1. Introduction

The compound verb (CV) is one of the hallmarks of the South Asian linguistic area (cf. Masica 1976) and has been a topic of debate in traditional as well as modern linguistic descriptions.

CV is concatenation of two verbs—polar verb V1 (aka main, or primary verb) and vector verb V2 (aka explicator, light verb, secondary verb, intensifier, operator, etc.).

The polar verb is in the conjunctive participle (or absolutive) form while the vector verb bears desinential affixes.

Compound verbs can usually be replaced by corresponding non-compound verbs with little or no difference in meaning translatable into languages (eg, English) that lack them.

The core class members of vector set are drawn from near identical or at least closely similar lexical items: GO, COME, GIVE, TAKE, THROW, PUT, KEEP, SIT, FALL, TAKE OUT.

(1) Ram-na patra lih-l-a
Ram-Erg letter.N write-Pst-N
'Ram wrote a letter.'

(2) Ram-na shaam-laa patra lih-un di-l-a
Ram-Erg Shyam-Dat letter.N write-CP give-Pst-N
'Ram wrote a letter for Shyam.' [OTHER-BENEFACTION]

(3) shaam-na patra lih-un ghet-l-a
Shyam-Erg letter.N write-CP take-Pst-N
'Shyam wrote the letter for himself.' [SELF-BENEFACTION]

(4) Raam-na patra lih-un Thev-l-a
Raam-Erg letter.N write-CP keep-Pst-N
'Raam wrote a letter.' [ANTICIPATORY ACTION]

(5) Raam-na patra lih-un Taak-l-a
Raam-Erg letter.N write-CP throw-Pst-N
'Raam wrote a letter.' [NOW RID or FREE of OBLIGATION]

(6) Raam-na patra lih-un kaadh-l-a
Raam-Erg letter.N write-CP draw-Pst-N
'Raam wrote a letter.' [EXHAUSTIVE]

(7) Raam patra lih-un bas-l-aa
Ram.M letter.N write-CP sit-Pst-M
'Raam wrote a letter.' [UNDESIRABILITY of ACTION]

Recently it has been asserted that the vector (aka "light") verb constituents of the compound verbs (V1+V2) found in South, Central, and Northeast Asian languages differ in fundamental ways from auxiliaries of tense and mood (Butt 2003, Butt & Geuder 2003, Butt & Tantos 2004).
1. Introduction

A central contention (Butt 2003:15-16) is that while auxiliaries may evolve from full verbs over longer or shorter periods of time in ways deemed by students of grammaticalization to be universally valid path-ways; the vector verbs do not evolve along those paths.

Vector verbs are said to be "form-identical" with their full verb counterparts while tense auxiliaries are not:
"the light verb is always form-identical to a main verb in the language … historically stable, very much unlike what has been documented for auxiliaries." (Butt 2003:15)

Furthermore, vector verbs are not to be regarded as semantically "bleached":
"… light verbs do not enter the grammaticalization cline, i.e., they are not main verbs which have been reanalyzed as light verbs and which are now prone to further reanalysis. … light verbs are intimately connected to their main verb counterpart in the lexicon. They are so intimately connected that we assume just one lexical entry which can give rise to both light and main verb meanings." (Butt 2003:16)

2. Form-identicalness

Evidence in support of Butt (2003): Shina-Gilgit

Auxiliary verbs ≠ full lexical source

(11) a. ma Caa b-ee bi g-as I.Nom cold become-CP I.3sgM went-1msg
   I got / became cold.'

b. Caa b-ee ma hamaam-elT g-as cold become-CP I.Nom bath-Dat went-1msg
   ‘Feeling cold, I went to the baths.’ (Hook and Zia 2005)
2. Form-identicalness

Evidence in support of Butt (2003): Marathi

vector verbs = full lexical source

(12) a. baaraa vaadz-un gel-e
twelve.Nom strike-CP WENT-M3pl
'It struck twelve.'
b. te ghari gel-e
they.Nom home went-M3pl
'They went home.'

2. Form-identicalness

Evidence in support of Butt (2003): Marathi auxiliary verbs? full lexical source

(13) a. te maadzhe mitra ahahe-t
they.Nom my friends BE-M3pl
'They are my friends.'
b. te ghari gel-e (ahahe)-t
they.Nom home went-M3pl BE-M3pl
'They have gone home.'

2. Form-identicalness

However, Butt's generalization is not universally applicable. In Hindi-Urdu the forms of the vector jaa-/ga-'go' are indeed form-identical with those of their etymological source as claimed by Butt.

(14) a. ye gaaliyAA sun-kar aape se baahar
these curses hear-CP self from outside
ho ga-ya
become WENT-Msg
'Hearing these curses, he lost control.' (godaan 48:33)
b. tab hiraa aphi ghar ga-ya
then Hira self's house went-Msg
'Then Hira went home.' (godaan 109:41)

2. Form-identicalness

However, although Hindi-Urdu h-/th-'be' also functions as an auxiliary of tense and mood, there is no difference in form between its forms qua auxiliaries and the corresponding full lexical verb (example (15) and (16)).

So the presence of "form-identicalness" does not in and of itself distinguish vectors from auxiliaries.

2. Form-identicalness

In fact, when the data net is cast further, the empirical evidence for the "form-identity" claim evaporates. Vector verbs do undergo phonological attrition, just as auxiliaries do.

(17) a. naan naay-e vitt-een (Tamil)
I.NOM dog-ACC released-M1sg
'I let the dog go.'
b. (naam) ad-e saappITtu -TT-een
I.NOM it-ACC not.RELEASED-M1sg
'I ate it (all) up.' (Schiffman 2005:90)
2. Form-identicalness

About vector koL-/koo- HOLD; CONTAIN Schiffman says: "The phonology of the spoken form of this aspectual verb differs much more from its literary Tamil counterpart than could be predicted by regular historical or morphophonemic rules." (2005: 96)

Schiffman adds a footnote: "The extreme variability of the phonology of this aspectual verb bespeaks a radical departure of some sort that is one of the symptoms of the process of grammaticalization" (2005:105).

2. Form-identicalness

Dictionaries specify forms for the imperative of koL-/koo- when it occurs as a vector that are different from those of koL-/koo- as a main verb

These facts are not consonant with Butt's and Tantos's claim that "... historical changes that apply to change the surface form of the verb (changes in morphology, form, etc.) will apply to both the light and the main verb uses..." (2004:126)

In Japanese the vector shimau PUT (AWAY) shows a high degree of phonological attrition. In fact, shimau’s ablation to a suffix -chau is seen by Japanese linguists as a normal instance of grammaticalization (Ono 1992: 372).

(18) a. ano ko wa moo otona ni nat.te shimatte iru
    that child Top already adult to become PUT-CP be
    ‘That little girl has already turned into an adult woman.’

b. kocio ni moo ki-chat-ta
    this.way-to already come-PUT-Pst
    ‘(He) came/has come here.’ (Ono and Suzuki 1993: 205)

We may conclude that the tendency over time for function as opposed to content verbs to undergo (or not to undergo) phonological attrition in a particular language or language family does not depend on whether they are functioning as vectors or as auxiliaries of tense or mood.

3. Semantic bleaching

Is the contribution of the vector verb to the semantics of a compound verb something that needs to be separately accounted for? Or is the meaning of the vector isotopic with that of its full lexical counterpart, hence not subject to independent specification?

What are the consequences of this hypothesis? If the isosemantic assumption were correct, we should expect differences in the semantic range of a given lexical verb to be reflected by parallel differences in the range of functions of the corresponding vector. And vice versa.

These correlations should be observable both within and across languages. As the semantics of a main verb evolve, the functions and distribution of the vector should evolve pari passu.

If cognate lexical verbs have the same or nearly the same range of meanings in languages x and y, their vector counterparts should have the nearly the same distributions in x and y. This seems to be true in the case of PUT/KEEP in (19).
Masica (1976) has noticed the cross-linguistic parallel in the function of vectors whose lexical counterparts mean 'put' or 'keep'. Regardless of their etymological source or phonological shape, vectors PUT/KEEP are used in the sense of performance of an act with future use or benefit in view.

Such parallels can be seen in the uses of Kashmiri's thav (19a) and Marathi's Thev (19b), Hindi-Urdu's (non-cognate) rakh (19c), Tamil's vayyi (19d), Japanese's ok (19e), and Korean's noh (19f) and twu (19g).

More cross-linguistic parallels:

(19) d. taNNiir-e kuDiccu veppoom (Tamil) water-Acc drink.CP PUT-Fut.1pl

'We'll tank up on water. (ie., fill up to avoid future thirst.)' (Schiffman 2005:91)

(19) e. wasure-nai uchi-ni kai-te ok-ou (Japanese) forget-Neg house-in write-CP PUT-Hortative

'I better write (this) down before I forget.'


'John prepared by reading a book.' (Suh 2000: 78)

This unexpected variation in vector function takes on dramatic form in Turkish:

(21) a. ko (p) ver-iniz ! 'Hurry up and run!

b. i cikis-in-i i çe-ver-di drink-his-Acc drink-GAVE-Pst3sg

'He gulped his drink down.'

While (21a) in Turkish has an apparent parallel in Hindi-Urdu's inverse CV de bhaagaa 'took off' there is no Hindi-Urdu counterpart to (21b) that can be related to any corresponding difference in the semantics of main verb -ver- in Turkish as opposed to the semantics of main verb -de- in Hindi-Urdu.

3. Semantic bleaching

Hindi-Urdu's vector de GIVE as in (20) has a much broader range of uses than its Marathi counterpart. Some of these are at odds with those of Marathi's de GIVE and are not predictable from the semantics of the main verb 'give' in either language.

(20) na-jaane kidhar cal de-tii. Neg-know where move GIVE-Habitual

'No knowing where she goes off to.' (Hindi-Urdu)

Marathi does not allow the equivalent of (20) even though it also has a vector correlated with its main verb de- 'give'.

This unexpected variation in vector function takes on dramatic form in Turkish:

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3. Semantic bleaching

The Japanese vector shimau PUT (AWAY) also exhibits a profound degree of semantic bleaching. As pointed out by Ono (1992:371) some dictionaries even have a separate entry for the grammaticalized usage and the Ministry of Education in Japan is trying to abolish use of the Chinese character (which denotes its lexical meaning) for the rendering of the grammaticalized usage. Example (22 a-f) shows the spectrum from lexical to grammatical usages of shimau.

Example (22a) represents the lexical use of shimau while (d-f) represent its grammatical uses. Examples (22b, 22c) straddle between the lexical and grammatical use with the former having a phonological break while the latter doesn’t. This according to Ono represents the iconic relationship holding between phonological distance and conceptual distance: In (22b) the presence of a phonological break has a two-event interpretation wherein shimau maintains its lexical meaning while (22c) with its absence of a phonological break has a one-event interpretation in which shimau does not have its lexical meaning. Example (22d) shows a concatenation with two shimau’s in a row. The first one has the lexical interpretation while the second one is grammaticalized.

In present day Japanese a layering of grammatical shimau and its phonetically reduced variant chau is encountered in which the full form marks the aspectual meaning (completeness) while the reduced form conveys what Suzuki (1999) calls "the speaker’s negative attitude towards completion of a situation" (example 23).

In other words the aspectual auxiliary is form-identical with its lexical counterpart while the attitudinal light verb is phonologically reduced. These facts run counter to the prediction of Butt (2003) and Butt and Tantos (2004).
3. Semantic bleaching

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the acquisition of the reduced form -chau precedes its non-reduced counterpart -te shimau. Through the analysis of mother-child interaction data, Suzuki (1999) demonstrates that -chau which is the most grammaticalized form occurs much more frequently than its full form counterpart -te shimau. She claims that the earliest meaning of -chau as shown to the child by his mother is affective, expressing a negative attitude toward completion of a situation, rather than mere completion. This according to her is one of the morphological tools that a Japanese mother uses in socialization, trying to teach a child how to behave, how to move his own body, and how the world around him is structured.

4. Entanglement

In a more recent study Butt and Tantos (2004) assert that the vector and its main verb counterpart are so closely linked that if the either one disappears from its language then so does the former, simultaneously.

4. Entanglement

"... evidence for the intimate connection between main and light verb ... is the observation that when a verb ceases to exist in a language, then both the main and the light verb usage disappear simultaneously (if both exist). ... if the lexical entry is deleted from the grammar of the language, then both the main and the light verb use will cease to exist at the same time. ... This situation stands in stark contrast to that of auxiliaries, which tend to develop away from the original main verb form until they are almost unrecognizable." (2004:126)

Further: "The available diachronic evidence... shows that one never finds a light verb on its own; there is always a form-identical main verb in use as well." (2004:126).

The clearest counter-example to this generalization is Hebbar Tamil's kyo:- which as a vector is cognate with Tamil's ko:/koL- CONTAIN (Sriram 2004) but which in contemporary Hebbar Tamil does not have a main verb counterpart. kyo:- is an "orphan" vector, a status that, by Butt's claims, should be impossible.

5. The end of the line.

A central contention (Butt 2003:15-16) is that while auxiliaries may evolve from full verbs over longer or shorter periods of time in ways deemed by students of grammaticalization to be universally valid path-ways; the vector verbs do not evolve along those paths. However...
5. Vectors do evolve.

[pi]rimi bāNā la-ta tama-haTa
men speak PUT-Cond self-with
rava-la [bā]jū dik-net
frown-PUT looked long-eye
‘Were men to speak to her, the long-eyed
one looked (at them) frowning.’
(Paranavitana 1956:2.119, 8th cent)

References


6. Conclusion

We conclude that any differences in the speed of phonological attrition or semantic bleaching that may seem to discriminate vector verbs from auxiliaries of tense/mood should be ascribed to the greater text frequency of the auxiliaries and not to some fundamental or categorical distinction between vector verbs and other kinds of auxiliaries. (cf. Fidelholtz 1975 and Johnson 1983 as discussed in Newmeyer 1998:256)

Thank you for your kind attention!
(Comments, suggestions, criticisms most welcome.)