

v or V

Gholamhossein Karimi-Doostan
Kurdistan University
gh5karimi@yahoo.com / kgholmh@uottawa.ca

Introduction

Kitahara (1997) claims that there is no morphophonetic or semantic evidence to support the existence of little verb *v* in the Minimalist Program. According to Kitahara functional categories T, D and C have semantic justification. T has a [finiteness] feature, D has a [referentiality] feature and C has a mood feature; on the other hand, the *v* is a functional category that has neither a morphophonetic nor a semantic justification. Under Kitahara's analysis, *v* is solely motivated by the theory-internal need. Stroik (2001) analyzes English "do so" constructions to show that they can be used as evidence for the existence of *v*. Stroik attempts to prove that in these constructions not "do" itself, but its complements substitute for the whole VP. So, "do" in "do support" constructions is the morphological realization of *v*. In this study, we try to find out how light verbs (LVs) in Persian, Kurdish and Korean may shed some light on the contrary views on the notion of *v*.

1. Light Verbs

Persian, Kurdish and Korean light verb constructions (LVCs) focused on in the present study contain LVs meaning "to do" or "to become" combined with a verbal noun (VN). The LVs are represented in capital letters and the VNs in bold face. Let us consider the LVs in (1-5) which predicate sentences with different types and number of arguments.

- (1) a. John ?aroosak-ra be Mary **?ehda:** KARD¹ (Persian)
John doll-SOM² to Mary giving do-past
"John gave the doll to Mary."
b. John ba'ulekan-aga va Mary **haba** KERD. (Kurdish)
John doll-the to Mar giving do-pass
"John gave the doll to Mary."

I would like to thank Prof. Paul Hirschbuhler who read the earlier version of this work and provided me with useful comments and suggestions.

¹ - The difference between KARDAN as a LV and KARDAN as a causative is explained in Karimi Doostan 1997: 95-99.

² - SOM stands for Specific Object Marker.

- c. John-i Mary-eykey inhyung-ul **senmwul-ul**³ HA-yess-ta. (Korean, Han and Rambow 2000)
 John-Nom Mary-to doll-Acc giving-Acc do-past-dec
 “John gave the doll to Mary.”
- (2) a. Culumbus ?amrika-ra **kašf** KARD. (Persian)
 Culumbus America-SOM discovery do-past
 “Culumbus discovered America.”
- b. Culumbus ?amrika **kašf** KERD. (Kurdish)
 Culumbus America discovery do-past
 “Culumbus discovered America.”
- c. Columbus-ka sintaylywuk-ul **palkyen-ul** HA-yess-ta. (Korean, Sato 1993)
 Columbus-Nom new-continent-Acc discovery-Acc do-Past
 “Columbus discovered America.”

In (1-2) the agent and theme arguments appear as subjects and direct objects respectively, and the goal arguments appear as PPs in (1). Direct objects are marked with *-ra* in Persian, *-ga* in Kurdish and *-lul* in Korean. In addition to the morphological markers, the fact that only the theme/patient arguments in (1-2) can appear as subjects in passive sentences, e.g. as in (5), leaves no doubt that these arguments are direct object noun phrases. Now consider the following intransitive sentences. In (3) the subject arguments are agents while they are patient arguments in (4)⁴.

- (3) a. John **narmesh** KARD. (Persian)
 John exercise do-past
 “John exercised.”
- b. John **narmesh** KERD. (Kurdish)
 John exercise do-past.
 “John exercised.”
- c. John-nun **undong**-HA-ess-ta. (Korean)
 John-Nom exercise-do-past-dec
 “John exercised.”
- (4) a. John **fout** KARD / ŠOD. (Persian)
 John death do-past / become-past
 “John died.”
- b. John **fout** KERD. (Kurdish)
 John death do-past
 “John died.”
- c. John-nun/ga **samang**-HA-ess-ta. (Korean)
 John-Nom death-do-past-dec.
 “John died.”

³ - Note that Schutze (2001) argues that *-lul* is not always a case marker and Ahn (1991) claims that *-lul* on nominal elements of LVCs is not an accusative case marker, but an emphatic delimiter. If they are right, we have only one accusative case in (1c).

⁴ . The unaccusativity diagnostics for differentiating sentences like those in (3) from those in (4-5) are provided in Karimi Doostan 1997:144-9.

In these languages, the inchoative counterparts of the above light verbs may replace the “DO” type LVs in transitive clauses and form passive-like clauses. Compare the transitive sentences in (2) with their passive-like equivalents in (5).

- (5) a. ?a:mrika: (tavasote Columbus) **kašf** ŠOD. (Persian)
 America (by Columbus) discovery BECOME-Past
 “America was/got discovered by Columbus⁵.”
- b. ?a:mrika: (wa wasile Columbus) **kašf** BŪ. (Kurdish)
 America (by Columbus) discovery BECOME-Past
 “America was/got discovered by Columbus.”
- c. sintaylywuk-i Columbus-ey-uyhay **palkyen**-i TOY-essta. (Korean, Sato, 1993)
 new continent-Nom Columbus-by discovery-Nom BECOME-Past
 “America was/got discovered by Columbus.”

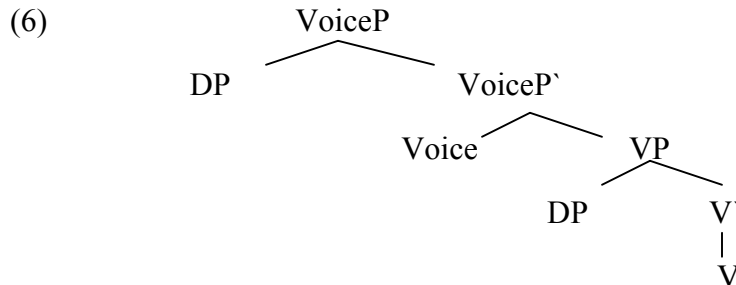
In Chomsky 1999 strong *v* is supposed to appear in clauses with nominative and accusative cases but weak *v* can only appear in defective clauses such as passives and unaccusatives. Also, in Sigurdsson 2000, 2003 *vP* is a case shell containing both Nominative and Accusative case and Nominative and agreement have the same loci. For him too only strong *v* can assign both Nominative and accusative case. The facts that transitive and unergative sentences (1-3) are only formed by DO type LVs, that the passive-like sentences (5) contain BECOME type LVs and that unaccusative sentences (4a) may be formed by BECOME type LVs may indicate that DO and BECOME type LVs in cases like (1-5) are morphological realizations of strong *v* and weak *v*. We examine this position in the following sections.

2. LVs Role: Thematic Content or Structural Case

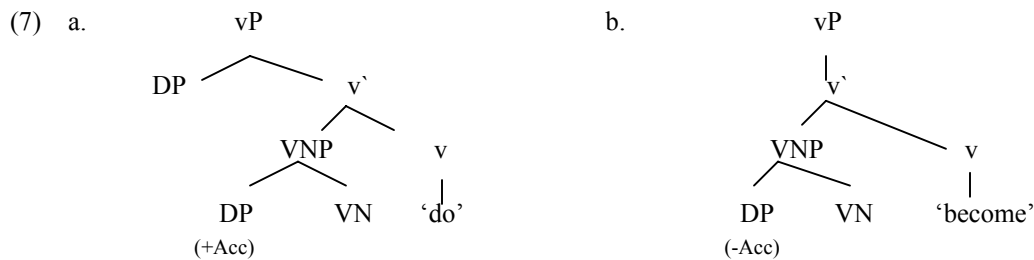
In the Minimalist Program approach, mainly under the influence of Hale and Keyser (1993), the configuration for assignment of an external (cause/agent) argument is created not by a projection of (transitive) *V*, but by the projection of an empty verb *v* dominating *VP*. It is assumed that having an external argument implies having strong *v*, and having strong *v* implies having accusative case (Chomsky, 1995; Adger, 2003). Kratzer’s (1996) active/inactive Voice head is very similar to strong/weak *v*. Kratzer, inspired by Hung (1988) and Johnson (1991), assumes a “Voice” head above *VP* as illustrated in (6). She believes that Voice head has semantic content and it might introduce external argument.

⁵ - Bear in mind that these types of sentences are not passive, but passive-like unaccusative. As we will see later, this type of unaccusative constructions are very common in languages with productive LVCs.

The Voice head may be active or inactive. Active voice, like strong *v*, adds external argument and assigns accusative case while inactive voice, like weak *v*, does not introduce external argument and does not assign accusative case.



As mentioned earlier the DO type LVs in our data are so similar to strong *v* and active Voice and BECOME type LVs are so identical to weak *v* and inactive Voice that one can claim that these LVs are the morphological realization of *v*. If so, then it seems reasonable to assume that DO LVs appear in structural configurations as (7a) and BECOME LVs form structures like (7b); compare with (6). In (7), +Acc and -Acc are supposed to indicate the presence or absence of accusative case marking ability.



According to this view, in cases like (1-2), we have DO/strong *v*, and as a result there are both external arguments and accusative case marked objects (7a), while in case like (5) and (4a) we have BECOME/weak *v* and therefore there is neither external argument nor accusative case (7b) and the DP in Spec Verbal Noun Phrase (VNP), due to the lack of accusative case, raises to Spec T to receive nominative Case. The behavior of DO LVs in (1-4) raises several questions for this view. We cannot explain why we have systematic change of a(rgument)-structure with the change of VNs. The LVs hata, kardan and kerden in (1-4) appear in clauses with one, two or three arguments. The subject arguments in (3) are agents, while those in (4) are theme/patient arguments. We have three arguments in (1) but two in (2). It would be very odd to imagine that we have four

kinds of verb in (1-4). If we have the same verb across the data from (1) to (4), then what do these LVs look like? Not only the number of arguments (1-4) but also the types of arguments in (3) and (4) strongly suggest that VNs bear thematic properties and are responsible for the number and types of arguments and the LVs are so bleached that they do not play any role in thematic properties of LVCs. (4a) is more interesting as both *kardan* “to do” and the inchoative LV *šodan* “to become” (5a) are used interchangeably. This means that the LVs are so semantically empty that DO type and BECOME type LVs can be optionally used with some unaccusative VNs as in (4a). This is true in Korean too. The VNs *pwungkoy* “collapse”, *chimmol* “sink” and *pyenhwa* “change” can co-occur both with *hata* “to do” and *toyta* “to become” (Kang, 1996). In addition, (8a) and (8b) are used to differentiate between agent/actor and patient/undergoer arguments (Chafe, 1970; Jackendoff, 1990). These tests also show that the LVs under investigation lack thematic force, since the LVCs in (3) and (4) behave differently when subjected to these tests. The DO type LVs *kardan*, *kerden* and *hata* are used with two groups of VNs, unergatives in (3) but unaccusatives in (4). The LVCs like those in (3) can be used in clauses like (8a) but they can’t be used in clauses like (8b) as shown in (9). On the other hand, the LVCs like those in (4) are ungrammatical in structures like (8a) but grammatical in structures like (8b) as illustrated in (10).

- (8) a. What x did was ...
 b. What happened to x was ...
- (9) a. ?anche ke John ?anjam dad in bud ke **narmesh** KARD.
 What that John performing gave this was that exercise did
 “what John did was he exercised.”
 b. *?anche bar sar John ?mad in bud ke **narmesh** KARD.
 what on head John came this was that exercise did
 “What happened to John was he exercised.”
- (10) a. * ?anche ke John ?anjam dad in bud ke **fout** KARD.
 What that John performing gave this was that death did
 “what John did was he died.”
 b. ?anche bar sar John ?mad in bud ke **fout** KARD.
 what on head John came this was that exercise did
 “What happened to John was he died.”

So, the agenthood tests (9-10) also indicate that what determines agenthood is the VN not the LV. This means the position according to which DO LVs, strong v, or active Voice add external argument cannot be supported by the data. However, if we reduce the semantic force of v and Voice and assume that these abstract heads only play role in case

marking in such a way that DO LV, strong v or active Voice, as in (7a), assigns accusative case, while BECOME LV, weak v or inactive Voice does not (7b), we only have to account for the problem why in cases like (3-4) DO LVs do not assign case and what happens to their accusative case marking ability. It seems plausible to say that DO type LVs case mark DPs when there are DP arguments that require to be case licensed. In the unergative sentences (3), although the LVs are able to assign accusative case to an internal argument, the VNs do not provide the sentences with such arguments. In other words, there is only one argument in (3-4) which receives nominative case. This is very similar to instances like (11b) and (12b) where the verbs are capable of assigning case, but they do not assign any case and their case marking ability remains unassigned. In (11a), the verb “eat” is transitive and assigns accusative case to a DP, but its accusative case is not assigned due to the lack of an explicit argument in (11b). Also, in (12b) the verb ‘sing’ does not assign accusative case, but it assigns accusative case to the so called ‘fake’ or ‘unselected’ object argument (Simpson 1983, Spencer and Zaretskaya 1995).

- (11) a. John ate **his meal**.
- b. John ate.
- (12) a. John sang **himself** hoarse.
- b. John sang.

Therefore, we may conclude that BECOME/DO type LVs in Korean, Kurdish and Persian can be considered as the morphophonetic realization of v or Voice provided that these functional heads are taken as heads involved in case checking without playing any role in introducing external arguments. In other words, the analysis of the data in this work only supports Stroik’s (2001) position partially for some reason that will be clarified in the next section.

3. LV as v or V

We assumed the position that the LVs under study function like v and Voice with respect to case marking. But can this indicate that we have v as a separate head from lexical V(erb)s? A comparison of the so called alternating verbs in English with their LVCs equivalents in Persian, Korean and Kurdish might help to tackle this issue. In English, the same lexical verb is used to form alternating transitive/intransitive verbs as in (13), while in languages with productive LVCs the DO type LVs are used to translate transitive

sentences and BECOME type LVs are employed in inchoative sentences. For instance, consider the Persian and Kurdish equivalents of sentences in (13) presented in (14-15).

- (13) a. John bent the rod.
 b. The rod bent.
- (14) a. John mile-ra **xam** KARD. (Persian)
 John rod-SOM bending did
 “John bent the rod.”
 b. Mile **xam** ŠOD.
 rod bending BECOME
 “The rod bent.”
- (15) a. John mila-ga **hal** KERD. (Kurdish)
 John rod-the Bending did
 “John bent the rod.”
 b. mila-ga **hal** BŪ.
 rod-the bending BECOME
 “The rod bent.”

At first glance, one can say that the comparison of (13) with (14-15) calls for a position that there is a *v* in each of the sentences in (13-15); morphologically abstract in (13) but morphologically realized in (14-15). This means that we may have something like “BENDING-DO” in (13a) and “BENDING-BECOME” in (13b). This way of looking at the data implies that LV can be considered as the morphophonetic realization of *v*. In fact, the same trend of thought motivated researchers to publicize the notion of *v* after Hale and Keyser (1993). In the remainder of this section, we will argue that although the LVs focused on in this study seem to be the morphological realization of *v*, they are in fact nothing but the semantically bleached forms of Vs, containing functional information like case and other verbal features. Let us consider the contrast between (13b) and (14b) after an agentive “by phrase” has been added to them, as in (16) and (17).

- 16) * The rod bent by John.
 17) Mile tavsote John **xam** ŠOD.
 rod by John bending BECOME
 “The rod was/got bent by John.”

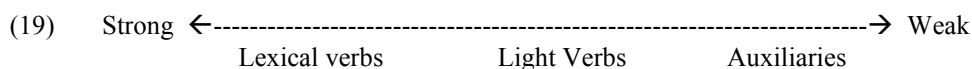
The contrast between (16) and (17) reveals that (14b) and (15b), unlike (13b), are ambiguous and they can have a passive reading too. (14b) and (15b) can be either inchoative or passive, but (17) has only a passive reading. We believe, in the spirit of Harley (1995a, 1995b) but contra Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995), that the differences and the similarities between the sentences in (13-17) arises because the VNs, LVs and lexical verbs are lexically specified in the way indicated in (18).

(18)

Lexical Items	A-structure	Accusative Case	Verbal Features
bend 1	<i>dyadic</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>
bend 2	<i>monadic</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>yes</i>
xam, 'bending' 1	<i>dyadic</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>no</i>
xam, 'bending' 2	<i>monadic</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>no</i>
"do"	<i>empty</i>	<i>yes</i>	<i>yes</i>
"become"	<i>empty</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>yes</i>

Now, we can explain the issues related to (13-17). The sentence in (13a) is transitive and can be passivized because it contains "bend1" which is dyadic and capable of assigning accusative case. (13b) has only an inchoative reading and cannot be passivized because it contains a monadic verb "bend2" unable to assign accusative case. (14a) and (15a) are transitive as they contain a dyadic VN and LV DO capable of assigning accusative case. (14b) and (15b) contain BECOME incapable of assigning accusative, so they cannot be transitive. Whether they have passive or inchoative readings depends on which of the dyadic or monadic VNs they contain. If they contain a monadic VN, they would have inchoative reading (14b, 15b). But if they contain a dyadic VN, they would have a passive reading (14b, 15b, 17). This reveals that BECOME and DO contain the same functional information that we have in the lexical verbs. That is, BECOME behaves like intransitive 'bend' and DO like transitive 'bend' with respect to case marking and carrying verbal feature. Simply, DO and BECOME LVs are dethematized versions of their lexical counterparts. Thus, they are Vs rather than vs.

The way Korean, Kurdish and Persian LVCs are pictured here indicates that LVs are specified to have at least some functional roles such as case marking and hosting verbal features but they lack thematic force. The fact that most of the LVs have lexical counterparts that function as full predicates and the development of lexical verbs into LVs also seems to support the view that LVs are nothing but the semantically bleached forms of their lexical counterparts. Ritter and Rosen (1996) place the LVs between the lexical verbs and auxiliaries on the semantic strength continuum as in (19).



Karimi Doostan (2001b) reports that Modern Persian and Kurdish use more LVCs in comparison to Middle Persian and some of the lexical verbs in Middle Persian are archaic and replaced by LVCs in Modern Persian and Kurdish. This indicates that LVs come into existence as a result of a grammaticalization process. Roberts and Roussou (2003) confirm Hopper and Traughott's (1993) proposal in (20) which suggests that inflectional affixes, clitics and grammatical words are obtained from content words as a result of grammaticalization.

(20) full Verbs > Vector > Auxiliary > clitics > Affix

Based on the properties of the LVs, as described here, it is reasonable to assume that DO and BEOME type LVs in the aforementioned languages are in a process of grammaticalization. They have lost their thematic force and they are only left with some functional roles such as case marking and hosting verbal features. In other words, LVs are lexical verbs without thematic information. This may imply that what has been taken as *v* is nothing but some of the functional properties of *V*.

4. Conclusion

Our analysis of the LVs in Persian, Kurdish and Korean reinforces Kitahara's (1997) position that *v* is only motivated by theory-internal need. Although the LVs are very similar to strong *v* and weak *v*, they cannot be used to support the notion of *v* as a head above *V*. If our analysis of LVs is on the right path, Stroik's (2001) way of using English "do support" constructions as morphophonetic evidence for the existence of *v* remains doubtful.

References:

- Adger, David. 2003. *Core Syntax: A minimalist approach*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ahn, Hee-Don. 1991. *Light Verbs, VP Movement, Negation and Clausal Architecture in Korean and English*. Doctoral Dissertation, Stanford University.
- Chafe, L. Wallace. 1970. *Meaning and the Structure of Language*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Chomsky, Noam. 1995. *The Minimalist Program*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Chomsky, Noam. 1999. Derivation by Phase. Ms. MIT.

- Hale, Ken and Samuel. J. Keyser. 1993. On argument structure and lexical expression of syntactic relations. In *The View from building 20*, eds. Hale, K. and S. J. Keyser, 53-110. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Han, Chung-hye. and Owen; Rambow. 2000. The Sino-Korean Light Verb Construction and Lexical Argument Structure. Paper presented in Tag+5 Conference, Paris, May, 25-27.
- Hung, H. J. 1988. *The Structure of Derived Nouns and Verbs in Malagasy: A syntactic account*. Ms. McGill University.
- Harley, Heidi. 1995a. *Subjects, Events and Licensing*. Doctoral Dissertation, MIT.
- Harley, Heidi. 1995b. Sase Bizarre: The structure of Japanese causatives. In Proceedings of the 1995 Annual Conference of the Canadian Linguistic Association, ed. Paivi Koskinen, 225-235. Toronto Working Papers in Linguistics, University of Toronto.
- Jackendoff, Ray. 1990. *Semantic Structure*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Johnson, Kyle. 1991. On Object Position. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 9: 577-636.
- Kang, Sun-Young. 1996. *Unaccusative Verbs in Korean with a Special Reference to ci and toy*. Ms. Ulsan University.
- Karimi Doostan, Gholamhossein. 1997. *Light Verb Constructions in Persian*. Doctoral Dissertation, Essex University, England.
- Karimi Doostan, Gholamhossein. 2001. *Ilami Kurdish*. Sanandaj: Kurdistan University Press.
- Kratzer, Angelika. 1996. Serving the external argument from its verb. In *Phrase Structure and the Lexicon*, eds. Rooryck, J. and Laurie Zaring, 109-137. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Levin, Beth and Malka Rappaport Hovav. 1995. *Unaccusativity*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Ritter, Elizabeth and Sara T. Rosen. 1996. Strong and Weak Predicates: reducing the Lexical Burden. *Linguistic Analysis* 26: 29-62.
- Robert, Ian. and Anna Roussou. 2003. *Syntactic Change: A Minimalist approach to Grammaticalization*. Cambridge University Press.
- Schutze, T. Carson. 2001. On Korean Case Stacking: The varied functions of the particles ka and lul. *The Linguistic Review* 18: 193-232.
- Sigurdsson, Halldor. 2000. The locus of case and agreement. In *Working Papers in Scandinavian Syntax* 65: 65-108.
- Sigurdsson, Halldor. 2003. Case: abstract vs. morphological. In *New Perspectives on Case Theory*, eds. Ellen Brandner and Heike Zinzmeister, 223-268. Stanford: CSLI Publications.
- Simpson, Jane. 1983. Resultatives. In *Papers in Lexical Functional Grammar*, eds. Levin, L., M. Rappaport, and A. Zaenen, 143-157. Bloomington: Indiana University Linguistics Club.
- Spencer, Andrew and Marina Zaretskaya. 1998. Verb prefixations in Russian as lexical subordinations. *Linguistics* 36: 1-39.
- Stroik, Thomas. 2001 On the light verbs hypothesis. *Linguistic Inquiry* 33: 362-69.

Gh. Karimi Doostan
 English Language Dept.
 Kurdistan University
 Sanandaj, Iran