

Review of: Aikhenvald, Y. Alexandra, Serial Verbs (2018). Oxford: Oxford University Press

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The book provides a comprehensive analysis of serial verb constructions (SVCs hereafter) from a typological perspective by one of the well-known authors and experts in linguistics. It is the first recent singular and detailed volume that presents data and analysis on serial verbs across the world. This is the unique feature of the book. In particular, the book systematically takes stock of serial verb constructions worldwide by incorporating new data and new insights.

The book is user friendly in terms of the simplicity of the analysis, presentation of the data and the language. It is a good basic textbook on serial verb constructions for students and an easy resource for researchers interested in typological studies on serial verb constructions. The book targets a wider readership and with this objective in mind, the discussions are pursued within the theoretical tenets of basic linguistic theory rather than any formal linguistic theory. This theoretical approach makes understanding of the analysis and discussions much easier.

The earlier chapter sets out with a definition of serial verb constructions or serial verbs as a sequence of many verbs that act together as one unit or a single event that form one predicate without an overt marker of coordination, subordination, or syntactic dependency of any type. It is observed by the author that serial verb constructions tend to share subjects and objects and have the same tense, aspect, mood and modality value. That is, one part cannot refer to the past while the other to the future. Serial verbs often express aspect, direction, or causation as further noted in the volume.

On the typological profile of languages that have serial verbs, the author identifies European Creoles, isolating languages of West Africa, South East Asia, Oceanic and New Guinea, the Americas, Australian Aboriginal languages of India, and Tiberto-Burma languages. In the linguistics literature, SVCs have been found to manifest in these languages and it is therefore not surprising that these same languages are found in the profile.

The characteristics of SVCs from cross-linguistic perspective as presented by the author include the following:

- A serial verb construction consists of two or more verbs each of which could also function as the sole verb in a clause.
- No marker of dependency such as coordinating, subordination or dependency of any sort between the verbs within a serial verb construction
- Serial verbs are monoclausal; the construction functions as a single predicate.
- SVC itself will have its own transitivity value.
- There is usually at least one core argument shared by all the verbs in a serial verb construction.
- The serial verb construction is conceived as describing a single event.

Thus, a prototypical SVC in any language is expected to have all these features. To show that a given sequence of verbs constitute a serial verb construction, will require testing for these characteristics. In this respect, it is shown that multi-verb constructions, which are sometimes confused with SVCs, are distinguished from the latter for the fact that they contain subordinating or coordinating linkers or dependent verb forms. Further, English imperatives such as *come play!*

or *I want you to come play* cannot qualify as candidates for SVCs per the characteristics outlined for SVCs above.

One other striking feature of the book is the use of authentic natural data from diverse primary and secondary sources from different languages across the world to pursue the analysis and discussion. The data employed in the analysis comes from over forty languages, which include *Akan, Anyi-Sanvi, Alamlak, Alto Perene, Baule, Bislama, Cantonese, Chamacoco, Dili, Dyirbal, Ewe, Fongbe, Goemai, Gurr-goni, Hungarian, Indonesian, Jamaican Patwa, Ijo, Isu, Kana, Kwaza, Kayardild, Krio, Klon, Kristang, Lao, Manambu, Macuna, Mave'a, Mauritian Creole, Numbami, Oro Win, Paamese, Partkateje, Saramaccan, Wwotlap, Tamambo, Tariana, Tetun Taba, Tucano, Toqabaqita, Teribe, Vietnamese, Yimas, White Hmong, and Wwotlap*. Throughout the volume, the comparison of the data in these languages used for the analysis is very intriguing. This makes it easy to understand the manifestation of SVCs in different languages and the interpretation of their meanings. This is very commendable particularly for students and researchers who are not familiar with SVCs or are exposed to the phenomenon for the first time. It is also very helpful to linguists who are interested in undertaking a typological work in this line of research.

Given the limited scope of book reviews, I am unable to provide a detailed review of the individual chapters of the books. However, I intend to provide some insights and highlights on the important aspects in the chapters in the volume.

The book has nine chapters in total. As indicated earlier, chapter 1 describes the framework of SVCs by defining their meanings and characteristics as I have stated above. The place of serial verbs in the history of linguistics has also been discussed in this chapter. The aims of the book as well as the empirical basis and conventions used in SVCs are part of this chapter.

Chapter 2 of the book provides a detailed framework for identifying or recognizing what constitutes a serial verb. As already noted, the authors note that the components of a serial verb construction share tense, aspect, modality, reality status, evidentiality, mood, and polarity values. The chapter uses rich data to illustrate all the properties of serial verbs manifestations in a language.

In chapter 3, the author looks at the semantics of SVCs focusing on their composition and meanings. The composition of serial verb constructions is classified into asymmetrical and symmetrical. The former consists of a verb from a relatively large class or open class and a verb from semantically or grammatically restricted class. They instantiate meanings that include direction and orientation, aspect, extent and change of state. Cantonese, Tariana, and Tamambo are cited as languages with this class of verbs. Symmetrical serial verbs on the other hand, come from open class of verbs with meanings involving sequence of actions that are related, cause-effect and result.

The formal properties of serial verbs are the focus of chapter 4 of the book. These properties are classified as contiguous or non-contiguous. SVCs that have contiguous formal properties do not permit other elements to intervene between them while non-contiguous SVCs allow other constituents to occur between them. Goemai, Yoruba, Taba, and Fongbe are said to be typical examples of non-contiguous SVCs. Languages that also exhibit contiguous SVCs are Tetun Dili and !Xun.

The limit of verb serialization constitutes the discussions in chapter 5 of the book where the author makes a distinction between SVCs and other types of clause sequences and multiverb-constructions. Clearly, a sequence of clauses that has serial verbs with a coordinator are not considered as serial verb constructions because the clauses have different meanings and also the scope of tense, aspect, and mood cannot be applied. The author also points out that in the case of multi-verb constructions, the verb sequence is usually characterized with a coordinator and therefore, cannot qualify as serial verb constructions. A number of languages cross-linguistically

include these types of non-serial verb constructions. These languages include Goemai, Dyirbal, Wolaitta, and Fongbe.

The attention of the book in chapter 6 is on the many facets of serial verbs. This includes the fact that one language can have more than one kind of serial verb construction, and that they may differ along the parameters of the number of words in a serial verb construction and contiguity. It further classifies languages into a table based on several kinds of serial verbs in a language based the parameters of contiguity and wordhood.

The question as to what serial verb constructions are good for is addressed in chapter 7. They are said to be good for expressing a number of grammatical functions, which include definiteness, directionality, aspect and change of state, modality, increasing valency, comparison, and focus.

Chapter 8 traces the origins of serial verb constructions as well as their grammaticalization path. Discussing the historical development of SVCs, the author suggests three sources; the clause fusion scenario, verbal modification scenario, and concurrent grammaticalization scenario.

The last chapter 9 provides an integrated summary of the properties, uses, and the characteristics of the SVCs. Indeed, the summary is precise and the reader without reading the entire book can get a sense of what is in the book in this chapter.

Despite the many languages that are included in the typological profile, one noticeable omission that I have observed in the book is the absence of data from the Mabia languages of Ghana. These languages have a rich serial verb construction as discussed in Bodomo (1993) and Atintono (2002, 2005). This could have enriched the dataset.

Overall, the book has provided an exhaustive discussion of the phenomenon of SVCs and it is a very useful book for linguists of different backgrounds, students, and researchers. It is worth getting a copy in a personal library or school library for reference and use as a textbook.