

Insights into Subject-Verb Agreement in the Syntax of Sindhi and English Languages: A Critical and Comparative Analysis

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Abstract

The central objective of this paper is to examine one of the important grammatical aspects of Sindhi and English language i.e. Subject-verb agreement but before moving to this central objective a brief historical background of both English and is given. Moreover some of the syntactic properties of both languages, including the positions of head word in the phrase and the position of verb and object, have been discussed. In addition to this Subject-verb agreement rule has been defined which is followed by the actual area of analysis. The analysis has been done by explaining various conditions in which the verb, due to the change in subject, changes similarly in both languages and some conditions where subject-verb treatment is different in both languages.

Introduction

According to Chomsky's idea of Universal Grammar, as discussed by Rosamond Mitchell and Florence Miles in their book *Second Language Learning Theories*, some basic linguistic features or principles are universal that is to say they are shared by all natural languages of the world for example all languages are structure-dependent which means all human languages have a definite structure which determines the way in which lexical items are arranged and disturbing that arrangement would result in illogical or meaningless utterances. On the other hand there are some features which are different among all the

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languages for example the structure or the arrangement of linguistic items discussed above is different across languages. For instance the arrangement of subject, verb and object is not same in all the languages as some languages take verb before object and some after object. (Mitchell & Myles, 2004, p.62). Another such feature varying among languages is how changes occur in verb according to the its subject. This paper aims to examine and compare, on a preliminary level, the rules of subject-verb agreement in English and Sindhi. But before that a brief account of the origin of both languages is necessary which is given as under

The Origin of English

Charles Barber in his book *The Story of Language* says that English has descended from a branch of Indo-European which is called Germanic to which German, Dutch, Frisian, Danish, Swedish and Norwegian also belong. English, along with these sister-tongues, has descended from one parent language, a dialect of Indo-European, known as Proto-Germanic which is further divided into three main branches or groups of dialects known as North Germanic, East Germanic and West Germanic. To North Germanic belong the modern Scandinavian languages which include Danish, Swedish and Norwegian, Gothic comes from East Germanic whereas Old English has descended from Anglo-Frisian which is a sub-branch of West Germanic. Old English experienced tremendous changes as the result of Vikings' invasion of England which took place between 8th century and 11th century. Hence English absorbed thousands of words from the language of Vikings. During this period Old English converted into Middle English. Later on, in the latter half of 11th century England came under the rule of Normans therefore their language French greatly affected English. This period saw the fall of English language but soon when certain circumstances brought the fall of French, English was once again given due consideration and certain factors like the invention of printing press fostered the spread of a re-born English called Modern English which was

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based on the London dialect as London was the centre of knowledge and learning at that time. During this whole evolutionary period the English could not retain its original form therefore the English that is spoken today is drastically different from Old English in its morphology and syntax as well. (Barber, 1964)

The Origin of Sindhi

Scholars have diverse viewpoints about the origin of Sindhi language. Some believe that it has descended from Sanskrit language as Dr Ernest trumpp says in the following statement: ‘The Sindhi is a pure Sanskritical language, more free from foreign elements than any other of the North Indian vernaculars.’ (Trumpp, 1872, p. 1)

Mr. Sirajul Haque Memon considers Sindhi as one of the Dravidian languages with roots in Indus Valley Civilization of Moen-jo-Daro that was inhabited by Non-Aryan (Dravidian) people. The fusion of two cultures of invading and local people developed a new language that is called Sindhi language today which was later blended with the words from Arabic and Persian languages.

Nevertheless, the peculiarities of Non-Aryan origin can be found in phonetics, phonology, morphology and syntax of Sindhi language which shows its ability to retain the flavour of native dialect. What has been explained is an opinion not the final verdict about the origin of this language. Still linguists are trying to seek the origin of Sindhi language. (<http://www.oocities.org>)

Brief Account of the Syntax of English and Sindhi

English and Sindhi are considerably different from each other as far as their syntax is concerned. For instance their head-parameters are different. Rosamond Mitchell and Florence

Myles say that ‘English is a head-first language, because the head of the phrase always appears before its complements’ (Mitchell & Myles, 2004, p.67). It means that the head word or the main word occurs in the beginning of phrase in English. Sindhi, on the contrary, is a head-last language as the head word occurs at the end of the phrase. Consider the following examples:

The Prime Minister of Pakistan went to America last week.

In the above example, noun phrase is ‘The Prime Minister of Pakistan’ and the head word is ‘Prime Minister’ which appears in the beginning of the phrase. Whereas we would find a different case in Sindhi translation of this sentence given as under:

Pakistan jo Prime Minister guzriyal hafty America wayo.

(Pakistan of Prime Minister last week America went.)

Here the head word ‘Prime Minister’ appears in the end of phrase.

In addition to this in English the verb comes before the object while in Sindhi verb comes after the object. It is evident in the following example:

She makes tea.	Hu chanh thahe thi. (She tea makes.)
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In the above example, the verb ‘makes’ comes before the object ‘tea’ in English whereas in Sindhi translation verb ‘*Thahy thi*’ (makes) comes after the object ‘*chanh*’ (tea).

Another extremely important aspect to be considered while studying the syntax of any language is subject-verb agreement which is the actual concern of this paper as mentioned before. In this paper we will examine, on a rudimentary level, the points where the subject-

verb agreement rule is similar and where it is different in both languages in question. But before this a basic understanding of this ‘Subject-verb agreement’ rule is necessary. Under the following heading a brief description of this grammatical rule is given.

Subject-Verb Agreement

The Subject-verb agreement rule states that the subjects and verbs must agree with one another in number (singular or plural) and in person. (Wren & Martin, 2001, p. 235) Thus, if a subject is singular, its verb must be singular; if a subject is plural, its verb must be plural moreover the change in noun or pronoun of the sentence will also bring change in the form of verb. This definition is complete in the case of English but not in the case of Sindhi as the verb in Sindhi does not only change according to the person and number of subject but it also changes when the gender of subject changes (Rashdi, 2007, p.118). This rule is known as ‘Kartary Paryoog’ in Sindhi. The word “Kartar” means ‘Faail’ (Subject) and ‘Kartary’ means ‘Faaily’, whereas the term ‘Paryoog’ is Sanskrit in origin which means showing relation or agreement (Jumani & Lashari, 2011, p.495).

Subject-Verb Agreement in Sindhi and English

After a brief description of Subject-verb agreement we will now examine the different contexts or situations in which the Subject-verb relation between Sindhi and English is different and in which it is similar. First, we will look at those conditions in which we find the verb changing according to the change in subject in similar ways in both languages or in other words in which the Subject-verb relation in both languages is similar.

Similarities

Below are some of the rules of Subject-verb agreement of English Grammar taken from *High School English Grammar and Composition* (Wren & Martin, 2001, p. 235) which have also been applied on Sindhi language in order to examine whether those rules, applicable in the case of English, are valid in the case of Sindhi or not. First, the rules that imparted similar results in the case of both languages will be stated then examples from English, along with their Sindhi counterparts, will be given in tables.

First Rule

The first rule says if subject consists of two or more singular nouns or pronouns joined by the conjunction ‘and’, plural verb will be used.

	EXAMPLES FROM ENGLISH	EXAMPLES IN SINDHI AND THEIR ONE TO ONE TRANSLATION IN ENGLISH
1.	Ali and Asma were there at that time.	Ali aen Asma un waqt huty hua. (Ali and Asma that time there were.)
2.	Macbeth and Hamlet are two famous dramas of Shakespeare.	Macbeth aen Hamlet Shakespeare ja ba mashhoor drama ahn. (Macbeth and Hamlet Shakespeare of two famous dramas are.)

In example 1, two singular nouns ‘Ali’ and ‘Asma’ joined by ‘and’ (*aen*) take plural verb ‘were’ and ‘*hua*’ in English and Sindhi respectively. In the second example again ‘Macbeth’ and ‘Hamlet’ connected by ‘and’ (*aen*) take plural verb ‘are’ in English and ‘*ahin*’ in Sindhi version. Hence it is evident that the rule mentioned above is applicable to both languages.

But there is an exception to this rule, i.e., when both nouns joined by ‘and’ refer to the same idea or the same person, then the form of verb will be singular as shown in the following examples:

The famous poet and mystic Shah Latif was born in Sindh.	Mashoor shair aen sufi Shah Latif Sindh ma paida thyo. (The famous poet and sufi Shah Latif Sindh in born was.)
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In the above example ‘The famous poet’ and ‘mystic’, in Sindhi ‘*Mashhoor shair*’ and ‘*sufi*’ refer to the same person ‘Shah Latif’ therefore in English singular verb ‘was born’ and in sindhi again singular verb ‘*paida thyo*’ is used which shows that the rule is valid on both languages.

Second Rule

The second rule says that in a case where words are attached to a singular subject by ‘with’, ‘in addition to’ etc, singular form of verb will be used as shown in the following examples:

1.	She, along with her children, often comes to meet us.	Hu pehenjy baaran soodho aksar asan saan Milan endi ahy. (She her children along with often us to meet comes.)
2.	The city, with all its people, was destroyed.	Shehar pehenjy sabhni rahakun soodho tabaah thi wayo. (The city its all people with destroyed was.)

In the above examples the additional phrases ‘along with her children’ (*pehenjy baran sudho*) and ‘with all its people’ (*pehenjy sabhni rahakun samait*) have no effect on the form

of verb in both examples as in the example 1 the singular form of verb ‘comes’ (*endi ahy*) has been used with ‘She’ (*hu*) which is a singular subject. Similarly in both English and Sindhi versions of example 2 again singular verb ‘was destroyed’ (*tabaah thi wayo*) has been used with the singular subject ‘the city’ (*shehr*) . Hence it is proved that this rule is valid on both languages in the same context.

Third Rule

The third rule says that two nouns qualified by ‘each’ or ‘every’ joined by ‘and’ take a singular verb ; as,

1.	Every woman and every man plays an important in the success of society.	Har aurat aen har mard samaaj ji taraqi ma hik ehm kirdar ada kary tho. (Every woman and every man society of success in an important role plays.)
2.	Every girl and every boy is going on picnic.	Har chokri aen har chokro picnic ty wanyi rahyo ahy. (Every girl and every boy picnic on going is.)

In the examples given above ‘woman’ (*aurat*) and ‘man’ (*murd*) , ‘girl’ (*chokri*) and boy (*chokro*) are qualified by ‘every’ (*har*) therefore in both English and Sindhi versions singular verbs ‘plays’ (*ada kary tho*) and ‘is going’ (*wanyi rahyo ahy*) have been used. Hence this rule also shows similar results in case of both languages.

Fourth Rule

The fourth rule says that the collective noun generally takes singular verb. Collective nouns are words that comprise more than one member, such as army, fleet, crew etc. It takes singular verb because the members are taken or considered as one whole or unit. Examples are as follows:

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1.	The caravan was returning at dawn.	Qaaflo fajr jy waqt moti rahyo ho. (The caravan at dawn returning was.)
2.	The crowd was shouting when he came on stage.	Manhun jo mer rarhyun kary rahyo ho jadhen hu stage ty ayo. (The crowd shouting was when he stage on came.)

In both examples given above the singular forms of verb ‘was returning’ (*moti rahyo ho*) and ‘was shouting’ (*rarhiyun kary rahyo ho*) have been used with collective nouns ‘The caravan’ (*qaaflo*) and ‘The crowd’ (*hujoom*) respectively showing that the rule is applicable for both languages.

Fifth Rule

The fifth rule of subject-verb agreement says that when the subject of a sentence is a proper noun which is plural in form but refers to some single object or some collective unit, the verb form will be singular, as given below:

1.	The Arabian Nights was greatly appreciated.	Arabian Nights tamam ghani sarahi wayi. (The Arabian Nights greatly appreciated was.)
2.	The United States is economically and politically very powerful.	United States muashi aen siyasi aitbar saan tamam taqatwar ahy. (The United States economically and politically very powerful is.)

In example (1) ‘The Arabian Nights’ in form is a plural name but it refers to a single literary work and USA in example (2) is a collective noun hence in both examples, including both English and Sindhi versions, singular verbs have been used. As we can see in the first

instance ‘was appreciated’ (*sarahi wayi hue*) and in second instance ‘is’ (*ahy*) have been used which clearly demonstrates that this rule also works for both languages.

Sixth Rule

The sixth rule says that when a subject consists of more than one noun, the verb is not used in accordance with the number of the noun close to it instead it is used according to the number of the noun which is the proper subject as shown the examples given below:

1.	His knowledge about Sindhi writers is so vast.	Sindhi lekhakan baabat hun ji dyaan tamam wasee ahy. (Sindhi writers about his knowledge very vast is.)
2.	The consequences of that act were very severe.	Hun amal ja nateeja tamam sakht hua. (That act of the consequences very severe were.)

In the above examples our actual subjects are ‘His Knowledge’ (*hun ji jyaan*) which is singular and ‘The ‘consequences’ (*nateeja*) which is plural. Therefore the verbs have been used accordingly in both examples as the singular forms of verb in first example is ‘is’ (*ahy*) have been used according to the singular nature of the subject and in the second example plural forms of verb ‘were’ (*hua*) have been used according to the plural nature of the subject. Hence the rule is valid for both languages.

Seventh Rule

The seventh rule of subject-verb agreement, similar in English and Sindhi, is concerned with the number of subject. According to this rule the number of subject determines the form of verb to be used. Consider the following examples:

1.	Patient was admitted to the hospital.	Mareez ispataal ma dakhil kayo wayo. (Patient the hospital to admitted was.)
2.	Patients were admitted to the hospital.	Mareez ispataal ma dakhil kaya waya. (Patients the hospital to admitted were.)

In the examples given above, including both English and Sindhi versions, we find that with the change in number of subject the form of verb also changes. In example 1, the subject, i.e. patient (*Mareez*), being singular takes singular verb form ‘was admitted’ (*dakhil kayo wayo*), whereas in example 2 ‘Patients’ (*Mareez*) both being plural take a different verb form, i.e., ‘were admitted’ (*dakhil kaya waya*). Hence it proves this rule has applicability in the case of both languages.

Dissimilarities

There are also some dissimilarities between English and Sindhi as far as their subject-verb agreement rules are concerned. For demonstration examples for all these differences in both languages will be given in tables along with some explanation.

First Difference

The first difference between the subject-verb agreement rules in both languages is on the basis of person or pronoun. (Rashdi, 2007, p.117). This is shown in the examples given below:

	EXAMPLES FROM ENGLISH	EXAMPLES IN SINDHI AND THEIR ONE TO ONE TRANSLATION IN ENGLISH
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1.	I sleep.	Aon sumhan thi. (I sleep.)
2.	We sleep.	Asan sumhun tha. (We sleep.)
3.	You sleep.	Tun sumheen tho. (You sleep.)
4.	He sleeps.	Hu sumhy tho. (He sleeps.)
5.	She sleeps.	Hu sumhy thi. (Hu sumhy thi.)
6.	It sleeps.	(Hu sumhy tho/thi.) (It sleeps.)
7.	They sleep.	Hu sumhan tha. (They sleep.)

In all the examples given above different pronouns have been used. It should be noticed that in these examples English has only two possible forms of the verb i.e. ‘play’ and ‘plays’. The former is used with first person singular ‘I’, first person plural ‘We’, second person ‘You’ (no matter singular or plural) and third person plural ‘they’ while the later is used with third person singular ‘He’, ‘She’ and ‘It’. On the contrary in Sindhi with every pronoun the verb changes its form as ‘*khedaan tho*’, ‘*khedoon tha*’, ‘*khedy tho*’ *khedan tha*’ etc. This is a significant difference between the subject-verb agreement of both languages.

Second Difference

Another difference between English and Sindhi subject-verb agreement is that in English the form of verb does not change according to the gender of subject while in Sindhi it does change according to the gender of subject. (Rashdi, 2007, p.118). It is evident in the given examples:

	EXAMPLES FROM ENGLISH (FOR BOTH MASCULINE AND FEMININE CASES)	EXAMPLES FROM SINDHI (FOR MASCULINE CASES)	EXAMPLES FROM SINDHI (FOR FEMININE CASES)
1.	I write.	Aun likhaan tho. (I write.)	Aun likhaan thi. (I write.)
2.	We write.	Asan likhun tha. (We write.)	Asan likhun thiyun. (We write.)
3.	You write.	Tun likheen tho. (You write.)	Tun likheen thi. (You write.)
4.	He writes.	Hu likhy tho. (He writes.)	
5.	She writes.	Hu likhy thi. (She writes.)	
6.	They write.	Hu likhan tha. (They write.)	Hu likhan thiyun. (They write.)

In all the above examples of Sindhi, verb form changes due to the change in gender. E.g. when ‘I’ (*aun*) refers to a male the form of verb is ‘*likhaan tho*’ but when ‘I’ (*aun*) stands for or refers to a female subject its form changes from ‘*likhaan tho*’ to ‘*likhaan thi*’. Same case is with all the examples in Sindhi. On the contrary, in both masculine and

feminine cases of pronouns in English counterparts the verb form remains unchanged showing that the verb in English is insensitive to the change in gender.

Third Difference

Sindhi also differs in the use of verb while addressing a person according to his or her status or the level of formality with him. This can be a minor difference but it also came under consideration while comparing both languages. Examples are as follows:

EXAMPLE FROM ENGLISH (FOR BOTH FORMAL AND INFORMAL CASES)	EXAMPLE FROM SINDHI (FOR INFORMAL CASE)	EXAMPLES FROM SINDHI (FOR FORMAL CASE)
You face every difficulty very bravely.	Tun har mushkil khy dadhi bahaduri saan munhn deen tho. (You every difficulty very bravely face.)	Twmaan har mushkil khy dadhi bahaduri saan munhn diyo tha. (You every difficulty very bravely face.)

The examples given above show that in English ‘you’ is equally used in both formal and informal contexts so there is no impact on the form of verb but in Sindhi versions a clear difference is shown in the subject and the verb in both contexts. In informal situation where you are talking to a person of your age and status, the subject used is ‘*Tun*’(you) therefore the verb form is also informal ‘*samnu Karen tho*’ (face). However, while addressing to a respectable or elderly person or with whom you are formal, the subject used is ‘*Tawmaan*’(you) and the verb form is ‘*samnu karyo tha*’ (face). It shows that the verb in Sindhi, unlike in English, is sensitive to status or the level of formality with the subject.

Conclusion

The above analysis and comparison between English and Sindhi shows that in certain conditions or contexts the verbs in both languages agree with the subject in the same way whereas in certain other conditions the treatment of verb in both these languages with the subject is different or in other words both languages have some similar as well as some different rules of subject-verb agreement.

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