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# Serial Verb Constructions in Nzema: A Descriptive Analysis

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## Abstract

This paper aims to discuss Serial Verb Constructions (SVCs) in Nzema, a Southern Bia (Kwa) language. It draws on some of the characteristics and properties that have been surveyed in the existing literature, for instance, subject/object sharing, tense, aspect, and negation. It also discusses the types and functions of SVCs in Nzema. The current paper analyses the notions of tense, aspect, and polarity and how they are marked in Nzema SVCs. Most of the data used in the analysis has been derived from the daily conversations of native speakers. Four respondents were approached for the purpose of this study. The analysis shows that Nzema SVCs belong to the types explored in the literature as clause chaining, both integrated and concordial. Moreover, serial verb patterns are used by the speakers to add argument, such as an instrument or beneficiary. Future markers are used before the verbs, while past markers occur after the verbs. On the other hand, progressive aspect markers occur before the verbs in the speech of the respondents. Furthermore, tense and aspect marking are repeated by the respondents on all the verbs in the series. Regarding argument sharing, the object is only shared when the verbs in the series are transitive.

**Keywords:** argument sharing, clause chaining serialization, concordial serial verb, integrated serial verb construction

## Introduction

Nzema is a Southern Bia (Kwa) language spoken in the southwestern part of Ghana and in some parts of the Ivory Coast (the La Côte d'Ivoire). It consists of five main dialects namely; Jomoro, Ellebele, Egila, Ajomoro, and Evaloe. This paper aims to examine SVCs in Nzema, primarily, focusing the structure and functions of Nzema SVCs. SVC is a syntactic structure with verb-verb combinations. Although speakers having similar language face similarity with the SVCs linguistic features yet, there are certain readers who are unfamiliar with this term. Consequently, the initial section of the paper examines the basic concept and characteristics of SVCs

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in Nzema. Structural and functional SVCs in Nzema are discussed in the subsequent sections.

### Review of the Literature

Serial verb construction (SVC), is a linguistic phenomenon among many West African languages, which has been well discussed in the literature (Aikhenvald, [1999](#), [2006](#); Bodomo, [1997](#); Kari, [2003](#); Osam, [1994a](#); Yin, [2015](#)). Unlike Akan, a sister language of Nzema, and some Ghanaian languages such as Ewe and some Mabia languages that have enough literature on SVCs, the phenomenon has little or no literature on Nzema. This section seeks to delve into some definitions and features of SVCs. Some definitions by various scholars are put forth in this section. Schachter ([1974](#)), described SVC as “a sentence that contains a serial verb construction comprises of a subject noun phrase. The sentence is also followed by a series of two or more verb phrases, each containing a finite verb plus, possibly, the complement(s) of that verb.” For Foley and Olson ([1985](#)),

These are constructions in which verbs sharing a common actor or subject are merely juxtaposed, with no intervening conjunctions. ... Serial verb constructions always contain two or more predicates. ...While they may require the same actor, each verb may have arguments that are not shared by the other verbs. (Foley & Olson, [1985](#), p. 18)

Durie ([1988](#)), defined SVC as,

In simple descriptive terms, serialisation is what happens when two or more verbs are juxtaposed in such a way that they act as a single predicate, taking a unitary complex of direct arguments. The verbs are bound together syntactically and/or morphologically on the basis of sharing one or more core arguments and neither verb is subordinate to the other. Typically, in a serial construction, there is no marker of coordination or subordination, no dividing intonational or morphological mark of a clause boundary and the verbs cannot have a separate scope of tense, mood, aspect, illocutionary force, and negation.

According to Aikhenvald ([1999](#)), SVC is “a sequence of several verbs which act together as a single predicate.” Sahoo ([2001](#)), shared a similar view regarding SVC he stated:

What we may broadly refer to as ‘verb serialisation’ resides in either a combination of verbs without complements and adjuncts or in a combination of phrasal items, viz verbs with their complements and adjuncts, in both cases without overt coordinators or subordinators.

Traditionally, the term serial verb construction refers to a sequence of verbs or verb phrases in a sentence in which there is no intervening conjunction (Yin, [2015](#)). Collins ([1993](#)), also defined serial verb construction as “a succession of verbs and their complements (if any) with one subject and one tense value that is not separated by any overt marker of coordination or subordination”.

According to the various definitions of SVC by Appah ([2009](#)), “two underlying explanations account for why authors’ definitions of SVCs contrast each other. Firstly, a particular definition proposed by an author influences his notion about SVCs. Secondly, authors tend to overgeneralize. This means that authors are tempted to make assertions which may be true in one language, but which may not hold in another”. Osam ([1994](#)), also supported this argument. He argued that usually, comments made about some SVC languages later turn out to be incorrect after a close examination with reference to specific serializing languages (Osam, [1994b](#)).

There is a consensus on common parameters that define SVCs without defying the differences in definitions. Therefore, from the definitions above, SVC is a concatenation of two or more verbs with no intervening conjunction, the verbs may share some arguments. SVCs may or may not include verb complements or adjuncts. However, there should be no overt marker of coordination or subordination. In other words, there must be no overt conjunction between verbs in serial construction. Verbs in serial construction must necessarily be close to each other. The verbs must also be of equal status. Therefore, there must not be a mix of both lexical and auxiliary verbs in the construction.

This sequence of verbs shares a common subject and common tense value. The subject of SVC can be a noun or a pronominal, followed by lexical verbs and their complements (if any). Verbs in serial construction can coexist in order to form a single predicate. The term serial verb construction in this paper is basically a syntactic structure, consisting of successive verbs without explicit conjunction between them which acts as

a single predicate. There are various ways of grouping SVCs. The grouping may be based on formal features or semantic features.

### **Statement of Problem**

Scholars such as Aikhenvald (1999, 2006), Bodomo (1997), Osam (1994a), Kari (2003) and Yin (2015) have discussed SVCs extensively in the literature. However, the phenomenon has little or no literature on Nzema. This paper therefore seeks to fill the lacuna on the part of Nzema, drawing on some of the characteristics and properties that have been discussed. Moreover, Aikhenvald (2006), Ameka (2006), Collins (1993), Durie (1988), Noonan (1992), Sahoo (2001), and others claimed that the verbs that constitute an SVC cannot be negated independently. This assertion needs to be investigated to find out whether the Nzema data support it or otherwise.

### **Research Objectives**

The research aims:

- 1) To explore the kinds of SVCs in Nzema language
- 2) To find out the defining properties of Nzema SVCs
- 3) To discuss the semantic roles of Nzema SVCs
- 4) To find out how negation is marked in Nzema SVCs

### **Research Questions**

- 1) What kinds of SVCs are found in Nzema?
- 2) What are the defining properties of Nzema SVCs?
- 3) What are some of the semantic roles of Nzema SVCs?
- 4) How is negation marked in Nzema SVCs?

### **Significance of the Study**

The present study aims to serve as the basis for the researchers conducting research on Nzema syntax. The current study also provides knowledge to students supported by the previous literature on Nzema.

### **Data and Methods**

The current study employs the qualitative research approach. The analysis was conducted by using primary and secondary data. The primary data were

a collection of oral stories from four Nzema undergraduates in the Faculty of Ghanaian Languages Education (FGLE). The authors also brought their native competence regarding the study. This was done by writing short stories and extracting the SVCs in them. The secondary data comprised extracts from Nzema literary texts. Extracts from *Èbelalekonle* by Enoku (1992), and from the drama text *Nyamenle asa enlomboe ne* by Soboh-Blay (1977), which had SVCs in them were taken for consideration. A grammar book on Nzema, *Nzema Aneemela Tagyee Ne* by Kwaw (2008), was also used. These examples were however, verified by two Nzema lecturers who are also native language speakers of Nzema.

### Data Analysis

This section presents the analysis of data in purely descriptive terms. It discusses types of SVCs in Nzema, some semantic types of Nzema SVCs, some properties of Nzema SVCs, and concordant marking in Nzema SVCs.

#### Types of SVCs in Nzema

SVCs have been categorized into two major types on the basis of the events that are integrated. Osam (1994b), referred to them as integrated SVC or SVC proper and clause chaining SVC. Lefebvre (1988), referred to ‘SVC proper’ as ‘true serialization’ and clause chaining as coordinate clause chaining. He explained that in coordinate clause chaining constructions, all the verbs in series denote different events. However, in a “true serialization” or ‘SVC proper’ constructions, all the verbs in series together denote a single event. There may be other forms of SVCs relative to a particular language. In Degema, two or more verbs can occur in series with one or more object clitics which both refer to the principal subject (Kari, 2003). In Williamson’s (1989) view it is “concordant” SVC. The discussion begins with examples of the main types of SVC from Nzema. (1a and b) are of the clause chaining type and (2a, and b) are of the integrated type.

#### Type 1 Clause Chaining

- (1) a. Kaku dó-lè            etu   hú-nlè   weɛɛ   dɔ́-né-nlè   ye  
 PN   shoot-PAST   gun   kill-PAST   deer   sell-PAST   3SG.OBJ  
 ‘Kaku shot (and) killed a deer (and) sold it.’
- b. Aka   súà            n-gane   kyé            nane            tó  
 dí

PN set.PRES PL-trap catch.PRES animal.PL cook.PRES  
eat.PRES

‘Aka sets traps, catches animals, prepares it (and) eats it.’

### ***Type 2 Integrated***

(2) a. Kofi kɔ́ tɔ́ bɛɛ bɛ̀lɛ yɛ  
PN go.PRES buy.PRES cassava bring.PRES 1PL  
‘Kofi goes (to) buy cassava for us.’

b. Aama kɔ̀ngò tɔ̀à bɛ  
PN crawls.PRES follow.PRES 3PL  
‘Aama crawls (and) follows them.’

The major difference between (1) and (2) can be seen in the degree of the semantic interrelation of the events designated by the verbs in the construction. In (2), the verbs are used to denote a single harmonious event. In (1), however, the semantic interrelation is not high. Therefore, the verbs are used to denote multiple events which form a bigger part of the event. Thereby, verbs are closely integrated to mark a single event in (1), the verbs are rather loosely connected in (2).

### **Semantic Types of SVCs**

In this section, some functional types of Nzema SVCs would be discussed. They are benefactive, instrumental, have specific direction and orientation, manner and interrogative, comparative, intensifier, and abilitative SVCs.

#### **Benefactive SVC**

In a benefactive SVC, the subject NP is the agent whereas, the benefactor and the object NP is the recipient or the beneficiary. This SVC therefore, presents an NP which is usually the recipient. Let us consider the examples below:

(3) a. Boa fá ezukoa máá Aka  
PN take money give PN  
‘Boa gives Aka money.’

b. Manye tɔ́ nane tó alee máá Kofi dí  
PN buy meat cook food give PN eat  
‘Manye buys meat (and) prepares food for Kofi to eat.’





- PN stand.PRES sweep.PRES rubbish  
 ‘Kofi sweeps in standing position.’
- b. Kofi dá súkòà  
 PN lie.PRES learn.PRES  
 ‘Kofi learns in lying position.’
- c. Kofi bútu súkòà  
 PN bend.PRES learn.PRES  
 ‘Kofi learns in bending position.’

### (iii) *Direction*

Direction or location is marked by *wɔ*, and may follow the actor or be outside of a clause. Regardless of any position in the construction, it indicates a particular setting of an event undertaken by the subject that results from the action expressed by the major verb. Consider examples (7a) and (7b):

- (7) a. Me w`ɔ sukulu eke me lé súkòà  
 1SG.SUB be school there 1SG.SUB PROG learn  
 ‘I am learning at the school.’
- b. Kofi súkòà debie w`ɔ sukulu lɔ  
 PN learn.PRES thing be school there  
 ‘Kofi learns at the school.’

It is observed that *wɔ sukulu eke* ‘at the school’ in (7a) follows the subject NP, *me* ‘I’ and in (7b), *wɔ sukulu lɔ* ‘at the school’ occurs outside of the clause to signal the location of the action of the matrix verb.

### Comparative SVC

This type of SVC can be categorised into two subtypes; one in which the SVC marks comparison between equality and similarity that is, the two NPs in the construction are of equal attribute or status. On the other hand, one in which the two NPs are juxtaposed to find out which of them has more qualities than the other. Let us call the former which is marked by *ke* ‘same’, ‘ke’ comparative SVC and the latter which is marked by *tela* ‘exceed’, ‘tela’ comparative SVC for the purpose of our description on Nzema. In the subtype which is marked by *tela*, the subject NP of the first verb has more qualities than the second NP. In both subtypes, however, the first verb can

be dynamic or stative. In either subtype, the comparative marker occurs in the object of V<sub>1</sub> and V<sub>2</sub>. Let us consider the examples below:

(8) a. Manza zé sú kpàlé ké ɔ nli  
 PN know.PRES cry.PRES better same 3SG.POSS mother  
 ‘Manza cries as better as her mother.’

b. Manza zé sú kpàlé télà ɔ nli  
 PN know.PRES cry.PRES better exceed 3SG.POSS mother  
 ‘Manza cries better than her mother.’

(9) a. Manza súkòà kpàlé ké ɔ nli  
 PN learn.PRES better same 3SG.POSS mother  
 ‘Manza learns better as her mother.’

b. Manza súkòà kpàlé télà ɔ nli  
 PN learn.PRES better exceed 3SG.POSS mother  
 ‘Manza learns better than her mother.’

The examples in (8) and (9) respectively are comparative SVCs in which the initial verbs are stative verbs and dynamic verbs.

### Intensifier SVC

The intensifier SVC<sup>1</sup> type consists of two synonymous verbs which are intransitively combined with other major verbs that can be transitive or intransitive. The V<sub>1</sub> is repeated in the V<sub>2</sub> slot to indicate that the action described by V<sub>3</sub> occurs many times. Consider the example (10a-c):

(10) a. Kofi bíé bíé gùà ɛkpa zo  
 PN urinate.PRES urinate.PRES drop.PRES mat POSTP  
 ‘Kofi urinates on a mat.’

b. Awoba tè'nd`ε tè'nd`ε kile ɔ nwo  
 PN talk.PRES talk.PRES show.PRES 3SG self  
 ‘Adwoba talks to herself.’

c. Akole bie nè nè gùà sua  
 ne azo  
 PN INDEF defecate.PRES defecate.PRES drop.PRES house  
 DET POSTP

<sup>1</sup> This type of SVC is also productive in Khwe (Kilian-Hatz, 2006).

‘A fowl defecates on the house.’

### Abilitative SVC

Abilitative SVCs express “ability”, in which the first NP of the first VP is capable of performing the activity of other following verb(s), shown in (11a) and (11b):

- (11) a. Kaku kòlà nríàndí kó’ sukulu  
 PN be able run.PRES go.PRES school  
 ‘Kaku can run (and) go to school.’
- b. Kaku kòlà tó’ kale kà  
 PN be able buy.PRES car drive.PRES  
 ‘Kaku can buy a car (and) drive.’

### Manner SVC

Manner SVC indicates how an action or a process is accomplished by the subject NP. In Nzema, the first verb may depict an action or a process and the manner is denoted by an adverbial marker or a comparative clause marker. Let us consider the examples below:

- (12) a. Akasi tó edwene ne kpólè ké ɔ nli  
 PN sing song DET loud same 3SG mother  
 ‘Akasi sings as loud as her mother sings.’
- b. Akasi tó alee sièziè ye ké ɔ nli  
 PN prepare food serve 3SG.OBJ as 3SG.SUB mother  
 ‘Akasi prepares food and serves as her mother.’

Example (12a) indicates that Akasi sings loud exactly the same way as she was taught to sing. The adverbial *kpole* ‘loud’ is used to express the manner in which the subject, *Akasi* sings in V<sub>1</sub>. In (12b) however, a comparative marker, *ke* ‘same’ is used to indicate the same competence in the act of preparing and serving food. It has been used to indicate that the subject, *Akasi* prepares food and serves it exactly the same way as her mother does.

### Interrogative SVC

Nzema SVCs can also be interrogative. The positive sentences in (5a) and (11a) have been reanalyzed in (13a) and (14a).

- (13) a. Boane bà dí alee

- Sheep.SG come.PRES eat.PRES food  
 ‘A sheep comes (and) eats food.’
- b. boane bà dí aleε ɔ  
 sheep.SG come.PRES eat.PRES food QP  
 ‘Does a sheep come (and) eat food?’
- (14) a. Kaku kòlà nríàndí kɔ́ sukulu  
 PN be able run.PRES go.PRES school  
 ‘Kaku can run (and) go to school.’
- b. Kaku kòlà nríàndí kɔ́ sukulu ɔ  
 PN be able run.PRES go.PRES school QP  
 ‘Can Kaku run (and) go to school?’

The question marker, ɔ in (13b) and (14b) have made the declarative statements in (13a) and (14a) to become interrogative.

### Properties of Nzema SVCs

In this section, some formal kinds of SVCs in Nzema are explored. These include monoclausal construction, argument sharing, tense-aspect sharing, polarity, and switch function serialization.

#### *SVCs as Monoclausal*

One major property of SVCs is that there must be no intervening coordinator or subordinator. However, when there is such a marker, it must necessarily be redundant. In other words, it must not carry any semantic or grammatical function (see Lee, 1992). Nzema SVCs constitute a single clause. Let us see from the examples in (15a) and (15b):

- (15) a. Kaku tíà kɔ́ sukulu  
 PN walk.PRES go.PRES school  
 ‘Kaku walks to school.’
- b. Kaku tɔ́ nane síè tɔ́ nè be  
 PN buy.PRES animal.PL rear.PRES sell.PRES 3PL.OBJ  
 ‘Kaku buys animals, rears (and) sells them.’

It can be observed from (15a) and (15b) above that, there is no explicit conjunction between the serial verbs. Other component(s) may, however, be allowed to intervene between verbs which do not mark the concept of SVCs as indicated in (b) above. This property deals with what Aikhenvald

(2006), referred to as contiguous elements against non-contiguous elements. This implies that the verbs in sequence may be connected to each other, or another element may be permitted to occur between them.

### Transitivity and Argument Types

Usually, the extent to which verbs in an SVC can govern object(s) is dependent on the second verb ( $V_2$ ). That is to say, the transitivity or intransitivity status of every SVC is governed by the second verb ( $V_2$ ) (Aikhenvald, 2006). Transitivity, in respect of verbs in serial construction, can best be deemed as a domain of argument sharing. Let us consider argument sharing in Nzema SVCs.

### Argument Form in Nzema SVC

Many opinions have been shared regarding how the subject or object must be shared in an SVC. Some argued that SVC must take and share an object (Baker, 1989). On the other hand, there are some opinions that are not in favour of this compulsory object sharing (see Osam, 1994b; Aikhenvald, 2006). Subject/object sharing is a significant characteristic of Nzema SVC. Both subject and object arguments may be shared. Both transitive and intransitive verbs can share a subject, but object is only shared when the verb is transitive.

This subsection, discusses a set of four (4) possible argument structures that can be found in Nzema SVC:

#### *i. Intransitive $V_1$ + Intransitive $V_2$*

The example in (16) below is a combination of two intransitively used verbs sharing their subject NP.

- (16) a. Aka      zèlè-lé              h`ɔ-lé  
           PN      laugh-PAST          go-PAST  
           ‘Aka laughed (and) went.’
- b. Toba      ne      b`ɔ-lé              zékyè-lé  
           Bottle    DET    crack-PAST      spoil-PAST  
           ‘The bottle cracked (and) spoilt.’

Example (16) involves two intransitive verbs that are serialised and does not include any internal argument sharing.

#### *ii. Intransitive $V_1$ + Transitive $V_2$*

According to the tenets of subject sharing hypothesis<sup>2</sup>, it is not obligatory for SVCs to share an object. Therefore, constituents that consist of both intransitive and transitive verbs are plausible in Nzema. Let us see from the examples below:

(17) a. Aka zú-nlè sèsà-lé ekpa ne  
 PN cry-PAST pick-PAST mat DET  
 ‘Aka cried (and) picked the mat.’

b. n-dwea kpɔ’sà kpòndé alee  
 PL-dog wander.PRES search.PRES food  
 ‘Dogs move about in search for food.’

### iii. *Transitive V<sub>1</sub> + Transitive V<sub>2</sub>*

Concatenation of two transitive verbs is also regular in Nzema SVCs, just as it is with two intransitive ones. Example (18) below is a combination of V<sub>1</sub> and V<sub>2</sub> transitive.

(18) a. Nyame tɔ’nè a-zua tɔ’ a-hale  
 PN sell.PRES PL-house buy.PRES PL-car  
 ‘Nyame sells houses to buy cars.’

b. Menla é-và ezukoa é-hílé Afiba  
 PN FOC-take.PERF money FOC-show.PERF PN  
 ‘Menla has picked some money (and) shown it to Afiba.’

Example (18) above represents an instance where an object is necessarily shared in Nzema SVCs. As a result of the fact that both verbs (V<sub>1</sub> and V<sub>2</sub>) are transitive and therefore, require the presence of a substantive subject and another argument.

### iv. *Transitive V<sub>1</sub> + Intransitive V<sub>2</sub>*

Another plausible V-V combination involves two verbs in which the first (V<sub>1</sub>) is transitive and the second (V<sub>2</sub>) is intransitive. Let us observe from example (19) given below:

(19) a. Soma tɔ’ saminla bíà  
 PN buy.PRES soap.PL bathe.PRES  
 ‘Soma buys soaps (and) bathes with them.’

<sup>2</sup> Lee’s SHH; Subject Sharing Hypothesis.

- b. Soma      bà-dó              εkpa              à-là  
 PN            FUT-spread          mat                PART-sleep  
 ‘Soma will spread the mat (and) will sleep (on it).’

From example (19), the objects *saminla* ‘soap’ and *εkpa* ‘mat’ though share their V<sub>1</sub>S, do not share their V<sub>2</sub>S. Relying on Lee’s SSH (subject sharing hypothesis), the only condition for object sharing is when two transitive verbs surface. In the examples, the object(s) is not shared because V<sub>2</sub> is not transitive. However, the subject, ‘Soma’ is shared by both V<sub>1</sub> and V<sub>2</sub>.

### Shared Tense/Aspect/ Polarity

SVCs sharing tense means that the verbs in series have no independent choice of tense or aspect (or mood) (Appah, 2009). As aspect or tense is marked on the first or second verb, all other following or initial verbs in the sequence are inherently marked by the same aspect or tense (as in Yimas (Foley & Olson, 1985)). This presupposes that it would be ungrammatical if the first verb is marked for the future or past and the other verbs are marked for the present. Below are examples. Those marked with asterisks indicate that the constructions are ungrammatical since the verbs in them are marked by independent aspects or tense.

- (20) a. Mieza      zèlè-lé              hílé-lé              yε  
 PN            laugh-PAST      show-PAST          3PL  
 ‘Mieza laughed at us.’
- b.\*Mieza      sèlè                  hílé-lé              ye  
 PN            laugh.PRES      show-PAST          3PL  
 ‘\*Mieza laughs showed us.’

From the examples above, tense and aspect markers occur on all the verbs. Despite the fact that the restriction on the individual selection of tense or aspect for verbs in SVCs may work in most serializing languages, there may be other ways through which some serialising languages deal with it. For instance, Nzema and Akan (a sister language), sometimes violate this constraint as shown in the Akan (a) and Nzema (b) examples below:

- (21) a. Kofi      à-sí                  nneema              rè-hàtá  
 PN      PERF-wash      cloth.PL      PROG-dry (Akan)  
 ‘Kofi has washed cloths (and) he is drying them.’
- b. Aka      é-dò                      kolonvia              é-lè-dí

PN FOC-cook.PERF food FOC-PROG-eat (Nzema)  
 ‘Aka has boiled an egg (and) he is eating it.’

The examples in (20a) and (21b) above attest to the fact that in Nzema, aspect and tense marker occurs on all the verbs and these verbs can be marked independently. It is worthy of noting, however, that a mixture of tense as in (20b) renders the construction ungrammatical; a mixture of aspect on the other hand, is grammatical as in (21b).

### Polarity Sharing

Polarity emanates from the notion that, usually, negative constructions are distinguished from the affirmative ones which create a distinction between positive and negative (Appah, 2009). Polarity sharing in SVCs therefore, concerns itself with those constructions that can be negated and those that cannot be negated. Discussing the typology of SVCs with respect to negation, Aikhenvald (2006), Ameka (2006), Sahoo (2001), Collins (1993), Noonan (1992), Durie (1988), among others agreed that verbs that constitute an SVC cannot be negated independently. In Nzema, however, all the verbs in the construction are negated individually. Let us consider the examples below:

- (22) a. Kofi lé kpole télà belemgbunli ne  
 PN be fat exceed king DET  
 ‘Kofi is fatter than the king.’
- b. Kofi é-ń-lè kpole é-ń-délà belemgbunli ne  
 PN FOC-NEG-be fat EMPH-NEG-exceed king DET  
 ‘Kofi is not fatter than the king.’
- c. ɔ-sòà ɔ-kɔ’ ɔ-bà  
 3SG-carry.PRES 3SG-go.PRES 3SG-come.PRES  
 ‘He/She carries it (and) go (and) come’
- d. ɔ-ń-zòà ɔ-ń-gɔ’ ɔ-ń-bà  
 3SG-NEG-carry 3SG-NEG-go 3SG-NEG-come  
 ‘He/she does not carry it (and) go (and) come.’

In example (22), we see that the verbs that are attached to their respective NPs are all negated, contrary to what has been discussed in the literature in respect of negation in SVCs.



## Switch-Function Serialization

Switch-function serialization in Nzema is generally the source of causative verbs. In causative serialization,  $V_2$  is usually dynamic and can be intransitive as in (23a) or transitive as in example (23b). In the latter instance,  $V_1$  shares the indirect object *Aka*, and the direct object *elue*.

- (23) a. Koame máá-nlè Aka zú-nlè  
 PN make-PAST PN cry-PAST  
 ‘Koame made Aka cry.’
- b. Koame máá -nlè Aka lí-lè elue  
 PN make-PAST PN eat-PAST yam  
 ‘Koame made Aka eat yam.’

## Concordant Marking in Nzema SVC

It is usually common for Nzema SVCs to comprise both principal subjects and other clitics, all referring to the principal subject. This type of SVC is termed as a concordial SVC (Williamson, 1989). There can be object clitics as well (as far as Nzema is concerned). Examples of such constructions are given below:

- (24) a. Kofi sòà ye aleε ne ɔ-kɔ́ ɔ-tɔ́nè  
 PN carry.PRES 3SG.SUB food DET 3SG.SUB-go.PRES  
 3SG.SUB-sell.PRES  
 ye  
 3SG.IMPERS  
 ‘Kofi carries his food, goes (and) sells it.’
- b. Kofi vélè-lé me zòà-nlé me gua nu  
 PN call-PAST 1SG send-PAST 1SG market POSTP  
 ‘Kofi called me (and) sent me to go to the market.’

In example (24a), it can be observed that there are three concordial subject clitics with a substantive subject NP. The first subject clitic is preceded by  $V_1$ , while the other two, are preceded by their respective verbs in the construction. In (24b), a subject and two object clitics can be seen. The person who did the ‘calling’ is Kofi (causer). The object, ‘causee’ is *me*, ‘me’ followed by the verbs in the construction.

## Discussion

The analysis demonstrated the fact that Nzema has two main types of SVC proposed in the literature; clause chaining and integrated SVCs. In the latter, the verbs were closely connected to form a single event while in the former, the events were loosely joined. Subject sharing in Nzema SVC is obligatory, however, object sharing is obligatory only when two transitive verbs form the construction. It was indicated that Nzema SVCs do not take multi agents, two direct objects or two instruments. There can however, be a concordial subject/object marking. With regard to transitivity, four different combinations of V-V are identified in Nzema. The current study showed that the analysis was not a comparative one, however, it is clear that Nzema SVCs consist of single clauses. Unlike in Yimas and some other serializing languages where verbs in the series are automatically specified, Nzema SVC sometimes violates this constraint. The assertion that verbs and form an SVC cannot be negated separately (Aikhenvald, [2006](#); Ameka, [2006](#); Sahoo, [2001](#); Collins, [1993](#); Noonan, [1992](#); Durie, [1988](#)) contrast the Nzema data.

## Conclusion

This paper has investigated the phenomenon of Serial Verb Constructions (SVCs) in Nzema. It delves into how argument is shared, in the structural and functional types of SVCs. It has been shown that, Nzema SVCs exhibit subject/object sharing. Subject sharing in Nzema SVC is necessary, however, object sharing is obligatory only when two transitive verbs are combined in the construction. The data have shown that Nzema SVCs do not take multi agents, two direct objects or two instruments. There can however, be a concordial subject/object marking. With regard to transitivity, four (4) different combinations of V-V were identified in Nzema. These include intransitive + intransitive; intransitive + transitive; transitive + transitive and transitive + intransitive. It has also been shown that aspect, tense, and negation are marked on all the verbs, whether in a two-verb series or three-verb series. Future markers come before the verbs while past markers occur after the verbs. Progressive aspect markers occur before the verbs. It has been demonstrated that it is not a strict requirement for verbs in Nzema SVC to share the same aspect but tense value. The observations deduced that the verbs are negated independently and are worthy to be noted. Moreover, Nzema SVCs can also be interrogative.

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### Abbreviations

QP	Question Particle	IMPER	Imperative
PL	Plural	INDEF	Indefinite (pronoun)
SG	Singular	NEG	Negation
1	First Person	OBJ	Object
3	Third Person	PART	Particle
DET	Determiner	PAST	Past Marker
EMPH	Emphasis	PERF	Perfect Marker
FOC	Focus Marker	PROG	Progressive Marker
PRES	Present Tense	POSTP	Post Position
IMPERS	Impersonal pronoun	PN	Personal Name
SUB	Subject	V1	First/Initial Verb
SHH	Subject Sharing Hypothesis	V2	Second Verb