

# A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF COMPLEX PREDICATES IN *GERMAN AND YORÙBÁ* LANGUAGES

**Ezekiel Oludare OLAGUNJU**

**Chercheur**

**Département des Langues Étrangères  
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile- Ife, Nigeria**

**Deborah Ibukun ADEYEYE**

**Chercheur**

**Département des Langues, Littératures Allemandes et Slaves  
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park,  
États-Unis d'Amérique**

## **Abstract**

The study presents a contrastive analysis of complex predicates in German and Yorùbá. It identifies German and Yorùbá complex predicates. The research further categorizes the morphological and syntactic features of the identified predicates. Furthermore, the morpho-syntactic roles of the identified complex predicates are analysed by comparing and contrasting their roles in both German and Yorùbá languages. How the addition of morphological constituents function in the formation of complex predicates, in the two languages under consideration, is the focus of this paper. The discussion is done within the framework of Contrastive Analysis Theory of Robert Lado. The result of the work shows that the majority of complex predicates in both German and Yorùbá is made up of two constituents, while those having more than two constituents are in the minority. The research finds out that complex predicate in German is a product of prefixation while complex predicate in Yorùbá is a product of compositional constituents. While prepositions play a key role in their formation in German, nouns in Yorùbá are the major compositional constituents of complex predicates. The study reveals composite nature of the verb forms in both languages coupled with their morphological traits hence instantiating areas of learning difficulties for Yorùbá learners of German and German learners of Yorùbá language pedagogically.

**Keywords:** Contrastive Analysis, Complex Predicates, Composition, Derivation, Morphology, Syntax

## *Análisis contrastivo de los predicados complejos en Alemán y Yorubá*

### **Resumen**

El estudio presenta un análisis contrastante de predicados complejos en los idiomas alemán y Yorùbá. Esto identifica predicados complejos alemanes y Yorùbá. La investigación categoriza aún más las características morfológicas y sintácticas de los predicados identificados. Además, los roles morfo-sintácticos de los predicados complejos identificados se analizan comparando y contrastando sus papeles tanto en el alemán como en el idioma Yorùbá. Cómo funciona la adición de constituyentes morfológicos en la formación de predicados complejos, en las dos lenguas bajo consideración, es el centro de este documento. La discusión se realiza en el marco de la Teoría del Análisis Contrastivo de Robert Lado. El resultado del trabajo muestra que la mayoría de los predicados complejos en alemán y Yorùbá se compone de dos constituyentes, mientras que los que tienen más de dos constituyentes están en minoría. La investigación halla que el predicado complejo en alemán es un producto de la prefijación mientras que el predicado complejo en Yorùbá es un producto de componentes compositivos. Mientras las preposiciones juegan un papel clave en su formación en alemán, los sustantivos son los principales

componentes compositivos de predicados complejos en el Yorùbá. El estudio revela la naturaleza compuesta de las formas verbales en ambas lenguas junto con sus rasgos morfológicos por lo tanto, instanciando áreas de dificultades en el aprendizaje para los alumnos de alemán de habla Yorùbá y los alumnos alemanes del idioma Yorùbá pedagógicamente.

**Palabras clave:** análisis contrastivo, predicados complejos, composición, derivación, morfología, sintaxis

## Introduction

Contrastive Analysis, which is described by Acheaoh (2013) as a process by which two languages are compared so as to identify the areas of differences and similarities in their linguistic patterns, is the field of this research. The German and Yorùbá languages are selected for the purpose of this analysis because they belong to different language families. While German belongs to the Germanic language group of languages, Yorùbá language belongs to the Kwa group of languages. The purpose of the study is to compare and contrast the morphological constituents of the two distinctive language groups with a view to bringing out the behaviours of their complex predicates.

Different German and Yorùbá researchers have at one time or the other paid much attention to the morphological formation and the syntactic functions of complex predicates. Müller (2002), for instance, describes complex verbs as verbs that have undergone derivational process in order to modify the form, meaning and argument structure of their basis verb.

Complex verbs in both German and Yorùbá, as the name implies, are not without complexities. The focus of this work would be a detailed analysis of morphological and syntactical differences and similarities of complex verbs in both languages. The German complex verbs were selected from the German novel *Blechtrommel* by Gunter Grass and the Yorùbá complex verbs are from the Yoruba novel *Ogboju ode ninu igbo irumole* by D. O. Fagunwa. The literary works are selected based on the fact that they employed a standard variety of the languages. Secondary sources will include books, journal articles and the Internet.

## 1. Complex Predicates in German

Complex predicates in German are combinations of multiple words that functions as a single verb with one of its components carrying inflections indicating tense, mood or aspect. These predicates are formed by the addition of separable or inseparable prefixes to verbs: *einkaufen*, *teilnehmen*, *unterschreiben*, *erfahren*. These prefixes could either be a noun: *rad fahren* - to cycle; a verb: *spazierengehen* - to go for a walk; a particle: *erfahren* - to experience;

or any other parts of speech. Syntactically, the first element of German predicates is positioned at the end of the clause: *radfahren* - to cycle = *Ingrid fährt gern Rad* - Ingrid likes cycling; while only the second element of such complex predicates is declined even if the first element is another verb: *radfahren* - to cycle = *Ingrid hat Rad gefahren*, *einkaufen gehen* - to go shopping = *Ingrid ist einkaufen gegangen*. A characteristic feature of German is its ability to create verbs with new meanings through the addition of prefixes. Many verbs in Germany are created from the addition of prefixes to:

- i. nouns e.g., *Urlaub* - holiday/leave > *beurlauben* – to grant a leave,
- ii. adjectives e.g., *einfach* – simple > *vereinfachen* – to simplify and
- iii. other verbs: *gehen* – to go > *spaziergehen* – to go shopping.

When prefixes are added to verbs, they create new verbs with their own meanings. Sometimes – not always – the new word or verb is similar in meaning with the root verb: *fragen* – to ask > *befragen* – to question. The newly formed verbs sometimes seem related to the root verb or is even opposite in meaning: *kaufen* – to buy > *verkaufen* – to sell. Attimes, the addition of prefixes results in change in meaning of a verb so substantially that the newly formed verb have no apparent semantic relationship to the root verb (*hören* – to hear > *aufhören* – to stop/cease; *fahren* – to drive > *erfahren* – to experience).

However, Steinbach et al (2007) grouped the German complex predicates into four: prefixed verbs: *zerfallen*, particle-prefixed verb: *umfahren*, particle verb: *umfahren* and double-particle verb: *hineinlaufen*. However, this study identifies two major types of complex predicates in German: the predicates that are both morphologically and syntactically separable i.e., the particle verbs and those that are morphologically and syntactically inseparable i.e., the prefix verbs.

### 1.1. Particle verbs

Dehe (2015) describes particle verbs as verbs having combinations of verbs and preposition-like elements. Particle verbs are a type of complex predicates which can be morphologically or syntactically subdivided into two constituents. According to Müller (2002) and Duden (2000), particle verbs are complex verbs with morphological and syntactical first constituent which is also called prefix, half prefix, postponed pre-verb, or verb particle. According to Willeke (2006), particle verbs in German include separable complex verbs with

pre-verb: *spazieren* in ***spazierengehen*** and particle verbs with initial adverbs, adjectives and/or prepositions: *ab-*, *auf-*, *nach-*, *unter-*, *wider-*, *fest-*, *frei-*.

Particle verbs are morphologically and syntactically separable. The verbal particle of particle verbs are essentially prepositions, adjectives, verbs, adverbs and nouns. While the verb occupies the left sentence bracket, the verbal particle occupies the right sentence bracket in declarative sentences. The position of the particle in German sentence depends on the sentence type or structure. A detailed description of particle verbs in German is as follows:

- i. **Prepositional verb particles:** They function as the core of verbal lexicon because they freely join themselves to simple verb in order to create new verbs. 79.3% of complex verbs examined in this research is a product of prepositional verb particles. Particle verbs formed with prepositional particles include verbs like *abraten*, *auffallen*, *aussprechen*, *nachlesen* etc.

<b>Prepositional particles</b>		<b>Verbs</b>	
<i>ab</i> (from)	+	<i>raten</i> (to advise/guess)	- to discourage/ dissuade
<i>auf</i> (upon/at)	+	<i>fallen</i> (to fall)	- to stand out/notice
<i>aus</i> (from/of)	+	<i>sprechen</i> (to speak)	-to express/pronounce
<i>nach</i> (after)	+	<i>lesen</i> (to read)	- to cross-check

- ii. **Adverbial verb particles** are not productive in the formation of complex verbs in German and German adverb of place like *oben*, *unter*, *hinter* do not function as particles of complex verbs. 17% of complex verbs examined in the data are made up of adverbial verb particle.

<b>Adverbial particles</b>		<b>Verbs</b>	
<i>hervor</i> (out of/from)	+	<i>ziehen</i> (to pull/drag)	- to pull out/remove
<i>voraus</i> (ahead/to the front)	+	<i>setzen</i> (to place/put)	- to require/ demand
<i>zusammen</i> (together)	+	<i>lesen</i> (to read)	- to read together
<i>zurück</i> (back)	+	<i>treiben</i> (to create/do)	- to repel/repluse

- iii. **Particle verbs with verbal particles:** Particle verbs with verbal particle are considered product of composition as against others which are product of derivational processes. They account for 0.2% of the examined verbs for this study.

Verbs		Verbs
<i>kennen</i> (to know somebody)	+	<i>lernen</i> - to meet somebody (to learn/study)
<i>spazieren</i> (to stroll)	+	<i>gehen</i> - to stroll/walk (to go/ walk)

- iv. **Particle verbs with adjectival particles:** Simple adjectives like *fest*, *fern*, *weiter* function as verb particle as opposed to complex adjectives like *un*, *ur*, *miss*, which do not function as verbparticle. Only 3.6% of complex verbs in this study are made up of adjectival verb particle.

Adjectives		Verbs
<i>fest</i> (firm/tight)	+	<i>halten</i> - to retain/adhere (to hold/to keep)
<i>fern</i> (far/distant)	+	<i>bleiben</i> - to be absent (to remain)
<i>fort</i> (gone)	+	<i>führen</i> - to continue (to lead)
<i>frei</i> (free)	+	<i>machen</i> - to disengage/vacate (to do/make).

- v. **Particle verbs with nominal particles:** Nominal particle are not productive in complex verb formation in German language though complex verb with nominal constituents can sometimes be derived through other morphological process like conversion: *Schulmeister/lecturer* - *schulmeistern/ to lecture*; through back formation: *Schutzimpfung/vaccination* - *schutzimpfen/ to vaccinate*. Only 0.2% of complex verb under consideration is formed with nominal particle: *Hand* + *haben* > *handhaben* - to administer/manage.

## 1.2. Prefix verbs

Prefixes are generally bound morphemes that are placed at the left side of the main verb. They are monosyllabic morphemes with abstract meaning. Prefix verbs are described as complex verbs with inseparable derivational prefixes. These groups of complex predicates are neither morphologically nor syntactically separable (Duden 2000). They are sometimes referred to as inseparable complex verbs:

er + scheinen = *erscheinen*

(-) (to shine)	= to appear
er + blicken	= <i>erblicken</i>
(-) (to glance)	= to behold
ver + sammeln	= <i>versammeln</i>
(-) (to gather)	= to assemble/to gather

There is another set of prefix verbs that demonstrated different morphological constituent from the ones above. As illustrated below, these class of prefix verbs take both inseparable prefix and separable verbal particle but with the inseparable prefix appearing first.

Prefixes		Particles		Verbs	
<i>be</i>	+	<i>an</i>	+	<i>tragen</i>	- to request/apply
(-)		(on/at)		(carry)	
<i>be</i>	+	<i>ein</i>	+	<i>drucken</i>	- to impress
(-)		(one)		(to print)	
<i>ver</i>	+	<i>an</i>	+	<i>lassen</i>	- to arrange/induce
(-)		(on/at)		(to allow)	

Particle verbs are differentiated from prefix verbs in that prefix verbs are inseparable while particle verbs are separable. In addition, the stress of the particle verb, according to Müller (2002), is on the particle, while prefixed verbs have their stress on the basis verb.

## 2. Complex predicates in Yoruba

Verbs in Yorùbá are majorly monosyllabic, although there are derived verbs with more than one syllable. Yorùbá verbs according to Ògúnwálé (2005) are canonically monosyllabic. With regards to complex verb formation in Yorùbá, Asiwaju (1967) pointed out that Yorùbá verbs are verbal combinations which can be likened to the German verbal composition (*toju, yawo, kawé, gbéwa*). Though there are difficulties associated with categorization of verbs in Yorùbá language due to their overlapping characteristics, some Yorùbá linguists have been able to examine the morphological and the syntactic behaviours of complex verbs in Yoruba.

Awóbùlúyì (2008) grouped verbs in Yorùbá into thirteen different classes which include amongst others: *splitting verbs, complex verbs, echoing verbs* and *adjectivisable verbs*. He posits that complex verbs in Yorùbá have idiomatic meanings and that they have newer entries in the lexicon. Awóbùlúyì (2008) pointed out that there is an absence of derivational affix in the formation of complex verbs in Yorùbá.

He states that complex verbs are morphologically formed:

- i. with a verb and its object. He referred to this category of verbs as phrasal verbs: (*gba* - receive + *afé* - enjoyment > *gbafé* - to enjoy)

- ii. by combining two verbs: (*gbe* - carry + *wa* - come) > *gbewa* (to bring) and
- iii. by combining a verb and a preposition: *bo* (fall) + *si* (in) > *bosi* (to succeed).

He, however, notes that out of the three methods of deriving a complex verb, the most productive combination is the verb and its object (noun) method.

Ògúnwálé (2005) asserts that verbs in Yorùbá are majorly monosyllabic although there are some simple verbs that have more than one syllable. According to Awobuluyi (2008), complex verbs in Yorùbá are not product of prefixation but product of composition which are most times cases of contractions. In a similar study on complex verbs in Yorùbá, Asiwaju (1967) stated that the Yorùbá language verbal combination (*toju* - to take care of, *yawo* - borrow money, *kawe* - read,) resembles the German compositional verbs. The complex verbs identified in this study would be discussed below:

- i. **Complex verbs with nominal constituent:** Majority of the complex verbs in this study fall under this category. Nouns are easily combined with simple verbs to form complex verbs in Yorùbá. 63.7% of the complex verb for this study are those with nominal constituents.

Verbs	+	Nouns
<i>gbé</i> (carry)	+	<i>iyawó</i> > <i>gbeyawo</i> - to marry (bride)
<i>ko</i> (to sing)	+	<i>orin</i> > <i>korin</i> - to sing (song)
<i>je</i> (to eat)	+	<i>iya</i> > <i>jeya</i> - to suffer (punishment).

- ii. **Complex verbs with verbal constituents:** Complex verbs in Yorùbá are also derived by combining two verbs together. 23% of verbs under consideration in this research are complex verbs with verbal constituents.

Verb	+	Verbal constituents
<i>fà</i> (to draw/pull)	+	<i>ya</i> > <i>faya</i> - to tear (to tear)
<i>fà</i> (to draw)	+	<i>yo</i> > <i>fayo</i> - to subtract/ draw out (to remove)
<i>re</i> (to cut/slice)	+	<i>je</i> > <i>reje</i> - to cheat (to eat)
<i>pa</i> (to kill)	+	<i>je</i> > <i>paje</i> - to kill for consumption (to eat).

- iii. **Complex verbs with prepositional constituents:** 10.6% of understudied Yorùbá verbs fall into this category.

Verbs	+	Prepositions
yé (to honour)	+	sí > yesi - to honour/respect (-)
re (to cast fruits/ to blast)	+	sí + ile > resile - to lower/degrade (-) ground.

### 3. Morpho-syntactic similarities and differences of complex verbs in German and Yorùbá

The morpho-syntactic similarities and differences of complex verbs in both German and Yorùbá languages are highlighted in the below:

**Table A: Morpho-syntactic similarities and differences of complex verbs in German and Yorùbá**

Similarities	Differences
(i) Simple verbs in both German and Yorùbá function as the base verbs for complex verb formation.	(i) While German complex verbs are product of derivational word process, complex verbs in Yorùbá are compositional constituents.
(ii) German seperable complex verbs i.e particle verbs are both morphologically and syntactically separable, this also is the case for separable complex verbs in Yorùbá.	(ii) Complex verbs in German are majorly formed by adding prepositional verbal particle while nominal constituent are in the majority with Yorùbá.
(iii) Majority of complex verbs in both languages could be decomposed into two constituents, while those with three or four constituents are in the minority.	(iii) While complex separable verbs in German are syntactically separable, multi-phased complex verbs are both syntactically separable and inseparable depending on the sentence structures.
(iv) Nominal and prepositional constituent are added to simple verbs to form complex verbs in both languages.	(iv) Complex verbs in German form their past tense by adding <i>-ge-</i> in between the particle and the verb while complex verbs in Yorùbá only take the particle <i>-ti-</i> before the verb for forming its past tense.
	(v) While contractions occur between verbs and it constituents in Yorùbá, such cases are absent with complex verbs in German.



## Conclusion

While the different meanings that arise through the addition of German prefixes to verbs may at first seem illogical to the Yorùbá speakers, it is important to note that Yorùbá has similar types of verbal phrases. This study reveals that complex predicates in both languages are combinations of simple verbs and other constituents such as prepositions, verbs, nouns, adjectives and adverbs. It is also discovered that complex predicates in both languages are morphologically and syntactically separable depending on the sentence structures in which they occur. The major difference between the two languages under consideration is that German language forms its complex verbs by attaching prefixes to verbs infinitives forms while Yorùbá uses the addition of other word(s) to the existing verbs to form its complex predicates.

The study concludes that the identified similarities between complex verbs in German and Yorùbá languages validate the theory of universality of languages. They also point to the fact that languages have their points of intersections. The identified differences in both languages also suggest the uniqueness of each of the two languages.

## References

- ACHEAOH John (2013). “A Contrastive Analysis of English and Afenmi Morphology”.  
Online Journal of Arts and Humanities. No. 2.1, 29-35
- ASIWAJU Micheal (1967). Lehrbuch der Yorùbá-Sprache. Verlag Enzyklopaedie: Leipzig
- AWÓBÙLÚYÌ Oladele (2008). Eko Isedale Oro Yorùbá. Montem Paperbacks: Akure
- DEHE Nicole (2015). “Particle Verb in the Germanic”. An International Handbook of the  
Languages of Europe. Vol. 1, 611- 625
- DUDEN (2000). Die Deutsche Rechtschreibung. Bibliographisches Institut & E. A  
Brockhaus AG: Mannheim.
- FAGUNWA D. O. (1950). Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmole. Church Missionary Society  
Bookshop: Lagos
- GRASS Gunter (1999). Die Blechtrommel. Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag: Germany
- MADUGU George (1985). “Complex Verbs in Yorùbá and Nupe”. Studies in African  
Linguistics, Vo. 1. 16 (3), 295-321

- MARKUS Steinbach et al (2007). *Schnittstellen der grammatischen Linguistik*. J. B. Metzler Verlag: Stuttgart
- MÜLLER Stefan (2002). *Syntax or Morphology: German Particle Verbs Revisited, Explorations in Verb-Particle Constructions*. Mouton de Gruyter: Berlin
- ÒGÚNWÁLÉ Abiodun (2005). "Problem of Lexical Decomposition: The Case of Yorùbá Complex Verbs". *Normadic Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 14 (3), 318-333.
- WILLEKE Felix (2006). *Die morphologische Integration englischer Verben im Deutschen unter besonderer Berücksichtigung von Partikelverben*. Masters Thesis. Humbolt Universität zu Berlin (unpublished).