

## The form and function of Conjunct verb construction in Hindi\*

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Abstract:

*The present paper examines the form and function of one of the complex predicates that is known as ‘Conjunct verb construction in Hindi. The conjunct verb is a kind of predicate that is formed with either a noun or an adjective and a verb (the light verb). The conjunct verbs that are formed with an adjective and a verb do not pose any problem for the theoreticians. However, the function of the conjunct verb that has a noun and verb is descriptively and theoretically puzzling. The nominal host which comes to form a complex predicate with the light verb has two functions. In one, it not only helps the verb to become complex, but also controls agreement when other noun phrases are overtly case marked, but in other case, it just remains passively in the verb phrase and even when it is the only noun phrase with no overt case marking, it does not show any agreement with the verb. The paper presents this puzzling behaviour of the conjunct verb and its nominal host in two sets A and B respectively and finally evokes the case theory of Chomsky and Panini to give a solution of the problem. The solution is of course a hypothesis but it seems to have explanatory power for the conjunct verb construction.*

Key words: Conjunct verb, predicate, theoretically puzzling, complex, Chomsky, Panini, explanatory power

### 1. Introduction

Complex predicate is used as a cover term to refer to various kinds of verbal strings in the languages of the world. The South Asian languages also employ ‘complex predicate’ in a variety of contexts to refer to several kinds of expressions. One might come across many more references of such construction, but it is very common to come across the following usages of the term; compound verb construction, conjunct verb construction, serial verb construction, participial construction, coverbs, small clause construction and infinitival construction etc. It is important to talk about the way through which the complex predicate is formed, used and differentiated from ‘simple predicate’ in linguistic literature. In general, a predicate is the part of the sentence that contains the verb (main verb) and the meaning or the sense of the sentence finds its ‘predication’ on it. This is how the simple predicate is defined but what about the complex predicate. Given the fact that the predicate must contain the verb of the sentence, in case of complex predicate, the form, function and even the nature of the predicate is complex because it contains more than one verbal element in the verb phrase. The second co-existent element in the verb phrase could be a verb, noun, adjective or any other grammatical

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construct<sup>1</sup> which firsts co-exists with the verb in the predicate position and later helps predication of the sentence possible.

The present paper examines the ‘complex predicate’ that is made out of a noun (abstract) and a verb (light verb<sup>2</sup>). Such a ‘*complex predicate*’ by definition is a grammatical category which is formed by the mutual sharing of semantic features and co-occurrence of two lexical items e.g. a ‘*host*’ and a ‘*light verb*’. It is interesting to note that the co-occurrence of the ‘host’ i.e. noun has very special function in the above mentioned complex predicate.

The main thrust of the paper is to examine this unique behavior or function of the ‘host’ noun. As we will see shortly that this host nominal entity sometimes functions as the integral part of the verb phrase in certain linguistic environment, however, in some other context, the host nominal despite the fact that it is the integral part of the verb phrase, shows the traits of a real nominal entity and controls the agreement pattern of the construction. Conjunct verb as the part of complex predicate has always been an area of interest for the scholars working on South Asian languages. Scholars such as Kellogg (1875), Gurtu (1922), Sharma (1958), Kachru (1966), Verma (1971), Hook (1974), Masica (1976), Butt (1995), Mohanan (1994) and Abbi (1994) have dealt with the complex predicate of one or other types. Despite of such a range of works being carried out in this area, conjunct verb and its agreement phenomenon has remained descriptively and theoretically puzzling. There have been specific attempts in the literature to find out the reason for such a quizzical function or behavior of the host nominal in such complex predicate, but beyond the mere structural descriptions<sup>3</sup> or pointing out what is there in the sentences such as the organization of the post-positions in the sentence, nothing much has been said on the theoretical side.

## **2. The formation of the complex predicate**

It is an interesting to examine and notice that not any combination of a noun and a verb can qualify the requirement of a ‘conjunct verb construction’. In other words, there are instances where the co-occurrence of a noun and a verb in a sequence of N+V cannot be called a ‘conjunct verb construction’.

Let us see examples:

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<sup>1</sup> In case of Persian language, a complex predicate can have a postposition/preposition and even an adverb as the second element in the predicate position with main verb to form the complex predicate.

<sup>2</sup> The verb is called light verb because it goes through a process of ‘grammaticalization’. There are lots of works that have been done for the explanation of the ‘light verb’. For a more detail and the history of ‘light verb’ see Butt (2003).

<sup>3</sup> Mohanan (1994) ‘The Argument Structure in Hindi’ has tried to analyze the structural dependencies of the complex predicates and she has at least been able to say something about the order of the post-positions in the sentences and she thinks this order itself is the reason for such quizzical behavior of the complex predicate. This has been at least a good start in terms of giving a path to find out the theoretical reason for this unique behavior of the construction.

1a. मानस ने अपना होमवर्क किया

manas-ne	apna	homwork	kiya
Manas-3MS-Erg	self	homework-MS	do-perf-MS

‘Manas did his homework’.

b. नीतू ने महेश को एक किताब दी

nitū-ne	mahes-ko	ek	kitab	di
Neetu-3FS	Mahesh-3MS-Dat	one	book-FS	give-perf-FS

‘Neetu gave a book to Mahesh’.

These examples (1a-b) also may falsely indicate to have ‘conjunct verb’ that are formed with a sequence of N+V. However, these examples are not the case of a conjunct verb construction. We cannot and do not consider these examples as the part of either complex predicate or conjunct verb construction because, the predicate contains just a simple verb and the thematic role<sup>4</sup> or the valency of the argument-structure entails that the verb ‘karna’, ‘to do’ and ‘dena’, to ‘give’ is well-satisfied or are in place, so there is no reason why it should be considered as the complex predicates.

Nevertheless, there are expressions such as ‘**to love, to remember, to rely, to hate, to progress, to listen to someone, to care, to insult, to praise, to forgive** etc.’ which cannot be expressed in many South Asian languages by using just a verb. In fact, it is almost impossible to think of these concepts to be expressed in these languages by employing a verb. This fact has been noticed in many languages outside the subcontinent as well. So, what appears to me as a linguist

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<sup>4</sup> **Agent**: deliberately performs the action (e.g., Bill ate his soup quietly).

**Experiencer**: receives sensory or emotional input (e.g., The smell of lilies filled Jennifer's nostrils).

**Theme**: undergoes the action but does not change its state (e.g., Bill kissed Mary). (Sometimes used interchangeably with patient).

**Patient**: undergoes the action and has its state changed (e.g., The falling rocks crushed the car) (Sometimes used interchangeably with theme).

**Instrument**: used to carry out the action (e.g., Jamie cut the ribbon with a pair of scissors).

**Natural Cause**: mindlessly performs the action (e.g., An avalanche destroyed the ancient temple).

**Location**: where the action occurs (e.g., Johnny and Linda played carelessly in the park).

**Goal**: what the action is directed towards (e.g., The caravan continued on toward the distant oasis).

**Recipient**: a special kind of goal associated with verbs expressing a change in ownership, possession. (e.g., I sent John the letter).

**Source**: where the action originated (e.g., The rocket was launched from Central Command).

**Time**: the time at which the action occurs (e.g., The rocket was launched yesterday).

**Beneficiary**: the entity for whose benefit the action occurs (e.g., I baked Reggie a cake).

**Manner**: the way in which an action is carried out (e.g., With great urgency, Tabatha phoned 911).

**Purpose**: the reason for which an action is performed (e.g., Tabatha phoned 911 right away in order to get some help).

**Cause**: what caused the action to occur in the first place; not for what, rather because of what (e.g., Since Clyde was hungry, he ate the cake).

See Fillmore (1968) ‘The Case for Case’ for a more detail analysis of thematic roles in linguistics.

is the fact that the languages of South Asia and of elsewhere fulfill this pattern-gap of human communication by employing a very unique, uniform and interesting strategy. The strategy seems to be something like this that the languages select the *abstract nouns* and lets them go through a process of ‘**grammaticalization**’<sup>5</sup> or what is known as ‘**semantic bleaching**’ and then incorporate these nouns in the verb phrase in order to meet the requirement of the structural patten-gap, and come up to equivalent expressions of above type.

Let us examine one case and compare it with the above given examples:

2a. संगीता ने कमल पर भरोसा किया

sangita-ne	kamal-par	bharosa	kiya
Sangita-3FS-Erg	Kamal-3MS-Loc	reliance-N(m)	do-perf-MS
‘Sangita relied on Kamal’.			

2b. धीरज ने बच्चों पर ध्यान दिया

dhiraj-ne	bacchon-pər	dhyan	diya
Dhiraj-3MS-Erg	child-MPI-obl-Loc	attention-MS	give-perf-MS
‘Dhiraj paid attention on children’.			

Let us now compare the examples (1a-b) and (2a-b) in order to prove that the ‘nominal host’ in (2a-b) is the integral part of the predicate, while the same is not true in case of example (1a-b).

In example (1a), we have an agent ‘*manas*’-‘Manas’ and an accomplished action ‘*apana homework*’-‘own homework’. These two arguments have been licensed in the clause by the transitive verb ‘*karna*’-‘do’. If we now examine the case of (2a), we would say that there is an agent ‘*sangit*’-‘Sangita’ and next is an accomplished action ‘*bharosa*’-‘reliance’. So far so good, however, we also have another argument in the clause i.e. ‘*kamal*’-‘Kamal’. The verb ‘*kərna*’ ‘do’, which is a transitive verb, cannot license this third argument ‘kamal’ in the clause. So, the question is where this third argument comes from, and how is this being licensed in the sentence in terms of the case and other things.

We could argue that the third argument in the clause has been licensed by the complex predicate i.e. ‘conjunct verb’- ‘*bharosa karna*’- ‘an act of reliance’ as a single linguistic unit. If we accept this we would realize that the ‘conjunct verb’, *bharosa karna*’ need a benefactor and thus contributes the third argument in the clause.

Now let us see the case association with the arguments in the clause. However, it is important to

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<sup>5</sup> The best example of the process of grammaticalization that I can think of is the process of putting two verbs together where one of the verbs has to be grammaticalized, or semantically bleached in order to co-exist together. The examples of ‘Compound verb’ can be something like ‘mar jana’, ‘to die’, ‘kha jaana’, ‘to eat’, ‘bol uthana’, ‘to speak’ etc. However, even in the normal case when we make use of a verb to express for any aspectual marker in the sentence, the verb seems to go through the same process of grammaticalization. For example, ‘jaa raha hai’, ‘is going’, ‘kha raha hai’, ‘is eating’. In these examples, the V2 in case of compound verb and auxiliary verb in normal verbal expression are said to have gone through the process of grammaticalization.

map the arguments first. In example (2b), we have an agent '*dhiraj*'-'Dhiraj'(i.e. the giver), a receiver '*bacche*'-'children' and the thing that is given '*dhyān*'- 'attention'. This is very similar to what we have in example (1b), *Neetu* (agent), *Mahesh* (the receiver) and *a book* (the thing that is given). In both the examples, we have two internal arguments and one external argument, as the verb of these clauses is a ditransitive one (i.e. a three place predicate).

However, there is an asymmetry in the distribution of the case markers in (2b) and (1b). We know that the receiver/benefactor (i.e. the goal of the giving) normally takes the *dative case* as is the case in example (1b), '*mahesh-ko*'- ' to Mahesh'. But, the receiver/benefactor in example (2b) '*bacche*' has a locative case marker. Mohanan (1994) has shown, following Gruber's (1965) '*Semantic field*'<sup>6</sup>, that the locative case marker '*par*'-'on' is not the part of semantic structure of the verb '*dena*'-'to give'. Therefore, '*dena*'-'to give' cannot license a locative case to its argument.

Moreover, if we consider the noun '*dhyān*'-'attention' together with the predicate '*dena*'-'to give' as a 'conjunct verb' i.e. '*dhyān dena*'-'to pay attention', we can definitely say that '*dhyān dena*' assigns the locative case '*par*'-'on' to the argument 'bacche'-'children'. The aforementioned explanation proves that the 'nominal host' is the integral part of the predicate and it plays a crucial role in deciding the number of valency, theta role, and postpositions associated with arguments in the sentences.

### 3. The Function of the Conjunct verb

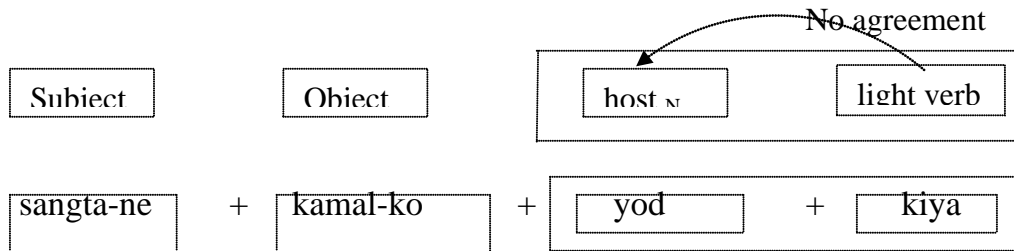
As I pointed out earlier the function of the nominal host in the 'conjunct verb construction' is descriptively and theoretically puzzling and unique. This theoretical puzzle is very interesting with regard to the agreement facts of the construction. There seems to be two distinct function of nominal host of the conjunct verb construction. In the first case, the nominal host remains completely in the verb phrase and even when other arguments are overtly case marked and the nominal host is an unmarked NP, it does not affect the agreement procedure and the verb (light verb) gets the default agreement marker i.e. 3MS. Moreover, in the second case, the same nominal host for some reason does not seem to an integral part of the verb phrase and it seems to retain some of its nominal property. The hypothesis gets strengthen when this nominal host of the conjunct verb construction becomes one of the arguments and controls the verb agreement of the construction when other nominal elements are overtly case marked. It somewhat functions like the grammatical subject of the sentence.

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<sup>6</sup> For a detail analysis of Gruber's proposal of 'Semantic field', see Mohanan (1994).

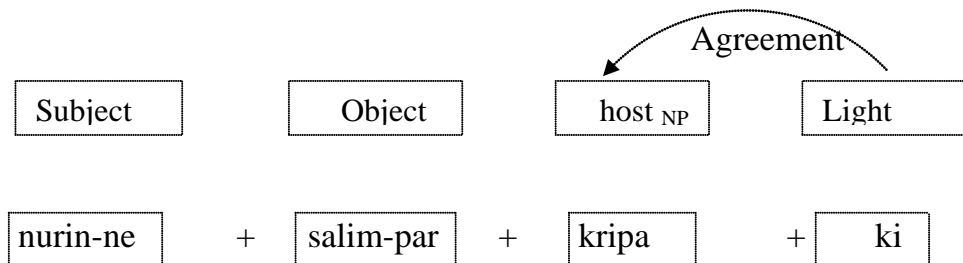
Let us examine these two sets of conjunct verb construction:

**Set A: The case of conjunct verb where the nominal host does not agree with the light verb**



- 1) समीरा ने महेश को पसंद किया  
 samira-ne                      mahesh-ko                      pasand                      kiya  
 Sarneela-3FS-Erg                      Mahesh-3MS-Acc                      liking-N(fem)                      do-perf-MS  
 ‘Samira liked Mahesh’.
- 2) दिनेश ने मधु को याद किया  
 dinesh-ne                      madhu-ko                      yad                      kiya  
 Dinesh-3MS-Erg                      Madhu-3FS-Acc                      memory-N(fem)                      do-perf-MS  
 ‘Dinesh remembered Madhu’.
- 3) निहारिका ने चन्दन को क्षमा किया  
 niharika-ne                      candan-ko                      kshama                      kiya  
 Niharika-3FS-Erg                      Chandan-3MS-Acc                      forgiveness-N(fem)                      do-perf-MS  
 ‘Niharika forgave Chandan’.

**Set B: The case of conjunct verb where the nominal host agrees with the light verb**



- 4) समीर ने नगमा का अपमान किया  
 samir-ne                      nagama-ka                      apman                      kiya  
 Sameer-3MS-Erg                      Nagma-3FS                      insult-N(masc)                      do-perf-MS  
 ‘Sameer insulted Nagma’.

- 5) नुरीन ने सलीम पर कृपा की  
 nurin-ne salim-par kripa ki  
 Nureen-3FS-Erg Saleem-3 PMS-Loc favor-N(fem) do-perf-FS  
 ‘Nureen did a favor for Saleem’.
- 6) नशीर ने शबनम को आवाज़ दी  
 nasir-ne sabnam-ko aawaz di  
 Naseer-3MS-Erg Sabnam-3FS-Gen call-N(fem) dive-perf-FS  
 ‘Naseer called Sabnam’.
- 5) सुजाता को दिनेश से नफ़रत हुई  
 sujata-ko dinesh-se nafrat hui  
 Sujata-3FS-Dat Dinesh-3MS-Inst. hatred-N(fem) be-perf-FS  
 ‘Sujata hated Dinesh’.
- 6) कोरिया ने तकनीकी के क्षेत्र में बड़ी तरक्की की  
 korea-ne takniki-ke chetra-me badi tarakki ki  
 Korea-Erg technology-Gen filed-Loc great sucessess-FS do-perf-FS  
 ‘Korea succeeded tremendously in the field of technology’.

The above illustrated examples in two different sets, in which the ‘light verb sometimes shows agreement with its ‘host’, but sometimes it does not, help us to hypothesize that the nominal host in ‘conjunct verb construction’ has interesting but puzzling function. Unlike (set A), the labeling of the ‘host’ in (set B) is in a separate box, which depicts the fact that even though the ‘host’ forms a ‘complex predicate’ by a mutual semantic sharing and co-occurrence with a ‘light verb’, it does not give up all its nominal characteristics. The nominal characteristics can be checked through different processes such as passivization, scrambling and topicalization etc. of the ‘host’. We cannot go into the details of such processes here, as it would divert our attention from the main focus of the paper.

However, before we sum up the issue, we would like to consider the following examples.

The classic example of this correlation between the predicate internal agreement of the light verb with the host and the case assigned to the nominal host can be explained through the following set of examples (adopted from Bahl: 1974:24)

- 7) उसने मोहन को याद किया  
 us-ne mohan-ko yad kiya  
 s/he-3M(F)S-Erg Mohan-3MS-Acc memory-N(f) do-perf-MS  
 ‘S/he remembered Mohan’.

7a) उसको मोहन की याद आई/ आयी  
 us-ko                      mohan-ki                      yad                      ayi  
 s/he-3M(F)S-Dat              Mohan-3MS-Gen              memory-N(fem) come-perf-FS  
 ‘S/he remembered Mohan’ or ‘Mohan’s memory came to him/her’.

In the last two examples (7-7a), the argument that precedes the nominal host of the complex predicate ‘mohan’-‘Mohan’ is marked with an accusative case marker and thus, the light verb does not agree with the nominal host ‘yad’- ‘memory’. It inflects for the ‘default form of agreement’. This proves that in example (7) the ‘host’ is integral part of the verb phrase and thus does not function as one of the arguments of the clause. However, in (7a), where there is a genitive case marker with the argument that precedes the ‘host’, and in this case the light verb shows agreement with it. We, for this reason, should treat the ‘host’ as one of the arguments of the clause than an integral part of the predicate in example (7a). This is the explanation that is given in the literature about the conjunct verb construction and the problem of its agreement phenomenon.

However, there can be a better explanation that can not only explain the phenomenon in a better way, but it would also help us to understand the very formation of the conjunct verb in the languages where the predicate such as ‘*to love, to hate, to rely* .....etc.’ does not exist. If the languages formulate a different mechanism or adopt a new device to fulfill the pattern-gape that is found at the structural level, they must have an intelligent way to evolving the mechanism and thus the explanation to the phenomenon must examine some cognitive factor than the mere structural explanation that we saw in the above paragraph.

#### **4. The Solution to the problem of ‘Conjunct verb construction’**

Let us start with Chomsky’s ‘Case theory’<sup>7</sup>. The simplest way of putting the crux of the theory would be that *every NP i.e. a nominal element must have a case in order to be parsed in the sentence*. This was taken very seriously by the researchers who worked or even works in the generative paradigm. The reason that I could think of is the cognitive value that underlies the theory. It is very interesting to note that Chomsky usually recognizes two cases under the category of structural case, i.e. the nominative and accusative. He further has developed a whole world around in order to specify as to how these two cases are assigned, by whom they are assigned, these cases must be checked in different linguistic environment. Although, in the latest theory of generative school i.e. Minimalist Program, things have radically changed. However, if one looks deep inside the new theory or any new attempt of theorization of a concept, it has been observed that even today Chomsky has not changed his position that he had in his earliest work

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<sup>7</sup> See Chomsky (1981) ‘*Lecture on Government and Binding Theory*’ for further details on the topic.

‘aspect’<sup>8</sup>. Let us come back to what we want to draw as the support from Chomsky’s formulation of case theory. The following examples would be worth examining at this stage:

a. **The boy goes** to the market.

= (*Nom case as zero*) = *important to cognize the SUB*

b. **The boy** saw **the girl**.

= (*Nom case as zero*) = (*Acc case as zero*) = *both are important to cognize SUB & DO*

c. **The boy** gave **flowers** to **the girl**.

= (*Nom case as zero*) = (*Acc as zero*) = (*Dat overtly marked*) = *so, again SUB and DO*

However,

c2. **The boy** gave **the girl** **flowers**.

= (*Nom as zero*) (*Dat as zero*) (*Acc as zero*) = *all three, SUB, IO & DO are important to cognize*

The point that I want to make here by illustrating these examples is that the concepts of subject, direct object and indirect object are far more important than any other actants or participants in the sentence with regard to their cognitive value. It could be one of the ground that Chomsky has always treated Nom & Acc cases (later Dative too) as the part of the structural case. They have a cognitive value in the Universal Grammar. They surprisingly function quite similar in the languages of the world. If I am not mistaken, more than 95% of the languages of the world mark these two cases (Nom & Acc) covertly. If they serve as the basic units of language and thought processing for humans, they must be regarded important and thus attend carefully for any explanation.

The other point that might be treated as a off-spring of the above discussion is what I prefer to called a Paninian approach to the analysis of the structure of human language. The term might sound as a big buzzing jargon, but I have used it here for a simple principle of Paninian approach to human language and that is the verb is always believed to be the central element in the language. If we accept this at the face value, we can understand the licensing of the cases in a better way. Chomskyan approach to the assignment or licensing of the case to the NPs does not deviate too much from that of Indian grammarians, however, neither of the approaches denies the fact that verb is an important element in human language. Thus, we can formulate the following schema to explain puzzling and unsolved issues of agreement phenomenon in Conjunct verb construction.

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<sup>8</sup> ‘Aspect’ is a well established ‘short’ form Chomsky’s 1965 book i.e. ‘Aspects of the theory of Syntax’

### Case and valency of the Verbs

- a. Intransitive Verb = one case i.e. Nom & must be given to the Subject/agent
- b. Transitive Verb= two cases i.e. Nom and Acc & must be given to Sub/agent and Obj(DO)/theme
- c. Ditransitive Verb= three cases i.e. Nom, Acc and Dat must be given to Sub, OD and IO respectively

The Hypothesis that I propose: **Dissemination of Case by the Verb:**

The core idea of dissemination, displacement or dispersing of the case from the verb is similar to the idea of ‘case filter’ in Chomskyan terminology. In its simplest version, it means that different verbs i.e. intransitive, transitive and ditransitive as mentioned above have one, two or three cases with them and in order to complete the ‘predication’ of the sentences, these cases from different verbs must be disseminated. I am proposing this here as a hypothesis. This has never been said or attempted before. This concept is necessary to solve the problems of agreement facts and explain the two different functions of the nominal host of the conjunct verb constructions. Let us see some of the examples and explain how this theory actually works:

Examples for Set A repeated here for explanation:

- 1a) समीरा ने महेश को पसंद किया  
samira-ne mahesh-ko pasand kiya  
Sarmeela-3FS-Erg Mahesh-3MS-Acc liking-N(fem) do-perf-MS  
‘Sarmeela liked Mahesh’.

In this example (1a) the verb is a transitive one i.e. ‘karana’, ‘to do’. By the above outline, this verb has two cases such as Nominative and Accusative respectively. The noun ‘samira’ as the nominative case and acts here as the subject (both logical as well as grammatical subject) and the noun ‘mahesh’ has the accusative case which functions as the direct object in the sentence. Since both the cases that the transitive verb ‘karana’ had, have been dispersed in the clause, the noun ‘pasand’ remains inside the verb phrase and thus does not play any role in the agreement pattern of the conjunct verb construction and the verb is thus marked with the ‘default’ agreement. We can also analyze other examples of Set A and find that our hypothesis works well for the sentences too.

Now, let us see one example from Set B and apply our theory on it and evaluate it:

5a) सुजाता को दिनेश से नफ़रत हुई

In the above sentence (5a), we have the verb 'hona', 'to be' which is an intransitive verb. According to our theory, this verb has just one case i.e. nominative case and this case must be necessarily displaced or disseminated to a noun in the sentence. The noun 'sujata' is marked with a non-nominative case (a dative case), the other noun 'dinesh' is also marked with a non-nominative case (structurally instrument, but thematically goal/theme). So, what we find that in example (5a), the verb has not been able to disperse its core structural case i.e. nominative to any of the actants in the clause. However, according to our proposal, this case must be disseminated by the verb, and having found no suitable participant to receive this case, the verb lands up giving this case to its internal or integral host nominal. Having got the nominative case from the light verb, the nominal host re-acquires or re-gains its nominal property that it has lost in the process of grammaticalization and thus functions as a grammatical subject of the clause and finally agrees with the light verb.

The same phenomenon can be observed in the other examples of Set B where a transitive verb and ditransitive verbs are used in the conjunct verb construction.

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