Pertinacity in Light Verbs Revisited

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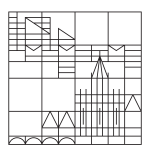


Complex Predicates

- South Asian languages (SAL) have various types of **complex predicates**.
- Complex predicates involve **combined argument structures** that correspond to a **monoclausal dependency** structure (Butt 1995).
- Urdu/Hindi has been shown to have the following types:
  - **permissives** (e.g., Butt 1994, 1995, 2014)
  - **V-V "aspectual" complex predicates** (vector verbs) (e.g., Hook 1974, 1993, 2001, Butt 1995, Butt and Geuder 2001, Butt and Ramchand 2005)
  - **morphological causatives** (e.g., Saksena 1980, Butt 1998)
  - **N-V complex predicates** (e.g., Mohanan 1994, Ahmed and Butt 2011, Ahmed et al. 2012)
  - **A-V complex predicates** (Butt et al. 2025)

Diachrony of Complex Predicates

- Complex Predication is
  - often intertwined with expressions of tense/aspect/modality
  - but distinct from the tense/aspect/modal paradigms of a language

- **Claim by Butt and Lahiri (2013):** The diachrony of tense/aspect/modality plays out differently from that of complex predication.
  - Tense/aspect/modal markers tend to be the result of diachronic reanalysis
  - Light verbs in complex predicates appear to be diachronically inert.
  - (Causatives also show remarkable stability in Indo-Aryan).

Diachronic Light Verb Origin: The Absence of Evidence

- Butt&Lahiri were curious about where V-V complex predicates in Bangla and Urdu originated from and how they were formed diachronically.
- Some examples from the modern languages:

(1) a. nadya=ne xɑt **lɪkʰ di-ya**
Nadya.F=Erg letter.M.Nom write give-Perf.M.Sg
'Nadya wrote a letter (completely).' (Urdu)

b. rɑm bɑgʰ-ʈɑ-ke **mer-e pʰel-l-o**
Ram.Nom tiger-Cl-Acc hit-Gd throw-Past-3
'Ram killed the tiger.' (Bangla)

- The light verbs (here: 'give', 'throw') generally add some dimension of meaning to the overall predication (event modification): completion, forcefulness, benefaction, suddenness, etc.)

Diachronic Light Verb Origin: The Absence of Evidence

- Initial assumption (following Hook 1991): reanalyzed from main verbs and destined to become auxiliaries via a light verb (vector) stage.
- **However:** we found **no diachronic evidence** for a light verb moving away from a main verb and then being reanalyzed as an auxiliary.
- Instead, we found instances of V-V complex predication as far as we could trace the historical evidence.
- Some examples:

(2) bājule **dila** moha-kak^{h}u **b^{h}aṇ-iā**
Bajula.Obl give.Past.3.Sg rooms of illusion count-Gd
'Bajula counted the rooms of illusion (for his disciple).'
(Caryapad 35, 950–1550 CE, Mojunder 1973, 248) (Old Bengali)

(3) daruni āharitvā aggiṁ **katvā** **dassati**
sticks bring.Gd fire.Acc.Sg make.Gd give.Fut.3.Sg
'Bringing wood he'll make a fire (benefactive use).' (Pāli)
(Trenckner 1879, 77; cited by Hook 1993, 97)

Diachronic Light Verb Origin: The Absence of Evidence

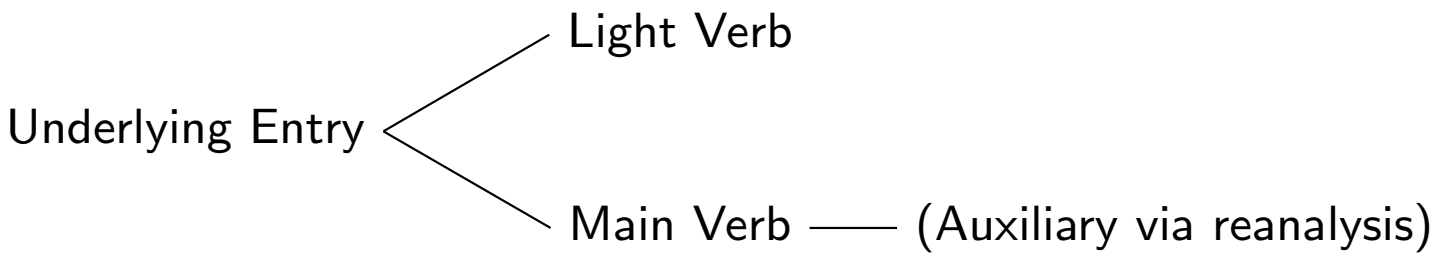
- So we concluded (Butt and Lahiri 2013, 18):

> *. . . that the use of light verbs can be traced to a very early stage of the language and that at every stage, the light verb was* **form-identical to a main verb**. *This suggests to us that rather than engaging in the type of reanalysis which leads to the formation of auxilaries or modals, light verbs are diachronically inert and have been an integral part of the language at every stage.*

The Claim: Light Verbs are Diachronically Pertinacious

The Claim:

- Light verbs are not the product of historical change.
- For a small set of core verbs (mostly motion verbs and verbs of putting and placing, 'do/make', 'be, become'), a "lighter" version of the main verb is available synchronically (throughout the ages).



- This light verb combines with a main predicator to modify an event predication: it forms a **complex predicate** together with another predicator.
  - The argument and event structure is complex and composed.
  - But in terms of dependency structure, the result is a monoclausal predication.

Light Verbs are Diachronically Pertinacious

Prediction: If a main verb falls out of use, the corresponding light verb use should also disappear.

- Evidence of this from English (Iglesias-Rábade 2001):
  - In the history of English, the verb *taken* gradually replaced the older form *nimen* for 'take'.
  - Iglesias-Rábade goes through the N-V constructions described in Brinton and Akimoto (1999) for Middle English and does not find a difference in usage.
  - This indicates that *taken* took over all the functions of *nimen*, including light verb functions.

A Challenge

- Butt&Lahiri's claim has since been challenged by Slade (2013), Ittzés (2022) and Peter Hook (p.c.).
- After careful scrutiny of the arguments and data ...
- Conclusion:
  - The work in Slade (2013) and Ittzés (2022) actually provides more evidence for Butt&Lahiri's original claim.
    - Slade with respect to V-V aspectual complex predicates.
    - Ittzés with respect to N-V complex predicates (see also Ittzés 2024).
  - Peter Hook's additional data is interesting and in need of further investigation.

Main Verb to Auxiliary

But first — some preliminary clarifications.

- We did find documentable instances in which a main verb was reanalyzed as an auxiliary.
- This happens when a main verb embedding a clause is reanalyzed as a wholly functional element.
- This can be illustrated schematically as shown in (1):

(1) Ravi $[_{VP}$ ___ to Venice fly] goes. (=Ravi goes to fly to Venice)

$\longrightarrow$

Ravi to Venice fly.Fut. (=Ravi will fly to Venice)

- This type of change has been documented extensively.

- But how can one tell if a main verb or a light verb is the source for reanalysis to an auxiliary?

$\longrightarrow$ This is a tricky question (and therefore gives rise to controversy.)

Structural Differences

- The following slides set out the structural differences between complex predicates, auxiliaries and modals.
- The syntactic perspective is from Lexical-Functional Grammar (LFG).
- LFG allows for both:
  - C(onstituency)-structure that models linear order, constituency and hierarchy.
  - F(unctional)-structure that models dependencies.
- The crucial differences between complex predicates, auxiliaries and modals are modeled at f-structure.

Differences in terms of Dependencies

- Permissive (Complex Predicate; Butt (1995))

(4)

nadya=ne	yɑssin=ko	pɑoda	kaṭ-ne
Nadya.F.Sg=Erg	Yassin.M.Sg=Dat	plant.M.Sg.Nom	cut-Inf.Obl
di-ya	t^{h}-a		
give-Perf.M.Sg	be.Past-M.Sg		

'Nadya had let Yassin cut the plant.'

- Modal (Raising Construction; Bhatt et al. (2011))

(5)

yasin	peṛ	kaṭ	**sɑk-ta**	hɛ
Yassin.M.Sg=Erg	tree.M.Nom	cut	can-Impf.M.Sg	be.Pres.3.Sg

'Yassin can cut the tree.'

- Auxiliary (No Embedding; Butt et al. (2004), Butt and Rizvi (2010))

(6)

yasin	pɑoda	kaṭ	**rɑh-a**	hɛ
Yassin.M.Sg.Nom	plant.M.Sg.Nom	cut	stay-Perf.F.Sg	be.Pres.3.Sg

'Yassin is cutting a plant.'

The Urdu Permissive: A Monoclausal Complex Predicate

Nadya let Yassin [cut the plant].

- composed a(rgument)-structure:
  GIVE/LET < agent goal$_i$ CUT < agent$_i$ patient >>
- f(unctional)-structure

$$\begin{bmatrix} \text{PRED} & \text{'let-cut} < \text{SUBJ}, \text{OBJ}_{go}, \text{OBJ} > \text{'} \\ \text{SUBJ} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{PRED} & \text{'Nadya'} \\ \text{CASE} & \text{ERG} \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{OBJ}_{go} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{PRED} & \text{'Yassin'} \\ \text{CASE} & \text{DAT} \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{OBJ} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{PRED} & \text{'plant'} \\ \text{CASE} & \text{NOM} \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{TNS-ASP} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{TENSE} & \text{PAST} \\ \text{ASPECT} & \text{PERF} \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix}$$

Example: Modals as Syntactic Raising

Yassin can [cut the plant].

- a-structure:
  CAN ___ $_i$ < theme/event > CUT < agent$_i$ patient >
- f-structure

$$\begin{bmatrix} \text{SUBJ} & [\quad]_i \\ \text{PRED} & \text{'can} < \text{XCOMP} > \text{SUBJ}' \\ \text{XCOMP} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{PRED} & \text{'cut} < \text{SUBJ, OBJ} >' \\ \text{SUBJ} & [\ \text{PRED} \quad \text{'Yassin'}\ ]_i \\ \text{OBJ} & [\ \text{PRED} \quad \text{'plant'}\ ] \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{TNS-ASP} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{TENSE} & \text{PRES} \\ \text{ASPECT} & \text{IMPF} \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix}$$

Auxiliaries: A Simple Monoclausal Predication

Yassin is cutting a plant.

- simple a(rgument)-structure:
  CUT < agent patient >
- f(unctional)-structure

$$\begin{bmatrix} \text{PRED} & \text{'cut} < \text{SUBJ}, \text{OBJ} > \text{'} \\ \text{SUBJ} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{PRED} & \text{'Yassin'} \\ \text{CASE} & \text{NOM} \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{OBJ} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{PRED} & \text{'plant'} \\ \text{CASE} & \text{NOM} \end{bmatrix} \\ \text{TNS-ASP} & \begin{bmatrix} \text{TENSE} & \text{PRES} \\ \text{ASPECT} & \text{PROG} \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix}$$

Summary

- Complex predicates:
  - take two (or more) predicational items and combine their argument structures into a single monoclausal predication
  - the dependency structure is essentially equivalent to that of a simple predicate
- Raising or Control verbs:
  - embed a non-finite clause
  - this results in a biclausal dependency structure (represented via XCOMP in LFG)
- Auxiliaries:
  - situate a predicate in time and thus merely provide tense/aspect features.
  - the dependency structure is that of a simple predicate

$\longrightarrow$ The overt syntax (c-structure) may differ, see Butt (1995).

Now freely available at: https://typo.uni-konstanz.de/csli-konstanz/index.html

The Claim: Light Verbs are Diachronically Pertinacious

Based on evidence from Urdu and Bangla V-V complex predicates, Butt and Lahiri made the following claim (Butt and Lahiri 2013, 26–27):

> *We propose that there is a very tight connection between a light verb and its corresponding main verb, and that this connection differs markedly from the relationship an auxiliary bears to the main verb it is derived from. We depart from the received view that the existence of a light verb is due to a historical process of semantic bleaching and instead propose that there is a single underlying lexical entry, which can account not only for the simultaneous synchronic uses of light and main verbs, but also for the available historical data.*

Note:

- It is important to note that this is a claim about the organization of the lexicon, not about the precise shape or form of different complex predications.

Pertinacity Revisited

- Slade (2013) claims to show that light verbs are not diachronically inert in Indo-Aryan.
- The evidence includes:
  1. The contemporaneous existence of a gerund interpretation.
  2. Differences between Hindi and Nepali.
  3. Morphosyntactic changes over time.
  4. The fact that a new progressive **auxiliary** derived from *rəh* 'stay/remain'
  5. Discussion of the **modal** *səkˈ* 'can/be able to'.

Age Old Ambiguity with the Gerund/Absolutive

- Slade focuses on V-V complex predicates of the type in (7).
- His argumentation is with respect to Hindi and Nepali, but the construction is also found in Bangla (which Butt&Lahiri look at).
- These complex predicates are known to be in principle ambiguous between a complex predicate reading and clausal adjunct reading.

(7) ʃæmoli tʃɑdor dʰu-e pʰel-l-o
Shyamoli.Nom shawl.Nom wash-Perf throw-Past-3
Reading 1: 'Shyamoli washed (completely) the shawl.' (complex predicate)
Reading 2: 'Having washed the shawl, Shyamoli threw it.'
(Lahiri and Fitzpatrick-Cole 1999, 125) (Bangla)

- Historical note:
  - The morpheme *-e* glossed 'Perf' in (7) is a remnant of the Sanskrit "gerund" or "absolutive" in *-tvā(ya)*, or *-ya/yā*.
  - This morpheme is realized as *-i* in Nepali but has been eroded to null in Urdu/Hindi.

Age Old Ambiguity with the Gerund/Absolutive

- This potential for ambiguity is regularly found in older stages of the language as well.
- Here in Pāli (Middle Indo-Aryan, about 300 BCE – 700 CE)
  - An instance of a V-V complex predicate is found with the "gerund" or "absolutive" in *-tvā* (make-give).
  - But the text also contains an adjunct clause formed with the gerund (having led).

(8) ... assamapadaṃ āne-tvā aggiṃ **ka-tvā** **a-dāsi**
hermitage.Acc lead-Gd fire.Acc.Sg make-Gd Aug-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)']
Jatāka Tales I.296.10, Sri Lanka (Hendriksen 1944, 134) (Pāli)

Unequal Probability of Ambiguity

- The two readings of the V-V sequences are not always equally likely.
- The more likely interpretation depends on the contextual situation and that some sequences are more entrenched in language use as either complex predicates or adjuncts.
- In (9), it is highly unlikely that Shyamoli first beat the boys and then threw them somewhere.

(9) ʃæmoli tʃʰele-der mer-e pʰel-l-e-tʃ-e
Shyamoli.Nom boy-Pl.Nom beat-Perf throw-Perf-Pres-3
Reading 1: 'Shyamoli beat the boys (to death).' (complex predicate)
Reading 2: #'Having beat the boys, Shyamoli threw them.'
(Lahiri and Fitzpatrick-Cole 1999, 136–137) (Bangla)

Unequal Probability of Ambiguity

- Similarly, Slade shows that not all V.Gerund-V sequences that can be found in the diachronic record allow for the adjunct reading (Slade 2013, 540).

(14) *yathā sūcyā vāsaḥ* ***saṁdadhad*** ***iyād*** *evam evāi*
as needle.SG.INSTR clothing.SG.NOM **mend**.PRES_PTCP.SG.NEU.NOM **go**.PRES.OPT.3SG thus PART
'tābhir yajñasya chidraṁ ***saṁdadhad*** ***eti***
these.PL.INSTR sacrifice.SG.GEN defect.SG.NOM **mend**.PRES_PTCP.SG.NEU.NOM **go**.PRES.3SG

a. "Just as one would [habitually] mend a garment with a needle, so with these one [habitually] mends [any] defect of the sacrifice." (complex predicate reading)

b. #"Just as one would move mending a garment with a needle, so with these one moves mending [any defect of] the sacrifice." (literal present participle reading)
(*Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 3,18,6; cf. Whitney 1879/1889. 1st/2nd edn: §1075a)

- In effect, Slade thus provides more data that complex predication can indeed be found in all stages of Indo-Aryan.
- All of his examples involve a light verb that is synchronically form-identical to a main verb.

Morphosyntactic Changes – Not the Point!

- Slade's argument against Butt&Lahiri revolves around the **morphosyntactic form** of such examples.
- For example:
  - He points out that the morphology involved (present participle in the mending example) is not what is involved in New Indo-Aryan (NIA) languages.
  - He points to differences in distribution and function of the V-V sequences.
  - This includes a discussion of Nepali, which has V-V complex predicates, but whose precise morphosyntactic form and distribution differs from Hindi.
- However: Butt&Lahiri made no claims as to the morphosyntactic form and distribution of light verbs.

Sanskrit Preverb Example

- It is already well-established that V-V complex predicates increased in frequency (presumably taking up the semantic space and function of the Sanskrit preverbs as those were lost), see the detailed work by Hook (1993, 2001) and in particular, Hook and Pardeshi (2009).

RV 3,33,6

ápāhan [=ápa ahan]	*vṛtráṃ*	*paridhíṃ*	*nadīnām*
off:LP.strike:AOR.ACT.3SG	Vṛtra:ACC.SG.M	encloser:ACC.SG.M	river:GEN.PL.F

'He repelled Vṛtra, the encloser of the rivers.' (Vedic)

(Casaretto and Schneider 2015, 231)

- Butt and Lahiri's claim is not about frequency, but about the fact that light verbs existed as far back as one can trace the record and that they are always form-identical to a corresponding main verb.

Morphosyntactic Differences

- Slade points to differences between Nepali and Hindi in terms of:
  - Interruptability
  - Combinatory Restrictions
  - Combinatory Differences
- (Note: there are further arguments in the paper but they are easily dismissed or are based on misunderstandings).

Interruptability

- Slade notes that while Hindi V-V complex predicates can be separated, for example by topicalization, the same is not true for Nepali.

(39) *mai-ne khānā* ***khā*** *to* ***liy-ā***, *lekin phir ulṭī bhī ā-ī*
I-AGT food **eat**.ABS EMP **take**.PAST.PTCP-SG.MASC but then vomit also come.PAST.PTCP-SG.FEM
"I did eat food, but then I also vomited." (Hindi)

(40) *mai-le bhāt **khā-i-** *ta* **sak-eṁ**, ...
I-AGT food eat-ABS- EMP finish-PAST.SG.MASC
"I did eat food, ..." (Nepali)

- This is a point about differences in the syntax of Nepali and Hindi.
- It is not a point about the existence of light verbs and their form identity with a main verb.
- Slade's argument is that since there is a difference to be found, there must have been historical change.
- Because there was historical change, the diachronic stability of light verbs is taken to be in question.

Combinatory Restrictions

- Similarly, differences in combinatory restrictions across the languages are taken to indicate historical change and therefore a questioning of the diachronic stability of light verbs.

(42) *un-le* *kican* *saphā* ***gar-i-*** ***di-i-*** ***hāl-in***
he/she.MIDHON-ERG kitchen clean **do**-ABS- **give**-ABS- **put**-PAST.3SG.FEM
"She cleaned the kitchen for me straightaway." (Peterson (2002: 107)) (Nepali)

*us-ne kican sāf **kar** **de** **ḍāl-ī**
he/she-AGT kitchen clean **do**.ABS **give**.ABS **put**.PAST.PTCP-SG.FEM
"He/she cleaned the kitchen for me straightaway." (Hindi)

- Despite the apparent similarity, Nepali and Hindi differ considerably in their syntax (case, agreement).
- So it should not be surprising that one finds differences in the syntax of the verbal complex.
- But similarity across languages as to:
  - use of lexical items for light verbs
  - use of both A-V and V-V complex predicates
  - ability to combine them (e.g., *clean do give* is grammatical in Hindi)

Combinatory Differences

- Slade asserts that Nepali and Hindi differ in terms of which verb determines the overall valency of the clause:
  - In Nepali the main verb always determines the overall valency.
  - In Hindi supposedly the light verb determines the overall valency.

b. Transitive main verb + intransitive light verb = Intransitive:

vah *khānā khā* *gay-ā*
he food eat.ABS go.PAST.PTCP-MSC.SG
"He ate up the food."

c. Transitive main verb + transitive light verb = Transitive:

us-ne *khānā khā* *liy-ā*
he-AGT food eat.ABS take.PAST.PTCP-MSC.SG
"He ate up the food."

(Hindi)

- However, there is a misunderstanding: both of the above clauses are **transitive**.
- Valency in Hindi is determined by the main verb (like in Nepali).
  - But the case marking on the subject is determined by the light verb (agentive verbs require an ergative subject, see Butt (1995)).
  - In contrast, the ergative in Nepali is also governed by differences such as stage vs. individual level predication (Poudel 2020).

Existence of Light Verbs in the Lexicon

- Recall:

  > *. . . that the use of light verbs can be traced to a very early stage of the language and that at every stage, the light verb was* **form-identical to a main verb**. *This suggests to us that rather than engaging in the type of reanalysis which leads to the formation of auxilaries or modals, light verbs are diachronically inert and have been an integral part of the language at every stage. (Butt and Lahiri 2013, 18)*

- The statement is about the existence of a light verb use that is form-identical to a main verb.
- The claim can be disproven if one finds productively used light verbs that are not form-identical to a main verb (cf. data from Peter Hook).
- But the precise morphosyntactic form and distribution of the complex predicate constructions is not at issue.

A New Progressive

- Slade points to Urdu/Hindi and Nepali *rɑh* 'stay/remain' as an instance of a light verb being reanalyzed as an auxiliary.
- In both Urdu/Hindi and Nepali the *rɑh* 'stay/remain' is clearly an auxiliary (much distributional evidence, see data in Slade (2013) for Nepali and Butt and Geuder (2001)) for Urdu/Hindi.

(10) a. ɑnjum adnan=ko mar rɑh-i hɛ
Anjum.F.Sg.Nom Adnan.M.Sg=Acc hit stay-Perf.F.Sg be.Pres.3.Sg
'Anjum is hitting Adnan.' (Butt and Rizvi 2010) (Urdu/Hindi)

b. kʊtta bʰõk-t-a rɑh-a
dog.M.Sg.Nom bark-Impf-M.Sg stay-Perf.M.Sg
'The dog kept on barking.' (Butt and Rizvi 2010) (Urdu/Hindi)

c. ma mandir-mā ga-i- rah-eko chu
I temple-Loc go-Abs remain-Perf_Ptcp.M.Sg be.1.Pres
'I am going to the temple.'/'I have been going to the temple.'
(Slade 2013, 564) (Nepali)

- But was it really a light verb before?

Event Semantics; Auxiliaries/Modals vs. Light Verbs

- It is tricky to distinguish between auxiliaries, modals and light verbs on the basis of their surface appearance.
- Butt see, e.g., Butt (2010) for some diagnostics as to the underlying syntax (cf. the f-structures/dependencies shown earlier).
- Thinking about their contribution in terms of event semantics further allows for a clear distinction between auxiliaries/modals and light verbs.
  - Light verbs **contribute** to an independently existing event predication at the subevental level (event modification).
  - Auxiliaries **situate** an event in **time**. They do not modify the basic event predication.
  - Modals **situate** an event with respect to **possible worlds**. They do not modify the basic event predication.
- Auxiliaries and modals do not modify the primary event predication
  - they do **not** form complex predicates
  - and are subject to diachronic reanalysis

Back to the Progressive

- Slade asserts that *rah* 'stay/remain' originated as a light verb, but does not demonstrate this.
- Deo (2006) assumes it is an auxiliary in a periphrastic construction.
- Previously (up until 19th century Hindi) the imperfective morphology could also denote progressives (Deo 2006, 176).
- As part of a general reorganization of the Indo-Aryan tense-aspect system, *rah* comes to denote specifically a progressive reading.

(18) a. niśā roṭi **banā rah-i** **hai**
N.NOM bread.NOM make-PROG.F.SG be-PR.3.SG
Niṣā *is making* bread. NOT *Niṣā *makes* bread.

b. niśā roṭi **banā-ti** **hai**
N.NOM bread.NOM make-IMPF.F.SG be-PR.3.SG
Niṣā *makes* bread. NOT *Niṣā *is making* bread.

⟶ The introduction of *rah* as a progressive is a very recent phenomenon.

The Progressive

- Slade points to Kellogg (1893) for the classification of *rɑh* as a light verb.
- Indeed, Kellogg lists *rɑh* among a list of verbs that would generally agree to be light verbs (he calls them 'intensives'), with the familiar range of extra semantic dimensions of completion/result and directionality.
- However, his discussion indicates an auxiliary status rather than a light verb.
  - The semantics is continuative (related to progressive): *bɛt$^{\text{h}}$ rɑhna* 'to sit *still*' (emphasis Kellogg's). (Kellogg 1893, §427)
  - It is the only verb in the list that has this type of meaning.
  - Kellogg further notes that:

    > *Compounds with rɑhna are common, but for the most part are used in the tenses of the past particple. As above remarked, these compounds exhibit the action of the verb, emphatically, as continuing or permanent. (Kellogg 1893, §428.e)*

  - This points to a selective use of forms — this is characteristic of an auxiliary.

The Progressive

- Deo (2006) shows that the imperfective morphology in Indo-Aryan:
  - goes from being able to denote both progressive and non-progressive (present, habitual, generic) situations
  - to only expressing non-progressives
- Progressives are expressed via the addition of tense auxiliaries ('be').
- In Urdu/Hindi (and Nepali) additionally *rah* 'stay/remain' was recruited.
- This is a crosslinguistically well-established type of change: recruiting verbs of standing/remaining for continuative/progressive meanings, e.g., see Bybee et al. (1994).
- The available data does not exclude the possibility of *rah* having been reanalyzed from a light verb version.
- But it also does not conclusively establish *rah* as a light verb.

The Progressive – Diachronic Reanalysis

- The most likely scenario is the crosslinguistically well-established reanalysis of a main verb as a progressive.
- This is what happened in Bangla (see Lahiri (2000), Butt and Lahiri (2013)) with the new progressive formed from the main verb version of *ɑtʃ* 'be'.
- The schema below provides a sketch with the root *pɑ* 'receive' (Butt and Lahiri 2013, 20).
- Note: the *-i* on *pɑ* 'receive' is a descendent of *tvā/ya*.

Formation of New Progressive:

$[\text{pɑ} + \text{i}]_{\omega} + [/\text{ɑʧ}^{\text{h}}/ + \text{Suffix}_{\text{PERS/NUM}}]_{\omega}$

$>\quad [[\text{pɑ} + \text{i}] + [\ \text{ʧ}^{\text{h}} + \text{Suffix}_{\text{PERS/NUM}}]_{\text{CLITIC}}]_{\omega}$

$>\quad [[\text{pɑ} + \text{i} + \text{ʧ}^{\text{h}}{}_{\text{AFF}}] + \text{Suffix}_{\text{PERS/NUM}}]_{\omega}$

$>\quad [[\text{pɑ} + \text{ʧʧ}^{\text{h}}{}_{\text{AFF}}] + \text{e}]_{\omega} \qquad = \text{receive.Prog}$

'can' and other arguments

- Slade invokes a number of other examples to argue for a light verb to auxiliary reanalysis. Among them:
  - Nepali honorifics
  - Nepali *ṭopalnu* 'to pretend'
  - The modal *sɑk* 'can'
- In no case does he conclusively establish that the items are light verbs.
- The Nepali honorific is originally borrowed from Persian and is used in a formulaic construction.
- Both the verbs 'pretend' and 'can' are not light verbs: they embed a full VP which denotes an independent event.
- Slade assumes that 'pretend' and 'can' must be light verbs because the **surface form** of the V-V sequence looks like that of V-V complex predicates.

A World beneath the Surface

- But we know that a given surface form does not necessarily correspond to exactly one structure (see the ambiguity with the *-tvā/ya* gerund)
- With 'pretend' and 'can' we can see clearly that the overt string might look similar to V-V complex predicates, but the meaning is very different.

(11) a. u gā-i- ṭopal-dai- cha
he/she sing-Abs- pretend-Impf_Ptcp- be.Pres.3.Sg
'He is pretending to sing.' (Pokharel 1991, 195) (Nepali)

b. vo ga sɑk-t-a hɛ
Pron.3.Sg.Nom sing can-Impf-M.Sg be.Pres.3.Sg
'He can sing.' (based on Slade 2013, 560) (Urdu/Hindi)

- These are clearly not light verbs, but main verbs embedding another main verb ⟶ there are two very separate events involved.
- And neither was 'can' a light verb in Sanskrit, rather it was a raising verb (cf. Lowe et al. 2021).

(1) a. *rājāno rāmaṃ hantuṃ na śaknuvanti*
kings.NOM.PL.M R.ACC.SG.M slay.INF not can.3PL
'The kings cannot slay Rāma.'

b. *rāmo rājabhir hantuṃ na śakyate*
R.NOM.SG.M kings.INS.PL.M slay.INF not can.PASS.3SG
'Rāma cannot be slain by the kings.'

Interim Summary

- Slade makes a number of very interesting points with respect to whether light verbs may be subject to further reanalysis.
- However: he mistakes Butt&Lahiri's claim to be about the construction rather than the light verb.
  - Butt&Lahiri are quite clear on changes with respect to the construction and link the rise in use of V-V complex predicates to the demise of the preverbs.

    > *The ya was generally used in conjunction with preverbs (Whitney, 1889, §989, also see Macdonell, 1917 for Vedic). Given that the modern light verbs contribute to the predication of the event in much the same elusive way as preverbs did in Sanskrit, this may be a significant factor in the spread of V–V constructions (section 5). (Butt and Lahiri 2013, 16)*

- Slade furthermore adduces evidence that:
  - Assumes light verb status rather than proving it.
  - Fails to look beyond the surface string to the underlying structure.

⟶ In the end there is no evidence that goes against Butt&Lahiri.

Evidence from Sinhala

- In recent work, Herath and Slade (2025) suggest that Sinhala provides an ideal testing ground for looking at the diachrony of light verbs.
  - Sinhala is an Indo-Aryan language spoken in Sri Lanka that is surrounded by Dravidian
  - continuous written record from the 8th century onwards
  - light verbs found in the earliest writings (graffiti on the famous rock formation at Sigiriya)
- Herath and Slade are also initially skeptical of Butt&Lahiri's claim.
- But end up adducing more evidence.

Evidence from Sinhala

Herath and Slade show:

- The earliest examples involve the light verbs *la-* 'put/place', *pa-* 'show' and *gan-* 'take'.
- Both the light and main verb versions of *la-* 'put/place' are replaced with dā/dama 'put/place' as of the 13th century.
- The light verb *gan-* 'take' appears to be used today much as it was in the 8th century.

Attestations: Old to Modern

- 'put' adds a completive dimension to the main verb: "fully bind", "make completely bound"

(12) sita bændæ lannā seyi
mind bind.Abs put.Ptcp like
'...as if to hold fast my mind.' (Old Sinhala)
(Sigiri Graffito 371)

- The same is true for 'take', but this also provides a sense of self-benefit.

(13) a. næga gan Sihigiri
climb.Abs take.Impv Sihigiri
'Ascend Sihigiri yourself!' (Old Sinhala)
(Sigiri Graffito 169)

b. gunapāla kæmak hadā gatta
Gunapala meal.Indef make.Abs take.Past
'Gunapala made himself a meal.' (Modern Sinhala)

Replacement of 'put'

- The lexical item *la-* 'put/place' shows a decreasing use over time.
- As its use declines, dā/dama 'put/place' is found instead.
- An early light verb use from the 13th century:

(14) jaṭā maňḍulu **kapā** **-damā** budun dæka baṇa asā
matted.hair cut.Abs -put.Abs Buddha.Acc see.Abs sermon listen.Abs
'Having cut off matted hair, seeing the Buddha, and listening to the sermon'
(Sinhala)
(Pūjāvəliyə, 13th century)

- Herath and Slade assert that the modern uses are similar.

⟶ More evidence in favor of Butt&Lahiri's core claims, including the fact that both main and light verb versions of a verb ('put') were lost and innovated at the same time.

N-V in Old Indo-Aryan

- Ittzés (2022, 2024) looks at the Old Indo-Aryan (OIA) N+V constructions.
- He establishes quite clearly that N-V complex predicates with *kṛ* 'do' existed in Vedic, much in the same way as they do today.

(15) ádhvaryavaḥ kártanā śruṣṭím asmai
adhvaryu.Voc.Pl do.Aor.Imp.2Pl obedience.Acc this.Dat
'Adhvaryus! Act in obedience to him!' (JB)
'Adhvaryu's! Erweiset ihm Gehorsam!' (G)
(Ittzés 2024, 12) (Rigveda 2.14.9a)

(16) us=ko mɑna kɑr-o!
Pron.3.Sg=Dat/Acc forbidding do-Imp
'Forbid him!/Hold him back!' (Urdu)

- **This further bolsters Butt&Lahiri's claims.**

N-V in Old Indo-Aryan

- Ittzés (2022) looks at the use of N-do constructions in Vedic as an alternative way of forming the perfect.
- The N+do construction is used for verbs which cannot form an inflectional perfect (for whatever reason).
- The idea is that the 'do' in these N+do constructions is an auxiliary because it essentially helps out a defective paradigm.

(17)

ásūm	pitṛbhyo	gamayāṃ	cakāra
spirit.Pl.Acc	father.Pl.Dat	go.Caus.Ām	do.Prf.Act.3.Sg

'He has let the spirits go to the fathers.' Vedic

(Ittzés 2022, 104); AVŚ 18,2,27d (≈ AVP 18,65,10d)

N-V in Old Indo-Aryan

- This perfect use also occurs in non-agentive verbs, creating an uneasy situation since the *kṛ* 'do' is agentive.
- The *kṛ* 'do' is eventually replaced by 'be', which is in turn eventually replaced by the formation in *-ta*, which yields the modern perfect.

(18) sa tathā˜ ity uktvā putram āmantrayām āsa
he so Quot say.Abs son.Acc speak.to.ĀM be.Prf.Act.3.Sg
'Having said "[Let it be] so!", he addressed his son.' (Ittzés 2022, 102)
(Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa 7,14,8)

- But there is no evidence that 'do' itself turned into an auxiliary.
- Indeed, while the introduction and abstract make strong statements contra Butt and Lahiri (2013), the conclusion ends up aligning in favor of Butt&Lahiri's claims.

N-V in Indo-Aryan

- From the perspective of Urdu/Hindi, the discussion in Ittzés (2022) is interesting as the patterns described are very similar to what is found with N-V complex predicates (Mohanan 1994).
- In particular, the three major light verbs 'do', 'be', and 'become' exhibit differences in frequency and constraints on combinatory possibilities.
- Ahmed and Butt (2011) set out to understand some of this distribution for Urdu via a corpus study.

N-V in Urdu

(19) shows the same noun *yad* 'memory' with the three different major light verbs (more are possible).

(19)
a. nadya=ne kahani yad k-i
Nadya.F.Sg=Erg story.F.Sg.Nom memory do-Perf.F.Sg
'Nadya remembered a/the story.' (lit.: 'Nadya did memory of the story.')

b. nadya=ko kahani yad hɛ
Nadya.F.Sg=Dat story.F.Sg.Nom memory be.Pres.3.Sg
'Nadya remembers/knows a/the story.'
(lit.: 'Memory of the story is at Nadya.')

c. nadya=ko kahani yad hu-i
Nadya.F.Sg=Dat story.F.Sg.Nom memory be.Part-Perf.F.Sg
'Nadya came to remember a/the story.
' (lit.: 'Memory of the story became to be at Nadya.')

N-V in Urdu

- We know these are **complex predicates** because each of the predicational elements contributes arguments to a joint prediction:
  - *kahani* 'story' is only licensed by *yad* 'memory', not 'do'.
  - But *kahani* is not in the genitive, as it would be as an argument of a noun.
  - Instead, it is in the nominative and acts as an object of the main clause (can be passivized, verb agrees with it, etc.)

(20)

nadya=ne	kahani	yad	k-i
Nadya.F.Sg=Erg	story.F.Sg.Nom	memory	do-Perf.F.Sg

'Nadya remembered a/the story.' (lit.: 'Nadya did memory of the story.')

N-V in Urdu

- The verbs are **light verbs** because:
  - they contribute an argument to the joint predication (effect can be seen on the case marking on the subject).
  - they augment the predication of the main element ('memory')
  - but do not situate it in time (as an auxiliary would do) or with respect to possible worlds (as a modal would do).

(21) a. **nadya=ne** kahani yad k-i
Nadya.F.Sg=Erg story.F.Sg.Nom memory do-Perf.F.Sg
'Nadya remembered a/the story.' (lit.: 'Nadya did memory of the story.')

b. **nadya=ko** kahani yad hɛ
Nadya.F.Sg=Dat story.F.Sg.Nom memory be.Pres.3.Sg
'Nadya remembers/knows a/the story.'

N-V in Urdu

- For example, we get the composed transitive predicate ‘do-memory’ with an agent (‘Nadya’) and a theme (‘story’) from the pieces below.

do < agent %Pred >
|
memory < theme >

- %Pred is a variable that indicates a slot to be filled by another predicate.
- This 'incomplete predication' is what characterizes light verbs according to Butt (1995) and Alsina (1996).

N-V in Urdu

- While the basic structure is the same for all N-V complex predicates, the light verbs differ as to what nouns they will combine with.
- The constraints on the combinations are difficult to work out.
- Ahmed and Butt (2011) did a corpus study with 'do', 'be' and 'become' and found three major classes.
  - Corpus: 100 000 words from the Penn Treebank translated into Urdu and POS-tagged (built in Lahore)
  - 45 nouns
  - 4 of 45 allowed for the full range (all three light verbs): these are all psych nouns (like 'memory' and 'belief')
  - 38 of the 45 allowed only for 'do'. These are all agentive event nouns such as 'signal', 'construction' or 'refusal'.
  - 3 of the 45 disallowed 'become': *tɑslim* 'acceptance', *bɑrdaʃt* 'tolerance' and *ɪntɪzar* 'wait'.

Light Verbs and Reanalysis

- Ahmed and Butt (2011) did not conclude that there is any form of grammaticalization going on in Urdu.
- The differences in frequency and combinatory possibilties are instead attributed to different (semantic) classes of nouns.
- **Question:** Could that work for Old Indo-Aryan as well? (or is it all morphosyntactically conditioned, as Ittzés suggests?)
- Ittzés notes that discussions in Patañjali and Kātyāyana talk about three verbs that form N-V constructions (Ittzés 2022, 101).
  - kṛ 'do'
  - *as* 'be'
  - *bhu* 'become'
- This would again seem to indicate that the modern Urdu/Hindi in fact continues an old pattern.

Upshot

Ittzés (2022) seems to provide more evidence for Butt&Lahiri's claim that light verbs were already available within the overall language structure in Old Indo-Aryan.

Data from Simla Dialects

- Peter Hook (p.c.) has pointed us towards data contained in Grierson (1928).
- The description of Śodōchī (a Himalayan language called Koṭgurū in Bailey (1908)) says:

  > *The usual verb for 'to go' is ḍēuṇau. Jāṇau is mainly employed in composition. (Grierson 1928, 657).*

- Indeed, in the text samples, we only find *ḍēuṇau* in a main verb use (Grierson 1928, 661).

(22) bhītre ḍēundau bhājau
within going he-refused
'As he was going, he refused.'

- And only *jāṇau* in a light verb use (Grierson 1928, 662).

sau	**sŏb**	**tērau**	**ā.**	**Hamā̃-lai**	**khuśī**	**mŏnāuṇī**	**chēijē,**	**kī-lai**
that	***all***	***thine***	***is.***	***Us-for***	***happiness***	***to-be-celebrated***	***is-proper,***	***what-for***
ḏzai	**tērau**	**bhāī**	**mŏrī-gōau-tau,**		**tēbī**	**jīundau**	**phirau ;**	
that	***thy***	***brother***	***having-died-gone-was,***		***then***	***living***	***returned ;***	
gŏṛāī-gōau-tau,		**ēbī**	**milī-gōau.'**					
having-been-lost-gone-was,		***now***	***having-been-found-went.'***					

Data from Simla Dialects

Potential Counterevidence

A light verb use of (*jāṇau*) 'go' that is not form-identical to a main verb 'go'.

- These are interesting pieces of data since these could potentially provide evidence against Butt&Lahiri's claims.
- However:
  - Grierson only says that *jāṇau* is **mostly** used in composition (e.g., as a light verb).
  - There are quite a few different verbs meaning 'run' or 'go away' that are used in all the text samples.

Data from Simla Dialects

- Grierson also provides paradigms for Śodōchī in which *jāṇau* is listed among the main verbs (Grierson 1928, 656).

Irregular are :—

auhṇau or *auṇau*, to be, to become, past part. *ūhau*, *ūau*
ḍēuṇau, to go, *ḍēũau*
laggṇau, to be joined, *lāgau*
jāṇau, to go, *gōau* or *gau*, plur. *gēai*, *gai* ; fem. *gēī*
kŏrnau, to do, *kīau*
dēṇau, to give, *dīnau* (O. S. *dēnnau*)
laiṇau, to take, is regular.

- The text samples are too small to really conclude anything.
- Needed: more research on these dialects!

Event Modification and Diachronic Change

- **Conclusion:** A decade on Butt&Lahiri's claims seem to hold up.
- But: Given how much languages change over time, the diachronic stability of light verbs is surprising.
- Reasonable question: Why are light verbs stable, but not auxiliaries?
- Suggestion:
  - Light verbs are a version of the main verb that are deployed for event modification and thus have no independent life.
  - Event modfication via co-predication does not lend itself to further diachronic change.
- There is evidence that certain V-V sequences may be lexicalized (Herath and Slade report some examples from Sinhala) — but this is an entirely different type of historical development.

Event Modification and Diachronic Change

- Syntactic reanalysis is generally preceded by a semantic/pragmatic reinterpretation:
  - In *I go to fly to Paris* the motion verb is reinterpreted as an event situater (future).
  - Once the verb has been reinterpreted as a functional element, it becomes subject to further changes (morphophonological).
- There is no obvious path for a semantic/pragmatic reinterpretation in the case of light verbs
  (or causatives, see 'The Morpheme that Wouldn't Go Away[1]).
- The light verb modifies a given main verb by:
  - adding to its argument structure
  - adding a dimension of meaning (e.g., completion, directionality benefaction, forcefulness)
  - Neither of these are easily subject to semantic/pragmatic reinterpretation.

[1] https://www.ling.uni-konstanz.de/butt/research/publications/papers-and-handouts/complex-predicates/

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