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To come into bloom: On the emergence of light verb constructions in Old West Norse

1 Introduction

Although it seems that every publication on light verb constructions (LVCs)[1] must make reference to the fact that it is still not entirely clear, what it is that constitutes them as a class cross-linguistically as well as with a focus on a single language or closely related languages[2], some core characteristics of this class of more or less fixed expressions have become apparent by today (Butt, 2010). It is not my intention here to define in as much detail as possible what an LVC in Old West Norse is, and nor do I think a strict definition (in the sense that it does not allow for contradictions and issues without an evident solution) is possible or preferable.

What I am rather going to do here is the following: In section 2, I am going to present what is to be considered the core characteristics of prototypical light verb constructions in the Germanic languages. In section 3, I am going to present the morphosemantic core characteristics of the reconstructed Proto-Germanic verbal systems. The four classes of that system will be discussed in individual subsections. I am going to do the same for the Old West Norse verbal system in section 4. Section 5 is devoted to some early prototypical light verb and similar constructions as attested in Old West Norse, with special focus on semantics. In four subsections, causative, stative/durative, inchoative, and intensive LVC will be discussed. The article concludes with a summary of the findings and open questions.

I am doing all this in order to promote an idea concerning the emergence of Germanic LVCs that has been brought up before.[3] Namely, that it is connected to the

1 In the article, I am going to use both the abbreviation 'LVC' and the written form 'light verb construction' indiscriminately mainly because I vacillate between meeting the requirements for high reading efficiency and my reservations about using abbreviations too frequently outside a lexicon.

2 Cf. Harm's recent note, "[d]ie Klage über die Vagheit des Begriffs 'Funktionsverbgefüge' ist längst zu einem Topos geworden" 'the complaint about the vagueness of the term 'light verb construction' has long since become a topos' (2021, 5).

3 The history and development of LVCs have mostly been discussed for Old High German, see Filatkina (2018) with recent literature; Blum (1986); Relleke (1974). For case studies on German

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weakening (and subsequent collapse) of the Germanic system of weak verbs. Even though that connection has already been assumed, fleshing out the details is still in its early stages. However, I do not aim for a systematic analysis in the present article. My approach is of a rather exploratory nature.

2 Prototypical light verb constructions in Germanic

A prototypical light verb construction as understood in the present article consists of a verb, a preposition, and a noun. They jointly form a complex predicate and therefore coarticulate the situational content.

Not every verb can be part of a light verb construction, but the verbs involved are commonly verbs of movement or transfer. This criterion seems to be very consistent throughout history and languages.[4] I am therefore going to focus on them in this article. Typical light verbs are the correspondences of 'to go', 'to come' (for movement) and 'to give', 'to take', 'to put' (for transfer). It can be specified that these verbs of movement or transfer not only verbalise basic human concepts (Harm, 2021, 44), but it seems they are restricted to their basic form. That is why the German verb *gehen* 'to go' can function as a light verb, but not the more specific *rennen* 'to run'. Consider, for example, the following two sentences:

(1) a. *Mein Wunsch wird in Erfüllung gehen.*
my wish will in fulfillment go
'My wish will come true.'
b. **Mein Wunsch wird in Erfüllung rennen.*
my wish will in fulfillment run

kommen 'to come' as a light verb, see Fleischhauer and Hartmann (2021) and Fleischhauer and Hartmann (2023). For (Old) English, see Brinton and Akimoto (1999). For Germanic in general, see Boldt (2023, 107–136).

4 It can be assumed that those verbs are stable in this regard, i.e., there is no indication that they started out as main verbs and somehow developed a secondary use as a semantically reduced light verb. It has in fact been shown that already by the time of the earliest Indo-European attestations, those verbs did function as light verbs, cf. Proto-Indo-European **d*^{h}*eh*$_1$- 'to put' in Ancient Greek *ὄνομα τίθημι* [ónoma títhēmi], Vedic *nāma dhā-* etc. 'to give a name' from the Proto-Indo-European LVC **h*$_1$*neh*$_3$*m̥n d*^{h}*eh*$_{1/3}$- (on this type see Schutzeichel, 2013, Hackstein, 2002, 6–8, 15–16, and recently Ittzés, 2024). Throughout this process, noun and verb became so closely connected to one another that the former verb was phonologically reduced to *-*d*^{h}- and fused with the noun. The *-*d*^{h}- could even be abstracted and used to form new roots (Kölligan, 2018).

In sentence (1a), the basic verb of movement *gehen* 'to go' functions as light verb in the LVC *in Erfüllung gehen* 'to come true'. By comparison, sentence (1b) differs from (1a) only in the selection of the more specific verb of movement *rennen* 'to run'. However, this selection results in an ungrammatical expression *in Erfüllung rennen*.

The most striking property of the verb in a light verb construction is its lightness. That means that it differs from a non-light, i.e., a full lexical verb in that it carries a reduced, non-literal abstract meaning, even though it is identical in form and inflectional properties to such a verb. *Mein Wunsch* 'my wish' from the above sentence is not literally going anywhere, because a wish is not capable of doing so, the subject cannot move through space. Instead, the verb conveys semantic nuances that differ from the meaning of an etymologically related simple verb that often, but not always, exists. In the above example, *in Erfüllung gehen* differs from the simple passive verb *erfüllt werden* 'to be fulfilled' in that the verb in the LVC highlights that a change to the situation is taking place. It highlights the inchoative aspect of the construction as a whole.[5] When I am using the term 'aspect' here and in the following, I am always referring to 'lexical aspect' (German 'Aktionsart') as opposed to 'grammatical aspect' ('Aspekt').

While pioneering work on LVCs has regarded the marking of aspect as essential (von Polenz, 1963, 1987, but already Heringer, 1968), newer research promotes the view that this is only one of the characteristics of the LVCs (Harm, 2021, 6–49 with references). Other semantic characteristics are causativity and passivity, while higher syntactic flexibility, pragmatic reordering, and stylistic characteristics concern further parts of the language system.

Just like the verbs, not every noun can be part of an LVC. Instead, the slot is restricted to abstract nouns, i.e., nouns that denote actions, activities, processes, events, or states.[6] Since the noun is part of the predicate and not its argument, it can not be asked for or be replaced by a pronoun or another noun:

(2) *Mein Freund geht in ein Haus.*
my friend is.going into a house
'My friend is going into a house.'

5 Adopting a historical perspective, however, elucidates the fact that an etymologically related simple verb cannot always be expected to exist. Filatkina (2018, 260) shows that for the Old High German prototypical LVC *zi site habēn* 'to do something habitually' no such etymologically related simple verb is attested.

6 For my purposes, it is more convenient to stick to the wider term abstract noun instead of the narrower eventive noun. For the latter, see Fleischhauer (2022, 267). For a general discussion, see Harm (2021, 23–26).

While in the structurally identical LVCs (as (1a)), we could neither ask *where* the wish is going nor can the noun be replaced by *there* or *into a garage*. However, both is possible in (2): *Where is your friend going?* and *My friend is going there/into a garage* are perfectly fine sentences.

The noun in an LVC includes the semantic role mediated by the verb, expresses quantification, definiteness, and carries the meaning of the construction. As Hellan remarks, the noun "avails itself of the light verb to have its predicative content expressed in a sentential pattern" (Hellan, 2023, 47). In this sense, the noun has a richer content then it has by itself. While the verb in an LVC is considered 'light', the noun, in contrast, can be considered 'heavy'. A light verb construction, from this point of view, is also a heavy noun construction.

Very little is known about the role of the preposition in LVCs. It appears only spatial prepositions, i.e., the equivalents of 'in(to)', 'on(to)', 'to', are allowed. Like the verb, the preposition loses its literal meaning. Prototypical LVCs, that is constructions that contain a preposition, are attested from early on in the history of the Germanic languages (Boldt, 2023, 114–120) and are especially frequent in modern Dutch, e.g., *onder controle staan* 'to be controlled', literally 'to stand under control', and German, e.g., *in Beziehung setzen* 'to relate', literally 'to put in relation' (von Polenz, 1987, 171), but are also known in English, e.g., *to come into bloom*, or Norwegian, e.g., *sette i forbindelse* 'to connect', literally 'to put in connection'.

3 The morphosemantic system of the Germanic weak verbs

One of the key properties that sets apart the Germanic languages from the other Indo-European languages is that Germanic languages have developed a distinct threefold verbal system. One group within the threefold verbal system is populated by the strong verbs. This inflectional class mostly contains underived verbs that form their preterite with an ablauting root vowel, cf. PG[7] **beitō* 'I bite' with its preterite **bait* 'I bit'.[8] This type is inherited from Proto-Indo-European but has undergone several changes in Germanic depending on the phonological surrounding of the

7 PG = Proto-Germanic. Other recurring language abbreviations used throughout this paper are: Goth. = Gothic, Lat. = Latin; MHG = Middle High German; OE = Old English; OFris = Old Frisian; OHG = Old High German; OS = Old Saxon; OWN = Old West Norse; PIE = Proto-Indo-European.

8 For reasons of space and readability, I am only giving the reconstructed Proto-Germanic forms here, not the attested forms of the daughter languages, which make these reconstructions possible. The attested forms can easily be looked-up in, e.g., Ringe (2017), and Kroonen (2013).

root vowel (Harðarson, 2017, 931–935; Ringe, 2017, 263–279; Krahe and Meid, 1969, 97–118). Another group is populated by the preterite-presents. This rather limited group of about fifteen verbs formed its present tense like a strong preterite (that developed from the PIE perfect), while its finite past and past participle were weak, cf. PG **wait* 'I know', **wissōn* 'I knew', **wissaz* 'known' (Harðarson, 2017, 939; Ringe, 2017, 290–293; Krahe and Meid, 1969, 135–139). This leaves the last group, which is populated by the weak verbs. The majority of weak verbs are derived from nouns or strong verbs, some from adjectives or adverbs, some are primary, i.d., non-derived verbs. The weak verbs are divided into four classes and are here referred to as (I) *jan*-verbs, (II) *ōn*-verbs, (III) *ēn*-verbs, and (IV) *nan*-verbs depending on which of these suffixes was used to form the respective present stem. Crucially, what sets the weak verbs apart from the strong verbs is that they form their preterite by adding a dental element PG **d* to the originally non-ablauting root[9], cf. the class I verb PG **satjan-* 'to put, make sit' with its preterite form **satidō* 'I put, made sit'. The dental element developed into OWN *ð, t, d*, or *þ* depending on the preceding phoneme and whether the root syllable was light or heavy (Noreen, 1923, §507; Nedoma, 2010, 117–118 for details). The originally non-ablauting root vowel could become subject to secondary sound change and analogical leveling in Old West Norse. That is why we have OWN *setja* 'to put, make sit' (< **satjan-*) and *setta* 'I put, made sit' (< **satidō*) with *i*-umlaut.

Although the Germanic weak verbs are usually divided on formal grounds with regard to the present suffix, it has long been noticed that the formal differences are accompanied by semantic respectively functional differences of the suffix. As far as I can trace back this path of research, Jacobi (1843) was the first one to do so. The most recent overview regarding the semantics that the Germanic weak derived verbs show in relation to their nominal or verbal bases is given by Ringe (2017, 280–290), and thus will serve as the basis for my analysis. In the following sections, I am going to discuss the semantic properties of the individual weak classes, focusing on inconsistencies and ambiguities. These inconsistencies and ambiguities are understood here as symptoms of the beginning of the collapse of the system of weak verbs which in turn is the condition of the possibility of the emergence of light verb constructions.

9 The literature on the origin of the dental element is abundant. For recent overviews with references, see Fulk (2018, 292–294); Ringe (2017, 191–194).

3.1 Class I

The class I verbs are generally known to be causative, factitive or (rarely) intensive-iterative derivations from their individual bases. To stay with the above example: the weak verb PG **satjan-* 'to put, make sit' is a deverbal derivation from the strong verb **sitjan-* 'to sit'. The meaning of this and many other formally identical or similar formations can be paraphrased as 'to cause to happen what is expressed in the base', therefore the term is causative.[10] Very similar to the causatives are the factitives as they differ only in that they are derived from adjectives, cf. PG **daudijan-* 'to kill', a derivation from **dauda-* 'dead'. The paraphrase that can be used to describe how derivation and base relate to each other semantically is the same as for the causatives, that is with regards to our example 'to cause to be dead'. A few Proto-Germanic desubstantival derivations are reconstructable as well. It appears as if they are not so easily definable semantically as a group, but at least some of them are closely related to the causatives and factitives, cf. the PG noun **daili-* 'part' and its class I derivation **dailijan-* 'to divide', which is best understood as 'to make a part', or the PG noun **dōma-* 'judgment' and its derivation **dōmijan-* 'to judge' or 'to make a judgment'.[11] A little different is the case of **arbijan-* 'to inherit', a derivation from **arbija-* 'heritage; inheritance', where factitive semantics ('to make heritage') is noticeable, but not straightforward. Finally, some intensive-iteratives are reconstructable with certainty for Proto-Germanic already, cf. **draibijan-* 'to drive' from the strong verb **dreiban-* 'to drive' and **waljan-* 'to choose' from **wiljan-* 'to want'.[12] What is striking about the intensive-iteratives is that the reconstructions as given in Ringe (2017, 283) seem to differ only slightly in meaning from their derivational bases. That might reflect an artifact resulting form the methods of reconstruction, but it still is conceivable that the differences could be (or become) minimal and eventually contribute to the destabilization of the whole system. It is important here to point out and keep in mind that the earliest reconstructable stages of the system of Germanic weak verbs suggest discrepancies and ambiguities. In addition, there is evidence which suggests that already in Proto-Germanic times there were some fossilized weak verbs from bases no longer in use. These should

10 According to Ringe (2017, 281), more than two dozen causatives are securely reconstructable for Proto-Germanic.

11 Ringe's (2017, 284) statement, "[t]he semantics of those [class I verbs, R.B.] derived from nouns seem to have been governed by the semantics of the noun" is too superficial. Krahe and Meid (1969, 248) use the term *Objektverwirklichung* 'realization of objects' when talking about those verbs.

12 Ringe (2017, 283) takes four examples that he considers "reasonably clear" from Krahe and Meid (1969, 247). The last two are **wagjan-* 'to move' and **wrakjan-* 'to drive (out)'. See García García (2005, 41–42, 63–64) for Goth. *draibjan-* 'to drive; to plague, to harass', which she considers the only real intensive formation in Gothic.

have been at least deverbal PG **tawjan-* 'to make' and PG **wazjan-* 'to clothe, dress', both formally regular causative formations belonging to PIE **deh$_1$u̯-* 'put together, organize' (LIV add. s.v. **deh$_1$u̯-*) and PIE **u̯es-* 'to wear (clothes), to be clothed with' (Rix and Kümmel, 2001, 692–693), respectively.[13] Also, there is denominal **hauzijan-* 'to hear' < PIE **h$_2$ḱ-h$_2$ows-i̯é/ó-*, 'to be sharp-eared'.[14] While the derivation **tawjan-* is attested already in Proto-Norse runic inscriptions, the earliest being the 3SG.PRS form **tawide** on the Garbølle wooden box (Krause, 1971, 148) from around 160–400, the derivational basis is attested nowhere in Germanic. It might be helpful, though, to consider how little difference there is between the reconstructed semantics of the PIE root **deh$_1$u̯-* 'to put together, organize' and the actually attested 'to make'. If this is not an artifact related to the general methods of semantic reconstruction, it is conceivable that there is a genuine instability in the semantic relation between verbs for 'to do; to make' and other verbs that cover a wide semantic range on the one hand and their respective derivations on the other.[15]

In addition, it is possible that the derivational direction cannot be determined satisfactorily. This, among others, appears to be the case for PG **gaumijan-* 'to notice, pay attention to'. While for Ringe (2017, 284), the situation is "difficult to determine", Lühr et al. (1988–2024, IV: s.v. gouma) understand PG **gaumō-* as "wohl postverbal" 'probably postverbal' from **gaumijan-*, and Schuhmann (2024, 110) favors Goth. *gaumjan* to be a denominal formation. Grestenberger and Kastner (2022) have recently argued that questions of directionality are not only a matter of historical linguistics. Rather, they can show "that [even] overt categorizing and derivational morphology is no guarantee for an unambiguous synchronic morphological analysis of directionality (though it certainly helps)" (Grestenberger and Kastner, 2022, 47). That means that even for the speakers of a language it is sometimes not entirely clear what is the basis and what is the derivation. If that happens to a sufficient extent, it might contribute to the confusion of derivational means in general.

For questions that arise from the semantic opposition of the class I *jan-* and the class IV *nan*-verbs, see below.

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13 Ringe (2017, 282) claims that also PG **sandijana-* 'to send' and **tandijana-* 'to kindle (trans.)' were fossilized formations with bases no longer in use. However, OWN *sinna* 'to travel, drive; pull, follow someone; adhere to, pay attention to, take care of, think about', OHG *sinnan* 'to strive, demand, go, come', OS *-sinnan* 'to recover consciousness, recall to one's mind', and OE *sinnan* 'to care for, mind, heed' point to a PG strong verb **sen(þ)na-*. For a discussion, see Lühr et al. (1988–2024, VII: s.v. sinnan). Also, OE *tinneð* 'ignites' and MHG *zinne* 'I ignite', both attested once, might point to a Germanic strong verb **tinnan-* 'to ignite (intr.)'. See Seebold (1970, 502); Kroonen (2013, 518).

14 A more literal German translation would be *spitze Ohren machen* 'to make pointed ears'.

15 But Kroonen (cf. 2013, 511), who understands the Germanic forms PN *tawjan** and Goth. *taujan* as factitive formations from PG **gatawa-* 'ready, finished' that would be only indirectly attested in Slavic loanwords going back to Proto-Slavic **gotovъ*.

3.2 Class II

The situation of the class II *ōn*-verbs is quite different from that of the class I *jan*-verbs. The oldest members of this group are denominals formed from *ō*-stems, with the case in point being PG **salbōn*- 'to anoint; to provide with ointment', derived from **salbō*- 'ointment, salve'.[16] However, in the PIE period it became possible to form *ōn*-verbs from other stems, as can for example be seen by Goth. *fiskon* 'to fish' and the corresponding Lat. *piscāri*, both derivations from PIE **pisk-o*- respectively **pisk-i*- 'fish' (Krahe and Meid, 1969, 239). The deverbal formations were mostly intensive-iteratives, cf. PG **wlaitōn*- 'to look around', a derivation from the strong verb **wleitan*- 'to look'. The denominal formations, however, formed a much more open group regarding semantics and this is particularly interesting for our purposes. According to Schaefer (1984, 363–383) there were eight types of desubstantival *ōn*-verbs alone, including agentives ('to act like the BS [= base substantive]'), fientives ('BS is taking place, happening'), efficientives ('to make BS [effected object]'), facientives ('to make BS [affected object]'), the *fiskōn*-type ('to catch, to collect BS') emotives ('to feel BS'), ornatives ('to equip someone with BS'), and instrumentatives ('to do something with BS'). Schaefer discusses words that are attested in more than one Old Germanic languages. This does not suggest that all the words mentioned here are of Proto-Germanic origin. It may, however, indicate that the processes of word-formation themselves are Proto-Germanic. As I will argue that the emergence of light verb constructions was connected to the collapse of the system of the Germanic weak verbs, let us keep this apparent diversity in mind, whether one agrees with it in detail or not.[17]

In this class, too, there were a few fossilised forms. As for the verb PG **frijōn*- 'to love', a synchronic derivational base **frija*- 'free' is reconstructable, but the two differ in meaning to such an extent that it seems likely that no speaker would connect them to one another.[18] In addition, there is a verb PG **wratōn*-, that looks like a derivation. However, no base is attested anywhere in the Germanic languages, and so it is likely that it never existed.

16 For an extensive discussion of the etymology, see Lühr et al. (1988–2024, VII: s.v. salbôn).

17 The same is true for Schwerdt (2008, 98), who identifies eighteen types of denominal derivations for the four weak classes. It might be questionable if this is necessary or particularly useful. Ringe (2017, 286) even states that the denominatives could be "formed freely".

18 On the etymology and for further references see Rix and Kümmel (2001, 490) and Schuhmann (2024, 91).

3.3 Class III

For the class III *ēn*-verbs, again, the situation is different from the other classes. The driving forces for the semantic inconsistencies of this class can be seen in the circumstance that the *ēn*-verbs contained mostly deverbal stative verbs and denominal factitive verbs with originally different suffixes that began to merge during the PIE period already (Yakubovich, 2013, 386–391). This group became secondarily productive in Old High German (forming inchoative verbs), but some of the verbs can be reconstructed for Proto-Germanic. By this time, however, they appear to have been a rather small group. I am citing here four Gothic examples that probably had cognates in Old High German, which would suggest that this type of word formation dates back to the Proto-Germanic period: Goth. *ana-*, *gaþiwan* 'to enslave', OHG *dewēn* 'to humiliate', continuing a derivation from the PG noun **þewa-* 'servant, slave'; Goth. *arman* 'to pity', OHG *armēn* 'to become poor; to suffer', continuing a deadjectival derivation from PG **arma-* 'poor, miserable'; Goth. *fastan* 'to hold fast, to maintain', OHG *fastēn* 'to fast, abstain from food', continuing a deadjectival derivation from PG **fasta-* 'fixed' (with a possible semantic narrowing 'to adhere (to the fixed Christian commandments)' > 'to keep (a commandment)' > 'to observe the fasting commandment (as a clearly recognizable sign of the Christian faith)' in OHG (Lühr et al., 1988–2024, III: s.v. fastên)) and Goth. *sweran* 'to honor', OHG *swārēn* 'to be heavy, to become heavy', both continuing a deadjectival derivation from PG **swēra-* 'weighty' (with metaphorical narrowing 'to make weighty' > 'to make (someone's) words weighty' > 'to consider important' > 'to honor' in Gothic, cf. Vedic *gurú-* 'heavy, weighty; honorable person; teacher, master' from a PIE root *$*g^{\underline{u}}reh_2$-* 'heavy', Mayrhofer, 1992, 490). Not only was this group comparatively small, it was also in competition with the deadjectival derivations that formed the class I-verbs of the **daudijan-* : *dauda-*type mentioned above.

Apart from the few factitives, there was the larger group of statives in Proto-Germanic. Some of them maintained a distinct inflection,[19] but most of them merged with the factitives. Again, some of those seem to have become fossilized forms that by the time of Proto-Germanic were no longer synchronically analyzable, e.g., PG **silēn-* 'to be still', the base of which should be an adjective **sila-* 'still, silent'. However, this is not attested anywhere.[20] PG **þulēn-* 'to endure' is a primary verb belonging to the PIE root *$*telh_2$-* 'to pick up, take upon oneself' (Schuhmann, 2024, 301 with references). PG **fijēn-* 'to hate' is another primary verb, belonging to the PIE root *$*peh_1i$-* 'to reprimand, taunt'. Additionally, the verb PG **hatēn-* 'to hate' is, according

19 Ringe (2017, 287), but **sagjan-* 'say' can hardly be understood as a stative.

20 OE *sāl* 'still, silent' (if emended correctly) continues the *o*-grade **saila-*, see Schuhmann (2024, 20).

to Ringe (2017, 288), not obviously derived from the *s*-stem noun **hataz* ∼ **hatiz-*. However, this example seems less clear as a synchronic motivation might have been given.

3.4 Class IV

The class IV *nan*-verbs remained a formally distinct class only in Gothic, while the Old Norse verbs are inflected exactly like the class II *ōn*-verbs.[21] This class has long been understood as containing deverbal inchoatives respectively deadjectival fientives. In recent years, however, some have begun to suggest that these verbs are best understood as being, above all else, anticausatives (Scheungraber, 2014; Ottósson, 2013). Indeed, if we consider the six deverbal examples that are, according to Ringe (2017, 289–290) securely reconstructable for Proto-Germanic, what is striking is that these verbs seem to require a non-agentive subject and cannot be passivized. In PG **libnan-*[22] 'to be left over', **(fra-)luznan-* 'to become lost', **þurznan-* 'to dry out (intr.), wither', **gasturknan-* 'to dry up (intr.), thicken', **waknan-* 'to wake up (intr.)', and **liznan-* 'to learn', the subject is the one to whom something happens, or, in Jacobi's words, "[d]ieses ist dabei nicht thätig [...], sondern leidend" 'it is not active, but permissive' (1843, 195). All of them were made to strong verbs that can also be reconstructed for Proto-Germanic. The same is true for the deadjectivals **$k^{w}ik^{w}nan$-* 'to come to life', which was formed to **$k^{w}ik^{w}a$-* 'alive', and **(ga-)batnan-* 'to get better', which was formed to **batizō-* 'better'.

Additionally, there was a group of strong (!) *nan*-verbs in Proto-Germanic, that could not show the same aspectual nuances as the weak derived *nan*-verbs and therefore might have challenged the otherwise apparently large conformity of this class. PG **spurnan-* 'to kick, spurn', that is reflected as strong verb in OE *spurnan*, *spornan*, OHG *-spurnan*, and (with less certainty) in OWN *sporna*, OFris. *spurna*, OS (*bi-*)*spurnan*, but also shows weak reflexes in OE *-sprynan*, OWN *spyrna*, OHG (-)*spurnen*, is very likely one of those words.[23]

A striking feature that might have contributed to the comparatively large semantic conformity of this class is the fact that they exhibited a strong formal semantic

21 On the pre-history of this class, see Scheungraber (2014, 169–177).

22 The verbs of this class are usually reconstructed as exhibiting the two stem variants **-nō-* ∼ **-na-*, reflecting an older ablauting suffix PIE **-neh$_2$-* ∼ **nh$_2$-*. Since the morphology of these verbs is not of primary importance here, I use the simplified notation **-nan-* to refer to them.

23 For the most recent reflections on this word, see now Lühr et al. (1988–2024, VIII: s.v. firspurnan) as well as Scheungraber (2014, 93–95), and Marti Heinzle (2014, 169–170).

opposition with the *jan*-verbs.[24] Katz recently explains that "a significant number of *-nan* predicates stand beside corresponding verbs of the first weak class in *-jan*, or beside strong verbs. For these, the *-nan* verb comprises half of a grammatical pairing" (Katz, 2021, 87). Indeed, I could find only two possible examples of verbs that might have been fossilized already by the Proto-Germanic period, both of which are only attested in Gothic and the first of which could very well be explained as secondary: PG **dōbnan-*, only attested in Goth. *afdobnan* 'to become dull, numb' (or secondarily nasalized, see Schuhmann, 2024, 68); PG **feinan-*, only attested in Goth. *infeinan* 'to have mercy'. The verb is probably a deadjectival derivation from **fija-* 'reconciled' (?), which is, however, attested nowhere in Germanic (Schuhmann, 2024, 160 with references).

3.5 Summary

The semantic nuances that the derived Proto-Germanic verbs show in relation to their bases are as follows:

- Class I: causative, factitive, intensive-iterative
- Class II: intensive-iterative, agentives, fientives, efficientives, facientives, *fiskōn*-type, emotives, ornatives, instrumentatives (probably because of the detailed study by Schaefer, 1984; a similar study by Schwerdt, 2008 suggests that the other classes were more diversified as well, but since she does not aim for a reconstruction of the Proto-Germanic system, her findings are of rather little value for the purposes discussed here.)
- Class III: stative, factitive
- Class IV: anticausative-inchoative

With that in mind, we can now summarize the semantic inconsistencies that were inherent to the Proto-Germanic system of weak verbs: a) For every class (except probably class IV) it is evident that the suffix carries out multiple functions. While it is probably true that there is a prototypical function, a single class forming feature should not be assumed. b) Some functions are in turn carried out by different suffixes (intensive-iterative: *-jan-* and *-ōn-*; factitive: *-jan-* and *-ēn-*), which means that the corresponding classes (I and II, respectively I and III) were in competition with one another semantically. c) Every class contains some unanalyzable fossils that

24 This opposition led Krämer (1971, 34) to suspect that *-j-* has a causative/factitive function only when it opposes a *nan*-verb or a strong verb. Therefore Goth. *hafjan*, lacking such an opposition, can keep its *-j-* which, according to Krämer, would have been otherwise likely to become subject of analogical removal.

synchronically do not relate to a base but look exactly like the rest of the group, i.e., verbs that were very well analyzable synchronically.

That state of linguistic development shown here indicates that the form of the word forming suffixes is partially detached from the content, i.e., the function of said suffixes. The former are thus partially reduced to mere inflectional markers and so become less capable of expressing semantic nuances.

4 The system of Old West Norse weak verbs

We have seen that already by the pre-historic Proto-Germanic period accessible to us by means of linguistic reconstruction the system of the weak verbs exhibited contradictions and discrepancies, which have led to the weakening of that said system in the daughter languages (except for Gothic). Since I want to argue that this weakening has contributed to the emergence of light verb constructions in Old West Norse, it is reasonable to now shed light on the system of weak verbs in this language and to pay special attention to the visible contradictions and discrepancies as well. In contrast to Gothic and the continental West Germanic languages (Schwerdt, 2008), the word formation of the Old West Norse weak verbs has not yet been subject to systematic investigations that are based on thorough corpus analyses and modern methods. It seems possible, however, to at least outline the main characteristics based on the works of Torp (1974, 38–46); Wessén (1970, 94–113) and a more recent article by Ottósson (2013).

Formally, the Old West Norse system distinguished between three weak classes of verbs, with the previously distinct class IV *nan*-verbs now inflecting exactly like those of class II. In section 4.1, I am going to examine the implications of this change.

4.1 Class I

As in Proto-Germanic, the Old West Norse class I contained causatives, factitives and intensive-iteratives. While the deverbal causatives “constitute a minority of that verb class, [...] the denominative [i.d, factitive; R.B.] *ja*-verbs seem to have been more productive in Old Nordic” (Ottósson, 2013, 367). This can be seen from young formations like OWN *hógværa* ‘to appease, calm down’, from *hógværr* ‘gentle, calm’, and OWN *prýða* ‘to adorn’, from *prúðr* ‘magnificent’, a loan from OE *prūd* ‘proud, arrogant’ (Fulk, 2018, 291).

Let us now return to the verb ‘to put, make sit’, reconstructable as PG **satjan-* (see Sections 3 and 3.1). It can be analyzed as having the *o*-grade of the root (with the

regular development PIE **o* > PG **a*) in contrast to its strong base **sitjan-* that shows the expected *e*-grade (with **e* > **i* as result of early *i*-umlaut). We know from similar cases that the *jan*-suffix in combination with the *o*-grade root forms causatives, factitives, and intensive-iteratives. However, in this particular case (and similar cases)[25] where the base verb continues a pre-Proto-Germanic *-i̯e/o-*present, the context is obscured because both the base **sitjan-* and the derivation **satjan-* show the element **-jan-*.

In Old West Norse, the *-j-* of the suffix causes umlaut, turning the **-a-* of the root into the palatal vowel *-e-*, in this case PG **satjan-* > OWN *setja*.[26] While those verbs might still have been analyzable to some degree, the *-j-* that triggered the umlaut in the first place could vanish in other cases making it unlikely that base and derivation could still be analyzed synchronically: while the *-j-* was retained after light root syllables before *a* and *u* (as in *setja*) and after heavy syllables between *g/k* and *a* or *u* (as in *drekkja* 'to drown, submerge (trans.)' < **drankijan-*), it was omitted in all other cases (Noreen, 1923, §§62–70; Nedoma, 2010, 47). That is why we have a pair like OWN *drjúpa* 'to drip' (< **dreupan-*) with a causative *dreypa* 'to let fall in drops' (< **draupjan-*). The "umlaut [comes] on top of ablaut […] making the phonological distance between base and derivation rather long" (Ottósson, 2013, 365). It is this great phonological distance that helps to obscure the connection between base and derivation. It finally yields a situation where once highly productive means of forming deverbal causatives becomes less applicable.

It is promising to understand other forms that were not analyzable synchronically in light of this context as well. Some of them were fossils like OWN *leifa* 'to leave behind', the causative of a strong verb that would have continued PG **leiban-* 'to stay'. However, these forms are not attested in OWN (and neither are they attested anywhere else in Germanic, but see the prefixed form PG **bileiban-* 'to stay' giving Goth. *bileiban*, OE *belīfan*, OHG *bilīban*). Another example might be OWN *beygja* 'to bend (trans.)', the causative of a strong verb that would have continued PG **beugan-* 'to bend (intr.)', which in its regular form is not attested on OWN but, for instance, in Goth. *biugan*, and OHG *biogan*. There is a strong form OWN *bugu* and a participle *boginn* 'curved, crooked, hooked, circular' (as well as Old Swedish *būgha* 'id.'), but they continue an unexpected root vowel **-ū-*, making it questionable as to whether speakers would associate the historically connected forms to each other.

Although most the *jan*-verbs were derived, some were primary and so had no synchronic base, cf. *søkja* 'to seek, fetch', a cognate with Goth. *sokjan*, OE *sēcan*, OHG

25 **ligjan-* 'to lie', **bidjan-* 'to ask for'. The *-i̯e/o-*presents were also common in the sixth strong verbal class with the present root vowel **a*, e.g., **swarjan-* 'to swear', **skapjan-* 'to make, fashion'. See Ringe (2017, 276).

26 But see the non-umlauting forms Goth. *satjan* : *satida* and Proto-Norse **satjan* : **satido** (Rö stone).

suohhen continuing PG **sōkijan-*, in turn a continuation from a *-i̯e/o-*present from the root PIE **seh$_2$g-* (Rix and Kümmel, 2001, 520; Kümmel, 2023, 71; Schuhmann, 2024, 260–261).

Some *jan*-verbs, in turn, were not analyzable as derived because the semantic difference between them and their respective base was too little, cf. OWN *þreifa* 'to touch, feel with the hand', historically a derivation from *þrífa* 'to grip, grasp, take hold of'. In addition, we have *hverfa* 'to (over-)turn' from PG **hwarbijan-* that at some point must have fallen together with its strong base **hwerban-*, yielding an isolated Old West Norse verb without base.

While we do not have detailed studies on the intensive-iterative group of the *jan*-verbs in Old West Norse, we know that at least some of them contributed to the weakening of the verbal system as the formal relation between base and derivation had become less apparent, cf. OWN *nema* 'to take' and the somewhat obscured *jan*-derivation *nœma* 'to deprive of'.

4.2 Class II

Class II is the biggest class in Old West Norse. The situation for the verbs of this class is quite different from that of class I. Perpetuating what we have seen for Proto-Germanic, the denominal verbs that belong to this class can show a great variety of derivational semantics in relation to their bases. Two examples may suffice here: 1) From the abstract noun OWN *afl* 'physical or mental strength, power' a verb *afla* 'to beget, arrange, achieve' was formed. The meaning of this verb can be generalized as 'to use what is mentioned in the base as an instrument'. It is therefore part of the group of instrumentals. 2) From the concrete noun OWN *dúkr* 'scarf, cloth, towel', a verb *dúka* 'to provide with a dúkr' was formed. The meaning of this verb can be generalized as 'to provide with what is mentioned in the base'. It is therefore part of the group of ornatives.

In contrast, the semantic variety of the deverbal derivations is much more limited in that they were mostly intensive-iteratives (with geminated voiceless root consonant, perhaps expressive in nature), cf. the OWN strong verb *ljúga* 'to lie' and the weak verb *lokka* 'to lure, entice' (< 'seduce' < 'to lie repeatedly'; Wissmann, 1932, 176; different Lühr et al., 1988–2024, V: s.v. liogan; Lühr, 1988, 348).

Old West Norse had some primary *ōn*-verbs, e.g., OWN *hrata* 'to crash, fall down', a descendant from PIE **(s)k/ḱer-* 'to jump, swing' (Rix and Kümmel, 2001, 556, 793) but "[e]lles er heile den uhorvelege mengdi av *ô*-verb avleidd" 'apart from that, most of the *ô*-verbs (= *ōn*-verbs, R.B.) are derived' (Torp, 1974, 38; similar Wessén, 1970, 95 "der weitaus größere Teil der *ō*-Verben (= *ōn*-Verben, R.B.) […] besteht indessen aus Ableitungen" 'the vast majority of ō-verbs (= ōn-verbs, R.B.), however, consist

of derivatives'). For a lot of those derived verbs, however, the base is not attested synchronically in the Old West Norse texts, e.g., *skoða* 'to view, look after'[27] or *mjólka* 'to milk'[28].

The former anticausative-inchoative *nan*-verbs of the fourth class gave up their existence as a morphologically distinct class in Old West Norse and inflect exactly like the old *ōn*-verbs. This can be seen in Table 1, which contains the present inflection of the former *nan*-verb *sofna* 'to fall asleep' and the old *ōn*-verb *kalla* 'to call, name':

Tab. 1: Present inflection of *sofna* and *kalla*.

SG	*sofna*	*kalla*
	sofnar	*kallar*
	sofnar	*kallar*
PL	*sofnum*	*kǫllum*
	sofnið	*kallið*
	sofna	*kalla*

Oddly enough, the former *nan*-verbs became secondarily productive in Old West Norse (Boldt, forthcoming; Torp, 1974, 41; Wessén, 1970, 100–110). While the early formal development of this class is not completely understood[29], synchronically it leads to class II-verbs being even more heterogeneous semantically as it adds weak verbs with anticausative-inchoative semantics to the already existing diversity. What can be seen in the case of *sofna* from the above table is that we have a non-agentive subject to which something is happening (and which therefore cannot be passivized). The same holds true for other former *nan*-verbs like *skriðna* 'to glide' with a base *skríða* 'to creep, crawl' or *rifna* 'to be rent, split' with a base *rífa* 'to tear'.

The majority of the *nan*-verbs were associated secondarily to the past participle of the strong verbs (*brotna* 'to break in two, break in pieces, crumble, collapse' to *brotinn* 'broken (off), fractured'; *bogna* 'to become bent, bend, crouch, buckle, become crooked' to *boginn* 'curved, crooked, hooked, circular'). However, there were some verbs with no such association and no attested synchronic base, e.g., *togna* 'to be stretched', the continuation of a derivation from PG **teuhan-* 'to pull', as attested in

27 With unclear etymology and derivational base; perhaps related to OE *sceāwian* 'to look, observe', OHG *skouwōn* 'to look, observe'. For those, see now Lühr et al. (1988–2024, VIII: s.v. skouwôn).

28 A deverbal derivation from strong PG **melkan-* 'to milk' which is attested in OE *melcan*, *meolcan*, OHG *melkan*, OS *melkan*; but probably with secondary association to *mjolk* 'milk'. See Lühr et al. (1988–2024, VI: s.v. melkan).

29 For the earliest tangible functions of the nasal verbal formation in Proto-Indo-European, see Scheungraber (2014, 182–183).

OE *teōn* and OHG *ziohan*. In the case of *staðna* ‘to stop, pause’, speakers did probably associate the verb with its strong base *standa* ‘to stand, stay’, but the formal as well as the semantic side must have been somewhat obscure.

What is remarkable about the *nan*-verbs is that they had a strong connection to the *jan*-verbs in that some of them formed an intransitive-transitive and anticausative-causative-opposition. The opposition does not seem to be as systematic as in Gothic (Ottósson, 2013, 335), but some *nan*-verbs are best understood as derived from weak *jan*-verbs rather than from their strong counterparts. For example, in the triad *sofa* ‘to sleep’ : *svejfa* ‘to lull to sleep, assuage, soothe’ : *sofna* ‘to fall asleep’, the derived verbs show the expected causative respectively anticausative semantics with regard to their common base. However, the situation is different for the triad *drekka* ‘to drink’ : *drekkja* ‘to submerge, sink, push below the surface’ : *drukkna* ‘to drown’. In Gothic the derived *jan*-verb *dragkjan* ‘to make drink’ is a straightforward causative formation to *drigkan* ‘to drink’, whereas the OWN derivations *drekkja* and *drukkna* are more closely connected to each other than to *drekka*. It seems as if *drekkja* has been reinterpreted from the *nan*-verb, while the old meaning ‘to make drink’ has been adopted by the verb *brynna* in the course of this process.

4.3 Class III

Finally, with regards to the *ēn*-verbs of the third class, the following general characteristics, contradictions, and inconsistencies can be observed:

In one of the very few recent works on Old West Norse verbal word formation, Ottósson (2013, 355) states that “[t]he stem suffix *-ē* - tended to form durative verbs, often stative verbs, or intransitive non-agentive verbs”, which seems especially true if there is an “Oppositionspartner” ‘opposition partner’ from another class (Krämer, 1971, 37). This, however, should be taken cum grano salis in light of the remarkable observation that only very little of the material that is contained in Torp (1974, 38) and Wessén (1970, 95) does actually suggest a synchronic relationship of a base and a weak *ēn*-verb. One of these few cases is OWN *trúa* ‘to believe, trust’, which historically continues a deadjectival stative formation derived from PG **truwa-* ‘loyal, faithful’ (Harðarson, 2018, 230, n. 11 with references), but synchronically was associated not only with the adjective OWN *trúr* ‘loyal, faithful’, but also with the noun *trú*(*a*) ‘loyalty, honesty’.

Most of the other verbs examined by Torp and Wessén only had strong counterparts as a derivational base in Gothic (OWN *lifa* ‘to be left; to live’ : Goth. *bileiban* ‘to remain, stay’) or were related to another OWN weak verb (*loka* ‘to lock, shut’ : *lokna* ‘to come to an end’).

Also, when compared to class II verbs, a lot of the verbs belonging to class III were primary and therefore could not be associated with a derivational base synchronically. Two instructive examples are the following: 1) OWN *duga* 'to make an effort, do one's best', either from PG **daug-*/*dug-*, a reformation of the stative present **d^hug^h-é(i)* with *o*-grade root after the preterite-presents, or straight from PG **dug-*, continuing the stative present PIE **d^hug^h-* from the root **d^heug^h-* 'to meet' (Rix and Kümmel, 2001, 148–149, fn. 4), and 2) OWN *gana* 'to yawn, gawp', continuing PIE **$g/ǵ^hn̥$-$h_1$ie-* from the root **$g/ǵ^han$-* 'to yawn' (Rix and Kümmel, 2001, 193) with an OWN back formation *gan* 'yawning, screaming'.

In addition, we have verbs like OWN *ljá* 'to lend' and *tjá* 'to show; to tell' (older *léa* and *téa*) that once were strong (< **leihwan-* and **teihan-*) but became weak and, accordingly, did not have a synchronic base. The paradigm of *ljá* was further obscured by the remnants of the strong form *lé* (1SG) and *léner* (PPNPLM) (Noreen, 1923, §483). Finally, a weak *jan*-verb OWN *leiga* 'to hire, rent' is attested, continuing PG **laigijan-* 'to make lend', a causative derivation from **leihwan-* which could not be analyzed synchronically because the phonological distance between *ljá* and *leiga* was too long.

Additionally, there were class III verbs with little or no difference in semantics compared to their strong base. The highly frequent verb OWN *hafa* 'to have, hold, use' was weak and thus was distinguished from its strong base *hefja* 'to lift, begin'. However, as Cleasby & Vigfússon have observed, "in sundry cases [...] it [*hafa*, R.B.] passes into the sense of this latter word; as also in some instances into that of another lost strong verb, *hafa*, *hóf* 'to behave', and *hœfa* 'to hit"' (Cleasby and Vigfússon, 1874, s.v. hafa).

4.4 Summary

All weak verbal classes in Old West Norse show general developments that point to a further weakening of the entire system. These developments are: 1) fossilisation through a) the loss of a synchronic base, b) phonological and morphological developments that lead to the complete coalescence of the formerly different classes II and IV as well as the coalescence of individual bases and derivations, and c) strong verbs becoming weak[30]; and 2) little or no semantic differences between base and derivation. For each individual class, the following peculiarities are to be mentioned:

30 There were some cases of labile verbs in OWN. These are verbs that vacillate between a transitive and an intransitive reading. They usually denote movement, for example OWN *renna* 'to run; to make run' and *koma* 'to come; to bring'. Nonetheless, because they are quite rare, I don't take them into account here.

The *jan*-class contained causatives, factitives and intensive-iteratives. The relations between base and derivation became obscured due to *i*-umlaut and the partial loss of the factor that triggered it. These developments resulted in a phonological distance between base and derivation in a way that the letter appeared as fossilised form, since it could not be associated with the former. Nonetheless, the class was still productive to a certain extent.

The *ōn*-class continued the semantic variety of the Proto-Germanic denominal formations. Deverbal formations, on the other hand, were intensive-iteratives, which resulted in partial competition with the *jan*-verbs. This class contained some primary formations but most of the *ōn*-verbs were derived. A lot of the bases, however, are not actually attested in the Old West Norse texts, rendering the derivations unanalyzable fossils. The semantic variety of the class continued to increase as the distinct inflection of the former anticausative-inchoative *nan*-verbs was given up and they assimilated to the old *ōn*-verbs. These *nan*-verbs, many of which were Nordic innovations, were often in secondary opposition to the *jan*-verbs. Moreover, the *jan*- and the *nan*-verbs were semantically closer to each other than to their base.

It might be speculated here that there could have been a contrasting development to the (secondary) productivity of the former *nan*-verbs. In the class II verb *bákna* 'to wave, give a sign', the *-n-*, which originally belonged to the stem of the derivational base *bákn* 'sign' (in turn a loan from pre-Old Frisian **bāken*, see Maini, 2017), might have been interpreted as part of the suffix, disintegrating its close connection to the anticausative-inchoative semantics.

Most of the *ēn*-verbs were intransitive stative verbs. However, what set them apart from the other classes was that a good part of them could not be associated to a base synchronically. It therefore appears that, in contrast to the other classes, the class II denominal verbs showed no prototypical derivational semantics. The class is hence best understood as default weak class in which new denominal verbs could be integrated regardless of the semantic relation they may have had to their bases. This includes the former class IV *nan*-verbs, as well as verbs from other classes, cf. *fá* 'to adorn, decorate' continuing Proto-Norse *faihijan**, a class I primary verb meaning 'to color, paint (runes)'. Class II was highly productive and so was its aspectual variety.

As can be seen by the secondary productivity of the *nan*-verbs, the fact that class II became the default class for new verbs does not mean that the semantic system of the verbs had altogether collapsed in Old West Norse. The fact, however, that new verbs could be integrated in class II with little regard to their semantic features points to a situation where the semantic system was weakened or where semantic nuances, that were once expressed by different verbal suffixes could possibly be expressed by other means.

I am focussing here on the semantic side of the weak verbs, but it is helpful to look at the formal side as well in order to better understand their development. This

can be seen not only on the basis of the *nan*-verbs becoming *ōn*-verbs, but also on the basis of the rest of the verbal paradigm. If we compare the endings of the present paradigm of the three weak verbal classes in OWN in Table 2[31], we can see that their coalescence is much more developed than, for instance, in OHG, where *-ō-* and *-ē* - as the stem forming suffixes are carried out consequently throughout the paradigm of the second and third class.

Tab. 2: OWN endings of the three weak classes.

	I	II	III
SG	*-0*	*-a*	*-i*
	-r	*-ar*	*-ir*
	-r	*-ar*	*-ir*
PL	*-um*	*-um*	*-jum*
	-iþ, *-it*	*-iþ*	*-iþ*
	-a	*-a*	*-a*

Formal coalescence and overlapping entails the loss of the possibility of associating form and function, and subsequently the loss of the possibility of expressing semantic nuances in the traditional way.

5 Old West Norse LVCs

When semantic categories that were once sufficiently formally separated give up their corresponding formal separation to a certain degree for whatever reason, they have to find new, sufficiently unambiguous means to be expressed. Having considered discrepancies and inconsistencies in the semantic system of the Old West Norse weak verbs, and partially coalesced verbal endings, it is plausible to assume that the semantic categories of causality and aspect once expressed by the weak verbs had to find new, sufficiently unambiguous means to be expressed. The observation that the LVCs express some of those semantic categories has led research to assume that there is a connection between both phenomena in that the first have taken over expressing those categories from the latter. In the following, I am going to assess the viability of this assumption with regards to the development in Old West Norse.

31 The endings are taken from Nedoma (2010, 110). It can be seen there that the coalescence is even more developed in the subjunctive, imperative, as well as the indicative preterite paradigms.

In order to do that, I am going to consider four types of LVCs from the Old West Norse texts that express semantic nuances that are known to have been expressed by derived weak verbs. Those types are: causative, stative/durative, inchoative, and intensive light verb constructions. What is important to keep in mind is that those types are not just any types amongst many others, but the only types of light verb constructions that are attested in Old West Norse, at least to my knowledge.

5.1 Causative light verb constructions

The first type of LVCs in OWN that I want to present here with regards to the semantics of the whole construction is the causative type. It is represented by the expression *setja í bann* 'excommunicate', which according to ONP is attested at least six times in the Old West Norse prose literature (ONP, 2005, s.v. bann 2) setja í bann)[32] and at least twice in Old East Norse (Boldt, 2023, 150–151). The sentence in (3) is taken from the Old West Norse version of the Statuta Vilhjalms kardinála (ONP, 2005, s.v. bann 2):

(3) *Item setium ver alla i bann er nunnur vilia taka naudgar.*
also put we all in ban who nuns want take forced
'We also excommunicate all those who want to force nuns to have intercourse.'

The text is a translation from a Latin original and the words *setjum ver …i bann* translate Lat. *excommunicavimus* 'we have excommunicated' (!) which means that the OWN light verb construction is not taken over from the source but seems to draw from a pattern that is genuinely Old West Norse. According to ONP (2005, s.v. bann), the abstract noun *bann* can convey three meanings in free use: (1) 'prohibition, ban'; (2) 'state of excommunication, sentence of excommunication'; (3) 'swearing, cursing'. As is typical for LVCs, the noun keeps its literal meaning (in this case (2)) within the construction.

In contrast to the noun, both the verb and the preposition lose their literal meaning within the construction. Focusing on the semantics of the LVC, it should be noted that the verb is not entirely stripped of meaning but rather determines the causative semantics of the entire formation: the bringing about of the excommunication.[33]

32 Formations like OWN *falla í bann* or *renna í bann* (cf. ONP, 2005, s.v. bann), seem to contradict what has been said under 1., namely that only basic verbs can be part of modern LVCs.

33 In Boldt (2023, 155), I described this light verb construction as ingressive-inchoative, which I now believe to be incorrect as *setja* primarily stresses the bringing about of the situation, not the

In modern LVCs, verb and preposition can usually not be replaced without rendering the sentence ungrammatical (see (1a) and (1b)). It seems this was the case with historical LVCs as well. This differentiates them from free word combinations where a replacement is possible, as can be seen in the following sequence (4) which is taken from Fix et al. (2006, 528):

(4) *setja sverðs eggina í ana*
put swords tip into water
'to put the tip of the sword into the water'

In this word group, *í* and *setja* (although the verb is used metaphorically) could be replaced by the OWN equivalents of 'above' and 'put' or any other preposition and verb from the same semantic field (i.e., a spatial preposition and a verb of movement/transfer) without rendering the sentence ungrammatical.[34] This is only possible because in (4), the noun retains its literal, concrete meaning.

In example (5), taken from Gulathing Law IV 102 (ONP, 2005, s.v. fjǫturr, fjaturr 2), there is another option regarding constructions that superficially look like LVCs:

(5) [...], *þa scal hann setia hann i fiotur*.
then should he put him in shackles
'[...] then he should put him in shackles.'

In this example and just like in prototypical LVCs, the preposition and the verb seem to be replaceable to a very low extent.[35] In contrast to prototypical LVCs, however, the noun is not an abstract, but a concrete noun. This entails that the verb, although used metaphorically, cannot function as a light verb denoting mainly aspectual nuances, but instead functions as a full lexical verb.

What is interesting and crucial for determining the state of development of the LVCs in Old West Norse is the observation that the noun as seen in (5) seems to allow for alternatives in similar contexts, see (6) from the Vǫlsunga saga 5:

(6) *Þess vil ek bidia þik, at* [...] *latit þa helldr settia i stock*
this want I ask of you that let them rather put in log of wood
'What I want to ask of you is for you to rather put them in a log of wood.'

beginning of the situation. One could also think about understanding the construction as ornative in the sense of 'to assign/place the ban onto someone' or 'to equip someone with a ban', but that is not something I can discuss in detail here. On the semantics of the ornative verbs, see Kuroda (2017).

34 See Fleischhauer (2022, 264–265) for a similar approach with regards to German *stehen unter*-LVCs.

35 From 11 instances that are listed in (ONP, 2005, s.v. *fjǫturr*, *fjaturr*; *setja*/*...í fjǫtur*), 9 show the verb *setja*.

Moreover, in this example, the verb cannot function as a light verb. Instead, the verb functions as a metaphorical full verb, since the literal bringing about of a concrete object such as a log of wood (and a shackle in (5)) is impossible.

Additionally, in the LVC *setja í bann*, the concrete, spatial meaning of *bann* as a place where someone could be sent is still tangible. Therefore, the literal meaning of the verb *setja* is still tangible as well, making it less light than, for example, in the Modern Norwegian LVC *å sette i forbindelse* 'to connect', literally 'to put in connection'.

5.2 Stative/durative light verb constructions

The second type of light verb constructions presented here is the stative/durative type. The expression *sitja í arfi* 'to be in possession of an inheritance', attested at least three times in the Old West Norse prose according to ONP (2005, s.v. arfr, sitja í arfi), may serve as an instructive example. The sentence in (7) is taken from Frostathing Law IX 27 (ONP, 2005, s.v. arfr):

(7) *Nú callar sá þann eigi arfa réttan er í arf sitr*
now asserts he him not heir right is in inheritance sits
'He [a minor] now asserts that the one who is in possession of the inheritance is not the right heir.'

According to ONP (2005, s.v. arfr), the noun *arfr* bears the meaning 'inheritance, what is (to be) inherited, inheriting, right to inherit'. One can observed in example (3) *setja í bann* that the literal, spatial meaning of the noun *bann* as a concrete location where someone could be sent during the process of banning, is still tangible. The same holds true for example (7), but to an even greater extent. While it is conceivable that someone is physically located in his or her inheritance (e.g., is sitting in an inherited house), this is most likely not what is meant here. Instead, the usage of *sitja í arfi* expresses that someone is in permanent possession of an inheritance. *Arfr* does not refer to a specific inherited item and is therefore an abstract noun. *Sitja* is not a full verb denoting the absence of movement, but a semantically reduced light verb that is denoting semantic nuances that highlight the stative/durative aspect of the LVC compared to the simplex *erfa* which is unspecific in that respect.[36]

36 OWN *erfa* historically is a *jan*-verb continuing PG **arbijan*-. The semantics of this type of *jan*-verbs aims for the realization of the object with regards to the base. See above fn. 11. Cf. OWN *dómr* 'judgement, ruling, decision' : *dǿma* 'to judge, rule, past a sentence' (i.d. 'to realize a judgment etc.').

This entails that *sitja í arfi* has a) a literal reading consisting of a predicate *sitja* plus a dative object *í arfi*, and b) a reading as one complex predicate structure. Only that latter reading qualifies it a as light verb construction.

A very similar, yet slightly different situation can be observed in the examples (8) and (9), taken from Óláfs saga helga and Bøjarlǫg (ONP, 2005, s.v. vǫrðr). They both contain the expression *sitja á verði*, which I translate literally first:

(8) *Enn er þeir sǫto a verþinom þa heyrdu þeir grat oc veinon*
and as they sat on watch-out they heard their weeping and wail
micla, […]
intensive
'And as they sat on their watch-out, they heard their weeping and intensive wail.'

(9) *þa skulu bœar men a værði sitia hina fimtu not siðan vorðr er*
then shall citizens on watch-out sit the fifth night since watch is
boðen
ordered
'Citizens shall sit on the watch-out for five nights after the watch has been ordered.'

In (8) and (9), the expression *sitja á verði* shows the meaning 'to keep watch'. However, in contrast to (7), *sitja í arfi* 'to be in possession of an inheritance', keeping watch does require an immediate physical presence. That in turn makes the verb less light than in sentence (7). The verb covers the stative/durative aspect of being present at the watch, but it still has the metaphorical qualities of a full verb. It is contexts like these where the noun vacillates between its literal and its metonymic meaning that may be understood as hinge points in the emergence of light verb constructions[37] under the condition that simple weak verbs can no longer sufficiently be used to express aspectual nuances.

5.3 Inchoative light verb constructions

The third type of light verb constructions is the inchoative type. The expression *koma til enda* 'to come to an end'[38] does not have a separate entry in ONP (2005) but is

37 Similar now also Fleischhauer and Hartmann (2023, 131), who state that "einzelne konkrete Muster […] als Ausgangspunkte […] fungieren" 'individual concrete patterns serve as starting points'.
38 In Boldt (2023, 308), I cited *koma fyrir enda*, which is perhaps best paraphrased as 'to come to the beginning of the end'.

interesting for our purposes. The following sentence (10) is taken from Karlamagnúss saga, 7 (ONP, 2005, s.v. endir):

(10) *mal mitt er sua til enda komit at ek skal nu vera j fylgd med*
speech my is thus to end come that I must now be in service with
godum monnum.
good men
'My speech has thus come to an end, as I must now serve with good men.'

As in the previous examples, the noun *endi* 'end' is an abstract noun. However, the concrete, spatial meaning is still clearly present. This is further reinforced by two observations, 1) the fact that, according to ONP (2005), *endi* can also be a concrete noun as it can refer to 'tip, arm, branch', and 2) the possibility that *mál mitt* 'my speech' in (10) refers to a written document of some kind, the reading of which has ended.

The usage of *koma*, however, does not entail the physical act of approaching a specific place (as *mál mitt* can not do such a thing). Rather, it denotes the inchoative aspect of *koma til enda*, which is therefore best understood as light verb construction.

How precarious the state of that word combination can be becomes apparent when the noun is part of a compound, as it is in (11). The passage is taken from the Prose Edda, 30 (ONP, 2005, s.v. koma A. 7):

(11) *Þa taka þeir en skeið, en er Hvgi er kominn til skeiðsenda ok*
then take they a race and as Hugi is come to end.of.run/track and
snyzt aptr [...]
turned back
'They then begin another race. And as Hugin has come to the end of the run / the track and turned around, [...]'

In this text passage, the reading vacillates. The raven Hugin may have reached the end of the running track, or the end of the running. In the first case, *koma* would be a full lexical verb denoting the physical motion of approaching the end of a concrete place. In the latter case, *koma* would denote the beginning of the end of the running and would therefore rather qualify as light verb. It is, again, ambiguous contexts like the given one that may have played a crucial role in the rise of light verb constructions.

In order to illustrate the differences of a light verb construction to an idiom[39], an expression like *koma í ljós* 'to be born' (literally 'to come into light') can be cited here. It is taken from Grágás 118 (ONP, 2005, s.v. ljós I. 6), and given in (12):

39 A semantically opaque fixed expression.

(12) *Ef sa maðr andaz er barn á i vánum þa er barn eigi*
if the man dies who child has in expectation then is child not
arfgengt nema lifanda komi i lios [...]
entitled.to.inherit unless living comes into light
'If the man dies who is awaiting a child, then the child is not entitled to inherit unless it is born alive [...]'

ONP (2005) lists seven instances of *koma í ljós* within the corpus of Old West Norse prose. Superficially, its structure looks similar to one of the LVCs as it consists of a verb of movement, a preposition of direction, and a noun. The noun *ljós*, however, is not an abstract noun but a metaphorically used concrete noun. In free use, its usual meaning is '(sun-)light; radiance, shine; public', while 'life (on earth)' seems rather marginally attested. It mainly bears the latter meaning in two idioms: *í/ór þvísa ljósi* 'in/from this life' and *koma í ljósa* 'to be born'.

Since *ljós* is a metaphorically used concrete noun and the verb *koma* cannot take the step from being a full verb to being a semantically reduced light verb, the whole expression does not qualify as an LVC. However, it is plausible that LVCs, idioms, and free word combinations that share the same or a very similar structure may have influenced each other and that problems in keeping them apart are not due to inadequate scientific reasoning but mirror linguistic reality.

5.4 Intensive light verb constructions and the role of OWN *gera* 'to do; to make'

It is striking that the LVCs discussed so far cover the semantic range of the classes I, III, and IV of the Germanic weak verbs–but not that of class II. The latter, as we have seen, inflect exactly like those of the former class IV, and we would not expect this finding to have purely formal reasons. It should be remembered that, while the deverbal derivations are mostly intensive-iteratives, the denominal derivations of class II verbs show a high degree of semantic variety. It is this variety and accompanying lack of semantic clarity that prevents corresponding LVCs from emerging. Another reason is the lack of suitable verbs. For instance, it is conceivable that the verb *come* can become desemanticised and so lose its literal meaning of movement towards a goal in order to merely denote an abstract meaning of inchoation. However, no verb of movement or transfer can become desemanticised and lose its literal meaning of movement or transfer in a way that would qualify it for taking over emotive or ornative semantics. These, among other features, are typical characteristics of class II-verbs.

There might, however, be some constructions with intensive semantics that are comparable to LVCs. Relleke (1974, 35) quotes OHG *anaruafti tuon* 'to call for help, beg' and *in feste tuon* 'to reinforce, confirm', suggesting that these constructions can give an event a higher degree of intensity than the corresponding simplicia. OHG *habēn* 'to have', *lāzan* 'to let, allow', and *sīn* 'to be' are rarely used in similar environments. However, in most cases (as can be seen in the two examples above), the verb in those constructions is *tuon* 'to do'. No cognate of *tuon* is attested in North Germanic. Instead it was replaced very early by a verb that surfaces in Old West Norse as *gera*.[40] A perusal of the entries given in ONP (2005, s.v. gera), however, suggests that there are no prototypical LVCs with *gera* (+ abstract noun + preposition) attested in Old West Norse. There are indeed similar constructions like *gera skaða* 'to do harm' or *gera verk* 'commit an act, a crime'[41], but it is questionable if those qualify as light verb constructions for three reasons: a) they can hardly be understood as complex predicates simply because, as in contrast to LVCs with a preposition of direction, the noun can be asked for; b) the verb *gera* is not desemanticised to the degree that it conveys mere abstract aspectual semantics, but rather functions as a full verb conveying a general 'bringing about, producing' of the noun. It likely does not primarily cover intensive semantics in relation to its simplicia; c) words for 'to do; to make' do not usually surface in prototypical light verb constructions in other Old Germanic languages.[42]

6 Summary, conclusive observations, and open questions

This article has demonstrated a number of features that accord with the emergence of light verb constructions. First, the reconstructable system of weak verbs in Proto-Germanic already exhibits discrepancies and inconsistencies in both form and content that point to a dynamic linguistic situation, i.e., to a system that is undergoing restructuring. Second, it has shown that these discrepancies and inconsistencies not only persist in Old West Norse but have intensified. The semantic coherence of the system of verbal classes has further decreased, as has the possibility of keep-

40 For the etymology, see Lühr (2000, 226).

41 For an overview of those constructions in Old West Norse legal texts, see Boldt (2023, 330). For Old Swedish, see Sundquist (2018, 2020). Also, compare already Proto-Norse *tawo laþodu* 'I make/prepare the invitation' on the Trollhättan bracteate, see Schulte (2023, 7), and Schuhmann (2016, 449–450).

42 The only case that is known to me is Old Frisian *tō bonne dwā(n)* 'to ban'. For a short discussion of verbs for 'to do; to make' as light verbs in the Old Germanic languages, see Boldt (2023, 132–136).

ing the classes apart formally. Although the causative-factitive *jan*-class was to a certain extent still productive, and the anticausative-inchoative *nan*-class became highly productive, the durative *ēn*-verbs in particular appear to have already been fossilized to a large extent, while numerous new formations were entering the class of *ōn*-verbs as the default class.

The instability of the system of weak verbs entails that the semantic nuances expressed in it must look for new means of expression. Against the background of what has been shown here, it seems likely that they find those new means in the light verb constructions. In Old West Norse, these have at least causative, durative and inchoative semantic properties and thus cover part of the semantic range that the derived weak verbs have shown in comparison to their bases. However, the observation that the semantic diversity of the denominal verbs of the second class has no equivalent in the light verb constructions remains striking and in need of explanation. This also means that no straightforward correlation can be postulated between the weakening of the system of weak verbs and the emergence of LVCs.

What characterises the early Old West Norse LVCs is that the concrete spatial dimension of the abstract noun is often still tangible. It is likely that the development originated here and was gradually extended to more abstract contexts. It is further possible that the emergence of LVCs goes back to Proto-Germanic. This is supported by the fact that an LVC **tō andijai kwemanan/kumanan* 'to come to an end' can be reconstructed, since the cognates OE *tō ende cuman*, OHG *zi ente queman*, OFris. *tō ende koma* and (with substitution of the preposition) OWN *koma til enda* are attested in the daughter languages (Boldt, 2023, 308). Prototypical LVCs wherein the spatial component of the noun is still tangible are also found outside of Germanic, cf. Lat. *in suffragium mittere* 'to let vote' (literally 'to send for voting'; Relleke, 1974, 13). The extent to which old or more recent, possibly areal linguistic patterns play a role here would also have to be examined.

Further questions might be raised. Why are there no LVCs that correspond to the semantically diverse denominal verbs of class II? We have seen that prototypical LVCs contain a verb of movement or transfer. Are those not suitable for that purpose? Another idea could be that denominal class II verbs were already formally weakened and semantically diversified to a degree that by the time LVCs emerged, they were not sufficiently unambiguously associated with certain semantic properties, which then could have been taken over by LVCs. Furthermore, how does the fact that at least the causative *jan*- and the former anticausative-inchoative *nan*-verbs were still partially productive (*jan*-verbs) or became highly productive (*nan*-verbs) relate to the fact that there were causative and inchoative LVCs? Is that view an artifact because we have too little data, or did both formations exist side by side?

Related to those is also the question how analytical LVCs like *koma til enda* 'to come to an end' relate synchronically to synthetic forms like the anticausative-

inchoative *setna* ‘sink (in); be digested’ but also ‘to come to an end, cease’, a derivation from *sitja* ‘to sit’.

Having presented some ideas of a rather exploratory nature, this study contributed to the understanding of the emergence of light verb construction Old West Norse. It further shows that a comprehensive study of the Old West Norse system of weak verbs and a systematic analysis of the character of light verb constructions in Old West Norse and the other Old Germanic languages is necessary to deepen this understanding.

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