

Squibs

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Telicity vs. Perfectivity: A Case Study of Odia¹ Complex Predicates

Abstract

This paper studies the telic feature of light verbs in Odia complex predicates. Odia V-v sequences, carrying a main verb and a light verb, both of which are semantically predicative and hence form a complex predicate, denote telicity of the action/event. Such light verbs are compatible with the morpho-syntactic perfective aspectual morpheme, which provides evidence that the perfective morpheme and the light verbs are different subtypes of telic features.²

1. Introduction

In the linguistic literature, clearly there is a distinction between morpho-syntactic tense and aspect markers on the one hand, and the notion of semantic aspect, on the other. ‘Morpho-syntactic tense and viewpoint aspect, which reflects the perfective/imperfective distinction, are determined by the Reference time system based on the relations established between Reference time, Speech time, and Event time’ (Borik & Reinhart

¹‘Odia’, formerly known as ‘Oriya’, is an Indo-Aryan language, spoken in Odisha (formerly known as ‘Orissa’), an eastern state in India.

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2004). They clearly distinguish ‘perfectivity’ from semantic aspect, such as *telic* and *atelic* aspects. A verb or VP that presents an action or event as being *complete* or having an endpoint, is said to be *telic*, and an action or event being *incomplete or lacking an endpoint* is *atelic*. Thus, telicity indicates a reached goal or action completed as intended.

Telicity and *boundedness* have often been treated as kindred terms (Kamp & Reyle 1993; de Swart 1998; Kratzer 2004; Giorgi & Pianesi 2004) as both the terms denote the culmination of events. Although (a)telicity and (un)boundedness are frequently used as synonyms, still quite a number of researchers have argued for separating telicity and boundedness (Verkuyl 1993; Depraetere 1995; Klein 1995; Borik 2006). ‘Telicity’ is considered by these researchers as an extra-linguistic parameter, mostly determined by pragmatic factors, while ‘boundedness’ is defined as a lexico-grammatical property of the linguistic predication. Following Depraetere (1995), we draw a distinction between the notions (a)telicity and (un)boundedness:³

(A)telicity has to do with whether or not a situation is described as having an inherent or intended endpoint; (un)boundedness relates to whether or not a situation is described as having reached a temporal boundary (Depraetere 1995: 2–3).

In terms of Depraetere, telicity relates to the “potential actualization” of a situation, whereas the boundedness parameter measures the “actual realization” of the situation. The telicity parameter is thus based on the attainment of a terminal point, which may be “inherent” or “intended”.

In this article, we study the telic feature of light verbs in Odia complex predicates. The article is structured as follows: section 2 gives a short overview of Odia complex predicates, section 3 deals with the impact of light verbs for the telicity of a construction. Section 4 compares and contrasts telicity with perfectivity, and finds out that semantic aspect like (a)telicity and morphological aspect like (im)perfectivity are two independent systems. In section 5, we investigate the completive aspectual feature of light verbs indicated through time adverbials and negation, and establish that light verbs contribute towards telicity in V-v complex predicates.

³ In this article, we do not consider the boundedness property of light verbs, the focus here is only on telic features of light verbs.

2. Odia complex predicates

Complex predicates or asymmetrical serial verb constructions in Odia (Sahoo 2001) consist of a sequence of two verbs. Such verbal complexes consist of an uninflected verb and an inflected verb: the uninflected one is a combination of the verb stem and a conjunctive morpheme, and the inflected one is a verb stem carrying Tense, Aspect, and Modality (TAM) features. They form a complex predicate as they involve the combination of two predicates in a single clause. In such V-v complexes, usually the first verb is a main verb and the second one is a fully or partially bleached light verb, where the main verb carries the lexical semantic information; the sequence as a whole determines the argument structure, e.g.:

- (1) a. *mun gata dui ghanTaa-re dui-Taa kaahaaNi lekh-il-i,*
 I last two hours-in two-CL⁴ story write-PAST-1SG
kintu puraapuri nuhen
 but completely be.NEG
 ‘In the last two hours I wrote two stories, but not completely.’
- b. *mun gata dui ghanTaa-re dui-Taa kaahaaNi lekh-i de-l-i*
 I last two hours-in two-CL story write-CONJ give-PAST-1SG
 (**kintu puraapuri nuhen*)
 (*but completely be-NEG)
 ‘In the last two hours I wrote two stories (*but not completely).’

In (1b), the main verb *lekh* ‘write’ and the light verb *de* ‘give’ form a sequence. Although the sentence can be formed by using a single verb predicate as in (1a) or a V-v sequence like (1b), semantically both the constructions denote different meanings. (1b) entails the natural culmination of endpoint, while (1a) entails the arbitrary culmination as well as possible cancellation of endpoint. Note that there is no aspectual morpheme in either of the constructions. So, following Depraetere (1995), both the predicates in (1a) and (1b) are ‘bounded’ and also can be considered as ‘telic’, though (1a) still gives a chance to consider it atelic (with the conjoined clause representing the terminal point is not achieved and the action can be continued further), while (1b) is telic through. The

⁴ The abbreviations used in this article are as follows: classifier (CL), conjunctive (CONJ), infinitival (INF), subjunctive (SUBJN), imperative (IMP), causative (CAUS), gerundive (GER), auxiliary (AUX), perfective (PERF), progressive (PROG), etc.

light verbs, thus, carry the semantic feature of telicity, and such a telic feature is not inherent in the full verbs of these constructions.

In Odia, while the regular verbs require the (morpho-syntactic) (im)perfective aspectual morpheme to mark (a)telicity, as in example (2); the light verbs mark it by default, as in example (3).

- (2) a. *skul jibaa purbaru mun goTie⁵ kabitaa lekh-i-th-il-i*
 school going before I a poem write-PERF-AUX-PAST-1SG
 ‘Before going to school, I had written a poem.’
- b. *skul jibaa purbaru mun goTie kabitaa lekh-u-th-il-i*
 school going before I a poem write-PROG-AUX-PAST-1SG
 ‘Before going to school, I was writing a poem (and not finished it yet).’
- (3) a. *skul jibaa purbaru mun goTie kabitaa*
 school going before I a poem
lekh-i de-i-th-il-i
 write-CONJ give-PERF-AUX-PAST-1SG
 ‘Before going to school, I had already written a poem.’
- b. *skul jibaa purbaru mun goTie kabitaa*
 school going before I a poem
lekh-i de-u-th-il-i
 write-CONJ give-PROG-AUX-PAST-1SG
 ‘Before going to school, I used to write a poem (and finished it).’

In the above examples, (2a) and (2b) indicate telicity and atelicity, respectively, because of the perfective and progressive aspectual morphemes. However, in example (3), because of the V-v sequence, both the constructions are telic, irrespective of the presence of a progressive aspectual morpheme in (3b). Note that here, the progressive morpheme does not refer to the continuation of the situation, rather it refers to a meaning of repetition of the completed action [‘the number of times I went to school, I used to write a poem before going’]. So, on the basis of the above examples, we can say that the aspectual semantics of Odia is more complex than only distinguishing perfective and progressive actions/events. The telic feature seems to be an additional semantic feature that needs to be analyzed here to clarify what the relation of all these aspectual features is.

⁵The upper-case letters in the transcription stand for retroflex phonemes.

Traditional studies on aspectual system in Odia (Nayak 1987; Pradhan et al. 1995; Mohapatra & Das 1962; Sahoo 2001) refer to two types of aspects:

1. The perfective aspect which expresses completeness, referring to completely done action or conceptualized to be complete, action drawn to the last point, totality or the result of actions.
2. The imperfective (progressive) aspect which expresses only actions in progress or repetition of action.

However, the traditional viewpoint does not explain why imperfective verb forms are used to express telic actions in some contexts, while in others their use is restricted. Also, it does not discuss how telicity is marked in the absence of a morphologically realized aspect marker. In addition, the traditional viewpoint does not sufficiently explain the use of aspect in infinitive, imperative and subjunctive constructions. In this study, we address all these phenomena and discuss how in the case of complex predicates, telicity is realized in the absence of a morphologically realized aspect marker.

Complex predicates often play the role of a morpho-syntactic gap-filler, expressing directional, aspectual or case-marking functions by lexical rather than morphological means. The light verbs, although form a closed class, manifest themselves in a wide range of constructions. The light verbs that occur in Odia as second element in V-v constructions can be grouped according to their original lexical semantic value as follows (Lemmens & Sahoo in progress):

- MOTION verbs: *jaa* ‘go’, *chaal* ‘walk’, *paD* ‘fall’, *pakaa* ‘drop’, *uTh* ‘rise’, *aas* ‘come’
- STATIVE verbs: *bas* ‘sit’, *rah* ‘stay’
- TRANSFER verbs: *de* ‘give’, *ne* ‘take’

Obviously, these verbs cannot co-occur randomly with any verb, but show clear semantic constraints, as well as differences in frequency.

The terms *telic* and *atelic* are not traditionally used in Odia grammatical description; instead, it is customary to speak of *completion* of the event/action denoting a result as in example (1). The resultative construction as in (1b) *necessarily* requires finishing the story writing; while in the irresultative/unbounded construction as in (1a), it is not expressed whether the situation has really ended, thus giving a chance for

the repetition of the action in future. This matches with Depraetere's notion of (a)telicity:

A clause is telic if the situation is described as having a natural or an intended endpoint which has to be reached for the situation to be complete and beyond which it cannot continue. Otherwise it is atelic. (Depraetere 1995: 3)

Comparing it with Comrie's definition of a telic situation:

(...) "a telic situation is one that involves a process that leads up to a well-defined terminal point, beyond which the process cannot continue" (Comrie 1976: 45),

we can say that (2b) is a telic construction.

3. Light verbs denoting telicity

Almost all light verbs can have an aspectual function indicating telicity or completion of an event. Consider the following examples.

The light verb *pakaa* 'put' denotes that the action is seen as happening suddenly or abruptly, with a telic effect:

- (4) *hari khusire liLaa-ku kundhaa-i pakaa-il-aa*
 Hari happily Lila-ACC embrace-CONJ drop-PAST-3SG
 'Being happy, Hari embraced Lila.' [Hari felt so happy that, he embraced Lila immediately]

The light verb *paD* 'fall' indicates telicity in addition to suddenness or abruptness:

- (5) *se sandhyaa na-heuNu so-i paD-il-aa*
 he evening NEG-happen sleep-CONJ fall-PAST-3SG
 'He fell asleep before evening.'

The light verb *ne* 'take' is used for situations where the agent profits from the action (self-benefactive), adding a telic reading of the event:

- (6) a. *se jibaa purbaru taara sabu kaama kar-i ne-l-aa*
 he going before his all work do-CONJ take-PAST-3SG
 'He got all his work done before he left.'

- b. *se raajaa-dwaaraa taara sabu kaama kar-aa-i ne-l-aa*
 he Raja-by his all work do-CAUS-CONJ take- PAST-3SG
 ‘He got all his work done through Raja.’

The light verb *uTh* ‘rise’ entails telicity, denoting suddenness of the event.
 E.g.

- (7) *mun katha-Taa kahi na-saarunu se jorre has-i uTh-il-aa*
 I tale-CL say NEG-finish he loudly laugh-CONJ rise-PAST-3SG
 ‘He started laughing loudly before I finished saying that.’

Usually such constructions, as in (4)–(7) are used/preferred with a V-v sequence than a single verb sequence.

In the case of infinitival, subjunctive and imperative constructions as in examples (8)–(10), respectively, the presence of a light verb denotes telicity of the event:

- (8) a. *mun sei kaama-Taa kar-ibaa-ku chaah-u-ch-i*
 I that work-CL do-INF-to want-PROG-AUX-1SG
 ‘I want to do that work.’ [I want to initiate that work]
- b. *mun sei kaama-Taa kar-i de-baa-ku chaah-u-ch-i*
 I that work-CL do-CONJ give-INF-to want-PROG-AUX-1SG
 ‘I want to do that work.’ [I want to complete that work]
- (9) a. *se jadi naaga saapa dhar-ant-i, taahale taanku dhar-ibaa*
 he if cobra snake catch-SUBJN-3SG, then him catch-INF
paain di-aa-j-ib-a
 for give-CAUS-go-FUT-3SG
 ‘In case he catches cobra snake, then he will be given the offer to catch cobra.’
- b. *se jadi naaga saapa dhar-i di-ant-i,*
 he if cobra snake catch-CONJ give-SUBJN-3SG,
taahale taanku dhar-ibaa pain puraskaara di-aa-j-ib-a
 then him catch-INF for prize give-CAUS-go-FUT-3SG
 ‘In case he catches cobra snake, then he will be awarded for catching cobra.’
 [‘In case he caught a cobra snake, then he will be awarded for catching cobra.’]

Note that the subordinate clauses cannot be exchanged in these two constructions.

- (10) a. *sei kaama-Taa kar-a !*
 that work-CL do-IMP
 ‘Do that work!’ [‘initiate that work.’]
- b. *sei kaama-Taa kar-i di-a !*
 that work-CL do-CONJ give-IMP
 ‘Do that work!’ [‘Complete that work.’]

In the above examples, the single verb sequence constructions as in (8a), (9a) and (10a) are atelic; while the presence of light verbs in the corresponding two verb sequence constructions as in (8b), (9b) and (10b), makes them telic.

4. Perfectivity vs. telicity

Often telicity is superficially similar to the perfective aspect, and one can find descriptions such as "roughly perfective/imperfective". However, does perfective aspectual morpheme denote telicity? Consider the following examples.

In certain cases in pluperfect, the presence of an aspectual morpheme does not suffice and a light verb becomes obligatory to denote telicity. E.g.

- (11) a. *1995 banyaa-re Cuttack-ra sabu ghara*
 1995 flood-in Cuttack’s all house
*bhaas-i jaa-i-th-il-aa/ *bhaas-i-th-il-aa*
 flow-CONJ go-PERF-AUX-PAST-3SG/ *flow-PERF-AUX-PAST-3SG
 ‘In the flood of 1995, all the houses of Cuttack had flowed away.’
- b. *1995 banyaa-re Cuttack-ra sabu ghara*
 1995 flood-in Cuttack’s all house
*bhaas-i ga-l-aa/ *bhaas-il-aa*
 flow-CONJ go-PAST-3SG/ *flow-PAST-3SG
 ‘In the flood of 1995, all the houses of Cuttack got flowed away.’

In (11), both the constructions are possible/acceptable in the presence of a light verb only: in (11a), in the presence of a perfective aspectual morpheme and in (11b), without any aspectual morpheme. Note that both the constructions are telic irrespective of the perfective aspectual morpheme. This indicates that telicity can just be attributed to the presence

of light verbs.⁶ The single verb-variant (with or without a perfective morpheme) cannot be used in all constructions, and the light verb construction is another way for expressing telicity. This certainly distinguishes “perfectivity” from “telicity”. Also, as we found in example (3b), because of the presence of a light verb, the co-occurrence of the light verb and the progressive morpheme denotes “repetition of the completed action” rather than the “action in progress”. So, we can claim that, perfective aspect \neq telicity. Aspectual markers like perfective, imperfective/progressive are grammatical phenomena, while (a)telicity refers to semantic features.

5. Completive aspectual feature of light verbs

In terms of temporal sequence of events, light verbs indicate a completive aspectual feature. The aspectual V2 position seems to be pre-programmed for that purpose. Temporal sequences of events are expressed by juxtaposition of clauses or VPs without any intervening conjunctions.

5.1 Light verbs and adverbials

Consider the following constructions (V-v sequences containing light verbs, and their corresponding single verb variant constructions) along with time adverbials:

- (12) a. *mun klaas-re pahanch-ibaa purbaru semaane*
 I class-in arrive-GER before they
pahanch-i jaa-i-th-il-e
 arrive-CONJ go-PERF-AUX-PAST-3PL
 ‘They had already arrived in the class before I arrived.’
- b. **mun klaas-re pahanch-ibaa purbaru semaane*
 I class-in arrive-GER before they
pahanch-i-th-il-e
 arrive-PERF-AUX-PAST-3PL
 ‘They had arrived in the class before I arrived.’

⁶Telicity can be attributed to the presence of light verbs, as illustrated by the grammatical constructions in (11), unless we propose that there is a null telic marker in light verb constructions. However, there is no real support for a null telic marker.

- (13) a. **mun ghar-e pahanch-ibaa pare semaane*
 I home-in arrive-GER after they
pahanch-i jaa-i-th-il-e
 arrive-CONJ go-PERF-AUX-PAST-3PL
 [‘They had already arrived after I arrived at home.’] / ‘They arrived after I had arrived at home.’
- b. *mun ghar-e pahanch-ibaa pare semaane **pahanch-i-th-il-e***
 I home-in arrive-GER after they arrive-PERF-AUX-PAST-3PL
 ‘They arrived after I had arrived at home.’
- (14) a. *mun ghar-e pahanch-ibaa beLa-ku semaane*
 I home-in arrive-GER time-PP they
pahanch-i jaa-u-th-il-e
 arrive-CONJ go-PROG-AUX-PAST-3PL
 [‘They used to arrive when I was arriving at home.’] / ‘They arrived when I arrived/was arriving at home.’
- b. *mun ghar-e pahanch-ibaa beLa-ku semaane **pahanch-u-th-il-e***
 I home-in arrive-GER time-PP they arrive-PROG-AUX-PAST-3PL
 ‘They arrived when I arrived/was arriving at home.’

In (12), the light verb *jaaithile* ascribes completive meaning, i.e., the action of their reaching the class is completed before the action of my doing the same. The temporally last action (‘me reaching the class’) cannot be expressed by a light verb construction (**mun klaas-re pahanch-i-j-ibaa*) denoting a completive action. Thus, only the temporally previous sequence of action is acceptable with the light verb denoting a completive action. The acceptability is reversed in (13) because of the nature of the adverb *pare* ‘after’. In (14), because of the simultaneity nature of the time adverbial, the event represented by the light verb ‘at the same time’ does not have to follow any temporal sequence as both the events are done simultaneously. Thus, we can say that in the above examples, the light verb emphasizes the completion of event. Note that, light verbs interact with all tenses and aspects.

5.2 Light verbs and negation

As light verbs denote completion of events, the interaction of negation and light verbs does not go well. This is shown in the following examples:

- (15) a. *mun taaku de-l-i, kintu se ne-l-aa-ni*
 I him give-PAST-1SG but he take-PAST-3SG-NEG
 ‘I gave him, but he didn’t take.’ [means, ‘I offered him, but he didn’t take.’]
- b. *mun taaku de-i de-l-i, (*kintu se ne-l-aa-ni)*
 I him give-CONJ give-PAST-1SG (*but he take-PAST-3SG-NEG)
 ‘I gave him, (*but he didn’t take).’ [means, the ‘giving’ act is completed.]
- (16) a. *se chiThi-Taa paDh-il-aa, kintu paDh-i-paar-il-aa-naahin*
 he letter- CL read-PAST-3SG but read-PERF-can-PAST-3SG-NEG
 ‘He read the letter, but could not.’ [means, ‘He tried to read the letter, but could not read it.’ More precisely, ‘he started reading the letter but was not able to continue reading’.]
- b. *se chiThi-Taa paDh-i de-l-aa,*
 he letter-CL read-CONJ give-PAST-3SG
 (**kintu paDh-i-paar-il-aa-naahin*)
 (*but read-PERF-can-PAST-3SG-NEG)
 ‘He read the letter, (*but could not).’

The ungrammaticality because of the conjoined clauses in (15b) and (16b) indicates that there is a completive meaning/ telicity associated with the light verb, which necessarily denotes the completion of the action/event and thus, does not allow the event to be shown 'undone', hence, not prone to negation. This supports our claim that light verbs have [+telic] feature and hence, indicate the telicity of the VP/sentence they occur in.

6. Conclusion

The study provides insight into the aspectual semantics of Odia. The semantic features of (a)telicity can be expressed by several linguistic means in Odia. Here, we have taken up the telic feature of light verbs, which has previously been neglected, as the progressive/perfective aspectual morphemes have reserved the main attention. The lexico-semantic properties of light verbs, which denote telicity in this language, function like a sort of aspectual feature. Aspectual markers like perfective, imperfective/progressive are grammatical phenomena, while (a)telicity refers to semantic features. The point we put forward in this paper is: the perfective morpheme and the light verbs are different subtypes of telic features.

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