

# What do we really know about serial verb constructions in Austronesian and Papuan languages?

Gunter Senft

The task of harmonizing a general account of verb serialization is a very major one which is hardly begun.

(Durie 1997: 320)

## Abstract

This paper first presents a number of serial verb constructions (SVCs) found in Papuan and Austronesian languages and then raises the following questions: What are SVCs? What about typological research on SVCs? What about the syntactic description of SVCs? Is there a comprehensive definition of SVCs? Which types of SVCs do we find? What about the functions SVCs fulfill? Which kind of verbs constitute SVCs? What about the order of verbs within SVCs? What kind of lexicalization processes can we observe in SVCs? What is expressed as an event in a SVC and how is it expressed? Are there any language – and/or culture-specific rules for the combination of verbs in these constructions? Can we infer from SVCs to language – and/or culture-specific conceptualizations of events? The paper ends with a brief outline of the direction for a new approach to research on SVCs which may lead to answers for at least some of these crucial questions.

## 1. What are serial verb constructions? – Features, types and functions<sup>1</sup>

Speakers of Taba, the Austronesian language spoken on the islands Makian, Moti and Kayoa in Indonesia (northern Moluccas) may describe their successful “hunting” of a mosquito as follows (Bowden 1997: 339):

- (1) *Npun bobay npake sandal.*  
*n-pun bobay n-pake sandal*  
3.Sg-kill mosquito 3.Sg-use thong  
'He killed the mosquito with a thong.'

When the Paama islanders in Vanuatu kill a pig, they refer to this event in their Austronesian language Paamese as follows (see Crowley 1987: 43):

- (2) *Kail amuas vuas emat.*  
*kaile a-muasi vuasi emate*  
 3.Pl 3.Pl-real-hit pig 3.Sg-real-die  
 'They hit the pig and it died.'

In Yimas, the Papuan language of the Yimas people living at the Arafandi river in Papua New Guinea, the activity of making firewood can be described in the following way (Foley 1991: 331):

- (3) *Yanparkmpikapikmpiwarkt.*  
*ya-n-park-mpi-kapik-mpi-wark-t*  
 V-Pl O-3Sg A-split-Seq-break-Seq-tie-Perf  
 'He split them, broke them into pieces and tied them together.'

Speakers of the Papuan language Kalam in the highlands of Papua New Guinea refer to the fact that a man has brought firewood to his house with the following utterance (Pawley 1993: 95):

- (4) *B ak am mon pwk d ap ayak.*  
*b ak am mon p-wk d ap ayak*  
 man that go wood hit-break get come put-3.Sg.-Past  
 'The man fetched some firewood.'

And in Kilivila, the Austronesian language of the Trobriand Islanders of Papua New Guinea, it is not uncommon to hear the question "*Ambeya?*" – 'Where (are you going) to?' when people are leaving their village. An adequate answer to such a question (which is ritualized as a form of greeting) may run:

- (5) *Bala bakakaya baka 'ita basisu bapaisewa batai waga kevau.*<sup>2</sup>  
*ba-la ba-kakaya ba-ka'ita ba-sisu ba-paisewa*  
 1.Fut-go 1.Fut-bath 1.Fut-return 1.Fut-be 1.Fut-work  
 'I will go I will have a bath I will come back I will stay (in the village) I will work'  
*Ba-tai waga ke-vau.*  
 1.Fut-cut canoe CP.wooden-new  
 'I will cut my new canoe.'

Any reader of these five illustrative examples from different Austronesian and Papuan languages will notice immediately that all these sentences contain more than one verb. In the sentences (1) and (2) we find two verbs, sentence (3) is a verbal expression that consists of three verbs, sentence (4)

consists of 6 verbs (only the last of which (*ay*) is inflected), and sentence (5) also consists of 6 verbs (which are all inflected).<sup>3</sup>

That such sentences with more than one verbs exist in the languages of the world is nothing new. In 1875, Christaller (1875: 69-73, 143f.) already discussed this phenomenon in his grammar of Twi (see: Sebba 1987: 5, Seuren 1991: 193), and Westermann, in his grammar of Ewe, pointed out

... a peculiarity of Ewe is that we often find a row of verbs one after the other. The chief features of this are that all the verbs stand next to each other without being connected, that all have the same tense or mood, and that in the event of their having a common subject or object, these stand with the first, the others remaining bare: should a conjunction stand between two verbs, the subject and object must be repeated ... In English these consecutive verbs are partly rendered by composite sentences. But very often several Ewe verbs may be expressed by a single verb in English. The explanation for this is that the Ewe people describe every detail of action or happening from beginning to end, and each detail has to be expressed by a special verb: they dissect every happening and present it in its several parts, whereas in English we seize on the leading event and express it by a verb, while subordinate events are either not considered or are rendered by means of a preposition, adverb, conjunction, or a prefix on the verb. (Westermann 1930: 126)<sup>4</sup>

In 1914 Hugo Schuchardt noted similarities with respect to these verb constructions between Suriname Creole on the one hand and Ewe on the other hand (see Muysken, Veenstra 1994: 289). The honour of being the first to describe the presence of more than one verb within a sentence for an Austronesian language – namely Jabêm – is due to Otto Dempwolff (Dempwolff 1939; see also Bradshaw 1983; Bisang 1986). In 1957 Jan Voorhoeve used the technical term “verbal chains”, however, according to Voorhoeve (1957), Sebba (1987: 2) and Zwicky (1990: 2) it was Stewart (1963) – again a scholar of African languages – who coined the term “serial verbs” to describe this phenomenon (see also Seuren 1991: 193).

So far, most research on serial verbs and serial verb constructions (from now on abbreviated as “SVC”) has been done on African languages and on pidgins and creoles; however, SVCs are also to be found in Hmong-Mien, Mon-Khmer, Sino-Tibetan, Tai-Kadai, Semitic and Central-American languages as well as in Japanese.

It should be noted, though, that the phenomena discussed as SVCs within the last mentioned languages are hotly and controversially debated and differently described and labelled. Linguists like Sebba (1987: 3), Seuren

(1991: 194), Bisang (1993: 71) and especially Pullum (1990: 219-222) also raise the issue whether there are SVCs in languages like English (or Dutch). Pullum refers to constructions like “Go get the paper.../Come get the paper.../Help get the paper.../Come go east with us” as “intransitive quasi-serial verb constructions”. There are only a few studies on SVCs in Austronesian and Papuan languages, and Durie emphasizes rightly that these languages are largely underrepresented in the present linguistic literature on the phenomenon:

The range of construction types and grammatical properties that these languages encompass is rather greater than has been appreciated in much of the theoretical literature on serial verbs, which has tended to take as representative patterns occurring in a few restricted areal contexts, e.g. from West African and creole languages, to the exclusion of data from Southeast Asia (except for a nod to ‘Chinese’) and the Pacific. (Durie 1997: 291f.).

This bias in typological studies on this phenomenon may also explain why there is no general definition of SVCs. Thus, Menick (1996: 41) laments that “there is little agreement as to how the phenomenon of serial verbs is to be defined”, Comrie (1995: 25) points out that there is a “considerable controversy concerning the precise characterization of the serial verb construction”, and in 1987 already Sebba pointed out that “... it is not at all clear that all authors are referring to the same thing when they speak of ‘serial verbs’. Very few of them are actually explicit about what they mean by the term, usually applying it fairly indiscriminately to constructions in which there is a sequence of the form V NP V NP or V NP V ...” (Sebba 1987: 1). All in all we have to agree with Lord’s (1993: 1) summary of the state of the art with respect to SVCs: Defining serial verb constructions is a sticky business”.<sup>5</sup>

Another reason for the difficulty in defining SVCs is certainly “the lack of a generally accepted framework in which to describe and compare these systems” (Crowley 1987: 36). Lane (1991: 31), for example, notes that linguists “have applied the term ‘serial verb construction’ to entities in a wide variety of languages, using a diverse set of analytic frameworks. Different analyses draw the boundaries between SVCs and other types of construction at different places”. For many grammar theories SVCs are a special challenge: “What makes serial verbs interesting is the fact that they cut across established categories” (Zwicky 1990: 10). SVCs are especially difficult to deal with in theories “where sentences were expected to have exactly one main verb” (Sebba 1987: 6). In his excellent study on the problems of describing SVCs syntactically, Durie (1997: 294-320) has

shown that despite many attempts within the different variants of Chomsky's theory of grammar, representatives of GB theory (see e.g. Baker 1989; Dechaine 1993) have also failed to describe adequately the phenomenon of SVCs. Durie bases his prolegomena for the description of the grammatical structures of SVCs on his own research (see e.g. Durie 1988) and on the findings presented by Bruce (1986; 1988), Crowley (1987; 1990), Lane (1991), Pawley (1987; 1993), Sebba (1987), Foley and Van Valin (1984) and Foley and Olson (1985). At the moment his approach seems to be the most adequate for a syntactic description of SVCs.

However, even Durie in his seminal contribution cannot give a general definition of what SVCs are. Like many other linguists he refers to a number of "key characteristics" (Durie 1997: 291) or "common features" (Lane and Pawley 1992: 5) or – (in a very cautious way) – "criteria" (Comrie 1995: 25), that are important for any description of SVCs. For Durie, these are the "key characteristics" of the SVCs:

... a single serial verb complex describes what is conceptualized as a single event: this is repeatedly reported to be a clear intuition of native speakers, and can be demonstrated through semantic analysis. It follows from this that a serial verb complex can often be best translated into a non-serializing language using a single, mono-verbal clause. – the serial complex has shared tense, aspect, modality, and polarity: this is often reflected in a single morphological realization of these operators ... or in obligatory concord across the verbs ... – serial verbs 'share' at least one and possibly more arguments. – one verb is not embedded within or as a complement of the other. – intonational properties of a clause with serialization are those of a mono-verbal clause (Givón 1990; 1991a, b). – the complex takes only one subject/external argument. – when serialization 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-serializing languages. – there is a very strong diachronic tendency to lexicalization and grammaticization of the meaning of serial complexes: this can involve treating the whole serial complex as a single lexical(ized) item, or 'demotion' of the meaning and grammatical status of one of the verbs to that of a modifier or case-marker. (Durie 1997: 291).<sup>6</sup>

These features are characteristic of, and can be observed in, all SVCs and they certainly have to be incorporated into, or at least considered for, any definition of the phenomenon. However, some of these features are problematic themselves, especially the notion of "single event": What is a 'single event', how is it constituted, perceived, conceptualized, expressed

and reported? Can we define this notion, for example, as “the answer to the question: ‘What happened?’” (Enfield, personal communication)?

Moreover, it is also possible to differentiate different types of SVCs. Crowley (1987: 38-40) – “according to the nature of the relationships that hold between the nominal arguments associated with each of the verbs in question” (Crowley 1987: 38, 48) – proposes the following five subcategories for SVCs:

### 1.1. “Same-subject serialization”

This is probably the most common and widespread type of SVCs; in this type “there is identity between the two subjects of the serialized verbs” (see examples (1) and (3)-(5) above).

### 1.2. “Switch-subject serial verbs” or “causative verbs”

In this type “there is identity not between two subjects, but between the object of the first verb and the subject of the following verb” (see example (2) above).

### 1.3. “Multiple object serialization”

This type is relatively rare in the languages of the world. We observe “‘same-subject’ or ‘switch subject’ conditions of identity between the subjects of the serialized verbs, each of which is transitive and each of which has its own object”. Example (6) from Paamese and example (7) from Barai, a Papuan language the speakers of which live in the vicinity of Popondetta in Papua New Guinea, illustrate this type:

- (6) *Inau namun sin dal oai.*  
 (*inau na-muni siini dali oai*)  
 1sg 1sg-real-drink gin 3sg-real-accompany water  
 ‘I drank gin with water’. (Crowley 1987: 39).

- (7) *Fu burede ije sime abe ufu.*  
 he bread def knife take cut  
 ‘He cut the bread with the knife.’ (Foley, Olson: 1985: 44).

## 1.4. “Ambient serialization”

This type is defined by Crowley (1987: 49) as “a construction in which a verb is serialized to another verb, but in which there is no specific referent associated with the subject of the serialized verb, and the verb simply describes a general predication”. Example (8) from Paamese illustrates this fourth type of SVCs:

- (8) *Kihulin ato kail hemal.*  
 (ki-huli-nV                    a<sub>too</sub>    kaile    he-malu)  
 2sg-dis-count-comm/obj    chicken pl                    3sg-dis-be.correct  
 ‘Count the chickens correctly’. (Crowley 1987: 40).

## 1.5. “Conjoined participant serialization”

This type is only briefly discussed in Crowley (1987: 48). On the basis of this paper, Early (1993: 68, 89) proposes the term “*conjoined participant serialization*” and defines this type “for the situation where the subject and the object of the first verb become the combined subject of the second”. Example (9) from Lewo, the Austronesian language of the Epi-Islanders in Vanuatu, illustrates this fifth type of SVCs:

- (9) *Ne-mio-la    me-pano.*  
 1sS-with-3pO    1pexclS-R.go  
 ‘We went together.’ (‘I with them we went’) (Early 1993: 89).

On the basis of research by Foley and Van Valin (1984: 189-208) and Foley and Olsen (1985: 33-38), Crowley proposes yet another differentiation that is important for the description of SVCs. This differentiation does not refer to the argument structure of verbs, but rather to “the actual ‘layer’ of the clause at which the serialization takes place” (Crowley 1987: 40). Crowley differentiates three such ‘layers’ that have specific ‘operators’: “The innermost layer is the nucleus, and nuclear operators include items such as aspect. The next layer is the core, and the operators at this level include the obligatory nominal arguments associated with a particular verb. The outermost layer is the periphery, and peripheral operators typically refer to things like the temporal and spatial setting on an event. It is argued that verb serialization can take place at either the nucleus or the core of the clause” (Crowley 1987: 40f.). Thus we differentiate between “Core Layer Serialization” (see example (2) above) and “Nuclear Layer Serialization”

(see example (3) above; see also Pawley 1993: 120). Crowley points out that there is a tendency for languages with an SOV word order pattern to prefer “Nuclear Layer Serialization” and a tendency for languages with SVO word order pattern to prefer “Core Layer Serialization” (Crowley 1987: 42).<sup>7</sup>

In the various languages SVCs fulfill a number of grammatical functions; Early summarized some of the more important functions of SVCs in the following list:

- a. aspect
- b. temporal, spatial, or psychological movement or distance or location
- c. logical relations like cause-and-effect, and purpose
- d. various semantic roles, including Instrumental, Dative, Benefactive, Locative, Manner, Comitative, Accusative, Direction, Comparison... (Early 1993: 67f.).

In what follows I illustrate these functions with a few examples:

*ASPECT (example from the Papuan-language Dani):*

- (10) *Wat-h-y-lak-ytyk.*  
hit-REAL-DEP-stay-1SG PAST  
'I was hitting him.' (Foley 1986: 144).

*LOCATION (example from the Austronesian language Lewo):*

- (11) *Ø-pa Ø-tapolou Ø-teke pulu-pālu.*  
3sS-go 3sS-hide 3sS-stay hole-creek  
'He went and hid in the creek-bed.' (Early 1993: 68).

*BENEFACTIVE (example from the Papuan-language Kalam):*

- (12) *Passkoy yp ag ñ-a-k.*  
girl me (Obj) say give-3sg-PAST  
'The girl told/confided (it) to me'. (Lane: 1991: 56).

*MOTION (example from the Austronesian language Taba):*

- (13) *Nhan ntono ni dawat.*  
*n=han n=tono ni dawat*  
3sg=go 3sg=look.at 3sg.POSS girlfriend  
'He's gone to see his girlfriend.' (Bowden 1997: 354).



*PURPOSE* (example from the Austronesian language Kilivila):

- (14) *Ema egimwali tokwalu.*  
*e-ma e-gimwali tokwalu*  
 3.-come 3.-bargain.for carving  
 'He came to sell carvings.' (Senft 1986: 41).

*CAUSATIVE* (example from the Papuan-language Yimas):

- (15) *Na-ka-tal-kwalca-t.*  
 3sgObj-1sgSubj-hold-arise-PERF  
 'I woke him up'. (Foley 1986: 154)

*RESULTATIVE* (example from the Papuan-language Alambalak)

- (16) *Tat-noh-me-an-r.*  
 hit-die-R:PST-1sg-3sgM  
 'I killed him (by hitting him).' (Bruce 1986: 22)

*ABLATIVE* (example from the Austronesian language Paamese):

- (17) *Namual naumai en leiai.*  
*(na-muali nau-mai en leiai)*  
 1sg-real-walk 1sg-real-come sp bush  
 'I walked from the bush.' (Crowley 1987: 53).

*ALLATIVE* (example from the Austronesian language Paamese):

- (18) *Namual namul en leiai.*  
*(na-muali na-mule en leiai)*  
 1sg-real-walk 1sg-real-exist sp bush  
 'I walked into the bush'. (Crowley 1987: 53).

*COMITATIVE* (example from the Austronesian language Lewo):

- (19) *Ø-to ma a-mio kana mama lala.*  
 3sS-stay Cont 3pS-with his mother PL  
 'He stayed with his mother and the others.' (Early 1993: 69).

*MODALITY* (example from the Papuan-language Hua):

- (20) *Ke hu-ko-mana.*  
 talk do I-see-OTHER INCONSEQUENTIAL  
 'I tried to talk (but to no avail).' (Foley 1986: 152, Haiman 1980: 147).

In this section we have discussed different forms, types, and some of the main functions of SVCs. In what follows, we will take a closer look at the individual verbs within a SVC. Here we are first interested in the kind of verbs that are serialized and then in the position of the verbs with respect to their arguments and their internal order within the SVC. At the end of the section we will propose a new approach to the analysis of SVCs.

## 2. Event report and event conceptualization in SVCs: A proposal for a new approach to the analysis of serial verb constructions

Besides the formal grammatical criterion “transitivity”, semantic facts play a crucial role in answering the question which verbs can be found in SVCs (Foley and Olson 1985: 40ff). On the basis of their research on the phenomenon, Foley and Olson come up with a “serialization hierarchy” (Early 1993: 68), which is succinctly summarized by Crowley as follows:

... the verbs that are most frequently encountered in serial constructions in languages of the world are the basic motion verbs (e.g. come, go), which are followed by other active intransitive verbs (e.g. wander, disappear, crawl) and intransitive posture verbs (e.g. stand, lie), followed by any other active intransitive verbs (e.g. go hunting, speak, jump, etc.), and finally followed by the class of transitive verbs, which are therefore the verbs that are least liable to enter into serial constructions with other verbs. (Crowley 1987: 42).<sup>8</sup>

With respect to the relationship between serialized verbs and their arguments, Durie observes the following:

... the phenomenon ‘verb serialization’ can manifest itself in two distinct patterns: either the verb series acts like a single verb for the purposes of placement of arguments – giving in an SVO language SV...V(O) type sequences – or an argument is located in the usual position with respect to the *first* verb that introduces it – giving in an SVO language SV(O)V(O)V(O) ... sequences. Some languages have either one pattern or the other, and some ... show both patterns. (Durie 1997: 307).<sup>9</sup>

In languages like Kalam, SVCs can consist of up to nine or ten verbs (Lane 1991: 1); in this Papuan language constructions with five or six verb-stems are nothing special (see also Foley 1986: 113; 1997: 383).

At first sight the sequence of verbs within the SVCs – especially within such complex SVCs – seems to follow “iconic” principles. Obviously

speakers of languages with SVCs want to describe an event (or a state) as minutely and as exactly as possible (see Escure 1991: 187, Senft 1986: 39).<sup>10</sup> In doing so, an event (or an action or a happening or a "Handlung" in Westermann's (1907: 94f.; 1930: 126) terminology) is classified, broken down, subdivided, ordered and arranged into its components and each of these components is expressed with a specific verb. In many languages this form of event report seems to follow specific rules, and these rules are constitutive for the well-formedness of the event report. Besides lexicalization processes that affect the combination of specific verbs, we also observe specific sequences of verbs that are crucial for the adequate expression of certain event types (Durie 1997: 322ff). These combination rules for verbs within SVCs seem to be largely culture dependent and culture specific. In what follows I will briefly illustrate these observations:

For the Papuan language Kalam, Pawley (1993: 97f.) lists the following expressions that consist of a generic verb and of one or two preceding verb stems with one or more nominal or adverbial complements. In these expressions the verbs in combination are lexicalized so that they form new expressions:

- |      |            |            |            |                                   |
|------|------------|------------|------------|-----------------------------------|
| (21) | <i>wsn</i> | <i>kn</i>  | <i>am-</i> | 'go to sleep, drift off to sleep' |
|      | sleeping   | recline    | go         |                                   |
|      | OBJ        | <i>nb</i>  | <i>nn-</i> | 'taste something'                 |
|      |            | consume    | perceive   |                                   |
|      | OBJ        | <i>d</i>   | <i>nn-</i> | 'feel something (by touching)'    |
|      |            | touch      | perceive   |                                   |
|      | OBJ        | <i>d</i>   | <i>am</i>  | 'take something'                  |
|      |            | hold       | go         |                                   |
|      | OBJ        | <i>d</i>   | <i>ap-</i> | 'bring something'                 |
|      |            | hold       | come       |                                   |
|      | OBJ        | <i>kby</i> | <i>am-</i> | 'leave, abandon something'        |
|      |            | leave      | go         |                                   |

In Alamlak, a Papuan language spoken in the East-Sepik area of Papua New Guinea (Bruce 1984), we find the following lexicalization:

- (22) *tu-fenah*  
 throw-arrive  
 'spear' (Bruce 1988: 33f.)

and in Vanimo, a Papuan language spoken in the East-Sepik area of Papua New Guinea, we find the lexicalization:

- (23) *Hún ha.*  
 3SM:drink 3SM:go  
 'He laughs.' (Ross: 1980: 92).

In the last example the meaning of the lexicalized form cannot be deduced from the meanings of the two individual verbs. These lexicalized forms are especially problematic for a grammatical analysis of SVCs, because "one cannot assume that the serialized verb will have the same argument structure in serialization that it has when used alone" (Durie 1997:324).

The Papuan language Kalam, however, shows yet another, even more complex pattern of productivity for SVCs. Pawley observes that event reports in Kalam follow general report schemata. These schemata can be represented in the following frame consisting of five event sequences (see Durie 1997: 325):

- I: movement to scene
- II: action at scene
- III: movement to next scene (taking something)
- IV action at scene
- V: movement away from scene

Based on Pawley's (1987: 349) data, Durie (1997: 325f.) illustrates these schemata with the following sentence:

- (24) *B tap sy d-p-Ø d-am kot g-y*  
 man stuff illegally get-PERF-3SG get-go court do-SS:PRIOR  
*kalabws ay-p-wn.*  
 jail put-PERF-1PL  
 'We have put the thief in jail.'

This event is subdivided into the event components "getting the thief" (II), "going to court" (III) and "putting chief in jail" (IV). Pawley (1987, 1993) Lane (1991) and Lane and Pawley (1992) present many such stereotyped schemata and "speech formulas" (Lane 1991: 72) that are defined as

a construction type whose lexical content is partly fixed and partly variable. It is a much more complex bundle of elements than a lexical unit. Besides being a conventional pairing of form and meaning associated with a particular grammatical category, a speech formula is indexed for occurrence in particular discourse contexts and discourse functions, can be varied according to formula-specific and general grammatical and idiomaticity constraints, and is spoken with a particular intonation and rhythm. (Pawley 1997: 24)

This definition and the examples presented by Pawley and Lane show that the term of the “event” that is expressed with SVCs cannot be discussed if detached from the individual language and its speakers – and this means that analyses of SVCs cannot be purely syntactic, but have to be also – and maybe even above all – semantic and pragmatic (see Lord 1993: 239). Durie (1997: 327f.) expresses this demand in the following way:

It is essential that my conception of event-type is based on what speakers habitually treat as unmarked complex events, so a rigorous investigation of the semantics and discourse properties of such sequences is required to develop a more convincing account for data of this kind.

Thus, following Bruce (1988: 28) and Pawley (1997) we have to research what a speech community conventionalizes verbally within the frame of a SVC as an “event”. Only then is it possible to decide (and to describe) whether a certain verb sequence within a SVC can be realized and will be accepted by the speech community, because it verbalizes an event type which is plausible and reasonable for the speakers of the respective language (see Enfield 1998, 2000b). As already stated above, the norms that mark what counts as an event within a speech community are certainly culture specific and culture dependent. Thus, SVCs ask for anthropological linguistic analyses. It is true that in many cases the sequence of verbs within SVCs is iconic. It is also true that in many cases parts of an event are listed in their temporal sequence within an event report (see Foley 1997: 384; Lane 1991: 176, Lord 1993: 237) – this is especially so for parts of an event that have a cause-effect relationship.<sup>11</sup> But there are also many cases where iconic principles are completely irrelevant for the sequence of verbs within a SVC. This is illustrated with the following two examples from Kilivila, an Austronesian language spoken on the Trobriand Islands in Papua New Guinea:

(25a) *Ekebiga elivala makala...*  
*e-kebiga e-livala makala*  
 3.-speak 3.-say like  
 ‘He said the following ...’

(25b) *Elivala ekebiga makala...*  
*e-livala e-kebiga makala*  
 3.-say 3.-speak like  
 ‘He said the following ...’

These SVCs mark in a highly idiomatic way that the speaker's utterances that follow these introductory formulae represent verbatim the utterances of another speaker. I have no idea whether these two variants otherwise differ with respect to their semantics.<sup>12</sup> To find out how events that are expressed in SVCs are actually conceptualized by speakers of this language, we need discourse semantic/pragmatic and anthropological-linguistic analyses. This requires a completely new approach to the analysis and description of SVCs. Such an approach considers not only the syntactic facts but also the semantic-pragmatic as well as the cultural conditions of an event report and especially the common and the different event conceptualizations that are shared by the respective speech communities. Durie has outlined the direction for such a new approach:

... I wish to suggest that the lamp of syntactic analysis can only probe some protuberances of verb serialization, without allowing one to gain a full impression of the phenomenon. I propose that models of lexical conceptual structure and event-hood which are in any case needed to account for the properties of verbs in non-serializing languages, will also need to be deployed to deal properly with verb serialization. My main theme is that non-serial verbs and serial verb complexes are subject to ... many of the same constraints on conceptual structure, and also on syntactic linking ... An advantage of this approach ... is that we can hope to achieve some clarity about which properties of serialization are manifestations or projections of semantic structure, culture-specific constructions of event-hood, and tendencies of grammaticization and lexicalization ... (Durie 1997: 349).<sup>13</sup>

## Abbreviations

A	Subject of a transitive verb	Perf	Perfective
excl	exclusive	Pl/pl	Plural
DEP	dependent	R/real	Realis
Fut	Future	S	Subject
Hab	habitual	Seq	sequential
CP	Classificatory Particle (see. Senft 1996)	Sg/sg/s	Singular
O	Object of a transitive verb	V	Verb
obj	Object		

## Notes

1. First of all I would like to thank the “Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft” (German Research Society) and the MPI for Psycholinguistics for financing and supporting my project on “Event conceptualization, event report, and serial verb constructions in Austronesian and Papuan languages” (DFG: SE 473/3-1). I would also like to thank the participants of “The Third European Meeting on Oceanic Linguistics”, 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> March 2001 at LACITO-CNRS in Villejuif/Paris, Terry Crowley, and my colleagues at the MPI in Nijmegen, especially Miriam van Staden, Melissa Bowerman, Felix Ameka, Jürgen Bohnemeyer, Nick Enfield, and Steve Levinson for helpful, constructive and interesting comments and discussions on the topic of SVCs or rather – according to Nick Enfield (2000a) and Felix Ameka (2001) – *multiverb constructions* (MVCs).
2. For further information on Kilivila and its orthography see Senft (1986). On ritual communication in Kilivila see Senft (1987). Evidence for the fact that the sentence quoted must be understood as a serial verb construction and not as parataxis comes from repairs that speakers of Kilivila make when producing sentences like this. If they realize that they have made a mistake in the sequence of verbs within a SVC, they start their repair by going back to the very first verb in the serial construction.
3. For a discussion of how many verbs can be found and produced within such constructions see below.
4. This reads in the German original version as follows:  
 “Eine Eigentümlichkeit des Ewe besteht darin, daß es gern eine Reihe von Verben unmittelbar aufeinander folgen läßt.. Im Deutschen werden diese aufeinanderfolgenden Verba zum Teil durch zusammengezogene Sätze oder Satzgefüge wiedergegeben. Sehr oft können aber auch mehrere Verba des Ewe im Deutschen durch ein einziges ausgedrückt werden. Der Eweer beschreibt nämlich jede Handlung, jeden Vorgang in allen Einzelheiten von Beginn bis zum Ende und drückt jede solche Einzelhandlung durch ein besonderes Verbum aus; er zerlegt jede Handlung in ihre einzelnen Teile and bringt jeden Teil für sich zur Darstellung, während wir im Deutschen nur die Haupthandlung herausgreifen and sie durch ein Verbum ausdrücken, während alle Nebenhandlungen entweder ganz unberücksichtigt bleiben oder mittels einer Präposition, eines Adverbs, einer Konjunktion oder einer Vorsilbe des Verbum etc. wiedergegeben werden.” (Westermann 1907: 94f.).
5. See also Durie (1988: 3), Foley, Olson (1985), Foley (1997: 382f.), Givón (1990: 19), Lane (1991:v, 24, 31, 36ff) Lane, Pawley (1992: 5ff), Schiller (1990: 34ff), Sperlich (1993: 95f.), and Zwicky (1990: 2). The fact that “svc” is not an empirically grounded *category* may also explain these difficulties – as Nick Enfield pointed out to me. The sequence of verbs within SVC and the sequence of their arguments is discussed below.

6. For the “polarity” criterion see also Lane (1991: 48):  
 “It is typical in *svcs* for negation to be marked only once, and to have scope over the whole construction”; however, see also Dol (1996: 35) who states that for Maybrat: “the scope of the negator is unclear”.  
 Durie refers to Givón’s research on the importance of the intonation contour and pauses for *svcs*. Givón first published his results on *svc* in 1990. The two papers which he published in 1991 (Givón 1991 a & b) are – with minor and marginal variations – identical with his article published in 1990. For a list of language specific characteristics of *svc*, see Lane (1991: 35f.); see also Dol (1996: 21f.) and Menick (1996: 42f).
7. On “Nuclear Layer Serialization” and its differentiation from “Compounding” see Crowley (1987: 59-62). By the way, it is rather plausible to find these preferences for languages with the word order patterns *sov* and *svo*: *sov* languages prefer nuclear layer serialization (*sov*[*v**v**v*...]), and languages with the *svo* word order pattern prefer core layer realisation (*sv*(*o*)[*v*(*o*)*v*(*o*)*v*(*o*)...]).
8. See also the diagram in Crowley (1987: 69) that summarizes this hierarchy as follows: “1. Basic motion intrans. 2. Posture/active intrans. 3. Stative/process intrans. 4. Other intransitives. 5. Transitive”.
9. Durie discusses in detail the topic of *svc* and argument structure. Even a short discussion of this topic here would go far beyond the scope of this paper. Thus, I refer the interested reader to Durie (1997) and also to Crowley (1987), Foley and Olson (1985) and Bisang (1992).
10. In what follows the term “event” is used as the most general cover term including states, actions, etc. (see Durie 1997: 320 fn.21). For the expressions “event” and “event report” see also Pawley (1993: 109).
11. Durie (1997: 331-336) also presents and illustrates the following types of *svc*: “Causative Serialization, Goal/Benefactive Serialization, Motion Serialization, Instrumental Serialization”.
12. The first variant of this example is documented by many tokens in my Kilivila data corpora; examples for the second variant are rather rare. Besides such “synonymous serializations” Durie (1997: 336-339) lists the following types of serialization where iconic principles seem to be irrelevant for the sequence of verbs within the *svc*: “Coincident motion or posture serialization, Manner serialization, Comitative serialization”.
13. Miriam van Staden, Alex Dukers, and I have started a research project (funded by the German Research Society – DFG) on *svcs* at the MPI for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen. We compiled a rather comprehensive questionnaire and have been asking colleagues via the Internet (Linguist List, Austronesian List, Papuan List) to please fill it in. The questionnaire can be found (and filled in) at the following web-page:  
<http://www.mpi.nl/world/serial-verb/quest/1st-quest.html>.