

A tentative classification of serial verb constructions in Bambara (Mande)

Klaudia Dombrowsky-Hahn

University of Bayreuth - Germany

Resuming the vast and controversial literature on serial verb constructions, Aikhenvald (2006) gives a definition and provides a framework for the study of the formal and semantic characteristics of such constructions. She defines a serial verb construction as a grammatical technique used to express different aspects of a complex situation in a single clause and with one predicate. Clauses bearing a serial verb construction are on a par with monoverbal clauses and form comparable prosodic units. The verbs in such a construction share Tense/Aspect, Mood, Modality and Polarity values, and main arguments. They do not show markers of dependency. Concerning this last point the author admits that there may be an overt linker or a tonal change characterizing a serial verb construction as distinct from other types of multiverb constructions such as for example consecutive constructions. The latter ones express sequences of events, while the verbs in a serial verb construction refer to sub-parts of a single event.

In my paper I will argue that the Mande language Bambara possesses serial verb constructions as part of a continuum of multiverb structures. However, unlike in the languages figuring in the typological study edited by Aikhenvald & Dixon (2006), the morpheme intervening between its components is identical in serial verb constructions and in consecutive constructions. I will apply Aikhenvald's framework to give a tentative classification of serial verb constructions in Bambara and demonstrate the criteria distinguishing them from consecutive constructions.