



**HAL**  
open science

## Serial Verb Constructions in Naija

Bernard Caron, Samson Tella, Emeka Onwuegbuzia, Chika Kennedy Ajede

► **To cite this version:**

Bernard Caron, Samson Tella, Emeka Onwuegbuzia, Chika Kennedy Ajede. Serial Verb Constructions in Naija. The 2021 Summer Conference of the Society for Pidgin and Creole Linguistics, Society for Pidgin and Creole Linguistics, Jun 2021, Paris, France. halshs-03983522

**HAL Id: halshs-03983522**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-03983522v1>**

Submitted on 11 Feb 2023

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

# Serial Verb Constructions in NAIJA

B. CARON, S. TELLA, E. ONWUEGBUZIA, C. AJEDE

SPLC. PARIS 2021



1. Naija and Nigerian Pidgin
2. Serial Verb Constructions
3. SVCs in Naija
4. The « no predicate-argument » rule
5. Predicate focus and SVC semantics
6. SVCs as a source of grammaticalisation: TAKE

# Naija and Nigerian Pidgin

- ▶ Naija is different from **Nigerian Pidgin**
- ▶ Nigerian Pidgin = creole = several hundred years old
  - ▶ Faraclas (1989) ;
  - ▶ Elugbe & Omamor (1991) ;
  - ▶ APICS (Faraclas 2013),
  - ▶ Mensah (2011, 2012)
- ▶ Naija = pidgincreole = 60 years old → vernacular
  - ▶ Deuber (2005); Mazzoli (2013, 2015)

# Serial Verb Constructions

→ Definition of SVC:

- “a monoclausal construction consisting of multiple independent verbs with no element linking them and with no predicate–argument relation between the verbs” (Haspelmath 2016: 292)

(1.) Keo (Central Malayo-Polynesian; Baird 2008: 60, cited by Haspelmath 2016:295)

*Ja'o kéma dapu ti'i 'ine*

1 SG build kitchen give mum

'I built a kitchen for mum.' (Lit. 'I built a kitchen (I) gave (it) to mum.')

(2.) Yoruba (Yoruboid, Benue-Congo)

*mo sùn lọ*

PRON sleep go

'I slept deep.'

(3.) Igbo (Igboid, Benue-Congo)

*Akudo zùrù jí síé súọ lóó*

Akudo buy.PST yam cook pound swallow

'Akudo bought yam, cooked (it), pounded (it) and ate (it).'

(4.) Ukwuani (Igboid, Benue-Congo)

*ò bà-nì ìjì kẹ̀ò shí é rì*

3SG peel-PST yam DEF cook 3SG eat

'S/he peeled the yam cooked it and ate (it).'

(5.) Naija (pidgincreole, Nigeria; ABJ\_GWA\_05)

*im*      ***pound***    *am*      ***finish***

3SG.SBJ   verb      3SG.OBJ   verb

'he/she pounded it all.'

- SVC = no subordination or coordination relation between the verbs
- Naija, a language with very little morphology
- Syntactic structures rely heavily on word-order, and often show no cue to differentiate e.g. complementation and coordination from and SVC construction

6 = complementation

(6.) P\_IBA\_31\_93  
*nobody want collect your money.*  
 nobody want collect 2SG.POSS money  
 'Nobody wants to take your money.'

8 = Serial Verb Construction

(8.) P\_ENU\_02\_16  
*I con prepare finish*  
 1SG.SUBJ AUX.CONNS prepare finish  
 I then got completely ready.



- (7.) P\_ENU\_37\_47  
*she just **look** me **smile** **comot**.*  
 She just looked at me, smiled, and came out.

(7) Annotated as coordination in the corpus.

However: cf. Igbo (3) analysed as SVC:

- (3.) Igbo (Igboid, Benue-Congo)  
*Akudo **zùrù** jí **síé** **sùó** **lóó***  
 Akudo buy.PST yam cook pound swallow  
 'Akudo bought yam, cooked (it), pounded (it) and ate (it).'

# SVC AS A COMPARATIVE CONCEPT

Haspelmath (2016: 296)

- *“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.”*

# SVCs in Naija

10

- ▶ **Verbhood:** SVCs link individual verbs that can be used as full lexical verbs heading an independent clause.
- ▶ **Intonation:** SVCs are pronounced with a single intonation contour, like single-verb clauses.
- ▶ **TAM and polarity:**
  - ▶ SVCs make up a single clause with a single TAM and polarity value having scope over the combination of verbs.
  - ▶ If there is just a single person, tense, mood or negation marker, it occurs in a peripheral position that is, preceding the first verb or following the last verb.
- ▶ **No dependency:** The verbs making up SVCS have no predicate-argument relation.

# VERBHOOD

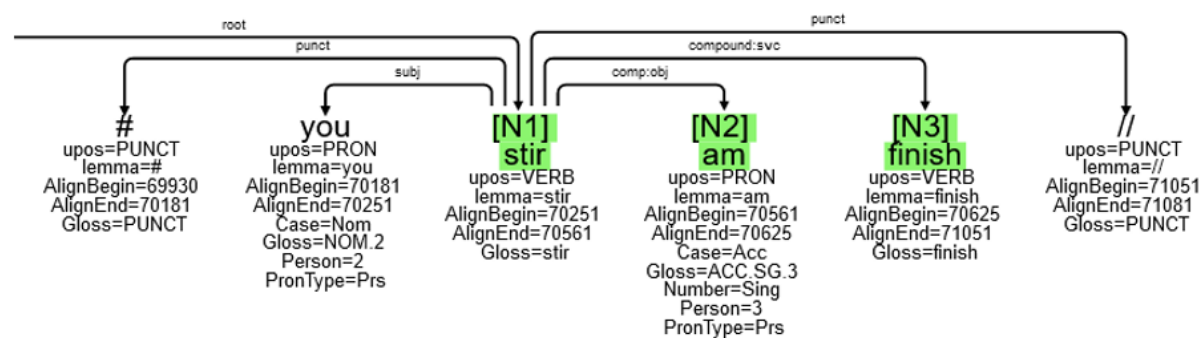
- ▶ Verbs that appear in SVCs normally appear as full verbs heading clauses outside SVCs

## SVC= stir-finish

BEN\_08\_19

*You stir am finish.*

You stir it well.



# Independent verbs

12

ENU\_37\_134

*Sey e go **finish** everyting.*

'He would finish everything.'

KAD\_10\_14

*If you pour your pepper, you **stir**.*

'When you have poured in your pepper, stir it.'

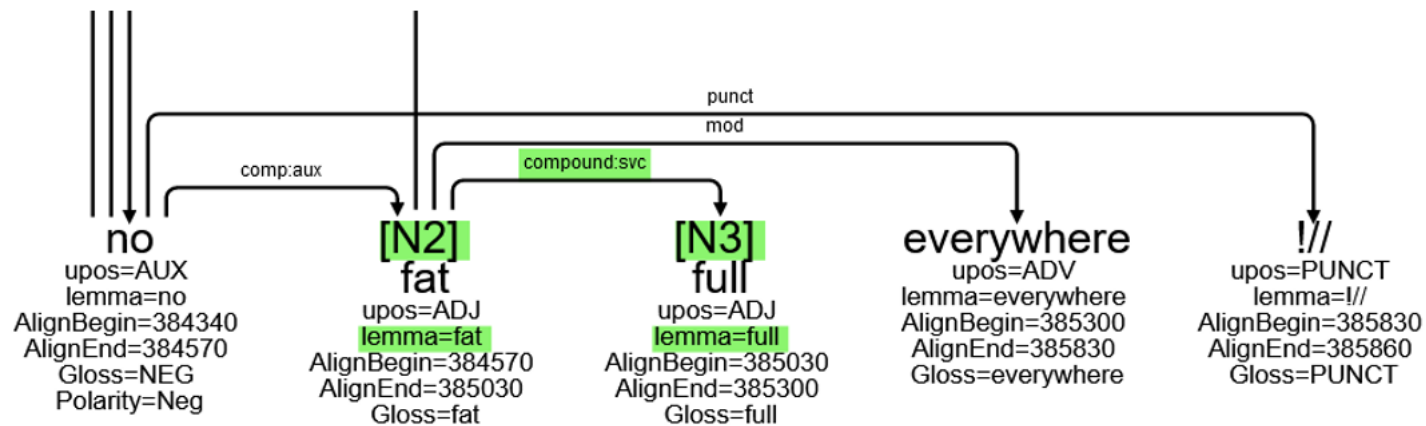
# SVCs and Adjectives

- ▶ The “Verbhood property “ is only partially met by Naija SVCs
- ▶ So-called “Adjectives” or “Property items” appear in SVCs both as V1 & V2

IBA\_03\_107

*But if di woman for house sef try, no **fat full** everywhere!*

‘But if the woman in the house makes an effort, she should not be too fat!’



<b>Adjectival noun modifier</b>	sweet ending	'happy ending' (KAD_03_69)
<b>Adjectival predicative complement</b>	e déy sweet it BE nice	'it is good' (ENU_17_144)
<b>Intransitive verb</b>	di fruit go sweet the fruit FUT nice	'the fruit will be nice' (IBA_31_31)
<b>Transitive verb</b>	di ting no con sweet im belle the thing NEG nice 3SG stomach	'He was pleased with it.' (LAG_11_66)
	my bele sweet me. my stomach nice me	'I am sated.' (lit. 'my stomach satisfies me', IBA_01_35)
<b>Indirect Transitive verb</b>	e no good for your kind body it NEG good for your kind body	'It is not good for your type of body' (PRT_02_9)

Conclusion: in Naija, SVCs concern both Verbs and “verby” adjectives (or Property Items as (Mazzoli 2013) calls them).



# SINGLE INTONATION CONTOUR

16

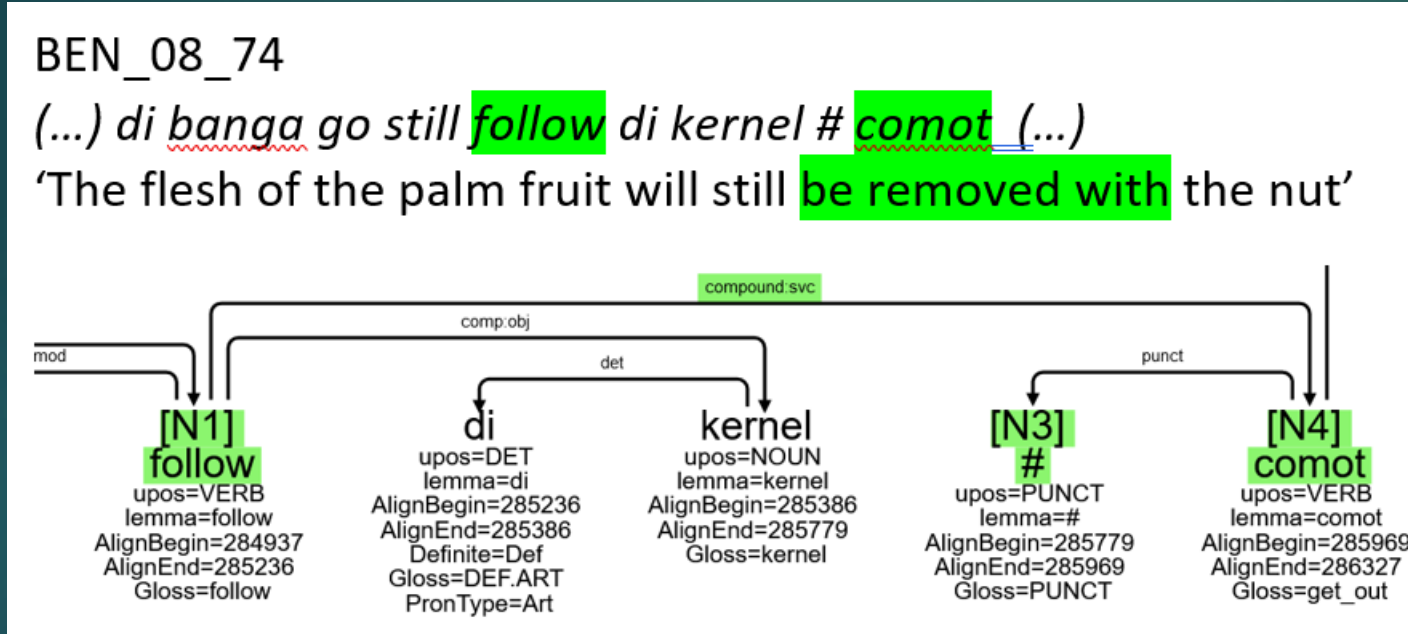
- ▶ SVCs are pronounced with a single intonation contour, and SVCs tend to be differentiated from, e.g., asyndetic coordination by pauses or other prosodic boundaries

WAZA\_05\_81IBA\_03\_107

*you go go di people dem wey get di oil |c talk to dem |c# do agreement wit dem |c# den  
move forward } //*

'You will go to the people who own oil reserves |c talk to them, |c enter into an agreement with them, |c then move forward.'

# Pauses do not necessarily change the intonation contour



- ▶ **However:** No precise prosodic survey has established the prosodic contours of SVCs
- ▶ Need for further research to be able to use prosodic criteria

# Negation & TAM markers

18

- ▶ Negative markers *no* and *never* (Negative Perfective); TAM markers *con* (Sequential), *go* (Future), *don* (Perfect), *dey* (Imperfective), *fit* (ability modality), etc. all appear on the left edge of SVCs, as individual words annotated as AUX

ENU\_17\_86

*I no go fit cook?*

Won't I be able to cook?

IBA\_04\_72

*de no con dey carry am go market //*

They were not taking them to the market.

# Negation placement in SVCs

- ▶ The structural position of the negative marker **no** in Naija SVCs is strictly before the first verb in the series, as in (21a).

D\_ABJ\_GWA\_05\_20

<i>we</i>	<b>no</b>	<i>con</i>	<b>sew</b>	<i>am</i>	<b>finish</b>	<b>wear</b>	<i>am.</i>
1PL.SBJ	NEG	CONS	sew	3SG.OBJ	finish	wear	3SG.OBJ

'We **did not** sew it up and wear it.'

The insertion of the negation marker *no* before the V2 (21b) or the V3 (21c) turns the SVC into a coordination, with a prosodic boundary preceding the negative particle *no*

(21.b) V1 neg V2 V3

<i>we</i>	<i>con</i>	<i>sew</i>	<i>am</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>finish</i>	<i>wear</i>	<i>am.</i>
<u>pron</u>	asp	verb	<u>pron</u>	neg	verb	verb	<u>pron</u>

'We sewed it **but** did not finish wearing it.'

(21.c) V1 V2 neg V3

<i>we</i>	<i>con</i>	<i>sew</i>	<i>am</i>	<i>finish</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>wear</i>	<i>am.</i>
<u>pron</u>	asp	verb	<u>pron</u>	verb	neg	verb	<u>pron</u>

'We sewed it up **but** didn't wear it.'

## Placement of *dey* (Imperfective) and *con* (Consecutive) in SVCs

Both are allowed to be repeated or moved away from the pre-V1 position of the other Auxiliaries

ABJ\_GWA\_10\_142

*I con **dey follow** one man **dey work**.*

I was working with one guy.

IBA\_01\_53

*(I like) as di teacher **take dey dress**.*

(I liked the way) the teacher **was dressing up**.

ABJ\_GWA\_10\_32

*Mah con say meh I take come Abuja, mah I **take con start** school.*

Then I said I should use it to go to Abuja, **to start** schooling.

# Conclusion

- ▶ TAM and negation markers (annotated as Auxiliaries in NSC) have a single value and take scope over the whole of the SVC construction (Property #3a). However, as they are not expressed by a single marker, property #3b does not apply: the Imperfective and the Consecutive are allowed to attach to the pre-V2 position in the SVC.

# THE “NO PREDICATE-ARGUMENT RELATION” RULE

23

- ▶ Following Haspelmath, rule #4 (“the verbs making up SVCS have no predicate-argument relation”) excludes completive (25) causative (26) and purposive (27) constructions where we analyse V2 as a predicative complement of V1 with subject raising.



## Completive

- (25.) JOS\_21\_136  
*de go just allow you do wetin you wan do.*  
 They'll just let you do what you want to do.

## Causative

- (26.) WAZA\_03\_  
*na im make me dey do am.*  
 That's what makes me do it.

## Purposive

- (27.) ABJ\_GWA\_03\_119  
*Mah go hustle for your admission letter for you.*  
 'Let me go to look for your admission letter for you.'

# PREDICATE FOCUS AND SVC SEMANTICS

- ▶ Many attempts have been made to classify SVCs according to their semantics (Lovestrand 2018: 31 ff.). We have adopted a classification of SVCs into symmetric vs. asymmetric (Aikhenvald 2006: 21–22). Asymmetrical SVC, that have one open class or unrestricted verb and one closed class or restricted verbics (as in e.g. Yoruba) while symmetric SVCs have no obvious restriction to a particular subclass of verbs.

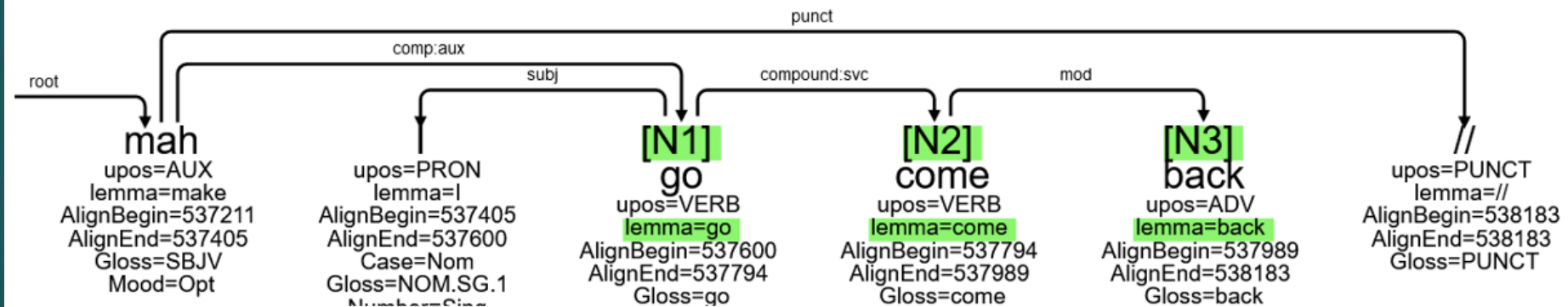
# SYMMETRIC SVCS

- ▶ “a set of (sub)events occurring in a temporal sequence or overlapping”. (Lovestrand 2018: 29). Not common in our corpus.

ABJ\_GWA\_10\_32

*Mah I go come back.*

Let me go and then come back.



# ASYMMETRIC SVCS

27

- ▶ In asymmetric SVCs, one of the verbs belongs to a restricted inventory, and this verb is modifying the other one, with modifying V2 constructions being the best known and more numerous.
- ▶ **Modifying V2**
  - ▶ **Direction:** *go, come, enter, comot* 'leave', etc.

BEN\_36\_11

*King con **call** di man **come** one day.*

So the king **called** the man **in** one day.

- ▶ **Valency increasing** (=dative): *give*

IBA\_02\_130

*De trou money give dem.*

They throw money at them.

- ▶ **Aspectual: Resultative**

IBA\_01\_152

*naim I con still do masters finish.*

Then, I went on to complete my Masters.

► **Comparative:** *pass, reach*

N1 = Comparee	V1 = Concept	V2 = Superiority Equality	N2 = Standard
<b>de</b>	read	pass/reach	me
<b>they</b>	are educated	more than/as much as	me

IBA\_01\_141

(...) **de** even *dey* **read** **pass** **me**.

'(...) they were even more educated than me.'

WAZL\_15\_14

Na **im** **bad** **pass**.

That's what is the worst.

IBA\_07\_130

Di guy **fine** **reach** me?

Is the guy as handsome as me?

# Modifying V1

- ▶ **Instrumental**, etc. : *take, use, carry*

LAG\_31\_40

no just **take** eye **look** tyre say [...]

'Don't just **look** at the tyre **with** your eyes and say [...]

- ▶ **Comitative**: *follow*

IBA\_03\_19

(...) *di circle of friends wey dem dey* **follow dey waka** (...)

the circle of friends they **are walking around with**, (...).

- ▶ **Attitude**: *sidon* 'sit down'

WAZK\_08\_57

(...) *na true sey* **de sidon talk** (...).

(...) it's true they **had a talk** on (...)

# SVC Focus split

Focus	V1	V2
V1 = modifier	NO	YES
V2=modifier	YES	NO

## Focused modified V1

BEN\_24\_51

e just **blow** am **come.**  
 3SG.SBJ just blow 3SG.OBJ come

'He/she just **blew** it in.'

na **blow** e blow am come.  
 FOC blow 3SG.SBJ blow 3SG.OBJ come

'He/she **really** blew it in'

\* **na come** e blow am come

## Focused modified V2

LAG\_31\_40

you **take** eye **look** tyre  
 2PL.SBJ take eye look tyre

'you **look** at the tyre **with** your eyes'

na **look** you take eye look tyre  
 FOC look 2PL.SBJ take eye look tyre

'you look at the tyre **well** with your eyes.'

(40c) \***Na take** you take eye look tyre.



# SERIAL VERBS AS SOURCE OF GRAMMATICALIZATION: TAKE : (MAZZOLI 2015)

1. Full verb
  2. Instrumental SVC
  3. Manner, place and time SVC )
  4. Conative modal Auxiliary
  5. Purposive SCONJ
- In this process, in stages (4) and (5), the verb take is undergoing phonological reduction through clipping, from [tɛk] (independent VERB and SVC V1) to the AUX and SCONJ [tɛ]

▶ Manner & Time SVC

IBA\_01\_74

*Which time dis woman take start school?*

**When** did this woman **start** school?

WAZA\_10\_74

*Na so we dey take speak am for here.*

**That's how** we speak it here.

▶ Conative modal Auxiliary

WAZA\_10\_68

*So all dose tings still take follow join.*

So all those things still **manage** to get together.

▶ Purposive SCONJ

BEN\_08\_68

*So you need to use hot water take wash am well.*

So you need to **use** hot water **to wash** it well.

# CONCLUSION

- ▶ We have excluded Complementing and Purposive constructions from SVCs
- ▶ Symmetric SVCs may have to be re-analysed as asyndetic coordinations, pending on proper prosodic analysis
- ▶ Focus splits SVCs into V1 & V2 modifying types
- ▶ The grammaticalization of take into modal AUX and purposive SCONJ (Mazzoli 2015) is confirmed by our corpus