

# Serial verbs in Tetun-Dili: a preliminary account

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## 1. Introduction

One feature of Tetum that is not considered to be characteristic of European languages such as English and Portuguese is a relatively heavy reliance on so-called serial verb constructions. The grammatical phenomenon of verb serialisation has been extensively examined in many languages of the world, and is known to be widespread in some parts of the Austronesian language family, of which Tetum is a member. In this paper we provide a preliminary description of serial verb constructions in the variety of Tetun-Dili, identifying a number of types with differing structural and semantic properties. While these serial verb constructions share many features of serial verb constructions cross-linguistically, they also show some interesting features deserving of further research.<sup>1</sup>

In a serial verb construction two verbs co-occur within a single clause, forming a single complex predicate.<sup>2</sup> Examples of serial verb constructions in Tetun-Dili include the following:

(1) *Ami bá sosa paun.*  
we go buy bread  
'We went and bought bread.'

(2) *Nia halai sa'e ba foho.*  
he run ascend to mountain  
'He ran up to the mountains.'

Serial verbs constructions in Tetun-Dili all share the following characteristics.<sup>3</sup>

1. The two verbs fall under a single intonation contour.
2. The verbs share tense and aspect.
3. A serial verb construction has a single illocutionary force. It is not possible, for instance, for the first verb to be interpreted as part of a conditional while the second is interpreted as part of an assertion.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based largely on chapter 9 of our recent grammatical description of Tetun-Dili (Williams-van Klinken, Hajek and Nordlinger (in press)). We would like to thank Terry Crowley for comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> While sequences of three verbs are possible in Tetum, these can be analysed as the embedding of one serial verb construction within another.

<sup>3</sup> Many of these features are common to serial verb constructions cross-linguistically. They have been discussed in many publications, including Crowley (1987), Durie (1997), Foley and Olson (1985) and Schachter (1974).

4. The two verbs belong to a single clause. There is therefore no syntactic marking of a clause boundary between the verbs, such as conjunctions, complementisers, and connective adverbs.
5. Neither verb is subordinate to the other, nor modifies the other.
6. The two verbs share at least one argument. In particular, the subject of the second verb is interpreted as being identical to either the subject, object or recipient of the first verb, depending on the construction.
7. The sequence of verbs is semantically interpretable as referring to sub-parts of a single, complex event.<sup>4</sup> For instance *Maria bá sosa kadernu* (lit. ‘Maria go buy exercise.book’) indicates that there is a close connection between Maria going and her buying an exercise book, in this case a purposive relation whereby the ‘going’ is almost certainly for the purposes of ‘buying the book’.
8. For Tetun-Dili (although not necessarily for serial verbs in other languages), one of the two verb slots in each construction appears to be restricted to a limited set of verbs, while the other is more open.

Tetun-Dili serial verb constructions may be usefully divided into two types, namely those involving serialisation at the ‘nuclear’ and ‘core’ layers of the clause.<sup>5</sup>

The clause nucleus consists simply of the verb. Nuclear serial verb constructions are tightly-bound compound-like sequences, in which the two verbs together form a single clause nucleus (i.e. together function as a single verb). Nothing can intervene between the two verbs, and they cannot be independently negated. In nuclear serial verb constructions in Tetun-Dili, the transitivity of the whole is determined by the transitivity of the initial verb. For instance, *la'o sai* ‘walk exit’ = ‘walk outside’ is intransitive because *la'o* is intransitive, while *soe sa'e* ‘throw ascend’ = ‘throw upwards’ is transitive on account of *soe* being transitive. Not only can the second verb not introduce an argument of its own, but it also cannot refer implicitly to the speaker or hearer or any other participant; hence verb sequences including *mai* ‘come (towards the speaker)’ and *bá* ‘go (away from, or at least not towards, the speaker)’ can not occur in nuclear layer serialisation. Note that although sequences of verbs in nuclear serialisation function like a single verb syntactically, the two verbs are apparently felt by native speakers to constitute two separate words, as evidenced by their strong tendency to write them as distinct words, without a hyphen.<sup>6</sup>

The clause core consists of the verb and its core arguments. In core layer serialisation, each verb can potentially introduce its own object or oblique arguments, which usually follow the verb that governs them (and therefore, sometimes appear between the two verbs in the serial verb construction). Modifiers can also potentially occur between the two verbs.

The common types of serial verb construction in Tetun-Dili are summarised in Table 1 below.

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<sup>4</sup> This statement (which is made in many published discussions of serial verbs) is of course open to the charge of circularity, since ‘event’ tends to be defined in linguistic terms as that which is expressed by a single unit (Givón (1991:140)). Nevertheless, despite its problems, the statement retains intuitive appeal.

<sup>5</sup> This distinction between serialisation within the clause nucleus and the clause core (Foley and Olson 1985; Foley and Van Valin 1984:77ff; Van Valin 1993:106ff) has been found helpful for the analysis of serial verbs in many other Austronesian languages also (Crowley 1987; Early 1993; Grimes 1991:391, 399).

<sup>6</sup> However, in this article we use a hyphen in some nuclear serialisations, following the spelling conventions used by this journal. The hyphen emphasises the syntactic unity and compounded nature of the sequence.

**Table 1: Summary of serial verb constructions in Tetun-Dili**

	Nuclear	Core	Non-serialised alternatives
Motion–action		‘come/go’ + V	
Motion–direction	Vi-Vi	Vi + ‘come/go’ Vt–O + ‘come/go’ Vi + Vt–O Vt–O + Vt–O	Prepositions (e.g. <i>ba</i> ‘to’)
Instrumental		V + ‘bring’–O	Preposition <i>ho</i> ‘with’
Causative with <i>halo</i> ‘make’	<i>halo</i> -Vi–O		Prefix <i>ha</i> - Complementation: <i>halo</i> O ...
Causative with <i>fó</i> ‘give’	<i>fó</i> -V–O	<i>fó</i> –O + ‘to’–Recipient Vt	
Causative—other	Vt-Vi–O	Vt–O Vi	

V = verb, Vi = intransitive verb, Vt = transitive verb, O = object

There are less common serial verb sequences which do not fit the above categories. In these, two consecutive verbs share a subject (3). If both are transitive, they also share an object (4). The second verb may indicate a following action (as per *lees fahe* in (4)) or a simultaneous one (as per *la'o hakru'uk* in (3)).

(3) *Sira la'o hakru'uk deit.*  
they walk bend.over just  
‘They walked just bent over.’

(4) *Nia lees fahe paun ne'e.*  
he tear divide bread this  
‘He tore the bread and divided it (amongst them).’

## 2. Motion–action serialisation

A very common type of core-layer verb serialisation consists of *bá* ‘go’ or *mai* ‘come’ followed by another verb. This construction indicates that the motion happened first, followed by the activity denoted by the second verb, and generally in order that the activity of the second verb can be carried out. For instance, *Ha'u bá han* ‘I go eat’, if used of the past, could be translated as ‘I went and ate’ or ‘I went to eat (and in fact did eat)’. This construction is common, reflecting a strong tendency for Tetun-Dili speakers to explicitly note motion towards or away from the speaker. For instance, *Nia sa'e bero* ‘he ascend boat’ = ‘He got into the boat’ is appropriate if the subject referent was already more or less in position to get into the boat. If he had to go to the boat first, however, *Nia bá sa'e bero* (lit. ‘he go ascend boat’) is more appropriate. Since this is

core layer serialisation, adverbs can follow either verb in this construction, as illustrated by *fali* ‘again, back’ in (5) and (6).

- (5) *Ami mai fali sa'e kareta.*  
 we come again ascend car  
 ‘We came back and got into the car.’

- (6) *Ami mai han fali.*  
 we come eat again  
 ‘We again came and ate.’

### 3. Motion–direction serialisation

In motion–direction serialisation, the second verb specifies the direction of motion for the first verb. There are three sub-types.

In nuclear motion–direction serialisation, the initial verb is intransitive, while the intransitively-used direction verb specifies intrinsic direction. There appear to be four such direction verbs: *tun* ‘descend’, *sa'e* ‘ascend’, *tama* ‘enter’, *sai* ‘exit’.<sup>7</sup>

- (7) *Ami halai sa'e to'o Dare ne'ebá.*  
 we run ascend until Dare there  
 ‘We ran up there to Dare.’

In deictic core motion–direction serialisation, the second verb is either *bá* ‘go’ or *mai* ‘come’ (e.g. *tama bá* ‘enter go’ = ‘go in’, *tama mai* ‘enter come’ = ‘come in’). They indicate movement away from (or at least not towards) the speaker and movement towards the speaker respectively. These deictics are only loosely tied to the verb; they follow the direction verbs (e.g. *monu tama bá* ‘fall enter go’ = ‘fall in (away from speaker)’), any intervening adverbs (e.g. *fila fali mai* ‘return again come’ = ‘come back here’), and source location (8). They precede prepositional phrases denoting destination, however (9).

- (8) *Nia monu hosi leten mai.*  
 he fall from top come  
 ‘He fell from above.’

<sup>7</sup> In his survey of ten Oceanic languages, Durie (1988:11) found that all had a well-defined class of intrinsically orientated verbs which behave in much the same manner as those of Tetum. According to Baker (1989:533) serialisation of manner-of-motion verbs and direction verbs are very common cross-linguistically, with the two verbs invariably occurring in this order.

- (9) *Ami sa'e bá to'o foho leten.*  
 we ascend go until mountain top  
 'We climbed up to the summit (away from here).'

The two deictics occur not only with intransitive motion verbs (as above), but also with transitive verbs which indicate a change of location of the object, such as verbs of bringing or giving (10). In this case they indicate the direction in which the object referent is moving.

- (10) *Sira lori osan mai.*  
 they bring money come  
 'They brought me/us money.'

The deictics are further extended to occurring with verbs of speaking (e.g. *hatete mai* 'tell come' = 'tell me/us', *hatete bá* 'tell go' = 'tell him/her/them/you').<sup>8</sup>

In non-deictic core motion–direction serialisation, the first verb is one of posture or motion, and the second verb is a transitive verb (or intransitive verb which takes an oblique argument), which specifies direction, path or position.<sup>9</sup> The set of verbs which can occur in this second position includes:

- *haleu* 'surround, encircle, around' (e.g. *Sira hamriik hale'u ami* 'they stand surround us' = 'They stood around us').
- *liu* 'pass' (e.g. *la'o liu bero ne'e* 'walk pass boat this' = 'walk past the boat').
- *liu hosi* 'via' (lit. 'pass from') (e.g. *la'o liu hosi uma* 'walk pass from house' = 'walk via the house').
- *tuir* 'follow' (e.g. *la'o tuir bee ninin* 'walk follow water edge' = 'walk along the shore').
- *hakat* 'cross' (e.g. *halai hakat estrada* 'run cross road' = 'run across the road').
- *hasoru* 'meet, oppose', *kontra* 'oppose' (from the Portuguese preposition *contra*) (e.g. *la'o hasoru nia* 'walk meet her' = 'walk towards her'). These occur in construction with non-motion verbs also (e.g. *funu hasoru sira* 'war oppose them' = 'fight against them').

#### 4. Instrumental serialisation

The transitive verbs *lori* and *hodi* both have as their primary meaning 'carry, bring, take', and both can be used in conjunction with a preceding or following verb phrase to introduce the instrument. Many speakers prefer *lori* while some (particularly from the south coast) prefer *hodi*.

<sup>8</sup> Phrase-final *bá* and *mai* are thus less explicit alternatives to prepositional phrases introduced by the related prepositions *ba* 'to (not towards speaker)' and *mai* 'to (towards speaker)' (e.g. *hatete mai ha'u* 'tell come me' = 'tell me').

<sup>9</sup> The second verb thus has the same function as prepositions (such as *ba* 'to (not towards speaker)' and *mai* 'to (towards speaker)'). They are however verbs and not prepositions, as shown by the fact that they can take manner modifiers, their complement is not required, and they cannot introduce a peripheral phrase. It would not be surprising, however, if these verbs were in time to become grammaticalised as prepositions, such as has happened with direction verbs in many languages (see, for example, Durie (1988) and Lord (1993:9, 29)). For discussion of the grammaticalisation of some verbs in Tetun-Dili see Eccles (1999).

Where *lori* or *hodi* precedes the other verb, as in (11), the first verb introduces the instrument with which the action denoted by the second verb is performed. This is the iconic order found in instrumental serialisations cross-linguistically.<sup>10</sup> In this construction, however, *lori* and *hodi* appear not to be fully verbal, in that (particularly for *lori*, although speaker judgments differ), the object of the initial verb cannot readily be fronted or omitted as can the objects of transitive verbs. It is thus possible that both words are in the process of change towards becoming prepositions.<sup>11</sup>

- (11) *Sira lori tudik sona malu.*  
 they take knife stab each.other  
 ‘They use knives to stab each other.’ or: ‘They stab each other with knives.’

In the other order, illustrated by (12) and (13), the instrumental phrase occurs in the position typical of prepositional phrases in Tetum. Here *lori* and *hodi* appear to be fully prepositional, with their objects unable to be fronted or omitted (e.g. one cannot say \**Tudik ne'e nia sona karau lori* ‘knife this he spear buffalo with’).

- (12) *Bibi tuku hodi dikur.*  
 goat butt with horn  
 ‘The goat butts with its horns.’
- (13) *Sira funu lori fatuk.*  
 they war use stones  
 ‘They fight with stones.’

There are three indications that *hodi* is further along the path of grammaticalisation towards being a preposition than *lori* is.<sup>12</sup> Firstly, *lori* is used far more frequently than *hodi* as a main verb meaning ‘carry, bring, take’. Secondly, the limited textual evidence suggests that *lori* occurs more frequently in the serial verb construction (as in (11)), while *hodi* more commonly occurs in the prepositional phrase position (as per (12)). Finally, it appears that *lori* can only introduce instruments that actually move (such as tools, arms and

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<sup>10</sup> This has been noted by many authors, including Durie (1997), and Foley and Olson (1985:53).

<sup>11</sup> It is common cross-linguistically for verbs which introduce instruments in serial verb constructions to grammaticalise into prepositions, as pointed out by many scholars (including Durie (1988) and Foley and Van Valin (1984:207f)). While this process is under way, the erstwhile verb has some characteristics of verbs, and others of prepositions. Such intermediate classes are given various labels in the literature, including ‘prepositional verb’ (Pawley 1973).

Note that a more common means of introducing instruments is the preposition *ho* ‘with’; in this case the normal position for the instrument phrase is following the verb (e.g. *hakerek ho lapizeira* ‘write with (a) pen’), just as is the case for other prepositional phrases in Tetum. *Ho* is itself grammaticalised from a Tetun-Terik verb meaning ‘accompany’ (van Klinken 2000); in the Fehan dialect of Tetun-Terik, at least, it is in some constructions already part-way towards becoming a preposition.

<sup>12</sup> This discrepancy also occurs in the Fehan dialect of Tetun-Terik. There, *lori* is a verb only, and is not used to introduce instruments, while *hodi* is analysed both as a verb, and (in instrumental constructions) as a prepositional verb (i.e. part-way between being a verb and preposition) (van Klinken 1999:273ff).

legs), while *hodi* can (at least for some speakers) also be used of seeing with one's own eyes (e.g. *haree hodi matan* 'see with eye') or hearing with one's own ears. Note that for the latter function, the indisputably prepositional *ho* 'with' is acceptable to all speakers.

## 5. Causative serialisation

### 5.1 Introduction

Causative constructions in Tetun-Dili can be formed in many ways: with the derivational prefix *ha-* (e.g. *ha-tama* 'insert' from *tama* 'enter'), a non-serialising periphrastic construction using *halo* 'make, do' (14),<sup>13</sup> or with one of a number of serial verb constructions.

- (14) *Situasaun ne'e mak halo ema Timór barak liu la ko'alia Portugés.*  
 situation this it.is.that make person Timor many more not talk Portuguese  
 'It is this situation (insufficient education for the common people) that caused most Timorese people to not speak Portuguese.'

The causative serialisation constructions are of five types, distinguished by whether serialisation is at the nuclear or core level, and what the closed-class verb is.

1. nuclear constructions with an initial verb *halo* 'make, do' (e.g. *halo kole* 'make-tired' = 'tire');
2. nuclear constructions with an initial verb *fó* 'give' (e.g. *fó-hanoin* 'give-think' = 'remind, instruct');
3. core constructions with an initial verb *fó* 'give' (e.g. *fó ba nia hemu* 'give to him drink' = 'give to him to drink');
4. nuclear constructions with a resultative second verb (e.g. *duni sai nia* 'chase exit him' = 'chase him out');
5. core constructions with a resultative second verb (e.g. *duni nia sai* 'chase him exit' = 'chase him out').

### 5.2 Causatives with initial *halo* 'make, do'

Nuclear causative constructions can be formed by an initial verb *halo* 'make, do' immediately followed by a verb or adjective indicating what is caused. The object of this sequence of verbs follows the second verb.

- (15) *Sira halo mate ikan.*  
 they make die fish  
 'They killed the fish (by neglecting to feed them).'

<sup>13</sup> These are not serial verb constructions, as evidenced by the fact that *halo* 'make, do' and the complement verb can be independently negated (14).

For some roots (e.g. *badak* ‘short’, *bokon* ‘wet’), speakers alternate freely between whether they use the causative prefix *ha-* or a serial verb construction with *halo* (e.g. *ha-badak*, *halo badak* ‘shorten’), with no apparent difference in meaning. For others (e.g. *fo'er* ‘dirty’), some speakers accept a derivation with *ha-*, while others accept only the use of *halo*. For yet other roots, causation is only ever expressed by *halo* (e.g. *halo kole* ‘make tired’).

On the other hand, there are expressions in which verbs derived by *ha-* cannot be replaced with a construction involving *halo*. For instance, *ha-tama sasán* ‘cause-enter goods’ = ‘bring in the bride price’, is never expressed as *\*halo tama sasán*, nor can *hasai raan* ‘cause-exit blood’ = ‘take blood (for a blood test)’ be replaced by *\*halo sai raan*.

### 5.3 Causatives with initial *fó* ‘give’

The verb *fó* ‘give’ is used as the initial verb in both nuclear and core serialisation.

In the nuclear construction, there are a limited number of verbs which can occur in the second slot; that is, this construction is not fully productive. For instance, ‘put to sleep’ is expressed by *ha-toba* ‘cause-sleep’, not *\*fó-toba*. The resultant sequences can thus be analysed as fixed compounds. Nevertheless native speakers feel them to consist of two separate words.

Usually, the original subject of the second verb becomes the direct object of the resulting serialised construction (16), although some verbs allow *ba* ‘to’ to introduce this argument, as illustrated by *fó-susu* in Table 2. In the examples in Table 2, the object of the second verb is unspecified. For instance, the expression *fó-han* ‘give eat’ = ‘feed’ does not allow one to indicate what type of food has been given.

**Table 2: Causatives with *fó* ‘give’**

Verb 2		Serialisation	
<i>barani</i>	Vi ‘brave, dare’	<i>fó-barani (ba)</i>	‘embolden’
<i>han</i>	Vt ‘eat’	<i>fó-han</i>	‘feed’
<i>hariis</i>	Vi ‘bathe’	<i>fó-hariis</i>	‘bathe (someone)’
<i>hatais</i>	Vt ‘wear, dress’	<i>fó-hatais</i>	‘dress (someone)’
<i>hemu</i>	Vt ‘drink’	<i>fó-hemu</i>	‘give drink to’
<i>sala</i>	Vi ‘err’, N ‘error’	<i>fó-sala ba</i>	‘accuse’
<i>susu</i>	Vt ‘suck’, N ‘breast’	<i>fó-susu (ba)</i>	‘breastfeed’

- (16) *Nia fó-han bebé.*  
 she give-eat baby  
 ‘She feeds the baby.’

In some expressions, however, the object (e.g. of *aluga* ‘rent’ in (17)) or complement (e.g. of *hatene* ‘know’ in (18)) of the second verb functions as the object or complement of the serialised construction, with the subject of the second verb becoming an addressee or recipient introduced by *ba* ‘to’ or *mai* ‘come’.<sup>14</sup>

(17) *Ami f<sub>ó</sub>-aluga ami-nia uma ba malae Tailândia.*  
 we give-rent our house to foreigner Thailand  
 ‘We rent out our house to Thai foreigners.’

(18) *Ema f<sub>ó</sub>-hatene ba sira seluk dehan “Iha ne'emai.”*  
 person give-know to them other say at here  
 ‘The person informed the others, “Here (it is).”’

Yet another pattern is observed for *sai* ‘exit’, as its subject becomes the object of the sequence *f<sub>ó</sub>-sai* ‘reveal (something to someone)’, and the addressee phrase specifies who the information is revealed to.

In a few instances, the addition of *f<sub>ó</sub>* to a transitive verb makes no apparent difference in meaning (e.g. *f<sub>ó</sub>-bandu*, *bandu* ‘prohibit’, *f<sub>ó</sub>-kastigu*, *kastigu* ‘punish’).

In core-layer serialisation, *f<sub>ó</sub>* is followed by a direct object specifying what is given, then a recipient introduced by *ba* ‘to’ or *mai* ‘come’, and finally by a transitive verb specifying what the recipient was to do to the object received.<sup>15</sup> The second verb specifies purpose, and (as in the nuclear construction) there is a strong implication that the purpose was indeed carried out.

(19) *Nia f<sub>ó</sub> bee ba labarik hemu.*  
 she give water to child drink  
 ‘She gave the child water to drink (and he drank it).’

In contrast to the nuclear serialisation construction discussed above, there appear to be no lexical restrictions on the second verb in this core-layer serialisation. Another difference is that the recipient of *f<sub>ó</sub>* ‘give’ is presented as the agent of the second verb. For instance, the nuclear serialisation *f<sub>ó</sub>-han* ‘give eat’ is interpreted primarily in terms of feeding someone (such as an infant) who cannot feed themselves. In contrast, the core layer serialisation in (20) is interpreted primarily in terms of the recipient themselves eating the proffered bread.

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<sup>14</sup> In some cases it is not clear whether the word following *f<sub>ó</sub>* is a noun or a verb. When it is a noun, however, it can be modified adjectivally, and the recipient is necessarily introduced by *ba* ‘to’ or *mai* ‘come’ (e.g. *f<sub>ó</sub> sala barak ba nia* ‘give error many to him’ = ‘accuse him of many things’).

<sup>15</sup> It is unusual in serial verb constructions for the subject of the second verb to be coreferential with the recipient of the first. Historically, at least, the *ba* introducing the recipient was itself a verb (meaning ‘go’) in Tetum. The analysis of this construction requires further research.

- (20) *Ami f<sub>ó</sub> paun ba nia han.*  
 we give bread to him eat  
 ‘We gave him bread to eat (and he ate it).’

#### 5.4 Causative with resultative second verb

In addition to serialisation with *halo* ‘make, do’ and *f<sub>ó</sub>* ‘give’, there is a third set of serial verbs for which the subject of the second (intransitively used) verb corresponds to the object of the first (transitive) verb.<sup>16</sup> In these, it is the second slot that appears to be lexically restricted; this verb specifies the result of the activity described by the first verb. Such sequences are found in both nuclear and core layer serialisation.

Verbs that can fill the second slot in nuclear-layer resultative serialisation include the four directionals listed in section 3 (21), and *mate* ‘die, dead’ (22). Intransitive *hela* ‘stay, reside’ follows transitive transfer verbs (e.g. of giving, putting, leaving, or throwing), to indicate that the object remains in the new location, at least temporarily (23).

- (21) *Sira duni sai nia hosi rai ne'e.*  
 they chase exit him from country this  
 ‘They chased him out of the area.’
- (22) *Se o bosok tan dala ida, ami tiru mate kedan o agora.*  
 if you lie again occasion one we shoot dead immediately you now  
 ‘If you lie once more, we’ll shoot you dead immediately.’
- (23) *Lori hela Señora ba Delta.*  
 take stay Mrs to Delta  
 (Instruction to a taxi driver:) ‘Take this lady to Delta.’

In core-layer resultative serialisation, the initial transitive verb is followed by an object, which is in turn followed by an intransitive verb (24). In this case, the second verb can take adverbial modifiers or complements, as in (25).

- (24) *Ami duni sira sai.*  
 we chase them exit  
 ‘We chased them out.’

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<sup>16</sup> These serialisations are called ‘cause-effect’ serialisation by Durie (1997:331).

- (25) *Samea ne'e bobar nia sai mate.*  
 snake this encircle him become dead  
 'The snake (python) wound around him until/and he died.'

## 6. Conclusion

In this paper we have discussed the properties of serial verb constructions in Tetun-Dili. We have shown that it is possible to identify a number of different types of serial verbs which, while sharing certain defining features common to serial verb constructions cross-linguistically, differ from each other both semantically and syntactically. In particular, these serial verb constructions can be divided into those involving motion ('motion-action' and 'motion-direction'); instrumental serialisations; and causative serialisations. Cross-cutting these semantic types is the syntactic distinction between nuclear-layer and core-layer serialisation, which determines various syntactic properties such as the placement of object and oblique arguments, and adverbial modifiers. The relationship of these serial verb constructions to those of other dialects of Tetum, as well as other languages of the region, is a topic for future research.

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