

Variation of ergativity patterns in Indo-Aryan

Krzysztof Stroński (Adam Mickiewicz University)

Dialects which are very often classified under the rubric ‘Hindi’ display various ergativity patterns. It has been noticed that some of them violate the universals formulated in the late 1970s regarding morphology and agreement in the ergative construction (Comrie 1978, Trask 1979). The recent studies on agreement in Hindi and its varieties have shown at least two major types of agreement in the perfective tenses based on the bare participial form, i.e. single and double agreement (Das 2006).

The main claim of this paper is that ergativity in Hindi dialects is of a more complex nature. At the morphological level we can observe a certain continuum, from disappearance of ergativity to its reinforcement. The first tendency is clearly visible not only in eastern Hindi and Bihari dialects, but also in eastern Rajasthani. The second tendency can be noted in Pahari dialects. Somewhere in between are western Hindi dialects, which have introduced analytical agent and patient marking. The transitional character of ergativity in the Hindi varieties can be observed while considering the alignment of the three semanto-syntactic Dixonian primitives, namely A, S, and O (Dixon 1979; 1994). It appears that in fact all possible alignments are traceable, even the one in which A and O receive the same marking and which was excluded by typologists (Comrie 1978). Extending the Dixonian three-primitive system by Obl (Klimov 1983), we can also observe that the same treatment of A and Obl (perceived as one of the implications of ergativity) is shared by, for example, early Rajasthani, contemporary Pahari and western Hindi, where it is closely connected with polyfunctionality of the ergative postposition.

Further evidence of disappearance vs. reinforcement of ergativity can be found when tracing the individual development of agreement patterns in the perfective tenses. The most intricate seem to be the phenomenon of split agreement in Marwari (which constitutes counterevidence to the claim of typologists that mixing of nominative case marking with an ergative agreement pattern is impossible (Anderson 1977; Comrie 1978)), the complex agreement in Pahari, and agreement of pronominal O with a verb in Rajasthani, Pahari and western Hindi (violating the rule of non-existence of person OV agreement in split ergative languages (Trask 1979)).

The data examined by the present author come from vernacular grammars, texts and two field trips to India in 2008. Contemporary as well as historical sources have been explored to demonstrate the richness of the split ergative system represented by Hindi and its varieties.

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