

THE NOTION OF SUBJECT IN PUNJABI LANGUAGE

Simarat Kaur
Research Scholar,
Department of Linguistics & Punjabi Lexicography

Abstract: This paper provides a detailed treatment of 'Subject' in a neglected language of South Asia, namely Punjabi; Secondly, it demonstrates that Subject in the languages under consideration is particularly intriguing because of its conflicting coding, behavioral and semantic properties; And finally, it explains this state of affairs on the basis of semantic roles of NPs.

Key words: Subject, Agreement, Subject Raising

I. INTRODUCTION

The descriptive and theoretical framework on which our discussion is based is that of Keenan (1976) and Comrie (1981). Employing their multifactorial universal definition of Subject, simplex and oblique Subjects will be analyzed according to the following criteria : (1) syntactic position; (2) case assignment; (3) verb agreement; (4) control requirements such as control of reflexive pronouns and null pronouns in syntactic possess such as Equi NP deletion, conjunction reduction etc.; and (5) accessibility to the syntactic processes mentioned above.

Punjabi belongs to the family of New Indo-Aryan languages. Syntactically, Punjabi is somewhat similar to Hindi-Urdu. Among New Indo-Aryan languages, Punjabi is unique in having tonal contrasts, i.e., low, mid and high tones. There is a close correlation between the 'h' and the voiced aspirates of Hindu-Urdu and Punjabi tones.

In the research literature only some passing remarks are made on nominative Subjects and the discussion of postpositions invite some indirect remarks on the nature of ergative Subjects. The following sentences exemplify different types of Subjects in Punjabi.

a. Nominative

1.	mai	∅	ja:	ria:	a:
	I	∅	go	ing.ms am	

'I am going.'

b. Ergative

2.	mai	∅	axba:r	vekhi:
	I	∅	newspaper.fs	see-pst.3fs

'I saw the newspaper.'

c. Ergative

1.	Oh	ne	axba:r	vekhi:
	he	erg.	newspaper.fs	see-pst.3fs

'He saw the newspapers.'

d. Dative

4.	oh	nu:	kata:b	Pasand a:i:
	he	dat.	book.fschoice	come-pst.3fs

'He liked a book'

e. Instrumental

5.	sa:De	to	kata:b	gava:ci:
	we-gen.	from (instr.)	book.fslose-pst.3fs	

'We lost a book.'

f. Locative

6.	sa:De	vicca	himmat	ai
	we-gen.	in (loc.)	courage.fs	is

'We have courage.'

Sentence (1) exemplifies the simple nominative Subject. Whereas sentences (3-6) reveal the occurrence of postpositional Subjects, termed 'Oblique Subjects'. The oblique Subjects can either take the ergative postposition *ne* (as in 3; henceforth, S. Ergative); or the dative postposition *nu:* (as in 4; hereforth, S. Dative). A number of other postposition such as instrumental *to* 'from' and locative *vicc* 'in' generally require their Subject NPs to be in their possessive form as shown in sentences (5) and (6); (henceforth, S Instrument and S Genitive). As their English translations reveal, the simple as well as the oblique, both qualify as candidates for Subjecthood.

Now, we discuss properties of Subject in Punjabi.

1.2. Syntactic Position

In configurational languages such as English, grammatical relations are encoded regularly in terms of phrase structure configuration. In unmarked word order, the position of Subjects or Objects is specified. In verb final languages, on the other hand, Subject and Object relations become accessible with reference to their relative position with reference to the verb. Punjabi, like its neighboring South-Asian languages, has the unmarked order SOV of their constituents. This order serves as an important point of reference for both simple and postpositional Subjects. An unmarked NP or a postpositional NP preceding a verb acts as the Subject of a simple intransitive verb or oblique Subject, respectively; whereas when they precede an NP/PP plus a verb they function as transitive Subjects. The point is illustrated below schematically in (7).

- a. Intransitive Verb : NP/PP - V
 b. Transitive Verb : NP/PP - NP/PP - V

Although syntactic position reveals an important property of Subjects in Punjabi, it is by no means sufficient to define Subjects for the following two reasons: one, the languages allow NPs to be extracted from their unmarked position and can be Subjected to left and right dislocation; and two, null pronouns of simple as well as oblique Subjects in a sentence.

1.3. Case Assignment

Cases are assigned essentially by postpositions which in turn induce morphological charge, called oblique case, in their preceding NP argument. The following factors serve as the determinants of case: (1) grammatical relations such as Subject, direct Object etc.; (2) perfective aspect; (3) person; and (4) verb.

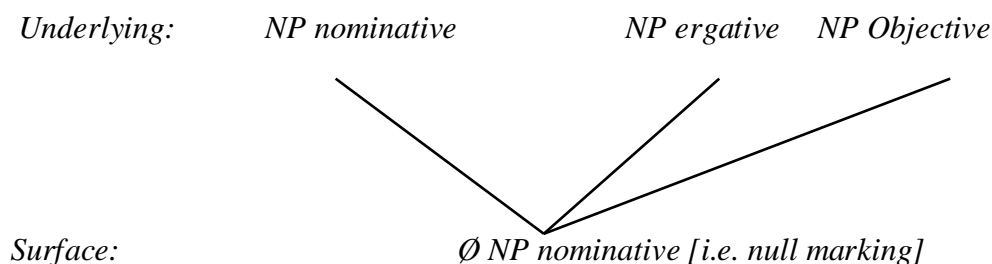
The Subject NP is normally assigned the null case marking in non-perfective tenses (as in sentence 1).

1. mai \emptyset ja: ria: a:
 I \emptyset go being.ms am
 'I am going.'

The ergative postposition – *ne* which occurs with a transitive in perfective aspect is an important marker of Subject NPs (as in 2).

- 2) Oh ne axba:r vekhi:
 he erg. film.fs see-pst.3fs
 'He saw the film.'

However, neither null nor ergative marking is unique to Subject. NPs because NPs with null case-marking exhibit neutralization in Punjabi at the surface level. The nominative, ergative and Object NPs are often realized overtly as NPs with null marking as exemplified schematically in given diagram:



An ergative NP with null marking (henceforth, S Ergative) Null) occurs with first and second person pronouns in a transitive perfective construction, as exemplified by sentence (3).

1. mai \emptyset axba:r vekhi:
 I \emptyset newspaper.fs see-pst.3fs
 'I saw the newspaper.'

It would be argued that in such sentence the ergative marker *ne* obligatorily undergoes deletion. As a result, the ergative case marker which unambiguously identifies Subject NPs in South Asian languages such as Hindi, Urdu in transitive perfective sentences, is not a reliable indicator of Subjecthood in Punjabi.

Both indirect Objects and direct Objects receive the postposition /*nu*/ if they are animate and or definite. If sentence (2) selects an animate Object NP, the selection of the postposition /*nu*/ is obligatory, as is evident from the grammaticality of (4) and the illformedness of 4(a).

(4) oh ne shilla: nu: vekhia:
he erg Sheela.fs acc. see-pst.ms
'He saw Sheela.'

*(4a) oh ne shilla vekhi:
he erg. Sheela.fs see-pst-fs
'He saw Sheela.'

The verbs of perception and obligation require dative Subjects (as in 5) whereas inchoative verbs select Subjects with instrumental case-marking (as in 6).

5) oh nu: kata:b Pasand a:i:
he dat. book.fschoice come-pst.3fs
'He liked the book'

6) sa:De to kata:b gava:ci:
we-gen. from (instr.) book.fslose-pst.3fs
'We lost a book.'

From the above discussion it is readily clear that postpositions are not a reliable criterion or identifying Subjects, either. Postpositions are multiply ambiguous with respect to grammatical relations and are sensitive to other factors such as aspect, verb and person besides grammatical relations.

Verb Agreement

The generalization about verbal agreement seems to be as follows. If the Subject is marked null for case, the verb agrees with it in number, gender and person as shown in sentence (7).

7. Oh kita:b parhda: hai
He book raed is
He is reading a book.

However, if the Subject is marked for case and is followed by a postposition, and the Object is marked null, the verb agrees with the Object. Sentences (8) support this observation.

8) usne kita:b parhi:
He book raed
He (did)read a book.

However, sentence (9) presents as counter example to this rule.

9. mein ca: pi:ti:
I tea drink
9.b. mein pa:ni pi:ta:
I water drink
I drank water.

In (9) although the Subject NP is marked null for case, the verb does not agree with it, instead it agrees with the Object. This fact points out the necessity of distinguishing between an underlying null case as in (7) and surface null as in (9). As pointed out above, the surface null marking in (9) is the result of the deletion of the underlying ergative marker '*ne*' and this then explains its inability to control agreement. Although the distinction between the underlying and surface null case marking accounts for difference in verb agreement in (7) and (9), it fails to explain the verb agreement patterns encountered in sentences such as (10a). Compare (10) and (10a):

*(10) sa: nu shi:la: nu: pasand a:i:/a:ia:
we dat. Sheela.fs acc choice come-pst.fs/comepst.ms
'We liked Sheela.'

(10a) sa: nu: shi:la: pasand a:i
we dat. Sheela.fs choice come-pst.fs
'We liked Sheela.'

Notice that the verb in (10) requires its Subject to take the dative postposition and the definite animate Object also require the *nu* postposition. What is important to note that unlike S Erg. Null, the patient NP with

overt null marking controls verb agreement like S. Nom. Hence, verb agreement is not a defining feature of Punjabi Subjects, and it poses an agreement paradox for its determinants.

1.4. Control

In this section, we pay attention to the behavioural properties of NP and those syntactic processes which are critically sensitive to the notion of 'Subject of the sentence'. Such rules in Punjabi are the rules of reflexivization, Equi NP Deletion, Raising, and Conjunction Reduction.

1.4.1 Reflexivization

A possessive pronoun that is coreferential with its preceding Subject NP in the same clause becomes a possessive reflexive pronoun, as is evident from the following sentences:

- (11) mai apne/*mere ghar ja: ria a:
I refl./*my home go ing am
'I am going home.'
- (12) assi apni:/*sa:Di: haTTi: vecci:
we refl./*our Shop.f sell-pst.3fs
'We sold our shop.'
- (13) Moni ne sonu nu: apni:/*Odi:i haTTi: ditti:
Mon ne Sonu dat. refl./*his_i shop.f give-pst.fs
'Mon_i gave his_i shop to sonu.'
- (14) kuRi:i nu: apna:i/oda:i kissa: pasand a:ia:
girl dat. refl./*heri story.m choice come-pst.ms
'The girl_i liked her_i story.'
- (15) onna to apna:/*ona:da:i kamma nai: hoia:
they_i instr. refl./*their_i job neg. happen-pst.ms
'They_i could not their_i job.'
- (16) Sa:de vicca apni:/*sa:Di: izzat ai
we-poss. in.(loc.) refl./*our honor is
'We have our honor.'

In sentences (11-16) the occurrence of non-reflexive possessive pronouns yield illformed output. Also, that the direct and indirect Objects fail to control reflexivization within a simplex sentence is self-evident from the fact that in sentences such as (13), the reflexive pronoun cannot be coreferential with the indirect Object, i.e., *sonu*. Similarly, a direct Object cannot control reflexivization, as is evident by the ungrammaticality of the following sentence :

- *17. moN_i ne apne_j munDe nu: kuri:^j ditti
Mon_i erg. refl_j boy to girl_j give-pst.fs
'Mon_i gave his_j boy a girl_j.'

1.4.2 Equi NP Deletion

The following data indicate that both simple and oblique Subjects control the deletion of their simple Subject in their complement clauses. The point of the origin and the deletion of the complement Subject is represented by the symbol \emptyset .

- (18) mai [s \emptyset otthe ja:Na:] ca:udha a:
I \emptyset there go-inf. want-prst.ms am
'I want to go there.'
- (19) asi: [s \emptyset paRNa:] ca:ia:
we [s \emptyset read-to] want-pst.ms
'we wanted to read.'
- (20) kuRi: ne [s \emptyset paRNa:] ca:ia:
girl erg. [s \emptyset read-inf.] want-pst.ms
'The girl wanted to read.'
- (21) loka: nu: [s \emptyset paRNa:] ca:ida: ai
people dat. [s \emptyset read-inf.] ought is
'People ought to read.'
- (22) ode to [s \emptyset otthe ja:N] di: pul hoi:
he-pos instr. [s \emptyset there go-inf] of mistake.f happen-pst.fs
'He made the mistake of going there.'
- (23) ode vicca [s \emptyset laRan] di: himmat ai

he-gen.in [s ø fight-inf.] of courage is
'He has the courage for fighting.'

1.4.3 Conjunction Reduction

Conjunction reduction yields *V+ke* phrases in Punjabi which function as finite time adverbial clauses. The tensed verb of the complement clause becomes non-tensed by this process. The following sentences illustrate this process as well the control of the matrix Subject on it.

- (24) [s ø zami:n te bai ke] munDa: ca: pff
[s ø floor on sit ing] boy.m tea drink ing was
'The boy was drinking tea sitting on the floor.'
- (25) [s ø zami:n te bai ke] mai ca: pitt:
I tea.f drink-pst.fs
'I drank tea sitting on the floor.'
- (26) [sø zami:n te bai ke] ø ne ca: pitt:
he erg. tea.f drink-pst.fs
'He drank tea sitting on the floor.'
- (27) [s zami:n te bai ke] ø nu: canga: laggia:
he dat. good feel-pst.ms
'After he sat on the floor, he felt good.'
- (28) [sø Zami:n te bai ke] ø(de) to kawma hoia:
he-gen.instr. job.m happen-pst.ms
'After he sat on the floor, he could do the job.'

From the above examples, it is clear that all Subjects – simple as well oblique - control the deletion of coreferential Subjects in their complement clauses. Observe that the matrix direct and indirect Object cannot control conjunction reduction, as is evident by the ungrammaticality of the following sentences.

- *(29) [s ø_i a: ke] mai ra:m_i nu: kata:b ditti:
[s ø_i come having] I Ram_i dat.f book give-pst-fs
'(Ram_i) came and I gave a book to Ram_i.'
- *(30) [sø_i ro ke] mai munDe_i nu: milia:
[sø_i cry having] I boy_i dat. meet-pst.ms
'(The boy) having cried, I met the boy.'

Sentences (29) and (30) show that indirect and direct Object, respectively cannot control conjunction reduction.

1.4.4. Subject Raising

Subject to Object raising is a minor rule in Punjabi. Only a few transitive verbs, such as *vekhNa*: 'to see', *manNa*: 'to consider' govern such *raising*. The former class of verbs allows the raising of Subjects of both perfective and non-perfective complement clauses. The latter category allows only the raising of the Subject of a copula sentence with a nominal or an adjectival argument.

- (31) mai [s oh nu: usta:d manna:] a:
I he dat. master consider-prst.ms am
'I consider him a master.'
- (32) tusi: [s oh nu: usta:d] mania:
you.pl he dat. master.m consider-prst.ms
'You considered him a master.'
- (33) kuRia: ne [s oh nu: usta:d mania:
girls erg. he dat. master.m consider-pst-ms
'The girls considered him a master.'
- (34) mai [s gurmit nu: a:unde](hoie) vekhia:
I Gurmit dat. come-ing (be-ing)see-pst.ms.
- *(34a) mai nu: [sgurmit nu: a:unde] (hoie) nazar a:ia:
I dat. Gurmit dat. coming-ing (being) sight come
pst.ms
'I saw Gurmit coming.'

From the above data, it becomes clear that unlike other Subjects, S Dat does not control the rule of Subject raising. This conclusion is supported by the grammaticality of sentences (31-35) and illformedness of (34a). S Instr. exhibits a similar behaviour and does not allow Subject raising.

Controlled Subjects

Equi NP Deletion

In Section 4.2, we will demonstrate that S Nom., S Erg. Null and S Erg. undergo the process of Equi, when their controllers are simple as well as postpositional or oblique Subjects. Examples (36-38), however, reveal the inability of S Dat, S Instr. and S Poss. to undergo Equi.

- *(36) mai [s ø bhukkha lagNa:]ca:ia:
I [s ø hunger feel-to]want-pst.ms
'I wanted to feel hungry.'
- *(37) mai [s ø kammahoNa:] ca:ia:
I [s ø job be-to] want-pst.ms
'I wanted to be able to do the job.'
- *(38) mai [s ø himmat hoNa:] ca:ia:
I [s ø courage be-to] want-pst.ms
'I wanted to have courage.'

Sentences (36-38) take S Dat., S. Instr. and S. Gen., respectively as their subordinate Subjects. The above sentences will yield well-formed output, if such Subjects occur with full clauses preceded by the complementizer *ki* 'that'

Conjunction Reduction

S Dat., S. Instr., and S. Gen. exhibit the same behavior with respect to Conjunction Reduction. They do not undergo such a process, as illustrated by the illformedness of the following sentences.

- *[sø dost di: ya:d a: ke] munDa:
[sø friend gen. memory come-having] boy.m
uda:s hoia:
sad become-pst.ms
'Having remembered (his) friend, the boy became sad.'
- *(40) [s ø pulla ho ke] mai uda:s hoia:
[s ø mistake be having] I sad become
'having made a mistake, I became sad.'
- *41. [s Ø kujh himmat ho ke] mein akhiya:
[s Ø some courage be having] I said.
'I spoke after I had some courage.'

The symbol ø indicates that deletion of S Dat. (*munDe Nu*: 'boy dat. '), S Instr. (*mere to* 'by me'), and S Obl. with a locative postposition (*mere vicca* 'in me') with resultant reduction of subordinate clauses yield ungrammatical sentences. However, such Subjects in full tensed adverbial clauses yield grammatical output.

The following chart displays the behavioral properties of S Nom., S Erg. Null, S Erg., S Dat., S Instr., and S. Gen. in Punjabi.

Rule	Controller	Controlled
flexivization	Nom., S Erg. Null, S Dat., S Instr., S Gen.	-
Equi	Nom., S Erg. Null, S Dat., S Instr., S Gen.	Nom., S Erg. Null S Erg.
Conjunction Reduction	Nom., S Erg. Null, S., S Erg. S Dat., S Instr., S Gen.	Nom., S Erg. Null S Erg.
Subject Raising	Nom., S Erg. Null, S Erg.	Nom., S Erg. Null. S Erg.

Subjects as controllers (i.e. in the matrix class) belong to one class on the one hand and S Dat., S Instr. and S Gen. behave differently from S No., S Erg. Null and S Erg. as controlled NPs (i.e., in the subordinate class) on the other. The semantic properties of the Subjects and the formal properties of the rules in question resolve this asymmetrical behavior. Equi NP Deletion is not restricted to Subject NPs alone. The Object NPs and NP Instrument potentially control Equi NP Deletion, as shown in (43 and 44).

- (43) mai oh_i nu: [ø_i ferist bana:N lai] a:khia:
I he dat. [ø_i list prepare-obl for] ask-pst-ms
'I asked him to prepare a list.'

- (44) mai øi to [øi ja:N va:ste] pucchia:
 I he gen instr. [øi go-to for] ask-pst-ms
 'I asked you to go'

In (43) the Object NP controls Equi whereas in (44) NP with instrumental marking in Punjabi control deletion. A similar argument also holds true for the rule of reflexivization. Furthermore, in some dialects of Punjabi, the rule of reflexivization is optional with S Dat., S Instr. and S Gen.

As regard the rule of Conjunction Reduction, examples (45-48) demonstrate S Nom. does not always undergo reduction.

- (45) huN oh vaDDa: ai te oh Da:kTar ai
 now he big is and he doctor is
 'Now he is big and he is a doctor.'
- * (45a) [ø huN vaDDa: ho ke] oh Da:kTar ai
 [ø now big be-having he doctor is
 'He is big and he is a doctor.'
- (46) oh vaDDa: hoia: te huN Da:kTa:r ai
 he big become-pst.ms and now doctor is
 'He grew up and now he is a doctor.'
- * (46a) [øi vaDDa: ho ke huN ohi Da:kTar ai
 [øi big became-having now he doctor is
 'Having become grown up, he is a doctor.'
- (47) vaDDa: ho ke oh Da:kTar baNia:
 became
 'Having become grown up, he became a doctor.'

Notice that the first clause in (45) and (46) take one-argument static and dynamic predicates, respectively. The Subject of these predicates, however, lack control over the action/state denoted by the predicates. The *V+ke* phrases require dynamic predicates and the control of their agents on the action/state denoted by the main clausal predicate. Since these requirements are not fulfilled in (45) and (46), the first conjunct cannot undergo the process of reduction in spite of the fact that both clauses contain correferential Subjects. Sentence (47), however, meets the condition just mentioned, and hence is grammatical.

Similarly the coreferential Subjects in the following sentences (48-49) cannot undergo reduction because the undergoer NP which is deleted is a patient and not an agent, whereas in the main clause it is an agent.

- * (48) [øi kuT kha: ke] cori jel vica gia:
 [øi beating eat-having] thief jail in go-pst-ms
 'After getting the beating, the thief went to the jail.'
- * (49) [øi kuTTia: ja: ke] cori jel vica gia:
 [øi beat passive having] thief jail in go-pst-ms
 'After being beaten, the thief went to the jail.'

The controlled Subject in (48) and (49) are S Erg. and S Nom., respectively. However, the mismatched semantic role of the Subjects in the above sentences renders the output illformed. Similarly, observe the following sentences. This explains why S Dat., S Intr. and S Gen. do not undergo reduction.

The following examples illustrate the use of S Dat. in both clauses. The deletion S Dat. in the first clause yields well-formed output in (50) because S Dat. in both clauses perform the same function, i.e., experiencer. The deletion of S Dat. is illformed in (51) because of the asymmetrical functions denoted by controller S Dat. and controlled S Dat. The controller S Dat. is an experience Subject whereas the controlled S Dat. is a recipient.

- (50) [ø ThanDa Lagga ke] oh nu: buxa:r a:ia:
 [ø cold catch having] he dat. fever.m happen-pst.ms
 'Having caught cold, he got fever.'
- * (51) [ø xabar mil ke] oh nu: xara:b laggia:
 [ø news receive-having] he dat. bad.m feel-pst.ms
 'Having received the news, he felt bad.'

Thus, experience dative NP can control the deletion of experiencer dative NP of the conjunctive participle clause, However, it cannot control the deletion of recipient dative NP in the same clause. Similarly, since dative Subjects are almost always undergoers (experience, recipient) and S Instr. are instrumental, they lack 'agency'. That is why the rule of conjunction reduction is blocked. One might argue that S Instr. are semantically agents.

However, agents in the sense that they can initiate and control the action/state at their will, i.e. volitional agents. Instrumental Subjects exercise accidental control rather than deliberate control to perform the act. As they lack agency, neither S Dat nor S Instr. undergo reduction.

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