

Mismatches between syntax and semantics in Mangarrayi complex verbs

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Complex predicates and complex
verbal constructions masterclass

ALS 2025 · 2 December

Background

- ▶ Much of the complex predicate literature takes up the issue of classifying particular construction types as ‘complex predicates’ (e.g., Alsina et al., 1997; Amberber et al., 2010; Rosen, 1990)
- ▶ Works on individual languages often explore internal criteria for categorising construction types this way (Amberber, 2010; Bowern, 2004; Krauße, 2021; Schultze-Berndt, 2000; Wilson, 1999)
- ▶ What about differentiating between the tokens of one construction type? Are all instantiations of a construction type equally good candidates for ‘complex predicate’?

Goals of the session

- ▶ We will think about these how these questions relate to the coverb construction in Mangarrayi: a syntactically but not semantically homogenous category
- ▶ Unlike Wagiman, the complex verb system in Mangarrayi is not predominantly transparent

Things to think about

Ask yourself:

- What criteria for ‘complex predicate’ might be suitable in Mangarrayi?
- Is ‘complex predicate’ the most useful characterisation of Mangarrayi complex verbs?

Session outline

Syntactic overview of Mangarrayi verbs

Compositional constructions

Non-compositional constructions

Proposals and remaining problems

SYNTACTIC OVERVIEW OF MANGARRAYI VERBS

- ▶ Non-Pama-Nyungan, formerly spoken in the Roper River region
(Merlan, 1982)
- ▶ ‘Prefixing’ type: obligatory agreement prefixes and TAM suffixes on verbs, noun class/case prefixes and suffixes, and complex (two part) verb lexemes
- ▶ Mangarrayi has three kinds of monoclausal complex verbs: simple, compound, and phrasal
- ▶ Phrasal verbs will be our focus, as they have the most varied behaviour

Simple verbs

- ▶ Simple verbs involve a monomorphemic verb stem, sandwiched in between an agreement prefix and a TAM suffix

(1) **ŋan-ka-ŋij**

3SG>1SG-take-PP

‘He took me.’ (Merlan, 1982, p. 26)

(2) **ŋawujan-ma-ŋ**

1SG>3PL-say-PP

‘I told them.’ (Merlan, 1982, p. 65)

- ▶ There are 36 monomorphemic verb roots, with meanings typical for similarly sized inventories, e.g., /pu/ ‘hit’, /mi/ ‘get’, /ka/ ‘take’, /cajki/ ‘stand’, etc. (see also Bowern, 2014; Schultze-Berndt, 2000)

Compound verbs

- ▶ There is a large but unproductive class of compounds ($N = 336$), in which the verb stem is a compound consisting of non-finite coverb and finite verb root

(3) **ŋawujan-**canj+wu**-ni** ŋuku
2SG>3PL-supply+HIT-PC water
'You supplied them with water.' (Merlan, 1982, p. 65)

(4) **ŋijan-**kalic+ma**-ŋ**
3SG>1PL.EX-report+SAY-PP
'He reported to us.' (Merlan, 1982, p. 68)

Phrasal verbs

- ▶ Phrasal verbs are the largest class of verb lexemes ($N = 763$); coverb and finite verb are separate syntactic words
- ▶ 25 of the 36 monomorphemic finite verbs can be used
- ▶ There are 614 unique covers

(5) **paɻik** ca-na-n
dry.out 3.PR-BURN-PR

‘It’s drying out.’ (Merlan, n.d.)

(6) **taʔma** wur-ka-ŋij
lift.up 3DU-TAKE-PP

‘They lifted it up.’ (Merlan, n.d.)

COMPOSITIONAL CONSTRUCTIONS

Syntactic transparency

- ▶ The phrasal verb construction consists of two independent syntactic words
- ▶ Clitics (a) and modifiers (b) can intervene, and constituents can be reversed (c)

- (7) a. [wolor]=**ca** [ka-ŋa-ma]
be.hungry=EMPH PR-1SG-DO.PR
'I'm *hungry!*' (Merlan, 1982, p. 47, emphasis in original)
- b. [caŋ?~caŋ?] **majawa** [ka-ŋi-ma]
RED~die now PR-12DU-DO.PR
'Now you and I die.' (Merlan, 1996, p. 17)
- c. [**wur-jini-wa**] [**katca**]
3DU-GO.PC-NAR go.across
'The two (girls) went across.' (Merlan, 1996, p. 6)

Productivity

- ▶ Phrasal verbs are the only open / productive verb structure
- ▶ All English and Kriol loans are adopted into this structure (not as compounds or directly inflecting verbs)

(8) a. **ṭuŋk** wu|a-ma
drunk 3PL-DO.PR

‘They’re drunk.’ (adapted from Merlan, 1982, p. 129)

b. **klinim?** ḡa-ma-ɿ-wa patɿum
clean 1SG>3SG-DO-PC-FOC bathroom
‘I cleaned the bathroom.’ (Merlan, 1996, p. 65)

Semantically compositional constructions

- ▶ Out of 763 phrasal verb lexemes, 545 are potentially compositional structures (the rest involve the ‘do’ finite verb – stay tuned)
- ▶ 335/545 (~61%) can be analysed as being semantically compositional (coverb and verb have similar meanings)

(9) **ŋoncot** wuran-**pu**-ni-wa
whack 3SG>3DU-HIT-PC-NAR
'She whacked the two of them.' (Merlan, n.d.)

(10) **pul** **ja-wa-t-ak** cip-nawu
throw.on.ground 2SG>3SG-THROW-PP seed-3SG.POSS
'You threw the seeds on the ground.' (Merlan, n.d.)

(11) **jarp** wur-**ja**-c
go.separate.ways 3DU-GO-PP
'Those two split up.' (Merlan, n.d.)

Causatives

- ▶ One of the main uses of complex verb systems is to alter the transitivity or *aktionsart* of a given construction (see e.g., Baker & Harvey, 2010; Merlan, 1983; Schultze-Berndt, 2000; Wilson, 1999)
- ▶ Often, the choice of finite verb conditions these syntactic alternations

(12) Causative alternations with /paɻik/ 'dry out'

a. Intransitive

ca-na-n

3.PR-burn-PR

'It is burning.'

c. Intransitive

paɻik ca-na-n

dry.out 3.PR-BURN-PR

'It is drying out.' (Merlan, n.d.)

b. Transitive

ŋa-wa-ɻa-k

1SG>3SG-throw-PP

'I threw it.'

d. Causative

paɻik ɻa-k

dry.out 1SG>3SG-THROW-PP

'I dried it out.' (Merlan, n.d.)

Causatives continued

- ▶ Some other examples of /waɻ/ ‘throw’ as a causativiser

- | | |
|------------------------|--------------------|
| (13) a. ηօt ni- | (14) a. ηereṇ ma- |
| heap.up SIT- | cry DO/SAY- |
| ‘be in a heap/pile’ | ‘cry’ |
| b. ηօt waɻ- | b. ηereṇ waɻ- |
| heap.up THROW- | cry THROW- |
| ‘heap up, make a pile’ | ‘make someone cry’ |

Multiple causativisers

- ▶ But... causativisation is not entirely predictable
- ▶ Some pairs use other causative finite verbs, like /ka/ 'take' or /cut+ma/ 'cause'

(15) Unpredictable causativisation

a. Intransitive

maŋkaljaŋ ka-ŋa-jak
be.ashamed PR-1SG-GO.PR

'I am ashamed.' (Merlan,
n.d.)

c. Intransitive

paŋ? wut-ni-wa
sit.down 3DU-SIT.PR-NAR

'They sit down.' (Merlan, 1996, p. 5)

b. Causative

maŋkaljaŋ ŋanpa-ka-ni
be.ashamed 3PL>1SG-TAKE-PC

'They would shame me.'
(ibid.)

d. Causative

paŋ? wuŋa-cut+ma-ŋi-wa
sit.down 3PL>3SG-CAUSE+DO-PC-NAR

'They set it down.' (Merlan, 1996, p. 70)

Is that all?

- ▶ Apart from those 335 compositional lexemes (including the 39 intransitive-causative pairs), there are no other compositional phrasal verbs
- ▶ Compositional constructions make up about 43% of all phrasal verbs
- ▶ The rest are non-compositional in one way or another

NON-COMPOSITIONAL CONSTRUCTIONS

Lexicalised pairings

- ▶ 428 (~56%) of phrasal verbs are not straightforwardly compositional
- ▶ There are two relevant kinds of non-compositionality; the first is lexicalised, where the coverb and finite verb have no sensible semantic or syntactic relation

(16) **mir?** ka-ŋanpa-**na**-n
know PR-3PL>1SG-BURN-PR
'They know me.' (Merlan, n.d.)

(17) ŋa|a-la-wura **ca|uk** wuran-**jac**
mother-DU-3DU.POSS forget 3SG>3PL-GO.PP
'Their mother forgot them.' (Merlan, n.d.)

More lexicalised pairings

- ▶ There are about 210 such lexemes, and they are fairly easy to find

(18) **jalja?** ηan-wa-p
be.suspicious 3SG>1SG-VISIT-PP
'She was suspicious of me.' (Merlan, n.d.)

(19) **cimi** ηawujan-pu-ni
think.about 1SG>3PL-HIT-PC
'I thought about them.' (Merlan, 1982, p. 62)

(20) na-piwa **kal?ma** Ø-ni-ŋ
M.NOM-boy climb 3SG-SIT-PP
'The boy climbed up.' (Merlan, 1982, p. 26)

Auxiliary-like constructions

- ▶ The other type of non-compositional construction is one where the finite verb is /ma/ ‘say/do’
- ▶ There 154 phrasal verb lexemes of this type (~20% of all)
- ▶ Like ‘auxiliary’ constructions (e.g., Anderson, 2006) because the finite verb is completely bleached, has purely grammatical function

(21) Intransitive, stative

... **wolor** ka-ŋa-**ma**
be.hungry PR-1SG-DO.PR

‘I’m hungry.’ (Merlan, 1982, p. 35)

(22) Transitive, dynamic

wuŋaj **to?** a-ŋajan-**ma**
maybe shoot IRR-3SG>1PL.IN-DO.PR

‘They might shoot us.’ (Merlan, n.d.)

Excluding ‘do’ tokens

- ▶ On its own, /ma/ can be intransitive or transitive so we cannot say that it contributes argument structure
- ▶ Most non-stative predicates involve ‘doing’, so we cannot say that it contributes event structure
- ▶ The use of /ma/ with states, which involve no ‘doing’, suggests that it contributes nothing

Auxiliary constructions

- ▶ Arguably, only the coverb contributes predicate structure and therefore these constructions are not compositional
- ▶ The /ma/ verb is there simply to satisfy syntactic conditions: a finite verb is obligatory in the clause, but the class of finite verbs is closed
- ▶ That is, /ma/ is like a ‘dummy’ or ‘expletive’ verb that hosts all the required morphology but is otherwise meaningless
- ▶ Like expletive subjects in English, where an overt NP is required to satisfy syntactic minima: [[It]_{NP} [rained]_{VP}]_S but not *[[Rained]_{VP}]_S

Productivity revisited

- ▶ So, /ma/ phrasal verbs are probably not good candidates for ‘complex predicate’ because the finite element does no predication!!
- ▶ Let’s think about the implications of this fact in the context of their productivity
- ▶ If this were the only productive class of phrasal verbs, would it be practical to describe Mangarrayi as having complex predicates?

Loan productivity

- ▶ Loaned verb lexemes are always borrowed as coverbs with the /ma/ finite verb

(23) **citinj?** ηjin-ma-ŋ
cheat 3SG>1DU.IN-DO-PP
'They cheated us.' (Merlan, n.d.)

(24) **tɻwŋk** wula-ma
be.drunk 3PL-DO.PR
'They're drunk.' (adapted from Merlan, 1982, p. 129)

- ▶ Contrast this with some other Australian languages with productive phrasal verb systems, where loans combine with a semantically compatible finite verb (e.g., Marra: Baker & Harvey, 2010; Jaminjung: Schultze-Berndt, 2000; Bardi: Bowern, 2004)

Productivity more broadly

- ▶ The largest class of phrasal verbs is /ma/, which occupies about 20% of the (phrasal verb) lexicon
- ▶ Out of all the other phrasal verbs, about 40% are lexicalised
- ▶ It's probable that only the /ma/ class is open
- ▶ So, the only productive complex verb structure is one that doesn't intuitively fit the notion of 'complex predicate'

PROPOSALS AND REMAINING PROBLEMS

Criteria for ‘complex predicate’ in Mangarrayi

- ▶ What can we say about Mangarrayi complex verbs?
- ▶ If we rely on purely syntactic criteria for COMPLEX PREDICATE, then all phrasal verbs are complex predicates because they are monoclausal constructions with two verb-y elements (see also Haspelmath, 2024)
- ▶ If we introduce semantic criteria, we can be more restrictive: only compositional complex verbs are complex predicates, since both parts of the construction jointly contribute to the predicational meaning

A cost/benefit evaluation

- ▶ Both options have issues...
- ▶ Establishing a category of ‘complex predicate’ with purely syntactic criteria eliminates the distinction between compositional and auxiliary constructions, even though they demand different semantic generalisations
- ▶ Building in semantic criteria isolates compositional constructions, however these are a quantitative minority of the lexicon and don’t appear to be productive
- ▶ So, is ‘complex predicate’ a motivated – or useful – category in Mangarrayi? Is this concept necessary to describe languages like this?

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