

Relative Pronoun-Less Relative Clauses in Modern Urdu

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1. Introduction

This paper examines relative pronoun-less relative clauses in Modern Urdu (Urdu, hereafter), and investigates what their properties suggest for the theory of (Urdu) syntax.

2. Background

Urdu is a register of the Hindi-Urdu or Hindustani language, and belongs to the Indo-European family. It is the national language of Pakistan. The basic word order is SOV, as shown in (1).

- (1) John-ne kal kitab khareedi(-thee).
John-Nom yesterday book bought(-PAST)
'John bought the book yesterday.'

Kachru (1978), among others, investigates the relative clause formation in Urdu, focusing on relative clauses with the relative pronoun starting with the [j] sound, as shown in (2).

- (2) Jo kitab John-ne kal khareedi(-thee) buhul dilchasp hai.
the book John-Nom yesterday bought(-PAST) very interesting is
'The book which John bought yesterday is very interesting.'

In (2), *jo* functions as the relative pronoun. However, there is another type of relative clause in Urdu, which does not make use of the relative pronoun, as shown in (3).

- (3) Kal John-ki khareedi-hui kitab buhul dilchasp hai.
yesterday John-Gen bought-PERF book very interesting be
'The book which John bought yesterday is very interesting.'

3. Data

Let us now summarize some of the properties of relative pronoun-less relative clauses in Urdu. (Due to space reasons, we cannot provide a full range of data.) **First**, the subject cannot be marked nominative, as shown in (4).

- (4) Kal John*-ne/-ki khareedi-hui kitab buhul dilchasp hai.
yesterday John*-Nom/-Gen bought-PERF book very interesting be
'The book which John bought yesterday is very interesting.'

Note here that the possessor noun is marked with the genitive case marker *-ki* or *-ka*, depending on the gender of the head noun, as shown in (5).

- (5) a. Mary-ki beti
Mary-Gen(F) daughter(F)
'Mary's daughter'

- b. Mary-ka beta
 Mary-Gen(M) son(M)
 ‘Mary’s son’

Second, the predicate of a relative clause must have the perfective form *-hui*, without which the sentence becomes ungrammatical, as shown in (6).

- (6) * Kal John-ki khareedi-~~hai~~ kitab buhut dilchasp hai.
 yesterday John-Gen bought-~~PERF~~ book very interesting be
 ‘The book which John bought yesterday is very interesting.’

Third, and finally, the predicate of a relative clause, however, cannot have the perfective form *-hui*, if adjuncts such as time and place phrases are relativized, as shown in (7-8).

- (7) Train-se John-ka Tokyo jane-ka din acha tha.
 train-by John-Gen Tokyo go.INF-Gen(M) day(M) fine was
 ‘The day when John went to Tokyo by train was fine.’
- (8) Kal John-ki Mary-se baat karne-ki jagah library hai.
 yesterday John-Gen Mary-to talk.INF-Gen(F) place(F) library is
 ‘The place where John talked to Mary yesterday is the library.’

Note that in (7-8), the predicates in the relative clauses are of the infinitival forms of the verbs, and do not contain tense.

4. Discussion

The above data suggest several important things for the theory of (Urdu) syntax. **First**, the data suggest the syntactic environments in which the genitive subject is possible. (3) shows that the perfect form *-hui* is a nominative case absorber, so that only the genitive subject is allowed (via agreement with the head noun with D). (7-8) show that without tense, the nominative subject is impossible, and again, only the genitive subject is allowed. Thus, these examples indicate that the genitive subject is allowed only when there is no nominative case assigner for it and there is an external nominal head. This in turn shows that there is no literal nominative/genitive alternation in Urdu, and each case may appear in the environment appropriate for it.

Second, (3) and (7-8) again show that the size of the relative clause, that is, whether it is TP, AspP, or *v*P, is irrelevant for genitive subject licensing in Urdu. This is because the size of the relative clause is AspP above TP in (3) and *v*P in (7-8) in Urdu.

Third, the fact that (2) becomes ungrammatical with a genitive subject provides an answer for the question as to why the genitive subject is impossible in the relative clause with the relative pronoun, which is part of Hiraiwa’s (2001) generalization. This is because when the relative pronoun appears, there should be a projection of C, which in most cases takes TP, the head of which again in most cases is a nominative case assigner. Therefore, unless there exists a nominative case absorber, a genitive subject is impossible in the relative clause.

Fourth, and finally, (7-8) show that the genitive subject in Urdu is licensed by D, not by Hiraiwa-type *v*-T-C complex. This is because T is missing in (7-8), and even if a phonologically null C may exist, it is not clear that it takes *v* directly, so that no head complex is formed in (7-8), yet the genitive subject is allowed. This in turn suggests that Hiraiwa-type genitive subject licensing via complex head formation is not universal.