



**The Productivity of Persian Light Verbs**  
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(1-28)

**Abstract**

There is a group of verbs in Persian which lost part of their semantic content in the process of language evolution. These so-called light verbs in addition with a preverbal element, a noun, an adjective or a prepositional phrase form light verb constructions in this language. The syntactic and semantic study of these constructions became one of the challenging issues in modern linguistics and they were the subject of linguistic studies in different languages from different points of view. Light verb constructions are one of the most productive constructions in Persian, but the degree of the productivity is not the same in all Persian light verbs. Why do they show different degrees of productivity in forming light verb constructions is an important question which was unaddressed by the previous scholars of the field? To answer this question, firstly we measure the productivity of each verb using the corpus data and then in the light of Distributed Morphology (Halle & Marantz, 1993; Marantz, 2013), which is a neo-constructionist view, we account for the differences in the degrees of their productivity. The results indicate that the degrees of Persian light verbs' productivity depend on the degrees of their semantic lightness, their insertion possibilities and their insertion blockings. We assessed the degrees of their semantic lightness by comparing the light and the lexical forms of each verb in the corpus data. Using the secondary exponence of Harley and Noyer (2000), we calculated the semantic and syntactic insertion possibilities of the verbs, which means the syntactic and semantic environments in which these verbs are allowed to be inserted and finally we calculated the semantic and syntactic blockings of each verb, that is the semantic and syntactic environments in which their insertion is blocked. Thus, the verbs which contain higher degrees of lightness, more syntactic and semantic insertion possibilities and less insertion blockings display higher degrees of productivity.

**Keywords:** Light verb, Productivity, Distributed Morphology, Semantic lightness, Insertion possibilities, Insertion blockings .

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### 1. Introduction

Light verbs introduced first by Jespersen (1965) became one of the challenging issues in modern linguistics after they were focused on by Mester and Gimshaw (1988). Light verbs are generally known as a group of verbs which carry some grammatical properties of a verb, but they are semantically bleached or devoid of meaning. Light verbs have been studied in different languages by many linguists from different aspects. Likewise, Persian light verbs have been scrutinized by many researchers from different viewpoints (Dabir-moghaddam, 1995; Folli, Harley & Karimi, 2004; Karimi, 1997; Karimi-Doostan, 1997; Megerdooonian, 2001; Samvellian & Faqiri, 2013; among many others). It is worth noting that there are less than 200 lexical verbs in the verbal system of modern Persian; most of the verbs are light verb constructions (LVCs). LVCs are so productive in Persian that the new verbal concepts that enter the language are also formed based on the LVCs' pattern, composed of a preverbal element and a light verb like *serch kardan* (to search), *bla:k kardan* (to block). It is what doubles the importance of their study in this language.

Although many studies have been done in this field, there are some questions left unanswered thus far. The present study attempts to account for the important issue of what causes the difference in the degree of Persian LV's productivity. While the productivity issue has been hinted at in the previous works too, no independent study directly has dealt with it till now. We tackle this issue in the light of Distributed Morphology (Hale and Keyser, 1993, 2002; Marantz, 2013). To answer this question firstly we measure the productivity of 21 Persian light verbs and then we discuss the causes of the difference in the degree of their productivity.

### 2. Literature Review

In this section, we've shortly reviewed the literature of distributed morphology, its basic features, its morphological operations and how they can help us in answering the present research question. We've also reviewed the concept of productivity in linguistics and introduced the most relevant methods of measuring the LVs productivity.

### 3. Methodology

To answer the research question, we first measured the productivity of 21 Persian LVs. We've followed Stevenson, Fazly & North (2001) to measure type frequency, Baayen and Lieber (1993) to measure token frequency and Baayen and Lieber (1991) to measure hapax-conditioned frequency of each verb in the corpus data. Then we accounted for the differences in the degree of their productivity within the framework of distributed morphology on the ground of three criteria; the degree of their semantic lightness, their insertion possibilities and their insertion blockings (using the secondary exponence of Harley & Noyer, 2000).

### 4. Results

The results of measuring the productivity have been represented in tables and diagrams to help the reader to compare them easily. Also, some tables have been provided to compare the semantic lightness of the 21 Persian LVs, their insertion possibilities and their insertion blockings.

### **5. Discussion**

Comparing the results gained in the previous steps, we discussed that the lighter the verb is, the more nodes it can be inserted in, because it will contain less semantic conflicting features. On the other hand, calculating the insertion possibilities and insertion blockings of the Persian LVs based on secondary exponence of Harley and Noyer (2000), we discussed that the less specified a verb is for being inserted into a node, the more insertion possibilities it is going to have and the less blocking it will encounter. They can be the cause of the difference in the Light verbs' degree of productivity.

### **6. Conclusions**

Based on the results, we have concluded that the degree of LV's productivity depends on three criteria; the degree of semantic lightness, the insertion possibilities and the insertion blockings. In other words, the verbs which contain higher degrees of lightness, more insertion possibilities and less insertion blockings display higher degrees of productivity.