

# Adjectival predicators and approaches to complement realisation

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## Abstract

Most research on complement realisation has been concerned with verbs, and a central assumption, especially in theoretically oriented approaches, has been that complement realisation, often referred to as argument realisation, is predictable from the structure of events, i.e. (a part of) the semantic structure of the verb. I refer to this assumption as the Predictability Thesis. Other valency carriers than verbs also need to be accounted for, and the article investigates the neglected area of adjectival valency. Two major versions of the Predictability Thesis are assessed: the aspectual approach and the causal approach. The findings support the view that valency is not predictable from these facets of event structure. Rather, the view that valency belongs to the idiosyncratic aspects of language is supported; it is necessary to specify both the semantic structure and the realisation of complements in the lexicon.  
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## 1. Introduction

Most research on complement realisation has been based on verbs, and different approaches have been concerned with different facets of the event structure of verbs, see [Levin and Hovav \(2005\)](#) for a comprehensive survey. A basic premise has been the hypothesis that the realisation of complements is predictable from the structure of events, i.e. (a part of) the semantic structure of the verb. I refer to this assumption as the Predictability Thesis. Given the central role of the verb in the clause, it is hardly surprising that most models of complement realisation have been developed on the basis of verbal valency. There are also other valency carriers that need to be considered, however, and the present article investigates the neglected area of adjectival valency.

The investigation is based on a corpus study of 181 polyvalent adjectives in Norwegian, in which 956 valency constructions, i.e. a particular adjective in a particular pattern, were recorded in a database. A polyvalent adjective is understood as an adjective taking at least two complements denoting event participants in at least one of its valency patterns. The focus is restricted to adjectives in predicative function.<sup>1</sup> The term valency construction has been adopted from [Herbst and Schüller \(2008\)](#), and a construction is to be understood as a conventionalised pairing of form and meaning, as the term is used in the construction grammars of [Goldberg \(1995, 2006\)](#) and [Croft \(2001\)](#). It should be noted,

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<sup>1</sup> The different possibilities for valency realisation between attributive and predicative adjectives constitute interesting problems in their own right, see [Haugen \(2013\)](#) for discussion. Pre-head attributive adjectives do normally not take complements in Norwegian, but this will not be further discussed here.

however, that the notion of valency construction refers to a specific predicator in a specific valency pattern. Hence, valency constructions are more specific than Goldberg's (1995) argument structure constructions.

Like verbs, adjectival predicators enter into constructions expressing different event structures, and when it comes to governing the basic structure of the clause, adjectives can play much the same role as the class of verbal predicators. Consider the following examples from Norwegian:

- (1) a. Han blir endelig kvitt problemet  
       He becomes finally rid.of problem.DEF  
       'Finally, he got rid of the problem'  
       b. \*Han blir endelig kvitt  
       He becomes finally rid.of

The adjective *kvitt* 'rid of' obligatorily takes a second complement, in this case the NP *problemet* 'the problem', in addition to the complement in the subject slot. Complements in this second slot will, for easy reference, be referred to as "objects", but no claim is made that they are equivalent to the objects of verbs. "Subject" and "object" should simply be understood as labels for the different slots. Norwegian has two basic copulas used in constructions with predicative adjectives: *være* 'be', which is mostly used in stative contexts, and the inchoative counterpart *bli* 'become', exemplified in (1), which is predominantly used in non-stative contexts.<sup>2</sup> The choice of copula, however, does not alter the valency features of the predicator in this case:

- (2) a. Han er endelig kvitt problemet  
       He is finally rid.of problem.DEF  
       'He is finally rid of the problem'  
       b. \*Han er endelig kvitt  
       He is finally rid.of

Hence, the adjective is the part of the predicator that seems to decide the basic structure of the clause. This observation is in accordance with Heltoft (1995:220), who analysed predicators in the form of adjectives in combination with copular verbs in Danish. He concludes that, "[i]t is the combinatorial potential of the adjective that determines the number and syntactic category of the nuclear participants of the clause". For example, the adjective *kvitt* 'rid of' determines the complements of constructions as in (1) and (2).

In Norwegian, adjectives can take basically the same complement types as can verbs:

- (3) a. Han er redd hunden  
       He is afraid dog.DEF  
       'He is afraid of the dog'  
       b. Ho er klar over problemet  
       She is aware over problem.DEF  
       'She is aware of the problem'  
       c. Dei er glade at sumaren kjem snart  
       They are glad that summer.DEF comes soon  
       'They are glad that summer is here soon'  
       d. Seieren er verdt å kjempe for  
       Victory.DEF is worth to fight for  
       'The victory is worth fighting for'

In (3a), the adjective *redd* 'afraid' takes an NP object-complement, in (3b) *klar* 'aware' takes a prepositional complement, *glad* 'glad' takes a *that*-clause in (3c), whereas *verdt* 'worth' takes an infinitive in the object slot in (3d).

Like verbs, adjectives do seem to determine both the number and the types of complements with which they occur in a clause. This means that models of complement realisation also need to account for adjectival valency, and a first step towards assessing predictability in the complement realisation of adjectives is to investigate whether facets of event structure that have been hypothesised to play a role in the complement realisation of verbs, also play a role for

<sup>2</sup> The verb *forbli* 'remain' is also classified as copular in the Norwegian Reference Grammar (Faarlund et al., 1997), but this verb is much less frequent than *bli* 'become' and *være* 'be'. We will return to this in section 4.1.

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