‘Subject’ in English is *abhihita*  

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1. Introduction  

Pāṇini’s method of grammatical description of the Sanskrit language is an important landmark in the history of language science. His grammar has continued to have influence not only upon the grammars of Prākṛta languages like Mahārāṣṭri (Scharfe 1977: 192), but also on the grammars of modern Indian languages such as the *Līlātilokam* of Malayālam (Pillai 1955), the *Āṇḍhraśābdacintāmaṇi* of Telugu (Nannayya 1932), and the *Mahārāṣṭraprayogacandrikā* of Marāṭhī (Arjunwadkar 1970), to name a few. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when modern linguistics was taking shape, focus among Pāṇinian scholars shifted to comparison of various modern linguistic theories with the Pāṇinian system and thus the development of grammars utilizing Pāṇini’s method for modern languages took a back seat.

The discovery of computers and advancements in computational linguistics have opened up new avenues to show the relevance of Pāṇini’s grammar for developing computational grammars of modern languages. The current trend in computational linguistics is either to develop parsers based on dependency grammar formalisms or to map native output of parsers (which is typically in terms of phrase structure rules) to a dependency format. Dependency format is preferred over the constituency not only from an evaluation point of view (Lin 1998: 323) but also because of its suitability (Marneffe 2006: 449) for a wide range of Natural Language Processing tasks such as machine translation, information extraction, question answering, etc. However, no two dependency output formats match each other. There is no consensus among dependency parser developers on the number

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of dependency relations and the names of these relations. One way to bring
uniformity to output formats is to map dependency relations to Pānini-
relations. Thus Pānini grammar, the foremost dependency grammar, has
a major role to play.

Akshar Bharati group has been developing a Language Accessor named
Anusaaraka\(^1\) that facilitates a Hindi reader to access English content through
Hindi. The Anusaaraka uses freely available English parsers such as link
parser\(^2\) and Stanford parser.\(^3\) These parsers show the parse of an English
sentence as dependency relations. However they differ in the number of
relations used and their labels. Anusaaraka provides a Pānini interface
to the output of these parsers that maps these outputs to Pānini relations.
The advantage of having an interface is that further processing is
independent of the parser being used and one can plug and play with vari-
ous parsers without the necessity of rewriting later modules. In an effort
to develop such an interface to the output of two English parsers viz. link
parser and Stanford parser, it was necessary to understand concepts used by
various Western grammar formalisms such as Chomsky’s minimalism (Rad-
ford 1997), Link grammar (Sleator 1993) and Phrase Structure Grammars
in terms of Pānini concepts.

The notion of subject is an important notion in these grammar for-
malisms. There have been efforts to provide a universal definition of subject
(Keenan 1975) and also to locate the subject in various languages including
modern Indian languages as well as Sanskrit. The notion of subject is alien
to most Indian languages. Cardona (1976a: 11) writes:

> In sum, it is not obvious that one can best describe Sanskrit in
terms of subjects of sentences, defined by the relation of elements
in a derivational scheme (a “tree”) and correlated with subjects
of predication. Nor, of course, is it necessarily true a priori that
all sentences of any language should be analyzed to conform with
the semantics of subject and predication.

This conclusion holds good for modern Indian languages as well. This poses
a problem when an English parser output is to be mapped to any modern
Indian languages. In this paper we look at the concept of subject in English
afresh from the point of view of information coding. We start with typol-
ogists’ classification of English as SVO and thus assume that pre-verbal
and post-verbal positions in English code information about grammatical
relations. On the basis of counter examples, we revise our hypothesis and
show that the subject in English is abhihita ‘already expressed’ and that

\(^1\)http://anusaaraka.iiit.ac.in
\(^2\)http://www.link.cs.cmu.edu/link/
\(^3\)http://nlp.stanford.edu/software/lex-parser.shtml
‘Subject’ in English is abhihita

it occupies a fixed position known as the subject position. Since English
codes the information about declarativeness and interrogativeness in the
subject-auxiliary order, it imposes a constraint that subject position can-
not be empty. This leads to a deviation from the observation that subject
(occupant of subject position) is abhihita. Further this also breaks the usual
sannidhi ‘proximity’ between an auxiliary and a verb. We show how the
gamakatva ‘ability to convey the desired meaning’ in all these cases helps
in comprehension. Instead of formulating the information content in the
notion of subject in the form of a definition, we state it in the form of rules.
These rules are ordered as a general (untsarga) rule followed by its exception
(apavāda). The information in the form of rules is more appropriate for
computer implementation than definition.

2. Subject in English: an investigation

The most frequently noted properties of subject that apply to English
(Keenan 1975, Harley 1995) are the following:

1. Every sentence must have a subject, either overt or covert. (Keenan
1975: A.24)

2. The unmarked position for overt subjects is pre-verbal. (Keenan 1975:
A.3.12)

3. In interrogative sentences, the subject and the finite verb are inverted,
except for wh-questions with the subject as wh-element.

4. In an imperative, there is no overt subject, but the subject is under-
stood to be the addressee. (Keenan 1975: C.3)

5. The subject triggers agreement with the verb. (Keenan 1975: A.3.3)

6. The subject is associated with certain semantic roles: for example, in
the active voice it is an agent. (Keenan 1975: C.2)

7. Subjects undergo raising. (Keenan 1975: A.3.16)

   (a) It seems the boys have eaten fruits.
   (b) The boys seem to have eaten fruits.

8. The controlled argument of a subordinate clause is its subject. (Keenan
1975: A.3.4.2)

   John wanted to read the letter.

9. The subject is stranded in VP preposing constructions. (Harley 1995:
18)

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4The reference is to the serial number in the Subject Property List under II
3.1.
Jane said John would write that letter, and write that letter
John did.

10. The subject is shared by coordinated clauses. (Keenan 1975: A.3.4.3)

I came in and was asked where I had put the keys.

We observe:

• 2 and 3 indicate that information about subjecthood is coded in posi-
tion, and in the case of declarative sentences its position is pre-verbal.
But 9 exhibits a different behavior: the subject is not before the main
verb but before an auxiliary verb.

• 4 and 5 are in favor of the position that a subject is expressed (abhi-
hita) by the verbal suffix.

• 6 states that the subject is associated with certain semantic roles, but
7(b) again is an exception, because the boys which is in the subject
position of seem does not have any semantic relation to the verb seem.

3. Information in position

Language typologists classify English as an SVO (Comrie 1983: 6) and In-
dian languages as SOV languages (Comrie 1983: 208). However, comparing
English and Indian languages on the basis of word order is like comparing
apples and oranges! The reason is: English uses position to code crucial
information of the grammatical relation. So when one says English is an
SVO language, one is asserting a fact about the encoding of grammatical
relations, viz. subject and object, with respect to a verb. On the other
hand, in the case of Sanskrit, a relatively free word order language, when
one says Sanskrit is an SOV language, one is just stating a statistical fact
about the order of words in a typical Sanskrit sentence.

To make the point clear: the following two English sentences have exactly
opposite meanings:

• Rats kill cats.
• Cats kill rats.

The following two Sanskrit sentences, on the other hand, have the same
meaning (ignoring the topicalization, of course):

• Skt: r̥maḥ phalaṁ khādati.
• gloss: Rama {nom. sg.} fruit {acc. sg.} eat {3rd sg. pres.}.
• Eng: Rama eats a fruit.
Subject in English is *abhihita*

- Skt: *phalavrč rāmaḥ khādati*.
- gloss: Fruit {acc. sg.} Rama {nom. sg.} eat {3rd sg. pres.}.
- Eng: Rama eats a fruit.

In order to understand the concept of subject in English, we start with the typologists’ classification of English as SVO and the assumption that both the subject and the object position mark grammatical relations. Thus our initial hypothesis is:

**H1**: In English, both pre-verbal as well as post-verbal positions mark grammatical relations.

However, we come across such sentences as

1. Mrs. Venables turned a little pale.
   Lord Peter presented no difficulties,
   but *Bunter* she found rather alarming.
   (Sayers 1972: 221)

where an argument (*Bunter*) which is expected to be in post-verbal position is not in that position. Therefore, we conclude that the information that *Bunter* is an argument of the verb *alarm* is not coded in the position. Thus it follows that the post-verbal position does not invariably mark a grammatical relation. This leads us to reframe our hypothesis as:

**H2**: In English, pre-verbal position marks the grammatical relation.

But there are examples going against this hypothesis as well.

2. Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.
3. Never was the sea so calm!
4. Here comes the bus!
5. On the bed, hung a mosquito net.

In the above examples, *head*, *sea*, *bus* and *net*, which are the arguments for the verbs *lies*, *was*, *comes*, and *hung* respectively, are not in pre-verbal position. Further, all these verbs are monovalent. That is, each of these verbs has an expectancy of only one argument. The argument (viz. *head*, *sea*, *bus* or *net*) agrees with the verb in number and person and thus may be considered to be abhihita (expressed) by the verbal suffix.

In Sanskrit, where an abhihita argument, which is already expressed by the verb, does not need any special vibhakti and hence takes *prathama vi-bhakti* (nominative case ending), in the case of a transitive verb which needs
two arguments, if one argument shows agreement with the verb and thus is abhihita, we expect the other argument to be marked explicitly. In English, on the contrary, we observe that the second argument of a transitive verb, unless it is a pronoun, does not have any specific marker—neither a morphological formative nor any fixed position and that an abhihita argument is always in the pre-verbal position. Hence we revise our hypothesis as follows:

H3: In the case of a transitive verb, S-V order invariably marks a grammatical relation.

There is also evidence against this observation. Consider the following sentences:

6. She could only hope that Harriet was mistaken in his feelings . . . .
   Wish it she must, for his sake . . . . (Austen 1867: 385)
7. Ride in the same taxi with Pamela Dean and Bredon he could not. (Sayers 1933: 60)

In both these examples, the abhihita argument is post-verbal. But at the same time, we also note that it is always followed by an auxiliary. So finally we conclude that it is the abhihita-auxiliary proximity (sannidhi) that is invariant in English. As a result, in English, the normal proximity between auxiliary verbs and the main verb is weakened, and a new proximity comes into existence between an abhihita and an auxiliary verb.

This leads to a new concept, a concept of ‘subject position’. The subject position is the position which is to the immediate left (avyavahita-pūrva) of a verb group. And thus, we revise our hypothesis as follows:

H4: In the case of a transitive verb, an abhihita always occupies a special position called the subject position; or the subject (occupant of the subject position) is abhihita.

The avyavahitatva (uninterrupted-ness) between the subject noun phrase and the verb phrase leads to a new meaning over and above the meanings of its constituents. For example, the group of words Rama laughs also indicates

5For example, in sentence 6 must and wish are separated and in sentence 7 could not ride is split as ride and could not.
6A verb group consists of a verb or a main verb followed by either a modal or one or more auxiliaries. Goes, am going, would have gone, can go, etc. are examples of verb groups.
the grammatical relation between *Rama* and *laughs* in addition to the meanings of individual words (*padas*) *Rama* and *laughs*. A complex unit, which is derived from components and which has a single complex meaning, different from the meanings of the components, is termed *vrtti* in the Pāṇinian grammar.\(^7\) Five types of *vrtti* are recognized and discussed by Bhaṭṭojīdīkṣīta in his *Siddhāntakaumudi*.\(^8\) They are *kṛdanta*, *taddhītanta*, *samāsa*, *ekaśeṣa*, and *sanādyantadhātu*. For example, the *kṛdanta* *pācaka* is derived from the verb *pac* ‘to cook’ with the *kṛt* affix *ṇul* signifying a kartr.-kāraka. The meaning of *pācaka* is ‘one who cooks’. Similarly, the *samāsa* ‘compound’ *rājapuruṣa* ‘king’s man’ is derived from the padas *rājñih* (*rājan-ṇih*) ‘king’s’ and *puruṣāḥ* (*puruṣa-suḥ*) ‘man’ whose endings, *ṇih* and *suḥ*, are deleted. The compound thus denotes a single complex meaning which also includes the grammatical relation between its constituents, *rājan* ‘king’ and *puruṣa* ‘man’. The avyayavahitatva between the subject noun phrase and the verb phrase comes close to the concept of a compound. However, this calls for a detailed comparative study of the two concepts, viz. that of an avyayavahitatva and that of a samāsa. Nonetheless, to present English grammar in the framework of Pāṇini, we need a *vrtti*, viz. avyayavahitatva between an NP and a VP. Whether the *vrtti* of this type is different from the five *vrtti* described in the Pāṇinian grammar or not needs further investigation.

4. *Ānuṇyūvī* or information in order

Consider the following two sentences in English:

8. *Rama* is going to school.

9. *Is Rama* going to school?

As is obvious from these sentences, the information of interrogativeness and declarativeness of a sentence is marked in the abhihita-auxiliary order. The concept of avyayavahitatva and the fact that the abhihita-auxiliary order codes a certain kind of information put several constraints on the sentence construction. We discuss below the consequences thereof.

\(^7\)MBh on vt. 2 to A 2.1.1 (II.238): *pararthābhidhānaṁ vrṭṭih*. In his *Pradīpa* (II.28) Kaiyata explains: *parasya śabdasya yo ‘ṛthas tasyābhidhānaṁ śabdāntareṇa yatra sā vrṭtī ity arthah.*

\(^8\)SK (Śrīvatsamāśaśaśaśapakaraṇa) [341]: *kṛttaddhitasamāśaśaśasanādyantadḥāturyaḥ paricarṇtayāḥ*
4.1. Consequences of information coding in position and order

- Subject position cannot be empty.
  For, if it were empty, it would not be clear whether the given sentence is an interrogative or a declarative.

- Insertion of auxiliary *do* in interrogatives.
  If a verb group does not have an auxiliary verb, then dummy *do* is inserted, as shown below.

10. He goes to school.

11. *Does* he go to school?

Here *goes* has two morphemes: *go-* and *-es*. The morpheme *-es* marks the tense and hence should get inverted with *he*. But *-es*, being a bound morpheme, requires a verb to which it should get attached. The auxiliary *do*\(^9\) satisfies the requirement, and thus the auxiliary *does* then is inverted with the subject to give an interrogative sentence. The verb *be*\(^10\) is an exception as shown below.

12. It is there.

13. *Is* it there?

- Extra overheads: dummy *it* and expletive *there*

  (1) In the case of verbs with implicit (*antarḥuṭa*) arguments, the subject position, which cannot be empty, is occupied by dummy *it*\(^11\) as in:

14. It is raining.

\(^9\)In his *Śrīgūramprakāśa* Bhoja classifies verbal bases into three types: *astyartha*, *bhavatyarthā*, and *karotyartha*. *Śrīgūramprakāśa* (I.194): *dhātuvaś ca tṛedhā—astyarthāḥ, bhavatyarthāḥ, karotyarthāḥ ca | tatra yesāṁ kariṣāru udāsate te astyarthāḥ—yathā asti vidyate dhṛṣṭāḥ tiṣṭhaṁ āste vartate ityādi | yesāṁ visākṣate te bhavatyarthāḥ yathā bhavati satīrayate vardhate viparītanate opakṣayate vibhoḥṣataḥ ityādi | yesāṁ prasārayate te karotyarthāḥ yathā—karotī vidhate janayati nirvarta-yati śūdhayati upādavyati |峻。Further, he says that all the karotyartha verbs can be paraphrased with *karotī*: e.g., *pacati = pākam. karotī*. *Śrīgūramprakāśa* (I.323): *tasmāt pākam. karotīti padadvayasya yo'arthas sa eva pacati ekapadasyeta |*

\(^10\)This is again in accordance with Bhoja’s distinction between karotyartha verbs and *astyarthā* verbs. The distinction between *bhavatyarthā* and karotyartha verbs however does not hold good in English. English allows *Does it grow?*, whereas Sanskrit does not allow *kim vṛdhanaṁ karotī?* The latter uses *bhavati* as in *kim vṛdhanaṁ bhavati?*

\(^11\)This *it* is termed ‘dummy *it*’ since it, being just a place holder, does not convey any information.
(2) The word or phrase that is to be focused is normally placed into a focus position at the front of a clause in order to highlight it. When a verb is to be focused, it is not possible to bring it to the front, since then either the subject position will be empty or the sentence with the verb in the front will become an interrogative sentence. Hence in such cases the subject position is filled with expletive there, as in:

15. There are flowers in the garden.
16. There could have occurred a diplomatic incident. (Radford 1997: 211)

The expletive there thus serves as a focus element to express the ‘factuality’ or ‘happeningness’ of the event.

It is interesting to note that certain transitive verbs also have the expletive there to express the happeningness. For example,

17. Suddenly there entered the hall an ugly old man. (Levin 1993: 90)

In the case of a verb group involving one or more auxiliaries, the main verb assumes the focus position, leaving the subject-auxiliary vítti intact as in sentences 6 and 7. If the manner of the activity is to be focussed, then the subject position is occupied by the adverb expressing the manner as in sentences 2 and 3.

4.2. asamarthaḥ padavidhiḥ?

The dummy it does not carry any lexical information, and hence it is an extra overhead. So there is a tendency to drop it. This is natural and consistent with the principle of economy (lāghava). In such cases then the subject (and in some cases the object) of the subordinate clause is moved to the subject position of the main verb. The raised subject, though it shows agreement with the verb, is not semantically related to the verb.

In order to interpret this phenomenon from the Paninian perspective, we look at the constraints imposed by Pāṇini on the grammatical operations (vidhi) concerning finished words (pada). Patañjali interprets Pāṇini’s sūtra A 2.1.1 samarthah padavidhiḥ as ‘wherever a grammatical operation (vidhi) concerning finished words (pada) is prescribed, it must be applied to words which are semantically connected (samartha)’ (Joshi 1968: v). Patañjali further discusses the example asūryampaśyāni mukhāni ‘faces that do not see the sun’. This is an example of an asamartha compound,12 where the

12 A compound whose components are semantically not connected.
negative particle a-, in spite of being semantically related to the verb drś of paśya, gets compounded with the noun sūrya. Such usages are still accepted because they convey the desired meaning. This leads to the acceptance of gamakatva as a criterion for accepting such syntactic constructions. Gamakatva ‘the ability to convey the desired meaning’ is not accepted in standard speech, as is evident from the mention of aśiṅcita kurvāṇam in the Mahābhāṣya as being regarded as ungrammatical. Only the constructions which are in usage in spite of being asamartha are accepted on the basis of gamakatva.

In the light of this discussion, let us now discuss two English constructions, which fall under the category of asamartha syntactic constructions but are in usage because of their gamakatva.

4.2.1. *Seem* type of verbs

Consider the following two English sentences with the same meaning:

18. It seems that the boys have eaten fruits.
19. The boys seem to have eaten fruits.\[13\]

In sentence 19, *the boys* is in the subject position of *seem* and also abhīhitā, as it shows person-number agreement with the verb *seem*. However, semantically, *the boys* does not have any relation with the verb *seem*. This is clear from sentence 18 in which *the boys* is semantically related to the verb *eat* and the *that* clause is an argument of *seem*. The sentence structure in sentence 19 thus seems to be asamartha to convey the desired meaning.\[14\]

But then the following questions arise. How is it that an English reader does not find such constructions odd? How is it that the sentence is acceptable to a native speaker? How does a language allow proper communication in spite of apparent incomprehensibility of the sentence at the structural level? It is gamakatva (*arthabodhakatva*, the ability to convey the desired meaning) that takes care of proper communication. The gamakatva of the construction is justified by the expectancy of the verb *eat* in the subordinate clause and the fact that the verb *seem* does not have an expectancy of a subject.

\[13\]This is an example of subject-subject raising, where the subject in the subordinate clause has been moved to the subject position of the main verb.

\[14\]Naiyāyikas, who hold the prathamāntamukhyaviśayakāśabdadodhakavāyuṣ, may not consider the two sentences to differ significantly; *the boys* is prathamānta ‘ending in the nominative case’ in both the cases. But they will have difficulty in explaining the kārakatva of a prathamānta in the following sentence:

The prisoners are alleged to have been ordered to pick up the money. Here *the prisoners* is semantically related to the verb *order* and not to the verb *allege*. 
4.2.2. **Tough type of adjectives**

Consider the following pair of sentences that convey the same meaning.

20. It is hard to see John.

21. John is hard to see.

In sentence 21, the object *John* of the subordinate verb is moved to the subject position of the main verb *is* which was occupied by dummy *it*. This is again a case of *asāmarthya* (the state of being asamartha). Because, though *John* is not an argument of the verb *is*, there is an agreement between *John*, which is an occupant of the subject position, with the verb *is*.

Not only objects but also complements of prepositions can move to the subject position. However, when the complement of a preposition moves to the subject position, the preposition is left behind. This then leads to the violation of normal proximity (*sannidhi*). For example, the dummy *it* in 22 is replaced by the noun phrase *this violin* in 23 leaving the preposition *on* in situ.

22. It is tough to play these sonatas on this violin.

23. This violin is tough to play these sonatas on.

Thus the normal *sannidhi* between the preposition *on* and the noun *violin* is violated.

4.2.3. **Exceptional case marking (subject-object raising)**

Another phenomenon in English is the raising of a subject to the object position, which is termed ‘exceptional case marking’ (ECM). Consider the following sentence:

24. I want him to go there.

Here the pronoun *he*, which is an argument of the verb *go* of the subordinate clause, gets case-marked by the main verb *want*. From the point of view of the Pāṇini grammar, there are two problems in this sentence.

(1) In the case of verbs signifying desire (*icchārthakadhātu*), if a subordinate verb is an infinitive (terminates in the suffix *tum*), then it shares kart-kaṇaka with the main verb which signifies desire,\(^\text{15}\) as in:

Skt: _aham bhoktum icchāmi._
gloss: I to eat desire {1st sg.}
Eng: I desire to eat.

\(^{15}\)A 3.3.158 _samānakartṛkṣu tumuṃ._
But in 24 the subject of the verb want, an *icchārthaḥ kādāṭu*, is different from the subject of go.

(2) The second problem is with the accusative form of he. He is an argument of the verb go which is in infinitive form. Hence according to A 2.3.65 *kartrkarmāṇoḥ kṛti* the kartr-kāraṇa of go should take the sixth case ending. But him is not in the genitive case.

In his *Vākyapādiya* Bhārtṛhari states (3.7.81–82):

> pradhānetarayoḥ yatra dravyasya kriyayoh pṛthak |
> śaktir guṇāśrayā tatra pradhānam anuvrddhyate ||
> pradhānaviṣayaḥ śaktih pratyayenābhidhyate |
> yadā gaṇe tādā tadvad anuktāpi prakāśate ||

According to Bhārtṛhari, if *x* is an argument of both a main verb and a subordinate verb, it is the main verb that assigns case to *x*, and the relation of the subordinate verb to *x* gets manifested even without any marking.

But we cannot adopt this way of looking at the problem since there lie the following discrepancies:

- The argument of want is not he but the clause him to go there.
- The relation of want with him to go there is not the same as that of go with he.

A native speaker understands such constructions, because they contextually have the property of making the meanings understood (gamakatva). For example, in this case, the object position of want overlaps with the subject position of go and this overlapping acts as a clue for gamakatva. Because now a native speaker of English finds he in the subject position of go helping him get the desired meaning. Further, since he also occupies the object position of want, want assigning the accusative case to he looks natural.

Thus sentence 24 is a case of exceptional case marking or anomalous behavior or a grammatical operation between two words that are not related semantically. And hence this is an example of *asamarthaḥ* padavidhiḥ. In spite of the asaṃmarthya the native speakers understand such usages because of gamakatva.

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16If a kartr or karman has not been expressed already, the sixth case ending is added to a prātipadika to denote the kartr or karman given a kṛt suffix construction.
5. Subject in English: a Pāṇinian viewpoint

Our observations may be summarized in the form of a set of rules as follows:

1. Modern English exhibits a special vṛtti, avyavahitavā, between an NP and a VP. The position that immediately precedes a VP is called ‘subject position’.

2. Abhihita—the kāraka which has been expressed by the verbal suffix—occupies the subject position. (Hence the abhihita is also called ‘subject’.)

3. If a verb is to be focussed, then the subject position is occupied by either there or here.

   Here comes the bus!

   Suddenly there entered the hall an ugly man!

4. If the manner of an activity is to be focussed, then the subject position is occupied by the adverb expressing the manner.

   Never was the sea so calm.
   Uneasy lies the head which wears a crown.

5. If a verb has an implicit kārtṛ, then the subject position is occupied by it.

   It is raining.

6. If the main verb is seem, then the subject of the subordinate verb optionally occupies the subject position of the main verb.

7. In such a case the verb of the subordinate clause takes an infinitive form.

   The boys seems to have eaten fruits.

8. If the subject of a verb signifying desire (iccārthakadhātu) is the same as that of the secondary verb in infinitive, the subject is shared.

   I want to go.

9. If the subject of the main verb signifying desire (iccārthakadhātu) differs from that of the secondary verb (which is in infinitive), then the subject of the secondary verb takes an accusative marker.

   I want him to go.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of the foregoing exercise is to look at the concept of subject in English from a Pāṇinian viewpoint. It has been shown that English exhibits
a special vr̥tti, avyavahitavā, between an NP and a VP, and also that
English codes information in the NP-VP order. These two factors, taken
together, explain the sacrosanctness of the subject position in English. Since
the subject position cannot be empty, it leads to an introduction of dummy
*it* and expletive *there*. Further, the natural tendency of a language towards
laghava introduces a kind of asāmarthya in sentences involving verbs like
*seem* and adjectives like *tough*. The overlapping of the object position of
the main verb with the subject position of the subordinate verb provides
the gamakatva for sentences with exceptional case marking.

References and abbreviations


Abhyankara, Vāsudevaśāstri

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