

Serial Verb Constructions

Explorations in Linguistic Typology

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Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald and R. M. W. Dixon

Research Centre for Linguistic Typology, La Trobe University

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Serial Verb Constructions

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Preface

Serial verb constructions (sometimes called just serial verbs) as a grammatical phenomenon have been in the focus of linguistic analysis for a fair time. However, no one has so far attempted a book-length cross-linguistic typological study of the phenomenon, which would provide a comprehensive analytic framework, based on a wide range of languages of different typological profiles and genetic affiliations. The purpose of this volume is to fill the gap.

The volume includes a typological introduction, followed by revised versions of fifteen of the sixteen presentations from the International Workshop 'Serial verb constructions', held at the Research Centre for Linguistic Typology, La Trobe University, 9–14 June 2003. An earlier version of Chapter 1 had been circulated to the contributors, to ensure that the detailed studies of serial verb constructions in individual languages were cast in terms of a common set of typological parameters. This is the second monograph in the series *Explorations in Linguistic Typology*, devoted to volumes from the International Workshops sponsored by RCLT.

Linguists interested in gaining a brief overview of the most relevant parameters for serial verb constructions are advised to first read Chapter 16, and then turn to Chapter 1 for a more detailed exposition of relevant analytical problems and the discussion of parameters for the classification of serial verbs—including division into symmetrical and asymmetrical, their formal properties, and their wordhood. Not all of these parameters are new—but the way in which they are systematically discussed and applied provides an original perspective and presents a comprehensive view of serial verb constructions worldwide.

The week of the workshop was an intellectually stimulating and exciting time, full of discussions and cross-fertilization of ideas. All of the authors have first-hand experience of intensive, fieldwork-based investigation of languages, as well as in dealing with linguistic typology, historical comparative issues, and problems of areal diffusion. The analysis is cast in terms of basic linguistic theory—the cumulative typological functional framework in terms of which almost all descriptive grammars are cast—and avoids formalisms (which provide reinterpretations rather than explanations, and come and go with such frequency that any statement made in terms of them is likely soon to become inaccessible).

Languages from West Africa, East Asia, and Oceania are known for their serial verbs. In view of the considerable number of extensive studies of verb serialization in Creole languages and their relative typological uniformity, it seemed

unnecessary to include a special chapter on Creoles in this volume. Instead, the volume covers languages from the areas where verb serialization is not as pervasive and not as widely known—New Guinea, northern Amazonia, Mexico, and especially North America.

It is our hope that this volume will provide a consolidated conceptual and analytic framework covering the major parameters for serial verbs as part of the phenomenon of multiverb structures. It lays the foundations for further typological cross-linguistic work on serial verb constructions, their nature, and development. The chapters follow a unified typological approach. All this contributes to the reliability and comparability of the inductive generalizations attempted throughout the volume.

We thank all the authors for taking part in the Workshop, for getting their papers in on time, and for revising them according to the recommendations of the editors.

We owe a special debt of gratitude to Siew Peng Condon, Executive Officer of RCLT, for organizing the Workshop in a most efficient and caring manner, and to Perihan Avdi and Adam Bowles for assisting with the preparation of this volume.

This volume owes its existence to the vision and care of Professor Michael Osborne, Vice-Chancellor and President of La Trobe University. He sponsored the establishment of RCLT within La Trobe's Institute for Advanced Study, and specified that its activities should include an annual International Workshop with stringent quality control. Professor Osborne opens each Workshop, launches our volumes, and every year hosts a convivial dinner for the participants.

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