Syntactic and Semantic Aspects of Subject-Less Sentences in Malayalam

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Abstract

Generally, all sentences can be broadly divided into a subject constituent and a predicate constituent is a view which is found in traditional as well as modern grammatical analysis. In surface level, the initial NP in a sentence of normal word order, which is directly related to the verb is identified as its subject. But, the identification fails to satisfy, when more complex structures are examined. The concept of "subject" is very elusive, and seems to be quite different depending on languages. The morphological feature, case is used to indicate the function of an NP within its clause. But case marking is not always a reliable guide for determining the grammatical relationship of a particular NP. An NP may be a grammatical subject or object even though its case marking suggests something quite different. This kind of irregular correlation between morphological features and syntactic functions is not uncommon. So the grammatical relations be identified on the basis of syntactic evidence which can be used to identify grammatical relations particularly in subjects.

In Malayalam though the subject is in nominative case, certain verbs do not allow NPs in the nominative to occupy the initial (subject) slot of sentences. And it is argued that subject-category is not relevant in the analysis of Malayalam sentences. This paper is an attempt to explain the above facts with reference to the syntactic and semantic aspects.

Keywords: Syntactic and Semantic, grammatical subject, dative case, logical subject

1. **Introduction**

All sentences can broadly be divided into a subject constituent and a predicate constituent is a view which is found in traditional as well as modern grammatical analysis. In surface level, the initial NP in a sentence of normal word order, which is directly related to the verb is identified as its subject. But, the identification fails to satisfy, when more complex structures are examined. The concept of "subject" is very elusive and seems to be quite different depending on languages (K.M. Prabhakara Varriar). The notion 'subject' is described by various scholars differently. According to Chomsky (1965) it is in terms of the topology of the deep-structure

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phrase marker that the semantically relevant notions of subject, object and predicate are defined and selection   restrictions are accounted for. A noun phrase immediately dominated by the node 'S' will be called the deep subject. The deep subject refers to the NP argument that appears to the immediate left of the verb in surface structure. According to Fillmore (1968), The NPs appearing in the underlying structure are differentiated only on the basis of various semantic roles that they manifest. In the absence of an agent in the deep sentence, another NP is moved to the position of subject.

There are observations made by other scholars. Kothandaraman (1972) examines that, there can be certain verbs in languages like Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam which do not require a subject in the sentence. Now examine the Malayalam grammarian's observation. Certain verbs do not allow NPs in the nominative to occupy the initial (subject) slot of sentences. Gundert (1859) termed them as verbs without nominative. Rev. George Mathen (1863) says that "state, happening and action show great difference. State is something which is possessed by the actor, happening is something which the actor is involved, and action is that thing which is performed by the actor. State and happenings are common to both animate and inanimate objects. Action is associated with only creatures and humans" George Mathen (p-138). In some verbs of happening and those which are used in that manner, the subject will be hidden. And such verbs are called subject less verbs. According to Raja Raja Varma, subject is the most important among case relations. If verb is divided into action and result, subject is action depended and object is result dependent. Some verbs, where the action of the subject is not required. Such verb is called subject-hidden verb. In such cases the position of the subject will have to be filled by the nominal in dative case. (A.R.p-189). Abraham (1976), says that, there is a class of verbs in Malayalam whose underlying (logic) subjects take dative case markers when they appear in the surface level. He refers such subject NP as pseudo dative. eg. enikku 'for me'.

K.M. Prabhakara Varriar had also some observations. There are a good deal of variation is found in the literature with reference to the role of subject. Besides subject, the terms such as 'topic', 'theme'and 'focus' are used to designate an element of statement. Each of these names is employed to explain the phenomenon in different contexts. Except subject, others are not grammatical category.   As far as grammatical analysis is concerned, the notion subject can be dispensed with in speaking of underlying semantic relationships.

In the sentence, 'ayaaḷkku eḻuttu kiṭṭi'. "He got the letter", here the aim is that something (the letter) has reached somewhere (he). Here he functions as the goal. The goal-case subsumes several sub notions. Here the suggestion given by Fillmore is, we might account for all these variations in meanings by using the 'principle of complementarity'. To quote Fillmore, "Sometimes we find in different sentences semantic functions which in detail are partly alike and

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partly different, their difference being systematically relatable to differences in the semantic properties of the lexical material they are in construction with." (Fillmore, 1968).

There are other expressions which overlap with other case-notions:
Eg. (1)   ñaan aṭutta maasam delhikku pookum. (destination)
            'Next month I will go to Delhi.'

    (2)   Pattu maṇikku skuuḷil kḷaas tuṭaṅṅum.   (Time)
            Ten-time-dat   school-loc class   start
            'The class will start at 10'clock'.
 (3) ii marunnu neRRikku puraṭṭaṇam.   (location)
        'Apply this medicine on the forehead'
    (4) Delhikku pookaan oruṅṅuu. (purpose)
          'Get ready to go Delhi.'
    (5) enikku oru viiṭuṇtu.   (possession)
          'I have a house'.

So, the dative nominal is the surface realization of the underlying 'goal-case'. The general case- frame consists of several sub-cases, which include experience and possession'. These presuppose an 'experiencer' and a 'possessor' respectively. The overt signaling of the relationship such as experience and possession is done with dative case markers in the language.

The dative case markers -kku and -nu, are phonologically conditioned and, are regularly used for indirect objects and locatives. Examples :
(6)   amma   kuṭṭi-kku paal koṭuttu.
          Mother   child-dat   milk   give. Past
          `Mother gave the child milk.'
(7)   raaju   kuṭṭi-kku   puuccakkuṭṭi-ye koṭuttu.
        Raju   child-dat   kitten-acc   give.past
        `Raju gave the child a kitten.'

The above examples show the fact that, in Malayalam, inanimate arguments take no case marker and only animate arguments take accusative case marking , which marked its absence on the argument paal `milk' in example (6) and its presence on puuccakkuṭṭi `kitten'   in (7).

Distribution of Dative Nominals in Malayalam
Dative case expressions in Malayalam exhibit various functions such as goal, experiencer, purpose, possession etc. Sometimes, the dative case appears on the `logical subject' of the

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sentence. Milla Nizar, explained that, there are three domains in which we find this use of the dative case: experiencer predicates, possession constructions and modal constructions.

Experiencer Predicates

In certain cases, certain verbs functions as `experiencer' verbs that take a dative as the logical subject. In that case the verbs convey semantic notions such as experiencer, feeling, etc. In experiencer predicates, two types of constructions can be possible, construction with a simple verb, and construction with a complex predicate.

Construction with a simple verb :
Eg.   enikku   veedanikkunnu.
      Isg.-dat   ache-have   'I have an ache'
      enikku   toonnunnu.
      Isg.-dat   feel-have   ' I have a feel'.

Construction with a complex predicate:
    In this construction, the first element is a noun, adjective or non-finite verb, while the second element is a verb lacking its typical semantic content, which Mohanan and Mohanan (1990: 47) characterize as a `light verb'. These light verbs generally have meanings such as `be', `have', `become', `feel', `come', etc. and when they combine with a noun, adjective, or non-finite verb, the complex predicate induces dative case on the logical subject (Milla Nizar). If the simple verb is used, the subject can only take the nominative case, and if the light verb, the subject can only be dative. The following examples show this:

(8)   (a)   avaḷ   santooṣiccu.
                3sg.f-nom be.happy.past
               'She became happy.'
        (b)   *aval-kku   santooṣiccu.
                3sg.f-dat   be.happy.past
                `She became happy.'

(9)   (a)   avaḷ-kku   santooṣam   aayi.
             3sg.f-dat   happiness   become.past
             `She became happy.'

      b)   *avaḷ   santooṣam   aayi.
            3sg.f-nom happiness   become.past
            `She became happy.'

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In (8a) the simple verb *santooṣikkuka* `be happy' takes a nominative subject and the usage of a dative subject in (8b) becomes ungrammatical. But, in (9a) the dative subject is grammatical with the complex predicate *santooṣamaakuka* 'happiness'+'to become', while in (9b) it cannot take a nominative subject. Semantically the two constructions are considered to be equivalent. Jayaseelan (2004: 231) notes that the nominative construction is grammatical with the imperative mood, while the dative construction is not.

Example:

(10) (a) (nii)   santooṣik'k'-uu
             2sg-nom   be.happy-imp
               '(You) be happy!'

      (b)   *nin-akku santooṣam aak-uu
             2sg-dat   happiness become-imp
             *`You become happy!   '(Jayaseelan 2004: 231)

Another type of predicates in which both the simple verb form and the corresponding light verb takes the dative case and the nominative usage is ungrammatical. Jayaseelan (2004) identifies the distinction between mental and physical experience as key to explaining this behavior. For predicates involving physical experience, such as *viśakkuka* `be hungry' and *veedanikkuka* `feel pain', the corresponding light verb predicates using the nouns *viśappu* `hunger' and *veedana* `pain' can only occur with a dative-marked subject.

Examples:

(11) (a)   enikku   viśappuṇṭu.
            1sg-dat   hunger   be. pres
            `I am hungry.'

     (b)   *ñaan   viśappuṇṭu.
             1sg-nom   hunger   be. pres
             *`I am hungry.'

(12) (a)   eni-kku   talaveedana   uṇṭu.
            1sg-dat   headache   be. pres
            `I have a headache.'

   (b)   *ñaan   talaveedana   untu.
           1sg-nom   headache   be. pres
          *`I have a headache.'

Mental experience predicates, illustrate an alternation between nominative and dative case, as seen in the examples (8) and (9). with a dative-marked subject. The simple verb *iṣṭappeṭuka* `to like' is an exception to this. While the complex predicate use only dative case, both the dative and nominative forms are grammatical with the simple verb.

Example:

(13) (a) avaḷ-kku   atu   iṣṭamaayi.
           3sg.f-dat   that liking - become. past
        `She liked that.'

     (b) *avaḷ   atu   iṣṭamaayi.
           3sg.f-nom that liking-become.past
         *`She liked that.'

(14) (a) avaḷ atu   iṣṭappeṭṭu
          3sg.f-nom   that like. past
        `She liked that.'

     (b) avaḷ-kku atu iṣṭappeṭṭu
          3sg.f-dat   that like. past
        `She liked that.'

2. Possession

In possession constructions, we can find the dative subjects in which the possessor is marked by the dative case. We can account for two types of possession, namely concrete and abstract which is exemplified below:

(15).   avaḷkku   viiṭuṇṭu. 'She has Home'
          3sg.f-dat   home-be
          avanu   viiṭuṇṭu. . 'He has Home' (Concrete possession)
          3sg.m-dat home -be

(16)   maaṅṅakku   puḷi uṇṭu.   (Abstract possession)
        mango-dat   sour   be. prest
        `Mango has   sour.'

Another distinction which has certain significance both syntactically and semantically is that of alienable and inalienable possessions. Inalienable possessives express inherently relational concepts. Nouns which express the kinship and social relations are said to be relational nouns. The alienable possessives include concrete possessions like viiṭu 'home'. In inalienable possessives we can see both abstract and concrete possessions (V.P.Gopinadhan). The example for inalienable possessives is given below:

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(17)   avar-kku   muunnu   kuṭṭikaḷ   uṇṭu.
        3pl-dat   three   child-pl   be. prest
        `They have three children.'

The possessive datives generate genitival phrases, as in (18) below.

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(18)   avanu viiṭuṇṭu.   . 'He has Home'
        avanRe   viiṭu.   'His home'
Another peculiarity is that , the substitutability of genitive case with datives without affecting any meaning change.
   viiṭinRe   cuRRum.   'Around the house'
   house-gen. around

   viiṭinu cuRRum .   'Around the house'
   house-dat. Around

   2. **Modality**

   The meaning of possibility is expressed by the suffix *'-aam'* in Malayalam. It determines the meaning when the occurrence is with the verbs and the subject which is in nominative or dative case. When it is used with a nominative subject, the modal suffix-*aam* has the meaning of possibility and with a dative subject the meaning of permission. *'-aṇam'*.

(19)   ñaan   naaḷe   pook-aam.
        1sg-nom   tomorrow   go-may
        `I may go tomorrow.'
(20)   nina-kku   naaḷe   pook-aam
        2pl-dat   tomorrow   go-may
        `You may go tomorrow.'

        Another suffix –*aṇam* is a shortened form of the modal *veeṇam* and has a meaning of external demand with a nominative subject and internal need with a dative subject (Mohanan and Mohanan 1990).

(21)   avan   naaḷe   skuuḷ-il   pook-aṇam.
         he-nom   tomorrow   school-loc   go-may
        'He may go to school tomorrow'
(22)   eni-kku   naaḷe   kaṭayil   pook-aṇam
       1sg-dat   tomorrow   shop-loc   go-may
        `I want to go to a shop tomorrow.'

        In certain cases, same NP appears in nominative and dative cases 'without affecting the meaning change'. (Abraham p-125). Abraham observed that:

(23)   (a)   enikku   viyarttu. 'I swet'

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(b)   ñaan   viyarttu. 'I swet'
(24) (a)   enikku viRaccu. ' I trembled'
      (b)   ñaan viRaccu. 'I trembled'
(25) (a) enikku   vallaate viśannu. 'I was hungry'
      (b) ñaan   vallaate viśannu. 'I was hungry'
(26) (a)   enikku atu iṣṭappeṭṭu. 'I liked that'
      (b)   ñaan atu   iṣṭappeṭṭu. ' I liked that'

Abraham points out that "the occurrences of dative nouns as subjects cannot be a syntactic contravention in Malayalam. But according to Prabhakara Varriar, the above sentence pairs are not synonymous. The dative nominal in '*enikku viyarttu*' stands for the 'experiencer'. The semantic distinction becomes explicit in the following sentences:

(27)   enikku mukham   viyarttu. 'My face swet'
(28) *ñaan   mukham   viyarttu. 'I face swet'

Consider the following sentence:
(29) enRe mukham   viyarttu. 'My face swet'

This is a well-formed sentence as two NPs in the same case relation, do not coincide here. And also, the sentences like,

(30)   nii viśakkunnuṇṭoo? 'Are you hungry?'
(31) ñaṅṅal   viśakkunnilla. 'We are not hungry.'

are not acceptable. But the corresponding dative forms make the sentences acceptable.
Another type of occurrence is that two datives in a single sentence. In this case one of the dative is not real.

(32) enikku pathikkunnatinu   kaḻiññu. 'I could have to study'.

The sense of the word 'atinu' (which is used as an anaphoric pronoun) in the sentence is related to a verbal infinitive whereas 'enikku' stands for the possessor.

Conclusion
As far as Malayalam is concerned the subject notion is not required for an adequate interpretation of the semantic input of a sentence. The surface dative is related to several complementary case relations. The parallel constructions are realizations of distinct semantic relationships.

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