

Serial Verb Constructions in Lio

This study explores serial verb constructions (hereafter SVCs) in Lio, a member of the Central Flores subgroup, with an SVO word order, high levels of polysemy, and little morphology (Elias 2018).

This study builds on Conway et al. (2022), which considered data from the PARADISEC Lio collection (Yanti 2019) collected as part of a training program in the Wolowaru subdistrict. Utilizing new data from ongoing fieldwork, we are now able to consider data from other dialects.

Both 2019 data and more recent data is overwhelmingly naturalistic, though ongoing fieldwork has allowed for elicitation sessions as well. Data collection is ongoing, but the present database of SVCs compiled by the authors already includes examples of SVCs from 8 texts (monologues and conversations) by 8 speakers (4F, 4M) from 3 Lio-speaking subdistricts.

Many typological studies done on SVCs rely on morphological structures to pave an understanding of their constituency, but because Lio is an isolating language, this is not possible. Though phonetic analysis is ongoing, we, building on Mayro (2024), have considered the stress patterns of SVCs in contrast to stand-alone verbs, and a preliminary survey suggests that SVCs exhibit stress shift, and are thus their own phonological unit.

The data largely confirms the generalizations from Conway et al. (2022), in that Lio SVCs are monoclausal phrases with no linking-element, nor is one of the verbs an argument of the other. One semantic event is expressed by each SVC, and SVCs tend to be contiguous, though this is not exceptionless. Most SVCs contain two verbs (1)-(5), though instances of three have been observed (6).

Lio also exhibits SVC subtypes that align with other typological findings (Aikhenvald 2006, Baird 2008). Examples (1) and (3) demonstrate *motion* SVCs, which is a common subtype (Baird 2008). Examples (2) and (6) showcase *synonymic* SVCs, where the verbs within the verbal complex are synonyms or closely related. Example (4) demonstrates the *causative* SVC, which exhibits one semantically rich verb (*mata* ‘die’) and one less rich (*pati* ‘give’). Example (5) demonstrates the *benefactive* subtype, which include semantic beneficiaries as objects of the SVC. The data used in this study also suggests that within the causative subtype, the semantically less rich verb *pati* ‘give’ seems to be the first verb, which aligns with Baird’s findings in Keo, a related language. The benefactive case is also the only exception to the generalization that Lio SVCs are contiguous, as words sometimes intervene, as seen in (5). Notably, no examples of cause-effect SVCs have yet been observed, although this is a relatively common subtype cross-linguistically (Aikhenvald 2006, Haspelmath 2016), and is also found in Keo (Baird 2008).

This study demonstrates typological similarities in Lio SVCs with those of similar Austronesian languages, with some acute differences. This is also, to our knowledge, the first study on a Central Flores language that uses phonetic evidence to motivate constituency. Thus, this study expands our understanding of Lio’s grammar, while also expanding our understanding of serial verb constructions typologically in the region.

Selected References:

Aikhenvald, A. Y. (2006). Serial Verb Constructions in the Typological Perspective. In *Serial Verb Constructions: A Cross Linguistic Typology*. • Baird, L. (2008). Motion serialisation in Keo. In *Serial verb constructions in Austronesian and Papuan languages*. Pacific Linguistics. • Conway, Thomas, Grace B. Wivell, and Fransiskus X. Mbete. (January 2023) Serial Verb Constructions in Lio [Poster]. 97th Annual Meeting of the Linguistic Society of America, Denver, Colorado, USA. • Eberhard, D., Simons, G., Fennig, C. (eds.). 2020. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*. Twenty third edition. Dallas, Texas: SIL International. Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com>. • Elias, A. (2018). Lio and the Central Flores languages. • Haspelmath, M. (2016). The Serial Verb Construction: Comparative Concept and Cross-linguistics Generalization. *Language and Linguistics*. • Mayro, Michelle (2024). An Acoustic Investigation of Stress in Lio [Talk] • Yanti (collector). 2019. Recordings of various texts in Lio, a language spoken in Ende, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. Collection LJL2019 at catalog.paradisec.org.au [Open Access]. <https://dx.doi.org/10.26278/5f35639ea0bcc>.

Sample Serial Verb Constructions

- (1) *èbe si'i tu da lau kapal*
3PL request bring to south ship
'They are taken by ship'
(PARADISEC, Yanti 2019; MON003, 263; Wolowaru; M64)
- (2) *ho'o èmba aku nemo nasu lèka tu'a ana*
Yes where 1SG cook cook in in-law child
'Yes, where I cook with my daughter in law'
(PARADISEC, Yanti 2019; CON002, 33; Wolowaru; F67)
- (3) *ho'o kita mbana sambu*
yes 1PL.incl go go.to.market
'Yes, we go to market.'
(PARADISEC, Yanti 2019; CON002, 260; Wolowaru; F67)
- (4) *pati mata do harimau ina*
give die already tiger this
'And he kills the tiger'
(PARADISEC, Yanti 2019; MON003, 83; Wolowaru; M64)
- (5) *taku ae pati aku*
carry water give me
'They carry the water for me'
(PARADISEC, Yanti 2019; CON002, 139; Wolowaru; F67)
- (6) *aku sua jaji sasa lèka koti nèku ghea ina*
1SG promise promise promise to spinning.top 1SG there this
'I swore a promise on the top...'
(Ongoing Fieldwork, Kelimutu, M55)