

*The Difference
between*

CONVERBS

&

COVERBS

Are they both Complex Predicates?

Daniel Krauße

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EXAMPLE OF A CONVERB AND A COVERB

Converb

- (1) *Carcaxa urʁcə id-äd xaj-ža-na.*
locust crop **eat**-CVB.ANT **throw**-PROG-PRS
'Locusts are eating (all) the crop.' (Baranova 2013:20)

[Kalmyk, Mongolic]

Coverb

- (2) *Gabarn-a wek-ka g-a-ra-n.*
quick-NPFV **swallow**-NPFV PRS-3>3SG-**throw**-PST
'He swallows it quickly.' (Wilson 1999:46)

[Wagiman, Australian]

EXAMPLE OF A CONVERB AND A COVERB

Converb

- (3) *Bitánee* *ʔoós-uwa* *wurs-ídí* *ʃemp-eési.* [Wolaitta, Omotic]
man.M.NOM work-M:ABS **finish-CVB.M** rest-3SG.M.IPFV
'Having finished work, the man rested.' (Amha & Dimmendaal 2006:323)
-

Coverb(s)

- (4) *Burrb-nyunga* *warrg* *ga-ram-biyang* *waga-bina.* [Jaminjung, Mirndi]
finish-ORIG work 3SG-come.PRS=NOW sit-ALL
'Having finished work, she comes now to sit down.' (Schultze-Bernd 2000:113)

EXAMPLE OF A CONVERB AND A COVERB

Converb

- (3) **Using** a sharp axe, he fought his way into the building.
(König 2016, ms.)

[English, Germanic]

Coverb

- (4) Zhōngguó rén **yòng** máo bǐ xiě zì.
China person **use** hair writing.brush write Chinese.character

[Mandarin, Sinitic]

‘The Chinese write characters **with/using** a writing brush.’ (DeFrancis 1963:215)



So, what is the difference?

*Let me concentrate on
coverbs*

DEFINITIONS

“A **converb** is a nonfinite verb form whose main function is to mark adverbial subordination.”

(Haspelmath 1995:3)

“**Converb**: A reduced form of a verb which, unlike full forms, does not distinguish tenses.”

(Matthews, Oxford Concise Dictionary of Linguistics, 2003)

“A **coverb** is a derived preposition, related to their corresponding verbs.”

(Clark 1975:4)

(Cf. Haspelmath 1995:37 who terms this a **converb**)

“**Coverbs**, like adverbs, do not inflect, and they are restricted to certain positions. [...] although **coverbs** are not grammatically obligatory, the meaning and, occasionally, also the argument structure of a clause may be completely changed if the coverb is omitted.”

(Schultze-Bernd 2000:71)

Neither term is listed in Trask’s *Dictionary of Grammatical Terms in Linguistics* (1993)

SUMMARY OF DEFINITIONS

Converbs are:

- derived from a verb stem
- always non-finite
- **optional** adverbial modifiers
- not arguments of verbs

Cf. Ross (2016) for definitions, including:

Participles = deverbal adjectives

Gerunds = deverbal nouns

Infinitives = arguments of verbs

Coverbs in the Sinitic literature are:

- homophones of verbs
- **optional** preposition-like markers of peripheral arguments

Coverbs in the Australian literature are:

- a word class on their own
- always non-finite
- either **optional** adverbial modifiers or predicational constituents in a complex predicate

Cf. Krauße (2020, forthc.) for definitions, including:

Coverbs = potentially predicational constituents

Serial verbs = strings of independent verb roots in a single clause

Complex predicate = monoclausal structure of one necessarily predicational constituent and at least one potentially predicational constituent

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CASE STUDY FOR COVERBS: WAGIMAN

Background

- spoken in northern Australia
- isolate within Australian language family
- 2 remaining L1 speakers

Linguistic profile:

- synthetic + agglutinative features
- split-ergative (ergative for nouns, accusative for pronominal affixes)
- non-configurational
- word order pragmatically determined, tends to be V-final
- flexible constituent order, but constituents are normally not intervened by other parts-of-speech
- about 560 attested coverbs, 43 attested verbs



For grammatical information on Wagiman, see:
Cook (1987)
Wilson (1999)
Krauße & Harvey (2021)
Krauße (forthc.)

COVERB CONSTRUCTION IN NORTHERN AUSTRALIAN LANGUAGES

- (5) *Lagiban* **durdut-ta** *g-a-ya.* **g-a-durdut* [Wagiman]
Aboriginal.man **run**-NPFV PRS-3-go PRS-3-run
'The man is running.'
(or 'The man goes runningly.')
- (6) *Lagiban* **gabarn-a** *g-a-ya.* **g-a-gabarn*
Aboriginal.man **quick**-NPFV PRS-3-go PRS-3-quick
'The man goes quickly.'
(or 'The man is quick.')

COVERB CONSTRUCTION IN NORTHERN AUSTRALIAN LANGUAGES

- (5) *Lagiban* *durdut-ta* *g-a-ya.*
Aboriginal.man **run**-NPFV PRS-3-go
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[Wagiman]

- (6) *Lagiban* *gabarn-a* *g-a-ya.*
Aboriginal.man **quick**-NPFV PRS-3-go
'The man goes quickly.'
(or 'The man is quick.')

 **predicational coverb** vs. **adverbial coverb**

COVERB CONSTRUCTION IN NORTHERN AUSTRALIAN LANGUAGES

complex predicate

(5) *Lagiban*

Aboriginal.man

<i>durdut-ta</i>	<i>g-a-ya.</i>
run-NPFV	PRS-3-go

[Wagiman]

'The man is running.'

(or 'The man goes runningly')

adjunct simple predicate

(6) *Lagiban*

Aboriginal.man

<i>gabarn-a</i>	<i>g-a-ya.</i>
quick-NPFV	PRS-3-go

'The man goes quickly.'

(or 'The man is quick.')

Cf. Krauße & Harvey
(2021) for more examples

↪ **predicational coverb** vs. **adverbial coverb**

COVERB CONSTRUCTION IN NORTHERN AUSTRALIAN LANGUAGES

	adjunct	complex predicate		
(7) <i>Lagiban</i> Aboriginal.man 'The man is running quickly.'	<i>gabarn-a</i> quick-NPFV	<i>durdut-ta</i> run-NPFV	<i>g-a-ya.</i> PRS-3-go	[Wagiman]

	complex predicate			
(8) * <i>Lagiban</i> Aboriginal.man (intended: 'The man is running quickly.')	<i>durdut-ta</i> run-NPFV	<i>gabarn-a</i> quick-NPFV	<i>g-a-ya.</i> PRS-3-go	
	adjunct			

COVERB CONSTRUCTION IN NORTHERN AUSTRALIAN LANGUAGES

(9) *Dongonyin* *lurrutj-ja* *jubungh-a* *g-a-∅-ba-bu-n.* [Wagiman]
cycad.nut **forceful-NPFV** **pound-NPFV** PRS-3-3P-NSG-**hit**-PRS
'They are pounding the cycad nuts forcefully.'

(10) **Dongonyin* *jubungh-a* *lurrutj-ja* *g-a-∅-ba-bu-n.*
cycad.nut **pound-NPFV** **forceful-NPFV** PRS-3-3P-NSG-**hit**-PRS
(intended: 'They are pounding the cycad nuts forcefully.')

COVERB CONSTRUCTION IN NORTHERN AUSTRALIAN LANGUAGES

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cycad.nut **forceful-NPFV** **pound-NPFV** PRS-3-3P-NSG-**hit**-PRS
'They are pounding the cycad nuts forcefully.'

adjunct complex predicate

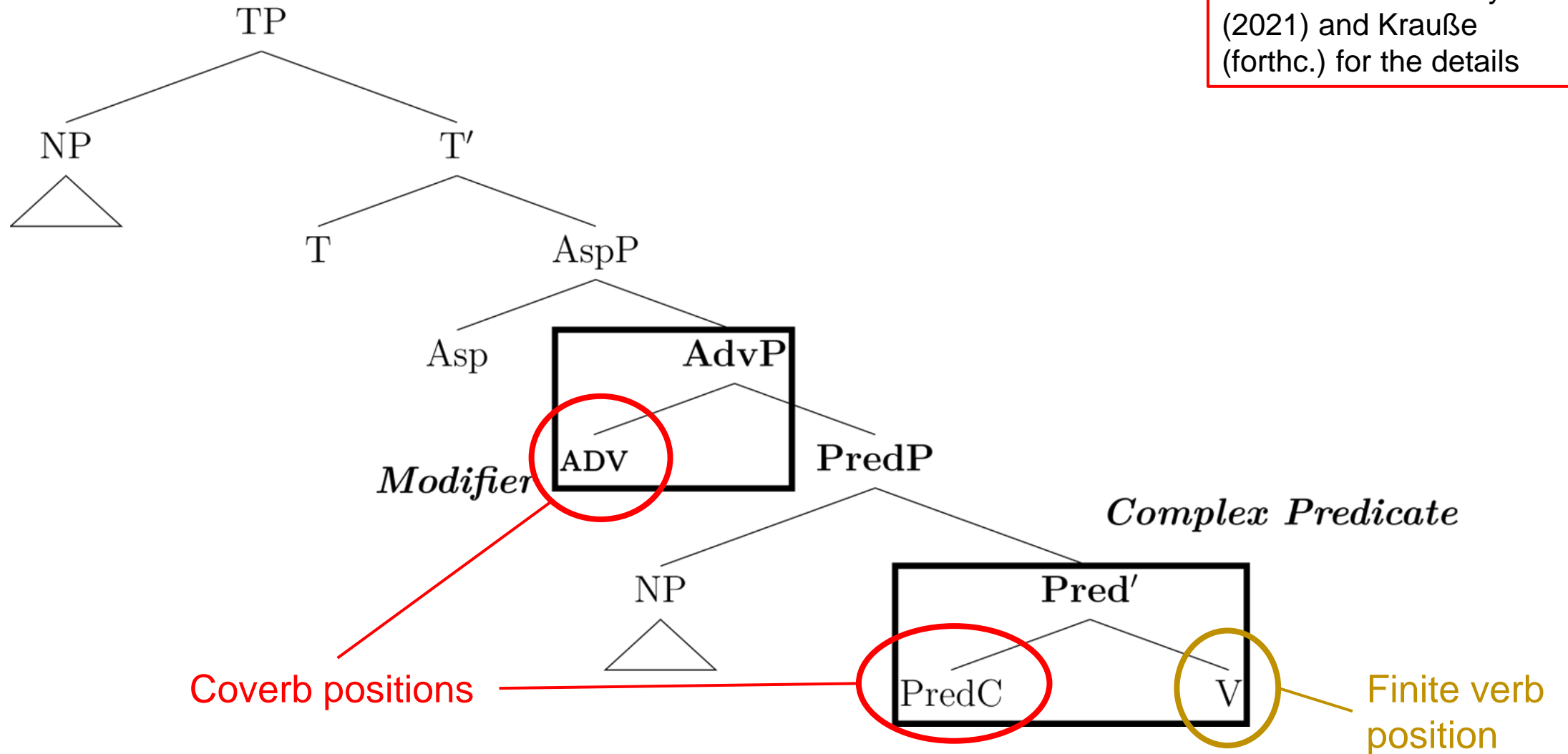
(10) **Dongonyin* **jubungh-a** **lurrutj-ja** *g-a-∅-ba-bu-n.*
cycad.nut **pound-NPFV** **forceful-NPFV** PRS-3-3P-NSG-**hit**-PRS
(intended: 'They are pounding the cycad nuts forcefully.')

complex predicate

adjunct

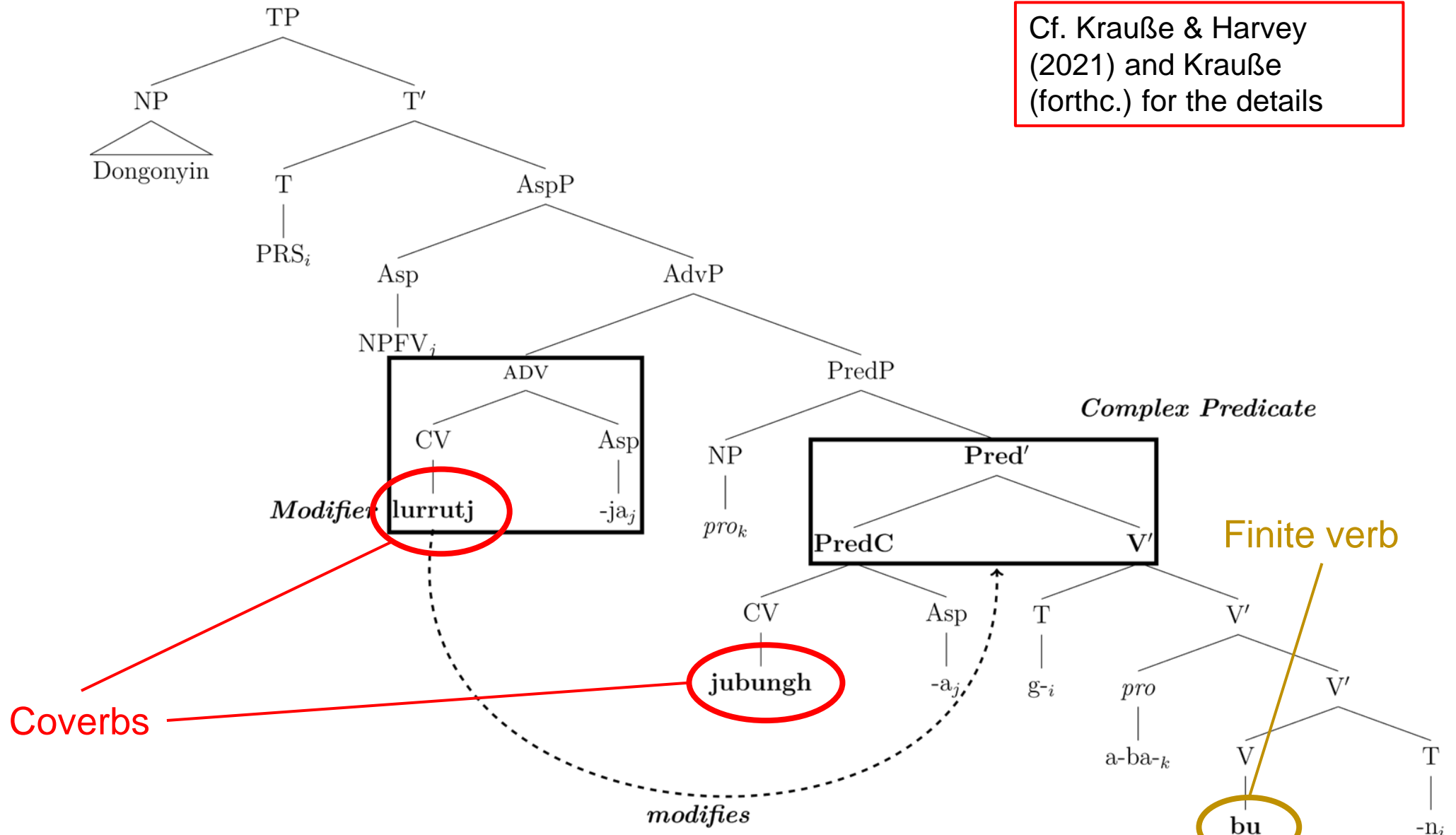
COVERB CONSTRUCTION IN NORTHERN AUSTRALIAN LANGUAGES

Cf. Krauße & Harvey
(2021) and Krauße
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USES OF COVERB CONSTRUCTION IN NORTHERN AUSTRALIAN LANGUAGES

1. Complex Predicate

- (11) *Lamang* *ngerrp-pa* *g-a-∅-ba-bu-n.* [Wagiman]
meat **cut**-NPFV PRS-3-3P-NSG-**hit**-PRS
'They are **cutting** the meat.'

Compare the simple predicate

- (12) *Yonggorn* *guda* *ng-a-∅-du-ni.*
meat firewood PST-1SG.A-3P-**cut**-PST
'Yesterday, I **cut** the firewood.' (Tryon 1971:4)

- (13) **Lamang* *g-a-∅-ba-ngerrp-n.*
meat PST-1SG.A-3P-**cut**-PST
(intended: 'They are **cutting** the meat.')

USES OF COVERB CONSTRUCTION IN NORTHERN AUSTRALIAN LANGUAGES

2. Imperatives

- (14) *Gud ba-iyaj, mugurn-marnany.* [Jaminjung]
get.up IMP-be **sleep**-PRIV
'Get up, no sleeping!' (Schultze-Berndt 2000:82)

Compare the complex predicate imperative

- (15) *Waj ba-wunga wajgany.*
leave IMP-**leave** honey
'Leave the honey alone.' (Schultze-Berndt 2000:94)

- (16) **nga-waj-ny* vs. *nga-wunga-ny.*
1SG>3SG-**leave**-PST 1SG>3SG-**leave**-PST
(intended: 'I left it.') 'I left it.'

USES OF COVERB CONSTRUCTION IN NORTHERN AUSTRALIAN LANGUAGES

3. Verbalization

- (17) *Gahan lagiban-yi, ng-a-n-dalh-ma-yi.* [Wagiman]
DEM.MED Aboriginal.man-ERG PST-1SG-3A-punch-VBZ-PST
'That man punched me.' (Wilson 1999:82)

Compare the underived form

- (18) *Waytpela-yi gayh-yi dalh-Ø ng-a-n-ma-ny.*
white.man-ERG DEM.MED-ERG punch-PFV PST-1SG-3A-get-PPFV
'That white man punched me.' (Wilson 1999:82)

USES OF COVERB CONSTRUCTION IN NORTHERN AUSTRALIAN LANGUAGES

4. Purposive subordinate clauses

(19) *Nyila=ma garu ga-ngga darugab-gu!*

[Bilinarra, PNy]

DEM=TOP child take-IMP **bathe**-DAT

'Take that kid **swimming!**' (Meakins & Nordlinger 2014:318)

Compare the complex predicate

(20) *Darugab-ba=yina yuwa-rra gubuwubu-yawung na.*

bathe-EP=3NSG.O **put**-PRS lemon.grass-PROP FOC

'Then she **bathes** them with the lemon grass tea.' (Meakins & Nordlinger 2014:90)

USES OF COVERB CONSTRUCTION IN NORTHERN AUSTRALIAN LANGUAGES

5. Valency change

(20) <i>-(i)nya</i>	'to catch, to pick up'	obligatorily transitive	[Bardi, Nyulnyulan]
a) <i>ngalar -(i)nya</i>	'to have one's eyes open'	intransitive	
b) <i>marrmarr -(i)nya</i>	'to flasch'	intransitive	
c) <i>galgooriny -(i)nya</i>	'to swim breaststroke'	intransitive	
d) <i>roowil -(i)nya</i>	'to walk'	intransitive	
e) <i>joony -(i)nya</i>	'to suck (something)'	transitive	
f) <i>bawinbawin -(i)nya</i>	'to cut up'	transitive	

(Bowern 2010:56)

USES OF COVERB CONSTRUCTION IN NORTHERN AUSTRALIAN LANGUAGES

7. Adverbial modification

- (23) *Gahan* **worok-∅** *lem-wi* *gu-ya* *gahan* *goron.* [Wagiman]
DEM.MED **wash**-PFV be.in-EXCL 3FUT-go DEM.MED house
'That (current) will wash right inside the house.'
(lit.: 'That will enter **washingly** right inside the house')

Compare the following sentences:

- (24) *Gahan* **lem-wi** *gu-ya* *gahan* *goron.*
DEM.MED **be.in**-EXCL 3FUT-go DEM.MED house
'That (current) will go right inside the house.'

- (25) ?*Gahan* **worok-∅** *gu-ya* *gahan* *goron.*
DEM.MED **wash**-PFV 3FUT-go DEM.MED house
(intended: 'That (current) will wash right into the house.')

USES OF COVERB CONSTRUCTION IN NORTHERN AUSTRALIAN LANGUAGES

adjunct

complex predicate

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DEM.MED **wash-PFV** be.in-EXCL 3FUT-go DEM.MED house
'That (current) will wash right inside the house.'
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complex predicate

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DEM.MED **wash-PFV** 3FUT-go DEM.MED house
(intended: 'That (current) will wash right into the house.')

adjunct

COMPARISON BETWEEN CONVERBS AND COVERBS

Converbs:

- are non-finite
- are always derived from a verb stem
- typically occur in subordination (embedded)
- are optional
- have no fixed position
- are often adverbial modifiers of the entire clause or proposition

Coverbs in Northern Australian languages:

- are non-finite
- are never formally derived from a verb stem
- predominantly occur in the same clause as the finite verb (not embedded) but can occur independently
- are optional
- have a very high tendency of occurring adjacent to the finite verb when used in a complex predicate
- **often form a complex predicate with the finite verb** of the same clause
- can be adverbial modifiers of the finite verb, rarely of the entire clause or proposition

COMPARISON BETWEEN CONVERBS AND COVERBS

Converbs and complex predicates:

- **cannot** form a complex predicate **with the finite verb of the matrix clause** because complex predicates are always monoclausal
 - **can** form complex predicates with the finite verb **if no subordination is involved** (cf. Baranova 2013 for Kalmyk and Ross 2016 for Udmurt)
 - implication: if converbs are defined as verb forms of subordination, then they cannot form complex predicates
 - → definitional problem?
-

Coverbs and complex predicates:

- **often form a complex predicate with the finite verb** of the same clause, as their argument structure is retained
 - do not form a complex predicate with the finite verb of the same clause if they are adverbial modifiers because they have no argument structure in this position
 - cannot enter complex predication when they are used independently, even though their argument structure is retained)
 - the syntactic position of the coverb determines their argument structure
-

Definition of complex predicate:

A complex predicate is a monoclausal structure in which one necessarily predicational constituent and at least one potentially predicational constituent merge on the nuclear layer of a clause and on the same level in the c-structure, so that the overall argument structure and event structure are equal to those of an underived monomorphemic predicate.

SUMMARY

Non-finite verb form	infinitive	converb	participle	action nominal	coverb
Syntactic function	argument (= subject, object, oblig. adverbial)	(free) adverbial (= adjunct)	attribute (+ adjectival predicate)	— (that of nouns)	part of the verb complex in a complex predicate or free adverbial (= adjunct)
Word class	verbal / derived	verbal / derived	adjectival (nominal) / derived	nominal / derived	coverbal / underived
Derived from	verb root	verb root	verb root	verb root	—

(based on Ylikoski 2003:228)

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