Argument Realisation in Complex Predicates and Complex Events

Verb-verb constructions at the syntax-semantic interface

Edited by

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Brian Nolan
Elke Diedrichsen
Institute of Technology Blanchardstown, Dublin

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Argument realisation in complex predicates and complex events at the syntax-semantic interface

Brian Nolan and Elke Diedrichsen
Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown, Dublin

The **theme** of the book is the argument realisation and syntactic variation of complex events, complex predicates and multi-verb constructions in a wide range of contexts. This book brings together **researchers** from a variety of functionally inspired theoretical backgrounds who have worked on these verb-verb and complex predicate constructions, including light-verb – matrix verb / serial verbs, within one language or from a cross-linguistic perspective at the syntax-semantics interface.

As such, the general **objective** is, through studying their semantics and syntax within the framework of functional, cognitive and constructional approaches, to arrive at a better understanding of the cross linguistic behaviour of the multi-verb constructions and complex predicates, and how they resonate in syntax.

In this book an impressive **variety of languages** is represented, ranging over languages such as German, Irish, Sicilian and Italian, Lithuanian, Estonian and other Finno-Ugric languages, Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara and Ngaanyatjarra from Australia's Western Desert region, Japanese, Tepehua (Totonacan, Mexico), Mexican Spanish, Coptic, Persian and Cheyenne.

The **topics** discussed in the book include: syntactic structure, argument structure and the different ways in the encoding of arguments of verb-verb constructions in complex predicates; the lexical semantics and event structure of these complex events and complex predicates; and synchronic and diachronic accounts of constructions with multiple verbs in a single clause. The **purpose** of the book is therefore to draw a comprehensive, representative and detailed picture of the multi-verb and complex predicate constructions, across a rich set of languages, in order to arrive at a better understanding of the cross linguistic behaviour of these predicate expressions and their argument realisation.

An **aim of the book** is to provide a number of case studies with data examples across a wide variety of languages; Additionally, we aim to explore the specification of the mapping at the semantic-syntactic interface across constructions where a single clause contains multiple verbs construed as a single complex predication and the degree of syntactic variation found with these. We treat the role of lexical semantics and event structure of the complex predication and how these mediate the realisation of the arguments of these verbs in morphosyntax. We explore the sharing of arguments across each of the verbs in their various nexus-juncture relations.

The **theoretical frameworks** utilised within this book are situated within the broad functional-cognitive-typological paradigm and analyses are supported by authentic data (including corpus data) from the languages concerned. Many of the chapters characterise their accounts within Role and Reference Grammar (Van Valin 2005; Van Valin & LaPolla 1997) but we also find cognitive grammar (Talmy 2000), construction grammar/construction morphology (Booij 2010) and typological perspectives (Haspelmath 2015) employed. The approaches in the book are mainly synchronic, although a few digressions to diachronic developments are made.

We find **evidence** that these constructions manifest considerable variability in cross-linguistic comparisons of complex predicate formation and the perspective they reveal on complex events. In European languages, for example, typically one of the verbs in a verb-verb construction highlights a phase of an underspecified event while the matrix verb specifies the actual event. In contrast, serial verbs, for example in Pacific Rim languages, require each verb to provide a sub-event dimension within a complex event viewed holistically as unitary in syntax. This book contributes to an understanding of multi-verb constructions verbs across languages, their syntactic constructional patterns and argument realisation.

Many different definitions of multi-verb constructions exist in the literature and it is clear that there is (still) no unified consensus on the characteristics of these in the world's languages. Complex events, complex predications and multi-verb constructions have a broad literature that spans many different theoretical frameworks and perspectives (Aikhenvald 2006; Aikhenvald & Dixon. 2006; Alsina, Bresnan & Sells 2001; Bohnemeyer & Pederson 2011; Bohnemeyer, Enfield, Essegbey et al. 2007; Bril 2007; Butt 1993, 1995, 2003, 1995; Butt & Ramchand 2003; Crowley 2002; Foley 2010; Traugott 1999).

Bril (2007) posits several criteria as diagnostics of complex predicates (in respect of Oceanic languages, summarised in (1)) that are applicable cross-linguistically.

(1)   Criteria of complex predicates   (based on Bril 2007)
    a.   They comprise a sequence of predicate constituting one single predication.
    b.   They share the same tense, aspect, and mood (marked on one or all verbs of the sequence) or, if not the same marker, a set of closely dependent mood markers; they share the same illocutionary force and polarity (all predicates fall under the scope of a negation marker).
    c.   They are lexically autonomous predicates with predictable semantics.
    d.   They do not evidence any loss of morphosyntactic properties, nor any loss of stress pattern or phonological form.

Aikhenvald proposes a set of formal and semantic properties (2) to characterize a serial verb construction.

(2)   Criteria of serial verb constructions   (based on Aikhenvald 2006)
    a.   Serial verb construction as a single predicate – An SVC functions on a par with mono-verbal clauses in discourse, and occupies one core functional slot in a clause
    b.   Mono-clausality of serial verb constructions – Serial verb constructions are mono-clausal and allow no markers of syntactic dependency on their components
    c.   Prosodic properties of serial verb constructions – A serial verb construction has the intonational properties of a mono-verbal clause, and not of a sequence of clauses.
    d.   Shared tense/aspect, mood, modality, illocutionary force and polarity value – This implies that no independent choice or contrast in any of these categories is possible for the individual components of an SVC
    e.   Serial verb construction as 'one event' – The verbs in the construction all refer to sub-parts or aspects of a single overall event.
    f.   Sharing arguments in serial verb constructions – Prototypical serial verb constructions share at least one argument.

In turn, Haspelmath defines a serial verb construction as (3)

(3)   Serial verb construction   (Haspelmath 2015)
    A serial verb construction a mono-clausal construction consisting of multiple independent verbs with no element linking them and with no predicate-argument relation between the verbs.

Haspelmath regards the lack of agreement concerning the definition of serial verb constructions as a perfectly natural situation, that is not surprising but, instead, actually necessary given the way that linguistic research has developed.

Pederson & Bohnemeyer (2011: 1–12) take a different approach when they appeal to the notion of a macro-event property (MEP) while characterising complex event representation (and event segmentation) in language. The MEP (4) is a semantic property of syntactic constructions used in event descriptions that determines certain aspects of the range of event representations compatible with these constructions.

(4)   Macro-event property   (MEP)
       An event-denoting construction has the MEP *iff* it combines only with those time-positional or durational operators that have scope over all sub-events it entails.

Light verbs are attested in many of the world's languages (Butt 1995, 2003; Alsina et al. 2001) and generally there is agreement that light verbs contribute to the formation of complex predicates. Light verbs have a non-light or 'heavy' verb counterpart. Light verbs contribute to the predication but require a resolution of the argument structure composition, and other elements, within the complex predication. The grammatical structure is that of a single complex predicate. That is to say, light verbs always form a complex predicate. Butt (2003) makes a clear distinction between auxiliary verb constructions and constructions involving light verbs, based on cross-linguistic evidence. Light verbs serve to modulate the event described by the matrix verb in a manner distinct from auxiliaries. Complex predicates allow two or more predicational elements to co-predicate in a mono-clausal structure.

The chapters in this book, covering a wide range of European and non-European languages and different approaches, and the definitions in (2)–(4), explore the relationship between complex events, complex predicates and predication, and multi-verb constructions.

The **organisation** of this book is as follows:

Nolan in Chapter 1 entitled '*The syntactic realisation of complex events and complex predicates in situations of Irish*' is concerned with the nature of complex events and complex predicates in Irish. Introducing a situation as a framing device, he characterises the framing of complex events. A situation is a structured entity that acts as a unifying cognitive construction to link events, participants, semantics and syntax. Through the perspective of a situation, a set of relationships between multi-verb constructions, single and multiple clauses, and a variety of complex events is explored. In a sentence or clause with multiple verbs, the multiple verbs are argued to represent individual discrete events characterised in some relation that is conceptualised as forming a cognitive unit with significant syntactic consequences. Using Irish data, he characterises multiple events where the events are in a transition from E1 into E2, in sequence where E1 occurs before E2, and events that are simultaneous where E1 and E2 unfold at the same time. He

differentiates between complex events and complex predications where the multi-verb single clause realises a single event in syntax but the phase of the event is also denoted. In Irish, a multi-verb single clause can encode causation or modulate some element of the event frame such as manner, means, path or trajectory of the event.

The second chapter, by Diedrichsen on '*Pleonasm in particle verb constructions in German*', examines one kind of separable prefix construction that has not received much attention in the literature so far. Verbs with separable prefixes or particles, as they are also called, belong to the discontinuous complex predicates in German. Their syntactic structure follows the widely described German sentence bracket structure, in that the finite verb base opens the bracket at the second position in the sentence, while the separable prefix, or particle, closes it at the end of the sentence. The space between the brackets is filled with the main informational content of the sentence. The construction type called "Pleonastic Particle Construction" involves a verb with a separable prefix that repeats locative or directional information given in a prepositional phrase in the same sentence. It is used frequently in colloquial German. Diedrichsen discusses the nature of this redundancy, and the question whether the redundant element is the prepositional phrase or the particle. She also addresses the observation that these constructions are constrained in that they cannot be used when the PP and/or the particle in the sentence are used figuratively. In order to account for the specifications and constraints of this construction type, the author uses Talmy's theory of the windowing of attention in a MOTION event frame. She argues that for this particular construction type, the separable prefix or particle can be assumed to be a redundant element, while the PP carries vital information about PATH and GROUND in a MOTION event. Furthermore, the study using Talmy's approach can show that the construction expresses an emphasis of the window of the PATH that is selected for attention, which is a possibility of semantic realisation that is restricted to non-figurative, locational or directional readings and is not compatible with any figurative uses of the construction.

In Chapter 3 entitled '*Serial Verb Constructions and Event Structure Representations*', Riccio surveys the literature on serial verb constructions (SVCs) and discusses their syntactic and semantic characteristics within a rich set of languages. The notion of event has been discussed in connection with formal, cognitive, and cultural constraints, which have led to disagreements and misunderstandings in the literature due to different approaches on determining the characteristics of the event as a whole. Riccio characterizes SVCs within the nexus-juncture relations at the syntax-semantics interface as developed by the Role and Reference Grammar (RRG) framework and relates her analysis to the Macro-event Property (Bohnemeyer et al. 2007). The criterion adopted to represent the

event in SVCs is the Macro-Event Property, i.e., a semantic property that assesses event representations in terms of their compatibility with temporal modifiers. The resulting analysis demonstrates that RRG provides a useful theoretical perspective with the descriptive and explanatory adequacy to embody the peculiarities of traditional SVCs, by distinguishing them from other multi-verb constructions that in the relevant literature are often classified as members of the SVC category.

In Chapter 4, 'Non-conventional arguments: finite and non-finite verbal complementation in Sicilian', Frenda analyses Sicilian folk tales to explore two functionally equivalent structures from a semantic and syntactic point of view, employing the formalism of Role and Reference Grammar, to understand what distinguishes them in terms of event structure and its expression via core complementation vs. adjunction. These structures are the subordinate phrasal constituent, expressing purpose, and the corresponding infinitive construction. While the distribution of these two functionally equivalent structures in a corpus of Sicilian folk tales is analysed, Frenda notes that, in the Romance context, Sicilian is unusual in allowing finite verbs to be governed by a preposition within a subordinate phrasal constituent expressing purpose. In other Romance languages, the verb slotted in this context is normally an infinitive. This study examines nexus-juncture relations within the two Sicilian structures, the semantic bleaching of the V1, and V1–V2 cohesion with respect to event structure, and the constraints that apply are shown to cover both of the Sicilian phenomena.

Chapter 5 by Bruno, on 'Complex predicates in Lithuanian', characterises the diverse and layered constructions of Lithuanian predicates where semantics, syntax and morphology play an equally important role in the formulation of complex predicates. The data for the analysis was collected from the publically accessible corpus of Lithuanian language and the examples were analysed within the RRG framework. Bruno argues that the V + V constructions of Lithuanian need to be reclassified as complex predicate constructions. This is a new insight into the nature of complex predicates in Lithuanian. Additionally, Bruno provides an analysis of Lithuanian nominal complex predicates [V + NP] and verbal complex predicates [V + V$_{INF}$] and provides evidence for a type of complex verbal predicate [V + V$_{INF}$ + V$_{INF}$...] which, in some cases, has a serial verb construction embedded in the predication [V + SVC].

Chapter 6 on 'Serial Verb Constructions in Estonian' by Tragel analyses serial verb constructions as found in Estonian. These are characterised by two or more adjacent verbs with concordant grammatical marking in the same clause. SVCs in the Finno-Ugric language family are not very often addressed and Tragel, based on the Estonian SVC data, examines the absence of locative adverbs typical of motion verbs as the first verbs of an SVC, for example directional adverbs of GO and COME verbs. Tragel demonstrates that the 'asymmetrical contiguous SVC with

concordant grammatical marking' exists in Estonian. SVCs from other Finno-Ugric languages are discussed and contrasted with Estonian from the perspective of grammaticalisation. From a typological perspective, this study supports the shared temporal adverb generalisation of Haspelmath (2015: 17, generalisation 3). The results of this study of Estonian *minema* 'to go' SVCs show that this type of verb serialisation is productive in Estonian; the SVCs are usually monoclausal, and the first verb of the SVC is often grammaticalised, taking an intentional, inchoative or imperative-hortative function.

In Chapter 7, '*Complex Predication in Three Dialects of Australia's Western Desert*', Pyle analyses complex predicates in three dialects of Australia's Western Desert, Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara and Ngaanyatjarra, within the functional linguistic model of Role and Reference Grammar. Data from each of these dialects illustrate that they have verb compounding and serial verb constructions, and that complexes may represent a single composite action or a sequence of related actions. The essential role of morphology in complex predication within these Western Desert languages of Australian is characterised. These languages are a dialect chain covering a large territory in Central Australia. Pyle discusses the nature of complex predicates, verb-verb compounding and serial verb constructions as they apply to these languages.

In Chapter 8, '*Complex Verbs In Bohairic Coptic: Language Contact And Valency*', Zakrzewska analyses complex predication and complex verbs in Bohairic Coptic from a diachronic and functional-typological perspective. Zakrzewska examines whether Coptic argument marking can be considered a replica of Greek valence patterns. Zakrzewska provides evidence that the rise of complex verbs has contributed to a radical restructuring of the transitivity system in Coptic. The formation of complex verbs is a Coptic innovation with respect to pre-Coptic Egyptian following intensive linguistic contacts between Egyptian and Greek. In particular, complex verbs with the light verbs *er-* and *ti-* are typically used to integrate verbal borrowings from Greek into Bohairic Coptic. Zakrzewska argues that the rise of complex verbs led not only to the enrichment of the lexicon and adjustment of the existing argument marking strategies but, by influencing quantitative proportions between head marked and dependent marked second arguments, eventually brought about a major rearrangement of the whole system of transitivity relations.

In Chapter 9, '*The organizational structure of lexical compound verbs in Japanese: A Construction Morphology account*', by Toratani analyses compound verbs of Japanese from the perspective of Construction Morphology. She argues that the compounds are arranged in two dimensions. The first dimension contains the inheritance hierarchy, with its root node diverging according to the position of the semantic head (for thematic, aspectual, and prefixed type compounds); the

second dimension covers compounds with extended senses (for the lexicalized type). Japanese has a large class of verb-verb compound verbs such as *osi-akeru* 'push open'. Formally, they constitute a uniform group of V1-V2 (V1 is non-finite; V2 carries tense) but, in combination, they are heterogeneous, as the components vary in meaning, case assignment and argument structure. To illustrate the organisation of the compound verbs within the inheritance hierarchy, the study applies Construction Grammar to propose constructional schemas. Toratani argues that prefixed and lexicalized type compound verbs constitute an important part of the system of compound verbs. The construction schemas proposed for four types of compound verbs – thematic, aspectual, prefixed, and lexicalized – clarifies their relationships and shows that Japanese compound verbs are organized in a hierarchical lexicon. Within this, they are categorised into left-headed and right-headed compounds based on semantic-headedness following Booij's (2010) model of Japanese noun compounds.

The next chapter, Chapter 10, reports on '*Verb-verb compounds and argument structure in Tepehua*'. Here, Watters discusses two kinds of verb-verb compounds and complex predicate constructions and how these are distinguished morphosyntactically with respect to argument realisation. The verb-verb compounds are seen to parallel the adverb-verb compounds structurally and functionally with the v1 specifying the manner in which the denoted event unfolds. Interestingly, these compounds share many of the distinguishing characteristics of serial verb constructions as described by Butt (1993) and Haspelmath (2015). In Tepehua, the verb-verb constructions, with a v1 head, involve a v2 that functions as a light verb. In many instances of these, the v2 is limited to a subclass of stative verb and their derived forms, including those specifying position or posture.

Chapter 11, on '*Multi-Verb Constructions in Cheyenne*', by Corral Esteban characterises complex predicates within mono-clausal constructions in this Native American language. These multi-verb mono-clausal constructions allow a speaker to express various aspects of a situation, or an event, within one clause and one predicate. A particular challenge in Cheyenne, and one directly addressed in this chapter, is in differentiating a serial verb construction from other types of multi-verb construction (Aikhenvald & Dixon 2006). This is not always an easy task in Cheyenne and is especially evident in determining the distinction between lexical and functional verbs that have a grammatical function rather than a lexical meaning. This chapter provides a detailed description of verb combinations in Cheyenne in a Role and Reference Grammar account, paying special attention to their syntactic and semantic properties. Corral Esteban' analysis allows one to observe similarities and differences, and characterise their place within the typology of multi-verb constructions.

Chapter 12, by Guerrero and Cruz Domínguez, on *'Feelings as emotion, attitude, and viewpoints'* examines the syntax and semantics of Mexican Spanish *sentir* 'to feel' in simple and complex structures from a functional and typological perspective. Using a corpus of Mexican Spanish data, the verb *sentir* is shown to take different complement types with corresponding differences in meaning. Within this, the object of perception refers to an individual, a proposition, or a descriptive state of an individual. Syntactically, the object of perception can take the form of an adjective, past participle, syntactic clause or noun phrase, in that order of frequency. Outside purely physical sensations, *sentir* predominantly conveys subjectivity and epistemic modality: the perceiver's feelings, emotions, attitude, judgment, thoughts and viewpoints. The predicative elements (mainly adjectives and past participles) describe the state, quality, or property of the perceived object. When the verb form is *sentirse*, both the verb and the perceived state form a complex predicate.

Chapter 13 by Saeedi on *'Nominal Predication in Persian: A Functional Characterization'*, examines the nominal complex predicates (CPs) in Persian in a functional Role and Reference Grammar account. In nominal complex predicates, a noun fuses with the impoverished form of the verb in a light verb construction. Saeedi analyses these nominal complex predicates in terms of nexus-juncture relations and the results of her analysis indicate that the nominal constituent (consisting of the four types of concrete, abstract, action, and process), plays an important role in determining the Aktionsart type of the juncture. This study finds that the noun in these constructions plays the crucial role of providing the aspectual information and that its semantic qualia structure imposes restrictions on the selection of the verbal element.

The final chapter of the book, Chapter 14, by Moezzipour and Ghandhari on *'Concept structuring in Persian PP-centric complex predicates'* applies the Concept Structuring System of Talmy (2000), in a cognitive-functional approach, to the analysis and characterization of prepositions and how they contribute to the schematic meanings in Persian complex predicates. Based on the definition by Butt (2010: 49), the authors take a complex predicate as a construction that involves two or more predicational elements (such as nouns, verbs, and adjectives) which predicate as a single element, i.e. their arguments map onto a mono-clausal syntactic structure. The authors find that, when the motion is fictive, the predicate is rendered as complex, and, in case the action is factive, a simple verb is realised. Given the continuum between lexical and grammatical forms, the authors argue that the preposition, together with a light verb, are responsible for the schematic meaning of the complex predicates, which originates from their inclusion in the category of closed forms. Additionally, the schematic role of the preposition has a bearing on encoding image schemas and spatial relations between the LANDMARK

and TRAJECTOR (Langacker 1987), which is unequivocally decisive in designating the senses of complex predicates.

The book provides a context for an integrated view of the role of complex events and multi-verb constructions, and complex predicates, within several functional-cognitive theories of grammar, including RRG, Talmy's cognitive approach to event-frames, functional typology, and Construction Morphology. It delivers a set of analyses of important elements of the grammar of a number of the world's languages. The languages include German, Irish, Sicilian and Italian, Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara and Ngaanyatjarra from Australia's Western Desert region, Lithuanian, Finno-Ugric Estonian and, Japanese, the Native American language of Cheyenne (Plains Algonquian: USA), Tepehua (Totonacan, Mexico), Mexican Spanish, Boharic Coptic, Persian. The book raises and addresses important challenges for functional, typological, cognitive and constructional approaches to language and the interfaces between morphosyntax, the lexicon, argument structure and event structure.

The work will be of interest to scholars of linguistics, researchers and postgraduate students internationally who work with complex events, multi-verb constructions and complex predication at the interfaces between syntax, argument realisation, semantics and the lexicon. It will also be of interest to the community of researchers within functional linguistics, functional typology and cognitive linguistics.

A **key important aspect** of this scholarly work is that it is grounded in the functional/typological/cognitive linguistic continuum. The book represents a valuable step forward in linguistics research due to the broad application of functional-typological-cognitive theory, examination of constructions relating *complex events, complex predicates and multi-verb constructions*, with original and scholarly analyses of elements of the grammars of a wide variety of languages of the world, from contributors who are experts within their respective fields.

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