

Encoding of the Hindi-Urdu Possessive Construction and Hindi-Urdu Idioms: Pedagogical Approaches

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Abstract

Hindi-Urdu uses different encoding for possessors. There is no Hindi-Urdu equivalent of the English verb 'to have', even though there are ways to express this meaning using different sentential structures. Mohanan (1994) talks about 'possession' in the realm of Genitive Logical Subject, and suggests that kaa/ke/kiiis used when the relationship of the possessed entity to the possessor involves kinship or friendship, whereas kepaasis employed when the relation is that of ownership. Pandharipande (1981b) talks about the difference by arguing that kepaasis used when the relationship is purely of material ownership, and kaais used to express emotional attachment, intimacy or inalienable possession. I would like to look at the issue from a different perspective. I would like to look at possession in Hindi-Urdu through the lens of animacy, and discuss this issue by comparing Hindi-Urdu with English, and giving illustrations of my experience. This is one of the most common mistakes of Hindi/Urdu students, and it would be best if students new to the language could avoid the same misstep through early intervention. This paper will also look at this feature in other East Asian languages, such as Japanese, Korean, and Chinese and compare them with Hindi-Urdu. Japanese in particular shows similarities to Hindi-Urdu in this linguistic feature. Animacy effects are not limited to affecting grammatical functions, and also come into play in the correct use of Hindi-Urdu idioms. Some idioms only apply to entities located highest on the animacy hierarchy, which are humans.

Keywords: animacy, possession, agent hood, encoding of idioms

Compared to other grammatical categories, the category of animacy has not received much attention in Hindi-Urdu language teaching/learning despite the fact that it can influence the grammaticality of sentence structures in Hindi-Urdu. My research shows that animacy plays a very important role in a range of linguistic phenomena in Hindi-Urdu, such as the choice of different subject and objects case-marking¹, different syntactic structures depending on the animacy/inanimacy of an agent in a sentence, possessive construction with different case markings and corrects encoding of idioms. Thus, understanding the role of noun animacy in relation to various other factors will contribute to correct sentence processing and production. This study will investigate how students of Hindi/Urdu in the US use the cues of animacy to process Hindi/Urdu sentence structures and produce the language in a grammatically correct way. Among the various linguistic phenomena related to animacy, this paper will examine the correlations between animacy and differential case marking of a possessor depending on the animacy of its possessed entities, restriction of inanimate subjects in active transitive sentences, encoding of Hindi-Urdu idioms, and how all of this impacts the learning process of Hindi-Urdu students. In exploring the issue of animacy in relation to the particular syntactic structures, I will use cross-linguistic data, especially from Japanese, Korean and Chinese. Japanese has similarities to Hindi-Urdu in regard to animacy in possessive construction. Lastly, the issue of animacy will be investigated in relation to its application to Hindi-Urdu idioms.

Comrie (1989) defined animacy as a hierarchy whose main components are:

Human > animal > inanimate

¹ This phenomenon has been discussed a lot and has received a lot of attention in Hindi-Urdu linguistics and language teaching, and this very feature in relation to animacy in South Asian languages is addressed and cited as a cross-linguistic feature in various linguistic research papers. (Asher and Kumari, 1997; Nagaraja, 1999;; Fauconner, 2011; Swart & et al, 2008, Mohanan. 1994) This specific feature will not be discussed in this paper due to the focus of this paper and lack of space.

Some languages distinguish it in two ways, such as animate versus inanimate. On the other hand, a much finer way was proposed by Yamamoto (1999).

Animacy Effects on the Encoding of the Hindi Possessive Construction

Hindi-Urdu uses different encoding for possessors depending on the animacy of the possessed entities. Look at the following three sentences in English where the same verb “to have” is used.²

- (1) a. Mary has a lot of books.
- b. Mary has three sons.
- c. Mary has a fever.

Hindi-Urdu students have a tendency to assume that the target language always has an equivalent into their native language. This still happens with students at intermediate and advanced levels who feel comfortable with the word order of the target language (which is quite different from that of the native language). There is no Hindi-Urdu equivalent of the English verb ‘to have,’ even though there are ways to express this meaning using different sentential structures. Mohanan (1994) talks about the relation of ‘possession’ in the realm of Genitive Logical Subject, and suggests that *kaa/ke/kii* is used when the relationship of the possessed entity to the possessor involves kinship or friendship, whereas *kepaas* (which she calls ‘locative case’) is employed when the relation is that of ownership. She further says the two markers can be used interchangeably in situations when the relationship may not be clear and convention does not clearly stipulate one³. Pandharipande (1981b) also talks about the difference by arguing that *kepaas* is used when the relationship is purely of material ownership, and *kaa* is used to express emotional attachment, intimacy or inalienable possession. I would like to look at the issue from a different perspective using the issue of animacy. Hindi-Urdu uses *kaa/kii/ke* postposition/genitive case when the possessed entities are animate (human) or nominal, highest on the animacy hierarchy, such as terms for relatives, friends, or lovers. This also includes human body parts, as *captain hook kiisirfeka Nkhhai* given in example (2.d) For all the possessive constructions, the verb *hona* “to be” is employed.

Hindi-Urdu

- (2) a. *kusum ke tiin bhaai haiN*
Kusum (f.) gen (m.pl.), three brothers are (pres. 3rd Pl.)
Kusum has three brothers.
- b. *raamke /kaakevaalekbeTaahai.*
Ram gen. Only one son be
Ram has only one son.
- c. **Simaakepaasekbehanhai.*
Sima (f.) near/ in possession one sister be
Sima has one sister.
- d. *captain hook kiisirfeka Nkhhai.*
Captain hook gen. only one eye (f.) be
Captain Hook has only one eye.

² .Citing Belvin (1993, 1996), Folli and Harley (2008) talk about the issue of animate subject .in relation to the verb ‘have’. So, the focus is on the animacy of possessors, not possessed entities. They said the “have” verb can be used for animate subjects when the possessed entities are inalienable and alienable ones, which covers almost everything. See the examples in (a & b). On the other hand, inanimate subjects can use the “have” verb when the possessor and the possessed entities are in a “meronymic relationship” This means the possessed entities are inalienable subparts of the inanimate subject. Examples (c & d) are given to illustrate this (Folli and Harvey, 2008:193)

- a. John has a broken arm.
- b. Johan has a car.
- c. The oak tree has many branches.
- d. *the oak tree has a family of birds.

³*Raam-kaa/raamke-paasekhiimakaanhai.* (Mohanan, 179)
Ram –gen/Ram-locone only house/building-N be-pre
Ram has/owns only one building.

On the contrary, when the possessed entities are inanimate, it uses a different postposition/locative case, *kepaas* “next to/near/in possession” as in *X kepaas s* “near /next to/in possession of X”. Look at the (3.a) example in which the logical subject, Kusum, is marked in *kepaas* is, as the possessed entity is books which are inanimate. As the example (3.b) shows, *kepaasis* used when the possessed entity is animal. There is some cultural difference here between the target and native countries. In America, pets are usually counted as members of a family, whereas this is not the case in India/Pakistan.

Hindi-Urdu

- (3) a. *kusumkepaas tiin kitaabeN haiN*
 Kusum (f.) near three books (f.)Are (pres.3rd Pl.)
 Kusum has three books.
- b. *sanjaykepaasekkuttaahai.*
 Sanjay-loc/pos.p.one dog be
 Sanjay has a dog.
- c. **sanjay kaaekkuttahai.*
 Sanjay (m.) gen. one dog be
 Sanjay has a dog.

There is another grammatical encoding in Hindi-Urdu for the English ‘to have’ verb as in “Anu has a fever.” or “I have a cold.” The Hindi-Urdu equivalent of this sentence would be “*anu-kobuKhaarhai.*” and “*mujh-kozukaamhai.*” respectively in which the logical subject Anu and I are marked in the dative case. This specific construction is called Dative Subject Construction (hereafter DSC) in Hindi-Urdu, and this particular construction occurs when the experiences are of feelings, sensation, perceptions, emotional experience, or a state of affairs⁴. So, this construction is also called Experiencer Subject Construction. Hindi-Urdu and other South Asian languages in general share the existence of the DSC. The eminent linguist Emeneau (1956) maintains that DSC is one of the features that can define India as a linguistic area. The phenomenon of DSC is also found in languages of other language groups. This feature can be found in both head final (Indic, Dravidian, Korean, Japanese, etc) and head initial languages (Italian, Spanish, Georgian, Russian, Polish, Icelandic, etc) As said earlier, Korean and Japanese have a similar construction, even though there is an issue of case alternation, which alters dative cased experiencer noun phrase (NP hereafter) to nominative cased experiencer NP in these languages. In other words, in Japanese and Korean, the experiencer NP marked in the dative case can occur with a nominative case marker. See the examples (5 &6) given below.

Hindi-Urdu

- (4) a. *aNu-kobuKhaarhai.*
 Anu-dat.fever be
 Anu has a fever.
- b. **Rahul kepaas bukhaarhai.*
 Rahul (m) Near/in possession fever be
 Rahul has a fever.
- c. *mujh-kozukaamhai.*
 Me-to cold be (pres.sg.3rd)
 I have a cold

Japanese

(Kuno 1973b:59)

- (5) a. *dare-nikore-gadekiru ka?*
 Who-dat. this-nom can-do Q
 Who can do this?
- b. *dare-gakore-gadekiruka?*

⁴. Swart (2008) examines the correlation between animacy, thematic roles, and grammatical functions, and says that determining which factor is playing a role in a given linguistic phenomenon is not always easy. She further says, citing Van Valin and LaPolla (1997), that roles close to the Actor of the “Macrorole hierarchy” are located higher than roles of the Undergoer on the hierarchy.

Who-nom this-nom can-do Q
Who can do this?

Korean

- (6) a. *na-eykey ton-iphilyoha-ta.*
I-dat money-nom need-dec.
I need money.
- b. *nay-ka ton-i philyoha-ta.*
I-nom money-nom need-dec.
I need money.

Japanese possessive sentence structures employ a different strategy, using two different verbs for “to be” depending on the animacy of the possessed entity. Animacy plays an important role in this construction. It utilizes “imas” for animate, and “arimas” for inanimate entities, respectively, as shown in (7a & b). Japanese uses different classifiers for animate and inanimate entities, *hutari* and *hutaz* respectively as shown in (7 a&b). Japanese has a very elaborate numeral classifier system. According to Pamela (1996), there is a corpus of 500 uses of classifier constructions. What is interesting is that a dead body is no longer considered to be animate, and “arimas” is used as in (7.c). Korean uses the same “to be” verb, *itta*, to express possession of animate and inanimate possessed entities. The animacy of a possessed entity in Korean is represented by the use of classifiers, *myung* “classifier for animates” and *kae* “classifier for inanimate entities”, as shown in ex. (8 a&b), but the classifiers can be dropped in informal/casual conversations. Chinese uses the same verb “yo” for animate and inanimate entities/possessions, as illustrated in ex.(9a&b)

Japanese informant

- (7) a. *kare-wamusume ga hutari imas*
He-top. Daughter nom two (class) to be/are
He has two daughters.
- b. *kare-wakabang-ga hutaz arimas.*
He-top bag -nom two (class) to be/ are
He has two bags.
- c. *kokonisitai ga arimas.*
Here dead body nom to be/is
There is a dead body here.

In Korean, different classifiers are used for animate and non-animate entities as shown in examples (8a&b). Although there are separate classifiers for animate and inanimate entities, sometimes people drop the classifiers in informal conversations. To some Koreans, the sentences without the classifiers might sound unnatural.

Korean

- (8) a. *keu-neunttal- i tumyung/tul iss-seupnita.*
He-top daughter-nom two (class)/two to be/are
He has two daughters.
- b. *keu-neunkabang-itu-kae/tul iss-seupnita.*
He-top bag -nom two-class to be/ are
He has two bags.

The Chinese equivalent of the English “to have” verb is *yo*. The same verb is used regardless of the animacy of possessed entities. The same classifier, ‘*ga*’ is used for animate and inanimate possessed entities in Chinese as shown in the examples (9 a&b). There is no distinction in terms of animacy

Chinese informant

- (9) a. *tā yǒu liǎnggè nǚér.*
He has two-class daughter.
He has two daughters.
- b. *tā yǒuliǎnggè bāo .*
He has two-class bag.
He has two bags.

The Correlation between Animacy Effects and Syntactic Structure

The issue of animacy and its interrelation with agenthood in Hindi-Urdu also influences the case marking of the inanimate agent and grammatical encoding of its subject. Thus, the whole sentence structure is affected by the animacy of the agent in Hindi-Urdu, an effect that can also be found cross-linguistically. Unlike English, the thematic role of agent plays an important role in Hindi-Urdu sentence structures, and the issue of animacy comes into play here. There are cases found cross-linguistically in which subjects of active transitive verbs are required to be animate. Thus, the grammaticality of case-marking and the choice of voice can be influenced by animacy distinction. Fauconnier (2011) came up with the notion of unexpectedness which says inanimates are atypical agents as they are not expected to occur in the agent role. She further argues that this nature of inanimate agents results in different agent markings (DAM) in some languages, or in other words, animacy-driven differential agent marking for animate and inanimate agents. In contrast to this, in some languages, there is a restriction on the use of inanimate agents, and she says that the former (DAM) is an uncommon phenomenon. Hindi-Urdu seems to belong to the second group of languages. Inanimate subjects in transitive clauses are impossible in Hindi-Urdu.⁵ This restriction can also be found in other languages, such as Japanese and Korean. This is well illustrated in the following examples.

English

(Verma, 1976:280)

- (10) a. The bus ran over him and killed him
b. He was run over and killed by the bus.

(Hindi-Urdu)

- (11) a. **bas- ne uskokucalkar maar diyaa*
Bus –erg he after trampling killed
The bus ran over and killed him.
b. *bas se vəh kucalkar mar gayaa*
Bus INS. He being trampled dies aux. (pst.m.sg)
He died after being run over by the bus. Korean
- (12) a. * *Bus-ka keu- leulcheoseo jukyeotta.*
Bus-nom.He-acc.hit/run over kill (pst)
The bus hit and killed him.
b. *keu-neun bus-eychiyeo jukeotta*
He-top bus-by hit/run over die (pst)
He died after being hit by the bus.

Japanese informant

- (13) a. **bas-gakare-o hii- te korosita.*
Bus-nom he-acc hit and kills (pst)
The bus ran over and killed him.
b. *kare-wa bas-ni hikarete korosareta.*
He-top bus-by be run over (VI) be killed (VI)
He was run over and killed by the bus.

⁵Fauconnier also discusses that in some languages, the restriction does not hold for all inanimates, but only applies to “a semantically well-defined subset”. In other words, inanimate Agents are possible when they are regarded as “autonomously acting entities” By this, she means “independent instigators which have not been manipulated by an implied animate controller.” This is illustrated in the following example.

Hare (DeLancey, 1984:186-187 via Fauconnier, 2011:539)

'idikone' ye-wehxi

lightning 3.O-kill.PST

'Lightning killed him.'

Hindi-Urdu seems to show the same feature as shown in the following example. This needs further investigation.

Hindi-Urdu (Hook, 1976: 66)

havaakejhoNkecanaarakaatanaajhukaarahethe.

Wind gen. gusts chinar tree gen. Trunk bend pro. pst.

The gusts of wind were bending the trunk of the chinar tree.

The phenomenon seen in Hindi-Urdu and illustrated in examples (11 a&b) is also upheld by cross-linguistic data, especially in Japanese and Korean. According to Branigan (2008), there is a preference for making an animate entity the sentence subject for syntactic prominence. Thus, if the animate entity is an agent, this will result in an active voice. On the other hand, if the patient is an animate entity, then this will result in a passive voice⁶. English speakers have a tendency to produce an active sentence when it involves an animate patient and inanimate agent. The example in (10.a) is still acceptable in English in which the patient ‘him’ is animate and the agent ‘bus’ is inanimate. However, the sentence in example (10b.), in which the animate patient is in the subject position of the passive voice, is preferable to most English speakers. On the other hand, in Hindi-Urdu, the *bas* ‘bus,’ which is an inanimate agent, can never occur as the grammatical subject as shown in (11 a), and the patient, *vəh* ‘he,’ which is animate is in the grammatical subject position of the intransitive verb which has a passive meaning as illustrated in (11 b). Unlike English, in passive sentences, like (11.b), Hindi-Urdu does not have to go through syntactic passivization, as Hindi-Urdu employs the intransitive verb *marnaa* “to die”, which is an unergative/intransitive counterpart of the transitive verb *maarnaa* “to kill”.

This restriction on the use of inanimate agents in Hindi-Urdu also appears when both the agent and the patient are inanimate. Normally, the inanimate entity cannot take the role of agent, so it does not occur as an agentive subject. For example, “The ball broke the window” is acceptable in English, but not in Hindi-Urdu, as seen in the examples below. In Hindi-Urdu, ‘the ball’ occurs in an instrument case, and ‘the window’ occurs as a grammatical subject which is a patient/theme. The sentence in Hindi-Urdu would be, “The window broke by the ball”(Verma, 1997). Again, the sentence does not have to be syntactically passivized, but the verb *to Rnaais* replaced by *Tuu Tnaa* “to be broken”/ “to get broken” which has the passive meaning (and I would like to call this “lexical passive”) Due to the fact that the verb is naturally passive, there is no need for it to be syntactically passivized.

English

- (14) The ball broke the window.

Hindi-Urdu

- (15) a. **gend ne khiRkiiko toRii/toR dii*
 Ball (m.sg) erg. Window (f.sg) breaks (vt.perf.part. f.sg.)
 The ball broke the window.
- b. *gend se khiRkii TuuTii/ TuuTgayii*
 Ball (m.sg.) by window (f.sg.) breaks (VI. Perf.part. f.sg.)
 The window broke by the ball.

The following Japanese and Korean examples demonstrate the similar feature as that of Hindi-Urdu. It clearly shows that active transitive verbs require the subject to be animate. Thus, animacy influences selection of grammatical function.

Japanese (Kuno, 1973:30 via Palmer, 1994:29)

- (16) a. **taihuuga mado o kowasita.*
 typhoonnom.SUBJ window OBJ broke (VT)
 The typhoon broke the window.
- b. *taihuu de madogakowareta*
 Typhoon by window nom broke (VI)
 The window broke by the typhoon.

Korean

- (17) a. **yakukong-i changmun-eulpuswetta.*
 Baseball-nom window-obj broke (VT)
 The baseball broke the window.

⁶ . Here, I meant a lexical passive construction, not a syntactic passive sentence. Hindi-Urdu has a lexical passive construction, which involves replacing a transitive verb with its passive intransitive counterpart. Hindi-Urdu has series of related verbs based on transitivity, such as the intransitive, transitive and causative verbs. This is a very productive grammatical device. Hindi-Urdu selects a different form for different grammatical function and category. As a result, the relation between form and function is very important in Hindi-Urdu.

- b. *yakukong-ttaemunei* *changmun-i* *pusweojeotta*
 Baseball because of window-sub broke (vi.)
 The window broke because of the baseball.

This restriction does not hold for animals, which are animate, although low on the animacy hierarchy, and *kutta*, “dog” still occurs as the subject shown in the following example. Korean shows the similar phenomenon in this respect as shown in ex.19.

- Hindi-Urdu**
- (18) *kutte* *ne* *usko* *bachaya*.
 Dog (obl.) erg he (acc.) saves (pst.m.sg)
 The dog saved him.

- Korean**
- (19) *kae-kasaram-eul* *kuhayetta*.
 Dog-nom person/human being-acc save (pst.)
 The dog saves a person.

Animacy and Asymmetries in Hindi-Urdu idioms

Animacy effects are not limited to affecting grammatical functions, but they also come into play in the correct use of Hindi-Urdu idioms. When students learn new idioms, they need to be properly instructed in how the new idioms are used in sentences, especially when they are animacy-related. There are idioms that are very clear and straightforward in the sense that they can only apply to humans, but a great number of idioms are not so transparent. Students generally learn idioms in context as they read texts, but somehow remember idioms more through their English meanings. Language students have a tendency to first think in their native language, and then translate into the target language. This works sometimes, but not always, especially when an issue of animacy is involved. The Hindi idiom, *nau-do gyaarahona* means ‘to run away’ in Hind-Urdu, and this idiom can be employed to humans and animals.

- (20) *puliskodekhhkar cor* *nau do gyaarah ho gayaa*.
 Police- acc. after seeing thief run away be went (m.sg)
 The thief ran away after seeing the police.
- (21) *cuuhaabillii kodekhhkar* *nau do gyaarah ho gayaa*.
 Mouse (m.) Cat acc. after seeing run away be went (m.sg)
 The mouse ran away after seeing the cat.

Some idioms are straightforward in that they cannot be used for non-human entities.

aNguuThaadikhaanaa, “to reject/defy” (literal meaning “to show a thumb”) is one of them. *aapraajaasaahab s rupaelekartijoriimeNrakhteaurmujheaNguuThaadikhaadete* (Godan– Premchand p.236) You take money from the king and put it in the iron safe, and refuse my request.

- (22) *(aap) mujheaNguuThaadikhaadete*.
 You me thumb show give (com.v.)
 You refuse my requests.
- (23) **kutte ne aNguuThaadikhaayaa*
 Dog -erg thumb show (past.sg.m.)
 The dog rejected (it).

Some idioms only apply to entities located highest on the animacy hierarchy, which are humans. The following is a good illustration. *calbasnaa* “to pass away” is a euphemistic expression of “to die” in Hindi-Urdu. This expression should not be employed to non-humans, as shown in the example (24,b).

- (24) a. *meriidaadii* *cal* *basiiN*
 Grandmother walk (v.s.) settles (pst.f.pl.) (Passed away)
 My grandmother passed away.
- b. **kutta cal basaa*
 Dog walk settle (pst.m.sg.)
 The dog passed away.

On the other hand, English counterpart, “pass away”, certainly sounds fine when applied to animals in English. If students remember these idioms by their English equivalents, they may later use them incorrectly, generalizing the same expression for humans and animals when they translate them back into Hindi-Urdu. Therefore, the teacher’s role is important in preventing students’ mistakes of this kind.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have investigated the interaction between animacy and morphological and syntactic encoding in Hindi-Urdu, and how they are reflected in various Hindi-Urdu sentence structures: the differential case marking of a possessor depending on the animacy of the possessed entity in possessive sentence structures, the restriction of inanimate subjects in active transitive sentences, and asymmetries in Hindi-Urdu idioms governed by animacy. This paper uses data from Korean, Japanese, and Chinese in addition to data from Hindi-Urdu and English as cross-linguistic data, and Japanese and Korean data shows patterns related to animacy effects similar to Hindi-Urdu. It is not appropriate to say that animacy is the only factor involved in the various morphological and syntactic grammatical functions, but it certainly is an important factor that influences differential encoding of subject/L-subject and object in various Hindi-Urdu sentential structures.

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