Chapter 5
Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

In the following chapter the research reported above is summarized, comments are made on methodology, scope and limitation is stated, and suggestions for areas of further research are made.

5.2 Summary

The Bwe language in the Karen branch of Tibeto-Burman languages is a language that has had very little research accomplished. The language community has expressed interest in having their language documented and in enacting literacy efforts. This research may also have benefits for the continuing efforts to historically reconstruct Proto-Karen, especially in regards to the serial verb constructions in these languages.

This thesis was based off of a corpus of seventeen texts taken from Henderson's dictionary (1997:vol II, viii-xviii). A review of the relevant research concerning the particular grammatical feature of serial verbs revealed that Aikhenvald's typology provided a cross-linguistic basis by which a language could be determined to have serial verbs, and several axes by which the types of serial verbs could be identified. The analysis of serial verbs in Bwe uses this framework for the multi-verb constructions.

In order to determine the constituents of the clauses in Bwe, the primary structure of Bwe clauses, noun phrases and particles was briefly described. The simple verb phrase was also described along with the aspect and modality markers, as well as a brief description of negation on the verb. These chapters were provided as background to better understand and separate the phrases, clauses, and auxiliary verbs from the main verbs in Bwe, so that the multi-verb constructions could be clearly seen and analyzed.

Aikhenvald's typology was applied to the multi-verb constructions in Bwe. It was shown that the six criteria for serial verb constructions were met by the multi-verb

constructions in Bwe. Bwe was then categorized as being a primarily contiguous SVC language, with only adverbs and negators being able to come between the verbs in most SVCs, and with only three verbs that show any consistent non-contiguity. It was also shown that all four of the categories of symmetrical SVCs can be exemplified in Bwe, whereas only three of the proposed eight categories of asymmetrical SVCs occur in this data. The three categories which were based on valency were not used due to the propensity for discourse anaphora in Bwe. There were also two categories, comparatives and superlatives, not used because Bwe expresses the concepts of comparative and superlatives with particles rather than serialization of verbs. The wordhood of the SVCs in Bwe was addressed as an issue primarily relying upon Henderson's dictionary, though elaborate constructions were set forth as a possible single word SVC in Bwe. The SVCs were also determined to have single marking for aspect, modality, and polarity, though the negator can occur in the middle of the SVC and only negate one of the verbs rather than the entire SVC.

Finally, the issue of categorizing non subject sharing SVCs via their transitivity was discussed. Aikhenvald proposes this as a secondary categorization for SVCs, However, there are several reasons that this categorization is invalid for this corpus. First, the primary form of expressing verbs in Bwe is via the SVC. This results in very few examples of single verbs comparatively. Second, even with the verbs that do occur as the only predicate in the clause, there is no consensus as to the transitivity. There are examples of the verbs being transitive in one case and intransitive in another case. Finally, and most importantly, Bwe uses discourse anaphora. Therefore the arguments of a verb, serial or not, will not necessarily be overtly stated in the clause. This feature makes it impossible to analyze the transitivity of the clause.

5.3 Comments on methodology

In terms of linguistic theory, this research has found that Aikhenvald's approach provides useful criteria on how to determine if a language has serial verb constructions. Areas that could use refinement would include using translation as a test of monoclausivity, and further definition of how to determine a single event.

Aikhenvald's categories of classification along the lines of contiguity, symmetry, wordhood, and operator marking provide excellent high level cross-linguistic comparison features. However, her focus on valency of a single verb in a language may be invalid in topic-comment languages, such as Bwe. Other features of

categorization for types of SVCs could be developed in order to make the cross-linguistic comparison on the axis of SVCs more detailed.

5.4 Scope and Limitations

The primary goal of this thesis was to analyze Bwe for serial verb constructions. As such it provides only a basic description of other grammatical features of the language as they relate to serial verb constructions.

This thesis is also not meant to compare Bwe to other Karen languages; however, it is attempting to use a common theoretical tool in order to make the comparison of SVCs in Bwe to SVCs in other Karen languages possible.

It is also important to note that the corpus used for this data was published in 1997 and, obviously gathered prior to that. Consequently, it may not reflect Bwe as it is spoken today. However, this historical snapshot of Bwe can provide a starting point for a more current analysis into the language and even a comparative tool for seeing the types of change in this language.

5.5 Areas for further research

One of the primary areas for further research in this language would be in the area of grammaticalization. The present analysis has taken a rather static view of the verbs in Bwe: if the verb could occur on its own as the only predicate in a clause, it was considered a main verb and therefore qualified for the label of serial verb construction. However, research has noted that verbs in asymmetrical SVCs tend to grammaticalize. It would be interesting to see an analysis of the grammaticalization cline for the asymmetrical verbs in Bwe, especially directionals, which could be done with this corpus.

Another possible area for research might be the change of the main verb 'give' í which is homophonous with the causative and the applicative in this corpus. This verb is far enough along on the grammaticalization cline to be analyzed with these three different functions for the purposes of this corpus. Further analysis could be done on this verb.

The transitivity of the single verbs in Bwe could be studied in an effort to determine how the individual transitivity effects the transitivity of the SVC as a whole. However, as I have stated above, the propensity for Bwe to drop arguments in

discourse would make the data necessary for a transitivity analysis highly contrived, so the validity of this kind of study would need to be carefully considered.

One of the main limitations of this corpus is its age. Another possible research idea would be to compare the data in this corpus with a more recent version of Bwe, phonologically, lexically, and grammatically. New data could shed some light on how robust the language is over time in order to further inform the sociolinguistic data gathered by Saw Lar Baa (2001).

There is certainly room for more analysis of the noun phrase, particles, aspect, modality, and verbs in Bwe. The above thesis has given an overview, but deeper analysis of the syntactical and semantic structures of this language could prove informative and useful.