

Light Verbs in Diachrony: Evidence from Marathi

The diachronic nature of light verbs in the Indo-Aryan languages has been a matter of debate. Scholars like Hook (1991, 1993) and Slade (2013) consider light verbs to have emerged as the resultant of diachronic change; whereas Butt and Lahiri (2013) opine that light verbs are historically stable and resistant to change. In the light of these views, the present paper traces the Marathi light verbs across time and tries to show that their pattern is indicative of gradual emergence rather than historical stability.

A light (or a vector) verb is bleached of its lexical meaning which its homophonous full verb counterpart expresses, but adds semantic nuances to the meaning expressed by the main verb when it occurs in a compound verb construction, as illustrated by ‘*takṇe*’ in (1):

- | | | | |
|-----------|--------------|---------------|----------------|
| <i>mi</i> | <i>pāṭṛā</i> | <i>lih-un</i> | <i>tak-l-e</i> |
| 1.SG | letter.N | write-CP | drop-PRF-N |

I wrote the letter (got rid of the task/responsibility of writing it).

Light verbs were believed to be absent in old Indo-Aryan, and were considered to have developed during the middle Indo-Aryan period to compensate for the loss of root modifying affixes (Beams, 1879). Taking this forward, Hook (1991, 1993) proposed that the development of light verbs in the Indo-Aryan languages is a case of ‘aspectogenesis’ (emergence of aspectual contrast). He posited that the difference between a Hindi compound verb and its corresponding simple verb construction (*karna* vs. *kār dena*) is mainly aspectual, and the usage of a light verb gives a perfective reading as opposed to its simple verb counterpart. In stark contrast to this, Butt and Lahiri (2013) claim that light verbs have always been present in Indo-Aryan languages and propose a single underlying lexical entry for a light verb and its homophonous simple verb in order to account for their (co-)existence since the old Indo-Aryan stage. They also claim that light verbs are inert to any kind of change and hence, depart from the prevalent view that auxiliaries develop from further grammaticalization of light verbs.

Now, the existence of light verbs since old Indo-Aryan stage and their stable nature would imply that the number of light verbs present in different time periods of a language should roughly be the same. However, a pilot study of around a thousand sentence corpus of the following texts from different time periods of Marathi shows otherwise:

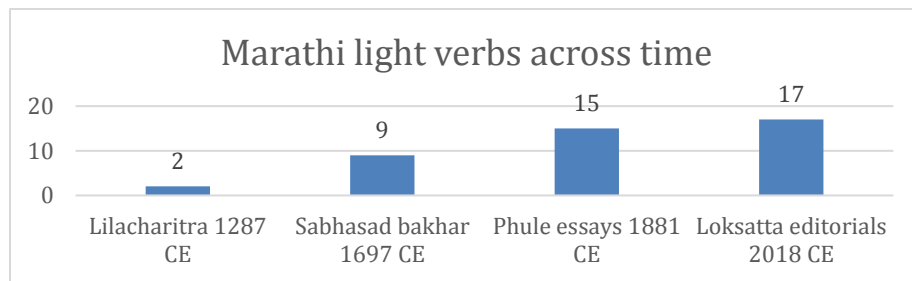


Figure 1: Marathi Light verbs across time

As seen in figure (1), number of light verbs attested in 13th century Marathi (two, in *Lilacharitra*) is significantly less than the number of light verbs attested in contemporary Marathi (seventeen, *Loksatta* editorials). This stark difference, along with the steady rise in the of number light verbs across time seen in this sample goes against the stability hypothesis put forth by Butt and Lahiri (2013), and necessitates a closer inspection of Marathi data in order to arrive at a better understanding of the diachronic nature of light verbs.

Therefore, by analyzing a thousand sentence corpus of various Marathi texts from time period ranging from 13th century C.E. to contemporary Marathi, the present paper shows that not all light verbs occur in all stages of Marathi, and there is a systematicity in the order of their emergence. Secondly, with the help of frequency patterns of the selected light verbs (*āzane* (GO), *jeṇe* (COME), *g^hene* (TAKE), *ḍeṇe* (GIVE), and *ṭakṇe* (THROW); selected based on their order of emergence and synchronic frequency), it tries to show that light verbs have undergone changes in terms of their collocational ability, frequency of occurrence, and to a smaller extent, their functions. Lastly, the paper takes into account Hook's (2001) tripartite classification of compound verb systems of Indo-Aryan languages (stage I being least advanced to stage III being most advanced in terms showing aspectogenesis) to show that Marathi, grouped under stage II, shows many characteristics of a stage III language; indicating that Marathi might slowly be moving towards a more advanced compound verb system like Hindi.

Thus, with the help of diachronic data, the present study traces the historical development of Marathi light verbs, and examines the implications of this evidence on our present day understanding of Indo-Aryan light verbs.

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