

# Investigating Serial Verb Constructions In Yemeni Tihami Dialect

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## Abstract

This article examines SVCs in various global languages, as well as Classical Arabic (CA) and certain contemporary Arabic dialects, specifically focusing on Yemeni Tihami Dialect (YTD). This study starts with a review of the literature on SVCs. Next, it discusses the significance of the study, methodology, and data analysis, the syntax of SVCs, and the verbs used frequently in SVCs. After that, the main properties of SVCs are highlighted. Then, it draws attention to the assertion that SVCs occur in CA, which is proved untrue. Then, SVCs in various Arabic dialects follow. Lastly, to determine whether or not SVCs exist in YTD, the coordination and SVCs in YTD are discussed, and then, the four SVC criteria listed by Cleary-Kemp (2015) are tested. The results indicate that SVCs are present in YTD after applying the four criteria to the structures of YTD.

**Keywords:** Serial verb construction; Arabic dialects, Yemeni Tihami dialect

## 1. Introduction

Presently, Serial Verb construction (SVC) is defined as a construction that has two or more verbs or verb phrases without the use of a subordinating or coordinating conjunction. SVCs are studied and analysed by many linguists in the world; Stewart (1963), Versteegh (1986), Baker (1989), Larson (1991), Collins (1997). Finney (2004), Aikhenvald (2006), Barbarinde (2013), Cleary-Kemp (2015), Haspelmath (2016), Ross (2020), and Lovstrand & Ross (2021) among others,

Ross (2020) discovers evidence of SVCs in 124 languages from a sample of 325 languages. Haspelmath (2016) argues that SVCs have been the subject of extensive discussion in several African, Oceanic, and other languages since the 1970s. Drozdík (2008) and Kari (2003) point out that SVCs occur in a number of the world's languages, most frequently in certain African, Asian, and Creole languages on both hemispheres of the globe.

Despite the imprecise nature of the category, different definitions of SVCs usually suggest groups of constructions that overlap predominantly. Haspelmath (2016) defines SVC as a serial verb construction with a monoclausal structure made up of several separate verbs that are not connected by an element and do not share a predicate-argument relationship. SVC is also defined as a term used to describe several different phenomena that are all related to the juxtaposition of several verbs to communicate complicated meanings that may otherwise be stated by particles, purpose clauses, lexical objects, etc in the source language (Versteegh, 1986, p.100). According to Larson (1991), SVC is described as a noun phrase subject followed by a sequence of verbs or verb phrases without conjunctions, usually with inflectional features.

Ross reported the earliest accounts of SVCs (2020, p.210). He pointed out that many people claim that Stewart (1963) coined the word "serial verb," SVC was originally used to characterize a construction in the West African language of Akan (Stewart, 1963). Barbarinde (2013) argues that linguists have been interested in the phenomenon since 1875. In the literature, numerous grammatical explanations of serial verb formations have been published. Barbarinde (2013, p. 468) states that three main stages of the research on SVCS in languages have been identified thus far:

Phase 1: From 1875 to the beginning of the 1960s – Concerning the educational aspects of grammar and basic language description (Christaller

1875, Balmer & Grant 1929, Westermann 1930, Westermann & Bryan 1952, Stewart 1963, and others).

Phase 2: Theorizing the characteristics that set SVCs apart, as well as applying pertinent theories to their syntactic representation, took place in the late 1960s and early 1990s (Boadi 1968, Awobuluyi 1967, 1971, 1973, Bamgbose 1973, 1974, 1982, Schachter 1974, Baker 1989, Agbedor 1994, and many others).

Phase 3: From the late 1990s to now; comparative studies, typological and cross-linguistic investigations, Semantics of SVCs, defining them from other verb sequence constructions, and demarcating them (Schiller 1990, Lord 1993, Bearth 1999, Baker & Stewart 2002, Ameka 2005, 2006, Aikhenvald & Dixon (eds.) 2006, Bisang 2009 and many others).

The literature on SVCs is reviewed at the beginning of this study. The importance of the study, methodology, data analysis, SVC syntax, and often-used verbs are then covered. The primary characteristics of SVCs are then emphasized. The claim that SVCs occur in CA is then brought to light, which is false. SVCs in different Arabic dialects come next. Finally, the four SVC criteria listed by Cleary-Kemp (2015) are examined after the coordination of SVCs in YTD is reviewed to ascertain whether or not SVCs exist in YTD. After applying the four criteria to the YTD structures, the results show that SVCs are present in YTD.

## 2. Significance of the Study

Although SVCs have been discussed by many linguists in the world, very few studies were conducted about SVCs in Classical Arabic (CA) and Arabic dialects. As far as I know, Hasibuan & Mulyadi (2024) investigated SVCs in CA whereas Altakhaineh & Zibin (2017) and Alotaibi (2023) studied SVCs in Jordan and Saudi Arabia respectively as well as Hussein (1990) in Palestinian dialect.

This study is the first one which discusses SVCs in Yemeni dialect particularly YTD and will contribute the information about SVCs in Arabic dialects and particularly the Yemeni dialects. Moreover, this study may fill linguistic gaps about SVCs in other dialects in the world.

## 3. Data collection

The data were collected from many papers related to SVCs in some global languages as well as classical Arabic and modern Arabic dialects. The

population is the Tihami speakers in Hodeida governorate in Yemen. It should be noted that TYA can be divided into three sub-dialects according to Al-Sharafi (2014). They are:

I. South Tihami Arabic (STA) which is called Yuman in Tihama. It extends from the north Rimaṣa valley to Jiddah sea port. It includes towns like Hays, Garahi, and Zabid

II. Middle Tihami Arabic (MTA) spoken from south Rimaṣa valley to Hodeida governorate. The towns of this sub-dialect are Bait Al-fakeih and the towns around them.

III. North Tihami Arabic (NTA) which extends from north Hodeida governorate to Mikhlaf Suliman in Gayzan (one of Saudi cities) and ṣabs in Hajja. It is spoken by people in towns like Al-Dihi, HaraD, Marawiṣah, Bagel etc.

The sample is the speakers of South Tihami Arabic particularly some citizens in Zabid town. The researcher is one of them.

#### 4. Methodology and Data Analysis

This study is descriptive and qualitative rather than quantitative. Document analysis, cooperative reading, listening, and note-taking procedures are the methods used to acquire data. This paper will be analyzed using the Content Analysis. Content analysis is "a highly flexible research method that has been widely used in library and information science (LIS) studies with varying research goals and objectives. The research method is applied in qualitative, quantitative, and sometimes mixed modes of research frameworks and employs a wide range of analytical techniques to generate findings and put them into context." (White & Marsh, 2006, p. 22).

Many forms of data can be analyzed using qualitative content analysis, however, most of the time written text must be converted into data before analysis can begin (Zhang, Y., & Wildemuth, B. M., 2009).

The data in this study were collected from different researches about SVCs from different Languages in the world. Then, the SVC data of my dialect, YTD, were converted into written data to be analyzed and compared with the written data of other Languages and dialects in the world.

#### 5. Syntax of SVCs

Finney (2004) explains the syntax of SVCs. He points out that verb serialization is arguably a phenomenon that is marked by languages because standard syntactic theories find it very difficult to explain. Every syntactic level must have a representation of the subcategorization attributes of lexical objects according to the Projection Principle (Chomsky 1986). At all syntactic levels, an element should be phonetically realized or represented

by an empty category at a certain point. The Theta Criterion also mandates that each argument should be given a unique thematic role and that each argument be given a unique thematic role that is available. Verbs in serial verb formations sometimes assign the same object case and thematic roles. Thus, SVCs are going against the theta requirement and the projection principle. These constructs have two possible outcomes: either the verbs in the sequence share an internal argument, or an object is not realized phonetically. The consequence that follows is that either one theta role is left unassigned or the item is theta marked twice. These kinds of constructs could be seen as refutations of Theta Theory, or the way the Theta Criterion is interpreted could be adjusted to consider them.

## 6. Verbs likely to occur in serial verb constructions

Aikhenvald (2006) points out that depending on the nature of SVC, some verbs are more and less likely to appear in SVCs. From a cross-linguistic perspective, the minor verb slot is where the basic verbs of motion, direction, posture, and position are most often found for asymmetrical SVC. The verbs \ 'Come \', \ 'Go \ ', and \ 'Move \ ' are the most commonly used verbs as in Yimas. Additional posture verbs may be added by some languages: The minor verb slot in the language Ndje'bbana uses the verbs "go," "move," as well as "sit," "stand," and "lie." This language has limited serialization.

## 7. Properties of SVCs

Certain properties need to be available in any SVC Language or dialect. This section discusses this topic.

Aikhenvald (2006, p.14) notes that "SVCs with shared subjects are the major type of SVCs in any language" but it is necessary to keep in mind that, contrary to Baker's (1989) hypothesis, SVCs do not necessarily share an internal argument (transitive object or unaccusative subject). SVCs similar to those in (1)–(2) are so found.

(1) "Baule (Kwa; Larson 2010: 195)

○ si-li bb balie-'n sɔkɔ-li tro-'n  
3SG.SUBJ pound-CPLV food-DEF prepare-CPLV<sup>1</sup> sauce-DEF

'She pounded the food and prepared the sauce.'

(2) Gungbe (Kwa; Aboh 2009: 4)

Sésínú kùn mótò cè só àdó.

It should be noted the examples are cited without any change I their transliterations in <sup>1</sup> order to avoid any change in the intended meaning.

Sesinou drive car my hit wall"  
'Sesinou drove my car into the wall.'

The characteristics of SVCs are described by Barbarinde (2013, p. 469). According to him, a single grammatical subject, and a set of verbs or verb phrases that express simultaneous or immediately succeeding actions with no connectives are all considered to be part of the same grammatical categories, such as aspect, modality, tense, and negativity or positivity. Haspelmath (2016, p. 292) argues that verbs are arranged as follows on SVCs: (1) monoclausal construction; (2) composed of multiple independent verbs; (3) lacking a linking element; (4) lacking a predicate-argument relation; (5) sharing the same tense and mood value; (6) having the same negator; (7) sharing at least one argument; and (8) sharing the same subject. On the other hand, Cleary-Kemp (2015) provides a brief and concise account of SVC properties. All the important and essential features of SVCs outlined by Haspelmath (2016) above are manifested in Cleary-Kemp(2015). He maintains that four fundamental properties are extracted from the existing collection of surface properties: major verbhood, monoclausal construction, single eventhood, and argument sharing. All these characteristics must be present for a structure to be considered an SVC.

For a building to be classified as an SVC, each of these requirements must be met. One when it comes to syntactic structures, the major verbhood criteria, for example, distinguishes between SVCs, which have two finite main verbs, and light verb or auxiliary verb constructions, which contain a finite and a dependent non-finite verb. Every element of an SVC must be capable of being a primary predicate on its own. This is typically achieved by demonstrating how each verb can serve as the main verb in a typical mono-verbal sentence. Matthews (2006), for example, asserts that the Cantonese word gan1 "follow" can exist alone in (3a), or it can join with another verb to make an SVC, as in (3b).

(3) Cantonese

"a. ngo gan keoi  
I follow him

'I am with him (as a student, etc.)'

b. ngo gan keoi hok  
I follow him study

'I study with him (as his student)' (Matthews 2006, p.70)

Concerning monoclausality, it is reasonable to suppose that the purpose of this criterion is to distinguish SVCs from non - SVC multi-verb constructs,

such as raising control structures, complement clauses, and other subordinate clause constructions (Cleary-Kemp, 2015).

Regarding single eventhood, Cleary-Kemp (2015) points out that the single eventhood criterion requires that Tense, Aspect, and Mood (TAM) marking on the first verb should take scope over both verbs.

Concerning sharing argument, Aikhenvald (2006b, p.14) argues that the most frequent type of argument sharing in an SVC is sharing the subject. The subjects of the two verbs in these SVCs must match, and if both verbs are transitive, they may also have the same object arguments as in (4a) when both verbs are intransitive, and (4b) when both verbs are transitive.

Jabêm

(4) a. Napale ke-taN ge-NgoN a ndu  
boy 3sg-weep 3sg-sit house  
'The boy sits crying in the house.' (Ross 2002b, p.287)

Pileni

b. Lha-ko toa lha-ko mot-ia te pakola la na  
3du-ta take 3du-ta cut-tr art giant dem dem

'They cut the giant (to pieces)' (Næss 2004:238)

## 8. SVCs in Classical Arabic

As far as I know, one co-author paper discusses SVCs in classical Arabic (CA); Hasibuan & Mulyadi (2024). Their data were taken from the Holy Quran and their Arabic speakers at Darularafah Islamic boarding school in Indonesia. Unfortunately, all the examples they present do not show the same tense. The tenses in these examples are often in two tenses; present and past, one after another and this contradicts the single eventhood criterion.

(5) "Wa kaanuu yaquuluuna a'izaa mitnaa wa kunnaa turaabanw wa izaaman'ainnaa lamab'uusuun"

'And they were saying 'When we have died and become dust and bones, are we indeed to be resurrected?' Hasibuan & Mulyadi (2024, p. 111)

They also give examples in which a complementizer intervenes between the two verbs as in (6) below.



(6) "Tazunnu an yufala bihā fāqirah"

'They thought that a severe calamity was to fall on them.' Hasibuan & Mulyadi (2024, p. 112).

The two examples given by Hasibuan & Mulyadi (2024) contradict the definition of SVC which is defined as a construction in which a succession of verbs are presented in a phrase with one subject and one tense without being separated by any intervention, such as coordination and subordination (Collins,1997).

In addition, Versteegh (1986) argues that one of the developments in modern Arabic dialects is SVC which has not been in CA. Moreover, as a linguist and a speaker of Arabic language, no two verbs of the same tense can occur without a coordinator, a conjunction, a particle, or a complementizer in CA so the sentence in ( 7 ) is ungrammatical.

(7) \* ali-on qahab-a ishtar -a al-lahm-a  
Ali-ind. went-3sm bought-3sm the-meat-sub.  
'Ali went and bought the meat.'

On the other hand, when a coordinator is put between the two verbs, the sentence becomes grammatical as in (8).

(8) ali-on qahab-a wa ishtar-a al-lahm-a  
Ali-ind. went-3sm and bought-3sm the-meat-sub.  
Literally, 'Ali went and bought the meat.'

The discussion above and examples ( 7-8 ) show clearly that SVCs do not occur in CA.

## 9. SVCs in Arabic Dialects

Versteegh (1984, pp. 99-100) points out that in most Arabic dialects, he finds a phenomenon of verbal construction that bears a striking resemblance to what is called 'verbal serialization' in pidginized languages. Versteegh supports the idea that varieties of Arabic might have developed as a result pidginization, creolization, and finally decreolization processes by using what he refers to as a serial-verb-like construction. These Arabic SVCs share a few syntactic and semantic traits with pidginized languages.

Multiword expressions in Arabic (henceforth MWE) are studied by Al-Badrashiny et al. (2016) and Hawwari et al. (2014). MWE focuses on expressions such as idioms, prepositional verbs, collocations, and compound nouns. On the other hand, neither of them discusses SVCs with their unique properties.

Altakhaineh and Zibin (2017) and Alotaibi (2023) study SVCs in Jordan and Saudi Arabia respectively. Both Altakhaineh and Zibin (2017) and Alotaibi (2023) show that the properties of SVCs are applicable in Jordan and Saudi Arabia. Both of them emphasize the inseparability of verbs in SVCs. They argue that no argument can intervene between the verbs in SVCs.

Altakhaineh and Zibin (2017) regard the sentence in (8) is not grammatical in Jordan because an object intervenes between the two verbs as in (9),

(9) "\*walid misik kull ʕulab l-bebsi fataħ  
 Walid grabbed.3SG.M all cans the-Pepsi opened.3SG.M"  
 ‘Walid grabbed and opened all Pepsi cans.’  
 lit. ‘Walid grabbed all Pepsi cans opened.’

Alotaibi (2023) considers the structure in ( 10 ) as not an example of SVCs because an object occurs between the two verbs, “no element is permissible to occur between them” (Alotaibi, 2023, p.22).

(10) "ʔaxaða Ali yadrusu  
 started.3SG.M Ali studying.3SG.M"  
 ‘Ali started studying.’

On the other hand, the object can be sandwiched between two verbs in many languages which have SVCs. Hiraiwa & Bodomo (2008, p.243) give an example of Object-Sharing SVC in Dàgáàrè as illustrated in (11). The transitive verbs sé and óó share the object néné. Here, Initially, the object is positioned between two verbs. As a result, whereas (10b) is not grammatical, (10a) is. Secondly, even though there are two verbs in the object-sharing SVC, there is only one object.

(11) " a. ò dà sé lá néné óó  
 3Sg Pst roast F meat eat"

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Another reason argued by Alotaibi (2023) is that the two verbs have different tenses and <sup>1</sup> aspects.

'He roasted meat and ate it.'

\*b. . ò dà sé lá óó néné .

3Sg Pst roast F eat meat "

'He roasted meat and ate it.'

Another example from Niger-Congo (Lefebvre 1991a) cited in Lovstrand & Ross (2021, p. 105) shows that the object can occur between the two verbs in SVCs.

(12) " *Kókú sò àtí h. àsibá*

Koku take stick hit Asiba"

'Koku hit Asiba with a stick.'

Some linguists may not accept the above examples arguing that they are not taken from Arabic dialects. The next example (13) is from my dialect; YTD.

(13) *miskat ambisah dharbtaha*

caught 2s the-cat beat-it 2s"

'I caught the cat and beat it.'

It is easily noticed in (13) that the object (*ambisah*) 'the cat' occurs between the two verbs.

The discussion above proves that objects can intervene between the verbs in SVCs as opposed to the claim of Altakhaineh and Zibin (2017) and Alotaibi (2023).

Concerning the Palestinian dialect discussed by Hussein (1990), this study follows a set of SVC properties suggested by Cleary-Kemp (2015) which are different from the ones applied by Hussein (1990).

## 10. SVCs in Yemeni Tihami Dialect

The Tihami dialect is one of the Yemeni dialects. It is a Yemeni dialect that was formerly limited to speakers of the Tihamah historical region, which is the coastal plain on Yemen's eastern coast. It is my dialect.

### 10.1 SVC and Coordination in YTD

Before discussing the properties of SVCs in YTD, it is important to prove that SVC is not a coordination structure. The argument below deals with this topic.

Aikhenvald (2006) points out that the Anyi-Sanvi dialect spoken in Niger-Congo provides a powerful illustration to distinguish between SVCs and coordination. Example (14) is a shared subject and object clause (SVC), while Example (15) is a coordinate structure with two unique verbs, "catch" and "eat," and one distinct subject marking an object element.

(14) "cu\_a' c\_i a'k\_O !dɪ'

dog catch+HAB chicken eat

'The dog eats (lit. catch-eat) a chicken'

(15) cu\_a' c\_i a'k\_O o' -dɪ' i'\_

dog catch+HAB chicken he-eat it"

'The dog catches a chicken and copulates with it' (Van Leynseele (1975) cited in Aikhenvald (2006, p. 6))

It is known in many languages that if the object is moved to the front of the sentence, a resumptive pronoun should be attached to the verb. The same can be noticed in YTD.

(16) a. kul am-hut

eat-2s the- fish

Eat the fish.'

b. am-hut kul-uh

the- fish eat-2s-it

The fish, eat it.

When the same movement is applied to the SVC in YTD, the resumptive pronoun can be attached only to the second verb as in (17 b ) and not to both verbs so ( 17 c) is ungrammatical.

(17) a. puz kul am-hut  
take- 2s eat-2s the- fish

Eat the fish.

b. am-hut puz kul-uh  
the-fish take- 2s eat-2s-it

The fish. eat it.

c. \*am-hut puz-uh kul-uh  
the-fish take- 2s-it eat-2s--it

Literarily, the fish, take it and eat it.

On the contrary, the same is not true in coordination in YTD. The resumptive pronoun should be attached to both verbs as in (18 b) and not to the second verb only therefore (18 c) is ungrammatical.

18. a. puz wa kul am-hut  
take- 2s and eat-2s the- fish

Take fish and eat it.

b. am-hut puz-uh wa kul-uh  
the-fish take- 2s-it and eat-2s--it

The fish, take it and eat it.

c. \*am-hut puz wa kul-uh  
the-fish take- 2s and eat-2s--it

The fish, take and eat it.

## 10. 2 Properties of SVCs in YTD

In this section, the YTD sentences with multi-verb structures will be tested according to the four criteria of SVCs described by Cleary-Kemp (2015). The first criterion is the main verbhood. As mentioned earlier, the major verbhood property makes SVCs different from other syntactic structures like light verbs or auxiliary verb constructions, which involve a finite and a dependent non-finite verb. SVCs have two finite main verbs. Each component that makes up an SVC needs to be able to stand alone as a primary predicate. This is usually achieved by demonstrating how each verb can serve as the main verb in a traditional monosyllabic sentence.

The verbs *jalas* 'sit' and *sharib* 'drank' in YTD can be used alone as an independent verb in ( 19 ) and ( 20 ) or together in SVCs as in ( 21 )

(19) *jalas-t fi am-hadeeqah*  
*sat-1s in the-garden*

'I sat in the garden.'

(20) *sharib-t am-qahwah*  
*drank-1s the-coffee*

I drank coffee.

(21) *jalas-t sharib-t am-qahwah*  
*sat-1s drank-it the-coffee*

'I drank coffee.'

Concerning monoclausality, according to Cleary-Kemp (2015), the goal of this criterion is to distinguish SVCs from non-SVC multi-verb constructs, such as coordinated clauses, raising and control structures, complement

clauses, and other subordinate clause constructions. The example in (22) from YTD shows no overt coordinator or complementizer between the verbs.

(22) Yaser rah nam  
Yaser went-3s slept-3s  
^à'Yaser slept.

In addition, monoclauslity requires a single scope of negation in SVCs as in (23a). On the contrary, the double negation in both verbs is ungrammatical as in (23b).

(23) a. Yaser rah-shi nam  
Yaser went-3s-Neg. slept-3s  
Yaser didn't sleep.  
b. \*Yaser rah-shi nam-shi  
Yaser went-3s-Neg. slept-3s-Neg.

Regarding the single eventhood criterion, it can be noticed that both verbs in (24) are in the past tense, perfective aspect. Mood is not available in Arabic dialect according to Versteegh (1986).

(24) "Sami nizal-3sm jab am-bisah min am-beer  
sami went down brought-3sm the-cat from the-well"  
'Sami went down and brought the cat from the well.'

Sharing argument criteria can be noticed in all the YTD examples given above. All the examples share the same subject.

The example (13) above and (25) below show that SVCs in YTD can share the same subject and object.

(25) Puz ishrab mayo  
take- 2s drink-2s water  
Literary, Take the water and drink it.

The above discussion shows that the the four criteria of SVCs described by Cleary-Kemp (2015) do occur in the YTD and these SVCs are different from the coordination structure in YTD.

## 11. Conclusion

This paper aimed to discuss SVCs in various languages in the world including CA and some modern Arabic dialects with particular reference to YTD. The focus of this study was on the properties of SVCs. It highlighted the claim that SVCs existed in CA and it showed that this was not true. After that, some previous studies about SVCs in some Arabic dialects were discussed. The author showed how this study was different from the previous studies about SVCs in Arabic dialects. Finally, the four criteria of SVCs described by Cleary-Kemp (2015) were tested to check whether SVCs occurred in YTD or not. After applying the four criteria to the structures of YTD, the results proved that SVCs do exist in YTD. The author suggests further researches about SVCs in some Yemeni dialects.

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