Serial verb constructions in Austronesian and Papuan languages

edited by

Gunter Senft

Pacific Linguistics
Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies
The Australian National University
# Table of contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List of contributors</th>
<th>vi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GUNTER SENFT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Serial verb constructions in a linguistic area</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIRIAM VAN STADEN AND GER REBSINK</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Motion serialisation in Kéo</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOUISE BAIRD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Verb serialisation in Taba</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOHN BOWDEN</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Boundaries of serialisation: non-serialised verb sequences in Tetun Dili</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CATHARINA WILLIAMS-VAN KLINKE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Verb serialisation in Tolaki</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAVID MEAD AND SCOTT YOUNG</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Verb serialisation in Eipo and Yale (especially in children's narratives)</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VOLKER HERSCHEIN</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Compact versus narrative serial verb constructions in Kalam</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANDREW PAVLEY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Event conceptualisation and event report in serial verb constructions in Kilivila: towards a new approach to research an old phenomenon</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GUNTER SENFT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of contributors

Louise Baird
Department of Languages and Cultures of Southeast Asia and Oceania
Leiden University
Postbus 9515
2300 RA Leiden
The Netherlands
E-mail: L.Baird@hotmail.com

John Bowden
Department of Linguistics
Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies
The Australian National University
P.O. Box 4
Canberra ACT 0200
Australia
E-mail: john.bowden@anu.edu.au

David Mead
SIL
P.O. Box 81439
8000 Davao City
Philippines
E-mail: mend2368@gmail.com

Volker Heeschen
Institute of Ethnology and African Studies
University of Munich
Oettingenstr. 67
D-80538 Munich
Germany
E-mail: VHeeschen@t-online.de

Andrew Pawley
Department of Linguistics
Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies
The Australian National University
P.O. Box 4
Canberra ACT 0200
Australia
E-mail: Andrew.Pawley@anu.edu.au

Ger Reesink
Department of Linguistics
Radboud University Nijmegen
PO Box 9103
NL-6500 HD Nijmegen
The Netherlands
E-mail: ger.reesink@hcnnet.nl

Gunter Senft
Max-Planck-Institute for Psycholinguistics
PB 310
NL-6500 AH Nijmegen
The Netherlands
E-mail: Gunter.Senft@mpi.nl

Miriam van Staden
Amsterdam Center for Language and Communication
University of Amsterdam
Taalkunde
Spuistraat 210
1012 VT Amsterdam
The Netherlands
E-mail: M.vanStaden@uva.nl

Catharina Williams-van Klinken
Dili Institute of Technology
P.O. Box 293
Dili, Timor Leste
E-mail: cvk@iinet.net.au

Scott Youngman
SIL International
7500 W. Camp Wisdom Road
Dallas TX 75236
USA
E-mail: scott_youngman@sil.org
**Verb serialisation in Taba**

**JOHN BOWDEN**

### 1 Introduction

This paper provides a description of serial verb constructions in Taba. Although a discussion of Taba serial verb constructions can be found in Chapter 12 of Bowden (2001), the present description updates that description in some important ways, especially with respect to the discussion of differences between what is known as core and nuclear serialisation in the language.

Serial verb constructions are constructions in which 'a sequence of two or more verbs ... in various (rather strong) ways together act like a single verb' (Danie 1997:230). In much cross-linguistic discussion of serial verb constructions, a distinction between 'core layer' and 'nuclear layer' serialisation is said to play an important role. In core serialisation, the verbs involved in the serial verb construction (SVC) are joined at the level of the core (as that level is defined by Foley and Van Valin (1984). In core serialisation each verb maintains some independence in terms of what arguments each can take. In nuclear serialisation, on the other hand, the individual verbs involved are allowed no real independence, all layers outside the nucleus being shared. Thus, in core serialisation, there may be separate cross-referencing of shared arguments by each of the verbs involved, but in nuclear serialisation, there may be only one occurrence of each shared argument.

In Bowden (2001) I argued that there was no significant distinction between nuclear and core serialisation and I did not discuss the distinction at any length. However, having made a more recent closer inspection of Taba serialisation, I have come to the conclusion that the distinction does have an important role to play in Taba morphosyntax, and in this paper I intend to explore these subtleties in more detail.

---

1 I would like to thank all the Taba speakers who made me so welcome during my time living in Ngadjakaba and staying in Tomate. I would also like to thank participants at the Ninth International Conference on Austronesian Linguistics who had useful comments at the end of my presentation. Of course, all the faults of this paper are my responsibility alone.

Abbreviations used in the glosses are as follow: 1sg - first person singular; 2sg - second person singular; 3sg - third person singular; 1pl.excl - first person plural exclusive; 1pl.incl - first person plural inclusive; 2pl - second person plural; 3pl - third person plural; ACT - active; ALL - allative; APP - applicative; CAUS - causative; CONT - continuative; DETR - detached; EMPP - emphatic; ESS - essive; INCL - inclusive; NEG - negative; PL - plural; POSS - possessive; POT - potential; REAL - realis; RES - resultative.
The next section of the paper provides a brief overview of the Tabā language, covering basic sociolinguistic and historical matters as well as providing a short discussion of the major aspects of morphosyntax that will be relevant to later discussion of serialisation. Section three runs through a checklist of criteria for determining whether or not a construction should be labelled a serial verb construction (SVC) and section four gives a semantically based typology of Tabā serialisation. In the final part of the paper, I turn to the issue of core vs nuclear serialisation and discuss its ramifications for Tabā grammar.

2 Tabā — an overview

Tabā is an Austronesian language from the South Halmahera — West New Guinea subgroup, a group which according to Blust (1978, 1993) is a sister to the much better known Oceanic subgroup. It is spoken in the eastern part of Indonesian, on Makian island and some nearby areas of North Maluku province. The major reference on Tabā is Bowden (2001).

Tabā shows characteristics which suggest that it is typologically a kind of hybrid between the more familiar western Austronesian languages and the also familiar Oceanic ones. Sociolinguistically, this hybrid nature is also apparent. Like many western Austronesian languages such as Javanese and Balinese, Tabā has named speech registers (albeit less elaborated than in those western languages). As do many speakers of Oceanic languages, Tabā speakers practice name taboo.

At the present point in time, virtually all Tabā speakers are also speakers of Indonesian or North Moluccan Malay. This is leading to a situation where the future existence of Tabā is threatened, Malay or Indonesian beginning to take over many of the functions that Tabā once had for itself. Although Tabā usage is still fairly vigorous amongst its speakers, quite a large part of the grammar of the language has become simplified, particularly amongst younger speakers, and a variety of aspects of Malay grammar are steadily being incorporated into Tabā. (See Bowden 2002 for discussion of some examples of this.)

Tabā is predominantly a head-marking language with basic AVP word order, and it has a number of prepositions as well as one postposition. Most nominal modifiers follow their heads, but the genitive precedes its noun. Tabā has a number of typologically unusual word-order correlations which are probably best explained as a result of contact between Austronesian and non-Austronesian languages in the North Maluku sprachbund. Tabā has a very productive set of valence affecting affixes. There is a causative prefix, a two applicative suffixes and also a de-transitive prefix. The valence affecting affixes can have a number of other functions, for example, the causative prefix ha- is also used to derive verbs from a variety of different sources.

The language also has an important set of directional cases whose use is pervasive in discourse. These are described in detail in Bowden (1997). Although both co-ordinate and subordinate clauses are found in Tabā, most natural discourse actually consists of loosely bound paratactic sequences of clauses. Any meaningful connections between the clauses involved in most multicausal constructions are understood pragmatically rather than through any overt semantic devices such as conjunctions.

Tabā has a mixed split-S and accusative system of pronominal cross-referencing: for intransitive verbs. An actor is obligatorily cross-referenced on a verb by a proclitic which indexes the Person and Number of the Actor argument; Undergoers are not obligatorily cross-referenced. Note that Actor and Undergoer are used in a slightly different sense from how they are generally used in the literature. Here capitalised Actor and Undergoer refer to

Tabā-specific morphosyntactic categories: an Actor is a core argument that is cross-referenced on the verb, while an Undergoer is a core argument that attracts no cross-referencing.

Transitive clauses in Tabā have an unmarked word order of AVP. A is cross-referenced on the verb, while P is not. Example (1) illustrates a transitive clause, where the Actor Oci is cross-referenced on the verb wet 'hit' by the proclitic m=3sg’, but the Undergoer Iswan is only represented by an independent noun with no cross-referencing.

(1) Oci m=net Iswan
Oci n=net Iswan
Oci 3sg=hit Iswan
'Oci hit Iswan.'

Examples (2) and (3) illustrate the split-S characteristics of Tabā. In (2) the Actor oriented intransitive verb han ‘go’ is cross-referenced by the proclitic m=3sg', but in (3), the Undergoer oriented intransitive verb duunik ‘be exhausted/used up’ carries no cross-referencing.

(2) motor nhan do
motor n=han do
motor 3sg=go REAL
'The boat went.'

(3) kof duunik do
coffee be.exhausted REAL
'The coffee has been used up.'

The kind of split-S patterning seen in (2) and (3) above occurs when non-human arguments are involved. When the sole argument of an intransitive verb refers to a human participant, an accusative pattern is followed in which the argument always triggers cross-referencing, as in (4) below, where the sole argument Ahmad triggers cross-referencing, even though the participant referred to has the (small ‘u’) macro-role of undergoer.

(4) Ahmad nament
Ahmad n=ha-mtat
Ahmad 3sg=ACT-fall
'Ahmad fell over.'

Tabā basic word order can be characterised as follows: one full NP argument may precede the verb within the clause, whatever its status as Actor or Undergoer. If two full NPs occur with a transitive verb, the Actor must precede it and the Undergoer must follow it, as in (1) above, but if only one full NP argument occurs it generally precedes the verb whether it is an Actor or Undergoer.

(5) Oci m=net
Oci n=net
Oci 3sg=hit
'Oci hit (someone).' or: '(Someone) hit Oci.'

On the other hand, when pronominal arguments occur, the pronominal Actor always precedes the verb and the pronominal Undergoer always follows it as in (6)-(8) below.
(6) yok kwet i
yak k=wt i
1sg 1sg=hit 3sg
'I hit him.'

(7) o nathod hu
i n=althod hu
3sg 3sg=run CONT
'He is running.'

(8) mnat i
mnat i
fall 3sg
'It fell over.'

Animacy effects pervade Taba grammar. We have already seen that human arguments pattern in a nominative-accusative fashion while non-humans follow a split-S alignment of arguments in intransitive clauses. In addition, pronominal reference is only available for animate arguments. Given these two requirements, it is true that example (8) must be referring to an animal; because the intransitive clause is based on an Undergoer oriented intransitive verb we know that the referent of the solo argument cannot be human; given that the argument is manifested by a pronominal we know that the referent must be animate. Thus, the only available candidates are animals.

Taba also has a small set of aberrant verbs referring to processes of excretion which behave somewhat differently from all other verbs. These verbs are obligatorily cross-referenced by both Actor proclitics and Undergoer suffixes at the same time. The proclitics and the suffixes are co-referential, and the structures that result are somewhat reminiscent of reflexive constructions.2 See (9) to (11) below for a few examples:

(9) Buang nciwil.
Buang n=sio i
Buang 3sg=shit-3sg
'Buang shitted.'

(10) shiitomu!
2pl=fart-2pl
'You farted!'

(11) yok kmiok hu
yak k=miok k hu
1sg 1sg=pee-1sg CONT
'I'm off for a piss.'

Although these verbs are very few in number, and the constructions utilising them bear a very low functional load in the language, the pattern seen above is repeated in some serial verb constructions which will be discussed later in the paper.

---

2 The pattern of double cross-referencing found on verbs of excretion resembles rather closely the pattern found in Taba reflexive constructions. Komnerra (1993) notes that reflexive morphosyntax is a common way of marking 'middle voice' in many languages, and that verbs of excretion fall neatly into her category of 'body middle' verbs which often attract middle voice.
A detailed justification for labelling all of the examples presented above as ‘serial verb constructions’ (henceforth SVCs) is given in §3 below. A functional typology of SVCs in Taba is provided in §4.

3 Taba SVCs and cross-linguistic features of SVCs

Durie (1997:291) outlines a range of key cross-linguistic characteristics of SVCs:

- a single serial verb complex describes what is conceptualised as a single event: this is repeatedly reported to be a clear intonation of native speakers, and can be demonstrated through semantic analysis. It follows from this that a serial verb complex can often best be translated into a non-serialising language using a simple, mono-clause.
- the serial complex has shared tense, aspect, modality and polarity: this is often reflected in a single morphological realisation of these operators ... or in obligatory concord across the verbs ...
- serial verbs ‘share’ at least one and possibly more arguments.
- intentional properties of a clause within serialisation are those of a monovariable clause ...
- the complex takes only one subject/external argument.
- when serialisation results in a complex of more than two arguments, the configuration of arguments corresponds closely to the kinds of configurations of arguments + adjuncts found for single clauses in non-serialising languages.
- there is a very strong diachronic tendency to lexicalisation and grammaticalisation of the meaning of serial complexes: this involves treating the whole serial complex as a single lexicalised item, or ‘derivation’ of the meaning and grammatical status of one of the verbs to that of a modifier or case-marker.

These characteristics will be addressed with respect to the Taba constructions tentatively identified as SVCs below, and insofar as they can be applied to the Taba data they will be shown to apply equally well as they do in other languages.

3.1 SVCs describe single events

It has often been noted by people writing on verb serialisation that SVCs fulfill a function in serialising languages similar to that of individual verbs in languages without serialisation. SVCs thus describe what native speakers are said to conceptualise as single events with the individual verbs referring to subcomponents of those events. (Here, the term ‘event’ is used to refer to both states and what are traditionally called ‘events’.) While the notion of single or multiple event is fraught with difficulty and conclusions to this effect are often arrived at with some circularity (as other papers in this volume point out) there are some ways in which the conceptual unity of what is referred to in a SVC can be illustrated reasonably uncontroversially. I will not, however, seek to explicitly defend the notion of ‘single eventhood’, since I am not even sure that it can be defended.

An example such as (14) above, repeated as (20) below, is best translated into English as ‘it bit the pig dead’ or ‘it bit the pig to death’ rather than, say, ‘it bit the pig and the pig died’ or ‘it bit the pig and killed it’.

(20) nhabas welik nnot do
    n=babas welik n=not do
    3sg=bite pig 3sg=die REAL
    ‘It bit the pig dead.’

The conceptual unity of (20) can be best illustrated by comparing it with (21) where two distinct events (one of biting and the other of killing) are referred to. Here, the pause after welik ‘pig’ and the appearance of i ‘3sg’ referring to the pig after nnot indicate that there are two clauses.

(21) nhabas welik nnamot i
    n=babas welik n=ha=not i
    3sg=bite pig 3sg=CAUS-die 3sg
    ‘It bit the pig and killed it.’

The death referred to in (20) must have come about as a direct and immediate consequence of the pig’s being bitten, but this need not have been the case with the death referred to in (21). In (21) there may have been a considerable period of time elapsed between the biting and the pig’s eventual death by bleeding. In fact, the pig need not even have died as a direct consequence of having been bitten (e.g. as by loss of blood). Its death may have occurred as a quite indirect consequence of having been bitten (as would be the case, say, if the bite wound had gone septic and the death had occurred much later as a consequence of the infection), or even as a result of something completely unconnected with the act of biting. The pig may in fact have been killed by some other action of the Actor at some later date.3

3.2 Shared tense, aspect, modality and polarity

Examples (12) and (13) above (repeated as (22) and (23) below) both show some of these characteristic SVC features.

(22) nhan ait tesu
    n=han ait te-su
    3sg=go ascend NEG-FOC
    ‘(S)he hasn’t yet gone up.’

(23) ncapang mmul hu
    n=capang n=mul hu
    3sg=descend 3sg=return CONT
    ‘(S)He’s still coming back down.’

In (22), tesu is a compound marker of both negative polarity and ‘potential’ modality. Although neither ‘going’ nor ‘ascending’ have yet occurred, the speaker expects such an event including both subcomponents to occur soon. Such non-occurrence and expectation

3 Of course an utterance such as (21) does contain an implicature that the act of biting was what caused the death of the pig. However, in (21) the implicature is defusable while there is no defeasibility with respect to (20).
is understood as applying to the whole sequence of sub-events referred to by the entire SVC and not just to any part of it. We would thus expect to hear such an utterance in a location where the speaker would know that neither component of the event had yet begun, as for example at home before the Actor referred to had left for the gardens. (This particular sequence of verbs has a conventionalised meaning by means of which it refers to an agent heading up the mountain to work in the gardens.)

In (23) the continuous particle *na* must be understood as qualifying the whole serial verb complex such that both ‘descending’ and ‘returning’ must be in progress at the same time. (Example (23) is the conventionalised counterpart of (24) since it characteristically refers to people returning home after completing work in their gardens.)

3.3 Sharing of arguments

All verbs in Taba SVCs share at least one of their arguments. There do not appear to be any categorical restrictions on the particular kinds of arguments that may be shared: a variety of possibilities were illustrated in the initial examples given in (12) to (19).

Example (14), repeated as (24) below shows a sequence of a transitive verb followed by an Actor intransitive in which the Undergoer of the initial transitive verb is coreferential with the Actor argument of the following intransitive verb.

(24) *nhabas welik nmot do*
     n=nhabas welik n=nmot do
     3sg=bite pig 3sg=die REAL

‘It bit the pig dead.’

Example (17) above which is repeated below as (25) illustrates a more complex situation where two arguments are shared by each of the constituent verbs.

(25) *notik si laosi*
     n=sotik si l=ha-laosi
     3sg=take-APPL[give] 3pl 3pl=CAUS-look

‘She showed it to him.’

None of the coreferential arguments exemplified in (24) and (25) was simultaneously subcategorised as Actor of each of the verbs in SVCs. In SVCs with non-coreferential Actors, the Actor argument of each verb is obligatorily cross-referenced on both of the verbs in the sequence. In (15) though, repeated as (26), the Actor of the initial transitive verb is coreferential with the Actor of the subsequent transitive verb.

(26) *npun bobay npake sandal*
     n=npun bobay n=npake sandal
     3sg=kill mosquito 3sg=use thong

‘He killed the mosquito with a thong.’

In this example, the person ‘killing the mosquito’ is also the person ‘using the thong’. In such cases, when both verbs in a SVC share the same Actor, cross-referencing of the Actor on the second verb is optional. Example (27) below, then, is also grammatical.

(27) *npun bobay pake sandal*
     n=npun bobay pake sandal
     3sg=kill mosquito use thong

‘He killed the mosquito with a thong.’

Examples (26) and (27) illustrate the difference between ‘core’ and ‘nuclear’ serialisation discussed by Foley and Van Valin. Example (26) where each verb is separately cross-referenced is an example of core serialisation, while (27) where the cross-referencing of ‘pun ‘kill’ with nmot ‘3sg serves to cross-refer to a previous ‘take’ use as well, is an example of nuclear serialisation. Choice between the two structures seems to be based solely on the carefulness of speech exhibited by whoever uses them. The distinction between core and nuclear serialisation will not be developed further here, but I will return to it in some detail in §5 below.

Before turning our attention away from ‘argument sharing’, it is worth noting that some writers on serialisation have pointed to a significant class of exceptions to Durie’s criterion that at least one argument must be shared in a SVC. This class of exceptions was labeled ‘ambient serialisation’ by Bradshaw (1982). According to Crowley (1987:49) ambient serialisation is ‘a construction in which a verb is serialised to another verb, but in which there is no specific referent associated with the subject of the serialised verb, and the verbs simply describe a general predication’. In Taba, there are possible examples of ambient serialisation in sentences like (19) above, repeated as (28) below, where *dumik ‘be exhausted’ might be viewed as such a general predication lacking an argument.

(28) *sagala bum dumik*
     stuff be=lost be=exhausted
     ‘Our stuff was completely lost.’

‘Ambient serialisation’, when it exists, does provide a significant exception to Durie’s criterion for argument sharing. However, in Taba at least there are grounds for suspecting that no real ambient serialisation takes place. In (28) at least, *sagala ‘stuff ’can be quite easily viewed as the sole argument of the verb dumik.*

3.4 No embedding or complementation

Taba often has little overt marking of either embedding or complementation but it can still be shown quite straightforwardly that SVCs are distinct from complement constructions. In those cases where there is overt marking of embedded clauses, it is quite obvious that they are distinct from SVCs. In example (29), for example, de ‘so that’ is a subordinating conjunction that marks the clause *notatas* as subordinate to the initial clause *nyol calana.*

(29) *nyol calana de notatas*
     n=nyol calana de n=ha-totais
     3sg=take trousers RES 3sg=CAUS-wash
     ‘She took the trousers so she could wash them.’

A similar construction involving a SVC is illustrated in (30) where there is no marking of subordination.

(30) *nyol calana notatas*
     n=nyol calana n=ha-totais
     3sg=take trousers 3sg=CAUS-wash
     ‘She took the trousers and washed them.’
A number of characteristic features of constructions involving embedded clauses which are not overtly marked as such can also be found, which set them apart from those labelled here as SVCs.

One of the most notable features of main verbs taking clausal complements and having no overt marking of their complement status is usually that the verbs which take such clausal complements are strictly subclassified as complement taking verbs. The individual verbs found in serial constructions are not. A verb such as halasa ‘to say’, for example, normally has a clausal complement as illustrated in (31), while the verbs involved in SVCs do not ordinarily require clausal complements.

(31) halasa nhan do
n=ha-hasa n=han do
3sg=CAUS-say 3sg=go REAL
‘He said “he’s gone.”’

Another characteristic feature of clausal complements in Taba is that they always follow the verbs of which they are complements. It is hard to see how such a criterion could be applied to putative SVCs in Taba when we regularly encounter pairs such as (12) and (13) above which are repeated here as (32) and (33).

(32) nhan ait tesu
n=han ait te-su
3sg=go ascend NEG-POT
‘(S)he hasn’t yet gone up.’

(33) nopang mnel hu
n=nopang n=mnel hu
3sg=descend 3sg=return CONT
‘(S)he’s still coming back down.’

The problem can be stated thus: ‘Is it the generalised motion verb which takes the specific verb as its complement (as one would probably expect from the semantics of the constructions) or vice versa?’. In (32) the general motion verb comes first and is followed by the verb specifying the direction of motion while in (33) it is the other way around. The ordering in each case can be most simply ascribed to iconic principles: the component of the event which occurs first in real life comes first in the SVC while the component of the event which comes last in real life also comes last in the construction and each verb appears to have roughly equivalent ‘syntactic weight’, Durie (1997:330) points out that all serialising languages have such iconic ordering principles.

While there is a requirement for SVCs that the individual verbs contained within them must share at least one core argument, there is no parallel requirement for complement clauses. Taking (31) above as an example again, the complement clause may or may not have as its Actor the Actor of halasa. Out of context, the sentence is thus ambiguous as to whether there is only one person both ‘saying’ and ‘going’ or different people performing each action.

4 The clausal complement of a verb like halasa is actually unmarkable in certain contexts (i.e. when it can be possible to be retrievable metaphorically by a listener) but it is clearly a situation parallel to that of, say, the ‘obligatory’ Undergoer of a transitive verb which can also be omitted under similar circumstances.
have them. Such resemblances can all be seen internal to Taba itself where some of the serial verb constructions have rough translation equivalents of both types. Example (15) had three arguments associated with it and it is repeated below as (36).

(36) npun bobay npake sandal
n=pun bobay n=pake sandal
3sg=kill mosquito 3sg=use thong
‘He killed the mosquito with a thong.’

Contrast (36) with (37) in which the instrument is licensed by an applicative suffix and (38) where it is licensed by an adposition.

(37) npunak bobay sandal
n=pun-ak bobay sandal
3sg=kill-APPL mosquito thong
‘He killed the mosquito with a thong.’

(38) n=pun bobay ada sandal
n=pun bobay ada sandal
3sg=kill mosquito with thong
‘He killed the mosquito with a thong.’

3.8 Strong tendency to lexicalisation and grammaticalisation

Durie (1997:322) points out that verb serialisation is universally characterised by heavy lexicalisation of particular verb combinations. He says ‘this is because the typing of events is matched by stereotyping of verb combinations used to represent those events’. The first two sentences illustrating serialisation (12) and (13), and repeated below as (39) and (40) are sentences which generally have highly lexicalised readings.

(39) nhan ait teau
n=han ait te-au
3sg=go ascend NEG-POT
‘(S)He hasn’t yet gone up.’
[‘S/He hasn’t gone to work in the gardens yet.’]

(40) neopang nmul hu
n=opang n=mul hu
3sg=descend 3sg=return CONT
‘(S)She’s still coming back down.’
[‘S/She is still coming back from working in the gardens.’] Every time I heard anyone use one of these combinations, they were always referring to either someone’s going to work in the gardens or their return from the gardens. (Taba villages are all located almost at sea level, close to the beach, while the gardens are all located at higher altitudes, spread up the sides of the mountain behind the villages.)

In an earlier paper, Durie (1988:3) discusses the diachronic instability of many serial verb combinations. These sometimes show a centripetal tendency for one of the verbs to pull in and become bound to another verb, in which case it may come to be reanalysed as a verbal affix. With other combinations, a centrifugal tendency for one of the verbs to pull away from the other is evidenced: in this case the verb that pulls away may eventually be reanalysed as a case marker or adposition.

There is evidence of both kinds of diachronic instability at work in Taba. The centripetal tendency is apparent with SVCs having the verb han ‘go’ as their first element. With the examples so far cited of SVCs with initial han (such as (41) below) the meaning combination.

(41) nhan ait
n=han ait
3sh=go ascend
‘He’s going upwards.’

Many more such examples where going is entailed in the meaning of the combination could be given. In some combinations, however, the independent meaning ‘go’ is not so readily apparent. This is the case in (42) which has semantic parallels with the English expression ‘go to sleep’.

(42) nhan tuli
n=han tuli
3sg=go sleep
‘(S)He’s going to sleep.’

Such an utterance could refer to a situation where the person referred to is either going off to his/her room in order to sleep, or in which s/he is already in bed and in the process of falling asleep. Sometimes, however, the following construction is used to refer to the situation where the referent is in the process of falling asleep, or is actually asleep.

(43) namtuli
n=nam-tuli
3sg=INCH=sleep
‘(S)His/Her falling asleep.’

In (43), not only has han been bleached of its lexical meaning, it has also become phonologically fused to the other verb from the original sequence: no longer carrying stress, the initial /h/ of han- is now subject to the morphophonemic rule of unstressed /h/ deletion and now functions as a prefix with a more general ‘inchoative’ meaning. The prefix occurs in a number of other formations.

The Taba corpus also contains abundant evidence for the centrifugal tendency of some SVC combinations identified by Durie. This notably affects the verb pake ‘to use/wear’ which is itself a borrowing from North Moluccan Malay. Serialisation is highly productive in North Moluccan Malay, and it is probable that the serial function of pake to introduce an instrument was borrowed into Taba at the same time as the form itself was borrowed. The example of pake already encountered in (15) above and repeated as (44) below is without doubt a verb: it is cross-referenced by the 3sg proclitic n=.

(44) npun bobay npake sandal
n=pun bobay n=pake sandal
3sg=kill mosquito 3sg=use thong
‘He killed the mosquito with a thong.’
As already discussed, cross-referencing of the Actor is optional for the second verb in a SVC containing an initial verb with a coreferential Actor. Example (45) then, can also be interpreted as containing a SVC.

(45) npun bobay poke sandal
n=pun bobay poke sandal
3sg-kill mosquito use thong
'He killed the mosquito with a thong.'

In example (46), however, poke must be considered a preposition. Here the PP poke sandal 'with a thong' has been fronted to the clausal focus position, a position not available for cross-referenced and unambiguously serial npake.

(46) poke sandal, npun bobay
poke sandal n=pun bobay
with thong 3sg-kill mosquito
'It was with a thong he killed the mosquito.'

4 A functional typology of Tuba SVCs

Durie (1997:330ff) attempts to provide a universal typology of serial verb construction types. Not all of the construction types identified by Durie are found in Tuba. Five of the types listed below derive from Durie's classification of SVCs. 'Aspectual' and 'modal' serialisation are my own categories.

- motion serialisation
- cause-effect serialisation
- causative serialisation
- instrumental serialisation
- modal serialisation
- aspectual serialisation
- manner serialisation

Each of these types will be discussed in turn below.

4.1 Motion serialisation

Motion serialisation is very productive in Tuba. These constructions may involve an initial verb of directional motion followed by some other verb describing an action of some sort, each of the verbs having the same agent, as in (47).

(47) nmul ntoyo ni dawalat
n=mul n=tono ni dawalat
3sg-return 3sg-look.at 3sg-POSS girlfriend
'He's come back to see his girlfriend.'

Motion serialisation may also occur with the directional following the verb which describes an action. In these constructions too, the agent of each verb is coreferential, as illustrated in (48).

(48) ntuu yan nmul
n=tuu yan 3sg=mul
3sg=buy fish 3sg-return
'He's returned from buying fish.'

The Tuba verb han 'to go' is not deictic in the same way as English 'go' and might in fact better be glossed as simply 'move'. Whenever it occurs in a motion serialisation it precedes any other verb that is included. In (48) it precedes an action verb while as we can see in (49) below, it can also precede a verb which encodes a specific direction.

(49) nhan ait tasu
n=han ait te-su
3sg=go ascend NEG-POT
'(S)he hasn't yet gone up.'

Durie's account of iconic ordering for verbs within motion serialisation constructions predicts that a verb describing motion leading up to a subsequent component of an event will always occur first, while a verb describing motion subsequent to some other sub-component of an event will always occur second. This prediction is borne out by all of the examples from the Tuba corpus.

4.2 Cause-effect serialisation

Cause-effect serialisation is illustrated in (50).

(50) nbabas welik nnot do
n=babas welik n=not do
3sg=bite pig 3sg=die REAL
'It bit the pig dead.'

In all of the examples of cause-effect serialisation encountered in the corpus, the first verb encodes a cause and the second verb encodes an effect (just as Durie's iconic account of ordering principles would predict). Also common to all of the cause-effect combinations is the fact that the first verb is a transitive verb which has as its patient an argument of the second verb. Transitive verbs, Actor intransitives and Undergoer intransitives are all found in second position. An Actor intransitive verb was seen in (50). Example (51) illustrates the occurrence of an Undergoer intransitive verb in second position and (52) shows a transitive verb in second position. Here the patient of the first verb is the agent of the second and the second verb again refers to what happened as a result of the first. In this example, the undergoer of the second verb is the milk that was burped up as a result of the baby's back being hit.

(51) nnotas nik kos bulang
n=notas nik kos bulang
3sg=wash 1sg.POSS T-shirt be.white
'She washed my T-shirt white.'

(52) ni momasi mwet i nggalekik susu
ni mama=si n=wet i n=ga.a.i.k susu
3sg.POSS mother=PL 3sg=hit 3sg 3sg=burp-APPL milk
'His mother hit him and he burped up milk/ his mother burped milk from him.'
4.3 Causative serialisation

Causative serialisation differs from cause-effect serialisation in that only a very general causative meaning is entailed by the first verb in the construction: the specific nature of the cause is not mentioned. As with cause-effect serialisation, the verb referring to causation occurs first. In all of the Taban examples causation is encoded by the morphomorphemic ditransitive verb oitik 'give'. In (53) two of the arguments of oitik 'give' are also arguments of the second verb adat 'look at/inspect'. The theme of oitik is the patient of the second verb and what would be the recipient of the independent verb oitik is the agent of the second verb.

(53) kotik si labai
 3sg=get-APPL (give) 3pl=ACT-look.at
'I showed it to him.'

In example (53) above, the first verb in the construction still has a very clear meaning of 'giving' entailed, since there actually is a transfer of possession of some theme that is referred to here. It also occurs in a few examples where there is no actual transfer of possession of any physical object. Example (54) appears to be a straight calque from North Moluccan Malay where kase tau 'give know' is the normal way to say 'teach'. In North Moluccan Malay the use of kase 'give' in SVCs is undoubtedly the most frequent way of expressing causation.

(54) altu notik munak?
  altu n=oi-ik m=unak
who 3sg=GET-APPL (give) 2sg=know
 'Who taught you? Who let you know?'

4.4 Instrumental serialisation

Instrumental serialisation has been illustrated at a number of points in this paper. Example (55) is a further illustration.

(55) gunun bobay nake sandal
    n=pun bobay n=pake sandal
    3sg=kill mosquito 3sg=use thong
    'He killed the mosquito with a thong.'

In these constructions, the first verb refers to an activity of some sort. Its agent is also the agent of the second verb, always the NMM borrowing pake 'to use/wear'. The undergoer argument of pake (i.e. the thing used) becomes the instrumental argument of the entire SVC.

The Taban instrumental constructions are noteworthy in that they do not follow the iconic ordering principle proposed by Durie (1997:335) who suggests that the verbs licensing instrumental nouns always occur first in the SVCs of other languages that have instrumental serialisation. It is probably noteworthy that in many languages which have instrumental serialisation, the verb which licenses the instrument has an independent meaning of 'get', while the independent meaning of the Taban verb having this function is 'use'. Presumably, under Durie's iconic ordering principle for SVCs, any 'getting' of an instrument must preclude the action which is accomplished by means of that instrument. A

4.5 Modal serialisation

Example (56) illustrates what might be called 'modal serialisation'. Modal serialisation was not one of the types identified by Durie. In the following example the second verb kahate 'I am unable' provides an evaluation of the speaker's belief that he is incapable of constructing a rice container from coconut leaves.

(56) kpe kahate
    k=ppe k=ahate
    1sg=make 1sg=be.unable
    'I can't make them.'

All of the verbs which provide a modal evaluation of ability occur after the verb to which the evaluation of ability applies. Ahan 'be able' can also occur before the verb which describes what the protagonist is able to do. The verbs involved are:

- ahan 'to be able'
- -ahate(s) 'to be unable'

A third form manpo 'to be able' is also sometimes encountered, but this is a borrowing from North Moluccan Malay that does not seem to have been completely assimilated into the Taban system so it will not be further addressed here. The interested reader can find more detail on this verb in Bowden (2001:318). The indigenous modal evaluators are discussed in turn below.

4.5.1 -ahate

This modal evaluative verb means 'to be able' and it is the only one of the three which can occur either as the first verb in the sequence, or as the second verb. It is shown as an independent verb in (57).

(57) tuhul mai tahan
    t=tuhul mai t=ahan
    1pl.incl=change well 1pl.incl=be.able
    'Changing it, well we can.'

In (58), -ahate is shown in the second position in a serial verb construction.

(58) npe nahan
    n=p= n=ahan
    3sg=do 3sg=be.able
    'He can do it.'

In (59), ahan is illustrated in the initial position of a SVC.

(59) wwe nahan ncashal
    wwe n=ahan n=sagal
    leg 3sg=be.able 3sg=step
    'My leg would be able to walk.'
4.5.2 -ahte(s)

This verb always occurs in the second position of a SVC and provides an evaluation that whatever is described by the first verb is not possible. Such impossibility of action may stem from either a lack of ability or a lack of permission. This form appears to have been derived historically as a result of the negative particle te having fused onto aha (see above) from which the final nasal has disappeared. It is attested in a variety of forms. Firstly, it can occur as either an Actor oriented intransitive verb as in (60), or as an agentless Undergoer oriented intransitive with the detransitivising prefix to- as in (61).

(60) ada mamatuua tagil taha te do
ada mamatuua-si tagil l=ahte do
and oldpeople=PL walk 3PL=be.unable REAL
'the old people who can’t walk any more.'

(61) ndadli boa hakaosak tahate ...
ndadli boa ha-ta-osae k ta=ahte
so door CAUS-DETR-open-APPL DETR-be.unable
'So the doors couldn’t be opened.'

Both -ahte and tahate are also encountered with a final ‘s’ segment as -ahtes and tahates. These forms clearly have a connection to the complex ‘negative potential’ particle tuus. The forms with a final -s indicate (as does tuus) that although something might be impossible at the time referred to, there is a belief on the part of the speaker that this will not always be the case, and that either a future potentiality will arise or that there was once a past potentiality for such an event to occur.

(62) ahe te -ahtes.
a=han a=ahte-s
1PL.excl=go 1PL.excl=be.unable-POT
'We couldn’t go.' [but one would expect that we might be able to go in the future]

The distinction between potential ability to do something in the future and no potential ability is seen clearly in examples (63) and (64) which each refer to the fact that a child is not permitted to smoke cigarettes. In the first of these, the child referred to is a girl: under the norms of Taba culture, one would expect that she (as a girl) will never be permitted to smoke cigarettes. In the second of these examples, however, referring to a young boy, there is a belief encoded that although he is currently forbidden from smoking, once he reaches a sufficient age he will then be allowed to take up the habit.

(63) Irianti nasodas naha te.
Irianti n=ha-sodas n=ahte
Irianti 3sg=CAUS-suck[smoke] 3sg=be.unable
'Irianti is not allowed to smoke.'

(64) Iswan nasodas naha te.
Iswan n=ha-sodas n=ahte-s
Iswan 3sg=CAUS-suck[smoke] 3sg=be.unable-POT
'Iswan is not allowed to smoke (now. But he will be allowed to in the future).'

4.6 Aspectual serialisation

The following example illustrates what might be called ‘aspectual serialisation’. Here, the verb you ‘to search’ has the lexicalised aspectual meaning ‘almost’. This construction is noteworthy in that the lexically secondary verb occurs before the lexically primary verb, in contradistinction to the situation seen above for true ‘manner serialisation’.

(65) myoa mhan
m=yoa m=han
2sg=search(almost) 2sg=go
'You’ve almost gone.'

If an independent Actor noun phrase is used in this construction, it precedes the entire SVC, as in (66).

(66) au myoa mhan
au m=yoa m=han
2sg 2sg=search(almost) 2sg=go
'You’ve almost gone.'

Yoa is also found as an invariant particle with fossilised 3sg cross-referencing, where it can also be translated into English as ‘almost’. The particle functions as either a modifier of quantifier phrases or as a modifier of whole clauses. These provide yet another example of the strong tendency towards lexicalisation and grammaticalisation that is at play with verbal serial constructions.

Another kind of aspectual serialisation is often encountered with the verb okik ‘be finished’ as the second verb in a serial construction.

(67) kahon okik do
k=ha-hon okik do
1sg=CAUS-eat be.finished REAL
'I have finished eating.'

Serial okik is often found in the first clause of a paratactic sequence of clauses where it serves to show that whatever is referred to in the second clause of a sequence has occurred or will occur after whatever is referred to in the second clause has been finished. Taba has no temporal conjunctions meaning either ‘before’ or ‘after’ so example (68) illustrates the normal way that Taba speakers refer to temporal precedence of one event over another.

(68) kahon okik, khan okla
k=ha-hon okik k=han ak-la
1sg=CAUS-eat be.finished 1sg=go ALL-sea
'Once I have finished eating, I will go seawards.'

4.7 Manner serialisation

According to Durie (1997:336), manner serialisation involves one serial verb which describes the manner in which an action described by the other verb is performed: so-called manner serialisation was illustrated in (18) and (19) above, which are repeated as (69) and (70) respectively.
As was noted in §3.3, manner serialisation in some languages is problematic for Durie’s criterion that all the verbs in a serial verb construction should share at least one argument. Ambient serialisation, according to Crowley (1987:49), refers to ‘a construction in which a verb is serialised to another verb, but in which there is no specific referent associated with the subject of the serialised verb, and the verbs simply describes a general predication’. At first sight it might appear that the second verbs in the examples just exemplified may fit the bill for ‘ambient serialisation’.

In examples such as (73) below, which can be seen as a kind of counterpart to (69) above, it is, however, abundantly clear that the manner encoding verb of Taba does indeed have an argument. In this example, the manner encoding verb is actually cross-referenced by a following pronominal. Here, the single argument of the SVC is cross-referenced twice: first by the Actor cross-referencing pronominal *i* which is attached to the first (Actor intransitive) verb, and then by the Undergoer referring pronominal *i* which occurs after the second (Undergoer intransitive) verb.

(73) mwosal muddodang i
n=mwosal muddodang i
3sg=stand be.straight 3sg
‘He’s standing up straight.’

5.3 Taban serialisation and the core — nuclear distinction

The distinction between core and nuclear serialisation has its roots in the layered conception of the clause propounded by Foley and Van Valin (1984). Under Foley and Van Valin’s view, the clause is seen as consisting of a series of concentric layers. The innermost region is the nucleus, which consists of the verb itself. The next layer is the core, which consists of the verb, plus its arguments and some adverbial operators. The final, outermost layer is the periphery, which consists of other adverbials including other modals, negation, etc. In core serialisation, the verbs involved in the serial verb construction (SVC) are joined at the level of the core, and each verb maintains some independence in terms of what arguments each can take. In nuclear serialisation, on the other hand, the individual verbs involved are allowed no real independence, all layers outside the nucleus being shared. Thus, in core serialisation, there may be separate cross-referencing of shared arguments by each of the verbs involved, but in nuclear serialisation, there may be only one occurrence of each shared argument.
In Bowden (2001) I suggested that the core vs nuclear serialisation distinction did not play a very significant role in Taba morphosyntax. Although the distinction could be observed in examples such as (26) and (27) above (repeated here as (75) and (76) respectively), it did not seem to have any consequences elsewhere in the grammar.

(75) n’pun bobay npake sandal
     n’pun bobay n’pake sandal
     3sg-kill mosquito 3sg-see thong
     ‘He killed the mosquito with a thong.’

(76) n’pun bobay pake sandal
     n’pun bobay pake sandal
     3sg-kill mosquito use thong
     ‘He killed the mosquito with a thong.’

Example (76) is characteristic of fast speech, while (75) is more characteristic of slow, careful speech styles. There do not appear to be any differences in meaning between the two structures, nor are there any intonational differences. The predonersence of examples such as those just illustrated led me to the conclusion that the distinction between core and nuclear serialisation was of little relevance to Taba. The distinction between the two kinds of structures seemingly had no impact on the grammar of SVCs in any other way. The only difference between them seemed to be a matter of stylistic choice. While this may be the case for examples such as those illustrated above, other structures that were not so obvious to me at the time I wrote Bowden (2001) suggest that the distinction between core and nuclear serialisation may reveal itself in more subtle and interesting ways in other parts of the grammar.

We noted in §2 that the sole human argument of an intransitive verb in Taba had to appear with Actor cross-referencing, and that Undergoer oriented intransitives only appeared with non humans as their arguments. In fact, this seems only to be true of such verbs when they occur as simple verbs. In serial verb constructions, Undergoer oriented intransitives with human arguments do occur, as in example (77) which is repeated from (69) above.

(77) mwoal mddodang
     n=mwoal mddodang
     3sg=stand be.straight (straight)
     ‘He’s standing up straight.’

In a non-serial clause, the verb mddodang could not be used underwain with a human argument. To occur with a human argument, it would need undergo derivation to become an Actor-oriented intransitive as in (78).

(78) Acan namddodang
     Acan n-ha-mmddodang
     Acan 3s-ACT-be.straight
     ‘Acan was straight.’

However, with the second verb in a serial structure, the restriction against human arguments of Undergoer intransitives does not apply, as long as the putative argument of the second verb is coreferential with the Actor of the first verb, as illustrated again in (79).

(79) Mina nhan tuli de npangin makoai tedo
     Mina n=han tuli de n=npangin makoai te-do
     Mina 3sg=go sleep RES 3sg=wake.up be.hot feel.sick) NEG-REAL
     ‘Mina has gone to sleep so that she’ll not wake up sick.’

It seems then, that the requirement for a single human argument of an intransitive predicator to have an Actor may actually be a stipulation that needs to be made about clauses rather than about verbs per se. If we adopt this view, we can see that there is an overly realistic Actor in each of examples (77) and (79), these being the arguments cross-referenced on the initial verb with the proclitic n=. More interesting, though, perhaps, we are also able to say that it is only in cases of nuclear serialisation that humans may co-occur with underrder Undergoer oriented intransitive verbs. They appear able to do so only because the SVC complex taken as a whole does have an overt Actor.

At this point, we can return briefly to the issue of whether or not a serial verb construction as a whole takes only one subject or external argument that we left hanging in the air at the end of 3.6. In examples such as (77) and (79) this is clearly the case: the initial Actor argument seems to occupy a privileged position, its cross-referencing on the initial verb in the construction being sufficient to license it with respect to any following verbs. The same might be said for examples like (76). The lack of cross-referencing on pake is only possible here because its argument is already cross-referenced on the preceding verb pan.

The Taba data discussed in this paper show that both nuclear serialisation and core serialisation are alive and well in the language. They further show a potential mechanism for how nuclear serialisation may arise in at least some languages. If the predominance of examples like (75) and (76) I noticed when writing Bowden (2001) are anything to go by, nuclear serialisation may arise from core serialisation by a simple process of deletion of pronominal cross-referencing in fast or casual speech.

It was once believed that nuclear serialisation might only occur in verb final languages, but Durie (1997) as well as Crowley (2002) and Bitt (2004) have all shown it to be common enough in languages with other basic word order patterns. The Taba data confirm yet again that nuclear serialisation is thriving in at least one more verb medial language.

References


5 Boundaries of serialisation: non-serialised verb sequences in Tetun Dili

CATHARINA WILLIAMS-VAN KLINKEN

1 Introduction

This paper addresses the question "What characterises serial verb constructions in Austronesian languages?" by investigating verb sequences in Tetun Dili which lie beyond the boundaries of narrowly-defined verb serialisation. Such sequences are shown to differ from narrowly-defined serial verb constructions both syntactically and semantically. The result is that, for Tetun Dili, serial verb constructions are restricted syntactically to those in which the subject of the second verb corresponds to one of the arguments of the first verb, while semantically the second verb phrase always represents "in some sense a further development, result, or goal of the first" (as stated by Lord (1974) for Yoruba). That is, Tetun Dili provides no support for syntactically extending the concept of serial verb to "ambient serialisation", in which the subject of the second verb does not correspond to an argument of the first. In tandem with this, it does not support a serial verb analysis for multi-verb expressions of concepts such as tense-aspect, modality and manner.

Tetun Dili is spoken in and around Dili, the capital of East Timor. It is an Austronesian language with strong Portuguese influence, particularly in its vocabulary and phonology. While Tetun Dili has its roots in a vernacular known as Tetun Terik, which is spoken on parts of the south coast and along much of the border with West Timor, the two have diverged to such an extent that they are virtually mutually incomprehensible. Differences between Tetun Dili and Tetun Terik include some differences in serial verb and other multi-verb constructions. However, while few if any of the Tetun Dili examples in this paper would be acceptable in Tetun Terik, most of the arguments which are presented hold for both varieties. That is, the boundaries of verb serialisation are not significantly affected by the widespread differences between the two.¹

¹ For descriptions of Tetun Dili, see Hull and Bules (2001) and Williams-van Klinken et al. (2002). The Tetun dialect of Tetun Terik is described by the present author as van Klinken (1999).

Abbreviations used are as follows: 1p - first person singular; 2p - second person singular; 3p - third person singular; CoM - continuous aspect; INTR - intransitive; MET - irrealis; PAR - perfective aspect; loc - locative; PL - plural; POS - possessive; REF - relative clause marker.