‘Subject’ in English is abhihita

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Influence of Pāṇini's grammar has continued through the grammars of Prākṛta languages like Mahārāṣṭrī to the grammars of modern Indian languages like Malayālam, Telugu, Marāṭhī through līlātilakam, Andhra śabdacintāmaṇi, Mahārāṣṭra-Prayoga-candrikā, respectively.

The discovery of computers and the advancements in the communication have opened up new vistas for the Pāṇinian studies.

In an effort to develop a Pāṇinian interface to the existing English parser[a] outputs, we found it necessary to understand the concepts used by various Western grammar formalisms such as Chomsky's minimalism, link grammar and Phrase Structure Grammars in terms of Pāṇinian concepts.

[a]The parsers used are minipar, link, and stanford.

The notion of 'Subject' is an important notion in these grammar formalisms.

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 of the Indian languages.

> 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.

Cardona in 'Subject in Sanskrit',1975.

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.

We report our understanding of what 'information' does the grammatical relation 'subject' in English code and consequences thereof.

Subject in English

Following are the most frequently noted properties of Subject that apply to English(Keenan 1975, Harley 1995):

1. Every sentence must have a subject, either overt or covert.
2. The unmarked position for overt subjects is pre-verbal.
3. In questions, 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 understood to be the addressee.

5. The subject triggers agreement with the verb.

6. The subject is associated with certain semantic roles: for example in an active voice it is an agent.

7. Subjects undergo raising, e.g.

   (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.

   John wanted to read the letter.

9. The subject is stranded in VP preposing constructions.
   Jane said John would write that letter, and write that letter John did.

10. The subject can be the only argument that is shared by the coordinated clauses.
    I came in and was asked where I had put the keys.

- 1,2 and 3 indicate that information about subjecthood is coded in position, but 8 exhibits a different behaviour.
- 4 and 5 are in favour of the position that Subject represents a kāraka expressed (abhihita) by the verbal suffix, but 7(b) is an exception.
- 6 may be interpreted as, in case of active voice, subject is kartā

Typologists classify English as SVO and Sanskrit as SOV.
Comparing apples with oranges!

Information in Position

These English sentences have exactly opposite meanings

- Rats kill cats.
- Cats kill rats.

Following two Sanskrit sentences with similar change in the order of words as above, have the same meaning (ignoring the topicalisation, of course).

- Rāmaḥ phalam khādati.
- Phalam rāmaḥ khādati.

Our initial hypothesis is:

In English, both the pre-verbal as well as the post-verbal positions mark the grammatical relations.

However, we come across such sentences as

1. Who likes sweets? **Sweets**, I like.

2. Mrs. Venables turned a little pale.
   Lord Peter presented no difficulties,
   but **Bunter** she found rather alarming. (source: D. Sayers, The Nine Tailors)

This leads us to reframe our hypothesis as,

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

But there are examples going against this hypothesis as well. Here are they:

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

In all these examples, the verb is monovalent.
But a transitive verb needs two arguments. Hence 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 the transitive verbs, except pronouns, does not have any specific marker - neither a morphological formative, and nor any fixed position.

In case of transitive verbs, abhihita is always in the pre-verbal position.
Or, in other words, in case of transitive verbs, S-V order invariably marks a grammatical relation.

There are evidences, which go against this observation too. Look at the following sentences

1. Something had to give. And **give it** *did*.
2. We all said she was bound to leave him, and **leave** him **she** *did*.
3. She could only hope that Harriet was mistaken in his feelings...
   Wish it **she** *must*, for his sake... (J. Austen, Emma)
4. **Ride** in a taxi with Pamela and Bredon **he** *could not*, even if it meant losing her forever... (D. Sayers, Murder must Advertise)

In all 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 it is the **abhihita**-*auxiliary* proximity(*sannidhi*) that is invariant in English. As a result, the normal proximity between auxiliary verbs and the main verb is weakened.

This leads to a new concept - a concept of ‘Subject Position’ - a position which is immediate left(avyavahita pūrva) to the verb group.

Ānupūrvī or Information in order

1. **Ram is** going to school. and
2. **Is Ram** going to school?

The information of 'interrogativeness' and 'declarativeness' of the sentence is marked in the **abhihita-auxiliary order**.

Consequences of Information Coding in Position and order:

Subject Position can't be empty:

Insertion of auxiliary *do* in interrogatives:

1. He goes to school.
2. *Does* he go to school?

Here *goes* is split as *go+does*[a]

[a]pacati=pākaṃ karoti; tasmāt pākaṃ karoti iti padadvayasya yo arthassa eva pacatītyekāpadasyeti.

extra overheads:

in case of verbs with implicit (antarbhūta) argument, the Subject Position is occupied by dummy **it**

1. It is raining.

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 it will result in an interrogative sentence. Hence in such cases, the subject position is filled with an expletive *there*, as in

16. *There* are flowers in the garden.

17. *There* could have occurred a diplomatic incident[a].

[a]Radford, pp 211

Certain transitive verbs which use expletive *there*. For example,

18. *There* entered a hall an ugly old man.

Expletive *there* thus serves as a focus element to express the 'factuality' or 'happeningness' of the event.

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 object) of the subordinate clause is moved to the subject position of the main verb. The raised subjects though shows agreement with the verb, is not semantically related to the verb.

'seem' type of verbs

Consider the following English sentences:

1. It seems that the boys have eaten fruits.
2. The boys seem to have eaten fruits[a].

[a]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.

In sentence(20), *the boys* is in the subject position of *seem* and also is abhhita, as it shows person-number agreement with the verb *seem*. However, semantically, *the boys* does not have any relation with the verb *seem*. It is semantically related to the verb *eat*! and the that clause is an argument of *seem*. The sentence structure thus seems to be asamartha to convey the desired meaning.

The prisoners are alleged to have been ordered to pick up the money.

Here *The prisoners* definitely is not an argument of *allege*.

It is the *gamakatva*[a] (arthabodhakatva, the ability to convey the desired meaning) that takes care of proper communication.

[a] *Suḍanapuṁsakasya* (P 1.1.42) serves as a jñāpaka for this.

TOUGH type of adjectives

21. It is hard to see John.

22. John is hard to see.

It is not John who is hard, but To see John is hard.

There is agreement between the occupant of the Subject Position with the verb, though not being the argument of the verb!

Not only the objects, but even the complements of prepositions can also move to the subject position. However, when the complement of prepositions move to the subject position, the prepositions are left behind.

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

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

Exceptional Case Marking

(Subject-Object raising)

28. I want [him to go there].

is an example of ECM.

There are two problems in this sentence:

- In case of verbs indicating desire etc. (icchārthaka), if the sub-ordinate verb is in tumun, then it shares the kartā with the icchārthaka dhātu. (3.3.158)
  aham bhoktum icchāmi.

  But in English sentence (28), the subject of

want(which is an icchā rthaka dhātu) is different from the subject of *go*.

- The second problem is with the accusative form of *he*.

Except for shared kartā, Pāṇini has not given any rules for sharing of other kārakas.

Bhartṛhari in vākyapadīyam states (3.7.81-82),

pradhānetayoryatra dravyasya kriyayoḥ pṛthak
śaktirguṇāśrayātatra pradhānamanurudhyate 3.7.81

pradhānaviṣayā śaktiḥ pratyayenaābhidhiyate
yadā guṇe tadā tadvad anuktāpi prakāśate. 3.7.82

Following Bhartṛhari, we may say since *he* is an argument of both the main verb as well as the subordinate verb, it is the main verb which assigns the case and the relation of sub-ordinate verb gets manifested even without any other marking.

But we encounter the following problems:

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

This anomalous behaviour in English may be explained as follows. The object position of *want* overlaps with the subject position of *go* and it is the main verb which assigns the case. Thus it is a case of exceptional case marking.

In spite of this anomaly, a native speaker understands such constructions, because of the *gamakatva*.

Gapping

Sharing of kartā and not abhihita.

English shares the subject.

This poses a problem, since kartā need not be an abhihita and vice versa.

Conclusion:
English exhibits a special vṛtti between a NP and a VP.
It also codes information in the NP-VP order.

Consequences:

- Subject position can not be empty.
  - Dummy It and Expletive There
  - Abhihita need not be an argument.
  - Break-down in the normal/default sannidhi
- ECM
- Subject Sharing (gapping)

1. In modern English,
2. pre verbal position is called *'Subject Position'*.
3. *abhihita* occupies the 'Subject Position'. (Hence the *abhihita* is also called a 'Subject'.)
4. If the verb is to be focussed, then the Subject Position is occupied by 'there' or 'here'.
   example: Here comes the bus!
   example: There entered the hall an ugly man!.
5. In case the manner of the activity is to be focussed, then the subject position is occupied by the adverb expressing the manner.
   example: Never was the sea so calm.

example: Uneasy lies the head which wears a crown.

6. If the verb has implicit *kartā*, then the Subject Position is occupied by 'it'.
   example: It is raining.

7. If the main verb is 'seem', then optionally the Subject of the subordinate verb occupies the Subject Position of the main verb

8. In such cases the verb of the subordinate clause assumes 'to infinitive' form.
   example: The boys seems to have eaten fruits.

9. In the case of icchārthaka dhātu, Subject sharing is optional.

example: I want to go.

example: I want him to go.

10. (In case of iccārthaka dhātu), if the Subject of the main verb differs from that of the secondary verb, then the Subject of the secondary verb takes an accusative marker.