The patterns of occurrence of Irish light verb constructions

Brian Nolan
Institute of technology Blanchardstown, Dublin

Abstract

Light verbs are attested in many of the world’s languages (Butt 1995, Butt 2003, Alsina et al. 2001). Cross-linguistically, there appears to be a common class of verbs involved in these constructions and generally there is agreement that light verbs contribute to the formation of complex predicates. Light verbs, too, have a non-light or ‘heavy’ verb counterpart. In this paper we discuss the patterns of occurrence of light verb constructions (LVC) as found in modern Irish. We claim that the light verb (LV) encodes the event process initiation (or cause) and the matrix verb indicates the bounded component or result. In light verb constructions, the matrix verb appears in syntax as a verbal-noun form. The function of light verbs in these constructions is to modulate the event and sub-event semantics and the different light verbs do this in different ways. We distinguish between auxiliary verbs constructions (AVC) and those constructions involving light verbs (Anderson 2006, Aikhenvald and Dixon 2007). We provide evidence based on Irish data that shows how aspect and argument structure considerations are resolved for the complex predicate within the light verb construction via the linking system between semantics and syntax. We motivate a functional account that appeals to the analysis of complex predicates found within Role and Reference Grammar (Van Valin and LaPolla 1997, Van Valin 2005), for the layered structure of the clause.

1. Introduction


1. Full verb > (light verb) > auxiliary > clitic > affix
2. Lexical verb > Serial verb > Light verb > Auxiliary verb > Clitic > Affix

2. The RRG view of complex predications

The nexus-juncture relations

- Nuclear junction: [CORE ... [NUC ...] + ... [NUC ...] ...]
- Core junction: [CLAUSE ... [CORE ...] + ... [CORE ...] ...]
- Clause junction: [SENTENCE ... [CLAUSE ...] + ... [CLAUSE ...] ...]

3. The facts about the light verb data

4. a. V₁ NP (Prep) V₂ (NP)
   Where, depending on the transitivity of the V₂, this will be of the following actual grammatical form as a light verb construction.
   b. LV₁ NP ag VN₂ NP (transitive VN)
   c. LV₁ NP VN₂ (intransitive VN)

5. Thosaigh an traein ag bogadh ar aghaidh
   go:V mail
   to:Prep slow:Adv
   The train started moving forward slowly

6. Members of the class of verbs that can form LVCs
   Déan ‘do/make’
   Thiosaitheag ‘start’
   Ceadaigh ‘let’
   Lig ‘allow’
   Éirigh ‘rise’
   Larraigh ‘try’
   Tróg ‘take’
   Gabh ‘take’
   Tábhairt ‘give’
   Chuir ‘put’
   Chaith ‘spend’
   Brus ‘hit’
   Tréigh ‘go’
   Seas ‘stand’
   Coimh’n ‘continue’
   Staid ‘stop’

7. Exceptions: Members of the category of Irish verbs of motion and path
   Saothraigh ‘do/obtain’
   Glac ‘take’
   Geile ‘yield’
   Aimsigh ‘hit’
   Iompaigh ‘turn’
   Tiontaithe ‘turn’
   Imigh ‘depart’
   Tar ‘come’
   Téigh ‘go’

Figure 1: General schema of the internal phases of an event (following Toratani 2002)
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4. The examples of light verbs in Irish

(11) Rinne duine ionsaí ar Threvors
Make:V-past person:N attack:VN on:prep Trevors:N
san áit sin
in:prep+the:DET place:N that:Dem

in:that.place'[(do'(person, Ø), make.attack'(person, Trevors))]]

in.that.place'[(do'(person, Ø), make.attack'(person, Trevors))]

Figure 2: Nuclear cosubordination of complex predicate (Example 11)

(12) Ansin rinne na páistí gáire.
then:Adv do.make:V-past the:Det-pl children:N laughing:VN
LIT: Then the children made laughing.
Then the children laughed.
	hen'[(do'(the children, Ø), made.laugh'(the children))]

(13) Déanann mé scrúdú an Bháis
do.make:V-pres I:PN examine:VN on:prep+her:PN
LIT: I did make examining on her.
I made/did an examination on her.
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(14) *An ndearna tú scrúdú air?*  
The:DET do.make:V-past you:PN ag examine:VN on+Prep+him/it:PN  
LIT: Did you do/make examining on it  
Did you examine him/it?

(15) *Thosaigh siad go leír ag troid.*  
start-V-past they:PN to:Prep all:QTY at:Prep fighting:VN  
They all started fighting  
[do'(they.all, [start'(they.all, [fight'(they.all)])])]  

(16) *Thosaigh siad ag imirt claiche peile.*  
start-V-past they:PN at:Prep playing:VN game:N ball:N  
They started playing a game of football  
[do'(they, [start'(they, [play'(they, football)])])]

(17) *Thosaigh an traein ag bogadh ar aghaidh go mall.*  
go mall  
The train started moving forward slowly  
[do'(train, [start'(train, move'(train))])]

Figure 3: Nuclear cosubordination of complex predicate (example 17)

(18) *Thosaigh sé ag foghlaim Béarla.*  
start-V-past he:PN at:Prep learning:VN English:N  
He started learning English.  
do'(he, [start'(he, [learn'(English)])])

Figure 4: Nuclear cosubordination of complex predicate (Example 18)

(19) *Taifeadadh Findlay ag canadh seicteacha.*  
Findlay began singing a seventies song.

(20) *Buaifidh mé ag siúlóid go dtraothfaidh mé mo bhéilí.*  
Hit:V-fut me:PN at:Prep walking:VN  
go dtraothfaidh mé mo bhéilí  
to:Prep digest:V-fut I:PN my:PN poss meal:N  
LIT: ‘I will hit at walking until I will digest my meal’.  
I will start walking until I digest my food.

(21) *Chaith John seacht mbliana ag canadh leis an ngrúpa ‘The Stargazers’.*  
John spent seven years singing with the group ‘The Stargazers’.
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(22) Sheasfá sa sneachta ag éisteacht léi.
Stand:V-Cond+1:PN in:Prep+the:Det snow:PN at:Prep listening:VN to:Prep+her:PN
I would stand in the snow listening to her.

(23) Staid m'é féin den tsaomhachán.
Step: V-Past 1:PN self:RefEx.Intensifier of:Prep+the:DET spinning:VN
I myself stopped the spinning.

(24) Cosimionn sé ag cur ceisteanna ort.
Continues-V-Pres he:PN at:Prep+put:VN questions:N to:Prep+her
He continues to put questions to her.

(25) Cosimionn sé air ag ól.
Continues-V-Pres he:PN on:Prep+him:PN at:Prep+drinking:VN
Lit: ‘He continues on his drinking.’
He continues his drinking.

(26) Chuirfadh muid ag snáith réidh.
Put:V-Fut wc:PN on:Prep+Swimming:VN them:PN
We will put them swimming.

(27) Togadh liú mór nuair a tháinig.
At:Prep+the:Det chief:N at:Prep+attempting:VN window:N REL
The man took the right hand of the woman in his own hand.

(28) D'éirigh said leis sin éalaí.
Rise:V-Past they:PN with:Prep+that:Dem escaping:VN
ar a bhealaich féin abhaile
I put in several dark days inside attending to office work.

(29) Cosimionn sé air ag easpa.
Continues-V-Pres he:PN on:Prep+him:PN at:Prep+swimming:VN
Lit: ‘He continues on his swimming’.
He continues his swimming.

(30) Tógadh liú mór nuair a tháinig.
At:Prep+the:Det chief:N at:Prep+attempting:VN window:N REL
The man took the right hand of the woman in his own hand.

(31) Lig Kenneth liú as.
LIT: Kenneth let a shout out
Kenneth let out a shout.

(32) Thug si iarraidh labhairt.
Give:V-Past she:PN attempting:VN speaking:VN
Lit: She gave an attempt at speaking.
She attempted speaking.

(33) Uaireanta, t'áin sá ag snáith.
frequently:ADV go:V-Pres he:PN at:Prep+swimming:VN
Occasionally, he goes swimming.
 Occasionally'[do'(he, [go'(he, [swim'(bo)])])]

(34) Tagham ag fiach.
Go:V-Fut=we:PN at:Prep+swimming:VN
We will go swimming.

[do'(we, [go'(we, [hunt'(we)])])]

5. Exceptions – verbs of motion and path

As Levin (1993:2630) notes, the lexical meaning of these verbs of motion and path include, along with the specification of some kind of event, a specification of the direction of motion, even if that motion is simply towards or away from the event participant.

(35) Shaothraigh si a MA in Education
Cultivate-V-Past she:PN her:PN-poss MA in Education
leis an Open University.
with:Prep+the Det Open University.
She obtained her MA in Education from the Open University.

(36) Glacann an feur láimh dheas na mná.
Take-V-Past the:Det man:N hand:N right:Adj (of) the:Det woman:N
de:Prep+easy:Adv
in:Prep+her:PN
The man took the right hand of the woman in his own hand.

(37) a. Níor ghabhann sé do.
NOT:Neg yield:V-Past he:PN to:Prep+her:PN
He would not yield to her.

b. Tá an chré bag agus péileach
she:PN to:Prep easy:Adj
The grave is soft and it yields easily.

(38) Ag an am céanna, d'iompaigh roinnt Lochlainneigh
At:Prep+the:DET time:N same:Adj turn:V-Past several:QTY Vikings:N
on bPagáinacht go dí an
From:Prep Paganism:N to:Prep+at:Prep+the:Det Christianity:N
At the same time, several Vikings turned from Paganism towards Christianity.
At the same time,[do'(do':Vikings, [turn ( Vikings)])
\L \ [BECOME [be-at' (Paganism, Vikings)]
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(39) Tháinig muid ar saoire cois na farraige
Come:V-Past we:PN on:Prep holidays:N beside:Prep the:Det sea:N
We come on holidays beside the sea.

[do´(we, [come´(we)]) \ \Lambda [(BECOME [be-at´(holidays, we)])
\Lambda [(BECOME [be-at´(the sea, we)])

(40) Dé hAoine, téann sé go dtí
Day:N Friday:N go:V-pres.hab he:PN to:Prep.to
an:Det teach tabhairne
the:DET house:N bar:N
On Fridays, he goes to the pub.

on.Friday´(do´(he, [go´(he)]) & INGR [be-at´(pub, he)])

(41) a. D'imigh an scáth as tóin a.
mountain:N
The shadow cleared from the foot of the mountain.

[do´(G), [go´(shadow)])
\Lambda NOT (INGR [be-at´(foot of the mountain, shadow)])]

b. I lár na 18ú aoise, d'imigh an-chuid Protastúnaigh go Meiriceá
Go.depart:V-past many:QTY Protestants:N to:Prep America;N
Many Protestants went to America.

Many Protestants went to America.

[do´(many Protestants, [go´(many Protestants)])
\Lambda (INGR [be-at´(America, many Protestants)])]

(42) Agus mé ag léamh roinnt blaganna anseo ar Blogger, d'aimiseadh mé
Aand me reading various blogs here on Blogger, I hit
roinnt dánta atá thar a bheith iontach le fear darb ainm Colm (ní fios a shloinne).
And reading various blogs here on Blogger, I hit upon various poems that were
dowonderful by a man whose name is Colm (I don’t know his title).

6. Auxiliary verb constructions that utilise light verbs

(43) Patterns of occurrence of AVCs utilising light verb
a. Aux NP LV
b. Aux NP (ag:Prep) LV
\Lambda NP
Where, in the AVC construction, the light verb - LV - is found in the
morphosyntactic form of a verbal noun.

(44) Bhí Trevors ag iarraidh éalú trasna na bpáircanna
across:Prep:the:DET park:N
LIT: Trevors was attempting an escape across the park.

Trevors was attempting an escape across the park.

Figure 5: RRG projection of example (44)
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(45) Níl mé ag iarraidh dul tríd an lá seo
NOT.Aux-Pres me:PN at:Prep attempting:VN going:VN across:Prep the:DET day:N this:Dem
LIT: I am not attempting going through this day.
I am not trying to go through this day.

Figure 6: RRG projection of example (45)

(46) Tá cúr ag tosaí ag tiocht ortu
LIT: A froth is starting coming on them.
Froth is starting to come on them.

Figure 7: RRG projection of example (46)
7. The RRG constructional schemata

(47) Constructional schema for the Irish Light Verb Construction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONSTRUCTION:</th>
<th>Irish Light Verb Construction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Syntax:</td>
<td>nuclear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juncture:</td>
<td>cosubordination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nexus:</td>
<td>light verb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction type:</td>
<td>light verb [Clause [CORE NP [NUC [NUC…] [NUC…] ] NP…]…]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSA:</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linking:</td>
<td>Link the NUCs to a single CORE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morphology:</td>
<td>The V2, the matrix verb, takes VN form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semantics:</td>
<td>[PREDaux] PHASE-CHANGE [PREDaux]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pragmatics:</td>
<td>unspecified</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(48) Constructional schema for the Irish Auxiliary Verb Construction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONSTRUCTION:</th>
<th>Irish Aux with Light Verb Construction</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Syntax:</td>
<td>nuclear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juncture:</td>
<td>cosubordination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nexus:</td>
<td>Auxiliary verb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction type:</td>
<td>Auxiliary verb [Clause [CORE Aux NP [NUC [NUC…] [NUC…] ] NP…]…]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSA:</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linking:</td>
<td>Link the NUCs to a single CORE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morphology:</td>
<td>The Vs takes VN form as [Aux VN VN]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semantics:</td>
<td>[PREDaux] PHASE-CHANGE [PREDaux]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pragmatics:</td>
<td>unspecified</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. The RRG approach to characterising complex predicates

(49) Constructional schemata for the Irish Auxiliary Verb Construction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construction type:</th>
<th>[CORE … [NUC …] … ∈ […] [NUC …] ] … ]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Core juncture:</td>
<td>[CLAUSE … [CORE …] ∈ […] [CORE …] ]…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clause juncture:</td>
<td>[SENTENCE … [CLAUSE …] ∈ […] [CLAUSE …] ]…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. Discussion

(50) Diagnostic of lexical phenomenon in RRG:
- a) changes the logical structure and aktionsarten properties of the event
- b) affects the argument structure of the predicate, and
- c) alters the semantic construal of the predicate, and
- d) affects the actor and undergoer assignment in the semantics to syntax linking system (Van Valin 2005: 136ff and 149ff)

(51) Diagnostic of syntactic phenomenon in RRG:
- a) Mapping between macroroles and the syntactic representation

The parameters of variation we have considered in our discussion of the patterns of occurrence of LVCs in Irish, and the AVCs that utilise light verbs, are (53):

(53) The parameters of variation of Irish light verbs
1. The LVC constitutes a single event predication.
2. The phenomenon of light verbs and LVCs are treated as lexical in Irish.
3. The single event predication and associated logical structure are input to the (RRG) linking system.
4. Light verbs can occur in LVCs and also auxiliary verb-constructions.
5. The single marking of tense is on the light verb in the LVC (and on the Aux in the AVC) that employs the LV. This is evident in the RRG operator projection in a structural diagram of the LVC.
6. The Aux in the AVC when a LV is employed also links the NUCs to a single CORE.
7. The LV in the AVC takes the VN morphosyntactic form, as well as the matrix verb, which is also in VN form.
8. Progressive aspect is recorded in the AVC that employs the LV through use of a preposition followed by the LV in VN form. This is evident in the RRG operator projection in a structural diagram of the AVC.
9. The LV is semantically bleached with respect to event type and event attributes.
10. The matrix verb in the LVC is morphologically marked as a verbal noun (This is a common feature of Celtic languages)
11. The class of light verbs is isomorphic with the class of phase verbs.
12. Verbs of motion and path are excluded from acting as light verbs in a LVC or AVC.
13. The LVC can occur within an impersonal passive construction.

10. References

Alsin, Alex, Joan Bresnan and Peter Sells (eds.). 2001. Complex Predicates. (Center for the Study of Language and Information - Lecture Notes. Stanford, California: CSLI.
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