

Attraction Effects on Closest Conjunct Agreement in Hindi-Urdu

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1. Abstract

Hindi-Urdu is a split ergative language, and a verb seeking agreement can agree with either the subject or the object, whichever is the highest nominative argument. When no argument is available, the verb resorts to default agreement, which morphologically is identical to Masculine Singular. Object agreement and default agreement usually take place in the perfective aspect. Another interesting thing about agreement in Hindi-Urdu is that when the agreement goal is a conjoined NP in the object position, the probe can optionally agree with the conjunct that is linearly close to the probe. This phenomenon has been called Closest Conjunct Agreement, or CCA. In this article, detailed analysis of Closest Conjunct Agreement in Hindi-Urdu is presented.

Keywords: Hindi-Urdu, Closest Conjunct Agreement, Attraction Effects.

2. Introduction

Hindi-Urdu is a split ergative language, and a verb seeking agreement can agree with either the subject or the object, whichever is the highest nominative argument. When no argument is available, the verb resorts to default agreement, which morphologically is identical to Masculine Singular. Object agreement and default agreement usually take place in the perfective aspect. Another interesting thing about agreement in Hindi-Urdu is that when the agreement goal is a conjoined NP in the object position, the probe can optionally agree with the conjunct that is linearly close to the probe. This phenomenon has been called Closest Conjunct Agreement, or CCA.

(1) a. Subject Agreement

[Ram ɔ:r Adil] cəna: k^ha:-te haiN
Ram.M.Sg and Adil.M.Sg chickpea.M.Sg **eat-HAB.M.Pl be.Pres.Pl**
'Ram and Adil eat chickpeas'

b. Object Agreement

Priya-ne [cəna: ɔ:r ci:ni:] k^ha:-yi: t^hi:
Priya.F-ERG [chickpea.MSg and **sugar.FSg**] **eat-PFV.F be.Pst.FSg**
'Priya ate sugar and chickpeas'

This phenomenon that has been observed in a number of languages such as Slovenian, Serbo-Croatian, Moroccan as well as Lebanese Arabic, Tsez, and Hindi-Urdu. However, they vary in small but non-trivial ways. In Moroccan Arabic, it can take place only in VS word order (Bhatia 2011:190), in Tsez, strict adjacency is required between the probe and goal (Benmamoun, Bhatia & Polinsky 2009), Slovenian and Serbo-Croatian number agreement is resolved, but the verb agrees with the gender of the closest conjunct (Marušič, Nevins & Saksida, 2007, Bošković, 2009, 2010), while in Hindi, CCA takes place with the number as well as gender ϕ -features, and does not require strict adjacency or specific word orders.

CCA poses an interesting problem for linguists, because it apparently displays effects of linear order within a syntactic operation. A number of analyses have been posited in the recent years, but the question is far from settled yet. In this paper, I will present novel data collected from native speakers of Hindi-Urdu over a number of different CCA environments, to present the attraction effects of factors other than the features on the nouns themselves. This data also shows that CCA is an optional agreement strategy used by native speakers of Hindi-Urdu, and not the only one, and in several instances not even the preferred strategy.

For the grammatical agreement task, an online Google form was created, and respondents were given a set of sentences, and were given different verb agreement options, and were allowed to pick more than one option, or none of the given options, and they could include any notes on the questions if they wished. All the questions were optional, where respondents could skip questions. Respondents self-identified as native speakers of Hindi-Urdu. 59 responses were recorded. Not every respondent answered every question, but many respondents chose more than one option within a particular environment, notably in object agreement environments where both conjuncts were singular. Most respondents chose at least one of the options given to them, and didn't report the sentences as ungrammatical, although some did point out that some of the sentences were clumsy. All the respondents self-identified as being multilingual, speaking two or more languages.

There weren't a lot of instances of CCA for bare NPs, but it was observed that other factors did affect the preference for CCA, like the presence of a determiner on the conjunct closest to the verb, or if the closest conjunct was plural, the occurrence of CCA increased substantially. Even so, both default agreement and resolved agreement strategies were used in these instances.

3. Does CCA Even Exist?

Bhatt and Walkow (2013) state that "...resolved agreement is not an option with objects", and that only one single conjunct can be accessed in object agreement. However, this was not found to be the case when respondents were asked to choose between resolved agreement and closest conjunct agreement in the object position.

Masculine singular can be indicative of single conjunct agreement as well as default agreement in Hindi-Urdu, which is why the more accurate means for testing closest conjunct is to look at instances of agreement with feminine NPs. In the experimental study conducted by Marušič et al (2015) on conjunct agreement in Slovenian, they studied the effects conjunctions with Feminine and Neuter

genders. Hindi-Urdu doesn't have a Neuter grammatical gender, and therefore the ways in which agreement can be looked at remains more limited.

Given below is the data from the responses of some sentences in the canonical SOV position. These are instances of object agreement, where one would expect to find closest conjunct agreement. Because the target conjunct is preverbal, last conjunct agreement is expected.

(2) Conjoined object NP agreement in canonical position

- a. a:dil-ne [təkya: ɔ:r caddar] **xari:d-a:/i:/e/iiN**
Adil-ERG [pillow.M.Sg and bedsheet.F.Sg] **buy-PFV.M.Sg/F.Sg/M.Pl/F.Pl**
'Adil bought a pillow and a bedsheet'
- b. a:dil-ne kuChh jhole ɔ:r ek kami:z **xari:d- a:/i:/e/iiN**
Adil-ERG some bag.M.Pl and one shirt.F.Sg **buy-PFV.M.Sg/F.Sg/M.Pl/F.Pl**
'Adil bought a few bags and a shirt'
- c. ra:m-ne kutte ɔ:r billi:-yaaN **dekh- a:/i:/e/iiN**
Ram-ERG dog.M.Pl and cat.F.Pl see- PFV.M.Sg/F.Sg/M.Pl/F.Pl
'Ram saw dogs and cats'
- d. ra:m-ne təkya: ɔ:r kursi-yaaN **xari:d- a:/i:/e/iiN**
Ram-ERG pillow.M.Sg and chair.F.Pl buy-PFV.M.Sg/F.Sg/M.Pl/F.Pl
'Ram bought (a) pillow and chairs'
- e. ra:m-ne ek təkya: ɔ:r kursi-yaaN **xari:d- a:/i:/e/iiN**
Ram-ERG one pillow.M.Sg and chair.F.Pl buy-PFV.M.Sg/F.Sg/M.Pl/F.Pl
'Ram bought a pillow and chairs'
- f. ra:m-ne ek təkya: ɔ:r kuChh kursi-yaaN **xari:d- a:/i:/e/iiN**
Ram.ERG one pillow.M.Sg and some chair-F.Pl buy-PFV.M.Sg/F.Sg/M.Pl/F.Pl
'Ram bought a pillow and some chairs'

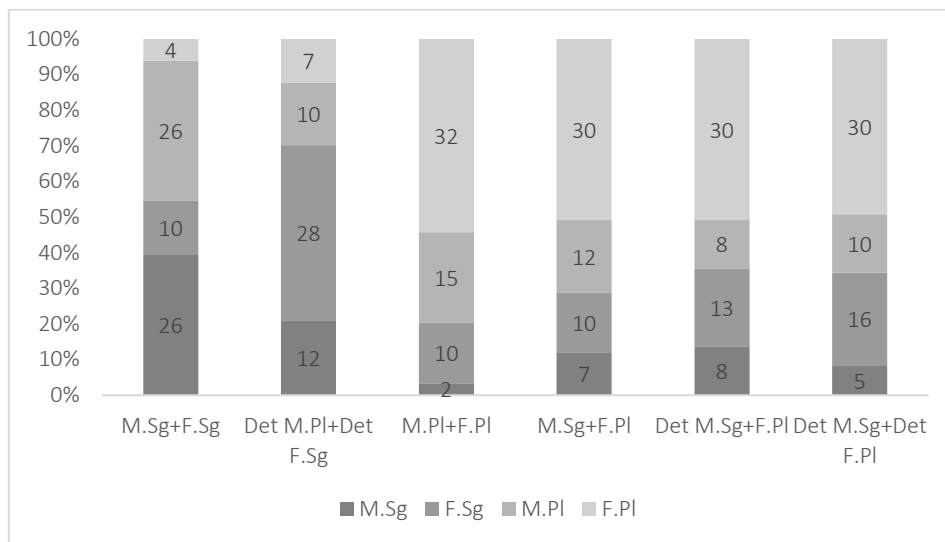


Figure 1

NP1+NP2	M.Sg	F.Sg	M.Pl	F.Pl
a. M.Sg+F.Sg	26	10	26	4
b. Det M.Pl+Det F.Sg	12	28	10	7
c. M.Pl+F.Pl	2	10	15	32
d. M.Sg+F.Pl	7	10	12	30
e. Det M.Sg+F.Pl	8	13	8	30
f. Det M.Sg+Det F.Pl	5	16	10	30

Table 1

With the F.Sg final conjunct (in the first column), only 10 of the recorded responses displayed a preference for Feminine Singular agreement. One can observe a much stronger preference for Masculine Plural agreement, which is the resolved agreement strategy, or Masculine Singular agreement, which can be the highest conjunct, or the default agreement strategy. I assume this is default agreement and not agreement with the highest conjunct. This can be inferred from figure 2, where the final conjunct is masculine, and the highest conjuncts are feminine. There is almost no tendency to agree with the highest conjunct at all, therefore the assumption that Masculine Singular agreement is a case of default agreement and not highest conjunct agreement seems to be sound.

In the second column, we can see that when there is a determiner (or quantifier) *ek*, ‘one’ before the final conjunct, the tendency towards agreeing with the final conjunct increases substantially. However, 28 is still fewer than half of all the responses that opted for CCA. There were 12 responses in favour of Masculine Singular agreement (default agreement) and 10 in favour of Masculine Plural or resolved agreement.

The tendency towards CCA also seems to increase when the closest conjunct is Feminine Plural. Even so, only about half the responses show CCA. In the third column above is where most people opted for Feminine Plural agreement, and this is where the first conjunct is also plural. Now we turn our attention to instances of object agreement when the last conjunct is Masculine Singular

4. Masculine Agreement Is Pervasive

In the sentences in (3), the final conjunct is Masculine, in SOV word order, so the expected CCA pattern to be expected is agreement with the last conjunct. As one can see from even a cursory glance, respondents seem to be more willing to agree with masculine singular nouns when it is the conjunct close to the verb than when the close conjunct was feminine.

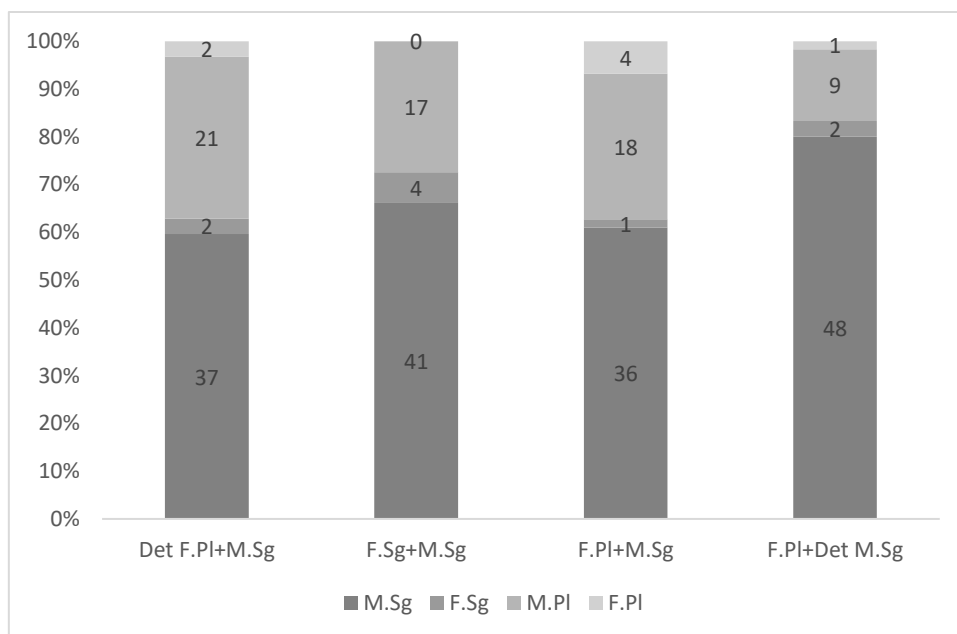


Figure 2

NP1+NP2	M.Sg	F.Sg	M.PI	F.PI
a. Det F.PI+M.Sg	37	2	21	2
b. F.Sg+M.Sg	41	4	17	0
c. F.PI+M.Sg	36	1	18	4
d. F.PI+Det M.Sg	48	2	9	1

Table 2

(3) Conjoined object NP agreement in canonical position, where expected agreement is with the final conjunct.

- a. a:dil-ne ka:fi: sa:ri: kami:z-eN o:r jhola **xari:d-a:/i:/e/iN**
 Adil-ERG enough all.F.PI shirt.F-PI and bag.MSg buy-PFV.M.Sg/F.Sg/M.PI/F.PI
 ‘Adil bought quite a few shirts and one bag’
- b. zoya-ne cu:Di o:r ju:ta **xari:d-a:/i:/e/iN**
 Zoya-ERG bangle.F.Sg and shoe.M.Sg buy.PFV-M.Sg/F.Sg/M.PI/F.PI
 ‘Zoya bought bangle and shoe’
- c. a:dil-ne kami:z-eN o:r jhola **xari:d-a:/i:/e/iN**

Adil-ERG shirt.F-Pl and bag.M.Sg buy.PFV-M.Sg/F.Sg/M.Pl/F.Pl
'Adil bought shirts and a bag'

- d. a:dil-ne kami:z-eN ɔ:r ek jhola xari:d-a:/i:/e/iiN
Adil-ERG shirt.F-Pl and one bag.M.Sg buy-PFV.M.Sg/F.Sg/M.Pl/F.Pl
'Adil bought shirts and one bag'

When the closest conjunct is Masculine, we see that respondents opt for Closest Conjunct Agreement more frequently and consistently. All of the environments where the last conjunct is Masculine show a greater preference for CCA than any of the instances where the last conjunct is Feminine.

The possible reason for this is that Masculine Singular is both the CCA strategy as well as the default agreement strategy. Besides this, other factors also seem to influence the presence of Masculine Singular agreement. We see that the environment for which there is the highest occurrence of masculine singular agreement is when the final conjunct NP is Masculine Singular with a determiner, where 48 of the 60 responses were in favour of M.Sg agreement. This indicates that determiners do affect CCA tendency. On the other hand, we see that the environment where most respondents opted for Resolved Agreement when the first conjunct is a Feminine Plural NP with a determiner.

The consistent preference for masculine singular CCA as opposed to feminine singular CCA can be explained by Anttila (1997), who holds the position that when there are multiple grammatical strategies which have the same surface result, that result is likely to be numerically more represented. In this case, since masculine singular is the agreement strategy for CCA as well as the default agreement strategy, its presence is more represented numerically.

The data from these sets also shows that the instances of MSg agreement shown in figure 1 weren't instances of highest conjunct agreement, but of default agreement, because there is negligible agreement seen with highest conjunct when the highest conjunct is feminine. From these data points, one can infer that CCA is definitely a strategy available for object agreement, but it may not be the most prevalent one.

5. First Conjunct Agreement Environment Patterns

Let us now turn our attention to environments where one can expect First Conjunct Agreement. Hindi-Urdu allows scrambling, and there can be instances where the agreeing verb is linearly adjacent to the target NP (in SVO order), but there can be intervening NPs between the probe and the goal, like in instances where the verb agrees with the object, but the subject NP intervenes between the verb and conjoined object, or VSO orders.

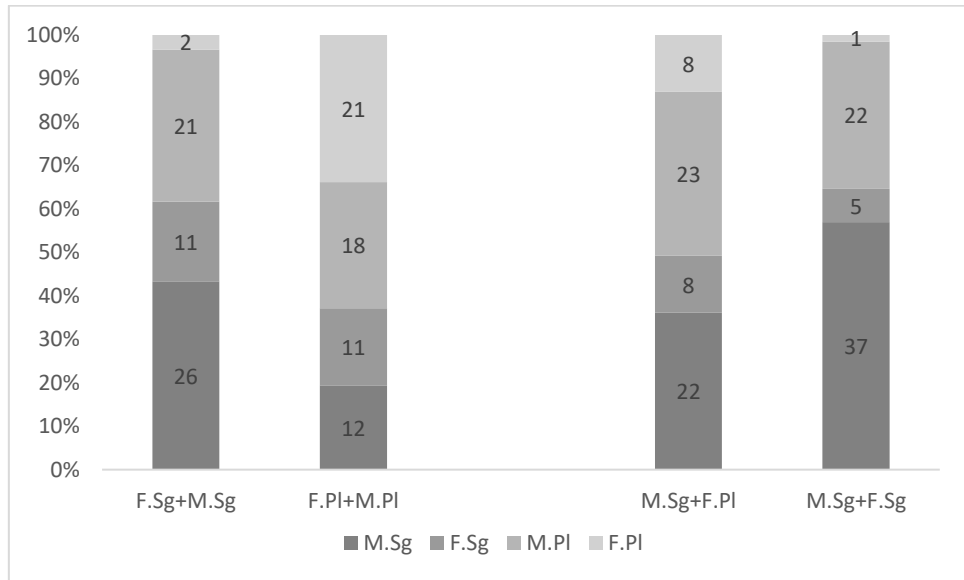


Figure 3

NP1+NP2	M.Sg	F.Sg	M.Pl	F.Pl
a. F.Sg+M.Sg	26	11	21	2
b. F.Pl+M.Pl	12	11	18	21
c. M.Sg+F.Pl	22	8	23	8
d. M.Sg+F.Sg	37	5	22	1

Table 3

(4) Expecting First Conjunct Agreement

- a. zoya-ne **xari:d-a:/i:/e/iiN** cu:Di o:r ju:ta
 Zoya-ERG buy.PFV-M.Sg/F.Sg/M.Pl/F.Pl bangle.F.Sg and shoe.M.Sg
 ‘Zoya bought bangle and shoe’
- b. zoya-ne **xari:d-a:/i:/e/iiN** cu:Di-yaaN o:r ju:te
 Zoya-ERG buy.PFV-M.Sg/F.Sg/M.Pl/F.Pl bangle.F.Pl and shoe.M.Pl
 ‘Zoya bought bangles and shoes’
- c. ra:m-ne **xari:d-a:/i:/e/iiN** təkya: o:r kursi-yaaN
 Ram-ERG buy.PFV-M.Sg/F.Sg/M.Pl/F.Pl pillow.M.Sg and chair.F.Pl
 ‘Ram bought (a) pillow and chairs’
- d. a:dil-ne **khari:d-a:/i:/e/iiN** təkyaa o:r caddar
 Adil-ERG buy.PFV-M.Sg/F.Sg/M.Pl/F.Pl pillow.M.Sg and bedsheet.F.Sg
 ‘Adil bought (a) pillow and (a) bedsheet’

When the first conjunct is feminine singular, 11 of the responses chose feminine singular, while 26 opted for default/second conjunct agreement and 21 for resolved agreement. This is consistent with

mixed gender conjunct agreement in the canonical SOV position. Compare the responses to sentence (4a) in figure 3 with the first set of answers in figure 1. The data is consistent for the two. However, compare the second set of answers in this figure with the third set of answers in figure 1. There are 21 responses for F.Pl agreement, but in the canonical SOV order, there were 32 responses in favour of last conjunct agreement, when the final conjunct is F.Pl.

In the M.Pl+F.Pl postverbal construction, there were only 2 responses in favour of default, Masculine Singular agreement, but in the SVO word order here, there were 12 responses in favour of default agreement.¹

Interestingly, more people opted for Masculine singular agreement in the first set of answers, where first conjunct is expected in F.Sg+M.Sg environments at 26 than when the closest conjunct is masculine singular, in M.Sg+F.Pl environment at 22. (Compare the first and third set of answers in figure 5).

The other puzzling thing about this data set is the presence of a sizable number of inexplicable responses – in F.Pl+M.Pl agreement, 11 people have opted for FSg agreement. This is not highest, closest, or resolved agreement. The only explanation I can think of is that the F.Pl and FSg morpheme are distinct only with respect to nasalization, and the distinction has blurred? (Having cross checked with some of the respondents who opted for FSg agreement, this does seem to be the case) Also, this is consistent with the SOV data sets shown above – between 10 and 16 people have opted for FSg when the closest conjunct is F.Pl. Bhatt and Keine (2017) have also noticed a trend of neutralization of the feminine plural morphological form.

Looking at the third set of answers in figure 5, First conjunct agreement is expected in MSg+F.Pl environments again, the presence of 8 F.Sg and 8 F.Pl agreement is puzzling. But again, one can see that the tendency to agree with a MSg conjunct is much higher when the gender is mixed than with F.Sg.

6. Determiner Effects

Presented below are the effect of a determiner (quantifier) on CCA, in passives and regular transitive verbs respectively. Last Conjunct Agreement is what is expected in these environments.

¹ There could be a generalisation that when the canonical word order is switched around, then more people opt for default agreement. However, I will hold off on this observation for lack of sufficient data and leave it for further work.

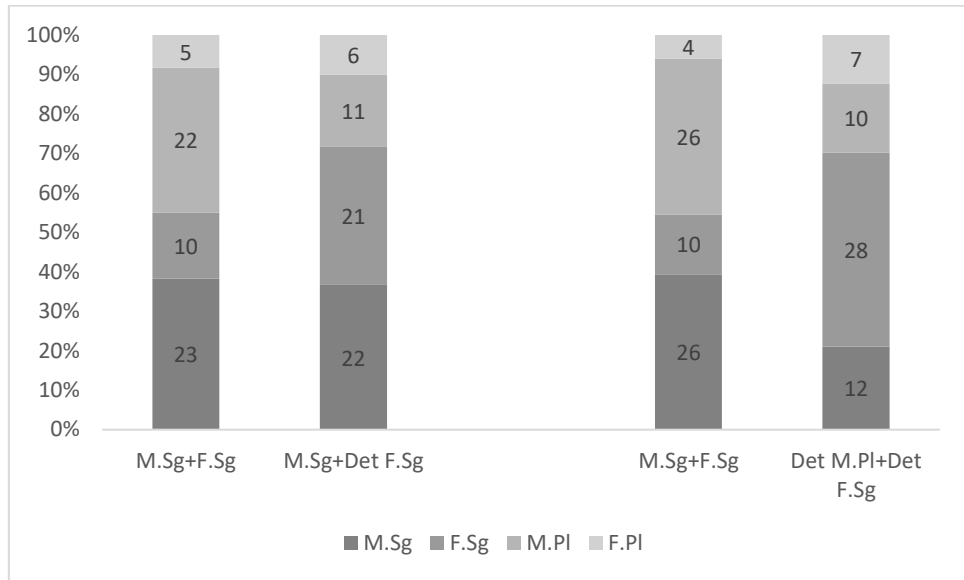


Figure 4

NP1+NP2	M.Sg	F.Sg	M.Pl	F.Pl
a. M.Sg+F.Sg	23	10	22	5
b. M.Sg+Det F.Sg	22	21	11	6
c. M.Sg+F.Sg	26	10	26	4
d. Det M.Pl+Det F.Sg	12	28	10	7

Table 4

(5) Determiner Effects on CCA:

- zoya-ko təkya: ɔ:r caddar di-ya: gəya:/di: gəyi:/diye gəye/diiN gəyiiN
Zoya-ACC pillow.MSg and bedsheet.FSg give-PFV.MSg /FSg/MPI/FPI
'Zoya was given (a) pillow and (a) bedsheet'
- zoya-ko təkya: ɔ:r ek caddar di-ya: gəya:/di: gəyi:/diye gəye/diiN gəyiiN
Zoya-ACC pillow.MSg and one bedsheet.FSg give-PFV.MSg/FSg/MPI/FPI
'Zoya was given (a) pillow and one bedsheet'
- a:dil-ne təkya: ɔ:r caddar xari:d-a:/i:/e/iiN
Adil-ERG pillow.MSg and bedsheet.FSg buy-PFV.M.Sg/F.Sg/M.Pl/F.Pl
'Adil bought (a) pillow and (a) bedsheet'
- Adil-ne kuChh jhol-e ɔ:r ek kami:z xari:d-a:/i:/e/iiN
Adil-ERG some bag.M.Pl and one shirt.F.Sg buy-PFV.M.Sg/F.Sg/M.Pl/F.Pl
'Adil bought a few bags and a shirt'

In the passive constructions, the agreement is taking place with the Direct Object, which precedes the verb in these constructions. One can see that in both these constructions, agreement with F.Sg is not the preferred strategy, but the number increases substantially when the second NP has a determiner. In the passive construction, the people who opted for F.Sg went up from 10 to 21 when there was a determiner, and with regular transitive constructions, it went up from 10 to 28. The determiner does seem to have quite an impact on the closest conjunct agreement facts.

7. Plural Effect on CCA

Speakers seem to opt for CCA more often if the closest conjunct is plural. Data to illustrate the point is given below.

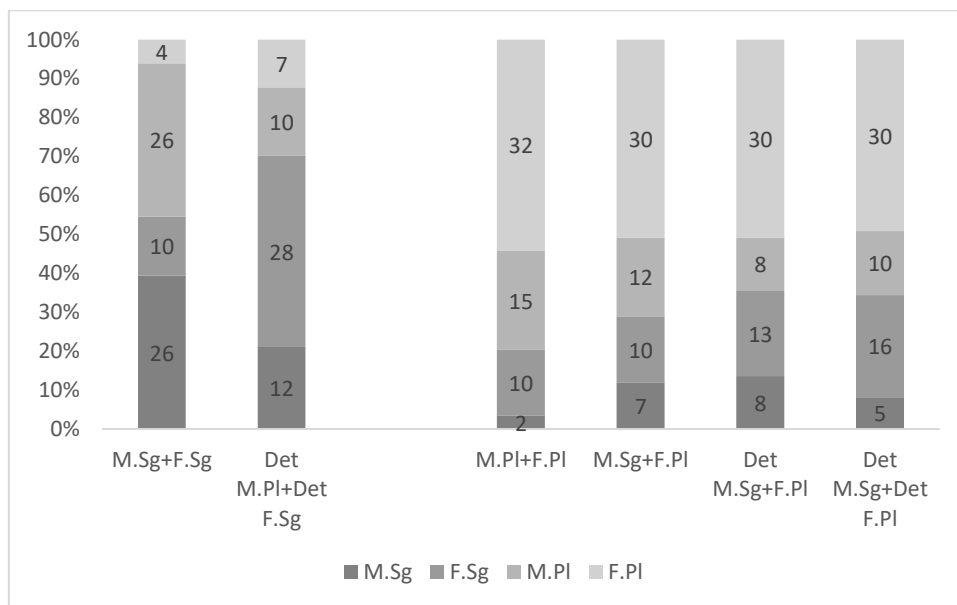


Figure 5

NP1+NP2	M.Sg	F.Sg	M.Pl	F.Pl
a. M.Sg+F.Sg	26	10	26	4
b. Det M.Pl+Det F.Sg	12	28	10	7
c. M.Pl+F.Pl	2	10	15	32
d. M.Sg+F.Pl	7	10	12	30
e. Det M.Sg+F.Pl	8	13	8	30
f. Det M.Sg+Det F.Pl	5	16	10	30

Table 5

(6) Feminine Singular vs Feminine Plural Final Conjunct Agreement

- a. Adil-ne təkya: ɔ:r caddar xari:d-a:/i:/e/iiN
 Adil-ERG pillow.MSg and bedsheet.FSg buy.PFV-M.Sg/F.Sg/M.Pl/F.Pl
 ‘Adil bought (a) pillow and (a) bedsheet’

- b. Adil-ne kuChh jhole ɔ:r ek kami:z **xari:d-a:/i:/e/iiN**
 Adil-ERG some bag.M.Pl and one shirt.F.Sg **buy.PFV-M.Sg/F.Sg/M.Pl/F.Pl**
 ‘Adil bought a few bags and a shirt’
- c. Ram-ne kutt-e ɔ:r billi-yaan **dek^h-a:/i:/e/iiN**
 Ram.ERG dog.M.Pl and cat.F.Pl **saw.PFV- M.Sg/F.Sg/M.Pl/F.Pl**
 ‘Ram saw dogs and cats’
- d. Ram-ne təkya: ɔ:r kursi-yaaN **xari:d-a:/i:/e/iiN**
 Ram.ERG pillow.M.Sg and chair.F.Pl **buy.PFV-M.Sg/F.Sg/M.Pl/F.Pl**
 ‘Ram bought a pillow and chairs’
- e. Ram-ne ek təkya: ɔ:r kursi-yaaN **xari:d-a:/i:/e/iiN**
 Ram.ERG one pillow.M.Sg and chair.F.Pl **buy-M.Sg/F.Sg/M.Pl/F.Pl**
 ‘Ram bought a pillow and chairs’
- f. Ram-ne ek təkya: ɔ:r kuChh kursi-yaaN **khari:d-a:/i:/e/iiN**
 Ram.ERG one pillow.M.Sg and some chair.F.Pl **buy.PFV-M.Sg/F.Sg/M.Pl/F.Pl**
 ‘Ram bought a pillow and some chairs’

As stated above, the determiner *ek*, ‘one’ appears to increase the tendency for CCA. When there was no determiner, only 10 responses chose Feminine Singular agreement, but when the final conjunct NP has a determiner, there were 28 responses that went for Feminine Singular agreement.

However, when the final conjunct is Feminine Plural, we see CCA more frequently and consistently. The puzzling point about respondents opting for Feminine Singular Agreement when the CCA is Feminine Plural, and the first conjunct is Masculine still persists. This is something that needs to be explored for future work.

8. Observations

One can see that CCA is not obligatory; it is not even the preferred agreement strategy. However, it is definitely an option that is available for speakers of Hindi-Urdu. In subject agreement, resolved agreement is by far the most widely used grammatical strategy, but factors such as the presence of plurals may create attraction effects and agreement with a single conjunct may take place. With object agreement, there is less consensus on the preferred agreement mechanism, and CCA is one of the available mechanisms. Observations from Bhatia (2011) are accurate here, in that the spec-head relation in addition to the Agree mechanism strengthens agreement in the subject position, leading to consistent resolved agreement and not a lot of instances of CCA or default agreement. In the case of object agreement, since there is no spec-head relation, agreement is not strengthened, there are more variations among speakers on what agreement strategies they can use, so one can see instances of CCA, Resolved Agreement, as well as Default Agreement. CCA is only one of the options available to a speaker when conjuncts are involved in the agreement with object position.

In this study conducted, not a lot of instances of singular CCA could be seen, especially when the closest conjunct was Feminine. However, one could see a lot more instances of Masculine singular agreement, but that could be explained by the fact that masculine singular agreement is also the morphological realisation of the default agreement strategy, which is consistent with the Anttila (1997) generalization, which is that if different strategies lead to the same surface result, that result will be more represented.

Most speakers use multiple grammatical strategies, resulting in intraindividual variation. This is in line with the experimental study conducted by Marušič et al (2015) in Slovenian, where speakers did use different grammatical strategies available. In their experiment from the 31 participants in the study, only 3 speakers consistently used the same agreement options, and all the other respondents used multiple options for agreement.

While CCA may not be the preferred option for object agreement when the nearest conjunct is a bare NP, it was noticed that there are factors that increase the tendency towards CCA. The closer the linear distance between the target VP and the controller NP, the greater was the tendency towards CCA was noticed. Additionally, when the closest NP contained a determiner, there was a greater tendency towards CCA. The tendency towards CCA was also seen to increase when the closest NP was plural.² Some of the factors that substantially increase the occurrence of CCA in the object position also seem to have an effect on subject agreement to a much lesser degree, such as having a plural in the closest conjunct and linear distance.

Bošković (2011), and Marušič et al (2015) assert that the ConjP cannot be specified for gender, and can only be specified for number, which in Hindi-Urdu would have to be plural. This assertion could apply to conjunctions in Hindi-Urdu, in which case Resolved Agreement could be plural agreement + default gender agreement. In subject agreement where both the conjuncts are feminine, agreement can be feminine plural or masculine plural. This could mean that the spec-head relation strengthens only the number agreement and not actually gender.

The second part of their assertion is that while number on NPs is valued and interpretable, the gender is valued and uninterpretable. This means that the gender feature can get checked before spell-out.

In the existing analyses for agreement in Hindi-Urdu, default agreement only seems to be a last resort when there aren't any unmarked NPs available to agree with. It is claimed that default agreement only takes place when both subject and object NPs are overtly case marked, so they are blocked as agreement targets. While this may be true when there ConjPs are not involved in the agreement process, default agreement definitely seems to be an option when there is a ConjP in the object position. From the data, it was observed that default agreement was preferred over CCA when the closest conjunct was a bare feminine singular NP.

² The tendency towards CCA when there is a determiner or plural could be for reasons of focus or other pragmatic reasons, and needs to be studied further.

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