Ergative remnants/invention of Angika dialects

Satyam Kumar and Usha Udaar

Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur

Montaut (2009) claims that the ergative-absolutive pattern is unique to the Western group of Indo-Aryan dialects. There are few instances of remnants of ergativity (or partial ergativity) in some Eastern Indo-Aryan languages like Bengali, Oriya, and Assamese. This paper presents novel data from a lesser-known dialect of Angika (EIA) to show an instance of contact-induced ergativity. See the data given below:

1. həmmã:/ʈohõ/wæ̃-**nɔ̃**   kʰa:na: kʰai-l-iyai/-e/-kai

   1.SG/2.SG/3.SG-ERG   food   eat-PST-1/-2/-3

   'I/You/He/She ate food.'

2. hunĩ:/hunĩ:-sini: kʰa:na: kʰai-l-kai

   3.SG.H/3.H-PL   food   eat-PST-3.NH

   'He/She(H) ate food.'

3. həmmã:/ʈohõ/wæ̃ kʰa:na bəna:y rəh-l-au/-ãũ/-au cʰ-iyai/-ãĩ/-ai
   1.SG/2.SG/3.SG food make PROG-1/2/3   be-PRS.1/2/3
   'I/You/He/She am/are/is making food.'

The data given above shows numerous restrictions on the presence of ergative case marker '**nɔ̃**', as it is found only on the non-honorific, third person, singular subjects of the transitive verb in the perfective aspect. Thus, it shows aspect-based, person-based, number-based, and honorificity-based ergativity. Interestingly, the split-ergativity paradigms are found scattered in other Western Indo-Aryan languages (Udaar, to appear). Additionally, the verbal agreement pattern shows that the verb inflects for tense, person, and honorificity, and agrees with both subject and object DPs. While it is yet to be ascertained, through diachronic data, whether this is a remnant of a pre-ergative construction or a reanalysis, the dialect co-exists and interacts with Hindi, Bengali, and Nepali. We will demonstrate that the appearance of the 'ergative' case marker is structure bound and fills in position for an empty slot of an oblique subject. The paper will provide a position-based analysis to justify the presence/absence of ergativity that is aspect and person-based. While several accounts to account for the person and aspect-based split-ergativity in Indo-Aryan languages exist, the Angika dialect shows an additional condition of 'non-honorificity'. We will show that the placement of the subject and its movement to TP and/or CP layer is the key to the ergative paradigm observed in a dialect of Angika. Hence, we prove that contact-based language variation does not entail only borrowing of a morphological case marker, it is governed by the rules of syntax.

Montaut (2009). Ergative and Pre-ergative Patterns in Indo-Aryan as Predications of Localization.: A Diachronic View of Past and Future Systems. *Language Vitality in South Asia*, Aligarh Muslim University Press, pp.295-325.

Udaar (to appear). 'Parametrizing Ergativity: Insights from Western Indo-Aryan languages.' Language Variation in South Asia. Springer Nature, Berlin.