



Delexical Verbs in English and Kurdish:

(A Comparative Study)

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Abstract

This paper entitled " Delexical Verbs in English and Kurdish Language: A Comparative Study" is an attempt to compare both languages related to delexical verbs in terms of syntax and semantics. Delexical verbs, a set of common and frequent verbs, are the indication of an important group of transitive verbs in English language which take a core role in spoken and written language. This study hypothesized that there are several similarities and differences regarding delexical verbs in both languages. Delexical verbs have a unique structure in which the lexical verb is delexicalised, and some changes occur in the nature of the verb, especially on its meaning. The meaning of the action is shifted from the verb into the accompanied noun. The aim of this study is to make a comparative analysis of delexical verbs in English and Central Kurdish languages to find out the similarities and differences of delexical verbs between English and Kurdish (Central Kurdish).

Keywords: Verbs, Delexical Verb, delexicalization, Kurdish Language, English Language

کرداره ديلیکسيه کان له زمانى ئینگلیزى و کوردى ناوهراستدا: تووژینه وهیه کی بهراوردکاری

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پوخته

ناونیشانی ئەم تووژینه وهیه بریتیه له (Delexiacl Verbs) له زمانى کوردى و ئینگلیزیدا که تووژینه وهیه کی بهراوردکاریه و بریتیه له هه ولتیک بۆ دۆزینه وه و ناساندنی زانیاریه کان که په یوه ندىدارن به و کردارانه وه له هه ردو زماندا. کارى بیهیز بریتیه له کۆمه لیک کارى باو و زۆر دوباره بوه وه که ده رخه رى کۆمه لیک کردارى گرنگی تپه رن له زماندا که رۆلێکی بنچینه یی ده گیرن له زمانى ئاخوتن و نوسیندا. ئەم تووژینه وهیه گریمانه ی ئەوه ده کات که چه ند خالێکی لیکچو، هه روه ها جیاواز هه یه له نیوان زمانى ئینگلیزى و کوردیدا له روى کردارى بیهیزه وه، کردارى بیهیز یان نافه ره نگی پیکهاته یه کی جیاوازی هه یه که یه کیک له کرداره فه ره نگیه کان به پرۆسه ی نافه ره گیکردندا ده روات و هه ندیک گۆرانکاری به سه ر سروشتی کرداره که دا روده دات به تابه تی له واتاکه یدا، به شیوه یه کی روتنر واتای کاره که له کرداره که وه بۆ ناوه که ی هاوه لى ده گوازیته وه، سه ره رای ئەوه ش، ئەو کردارانه به وه ده ناسرێته وه زۆرتین دوباره بونه وه یان هه یه له زماندا، ئامانجى ئەم تووژینه وهیه بریتیه له لیکۆلینه وهیه کی بهراوردکاری زمانه وانى ئەو کردارانه له هه ردو زمانه که و ده ستنیشانکردنی خالی لیکچو جیاوازی کرداره بیهیزه کان له نیوان زمانى ئینگلیزى و کوردى ناوه راستدا.

وشه گرنکه کان: کردار، کردارى نافه ره نگی، نافه ره نگیکردن، زمانى ئینگلیزى، زمانى کوردى.

I. Introduction

In this study, delexical verbs in English and Central Kurdish (CK) have been examined in order to indicate their similarities and differences in the two languages. English language has been classified as one of the Germanic languages which means that it is a member of Indo-European language family (McWhorter, 2019), and also Kurdish language is a member of Iranian languages belonging to Indo-European language family (Windfuhr, 2009). Central Kurdish can be labeled as one of the main dialects of Kurdish language (ibid). Through this study a comparative approach is used mainly so that delexical verbs in both languages are examined and then compared with regard to their formation process and characteristics. The study consists of six parts which are arranged in this way. An introduction is given as the first part of the study. Part two is devoted to the theoretical background of delexical verbs while through the third part a general description of delexical verbs in English language is provided. Moreover, part four involves an investigation of delexical verbs in Central Kurdish, and the fifth part of the study is a

comparative part and it is devoted to show the similarities and differences of delexical verbs between English and Central Kurdish languages. The last part is dedicated to conclude the study. Perhaps this study is an important study as delexical verbs in Kurdish language, more particularly, in Central Kurdish have not been treated in detail yet, and information in relation to them cannot easily be found.

1.1 The aim of the study

The study aims at describing the delexical verbs in English and Central Kurdish as well as identifying the similarities and differences between both languages.

1.2 The research questions

The questions of the study are: Do English and Central Kurdish have relationship regarding delexical verbs? And also, what are the similarities and differences between both languages in terms of delexical verb?

1.3 The hypothesis of the study

Through this study, it has been hypothesized that delexicalisation of verbs in English and Central Kurdish occurs on the same basis in terms of syntax and semantics.

2. Theoretical Background and Previous Studies

2.1 A Theoretical background

The term 'delexical verb' which is also called light verb was first coined by the Danish linguist Otto Jespersen (1942). Kurtboke (2000) notices that the term "delexicalisation" showed up within the early nineties to allude to the fact that words, of diverse classes, can act together to create different meanings, those implications are thought to be collocational. He adds that nouns, verbs, descriptive words, relational words, and intensifiers can all insert into delexicalisation. He argued that the frequent words can be delexicalised that they lose some of their meanings.

Verarbeitung (2004) believes that the term 'delexicalisation' is the method in which words form combinations, ordinarily of two lexical items, some or all of the independent meaning of the primary items may lose while the meanings of the second part retain fully. The words which lose some or all of their meanings are called delexicalised words. Philip (2003) states that one of the most viewed characteristics of everyday language use is delexicalisation, and he says "everyday language of the native speaker is delexicalised to a considerable extent".

Bonelli (2000, p: 229) illustrates the process of delexicalisation to be "The process through which a lexical item loses its original lexical value and often acquires other meanings and other functions within a larger unit". In the light of this notion, the delexicalisation process can be noted on many verbs which have a high frequency in English language like "have a bicycle" the meaning of the verbs indicates (possess) which is lexical. On the other hand, the same verb in "have a bath" indicates the meaning of doing a bath and the main meaning of this expression can be found on (bath), not the verb itself. Thus, the verb is delexicalised (Eftekhari & Rahimi, 2011).

2.2 Previous studies

In relation to delexical verbs, several scholars have investigated the subject of delexical verbs, and a few studies have been done in the field of comparison of delexical verbs between two languages.

Suleinman (2022) indicates that EFL students can acquire native like communication accuracy by understanding the value of collocating delexical verbs and their function in expressing meaning. The study was done with the aim of determining the range of the errors that the learners make while using a delexical verb in a collocation. The investigation focuses on the four delexical verbs *do*, *make*, *take*, and *have* that frequently generate difficulties for EFL learners when collocated with head nouns because of their semantic similarity. The study's findings indicate that the L1 has a significant impact on how delexical verb collocation is perceived and produced. Participants in this study included 48 university students from Arabic-speaking backgrounds who are studying English at Al-Kharj Community College. Advanced level students were randomly chosen as the participants. The participants were all male Arab students between the ages of 17 and 24. Students who enter the English department at the community college where the study conducted must take an admission test to determine their proficiency in the English language. Students are divided into three levels by the admissions test: beginner, elementary, and pre-intermediate. The test was divided into three main sections that assess reading comprehension, vocabulary use, and English grammar. Only students who are deemed pre-intermediate are admitted to the English program; everyone else will either be admitted to the computer or business administration programs. The results of the tests have shown that the number of errors was higher than the number of correct answers. Furthermore, the findings also revealed that the delexical verb "do" was collocated with the fewest errors (23.52%), the verb in question "have" was collocated with the largest number of mistakes (64.7%), and the delexical verbs "take" and "make" were collocated with the greatest

number of errors (61.76% each). It seems that EFL learners have more difficulty producing the delexical verbs *have*, *make*, and *take* with deverbal nouns than they do with the delexical verb *do*.

Kittingsoin (2015) has presented a study entitled "Investigation into Learning Strategies and Delexical Verbs Use by Thai EFL Learners". The main aim of the study was to investigate a set of learning strategies that cause abnormal use of delexical verbs by Thai learners. The results indicate that the learners depend on some main learning strategies which are native language transfer, synonym and overgeneralization in learning language. These strategies lead them to abnormal or misuse of delexical verbs.

Al-Shemmary and Ali (2015) studied delexical verbs as a realization by Iraqi EFL university students with the aim of demonstrating the semantic characteristics of delexical verbs, students' performance while using these verbs, and classifying the mistakes and sources of the mistakes during the use of delexical verbs. The study hypothesizes that most of the EFL university students do not succeed using delexical verbs, and they are not able to differ delexical verbs from lexical ones. The results of the study show that most of the Iraqi EFL university students cannot use those delexicalised structures at the recognition and production levels. They also face difficulty in recognizing lexical and delexical verbs because of their semantic features. The reasons for learners' mistakes are related to strategies of learning rules and interference of the first language.

Shihab & Daham (2013) have presented a paper to study the confused nature of delexical verbs in English which is an error analytical study. The study aims at presenting obvious information related to a set of delexicalised verbs in English to gather information about the subject for Iraqi English learners. It is hypothesized that the learners of English language use delexical verbs instead of other verbs. The results of the study show that the use of English delexical verbs by Iraqi English learners is clearly problematic. Several reasons are found for that such as misuse of delexical verbs because of their semantic weaknesses, and the intensive relation of delexicality to other terms such as idiomaticity, collocation and phrasal verbs. It is concluded that about 76% of the learners have failed in differentiating delexical verbs from lexical verbs.

Alkhfaji (2004) conducted a study to compare English delexical verbs with Arabic delexical verbs while delexical verbs have not been treated before in Arabic. The main aim of the study is to investigate semantic and syntactic characteristics of delexical verbs in the two languages. It is hypothesized that the process of delexicalisation takes place on similar

basis in the two languages. The results of the study have shown that a set of points of similarities and differences is found between both languages in terms of delexical structure.

2.3 Delexical Verb in English

Among different classifications of verbs in English language by different linguists, Jespersen (1954) described a different group of verbs, named light verbs. They can be seen in many other languages such as Kurdish and Arabic. This group of verbs is named differently by different scholars such as light verbs by Butt (2010), supportive verbs by Dura and Gawronsk (2008), delexicalised verbs by Hill (2000) and lexically empty verbs by Live (1973). Guinda and Plaza (2008) claim that they can be called "empty verbs" or "thin verbs". However, among all these different terms used to describe this kind of verbs, light verbs and delexical verbs are the most suitable terms for those verbs because the two terms are the most used terms among scholars to describe these verbs (Geld, 2009). Delexical verbs like "take, have, make, do, and give" are the most frequently used verbs in the English language (Coffey, 2006).

Delexical structure can be seen as a particular structure in the English language, and based on their structure; the delexical verbs can be divided into four different structures like the following.

1. The expressions having multi words and including verbs as the main element of expression have become one of the topics to be studied in recent years. Most of the studies focus on the verb-particle construction (VPC) like "*put down*", while another kind of construction is light verb construction (LVC) also becomes the topic of research. Unlike verb-particle construction which consists of a huge number of verbs with a limited number of particles in combinations, light verb constructions contain a limited number of verbs and an endless number of co-verbal components. In order to form this construction, one of the light verbs like *take, give, make, have* or *do* is combined with a complement functioning as an object in which most of the meaning of this kind of construction is not on the verb, but on the complement (Stevenson et al, 2004). The noun taking place after the delexical verbs can be in singular and plural forms (Sinclair, 1990), and the structure is called delexical structure. For example:
(1) David gave a speech.

(2) She always takes a cold shower in the morning.

In both examples, the verbs are delexicalised and combined with a singular noun (speech, a cold shower). The core meaning of the delexicalised verbs in both examples is conveyed from the verbs to the following nouns.

2. Delexical verbs can be structured with the participation of one or more adjectives placed before the noun. These adjectives give more details related to the event. Using adjectives, rather than adverbs, is more common (ibid). For instance,

(3) He gave a quick lecture.

(4) I took a cold and comfortable shower.

3. A verb functioning as an object can occur after the delexical verb with an indefinite article. It is stated that such kind of structure shows the same meaning of certain verbs, for instance, the entire delexicalised structure "*have a look*", in which the verbs "look" takes the role of a noun, and holds most of the meaning of the structure, gives the same meaning as the verb "look". However, they have a little difference related to their meaning. For example:

(5) She gave a quick scream.

It means that there was only one quick scream while she screamed suggested that the event was not brief (ibid).

4. Another point of view about the delexical structure is provided in a way that an indefinite article should be placed between the delexical verb and the noun, and also it is believed that using delexical structure enables us to give our comment on the action by adding a descriptive word before the noun, more specifically when the noun is made out on a verb that becomes more elegant such as:

(6) He gave an interesting lecture. (Willis, 2003).

5. It is believed that the same noun accepts more than one delexicalised verb, and there may be a little difference between them related to their meanings (Sinclair 1990).

For example:

(5) Make a call.

(6) Give a call.

One of the characteristics of delexical verbs is semantic weakness. A lot of ideas describing the meaning of delexical verbs are provided by scholars. It is argued that some lexical verbs are weakened in terms of meaning, and the process of delexicalisation provides meaning to them. Another word is used with delexical verb which is mostly a

noun, and its meaning shifts from the verb into the accompanied noun. Furthermore, according to Verarbeung (2004), delexicalisation means a process in which words are combined to form a particular structure, usually two words; the first word loses part or entire of its independent meaning while full meaning remains certainly on the second word. The meaning-lost word is delexicalised and the process is known as delexicalisation. For example, in the delexical structure "*take a walk*", the verb "take" is reduced in terms of meaning because it is delexicalised, and the following noun "a walk" takes the main meaning of the entire structure. Thus, it can be called a collocation which means that delexical verbs could not be used alone without being accompanied by a noun or a noun phrase (Kumar & Charyulu, 2019).

Furthermore, a light verb is defined as a verb whose meaning is very weak by itself, but their meaning is conveyed by their objects (Altenberg & Granger, 2001). It is stated that delexical verbs show the reality that they are combined with functionally nouns which take the role of presenting most of the meaning of the combination (Lock, 1996).

Another characteristic that identifies delexical verbs in general is the high frequency of these verbs in spoken and written language. It makes trouble for the learners of a language at upper levels (Nesselhauf, 2005), and also the difficulty sources from the shift happen within the delexical structure that the core meaning of the verbs goes into the noun, and they make a different meaning from their basic meaning individually (Hugon, 2008).

2.4 Delxical Verb in Central Kurdish (CK)

In Kurdish language, a verb is defined as the main element of the sentence. It is the head of verb phrase which includes time and event (Khoshnaw, 2014). Based on the syntactic types of verbs, the types of verbs are recognized in Central Kurdish which are (Simple, complex, compound) (Zangana, 1989). Furthermore, (Fattah, 1997) argued that simple verbs cannot be found in Central Kurdish. The verbs in this language are categorized either under complex or compound because every the verb normally includes two morphemes. Kareem (2016) also shows his agreement with the notion of having no simple verb in Central Kurdish, and he believes that verbs in Central Kurdish are morphologically categorized into two categories which are complex and compound. On the other hand, verbs in the language are divided differently into two groups which are simple verbs and non-simple verbs while non-simple verbs consist of complex and compound verbs.

As mentioned above, those verbs in Kurdish can be lexical verbs and light verbs which can take part in forming complex predicate constructions in which a non-verbal element comes

together with delexical verbs side by side with at least one free morpheme. Unlike lexical/thematic verbs, delexical or light verbs are normally utilized with a noun. Complex verbal structures are often formed as a result of collocating a light verb plus a noun. Delexical verbs using in such a complex verbal construction are (dan 'to give' , Kirdin ' to do', birdin ' to take' kewtin "to fall"). For example:

(8) Minal – eke – an şer de-ke-n
 Child – DEF - Plu Fight(non-verbal element) IND- do- 3pl
 The children are quarrelling. (Kareem, 2016).

Claiming that delexical verbs are grouped under complex verb constructions, and complex verb is described as a construction in which a verb is collected with a noun or a suffix, and based on this type of constructions, complex verbs are divided into two types: nominal complex verb and suffixed complex verb. Nominal complex verb consists of noun and verb, and every noun position in this structure can be filled by a noun, adjective or a number. This collection of words mostly creates a new meaning in language. Some light verbs, such as *Kirdin* " to do", *dan* " to give" , *bun* "to be" are arranged under this section, and according to Kurdoif (1984), they do not have independent meaning but the meaning is conveyed into the first word in the structure.

In terms of construction, Delexical verbs (light verb) in Kurdish language can be categorized under complex verbs which are constructed with the help of a noun or an adjective (Marf, 1997).

It is also said that most of the verbal predicates in Central Kurdish are complex predicates, and one of the delexical verbs like '*kirdin* " to do" ' forms the complex predicates with a noun or another part of speech in the process of formation of the structure. According to this, a complex structure includes a non- verbal element that is possibly a preverbal particle, an adjective, a noun or a preposition, accompanied by an inflected delexicalised verb which has partly or entirely a vague meaning, for example:

(9) Noun + Delexical Verb ser birîn (head+cut) (to behead)
 (10) Noun+ Delexical Verb Xwardin pēdan (Food + give) (to feed)
 (11) Adjective + Delexical Verb amade kirdin (ready + do) (to prepare)
 (12) Adjective + Delexical Verb Bahêz kirdin (Strong+ do) (to strengthen)

- (13) Preposition + Delexical Verb ser kewtin (up + fall) (to succeed)
- (14) Preverbal Particle+ Delexical Verb ra kirdin (Preverbal Particle + do) (to run).
(Kareem, 2016).

It can be said that two of the characteristics of the English delexical verbs are true for delexical verbs in Central Kurdish which are (1) delexical verbs are semantically incomplete, and (2) they are phonologically null. Sometimes they are apparent, but they have only the role of making agreement.

Delexical verbs in Central Kurdish do not provide a complete meaning without combining with a non-verbal element. For example, the delexical verb 'Kirdin' "to do" as a predicate does not carry a full meaning before combining with a non-verbal element. On the other hand, light verbs in Central Kurdish, like lexical verbs, serve as a host for verbal inflection like negation, aspects, agreement, etc.(Kareem, 2016).

Along with the syntactic role, semantic weakness is found to be the feature of delexicalised verbs in Central Kurdish in which a kind of shift of meaning occurs from the verb into its company in the complex structure. High Frequency is also one of the most common features of light verb construction (LVC) in Central Kurdish (CK) (Akin &Bouveret, 2021).

2.5 Points of Similarities and Differences

This section is devoted to show the similarities and differences of delexical verbs in English and Central Kurdish.

1. The number of verbs which can be delexicalised is limited, and cannot be widened. The most common delexical verbs in English language are (Take, have, make, give and do), and they are the most frequent verbs in the language. In Central Kurdish, a group of verbs are considered as delexical verbs (mainly they are called light verbs) such as: *Kirdin "to do", Birdin "to take", Dan "to give" and bun "to be"*.

2. One of the most common similarities in both languages concerning delexical verbs is that they are semantically weak which means the delexicalised verb does not carry the main meaning of the structure. As mentioned before, delexical verbs are combined with some other elements of language, and the main meaning of delexical structure is conveyed from the verb to its company which is mostly a noun, for example:

- (15) Make a decision.

(16) Seîr kirdin. (look + do) (have a look)

In both examples the main meaning is found not in the verb but in the combined noun.

3. In accordance to the scholars and the speakers of the two languages, delexical verbs have the highest range of frequency among verbs in the two languages. This feature of delexical verbs indicates the importance of these verbs for the speakers of the languages as well as they have a greater use than among verbs in both languages particularly in spoken language.

4. The verbs that can be delexicalised come from a process of delexicalisation in which a verb is combined with some other elements in both languages. On the one hand, in English language a noun, prepositional phrase or particles can be combined with a verb to create a delexical structure such as *take a look, she had a talk*. On the other hand, delexical verbs in Central Kurdish can also be combined with a noun such as *Sernc dan* "to pay attention, *newêj kirdin* "to pray". In contrast to English delexical structure, delexical verbs in Central Kurdish can be combined with some other elements like adjective like *Jwan kirdin* "to beautify", preposition like: *Jêr Kawtin* "to fail/lose" and preverbal particle such as : *ra kirdin* "to run".

5. In relation to their contrasts, there is a difference in both languages that some verbs in English that can be delexicalised cannot be delexicalised in Central Kurdish. For example, delexical verbs like *do, take, give* can be found in Central Kurdish (CK) such as *Kirdin, Birdin, dan*. On the other hand, other delexical verbs like *have* and *make* cannot be found in Kurdish.

6- One of the great differences between English and Central Kurdish in terms of delexical verbs is that in the English language verb "be" cannot be delexicalised while it can be delexicalised in Central Kurdish such as '*Başbwn* "to be good" '.

7- In English language, delexical verbs come first before other elements used within the delexical structure such as "*give a presentation*" while it is different in Central Kurdish as the delexicalised verbs come last in the structure such as *xwardin pêdan*.

3. Conclusion

The concluding remarks of this study seem to support the insight that delexical verbs and process of delexicalisation in both languages are somehow related particularly

in terms of semantics because delexical verbs lose some or all their meanings in both languages. In this case, the meaning of the verb is conveyed into the accompanied noun. Furthermore, delexical verbs are placed within the most common group of verbs which have the highest range of frequency in both languages. Verbs like "*take, give and do*" can be delexicalised in both languages while other delexical verbs are different between the two languages such as verb 'to be' which can be delexicalised only in (CK). On the other hand, the combination of delexical structure is different in both languages as in English delexical verbs can only be combined with an adjective, but a preposition can accompany delexical verbs in Central Kurdish to create a delexical structure.

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