

A Comparative Study of Light Verbs in Tamil and Tulu

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ABSTRACT

In South Asian languages with SOV word order as an areal feature, a compound verb construction appears as V1+V2 where V1 is the main verb and V2 the light verb. The semantic content that a light verb has is a grammaticalised one, in a V+V construction. The light verb usually contributes grammaticalised meanings, aspect/aktionsart, speaker evaluation etc. The light verb has an independent lexical meaning when it occurs solely as a main verb. Light verbs are also called as Explicator verbs and Vector verbs. They are found in Compound Verb Constructions as a verb that modifies the main verb. The main verb is called as a Polar verb and the light verb is called as a Vector verb. The V+V construction is variously called as a Compound verb, Serial verb etc. This paper is the first of its kind to explore the area of light verbs in Tulu. Apart from listing out the light verbs in Tulu (which is definitely not an exhaustive one), this paper compares them with their counterparts in Tamil, checking meanwhile if they are at all etymologically related. The etymological relation between the Tamil and Tulu light verbs is sought after because they both belong to the Southern branch of Dravidian languages.

KEYWORDS: *Light Verbs, Comparative Dravidian Linguistics, Tamil linguistics, Tulu Linguistics*

What are Light Verbs?

In South Asian languages with SOV word order as an areal feature, a compound verb construction appears as V1+V2 where V1 is the main verb and V2 the light verb. The semantic content that a light verb has is a grammaticalised one, in a V+V construction. The light verb usually contributes grammaticalised meanings, aspect/aktionsart, speaker evaluation etc. The light verb has an independent lexical meaning when it occurs solely as a main verb. Light verbs are also called as Explicator verbs and Vector verbs. They are found in Compound Verb Constructions as a verb that modifies the main verb. The main verb is called as a Polar verb and the light verb is called as a Vector verb. The V+V construction is variously called as a Compound verb, Serial verb etc. For example, let us consider the following Hindi sentence:

vo: a: gə-jə:

He come GO-pst

'He came'

In the above sentence the V2 gəjə: is the light verb. It has a lexical meaning (that meaning a word has

independent of any construction) which is 'go'. It has a grammatical meaning (as part of the V1+V2 construction) as a marker of perfectivity. So it means that 'α', the action of 'coming' is complete/perfect.

There are many such light verbs among the languages of the linguistic area of South Asia. Each of them has an independent lexical meaning and a grammatical meaning. The grammatical meanings that the set of light verbs encode in a language are diverse. Abbi & Gopalakrishnan (1991) classifies these diverse meanings into three semantic subtypes - Aspectual, Adverbial and Attitudinal. The following is a Tamil sentence:

ɪŋɖə pa:t-ə ke:t-tu pa:ru

this song-ACC listen-CVB SEE

'Try listening to this song'

*CVB is the abbreviation of Converb marker, also called as the marker of adverbial participle.

In the above sentence, the word pa:ru does not mean 'see' even though that is what it means as an independent verb. It however means 'to try X' where

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X is the main verb. So $\epsilon\delta\eta\tau\colon\eta\text{ } \rho\alpha\colon\text{ru}\iota$ means ‘try taking’ ($\epsilon\delta\eta\tau$ means ‘take’), $\omicron\colon\delta\iota\text{ } \rho\alpha\colon\text{ru}\iota$ means ‘try running’ ($\omicron\colon\delta\eta$ means ‘run’).

Compound verbs also occur in N+V constructions. The function of the light verb in these constructions is to incorporate the noun in the VP by verbalising it. As an illustration, consider the following Tamil sentence:

$\xi\eta\iota\colon\text{I } \epsilon\delta\iota$

liquor HIT

‘drink liquor’

While the noun $\xi\eta\iota\colon\text{I}$ in the above sentence means ‘water’ which is a euphemism for liquor, the light verb $\epsilon\delta\iota$ means ‘hit’ when occurring as a main verb.

This paper is the first of its kind to explore the area of light verbs in Tulu. Apart from listing out the light verbs in Tulu (which is definitely not an exhaustive one), this paper compares them with their counterparts in Tamil, checking meanwhile if they are at all etymologically related. The etymological relation between the Tamil and Tulu light verbs is sought after because they both belong to the Southern branch of Dravidian languages.

Comparison of Light verbs in Tamil and Tulu

1. Tamil

The Tamil main verb $\rho\alpha\colon\text{ru}\iota$ ‘see’ also functions as a light verb in a compound verb construction, meaning ‘to try X’ where X is the main/polar verb.

$\omicron\colon\delta\iota\text{-I } \rho\alpha\colon\text{ru}\iota$

run-CVB SEE

‘try running.’

Tulu

The Tulu main verb $\xi\iota\colon$ ‘see’ though not etymologically related to the Tamil $\rho\alpha\colon\text{ru}\iota$, also functions as a light verb with the same meaning as the above mentioned Tamil light verb.

$\text{be}\colon\text{le-nu}\iota\quad \text{m}\epsilon\text{-}\xi\iota\iota\quad \xi\iota\iota\colon\text{-la}\iota$

work-ACC do-CVB SEE-2.SG

‘try doing the work.’

2. Tamil

The Tamil main verb $\text{vi}\delta\eta\iota$ ‘leave’ functions as a light verb as a marker of perfectivity.

$\text{sol}\colon\text{-I}\quad \text{vi}\delta\iota\colon\text{-}\tilde{\alpha}\iota$

tell-CVB LEAVE-3.SG.M

‘He has said.’

Tulu

An etymologically related word to the Tamil $\text{vi}\delta\eta\iota$ is $\text{bu}\delta\eta\iota$ in Tulu. It too functions as a marker of perfectivity as a light verb.

$\iota\colon\text{ } \rho\alpha\colon\text{tr}\epsilon\text{-nu}\iota\quad \text{aolu}\quad \xi\iota\iota\colon\text{-}\delta\eta\iota\text{ } \text{bu}\delta\eta\iota$

this vessel-ACC there keep-CVB LEAVE

‘keep this vessel there.’

3. Tamil

The Tamil verb $\rho\text{o}\colon\text{I}$ meaning ‘go’ functions as a light verb marking a change of state, as in the following sentence:

$\text{na}\colon\text{ji}\text{ } \text{s}\epsilon\text{-}\xi\iota\iota\text{ } \rho\text{o}\colon\text{-}\emptyset\text{-c}\colon\text{u}\iota$

dog die-CVB GO-PST-3.SG.N

‘The Dog is dead.’

There is yet another light verb of the same form $\rho\text{o}\colon\text{I}$ which expresses future intention.

$\text{n}\tilde{\alpha}\iota\colon\quad \text{kulu-kk}\epsilon\quad \rho\text{o}\colon\text{-r-}\tilde{\epsilon}\iota$

I bathe-INF GO-PRS-1.SG

‘I am going to bathe’

Tulu

Tulu uses the same root verb $\rho\text{o}\colon\text{I}$ as a light verb in a similar sentence:

$\epsilon\text{n-kui}\text{ } \text{m}\epsilon\text{-}\rho\epsilon\text{-}\xi\iota\iota\text{ } \rho\text{o}\colon\text{-}\emptyset\text{-}\eta\delta\eta\iota$

me-DAT forget-CVB GO-PST-3.SG.N

‘I forgot.’

Tulu also has a $\rho\text{o}\colon\text{I}$ which expresses future intention.

$\text{na}\colon\text{ji}\text{ } \text{s}\epsilon\text{j-}\xi\iota\iota\text{ } \rho\text{o}\colon\text{-}\xi\iota\iota\text{-}\eta\delta\eta\iota$

Dog die-CVB GO-PST-3.SG.N

‘The dog is dead.’

4. Tamil

The Tamil root verb $\xi\iota\colon\text{r}$ means ‘complete, finish’. But when it functions as a light verb in a V1+V2 construction, it means ‘to do V1 at any cost’. Take the following sentence for instance:

$\alpha\colon\delta\iota\text{-I}\quad \xi\iota\iota\colon\text{-r-}\epsilon\text{-}\eta\text{um}$

dance-CVB COMPLETE-INF=OBLG

‘have to dance at any cost.’

*OBLG is the Obligation modal marker

Tulu

Tulu uses the very same root verb $\xi\iota\colon\text{r}$ as a light verb in exactly the same way as Tamil.

$\iota\colon\text{ } \text{gob}\colon\text{u-nu}\iota\quad \text{g}\epsilon\text{nd}\eta\iota\text{-}\delta\epsilon\iota\colon\quad \text{ti}\colon\text{r.u-v-}\epsilon$

this game-ACC win=EMP COMPLETE-FUT-1.SG

‘I will win the game at any cost.’

5. Tamil

The Tamil root verb $\rho\text{o}\colon\text{d}\eta\iota$ means ‘put’. This light verb comes under the semantic subtype

ATTITUDINAL, according to Abbi & Gopalakrishnan (1991). It expresses the speaker's opinion that the subject shows a lack of care towards the object of the event (Annamalai 1982:68).

nā: əḍ-ə vɛɭ:-i po:ɭ-t-ē:

I that-ACC cut-CVB PUT-PST-1.SG

'I cut that carelessly.'

Tulu

Tulu uses a cognate **pa:ḍu** of Tamil **po:ḍu** to be used in a V1+V2 construction. As a light verb, it adds a perfective aspect to the construction unlike the attitudinal meaning conveyed by its Tamil counterpart.

ja:nw a: be:lɛ-nw mɛl-tu pa:ḍ-ij-æ

I that work-ACC do-CVB PUT-PST-1.SG

'I did that work.'

6. Tamil

As a light verb, the Tamil verb **vai** acts as a causative. It has the meaning 'keep' when occurring as a main verb.

sə:p:ɪḍ-ə vai

eat-INF KEEP

'make (him) eat'

In Modern Tamil, causativisation happens morphologically as well as periphrastically. The above light verb construction is the periphrastic strategy, while the suffixation of **-vi** to the verb stem is the morphological strategy (e.g. **əri-vi** 'make know'). The light verb **vai** and the auxiliaries **pəṇ:u** and **cəy** (both meaning 'do') occur after an infinitival form of the main verb to form the periphrastic causative construction.

Tulu

The Tulu **ḍi:** is not a cognate of Tamil **vai**, even though they both mean the same i.e. 'keep'. This Tulu light verb however differs from the Tamil one, as it marks for perfective aspect and is not a causative.

be:lɛ-nw mɛl-tu ḍi:-lə

work-ACC do-CVB KEEP-2.SG

'you do the work.'

7. Tamil

The Tamil verb **koḍu** expresses benefaction when it occurs as a light verb. As an independent verb, it means 'give'. It occurs after the adverbial participle form of the main verb.

sol:-i koḍu

tell-CVB GIVE

'Teach'

Tulu

Tulu has a cognate **koru** which forms a very similar construction to the one above, as a light verb.

pəṇḍu-ḍu koru

tell-CVB GIVE

'teach'

8. Tamil

The Tamil verb root **va:**₁ means 'come'. It is grammaticalised as a light verb in the following construction to express future intention. This expression of future intention is also conveyed by the light verb **po:**.

ke:k:-ə və-r-ē:

ask-INF COME-PRS-1.SG

'I am going to ask.'

There is yet another light verb **va:**₂ which is grammaticalised as the modal 'can' which expresses ability.

ənə-kku pa:ḍ-ə vər-um

I-DAT sing-INF COME-FUT

'I can sing'

Tulu

The Tulu cognate **ba:**₁ is also employed in a similar construction as a marker of intended future actions.

ke:ṇḍu-ḍu bər-p-æ

ask-CVB COME-PRS-1Sg

'I am going to ask.'

Tulu too, like Tamil, has yet another **ba:**₂ which is a modal verb expressing ability.

ən-kw pəḍə pən-ræ bər-pu-ṇḍu

I-DAT song tell-INF COME-FUT-3.N

'I can sing.'

9. Tamil

The following is not a V1+V2 construction but rather a N+V construction where a light verb **iru** is employed. The lexical meaning of **iru** is 'sit'. As a light verb however it functions as a stative verb of possession.

ənə-k:w kə:ɸ:əl iru-k:w-Ø

I-DAT fever SIT-PRS-3.N

'I have fever.'

Tulu

An equivalent to the above Tamil sentence is the following employing **kul:u** (meaning ‘sit’) as a light verb acting as a stative verb of possession.

en-kul jwəra kul-ḡu-ṇḡu
I-DAT fever SIT-PST-3.N
‘I have fever.’

Summary

The above is not an exhaustive list of light verbs in Tulu. We have listed only those salient light verbs and their counterparts in Tamil that yield some comparison. It is beyond the scope of this comparative paper to dwell on why there is a similarity between the light verbs of Tamil and Tulu, whether it is due to inheritance from a proto-language or due to areal influence.

S. No.	Tamil light verb	Tulu equivalent	Lexical meaning	Grammatical role as a light verb
1.	<i>pa:ru</i>	<i>ḡu:</i>	‘see’	Expresses the meaning ‘try (something)’
2.	<i>viḡu</i>	<i>buḡu</i>	‘leave’	Marker of perfectivity
3.	<i>po:₁</i>	<i>po:</i>	‘go’	Marks a change of state
4.	<i>po:₂</i>		‘go’	Expresses future intention
5.	<i>ṡi:ru</i>	<i>ṡi:ru</i>	‘complete’	Expresses the meaning ‘to do something at any cost’
6.	<i>po:ḡu</i>	<i>pa:ḡu</i>	‘put’	Marker of perfectivity
7.	<i>vai</i>	<i>ḡi:</i>	‘keep’	Causative
8.	<i>koḡu</i>	<i>koru</i>	‘give’	Marker of benefactive case
9.	<i>va:₁</i>	<i>ba:</i>	‘come’	Marker of intended future actions
10.	<i>va:₂</i>		‘come’	Modal marker of ability
11.	<i>iru</i>	<i>kul:u</i>	‘sit’	Stative verb of possession

The following table summarises the etymological relatedness (using the Dravidian Etymological Dictionary) of the light verbs in Tulu and Tamil:

S. No.	Tamil Light Verb	Tulu equivalent	Etymologically related?	DED entry no.
1.	<i>pa:ru</i>	<i>ḡu:</i>	NO	-
2.	<i>viḡu</i>	<i>buḡu</i>	YES	5393
3.	<i>po:</i>	<i>po:</i>	YES	4572
4.	<i>ṡi:ru</i>	<i>ṡi:ru</i>	YES	3278
5.	<i>po:ḡu</i>	<i>pa:ḡu</i>	YES	4581
6.	<i>vai</i>	<i>ḡi:</i>	NO	-
7.	<i>koḡu</i>	<i>koru</i>	YES	2053
8.	<i>va:</i>	<i>ba:</i>	YES	5270
9.	<i>iru</i>	<i>kul:u</i>	NO	-

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