

## Light Verbs are Just Regular Verbs

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Light verbs, illustrated with some English examples in (1), have generally been analyzed as requiring some kind of complex predicate formation. Analyses include the Complex Predicate Rule of Jackendoff (1974), the Argument Transfer operation of Grimshaw and Mester (1988), the Argument Fusion operation of Butt (1995), and the combination of a verb and NP to produce another verb (Pylkkänen 2008, 35).

- (1) a. She gave a sigh.  
b. Take a look at this!  
c. She put the blame for the accident on him.

In contrast, I argue that light verbs are just regular verbs, and their complements, which in these examples are all NPs, are just regular complements (here, regular NPs). As pointed out by Butt (2010), light verbs are always identical in form to regular, non-light verbs. This follows if they are regular verbs. Furthermore, as Jackendoff (1974) and Huddleston and Pullum (2002) note, the NP in light verb constructions appears to be a normal NP in every way, and can appear in other NP positions with different verbs:

- (2) a. She gave him a pat on the back/a kick in the teeth. (light verb)  
b. A pat on the back is better than a kick in the teeth. (non-light verb)  
(3) a. She heaved a sigh. (contentful verb, cf. 1a)  
b. She denied him a look at this. (contentful verb, cf. 1b)

The NP is typically indefinite with light verbs, but it does not have to be. It can have the definite article, various quantifiers, and can be relativized or undergo other grammatical operations available to NPs:

- (4) a. She gave the kind of sigh that is the result of extreme disappointment.  
b. She gave many sighs as they parted.  
c. Most of the sighs that she gives are obviously affected.

The NP can also be modified as an NP in ways that are not available to the corresponding verbal construction (Huddleston and Pullum 2002):

- (5) a. She gave him a well-earned pat on the back.  
b. \* She patted him on the back well-earnedly.

Additionally, all of the operations of complex predicate formation that have been proposed have the result that a light verb plus its NP are equivalent to the corresponding verb in being a single event. This is not correct. The verb seems to denote one event and the NP a different one:

- (6) a. He slowly gave two quick grunts.  
b. \* He grunted slowly twice quickly / quickly twice slowly.

With the light verb, the verbal event can be slow, while each individual grunt is quick. If there is only a single event, this should be impossible, as is impossible with the corresponding verb. The fact that it is possible to have conflicting adverbs means that there are two events, unlike with the corresponding verbal construction.

Moreover, the aspectual properties of light verb *give* and the corresponding verb are not the same: In *He gave a scream*, there was a bounded and probably short event (Huddleston and Pullum 2002). *He screamed* can carry on, potentially unbounded. In (6a), the grunting events are quantified and enumerable. These facts follow if the events denoted by the nominals have in fact been nominalized and enter the count domain (e.g., Krifka 1989, Chierchia 1998).

The only thing that is special about light verbs is obligatory control. The nominals have arguments, which are typically not syntactically realized. When the nominals combine with light verbs in particular, one or more of their arguments is obligatorily controlled by the argument(s) of the light verb. This treats light verb constructions in exactly the same way as obligatory control verbs, which they are exactly analogous to: With obligatory control verbs, the subject of the infinitival complement of the verb must be controlled by an argument of the verb. However, the same infinitive can occur with other verbs or in other contexts with no control whatsoever; instead the subject can be interpreted in a variety of ways:

- (7) a. Did you decide [to portray yourself/\*oneself/\*herself as a victim]?
- b. I believe it would be a mistake [to portray yourself/oneself/herself as a victim].
- (8) a. She gave him a kick in the teeth. (kicker = she, kickee = him)
- b. I think a kick in the teeth is warranted. (kicker and kickee determined by context)
- (9) a. She gave the tables a good scrubbing. (scrubber = she, scrubbee = the tables)
- b. A good scrubbing will make a huge difference. (scrubber and scrubbee determined by context)

With the obligatory control verb *decide* in (7), the subject of the infinitive must be the subject of *decide*, here *you*, as revealed by the reflexive. In a different context, the reflexive and hence the subject can be anything. Exactly the same facts hold in light verb constructions (8–9): With a light verb, we get obligatory control, but the same nominal in a different context permits a range of interpretations for its implicit arguments.

These similarities motivate treating light verbs as obligatory control verbs. Importantly, we see the same pattern of obligatory control into nominals with other verbs, too, which are not usually considered to be light verbs:

- (10) a. She gave a sigh. (agent of give = agent of sigh)
- b. She heaved a sigh. (agent of heave = agent of sigh)
- (11) a. She gave him a swift kick in the head. (agent of give = agent of kick)
- b. She aimed a swift kick at his head. (agent of aim = agent of kick)
- (12) She performed the operation on him. (agent of perform = agent of operation)

In other words, control into nominals is something we need to recognize anyway, and it is not something we have to build a theory of just for light verbs. This means, again, that there is absolutely nothing special about light verbs. This will be shown to be true in other languages, as well, in particular Japanese and Indo-Iranian languages.

## References

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