The Ergative Morphosyntax in Danuwar  
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Abstract

This article is an attempt to analyse ergativity in Danuwar clauses. It is organized into four sections. First section provides the theoretical background where attempts are made to explain the concept of ergativity. The next section deals with the morphology of ergativity in Danuwar. Then after, efforts are made to analyse the syntax of ergativity in the language in terms of constituent order, transitivity, verb agreement, control site, case demotion, and coordinate construction. Finally, the main findings of the paper are summarized.

Keywords: Ergativity, morphosyntax, transitivity, converbal clause.

Introduction

Danuwar is one of the languages belonging to Indo-Aryan branch of indo-European language family. It is spoken in Nepal by an ethnic group of the same name as their mother tongue. The 2011 Census report shows out of 48,650 people, 45,800 can speak this language. The language has developed different dialects because of geographical distance and the influence of other surrounding languages. Mainly, it shows influence of Nepali, Tharu, Maithili, Bhojpuri, and Hindi. In the hilly region, some influence of Tibeto-Burman languages can also be observed.

Theoretical Background

Case and agreement markers are not always in a one to one correspondence with grammatical relations. There are many language in which certain verbs required special case marking for their subjects and objects. In other languages, the marking of subjects depends on the transitivity of the clause: transitive subjects are marked one way, while intransitive subjects are marked another way. Most languages that have grammatical case markers follow one of two basic patterns The more common of these patterns can be observed in English. As we know case marking in modern English is found only in pronouns, consider the following examples that are focused on the distribution of the pronominal forms.

(1) a. I dance.
    b. He dances
c. I like him.

d. He likes me.

These examples illustrate, subject pronouns have the same form ('I' and 'He') whether the clause is intransitive, as in (la) and (lb). Following standard terminology, we should call this the nominative form. Direct object occurs in different form ('me' and 'him'). We could call this the accusative form. This pattern of case marking is referred to as a Nominative-Accusative system, or Accusative for short. Example (2), showing the distribution.

(2) INTRANSITIVE SUBJECT : I, he
TRANSITIVE SUBJECT : I, he OBJECT : me, him

[Nominative] [Accusative]

Now let's imagine that following utterances of Pigdin English Spoken in a south Pacific Island have been recorded:

(3) a. mi dans 'I dance.'
    b. him dans 'He dances.'
    c. ai laik him 'I like him.'
    d. hi laik mi 'He likes me.'

In these examples, we see that direct objects of transitive clauses take the same form as subjects of intransitive clauses, viz. mi or him subjects of transitive clauses take a special form, ai or hi. This kind of case marking pattern summarized in (4) is referred to as an Ergative-Absolutive system, or ergative for short. The form used for transitive subjects is called ergative case, while the form used for transitive objects and intransitives subjects are called absolutive case.

(4) INTRANSITIVE SUBJECT : mi, him
TRANSITIVE SUBJECT : ai, hi OBJECT : mi, him

[ergative] [absolutive]

Now, let's have a look at these Danuwar sentences:

(5) a. raam -aai-lak
    Ram -NOM come - PT 3 SG-M
    'Ram came.'

    b. raam-e kitaab-ϕ paDhi-lak
In these examples, (5a) is an intransitive clause having a single argument (ram) and it is unmarked. But (5b) is a transitive clause with two arguments, one as a subject (raam-e) and another as an object (kitaab). In this clause, object is also unmarked as subject argument in (5a), but subject is marked differently, viz, with the ergative case marker-e. So, this language is ergative language.

This pattern of Danuwar language is displayed in (6)

(6) INTRANSITIVE SUBJECT : Ø

TRANSITIVE SUBJECT :e OBJECT : Ø

[ergative] [abosolutive]

The morphology of Ergativitgy in Danuwar

As it is exemplified, in Danuwar, the ergative subject is marked with the case inflection-e.

(7) a. raam-e bhaat khaai-lak

Ram-ERG rice eat - PT 3 SG M

'Ram ate rice.'

b. Sita-I bhaat khaai-lik

Sita-ERG rice eat - PT 3 SG F

'Sita ate rice.'

c. keTi bhaat khaai-lik

girl.ERG rice eat-PT 3 SG F

'The girl ate rice.'

In the above examples, raam (7a) inflect with -e without any change in their form. But when we attach the ergative -e to sitta in (7b), it changes to I and the final aa (7a) which ends with a vowel -I remains same, i.e. keTi. Such morphophonemic alternations occur with other cases, as well.

The case of pronominal ergative subjects, however, is different. The following table (Table 1) reveals the ergative marking on pronouns in Danuwar.

Table 1:
Ergative Marking on Danuwar Pronominals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pronominal Roots</th>
<th>Ergative Marking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mui</td>
<td>mui</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>haamai</td>
<td>haamai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tui</td>
<td>tui</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tolok</td>
<td>tolokhe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aaphnakelok</td>
<td>aaphnakelokeh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>u</td>
<td>oi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>olok</td>
<td>olokhe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table I we can see that when the ergative case marking -e is suffixed to pronouns like mui, tui, haamai, and aaphnakelok, their forms have remained same whereas tolok, aaphnakelok, u and olok have change into tolokhe, aaphnakelokeh, oi and olokhe, respectively. This observation indicates that the pronouns ending with the vowel sounds /I/ and /e/ remain same in ergative case, the pronouns ending with consonant take-e and the stem u changes o and the erative maker-e becomes i.

Apart from ergative marking, the nominals (but not pronominal) in Danuwar also show inflection for number. The relative position of the inflectional categories affixed to these nominal is ]

(8)  Noun-Number ERG

It is exemplified in (9)

(9)  a. betyaak-lok-e macho marr-ti ra-chat
    son-PL-ERG fish kill-PROG be-NTP 3PL
    'SONs are fishing.'

b. maanus -lok-e baaT kheni-laa
    man-PL-ERG road dig-PTPL
    The men constructed road.

c. ChhaTE-lok-e piTho boi-khaai-laa
    child-PL-ERG chapatti EG-eatPT3PL
'The children did not eat chapatti.'

In these examples, the ergative case maker -e is suffixed to number inflections (i.e. plural marker -lok) following the nominals, viz. be Tyaak, maanus and chaaTe in (9a), (9b) and (9c) respectively.

It is to be noted that the ergative marker -e is homophonous with the instrument marker -3, For example, consider the following sentence.

(10) saap-e data-e kapta-chat
    snake -ERG teeth-INSTR bite-NPT3PL
    'Snake bite with teeth.'

It is a widespread phenomenon is several south Asian language.

The Syntax of Ergativity in Danuwar

In this section, attempts are made to analysis the properties characterizing ergativity at clausal/ sentential level in Danuwar. Cases and grammatical relations (subject/object) often have no one-to-one relation in Indo-Aryan language including Danuwar. Thus, not all nominative nominals are subjects and conversely, not all subjects are nominative nominals. However, ergative case in unique in the sense that it always has unidirectional relation with the subject. That is to say, all ergative nominals are subjects through all subjects are not ergative, as shown in (11).

(11) a. ERG \rightarrow subject
    b. * ERG ⇔ Subject

This formulation implies that all ergative nominals must be subject. If so, then we assume that all the properties so subjectivehood (proposed by keenan, 1976 will naturally follow. This section examines the syntactic behaviour of ergative subject in the various facts about Danuwar syntax. They include the following:

- Constituent order.
- Transitivity
- Verb agreement
- Control site
- Case demotion
- Coordinate construction
Constituent Order

We assume that the basic constituent in a Danuwar transitive clause is SOV. This assumption implies that the nominals with ergative marking -e, which are subjects, occur clause initially. However, for special semantic and pragmatic effects the basic constituent order can be permuted. For example, consider the following examples in (12).

(12) a. raam-e hari-lai bheTi-lak
    Ram-ERG Hari-ACC meet-PT3SGM
    'Ram met Hari.'

b. hari-lai raam-e bheTi-lak
    Hari-ACC Ram-ERG meet-PT3SGM
    'Ram met Hari.'

c. bheTi-lak raam-e hari-lal
    meet-PT3SGM Ram-ERG Hari-ACC
    'Ram met Hari.'

Sentence (12a) is normal utterance in Danuwar. (12b) is used to emphasize that it was Ram (nobody else) who met Hari. Similarly, (12c) is uttered to mean that, perhaps Ram had been trying to meet Hari for a long time and he was successful.

Transitivity

Danuwar ergative marking -e on the subject is associated with transitivity of its verb: if the verb in the ergative clause is transitive, the subject NP must get ergative marking, on the contrary the NP of an intransitive clause does not get ergative marking. Consider the following examples in (13) and (14)

(13) a. resam-e ekTaa kukraa maar-la ra-lok
    Resham-ERG one. CLF dog kill-PERF be-P3SGM
    'Reshan had killed a dog'

    a1. * ream etTaa Kukraa maar-lara-lak

b. ajit-e dhulikhel-maa ghar baanaai-rai-lak
    Ajit-ERG Dhulikhel-LOC house build-be-PT3SGM
    'Ajit has built a house in Dhulikhel.'
b1 ajit dhulikhel-maaghar banaai-rai-lak

c. sujit-e chThi lekh-ti ra-is
   Sujit-ERG letter write -PROG be NPT3SG
   'Sujit is writing a letter'.

c1 *Sujit ciThi lekh -tira-is

Through (13a), (13b) and (13c) are in different tenses and aspects, they are all transitive clause. So, the subject NPS in all these three clauses must take the ergative marker-e. That's why, (13a1), (13b) and (13c) are unacceptable utterances.

(14) a kedaar dilli jai-la ra-lak
   kedar delhi go-PERF be-PT3SGM
   'Kedar had gone to Delhi.'

a1 *kedaar-e dilli jai-la ra-lak
   sitta aai-ra-lik
   Sita come-be-PT3SGF
   'Sita has come.'

b1 *Sita-i aai-ra-lik

d syaam kaad-ti ra-is
   shyam weep-PROg be-NPT3SG

c1 *syaamekaaD-tira-is

Although (14a) is in past tense and perfective aspect, (14b) is in non-past tense and perfective aspect, and (14c) is in non-past tense and progressive aspect, similar to (13a), (13b) and (13c), respectively, all these utterances are intransitive ones. So, the NPS in all these three clauses con not take the ergative marker. They must be unmarked. Therefore, (14a1), (14b1) and (14c1) are ill formed utterances.

The ergative marking can not always be attributed to transitivity in Danuwar. Consider the following examples in this regard.

(15)a. raam-e iskul u-yaa9 parchi
   Ram-ERG School go-INF OBL
   'Ram must go to school'
In both these examples, the verbs are intransitive marked with non past tense and non-perfective aspect and yet they cause ergative marking on their subjects. It seems we need to look for some semantic explanations like 'necessity' / 'obligation' for the choice of an ergative subject. Suppose that this semantic basis is encoded by denotic modality. If so then the morphosyntactic factors combining for the choice of the ergative subject fall into two disjunctive groups: transitivity vs. deontic modality. This leads to the generalization that Danuwar has split ergativity. This analysis has been undertaken on the basis of limited data so further investigation is necessary in this area.

**Verb Agreement**

Like nominative subjects, ergative subjects also control the verb agreement in Danuwar, eg.

(16) a. raam-e sitaa-lai man paraai-lak
    Ram-ERG Sita-ACC heart fall-PT3SGM
    'Ram liked Sita.'

b. Sita-I raam-lai man paraai-lik
    Sita-ERG Ram-ACC heart fall-PT3SGM
    'Sita liked Ram.'

It is to be noted that the subjects associated with cases other than nominative and ergative do not trigger the verb agreement in Danuwar. Danuwar, thus, contrasts with Hindi, in which an ergative subject can not control verb agreement, e.g.

(17) a. raam roTi khaataa hai
    Ram chapatti eat be RP3SG
    'Ram eats chapatti.'

b. raam-ne roTi khaa-yii
    Ram-ERG chapatti eat-PT3SGF
    'Ram ate chapatti.'
Control Site

As in other languages, the control site in a Danuwar converbal construction is the ergative or other types of subject of the matrix clause. e.g.

(18) raam-e hari-lai [PRO\(i\)git baj-e] baaji-lak
    Ram-ERG Hari-Dat song tell-INF tell-PT3SGM
    'Ram told Hari to sing a son.'

Case Demotion

Danuwar is different from Hindi or Maithili in overtly allowing subjects without enforcing any case demotion rule. Both nominative and ergative are fine in complement (19) attribute (20) and converb (21) clauses:

(19) a. [raam ghar j-yaal] thik boike
    Raam. NOM home go-INF right be.NEG.NPT
    'It is not good for Ram to drink alcohol.'

(20) a. [[bhim hoski-la] din]
    Bhim. NOM laugh PT day
    'The day Bhim laughed'
    b. [[bhim-e baanaai-la] ghar]
    Bhim.ERG build-PT house
    'The house Bhim built.'

(21) a. [ajit kaanu nai-aai-ku] kunnu kaam
    Ajit.NOM tomorrow NEG-come-CONv any work. N
    nai-hokh-is
    NEG-be NPT3SG
    'Unless Ajit comes tomorrow, there won't be any work.'
    b. [baaba-I baaji-ku tani]o-I yl kaam kari-lak
    fathr-ERG tell-CONV only h-ERG this work do-PT3SGM
    'He did this work only because fathr told him/her so.'
Coordinate construction

Except for the presence of PRo- element, conduction reduction has similar properties as converbal chaining (and earlier literature often conflates the two, e.g. Kachru et al., 1976). In the programmatically unmarked case, the dropped element (PRO) can be ergative subject (22a), but this is not a syntactic constraint. The example (22b) shows that under some conditions, the dropped element can also be the object.

(22) a. bhim-e kitaab kini-lak ra malaai di-lak
   Bhim-ERG book buy-PT3SGM and me give PT3SGM
   'Bhim bought a book and gave me.'

b. bhim aai-lak ra mui piTi-nu
   Bhim.NOM come-PT3SGM and I beat-PT 1SG
   'Bhim came and I beat him.'

Conclusion

To sum up, the ergative morpho-syntax in Danuwar is characterized by a set of properties. It is morphologically marked with the case particle-e. In an unmarked construction, the ergative subject appears clause initially in transitive clause. Like the nominative subject, it shows agreement with the verb. The control site in a Danuwar converbal construction in the ergative or other types of subject. Danuwar overtly allows subjects without enforcing any case demotion rule. In the pragmatically unmarked case, the dropped element (PRO) can be an ergative subject, but this is not a syntactic constraint in PRO drop language.

Abbreviations

ϕ zero element
1: first person  NO: number
2: second person NOM: nominative case
3: third person  NP: noun phrase
ACC: accusative case  NPT: non-past tense
CLF: classifier  OBL: obligation marker
CONV: converb  PAT: perfective aspect
DAT: dating case  PERF: perfective aspect
ERG: ergative case  PL: plural
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