

Non-nominative subjects in Minimalist Program - Case checking in Telugu

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ABSTRACT: Minimalist Program or Case checking offered by Chomsky provided much deeper understanding towards phi-features(PNG) and the spec-head configuration (subject-verb agreement) that play crucial role in a language. Unlike other syntactic/semantic theories that discussed case, Minimalist program is mainly application based. However, Minimalism doesn't provide an account for dative subject constructions in Indian languages that is the subject of the construction carries dative case marker whereas the inflectional markers on the verb varies. In these dative subject constructions there is an agreement shift with regard to the subject verb agreement. Therefore, I aim to investigate the Case checking/ Minimalist Framework between dative subject constructions in Telugu that disrupts the spec- head relation.

KEYWORDS: Minimalism, Case checking, Dative case.

Date of Submission: 05-09-2021

Date of Acceptance: 18-09-2021

I. INTRODUCTION

Chomskyan's Government and Binding theory initiated a new era in analysing sentences. With all four levels of representation, GB has shifted the focus from transformational or phrase structure rules to understanding syntactic relations, based on the role or the functions of the individual elements in a sentence. Based on Principles and Parameters model, GB mainly focuses on Case assignment and Binding. Case in GB framework gets assigned to nouns in a construction through a government relationship. Therefore, case according to GB is dependent on the verb and the relationship verb holds with a noun in a sentence; however GB in itself offers M-command relationship which contradicts the key notion of government. Similarly, M-command is not the only the unresolved issue in GB but also situations like non-nominative subjects in nominative position and their spec-head¹ relation were not discussed elaborately. Therefore, this paper mainly observes the non-nominative subjects or dative subjects in Indian languages through Minimalist Framework.

Structural case

“‘Structural case,’ in general is dissociated from theta role; it is a structural property of formal configuration.”(Chomsky 1981:171)

Inherent case

“Inherent case is defined in terms of purely thematic relations between case assigners and case assignees.”(Chomsky 1981:171).

Structural case is an independent case, it can only be correlated with grammatical functions or it may be associated with a particular phrase's structural position. On the other hand, inherent case is purely associated both with thematic roles that the noun receives and the position it holds in a sentence. It is dependent on semantics of its head. Cases are two types:

- Verbal case
- Nominal case

Verbal case is realization of case on nouns, based on the relation that both noun and verb hold in a sentence. Nominal cases are determined by another noun to another noun, eg. genitive case. This paper discusses 'verbal case' through Minimalist framework.

Case can be both marked and unmarked; it is marked through case makers such as *nominative*, *accusative* and *dative*. Case is also marked inherently through thematic roles as discussed above. Prepositions /postpositions are mainly used to indicate the thematic roles of a noun in a sentence, i.e., *in*, *on*, *inside* in a sentence represent the location of the noun therefore indicating noun's relation with the verb inherently. Telugu has both structural case as well as inherent case.

¹ Spec is a specifier position in GB and head refers to the head of the phrase.

Dative case signifies transfer/beneficiary relation nouns in a sentence. Dative case is thematically provided to a noun in sentence therefore dative case is inherent case in Telugu.

1. raviaame-kipuvvuicaDu
ravishe-datflower give-past.3.sg.M.
Ravi gave her flower

On the other hand, nominative case in Telugu is a structural case, that is the case mainly understood based on the structural configuration rather than thematic role association to it.

2. atanuttaramraas-a-Du
He letter write-past.3sg.M
He wrote a letter.

Therefore, nouns that occupy subject position are usually nominative case. Nominative case is not marked in Telugu. On the other hand, Indian languages also have constructions such non-nominative subject or dative subject constructions. Therefore, how is the case assigned to a non-nominative subject/dative subject in GB, if it is assigned inherently or structurally because of its position, what is the inherent case that gets assigned to the noun in a non-nominative subject construction. What role does the noun carry in non-nominative subject or dative subject constructions?

Fillmore's Case theory and Panini's account on case

Sanskrit case morphology reflects to have eight cases. This classification is adopted into all earlier grammar texts of Telugu. A.D. Campbell in (1849)² mentioned these set of eight case inflections; He discussed Telugu case grammar with these case markers. Case is called *vibhakti* in Sanskrit. Without *vibhakti*/case neither *Knowledge* nor *sentence construction* cannot be achieved. However, some of the early studies also have accounted for case not based the inflectional realizations rather than the relationships between words in grammatical sentence. One of such early theory that discussed case based on the relations in a sentence is Panini's Karaka theory.

Panini's Karaka theory and Fillmore's case theory are similar, as both of them discuss case based on the semantic role of a noun in a construction. '*Karakas*' are semantic relations held between nouns and verbs. According to them the verb is the head of a clause and each nominal is assigned case from one of the six *karakas*.

Fillmore's (1968) study is based on the deep cases (semantic roles) of nouns which are specified by the specific verb. Verb selects certain number of deep cases & forms a case frame. Agentive, Instrumental, Dative, Factive, Locative, and Objective all these case relationships were suggested by Fillmore. According to Fillmore, all these cases represent a deep structure that would then be made to correspond to the surface string via transformations. Sometimes case relations abstract away from a precise realization of case marking therefore, case roles could be realized as *nothing* or *aspreposition, inflectional case marking*, or by some other device. Using these case relations and patterns of realizations; He classified languages by the case marking patterns that they display.

Government and Binding

However, Government and Binding started as a new approach in phase structure grammar, where case system in a language is assigned. GB consists of many rules and constraints to assign case such as Case filter, Case assignment etc. According to Case filter rule every NP should have case in the sentence.

Case in GB is observed through a four level representation of derivational model. DS (Deep structure)-SS (Surface structure)- PF(-) LF (Logic). DS is responsible to theta mark NPs. In the second level which is SS case assignment takes place and it is the junction where the derivation splits to PF and LF. Case is assigned by the heads (V, T, PP). Case assignment process in GB is achieved through Government relation in sentence. Noun comes uninflected and they receive their case in a government relation.

- A finite clause assigns Nominative case, Accusative case to it's nouns by verb.
- Locative, instrumental cases are assigned by PPs.
- According to GB V, T, & P are governors and nouns are governed in a c-commanding relation to receive their cases.

A governs B iff

- A is x' category
- A c-commands B
- There should be no maximal projection between A and B.

²*Telugu Grammar*

C-command

- A c-commands B if and only if A does not dominate B and every X that dominates A also dominates B.
- Case is assigned in the above context of Government.
- There is *m-command* relation to assign case to Nominative case to subject NP.
- According to the above conditions on government there should not be any intervening maximal projection, if such situation exists in the analysis of certain structure. GB offers *ECM* to meet the criterion of case marking.

Minimalist Program or Case checking

Minimalist Program is a revised version of GB. The major difference between GB and Minimalism in terms of case is, case in minimalist program case is *checked*, no government is employed. Minimalism is an *economy driven* program that provides a *research environment* in analyzing case. Methodological economy: This relates to parsimony and simplicity. Three theoretical entities are better than four; four modules are better than five.

- Substantive economy: *Natural sources* for grammatical principles; suggesting conceptual necessity. This second principle of Substantive economy is responsible for the deletion of DS and SS; As these two are theory internal mechanisms and there is no empirical evidence for their existence. Interface levels are levels that are involved in the interaction of grammar. Minimalism concludes that -Language consists of form and meaning. So the grammar of a language interacts / interfaces with systems that are responsible: Articulatory and Perceptual Properties (PF) Conceptual and Intentional Characteristics (LF) therefore DS and SS are not required anymore.

Few fundamental concepts in minimalism

- Merge
- Move
- Inclusiveness condition

Merge is a structure *building operation*; it builds the structures to merge in the tree.

Move: Movement in minimalism is costly, not that anything can move anywhere. A movement operation is *licensed* only if it allows the elimination of [uninterpretable] formal features. It should be case that drives movement.

Inclusiveness condition: it does not introduce new kinds of theoretical *entities* to the merged elements during the derivation. In minimalism it is assumed that the lexical items come inflected, they are fully specified in the numeration and have their features checked in the course of derivation. NPs that enter derivation already come with their features and checking takes place as part of derivation process. Case in minimalism occurs as a result of spec-head configuration.

- Minimalism, is still not minimal because of the agr's projections. Therefore, these agr's projections are replaced by VP shells that can hold multiple specifiers.

For current research Minimalism (1995) is used with Vp shells.

Vp shells in minimalism introduces external argument and assigning accusative case. After the elimination of these levels, Minimalist Program framework focuses on

- How derivation might be minimized?
- How exactly full interpretation is to be understood?
- Suggests that the derivation should be short, and whatever is primitive to language must be achieved.
- As per case checking licensed DPs that arrive at a derivation must be validated or governed by the head v.

Other than the few theoretical objectives, Minimalism also highlights multiple indigenous language features that have lucid empirical bases, for example Strong/weak features- overt and covert movements, Inflectional features -phi features (PNG).

Features are two types:

- Interpretable -have meaning & semantic content
- Uninterpretable- devoid of meaning

Features on NPs are interpretable, & unvalued case feature

Features on V, T & P are uninterpretable -valued case features

These uninterpretable features probe the goal to check its features, ones features are checked the uninterpretable feature gets deleted on V, T & P. If these uninterpretable features on v remain then the derivation crashes, even if the features do not match, derivation crashes. These uninterpretable features have to be deleted, so it probes for an NP to satisfy its features. Case is interpretable only on NPs not on assigners. V depends on N to determine its features. These features are not intrinsic to V in Minimalism.

Case checking in Telugu

Nominative case in Telugu is lexical, it is not inflected like in English; therefore there is no evident morphological case marker on the NP.

| Person | Singular | Plural |
|------------------------|--|-------------------|
| 1 st person | nenu-I | memu-we/manamu-we |
| 2 nd person | nuvvu- you | mi:ru -you |
| 3 rd person | atanu- He, aame- She waDu- He (impolite) | waaru- they |

Probe-goal relation

The case bearing NP enters derivation, and the appropriateness of this NP with case is enforced by case checking. The uninterpretable, valued case on ‘V/I’ probes the NP that has interpretable features, & unvalued case. This NP is goal. Once the features are checked the uninterpretable features get deleted, if the features are not checked then the derivation crashes, even when there is mismatch, the derivation gets crashed. Primarily in relation to word order difference between these languages, this framework offers a solution that is basing on the strength of features in SOV languages, Object moves overtly to case checking results SOV. But in English the Object moves covertly, Minimalism argues the basic word order to languages is SVO.

Nominative case checking

3. atanaame-nicusa-aa-Du.
 He-nom she-acc saw-past.3sg.M
 He loves her

Feature checking:

3rdsg Masculine

atanu-Nom

3rdsg Masculine

Verb

Du- here signifies the features on tense, in Telugu

only tensed verbs carry features of the verb, which is observed in the above context, the tense phrase checks its uninterpretable features with NPs phi feature, the derivation is successful because of the features match.

Accusative case checking

4. atanaame-nipremist-un-aa-Du.
 He her-acc love be- pre.3rdsg.M.
 He loves her.
 3rdsg Masculine 3rd Masculine
 acc acc

Here the *v* checks its uninterpretable case against its NP, and checks its case. This case checking occurs in Spec-Head configuration in Minimalism. Minimalism suggests that Accusative case is assigned by the VP directly to the object of the sentence.

Dative case

Telugu dative case marker is Ki/ku, though the case is realized structurally it is assumed to be an inherent case. In double object constructions these dative NPs are recipient of an action or event just like dative subjects.

5. nenuatani-kipustakaamica-nu.
 I-nom he-dat book-acc give-past-1sg.
 I gave him (a)book.

Dative subject

It is commonly noted phenomena in South Indian languages that there are certain verbs that take dative as their subject, mainly because these verbs carry semantics of an *experiencer* of a particular action rather than a volitional participant of the action. The semantics of these verbs consists of characteristics such as experiencing, liking, wanting or feeling. Examples as follows:

6. naakudahamgaundi
 to me thirsty be.3rdSg.f
 I am thirsty

7. naa-kutalanoppivast-undi.
 To me headache- come-be.past.3sgn
 I have headache.

The actual problem occurs when analyzing Datives in subject position.

- Telugu has a non-nominative subjects, though they are subjects, they receive Dative case instead of Nominative case.

- Dative case is an inherent case as mentioned above, the case is assigned through theta marking.

Let's observe the distribution of theta roles in a dative subject construction.

8. naakubayamvestundi
me-dative fear throw-be- past.3sgn
I am scared

Here "I" is not responsible for the action instead *I* is experiencer of the action. Problem here is a Nominative position is occupied by a subject with Dative case; interestingly the agreement also differs here in these sentences declaring a relation between agreement and case. It is well observed that in dative subject constructions the verb agree with object of sentence rather than subject of the sentence, it is interesting to explore how does this derivation gets processed and where does the dative subject gets its case checked in the minimalist framework.

Analyses of the Dative subject constructions

There have been two views on dative subject constructions – subject hood status of dative NPs and indirect object status of dative NPs. There are several tests to prove these two statuses attributed to Datives.

There are two kinds of *properties that subjecthood denotes*: one is *coding properties* of the subject and the other is a *behavioral properties* of the subject. Coding properties of subject are three-case, agreement, and word order (Keenan 1976). Dative subjects seem to fail in all these properties. Some of the *behavioral properties* of subjecthood are -conjunction reduction, reflexivization, *euqi* – NP deletion with subject controller, causativization. These are the behavioral properties that subject exhibits in a sentence.

Conjunction reduction

In most of Indian languages null subject phenomena is widely observed. Similarly in conjunction construction, one single subject is used with more than one to two clauses. In such constructions only the last verb appears in finite form and the other in participle form. The subjects of the internal clauses are not uttered; therefore, the subject of the main clause controls the subjects of the internal clauses.

9. aamekottu-kivellibhiyamkoni, intikivacinDi
She shop- to go, rice buy, home to came.
She went the shop, brought rice came home.

Here, in the above instance each null subjects are controlled by the 1st a nominative subject, *aame*. Similarly in dative subject construction it is observed the subject of the main clause controls the subjects of the subordinate clauses.

10. aamekiaakalesivellipoinDi.
She-dative hunger-throw- go-go-past-3rd.sg.F
She got hungry and left.
11. aatanikigaayamaeiaaTamanesaDu.
He-dative wound-happen game stop-past-3sg.M
She became hungry and left.

Both ex 10.&11 indicate the absence of a subject for the internal clause. Verbs of internal clauses are *vesi*(throw), *aei*(happen) . In both these cases there is agreement between subject and the finite verb and the sentences are grammatically clear without the internal subjects.

Similarly, reflexivization and anaphor control is observed in dative subject construction indicating their subjecthood.

12. aame-kitanapilla-anteistam
She-datanapchildren means like.
She likes her children.

Reflexivization test

13. aapilla-vani-
kitanapustakamundi
That child-datself book be
3rdsn
The child has his own book

In the above mentioned example there is an evidence of subjecthood that the Dative subject here controls the anaphor.

Equi-NP deletion

In this test the subjects of embedded clauses get deleted under the identity with subjects or objects of the matrix clause. That is the subject of matrix clause controls subject of embedded clause.

14. aame-kuAmerikavella-laniaashaleDu.
she -DAT America go -to desire no be.
she does not wish to go to America

Vell- to go is nonfinite verb which has no subject to it. This dative subject controls the embedded subject in the clause.

The embedded subject is nominative subject,

Let us see one more case

15. aameAmerica veltun-undi.
She(NOM) americago to- be 3SF nom-sub
She is going to America

16. aame-ku America vella-laniledu.
She-datamerica go to- that not there .
She doesn't want to go America

Here the subject of the embedded clause will be the same NP seen above Nominative- *aame*. Here, we see that the subject of matrix clause and the subject of the embedded clause do not match yet there is control of the matrix clause NP on the embedded clause subject. Dative NPs in experiencer predicates only partially behaves like true subjects, in that they can control embedded subjects and be controlled by matrix subjects, but not by matrix objects.

All these tests prove that these Dative subjects share behavioral properties of subjects, rather than the coding properties of the subject; Case, agreement and word order. Giving us the evidence here, that the Dative NP is not a subject in these sentences, but acts like a subject, it behaves like nominative structurally but inherently theta marked. Nominative case marking is typically a coding property of subjects.

Therefore, when the derivation arrives to the spec-head configuration, its behavioral properties allows Dative subject to pass through the feature matching and allows the derivation to succeed in feature matching without it getting crashed.

Oblique case

Oblique case is an inherent case; it is to do with the semantics of the nouns and the PPs. Minimalism assumes that basing on the strength of the preposition, there is covert or overt movement in PP's also. Data from Hungarian provides evidence when there is postposition case marking, the agreement is rich. But when there is preposition case marking there is no agreement at all. This adpositional case checking results as inherent case since there are no features to check.

II. CONCLUSION

Minimalism holds a good account for all SVO languages, whereas for few other languages the functional head initial, like in PP NPs in English. However, Minimalism provides chances to research language data, since it's a program, not a theory. Minimalism is empirically driven to facilitate the observation of languages. It also paved way to the analysis of features of language rather than elusive designs that don't suffice the system of language faculty.

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