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On the status and function of the particle *ń* in serial verb constructions in Kusaal

Hasiyatu Abubakari

Abstract

This paper discusses a particle *ń* in serial verb constructions (SVCs) in Kusaal. Previous studies have argued that SVCs in the language are neither coordinate nor subordinate constructions. One then questions the status of the identified particle which necessitates extra research to guide the argument in both previous and upcoming studies on SVC in Kusaal and, by extension, other sister languages. With empirical data and several tests for SVCs, it is argued that the particle *ń* has several functions in Kusaal and other Mabia languages. It functions as a subject focus marker in Kusaal, Gurenɛ, and Dagbani, as well as a serializing connector in Moore. It will be established that the particle *ń* is not obligatory in SVCs in Kusaal and its presence encodes an emphatic or focus interpretation on the verb it precedes.

Keywords: Serial verb constructions, serializing particles, focus particles, Kusaal, focus function, Mabia languages.

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Hasiyatu Abubakari (haabubakari@ug.edu.gh) is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, and an Honorary Research Associate, School of Languages and Literatures, Rhodes University, South Africa. She holds a PhD in African Studies (Languages and Literatures) from the University of Vienna, Austria, and an MPhil in Theoretical Linguistics from the University of Tromsø in Norway. She engages in both descriptive and theoretical linguistics in areas including Syntax, Information Structure, Pragmatics, and Sociolinguistics. She has projects that focus on the grammars of Mabia languages and cultures, language and media, language and gender, language and education, onomastics, folklore, popular culture, among others. Using songs, docudramas, folktales among others, she engages community members on possible ways to overcome 'unprogressive' cultural practices such as child marriage, female genital mutilation, among others. Hasiyatu is a member of several local and international professional bodies. She is a fellow of the American Council of Learned Society (AHP: 2019–2020). She is an associate editor of the *Journal of West African Languages* and an editorial board member of Language Sciences, Elsevier. She is a receiver of a number of scholarships and awards, both locally and internationally.

Résumé

Cet article traite de la particule *ń* dans les constructions des verbes en série (CVS) en kusaal. L'étude est importante car des études antérieures sur ladite langue ont soutenu que les CVS en kusaal ne sont ni des constructions coordonnées ni des constructions subordonnées. Nous nous interrogeons alors sur le statut de la particule identifiée, ce qui nécessite des recherches supplémentaires pour guider l'argumentation dans les études précédentes et à venir sur les CVS en kusaal et dans d'autres langues apparentées. Sur la base de données empiriques et de plusieurs tests pour les CVS, nous observerons que la particule *ń* a plusieurs fonctions en kusaal et dans d'autres langues Mabia. Cette particule fonctionne comme un marqueur de focalisation du sujet en Kusaal, Gurenɛ et Dagbani et comme un connecteur de sérialisation en Moore. Nous observerons également que la particule *ń* n'est pas obligatoire dans les CVS en kusaal et que sa présence encode une interprétation emphatique ou de focalisation sur le verbe qu'elle précède.

Mots clés: Constructions de verbes en série, particules sérialisantes, particules de focalisation, Kusaal, fonction de focalisation, langues Mabia.

Introduction

Cross-linguistically, serial verb constructions (SVC) are noted for their prohibition of overt coordinators and subordinators (Bodomo, 1997; Collins, 1997; Hiraiwa and Bodomo, 2008; Aikhenvald, 2006; Osam, 1994; Abubakari, 2011, 2018, 2019b). This prohibition leads researchers to question the status of SVCs in Moore where an obligatory 'serializing connector' is observed (Bodomo, 1997:115; Pajancic, 2017; Zongo, 2014; Nikièma, 2003). A morphologically identical particle, which is quite elusive in casual speech, is observed in SVCs in a collection of folktales in Kusaal. This paper explores the pragmatic functions of the so-called serializing particle in Kusaal SVCs. This has become important since previous research on the language has established that SVCs in Kusaal can neither be considered as coordinate constructions nor can they be analysed as subordinate constructions (Abubakari, 2011, 2019b, 2020; Bodomo, 1993). However, the observation with data from folktales originally gathered in 1981 by Samuel Akon and Joe Anaba show instances of a particle *ń* occurring in between some VPs in SVCs. The questions that arise from this observation, thus, forming the basis of this paper, include: (i) What is the status

of this particle in SVCs in Kusaal? (ii) Can it be replaced with the NP or VP conjunctions *nɛ́* and *ká* respectively? (iii) Is it obligatory in all SVCs, and if not, what accounts for the use of the particle in SVCs? and (iv) Can the particle be described as a diachronic feature which is synchronically fading away in speech?

In finding answers to these questions, the paper, which is entirely qualitative, explores the various instances and environments that allow the use of *ń* in SVCs in Kusaal, and compares the various interpretations derived when *ń* occurs in an SVC. It also traces the origin of *ń* by comparing it with the NP conjunction, as well as the subject focus marker *ń* in Kusaal (Abubakari, 2020). All these are carried out using data from folktales and other literary materials in the language. It will be observed that the particle *ń*, though quite similar, in form, to what is termed 'a serializing connector in Moore' (Bodomo, 1997: 115; Pajancic, 2017; Bodomo, 2002:42), is not obligatory in SVCs in Kusaal, and when used, it encodes a strong emphatic interpretation on the VP(s) it precedes. The hypothesis is, the particle *ń*, in SVCs in Kusaal, functions as a marker of assertion, emphasis or focus. The lack of an overwhelming use of the particle in casual speech also leads to the hypothesis that it could potentially be a diachronic feature which is synchronically fading away.

Kusaal is a Mabia (Gur) language spoken in three West African countries: Ghana, Burkina Faso and Togo. The term, Mabia, as proposed by Bodomo (2020:5–34) is composed of two morphemes *ma* 'mother' *bia* 'child', thus *Mabia* 'My mother's child'. It is argued that the two morphemes are present in a large number of the languages represented herein, making it a better cover term, compared to the term Gur, which was suggested because the morpheme was observed to be present in a number of the languages under discussion. Apparently, the morpheme 'gur' is only found in about three of these languages: Gurma, Gurensi, and Gurenni (Bodomo, 2020). Following the Ghana Statistical Service's 2010 Population and Housing Census, there were 534,681 speakers of Kusaal in Ghana (Abubakari, 2018). Bodomo (2020), on his part, gives an estimate of 500,000 speaker population of the language across Ghana.

Kusaal is a head–initial language where a neutral clause typically has the subject preceding the verb, with the object arguments following the predicate. The word order is strictly SVO. Information structural conditions can alter this order, which pragmatically affects the interpretation of the sentence as well. This type of word order alternation is mostly found in focus constructions, relative clause constructions and constituent questions (see Abubakari, 2018; Abubakari, and Issah 2020). There are two dialects of Kusaal. The first is Agolle, spoken in Bawku Municipal, Garu, Tempane, Binduri, Pusiga and their adjoining

villages. The folktales used in this paper are from the Agolle dialect of Kusaal. The other dialect is Atoende, spoken in the Bawku West District, thus, Zebilla and its surrounding villages. The map below shows the Kusaal speaking areas with the six district capitals in bold: Bawku Municipal, Garu, Tempane, Binduri, Pusiga, and Zebilla. Kusaug, the traditional homeland of the Kusaas, is located in the Upper East Region of Ghana.

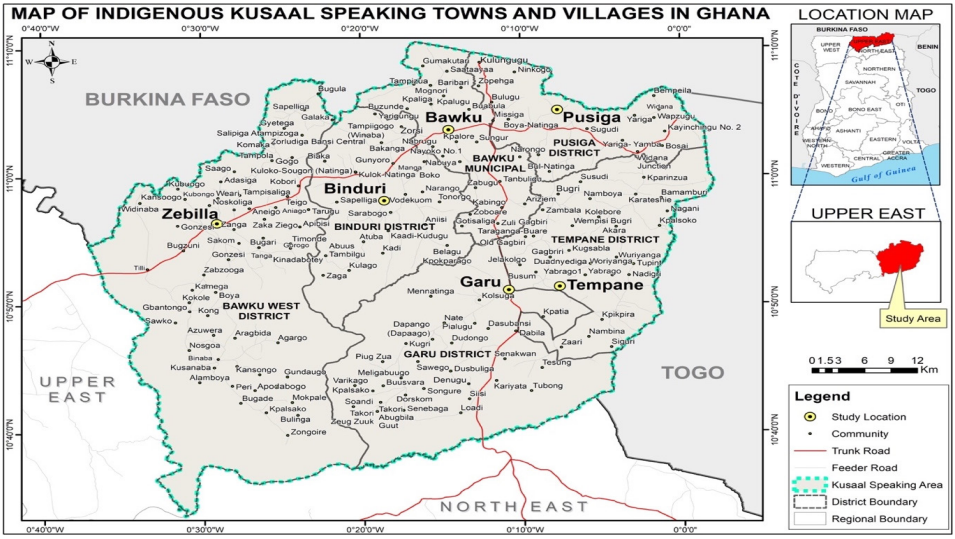

Figure 1: Map of Kusaug (Abubakari 2022)

This paper is divided into five (5) sections. Apart from the current section which is Section one (1), Section two (2) offers a brief review of serial verb constructions explicating why SVCs in Kusaal are not considered as instances of coordination or subordination. Section three (3) discusses the serializing particle *ń* in Kusaal, taking into consideration its syntax as well as its semantics. Section four (4) gives account of focus marking in SVCs in the language. It further traces the etymology of the particle and its relationship with the subject focus particle in Kusaal. Section five (5) is the conclusion.

Brief description of SVCs in Kusaal

Kusaal is among the various certified serializing languages in the literature in which series of verbs are used to express single or consecutive events without any overt markers of subordination or coordination. The verbs in SVCs in Kusaal share single tense node, same subject and object, where the latter (oblect)

only possible when the verbs are two or three place predicate verbs (Abubakari, 2011, 2018, 2019a, b; Bodomo, 1993; Osam, 1994; Ameka, 2006; Stewart, 2001, 2018; Eddyshaw, 2016; Niggli, 2014; Haspelmath, 2015; Aikhenvald, 2006; Aikhenvald and Dixon, 2006). Examples (1–3) are illustrations of SVCs in Kusaal.

(1) Ò nwá gɔ´tin lá bás.
3SG break mirror DEF leave
's/he has broken the mirror.'

(2) Ò sà dúg dííb tór.
3SG past cook food share
'She cooked for sharing'

(3) Ò dúg dííb tís[1] bííg lá.
3SG cook food give child DEF
'She cooked food and gave to the child

One common structural feature of SVCs in Kusaal is the absence of coordinating or subordinating markers, which are also referred to as 'connectors'. According to Bodomo (1997:115), a 'connectors' refers to any linguistic item used to connect or conjoin two predicate items in coordination, subordination, or complementation. SVCs in Kusaal are constrained by the presence of any connecting elements since this has direct implication on the semantics as well as the syntax of such constructions. SVCs in Kusaal are mainly distinguished from other complex constructions by the presence of subordinators and conjunctions in the latter, which are not the case in the former. Previous attempts have classified SVCs as instances of "coordinations with conjunction suppressed" (Bamgbose, 1974 cf. Bodomo, 1997:115) or "embedded purpose or result clauses with complementizers suppressed" (Awobuluyi, 1973 cf. Bodomo, 1997:115). The need to clarify that SVCs in Kusaal are neither coordinate constructions nor subordinate constructions requires further explications. Kusaal, just as other Mabia languages such as Dagaare, shows asymmetric semantic interpretation for constructions that have overt connectors and others that do not. The introduction of a connector in a monoclausal SVC in Kusaal distorts the meaning and the flow of activities as illustrated in the ungrammaticality of (4b). Example (4c) is a coordinate construction which repairs (4b). It is obvious that the SVC in (4a) has an entirely different syntax and semantics from (4b), which is evidence

1 The verbs tis and tisi are both the same and mean 'give'. Abubakari (2018:47–48, 2017: 51) explains that verbs in Kusaal come in long and short forms. The long forms are the lexical entries; they end with vowels and are more emphatic whilst the short forms lose the final vowels of their long counterparts. The form tisi is the long counterpart of tis. The examples that have tisi often occur in environments that require emphatic semantic interpretations.

that the introduction of a coordinator is infelicitous in SVCs in Kusaal.

(4) a. Ò nɔ́k bííg lá tís bà
3SG take child DEF give 3PL
'She gave them the child

b. *Ò nɔ́k bííg lá ká tís bà
3SG take child DEF CONJ give 3PL
Intended: 'She took the child and gave him/her to them

c. Ò nɔ́k bííg lá ká mɔ́r ò tís bà
3SG take child DEF CONJ have 3SG give 3PL
Intended: 'She took the child and gave him/her to them.'

Comparatively, SVCs are also used extensively in folktales just as in casual speeches in Kusaal. The following lines are taken from a story on *Asumbul nɛ Ayalsuŋ* 'Mr Rabbit and Mr Songbird taken from Akon and Anaba (1981, 2013:35).

(5) a. Àsúmbúl yáán dà bɛ́ ká dáár yínnɛ́ ká ò dúóe
rabbit again PAST COP CONJ day one CONJ 3SG get–up
záámnɔ́ɔ́ré záŋì ò gɔ́ŋɔ́ kéŋ síínd táábūg.
down take 3SG.POSS sickle go honey hunt
'There lived Mr Rabbit who got up one day and took his sickle and went hunting for honey.'

b. Ká ò dúóe zɔ́ɔ́ kúlì yɛ́lì ò pú^{l}à
LINKER 3SG get–up run go–home tell 3SG.POSS wife
nɛ́ ò bíís.
CONJ 3SG.POSS child.PL
'He got up and ran home and informed his wife and children.'

To show that object–sharing SVCs in Kusaal are true SVCs different from coordinating constructions, the various tests below taken from Abubakari (2011, 2019b) and inspired by Bodomo (1997), Collins (1997), Hiraiwa and Bodomo (2008) and Aikhenvald (2006) are used for illustrations. These tests are necessary to debunk previous notions that SVCs are instances of coordinating or subordinating constructions with conjunctions suppressed (Sebba, 1987; Schiller, 1991; Bamgbose, 1973; all cf. Bodomo 1997: 115).

The single tense marker test and the empty pronoun test

Preverbal particles are used in marking the remoteness of activities or events in Kusaal. The particle *sa* codes events that took place the previous day (hesternal past), *daa/da* codes events that took place prior to yesterday (pre-hesternal past). In SVCs, only a single particle can be used to express time, andthe said particle must occur after the subject and before the first verb, with its scope spreading across the entire construction (6a). Coordinating constructions on the other hand can have different particles coding different time frames. The examples in (6) further show that SVCs do not have an overt pronoun after the second verb (6a) but the use of an overt pronoun after the second verb is grammatical in a coordinating construction as in (6b).

(6) a. Àdúk dà dá' ná'áfù kúós *(lí)
Aduk PAST buy.PERF cow sell.PERF it
'Aduk bought a cow and sold it.'

b. Àdúk dà dá' ná'áfù ká (sà) kúós (lí).
Aduk PAST buy.PERF cow CONJ PAST sell.PERF it
'Aduk bought a cow and sold it.'

The single tense test is more evident when aspectual morphemes are used in SVCs in Kusaal. Whilst all the series of verbs in SVCs must have the same aspectual suffix morpheme (7a), coordinating constructions can have different aspectual suffix morphemes and they are also required to have a conjunction. This is exemplified in in (7b). This is a difference between SVCs in Kusaal and Dagaare. In the latter, a construction that is not a typical SVC can have different aspectual suffix morphemes, and yet a conjunction is also not obligatory as in (7c).

(7) a. Bà zɔ́tnɛ́ kénnɛ́ àní dít múì lá.
3PL run.IMPERF go.IMPERF DEM eat.IMPERF rice DEF
'They ran there to eat the rice always.'

b. Bà zɔ́ kéŋ àní (*ká) dít múì lá.
3PL run.PERF go.PERF DEM CONJ eat.IMPERF rice DEF
'They ran there and are eating the rice.'

c. Ba zɔ gaa di-re la. (Dagaare)
3PL run.PERF go.PERF eat-IMPERF la
They ran there and they are now eating.' (Bodomo 1997:112–113)

The negation test

In Kusaal SVCs, the negative particle *pʊ* 'not' and *kʊ* 'will not' must obligatorily occur before V_1, and its scope spreads across the entire construction.

(8)a. Bà pʊ́ dúgí dííbí díí.
3PL NEG cook.PERF food eat.PERF
'They did not cook food and eat.'

b. *Bà dʊ́g dííb pʊ́ díí.
3PL cook.PERF food NEG eat.PERF
Intended: They cooked food and did not eat it.'

c. *Bà pʊ́ dúgí dííbí pʊ́ díí.
3PL NEG cook.PERF food NEG eat.PERF
Intended: 'They did not cook food and did not eat it.'

On the other hand, in overt coordinating constructions, the negative particle can occur before the V2, as in (9a), compared to (8b). This is another major difference between SVCs and overt coordinating constructions in Kusaal.

(9)a. Bà dʊ́g dííb ká pʊ́ díí.
3PL cook.PERF food CONJ NEG eat.PERF
'They cooked food and did not eat it.'

b. Bà pʊ́ dúgí dííbí ká pʊ́ díí.
3PL NEG cook.PERF food CONJ NEG eat.PERF
'They cooked and ate/There is no instance when they cooked and did not eat.'
Intended: (They did not cook food and did not eat it)

Double negation in coordinate constructions, where the negative particle precedes both V_1 and V_2, results in a positive interpretation, as in (9b).

The extraction test

Unlike SVCs that are not subject to the Coordinate Structure Constraint (Ross, 1967), as shown by the possibility of extracting the object in example (10a), it is ungrammatical to extract the object in overt coordinate structures as in (10b–c) in Kusaal.

(10) a. Bɔ́ kà bà sà dúgí díí?
what FOC 3PL PAST cook.PERF eat.PERF
'What did they cook and eat?'

b. *Bɔ́ kà bà sà dúgí ká díí lí?
what FOC 3PL PAST cook.PERF CONJ eat.PERF it
'What did they cook and then eat..

c. *Bɔ́ kà bà sà dúgí ká díí?
what FOC 3PL PAST cook.PERF CONJ eat.PERF
'What did they cook and eat?'

From the various tests illustrated above, object–sharing SVCs in Kusaal demonstrate features that clearly separate them from overt coordinating constructions in the language. It is important to mention that a close look at the data used in this section reveals the absence of the particle *ń*. The preliminary assertion is that the use of *ń* is not obligatory in SVCs in Kusaal. Having shown that object–sharing SVCs in Kusaal are true SVCs, the next subsection discusses an observed serializing particle in SVCs in the language. This is mainly seen in a collection of folktales by Akon Samuel and Joe Anaba which was first printed in 1981 and reprinted in 2013. The use of folktales is very important and appropriate in looking out for the original and archaic forms of grammatical constructions in languages. More importantly, forms that are synchronically missing could be traced diachronically in documented folktales of the nature used in this study. Further checks with native speakers confirm the availability of the serializing particle in Kusaal, but they further contend that it is often missing in rapid speech.

The serializing particle *ń* in SVCs in Kusaal is compared to a seemingly identical morpheme in SVCs in a closely related sister language, Moore.

The particle *ń* in SVCs in Kusaal

This section discusses an observed particle *ń* in serial verb constructions in Kusaal. The data for this observation is taken form a set of folktales, first printed in 1981, by Akon Anaba and Samuel Joe. The study interest is to ascertain whether the presence of the said particle affects the status of SVCs in Kusaal, as true SVCs or not. Thus, this observation could possibly lead to the assertion that *ń* serves as a marker of dependency, connecting the series of activities in the succession of their occurrences in SVCs. This claim is borne out of previous research which establishes a serializing connector in a closely related language Moore (Pajancic, 2017). Bodomo (1997:116) initially glossed the particle in Moore as a coordinator as illustrated below:

(11) I ti tigis taaman n di
Let us pick sheafruits and eat
'Let us go and collect sheafruits and then eat them.' (Bodomo 1997:115)

Although the supposed serializing particle in Kusaal appears identical to what is observed in Moore, the distributional function and semantic interpretation of the particle in the two languages differ. The serializing particle is not found in all SVCs in Kusaal as in the case of Moore. The use of ń in SVCs in Kusaal is associated with a focus interpretation on the VP it precedes. In the selected lines of a folktale in (20), it can be observed that the particle ń does not occur with all the verbs in the sentences.
In (20a) the series of verbs: *paae* 'arrive' *tisi* 'give', *nu* 'drink' and *kpi* 'die' are used without the particle. Equally noticeable in (20b) are the series of verbs: *duom kpɛnˡ..piis* 'get-up, enter…sweep' without the particle. In the other instances where the particle occurs, there is a connotation of emphasis and assertion on the verbs it precedes, whilst the same interpretation is not deduced on the series of verbs where the particle is not used.

(12) a. Ò yɛ́lì ò mɛŋ́ yé, ò nà dáˡ nɛ́ dáám lá
3SG say 3SG self COMP 3SG FUT buyFOC wine DEF
ká bɔ´ tĩ́kʊ́ʊ́dím ń lɔ´s dáámínlá ń páaé
CONJ search poison N put wine.LOC DEF N arrive
tísì bà ká bà núú kpí ká ò sʊˀoé
give 3PL.ACC CONJ 3PL.NOM drink die CONJ 3SG own
lígídí lá wʊ́sá.
money DEF all
(Akon and Anaba 2013:25)
'He told himself that, it is wine/drink he will buy and look for poison to add to the drink, to go and give it to them and they will drink and die so that he takes all the money.'

b. Ká ò tánsì ò púˡá yé ò dúòm tɔ́'ɔ́tɔ́
LINKER 3SG shout 3SG.POSS wife COMP 3SG get-up quickly
ń dɔ́l̀ ò kpɛ́nˡ ò dɔ́ɔ́gìn sà píís…….
N follow 3SG enter 3SG room.LOC FUT sweep
(Akon and Anaba 2013:21)
'And he shouted on his wife to get-up quickly and get in the room and sweep the place….'

The data below is taken from a Kusaal primer, which is designed for literacy training, and the particle *ń* is also used in between some series of verbs.

(13) a. Dáú dà bɛ́ ń mɔ́r ná'ábíbís nɛ́ nɔ́bíbís
man PAST COP N have calf.PL CONJ chicken.PL
nɛ́ mɔ́ɔ́d. Ká ń sáám dáˡ mɔ́ɔ́d la ń
CONJ thatch CONJ 1SG.POSS father buy thatch DEF N
tísì mám.give
give 1SG.EMPH.
'There was a man who had calves, chicken and thatch. (And) my father bought the thatch for me.'

b. Àbúpúàk mɔ́n sáˡab ń tísì bá.
girl prepareT.Z N give 3PL
'The young lady prepared T.Z for them.'
(GILLBT 2014:53)

The occurrence of the particle ń in SVCs in Mabia languages is not unique to Kusaal. In a closely related sister language, Moore, a morpheme ń is observed to occur in between SVCs. The said morpheme is argued to be a serializing connector (Bodomo, 2002; Nikièma, 2003; Pajancic, 2017). In Moore, the observed serializing connector is obligatory in all SVCs without any observed discourse or semantic implications. This is the significant element which differentiates the syntax as well as the semantics of the serializing connector in Moore from the particle ń which is observed in some SVCs in Kusaal what is the case in Kusaal. Consider the examples below in Moore, with a direct translation to Kusaal. The Moore example in (22a) is taken from Nikièma (2003:128 cf. Pajancic, 2017). This example is translated into Kusaal (22b, c) for purposes of cross-assessment and analysis.

(14)a. A zoeeme n wa ka Moore
3S run.PERF n come.PERF here
S/he ran here / s/he came by running. (Nikièma 2003:128)

b. Ò zɔ́ kéná Kusaal
3SG run.PERF come.PERF-here
'She ran here'.

c. Ò zɔ́ ń kéná Kusaal
3SG run.PERF N come.PERF.here
'S/he ran and CAME HERE. /S/he CAME HERE by running.'

The example in (14b), with data from Kusaal, does not have the 'serializing connector', compared to the example in (14a) from Moore where the particle *n* is obligatory. The use of *ń* in (14c) for Kusaal is grammatical but not commonly used in casual and rapid speech. To also show that *ń*, when even used in (14c) cannot function as a coordinator, consider the substitution test below, (15–16), and see sub-section (4.1) for further discussion on this.

(15)a. Ò zɔ́ ká kéná
3SG run and come.here
'She run and came here.'

b. *Ò zɔ́ ò kéná
3SG run 3SG come.here

(16)a. Ò zɔ́ ká ò kéná
3SG run and 3SG come.here
'She run and she came here.'

b. *Ò zɔ́ ń ò kéná
3SG run FOC 3SG come.here

The examples in (15–16) show that the particles *ń* and ka have different syntax and semantics in Kusaal. The verbs in the compound sentence in (15a) can share a common subject, as well as have different subjects as in (16a). This is because of the VP conjunction *ka*. However, it is ungrammatical to have multiple subjects in SVCs as in (15b) and (16b). More importantly, whereas (16a) is grammatically accepted, (16b) is ungrammatical. This is an indication that the VP conjunction *ka* and the particle *ń* have different syntactic roles. Below are more comparative data from Moore and Kusaal.

(17) rɪk bɛngã n wãbe Moore
take bean+def pvc eat
"take the bean and eat" (Nikièma 2003:128)

(18) nɔ́kím bɛŋ́á lá dí Kusaal
take.IMPERF beans DEF eat
'Take the beans and eat.'

(19) nɔ́kím bɛŋ́á lá ká dí (li)
takeIMPERF beans DEF CONJ eat (it)
'Take the beans and eat (it)'

(20) nɔ́kím bɛ́ŋá lá ń dí
take.IMPERF beans DEF N eat
'Take the beans and EAT.'

Again, it is observed that whereas the serializing particle is used in the data from Moore as in (17), same cannot be said for Kusaal as in (18). Unlike the coordinate structure in (19), where a resumptive pronoun can optionally be used in the second clause, it is ungrammatical to have the pronoun in the SVC in (20). Equally noticeable is the emphatic interpretation associated with the V2, represented in upper case in the interpretation in example (20). It is assumed to be due to the presence of the particle *ń*, which when absent, the emphatic interpretation is also not implied as in (19). Examples (21–22) are further illustrations from Moore, taken from Zongo (2014:100) to show the profound use of the 'serializing connector' in the language (Moore).

(21) À ká góm–d wʊsg n yúg–d máam yé
He neg talk+imperf a lot pvc exceed+imperf. me neg
"He does not talk a lot more than me."

(22) à tall–d–à teed n wa–t n
he take+imperf+aff pvc come+imperf pvc
kò–t máám
give+imperf me
"He brings me some things." (Zongo 2014:61)

By comparing the data and examples from Moore and Kusaal, where the particle *ń* is obligatory in the former but not in the latter, it is argued that the use of the particle could be a common diachronic feature in both languages, where their semantics is synchronically disconnected. Whilst the particle could be described as a serializing connector in Moore, the same cannot be established for Kusaal. It will be observed in the next section that though syntactically, *ń* may have retained some properties of a coordinate conjunction, the interpretation is semantically bleached. In the next section, I examine the syntax and semantics of the particle *ń*. This is carried out by substituting the NP and VP conjunctions nɛ and ka with the particle *ń*, as well as considering possible semantic implications on the constructions that have this substitution where possible.

Substituting *ń* in SVCs with the conjunctions nɛ and ka

The particle *ń* in SVCs seems to be in complimentary distribution with the VP conjunction *ka*, but the same cannot be argued for the NP conjunction *nɛ*. The question then is whether similar interpretations can be derived, should

ń be replaced by ka and ka also replaced by ń. Consider the data in (23) and the explanation after it.

(23) Ò yɛ́lì ò mɛŋ́ yé, ò nà dáˡ nɛ́ dáám lá
3SG say 3SG self COMP 3SG FUT buy FOC wine DEF
ká (n) bɔ́ tĩ́kʊ́ʊ́dím ń lɔ́s dáámínlá ń páaé
CONJ search poison N put wine.LOC DEF N arrive
tísì bà ká(*n) bà núú kpí ká(*n) ò sʊ́ˈoē
give 3PL.ACC CONJ 3PL.NOM drink die CONJ 3SG own
lígídí lá wʊ́sá.
money DEF all
(Akon and Anaba 2013:25)
'He told himself that, it is wine/drink he will buy and look for poison to add to the drink, to go and give it to them and they will drink and die so that he take all the money.'

The VP conjunction within the SVC can be replaced with the particle *ń* as illustrated in (24), with the verbs sharing an identical subject. The replacement of ka with *ń* erodes the simple conjunctive interpretation to an interpretation involving a strong assertion or emphasis on the act immediately following the particle. The other VP conjunctions linking major clauses, on the other hand, cannot be replaced with *ń*. It is ungrammatical to use *ń* in place of *ka* in compound–complex structures. With reference to the NP conjunction *nɛ*, a similar observation is made; it is infelicitous to replace the NP conjunction *nɛ* with the particle *ń*:

(24) ò nà dáˡ nɛ́ dáám lá n(*nɛ) bɔ́ tĩ́kʊ́ʊ́dím
3SG FUT buy FOC wine DEF N search poison
ń lɔ́s dáámín lá ń páaē tísì bà
N put wine.LOC DEF N arrive give 2PL
'It is wine/drink he will buy and look for poison to add to the drink, to go and give it to them and they will drink and die so that he takes all the money.'

The argument posed is that the particle *ń* is selectively used when an emphatic interpretation is intended on the verb it precedes. Some verbs in the series in the folktales are not preceded by the particle, which is an indicationthat the use of the particle is not optional but rather one that has an additional emphatic focus interpretation (Abubakari, 2018: 129–130, 2019a).

Just as the use of *ń* after a subject constituent encodes an interpretation of contrast on the NP argument (Abubakari, 2018, 2019a), the use of *ń* in SVCs encodes an interpretation of emphasis/focus on the adjoining VP. The next section throws some light on focus marking in SVCs in Kusaal. This is intended to establish a link between the discourse particle *ń* in SVCs and the focus particles in Kusaal in general.

Focus marking in SVCs

Focused constituents in SVCs in Kusaal are mostly fronted, followed by the focus particle *ka* (Abubakari, 2011, 2018, 2019a, b, 2020; Eddyshaw, 2016; Musah, 2018). Abubakari (2020) observes that, in Kusaal SVCs, constituents can be focused by fronting the focused constituents using the particle *ka*, or by in–situ focus where the particles *ń* and *nɛ* are used for subject focus and non–subject focus respectively. The data and examples below are mostly taken from Abubakari (2020).

The shared object in SVCs in Kusaal can be focused both in–situ as in (25b, 26b), using the particle *nɛ*, and ex–situ as in (25c, 26c), using the particle ka.

(25) Q.: What did the man buy and eat?

Ans. a. Dáú sà dá' múì dí.
man PAST buy rice eat
'A man bought rice and ate.'

Correction: b. Àyéí dáú sà dá' nɛ́ bɛŋ́ír dí.
no, man PAST buy FOC beans eat
'No, it is beans that the man bought and ate (rather than rice).'

c. Ayei, bɛ́ŋír kà dáú sà dá' dí.
no, beans FOC man PAST buy eat
'No, it is beans that the man bought and ate (rather than rice).'

(26) a. S: The woman bought rice for the child.

b. Ayei, pʊ́ˡá lá sà dáˡ nɛ́ súmá tís
no, woman DEF PAST buy FOC groundnut give
bííg lá.
child DEF
'No, it is GROUNDNUT the woman bought for the child.'

c. Ayei,	súmá	kà	pú'á	lá	sà	dá^{l}	tís
no	groundnut	FOC	woman	DEF	PAST	buy	give
bííg	lá.						
child	DEF						

The particle *ń* is a subject focus marker in Kusaal. It is often associated with a strong interpretation of assertion, exclusiveness and exhaustivity (Abubakari, 2019a, b, 2018:148; Musah, 2018: 224).

(27) Q: Who is in the room?

Ans.:	pʊ́^{l}á	bɛ́	dɔ́ɔgin	lá.
	woman	COP	room–LOC	DEF

'A woman is in the room.'

Ans.:	Ayei, dáú	ń	bɛ́	dɔ́ɔgin	lá
	no, man	FOC	COP	room–LOC	DEF

'It is a man that is in the room (not a woman).'

It is infelicitous to use *ń* to mark focus on non-subject arguments (28) and VPs (29). This is exemplified in the corrections to the wrong information in the sentences in (28–29).

(28) S: They bought rice yesterday.

Correction:	Ayei,	bà	sà	dá'	nɛ́ (*n)	súmá
	No	2PL	PAST	buy.PERF	FOC	groundnut

'No, it is groundnut they bought yesterday'

(29) S: They bought rice yesterday.

Correction:	Ayei,	ò	sà	kúòs	súmá	nɛ́(*n).
	no,	3SG	PAST	sell	groundnut	FOC

'No, it is groundnut she sold yesterday.'

The shared subject in SVCs in Kusaal can also be focused using the particle *ń*.

(30) S: The woman bought beans and ate it.

Àyéí,	dáú	lá	ń	sà	dá'	bɛ́ŋír	dí.
no,	man	DEF	FOC	PAST	buy	beans	eat

'It is the man who that bought beans and ate.'

Abubakari (2020: 53–56) further shows that in-situ predicate focus in SVCs in Kusaal has the following possibilities:

i. Individual verbs can be focused independently but not simultaneously, in which instance the particles *nɛ* can either be used:

(31) a. Q: What did he do before running home?

b. Ans: Ò sà dɔ́ nɛ́ zɔ́ kúl.
3SG PAST get–up.PERF FOC run.PERF go.home.PERF
'He GOT–UP and ran and went home.'

c. * Ò sà dɔ́ nɛ́ zɔ́ nɛ́ kúl nɛ́.
3SG PAST get–up.PERF FOC run.PERF FOC go.home.PERF FOC

ii. The series of verbs in SVCs can be focused collectively with a single focus particle at the right periphery of the sentence, and in which situation, only the particle *nɛ* can be used.

(32) a. Q: What did he do?

b. Ans: Ò sà dɔ́ zɔ́ kúl nɛ́ (*n).
3SG PAST get–up.PERF run.PERF go.home.PERF FOC
'He GOT–UP AND RAN AND WENT HOME.'

iii. Multiple foci with either the same particle or different particles on either the same lexical constituent or different constituents in a single construction are ungrammatical (Abubakari, 2020:55)[2].

(33) a. Q: What did he do?

b. Ans: *Aduk n sà dɔ́ nɛ́
Aduk FOC PAST get–up.PERF FOC
zɔ́ n kúl nɛ́.
run.PERF FOC go.home.PERF FOC
'He GOT UP AND RAN AND WENT HOME.'

Unlike the rules in (i) and (ii), which also apply to the serializing particle, rule (iii) appears to differ as illustrated in the data below which is a repetition of example (24).

(34) Ò nà dáˡ nɛ́ dáám lá ń bɔ́ tĺḱúúdím n
3SG FUT buy FOC wine DEF N search poison N
lɔ́s dáámín lá ń páaē tísì bà
put wine.LOC DEF N arrive give 2PL
'It is wine/drink he will buy and look for poison to add to the drink, to go and give it to them and they will drink and die so that he takes all the money.'

2 Abubakari arrived at this hypothesis based on data gathered from casual speech during field–work between 2016 and 2018.

In this example, both *nɛ́*and *ń* are used as VP emphatic markers. However, in a 'normal' rapid speech, the serializing particle *ń* could potentially be missing. The likelihood of dropping *ń* in casual speech could be considered as further indication that the use of *ń* in SVCs is synchronically fading.

Similarly, there is restriction on the use of the serializing particle in questions and negations. Thus, the particle *ń* is missing in the data used for the tests for SVCs. This could be attributed to the fact that these constructions are inherently emphatic, which renders the use of the particle redundant. Abubakari (2018:147) explains that focus, in Kusaal, can also be expressed by using vowel lengthening plus prosody or vowel insertion plus prosody. Ex-situ focus marking, on the other hand, mostly uses morphological marking in Mabia languages whilst in-situ focus marking may or may not employ overt morphological markings. Both the negation test and the extraction tests used in section two (2) have the V2 which would otherwise be preceded by the discourse particle lengthened. The long forms of the verbs are emphatic and always end with vowels, compared to the short forms which end with coda consonants (Abubakari, 2018:47–48, 2017: 51). An emphatic interpretation is, therefore, already eminent in the forms that are lengthened and all the long forms of lexical items in Kusaal in general. The long forms of lexical items are described by Musah (2018: 224) as the forms that use the –i clitic Foc on nouns and verbs that end with consonant coda for emphasis. What is described as the long form with the extended i-vowel in this context is described as the –i clitic Foc in Musah (2018:224). It, therefore, sounds very unnatural to introduce *ń* in these forms for emphasis. The data used for these tests in section (2) are repeated here.

(35) a. Bà pʊ́ dúgí dííbí díí.
3PL NEG cook.PERF food eat.PERF
Intended: They did not cook food to eat/ and ate it)

b. *Bà pʊ́ dúgí dííbí n díí.
3PL NEG cook.PERF food N eat.PERF

(36) a. Bɔ́ kà bà sà dʊ́gí díí?
what FOC 3PL PAST cook.PERF eat.PERF
'What did they cook and eat?'

b. *Bɔ́ kà bà sà dʊ́gí n díí?
what FOC 3PL PAST cook.PERF N eat.PERF

The inherent emphatic interpretation of questions and negation could be assumed to account for the incompatible use of the serializing particle to avoid redundancy. Further still it could be explained that the synchronic dearth of the use of the particle in casual speech in SVCs could also be a potential reason for which the serializing particle is absent.

The relationship between the particle *ń* in SVCs and in subject focus constructions in Kusaal

It has been mentioned that though *ń* functions as a subject focus marker, a similar morpheme is used in between series of verbs in SVCs with identical emphatic/focus interpretation. The subject focus particle and the observed particle in SVCs could be argued to perform the same emphatic focus function, with perhaps the same etymology but different distributions.

Following Abubakari (2018:112), it is argued that the focus particles *ń*, *nɛ́* and *kà* are grammaticalized from the NP and VP conjunctions *nɛ́* and *ká* respectively. Abubakari (2018: 112) asserts that the grammaticalization of the conjunctions *nɛ́* and *kà* into focus particles is not unique to Kusaal since this has been shown to be a common phenomenon in information structure particles in mostly African languages (Heine and Kuteva, 2002: 95, 331; Heine and Reh, 1984:181–2; Stassen, 1997:85; Fiedler and Schwarz, 2005:137; Boadi, 1974). As presented in Table (2), Abubakari (2018) suggests a pattern of desemanticization of focus particles in Kusaal from the copula verbs àn(ɛ́) 'to be' and the negative polarity copula verb *ká^{l}á* 'to be/have not'.

Table 2. Grammaticalization Chain of focus particles in Kusaal (Abubakari 2018:112)

Lexical items	Copula >Conjunction > Complementizer > Focus Particle			
Copula 'to be'	àn(ɛ́)	nɛ́	nɛ́	ń, nɛ́
Copula+Neg 'to be/have not'	ká^{l}á	Ká	ká	kà

In general, this section ties up the seeming relationship in the function of the serializing particle *ń* in SVCs in Kusaal and the subject focus particle *ń* in focus constructions in the language. Although the main objective of the paper is to explore the nature and function of the said particle in SVCs in Kusaal, it has become important to discuss the other grammatical scopes where a similar or near similar particle occurs. The comparison has aided in revealing that the morpheme from which the particle is derived from has undergone several phases

to its current function (Abubakari, 2018). More likely is the hypothesis that the discourse marker ń in SVCs is synchronically dying off. This is because it is already elusive in casual speech as indicated elsewhere. The same trend is likely to be observed in other oral literary forms. This observation is presented in Figure 2.

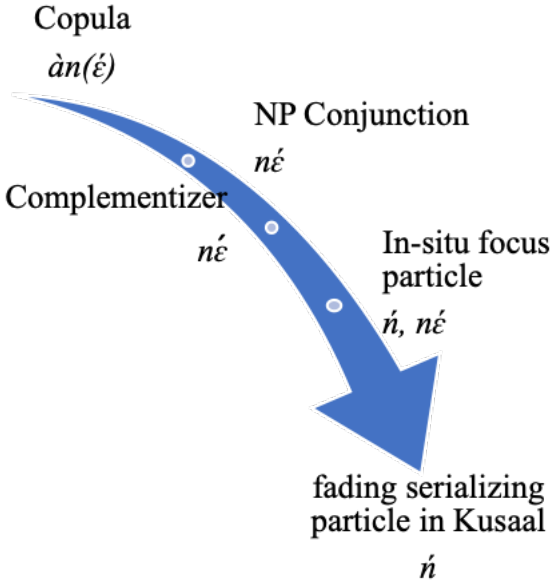

Figure 2: Synchronic status of the 'serializing particle ń in Kusaal

Conclusion

This research aimed at investigating the pragmatic functions of the particle *ń* in serial verb constructions in Kusaal. Part of the main goal of this research was to show that the observed particle in SVCs in this language is neither a serializing connector nor a coordinating or subordinating element. The findings in this research shown that though *ń* functions as a subject focus marker in Kusaal, a similar morpheme is used in between series of verbs in SVCs with identical emphatic/focus interpretation. The subject focus particle and the observed particle in SVCs are argued to perform the same emphatic focus function, with perhaps the same etymology but different distributions. This study observes that, unlike in previous observations where the particle *ń* is exclusively claimed to express focus related interpretation on subject constituents (Abubakari, 2018, 2019a), it additionally expresses same interpretation on VPs clause internally, typically common in SVCs. This study contributes to our understanding of the semantic asymmetry of SVCs that have the particle *ń* and those that do not have this particle in Kusaal, since the observed particle is not obligatory in SVCs in this language, compared to the situation in other sister languages such as Moore, where *n* occurs in all SVCs. More importantly, although my language consultants admit to the grammaticality of the serializing particle, they also admit that it is currently fading out quickly, especially in rapid casual speech. The scope of this study is limited to only Kusaal, which was extensively compared to Moore. This will present a fruitful area of research with data from other languages that show traces of identical particle or others in SVCs in Mabia languages.

List of Abbreviations

ACC	accusative	NOM	Nominalized
CONJ	conjunction	PAST	past
COMP	complementizer	PERF	perfective
COP	copula	PL	plural
DEF	definite	POSS	possessive
EMPH	emphatic	Q	question marker
FOC	focus	SG	singular
FUT	future	SVC	serial verb construction
IMPERF	imperfective	T.Z.	tuo-zaafi 'staple corn dish'
LOC	locative	V, V1, V2	verb, 1st verb, 2nd verb
NEG	negative	VP	verb phrase

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