

# A SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF SERIAL VERB AND DOUBLE COMPLEMENT BENEFACTIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN YORÙBÁ LANGUAGE

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## Abstract

*This paper examines the similarity in the surface meaning of the role of the agent in the two constructions of serial verb benefactive construction and double complements benefactive construction in the Yoruba language. Employing the descriptive method to analyse the data, the two constructions are used alternately to derive an intended notion carried out by the agent of the constructions. But further justification on the two constructions from the angle of semantics affirms that serial verb benefactive construction is preferred to double complement benefactive construction by native speakers because the serial verb benefactive construction gives explicit information about the source of action and also help do away with ambiguity that could be attached to the agent of the constructions.*

**Key words:** Serial verb, double complement, benefactive, alternate, semantics, ambiguity.

## INTRODUCTION

Syntactic descriptions are best understood often time when it is been addressed on the platform of semantics. There are some syntactic alternations in the structural description of some languages which could lead to ambiguity and in several situation confusion; the possible escape route is to justify the explanation of such alternating structure with semantic analysis. Yorùbá language exhibits a syntactic alternation which involves the encoding of benefactive constructions either by using verb serialization or double complement constructions. The choice of speakers of one over the other could be nailed on semantic clarifications.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework employed in the discussion of this work is descriptive analysis. The choice of descriptive analysis borders on the actual usage of the speaker's vis-à-vis the explanation that will be given. The data for analysis is elicited from native speakers of the language and the innate knowledge of the researcher who is also a native speaker.

## SERIAL VERB CONSTRUCTIONS IN YORUBA

Serial verb construction (SVC), also known as verb serialization is a syntactic phenomenon common to many language in Africa. It is a construction in which two or more verbs are strung together without an overt connective morpheme. George (1975), Bamgbose (1974) describes serial verbal construction as the combination of verbs where all the verbs share a common subject in the surface structure. Bamgbose (1974) opines that there are at least two types of SVC; a “linking” type and a “modifying” type which can only be derived from a single underlying sentence. Awobuluyi (1978) explains those serial verbs sentences are formed by combing parts of simple sentences, the order of occurrence of the serial verbs are significant.

### SERIAL VERB BENEFACTIVE CONSTRUCTION.

Two or more verbs may occur within a clause; these verbs are used to express an event or a set of tightly related events. Serial verb benefactive construction in Yorùbá language is a rendition that expresses the semantic role of the source of actions within a structure. The ultimate source of the action that the verbs in series are receiving the actions from is not overtly discovered in the grammatical constructions of such verbs in series, but an abstract entity is known to be present somewhere outside the grammatical constructions that is describing the events. This abstract entity is established in the conscious mind of the speaker and hearer. The language uses “gbà..... fún” as contiguous verbs for benefactive constructions. Let’s consider the constructions below:

- (1) Ó gba aṣọ fún Ayò  
3sg collect cloth give Ayò  
‘He collected cloth for Ayò’
- (2) Ayò yá owó fún Bólá  
Ayò borrow money give Bólá  
‘Ayò borrow money for Bólá’
- (3) Mo gba ìwé fún ògá mi  
1sg collect book give boss 1sg  
‘I collected book for my boss’
- (4) Adé gba oúnjẹ tí kò dára fún mi  
Ade collect food that Neg. good give 1sg  
‘Ade collected bad food for me’
- (5) Tómi gba ẹ̀rù wá fún Adé  
Tomi collect load come five Ade  
‘Tomi collected and brought the load for Ade’
- (6) Adé yá bàtà dúdú fún un ní ànà  
Ade borrow shoe black give 3sg. Prep. Yesterday  
‘Ade borrowed a black shoe for him/her yesterday’

In describing the constructions in numbers 1-6, using theta roles and thematic relations, the subject of these constructions is accorded a theta role of a primary (external) argument. But considering the thematic relation, they are the agents of the actions which gbà..... fún and yá..... fún are describing. The semantic

detail of these constructions is that there is a source somewhere through which the action is instigated and then passed to the agent who carries out the action. Although this source is not part of the grammatical structure but a competent speaker and hearer of the language in agreement consciously knows that the source of the actions is distinctly different from the agent of the actions showcased in the structures.

The verbs that show for the transfer of actions from the source to the structurally described agent is “gbà” (collect) and “yá” (borrow) which is used with the benefactive verb “fún” (give) in the language. Whenever these verbs appear together in a benefactive serial verb constructions in Yorùbá language, the ultimate source of action is legitimately taken care of in context.

## COMPLEMENT

Complement may be word, phrase, or clause used in expatiating more on a constituent of a sentence. Complement can function as an argument; it may also exist within an argument in Yorùbá language. Any constituent in a grammatical construction in the language may be complemented just for broader understanding of what it is encoding. The subject of any grammatical construction may have complement.

- 7 Olùkó ìsirò wọ sòkòtò pupa  
Teacher maths wear trouser red  
'The maths teacher wore a red trouser'
- 8 Àgbè oníkòkó jèrè púpọ̀  
Farmer owner of cocoa gained plenty  
'The cocoa farmer gained a lot'

The nouns ‘ìsirò’ (maths) and oníkòkó (Owner of cocoa) in the constructions above are the complements of the subjects Olùkó (teacher) and Àgbè (farmer). These complements stand in opposition to the subject nouns, ìsirò tells the particular subject the teacher teaches while oníkòkó tells the types of farming the farmer is engaged in. Object could also have complement as in constructions below;

- 9 Adé gun Igi eléso  
Ade climb tree fruit  
'Ade climbed a fruit tree'
- 10 Adé kun ilé rẹ̀ ní pupa  
Ade paint house 2poss. pron. Part. red  
'Ade painted his house red'

In these constructions, eléso (fruit) and Pupa (red) are the complements of the direct object igi (tree) and Ilé (house) respectively.

Predicate also take complement, using the sub-categorization frame, certain lexical item under the verb class subcategories a particular range of complements. The information about the range of complement(s) which an item takes could be referred to as the sub-categorization information (Radford 1988). The lexicalization principle (attaching lexical items under appropriate word-level category nodes) allows us to insert any word specified as a V in its lexical entry in any V- position of S-structure. But this fails to take into account the fact that only a specific subset of verbs can be used in certain structure. We sometimes need to specify in our lexical entries that certain verbs can occur as the head of a V-bar in which they are immediately followed by an NP-on way of doing this (essentially following Chomsky 1965) would be to incorporate into our lexical entries sub-categorization features which specify whether or not a given verb can

occur in a V-bar containing an NP complement following it. The case of verb taking a single NP complement is applicable to transitive verbs, but there are subsets of transitive verbs (ditransitive verbs) which can take two complements. The structure of the construction that requires a double complement is based on the sub-categorization feature of the verb present within the syntactic construction. We may have two NP objects with the sub-categorization frame as [- NP NP] as in the case of English dative construction, but the sub-categorization frame for Yorùbá language is different, an NP complement is followed by a PP complement we then have [- NP PP].

### DOUBLE COMPLEMENT BENEFACTIVE CONSTRUCTION

The need for double complement benefactive construction in Yorùbá is as a result of the valency of the benefactive verbs that occur within such construction. The benefactive verbs in the language are ditransitive that belong to the type of three valence verb which compulsorily takes two complements and an external argument to satisfy the EPP condition.

There are two main verbs that tends to express the notion of beneficiary, these verbs are ‘fún’ (give) and yá (lend). These trivalent verbs sub-categories for two complement which are realized as; an NP and a PP within its framework. Jackendoff (1983) is of the opinion that the behavior of a verb, particularly with respect to the expression and interpretation of its arguments, is to a large extent determined by its meaning. The verbs (fún) and (yá) are benefactive verbs with two arguments as complement; a ‘beneficiary’ and a ‘theme’ using semantic relation to define these arguments as it occur in structure. The verbs have an intrinsic meaning of movements (transfer of property or a change of location from a starting point to a certain destination). Thus, these verbs need a receiving entity to accomplish its meaning. The beneficiary is often an NP while the theme is realized as a PP. the ordering of these complements in the structure in which they are contained distinguishes them from each other. Therefore, the order of occurrence of this complements are fixed in the syntax of the language. See the constructions below;

- 11 Ó fún Ayò ní aṣò  
3sg give Ayo prep. cloth  
He/she gave Ayo cloth
- 12 Adé yá Bólá ní owó  
Ade lend Bola prep. Money  
‘Ade lent Bola some money’
- 13 Mo fún ògá mi ní ìwé  
1sg give boss poss. Prep. book  
‘I gave my boss the book’
- 14 Tolú yá Adé ní bàtà  
Tolu lend Ade prep. shoe  
‘Tolu lent Ade a pair of shoe’

In analyzing the double complement constructions above specifically the subjects of the construction, the theta role that is accorded to them is an external argument. Using thematic relation, they are the agents of the actions described by the benefactive verbs ‘fún’ and ‘yá’. Further semantic consideration shows that these

agents are the source of the actions that is; they have a dual role of being the agents and also the source from which the actions originates from.

### SEMANTIC JUSTIFICATION ON THE ULTIMATE SOURCE OF ACTIONS IN SERIAL VERB AND DOUBLE COMPLEMENT BENEFACTIVE CONSTRUCTIONS

The absolute meaning of a grammatical construction is explicitly encoded within its structure, these two constructions expressing benefaction could be used alternately by the speakers of the language. But problem that relates to ambiguity often occurs with one of the constructions as against the other when it comes to identifying the ultimate source of actions expressed by the benefactive verbs 'fún' and 'yá'. The double complement benefactive constructions show case this state of ambiguity in which the agent (subject of the construction) could be taken as the source of the action and the effort of action, or as the effort of action alone with an ultimate source elsewhere. It is at this level that the competent speaker of the Yorùbá language would prefer to use the complex structure of serial verb benefactive construction to avoid ambiguity and which expresses more the ultimate source of the action described by the construction and clearly showing the effort of action.

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|-----|--|------|
| (a) | Tómi gba ẹ̀rù wá fún Adé<br>Tomi collect load come give Ade<br>'Tomi collect and brought the load for Ade' | SVBC |
| (b) | Tómi fún Adé ní ẹ̀rù<br>Tomi give Ade prep. load<br>'Tomi gave Ade the load'                               | DOBC |

Semantically considering the source of action which fún (give) is accomplishing, the speaker would make the first sentence his/her choice having a full understanding of the transfer of ownership, the 'load' (ẹ̀rù) being transferred is from a third party contextually understood which is only passing through Tómi (the agent). In the second construction, the load may belong to the giver (Tómi) or another third party which is not well defined.

### CONCLUSION

The serial verb benefactive construction identifies the subject of its construction as the agent who undergoes the effort of the action and not the ultimate source of the action. Considering the role of the subject in the double object benefactive construction, the hearer may infer from the speaker that the subject is not only an agent of action but may also be the ultimate source of action. The motivation for the choice of these constructions in alternation by the speakers of the language is subject to critical semantic consideration and evaluation.

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