Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald and Robert M. W. Dixon: *Serial Verb Constructions — A Cross-Linguistic Typology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. xxiv + 369 pp. Hardback ISBN 0199279152. USD 110.00.

The publication of Mark Durie's seminal paper on serial verb constructions in 1997 lead to a resurgence of interest in this kind of complex predicate. Serial verb constructions (from here onwards abbreviated as SVCs) were first described by Christaller (1875: 69–73, 143f.) in his grammar of

the African language Twi. Up to the end of the twentieth century, most research on SVCs had been done on African languages, as well as on pidgins and creoles. However, SVCs are also to be found in Hmong-Mien, Mon-Khmer, Sino-Tibetan, Tai-Kadai, Papuan, Austronesian, Semitic and Central-American languages as well as in Japanese. Recently, a number of excellent books have been published that contribute much to our knowledge on SVCs and their typology in Austronesian, especially in Oceanic languages (Crowley 2002; Bril and Ozanne-Rivierre 2004; Lynch et al. 2002; see also Senft 2004a, b). And now Alexandra Aikhenvald and Robert Dixon have published an edited volume that claims to present a crosslinguistic typology of this fascinating phenomenon. The book is the result of a workshop on SVCs that was held at the Research Centre for Linguistic Typology at La Trobe University in Melbourne in June 2003.

After the table of contents, the preface, the notes on the contributors and a long list of abbreviations (seven pages!), Alexandra Aikhenvald presents an introduction in the first chapter entitled "Serial Verb Constructions in Typological Perspective" (pp. 1–68). This chapter sets the scene for the next fourteen chapters. In the last chapter, "Serial Verb Constructions: Conspectus and Coda" (pp. 338–350) Robert Dixon presents a summary of "some of the main properties, and some of the main parameters of variation, of [...] SVCs" (p. 338) and inquires in a final section whether Dyirbal verb-plus-adverbal constructions should be regarded as SVCs.

A first version of Aikhenvald's introductory paper "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" (p. xi). Because this chapter is so crucial for the structure of the volume as a whole and, because of the summarizing character of the last chapter, I will put the emphasis of this review on these two contributions to the volume.

The second sentence of Aikhenvald's introduction already presents the readers with a highly problematic and hotly debated issue, namely the claim that SVCs "describe what is conceptualized as a single event" (p. 1). This claim is also made by Durie (1997: 291) and many other researchers interested in SVCs (including myself; see Senft 2004c). Terry Crowley (2002: 263) points out that "[t]he problem with any claim relating to 'eventhood' is that it is difficult — or perhaps even impossible — to verify empirically with our current state of knowledge precisely what an event is". William Foley (in press) also takes up this problem in his paper "The notion of 'event' and serial verb constructions: arguments from New Guinea" which he presented at the 14th Annual Meeting of the

Southeast Asian Linguistics Society. In a rather provocative vein, he "put[s] to bed permanently the old chestnut that SVCs express a single event" because "our knowledge in this area is woefully insufficient to allow us to read off from the formal crosslinguistic variation in the data, semantic and perhaps ultimately conceptual notions like single or multiple eventhood" (Foley: in press). Moreover, more than ten years ago Bernard Comrie already pointed out the following: "The claim that serial verb constructions encode a single event is made with great regularity in the literature on serial verbs but is a claim that I find difficult to test in critical cases" (Comrie 1995: 36). In connection with SVCs Bohnemeyer and others have introduced the notion "macro-event property (MEP)"; they argue that "an expression has the MEP iff any time-positional operator denoted by a time-positional adverbial, temporal clause, or tense which 'locates' a subevent entailed by the expression in time also locates all other subevents in time" (Bohnemeyer et al. 2005). They claim that this "measure of event segmentation" can be used to decide whether a "serial verb" or "multiverb construction" can be regarded as a construction that has the property of a "macro-event". This is an interesting proposal that may help us decide whether or not it is true that the verbs in SVCs are interpreted as expressing a single event. However, it seems that for the time being it is still an open question whether this claim is true or not. Aikhenvald does not mention at all that this claim is controversial, and, actually — with the exception of Anthony Diller (see p. 174) — neither do any of the other contributors to this volume. The author continues to define SVCs as "a sequence of verbs which act together as a single predicate" and mentions that "[t]hey are monoclausal; their intonational properties are the same as those of a monoverbal clause and they have just one tense, aspect and polarity value. Many SVCs also share core and other arguments. Each component of an SVC must be able to occur on its own. Within an SVC, the individual verbs may have same, or different, transitivity values" (p. 1). These general remarks are almost identical with Durie's (1997: 291) "key characteristics" of SVCs. In a footnote Aikhenvald claims that "[t]his definition consolidates the existing terminological consensus" — and there she refers to Durie (1997) and other important publications in the field.

After a few further remarks on the functions and meanings of SVCs Aikhenvald presents "an overview of SVCs covering cross-linguistically attested parameters of variation, formulating generalizations as to the types of SVCs and their expected behaviour, so as to provide a unified framework for the analysis and interpretation of verb serialization in its full density" (p. 3). In Sections 2–9 SVCs are classified on the following parameters (see p. 3):

– Composition: Aikhenvald distinguishes "symmetrical" SVCs, which "consist of two or more verbs each chosen from a semantically and grammatically unrestricted class" from "asymmetrical" SVCs, which "include a verb from a grammatically and semantically restricted class" (p. 3). (This is discussed in Section 3).
– Contiguity versus noncontiguity: We find SVCs where verbs "may have to be next to each other" and SVCs where "another constituent may be allowed to intervene between them" (p. 3). (This is discussed in Section 4).
– Wordhood of component: "components of a [. . .] [SVC] may or may not form independent grammatical or phonological words" (p. 3). (This is discussed in Section 4).
– Marking of grammatical categories in SVC: "verbal categories [. . .] may be marked just once per construction [. . .] or can be marked on every component . . ." (p. 3f.). (This is also discussed in Section 4).

In Section 2 of the paper, she surveys properties of SVCs and defines them on the basis of these properties, then she discusses argument sharing in SVCs and gives an outline of additional properties of SVCs. Section 3 deals with composition and semantics of SVCs, Section 4 discusses formal properties of SVCs, Section 5 deals with productivity of serialization and functions of SVCs, Section 6 attempts to answer the question which verbs are likely to occur in SVCs, Section 7 discusses why we find several kinds of SVCs in one language, Section 8 presents the properties of serializing languages and the diffusion of serial verb constructions, and Section 9 summarizes the arguments made so far and offers prospects for further study. Finally, Section 10 gives an overview of the volume and the chapter ends with an appendix that presents approaches to SVCs and terminological issues.

Any positive or negative assessment of this volume depends on whether or not the reader accepts the framework for the analysis and interpretation of verb serialization as outlined in this chapter. I am sure that not every linguist will agree with each and every argument that is put forward here, however, I think this chapter provides an excellent starting point for further discussion of more or less controversial issues in the analysis and description of SVCs, and I agree with Foley, who points out that "whatever they are, their continued detailed study will pay rich dividends in unraveling the role of lexical, semantic and pragmatic constraints on the formal structure of language" (Foley in press).

The following fourteen chapters aim "at a cross-linguistic account of SVCs in typological perspective, in terms of the parameters outlined in [Aikhenvald's] introductory chapter" (p. 57).

In Chapter 2 (pp. 69–87) Stephen Matthews writes "On Serial Verb Constructions in Cantonese", a Sinitic language. Birgit Hellwig discusses "Serial Verb Constructions in Goemai", a West Chadic language (spoken in Nigeria) with isolating tendencies, in Chapter 3 (pp. 88–107). In Chapter 4 (pp. 108–123) Christa Kilian-Hatz presents her analyses of "Serial Verb Constructions in Khwe (Central Khoisan)"; Khwe is spoken in Southern Africa. Chapter 5, "Serial Verb Constructions in their grammatical context", presents Felix Ameka's analyses of SVCs in Ewe, a Kwa language spoken in Ghana (pp. 124–143). David B. Solnit discusses "Verb Serialization in Eastern Kayah Li", a language from the Karen group of the Tibeto Burman family, in Chapter 6 (pp. 144–159). Kayah Li is spoken in Burma and in Thailand. Anthony V. N. Diller presents his analyses on "Thai Serial Verbs: Cohesion and Culture" in Chapter 7 (pp. 160–177); Thai belongs to the Tai-Kadai language family. Alexandra Aikhenvald presents her analyses on "Serial Verb Constructions in Tariana", an Arawak language from northwest Amazonia, in Chapter 8 (pp. 178–201). In Chapter 9 (pp. 202–222) Andrew Ingram discusses "Serial Verb Constructions in Dumo", a language of the Sko language family spoken on the north coast of the island of New Guinea; it is also known as "Vanimo". All the languages presented in these eight chapters have "productive SVCs of a variety of structural and semantic types" (p. 57). Alexandre François presents his analyses of "Serial Verb Constructions in Mwotlap", an Oceanic language, in Chapter 10 (pp. 223–238). Mwotlap is spoken on a small island of the Banks group north of Vanuatu. It has a large array of productive SVCs. François is the only one of the contributors to this volume who quotes Isabelle Bril's and Françoise Ozanne-Rivierre's (2004) important contribution to the research on SVCs in Oceanic languages. In Chapter 11 (pp. 239–253) John Hajek discusses "Serial Verb Constructions in Tetun Dili", an Austronesian language spoken in Dili, the capital of East Timor. Tetun Dili is undergoing "deserialization". In Chapter 12 (pp. 254–272) Frantisek Lichtenberk discusses "Serial Verb Constructions in Toqabaqita", an Oceanic language spoken on the island of Malaita in the Solomon Islands. Roberto Zavala presents his analyses on "Serial Verbs in Olutec (Mixean)" in Chapter 13 (pp. 273–300). Olutec is spoken in Mexico and has one-word SVCs. Willem J. de Reuse discusses "Serial Verbs in Lakota (Siouan)" in Chapter 14 (pp. 301–318). Lakota is also known as "Teton Dakota"; it is spoken on reservations in North and South Dakota in the USA. The structural and semantic properties of SVCs in Lakota are very idiosyncratic. In Chapter 15 (pp. 319–337) Azeb Amha and Gerrit J. Dimmendaal present their analyses of "Verbal Compounding in Wolaitta". Wolaitta is a language from the Omotic branch of the Afroasiatic language family and is spoken

in Ethiopia. Wolaitta does not have SVCs, but converb constructions that show interesting similarities with SVCs.

These fourteen chapters provide incredibly rich and fascinating data from languages "of varied genetic affiliation and typological profile" that are spoken in "heavily-serializing areas" (p. 57). The editors decided against featuring a creole language in the volume because creoles and their SVCs "have been extensively described".

As already mentioned above, Robert Dixon gives a summarizing typological overview of the findings presented in the preceding chapters in the first part of the last chapter, Chapter 16 (pp. 338–350). After a brief characterization of the construction type Dixon presents "approximate percentages of textual clauses" (p. 338) with SVCs for the languages presented and discussed in this volume. He does not provide any information with respect to the text genres that he — or the contributors? — used for counting the SVCs in the respective languages to come up with these percentages, despite the fact that Hajek (p. 252f.) emphasizes the interdependence of the frequency of SVCs and the text genres in which they are produced. Then Dixon points out that "SVCs are not restricted to languages of a particular typological profile" (p. 338) and presents his summarizing remarks on their relevant semantic property and the grammatical properties and parameters under the following headings (printed in bold, pp. 339–344):

A. An SVC consists of more than one verb, but the SVC is conceived of as describing a single action.
B. There is no mark of linkage or subordination in an SVC.
C. Each verb in an SVC may also occur as the sole verb in a clause.
D. An SVC functions like a single predicate.
E. An SVC will generally have its own transitive value.
F. There must always be (at least) one argument shared by all verbs in an SVC.
G. The verbs in an SVC may make up one word, or may remain separate words.
H. The components of an SVC may be contiguous or non-contiguous.
I. There must be some general rules for what makes up an SVC.
J. Asymmetrical SVCs tend to become grammaticalized, and symmetrical SVCs tend to become lexicalized.
K. Although most SVCs in a language involve just two verbs, in most languages there can be three or more verbs involved.

Some of these rather generally formulated (and discussed) topics are controversial — and I can only agree with the author that "[f]urther

work is needed (on a large sample of languages) to see whether any cross-linguistic generalizations are possible ..." (p. 344); however, this holds for SVCs in general and not only for "generalizations [...] concerning the details of inclusion of SVCs within a higher SVC" (p. 344), as Dixon restricts his statement here. Such further research will also enable us to finally decide whether Crowley (2002: 18) was right or wrong in empha-sizing that "it may in fact be wishful thinking to assume that we can come up with a universally applicable definition of verb serialization". Never-theless, the summary presented by Dixon in the first part of the last chap-ter of this volume provides an excellent starting point for further research on SVCs; but I am afraid that so far we have to take some of these prop-erties and parameters that are relevant for the description and analysis of SVCs as hypotheses that must be either verified or proven false in future studies and that may see "many happy restatements" as we know more about this fascinating phenomenon. This future research must consider text categories in which SVCs are used (see Hajek's contribution, p. 252f.); it must include "cultural and sociolinguistic factors" and their in-fluence on SVCs as well as their actual usage, as Diller (p. 175) points out in his contribution to this volume (see also Ingram's remark in footnote 4 on p. 218 and Zavala's final remarks on p. 298; see also Senft 2004c: 61); and, as Crowley (2002: 262ff.) emphasized, it must also discuss cognitive implications of SVCs. It is a pity that these aspects of research on SVCs are rather neglected in this volume.

Dixon's chapter ends with a discussion of whether Dyirbal verb-plus-adverbal constructions should be regarded as SVCs. Dixon presented his data and the arguments that speak for and against such an analysis to the participants of the 2003 workshop on SVCs in Melbourne and took a vote. He states that "[e]very participant voted 'yes', that the verb-plus-adverbal construction in Dyirbal should be regarded as a bona fide SVC". This is rather strange — results of linguistic research are not a matter of majority vote but of convincing data analyses — as Dixon him-self has been showing us for many years now!

The book ends with an index of authors (pp. 351–354), an index of subjects (pp. 355–364) and an index of languages, language families, and areas (pp. 365–369).

The anthology is clearly structured, relatively easy to read and presents excellent data on and analyses of SVCs in 15 languages (with Dyirbal in-cluded). There are a few typos (e.g., p. 108, third to last line, read: Verbs may be ... (for: Verbs maybe ...), p. 111, last line, read: ... are under-lined ... (for: ... are marked in bold), p. 113, line 14: read: ... to express ... (for: ... to expresses ...), p. 216: II. 'Switch-function' SVCs — this heading is not printed in bold, p. 269 example (60): the SVC "riki

thatoqoma-na'' is not underlined, p. 276: there is no reference to Table 3 in the text, p. 328: there is no reference to Table 2 in the text). However, all this criticism is carping.

In general, this anthology provides the reader with rich and fascinating data on and sound analyses of SVCs and contributes decisively to the slowly but gradually growing literature towards a crosslinguistic typology of SVCs.

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