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# On the Diachronic Nature of Marathi Light Verbs

Aaditya Kulkarni\*

## 1 Light Verbs in Indo-Aryan: Introduction, Origins, and Issues

A light verb (LV) (also called a vector or an explicator) is a semi lexical verb that appears in various types of complex predicate constructions. The type of LVs considered here primarily appear in constructions known as compound verbs (CVs), which are a characteristic feature of south Asian languages. A CV as shown in (1) typically consists of a main verb (nonfinite, appears first canonically) responsible for the lexical content of the compound and a light verb ( $V_2$ , takes TAM markings) which does not appear in its primary lexical meaning, but adds some aspectual information as well as certain semantic nuances to the meaning of the main verb. A light verb almost always has a homophonous simple verb counterpart.

- (1)  $\text{tja-ne}$   $\text{pətrə}$   $\text{lih-un}$   $\text{ʈak-l-e}^1$   
he-ERG letter.N write-CP throw-PRF-3.SG.N  
'He wrote the letter (got rid of the responsibility of writing it).'

### 1.1 Aspectogenesis vs. Pertinacity: Two Views on the Diachronic Nature of Light Verbs

#### 1.1.1 Hook's Theory of Aspectogenesis

Hook (1991, 1993) claims that the CVs were completely absent in the old Indo-Aryan (OIA), are first attested during the middle Indo-Aryan (MIA) stage, and have flourished thereafter<sup>2</sup>. He claims that the development of CVs (=the emergence of light verbs) is a case of 'aspectogenesis'; i.e. marking aspectual contrast. According to him, LVs are formed via grammaticalization of their full verb counterpart, and can grammaticalize further to form auxiliary verbs.

#### 1.1.2 Butt & Lahiri's Proposal of Diachronic Pertinacity

Butt and Lahiri (2002, 2013) show that light verbs have been present in IA languages since OIA stage, and are diachronically stable and inert (i.e. once established, LVs are resistant to any change). They propose that existence of LVs is not the resultant of any historical change; and LVs and their main verb counterparts are actually part of a single underlying lexical entry. Further, Butt and Lahiri claim that auxiliaries are formed via reanalysis of the main verbs, as opposed to a more prevalent view that auxiliaries are formed via further grammaticalization of LVs.

### 1.2 Issues

The proposals mentioned in section 1.1 are contradictory in nature. Not only do they make completely opposite claims about diachrony of IA LVs, they also posit different explanations for their existence. These claims present evidence from languages like Bangla, Hindi, and Marwari. The present study studies data from Marathi, a southern IA language, to investigate the diachronic nature of Marathi LVs by attempting to answer the following questions:

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\*The present paper is an abridged version of part of my M.Phil. thesis titled 'Synchrony and Diachrony of Compound Verbs in Marathi'. An earlier version of this paper appears in the proceedings of ICOLSI-40. Versions of this paper (or related work) were presented at ICOLSI-40, StuTS 67, and LDG Deccan College. Along with the audience at these venues, I am thankful to the following people for their comments, suggestions, and discussion related to this project (though not all which have yet been incorporated): Rajesh Bhatt, Ashwini Deo, Peter Hook, Shubhangi Kardile, Sonal Kulkarni-Joshi, Prashant Pardeshi, and Biswamohan Pradhan. The usual disclaimer applies.

<sup>1</sup>Unless mentioned otherwise, data that appears here comes from Kulkarni (2019).

<sup>2</sup>Since the faith of the LVs considered here is intertwined with that of CVs they appear in, it is often not possible to talk about one without mentioning the other; and the observations and claims made regarding one's diachronic nature almost always stand true for the other.

I. Are Marathi LVs stable? Do all LVs attested in contemporary Marathi appear in the earlier stages of the language?

II. Do LVs show any change(s) in terms of a. their frequency of occurrence, ii. their (semantic) functions, and iii. their collocational ability?

### 1.3 Methodology

The present study traces the Marathi LVs historically, by taking into account texts ranging from late 13th century to 21st century. The genres of the selected texts include *Bhakti* literature, historical annals (*Bakhars*), and commentaries on socio-political issues. The selection of the texts is governed by restrictions such as their availability rather than any explicit selectional criteria (this is especially true of the older texts). A sample of roughly a thousand sentences (or verses) is taken into account for each chosen text. All texts, except one, are available either in print or as scanned copies; thus, almost none of the corpus is electronically searchable. Therefore, each task; such as identifying a LV or taking the sentence count; has been done manually for the large part of the corpus. The list of the texts considered is given below:

No.	Text	Time period C.E.	Referred as <sup>3</sup>
1	<i>Lilacharitra</i>	1278	LC13
2	<i>Dnyaneshwari</i>	1290	DY13
3	<i>Eknathi Bhagawat</i>	1570-1573	EB16
4	<i>Sabhasad Bakhar</i>	1697	SB17
5	<i>Bhausahabanchi Bakahr</i>	Circa 1762	BB18
6	<i>Sanskrit Kavi Panchakam</i> (Essays by Chiplunkar)	1870	CE19
7	<i>Shetkaryacha Asud</i> (Essays by Phule)	1981	PE19
8	<i>Vidnyan-Nishtha Nibandh</i> (Essays by Savarkar)	Circa 1930	SE20
9	Blog: <i>Jagta Pahara</i>	2018	BG21

Table 1: Lists of texts selected.

The diachronic nature of Marathi LVs is investigated by taking into account their frequency patterns as well as their semantics. All LVs are taken into account for the purposes of quantitative analysis; but a select five LVs (GO (*d̄zane*), COME (*jene*), THROW (*takne*), TAKE (*g<sup>h</sup>ene*), and GIVE (*qene*)) are chosen for the purpose of examining the semantic change (if any). These LVs are chosen based on i. Their (higher) synchronic frequency, and ii. Their earliest attestation in the texts considered.

## 2 Diachronic Nature of Marathi LVs

### 2.1 Quantitative Evidence

<sup>3</sup>Each text is referred to with an alphanumeric abbreviation, consisting of abbreviation of the text followed by the century it was written in.

### 2.1.1 Percentage Occurrences of LVs across time

The percentage of LVs (number of instances of LVs per hundred sentences) across time, shows a clear rising pattern. Occurrence of LVs is less than 1% in the earliest texts taken into account; but they show rapid and steady rise in frequency starting the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In contemporary Marathi, frequency of around 12% is attested for the given texts.

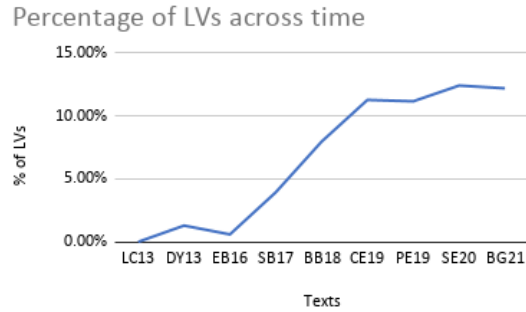


Chart 1: Percentage of LVs across time.

### 2.1.2 Number of LVs across time

The number of LVs attested across time is also taken into account. Only 3 LVs are attested in the earliest text considered (LC13); but their pattern shows a nearly steady increase over time with attestation of many more LVs, with 17 LVs being attested in the contemporary Marathi text BG21.

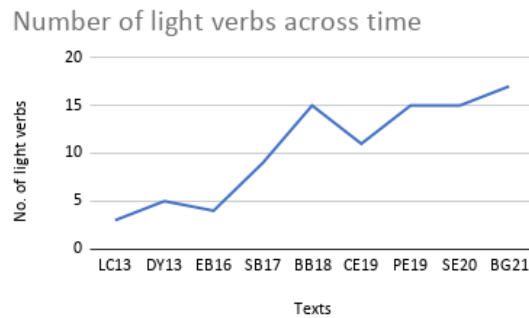


Chart 2: Number of LVs across time.

### 2.1.3 Percentage of most Frequent LVs

The ratio of the number of occurrences of the most frequent LVs to the total number of LVs as shown in chart 3 shows a very interesting pattern. In the initial stage, the percentage of the most frequent LVs is very high which decreases with time to reach its lowest value in 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, it rises steadily from there till contemporary Marathi.

This peculiar pattern can be explained if the total number of LVs across time is taken into account (chart 2). There, as the number of LVs is seen increasing between the 13<sup>th</sup> century till the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the occurrences of these LVs also keep on increasing, causing a relative drop in the contribution of the most frequent LVs. However, post 18<sup>th</sup> century, the number of LVs in a text across time becomes comparatively stable, and newer LVs are no longer attested with the same frequency. At the same time, the occurrences of most frequent LVs rise rapidly, which is reflected in the rise observed in percentage occurrences of these LVs post 18<sup>th</sup> century, whereas the contribution of the less frequent LVs decreases.

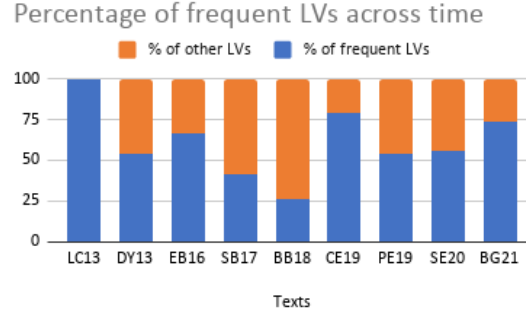


Chart 3: Percentage of frequent LVs across time.

## 2.2 Semantics of LVs across Time

As opposed to their frequency patterns, the changes observed in the semantics of Marathi LVs are much less discernible, and perhaps even slower to take place. The semantic change observed in LVs can be grouped into two categories: i. changes in the collocational ability of the LVs; and ii. changes in the semantics of the LVs.

Four of the LVs taken into account (all except COME) show an increase in their collocational abilities. Initially, all four verbs are found to combine only with verbs describing physical actions. However, over a period of time, they are found in combination with verbs describing more abstract actions, or denoting mental states. The light verb GO, for example, combines only with verbs which describe physical actions such as *gilʱe* (swallow), *gəʱe* (drop), etc. in the earliest of the texts considered. However, in the later stages, it starts combining with motion verbs such as *nigʱe* (leave), *pəʱe* (run), etc. Finally, in 19th century texts and onwards, it starts combining with verbs such as *wisəʱe* (forget) and *rəŋgəʱe* (enjoy/get immersed) which describe mental actions or states.

Along with the increase in its collocational powers, GO also acquires newer functions as a light verb. It gives a complete reading when combined with action verbs (3); it expresses directionality as well as the sense of completion when combined with motion verbs (4); and when combined with verbs denoting mental states or actions, it gives an inadvertent reading (5).

- (2) uḍja-pəɾjəntə kam ho-un ḍza-i-l  
tomorrow-till work.N become-CP go-OBL-FUT  
'The job will be done by tomorrow.'
- (3) ʈə nigʱ-un ge-l-a  
he leave-CP go-PRF-3.SG.M  
'He left.'
- (4) mi kahiṭəri bol-un ge-l-o  
I something speak-CP go-PRF-1.SG.M  
'I (unknowingly) said something (which I was not supposed to).'

However, GO isn't the only verb which truly acquires newer functions as a light verb. As seen in (6) and (7), light verb GIVE can express benefaction, as well as directionality.

- (5) ram-ne məla eka ḍiwsaṭ kumpəŋ rəŋgəw-un ḍi-l-ə  
Ram-ERG I-DAT in one day fence colour-CP give-PRF-3.SG.N  
'Ram coloured the fence for me in a single day.'
- (6) ram-ne eka ḍiwsaṭ kʰeʎi pʰek-un ḍi-l-i  
Ram-ERG in one day toys.PL throw-CP give-PRF-PL.F  
'Ram threw out the books within a day.'

## 3 Discussion

### 3.1 Observations

Based on the evidence presented sections 2.1 and 2.2, some crucial inferences about the diachronic nature of Marathi light verbs can be made. For the given time period of late 13<sup>th</sup> century till 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is clearly observed that light verbs are not stable. Newer LVs continue to emerge in the texts considered till late 18<sup>th</sup> century; with 17 LVs being attested the contemporary Marathi text BG21 as opposed to the 3 LVs attested in LC13, the earliest text considered. Percentage occurrence of LVs also climbs to 12% in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (from the initial value of 0.80%), and stabilizes at that value from 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Five most frequent LVs selected constitute for about 75% of the total number of occurrences of LVs.

As striking the evidence for quantitative change in Marathi LVs may be, they show very little to no change in terms of their semantics. An increase in the collocational ability is observed for all frequent light verbs but one; but only two light verbs, GO and GIVE, seem to acquire some newer senses or functions. There is no evidence of any kind, even for the earliest attested light verbs, that would suggest light verbs have grammaticalized (any) further.<sup>4</sup>

### 3.2 Conclusion

The historical evidence collected for the purposes of present study suggests the following:

- I. The frequency patterns of light verbs, and related quantitative evidence indicates that Marathi light verbs are not stable; and must have flourished over time.
- II. Semantically, however, Marathi light verbs do not undergo much change over time, affirming Butt and Lahiri's (2015) view that once established, Indo-Aryan light verbs are resistant to change.

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<sup>4</sup>For an at length discussion regarding changes in Marathi LVs, and their position in the broader Indo-Aryan landscape, see Kulkarni (2019:75–83).