

## An LFG Approach to Complex Predicates in Swahili

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Swahili (or *Kiswahili*) is an agglutinative, Bantu language spoken in Eastern Africa, mainly in countries such as Tanzania (official language), Kenya (national language), Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi. Dialects of Swahili are also spoken in Zambia, Malawi and on northern Madagascar and the Comoro Islands.

This paper deals with constructions such as the one in (2), which resemble a typical verb-object relation (cf. (1)). However, a closer and a more detailed morphosyntactic analysis shows that the grammatical relation between the verb and the postverbal NP in (2) is different from that in (1).

- (1) *Juma*            *a-li-m-pig-a*                            *mwizi.*  
C1.Juma            C1.SM-PST-C1.OM-hit-FV            C1.thief  
'Juma hit the thief.'
- (2) *Juma*            *a-li-pig-a*                                        *mwayo.*  
C1.Juma            C1.SM-PST-hit-FV                        C3.yawn  
'Juma yawned.'

This paper aims at analyzing V + N sequences like the one in (2) as complex predicates, based on analogous discussions on Persian (Megerdumian 2002), Hindi (Mohan 1994), Urdu (Butt 1995), Japanese (Grimshaw and Mester 1988) and English (Cattell 1984; Kearns 2002). The verb that is most productive in the process of complex predicate formation (*argument merger*) in Swahili, is the verb *-piga* 'to beat, hit, strike'. It is referred to as the *light verb*, since its semantic content is of a minor importance, and bearing an impoverished argument structure the light verb serves mainly as a verbal licenser for the noun (Butt 2003), which provides the major semantic input and participates in the final establishment of the argument structure of the entire complex predicate. The aspectual interpretation of a complex predicate is interdependent on the light verb and the nominal complement.

The formation of complex predicates in Swahili is not a periphrastic alternative to simplex verbs, as it is in English, where nouns which enter light verb constructions are derived from verbs, and the morphological form of such a noun is either identical (*Jennifer dashed across the road/ Jennifer made a dash across the road*) or strongly related to the corresponding verb (*The Prime Minister appeared at the concert/ The Prime Minister made an appearance at the concert*) (Cattell 1984). In Swahili, simplex verbs which would convey the meaning of performing certain actions are either missing (*to yawn: -piga mwayo; to iron: -piga pasi*), or are used rarely due to their sophistication (*to sneeze: -chemua* vs. *-piga chafya; to photograph: -fotoa* vs. *-piga picha*). An easy way of obtaining verbs is to derive them from nouns – a phenomenon which is found in English, where one can use a denominal verb to describe such peculiar activities as for instance putting the books on the shelf (*John shelved the book*) or providing the horse with a saddle (*Bill saddled the horse*) (Hale and Keyser 1993; Kiparsky 1997). However, in Swahili no such possibility exists and verbs cannot be derived from the nouns *mwayo* 'a yawn', *pasi* 'an iron', *chafya* 'a sneeze' or *picha* 'a photo' in order to describe relevant activities. Therefore, in this paper I view the formation of complex predicates as a means of filling gaps in the Swahili lexicon and enriching it with new verbal concepts that are easily acquired by native speakers.

In my examination of this phenomenon, I draw on the concept of complex predication as elaborated by Butt (1995; 1998) and Butt, King and Ramchand (2007), and I present my analysis within the theoretical framework of *Lexical-Functional Grammar* (LFG) (Dalrymple 2001; Butt et al. 1999). This nonderivational, post-Chomskyan theory has already been successfully adopted for the purpose of investigating double object constructions and locative inversion in another Bantu language – Chicheŵa (Bresnan and Kanerva 1989; Bresnan and Moshi 1993; Alsina and Mchombo 1993). Nonetheless, it has not been applied to studying Swahili syntax yet. The three main levels of representation used in LFG, namely *c(onstituent)-structure*, *f(unctional)-structure* and *a(rgument)-structure*, as well as the system of annotations and the linking architecture (*Lexical Mapping Theory* (LMT)), make it possible to account for the syntactical divergence of sentences in (1) and (2), whose linear structures are so much alike.

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