

## Light verb's role in idiomatic expressions in Telugu

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**ABSTRACT:** Idioms are not non-compositional, as this perception is gaining importance in recent studies (Gibbs1995) there is another rising question, which is- how constructive are the constituents in an idiom that make them compositional? Unlike idiomatic expressions complex predicates though consists of more than one categorical yet their meaning is compositional. However, there are certain complex predicates in Telugu that have idiomatic implications. In relation to complex predicates which have idiomatic semantics are ambiguous in terms of how far they are compositional? And light verbs are constant to complex predicate constructions. In terms of meaning conveyed through light verbs there have been number of perceptions such as that they mainly express completion of an event, suddenness and forcefulness, however Butt (1997:123) Butt and Geuder(2001) have argued that along with these light verbs also express volitionality and some pragmatic information. Butt (2004) also has argued that light verbs modify the semantics of the entire event. This paper is an attempt to explore the compositionality of idiomatic complex predicates in Telugu and the role of a light verb in providing that idiomatic reading.

**KEYWORDS:** IMP- imperative, complex predicates, compositionality.

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Based on the compositionality of idioms, Nunberg et al (1994) have grouped idioms into three groups semantic dimension, which are – compositionality, conventionality and transparency. Compositionality refers to the meaning of the individual phrasal meaning, which can contribute to the idiomatic parts. They also proposed the difference between idiomatically combined expressions (ICE) and idiomatic phrases (IP). The former type is idiomatic expression in which each element has a idiomatic sense that is brought together whereas the latter is idiomatic phrase in which the meaning is not divided between the words rather than the entire phrase has a global interpretation. Telugu has both these varieties of idioms. Therefore, in this paper I would like to observe the idiomatically combined expressions in Telugu. Idiomatic complex predicates are one such variety because of their compositionality. In this paper, I would like to analyze complex predicates that express idiomatic meaning, to observe which constituent plays key role in providing the idiomatic sense to the predicates. First section of this paper discusses the semantics of complex predicates, later section deals with idiomatic complex predicates and their meaning, and final section presents a discussion on the role of the light verbs in these idiomatic complex predicates followed by a conclusion.

#### 1.1. SEMANTICS OF IDIOMS

Structurally idioms usually consist of more than one word. Most of the idioms have two to three words, in some cases a phrase or a complete sentence as an idiom. On the contrary, every idiomatic expression consists of one single meaning or concept. This single sense provided by an idiom is not derived from its constituents rather it is arbitrary. Idioms are lexical constituents whose meaning is non-transparent or non-compositional because of their non-compositionality.

..they are regarded as linguistic expressions that are independent of any conceptual system and that they are isolated from each other at the conceptual level.' (Kovecses and Szabo 1996:329)

Within an idiomatic expression the idiomatic sense is not usually drawn from one single word rather than a collection of words participate in conceptualizing an idiom. This paper mainly discusses the compositionality of idiomatic expressions therefore Nunberg's division of compositionality of idiomatic expressions will be taken into consideration. However, Nunberg's tests to identify the difference between ICE and IP will not be conducted rather a plain semantic observation will be presented.

### II. COMPOSITIONALITY OF COMPLEX PREDICATES

According to compositionality principle by Partee (1984) "the meaning of an expression is a function of the meanings of its parts and of the way they are syntactically combined". As Montague (1970) defines that the meaning of the entire proposition is resulted by applying the meanings of the immediate constituents. Complex predicates are predicate constructions with more than one predicative constituent in them (Butt

1995). Monoclausality is one of the defining features of complex predicate constructions. The argument structure and the semantics of complex predicate are simple as in a simple verb construction that is they share single argument structure, and one single meaning is also easily derived, however in terms of form and meaning correlation there is a gap. This gap is because one of the predicative elements in complex predicate that remains unexecuted, which is the light verb, for example-in take a nap construction, the verb take doesn't mean to take something physically but the actual sense of the structure is provided by the noun, which is nap. In this complex predicate construction- it is not just the semantics of take that is not being spelt out, but also take as a verb doesn't execute its predicative power by having its own argument structure in a complex predicate sentence. Therefore, light verb is called a light both semantically and also argument structure wise. However, light verbs play a crucial role in a complex predicate construction. They are constant to complex predicate constructions, without verbs like light verbs a lot of non-verbal categories will not have a verbal counterpart. Therefore, light verbs are also called as verbalizers (Cattell 1984).

Semantically, it is argued that in a complex predicate construction the meaning is present in the main verb, and the light verb's semantics are absent in the structure. Algeo(1995) refers to this as "lexical center". Despite of such semantic conditions, complex predicates are not non-compositional in nature, that is despite of presence of semantic deficit verbs like light verbs, they still carry semantic information which is compositional. There are three types of complex predicate constructions N+V, V+V and Adj+V constructions. Within a complex predicate construction undoubtedly the main verb or the content word is the main semantic source; it contributes to the main semantic sense of the proposition. On the other hand, initially light verbs were interpreted to have no semantic value, but as mere aspectual marker (Hook 1974). However later studies have shed light on the semantics of light verbs which showed that they carry sense such as: completion, inception, forcefulness, volitionality or suddenness and benefaction (Hook 1974). Apart from these Butt and Geuder(2001) argued that they modify the event semantics. Therefore, it is evident that complex predicate constructions are compositional and also all the constituents within a complex predicate construction contribute to its compositionality. If so, within an idiomatic complex predicate how much do the constituents contribute to its semantic composition? And mainly the role of light verb in composing an idiomatic expression.

## 2.1 IDIOMATIC COMPLEX PREDICATES

What are idiomatic complex predicates? As I have mentioned in the earlier section that complex predicates are compositional; however there are certain complex predicates which are non-compositional, that is even the meaning of the main verb which is the main semantic source of the complex predicate, does not contribute to the actual semantics of the complex predicate. One can argue that these idiomatic predicate structures as simple predicate structures rather than idiomatic complex predicates. However, these idiomatic predicate structures are idiomatic complex predicates based on two main reasons one is that these structures consist of well attested list of light verbs (Hook 1974, Butt 1995) such as- vacu- to come, peTTu- to put, koTTu - to beat, veyyu- to throw and paDu- to fall.

Another major evidence is drawn from the functional behavior of light verbs in complex predicate constructions. Light verbs are known to be verbalizer Hook (1975) Butt (1995), Krishnamurthy (1993) and Rajyarama (1998). Light verbs in idiomatic complex predicates also act as the same.

Therefore, it can be concluded that these idiomatic predicate structures are idiomatic complex predicates not by an accident. Following section provides data that supports idiomatic complex predicates. Hence, let's observe the role of light verbs in these sentences to identify their role in meaning contribution. Based on the idiomatic sense provided by complex predicates I would like to categorise such complex predicates as abnormally decomposable idioms in Telugu.

## III. DATA FROM TELUGU

Light verbs- **peTTu- to put, koTTu -to beat, vacu- to come, veyyu- to throw and paDu- to fall.**

### 3.1 peTTu- to put

1. aamepustakamakka DapeTT-i-ndi

She book there put-past-3SF She kept the book, there. peTTu as a light verb

2. aamepillava Di-nivi Dica-peTT-i-ndi She boy-fellow-ACC leave-put-past-3SF She left the boy.

peTTu in idiomatic complex predicate

3. aamepanijaraga-kun DavelupeTT-i-ndi She work happen-NEG figer-put-past-3SF

**She stopped the work from happening.**

4. aamevallamadyaciccu-peTT-i-ndi She they in-between fire-put-past-3SF She **made them both fight.**

5. vaaDuannaTi-kipulla-peDat-aa-Du he all-DAT- stick-put-past-3SM He **obstructs** every work.

6. vaTi-niaamuulatagala-peTTu all those that corner burn-put-IMP **Put** them all in that corner.

7. aamepanijaragakun DapeTT-i-ndi

She work happen-NEG -put-past-3SF  
She stopped the work from happening

In the above mentioned example 3,4 and 5, the idiomatic meaning is dependent on finger, stick, fire and burn. In all of these idiomatic expressions *veelupeTTu*, *ciccupeTTu* and *pullapeTTu* one of the constituents create a meaningful sentence without a light verb. Here in this case light verb's contribution to the idiomatic meaning is not explicitly seen. However, *peTTu* in these examples provides some semantic sense such as something is being placed or put. At the same time, example 7 indicates that without the presence of main words like finger, fire, stick and burn no idiomatic sense can be formed. Though light verb doesn't seem to provide the idiomatic sense yet it carries meaning such as being placed or put, if we observe example 6 we can clearly see the role of the light verb providing the main semantic meaning as – to put something here. Therefore, light verbs in these examples act as verbalizers 3-6 . And light verbs provide clear semantic meaning , which is not idiomatic.

### 3.2 koTTu- to hit

8. aamepillavaDi-nikoTT-i-ndi She boy-ACC beat-3<sup>rd</sup> SF She beat the boy  
koTTu-as a light verb

9. aameaddampagala-goTT-i-ndi  
she mirror broke-beat-3<sup>rd</sup> SF  
She broke the mirror

debba+ other light verb construction

10. atani-kidebbatagil-i-ndi  
he-DAT wound- touch/nudge-3<sup>rd</sup> SN  
He got wounded.

debba-in general means 'wound' in Telugu,

koTTu-in an idiomatic construction

11. vaDumanalnidebba-koTT-a-Du.  
He/that fellow us-ACC wound-hit-past-3<sup>rd</sup>-SM  
He cheated us.

12. aamebagasutti-koDut-un-di  
she a lot hammar-hit-be-pres-3SF  
She chats a lot.

13. aamebagasutti-i-ndi  
She a lot hammer-3SF

14. vaadunannukoTT-aa-Du  
he – me-ACC hit-past.3SM  
He hit me.

15. \*vaaDunannudebbaDu.  
He me wound-3SM

16. vaaDunaakudebba-tagil-inc-a-Du  
He to me wound-CAU-past.3SM  
He caused me to have a wound

In these examples, *debba* and *sutticarry* idiomatic sense and *koTTu* also adds idiomatic sense to the structure. Without the word *debba* example 14 will result with the meaning that he hit me. On the other hand, sentence 15 is not possible without *koTTu* because *debba* is a noun it requires a verbaliser like *koTTu*. However, sentence 16 will be possible with another verb attached to *debba* – *tagulu*, where the meaning is totally different and doesn't carry any idiomatic sense.

Therefore, the idiomatic sense can only be drawn from the combination of *debba-koTTu*. *koTTu* draws semantic sense because the verb *koTTu*'s core meaning is to hit. Hit as a word conveys some damage or hurt to the recipient. Therefore, because of the presence of *koTTu* there is a psychological damage or hurt happening to a person. Hence, idiomatic meaning of this construction is shared by both *debba* and *koTTu*. This can be evidently understood from example 18, in which though the idiomatic sense is drawn from the word *sutti-hammer*, yet without the addition of *koTTu*, the idiomatic sense cannot be achieved. Therefore, in these contexts hit doesn't refer to hitting physically rather emotionally or mentally. In these examples, the meaning is quiet idiosyncratic, however this set can be regarded as abnormally decomposable idioms in Telugu.

### 3.4. vacu-to come

17. atanuvac-aa-Du  
he come-past-3p.sg.masc  
He came.

vacuin a light verb construction

18. atani-kijawaramvac-i-ndi.  
he - fever-come-past.3SF  
He got fever.

19. memuvalla-nikalis-aa-mu.  
we- them-ACC-meet-past.1p.pl  
We met them.

Example number 3kalisirefers 'to meet' in Telugu.  
vacu-in idiomatic constructions

20. vaala-kueemadyabagakalis-oc-i-ndi  
they-DAT this middle a lot together-come-3p.sg.fem

**Good things are happening** for them these days.

21. maakuemikalisi-rava-Tam ledu.

We-DAT what meet-come-GER not

Nothing is **working out** for us these days

In 20 and 21 exampleskalisi-vacor kalisi-raathe meaning of kalisiis to meet, the idiomatic meaning of these sentences is derived from both the verbs equally as which are kalisi-vacu. Because without, one another, both of these wordsdo not create anyidiomatic meaning.For example if these sentence were written without a – light verb vacufor 22 and without kalisiin 23 then the idiomatic meaning is lost as well as meaning changes.

22. vaala-kueemadyabagakalis-ndi.  
they-DAT this middle a lot together- 3p.sg.fem

23. maakuemiraa-ledu.  
We- didn't get anything

**veyyu-to throw**

24. vaaDubantiaaTuvypuves-aa-Du  
he ball that side throw-3p.sg.masc  
He threw the ball that side.

veyyu-in a complex predicate construction

25. vaaDucettagoDaavatalavisir-esa-Du  
he garbage wall that side throw-throw-past-3SF  
He threw the garbage over the wall

26. vaDuvastanuaniceppi- debbavesesaaDu.

He/that fellow-come-1<sup>st</sup> S- that-say-wound-throw-PST-Perf-3<sup>rd</sup>SM

He promising that he will come he did not come.

Here, debbaveyyu doesn't refer to hit somebody rather it refers to give false promise.

27. aamekopamtoandari-nidulip-es-in-di  
she anger-with all-ACC dust-throw-3p.sg.fem

In anger she **blasted them off with many questions.**

Let's examine this sentence without a light verb.

28. aameandari-nidulip- in-di  
she all-ACC dust-throw-3p.sg.fem

She blasted them off with many questions.

Similarly veyyu in other contexts:

kadugu- to wash with water

29. aameanTluannikandig-in-di  
She dishes all wash-PST-3p.sg.fem  
She washed all the dishes.

kadugu- with light verb.

30. eerojujariginataNiki-la-lo paiadhikaru-luudyogulanuandarinikaDig-es-aa-Du.  
this day happen- inspection-pl-in- up- officer-pl staff-pl-ACC all-ACC wash- throw-3p.sg.masc

In the inspection that happened today the higher authorities have reprimanded the staff.

Or a simpler example

31. aamevallanikaDigesindi  
shethey-ACC wash-throw-past-3SF  
She scolded or questioned them.

32. aamevalla-nikaDigindi.

shethey-ACC wash -past-3SF

She scolded or questioned them

27 and 32 sentences can be framed without a light verb such as *veyyu*. However, without light verb construction they don't have strong idiomatic sense that was found in the other sentences with light verbs in them.

*kaDuguand dulupu*, -without light verb – *veyyu*, doesn't convey strong semantic sense. Though the sentence can be still idiomatic yet it is more strong and affirmed with the light verb in the construction.

### **3.5.paDu- to fall**

33. *pustakamkindapaDindi*

book down fall-past-3SN

The book fell down.

*paDu*in complex predicate construction

34. *kommavirigi-paDindi*

trunk broke-fall-past-3SF

The trunk fell down.

*paDu* in idiomatic constructions

35. *vaaDubagadebbapaDDaDu*.

Fellow a lot wound-fall-past 3SM

He has faced adverse situations.

*paDu*acts similar to the light verb *peTTu*, that is without the light verb *paDu*the sentence will not have idiomatic sense. Similar examples of *paDu*:

*paDu* in an idiomatic sentence

36. *vaalunaameedavirucuku-paDDaru*.

They me on stretch –fall-past-3pl

They have yelled at me.

In relation with *paDu* if the idiomatic constructions were produced without *paDu* they don't contain proper semantic meaning as well as they will be ungrammatical. Therefore, *paDu*act similarly like *peTTu*as a verbalizer.

37. *nuvvuakkaDatagala-paDu*.

You there burn-fall-IMP.

You be there.

In all the mentioned examples it can be clearly stated that light verbs play similar roles both in complex predicates and idiomatic complex predicates in Telugu. However, Telugu has idiomatic expressions composed of other categories as well. *dimma-tirig-i-ndi*-

38. *vallamatalakinaakudimma-tirigindi*.

Their words-DAT to me mind-turn-past.3SN

I lost my mind because of their talk

*suDi-tirig-i-ndi*.

39. *valla-kisuDi-tirig-i-ndi*.

To them- whirlpool-turn-past-3SN

They had a fortune.

*aDDam-tirugu*

40. *appudeeparistitu-luaDDamtiri-gaayi*.

At that conditions width turn-past-3PL

At that time things have totally changed.

## **IV. DISCUSSION**

This paper mainly focuses on compositionality of idiomatic expressions therefore, it is evident that light verb *peTTu*in Telugu acted as verbalizer and also provided meaning to the entire concept from its core meaning as in- being placed or put. Similarly, with *vacu*which doesn't completely contribute to the idiomatic sense. On the other hand, *koTTu* takes part in composition of idiomatic sense. It also acts as a verbalizer. Similarly, *veyyu* contributes to the idiomatic sense to the construction by the addition of the effect to the entire event. Lastly, *paDu* acts similar to *veyyu*which creates the effect on the event.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

From all the above examples it is clear that in terms of meaning conveyed in an idiomatic complex predicate, though the meaning is not completely compositional, there is still a hint of core meaning conveyed through the light verb andidiomatic meaning is drawn from the main verb to the sentence.Composition of an idiomatic sense never one word's obligation, rather than it is a collective composition that is each word that

participates/ has some sort of involvement in producing idioms; however this compositionality is not purely direct conceptual mapping of individual words in an idiom. Therefore, light verbs role in idiomatic complex predicate and complex predicate is same.

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