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A Morpho-Syntactic Analysis of Agreement Patterns in Pashto and English

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ABSTRACT: This research explores the subject-verb agreement system of Pashto and English, focusing on their syntactic and morphological properties. Pashto belongs to the group of Indo-Iranian languages, characterized by a sophisticated agreement system with verbs inflected for number, person, and gender, particularly in past and future tenses. In contrast to Pashto, the English language has a simpler agreement system with minimal inflection. This study explores various approaches to grammatical agreement and their implications for language learning and theoretical linguistics by comparing the subject-verb agreement of both languages. A comparative linguistic approach was employed, utilizing a qualitative method. Data were collected from written and spoken sources in both languages, followed by systematic syntactic analysis. The findings of this study show apparent discrepancies in the agreement system of Pashto and English Languages. Pashto has a complex agreement system involving a rich inflection for number, person, and gender, showing a loaded morphological structure. This inflectional richness of Pashto provides multifaceted information that supports accurate and clear communication. In contrast, English has a more streamlined agreement system with simpler inflection. Moreover, the findings contribute to the knowledge of cross-linguistics variations and offer information for language education in multilingual contexts.

Keywords: Morphology, Syntax, Pashtoo, English.

INTRODUCTION

In linguistics, an agreement system is a multifaceted syntactic phenomenon that indicates the syntactic relations and provides grammatical coherence within a sentence. Agreement primarily refers to the systematic relation between parts of a sentence, specifically between the subject and other constituents of the verb phrase such as person, number, gender, and case. (Corbett, 2012). Chomsky (1995), in his theory on generative grammar, postulates that subject-verb agreement is a formal syntactic feature-checking process where the agreement is encoded in both the subject and the verb. This shows that subject-verb agreements are underlying principles of human language.

This paper compares and contrasts the subject-verb agreement systems of Pashto and English, two languages with distinctly different linguistic heritages and agreement mechanisms. Pashto is an

Indo-Iranian language with a very complex verb conjugation paradigm. Passive verbs in Pashto are not only conjugated according to the number and person of the subject but also according to the gender in certain tenses. This shows that Pashto has a very complex morphological system in which verbs themselves undergo weighty changes depending on the required contexts and the characteristics of the subject (Tegey & Robson, 2002). According to Kandahar (2008) , such complexity is observed based on the fact that languages belonging to the larger family of Indo-Iranian languages in general are morphologically richer and more flexible

On the other hand, English belongs to the Germanic branch of the Indo-European language family and has a considerably simpler system of subject-verb agreement. According to Huddleston &Pullum (2002, p.373), agreement in the English language only occurs in the context of the third person singular present tense in which the verb agrees with the subject in number by having an "s" or "es" suffix marker. This relative simplicity of the English agreement stands in contrast to the inflectional languages; thereby demonstrating that there is a typological distinction between languages in the agreement system (Quirk et al., 2010).

This study conducts a comparative analysis of the subject-verb agreement systems in Pashto and English, concerning the structural variations between the two languages. In this way, the study aims to make a theoretical contribution to linguistics about the nature of agreement and the factors that influence its realization across languages. Further, the findings of this study have practical implications for language teaching and learning, particularly in multilingual contexts where both Pashto and English may be used. The contrast between the complex inflectional morphology of Pashto and the simple agreement rules of the english language can offer further insights to educators, linguists, and learners to address discrepancies that still exist in language learning and teaching in multilingual contexts (Liu & Wall, 2009; Wilson & Goodbred, 2015).

Agreement in Linguistics

Agreement is one of the critical concepts in linguistics essential for ensuring sentences' grammatical coherence and syntactic integrity. Agreement involves the correspondence of grammatical features such as number, person, gender, and case between different elements within a sentence, typically between a subject and its verb, or a noun and its modifiers. The system of agreement is crucial for the maintenance of the syntactic agreement that is important for understanding natural languages (Corbett, 2006).

Research on agreement systems includes different linguistic theories and offers global and concrete findings. As Chomsky (2001) and Premier (2014) explain, based on Minimalist syntax, how the agreement features are checked and valued in the syntax-semantics interface. Chomsky claims that subject-verb agreement is an abstract underlying syntactic structure that guides the surface structure of a sentence. This means that if constituents are even moved around for syntactic reasons, such as in passivization, the abstract underlying structures of the agreement system still dictate the sentence structure. In addition to this, Bobaljik (2008) brings up post-syntactic processes in agreement; he postulates that agreement is a deeper syntactic process. rather than a direct morphological phenomenon(Bobaljik, 2008). These assumptions have been refined in cross-linguistic empirical studies, such as Benmamoun (2000) and Polinsky (2018), which highlighted the

diversity of agreement systems across languages and theoretical implications for linguistic theories(Polinsky, 2018). Therefore, subject-verb agreement, a specific type of agreement, has attracted impressive interest, owing to its importance in offering a much clearer perspective in understanding the syntactic processes that govern sentences.

Subject-Verb Agreement in Pashto

Pashto, an Eastern Iranian language in the Indo-Iranian group, shows a sophisticated and complex pattern of subject-verb agreement attributed to the rich morphological structure. The Pashto agreement system is described as the system of verbs that agree with the subject in terms of person, number, and sometimes gender in certain tenses (Tegey & Robson, n.d.). This true morphological complexity differentiates Pashto from the languages with less inflectional richness.

Subject-verb agreement in Pashto is affected by the use of certain morphemes that are suffixed to the verb stem to indicate the grammatical features of the subject. For instance, the past tense, first person singular verb form is "زه راغلم" (za raghlem – I came) where the singular subject in use is "زه" (za – I), and the plural form is "مونږ راغلو" (moong roughly – We came) concerning the plural subject "مونږ" (moong – We) (David & Skjaervo, 2003). The given examples prove that inflection operates in different grammatical categories, indicating that Pashto is a language with a highly developed inflection instrument that can be studied in different categories.

Moreover, the gender agreement makes the Pashto language even more complicated when it comes to past tense where the 'verb' can be either of the gender, female or male. For instance, as noted by Khan (2010) the form for the feminine particle is 'زه راغلی یم' (za raghali yam – I (female) have come) while that of the masculine particle is 'زه راغله یم' (zaroughly ym– I (male) have come). This gender distinction is not only a function of verb morphology of the Pashto language but also contributes to the syntactic structure of the language (Baiyin et al., 2021; Boeing, 2021).

The richness of Pashto's agreement system has advantages and disadvantages for linguistics, specifically for language learning processes. In the context of learning the Pashto language, it is noteworthy to understand that learners from other languages with less complex morphology can have a challenging task trying to master m the intricacies of subject-verb agreement and the conjugation of verbs based on the subject (Baloch &Mushtaq, 2012). However, this intricacy also provides a valuable lens to examine the interplay between morphology and syntax in natural languages (Benmamoun, 2000).

Subject-Verb Agreement in English

English subject-verb agreement is best evident in the present tense where the verb typically inflects with an "-s" or "-es" suffix in the third-person singular form, as in "He walks" (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). As for the type of agreement shown by such words as fish/fishes, the pattern illustrated above can be treated as fairly simple compared to the morphological structure of languages such as Pashto. As Bresnan (2001) mentioned, word order and auxiliary verbs are used intensively in English to express the Grammatical relation that in other languages are marked with inflection. For

instance, in constructions like "She is running", and "They have run" English uses auxiliary verbs to express tense and aspect. Moreover, in English, in agreement with the subject of the verb in terms of person, the verb's stem is unchanged (Rizzi, 2016). This kind of reliance on syntactic structures and not morphological inflection is one aspect that makes the English language different from other languages like the Pashto, as noted by Van Gelderen (E, 2013).

Regarding the implications of this simplicity of the subject-verb agreement for linguistic theory and language learning, it must be stated that these aspects are highly relevant in both areas. It provides some point of reference when compared with other morphologically heavier languages, where it is employed as a tool in explaining how the various languages might employ syntactic or morphological features toward agreement (Quirk et al., n.d.). Conversely, mastering English's less complex agreement system is easy for language learners, particularly those originating from languages with rich agreement systems. However, other aspects such as word order and usage of auxiliary verbs need much attention and analysis. (Saville-Troike & Barto, 2016).

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach, analyzing agreement patterns using linguistic corpora. Data is categorized and compared based on morpho-syntactic structures. For Pashto, the working corpus includes a sample of newspaper articles from major Pashto-language newspapers and several extracts from modern Pashto literature, which offer the most accurate representation of the formal standard and literary variety of the language. These texts were selected to focus on the manifestations of agreements in various situations and types of texts. For English, the extracts were taken from research articles and literary works. These data sources were selected to facilitate the fairness of comparisons with various contexts observed.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Subject-Verb Agreement in Pashto

In the Pashto language, Subject-verb agreement is one of the significant factors of the grammatical pattern. This part of the paper analyzes how the subject-verb agreement system of the Pashto language works according to person, number, and sometimes gender.

1. First-Person Singular

In Pashto, the first-person singular subject 'زه' (za—'I') has a special conjugation that varies according to the tense but always indicates that the speaker is the doer of the action. This contrasts with English, where the verb form undergoes a slight change according to the subject.

- Example 1: "زه د دې پروژې د کامیابی لپاره پلان جوروم" (za da dey project da kamiyabi lapara plan jorom - "I am making a plan for the success of this project").

Here, in this sentence, "جوروم" (jorom) is the first-person singular form of the verb "جورول" (jorawal - "to make"). The root is "جور" (jor) which when joined with the suffix "وم-" (-oom) results in "جوروم" (joroom) which explicitly indicates that the speaker ("زه" - za) making the plan.

This is dissimilar from English, where the verb "make" remains the same for the first-person singular ("I make") and only changes to "makes" for the third-person singular ("He makes"). In Pashto, the suffix '-وم' (-oom) explicitly shows the speaker's involvement, providing a clear and specific indicator of who is acting. This morphological specificity in the Pashto language shows how Pashto is more detailed in its subject-verb agreement than English, where the verbs are more uniform. Similarly, in another example

- Example 2: "زه د وطن د پایداره لپاره کار کوم" (za da watan da paidarai lapara kar kom - "I am working for the sustainability of the country")

Here, the verb "کوم" (kom) is the first-person singular form of the verb "کوَ" (kaw - "to do"). The suffix "م-" (-m) added to the root word "گو" (kaw) indicates that the speaker ("زه" – za) is doing the action. This is much different than English, for example, the verb "work" does not have a specific suffix for first person singular "I work" but has third person singular suffix "s" "He works". As pointed out by Smith (2020), this is so because Pashto has a more dissimilar subject-verb agreement than English(Smith, 2020).

In both examples like "کار کوم" (karkom-I am working) or "جوروم" (joroom), the role of the subject acting is clearly defined. This is not the case when using the English verb "make", which does not change according to the subject. In the English language, the context or auxiliary verbs define the role of the subject as noted by (Ahmad, 2018). In this regard, while English has a less complicated verb agreement mechanism that utilizes fewer grammatical alterations and other related syntactic clues to show subject-verb relations; Pashto displays an extensive subject-verb agreement system through additional changes in verb morphemes.

2. Second-Person Singular

In Pashto, the verb form for the second-person singular subject "ته" (ta - "you") is also changed according to the person being referred. This inflection system is different from English where the verb form minimally varies depending on the subject. For example:

Example 3: "ته د دی پروژی د تکمیل لپاره مرسته کوی" (Ta da d project da takmeel kawalo lapara mrasta

kawe "You are helping with the completion of this project")

In the above sentence, "کوی" (kowey) represents the second-person singular subject "ته" (ta). The suffix "ی-" (-ey) which shows that the action is done by the person being addressed, is attached to the base verb "کوَ" (kaw) to form "کوی" (kowey). Unlike in English, where the verb "help" does not alter regardless of who the subject is, even when it is second person, "You help" or first person, "I help". This suggests that in the Pashto language, the obligatory suffix must be used to indicate the role of the subject.

- Example 4: "ته د ښوونی د معیار لوړولو لپاره کار کوی" (ta da shwoona da miyaar loorwalo lare

kaar kowey " You are working to increase the quality of education")

Here in the above sentence, "کوی" (kowey) represents the second person singular subject "ته" (ta). The suffix "ی-" (-ey) which shows that the action is done by the person being addressed, is attached to the base verb "کوَ" (kaw) to form "کوی" (key). English language verb "work" is the same for both

"you work" and "I work" whereas Pashto does make a clear distinction for the subject. This inflectional-oriented subject-verb agreement of the Pashto language brings clarity to communication, as Rahman and Ali (2020) discuss that this specific inflexion system helps in maintaining effective interaction by clearly identifying the person acting(Rahman & Ali, 2020).

3.   Third-Person Singular

In Pakistani Pashto, third-person singular verbs are inflected to align with the subject **"هغه"** (hagha

-   "he/she/it").

- Example 5: "هغه د ښار د پرمختگ لپاره پلان جوړوي" (hagha da khaar da parmakhtag lare plan jorawi - "He/She is making a plan for the city's development").

In this sentence, "جوړوي" (jorawi) is the third-person singular form of the verb. The suffix "-وي" (-wi) is attached to the verb root "جوړ" (jor) to create "جوړوي" (jaw), indicating that the subject (he/she) is acting as making a plan. Unlike English, where the verb "make" remains the same across different third-person singular subjects (e.g., "He makes" vs. "She makes"), Pashto uses distinct inflexions to show the subject's involvement. Khan (2018) notes that this inflexion is essential for conveying ongoing actions performed by the subject and aligns with the verb agreement rules of Pashto (Khan, 2018).

☐   Example 6: "هغه د کتابونو د خپرولو لپاره نوي قواعد وضع کړل" (hagha da kitaabuno da khparolo lapara naway qawaid wazeh kral - "He/She established new rules for the publication of books").

Here, "وضع کړل" (wazakrale) is the past tense form used for the third-person singular subject. This form indicates that establishing new rules was completed by **"هغه"** (hagha). In Pashto, gender distinctions are evident in past tense forms: "راوغلی" (raghaley) is used for males and "راوغله" (raghla) for females, illustrating the role of gender in verb inflexions. This is unlike English verbs where past tense does not alter according to gender; for example "He established" and "She established". This also proves that in the Pashto language, there are gender-specific verb forms and forms of the Past tense that help know about the gender of the subject.

Past Tense Gender Agreement

Pashto past tense verb forms are not only affected by additional particles but also by the gender of the subject. This gender-specific agreement differs from English, where verbs do not change according to the subject's gender. For Instance:

- Example 7: هغه راغی hagha raghi ('He came').

In this sentence, the verb "راغی" (raghi) is the past tense of the verb and used for male subject. When the verb root is "راغ" (ragh) the suffix "ی" (-i) is added to make it "راغی" (raghi). This suffix implies that a specific male person accomplished a given action. However, as it differs from English, in Pashto, the 'come' verb in the past tense has a gender – 'He came,' 'She came,' etc.

This illustrates that Pashto uses gendered verbs to describe the subject. It supports this article by

stating that this sort of gender agreement is one of the principles of the Pashto verb system to make explicit and accurate information about gender in past tenses.

Similarly, in another example where the subject is feminine

- Example 8: "هغه راغله" (hagharaghla - "She came").

Here, "راغله" (raghla) refers to the past tense form of the verb where the subject is a female. The root "راغ" (ragh) and then the suffix "له-" (-la) combined to form the verb "راغله" (raghla). This type of differentiation between males and females differs in Pashto from English, where the verb form is similar for both genders. Such gender-specific verb forms are part of Pashto grammar and help to distinguish gender differences, particularly when it comes to past tense narrations.

Future Tense Agreement

In Pashto, the future tense reflects subject agreement, maintaining consistency across different persons. This system ensures that the verb form corresponds accurately to the subject, distinguishing it from English, where the future tense is formed uniformly regardless of the subject.

- Example 9: "زه به خُم" (zabazama - "I will go").

In this sentence, "خُم" (zama) is the future tense verb form for the first-person singular subject "زه" (za - "I"). The verb root "خُ" (z) combines with the future tense marker "به" (ba) to form "خُم" (zama), indicating that the speaker will act. While English uses "will" to make the future tense (for instance, "I will go" is the same for any subject), in Pashto future tense is properly inflected and agrees with the subject.

- Example 10: "ته به خُی" (ta bazaey – "You will go".)

Here, "خُی" (zaey) is the future tense verb form for the second-person singular subject "ته" (ta - "you"). The root "خُ" (z) is combined with the future tense marker "به" (ba) and the suffix "ی-" (- ey) to form "خُی" (zaey). This means that the person referred to will execute the action prescribed by the verb's subject. In English, on the other hand, the future tense does not change with the subject "you will go vs I will go", Pashto, however, has different verb forms for the different subjects in simple future to have a proper subject-verb agreement.

The current comparative analysis of the subject-verb agreement in English and Pashto demonstrates the major contrast between their subject-verb agreement systems due to their different linguistic families and typological systems. Pashto is an Indic–Iranian language that is highly inflected, where verbs are more definite to person, number, and gender. These differences are more noticeable in the past and future tense. For example, "راغی " (raghi - "he came") and "راغله" (raghla - "she came") are distinct past tense forms which have a verb ending that indicates gender, which English lacks. Agreement in gender is therefore significant for correct grammatical alignment. In the same way, the future tense, "خُم" (zama - "I will go") and "خُی" (say - "you will go") also follow the number and person demonstrating the language's complex morphological system. It shows that the Pashto language contains a substantially higher number of inflectional patterns than any other language. This aligns with the studies of Gul (2017), Hussain (2018), and Farooq (2019)

who claim that Pashto is a highly inflectional language, where the verb changes according to the subject. Therefore, as Tegey and Robson (1996) in such inflectional languages, learners need to know inflectional morphemes to change the verb according to its subject(Robson & Tegey, 2009).

However, subject-verb agreement in English is far less complicated than in the Pashto language. English mainly concerns itself with the number agreement of verbs in the present tense, which typically entails a change only in the third person singular (e.g. "make" vs "makes") (Brown, 2016). According to Smith (2017) and Jones (2018), this simplification is accomplished through auxiliary verbs and a fixed word order allowing minimal inflectional verb alterations. For example, English exploits auxiliary verbs to form questions and negatives: "Do you make?" and "He does not make" (Green, 2020). The overtly syntactic structures of English compared to the overtly morphological verbs of Pashto, illustrate the distinction between both languages. This shows that languages have variations in their agreement system(Preminger, 2014).

As mentioned above, Subject-verb agreement in English is relatively simple and primarily marked by the addition of the suffix "-s" to the third person singular form in the present tense (e.g., "he makes" vs. "they make). The simplicity of subject-verb agreement in the English language can be attributed to English's weak agreement parameter setting according to Chomsky's principle and parameter theory (1995). By weak agreement parameter setting, Chomsky means the language has a minimal overt morphological inflection. As a result, English relies on fixed word order and auxiliary verbs to maintain syntactic structure consistent with Chomsky's Minimalist Program. This approach argues that language operates under principles of economy and simplicity to avoid complex morphological changes wherever possible (Chomsky, n.d.). Additionally, Chomsky (1995) suggests that parameters can be set to either high or low levels of morphological expressions depending on the language. Pashto demonstrates a "strong" agreement parameter setting. It is characterized by extensive morphological inflections for person, number, and gender in past and future tenses. This is evident in the distinct verb forms like "راغی" (raghi - "he came") and "راغله" (raghla - "she came") for past tense, and "ځم" (zama - "I will go") and "ځې" (say - "you will go") for future tense as discussed above. Chomsky also emphasizes the role of functional categories such as Tense (T), Agreement (Agr), and Determiner (D), in the syntactic structure of languages. This renders Pushto one of the languages that adopts complex overt expressions of functional categories through inflectional morphemes.

Furthermore, these findings align with Corbett's (2006) discussion of agreement systems across languages, highlighting the variation in inflectional complexity. The contrast between Pashto's elaborate inflectional system and English's simpler approach supports Bobaljik's (2008) observations on the universality and variability of agreement mechanisms. Understanding Pashto's detailed verb inflections offers insights into designing effective teaching strategies for learners transitioning from less inflected languages. Conversely, recognizing English's reliance on auxiliary verbs and word order provides valuable perspectives for developing pedagogical approaches suited to its grammatical simplicity. This comparative analysis thus contributes to a deeper understanding of cross-linguistic agreement mechanisms and informs more complex approaches to language education.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study demonstrated significant differences in the grammatical systems of Pashto and English, by investigating their subject-verb agreement patterns. Pashto language holds a complex agreement system with verbs inflected for person, numbers and gender; hence, it follows a morphological-oriented construction. This inflectional complexity is apparent in the verb's forms of the Pashto language and reveals a towering level of semantic and syntactic precision. In contrast, English language follows a smooth approach, with simpler inflection, principally in the present tense for the third person singular. It relies on auxiliaries and word order to manage grammatical relationships. Educators can highlight the variation in inflectional complexity and emphasize the importance of recognizing these differences when designing teaching strategies.

These findings highlight the diverse strategies languages employ to achieve grammatical coherence. Pashto's inflectional richness provides complex information that supports clear and accurate communication, while English's reliance on syntactic structures simplifies its agreement system. Understanding these differences enhances our grasp of cross-linguistic variations and has practical implications for language teaching. Insights from this study can inform pedagogical strategies and contribute to more effective language learning and teaching practices in multilingual contexts. Pashto ESL learners can face problems while learning English syntactic structures and using auxiliary verbs to form questions and negatives. Instructors can plan their lessons according to their need and inform them best about the variations beforehand.

This study highlights key differences in agreement structures between Pashto and English. Limitations include the scope of analyzed data and regional variations in Pashto usage. Future research could expand corpus size and explore agreement in bilingual speakers. Theoretical implications contribute to syntactic theory, while practical implications aid language teaching and translation.

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