Call for papers
For a workshop proposal for the 58th SLE meeting in Bordeaux, August 26-29, 2025

Workshop title: **Omnipredicativity: its core and its fringes**
Convenors: Katharina Haude (CNRS–SEDYL), Albert Álvarez (Universidad de Hermosillo)

In some languages, both verbs and nouns can function both as predicates and as arguments: nouns can be used as main-clause predicates without the need of a copula, and verbs can be combined with some determiner-like element, with which they form a determiner phrase (DP). In the canonical type of this system, a DP containing a verb refers to a participant in the event denoted by the verb, so that the verb can be analyzed as a headless relative clause ('the one/someone who Vs'). This is illustrated in (1) with examples from Classical Nahuatl (Launey 1994: 29; 58). The clause in (1a) is a typical intransitive clause with a verbal predicate and a nominal argument DP, whereas in (1b), the predicate is a noun and the DP contains a verb.

(1) a. *chōca   [in piltōntli]*
         cry   DET child
         'the child is crying'

     b. *ca   piltōntli   [in   chōca]*
         ASSERT   child   DET   cry
         'the one who is crying is a child'[1]

The term "omnipredicative" for such a system was coined by Launey (1994; 2004) on the basis of Classical Nahuatl. The idea is that in a language of this type, all content words are primarily predicates. The referential function is derived through the combination with a determiner, the resulting structure being analyzable as an oriented nominalization or a headless relative clause ('the one who is/was X'; Launey 2004: 55–56).

Besides Classical Nahuatl, systems in which verbs and nouns are syntactically interchangeable have also been described for other languages of the Americas, such as Salishan languages (e.g. Jelinek & Demers 1994), Mayan (Vapnarsky 2013), Tupi-Guaranian languages (da Cruz & Praça 2019), or Movima (Haude 2019), but also beyond, as for Tagalog (Himmelmann 1991; Himmelmann 2008) or Khoekhoe (Hahn 2014).

Omnipredicativity has sometimes been understood in the literature as implying that a language lacks lexical categories (Evans & Osada 2005; Beck 2013) or that all its content words are verbs (Bisang 2013). Yet, even though the tendency is to reduce the distance between lexical classes, omnipredicativity does not imply noun/verb indistinction. Rather, the syntactic flexibility of nouns and verbs contributes to the **information-structuring potential** that is central to an omnipredicative system (Launey 2004: 49, 69). As illustrated by the translation, the construction in (1b) is pragmatically marked: placing a noun in predicate position ('It is N') and a verb in the referring one ('the one who Vs') leads to a focus reading of the noun, similar to an English cleft.

At the same time, it is easy to understand why omnipredicativity is rare and why the concept is challenging. Reference is associated with words denoting "objects" and predication with words denoting "actions" (Croft 2001: 88), which is why most languages distinguish verbs and nouns also on the syntactic level. It has been suggested (Sasse 1993; 2009) that omnipredicative systems can arise from the systematic use of oriented nominalizations

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[1] According to Launey (2004: 50), the assertive marker *ka* can just as well appear before a verbal predicate.

(participles) as main-clause predicates, but that they **are not very stable over time**. This can result, for instance, in the functional decay of the determining element (Queixalós 2006).

Comparing omnipredicative languages is of **typological interest** because these languages often share traits that seem to be only indirectly associated with the syntactic flexibility of nouns and verbs. These include (but may not be restricted to):

- predicate-initial clause structure
- zero or optional argument indexation
- lack of case marking
- possessor-like encoding of one argument
- restrictions on extractability

In order to figure out what the core of an omnipredicative system is and how much variation is possible within such a system, this workshop aims at bringing together experts on languages that can be analyzed as omnipredicative. **Specific questions that contributions may address** include (but are not restricted to) the following:

- How are lexical categories distinguished?
- Are nouns and verbs to 100% syntactically flexibility with semantic uniformity (i.e. can the content word in a DP always be paraphrased as a headless relative clause)?
- Are semantic differences between the predicative and referential use systematic?
- How does negation work, both of a main predicate and inside a DP?
- If the language has a copula, when is it needed?
- Does an omnipredicative analysis require a determiner?
- Is there evidence of a pragmatic effect of "swapped" lexical categories?
- How are equational sentences with a pronominal subject (of the type 'She is/was an actress') formed?
- Along which diachronic pathways does the rise or decline of an omnipredicative system take place?

This workshop intends to explore to what degree omnipredicativity can be usefully considered a morphosyntactic type, and which would be the more central and the more marginal features of languages belonging to this type.

Abstract submission
We invite abstracts of up to 300 words (plus references), to be submitted in Word and PDF format to the workshop organizers by **November 10, 2024**:

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The decision of acceptance of the workshop by the SLE committee will be published on December 10, 2024 (see https://societaslinguistica.eu/sle2025/first-call-for-papers/).

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