How to Find Serial Verbs in English: An RRG Analysis of Phase Verb Constructions

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ABSTRACT

Serial verb constructions (SVCs), are found in Creole languages, in the languages of West Africa, Southeast Asia, Amazonia, Oceania, and New Guinea. Protoypical SVCs have the following syntactic and semantic properties according to Kroeger (2004:229-230):

Characteristic properties of SVCs:

a. A prototypical SVC contains two or more morphologically independent verbs within the same clause, neither of which is an auxiliary.
b. There are no conjunctions or other overt markers of subordination or coordination separating the two verbs.
c. The serial verbs belong to a single intonation contour, with no pause separating them.
d. The entire SVC refers to a single (possibly complex) event.
e. A true SVC may contain only one specification for tense, aspect, modality, negation, etc., though these features are sometimes redundantly marked on both verbs.
f. The two verbs in the SVC share at least one semantic argument.
g. Obligatory non-coreference: a true SVC will not contain two overt NPs which refer to the same argument.
h. A prototypical SVC contains only one grammatical subject.

In this paper we examine a set of verbal complexes in English called phase verb constructions (PVCs) in Collins Cobuild English Grammar (1990:184-193) from an RRG perspective and compare them with SVCs. We demonstrate that PVCs have all of the characteristic syntactic and semantic properties of SVCs.

Proposal

In this paper we examine a set of verbal complexes in English called phase verb constructions (PVCs) in Collins Cobuild English Grammar (1990:184-193) from an RRG perspective and compare them with serial verb constructions (SVCs). We demonstrate that PVCs have all of the characteristic syntactic and semantic properties of prototypical SVCs.

Serial verb constructions can occur where the shared argument in the verb series is only the subject, as illustrated in (1).

(1) SVCs with same subjects:
   a. Yoruba (Trask, 1993) (West Africa)
      ó mú iwé wá
      3sg took book came
      ‘He brought the book.’
   b. Cantonese (Matthews and Yip, 1994:143) (S. E. Asia)
      bātyūŋ ngóhdeih heui tài hei
      rather 1pl go see film
      ‘Let’s go and see a film.’
c. Tok Pisin (Verhaar, 1995:100) (Papua New Guinea)
dispela pisin i-flai i-go na i-no kam bek
this bird fly go and not come back
‘This bird flew away and didn’t come back.’

Serial verb constructions can also occur where the shared argument in the verb series functions as object of the first verb and notional subject of the second linked verb. Examples are given in (2) from the same languages illustrated in (1).

(2) SVCs with different subjects:

a. Yoruba (Bamgboye, 1974; tone not shown) (West Africa)
olu ti ọmọ naa šubu.
Olu push child the fall
‘Olu pushed the child down.’ (lit. ‘Olu pushed the child and it fell.’)

b. Cantonese (S. E. Asia)
ngôh diu goh bôh lohk heui
1sg throw CL ball down go
‘I threw the ball down.’ (lit. ‘I threw the ball and it went down.’)

c. Tok Pisin (Papua New Guinea)
ol i-sutim pik i-dai
3pl shoot:TRANS pig die
‘They shot the pig dead.’ (lit. ‘They shot the pig and it died.’)

d. Seimat (Wozna and Wilson, 2005:57) (Austronesian: Pacific)
ti ipong nga tahuni ha-paxe
at night 1sg smoke CAUS-dry
‘At night I dried (the pandanus) by smoking it.’ (lit. ‘At night I smoked the pandanus and caused it to dry.’)

Definition

Aikhenvald (2006) says: “A serial verb construction (SVC) is a sequence of verbs which act together as a single predicate, without any overt marker of coordination, subordination, or syntactic dependency of any sort. Serial verb constructions describe what is conceptualized as a single event. They are monoclausal; their intonational properties are the same as those of a monoverbal clause, and they have just one tense, aspect and polarity value. SVCs may also share core and other arguments. Each component of an SVC must be able to occur on its own. Within an SVC, the individual verbs may have same, or different, transitivity values.”

In addition

Aikhenvald (2006:1) says SVCs are widespread in Creole languages, in the languages of West Africa, Southeast Asia (Chinese, Thai, Khmer, etc.), Amazonia, Oceania, and New Guinea.

But Dixon (2006) adds that while SVCs are found in perhaps one-third of the languages of the world, there appear to be none in Europe or north or central Asia, and rather few in North America or Australia.

Kroeger (2004:229-230) shows that protoypical SVCs have the following syntactic and semantic properties:
Characteristic properties of SVCs:

a. A prototypical SVC contains two or more morphologically independent verbs within the same clause, neither of which is an auxiliary.
b. There are no conjunctions or other overt markers of subordination or coordination separating the two verbs.
c. The serial verbs belong to a single intonation contour, with no pause separating them.
d. The entire SVC refers to a single (possibly complex) event.
e. A true SVC may contain only one specification for tense, aspect, modality, negation, etc., though these features are sometimes redundantly marked on both verbs.
f. The two verbs in the SVC share at least one semantic argument.
g. Obligatory non-coreference: a true SVC will not contain two overt NPs which refer to the same argument.
h. A prototypical SVC contains only one grammatical subject.

In a generative analysis of SVCs the verbs are represented as a series under VP, as illustrated in (4).

In essence, generative syntax requires that SVCs be a series of VPs - or rather V’s, since this is the only constituent of the sentence available that can be headed by a verb. This analysis also requires that the shared argument be the subject because this is the only core argument that can be external to the VP. However, SVCs readily occur where the object of the first verb functions as the subject of the second verb, as in (2). In this case the generative analysis of SVCs cannot apply.

(4) Generative analysis of SVCs:

(5) PVCs where both verbs have the same (notional) subject:

a. Mary *stopped crying.*

b. Sheila *was barred from going to work.*

c. James *wants to see a movie.*

d. Sam *helped run the tournament.*

e. Those very close to the blast *risk being burned.*

(6) PVCs where the object of the main verb functions as the (notional) subject of the second verb:

a. The attendant *stopped him falling.*

b. The new law *prevents people from smoking* in public places.

c. The government *encourages people to pay* their taxes.

d. He *watched her play tennis.*

e. Coffee *helped keep* him alert.

Cobuild does not include the *from*-present participle forms in their set of PVCs.
f. Those people *got burned* by the blast. [main verb + past -ed participle]

**Characteristic property (3a): A prototypical SVC contains two or more morphologically independent verbs within the same clause, neither of which is an auxiliary.**

By morphologically independent Kroeger means that serial verbs are not part of a verbal compound and can occur as full lexical verbs independent of the series. (*personal communication*) Phase verbs are morphologically independent in that they can all occur as independent lexical verbs:

(7)  a. Mary stopped.  a’. Mary cried.
   b. Sheila barred the way.  b’. Sheila went to work.
   d. Sam helped Phil.  d’. Sam ran the tournament.
   e. They risked everything.  e’. They were burned.

(8)  a. The attendant stopped the train.  a’. He fell.
   b. Vaccination prevents disease.  b’. People smoke in public places.
   c. He encourages people.  c’. People pay their taxes.
   d. He watched her.  d’. She played tennis.
   e. Coffee helped him.  e’. He kept alert.
   f. They got the bus.  f’. They were burned by the blast.

The V₁ of a PVC is not an auxiliary verb:

(9)  a. *Stopped Mary crying?  [PVs do not invert with subject]
     b. *Helped Sam run the tournament?

(10) a. *Mary stoppedn’t crying.  [PVs do not take negator contraction]
     b. *Sam helpedn’t run the tournament.

**Characteristic property (3b): There are no conjunctions or other overt markers of subordination or coordination separating the two verbs.**

The V₂ phase verb is not a VP complement of the V₁ phase verb (see Van Valin and LaPolla (1997:469-471) for this analysis of VP complements in English):

(11) a. Mary stopped the car.
     a’. The car was stopped by Mary.  [NP complement can be passivized]
     a”. It was the car that Mary stopped.  [NP complement can be focussed]
     b. Mary stopped crying.  [main verb + bare present -ing participle]
     b’. *Crying was stopped by Mary.  [Linked core cannot be passivized]
     b”. *It was crying that Mary stopped.  [Linked core cannot be focussed]

(12) a. Dave helped the old lady.
     a’. The old lady was helped by Dave.
     a”. It was the old lady that Dave helped.
     b. Sam helped run the tournament.  [main verb + bare infinitive]
     b’. *Run the tournament was helped by Sam.  [Linked core cannot be passivized]
     b”. *It was run the tournament that Sam helped.  [Linked core cannot be focussed]

Therefore the conjoining relationship between phase verbs is non-subordinate.

**Are to and from subordinating conjunctions?**

Neither the to-infinitive nor the from-present participle linked cores are subordinate to the main verb. Therefore to and from cannot be subordinating conjunctions.
The new law prevents people from smoking in public places.

*From smoking in public places is prevented people by the new law.

[Linked core cannot be passivized]

It is from smoking in public places that the new law prevents people.

[Linked core cannot be focussed]

to and from cannot be substituted by coordinating conjunctions, as shown in (15), therefore they do not function as coordinating conjunctions.

What is the function of to and from in PVCs? When to or from are present the default interpretation is that the linked events do not overlap temporally, i.e. they are sequential. Their absence indicates that the linked events necessarily overlap temporally. (See Van Valin and LaPolla, 1997:472) This is summarized in (16).

PVCs with zero marker on linked unit: [+temporal overlap].

PVCs with to/from marker on linked unit: [−temporal overlap].

Verbs that link to a bare infinitive (express perception):

X felt his scalp tingle (feel & tingle) [+temporal overlap]
X heard Y sing (hear & sing) [+temporal overlap]
X noticed Y arrive (notice & arrive) [+temporal overlap]
X watched Y dance (watch & dance) [+temporal overlap]

Verbs that link to a to-infinitive (express intention/wish or accomplishment):

X agreed to go (agree & go) [−temporal overlap]
X decided to go (decide & go) [−temporal overlap]
X volunteered to go (volunteer & go) [−temporal overlap]
X managed to go (manage & go) [−temporal overlap]

Verbs that link to a from-present participle (express constraint):

X barred Y from going (bar & go) [−temporal overlap]
X deterred Y from going (deter & go) [−temporal overlap]
X kept Y from going (keep & go) [−temporal overlap]
X prevented Y from going (prevent & go) [−temporal overlap]

Additionally, from indicates the linked event did not happen. The logical operator NOT represents the meaning of from in (20).

Sheila was barred from going to work.

[do' (Ø, Ø)] CAUSE [NOT (do' (Sheila, [go' (Sheila)] & INGR be-at' (work, Sheila)))]

James kept Mary from waiting.

[do' (James, Ø)] CAUSE [NOT do' (Mary, [wait' (Mary)])]

The new law prevents people from smoking in public places.

[do' (law, Ø)] CAUSE [NOT be-in' (public place, (do' (people, [smoke' (people)]))]

Verbs that link to a from-infinitive (express perception):

X barred Y from going (bar & go) [−temporal overlap]
X deterred Y from going (deter & go) [−temporal overlap]
X prevented Y from going (prevent & go) [−temporal overlap]
d. James stopped Mary from crying.
d’. \([\text{do}’(\text{James}, \emptyset)] \text{CAUSE} \lnot (\text{do}’(\text{Mary}, [\text{cry}’(\text{Mary})])))\]

Thus the syntactic structure of PVCs is primarily coordinated core conjoining, as shown in (21) and (22). This is a prototypical SVC construction.

(21) PVCs where both verbs have the same (notional) subject:
   a. \([\text{CL} \ [\text{CORE} \text{Mary stopped } ] \ [\text{CORE} \text{crying } ]]\).
   b. \([\text{CL} \ [\text{CORE} \text{Sheila was barred } ] \ [\text{CORE} \text{from going to work } ]]\).
   c. \([\text{CL} \ [\text{CORE} \text{James wants } ] \ [\text{CORE} \text{to see a movie } ]]\).
   d. \([\text{CL} \ [\text{CORE} \text{Sam helped } ] \ [\text{CORE} \text{run the tournament } ]]\).
   e. \([\text{CL} \ [\text{CORE} \text{Those very close to the blast risk } ] \ [\text{CORE} \text{being burned } ]]\).

(22) PVCs where the object of main verb functions as (notional) subject of second verb:
   a. \([\text{CL} \ [\text{CORE} \text{The attendant stopped him } ] \ [\text{CORE} \text{falling } ]]\).
   b. \([\text{CL} \ [\text{CORE} \text{The new law prevents people } ] \ [\text{CORE} \text{from smoking in public places } ]]\).
   c. \([\text{CL} \ [\text{CORE} \text{The government encourages people } ] \ [\text{CORE} \text{to pay their taxes } ]]\).
   d. \([\text{CL} \ [\text{CORE} \text{He watched her } ] \ [\text{CORE} \text{play tennis } ]]\).
   e. \([\text{CL} \ [\text{CORE} \text{Coffee helped } ] \ [\text{CORE} \text{keep him alert } ]]\).
   f. \([\text{CL} \ [\text{CORE} \text{Those people got } ] \ [\text{CORE} \text{burned by the blast } ]]\).

Characteristic property (3c): The serial verbs belong to a single intonation contour, with no pause separating them.

Cobuild (1990:184-193) cites the fact that PVCs have a single intonation contour as one of the identifying features of this construction in English.

Characteristic property (3d): The entire SVC refers to a single (possibly complex) event.

Cobuild (1990:184-193) says that PVCs describe two actions or states which are closely linked. Bohmeyer and Van Valin (2009) suggest that the notion of ‘single event’ can be defined in terms of the Macro-Event Property (MEP). The MEP is a property of construction types that can encode the ontological properties of temporal space, such as expressions of location in time, duration and boundaries in time. The MEP applies to constructions that package the parts of an event so tightly as to not permit individual access by temporal expressions, e.g. adverbials, temporal clauses, tenses. Bohmeyer and Van Valin present cross-linguistic evidence that single core constructions must have the MEP and that multiple core constructions only have the MEP if they are cosubordinate. However, none of the PVCs in (5) and (6) have cosubordinate cores. Instead they have coordinated cores, as illustrated in (21) and (22). Nevertheless, PVCs, as in (5) and (6), are considered to describe single (possibly complex) events because the SVC has only one tense designation. Only the V\(_1\) main verb can be marked for tense; the V\(_2\) is nonfinite. All PVCs except the from-present participle form do not allow separate modification by a temporal adverbial, as illustrated in (23). Thus PVCs demonstrate Macro-Event Properties even though they are not cosubordinate.

(23) PVCs and individual temporal modifiers:
   a. Mary \textit{stopped} (*yesterday) \textit{crying} (today).
   b. Sheila \textit{was barred} (yesterday) \textit{from going to work} (today).
   c. James \textit{wants} (*yesterday) \textit{to see} a movie (today).
   d. Sam \textit{helped} (*yesterday) \textit{run} the tournament (today).
   e. Those very close to the blast \textit{risk} (*yesterday) \textit{being burned} (today).

Also, as with SVCs, the verbs in a PVC can have a specialized function. This is another characteristic of a single event description.
The V₁ (main) verb can set a temporal frame for the V₂ (nonfinite) verb. In (24) the verbs begin and start express the onset of an event, continue and keep express the continuation of an event, and finish and stop express the termination of an event. The semantic representations for the temporal frames are respectively, BECOME for the onset of an event (24a’), CONTINUE for the continuation of an event (24b’), TERMINATE for the termination of an event (24c’). Van Valin (2005:51) suggests that the logical structure of begin in this context is BECOME do’ (x, y), where the logical structure of the complement verb fills the y variable slot. This is because begin is a full lexical verb in this construction and not an auxiliary verb or operator.

(24)  
a. Mary began crying.  [begin = onset of event]
a’. Mary started crying.  [start = onset of event]
a”. BECOME do’ (Mary, [do’ (Mary, [cry’ (Mary)])])
b. Mary continued crying.  [continue = continuation of event]
b’. Mary kept crying.  [keep = continuation of event]
b”. CONTINUE do’ (Mary, [do’ (Mary, [cry’ (Mary)])])
c. Mary finished crying.  [finish = termination of event]
c’. Mary stopped crying.  [stop = termination of event]
c”. TERMINATE do’ (Mary, [do’ (Mary, [cry’ (Mary)])])

When this type of main verb is transitive it has a causative meaning:

(25)  
a. James started Mary crying.
a’. [do’ (James, Ø)] CAUSE [BECOME do’ (Mary, [cry’ (Mary)])]  
b. James kept Mary waiting.
b’. [do’ (James, Ø)] CAUSE [CONTINUE do’ (Mary, [wait’ (Mary)])]  
c. James stopped Mary crying.
c’. [do’ (James, Ø)] CAUSE [TERMINATE do’ (Mary, [cry’ (Mary)])]

The V₁ can set a spatial frame for the V₂ event:

(26)  
a. The child lay sleeping.
a’. do’ (child, [lay’ (child)]) Λ do’ (child, [sleep’ (child)])  
b. The teacher sat reading.
b’. do’ (teacher, [sit’ (teacher)]) Λ do’ (teacher, [read’ (teacher)])  
c. The waitress stood talking.
c’. do’(waitress, [stand’ (waitress)]) Λ do’(waitress, [talk’ (waitress)])

The V₂ can modify the meaning of the V₁:

The V₂ can indicate a perfective/imperfective aspect modification of the V₁ event:

In (27a) and (b) the bare infinitives of scream and run give the meaning that these events are completed within the event frame of the preceding perception verb. Whereas when the present participial forms are used in (27a’) and (b’)) the events of ‘scream’ and ‘run’ are not completed within the event frame of the perception verbs.

(27)  
a. They heard her scream.  [hear = perfective event]
a’. They heard her screaming.  [hear = imperfective event]
a”. hear’ (they, [do’ (her, [scream’ (her)])])  
b. They saw him run.  [see = perfective event]
b’. They saw him running.  [see = imperfective event]
b”. see’ (they, [do’ (him, [run’ (him)])]

The V₂ can indicate the manner in which the V₁ event is performed:

In (28a) and (b) the V₁ motion verb is modified by the V₂, which expresses the manner in which the motion is carried out. The logical structures of (28a’) and (b’) specify two events occurring
concurrently. This is the same as in (26a′, b′, c′). However, in (26) the V₁ specifies the spatial frame of the event and is the modifying verb, whereas in (28) it is the V₂ that specifies this modification of the complex event.

(28)  a. The girls came out running / came running out.
    a′. do′ (girls, [come (girls)]) & do′ (girls, [run (girls)]) & INGR be-out′ (girls)
    b. Bill entered the room skipping.
    b′. do′ (Bill, [enter (Bill, room)]) & do′ (Bill, [skip (Bill)])

**Characteristic property (3e): A true SVC may contain only one specification for tense, aspect, modality, negation, etc., though these features are sometimes redundantly marked on both verbs.**

Scope of operators in PVCs:

With regard to the marking of tense, aspect, modality and negation in PVCs, the full range of these categories can only be marked on the V₁ finite verb, as illustrated in (29)-(33). As a clause operator, tense has default scope over both the phase verbs. As nuclear operators, progressive and perfective aspects only have scope over the first verb. Modality operators, such as must, and the negation operator are core operators and they may have scope over just the first verb, in which case it is a core coordination nexus, or they may have scope over both the verbs, in which case it is a core cosubordination nexus. Only negation can be marked independently on the V₂ nonfinite verb, as illustrated in (34).

(29)  the bare present -ing participle:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mary</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>stopped crying.</td>
<td>[past tense]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>is stopping crying.</td>
<td>[prog aspect]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has stopped crying.</td>
<td>[prfv aspect]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>must stop crying.</td>
<td>[modal]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>didn’t stop crying.</td>
<td>[negation]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(30)  the from-present participle:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sheila</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>was prevented from going to work.</td>
<td>[past tense]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is being prevented from going to work.</td>
<td>[prog aspect]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has been prevented from going to work.</td>
<td>[prfv aspect]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>must be prevented from going to work.</td>
<td>[modal]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wasn’t prevented from going to work.</td>
<td>[negation]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(31)  the to-infinitive:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The government</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>encourages people to pay their taxes.</td>
<td>[present tense]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is encouraging people to pay their taxes.</td>
<td>[prog aspect]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has encouraged people to pay their taxes.</td>
<td>[prfv aspect]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>must encourage people to pay their taxes.</td>
<td>[modal]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>didn’t encourage people to pay their taxes.</td>
<td>[negation]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(32)  the bare infinitive:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>He</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>watches her play tennis.</td>
<td>[present tense]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is watching her play tennis.</td>
<td>[prog aspect]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>has watched her play tennis.</td>
<td>[prfv aspect]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>must watch her play tennis.</td>
<td>[modal]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>didn’t watch her play tennis.</td>
<td>[negation]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(33) the past -ed participle:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Those people</th>
<th>got burned by the blast. [past tense]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>are getting burned by the blast. [prog aspect]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>have got burned by the blast. [prfv aspect]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>must have got burned by the blast. [modal]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>didn’t get burned by the blast. [negation]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(34) a. From today he has started not smoking.
    b. Cheap booze encourages people to not quit drinking.

Kroeger (2004:230) says one clear indication that the two serialized verbs express a single event is that we cannot negate one verb while asserting the truth of the other. But since verb serialization is prototypically core coordination with arguments shared between the cores, and since negation is a core operator (as well as a nuclear and clause operator) it does not follow that negating one core independently of the other core disqualifies a construction as an SVC.

Kroeger (2004:230) also says that it is generally not possible for the two (or more) verbs in an SVC to have independent marking for tense and aspect. He illustrates this from Akan (35). In (35a) both verbs are marked for past tense and this is a serial verb construction. It is not possible to have one verb marked for past tense and one marked for perfect aspect in an SVC, as shown by (35b). For this coding, a coordinating conjunction must be used, as in (35c). In (35c) the verbs belong to separate clauses.

(35) Akan (Akuapem dialect; Shachter, 1974)
   a. me-kɔɔ-e me-baa-e.
      I-go-PAST I-come-PAST
      ‘I went and came back.’
   b. *me-kɔɔ-e maba.
      I-go-PAST I-come-PERF
   c. me-kɔɔ-e na maba.
      I-go-PAST and I-come-PERF
      ‘I went and I have come back.’

However, there are some issues with the Akan example Kroeger uses to substantiate his claim that it is generally not possible for the two (or more) verbs in an SVC to have independent marking for tense and aspect. Firstly, Christaller (1964:58-59) says that the verb in Akan can be marked for either past tense or perfect, but not both categories. Compare English where tense and perfective aspect can both be marked on the same verb, e.g. *he has gone [present tense + perfective aspect] vs. he had gone [past tense + perfective aspect]. Secondly, Christaller (1964:58-59) calls perfect in Akan a tense and says it indicates an action completed in past time, but whose result is present as a state, or whose consequences extend to the present time. If perfect is a tense category in Akan then it stands to reason that two different tenses cannot be marked on the same clause. Thirdly, aspect is a nuclear operator. As such, aspect has scope over the nucleus and not the core or the clause. In the Barai example, (36), the verb furi ‘finish’ is an aspectual modifier of ufu ‘cut’, but these verbs form an SVC with numu ‘pile’ and akoe ‘throw.away’ because fu ‘3sg’ and vazai ‘grass’ are shared arguments for all these verbs. Thus while it is true that verbs in an SVC must all come under the scope of the one tense category, since tense is a clausal operator, it is not necessarily the case that verbs in an SVC cannot be marked independently for an aspectual category.

(36) Barai (Olson, 1981)
    Fu vazai ufu furi numu akoe.
    3sg grass cut finish pile throw.away
    ‘He finished cutting, piled and threw away the grass.’
What about the nonfinite forms of the \( V_2 \) in the English phase verb constructions, as summarized in (37)? Do they effect the tense, aspect or modality status of the PVC? They do not, since these categories are marked once only on the \( V_1 \) main verb. What the \( V_2 \) nonfinite forms do effect is the relationship between the events expressed by \( V_1 \) and \( V_2 \). Examples (27) show that a \( V_2 \) bare infinitive gives a perfective meaning to the event described by the \( V_1 \) and that a \( V_2 \) bare present -ing participle gives an imperfective meaning to the event described by the \( V_1 \). Examples (17)-(19) show that the \( V_2 \) to-infinitive and from-present participle forms indicate that there is no temporal overlap of the \( V_2 \) event with that described by the \( V_1 \).

(37) Nonfinite \( V_2 \) forms in the PVC:
- bare present -ing participle
- \( from \)-present participle
- to-infinitive
- bare infinitive
- past -ed participle

(38) The function of the past -ed participle:
- the perfective aspect following have: \( He \ has \ called \ twice \ today. \)
- the passive voice following be: \( Her \ brother \ is \ called \ John. \)
- past -ed participle clauses: \( Called \ early, \ he \ ate \ a \ quick \ breakfast. \)

According to Quirk (1985:97) the primary functions of the past -ed participle in English are as given in (38). Cobuild (1990:185-186) say that the past -ed participle can occur as the nonfinite \( V_2 \) in a PVC either with or without to. In both cases the \( V_2 \) can either have a passive function, as in (39a,c) or a perfective aspect function, as in (39b,d). However, neither of these expressions effect the tense category of the PVC as a unit.

(39) The past -ed participle in the PVC:
- Those very close to the blast risk being burned.
- Neither Rita nor I recalled ever having seen her.
- She wanted to be reassured.
- They claimed to have shot down 22 planes.

Characteristic property (3f): The two verbs in the SVC share at least one semantic argument.

PVCs are either as in (5), where both verbs have the same (notional) subject, or as in (6), where the object of the main verb functions as the (notional) subject of the second verb. This sharing of grammatical arguments is matched in logical structure in various ways, depending on the form of the logical structure.

(5) PVCs where both verbs have the same (notional) subject:
- \( Mary \) stopped crying.
  a’. TERMINATE do’ (Mary, [do’ (Mary, [cry’ (Mary)])])
    (stop)/cry
  b’. [do’ (Ø, Ø)] CAUSE [NOT (do’ (Sheila, [go’ (Sheila) & INGR be-at’ (work, Sheila)])]
    (bar)/go

- \( Sheila \) was barred from going to work.
- James wants to see a movie.
- \( Sam \) helped run the tournament.

c’. want’ (James, [[do’ (x, Ø)] CAUSE [see’ (x, movie)])]
  want

d’. do’ (Sam, [help’ (Sam, Ø)]) CAUSE [[do’ (Sam, [run’ (Sam, Ø)]) & [do’ (Øk, [run’ (Øk, help

OAD))] & INGR exist’ (tournament)]

OAD
e. Those very close to the blast risk being burned.
e′. [do (those, Ø)] CAUSE [POSSIBLE [do (Ø, Ø)] CAUSE [BECOME burned′ (those,)]]
    risk
b′. [do′ (law, Ø)] CAUSE [NOT be-in′ (public place, do′ (people, smoke′ (people,)))]
    prevent/smoke

c. The government encourages people to pay their taxes.
c′. [do′ (government, say′ (government, Ø))] CAUSE [TERMINATE do′ (people, pay′
    (people, their taxes,))]
    encourage/pay
d. He watched her play tennis.
d′. do′ (he, see′ (he, she)) ∧ do′ (she, play′ (she, tennis))
    watch play
e′. do′ (coffee, help′ (coffee, him)) CAUSE [CONTINUE be-alert′ (him)]
    help keep
f. Those people got burned by the blast.
f′. [INGR happen′ (blast)] CAUSE [INGR burned′ (people)]
    got/burn

Characteristic property (3g): Obligatory non-coreference: a true SVC will not contain two overt NPs which refer to the same argument.

A PVC cannot contain two overt NPs which refer to the same semantic argument.

(40) PVCs where the object of the main verb functions as the (notional) subject of the second verb:
    a. He stopped him falling.
    b. They prevented them from smoking in public places.
    c. She encouraged her to pay their taxes.
    d. He watched him play tennis.
    e. Those people got burned by them.

Characteristic property (3h): A prototypical SVC contains only one grammatical subject.

PVCs in English may only contain one overt grammatical subject.

(5) a. Mary stopped (*she) crying.
b. Sheila was barred (*she) from going to work.
c. James wants (*he) to see a movie.
d. Sam helped (*he) run the tournament.
e. Those very close to the blast risk (*they) being burned.

(6) a. The attendant stopped him (*he) falling.
b. The new law prevents people (*they) from smoking in public places.
c. The government encourages us (*we) to pay their taxes.
d. He watched her (*she) play tennis.
e. Coffee helped keep him (*he) alert.
f. Those people got (*they) burned by the blast.

Table 1 compares the properties of SVCs as given in (3) with the properties of PVCs described in this section. From this we see that phase verb constructions in English have the same semantic and
syntactic properties as serial verb constructions found in Creole languages, West Africa, mainland Southeast Asia, New Guinea and the Pacific Islands. We can conclude therefore that phase verb constructions in English are a type of serial verb construction.

Table 1: Properties of English phrase verb constructions compared to SVC properties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SVC properties</th>
<th>English PVC properties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A prototypical SVC contains two or more morphologically independent verbs within the same clause, neither of which is an auxiliary.</td>
<td>PVC s are a combination of fully lexical verbs; none of which is an auxiliary, see (9). The first verb in the series is finite and the second nonfinite.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In SVCs there are no conjunctions or other overt markers of subordination or coordination separating the two verbs.</td>
<td>The second nonfinite verb in a PVC is not subordinate to the first verb, see (11)-(12). The to in the to-infinitive and the from in the from-participle form do not indicate a subordinate or coordinate relationship. Instead the presence of to and from indicate no temporal overlap between the events described by the first and second verbs. Additionally, from indicates that the event described by the from-participle verb did not occur.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The verbs in an SVC belong to a single intonation contour, with no pause separating them.</td>
<td>The verbs in a PVC belong to a single intonation pattern.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The entire SVC refers to a single (possibly complex) event.</td>
<td>PVC s describe two actions or states which are closely linked. The nonfinite verb may describe the main event and be modified by the preceding finite verb, see (24)-(25) and (26). Vice versa, the finite verb may describe the main event and be modified by the following nonfinite verb, see (28).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A true SVC may contain only one specification for tense, aspect, modality, negation, etc., though these features are sometimes redundantly marked on both verbs.</td>
<td>PVCs comprise finite verb + nonfinite verb. The nonfinite form may be the infinitive or a past -ed or present -ing participle. Only the finite verb is marked for tense.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The two verbs in the SVC share at least one semantic argument.</td>
<td>PVCs may have a single subject argument shared by both verbs, as in (5), or an object of the first verb interpreted as subject of the second verb, as in (6).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obligatory non-coreference: a true SVC will not contain two overt NPs which refer to the same argument.</td>
<td>Where a non-reflexive pronoun occurs in a phase verb construction it cannot be coreferential with any other argument in the construction. E.g. in he stopped teasing him, he and him cannot be coreferential.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A prototypical SVC contains only one grammatical subject.</td>
<td>PVCs may only contain one grammatical subject.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conclusion**

The verbal complexes in English called phase verb constructions in *Collins Cobuild English Grammar* (1990:184-193) are undoubtedly serial verb constructions. Contrary to typological predictions, serial verb constructions occur in English.
References


