

Ergativity in Bagri

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Abstract: *The aim of this paper is to provide a descriptive account of ergative Case marking and agreement pattern in Bagri. Being a dialect of Hindi, it also exhibits split-ergativity in perfective clauses. Unlike Hindi, we also observe person-based split in ergative marking i.e. overt ergative Case marking is restricted to second person singular and third person pronouns. Moreover, we notice a nested agreement pattern where auxiliary optionally agrees with the subject and the main verb obligatorily agrees with the direct object. A close inspection of ergative Case marking and agreement pattern in other Indo-Aryan languages reveals that Bagri is heading towards a complete wipeout of its ergative morphology.*

Keywords: transitive, perfective, imperfective, ergative Case, agreement

1. Introduction

Like Hindi, Bagri is also an aspectually-conditioned split-ergative language. In perfective clauses, subject DPs appear in ergative form. In Hindi, an overt morphological Case marker *-neis* used to mark ergative Case. However, in Bagri, overt ergative Case marking is restricted to some pronominal forms namely, second person singular and third persons. Additionally, like Kutchi Gujarati and Marwari, we observe a nested agreement pattern in Bagri where auxiliary optionally agrees with ergative subject and the transitive verb agrees with the direct object. In addition, agreement between the verb and direct object is obligatory i.e. overt Case marking on object DP does not affect agreement relationship. Using diagnostic tests of coordination and Case agreement phenomenon, we show that all subjects of perfective clauses bear ergative Case features. We argue that optional agreement between an auxiliary and a subject in a perfective is due to transitional state of Bagri where it is in the process of shedding all its overt ergative Case marking. To back our claim, we closely examine ergative Case marking and agreement pattern in other Indo-Aryan languages.

An outline of the paper is as follows. In section 2, we briefly discuss ergative Case marking and agreement pattern in Indo-Aryan languages and also introduce ergative alignment in Bagri. In section 3, we lucidly state the puzzling questions that we attempt to answer in this paper, and in section 4, we define our methodological approach. In section 5, we provide a descriptive account of the data presented above and also make a strong prediction about morphological ergative Case marking and agreement pattern in future. In section 6, we summarize our key findings and in section 7, we state the relevance of this study to future studies in the field of linguistics.

2. Literature Survey

Ergativity is standardly conceived as a grammatical pattern where intransitive subjects (S) are identified with transitive direct objects (O) as opposed to transitive subjects (A). On the other hand, in an accusative alignment, intransitive subjects (S) are identified with transitive subjects (A). Dixon (1994) defines ergativity as a grammatical pattern “in which

the subject of an intransitive clause is treated in the same way as the object of a transitive clause, and differently from transitive subject” (Dixon 1994: 1). In split-ergative languages, ergative marking occurs only in certain structures, for instance, in the perfective aspect or with certain pronominals (i.e. person-based split ergativity). Ergativity contributes in a crucial way to the study of Case and agreement. Therefore, it becomes imperative to study ergativity in depth as it offers an abundance of cross-linguistic variation ranging different disciplines yet in the confines of potential language universals. Numerous studies on ergativity in South-Asian languages, especially in Indo-Aryan languages have revealed some interesting patterns with respect to ergative subject marking and agreement patterns. A brief summary of different ergative Case marking and agreement patterns in Indo-Aryan languages is presented here from Deo and Sharma (2006)¹. In perfective aspect, subject of a transitive predicate in all persons bears overt ergative Case both in Hindi and Nepali. However, these two languages differ in their agreement patterns in these structures. In Hindi, a transitive verb agrees with unmarked object, if available; otherwise, default option. However, in Nepali, a transitive verb uniformly agrees with the subject irrespective of Case marking on it. In Gujarati, overt ergative Case marking is missing from first and second person plural subjects. However, unlike Hindi, a transitive verb always agrees with direct object irrespective of whether it is Case marked or not. In Marathi, there is no overt ergative Case marking on first and second person subjects and the agreement pattern is similar to Hindi. In Bangla, there is no ergative Case marking. Patel-Grosz and Grosz (2013) discuss data from Kutchi Gujarati and Marwari and report that there is no ergative Case marking in these languages. Moreover, there is a “nested” agreement in these languages in that in perfective aspect, the auxiliary agrees with the subject, if present and the direct object agrees with the transitive verb.

Coming to Bagri, an Indo Aryan language predominantly spoken in the states of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan in the Indian subcontinent, it displays similarities with other Indo-

¹ To give a general overview of the facts, we have taken findings from Deo and Sharma (2006). For a detailed discussion on individual languages, interested readers are advised to look for further relevant papers.

Aryan languages. Like other Indo-Aryan languages, Bagri is also an aspectually-conditioned split-ergative language i.e., the aspectual information on the verbal predicate determines whether it exhibits “ergative alignment” or “accusative alignment”. It exhibits ergative alignment when a transitive verb is in the perfective aspect². It implies that, in such contexts, transitive verbs agree with objects. Unlike Hindi, ergative Case marking in Bagri is mainly covert except for second person singular and third person subjects, and a transitive verb always agrees with the direct object sharing the pattern with Gujarati. Consider the following.

(1) a. mǝgaaN:obajaayo: hu:/hai
I.Nom/Erg song.Acc.M.Sgplay.Pfv.M.Sg
be.Pres.1.Sg/be.Pres
'I have played a song.'

b. mǝsittibajaaihu:/hai
I.Nom/Erg whistle.Acc.F.Sgeat.Pfv.F.Sg
be.Pres.1.Sg/be.Pres
'I have blown the whistle.'

(2) a. mħegaaN:obajaayo: haa:/hai
we.Nom/Erg song.Acc.M.Sgplay.Pfv.M.Sgbe.Pres.1.Pl/be.
Pres

'We have played a song.'
b. mħesittibajaaihaa:/hai
we.Nom/Erg whistle.Acc.F.Sgeat.Pfv.F.Sg
be.Pres.1.Pl/be.Pres
'We have blown the whistle.'

(3) a. thegaaN:obajaayo: ho:/hai
you.Nom/Erg.Pl
song.Acc.M.Sgplay.Pfv.M.Sgbe.Pres.2.Pl/be.Pres
'You (Pl) have played a song.'

b. thesittibajaaiho:/hai
you.Nom/Erg.Pl
whistle.Acc.F.Sgeat.Pfv.F.Sgbe.Pres.2.Pl/be.Pres
'You (Pl) have blown the whistle.'

(4) a. tǝ/bǝN/baangaaN:obajaayo: hai
you/(s)he/they.Erg song.Acc.M.Sgplay.Pfv.M.Sgbe.Pres
'You(Sg)/(s)he/they has/have played a song.'

b. tǝ/bǝN/baansittibajaaihai
you/(s)he/they whistle.Acc.F.Sgeat.Pfv.F.Sgbe.Pres
'You (Sg)/(s)he/they has/ have blown the whistle.'

(5) a. Ram gaaN:obajaayo:hai
Ram.Nom/Erg
song.Acc.M.Sgplay.Pfv.M.Sgbe.Pres
'Ram has played a song.'

b. Ramsittibajaaihai
Ram.Nom/Erg
whistle.Acc.F.Sgeat.Pfv.F.Sgbe.Pres
'Ram has have blown the whistle.'³

In (1-3), like Kutchi Gujarati and Marwari⁴, we notice a nested agreement pattern in which the participial verb agrees

with the object in both gender and number features, and the auxiliary also optionally agrees with the subject in person and number features. Besides, there is also no morphological difference between nominative and ergative forms of the pronouns; hence, they have been glossed here as Nom/Erg. In (4), we can notice that when the ergative Case is realized phonologically on the subject, the auxiliary *hai* remains unchanged for second person, singular and third person subjects, and the participial verb agrees with the direct object in number and gender. In (5), as expected, when a referential DP occurs without an overt ergative inflection, *hai* is used and the participial verb agrees with the direct object in number and gender.

3. Problem Definition

In this paper, we attempt to provide a descriptive account of ergative Case marking in Bagri and also its correlation with agreement pattern. A related question that arises at this stage is whether subjects in (1-3) and (5) are in nominative or ergative. Moreover, how do account for optional agreement between the auxiliary and the subject in (1-3). Additionally, like Gujarati, a transitive verb in Bagri agrees with both marked and unmarked objects. This is in contrast with what we see in Hindi or Marathi. How do we account for this parametric variation? These are some of the key questions that we attempt to answer in this paper.

4. Methodology/Approach

In this paper, we use comparative approach to analyse the cross-linguistic parametric variation in ergative Case marking and its correlation with agreement pattern in Indo-Aryan languages. Apart from this, we use some standard diagnostic tests to check Case marking. Being a native speaker of Bagri, major part of data is based on my competence. For clarity and confirmation, I also verified this data with my colleagues as well as relatives through constant dialogue and discussion.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Ergative Subjects

Let's analyse some examples from Marathi that are akin to Bagri before examining Bagri itself at length. As we discussed above, there is no overt ergative marking on first and second person pronouns in Marathi. Nevertheless, it is identical to Hindi in agreement i.e. in perfective clauses, the transitive verb agrees with the direct object. Using the test of coordination, Dhongde and Wali (2009:233) explicitly show that nouns with non-matching Case makers cannot be coordinated. And yet, sentences like (6) allow coordination of an ergative Case marked DP with an unmarked DP in the subject position of a transitive, perfective clause, reflecting its non-nominative nature.

(6) liki-ne ani mi kelikha-ll-i
Liki-Erg and I.Nom banana.Npl.Nom eat-

⁴In Kutchi Gujarati and Marwari, auxiliary always agrees with the subject DP as there is no overt marking for ergative Case in the language.

²We have avoided a discussion of imperfective clauses where we see accusative alignment as it is similar to other Indo-Aryan languages.

³For a deeper understanding of syntax and morphology of Bagri, see Gussain (1999)

Pfv-Npl

‘Liki and I ate bananas’ (Dhongde and Wali, 2009: 233)

Case agreement phenomenon has also reinforced the non-nominative nature of *mi* as we see that in Marathi, modifiers of pronouns agree with their heads with regards to Case marking. When pronouns are in nominative forms, modifiers also occur in nominative, whereas in oblique forms, modifiers also show obliqueness marking. Let’s examine the following examples.

(7) a. *mi ekambakha-lla*

I.F.Erg one mango.M.Nom eat.Pfv.M.3.Sg
‘I ate a mango.’

b. *ved-ya ash-a mi ekambakha-lla*
foolish.Obl like.Obl I.F.Erg one
mango.M.Nom eat.Perf.M.3.Sg
‘Foolish me ate a mango.’

c. *vediashi mi ekambo kha-te*
foolish.F.Nom like.F.Nom I.F.Nom one
mango.M.Nom eat.Pres.F.Sg
‘Foolish me eats a mango.’ (Deo and Sharma, 2006: 12)

We see from (7b) that, modifiers carry oblique Case forms just as anticipated with the non-nominative heads but on the other hand the very same modifiers are in nominative forms as in (7c) when the head noun is in nominative. Thus, based on the outcome of diagnostic tests such as modifier-head agreement and coordination, Dhongde and Wali (2009) and Deo and Sharma (2006) note that nominative-like subjects in these constructions are ergative subjects with abstract ergative Case features. When these exact tests are run on the relevant Bagri structures, it is found that all subject DPs of transitive clauses in perfective aspect bear abstract ergative Case features.

(8) Coordination

bəNaurməkhaNokhayohai
he.Erg and
I.Erg food.Acc.M.Sg eat.Pfv.M.Sg be.Pres
‘He and I have eaten food.’

(9) Case agreement

a. *merobhaikhaNokhaaNlaagryohai*
my.Nom brother.Nom food.Acceat.Impfv fee
I stay.Prog.M.Sg be.Pres
‘My brother is having food.’
b. *meRbhaikhaNokhayohai*
my.Obl brother.Erg food.Acceat.Pfv.M.Sg be
.Pres
‘My brother has eaten food.’

In (8), nominative-like conjunct *mə* coordinates with an overtly ergative marked pronoun, implying that it has an abstract ergative Case feature. In (9a), possessive pronoun agrees with its head in Case and appears in nominative when the transitive verb is in imperfective aspect. In (9b), the same possessive takes oblique form when the transitive verb is in perfective aspect. Hence, predicated on the empirical evidence, we also conclude that subjects of transitive

predicates in perfective aspect always bear an abstract ergative Case feature.

5.2 Agreement in Perfective Clauses

Now evidently the elephant in the room is the agreement pattern observed in (1-5) which needs to be accounted for. It has already been noticed that as and when ergative Case is not overtly realized, auxiliary agrees with first person pronouns and second person plural nouns in person and number. Bobaljik (2008) notes that a DP in ergative form is inaccessible for agreement in languages with ergative alignment. He is of the opinion that morphological Case on a DP can be tracked via agreement morphology yet, that can’t be totally right, as data from Nepali speaks otherwise. Nepali has put forward some compelling evidence of ergative marked subjects agreeing with transitive verbs in perfective clauses.

(10) Nepali

mai-lemerolugadho-en

I.Erg my clothes.Nom wash.Perf.1.Sg

‘I washed my clothes.’ (Deo and Sharma, 2006: 9)

In (10), the verb agrees with the ergative subject even though the object is in the nominative. What it demonstrates is that verbs do agree with ergative subjects. From the proofs collected from Nepali, it can also be stretched to Bagri that all ergative subjects in Bagri do agree with auxiliaries. However, there is an important distinction between Nepali and Bagri data. In Nepali, the main verb agrees with the subject, while in Bagri, the auxiliary agrees with the subject in person and number and the main verb agrees with the object in number and gender in the same structure.

As we have said earlier, the main verb in perfective clauses obligatorily agrees with its direct object. In this respect, Bagri is similar to Gujarati than Hindi. In Hindi, the main verb appears in default form if the direct object is overtly Case marked. If we assume that overt Case marking is not a blockade to agreement in Bagri and Gujarati, then we can account for this difference. Since overt Case marking is not an issue for agreement in Bagri, the main verb will always match with its direct object (in terms of *Phi*-) features in perfective clauses irrespective of Case marking on it.

5.3 Optionality in Agreement

Let us now attend to the issue of optionality in agreement with the auxiliary in structures with first person pronouns and second person plural subjects. As seen in examples (1-5) when there is second person singular or third person pronouns or referential DPs as subjects, every time the auxiliary *ishai*. Superficially, it would appear as though there is no agreement taking place and features of T(ense) are realised on a dummy auxiliary ‘be’ as a last resort. Additionally, this is not true of just perfective clauses but also of imperfective clauses. It is illustrated in (11).

(11) *Ram/tu/bo/ba/be* cricket

khelaNlaagryohai

R/you/he/she/they.Nom cricket.Acceat.Impfv fee
I stay.Prog.Sg.M be.Pres.3

‘Ram/you(Sg)/he/she/they is/are playing cricket.’

From the above example, we notice that even in the imperfective aspect, *hai* is used as the default form; it remains unchanged even if the subject's person, number, or gender changes. This is the reason agreement with these subjects is not seen in perfective structures either. An identical pattern is noticed in future tense as well. Consequently, it can be said that in Bagri, T can either possibly agree with the subject in a perfective clause or realize its features on a dummy 'be' as a default option. Incidentally, the default choice is the most picked one to achieve uniformity. In next subsection 5.4, we discuss directionality of the disappearance of morphological ergative Case marking in Bagri. At this stage, Bagri is in the transitional phase of this process as it has managed to hold onto overt ergative Case marking in some pronominal subjects. We surmise that optional agreement seen in (1-3) is due to this transitional state.

5.4 Trajectory of Loss of Ergative Case Marking

Let us now try to address the issue of the loss of morphological ergative marking in Bagri. A detailed study of the same is beyond the scope of this paper and hence not delved deep into; still, we shall try to highlight its correlation with the agreement pattern discussed above. Ergativity in the Indo-Aryan (IA) languages is standardly considered a case of passive-to-ergative reanalysis (Hook 1992; Dixon 1994; Peterson 1998). It is of general consensus that active, ergative construction was absent in Old Indo-Aryan (OIA) languages. Alternatively, they made do with passive and periphrastic constructions that involved non-finite form of a verb. This verb was a deverbal stative participle and was used to indicate the perfect aspect. This style of construction was another way of marking both perfect and perfective aspects in OIA languages. Gradually, the tense-aspect system of OIA departed with most of the inflectional forms such as the aorist, the inflectional perfect, and non-perfect inflectional past tense form as it underwent a rigorous process of simplification in Middle Indo-Aryan (MIA) languages (Pishel 1981). At the same time though, the periphrastic construction survived to tell the tale of the past as it stands alone to this day having overcome the exhaustive changes of its day. Being the only structure to convey the past occurrence of events, scope and frequency of this structure increased, which, in turn, led to alteration in the voice and reanalyze it as an active, ergative clause in late MIA (Hock 1986; Bubenik 1998). Consequently, New Indo-Aryan (NIA) languages display morphological ergativity on an aspectual basis.

The great Greek philosopher Heraclitus is believed to have said that change is the only constant in life and language is no exempt to this inevitable process. Languages are also constantly changing. As discussed above, the pattern of ergative subject marking emerged in MIA. Deo and Sharma (2006) note that the pattern of ergative subject marking in NIA languages has also changed; it is reduced to varying degrees but follows the same trajectory (of reducing overt subject marking) and strongly correlates with the agreement pattern. As Bagri a part of NIA languages family, it can be deduced that Bagri must have had uniform ergative marked subjects at some point during its evolution. Further evidence to strengthen the above claim is traced to one of its

ancestors, Old Western Rajasthani (Stronski 2010), which evidently had ergative Case marking. Despite being subjected to long periods of simplification, Bagri has held on to overt ergative subject marking only in second person singular and third person subjects. It is an instance of person-based split ergativity⁵. Agreement pattern in Bagri shows similarity with that of Kutchi Gujarati and Marwari. These languages lack ergative Case. Since these languages are spoken in the neighbouring regions, it is natural to assume that Bagri is moving in a direction where at some stage in future it will lose ergative Case marking completely.

Person-based split ergativity is a widely studied phenomenon in the literature. Languages displaying this sort of ergative split have been attested in approximately all major ergativity hubs worldwide. Dixon (1972) has extensively studied the person-based ergative pattern in Dyrbal. Similar studies have been carried out in Kham (Watters 1973, 2002), Marathi (Deo & Sharma 2006; Dhongde & Wali 2009) in South Asia

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we have presented a unique ergative Case marking and agreement pattern in Bagri and sketched a descriptive account of this pattern. We have claimed that in perfective clauses, all subjects bear ergative Case. Additionally, optional agreement between auxiliary and ergative subjects is ascribed to the transitional state of the language where it is heading towards shedding its morphological ergative Case marking. Typologically, ergative alignment in Bagri is similar to that of Kutchi Gujarati and Marwari with a crucial difference that these languages have lost morphological ergative Case marking completely.

7. Future Scope

In this paper, we have given a descriptive account of ergative Case marking and agreement pattern in Bagri. The study has laid out the groundwork for theoretical analysis in future. Moreover, it will contribute to the typological studies concerning parametric variations cross-linguistically, especially with regard to ergativity. It can also be instrumental in diachronic studies documenting language change.

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⁵ Person-based ergative split has been attested in approximately all major ergativity hubs worldwide. For example, Punjabi, Dyrbal, Marathi, etc.

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