

Review of Ljubica Leone. *Composite Predicates in Late Modern English* (Routledge Focus on Linguistics). 2024. London: Routledge. 92 pp. ISBN 9781003410256.  
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Since the publication of Brinton and Akimoto's pioneering work, *Collocational and Idiomatic Aspects of Composite Predicates in the History of English* in 1999, increasing interest in composite predicates (CPs),<sup>1</sup> verbal structures consisting of a verb + an indefinite article + a deverbal noun or eventive object (Quirk *et al.* 1985: 750–752), has been consistently shown in various studies: Claridge (2000) explores the *Lampeter Corpus of Early Modern English Tracts* in 1640–1740, Moralejo Gárate (2003) examines the Middle English period of the *Helsinki Corpus*, supplementing Kytö (1999), Bergs (2005) includes a chapter concerning the light verb constructions in the Paston Letters, Wang (2019) analyses the speech-focused text in *A Corpus of English Dialogues in 1560–1760* and in even more recent work Berlage (2025) investigates present-day English CPs. In line with this trend, Leone's monograph *Composite Predicates in Late Modern English* (2024) is highly welcomed, as it studies CPs in Late Modern English (LModE) with a view to portraying ongoing linguistic change through a historical survey of the CPs in this period. Leone intends to fill the gap in research on CPs in the LModE period on which scholarly work in CPs has been so far sparse, except for Akimoto (1999). Besides, she aims “to test whether and the extent to which these verbs were affected by similar paths of development that characterized other multi-word verbs of the LModE time as examined in other works” (Leone 2024: 12). Having already published another volume, *Multi-word Verbs in the Late Modern English Period (1750–1850)*, which examines phrasal verbs, prepositional verbs and phrasal-prepositional verbs in the LModE part of

<sup>1</sup> This verbal construction has been variously referred to since Poutsma regarded it as one type of group-verb as early as in 1926. The term composite predicate was first used by Cattell (1984). Other terms are complex verb (Nickel 1968), expanded predicates (Algeo 1995), verbo-nominal structure (Akimoto 1989, 1999), verbo-nominal combination (Claridge 2000), just to name a few.



the *Old Bailey Corpus (LModE-OBC)*, she has chosen the same corpus for her study of CPs to facilitate comparison of the results between CPs and other multi-word verbs.

Verbs used in CPs such as *do*, *give*, *have*, or *make* are known as light verbs as they have undergone semantic bleaching with more emphasis on the nouns to express the meaning of the whole unit. An indefinite article preceding a noun is optional or sometimes substituted with other determiners such as *the*, *this*, *that*, *some*, *any*, *no*, or personal pronouns. Leone's corpus-based study investigates CPs appearing in her self-edited *LModE-OBC*, an extract from Late Modern English texts (1750-1850) drawn from the *Old Bailey Corpus*, which is a collection of trial depositions and dialogues recorded in London's Central Criminal Court from 1674 to 1913.

Chapter 1 "Composite Predicates in 1750-1850" introduces the structure, linguistic features, a brief historical outline of CPs in general, and explains the compilation process and the details of the corpus used in the study. In Section 1.5 "Method", selection criteria for light verbs and deverbal nouns or eventive objects are briefly explained. Following Brinton and Akimoto (1999), the light verbs *do*, *give*, *have*, *make*, and *take* are chosen and as the nominal element i) a deverbal noun of the same form as a simple verb, ii) a deverbal noun derived by suffixation and iii) a noun etymologically related to the simple verb (p. 10). To ensure the etymological relationship between nouns and verbs, all the instances of nouns are checked against the OED to see if they have the relevant verbal form. If they do, regardless of their historical status or semantic correspondences, they are included as an element of CP (pp. 10–11). As for the statistical methods, the author calculates the raw and normalized frequencies (NFs), percentages, type/token ratio, log-likelihood score and logistic regression to assess the degree of productivity and the statistical significance (pp. 11–12).

Chapter 2 "History" outlines a more detailed history of CPs by introducing the previous studies, focusing on the diachronic development of idiomaticity (pp. 14–25). In Old English, there are some combinations regarded as CPs but they are not fully established as a unit equivalent to what we call CPs now. In Middle English, although the frequencies are still not so high, CPs are certainly emerging. In Early Modern English, Hiltunen (1999) and Kytö (1999) conducted thorough surveys in the *Helsinki Corpus* and found *have* and *make* to be most frequent and productive base verbs. In *A Corpus of English Dialogues*, the corpus of drama and court trials from 1640-1740, Wang (2019)

examined the frequency, lexical productivity and syntactic features of the light verbs in drama and trial texts 1640-1740.

Leone regards the LModE period as a transition from a synthetic to a more analytic language, and quoting Akimoto (1999), who examined CPs in the eighteenth and nineteenth century texts and the OED citations, she highlights, as Akimoto (1999: 225) finds, a remarkable tendency towards idiomatization (p. 22).

Chapter 3 “Linguistic features” displays the results of the survey of CPs. The overall NF of CPs in this period, 3.01 NF per 1000 words, is revealed to be increasing compared with the rate in former periods (p. 25), but within the period of 1750-1850 the rate stays almost stable with a decrease in the 1810s and a quick recovery in the 1830s (p. 27, Figure 3.1). The log-likelihood score of the increase from 3.21 NF in the 1750s to 3.45 NF in the 1830s shows this is not statistically significant. Furthermore, to check the relationship between time and frequency, the author, saying she will use logistic regression, in fact applies linear regression (p. 28). As a result, the line in Figure 3.2 (p. 28) indicates a gradual decrease in frequency, but it is also found to be statistically insignificant. Leone’s quantitative analysis lacks sufficient discussion, but she seems to imply these results can be evidence of the stability of CPs in this period. To prove the data’s stability, however, she needs appropriate statistical procedures.

The productivity of CPs is evaluated, based on the variation in light verbs and nouns. It is found that the higher frequency verbs, *have*, *give*, and *make* tend to occur with a wider range of nouns, while the lower frequency verbs, *do* and *take*, combine with a rather limited number of nouns (p. 34).

Chapter 4 “Composite predicates between stability and change” discusses mainly morphosyntactic features of CPs, providing a general portrait of syntactic forms showing stability in LModE in comparison with those of the EModE and PDE periods, but some innovative aspects are observed at the same time (pp. 41–42). By analyzing the determiners and internal modification patterns of CPs, Leone reveals that singular nouns, especially with zero article, overwhelmingly outnumber the plural counterparts in her *LModE-OBC*, showing a substantial increase compared with the data in the EModE period obtained from Kytö (1999). This may support the trend toward lexicalization and grammaticalization together with appearance of high-frequency fixed expressions such as *make a great noise* (pp. 49–50). This chapter concludes by proposing a cline of

semantic compositionality in CPs, ranging from literal (e.g. *have account*) to idiomatic (e.g. *make haste*) (pp. 64–66).

Chapter 5 “Process of change” further discusses how change took place in terms of grammaticalization, lexicalization and idiomatization. Drawing on Akimoto’s (1989, 1999) four-stage theory of idiomatization<sup>2</sup> which evolves from free phrasal combinations of components to lexicalization, to syntactic and semantic reanalysis and subsequently to idiomatic combinations with syntactic fixity (p. 55), Leone places CPs in the middle of the lexicalization cline, with reference to the criteria that can judge the degree of internal cohesion in CPs. Therefore, diachronically, as nouns in verbal units lose determiners or modification and plural forms become rarer, then the more lexicalized and idiomatized the units become as CPs (p. 56). Another criterion for lexicalization is phraseological variation and layering of prepositions. Occasionally CPs appear in different patterns such as V+(Det)+N (e.g. *have any reason to do*) or V+(Det)+N+Prep (e.g. *have any reason for doing*), while CPs can take various prepositions in the same meaning (e.g. *make observation on/upon/of/about*). CPs with these variations and layering signal incomplete lexicalization (p. 60). This leads the author to view LModE as a period closer to earlier periods. At the same time, innovative aspects, as the author considers, are seen in introduction of newly coined CPs such as *take warning*, *take opinion*, which are not recorded in Kytö (1999) and ARCHER before 1750 (p. 62),<sup>3</sup> and also in semantic changes that some CPs have experienced due to the loss of the definite article or other determiners (p. 64).

The final chapter briefly summarizes the findings, followed by Appendix, References and Index. Regrettably, Appendix, the three-column list of CPs appearing in the *LModE-OBC*, is typographically flawed, with the final four lines in each column, probably intended to be on one page, printed on the next. As a result, the list is hard to decipher.

Throughout the discussion in the volume, the author tries to envisage a broader picture of CP change, situating it on a scale from synthesis to analyticity and applying the frameworks of lexicalization, grammaticalization and idiomatization. Her wide

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<sup>2</sup> Traugott (1999) proposes three stages rather than four in a modified version of this theory.

<sup>3</sup> Rodríguez-Puente (2025: 6) points out that earlier occurrences of the new coinages are found in OED (e.g. *make discussion*, *take warning*, *make effort*).

perspective is commendable, though a higher degree of precision would strengthen certain aspects of the analysis.

One of the points where more accuracy is expected, as Rodríguez-Puente (2025: 2–3) has pointed out, concerns the definition of CPs. The task of defining a CP may seem straightforward if CPs are confined to a verbal sequence of a verb plus a deverbal noun either with zero derivation (e.g. *take a walk*), or suffixation (e.g. *make comparison*), following simply formal criteria. However, as Leone, like Quirk *et al.* (1985: 750–752), Kytö (1999) and others, includes eventive objects as nominal elements,<sup>4</sup> and applies semantic criteria, some ambiguity arises. The problem of differentiation between CPs and free combinations naturally emerges, too. Leone appears to pay limited attention to this issue, as several examples from the *LModE-OBC* quoted in the volume are unrelated to CPs ((32) *I have made all my friends my foes* (51) is in a different construction from a CP and (8) *I ... took the place at the public-house* (57) is a literal free combination). A purely formal approach, as taken by Algeo (1995), Claridge (2000) and others, might have yielded clearer results. However, if CPs are defined as constructions semantically equivalent to a simple verb with the same or similar meaning, more verbal units can be taken into consideration. This is a merit in dealing with earlier texts where the frequency of CPs is low. Leone's concise discussion of noun selection criteria leaves room for misinterpretation: the readers may be perplexed to see *dinner*, *air*, *garden*, or *time*<sup>5</sup> treated as CP nouns. A more detailed discussion would have mitigated such confusion.

Another point to note is in cross-corpus comparison. The period she focuses on is only one hundred years, limited to 1750–1850. Therefore, to compare the frequencies from her period and others, she draws on the results from previous studies. But this may lead to inaccuracy. For instance, Leone compares the NF of the CPs in the *Lampeter Corpus* 1640–1740, 1.7 NF (Claridge 2000: 108, 178–179), with her results 3.01 NF in 1750–1850, claiming that “the LMod period is characterized by increasing use” (p. 25). Claridge takes up only deverbal and suffixed nouns while Leone includes eventive objects. Conversely, Claridge (2000: 40, 76–77) includes verb+prepositional phrase units

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<sup>4</sup> Leone follows Kytö (1999: 169) in selecting nominal elements in CPs and checking the etymological information in the OED, but in checking all the nouns she is more rigorous than Kytö, who checked the OED only in cases “intuition and the information in ordinary dictionaries are insufficient” (Kytö 1999: 206).

<sup>5</sup> Rodríguez-Puente (2025: 3) considers these nouns are not suitable as an element of a CP as she does not admit nouns merely etymologically or semantically related to the verb. Opinion may be divided on this point, but as she claims, it would be better to limit the nouns to those having abstract meaning, excluding *memorandum* etc.

(Group III)) and 14 more light verbs such as *come, lay, set, put* (Claridge 2000: 120–122, Table 6.5), not present in Leone’s selection;<sup>6</sup> and the *Lampeter Corpus* examined by Claridge, as Leone is well aware (p. 26), consists of religious, political, economic and scientific tracts, more formal in style than the spoken court depositions of *OBC* Leone studies. Wang’s (2019: 46) findings indicate that the drama section has higher frequencies and more variety of units than the trial section, probably because of more limited contexts in trials, clearly indicating there is a difference in the use of CPs depending on text type. All in all, comparing the NFs might end up being an imprecise enterprise.

Furthermore, the connection between the LModE period and the next period needs more exploration. The author frequently refers to previous studies in earlier times to discuss the stability of CPs in the LModE period, but the situation of CPs after 1850 is not clear enough as there is not much reference to the previous works. In fact, to demonstrate that the CPs found in the *LModE-OBC* exhibit stable features, Leone queries ARCHER and quotes similar examples in late twentieth century from it (p. 41). As ARCHER is a multi-genred corpus, an examination of the 1850-1913 part of *OBC* applying consistent criteria for text type and the definition of CPs would provide a more coherent continuation.

The reasons why the period for the survey of the *LModE-OBC* is limited to 1750-1850 are the continuity of the period from Claridge (2000) and matching the period for her study on multi-word verbs (Leone 2023). While this is understandable for comparing the results, a more detailed survey of the entire *OBC* up to early twentieth century would be more beneficial for a deeper investigation of the diachronic development. In addition, there are repeated statements that CPs in LModE have similar tendencies to those observed in multi-word verbs in Leone (2023), but without providing details of cases in multi-word verbs. Therefore, combining Leone’s two volumes on CPs and multi-word verbs into a single volume—around 160 pages—might also offer readers a more comprehensive and accessible reference.

Finally, Leone acknowledges the possibility of a declining trend in the LModE period up to 1810s (p. 67), in agreement with Akimoto (1999: 208, 215, Table 7.1), who says the CPs are more numerous in the eighteenth than in the nineteenth century, and Claridge (2000: 178), who reports a slight decline in CP frequency during 1640-1740. In

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<sup>6</sup> Although Claridge (2000: 122) includes Group III verb-nominal combinations, the frequency is 13 only with the base verb *take*.

addition, Berlage (2025: 189–192) finds that the specific CPs she has chosen show a decrease in frequency during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. All these findings indicate the need for a fresh insight into the chronological change of CPs in LModE, choosing the most suitable corpus under consistent conditions and a more precise framework. To arrive at this goal, Leone’s volume certainly makes a timely and meaningful contribution to our understanding of the linguistic features, processes and mechanisms underlying the historical development of CPs, and it provides a solid foundation for future studies on the evolution of multi-word verb constructions in the history of English.

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