

Light Verbs as Classifiers in Udi

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In Udi, the vast majority of all verbs are composed, in all tense-aspect-mood categories, of a light verb and another element, here termed the “initial”. In the example, *äit* ‘word’ is the initial, and *-p-* ‘say’ is the light verb.

Luiza-n udi-n muz-in äit-ne-p-e
Louisa-ERG Udi-GEN language-INST word-3SG-SAY-AORII
‘Louisa spoke in Udi.’

It is argued here that these complex verb constructions developed through three stages. In the first stage, simplex verbs were juxtaposed with focused constituents; evidence for this stage comes from the position of the focus marker, between the initial (previously focused) and the verb. In the second stage, initials and verbs formed compounds and this pattern spread beyond those that had once involved focus. In the third stage, the focus of this paper, light verbs become classifiers, classifying the verb type – inchoatives, other unaccusatives, unergatives, transitive verbs of inherently directed motion, transitive change-of-state verbs, other transitives. I argue at the same time that the classes identified by (some of) the light verbs have not become less semantically motivated; rather the semantics has shifted from a relatively narrow meaning to one of the three major classes. For example, the meaning of *-ey-* has shifted from narrowly ‘come, go’ to one of classifying a verb as an unaccusative.