

Light Verb or Phrasal Verb: exploring the V-V construction in Meiteilon

The presence of light verbs in South Asian Languages (SALs) such as Hindi-Urdu, Bangla and Telegu have been reported in works of Balusu (2012), Basu and Wilbur (2010), Butt (1995, 2003, 2008) Butt and Ramchand (2001). Light verbs are the semantically bleached verbs in complex predicates or V-V constructions. Using the data of V-V constructions in Meiteilon, this paper aims to argue a) that Meiteilon V-V constructions are complex verb constructions akin to light verb structures and b) that dissociation or separability of the two verbs is not a crucial test to identify light verbs. The proposal of aligning Meiteilon V-V with light verb constructions is based on the idea that light verbs encode sub-ventual information (Butt and Ramchand, 2001).

Meiteilon, a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in Manipur, India, has V-V constructions where the second verb (V2) denotes the movement direction of events and states (Bhat and Ningomba, 1997). Consider the following examples in (1) where the so-called ‘directional suffixes’ are *sin-* ‘in’; *t^hok-* ‘out’; *t^ha-* ‘down’ and *k^hət-* ‘upward’ are combined with the verb *pu-* ‘take’.

- 1a. *pu-* + *sin-* → *pu-sin* ‘take in’ 1b. *pu-* + *t^hok-* → *pu-t^hok* ‘take out’
 1c. *pu-* + *t^ha-* → *pu-t^ha* ‘take down’ 1d. *pu-* + *k^hət-* → *pu-k^hət* ‘take up’

At a first glance, the above examples look like Phrasal Verb or Particle Verb (PV) constructions (PVs). However, further probing indicates that they are quite different from PV constructions. In the literature, there are two types of PVs that have been noted extensively; a) Compositional PV (CPV), and b) Idiomatic PV (IPV) (Wurmbrand, 2000). As the name suggest, the meaning of both units are retained in the former type whereas the latter one functions as a single semantic unit or as idioms. Due to the idiom like characteristics, IPV can be replaced by a single word. For example, the English Phrasal Verb *throw up* can be replaced by *vomit*.

Among these two types of PVs, Meiteilon V-V does not fall under IPV type because they do not form a single semantic unit. Unlike IPVs, Meiteilon V-V cannot be replace by another word. With ruling out Meiteilon V-V as IPV, the next step is to examine if they can be analysed as CPV. Wurmbrand (2000) supports the proposal for assigning small clause structure to CPV because its transparent nature is due to particle being licensed in particle/argument relation. Though Meiteilon V-V exhibits the compositional nature of retaining the meaning of both elements in the complex structure, an important difference exists between CPV and Meiteilon V-V. The small clause analysis allows for an argument to occur between the verb and its particle which can be seen in English phrasal verb such as *throw up the ball* or *throw the ball up*. However, in case of Meiteilon V-V, nothing can intervene between the two elements. Let alone arguments, even the occurrence of causative marker *hən-*, a verbal suffix, between the two elements produces an ungrammatical structure (2).

2. *tombi-nə tombə-də layrik pi-t^hok-hən-k^hi/ *(pi-hən-t^hok-k^hi)*
 Tombi SubjMkr. Tomba-Loc. book. give-out-Caus-Past *(give-Caus-out-Past)
 ‘Tombi made Tomba gave away the books.’

Thus, eliminating a Phrasal Verb account, the paper proceeds with exploring a light verb based analysis. Some test for identifying light verbs include monoclausality, form identity, joint predication, separability and aspectual effects linkage. Of these criteria, the second item of Meiteilon V-V satisfy the form identity test as they can occur as main verbs. Let us consider the examples in (3) where V2 from (1) functions as the main verb.

- 3a. *tombə p^hurit sin-de* 3b. *ɲuŋsa t^hok-te*
 Tomba shirt change-Neg sun come out Neg
 ‘Tomba didn’t change shirt’ ‘The sun hasn’t come out’ (Lit. It’s cloudy)
 3c. *tombə u t^ha-ri* 3d. *tombi bol k^hət-li*
 Tomba tree plant-Prog Tombi ball up and down-Prog
 ‘Tomba is planting tree’ ‘Tombi is dribbling the basketball’

Further, the Meiteilon V-V constructions also exhibit monoclausality. To establish this point, only the test of Negative Polarity Item (NPI) could be used as Meiteilon, unlike most SALs, does not have agreement system. Also, the case system in this language is still a debatable issue (Kidwai, 2010). The markers associated with the arguments in a sentence are optionally present and functions more as subject vs non-subject marker. Similar to the case of Korean noted in Butt (2003), the distribution of NPI and

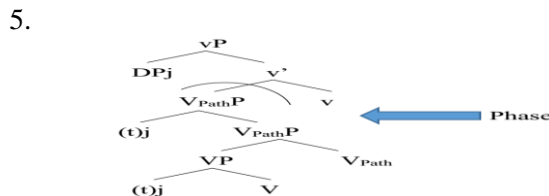
the negation marker beyond a clausal boundary also produces ungrammatical structure in Meiteilon (4b).

- 4a. tombi **kənə-mətə-də** layrik pi-t^hok-te
 Tombi who-one-Loc book give-out-Neg
 ‘Tombi does not give book(s) to anyone’
- 4b. *tombə-nə [tombi **kənəmətə-də** layrik pi-t^hok-i] haynə hay-de

Tomba-SubjMkr.Tombi.who-one-Loc book give-out-Ind. Comp say-Neg

However, V2 in Meiteilon V-V constructions neither contributes aspectual reading nor exhibit joint predication characteristic. So, the second verb does not have any implication on argument predication. Rather it is the predication of only the first verb that determines the argument structure of a V-V syntactic construction. Though the Meiteilon V-V construction is quite similar with Chinese directional, argued to align with the light verbs of Hindi-Urdu (Butt and Scott, 2002), it differs on two main points namely a) dissociability and b) availability of non-directional reading. As shown earlier in (2), the two elements in Meiteilon V-V can never be separated. Further, the second verb always encodes directionality of the events or states.

Given these discussions, I argue that the second verb in Meiteilon contributes to the event structure by encoding path reading of event occurrences. Adopting Ramchand’s (1997, 2008, 2014) idea of verbal structure decomposition, I argue that the Meiteilon V-V can be represented as a complex verbal structure illustrated below.



I further argue that the reason for inability to dissociate the two verbs in Meiteilon V-V is because they are in within phase. Previous literature on syntax-phonology interface have indicated that the domains for phonological operations are drawn from syntactic information (Seidl, 2001), (Dobashi, 2003), (Ishihara, 2003), (Kratzer and Selkirk, 2007), (Elordieta, 2008), (Selkirk, 2011). Based on this proposal and drawing inference from the phonological processes of nasal place assimilation (NPA) and loss of aspiration (LoA), I substantiate my argument of Meiteilon V-V being in a phase. In Meiteilon, the verbal root and its suffixes forms a prosodic word which functions as a phonological domain, where phonological operations take place (Ashem, in preparation). However, within this domain, NPA and LoA take place only between V-V (6a) and do not occur between verb and the other suffix (6b).

- 6a. t^hon- + k^hət- + -k^hə + -le → t^hoŋ-gət-k^hə-re/ *(t^hoŋ-gət-kə-re) ‘have layered up’
 layer up Past Perf
- 6b. t^hon- + -k^hi → t^hon-k^hi/ *(t^hoŋ-gi) ‘was layered’
 layer Past

To sum up, this paper argues that V-V construction in Meiteilon is a complex verb structure where the second verb contributes sub-evental information. This information serves to help build event structures in the language thereby making the second verb behave like light verbs. This analysis thus indicates that dissociability or extraction of element from the complex verbal structure is not a strong test to identify light verbs in languages.

Selected Abbv: Comp-Complementizer; Ind- Indicative mood; SubjMkr-Subject Marker

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