

Verb Agreement in Hindi and its Acquisition

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This paper explores the theoretical implications of our elicited production study of the acquisition of Case marking¹ by 21 Delhi Hindi speaking children aged between 41 to 71 months, by which the children are shown to make many more errors in the expression of sentential and DP-internal agreement than that of Case-marking.

Case Marker	ERROR %
Subject: NOM.	0
Subject: ERG.	2.58
DO: ACC.	6.48
DO: INST.	35.38
DO: GEN.	18.00
IO: NOM.	1.46

Of the total number of utterances (1231), the relatively high number of errors in Instrumental and Genitive Case markers (Table 1) are attributed to the child using an unfamiliar verb with a complex predicate structure for the first time as introduced by the researcher, and not because the child does not know the case marker. In the verbal elements (verbs and auxiliaries) children were observed to agree in gender with the object instead of with the subject even when there is no blocking of such agreement by overt case marking on the subject. Almost 40% of the agreement errors were observed to be due to this phenomenon. In order to

Table 1: Errors in Case marking

characterize these errors the paper looks to Baker's (2008) *Structural Condition On Person Agreement* (SCOPA):

- (1) A category *F* can bear features +1 or +2 if and only if a projection of *F* merges with a phrase that has that feature and *F* is taken as the label of the resulting phrase.

SCOPA predicts the facts of verb agreement in adult Hindi grammar, where, as (2) shows, [person] agreement is restricted to the higher *be* auxiliary, as it is realised in the vicinity of the T head (Bhatt & Homer, 2014). We take the fact that the progressive auxiliary -rah- only in (2) agrees with the subject in number and gender and number but not for person to indicate that this auxiliary is much lower, located in vP.

- (2) mE papa ko kitaab de rahii huN
I father ACC. book give PROG.F.SG. AUX.PRS.1P.SG.
'I am giving the book to father'

The absence of person agreement in contexts in which the subject is overtly case marked, shows SCOPA at work, in conspiracy with the constraint that overtly Case-marked arguments block verbal agreement, as stated in (3):

- (3) Case-marking makes the phi-features of nominal phrases invisible to T and v Probes.

In (1), the perfective aspect requires transitive subjects to be marked ergative, and SCOPA in conspiracy with the condition just mentioned, ensures that object agreement can only access Gender and Number features.

- (4) laRkii ne papa ko kitaab dii
girl ERG father ACC book give-PRF.F.
'the girl gave the book to the father'

We argue that all that is needed to explain the verbal agreement errors that Hindi speaking children make is that in children's grammar, (3) is not operational, but SCOPA is. This analysis explains the facts of (5) where subject-verb agreement is unaffected by the presence of ergative/dative marking on the subject.

- (5) raajaa ne doctor ko ghaRii diyaa

king ERG. doctor ACC. watch give-PERF.M.SG.
'the king gave the watch to the doctor'

Our analysis also explains the facts in (6) where the 'be' auxiliary agrees with the subject in line with SCOPA, there is also verbal agreement of the progressive auxiliary with the object.

(6) raajaa is laRkii ko khiiNc rahii hE
king this girl ACC. pull PROG.F. (PROG.M.) AUX.PRS.
'the king is pulling this girl'

This characterization of the error is confirmed by the data in (6) and (7), where the *be* auxiliary marks person agreement with the subject, but the progressive auxiliary agrees with the Indirect Object, that is, the noun phrase highest in the vP structure, in spite of this argument being overtly case marked.

(7) ye aadmi isⁱⁱ ko ciTThii likh rahii hE
this man this ACC. letter write PROG.F.SG. AUX.PRS.
'this man is writing a letter to her'

(8) raaja laRkii ko gift de rahii thaa
king girl ACC. gift give PROG.F.SG. AUX.PRS.M.SG.
'the king was giving the gift to the girl'

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ⁱ As part of a JNU/Essex Development Fund grant to study the 'Acquisition of Hindi Case Marking' conducted in Delhi-NCR (2013). The study employed a pair of picture-based elicited production tasks – Case Task and Possessives Task, developed by Ruigendijk, Eisenbeiss and others, which aimed to capture the use of overt case markers in transitive, ditransitive and possessive structures.

ⁱⁱ The referent of the pronoun is FEM. in the context.