The Light Verb Jungle

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1 Questions

• How do I recognize a light verb when I meet one?
  – Do light verbs instantiate a uniform syntactic category?
  – Are they associated with a uniform semantics?

• Do light verbs always form a part of complex predicates?

• How do light verbs come to be?

• What are light verbs good for anyway?

2 The Jungle

2.1 The Term

Jespersen (1965, Volume VI:117) is generally credited with first coining the term light verb for English V NP constructions such as

- have a rest, a read, a cry, a think
- take a sneak, a drive, a walk, a plunge
- give a sigh, a shout, a shiver, a pull, a ring

2.2 A Verb-Light Verb Construction (Urdu)

(1) a. nadya=ne xqt $hk^b$ li-ya
Nadya.F=Erg letter.M.Nom write take-Perf.M.Sg
‘Nadya wrote a letter (completely).’ (Urdu)

b. nadya=ne m$\text{\text{\textvisiblespace}}$kan $b\text{\text{\textvisiblespace}}$na di-ya
Nadya.F=Erg house.M.Nom make give Perf.M.Sg
‘Nadya built a house (completely, for somebody else).’ (Urdu)
2.3 Sample Syntactic Analyses of Light Verbs

The Light Verb is Functional

Several approaches assume that the light verb simply serves as a licenser of predication:

- Grimshaw and Mester 1988 — N-V complex predicates with Japanese *suru* ‘do’
  (assume a notion of Argument Transfer)
- Cattell 1984 — V+NP phenomena in English.

Light Verbs are a Type of Auxiliary

- Hacker 1958 – Light verbs are essentially redundant elements:
  "eine eigentümliche, nicht nur bei den Hilfsverben [= light verbs] wirksame, sondern die ganze Sprache durchziehende stilistische Tendenz des Hindi in Aktion: die Neigung zum Pleonasmus."
- Hook 1974, 1991 — Light verbs are *vector* verbs that serve an *explicating* or aspectual function.
- Abeillé, Godard, and Sag 1998 — Tense auxiliaries and causative *faire* constructions in French are both analyzed as complex predicates.
- Most any GB/MP approach.

Complex Predicates are a Variation on Control/Raising

- Huang 1992 — Analyzes Chinese *ba* and *de* constructions as an instance of control.

The Light Verb Systematically Contributes to the Argument Structure

Light verbs are seen as contributing to the argument structure of a predicate they are syntactically and semantically dependent on.

- Rosen 1989 — Posits *light* (empty), *partial*, and *complete merger* at the level of argument structure for Romance restructuring verbs and causatives.
- Alsina 1996, Mohanan 1994, Butt 1995 — Posit the notion of *Predicate Composition*, *Argument Merger* and *Argument Fusion* in order to account for Romance, Hindi and Urdu complex predicates, respectively.
Little v

Light Verbs are actually v.

- This goes back to Chomsky (1957) who introduces v for auxiliaries and modals — the conflation of auxiliaries/modals with light verbs as in take a bath continues to this day.
- v is a mixture: could be seen either as a functional or a lexical projection or a bit of both. As such it is actually a very good candidate for a light verb analysis — I explore this option in section 9.

3 What I Believe

- Light Verbs are part of complex predicates. The defining characteristics of complex predicates are:
  - The argument structure is complex
two or more semantic heads contribute arguments as part of primary predication).
  - The grammatical functional structure is that of a simple predicate: there is only a single subject and no embedding (no control/raising).
  - Complex predicates may be formed either morphologically (lexically) or syntactically. The constructions under investigation here are formed syntactically.

- Identifying Light Verbs
  - A light verb is always form-identical with a main verb (Butt and Lahiri 2002).
  - Light Verbs have a funny syntax: they can be distinguished syntactically and phonologically from main verbs and auxiliaries — this indicates the need for a separate syntactic class (Butt and Geuder 2001).
  - The funny syntax goes hand-in-hand with a funny semantics: the systematic semantic contribution of a light verb is hard to characterize (cf. descriptive grammars of a language).

- Idea
  - Light verbs serve to further structure or modulate the event described by the main verb in a manner that is quite distinct from auxiliaries, modals or other main verbs.
  - Light verbs straddle the divide between the functional and lexical. They are essentially lexical elements but do not predicate like main verbs.
  - Prototypical Serial Verb Constructions do not involve light verbs. The syntax and semantics of Serial Verb Constructions are quite different and need to be kept separate.
4 Establishing Monoclausality

- Light verbs tend to combine with nouns, adjectives or verbs.
- For nouns and adjectives (in particular, resultatives), small clause analyses have been popular but not necessarily right.
- With V-V complex predication, the tendency has been to see this as a syntactic construction analogous to raising or control, i.e., as biclausal.

**Definition:** Complex Predicates are monoclausal (primary predication): the light verb does not contribute its own separate domain of predication, rather it contributes information which interacts with the predicative power of the main verb.

**Observation:** The establishment of monoclausality is language dependent.

4.1 Romance

Aissen and Perlmutter (1983) show that Clause Union (or Reduction) in Spanish and Italian is evidenced by phenomena such as clitic climbing. Rosen (1989) provides further discussion and tests, such as passivization, etc.

(2) a. Jean a fait partir Marie.
   Jean has made go Marie
   ‘Jean made Marie go.’ (French, Rosen 1989:22)

   b. Jean l’a fait partir.
   Jean her has made go
   ‘Jean made her go.’ (French, Rosen 1989:23)

(3) a. Marie a entendu Pierre réciter les poèmes.
   Marie has listened Pierre recite the poems
   ‘Marie heard Pierre recite the poems.’ (French, Rosen 1989:25)

   b. *Marie les a entendu Pierre réciter.
   Marie them has listened Pierre recite
   ‘Marie heard Pierre recite them.’ (French, Rosen 1989:25)

4.2 Korean

Choi (2002) shows that V-V constructions such as (4) are monoclausal: behavior of NPI, negation and non-separability of the two verbs.

(4) Chelswu-Ka namwunip-ul ssel-E chiw-ess-ta
    Chelswu-Nom leaves-Acc sweep-E clean-Past-Decl
    ‘Chelswu has **swept up** the leaves.’ (Korean)
The NPI items *anwu-to* ‘nobody’ and *an* ‘not’ together mean ‘nobody’. These items must cooccur in the same clause, otherwise the sentence is ungrammatical, as shown in (5).

   ‘Chelswu did not say that nobody ate the chestnut.’ (Korean)

V-V constructions such as (4) in contrast allow the distribution of NPI items, indicating monoclausality.

(6) anwu-to pam-ul an mek-E chiw-ess-ta.
   ‘Nobody (children) has eaten up the chestnut.’ (Korean)

### 4.3 Urdu

Butt (1995) shows that V-V such as in (7) and (8) are monoclausal: agreement, anaphora and control phenomena all indicate that there is only a single subject in the clause (no embedded clause, no embedded subject).

(7) nadya=ne saddaf=ko cıtlihk-ne di
    Nadya.F.Sg=Erg Saddaf.F.Sg=Dat letter.F.Nom write-Inf.Obl give-Perf.F.Sg
    ‘Nadya let Saddaf write a letter.’ (Urdu)

(8) nadya=ne xatlihk li-ya
    Nadya.F=Erg letter.M.Nom write take-Perf.M.Sg
    ‘Nadya wrote a letter (completely).’ (Urdu)

### 5 Light Verbs as a Separate Syntactic Class

Light Verbs are generally readily identifiable as a separate syntactic class. They have distinct distributional properties which coincide with a distinct (though hard to characterize) semantic contribution.

#### 5.1 Mandarin Chinese (Scott 1996)

Chinese directionals are usually classed with resultatives because both take the potential infix (*de/bu* for positive and negative, respectively).

(9) duan de shang (Directional)
    serve POTpos ascend
    ‘can be served up’ (Chinese)
(10) da bu po (Resultative)
hit POT_neg break
‘cannot be broken/unbreakable’ (Chinese)

Directionals are drawn from a closed set of verbs of direction.

(11) Directional Etymons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Directional Etymons</th>
<th>shang ascend/up</th>
<th>xia descend/down</th>
<th>jin enter/in</th>
<th>chu exit/out</th>
<th>guo cross/over</th>
<th>dao reach/to</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>return/back</td>
<td>hui</td>
<td>qi rise</td>
<td>kai open/apart</td>
<td>lai come/here</td>
<td>qu go/thither</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(12) Examples of Usage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Usage</th>
<th>pao jin run enter</th>
<th>na chu take exit</th>
<th>fang xia put descend</th>
<th>pa shang climb ascend</th>
<th>tong guo traverse cross</th>
<th>zhuan hui turn return</th>
<th>lai dao come reach</th>
<th>zhan qi stand rise</th>
<th>zou kai walk open</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>=‘to enter running’</td>
<td>=‘to take/extract’</td>
<td>=‘to put down’</td>
<td>=‘to climb up’</td>
<td>=‘to go through/cross’</td>
<td>=‘to go through/cross’</td>
<td>=‘to turn back/return’</td>
<td>=‘to arrive, come to’</td>
<td>=‘to stand up’</td>
<td>=‘to walk away’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.1.1 Directionals as Light Verbs

Previous analyses: Several Sinologists have suggested that in addition to Resultatives and Directionals, a third class of verb compounds exists, often referred to as “phase” complements following Chao (1968).

The common properties of this class include: 1) a quasi-aspectual meaning; 2) boundedness; 3) they do not take the potential infix or the deictic lai ‘come’ and qu ‘go’.

Sample Directional Light Verb

(13) qing ni liu xia nide ming-pian
please you leave descend your name card
‘Please leave your name card.’ (Chinese)

Light verbs can be clearly distinguished from a lexical V2 directional usage ((9)) and from a fully functional aspectual usage (exemplified by guo, see Scott (1996) for further discussion).
The light verb usage adds a telic component to the event (in most cases).

The light verb usage can serve as a substitute for an otherwise obligatory aspectual marker (e.g., the *ba*-construction).

The Chinese light verbs construction shows selectional restrictions that go beyond the merely functional.

(15) a. guan diao/*shang shouyinji
    shut fall/ascend radio
    ‘switch off the radio’ (Chinese)

b. guan shang/?diao men
    shut ascend/fall door
    ‘close the door’ (Chinese)

Here again we have a set of light verbs identified by a set of distinct properties (phonological, syntactic, semantic) which interact with the main event predication by specifying more information about the type of event (for a detailed analysis see Butt and Scott 2002).
5.2 Urdu

Light verbs in Urdu can similarly be identified via a set of distinct properties.

- The light verb always carries tense/aspect inflection.
- The light verb fits into a distinct slot in the verbal complex
  
  (16) Main Verb (Light Verb) (Passive) (Progressive) (Be Auxiliary)

- The light verb influences the case marking of the subject (the relevant semantic parameter is volitionality (roughly)).

  (17) \( us=ne/^*vo \ xat \ lik^b-a \)
  
  
  ‘He wrote a letter.’ (Urdu)

  (18) a. \( *us=ne/vo \ xat \ lik^b \ par-a \)
  
  
  ‘He fell to writing a letter.’ (Urdu)

  b. \( us=ne/^*vo \ xat \ lik^b \ li-ya \)
  
  
  ‘He wrote a letter (completely).’ (Urdu)

- Light verbs phrase together with the main verb but still form their own prosodic words. This affects phenomena like reduplication: light verbs can be reduplicated ((19)), auxiliaries cannot ((20)).

  (19) a. \( vo \ dga-ti \ t^b-i \)
  
Pron.3.Sg.Nom sleep go-Impf.F.Sg be.Past-Sg.F
  
  ‘She to used to go to sleep.’ (Urdu)

  b. \( vo \ dga-ti \ vati \ t^b-i \)
  
Pron.3.Sg.Nom sleep go-Impf.F.Sg go.Redup be.Past-Sg.F
  
  ‘She used to keep going to sleep (at inopportune moments).’

  (20) a. \( vo \ rah-i \ t^b-i \)
  
Pron.3.Sg.Nom sleep Prog-F.Sg be.Past-Sg.F
  
  ‘She was sleeping.’ (Urdu)

  b. \( *vo \ rah-i \ vahi \ t^b-i \)
  
Pron.3.Sg.Nom sleep Prog-F.Sg Prog.Redup be.Past-Sg.F
  
  ‘She was sleeping.’ (Urdu)
Light verbs are often associated with perfectivity (Hook 1991, 1993, Singh 1994) or inception/completion (Butt 1995) and various other more vague semantic dimensions such as suddenness, forcefulness, volitionality, benefaction, etc. (Hook 1974).

\[\text{Analysis:} \] Again we have a set of light verbs identified by a set of distinct properties (phonological, syntactic, semantic) which interact with the main event predication by specifying more information about the aktionsart and the manner of the event. That is, analyses in terms of perfectivity and the associated idea of aspectogenesis mistake the actual nature of the semantic impact of these light verbs.

6 Light Verbs and Change: Some Existing Ideas

6.1 Clause Fusion


When the two clauses are made one by diachronic processes, the main verb governs the syntax of the reflex clause.

This turns out to apply only to auxiliary formation.

6.2 Simplification of Syntactic Structures

Roberts and Roussou (1999) and Roberts (1995) see grammaticalization as a simplification of syntactic structures.

(25) a. The kynge mote spoken.

b. $[\text{TP} \text{ The kynge } [\text{T} \text{ mote} ] \ [\text{VP} \text{ t} \text{mote} [\text{TP} \text{ np} \text{ spoken}]]]$

c. $[\text{TP} \text{ The king } [\text{T} \text{ must} [\text{VP} \text{ speak}]]]$

Again, this work focuses on the development of auxiliaries from main verbs (as does Roberts and Roussou 2003).
6.3 The Grammaticalization Cline

Hopper and Traugott (1993:108)

full verb > (vector verb) > auxiliary > clitic > affix

- Vector (light) verbs are included due to a study on Hindi and Marathi by Hook (1991).
- Hook sees vector verbs as
  1. a subtype of auxiliaries
  2. an instance of Aspectogenesis

6.4 The Problem of Staying Power

- If light verbs follow a grammaticalization cline or are subject to reanalysis, then one would expect light verbs and main verbs to display a divergence in form (cf. English past tense -d from do, Urdu future -g- from ja/ga ‘go’).
- In other words: why are light verbs always form-identical to a main verb?

This observation points to the idea that light verbs do not seem to enter the grammaticalization cline, i.e., they are not main verbs which have been reanalyzed as light verbs and which are now prone to further reanalysis.

(26) \[ \text{full verb} \rightarrow \text{auxiliary} \rightarrow \text{clitic} \rightarrow \text{affix(es)} \]

7 Tracing Light Verbs through the Ages

Indo-Aryan is a language family which has an unbroken historical record of about 3000 years.

So, beginning with any of the modern Indo-Aryan languages (like Urdu/Hindi), one should in principle be able to reconstruct where and how complex predicates originated.

Based on Butt and Lahiri (2002), the results for one type of V-V complex predicates for Urdu and Bengali are summarized in this section.
7.1 The Sanskrit participle in tvā

- The modern main verb form in complex predicates originates in the Sanskrit “gerund”.
- The Sanskrit “gerund” was indeclinable and was formed by the suffixes tvā(ya), or ya/yā (see Whitney 1889:345–360, also Tikkanen 1987 for detailed investigations).
- These suffixes were also sometimes referred to as conjunctive participles (CP).
- The use of tvā was manifold and varied (see Tikkanen 1987).
- One of the uses is comparable with the modern complex predicate — note the same possibilities for ambiguity found in modern Urdu and Bengali (compare (27) with (28)).

(27) a indram ārabhyya cara
    Indra-ACC grasp-GD go-IMP.2SG
    ‘Having taken hold of Indra, move!’
    ‘Keep yourself to Indra!’
    (Sanskrit, Tikkanen 1987:7)

b. ime ta indra te vayam
    puruṣṭuta ye tvārabhyya carāmasī
    ‘We here are yours, O ever-praised Indra, who wander about having taken hold of you/who constantly keep ourselves to you.’ (Vedic)
    (Rgveda I.57.4; Tikkanen 1987:175)

(28) a. nadya a ga-yi
    Nadya.F.Nom come go-Perf.F.Sg
    ‘Nadya has arrived.’
    ‘Having come, Nadya went.’ (Urdu)

b. ram es-e por-l-o
    Ram.Nom come-Perf fall-Past.3
    ‘Ram arrived.’
    ‘Having come, Ram fell.’ (Bengali)

Also compare the Sanskrit (29) with the modern Urdu (30).

(29) tato makṣikoddīya gatā
    then fly-fly.Gd go.PastParticiple
    ‘then the fly flew away’

(30) kabutre ur ga-ye
    pigeon.M.Pl.Nom fly go-Perf.M.Pl
    ‘The pigeons flew away.’ (Urdu)
7.2 Pāli (600 BCE — 1000 CE)

Joint predication is very clearly attested in Middle Indo-Aryan (Hendriksen 1944, Hook 1991).

(31) a. ... assamapadaṁ ānetvā agginḥ katvā adāsi
   hermitage.Acc lead.Gd fire.Acc.Sg make.Gd give.Impf.3.Sg
   ‘... brought her to his hermitage and made a fire for her’
   ['having brought (her) to the hermitage, made a fire (for her)']
   Pāli, Jatāka Tales, Sri Lanka (Hendriksen 1944:134)

b. daruni āharitvā agginḥ katvā dassati
   sticks bring.Gd fire.Acc.Sg make.Gd give.Fut.3.Sg
   ‘Bringing wood he’ll make a fire (benefactive use).’
   (Trenckner (1879:77), cited by Hook (1993:97))

7.3 950–1550 CE

Examples of complex predicates can be found in Old Bengali in the Caryapad.

(32) a. cauṣatḥi koṭhā guṇ-īā lehu
   sixty-four rooms count.Gd take
   ‘count sixty-four rooms (for yourself)’
   (Caryapad 12, Mojunder 1973:248) (Old Bengali)

b. bājule dila moha-kakḥu bāṇ-īā
   Bajula.Obl give.Past.3.Sg rooms of illusion count-Gd
   ‘Bajula counted the rooms of illusion (for his disciple).’
   (Caryapad 35, Mojunder 1973:248) (Old Bengali)

Note the separability of main verb and light verb — this is still a characteristic of complex predicates in the modern languages.

7.4 1575–1600 CE

In the New Indo-Aryan times co-predication is even more easily identifiable (Meißner 1964).

McGregor (1968:209–213) notes that a form of verbal composition found in Braj Bhāṣā prose from around 1600 CE is used much as in modern Hindi.

(33) a. ... cori letu hai
   steal.Gd take.Impf be.Pres.3.Sg
   ‘... (he) steals’ (Old Hindi)
b. \textit{kāḍhi lei} \\
pull out.Gd take.Perf \\
‘(he) pulled out (with effort)’ (Old Hindi)

c. samudraḥim \textit{nāsi jāta} haim \\
‘(They/We) cross oceans (completely).’ (Old Hindi)

7.5 Summary

- Light verb constructions can be identified throughout the ages.
- In all cases the light verb is form-identical to a main verb in the language.
- They thus appear to be historically stable, very much unlike auxiliaries.

8 The Connection to Preverbs/Particles

Sanskrit had a set of preverbs/particles which combined with a main verb to result in a range of meanings, many of them reminiscent of light verb semantics.

(34) \textbf{Preverb} \hspace{1cm} \textbf{Rough Meaning}

\begin{tabular}{ll}
\textit{ati} & across, beyond, past, over, to excess \\
\textit{adhi} & above, over, on, on to \\
\textit{anu} & after, along, toward \\
\textit{antar} & between, among, within \\
\textit{apa} & away, forth, off \\
\textit{api} & unto, close upon, on \\
\textit{abhi} & to, unto, against (often with implied violence) \\
\textit{ava} & down, off \\
\textit{ā} & to, unto, at \\
\textit{ud} & up, up forth, out \\
\textit{upa} & to, unto, toward \\
\textit{ni} & down, in, into \\
\textit{nis} & out, forth \\
\textit{parā} & to a distance, away, forth \\
\textit{pari} & round about, around \\
\textit{pra} & forward, onward, forth, fore \\
\textit{prati} & in reversed direction, back to, back against, against, in return \\
\textit{vi} & apart, asunder, away, out \\
\textit{sam} & along, with, together
\end{tabular}
(35) a. pariṇīya
   around.lead.Gd
   ‘having led around’

b. vi-kṛ
apart-do
‘scatter’

The modern Indo-Aryan languages (like Urdu/Hindi, Bengali or Marathi) do not have such preverbs or particles.

Some modern Indo-Aryan languages do not have “aspectual” V-V light verbs. These languages instead employ adverbials (e.g., hither, thither) (Hook 2001).


**Question:** Is there a connection?

### 8.1 Development of the Preverbs (Deo 2002)

Deo (2002) traces the development of preverbs in Indo-Aryan.

**Vedic** (oldest form of the language)

- Preverbs are associated with canonical directional or adpositional meanings.
- For some preverbs, the meanings are less transparent (non-compositional) and the use of the preverbs is associated with semantic notions of forcefulness, completion, inception, etc. (Just as with the modern light verbs).

**Sanskrit**

- Preverbs can be divided into two categories: those that have a prepositional semantics (multisyllabic) and those that have a non-transparent semantics (monosyllabic).

**Middle Indo-Aryan** (Prakrit)

- Preverbs are reanalyzed as either verbal prefixes or part of a monomorphemic root.
- There is a marked decline of preverbs which have only directional semantics.

**Modern Indo-Aryan**

- The only surviving preverbs are those that have been reanalyzed as a part of the verbal root (unrecognizable to the native speaker).
8.2 Summary

- It is plausible that the use of light verbs increased as preverbs fell out of the language.
- The South Asian light verbs are often compared to Germanic particle verbs (e.g., when I give talks). An explicit connection is made by Ramchand (2002, 2003), section 9.1.3.

9 Verbal Passepartouts

Facts to Account for in an Analysis:

- A light verb is always form-identical with a main verb form in the language.
- A light verb contributes a non-transparent meaning to the complex predication. The generalization seems to be that light verbs modulate/structure a given event predication
  - in a manner similar to that of modifiers with respect to semantic notions such as benefaction, suddenness, etc. (Butt and Geuder 2001);
  - by specifying information about the aktionsart of the predicate.

Proposal:

- The lexical specification of some verbs (crosslinguistically) allows for a use as either a main verb or a light verb, e.g., *come, go, take, give, hit, throw, give, rise, fall*.

(36) Full Verb

  `take` Underlying Entry Light Verb

- When a lexical item such as *throw* or *take* enters the syntax as a main verb, it predicates like a main verb.

- When it enters the syntax as a light verb, it is dependent on another event predication and interacts with this one.

- This results in the further specification of the aktionsart and the manner of the event.

- Semantic notions such benefaction, force etc., are derived from the collection of entailments usually associated with the lexical semantics of the main verb (see Butt and Geuder 2001).

The essential parts of this idea can be found in Butt (1995).

An articulation in terms of recent ideas (e.g., Borer 1998) points to an unexpected result, which is explored in section 9.1. Section 9.2 provides an LFG analysis.
9.1 The Syntax of Event Structure

Light verbs serve to help structure events. Ramchand (2001, 2003) and Butt and Ramchand (2003) assume the following decomposition of event structure (aktionsart).

\[
(37) \quad vP \quad (= \text{causing projection})
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{NP}_3 \\
\text{subj of ‘cause’}
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
v \\
\text{VP} \quad (= \text{process projection})
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{NP}_2 \\
\text{subj of ‘process’}
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
V \\
\text{RvP} \quad (= \text{result projection})
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{NP}_1 \\
\text{subj of ‘result’}
\end{array}
\]

\[
\text{Rv} \quad \text{XP}
\]


The following notions are assumed to be primitives of the metalanguage:

\[
e = e_i \rightarrow e_j : e \text{ consists of two subevents, } e_i, e_j \text{ such that } e_i \text{ leads to or causes } e_j
\]

(see Hale and Keyser 1993)

\[
e = < e_i, e_j > : e \text{ consists of two subevents, } e_i, e_j \text{ such that } e_i \text{ and } e_j \text{ form an accomplishment event structure where } e_i \text{ is the process portion and } e_j \text{ is a state interpreted as the result state of the process (see Parsons 1990 and Higginbotham 1999, cf. also Levin and Rappaport-Hovav’s 1998 notion of template augmentation).}
\]

(38) ‘build the house’ \( (e = e_1 \rightarrow < e_2, e_3 >) \)

where \( e_1 \) = the causing, intentional impulse

\( e_2 \) = the process of house-building

\( e_3 \) = the state of the house having been built.
9.1.1 The Urdu Permissive

(39) nadya=ne saddaf=ko xqt likh-ne di-ya
Nadya.F.Sg=Erg Saddaf.F.Sg=Dat letter.M.Nom write-Inf.Obl give-Perf.M.Sg
‘Nadya let Saddaf write a letter.’

Syntax and Semantics for (39)

(40) V1=V=write(e; y, z) V2=v=Cause\allow\(e'; x, e''\)
\[\exists e: e = e_2 \rightarrow e_1 [\text{write}(e_1; \text{‘Saddaf’, ‘letter’}) & \text{Cause}_{\allow}(e_2; \text{‘Anjum’, e_1})]\]
‘Anjum is the causer/allower of a subevent of Saddaf writing a letter.’

(41)

Features of the Analysis:

- The permissive ‘give’ is a natural v: Its semantics are consonant with the causal semantics posited for v in general.
- The process phrase (VP) is a complement of v: There is only one clausal nucleus.
- When v is overtly instantiated, particular semantics result: the permissive is a particular instantiation of a causative semantics.
- It introduces event structural complexity (subevents).
- There is no result portion to this structure: permissives have no telic readings.
9.1.2 Light Verbs with Telic Readings

(42) nadya=ne xat likʰ li-ya
    Nadya.F=Erg letter.M.Nom write take-Perf.M.Sg
    ‘Nadya wrote a letter (completely).’

Syntax and Semantics for (42)

(43) V1 = Rv = written (e; y) V2 = v = CAUSE (e′(=e₁ → e₂); x,y)
    ∃e: e = e₁ → <e₂ e₃>[Cause(e₁ → e₂; ‘Nadya’, ‘letter’) & written(e₃; ‘letter’)]
    ‘Nadya instigates a process affecting a letter which has the result that the letter comes
to be written.’

(44)

Features of the Analysis

• The light verb in this takes up both the cause and the process part of the predication.

• The light verb must primarily be licensed in V because of:
  – Greater cohesion between light and main verb here as compared to the permissive.
  – Negation facts and the fact that the permissive can stack on top of the light verb, but not the other way around.
The light verbs play a role in the determination of subject case ((18)). The relevant semantic parameter is volitionality, which can be subsumed by a more general causal semantics and the light verb is thus also present in v.

The complex predicate construction forces the main verb (V1) into the result component, not the light verb as would be expected if light verbs were indeed akin to aspectual markers.

This is a relatively surprising result and goes against much of the intuition in the literature. However, it seems to be right (supported by the morphological history of the main verb in the V-V complex predicate, also cf. Bangla).

### 9.1.3 Sample Analysis of English Particles (Ramchand 2002)

Ramchand (2002) claims to give a particle theory of light verbs. But while both particles and light verbs involve subevental modulation, they do so in different ways.

(46) Throw the boxes out.

(47) 
```
   VP
   /\  \\
  /   \ \\
/     \ \\
V   RvP
   /\  \\
  /   \ \\
/     \ \\
subject of Process
```

- Note that the particle is confined to the result portion.
- It is not a verb and therefore does not enter the syntax as a little v or V.
• Thus, while particles and light verbs often appear to have the same kind of overall semantic effect on the event predication, the actual structure is different.

**Semantic Construction:** The overall event semantics arises out of the construction the light verbs or particles enter into with a main verb.

### 9.2 Light Verbs and Event Composition in LFG

**Basic Idea:**

- The verbal passepartouts can appear either as main verbs or as light verbs.
- The version that is chosen must be compatible with the syntax of the overall clause.
- There is one underlying lexical entry which gives rise to all of the relevant possibilities.

**Sample Lexical Entry:**

(48)  \( \text{‘give’} \) V  

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{PRED} & = \text{‘de<([SUBJ],([OBJ],([OBJ])>’} \\
\text{LEX-SEM AGENTIVE} & = + \\
V_{\text{(light)}} & = \text{‘de<([SUBJ],%PRED>’} \\
\text{LEX-SEM AGENTIVE} & = + \\
\text{LEX-SEM GOAL} & = + \\
\text{Cause}_{\text{allow}}(e'; x, e'') \\
V_{\text{(light)}} & = \text{LEX-SEM AGENTIVE} = + \\
\text{Cause}(e'(=e_1 \rightarrow e_2); x, y)
\end{align*}
\]

The information under lex-sem is a “poor person’s” argument-structure. One could include an explicit level of argument structure, but I haven’t done so.

**Event Semantics**

- The event semantics of the main verb are arrived at by default in semantic construction and do not need to be specified explicitly.
- The light verb versions contribute to the event semantics of the main predication by providing information about the subevents which are involved.
- Additional dimensions of meaning such as forcefulness or benefaction are context-dependent and must be derived via pragmatics on the basis of the lexical semantics of the main and the light verb.
- The telic component is triggered in the syntax by the complex predicate construction.
10 Conclusion

- Light verbs crosslinguistically form a distinct category, but the precise syntax in individual languages will differ.

- Light verbs serve to modulate (sub)event structure.

- Light verbs and their form-identical main verbs share a lexical entry: the difference in predicational power depends on their position in the syntax.

- Light verbs are inert with respect to historical change.

References


http://www-ualots.let.uu.nl/conferences/Perspectives_on_Aspect/PoA_index.html


