

Northern Australian complex predicates in a cross-linguistic perspective

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Abstract

This class will provide the opportunity to discuss some core issues in the analysis of complex predicates, in a cross-linguistic and cross-theoretical perspective. Topics covered include: (i) criteria for the identification of complex predicates and their delimitation from other multi-predicate constructions such as core serial verb constructions and depictive secondary predicates, (ii) the typological and diachronic variability of complex predicate constructions, (iii) approaches to a compositional semantic analysis of complex predicates, and (iv) specific issues raised by complex predicates consisting of a coverb and a closed-class verb as found in a number of Australian languages.

The outline below indicates questions for discussion, and core reading. (Be warned that there may not be definitive answers to all of the questions...). Participants are welcome to bring (or indeed, send in advance) interesting / problematic examples for discussion.

Welcome and introduction (8.45-9.00)

Session 1 (9.00-10.30): Definition and delimitation of complex predicates

General:

We will assume a definition of complex predicates as monoclausal constructions where two or more lexical elements each make a contribution to the semantics and argument structure but jointly function as a single predicate with a single set of arguments; cf. e.g. Butt (1997: 108).

- What are the criteria proposed in the literature for distinguishing complex predicates (*nuclear junctures* in Role and Reference Grammar terminology; *merger constructions* in Baker and Harvey (2010)) from
 - multicausal constructions
 - other monoclausal multi-predicate constructions (*core junctures* / *co-indexation constructions*)
 - lexical compounds?
- How universally applicable are these criteria?
- Are there universal correlations between syntactic level and semantic type of multi-predicate construction?
- How can we diagnose and analyse cases where a language allows the combination of the same predicates in constructions at different levels?

Applied to complex predicates of Northern Australian languages:

- Are these actually (all) complex predicates as per the above definition?
- What diagnostics are applicable?
- Are “verb classification” constructions a distinct subtype of complex predicate, or indeed not complex predicates at all? (As claimed by McGregor (2002: 265); see Bowerman (2010) for critical discussion.)
- Do some languages exhibit multi-predicate constructions at different levels? If yes, at which levels and in which functions? E.g., how should coverbs/preverbs outside of complex predicates be analysed?
- If there is sufficient interest we may also consider the case of Kriol and mixed languages in Australia; see Meakins (2010)

Reading:

Van Valin and LaPolla (1997: 441–469) [Ch. 8.4.1 on core and nuclear SVCs] ; Baker and Harvey (2010); Foley (2010)

Session 2 (11.00-12.30): Typological and diachronic variability of complex predicate constructions

General:

- What kinds of components can form complex predicates cross-linguistically?
- What parameters can serve to categorise the resulting structures?
- What typical developments do they undergo diachronically?

Applied to complex predicates of Northern Australian languages:

- How do these CPs compare with other types found cross-linguistically?
- How did they arise?
- Is there evidence for grammaticalisation of components of complex predicates?
- Are there degrees of lexicalisation of complex predicates?

Reading:

Bowerman (2008); Schultze-Berndt (2003)

Plus your choice of treatments of typologically diverse complex predicates, e.g. Pawley (1993); contributions to Alsina et al. (1997); Crowley (2002); contributions to Brill and Ozanne-Rivierre (2004); Brill (2007); contributions to Aikhenvald and Dixon (2005); contributions to Amberber et al. (2010); DeLancey (1996); Sakel (2007); Harris (2000).

Session 3 (1.30–3.00). Approaches to a compositional semantic analysis of complex predicates (I)

General:

- What are the main semantic types of complex predicates cross-linguistically?
- How semantically compositional are complex predicates?
- Are there constraints on what can be encoded by a complex predicate?
- What approaches have been employed to capture the semantic contributions of the components of complex predicates?

Reading:

Folli et al. (2005); Butt et al. (2008); Baker and Harvey (2010) [as per Session 1];

Session 4 (3.30–5.00). Approaches to a compositional semantic analysis of complex predicates (II) & further discussion of any other points / data

Applied to complex predicates of Northern Australian languages:

- What are the main semantic types of complex predicates in these languages? Are they universal or areal features?
- In how far can a “verb classification” analysis be applied to these complex predicates?

Reading:

The above plus Nordlinger (2010); McGregor (2002: 245-276 [Approaches to verb classification] and 171-206 [Gooniyandi and Nyulnyul systems in contrast])

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