



Subject-Verb Relation in North Dravidian Language

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Abstract

The main objective is to highlight some of the distinctive features pertaining to agreement phenomenon and language structure in Kisan. It is a agglutinative language having nominative-accusative case markings. The characteristics of an agglutinative language has gradually been converged with those of analytic language like Hindi and Odia which are the dominant languages of the region.

Keywords: Dravidian, Indo-Aryan, Kurux, Agglutinative

Kisan (ISO 639-3: xis) is a speech variety derived from Kurux, a North Dravidian language which is generally known as kuh by the native speakers. It is widespread in the western parts; Sundergarh, Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj and undivided Sambalpur districts of Odisha. Konow (1906) had erroneously termed Kisan to be a part of Austro-Asiatic language family but later it was established to be part of North Dravidian language family. The existence of Kisan as the distinct speech variety was recorded in 1961 census. The first compiled work on Kisan appeared in 1989 which was intended to provide a grammatical sketch of tense and focus on the basic knowledge of the language. There is no recent extensive study on Kisan as the linguistic differences from Kurukh/Oraon.

For the first time, Kisan language with a sizeable population of around 73,847 was listed separately from Oraon in the 1971 census. According to 1991 census, there are 160,704 speakers in Odisha out of total 162,088 in India spread over essentially in the following two districts: Sambalpur and Sundergarh. The total number of Kisan speakers has dropped to 141,088 in 2001. However, as a native speaker of the language, I can feel that the given number of speakers has gradually declined further in reality.

Agreement is cross-linguistically very common; at the same time, languages of the world can differ quite dramatically in the amount of agreement morphology they exhibit. Corbett 2006 states that agreement in language occurs when the source of grammatical information appears on a word is elsewhere and sharing the properties between two items must be systematic. Agreement morphology will mark on targets information which relates primarily to controllers. “Agreement is a phenomenon in natural language in which the form of one word or morpheme covaries with the form of another word or phrase in the sentence” (Preminger 2014).

Subject-Verb Agreement

Kisan language follows single system agreement. Though subject NPs are case-marked with nominative yet VPs agree with the subject NPs.

There is no Object-Verb agreement in Kisan. The finite verb has following structure as Verb Base + Aspect Suffix + Tense Suffix + Personal Suffix.

	2NS-Nom	Home	go-Pres-2MS
'Yougo home.'			

1a.	kukko-s	asma-bon	moh-c-as
	boy-3MS-Nom	bread-Acc	eat-Pst-3MS
'Boy ate the bread.'			

1b.	rita-d	asma-bon	moh-y-ad
	Rita-3FS-Nom	bread-Acc	eat-Pst-3FS
'Rita ate the bread.'			

The verb /moh-c-as/ and /moh-c-as/ 'ate' agree with the morphologically nominative case-marked subject NPs /kukko-s/ 'boy' and /rita-d/ 'Rita' in person, number and gender (henceforth PNG).

In equational sentences, the predicate noun shows agreement with the subject pronoun by taking the same personal suffixes as the finite verb. The use of the copular verb /tal/ 'to be' in such sentence is optional in Kurux but Kisan completely preserves the old Dravidian feature of the absence of the copular verb as in (1c).

1c.	en	kuṛḥa-n	tal-d-an
	1S-Nom	kuṛḥa-1S	
'I am kuṛḥa (speaker).'			

Agreement and Pronominal Endings

It is observed that the finite verbs show agreement with the subject pronoun or corresponding noun by a change in the personal suffix. Most typical feature of Kisan which makes this language quite different from neighbouring languages like Hindi, Odia, Sadri etc. is the obligatory marking of pronominal suffixes on both transitive and intransitive verbs in 1st person and 3rd person.

2a.	en	erpa	ka-al-d-an
	1NS-Nom	Home	go-Imperf-Pres-1MS
'I am going home.'			
2b.	hu-d	erpa	ka-θ-id
	3FS-Nom	Home	go-Pres-3MS
'She goes home.'			
2c.	nin	erpa	ka-d-e

The finite verbs like /ka-na/ 'to go' as in (2a, 2b & 2c) example always display compatible agreement with the subject NPs like /en/ 'I', /hud/ 'She', and /nin/ 'You'. The pronominal suffixes '-n' and '-d' in the examples (1a & 1b) respectively affixed to the VPs indicate PNG agreement with the subject NPs which are marked with nominative case. Though there is an agreement between subject NP and VP for PNG yet pronoun /nin/ 'you' does not show the pronominal ending on VP in 2nd person as in the example (1c) and 3rd person plural. All the VPs in Kisan are marked distinctly for PNG and so the pronouns as subject NPs tend to be optional in oral discourse.

Pronominal Cuffixes (Gender-Number-Person Markers)

Personal endings retained in Kisan are believed to be Proto-Dravidian feature. It is argued that historically, the personal endings of the verb were derived from the pronouns (Subramanyam 1971:404). Subramanyam (1971), among others, argues that personal endings are gradually dropped over a period of time, with some languages such as Malayalam, losing the endings all together.

Table 1: Pronominal Suffixes (Gender-Number-Person Markers) in Finite Verbs in Kisan

	Person	Present	Past	Future
1m sg	en	an	an	n
1f sg	en/nen	en	an	n
1pl (excl)	em	am	am	m
1pl (incl)	nam	at	at	t
2m sg	nin	ay	ay	y
2f sg	nin	i	i	i
2pl	nim	ar	ar	r
3m sg	hus	as	as	s
3f sg	hud	id	ad	d
3pl	hubrar	ae	ar	r
3h pl	hubrar	ar	ar	r

Inclusive-Exclusive Pronouns

One of the attested features of Dravidian linguistics found in Kisan is to mark distinction between inclusive and exclusive pronouns in the 1st person plural. The inclusive pronoun /em/ ‘we’ refers to ‘I and you’ and /nām/ ‘we’ refers to ‘I and some other, but not you’. The impact of inclusive/exclusive distribution is morphologically shown through the verbal inflection in the below examples.

3a.	em	bec-a	kɑ-d-am
	1PI-Nom	play-Inf	go-Pres-1PI
‘We (Inclusive) go to play.’			
3b.	nām	bec-a	kɑ-d-at
	1PI-Nom	play-Inf	go-Pres-1PI
‘We (Exclusive) go to play.’			

The verb morphology in Kisan carries a significant influence on the subject of sentences. The verbal inflectional morphemes /-am/ in (3a) and /-at/ (3b) carrying PNG markers facilitate an agreement between Subject NPs and VPs. Caldwell considers that the adding of personal endings to the verb brings clarity to an utterance. Caldwell (1956:481) considers that the verb in Dravidian lacked pronominal suffixes (as in Malayalam), but added them later for clarity, which over time reduced to suffixes.

Agreement in Compound Verb Constructions

A sentence with V1+V2 construction functions as single finite verb. The main verb also known as polar verb (i.e. V1) has root/stem form with generally no inflectional morphemes. The vector verb (i.e. V2) semantically delexicalized or grammaticalized. It bears all the inflectional markers for agreement with different arguments in a sentence. It explicates the meaning of polar verb or main verb.

4a.	əlla-d	gəddr-nu	kʰətr-y-əd	ker-y-əd
	dog-3FS-Nom	pit-Loc	fall-Pst-3FS (V ¹)	go-Pst-3FS (V ²)
‘The Dog fell down in a pit.’				
4b.	bāŋ-s	erā-bon	ondr-d-as	cic-d-as
	my father-3MS-Nom	goat-Acc	bring-Pres-3FS (V ¹)	give-Pres-3FS (V ²)
‘My father brings the goat.’				

The examples (4a & 4b) present the evidence against the generalization about the nature of the ‘polar verb’ in the compound verb construction. The verbs /kʰətr-y-əd/ ‘fell’ and /ondr-d-as/ ‘brings’ function as polar verbs by retaining the core meaning of the sentences. However, these polar verbs carry tense and PNG agreement markers unlike Hindi examples /khālīya/ ‘ate’ and /lādīya/ ‘brought’ where the polar verbs (V1) are not marked with morphological inflections for tense and PNG. So, the polar verbs in any combination of V1+ V2 always agree with subject arguments in Kisan.

Conclusion

Case marked subject argument does not pose any constraint for agreement with VP in a sentence. Subject agreement with +- transitive are invariably marked with morphological inflectional markers for PNG. The contact-induced changes in Kisan are triggered due to the speakers’ regular contact with Indo-Aryan languages like Hindi, Oriya, Sadri and Austro-Asiatic languages Kharia, Munda. Due to the significant rise of industrialization in the western districts of Odisha, speakers of Kisan are leaving their traditional agrarian profession and the synchronic analysis of Kisan demonstrates its explicit impact on the present speech variety. In an attempt to maintain and to preserve it, Kisan Samaj organises Kisan Sabha and Kisan Mela yearly in different villages of Kisan speakers.

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