

Complex Predicates in Tsafiki

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0. Introduction

In Tsafiki (Colorado), a Barbacoan language spoken by approximately 2,000 people in the western lowlands of Ecuador,¹ the majority of verbs are complex predicates, formed by a “coverb” and a “generic” verb. The coverb and the generic verb jointly determine the syntactic structure and semantic interpretation of a single clause. This, of course, is a defining characteristic of complex predicates (Mohan 1997). In this paper, I will argue that this process of complex predicate formation is not simply compositional in that, the meaning of the final construction cannot be attributed to solely the combination of the individual features of the coverb and the generic verb. The syntactic combination of the individual elements can create semantic participant roles, which are not present in any one of the elements in isolation.

After first presenting a general overview of complex predicates, in Section 2, I will present complex predicate constructions where the process is, to some extent, compositional. In Section 3, I will discuss a type of complex predicate in which the semantic participant role of the subject is created by the construction.

1. Complex Predicates

As noted above, complex predicates in Tsafiki consist of a coverb and a generic verb. Coverbs form a large open class. Coverbs are neutral elements that can occur with a nominalizing suffix to form a nominal (1) or with a generic verb to form a predicate (2). In (1) the nominalizing suffix on the coverb *tera* ‘step’

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results in a nominal, 'ladder', whereas when it occurs with the generic verb *ki* 'do/make/hit' it results in the predicate 'dance'.²

- (1) ya **tera-n-ka-ka** ke-e
ya **step-NM-NCL-ACC** do-DCL
"He made this ladder."
- (2) ya-ri **tera-ke-e**
3-FC **step-do-DCL**
"She danced."

In contrast to the coverbs, the 32 generic verbs form a closed class. A generic verb can occur as the sole predicating element in a finite clause. The generic verbs are listed in (3) below:

- (3) **Tsafiki Generic Verbs**
- | | | | |
|-------------|-----------------|-------------|--------------------|
| <i>piya</i> | 'lose' | <i>ki</i> | 'do' |
| <i>puya</i> | 'die' | <i>kari</i> | 'cause' |
| <i>ja</i> | 'come' | <i>suwa</i> | 'cause to become' |
| <i>ji</i> | 'go' | <i>ere</i> | 'send' |
| <i>la</i> | 'come out/up' | <i>po</i> | 'put' |
| <i>lo</i> | 'go out/up' | <i>ka</i> | 'get' |
| <i>fa</i> | 'arrive here' | <i>pa</i> | 'talk' |
| <i>fe</i> | 'arrive there' | <i>kira</i> | 'see' |
| <i>pata</i> | 'come down' | <i>fi</i> | 'eat' |
| <i>pati</i> | 'go down' | <i>ti</i> | 'say/feel/express' |
| <i>pola</i> | 'come across' | <i>i</i> | 'become' |
| <i>pole</i> | 'go across' | <i>ta</i> | 'have' |
| <i>wiya</i> | 'come in' | <i>ra</i> | 'be in a position' |
| <i>wi</i> | 'go in' | <i>jo</i> | 'be' |
| <i>luwa</i> | 'come floating' | <i>ito</i> | 'not be/not have' |
| <i>luwe</i> | 'go floating' | | |
| <i>nen</i> | 'go around' | | |

² Examples followed by letters and numbers in parentheses are taken from texts. All other examples are from my fieldnotes. The abbreviations used in this paper are: 1F-first person feminine; 1M-first-person masculine; 3-third person; ACC-accusative; ADV-adverb; ASSC-associative; CNGR-congruent; CNTR-contrastive; DCL-declarative; DEM-demonstrative; DS-different subject; EV-evidential; FC-focus; HS-hearsay; INCL-inclusive; INCP-inceptive; INF-infinitive; INSTR-instrument; INT-interrogative; IRR-irrealis; LC-locative; NCL-numeral/adjectival classifier; NCNGR-non-congruent; NEG-negative; NM-nominative; PF-perfective; PL-plural; PRG-progressive; SS-same subject; VCL-verb class marker.

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By comparing the above examples (4)-(6), it is possible to see that the final valency of the clause is a feature of the combination of the coverb with the generic verb. The use of *i* 'become' with the coverb *wiru* 'stand' in (4) results in an intransitive predicate. But the use of *i* 'become' with the coverb *mi* 'know' in (6) results in a transitive. This would seem to indicate that the coverb determines valency. However in (5) the same coverb *ba* 'unstick' forms a transitive predicate with *ki* 'do' and an intransitive with *ji* 'go', which indicates that it is not the coverb alone that determines valency.

The coverbs do not freely combine with all thirty-three of the generic verbs. Hence, the coverbs can be classified according to the set of generic verbs with which they can combine. *Wiru* 'stand' belongs to the set of positional coverbs that generally occur with *i* 'become', *kari* 'cause' and *ra* 'be in a position' to form an inchoative, a causative and a stative respectively. *Ba* 'unstick' belongs to a class of coverbs which regularly combine with *ji* 'go' and *ki* 'do/make/hit' to form an inchoative and causative construction respectively. This class includes *bo* 'crack', *be* 'chip', *biti* 'snap' which can all be roughly characterized as 'break' verbs.

In the next section two classes of intransitive coverbs will be examined in relation to their combination with various generic verbs.

2. Change-of-State and Manner-of-Motion Coverbs

As mentioned above, Tsafiki coverbs form their own grammatical class. However there is a subset of coverbs which can be identified as being derived from ideophones. Tsafiki has a large open class of ideophones, some of which can occur as coverbs. Long stressed vowels and repetition are distinguishing features of ideophones. Example (7) contains two ideophones. The first *biti::le* dramatizes the snapping off of a man's head by a giant lightning bug. The second *poton poton* is the sound of the head bouncing around after it is detached from the body.

- (7) **Biti::le** ka-ti-e su-lo-nin
snap-ADV get-HS-DCL feet off ground-go up-CNTR
- i-ti-e **poton poton poton**, misu-ka-ri
VCL.become-HS-DCL **poton poton poton**, head-NCL-FC
"He grabbed it **SNAP!** It just jumped up, **poton poton poton**, this head."
(AAPALUKA.70)

There are basically two classes of ideophones, those representing sounds and those representing movement. In (8), *biti* is repeated twice to dramatize the movement. Note that (8) codes a sound and implies that there is some other participant in the event which is interacting with the subject to produce the sound. In contrast (9) simply codes the manner of motion and there is no other implied participant.

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- (8) ya **biti biti** ji-e
3 **snap snap** go-DCL
“He went snapping (through the brush).”
- (9) ya **soko soko** ji-e
3 **writhe writhe** go-DCL
“He went writhing writhing.”

When these same ideophones occur as coverbs there is a striking difference in the constructions. *Biti* occurs with *ji* ‘go’ to code a change of state (10). The participant that was only implied when *biti* occurred as an ideophone is now the subject of a change-of-state predicate construction, whereas *soko* continues to simply code manner of motion (11).

- (10) na-ka chide ali **biti-ji-e**
small-NCL stick branch **snap go-DCL**
“The twig snapped.”
- (11) pini foro-bi nechi **soko-ji-e**
snake hole-LC from **writhe-go-DCL**
“The snake slithered out of the hole.”

The intransitive structures formed with *ji* ‘go’ imply that coverbs such as *biti* ‘snap’ select a single non-agentive participant, whereas agentive coverbs such as *soko* ‘writhe’ select a single agentive participant. Hence, the differences between these constructions could be solely due to the semantic roles of the participants selected by the coverb. However, the dual behavior of motion verbs, particularly in analyses addressing unaccusative and unergative categories, has often been noted in the literature (Rosen 1984, Levin, 1995). The subject of a motion verb can be portrayed as either the instigator of the action or the entity which undergoes a change of location. The dual nature of motion verbs allows them to occur with either an intransitive agentive or non-agentive coverb. The subject will carry the participant role emphasized by the coverb.

2.1 Intransitive coverbs occurring with *ki* ‘do/make/hit’

When the intransitive coverbs discussed above combine with *ki* ‘do/make/hit’ there is again a striking difference between the two constructions. The complex predicate with *biti* ‘snap’ now codes a causative change-of-state (12), while *soko* ‘writhe’ codes nontranslational motion (13).

- (12) ya na-ka chide ali-ka **biti-le ke-e**
3 small-NCL tree branch-ACC **snap-ADV do-DCL**
“He snapped the twig.”

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- (13) *junni kuru a-ti-to soko ke-e.*
then *guatusa* scream-say-SS **writhe** do-DCL
“Then the *guatusa* writhed, screaming .”

Example (12) clearly demonstrates that the generic verb can contribute to the argument structure of the predicate. The single nonagentive participant of the coverb *biti* ‘snap’ is coded as the object and the agentive participant of *ki* ‘do’ is coded as the subject of the clause. When *ki* ‘do’ combines with the coverb *soko* ‘writhe’ the result is an intransitive clause with a single agentive subject (13). *Ki* ‘do’ is ambitransitive in that it can occur in either transitive or intransitive constructions.

Both change-of-state coverbs and motion coverbs can also occur with transitive generic verbs. As noted above, *wiru* ‘stand’ can occur with *-i* ‘become’ to form an inchoative and *ra* ‘be in a position’ to form a stative. To form a causative, *wiru* can combine with *kari* ‘cause’. In (14) *kari* contributes an agentive participant to the clause which is coded as the subject, while the non-agentive argument of *wiru* ‘stand’ is coded as the object.

- (14) *ya chide-ka wiru-kari-e*
3 tree-ACC **stand-cause**-DCL
“He stood the pole up.”

When manner-of-motion coverbs combine with a transitive generic verb, the agentive participant of the coverb loses its status in terms of being the primary effector (Van Valin and Wilkins 1995) or ultimate cause (DeLancey 1984, 1991) of the event conveyed in the proposition. The transitive generic verb adds an agent/causer while the coverb participant is coded as the causee. *Su* ‘feet off the ground’ combines with the intransitive *ji* ‘go’ to indicate running (15). When it combines with the transitive *ere* ‘send’ it results in a causative predicate (16).

- (15) *susu su-ji-e*
dog **feet off ground-go**-DCL
“The dog ran.”
- (16) *ya susu-ka su-ere-e*
3 dog-ACC **feet off ground-send**-DCL
“He sent the dog running.”
- (17) *la ya-ka tienda-ka ere-yo-e*
1M 3-ACC store-LC **send-CNGR**-DCL
“I sent him to the store.”

Ere ‘send’ and *kari* ‘cause’ always occur in transitive constructions such as (17). Unlike *ki* ‘do’, both always require two participants. In (14) and (16) above,

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the agentive argument of the generic verb is coded as the subject, regardless of the agentivity status of the semantic participant of the coverb. The single participant of the intransitive coverb is coded as the object.

The interaction of the two types of coverbs with various generic verbs can be summarized as follows:

- | | | |
|------|-----------------------------------|--|
| (18) | nonagentive cov. + <i>ji</i> ‘go’ | = nonagentive intransitive |
| | agentive cov. + <i>ji</i> ‘go’ | = agentive manner of motion intransitive |
| | nonagentive cov. + <i>ki</i> ‘do’ | = causative change-of-state transitive |
| | agentive coverb + <i>ki</i> ‘do’ | = nontranslational motion intransitive |
| | nonagentive cov. + trans. | = causative change-of-state transitive |
| | agentive cov. + trans. | = causative transitive |

3. *Ki/i*-class coverbs

The next class of coverbs to be discussed is the by far the largest class in Tsafiki, these coverbs can combine with *ki* ‘do/make/hit’ or *i* ‘become’. So far all the coverbs discussed have been intransitive, contributing a single agentive or nonagentive participant to the clause. The *ki/i* class of coverbs differs in that the coverbs in this class are transitive. This is unproblematic when they occur with *ki* ‘do’. As we have seen above, *ki* is ambitransitive occurring in both transitive and intransitive constructions. With a transitive coverb there is compatibility between the agentive participant of the coverb and the agentive participant of the generic verb. Both are agentive participants and the two converge on a single subject. The nonagentive participant of the coverb is coded as the object (19).

- (19) Juan Gloria-ka **aman-ke-e**
Juan Gloria-ACC **hug-do-DCL**
“Juan hugged Gloria.”

However when combined with *i* ‘become’, there is a conflict between the agentive participant selected by the coverb and the nonagentive participant of the generic verb. When the generic verb *i* ‘become’ occurs as a simple verb, it forms a predicate construction with a non-agentive subject (20).

- (20) Juan peperoka **i-e**
Juan black dung beetle **become-DCL**
“Juan became/turned into a black dung beetle.”

When *i* ‘become’ combines with a transitive coverb the conflict between the agentive participant of the coverb and the nonagentive participant of the generic verb is resolved by creating an affected agent participant role. The following example occurred during a discussion concerning the movie Terminator II. In the movie the Terminator protects a child from flying bullets by holding the child in front of him while the bullets fly into his back.

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- (21) terminadori na-ka bala ika-tu-sa pore-i-e.
 terminator child-ACC bullet crash-NEG-DS cut-**become**-DCL
 “The terminator prevented the bullets from hitting the child (by using his own body).”

If the terminator did not use his own body to stop the bullets the presence of *i* ‘become’ is inappropriate and *ki* ‘do’ is used instead (22).

- (22) terminadori na-ka bala ika-tu-sa
 terminator child-ACC bullet crash-NEG-DS

 lata-chi pore-**ke**-e.
 sheild-INSTR cut-**do**-DCL
 “The terminator used a shield to prevent the bullets from hitting the child.”

The reflexive like reading resulting from the complex predicate formed with *i* ‘become’ and a transitive coverb can be seen as a direct result of the convergence of the two participant roles selected by the generic verb and the coverb on a single argument, the subject.

The creation of the affected agent participant role can also arise from the syntactic construction. In Tsafiki, the syntactic subject of an active clause will always be interpreted as the primary effector or ultimate cause of the event. This can be seen most clearly in the passive construction. In the passive construction, the affected entity is coded as the subject, the doer of the action occurs with an oblique suffix *-be* and the verb occurs as a perfective participle which is followed by *i* ‘become’. But the affected entity, the subject, carries the role of controller and/or instigator of the event. This is not predictable from its role as the effected entity of the action conveyed by the verb, nor from the nonagentive semantic role normally associated with the verb *i* ‘become’. The agentive properties of the subject arise from the construction. This is illustrated in (23) and (24). An inanimate subject is not allowed in these constructions (25).

- (23) ...ya-ri miya-**be**-nan ka-**ya** i-no-yo-e
 ... 3-FC king-**ASSC**-INCL get-**PF** **become**-INF-CNDR-DCL
 “...she would let this king himself take her” (MIYA2.12)
- (24) tsanke kono-ri kela-**be** fi-ka i-tu-man-ti-e
 so rabbit-FC tiger-**ASSC** eat-PF become-NEG-SIT-HS-DCL
 “So in this way, they say the rabbit didn’t let the tiger eat him.” (SA13)
- (25) *tsanke ano-ri kela-**be** fi-ka i-tu-man-ti-e
 so platano-FC tiger-**ASSC** eat-PF become-NEG-SIT-HS-DCL
 (Intended reading) “So in this way, they say the platano didn’t let the tiger eat it.”

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There is another possibility with this combination, which creates a structure very similar in meaning to the passive above, i.e. the nonagentive participant of the generic verb could converge with the nonagentive participant selected by the coverb. But, as illustrated in (23) and (24) above the syntax of the construction will impose a reading in which the subject is interpreted as the instigator of the event, regardless of the presence of an agentive participant selected by the coverb. When this occurs, the result is a permissive causative. In (26) the star woman allows the Tsachi to see her, but the Tsachi, who actually performs the act of seeing, occurs with the associative marker *-be*. This differs from (21) above, in which there were two affected participants, the bullets, which were cut-off and the agent who used his own body to stop them.

- (26) ya tsabo sona ya jaatsanke tsachi-**be** kira-i-to...
 3 star woman 3 like.this tsachi-ASSC **see-become-SS**
 “This star woman appearing like this to the Tsachi...” (Cctsabo1.142)

The coverb *pore* ‘cut’ can also occur with this permissive reading (27). Note that there is a change in vowel quality that indicates that the subject of the clause is coreferent with the patient of the coverb and not the agent as it was in (21). (This is not so readily apparent in (26) where the coverb ends in a low vowel). In this clause, the speaker controls and instigates the event but the actual act is performed by another person (27).

- (27) tse Maria-**be** a pura-i-yo-e
 1F Maria-ASSC hair **cut-become-CNGR-DCL**
 “I had (my) hair cut by/with Maria.”

In the following example taken from a text, Salun, a mythical character has been using his unusually long private appendage as a lasso. He throws it into a clump of bamboo, hoping to use it to pull himself out of the river. Instead it gets tangled in the trees and cut off and he goes floating down the river.

- (28) aman a-ti-e ti-ti-‘ loberto loberto loberto
 now scream-say-DCL say-HS-DCL loberto loberto loberto

 numi wari numi **pora-i-to...**
 penis EMPH penis **cut-become-SS...**
 “They say he screamed ‘loberto loberto loberto’ when he got his penis cut off...” (Aasalun.134)

One more possible, although related interpretation, for these complex predicates concerns the degree of resistance offered by the affected entity. Unlike the passives, inanimates are allowed in these constructions, but the reading is always that, contrary to expectations, the action was carried out easily (29).

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- (35) sili Juan-**be** **pura-i-e**
rope Juan-ASSC **cut-become**-DCL
“The rope cut (easily) with Juan.” (This implies that the rope was difficult to cut, nobody thought it could be cut, but it cut easily with Juan)

Although these constructions have an inanimate subject, the subject is portrayed as the effector of the action, i.e. the action occurs because of the potential malleability of the subject. In these constructions, whether the subject be animate or inanimate, it carries the role of instigator of the action conveyed by the proposition.

4. Conclusion

Complex predicates comprise the major strategy utilized by Tsafiki to encode events which in other languages are encoded by a single verb. The constructions differ from other types of complex predicates in that the process by which the constructions are formed is not strictly compositional. I have argued that the construction itself can create semantic participant roles that are not individually selected by the coverb or the generic verb, but created by their combination in certain syntactic constructions. The type of complex predicate described here is also found in the non-Pama-Nyungan languages of Northern Australia (Schülze-Berndt 2000). The parallelism found between the Tsafiki complex predicates and the complex predicates found in these languages, indicates that these types of systems are not simply an idiosyncrasy of an individual language or group of related languages, but rather comprise yet another typologically possible system for conveying events. Further research on these types of systems needs to be done to explore the extent to which the proposal presented here is the canonical pattern within languages with these types of complex predicates.

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