

Conclusion

The term ‘serial verb construction’ has been used to refer to a diverse array of constructions in a wide variety of different languages: from constructions expressing a series of events to those expressing a single event; from constructions involving syntactic coordination to those involving syntactic subordination (Chapter 2, §2.1). The term is used here to describe a series of two or more verbs, none of which is syntactically embedded as an argument of another, which work together to express a single event within a single proposition (Chapter 2, §2.2 and §2.3).

The notion of two or more verbs working together in a particular language to express a single event within a single proposition raises a number of important questions. These questions relate to issues such as: an appropriate syntactic analysis of the constructions concerned and the boundaries within which they might differ syntactically (Chapter 2, §2.4); the common properties and functions of the SVC types identified in the language concerned (Chapter 3, Introduction), and the properties and functions of each of these types (Chapter 3, §3.1–3.4; the relationship between function and part-of-speech classification (Chapter 4), and the similarities and differences between the SVC types identified and other constructions to which they are superficially similar (Chapter 5). All these issues have been dealt with in depth in various parts of this study, and the conclusions reached concerning them are briefly summarised here.

6.1 The Notions of a Single Event and of Joint Predication

Section §2.2 of Chapter Two described research by Givón (1987, 1991) regarding the pause probabilities within serial verb constructions. On the basis of that evidence, Givón concludes that serial verb constructions simply represent a different way of expressing propositions, not a totally different way of mentally segmenting the real world, implying a totally different conceptualisation of the notion of ‘event’. However, the factors that lead to two or more conceptually separable events being thought of, and treated as, one event are the factors of common and cultural association, allowing for some variation between speech communities regarding the kinds of event types that can be serialized (§2.2.1).

The fact that serial verb constructions consist of two or more verbs working together to express a single event means that they can be viewed as constituting a bridge between the syntax and the lexicon. Like lexical items, serial verb constructions express commonly or culturally associated ideas within a single unit. However, unlike lexical items, the component parts of serial verb constructions are transparent and must be processed individually, in order that the construction as a whole be understood. In this way serial verb constructions are clearly a syntactic phenomenon (§2.2.1).

The interpretation of serial verb constructions as expressing a single event can be seen as iconically related to their syntactic structure. The two (or more) verbs are united by the fact that they occur together in a single clause, sharing all core and clause-layer operators, and having in common at least one core argument and all peripheral arguments. Furthermore, the lack of lexical linkage in the form of conjunctions or complementizers means that the verbs appear physically close together, reinforcing their semantic oneness (§2.2.2).

Finally, in this analysis the criterion that the two verbs in a serial verb construction work as joint predicators of a single proposition (§2.3) is taken to be an important issue in delimiting SVCs in White Hmong. In cases in which the second of the two verbs is part of a complement of the first, the two verbs are not seen as acting as joint predicators. This criterion allows us to delimit a distinct group of constructions as serial verb constructions in this language, and to thereby identify a distinct function that the strategy of serialization fulfils (see §6.4 below).

6.2 The Syntactic Analysis of SVCs in White Hmong

The syntactic analysis of serial verb constructions in White Hmong proposed in this study (Chapter 2, §2.4) involves the linkage of either clausal nuclei (verbs) or cores (verbs plus their core arguments). When nuclei are linked, they share all core arguments, and the verbs are in a cosubordinate relationship (dependent with regard to nuclear layer operators). When cores are linked, the verbs share at least one core argument, and are also in a cosubordinate relationship (dependent with regard to core layer, modal operators). All peripheral arguments and operators are shared by all junctives in all SVC types, consistent with the fact that the junctives constitute a single clause. In this respect core layer serial verb constructions are seen to differ from the notion of core juncture proposed in the revised version of Role and Reference Grammar (RRG), which portrays core juncture as linkage between separated clauses (core and periph-