

Optional Agreement and Information Structure in Surati Gujarati

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Abstract

Previous studies on Standard Gujarati claim that a predicate can never exhibit default neuter agreement when both the subject and the object are case marked. When the subject is case marked, the predicate must agree with the case marked object. However, in this paper I present new empirical evidence from Surati Gujarati (a dialect of Gujarati) where both object agreement and default neuter agreement on the predicate are possible within the same syntactic configuration. To explain this optionality in agreement, I argue for a case alternation analysis, i.e. the object case alternates between accusative and dative. Further, I make explicit the contexts that govern the case alternation and present empirical evidence to argue for my proposal. Subsequently, I illustrate how the information structure of the language, mainly ‘Focus’, interacts with the case alternation phenomenon. I conclude by proposing an object shift analysis, which provides a structural account of the role of ‘Focus’ in case alternation. This puzzle has never been accounted for in literature. Thus, the article not only provides an empirical insight but also a theoretical insight into the grammar of Surati Gujarati.

1 Introduction

Cardona (1965), Mistry (1998), and Suthar (2005) claim that in Standard Gujarati when both subject and object are case marked, the predicate must agree with the case marked object as seen in sentence (1). And if the predicate shows default neuter agreement, it renders the sentence ungrammatical, as seen in sentence (2).

1. vaagh-e **bakri-ne**_{ACC} **khaadhi**
tiger.M.SG-ERG goat.F.SG-ACC eat.PFV.F.SG
‘The tiger ate the goat.’
2. *vaagh-e bakri-ne_{ACC} khaadhu
tiger.M.SG-ERG goat.F.SG-ACC eat.PFV.N.SG
‘The tiger ate the goat.’

However, empirical evidence from Surati Gujarati presents a new puzzle, which I describe in the next section.

2 The Puzzle

Looking at the agreement in Surati Gujarati, this syntactic environment presents an intriguing puzzle as we obtain an unpredictable behavior of the agreement patterns with causative predicates (both causativized transitive and intransitive predicates). Here, both object agreement and default neuter agreement on the predicate are possible, as seen in sentences (3) and (4), respectively. For the sake of simplicity I use a causativized unergative predicate *dodaav* (‘cause to run’). My proposal for solving this puzzle is to argue that this optionality in agreement, seen in (3) and (4), is due to alternation in case. The phenomenon of case alternation has been attested for many languages, like Russian, Icelandic, Spanish and Dutch (For more see Svenonius 2006, Demonte 2009, Pineda 2013)

3. rina-e **ghoda-ne**_{ACC} **dodaavo**
Rina.F.SG-ERG horse.M.SG-ACC run.CAUS.PFV.M.SG
‘Rina made the horse run.’
4. rina-e ghoda-ne_{DAT} dodaaivu
Rina.F.SG-ERG horse.M.SG-DAT run.CAUS.PFV.N.SG
‘Rina made a/the horse run.’

3 Basics of Object Case in Surati Gujarati

Before fleshing out the argument for case alternation, I discuss the properties and the impact of the *-ne* marker, a homophonous marker for accusative and dative case, on the interpretation of the sentence (for standard Gujarati, see Mistry 1998). The *-ne* marker is sensitive to definiteness and animacy. Following Bossong (1985), Aissen (2003) calls this phenomenon ‘Differential Object Marking’ (henceforth DOM). DOM is optional and its absence yields an indefinite interpretation of the direct objects as seen in (5), where, the direct object ‘horse’ has an indefinite reading. An unmarked in-situ object triggers agreement on both the adverb *vhel-* (‘early’) and the predicate *joyo* (‘saw’).

5. rina-e varamvaar **ghodo**
 Rina.F.SG-ERG frequently horse.M.SG.
vhel-lo jo-yo
 early-M.SG see-PFV.M.SG
 ‘Rina frequently saw a horse, early.’

The presence of DOM imparts a definite interpretation to the object as seen in (6). The position of the DOM marked object *ghoda-ne_{Acc}* (‘horse’) in (6) must be noted as it is higher than the indefinite *ghodo* (‘horse’) in (5). I use adverbs *varamvaar* (‘frequently’) and *vhel-* (‘early’) to indicate the difference in the positions of the two objects in (5) & (6).

6. rina-e **ghoda-ne** varamvaar
 Rina.F.SG-ERG horse.M.SG-ACC frequently
vhel-lo jo-yo
 early-M.SG see-PFV.M.SG
 ‘Rina frequently saw the horse, early.’

By contrast, with ditransitives, the *-ne_{Dat}* marked indirect object *ghodo* (‘horse’) in (7) does not trigger agreement and can never do so. The adverb *vhel-* (‘early’) and the predicate *aap* (‘give’) both agree with the unmarked object *boot* (‘shoes’). Another important observation is the in-situ position of the *-ne_{Dat}* marked object *ghodo* (‘horse’), which is similar to the position of the unmarked object in (5). Note also that the indirect object is ambiguous between definite and indefinite. Therefore, I analyze *-ne* in (7) as a dative, which is different from the DOM marker *-ne* in (6).

7. rina-e (varamvaar) **ghoda-ne_{DAT}**
 Rina.F.SG-ERG frequently horse.M.SG-DAT
 (??varamvaar) **boot vhel-la**
 frequently shoes.N.PL early-N.PL
aapya
 give-PFV.N.PL
 ‘Rina frequently gave shoes to a/the horse early.’

Note that the overt accusative case marking on direct objects (DOM) in Surati Gujarati, is sensitive to both animacy and definiteness. The overt case marker *-ne* is obligatory for direct objects that are proper names as seen in sentence (8).

8. Raj-e **ram*(-ne_{Acc}) jo-yo**
 Raj.M.SG-ERG Ram.M.SG-ACC see.PFV.M.SG
 ‘Raj saw (*a) Ram.’

Other than that the case marker *-ne* is optional for objects with [+ANIMATE] features as seen in sentence (9).

9. Raj-e **bakri(-ne_{ACC}) jo-yi**
 Raj.M.SG-ERG goat.F.SG-ACC see.PFV.F.SG
 ‘Raj saw a (the) goat.’

[–ANIMATE] objects cannot license the overt case marker in Surati Gujarati as it is sensitive to animacy as seen in sentence (10).

10. Raj-e **shaak(*-ne_{ACC}) jo-yu**
 Raj.M.SG-ERG vegetable.N.SG(*-ACC) see.PFV.N.SG
 ‘Raj saw (*the) vegetable.’

The hierarchy in Surati Gujarati for licensing an overt accusative case marker on the object is illustrated in (11).

11. **Animacy scale:** Animate Definite >
 Animate Indefinite > Inanimate

4 Evidence for Case Alternation in Surati Gujarati

I propose the following explanation for the optionality in agreement in Surati Gujarati: when the case on the object is accusative case, the verb agrees with the case marked object, and when it is dative, the verb exhibits default neuter agreement as dative case blocks agreement in Surati Gujarati (see Mistry 1998 for Standard Gujarati). Svenonius (2006) argues a similar for case alternation analysis to account for Icelandic data.

4.1 Diagnostics for Case Alternation

The hypothesis must be empirically substantiated, as *-ne* marks both accusative and dative case in Gujarati (also see Mistry 1998). One piece of empirical evidence to explicitly show the presence of accusative-dative case alternation is seen in sentences (13) and (15) for contexts (12) and (14) respectively; here, the *-ne_{ACC}* marker is the accusative case marker and it is optional as shown in (13) vs. (15).

The predicate in both these examples agrees with the object.

12. **Context:** Rina is a shepherd and has three horses Y1, Y2, Y3. Frequently, Y1 entered her kitchen early.

13. rina-e **ghoda-ne_{ACC} varamvaar**
 Rina.F.SG-ERG horse.M.SG-ACC frequently
vhel-lo dodaaivo
 early-M.SG run.CAUS.PFV.M.SG
 ‘Rina frequently made the horse run early.’

14. **Context:** Some horse or other from Rina's village frequently entered her house early.

15. rina-e varamvaar **ghodo**
 Rina.F.SG-ERG frequently horse.M.SG
vhel-lo dodaaivo
 early-M.SG run.CAUS.PFV.M.SG
 'Rina frequently made a horse run early.'

By contrast, the dative *-ne_{DAT}* case marker is always obligatory as seen in sentences (17) and (18) for context (16). Note that sentence (17) is ambiguous between definite and indefinite, which is what we would expect from a dative-marked object. This is the context where we find default neuter agreement.

16. **Context:** Rina's mother asked her mother: what did Rina do?

17. rina-e varamvaar **ghoda-ne_{DAT}**
 Rina.F.SG-ERG frequently horse.M.SG-DAT
vhel-lu dodaaivo
 early-N.SG run.CAUS.PFV.N.SG
 'Rina frequently made a/the horse run early.'

18. *rina-e varamvaar **ghodo**
 Rina.F.SG-ERG frequently horse.M.SG
vhel-lu dodaaivo
 early-N.SG run.CAUS.PFV.N.SG
 'Rina frequently made a horse run early.'

It must be noted that sentences (13), (15) and (17) are all grammatical in their respective contexts. However, there is no context in which sentence (18) is grammatical. Thus, it seems that the distribution of accusative and dative case on the object is contextually determined. Another piece of evidence for case alternation in Surati Gujarati is presented by double object constructions. It seems very clear from Cardona and Suthar (2007:748) that SUBJ-IO-DO-VERB can be considered the base word order for double object constructions in Standard Gujarati as seen in (19) and this also holds for Surati Gujarati. The double object constructions are also relevant as dative case is considered the case of the indirect objects (see Dryer 1986; Haspelmath 2005). This is illustrated in (19). In sentence (19), the beneficent is unambiguously dative marked. And the verb never agrees with the beneficent. a causativized transitive will end up looking similar, as in (20).

19. ram-e raj-ne_{DAT} **bakri aapi**
 Ram.M.SG-ERG Raj.M.SG-DAT goat F.SG give.PFV.F.SG
 'Ram gave Raj a goat.'

However, the language cannot license accusative case on the direct object in sentence (20) as long as it is in the in-situ position.

20. ram-e varamvaar raj-ne_{DAT}
 Ram.M.SG-ERG frequently Raj.M.SG-DAT
 VP [**bakri(*-ne_{ACC}) vhelli khawdaavi**]
 goat.F.SG(*-ACC) early-F.SG eat.CAUS.PFV.F.SG
 'Ram frequently fed a (*the) goat to Raj early.'

But when the direct object *bakri* ('goat') moves out of the VP then it can be *-ne* marked as seen in (21).

21. ram-e **bakri-ne_{ACC}** varamvaar
 Ram.M.SG-ERG goat.M.SG-ACC frequently
 raj-ne_{DAT} VP [**t_i vhelli khawdaavi**]
 Raj.F.SG-DAT early-F.SG eat.CAUS.PFV.F.SG
 'Ram frequently fed the goat to Raj early.'

The dative-marked argument can only occur to the right of *varamvaar* ('frequently') as seen in sentences (17) & (20), whereas the direct object can only be accusative-marked if it occurs to the left of *varamvaar* ('frequently') as seen in (13) & (21). Thus, based on the empirical evidence presented above I claim that the optionality manifested in the agreement patterns of Surati Gujarati is due to accusative-dative case alternation.

5 Role of Information-Structure in Case Assignment

In this section, I argue that information structure plays a vital role in case alternation. To explain the role of information structure in case assignment, I propose the following: In Surati Gujarati, the case marked objects of the causative predicates are marked accusative case if the focus is narrow focus on the object. By contrast, the object is marked with dative case if the focus is broad focus on the entire VP.

5.1 Diagnostics for Focus

To test the above hypothesis, I use the question-answer congruence test following Hamblin (1973), as the main example of pragmatic focus emerges in question-answer congruence where a question indicates the communicative goal of the questioner. In context (22), the focus is on the entire VP. As we see, the direct object *ghodo* ('horse') is licensed with dative case as seen in sentence (23). Here, the presence of dative case is evident, as the verb shows default neuter agreement and it does not agree with the direct

object; recall that I have argued that dative case does not control agreement in Surati Gujarati.

Broad Focus (Focus on the VP)

22. **Context:** Rina wanted to know the strength of her new horse. When her mother saw the horse gasping for breath she asked Rina's Father:

Q1: What did Rina do?

23. rina-e VP[ghoda-ne_{DAT} dodaaivu]_F
 Rina.F.SG-ERG horse.M.SG-DAT run.CAUS.PFV.N.SG
 'Rina made a/the horse run.'

In context (24), the focus is on the direct object. As a result, it gets the accusative case, as seen in sentence (25). The presence of accusative case in this sentence is evident, since the verb in (25) agrees with the direct object, and as argued previously accusative case is transparent to agreement in Surati Gujarati (see Cardona 1965:72).

24. **Context:** Rina had a goat and a horse. She was unsure whom she would send to the race. So Salman asked her mother the following question:

Q2: Whom did Rina pick to run in the race?

25. rina-e [ghoda-ne_{ACC}]_F dodaaivo
 Rina.F.SG-ERG horse.M.SG-ACC run.CAUS.PFV.M.SG
 'Rina made the horse run.'

In the next section I propose an object shift analysis to account for the relation between case alternation and information structure.

6 Object-Shift/Scrambling in Surati Gujarati

Case alternation and the optionality in agreement seem to be the results of object shift/scrambling. I propose that an object with +FOCUS feature moves out of the VP where it gets accusative case, whereas an object with -FOCUS remains in-situ regardless of its specificity. The crucial data supporting the claim comes from the adverb placement test (Pollock 1989). Assuming that adverbs have fixed positions, the results of the adverb placement test have a direct implication for the syntactic analysis of the word order. I use the adverbs *lagbhag* ('probably'), *varamvaar* ('frequently'), and *vhel-* ('early') to test object movement. For the object to get accusative case

it must move out of the VP as seen in (26), where the direct object *Ram* occurs to the left of the adverb *varamvaar* ('frequently').

26. rina-e lagbhag ram-ne_{i ACC} Rina.F.SG-
 ERG probably Ram.M.SG-ACC varamvaar
 VP[t_i vhel-lo dodaaivo] frequently
 early-M.SG run.CAUS.PFV.M.SG
 'Rina probably frequently made Ram run early.'

The sentence is grammatically deviant if accusative case is forced on the object in-situ as seen in sentence (27). Since proper names must be case marked with the DOM marker, *-ne* cannot be omitted from *Ram*.

27. ??rina-e lagbhag varamvaar
 Rina.F.SG-ERG probably frequently
 VP[ram-ne_{i ACC} vhel-lo dodaaivo]
 Ram M.SG-ACC early-M.SG run.CAUS.PFV.M.SG
 'Rina probably frequently made Ram run early.'

However, if the object is dative case marked with default neuter agreement on the verb, the object remains in-situ, to the right of the adverb *varamvaar* ('frequently'), as seen in (28).

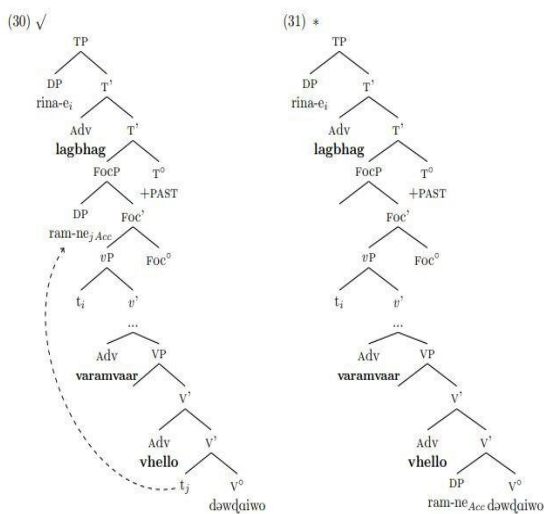
28. rina-e lagbhag varamvaar
 Rina.F.SG-ERG probably frequently
 VP[ram-ne_{i DAT} vhel-lu dodaaivu]
 Ram M.SG-DAT early-N.SG run.CAUS.PFV.N.SG
 'Rina probably frequently made Ram run early.'

The sentence is not judged to be perfectly grammatical if the dative case marked object moves higher on the clausal spine out of the VP, as seen in sentence (29).

29. ?rina-e lagbhag ram-ne
 Rina.F.SG-ERG probably Ram M.SG-DAT_{i DAT}
 varamvaar VP[t_i vhel-lu dodaaivu]
 frequently early-N.SG run.CAUS.PFV.N.SG
 'Rina probably frequently made Ram run early.'

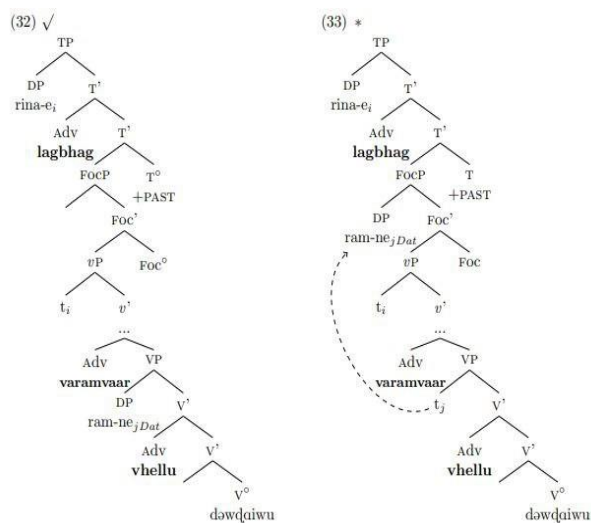
To account for object shift (sentence 26) I propose the following: First the ergative subject moves to the specifier of TP to check T's uninterpretable phi-set and EPP feature. This has been argued for Hindi-Urdu ergative constructions by Davison (2004). Second, the accusative case marked object moves out of the VP. Movement of the DP out of the VP has been previously argued by Diesing (1992) to target specific objects. For now I assume that the accusative object originates in the complement of V and the dative object in spec, VP. Third, the movement of the object out of the VP is connected to accusative case in causatives .

The evidence from the adverb placement test clearly shows us that the object has to be higher on the clausal spine for it to surface with accusative case. Fourth, only objects with +FOCUS feature move out of the VP and get accusative case, as seen in sentence (25) and (26). If objects with +FOCUS feature do not move out of the VP to the specifier of focus phrase, it renders the sentence grammatically deviant as seen in (27). I build on Diesing (1997) and claim that objects with +FOCUS feature escape the existential closure when they move out of the VP to the specifier of the focus position as argued by Jayaseelan (2008), thereby acquiring accusative case as a form of dependent case (Baker 2015). This is sketched in (30) for sentence (26), and in (31) for sentence (27).



To account for in-situ object (sentence 28) I propose the following: First, ergative subject moves to the specifier of TP to check T's uninterpretable phi-set and EPP feature as previously argued. Second, the dative case marked object remains in-situ and does not move out of the VP to the specifier of the focus position like the accusative case marked object in (26). The in-situ position of the dative case marked object is confirmed by the adverb placement test in (28). The sentence is perfectly grammatical when the dative marked direct object remains in-situ as seen in (28). However, the sentence is less acceptable when the dative marked direct object moves out of the VP as in (29). Third, only objects with +FOCUS feature can move out of the VP. Since, the object in (28) does not have the +FOCUS feature, it remains in-situ and gets bound by existential closure inside the VP. The fact that the object in (28) is not the focused element of the sentence was illustrated

in (23). The structural analysis for sentence (28) is sketched in (32), and for sentence (29) in (33).



7 Conclusion

In this paper, I have presented novel empirical evidence demonstrating optionality in agreement in Surati Gujarati. I have also presented arguments in section 4 to show that what appeared to be optionality in agreement seems to be accusative-dative alternation case on the objects. The next task was to define the conditions for case alternation. While pursuing this task I determined the information structure and agreement relationship in Surati Gujarati. I showed that it is the presence or absence of a +FOCUS feature on the object, which seems to be the necessary condition for case alternation. To account for all of the above generalizations, I proposed an object shift analysis that derives both case alternation and the information structure-agreement relationship in Surati Gujarati. The requirement for object movement out of the VP is due to the +FOCUS feature, as objects without the +FOCUS feature remain in-situ. Such focus-driven object movement is the pre-requisite for accusative case assignment. This idea is supported by the empirical data in the paper in particular, (26) and (28).

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