

The development of complex predication in Turkic: Uyghur light verbs

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Light verbs (LVs), which modulate the meaning of a main verb and differ from other complex predicates in quantity, semantic range, and structural properties, have been described both as V+N and V-V sequences. These two structures may or may not be related, and their semantics are poorly understood cross-linguistically, regardless of the term used (e.g. “LVs”, “coverbs”, “restructuring predicates”). Uyghur [ISO 639-3: uig] exemplifies Turkic and has both V+N and V-V constructions. This paper analyzes the formal and semantic co-occurrence properties of V-V sequences, since these are unusually elaborated in Uyghur, expressing aspectual and actional nuances of the preceding lexical V, as well as telicity, agency, and directionality. I hypothesize that LVs form a verb class distinct from lexical verbs and auxiliaries; are defined by a range of formal and functional criteria; and can be diachronically unstable (contra Butt 2003). The paper evaluates the diachronic development of monoclausal V-V sequences in Uyghur and other Turkic languages, and concludes that these developed from serial verbs rather recently.

Contrast the non-LV uses of *ket-* ‘depart, leave’ in (1a-b) with the light-verb use in (1c). (1a) is an independent simplex predicate; (2b) illustrates use of converbial *-IB* in a “serial” verb construction; and (1c) as an aspectual/actional modification on the lexical verb (*chiq-* ‘emerge’). Though all three converbial constructions are structurally related, only in (1c) is *ket-* monoclausal, where it loses its literal meaning and acquire a new sense.

(1) a. As a lexical verb (non-converbial, simplex predicate):

Men kinoxanidin **kettim.** ‘I left the movie theater.’

PN1sg movie.theater-ABL leave-PST.DIR1sg

b. As a (provisionally) “serial” verb construction (see e.g. Lord 1993):

Men kinoxanigha **kirip,** kino körüp, sa’at üçte **kettim.**

PN1sg movie.theater-ABL enter- CNV movie see- CNV time three-LOC leave-PST.DIR1sg

‘I went into the theater, saw a movie, and left at three o’ clock.’

c. As an aspectual/ actional complex predicate (“light verb”):

men tünügün shundaq hérip kettim. ‘Iwas so (totally) exhausted yesterday.’
PN1sg yesterday so.much be.tired-CNV leave- PST.DIR1sg

Clarifying the status of the developments above leads to a better understanding of the range of complex predicates in Turkic. Using corpus-based diachronic evidence, as well as a range of formal and semantic criteria allows these results to be compared cross-linguistically. For example, the form of such complex predicates in Uyghur is strikingly like that of Hindi/Urdu, whereas their diachronic development apparently differ. The comparison of related and antecedent languages (e.g. Uzbek and Middle Turkic) provides ontological evidence for complex predicate development, and suggests potential universal principles in relations between LVs and other types of complex predicates.

References.

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