

Agreement as DSM¹

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- Aissen (2003): Subject-markedness bears the inverse relation to the definiteness hierarchy as object-markedness. The more definite a subject is, the less marked it is (while the more definite an object it, the more marked it is).
- Peter's claim: Subject-markedness bears the same relation to the definiteness hierarchy as object-markedness, but subjects are marked by verb agreement rather than case.
- Definiteness Hierarchy: 1st, 2nd > 3rd > Name > Definite > Specific Indefinite > Non-specific Indefinite

Observation 1: In some languages, agreement marks subject-specificity, just as case marks object-specificity in other languages.

Differential object marking in Turkish: a marked object is specific or higher on the definiteness hierarchy (Dede, 1986; Enç, 1991; Kornfilt, 1995). A specific indefinite refers back to a part of a previously mentioned plurality (Enç, 1991).

- (1) Zeynep Ali-*(yi) / on-*(u) / adam-*(i) / o masa-*(yi) gördü
Zeynep Ali-*(acc) / he-*(acc) / the-man-*(acc) / that table-*(acc) saw
'Zeynep saw Ali/him/the man/that table.'
- (2) Odam-a birkaç çocuk girdi
my-room-dat several child entered
'Several children entered my room.'
 - a. İki kız-i tanıyordum
two girl-acc I-knew
'I knew two of the girls.' [specific]
 - b. İki kız tanıyordum
two girl I-knew
'I knew two girls.' [non-specific]

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Differential subject marking in Levantine Arabic: agreement with the subject is generally obligatory regardless of order (VS or SV). But for a class of intransitive verbs (roughly the unaccusatives), agreement with a post-verbal indefinite subject is optional. In this case, verb agreement marks the specificity of the subject. Specific DPs refer back to a previously introduced discourse referent, non-specific DPs introduce a new discourse referent.

- (3) a. ġaraʔ-*(o) l-ʔawārib.
sank-*(P) the-boats
'The boats sank.'
- b. ġaraʔ-(o) tlāt ʔawārib.
sank-(P) three boats
'Three boats sank.'
- (4) ma raǰʔ-o ʔiddat ʔawārib šīd baʔd l-ʔašife, wa baʔdēn smiʔ-na
not returned-P several boats fishing after the-storm, and afterwards heard-1P
inno...
that
'Several fishing boats didn't return after the storm, and afterwards we heard that...'
- a. ġarʔ-o tlāt ʔawārib.
sank-P three boats
'three boats sank.' [specific]
- b. ġaraʔ tlāt ʔawārib.
sank three boats
'three boats sank.' [non-specific]
- (5) l-mufattišīn faḥṣ-o ʔiddet mašāniʔ, wa baʔdēn...
the-inspectors inspected-P several factories, and afterwards
'The inspectors inspected several factories, and afterwards...'
- a. ḥtarʔ-o tlāt mašāniʔ.
burned.down-P three factories
'three factories burned down.' [specific]
- b. ḥtaraʔ tlāt mašāniʔ.
burned.down three factories
'three factories burned down.' [non-specific]
- (6) šōfōr l-baṣ ʔell-na inno ʔiddet baṣāt ʔilʔ-o bi-ʔažʔet sīr, wa baʔdēn
driver the-bus told-us that several buses stuck-3PL in-jam traffic and afterwards
smiʔ-na inno...
heard-1P that
'The bus driver told us that several buses were stuck in traffic, and afterwards we heard that...'
- a. waṣl-o tlāt baṣāt mʔaxxarīn
arrived-3PL three buses late
'three buses arrived late.' [specific]

- b. waṣil tlāt baṣāt mʔaxxarīn
 arrived three buses late
 ‘three buses arrived late.’ [non-specific]
- (7) waṣl-it ǰamāʕat suwwāḥ mbāriḥ, wa l-yōm...
 arrived-FS group tourists yesterday, and today
 ‘A group of tourists arrived yesterday, and today...’
- a. dāʕi-o tlāt suwwāḥ bi-l-madīne.
 got.lost-P three tourists in-the-city
 ‘three tourists got lost in the city.’ [specific]
- b. dāʕi tlāt suwwāḥ bi-l-madīne.
 got.lost three tourists in-the-city
 ‘three tourists got lost in the city.’ [non-specific]

Observation 2: Cross-linguistic and diachronic variation in agreement-markedness ‘tracks’ the definiteness hierarchy.

Modern Levantine Arabic: Agreement for pronominal, definite and specific postverbal subjects but not for non-specific postverbal subjects.

Classical Arabic: Agreement in number for pronominal but not definite, specific or non-specific postverbal subjects (agreement in gender is always present) (Wright, 1981).

- (8) a. ḥaḍar-at (hiya) l-qāḍiy-a
 came-3FS she the-judge-ACC
 ‘She came before the judge.’
- b. ḥaḍar-na (hunna) l-qāḍiy-a
 came-3FP they_{FP} the-judge-ACC
 ‘They (F) came before the judge.’
- c. ḥaḍar-at l-nisāʔ-u / nisāʔ-un l-qāḍiy-a
 came-3FS the-women-NOM / women-NOM.INDEF the-judge-ACC
 ‘(The) women came before the judge.’
- (9) CA LA
 Pro | Def Indef_{Spec} | Indef_{Non-Spec}

Standard European Portuguese: Agreement for all subjects.

Colloquial European Portuguese a la Costa (2001): Agreement obligatory for pronominal but optional for definite and indefinite postverbal subjects (condition: the subject is postverbal and the verb is unaccusative).

- (10) a. Fecharam / fechou muitas fábricas.
 closed-3P / closed-3S many factories
 ‘Many factories closed.’

- b. Chegaram / chegou as cadeiras.
arrived-3P / arrived-3S the chairs
'The chairs arrived.'
- c. Chegaram / *chegou eles.
arrived-3P / arrived-3S they
'They arrived.'

- (11) CP SP
Pro | Def Indef_{Spec} Indef_{Non-Spec} |

Observation 3: Agreement correlates with subject prominence, just as case correlates with object prominence.

Turkish: Non-specific indefinite objects (which are not case marked) must appear adjacent to the verb, while specific indefinites (which are case marked) may appear further to the left.

Enç (1991):

- (12) a. Yedinci sınıf-a iki çocuk gönderdim
seventh grade-DAT two child I.sent
'I sent two children to the seventh grade.' [non-specific]
- b. İki çocuğ-*(u) yedinci sınıf-a gönderdim
two child-ACC seventh grade-DAT I.sent
'I sent two of the children to the seventh grade.' [specific]

Kornfilt (1995):

- (13) a. Ahmet bütün gün pasta ye-di.
Ahmet whole day cake eat-PAST
'Ahmet ate cake all day long.'
- b. pasta-*(y) Ahmet dün akşam ye-di.
cake-ACC Ahmet yesterday evening eat-PAST
'Ahmet ate the cake yesterday evening.'

Levantine Arabic:

- (14) a. ġaraʔ-(o) tlāt ʔawārib.
sank-(P) three boats
'Three boats sank.'
- b. tlāt ʔawārib ġaraʔ-*(o).
three boats sank-*(P)
'Three boats sank.'

Classical Arabic

- (15) a. ḥaḍar-at l-nisāʔ-u l-qāḍiy-a.
came-3FS the-women-NOM the-judge-ACC
'The women came before the judge.'
- b. ʔal-nisāʔ-u ḥaḍar-na l-qāḍiy-a.
the-women-NOM came-3FP the-judge-ACC
'The women came before the judge.'

Colloquial European Portuguese:

- (16) a. Chegaram / chegou as cadeiras.
arrived-3P / arrived-3S the chairs
'The chairs arrived.'
- b. As cadeiras chegaram / *chegou.
the chairs arrived-3P / *arrived-3S
'The chairs arrived.'

Greenberg's universal #33: "When number agreement between the noun and verb is suspended and the rule is based on order, the case is always one in which the verb precedes and the verb is in the singular" (Greenberg, 1963).

Observation 4: Case and agreement are broadly complementary

Keenan's subject property 3.3: "The NPs which control verb agreement, if any, include basic subjects" (Keenan, 1976).

Greenberg's universal #38: "Where there is a case system, the only case which ever has only zero allomorphs is the one which includes among its meanings that of the subject of the intransitive verb" (Greenberg, 1963).

Observation 5: Sometimes agreement marks high definiteness and prominence for objects.

Kiswahili (Perrott, 1983)

- (17) a. U-me-let-a kitabu?
you-PERF-brought-INDIC book
'Have you brought a book?'
- b. U-me-ki-let-a kitabu?
you-PERF-OM-brought-INDIC book
'Have your brought the book (the particular one I wanted)?'

Chicheŵa (Bresnan and Mchombo, 1987):

- (18) a. Njûchi zi-ná-lúm-a alenje.
 bees SM-PAST-bite-INDIC hunters
 ‘The bees bit the hunters.’
 b. * Alenje njûchi zi-ná-lúm-a.
 hunters bees SM-PAST-bite-INDIC
- (19) a. Njûchi zi-ná-wá-lum-a alenje.
 bees SM-PAST-OM-bite-INDIC hunters
 ‘The bees bit them, the hunters.’
 b. Alenje njûchi zi-ná-wá-lum-a.
 hunters bees SM-PAST-OM-bite-INDIC
 ‘The hunters, the bees bit them.’
- (20) a. Mw-a-bwerets-a bûku?
 you-perf-bring-indic book
 ‘Have you brought a/the book?’
 b. Mw-a-lí-bwérets-a bûku?
 you-PERF-OM-bring-INDIC book
 ‘Have you brought one/it, a/the book?’
- (21) A: Katenje wa-ndí-úza kutí a-na-gúlá mabúkú ámbîri ndiyé
 Katenje SM-PERF-me-tell that he-REC.PAST-buy books many so
 nd-a-mú-úza kutí a-ti-bwéréts¹éré límôdzi.
 I-PERF-him-tell that he-us-bring one
 ‘Katenje has told me that he bought a lot of books, so I have told him to bring
 us one.’
 B: Koma wa-bwera, ali panjâpo.
 But he.PERF-arrived, he.be outside
 ‘But he’s arrived, he’s outside.’
 A: Chábwino, ndi-ká-mú-funsa. Katenje, mw-a-lí-bwéretsa bûku?
 fine I-go-him-ask. Katenje, you-PERF-OM-bring book
 ‘Okay, I’ll go ask him. Katenje, have you brought us one, a book?’

“Note that the interlocutors have no particular, definite, or specific book in mind... The topic NP is used for information *previously mentioned in the discourse*, whether or not it is something specific or definite” (Bresnan and Mchombo, 1987, italics added).

French (Sportiche, 1996)

- (22) a. Marie les_i aura présentés *pro*_i à Louis.
Marie AGR will.have introduced them to Louis
'Marie will have introduced them to Louis.'
- b. * Marie les_i aura présentés les/des Canadiens_i à Louis.
Marie AGR will.have introduced the/∅ Canadians to Louis

- (23) Fr Ki Ch
 Pro | Def | Indef_{Spec} | Indef_{Non-Spec}

Conclusion

- Agreement is 'markedness' for subjects.
- Subject and object markedness have the same orientation to the definiteness hierarchy (not the inverse orientation).
- Subjects as such are not less marked than objects, they're just marked differently.

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