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Complex verb constructions in Hill Mari: semantics and event structure

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Research topic

Complex predicates (CP) in Hill Mari:

1.	mən’	cüdej-en	kolt-en-äm
	I	get.surprised-CVB	send-PRET-1SG
		lexical verb	light verb

‘I got surprised’.

Data

- Hill Mari (Finno-Ugric).
- Spoken in the Republic of Mari El along with Meadow Mari.
- Fieldwork in 2016–2018 in the village of Kuznetsovo and its surroundings, see more at http://hillmari-exp.tilda.ws/en/
- Elicitation.
- Corpus of transcribed oral narratives (ca. 45000 tokens).

Previous studies

- Descriptive work in [Serebrennikov 1960; Pengitov et al. 1961; Chkhaidze 1969; Bradley 2010] etc.
- Lists of light verbs, some semantic features, some syntactic properties.
- More research is needed on:

✓ semantic restrictions on lexical verbs;

✓ syntactic analysis;

✓ what properties of a CP can be predicted from the properties of a light verb.

Structure of the talk

1. Syntax of CPs
2. Semantics of some CPs
3. Analysis

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General rule

- If a CP is subject to any syntactic process, it is always the light verb that is inflected, while the lexical verb remains intact:

2. *mən’ Vas’a [kagôl’ xälä **kačk-ə̂mə̂**
   I V. pie all eat-NMLZ
   kolt-en gəc] lüd-äm
   send-PRET from be.afraid-NPST.1SG
3. mən’ [Vas’a kagôl’ xälä **kačk-ə̂n**
   I V. pie all eat-CVB
   kolt-ə̂mə̂ gəc] lüd-äm
   send-NMLZ from be.afraid-NPST.1SG
   ‘I am afraid that Vasya will eat the whole pie’.

Inseparable construction

- No constituent can be inserted between the parts of a CP.

4.	Vas’a	kagâl’-âm	**kačk-ân̂**	**kolt-en**
	V.	pie-ACC	eat-CVB	send-PRET
	‘Vasya ate a/the pie [completely]’.			
5.	*Vas’a	**kačk-ân̂**	kagâl’-âm	**kolt-en**
	V.	eat-CVB	pie-ACC	send-PRET
	‘Vasya ate a/the pie [completely]’.			

Ellipsis

- Light verbs can be omitted, but lexical verbs cannot:

6. Vas'a **cüdej-en** **kolt-en** dä
   V. get.surprised-CVB send-PRET and
   Pet'a=at **cüdej-en**
   P.=ADD get.surprised-PRET
   'Vasya got surprised, and Petya did so too'.

7. *Vas'a **cüdej-en** **kolt-en** dä
   V. get.surprised-CVB send-PRET and
   Pet'a=at **kolt-en**
   P.=ADD send -PRET
   Int.: 'Vasya got surprised, and Petya did so too'.

- A light verb can always be omitted without the loss of grammaticality.

1. Syntax of complex predicates (CP)
2. Semantics of some complex predicates
3. Analysis

General observations

- Light verbs usually introduce a resulting state (if the lexical verb cannot project it) or emphasize it ('V is done *completely*').
- Different light verbs have different semantics.
- Light verbs combine with different types of predicates.
- The meaning of a complex predicate can be predicted => complex predicates are derived compositionally in syntax.

Case studies

- We investigated several light verbs: *koltaš* ‘to send’, *keäš* ‘to go, to leave’, *šənzäš* ‘to sit down’, *šəndäš* ‘to seat’, *šalgaš* ‘to stand’, *šagalaš* ‘to stand up’, *šuaš* ‘to throw’, *kəškäš* ‘to throw (about a multiple action)’, ‘to reach’.
- A case study: *koltaš; keäš; šəndäš (+ šənzäš):*

- denote telic events;
- quasi-synonyms;
- *šəndäš and šənzäš*: formed from the same root, share the crucial semantic properties.

koltaš ‘to send’: literal use

- An achievement in its literal use:

  Attenuative marker can only modify a resulting state but not the process => the transition to a resulting state is conceptualized as instantaneous:

8. *%Vas’a* *âškal-âm* *kolt-al-ân*

   V. cow-ACC send-ATT-PRET

   ‘Vasya drove a/the cow for a short time’ (i.e. the cow was out of some place not very long)

   *‘Vasya was not driving a/the cow long’.

koltaš ‘to send’: CPs

- Semelfactive

9. *vas’a* *pičäl* *gäc* *lü-en* ***kolt-ə̂š***
   V. gun from shoot-CVB send-AOR
   ‘Vasya shot a gun once’.

- Completive

10. *män’* *šäšer-äm* *jü-n* ***kolt-en-äm***
    I milk-ACC drink-CVB send-PRET-1SG
    ‘I drank all / *some milk’.

- Unexpected event

11. *tädä* *tol-ə̂n* ***kolt-en***
    he come-CVB send-PRET
    ‘He has come (unexpectedly)’.

šänzäš ‘to sit down’ & *šändäš* ‘to seat’: literal use

- A process, not a punctual event:

12. *papa* *minut* *närə* *kreslä-š*
    grandmother minute APPROX armchair
    šänz-eš
    sit.down-NPST.3SG
    Lit.: ‘Grandmother is sitting down into an armchair for about a minute’.

13. *mən’* *lu* *minut* *pi-m* *mašinä-š* ***šänd-em***
    I 10 minute dog-ACC car-ILL seat-NPST.1SG
    Lit.: ‘I am seating the dog into the car for 10 minutes’.

- A resulting state (‘somebody is sitting’) is typically available to the observer.

šänzäš ‘to sit down’ & šändäš ‘to seat’: CPs

- Typically *šänzäš* with intransitive verbs, *šändäš* with transitive verbs.
- Completive
- Accumulation of a resource or quality:

14.	*vas’a*	*peckä-m*	*väd*	*dono*	***tem-en šänd-en***
	V.	barrel-ACC	water	with	fill-CVB seat-PRET

‘Vasya has filled the barrel with water’.

- Creating a new entity:

15.	*püergä*	*toma-m*	***stroj-en***	***šänd-en***
	man	house-ACC	build-CVB	seat-PRET

‘The man has built a house’.

šänzäš vs. *koltaš*

16. *papa cålan-åštå l'ävärä-m už-ån dä kogo-n…*
grandmother kitchen-IN dirt-ACC see-PRET and big-ADV…
'Grandmother saw dirt in the kitchen and … very much'.

- *šädešk-en* *kolt-en*
get.angry-CVB send-PRET
'immediately got angry'
- *šädešk-en* *šänz-än*
get.angry-CVB sit.down-PRET
'got angry and remained angry for some time' => **a resulting state**

keäš ‘to go, to leave’: literal use

- Leaving

17. *tädä* *uže* ***ke-n***
    he already go-PRET
    {Where is the boss?} ‘He has already left’.

- Motion to some direction (the latter is more frequently expressed overtly).

18. *vas’a* ***ke-ä*** *kukšlidä-škä*
    V. go-NPST.3SG Kukshilidy-ILL
    ‘Vasya is going to (the village of) Kukshilidy’.

- No reference to preparation for leaving.

19. *vas’a* *šukə̑* *veremä* ***ke-ä***
    V. much time go-NPST.3SG
    ‘Vasya is going (somewhere) for a long time’.
    *‘Vasya is preparing to leave for a long time’.

keäš ‘to go, to leave’: CPs

- A resulting state of a telic process (usually with gradual achievements) & fast development of the process:

20. *paj* *maklaka (jäle* / *??olen)* ***šə̂l-en*** ***ke-n***
meat piece fast slowly thaw-CVB leave-PRET
‘A piece of meat thawed (fast / ??slowly)’.

- The same with some result verbs, the temporal distance is not specified:

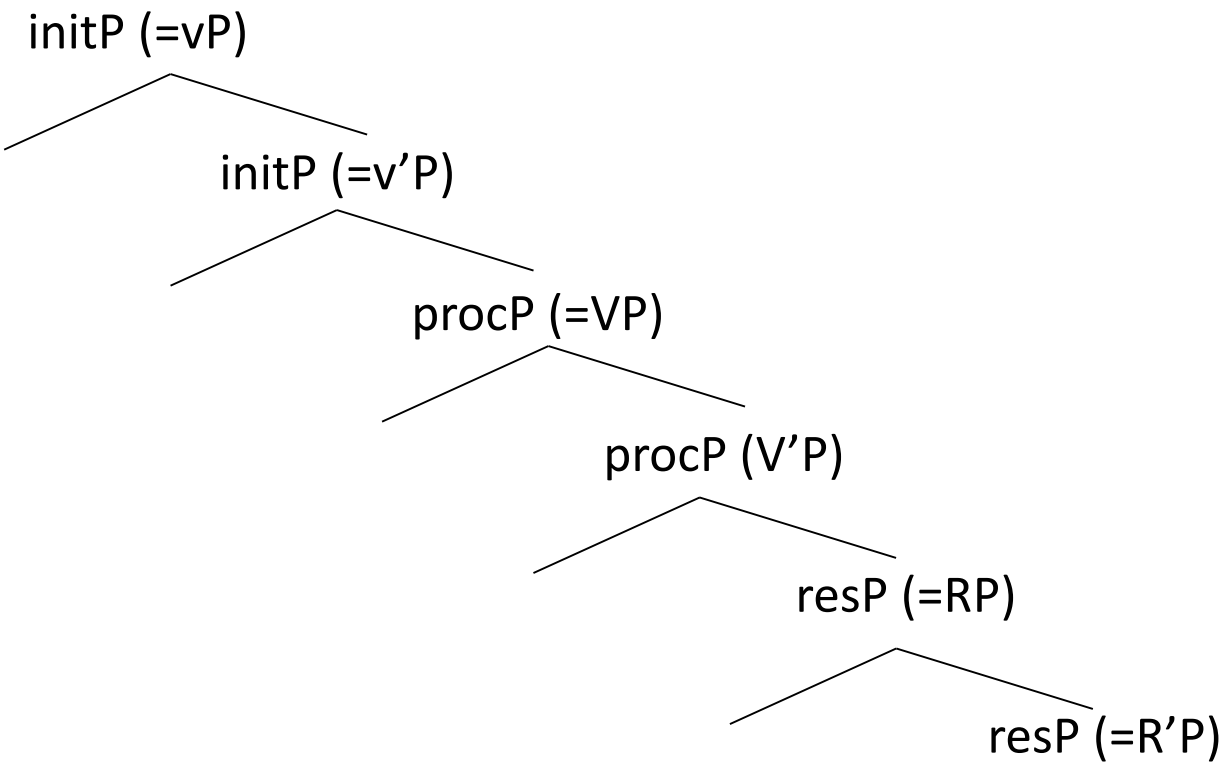
21. *vas’a* ***kol-en*** ***ke-n***
V. die-CVB go-PRET
‘Vasya died’. (OKsuddenly after a heart attack; OKafter a long illness)

- Incompatible with atelic processes:

22. **ädäräš* ***vaštə̂l*** ***ke-n***
girl laugh.CVB go-PRET
Int.: ‘The girl stopped laughing’.

1. Syntax of complex predicates (CP)
2. Semantics of some complex predicates
3. Analysis

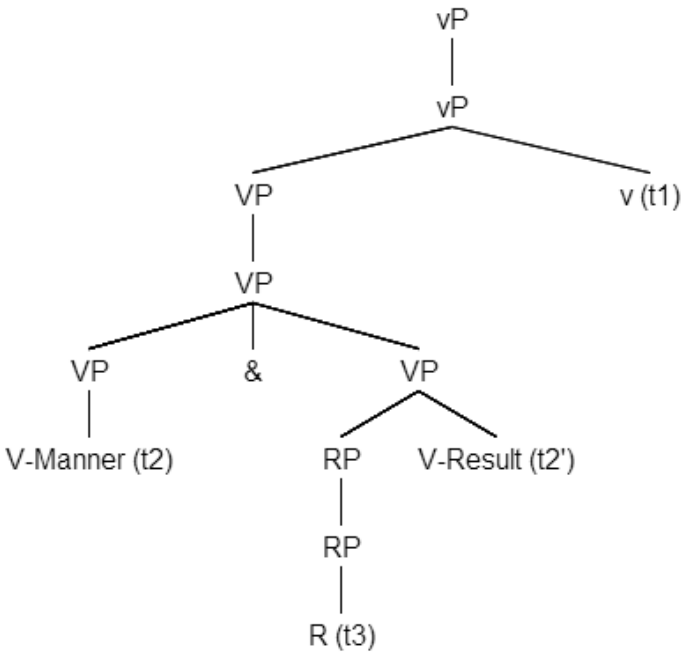
- Ramchand's event structure framework [Ramchand 2008]
- A verb can be inserted into one to three functional projections which are responsible for describing initial, process and resulting subevents



Chain verbs in Turkic languages

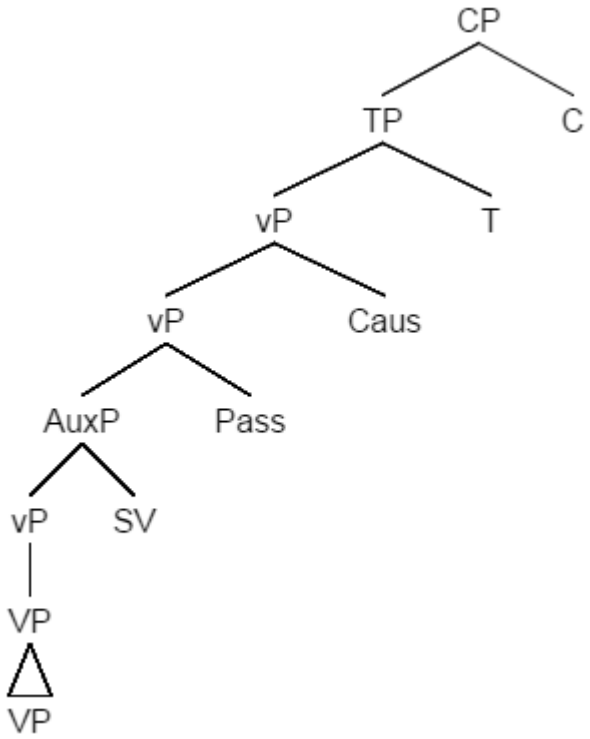
[Grashchenkov 2017]:

- Turkic complex predicates are investigated which are believed to be the source for Hill Mari complex predicates (see the discussion in [Chkhaidze 1969: 96-98; Honti 2013])
- At least two basic structures are postulated
- Complex predicates as VP coordination.
- Initiator and undergoer are common with both verbs, but process subevents are not.



Chain verbs in Turkic languages

- One more option: some verb collocations are analyzed as chain verbs
- Light verbs are projections which c-command lexical verbs and are only accessible to syntactic processes (negation, passivization etc.)



What about Hill Mari?

- [Grashchenkov 2017]: light verbs are functional projections which preserve some semantic features of corresponding verbs but cannot project their own arguments
- The same features are observed in Hill Mari complex predicates – as we have seen before, their syntactic structure is the same:

23.	**mən’*	*Vas’a*	*[kagə̑l’*	*xälä*	***kačk-ə̑mə̑***
	I	V.	pie	all	eat-NMLZ
	kolt-en	*gəc]*	*lüd-äm*		
	send-PRET	from	be.afraid-NPST.1SG		
24.	*mən’*	*[Vas’a*	*kagə̑l’*	*xälä*	***kačk-ə̑n***
	I	V.	pie	all	eat-CVB
	kolt-ə̑mə̑	*gəc]*	*lüd-äm*		
	send-NMLZ	from	be.afraid-NPST.1SG		

‘I am afraid that Vasya will eat the whole pie’.

- The question still remains: how can the semantics of the light verb (and further that of the whole CP) be derived from its primary meaning?

Our proposal

- Light verbs are projections which do not preserve their lexical meaning but preserve some of its crucial semantic components
- Light verbs have quite a general and abstract meaning
- The meaning of a light verb and, therefore, of a complex predicate can be predicted by taking into account some important semantic features

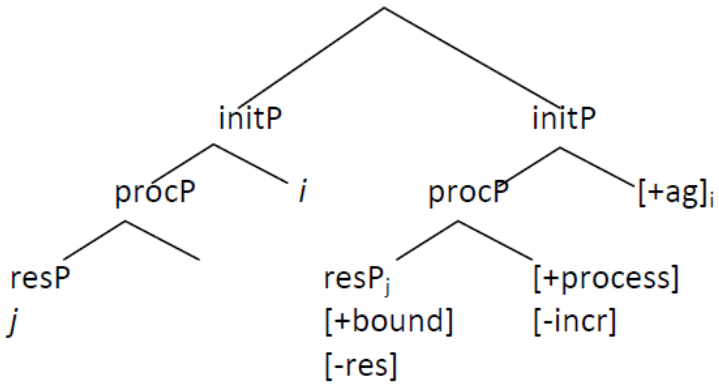
Our proposal

- Lexical verbs may have a different set of projections than light verbs.
- Example: the light verb *šalgaš* ‘to stand’ (→habitual action)

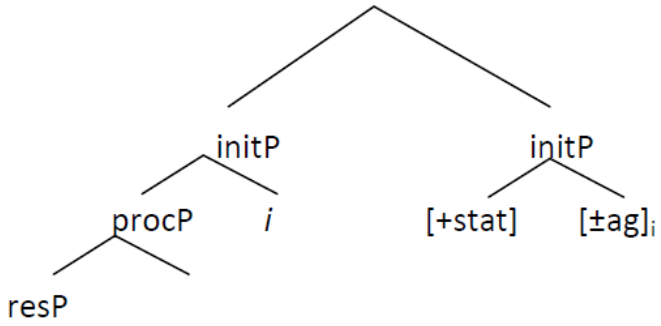
25. *ti ärvezä-m tâmd-âšâ-vlä so* ***xval’-en šalgat***
this boy-ACC teach-PTCP.ACT-PL always praise-CVB stand-NPST.3PL
‘Teachers always praise this boy’.

- In Ramchand’s framework it can only be inserted into an *init,P* projection but it can combine with [init, proc] (e.g. *lâdaš* ‘to read’) or [init, proc, res] verbs (e.g. *pâdârtaš* ‘to break’) => the complex predicate cannot be a VP-coordination structure

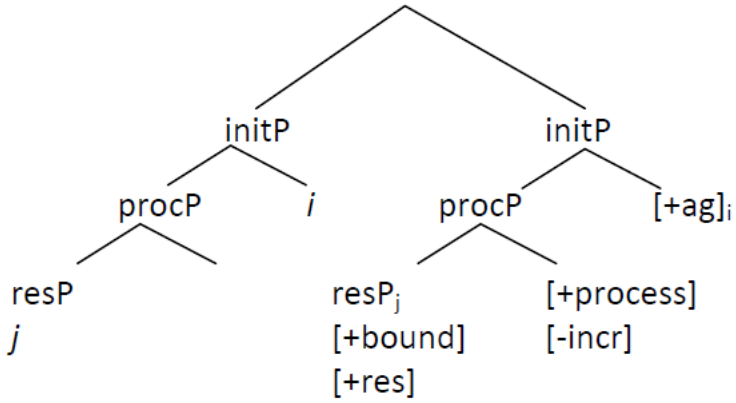
koltaš



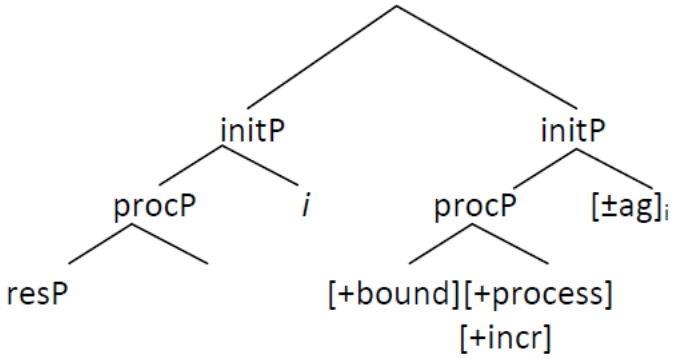
šalgaš



sändäš



keäš



Light verbs as bundles of features

- [**ag**] – the event contains an agent, [**stat**] – the event is stative (in Ramchand's terms, it contains only initP), [**process**] – event is continuous (not instantaneous), [**incr**] – incrementality, [**bound**] – telicity, [**res**] – resulting state of the participant
- *koltaš* and *šändäš* can be distinguished lexically by the character of the resulting state. The verb 'to send' denotes actions which are exhausted when finished, and the verb 'to seat' denotes actions which lead to an observable result. In this respect, 'to seat' resembles gradable change-of-state predicates
- In *keäš*, as we suggest, telos (=[+bound] feature) is introduced by Path arguments (either 'towards X' or 'from X'). This telos can be relative since the verb is a gradual achievement

Light verbs as bundles of features

Predictions:

- CPs with *šalgaš* denote stative-like situations **true**
- CPs with *koltaš* denote quick (instantaneous) telic events **true**
- CPs with *šändäš* denote events which are non-instantaneous and can be regarded as gradual achievements. The resulting state of the participant can be observed **true**

Light verbs as bundles of features

- CPs with *koltaš* are also non-incremental, and incrementality of some verbs can be "erased":

26. *Vas'a* *kanavə̂-m* ***kapaj-en*** ***kolt-en / šänd-en***
V. ditch-ACC dig-CVB send-PRET seat-PRET
'Vasya dug a/the ditch'

27. *Vas'a* *šäšer-äm* ***jü-n*** ***kolt-en***
V. milk-ACC drink-CVB send-PRET
'Vasya drank all the milk / *some milk'.

28. *ärvezä* ***kušk-ə̂n*** ***ke-n*** ***/ %kolt-en***
boy grow-CVB go-PRET send-PRET
'The boy has grown [%I have not seen him for a long time]'.

Semantic shift to mirativity?

29. *Vas'a* ***kol-en*** ***kolt-en***
V. die-CVB send-PRET
'Suddenly, Vasya died'.

Conclusion and challenges

- We propose that light verbs in Hill Mari are functional projections. Light verbs have lost their lexical meaning but do preserve their crucial semantic features
- The set of these features depends on the event structure of the verb that gave rise to a light verb. Each sub-event is characterized by some basic abstract feature(s)
- Bundles of these features determine sets of interpretations available for a CP

Theoretical problems:

- Light verbs tend to become emphatic/mirative markers
- The light verb *keäš* combines mostly with gradual achievements. They are both identical in their event structure, and the telos of gradual achievements is always relative. Thus, the interpretation ‘have done V completely’ or ‘have done V fast’ must be accounted for with respect to the relative nature of the telos