Verb Concatenation in Asian Linguistics

Benjamin Slade


Summary
Across a large part of Asia are found a variety of verb-verb collocations, a prominent subset of which involves collocations typically displaying completive or resultative semantics. Such collocations are found in Indo-Aryan and Dravidian languages of South Asia, Turkic and Iranian languages of Central Asia, and in Chinese languages.

In South and Central Asian languages, verb-verb collocations usually involve some added aspectual/Aktionsart element of meaning, frequently (though not exclusively) indicating completion of an event and sometimes involving speaker evaluation of the event (e.g. surprise, regret). Thus Hindi Rām-ne kitāb parb diyā, literally “John read-gave the book”, with the sense “John read the book out”. In Chinese languages, many verb-verb collocations involve a resultative sense, similar to English “Kim ran herself/her shoes ragged”. However, earlier Chinese verb-verb collocations were agent-oriented, e.g. She-sha Ling Gong “(Someone) shot and killed Duke Ling”, where she is “shoot” and sha is “kill”.

In Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, and Central Asian languages, we find verb-verb collocations which evolve from idiomaticisation and grammaticalisation of constructions involving converbs, e.g. a collocation meaning “he, having eaten food, left” acquires the meaning “he ate food (completely)”. Similarly, the Chinese verb-verb resultatives derive from earlier verb-verb “co-ordinate” constructions (originally with an overt morpheme er: ji er sha zhi “struck and killed him”) which functionally is similar to the role of converbs in South and Central Asian languages.
While these Asian verb-verb collocations are strikingly similar in broad strokes, there are significant differences in the lexical, semantic, and morphosyntactic properties of these constructions in different languages. This is true even in closely related languages in the same language family, such as in Hindi and Nepali.

The historical relation between verb-verb collocations in different Asian languages is unclear. Even in geographically proximate language families such as Indo-Aryan and Dravidian, there is evidence of independent development of verb-verb collocations, with possible later convergence. Central Asian verb-verb collocations being very similar in morphosyntactic structure to South Asian verb-verb collocations, it is tempting to suppose that for these there is some contact-based cause, particularly since such collocations are much less prominent in Turkic and Iranian languages outside of Central Asia. The relation between South and Central Asian verb-verb collocations and Chinese verb-verb collocations is even more opaque, and there are greater linguistic differences here. In this connection, further study of verb-verb collocations in Asian languages geographically intermediate to Central and South Asia, including Thai, Vietnamese, and Burmese, is required.

**Keywords:** verb collocations, South Asian languages, Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Chinese, Central Asian languages, grammaticalisation, light verbs

1 Asian Verb-Verb Collocations

Verb-verb [V-V] collocations with special grammatical functions are prominent in a number of the languages of Asia, from the Indian subcontinent to Central Asia to China. While the details of these constructions vary from language family to language family, and even in some cases between closely-related languages, there is a shared tendency for the semantics of such collocations to include a sense of completedness of action, in some cases including some result of the action – though this is far from the only function expressed by V-V collocations. The V-V constructions examined here originate from serialising constructions of various types, and we find a crosslinguistic tendency for V-V collocations to be able to give rise to further grammaticalised auxiliary-type elements.
1.1 Indo-Aryan V-V collocations

In Hindi and other Indo-Aryan languages, as well as in neighbouring Dravidian languages, a prominent grammaticalised verb-verb collocation structure (often referred to as “explicator compound verbs” by South Asianists) involves a regular main verb in a bare stem or other invariant form\(^1\) collocated with a member of a closed-class of semantically-bleached light verbs (usually but not always homophonous with an existing full verb counterpart in the language).\(^2\)

Compare the simplex (1-a) with the compound verb counterpart in (1-b):

\[
(1) \quad \begin{align*}
\text{a. } & \text{Us-ne khānā (nahīṁ) khāy-ā.} \\
& \text{he/she-AGT food-SG.MSC (NEG) eat-PERF-PTCP-SG.MSC}
\end{align*}
\]

“He/she (didn’t eat) ate the food.” \[Hindi\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{b. } & \text{Us-ne khānā khā liy-ā.} \\
& \text{he/she-AGT food-SG.MSC eat.ABS take-PERF-PTCP-SG.MSC}
\end{align*}
\]

“He ate up the food.” \[Hindi\]

In Indo-Aryan generally, and very prominently in Hindi in particular, V-V collocations of the type shown in (1-b) encode completedness of the event, and, in idiomatic speech, are very frequent in utterances referring to events which reach completion.\(^3\)

Even between closely related Indo-Aryan languages, the precise semantic and pragmatic details of the use of such V-V collocations varies significantly.\(^4\) Thus, while many other Indo-Aryan languages like Nepali often use simplex verbs for complete eventualities, in idiomatic Hindi such constructions are less common, except where negated (see (1-a)).\(^5\)

Compare also (2) where no V-V option is available in Nepali, whereas in Hindi in non-

\[^1\]Usually indicated herein as absolutive (abs) when its use is clearly that of a V1 in a V-V collocation, or when its use is ambiguous. When such a form functions as a converb/conjunctive participle, it is glossed as conv.


\[^4\]See Hook (1974), Abbi & Gopalakrishnan (1991), and Poornima (2012), inter alia, for discussions of the semantics of V-V collocations in Hindi and other languages.

\[^5\]See Hook (1974, 1993) and Slade (2013) for further discussion.
negative utterances it is nearly obligatory from a pragmatic standpoint:

(2) a. U marya.
   he/she die.PAST.3SG
   “He/she died.” [Nepali]
b. Vah mar gaya.
   he/she die.ABS go.PAST_PTCP.MASC.SG
   “He died.” [Hindi]

Table 2 perhaps still does not fully convey the amount of variation found between different Indo-Aryan V-V systems because even the semantics of the light verb uses of verbs which bear similar full verb semantics (and even cognate verbs) varies somewhat between languages, which Table 1 gives a small sampling of. Thus, sometimes the same light verb function is expressed using verbs with the same full verb meaning, e.g. Hindi dāl- and Nepali bāl. Sometimes the forms are even cognates, as is the case for Hindi de- and Nepali di-. But sometimes light verb functions are expressed using verbs with distinct full verb senses, e.g. Hindi baiṭh- and Nepali paṭhau-, and in some cases a light verb sense is expressable in some languages but not in others, e.g. Nepali lacks an equivalent to the light verb function of Hindi le-.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HINDI STEM</th>
<th>HINDI FULL VERB MEANING</th>
<th>LIGHT VERB SENSE</th>
<th>NEPALI FULL VERB MEANING</th>
<th>NEPALI STEM</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>dāl</td>
<td>throw</td>
<td>immediacy</td>
<td>throw</td>
<td>bāl</td>
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<tr>
<td>de</td>
<td>give</td>
<td>other-directed</td>
<td>give</td>
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<td>cuk</td>
<td>be used up</td>
<td>completive</td>
<td>complete / be able to</td>
<td>sak</td>
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<tr>
<td>baiṭh</td>
<td>sit</td>
<td>regret</td>
<td>send</td>
<td>paṭhāu</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Selected Hindi and Nepali light verbs compared [adapted from Slade (2013)]

However, in addition to being used to indicate event-completedness, light “explicator” verbs in V-V collocations often bear other meanings, including directedness of action (benefiting the agent or someone else), conscious choice (see Hook 1974, Bashir 1993, Butt 1993), or speaker evaluation of the action (e.g. regret or dismay).
(3) Directedness of action
   a. Rām-ne kām kar diyā.
      Ram-AGT work do.ABS give.PAST.MASC.SG
      “Ram did the work (for someone else’s benefit).” [Hindi]
   b. Rām-ne kām kar liyā.
      Ram-AGT work do.ABS take.PAST.MASC.SG
      “Ram did the work (for his own benefit).” [Hindi]

(4) Consciousness of choice 1
   a. Kalambas-ne Amrikā ki khoj ki /
      Columbus-AGT America of discovery.FEM do.PAST_PTCP.FEM.SG /
      *kar dī / *kar li.
      *do.ABS give.PAST_PTCP.FEM.SG / *do.ABS take.PAST_PTCP.FEM.SG
      “Columbus discovered America.” [Hindi] (Hook 1974: 240)

(5) Consciousness of choice 2 (Butt 1993: 35)
   a. Vah cikhā.
      he/she scream.PAST_PTCP.MSC.SG
      “He screamed (despite himself).” [Hindi]
   b. Us-ne cikhā.
      he/she-AGT scream.PAST_PTCP.MSC.SG
      “He/she screamed (on purpose).” [Hindi]
   c. Vah cikh parā.
      he/she scream.ABS fall.PAST_PTCP.MSC.SG
      “He began screaming suddenly (despite himself).” [Hindi]
   d. Us-ne cikh ḍālā.
      he/she-AGT scream.ABS put.PAST_PTCP.MSC.SG
      “He/she screamed violently (on purpose).” [Hindi]
(6) Speaker-evaluation of action

a. Maiṁ kyā kar baiṭh-ā?
   I.NOM what do.ABS sit.PERF_PTCP-MSC.SG
   “Oh what have I done?” [Hindi]

b. Mai-le ke gar-i- paṭhā-cm?
   I-AGT what do-ABS- send.PERF_PTCP-1SG
   “Oh what have I done?” [Nepali]

The full-verb meanings of the light verbs across Indo-Aryan languages there show some variation, while the meanings GIVE, GO, COME, FALL, SIT, TAKE, and KEEP are common, not even these are all found universally; see Table 2 (cf. Masica 1976: 146–147).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bengali</th>
<th>Hindi</th>
<th>Marathi</th>
<th>Nepali</th>
<th>Oriya</th>
<th>Kohistani6 Shina</th>
<th>Old Sinhala</th>
<th>Modern Sinhala</th>
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<tr>
<td>GIVE</td>
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<td>GO</td>
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<td>bōjoón</td>
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Table 2: Light verbs that occur in V-Vs from selected Indo-Aryan languages [adapted and expanded from Slade (to appear)]

In terms of morphosyntax, V-V collocations also vary rather widely in Indo-Aryan. While in Hindi, a variety of other linguistic material can intervene between the main verb and

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6The Shina varieties in Gilgit and Skardu do not appear to exhibit use of V-Vs (Peter Hook, p.c.).
the “explicator” light verb, as in (7), this is not true in Nepali, where not even particles may intervene, as shown by the ungrammaticality of (8).7

(7) Mai-ne khānā khā to liyā, lekin phir ulṭī bhī a-ī.
I-AGT food eat.ABS EMPH take.PAST.PTCP-SG.MSC but then vomit also come.PAST.PTCP-SG.FEM
“I did eat food, but then I also vomited.” [Hindi]

(8) *Mai-le bhāt khā-i ta sak-em, ...
I-AGT food eat-ABS EMPH finish-PAST.SG.MSC
“I did eat food, …” [Nepali]

Likewise, while Hindi allows for only one light verb per main verb, as shown in (9), in other Indo-Aryan languages, V-V collocations can involve two distinct “explicator” light verbs associating with a single main verb, as in the Nepali (10) and the Sinhala (11).

(9) a. Us-ne kican sāf kar dī.
he/she-AGT kitchen clean do.ABS give.PAST.PTCP.SG.FEM
“He/she cleaned the kitchen for me.” [Hindi]

b. Us-ne kican sāf kar ḍāl-ī.
he/she-AGT kitchen clean do.ABS put.PAST.PTCP-SG.FEM
“He/she cleaned the kitchen straightaway.” [Hindi]

c. *Us-ne kican sāf kar de ḍāl-ī.
he/she-AGT kitchen clean do.ABS give.ABS put.PAST.PTCP-SG.FEM
“He/she cleaned the kitchen for me straightaway.” [Hindi]

7Further discussion of the specific properties of Nepali V-Vs is found in Pokharel (1991), (Peterson 2002), and Slade (2013).
Un-le kican saphā gar-i- di-i- hāl-in.
he/she.MIDHON-AGT kitchen clean do-ABS- give-ABS- put-PAST.3SG.FEM
“She cleaned the kitchen for me straightaway.” (Peterson (2002: 107))[Nepali]

Meyāge ba’dino wayāsā dæŋ pahu wē -gānə -enəwa.
his/her marrying age now past become.ØABS -take.ØABS -come.PAST
“Her marrying age is approaching (coming past) now.” (Paolillo 1989, cited in Herring 1993) [Sinhala]

For other dimensions of variation in the morphosyntactic properties of “explicator” V-V constructions in Indo-Aryan, see Slade (2013, 2016, to appear). Neighbouring Dravidian languages, as discussed in the next section, also employ V-Vs, and in very similar ways to Indo-Aryan languages.

1.2 Dravidian and other Indian languages

Dravidian languages, like Indo-Aryan languages, use a V-V construction in which a light verb collocates with a non-finite form of the main verb. In Dravidian, this non-finite form may be a converb (as in Indo-Aryan). Like in Indo-Aryan these V-V collocations sometimes signal completedness of an event (12-a), but can other encode other Aktionsart-like meaning components, like (direction of) benefaction (12-b), speaker evaluation of an event (12-c), (12-d), etc.

(12) Dravidian V-Vs with converbs/conjunctive participles

a. Avaḷṉ uṭippōy viṭṭāl.
  she.NOM run-away.ABS leave.PAST.3SG.FEM
  “She’s run away (from home).” [Tamil] (Steever 2005: 157)

b. Atai uṭaiṭtu-k kōtu.
  it.ACC break-ABS give.IMP
  “Get that broken up/ground for us.” [Tamil] (Steever 2005: 231)

c. Avaṉ oru nāvalai ezuti-t tāllināṇ.
  he.NOM one novel.ACC write-ABS push.PAST.3SG.MASC
  “He dashed off a novel.” [Tamil] (Steever 2005: 114)
d. Contakkăran vantu tolaïntăń.
   relative.NOM come.ABS lose.PAST.3SG.MASC
   “My relative arrived, damn it!” [Tamil] (Steever 2005: 7)

(13) Dravidian V-Vs with infinitives

a. Avan kărăi ôṭ-a vaittăñ.
   he car.ACC run-INF place.PAST.3SG.MASC
   “He made the car run.” [Tamil] (Annamalai 2016: 549)

b. Makañ aruk-a varu-v-āṅ.
   son.NOM near-INF come-FUT-3SG.MASC
   “His son will approach.” [Tamil] (Steever 2005: 77)

As for Indo-Aryan, the inventory of light verbs found in such constructions shows some similarity – at least in terms of the full-verb meanings of the light verbs – across Dravidian languages, but there are still substantial differences. Likewise, some of the Dravidian light verbs have similar meanings when they occur as full verbs to the light verbs of Indo-Aryan V-V constructions. See Table 4 below.

Likewise, in South Asian languages from other families, we see the presence of V-V collocations, including Munda (Austro-Asiatic), on which see Hook (1991a); and a number of Tibeto-Burman languages, including Tibetan (Tournadre & Jiatso 2001). See Hock (2016) for a recent overview.

1.3 Central Asian languages

Central Asian languages, including Turkic Uighur, Uzbek, and Kazakh, as well as Iranian Tajik, have V-V collocations that are remarkably similar to South Asian V-V constructions, including even the appearance of the main verb in a form identical to or deriving from a converb/conjunctive participle (see further below in Section 2.2).

The meanings of V-V collocations in Central Asian too resembles those found in South Asian V-V collocation, including aspectual senses (14) and other Aktionsart senses like benefaction (15), (16-b).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Light verbs that occur in V-Vs from selected Central Asian languages</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PUT, PUT DOWN</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>STAY, STAND/GET UP, LIVE</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>WALK, MOVE, TURN</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>GET/TAKE</strong></td>
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<td><strong>LIE (DOWN)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>GIVE</strong></td>
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<td><strong>SIT</strong></td>
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<td><strong>GO OUT, GO UP</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>COME</strong></td>
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<td><strong>PASS (THROUGH)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>GO, REACH</strong></td>
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<td><strong>REACH</strong></td>
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<td><strong>LEAVE</strong></td>
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<td><strong>PUT INTO</strong></td>
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<td><strong>SEND (OFF)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>SEE</strong></td>
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<td><strong>THROW</strong></td>
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<td><strong>LOOK AT/AFTER</strong></td>
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<td><strong>REMAIN</strong></td>
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<td><strong>BE, BECOME</strong></td>
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<td><strong>LOOK AT</strong></td>
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<td><strong>BE FINISHED</strong></td>
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<td><strong>KNOW</strong></td>
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<td><strong>LOSE</strong></td>
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<td><strong>WRITE</strong></td>
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<td><strong>COME OUT</strong></td>
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<td><strong>CARRY, TAKE AWAY</strong></td>
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<td><strong>BRING</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Light verbs that occur in V-Vs from selected Central Asian languages

(14) Completive senses

a. 54 ming yuwanlik quyun setilmay, bharya kältändä həmmisi ses-ip

kättı.

left

“Not having been sold, all of the honey melons worth 54 thousand yuan
completely rotted when spring came.” [Uighur] (Ibrahim 1995: 78)

b. Men sizga hali ayt-ib qŭydim
tell-ABS put
“I have already told you.” [Uzbek] (Ibrahim 1995: 185)

(15) Benefactive senses

a. Sizgä xat yez-ip bärśäm ayiniŋyzga özäm ogu-p bärśäm bolidu.
letter write-ABS give read-ABS give
“If I write a letter (for you), I have to read it myself to your friend.”
[Uighur] (Ibrahim 1995: 116)

b. Gulnaraxon ašula ayt-ib bersa, čal-ib beraman.
Gulanaraxon song sing-ABS give, play.music-ABS give
“If Gulnaraxon sings a song (for us), I will play the music (for you or for her).” [Uzbek] (Ibrahim 1995: 194)

(16) a. Mujhe kuch acchī khabar kah dijiye.
me some good news tell.ABS give.POL.IMPV
“Tell me some good news.” (Hindi)

b. Siz mağan mınaday waqiŋanŋ qalay bolğanı turalı ayt-ip beniŋiz.
tell-ABS give.IMPV
“Tell me how such an incident happened.” (Kazakh; Demirci (2003: 124))

The inventories of light verbs of Central Asian languages (see Table 3) have some similarities, in terms of the full-verb meanings of the light verbs, with those of South Asian languages. We find closer similarities in the light verbs inventories of the Turkic Uighur, Uzbek, and Kazakh than we do between the inventories of Indo-Aryan or Dravidian languages. Tajik seems to have acquired V-V constructions through contact with Turkic languages: “these are a salient feature of Tajik, especially in the literary language and the Northern dialects, where they seem to have originated as calques on Uzbek usage. The category may still be evolving and expanding” (Perry 2005: 467).
1.4 Chinese

Modern Mandarin Chinese prominently employs a number of V-V constructions, which generally have the form “V₂ occurs as a result of V₁”, not unlike English constructions of the sort Charles talked himself hoarse, James ran his shoes ragged. As shown in (17), the result can be something that applies to the subject or an object.

(17) Mandarin V-V resultative constructions (from Liu 2019: 2)
      John push-open-PERF door
      “John pushed the door open.” [object-oriented]
   b. John chi-bao-le.
      John eat-be.full-PERF
      “John got full from eating” [subject-oriented]

(18) Mandarin parallel V-V constructions (from Liu 2019: 13)
   a. John hen xiang-nian jiaren.
      John very think.about-miss family
      “John missed his family very much.”

Setting aside the parallel “stir-fry” V-V type of (18), the resultative V-V type shown in (17) are reminiscent of the South Asian and Central Asian V-V collocations, however these are rather different from the South Asian or Central Asian V-V collocations in not being directly about completion of an eventuality or contributing Aktionsart-type information, nor in involving a small, closed-class of light verbs. Further, where the semantic contribution of the light verb in the South Asian and Central Asian V-V collocations, where it is not purely aspectual, tends to be more uniformly subject- or agent-oriented.

However, in examining the origins of the Chinese construction (see Section 2.3 below), as well as in some of the historical developments of auxiliaries from resulative V-V constructions, we will find a number of parallels with the South Asian or Central Asian type of V-V constructions.⁸

⁸See Masica (1976), Liang & Hook (2007), and Hook et al. (2012) for further comparison of South Asian and Chinese V-V constructions.
1.5 V-V collocations in other Asian languages

Like in Chinese, resultative V-V also appear in Vietnamese (Masica 1976: 152). Thai and Burmese display something apparently closer to the South Asian system, with verbs in these languages using the addition of a V2 to make the result non-inchoative (Masica 1976: 152–153). Japanese, Korean, and Mongolian also employ V-V structures very similar to what are found in South Asian and Central Asian languages: V-V collocations where the V1 appears in what formally is a conjunctive participle (=converb) form, with the V2 being drawn from a set of light verbs whose full verb counterpart bear meanings at least partially similar to those found for South Asian languages (Masica 1976: 154–155).

In the next section is given an overview of the historical development of V-V collocations in South Asian (Indo-Aryan and Dravidian), Central Asian, and Chinese languages.

2 Origins and developments of Asian V-V constructions, and their connection with converbs

In South Asian and Central Asian languages, light verb V-V constructions clearly derive from converb constructions (of the form “N having X-ed, Y-ed”). In Chinese, there are no converb-constructions as such, but the later resultative V-V constructions derive from an earlier construction which involved an overt verb/clause connective particle *er*.

2.1 Development of South Asian V-V constructions

Historically, the morphological form of the main or polar verb of the Indo-Aryan light verb V-V construction is an absolutive, a fixed, indeclinable form also used in earlier converb constructions, which also survive in to the modern IA languages, sometimes (as in Hindi) with in extended forms distinguishing them from the absolutive used in CVs, compare (i) with (19), where the latter show the sequential ordering of events use of the converb in (19-a) or the co-eventual (Raina 2011) use of the converb in (19-b).

   he/she=NOM food.SG.MSC eat-CONV home go.PERF_PTCP-SG.MSC
   “(After) having eaten food, he went home.” [Hindi]
b. Vah ħāṁ-s-ke bol-i 'hāṁ'.

he.she laugh-CONV say.PERF_PTCP-SG.FEM 'yes'

“Laughing(ly) she said ‘yes’.”

Such constructions are prominent in Sanskrit:

(20) Sītā mad-vacanāt vācyā samāśvāsa prasādy ca.
Sita.FEM.SG.NOM my-command.ABL speak.GDV console.GER calm.GER and

a. #“By my command Sita is to be spoken to, having consoled and calmed (her).” (past-tense converb reading)
b. “By my command Sita is to be spoken to consolingly and calmingly.”

(non-past converb reading)

(Mahābhārata 3.264,56, cited in Tikkanen 1987: 123)

(21) Vikramārko nītim ullaṅghya rāyjaṁ na karoti.
Vikramārka.NOM rules-of-ethics.ACC transgress.GER rule.ACC not do.PRES.3SG

a. #“Vikramarka, having transgressed the rules of ethics, does not rule (his kingdom).” (past-tense converb reading)
b. “Vikramarka does not rule (his kingdom), transgressing the rules of ethics.” (non-past converb reading)

(Vikramacarita 18.0, cited in Tikkanen 1987: 124)

And likewise in Pali:

(22) ... atha so ... bhatiṁ katvā jivati.
... thus he.NOM ... wages.ACC do.GER live.PRES.3SG

a. #“... and so he, having worked as a day-labourer, lives.” (past-tense converb reading)
b. “... and so he lives by working as a day-labourer.” (non-past converb reading)

(Jātaka 41, cited Tikkanen 1987: 125)

And these are found throughout later Indo-Aryan, including in the pre-modern period:

*For more discussion of ‘non-past’ readings of Sanskrit gerunds, see Hock (1992).*
The morphological form of the main or polar verb in many modern Indo-Aryan V-V constructions generally derives from the Old Indo-Aryan (OIA) past gerund of prefixed verbs in -(t)ya/(t)yā (Chatterjee 1926; Hendriksen 1944; Tikkanen 1987), an element which has the “virtual value of an indeclinable participle” (Whitney 1879/1889: §989), which in general functions as a converb, meaning something like “having X-ed”. Modern Indo-Aryan V-V compounding ultimately derives from a reanalysis of structures involving this absolutive, in its converb/gerund-sense, combined with another verb. Thus the Sanskrit example in (24) can be seen as the formal precursor of Hindi (25).\(^\text{10}\)

\((24)\) Annam sam-\text{khād-ya} gataḥ asti.
food.ACC together-\text{eat-GER} go.TA_PTCP.NOM.SG be.PRES.3SG
“He ate up the food and left” (Lit., “Having eaten up the food, (he) left.”)

\[[\text{Sanskrit}]\]

\((25)\) Vah \text{khānā} \text{khā} gay-ā.
he/she food.MSC.SG eat.ABS go.PERF_PTCP-SG.MSC
“He gobbled up the food.”

\[[\text{Hindi}]\]

The change from (24) to the V-V construction of the type exemplified by (25) took place via the reanalysis of gerund + \(V_2\) as a single predicate, in which the semantic contribution of the gerund was taken to be primary, and the \(V_2\) as a modifying element (i.e. a vector or light verb). This only happened with a subset of verbs occupying the \(V_2\) position, specifically with verbs with broad semantic values, e.g. verbs meaning “go”, “give”, “take”, etc. Further, converb constructions did not disappear from modern IA; rather a sort of morphosyntactic split took place, with some gerund + \(V_2\) constructions being reinterpretable/reinterpreted as V-Vs. (See Slade (2013) for more details.)

\(^{10}\)Example (24) and all subsequent examples from Sanskrit are shown in unsandhied form.
(26) Hindi

a. Maiṁ yah bāt bilkul bhūl cukā
   I this matter completely forget.ABS used.up.PERF_PTCP.MSC.SG thā.
   PAST.MSC.SG
   “I had completely forgotten about this thing.”

b. Gusse meṁ us-ne merā reḍyo tōr
   anger in he/she.OBLQ-AGT my.MSC.SG radio break.ABS dālā.
   throw.PERF_PTCP.MSC.SG
   “In anger, he broke my radio.”

(27) Nepali

a. Āṭh baj-i-sakyo.
   eight strike.ABS-finish.PAST.3SG
   “It’s already eight o’clock!”

b. Anju-le bibek-lāī gupta kurā bhan-i-hālyo.
   Anju-AGT Bibek-oblQ secret thing speak-ABS-throw.PAST.3SG
   “Anju blurted out the secret to Bibek.”

(28) Sinhala

a. Gunəpālə kēmak hadā“ gatta.
   Gunapala meal.INDEF make.ØABS take.PAST.
   “Gunapala made a meal (for himself)” (Paolillo 1989) [Modern Colloquial Sinhala]

b. Gunəpālə mahatteaṭə kēmak hadə.la dunna.
   Gunapala gentleman.DAT meal.INDEF make.ABS give.PAST
   “Gunapala made a meal for the boss.” (Ibid.) [Modern Colloquial Sinhala]

c. Gewal pol atu-wəliŋ hewili kərə-la ě uḍətə houses coconut branches.PL.INSTR roofing do.ABS that above.DAT
   piduru thirō-la arinəwa.
   straw sprinkle.ABS open(vol).PAST_PTCP
   “Having roofed the houses with coconut branches, on top of that (they) cover it (up) with straw [i.e. sprinkle it completely with straw].” (Ibid.)
Definitive examples of V-V constructions of the modern IA type in (25), (26), (27), (28) do not appear until the modern period (see Masica 1991: 325 and Slade 2013), with the exception of Sinhala (discussed below around example (31)). Below are given early definitive examples of V-V constructions in Hindi, Nepali, and (occurring significantly earlier) Sinhala:

(29) Early V-Vs in Hindi

a. Bhayabhīta hvai-kari samudra kau mathivau na cchāḍ-i without fear be-CONV ocean of churning not leave-ABS
dayau.
give.PERF_PTCP.MSC.SG

(i) “Having become fearless, (he) did not leave off the churning of the ocean.” (complex predicate reading)

(ii) “Having become fearless, (he), having not left the churning of the ocean, gave.” (literal converb reading)

(ca. 1600 C.E., Indrajit of Orchā’s commentary on the Nitiśataka of Bhartrhari, f.17a; McGregor 1968: 54)

(30) Early V-Vs in Nepali

a. 2 ālā motipur-kā 2 ālā vaks-i 2 field.MSC.PL Motipur.GEN 2 field.MSC.PL bestow.ABS
diyāṁ chauṁ.
give.PERF_PTCP.MSC.PL be.PRES.IPL

“We have given two fields of Motipur.” [Old Shah Nepali, 1529 C.E.; Wallace 1982: 164]

b. Tāhāṁ kājikana vujhāi samjhāi ņahā there Kazi.INSTR understanding understand.caus.CONV here
paṭhā-i- dinu havas.
send-ABS- give.IMPV

12Curiously, V-Vs with gannəwa, unlike the others, use the (fossilised) old Sinhala absolute form without la for the main/polar verb, glossed here and below as ØABS.

13See Delbrück (1888: 406–7) and Tikkanen (1987) for examples of idiomatic V-V combinations in Sanskrit, but see Slade (2013) for discussion of such putative early examples in Sanskrit and Pali and their differences from the modern type of V-V collocation.
(i) “Persuade the Kazi there, and send him here.” (complex predicate reading)

(ii) #“Persuade the Kazi there, and having sent him here, give (him).” (literal converb reading)

(Old Shah Nepali, 1755/6 C.E. ∼ 1812 V.S., Prithvinarayan Shah, letter to Paṇḍit Rājivalocana; Pokharel B.S. 2020 [=1963 C.E.]: 196)

c. Pachillā ciṭhi-ko javāph hāmi-le leṣ-i-
last.OBLQ letter.Gen.msc.sg answer we.agt write.abs
rākhya-thyaurn.

place.perf_ptcp.msc.pl-be.past.ipl
“We wrote our answer to the last letter.” [Old Shah Nepali, 1792 C.E.; Wallace 1982: 191]

d. Unai-ki maiyā hāmī-le lyā-i pal-i
she.emph-gen.fem daughter we.agt bring.conv nurture.abs
rāṣyāki chan.

place.perf_ptcp.fem.sg be.3pl.h
“We took her daughter in and raised her.” (? Or, “We took her daughter in and kept nurturing her.”) [Old Shah Nepali, 1800 C.E.; Wallace 1982: 193]

It is notable that, as shown by Table 2, the set of light verbs in Old Sinhala and modern Sinhala are rather different, sharing only two items in common.
Early V-Vs in Sinhala

a. Suka topa vi divi giya.
   Happiness.NOM your.GEN become.PAST.3SG run.ABS go.PAST
   “Your pleasure vanished.” (Lit. “Your pleasure having run went.”) [Sigiri Graffito 498; 750–800 C.E.]
   [Old Sinhala]

b. Næga gan Sihigiri.
   rise.ABS take.IMPV Sihigiri
   “Ascend Sihigiri!” (Lit. “Having risen take Sihigiri!”) [Sigiri Graffito 169; 850–900 C.E.]
   [Old Sinhala]

c. Heḷa-divi a Jabu-duvu datimi pataka
   Ceylon come.PAST.PTCP Indian know.PAST.1SG letter.ACC.SG.INDEF
di kese lami.
   give.ABS how place.PRES.1SG
   “To Sri Lanka has come an Indian; I know how to give (him) a letter.”
   (Lit. “...I knew how to, having given a letter (to him), place (it).”) [Sigiri Graffito 293; 700–800 C.E.]
   [Old Sinhala]

In Dravidian too, most of the V-V collocations involve converbs (=nonfinite conjunctive participles). As in Indo-Aryan, these conjunctive particples still exist in their verb uses:

(32) Rattiri pō-y pakal vantatu.
   Night depart-CONV daylight come.PAST.3SG.NEU
   “Night having departed, daylight came.” [Tamil]

In Tamil, as in Sinhala, there has been significant change in terms of the inventory of light verbs that appear in V-V collocations. Only two of the light verbs found in Old Tamil show up in modern Tamil (which also shows the development of a number of additional light verbs not found in Old Tamil), as shown by Table 4. An example of an early Tamil V-V collocation is shown in (33).

(33) Nemiṭi koṇṭu ...
    scoop.ABS hold.CONV ...
   “While (someone) was scooping up (something) ...” [Old Tamil] (Steever 2005: 38)
### Table 4: Light verbs that occur in V-Vs from selected Dravidian languages [adapted and expanded from Slade (to appear)]

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A similar pattern of development of V-V collocations is found in Central Asian languages, described in the next section.
2.2 Development of Central Asian V-V constructions

The Central Asian V-V collocations likewise derive from constructions involving converbs. Uighur, Uzbek, and Kazakh form converbs with the affixes -(V)p and -a:

(34)  a. Yürt çoŋliri arqisiɣa **burulu-p** qaridi.
     turn.around-CONV looked
     “The elders of the people turned around and looked [at him].” (Uighur; Ibrahim (1995: 9))

b. Kumušbibi Ətabekning qūlidan ušla-b,  qūyida  yɔzıp qūyilgan
     Kumushbibi Otabek.GEN hand  take-CONV,
     dasturxon yɔniga bɔšladi.
     “Kumushbibi took Otabek’s hand, and led him to the dasturon where
     food had been spread out.” (Uzbek; Ibrahim (1995: 9))

c. Ulpan sarı cez samavırındı **köter-ip**
     samovar  lift-CONV,
     dalağ şığıp ketti.
     “Ulan, lifting his yellow samovar, went to the field.” (Kazakh; Demirci (2003: 49))

Thus we can find converb constructions in Central Asian languages which are very similar to those found in South Asian languages, as shown in (35).

(35)  a. Rām kitāb le-kar  āyā.
     Ram book  take-CONV come.PTCP.MASC.SG
     “Ram brought the book.” (Lit. “Ram, having taken the book, came.”) (Hindi)

     Ali book  take-CONV come.PTCP

V-V collocations in Chinese, on the hand, while differing in significant respects from South Asian or Central Asian V-Vs both in terms of their semantics and morphosyntax, are in their earliest stages more similar in certain respects.
2.3 Development of Chinese V-V resultatives

In Old Chinese – while we find no exact morphological counterparts of the South Asian or Central Asian converbs – we do find an overt particle *er* which “co-ordinates” verb phrases or clauses (it cannot co-ordinate nouns or other types of phrases) which appears functionally very similar to the converb constructions of South Asian and Central Asian languages:

(36) *Er* as a verb connective

a. Feng xing er zhuo yu tu.
wind move *er* attach to soil

b. Bao zi hou ji er sha zhi.
leopard from back strike *er* kill he

(37) *Er* as a clausal connective

a. Qi zi qu er wang shi zhi.
his son ran *er* go see them
“His son ran to the field and saw them.” (Old Chinese, *Mengzi* 400BC, Shi (2002: 157))

b. Min qi miao zhibu zhang er ya zhi.
worry his seedlings NOM. not *er* pull-up they
“He worried about the slow growth of his seedlings and pulled them up.” (Old Chinese, *Mengzi* 400BC, Shi (2002: 157))

c. Shi he yi-yu ci ren er sha zhi?
this how different-from stab people *er* kill he
“How is it different from the fact that (you) stab the people and kill him?” (Old Chinese, *Mengzi* 375BC, Shi (2002: 55))

d. Meng wei yu er mo/mei yu yuan.
dream become fish *er* sink into abyss
“(He) became a fish in his dream and sank into an abyss.” (Old Chinese, *Huainanzi*, *Zhenxun* 125BC, Shi (2002: 199))
These constructions with er are the predecessors of the Chinese resultative constructions. And in fact, early proto-resultative constructions can still be found containing er, as in (38).

(38) Proto-resultative structures still containing er
   a. Qiu wu yu chu er bu de.  request material and fodder er not get
      “Requested materials and fodder but did not get.” (Old Chinese, Mengzi 375BC, Shi (2002: 56))
   b. Zhi Guan Zhong Yan Zi er yi  yi.  know Guan Zhong Yan Zi er complete PRT
      “(They) just knew Guan Zhong and Yan Zi. That’s it.” (Old Chinese, Mengzi 375BC, Ibid.)

Not only the er “converb”-type constructions, but also these early proto-resultatives are agent-oriented like the South Asian and Central Asian converb constructions (and the later V-V constructions).

Thus in Old Chinese we find numerous constructions of the sort V-sha “V-kill”:

(39) She sha Ling Gong. shoot kill Ling Duke
    “(Someone) shot and killed Duke Ling.” (Shi ji, Chen Qi shijia, 100 B.C., Shi (2002: 55))

(40) An beng, jin ya-sha wo-zhe. Bank collapse, entirely press-kill sleeper
    “The collapsing of the bank crushed and killed all the sleeping people” (Shi ji, Xiang Yu benji 100 B.C., Shi (2002: 45))

We find other, similarly agent-oriented V2 instances in Old Chinese with other V2s:

(41) a. Nai shou yang zhi. then adopt raise it
    “Then adopted and raised it.” (Old Chinese, Lunheng, Jiyan pian 100BC, Shi (2002: 55))
b. Gong Zheng bai zhi.
   attack Zheng defeat it
   “(They) attacked Zheng country and defeated it.” (Old Chinese, Shi ji, 
   Zhao shijia 100BC, Shi (2002: 55))

By Middle Chinese, these agent-oriented V-V resultatives disappear, replaced with the subject-/object-oriented V-V type familiar from modern Chinese, and thus V-sba “V-kill” is replaced by V-si “V-die”:

(42) Bai yu ren tan beng jin ya-si.
   Hundred more people charcoal burst entirely press-die
   “Because the charcoal burst, more than a hundred people were crushed and all died.” (Middle Chinese, Lunbeng, Mingyi 15AD, Shi (2002: 45))

(43) Ni ba wo laozi yao-si le.
   you BA I father poison-die PERF
   “You poisoned my father and killed him.” (Early Modern Chinese, Du E yaun, 
   A.D. 1325, Shi (2002: 219))

Developments involving further grammaticalisations of light verbs occurring in V-V collocations are found in all three of these linguistic areas (South Asia, Central Asia, China), and, here again, display a number of interesting analogues to one another.

3 Further evolution of V-V collocations

In South Asian languages, Central Asian languages, and Chinese, we find that certain light verb V-V constructions have undergone further grammaticalisation, taking on more clearly auxiliary-type functions.

3.1 Further grammaticalisation of light verbs in South Asian languages

Nepali, Hindi, and Sinhala all present evidence of the grammaticalisation of certain V-V constructions. This article focusses on developments in Indo-Aryan, but see Coelho (2018) for similar observations of change in the V-V system of the South Dravidian language Betta
3.1.1 Nepali honorifics

The Nepali light verb *baksinu* provides an example of change affecting a light verb independently of its full verb counterpart. Nepali *baksinu* is a light verb employed in V-V constructions as an honorific when referring to Nepali royalty and other persons due great respect, e.g.:

\[(44)\] Mausuph-le yo kuro ghosaṇā gar-i- baksi-yo.
His Majesty-AGT this thing proclamation do-ABS- bestow.PAST.PTCP-3SG
“His Majesty made this proclamation.” (Sharma 1980: 131) [Nepali]

Both *baksinu* as well a phonologically-reduced form are also employed in upper-class Kathmandu families (e.g. by children to parents, wife to husband etc.), as discussed in Sharma (1980: 130–2). An example of the reduced form of *baksinu* is given in example (45).

\[(45)\] Buwā-le bhuja khā-i- s-yo.
dad-AGT rice eat-ABS- HON-3SG
“Dad ate rice.” (Sharma 1980: 132) [Nepali]

While *baksinu* is employed as a main verb (46), -s- is not (47).

\[(46)\] Mahārāni-le ma-lāi takmā baksi-yo.
queen-AGT I-OBLQ medal bestow-PAST.3SG
“The queen bestowed a medal upon me.” (Ibid.) [Nepali]

\[(47)\] *Mahārāni-le ma-lāi takmā s-yo.
queen-AGT I-OBLQ medal hon-PAST.3SG

Thus while *baksinu* as a light verb can occur in both a reduced and an unreduced phonological form, the full verb form can occur only in unreduced form.¹³ The next section

¹³Nepali *baksinu* is ultimately a loanword from Persian *bakhši* “to give”, and obviously was borrowed as a full verb, not as a light verb, since, as shown by example (46), it can still be used as a full verb.
investigates the partial grammaticalisation of a different Nepali V2 as an aspectual auxiliary.

### 3.1.2 Nepali *rahanu*: light verb > aspectual auxiliary

Nepali *rahanu* “remain, stay” behaves morphologically like other light verbs with respect to other properties of V-V constructions in Nepali, including selecting for an absolutive participle in -i.

However, unlike other Nepali V-V constructions, V-Vs involving *rahanu* (or *rākhnu* “keep”) never require agentive-marking on the subject, regardless of the transitivity of the main verb. In this, the construction including *rahanu* in its light verb function appears to be a periphrastic counterpart of the Nepali synthetic imperfect construction, verb-stem + *dai* + inflected form of *be*. Thus *rahanu* as a light verb, (48) with respect to agentive case-marking assignment patterns with the synthetic imperfect in -dai, (49), not with other V-Vs (such as the light verb *di-* as shown in (50)).

(48) Nepali

```
a. Ma mandir-mā ga-i- rah-eko chu.  
   I temple-LOC go-ABS- remain-PF_PTCP.MSC.SG be.IP.PRES  
   “I am going to the temple.” / “I have been going to the temple.”

b. Ma yo kām gar-i- rah-eko chu.  
   I this work do-ABS- remain-PF_PTCP.MSC.SG be.IP.PRES  
   “I am doing this work.” / “I have been doing this work.”
```

(49) Nepali

```
a. Ma mandir-mā jāṁ-dai chu.  
   I temple-LOC go-IMPF_PTCP be.IP.PRES  
   “I am going to the temple.”

b. Ma yo kām gar-dai chu.  
   I this work do-IMPF_PTCP be.IP.PRES  
   “I am doing this work.”
```
In contrast to typical V-V constructions (like those in (50)), constructions in which *rahanu* functions as a light verb do not require agentive marking on the subject (even when the main verb is transitive); see (48). In this, the V-V construction with *rahanu* closely resembles the synthetic imperfect construction, as in (49).

The Nepali light verb *rahanu* appears thus to be in the process of becoming an auxiliary like Hindi *rabnā*. Both *rahanu* and *rākhnu* are further interesting in that sometimes they maintain a more contentful light verb sense\(^\text{14}\) – e.g. as in (51) and (52), respectively – another indication of their intermediate status in present-day Nepali.

\(^{14}\)See also above Old Shah Nepali examples of *rākh-* as a light verb in (30-c)-(30-d).
3.1.3 The development of the Hindi auxiliary raṅnā

The Hindi continuative auxiliary use of raṅnā also originated as a light verb before being further grammaticalised as part of the core grammar of aspect in Hindi.\(^{15}\)

Though in Modern Hindi, the simple present and the present continuous are clearly distinguished, as shown in (53).

\begin{quote}
(53) Present-Day Hindi
\begin{enumerate}
\item a. Maiṁ skūḷ jātā hūṁ.
   \hspace{1cm} I school go.IMPF_PTCP.MSC.SG be.PRES.1SG
   \hspace{1cm} “I (habitually) go to school.”
\item b. Maiṁ skūḷ jā rahā hūṁ.
   \hspace{1cm} I school go.ABS remain.PERF_PTCP.MSC.SG be.PRES.1SG
   \hspace{1cm} “I am going to school (just now).”
\end{enumerate}
\end{quote}

However, Kellogg (1893: §404) cites forms like maiṁ jātā hūṁ as meaning either “I go” or “I am going”.\(^{16}\) Further, he categorises raṅnā as a light verb (Kellogg 1893: §428) rather than an auxiliary, suggesting that—as in the case of Modern Nepali raḥanu—the use of raṅnā as indicating continuous action in 19th c. Hindi was more peripheral and not yet integrated as part of the core grammar as a clear aspectual auxiliary; see (54) and (55), taken from Kellogg (1893: §404), retaining his translations.

\begin{quote}
(54) 19th-century Hindi
\begin{enumerate}
\item a. Donoṁ larke khelte the.
   \hspace{1cm} both boy.PL play.IMPF_PTCP.MSC.PL be.PAST.3PL
   \hspace{1cm} “The two children were playing.”
\item b. Donoṁ larke khel rahe the.
   \hspace{1cm} both boy.PL play.ABS remain.PERF_PTCP.MSC.PL be.PAST.3PL
   \hspace{1cm} “The two children were engaged in play.”
\end{enumerate}
\end{quote}

\(^{15}\)See further Bloch (1920), Hock (2008), and Slade (2013).

\(^{16}\)A situation which persists marginally in modern Hindi, in much the same way as the modern English simple present can be employed with a progressive sense in certain contexts, e.g. “I am attaching a document to this email...” vs. “I attach a document to this email....”
The later auxiliary nature of Hindi *rahnā* represents a reanalysis which is part of larger reconstructing of the Hindi verbal system (see further Slade 2013: §5.3).

In Central Asian languages too, we find further grammaticalisation of certain V2s as aspectual auxiliaries, as show in the next section.

### 3.2 Development of imperfective in Central Asian languages

A number of light verbs involved in V-V constructions in Kazakh, including *otır* “sit”, *tur-“stay”, *cūr- “walk”, have been grammaticalised to mark the present progressive tense in Kazakh (Demirci 2003).

(56)  
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Kərim şay iş-ip otr.} \\
\text{Karim tea drink-ABS sit}
\end{align*}
\]

“Karim is drinking tea.” (Kazakh; Demirci (2003: 176))

(57)  
\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Bala dalada oyna-p cūr.} \\
\text{Child in-field play-ABS walk}
\end{align*}
\]

“The child is playing in the field” (Kazakh; Demirci (2003: 177))

Certain V2s from Chinese resultative V-V constructions have also been grammaticalised as aspectual markers; the next section provides an overview of the grammaticalisation of *liao* > the perfective particle *le*.

### 3.3 Development of aspectual auxiliaries in Chinese

In modern Chinese, the particle *le* marks perfective aspect:
Prior to the 10th-century AD, liao (>le) was used as a main verb as well as in resultative construction; after the 10th-century it became purely an aspect marker attached to the main verb, indicating perfective aspect.\(^\text{17}\)

**Liao as an independent clause:**

(59) Wu jiu yu zhu, shang wei liao.
I long want annotate still not complete
“I wanted to annotate it a long time ago, but it still is not complete.” (late Old Chinese, *Shi shuo xin yu* 450AD, Shi (2002: 62))

As modifying the preceding clause:

(60) Dashi shuo jie yi liao.
master explain Buddhist-verse already complete
“The master already explained the Buddhist verse completely.” (Middle Chinese, *You xianku* 700AD, Shi (2002: 63))

(61) Wei shuo shi ji shi, shuo liao shi ji bu shi.
not speak time then be say complete time then not be
“When it is not said, then it is so; when it is completely said, then it is not so.”

Around the 11th-century, from liao emerges the modern aspectual marker le:

(62) Xiao Xi yi shou le di-san ci sheng-zhi.
Xiao Xi already receive PERF third CLSF imperial-edict
“Xiao Xi has already received the third imperial edict.” (Middle Chinese, *Yimao ruguo zouqing* 1077AD, Shi (2002: 63))

\(^{17}\)See Shi (2002: 59–67) for discussion of the development of a number of modern Chinese auxiliaries out the V2s of earlier resultatives, including liao>le.
The use of le as a perfective aspectual marker is reminiscent of the completive functions of South Asian V-V collocations (and their general tendency to occur with perfective aspect).

4 Connections between Asian V-V collocations

The wide-spread use of V-V collocations across much of Asia raises questions of anterior origins. It is tempting to imagine that V-V collocations arose in one language or language family and spread via contact to the other languages. However, the evidence available suggests that instead it may be the result of independent developments of similar constructions which may have been subsequently developed further as the result of convergence.

It is interesting, as noted by Masica (1976), that while V-V collocations are found in Tajik Persian, these are not prominent in Iranian Persian (Masica 1976: 155); and while V-V collocations appear in the Turkic languages Uighur, Uzbek, and Kazakh, they are not well-developed in Anatolian Turkish (Ibid.). This also speaks against a clear and direct transmission of V-V collocations via a contiguous linguistic path from India to Central Asia or vice-versa, despite the obvious similarity of the morphosyntactic structure of V-V collocations of languages in these two areas.18

Even the developments within South Asia are quite possibly the result of independent developments within Indo-Aryan and Dravidian, with subsequent convergence.

The larger “Asian” pattern is even less clear. It may be that language contact has played some role here: for example, the existence of V-V collocations in both South Asian and Chinese languages may be the result of mediated contact via Southeast Asian languages like Burmese, Thai, Vietnamese. But it is also possible that these are fully unrelated developments. Or, perhaps most likely, that V-V collocations developed independently with later convergence due to language contact.

18Though it perhaps tempting to speculate about the possibility of V-V collocations arriving in South Asia carried by the Central Asian Mughals. However, as discussed above, there are clear V-V collocations in South Asia well before the arrival of the Mughals.
Further Reading


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