

LEXICAL ASPECT IN MARATHI  
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## 1. Introduction

This paper explores the lexical aspect of Marathi verbs by examining how different verb classes inherently encode aspectual meaning. Lexical aspect which is also known as Aktionsart refers to the inherent temporal structure of events, states and processes as encoded in semantics of verbs. The study of lexical aspects has evolved since Vendler's (1967) four way classification of verbs into states, activities, accomplishments and achievements. Many other scholars have also contributed to the event types.

Utilizing a dataset comprising 105 verbs selected from Abbi's verb list and intuitive judgment, I apply various diagnostic tests to classify these verbs into aspectual categories. The analysis follows the frameworks of Vendler (1967), Dowty (1979), and Croft (2012), combining their texts and event types to refine our understanding of Marathi verb behavior. Since, some of the test types were not fitting for Marathi language I have created my own tests.

## 2. Methodology

To conduct this analysis, I selected 105 Marathi verbs, primarily from Abbi's verb list. I ensured a balanced representation of different aspectual categories, including states, activities, accomplishments, achievements, and semelfactives. Special attention was given to dative-subject predicates. The analysis started with simple verb constructions before moving to complex predicates and light verbs.

## 3. Diagnostic Tests

To classify these verbs, I applied various linguistic tests, including:

1. Imperative (Can the verb be used in a command?) - If a verb can appear in an imperative construction, it typically indicates that the verb is dynamic rather than stative.
2. Progressive test (-t ahe or hot ahe)
3. Agentivity test (Does the verb allow intentional actions? – mud:dam)
4. Habituality test (-karto or use of roz)
5. Pseudocleft test (ram ne kaj kela? ram g<sup>h</sup>ari gela)
6. Force test (Can the action be forced? – tjane tjala jajla dzəbərdəsti keli)
7. "In X time" test (X mintat – Can the event happen within a specific time?)
8. Entailment tests (X is V-ing entails X has V-ed / V for an hour entails at all times in the hour)
9. Stop test (t<sup>h</sup>ambəvṇe)
10. "For an hour" test (Can the verb express duration?)
11. Finish test (səmpəvṇe)

12. Almost test (dʒəvəlpas)
13. Again Test pun<sup>h</sup>a
14. Punctuality test (At X time)
15. Reversibility test (Can the action be undone?)

By applying these tests, I analyze how Marathi verbs encode aspectual meaning and what this reveals about their classification.

## 4. Classification of Event types in Marathi

### 4.1. States

Pure states strongly resist imperative forms because they involve non-controllable conditions. The ungrammaticality of imperatives with pure states shows that they denote properties or relations that cannot be voluntarily initiated or controlled. Unlike activities, accomplishments, or achievements, states lack dynamicity as they persist over time without requiring external input to maintain them.

For example, the following imperative sentence is ungrammatical because being someone's sister is an inherent relation that cannot be initiated through a command.

\*1) ti = tʃi          bəhin as!  
       3FSG = GEN    sister be.IMP  
       Be her sister.

2) savəd<sup>h</sup> raha  
       careful stay.IMP  
       Be careful

The imperative form conflicts with the non controllable nature of the state.

Some stage-level states or also known as interval states, however, can be volitionally controlled and may accept imperatives. Croft (2012) refers to these Inherent States, which show permanent properties or relations that can be voluntarily initiated or terminated. Examples of inherent states include *mərat<sup>h</sup>i əsɳe* (*to be Marathi*) and *untʃ əsɳe* (*to be tall*).

In contrast, Temporary/ Interval State represent conditions that hold for a limited duration and can change. They are compatible with temporal modifiers and can appear with adverbials indicating onset or continuation. For example,

3) to          ədʒun    adʒari    ahe  
       3MSG    still          sick        be.PRES  
       He is still sick.

States do not exhibit the dynamic temporal structure found in other event types.

4) ma=la      te      p<sup>h</sup>ul      avəɖ-tə

1SG=DAT that flower like-HAB  
I like that flower.

With a singular, definite object (that flower), the sentence (4) expresses stative reading, indicating a continuous state of liking that holds uniformly across time. Since states already express continuing conditions, habitual markers like *roz* (daily) or *-karto* may trigger special interpretations. Rather than indicating repeated instances of “liking”, they emphasize the unwavering or consistent nature of the state.

?5) *to roz ti=la avəɖ-to*  
3MSG daily 3FSG=GEN like-HAB  
He likes her every day.

Here, the interpretation shifts to “he consistently likes her” or “his liking for her never wavers”.

States resist modification by *ərdəvət* (partially completed) test because they lack internal structures that can be partially completed. Additionally, unlike accomplishments and achievements, states cannot combine with “X minutat” (in X minutes) phrases.

\*6) *to vis mint=at hudʃar ho-to*  
3MSG twenty minutes =LOC intelligent be-PST  
He was intelligent in twenty minutes.

This sentence is ungrammatical because intelligence is a state, not an event that can be completed within a time frame.

\*7) *ma = la he mahit asa-t ahe*  
1SG =DAT this known be-PROG be.PRES  
Intended: I am knowing this.

8) *mi ʃa|e-t dʒa-t ahe*  
I school-LOC go-PROG be.PRES  
I am going to school

The stative verb is highly resistant to the imperfective aspect. Sentence (7) sounds unnatural or ungrammatical because knowledge is conceptualized as a stable state rather than an ongoing process. In contrast, “*dʒane*” goes naturally in imperfective aspect.

?9) *mi he mud:dam mahit ke-lə*  
1SG this deliberately know do-PST  
Intended: I deliberately came to know this.

10) *mi mud:dam ʃa| =et dʒa-to*  
1SG deliberately school=LOC go-HAB  
I deliberately go to school

The stative verb “mahit əsne” cannot typically occur with the adverb “mud:dam” (deliberately) as seen in (9) because knowledge states are not typically under volitional control. The construction becomes marginally acceptable only if reinterpreted as deliberately acquiring knowledge. dʒane naturally occurs with “mud:dam” as in (10) because going is a controllable action.

khuf əsne (be happy), avədnə (to like), bʰiti vatne (to feel afraid), mahit əsne (to be aware), visvəs əsne (to trust), tʰevlele əsne (to be kept), səmədʒəne (to understand), rahne (to stay), dʒəgəne (to live) are some of the examples of stative verbs.

If a verb in Marathi resists imperfective aspect constructions, deliberate action markers, imperative forms, bounded time expressions, and partial completion modifications, then it is likely a stative verb denoting a state or condition rather than an action or change.

#### 4.1.1. Dative Subject Predicates

mahit asne which functions as an inherent state, behaves differently from typical nominative subject constructions. Similarly, avədnə (to like) and gərdʒ asne (to need) follow patterns distinctive to experiencer oriented predicates. I have also included disne (to see) which shows that there is interaction between perception and dative marking. disne is not something I can control it is something which happens involuntarily to me. These verbs consistently appear with the dative case marker “-la” on the subject as seen in məla (to me), tula (to you), tjala (to him).

I observed that most dative subjects are classified as either Inherent States or Transitory States. This confirms my hypothesis about the correlation between dative case marking and stativity in Marathi. For instance, while checking mahit asne (to know) and avədnə (to like), I found they resist modification with frame adverbials like X minitat (in a minute) which show atelicity.

Dative Subject systematically reject modification with volitional adverbs mud:dam (deliberately). This confirms that these predicates involve experiences rather than volitional actions. Dative subject construction often expresses psychological or mental states. They show internal experiences which are not externally observable like aʰəvəne (to remember) and vatne (to feel). It creates a different experiencer centered perspective on events. Some verbs allow alternation between dative and nominative subjects. There are two see verbs in Marathi - one which is volition and one which is not. disne is showing involuntary experience using the dative subject whereas pahne is showing deliberate action of looking using nominative subjects.

- 11) mə = la      pəkʃi dis-la  
 1SG = DAT    bird see-PST  
 I happened to see bird.

- 12) mi pəkʃi pahi-la  
 1SG bird see - PST  
 I saw the bird.

In the dative construction, the event is presented from the perspective of the experiencer receiving the visual stimulus. The bird comes into the experiencer's awareness, with the experiencer portrayed as a passive recipient of the perception. The focus is on how the event affects

the experiencer, not on any action they performed. The experiencer centered can portray that the subject is undergoing rather than controlling the experience. The main focus is on the receiving end. It removes agency and volition from its description.

- 13) mə=la      mud:dam   mahi-t      ahe  
 1SG=DAT deliberately know-PROG be.PRES  
 I deliberately know.

The ungrammaticality shows the non-volitional nature of dative subject predicates. Another significant pattern that I've seen in my data is the association of dative subjects with specific light verbs. They frequently combine with *hoŋe* (become/ happen) and *asŋe* (to be).

The verbs which take dative subjects are *səmədʒŋe* (to understand), *kəɭŋe* (to realize), *dʒanəŋe* (to feel/ to sense).

### Conclusion

1. If a Marathi verb marks its subject with the dative case "-la" rather than nominative case, then it encodes non-volitional, experiencer-oriented states or events where the subject undergoes rather than controls the experience.
2. If a Marathi verb describes internal experiences, psychological states, or involuntary perceptions, then it tends to employ dative subject marking and frequently combines with light verbs "*hoŋe*" (become or happen) or "*asŋe*" (to be).

### **4.2. Activities**

Activities allow imperative construction. Unlike stative verbs such as "*mahit əsŋe*" or *avdʰəŋe* which resist imperative forms due to their non-controllable nature, activity verbs represent processes. Since imperative construction is possible in activities provides evidence that these verbs encode dynamic situations rather than static conditions.

- 14) dʒa!  
 go.IMP  
 Go!

- 15) pəɭ!  
 run.IMP  
 Run!

Activities combine with progressive aspect, appearing in the "-t ahe" construction without requiring any special interpretation.

- 16) mi      dʒa-t      ahe  
 1SG   go-PROG be.PRES  
 I am going.

- 17) to            k<sup>h</sup>e|ə-t            ahe  
       3MSG play-PROG    be.PRES  
       He is playing.

Unlike stative verbs which sound unnatural in progressive forms ( ?məla he mahit asat ahe - I am knowing this), activity verbs express ongoing processes that are core to their meaning.

Activities readily combine with agentive markers like mud:dam (deliberately) because they involve volitional control.

- 18) to            mud:dam            dʒa-t            ahe  
       3MSG deliberately go-PROG be.PRES  
       He is deliberately going.

This contrasts with stative verbs which cannot typically occur with deliberate action markers. Activity verbs naturally appear with habitual markers. An important property of activity is that their progressive forms do not entail completion. While someone is in the process of performing an activity, it doesn't mean they have completed it.

to titʃakəd<sup>h</sup>e dʒat ahe (He is going at her place) does not entail to titʃakəd<sup>h</sup>e gelaj (He have come to her place)

- 19) to            5    minṭ=at            je-to  
       3MSG 5 minutes = LOC come-HAB  
       He will come in 5 minutes.

In (19) example, the "X minṭat" phrase doesn't indicate that the coming action takes 5 minutes to complete. Instead, it indicates that after 5 minutes pass, the action of coming will begin. This is the inception reading - focusing on when the activity starts, not when it completes.

If a Marathi verb accepts imperatives, works naturally with progressive aspect, combines with "mud:dam" (deliberately), and gets an inception reading with X minṭat phrases, then it is an activity verb, representing an ongoing process without an inherent endpoint.

### 4.3. Accomplishments

Accomplishments in Marathi language are telic events with inherent endpoints that unfold over a duration. Unlike achievements which are instantaneous, Accomplishments require time to complete and involve a process leading to a result state. Accomplishments combine naturally with the progressive aspect but with special entailment patterns. Accomplishments are durative, but in the process they "proceed toward a terminus" which was discussed by Vendler (1967) and in the later years Dowty (1991) describes that the procession has an incremental change.

- 20) to            tʃitrə            kad<sup>h</sup>-ət            ahe  
       3MSG picture draw-PROG be.PRES  
       He is drawing a picture.

When an accomplishment appears in progressive, it indicates that the process part of the event is ongoing. The endpoint has not yet been reached. There is an implication of intention to complete the action. The progressive with Accomplishment creates an inception which tells that event has begun but not yet culminated.

- 21) ti=ne                vis        minʈa-t        tʃitrə        kad<sup>h</sup>-lə  
       3FSG=ERG        twenty minute-LOC picture draw-PST  
       She drew the picture in twenty minutes.

The adverbial “X minʈat” measures the time taken to reach the culmination point having a completed picture. When we consider the verb tʃitrə kad<sup>h</sup>ne, we can clearly observe the mapping relationship between the direct object being picture and the event of painting process. It shows that the painting event is exactly halfway through because the picture itself is half complete. It shows the temporal development of the painting event which we can see as part - the whole structure of the picture. If a quarter of the picture is painted, the event is a quarter complete. If the entire picture is painted, the event is fully complete.

- 22) ram=ne            ek tʃitrə kad<sup>h</sup>-lə  
       Ram=ERG one picture draw-PST  
       Ram painted a picture.

This shows the telicity that the event concludes when the picture is complete. In the below one it becomes potentially atelic like an activity with no specified endpoint.

- 23) rama tʃitrə        kad<sup>h</sup>-to  
       ram pictures draw-HAB  
       Ram paints pictures.

Here, the telicity becomes ambiguous. Did Ram complete the picture within an hour, or did he engage in painting for an hour without necessarily completing it?

- 24) ram=ne        tasb<sup>h</sup>ər        tʃitrə kad<sup>h</sup>-lə  
       ram=ERG hour.for picture draw-PST  
       Ram painted a picture for an hour.

The object to event mapping with painting is particularly intuitive because we can visually conceptualize the incremental completion of the canvas. When the canvas is half filled with paint, the painting event is half complete. As Dowty (1979) explained, this mapping relationship allows accomplishment verbs to shift between telic and atelic readings depending on the properties of their objects and modifiers which shows ambiguities in aspectual interpretation.

We can break the event into three major phrases on the event scale. The initiation of the event where the agent (painter) picks up a brush and starts applying paint. The event begins but there are no complete results yet. The picture is half blank. Here is where most progressive reading lies. When the event has an intermediate stage we can imagine that the painter is adding colour and details. The picture gradually takes shape. It shows incremental change over time. In the result state the entire picture is painted. The event reaches its endpoint and the final goal is met. The event moves gradually from zero completion to partial completion to full completion. At any point,

we can measure progress and say that she has painted 30 % of the picture. This is what separates accomplishment from the rest of the types.

Some verbs that are accomplishments are vatʃne (read), kʰa (eat), tʃitrə kadʰne (to draw a picture), gʰər bandʰne (to build a house), pustək lihine (to write a book), gani bəṇəṇne (to compose a song).

#### 4.4. Achievements

There are three types of Achievements seen in Marathi Language - Reversible, irreversible and Cyclic Achievements. Reversible Achievements have result states that can be reversed. They can be agentive in nature compared to cyclic achievements involving volitional action and control. The main characteristics of reversible achievements is that the end state reached can return to its initial state. Reversible Achievements typically involve a directed change, leading to a new state that persists but can be reversed through another action. These are telic events with clear endpoints similar to accomplishments. But Achievement in general differs from Accomplishment because they happen to be instantaneous rather than being durative.

- 25) ti=ne            dar    ugʰəḍ-lə  
       3FSG=ERG door open-PST  
       She opened the door.

After the opening event, the result state persists. However, this state can be reversed through another action like closing of the door. Reversible Achievements are compatible with punctual time adverbials like ekdum (suddenly) or ləgetʃ (immediately). They work well with deliberate action modifiers like dʒanunbudʒun (deliberately).

Irreversible Achievement on the other hand shows events that lead to a permanent result states which cannot be undone or reversed. These events represent permanent transitions from one state to another with no possibility of returning to the initial state. In the example here, he died - the act of dying cannot be reversed, as dying is a one time event.

- 26) to            me-l-a  
       3MSG die-PST  
       He died.

Once these events occur, the resulting state is permanent and cannot be reversed. The permanent nature of irreversible achievements make them incompatible with reversing predicates. They are showing polar opposite meanings.

- \*27) to            me-la    ani dʒiwənt dʒa-la  
       3MSG    die-PST and    alive    go-PST  
       He died and became alive.

Irreversible achievements are telic and punctual happening at a precise moment. That is why they work well with point time adverbials. Unlike Reversible Achievements, Irreversible Achievements typically cannot be controlled or be deliberate. When tested with completive



adverbials like *purŋəpəŋe* (completely), they are acceptable but redundant since Irreversible Achievements are inherently complete.

- 28) *p<sup>h</sup>ulə purŋəpəŋe kəmedʒə-la*  
 flower completely wither-PST  
 The flower withered completely.

Cyclic Achievements show single, repeated actions that happen instantly and can occur multiple times. Some Cyclic Achievement also show reduplication which shows their multiple times instances within the word itself. They involve momentary changes that immediately return to their original state. Cyclic Achievement with “X mintat” gives the reading that the action happens in once or at that specific moment within that “X mintat”.

Most Cyclic Achievements do not have agentivity and they are not volitional in nature. There is no directed change that can be seen with Cyclic Achievements. Unlike typical achievements, they do not lead to a new state. They occur spontaneously, without a directed or controlled effort, for example *ʃiŋkəla* (He sneezed) happens involuntarily. Though verbs like *k<sup>h</sup>okəŋe* (to cough) can be done deliberately. We can imagine a situation where a spy is meeting someone in a cafe and they have to signal some secret message, in that situation they have to deliberately cough twice, as per arranged code.

There are certain verbs such as *k<sup>h</sup>okəŋe* (to cough), *ʃiŋəkəŋe* (sneeze), *tʃəməkəŋe* (to flash) which are semelfactives or cyclic achievements. They show instantaneous events that occur at a single point in time. They automatically return to their initial state after occurrence. Unlike accomplishments, they lack a result state that persists after the event. They can be interpreted as either single occurrences or repeated actions. They don't have a result state that differs from the initial state. It shows a single occurrence and works with repetition tests.

- 29) *to ekda k<sup>h</sup>okla*  
 3MSG one.time cough  
 He coughed once.
- 30) *diva ekda tʃəməkəla*  
 light one.time flash  
 The light flashed once.

In this, after the flashing happens the light returns to its initial state. It can be repeated but the meaning of the light flashing can be multiple times, but each flash is independent. In simple present forms they automatically indicate repetition. When semelfactives appear in Simple present or Imperfective forms they are automatically interpreted as multiple instances of the punctual event not as an extended version of a single event.

- 31) *to k<sup>h</sup>okto*  
 3MSG cough  
 He coughs.

- 32) diva tʃəməkto  
light flash  
Light flashes.

It is compatible with frequency adverbial tests varuvar (again and again) or pun<sup>ha</sup> pun<sup>ha</sup> (repeatedly) which is used to show restorative and repetitive ability. When I try to stop this activity, nothing remains and the state goes back to normal. It shows no result state.

- 33) ti pun<sup>ha</sup> pun<sup>ha</sup> ʃikə-t ahe  
3FSG again again sneeze-PROG be.PRES  
She is sneezing repeatedly.

Since semelfactives denote punctual events, they cannot be modified by adverbials that imply gradual change over time, such as hə|uhə|u (gradually). This shows ungrammaticality as seen in (11b).

- \*34) to hə|uhə|u k<sup>h</sup>okla  
3MSG gradually cough  
He gradually coughed.

When combined with taskbar (for an hour) time duration adverbials, semelfactives do not extend the event itself but instead indicate repeated occurrences over the specified period. It implies that there are multiple instances of coughing that took place within the hour and not a single prolonged or hour-long cough.

- 35) to tasbər k<sup>h</sup>okə-t ho-ta  
3MSG for.hour cough-PROG be-PST  
He was coughing for an hour.

Since semelfactives are punctual, they are compatible with adverbials that specify an exact moment in time.

- 36) nemka tʃatʃ ʃəŋi to ʃikəla  
exact that moment 3MSG sneeze  
At that exact moment, he sneezed.

Semelfactives differ from Reversible Achievements because they do not result in a persistent state. For example, with a directed achievement like ug<sup>h</sup>ədɲe (to open), the event's result state remains. The interpretation it gives is that someone has opened the door and the door remained opened thereafter.

dar ug<sup>h</sup>ədəle (The door opened) → dar ug<sup>h</sup>ədə ahe (The door is open)

In contrast, semelfactives do not allow such a transition:

to k<sup>h</sup>okto (He coughed/ coughing) → to k<sup>h</sup>oklela ahe (He is in a coughed state)

One difference between semelfactives and activities is divisibility. Activities allow for partial completion without altering meaning, whereas semelfactives do not.

37) to t<sup>h</sup>oda tʃalla.  
3MSG little walk  
He walked a little.

\*38) to t<sup>h</sup>oda k<sup>h</sup>okla  
3MSG little cough  
He coughed a little.

Even if he walks a little, we still consider that as walking. But, he coughed a little doesn't make any sense. Even if it were to make sense, it feels as if the coughing has happened in less intense mode, not shorter in duration. Semelfactives occur momentarily and do not retain a resulting state.

Unlike accomplishments, semelfactives cannot take incremental themes or be expressed in terms of partial completion. The act of drawing involves gradual progress and it can be partially completed. The event of painting/ drawing is extended over time. The object (picture) undergoes incremental changes as more of it is drawn. It has a clear endpoint (when the full picture is drawn) so stating that "half" of it is drawn makes sense. With sneezing though, it is not a process and happens suddenly also in a non-agentive form. There is no measurable progression i.e you either sneeze or you don't. The idea of "half-sneezing" does not align with how the event naturally occurs.

39) ti=ne ar<sup>d</sup>he tʃitrə kad<sup>h</sup>le  
3MSG =NOM half picture draw  
She drew half the picture.

\*40) tja=ne ar<sup>d</sup>he ʃikle  
3MSG = NOM half sneeze  
He sneezed half

The second construction sounds odd or ungrammatical. Whereas, the painting one sounds as if the painting is partially done. This is what separates semelfactives from the rest of the types. Below is the table showing some of the examples which are there in Marathi language for Achievements and their types.

### Conclusion

1. If a Marathi achievement verb shows ungrammaticality when combined with reversing predicates, then it is an Irreversible Achievement.
2. If a Marathi achievement verb produces ungrammaticality when modified by gradual change adverbials like "hə[uhə]u" (gradually) and cannot be used with partial completion expressions like "ər<sup>d</sup>he" (half), then it is a Cyclic Achievement.
3. If a Marathi achievement verb involves an instantaneous event whose result state persists but can be reversed through another action, then it is a Reversible Achievement.





[illegible]



gərdʒ asne	to need	✓	✓	×	×	✓	×	×	×	Transitory State
avəðne	to like	✓	✓	×	×	×	×	×	×	Inherent State
prem kərne	to love	✓	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	Inherent State
kʰuʃ asne	to be happy	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	×	×	×	Transitory State
əsne	to be/exist	×	✓	×	×	×	×	×	×	Inherent State
bharəvne	to be filled	✓	✓	×	×	×	×	×	×	Transitory State
tʰəkne	to be tired	×	×	×	×	✓	×	×	×	Transitory State
ʃodʰne	to search	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	×	×	×	Activity
kʰadʒəvne	to scratch	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	×	×	×	Activity
ʃvas gʰeɲe	to breathe	✓	✓	×	✓/×	✓	×	×	×	Activity
udʒəɲe	to shine	✓	✓	×	×	✓	×	✓	✓	Activity
talja vadʒəvne	to clap	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	×	×	×	Activity
tʰambne	to stop	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	Reversible Achievement
tʃəmkanve	to flash	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	Cyclic Achievement
phutne	to burst	✓	×	✓	×	×	✓	×	✓	Irreversible Achievement
phekne	to throw away	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	Reversible Achievement
dukhavne	to hurt	✓	×	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	Reversible Achievement
hərne	to lose	✓	×	✓	✓/×	✓	✓	×	✓	Reversible Achievement
sədʒəvne	to decorate	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	Accomplishment
sudhərne	to improve	✓	✓	✓	✓/×	✓	×	✓	✓	Accomplishment
nirmit kərne	to create	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	Accomplishment

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