By 'serial verbs' we refer to constructions (SVCs) in which more than one verb is used to describe a single event in one and the same clause. The verbs participating in this construction do not stand in a relation of subordination, they should be able to occur independently as single verbs and they preferably inflect for identical categories. With this definition, we are close to Aikhenvald’s (2006, 2018) proposal. We are well aware of further empirical and theoretical discussion on the topic but this is not crucial to the aim of our presentation.

As far as Mesoamerican languages are concerned, we are struck by the wide absence of such constructions in the literature: traditional grammars do not mention this structural type. The records of SVCs in Mesoamerican languages are rather poor. Zavala (2006) describes a related phenomenon of verb root combinations for Olutec, Beck (2011) and Watters (2017) address Totonacan languages. Even more specifically, there is no mention of serial verb constructions for languages of the Otopamean subgroup. Contrary to this apparent lack, serial verbs, exactly as characterized above, have been described for Central Pame (pbs) by Hurch (2018 and in press) as examples 1-3 below illustrate.

Central Pame for sure is an underdescribed language, but it must be mentioned that very solid descriptive linguistic work was done by members of the SIL surrounding Lorna Gibson and Dan Olson in the middle of the last century. The material has remained largely unpublished in the Language and Culture Archives of the Summer Institute. The linguistic endeavor of the SIL group working on Pame was quite serious but also following specific, strict and limited guidelines. Unfortunately, SVCs were not part of the list of analytical categories and we suspect this to be one major reason for why we do not find them in their work.

In some rare occasions, we encounter SVCs in published and unpublished SIL material. But the construction type as such lacks any mention (e.g. Olson 1951, Gibson 1966, Gibson/Olson/Olson 1963) as in ex. 4 below.

As it seems, and as we can deduce from our own field experience, SVCs are a phenomenon mostly showing up in and maybe even limited to registers of spontaneous speech in Pame. During quite a few months of elicitation work we never became aware of such forms and we had to wait for the moment of analyzing specific recordings of ‘unrestricted’ speech which, under our guidance, have been realized by a traditional native speaker with other members of the ethnic group. And it turned out that this construction type is used very frequently in this context.

Still we only have hypotheses about the different grammatical functions it may cover, as we suspect that it goes well beyond being a stylistic peculiarity and that it is of some basic grammatical importance in the expression of TAM-related semantic variables. We furthermore suspect that SVCs are not a phenomenon restricted to Central Pame, and by using appropriate recording techniques and research methods it will turn out that their existence must be assumed also for other languages of the Otopamean subgroup. The scarcity of instances of SVCs in certain types of material depends furthermore, as we suspect, also on the influence of the dominating Spanish language which lacks such constructions altogether. The frequency of occurrence presumably is inversely proportional to the knowledge and exposure of Spanish of the subjects.

SVCs are part of a given grammar and encode specific grammatical functions and meanings, and as such must be part of linguistic description and analysis. So, one of the points of our presentation is to give a clear example of the interdependence between type of field recordings and grammatical analysis.
Examples of SVCs in Central Pame

(1) Felipa Landaverde Durán, 25 de sept. 2013 / Hurch, In press, Verbos Seriales

kupú pe nu=?ui ku=má nu=pup kauk ne
ADV ADV 1.S.Pt=hacer 1.S.Pt=ponerse 1.S.Pt=empezar PP1S ART.S
Así como hice me puse empecé yo el

ngul?áho re kibie.
NPOS.S.trabajo ART.PL trabajo, NPOS.PL.tejido los tejidos.

ESP: Así es como empecé a tejer ENG: And this is how I started sewing

(2) Gerónima Ramos de Jesús, 19 de feb. 2014 / Hurch, In press, Verbos Seriales

wa=?eh? wa=sei=k nda ntsu’=k ngon=hiú? Lencha
3.S.PC=decir 3.S.PC=contar1o1 NUM tía=1S 3S=nombre NPROP

dice me cuenta una mi tía su nombre Lencha

ESP: Decía una de mis tías de nombre Lencha ENG: One of my aunts named Lencha told me

(3) Fortunata Botello Medina, 26 de feb 2014 / Hurch, In press, Verbos Seriales

kuhui tu=wauc’ lá=taháo kun diwienent kun či mé?ei
ADV 1.S.PC=exprimir 1.S.PC=moler ESP NPOS.PL.ajo ESP DIM NPOS.S.chile

entonces exprimo muelo con ajos, con chilito
ESP: Entonces […] los [los quelites] exprimo bien, muelo ajo, con un poquito de chilito
ENG: And then I squeeze them [the quelites], grind garlic with a little bit of chilli

(4) Gibson, Olson, Olson 1963, Four Pame Texts, 126 / glosses by the author

Va=tsé’=k y ra=máª ló=jua’al=t […]
3.S.PC=llevar=03 ESP 3.S.PC=ponerse 3S.PC=traer=03

She-leads-them and repeatedly-goes she-brings-them […]
She would lead them away […]

References


