SUBJECT CASE MARKING IN URDU UNERGATIVE AND UNACCUSATIVE COMPOUND VERBS

MJ Warsi & Noman Tahir

Department of Linguistics
Aligarh Muslim University, India
Corresponding author:warsimj@gmail.com

This paper examines subject case marking with unergative verbs in Urdu compound verb constructions. Urdu has two types of intransitive verbs: unergative and unaccusative. While intransitive verbs typically take a nominative subject, unergative verbs may optionally take an ergative subject, indicating agentivity. Unergative compound verbs take an ergative subject when the light verb (V2) is transitive, but not when it is intransitive. Unaccusative compound verbs, however, always take nominative subjects as they cannot combine with transitive light verbs. Thus, the transitivity of the light verb influences the ergative marking in unergative, but not unaccusative, constructions.

Keywords: Subject case marking, transitivity, unergative vs. unaccusative verb, light verb constructions, Urdu.

1. Introduction

Many Indo-Aryan languages, including Urdu, employ different case markings for subjects and objects. The marking for the subject can vary between nominative and ergative cases. Specifically, when transitive verbs are in the imperfective aspect, the subject takes the nominative case. Conversely, in the case of transitive verbs with the perfective aspect, the subject is marked with the ergative case.[1]

Object case markings depend on both animacy and specificity. A direct object is marked with the accusative case if it is animated and specific. If the direct object is either inanimate or non-specific, it is marked with the nominative case, which is unmarked for arguments.

(1) a. ahmad
       Ahmad.NOM.3SG.M
       a:m
       mango. NOM.3SG.M
       kha-ta   hai
       eat- IMP.SG.M   be.PRS.3SG
       'Ahmad eats mango.'

    b. ahmad   a:m-ko
       Ah.NOM.3SG. M   mango- ACC.3SG.M
       kha-ta   hai
       eat-IMP.SG.M   be. PRS.3SG
       'Ahmad eats mango.'

    c. ahmad-ne   sali:m-ko
       Ahm-ERG.3SG.M   saleem-ACC.3SG.M.
       dekha
       see.PFV.SG.M
       'Ahmad looked at Saleem.'

    d. ahmad-ne   a:m
       Ahm-ERG.3SG.M   mango.NOM.3SG.M
       kha-ya
       eat.PFV.SG.M
       'Ahmad ate a mango.'

In the given example 1(a), the subject *Ahmad* is marked with the nominative case instead of the ergative case due to the presence of the imperfective verb *kha-ta*. In example 1(b), the object *a:m* takes the accusative case marker *ko* as a result of its specificity. Typically, animate objects (as seen in example 1(c)) take the accusative case, but the accusative marker *ko* can also be used after the object to indicate specificity.

1.1   Subject differentiation in Urdu

Differential subject marking in Urdu presents a significant challenge for analysis based on case distinction. In transitive clauses where the

---

[1] See Surtani & Paul (2011), Park & Lakshmanan (2007), Chandra & Udaar (2017) and Chakrabarti et al., (2008) for more insights.

subject and object are not minimally distinct, one might expect that the case marking of the object would suffice to clarify roles. According to Aissen (1999, 2003) there is no need to further indicate the subject of a transitive clause in the perfective aspect using the ergative case.

In Urdu, however, the ergative case marking of the subject in perfective transitive clauses does not appear to arise from any inherent weakness of the subject. Specifically, subjects in perfective clauses are neither weaker nor more similar to objects than subjects in imperfective clauses. Following Aissen's theory, one would anticipate overt case marking for non-canonical subjects, such as weak agents (e.g., inanimate or non-volitional subjects). Contrarily, the subject of a perfective transitive clause, which typically denotes the agent of an action that completes an event, is often viewed as strongly agentive (Dowty, 1991). This situation aligns with a high degree of transitivity (Hopper & Thompson, 1980), which challenges Aissen's prediction of a weak agent.

Further evidence that the ergative case marker *ne* is linked to the characteristics of potent agents can be seen in constructions where its use is not obligatory. Intransitive predicates lack a second argument, yet case marking is employed to resolve specific ambiguities allowed by the semantics of the predicate. For a limited number of verbs that denote "bodily emission," the singular argument may or may not take the ergative case. The presence of the ergative case marking suggests that the agent is perceived as volitional or in control of the event described by the predicate, aligning them with the prototypical agent in such contexts (Butt & King, 1991; Mohanan, 1994; Lee, 2006).

Similarly, subject arguments can vary in case between nominative and ergative forms in unaccusative and unergative verbs. In this case, the subject of an unaccusative verb is marked with the nominative case, while the subject of an unergative verb may take the ergative case, though this marking is optional.

(2 a. ahmad-ne/ ahmad
   Ah-ERG.3SG.M Ah.NOM.3.SG.M
   khã:sa
   cough.PFV.SG.M
   'Ahmad coughed.'

  b. ahmad-e*/ ahmad
   Ah-ERG.3SG.M Ah.NOM.3.SG.M
   gira
   fall.PFV.SG.M
   'Ahmad felled.'

In the example 2(a), the subject *ahmad* can use the ergative case marker *ne* because it is associated with the unergative verb *khãsa*. Unergative verbs typically involve "willed or volitional acts" and take an agentive argument, meaning the subject is actively performing the action.

In contrast, the unaccusative verb represents "unwilled and involuntary acts" and takes a theme argument, focusing on the event rather than an active agent. This distinction is illustrated in example 2(b), where the unaccusative verb *gira* cannot take the ergative subject *ahmad-ne*. Instead, it requires the nominative subject *ahmad*. Thus, while unergative verbs allow for an ergative subject due to their agentive nature, unaccusative verbs do not, as they do not imply agency.

Overall, it seems that ergative subjects of intransitive verbs, including those of perfective transitive sentences and "to cough", indicate forceful agents as opposed "to fall" ones. In order to prevent any potential confusion regarding the object, the ergative case marking is not required for these subjects. All of this provides significant evidence that ergative case-marking in Urdu corresponds to the function of case identification.

In other words, it appears that the case marking patterns in Urdu cannot be explained solely by considering the distinguishing function of the case; we must also consider the identifying function of the case. Ergative case-marking appears to serve an identifying function in Urdu by designating powerful agents, thereby encoding characteristics that are prototypical of agents, such as volitionality. However, as we

shall contend subsequently, the differential subject marking in Urdu cannot be explained by (directly) relating ergative case to volitionality. Instead, we shall contend that the ergative case is exclusively assigned to formidable agents in Urdu, and volitionality does not rank among the determinants of an agent's strength in Urdu. In a separate section, we proposed an alternative rationale for the correlation between ergative case and volitionality: it is an indirect correlation that emerges from bidirectional optimisation (De Hoop & Narasimhan, 2009).

1.2   Split-ergative

Split ergativity is a grammatical phenomenon in which a language displays different alignment patterns based on the type of clause or verb construction being used. In Urdu, this pattern can be seen in the alignment of transitive and intransitive verbs across various tense, aspect, and mood contexts.

In Urdu, transitive verbs typically follow an ergative alignment pattern. This means that the subject of a transitive verb is marked with the ergative case marker *ne*. For example, in sentences with transitive verbs in the perfective aspect, the subject is in the ergative case, while in the non-perfective aspect, the subject takes the nominative case.

Thus, Urdu is classified as an aspect-based split ergative language (as noted by Bhatt 2007, Mahajan 1994, and Butt 2006). Specifically, the case assignment for the subject of a finite transitive verb varies depending on the aspect. In the non-perfective aspect, the subject is marked nominative case, whereas in the perfective aspect, the subject is marked ergative case. This distinction highlights how aspect influences grammatical structure in Urdu as in (3).

(3)   a.   ahmad-ne/   a:m
              Ah-ERG.3SG.M   mango.NOM.3SG.M
              kha-ya
              eat-PFV.SG.M
              'Ahmad ate the mango.'

       b.   mi:na   a:m
              M. NOM.3SG.F   mango.NOM.3SG.M
              kha-ti   hai
              eat-IMP.SG.F   be.PRS.3SG
              'Meena will eat the mango.'

In example (3a), the ergative subject "*ahmad-ne*" is associated with the perfective verb "*kha-ya*," while in (3b), the nominative subject "*mina*" is linked to the imperfective verb "*kha-ti*".

1.3   Agreement

In this analysis, the verb does not agree with the overtly case-marked noun phrase (NP). For example, in (4a), the ergative subject *si:ta:-ne* is marked with the case clitic 'ne,' which causes a lack of agreement with the verb *kha-i:*. Instead, the verb agrees with the non-overtly case-marked NP *roti*, which appears in the object position.

In (4b), if the object NP *mira-ko* is also overtly case-marked to indicate specificity, the verb then reflects default agreement, marked as 3SG.M.

(4)   a.   si:ta-ne   roti
              Sita-ERG   bread.NOM.3SG.F
              kha-i:
              eat-PFV.SG.F
              'Sita ate bread.'

       b.   si:ta-ne   mi:ra-ko   pi:ta-a:
              Sita-ERG   Meera-ACC   hit-PFV.SG.M
              'Sita hits Meera.'

2. Literature review

2.1 Patterns of case-marking

Two primary patterns of case-marking are observed across languages (Blake, 2001). In the nominative-accusative system, the morphological treatment of the subject of both intransitive and transitive verbs is the same, while the object of the transitive verb receives distinct marking. In contrast, the ergative-absolutive pattern (Dixon, 1979) treats the subject of an intransitive verb identically to the object of a transitive verb, whereas the subject of the transitive verb is marked differently. For illustration, consider examples from nominative-accusative Urdu (5a, 5b) and ergative-absolutive West Greenlandic (5c, 5d) (Manning, 1996).

           Urdu
(5)   a.   ahmad   a:m
              Ah.NOM.3SG.M   m.-NOM.3.SG.M
              Kha-ta   hai
              eat-IMP.SG.M   be.PRS.3SG
              'Ahmad eats the mango.'

b. ahmad   soya
    Ah.NOM.3.SG.M   sleep.PFV.SG.M
    'Ahmad sleeps.'

West Greenlandic
c. Oli-p   neq
    Oli-ERG   meat.ABS
    neri-vaa
    eat-IND.TR.3SG
    'Oli eats meat'

d. Oli   sinippoq
    Oli.ABS   sleep:IND.INTR.3SG
    'Oli sleeps'

The nominative or absolutive case in various languages is often the default case used for subjects or objects in transitive phrases. We propose that the nominative (or absolutive) case functions as a marker for 'no case,' indicating that the absence of distinct morphological marking signifies the lack of a grammatical case. While some perspectives classify morphologically zero instances as 'unmarked' or 'obligatory,' we adopt the view suggested by Aissen (2003) and consider these instances as representing 'no case.'

In transitive structures, the "primary" argument, which is unmarked, stays null-marked, indicating that it does not contain a case. This principle also applies to intransitive predicates and their single arguments.

2.2 Two functions of case-marking

Within the functional-typological literature, two main functions of case-marking are identified, as discussed by Mallinson & Blake (1981), Comrie (1989), Kibrik (1985), and Song (2001).

One motivation for case-marking the subject or object of a transitive clause is to clarify the roles of different arguments within that clause. This clarification becomes essential in clauses with multiple arguments (Van Valin, 1992).

To distinguish between the subject and object, marking just one of them with a case marker is sufficient. If the marker is assigned to the object, the subject retains its citation form, resulting in the subject of both transitive and intransitive clauses being morphologically unmarked. In this scenario, the object is marked, creating what is known as an accusative pattern. Conversely, if the marker is applied to the subject of a transitive clause, the object remains unmarked, leading to an ergative pattern where both the subject of an intransitive clause and the object of a transitive clause are morphologically unmarked, while the subject of the transitive clause is marked (Van Valin, 1992). This function of case marking is commonly referred to as the differentiating or discriminating function.

Case morphology often serves to convey distinct semantic information. Morphological instances are typically understood to represent specific thematic roles related to the argument in question. This applies not only to lexical or semantic cases, such as locative cases, but also to structural cases to some extent. For example, the dative case is associated with aim and experiencer semantics; the ergative case is often linked to agentivity, particularly qualities like volitionality or control; and the accusative case is connected to patienthood. This aspect of case marking is commonly known as the identifying or indexing function of case. Both the differentiating and identifying functions are assumed to play a role in the case patterns observed across languages.

Ergative case marking can indicate agentivity or differentiate the first argument of a transitive sentence from the second argument. While these two purposes of ergative case marking can be compatible, they may also present specific challenges in interpretation.

2.3 Light verb constructions in Urdu

Light verb constructions (LVCs) are common in various languages, including Hindi and Urdu. These constructions involve combining a light verb with a noun or adjective to form a verb-like structure. The syntactic properties of LVCs in Urdu explore their structure and word order patterns, emphasizing the role of the light verb and its relationship with the noun or adjective complement. This analysis also addresses the argument structure and the presence of additional elements, such as prepositions or

postpositions, within LVCs. The semantic characteristics of LVCs in Hindi and Urdu examine the range of meanings these constructions convey, as well as the nuances associated with different combinations of light verbs and their complements. Additionally, the relationship between verb-particle constructions and LVCs in these languages is discussed.

The term "light verb" was introduced by Otto in 1965 to describe verbs that differ from typical verbal predicates by having a reduced semantic impact on the events expressed within the light verb construction. Light verbs such as "take," "make," and "give" demonstrate cross-linguistic similarities, appearing in languages like English, Persian, and Hindi. However, their distribution varies across different languages.

In their study, Begum et al. (2011) presented a classifier for Hindi LVCs but did not provide information about the distribution of LVCs in their dataset. This omission raises challenges in determining whether their findings are generalizable to all LVCs or only to the light verb *kar*. In contrast, the research conducted by Butt et al. (2012) focuses specifically on the light verbs *kar*, meaning *do*, and *ho*, meaning "be."

2.4 The unaccusative hypothesis

The Unaccusative Hypothesis is a linguistic theory that posits a syntactic distinction between two types of intransitive verbs, namely unergative and unaccusative verbs. Perlmutter (1978) introduced the Unaccusative Hypothesis in the framework of Relational Grammar. This hypothesis differentiates between two categories of intransitive verbs. The first category, referred to as unergative verbs, involves actions that are volitional or willed, such as dancing, running, walking, working, and so on. The second category, known as unaccusative verbs, pertains to actions that are non-volitional or unwilled, such as burning, melting, falling, happening, and so forth. Unaccusative verbs can be classified into two subtypes, namely alternating unaccusative verbs and non-alternating unaccusative verbs. Verbs that alternate between unaccusative and transitive/causative forms, such

as "break," "freeze," "melt," and "sink," possess a counterpart that is transitive/causative in nature. However, non-alternating unaccusative verbs, such as "appear," "arrive," "fall," and "happen," do not have such a counterpart. Both unaccusative and unergative verbs are characterised by having only one argument. The unergative verb's argument is exclusively agentive, while the unaccusative verb's argument is exclusively a theme.

There exists cross-linguistic evidence supporting the existence of a universal linking rule that pertains to the typical mapping of thematic roles, which are linked to verbs, onto the syntactic positions found within a clause.

It is a common convention in linguistic analysis that agents are generally associated with the subject position, while themes and patients are associated with the direct object position. As depicted in (6a), the agent constituent of a transitive verb, such as "melt," is assigned to the subject position, while the theme constituent is assigned to the object position. In instances where an unergative verb is utilised, as exemplified in (6b), the singular argument (agentive) is assigned to the subject position. In the context of unaccusative verbs, as exemplified in (6c), there seems to be a discrepancy between the theta role (namely, theme) that is assumed by the single argument and its placement in the surface syntax (specifically, subject).

(6) a. Transitive
        Mary melted the snow.
        Subject   Direct object
                     (Grammatical roles)
        <Agent>   <Theme>
                     (Thematic roles)

    b. Unergative
        Mary danced.

        Subject   (Grammatical roles)
        <Agent>   (Thematic roles)

    c. Unaccusative
        The snow melted.
        Subject   (Grammatical roles)
        <Theme>   (Thematic roles)
                (Park & Lakshmanan, 2007)

2.5 The uniformity of Theta Assignment Hypothesis (UTAH)

The Uniformity of Theta Assignment Hypothesis (UTAH) is a theoretical proposition. The level of D-Structure exhibits a correspondence between the structural relationships of items and their thematic relationships, such that identical thematic relationships are represented by identical structural relationships (Baker, 1988).

The subject position of unaccusative verbs may seem to contain the theme argument on the surface. However, as per UTAH, the argument of unaccusative verbs is solely generated at the direct object position during D-Structure, unlike unergative intransitives. This argument is generated as an internal argument. The occurrence of "it" in the subject position within the surface syntax is a consequence of its displacement from its initial position, namely the direct object, to the specifier position of IP. As per Burzio's generalisation (1986), unaccusative verbs exhibit passive-like behaviour by being unable to assign an accusative case to the internal argument in a direct object position. This necessitates the movement of the theme argument to the specifier position of IP to enable the assignment of a nominative case. The third configuration outlines the D-Structure syntax of unergative and unaccusative verbs. As demonstrated in reference (7), unergative verbs are characterised by taking an external argument in their underlying argument structure, whereas unaccusative verbs take an internal argument.

(7) a. Unergative: NP   [VP V]

   b. Unaccusative: __   [VP V NP]

(Park & Lakshmanan, 2007)

3. Subject case realisation with various compound verbs (V1+V2) construction

The subject NP takes the ergative case when the compound verb (V1 + V2) is a combination of two transitive verbs. However, when the compound verbs consist of a transitive verb followed by an intransitive verb (V1 + V2), the subject does not take the ergative case. In contrast, when both verbs in the compound (V1 + V2) are intransitive, the subject takes the nominative case rather than the ergative.

3.1 Compound verb (transitive + transitive) assigns ergative subject

(8) a. ahmad-ne   a:m
         Ahmad-ERG   mango
         khaa   da:l-a:
         eat.V1   Put-V2.PFV.SG.M
         'Ahmad ate up the mango.'

     b. *ahmad   a:m
         Ahmad.NOM   mango
         khaa   da:l-a:
         eat.V1   put-V2.PFV.SG.M.
         'Ahmad ate up the mango.'

In example (8a), the compound verb *khaa da:l-a:* assigns the Ergative case because both the main verb *khaa* (V1) and the light verb *da:l-a:* (V2) are transitive. As a result, in this verb construction, using the nominative case in (8b) would be ungrammatical.

3.2 Compound verb (intransitive + intransitive) assigns nominative subject

(9) a. ahmad   aaj
         Ahmad.NOM   today
         so   ga-ya
         sleep.V1   go-V2.PFV.SG.M
         'Ahmad sleeps today.'

     b. *ahmad-ne   aaj
         Ahmad-ERG   today
         so   ga-ya
         sleep.V1   go-V2.PFV.SG.M
         'Ahmad sleeps today.'

In (9a), the compound verb *so gaya* takes the nominative case as both verbs are intransitive. However the ergative subject in this construction would be ungrammatical.

3.3 Compound verb (transitive + intransitive) assigns nominative subject

(10) a. ahmad   a:m
          Ahmad.NOM   mango.NOM
          kha   ga-ya
          eat.V1   go-V2.PFV.SG.M
          'Ahmad ate up mango.'

      b. *ahmad-ne   a:m
          Ahmad-ERG   mango.NOM

kha   ga-ya
eat.V1   go-V2.PFV.SG.M
'Ahmad ate up mango.'

Here's a clearer version of the text:

In example (10a), the compound verb *kha gaya* takes a nominative subject. This is because the polar verb *kha* is transitive, while the light verb *gaya* is intransitive. In contrast, in sentence (10b), the ergative subject *ahmad-ne* is ungrammatical with the same compound verb (transitive + intransitive), suggesting that the subject's case is assigned by the light verb (V2). Since *gaya* (V2) is intransitive, it assigns the nominative case to the subject.

3.4 Compound verb (intransitive + transitive) assigns ergative subject

(11)   a.   ahmad -ne   ghar-me
              Ahmad-ERG   home- LOC
              thu:k   di-ya
              spit.V1   give-V2.PFV.SG.M
              'Ahmad spitted in the home.'

       b.   *ahmad   ghar-me
              Ahmad   home- LOC
              thu:k   di-ya
              spit.V1   give-V2.PFV.SG.M
              'Ahmad spitted in the home.'

In (11a), the polar verb *thu:k* is intransitive, while the light verb *diya* is transitive. The transitive light verb *diya* assigns the ergative case to the subject *ahmad-ne*. However, in (11b), the subject *ahmad* in the nominative case becomes ungrammatical when used with the verb combination *thu:k diya*, where *diya* remains transitive. This demonstrates that the ergative case cannot be assigned when the light verb (V2) is transitive.

Finally, the examples (8-11) illustrate that when the light verb *(V2)* shifts from intransitive to transitive, the subject's case also changes from nominative to ergative. Therefore, the transitivity of the light verb *(V2)* plays a crucial role in determining whether the subject takes the ergative case.

4. Unergative vs unaccusative

Despite the fact that certain intransitive verbs like "cough" and "sneeze," such as *khãnsna* and

chĩnkna, can assign an ergative subject, it is not possible to assign an ergative subject when the main verb is intransitive (Butt, 2006; Mahajan,1994). This constraint applies even though the transitive verb is limited to having an ergative subject, preventing the main verb (V1) from undergoing inflection from transitive to intransitive.

The difference between unergative and accusative can be demonstrated through the following examples from Urdu:

(12)   a.   ahmad -ne   khub
              Ahmad-ERG.3SG.M   very
              dauṛa:.
              run.PFV.SG.M
              'Ahmad ran a lot.'

       b.   kəp   ṭuṭa:.
              Cup.NOM.SG.M   break.PFV.SG.M
              '(The) cup broke.'

The verb in (12a), 'dauṛa:' is an unergative verb that takes the subject *ahmad-ne* with an ergative case marker due to willed or volitional acts. But in (12b) the verb 'ṭuṭ-aa' is an unaccusative verb that takes subject *kəp* as patient or theme.

Unergative verbs show optionality with respect to ergative subject case marking. Thus, the unergative verbs 'to dance', 'to cough' and 'to laugh' take optionally ergative subjects.

(13)   a.   ahmad-ne/   ahmad
              Ah.-ERG.3SG.M.   Ah.NOM. 3SG.M.
              khã:sa
              cough.PFV.SG.M.
              'Ahmad coughed.'

       b.   ahmad-ne/   ahmad
              Ah.-ERG.3SG.M.   Ah.NOM. 3SG.M.
              hɔ̃nsa
              laugh.PFV.SG.M.
              'Ahmad laughed.'

In examples (13a) and (13b), both the verbs *khã:sa* and *hɔ̃nsa* have the option to take either the nominative *ahmad* or the ergative subject *ahmad-ne* optionally.

5. Analysis

This study aims to examine the subject case markings used with unergative verbs in compound verb constructions. It explores

different types of compound verbs and the corresponding subject case markings. An unergative compound verb consists of a polar verb (V1) and a vector or light verb (V2), which can be either transitive or intransitive.

When the vector verb (V2) in the unergative compound verb is transitive, the subject takes the ergative case. However, if the vector verb (V2) is intransitive, the subject is marked with the nominative case. The examples provided in (14) demonstrate this distinction.

(14) a. ahmad-ne/   ahmad
          Ah.-ERG.3SG.M Ah.NOM. 3SG.M
          khã:sa   di-ya
          cough.PFV.SG.M give-V2 PFV.SG.M
          'Ahmad coughed.'

      b. *ahmad-ne/   ahmad
          Ah.-ERG.3SG.M. Ah.NOM. 3SG.M
          khã:s   paṛa
          cough.V1   lie.V2-PFV.SG.M
          'Ahmad laughed.'

      c. ahmad-ne/   ahmad
          Ah.-ERG.3SG.M Ah.NOM. 3SG.M
          hɔ̃ns   di-ya
          laugh.PFV.SG.M give-V2 PFV.SG.M
          'Ahmad laughed.'

      d. *ahmad-ne/   ahmad
          Ah.-ERG.3SG.M Ah.NOM. 3SG.M
          hɔ̃ns   paṛa
          laugh.PFV.SG.M lie.V2 PFV.SG.M
          'Ahmad laughed.'

In the given examples, the subject "Ahmad" in sentences (14b) and (14d) does not require the ergative case marker *ne* due to the presence of the intransitive light verb *paṛa* (V2) in the unergative compound verbs *khãs paṛa* (to cough) and *hɔ̃ns paṛa* (to laugh). However, in examples (14a) and (11c), the subject *Ahmad* can optionally take the ergative case marker *(Ahmad-ne)* because of the presence of the transitive light verb *diya* (V2) in the unergative compound verbs *khãs diya* and *hɔ̃ns diya*.

In the previous examples (13a) and (13b), the ergative case marker *Ahmad-ne* is also optional, even when there is no light verb (V2), as seen in

khã:sa and *hɔ̃nsa*. Thus, the ergative case appears in unergative compound verbs like *khãs diya* and *hɔ̃ns diya* when the light verb (V2) is transitive in nature. In contrast, in the case of unaccusative compound verbs in the example (15b), the subject takes the nominative case because a transitive light verb *diya* (V2) cannot be used in this construction. For instance, in *gir diya* (caused to fall), the light verb is transitive, but in (15c), the intransitive light verb *gaya* is used, resulting in a nominative subject like *Ahmad*. The examples (15) below provide further illustration of this distinction.

(15) a. ahmad   *ahmad-ne/
          Ah.NOM. 3SG.M Ah.-ERG.3SG.M
          gir   paṛa
          fall.V1   lie.-V2 PFV.SG.M
          'Ahmad falls.'

      b. *ahmad-ne/   ahmad
          Ah.-ERG.3SG.M Ah.NOM. 3SG.M
          gir   di-ya
          fall.V1   give-V2 PFV.SG.M
          'Ahmad falls.'

      c. ahmad   *ahmad-ne/
          Ah.NOM. 3SG.M Ah.-ERG.3SG.M
          so   gaya
          sleep. V1   go.V2 PFV.SG.M
          'Ahmad slept.'

      d. *ahmad   *ahmad-ne/
          Ah.NOM. 3SG.M Ah.-ERG.3SG.M
          so   di-ya
          sleep.V1   give-V2 PFV.SG.M
          'Ahmad slept.'

      e. ?ahmad   ?ahmad-ne/
          Ah.NOM. 3SG.M Ah.-ERG.3SG.M
          so   liya
          sleep.- V1 take.-V2 PFV.SG.M
          'Ahmad slept.'

In examples (15a) and (15c), the subject "Ahmad" does not take the ergative case marker *ne* because the intransitive light verbs *paṛa* and *gaya* (V2) are used in the unaccusative compound verbs *gir paṛa* and *so gaya*. These light verbs assign nominative subject.

However, in examples (15b) and (15d), neither the nominative subject *Ahmad* nor the ergative subject *Ahmad-ne* can appear, as the combination

of the unaccusative verb *gir* (V1) with the transitive light verb *diya* (V2) is ungrammatical. This combination does not allow for a subject, whether nominative or ergative, as demonstrated in examples (10b) and (10d).

This indicates that a transitive light verb cannot be combined with an unaccusative verb to assign an ergative subject. The reason is that a transitive verb carries the agentive property necessary to assign the ergative case or an agent argument, which is not compatible with the structure of an unaccusative verb, which lacks this agentive quality.

Findings can be summarized as:
- The occurrence of an ergative subject is determined by the transitivity of the light verb (v2) in unergative compound verbs.
- The presence of an ergative subject depends on the light verb (v2) in compound verb constructions.
- A transitive light verb (v2) cannot be combined with an unaccusative compound verb.
- Transitivity is related to the agent argument; since unaccusative verbs always take a patient argument, a transitive light verb can be combined with an unaccusative verb.
- Therefore, we utilized this diagnostic test to demonstrate that transitive verbs possess agentive qualities to assign the ergative case.

6. Conclusion

In this study, we found that in compound verb constructions involving unergative verbs, if the light verb (V2) is intransitive, the subject cannot take an ergative case. On the other hand, unaccusative compound verbs only allow nominative case for the subject, as they cannot have a transitive light verb (V2). Thus, the presence of an ergative subject depends on whether the light verb (V2) is transitive.

It is important to note that both unergative and unaccusative verbs are inherently intransitive. However, in compound verb structures, an unergative verb can take either a transitive or intransitive light verb (V2), whereas an unaccusative verb cannot combine with a transitive light verb (V2), and cannot combine with a transitive one.

Abbreviations

3	Third person
ABS	Absolutive
ACC	Accusative
ERG	Ergative
F	Feminine
IM	Imperative
IND	Indicative
INT	Intransitive
M	Masculine
NOM	Nominative
PFV	Perfective
PRS	Present
SG	Singular
TR	Transitive
V1	Verb 1
V2	Verb 2

References

Aissen, J. (1999). Markedness and subject choice in Optimality Theory. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory*, 17(4), 673-711.

Aissen, J. (2003). Differential object marking: Iconicity vs. economy. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory*, 21(3), 435-483.

Baker, M. C. (1988). *Incorporation: A theory of grammatical function changing*. University of Chicago Press.

Begum, R., Jindal, K., Jain, A., Husain, S., & Misra Sharma, D. (2011). Identification of conjunct verbs in Hindi and its effect on parsing accuracy. In *Computational linguistics and intelligent text processing: 12th international conference, CICLing 2011, Tokyo, Japan, February 20–26, 2011. Proceedings, Part I* (Vol. 12, pp. 29–40). Springer Berlin Heidelberg.

Bhatt, R. (2007). *Ergativity in Indo-Aryan languages*. Ergativity Seminar MIT.

Blake, B. J. (2001). *Case*. (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Burzio, L. (1986). *Italian syntax: A government-binding approach* (Vol. 1). Springer Science & Business Media.

Butt, M. (2006). The dative-ergative connection. *Empirical Issues in Syntax and Semantics*, *6*, 69-92.

Butt, M., & King, T. H. (1991). *Semantic case in Urdu*. Papers from the 27th Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society. Chicago (31-45).

Butt, M., Bogel, T., Hautli, A., Sulger S., & Ahmed, T. (2012). Identifying Urdu complex predication via Bigram extraction. *Proceedings of COLING 2012: Technical Papers* (pp. 409-424).

Chakrabarti, D., Mandalia, H., Priya, R., Sarma, V. M., & Bhattacharyya, P. (2008). Hindi compound verbs and their automatic extraction. In *Coling 2008: Companion volume: Posters* (pp. 27–30).

Chandra, P., Kaur, G., & Udaar, U. (2017). Optional ergativity with unergatives in Punjabi. *Taiwan Journal of Linguistics*, *15*(2), 1-35.

Comrie, B. (1989). *Language universals and linguistic typology*. University of Chicago Press.

De Hoop, H., & Narasimhan, B. (2009). Differential subject marking in Hindi. In H. de Hoop & P. de Swart (Eds.), *Differential subject marking* (pp.63-78). Springer.

Dixon, R. M. W. (1979). Ergativity. *Language*, 55, 59-138.

Dowty, D. (1991). Thematic proto-roles and argument selection. *Language*, 67(3), 547-619.

Hopper, E J., & Thompson, S. A. (1980). Transitivity in grammar and discourse. *Language*, 56(2), 251-299.

Kibrik, A. E. (1985). Toward a typology of ergativity. In J. Nichols & A. Woodbury (Eds.), *Grammar inside and outside the clause* (pp. 268-324). Cambridge University Press.

Lee, H. (2006). Parallel optimization in case systems: Evidence from case ellipsis in Korean. *Journal of East Asian Linguistics 15*(1), 69-96. DOI: 10.1007/s10831-005-3004-1

Mahajan, A. (1994). The ergativity parameter: have-be alternation, word order and split ergativity. *North East Linguistics Society, 24* (1), 317-331.

Mallinson, G., & Blake, B. (1981). *Language typology: Cross-cultural studies in syntax.* North Holland Publishing.

Manning, C. (1996). *Ergativity: Argument structure and grammatical relations*. CSLI.

Mohanan, T. (1994). *Argument structure in Hindi*. Stanford University.

Otto, J. (1965). *A modern English grammar on historical principles*. Part VI. Morphology/Otto Jespersen.

Park, K. S., & Lakshmanan, U. (2007). The unaccusative-unergative distinction in resultatives: Evidence from Korean L2 learners of English. *Proceedings of the 2nd Conference on Generative Approaches to Language Acquisition North America (GALANA)* (pp. 328–338).

Perlmutter, D. M. (1978). Impersonal passives and the unaccusative hypothesis. *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society* (pp. 157-189). *Berkeley Linguistics Society*. https://doi.org/10.3765/bls.v4i0.2198

Song, J. J. (2001). *Linguistic typology: morphology and syntax*. Longman.

Surtani, N., Jha, K., & Paul, S. (2011). Issues with the unergative/unaccusative classification of the intransitive verbs. *Proceedings of the 2011 International Conference on Asian Language Processing* (pp. 55–58). IEEE. 10.1109/IALP.2011.54

Van Valin, R. (1992). An overview of ergative phenomena and their implications for language acquisition. In D. I. Slobin (Ed.), *The cross-linguistic study of language acquisition*. (Vol. 3, pp. 15-39). Lawrence Erlbaum.