

Gradient univerbation in light verb constructions in Horokoi

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Butt (2010) argues that light verbs (LVs) are a distinct syntactic class with distinct semantic properties. Bruening (2016) responds that LVs are the same as regular verbs. Both observe that LVs are always form-identical to some lexical verb. However, they have flexible semantics and special syntactic distribution. This presents a puzzle: are LVs different from normal verbs that combine with another element (the "initial", following Harris (2008)), and if so, how?

The Papuan language Horokoi [gsp] has ubiquitous light verb constructions (LVCs) which suggest some answers. They show varying degrees of phonological and morphosyntactic univerbation. In some LVCs, the LV root is optionally integrated into one phonological word with the initial, based on admission of only one primary stress (1) (deleted vowels are underlined). In others, collocation is stronger, leading to obligatory phonological fusion but allowing intervening modifiers (2). Some LVCs are completely fused, identifiable only by irregular stress.

Horokoi LVCs show some unexpected properties. Due to phonological erosion, some LV realizations are no longer form-identical with a lexical verb. Some can be zero, so the initial appears to bear verbal morphology. This is expected with usage-based reduction of frequent forms, but against Butt's assertion that light verbs do not participate in such historical processes. Evidence of constructional reanalysis (Traugott 2015) is seen because objects must be marked as possessors in some LVCs (3), but can optionally occur on the LV in others, so speakers are beginning to treat the latter like a single verb stem (4).

This paper has two goals. First, I describe the Horokoi LVC system in detail. Second, I use quantitative analysis to investigate the gradience of univerbation and explain it in a usage-based framework (Bybee & Beckner 2012). For instance, some LVCs seldom have intervening modifiers, increasing the frequency of vowel deletion and fusion over time. I define a multidimensional space of Horokoi LVCs, considering variables such as the number, position, and intensity of stressed syllables; frequency of vowel elision; collocation frequency; flexibility of which initials can occur with which LVs; morphology on the initial; and degree of semantic compositionality.

1. Mínda *a-mái-pi.* ~ Míndā-*a-mài-pi.*
song hit-CONT-3PL song-hit-CONT-3PL
'They are singing.'

2. Àipē-*máisā-e-mà-re.*
cry-bad-take-CONT-3SG
'It (baby) is really crying.'

3. Urá-*nă-e-ra.* **Ură-e-na-ra.*
fear-2SG.POSS-take-1SG fear-take-2SG.OBJ-1SG
'I fear you.' (lit. 'I take your fear.') (*lit. 'I fear-take you.')

4. *Khunukhá-nă-pa-mà-re.* ~ *Khunúkhă-pa-na-mà-re.*
smell-2SG.POSS-stab-CONT-3SG smell-stab-2SG.OBJ-CONT-3SG
'It (dog) is smelling you.' (lit. 'It stabs your smell.'~'It smell-stabs you.'

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