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Telic events and definiteness in Hindi

1. *Introduction*

Telicity of an action is often described as a compositional phenomenon, depending on the verbal semantics and on the type of the object noun (Verkuyl, 1972). In this perspective *drink wine* is different from *drink the wine* or *drink a glass of wine*. The first phrase expresses an atelic event, while the others denote a telic one.

Some authors, especially Krifka (1991), argued that the influence is not only from noun phrases to verbal predicates but also from verbal predicates to noun phrases. In particular, in languages devoid of articles, a telic predicate would determine a definite reading of the object. This theory has been applied to Hindi too and upheld, among others, by Singh (1990, 1994, 1998). The aim of this paper is trying to show that it is not appropriate to assume that verbal predicates affect the noun interpretation in terms of definiteness.

After having analyzed theories supporting such interaction (section 2), we will focus on Hindi. We will study in which way telicity is expressed (section 3) and in which way telic verbal predicates influence the noun phrase reading (section 4). In sections (5) and (6), we will examine the notion of definiteness, showing that it depends on factors different from the verb type. We will give some evidence to prove that telic predicates do not make the object noun definite but referential, absolving some functions usually performed by articles in languages endowed with them.

2. *Telicity and definiteness*

A well-noted semantic classification of verbal predicates was formulated by Vendler (1957). Vendler displayed a four-way typology of verbal classes, based on temporal duration, termination, change and internal temporal structure of the action. In such classification verbal predicates may represent states, activities, accomplishments or achievements. “States” do not exhibit any change in the extent of time during which they take place (examples of states are *love, desire, believe, want, know French*). “Activities” are ongo-

ing events with duration but no necessary temporal endpoint (e.g. *run, walk, write letters*). An “accomplishment” is a gradual event, with a duration and an obligatory temporal endpoint (examples of accomplishments are *eat an apple, build a house, write a letter*). “Achievements” are punctual events, they have an instantaneous culmination and they are without duration (e.g. *arrive, win a race, reach the summit, start*).

These four classes have been organized by various authors into different subgroups, the most basic distinction being made between states and activities on the one hand and achievements and accomplishments on the other. It is an essential feature of state and activity events that they may be divided in any number of temporal segments and one will still have an event of the same kind (e.g. if *Mary walked in the park* is true for ten minutes, than a one minute segment of that walking is still an event of walking in the park). This fact has the following consequence: states and activities are homogeneous events. They go in time in a homogeneous way: every part of the process has the same nature as the whole. In contrast, accomplishments and achievements are not homogeneous: accomplishments have a *climax* which has to be reached therefore if one says that *Mary ate an apple in an hour* it is possible that she did not eat in the first quarter; achievements are punctual, they do not have duration, therefore the event cannot be divided.

Another fundamental criterion, used in order to distinguish the two subgroups (states and activities *vs* accomplishments and achievements) is the property of an event having or not having a temporal endpoint. Such property has been referred to, in literature, as the bounded/non bounded distinction (Jackendoff, 1990; Verkuyl, 1972), the delimited/non delimited distinction (Tenny, 1994) and the telic/atelic distinction (Garey, 1957; Smith, 1991 among others). Telic events are those conceptualized or represented as having an endpoint. Smith (1991) gives the following definition:

Events may be telic or atelic. Telic events have a change of state which constitutes the outcome, or goal of the event. When the goal is reached, a change of state occurs and the event is complete (Garey 1957: 106). The category of telic events includes events without agents. A rock falling to the ground from a cliff is a telic event: the final endpoint is reached when the rock is on the ground. To avoid agentive connotations I will say that telic events have a natural final endpoint, or intrinsic bound. In contrast atelic events are simply processes. They can stop at any time: there is no outcome. In other words, atelic events have arbitrary final endpoints (Smith, 1991: 19).

The main property of a telic situation is that of including a goal, aim or

conclusion. The goal is an inherent part of the situation, in this sense it is necessary. Thus, for example, a telic situation described by the sentence *John is making a chair*, entails a terminal point, namely that point at which the chair is ready. Until this point is reached, the situation described by *make a chair* cannot come to an end. On the other hand, a situation described by a sentence like *John is singing*, can stop at any point (in this sense its endpoint is arbitrary), it will still be true that John has sung. Hence, as Comrie (1976) states: «[...] the situation described by *make a chair* has built into it a terminal point, namely that point at which the chair is complete, when it automatically terminates; the situation described by *sing* has no such terminal point, and can be protracted indefinitely or broken off at any point» (Comrie, 1976: 44).

Since telic events are oriented towards a goal, they are considered to be delimited namely as having a natural endpoint in time¹. A sentence like *Mary ate an apple* describes a delimited event, since the act of eating an apple requires a period of time to be accomplished and it has a precise endpoint i.e. when the apple has been totally consumed. Instead a sentence like *Mary slept* does not describe a delimited event: the act of sleeping may go on indefinitely.

The direct internal argument is fundamental for creating a telic event since it “measures out” the action to which the verb refers (Tenny, 1994; Verkuyl, 1972). It furnishes the terminus of the event which is coinciding with the complete affection of the object. When it is totally affected by the verbal action, it bounds the event, endowing the verb with an endpoint. The “delimitedness” of telic sentences is confirmed by a battery of tests (cf. Dowty, 1979). For example atelic expressions allow for durative adverbials like *for an hour*, but not allow for adverbials like *in an hour*, while for telic expression the situation is reversed:

- (1) Mary ate an apple in an hour / *for an hour (telic)
- (2) Mary slept *in an hour/ for an hour (atelic)

Many authors studied telicity as a compositional phenomenon (for example: Verkuyl, 1972, Taylor, 1977, Mourelatos, 1978, Krifka, 1991). Ac-

¹ It is convenient to distinguish between “lexical telicity”, depending on semantic properties of the verbal lexeme and “configurational telicity”, depending on the verbal semantics plus nominal phrases which delimit the verbal process. Telicity is lexical for verbs such as *to kill, to born, to die*; it is configurational with verbs like *to eat, to paint, to drink* etc.

according to Verkuyl (1972: 97), telicity should not be considered as a not analyzable category inherent to verbs but it should be regarded as involving the durational qualities of adverbials and the quantitative features of nominals. On this view, telic value of a sentence can be altered by properties of nouns in object position: it is not simply a semantic property of the verb but it is the result of the interaction between the verb and its arguments. Taylor (1977) proposes the concept of definite quantity and indefinite quantity. Mourelatos (1978) evokes the count/mass distinction: like Verkuyl and Taylor, he states that when the argument is count, an event is expressed, and when the argument is mass, a process is expressed. Mass nouns and bare plurals determine non delimited events (3), while countable singulars lead to delimited events (4):

- (3) a. Mary drank milk for an hour / *in an hour
 b. Mary ate apples for an hour / *in an hour
- (4) Mary ate an apple *for an hour / in an hour

Krifka's analysis (1991) is centred on the interaction between the reference type of noun phrases (i.e. mass nouns, count nouns, plurals, measure phrases) and the event constitution (i.e. accomplishments or activities). He introduces the notions of "quantized reference" and "cumulative reference". An expression has a cumulative reference if and only if, given two entities to which a mass noun term applies e.g. *wine*, then, the sum of such two entities can also be described as *wine*. An expression has a quantized reference if and only if, given an entity to which a count noun applies, e. g. *a house*, then no proper part of the entity *a house* can be described again as *a house*. Krifka represents as a homomorphism², the mapping relation, holding between nominal reference and verbal predicates. He argues that an expression like *wine* is cumulative exactly like the verbal expression *drink wine* since every part of such event can still be described as *drink wine*. Seemingly, a cumulative term like *apples* yields a cumulative predicate, e.g. *eat apples*, since every proper part of the event *eat apples* can be described as *eat apples*. On the other hand, a quantized nominal expression like *the/an apple*, denoting an object with precise limits, yields a telic/quantized verbal predicate. In fact, if

² "Homomorphism" is a standard mathematical notion which found many applications in linguistics, e.g. KEENAN and FALTZ (1985), MONTAGUE (1970). Simply speaking, it is a function, from its domain to its range, which preserves some structural relation defined on its domain in a similar relation defined on the range.

we take as example a verbal predicate like *eat the/an apple*, no proper part of such event can be described as *eat the/an apple*.

The hypothesis that telic predicates are homomorphism explains Verkuyl (1972) long-standing puzzle about the way that bare plurals and mass nouns arguments are able to make a telic predicate to act as it were “durative” creating a process. If I say *John drank a glass of wine*, the noun phrase *a glass of wine* refers to an entity that has many subparts (quantities of wine of various sizes) and no one of these is itself *a glass of wine*. Since *drink* is a telic predicate, there is a homomorphism between the object and the event, mapping the argument *glass of wine* into an event of *drinking a glass of wine*, and mapping the subparts of the glass of wine into sub-events of drinking sub-quantities of that wine. In such sense, the telic sentence has no proper subparts that we can describe by the same sentence. Conversely, in the sentence *John drank wine for an hour*, the homomorphism maps some quantity of wine into a corresponding event of drinking wine, but, in this case, the sub events which constitute the main event, can be described by the same sentence *John drank wine*.

Krifka (1991: 49) supposes that the transfer is not only from a nominal operator to a verbal operator but that it can hold in both directions and that also verbal predicates are able to affect the meaning of nominals. He cites the example of Czech. Czech is a language devoid of definite articles³, and in Czech, a mass noun like *víno* means by itself “wine” or “the wine”. The noun phrase gets a different reading (definite or indefinite) depending on some properties of the verbal predicate:

- (5) a. *Otal pil víno*
 “Otal drank wine”
 b. *Otal vy-pil víno*
 Otal PREF-drank wine
 “Otal drank the wine”

(Krifka, 1991: 49)

As Krifka states: «As is well known, Slavic languages mark perfective aspect (or aktionsart; the difference does not matter here), whereas they do not mark definiteness of the NP» (Krifka, 1991: 49). According to Krif-

³ Even if in colloquial Czech, currently the demonstrative *ten* is often used as a definite article. There is a wide debate on the use of such demonstrative since the present situation seems to be suggestive of an incipient category. For more details, see CUMMINGS (1998); PUTZU and RAMAT (2001: 128-129).

ka, examples like (5) show that «aspect marking can distinguish between the indefinite and the definite reading of mass nouns and bare plurals, as the perfective aspect is compatible only with the definite interpretation of the object» (Krifka, 1991: 50). He explains this effect assuming that the perfective operator has scope over the complex verbal predicate. One of its properties is that it conveys the meaning that the event is “completed” and the predicate it applies to, becomes quantized. Since only with a quantized object, the complex verbal predicate will be quantized as well, the perfective aspect will force a quantized interpretation of the complex verbal predicate and the complex verbal predicate will again force a quantized interpretation of the object noun phrase. In (5b) the prefix produces a quantized expression and consequently the mass noun, once delimited and quantized, obtains a definite interpretation⁴.

With countable nouns like *hrušku* “pear”, the discourse might be a bit difficult. The telicity operator makes the object to be quantized, but quantization on a countable noun is compatible with an indefinite reading too, therefore both the definite and the indefinite interpretations are available. Conversely an atelic verbal predicate makes the object to be cumulative and “cumulativity” rejects a definite interpretation:

- (6) a. Jedl hrušku
 (He) ate pear
 “He ate a pear/ ?the pear”
 b. Snědl hrušku
 (He) PREF-ate pear
 “He ate a pear/ the pear”

(Krifka, 1991: 49)

Krifka’s theory is particularly persuasive and it has the merit of having detected a significant correspondence between the reference of nominals and the constitution of verbal predicates.

Nevertheless in my opinion, there is one point to clarify. When we talk about the transfer mechanism (from nominals to verbs and *vice versa*), it is important to keep in mind that there is an evident typological difference

⁴ The correlation between telicity and the definite reading is supported by the data from Bulgarian where the use of the enclitic definite article *-to* is in such cases obligatory.

i. Toj izpi *kafe/ kafeto (FILIP, 1997: 81)
 He PREF-drank *coffe/coffe-DF “He drank up (all) the coffee”.

among languages taken into consideration: the fact of being endowed or not with a system of articles. In such sense, English is obviously very different from Czech and generalizations holding for the first cannot be applied to the latter and *vice versa*. In a language endowed with articles like English, telicity can be created or ruled out depending on the presence or the absence of articles, absolving the same function as verbal prefixes in languages devoid of them, like Czech:

- (7) a. Mary ate apples (atelic)
 b. Mary ate the apples (telic)
 c. Mary drank beer (atelic)
 d. Mary drank the beer (telic)

- (8) a. Jedl orěchy
 (He) ate nuts
 “He was eating nuts”
 b. Snědl orěchy
 (He) PREF-ate nuts
 “He ate (all) the nuts”

(Filip, 1997: 64)

In cases like those in (7), the presence of articles is decisive in the sentence interpretation, not for the definiteness feature that they convey but for the fact that they make the noun to denote a specific and delimited entity. It is the specified/delimited quantity of the object that is useful to delimit the event, not its definiteness, as shown by the fact that indefinite determiners or quantificational phrases have the same effect:

- (9) a. Mary ate five apples in an hour (telic)
 b. Mary drank a glass of beer in an hour (telic)

Therefore definiteness of the object, by itself, is not important for the determination of telicity. The two notions are in relation but telicity is not a direct consequence of definiteness. What is important is the fact that the object is bounded (and “boundedness” is inherent in singular count nouns while mass and plurals get it by means of articles and/or determiners).

Given the importance of this concept for our argumentation, we will spend some word to define it. Jackendoff (1991) introduced the feature [\pm bounded], in both the object and the event system. Individual objects

(usually described by counts nouns) and completed events are encoded as [+ bounded] while unbounded substances (usually described by bare mass nouns) and unbounded processes are encoded as [-bounded]. Jackendoff explains what he intends as [-bounded] as follows:

A speaker uses a -b constituent to refer to an entity whose boundaries are not in view or not of concern; one can think of the boundaries as outside the current field of view. This does not entail that the entity is absolutely unbounded in space or time; it is just that we can see the boundaries from the present vantage point (Jackendoff, 1991: 18).

Hence an entity unbounded is an entity seen or conceptualized as without borderlines. Plural and mass nouns pattern together in various respects: they admit many of the same determiners and, significantly, the zero determiner. Moreover they can occur in expressions of distributive location such as *There was water / there were books / *there was a book all over the floor* and when they serve as direct objects of a verb such as *eat*, the resulting sentence is a process (*Bill ate custard until dawn / Bill ate hot dogs until dawn*). For these reasons, Jackendoff groups together mass nouns and plurals. The difference between the two is that plurals comprise a multiplicity of distinguishable individuals, whereas mass nouns carry no such entailment. Jackendoff considers plurals as “aggregates” endowed with the feature [+internal structure] and mass nouns as “substances” devoid of it. On his view, the two features, [± bounded] and [± internal structure], can be applied in the event/process domain as well: «A closed event such as *John ran to the store* is [+b, -i]; an unbounded homogeneous process such as *John slept* is [-b, -i] [...]» (Jackendoff, 1991: 20).

Now, in languages devoid of articles like Czech, it has been said, the telic value, induced by the prefixed verbs, should affect the object noun interpretation making it definite.

In my opinion, in this case too, between telicity and definiteness there is a relation, but telicity does not create definiteness. Instead it bounds, in Jackendoff's sense, the object. It provides boundaries to it. In the examples given by Krifka (5b), the action is represented as concluded: the telic prefix *vy-* gives to the verb *pít* “drink” the meaning of “drinking up” and consequently the mass noun object *víno* is figured out as totally affected. Therefore the definite reading is the result of the total affected condition of the mass noun. As stated by Filip (1997):

Just in case the Incremental Theme⁵ in the scope of a perfective aspect is an undetermined plural or mass NP, the assignment of the universal or totality ‘all/whole’ interpretation presupposes that there is some contextually identifiable bounded referent that is asserted to be completely subjected to the denoted event. Such a contextually identifiable bounded referent will typically be high on an individuation and definiteness scale (the note is mine) (Filip, 1997: 79).

Hence definiteness, in a language without articles, may be considered as related to telicity but it is also a product of the interaction of many semantic and pragmatic facts.

3. *The representation of telic events in Hindi*

Hindi aspectual system is particularly complex. It consists of the perfective and the non perfective aspect (progressive and habitual) but it is enriched by compound verbs too. By “compound verbs” we mean a sequence of at least two verbs, the first in the root form and the second regularly inflected (Burton-Page, 1957; Hook, 1974; Kachru, 2006; Kellogg, 1876; Masica, 1991; Shapiro, 1989):

- (10) a. *dekhā* (simple verb)
see-PERF.M.Sg.
“He saw”
b. *dekh liyā* (compound verb)
see-ROOT take-PERF.M.Sg.
“He saw”

⁵ The role category “Incremental Theme”, was firstly sketched by DOWTY (1991) suggested by proposals in HINRICHS (1985). This idea was independently noticed and formally developed by KRIFKA (1987). In the course of this paper we have indirectly talked about this notion. The central idea of the role Incremental Theme concerns the way in which the aspect of telic predicates (accomplishments and achievements) depends on their argument noun phrases. The meaning of a telic predicate is a homomorphism from its Theme argument denotations into a domain of events. In the case of telic predicates, this function establishes a “part of relation” mapping from objects to events, according to which: if x is part of y , then if a telic predicate maps y (as Theme) onto event e , it must map x onto an event e' which is part of e . For example, take the telic event described by *brush the dog*. If I ask to someone to brush my dog, I will be able to conclude something about the event of brushing the dog from the state of the dog. From this state I can see if the event is begun, partly done and partly not finished, or completed, according to whether hair of my dog are all tangled, or partly soft, or all soft. In this event, the dog is the Incremental Theme. The homomorphism claims that because of the meaning of *brush*, the state of parts of the dog and their part-whole relationships are reflected in the parts of the event of brushing it and its part-whole relationships.

where Verb 1 carries the semantic weight while Verb 2, although homophonous with an independent verb in the language, loses its primary lexical meaning to a large extent. It only occurs in the sequence in order to mark the main verb for certain grammatical features and additional items.

Compound verbs have received considerable attention especially for their *status* of event construction modifiers (see for example Butt, 2005; Butt and Ramchand, 2005; Hacker, 1961; Hook, 1974). In this perspective the Verb 2 (henceforth “light verb”), semantically acting like an adverb, provides information relative to the manner and type of event (e.g. inceptive or telic). There is a great amount of light verbs listed by grammarians. The most common, used for achieving a telic interpretation of the event, are *lenā* “take” and *denā* “give” chiefly occurring with transitive verbs and *ānā* “come” and *jānā* “go” mainly occurring with intransitives. Note the different reading if a compound verb occurs:

- (11) a. *rājā ne tasvīr banāī magar nahī ban pāī*
king ERG picture make-PERF.F.Sg. but NEG
to be made-ROOT make-PERF.F.Sg.
“The king tried to make a picture but he couldn’t”
- b. *rājā ne tasvīr banā lī*
king ERG picture make-ROOT take-PERF.F.Sg
“The king made a picture” (completed action)
- c. **rājā ne tasvīr banā lī magar nahī ban pāī*
king ERG picture make-ROOT take-PERF.F.Sg but NEG
to be made-ROOT make-PERF.F.Sg.
“The king made a picture but he couldn’t”
(Hook, 1974: 164)
- (12) a. *mai ne use paise diye lekin us ne nahī liye*
I ERG he-DAT money give-PERF.M.Pl but he ERG NEG
take-PERF.M.Pl
“I gave him the money but he wouldn’t take it”
- b. *mai ne use paise de diye*
I ERG he-DAT money give-ROOT give-PERF.M.Pl
“I gave him the money”
- c. **mai ne use paise de diye lekin us ne nahī liye*
I ERG he-DAT money give-ROOT give-PERF.M.Pl
but he ERG NEG take-PERF.M.Pl
“I gave him the money but he wouldn’t take it”
(Hook, 1974: 165)

The compound verbs *banā lī* in (11b) and *de diye* in (12b) entail completion of the action; hence, as shown respectively in (11c) and (12c), it creates a contradiction to affirm that the action did not come to an end.

Light verbs represent the action as terminating but, besides the telic reading, they add many other nuances of meaning to the main verb:

- *lenā* emphasizes that it is done to the advantage of one's self, it may connote priority of the action and it refers that the action goes back towards the doer (Kellogg, 1876: 189; Pahwa, 1936: 241). Kellogg compares compounds with *lenā* to the Middle Voice in Greek. Moreover according to Kachru (2006), *lenā* has the accessory sense of low ability in performing an act.
- *denā* indicates that the beneficiary is someone other than the doer and it signals posteriority and intensity of the action (Kellogg, 1876: 189; Pahwa, 1936: 241; Phillott, 1928: 65).
- *ānā* and *jānā* are directional light verbs. *ānā* describes the process in relation to its goal while *jānā* describes it in relation to its source. *jānā* expresses suddenness (Pahwa, 1936: 242), finality and completeness (Kellogg, 1876: 189) and a decrease of control on the action (Montaut, 1991: 40; Phillott, 1928: 65).

So for example: *phēknā* means “to throw” while *phēk denā* “to throw away”; *bhejnā* means “to send” while *bhej denā* “to send away”; *pīnā* means “to drink” while *pī lenā* “to drink up”; *lenā* “to take” while *le lenā* “to take away, to appropriate”, *khā* “to eat”, *khā jānā* “to eat up” (Kellogg, 1876: 188).

As Kellogg (1876: 188) stresses, it is difficult to find a term which exhaustively expresses the idea added by such verbs; with some approximation, such sense, as he states, may be sometimes expressed in English by a preposition adverbially used with the verb.

Compound verbs are considered to denote a completed action (with “self-benefaction” or “other benefaction”) and they are supposed to imply the total affectedness of their object argument:

- (13) a. *nadya ne xat likh liyā*
 Nadya ERG letter write-ROOT take-PERF.M.Sg
 “Nadya wrote a letter (completely)”

- b. nadya ne makān *banā diyā*
 Nadya ERG house make-ROOT give-PERF.M.Sg.
 “Nadya built a house (completely, for somebody else)”
 (Butt and Ramchand, 2005: 121)

- (14) a. us ne āj galtī se tālā *tor diyā*
 he ERG today mistake INSTR lock break-ROOT give-PERF.M.Sg
 “He broke the lock today (entirely) by mistake”
 (Singh, 1998: 183)

Such characteristics, as we have seen above, are claimed by some linguists to interact very deeply with the notion of definiteness. The interaction has been studied especially in Slavic languages but some work in this direction has been done for Hindi too, in particular by Singh (1990, 1994, 1998) whose analysis we will give an account in the next paragraph.

4. *Telicity and definiteness in Hindi*

Singh (1990, 1994, 1998) argues that compound verbs are functional in order to establish the definiteness of a nominal in a sentence and that they influence the nominal interpretation in a similar way to that described by Krifka for Slavic languages. She examines compound verbs in Hindi and she analyses light verbs as telicity markers focussing on different stages of a telic event. She takes three different stages for telic events: Initial, Final and Result:

- (15) a. vah res jītne lagā (Initial)
 he race win-INF EV(I)⁶-PERF.M.Sg
 “He started to win the race”
 b. vah res jīt cukā (Result)
 he race win-ROOT EV(R)-PERF.M.Sg.
 “He has won the race”
 c. usne res jīt lī (Final)
 he-ERG race win-ROOT EV(F)-PERF.F.Sg
 “He won the race”
 (Singh, 1990: 267)

⁶ In Singh’s terminology, EV(I) means Initial Event light verb, EV(R) Result Event light verb and EV(F) Final Event light verb.

Singh shows in some detail that the *lenā-denā* type is related to the final stage and it encodes a notion of completeness. In her analysis, a simple verb form never implies that the action is completed:

- (16) a. usne kal mūrti banāī
 he-ERG yesterday statue make-PERF.F.Sg.
 “He made a statue yesterday, for some time”
 (He worked on the statue yesterday)
- b. usne kal mūrti banā lī
 he-ERG yesterday statue make-ROOT EV(F)-PERF.F.Sg.
 “He made a statue yesterday”

The perfective form of the simple verb *banānā* “to make” in (16a) is not sufficient by itself to mean that the natural endpoint is reached but it is necessary to use a compound form of the verb (see (16b)). In languages such as English, a simple verb is usually neutral with respect to this information. If the speaker wants to specify that the action stopped at an arbitrary endpoint, he has to use additional descriptions (for example in the form of a determiner: “He made *some of the statue*”) or he has to use a different verb. Instead other languages stress natural or arbitrary endpoints in a different way. In Hindi, simple verbs signal arbitrary endpoints while compound verbs signal natural endpoints. Hence, one of the functions of compound verbs is to specify the completion of the event: they imply that the noun phrase denoting the patient refers to all of it while the simple verb implies that the noun phrase refers to some unspecified part of the patient. Singh directly relates such facts with the definite and the indefinite reading of noun phrases. Singh’s claim is that «the distinction between the CV and the SV⁷ form is precisely the distinction between definiteness and indefiniteness» (Singh, 1994: 228):

- (17) a. usne āj kek khāyā (par pūrā nahī khāyā)
 he-ERG today cake eat-PERF.M.Sg (but all Neg eat-PERF.M.Sg)
 “He ate *a cake* today (but he didn’t eat all of it)”
- b. usne āj kek khā liyā
 he-ERG today cake eat-ROOT take-PERF.M.Sg.
 “He ate *the cake* today (all of it)”

⁷ In Singh’s terminology, the abbreviation CV means *compound verb* and the abbreviation SV means *simple verb*.

- c. usne āj wāin pī
 he-ERG today wine drink-PERF.F.Sg.
 “He drank *wine* today”
- d. usne āj wāin pī lī
 he-ERG today wine drink-ROOT take-PERF.F.Sg.
 “He drank *the wine* today”

(Singh, 1994: 229)

The hypothesis is reinforced by the effect of compound verbs on instantaneous predicates like *win*, *break*, *lose*, *find*. With them, both simple verbs and compound verbs indicate completion of the event, therefore the use of one or the other does not depend on the intention to represent the event as concluded. Instead it should depend on the purpose of the speaker to mark the object as definite:

- (18) a. usne res jītī
 he-ERG race win-PERF.F.Sg.
 “He won *a race*”
- b. usne res jīt lī
 he-ERG race win-ROOT take-PERF.F.Sg.
 “He won *the race*”

(Singh, 1998: 182)

According to Singh (1998: 186) «it seems that CV forms have more than one function, and that these functions are ordered hierarchically: the most important function of CV forms is that they mark completion. In cases where this function is pre-empted, be it because the SV itself implies completion of the event [...] or because we do not have a gradual relationship [...], the CVs mark the objects as definite (as opposed to indefinite in the SV construction)». Therefore she concludes that «in all cases where CVs do not signal completion, they mark the object as definite» (Singh, 1998: 187). She extends the definiteness effect noticed by Krifka for bare mass and bare plural nouns to count nouns too.

With mass nouns compound verbs would be able to convert an unspecified amount in a salient, hence definite, quantity:

- (19) a. usne bīyar pī
 he-ERG beer drink-PERF.F.Sg.

- “He drank beer” (cumulative reading)
- b. usne bīyar pī lī
 he-ERG beer drink-ROOT take-PERF.F.Sg.
 “He drank the beer” (some salient quantity)
- (Singh, 1998: 185)

In (19b) the presence of the compound form would signal the definite reading of the nominal argument.

With quantized nouns like *two glasses of beer*, both simple verbs and compound verbs would entail completeness. In her words: «In the case of quantized mass nouns there is no distinction between SV and CV forms – both would imply a completive reading. However, there is a distinction between the two forms in terms of definiteness [.....]» (Singh, 1998: 186). Look at the given examples:

- (20) a. usne do gilās bīyar pī (*par pūrī nahī pī)
 he-ERG *two glasses* of beer drink-PERF. (but all NEG drink-PERF)
 “He drank two glasses of beer (*but did not drink all of it)”
 (completive reading)
- b. usne do gilās bīyar pī lī
 he-ERG two glasses beer drink-ROOT take-PERF
 “He drank *the two glasses* of beer”
- (Singh, 1998: 185-186)

Now, light verbs in compound constructions can notoriously have more than one function. The representation of the action as terminating at a natural endpoint is one of them. However they may convey other meanings. For example, as we have shown in section (3), they express the psychological orientation of the actor/agent since they describe the action in relation with a central point constituted by himself. They may indicate that the beneficiary of the action is the actor/agent of the main verb (when *lenā* is used) or that is someone else (with *denā*); or they may say in which manner the action is performed (volitional, casual etc.).

Hence, given all these meanings of light verbs, there is no reason to suppose that if they are not used for denoting completeness, they are markers of definiteness. When they don't work as completion markers, they can occur for marking many other features. The difference between *pī* in (20a) and *pī lī* in (20b) is similar to that existing between *drank* in (21a) and *drank up* in (21b):

- (21) a. He drank two glasses of beer
 b. He drank up two glasses of beer

The employ of the form *drank up* in English does not entail the use of the definite article. Definite articles may be employed in such contexts but they are not necessary.

In the same way, a compound verb in Hindi does not entail a definite reading, this is possible but it is not necessary.

Furthermore, if a compound verb entails definiteness of its object then we should expect that the use of a compound is banned with overtly indefinite noun phrases. But this prediction is clearly denied by those sentences, commonly used by Hindi speakers, where compound verbs take indefinite noun phrases as objects:

- (22) a. usne ek tasvir banā lī
 he-ERG one picture prepare-ROOT take-PERF
 “He made a picture”
 b. usne ek seb khā liyā
 he-ERG one apple eat-ROOT take-PERF
 “He ate an apple”
 c. usne ek cīṭhī likh lī
 he-ERG one letter write-ROOT take-PERF
 “He wrote a letter”

5. “Definiteness” is not “referentiality”

At this point of our investigation, it is useful to say something on the notion of “definiteness”.

What differentiates definite from indefinite noun phrases has been matter of some dispute. Several criteria have been proposed to establish the difference. One tradition comes from the philosophical literature, specifically from the classic work of Russell (1905) on denoting phrases. On this view what distinguishes *the* from *a/an* is “uniqueness”, namely the existence of one and only one entity meeting the descriptive content of the noun phrase (Russell examines sentences such as *the king of France is bald* as a conjunction of three statements: a. *there is a King of France*; b. *there is only one King of France*; c. *this individual is bald*).

Strawson (1950) rejects Russell's uniqueness implication on the basis that the referent of singular indefinites is unique exactly like that of singular definites. He introduces the concept of "presupposition": existence and uniqueness of an entity are not asserted by the sentence containing the definite description but they are presupposed, they are felt to be background assumptions. Presuppositions are taken to be common ground of the participants to the conversation. They are their common or mutual knowledge.

Hawkins (1978) extends the notion of uniqueness to plurals by employing the idea of "inclusiveness" that is reference to the totality of entities, in the set shared by speaker and hearer, to which the content of the noun phrase applies. To summarize Hawkins's account of the use of the definite article: it introduces a referent to the hearer, it suggests in which shared set of objects the referent must be located, and, finally, it refers to the totality of the objects or mass within this set which satisfy the referring expression.

As noticed by Lyons (1980) the previous theories fail to account for immediate situation uses of *the* like the following:

- (23) [In a room with three doors, one open and two closed]
Close *the door*, please.
- (24) [In a hallway with four doors, all closed, the speaker stands dressed
for a journey, a suitcase in each hand]
Open *the door* for me, please.

Here uniqueness or inclusiveness do not apply. Some factors in the sentence or the situation clarify which object, among several, is intended. Lyons takes this to argue for "identifiability" rather than inclusiveness or uniqueness. The notion of identifiability, strictly related to Strawson's presupposition implication, was developed by Kempson (1975). She claimed that the definite article directs the hearer to the referent of the noun phrase by signalling that he is in a position to identify it. She took the sentence-anaphoric use (where the definite noun phrase picks up a referent earlier mentioned in the same sentence) as a model for the interpretation of other uses.

A different approach to definiteness was proposed by Heim (1988). Her account, closely related to the "discourse representation" theory of Kamp (1984), describes definiteness in terms of the traditional concept of "familiarity" (Christophersen, 1939): use of a definite is permitted only if it refers to a familiar entity, namely well-established in that particular discourse. Instead, indefinites are used to introduce a novel entity into the discourse. Her

idea is that understanding a discourse is like keeping a file in which every discourse referent corresponds to a card. Every time a new discourse referent is introduced into the conversation, the file is updated with a new card. The association between definiteness and an “old card” on one hand and that between indefiniteness with a “new card” on the other hand, is the main difference between the notion of definiteness and that of indefiniteness.

In the literature several other proposals have been suggested (for a detailed overview on the problem see Abbott, 2001; Lyons, 1999). Anyway, as Lyons observes (1999: 253, 274), all the accounts of definiteness from various theoretical perspectives are different versions of the two basic criteria of familiarity-identifiability and inclusiveness. These concepts have undergone considerable revisions but «in so far we can still say that identifiability and inclusiveness have persisted, writers invariably choose one or the other of them and claim that this one gives the correct account. The reality, however, is that no-one has shown conclusively that a version or mutation of either identifiability or inclusiveness accounts adequately for all definite uses. Some uses still seem yield to only one or the other characterization» (Lyons, 1999: 274). He stresses that any attempt to find a fully unified description of definiteness in semantic or pragmatic terms is misguided. Following Lyons’s proposal, I will consider definiteness as a grammatical category on a par with tense, mood, number, gender, etc. and I assume that it is present only in languages showing an overt definiteness marking, a definite article of some kind. Quoting his words:

definiteness is the grammaticalization of identifiability. It may be that identifiability is an element in interpretation in all languages, but in many languages it is not grammaticalized. In languages where identifiability is represented grammatically, this representation is definiteness; and definiteness is likely to express identifiability prototypically (Lyons, 1999: 278).

A clear example of grammaticalization is in languages like English or Italian where definiteness is obligatorily expressed by means of an article system⁸.

In English it is ungrammatical to say *I ate *apple*. The noun *apple* cannot

⁸ The article system varies from one language to another. The main difference between Italian and English is in kind names: in English they can be bare while in Italian they have the definite article (compare *dogs are mammals* vs *i cani sono mammiferi*). For an explanation on the differences between English and Italian, especially in relation to the so-called “bare nouns”, see CHERCHIA, 1998; LONGOBARDI, 1994, 2001, 2005)

occur bare; it must be specified for the feature [\pm definite]: *I ate the/an apple*. But the choice between *the* or *an* is not determined by the verb type. Instead it depends on the knowledge shared by speaker and hearer in that particular discourse context.

In Hindi, a language devoid of articles, definiteness is not a grammatical category. Identifiability is not encoded; it arises as a result of pragmatic facts. The object of a verb may be familiar both to speaker and hearer as well as not. Since it can occur bare, such item is not signalled at any grammatical level.

Anyway, neither in English nor in Hindi, does the fact that an object is unique or identifiable depend on features of the verbal predicate.

The main argument invoked in support of the hypothesis that compound verbs entail definiteness is that of mass nouns (see example (19)): a telic predicate represents the object as completely affected hence if the object is a mass noun it becomes definite.

In my opinion, such hypothesis, widely spread in literature especially in regards to Slavic languages, lays on a misunderstanding.

First of all, a serious gap in most works facing this problem is that they do not clarify what they mean when they talk about definiteness.

Moreover, the fact that an object is totally involved in the event does not entail that it is definite, according to none of the definitions among those proposed in the literature.

In English it is not possible to combine a telic predicate with a bare mass noun: **he drank up beer*. It depends, in my opinion, on the fact that a telic predicate converts the mass noun into a singular count. A telic predicate makes the object completely affected by the action described in the main verb. It will bound its object converting it in a bounded entity (in Jackendoff 1991's sense).

Hence a mass or plural noun, by itself undetermined for quantity, becomes delimited (not definite!). As we said above, singular counts in English cannot be bare. They must be preceded by a determiner: *he drank up the beer/a beer/ a glass of beer*. The choice of the determiner will be determined by various pragmatic facts. One will be the degree of familiarity of the object: so, for example, if the object is familiar both to speaker and hearer, it will be employed the definite article; if it is known only to the speaker, but not to the hearer, it will be used the indefinite article (or most probably an indefinite measure phrase⁹ such as *a glass of*). What is important to remark

⁹ In fact the indefinite article combined with a mass noun can yield a taxonomic reading: *a beer* = "a kind of beer".

is that the employ of a determiner is required by the *status* of the noun. If it is countable it must be specified for the feature [\pm definite] and there is anything in the verbal predicate determining the positive or the negative value of the feature.

The role of the telic predicate is another. Doing the action of “delimiter” or “bounder”, it makes the object noun phrase referential. You can’t say *he drank up the beer (wholly)* if such a beer does not exist. Conversely you can say *he drank beer* meaning that he drank beer and not wine. In the first case *beer* is referential (and it behaves like a count noun); in the latter case, *beer* does not represent a real object, but it rather functions as a modifier of the verbal lexeme. *To drink beer* is in opposition to *to drink wine* like *to sell flowers* is in opposition to *to sell books* (Lazard, 2001: 881; Romagno, 2006: 206).

The telic operator is able to convert an expression property-denoting in an expression individual-denoting¹⁰. On this side it has a function similar to that of the articles. But telic operators overlap with articles only for this one. Many others are not shared. In fact the presence of a telic operator does not exclude the presence of an article. On the contrary, they must co-occur since telic operators are not able to specify nouns for the feature “definiteness”.

Hindi does not have a grammatical expression of definiteness. From this point of view, as we said above, every noun by itself is ambiguous and compound verbs do not say anything about it. They do not entail definiteness but “referentiality”. Now, referentiality¹¹, as Givón (1978: 293) defines it:

referentiality is a semantic property of nominals. It involves, roughly, the speaker’s intent to ‘refer to’ or ‘mean’ a nominal expression to have non-empty references –

¹⁰ A property-denoting nominal, e.g. “dog” simply expresses the natural property of being a dog while an expression individual denoting associates an entity to the descriptive content of the noun (see CARLSON, 1977 for the concept of individual and CHERCHIA, 1998 for the concept of property).

¹¹ I prefer to use the label “referentiality” instead that of “specificity” since the latter is often used for talking about indefinite noun phrases, i.e. expressions introduced by indefinite articles. The two notions practically coincide. Briefly, the difference between an indefinite specific and an indefinite non specific is that provided by the two possible readings of a sentence like the following:

- (i) Mary was looking for a pen.
She found one (non specific)
She found it (specific)

On the nature of specific expressions there is a wide debate (see for example; ENÇ, 1991; FARKAS, 1994; FODOR and SAG, 1982; KARIMI, 2003). Now in Hindi, we can safely assert that definiteness is not a grammatical category but we can not plainly assert the same for indefiniteness. There is, in fact, a use of *ek*, the numeral for “one”, that closely resembles that of an indefinite article of languages like Italian or English. To a deeper investigation, it seems that the use of *ek* is always associated to indefinite specifics but the problem is very thorny and it is not in the purposes of this paper to discuss it.

i.e. ‘to exist’ within a particular universe of discourse. Conversely, if a nominal is ‘non-referential’ or ‘generic’, the speaker does not have a commitment to its existence with the relevant universe of discourse. Rather, in the latter case the speaker is engaged in discussing the genus or its properties, but does not commit him/herself to the existence of any specific individual member of that genus (Givón, 1978: 293).

Thus, if my hypothesis is correct, in presence of compound verbs, the only inference we may deduce is that the object noun of a compound verb denotes a “discourse referent”¹² and that this fact will block incorporating readings¹³.

An important consideration needs to be remarked: obviously it is not the case that, every time there is a referential noun, a compound verb is used; but if a compound verb is used as a telic operator, since it entails that the object is completely affected, then there will be a commitment about the referential nature of such entity.

¹² On the notion of “discourse referent” see KARTTUNEN (1976).

¹³ Noun incorporation structures have been investigated in detail by semanticists in recent years. Much of literature on noun incorporation focuses on whether it is a syntactic structure (e.g. SADOCK, 1980; BAKER, 1988) or it is a semantic phenomenon (e.g. MITHUN, 1984; ROSEN, 1989). In these constructions, a nominal stem is compounded with a verbal stem to yield a larger derived verbal stem. MITHUN (1984), in her pioneering work names “lexical compounding” the process of noun incorporation that consists of the derivation of a complex lexical item from the combination of a noun and a verb to form a new verb. Another theory worth to be cited, is that of VAN GEENHOVEN (1998). Through a precise scrutiny of the semantic properties of West Greenlandic noun incorporation constructions, she argues that, like all narrow scope indefinites, incorporated noun and their external modifiers in West Greenlandic denote a property only. As such incorporated nominals are predicates, not arguments and a predicate contributed by an incorporated noun is absorbed by a verb. The process of ‘semantic incorporation’ as Van Geenhoven calls it, is put in relation to the narrow scope properties and the lack of specificity of incorporated nouns. Semantic incorporation is only intended as a sub-theory of a more general theory of indefinite descriptions. The phenomenon of “noun incorporation” has been studied for Hindi especially by MOHANAN (1995) and DAYAL (1999, 2004, 2007). With this expression they mean constructions where the incorporated nominals show typical characteristics: they are interpreted as non specific indefinites, they are neutral and they are not able to support discourse anaphora. See for example:

- (i) anu ne kitāb paṛh rahī hai. ?vah bahut acchī hai
Anu ERG book read-ROOT PROG.F.Sg. be-PRES.3-Sg it very good be-PRES.3-Sg.
“Anu is reading a book. ?It is very good”
- (ii) anu ne kitāb paṛhī
Anu ERG book read
“Anu read a book/books” = “Anu did the activity of book-reading”

These facts were interpreted, especially by DAYAL (1999), FARKAS and DE SWART (2003), as cases where the nominal in object position acts as a predicate modifier rather than a direct argument of the verb. The key feature of incorporation is that the argument does not introduce a discourse referent.

So “referentiality” is not “definiteness”. They are two different categories. There are some proofs in support of this proposal.

Burton-Page (1957: 473) reported the following contrast between simple and compound forms:

- (25) a. kyā us ne tumhẽ dūdh becā?
 what he ERG you-DAT milk sell-PERF.M.Sg.
 b. kyā us ne tumhẽ dūdh bec diyā?
 what he ERG you-DAT sell-ROOT give-PERF.M.Sg.

He translates (25a) as “Did he sell you *any milk?*” while (25) as “Did he sell you *the milk?* (*as was previously agreed*)”. No more explanations are given except the comment between parentheses in (25b) but the contrast reported is evidently a contrast between a not referential reading and a referential one.

Hook (1974) has a similar intuition. He lists a number of contexts where compound verbs cannot be used. One of them is labelled as “lack of prior knowledge”: the speaker can employ compound verbs only when he has presupposed the existence of the entities that his utterance describes. For example, a question like *who came?* in Hindi may be correctly translated with a simple verb, not with a compound:

- (26) a. kaun āyā
 “Who came”
 b. kaun ā gayā
 who come-root go-PERF.M.Sg

(Hook, 1974: 316)

According to Hook (1974), (26b) might be acceptable only as a question about a specific gathering: «in this case the questioner is presumed to have known beforehand that someone would come» (Hook, 1974: 316). He concludes with an hypothesis: «the opposition compound:simple verb in Hindi functions not only to express aspectual contrast but in addition performs the communicative functions which in English are associated with the opposition *some:any* and *the:a*» (Hook, 1974: 318). And he comments: «We leave the systematic demonstration or the conclusive refutation of this hypothesis to our successors» (Hook, 1974: 318).

Such hypothesis, in my opinion, is not to be rejected but it must be analyzed under a new perspective. The contrast between presupposed (with compound verbs) and not presupposed (with simple verbs) does not corre-

spond to a contrast between definite and indefinite, but to a contrast between referential and not referential. The behaviour of compound verbs in negative contexts confirms such theory.

6. Negation and referentiality

A well noted characteristic of compound verbs is that they do not occur in most types of negative sentences, in particular in the indicative mood. A number of authors have observed this distinctive feature (for example see Burton-Page, 1957: 472; Hook, 1974: 98 ss; McGregor, 1972: 104; Montaut; 1991: 30; Pahwa, 1936: 245; Phillott, 1928: 79).

See the following example:

- (27) a. *rām fenī *nahī pī gayā*
 Ram feni (cashew wine) NEG drink-ROOT go-PERF.M.Sg.
 “Ram did not drink feni”
- b. rām fenī *nahī pī*
 Ram feni NEG drink-PERF.F.Sg.
 “Ram did not drink feni”
 (Hook, 1974: 100)
- (28) a. *māī ne us ko paise *nahī de diye*
 I ERG that DAT money NEG give-ROOT give-PERF.M.Pl.
 “I didn’t give money to him”
- b. māī ne us ko paise *nahī diye*
 I ERG that DAT money NEG give-PERF.M.Pl.
 “I didn’t give money to him”
 (Hook, 1974: 100)
- (29) kyā us ne sabhī khānā khā liyā? nahī
 what he ERG all food eat-ROOT take-PERF.M.Sg.? NEG
 “Did he eat up all his dinner? no”
- a. *sab to *nahī khā liyā*
 all PTC.ENF. NEG eat-ROOT take-PERF.M.Sg.
 “he did not eat all of it”
- b. sab to *nahī khāyā*
 all PTC.ENF. NEG eat-PERF.M.Sg.
 “he did not eat all of it”
 (Hook, 1974: 102)

- (30) a. *us ne tās̄vīr nahī banā dī
 he ERG picture NEG make-ROOT give-PERF.F.Sg.
 “*He did not make the picture”
- b. us ne tās̄vīr nahī banā
 he ERG picture NEG make-PERF.F.Sg.
 “He did not make the picture”

(Singh, 1998: 195)

To my knowledge there is not any systematic study or exhaustive explanation of such phenomenon. All the attempts to give an account for it (see Hook, 1974: 201 for a full bibliography) are based on the idea of a semantic conflict between negation and compound verbs. For example Pahwa (1936) writes: «The idea of finality and completion is common to all of them. That is why these compounds, with very few exceptions are not used in the negative» (Pahwa, 1936: 240).

Obviously negation removes the telic value of a sentence (see Verkuyl, 1993: 163-164).

However, the idea of completion by itself does not have a blocking effect on the use of negation, in fact, as stressed by Hook, in some languages telic predicates can be plainly negated (e.g. Eng. *he ate up the apple/ he didn't eat up the apple*).

It is true. Nevertheless we shall not forget the obvious fact that Hindi is a different language from English. There are many variables to take into account and probably English verb particles and Hindi light verbs do not fully match. We said that in Hindi the use of compound verbs is triggered by the commitment that the action has achieved its natural endpoint, coinciding with the complete affection of the object when there is one. In this case, the object will be supposed to exist. On the other hand, if a negation occurs, the action does not achieve the natural endpoint and the use of the compound verb will be pragmatically infelicitous. Moreover it will not be possible to infer anything about the existence of the entity denoted by the object noun.

Negation decreases the degree of its referentiality¹⁴ and such absence of referentiality is associated to the use of a simple verb.

There are some contexts where negation and compound verbs can co-occur. Such exceptions may be useful for a better understanding of the phenomenon. Burton-Page (1954: 472) refers that negative particles are restricted to a “particular denial” illustrated by the following contrast simple:compound:

- (31) a. us ne mujhe dūdh *nabī becā*
 he ERG I-DAT milk NEG sell-PERF.M.Sg.
 b. us ne mujhe dūdh *nabī bec diyā*
 he ERG I-DAT milk NEG sell-ROOT give-PERF.M.Sg.
 c. us ne mujhe dūdh *bec to nabī diyā*, de hī diyā
 he ERG I-DAT milk sell-ROOT PTC.ENF. NEG give-PERF.M.Sg.,
 give-ROOT PTC.ENF. give- PERF.M.Sg.
 (Burton-Page, 1954: 472)

Burton-Page gives the following translations for the three sentences: (31a) “He didn’t sell me any milk (*but I bought some butter*)”; (31b) “He hasn’t sold me the milk (*yet, but I’m expecting him soon*); (31c) “He didn’t sell me the milk, he *gave* it to me”. Clearly the difference between the simple form

¹⁴ For example, GIVÓN (1984: 331) groups negation with the irrealis modality rather than with the realis modality with the purpose of predicting the referentiality of nominal argument (but see also HOPPER and THOMPSON, 1980: 276 among others). Under the scope of negation indefinite arguments are interpreted as non referential. Look at the following example:

- (i) John met a stranger
 $\exists x$ (stranger(x) \wedge met(John, x))
 ‘There is some x such that x is stranger and John met x’
 (ii) John didn’t meet a stranger
 a. $\neg \exists x$ (stranger(x) \wedge met(John, x))
 ‘It is not the case that x is stranger and John met x’ (non referential reading: the existential quantifier has narrow scope relative to the negation operator)
 b. $\exists x$ (stranger(x) \wedge \neg met(John, x))
 ‘There is some x such that x is a stranger and it is not the case that John met x’ (referential reading: the existential quantifier has wide scope over the negation operator).
 (LYONS, 1999: 169)

While in an affirmative sentence the indefinites are always referential, under the scope of negation they are not.

KARTTUNEN (1976: 367) claims that indefinites in negated sentences are not able to introduce discourse referents:

- (iii) Bill saw a unicorn. The unicorn has a gold mine.
 (iv) Bill didn’t see a unicorn.*The unicorn has a gold mine.

While in an affirmative sentence they are referential, under the scope of negation they are not.

(31a) and the compound forms (31b, 31c) is a difference of scope reading and it involves a different degree of referentiality of the object noun. With the simple verb, the negation has narrow scope over the object *dūdh* yielding a non specific interpretation. Instead with the compound forms, the negation has wide scope and *dūdh* gets a referential interpretation according to which the speaker has a specific milk in mind. The difference between (31b) and (31c) is produced by the position of the negative particle *nahī̃*: in the latter sentence it negates the verbal root *bec*.

In this particular case, it seems that the use of the compound form is associated with the referentiality of the noun. The compound form produces the meaning that there exists an amount of milk to which the action does not apply. What is in discussion is the action by itself, not the object whose existence is assumed.

Another interesting exception corroborating my hypothesis has been firstly individuated by Pahwa (1936: 240). It is in interrogative sentences expecting a positive answer:

- (32) *ardalī ko na bhej dū̃?*
 orderly DAT NEG send-ROOT give-SUBJ.1Sg.
 “Shall I not send the orderly?” (I hope that you will say “yes”)
 (Pahwa, 1936: 240)

In this case too, since a compound verb is used, the action is supposed to reach the end and the object *ardalī* is supposed to be referential.

The same explanation can be adduced in order to account for the availability of compound verbs in negated conditional sentences with *jab tak* “until”:

- (33) *jab tak un ke hāth kā kaur na pā letī khaṛī tāktī rahtī*
 until those GEN hand GEN morsel NEG get-ROOT take-PART.
 PR.F.Sg. standing star-PART.PR.F.Sg. PROGR.PART.PR.F.Sg.
 “She would just stand there staring in front of her until she got a
 piece from their hand”
 (Hook, 1974: 217)

The compound form *pā letī* may be negated since the negation does not remove the telic feature of the predicate and the specific reference of the object. In fact the action in the sentence with *jab tak* is presumed to be fulfilled.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, I propose to revise the theories which consider the event type of the verbal predicate and the definite reading of the noun phrase object as directly related.

My claim is that telicity only entails complete affection of the object hence its referentiality, not its definiteness. Telic predicates imply that their object has a discourse referent. Such referent may be definite as well as not, but it depends on factors (like the fact of being identifiable to speaker and hearer) having nothing to do with the event type constitution of the verb.

Referentiality and definiteness are two different categories and they are not grammatically encoded in all languages of the world. As a consequence, I suggest to distinguish languages endowed with articles from languages devoid of them. In languages of the first type, telicity is a compositional phenomenon since the kind of nominal reference and in particular the presence or the absence of a determiner can make the difference in the event constitution (*drink wine vs drink the wine; eat apples vs eat the apples*).

In languages where noun phrases may occur bare, it is obvious that they will not influence the event type constitution when they are not introduced by determiner phrases. On the other hand, the verbal predicate affects the noun interpretation but only in relation to the feature “referentiality”. This hypothesis is supported by Hindi data, where telic events, realized by means of compound verbs, yield a wide scope reading on the noun phrase object, prevent an incorporated reading and cannot be used in negative contexts.

As a result of my analysis, compound verbs, and in general telicity operators, share a quality with articles: it is the ability to endow nouns with referentiality (and not with definiteness!) and to make them working as arguments.

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