

How many underlying objects in object-sharing serial verb constructions (SVCs)?

New evidence from suspended *pro*-drop

Doreen Georgi, Anna Struck & Malte Zimmermann (U. Potsdam)

Claim: We propose a new diagnostic for testing if OBJ(ect)-sharing SVCs involve only one underlying object (= true sharing) or more than one (one per lexical verb = surface sharing). Surface sharing is often analyzed as involving object *pro*-drop with non-initial verbs. Such accounts predict that these pronouns should be overt in contexts where *pro*-drop is blocked, while true sharing will always feature just one overt object. We provide novel evidence for surface sharing from blocked *pro*-drop in Akan (Kwa).

Background: SVCs are monoclausal constructions containing at least two (in)transitive V(erbs) with the same subject; they denote complex events or series of events. The Vs are juxtaposed with no overt linker. Non-initial Vs often show reduced inflection (Veenstra & Muysken 2017). Transitive Vs in SVCs can share their OBJ(ect): the shared OBJ in Akan (1) is realized once, between the Vs, but is interpreted as the object of both (cf. *it* in the paraphrase).

- (1) Kweku kù-ù àkókó nó nòá-àyè
Kweku kill-PST chicken DEF cook-PST
'Kweku killed the chicken and cooked it.' Akan OBJ-sharing SVC (AUTHOR 2023)

The syntax of OBJ-sharing SVCs has been studied extensively, especially in West African languages (see, e.g., Déchaine 1993 on Yoruba and Igbo, Campbell 1996 on Akan, Aboh 2009 on Gungbe). There are two major analytical issues addressed in the SVC-literature: (i.) Do SVCs involve coordination or subordination? (ii.) In case of OBJ-sharing as in (1), how many objects are there in the underlying syntactic structure? We will focus on (ii.), for which two proposals exist in the literature: Approach 1 assumes *true sharing*, viz., there is only one underlying object that is linked to both verbs, e.g., in a 'double headed VP', exemplified in (2) (Baker 1989, Baker & Stewart 1999) or in terms of multidominance (see Hiraiwa & Bodomo 2008 for Dàgáárè). Approach 2 postulates an underlying object for each lexical verb. If the object of the non-initial verb is a pronoun co-referring with the NP-object of V1, the impression of a single surface-shared object arises if this pronoun is silent (*pro*-dropped), as sketched in (3) (Collins 1997, Déchaine 1993, Campbell 1996, i.a.). We propose a new diagnostic to distinguish true and surface sharing by exploring their predictions about the *possible* number of overt objects.

- (2) True sharing:
- ```
 VP
 / | \
 V NP V
 kill the chicken cook
```
- (3) Surface sharing:
- ```
      VP
     /  \
    V    VP
  kill  /  \
       NP  V'
    the chickeni  V  NP
                  cook iti ⇒ pro-drop
```

Prediction / new diagnostic: If a (PF-dropped) pronoun is present in non-initial VPs in an SVC, this pronoun should be overt in contexts in which *pro*-drop is excluded. When dropping is impossible, surface-sharing (3) predicts that we will see more than one object. Under true-sharing (2), we should still see just one overt object even in contexts blocking *pro*-drop.

Evidence for surface sharing from Akan suspended *pro*-drop: I. Grammatical properties: Akan is a tone language (H: á, L: à) with rigid SVO order in all-new contexts, the subject raises to SpecTP, there is neither agreement nor morphological case (Osam 1994, Marfo 2009, Saah 2010). Verbs inflect for tense; in fact, *all* verbs in an Akan SVC do so, see (1) (Owusu 2022).

II. The structure of Akan OBJ-sharing SVCs: AUTHOR (2023) argue on the basis of event structure diagnostics that OBJ-sharing SVCs as in (1) involve multiple independent events, e.g., because the two VPs can be modified by contrary adverbs and do not allow free agent

cumulativity. They conclude that this type of SVC results from (i) (covert) coordination of vPs (whose external arguments undergo ATB-movement to SpecT), and (ii) surface OBJ-sharing in the sense of (3) with the object pronoun of the non-initial VP being dropped, see (4) for (1).

(4) $[_{TP} K_{-1} [_{T'} T [_{\&P} [_{\bar{VP}1} t_1[_{v'} v [_{VP} k\grave{u}-\grave{u} \grave{a}k\acute{o}k\acute{o} \acute{n}\acute{o}]]]] \& [_{\bar{VP}2} t_1[_{v'} v [_{VP} n\acute{o}a-\grave{a}y\grave{e} \mathbf{pro}]]]]]]$

III. *Pro-drop in Akan*: Akan *pro-drop* is subject to various restrictions (see Boadi 1971, Saah 1994, Osam 1996, Korsah 2017): (A) Non-human pronominal 3rd person objects are dropped (indicated by an underscore, see (5-a)), while human ones must be overt (see (5-b) with the 3sg pronoun *n\acute{o}*). Non-human 3rd person objects must still be overt if they are (B) followed by certain adverbs (see (5-c)), or (C) are complements of change-of-state (COS)-verbs (see (5-d)).

- (5) a. Kofi s\acute{o}a-\acute{a} ✓ ___ / *n\acute{o} c. Kofi s\acute{o}a-\acute{a} * ___ / ✓n\acute{o} \grave{a}n\grave{d}\acute{p}\acute{a}
- Kofi carry-PST 3SG Kofi carry-PST 3SG morning
- ‘Kofi carried it (e.g., the bowl).’ ‘Kofi carried it (the bowl) in the morning.’
- b. Kofi s\acute{o}a-\acute{a} * ___ / ✓n\acute{o} d. Kofi b\grave{u}-\grave{u} * ___ / ✓n\acute{o}
- Kofi carry-PST 3SG Kofi break-PST 3SG
- ‘Kofi carried her/him.’ ‘Kofi broke it (e.g., the bowl).’

IV. *Suspended pro-drop in Akan SVCs*: If AUTHOR’s surface sharing approach to SVCs in (1) is correct, the pronoun postulated in the non-initial VP should be overt when used in the contexts (5-b-d). This is indeed the case (non-referenced data elicited with 5 native speaker): (A) When the shared OBJ is human, the pronoun must surface, see (6-a) (Owusu 2022: 15). (B) When we add the adverb *\grave{a}n\grave{d}\acute{p}\acute{a}* ‘morning’ to (1), *n\acute{o}* is obligatory after the 2nd verb, see (6-b).

- (6) a. Kofi kye-e ab\textcircled{f}ra no bo-o b. Kweku k\grave{u}-\grave{u} \grave{a}k\acute{o}k\acute{o} \acute{n}\acute{o} n\acute{o}a-\grave{a}
- Kofi catch-PST child DET beat-PST Kweku kill-PST chicken DEF cook-PST
- * ___ / ✓no * ___ / ✓n\acute{o} \grave{a}n\grave{d}\acute{p}\acute{a}
- 3SG 3SG morning
- ‘Kofi caught the child and spanked him.’ ‘K. killed the chicken and cooked it in the m.’

(C) Finally, consider the effect of COS-verbs in SVCs with V1 and V2 with shared non-human objects. The object is given in the context, which allows for pronouns to occur also after V1. (7)–(10) vary the position of the COS-verb (underlined): both V1 and V2 can be COS (7) or neither V1 nor V2 is (8); moreover, only V1 can be COS (9), or only V2 is (10). The data show that all COS-verbs (V1, V2) require an overt object pronoun, whereas non-COS-verbs never do.

- (7) Context: Kwame has a key chain on his back-(9) Context: Ama makes plantain. Looking for pack. Walking to school he tore and broke it. Kelewele, she opened and smelled the spice.
- Kwame tete-e_{V1} **no** bubu-u_{V2} **no** Ama bue-e_{V1} **no** hweae-ε_{V2}
- Kwame tear-PST **3SG** break-PST **3SG** Ama open-PST **3SG** smell-PST
- ‘Kwame tore and broke **it**.’ (COS-V1+V2) ‘Ama opened and smelled **it**.’ (COS-V1)
- (8) Context: Kwame picked a flower which he held and smelled on the whole way home. (10) Context: Looking for Kelewele, Ama smells and opens the spice.
- Kwame kura-ε_{V1} hweae-ε_{V2} Ama hweae-ε_{V1} bue-e_{V2} **no**
- Kwame hold-PST smell-PST Ama smell-PST open-PST **3SG**
- ‘Kwame held and smelled **it**.’ (no COS-V) ‘Ama smelled and opened **it**.’ (COS-V2)

Summary: We introduced a new diagnostic for the underlying syntax of OBJ-sharing SVCs in *pro-drop* languages: Surface sharing analyses, which assume a PF-dropped pronoun in OBJ-position of non-initial VPs, predict such pronouns to be overt when the language-specific conditions for *pro-drop* are not met. We have shown this to be correct for Akan SVCs of type (1). We will also address true OBJ-sharing in idiomatic SVCs in Akan.

Selected refs.: Baker, M. (1989): Object sharing and projection in serial verb constructions, LI 20. • Campbell, R. (1996): Serial verbs and shared arguments, TLR 13. • Collins, Ch. (1997): Argument

sharing in serial verb constructions, LI 28. • Hiraiwa, K. & Bodomo, A. (2008): Object-Sharing as Symmetric Sharing: Predicate Clefting and Serial Verbs in Dàgáárè. NLLT 26.