



Serial Verbs and Event Plausibility in Tariana from Northwest Amazonia

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Preamble: Serial Verb Constructions and Event Conceptualization

A language is likely to bear an imprint of its speakers' habitat and physical environment, their relationships to one another, and their beliefs and ways of viewing the world. Correlations between individual linguistic categories, cultural values, and social parameters have been the focus of a large body of work. As Enfield (2002a: 3) puts it, in his introduction to the area of "ethnosyntax," "encoded in the semantics of grammar we find cultural values and ideas, we find clues about social structures which speakers maintain, we find evidence, both historically and otherwise, of the social organisation of speech communities." Mutual co-dependence between the grammar of a language and the non-linguistic parameters of the society where it is spoken is at the core of the cultural linguistics, pioneered by Farzad Sharifian (e.g., Sharifian 2017).

Serial verb constructions – monopredicative sequences of verbs without any markers of subordination or coordination between them – offer speakers a versatile

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and powerful means of representing events in the form of multi-verb combinations, as opposed to sequences of separate clauses.

In terms of their meanings, serial verbs generally describe what is conceptualized as a single event. The ways verbs combine together need to make sense to the people, often reflecting their ways of life and customary actions. What constitutes a plausible event and event typicality is embedded in cultural practices, ways of doing things, and also environmental conditions.

Here we focus on the ways in which culture-specific motion verbs and motion events are encoded in Tariana, an Arawak language from northwest Amazonia. We start with a snapshot of serial verbs in Tariana in section “When a String of Verbs Counts as One: Serial Verbs in Tariana”. In the following section, we address the ways in which serial verb constructions reflect cultural practices and the environment. The last section is a brief summary.

When a String of Verbs Counts as One: Serial Verbs in Tariana

A prominent feature of Tariana (only partly shared with neighboring languages) is highly frequent multi-word serial verb constructions of various types. Tariana is an endangered Arawak language from northwestern Amazonia (Brazil). Once a powerful language group, it is now reduced to about 70 speakers in two villages (Santa Rosa and Periquitos). The language is spoken within the Vaupés River Basin linguistic area known for its linguistic exogamy and multilingualism. The area spans adjacent regions of Brazil and Colombia (see Aikhenvald (2003, 2012)). This paper is based exclusively on original fieldwork conducted by the author since 1991. A comprehensive grammar is in Aikhenvald (2003). Examples are taken from 35 hours of recorded texts and conversations (none are elicited), with the corpus being constantly augmented by daily interactions with speakers via Facebook and WhatsApp, using the methodology of remote fieldwork. Over 80% of clauses in the corpus contain serial verbs.

Serial constructions (or serial verbs, for short) in Tariana have all the properties of monoverbal clauses. Their components act together as a single predicate, without any marking of coordination, subordination, or any kind of syntactic dependencies. A serial verb will have a single value for tense, aspect, mood, modality, evidentiality, polarity, and illocutionary force (a further discussion and a consensus of the definition of serial verbs, including the references, are in Aikhenvald (2018a: 178–184; 2018b); see a summary in Dixon (2006). Serial verbs share subject marking and the tense-evidentiality, aspect, mood, modality, and polarity values, in addition to shared marking of syntactic function including subordinating markers and nominalizers. As we see in the examples throughout this paper, person markers are repeated on each component of a serial verb which take prefixes (a feature of transitive and active intransitive verbs but not of stative verbs). Other categories are marked once per construction. Components of an SVC cannot be questioned or repeated separately without questioning or repeating the whole construction. In the attested data, serial verbs can consist of up to seven components. They can be easily distinguished from

multiclausal sequences of verbs by their prosodic properties. Serial verbs, no matter how long, are pronounced as one intonation unit, with no pause between the components. The components are strictly contiguous: no constituent can intervene between them (see Aikhenvald (2003: 423–448; 2006: 183–184) for further evidence for monoclausality of serial verbs, including from false starts and speech repair).

As is typical for languages with productive verb serialization, Tariana has an array of asymmetrical and symmetrical serial verbs. Asymmetrical serial verbs consist of a minor verb from a closed class and a major verb from an open class. They express direction and orientation, aspect, and valency increase. Symmetrical serial verbs consist of several verbs each from a large open class. They typically denote sequence of subactions, cause-effect, and or a manner in which the action is performed (for a further elaboration of the notions of asymmetrical and symmetrical serial verbs, the reader is directed to Aikhenvald (2018a, b) and references there).

Across the languages of the world, serial verb constructions are a means of representing events – including motion events, speech events, causation, and actions linked together. Within a motion event, “source,” arrival at an endpoint or a goal, and passing of an intermediate route have to be specified and integrated within one multi-word serial verb construction. One verb will not be enough for a motion event to make sense.

How to Talk About a Motion Event in Tariana

Whether or not a serial verb construction – with one event obligatorily broken down into its components – represents a different cognitive way of segmenting reality (cf. Bohnemeyer et al. 2007: 498–499) is an open question. Native speakers’ intuition points toward their awareness of the differences between languages with and without serial verbs in the ways of framing an event. At the very early stages of learning Tariana back in 1991, I offered to bring some juice for the speakers. It took me some time to take in the fact that to render the Portuguese verb *trazer* “bring” into Tariana, one has to use a serial verb *-hita -nu* “get come”: I was told to say the following: (Components of serial verbs are in bold throughout this paper, and the components are detailed in parentheses after the translation.)

- (1) uni pumeni-peri **phita** **pi-nu**
 water sweet-COLL 2sg + get 2sg-come
 ‘Bring the juice (lit. sweet water)’ (get come)

My main teacher, the late Graciliano Sanchez Brito, came to my aid and said: “It is not like Portuguese, we just cannot say it with one verb.” A gifted natural linguist, Graciliano, captured the monopredicative character of serial verbs and their equivalence to monoverbal predicates in another language he was fluent in. The multiple facets of one motion event are not separable from each other – as Enfield (2002b: 240–241) puts it, they are “overlaid to form a more detailed and complete event

description.” Typical multifaceted events combine manner and direction of motion or posture and action.

Serial verb constructions have numerous functions. Since Tariana has only one locational case on noun phrases, serial verb constructions serve to disambiguate direction “to” and source “from.” So the construction *pi-pala pheta* (2sg-put 2sg + enter.enclosed.space+CAUS) means “you put (it) into (something)” (put make.enter. enclosed.space) and *pi-pala pi-musu-ita* (2sg-put 2sg-go.out-CAUS) means “take (it) out of (something)” (literally, you put you make go out).

An example of a complex asymmetrical serial verb containing two motion verbs indicating directions (*-musu* “go out” and *-nu* “come, move toward a target”) and a verb indicating manner of motion (*-dena* “paddle”) is in (2):

- | | | | |
|-----|---|--|--------------------------------|
| (2) | mayakani-dawa-ne-pidana
righthand.side-CL.HOLE-ALONG-REM.P.REP
di-nu
3sgnf-come
“From a lake on the righthand side, one (man) came out paddling” (paddle go. out come) | di-dena
3sgnf-paddle
paita
one+CL.ANIM | di-musu
3sgnf-go.out |
|-----|---|--|--------------------------------|

Using any of those verbs on their own to attempt a description of a motion event would result in a grammatically awkward sentence. Similar to other languages with serial verb constructions, each component of an event involving physical motion has to be explicitly stated. The multiple facets of one motion event are not separable from each other – as Enfield (2002b: 240–241) puts it, they are “overlaid to form a more detailed and complete event description” (see also Enfield (2008: 130ff) and Aikhenvald (2018a: 178–182)).

Serial verbs allow the speakers to be explicit in their representation of the components of an event, breaking it down into minute details. The ways verbs combine together tells us something about the speakers and their way of life. What constitutes a plausible event is often culture-specific, reflecting traditional practices. Combining components within serial verb constructions is, in many instances, constrained by what is normally done and what makes sense.

Traditional Practices and Serial Verb Constructions

The Tariana, similar to most Amazonians, sleep in hammocks hung between two house posts (rather than lying on beds) (The word “hammock” in English is the legacy of Taino, from the same Arawak family as Tariana (borrowed via Spanish and first attested in 1555: Aikhenvald (2012: 64)). The practice of having hammocks on ships is known to have been borrowed from the South American Indians after Columbus had made contact with the Taino on the Hispaniola island (in 1492). The Tariana noun *amaku* “hammock” is cognate to Taino *hamaca*.) Hammocks are

high enough from the ground to keep the sleeper safe from occasional nocturnal creatures creeping in. And they are a useful asset – easy to put away for the day, roll out again at night, and carry around on a long hunting expedition.

This practice of “sleeping hanging” rather than “sleeping lying down” qualifies Enfield’s (2002b: 243) statement concerning “the fact of all humans’ sleeping lying down.” An advice to get a rest – translatable into English or Portuguese as “go and lie down” – was phrased as (3), “go hang, have a breather”:

- (3) **pi-a** **pi-kwa-daka** **pi-hwahweta**
 2sg-go 2sg-hang-YET 2sg-breathe/have.a.rest
 “Go hang have a rest (in a hammock)!” (go hang have.a.rest)

Europeans would lie down to sleep on a bed or a mat and get up in the morning. A Tariana will climb up into a hammock, sleep hanging, and then get down from it in the morning, rather than getting up – see (4).

- (4) **amaku-se** **di-ruku** **di-a-ka**
 hammock-LOC 3sgnf-descend 3sgnf-go-REC.P.VIS
 “He has got down from the hammock” (meaning: he has got up in the morning) (descend go)

The term for “blanket” which is typically used as a cover for those sleeping in a hammock (and thus hanging, not lying in it) is shown in (5).

- (5) **pa-ña-nite** **pa-kwa**
 IMP-wear/be inside/live-TOP.ADV + NCL:ANIM IMP-hang
 “blanket” (literally “the one (which) one wears (and) hangs in a hammock”) (wear hang)

Example 5 is a nominalization of a serial verb construction *pa-ña pa-kwa* (IMP-wear IMP-hang). The animate classifier (which refers to a blanket as an attribute of a human) has a nominalizing function and occurs on the first component of the serial verb.

To describe a typical position of sleeping in a horizontal position in Lao, the verbs *nòòn²* “lie” and *lap²* “be asleep” conventionally combine in describing one event in which someone has gone to sleep (Enfield 2002b: 243–244) – see (6).

- (6) **laaw²** **nòòn²** **lap²** *Lao*
 3sg lie be.asleep
 “She/he is asleep” (lie be.asleep)

It is possible to refer to other (atypical) kinds of sleeping, such as “sleeping standing” or “sleeping sitting” – as in a serial verb construction shown in (7):

- (7) **laaw²** **jùùn³** **lap²** *Lao*
 3sg stand be.asleep
 “She/he is asleep standing” (stand be.asleep)

The “typical posture” serial verb in (6) and the atypical posture serial verb in (7) differ in terms of their grammatical features. The serial verb in (6) can be negated by inserting the marker *bòò¹* between the two components of the serial verb, signifying failure to achieve the result. An “atypical” posture construction (e.g., example 7) cannot be negated in a similar way.

Along similar lines, in agreement with Tariana cultural practices of sleeping in hammocks, a typical action of sleeping in Tariana will be described with a serial verb consisting of two components, *-kwa* “hang” and *-ma* “sleep, close one’s eyes”:

- (8) **di-kwa** **di-ma-pidana** *diha-maka-se*
 3sgnf-hang 3sgnf-sleep/close.eyes-REM.P.REP this-CL:HAMMOCK-LOC
 “He was reportedly sleeping in his hammock” (hang sleep/close.eyes)

The Tariana positional verb *-swa* “be lying down, be positioned on a horizontal surface, extend horizontally over a large surface” can be used with any subject. If used with a human, it has nothing to do with sleeping or being at rest: a human lies on the ground if they are unable to get up (for instance, if wounded or sick). In the following example (9), men are lying on the ground having fallen down after a fight:

- (9) **Na-siwa** *na-nalita,* **na-swa** **na-hwa-pidana**
 3pl-each.other 3pl-fight 3pl-lie 3pl-fall-REM.P.REP
 “They fought each other, (and) fell down in a lying position” (lie fall)

Lying on the ground sleeping would represent an atypical posture for a human. Example below describes a person lying on the ground (wounded or sick) with their eyes closed. Using it to refer to someone sleeping was judged bizarre:

- (10) **di-swa** **di-ma-pidana**
 3sgnf-lie 3sgnf-sleep/close.eyes-REM.P.REP
 “He was reportedly lying (on the ground) with his eyes closed” (lie close eyes)
 ?“He was reportedly lying sleeping” (lie sleep?)

The serial verb in (10) has the same properties of a serial verb construction as does (8) (which describes a typical posture for sleeping). This is in contrast to (7), from Lao: here the construction denoting atypical posture does not share all the properties with a serial verb referring to a typical event (as in (6)). However, an atypical posture in Tariana (10) will not be associated with being asleep: the other meaning of the verb *-ma*, “close eyes,” will be read into it.

The verb *-swa* “lie down” applies to animals (a tapir, a wild pig, or a snake lying on the ground). A story (see example 11) about a man who went around with wild

pigs and ended up becoming one of them uses this verb twice. Firstly, it occurs in a nominalized serial verb construction *di-wera di-sue-mi* “the place of his spilling (manioc juice)” (lit. spill make lie). Secondly, it appears in the description of the resting place of wild pigs at the end of the sentence (here the verb does not take part in a serial verb construction and is used on its own):

- (11) **[di-wera di-sue-mi]** i-thani-pidana
 3sgnf-spill 3sgnf-lie+CAUS-LOC.NOM INDEF-near-REM.P.REP
 ãpia na-swa-ku
 wild.pig 3pl-lie-QUIETLY
 “Near the place where he spilt (spill make.lie) (the manioc juice liked by the wild pigs), wild pigs were resting quietly (lit. lying down)”

The same verb *-swa* applies to natural phenomena – light, darkness, dawn, and dusk – and also to liquids, as it is in its first occurrence (in 11) in a nominalized serial verb construction. A traditional headdress, or a hat, “lies” on the person’s head. The term for “hat” in Tariana is a nominalization *pa-swa-ni-da* (IMP-lie-TOP.ADV-CL: ROUND); literally, “a round one which lies” (see further examples in Aikhenvald (2003: 609, 612–613, 431)). The distribution of positional verbs of “lying down” and “hanging” correlates with cultural practices.

Motion Verbs and Environmental Features

In contrast, verbs of motion – a closed subclass in Tariana, as in many other languages – reflect environmental features. The two verbs of entering are a case in point:

- (a) *-he* “enter an enclosed space,” for example, a house or a limited open space in the jungle, often referred to as “clearing.”
 (b) *-wa* “enter a large non-enclosed unbounded space,” for example, jungle or a riverway.

Their correlates for expressing an upward movement are *-ñu* “go upwards, upstream (enclosed space, such as a house or a riverway)” versus *-(h)isa* “go upwards (open space).” There is only one motion verb for downward movement: *-ruku*. A brief summary of Tariana motion verbs is in Aikhenvald (2003: 434–436). Table 44.1 summarizes the range of meanings of the two verbs of entering.

All motion verbs, including these two, occur in serial verb constructions. The verb *-he* can be used as a monoverbal predicate if it refers to a result rather than a process. The verb *-wa* only rarely occurs on its own, outside a serial verb. We now turn to some examples.

In (12), the verb *-he* “enter (enclosed space)” describes entering a house. The grandmother is inviting the Tariana ancestors to come inside the house belonging to her grandson, the wind:

else. This reflects a typical Amazonian transformation: as Carlin (2018: 315) puts it, “a spirit or a soul can be wearing “clothes” that mask the underlying essence.” A shaman, or a human being in a story, may acquire an external shape, or the looks, of an evil spirit. This will be described as *iñe-maka-pe dhe* (spirit-CL:CLOTH-pl 3sgnf + enter.encoded.space) “he enters the clothing of an evil spirit.” A similar expression was used to describe what happened to a former priest, who subsequently got married and left the priesthood:

- (16) *iñe* *dhe-ka*
 evil.spirit 3sgnf + enter.encoded.space-REC.P.VIS
 “He has entered evil-spirithood”

The Tariana shamans are known to have the potential of transforming themselves into a jaguar (see a comprehensive discussion of Jaguar shamans in the region by Wright (2003)). This is described with a serial verb:

- (17) **yawi** **dhe-pidana**
 be.jaguar 3sgnf + enter.encoded.space-REM.P.REP
 “He became a jaguar; entered jaguar-hood” (be.jaguar enter.encoded.space)

In a story, a turtle acquires the shape of a snake – that is, turns into a snake:

- (18) **mawali** **dhe-pidana** **di-ña-nhi**
 be.snake 3sgnf + enter.encoded.space-REM.P.REP 3sgnf-stay/live-ANT
 “He (turtle) entered snake-hood for good” (be.snake enter.encoded.space stay)

With an inanimate subject, *-he* will describe movement into the insides of an enclosed location: rain getting inside a bag (exposed on an open canoe) or smoke entering the house:

- (19) *isa* *dhe-mha* *panisi-se*
 smoke 3sgnf + enter.encoded.space-PRES.NONVIS house-LOC
 “Smoke has entered the house”

The same verb for “entering” was spontaneously used to describe a word occurring in a sentence. Below, a speaker acknowledges his mistake: he used the word “hit” instead of “kill”:

- (20) *nu-inu* *yaphini* *nu-ña* *dhe-ka*
 1sg-kill instead 1sg-hit 3sgnf + enter.encoded.space-REC.P.VIS
 “Instead of ‘I kill’, ‘I hit’ entered [my speech]”

The verb *-wa*, “enter an open space,” is most often used to describe entering the jungle (cf. examples (15) and (21)). The serial verb construction (see example 21)

has a complex internal structure: it is a symmetrical serial verb consisting of two motion components: the verb “jump” and an asymmetrical serial verb construction “enter.unbounded.space go.”

- | | | | | |
|------|-----------------------------|--|-------------|-------------------------|
| (21) | diha | | yawi | di-wasa-tatha-hu |
| | ART | | jaguar | 3sgnf-jump-UP-AWAY |
| | di-wa | | di-a | |
| | 3sgnf-enter.unbounded.space | | 3sgnf-go | |
- “The jaguar was jumped up and away (and) went (into the jungle)” (jump enter.unbounded.space go)

The same verb is used to describe entering water or a riverway. This is what a fox (*raposa amazonica*) did in (22), fleeing from a jaguar.

- | | | | | |
|------|------------|-------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| (22) | ha-ehkwapi | uni | di-wa | di-a-pidana |
| | DEM-CL:DAY | water | 3sgnf-enter. | 3sgnf-go-REM. |
| | | | unbounded.space | P.REP |
| | ñapu-pe | u:ni-nai-se | | |
| | rivulet-pl | water-CL:LAKE-LOC | | |
- “That (day) he went off into water, rivulets, lakes” (enter.unbounded.space go)

In its nonspatial sense, the verb *-wa* describes entering into an emotional or a physical state, for example, *puwhi* “be happy and merry,” *hama* “be fed up and tired,” *thepe* “be annoyed,” and *tarada* “be living, be alive.” An example is in (23). After a man kidnapped by fish-women had been freed, his mother became very happy, literally, “entered being happy”:

- | | | | | | |
|------|------------------|--------------|-----------------|------------|-----------|
| (23) | kiaku-pidana | puhwi | du-wa | hado-peru | di-na |
| | strong-REM.P.REP | be.happy | 3sgf-enter. | mother-OLD | 3sgnf-OBJ |
| | | | unbounded.space | | |
- “Old mother became happy concerning him” (be.happy enter.unbounded.space)

Serial verb constructions represent motion events whose co-occurrence makes sense to the speakers. The verb *-wa* “enter an open space” will easily combine in one serial verb with a verb of motion with a directional meaning, for example, *-a* “go (away from the speaker or the deictic center)” (as in (13), (21), and (22)) and also *-ruku* “go down,” *-mara* “go downstream,” *-thaka* “go across,” *-ñu* “go upstream,” and *-musu* “leave, go out, go away.”

The verb *-wa* cannot felicitously combine with some motion verbs. The commonly used verb *-nu* “come, move towards the speaker or the deictic centre” – illustrated in (1) and (2) – is a case in point. A combination **di-wa di-nu* (3sgnf-enter.unbounded.space 3sgnf-come) was judged bizarre: this would imply that the speakers themselves were in the jungle. The verb *-wa* could not be felicitously

combined with *-(h)isa* “go up into open space (typically, open air),” since the meaning of *-wa* presupposes entering a space on the same level or below the deictic point or the speaker, as mentioned earlier in this section.

Combinations of *-wa* with positional verbs are also restricted to what is “common-sensical.” It can combine with *-swa* “be in horizontal position, lie, stay,” but not with *-kwa* “hang.” Hanging in a hammock involves an enclosed space (for instance, a hammock in (3), (4), and (8)) and is thus incompatible with the meaning of *-wa* “enter an open space.” The verb *-wa* is equally incompatible with positional verbs which presuppose the ground or any other fixed surface as a destination: *-hwa* “sit; fall down from short height into a position spread on the ground,” *-pha* “fall down from a height, e.g., a tree or a drunk,” *-wera* “fall down (from a location where the object had been fixed), e.g., a hair, a leaf, or a fruit,” or *-eru* “get stuck onto something.” Generally speaking, the meanings associated with *-wa* are constrained by a limited selection of environmental features subsumed under “open space” – the jungle and waterways. Tariana uses the same term for “village” and “city” (*yakale*). No matter how big a city would be, “entering” a city requires the verb *-he* and not *-wa*, as it is viewed as an enclosed space.

Asymmetrical serial verb constructions with posture verbs make sense to speakers if the posture meets their expectations concerning how things are done normally – and a typical posture is involved. A traditional Lao musical instrument *lanaat*⁴ is typically played in a sitting position; serial verb constructions with verbs “stand” or “lie” describing this activity were not judged acceptable (see Enfield (2002b: 241–254) on this and other examples). Listening to a sermon, *fang*²-*théét*,⁴ also involves sitting. Non-sitting postures (lying down or standing up) would imply that the subject will not be properly performing the ritual. Culturally logical solutions will be the less marked options. When confronted with atypical postures, speakers overtly mention their marked character, providing an additional explanation for an atypical posture so as to “activate non-default cultural representations in the minds of interlocutors, ensuring convergent culturally logical solutions” (Enfield 2002b: 254). A typical way of sleeping in the Vaupés culture is “hanging” in a hammock. Lying down to rest is what animals do, as in (11). In the same story, a man who had turned into a wild pig also lies on the ground. A person cannot “lie” in a hammock: they can sit in it, which would be an atypical position for sleeping or having a rest but quite acceptable for chatting or another activity.

In the case of the Tariana verb *-wa* “enter an unbounded or open space, usually jungle or a waterway,” atypical directions or locations were rejected outright. The semantic construal of an event and the environmental appropriateness of the components account for the grammaticality of serial verb constructions. Along similar lines, event typicality and conventional actions are reflected in directional serial verb constructions in Barupu, a Sko language from northwest Papua New Guinea. They can only contain directional verbs indicating downward movement, of the kind “push go down” or “pour go down.” Using a motion verb indicating upward direction (of the kind “push go up”) in a serial verb construction would result in an ungrammatical expression. These same meanings will then be expressed using a directional bound morpheme. As Corriss (2005: 225) put it, “capturing and

containing liquids like water and loose dry substances like lime and tobacco is part of everyday life in Barupu and the most common way of doing so is to cause them to go down into something.”

Cultural appropriateness affects grammaticality judgments. As Diller and Khanittanan (2002: 47) aptly put it, “the culturally bizarre merging into the unimaginable” may result in an unacceptable expression. The specific meaning of *-wa* “enter unbounded space, most frequently the jungle” is so obvious for the speakers that [my] recurrent mistakes in using it provoked an annoyed reaction: “White people can never get it.”

We can conclude that the distinction between *-he* “enter an enclosed space” and *-wa* “enter an open space (typically, jungle or waterway)” reflects environmental preoccupations of the speakers. Once the analyst has understood the semantics of each verb and its combinability with other verbs, serial verb constructions in (12), (15), (21), and (22) can be described as semantically compositional, rather than as having conventionalized idiomatic meanings.

The verb *-wa* has grammaticalized into a postposition with a specific meaning reflecting the environment (see Aikhenvald (2003: 225), on the Tariana spatial postpositions grammaticalized from frequently used motion verbs). The postposition *-wetaka* “in the direction of the jungle, towards the jungle” is a fossilized causativized form of *-wa* (underlyingly *-wa-ita* > *-weta*), accompanied by the subordinator *-ka*, as shown in example (24).

(24)	kepiriali	kepitana-pua-se	
	bird+AFF:RIVER	REL + name-CL:RIVER-LOC	
	diha-pua-se	diha-pua	di-wetaka
	ART-CL:RIVER-LOC	he-CL:RIVER	3sgnf-in.direction.of.
			jungle
	di-wa	di-a-mha	pa:-pua
	3sgnf-enter.	3sgnf-go-PRES.NONVIS	one-CL:RIVER
	unbounded.space		
	“On this (previously mentioned) river called ‘Kepiriali’, in the direction towards the jungle from this river, another river goes towards the jungle”		
	(enter.unbounded.space go)		

Grammaticalization of *-wa* correlates with its frequency in the discussions of the environmental features of vital importance for communities who live on riverbanks, practice fishing, and are surrounded by the jungle.

The ways in which cultural typification and cultural “normality” affect the composition and the acceptability of serial verb constructions are discernible in symmetrical serial verbs. These consist of several verbs – each from a large open class. They typically denote sequences of subactions, cause-effect, or manner in which the action is performed. In many languages, randomly co-occurring verbs may not be amenable to forming a grammatical serial verb construction if the sequence of sub-actions does not represent a conventionalized activity and thus does not make sense to the speakers.

An oft-quoted example comes from White Hmong. White Hmong has a number of symmetrical serial verb constructions which describe “co-temporal action.” The components of the serial verbs portray the action as a “single event,” referring to its different facets.

“Paying the *queej* bamboo pipes” and the dancing together (25) constitute the key elements of the performance: not two actions but one. Whenever the *queej* is played, the performer’s feet and body move and sway in tune with the music. The assertion that this is thought of as a single action is supported by the fact that the verb phrase *dhia queej* “dance the pipes” can be used (Jarkey 2015: 117–118). As a consequence, the serial verb construction *dhia tshov* (dance blow) (25) is perfectly acceptable:

- (25) nws_{A/S} **dhia** **tshov** queej_O *White Hmong*
 3sg dance blow bamboo.pipes
 “He dances (while) playing the pipes”

In contrast, “dance” and “listen to music” in White Hmong are normally viewed as distinct actions. Consequently, the two verbs cannot form one serial verb construction (see also Jarkey (2015: 117–118) and Durie (1997: 329)). “Dancing” and “listening” have to be expressed as coordinated clauses as can be seen in the example below.

- (26) nws_{A/S} dhia thiab mloog nkauj_O *White Hmong: sequence of clauses*
 3sg dance and listen song
 “He dances (while) playing the pipes”

The use of a serial verb construction to describe the two actions viewed in the White Hmong culture as having no intrinsic connection “is completely unacceptable” (Jarkey 2015: 118). As a consequence, the expression below is not grammatical:

- (27) *nws_{A/S} **dhia** **mloog** nkauj_O *White Hmong: putative serial verb?*
 3sg dance listen song

Two subactions in Hmong can form a serial verb construction only if they occur “together so commonly” that they are “thought of as practically inseparable” (Jarkey 2015: 181–182). Other examples of such inseparable actions include “preparing vegetables and preparing rice” and “crying and scolding.” Along similar lines, Bruce (1988: 30) formulates semantic and pragmatic constraints on verb combinations in serial verbs in Alamblak, a language from the Sepik Hill family in northwest Papua New Guinea: “Serialisation of roots in a verb stem is restricted to sequences of events which are commonly associated culturally or for which there is a cultural basis or pragmatic reason for their close association.”

Symmetrical serial verbs in Tariana correspond to conventionalized and culturally typified activities and often represent closely intertwined sub-actions forming one

typical event type. To an outsider, they are non-compositional in their meanings and thus idiomatic. To the speakers, they are “normal,” as they correspond to the phases of what is conventionally done. The serial verb *di-ma di-hña di-emhani* which literally translates as “he-sleeps he-eats he-walks.around” means “go hunting or fishing for several days.” This is a standard way of describing a traditional fishing or hunting expedition lasting for several days and nights. The meaning of the whole is not equal to the sum of meanings of the components, and none of the components can be substituted with another verb. The activity of fishing is described as a resultative serial verb *dhilitu dinu* (3sgnf + fish 3sgnf + kill), literally “he-fishes he-kills.” *Ka-wana ka-hña* (REL-call REL-eat), literally “crying eating,” is the name for an evil spirit who emits terrible cries and devours people. The process of entering the “shape” of a jaguar by high-ranking shamans with special powers – described in (17) – results in their capacity to devour people during their nighttime shamanic travels. This is described as *yawi di-hña* (be.jaguar 3sgnf-eat), “(he is) jaguar he-eats.” Each of these represent a unitary notion, reflecting event typicality embedded in cultural practices and beliefs.

Semantic – and ultimately, cultural – constraints on combinability of verbs within serial verb constructions are somewhat similar to how the “name-worthiness” of an activity provides a reason for nominal and verbal lexical compounds: for instance, in English, compounds like *mountain-climbing* or *berry-picking* are coined as names of recognizable activities. A new compound, for example, *ladder-climbing*, makes one immediately suspect that it must refer to an activity recognized as such in some context (Mithun 1984: 848). In this sense, symmetrical serial verbs, just like noun-verb compounds in English, may have a lexical status.

Serial Verb Constructions and Event Typicality

Serial verb constructions are a powerful means of structuring events. The ways in which their components combine reflect conventional activities done in typical ways. Composition of serial verbs correlates with the speakers’ practices and the environment in which they live, so as to make sense to the community – a prime instance of how “the fine cogs and springwheels of syntax might be guided and/or constrained by the culture of speakers” (Enfield 2002b: 255).

Motion events in Tariana contain several components, including goal and path. They reflect typical patterns of motion and posture: as people sleep in hammocks rather than on beds, one sleeps hanging rather than lying down (which is what animals do). The semantics of verbs of entering mirrors environmental features: there are different forms for entering an enclosed space (a house or a town) and for entering an open area, such as the jungle or a waterway. Co-conceptualization of culturally associated sub-actions, which form a typical event, leads to the creation of combinations which may sound inexplicable and idiomatic to an outsider and perfectly natural to an insider – someone who knows the language and the culture. To an analyst, they offer salient points indicative of integration of language and society (along the lines of Aikhenvald, Dixon, and Jarkey (2021)). Cultural typifications underlie the versatile nature of serial verbs, embedded in peoples’ practices and ways of life.

Abbreviations and Conventions All abbreviations are in SMALL CAPS; meanings of specific classifiers, such as “hole” and “day,” are in small caps and are not abbreviated.

1, 2, 3 first, second, third person

A/S	transitive/intransitive subject
AFF	RIVER affix used in terms for rivers
ALONG	movement “along”
ANT	anterior aspect
ART	article
AWAY	movement away from something
CAUS	causative
CL	classifier
CL.ANIM	classifier for animates
COLL	collective
DEM	demonstrative
IMP	impersonal
INDEF	indefinite person
LOC	locative
LOC.NOM	locative nominalization
NCL:ANIM	noun class for animate
OBJ	object
OLD	derivational suffix denoting an older person
PEJ	pejorative
pl	plural
POSS	possessive marker
PRES.NONVIS	present nonvisual
QUIETLY	do in a quiet manner
REC.P.VIS	recent past visual
REL	relative marker
REM.P.REP	remote past reported
sg	singular
sgf	singular feminine
sgnf	singular nonfeminine
TOP.ADV	topic-advancing derivation
UP	upward direction
YET	ongoing action

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