

RESULTATIVE SERIAL VERB CONSTRUCTIONS IN IGBO*: A MINIMALIST APPROACH

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Abstract

This paper investigates the resultative serial verb constructions in Igbo. Contrary to the view expressed by Déchaine (1993) that Igbo does not have this type of serial verb construction, this paper confirms that the resultative serial verb construction is attested in the language. The Minimalist Program is adopted as the theoretical framework for our analysis. A major finding of this study is that Igbo attests more serial verb construction types than those discussed in the literature. In resultative serial verb constructions, the object of the initial verb (V_1) is the subject of the second verb (V_2). This is a peculiar feature of causatives in which the object of the “cause” verb is the subject of the “effect” verb. It is also found that verbs in serial constructions may share core argument subject and other arguments, and not necessarily must share the same argument subject as defined by some scholars like Welmers (1973) and Bamgbose (1974).

Keywords: resultative serial verb construction, Igbo, subject-sharing

1.0 Introduction

Serial verbs are complex syntactic structures that are internally made up of a number of verbs. The peculiar nature of these kinds of verbs among African languages has necessitated the need for theories of grammar to take cognizance of them in syntactic analysis. Serial verbs allow the speaker to express various aspects of a situation as a single cognitive package within one clause and with one predicate. This paper investigates Resultative Serial Verb Constructions (RSVCs) and the properties of such verbs in Igbo. This serial verb construction type violates the same subjecthood constraint which is typical of most serializing languages, in which all the verbs that make up the serial construction share a single subject. In RSVCs, the object of the initial verb (V_1) is the subject of the second verb (V_2). In other words, it is a case of argument sharing. We also consider causative construction as a form of RSVC in the language.

2.0 Defining Serial Verb Constructions

Serial verb construction (SVC) or verb serialization is a syntactic resource which allows the speaker to express various aspects of a situation as a single cognitive package within one clause and with one predicate. Noonan (1985) describes an SVC as a string of verbs within single clauses that express simultaneous or immediately consecutive actions; have a single grammatical subject; have no connective markings, and are marked or understood as having the same grammatical categories such as tense, modality, aspect and negation. Welmers (1973: 367) says serialization ‘... seems to involve actions that can be associated with each other only if they are performed by the same subject’. Along this view, Bamgbose (1974:17) defines it as a construction ‘... where all the verbs share a common subject in the surface structure. Ihionu (1988:2) defines the phenomenon as ‘a syntactic/semantic phenomenon whereby verbs occur in series in a sentence or construction’.

Larson (1991:185) describes verb serialization as a phenomenon whereby notions that would elsewhere be expressed through conjunction, complementation, or secondary predication are rendered uniformly by means of a sequence of verbs or VPs.

For our working definition of the serial construction, we shall adopt Aikhenvald's (2006:1) definition:

A serial verb construction is a sequence of verbs which act together as a single predicate, without any overt marker of coordination, subordination or syntactic dependency of any sort. They are monoclausal; their intonation properties are the same as those of a monoverbal clause and they just have one tense, aspect, and polarity value. Serial verb constructions may also share core and other arguments. Each component of an SVC must be able to occur on its own right.

The claim by earlier scholars that SVCs have one subject is not always the case. There are cases where verbs in a serial construction do not share a single subject especially in RSVCs (Ogie, 1991; Arokoyo, 2010).

Payne (1997) argues that serial verbs occur in all types of languages, but are more common in languages that have little or no verbal morphology, that is, isolating languages. SVC is widespread in West African, South-east Asian, Creole, Amazonia, Oceania, and New Guinea languages (Aikhenvald, 2003). The sequence of verbs in an SVC shares the same subject NP in most cases and may have an intervening object between the verbs. The Igbo data in (1a-d) below illustrate this phenomenon.

- (1) a. Ada **jì** ríma **bèe** ányị
 Ada hold knife cut meat
 'Ada cut the meat with a knife.'
- b. Ó **siri** jí **rié**
 3SG cook yam eat
 'He/She cooked yam and ate.'
- c. Ó **zurụ** ákwụkwọ **nyé** m
 3SG buy book give me
 'He/She bought a book for me.'
- d. Ó **sò** úgbó élu **gáa** Àsàbà
 3SG follow vehicle top go Asaba
 'He/She travelled to Asaba by air.'

Each of the verbs (in bold type) in the serial constructions above has its own object. The object of V₁ in (1b) is understood as the object of V₂ in the same clause. All the verbs in a clause share the same subject. Object of a V₁ functioning as the subject of V₂ is possible in RSVCs.

2.1 Déchaine View on Resultative Serial Verb Constructions

Déchaine (1993) considered SVCs as bivalent projections. She analyzed SVCs in Yoruba, Igbo and Haitian as bivalent phrases. She claims that Yoruba attests benefactive, instrumental, multi-event

and resultative verb serializations. While Haitian has just the dative type, Igbo is limited to the instrumental and multi-event types on the surface (Déchaine (1993:202), while dative and resultative SVCs only surface as V-V compounds as shown in the examples below.

- (2) a. Ó **bì-nyè-rè** Ada ákwà
 3SG borrow-give-rV Ada cloth
 ‘He/She lent Ada (some) cloth.’
 b. Ó **rì-jù-rù** afọ
 3SG eat-be full-rV stomach
 ‘He/She ate (his/her) stomach full.’

Déchaine (1993) and Baker and Stewart (1999) claim that RSVCs show up in the form of V-V compounds in Igbo. Contrary to this view, we have instances of RSVCs that actually show up as true SVCs in Igbo. We shall examine this under the different types of SVCs attested in Igbo. In the following sub-section, we will look at the basic distinctive features of SVCs in Igbo.

2.2 Properties of Serial Verb Constructions in Igbo

Serial constructions in Igbo have the following properties:

- (i) The two or more verbs with their complements (if any) in an SVC do not have any marker of coordination or subordination. This makes SVCs monoclausal. Coordination and subordination are usually achieved with the use of tone in Igbo (see Emenanjo, 1978; Welmers, 1973; Watters, 2000).
- (ii) The VPs in the sequence are construed as occurring within the same temporal frame. Some verbs appear with or without the $-rV^1$ affix that indicate past but the sentence obligatorily receives a past interpretation (Uwalaka, 1982):

- (3) a. Ó **jì** ñmà **báa** jí
 3SG hold knife peel yam
 ‘He/She peeled yam with a knife.’
 b. Ó **jì-rì** ñmà **báa** jí
 3SG hold-rV knife peel yam
 ‘He/She peeled yam with knife.’

Auxiliaries, negation, tense and aspect markers of all the verbs in the sequence are found with the first verb of the construction. Extensional affixes and the open vowel suffix may however be found on the other verbs in the series (Emenanjo, 1978).

¹The $-rV$ suffix is attached to the verb stem. The last vowel in the verb stem is reduplicated and the trill /r/ is placed between the vowels to break the sequence.

- (4) a. Adá nà-**ebú** nkú **aga** áhja
 Ada PROG carry firewood go market
 ‘Ada carries firewood to the market.’
 b. Ó **jí-ghì** ñgàjì **erí** níri
 3SG hold-NEG spoon eat food
 ‘He/She is not eating with a spoon.’

- c. Ọ **ga-ra** áhja **zuọ** nchà
 3SG go-PAST market buy soap
 ‘He/She went to market and bought soap.’

All VPs in the series share the same grammatical subject except in RSVC where the object of V₁ is understood to be the subject of V₂. This is referred to as subject-object alternation SVC.

- (5) a. Ọ **sìrì** jí **rie**
 3SG cook yam eat
 ‘He/She cooked yam and ate.’
- b. Ada **mèrè** dí ya **aruọ** ụlọ
 Ada cause husband her build house
 ‘Ada made her husband build a house.’

It is clear that the subject of the verb *siri* ‘cook’ in (5a) is also the subject of *rie* ‘eat’. The direct object of V₁ is also the direct object of V₂, therefore there is internal argument sharing in the SVC. Collins (1997) following Baker (1989) states that internal argument sharing is a necessary property of SVCs. In (5b) the object of V₁ *di ya* ‘her husband’ is the subject of V₂. (5b) is an RSVC.

(iii) The individual verbs that make up an SVC can function as independent verbs in simple clause. (4a) and (5a) above can be thus;

- (6) a. Adá nà-**ebú** nkụ
 Ada PROG carry firewood
 ‘Ada carries firewood.’
- b. Adá nà- **aga** áhja
 Ada PROG-go market
 ‘Ada is going to the market.’
- c. Ọ **sì-rì** jí
 3SG cook-PAST yam
 ‘He/She cooked yam.’
- d. Ọ **rì-rì** jí
 3SG eat-PAST yam
 ‘He/She ate yam.’

The VPs share the same mood e.g imperative, future, indicative, hortative, or progressive. (3a) is indicative and (4a) is progressive. Serial constructions are used to express some meanings in Igbo. Primary of such meanings expressed are preposition and adverb. SVCs are also used for expressing direction, modality, causatives, benefactive, instrumentals, manners, comparison, purpose, and dative (see Emenanjo, 1978; Madugu, 1976; Ogie, 1991).

2.3 Types of Serial Verb Constructions in Igbo

There are different types of SVCs in Igbo. SVCs may surface as pure serial constructions or as V-V compounds which are analyzed as being derived from covert serial constructions by movement. Contrary to Dechaine’s (1993: 238) claim that there are no dative and resultative serial

constructions in Igbo but that these predicates types surface as V-V compounds, we will show that some datives and resultatives SVCs actually show up as serial constructions in the language.

2.3.1 Instrumental Serial Verb Construction

The verbs *ji* ‘hold’ and *were* ‘take’ are used to express instrumentality in Igbo. Both verbs are syntactically similar. Each occurs in a complex structure [- NP VP], typical of SVCs, where it obligatorily takes a complement and a VP.

- (7) a. Ugo **wèrè** ụkwụ **gàá** áhja
 Ugo take leg go market
 ‘Ugo went to market on foot.’
 b. É **jì** ázịzà **ázà** ụlọ
 IMP hold broom sweep house
 ‘People sweep the house with a broom.’
 c. Obí **wèrè** ósísí **kụọ** Adá
 Obi take stick hit Ada
 ‘Obi hit Ada with a stick.’

In instrumental SVC, the object of V₁ is also the instrumental argument of V₂. In (7c) above, the object of *were* ‘take’ is *osisi* and it is also the instrument used to carry out the action of the verb *kụọ* ‘hit’.

2.3.2 Multi-Event Serial Verb Construction

In multi-event SVC, different events which are related are formed. All the verbs share a single subject in a multi-event serial construction. (8a-c) illustrate this.

- (8) a. Ógù **gòrò** ọkụkọ **gbúo síe ríe** (Dechaine, 1993)
 Ogu buy chicken kill cook eat
 ‘Ogu bought a chicken, killed [it], cooked [it] and ate [it].’
 b. Ó **kwùrù** ókwu **kwáa** ákwa
 3SG speak word cry crying
 ‘He/She spoke and cried.’
 c. Ọ **bjàrà** **kụọ** aka
 3SG come knock hand
 ‘He/She came and knocked.’

2.3.3 Dative Serial Verb Construction

Dative SVC indicates and distinguishes the recipient of something given or transferred. Dative constructions in Igbo usually surface as V-V compound. Hence, Dechaine’s (1993:202) claim that there are no dative serial constructions on the surface in the language does not hold. Emenanajo (1978:202) states that SVCs are used in expressing dative. Examples (9a-b) show dative constructions with V-V compounds, while (9c - d) illustrate those with serial construction.

- (9) a. Ó **bì-nyèrè** Adá égo
 3SG borrow-give Ada money
 ‘He/She lent Ada some money.’

- b. Ó **bù-nyèrè** únù jí
3SG carry-give you (pl.) yam
'He/She gave you(pl) yams.'
- c. Ọ **zùtàrà** ákwukwọ **nye** m̀
3SG buy book give me
'He/She bought a book and gave me [for me].'
- d. Ọ **nàtàrà** ya **nyé** ụzọ
3SG collect 3SG give Uzo
'He/She got it from him/her and gave it to Uzo.'

2.3.4 Resultative Serial Verb Construction

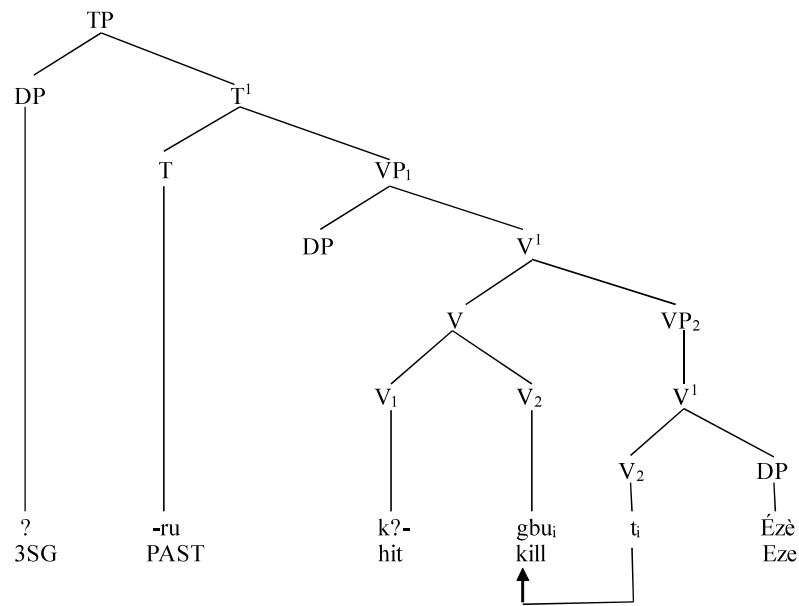
Just like the use of dative constructions surfacing as V-V compounds, resultative constructions also surface as V-V compounds in Igbo (10a-b) (Baker & Stewart 1999:11). There are some occasions where resultative constructions surface as true serial construction (10c-f).

- (10) a. Ọ **kụ-gburu** Ézè
3SG hit-kill Eze
'He/She beat Eze mercilessly to death.'
- b. Há **kụ-wara** ikó
they hit-break cup
'They broke the cup.'
- c. Adá **mere** dí ya **arụọ** ụlọ
Ada cause husband her build house
'Ada made her husband build a house.'
- d. Ọ **kpọọ** anyị **bịá**
3SG call us come
'He/She summoned us.'
- e. Uzọ **zìrì** Obi **goté** azụ
Uzo send Obi buy fish
'Uzo sent Obi to buy (some) fish.'
- f. Ada **nyèrè** Obi nri **rie**
Ada give Obi food eat
'Ada gave Obi food to eat.'

3.0 Igbo Resultative Serial Verb Constructions

In Igbo, RSVC is a type of SVC in which one of the verbs in the serialization expresses the result of the other verb. V_2 in an RSVC expresses the result of V_1 . Thus, the object of V_1 is regarded and understood to be the subject of V_2 . For those RSVCs that surface as V-V compound, V_2 is analyzed as incorporating into V_1 to give the complete predicate (Dechaine, 1993). Example (10a) above is derived through movement operation as shown in the diagram below.

(11)



‘He/She beat Eze mercilessly to death.’

V_2 left a trace copy in its original position under the node VP_2 . The moved verb is incorporated into the V_1 . This shows that Igbo V-V compounds are covert serial constructions headed by V. This is in line with the copying component of movement. We see that V_2 involves a form of merger operation by which a copy of the moved constituent which has already been merged in one position is subsequently merged in another position.

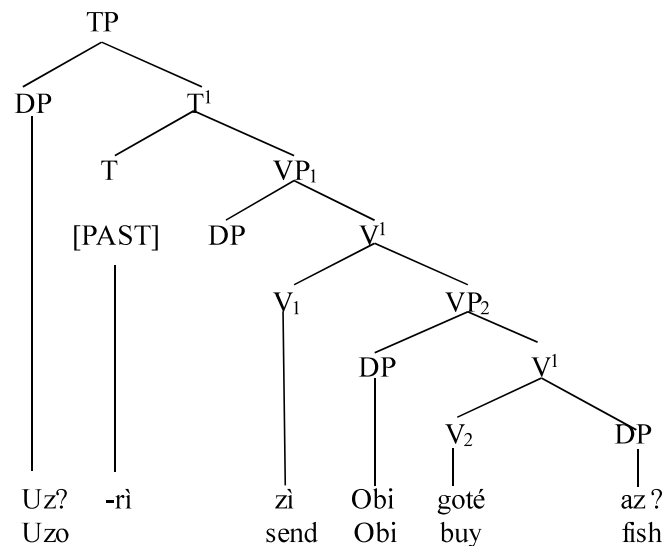
RSVCs do not have a single subject, and as such, it violates the subjecthood constraint of SVCs. Bodomó (1993:39) describes subjecthood constraint as “a construction c satisfies the subject sameness constraint if all the lexical verbs in c share the same structural subject”. However, lexical verbs in RSVCs do not share the same subject but this SVC type is still accepted as grammatical in Igbo. The examples below from (10e-f) buttress this claim.

(12) a. Uzo **zìrì** Obi **goté** azu
 Uzo send Obi buy fish
 ‘Uzo sent Obi to buy (some) fish.’

b. Ada **nyèrè** Obi nri **rie**
 Ada give Obi food eat
 ‘Ada gave Obi food to eat.’

The data in (12) above show RSVCs where the subjects are not shared. This is further illustrated with the diagram below.

(13)



‘Uzo sent Obi to buy (some) fish.’

RSVCs are also attested in Yoruba as exemplified below.

(14) a. *Ọlọpáá na olè náà bẹ* (Déchaine, 1993)
 police flog thief DET cut
 ‘Police whipped the thief bloody.’

b. *Olú gbé ọmọ náà subú* (Arokoyo, 2010)
 Olu carry child DET fall
 ‘Olu caused the child to fall.’

3.1 Causatives as Form of Resultative Serial Verb Construction in Igbo

Causative constructions (or causatives) are linguistic instantiation that express the conceptual notion of causation (Payne, 1997). It can be seen as a device that changes the grammatical status of the arguments in the predications. This type of construction introduces a new argument that represents the notional “causer”, which can be considered as having the (new) grammatical role of Causer, placing it in subject position, while demoting the original subject to oblique or peripheral status (Palmer, 1994; Tallerman, 2005).

Causative constructions are considered as form of serial construction which involves the ‘cause’ verb and the ‘effect’ verb in the sequence. The verb of causation precedes the verb which refers to the effect, or the result (Aikhenvald, 2003; Uwalaka, 1995). There is a controversy as to whether causative constructions with a single predication expressing a single event or a biclausal construction involving a matrix clause and the addition of a causative verb gives rise to an additional clause. Tallerman (2005:206) distinguishes between causatives which are biclausal and those which form a single verbal unit and not as predicates in separate clauses. Payne (1997:176) argues that causatives consists of a predicate of effect, while the predicate of cause which is the

matrix clause contains the notion of causation, the predicate of effect which is embedded in the predicate of clause expresses the effect of the causative situation.

- (15) a. The boy ate rice.
b. We caused the boy to eat rice.

(15a) above is the basic simple clause. The structure in (15b) is a causative construction.

The boy in (15a) has been demoted from its original position as the subject of the simple clause, and a new subject, *we* has been introduced. Also, a new predicate – *we caused* is introduced – so creating a whole new clause. There are three types of causatives. These are lexical, morphological and periphrastic/analytic causatives (Payne, 1997; Tallerman, 2005).

3.1.1 Lexical Causative

According to Payne (1997:177), most, if not all, languages have some lexical causatives. In lexical causative, the notion of clause is wrapped up in the lexical meaning of the verbs can be used either intransitively, so that no causation is expressed, or transitively, so that they include a causer as their subject. There are three subtypes of lexical causatives as exemplified with Igbo data below.

(i) Lexical Causatives with no Change in Verb Form

- (16) a. Éféré **kụ-wà-rà**
Plate hit-break-rV
'The plate broke.'
b. Adá **kụ-wà-rà** éféré
Ada hit-break-rV plate
'Ada broke the plate.' (i.e., Ada caused the plate to break)

(ii) Lexical Causatives with some Idiosyncratic Change in Verb Form

- (17) a. Ósísí **dà-rà**
tree fall-rV
'The tree fell.'
b. Obí **gbu-dara** ósísí
Obi kill-fall-rV tree
'Obi felled the tree.'

(iii) Lexical Causatives with Different Verbs

- (18) a. Obi **nwụ-rụ**
Obi die-rV
'Obi died'
b. Ézè **gbù-rù** Obí
Eze kill-rV Obi
'Eze killed Obi'

The (b) examples in (16 to 18) above are causative constructions. The verbs in most causative structures in Igbo are of the V-V compound (Uwalaka, 1995). The causative is a verb and precedes the effect verb in the V-V compounds. Uwalaka claims the Igbo has the cause-verb pattern as

opposed to the verb-cause found in the literature. In addition to this, a small set of causative affixes that gives rise to verb - clause pattern occur in morphological causative.

3.1.2 Morphological Causative

Morphological causatives involve a productive change in the form of the verb. The causative is inflected on the verb in this case with the use of the affix *-wa* rather than using a separate causative verb.

- (19) a. Ada **rahụ-rụ**
Ada sleep-rV
'Ada slept.'
- b. Nne **rahụ-wa-ra** Adá
mother sleep-CAUS-rV Ada
'Mother made Ada sleep.'

3.1.3 Periphrastic/Analytic Causative

Some causatives are analytic in that they involve a separate causative verb. In most cases, they consist of a matrix verb (expressing the notion of CAUSE) whose sentential complement refers to the caused event.

- (20) a. Ozo **mè-rè** m **chịá** ọchị
Ozo CAUS-rV me laugh laugh
'Ozo made me laugh.'
- b. Ó **mè-rè** anyị **bịá**
3SG CAUS-rV us come
'He/She made us come.'
- c. Ada **me-re** di ya **ruọ** ụlọ
Ada CAUS-rV husband 3SG build house
'Ada made her husband build a house.'

Uwalaka (1995) pointed out that while Igbo causative verb is intrinsically the verb *ime* "do/cause", any appropriate verb can combine with another verb in the language to give the required causative reading of cause-V. This is very common with V-V compound, but in analytic causative, the verb *ime* usually surfaces as the causative verb before the verb that expresses effect or result.

It is an assumption in the literature that the basic structure of all causatives is like that of periphrastic ones that is, consisting of a cause verb and a subordinate effect verb. In the generative semantic theory that was popular in the 1970, this analysis was applied even to lexical causatives such as KILL which was interpreted as "CAUSE-TO-DIE" (Palmer, 1994). Most of the constructions that are regarded as causative constructions in Igbo surface as V-V compounds and analytical causatives are usually referred to as biclausal. Palmer (1994:218) remarks that "periphrastic causatives appear to be biclausal in that they contain two predicators, yet often have syntactic features that make them more like monoclausal constructions." This means that it is possible to have serial constructions that express causatives. Déchaine (1993:206) states that "causatives... satisfy all the standard serial diagnostics". Uwalaka (1995:160) reports that "in the formation of causative structures, Igbo complements the use of compound verbs with the use of serial structures".

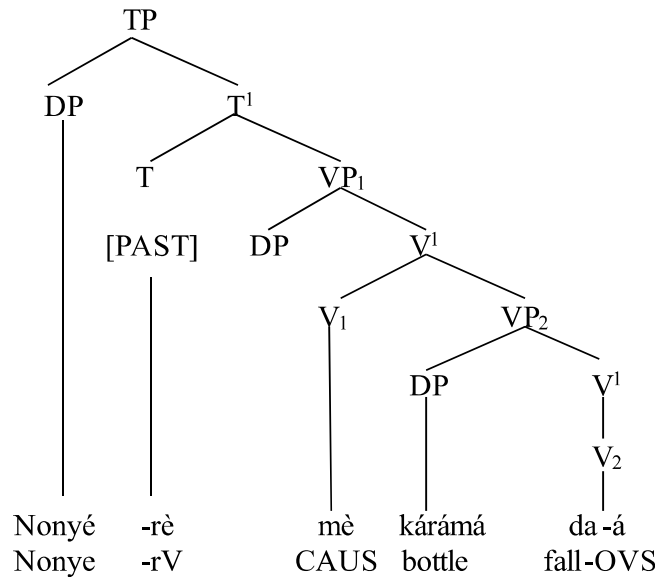
- (21) b. Nonyé **mè-rè** káramá **da-á**

Nonye CAUS-rV bottle fall-OVS
 ‘Nonye caused the bottle to fall.’

f. Ozo **mèrè** Ézè **sa-á** éféré n’ábàlì
 Ozo CAUS-rV Eze wash-OVS plate at night
 ‘Ozo made Eze to wash the plate at night.’

Examples (21a) is phrase-marked in (22) below.

(22)



‘Nonye caused the bottle to fall.’

The causative constructions in (20 and 21) above involve serial constructions. The features of serial constructions highlighted above are found in the structures. The first verb, which is the causative verb, bears the *-rV* suffix, while the effect verb bears the OVS. Crucially the lack of tense in non-initial verbs is claimed to be an outstanding characteristic of the consecutive/serial verb constructions.

V-V compounds have been referred to as covert serial construction with verb movement (Dechaine, 1993). Consider the following examples.

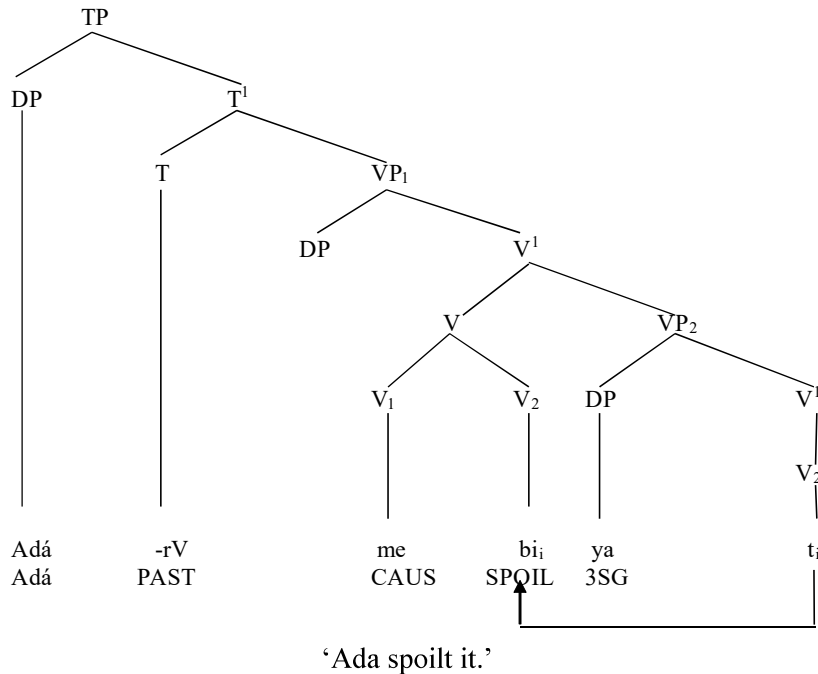
(23) a. Ada **me-bi-ri** ya
 Ada CAUS-spoil-rV 3SG
 ‘Ada spoiled it.’

b. O **chụ-pụ-rụ** ụmụ ya
 3SG chase-leave-rV children 3SG
 ‘He/She/it chased his/her/its children away.’

- c. Adá **me-ba-ra** m ája n'anya
 Ada CAUS-enter-rV me sand in eye
 'Ada caused sand to enter my eye.'

Tense is no longer inflected in the causative verb but on the moved verb in the structure. (23a) above can be realized with a serial construction. The diagram below shows the covert verb serialization and shows the verb movement involved in V₂ incorporation in V₁.

(24)



V₂ left a trace copy in its original position under the node VP₂. This shows that Igbo V-V compounds are covert serial constructions headed by V₁. This is in line with the copying component of movement. We see that V₂ involves a form of merger operation by which a copy of the moved constituent which has already been merged in one position is subsequently merged in another position.

4.0 Conclusion

This paper has presented data to prove that contrary to the view expressed by Déchaine (1993), Igbo has Resultative Serial Verb Construction. In addition to this, the paper revealed that the language attests dative overt serial verb construction and resultative serial verb constructions contrary to Déchaine’s (1993) claim that these serial verb construction types are not allowed in the language but only surface as V-V compounds. These serial construction types also have V-V compounds exemplified in (9a-b) and (10a-b). It is also observed that not all serial constructions share a single subject as defined by scholars like Welmers (1973) and Bamgbose (1974). In resultative serial verb construction, the second verb expresses the effect of the initial verb in the serialization. Resultative serial verb construction sometimes surface as causatives, where the

subject is not shared by both verbs. We adopt Aikhenvald's (2006) definition that SVCs may share core subject and other arguments such as direct object.

Abbreviations

3SG	Third Person Singular
CAUS	Causative
DET	Determiner
DP	Determiner Phrase
IMP	Impersonal Pronoun
NEG	Negation
NP	Noun Phrase
OVS	Open Vowel Suffix
PAST	Past Tense
PROG	Progressive Aspect
RSVC	Resultative Serial Verb Construction
-rV	Past Tense Suffix
SVC	Serial Verb Construction
T	Tense
TP	Tense Phrase
V	Verb
V ₁	Initial verb in an SVC
V ₂	Second verb in an SVC
VP	Verb Phrase
VP ₁	Initial VP in an SVC
VP ₂	Second VP in an SVC

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