Parameters Difference Between English And Urdu In Terms Of Null Subject Parameters.

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Abstract

In UG, principles and parameters postulate that innate language faculty possess finite set of fundamental principles common to all languages and seeks to explain the variation between languages through parameters. In other words the parameters determine syntactic variability amongst languages within pre-set limits for a particular parameter. This study takes into account one of such parametric variations among the languages i.e. phenomenon of null-subject parameter and explores whether Urdu language is null subject/pro-drop or not. The study analyses an exchange between teacher and mother. It reveals that null-subject constituent is not a characteristic feature of English syntax but a feature of Urdu syntax as well. Moreover, it verifies that contrary to English structure, Urdu is Pro-drop or null subject language within pre-set limit i.e. binary principle. This study is significant as it contributes fresh linguistic data for the principles and parameter theory.

1.   Introduction

Every complete sentence consists of two parts: a subject and a predicate. The subject is sometimes called 'the naming part of a sentence or clause' (Nordquist, 2019)whereas a predicate is the part of a sentence, or a clause which tells about 'what the subject is doing or what the subject is' (How to identify subject and predicate in a sentence, 2021).   The subject-predicate relation has long been assumed by grammarians to be a basic structural feature of all languages. However, it is a striking fact that the languages in which sentence remains grammatical and meaningful without an overt subject with a finite verb are characterized as null-subject or pro-drop languages. In such languages 'the content of null

subject is phonologically and morphologically covert but is recoverable in context by competent native speakers of the language' (Macdonald, 2016). In other words a null-subject is said to have grammatical and semantic properties but lacks overt phonetic form.

There is another category of languages in which finite verbs can generally have only overt subjects, not null subjects, to produce a grammatical sentence. In such cases the content has not only grammatical and semantic properties but is also phonologically and morphologically overt. Dropping of the subject leave the sentence ungrammatical. However, universal aspect or the constraint on this subject parameter is banarity i.e. either a language is pro-drop/null subject or non-pro drop/non-null subject. Radford(2009) verifies this emerging universal principle by adding that 'the range of grammatical variation found across languages appears to be strictly limited to just two possibilities – languages either do or don't systematically allow finite verbs to have null subjects'.

Null-subject parameter is one of the most prominent parametric variations among the natural languages. As discussed before that in some languages every sentence must have a subject, while in others it is systematically possible for subjects not to occur. This dichotomy is not "the result of genetic developments, as closely-related languages differ on this point (e.g. Bani-Hassan Ar- abic and Levantine Arabic), while members of clearly unrelated families (e.g. Italian and Chinese) behave alike with respect to the obligatoriness of subjects" (Jaeggli and Safir, 1989).

This paper is a comparative review of the null-subject parameter involving Urdu and English languages. The aim of the paper is to characterize the parametric choices by Urdu languages and English in the derivation of grammatically convergent sentences with null-subject constituents. The paper is hinged principally on theoretical linguistics which will provide linguistic information about the null-subject status of the two languages.

1.1   Research Question:

This study has been conducted to find answers to the following research questions:

1. Which type parametric choice Urdu language opt for while parametric setting of subject parameter?
2. In what ways Urdu language is different from English in terms of null subject parameter.

1.2   Objectives:

Through this research study, we aimed to achieve the following objectives:

1. To study occurrence or non-occurrence of Pro-drop in Urdu

2. To provide fresh linguistic data for the principles and parameter theory
3. To enhance the learnability of Urdu and English as second languages

2.   Literature Review

The theory of Universal Grammar relies onthe concept of natural endowment of "innate Language Faculty" (Radford,2009, p. 19)i.e"innate knowledge and linguistic principles"(Culiover, 2011) and Parametric variation i.e. "Systematic grammatical variation permitted by the human language faculty" (Biberauer et al.,2009). It assumes that for studying grammatical competence of a native speaker of a language a "cognitive system internalized within the brain/mind of native speakers" (Chomsky, 2006) needs to be uncovered. The Universal Grammar (UG) also hypothesizes that this internalizedsystem is 'shared among human beings' (Chomsky 2006, p.1). He elaborates that "human languages, as superficially diverse as they are, share some fundamental similarities, and that these are attributable to innate principles unique to language: that deep down, there is only one human language" (Chomsky, 2000a, p.23, Chomsky, 2000, p. 7)

In other words a finite set of fundamental principles embedded in the language faculty are "common to all languages".However, this should not lead into thinking that languages have same grammatical pattern because languages differ in terms of idiosyncratic language-specific propertiessuch as lexical differences. Languages also vary in word-order or syntactic structure.Smith (2005), while explaining the diversity of languages, states that "although languages differ along various dimensions, the principles and parameters have been there from the beginning and children are born with the principles with some specifications of the range of variations in possible human languages." (p. 38).

The differences between languages are considered to be parametric differences and the UG also explains those variations between languages through parameters."The parametric variation refers to as the systematic grammatical variation permitted by the human language faculty" (Biberauer, et al.,2009).

Principles and parameters is a framework within generative linguistics formulated by Chomsky (1981) and propagated by other linguists such as Radford (1997, 2004a, 2004b), and Webelhuth (1995)in which "the syntax of a natural languages is described in accordance with general principles (i.e. abstract rules or grammars) and specific parameters (i.e. markers, switches) that for particular languages are either turned on or off".

Hoeksema(n.d.) observes that recent work on parametric approaches to the study of interlinguistic variation and universals of grammar has drawn "a great deal of attention to

what to many appears to be one of the most basic cases of parametric variation, the position of the head element within a constituent"as per his observation many of "the syntactic differences between languages are thought to derive from (in the typological tradition: to correlate with) the placement of head elements"(p. 119).

For example the head parameter,"captures the way languages differ in the position of heads within phrases". (Haegeman, 2008; Cook, 1988).

In head-initial languages the head precedes its complements, and in head-final languages the head follows its complements. (Cook &Newson, 1996).Example of English "In English all heads (whether nouns, verbs, prepositions, or adjectives etc.) normally precede their complements" (Radford, 2006: p. 19).Japanese,Persian and Korean are head-final in its syntax (Gunji, 1987,Rahmani&Abdolmanafi2012)

Another type of syntactic difference among the languages, which is part of the present study, isa null subject parameter. Macdonald (2016) explains that"The Null-subject or pro-drop parameter is a concept rooted in the principles and parameters theory of Universal Grammar (UG)" (p 80).

Nordquist (2019) states that"A null subject is the absence (or apparent absence) of a subject in a sentence."The phenomenon of null subject is sometimes also called subject drop.Further, Biberauer, et al., (2009) comment that "The Null Subject Parameter, which determines among other things whether or not a language allows the suppression of subject pronouns, is one of the best-known and most widely discussed examples of a parameter."

In the article "Universal Grammar and the Learning and Teaching of Second Languages" Cook(1994)points out that some languages (such as Russian, Spanish, and Chinese) "permit sentences without subjects, and are called 'pro-drop' languages. Other languages, which include English, French, and German, do not permit sentences without subjects, and are called 'non-pro-drop".

Macdonald (2016) says that "Although pro-drop is not permissible parameter English grammar, it is the parametric choice of Italian syntax"(p. 81). To support his stance he quotes Radford (2004a: 107), who says that "all finite clauses in Italian allow null-subject.

English, according to Chomsky (1995) and Radford (2004a) is "a non-pro-drop language". Let's take into account the structure of English to explain these phenomena.
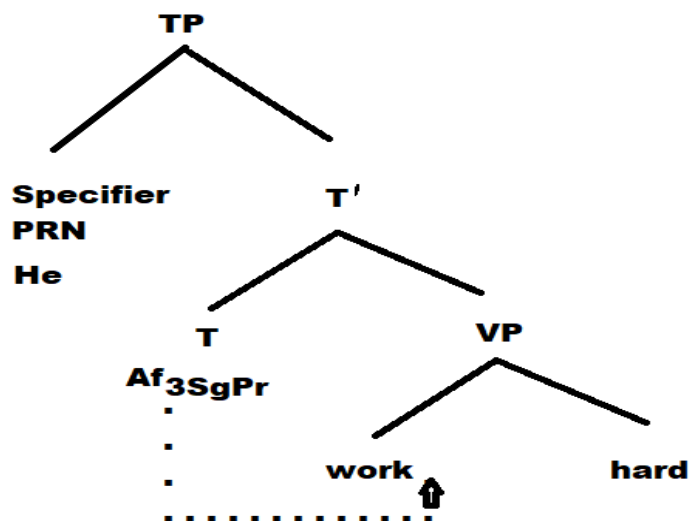
The subject position which is the Specifier of Inflection is not covert but overt and "morphologically realized". But if these derivations are presented with a null Specifier of Inflection, they would become ungrammatical and unacceptable to native speakers or other competent speakers of English as shown below.

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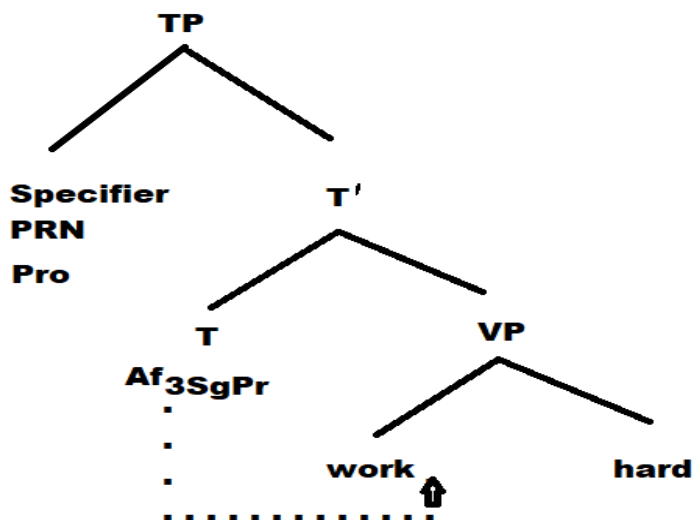
"A subject is normally essential in English sentence structure--so much so that a dummy subject must sometimes be introduced (e.g. It is raining). Subjects are, however, usually missing from imperative sentences (e.g. Listen!) and may be ellipted in an informal context (e.g. See you soon)." (Norduist, 2019).

Again, although English is not a null-subject language, it does permit pro-drop in imperative sentences and "truncated null subjects in colloquial spoken English" (Radford, 2004a: p. 106).

This article is a defense of the parametric approach to linguistic variation, set within the framework of the Minimalist Program and provides a fresh linguistic data in form of Urdu structure to verify typology of null-subject language systems. A digression is desirable here to introduce Urdu language as this study focuses on Urdu structure in terms of null subject parameter.

Urdu language is a member of the Indo-Aryan group within the Indo-European family of languages.It is official state-language of Pakistan and is also officially recognized, or "scheduled," in the constitution of India.Urdu is closely related to Hindi, a language that originated and developed in the Indian subcontinent. They share the same Indo-Aryan base and are so similar in phonology and grammar that they appear to be one language.Their distinction is most marked in terms of writing systems: Urdu uses a modified form of Perso-Arabic script known as Nastaliq (nastaʿlīq), while Hindi uses Devanagari. They are usually treated as independent languages.

Urdu is also a highly inflected language. In addition to tense, words are inflected to express gender, number, person, and case, and words are inflected by adding a new suffix or by changing the sound of the word-endings. Urdu nouns include two genders, two noun types (count or non-count), two numbers, and three cases. Nouns are also divided into classes based on marked and non-marked declension.

3. Research Methodology

The present study is descriptive in nature because an 'observational research method' has been used for data collection to understand the phenomena under question. The data has been analyzed qualitatively. The following two research tools were used for data collection.

- A dialogue between a teacher and mother of a girl was recorded to find the required data in real-life situation.
- Five (5) experts with Urdu as their mother tongue and with good command of English Language were given questionnaire based on the responses of the mother for confirmation of null subject parameter in analysis of mother's responses in Urdu.

The data is analyzed in the backdrop of Minimalist Program proposed by Chomsky. The analysis of the data is provided in the following section.

4.   Data Analysis

Data collected through observation and short interview are analyzed in this section. First the analysis of the dialogue is presented below the actual dialogue.

4.1   Dialogue

hay kamzoor bahot mi parhai beti ki aap   : **Teacher**

hay zaroorat ki mehnat osay

mehnat hay karti **Pro**   : **Mother**

hay parti tak dair ko raat **Pro**

hay soti kay kar mukammal homework **Pro**

hay karti bhi misbehave say bahchoon dosray mi school : **Teacher**

hay kiyun esi   **Pro** nahi pata : **Mother**

The teacher informs the mother about the performance of her daughter in this dialogue and suggests/advises hard work for her daughter. The mother, getting shocked, utters three sentences advocating her daughter. The analysis of the sentences is given below:

1. Sentence one with its analysis and comparison
a) mehnat hay karti **Pro**
    work hard does   **Pro**
b) **She/Pro** does work hard

Note: Urdu sentence is to be read from right to left.

The reply of the mother in 1 (a) in Urdu without subject pronoun is both meaningful and grammatical. It suggests that Urdu is null subject language. If its counterpart in English given in 1 (b) is analyzed and compared it is found that if subject of the sentence i.e. 'she' (third person singular) is dropped in English the sentence becomes ungrammatical which means that contrary to Urdu sentence which hasan overt subject, a subject is necessary in English.

2. Sentence two with its analysis and comparison
a) hay parti tak dair ko raat **Pro**

      studies till late night   **Pro**

b) **She/Pro** studies till late night

The second sentencein Urdu language in reply from mother is also with null or pro subject. The sentence with pro remains meaningful and grammatical. It seems that subject-drop with finite verb is a common phenomenon in Urdu. The reflection of the same sentence is given in its English counterpart 2 (b). However, if the option of pro is opted for in English sentence provided in 2(b) the sentence becomes ungrammatical, which means that English is non-pro or non-null subject whereas Urdu is null subject or pro language.

3. Sentence three with its analysis and comparison

a) hay kiyun   esi   **Pro**   nahi pata **Pro**

    is   why like this   **Pro**   don't know **Pro**

b) **I/pro** don't know why is **she/pro** like this?

On complaint of the teacher regarding behavior of the girls towards other classmates, the mother's response is given in 3(a) above. In Urdu sentence given in 3(a) the subject 'mujhay', whose counterpart in English word for word translation in 3 (a) could be 'I' , is dropped or replaced by **Pro i.e** 'nahi pata **Pro'.**

The response of the mother in form of the question in the same sentence contains another pro which is used instead of 'Wo' i.e third person singular 'She' in English. In other words no overt subject is given to the finite verb. The sentence is still grammatical which confirms the hypothesis that Urdu is a null subject or pro-drop language.

However, in both of the clauses in English sentence in 3 (b) which is translation of the response by the mother i.e. 'I don't know' and 'why is she/pro like this? the subject 'I' and 'she' respectively are overt and if the option of pro is opted for, the English sentence becomes ungrammatical. It suggests that English is non-pro-subject or non-null subject language.

The replies of the mother in 1(a), 2(a) & 3(a) were transformed into question form and five English language teachers with Urdu their mother tongue were given a questionnaire to confirm the existence of Pro drop/null subject in Urdu and to verify the analysis of the dialogue presented in this section. The experts were also explained the phenomenon of null subject parameter in natural language before administering of the questionnaire. Hundred percent of the responses established Urdu as null subject language which in other words verified the analysis of the dialogue in this section.

5.   Conclusion

The thrust of this paper has been to determine whether Urdu language is null subject/ pro drop language or non-null subject and whether in terms of null subject parameter it operates within set of limits suggested in UG. The data was seen in comparison with English language which is acknowledged as non-null drop language to provide a comparison to help understand subject parameter.

The analysis of the data revealed that Urdu is a null subject language. Moreover, although both languages possess the biological aspects of language, that is, the general principles of language which linguists call Universal Grammar, each language also has its own idiosyncratic features which differentiate them significantly because they are parameterized differently.

The research also suggests that a learner with English as his / her 2nd language and Urdu as the mother tongue may avoid translation and try to adopt process ofparametric resetting as mere translation of a null-subject sentence in Urdu language will be ungrammatical in English.

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