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Multiverb Constructions in Ogba Language: A Syntactic and Semantic Exploration

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Abstract: ***This study investigates the nature of multiverb constructions in Ogba, a Niger-Congo language spoken in Nigeria. This study employs a descriptive and analytical approach, utilising primary data collected through fieldwork in Ogba-speaking communities. This study employs a generative grammar framework, particularly drawing on the principles of minimalist syntax (Chomsky, 1995). The result of the study shows that Ogba, like many other African languages, showcases a rich array of syntactic structures, particularly in its use of verbs. Multiverb constructions in Ogba present a fascinating area for linguistic analysis due to their complexity and the insights they provide into the language's syntax and semantics. The study solely focuses on multiverb construction in the Ogba language. Finally, the exploration of multiverb constructions in the Ogba language has the potential to significantly enrich various fields within linguistics and beyond, offering new data, theoretical insights, and practical applications.***

Keywords: Ogba, Ogba Language, Language, Minimalist Syntax, Multiverb Constructions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language is a window into the cognitive and cultural landscapes of its speakers. It is a fundamental component of human existence (Ordu, 2023). The Ogba language, spoken by the Ogba people in Rivers State, Nigeria, represents a rich and understudied linguistic tradition within the Niger-Congo family (Ngulube, 2011). One particularly intriguing feature of Ogba is its use of multiverb constructions (MVCs). MVCs, a phenomenon present in various African languages but under-researched in Ogba, involve sequences of verbs that work together to convey complex actions or states. This work aims to explore the syntactic and semantic properties of MVCs in Ogba, drawing parallels with related languages and contributing to the broader understanding of verb serialization in African linguistics. This study delves into the syntactic and semantic dimensions of multiverb constructions in Ogba.

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By syntactic analysis, we aim to unravel the structural rules that govern how these verbs combine and interact within sentences. This involves exploring the order of verbs, the role of conjunctions, and the hierarchical relationships between them. On the semantic front, we examine the distribution of meaning among the verbs, the integration of these meanings, and the influence of context on interpretation.

Understanding multiverb constructions in Ogba is not merely an academic exercise. It sheds light on broader linguistic phenomena such as verb serialisation, grammaticalization, and the interplay between syntax and semantics in human language. Moreover, it contributes to the documentation and preservation of the Ogba language, enriching the global tapestry of linguistic diversity.

Through a detailed exploration of multiverb constructions, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive account of a key aspect of Ogba syntax and semantics. It aims to enhance our understanding of the cognitive and cultural underpinnings of this linguistic feature, offering insights that resonate beyond the Ogba-speaking community and into the wider field of linguistics.

2. RELATED WORKS

Languages like Yoruba (Bamgbose, 1974; Aikhenvald, 2006) and Ewe (Lord, 1993) have seen extensive research on MVCs, also known as verb serialisation, but Ogba has received less attention. Bamgbose (1974) describes serial verb constructions (SVCs) as sequences of verbs that occur together without any intervening conjunctions or markers, forming a single syntactic unit. Aikhenvald (2006) further elaborates that these constructions are common in many languages worldwide, particularly in West Africa and Southeast Asia. In the context of Nigerian languages, scholars such as Ordu (2022), Awoyale (1988), and Lord (1993) have highlighted the importance of SVCs in expressing complex actions that would otherwise require multiple clauses in Indo-European languages. However, the focus has largely been on Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa, leaving a gap in the literature regarding languages like Ogba.

The Ogba language, spoken by the Ogba people in Nigeria, provides fertile ground for exploring these phenomena. This literature review examines the existing research on MVCs, focusing on their syntactic and semantic dimensions in various languages, and contextualises these findings within the framework of Ogba. Different languages have extensively studied multiverb constructions. Aikhenvald (2006) and Butt (1995) highlight that MVCs can serve various functions, including expressing sequential actions, causation, and aspectual nuances. These constructions often involve intricate syntactic dependencies and semantic interpretations, making them a rich area for linguistic investigation.

Syntactic analyses of MVCs often focus on the structural relationships between the verbs. Baker (1989) and Larson (1991) propose that MVCs can be understood through the lens of syntactic theories like the Government and Binding Theory and the Minimalist Program. These frameworks suggest that verbs in MVCs may share arguments or exhibit control and

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raise phenomena. In some languages, verbs in MVCs may form a single syntactic unit, while in others, they maintain distinct syntactic identities. Understanding the construction of meaning when multiple verbs co-occur is the semantic aspect of MVCs. Talmy (2000) and Jackendoff (1990) emphasise that MVCs can encode complex event structures, where each verb contributes to the overall event's interpretation. For instance, serial verb constructions in West African languages often denote a series of actions performed by a single agent (Lord, 1993). African languages, particularly those in the Niger-Congo family, are known for their rich use of MVCs. Ameka (2005) and Aboh (2009) discuss how serial verb constructions are a hallmark of languages in this region, functioning to express various grammatical relations such as motion, causation, and aspect. These constructions not only function as juxtaposed verbs, but also intricately integrate into the language's syntax and semantics.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a generative grammar framework, particularly drawing on the principles of minimalist syntax (Chomsky, 1995). The framework enables an in-depth analysis of MVCs' underlying structure and helps to articulate the syntactic rules that govern their formation in Ogba. Additionally, we use insights from Role and Reference Grammar (RRG) to gain a deeper understanding of the semantic roles and relationships within these constructions. Generative grammar, a theory primarily developed by Noam Chomsky, aims to describe the implicit knowledge that humans have about the structure and formation of sentences in their native languages. One of the most influential developments in this field is the minimalist syntax framework introduced by Chomsky in 1995. This framework, often referred to as the Minimalist Program, seeks to explain the properties of natural language using the simplest and most economical principles. There are key principles of the minimalist program that are applied in the work: Economy of Derivation:
The Minimalist Program emphasizes economy in the syntactic operations that derive sentence structure. This means that the processes involved in generating sentences should be as simple and efficient as possible, minimizing unnecessary steps.

Economy of Representation:
The structures generated by syntactic operations should be as economical as possible. This principle favors structures that are simpler and avoid redundancy.

Merge:
Merge is a fundamental operation in minimalist syntax. It combines two elements (e.g., words or phrases) to form a new syntactic unit. Merge can be external (combining elements from the lexicon) or internal (recombining elements already present in the structure).

Move:
Move is an operation that displaces elements within the structure to satisfy certain grammatical requirements, such as subject-verb agreement or question formation. The minimalist approach favors the least costly or simplest movement necessary to satisfy these requirements.

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Features and Checking:
Syntactic elements have features (e.g., tense, case, number) that need to be checked and matched through syntactic operations. The process of checking these features ensures that sentences conform to grammatical rules.

Phases:
The derivation of syntactic structures proceeds in phases, or chunks, which are independently sent to the interfaces (phonological form and logical form). This phase-based approach simplifies the overall derivation process by breaking it into manageable parts.
Reference grammar is a comprehensive description of the rules and conventions of a language. It serves as a guide for understanding and producing correct language. And In grammar, "roles" typically refer to the various functions that words or phrases can perform within a sentence. These are theories applied in this work.
This study employs a descriptive and analytical approach, utilizing primary data collected through fieldwork in Ogba-speaking communities. Data collection involved eliciting sentences from native speakers and recording natural speech. The data were then transcribed and analyzed to identify patterns in MVC usage, focusing on syntactic structure and semantic roles.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Syntactic Structure
Ogba MVCs typically involve two or more verbs in a sequence that shares the same subject and, often, the same object. Consider the following example:

Cohesive Construction
This is a way multiple verb in a sequence work together to create a unified meaning. This can be sharing arguments i.e the verbs share common arguments such as subjects or objects or forms a single event i.e the verbs together describe a single event or action.

Example:
Ọ́ zụ̀ru áhia ọ́ buru ekite
(He/she buy market he/she carry basket)
"He/she went to the market and bought a basket."
In this example, the verbs "buy" (zurụ̀) and "carry" (buru) form a sequence that conveys a single, cohesive action. This pattern aligns with Aikhenvald's (2006) description of SVCs as verb sequences that function as a single predicate without intervening conjunctions.

Serial Verb Construction
They are common in many African languages, where multiple verbs appear in sequebce to describe a single event or series of closely related events.

Example
(1) Ọ́ kpre osi gbuji ga ekika

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(He/she climb go cut branch)
"He/she climbed the tree to cut a branch"
(2) Unu re echa zuru ali
(You sold cassava buy land)
"You sold the cassava to buy land"
In these examples, the verbs "climb" and "go", "sold and buy" are serial verbs that describe actions sequentially by the same object.

Coordinated Verb Constructions
These constructions involve verbs connected by a coordinating conjunction, which in Ogba can sometimes be implied rather than explicitly stated.

Examples
(1) Ọ́ riri iji ra mini
(He eat yam drank water)
"He/she ate yam and drank water"
(2) Iye vbnu egu 'gba zizi mkpu
(We sing dance and shouted)
"We sang, danced and shouted"
In the coordinating constructions in Ogba are used to link multiple verbs together to convey a single meaning.

Complementary Verb Constructions
In Ogba, complementary verb constructions are a type of serial verb construction where two or more verbs are combined to convey a single meaning. In CVCs, the second verb complements the first verb often indicating: completion, result and enhancement.

Examples
(1) Iye gbra egu gba kuba oka (Enhancement)
(We dance well)
"We danced very well"
(2) Iye re ali ka iye ri wheori (Result)
(We sold the land eat)
"We sold the land to have food to eat"
(3) Ọ́ guru ulo gu chapua (Finished)
(He builds finish)
"He completed the building"
The syntactic structure of multiverb constructions in Ogba can be represented using tree diagrams that show the hierarchical relationship between the verbs and their arguments.
(Ọ́ kpre osi ji gbuji ekika)
"He climbed the tree to cut branch.

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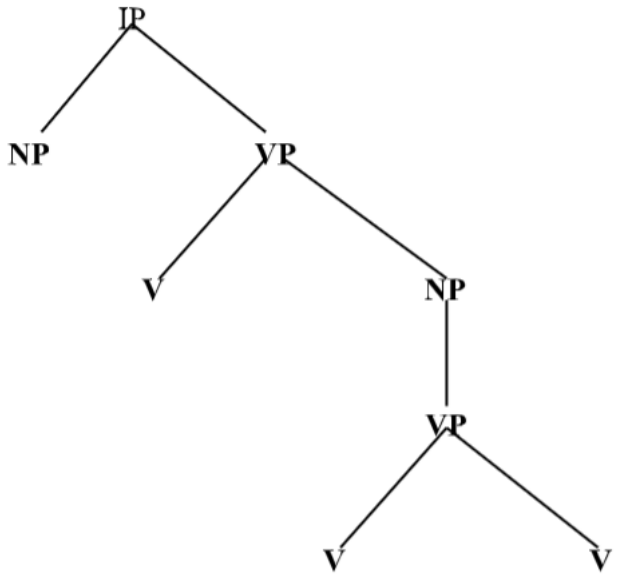


Fig 1. This construction is a sample represented diagrammatically using minimalist schema showing the appearance of multiverb construction:

This tree diagram shows that "Ọ́" (He/She) is the subject noun phrase (NP) of the inflectional phrase (IP), with the verb phrases (VP) Kpre osi (climb tree) and ji gbiji ekika (go cut branch) indicating a sequence of actions.

Semantic Structure and Roles
The semantics of MVCs in Ogba often involve aspectual nuances or the expression of causative actions. For instance, aspectual MVCs can convey the completion or continuation of an action:
Ọ́ rị́ kala hweori
(He/she eat finish food)
"He/she has finished eating the food."
Here, the verbs "eat" (rị́) and "finish" (kala) combine to indicate the completion of the eating action. This aspectual use mirrors what has been observed in other Niger-Congo languages, such as Akan (Osam, 1994), where serial verbs are used to convey aspectual meanings.

Serial Verb Constructions (SVCs)
Serial verb constructions in Ogba typically involve multiple verbs that share the same subject and occur within a single clause. Each verb contributes different semantic components to the overall event described.

Example:
- **Ogba:** [Ọ gra la miniozno ru anyi odna]
- **Gloss:** [He walk.PST in rain fell.PST sun]
- **Translation:** He walked in the rain until the sun set.

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In this example, the verbs "walk" and "fell" are serialized to describe a continuous action leading to an endpoint.

Complementation
In Ogba, multiverb constructions can also occur where one verb complements another, providing additional information about the action or state.

Example:
- **Ogba:** [Ọ chọ ịzụ ahịa]
- **Gloss:** [He PROG seek buy market]
- **Translation:** He is trying to buy goods.

Here, the verb "seeks" (chọ) is complemented by the verb "buy" (ịzụ), indicating the purpose of the seeking action.

Causative Constructions
Causative constructions involve a verb that causes another action or state. These constructions are often marked by a causative verb that indicates the agent causing the action.
Example:
- **Ogba:** [Ọ okpra emu la ụtnu]
- **Gloss:** [He make laugh morning]
- **Translation:** He made them laugh in the morning.

The causative verb "makes" (okpra) indicates that the subject caused the action of laughing.

Resultative Constructions
Resultative constructions in Ogba typically involve one verb indicating an action and another verb indicating the result of that action.

Example:
- **Ogba:** [Ọ zura kpuchi 'enya]
- **Gloss:** [He hit close eyes]
- **Translation:** He hit (someone) and (they) closed their eyes.

In this example, "hit" (zura) is the action, and "close" (kpuchi) is the result.

Coordinated Actions
These involve verbs that describe two actions performed simultaneously or in sequence by the same subject.

Example:
- **Ogba:** [Ọ gbanapru ụrna mechị isi ka]
- **Gloss:** [He run.PST escape sleep and lock.PST head his]
- **Translation:** He ran away and locked his head.

The verbs "run" (gbanàpru) and "lock" (mechị) describe two coordinated actions performed by the same subject.

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Semantic Roles

The semantic roles in these constructions can be understood through the relationships between the verbs and their arguments. Some key roles include:

- **Agent:** The doer of the action (e.g., "Ọ" in most examples).
- **Theme:** The entity affected by the action (e.g., "ụrna" in the last example).
- **Goal:** The endpoint or beneficiary of the action (e.g., the implied endpoint in the serial verb construction).
- **Instrument:** The means by which an action is performed (e.g., implied in causative constructions).

Understanding multiverb constructions in Ogba requires examining how verbs interact within sentences and how their meanings combine to form complex events. This exploration reveals the syntactic flexibility and semantic richness of the language.

5. CONCLUSION

The study of MVCs in Ogba not only enriches our understanding of this specific language, but also contributes to the broader field of African linguistics. By examining the syntactic structures and semantic roles of MVCs in Ogba, this research highlights the complexity and versatility of verb serialisation in African languages. Future research should continue to explore the cross-linguistic variations and underlying principles of MVCs to further uncover the linguistic diversity within the Niger-Congo family.

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