

THREE-PLACE PREDICATES IN WEST AFRICAN SERIALIZING LANGUAGES

Felix K. Ameka
Leiden University

The widespread assumption that serializing languages use serial verb constructions (SVCs) to code three-participant situations and therefore lack three-place predicates and three-place mono-verbal constructions is shown not to be valid for West African serializing languages. Using Ewe (Gbe), Likpe (Na-Togo) and Akan (Tano) as exemplars, I demonstrate that these languages have trivalent predicates and various constructions in which a single verb hosts three arguments in a clause. The languages deploy three-place predicate, adpositional, SVC, and adnominal strategies to code three-participant situations. I argue that there are semantic differences between the various constructions. The hyper-transitivity of these languages might account for the presence of three-place predicate constructions.

1. Introduction¹

A widespread assumption in the literature on serializing languages is the claim that such languages use serial verb constructions (SVC) to code three-participant situations. The corollary of this assumption is that such languages do not have structures in which a single verb hosts three overt surface arguments (see e.g. Nylander 1997, and Delpianque 1998 for some other myths about verb serialisation). These assumptions may be valid for some serializing languages but do not apply across the board to all serializing languages. Even for those languages where it seems to hold, I would argue that other typological features of those languages contribute to the property rather than serialization as such.

¹ The ideas discussed here were first presented during the Dative Days at the Institut für Afrikanistik at the University of Cologne in June 2002. I am grateful to Erhard Voeltz who invited me and suggested the topic. I also thank the participants for their comments and animated discussions on grammaticalisation and transitivity. Sasha Aikhenvald also gave valuable comments on an initial draft. I am greatly indebted to Ron Schaefer for reviving its publication and to the anonymous referees for their comments and disagreements with some of my analyses. I hope I have satisfactorily responded to their skepticisms. I thank Tucker Childs for his patience and understanding.

With respect to West African languages, such a claim has been made by Dimmendaal (2001). He writes:

Cross-linguistically, there are different types of serial verb constructions ... Periphrastic causatives (make/give/let x do y), for example, are widespread cross-linguistically. The latter, however, are quite compatible with verbal valency-changing markers in a particular language, or with case marking strategies. In this sense they are not a predictor of a language type. *A central feature of West African languages with serial verbs however is the lack of three-place predicates. Instead, a second verb (prepositional verb, coverb, verbid) is required to host a third argument* (Dimmendaal 2001:384 emphasis added).

In the context of the distribution of serial verb constructions in West Africa, Dimmendaal argues that the languages that use them tend not to use verb derivational morphology for the coding of three-participant situations and suggests that serialization is the factor responsible for the paucity of three-place verbs, be they simple or derived. He notes:

Andy Pawley (p.c.) has suggested that the absence of three-place predicates in West African languages may be epiphenomenal. Whereas this observation no doubt is justified with respect to Papuan languages ... the situation in the case of the West African Niger-Congo languages must be different. Outside this spread zone for serial verbs, there is a widespread tendency to use verb morphology (Dimmendaal 2001:384-385).

My aim in this paper is to demonstrate that the assumptions relating to ditransitive verbs, three-place verb constructions, and verb serialization do not hold for West African serializing languages. I will show that these languages do have three-argument verbs of different kinds. They also have three-place constructions where a verb hosts three surface arguments. Furthermore, I will show that some verbs are ambivalent and can participate in different argument structure constructions in which case the construction licenses some of the arguments.

My illustrations are taken from three languages. I describe in detail three-place verbs and constructions in Ewe (Gbe), usually cited as a representative of a Kwa-type serialising language (cf. George 1975[1981]).² I set out the types of predicates and constructions

² The Ewe data are drawn from various sources: oral performances, folktales, and other verbal art genres and television and radio drama as well as written plays and fictional novels. Where the data come from the written sources, they are referred to in one of two ways: (i) if taken from the paper version, the author, year and page number are given. (ii) If cited from my electronic database of written Ewe, it is referenced with title of book with the concordance number in square brackets.

involving three-participant situations in the language. I complement it with a look at the same phenomena in two other languages Akan (Tano) and Likpe (Sekpelé), a Na-Togo language. It is shown that the phenomena in the three languages are very similar. I argue that the use of three-place constructions for coding three-participant situations is favoured by the presence of obligatory complement verbs or inherent complement verbs (Avolonto 1995, Essegbey 1999) in these languages leading to their hyper-transitive nature.³ From this point of view, the claim that the apparent lack of three-argument verbs in West African serializing languages may be an epiphenomenon reduces to a situation where that property is not a phenomenon at all. Rather what needs explanation are the differences between the West African languages in terms of the types of double object constructions they employ and the differences in the conditions under which serial verb constructions and double object constructions may be the linguistic representations of similar three-participant situations. For instance, under what conditions is the transfer of an item to a recipient more felicitously represented in a double object construction rather than a serial verb construction? We will see below that in Akan, for example, this depends on the definiteness of the thing transferred, while in Ewe it depends on whether the transfer takes place between two co-present participants.

The variation in the expression of three-participant states of affairs in languages with serial verb constructions is an indication that one should not treat serializing languages as a homogenous linguistic type, nor is there a serialisation parameter (Newmeyer 2004, see also Baker 1989, Déchaine 1993). One can talk, though, of areal types such as a West African type, an Oceanic type, a Papuan type or a Southeast Asian type. There are serializing languages which lack three-place constructions. For instance, Enfield (2007) demonstrates that the assumptions about three-place constructions and verb serialization are by and large true for Lao, a Southwestern Tai language of Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia. He shows, however, that even though verb serialization is the “most common and most productive way of structurally accommodating reference to three event participants in a single clause in Lao” (Enfield 2007:521), other strategies consistent with the general typological profile of the language are also used, namely, topic-comment structures as well as the pervasive use of ellipsis in discourse.⁴ Furthermore, these typological features noted for Lao are typical for the

The Likpe (Sekpelé) data come from my corpus of Likpe language gathered during fieldwork visits to the Likpe area since the mid 1990s. I am grateful to my language consultants especially Mr. E. K. Okyerefo and Justina Owusu for helping me to understand their language.

The Akan data are taken from the Akan linguistic literature, especially Osam 1994, and cross checked with Akan native speakers.

3 Kropp Dakubu (2010:2) notes for Ga, another Kwa serializing language of West Africa, that a verb may be intransitive, transitive or ditransitive and adds that “by far the most common configuration is transitive ... most verbs that occur ditransitively can also occur with one object.”

4 König and Heine (2007) report that !Xun, a Khoisan language of Namibia, has no ditransitive clauses but only monotransitive clauses, and SVCs participate in the expression of three-participant events. !Xun is thus another serializing language for which the assumptions seem to be valid.

mainland Southeast Asia area (isolating, topic-prominent, verb-serializing, widespread nominal ellipsis) so that the strategies outlined for Lao presumably hold for several other languages in the area.

But there is variation among these languages in this domain too. While in Lao when three-participant situations are expressed in a monoverbal clause, non-theme arguments may be marked as peripheral adjuncts, Diller (2006: 161) notes for Thai, a Tai-Kadai language closely related to Lao, that “about twenty ditransitive verbs including **hay**² ‘give’ admit AVOD (D being a dative-like indirect object).” Thus while it is tempting to say that the SE Asian type serializing languages conform to the widespread assumptions on the coding of three-participant events in such languages, one should be aware of possible variations among these languages.

Similarly, Margetts (2007) investigates the strategies used across the families of Oceania—another areal grouping of languages characterised by verb serialization (Crowley 2002, Bril & Ozanne-Rivierre (eds.) 2004). She finds that Oceanic languages use clauses with three-place predicates occurring with three surface arguments less commonly than European languages. She adds that “there are a large number of Oceanic languages that have no ditransitive ... verbs at all.” (Margetts 2007:124). Significantly, she attributes these features not to verb serialization but links them to another typological feature of these languages. She writes:

This tendency may be related to the typological characterization of Oceanic languages as preferred intransitive ... In preferred intransitive languages, the majority of basic verbs are intransitive, and most valency-changing processes are valency-increasing. If this is true, then deriving ditransitive verbs may require several steps and more morphosyntactic effort than in languages that are preferred transitive or neutral. So possibly the preference in Oceanic languages for strategies other than three-place predicates may be rooted, among other things, in their preferred intransitive set up. [p. 124]

Thus even though Oceanic languages are also serializing and many of them do not have ditransitive verbs, Margetts links this feature to the preference for intransitivity rather than serialization. I claim below that the presence of obligatory complement-taking verbs, including inherent complement verbs in the West African serializing languages, suggests that they have a preferred transitive set up which is not averse to ditransitive verbs and three-place constructions.

In fact the best piece of evidence, in my view, for the non-correlation between the use of three-place predicates or double object constructions and verb serialization seems to be provided by Creole languages. It appears that a large majority of Creole languages use double object constructions even those whose superstrates do not have double object constructions such as Papiamentu or Haitian Creole. These languages have the Romance languages, Spanish and French respectively, as their superstrates. And Romance languages do not seem to have

double object constructions. Fewer Creoles use serial verb constructions than use double object constructions. What is even more remarkable is that a Creole like Papiamentu which has double object constructions and serial verb constructions does not have the type of SVC called serial dative constructions, that is an SVC in which the final verb is a three-place verb of the “give” type (see Bruyn et al. 1999). Thus there does not seem to be a correlation. This paper demonstrates that West African serializing languages are another set of languages which shows that serializing languages do have double object constructions and three-place verbs.

Before turning to the phenomenon of three-place predicates, I will discuss another widespread assumption about what some would call the typical three-argument verb: ‘give’.

1.1 The tyranny of grammaticalization. Another widespread assumption is that the presumed typical three-place ‘give’ verb grammaticalizes into a dative preposition in the context of serial verb constructions in many serializing languages. This has happened in some of the West African serializing languages but by no means all. An implication that is further associated with this is that the grammaticalization leads to the loss of the lexical verb, thus spawning, if you like, the paucity of three-place verbs in these languages. Carol Lord has made such a claim with respect to Ewe. She writes the following about the form **ná** ‘GIVE’:

*The data suggest that the Ewe verb **ná** may be entering its decline: it appears infrequently as a main verb, and when it does it appears to allow non-standard object ordering; in serial constructions, where it commonly functions as a Recipient/Benefactive marker, modern speakers no longer conjugate it (Lord 1993:41, italics added).*

There are several things that are puzzling in this comment. First, is the claim that the form **ná** occurs infrequently as a main verb. This claim is not supported by any text counts of the author. I took a cursory look at a concordance page of an Ewe modern novel (Hlõbiabia ‘Seeking revenge’) for the bare form **ná**. Out of 42 lines, 9 of these are fully fledged three-place uses of the verb. The rest are serial verb constructions and some are prepositional uses. I believe if I did a more systematic count of all the forms of **ná** including those in which the verb is marked for various mood and aspect categories, a more complicated picture, which would not support the claim of the decline in the use of **ná** as a main verb, would emerge. Second, as we shall see below, the verb **ná** is not the only verb that occurs in the construction that Lord describes as involving the non-standard ordering of objects (see section 2). I argue below that this is a distinct double object construction type in the language. This is just an indication that the data suggest something different from what the grammaticalization literature would like us to believe (cf. Ameka 2006a on some other untenable claims about grammaticalization in Ewe).

1.2 The organisation and assumptions of the paper. The rest of the paper is structured as follows: First, I discuss the different types of three-place constructions in Ewe as representative of the Gbe languages. I show that there are at least three types of three-place constructions in the language and the verbs that occur in these structures do host three surface arguments in a clause. I also show that some transitive verbs can occur in some of these three-place constructions showing their productivity. Next, other strategies for coding three-participant situations such as the serial verb constructions and the dative and allative prepositional constructions are described. Some verbs require these prepositional constructions obligatorily in their three-place function. This is followed by a summary of the structures used for coding three-participant situations in two other Kwa languages: Akan as a representative of the Tano group and Likpe (Sèkpelé) as a representative of the Ghana-Togo Mountain languages group. The section on Ewe is more detailed than those of the other two languages. This is because Ewe is considered a prototypical verb serialising Kwa language. In addition, it has been claimed that verb serialisation in the GTM languages, and for that matter in Likpe, is contact-induced (Dimmendaal 2001). Ewe would have been the conduit for this transfer (Ameka 2006b). The Likpe data presented shows that even if it changed its profile to a serialising language this has not led to impoverishment in its ditransitive verbs or three-place constructions.

Margetts and Austin (2007) provide a descriptive typology for the coding of three-participant situations. They identify seven major strategies with subtypes. The major strategies are exemplified as far as possible from English and the subtypes are omitted in the list below:

(i) Three-place predicate strategy: All three-participants are expressed as syntactic arguments of the verb.

John baked Mary a cake.

(ii) Oblique and adjunct strategies: The verb takes two arguments, a third participant is expressed as an oblique argument or an adjunct.

John baked a cake for Mary.

(iii) Serial verb strategy: Two (or more) verbs combine in a complex construction and share the three participants as arguments (or adjuncts) between them. See the examples provided from the serializing languages below.

(iv) Incorporation strategy: One participant is expressed by an incorporated nominal. The a. example shows the incorporation while the b. example is a manifestation of the direct strategy. E.g. Bininj Gun-wok (Non-Pama-Nyungan, Northern Australia)

- a. Gamak gan-bolk-bukka-n ge.
 good 2/1-country-show-NPST your
 ‘It’s good that you will show me your country.’ (Evans 2003: 452)
- b. Gamak gan-bukka-n gun-bolk ge.
 good 2/1-show-NPST class4-country your
 ‘It’s good that you will show me your country.’ (Nick Evans p.c. 2003)

(v) Adnominal strategy: The verb takes two arguments, a third participant is expressed as an adnominal dependent of one of the arguments.

They stole his money.

(vi) Directional strategy: The verb takes two arguments and an adverbial directional marker indicating transactional orientation. E.g. Maori (Oceanic, New Zealand)

Naa te kurii i mau mai te raakau.
 ACTGEN the dog TAM bring hither the stick
 ‘The dog brought me a stick.’

In this example, it is only the directional particle *mai* ‘hither/towards the speaker’ which codes the recipient.

(vii) Absorption strategy: There are two arguments in the clause but the verb includes information about a further participant. (Margetts and Austin 2007:402)

- a. We shelved the books.
 b. They bottled the wine.

I doubt if West African languages employ the incorporation or directional strategies. Even though the adnominal and absorption strategies may be represented,⁵ we will be concerned primarily with the first two strategies with some remarks on the third.

⁵ In fact, the predicate meanings that Margetts and Austin discuss as cases of lexical absorption such as English ‘kick’, ‘punch’ and ‘stab’ in which the instruments such as foot, fist and knife are absorbed in the verb, are not available in many West African languages. For these languages, these instruments have to be explicitly expressed for the sentence to be grammatical. These instruments are inherent objects, and the patient or target is coded as second or Dative (Goal) objects. For instance, to express the idea of ‘stab someone’ Ewe uses the expression *tó hē ame* ‘contact knife person’. Margetts and Austin’s

2. Ewe (Gbe)

The first of the languages to be discussed is Ewe, a Gbe (Kwa, Niger-Congo) language spoken in southeastern Ghana across to southern Togo and just across the Togo–Benin border. Ewe is a tone language, morphologically isolating with agglutinative features with constituent order marking grammatical relations. It has AVOD and SV order and syntax. It is an aspect prominent language and does not have grammatical tense.

The structure of a verb cluster is shown in Table 1, where a verb stem may be marked for aspect by a suffix and/or preceded by a host of other preverbs that signal aspect, modality and directionality (see Ameka 2008a). The irrealis markers in column 1—the potential and the subjunctive—are mutually exclusive with each other, and also with the Habitual marker in the final column. A value of the realis/irrealis domain has to be expressed in each verbal clause in Ewe.

Table 1: Ewe verb complex

Preverb markers						Verb	
Modal 1	Aspect	Directional 1	Modal 2	Modal 3	Directional 2		Aspect Suffix
Potential (l)a	Repetitive ga	Itive hé	Certainty nyá	Immediate gbé	Ventive vá	Verb root	Aorist Ø
Subjunctive ná-		Altrilocal ɖa	Voice nyá	Bother xa			Habitual -(n)a

About one third of the verb roots in the lexicon are intransitive. Almost all of these are ambitransitive. When most of these verbs occur in transitive structures, the S argument can either surface as A or O. For only a handful, for example **dze** ‘land’, is the S argument realized as A. A majority of Ewe verbs take obligatory complements. The complement functions as a direct argument of the verb. In addition, there are several types of ditransitive or trivalent verbs, as we shall see below. Virtually all verbs participate in multiple argument realization, some of them involving event composition, i.e., having semantic implication, while others reflect a difference in perspective-taking (Levin and Rappaport-Hovav 2005; and see e.g. Ameka 2008b, Bobuafor 2001, Bobuafor et al. 2006/7, Essegbey 1999 for discussions of Ewe verbal alternations).

assumption, then, that this absorption strategy is “present in most if not all languages of the world” would have to be read as “most but not all”.

For Ewe, one can identify three distinct grammatical constructions, by which I mean form-meaning pairings with sub-constructions in some cases, which are used to characterize three-participant situations. We will label these the THEME-GOAL Double Object Construction; the GOAL-THEME Double Object Construction and the Object Complement Construction. In these constructions, three surface NP constituents function as direct arguments of a single predicate. There are two distinct constructions in which the third argument in a three-place construction is coded as an oblique. These are labeled after the prepositional head of such constituents as the DATIVE OBLIQUE three-place construction and the ALLATIVE OBLIQUE three-place construction. Each of these will be described in turn.

2.1 The THEME-GOAL three-place construction. This construction, whose semantics can be characterized, following Essegbey (1999), as ‘caused transfer’ has the following structure:

Actor (= X) – V – THEME (=Y) – GOAL (=Z)

Essegbey (1999:170) argues that “there are three specific ways in which the transfer is encoded and each instantiation is dependent on the semantics of the particular verbs. The three senses are represented below:

- a. X causes Y to undergo a change of location towards Z
- b. X causes Y to make contact with Z
- c. X causes Y to be located at Z”

There are various classes of verbs that enter this construction. The first are the typical three core participant verbs such as *ná* ‘give’ *tsyé* ‘give a gift’, *fiá* ‘teach/show’ *biá* ‘ask’, *dó* ‘send (someone) for something’.

- (1) *Kofi fiá agble-a dɛvi-á-wó*
 NAME show farm-DEF child-DEF-PL
 ‘Kofi showed the farm (to) the children’

For this sub-construction, the THEME argument is not an inherent complement of the verb. Some of the verbs that participate in it can, however, take inherent complements such as the collocations *fiá así* [show hand] ‘point to’ or *dó dɔ* [send work] ‘send on an errand’. These require a second object to be used felicitously, showing that these verbs are primarily trivalent. Even though these complements are described as inherent, it does not mean that they do not represent independent participants in the situation. Moreover, it has been demonstrated by e.g. Essegbey 1999, 2010 and Ameka 2008b, that these inherent complements are direct arguments of the verb.

Similarly, a second group of verbs that occur in the THEME-GOAL three-place construction are those that have an inherent complement filling the THEME slot (see Essegbey 2003, 2010). The verbs in this group have the generic entity nominal **nú** ‘thing’ as the inherent object. These verb phrases are of two kinds: those like **xlɔ nú Z** ‘advise Z’ where the **nú** ‘thing’ cannot be substituted for by anything else (although it can be modified) and others like **te nú Z** ‘deny something to Z’ where the thing can be made specific, as in (2).

- (2) Dadá-á te núɖuɖu-i
 mother-DEF drag food-3SG
 ‘The mother denied her/him food.’

These verbs require a third argument to be expressed for them to be used felicitously in a clause.

A third sub-construction of the THEME-GOAL family of constructions is one in which the THEME is an inherent complement and it is a body part. In the instantiations of this construction the THEME body part is construed as part of the Actor argument. They may be interpreted as the Actors causing a part of their body to make contact with another entity. Depending on the semantics of the verb (phrase), the instantiation may be interpreted as experiential as in (3a) in which case the GOAL argument is construed as an experiencer (Ameke 1990, 2002a). In (3b-3f) I list several verb phrases with generic nouns as place holders to illustrate the ubiquity of expressions that belong to this sub-construction.

- (3) a. ɖeví mamlea-á-wó á-va ŋu-i
 child rest-DEF-PL POT-move EYE-3SG
 ‘The other children would be jealous of him/her.’
- b. ɖó ŋkú náné dzí
 set eye something surface
 ‘remember something’
- c. ká fe ame
 break.off nail person
 ‘pinch someone to give info’
- d. mia así ame
 signal hand person
 ‘beckon someone’

- e. tó así náné dží
 contacth and something surface
 ‘identify/select something’
- f. tu kó ame
 ram fist person
 ‘punch someone’

Another sub-construction of the THEME-GOAL three-place construction is used to express causative situations in which the GOAL argument is a causee. These typically involve the verb **dó** ‘PUT, CAUSE’

- (4) a. srɔ̃-a dó mɔ́-e
 spouse-DEF PUT road-3SG
 ‘Her husband dispatched her.’
 i.e. gave her the necessary authority and supplies to go
- b. é-dó du sɔ́-á
 3SG-PUT race horse-DEF
 ‘He set the horse to run.’

Some predicates with causative motion readings can participate in the THEME-GOAL construction. These predicates include **da** ‘THROW, release a projectile’ and **fú** ‘move limbs in medium’. Instantiations of this sub-construction indicate that an Actor causes a THEME to come in contact with a GOAL which could be interpreted as a location, as illustrated in (5).

- (5) a. Kofí da bólu-ɔ Yawo
 NAME discharge ball-DEF NAME
 ‘Kofi threw a ball at Yawo.’
- b. Kofí fú así nǔ
 hand move.limb hand mouth
 ‘Kofi hit his hand against his mouth.’/ ‘Kofi raised an alarm.’

A final sub-construction of the THEME – GOAL double object construction is one in which the predicate **wɔ** ‘do, make, cause’ functions as the verb. Consider the following examples.

- (6) a. tsi.dza.dza wɔ nú-m ló
rain do thing-1SG UFP
'The rain did something (=something bad) to me.'
- b. é-wɔ náné nɔví-á
3SG-do something sibling-DEF
'She did something (=something bad) to her sibling.'

The GOAL argument in such constructions is construed as being negatively affected by the event directed at them. For a benefactive reading to be realized with this predicate the GOAL argument has to be coded as a Dative Prepositional object as we shall see below.

2.2 The GOAL–THEME three-place construction. The prototypical trivalent verbs, namely, *ná* 'give' *tsyé* 'give a gift', *fiá* 'teach/show' *bíá* 'ask', *dó* 'send (someone) for something' occur in this construction where the iconic order of an Actor transfers a Theme to a Goal participant is reversed. In this structure the GOAL precedes the THEME, as shown in (7). Compare (7) with (1) above.

- (7) Kofi fiá ɖɛví-á-wó agble-a
NAME show child-DEF-PL farm-DEF
'Kofi showed the children the farm.'

Interestingly, the GOAL-THEME construction is a marked structure in Ewe and other Gbe lects. It involves a gestalt reversal. However, this is the basic construction for double object constructions in other Kwa languages including Akan (see below) and several Ghana-Togo-Mountain Languages such as Likpe (see below), Logba (Dorvlo 2008) Tafi (Bobuafor 2013) and Nyagbo.

2.3 Three-place object complement constructions. These are constructions in which there are two post-verbal NPs with one of them optionally flagged as secondary predicate, marked by the Predication marker -i, written as 'e' in the examples (see Ameka and Schultze-Berndt 2000, Ameka 2005a). Object complements of two classes of verbs occur as second post-verbal NPs.

The first set are certain factive verbs that take 'object complements', e.g. *wɔ* 'do, make', *ɖó* 'set', *kpa* 'carve', *gbi* 'weave', *tiá* 'elect', *ɲlo* 'write' (cf. Amuzu 1993: 61-72).

- (8) a. du-a ɖó Kofi fia-e
town-DEF install NAME chief-PRED
'The town installed Kofi as chief.' (Amuzu 1993: 62)

- b. wó-ɲlɔ wó nya ɖɛká-e
 3PL-write 3PL word one-PRED
 ‘They write them as one word.’ (Collins 1993: 24, cited from an orthography manual)

The second set of predicates are verbs of perception and cognition which also take ‘object complements’, e.g. **kpɔ** ‘see’, **bu** ‘think’ (cf. Amuzu 1993: 61-72).

- (9) Áma kpɔ srɔ̃-a ga-tɔ-e
 Name see spouse-DEF money-owner-PRED
 ‘Ama saw her husband as a rich person.’ (Amuzu 1993: 61)
- (10) ... gaké mié-bu wó nánéké-e o
 but 1PL:NEG-think3PL nothing-PRED NEG
 ‘...but we did not think them anything (i.e. we did not think anything of them)’
 (Ayeke 1996: 82)

Margetts and Austin (2007) exclude such object complement structures from their typological survey because the three surface constituents do not represent distinct entities. I include them here, first, because the object complement behaves in all respects like a direct argument, for instance with respect to extraction for focus. A second reason is because on the surface the three constituents appear with some of the predicates that occur in other three-place constructions, e.g. the factive verbs. In fact, Margetts and Austin admit that such structures may be ditransitive. In the next two sections we look at three-participant constructions in which one of the participants is coded as an oblique or a prepositional object. Two prepositions are typically used in Ewe for this: the Dative **ná** and the Allative **ɖɛ**.

2.4 DATIVE OBLIQUE three-place constructions. For various three-participant situations, one of the participants is coded as the object of the dative preposition **ná**. This is the case with the coding of addressees of routines (11), in speech act verb constructions (12) and in delocutive constructions with the verb **dó** ‘PUT, cause, say’ as in (13).

- (11) me-dá akpé ná wò
 1SG-PUT thanks DAT 2SG
 ‘I thank you.’
- (12) Dziɖuɖu ɖɛ adzɔgbe ná Agbeko bé ...
 government remove destiny DAT NAME QT
 ‘The government has sworn to Agbeko that ...’ (Hõbiabia [18])

- (13) Mía-fé Fia-gá Agokóli ... dó gbe ná mi.
 1PL-POSS chief-big NAME PUT voice DAT 2PL
 ‘Our supreme chief Agokoli ... greets you.’ (Kwamuar1997: 15)

Similarly, Experiencers in experiential situations involving three participants where the Stimulus functions as the grammatical subject are also coded as dative prepositional objects, as shown in (14) (cf. Ameka 1990).

- (14) a. nya lá kú dzi nê
 word DEF die heart DAT:3SG
 ‘The matter angered him/her.’
- b. é-fá akó ná-m
 3SG-cool bosom DAT-1SG
 ‘She comforted me.’

The subjective evaluator or experiencer in evaluative and emotive modal constructions involving three-participants is also coded as a dative prepositional object. In these structures one of the participants is a situational participant realized as an impersonal pronominal subject in the matrix clause. The content of the situational participant may be spelled out in a complement clause (Ameka 2008a). For example:

- (15) é-dzo dzi ná-m bé nye mâ-gblé wò dji o
 3SG-straighten heart DAT-1SG QT 1SG NEG:POT-spoil 2SG down NEG
 ‘It pleases me that I will not leave you behind.’

Furthermore, the affected possessor in external possessive constructions, which also constitute three-participant situations, is also coded as a dative prepositional object (cf. Ameka 1996).

- (16) Kofi ñé afɔ nê
 NAME break leg DAT:3SG
 ‘Kofi broke his (someone else’s) leg.’ lit: Kofi broke leg to him.
- (17) srɔ̄-a fo tó.me nê
 spouse-DEF hit ear.containing.region DAT:3SG
 ‘His spouse slapped him’ lit: ‘His spouse hit ear region for him.’

This construction is also used to introduce dative arguments more generally such as recipients, e.g. 18 a., b., beneficiaries as well as maleficiaries, e.g. 18 c.

- (18) a. é-ɲlɔ agbalẽ ná é-dzilá-wó
 3SG-write letter DAT 3SG-parent-PL
 ‘He wrote a letter to his parents.’
- b. núfiáláqó dɔ ná sukuví-á-wó
 teacher set work DAT pupil-DEF-PL
 ‘The teacher set work for the pupils.’
- c. kpovítɔ-wó dó fe na dráiva lá
 police-PL put debt DAT driver DEF
 ‘The police heaped a debt on to the driver.’

As is evident from the examples, many of the situations for which a third participant is required and coded through a dative oblique construction in Ewe would normally surface with two participants in a language like English. In this sense Ewe has many more situations presented as involving three participants which surface as three arguments in a clause even if one is oblique.

2.5 ALLATIVE OBLIQUE three-place constructions. The allative oblique construction is used to code the GOAL as an indirect argument of some three-participant situations. This construction can be used to characterise a transfer event involving a targeted recipient coded as the allative complement where the implication is that it is not known whether the GOAL argument came to have the transferred entity, as illustrated in (19).

- (19) é-dó agbalẽ dqé é-dzilá-wó
 3SG-set letter ALL 3SG-parent-PL
 ‘S/he sent a letter to his/her parents.’

The endpoint target of a movement or a caused motion event is also coded as an oblique allative object, as in (20).

- (20) a. é-da avɔ dqé abɔ
 3SG-throw cloth ALL arm
 ‘He has draped cloth over his shoulder.’
- b. dqeví-á da ga-a dqé kplɔ-a dzi
 child-DEF throw money-DEF ALL table-DEF upper surface
 ‘The child put the money on the table.’

Addressees of speech acts that are negatively affected are also coded as objects of the allative preposition.

- (21) é-dó ɣlí dɛ́ dɛ́ví-á-wó dzí
 3SG-say shout ALL child-DEF-PL upper surface
 ‘He shouted at the children.’

2.6 Serial verb constructions with three-place verbs in final verb position. Most of the three-participant situations characterised by the various three-place constructions described so far can be paraphrased as serial verb constructions. SVCs are thus just one of the many options in the language for coding three participants in a single clause in Ewe (see Collins 1997, Ameka 2006c and references therein on Ewe SVCs). When three-place predicates occur in SVCs they typically occupy the final verb position in such clauses, and their direct objects are the semantic dative or GOAL participants, but they share the other arguments of the other verb(s) in the series. Consider the following sentences.

- (22) a. é-dɛ dɛ́ví lá fíá ame-wó
 3SG-remove child DEF show person-PL
 ‘S/he introduced the child to the people.’
- b. wó-mé-tsó-á belélé ádéké hã ná-á núkú-á-wó o
 3PL-NEG-take-HAB care INDEF also give-HAB crop-DEF-PL NEG
 ‘They do not also give any care to the crops.’ (Hlõbiabia 3116)
- c. é-tu así-i fú anyí
 3SG-hit hand-3SG move.limb ground
 ‘S/he shoved him/her to the ground.’
- d. é-ɲlo agbalẽ dɔ́ dɛ́ é-edzilá-wó
 3SG-write letter place ALL 3SG-parent-PL
 ‘S/he wrote a letter to the parents.’

There are different motivations for coding three-participant situations in an SVC than, say, in a double object construction. This may be semantic. For instance, the SVC in (22a) is the only way to express the idea of ‘introducing someone to someone else’. If the verb **fíá** ‘show’ is used in a comparable double object construction it only entails that the people (the dative participant) could see the person (but may not know anything more about the person). The SVC implies that the dative participant gets some more information about the person. Also an ‘A-take-X-give-Y’ SVC entails that A and Y are co-present when the transfer takes place.

However, for a double object construction with ‘give’ the Agent and Goal participants need not be in contact.

In the rest of the paper we look briefly at two other languages—Likpe and Akan—which are also serializing and yet have three-place predicates which surface with three arguments in a single clause.

3. Likpe (Sekpelé)

Likpe (autonym Sekpelé) is a Na-Togo, Kwa, language. It is head-marking at the clause level as well as a serializing language and has several predicates which surface with three arguments in a clause. The verbs in a Likpe serial verb construction (SVC) must share the same Subject. The Subject is expressed on subsequent verbs by a Subject pronominal concord. In addition, Sekpelé has retained a number of verb derivational suffixes. These include the productive causative *-sɔ́* and the associative *-ko* and a semi-productive “contactive” extension *-fɔ́*. Each of these can be used to introduce a core third argument into an otherwise transitive clause (Ameka 2009b).

There are three double complement constructions. In one type of double object construction in the semantic frame of TRANSFER the DATIVE or GOAL argument precedes the THEME. In another type the THEME precedes the LOCATIVE. This LOCATIVE is used for PLACEMENT events. While the order of the TRANSFER construction is fixed, in the PLACEMENT construction the Figure (THEME) Ground (LOCATIVE) alignment can be reversed where the LOCATIVE precedes the THEME. A third structure with two complements is one in which the second complement is a situational argument, and is typically coded as a nominalized verb. This structure is used to characterize various circumstantial aspects of states of affairs such as modality, attitudinal meanings and aspect (see Ameka 2009a for more details on participant coding).

3.1 The GOAL THEME or Dative Double Object Construction. In this construction, the Dative or GOAL argument occurs in the immediate post-verbal position while the THEME argument occurs after it. This order of the Dative and the Theme arguments is fixed and cannot be reversed. Roughly speaking, the message of such a construction is (caused) transfer:

Someone (Actor) does something (Verb) to something else (THEME)
 Because this person (Actor) wants someone else (GOAL) to have this thing (THEME)

Several verbs participate in this construction: the prototypical transfer verbs such as *tɔ́* ‘give’ or *té* ‘show, teach, sell’ used to describe three-participant events are found in this construction.

- (23) a. mɔ̃ anto ə-tá li-kpéfi ná-má a-taabí
 1SG father SCR-give CM-child AGR-DET CM.PL-cowry
 ‘My father gave the child money.’
- b. fə tó me si-kpi
 2SG give 1SG CM-fear
 ‘You frighten me.’

Handling verbs such as the verb **tá** ‘handle an instrument with a long dimension to do something to something else’, glossed as ‘shoot, kick, sling’ also occurs in this three-place construction as illustrated in (24).

- (24) Sáka à-tà u-kiti ko-tá
 Name SCR-shoot CM-wolf CM-gun
 ‘Saka shot (the gun) the wolf.’

Furthermore, a verb like **di** ‘eat, experience’ can be used in the dative double object construction to describe a speaking event. The ‘eating’ verb then surfaces with minimally three arguments. Consider the following example.

- (25) o-sani á-má ə-dí wə u-síá li-tikí mínimíni
 CM-man AGR-DEF SCR-eat 3SG CM-wife CM-word sweet
 ‘The man said something sweet to his wife.’

Some contact verbs such as **sɔ̃** ‘strike’ also participate in the dative double object construction. Another such verb is **sé** ‘be接触ed’ which can be used in a three-place construction to describe a stabbing event where it is presented as an Actor moves a theme (instrument), e.g. a knife, and makes contact with a dative Object, see (26).

- (26) li-kpéfi ná-má a-sé wə ə-xɔ̃ le-síábí
 CM-child AGR-DEF SCR-be.contacted 3SG CM-friend CM-knife
 ‘The child stabbed his friend.’

The ‘do’ verb in Likpe **yifó** ‘do’, like its counterpart in Ewe and Akan, can surface with three arguments in a mono-verbal clause as in (27).

- (27) u-yifo me u-tídi yí-yí
 3SG-do 1SG CM-person RED-know
 ‘He is a known person to me.’

A causativised verb such as **yi-só** ‘full-CAUS’ also surfaces with three arguments in a clause as shown in (28).

- (28) yi-só mɛ tánki
 full-CAUS 1SG tank
 ‘Fill the tank for me.’

It is important to note that each of the instantiations of the construction can be expressed in alternative constructions such as SVCs and even adnominal constructions where the verb may surface with two arguments and the third participant coded as a dependent of one of them. Thus an alternative way of expressing (28) is (29) which is a two-place construction in which the direct object argument is a possessive phrase representing two arguments (hence not a three place construction) but three participants, hence a three-participant expression.

- (29) yi-só mɔ tánki
 full-CAUS 1SG tank
 ‘Fill my tank’

The difference between the structures described in this section and the next is in the semantic role of the GOAL argument. In the construction described in the next section it is a Locative while in previously discussed constructions it has been a Dative. Another difference between the two constructions is that the THEME-LOCATIVE construction has an alternative construction involving Figure-Ground reversal.

3.2 The THEME-LOCATIVE Double Object construction. This construction is used in the description of three-participant situations involving change of location or placement of entities. Locative verbs used to express caused change of location such as **kpé** ‘be.in’, **tókó** ‘be.on’, **tó** ‘throw’ and **bóko** ‘bring’ (from **bó** ‘come’ **-ko** ‘ASOOC’) participate in this construction. Examples of two of these verbs in this construction are given in (30).

- (30) a. ɔ-fu Kɔdzó á-má le-bokó a-sóle kú sikuu ka-kpelé-só
 Name Name AGR-DEF DEP-bring CM-church LINK school CM-Likpe-land
 ‘ɔfu Kɔdzo brought church and school to Likpe land.’
- b. u-tókó ko-fā le-fabé
 3SG-be.on CM-medicine CM-wound
 ‘He put medicine on the wound/sore.’

A sub-construction of this structure is that the order of the Theme and the Locative Objects can be reversed yielding a different gestalt relation between Figure and Ground. Thus a variant of (30b) with LOCATIVE-THEME order is shown in (31).

- (31) u-tákó le-fabé ko-fâ
 3SG-be.on CM-wound CM-medicine
 ‘He put medicine on the wound/sore.’

3.3 The Double Complement Construction. In this construction one of the post-verbal constituents is formally a nominalised verb. Verbs can be nominalised in Likpe, and gerund forms are derived by prefixing the class marker **bV-** to verb roots.⁶ Such forms behave like any other nouns and can fill argument positions in a clause. Where the nominalisation involves a verb and its internal argument the [V – NP] order is permuted. The verbs that participate in this construction include verbs of wanting such as **la** ‘want’, **ni** ‘refuse’ and operator verbs in constructions involving the modelling of states of affairs with respect to aspect or modality such as **lé** ‘hold’ in the present progressive construction (see Ameka 2002b) or **fo** ‘can’ in the ability modal construction.

This construction is also used to code three-participant situations; the main or operator verb has two complements the second of which is a nominalised verb. There is a close relationship between the two complements in the sense that the immediate post verbal complement tends to be an internal argument of the nominalised verb constituent. In terms of roles, the first complement is like a GOAL more broadly construed and the second complement is a Theme. A reviewer challenges the claim that such structures involve three participants especially given the close relationship between the nominalised verb complement and its internal argument. First of all, the nominalised verb complement behaves in all senses as an event nominal. It can be extracted for, for example, focus independently of its internal argument. Moreover, the relationship that exists between the two complements is parallel to the structural relation that has been proposed to exist between bona fide double objects in X-bar treatments, see e.g. Hellan 1988. I maintain that these structures are clauses in which a verb surfaces with three NPs which can be considered as semantic participants.

- (32) a. li-kpéfi nǎ-mó a-ni le-sa bú-di
 CM-child AGR-DEF SCR-refuse CM-thing CM-eat
 ‘The child refused to eat the food’

⁶ The V in bV- stands for a back vowel that agrees in ATR and /or height with the vowel in the first syllable of the verb, e.g. bó-be ‘looking’, bú-di ‘eating’, bǎ-sǎ ‘hitting’, etc.

- b. moo-fo fə bɔ́-sɔ́ né ló
 1SG:POT-can 2SG CM-hit INFER UFP
 ‘I can hit you, you know’ [A mother threatening a child]

Even if one does not want to accept that on the surface there are three syntactic participants represented, one would have to concede that there are three semantic participants and maybe two of those are coded in a way similar to the adpositional strategy as discussed and exemplified above. Example (29) above is an illustration of this for Likpe.

The three constructions described so far are structures in which all three participants in a situation are coded as direct arguments of the verb. In the next section we look at a construction in which a third participant, a locative argument, is coded as an oblique object of the locative preposition **lɔ́** ‘LOC’.

3.4 LOCATIVE Oblique constructions. An alternative structure to the Double Object THEME-LOCATIVE construction is one in which the participant that has the Locative role fills an oblique function and is marked by the locative preposition **lɔ́** ‘LOC’. Some change of location verbs such as **kpɔ́** ‘be.heaped’ and **tsyí** ‘carry’ occur in this structure.

- (33) ú-tsyi bi-kə lɔ́ di-sí
 3SG-carry CM-load LOC CM-head
 ‘He carried luggage on his head.’

In the description of three-participant situations involving removal, lending, borrowing, renting, stealing etc. the locative source participant is coded as an oblique locative argument marked by the locative preposition. For example:

- (34) o-teasá a-hayí dí-yó lɔ́ Sáka e.flɔ
 CM-teacherSCR-rent CM-room LOC NAME place
 ‘The teacher rented a room from Saka.’

Similarly, the representation of speaking events can involve three participants and in this case the TOPIC participant, that is, the constituent that represents the entity talked about, is coded as an oblique locative argument as in (35).

- (35) wəə-dí ə-tikí kpɛ lɔ́ li-kpéfi nɔ́-mó əsúó
 3SG:HAB-eat CM.PL-word plenty LOC CM-child AGR-DEF surface
 ‘S/He says a lot of things (words) about that child.’

External possessor constructions with bivalent predicates surface with three arguments in a clause. The third argument, the possessee, in such constructions is marked by the locative preposition as shown in (36).

- (36) le-kpakpa kpé wə ló li-sí
 CM-hat be.in 3SG LOC CM-head
 Lit. 'A hat is on him at head.'

Thus far we have presented monoverbal constructions in which three arguments surface with a verb in a clause. In three of the constructions all three arguments are direct arguments of the verb, while in one case the third argument is an oblique. In the next section we show that Likpe also uses serial verb constructions (SVCs) to code situations involving three participants. In these structures, as is usual in serializing languages if one of the verbs involved is a three-place verb it occurs in the last verb slot in the construction.

3.5 Serial verb constructions. Serial verb constructions of different types also host three arguments in a clause. Situations involving three participants such as caused location, handling (see 37) and transfer (38 a., b.) can be expressed in SVCs. Such situations, as we have seen, can also be coded in monoverbal structures.

- (37) ú-fi o-fia á-mó o-k(e)lé lí-si
 3SG-take CM-headkerchief AGR-DEF 3SG-tie CM-head
 'She used a headkerchief to tie (around) (her) head.'

- (38) a. u-síó á-mó á-ba a-taabí u-tó wə
 CM-woman AGR-DEF SCR-loan CM.PL-cowry 3SG-give 3SG
 u-só
 CM-husband
 'The woman loaned money to her husband.'

- b. moo-ya ka-mó n-tó be-kpéfi bá-mó
 1SG:POT-buy CM-rice 1SG-give CM.PL-child AGR-DEF
 'I will buy rice for the children.'

Thus, Likpe, a clause level head-marking language with verb derivational affixes, makes use of three sub-constructions of three-place predicate constructions, predicates with oblique arguments and SVCs for coding three-participant situations. SVCs are but one option. In the next section a similar picture emerges for Akan which is not head-marking and does not have verb derivational affixes.

4. Akan

Akan belongs to the Tano subgroup of Kwa languages. Grammatical relations are predominantly determined by constituent order. It has SV and AVO order in intransitive and transitive clauses respectively. Inanimate pronominal objects are null. It has inherent complement verbs and deploys serial verb constructions. In ditransitive clauses it has a strict GOAL-THEME order for objects. As Osam (1996:62) puts it: “All ditransitive verbs in the language allow indefinite Theme NPs, but very few of them permit a definite Theme NP.” Because of these features, three sub-constructions of the three-place predicate constructions can be identified: one in which the THEME argument must be indefinite, another in which the THEME can be definite or indefinite and a third in which the THEME is an inherent complement of the verb (see Stewart 1963, Osam 1997, Saah and Eze 1997 on double object constructions in Akan).

4.1 Three-place constructions. Akan, like Likpe, also has only one order for the objects in a three-place construction: GOAL-THEME. At least three classes of verbs participate in this construction. The first group are the prototypical ditransitive verbs of transfer or change of location verbs such as **ma** ‘give away’ **kye** ‘give’, **bre** ‘bring’ **mane** ‘send’ **fem** ‘lend’. The main restriction with respect to these verbs and the three-place construction in which they occur is that the THEME cannot be definite nor pronominalized. Examples (39a) and (39b) are instantiations of this construction with the verb **ma** ‘give away’. In the former the THEME argument **siká** ‘money’ is bare and is interpreted as indefinite. In (39b) the THEME argument is marked by the indefiniteness marker **bí** ‘some’. The sentence in (39c) is ungrammatical because the THEME argument is marked for definiteness. An SVC can be used to express such a state of affairs grammatically (see section 5.3).

- (39) a. Kofi ma-a Áma siká
 NAME give-PAST NAME money
 ‘Kofi gave Ama money.’
- b. Kofi ma-a Áma siká bí
 NAME give-PAST NAME money some
 ‘Kofi gave Ama some money.’
- c. *Kofi ma-a Áma siká no
 NAME give-PAST NAME money DEF

A second set of trivalent verbs, mostly speech act or change of state verbs, also participate in a sub-construction of the three-place predicate construction with GOAL-THEME order. There is no definiteness restriction on objects in this sub-construction. The members of this

class include **bisa** ‘ask’ **kyere** ‘show/teach’ **sre** ‘beg/request’ **gye** ‘receive’ (cf. Osam 1997). Consider the following examples:

- (40) a. Kofi kyere-ε mbofra no ndwom
 NAME teach-PAST children DEF song
 ‘Kofi taught the children a song.’
- b. Kofi kyere-ε mbofra no ndwom no
 NAME teach-PAST children DEF song DEF
 ‘Kofi taught the children the song.’

A third group of verbs which can surface with three direct arguments in a mono-verbal clause are those that take inherent complements and obligatorily require a second object. The second object is a GOAL argument and occurs in immediate post-verbal position. The inherent complement is a THEME argument and occurs after the GOAL, as should be expected. As the inherent complement and the verb tend to be seen as belonging together and the GOAL argument as it were occurs between them, Osam (1994) talks of them as having developed into discontinuous verbs. Essegbey (2003, 2010), however argues that they are not discontinuous, rather the structures just conform to the order of elements in an Akan double object construction. Examples of such expressions include: **ka X yaw** ‘tease X’ **bɔ X bosa** ‘give a loan to X’ **yi X aye** ‘praise X’. Sentences in (41) illustrate some of these.

- (41) a. Kofi yi-i Nyame aye
 NAME V-PAST God IC
 ‘Kofi praised God.’
- b. me-bɔ wo abaso sɛ ...
 1SG-hit 2SG ?? COMP
 ‘I congratulate you ...’

Some bivalent verbs also participate in three-place constructions and express specific (cultural) events. A case in point is **twa** ‘cut’ as used in example (42).

- (42) me-twa wo asu firi kurom ha
 1SG-cut 2SG river from town here
 ‘I banish you from this town.’

In this example, **twa** ‘cut’ takes two objects and also an oblique locative argument marked by **firi** ‘from’. I assume that this form is a grammaticalized form of the verb **firi** ‘come from’.

4.2 Three-place object complement constructions. Akan also makes use of constructions in which one of the objects is a complement of the other. In fact, in the example in (43), as a consequence of the verb being a three-place predicate, and one of the objects taking an object complement, the verb surfaces with four arguments.

- (43) me-to wo din Kofi
 1SG-throw 2SG name NAME
 ‘I name you Kofi.’

As indicated in section 2.3, Margetts and Austin (2007) do not consider object-complement constructions as distinct participants. However, as I argued there, such structures in the Kwa languages behave just like other three-participant constructions and hence they are included here.

4.3 Serial verb constructions. Akan, like the other languages discussed in this paper, has serial verb constructions. Christaller (1875) identifies two types which he labeled “essential combinations” and “accidental combinations”. This classification has survived in Akan linguistics but they have been relabeled by Osam (e.g. 2004) as “Integrated SVCs (ISVC)” and “Clause Chaining”⁷ respectively. Osam (2004: 34-35) distinguishes the two types on the basis of semantic integration of subordinate events that are construed as representing a single event. Thus ISVCs represent “tightly integrated events”; benefactive SVCs such as those denoting “a praying for someone” event are an example. The so called “Clause Chaining” type are those in which the “verbs in the chain constitute the concatenation of otherwise potentially independent events” (Osam 2004: 34). For example, an SVC used to represent the scene of ‘X got money built a house sold it’. Verbs in Akan SVCs share the same subject and are marked only once in the clause⁸ for tense and mood. If it is negative, each verb is marked for negation. Verbs in the series have compatible aspectual semantics.

A distinguishing feature of Akan in terms of the coding of three-participant situations is the definiteness restriction on THEMES, as noted above. If the THEME is definite or pronominalized, an SVC is used to express the state of affairs. Such SVCs typically have a handling verb as first verb and the three-place verb occurs as the final verb in the series. There are no definiteness or pronominalization restrictions on the objects in the SVC (see Stewart

7 The term “Clause Chaining” is unfortunate as it is used in other traditions to talk of a clause combining strategy in which clauses are linked but the verbs in the clauses in the series are marked for dependence. A better term for these SVCs might be sequential.

8 In some Akan SVCs the subject is marked on each verb. One context in which this happens is when the subject is the first person (see Ameka 2005b)

1963, Osam 2004). Thus a three-participant situation involving a pronominal THEME can be expressed grammatically with an SVC as in (44).

- (44) ɔ-de sika no ma-a me
 3SG-TAKE money DEF give-PAST 1SG
 ‘S/he gave me the money’

It was already indicated in section 4.1 that some ditransitive verbs do not have the definiteness restriction. It was also indicated that there are different classes of verbs that surface with three arguments in a clause. Verb serialization is thus not the only strategy for coding three-participant situations. As I have argued throughout for these West African serializing languages, SVCs are but one among other devices, primarily three-place predicates and adpositional constructions, for coding three-participant situations.

5. Summary and concluding remarks

I have explored the behaviour of three-place verbs, and three-place constructions in three Kwa verb serializing languages of West Africa. One conclusion that emerges is that contrary to the widespread assumption that these languages lack three-place verbs, each of the languages surveyed has a set of these verbs, not just those of the “give” or transfer type but also those involving location as a third participant type. One difference between the languages surveyed is that in the Gbe languages (Ewe, Gen, Aja, Fon, Gungbe) there are two orders for double object constructions– a THEME-GOAL and a GOAL-THEME order. In the other languages, Akan and Likpe, only one type of construction, the GOAL-THEME order type, is found. An important feature of the languages that promotes or is responsible for the pervasive use of constructions in which a verb surfaces with three arguments is the presence of obligatory complement verbs in these languages. Some of these verbs code a third participant in the situation as a direct argument of the verb (cf. Essegbey 1999, 2003, 2010).

While serialization is used in Akan as an option of coding three-participant situations when the THEME is definite (or pronominalized) for a small set of verbs, the relationship between SVCs and three-place verbs or constructions as alternates is not borne out by the rest of the data. In Ewe, for instance, the motivation for the use of SVCs to code three participant situations relates to the semantics of the situation. A semantic difference between an SVC involving transactions and a three-place construction is that the former codes a direct transfer (between the participants) while the latter codes caused transfer. Furthermore, we have shown that one of the differences between a three-place construction and a dative prepositional construction with respect to verbs of communication is that of addressee as recipient for the former, and as addressee as an affected participant for the latter.

Moreover, in each of the languages and for some monovalent and bivalent verbs the three-place construction licenses the introduction of a third participant. Thus we have given

examples in which the verb for ‘strike’ or ‘hit’ in the languages can be used in three-place constructions. Similarly a ‘do/make’ verb can occur in three-place constructions. In fact in Ewe, as shown in (45) the verb occurs in various three-place constructions including oblique ones with semantic effects.

- (45) a. THEME-GOAL three-place construction
 tsi.dza.dza wɔ náné-m
 rain do something-1SG
 ‘The rain did something to me.’ (It did something bad to me)
- b. DATIVE-OBLIQUE three-place construction
 tsi.dza.dza wɔ náné ná-m
 rain do something DAT-1SG
 ‘The rain did something for me.’ (It did something good for me)
- c. ALLATIVE-OBLIQUE three-place construction
 tsi.dza.dza wɔ náné dé ɲú-nye
 rain do something ALL surface-1SG
 ‘The rain did something against me.’
 (It did something that negatively affected me)

The semantic difference between (45a) and (45b) in terms of the double object construction having a malefactive meaning and the dative oblique construction having a benefactive meaning is observed in other West African languages as well. In Akan the benefactive meaning seems to be expressed with a serial dative construction (instead of an oblique construction as in Ewe).

It seems evident that the presence or absence of three-place verbs in verb serializing languages may well be an epiphenomenon. There is no correlation between a serializing language and the presence or absence of three-place predicates and monoverbal three-place constructions such as double object constructions in such a language. It has been indicated that the lack or paucity of clauses that host three arguments in SE Asian serializing languages may be due to their reliance on ellipsis and inferential processes in discourse. For Oceanic languages, Margetts (2007) argues that the lack of ditransitive verbs may be because of their preferred intransitive nature. By contrast, the ubiquity of clauses with three overt arguments in a clause in West African serializing languages, I suggest, may be due to their hypertransitive nature with lots of obligatory complement taking verbs, many of which require a further object to express particular cultural meanings. Thus what may be a predictor of the language type of the West African serializing languages is their possessing a closed class of verbs with no morphological means of creating new verbs. This shifts the burden in the languages to syntactic means of expressing predicate meanings and to various verbal constructions such as

obligatory complement verb constructions and their interaction with argument structure constructions.

Abbreviations

AGR	agreement marker	INFER	inferential marker
ALL	allative	LINK	linker
AVOD	adjunct verb object dative	LOC	locative
CAUS	causative	NEG	negative
CM	class marker	PAST	past tense
CM.PL	class marker plural	POSS	possessive
COMP	complementizer	POT	potential
DAT	dative	PRED	predication marker
DEF	definiteness	QV	quotative
HAB	habitual	RED	reduplicative
IC	inherent complement	1	first person
INDEF	indefiniteness	2	second person
SCR	subject cross-reference	3	third person
SG	singular		
UFP	utterance final particle		

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Felix K. Ameka
Leiden University
f.k.ameka@hum.leidenuniv.nl

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