A unified licensing based approach to DSM & DOM: Evidence from subject-object person effects

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Introduction: Recent literature (Harbour 2017, Kalin 2017, also Ormazabal & Romero 2013) shows that the seemingly distinct phenomena of Person Case Constraint/PCC and differential object marking/DOM are reflexes of the same underlying requirement of certain nominals, including but not restricted to 1st/2nd pronouns, to be licensed. This paper aims to extend the unified licensing based approach to differential subject marking/DSM by presenting a unique subject-object person effect from Punjabi (Indo-Aryan), which bans a 3rd person animate object clitic only with differentially marked 1st/2nd person subjects, but not 3rd. Moreover, replacing the object clitic with a full 3rd pronoun which bears DOM voids the ban.

Background: Punjabi is a person and aspect based split ergative language (Bhatia 1993 a.o). All subjects in the imperfective receive an unmarked nominative case and control full phi-agreement, (1). In the perfective (transitive) domain, only 3rd person subjects receive an overt ergative –ne, while 1st/2nd person subjects receive an unmarked oblique case, (2). None of the subjects in the perfective trigger agreement on the verb, which either agrees with the unmarked object, or occurs in its default form (3msg) with a marked object. Notwithstanding, 1st/2nd unmarked subjects differ from 3rd subjects with regard to Legate’s (2014) diagnostics of coordination and modification, signaling a syntactic instead of a morphological basis for the person based split (see Chandra & Kaur 2017).

1. maiN/o billiyaAN paaldaa aaN/e
   1sg.nom/3sg.nom cat.f.pl raise.hab.m.sg be.pres.1sg/3sg
   ‘I/he raise(s) cats.’

2. maiN/o-ne billiyaAN paaliyaAN ne
   1sg.obl/3sg-erg cat.f.pl raise.perf.f.pl be.pres.3pl
   ‘I/she have raised cats.’

In addition to DSM, the language also has DOM in that it differentially marks some of its objects with a distinct marker –nuu. 1st/2nd person pronouns, proper names and anaphors obligatorily receive DOM. With 3rd person pronouns, the marking is optional. Only when it is present, the pronoun is interpreted as 3rd person animate. In the absence of DOM, the 3rd person pronoun receives an inanimate reading. For the remaining nominals, which we do not discuss here, the presence/absence of DOM typically correlates with effects like definiteness and specificity (Bhatia 1993, Kaur 2016).

3. karan-ne maiN-nuu/o-nuu/o vekhyaA e
   Karan-erg 1sg-DOM/3sg-DOM/3sg see.perf.m.sg be.pres.3sg
   ‘Karan has seen me/him/her/it.’

Puzzle: Punjabi exhibits a unique person effect in the subject-object configuration—the language has a 3rd person clitic suu, which is banned in the object position with the differentially marked 1st/2nd person subjects in the perfective (Kaur 2016, 2017; Kaur & Raynaud 2018, in prep.). suu is an animate 3rd person singular clitic, which occupies the auxiliary slot to replace non-agreeing arguments (Akhtar 1997, Butt 2007, Kaur 2016, 2017). Consider (4) where suu replaces the (ergative) 3rd subject in the perfective. Employing suu to replace a 3rd person nominative subject, which controls verbal agreement, results in ungrammaticality. The imperfective sentence in (5) illustrates this.

4. karan-nuu vekhyaA suu/e
   Karan-DOM see.perf 3sg.cl/be.pres Karan-DOM see.hab be.pres/*3sg.cl
   ‘He/she saw Karan.’

5. karan-nuu vekhdaa e/*suu
   Karan-DOM see.perf 3sg.cl/be.pres Karan-DOM see.hab be.pres/*3sg.cl
   ‘He/she sees Karan.’

Similarly, the clitic can replace a 3rd person animate object, which must also be non-agreeing. This is shown with the ban on the (object-) agreeing perfective verb form in (6). Importantly, the replacement of a 3rd object with suu is possible only when the subject is also 3rd person. The presence of a 1st/2nd person subject with an object suu results in ungrammaticality, (7) (Kaur 2016, 2017; Kaur & Raynaud 2018).

6. karan-ne vekhyaA/*vekhi suu (7) *maiN/tuu vekhyaA suu
   Karan-erg see.perf.m.sg(default)/see.perf.f.sg 3sg.cl 1sg.obl/2sg.obl see.perf.m.sg 3sg.cl
   ‘Karan saw him/her/*it.’

7. *maiN/tuu vekhyaA suu
   ‘I/you saw him/her.’

Crucially, these effects disappear in the presence of a DOM hosting 3rd full pronoun object instead of suu.

8. maiN/tuu o-nuu vekhyaA
   1sg.obl/2sg.obl 3sg-DOM see.perf.m.sg
‘I/you saw him/her.’

Question: What explains the interaction between object suu and 1st/2nd subjects (but not 3rd subjects)?

Analysis: I claim that this interaction follows straightforwardly from a unified treatment of DSM (on 1st/2nd subjects) and DOM (on 1st/2nd and 3rd animate objects) as distinct manifestations of the licensing requirement of the [+participant] feature, with due consideration to the distinct internal structure of clitics. DSM at par with DOM: Following Chandra & Kaur (2017) for Punjabi, Deal (2016) for Nez Perce (also Coon & Preminger 2012 a.o.), I analyse DSM as ensuing from the unique [+participant] feature licensing requirement of 1st/2nd subjects. Specifically, I propose that 1st/2nd subjects in Punjabi enter the derivation with a [+participant] feature which needs licensing, defined as the requirement of certain valued features on a nominal to agree with an appropriate functional head (Kalin 2017). Building on Bianchi (2006), and Merchant’s (2006) approach to person-sensitive syntax according to which clause-structures can host dedicated agreement heads specialized for particular person values (e.g., Zanuttini’s Jussive Phrase 2008), I propose that the perfective clause-structure in Punjabi hosts a unique phrase labeled PartP, which licenses the [+participant] feature on 1st/2nd subjects and values them with an unmarked oblique case. The 3rd subject, for lack of a [participant] feature, only gets an inherent ergative –ne from the v head. (9) \[\text{PartP}^{[+ \text{participant}]} [\text{VP 1st/2nd subject}^{[+ \text{participant}]} [\text{VP Obj V}]]\]

Similarly for full pronominal objects, I follow Kalin (2018) in treating obligatory DOM on 1st/2nd and 3rd full pronouns as a licensing requirement. In the object domain, not only 1st/2nd pronouns but also 3rd person full animate pronouns enter the derivation with a [participant] feature, albeit negatively specified (Adger & Harbour 2007). The [+participant] feature on said nominals is licensed by agreement with a postposition/P selected by v. This gets realized as –nuu, yielding DOM. (10) \[\text{VP-P}^{[+ \text{participant}]} [\text{VP 1st/2nd/3rd animate pron. obj}^{[+ \text{participant}]} \text{V}]\]

Disrupted licensing with object suu: The presence of the 3rd animate clitic suu instead of the full pronoun in the object position disrupts this system. By virtue of its ability to coreference only animate 3rd person items, suu also hosts a [-participant] feature that requires licensing. However, it cannot be licensed by the adpositional –nuu. I follow Nevins (2011) in proposing that clitics originate as part of a big-DP structure but are deficient in that they do not contain a KP/PP layer (also Roberts 2010). This means that suu cannot receive the P-based licensing via DOM. Consequently, suu targets the next potential licensor, i.e. PartP, resulting in competition with 1st/2nd subjects for licensing. Assuming intervention based accounts of PCC (Bejar & Rezac 2003, Anagnostopoulou 2003, 2005), PartP is unable to agree with object suu in the presence of an intervening 1st/2nd subject which also hosts a [participant] feature. This yields the ban on object suu with 1st/2nd subjects, schematized in (11). With a 3rd subject, which does not require licensing and is case-valued by v, object suu is licensed freely by PartP, resulting in (6). (11) \[\text{PartP} [\text{VP 1st/2nd sub} [\text{VP object-suu V}]]\]

This analysis predicts that the reverse configuration with subject suu and a 1st/2nd full object should be grammatical since the object can be licensed via the P based DOM, leaving PartP to license suu; see (12). (12) maiN-nuu vekhya suu
1sg-DOM see.perf.m.sg 3sg.clitic
‘He/she has seen me.’

Conclusion: My account of suu clearly illustrates that despite not affecting the object position, DSM must be unified with DOM in constituting a reflex of the licensing requirement of certain features. It is only with a DSM-exhibiting subject that the object, which also requires [participant] licensing but fails to receive it via DOM, ends up getting banned. An upshot of treating DSM/DOM as a participant-licensing requirement is that allows us to revisit the weak/strong pronoun distinction in the PCC-literature. It is well-known that PCC holds over weak pronouns and is obviated by strong pronouns, leading to analyses that posit a [participant] feature which requires licensing only on weak pronouns (Stegovec 2019). Differently, my proposal shows that strong pronouns in certain languages also require [participant] licensing. Since strong pronouns project a KP/PP, their licensing requirements translate into differential case/agreement patterns realized as DSM/DOM. Clitics, for lack of a KP, manifest PCC-like violations.