

Diachronic and semantic aspects of ergativity

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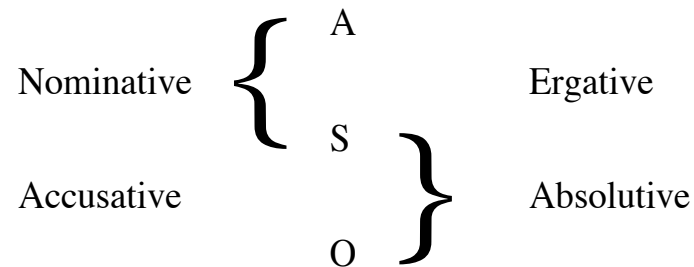
Workshop on

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Objectives

- In Nepali, the ergative developed from the change in verbal semantics, not from MIA ergative syntax, and it expanded its domain in other contexts.
- South Asian languages such as Nepali and Manipuri systematically use the ergative to make primarily semantic distinctions.
- More specifically, the semantic notions of control and individual level predications determine the use of the ergative in Nepali and Manipuri.

Ergativity: the Standard View



- The original idea of ergativity was structural.
- We claim that it is not just the structural notion but, like other case relations, ergativity is also a semantic one.
- In this talk we provide evidence from Nepali and Manipuri both from diachronic and synchronic data that ergativity is a semantic notion.

Indo-Aryan History

- **Chronological development of IA languages:**

Until 600BC	Vedic Sanskrit
600 BC-200AD	Epic Sanskrit
200AD-700AD	Prakrit languages
700AD-1100AD	Apabhramsa
1100 AD-Present	Nepali, Hindi, Bengali, etc.
- **Nepali:**

1100 AD-1400 AD	Early Nepali
1400 AD-1800 AD	Middle Nepali
1800 AD- Present	Modern Nepali

Ergativity: origin

- **Accepted View:** The NIA ergative marker evolved from Sanskrit instrumental *-ena* through passive to ergative reanalysis.
- However, this is not supported by the historical data (Butt 2001).
- Furthermore, in Nepali the ergative appeared first and it got expanded to instrumental.
- Manipuri, a TB language, also has similar development.
- **One Alternative:** Kellog (1875) derives the ergative marker in NIA languages *lag*(Sans.)>*laggio*(Prak.)>*lagi*>*lai*>*le*>*ne* ‘attach, stick to’.

Ergativity: origin

- The ergative/instrumental of one language is the dative/accusative of another e.g.,
 - ne* as ergative in Khariboli, Kannauji, Gadhwali,
 - ne* as accusative in old Rajasthani and Gujarati,
 - le* as ergative/ instrumental in Kumaoni and Nepali (Sharma 1964: 183-4).
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- It is possible that, when *-la* transformed into *-na*, it replaced *-la* as accusative in Modern Marathi.

Ergativity: origin

- The ergative marker in NIA appeared around 1400.
- Nepali ergative marker *-le* appeared in 1389 and Dakhini Hindi also had the ergative marker *-ne* almost at the same time (Sharma 1964), although the rule was not stable.
- During Apabhransha period a single form was used for different case roles, i.e., genitive, dative and accusative.
- Rajasthani accusative *-ne* came in use in Khariboli as ergative because Khariboli already had *-ko* as accusative.
- Change of one case marker for another is common. Early Nepali dative/accusative *-kana* got replaced by modern *-lāi*

Ergativity: Verbal semantic shift

- In early Nepali, three predicate clauses were non-existence.
- In a *give*-type three argument-clause, the acts of giving and receiving got represented in separate clauses.

upaali dharaali rajbar datta pasaa ki
upper sloped land king Dutta charity do.Perf

raaudu bhanDari paa-i
Raudu Bhandari receive-Perf

‘The king, Dutta, gave the upper sloped land in charity and Raudu Bhandari received (it). (1390)

- The recipient had no control over the verbal action in getting the land and it is in nominative case.

Ergativity: Verbal semantic shift

- On the other hand, when the recipient had control over the verbal action, the appearance of the ergative marker - *le* represented this semantic shift.

khiDki sainya baahun=**le** paa-yo
khidki army Brahmin.M=**ERG** get-Past.3.SG.M
'The Brahmin got the army of Khidki.' (1389)

In this example the ergative subject, not the object, agrees with the verb in person, number and gender.

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

Ergativity: Verbal semantic shift

- After the appearance of ergative, the language seems to have regularized the patterns of marking for control and the ‘receive’ sense of *paa-* disappeared.

... joisi=**le** paa-i

... Joisi=**ERG** get-Perf

‘[Malla’s promise made the charity] and Joisi got (it).’

(1450)

<Nepali>

Ergativity: Verbal semantic shift

- As the language established the co-relation between the feature of control and ergativity, the ergative replaced the genitive in appropriate environments.

malla=**ko** sankalpa pasaa kar-i
Malla=**GEN** promise charity do-Perf
'Malla's promise made the charity .' (1450) <Nepali>

kuber=**le** sankalpa pasaa kar-i
Kuber=**ERG** promise charity do-Perf
'Kuber made a promise for the charity .' (1477) <Nepali>

Ergativity: Complex predicate

- Towards the close of the 16th century, the ergative/genitive alternations led to a different form of verbal constructions known as complex predicates.

[**sukram=ki mayaa**] bha-i cha
Sukram=**GEN** mercy become-Perf Aux.NonPast
'Sukram has become merciful.' (1604) <Nepali>

maharaja=**le** [**mayaa bha-i** **cha**]
majesty=**ERG** mercy become-Perf Aux.NonPast
'His majesty has become merciful.' (1591) <Nepali>

- We would expect a do-type light verb with the ergative subject.
- But the kings are not supposed to act as they were considered to be the incarnations of Gods and everything happens whatever they wish.

Ergativity: Complex predicate

- Simultaneously an analogical construction developed with the verb in nominalized form.

arjanya=**le** paa-yaa bha-i cha
Arjanya=**ERG** get-PPART become-Perf Aux.NonPast
'Arjanya got (the piece of land).' (1591) <Nepali>

- But an alternative construction, which borrowed the genitive *-ko*, developed and became dominant replacing the other.

hamra=**le** paa-yaa-ko cha
1.Pl=**ERG** get-PPART-GEN Aux.NonPast
'We have got (the piece of land).' (1590) <Nepali>

Ergativity: Complex predicate

- The semantic incompatibility of the *become*-type light verb NV complex predicates with the ergative led to the replacement of the ergative marker with the ablative case marker *-baaTa*.

maharaaj-**baaTa** pradarsani najar bha-yo
majesty-**ABL** exhibition sight happen-Past
'The king saw the exhibition.'

<Nepali>

- Consequently ergativity was restricted to the *do*-type light verb complex predicates in modern Nepali.

mantri=**le** pul udghaaTan gar-e
minister=**ERG** bridge inauguration do-Past.3.HON
'The minister inaugurated the bridge.'

<Nepali>

Ergativity: Nominalization

- In Nepali and Manipuri, the agents of nominalized constructions receive ergative marking if they have control over the action denoted by the nominalized verb.

mai= le	lekh-eko	kitaab
1.SG.Obl=ERG	write-NOMZ	book
‘The book I have written...’		<Nepali>

mai= le	lekh-ne	kitaab
1.SG.Obl=ERG	write-NOMZ	book
‘The book I will write...’		<Nepali>

- Other IA languages such as Hindi/Urdu use genitive in such contexts.

Ergativity: Nominalization

- The ergative in one language and genitive in the other in the same context shows close semantic relation between the two.
- Further evidence: the ergative and genitive are form identical in many languages such as Mayan languages (Holfing 1990), Classical Tibetan and Lhasa Tibetan (De Lancy 2003), Thulung (Lahaussais 2003) and Bhujel (Regmi 2007).

Ergativity: Control

To trigger the ergative marking on the subject, the subject must control the action denoted by the verb and its volitionality is not related with the ergative marking.

bhuîcaalaa=**le** dherai ghar bhatkaa-yo
earthquake.Obl=**ERG** many house collapse-Past.3.SG
‘The earthquake collapsed many houses.’ <Nepali>

gaari=**naa** angaang ama thom-kh-re
vehicle=**ERG** child one hit-EVD-ANT.REAL
‘The vehicle hit a child.’ <Manipuri>

Ergativity: INST/reason clause

- Many South Asian languages get ergative/ instrumental markers extended to the reason clause because of their common semantic feature i.e., they control the verbal action.

[mi laak-paa-ni]=naa ai nang=gi
people come-NOMZ-COP=ERG/INST 1.SG 2.SG=GEN

parti=daa laak-paa ngam-da-re
party=Loc come-NOMZ be able-NEG-ANT.REAL
'Because of the coming of the people, I could not come
to your party.'
<Manipuri>

Ergativity: perfectivity

The subjects of perfective transitive clauses are default for ergative marking because such subjects have maximum control over the verbal action.

maitei=**naa** british-pu maaithiba pi-kh-re

Manipuri=**ERG** British-FOC defeat give-EVD-ANT.REAL

‘Manipuris defeated British.’

<Manipuri>

maobaadi=**le** cunaab jit-e

Maoist=**ERG** election win-Past.3.PL

‘Maoists won the elections.’

<Nepali>

Individual/Stage level

- Ontological primes—stage, object and kind. Stages correspond to stage level and objects and kinds to individual level (Carlson 1977).
- Diesing (1992) attributes temporary time reference to stage level predicates and permanent time reference to individual level predicates.
- Carlson (1977) distinguishes the stage level reading as ‘happening’ and individual level reading as ‘characteristic’ reading.
- South Asian languages like Nepali and Manipuri employ case marking to distinguish individual level and stage level readings.

Ergativity: Individual level

- Manipuri copula verbs *ni* and *lai* express permanent and temporary properties of the referents and give the individual and stage level readings respectively.
- These two readings are represented by the ergative/nominative case alternation on the subject.

mahaak=**naa** ojaa ni

3.Hon=**ERG** teacher Cop.REAL

‘He is a teacher.’ <Manipuri, Individual level>

mahaak ngasi ma-yum=daa lai

3.Hon today 3-house=**LOC** Cop.REAL

‘Today he is in his house.’ <Manipuri, Stage level>

Ergativity: Individual level

- Unlike Manipuri, Nepali does not employ case marking to distinguish individual/stage level in copular sentences.
- The copula verbs *ho* and *cha* express individual and stage level readings.

saru b^hakta kabi hun

Saru Bhakta poet Cop.NonPast.3.Hon

‘Saru Bhakta is a poet.’ <Nepali, Individual level>

saru b^hakta aaja k^husi chan

Saru Bhakta today happy Cop.NonPast.3.Hon

‘Saru Bhakta is happy today.’ <Nepali, Stage level>

Ergativity: Individual level

- Turning to the non-past transitive sentences in Nepali, the ergative and nominative distinguish the individual and stage level readings.

ramesh= le	gaari	calaaû-cha
Ramsh= ERG	car.Nom	drive-NonPast.3.SG.M
‘Ramesh drives cars.’		<Nepali, Individual level>

ramesh	gaari	calaaû-cha
Ramesh	car.Nom	drive-NonPast.3.SG.M
‘Ramesh will drive/drives a car.’		<Nepali, Stage level>

Ergativity: Individual level

- Manipuri also behaves like Nepali. The realis action sentences with the ergative subject express individual level and with the nominative subject express stage level predications.

imaa=**naa** caak t^hong-i
mother=**ERG** food cook-Real

‘Mother cooks food.’ <Manipuri, Individual level>

imaa caak t^hong-i
mother food cook-Real

‘Mother is cooking food.’ <Manipuri, Stage level>

Ergativity: Individual level

- Stative verbs prototypically express individual level notion (Carlson 1977).

carulata= naa (*ngasi)	inglis	hai-i
Carulata= ERG (today)	English	know-REAL

‘Carulata knows English (*today).’

<Individual level, Manipuri>

- Non-stative verbs are stage level predicates by default and they accept spatio-temporal adverbs (Kratzer 1995).

carulata	(ngasi)	inglis	ngaang-i
Carulata	(today)	English	speak-REAL

‘Carulata is speaking English (today).’

<Stage level, Manipuri>

Ergativity: Individual level

When-clauses are stage level predicates because they are event arguments (Kratzer 1995). As expected the subjects of *when*-clauses are in nominative case.

pallawi	angreji	bol-daa	raamrari
Pallawi	English	sepak-Impf	well

bol-che

speak-NonPast.3.SG.F

‘When Pallawi speaks English, she speaks it well.’

<Nepali, Stage level>

Ergativity: Individual level

But when *when*-clauses are raised to individual level by replacing one of the specific NPs into non-specific, the subject is marked with ergative case.

nepali= le	angreji	bol-daa
Nepali= ERG	English	know-Impf

ramrari	bol-chan
properly	speak-NonPast.3.Pl

‘When Nepalese speak English, they speak it well.’

<Nepali, Individual level>

Ergativity: Individual level

- In transitive clauses the ergative marks the subjects of generic clauses (Individual level) and the unmarked nominative case marks the specific NP subjects (stage level).

hui=**naa** haaudong taal-i
dog=**ERG** cat chase-REAL

‘The dog chases the cat. OR Dogs chase cats.’

<Individual level, Manipuri>

hui-du haaudong amaa taal-i
dog-that cat one chase-REAL

‘That dog is chasing a cat.’

<Stage level, Manipuri>

Ergativity: Individual level

The association of ergative/nominative case and individual/stage level is not restricted to transitive clauses but cuts across intransitive clauses in Manipuri.

hui=**naa** k^hong-i

dog=**ERG** bark-Real

'The dog barks. (Dogs bark.)' <Manipuri, Individual level>

hui amaa k^hong-i

dog one bark-Real

'A dog is barking.' <Manipuri, Stage level>

Ergativity: Individual level

- The individual level predicates are inherently presuppositional (Kearns 2001:22).
- An utterance is presuppositional if the speaker assumes the addressee knows a set of information contained in the utterance at speech time (Darlymple and Nikolova 2007).

mai= le	hiD-eko	baaTo
1.SG.Obl= ERG	walk-NOM	road
dherai garho	cha	
much difficult	Cop.NonPast	

‘The road I walked is very difficult.’ <Nepali>

Ergativity: Individual level

- Kind referring NPs presuppose typical activities, so the ergative is obligatory when the presupposition is fulfilled otherwise a stage level predicate is asserted.

ojaa=**naa** laairik taak-i

teacher=**ERG** book teach-REAL

‘The teacher teaches. (The teacher does teaching)’

<Individual level, Manipuri>

ojaa laairik taak-i

teacherbook teach-REAL

‘The teacher is teaching.’ <Stage level, Manipuri>

Ergativity: Individual level

Same explanation holds for Nepali.

caalak=**le** gaaDi calaaù-cha

driver=**ERG** car drive-NonPast.3.SG.M

‘The driver drives the car/ Drivers drive cars.’

<Nepali, Individual level>

sikshak gaaDi calaaù-chan

teacher car drive-NonPast.3.SG.Hon

‘The teacher will drive the car.’

<Nepali, Stage level>

Ergativity: Individual level

- Carlson (1977) identifies two types of predicates — ‘happening’ and ‘characteristic’. ‘Happening’ reading corresponds to stage level and ‘characteristic’ to individual level.

tomba=**naa** curup t^hak-i

Tomba=**ERG** cigarette drink-REAL

‘Tomba smokes cigarettes.’ <Manipuri, Individual level>

tomba curup t^hak-i

Tomba cigarette drink-REAL

‘Tomba is smoking a cigarette.’ <Manipuri, Stage level>

- In the first example, the predicate *t^hak*-‘smoke’ refers to *Tomba*, the individual, which is an abstract organization of a series of *Tomba*-stages, which participate in smoking represented in the second example.

Ergativity: Intransitive constructions

- Those Nepali verbs, which are termed as unergative, have transitive counterparts. They look like intransitive because of the object drop phenomenon.
- Such verbs have typical NPs always associated with them as their objects. For example, the verbs such as *padh-* ‘read’, *chaad-* ‘vomit’, *nuhaa-* ‘bathe’, *thuk-* ‘spit’ etc. take *kitaab* ‘book’, *mut* ‘urine’, *jiu* ‘body’, *t^huk* ‘saliva’, as their unmarked objects, which are known from the world knowledge.
- But if they have objects other than these for example, *k^habar* ‘newspaper’, *ragat* ‘blood’, *Taauko* ‘head’, *k^hakaar* ‘phlegm’, etc. respectively, these are like normal transitive verbs.

Ergativity: Intransitive constructions

baccaa=**le** chaad-yo

child=**ERG** vomit-Past.3.SG

‘The child vomited.’

<Nepali>

baccaa=**le** ragat chaad-yo

child=**ERG** blood vomit-Past.3.SG

‘The child vomited blood.’

<Nepali>

- Only unaccusative verbs are true intransitives in Nepali and they receive nominative case on their subjects.

Dhokaa khul-yo

door open-past.3.SG

‘The door opened.’

<Nepali>

Ergativity: Intransitive constructions

- The case is different in Manipuri. It is individual/stage level distinction, not unergative/unaccusative one, determines the case of subject in intransitive constructions.

pokpadaa ngaairiba angaang=**naa** yaam tum-i
newly born child=**ERG** much sleep-REAL
'Newly born babies sleep much.' <Manipuri, Individual level>

angaang tum-i
child sleep-REAL
'The child is sleeping.' <Manipuri, Stage level>

Ergativity: Intransitive constructions

- In Manipuri the association between ergative and individual level is so strong that the contrast is evident even with the inanimate subjects.

lai=**naa** sat-li

flower=**ERG** bloom-Real

‘The flower blooms/Flowers bloom.’ <Manipuri, Individual level>

lai saat-li

flower bloom-Real

‘The flower is in bloom.’ <Manipuri, Stage level>

Conclusions

- Both Nepali and Manipuri mark the subject of transitive clause with ergative marker if it controls the verbal action.
- The subjects of transitive individual level predicates also have control over the verbal action.
- Manipuri further extends the use of ergative marking with individual level copular and intransitive constructions.
- In Nepali the feature of control determines the use of ergative marking but in Manipuri both the feature of control and individual level predications equally determine the use of ergative marking.
- Finally, the data presented in this talk provide further evidence that ergativity, like other case relations, is a semantic notion.