Variation in blocking effects: investigating 2nd and 3rd person clitics in Punjabi

It is well known from studies by Huang and Tang (1991), Jayaseelan (1998), and Cole, Hermon and Huang (2006) among others that 3rd person long distance reflexives in Mandarin Chinese and Malayalam are blocked from getting bound by a long distance antecedent in the presence of an intervening 1st/2nd person argument. Employing novel data from blocking effects with 2nd and 3rd person clitics in Punjabi, this paper aims (a) to add to the existing literature on blocking effects and, (b) to explain the distinct blocking patterns with 2nd and 3rd person clitics as ensuing from their differential syntactic nature.

Punjabi has 2nd and 3rd person 'argument replacing morphemes' that occur attached to the verb (Akhtar 1999; Butt 2007). Consider the following examples where the 3rd person object in (1a) has been replaced in the presence of the morpheme -suu in (1b). However, the presence of –suu as co-referencing the object is blocked in the presence of a 1st/2nd subject- agreeing or non-agreeing, as in (2) and (3), (see Kaur 2016).

(1a) raam-ne   kuRii-nuu   vekhyaa   (1b) raam-ne   vekhyaa-suu
     ram-erg   girl.f.sg-acc   eat.perf.m.sg   Ram-erg   see.perf.m.sg-3sg
     'Ram saw the girl.'   'Ram saw him/her.'

(2)*maiN /tuu   vekhyaa-suu   (3) *maiN /tuu   vekhdaa-suu
     1.sg.obl/2.sg.obl   see.perf.m.sg-3sg   1.sg.nom/2.sg.nom   see.hab.m.sg-3sg
     'I/you saw him/her.'   'I/you see him/her.'

Similar to 3rd person –suu, 2nd person clitics –ii(sg) and –je(pl/hon) can co-refer to a 2nd person object, as illustrated for –je in (4a-b). However, in contrast to –suu that gets banned both with agreeing and non-agreeing 1st/2nd subjects, -je is blocked only in the presence of an agreeing 1st person subject, as in (5). A non-agreeing 1st person subject does not block object -je, as shown in (6).

(4a) karan-ne   twa-nuu   vekhyaa   (4b) karan-ne   (twa-nuu)   vekhyaa-je
     Karan-erg   2.pl/hon-acc   see.perf.m.sg   Karan-erg (2.pl/hon-acc)   see.perf.m.sg-2pl/hon
     'Karan saw you (pl/hon).'   'Karan saw you (pl/hon)'

(5) *maiN   (twa-nuu)   vekhdaa-je   (6) maiN   (twa-nuu)   vekhyaa-je
     1.sg.nom (2.pl/hon-acc)   see.hab.m.sg-2pl/hon   1.sg.obl (2.pl/hon-acc)   see.perf.m.sg-2pl/hon
     '(I am telling you) I see you.'   '(I am telling you) I saw you.'

This variation in the blocking pattern between the 2nd and 3rd person morphemes is surprising since both –suu and –je seem to be syntactically alike in that they behave like clitics. To begin, both elements under question are found attached to the verb, as shown in the examples above. Next, both –suu and –je are optional in a given structure, such that structures with a full nominal/pronominal 2nd and 3rd person object are also grammatical in the language (1a and 4a). If present, the said forms perform the discursive function of back-grounding (see Butt, 2007). Next, both –suu and je remain invariant across change in tense/aspect, indicating their clitic-hood (à la Nevins 2011), as shown in (7)-(8) respectively. Further, both –suu and –je cannot be conjoined without the verb, as in (9) and (10). Lastly, nothing can intervene between the two elements in a clitic+verb structure, except another clitic; see (11) and (12).

(7) raam-ne   vekhyaa-suu /   raam   vekhegaa-suu
     Ram-erg   see.perf.m.sg-3sg   /Ram.nom   see.fut.m.sg-3sg
     'Ram saw/will see him/her.'

(8) raam-ne   vekhyaa-je /   raam   vekhegaa-je
     Ram-erg   see.perf.m.sg-2pl/hon   /Ram.nom   see.fut.m.sg-2pl/hon
     'Ram saw/will see you.'

(9) *raam jaandaa   suu te suu   (10) *raam jaandaa   je   te   je
     Ram know.hab.m.sg-3sg and 3sg   Ram know.hab.m.sg-2hon and 2hon

(11) raam-ne daaNtyaa-ii-suu, maaryaa nayii   (12) raam-ne   daaNtyaa-ii-je,   maaryaa nayii
     Ram-erg scold.perf-foc-3sg hit.perf   neg   Ram-erg   scold.perf-foc-2pl/hon   hit.perf   neg
     'Ram only scolded him/her, not hit.'   'Ram has only scolded you, not hit you.'

I contend that despite the similarity between the two morphemes in question, they are syntactically distinct elements. While –suu is a true pronominal clitic, -je (also, –ii) is an addressee agreement marker in the language. This difference between the two morphemes determines their differential blocking patterns with 1st/2nd subjects. Before I proceed to explain the variation in blocking effects, I establish that

–je corresponds to allocutive/addressee agreement in the language (Oyharçabal 1993, Miyagawa 2012 among others). First, it is possible for –je to occur in a structure where it does not correspond to any of the arguments of the verb (13). This possibility is banned for –suu which must correspond to one of the selected arguments (14). Next, -je occurs either in the main clause as in the examples so far, or in the complement clause of a non-factive verb like 'say' (15). However, it is banned with factives (16). No such restriction is found on –suu, which is not banned with factives (17).

(13) kuRii-ne munDe-nuu vekhyaa-je   (14) *kuRii-ne munDe-nuu vekhyaa-suu
     girl-erg boy-acc see.perf.m.sg-2pl/hon   girl-erg boy-acc see.perf.m.sg-3sg
     '(I am telling you) the girl saw the boy.'   '(I am telling him) the girl saw the boy.'

(15) raam-ne$_i$ aakheyaa (ki) o$_{i/j}$ aayaa-je
     Ram-erg$_i$ say.perf.m.sg (that) 3.sg.nom$_{i/j}$ come.perf.m.sg-2pl/hon
     '(I am telling you) Ram said that he/someone else is coming.'

(16) *raam jaandaa e ki o aayaa-je
      Ram know.hab.m.sg be.pres.3.sg that 3.sg come.perf.m.sg-2pl/hon
      'Intended: (I am telling you) Ram knows that he/someone has come.'

(17) raam jaandaa e ki kuRii-ne vekhyaa-suu
      Ram know.hab.m.sg be.pres.3.sg that girl-erg see.perf.m.sg-suu
      'Ram knows that the girl has seen him/someone else.'

Given the above discussion, I claim that –suu is banned with all 1st/2nd subjects since it is a true pronominal clitic (with Kaur 2016). Assuming the big-DP structure (Uriagereka 1995; Nevins 2011), I propose that –suu originates within a big-DP in the complement of the verb. -suu is a case-less element that must be licensed for D/person before moving to the CP domain for its discursive function. I claim that this D/person licensing takes place at PartP (a functional head located between TP and vP) in the perfective clause, and at TP in the imperfective clause. However, the derivation licensing –suu crashes in the presence of 1st/2nd person subjects since 1st/2nd subjects and -suu compete for person licensing at Part/T (see Chandra&Kaur 2014; Kaur 2015, 2016). Licensing of 1st/2nd subjects at Part/T renders the functional head inert for licensing the D-feature of the clitic, resulting in its blocking, as shown in (18).

(18) [CP   [TP/PartP 1/2 subj [vP 1/2 subj$_t$ [vP [D-clitic[DP]] [VP [D-clitic[DP]] V]]]]]

Differently from –suu, -je is an addressee agreement marker, which is obtained as a result of agreement between a [participant] probe located at C and the Hearer goal located in the speech act projection/SAP (à la Speas &Tenny 2003). Concretely, I contend that the C head in Punjabi bears an unvalued [participant] feature. This feature, located on the C head undergoes raising to the speech act head. From this position, it probes in its c-command domain and locates the Hearer located in the specifier of SaP, with which it undergoes agreement to be realized as –je (see Miyagawa 2012). Consider the schema in (19).

(19) [$_{SAP}$ Speaker [$_{saP}$ Hearer [$_{CP}$ [$_{TP}$...] T] C$_{[part:\_\_]}$] saP] SAP]

The unvalued participant feature on C can also be valued by a nominative, agreeing 1st/2nd (plus participant) subject. In such instances, -je gets blocked, thereby explaining the ban on –je in (5). A 1st/2nd subject in the perfective, however, is oblique case valued and does not trigger agreement on the C-T which instead manifests default agreement; this allows –je to be realized, as in (6).

Variation in blocking effects between –suu and –je therefore ensues from their distinct syntax. While –suu is a clitic requiring D/person licensing at Part/T, -je is addressee agreement at C-T with no interference from below. This analysis has ramifications for (a) clitic licensing, and (b) the C-T domain in Punjabi.

Selected References: Butt, M. (2007) The role of pronominal suffixes in Punjabi. In Architecture, Rules, and Preferences, 341-368; Chandra, P. & Kaur, G. (2014) Two nominative cases in Punjabi? Paper presentation at FASAL 4, Rutgers University, USA; Miyagawa, S. (2012) Agreements that occur mainly in main clauses. In Main Clause Phenomena. New Horizons, eds., Lobke Aelbrecht et al., 79–112; Speas, P. & Tenny, C. (2003) Configurational properties of point of view roles. Asymmetry in grammar, ed. A.-M. Di Sciullo, 315-344; Uriagereka, J. (1995) Aspects of the Syntax of Clitic Placement in Western Romance. Linguistic Inquiry: 26(1), 79-123.