

THETA ROLES AND THE URDU PRONOMINAL CLITICS

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Abstract

This article explores the role of Urdu pronominal clitics in assigning θ -roles. These clitics not only mark cases and grammatical relations but also assign different θ -roles, playing a significant role in constructing the argument structure of Urdu. While abstract Case is inherent to nominal lexical items, these clitics materialize the realization of case at the surface level in Urdu. They mark θ -roles such as Agent, Experiencer, Theme, Patient, Instrument, Force, and more.

Introduction

Sentences/propositions are constructed in such a way that some of their constituents (XPs/DPs etc.) identify individuals and entities and some tell us about these individuals and entities. The constituents that identify the individuals and entities are called referring expressions and the constituents that tell us about these individuals and entities are known as predicates in formal logic. The referring expressions are known as arguments. An argument is thus an individual, an entity or an item about which a predicate tells us something (Katamba, 1993). Thus, predicates have the properties of telling us about the arguments and these properties of predicates are known as thematic roles. In other words, predicates have “thematic roles as part of their lexical semantics” (Adger, 2003, p.62).

It does not mean that the θ -roles assigned by predicates are purely semantic and they don't have an effect on the syntax. “One criterion for judging whether a sentence is grammatical is that the θ -roles associated with its predicate(s) must be assigned to arguments, these arguments must be structurally realized” (Haegeman, 1994, p.52). If a predicate has a θ -role, but it has not an argument to assign that θ -role, then the sentence is grammatically unacceptable. “Conversely, the referring NPs in the sentence must bear some semantic relation to a predicate. This semantic relation can be established via the assignment of thematic roles” (Haegeman, 1994, p.52).

- 1) *a. Aslām=ne Akram=ko dīya
Aslam. AGENT Akram.RECIPIENT give
Aslam gave to Akram
- *b. us=ne hām=ko dī
He. AGENT we. RECIPIENT give.3PLPAST
He gave us.

The sentences (1a&b) are ill-formed because one argument of the argument structure is missing.

It means every θ -role of a predicate must be assigned to an argument and to only one argument in the sentence. A single argument cannot be assigned two θ -roles. “Each θ -role is assigned to exactly one constituent in the sentence” (Adger,

2003, p.63). But it is not necessary that “every constituent needs to be assigned a θ -role” (Adger, 2003, p.63), because the arguments can be realized by other than a noun phrase.

Theta Roles and Syntax

Linguists recognize θ -roles and share an intuition that human languages have semantic properties that are relevant to syntax. These semantic properties play a vital role in the transitivity system of the languages (Katamba, 1993). In Urdu, these semantic properties make use of the clitics (in addition to other syntactic phenomena) to realize themselves.

- 2) a. $b\hat{a}t\check{d}=ne$ $f\acute{a}kir=ko$ $mara$
 children=ERG beggar.DAT beat.PAST
 The Children beat the beggar.
- b. $b\hat{a}t\check{d}=ko$ $f\acute{a}kir=ne$ $mara$
 children=DAT beggar.ERG beat.PAST
 The beggar beat the children.

In (2a&b) the words are same in both sentences but they give different meanings when the theta roles assigned by the clitics are changed. It means that the theta-roles do not inherently reside in the meanings of the words. The different meanings of these sentences are due to the theta roles assigned by the clitics to the NPs $b\hat{a}t\check{d}$ (the children) and $f\acute{a}kir$ (the beggar). Urdu has flexible word order and the meanings of a sentence are not affected if the subject and object interchange their places but if the clitics exchange their DPs, the meanings are changed because the theta roles are changed.

It is not only the structural position of the argument that gives meaning; rather structures, verbs and the clitics that mark the theta roles contribute to the meanings of the sentences. In (2a&b) the verb *mara* determines the argument structure, the syntactic positions of the subject and objects realize the argument structure and the clitics *ne* and *ko* θ -mark the roles. And thus the grammatical sentence is created.

The Argument Structure of the Verb

The “information about the number and category of the arguments that a predicate takes is called the argument structure of the predicate” (Poole, 2002). The obligatory elements of the sentence are determined by the argument structure of the verb. This structure of the verb specifies only the number of the required constituents and not their type.

In MP and Government and Binding Theory this specification is represented by means of a thematic grid/theta grid. A lexical verb has a slot for a θ -role as a part of its specification and this slot on the one hand is associated with the thematic role and s-selectional features and on the other hand is related to the c-selectional features. Thus, both types of selectional features are associated with θ -roles or slots arranged in the form of a list or θ -grid. A lexical item like *dena* (give) has the following internal structure:

Table 1: The internal structure of *dēna*

<i>dēna</i> (give) V	Syntax (c-select features)	θ -Grid (i.e. list of θ -roles)	Semantics (s-select features)	Thematic Roles
	N	X	Entity	Agent
	N	Y	Entity	Theme
	N/P	Z	Entity	Goal

This table specifies part of the lexical entry for the verb *dēna* (give) and represents the θ -grid as a list of letters (x, y, z). We can know from the θ -grid how much of the verb's lexical semantics is active syntactically. In Table (1) the lexical semantics is divided into three parts to be used by the syntax. The c-selectional features inform us about the categories of the syntactic arguments that are assigned the roles and the relations between the lexical semantics of the predicate and the θ -grid tell us about the s-selectional properties and the thematic-roles that are associated with each formative of the θ -grid (Adger, 2003).

The Realization of the Theta Roles in Urdu

Pronouns or pronouns plus clitics make the pronominal arguments in Urdu. Sometimes, pronouns alone cannot realize the arguments of the predicates. They need the clitics to realise the arguments.

- 3) *a. $m\ddot{o}d\ddot{z}^h$ $k^h\ddot{a}n\ddot{a}$ $n\ddot{a}h\ddot{i}$ $k^h\ddot{a}y\ddot{a}$ $d\ddot{z}\ddot{a}\ddot{t}\ddot{a}$
I.AGENT food not eat go
I cannot eat food.
- b. $m\ddot{o}d\ddot{z}^h=se$ $k^h\ddot{a}n\ddot{a}$ $n\ddot{a}h\ddot{i}$ $k^h\ddot{a}y\ddot{a}$ $d\ddot{z}\ddot{a}\ddot{t}\ddot{a}$
I. AGENT food not eat go
I cannot eat food.

The sentence (3a) is not grammatical because *se* that θ -marks the argument is missing and (3b) is grammatically correct tense because it has the θ -marker *se*.

In English, DPs, PPs, clauses, small clauses etc., make the arguments and in Urdu, D/NPs, PPs, nominal and pronominal forms plus clitics and clauses realize the arguments.

- 4) a. $\ddot{u}s=ne$ $k\ddot{a}h\ddot{a}$ $h\ddot{e}$ (adapted from Siddiqui, 2003)
he. AGENT
He has said.
- b. vo $\ddot{u}s=se$ $m\ddot{i}l\ddot{a}$
he.AGENT he.GOAL

In (4a&b) arguments are formed by pronouns and pronominal clitics.

Ojectives of the Study



1. To examine the role of Urdu pronominal clitics in assigning θ -roles and their impact on the argument structure of the language.
2. To investigate the relationship between pronominal clitics and the realization of case at the surface level in Urdu.
3. To analyze how pronominal clitics mark specific θ -roles, such as Agent, Experiencer, Theme, Patient, Instrument, Force, and more in Urdu.

Research Questions

1. How do Urdu pronominal clitics assign θ -roles and contribute to the argument structure in the language?
2. What is the role of pronominal clitics in marking different θ -roles, such as Agent, Experiencer, Theme, Patient, Instrument, and Force, in Urdu?
3. How does the realization of case at the surface level in Urdu rely on the usage of pronominal clitics?

Methodology

The research design for the present study is the qualitative research.

Framework

The present research will be undertaken within the framework of the Minimalist Program.

The Assignment of the Theta Roles in Urdu

In accordance with the Minimalist Programme “ θ -roles are only assigned under a Merge operation” and “all θ -roles associated with a head H are assigned within projections of H” (Hornstein, Nunes, & Grohmann, 2005, p.81). The external arguments like subjects are generated in the specifier of the lexical head and with this head they enter into a θ -relation. That’s what the Predicate-Internal Subject Hypothesis (PISH) says “the thematic subject is base-generated inside the predicate” (Hornstein et al., 2005, p.367). But it is not only the head (verb) that theta-marks the subject. It is verb plus its object that together mark the thematic role. “The external θ -role, the one that the subject receives, is actually assigned not by the verb alone, but by the whole VP (the verb plus the internal argument)” (Hornstein et al., 2005, p.77).

- 5) a. She took a rest.
EXPERIENCER
- b. She took the book.
AGENT

Hornstein et al. (2005) are of the opinion that *she* in (139a&b) has different thematic role on account of the whole VP, (the verb *took* plus the internal arguments, *a rest* and *the book*). Thus predicates directly θ -mark their complements, and indirectly θ -mark their subjects/specifiers (Radford, 2004).

The configurations for θ -assignment to Urdu pronominal arguments

Moreover, a VP assigns its theta role to a D/NP that is close by. Hornstein et al. (2005) say that “the configurations for θ -assignment must be local in some sense” (p.78). The structure based on binary branching and endocentricity θ -marks only the c-commanded elements. In the minimalist programme, the derivation of a sentence occurs phase by phase. A phase is an independent unit of syntactic structure. Syntactic operations apply to the whole of the phase and not to its parts. Once a phase is complete, it is transferred to PF and LF and it becomes inaccessible for any further operation. It is called the Phase Impenetrability Condition:

In a phase α with head H, the domain of H is not accessible to operations outside, only H and its edge are accessible to such operations (Hornstein et al., 2005, p.367).

The Phase Impenetrability Condition applies in the case of arguments constituted of pronouns plus clitics in the Urdu language. When pronouns plus clitics make the arguments, the clitics as opposed to verbs assign the theta roles because the principle of the Phase Impenetrability Condition applies.

- 6) a. vo os=mē dīltfāspi rākhta hā
 he.EXPERIENCER he.THEME interest keep be
 He is interested in her.
 He has an interest in her.
- b. mā=ne kītab os=se li
 I.RECIPIENT book he.SOURCE get
 I got book from him.
- c. mā=ne kītab os=ko di
 I.AGENT book he.RECEPIENT give
 I gave a book to him.

The pronouns in (6a-c) are θ -marked by clitics because they are assigned theta roles under the local head. The clitics are the local heads and they show whether an argument is an agent, an experiencer or a theme etc. After the phase is complete, it is sent to the PF and LF and is not accessible for further operations.

Thematic Relations and Theta Roles

The thematic structure is very important for some syntactic structure but the theta theory or the theory of thematic roles is very sketchy and there is no agreement about the number and labels of thematic roles. They are discussed generally and informally and their definitions are not universally accepted. The inventory given below is tentative and not exhaustive.

Different θ -Roles Assigned by *Ne*

The clitic *ne* assigns different thematic roles. It usually assigns the theta role of the agent to the arguments that wilfully instigate and intentionally initiate the action or event described or expressed by the verb/the predicate.



- 7.4 a. mǎ=ne gend=ko t^hokər mari
AGENT

I kicked the ball.

- b. həm=ne Ahmed=ko mara
AGENT

We hit/beat Ahmed.

- c. mǎ=ne glas tər dıya
AGENT glass broke do

I broke the glass.

The clitic *ne* also theta-marks the role of agent when the action expressed by the verb is not by virtue of volition.

- 7) mǎ=ne ittifakən glas tər dıya
AGENT accidentally glass broke do

I accidentally broke the glass.

The clitic *ne* also assigns the role of experiencer to the arguments when the verbs like dek^hna, mōhəbbət kərna, nəfərət kərna, sətʃna, yəkin kərna etc. are the head of the predicate that expresses the past action.

- 8) a. mǎ=ne ʊs=ke mütələk sətʃa
I.EXPERIENCER him about thik

I thought about him.

- b. mǎ=ne tʃand dek^ha
I.EXPERIENCER moon saw

I saw the moon.

The clitic *ne* also assigns the role of instrument to an argument having an inanimate entity that is manipulated by an individual to carry out an action or bring about a state of affairs identified by the verb.

- 9) a. kia pə^hər=ne k^hırki tərđi
stone.INSTRUMENTAL window break

Has the rock broken the window?

- b. hā ʊs=ne k^hırki tərđi
he.INSTRUMENTAL

Yes, it broke the window.

The clitic *ne* also assigns the role of instrument to an argument having an involuntary causal participant that is not manipulated by an agent. It includes tornados, rain, earthquake, storms, and acts of God etc.

- 10) a. kĩa zəlzəle=ne həzarō log mar dıye
earthquake.FORCE

Did the earthquake killed thousands of people?

- b. hā dʒi ʊs=ne həzarō log mar dıye
FORCE

Yes, it killed thousands of people.

c. kīa silab=ne gaḍ=ka sḥfaya kḥr ḡiya
flood.FORCE

Has the flood washed away the village?

d. hā ūs=ne gaḍ=ka sḥfaya kḥr ḡiya
he.FORCE

Yes, it washed away the village.

The clitic *ne* also assigns the role of patient to an argument that undergoes the process or action identified and expressed by the predicate in a passive construction.

11) ūs=ne kīs=se mar k^hai
he.PATIENT

By whom was he beaten?

The clitic *ne* also assigns the role of theme when it is used with the argument of a verb expressing state.

12) ūs=ne aaram kīya.
he.THEME
He rested.

Table 2: Different roles assigned *ne* in Urdu

e	Rol	Clitic
nt	Age	ne
eriencer	Exp	ne
ument	Instr	ne
e	Forc	ne
ent	Pati	ne
me	The	ne

Thus *ne* assigns and marks different thematic roles. Its prototypical role is that of an agent but in addition to this role it also indicates the roles of an experience, instrument, force, patient and theme.

1.1.1 Different θ -Roles Assigned by *ko*

The theta role that *ko* most usually assigns is that of a *recipient*. A *recipient* is a special kind of goal. *Recipients* “only occur with verbs that denote a change of possession” (Carnie, 2006, p.231). It is an animate individual who receives something.

13) a. mā̃=ne ūn=ko kar peḡ ki
I.AGENT them.RECEPIENT car.THEME offer do

I offered them a/the car.

- b. mæ=ne ʊn=ko kɪt̪ab bʰedʒi
AGENT RECEPIENT THEME

I sent a/the book to them.

- c. Hamid=ne ʊs=ko kɪt̪ab ɖi
RECIPIENT

Hamid gave him a/the book.

The clitic *ko* marks many theta roles and one of them is the role of an experiencer. An experiencer is an entity (perceiver or emoter) that experiences some internal or psychological state or the argument that perceives or feels some event expressed by the predicate is called experiencer. Experiencers can appear as subjects of verbs like, love, think, hate and believe, etc. (Van Valin, 1999). In Urdu, they can be subjects of verb like soʃna, pəsəŋɖ/məhsus hona/kərna, lægna and yəkin hona/kərna etc.

- 14) a. ʊs=ko sara ɖɪn tʰəŋɖək məhsus hoʃi/ləɖʒi rəhi hæ
he.EXPERIENCER
He has been feeling cold all the day.
b. mera kʰɪyāl hæ keh ʊs=ko bɪskɪt pəsəŋɖ hæ
he.EXPERIENCER

I think that he likes biscuits/cookies.

The clitic *ko* also θ -marks the role of a patient. A patient is a person or thing that undergoes the process or action identified and expressed by the predicate.

- 15) a. genɖ=ko kɪs=ne tʰokər mɑri
PATIEN
Who kicked the ball?
b. Aslam=ne ʊs=ko tʰokər mɑri
PATIENT

I kicked the ball.

Another theta role marked and assigned by *ko* is theme. A theme is a person or a thing that undergoes an action or a change of location (motion).

- 16) a. Hamid=ne ʊs=ko mez= pər rəkʰɑ
THEME
Hamid put it on the table.
b. ʊs=ne ʊs=ko meri t̪ərəf dʰəkɑ diya
GAENT THEME GOAL

He pushed her towards me.

Another theta role marked by *ko* is the Goal which is the destination of abstract motion.

- 17) ʊs=ko kɪt̪ab ɖi gəi
GOAL

He was given a/the book.

The theta role of beneficiary is also marked by the clitic *ko*. A benefactive is an entity that benefits from the action expressed by the predicate.

- 18) us=ne xəṭ ṭum=ko diya
 AGENT THEME BENEFACTIVE/GOAL
 He gave (a/the) letter to you.

Table 3: Different roles assigned by *ko* in Urdu

e	Rol	Clitic
Recipient	Reci	ko
Experiencer	Exp	ko
Agent	Pati	ko
Theme	The	ko
Goal	Goa	ko
Benefactive	Ben	Ko

Different θ -Roles Assigned by *se*

The typical theta roles assigned by *se* are *source* and *instrument*. The source is the opposite of a goal. It is an entity that is the origin of an event or action, the entity from which something is moved as a result of the activity expressed by the predicate. It is used in a variety of situations, which can conflate the ambiguity between recipient and goal (Haegeman, 1994).

- 19) a. vo $\text{mudz}^h=\text{se}$ xəṭ laya
 he.SGNOM I.SGOBL=SOURCE letter bring
 He brought (a/the) letter from me.
 b. us=ne $\text{mudz}^h=\text{se}$ xəṭ lrya
 he.3.SGOBL=RCP I.1GSOBL=SOURCE
 He took (a/the) letter from me.
 c. $\text{mā}=\text{ne}$ kṭab us=se xəriḡi
 I.SGNOM=AGENT book he.SGOBL=SOURCE buy
 I bought a/the book from her.
 The clitic *se* also expresses the source of experience.

- 20) mā us=se dərṭa hū
 I.1.SG.NOM he.3.SG.OBL=SOURCE fear be
 I fear him.

Urdu uses *se* for motion away from a source. Different semantic usages of *se* show that “its core meaning is of source point of motion. The other usages are its extensions” (Ahmed, 2007, p.2)

It also θ -marks the intermediate agent in causatives.



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