Pseudo-Ergativity: Contact-Induced Case Alternation in Punjabi-Hindi

This paper critically analyses the pattern of dative and ergative case alternation found in the Hindi language spoken by Punjabi-Hindi bilingual speakers living in the Delhi-NCR region in India. Note that this case marker is restricted to the informal language spoken by bilingual Punjabi speakers, and Hindi speakers from Eastern Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, and West Bengal find this case alternation odd (if not ungrammatical), and do not use this particular case marker in such constructions. Representative data outlining the phenomenon is given below:

(a) mɛne   gʰər   jana   hɛ
    1.sg-erg   home   go.inf   be.1.sg.pres
    'I have to go home.'
(b) mujʰko   gʰər   jana   hɛ
    1.sg-dat   home   go.inf   be.1.sg.pres
    'I have to go home.'

Note the case alternation between ergative and dative in the constructions given above. Butt (2006) discusses a similar dative-ergative alternation in Urdu, where the presence of a dative case marker on the subject expresses both desire and necessity, while the presence of an ergative case on the subject expresses a greater control over the action. Through this paper, I will make the following claims about the '-ne' case marked subject in the sentences given above:

(i)   The 'ergative' case seen in this context is not the same as the ergative case found in the perfective aspect in Hindi-Urdu and/or Punjabi.
(ii)   The possibility of '-ne' case marker in this construction results from a specific position of the concerned subject DP in the narrow syntax, rather than its semantic role as an 'agent'.
(iii)   The ergative case marker for dative, is a morphological borrowing from Haryanavi languages that co-exist and interact with Punjabi and Hindi in the region.

I will demonstrate that the pseudo-ergative case found in (a) fills the spot for an oblique case marker on the subject of an infinitival construction, where the subject fails to rise to the spec, TP position. As the subject remains stranded in situ, a dependent case marking algorithm is activated, marking the subject with dative/ergative (Udaar, 2016). I also provide more data from the contact-language Haryanavi to demonstrate the position-based marking of case on objects as well as subjects. An analysis of this phenomenon proves that the contact-induced case alternation of Punjabi-Hindi does not entail only morphological borrowing of a case, but is a change facilitated by structure building operation of narrow syntax.

References

Butt, M. (2006). The dative-ergative connection. Empirical issues in syntax and semantics, 6, 69-92.

Udaar, U. (2016). Ergativity in Western Indo-Aryan Languages. PhD manuscript. IIT Delhi, India.