

Serial verb constructions in Akebu

1. Akebu

Akebu (Kebu):

- a Kwa (Ghana – Togo mountain) language of the group Kebu-Animere,
- spoken mainly in the prefecture of Akebu of Togo by ca. 70000 people,
- underdescribed; phonology and noun class system described by Heine (1968), Storch & Koffi (2000), Makeeva & Shluinsky (2018); a dictionary compiled by Koffi (1981).

The data:

- fieldtrips in 2012, 2013 and 2016 – author, Nadezhda Makeeva, Pasha Koval, Nikita Muraviev, Dasha Shavarina,
- the village of Djon (+ neighbouring villages of Kotor and Djitrane; prefecture of Akebu),
- mainly elicited data (+ data of ca. 3h of texts).

2. Serial verb constructions in Kwa and beyond

SVCs are a typical morphosyntactic feature of Kwa and other West African languages families:

- a combination of 2 or more VPs with no subordinative or coordinative linker,
- typically, common TAM and negation,
- expressing (a) closely related (sub)events or (b) valency or aspectual meanings.

- (1) *araba tɔ-ɔ nam kyew-w* AKAN
Araba buy-PST fish fry-PST
'Araba bought fish and fried it.' (Osam 1994: 17)

Structure of Kwa & Kwa-type SVCs is widely discussed – e.g. famous (Baker 1989), more or less recent (Aboh 2009) among many others,

but based mostly on data of a restricted sample of languages:

- as for Kwa, these are Akan and Gbe (Ewe, Fon, Gen, Gun),
- work on SVCs in other Kwa are not numerous: (Van Leynseele 1975), (Kouadio N'Guessan 2000), (Dorvlo 2007),
- although despite similarities there are differences in the structure among Kwa (Shluinsky 2017).

3. Morphosyntactic features of Akebu SVCs

3.1. Expression of the subject

In contrast to Akan and Gbe, Akebu has subject cross-reference on the verb. Because of that, subject is expressed with every verb of a SVC.

- (2) *ná-sāāpà kēēṭi-wā né-kpíí má kēē-yā*
1SG.PFV-divide food-CL 1SG.PFV-put 1SG.POSS friend-CL
'I have shared the food with my friend.'

3.2. TAM&Negation marking

Symmetrical TAM expression with positive past reference forms (3a-b).

Subjunctive form with non-first verbs, if with the first verb has an irreal (3c) or a negative form (3d).

- (3) a. *nó-fú* *kēēfī-wā* *nó-kùḡ* *má* *à-nàtā-tá-pá*
 1SG.PFV-buy food-CL 1SG.PFV-give 1SG.POSS CL-house-ADJ-CL
 ‘I bought food for my family.’
- b. *ḡ-fúú* *kēēfī-wā* *ḡ-kòḡnū* *má* *à-nàtā-tá-pá*
 1SG-buy_{FCT} food-CL 1SG-give_{FCT} 1SG.POSS CL-house-ADJ-CL
 ‘I had bought food for my family.’
- c. *nóò-fú* *kēēfī-wá* *ḡ-kùḡ* *má* *à-nàtā-tá-pá*
 1SG.PROSP-buy food-CL 1SG.SBJV-give 1SG.POSS CL-house-ADJ-CL
 ‘I am going to buy food for my family.’
- b. *nòò-fú* *kēēfī-wā* *ḡ-kùḡ* *má* *à-nàtā-tá-pá*
 1SG.PFVNEG-buy food-CL 1SG.SBJV-give 1SG.POSS CL-house-ADJ-CL
 ‘I didn’t buy food for my family.’

Habitual form with non-first verbs, if with the first verb has a Factative form with positive present permanent state reference (4).

- (4) *ḡ-kpí* *náá-pā*
 1SG-stand 1SG.HAB-come
 ‘I am coming.’

Special ‘Adhabitual’ form with non-first verbs, if with the first verb has a Habitual (5) or Past Habitual (6) form.

- (5) *kà-kpá-ká* *kà-láá-lāāfī* *kíḡ-tēfī* *à-kpàtāpàḡ-yā*
 CL-shirt-CL CL-3.HAB-be_{tor} CL.ADHAB-surpass CL-trousers-CL
 ‘A shirt is torn more typically than trousers.’
- (6) *ḡ-káḡ-cāā* *má* *kéē-yā* *míḡ-kó*
 1SG-HABPST-accompany 1SG.POSS friend-CL 1SG.ADHAB-go
 ‘I used to go with my friend.’

3.3. Motivation of TAM&Negation marking

Symmetrical TAMN choice for past reference SVCs vs. asymmetrical TAMN choice for other contexts is motivated by the fact that a non-first subevent cannot be claimed of before the culmination of the first event.

Remarkably, symmetrical TAM marking is ungrammatical if the context shows that the non-first subevent was not completed (7b). Purpose construction with Subjunctive marking can be used instead (7c). Importantly, this is not the case in more known Kwa (8).

- (7) a. *tìè-yā* *lā-sóḡ* *vūé-yá* *lō-kùḡ* *nó* *nùḡ-yā*
 woman-CL 3.PFV-pound fufu-CL 3.PFV-give 3.POSS husband-CL
 ‘The woman pounded fufu for her husband.’
- b. **tìè-yā* *lā-sóḡ* *vūé-yá* *lō-kùḡ* *nó* *nùḡ-yā* *wá* *nàà-pā*
 woman-CL 3.PFV-pound fufu-CL 3.PFV-give 3.POSS husband-CL and 3.PFVNEG-come
 exp. ‘The woman pounded fufu for her husband, but he did not come.’
- c. ^{OK}*tìè-yā* *lā-sóḡ* *vūé-yá* *ḡ-kùḡ* *nó* *nùḡ-yā* *wá* *nàà-pā*
 woman-CL 3.PFV-pound fufu-CL 3.SBJV-give 3.POSS husband-CL and 3.PFVNEG-come
 ‘The woman pounded fufu for her husband, but he did not come.’
- (8) ^{OK}*kofī* *tɔ-ɔ* *bukuu* *ma-a* *ama,* *nanso* *wɔ-a-m-fa* AKAN
 Kofi buy-PST book give-PST Ama but 3SG-PST-NEG-take

a-m-ma *no*

PST-NEG-give 3SG

‘Kofi bought a book for Ama, but did not give (it) to her.’ (personal data)

Still, a contrast of Subjunctive with non-first verbs in SVCs (9a) and of Subjunctive expressing purpose (9b) can be shown.

(9) a. *yé* *kà-nāné-ká* *ē-tēfí* *làá* *kéè-yā* !

do.IMP CL-work-CL 2SG.SBJV-surpass 2SG.POSS friend-CL

‘Work more than your friend!’

b. *yé* *kà-nāné-ká* *ká* *ē-tēfí* *làá* *kéè-yā* !

do.IMP CL-work-CL CONJ 2SG.SBJV-surpass 2SG.POSS friend-CL

‘Work in order that you surpass your friend!’

4. Functions of Akebu SVCs

4.1. Non-grammaticalized SVCs

SVCs expressing closely related (sub)events that are a part of a culturally conditioned scenario (10)-(11).

(10) *ná-ńá* *síká-yá* *ná-t̃* *ńàt̃-wā*

1SG.PFV-find money-CL 1SG.PFV-build house-CL

‘I got money and built a house (with them).’

(11) *lē-sítí* *lō-kó* *tījt̃à-wā* *sā*

3.PFV-walk 3.PFV-go village-CL DEM

‘He went for a walk to that village.’

Idiomatic SVCs where 2 verbs express a single event that is not transparently related to their own meanings (12). Typical for Kwa, not so typical for Akebu.

(12) *ná-lí* *ńì-yā* *wé* *nó-nūj̃*

1SG.PFV-pick person-CL DEM 1SG.PFV-listen

‘I have trusted this man.’

4.2. Valency SVCs

1) *f̃* ‘take’ introducing a direct object (including and especially, a theme object of a ditransitive verb); typical for Kwa; other typical functions of ‘take’ SVCs in Kwa are marginal, though possible (15a)>(15b)

(13) *ná-f̃* *kà-fūēē-kā* *ná-káj̃* *má* *kéè-yā*

1SG.PFV-take CL-paper-CL 1SG.PFV-show 1SG.POSS friend-CL

‘I showed the book to my friend.’

(14) *ná-f̃* *má* *síká-yá* *ná-ńá*

1SG.PFV-take 1SG.POSS money-CL 1SG.PFV-hide

‘I hid my money.’

(15) a. *ná-ńáání* *má* *wē* *mā* *tòkū-wā*

1SG.PFV-bless 1SG.POSS REFL PREP knife-CL

‘I have blessed myself with a knife.’

b. *ná-f̃* *tòkū-wā* *ná-ńáání* *má* *wē*

1SG.PFV-take knife-CL 1SG.PFV-bless 1SG.POSS REFL

‘I have blessed myself with a knife.’

2) *cāā* ‘accompany’ introducing a comitative; normal, but not so typical for Kwa

- (16) *ná-cāā mǎ kéè-yā nó-kó*
 1SG.PFV-accompany 1SG.POSS friend-CL 1SG.PFV-go
 ‘I went with my friend.’

3) *kūñ* ‘give’ introducing recipients and beneficiaries; typical for Kwa; in contrast to some other Kwa, not other semantic roles

- (17) *né-súfī mǎ nēñ-yā nó-kūñ mǎ kéè-yā*
 1SG.PFV-sell 1SG.POSS bull-CL 1SG.PFV-give 1SG.POSS friend-CL
 ‘I sold my bull to my friend.’

4) *tánǎ* ‘leave’ marginally introducing recipients and beneficiaries

- (18) *tìè-yā lā-sǒǒ vūè-yá lā-tánǎ nó nùñ-yā*
 woman-CL 3.PFV-pound fufu-CL 3.PFV-leave 3.POSS husband-CL
 ‘The woman pounded fufu for her husband.’

5) *tēfī* ‘surpass’ introducing the standard of comparison in comparative constructions; typical for Kwa

- (19) *lē-yé kà-nāné-ká lē-tēfī ná kéè-yā*
 3.PFV-do CL-work-CL 3.PFV-surpass 3.POSS friend-CL
 ‘He works more than his friend.’

4.3. Aspectual SVCs

0) *yā* ‘stand’ expressing progressive; synchronically can be analyzed as an analytical part of the verbal paradigm, since is the only way to express this meaning and since the verb has some morphological reduction in this function.

- (20) *gúú-ká kà-yā kà-láá-tò*
 spoon-CL CL-<stand CL-3.HAB-fall.down
 ‘The spoon is falling down (at the moment).’

1) *kpí* ‘be standing’ expressing progressive

- (21) *ñ-kpí náǎ-pā*
 1SG-stand 1SG.HAB-come
 ‘I am coming.’

2) *síééní* ‘turn’ expressing repetitive; typical for Kwa

- (22) *ná-síééní ná-céélī kátà-wā*
 1SG.PFV-turn 1SG.PFV-sweep floor-CL
 ‘I swept the floor again.’

3) *céè* ‘repeat’ expressing iterative

- (23) *lē-céè lā-táá nó ò-tù-yā*
 3.PFV-repeat 3.PFV-look_for 3.POSS CL-thing-CL
 ‘He looked for his things repeatedly.’

4) *máá* ‘leave’, *mááťí* ‘build’ expressing iative (24) and ‘not yet’ (25)

- (24) *lā-mááťí* *lā-pā*
3.PFV-build 3.PFV-come
‘He has already come.’
- (25) *lā-máá* *ň-kpí*
3.PFVNEG-leave 3.SBJV-be_present
‘He is not yet here.’

5) *léé* ‘finish’ expressing terminative; typical for Kwa

- (26) *né-ťí* *ná-léé*
1SG.PFV-eat 1SG.PFV-finish
‘I finished eating.’

6) *ñù* ‘see’ expressing experientive; typical for Kwa

- (27) *kà-kpá-ká* *kà-lā-lāāťí* *kà-lā-ñù*
CL-shirt-CL CL-3.PFV-be_torn CL-3.PFV-see
‘The shirt has been torn (once).’

7) *yīťí* ‘look’ expressing conative

- (28) *né-ťí* *vūé-yá* *ná-yīťí*
1SG.PFV-eat fufu-CL 1SG.PFV-look
‘I tasted (eating) fufu.’

8) *tà* ‘do once more’ expressing additive

- (29) *lā-tà* *lā-pā*
3.PFV-do_once_more 3.PFV-come
‘He has come once more.’

9) *fāālā* ‘be quick’ expressing brevitative

- (30) a. *ná-fāālā* *ná-sáánī* *má* *kéé-yā*
1SG.PFV-be_quick 1SG.PFV-wake 1SG.POSS friend-CL
‘I have waked my friend quickly.’

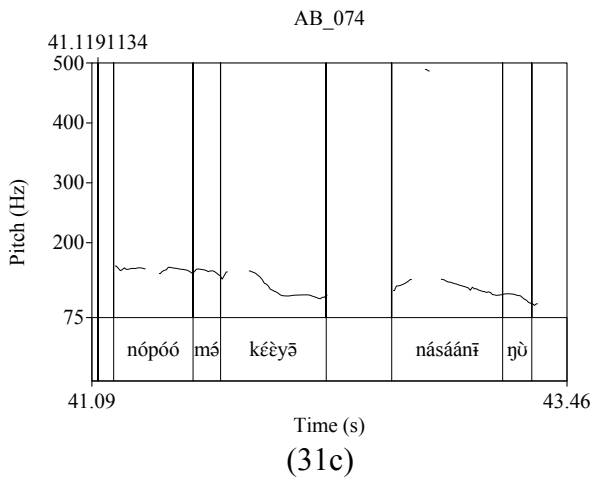
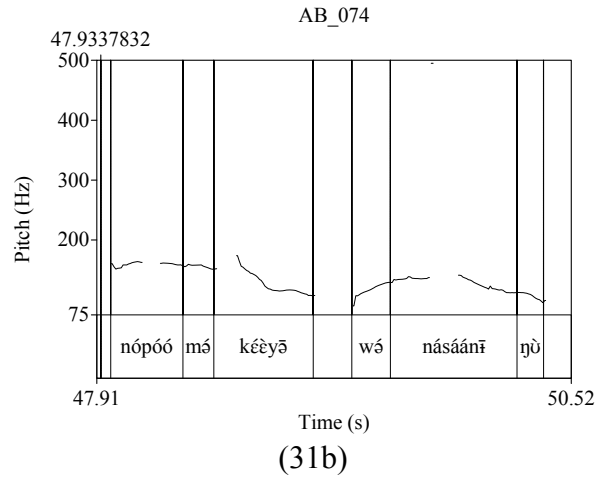
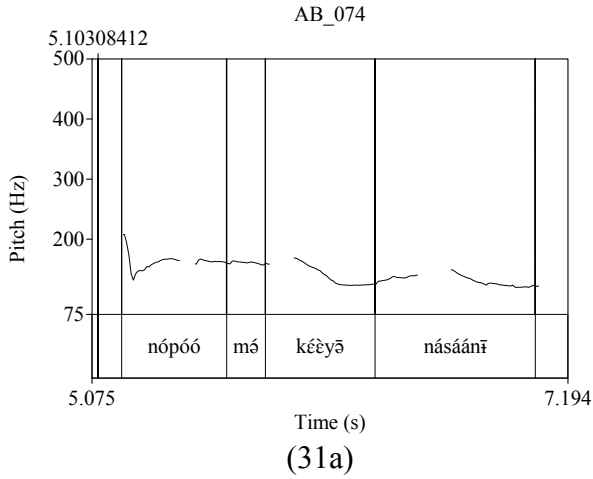
5. Syntactic features of Akebu SVCs

SVCs (31a) are contrasting with 2 other types of constructions: clausal coordination (31b) & clausal juxtaposition (31c). Constructions are perfectly distinguished by the speakers, SVC being interpreted as a significantly more tight semantic relation between (sub)events expressed by the verbs.

5.1. Joint vs. separate intonation contours

SVCs have a joint intonation contour – see no interval on the pitch contour for (31a). Typical for SVCs. Pairs of coordinated and juxtaposed clauses have a pause between two clauses – see contours for (31b-c).

- (31) a. *nó-póó* *má* *kéè-yā* *ná-sáánī*
 1SG.PFV-call 1SG.POSS friend-CL 1SG.PFV-wake
 ‘I have waked my friend through a call.’
- b. *nó-póó* *má* *kéè-yā* *wá* *ná-sáánī* *ηù*
 1SG.PFV-call 1SG.POSS friend-CL and 1SG.PFV-wake 3.O
 ‘I have called my friend, and I have waked him.’
- c. *nó-póó* *má* *kéè-yā,* *ná-sáánī* *ηù*
 1SG.PFV-call 1SG.POSS friend-CL 1SG.PFV-wake 3.O
 ‘I have called my friend, I have waked him.’



5.2. Expressing common object

Verbs in a SVC have a common object NP (32a), in contrast to coordination (32b) & juxtaposition (32c). Typical for Kwa.

- (32) a. *ηì-yā* *lā-fá* *kòòdú-yá* *lē-tī*
 person-CL 3.PFV-take banana-CL 3.PFV-eat
 ‘The man ate the banana.’
- b. *ηì-yā* *lā-fá* *kòòdú-yá_i* *wá* *nē-tī* *ηù_i*
 person-CL 3.PFV-take banana-CL and JNT.3.PFV-eat 3.O
 ‘The man took the banana and ate it.’
- c. *ηì-yā* *lā-fá* *kòòdú-yá_b* *lē-tī* *ηù_i*
 person-CL 3.PFV-take banana-CL 3.PFV-eat 3.O
 ‘The man took the banana, he ate it.’

5.2. Wh-questions (~ focus constructions)

Focus (wh-)fronting is possible only with a SVC (33a), not with a coordinate construction (33b). Focus (wh-) in situ is possible with both of them (33c-d).

- (33) a. *kà wá jì-yā nā-fá nē-tī*
 what FOC person-CL 3.PFV-take JNT.3.PFV-eat
 ‘What did the man eat?’
- b. **kà_i wá jì-yā nā-fá wá nē-tī wū_i*
 what FOC person-CL JNT.3.PFV-take and JNT.3.PFV-eat 3.O
 exp. lit. ‘What did the man take and ate it?’
- c. *jì-yā lā-fá kà lē-tī*
 person-CL 3.PFV-take what 3.PFV-eat
 ‘The man ate what?’
- d. *jì-yā lā-fá kà_i wá nē-tī wū_i*
 person-CL 3.PFV-take what and JNT.3.PFV-eat 3.O
 lit. ‘The man took what and ate it?’

5.3. Adverbial modifiers and their scope

Any verb in a SVC can have its own adverbial modifiers (not typical for Kwa), but there are two options for their scope.

1) Independently of the place of the modifier, it modifies the SVC as a whole.

- (34) a. *tìè-yā ø-sóó vūé-yá ø-kòòñū nó nùñ-yā àsāākā*
 woman-CL 3-pound_{FCT} fufu-CL 3-give_{FCT} 3.POSS husband-CL yesterday
 b. *tìè-yā ø-sóó vūé-yá àsāākā ø-kòòñū nó nùñ-yā*
 woman-CL 3-pound_{FCT} fufu-CL yesterday 3-give_{FCT} 3.POSS husband-CL
 ‘Yesterday the woman pounded fufu for her husband.’ {a=b}
- (35) a. *ná-ló yíláyítē-yā māmá nó-cúlù*
 1SG.PFV-pick thief-CL 1SG.INT 1SG.PFV-beat
 ‘I have caught and beaten the thief myself.’ {a=b}
- b. *ná-ló yíláyítē-yā nó-cúlù māmá*
 1SG.PFV-pick thief-CL 1SG.PFV-beat 1SG.INT

2) The modifier modifies only the verb it is adjacent to. The only option if each verb has its own modifier.

- (36) a. *né-tī ná-léé kālāñ*
 1SG.PFV-eat 1SG.PFV-finish quickly
 ‘I quickly finished eating.’
- b. *né-tī kālāñ ná-léé*
 1SG.PFV-eat quickly 1SG.PFV-finish
 ‘I finished eating quickly.’
- (37) a. *ná-wēēlí kélélé ná-sáánī má kēè-yā*
 1SG.PFV-speak sharply 1SG.PFV-wake 1SG.POSS friend-CL
 ‘I woke my friend with a high voice.’
- b. **ná-wēēlí ná-sáánī má kēè-yā kélélé*
 1SG.PFV-speak 1SG.PFV-wake 1SG.POSS friend-CL sharply
- (38) a. *jì-yā ø-fáá kòòñū-yá ø-tīlí àsāākā*
 person-CL 3-take_{FCT} banana-CL 3-eat_{FCT} yesterday
 ‘The man (took and) ate the banana yesterday.’

- b. ^{OK} *nì-yā* *ø-fáá* *kòdòdú-yá* *jìtā* *ø-tíllí* *àsāākā*
 person-CL 3-take_{FCT} banana-CL day_before_yesterday 3-eat_{FCT} yesterday
 ‘The man took the banana yesterday and ate (it) yesterday.’

6. Conclusion

In general, Akebu SVCs are like Kwa SVCs in general ☺

But there are peculiarities on different levels :

- morphosyntax (expressing subject, not symmetrical, but more meaningful TAM marking),
- functions (less idiomatic SVCs, set of grammaticalized SVCs and their functions),
- syntax (own adverbials).

Informally, Akebu SVCs are less conventionalized as a clause structural type than in some other Kwa. Prettily, this does not matter for grammaticalization of separate verbs that is widespread in Akebu.

Abbreviations

1, 2, 3 – 1, 2, 3 person; ADHAB – adhabitual; ADJ – adjectivizer; CL – class or class agreement marker; CONJ – conjunction; DEM – demonstrative; FCT – factative; FOC – focal marker; HAB – habitual; IMP – imperative; INT – intensifier pronoun; JNT – conjoint marker; NEG – negation; O – object pronoun; PFV – perfective; POSS – possessive pronoun; PREP – preposition; PROSP – prospective; PST – past; REFL – reflexive; SBJV – subjunctive; SG – singular

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