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A Comparative Analysis of the Roles of Subject and Object in Verb Structure in English and Pashto

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effects of subject and object relations on verb structure in English and Pashto, two genetically related Indo-European languages that exhibit significant typological divergence. While English follows a nominative–accusative alignment characterized by subject prominence and syntactic regulation, verb agreement is limited to the subject's person and number. In contrast, Pashto demonstrates a split-ergative system with rich morphological marking, in which verbs agree with the subject in the present tense and with the object in transitive constructions in the past tense. Using a comparative analytical approach, this study examines patterns of verb agreement, word order variation, and case marking across the two languages. The analysis reveals that English relies on a relatively fixed SVO word order and minimal inflectional morphology to encode grammatical relationships. In contrast, Pashto exhibits a more flexible SOV-based word order, supported by extensive

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verb morphology and case marking, which together maintain clarity of grammatical roles despite syntactic variation. These findings highlight fundamental differences in how the two languages encode grammatical meaning, reflecting broader typological distinctions. The study contributes to theoretical linguistics by clarifying the interaction between alignment systems and verb agreement, and it also offers practical implications for second language pedagogy, bilingual acquisition, and translation studies. In particular, the typological differences identified may facilitate or hinder language learning, especially for Pashto speakers acquiring English or vice versa within the Afghan context. Understanding these structural contrasts is therefore essential for improving cross-linguistic comprehension, teaching strategies, and translation accuracy.

***Keywords*:**English grammar, Pashto grammar, subject, object,verb agreement, split-ergativity.

1.**INTRODUCTION**

اَلْحَمْدُ لله رَبِّ العَالَمِينَ وَالصَّلاَةُ وَالسَّلاَمُ عَلى سَيدِالْمُرْسَلِينَ وَعَلَى اٰلِه وَصَحْبِه اَجْمَعِينَ.

Language is a fundamental tool for communication, enabling individuals to express ideas, share emotions, and establish social relationships. Central to linguistic structure is the relationship between subjects, verbs, and objects, which together determine how meaning is conveyed in sentences. In most languages, the verb functions as the core of the clause because it establishes grammatical relations and assigns semantic roles to other constituents (Carnie, 2013). However, the interaction between subjects, objects, and verbs varies significantly across languages. Although English and Pashto both belong to the Indo-European language family, they exhibit distinct syntactic and morphological systems. Comparing these languages provides valuable insights into grammatical variation and broader typological principles governing how languages encode relationships among event participants (Comrie, 2009; Croft, 2003).

Consequently, the study of subject, verb, and object relations lies at the heart of syntax, the branch of linguistics concerned with sentence formation and interpretation.

Recent comparative linguistic research has increasingly examined how languages express grammatical relationships through syntax and morphology. Particular attention has been given to argument structure and verb agreement because these features play a crucial role in meaning construction (Haspelmath, 2010). Previous studies demonstrate that languages differ considerably in their reliance on word order and morphological marking to express grammatical relations. While analytic

languages typically depend on fixed structures, synthetic languages often employ inflectional systems to convey similar meanings (Dixon, 2010). Despite growing scholarship in this field, detailed comparative analyses of English and Pashto remain limited, especially regarding the influence of subject and object relations on verb structure under different tense and aspect conditions. This gap is especially significant in multilingual contexts such as Afghanistan, where cross-linguistic interaction directly affects language learning, translation, and communication.

English follows a fixed Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) word order in which grammatical functions are largely determined by position. For instance, in the sentence "Ahmad reads the book," the subject precedes the verb, while the object follows it. Altering this order significantly changes the meaning. In contrast, Pashto generally follows a Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) structure, placing the verb at the end of the clause, as in احمد کتاب لولي (Ahmad kitāb lūlī), meaning "Ahmad reads the book." In Pashto, grammatical relations are indicated not only through word order but also through morphological features such as case marking and verb agreement (Robson & Tegey, 2010).

Although both languages exhibit subject-verb agreement, the mechanisms differ substantially. English primarily marks agreement according to person and number, whereas Pashto employs a more complex system influenced by tense, aspect, and gender. Notably, in certain past tense transitive constructions, Pashto verbs agree with the object rather than the subject. This phenomenon, known as split ergativity, represents a fundamental structural difference between Pashto and English (Dixon, 2010). Understanding these distinctions is valuable for linguists, translators, and second-language learners, particularly in Afghanistan, where English serves important educational and communicative functions alongside Pashto.

Comparative analysis of English and Pashto offers both theoretical and practical benefits. It deepens understanding of how typologically different languages encode syntactic relations and supports more effective language teaching by identifying potential learner difficulties. Pashto speakers often struggle with English due to its rigid word order and limited case marking, while English speakers may encounter challenges with Pashto's agreement system, ergative structures, and morphological complexity. Therefore, this study investigates how subjects and objects contribute to verb structure and agreement in English and Pashto through three dimensions: syntactic position and word order, morphological agreement and case marking, and the role of tense and aspect in shaping grammatical alignment. By addressing these issues, the study contributes to linguistic theory and applied language pedagogy while promoting more effective translation

and cross-linguistic communication in Afghanistan's multilingual context.

Research questions

1. How do the grammatical roles of subject and object influence the structure and behavior of verbs in English and Pashto?
2. What are the major syntactic differences between English and Pashto in terms of subject–verb–object order and agreement patterns?

Research Objectives

1. To examine and describe how subjects and objects determine verb structure and agreement in English and Pashto.
2. To identify and analyze the key syntactic and morphological differences between the two languages regarding subject and object roles.

2.MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1. Research Design

This study will have a qualitative comparative design that looks at grammatical and syntactic properties surrounding the subject, object and verb relations of English and Pashto. This study uses descriptive and analytical comparison to locate converging and diverging features of the two languages regarding word order, verb agreement and case-marking. This linguistic comparison will also involve grammatical structures of both languages. The principle of contrasting grammatical features has been extensively used in contrastive linguistics as a means of revealing similarities and differences that can assist in theoretical understandings and pedagogical implications (James, 1980). Thus, the analysis brings together aspects of descriptive linguistics with contrastive analysis and typological linguistics.

3.2. Data Sources

The data for this study comes from two primary sources:

1. Primary data: Selected grammatical examples from authentic texts in English and Pashto (textbooks, newspaper articles, and brief narrative texts).
2. Secondary data: Established linguistic references, such as A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language (Quirk et al., 1985), English Syntax: An Introduction (Radford, 2004), and Pashto Reference Grammar (Tegey & Robson, 1996).

In relation to verb tenses (present and past), transitivity types (transitive and intransitive), and where applicable, agreement conditions, examples of both English and Pashto were selected. Examples of English were taken from established corpus references so that there was consistency in the grammatical analysis. All examples were translated and glossed according to interlinear glossing, following the Leipzig Glossing Rules (Haspelmath,

2008) for transparency and comparability in both languages.

3.3. Analytical Framework

The research's analytical framework is grounded in generative grammar theory (Chomsky, 1995) and typological linguistics (Comrie, 2009). These frameworks provide a means to describe both structural and functional links between elements of clauses. The analysis unfolds in three primary phases:

1. Syntactic Analysis is the focus on the position and order of subjects, verbs, and objects. For English, this will examine only the strict SVO pattern, while in Pashto we need to accommodate SOV, and sometimes also SOV patterns.
2. Morphological Analysis is the focus on the agreement markers, verb inflections, and case endings. The study looks at the interaction of Pashto's inflectional morphology to its syntactic pattern, and this in contrast to the analytic nature of English.
3. Functional and Semantic Analysis is the focus on determining how grammatical relations might convey meaning, prominence, or information structure. This will involve investigating voice alternations (active/passive) and how focalization may be marked in syntax and morphology.

As such, the framework is a combination of formal syntax and functional grammar, in that the structure of a language cannot be disentangled from its communicative purpose (Halliday, 2014).

Comparative Procedure

The comparative will follow the model of contrastive linguistics proposed by Lado (1957), who suggested that a systematic comparison of a native and target language will reveal predictable areas for learning difficulties. This will consist of:

1. Structural Analysis - Each sentence will be analyzed for grammatical roles (subject, object) internal to the clause and verb agreement patterns.
2. Categorical Comparison - Findings were assessed according to the following parameters:
    - Word order (SVO vs. SOV)
    - Subject–verb agreement patterns
    - Object–verb agreement (ergative constructions in Pashto)
    - Morphological marking and case systems
3. Interpretation - Patterns were interpreted in terms of linguistic typology to explain structural tendencies and their cognitive or communicative motivations.

This comparative investigation allows for the identification of both

universal features (typical across languages) as well as language-specific features (which are distinctive to Pashto and/or English).

3.5. Reliability and Validity

Reliability was ensured by cross-checking all grammatical analyses according to standard reference grammars as well as in peer reviewed linguistic studies (Radford, 2004; Tegey & Robson, 1996; Noori, 2021). Any examples were verified for grammatical correctness through the input of native speakers or existing corpora, such as the British National Corpus for English, and the Pashto Web Corpus for Pashto texts. Validity was ensured through triangulation - comparison of syntactic data, morphological description, and theoretical interpretation. In addition, the framework of the study is based on established theories of linguistics, which enhances the conceptual validity of the study.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

This study does not involve human participants; however, academic ethics were still in place through following proper citation, acknowledgement of sourcing data, and following standard copyright and translation integrity (American Psychological Association, 2020). Translated Pashto examples were used solely for linguistic illustration without cultural or political interpretation.

3.7. Scope and Limitations

Although the study provides a thorough comparative viewpoint, the study only analyzed standard varieties of English and Pashto and did not examine dialectal or regional varieties. Additionally, it is limited to syntax and morphology; phonological or pragmatic features are outside the domain of the study. Further, there are representativeness restrictions because the corpus is of moderate size and cannot capture all potential instances of verb agreement in English and Pashto. Future research could provide a way of developing this and examining some of the frequency-based hypotheses regarding verb agreement with computational or quantitative methods. Despite these limitations, the study does provide a systematic framework to understand the influence of the subject and object on the structure of the verb across typologically distant languages. The findings can inform future research into:

i. Contrastive and comparative grammar study and research
ii. English language education for Afghan Pashto speakers
iii. The study of translation

3.RESULTS

4.1. Subject and Object Influence on the Structure of the Verb in English

In English, the relationship between the subject, object, and verb is the bedrock of clause structure and syntactic organization. English is most widely considered to be a Subject - Verb - Object (SVO) language (Greenbaum & Quirk, 1990; Radford, 2004). So, in an English sentence, the grammatical function and interpretation of any sentence will depend on the relative position of the subject, verb, and object. The subject is always before the verb, and the object always follows the verb.This strict syntactic structure makes up for the relatively poor richness of morphological case marking in less inflected languages.

The subject controls verb agreement in number and person, and the object determines semantic completion of the verb and valence requirements. They provide both grammatical and interpretive structure to the sentence in English. This section will consider the effects of each of these elements on verb form, clause types, and meaning in the English grammatical system.

4.1.2. Subject as Structural Participant

The subject is the grammatical element responsible for controlling agreement of the verb in person and number (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). The subject occurs across the verb in declarative clauses and it is an obligatory element of all finite clauses.

Table 1. Subject–Verb Agreement Patterns

Person/Number	Subject	Verb	Example Sentence
1st Singular	I	write	I write letters every day.
3rd Singular	He	writes	He writes letters every day.
Plural	They	write	They write letters every day.

As noted in Table 1, a third person singular subject requires the verb's -s inflection in (writes), whereas all other subjects require the base form of the verb in (write). This shows that the English subject has direct and grammatical control over verb morphology. Furthermore, in semantically impersonal clauses like It rains or It appears that he knows, the subject is still expressed. The dummy subject "it" indicates that the English syntactic requires a subject slot even when there is no semantic agent, which is referred to as syntactic subject obligatoriness (Radford, 2004).

4.1.3. Thematic and Semantic Roles of the Subject

Although the syntactic subject is usually the agent—the doer of the action—it can be the experiencer, theme, or patient, according to verb

meaning. Hence, in English, syntactic subject and semantic roles are not always one and the same (Levin & Rappaport Hovav, 2005).

- John opened the door. → Agentive subject (doer)
- The door opened. → Theme subject (undergoer)

This change illustrates that English permits subjects to signal several semantic functions even as they maintain grammar control over the verb. Such flexibility permits voice alternation. In the passive voice, the object of the grammatically active sentence becomes the grammatical subject:

- Active: Mary helped John.
- Passive: John was helped (by Mary).

In this situation, the grammatical subject (John) remains responsible for the form of the verb (was helped) despite not being the agent. This illustrates that while semantic agency governs agentivity, subjectivity - as expressed in grammatical structure - governs verb behavior (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002).

4.1.4. The Object and Verb Transitivity

The object is not directly responsible for verb agreement, yet it plays a significant role in determining the verb's valency (i.e., how many arguments a verb takes). English verbs are categorized based on whether they take an object (Quirk et al., 1985).

Table 2. Verb Types and Object Requirements

Verb Type	Example Sentence	Object Type	Explanation
Intransitive	She sleeps.	None	The verb completes its meaning alone.
Monotransitive	She reads a book.	Direct object	The verb's meaning requires one object.
Ditransitive	She gave him a gift.	Indirect + Direct	The verb requires two objects to complete its meaning

As a result, objects help to complete and extend the semantic range of the verb. Many English verbs are semantically incomplete, and grammatical unacceptability, without the appropriate object. In addition, some verbs will have different meanings based on whether they take an object. This has been referred to as valency alternation (Levin, 1993):

- She runs every morning. (intransitive–movement)
- She runs a business. (transitive–management)

In this instance, the presence of the object alters the way we interpret the verb, showing that the object contributes to the semantic and lexical domain of the verb rather than its morphological domain.

4.1.5. Clause Structure and Word Order

In English, the order of subjects, verbs, and objects is very rigid, and this order of constituents is very important to the syntactic relations in a sentence since English has no morphological case mark for grammatical functions (Greenbaum & Quirk, 1990).

- Example: The girl (S) saw (V) the cat (O) = (Stative situation).
- Example: Saw (V) the girl (S) the cat (O) = incorrect order!

4.1.6. Subject and Auxiliary Verbs

When constructing sentences with more than one verb, the first auxiliary verb will inflect for tense, person, and number with the subject (Biber et al, 1999).

- She is writing a letter.
- They are writing a letter.

In these cases of punctuation, we see that the auxiliary be must agree with the subject (she/they) of the sentence, while the main verb write does not show a subject agreement. Furthermore, we could say:

- He has finished his work.
- They have finished their work.

When using auxiliary verbs, we see agreement as a subject only proposition, as it is only associated in relation to the subject in the clause. The object of a sentence does not define agreement, the object simply enacts a semantic role of the receiver or target of an action.

4.1.7. Counterexamples in English Subject and Object Relations

There are a number of constructions in English that disrupt or extend the normal relationship between subject, object and verb.

1. Expletive or Dummy Subjects

- It is raining.
- There are many students in the hall.

In these sentences we have subjects (it, there etc) that fulfill syntactic subjects but do not fulfill a semantic role. They show that English verbs in finite clauses must have a subject, even when their subject is not themselves meaningful (Radford, 2004).

2. Object-Control Constructions

- I told him to leave.
- She asked them to help.

In this case, the object of the main verb (him, them) behaves semantically as the subject of the subordinate infinitive clause (to leave, to help).

3. Raising Constructions
    - He seems to understand.
    - There appears to be a problem.

In these examples, the subject originates within a lower clause but is raised to the subject position of the higher verb (seem, appear). These constructions illustrate that English syntax treats subject and object positions as grammatical functions that are distinct from their thematic roles, justifying the syntactic independence of the subject (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002).

4.1.8. Voice and Causative Constructions

The passive voice demonstrates how the subject-object relation affects verb morphology and auxiliary use:

- Active: The teacher praised the student.
- Passive: The student was praised (by the teacher).

In the passive construction, the object (student) is now the grammatical subject of the new clause. The verb now takes an auxiliary (be) and is in a past participle form (was praised). The role of the subject now directly impacts the verb structure, its auxiliary and voice form. In causative constructions, another subject modifies the verb's argument structure:

- She made him cry.
- They let the children play.

In both examples, causative verbs (make, let) lead to an embedded verb realizing a subject that is semantically associated with the object of the main verb. This provides a clear example of verb argument interaction complexity in English syntax.

4.1.9. Subject and Object Influences Summary

The combined grammatical (or systemic) effects of subject and object on the English verb can be summarized as follows:

Table 3. Comparison of the Grammatical and Functional Characteristics of Subjects and Objects in English Clauses

Feature	Subject Influence	Object Influence
Word Order	Always precedes verb; determines sentence pattern	Always follows verb in declarative clauses
Agreement	Determines verb form in person and number	No agreement influence
Case	Nominative	Accusative (or objective)
Semantic Role	Typically agent, experiencer, or theme	Typically patient or recipient
Verb Type Effect	Determines finite agreement morphology	Determines transitivity and valency
Influence on Voice	Source of verb concord	Becomes subject in passive
Meaning Contribution	Minimal grammatical; high structural	High semantic; defines verb meaning

As shown in Table 3, English grammar is subject-driven. The subject affects nicto-inflectional and syntactic behavior, but the object primarily constrains meaning and the argument structure.

To sum up, English verb structure relies on subject agreement, fixed SVO order, and minimal morphology to systematically encode grammatical relations and meaning.

4.2. Influence of the Subject and Object on Verb Structure in Pashto

Pashto, an Eastern Iranian language, displays a typologically different system of verb agreement and argument marking than found in many of the Indo-European languages. In contrast to English, Pashto is often labeled as a split-ergative language, where the verb agreement system is dependent on tense/aspect and dialect (Tegey & Robson, 1996; Noori, 2021). In Pashto, the subject and object influence verb morphology differently depending on whether the verb is from an Eastern variety (e.g., Kabul, Nangarhar) or a Western variety (e.g., Kandahar, Herat). The subject may control agreement in present tense and the object may control agreement in past transitive constructions. Although the word order is primarily SOV, there is some flexibility that is offered to Pashto speakers through case marking on nouns and pronouns. Understanding the syntactic and morphological function of subjects and objects in Pashto will be valuable for linguistic analysis, typological comparison, and pedagogy for Pashto learners (David, 2014; Sami, 2011).

4.2.2. Subject Role in Verb Agreement

In Pashto, the subject typically controls the agreement of the verb in present tense and also in intransitive verbs. The subject agreement will be marked by the verb endings that correspond to person and number (Robson & Tegey, 1996).

Example 1: Present Tense, Intransitive Verb (Eastern Pashto)

- پښتو: زه کور ته ځم.
- Transliteration: Za kor ta dzam.
- Translation: “I am going home.”

Here, زه (Za) “I” is the subject, and the verb ځم (dzam) agrees in first person singular. The verb morphology changes depending on the subject:

Table 4. Subject-Verb Agreement in the Present Tense in Pashto

Subject	Verb	Gloss
زه (Za) “I”	ځم (dzam)	1SG go-PRES
ته (Ta) “You (singular)”	ځي (dzai)	2SG go-PRES
هغه (Hagha) “He/She”	ځي (dzi)	3SG go-PRES

In Western Pashto, the endings are similar but may show minor phonological variation:

- زه کور ته ځم /zɑ: kor tɑ: d͡zʊm/
- هغه کور ته ځي /hɑ:ɣa kor tɑ: d͡zi/

Both dialects show subject-driven agreement, confirming the subject’s dominant grammatical role in present tense constructions (Tegey & Robson, 1996).

4.2.3. Object Role in the Past Tense Transitive Construction

The presence of split-ergativity, which is particularly prominent with past tense transitive verbs, can be found in Pashto. In this construction, the verb will need to agree with the object instead of the subject, which has been noted in Pashto grammar (Noori, 2021; Sami, 2011). The following examples are included to illustrate this phenomenon, and all sentences are acceptable in both variation of Pashto.

Example 2: Past Tense, Transitive Verb (Eastern Pashto)

- Pashto: ما کتاب ولوست.
- Transliteration: Ma kitab walwast.
- Translation: “I read the book.”

Analysis:

- ما (Ma) – Marking for the ergative case indicating the subject of a past transitive construction
- کتاب (kitab) – Object in the direct case
- ولوست (walwast) – The verb agrees with the object in gender/number

Example 3: Past Tense, Transitive Verb (Western Pashto)

- Pashto: ما کتاب ولوست.
- Transliteration: Ma kitab walwast.
- Translation: “I read the book.”

While the spelling is identical, dialects from the west may differ slightly in pronunciation around past verb endings. The grammatical pattern, that is, object agreement, remains the same (David, 2014).

4.2.4. Case Marking and Its Effect on Verb Structure

So, Pashto is also using an ergative-absolutive alignment in the past tense. In reference to an ergative subject of a past transitive verb, it takes the ergative case, for example ما Ma; and for the object in a past transitive verb, the object will usually as the direct case. And the verb will agree with the object being used in terms of gender and number. (Robson & Tegey, 1996; Tegey, 1977).

Table 5. Subject and Object Marking and Verb Agreement Across Tenses in Pashto

Tense/Aspect	Verb Type	Subject Case	Object Case	Verb Agreement
Present	Intransitive	Direct	None	Subject agreement
Present	Transitive	Direct	Direct	Subject agreement
Past	Transitive	Ergative	Direct	Object agreement
Past	Intransitive	Direct	None	Subject agreement

This split-ergative phenomenon shows that the effect of the subject and object with respect to the verb is dependent on tense and transitivity, which is a very particular distinction from many non-ergative languages.

4.2.5. Word Order and Flexibility

Pashto typically uses SOV word order: Subject–Object–Verb.

Example:

- پښتو: زه کتاب لولم.
- Transliteration: Za kitab lulum.
- Translation: “I read a book.”

However, because of case marking, either objects or subjects can move for an emphasis or focus:

- کتاب زه لولم (Kitab za lulum) → Emphatic: “It is the book that I read.”

This is different from some languages that have rigid word order, because it offers evidence of how word order can change, while the morphological system signals just what each element is contributing to their interaction (Sami, 2011).

4.2.6. Interactions of Subjects and Objects

Pashto subjects and objects interact with verbs in substantive and morphologically intricate ways:

1. Present tense driven by the subject: The endings of the verb denote the person/number of the subject.

2.Past transitive driven by the object: The endings of the verb will denote the gender/number of the object.

3.Embedded clauses: Subject of the embedded clause will continue to show independent agreement (David, 2014).

Example 4: Embedded Clause

- پښتو: زه پوهيږم چې هغه کتاب لوست.
- Transliteration: Za pohigum che hagha kitab last.
- Translation: "I know that he read the book."

Here, زه (Za) governs the present verb پوهيږم (pohigum), while the past verb لوست (last) agrees with the object کتاب (kitab), demonstrating dual agreement patterns in complex sentences.

4.2.7. Charts of Verb Agreement in Pashto

Table 6. Eastern vs. Western Pashto: Present Tense Subject Agreement.

Subject	Eastern Pashto	Western Pashto	Gloss
زه (Za)	ځم (dzam)	ځم (dzum)	1SG go-PRES
ته (Ta)	ځي (dzai)	ځي (dzai)	2SG go-PRES
هغه (Hagha)	ځي (dzi)	ځي (dzi)	3SG go-PRES
مونږ (Mung)	ځو (dzoo)	ځو (dzoo)	1PL go-PRES

Table 7. Past Tense Transitive Verb Agreement (Object-Driven)

Object	Verb (Eastern)	Verb (Western)	Gloss
کتاب (kitab, M.SG)	ولوست (walwast)	ولوست (walwast)	read-PST
کتابونه (kitabuna, M.PL)	ولوستل (walwastel)	ولوستل (walwastel)	read-PST-PL

These tables clarify agreement patterns across dialects, showing object-driven agreement in past transitive verbs, unlike English.

Significant findings:

- Present tense/intransitive: Subject agreement with verb.
- Past tense/transitive: Object agreement with verb, or ergative patterned verb agreement.
- SOV word order is ordinary but flexible because of case markings.
- Dialectal variations (Eastern vs. Western Pashto) produce some phonological variations, but do not alter any fundamental agreement principles.

- Agreement patterns originating from subject/object interactions exist within dominant-subordinate structure of embedded/modular clauses.

Pashto displays a morphologically rich verb agreement system where both subjects and objects contribute to the forms of verbs, compared to English which has an agreement system driven by syntax—subject-centered.

4.3. Comparing and Contrasting the Role of Subject and Object on Verb Morphology in English and Pashto

Languages have different grammatical systems across the world in which subjects and objects affect verb morphology, agreement, and overall syntactic organization. English and Pashto, although both belong to the Indo-European language family, exhibit two very different grammatical systems—where English is a nominative-accusative and mainly analytic language, and where Pashto exhibits an ergative-absolutive and a morphologically rich grammatical structure (Tegey & Robson, 1996; Crystal, 2008). Exploring verbs across both languages serves as a useful perspective for wider investigations into how subjects or objects contribute to verbal behavior, their effects on clause structure, and ultimately meaning. Such comparative work assists not only in enhancing linguistic knowledge, but also in aiding the teaching of languages and language contact more generally, especially where languages are in contact or where speakers are bi/multilingual, e.g. in Afghanistan where bilingualism between Pashto and English is very common (David, 2014; Sami, 2011).

4.3.2. Structural Foundations of English and Pashto

English is a subject-verb-object (SVO) language, where a subject precedes a verb and a verb precedes its object. This restrictive word order is essential for understanding grammatical relationships, and English is more reliant on position than morphology (Quirk et al., 1985). For example,

Example 1: "John saw Mary."

- Subject: John
- Verb: saw
- Object: Mary

As we noted before, if we change the order we change the meaning entirely, and we will have "Mary saw John." So it can be said that word order is semantically determining. Pashto has a subject-object-verb (SOV) ordering, and it is only "morphologically flexible", due to case markings that appear on nouns and pronouns, so grammatical relations are identified by inflection rather than by position (Robson & Tegey, 1996) as illustrated in example 2:

- Example 2 (Pashto): زه کتاب لولم (Za kitab lulum) — "I read a book."

Even if I were to change the word order to کتاب زه لولم (Kitab za lulum), the meaning does not change, in part because it is the morphology that identifies the relations. Thus, English uses syntax to mark the subject and object function in the clause, while Pashto uses morphology.

4.3.3. Subject Dominance in English Versus Split Agreement in Pashto

In English, the subject is solely responsible for governing verb agreement in person and number. The verb does not inflect based on the object. For example:

Table 8. Subject-Verb Agreement in English Transitive Clauses

Subject	Verb	Object	Example	Gloss
I	eat	apples	"I eat apples."	Subject = 1st person singular
She	eats	apples	"She eats apples."	Subject = 3rd person singular

This shows that it is subject-only agreement, indicative of a nominative–accusative alignment (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). On the other hand, Pashto is split-ergative; agreement is based on both subject and object according to tense and transitivity. In present tense, the verb agrees with the subject; in the past tense, transitive, and the verb agrees with the object (Noori, 2021). This highlights that while English is syntactically simple but rigid, Pashto is morphologically complex but flexible.

4.3.4. Tense on Agreement Patterns

A major contrast between English and Pashto is tense and how it impacts agreement. In English, tense affects the verb form and does not affect the subject-object relation:

- Present: "He eats."
- Past: "He ate."

The subject is still nominative, and the verb form changes only according to reference for time.

Pashto, on the other hand, has alternate agreement based on tense entirely:

Table 9. Verb Agreement Patterns in Pashto Across Different Tenses and Verb Types

Tense	Agreement with	Example	Translation
Present (Intransitive)	Subject	زه ځم (Za dzam)	"I go."
Present (Transitive)	Subject	زه کتاب لولم (Za kitab lulum)	"I read a book."

Past (Transitive)	Object	ما کتاب ولوست (Ma kitab walwast)	"I read the book."

The tense-related ergative split demonstrates that, while English keeps a consistent pattern of subject control across all tenses, Pashto shifts between being subject-prominent and object-prominent contingent on the temporal aspects of the clause (Tegey & Robson, 1996; Sami, 2011).

4.3.5. Word Order and Syntactic Rigidity

Due to the reliance on fixed word order for English, any deviation from this standard will create ambiguity or grammatical unacceptability. For example:

- "John loves Mary."
- "Mary John loves." (This is unacceptable in normal declarative syntax)

In contrast, Pashto may vary word order because case markers provide clarity surrounding the syntactic role of any argument:

- زه کتاب لولم (Za kitab lulum)
- کتاب زه لولم (Kitab za lulum)

Both sentences mean "I read the book, " though the contrast in emphasis varies as a consequence. This variation arises from the rich inflectional system of Pashto because the subject and object are marked morphologically, not by their position (David, 2014). Thus, while English emphasizes the syntactic hierarchy, Pashto emphasizes the morphological marking.

4.3.6. Morphological Simple vs. Morphological Complexity

The verbs in English are morphologically relatively simple. The only significant inflections are found with the third-person singular morpheme, "-s," and tense marking with "-ed" or other irregular form (Crystal, 2008):

Table 10. Comparison of Present and Past Verb Forms in English

Verb Root	Present (3SG)	Past	Example
Go	Goes	Went	"He goes home." / "He went home."

Pashto verbs are morphologically rich, encoding gender, number, tense, and agreement with subject or object. For example:

Table 11. Illustration of Subject and Object Agreement in Pashto

Subject/Object	Verb	Gloss	Translation
زه (Za)	ځم (dzam)	1SG go-PRES	"I go."
ما (Ma)	ولوست (walwast)	read-PST (object agreement)	"I read it."

Therefore, while English simplifies morphology for easier syntax, Pashto embeds grammatical meaning within the verb itself.

4.3.7. Case System: Accusative vs. Ergative Alignment

English marks the subject and object through word order and pronoun distinctions only:

Table 12. Grammatical Case Marking of Subjects and Objects in English

Case	Example	Role
Nominative	I, he, she	Subject
Accusative	me, him, her	Object

On the other hand, Pashto has ergative (for subjects of past transitive verbs), absolutive (for subjects of intransitive verbs and objects of transitive verbs), and oblique cases that are marked explicitly (Tegey, 1977). The ergative-absolutive system does not exist in English.

Table 13. Case Marking and Verb Agreement in Present and Past Transitive Clauses in Pashto

Tense	Subject Case	Object Case	Verb Agreement
Present	Direct	Direct	Subject
Past (Transitive)	Ergative	Direct	Object

Thus, Pashto sentences syntactically prefer semantic roles (agent/patient) over positional structure while English prefers syntactic roles (subject/object).

4.3.8. Aspects of Language Teaching and Translation

The structural difference presents many challenges for Afghan learners of English. For example, Pashto speakers will sometimes make errors like:

- "Book I read," given the transfer of the SOV structure from Pashto.
- Not using auxiliaries ("He going" instead of "He is going").
- Not agreeing in tense ("He go yesterday").

These errors are an example of morphological interference and highlight the shift from a flexible, case-based system to a rigid, word-order based system (Swan & Smith, 2001). Thus, teachers should focus on:

1.Reinforcing fixed word order patterns in English.

2.Making subject-verb agreement consistent across meanings.

3.Utilizing contrastive analysis to show cases of difference in meaning, case and agreement.

4.3.9. Comparative Summary Table

Feature English Pashto Key Difference

Basic Word Order	SVO	SOV	English rigid; Pashto flexible
Agreement	Subject-only	Split: Subject/Object	Pashto alternates by tense

Morphology	Simple	Complex	Pashto marks gender, number, tense
Case System	Nominative-Accusative	Ergative-Absolutive	English lacks ergativity
Verb Dependence	Syntactic	Morphological	Pashto verbs encode agreement
Tense Sensitivity	Minimal	High	Pashto agreement shifts with tense

This table summarizes how structural and morphological systems define verb behavior in both languages.

4. DISCUSSION

The comparison of English and Pashto verb structures provides deep insight into how languages structure grammatical relations among subjects, objects, and verbs. The results show that English exhibits syntactic governance whereas Pashto is morphologically governed. The contrast in structure reflects the impact of typological alignment, and shows how each language encodes meaning and grammatical relations (Comrie, 2009; Tegey & Robson, 1996)—of nominative-accusative in English and ergative-absolutive in Pashto. In English, the subject's number and person determines the agreement on the verb, with the object having no morphological effect on the verb form. This subject-centered pattern fits with the analytic nature of English, which relies on word order and auxiliary verbs to encode grammatical meaning (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). For example, in "He eats an apple," the verb "eats" agrees with the subject "he," not the object, which is "apple." Thus, English's rigid syntax is the mechanism that maintains clarity and interpretability. In contrast, Pashto exhibits a split-ergative pattern in which the verb agrees with the object or subject depending on transitivity and tense. In present tense, the verb agrees with the subject, whereas in the past tense and transitive the verb has object agreement. The distinction highlighted in Robson & Tegey (1996) and Noori (2021) also illustrates Pashto to be a morphologically rich language, balancing semantic roles with syntactic structure. For example, in the sentence, "ما کتاب ولوست" (Ma kitab walwast — "I read the book"), the verb's agreement is with the object, rather than the subject, suggesting an ergative arrangement. The arrangement of the morphological structure gives language users more flexibility spatially, but it requires language learners to process additional grammatical information that is presented via the verb. These structural differences have important implications for second language acquisition and language learning in a bilingual context such as Afghanistan. For example, Pashto speakers must adjust from a flexible, morphology-based syntactic structure

to one that is highly dependent upon a word-order based system. Thus, it is common for learners to make errors such as misplacing objects within the sentence ("Book I read") or eliding the auxiliary form of the verb ("He going"). These errors are a function cross-linguistic interference (Swan & Smith, 2001). Understanding the structural differences and what students must learn to OVERCOME both semantically or syntactically can help teachers formulate specific instructional plans that emphasize formality fixed SVO patterns, subject-verb agreement, and correct use of auxiliary verbs.

As a language, this comparison also contributes to a broader understanding of how human languages achieve a balance between morphological richness and syntactic economy. Whereas English, as a language that favors economy, achieves communicative efficiency through left-to-right adherence to a fixed word order structure, Pashto, embed its communication within the morphological properties of the verb, resulting in flexibility at the cost of morphology richness. According to Bobaljik (2008), this type of cross-linguistic variation challenges the notion of uniform subject–verb agreement, instead demonstrating that languages develop agreement models based on their grammatical systems. Overall, both English and Pashto reflect two very different linguistic 'system' ways of approaching verbs. English privileges syntactically simple representation (i.e., positional order), while Pashto privileges morphologically robust representation (i.e., grammatical detail). Understanding both 'systems' contributes to both comparative theory and pedagogy and translation involving English and Pashto.

5.CONCLUSION

This study compares the influence of subject and object on verb structure in English and Pashto, revealing major grammatical, morphological, and typological differences between the two languages. Although both belong to the Indo-European language family, they employ fundamentally different systems for expressing grammatical relations. English relies primarily on syntactic order, while Pashto depends heavily on morphological marking and agreement.

English is a nominative-accusative and highly analytic language in which the subject consistently controls verb agreement regardless of tense or transitivity. Its verb system contains relatively limited inflection, mainly indicating tense and third-person singular forms. In sentences such as “She eats an apple” and “She ate an apple,” the subject remains the controller of the verb, while the object follows as a syntactic complement. Because English depends largely on word order rather than morphology, its fixed Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) structure is essential for identifying

grammatical functions and maintaining clarity.Pashto, in contrast, exhibits a split-ergative alignment system. In present tense constructions, the verb agrees with the subject, but in past transitive clauses, the verb often agrees with the object while the subject appears in the ergative case. This feature demonstrates the greater morphological richness of Pashto, where verbs encode information about person, number, gender, and case simultaneously. Consequently, Pashto allows greater flexibility in sentence structure because grammatical relations are marked morphologically rather than solely through word order. Its basic Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) order can be altered for emphasis without causing ambiguity.

From a typological perspective, these differences illustrate alternative strategies through which languages achieve communicative efficiency. English attains clarity through structural economy, combining minimal morphology with rigid syntax. Pashto, however, achieves precision through extensive morphological marking, allowing semantic relationships to be expressed directly within verb forms. These contrasting systems contribute to broader discussions of language typology and linguistic universals by demonstrating that languages balance form and function in different ways. The findings have important pedagogical implications, especially in Afghanistan, where English serves as a key language for education and international communication. Pashto-speaking learners of English often encounter difficulties due to first-language transfer. Common errors include incorrect word order ("Book I read"), omission of auxiliary verbs ("He going"), and tense-agreement mistakes ("He go yesterday"). Therefore, language teachers should adopt a contrastive approach that explicitly highlights differences between Pashto and English grammar, particularly regarding SVO order, auxiliary usage, and subject-based agreement. The study also has implications for translation. Since English primarily encodes meaning syntactically and Pashto encodes meaning morphologically, literal translations may fail to preserve intended meanings. Translators must reorganize structures to accommodate the grammatical principles of each language, especially when translating ergative constructions.

Finally, this comparison enriches understanding of bilingual cognition. Speakers proficient in both languages navigate two distinct grammatical systems simultaneously: one based on syntax and the other on morphology. This demonstrates the adaptability of human cognition and underscores the need for linguistically informed teaching practices. Overall, the study concludes that neither language is inherently more complex than the other; instead, each achieves communicative precision through its own internally coherent grammatical system.

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