

Research Article

Sanskrit Event Verbs in the *Bhagavad Gita*: A Natural Semantic Metalanguage Analysis

Ni Nyoman Tri Gitayani^{1*}, Ni Luh Sutjiati Beratha², I Made Rajeg³¹⁻³ Department of Linguistics, Faculty of Humanities, Udayana University, Indonesia* Corresponding Author: trigitaayani@gmail.com

Abstract: Sanskrit verbs constitute a compelling object within linguistic research because of their semantic and structural complexity, which has not yet been widely explored. A proper understanding of Sanskrit verb usage can help prevent errors, especially among Hindus who use the language in cultural or religious contexts. Therefore, this research aims at analyzing the structure and semantic role of Sanskrit event verbs through the Natural Semantic Metalanguage approach. The data sources were from three chapters of the *Bhagavad Gita* (Chapters IX, X, and XI). The data were gathered using documentation and systematic note-taking techniques, and subsequently analyzed through qualitative methods by implementing the Natural Semantic Metalanguage approach conducted by Wierzbicka, supported by the semantic macroroles theory by van Valin and Lapolla. From this research, five Sanskrit event verbs were found in those chapters, namely *cyavanti* “to fall down”, *pravartate* “to develop”, *vepamānah* “to tremble”, *abhivijvalanti* “to blaze”, and *pratāpanti* “burns”. Further analysis showed that these event verbs can be classified into MOVE and HAPPEN types. In addition, the semantic macroroles of the Sanskrit event verb arguments found can be identified in the form of AGENT, PATIENT, EXPERIENCER, SOURCE, and THEME.

Keywords: *Bhagavad Gita*; Event Verbs; Natural Semantic Metalanguage; Sanskrit; Semantic Macroroles

1. Introduction

As one of the oldest languages in the world, Sanskrit has a deeply rooted foundation in the religious traditions of Hindu communities, including those in Indonesia. This language belongs to the Indo-European language family and is often referred to as *daiivivak* (the language of the gods) (Miswanto, 2022). This is because the language tends to be used by priests or yogis, and is limited to mantras addressed to God and the deities (Setia, 2008). In general, Sanskrit can be classified into three groups: (1) Classical Sanskrit, which is the Sanskrit generally used in Hindu literature, such as the *Purana* and *Itihasa*; (2) Vedic Sanskrit, which is the Sanskrit generally used in the Vedas; and (3) Hybrid Sanskrit, as the Sanskrit used in Indonesia with several adaptations (Winanti & Gunarta, 2024)

In practice, Classical Sanskrit is a type of Sanskrit commonly found in Hindu literature, and is even used to write millions of texts related to literature, philosophy, and *yajña* (sacred and sincere offerings to God) (Siswadi, 2019). The religious life of Hindus is inseparable from the existence of religious scriptures that shape the moral and spiritual identity of their followers. Religious scriptures provide the basis for understanding morality while teaching the inner consequences of good and bad karma for humans during their life on earth (Luthfi, 2018). In supporting the religious practices of Hindus, the *Bhagavad Gita* is one of the religious scriptures that is rich in morality and spirituality. The *Bhagavad Gita* is central in not only guiding humanity towards ethical behaviour but also directing them towards a deep understanding of their every action (Arta, 2024). This literature contains one specific episode from hundreds of episodes in the *Mahābhārata* story, and its position is believed to be higher than that of the *Mahābhārata* itself because it is considered *śruti* (divine revelation; what is heard) (Sudiarja & Baryadi, 2012).

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As one of the important scriptures in Hinduism, the *Bhagavad Gita* is written in Classical Sanskrit and consists of hundreds of verses. From a linguistic perspective, these verses demonstrate the uniqueness and complexity of Sanskrit grammar because the purposes and actions described in the language require changes in case (*vibhaktih*), number (*vacanam*), and even gender (*lingah*) in its grammatical elements (Chakraborty, 2021). One of the most prominent linguistic units of Sanskrit in the verses of the *Bhagavad Gita* that shows significant grammatical changes is the verb. In this text, the use of Sanskrit verbs is not only influenced by aspects of time, number, and person, but also by complex meanings, given that Sanskrit verbs can carry symbolic, ethical, spiritual, and even metaphorical meanings. This complexity makes Sanskrit verbs an interesting subject for linguistic study, especially in analyzing the use of event verbs in Sanskrit through the perspective of Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM) as an approach to deciphering the universal meaning of these verbs. According to Givón (2001), event verbs are a type of verb that does not involve mental actions or activities. This type of verb refers to verbs that express a process or action performed by someone or something. When associated with Hinduism, this type of verb is able to express meanings that are not only conceptual, but also metaphorical about the religious life of Hindus through linguistic perspectives.

Research related to verb analysis from the NSM perspective tends to focus on one or several types of verbs in non-religious data sources and has not been accompanied by an in-depth analysis of the general semantic role of these verbs. This can be observed in studies conducted by Khrisnantara et al. (2020), Rahardian (2021), and Sukma (2024). Meanwhile, studies that focus on meaning relations tend to discuss the social meaning of a linguistic unit in general, as seen in the research conducted by Charyyeva (2024). Other studies use Sanskrit as the object of study, but do not discuss the analysis of the meaning of the language's verbs in depth, as can be observed in the latest study conducted by Hellwig and Biagetti (2025).

An understanding of the Sanskrit event verbs in the *Bhagavad Gita* from the perspective of NSM and semantic macroroles is expected to provide new insights for the public in understanding the complex meaning of verbs in relation to activities that are often performed by humans across languages and cultures. At the same time, this research has the potential to make a new scientific contribution in the field of linguistics, particularly in the realm of lexical semantics. Meanwhile, understanding the meaning associated with the use of Sanskrit event verbs in the *Bhagavad Gita* can also prevent people from being vague and making mistakes when using or pronouncing verbs in that language.

2. Literature Review

In supporting this research, there are five prior research that served as references and two theories that form the theoretical framework of this research. These research consist of several articles that are relevant to the topic of this current research.

Prior Research

Khrisnantara et al. (2020) analyzed the verb “bring” in the Osing Banyuwangi language and its lexical variations. A qualitative-descriptive method was used to analyze the data in reference to NSM theory. From the research, it was found that lexical variations of the verb “bring” can be *nyangking*, *nyuwun*, *mikul*, *ngemplok*, and *ngendong*. In addition, the findings also revealed the polysemy of the action DO and MOVE from one part of the body to another.

Rahardian (2021) conducted research that focused on analyzing dental activity verbs in Javanese from an NSM perspective and the lexical variation contained therein. To support the data analysis, a qualitative method was used to analyze dental activity verbs, applying NSM theory as a reference for analysis. From the research, 23 lexical items in Javanese related to dental activities were found. The variation in these lexical items retains the original meaning of DO or HAPPEN with semantic components related to activities, such as chewing, biting, carrying, breaking, and releasing.

Sukma (2024) also conducted research on verb analysis, specifically the verb “give” in Japanese. The research was conducted using a qualitative approach based on Goddard's NSM theory to analyze data found in the *Minna no Nihongo* textbooks volumes I and II. From the analysis, it was found that the verbs *ageru* and *akeru* are used to indicate the use of the verb “give” followed by an object. Meanwhile, the verbs *kureru* and *tsukeru* are used without being followed by an object and tend to be used when the semantic role of RECIPIENT is the main focus in a sentence.

Charyyeva (2024) conducted research by exploring and comparing the concept of ‘happiness’ in the Turkmen language with equivalent words in various languages to understand the cultural and semantic meaning of happiness. Methodologically, the research used a qualitative-comparative design and obtained data from three Turkmen-language corpora. The research found that there are three main aspects of the concept of happiness, particularly the word *bagt*: positive spiritual feelings, reciprocal relationships, and good

fortune. In addition, cultural texts in Turkmen society were also found that can be analyzed and explained through the NSM approach.

Hellwig and Biagetti (2025) conducted research using a similar object, namely Sanskrit, by introducing a lexical semantic access source called Sanskrit Sembank. The research provided various annotations of meaning in the context of Vedic and Classical Sanskrit texts by adapting the WordNet conceptual framework to the use of Sanskrit. From the research conducted, Sanskrit Sembank is able to present the meanings of Sanskrit words in a historical context and text corpus.

Overall, these prior research have gaps with the current research, particularly in terms of the selection of research objects and the focus of the analysis. The current research uses the Sanskrit event verbs in the *Bhagavad Gita* as the object of research, considering that this type of language has complex linguistic markers, which distinguish it from other languages in the world. The selection of this language as the object of research is also due to the fact that there has been no research discussing the meaning of verbs in Sanskrit through the NSM approach, and the general role of semantics in depth. However, despite these differences, prior research have contributed to this current one in terms of how to analyze data and present it in detail.

Theories

In this research, NSM theory was used to analyze the meaning of the Sanskrit event verbs in the *Bhagavad Gita*. The NSM theory aims at explaining the meaning of a word in a simple, accurate, and neutral manner. According to Wierzbicka (1996:15), NSM does not aim to present linguistic forms or structures that have identical relationships between languages, but rather to reveal semantic relationships through a series of undefined or fundamental linguistic units. Therefore, the semantic meaning of a verb can be explained by focusing on the analysis of semantic primes. There are 65 semantic primes used as references in NSM research, which can be seen as follows.

Table 1. Semantic Primes

1.	Substantives	I, you, someone, something, people, body
2.	Relational substantives	kind, part
3.	Determiners	this, the same, much-many
4.	Quantifiers	one, two, some, all, other-else
5.	Evaluators	good, bad
6.	Descriptors	big, small
7.	Mental predicates	know, think, feel, want, hear, see
8.	Speech	say, true, word
9.	Actions, events, movement, contact	do, move, happen, touch
10.	Location, existence, possession, specification	be (somewhere), there is be (someone's), be (someone-something)
11.	Life and death	live, die
12.	Time	when-time, now, before, after, a long time, a short time, for some time, moment
13.	Space	where-place, here, above, below, far, near, side, inside
14.	Logical concepts	not, maybe, can, because, if
15.	Intensifier, augmentor	very, more
16.	Similarity	like-way

Next, the theory of semantic macroroles was used to analyze the semantic roles of Sanskrit verb arguments in the *Bhagavad Gita*. According to van Valin & Lapolla (2004), semantic macroroles are the generalisations about the roles of all types of arguments indicated by certain verbs that have significant grammatical consequences. Generally, the semantic macroroles of an argument are related to the actor and the undergoer. These semantic roles are derived into several specific roles, which can be seen as follows.

Table 2. Semantic Macroroles

No.	Semantic macroroles	Explanations
1.	AGENT	A participant who deliberately and intentionally performs an action or event
2.	EFFECTOR	A participant, with or without intent
3.	EXPERIENCER	A participant who experiences internal states, such as thoughts, emotions, and perceptions
4.	INSTRUMENT	An inanimate entity used by an agent to perform an action
5.	FORCE	An entity that cannot be manipulated or controlled
6.	PATIENT	An entity that experiences a change in condition.
7.	BENEFACTIVE	An entity that receives the benefit from an action
8.	THEME	An entity that is located or experiences a location change
9.	RECIPIENT	A living or semi-living entity that receives something
10.	GOAL	The final destination of an action or movement.
11.	SOURCE	The origin of a condition or movement.

3. Research Method

This research was conducted using qualitative methods. According to Wahyuni (2024:1), this method was developed to enable researchers to study cultural and social phenomena in society. This is in line with the objectives of this research, which seeks to analyze the meaning of Sanskrit event verbs with a focus on the cultural and social aspects described in the *Bhagavad Gita* and to gain a deeper understanding of their use. In addition, this research focused on analyzing the semantic structure of Sanskrit event verbs found in the *Bhagavad Gita* based on NSM theory and explaining the semantic role of each verb argument based on the semantic macroroles theory.

In conducting this research, data were obtained from Chapters IX, X, and XI of the *Bhagavad Gita* to acquire a variety of event verb types and their meanings. The data source used was the *Bhagavad Gita*, written by Narasingha (2022). The event verb data obtained from this data source was collected through the documentation method. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018:303), the documentation method is an appropriate method for collecting data from a document, whether it is general or specific. Furthermore, the note-taking technique was used to collect the types of event verbs found in the three chapters of the *Bhagavad Gita* with the help of Microsoft Excel.

The collected data were then analyzed by applying the NSM theory proposed by Wierzbicka (1996) and semantic macroroles by van Valin and Lapolla (2004) to analyze the structure and semantic roles of the Sanskrit event verbs found. Then, the data were presented through a descriptive method to explain in detail the verbs found and assisted by the Leipzig Glossing Rules (LGR) proposed by Comrie et al. (2015). The use of LGR makes it easier for researchers and readers to understand the analysis of verbs in a Sanskrit sentence and its translation.

4. Results and Discussion

Event verbs tend to involve physical changes or spatial movements experienced by participants. In the list of semantic primes in NSM studies, this type of verb includes the elements of events and movement, which consist of the types MOVE and HAPPEN.

Semantic Structure and Semantic Macroroles of Event Verbs of the MOVE Type

This type of event verb is categorized into the semantic prime of movement, which reflects a change in motion in X. This change in motion can be caused by another person, resulting in a semantic mapping of “Y does something to X”, or it can be triggered by oneself, resulting in a semantic mapping of “X becomes like this”. Event verbs of the MOVE type can be seen in the verbs *cyavanti* and *pravartate*.

(4-1) Verb *cyavanti* “to fall down”

<i>na</i>	<i>tu</i>	<i>mām</i>	<i>abhi-jān-anti</i>	<i>tattvena</i>
NEG	but.CONJ	1SG.ACC	INTENS-know-3PL.PRS	truth.INS.SG

<i>ataḥ</i>	<i>cyav-anti</i>	<i>te</i>
so that.CONJ	fall down-3PL.PRS	3PL.NOM

“...But those who are ignorant of My true nature **fall down** from the path of self-realisation.” (BG:IX-24)

The verb *cyavanti* comes from the root verb *cyu*, which means to fall down (Surada, 2007). Generally, the verb *cyavanti* is used to describe the act of falling, failing, or moving away from one's original state, which is often associated with a person's inner condition. The semantic component of the verb *cyavanti* can be mapped as “something happened to X”. X refers to an entity, namely a human being. The semantic explanation of the verb *cyavanti* can be described as follows.

Semantic Explication:

At that time, X was in a good state.
 Something happened to X.
 Therefore, X is no longer in that state.
 X feels something is bad.
 X does not want that to happen.
 X happened like this.

Data (4-1) has the semantic role of *te* as both undergoer, especially THEME and EXPERIENCER. The semantic role of THEME is given to *te*, which refers to humanity in the *Bhagavad Gita*, because those entities are participants that experience a state change (from right to wrong). Meanwhile, the semantic role of EXPERIENCER is assigned because the entities experience cognitive deviation, which is indicated by the verb *cyavanti*.

(4-2) Verb *pravartate* “to develop”

ahaṁ sarvasya prabhavo mattaḥ sarvaṁ pravartate, ...

ahaṁ sarva-sya prabhavo mattaḥ sarvaṁ
1SG.NOM all-GEN.SG origin.NOM.SG 1SG.ABL all.NOM.SG

pra-vart-ate

advance-develop-3SG.PRS.MID

“I am the source of everything. From me all things **develop**...” BG:X-8)

The event verb *pravartate* comes from the root verb *vṛt*, which means to develop, to process (Surada, 2007). The use of this verb is related to cosmological meanings, particularly the beginning and continuation of a process. From the above data, the verb *pravartate* is categorized as an event verb of the MOVE type. The semantic component of the verb contains X, which refers to the entity undergoing the process of movement, namely all beings in the universe. The semantic explication of the verb *pravartate* can be described as follows.

Semantic Explication:

At that time, something happened to X.

Something is happening to X now.

Previously, it did not happen.

Something happened to X for some time.

Something happened like this.

Data (4-2) presents two arguments with the semantic role of *mattaḥ* as SOURCE and *sarvaṁ* as undergoer and THEME. The semantic role of SOURCE is given to *mattaḥ* because this argument indicates the point of origin of the process. Meanwhile, the roles of undergoer and THEME are given to *sarvaṁ*, which refers to all beings in the world in the *Bhagavad Gita*, because these entities are participants who experience the process of continuity.

Semantic Structure and Semantic Macroroles of Event Verbs of the HAPPEN Type

The event verbs of the HAPPEN type are categorized under the semantic primes of happen, which concern the occurrence of an event or activity. As a result, the event causes a change in X. The event can be caused by another person or triggered by oneself. When an event is caused by oneself, the semantic mapping that emerges is “X becomes like this”. Event verbs of the HAPPEN type can be seen in the verbs *pravyathitāḥ*, *vyathisthāḥ*, *vepamānaḥ*, *abhinivānti*, *tapāmi*, and *pratāpanti*.

From the data found, there appear to be similarities between verbs in terms of meaning and root words. The event verbs *pravyathitāḥ* and *vyathisthāḥ* have the same root word, namely *vyath*, which means to tremble or shake. The fundamental difference between the two verbs lies in the insertion of the prefix *pra-* in the word *vyathisthāḥ*, which serves to indicate intensification towards the future. However, both have the same semantic structure. Meanwhile, the event verb *vepamānaḥ* has the same meaning as *pravyathitāḥ* and *vyathisthāḥ*, namely to tremble. The subtle difference between the verb *vepamānaḥ* and the two event verbs lies in their nuances. The verbs *pravyathitāḥ* and *vyathisthāḥ* are generally used to describe a deeply shaken inner state. In contrast, the verb *vepamānaḥ* is generally used to describe the process of trembling that occurs in a person's body.

In addition, there is also a similarity in the root of the verbs *tapāmi* and *pratāpanti*. Both come from the same root verb, *tap*, and both are interpreted as burning. The significant difference between the two verbs lies in the affixes attached to the verb roots. The suffix *-ami* in the verb *tapāmi* indicates the first person singular subject, while the insertion of the prefixes *pra-* and *-anti* in *pratāpanti* indicates intensification of direction and a third person plural subject marker. The complete description of each of these event verbs of the HAPPEN type can be seen as follows.

(4-3) Verb *vepamānaḥ* “to tremble”

sañjaya uvāca etacchrutvā vacanaṁ keśavasya kṛtāñjalirvepamānaḥ kīrṭi,...

Sañjaya uvāca etat-śrutvā vacanaṁ
Sañjaya.NOM.SG said.3SG.PFV DEM.ACC.SG-heard.GER speech.ACC.SG

keśava-sya kṛta-añjalir
Keśava-GEN.SG did.PPP-hands clasped.NOM.SG.M

vepamānaḥ *kīrṭi*
trembling.PAP.NOM.SG.M Arjuna.NOM.SG.M

“Sañjaya said: Upon hearing Keśava’s words, the **trembling** Arjuna offered his obeisance...” (BG:XI-35)

The lexicon *vepamānaḥ* comes from the root word *vep*, which means to tremble (Surada, 2007). From the above data, the verb *vepamānaḥ* is an event verb of the HAPPEN type. Its semantic component can be mapped as “something happened to X”. X refers to an entity, namely the body. Meanwhile, the cause of the change in X is due to another agent, which, in the context of the above verse, is the utterance of Keśava (Śri Kṛṣṇa). The semantic explication of the verb *vepamānaḥ* can be described as follows.

Semantic explication:

At that moment, something happened to X.
Therefore, X's body moves slightly.
X feels something is wrong.
X does not want this to happen.
X happened like this.

Data (4-3) presents an argument with the semantic role of *kirīṭi* as undergoer and EXPERIENCER. The semantic roles of undergoer and EXPERIENCER are given to *kirīṭi*, which refers to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gīta*, because that entity is a participant who experiences an internal state of trembling, which is reflected through the verb *vepamānaḥ*.

(4-4) Verb *abbivijvalanti* “to blaze”

...*tathā tavāmī naralokavīrā viśantivaktrāṇyabbivijvalanti*
tathā tava-amī nara-loka-vīrā
thus.CONJ 2SG.GEN-DEM.DIST.NOM.PL men-world-heroes-NOM.PL

viśanti vaktrāṇi abhi-vi-jval-anti
enter.3PL.PRS mouths.ACC.PL.N INTENS-DISTR-to blaze-3PL.PRS

“...so too do the heroes of this human world flow into your **blazing** mouths.” (BG:XI-28)

The event verb *abbivijvalanti* comes from the root verb *jval*, which means to burn, to blaze (Surada, 2007). The use of this verb describes a process of cosmic energy, in which the “blazing mouth” represents the divine power of Śri Kṛṣṇa, who is able to bring forth flames from his mouth. From the above data, the verb *abbivijvalanti* is categorized as an event verb of the HAPPEN type. Its semantic component can be mapped as “something happened to X”. X refers to the entity that glows, namely the mouth. The semantic explication of the verb *abbivijvalanti* can be described as follows.

Semantic Explication:

At that moment, something happened to X.
Something very powerful happened inside X.
Because of this, fire comes out of X in many directions.
People can see something from X.
X happened like this.

The above data presents an argument with the semantic role of *vaktrāṇi* as undergoer and THEME. This semantic role is assigned because the entity is in the state of *abbivijvalanti* and displays the event.

(4-5) Verb *pratāpanti* ‘burns’

...*tejobhirāpūrya jagatsamagraṁ bhāsastavograhḥ pratāpanti viṣṇo*
tejo-bhīḥ āpūrya jagat-samagraṁ bhāsaḥ
light-INST.PL fills.GER the entire world.ACC.SG.N brilliant.NOM.PL

tava ugrāḥ pratap-anti viṣṇo
2SG.GEN terrible-NOM.PL burn-3PL.PRS Viṣṇu.VOC.SG

“...Your blazing light fills the entire universe and **burns** with its extraordinary flame, O Viṣṇu.” (BG:XI-30)

The verb *pratāpanti* has a meaning quite similar to the verb *abbivijvalanti*. The fundamental difference between the two lies in the root word and the nuances they possess. The verb *pratāpanti* comes from the root word *tap*, which means to burn, to heat (Surada, 2007:142). This type of verb is categorized as an event verb of the HAPPEN type and is generally used to express the heat emitted by X and its effects felt by Y (another party), either explicitly or implicitly. X refers to the entity that burns, namely the rays of Viṣṇu. The semantic explication of the verb *pratāpanti* can be described as follows.

Semantic Explication:

At that moment, something happened to X.
X becomes very hot.
Therefore, heat emanated from X.

Y feels something bad.
 X does not want this to happen.
 X happened like this.

Data (4-5) presents two arguments with the semantic role of *bhāsastavogrāh* as the actor, specifically AGENT, and *jagatsamagrām* as the undergoer, specifically PATIENT. The semantic role of AGENT is assigned to *bhāsastavogrāh* because this entity acts (praises). In contrast, the semantic role of PATIENT is assigned to *jagatsamagrām* because this entity is affected by the *pratāpanti* event.

5. Conclusion

This research found that the use of event verbs in Sanskrit reveals fundamental differences in meaning and nuance between verbs used in Hindu religious activities, especially those listed in the Bhagavad Gita. Through the NSM approach, there are five Sanskrit event verbs, namely *cyavanti*, *pravartate*, *vepamānah*, *abbivijvalanti*, and *pratāpanti*. In general, the verbs *cyavanti* and *pravartate* can be classified as MOVE-type process verbs. Meanwhile, the verbs *vepamānah*, *abbivijvalanti*, and *pratāpanti* are classified as HAPPEN-type process verbs. The use of the semantic prime MOVE represents activity involving a change of position, while the semantic prime HAPPEN represents activity that occurs or is experienced by someone. In addition, the existence of actors and undergoers is also found in the semantic roles of the Sanskrit event verbs found in the Bhagavad Gita. The semantic role AGENT tends to refer to the subject performing an activity; PATIENT becomes the entity that experiences a state change; EXPERIENCER becomes the party that experiences internal states, whether good or bad; SOURCE becomes the source of an activity; and THEME becomes the entity that experiences an action.

Future researchers are encouraged to explore other linguistic units of Sanskrit (nouns, adjectives, and adverbs) or the processes of forming these linguistic units (case formation and *sandbiḥ*) in the *Bhagavad Gita*. In addition, future researchers are expected to use other data sources to analyze the use of other types of Sanskrit verbs and use a wider range of Hindu religious literature.

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