

Morphosyntactic Status of Pashto Light Verbs

Inayat Ullah¹

Abstract

This paper is an attempt to provide a detailed description and analysis of the morphosyntactic status of light verbs in Pashto. Light verbs, which are found in all languages, have been intensively researched across the world. They have been studied cross-linguistically; however, most of the research has focused on Indo-Aryan languages, as these languages make pervasive use of light verbs in their syntactic structures. Pashto, an Indo-Iranian language, likewise makes considerable use of light verbs in its constructions called light verb constructions; however, light verbs in Pashto have remained unexplored to a greater extent. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to fill this gap and provide a descriptive analysis of Pashto light verbs, especially from morphosyntactic perspective. The study follows a descriptive and qualitative approach and uses data collected from various sources, such as personal observation, Pashto books, articles, journals and other relevant sources, to highlight the hidden aspects of the Pashto light verbs.

Keywords: Pashto, Morphosyntax, Light Verb, Light Verb Constructions

1. Introduction

Pashto, an Indo-Iranian language, is widely spoken in Pakistan, notably in the provinces of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan. Pashto is taught as a subject in all most all public schools in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and it is used as a medium of instruction in more than 90% of them (Iqbal et al., 2013). According to Rahman (2009), Pashto is typically classified into five main dialects: North-Western (Central) Dialect, South-Western (Kandahar) Dialect, South-Eastern (Quetta) Dialect, North-Eastern (Yusafzai) Dialect, and Middle Tribal Dialect. Each of these dialects has its own distinct pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. This research, however, focuses on the Yusafzai dialect, a typical dialect in Pakistan.

¹ PhD Scholar, Department of English, University of AJ&K, Muzaffarabad

1.1 Light Verb

The concept of light verbs has piqued the interest of linguists, syntacticians and scholars owing to their versatility, productivity and effectiveness in comparison to simple verbs across various languages. Light verbs were first coined by Otto Jespersen (1965), a renowned Danish linguist, and since then, they have become a subject of discussion in the relevant literature. He applied the concept of light verbs to English constructions where a verb is paired with a noun phrase, such as in expressions like 'make an offer', 'take a walk', and 'give a sigh' etc. Later on, Grimshaw and Mester (1988), Mohanan (1994), Butt (1995), Akhtar (1998 & 2000) and Bukhari (2009) have frequently used this term. In recent year a light verb have become more popular, and has mostly replaced the previous terminology. Previously, various researchers have used different terminologies to refer to light verbs. Some call them explicators, while others call them auxiliary verbs and intensifiers. Others have used the words operator, vector, and vector verb to denote light verbs. The defining feature of light verbs is that they are weaker or bleached versions of the corresponding lexical verbs and do not communicate the same lexical meaning. However, several scholars, including Butt (1995), Akhtar (2000) and Bukhari (2009), argue that light verbs can also serve as the main verb in a clause.

Light verbs are so called since they have a weaker semantic content. Light verbs are verbs that do not completely convey their lexical meaning in a sentence. This means that they do not assign semantic roles to their arguments and are therefore semantically deficient or light. Putting in other words, they are verbs that lack a specific meaning or do not provide enough information to fully describe the action they denote (Karimi-Doostan, 2005). They get combine with a variety of other lexical categories, including verbs, adjectives, nouns, prepositions and adverbs to convey a specific meaning. For instance, the word 'throw' can mean 'to move an object through the air speedily in a particular direction'. However, in the phrase 'throw a party' the light verb 'throw' has taken on entirely different meaning. Here, 'throw' means 'to arrange a party, probably for someone else'. So, in this new context, the original semantic content of 'throw' has been lost, and the light verb has evolved to convey a distinct meaning. Hence, light verbs can simply be defined as those verbs that do not have particular meaning on their own but rely on other

words to express their intended meaning. Therefore, light verbs will only be meaningful when coupled with another expression, such as verb, noun or adjective. Thus, the defining property of light verb is that it contributes little to the meaning so are called light verb.

1.2 Research Questions

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the key characteristics and defining features of light verbs in Pashto?
2. What are the various types of light verbs found in Pashto?
3. How do light verbs function morphosyntactically in Pashto sentences?

1.3 Significance of the Study

The purpose of this study is to improve the understanding of Pashto syntax, especially in the domain of light verbs. The findings of this will be useful for language instructors and learners, particularly in the area of syntax. By investigating the morphosyntactic features of light verbs in Pashto, the study hopes to provide valuable insights into the language underlying structures and complexities. Additionally, it will lend hand to readers in comprehending the syntactic nature of light verbs and their role in complex verb constructions in Pashto. Apart from that, this research might be useful for future scholars interested in doing a comparative analysis of Pashto light verbs and those found in other languages.

2. Literature Review

Due to the complex nature of light verbs in various languages, many researchers and professors from various countries have expressed an interest in them. Numerous analyses have been conducted to better comprehend the idea of light verbs in various languages, and scholars have addressed them from various perspective. According to Butt (1995), light verbs are usually used in the formation of complex predicates. Adger (2003) suggests that light verbs are instantiations of *v*, which is present in all transitive sentences within minimalist theory. Hale and Keyser (1993) first proposed that transitive verbs consist of two heads, the root *V* and a transitive head called *v*, a concept now widely accepted. It is generally considered that there are many 'flavours' of *v*. Chomsky (2000, 2001) for instance, assumes the existence of *v* for intransitive verbs and *v** for

transitive verbs. According to the literature on complex predicates, one part of the predicate is incomplete yet nevertheless carries meaning. Therefore, this element is regarded as an intermediate form between an auxiliary verb and a main verb. Several researchers have investigated the topic of light verbs in several languages, with Jespersen (1965) being the first to do so. Grimshaw and Mester (1988), Mohanan (1994), Geuder (2001), Lahiri (2003), Akhtar (2000) and Bukhari (2009) have all investigated light verbs as part of complicated predicates. Thus, a number of researchers have addressed the phenomenon from different perspective in order to provide a proper understanding of the nature of light verbs.

Pashto, on the other hand, has remained largely unexplored and a lesser studied language in terms of light verbs. Despite the fact it makes the significant use of them in its constructions; however, light verbs in Pashto have remained unexplored to a greater extent, especially from morphosyntactic perspective. From Raverty's work in 1855 until the last decade of the twentieth century, the majority of Pashto grammarians, including Roos-Keppel (1922), Penzl (1955), Shafeev (1964), Mackenzie (1987), and Khattak (1988), Babrakzai (1999), did not utilize the term light verb. Tegey and Robson (1996) classified Pashto verbs into three groups: simple verbs, derivative verbs, and doubly irregular verbs (prefixed verbs). Thus, the review of the existing literature reveals and confirms that no study has yet carried out to explore the morphosyntactic status of light verbs in Pashto. In order to fill this gap, the present study is an attempt to provide a descriptive analysis of the morphosyntactic status of light verbs in Pashto.

3. Light Verbs in Pashto

According to Butt (2003) the number of light verbs can vary in a language, however they are typically high- frequency verbs with broad or general semantics. Majority of South Asian languages are notable for having a large number of light verbs, though linguists disagree on the exact number depending on the selection criterion used. For instance, Bhatia (1993) identified around twelve light verbs in Punjabi, whereas Mohanan (1994) listed 'kar' (do) and 'ho' (become) as typical light verbs in Hindi. Other researchers, such as Singh (1990) and Akhtar (2000), found ten light verbs, respectively, that contribute in the formation of complex predicates in Punjabi. Similarly, in Urdu, Butt (1995) identified thirteen light verbs,

whereas Bukhari (2009) found seventeen light verbs in Gojri. Although Pashto does not have the same level as other languages, it still utilizes light verbs to a significant extent in various complex verb constructions. The most common light verbs in Pashto are listed in table 3.1 below:

Table 3.1: Light Verbs in Pashto

S.No	Light verb	Lexical Meanings
1	kedəl	to become / to happen
2	kawəl	to make / to do
3	sho/shi /shom	to become / to happen
4	akhistəl	to take
5	wahəl	to beat
6	niwəl	to hold
7	ratələl/ raghlo	to come
8	larəl	to have / keep
9	wa/ wo/ wi/ wum/yam	be (past) /do
10	de/ da	be (present) / do
11	varkai or varkra/ varkro	to give
12	lār	to go

These Pashto light verbs have properties in common with light verbs in other languages. They are distinguished by particular defining characteristics, some of which are described below:

Firstly, Pashto light verbs have various forms that vary according to their tense, person number and gender, in addition to their base or root forms. The reason for this variation lies in the fact that light verbs in Pashto have complex inflectional system that allows for a large range of inflected forms.

Secondly, in Pashto, certain light verbs such as *de*, *wi*, *sho*, *kegi* and *kai* do not retain their full lexical/ inherent meaning as they do when used separately. This is due to the fact that they have no semantic contents on their own and are only used as *v2* in complex verb formations. The resulting sentence would be unacceptable if it is used as *V1*. Consider the following examples:

1.
 - a. Farid kitab lvastəloy de
 Farid-ERG book-NOM read do.PRS.M.3.SG
 ‘Farid has read a book.’

- b. *Farid kitab de
 Farid -ERG book-NOM do.PRS
 ‘Farid has (read) a book.’
- c. Asma ba khat lekalay wi
 Asma-ERG will letter-NOM write do.PST.F.3.SG
 ‘Asma will have written the letter.’
- d. *Asma ba khat wi
 Asma-ERG will letter-NOM do.PST
 ‘Asma will have the letter.’

In the above examples, the sentence (1a) and (1c) are grammatical because ‘de’ and ‘wi’ are used as v2, while in (1b) and (1d), the same verb is used as V1, resulting in ungrammatical structure. Therefore, when ‘de’ and ‘wi’ are used as v2 in complex verb formations, they are acceptable, but when used as V1, they create grammatically incorrect structure. This indicates that they do not carry any meaning on their own but rather merely contribute grammatical information.

Thirdly, like other languages, light verbs in Pashto lack a specific or concrete meaning on their own. Instead, they rely on other lexical categories, such as nouns, adjectives, or verbs to express the core semantic content of a sentence. Light verbs serve as functional components in the context of other lexical categories. For instance, the light verb ‘kro’ (to do) can be observed in the following examples:

- 2.
- a. Uzma mobile mat kro
 Uzma-ERG.3SG moile-NOM break do.PST
 ‘Uzma broke a mobile.’
- b. Farid mehnəth kro/kawalo
 Farid-ERG hardwork-NOM do.PST
 ‘Farid worked hard.’

In example (2), the word mat (to break) and mehnat (hard work) are the parts of light verb constructions. However, in both examples, if we take them out from the construction, the remaining part ‘kro’ does not convey any significant meaning on its own. This is due to the fact that kro’ is a

light verb that contributes no substantial meaning to the sentences by itself.

Finally, in Pashto light verbs only provide aspectual meaning to a sentence and do not bear beneficiary meaning, as exemplified by the following example:

3. Uzma hindwana kat kra
 I-ERG melon-NOM.F cut. PST.F.3.SG do.PST.F.3.SG
 'I have cut the melon.'

The above example only expresses aspectual meaning rather than beneficiary meanings. In Pashto, some expressions are employed to express beneficiary meanings rather than light verbs. The following examples demonstrate this phenomenon:

4.
 a. Farid mala manra kat kra
 Farid-ERG me-DAT apple-NOM.F cut.PST.F.3.SG do.PST.F.3.SG
 'Farid cut an apple for me.'
 b. Uzma zanla rotai pakha kra
 Uzma -ERG her bread-NOM cook.PRS.F.3.SG do.PST.F.3.SG
 'Uzma cooked the bread for herself.'

In (4a) mala 'for me' and in (4b) zanla 'for her' are the expressions used to express beneficiary meaning in Pashto. However, the same meaning cannot be expressed via light verbs.

4. Morphosyntactic Properties of Light Verbs in Pashto

Pashto light verbs exhibit the following morphosyntactic properties:

4.1 Agreement and Light Verb

Pashto light verbs exhibit agreement with arguments with respect to gender and number. This means that, depending on the tense, the light verbs used in a construction must correspond to either the subject or object of the sentence with respect to gender and number. Specifically, in the present tense, they agree with the subject, whereas they agree with the object in the past tense.

4.1.1 Gender

Light verbs in Pashto are inflected according to the relevant gender for agreement, as seen in the example below. In (5a), the light verb *kra* (do) agrees with the feminine gender of ‘manra’ apple, while in (5b), the same light verb is marked with the morpheme [-o], indicating 3rd person masculine gender agreement.

5.

a. *hagha manra kat kra*
 he-ERG apple-NOM.F cut do.PST
 ‘He cut an apple.’

b. *hagha khaṭakai kat kro*
 he-ERG melon-NOM.M. cut do.PST
 ‘He cut the melon.’

In the above examples, the light verb ‘*kra*’ is getting inflected to match the object NP agreement morphology. The inflection of the light verb changes according to the feminine and masculine gender of the object NPs, *manra* (apple) and *khaṭakai* (melon) respectively. When the object NP is ‘*manra*’, the light verb takes the morpheme [-a] that reflects feminine gender, whereas for the object NP ‘*khaṭakai*’, the light verb takes the morpheme [-o] that reflects masculine gender.

4.1.2 Number

Pashto, like various other languages, uses light verbs which display agreement in number. This means that the verb takes on a different inflection depending on whether the object is singular or plural. For instance, in sentence (6a), the verb is inflected with the morpheme [-a] to indicate agreement with a singular object, while in sentence (6b), the same verb is inflected with the morpheme [-i] to show agreement with a plural object:

6.

a. *ma paila mata kra*
 I-ERG cup-NOM.S break do. PST
 ‘I broke the cup.’

- b. ma pailai mati kri
 I-ERG cups-NOM.P break do. PST
 'I broke cups.'

The examples in (6a) and (6b) demonstrate the agreement of light verb in respect of number. In (6a), the object NP 'paila' (cup) is singular, therefore the light verb takes the [-a] morpheme to agree in number. On the other hand, in (6b), the object NP 'pilai' (cups) is plural, resulting in the same light verb taking the [-i] morpheme to reflect this agreement in number.

4.2 Case Marking

In complex predicates, light verbs have a significant impact on deciding the case marking of the subject. When the verb is transitive and displays either a past tense or perfective aspect, then the subject is assigned ergative case. If any of these two requirements is not satisfied, the subject is given the nominative case. The following examples demonstrate this phenomenon:

7.

- a. Uzma Kashmir lidali de
 Uzma-ERG Kashmir-NOM see.PRS.M.SG do.PRS.PF.M.SG
 'Uzam has seen Kashmir'

- b. Uzma sara khor raghali da
 Uzma-ERG with sister come.PRS.F.SG do.PRS.PF.F.SG
 'A sister has come with Uzma.'

- c. *za hagma lidale da
 I-NOM she-OBL see do.PST.PF. SG
 'I had seen her.'

In example (7a), the v2 'de' exhibits agreement in gender and number with the masculine nominative argument *kashmir*. Furthermore, the same verb also indicates present tense and perfect aspect, therefore the ergative case is assigned to the subject of the sentence. Similarly, in example (7b), the v2 'da' is inflected for the singular feminine gender, matching with the feminine nominative argument 'khor' (sister). The same v2 also indicates perfect aspect and present tense, therefore it becomes necessary for the

subject argument to carry ergative case marking. In addition, example (7c) is grammatically incorrect because the subject is assigned nominative case but the verb (v2) 'da' is in past tense, resulting in a mismatch. So, in the light of above data it can be concluded that, light verbs play significant role in case marking of the sentence arguments.

4.3 Scrambling

Light verbs exhibit another characteristic in the light verb constructions where the two verbs (i.e. V1 v2) cannot be scrambled away from one another. They are semantically and syntactically reliant on each other. The following examples illustrate this phenomenon:

- 8.
- a. hagma pen [mat kro]
 he-ERG pen-NOM break do.PST
 'He broke a pen.'
- b. hagma [mat kro] pen
 he-ERG break do.PST pen-NOM
 'He broke a pen.'
- c. *hagma mat pen kro
 he-ERG break pen-NOM do.PST
 'He broke a pen.'
- d. *hagma kro pen mat
 he-ERG do.PST pen-NOM break
 'He broke a pen.'

The grammaticality of (8a-b) illustrates that the verb components within Pashto light verb formations can be scrambled as a unit. However, (8c-d) are grammatically incorrect since they display the split of the verb unit. This phenomenon is also common in other South Asian languages such as Gojri, Punjabi, Urdu, Pahari, etc.

4.4 Position of Light Verbs

Another defining feature of the light verbs is their position in the light verb constructions. It is commonly believed that the light verbs (v) invariably hold the second position in such constructions; hence they are

referred to as v2. Similarly, the word order of light verb constructions in Pashto is consistent: the lexical verbs, as well as other lexical categories such as, nouns, or adjectives, always come precede the light verb. The main verb in most of the cases remains uninflected, while the light verb undergoes inflection for tenses and agreement. Consider the following examples:

9.

a. Farid mez mat kro
Farid-ERG table-NOM break do.PST
'Farid broke the table.'

b. Ali pekar kaw-i che saba ba lar sh-i
Ali-NOM think-ACC do.3.SG that tomorrow will go become.PRS 3.SG
'Ali thinks he will go tomorrow.'

c. d̤elta d̤ə cricket lube kegi
here.ADV.PROX of cricket-OBL play-NOM do.PRS.IPFV.3.SG
'Here cricket is played.'

Examples in (9) demonstrate that light verbs are typically placed on the right side within such constructions. Additionally, they do not convey any lexical meaning themselves; rather they provide meaning to the sentence in the form of directionality, hosting tense and aspect feature, licensing arguments and carrying argument markers. So, the semantic content in the construction is provided by nouns, adjectives or the first verb, while the second verb plays the syntactic role

5. Role of Light Verbs in Pashto Light Verb Constructions

Indo-Aryan languages are well-known for their intricate sentence structures, with various factors contributing to this complexity. One such factor is the formation of light verb constructions, which are made up of two word expressions that can be interpreted semantically as a single predicate. Light verbs are useful in this structure for a variety of reasons. They provide aspectual meanings to the main verb and carry all the necessary grammatical inflections, such as person, number, tense, and mood. They essentially integrate with other lexical categories, such as verbs, adjectives, nouns, adverbs, and prepositions, to generate a unit that

expresses the desired meaning. Consequently, this combination functions as a single semantic unit, coding a single event.

Pashto, like many other languages, exhibits light verb constructions, which involve pairing a light verb with various parts of speech. Pashto, in particular, is rich in such combinations and the combinations that we find in Pashto are including (V1+ v2), (N+ v) and (A+ v). These constructions are quite prolific in Pashto. Following are some examples which demonstrate these constructions:

10.

- a. hagma pen mat kro.
 he-ERG pen-NOM break do.PST
 'He broke a pen.'
- b. Farid makan jor-aw-í.
 Farid-NOM. house-ACC built.do.CONT.PRS.3.SG.F
 'Farid is building a house.'
- c. Farid pa pati ki kar kawi
 Farid-NO.M.3S in field-LOC work do.PRS.3.SG
 'Farid works in the field'
- d. Nadia Uzma khafa kra
 Nadia-ERG Uzma-NOM.F.SG upset do. PST
 'Nadia made Uzma upset.'

The examples above illustrate the formation of light verb constructions where examples 10(a-b) exemplify the sequence of V1 v2 known as compound verbs. In this sequence, the first verb serves as the main verb, while the second verb functions as a light verb. Examples (10c) and (10d) are categorized as conjunct verbs where the light verb selects a host which could be a noun and adjective. The noun or adjective combined with the light verb acts together as a lexical equivalent to a single verb.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, the study reveals that Pashto, like other languages, has light verbs. This paper also unfolds that Pashto light verbs exhibit gender and number agreement with their subjects or objects depending on the tense.

They agree with the subject in the present tense, whereas in the past tense they match with the object of the sentence. light verbs also have an effect on the subject case marking, assigning ergative case to the subject if the verb is transitive and displays past tense or perfective aspect, but if not, the subject bears nominative case. Pashto light verbs tend to combine with different lexical categories such verbs, nouns and adjective to construct different constructions that invariably take the form (V1+ v2), (N+ v) and (A+ v), where the (V1) usually appears in uninflected form. It is worth noting that in Pashto, the main verb is usually in its root form, but in certain instances, as seen in example (6) above, it may undergo inflection as well. Furthermore, in these constructions the semantic content is provided by nouns, adjectives or the first verbs, while the light verb provide the grammatical information and invariably appears in the second position.

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