This paper describes the grammar of serial verb constructions in Teribe, a Chibchan language of Costa Rica and Panama; it also analyzes the grammaticalization of minor components of Teribe serial verb constructions as potential auxiliaries. By comparing the Teribe verb serialization patterns with the behavior of positionals in three neighboring Chibchan languages, Bribri and Cabecar (Costa Rica) and Cuna (Panama and Colombia), the paper explores the grammaticalization path of verb serialization in Chibchan. The analysis suggests that the difference between Bribri, Cabecar, Teribe, and Cuna in terms of positionals has to do with varying degrees of grammaticalization of those verbs.

1 Introduction

The Chibchan languages extend from Northeastern Honduras, through the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua, most of Costa Rica and Panama, Colombia and West of Venezuela; they represent the most widespread language family in the cultural and linguistic area known as the Intermediate Area.² The Intermediate Area borders with Mesoamerica to the North and with the Peruvian (Andean) and Amazonian areas to the South. On the basis of important differences that recent archaeological, anthropological and linguistic research have established between Central America and Colombia, the Chibchan world has been divided into these two geographic zones (cf. Quesada 2007); one of these differences has to do with the category of auxiliaries, which seems

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² The Intermediate Area was first proposed by Willey (1971) as a cultural unit, clearly differing from neighboring Mesoamerica and the Andean Area, in terms of twelve features that reveal both geographical and developmental “intermediateness” between those two cultural complexes; the list is long, so the features will not be cited here (see Willey 1971: 277–8). More recent archaeological (Lange 1992) and linguistic (Constenla 1991) research has confirmed the existence of this cultural area.
to be more relevant and more grammaticalized in Colombia. This paper describes the grammar of serial verb constructions in Teribe, a Chibchan language of Costa Rica and Panama. By comparing the Teribe verb serialization patterns with similar constructions in three neighboring Chibchan languages, Bribri and Cabecar (Costa Rica) and Cuna (Panama and Colombia), the paper next explores the grammaticalization path of verb serialization in these languages in terms of the above-mentioned difference between Central America and Colombia.

The aim of the paper is twofold. First, it describes in detail the grammar of verb serialization in Teribe. Verbal series in Teribe can have two (1), three (2), and even four verbs (3); at least one verb in every series is a motion and/or a positional verb; the other member can, but need not, be a verb other than those two types.

(1) tawa shro-no löng bomi tok na
   1PL.EXCL arrive-PFV POSIT.BE.PL 2PL with here
   ‘We came to you.’

(2) sënwa dbuk jem pang di kingo
   bird fly go.up POSIT.HANG river above
   ‘The bird is flying over the river.’

(3) tawa shro-no to tek shäng
   1PL.EXCL arrive-PFV go come POSIT.STAND
   1PL.EXCL.POSS husband with
   ‘We came with our husbands.’

Rules of combination are difficult to state because each series, especially in the case of larger ones, is the sum of its components; that is, the verbs that enter a series keep their lexical meaning and their presence in the series is highly speaker and context-dependent. Still an attempt to capture the semantic and syntactic factors involved will be proposed.

The second aim of the paper is to explore the grammaticalization path of verb serialization in the Chibchan languages by comparing the Teribe verb serialization patterns with the behavior of positionals in three relatives of Teribe (Bribri, Cabecar and Cuna). The Chibchan data will be analyzed in the light of current research (cf. Aikhenvald 2006, and Introduction to this volume), which reveals that grammaticalizing