences can be rephrased as shown below:

- 57b. **ó nà mí nígba tí ó ń lẹ**  
he beat me at time he PROG go  
'He beat me while he was going'
- 58b. **Bólá jóko nígba tí ó ń kàwé**  
Bola sat down at time she PROG read  
'Bola sat down while she was reading'
- 59b. **Bólá dúró nígba tí ó ń jẹun**  
Bola stood up at time she PROG eat  
'Bola stood up while she was eating'
- 60b. **Bólá mu ọsan nígba tí ó ń rìn**  
Bola drink orange at time she PROG walk  
'Bola was eating an orange while walking'

In Circumstantial constructions, either of the two VPs may function as the background. The choice depends on the particular discourse situation. Such sentences are therefore ambiguous. They can be disambiguated by inserting *nígba tí* 'while' in the sentence. However, this may require interchanging the position of the two VPs since *nígba tí* must occur between the two VPs and the verb which denotes the main event always precedes *nígba tí* while the VP which describes the context or circumstance always follows it. This phrase therefore may serve to determine the main event.

In 57. for example, the act of beating is said to have taken place under a certain context; the verb *lẹ* expresses the context. In 59. the verb *dúró* 'stand' describes the circumstances under which Bola ate, and in 58., it is the verb *jóko* which describes the circumstance or context for the action of reading.

Some Circumstantial constructions which contain locative verbs like *lẹ*, as in 57., look like Locative/Directional constructions. However, they differ from Locative/Directional constructions in that they may not take locative NPs. Thus in 57., for instance, the verb *lẹ* cannot be followed by a locative NP. This is illustrated by the unacceptable sentence below:

- 57c. **\*ó nà mí lẹ ilé**  
he beat me go home

The unacceptability of 57c. shows that the construction is not a Locative/Directional construction. Thus the verb *lẹ* is not always construed with a locative NP. It takes locative NPs only when it functions as a Locative/ Directional verb.

## 4.2.6. Comparative Constructions

This construction has already been identified by Oyelaran (1983). It is characterised by the presence of the verbs **ju** 'surpass', or to 'equal', or **jo**. The examples below are from Oyelaran.

61. **omọ náà gbón ju asarun** 'The child is cleverer than a tsetse fly'  
child the clever surpass tsetse fly
62. **isẹ yí pò tó ti ẹni mífà** 'This work amounts to 6 people's work'  
work this amount equal that (of) person six
63. **agbáyun dùn jọ oyin** 'The agbayun is sweet like honey'  
agbayun sweet resemble honey

Comparative constructions in many SVC languages are similar to those of non-SVC languages. The only difference is that the comparative forms in SVC languages are verbs while non-SVC languages employ adjectives with comparative suffixes or affixes.

## 4.2.7. Temporaneity SVC

Temporaneity SVCs simply defines the temporal sequence of two or more events. There are very few such constructions in Yoruba. An example is given below:

64. **ó jẹun sùn** 'He ate and slept'  
he ate slept

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

We have examined SVCs in Yoruba. Eight classes have been identified in two groups. Prepositional constructions constitute one group. The second and larger group consists of constructions as Locative/Directional, Manner, Purposive, Resultative, Comparative, Circumstantial and Temporaneity. This classification employs both syntactic and semantic criteria for classifying Yoruba SVCs.

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