

Development of Case in South Asian Languages¹

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1 Introduction

Observation: Languages can start out with perfectly good case systems and then:

1. lose the original case marking system (due to the usual processes of erosion) and fail to innovate a new one (e.g., English, German, Romance languages)
2. lose the original case marking system (due to the usual processes of erosion) and begin to press new forms into service, replacing the old ones (though not necessarily in a one-to-one relationship) (e.g., Hindi/Urdu, Nepali).

Question: What accounts for both these possibilities?

One Possible Answer:

- Kiparsky's (1987, 1988, 1997, 2001) idea of linkers:
 - There are three *linkers* which serve to identify the arguments of a clause: position, case and agreement.
 - Languages may make use of one, two or all of these linkers.
 - For most languages one will observe an interacting system.
 - Languages can change with respect to the main linkers they use.

Problem: But this by itself doesn't explain why

- case-rich free word order SOV languages like Old English and Latin would mutate into case-poor, fairly fixed word order SVO languages
- while other case-rich free word order SOV languages like Sanskrit mutate into different versions of case-rich free word order SOV languages (e.g., Hindi/Urdu, Punjabi, Nepali).

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Another Possible Answer:

- Hewson and Bubenik (2006) suggest that a relevant parameter is whether the languages develop *prepositions* vs. *postpositions*.
- Languages with prepositions use prepositions instead of case (their analysis is based mainly on spatial relations).
- Languages developing postpositions assimilate those into a new case system.
- (And when articles are developed, case is less likely.)

This observed correlation is interesting and should be looked into further.

Problem: However, it does not explain why languages with postpositions whose case marking distinctions have been lost do not immediately make new case markers (e.g., Middle Indo-Aryan dialects, Balochi, Santhali).

Current Hypothesis:

- While the primary function of case is to help identify grammatical relations, this job seems to be too “easy” (and other parts of the grammar tend to help anyway: e.g., agreement, position).
- So case marking is also used for expressing (sometimes subtle) semantic contrasts.
- This follows naturally from the historical origin of most case markers from adverbials, adpositions or participials — the original semantics are pressed into service.
- In particular, the precise semantic import of a case marker emerges out of a language particular system of contrasts and may therefore differ from language to language.
This means that the same original source may give rise to two different case markers in the language (i.e., ergative vs. dative).
- If the case markers erode and the language finds another means of expressing those contrasts, then there is no need for new case markers to be pressed into service (but what are the conditions???)
- Other means might be:
 - hugely expanded lexicon
 - specialized modal verbs
 - articles
 - preverbs, complex verbal aspectual system
 - ...

This talk looks at some of the systematic semantic contrasts expressed by case from a synchronic and diachronic point of view.

2 Types of Case in South Asian Languages

- South Asian languages form a *Sprachbund* (Masica 1979, 1991).
- They consist of Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Tibeto-Burman and Dardic languages.
- The region covers Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Tibet and (probably) Bhutan.
- There seem to be roughly **three** types of case-marking strategies:
 1. Simple nominative vs. oblique contrast (e.g., Balochi)
 2. Marking on nouns plus complicated system of clitics on the verb (e.g., Kashmiri).
 3. More elaborate system of cases marked morphologically or mixture of inflections and clitics (most languages, e.g., Urdu/Hindi, Nepali, Bengali, Malayalam).
- All three types show evidence of semantic contrasts expressed by case markers.

2.1 Nominative vs. Oblique Contrast

Balochi

- Spoken in Pakistan (Balochistan) and neighboring Iran
- Dialectal differences with respect to case
- No gender marking, also a genitive case for dependent of nominal (*John's hat*)
- Differential Case Marking with respect to definiteness/person (Mirdeghan 2005).

Oblique on Objects codes Definiteness/Specificity

- (1) a. aa man-aa **kitaab-aa** d-aa
 he.Nom I-Obl book-Obl give-Sg
 ‘He gives me the book.’ Balochi
- b. aa man-aa **kitaab** d-aa
 he.Nom I-Obl book.Nom give-Sg
 ‘He gives me book(s).’ Balochi
- (2) **is-aa** bæhaa kæn-aa guṛaa **pæs** gir-aa
 these-Obl sell do-Sg then goat.Nom buy-Sg
 ‘I will sell these and buy goats.’ (Farrell 1989) Balochi

2.2 More Complex Systems

- This encompasses the majority of South Asian languages.
 - Free Word Order (Discourse Configurational)
 - Agreement Patterns are wild and varied (see Subbarao 1999, Butt and Deo 2001) and do not have much to do with the case systems (no systematic correlation).
 - Rampant Pro-Drop
- Case Markings include at least: Ergative (not always), Nominative (unmarked), Accusative, Dative, Instrumental, Genitive, Ablative, some Locatives.
- Languages are all **syntactically** accusative (i.e., all subjects always pattern together with respect to control, anaphora, coordination, etc.).
- Many of the Indo-Aryan languages employ an ergative case, none of the Dravidian languages do.

3 Case Alternations

Semantically-based case alternations seem to be a hallmark of South Asian languages.

Questions:

- How can these alternations be analyzed/accomodated within current theories of case? (This question not answered in this talk, but see Butt 2006b for an overview).
- How do they relate to the (re)development of case systems?

3.1 Some Typical Case Alternations

- **Nominative-Accusative** Alternations signify differences in: animacy (supposedly), sentience (Malayalam), specificity/definiteness (Urdu, Balochi, Nepali)
- **Nominative-Ergative:** 1) Difference in Control/Agentivity (Urdu); 2) Individual-vs. Stage-Level Predication (Nepali, Manipuri)
- **Nominative-Dative:** Differences in Modality (can vs. must) (Malayalam);
- **Nominative-Genitive:** Differences in Modality (want vs. need) (Bengali);
- **Dative-Ergative:** Differences in Control (Urdu), also modality (want vs. must)
- **Dative-Instrumental:** Differences in (Dis)ability (Malayalam)
- **Nominative-Instrumental:** Differences in (Dis)ability (Urdu)

3.3.1 Typical Split Ergativity Pattern

By Tense/Aspect ((6))–(7)) and/or Person ((7)).

- (6) a. **mai=le** sodhpatra lekh-y-ẽ
 Pron.1.Sg=ERG research paper write-Past-1.Sg
 ‘I wrote the/a research paper.’ Nepali
- b. **mai** sodhpatra lekh-chu
 Pron.1.Sg research paper write-NonPast.1.Sg
 ‘I (will) write research papers.’ Nepali
- (7) a. **ram** muᅇᅇiã=nũ **mar-da** ẽ
 Ram.M.Sg boy.M.Pl=Acc hit-Pres.M.Sg be.Pres.3.Sg
 ‘Ram is hitting the boys.’ Punjabi
- b. **ram=ne** muᅇᅇiã=nũ **mar-ia** si
 Ram.M.Sg=Erg boy.M.Pl=Acc hit-Past.M.Sg be.Past.3.Sg
 ‘Ram has hit the boys.’ Punjabi
- (8) **mẽ** kamputar bec^h-ia
 I.F/M computer.M.Sg sell-Past.M.Sg
 ‘I (male or female) sold the computer.’ Punjabi
- (9) **o=ne** kamputar bec^h-ia
 Pron.3.Sg.F/M=Erg computer.M.Sg sell-Past.M.Sg
 ‘He/She sold the computer.’ Punjabi

3.3.2 Individual- vs. Stage-Level Predication

In Nepali, the ergative/nominative also helps code the distinction between Individual- and Stage-Level Predication articulated by Kratzer (1995).

Difference coded by differing copulas

(cf. similar patterns in Scottish Gaelic, Ramchand 1997)

- (10) saru bhakta kabi **hun**
 Saru Bhakta poet be.NonPast.3.M.Hon
 ‘Saru Bhakta is a poet.’ Nepali (Individual-Level)
- (11) saru bhakta aaja khusi **chan**
 Saru Bhakta today happy be.NonPast.3.M.Hon
 ‘Saru Bhakta is happy today.’ Nepali (Stage-Level)

Difference coded by Ergative vs. Nominative

- (12) a. **hasan=le** gaari chalaun-cha
 Hassan=Erg car.Nom drive-NonPast.3.Sg
 ‘Hassan drives cars (that’s what he does).’ Nepali (Individual-Level)
- b. **hasan** gaari chalaun-cha
 Hassan.Nom car.Nom drive-NonPast.3.Sg
 ‘Hassan is driving a car/cars.’ Nepali (Stage-Level)
- (13) a. **raam=le** (#aajaa) angreji jaan-da-cha
 Ram=Erg today English know-Impf-NonPast.M.3.Sg
 ‘Ram knows English (#today).’ Nepali (Individual-Level)
- b. **raam** (aajaa) angreji bol-da-cha
 Ram today English speak-Impf-NonPast.M.3.Sg
 ‘Ram will speak English (today).’ Nepali (Stage-Level)

As would be expected, kind/generic NPs are also marked by the ergative.

- (14) **raaute=le** jangle=ko kandamul khaa-(n)chan
 Raute=Erg forest=Gen wild edibles eat-NonPast.3.Pl
 ‘The Rautes eat the wild edibles of the forest.’ Nepali
- (15) **kukur=le** maasu khaan-cha
 dog=Erg meat eat-NonPast.3.Sg.M
 ‘The dog eats meat(≡Dogs eat meat).’ Nepali

Other Tibeto-Burman languages such as Manipuri also use the ergative to code stage- vs. individual-level distinctions.

- (16) a. nauna pokpa **angaang=naa** yaam tum-i
 newly born baby=Erg much sleep-Real
 ‘Newly born babies sleep much.’ Manipuri
- b. nauna pokpa **angaang** ama tum-i
 newly born baby one sleep-Real
 ‘A newly born baby is sleeping.’ Manipuri
- (17) a. **sing=naa** mai caak-i
 firewood=Erg fire eat-Real
 ‘Firewood burns.’ Manipuri
- b. **sing** asi mai caak-i
 firewood this fire eat-Real
 ‘This firewood is burning.’ Manipuri

3.4 Volitionality/Control

It has long been observed that ergative-nominative alternations can also be used to make distinctions with respect to control over an action.

Nominative vs. Ergative

- (18) a. **ram** k^hās-a
 Ram.M.Nom cough-Perf.M.Sg
 ‘Ram coughed.’ (Tuite, Agha and Graczyk 1985:264) Hindi/Urdu
- b. **ram=ne** k^hās-a
 Ram.M=Erg cough-Perf.M.Sg
 ‘Ram coughed (purposefully).’ (Tuite, Agha and Graczyk 1985:264) Hindi/Urdu

3.5 Modality

The use of case to mark differences in modality is quite common.

Ergative vs. Dative

- (19) a. **nadya=ne** zu ja-na he
 Nadya.F=Erg zoo go-Inf be.Pres.3.Sg
 ‘Nadya wants to go to the zoo.’ Hindi/Urdu
- b. **nadya=ko** zu ja-na he
 Nadya.F=Dat zoo go-Inf be.Pres.3.Sg
 ‘Nadya has to go to the zoo.’ Hindi/Urdu

Nominative vs. Dative

Note: Malayalam is a Dravidian language, no ergative, case is inflectional.

- (20) a. **amma** kuṭṭiye aḍik’k’-aṇam
 mother.Nom child.Acc beat-want
 ‘Mother must beat the child.’ Malayalam
- b. **ammak’k’ə** kuṭṭiye aḍik’k’-aṇam
 mother.Dat child.Acc beat-want
 ‘Mother wants to beat the child.’ Malayalam
- (21) a. **avan** var-aam
 he.Nom come-may
 ‘He may come.’ (possibility) Malayalam
- b. **avanə** var-aam
 he.Dat come-may
 ‘He may come.’ (permission) Malayalam

- (22) a. **enik’k’o** itə **aṛiy-aam**
 I-Dat this know-Modal
 ‘I know this.’ (state of knowledge) Malayalam
- b. **iaan** itə **aṛiññu**
 I-Nom this know-Past
 ‘I know this.’ (came to know) Malayalam

Nominative vs. Genitive

Note: Bengali is an Indo-Aryan language, no ergative, no gender.

- (23) a. **ami** toma=ke cai
 I.Nom you=Acc wants
 ‘I want you.’ (Klaiman 1980:279) Bengali
- b. **amar** toma=ke cai
 I.Gen you=Acc wants
 ‘I need you.’ (Klaiman 1980:279) Bengali

3.6 (Dis)ability

Instrumental vs. Nominative

Note: This cannot be analyzed as an active/passive alternation.

- (24) a. **vo** gir ja-e-g-i
 Pron.3.Sg.Nom fall go-3.Sg-Fut-F.Sg
 ‘She will fall.’ Hindi/Urdu
- b. **us=se** gir-a ja-e-g-a
 Pron.3.Sg=Inst fall-Perf.M.Sg go-3.Sg-Fut-M.Sg
 ‘She will be able to fall.’ Hindi/Urdu

Dative vs. Nominative

- (25) a. **meeri-k’k’ə** paadaan kazhiy-illa/patt-illa
 Mary-Dat sing.Inf be.able-neg/can-neg
 ‘Mary cannot sing.’ (she is unable to sing for now) Malayalam
- b. **meeri-ekkoṇḍə** paadaan kazhiy-illa/patt-illa
 Mary-Inst sing.Inf be.able-neg/can-neg
 ‘Mary cannot sing.’ (she could never sing/she is too lazy to sing) Malayalam

3.7 Summary

- Case alternations that express semantic distinctions are a robust and widespread feature of South Asian languages.
- Was this always so?

4 Looking Back in Time

- Versions of Old Indo-Aryan (OIA) Sanskrit gave rise to the New Indo-Aryan (NIA) languages.
- Sanskrit was free word order, case-rich and used case marking to make semantic distinctions (section 4.1).
- In Middle Indo-Aryan (MIA), the case system eroded massively, leading to just a direct vs. oblique contrast by New Indo-Aryan.
 - We have no information at present about whether MIA allowed for semantically based case alternations.
 - But:
 - * there was a split-ergative system (governed by aspect, cf. Peterson 1998);
 - * different verb classes required different subject marking (‘desire’ with Nominative/Direct, ‘please’ with Oblique).
- New Indo-Aryan languages rely on case alternations to express semantic distinctions — including Balochi ((1)), which has just a direct vs. oblique system.

4.1 Old Indo-Aryan Case Alternations

The use of case alternations to express semantic distinctions is an old part of the language.

This section provides just a piece of the larger picture.

4.1.1 Partitivity

It is probably the case that the alternation between AC [accusative case] and GC [genitive case] with verbs of consumption originally signalled a semantic difference. A food or drink in AC [accusative case] was entirely consumed, while only part of one in the genitive was. [Jamison (1976:131,135)]

Accuative vs. Genitive

- (26) a. pibā somam
 drink.Imp soma.**Acc**
 ‘Drink soma.’ (Ṛgveda VIII.36.1, from Jamison 1976)
- b. pibā somasya
 drink.Imp soma.**Gen**
 ‘Drink (of) soma.’ (Ṛgveda VIII.37.1, from Jamison 1976)

4.1.2 “Affectedness”

If one wants to say *he causes me to do something, it is by his impulse I act*, there is room for the type [accusative causee], but if it be meant *he gets something done by me, I am only the agent or instrument through which he acts*, the instrumental is on its place. [Speijer (1886:§49)]

Accusative vs. Instrumental

- (27) a. mantrapūtam carum rājñīm prāśayat
consecrated.Acc porridge.Acc queen.Sg.**Acc** eat.Caus.Impf.3.Sg
munisattamaḥ
best-of-ascetic.Nom
‘the best of ascetics made the queen eat a consecrated porridge.’ (Sanskrit)
(Kathāsaritsāgar 9.10)
- b. tām śvabhiḥ khādayet rājā
Demon.F.Sg.Acc dog.Pl.**Inst** eat.Caus.Opt.3.Sg king.Nom
‘Her the king should order to be devoured by dogs.’ (Sanskrit)
(Mahābhārata 8.371)

Compare this with the modern Urdu/Hindi (Instrumental vs. Accusative/Dative)

- (28) a. saddaf=ne masala cak^h-a
Saddaf.F=Erg spice.M.Nom taste-Perf.M.Sg
‘Saddaf tasted the seasoning.’ Hindi/Urdu
- b. anjum=ne saddaf=**ko** masala cak^h-va-ya
Anjum.F=Erg Saddaf.F=**Acc** spice.M.Nom taste-**Caus**-Perf.M.Sg
‘Anjum had Saddaf taste the seasoning.’ Hindi/Urdu
- c. anjum=ne saddaf=**se** masala cak^h-va-ya
Anjum.F=Erg Saddaf.F=**Inst** spice.M.Nom taste-**Caus**-Perf.M.Sg
‘Anjum had the seasoning tasted by Saddaf.’ Hindi/Urdu

4.1.3 Pāṇini

- Pāṇini’s grammar of Sanskrit mentions 23 possibilities of case alternations (Katre 1987, Böhtlingk 1839–40).³
- Some of these have to do with formal reasons (morphophonology).
- Some of these are governed by lexical semantics.
- Others are clearly expressing semantic distinctions along the lines already illustrated for Old and New Indo Aryan.

³This work was carried out by Karin Schunk.

Example:

Rule 2.3.12: The Dative and Accusative are used for verbs of movement, but the dative cannot be used if motion is an abstract one.

That is if a person named Ram goes to a village, the village can be marked either Accusative or Dative. But if only one's thoughts "go" towards a village, the Dative cannot be used.

4.2 Interim Summary, Leading to Questions

- Old Indo-Aryan used case alternations to express semantic distinctions.
- Modern South Asian languages, including New Indo-Aryan languages use case alternations to express semantic distinctions.
- The original inflectional case system of Sanskrit has been lost almost completely (mainly a direct vs. oblique marking on some nouns still survives).

Questions:

1. How did the new case markers innovate?
2. Did the same sources give rise to the same kinds of case markers?

5 Modern Innovation

The innovation of new case markers in South Asian languages seems to be driven by a combination of lexical and clausal semantics.

- Clausal Semantics: modality contrasts, focus, stage- vs. individual level
- Lexical Semantics: Differing verb classes conceptualize the relations between the participants differently and mark them accordingly (based primarily on originally spatial relationships) — this also applies to "structural" case.

5.1 Lexical Semantics

A look at case marking patterns on second and third arguments within any single South Asian language conveys the impression of idiosyncrasy:

- there are canonical dative/accusative/nominative patterns
- but also ablatives, instrumentals, comitatives, various types of locatives

Nevertheless, a crosslinguistic comparison of the patterns across different South Asian language families reveals:

- a systematic semantic usage
- a classification by verb types

Range of Languages

The range of languages investigated so far is:

- Indo-Aryan (Urdu/Hindi, Nepali, Sindhi, Punjabi, Siraiki)
- Indo-Iranian (Balochi, Pashto)
- Dravidian (Malyalam)
- Tibeto-Burman (Manipuri)

Semantic Factors

The selection of the appropriate oblique marker for the second argument depends on semantic factors:

- source/stimulus
- impinged (Beavers 2006)
- attached/involved

5.1.1 Verb Classes and Non-Canonical Objects

The range of data we have studied clearly shows that there are 5 major different basic patterns of non-canonical objects at work.

(29)

Subject	Object	Example Verbs
Nom, Dat <i>experiencer</i>	Ablative <i>stimulus/source</i> (Urdu <i>se</i> , Punjabi <i>tō</i> , Nepali <i>dek^hi</i>)	fear
Nom, Dat <i>experiencer</i>	Locative ‘on’ <i>impinged</i>	trust, doubt, suspect, believe
Nom/Erg <i>agent</i>	Locative ‘on’ <i>impinged</i>	bless, capture, govern, attack, sign, blame
Nom, Dat <i>experiencer</i>	Comitative <i>attached/involved</i> (Urdu <i>se</i> , Punjabi <i>nal</i> , Nepali <i>sanga</i>)	love, hate
Nom/Erg <i>agent</i>	Comitative <i>attached/involved</i> (Urdu <i>se</i> , Punjabi <i>nal</i> , Nepali <i>sanga</i>)	marry, fight

- The first argument is marked for degrees of control/agency, the second argument is marked for degree of affectedness (accusative vs. nominative vs. comitative vs. location).
- The markings for degree of affectedness are drawn from originally spatial markers.
- The semantics of these originally spatial markers is exploited systematically by the case marking system.

5.1.2 Spatial Metaphors — Ablatives and Psych Verbs

- Nepali has two ablatives: *dek^hi* and *baaṭa*.
- These two are in complementary distribution:
 - *dek^hi* encodes the starting point of the path
 - *baaṭa* encodes the whole path

(30) a. us=le **dilli=dek^hi** kathmandu=samma baaṭo banaa-yo
 3=Erg Delhi=Abl Kathmandu=Loc.to street make-Perf
 ‘He built a street from Delhi to Kathmandu.’ (Point) Nepali

b. u **dilli=baaṭa** kathmandu=samma kud-yo
 3.Nom Delhi=Abl Kathmandu=Loc.to ran-Perf
 ‘He ran from Delhi to Kathmandu.’ (Path) Nepali

Psych Verbs

Logically, a stimulus in an experiencer predication is marked by the starting *point* ablative, but not the path ablative.

(31) u **sarpa=dek^hi** ḍaraũũ-cha
 3 snake=Abl fear-NonPast
 ‘He fears snakes.’ (Stimulus) Nepali

5.1.3 Spatial Metaphors — Endpoints, Psych Verbs and Specificity

Similarly, in Urdu the originally spatial marker *ko* ‘side, near’ now marks experiencers (subjects of psych verbs) and specific objects.⁴

- *ko* once systematically designated the endpoint of directed motion verbs ((32)).

(32) us manzil=ko kab pāũc-o-ge
 that.3.Sg destination=at when reach-2.Sg-Fut
 ‘When will (you) reach that destination.’ (Dehalvi 1804) Old Urdu

- In the modern language, *ko* continues to mark spatial terms ((33)).

⁴This section represents work done in cooperation with Scott Grimm.

5.2 Ergativity

- The historical of the ergative case is usually seen *structurally* — as a realignment/reinterpretation of originally passive structures.
- However, in the one language family which displays ergativity and has a historical record of about 4000 years, this cannot be confirmed (see Butt 2001 for an overview of the situation with respect to Urdu/Hindi).
- Rather:
 - an originally spatial connection seems likely for Urdu/Hindi.
 - complex lexical semantic factors seem to be involved in Nepali

5.2.1 Urdu/Hindi — A Dative Connection

- The modern Urdu/Hindi ergative =*ne* did not begin appearing until about 1400 and was well established in the 1600s.
- There is no connection to instrumental or source meanings, as these were expressed by other postpositions/case markers.
- The source of the modern Urdu/Hindi ergative =*ne* is not clearly established.

Beames (1872–79:270): the modern ergative Urdu/Hindi *ne* comes from a **dative** form *nē*

- This dative was used on subjects in a dialect of Hindi spoken in provinces adjacent to the Moghul court.
- During the reign of the Moghul Emperor Shah Jehan (1627–1658) a change in administrative policies led to an influx of Hindu administrators, who might have influenced the language of the court (cf. the history of English).

Synchronic Homophony between Dative and Ergative

Shirani (1987b) reports a use in Haryani, a dialect/language spoken near Delhi, whereby =*ne* is used as both an object and subject marker.

- (36) a. **man=ne** sahib=ne mar-a
 Pron.1.Sg=Acc/Dat Sahib.M.Sg=Erg hit-Perf.M.Sg
 ‘The Sahib hit me.’ Haryani
- b. **muj^h=ko** **sahab=ne** mar-a
 Pron.1.Sg=Acc/Dat Sahib.M.Sg=Erg hit-Perf.M.Sg
 ‘The Sahib hit me.’ Urdu/Hindi

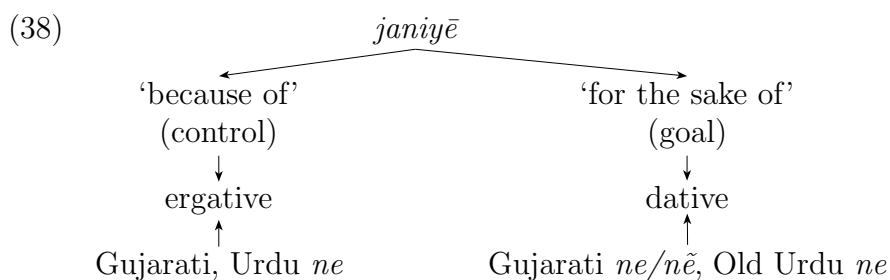
Also consider(37) from the Sarawani dialect of Balochi (recall that this language has only a direct/oblique distinction).

- (37) **tafsir-ara jamil-ara kitab da-t-a**
 Tafseer.M.Sg-Obl Jameel.M.Sg-Obl book.Nom give-Impf-M.Sg
 ‘Tafseer gave the book to Jameel.’ Saarwaari Balochi

So, a dative/accusative-ergative connection seems to be a distinct possibility (see Butt 2006a for a longer discussion).

A Spatial Connection

- Beames and Kellogg propose the participial form *lage* of the verb *lag* ‘stick to’ as a possible ancestor.
- More likely is that *ne* is related to Bengali *jonno* ‘for’, derived from the Sanskrit locative *janiyē* (from *janiyā*) ‘for the sake of, because of’ (Aditi Lahiri, p.c.; Chatterji 1926).
- One can see immediately how this might give rise to both goal/spatial (dative) and control (ergative) readings.



- Compare German (*wegen* is derived from a spatial concept, the dat. pl. of *Weg* ‘way’) (Ingrid Kaufmann, p.c.):

(39) **wegen ihm zerbrach die Vase**
 because he.Dat broke the vase
 ‘Because of him the vase broke’ (**cause/control**) German

(40) **wegen ihm schaffte ich einen Hund an**
 because he.Dat acquired I.Nom a.Acc dog at.Prt
 ‘For him I got a dog.’ (**for/goal**) German

5.2.2 Nepali

In Nepali, the ergative marker =*le* first appeared in 1389 in a simple transitive clause with the predicate *paa-* ‘obtain’.

- (41) **khidki sainya bahun=le paa-yo**
 soldier Brahmin=Erg obtain-Past.3Sg.M
 ‘The Brahmin obtained the Khidki army.’ (1389) Old Nepali

- The ergative did **not** first appear on an instrumental agent in a passive, as would have been expected by the standard story on structural ergativity.

- It also did not mark the stage- vs. individual-level representation right away.
- Rather, complex lexical semantic factors seem to be involved.

Historical Development

- The language already had a *paa-* verb, which had a ‘receive’ sense.
- The subject was always in nominative case, and only occurred in parallel with a clause with a ‘give-type’ predicate.

(42) upali d^harali rajbar datta pasaa ki
 upper sloppy land king Dutta charity do.CP
 raaudu b^handari paa-i
 Raudu Bhandari get-Past.F
 ‘Raudu Bhandari received (it), the king having given the upper sloppy land on
 charity.’ (1390) Old Nepali

- The ergative subject of the *paa-* ‘obtain’ had control over the action denoted by the verb, but the nominative subject of the *paa-* ‘receive’ was just a passive recipient.
- After the appearance of ergative, the language seems to have regularized the pattern of marking for control and the ‘receive’ sense of *paa-* disappeared.
- This semantic shift somehow seems to be related to a first appearance of ditransitive predicates.

(43) rajbar=le raaudu=laai dharali daan di-yo
 king=Erg Raudu=Dat sloppy land charity give-Past
 ‘The king gave the sloppy land to Raudu on charity.’ Nepali

- The ergative seems to have generally been associated with the feature of control and replaced the other cases in the appropriate environments.

(44) a. malla=ko sankalpa pasaa kar-i
 Malla=Gen promise charity do-Past
 ‘Malla gave (the land) (to someone) on charity.’ (1450) Old Nepali
 b. kuber=le sankalpa pasaa kar-i
 Kuber=Erg promise charity do-Past
 ‘Kuber gave (the land) (to someone) on charity.’ (1477) Old Nepali

6 Conclusions

- No real answer to the the “big” questions posed at the beginning of this talk — why do some languages reinvent case and others don’t?
- However, one clue seems to lie in how pervasively a language makes use of case to express semantic distinctions.

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