

Exploring the Limits of Complex Predicates

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Workshop at the 57th Annual Meeting of the Societas Linguistica Europaea, University of Helsinki, 21–24 August 2024

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Call for abstracts: We invite abstracts for our workshop titled *Exploring the Limits of Complex Predicates*, to be held as part of the 57th Annual Meeting of the Societas Linguistica Europaea, hosted by the University of Helsinki, 21–24 August 2024. Please, submit your 500 word abstract **by 15 January 2024** through EasyChair using the following link:

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Workshop description: The term ‘complex predicates’ has received increasing attention in recent years (Amberber et al. 2010, Bower 2014, Nash and Samvelian 2015, Nolan and Diedrichsen 2017, Csató et al. 2020, Krauße 2021), yet it still poses a challenge for theoretical linguistics, typology as well as language description. Complex predicates are generally defined as sequences of phonologically independent words, which together behave like a single predicate with one set of arguments; yet this definition covers a broad range of constructions whose boundaries are not always well defined.

‘Complex predicate’ is thus used as a cover term to include various syntactic phenomena such as serial verbs, converbs, light verbs, auxiliaries, verb compounds, and even noun incorporation (Anderson 2011, Bisang 1995, Baranova 2013, Butt 2010, Foley 2010, Müller 2002, Brill and Ozanne-Rivierre 2004, Evans 1997, Massam 2013, Van Valin 2005). We wish to investigate where there are natural and typologically supported boundaries of verbal complex predicates within a still broader domain of multi-verb expression since for both domains the boundaries are not always clear (Ameka 2005, Aikhenvald 2011, Unterladstetter 2020). Specifically, the boundary between complex predicates and complex (complement and adverbial) clauses on the one hand, and phenomena like root serialisation on the other hand is not always straightforward, particularly in light of cross-linguistic variety in this and other relevant domains. These domains include, but are not limited to language-specific criteria for wordhood, finiteness, prosodic distinctions, etc. The inclusion of borderline cases, which normally fall outside the scope of studies on complex predicates, explicitly allows us to explore the limits of constructions that may or may not be captured by the term ‘complex predicate’.

Our workshop, proposed in relation to the international project [ComPLETE](#) (ANR/DFG) led by Martine Vanhove, Walter Bisang, Andrej Malchukov and Alexandre François (Vanhove et al. 2021) aims to bring together a range of topics that can be subsumed under the term ‘complex predicate’ from different research perspectives, such as synchrony, diachrony, geographical distribution and areal typology. While the project has a mostly typological orientation, its outcomes are likely to contribute to theory building.

Although several attempts have been made to arrive at a coherent and cross-linguistically applicable definition for ‘complex predicate’ (cf. above-mentioned references), those proposed so far always leave some leeway for including or excluding specific linguistic constructions. For example, the term ‘complex predicate’ could, in theory, apply to all constructions given in examples (1) through (4).

- (1) *A-riu pu.* [Arop-Lokep, Austronesian/Oceanic, Papua New Guinea]
 1_{DU}-bathe walk
 ‘I am going to bathe’ (D’Jernes 2002: 262–263)
- (2) *jih_cò?~bâh ~âh bájéjép cób^m jâp.* [Yuhup, Nadahup, Brazil]
 afterwards 1_{SG} go.and.return bathe INDIV
 ‘Afterwards, I went to take a bath.’ (Ospina Bozzi 2002: 264)
- (3) *Bornh-na-ga ng-a-ya-nggi.* [Wagiman, isolate, Australia]
 bathe-NMLZ-ALL PST-1_{SG}-go-PST
 ‘I went to bathe.’ (Krauße 2021: 169)
- (4) *Je prend-s un bain.* [French, Indo-European/Romance]
 1_{SG}.SUBJ take-1_{SG}.PRS INDEF.ART.MASC bath
 ‘I am taking a bath.’

These sentences differ in their grammatical make-up: examples (1) and (2) juxtapose two verbs and may be termed serial verb constructions; examples (3) and (4) involve nominalisation strategies and may be termed light verb constructions. To refer to constructions as different as those illustrated in examples (1) through (4), descriptive grammars have rightfully proposed different terms, yet these constructions do share some notable similarities, which we propose to capture using the cover term ‘complex predicate’. We deliberately assign a rather broad definition to this term: these should correspond to cases where a combination of two lexemes (two independent verbs as in “go bathe”, or a verb and a noun as in “take a bath”) constitute a single predicate. Our workshop provides a basis for a systematic (re-)assessment of typological concepts such as serial verb constructions, converb, light verb and auxiliary constructions for their use as ‘comparative concepts’ (in terms of Haspelmath 2010). While these concepts are evidently valid to the extent that they show clustering with regard to relevant diagnostics, the distinction between such subtypes of VCPs may in fact be scalar. A reconsideration of established terms would have repercussions for both typology and linguistic theory.

We invite our participants to inspect their own data for non-canonical, unexpected or otherwise interesting verb constructions in terms of argument structure, tense/aspect/mood sharing, prosody as well as grammaticalization and lexicalization patterns. Presentations from different

theoretical frameworks focusing on complex predicates are also welcome as long as they make clear cross-linguistic predictions.

Proposed topics include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Methodological approaches to complex predicates (e.g. databases, annotation schemas, questionnaires and other elicitation tools)
2. Empirical and theoretical challenges to categorizing complex predicates into noun-based vs. verb-based complex predicates including rarely discussed cases such as ideophone-based complex predicates
3. Theoretical motivations to distinguish between subtypes of complex predicates (e.g. auxiliaries vs light verbs)
4. Potential correlation between canonical or unexpected paths of grammaticalization/lexicalization and subtypes of complex predicates (e.g. serial verbs, converbs, light verbs, auxiliaries)
5. Conceptual and terminological issues in the domain of complex predicates (e.g. the notion of finiteness, mechanisms of argument-sharing and argument-pooling in different types of complex predicates, etc.)
6. Complex predicates in sign languages
7. Complex predicates and corpus linguistics
8. Delimiting the domain of verbal complex predicates within the broader domain of 'multi-verb constructions'

Bringing together different approaches to complex predicates across a variety of languages will shed light not only on the individual languages in which they are found, but also on theoretical and empirical issues of argument structure and clausehood (monoclausality). Our workshop will be an opportunity to share diverse data from the languages of your expertise and explore potential cross-linguistic approaches to a variety of different phenomena that fall under, or are relevant to complex predicates.

Our workshop will run for **two days**.

Submission instructions: The submission guidelines are outlined [here](#) [#5]. When submitting your abstract, please select the workshop your abstract is intended for upon submission. Please make sure that you follow the multiple paper policy, which states that one person may be the first author of only one submission of any kind (workshop paper, general session paper, poster, or workshop proposal). It is possible to co-author more than two papers. For the details, see the [FAQ](#) [#14]. Please bear in mind that if you are the first convenor of another workshop, you cannot submit a paper as the first author to our workshop.

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