

SERIAL VERB CONSTRUCTIONS IN SEZO

ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the compositional and semantic characteristics of Serial Verb Constructions (henceforth SVC) in Sezo, a little-known Afroasiatic language belonging to the Mao subgroup of Omotic family.

Most often Sezo SVCs are formed by simple juxtaposition of two verbs without any marker of coordination or subordination. SVCs with three verbs have also been recorded. These however, are analyzed as binary because two of the three verbs form a compound occurring in one syntactic slot. The components of an SVC are always contiguous and do not allow any syntactic constituent to appear between them. An SVC forms one phonological and grammatical word which describes a single event. Subject, tense, polarity and other syntactic dependency markers occur only once per SVC.

Following compositional characteristics of SVCs established by Aikhenvald (2006), I describe SVCs of Sezo as asymmetrical because they consist of a ‘major’ and a ‘minor’ verb. The ‘major’ verb comes from semantically unrestricted class and acts as the head of the construction. The ‘minor’ verb, which usually comes from semantically restricted class (e.g. a motion or a posture verb) has different functions. It changes the valence of the major verb or adds directional or aspectual values.

Taking the syntactic position of the ‘minor’ verb as the formal criterion, two types of asymmetrical SVCs are distinguished: SVCs in which the ‘minor’ verb precedes the ‘major’ verb and SVCs in which the ‘minor’ verb follows the ‘major’ verb. In the first type of SVCs, the function of the ‘minor’ verb is to add aspectual value to the major verb. In the second type of SVCs, the function of the ‘minor’ verb is either to change the valence of the verb or to express directional orientation.

Key words: *Sezo, Serial Verb Construction, asymmetrical serial verb, major verb, minor verb, valency, aspect, directional orientation*