Original Paper

Multiple Objects, Serial Verbs and the Question of Argument-Sharing

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Abstract

This paper explores syntactic operations that obtain in multiple object and serial verb constructions in Akoose, a Bantu language spoken in Cameroon. Focus is placed on the structure and types of multi-verb constructions (MVCs), the structure of (MVCs), as well as multiple object constructions (MOCs). The paper also examines argument-sharing in both (MVCs) and (MOCs). The analysis is done following insights from Chomsky (1981, 1995; Miyagawa, 2010). While (MOCs) display predicates with two structural patterns, namely [$_{VP}$, [$_{NP}$ IO [$_{NP}$ DO]]] and [$_{VP}$, [$_{NP}$ DO [$_{NP}$ IO]]], serial verb constructions (SVCs) constitute a maximum of three different VP structures, namely a) [$_{V1}$ [XP [$_{V2}$]], b) [XP [$_{V1}$ [$_{V2}$]], and c) [$_{V1}$[$_{V2}$ [XP [$_{V3}$]]]. It is found that notwithstanding the normal SVO word order in the language, complex serial verbs impose an S-V_1-V_2-(V_3)-O word order, which further derives S-V_1-V_2-O-V_3 and S-V_1-O-V_2-V_3 surface variants. The analysis further reveals that irrespective of the complex nature of structures examined and the various transformational operations they undergo, there is no argument sharing in MOCs and SVCs in Akoose.

Keywords

Akoose, MOCs and SVCs, argument-sharing, word order, case assignment and theta-roles, feature checking

1. Introduction

The Akoose verb can broadly be classified as comprising main and light verbs. While the main verb distinguishes four types (infinitive verbs, imperative verbs, auxiliary verbs, and phrasal verbs), light verbs are made up of two types—Lexical Light Verbs (LLvs) and Suffixal Light Verbs (SLvs). Possibilities of combining the various verbs in this language are multiple and varied in nature. For instance, multiple verb constructions (henceforth MVCs) attested in the language include Auxiliary

Verb Constructions (AVCs) and Serial Verb Constructions (SVCs); the entire complex exhibits a maximum of three verbs in a given construction. It is intriguing to note that predicates in this language select multiple arguments, including multiple objects. While this seems to pose a problem to Case Theory in particular and to the concept of argument sharing in general, it is more bewildering, theoretically speaking, to note that in SVCs, three verbs tend to select only one internal argument. Unravelling the foregoing intricacies in the *Akoose* verb structure constitutes the aim of this paper.

The Case Filter, which stipulates that all visible NPs must be assigned case and the Theta (θ-) Criterion that asserts that "Each argument bears one and only one θ-role, and each θ-role is assigned to one and only one argument according to Chomsky (1981, p. 35), *comprise the conceptual frameworks adopted in this paper*. Also, following Chomsky (2001b) and Miyagawa (2010), recent minimalist approaches that point to the conclusion that agreement triggers movement and that "heads" select their complements while movement brings the goal close to the probe are explored.

Related studies in the literature abound and take different perspectives. Schneider (2021) worked on the classification of multi-verb constructions in *Hul'q'umi'nun Salish*. The work characterised AVCs, SVCs and VCCs in the language under study. While verb components in AVCs and SVCs share a subject argument, component verbs of a VCC need not share. In 2005, Amekaexplored SVCs in their grammatical contexts in *Ewe*. Issues at the heart of SVCs in *Ewe* include: types and function, constraint on aspect, modality, negation and focus. Also, Koch (2009) worked on "Innovative double subject marking in *Nɨe? kepmxin*". Taking recourse to the Proto-Salish pattern of transitive subject marking obtained via person agreement suffix and explitive (3rd person) clitic following Davis (1999), Kochasserts that in Central Salish, transitive subjects tend to be marked with a *clitic*, while subject suffixes are eliminated. From the *Nɨe? kepmxin* facts, Koch sheds light on how the historical shift in transitive subject marking from Proto-Salish may have begun, as attested in *Nɨe? kepmxin*.

Akoose SVCs and MOCs seem to present more complex structures from the ones seen in the foregoing works. It is therefore important to present the facts and to show how the complex structures fare with certain theoretical frameworks.

2. Method

The paper is divided into 6 sections. Section 1 introduces the paper while section 2 presents the method. In section 3, SVCs are examined; argument sharing in both DOCs and SVCs is handled in section 4. While the result is stated in section 5, section 6 presents the discussion and conclusion of the paper.

2.1 The Place of Objects within Clause Structures

Akoose exhibits various clauses with different types of verb usage, namely transitive, intransitive and di-transitive verbs. Within a finite clause, the verb occurs between the subject and the complement, just as in English. The number of complement(s) a verb may or may not select point(s) to the transitiveness of the verb or its given usage. Therefore, in a construction in the language, a verb can either be objectless, even though it can also select a single or double object. This reasoning is developed in the

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subsequent sub-sections.

2.2 Objectless Constructions

Unlike transitive clauses, intransitive clauses express an action or state as limited to the agent or subject, or as ending in itself. In other words, verbs in such clauses do not necessitate an object to complete the intended meaning of an expression. Examples are given in (1).

(1) a. **mwăn a kún-é**

1-child agr sleep-perf

"The child has slept"

b. **epupub é púm-mé**

7- butterfly agr 7-it fly-perf.

"The butterfly flew (away)"

c. **mod a pol-é**

1-person agr travel-perf

"The man has travelled"

Note however that in some forms of usage in Akoose, these verbs can be followed by optional indirect objects. This applies to (2), where the verb selects a direct object, ʧê "sleep". This is optional and it is only possible in languages like Akoose that allow expressions like "sleeping sleep", which is illicit in a language like English.

(2) **mwăn a kún-é ʧê**

1-child agr sleep-perf sleep

"The child is sleeping"

In the following sub-sections, the focus is on more constructions with objects. Constructions with single objects are considered before those with complex objects.

2.2.1 Single Object Constructions

Structures that obligatorily select objects are transitive clauses wherein the verbs express an action as not limited to the agent or subject, but directed upon an object as well. This is illustrated in the examples in (3).

(3) a. **Mod a - n wúúmbód**

1.person agr p1 kill goat

"The man killed a goat"

b. **mwăn a dəb-é ɛkub**

1-child agr close-Perf. door

"The child closed the door"

c. **mwăn a pím-é epal**

1-child agr carry-perf bag

"The child is carrying a bag"

d. *__mwăn a pím-é__

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1-child 1-he carry-perf

"*The child is carrying"

In (3), the acts of "killing", "closing" and "carrying" are respectively construed as directed upon their corresponding direct objects. Unlike the (3a-c), (3d) is ungrammatical because the transitive verb, **pím-é** lacks an object, since it has the structure NP+V.

2.2.2 Multiple Object Constructions

This class of clauses involves verbs that trigger the use of two objects for a construction to be meaningful. In other words, such verbs express an action that involves the subject, direct object, and an indirect object. Observe that while (3a) and (4a) are grammatical, the rest of the examples are ill-formed. The ungrammaticality is due to the fact that one of the NPs is absent from the structures.

(4) a. **mwăna byăsáákáálag**

1- child agr-give perf. father book

"The child gave the book to his father"

b. ***mwăn a byăsáá**

1-child agr give-Perf. father

"*The child gave his father"

c. ***mwăn a byăkáálag**

1- child agr give-Perf. book

"*The child gave the book"

While the ungrammaticality of (4b) is caused by the absence of the direct object in the structure, the ungrammaticality of (4c) stems from the absence of the indirect object. This reasoning holds sway for the ungrammaticality of (5b-c).

(5) a. **a láŋ-é mwăn pɔ́lə**

1-he tell-Perf. child story

"He told the child a story"

b. ***a láŋ-é pɔ́lə**

1-he tell-Perf. story

"*He told a story"

c. ***a láŋ-é mwăn**

1-he tell-Perf. child

"*He told the child"

Obligatorily therefore, both NPs have to be present in such structures in Akoose, just like in English. The grammatical sentence (5a) is represented in (6).

(6) [$_S$ [$_{NP}$ [Su] [$_{VP}$[$_{NP}$ DO [$_{NP}$ IO]]]]]

In (6), the direct object (DO) precedes the indirect object (IO). Consider other examples in (7).

(7) a. **Mwăn a láŋ-é sáá pɔ́lə**

Child 1 agr tell-Perf. father story

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"He told the child a story"

b. **Mwǎn a byăkáálagáwəsáá**

Child 1 agr give-Perf. book LOC father

"The child gave the book to his father"

Both (7a) and (7b) exhibit ditransitive clauses, although the structures of the constructions are dissimilar. While the objects in (7a) are contiguous, those in (7b) are separated by an intervening locative morpheme. The representation of (7a) takes the form in (6), but (7b) takes the form in (8), where the indirect object precedes the direct object.

(8) [$_S$ [$_{NP}$ [Su], [$_{VP}$, [$_{NP}$ IO [$_{NP}$ DO]]]]].

In Akoose, tri-transitive clauses, the verbs can take three objects with the indirect object being optional. Consider the following examples drawn from Hedinger (2008).

(9) a. V   IO   O   Inst

bé-dibnaad   **(me)**   **saadîne'kii**

2-open.with.IMPF 1S.PRO   9.tin   14.key

"They opened me the sardine tin with a key"

b. **bé-bɔ́mné**   **(me)**   **mwǎnbwel**

2-beat.with.PERF 1S.PRO   1.child 14.stick

"They beat my child with a stick"

In (9), the three objects have no intervening elements separating them. The order comprises a direct object followed by the direct object and finally by the second indirect object which plays the role of an instrument.

The foregoing section specified the nature of clauses in the language under investigation. In the following section, SVCs are examined.

3. Serial Verb Constructions SVCs

SVCs in Akoose are made up of two or three different verbs and consist of at least an auxiliary verb and the main verb. The final verb is semantically the main verb while the initial verb belongs to the auxiliary class (Hedinger, 2008, p. 152). Akoose distinguishes two (SVCs), namely the simple and the complex SVCs.

3.1 The Simple Serial Verb Vonstruction

Simple serial verbs consist of an inflected verb and an infinitive verb (V-Inf). As shown in (10), there is no intervening element between the two verbs. The infinitive verb in final position takes the low-tone.

(10) a. **Epie a hede a-chine**

Epie agr want to-leave

"Epie wants to leave"

b. **Epie a wúmtáné a-pol**

Epie agr think to-travel

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"Epie intends to travel"

While the examples in (10) are cases of intransitive clauses, the one in (11) is a transitive instance.

(11) a. **Epie a-wánsáné a-sú á- ndáp**

Epie agr hurry to-return LOC house

"Epie returned to the house in a haste"

In some simple structures, one may have the impression that the two verbs are not immediately serial, as shown in (10). However, note that the intervening NP, **nzum** "fight" between the two verbs (**tángáné** and **a-wan**) in (10a) for example, undergoes object shift from the post verbal position through a movement operation (Apuge, 2017).

(10) a. **Epie a tángánénzum a-wan**

Epie agr must fight to-fight

"Epie must fight"

b. **Epiea- wánsánésabéá-pál**

Epie agr hurry orange to-harvest

"Epiehurried to harvest an orange"

The following section handles more complex sentences. The interesting issue at this juncture is to establish two facts related to the maximum number of verbs that can be stacked in Akoose SVCs and the patterns they take in clause structure.

3.2 Complex Serial Verbs

Complex serial verbs involve three verbs in a construction. Unlike the simple serial counterparts, each verb in the serial complex has a subject agreement prefix. This prefix (that is also a subject marker), agrees with the subject in person, number and noun class. Following the example in (11) Hedinger (2008) notes: "The first (auxiliary) verb in the string is fully conjugated. The second (auxiliary) verb and the third (main) verb are in the neutral form" (p. 153).

(11) **Bé- téŋgénébé-sébébé-hɛdmelâm**

2-must.EXT.PERF. 2-first 2-look. for 6. Whiskey

"They must first look for whiskey"

While Hedinger's assertion is backed by some evidence from the data, Apuge (2021) notes that Hedinger's example is just one way of expressing serial verbs in Akoose. Other instances appear with intervening adverbial particles between the first and the second auxiliaries preceding the main verb. For example, note that unlike (11), the first auxiliary verb and the main verb in (13) and (14) are inflected. Also note that (12) involves a final, optional preposition (**baŋ** "before"), denoting an alternative way of rendering Hedinger's (11).

(12) **Bé- téŋgénébé-sépébé-hɛdmelâmbaŋ**

2-must.EXT.PERF. 2-first 2-look. for 6. Whiskey before

"They must first look for whiskey"

(13) **Bé- téŋgén-é nɛɛbé-sépébé-hɛd-é melâm**

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2-must.EXT.PERF. just 2-first 2-look. for PERF. 6. Whiskey

"They must first look for whiskey"

(14) **Bé- téŋgέn-é nέɛbé-sépébé-hɛd-έέmelâm**

2-must.EXT.PERF. just 2-first 2-look for PROG. 6. Whiskey

"They must first be looking for whiskey"

The adverbial particle, **nέɛ** "just" introduced in (13) and (14) emphasises the degree of compulsion with respect to what the main verb expresses. Also, while (13) is in the perfective mood, (14) is in the progressive mood.

The examples in (15) and (16) appear with some verbal satellites that change the form of the first auxiliary verb in the structure. In (15), the past tense morpheme (**P1**) is introduced.

(15) a.**Bé- n- téŋgέnnέɛbé-sépébé-hɛd-é melâm**

2- P1 must.PERF. just 2-first 2-look. for PERF 6. Whiskey

"They ought to have first look for whiskey"

b. **Bé- n- téŋgέnnέɛbé-sépé melâm a-hɛd**

2- P1 must.PERF. just 2-first 6. Whiskey to-look. INF

"They ought to have first look for whiskey"

c. **Bé- n- téŋgέn melâma-sépé a-hɛd**

2- P1 must. PERF. 6. Whiskey to-first to-look. INF

"They ought to have first look for whiskey"

Note that notwithstanding the traditional SVO word order, (15) portrays different possibilities, which show that a complex serial verb with the structure S-V_1-V_2-(V_3)-O word order, can further derives S-V_1-V_2-O-V_3 and S-V_1-O-V_2-V_3 surface variants. In all cases, however, V3 represents the main verb.

4. Argument-Sharing

It is important to show how argument sharing obtains in different structures in Akoose. Since structures involving conjugated verbs will normally select subject NPs that are assigned the nominative case, the focus in this section is limited to object sharing. Furthermore, for purposes of simplicity, complements are also considered in this paper as objects. As a result, object sharing in instrumental and applicative constructions are examined in sub-sections 4.1 and 4.2 respectively.

4.1 Object Sharing in Instrumental Constructions

Consider the structures below and note that while the two objects in (17a) are separated by the instrumental morpheme, those in (17b) are contiguous. As a result, while it is apparent that object sharing is not possible in the former, the contiguous nature of objects in the latter seems to suggest object sharing. A closer look at (17b) reveals some curious phenomena: a movement operation is observed; the form of the verb is altered and the direct and indirect objects have become contiguous.

An intriguing syntactic operation is observed in (17b), since the instrumental morpheme moves and suffixes to the main verb, akin to Baker's (1985) incorporation theory. Elsewhere, it is argued that

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instrumental morphemes in *Akoose* function as light verbs, since they constitute verbal extensions. It is further argued that although light verbs select independent objects, they must be suffixed to main verbs in finite clauses for purposes of convergence (Apuge, 2017). Furthermore, although the instrumental morpheme has incorporated into the main verb (17b), it can be assumed that category marking took place in the structure prior to verb movement. This presupposes that in the complex VP, each constituent part has a theta role corresponding to its object.

(17) a. **Epie a n páádsabé ne ntóŋ**

   Epieagr P1 harvest orange with stick

   "Epie harvested an orange with a stick"

b. **Epie a- n páár-ín$_i$ sabέ t$_i$ ntóŋ**

   Epieagr P1. harvest instr. orange stick

   "Epie harvested an orange with a stake"

To further buttress the reasoning sustained above, consider the ungrammatical example in (18a),where the verb selects a direct object followed by an indirect object. Although this structure is compatible with the normal word order of the language,it flouts grammaticality.

(18) a. ***Epie a n páádsabéntóŋ**

   Epieagr P1 harvest orange stick

   "*Epie harvested an orange a stick"

b. * [$_{VP}$, [$_{NP}$ DO [$_{NP}$ IO]]]],

In terms of argument sharing, (18) wrongly suggests that object sharing occurs between the DOCs and their C-commanding verb. However, this structure is illicit because *Akoose* forbids the stacking of NPs without intervening material that guarantees category marking between arguments. This also violates the Case Filter, which stipulates that all visible NPs must be assigned case (Chomsky, 1981). Apparently therefore, the second NP in (18) does not receive case. Assuming that the verb, **páád** "harvest" assigns case to the two NPs, the ungrammatical status of the sentence does not change, especially as the Theta (θ-) Criterion will also be violated. In the θ-Criterion, Chomsky (1981) asserts that "Each argument bears one and only one θ-role, and each θ-role is assigned to one and only one argument (p. 35). Also, following Williams (1994, p. 154), preserving θ-role assignment possibilities must be open given that θ-role is subject to absolute (sister) locality and θ-role directionality parameter setting. As a result, (18a) will be ruled out on the grounds that the verb is not in a sisterhood relation with the rightmost NP.

Consider another ill-formed structure in (19). At first glance, the sentence seems to be grammatical, since argument sharing is not attested in the construction. However, unlike (18), (19) is banned due a violation of word order. The fact that an indirect object precedes a direct object without the movement of any constituent in the sentence violates the word order constraint in Akoose. The wrong reading is that "a stick was harvested with an orange" instead of "an orange was harvested with a stick".

(19) a. ***Epie a- n páád - ntóŋ ne sabέ**

   Epie agr P1. Harvest stick instr. orange

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"*Epie harvested a stick with an orange"

b. *[$_{VP}$, [$_{NP}$ IO [$_{NP}$ DO]]]]].

4.2 Object Sharing in Applicative Constructions

This section discusses object sharing in Double Object Constructions (DOCs) involving applicative constructions. These types of constructions exhibit the following structure: the main verb the light verb, the indirect object and the direct object (V,v, IO, DO). In *Akoose*, both main verbs and light verbs obligatorily select independent objects. As a result, the absence of one NP in a construction that contains two verbs presupposes a violation of the Case Filter. While the predicate in (20a) denotes a verb and a complement, (20b) denotes verb + Light Verb + Direct object +Complement. Apparently, (20b) is a complex structure, as the morphological form of the verb is changed and two syntactic elements follow this verb.

(20) a. **Epie a - n – kɔ́n nkóngé**

Epie agr p1 sing song

"Epie sang a song"

b. **Epie a – n kɔ́n - tíd mwǎn nkóngé**

Epie agr p1 sing appl. child song

"Epie sang a song for the child"

An observation of (20a) reveals that **nkóngé** originates as the direct object of **kɔ́n**, but in (20b), the applicative morpheme that has incorporated into the main verb plus the introduction of another object that is orchestrated by the light verb, intervene between **kɔ́n** and **nkóngé**. It should be understood that although the two objects seem to be contiguously structured, there is no argument sharing between them. Just as seen in section 4.1, both verbs category-mark their corresponding objects.

If (20) is ruled in on conceptual grounds, then the task now is to explain the ungrammaticality of (21). Since SVCs of the applicative construction type necessitate DOCs, the absence of one object in a structure renders it ungrammatical. While the indirect object is absent in (21a), the direct object is absent in (21b).

(21) a. *** Epie a – n - kɔ́n -tídnkóngé**

Epieagr p1 sing appl. child

"*Epie sang for the child "

b. ***Epie a – n kɔ́n -tídmwǎn**

Epieagr p1 sing child

"* Epie sang for child"

The foregoing argument stipulates that while ungrammatical structure like (18) are based on claims of forced argument-sharing, (19) is assumed to flout word order in Akoose. Assuming that this stance sufficiently explains the status of these examples, it will be too simplistic to rule in their grammatical counterparts (repeated below as (22a) and (22b) on grounds that object sharing is not apparent in the former and that word order does not seem to be violated in the latter. In order words, it is expedient to

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provide a theoretical explanation on the syntactic operations that underlie (22a) and (22b).

(22) a. **Epie a- n páár-ín$_i$ sabέ t$_i$ ntóŋ**

      Epieagr P1. harvest instr. orange stick

      "Epie harvested an orange with a stake"

b. **Epie a – n kɔ́n - tíd mwǎn nkóngé**

Epie agr p1 sing appl. child song

"Epie sang a song for the child"

Note that (22a) involves an instrumental structure that obligatorily occurs between the two objects. The trace in (22a) reveals that the instrumental morpheme has moved and can be traced as a suffix to the main verb. It can be argued that this movement operation is compatible with claims of agreement requirements (Chomsky, 2000, 2001a & 2001b) and (Miyagawa, 2010). According to Chomsky, agreement involves a relation between a **probe** and a **goal** in terms of case marking on the one hand, and movement on the other. Miyagawa (2010) also holds that the purpose of agreement is to establish a functional relation between a functional head and an XP and that movement, whichbrings the goal close to the probe, must be justified where agreement is concerned.

In (22a) for example, the instrumental morpheme moves to the VP projection in order to acquires the necessary features for purposes of checking the features of its object (Chomsky, 1995). The analogy that can be made from this example is that only verbal features are required for the purposes of feature-checking involving double objects. This justifies the movement of the instrumental morpheme. The same reasoning applies to (22b), wherein the applicative morpheme (light verb), **-tíd** suffixes to the main verb and leaves double objects in sentence-final position. From this position, the light verb selects the object, **mwǎn** while the main verb, **kɔ́n s**elects**nkóngé**. This further confirms the argument in favour of zero object sharing in Akoose.

5. Result

This paper has examined syntactic operations in multiple object and serial verb constructions in Akoose. While MOCs display predicates with two structural patterns, namely [$_{VP}$, [$_{NP}$ IO [$_{NP}$ DO]]] and [$_{VP}$, [$_{NP}$ DO [$_{NP}$ IO]]], serial verb constructions (SVCs) constitute a maximum of three different VP structures, namely a) [$_{V1}$ [XP [$_{V2}$]], b) [XP [$_{V1}$ [$_{V2}$]], and c) [$_{V1}$[$_{V2}$ [XP [$_{V3}$]]]]. Findings reveal that irrespective of the normal SVO word order in the language, complex serial verbs impose an S-V$_1$-V$_2$-(V$_3$)-O order, which further derives S-V$_1$-V$_2$-O-V$_3$ and S-V$_1$-O-V$_2$-V$_3$ surface variants. In all cases however, the third verb (V3) in the series is the main verb.

6. Discussion

It is argued that the movement of elements observed in the data is triggered by agreement and feature checking. It has also been asserted that although certain surface structures seem to show that Akoose exhibits object sharing, the analysis has revealed that predicates (with the exception of strictly

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intransitive verbs) invariably include objects. Even when a light verb is introduced in a structure, a corresponding object is necessitated. Where verb movement is attested, the outcome presents a deceptive structure of two consecutive NPs in the relevant constructions. However, the analysis of such structures reveals a movement operation in the latter. The trigger for such movement has theoretical backing-feature checking. It is further argued that case assignment precedes movement and that feature-checking of the moved constituent is not blocked from its new position. From the data analysed, some salient can be drawn from instrumental and applicative structures with respect to argument sharing: (i) NP arguments have their corresponding verbs in both SVCs and DOCs; (ii) in grammatical structures where object sharing appears to be violated, there is evidence of syntactic operations in the same (for instance, the incorporation of the instrumental and applicative morphemes into their corresponding main verbs explains the grammaticality of the structures in which they are attested); (iii) it has been demonstrated that ungrammatical structures that nevertheless exhibit no argument sharing flout the acceptable order of the direct and indirect objects.

In conclusion, this paper underscores the fact that SVCs and DOCs are attested in Akoose and that the complex structures in the language do not make the analysis of argument sharing predictably obvious. In essence, however, the analysis reveals that notwithstanding the complex nature of the structures examined on the one hand and the various transformational operations on the other, there is no object sharing in SVCs and DOCs in Akoose.

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