

## A Constructionist Account of Light Verb Constructions in Persian

Persian has a deceptively small repertoire of about 160 single word verbs which belies an intricate system of light verb constructions (LVC), similar to the English *take a walk* or *give a speech*. In fact, about 15 *light verbs* (LV) form the foundation of a vast array of LVCs in Persian. Most verbal notions expressed in other languages by a simple verbs are expressed in Persian through these constructions (e.g. *to dream* is ‘*see sleep*’, etc.). A sophisticated verbal system results from this small set of general-action verbs. The LVs, combine with an open set of *preverbal elements* (PV) to produce new verbal expressions semantically distant from the LV itself. In other words, the meaning of the whole is more than the sum of the meaning of its parts.

xun ændaxtæn	blood THROW	cause to bleed
kæm fodæn	few HIT	be diminished, lessen
aramef dadæn	calmness GIVE	calm
jæfn gereftæn	party GET	celebrate
tfopeq kefidæn	pipe PULL	smoke a pipe
qorbæt kefidæn	remoteness PULL	suffer a longing for home

This productive compounding has evolved according to certain principles that help organize semantic space in Persian and is the only manner of verb formation. Unlike English, where nouns morph into verbs, as in ‘I will *phone* you,’ Persian speakers must always produce verbs by combining words with an appropriate, non-random LV (e.g. *telefon zædæn* ‘telephone HIT’ *to phone*).

The objective of the current study is to investigate the mechanisms that regulate the meaning of LVCs. Although the system is easily acquired by Persian speakers, the rules underlying this compounding process have never been deciphered. The framework needed must account for the key features of this system: compositionality, productivity, and polysemy. The tenets of Construction Grammar inherently provide us with these features.

I introduce the idea of *islands*, where a cluster of LVCs express similar verbal notions using the same LV and a strict class of PVs. Each island is represented by a construction which includes an LV and attributes of the PVs, resulting in an LVC with a meaning different from the sum of its components and not derivable by strict compositionality. For example, one of the several islands of *gereftæn* ‘OBTAIN’ expresses covering with a liquid that hardens and sets. In this case, the PV refers to such a liquid.

gætf gereftæn	plaster OBTAIN	set in plaster
tæla gereftæn	gold OBTAIN	gold-leaf
siman gereftæn	cement OBTAIN	cover in cement

These islands form a generative system in which knowledge is organized in constructions (see diagram below for an illustration of the semantic space of *zædæn* ‘HIT’). Furthermore, some islands of one LV can predict islands in other LVs. For example, an island of *xordæn* ‘EAT’ hosts the notion of *being hit with a weapon* where the PV is the weapon. The LV *zædæn* ‘HIT’ combines with the same set of PVs to express *hitting with a weapon*. Thus, the knowledge about one island can safely predict others.

