

## On Aktionsart issues relating to dative-experiencer predicates in Indic<sup>1</sup>

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*This paper is dedicated to the memory of my co-alumna, mentor, and friend  
Alice Louise Davison*

### ABSTRACT

Dative experiencers are attested in the Germanic branch of Indo-European (Hock 1990) notably including the Scandinavian language group (Barðdal et al. 2014; Schätzle, Butt, and Kotcheva 2015), Italic (Giusti and Iovino 2016), and the Iranian (Windfuhr 1990) and Indic (Montaut 2013) subgroups of the Indo-Iranian branch, as well as in the Dravidian family of languages in South Asia (e.g., in the Dravidian language Malayalam: Mohanan and Mohanan 1990). The discussion on dative experiencers has thus far been focused primarily on the issue of whether or not they count as subjects, with differing positions emerging on the issue (e.g., Butt et al. 2006 versus Barðdal et al. 2014). A poorly explored question thus far is the characterization of Aktionsart or “inner aspect” (Vendler 1957/1967; Smith 1991; called “situation type” by Saeed 2002: 106-114) of the classes of predicates that take dative-experiencer arguments. This is all the more surprising since a number of observations have been recorded in the literature about other kinds of semantic characteristics that such predicates are grouped by, such as physiological and psychological state expression and, occasionally, possession or its achievement (cf., for example, Hindi *mujhe yeh khəbər miliī* ‘I-dat one news-item came-into-possession’ ‘I received this piece of news’). In this paper, it is noted that the broad kinds of “inner aspect” or Aktionsart classes that one can identify amongst such predicates in the modern Indic languages that have been examined thus far are the following: (i) states (as in *mujhe yeh əčħaa ləg-rəħaa hai* ‘to-me this good striking is’ ‘I like this’, (ii) semelfactives (as in *use čot ləgii* ‘to-him/her injury struck’ ‘s/he got injured’) and (iii) in very limited cases, achievements (as in *use kuč riħaayət miliī* ‘to-him/her some relief was-obtained’ ‘s/he got some relief’). The paper proceeds to take a brief overview of the manifestation of these Aktionsart classes in dative-experiencer predicates in Sanskrit and certain selected Middle Indic forms (following especially Masica’s 1991 survey of dative-experiencer predicates from a diachronic perspective). It is then argued that these three Aktionsart classes do not exhaust the inductively known totality of dative-experiencer predicates in the Indic languages studied for these at the major recognized historical stages for Indic (Halдар & Bagchi 2000/2007), but that these may include at least one more Aktionsart type, involving a determinate starting-point followed by a stative phase, i.e., a “mirror image” of sorts to the “accomplishment” Aktionsart, that researchers on Aktionsart in South Asian languages may also need to take into account.

### 1. Introduction: Dative or oblique experiencers?

Dative experiencers and predicates that select them pose an interesting set of challenges for linguistic analysis relating to a significant number of South Asian languages, notably those belonging to the Indic and Dravidian (sub)families (as borne out by articles and

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anthologies of articles focusing on them such as Verma & Mohanan 1990; Bayer 2004). They are exemplified by sentences such as the following:

*Sanskrit*

- (1) devadattāya modakah rocate (Deshpande 1990: 150)  
 Devadatta-dat sweet-nom appeal.to-pres.-3sg  
 ‘Devadatta likes (the) sweet(s).’ – Lit. ‘(The) sweet(s) appeal to Devadatta.’

In the transition from Old through Middle into Modern Indic languages (Masica 1991; Haldar & Bagchi 2000; Montaut 2013), the dative-experiencer construction takes a rather different morphosyntactic form:

*Hindi*

- (2) mujhe gussaa aayaa  
 I-dat/acc anger come-perf-m.sg  
 ‘I became angry.’ – Lit. ‘To-me anger came.’

However, the term “dative experiencer” is both empirically and typologically too restrictive a descriptor for such oblique-case-marked experiencer arguments – empirically so, because such experiencers are marked as genitive experiencers in Bangla:

*Bangla*

- (3) ram-er rag holo  
 Ram-gen anger happen-past-3  
 ‘Ram felt angry.’ – Lit. ‘Of-Ram anger occurred.’

-- and typologically so, because cross-linguistically such experiencers are marked not only by the dative case but also, as in Latin > Italian (Belletti & Rizzi 1988, 2012; Giusti & Iovino 2015/2016), they are sometimes marked by the accusative case, as in Hindi as well (Bhatt 2003), and at others by linking postpositions (such as *di* in Italian).

On certain syntactic grounds (such as their predominantly sentence-initial occurrence, the occasional ability to bind anaphors, and the ability to control PRO in a subordinate clause), such dative- and genitive-marked experiencers have also been termed “experiencer subjects” in the literature on South Asian languages (Verma & Mohanan 1990; Bayer 2004 and others), though their claim to subjecthood in Sanskrit is a strongly disputed one (Hock 1990; Cardona 1990; Deshpande 1990; also Butt et al. 2006). Moreover, the occurrence of unaccusative subjects in Bangla as buttressing the case for non-agentive stimulus/theme arguments in such constructions (see Bagchi 2005) as well as that of non-agentive stimulus/theme arguments in Hindi (Bhatt 2003, Davison 2004) have been noted as well. The concern of this paper, however, is somewhat different: it is with the nature of oblique-experiencer *predicates* that are found across a significant number of Indic languages. In particular, the paper examines the relatively neglected issue of the possible Aktionsart (“inner aspect”) categories in which such predicates are found to occur.

## 2. Oblique experiencers in Indo-European language groups outside South Asia

It turns out that such oblique case-marked experiencers, and dative-marked experiencers in particular, are by no means unknown in language families and subgroups outside South Asia. They occur in the Germanic branch of the Indo-European family (Hock 1990: 121):

*Gothic*

- (4) hwa            **izwis**    þugkeiþ?  
 what-n.sg      2pl.dat think-pres.-3sg  
 ‘What do you think?’ – Lit. ‘What does (it) think to you?’

*Old English*

- (5) Do    swa    þe            þynce  
 do-ipt as    2sg.dat/acc    think-pres.-3sg  
 ‘Do as it may appear to you / Do as you think.’

They are also attested in the Scandinavian branch of Germanic (Barðdal et al. 2014; Schätzle, Butt, and Kotcheva 2015). They are further attested in Italic (Giusti & Iovino 2015/2016):

*Latin*

- (6) Placent            vobis    hominum            mores?  
 ike-pres.3pl    2pl.dat men.gen            behaviour.nom.pl (Cicero, *In Verrem* II,3,208)  
 ‘Do you like these men’s behaviour?’

*Italian*

- (7) A Maria piace la tranquillità. (Prepositional Object Experiencer > Subject Stimulus)  
 to Maria likes the peacefulness  
 ‘Maria likes peacefulness.’ – Lit. ‘To Maria, peacefulness is pleasing.’

While the story of oblique experiencers is somewhat more complex in the Iranian group of Indo-Iranian languages (by the Modern Persian stage they are no longer attested – Simin Karimi, p.c. 2016), there is also some evidence (Windfuhr 1990) that Avestan had at least accusative-marked experiencer constructions, and dative-argument predicates such as in (8) below. (Courtesy also Agnes Korn, p.c. 2016.)

*Avestan*

- (8) **uštā**            **ahmāi** /            hyat    ašāi            vahištāi            ašəm  
 happiness    m3-dat.sg    rel-sg righteousness-dat.sg    best-dat.sg    true  
 ‘Happiness to him / who is true for the sake of the best righteousness.’  
 (Karl F. Geldner 1896: *Avesta*)

The issue of whether such oblique experiencers are subjects across the board in Indic languages has already been examined and debated (Hock 1990, Bhatt 2003, Butt et al. 2006); the consensus that seems to have emerged is that these were not subjects in Sanskrit but emerged as oblique subjects in later Indic languages such as Hindi, Punjabi, Bangla, and Marathi (Verma & Mohanan 1990, Bayer 2004, Dasgupta 2004). The question remains, however, as to the Aktionsart of such oblique-experiencer predicates across these different

branches of Indo-European. As one can tell, in most of the examples mentioned thus far from Indo-European language groups outside South Asia, the predicate in question is stative, expressive of some psychological state or other. However, given that oblique-experiencer constructions are varied and widespread in usage in Indic languages, are the predicates that figure in these constructions only of the stative Aktionsart-class in Indic? Or are they more varied in their Aktionsart profiles?

### 3. Aktionsart profiles of oblique-experiencer predicates

It turns out that, on closer inspection of the data pertaining to experiencer predicates, at least three different Aktionsart classes are instantiated by the predicates (according to Vendler's 1957/1967 and C. S. Smith's 1991 categorizations). The first, i.e., that of states, is expected in the case of physiological and psychological predicates, at least in Modern Indic.

#### 3.1 States

The Aktionsart class "stat(iv)e" for some oblique-experiencer predicates has been noted by Bhatt (2003), for which he cites the following example:

- (9) Uma-ko            sirdard            hai  
       Uma-dat        headache        be-pres.-3sg  
       'Uma has a headache.' – Lit. 'To Uma a headache is.'

However, the diagnostic that works for stative predicates in English, viz., that of resisting the progressive aspect, does not seem to hold in the case of state experiencer predicates in Hindi such as in the following example:

- (10) mujhe yeh      əččhaa ləg-rəhaa            hai  
       1sg-datthis    good strike-prog.-m.sg    be-pres.-3sg  
       'I like this.' – Lit. 'This is striking me (as) good.'

#### 3.2 Semelfactives

- (11) use      čoṭ      ləgii            (punctual reading, without ensuing state)  
       3sg-datinjury strike-perf.-f.sg  
       'S/He got hurt.'

- (12) use                    əčaanək            čhīṅk aayii  
       3sg-dat            suddenly            sneeze come-perf.-f.sg  
       'S/he suddenly sneezed / had the sudden urge to sneeze.'

#### *Bangla*

- (13) kəmol-er      buk      čhāt      kore            uṭhlo  
       Kamal-gen    chest [onom]do-conj.ppl    rise-past-3  
       'Kamal felt sudden panic/anguish.'

These are one-off events that **may or may not** result in an entailed change of state in the experiencer or the circumstances, comparable to an English example such as the following:

- (14) Kim coughed once.

### 3.3 Achievements

These are also one-off events, but they necessarily involve a significant change of state from “before” to “after” the event:

- (15) use kučh rihaayət milii  
3sg-datsome relief be.found-perf.-f.sg  
'S/he got some relief.'
- (16) Sanjana-ko uttər suujh gəyaa  
Sanjana-dat answer strike go-perf.-m.sg  
'The answer occurred to Sanjana.'  
(Bhatt 2003)
- (17) aaj hii mujhe yeh khəbər milii  
today emph 1sg-dat this news be.found-perf.-f.sg  
'I got this (piece of) news just today.'

### 3.4 None of the above – “mirror image” of “accomplishment”?

There are, however, predicates that cannot be satisfactorily classified into any of the three recognized classes that I have just mentioned without loss of an important semantic generalization – namely, that these predicates semantically **combine** a punctual event-component with a process event-component, but in a “mirror image” pattern of sorts to the pattern found in the Aktionsart category “accomplishment” – namely, a process-component culminating in an end-point – so that these predicates semantically embody a punctual starting-point initiating a process or state that may or may not have a clear end-point. This is to be found in common psych predicates with experiencer argument in Hindi and in Bangla:

- (18) (yeh sun-kər) daadii-ko gussaa aayaa  
this hear-conj.ppl. grandma-dat anger come-perf.-m.sg  
'(Hearing this), (her) paternal grandmother became angry.'  
(Line from a children's nursery rhyme in Hindi)

The predicate /gussaa aayaa/ is, at the very least, ambiguous between a semelfactive reading and an initiation-point + process reading: the grandmother may have felt anger for just an instant, or she may have experienced the initiation of the anger and the subsequent internal state/process of continuing anger. To strengthen the case for the second interpretation, i.e., the initiation-point + process reading, three diagnostic tests are applied here.

3.4.1 *Combined with the present tense:*

When combined with the present tense, such a predicate overwhelmingly expresses the initiation-point + process reading:

- (19) daadīi-ko gussaa aayaa hai  
 grandma-dat anger come-perf.-m.sg is-3.sg  
 ‘Grandma is (now) angry.’ / ‘Grandma has become angry.’

A punctual reading such as that of an achievement or a semelfactive without an entailed ensuing psychological state/process is, at best, an incomplete one for example (19).

Moreover, tests for activity and achievement predicates as used by Dowty (1979) as diagnostics do not work successfully for such predicates in Hindi, at least:

3.4.2 *Test for activity – no agentivity:*

- (20) ?daadīi-ko do ghāṅṭe ke liye gussaa aayaa  
 grandma-dat 2 hour gen for anger come-perf.-m.sg  
 ?‘Grandma became angry for two hours.’

The result is more natural, however, when the (nominative-experiencer) predicate expresses a state:

- (21) daadīi do ghāṅṭe ke liye gusse-mē thīi  
 grandma 2 hour gen for anger loc be-past-f.sg  
 ‘Grandma was angry (lit. was in anger) for two hours.’

3.4.3 *Test for achievement – result not great, \* for initiation-point + process:*

- (22) daadīi-ko do ghāṅṭe-mē gussaa aayaa  
 grandma-dat 2 hour loc anger come-perf.-m.sg  
 ? ‘Anger came to grandma in two hours.’ (Achievement reading alone)  
 \* ‘Grandma became angry and stayed angry in two hours.’ (Initiated-state reading in full)

*Bangla*

- (23) ?\*tin minīṭ-er moddhe ṭhamma-r rag holo  
 3 minute-gen within grandma-gen anger happen-past-3  
 ? ‘Anger happened to grandma within three minutes.’ (Achievement reading alone)

When the verb is made into a compound verb with achievement/semelfactive Aktionsart, the sentence becomes perfectly natural, since it now has a clear achievement reading:

- (24) tin minīṭ-er moddhe ṭhamma-r rag hoye gelo

3 minute-gen within grandma-gen anger happen-conj. gov2-past-3  
 ‘Anger happened to grandma within three minutes.’

The initiated-state readings for the examples (22-23) conflict with the achievement reading demanded by the time-delimiting adverbial phrase, /do ghəntə mē/ ‘in two hours’ in Hindi and /tin miniṭ-er moddhe/ ‘within three minutes’ in Bangla, yielding the (at least slight) oddness of such readings for these examples.

The issue, then, is whether there is conceptual motivation for such a “mirror-image” Aktionsart class of predicates. It turns out that there is some motivation from two mutually different theoretical perspectives already available to syntax and semantics, particularly to the latter in relation to argument types and the lexical nature of predicates.

#### **4. Support for the fourth Aktionsart type “initiated process”: Ritter & Rosen (2000), Ramchand (2008)**

An interesting typological division of languages has been proposed by Ritter & Rosen (2000). In this article of theirs, Ritter & Rosen propose an event-structure typology of languages, based on a distinction between endpoint or delimitation languages (or “D”-languages) and initiation point languages (or “I” languages), depending on whether (under an early-Minimalist approach to morphosyntax) Agr<sub>O</sub> or Agr<sub>S</sub> is the more “activated” head in the language in question. It is proposed here that this typological divide works at a less macroscopic level within Indic languages, to differentiate *predicates* in terms of those that signal an initiation point (with a subsequent process or state) and those that do not do so (e.g., simple state predicates, simple semelfactives, or simple achievement predicates). Since nominative stimulus/theme arguments are strongly linked with Agr<sub>S</sub> in theory-internal terms, the initiation-point semantics found in predicates that select such arguments is consistent with this. Since oblique experiencer arguments are typically not linked with Agr<sub>O</sub> in most Indic languages known thus far, the lack of a terminal point found in the semantics of these predicates is also consistent with this lack of a link.

The recognition of “init” and “process” as semantic projection-elements by Ramchand (2008) and their application in the elucidation of meanings of complex predicates in languages such as Bangla, using the nanosyntax approach, is already available publicly. In the case of experiencer predicates that express a distinct initiation point and a subsequent psychological or physiological process, these semantic elements can then provide clear justification for this cross-linguistically somewhat unusual Aktionsart-class of predicates. The working out of the nanosyntax of these predicates is beyond the brief of this paper, but deserves further attention and investigations.

#### **5. Conclusion: Experiencer predicates in Indic languages suggest a SIXTH Aktionsart category**

While more conclusive arguments await to be gathered to establish the existence of the sixth Aktionsart category that this paper has tentatively proposed, the Aktionsart features of

the fourth class of oblique-experiencer predicates at least in a few of the Indic languages seem to follow from preliminary syntactic tests as well as from the typologies of experiencer predicates that have been predicted on different explanatory metrics (such as those of Ritter & Rosen 2000 and Bhatt 2003). This paper has sought to make a modest beginning towards further nuanced investigations into the inner aspect characteristics of experiencer predicates in other South Asian language groups as well as in other Indic languages.

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