



Research article

## Argument Patterns in Telugu Complex Predicates: Noun + Light Verb Combinations

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### Abstract

Dravidian languages, spoken mostly in the Southern part of India, abound in multi-verbal constructions, which are now called Complex Predicates (CPs). A CP is a multiword compound that acts as a single verb with a Light Verb (LV) as an integral part. LVs significantly determine the argument structure and the meaning of the entire CP construction. They contribute a wide range of semantic values in combination with the preverbal elements of the CPs (Hook 1991, 1993, Butt 1995). Regarding Noun (N) +LV CPs, all N+LV constructions are not CPs. Noun Incorporation (NI) structures are a similar and wide phenomenon present across language families. These NIs are also composed of the same N+V constituents. Baker (1988) assumes a set of defining characteristics for NIs, which falls short for languages like Telugu and Kannada that have rich morpho-syntactic features, allowing multi-word constructions. The present study proposes some more criteria for differentiating CPs from NIs. The composition of the argument structure is also determined by the combinatorial possibilities of the constituents in an N +LV CP. The present study will also examine whether the N+LV type can be subcategorized for clausal arguments in Dravidian Languages, with Telugu data serving as a case in point. Moreover, it finds out what clauses the N+LV CPs subcategorize for and how the LVs play a role in determining the transitive value and argument/thematic structure of the whole sentence. This study would eventually contribute to the universality of CPs in particular and to the Universal Grammar at large.

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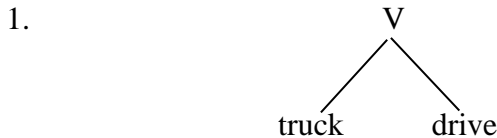
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## 1. Introduction:

Telugu and Kannada (Dravidian Languages) are very rich in Noun + Light Verb (LV) constructions, which have been referred to as ‘Complex Predicates (CPs)’ in recent literature. All Complex N+LV constructions are not CPs. It is not always easy to distinguish between an N+LV CP and a noun-incorporated (NI) structure<sup>1</sup>. First, we know that in an incorporated structure, the incorporated noun counts as an internal argument of the head V into which it is incorporated. Secondly, Baker (1988) observes that a noun gets incorporated into a lexical verb but never to an LV. But we know that most of the LVs also function as lexical verbs. So the first criterion would be a better one to determine whether it is a CP or an NI. Another difference between an NI structure and a CP is that certain nouns can occur incorporated or unincorporated depending upon the type of complement that the verb takes. For instance, certain abstract nouns can be used as count nouns also. And these nouns can occur separately with a determiner or some kind of modifier. In other cases, where a noun cannot be used as a count, it can still occur independent of the verb or alternatively incorporated into the verb depending upon the type of complement the verb has.

Lieber (1983) also makes similar observations about N+LV compound structures, although he does not use the terms CP or NI. Lieber says that a verb’s argument structure is a kind of feature which is subject to percolation. The argument structure of the verb percolates up to the branching node dominating the stems.



‘drive’ governs and thus assigns its theta role to ‘truck’ which finally becomes a synthetic compound. That the N (truck) can be treated as the object of the V (drive) is put across by Lieber’s concept of the Argument Linking Principle, which says when a verb occurs in a structure as sister to a potential complement, it must be able to assign all its internal arguments. In other words, the head, which is a verb, assigns its internal theta role to its complement, and if the verb is transitive, the whole compound will also become transitive. In order to see what nouns with what semantic features count as arguments of the following verb and what nouns don’t count as arguments, Rajyarama (1998) analyses the semantic features of certain nouns that occur as preverbal elements in N+LV compounds. According to her, the nouns that have – abstract, - countable; -abstract, +countable and +abstract, +physiological can count as internal arguments of the verb. On the other hand, nouns that have +abstract, - stative and +abstract, + stative, + physiological cannot count as internal arguments of the verb. In our analysis, we will take up this categorization. She, however, does not categorize these N+LV structures as CP or NIs. As stated at the outset of this section, we will use the argument status of nouns in N+LV structures to decide whether they are CPs or NIs. Nouns that count as arguments of the verb will be considered as part of NIs, and nouns that do not count as arguments of verbs are part of CPs. Consider the following examples

2. neenu bhayapaDDaanu  
I.nom fear.fall.pst.1s  
I feared.
3. neenu atanni bhayapeTTaanu.  
I.nom he.acc. fear.keep.pst.1s

I feared him.

In (2), the LV *paDu* ‘to fall’ is intransitive and thus functions so in this N+LV structure. Therefore, it takes only one argument, that is, *neenu* ‘I’. This means that the noun *bhayamu* ‘fear’ does not count as the verb’s argument. This is shown by the ungrammatical example in the following, which has two arguments.

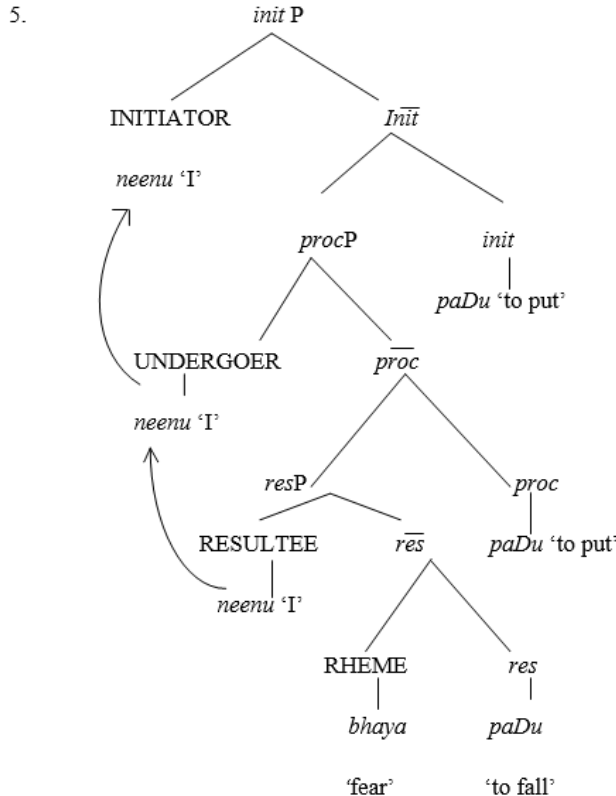
4. \**neenu atanni bhayapaDDaanu.* (the asterisk symbol denotes ungrammaticality)

I.nom he.acc fear.fall.pst.1s.

I feared him (Intended meaning)

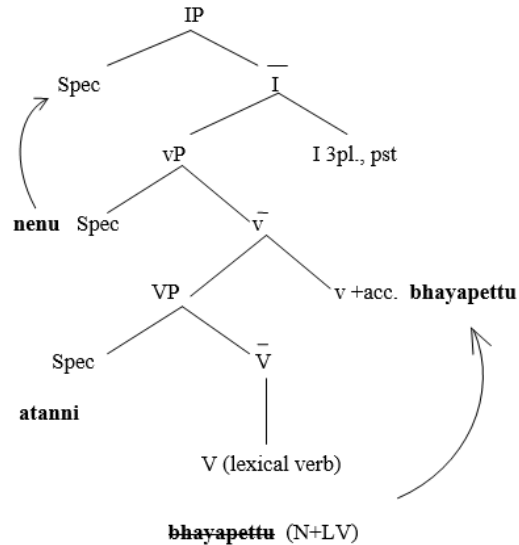
In sentence (3), *peTTu* ‘to keep’ is a transitive LV and it has two arguments, *atanni* ‘him’, which is an internal argument and *neenu* ‘I’, its external argument. The fact that the sentence is grammatical shows that *bhayamu* ‘fear’ cannot be its argument. So this shows that *bhayapaDu* or *bhayapeTTu* is a CP not an NI. The LV *paDu* in the CP of the sentence (2) is a verbaliser forming a verb out of a noun, thus *bhayapaDu* together functions as a verb while the LV *peTTu* ‘to keep’ in the sentence (2) is a transitiviser adding one more argument. However, in Kannada, for the example ‘*bhayapaDu*’, the causative marker *-isu* attaches to the CP to make it a transitive one. Here are diagrammatical representations of the sentences (2) and (3) in Ramchand’s (2008) First Phase Syntax, and the VP-Shell hypothesis proposed by Chomsky (1995) in Minimalist Program respectively. This diagrammatical representation of the constituents in CPs would tell us how the unification of the individual chunks takes place.

**First Phase Syntax** (Gillian Ramchand)



## VP-Shell Hypothesis in Minimalist Framework (Chomsky)

6.



Returning to the previous point, we will use another criterion to show that an N+LV structure is an NI structure. Some nouns can be incorporated or not incorporated depending upon the kind of clausal complement an N+LV structure can take. In a CP, on the other hand, the noun can never be detached. Consider these examples:

1. [nenu aameni peLLi ceesukunTaan**ani**] maaTiccaanu  
 I.nom she.acc marriage do.refl.pres.1s.comp. word.give.pst.1s.  
 I promised that I would marry her.
2. \*[nenu aameni peLLi ceesukunTaan**ani**] maaTa aameeki iccaanu  
 I.nom she.acc marriage do.refl.pres.1s.comp. word.she.dat give.pst.1s.  
 I promised that I would marry her.
3. [nenu aameni peLLi ceesukunTaan**anna**] maaTa aameeki iccaanu  
 I.nom she.acc marriage do.refl.pres.1s.comp. word she.dat give.pst.1s.  
 I promised that I would marry her.

In example (7), the N+LV *maaTiccaanu* takes *-ani* clause as its complement. Here *maaTiccaanu* cannot be separated; this is because *-ani* clause is a verb complement and it can never be a complement of a noun. Since the N+LV functions as a single verb, the *-ani* clause can be used as its complement. Sentence (8) is ungrammatical, because the noun *maaTa* ‘word’ is detached from the verb and the noun *aameeki* ‘to her’ is inserted between the noun and the verb, the noun is not incorporated into the verb. Hence, the ungrammaticality. As for sentence (9), the *-anna* clause can

be the complement of a noun. And since the noun *aameki* ‘to her’ occurs between the noun *maaTa* ‘word’ and the verb *iccaanu* ‘to give’, it shows that the noun *maaTa* ‘word’ is not incorporated into the verb and hence it can take *-anna* clause as its complement, which renders the sentence grammatical. These are some of the clear cases which we can use to show the difference between CP and NI structures. There are, however, many border cases which we do not want to discuss since our focus is mainly on CPs.

Now we will consider only those nouns which have the following semantic features as part of CP constructions. These nouns, according to Rajyarama (1998) cannot function as an internal argument of the following verb. Therefore they are CPs. Here are the two types.

### **Type -1: + abstract and – stative**

The nouns *maarpu* ‘change’, *amalu* ‘implementation’, *puurti* ‘completion’, *dagaa* ‘to cheat’, *adupu* ‘control’, *gurtu* ‘identification’, *allari* ‘mischief’, *lekka* ‘count’, *maData* ‘fold’ are some of the nouns which have these features . Here is an example in the following.

4. *atanu pani puurticeesaaDu.*  
 He.nom Work.acc completion.do.pst.3sm  
 He completed the work.

The CP in (10) is a transitive one having two arguments which are *atanu* ‘he’, an external argument, and *pani* ‘work’, an internal argument. The noun in the CP is just part of the predicate and not an argument.

### **Type-2: +abstract, +stative and +psychological**

The nouns *digulu* ‘being worried’, *kalata* ‘agitation’, *uluku* ‘fear’, *baada* ‘sadness’, *kalavaramu* ‘confusion or anxiety’, *kangaaru* ‘hurriedness’, *benga* ‘pining’, *ibbandi* ‘inconvenience’, *bayamu* ‘fear’ and so on are the nouns which have these semantic features. Here is an example below.

5. *neenu pustakamu dorakaledani digulupaDDaanu.*  
 I.nom book find.neg.comp worry.fall.pst.1s  
 I felt worried that I couldn’t find the book.

The CP in (11) is an intransitive one having only one argument which is *neenu* ‘I’, an external argument. The noun in the CP is just part of the predicate and not an argument.

Now we will list out the LVs that combine with nouns and other grammatical categories to form a CP.

## 2. LVs in N + LV CPs

LVs in this type are mainly verbalizers rather than meaning contributors. Some function as transitorizers forming transitive nominal CPs. We will now look at different LVs which frequently combine with nouns to make a CP.

### 2.1. N + LV CPs with transitive LVs

Some LVs always go with nouns and some of them with adjectives; they do not generally attach to verbs Nadimpalli (2016). These transitive LVs are: *kaTTu* ‘to tie’, *ceyyu* ‘to do’, *ekku* ‘to climb’, *paTTu* ‘to hold’, *aaDu* ‘to play’, *tinu* ‘to eat’, *pannu* ‘to contrive’, *puuyu* ‘to pour’, *pondu* ‘to acquire’, *moopu* ‘to load’, *visuru* ‘to throw’, *daalcu* ‘to bear’, *diddu* ‘to order’ and so on.

Here are examples from Telugu:

N + LV	Gloss	Meaning
amalu-ceeyu	implementation do	‘to implement’
gurtu-paTTu	recognition catch	‘to recognise’

Here are some sentence examples:

6. atanu nannu gurtu paTTaaDu.  
He.nom me.accu recognition.catch.pst.3sm  
He recognized me.
7. atanu niiru-ceTTu pathakamu amaluceesaaDu.  
He.nom water-tree scheme implementation.do.pst.3sm  
He implemented ‘niiru-ceTTu’ scheme.

There are a few LVs which can go with both nouns and verbs equally. These transitive LVs are: *koTTu* ‘to beat’, *veyyu* ‘to throw’, *tiyyu* ‘to take’, *peTTu* ‘to keep’, *cuuDu* ‘to see’, *paracu* ‘to spread’, *paluku* ‘to utter’ and so on.

Here are sentence examples for the LV *veyyu* ‘to throw’:

8. amma nannu tiTTeesindi. (V+LV)  
My mother.nom me.accu scold.throw.pst.3sn  
My mother scolded me.

9. naanna gaaru Dabbulu lekkeesaaru. (N+LV)  
 my father.nom money.acc count.throw.pst.3pl.  
 My father counted the money.

## 2.2. N + LV CPs with intransitive LVs

Some intransitive LVs always go with nouns and they do not attach to verbs. These LVs are: *cendu* ‘to acquire’, *baaru* ‘to become’, *tappu* ‘to miss’ *kuduru* ‘to be settled’, *tirugu* ‘to turn round’ *kalugu* ‘to occur or happen’ *tagulu* ‘to touch’ *maaru* ‘to change’.

Here are examples from Telugu:

N+LV	Gloss	Meaning
digulu-cendu	fear acquire	‘to worry’
lekka-tappu	count miss	‘to miscount’

Here are some sentence examples:

10. vaaru digulucendaaru .  
 They.nom worry.acquire.pst.3pl.  
 They got worried.

11. Dabbu lekkatappindi.  
 money.nom count.miss.pst.3sn  
 The count of the money got disturbed.

There are some LVs which can go with both nouns and verbs equally. LVs like *puTTu* ‘to be born’, *paDu* ‘to fall’, *avvu* ‘to become’, *vaccu* ‘to come’, *poo* ‘to go’ are some of them. The following are examples of these.

12. aame naaku gurtoccindi. (N+LV)  
 She.nom me.dat recognition.come.pst.3sn.  
 I remembered her.

13. aame ivvaaLa inTiki raavaccu. (V+LV)

She.nom today home.dat come.come.pres.3

She may come home today.

Now, we will look at the morpho-syntactic features of N+LV CPs.

The above data shows that the same LVs can occur both in V+LV and N+LV CPs. Only certain LVs occur either in V+LV CPs or in N+LV CPs. Now we will move on to the morpho-syntax of N+LV CPs.

### 3. Morpho-Syntax of N + LV CPs

In this section, we will examine the clausal and non-clausal arguments of N+LV CPs to understand how the argument structure is composed and how the case on the arguments changes depending on the LV.

#### 3.1. Clausal Subcategorization

Now we will look at N+LV CPs to know if this type can subcategorise for clausal arguments or not. We will also find out what clauses the N+LV CPs subcategorise for and also how the LVs play a role in determining the transitive value and argument/thematic structure of the whole sentence. We will first look at the *-ani* clause functioning as an internal argument.

14. atanu hyderaabaadu vastaa**Dani** prakaTana ceesaaru.

He.nom Hyderabad come.pres.3sm comp. announce.do.pst.3pl.

They announced that he would come to Hyderabad.

In sentence (20), the N+LV CP is subcategorised for an NP argument and a clausal argument. The noun *prakaTana* and the transitive LV *ceeyu* ‘to do’ together become a transitive verb and therefore take two arguments. The clause takes the internal theta role and gets an accusative case. The same CP becomes passive with the replacement of *ceeyu* ‘to do’ with *paDu*. However, the noun *pakaTana* takes a causative marker *-incu* to become a verb to which the intransitive LV *paDu* attaches and makes the whole sentence an intransitive one.

15. atanu hyderaabaadu vastaa**Dani** prakaTincabaDindi.

He.nom Hyderabad come.pres.3sm.comp. announce.do.pst.3sn.

It was announced that he would come to Hyderabad.

With the LV *paDu* in the above sentence, the CP becomes an intransitive one taking only a clausal argument. The *-ani* clause taking the internal theta role gets a nominative case functioning as the subject of the whole CP.



The same CP cannot be subcategorised for *-anna* clausal argument as it functions as a relative clause requiring a head noun following it. In the following example, the clause seems to be taking the noun of the CP as its relative head. That way, though it appears to be natural, the sentence is not grammatical.

16. \**atanu hyderaabaadu vastaaDanna prakaTana ceesaaru.*  
 He.nom Hyderabad come.pres.3sm.comp. announce.do.pst.3pl.  
 They announced that he would come to Hyderabad.

However, when there is a head noun for the preceding *-anna* relative clause, the noun in the CP seems more attached to the LV and not as a head for the *-anna* clause. The sentence thus becomes grammatical which we can look at below.

17. *atanu hyderaabaadu vastaaDanna vaarta prakaTana ceesaaru.*  
 He.nom Hyderabad come.pres.3sm.comp. news announce.do.pst. 3pl.  
 They have announced that he will come to Hyderabad.

In sentence (23), the noun *vaarta* ‘news’ is the head noun for the *-anna* clause. The CP takes the *-anna* clause as its internal argument, which has an accusative case, and the null subject *vaaru* ‘they’ as its external argument, which has a nominative case. The transitive value of the LV makes the whole CP a transitive construction. The LV *paDu* ‘to fall’ can render the same sentence a passive one, changing the argument/thematic structure and also the case on the arguments. Here is the example in the following

18. *atanu hyderaabaadu vastaaDanna vaarta prakaTincabaDindi.*  
 He.nom Hyderabad come.comp. news announce.caus.fall.pst.3sn.  
 The news that he would come to Hyderabad was announced.

In the afore-given sentence (24), the LV *paDu* ‘to fall’ renders the sentence passive taking only one clausal argument. In the sentence, the clausal argument, which has an internal argument, gets a nominative case functioning as the subject.

The *-annadi* clause functions just like *-anna* + N clause which we have already looked at above. Coming to *-Dam* clauses, this clause does not go with the N+LV *prakaTana ceeyu* but can function as an argument with other N+LV CPs. Here is an example below.

19. *atanu naa peLLiki raavaDam nannu ibbandipeTTindi.*  
 He.nom.mymarriage.to coming.comp. me.acc. inconvenience.keep.pst.3sn  
 His attending my marriage caused inconvenience to me.

In sentence (25), the N+LV CP is a transitive one with the transitive LV *peTTu* ‘to keep’. Because of the transitive value of the LV, the CP takes two arguments which are the clausal argument – *Dam*, which has an external theta role with a nominative case and the NP *atanu* ‘he’ which has an internal theta role with an accusative case. The *-Dam* clause can function as a subject with an external theta role when the CP is transitive. However, the clause becomes an adjunct when the CP contains the intransitive LV *paDu*. Here is an example.

20. *atanu naa peLLiki raavaDam neenu ibbandipaDDaanu.*  
 He.nom my marriage.to coming.comp I.nom inconvenience.fall.pst.1s  
 His attending my marriage caused inconvenience to me.

Because of the intransitive LV *paDu* in sentence (26), the argument/thematic structure of sentence (25) is changed. The *-Dam* clause is not an argument but just an adjunct. *Nee nu* ‘I’ takes the internal theta role with a nominative case and thus functions as the subject of the sentence.

Thus, the clauses can also be the arguments of the N+LV CPs. The argument/ thematic structure and case of the arguments are determined by the syntactic and semantic properties of the LVs used in a CP.

### 3.2. Argument structure of N + LV CPs

The argument structure of complex N+LV constructions makes an interesting study. The argument structure of CPs depends upon the combination of noun and LV and the context as well. All these decide the argument structure and thematic structure of CPs. All verbs take arguments and when these verbs combine with nouns to form a compound, the valency and the lexical semantics of the verb may undergo some changes. Root compounds are formed by joining more than one word whereas synthetic compounds combine a verb with an argument.

As discussed earlier, the nouns of type 1 and 2 can form a CP with an LV. Compounds like *gurtupaTTu* ‘to recognise’, *bhayapaDu* ‘to feel fearful’ are N+LV CPs, although Rajyarama does not classify them as such.

However, nouns which have + abstract and – stative semantic features can also function as direct objects with case in some rare instances in Telugu. Here is an example.

21. *neenu aa kashTaalannii paDDaanu*  
 I.nom that hardships all.acc fall.pst.1s  
 I underwent all those hardships.

Prof. Sudharsan (Personal Communication) says that the verb *paDu* ‘to fall’ is used as a transitive verb in Tamil in some sentences with an object NP argument, whereas in Telugu, in a few instances, it is used as a transitive verb as in (27). In Kannada, it is used just as an LV and not a transitive one. Here is an example from Tamil.

22. avan ennai paDattinaan  
he.nom me.acc bother.pst.3sm  
He made me suffer.

The noun *kashTam* ‘harship’ as in (27) is an exception to what we have proposed in some rare instances.

We have seen that nouns with certain semantic features do not function as arguments and are just part of the predicate. Now, we will look at those CPs and see how argument structure is decided in them. The requirement of number of arguments is decided by the semantics of the whole N+LV CP. The LV and the noun with their syntactic and semantic features constitute a CP that may have a different valence value from its individual counterparts. Consider the following examples below.

23. atanu caalaa kashTapaDDaaDu.  
He.nom very hardship.fall.pst.3sm  
He faced many hardships.

24. atanu itanni kashTapeTTaaDu.  
He.nom he.acc hardship.keep.pst.3sm  
He distressed him.

In sentence (29), the noun *kashTamu* ‘hardship’ and the LV *paDu* ‘to fall’ constitute an intransitive CP, taking only one argument, i.e., *atanu* ‘he’. On the other hand, in sentence (30), the same noun *kashTamu* combines with the LV *peTTu* ‘to keep’ to constitute a transitive CP taking two arguments, which are *atanu* ‘he’, an external argument, and *itanni* ‘him’, an internal argument. Thus, the same noun may have different valence value depending on what it combines with. Now, we will look at some more examples in which the same LV has different valence values depending on what noun it combines with.

25. pillavaaDu allariceesaaDu.  
Boy.nom mischief.do.pst.3sm.  
The boy made a lot of noise/ was mischievous.

26. neenu pillalni adupuceesaanu.  
I.nom children.acc control.do.pst.1s  
I controlled the children.

In sentence (31), the CP consists of the noun *allari* ‘mischief’ and the LV *ceeyu* ‘to do’, functioning as an intransitive verb. The CP takes only one external argument, i.e., *pillavaaDu* ‘the boy’. Coming to the sentence (32), the CP consists of the noun *adupu* ‘control’ and the same LV *ceeyu* ‘to do’ taking *pillalni* ‘children’ as an internal argument. The CP, in this sentence, is a transitive one because of the semantic value of the noun and, therefore, the combination.

Thus, the argument/thematic structure of an N + LV CP is determined by both the constituents of the compound. It is against the view expressed by Balusu, R. (2012), who states that in N + LV CPs, the LVs determine the argument structure of the CP and not the preverbal nouns. The counterexamples we have provided will tell us that the argument structure of N + LV CPs depends on both nouns and LV. The semantic and the syntactic values of both the noun and the LV together decide the valence value of the CP. In this type of CP, the LV functions more as a verbalizer than a meaning contributor. The main meaning carrier of the CP is the noun, and the LV, with its transitivity value, determines the transitivity of the whole CP, in addition to verbalizing the nominal element.

#### 4. Conclusion:

All N+LV structures are not CPs. We developed some criteria to distinguish N+LV CPs from noun-incorporated (NI) structures. Firstly, we observed that in NI structures, the noun gets incorporated into a lexical verb not to an LV. Secondly, since a CP is always one semantic unit functioning as one predicate, the noun cannot count as an argument of the verb, as we saw in the case of *bhayapaDu*. On the other hand, in an NI construction, the noun in the compound always counts as an argument. We have made a list of transitive and intransitive LVs and their combinatorial possibilities to nouns as well as other grammatical elements. The N+LV CP, just like the V+LV type, subcategorizes for clausal arguments too. The performative verbs, which are single predicates in English, are all N+LV CPs in Telugu and Kannada. There is a collocational restriction on this combination. The noun *bhayamu* ‘fear’ and the LV *paDu* ‘to fall’ share a sense of emotional state and, therefore, form a CP. The LV in this type is more a verbalizer and transitivizer than a contributor of meaning. Most of the meaning content is expressed by the noun itself and the LV makes it a transitive or an intransitive verb.

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### **List of abbreviations used in glosses of the data**

*	: unacceptable or ungrammatical
acc.	: accusative case
aux.	: auxiliary
caus.	: causative marker
comp.	: complementiser
CP	: complex predicate
dat.	: dative case
DP.	: determiner phrase
emp.	: emphatic
f.	: feminine
gen.	: genetic case
loc.	: locative case
LV	: light verb
m.	: masculine
N.	: noun
n.	: neuter gender
neg.	: negation
NI	: noun incorporation
nom.	: nominative case
NP.	: noun phrase
pass.	: passive
perf.	: perfective aspect
pl.	: plural
ptcpl.	: participle
pres.	: present
prog.	: progressive

pst.	: past
refl.	: reflexive
s.	: singular
V	: verb
VP	: verb phrase
1	: first person
2	: second person
3	: third person

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