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Light Verbs in Pashto: Traditionally and Generatively

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
	Light verbs have been a topic of discussion for the last six decades. It has been studied cross-linguistically; however, most of the influential accounts of light verbs have been about Indo-Aryan languages, as these languages make extensive use of light verbs in their argument structures. Pashto, an Indo-Iranian language, also makes frequent use of light verbs in its constructions; however, light verbs in Pashto have remained unexplored to a greater extent, both traditionally and generatively. The majority of the accounts discuss complex predicates but not the light verbs in their own right. The goal of this paper is to explore light verbs in Pashto both traditionally and generatively. This involves gleaning light verbs in Pashto by applying yardsticks that have been used cross-linguistically during the last few decades. The generative aspect lies in proposing argument structures/ derivations for the three tenses where slots for the light verbs are located/ proposed.

Introduction

Light verbs have been there in the relevant literature due to one reason or another since they were introduced by Jespersen in 1965. The concept of light verbs acquired more significance when they were seen in the context of the internal subject hypothesis and Larson's vP shells (1988, 1990). However, light verbs in Pashto remained unexplored both traditionally and generatively despite these developments. This was coupled with the fact that like Indo-Aryan languages, light verbs play a very significant role in Pashto's (an Indo-Iranian language) argument structure. In the context of this background, the goal of the present study is to explore light verbs in Pashto. To achieve that goal, this study explores the general features of light verbs, cross-linguistically. Based on these features, light verbs in Pashto are explored, both traditionally and generatively.

The word 'light' perhaps draws its origin from the fact that these verbs cannot be said to predicate fully. Therefore, these verbs "seem to be more of a verbal licenser for nouns. However, the verbs are clearly not entirely devoid of semantic predicative

power either: there is a clear difference between take a bath and give a bath. The verbs thus seem to be neither at their full semantic power nor at a completely depleted stage" (Butt 2003 p. 1). Some of the well-known characteristics of light verbs are: 1) they always form a part of a complex predicate, 2) they have a single subject, 3) they have a form identical in form with the main verb, 4) they can be distinguished syntactically from both auxiliaries and main verbs, and 5) they conflate the divide between the lexical and the functional categories.

Literature Review

Since Jespersen (1965), several attempts have been made to explain light verbs with reference to different languages (Grimshaw & Mester, 1988; Rosen, 1989; Mohanan, 1994; Butt, 1995; Butt & Geuder, 2001; Butt & Lahiri, 2003). In most of these studies, light verbs have been studied as forming part of complex predicates (or other names such as compound verbs, serial verbs, composite predicates, auxiliary constructions, etc.).

In the generative enterprise, the dominant idea has been that light verbs are instantiations of small v (Adger, 2003), an idea that goes back to Chomsky (1957) and repeated in Chomsky (1981, 1995, 2000, 2001, 2005, 2006, 2008). As compared to the other studies, generative studies have most of the time conflated the ideas of light verb and auxiliary verb in the same small v; and, it has also born both lexical features and functional features, though the functional head v has always been considered as functional.

As far as Pashto is concerned, the light verb has most of the time remained unexplored both traditionally and generatively. All that we have about light verbs form a part of the details about complex predicates (or other names used for that matter). On the whole, light verbs as an independent topic have not been explored. Starting from Raverty (1855) down to the last decade of the twentieth century, most of the Pashto grammarians (Lorimer, 1902; Roos-Keppel, 1922; Penzl, 1955; Shafeev, 1964; Mackenzie, 1987; Khattak, 1988) have not used the word 'light verb'. Even afterward the same situation prevails. Tegey and Robson (1996) have divided verbs into three groups: simple verbs, derivative verbs, and doubly irregular verbs. Babrakzai (1999) has touched on a few aspects of the Pashto light verb with reference to complex predicates. He divides Pashto light verbs into two groups: first, the verb complex where the nominal part acts as the subject of the auxiliary, and second, the verb complex where the nominal part acts as the object of the auxiliary. Roberts (2000) has dealt with clitics and agreement in Pashto. He has made use of the small v in his derivations; however, he has not differentiated between the v for auxiliary and v for light verbs as generative syntacticians have conflated light verbs and auxiliaries in the head v.

Light Verbs in Pashto

Generally, Indo-Aryan languages are characterized by a large number of light verbs, for example, Urdu has 13 light verbs (Butt, 1995, p. 91), Gojri 17 (Bukhari, 2007, p.450), Punjabi 10 light verbs (Singh, 1990), etc. Pashto, on the other hand, does not enjoy such a luxury. Still, light verbs are there in Pashto and play an important role in different Pashto constructions. The most well-known and frequently used light verb in Pashto is *kawəl* which means 'to do'. It has different forms which change with the person, number, gender, and tense. The different forms of *kawəl* in the present tense are:

Present Imperfective:

kawum (1S), *kawo*(1P), *kaway* (2S), *kawai* (2P), *kawi* (3S), *kawi* (3P).

Present Perfective:

kṛum(1S), *kṛo*(1P), *kṛay*(2S), *kṛai*(2P), *kṛi*(3S), *kṛi*(3P).

Past forms of *kawəl*

Past Imperfective:

kawə (1S, 1P, 2S, 2P, 3S, 3P)
kawəlum (1S), *kawəlo* (1P), *kawəlay* (2S), *kawəlai* (2P), *kawə* (3S),
kawəla (3SGF), *kawəl* (3PM), *kawəlay* (3PF)

Past Perfective:

kṛum(1S), *kṛo* (1P), *kṛay* (2S), *kṛai*(2S), *kṛə* (3SM), *kṛa*(3SF), *kṛul*(3PLM), *kṛulay* (3PLF),

kṛulum (1S), *kṛulo* (1P), *kṛulay* (2S), *kṛulai* (2P), *kṛə* (3SM), *kṛula* (3SF), *kṛul* (3PM), *kṛulay* (3PF).

The second most frequent light verb is *kedəl*. Its forms also change with person, number, gender, and tense. The different forms of *kedəl* are:

Present Tense

Present Imperfective:

kegum (1S), *kego* (1P), *kegay* (2S), *kega*i (2P), *kegi* (3S), *kegi* (3P).

Present Perfective:

shum (1S), *sho* (1P), *shay* (2S), *shai* (2P), *shi* (3S), *shi* (3P) (Note that the present perfective forms of *kedəl* are the same as the present perfective forms of Pashto 'be'. The real difference between the two lies in the meaning and construction of sentences.)

Past Imperfective:

kedum (1S), *kedo* (1P), *keday* (2S), *kedai* (2P), *kedə* (3SM), *keda* (3SF), *kedəl* (3MF), *keday* (3PF) *kedəlum* (1S), *kedəlo* (1P), *kedəlay* (2S), *kedəlai* (2P), *kedəlo* (3SM), *kedəla* (3SF), *kedəl* (3PM), *kedəla* (3PF)

Past Perfective:

shwum (1S), *shwo* (1P), *shway* (2S), *shwai* (2P), *shə* (3SM), *shwa* (3SF), *shwəl* (3PM), *shway* (3PF)
shwəlum (1S), *shwəlo* (1P), *shwəlay* (2S), *shwəlai* (2P), *shə* (3SM), *shwa* (3SF), *shwəl* (3PM), *shwəlay* (3PF)
(Note again that past perfective forms of *kedəl* are the same as the past perfective forms of Pashto 'be'. The real difference lies in the meaning and construction of sentences.)

In addition to their use as light verbs, many of the verbs above, especially the perfective ones can be used again as light verbs if they are preceded by the prefix *o*. For instance, in the following examples the light verbs are preceded by the prefix *o*:

1. *Ma   kar   okɻə.*
   I.ACC work.NOM   do.PST
   'I did the work.'
2. *Zə   ba   mehnəth   okɻum*.
   I.NOM   will   hard work.ACC   do.PRS
   'I will do the hard work.'

Moreover, there are some other verbs that in addition to their use as copulas can also be used as light verbs, such as *wum* (1SG), *wi* (1PL), *wo* (3SG), etc. depending on the context.

3. *Peter   hagha pen   che   tha   ledəlay wo   mathawi.*
   Peter.NOM that   pen.ACC that   you.ACC see   do.PST break.PRS
   'Saleem breaks that pen which you had seen.'

The proposed Pashto light verbs possess the typical properties of light verbs in other languages: firstly, they have base forms, as for instance, in the above paragraphs, the two light verbs have the base forms as *kawəl* and *kedəl*, while they have dozens of other forms according to their tense, person, number and gender.

Secondly, like light verbs in other languages, they have a sort of light or bleached meaning. For instance, consider the light verb *kɻəl* in the following examples:

4. *Ma   pen   math   kɻə.*
   I.ACC   pen.NOM   break   do.PST
   'I broke a pen.'
5. *Haghə   mehnəth   kɻə.*
   he.ACC   hardwork.NOM   do.PST
   'He worked hard/ he used to work hard.'

In both the examples, there is the doing of something – in the first example the action of breaking a pen while in the second example the doing of hard work. In the first example, action on a concrete thing is involved, while in the second example action on an abstract thing is involved. However, in both the examples, if the other parts, i.e. *math* 'break', a verb belonging to the light verb complex in the first example, and *mehnəth* 'hard work', a noun belonging to the light verb complex in the second example, are removed then the other parts of the compound verbs, i.e. *kɻə*, do not convey to us any complete/ substantial meaning. Rather, at the most, they convey the meaning of 'doing', thus a sort of light or bleached meaning.

Thirdly, like light verbs in other languages, they can have combinations with different parts of speech to form a sort of light verb complex. Pashto is rich in such combinations, and the combinations that we find in Pashto are (N+v), (adj+v), (V+v), (N+V)v, and (adj+V)v; as is shown by examples below:

6. *Haghə   pen   math kɻə.* (V+v)
   he.ACC   pen.NOM   break do.PST
   'He broke a pen.'
7. *Hagha saɻay   [che   thə   ye   milma kaɻay way]   laɻo.*
   (N+v_1+v_2) (Roberts, 2000)
   that   man.ACC   COMP   you.NOM   he.ACC guest do-PART was   go
    'The man who had invited you left'.
8. *Moong   umeed laɻo che thə   ba   imthehan   pas   kɻay.* (N+v)
   (V+v)
   we.NOM hope   keep that you.NOM will examination.ACC pass do.PRS
   'We hope that you will pass the examination.'
9. *Haghoi   ghwaɻi   che kha   looba okɻi.* (Adj+N)v
   they.NOM   want.PRS that good match do.PRS
   'They want to play a good match.'
10. *Doctor   da mareez   elaj   kawi.* (N+v)
    doctor.NOM of patient.GEN treatment   do.PRS
    'The/a doctor is treating the/a patient.'

The Proposed Derivation/ Framework for Light Verbs in Pashto

Present Tense

Light verbs can be found in all the three tenses of Pashto. This section tries to propose derivations for all three tenses and to show where the light verbs would be located on the tree for the derivation. For this purpose, first, we take the case of the present tense. In the present tense the subject carries nominative case and the object carries accusative case. The verb agrees with the subject. For the present tense, a construction is given below:

11. *Hagha   cake   cut   kawi.*
    he.NOM   cake.ACC   cut   do.PRS
    'He is cutting a cake.'

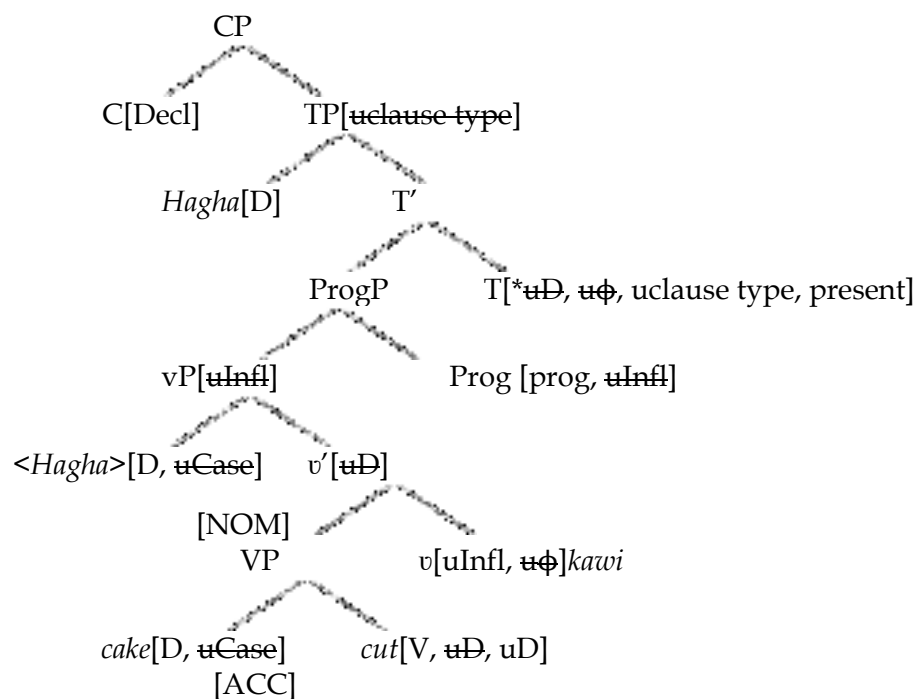The derivation for the example above is proposed in Figure 1 below:

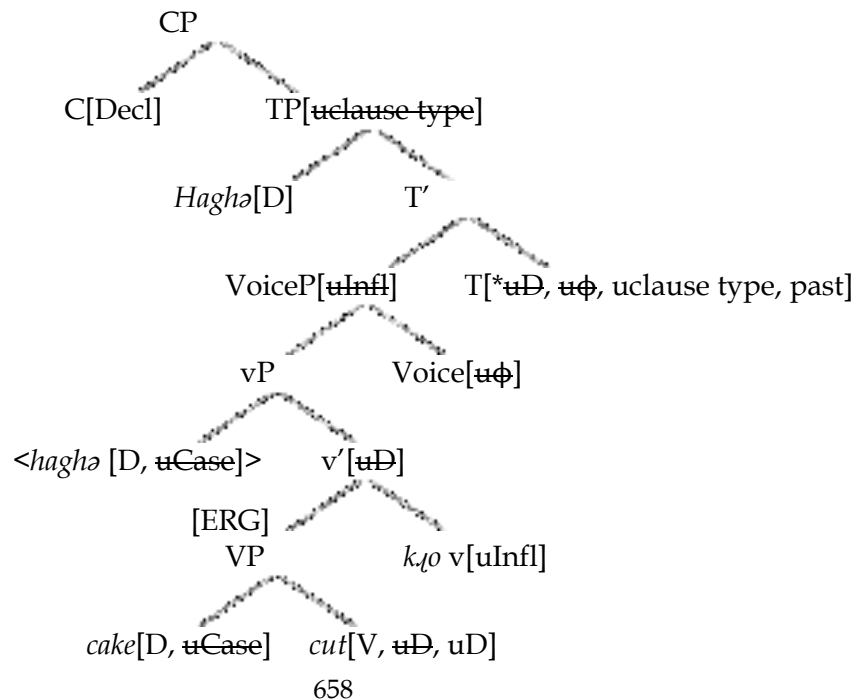
Figure 1. Complete derivation for *Hagha cake cut kawi.*

As can be seen in the derivation, the object *cake* merges with the verb *cut* to form VP. This VP merges with the small v to form v-bar. This small v has the light verb in the base form *kaw/ kawəl.* The external argument *Peter* merges in Spec vP to form vP. It is in the vP that theta-roles are assigned. T merges with the vP to form T-bar. Due to EPP, the external argument moves from Spec vP to Spec TP. Two agree

relations establish between the nominals (*Peter* and *cake*) and the functional heads v and T. These agree result in checking the nominative and accusative Cases of *Peter* and *cake*, respectively. The derivation above has the advantage that the order of constituents in the clause is not disturbed as it remains the same as was required for understanding it both semantically and phonetically. An alternative approach could be that both the main verb and the light verb first form a unit/ constituent. Then this constituent merges with the internal argument to form VP. From the VP, the light verb move to v. Though, this proposal is an elegant one and is more according to the proposals where the predicate complex is treated as a unit; however, the issue is that there is no compelling necessity to show that the light verb moves from the VP to v. Therefore, there is more likelihood that the light verb joins the derivation at the v stage. (To keep the derivation and discussion short, the functional head Progressive has been omitted although the construction has progressive aspect.)

Past Tense

Pashto past tense constructions have Erg-Abs case alignment. The verb agrees with the object. Thus, in terms of agreement and case assignment, the past tense is the exact opposite of the present tense. To show this and the role of the light verb, another example in the past tense is given. In addition to other things that example makes use of a pronoun (since in Pashto most of the time only singular pronouns carry morphological markings for case).

12. *Haghə   cake   cut   kɽo.*
    He.ERG   cake.ABS   cut   do.PST
    'He cut the cake.'

[ABS]
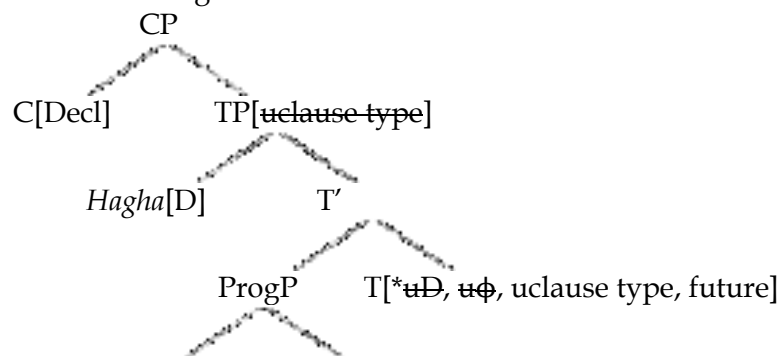*Figure 2.* Complete derivation for *Haghə cake cut kɽo.*

As can be seen in the derivation above the internal argument *cake* merges with the verb *cut* to form VP. A functional head v, having morphological representation as the light verb of this derivation is merged with the VP to form v-bar. At this stage, the external argument merges at Spec vP to form vP. This external argument moves to Spec TP due to EPP. Thus, the word order *haghə cake cut kɽo* is obtained which is both semantically and phonologically adequate. An agree between v and the external argument establishes, resulting in ergative case on the pronoun *haghə* while an agree between T and the internal argument establishes resulting in absolute case on the internal argument *cake*. The agree between T and the internal argument gets visible on the light verb as *kɽo* which has 3rd person singular male connotations.

At this stage, it would be better to refer back to example (8). The construction in example (8) is unique as it has two light verbs, *kɽay* and *way*. As it is a past tense clause, therefore, our solution for this example is that both these light verbs v₁v₂ are defective, thus lacking [uɸ] features, hence the ability to assign accusative case. However, if there is such a construction in the present tense, then our tentative solution would be that v₁ is defective, lacking [uɸ] features and case assignment, while v₂ possesses [uɸ] features, hence has the ability to assign accusative case. The possible reason/ logic for this assumption is the fact that the nominal in the subject position agrees with v₂, not with v₁.

Future Tense

In the future tense, Pashto has the same constructions as the present tense except that it has additional modal clitic *ba*. The following example is given to show the derivation for the light verb in the future tense.

13. *Hagha   ba   cake   cut   kawi.*
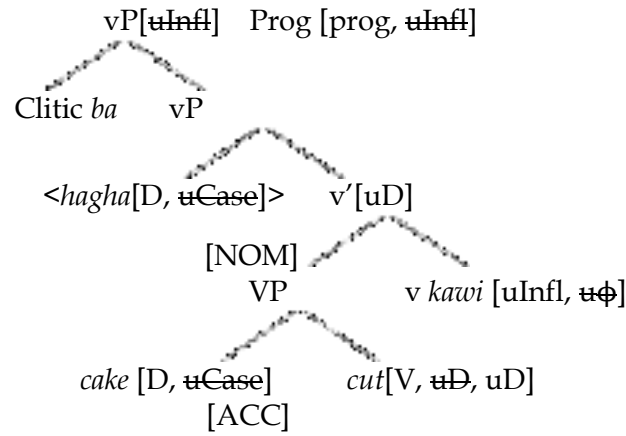   he.NOM   will.FUT   cake.ACC   cut   do.PRS
    'He will be cutting the cake.'

$$
\begin{array}{c}
\text{CP} \\
\diagup \diagdown \\
\text{C[Decl]} \quad \text{TP[uclause type]} \\
\diagup \diagdown \\
\textit{Hagha}\text{[D]} \quad \text{T}' \\
\diagup \diagdown \\
\text{ProgP} \quad \text{T[*uD, uɸ, uclause type, future]}
\end{array}
$$

vP[u̶I̶n̶f̶l̶]   Prog [prog, u̶I̶n̶f̶l̶]

Clitic *ba*   vP

<*hagha*[D, u̶C̶a̶s̶e̶]>   v′[uD]

[NOM]

VP   v *kawi* [uInfl, u̶ϕ̶]

cake [D, u̶C̶a̶s̶e̶]   *cut*[V, u̶D̶, uD]

[ACC]

Figure 5. Derivation for *hagha ba cake cut kawi*.

Like the other two tenses, there is a merge between the internal argument *cake* and the verbal part of the complex predicate to form VP. This VP merges with the light verb in its base form *kaw/kawəl* to form v-bar. The external argument *Peter* merges in Spec vP to form vP. It is inside this vP that the arguments are assigned theta-roles. A Pashto modal clitic ba adjoins to the vP to form an extended vP. The external argument *hagha* moves to Spec TP due to EPP. An agree between v and the internal argument and an agree between T and the external arguments results in assigning nominative and accusative cases to the two nominals respectively. The agree between T and the external argument gets morphologically visible on the light verb as *kawi* which has 3rd person singular male features. It does not get visible on the modal clitic *ba*; hence, it points to the important role that the light verbs play in sentence structure and agreement.

Conclusion

Thus, in this paper, an effort was made to explore light verbs in Pashto, from both traditional and generative perspectives. To achieve that goal, some general features of light verbs were considered cross-linguistically. Based on these features various light verbs in Pashto were explored. It was observed that light verbs in Pashto were not restricted to the most frequent form of N+v complex predicates; rather, they could be found as forming part of V+v, Adj+v, and light verb complexes consisting of three constituents. Afterward, different generative derivations for the light verbs in the three tenses of Pashto were proposed as the three tenses in Pashto have different case alignment and agreement patterns and they could not be covered by a single argument structure/ derivation. These derivations were able to adequately describe light verbs in argument structures/ derivations for the three tenses. In addition, there were some other topics that we could not discuss extensively due to space limitations. One such thing was to draw the line between the light verbs and

auxiliary verbs in Pashto. This distinction was not explored as the generative enterprise has so far reserved a single head v for both of them. Again, a detailed discussion on the point that the modal clitic *ba* does not occupy T position and agreement between T and the external argument is not visible on T rather it gets visible on the light verb was left for future research.

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