

# Morphosyntax of Noun-Verb Complex Predicates: Evidence from Dargwa<sup>1</sup>

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**INTRODUCTION.** Complex predicate (CPr) is a construction consisting of two elements – a light verb (LV) and a non-verbal element (NVE). The latter provides the core conceptual meaning, while the former serves primarily as a ‘verbalizer’, expressing relatively abstract meaning (causation, initiation, etc.). The example (1) instantiates the CPr *wana* AGR-*arq’*- ‘warm up’ built up of the NVE *wana* ‘warm’ and the LV AGR-*arq’*- ‘make’.<sup>2</sup>

- (1)      waba-li              xureg              **wana**    **b-arq’-ib**  
         mother-ERG      food.ABS      warm    N-make.PFV-AOR  
         ‘Mother warmed up the food.’

Besides adjectives, the NVE in Dargwa languages can also be represented by a noun, ideophone, adverb/post-position, numeral, borrowed verb, and some special element that is no longer used outside the construction. Nominal NVE are of particular interest because, as extensive literature on different languages shows (see, e.g., [Folli et al., 2004](#) for Modern Persian and [Gündoğdu, 2016](#) for Kurmanji Kurdish), they sometimes possess both lexical and phrasal properties. Moreover, even though N(oun)-LV CPrs are abundant in Nakh-Daghestanian languages, for instance, in Lezgian ([Haspelmath, 1993](#)) and Chechen ([Komen et al., 2021](#)), there have not been any in-depth investigations of the phenomenon in any of the languages. The present work attempts to fill this gap by providing a comprehensive account of N-LV CPrs in three Dargwa languages (< Nakh-Daghestanian): Muira, Icari, and Kaytag. The goals are threefold. Firstly, I discuss the main morphosyntactic properties of N-LV CPrs in Muira Dargwa. Then, I show that the properties are also characteristic of CPrs in other Dargwa languages, presenting evidence from Icari Dargwa and Kaytag Dargwa, two languages from different branches of the Dargwa language group. Finally, I investigate how the current understanding of argument structure can help us to account for the discussed properties of the CPrs.

**DATA.** All data come from the author’s field work. Muira Dargwa data were primarily collected in the village of Kalkni (Republic of Daghestan, Russia) during two fieldtrips in August 2022 and June 2023; Icari Dargwa and Kaytag Dargwa data were collected during fieldtrips to the villages of Ivan-Kutan and Javgat (Republic of Daghestan, Russia) in 2023 and 2024 respectively. All acceptability judgements were elicited from at least three speakers and subsequently confirmed in different sessions.

**MORPHOSYNTAX.** The two elements of a CPr demonstrate a considerable degree of independence. For instance, an NVE and an LV need not be linearly adjacent (2). Moreover, the order of the elements may be reversed, and it is possible to elide only one of the elements of the CPr, leaving the other intact.

- (2)      pat’imat-li              xureg              c:e      kuɣni-le-b              **w-arq’-ib**  
         PN-ERG              food.ABS              salt      kitchen-LOC-N      M-make.PFV-AOR  
         ‘Patimat salted the food in the kitchen.’

Another important property of the majority of CPrs is the deficient nature of the NVE. That is, nominal NVEs bear no Case and cannot serve as a goal for agreement relation – as (3) shows, the NVE *gap* ‘praise’ is not in absolutive (which is zero-marked), since there is another zero-marked DP *Rasul* with which the verb agrees in gender. Additionally, an NVE cannot be modified (4), it is not referential (5), and it does not become a subject under antipassivization.

- (3)      učitel’-li              rasul              **gap**      {**w-arq’-ib** / **\*b-arq’-ib**}  
         teacher-ERG      PN.ABS      praise      M-make.PFV-AOR / N-make.PFV-AOR  
         ‘The teacher praised Rasul.’
- (4)      \* darɣa              [qaʳq-il              **duc’]**      **Ø-ik’-u-r=ri**  
         child.ABS              quick-ATR      run      M-say.IPFV-PROG-CVB=PST  
         Exp.: ‘The child ran fast.’
- (5)      \* murad              [iʃ              **taʰh]**      **Ø-uq-un**  
         PN.ABS              this.2      jump      M-move.PFV-AOR

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<sup>2</sup> All the unspecified examples are from Muira Dargwa. The components of the CPr are in boldface.

Exp.: ‘Murad made that jump.’

**HETEROGENEITY.** There is, however, distinguished a small group of nominal NVEs which possess certain phrasal features and resemble direct objects. They occupy the internal argument slot and thus prevent any absolutive arguments from occurring with CPrs. Consequently, they receive absolutive case and trigger agreement on the verbs, as in (6). Moreover, such NVEs can be modified (7).

- (6)      asadulla-li      sun-i-la      aba-s      **q:ulluq:**      **b-irq'-u-li**      sa<b>i  
             PN-ERG      SELF-OBL-GEN      mother-DAT      care.ABS      N-make.IPFV-PROG-CVB      <N>AUX  
             ‘Asadullah cared about his mother.’
- (7)      murad-li      rasul-li-s      [χula-l      **kumek]**      **b-arq'-ib**  
             PN-ERG      PN-OBL-DAT      big-ADJ      help.ABS      N-make.PFV-AOR  
             ‘Murad provided great help to Rasul.’

**HOMOGENEITY.** Icari Dargwa and Kaytag Dargwa demonstrate exactly the same picture. In these languages, the two elements of the CPr are also quite independent of each other, thus they need not be linearly adjacent (8). The majority of NVEs are also unable to host modifiers and be referential, cf. (9) and (10).

- (8)      ICARI DARGWA  
             učiteli-li      **gap**      rasul      **w-a'rq'-ib**  
             teacher-ERG      praise      PN.ABS      M-make.PFV-AOR  
             ‘The teacher praised Rasul.’
- (9)      \* ICARI DARGWA  
             učiteli-li      rasul      [χula      **gap]**      **w-a'rq'-ib**  
             teacher-ERG      PN.ABS      big      praise      M-make.PFV-AOR  
             Exp.: ‘The teacher praised Rasul very much.’
- (10)      \* KAYTAG DARGWA  
             učiteli-li      rasul      [χ<sup>w</sup>ala      **gap]**      **k-Ø-ar-iw**  
             teacher-ERG      PN.ABS      big      praise      DOWN-M-make.PFV-AOR  
             Exp.: ‘The teacher praised Rasul very much.’

Just like Muira Dargwa, Icari Dargwa and Kaytag Dargwa possess a small class of NVEs that play a ‘dual role’, being not only part of a CPr but also an internal argument, see (11) with a modified NVE *q:ulluq:* ‘care’.

- (11)      ICARI DARGWA  
             musa-li      cin-na      waba-j      [χula      **q:ulluq:]**      **b-irq'-a**      ca-b  
             PN-ERG      SELF-GEN      mother-DAT      big      care.ABS      N-make.IPFV-PROG      AUX-N  
             ‘Musa really cares about his mother.’

**ANALYSIS PROSPECTS.** Given all the facts about morphosyntactic deficiency of the majority of NVEs, I consider an NV to be the realization of a bare root (Marantz, 1997) which corresponds to a phonological word. Those NVEs that also function as arguments should be analyzed as full-fledged DPs; the oblique arguments in such cases are introduced by an Appl or some other argument-introducing functional head. Such structures raise the question of whether roots are even necessary in the structure. I will discuss this question and argue that the absence of roots raises no problems for derivation, being sometimes even a desirable possibility.

**CONCLUSIONS.** After examining a range of N-LV CPrs in three rather different Dargwa languages I come to the conclusion that CPrs behave quite uniformly in all Dargwa languages. Within a single language, however, N-LV CPrs do not form a homogenous group: at least two classes of NVEs should be differentiated. Consequently, these two classes require different syntactic analyses.

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**Abstract submission for Workshop on Light Elements Across Languages**

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4 октября 2025 г. в 12:26

Кому: Ivan Kalyakin &lt;kalyakin.iv@gmail.com&gt;

Dear Ivan,

I am happy to inform you that the paper titled "Morphosyntax of Noun-Verb Complex Predicates: Evidence from Dargwa" has been accepted for presentation at the *Light Elements* workshop.

One question, though, before further arrangements are made. The workshop was initially announced for November 21; however, due to unforeseen administrative duties, I'll have to schedule the papers on November 22. Would that be okay with you?

Many thanks and kind regards,

Mihaela

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