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OBLIQUE AGREEMENT FEATURE AND OBLIQUE ADJUNCT PHRASE

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ABSTRACT

In Urdu phrases, a very small feature [e] that marks certain nouns plays astonishingly complex and extensive role. Until now it has been just taken for granted. It used to be described merely as a link between a noun and its case marker called oblique marker. But when the researchers focused it closely, we came to know it is not simply a linking feature. It plays an important role in binding the constituents of a DP, and also in its recurrence. It also transforms different word classes into nominals, and often it functions as a postposition. Different researchers like Schmidt, Mohanan, Butt have described Urdu postpositions differently, but exploration of this particle has enabled the researchers to synthesize their theories, and differentiate the functions of case markers from postpositions.

Key words: Case Nominative Oblique Dative Genitive
Adjunct Nominal Infinitive participle Inflection

In Urdu phrase structure, Oblique Agreement Feature (OAF) [e] isboth a confusing, and systematic, feature. It marks determiners, adjectives, nouns, infinitives, adjuncts etc., both overtly and covertly. Though its apparent function is merely to keep the constituents of a noun phrase bound together, yet its covert presenceaffects Urdu phrase structure in a surprising way. This paper is going to describe the role of OAF in Urdu noun and adjunct phrases.

Before we explore the complexities of our topic, we better know what exactly oblique feature is. [e] marking is variously used in Urdu NPs. It's a plural marker, vocative case marker, and also an agreement link between a noun and its respective case marker (Butt, 1995; Woolford, 1997; Butt and King, 2004). But these functions can easily be differentiated from each other. See how singular and plural markers appear on Nominative, Oblique and Vocative NPs.

Table 1: Number, Oblique and Vocative markings on NPs

Nominative		**Oblique**		**Vocative**	
Singular	**Plural**	**Singular**	**Plural**	**Singular**	**Plural**
لڑکا	لڑکے	لڑکے	لڑکوں	لڑکے	لڑکو
larka	*larke*	*larke*	*larkon*	*larke*	*larko*
ˈləɽ·k[a]	ˈləɽ·k[e]	ˈləɽ·k[e]	ˈləɽ·k[õ]	ˈləɽ·k[e]	ˈləɽ·k[o]
A boy	Boys	A boy	Boys	Boy!	Boys!

(Butt, 1995)

Now see their usage.

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Table 2: Number, Oblique and Vocative markings on Subject NPs

Nominative		Oblique		Vocative	
Singular	**Plural**	**Singular**	**Plural**	**Singular**	**Plural**
لڑکا کھانا کھا رہا ہے۔	لڑکے کھانا کھا رہے ہیں۔	لڑکے نے کھانا کھایا۔	لڑکوں نے کھانا کھایا۔	لڑکے! کھانا کھا۔	لڑکو! کھانا کھاو۔
Larkakhana kha raha he.	*Larke khana kha rahay hain.*	*Larkene khana khaya.*	*Larkon ne khana khaya*	*Larke! Khana kha*	*Larko! Khana khao*
ˈləɽ·k[a]ˈkʰɑːna kʰa rə·ˈha hɛ	ˈləɽ·k[e]ˈkʰɑːna kʰa rə·ˈhe hɛ̃	ˈləɽ·k[e]neˈkʰɑːna ˈkʰɑːja	ˈləɽ·k[õ] ne ˈkʰɑːnaˈkʰɑːja	ˈləɽ·k[e]/ ˈkʰɑːna kʰa	ˈləɽ·k[o]/ ˈkʰɑːnaˈkʰɑo
A boy is eating food.	The boys are eating food.	A boyate food.	The boys ate food.	Boy! Eat food.	Boys! Eat food.

(Khurshid et al, 2021)

Table 2 illustrates the morphemic structures of singular and plural subject NPs in nominative, oblique, and vocative cases. Now let's see their structures in object slot. Vocative case does not appear on the object NPs.

Table 3: Number and Oblique markings on subject and objectNPs

Masculine		Feminine	
Singular	**Plural**	**Singular**	**Plural**
بلے نے ایک لڑکے کو دیکھا۔	بلوں نے کچھ لڑکوں کو دیکھا۔	بلی نے ایک لڑکی کو دیکھا۔	بلیوں نے کچھ لڑکیوں کو دیکھا۔
Billay ne aik larke kodekha	*Billon ne kuchh larkon ko dekha.*	*Billi ne aik larki ko dekha*	*Billiyon ne kuchh larkiyon ko dekha.*
ˈbɪl·l[e] ne ek ˈləɽ·k[e] ko ˈɖekʰ·a	ˈbɪl·l[õ] ne kʊt͡ʃʰˈləɽ·k[õ]ko ˈɖekʰ·a	ˈbɪl·li[Ø] ne ek ˈləɽ·ki[Ø] ko ˈɖekʰ·a	ˈbɪl·li·j[õ] ne kʊt͡ʃʰ ˈləɽ·ki·j[õ] ko ˈɖekʰ·a
A tom cat saw a boy.	A tom cat saw a few boys.	A cat saw a girl.	A cat saw a few girls.

(Khurshid et al, 2021)

So, we come to know that nominative and oblique NPs bear different number and case markings. Nominative is the case free NP. It usually bears [a] marking on singular masculine nouns and [i] on feminine, [e] marking on plural NP both in subject and object slots, and [ã] on plural feminine nouns in either slot. Oblique case markers are [ne], [ko], [mẽ], [pər], [pə], [ʈək], [se], [ka], [ki], [ke] (Butt, 1995; But and King, 2004). Whenever a noun precedes any of them, it acquires an agreement feature [e] to link itself with its respective case clitic (Mohanan, 1990; Schmidt, 1990; Butt, 1995; Davison, 2004; Kachru, 2006; Anderson, 2006; Koul, 2008; Rizvi, 2008). Oblique agreement marking on singular subject nouns is [e], and [õ] on plural masculineand feminine nouns. But this is not the complete story.

Both number and oblique agreement markings do not appear overtly on every NP. In many instances, they remain silent too. Subject nouns that end on the sound [a] bear the OAF inflection [e] if a case clitic follows them.Those that end on any other sound do not get OAF. But plural nouns do get a plural OAF marking [õ] both for masculine and feminine nouns, in both subject andobject slots. For example,

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Table 4: Combinations of Covert OAF/Singular NP, Overt OAF /Plural NP

Masculine		Feminine	
Singular	**Plural**	**Singular**	**Plural**
کسان نے سانپ کو مارا۔	کسانوں نے سانپوں کو مارا۔	بلی نے سانپ کو مارا۔	بلیوں نے سانپوں کو مارا۔
Kisan ne sanp ko mara.	*Kisanon ne sanpon ko mara*	*Billi ne sanp ko mara*	*Billiyon ne sanpon ko mara.*
kɪ·ˈsɑːn[Ø] ne sə̃ːp[Ø] ko mɑːra	kɪ·ˈsɑːn[õ] ne sə̃ːp[õ] ko mɑːra	ˈbɪl·li ne sə̃ːp[Ø] ko mɑːra	ˈbɪl·li·j[õ] ne sə̃ːp[õ] ko mɑːra
A peasant killed a snake	The peasants killed the snakes.	A cat killed a snake	The cats killedthe snakes.

So, we see all plural NPs carry [õ] inflection as OAF in front of a case clitic. This information gives us a lot of help in diagnosing the presence of a silent OAF on singular NPs ending on sounds other than [a]. We can verify the presence of overt OAF simply by replacing the singular NP with its plural variant. For example, see the table 4. The singular [kɪ·ˈsɑːn] is replaced by its plural variant [kɪ·ˈsɑːnõ], and the singular [ˈbɪl·li]is replaced by its plural variant [ˈbɪl·li]. In each example, the plural NP displayed OAF inflection [õ]. Therefore, we may infer that the singular NPs also carried covert OAF, which is phonetically null [Ø], but logically present. This covert presence of OAF can be double checked by another method too.

OAF inflection appears on all the constituents of a DP (determiner(s), adjective(s), Noun) that fall in front of a case clitic, under the same rules as are described in the last paragraph. For example, see Table 5.

Table 5: OAF on the pre-modifiers

Nominative	Oblique Singular	Oblique Plural
میرا چھوٹا بھائی بڑا سیب کاٹتا ہے۔	میرے چھوٹے بھائی نے بڑے سیب کو کاٹا۔	میرے چھوٹے بھائیوں نے بڑے سیبوں کو کاٹا۔
Maira chhota bhai bara seb kat ta he.	*Mairay chhotay bhai ne baray seb ko kata.*	*Mairay chhotay bhaiyon ne baray saibon ko kata.*
ˈme·ra[Ø] ˈʧʰo·ʈa[Ø] bʰɑɪ[Ø] ˈbə·ɽa[Ø] seb[Ø] ˈkɑːt·ʈa he	ˈme·r[e] ˈʧʰo·ʈ[e] bʰɑɪ[Ø] ne ˈbə·ɽ[e] seb ko ˈkɑː·ta	ˈme·r[e] ˈʧʰo·ʈ[e] ˈbʰɑɪ·j[õ] ne ˈbə·ɽ[e] ˈse·b[õ] ko ˈkɑː·ta
My younger brother cuts an apple.	My younger brother cuts a big apple.	My younger brothers cut the big apple.

In the left column, both DPs carry nominative case, therefore, we find the adjective and determiners ending on [a] sound. In middle column, both DPs precede one case clitic each. In each case we observe the determiner and adjective [a] sound transformed into [e] sound. This indicates that the NPs [bʰɑɪ] and [seb]bear overt OAF, as demonstrated in the right column. In this sentence, both DPs, along with their constituents, bear either singular [e] or plural [õ] variant of OAF inflection.

Now we have two tests for confirming the presence of overt OAF: (1) **replacement** by the plural NP; (2) **insertion** of a determiner and/or adjective ending on [a] sound.

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So we conclude that Oblique Agreement Feature (OAF) is an inflection that the constituents of an Urdu DP bear if it occurs before a case clitic. OAF may be overt, but it may easily be tested. Its presence distinguishes the structure of an oblique DP from that of a nominative DP. The role of OAF doesn't end here. But before we proceed with their role, we should re-analyse the function of case markers.

Case clitics also perform the function of postpositions. We may take them as case markers on grammatical relations. But their presence on Adjunct NPs makes them a better candidate for a postposition (Khurshid, et al, 2021). Therefore, we will take clitics on complement DPs, and adjunct DPsas PP heads. The nouns in every DP agrees with the following particle, a postposition according to Schmidt (1990), with the help of an inflection called Oblique Agreement Feature.

Sometimes, the PPs recur, and generate a chain of daughter PPs. In such situations all the constituent PPs remain connected to the mother head P with the help of OAF. All the constituents of all the subordinate PPs bear OAF. See the example below.

Table 6: OAF in recurring phrases

لڑکے کے بلے کے پنجے کے زخم میں
Larkay kay billay kay panjay kay zakham main
ˈləɽ·k[e] k[e] ˈbɪ·l[e] k[e] ˈpən·d͡ʒ[e]k[e]ˈzə·xəm[Ø]mẽ
In the boy's cat's paw's wound...

In table 6, three phrases are placed inside the fourth one. All the constituents except [mẽ] are oblique marked. They are shown with the help of square brackets. The leading P [mẽ] assigns OAF to its complement DP, which in return, assigns it to its daughter PP head, which extends it to its DP complement, and the chain continues.

Up to this point we have discussed the overt and covert presence of OAF. Its third aspect is yet to be discussed. In certain cases, inflection[a] of NP is not transformed into the inflection [e], though OAF occupies that slot covertly. It so happens in case of proper nouns, or deference for the person cited. For example,

Table 7: covert OAF on inflection [a] (Proper name)

میں پرانے سرگودھا گیا۔
Main puranay Sargodha gaya.
mɛ̃ pu·ˈrɑː·n[e] sər·ˈgo·ɖʰa[Ø] gə·ˈja
I visited the older (part of) Sargodha.

Table 8: covert OAF on inflection [a] (deference)

میرے چچا نے کہا
Mairay chacha ne kaha.
ˈme·r[e] ˈt͡ʃʌ·t͡ʃa[Ø] ne kə·ˈha
My uncle said.

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In tables 7 and 8,NPs [sər·ˈgo·ɖʰa[Ø] and [ˈt͡ʃʌ·t͡ʃaØ], end on [a] sound, though their pre-modifiers [puˑˈraː·ne] and [ˈme·re] display OAF inflection. It proves that [a] sound on both NPs carries covert OAF.

This is how the OAF works to bind constituents of an oblique DP together. But the story is not over yet. Until now we have discussed the function of OAF on subject and object NPs. Its role in adjunct phrases is more interesting.

From the above discussion, we can draw one generalization. OAF and case clitics/postposition co-exist in Urdu phrase structure. The presence of one entails the presence of the other. Before we proceed with this topic, I want to introduce a new classification of case clitics. I take the clitics that mark subject and object NPs as oblique case markers. But those particles that escort complements, and adjuncts are postpositions (Khurshid, et al., 2021).

Table 9: case clitics as postpositions

میں شام کو آوں گا۔
Main sham ko aon ga.
[mẽ ʃɑːm ko ɑõ ga]
I will come back in the evening.

In 9, [ʃɑːm ko] is an adjunct phrase. [ko] is the postposition and [ʃɑːm] is its complement DP.

Table 10: case clitics as postpositions

قصاب نے چاقو سے گوشت کاٹا۔
Qasab ne chaqoo se gosht kata.
qə·ˈsɑːb ne ˈt͡ʃɑːqu se goʃʈ ˈkɑːʈa
The butcher sliced meat with a knife.

In 10, [ˈt͡ʃɑːquː se] is an adjunct phrase. [se] is the postposition head and [ˈt͡ʃɑːqu] is its complement DP.

Table 11: case clitics as postpositions

کشتی شمال کی سمت گئی۔
Kishti shumal ki samt gai
ˈkɪʃ·ʈi ʃʊ·ˈmɑːl ki səmʈ gəi
The boat went towards the north.

In 11, [ʃʊ·ˈmɑːl ki səmʈ] is a complex adjunct phrase. Here [səmʈ] is a DP whose postposition is phonetically null, but logically present. [ʃʊ·ˈmɑːl ki] is the complement PP of the higher noun [səmʈ]. We will return to this topic again.

Table 12: case clitics as postpositions

کشتی شمال کو گئی۔
Kishti shumal ko gai

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ˈkɪʃ·ʈi ʃʊ·ˈmɑːl ko gəi
The boat went to the north.

In 12, [ʃʊ·ˈmɑːl ko] is the adjunct phrase. [ko] is the postposition and [ʃʊ·ˈmɑːl] is its complement DP.

Table 13: case clitics as postpositions

میں تھانے کی طرف گیا۔
Main thanay ki taraf gaya.
mẽ ˈʈʰɑː·ne ki ˈʈə·rəf gə·ˈja
I went towards the Police station.

Table 14: case clitics as postpositions

میں تھانے کو گیا۔
Main thane ko gaya.
mẽ ˈʈʰɑː·ne ko ge·ˈja
I went to the police station.

Table 15: case clitics as postpositions

میں تھانے گیا۔
Main thane gaya.
mẽ ˈʈʰɑː·ne ge·ˈja
I went to the police station.

13 and 14 are very similar to 11 and 12. But the structure of 15 is a bit different. [ˈʈʰɑː·ne]carries OAF which entails the presence of a postposition. We can also feel a sense like 'to' or 'towards' in this slot. But where is the postposition? It is silently present here. Kachru (2006, p. 107) has termed them as *zero postpositions*. We can feel it, but cannot hear it. Since we associate the sense of the silent postposition with OAF, I will term it as the working PP head. Now OAF appears as the PP head on the adjunct [ˈʈʰɑː·ne], with [ˈʈʰɑː·na] as its complement DP. This is like saying *I went home.* We know the preposition (to) silently sits here.

On[ˈʈʰɑː·n**e**], OAF is overtly marked because the NP ends on [a] sound. What about the DPs that do not end on [a] sound? If we replace [skuːl], [gʰər], etc. with [ˈʈʰɑː·ne], what phrase structure appears?Presence of OAF on the DP [ˈʈʰɑː·ne] clearly indicates all adjunct DPs are logically marked with aphonetically null OAF. We can test our hypothesis by inserting a pre-modifier in these phrases. See [ˈɖuː·sr[e] skuːl] and [ˈbə·ʈ[e] gʰər] etc. The presence of OAF on the pre-modifiers suggests that the noun head also carries it silently. On the second step, the presence of an OAF (overt or covert) entails the presence of a postposition.

Adverb Nominals

In the light of the above information, we can describe the structures of [ʃʊ·ˈmɑːl ki ˈsəmʈ[Ø] and [ˈʈʰɑː·ne ki ˈʈə·rəf[Ø]. Like all adjunct, [ˈsəmʈ[Ø] and [ˈʈə·rəf] also carry a silent OAF and a silent postposition. In view of the above information, I term adjunct phrases as Oblique Adjunct Phrases (OAP).

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There are many other examples of OAP. They are often confused with adverbs, nouns, participles, infinitives, gerunds, etc. We will try to explore the nature of this confusion.

In Urdu, some words like [ˈuː·pər], [ˈniː·t͡ʃe],[ɖɑ̃ĩ], [bɑ̃ĩ] are generally taken as adverbs (Koul, 2008). But they look like nouns. If they fall in the adjunct slot, they acquire OAP structure: [N+e+P]. That is, a noun with OAF inflection followed by a covert postposition. Semantically, the above mentioned words mayappear like an adverb, but their formal order assigns them the function of an NP. The following example provides the evidence of [ˈuː·pər] and [ˈniː·t͡ʃe] as NPs:

Table 16: A genitive phrase (a)

اوپر کا کمرہ
Ooper ka kamra
ˈuː·pərØ ka ˈkə·mra
Upper room

Table 17: A genitive phrase (b)

نیچے کا نشان
Neeche ka nishan
ˈniː·t͡ʃ**e** ka ˈnɪ·ˈʃɑːn
A downward mark

In the above examples, we see two *free genitive* phrases (Carnie, 2013), each with a N head, and PP complement. The PP complements [ˈuː·pərØ ka] and [ˈniː·t͡ʃ**e** ka] consist of P head [ka] and NP complements [ˈuː·pərØ] and [ˈniː·t͡ʃ**e**]. In 16 and 17, genitive P [ka] combines two nouns. Head [ˈkə·mra] follows the complement PP [ˈuː·pərØ ka], and head [ˈnɪ·ˈʃɑːn] follows the PP [ˈniː·t͡ʃ**e** ka].

But here arises a problem. If we insert a pre-modifier before [ˈuː·pərØ] and [ˈniː·t͡ʃ**e**], it does not get OAF inflection.

Table 18: No OAF inflection on pre-modifiers

تھوڑا سا نیچے کی طرف
Thora sa neechay ki taraf
ˈʈʰoː·ɾa sə ˈniːt͡ʃe ki ˈʈə·rəf
Towards a little lower side

In 18, the pre-modifiers of [ˈniː·t͡ʃ**e**] do not bear OAF. See their closing sounds: [ˈʈʰoː·ɾa] and [sə]. They close on [a] and [ə] sounds. On the other hand, see the same pre-modifier in front of another noun.

Table 19: OAF inflection of pre-modifiers

تھوڑے سے ذخیرے میں
Thoray say zakheeray main
ˈʈʰoː·ɾ[e] s[e]zə·ˈxiː·re mẽ
In a small storage.

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In 19, both [ˈʈʰo·ɽa] and [sə] get OAF inflection. This suggests that [ˈuː·pər], [ˈniː·t͡ʃe],[ɖɑ̃ĩ], [bɑ̃ĩ] are not pure nouns. They are adverbs, placed in the slot of a noun. Therefore, we will call them nominal adverbs. From the above example we come to know that the nominal adverbs get OAF when they precede a postposition. They assign it to the postpositions of their complements too, but not to their pre-modifying adverbs.

Adjective Nominals

Sometimes, Adjectives also appear in the adjunct slots as nominals.

Table 20: OAF inflection of nominal adjective

آپ کے مطابق
Aap ke mutabiq
ɑːp k[e] mʊ·ˈʈɑːbɪqØ
According to you.

In 20, the genitive P carries OAF inflection. This happens only when it precedes an oblique noun. In the current example, [ke] precedes an OAF-marked adjective [mʊ·ʈɑːbɪqØ]. As the presence of OAF on the adjective implies the presence of a silent postposition ahead, it means the adjective is functioning as a nominal here.

Table 21: OAF on the pre-modifiers of Adjective

ہمارے اچھے برابر والے۔
Hamaray achhay brabar valay
hə·ˈmɑː·r[e]ˈət͡ʃ·t͡ʃʰ[e] ˈbrɑː·bər ˈʋɑː·l[e]
Our nice neighours.

Unlike adverb nominal, adjective nominal assigns OAF to its pre-modifiers. The adjective [ˈbrɑː·bər] has assigned OAF to the preceding adjective [ˈət͡ʃ·t͡ʃʰe] and determiner [hə·ˈmɑː·re]. In this combination an adjective [ˈət͡ʃ·t͡ʃʰe] is modifying another adjective [ˈbrɑː·bər], which looks strange. But it is not illogical. Actually [ˈbrɑː·bər] sits here as a adjective nominal, and is the complement of postposition [ˈʋɑː·le]

Participle Nominal

A participle [lɪ·ˈja] (taken) is often used in the genitive phrases as [lɪ·ˈje]. See the following table.

Table 22: OAF inflection of a participle

آپ کے لیئے۔
Aap ke liyay.
ɑːp k[e]lɪ·ˈj[e].
For you.

An objection may be raised that [lɪ·ˈja] is the past tense of [ˈle·na]. Objection is relevant, but [lɪ·ˈja] is also used as the past participle. For example, [goɖ lɪ·ˈja ˈbe·ʈa] (adopted son). Once again the presence OAF on [lɪ·ˈje] in 22 implies the presence of a silent postposition ahead.

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Infinitive Nominal

Often infinitives precede dative [ko] or any other postposition, and acquires OAF. Unlike adverb nominals, it assigns OAF to its pre-modifiers. See the examples in tables 23 and 24 below.

Table 23: OAF on pre-modifier of the infinitive

میرے آنے سے۔
Mairay aanay se.
ˈmeː·re ˈɑː·ne se
By my coming.

In 23, [ˈɑː·ne] is an infinitive, functioning as a nominal. The evidence of its being a nominal is that a determiner [ˈmeː·re]precedes it, and an Instrumental P [se] follows it.

Table 24: OAF inflection on an Infinitive

گاڑی جانے کو ہے۔
Gari jaanay ko he.
ˈgɑː·ɾi ˈd͡ʒɑː·ne ko he
The train is about to leave.

In 24, [ˈd͡ʒɑː·ne ko] is not a VP. It is rather an adjunct PP joined with a copular verb. [ˈd͡ʒɑː·ne] is the nominal complement of the dative P [ko].

Covert OAF on the pre-modifiers with [a] inflection

Though generally the oblique nouns and their pre-modifiers ending on [a] sound bear OAF. But in case of proper nouns, or high level of formality, OAF goes silent, but it stays over there. See the following two examples.

Table 25: Covert OAF on Oblique noun

میرے چچا کے بیٹے نے۔
Mairay chacha ke baitay ne
ˈme·r[e] t͡ʃʌ·t͡ʃaØk[e]ˈbe·ʈ[e]ne
My uncle’s son.

In 25, oblique noun [t͡ʃʌ·t͡ʃaØ] is without OAF, whereas its determiner [ˈme·re] bears it. This combination suggests that [t͡ʃʌ·t͡ʃaØ] carries a silent OAF, which is illustrated by [Ø].

Table 26: Covert OAF on a pre-modifier

بڑے عمدہ کمرے میں۔
Bary umda kamray main.
bə·ˈɽ[e] ʊm·ɡaʰØˈkəm·remɛ̃
In a very fine room.

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In 26, [ʊm·d̪aʰØ] is an adjective, usually used in formal conversation. It shows null [Ø] OAF in spite of the fact both its head [ˈkəm·re,] and its modifier [bə·ˈɽe] carry it. Again the suggestion is clear. The adjective [ʊm·d̪aʰØ] bears it silently.

This paper synthesizes the theories of Mohanan (1990), Butt (1995), Schmidt (1999), Kachru (2006), Koul (2008) on Urdu/Hindi postpositions. A new classification that differentiated postpositions from case markers is introduced here. This classification answers many questions, and removes many confusions. It clearly describes the structure ofUrdu Adjunct Phrase. This also throws light on the structure of complement phrases. As a matter of fact, confusion of case and postpositions could only be resolved from a syntactic approach.

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