

Argument, Adjunct or Neither: Emai Co-participant Serials

This investigation of southern Nigeria's Edoid language Emai examines a subset of its serial verb constructions. They have in common the identification and coding of a co-participant that is obligatorily human but not required by core verb argument structure. All reflect classic serial verb properties (Aikhenvald and Dixon 2006): a verb sequence sharing tense, aspect and polarity under a single intonation contour acting as a single predicate with no overt marking of clausal dependency. Each construction consists of a core verb (*vbaye* 'chat', *e* 'eat', *kɛn* 'share') preceded by a co-participant predicate (*kpaye* 'accompany', *kpaye* 'replace' and *de baa* 'join'): *óje kpayé' òlólò vbáyé* [Oje accompany Ololo chat] 'Oje chatted with Ololo'; *òjè kpayé' òlólò é ǒlí émàè* [Oje replace Ololo eat the food] 'Oje ate the food instead of Ololo'; and *óje dé' báá òlólò kɛn émàè* [Oje reach add.to Ololo share food] 'Oje shared food with Ololo / joined Ololo and shared food'.

Co-participant constructions were highlighted as part of the Leipzig Valency Project (LVP), where we identified lexical equivalents for a predetermined set of verb meanings and assessed their valency profile. Initially, co-participants were considered as possible core verb arguments. This was rejected since a co-participant was not entailed by core verb meaning. Subsequently, co-participant phrases were evaluated as possible adjuncts. This, too, was rejected since the co-participant corresponded neither to semantic notions typically associated with adjuncts, e.g. location, time or manner (Dixon and Aikhenvald 2000), nor to Emai question types reflecting such notions, e.g. *ébé* 'where', *éghè re* 'when' and *ébé i* 'how', respectively.

Despite their common co-participant coding, these constructions contrast in some key temporal, discourse and event properties, with *kpaye* 'replace' and *de baa* 'join' at opposite poles. For instance, *kpaye* serials answer the subject action question *émé' S ú-ì?* 'What did the Subject do?', while *de baa* serials do not. Similarly, *kpaye* can co-occur not only with a lexical verb but Emai's pro-verb *u* 'do' (*òjè kpayé' òlólò ú ǒí* [Oje replace Ololo do it] 'Oje did it instead of Ololo'), although *de baa* cannot (**óje dé' báá òlólò ú ǒí* [Oje reach add.to Ololo do it] 'Oje did it with Ololo / joined Ololo and did it'). *kpaye* serials allow each associated grammatical relation, subject and direct objects, to occur in left periphery focus position (e.g. *émáé mè lí óje kpayé' òlólò é* [food my PF Oje replace Ololo eat] 'It was my food that Oje instead of Ololo ate'), whereas *de baa* in this regard absolutely constrains its grammatical relations (e.g. **émàè lí óje dé' báá òlólò kɛn* [food PF Oje reach add.to Ololo share] 'It was food that Oje joined Ololo and shared'). Finally, *kpaye* constructions show imperfect continuous (C) aspect (*òjè ǒ ǒ kpayé' òlólò è ǒlí émàè* [Oje SC C replace Ololo eat the food] 'Oje is eating the food instead of Ololo') but *de baa* constructions do not (**òjè ǒ ǒ de baa òlólò kɛn émàè* [Oje SC C reach add.to Ololo share food] 'Oje is sharing food with Ololo / is joining Ololo and sharing food'). Subsequently, we consider *kpaye* 'accompany' construction behavior, which tends toward *kpaye* 'replace', although not absolutely so.

We conclude with a brief discussion of how these data fail to mesh with functions conventionally attributed to serial verbs, expression of verb arguments or creation of lexical items (Comrie 1995), and, instead, highlight functions related to information and aspectual structure.