6_ANNEXES

A0.0_THE DEFINITION OF COMPLEX AND COMPLEXITY

Currently the terms Complex and Complexity are used in many different fields, coexisting also very different definition proposals for both [sometimes even within the same field].

This is the first obstacle that must be solved for a Unified Theory, because defining a term [or explaining the concept it refers to] is equivalent to setting the first premise\(^1\) from which we infer the statements of the theory; different definitions equate to different premises and necessarily lead to different conclusions.

Therefore, as the first step for the present theory, it is necessary to arrive at a definition of those terms which must have two qualities:

- Be based on a sufficiently solid basis, which allows justifying the choice of such definition instead of others possible\(^2\).
- Being able to embrace -and explain- the different utilizations of the term within the theories or fields of knowledge that are intended to 'unify'. All of them should be able to be conceptualized as particular cases of the general definition.

And we will be able to achieve it by reviewing the etymology of the two terms:

A0.0.0_OF ‘COMPLEXUS’ AND ‘SIMPLEX’

The term ‘complex’ is incorporated to English language from the French complexe, which in turn adopts it from the Latin complexus, with the meaning of:

- "a surrounding, encompassing, encircling, embracing, embrace..." [Lewis, 1879]
- “embrace, link, chaining...” [Coromines y Pascual, 1996].
- “union, link, chain, encircle,...” [Segura, 2014]

How has it evolved from the original meaning of complexus [mainly as “embrace”] to its different uses today? To understand it, we need to deepen both into the etymology of complexus and in its subsequent evolution.

The term complexus is the past participle of complector which means:

- “to link, to embrace, to wrap, to surround...” [De Miguel, 1879]
- “to grasp, clasp, seize, encircle, surround, compass, enclose” [Lewis, 1879]
- “to embrace, to encompass, to grasp...” [Coromines y Pascual, 1996]

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\(^1\) [Carnap, 1945, p.397] proposes that a definition is “an equivalence statement”. In certain way, it can be interpreted as the first ‘premise’ on which a theory is built.

\(^2\) Simply choosing one definition of the existing ones [or proposing a personal definition] would be an arbitrary act that may exclude from conclusions of the present text all those theories based on different definitions.
And the etymology of *complerctor* brings us in turn to the conjunction of two Latin terms derived from Proto Indo European [PIE] roots:

**Cum, com:**

*from kum [PIE]: “Beside, near, by, with” [AHD 1992; Roberts & Pastor 1995].*

“with, together” [De Miguel 1879; Klein 1966]

**plecto, plectere, plexi, plexum:**

*from plek [PIE]: “to braid, to fold” [Roberts & Pastor, 1995]; “bend, fold, braid, twist, weave…” [Shipley, 1894].*

“to bend, to fold, to link, to interlace” [De Miguel, 1879]

“to fold, to bend, to interlace, to link, to braid, to weave” [Segura, 2014]

We arrive to identifying *complerctor* with *interlace, braid or fold together* and *complexus* as that *which is interlaced, braided or folded together*, i.e., forming a unit or entity. The term *complexus* refers therefore to the idea of different elements that come together composing a bigger entity without losing their individuality.

Importantly, the original meaning of *complexus* significantly contrast with the concept ‘complicated’ for which the Latin has a different term [complico, -are]³.

And it will be starting from 17th century that the term *complexus* incorporates the meanings of "complicated and intricate" [ODEE 1996; Harper 2014] and from 18th century that it starts to be used to refer also to “not easily analyzed” issues [Harper, 2014].

There are two reasons for this extension of the meaning of the term ‘complexus’: 

- On the one hand, the prefix ‘com’ can refer to ‘what is together’ but also can imply an intensification of the term which accompanies [De Miguel 1879]⁴; ‘com’ can designate what is "woven together" but also what is "very woven"⁵.

- On the other hand, although Latin has a different term to designate what is complicated, its etymology is coincident with that of complex; both use the prefix ‘com’ accompanied by two terms ‘plicare’ and ‘plecto’ derived from ‘plek’.

It is noteworthy that the term *complexus* expands its meanings in 17th/18th centuries without deleting any of its previous meanings. Since then, it may designate that which is ‘woven together’, ‘composed of many interlocking elements’ or ‘not easily analyzable’.

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³ *Complicare:* to fold, to bend, to twine, to screw. For instance, ‘Complicata notio’ refers to a ‘complicated idea’ [Segura, 2014]

⁴ This reference to the intensive nature of the term ‘com’ is also found in AHD 1992 and Harper 2014.

⁵ This will be the dominant meaning in the *Sciences of Complexity*. For example, Gell-Mann [1994, p. 22] proposes conceptualizing Complexity/what is complex as that which is "totally woven"
And if we divide into three areas the current use of the term 'complex' [Epistemology-Philosophy, Sciences of Complexity and Unscientific use] their analysis shows us that each of these areas will choose [or at least 'prefer'] one of its possible meanings:

- **Epistemology** and **philosophy** will be making an ample use of the term that supports nearly all its possible meanings, preferring that linked to its etymology; **which is woven together**.
- The **sciences of complexity** will prefer the conceptualization of the complex as those **entities composed of many elements interacting in a not easily way to understand**, approaching the concepts of structure and network.
- The **unscientific use** of the term will mainly conceptualize it as **difficult to understand**.

However, while the etymological meaning of complex as 'that which is woven together' underlies all its possible uses, its other meanings do not.

Any complex object from the perspective of sciences of complexity or unscientific use of the term is also complex from the etymological perspective, but on the contrary is not the case; an **embracing is something complex -two people woven together- that 'is not made up of many elements interacting in a non-easy way' nor is ‘difficult to understand’**.

The Unscientific and Sciences of Complexity uses of the term do not consider as 'complex' objects that are complex in the etymological sense of the term. They restrict the meaning of the term deleting its original meaning [which we can relate to its PIE roots -approximately 7,000 years old] and limit it to meanings incorporated in the last three centuries.

And a Unified Theory must necessarily be built on a definition compatible with [or underlying] all its uses, which forces us to go to the original meaning of the term [complex as that which is woven together] that allows us to conceptualize its more restricted uses as 'particular cases':

- The **sciences of complexity** will refer to a particular case of ‘complex objects with many elements and relationships that make difficult to understand them and predict their futures states’.
- The **unscientific use** of the term will refer to objects whose 'complexity' generates ‘comprehension and analysis difficulty, leading to a difficulty of assigning them a truth value’.

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6 And an embrace let us highlight another issue that we have championed in the text. An embrace is not more embrace when the number of people involved increases, but when it is most intense. In systemic terms when the interaction between the parts makes the global identity more clearly emerge. The complexity of an embrace is less related to the idea of organization than to the idea of emergence.
However, the above definition can be difficult to relate to the conceptualizations of the Sciences of Complexity that allude to a greater or lesser number of parts and relationships. Therefore, we propose a definition of complex slightly adapted as that 'which identity or meaning emerges [nonlinearly] from the interaction between its parts'.

This definition will be broad enough to allow us its use referred to objects that go from something etymologically complex [e.g.: an embrace] to something complex as per the sciences of complexity [e.g.: a society]; including real objects [any of the above] but also conceptual objects [e.g. text or idea] that allow us to understand its unscientific use.

Thus we see that this definition will allow us to encompass all uses of the term, and also keeps a 'reasonable' resemblance to some dictionary definitions:

**Complex** [Drae, 2014]:

“Composed by various elements”

“Whole or union of two or more things”

And the term **Complexity** designates the "quality of complex" [Drae 2014; Moliner 2007]. It refers to the degree to which an object is complex, i.e., the object as a whole embraces, surrounds and braids its parts.

We thus identify **Complexity** as the quality of those objects whose identity or meaning emerges from the interaction between some parts that make up a unit or entity without losing their individuality.

Moreover, it is interesting that the term **plecto** means both 'to fold' as 'to braid' because both meanings involve subtle differences:

If we interpret it as 'to fold', complexity would be referring to the idea of iteration as a rule to generate a global identity, approaching several concepts frequently used in the systemic perspectives already reviewed in the text:

- To fractal structures generated by indefinitely iterating a pattern through a self-similarity relation.
- To chaotic systems whose unpredictable behavior can be modelled as the iteration of simple formulas.
- To hierarchical structures and holarchies considering that each inclusion relation is equivalent to a nonlinear aggregation of information; i.e.: a 'fold'.

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7 Actually, we have already seen that both Emergence [Lewes, 1875] and Interaction [von Bertalanffy, 1968] definitions involve nonlinearity. Therefore we put it in brackets indicating that it might actually be removed from the definition. We maintain this redundancy [or perhaps ‘pleonasm’] to better clarify the idea.

8 This allows us to state that from an etymological perspective all systems are complex.
If we interpret it as 'to braid' it refers to the idea of interaction between two elements that limits its possible configurations, in turn generating a global form or identity.

- To the concept of System as organization of elements by a relationships structure that limit their possible states, defining their global identity.
- To Evolution as successive addition of rules that intertwine [interact] among them, shaping 'organisms' and 'behaviors/conducts'9.
- To the ideas of interdefinition [elements give shape -or define- each other], recursiveness [the part shapes the whole, but the whole shapes the part] and infiniteness [no start and no end] present especially in the epistemological approaches to complexity.

We have therefore defined the terms Complex and Complexity; definition that will be the first premise on which to build the unified theory, allowing to encompass the majority of utilizes the two terms [as general or particular cases] and it is interesting to review also two terms frequently used as complementary terms: Simple and Simplicity.

The term simple comes from the Latin simplex that we can also decompose into two Latin roots that come from PIE language:

- plex [from plek] which meaning we have already reviewed.
- sim [from sem] which meaning is 'one, same as one' [Shipley, 1984].

And this second term introduces some 'ambiguity' because it supports two interpretations that lead to different definitions:

- On the one hand, we can interpret it as 'that which is folded once' [i.e., it is folded into two parts].

9 This allows us to insist that it is not possible to separate 'Complexity of Reality' from 'Epistemological Complexity'.
• On the other hand, we can interpret it as 'that which is folded in one' [i.e., that is not folded].

The importance of this issue is that in the second case simple would be the opposite of complex, while in the first case it would not. However, considering the meaning of the term, the second consideration appears to be the correct one\(^{10}\); simplex as that which it is not folded nor woven:

“Straight [no folds or knots]” [De Miguel, 1879]

“Which is not folded” [Corominas y Pascual, 2002 citing Berceo]

“Characterized by a single part”, ca 1590 [Harper, 2014]

The etymological analysis leads us to complex -that which is folded or woven- as the opposite concept to simple -that which is not folded nor woven-. There is a binary separation between the two concepts. From an etymological perspective only which does not interact is simple and therefore any object which emerges from the interaction between two or more elements is a complex object.

However, we have seen that in the 17\(^{th}\)/18\(^{th}\) centuries the term complex expands its meanings, and this leads to a change in the meaning of the term simple\(^{11}\). In the areas in which complex is used to designate ‘that in which a large number of elements interact’ simple is going to designate objects that do not necessarily lack interaction, it is sufficient that ‘only a small number of elements interact’ or ‘their interactions are easy to understand’.

And the hue becomes very important for two reasons:

• The first is that the gap between simple and complex is binary in the Etymological sense, but becomes a diffuse separation in the sense of the Sciences of Complexity and Unscientific use of the term. What was a well-defined limit becomes a border impossible to pinpoint: it is not possible to set an exact point when an object goes from having few to many elements or from easy to difficult to understand\(^{12}\).

• The second is that the term simple in the sense of complexity science or non-scientific use can be used to designate objects that are complex in the etymological sense of the term [e.g., an embrace or five people dancing in a circle].

\(^{10}\) Simplex shares etymology with Duplex, Triplex, etc... Duplex is not what is folded twice [folded in three parts], but what is folded in two parts. Triplex is not what is folded three times [folded in four parts], but what is folded into three parts, etc. The term Simplex refers to the idea of folded in one, i.e. ‘un-folded’.

\(^{11}\) The meaning of linguistic terms is shaped due to their interaction with the opposite terms [they inter-define]. So, when a linguistic term changes its meaning, the opposite term necessarily modifies it too. Saussure [1945] qualifies the ‘language’ as ‘essentially complex’; as a set of rules and interactions between the different terms.

\(^{12}\) This is why scientists from the Sciences of Complexity never agree to define ‘when complexity starts'; it is not possible to set a sharp [exact] limit for a ‘fuzzy’ concept. But also, the definition of ‘complex’ in the framework of ‘Sciences of Complexity’ does not refer to one but to two fuzzy concepts at the same time [‘number of elements’ and ‘ease to understand’], making even more difficult [may be impossible] to set limits to the concept, since it depends on two independent dimensions.
Apparently, according to the criteria above, we should propose a definition of simple that encompasses all its possible uses. However, a review of this issue from Spanish and English languages shows two different situations:

In Spanish both the use of term simple in the context of Sciences of Complexity as its unscientific use, can be perfectly replaced by term 'sencillo'.

Sencillo [Drae, 2014]: which offers no difficulty

Therefore, there is no reason why the word 'simple' could not be used in its etymological sense.

However, English language has no term to differentiate what is 'simple' from what is 'sencillo'; both issues are designated by the same term: 'simple'.

Hence, we find that in English a definition of 'simple' should encompass any of its possible uses thus ‘simple’ may refer to which...

… Is not compounded or is composed by non-interacting parts.
… Consists of a small number of interacting parts.
… It is easy to understand.

But proposing a definition of the term 'simple' in Spanish takes us to two options both presenting some drawbacks:

- Using the term 'simple' to designate also what is 'sencillo' is unnecessary while it can lead to some confusion, since there are cases where both terms refer to different issues.
- Using the term 'simple' to designate only what is 'uncompounded' could lead to confusion when translating English-Spanish texts, thus missing the unifying interest of this proposal.

We see that the term simple is not going to allow us its use with a single meaning, but especially in English it will require us to admit an ample use and it may designate 'which is easy to understand', coinciding with the Spanish term 'sencillo'.

The 'simple' may be or not the opposite to complex depending on the context, and therefore in a Unified Theory we do not differentiate between 'complex' and 'simple' objects but between ‘complex’ and ‘non-complex’ objects.

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13 This explains in part the current confusion between complex and complicate; in English, simple is the opposite term to both of them. On the contrary, in Spanish simple is the opposite term to complex, while sencillo is the opposite term to complicate. Interestingly, the etymology of 'sencillo' goes back to the Latin 'singulus' [which in turn is also derived from PIE 'sem'], whose evolution in the English language leads to the term 'single', whose meaning 'considerably' differs from that of 'sencillo'.

14 In this case the number of parts is not relevant.

15 The unifying interest of this proposal does not arise only in relation to the joint understanding of the different conceptualizations of complexity; also in relation to communication between scientists.
A non-complex object will be that which does not fulfill the proposed definition of complex, i.e.: which identity or meaning does not emerge from the interaction between its parts. Another way to conceptualize it is as 'that which is not compound or is compound by addition or superposition of non-interacting [independent] parts'.

Image 65: A dozen of eggs is a ‘non-complex’ object in relation to its parts [the eggs]. The overall identity is the result of the sum or superposition of these parts; which do not interact between them.

However, if we change the scale, each egg itself is a complex object; and it is almost sure that the price of a dozen eggs is lower than the sum of the price of each egg. This shows us the difficulty of finding real objects that are not complex in any scale or from some perspective.

And we can relate the above definitions with a statement that appears recurrently throughout the history of philosophy: the whole is not the sum of the parts.

The concept of interaction is associated with the idea of non-linearity; the generation of a global entity that is not resultant of the superposition or sum of the parts [Von Bertalanffy 1968; Simon 1962; Morin 1990], and this leads us to inextricably link the concepts of complexity and non-linearity:

- **Complex objects** are those in which two or more parts interact, that is, in which 'the whole is not the sum of the parts'; *the whole is not deductible as a superposition or linear aggregation of parts.*

- **Non-complex objects** are those in which their parts do not interact, i.e., in which 'the whole is the sum of the parts'; *the whole can be generated as a superposition or linear aggregation of parts.*

The criterion of non-linearity / linearity is established as necessary / sufficient condition for determining whether a phenomenon is complex or not; an object may or may not be complex but it will not be by halves.

Furthermore, if we review all definitions of complexus, we see several common characteristics:

- Braid, fold, embrace ... all of them involve a type of interaction between parts.
- Encompass, encircle, embrace ... all of them involve a global shape or identity.

Essentially complexity refers to the existence of a global form or identity that emerges from the interaction between parts; to a whole that relates non-linearly to its parts.

The concept of ‘complex’ links to those of Organization [or interactions system between parts] and Emergence [of an identity or globally recognizable form] and becomes equivalent to the concept of ‘system’.

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A0.0.1_THE DEFINITION OF COMPLEXITY IN THE SCIENCES OF COMPLEXITY

The use of the term complexity by the Sciences of Complexity is based largely on the sense in which it was used by Weaver in his article 'Science and Complexity' [1948].

Although Weaver does not explicitly define it, he uses it referring to 'being composed by many interacting elements in a way not easy to understand'.

And this conceptualization of the complex involves breaking the equivalence between the terms complex and system, and it will be developed and reinforced by all scientists in the framework of the Sciences of Complexity:

- Simon [1962, p. 468] defines a complex system as that "made up of a large number of parts that interact in a nonsimple way"
- Von Bertalanffy [1968] describes Auto-differentiating Systems as Systems of Ever-Increasing Complexity, suggesting that systems' complexity increases as their differentiation / amount of organization increases.
- The proposal itself of 'Complex Adaptive System' [Gell-Mann, 1994; Holland 1995] which adds the word 'Complex' to the name Adaptive System [Simon, 1962] confirms this breach of the equivalence between the terms complex and system.

In the framework of the Sciences of Complexity the possible meanings of the term 'complex' are restricted, thus eliminating both the 'epistemological' as the 'unscientific' use of the word.

This restriction of the meaning becomes clear when reviewing the dictionaries of universities linked to the world of the sciences of complexity, that have eliminated the meaning of complex as 'which is woven together' keeping only those that also imply having a large number of parts:

"involving a lot of different but related parts" [CDO]

"consisting of many different and connected parts" [OED, 2014]

And shifted the meaning of complexity from the "quality of complex" to

"The state of having many parts and being difficult to understand or find an answer to" [CDO, 2014]

"The state or quality of being intricate or complicated" [OED, 2014]

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16 It is at least curious the existing semantic parallelism between Proto Indo-European and Latin roots [plek / plecto] one of whose meanings is 'to weave' and the surname Weaver; i.e. 'a person who weaves'.

17 Therefore, in the framework of the Sciences of Complexity only those systems composed of many elements and relationships are considered complex.

18 Apparently the use of the term complex by the Sciences of Complexity could be compatible with its non-scientific use as "difficult to understand", but actually it is not. There are many objects difficult to understand which are not complex as per the sciences of complexity [eg, any logical contradiction as the liar paradox; a surreal painting, etc.]

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It is noteworthy that this restriction/modification of the meaning of the terms complex and complexity is not characteristic of the entire English-speaking world. The Dictionaries non related to the world of the Sciences of Complexity include its new meanings but retain the original meanings of the term:

Complex [TRHD 1967; AHD 1992; NWD 1995]:

“Consisting of interconnected or interwoven parts; composite”

“Composed of two or more units”

Complexity [TRHD 1967; AHD 1992]

“The quality or condition of being complex”

This 'restricted' conceptualization in the framework of the sciences of complexity is an impassable barrier to any unifying theory since it does not support other possible meanings of the term which are necessary for understanding its use in other areas, such as epistemological and unscientific fields.

It is not possible to build a Unified Complexity Theory based on the definition of complexity by the Sciences of Complexity that have limited its meaning, proposing that not everything that is woven together is complex; only which also meets the condition of being composed of many elements and difficult to understand.

This explains, for example, that although certain epistemological proposals of Complex Thinking are accepted in the world of the Sciences of Complexity19, they are not linked to the term complexity but considering them philosophical issues20 not directly related to the Sciences of Complexity. And that ‘complex issues’ according to the unscientific use of the term are neither considered ‘complex’ in the field of sciences of complexity.

A unified complexity theory will only be possible if scientists of the Sciences of Complexity review their conceptualizations of complexity/the complex, extending them to accept their epistemological meaning [which implies their epistemological/unscientific use].

This does not preclude that in some contexts a more specific use of the term ‘complex’ can be made21, but without forgetting its 'broad' meaning.

Not accepting its etymological meaning is unnecessary while it prevents from taking advantage of the benefits that multidisciplinary / transdisciplinary approaches bring in scientific research, only possible in a unified view of complexity.

19 In part because without epistemology is not possible to do science, and in part because some ideas of Complex Thinking are re-elaborations of former systemic scientists' proposals [Von Bertalanffy, Wiener, Ashby, Von Foerster...]

20 This is at least shocking from a scientific field which origin leads us directly to an epistemological article [Science and Complexity]; another article published in a Philosophical Journal [The Architecture of Complexity] and an essentially transdisciplinary Theory [General Systems Theory]. And which has also incorporated essentially philosophical expressions such as ‘emergence’ or ‘the whole is more than the sum of the parts’.

21 For example, when designating as ‘Complex Systems’ a type of systems composed of many elements whose interactions and dynamics of change make them difficult to understand / predict their future states
A0.0.2 REFERENCES EXCLUSIVE FOR THIS ANNEX


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