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ISSUES ON SERIAL VERB CONSTRUCTIONS IN MEDUMBA

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Abstract: This study attempts to account for the analysis of the interaction between the syntactic structure and the semantic outcome of serial verb constructions in Mədʉ́mbə̀, an East Grassfields Bantu language spoken in the Nde division, West Region of Cameroon. It builds from natural data collected from field informants and native speakers' intuitive knowledge of the language to provide an in-depth descriptive analysis of Mədʉ́mbə̀ serial verb constructions from a morpho-syntactic and semantic perspective. In this view, the article examines the structural characteritics of SVCs in the language and brings up a semantic typology of SVCs in Mədʉ́mbə̀. The discussion of the morpho-syntactic manifestation of SVCs goes in line with Ameka (2005) while the overall analysis is undertaken from a descriptive grammar perspective. The paper also attempts a compositional semantic analysis of SVCs in the language.

Key words: serial verb constructions, composition semantics, morpho-syntactic manifestation, argument sharing, homorganic nasal

1. Introduction

Haspelmath (2016) points out that in earlier comparative literature the notion of a serial verb construction (SVC) has not been delimited clearly, and/or has been formulated in much too wide terms. He then proposes the following definition: "a serial verb construction is a monoclausal construction consisting of multiple independent verbs with no element linking them and with no predicate–argument relation between the verbs".

The principal aim of this paper is to highlight some issues regarding the morpho-syntax as well as the semantic properties of serial verb constructions in the Mədúmbɑ̀ language. To come across this, we have gathered natural data through simple data elicitation techniques coupled with our native speakers' intuitive knowledge of the language. To get to the bottom of the analysis, the following questions were raised: What are the morpho-syntactic features of these constructions? What could be the different types of multiple verb constructions in the language? What are their semantic functions? How does their compositional semantic interpretation look like? An attempt to answer these questions led to organizing the content of the article as follows. §2 presents the language and its speakers as well as a sketch background study on the language. In §3, I review some structural properties of SVCs. §4 draws up a semantic typology of SVCs in Mədúmbɑ̀. In §5, a compositional semantic analysis of SVCs is provided. §6 provides a summary of the main points of the article. The discussion is purely descriptive. This descriptive analysis will add onto existing data and broaden the base on which more comprehensive and adequate theories of serial verb constructions can be built. Before delving into the work properly, we first endeavour to provide a background information on the language of study.

2. Background knowledge

2.1. The language and its Speakers

Spoken in the West region of Cameroon, Mədúmbɑ̀ is a Grassfields Bantu language, zone 9, Noun subgroup of the East Grassfield group. It is the native language of the "Ngangte", that is the people from Nde division. The Nde division, noted for its thick population density, is situated on the southern belt of the "plateau du Noun" on an altitude which varies between 1200–1300m. The relatively humid climate has an average rainfall of about 1457mm a year (Kouankem 2012: 21).

About 136000 speakers of Mədúmbɑ̀ are found in the major villages of the division. They are: Bangangte which administratively is the headquaters of the Nde division, Bakong, Bangoulap, Balengou, Bachingou, Bazou, Badounga, Bamena, Bahoc, Bangang Fokam, Tonga, Bangoua, Maha and Bangou. Mədúmbɑ̀ is bordered by Shʉpaməm in the North, Ghomala', Fe'fe' and Nda'nda' in the West, Kwa in the South West, Tunen and Nyo'o' in the South.

2.2. Background sketch

Various topics of Mədúmbɑ̀ grammar have been treated in existing works. These topics include tense, aspect and mood (Ngangoum 1991), the syntax of the Mədúmbɑ̀ Determiner Phrase (Kouankem 2012), a formal semantic analysis of temporal and aspectual reference (Mucha 2015) and the syntax of A'-dependencies namely wh-movement, focus movement, relativization and topicalization (Keupdjio 2020). Core areas of the grammar such as the features of serial verb constructions have not been mentioned in these works. Thus, our article comes in to fill this gap. Besides, the challenge of providing linguistic data in a wide range of languages in order to develop an explanatorily adequate and universal (or at least, potentially generalizable across languages) theory cannot be overemphasized. It is against this background that we have chosen to study serial verb constructions in the Mədúmbɑ̀ language. This study will add onto existing data and broaden the horizon of knowledge, provide support to some previous accounts of these phenomena and suggest ways in which these could be revised in order to accommodate a wider range of data available across languages. In the section that follows, we will focus on some tenses in the language.

2.3. Tense markers and the homorganic nasal prefix

Tense is generally used to refer to the location of the time point of one event by making reference to another event, very often the speech event. Mədúmbɑ̀ distinguishes eight past tenses and five future tenses

in addition to a present tense, thus giving a fourteen-way tense distinction. Corresponding to the eight semantic categories of past, there are also eight morphosyntactic markers. The division of tense into eight semantic categories is based on the degree of remoteness. Thus for the past tense, there is a past tense marker referring specifically to yesterday events, one referring to today's past events, another for events prior to yesterday and so on. The future patterns also fall along similar lines. Thus there is a morphological marker that makes reference to future events within today, one that refers to tomorrow future and another for distant future (i.e. beyond tomorrow).

This section presents the correlation that exists between some tenses and the homorganic nasal in Mədúmbə̀. I focus only on the tenses that provoke the appearance of the homorganic nasal on the verb. This overview sketch is intended to prepare the reader for the data and discussions on serial verbs. As a consequence, it is not only selective but limited in scope and focuses on the bare essentials that are necessary for a better assimilation of the data to be presented herein.

Some past and future tense markers cause the appearance of a homorganic nasal on the verb.

2.3.1. P1 (during the day past tense)

The past expressed by P1 refers to events that happened during the day (the day of speaking). This form of the past tense is morphologically marked by *yɔ̄g*. This morpheme provokes the occurrence of a homorganic nasal consonant prefix on the initial syllable of the following verb. Let us consider the following example (1).

(1) a. *Wǎzí* *yɔ̄g* ***n****-sɔ̀g* *ŋká*
Wandji P1 N-wash dishes
'Wandji has washed the dishes (during the day).'

b. *Nǎmí* *yɔ̄g* ***ŋ****-kə̀b* *ncwə̀n*
Nami P1 N-cut wood
'Nami has cut the wood.'

2.3.2. P2 (this morning past)

This morning past (P2) is used to designate actions that took place earlier in the morning in the day of speaking. It is morphologically marked by the morpheme *càg*. Following are illustrations of the use of this morning past.

(2) a. *mén* *càg* ***n***-*zhʉ́* *cāŋ*
child P2 N-eat food
'The child has eaten (this morning).'
b. *Nǎná* *càg* ***n***-*sɔ̀g* *ŋká*
Nana P2 N-wash dishes
'Nana has washed the dishes (this morning).'

It is worth noting that the morpheme of this past tense also provokes the occurrence of a homorganic nasal on the initial syllable of the following verb as can be seen from the examples above.

2.3.3. P4 (yesterday past)

The yesterday past tense also referred to in this work as P4 is marked by *fə̂*. It is used to describe actions/events that occurred the day before. The examples below illustrate P4.

(3) a. *Nǎná* *fə̂* ***n***-*sɔ̀g* *ŋká*
Nami P4 N-wash dishes
'Nami washed the dishes.' (yesterday)
b. *á* *fə̂* ***n***-*sə̀'ə̀* *ndà*
3SG P4 N-come home
'He came home.'

When the morpheme *fə̂*, is used, just as its P1 and P2 counterparts; it also causes the appearance of a homorganic nasal on the verb.

2.3.4. Today future (F1)

The today future tense (F1) is marked by the simple future tense morpheme *à'* and another morpheme *gʉ̀ʉ̀* which specifies F1 occurrences.

It specifically refers to an event yet to come but which is projected to take place later within the same day that the statement is uttered. It cannot mean that the event is projected to occur beyond the 'speech day'. Examples of sentences in F1 tense follow below.

(4) a. *à* *à' gɣʉ̀* ***ŋ-kǐ*** *ŋgwà'ni*
3SG F1 N-write letter
'She will write the letter.'

b. *à* *à' gɣʉ̀* ***n-sə̀'ə̀***
3SG F1 N-come
'He will come.'

2.3.5. During the day future (F2)

The today tense marker can also be expressed by another morpheme which brings further specification to the utterance. *à' yɔ̄g* is used to refer to an action/event that will take place during the day. Even without the temporal adverbial, it can be translated as an event projected to occur today as the following examples indicate.

(5) a. *mə̀* *à'yɔ̄g* ***n-ná*** *cāŋ*
1SG F2 N-cook food
'I will write.' (today)

b. *mə̀* *à'yɔ̄g* ***n-dʉ́'*** *nà*
1SG F2 N-cultivate farm
'I will farm.'

Again, like the today future F1, the future tense F2 occasions the insertion of a homorganic nasal consonant on the following verb. Parallel to P1 and P2, F1 and F2 are not relative, that is, they relate strictly to the utterance time. F1 for instance means today. It does not mean the day after tomorrow.

2.3.6. Tomorrow future F3

The tomorrow future is marked by a combination of the simple future tense morpheme *à'* and the morpheme *càg* which specifies F3 events.

The tomorrow future tense is used to describe actions and events that are expected to take place or situations that will occur tomorrow.

(6) a. *mə̀ à'càg **n**-ná cāŋ*
1SG F3 N-cook food
'I will write.' (tomorrow)

b. *mə̀ à'càg **n**-dɯ́' nà*
1SG F3 N-cultivate farm
'I will farm.' (tomorrow)

As we have seen throughout the various examples in this section, some tense markers in the language provokes the appearance of the nasal prefix on the subsequent verb. Gueche Fotso (2015) analysing tenses in Nda'nda', a related Grassfields Bantu language suggested that these tenses come with the nasal. Tenses in the Nda'nda' language can be formally expressed by means of morphological or/and tonological markers. He refers to as tense tonological marker, the floating tone that depending on the tense can either dock rightwards on the verb or leftwards on the subject, a pronoun or a noun. The morphological marker, on its part, includes the morpheme that is placed in front of the verb and that is generally monosyllabic and the homorganic nasal that, depending on the tense, associate to the verb.

The homorganic nasal discussed by this author is similar to the one which appears on verbs in the Mə̀dɯ́mbə̀ examples in this section.

The brief presentation presented here should help the reader have some background knowledge about the language tense specification system and specifically on the nature of the tense system homorganic nasal. See (Ngangoum 1991; Kouankem 2012; Mucha 2015) for more details about the Mə̀dɯ́mbə̀ TAM system

After ironing out some issues regarding tenses and the homorganic nasal in the language, we now turn to the next section to address the morpho-syntactic criteria for identifying Mə̀dɯ́mbə̀ serial verb constructions which is the main goal of this paper.

3. Morpho-syntactic criteria for identifying Mədúmbà SVCs

There are several perspectives on verb serialization as well as unresolved issues on the subject. Klamer et al. (2008: 21) affirm that "despite the by now impressive literature on serial verb constructions, there is still surprisingly little agreement on what exactly defines serial verb constructions". For the purpose of this discussion, we will rely on Ameka (2005) who defines a serial verb construction as a sequence of two or more VPs (including complements and adjuncts) that obey the following criteria:

- there is no marker of syntactic dependency,
- they have at least one common argument or marker,
- they share the same aspect, tense and mood markers,
- all VPs in the sequence share the same syntactic subject,
- the individual verbs can function as independent verbs in simple clauses.

In this regard, Mədúmbà SVCs consist of the following components:

a. Monoclausal
b. A series of two or more verbs
c. Shared arguments
d. No dependency marker
e. Shared tense/aspect specification
f. Homorganic nasal prefix

3.1. Monoclausality

In Mədúmbà, a serial verb construction is considered as monoclausal because it functions as a single predicate. Verbs which form this construction act together as a syntactic whole. Illustration is provided below.

(7) a. *Nămí ná' kèd ncwèn*
Nami P6 carry wood
'Nami carried the wood.'

b. *Nămí* *ná'* *nɛ̀n* *ndá*
Nami P6 go home
'Nami went home.'

c. *Nămí* *ná'* *kɛ̀d* *ncwɛ̀n* *n-nɛ̀n* *yí* *ndá*
Nămí *ná'* *kɛ̀d* *ncwɛ̀n* N-*nɛ̀n* *yí* *ndá*
Nami P6 carried wood N-go it home
'Nami took the wood home.'

Notice from example (7c) above that Mədúmbà SVC is translated as a single predicate into English. This observation is in line with Aikhenvald (2006b: 5) who asserts that SVCs are often translated into non-serializing languages with a simple mono-verbal clause, which suggests that an SVC represents a single event. As can be seen from this example, the predicates are strung together as a whole sharing a unique tense marker *ná'* 'P6: remote past tense marker' and other features which will be discussed in subsequent sections.

3.2. Shared argument

Argument sharing is generally considered as a defining criterion of SVCs. Cleary-Kemp (2015) points out that this appears to follow from the requirement that the two verbs form a single complex predicate with a 'fused' argument structure.

In Mədúmbà SVCs, the subjects of the two or more verbs must be identical, and the verbs may additionally share their object arguments, if both are transitive.

A same-subject SVC may involve two intransitive verb stems (8a), a transitive (8b) and an intransitive stem (8c).

(8) a. *á* *tsʉ̀ə* *ndà* *n-dă*
á *tsʉ̀ə* *ndà* *N-lă*
3 SG remain house N-cry
'He remained house crying.'

b. *á* *kɨ́* *n-tsùm* *ndà*
á *kɨ́* *N-tsùm* *ndà*
3SG run N-leave house
'He ran out of the house.'

c. *kɛ̀d* *díàŋ* *n-sə́'* *yí*
kɛ̀d *díàŋ* *N-sə́'* *yí*
carry chair N-bring it
'Bring the chair!'

In this section, I exemplify each of the different types of surface argument-sharing found in SVCs in the Mədúmbɑ̀ language and make some observations about their properties. The examples are arranged by argument-role types. I begin with agent-sharing constructions and then move on to patient-sharing constructions.

3.2.1. Same subject SVC

(9) a. *á* *làŋ* *n-jà'* *kàb*
á *làŋ* *N-yà'* *kàb*
3SG jumped N-cross fence
'He jumped across the fence.'

b. *á* *bə̌* *ntsə̀* *n-nàŋ* *mbwògə̀*
á *bə̌* *ntsə̀* *N-nàŋ* *mbwògə̀*
3SG tilt water N-pour fire
'He poured the water onto the fire.'

In the Mədúmbɑ̀ language, it is also possible for the directional verb to have an agent that includes the agent and patient of the other verb:

(10) *mə̀* *à'* *lù'* *ú* *n-nɛ̀n* *yí*
mə̀ *à'* *lù'* *ú* *N-nɛ̀n* *yí*
1SG F0 take you N-go it
'I will take you away.'

3.2.2. Agent-sharing: two different patients

In a Mədúmbɑ̀ SVC, a single argument can share two different patients. Illustration is provided below.

(11) a. *mə̀ kú' tə̀ ŋ-kàp bɛ̀*
mə̀ kú' tə̀ N-kàp bɛ̀
1SG climb palm tree N-pick nuts
'I climbed the palm tree to pick palm nuts.'

b. *mə̀ ná' càg ŋwà'ni m-fà ŋgămí*
mə̀ ná' càg ŋwà'ni N-fà ŋgămí
1SG P6 send book N-give ngami
'I handed the book to Ngami.'

3.2.3. Agent-sharing ditransitive verb

When agents share ditransitive verbs, the ditransitive verb is normally the second verb, and the patient of the first verb is shared with the theme of the ditransitive verb.

(12) *ŋgămí kɯ́t fə̀ mbwɔ̀g m-fà má*
ŋgămí kɯ́t fə̀ mbwɔ̀g N-fà má
ngami build space fire N-give mum
'Ngami built a kitchen for mum.'
(Lit. 'Ngami built a kitchen (Ngami) gave (it) to mum.')

3.2.4. Agent-sharing: patient and instrument are shared in addition

In some serial verb constructions, the same agent can share both the patient and instrument of the sentence as illustrated below.

(13) a. *á lú' bí ŋ-kə̀b mbàb ŋgàb yí*
á lú' bí N-kə̀b mbàb ŋgàb yí
3SG take knife N-cut meat chicken it
'She cut some chicken meat with a knife.'
(Lit. 'She took a knife she cut the chicken meat.')

b. *á lú' bă n-nɛ̀n yí nvɯ́ ntànɔ́*
á lú' bă N-nɛ̀n yí nvɯ́ ntànɔ́
3SG take bike N-go it to market
'He rode to the market.'
(Lit. 'He took the bike (he) went to the market.')

In contrast to same-subject SVCs, switch-function SVCs have a transitive V1 (initial verb), and the object of V_1 is the subject of V_2 (second verb).

(14) *lù' mɛ́n m-bɛ̀n ndà*
lù' mɛ́n N-bɛ̀n ndà
take child N-return home
'Take the baby back home!'

In Mədúmbà, inclusory SVCs have a transitive V_1, but the subject of V_2 includes both subject and object of V_1. These typically have a comitative reading, as in (15), where the first person dual inclusive subject of V_2 ***n-nɛ̀n*** 'go' includes both the subject and the object of V_1 *lù'* 'take'.

(15) *mə à' lù' ú n-nɛ̀n yí*
mə à' lù' ú N-nɛ̀n yí
1SG F0 take you N-go it
'I will take you away with me.'

Multiple object SVCs involve two transitive verbs, each with its own object. Like inclusory SVCs, they tend to have a reading of accompaniment.

(16) *mə lù' tằntsə̀ n-nú ntsə̀ yí*
mə lù' tằntsə̀ N-nú ntsə̀ yí
1SG use calabash N-drink water it
'I drink water with a calabash.'

Having discussed the type of argument-sharing properties exhibited by Mədúmbà SVCs, we now turn to look at another syntactic feature that characterizes these SVCs namely the tense/aspect specification.

3.3. Tense and aspect specification

In Mədúmbà serial verb constructions with a single tense or aspect marker, the latter occurs in a peripheral position that is, preceding the first verb. This can be observed in the examples below.

(17) a. *á* *ná'* *sə̀'* *ŋ-kə̀b* *ncwɛ̀n*
á *ná'* *sə̀'* *N-kə̀b* *ncwɛ̀n*
3SG P6 come N-cut wood
'He came and cut the wood.'

b. *à* *à'* *cù* *n-jùb* *kwì*
á *à'* *cù* *N-yùb* *kwì*
3SG F0 enter N-sing song
'She will enter and sing'

c. *à* *ná'* *ká* *sə̀'* *n-sɔ̀g* *nzwə́* *nămí*
à *ná'* *ká* *sə̀'* *N-sɔ̀g* *nzwə́* *nămí*
3SG P6 HAB come N-wash cloth Nami
'He used to come and wash Nami's cloth.'

We can observe from these examples that there is only one tense and aspect marker which appear in these constructions.

3.4. Shared negation markers

Mədúmbà serial verb constructions share a single negation marker. Any attempt to independently negate predicates that constitute a Mədúmbà SVC results in a different semantic interpretation of the construction as evidenced by (18e) below. This observation is backed up by Kari (2003) who points out that "the verbs in series are not independently negated".

(18) a. *nănáá kà kɛ̀ mbàb m-fɛ́lá́*
nănáá kà kɛ̀ mbàb N-fɛ́lá́
Nana NEG fry meat N-eat
'Nana has not fried and eaten the meat.'

b. *á ná' kà sà' ŋ-kàb ncwɛ̀n*
á ná' kà sà' N-kàb ncwɛ̀n
3SG P6 NEG come N-cut wood
'He did not come and cut the wood.'

c. *á ná' kà sà' n-sɔ̀g nzwá́ nămí*
á ná' kà sà' N-sɔ̀g nzwá́ nămí
3SG P6 NEG come N-wash cloth Nami
'He did not come and wash Nami's cloth.'

d. *á ná' kà ká ndú' mén n-én yí*
á ná' kà ká N-lú' m én N-nén yí
3SG P6 NEG HAB take child N-bring it
'She did not use to come with the child.'

e. *á ná' kà sà' kà sɔ̀g nzwá́ nămí*
á ná' kà sà' kà sɔ̀g nzwá́ nămí
3SG P6 NEG come NEG wash cloth Nami
'He did not come (and) did not wash Nami's cloth.'

When a negation marker appears once before the first verb and following the tense/aspect markers (18a–d), it has scope over the entire serial verb construction. Negating each of the verb in the series, as can be seen from (18e), causes the disappearance of the homorganic nasal on the non-initial verb. Furthermore, instead of having a single-eventhood structure, we are now dealing with two independent coordinated clauses and not a negated serial verb construction. We also observe that when *kà* negates each of the verbs in the series; there is an intonation break that is perceived between these two clauses. In this case, the scope of the negation marker is restricted to the negated verb.

3.5. No Dependency markers

One of the salient characteristics that distinguishes a serial verb construction from other constructions is the absence of an overt marker of coordination or subordination. Verbs which form an SVC in Mə̀dúmbə̀ do not take any marker of syntactic dependency, in other words, SVCs in Mə̀dúmbə̀ are not linked overtly by any coordinating or subordinating conjunctions. Though the constructions in (19a–b) below convey a coordinate reading, there is no overt coordinator that links the verbs together.

(19) a. *Nǎná ná' kǐ ŋwà'nì n-cá'gə̀*
Nǎná ná' kǐ ŋwà'nì N-cá'gə̀
Nana P6 write letter N-send
'Nana wrote and dispatched the letter.'

b. *Nǎmí ná' sə̀' ŋ-kɛ̀d ncwɛ̀n*
Nǎmí ná' sə̀' N-kɛ̀d ncwɛ̀n
nami P6 come N-carry wood
'Nami came and carried the wood.'

As pointed out by Sultan (2012) the absence of a coordinator may manifest a maximum degree of cohesion between V1 and V2.

Looking at these examples, one may think that the nasal that precedes the non-initial verb might be a linking element or the vestige of a coordinator. Tamanji (2009) and Gueche Fotso (2019) intensively discussed the function of the homorganic nasal that appears in multiverb constructions in Grassfields Bantu languages and argue that this nasal is a marker of verb series. I concur with these authors that the homorganic nasal that appears on the subsequent verb in a serial verb construction is "a characteristic of verbs in the […] language that whenever they occur in a series, a nasal consonant is inserted on all subsequent verbs in that series". As further specified by Tamanji (2009), the expression "series" refers here to the fact that verbs occur one after the other. As will be made clear in the next section, this nasal cannot be considered as a dependency marker.

3.6. The homorganic /N-/ nasal prefix

Mədúmbɑ̀ serial verb constructions share a common feature which is the /N-/ prefix that precedes non initial verbs in these constructions. More illustrations are provided below with the nasal prefix in bold.

(20) a. *bàg à'cág n-nén* ***ŋ****-kəb ncwèn*
bàg à'cág N-nén ***N****-kəb ncwèn*
1PL F2 N-go N-cut wood
'We will go and cut wood.'

b. *Nănɑ́ fə̀ n-sə̀' n-jʉ̀ cāŋ fé*
Nănɑ́ fə̀ N-sə̀' N-jʉ̀ cāŋ fé
Nana P4 come N-eat food all
'Nana came and ate all the food.'

This homorganic nasal appearing on the non-initial verb in verb series is also reported in other Grassfields Bantu languages such as Bafut (Tamanji 2009), Nda'nda' (Gueche Fotso 2019). Working on multiverb constructions in Nda'nda', Gueche Fosto (2019) observes that there is usually a homorganic nasal that is prefixed to the subsequent verb(s) in both serial and consecutive constructions in the language.

When sketching tenses in Mədúmbɑ̀, we showed that some tense markers cause the appearance of a homorganic nasal on the verb that follows them. This also the case in Nda'nda' where Gueche Fotso (2015) argues that some tenses come along with a nasal that attaches to the verb they precede. He demonstrates that there is a hierarchy between this nasal and the tense-driven homorganic nasal like the one we discussed in §2.3. This author shows that these two homorganic nasals are mutually exclusive, this explains why they never co-occur in the same constructions.

In the Nda'nda' language, the future tense always provokes the appearance of a homorganic nasal on the verb it precedes as in (21a) and (21b). And as shown in example (21c), a homorganic attaches to the non-initial verbs in Nda'nd'a SVCs. However, when in a serial

verb construction the tense requires a homorganic nasal on the initial verb, the second verb does not take it as evidenced in (21d).

(21) Nda'nda (Gueche Fotso, 2019: 49)

a. *ʒík ʃí **n**dʒí*
ʒík ʃí n-jí
3SG F1 N-go
'He will go.'

b. *ʒík ʃí **n**dʒú ŋgəfí*
ʒík ʃí n-jú ŋgəfí
3SG F1 N-buy corn
'He will buy corn.'

c. *ʒígă jī **n**dʒú ngəfí **ŋ**kpé*
ʒík ă jí n-jú ngəfí N-kpé
3SG P1 go N-buy corn N-eat
'He has gone, bought and eaten corn.'

d. *ʒík ʃí **n**dʒí jú ŋgəfí*
ʒík ʃí n-jí jú ŋgəfí
3SG F1 N-go buy corn
'He will go and buy corn.'

Since the future tense in Nda'nda' requires a homorganic nasal on the initial verb, the subsequent verb does not take it as in (21d); but when the tense does not require a homorganic nasal on the initial verb as in the past tense (21c), the said homorganic nasal automatically reappears on the non-initial verb. Things are rather different in the Mədúmbà language.

In Mədúmbà, the homorganic nasal that precedes serial verbs is always present no matter the tense used. Illustration is provided below.

(22) a. *á yɔ̄g **n**-dàŋ **n**-jà' kàb*
á yɔ̄g N-làŋ N-yà' kàb
3SG P2 N-jumped N-cross fence
'He jumped across the fence.'

b. *mén* *à'gɣʉ́* ***n-***zhʉ́ *cāŋ* ***n-****nénə̀*
mén *à'gɣʉ́* ***N-***zhʉ́ *cāŋ* ***N-****nénə̀*
child F1 N-eat food N-go
'The child will eat and go.'

c. *Nănná* *càg* ***n-****dùú* ***n-****sɔ̀g* *ŋká*
Nănná *càg* *N-lùú* *N-sɔ̀g* *ŋká*
Nana P2 N-wake up N-wash dishes
'Nana has woke up and washed the dishes'

d. *Nănná* *fə̀* ***n-****sə̀'ə̀* ***n-****sɔ̀g* *ŋká*
Nănná *fə̀* *N-sə̀'ə̀* *N-sɔ̀g* *ŋká*
Nana P4 N-come N-wash dishes
'Nana came and washed the dishes.'

e. *Nănná* *ná'* ***n-****sə̀'ə̀* ***n-****sɔ̀g* *ŋká*
Nănná *ná'* *N-sə̀'ə̀* *N-sɔ̀g* *ŋká*
Nana P6 N-come N-wash dishes
'Nana came and washed the dishes.'

As evidenced by examples (22a–e), the appearance of the homorganic nasal in the Mədʉ́mbə̀ serial verb constructions, is different from what obtains in other Grassfields Bantu languages. The nasal carried by the initial verb co-occurs with the serial verb homorganic nasal. Therefore, contrary to Nda'nda' these homorganic nasals are not mutually exclusive. This observation reinforces the proposal that the /N-/ prefix of multiple verb construction is really a salient feature of these constructions in the Mədʉ́mbə̀ language.

Having surveyed the distribution of the homorganic nasal and the various syntactic manifestations of Mədʉ́mbə̀ SVCs, we can now turn to analyse certain semantic functions of Mədʉ́mbə̀ serial verb constructions.

4. Semantic functions of Mədʉ́mbə̀ SVCs

Lynch et al. (2002) identify five main types of serialization in Oceanic languages, based on semantic function: directional/positional, sequential,

causative, manner, and ambient. In addition to these categories, Aikhenvald (2006b) discusses a number of functions of SVCs across languages, some of which are also found in the Mədúmbà language.

Verbs in a series can share a temporal relationship and are therefore said to be in a consecutive construction or sequential construction. The verbs can share a resultative or causative relationship and the structures are referred to as resultative serial verb constructions or causative serial verb constructions depending on the semantic interpretation. In what follows, I discuss semantic types of SVCs that feature in Mədúmbà. These include directional, sequencial, comparative, benefactive, instrumental, comitative, resultative and causative SVCs.

4.1. Directional SVCs

Directional SVCs can be same subject or switch-function. Generally, V1 in same subject directionals can either be transitive as in (23a–b) or intransitive as evidenced by (23c). In (23c) for instance, all three verbs are intransitive and they all share a subject.

(23) a. *kɛ̀d ncwɛ̀n n-sə̀' yí nzǐ*
kɛ̀d ncwɛ̀n N-sə̀' yí nzǐ
carry wood N-bring it here
'Bring the wood here.'

b. *bàg sɔ̀ŋ yǎŋbà' n-swə̀ yí*
bàg sɔ̀ŋ yǎŋbà' N-swə̀ yí
1PL pull car N-descend it
'We have pulled the car down.'

c. *nǎná zìn n-dàŋ n-jà' kàb*
nǎná zìn N-làŋ N-yà' kàb
nana walk N-jump N-cross fence
'Nana has walked crossed the fence.'

In switch function directionals as in (24) below V2 is always transitive and it shares argument with V_3. In this example, V_2 ***m-fà*** 'give' is transitive, and its object ***nǎná*** 'Nana' is the subject of V_3 ***n-nɛ̀n*** 'go'.

(24) *má kǐ ŋwà'nì m-fà nǎná n-nɛ̀n yí*
má kǐ ŋwà'nì N-fà nǎná N-nɛ̀n yí
mum write letter N-give nana N-go it
'Mum wrote a letter and Nana took it to…'

This example is semantically switch-function, since the shared argument is the object of V_2 and subject of V_3.

4.2. Sequencial SVCs

Sequential SVCs, in contrast to directionals, are generally same subject in the Mə̀dúmbə̀ language. In this type of SVC, V_2 describes an event that temporally follows the V_1 event. In the sequential SVC, the initial verb expresses the fact that the subject noun phrase (NP) will be as in (25a–b), where the action of V_2 is understood to follow the event of V_1.

(25) a. *Nǎná ná' kǐ ŋwà'nì n-cá'gə̀*
Nǎná ná' kǐ ŋwà'nì N-cá'gə̀
Nana P6 write letter N-send
'Nana wrote and dispactched the letter.'

b. *Nǎná à' sìáŋtə̀ ŋkáb àm m-fá*
Nǎná à' sìáŋtə̀ ŋkáb àm N-fá
Nana F1 count money my N-give
'Nana will count and give my money.'

4.3. Comparative SVCs

In this type of SVC, two NPs are compared to determine which of them has more or less attributes than the other, as in (26a–c).

(26) a. *nǎná ná' zín n-shà nǔmí*
nǎná ná' zín N-shà nǔmí
nana P6 walk N-pass numi
'Nana walked faster than Numi.'

b. *nŭmí ná' làŋ n-shà Nănná*
nŭmí ná' làŋ N-shà Nănná
Numi P6 jump N-pass nana
'Numi jumped higher that Nana.'

c. *á à' sə̀ n-jùb kwì n-shà Nănná*
á à' sə̀ N-yùb kwì N-shà Nănná
3SG F1 come N-sing song N-pass nana
'She will come and sing better than Nana.'

The subject NP of the initial verb has more or less attributes than the second NP. The initial verb in this SVC is either a stative or motion verb.

4.4. Resultative and causative SVCs

In the resultative SVC, the action of the first verb results in the consequence or state of the second verb. In example (27a) the second clause *ŋ-kɛ̀d ŋgùm àm* 'got into trouble' is interpreted as a result of the first one 'to do good'.

(27) a. *mə̀ fà' mə̀bwó ŋ-kɛ̀d ŋgùm àm*
mə̀ fà' mə̀bwó N-kɛ̀d ŋgùm àm
1SG work good N-carry trouble my
'I did good and got into trouble.
(lit. Getting into trouble results from the good I did.)'

In a (27b) below, V_2 identifies the event or state that results from the action of V_1. In this example, V_1 *tɛ́n* 'push' describes an action and V2 *n-tàm* 'fall' specifies the result.

(27) b. *nănná tɛ́n í n-tàm nsì*
nănná tɛ́n í n-tàm nsì
nana push him fall down
'Nana pushed him down.'

In the causative reading of (28), the action in the second verb is seen to be caused by the action in the first verb.

(28) *mə fà' məbwó ŋ-kɛ̀d ŋgùm àm*
mə fà' məbwó N-kɛ̀d ŋgùm àm
1SG work good N-carry trouble my
'I did good and got into trouble. (lit. The good I did caused me trouble.)'

4.5. Benefactive SVCs

This SVC suggests that the oblique object benefits from the action carried out by the subject.

(29) *ŋgămí tàm nzwə̀ m-fà yí*
ŋgămí tàm nzwə̀ N-fà yí
Ngami sow dress N-give her
'Ngami sew a dress for her.'

The oblique object in (29) is the object pronoun *yí* "her" after the non-initial verb, V_2, which benefits from the action of sewing (a cloth) carried out by the subject NP of the initial verb, V_1.

4.6. Instrumental SVC

In the instrumental SVC, the subject NP of the initial verb brings about some change in the physical state of the object NP of V_1 with the aid of an instrument. Generally in Mə̀dúmbà, the initial verb in the series is expressed by the verb *lú'* 'take'.

(30) a. *á lú' bí ŋ-kə̀b mbàb ŋgàb yí*
á lú' bí N-kə̀b mbàb ŋgàb yí
3SG take knife N-cut chicken meat it
'She has cut some chicken meat with a knife.'

b. *mə̀ lù' tə̌ntsə̀ n-nú ntsə̀ yí*
mə̀ lù' tə̌ntsə̀ N-nú ntsə̀ yí
1SG take calabash N-drink water it
'I have drank water with a calabash.'

4.7. Comitative SVCs

The functional category of SVCs labelled comitative SVC expresses the meaning of 'go together with'. The subject NP of the initial verb goes with the object NP of the same verb to some destination.

(31) a. *kɛ̀d díàŋ n-sə́ yí*
kɛ̀d díàŋ N-sə́ yí
carry chair N-bring it
'Bring the chair!'

b. *á bít nə̌ná n-nɛ̀n ntànə́*
á bílə́ nə̌ná N-nɛ̀n ntànə́
3SG follow nana N-go market
'She has gone with Nana to the market.'

From the data and the discussion on semantic types of SVC's in Mədʉ́mbɑ̀, it is clear that Mədʉ́mbɑ̀ serial verbs cover a wide range of semantic interpretations. In the next section, we look at the correlation between composition and the semantics of SVCs in the language.

5. Compositional semantics of Mədʉ́mbɑ̀ SVCs

In terms of compositional semantics, SVCs can be divided into two types: asymmetrical and symmetrical. Symmetricality refers to the level of restriction on each of the verb slots in an SVC (Aikhenvald 2006b). An SVC is classed as symmetrical if all the verbs that comprise the construction come from unrestricted and open classes. An illustration is given in (32) below.

(32) *Nǎná à' kwí mbàb m-fɛ̀lɔ́*
Nǎná à' kwí mbàb m-fɛ̀lɔ́
Nana F0 receive meat eat
'Nana will receive meat and eat.'

In this construction there is no restriction on the type of verb that can occur as V_1 or V_2; any two verbs that can be interpreted as occurring in sequence are allowed. In this example V_1 is *kwí* 'receive' and V_2 is ***m****-fɛ̀lɔ́* 'eat', and the events of receiving and eating are understood as having occurred consecutively.

In contrast, asymmetrical SVCs consist of one verb from a relatively large, open, or unrestricted class, and another from a semantically or grammatically closed class (Sultan 2012). They denote a single event described by the verb from a non-restricted class. V_1 usually comes from a small class and provides a modificational specification to V_2. The first verb is most of the times a motion verb which can be directional and purposive as in (33a), manner as in (33b). It can also encode manner and path as in (33c–d).

(33) a. *á à' sə̀' cāŋ n-jʉ̀*
á à' sə̀' cāŋ N-jʉ̀
3SG F0 bring food N-eat
'He will bring food and eat.'

b. *nǎná fí n-tsúmɔ́*
nǎná fí N-tsúmɔ́
Nana slip N-go out
'Nana slipped out.'

c. *á kʉ̌ n-cù ndà*
á kʉ̌ N-cù ndà
3SG run N-enter house
'He ran into the house.'

d. *ŋgâmì nyà'tɔ́ n-cù ndá*
ŋgâmì nyà'tɔ́ N-cù ndá
ngami tiptoe N-enter house
'Ngami tiptoed in the house.'

In this particular type of SVC the V1 slot is restricted to a small set of motion verbs. In these specific examples, the verb *sə̀'* 'come' contributes to (34) what Hellwig (2006) calls a resultative meaning.

(34) *lú'* *ntsə̀* *n-sə̀'* *yì*
lú' *ntsə̀* *N-sə̀'* *yì*
take water N-come it
'Bring some water!'

In the construction in (34) the verb *lú'* 'take', and *n-sə̀'* 'come' verb both refer to one single complex event.

In the case of asymmetrical SVCs, it is necessary to note that the verb coming from the restricted class not only is able to occur as a main verb in a mono-verbal clause as in (35a–b), but also that it has main verb status when it occurs in the SVC.

(35) a. *má* *lú'* *ŋwà'nì*
má *lú'* *ŋwà'nì*
mum take book
'Mum has taken the book.'

b. *nǎná* *à'* *sə̀'* *ndàmnjʉ̀*
nǎná *à'* *sə̀'* *ndàmnjʉ̀*
nana F0 come tomorrow
'Nana will come tomorrow.'

6. Conclusion

Stepping from the necessity to provide an in-depth description of serial verb construction and broaden the base on which more comprehensive and adequate theories of serial verb constructions can be built, we set out in this article to analyse the syntactic features and the semantics functions of SVCs in the Mədʉ́mbə̀ language. It is found that Mədʉ́mbə̀ is a serializing language which exhibits among many others directional, benefactive, comparative and resultative SVCs. Having reviewed the

syntactic properties of SVCs in Mə̀dúmbə̀, we can summarize their general characteristics into the following points:

- The verbs form a single predicate.
- They contain two or more verbs without overt markers of coordination or subordination.
- They are mono-clausal
- Arguments may be shared or be in switch function
- They share the same markers of tense and aspect.
- They exhibit a homorganic nasal prefix on the non-initial verbs which is not incompatible with the tense-driven homorganic nasal.

Abbreviations

P1 – during the day past tense
P6 – remote past
F0 – general future
F1 – today future
VPs – verb phrases
1PL – first person plural
P2 – this morning past
F3 – tomorrow future
NEG – negation marker
F2 – during the day future
N – homorganic nasal prefix
NP – noun phrase
1SG – first person singular
3SG – third person singular
P4 – yesterday past
HAB – habitual marker
SVCS – serial verb constructions

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