Development of the Ergative Case in Garhwali

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Abstract

This paper briefly describes the development of the ergative case in Indo-Aryan languages based on linguistic literature and ergative constructions in Garhwali as they occur synchronically. It describes the possible development of the ergative case in Garhwali from a diachronic perspective, considering the forms of the ergative marker used in two available copper inscriptions from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Diachronic facts point to the possibility that Garhwali had a single ergative marker /le/ at some point in its early history, which was used only in the perfective aspect, and after that period, two different ergative markers could have evolved through two different routes of evolution. While /-l/ in the Southern varieties seems to be inherited from the earlier common marker /le/, as was the case with Kumauni and Nepali, the /-n/ in the Western varieties seems to have developed in the same manner as other Indo-Aryan languages which lie geographically to the West of Garhwal due to common inheritance from the Middle Indo-Aryan languages.

Keywords: Ergative, Case, Garhwali, Indo-Aryan, Central Pahari

Introduction

In this paper, I attempt to study the development of the ergative case in Garhwali, primarily from a diachronic perspective. Garhwali is one of the two major languages of the Central Pahari sub-branch of the Indo-Aryan branch of the Indo-European language family. It was reported as 'Mother Tongue' by 24,82,089 people in the language report of the Census of India (2011), primarily residing in the state of Uttarakhand, India. It is an Indo-Aryan (IA) language that evolved from the Old Indo-Aryan language Sanskrit through various stages of the Middle Indo-Aryan languages. Grierson (1916, 1927) classified Garhwali as a member of the 'Inner Sub-Branch' of the Indo-Aryan Languages. According to him, the Inner sub-branch is made up of three groups of languages: Eastern Pahari (Nepali), Central Pahari (Kumauni and Garhwali), and Western Pahari (includes Jaunsari, Sirmauri, Kullui, Mandiali, Chambiali, etc.). At the conclusion of his survey, he believed that all the *Pahari* ('of the mountains') languages were spoken by the Khasas, who inhabited the entire Himalayan region from Kashmir in the West to Nepal in the East. The principal dialect of Kumauni is called Khasparjiya even today and that of Nepal Khas Kura (Grierson 1927: 181). According

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to him, this is reflected in their linguistic structures and differences with the principal northern Indo-Aryan languages.

Grierson's belief is based on the two-wave theory of the Aryan migration into India advocated by Hoernle (1880), which has been a source of wide dispute in literature. In line with his thoughts, many scholars (e.g., Chatterjee 1926; Sharma 1985) traced the origin of Pahari languages, including Garhwali to *Khasa, Dardic,* and *Paisachi,* while others (e.g., Chatak 1956; Varma 1949) have traced it to *Shaurseni*, to which the evolution of Hindi has also been traced to.

The diachronic study of IA languages, in general, is facilitated by the fact that representative texts from all three stages are available in the major literary languages. In the case of Garhwali, several written historical texts have been found in the form of copper inscriptions and other official documents. However, it later lost the status of the state language of the kingdom and became primarily a spoken language. Consequently, different languages, such as Sanskrit and later Hindi, were adopted as their literary language by the Garhwali people. Hence, Garhwali texts from the intervening period are rarely available.

Masica (1991: 50) divides periods of the evolution of the Indo-Aryan languages into three stages, based on the grammatical differences between them: Old Indo-Aryan (OIA) from 1500 BCE to 600 BCE, Middle Indo-Aryan (MIA) from 600 BCE to 1000 CE and New Indo-Aryan (NIA) from 1000 CE onwards. The evolution and development of the ergative case are interesting from a diachronic perspective since it was not attested in its current form in OIA but developed in MIA and has varied manifestations and functions in NIA. The forms and functions of the ergative case are not uniform synchronically, and great variation is attested in NIA languages, ranging from the occurrence of split-ergativity in Hindi to complete (or near-complete) loss of ergativity in certain Eastern NIA languages (Masica 1991).

We will briefly examine the various explanations provided in linguistic literature to account for the origin and development of the ergative case in IA languages, primarily in OIA and MIA. I will then provide synchronic and diachronic data from Garhwali to look into the development of the ergative case in the language and attempt to analyze its possible evolution.

The Evolution of Ergative Case in IA

Sanskrit, the representative OIA language, had a rich system of case declensions (or *vibhakti* in the Indic grammatical tradition) for eight cases which had regular correspondence with semantic cases (or *karaka*), but ergative was not one of them, and the agent semantic role could be expressed by various cases, primarily by the instrumental case (Masica, 1991).

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Verbeke (2013: 75-78) notes that there were at least two ways of expressing a perfective in Classical Sanskrit. First, a conjugated form of the reduplicated stem *ca-kar*, i.e., *ca-kār-a.,* a synthetic verb form in the past tense, could express perfect aspect, as shown in (1).

1)   *devadatta-ḥ*   *kaṭa-ṃ*   *ca-kār-a*

       Devadatta-NOM   mat-ACC   PRF-make-3SG

       'Devadatta (has) made a mat.' (Verbeke, 2013: 75)

A second way to denote a perfective was to use a periphrastic construction with a perfect participle with the suffix *-ta* added to the bare root of the verb, as shown in (2). Here, the subject takes an instrumental case (*-ena*).

2)   *devadatt-ena*   *kaṭa-ḥ*   *kṛ-ta-ḥ*

       Devadatta-INS   mat-NOM.SG   make-PRF.PTCP-NOM.SG

       'The mat is made by Devadatta' (Verbeke, 2013: 76)

Verbeke (2013) notes that this *–ta* construction is often taken to represent a passive meaning, but certain verbs can have both passive as well as active interpretations with this construction. Hock (1986:16) notes that although the *–ta* particle with a passive reading is more frequent, it can have both an active and a passive reading and a past as well as a present tense reading. Many scholars believe that the ergative construction in Hindi originated from this construction with the suffix *-ta,* although there are varying opinions among scholars about whether this construction should be treated as just a canonical passive (Comrie 1978: 371; Estival and Myhill 1988; and Dixon 1994:190, all cited in Verbeke, 2013).

In the MIA period, the perfective aspect was being more and more expressed by the *–ta* participle constructions, and other constructions to express the perfective were being lost (Verbeke, 2013:78). An example of the *–ta* participle construction from MIA is shown in (3) where the participle agrees with the patient in gender and number, and the subject takes the instrumental case.

3)   *iyaṃ*   *dhaṃmalipi*   *lāj-inā*   *likhā-pi-tā*

       this.NOM   true inscription[n]NOM.SG   king-INS   write-CAUS-
                                                                PRF.PTCP.NOM.M.SG

       'This true inscription was caused to be written by the king.' (Verbeke, 2013:78)

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The late MIA period showed even more changes. Bubenik (1998) states that the seven cases of Sanskrit were reduced to just three in late-MIA (*Apabhramsha*) because of a merger of the nominative and accusative, instrumental and locative, and ablative, genitive and dative.

According to Verbeke (2013:80), the simplification of the case system or case-syncretism of the late MIA period also continued in the NIA period, resulting in more mergers and the loss of several cases. Verbeke (2013:80) notes that the early NIA exhibited just two cases: the nominative and the oblique, and this led to a potential problem of ambiguity since it was difficult to determine whether a perfective construction had "a passive pattern or an ergative pattern."

The origin of the ergative in IA has been a matter of great debate between scholars. There are two major lines of thought to account for the source of the ergative case in IA, which are briefly described below.

Many scholars (e.g., Kellogg 1938; Beames 1872) believe that the ergative case evolved from the reanalysis of the passive construction of OIA, specifically the –ta constructions we saw in the earlier sections. Many grammars of IA languages (e.g., Kellogg 1938) strongly favour this argument in line with their consideration of the ergative as inherently being a kind of passive; hence they consider this 'passive-reanalysis' approach as granted and natural in the course of evolution of the ergative in NIA.

Bubenik (1998) postulates four stages of the development of the ergative in NIA in his model of the different language stages in the context of IA. His first stage coincides with the OIA, where the language is largely an accusative language and has a marked passive construction. His second stage coincides with MIA, where the language is still an accusative language, but the marked passive has changed into an unmarked one. In the case of MIA, the –ta construction starts to be used as the canonical perfective construction in the language at this stage. In the third stage, which coincides with the NIA languages, including Hindi, the passive is reanalyzed as the ergative, and at this stage, the passive no longer exists. This leads to the fourth stage in certain NIA languages, where a new passive construction evolves and fills in the void created by the reanalysis of the earlier passive.

In line with the idea that the ergative construction is not passive in nature (Comrie 1978; Dixon 1979), some scholars (e.g., Verbeke 2013) in recent times have been critical of this notion and have claimed that the ergative case actually originated in OIA and has "remained" ergative in MIA and NIA. Such a line of thought thus believes that the ergative case has its origin in OIA itself, although it was not very frequent and may have the same morpho-syntactic form marking other functions as well, leading to the situation of less clarity when analyzing it diachronically.

Out of the two approaches described above, the passive-to-ergative reanalysis hypothesis, as has been seen across languages, seems to be the most plausible explanation to

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trace the evolution of split-based ergativity in NIA languages (e.g., Hook 1992; Dixon 1994; Bubenik 1998)

The Ergative Case in Garhwali

Garhwali attests ergativity, which means that the subject of an intransitive clause behaves in the same manner as the object of a transitive clause and not like the subject of a transitive clause, which is in line with the definition of ergativity as proposed by Dixon (1994). In Garhwali, agreement patterns in terms of gender, number, and person show that these subjects are treated differently. In general, subjects in Garhwali agree with the verb in terms of person, gender, and number, but this is not the case in ergative constructions. Let us look at the following sentences:

4) *nɔnʊ/nɔnɪ*   *hɔl*   *ləgãḍʊ/ləgãḍɪ*

    boy.MSG.NOM/girl.FSG.NOM   plough.MSG   apply.PRS.MSG/ apply.PRS.FSG

    'The boy/girl ploughs.'

5) *nɔna/nɔnɪ*   *hɔl*   *ləgãḍa-n/ləgãḍɪ-n*

    boy.MPL.NOM/girl.FPL.NOM   plough.MSG   apply.PRS.M-PL/ apply.PRS.F-PL

    'The boys/girls plough.'

6) *nɔna-n/nɔni-n*   *hɔl*   *ləgɛ*

    boy.MSG-ERG/girl.FSG-ERG   plough.MSG   apply.PERF

    'The boy/girl ploughed.'

7) *nɔnɔ-n/nɔnʲɔ̃-n*   *hɔl*   *ləgɛ*

    boy.MPL-ERG/girl.FPL-ERG   plough.MSG   apply.PERF

    'The boys/girls ploughed.'

The sentences (4) and (5) show that with a subject in the direct case, subject-verb agreement in terms of gender and number is attested, while in (6) and (7), when the subject has an ergative case, subject-verb agreement is not attested and the verb is default marked, unlike subjects in unergative transitive clauses which show gender and number agreement with the verb.

Like most IA languages, Garhwali is a split-ergative language, which means that the ergative case is attested in only certain paradigms. The split-ergativity in Garhwali is primarily based on the perfective aspect, i.e., ergativity is attested when the verb in the

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relevant clause is in the perfective aspect. The sentences below show the split: (8) is not ergative as the transitive verb is in the progressive aspect, and subject-verb agreement is attested, but when the transitive verb is in the perfective aspect, (9) is an ergative construction. The subject-verb agreement is blocked in this case.

8) *ram(*-n)/siṯa(*-n)*   *mɛc*   *cʰɔ/cʰɛ*   *djəkʰŋʊ/djəkʰŋɪ*

    Ram/Sita   match   be.PST.MSG/be.PST.FSG   see.PROG.MSG/see.PROG.FSG

    'Ram/Sita was watching a match.'

9) *ram-ən/siṯa-n*   *mɛc*   *djekʰɪ*

    Ram-ERG/Sita-ERG   match   see.PERF

    'Ram/Sita watched a match.'

Synchronic Variation in Morphological Forms

Significant variation in the form of the ergative marker is attested in Garhwali synchronically. In the Northern and Western varieties of Garhwali, the ergative case is marked by /-n/ (or /-na/), while in the Southern and Eastern varieties, it is marked by /-l/ (or /–la/).

While the two forms look phonologically similar and may give the impression that they are just phonological variations of one single form, the diachronic facts, which we shall look into in the next section, do not seem to attest their common origin, i.e., they seem to have evolved through two different routes historically even though their functions are essentially the same synchronically. More research into the usage of the two variants needs to be undertaken to assert this fact more conclusively.

Diachronic Forms

The earliest available inscriptions in the Garhwali language point to the fact that it had the status of the state language of the Garhwal kingdom at least by the 15th century and probably even before that. A copper inscription dated 1456 CE of the ruler of Garhwal of that time, Maharaja Jagatpal, attests to this fact. For the purpose of this paper, we are only concerned with the ergative case used in such documents. The first line of the 1456 inscription is reproduced here from Panwar (1985:1): (To convert the Vikrami Year into Gregorian year, I have used the general practice of deducting 56 from the Vikrami year. This is not entirely accurate yet gives an idea of the timeline.)

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10)   *ʃrisəmvəṯ 1512*   *ʃake 1377*   *cɛṯrəmase*   *ʃʊkləpəkʃe*   *cəṯurṯʰi ṯɪṯʰɔ*

Samvat 1512   Saka 1377   Chaitra   Shukla   fourth
                          month.LOC Paksha.LOC date.LOC

rəvɪvasre   *ɟəgṯɪpal*   *rəɟvar-le*   *ʃəŋkər bʰarṯi krɪʃnə bʰəṭṭ kɔ*

Sunday.LOC   Jagtipal   Rajwar-ERG   Shankar Bharti Krishna Bhatt.DAT

ramcɔ̃ḍrə ka məṭʰ   *sərvəbʰumi*   *ɟakʰɪni*   *kɪṯi*

Ramchandra's mutt (temple)   all land   donate   do.PERF

'On Sunday, the fourth date of the *Shukla Paksha* of *Chaitra* month of *Samvat* 1512 Saka 1377, King Jagtipal (Jagatpal) donated all the land of the Ramchandra Mutt/Temple to Shankar Bharti Krishna Bhatt.'

(The origin of the word /ɟakʰɪni/ is unclear, and the given translation is approximate as per the context.)

The language used in this inscription is Sanskrit-mixed Garhwali, and the ergative is marked by /le/ (in bold). Crucially, the sentence where the ergative is marked by /le/ seems to be in the perfective aspect. On perusal of the full text, it appears that the ergative was used only with the perfective aspect from this time period itself since the ergative, in this inscription as well as the others documented in Panwar (1985), is not attested in other aspects.

Another early written record available is a copper inscription of Maharaja Phatehpati Shah of around 1671 CE; its first line is reproduced here from Panwar (1985):

11)   *ʃri-məharaɟaḏʰɪraɟ*   *pʰəṯepəṯɪsahḍev ɟʲʊle*   *pɑ̃ɟo*   *kəro*

The King   Phatepati Shah Dev ji.ERG   arrangements do.PERF

ɟo   *pɑ̃ɟo*   *ɛso*   *kəɟo*

REL   arrangement   like this   do.PERF

'The King Phatepati Shah Dev made arrangements which are in this manner…'

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The ergative here is again marked by /le/. This sentence also seems to be in the perfective aspect.

In fact, Panwar (1985: xxv) mentions in the introduction to his book, which is a collection of historical inscriptions in Garhwali language, "उस काल की गढ़वाली भाषा में 'ने' के लिए 'ले' का प्रयोग होता था" (In the Garhwali language of that era, 'le' was used in place of 'ne'). Thus, it becomes clear that the ergative was marked by /le/ in the period between the 15th and 17th centuries. A comprehensive study of all the available inscriptions and other historical documents in the future is needed to establish this conclusively.

Two Routes of Evolution?

If we accept the dominant view of scholars that the ergative case and its markers in NIA languages evolved after the stage of loss and mergers of OIA cases in late-MIA, it can be presumed that the ergative marker would have evolved in the Central Pahari languages (which includes Garhwali) in the NIA period only. Based on the written diachronic evidence presented above, it seems that Garhwali had a single ergative marker /le/ at least in the 15th century, which can be considered an early part of the NIA period when NIA languages were still developing from MIA. Sometimes, after that period, two different ergative markers could have evolved in Garhwali through two different routes of evolution.

A piece of crucial evidence that seems to suggest this comes from related and neighbouring languages: the ergative marker in Nepali is /le/ (Turnbull 1982), and its counterpart in at least some varieties of Kumauni synchronically is also /le/ while in other varieties it is /-l/ (Sharma 1985). On the other hand, most of the Northern Modern Indo-Aryan languages to the west of Garhwali have /-n/ or /-ne/ as the ergative marker. Masica (1991: 345) states that agentive function (morphological ergative marker) has been taken over by "new" instrumental markers in modern Nepali and Kumauni (-le). The ergative marker in Hindi (Braj Bhasha, Kauravi, Khari Boli) and Rajasthani is /-ne/, which seems to have evolved from the locational form of the noun /kərṇə/ 'ear' (Montaut 2015).

It seems probable that the ergative marker /-l/ (or /-la/) in the Southern and Eastern varieties of Garhwali was inherited from the earlier common form /le/, as was the case with Kumauni and Nepali, which evolved through the instrumental taking the function of the ergative in NIA. On the other hand, the /-n/ (or /–na/) in the Western and Northern varieties may have developed either as a result of borrowing or common inheritance from the Middle Indo-Aryan languages, which lie geographically to the west of the Garhwal region.

Conclusion

The ergative in Garhwali, as in all IA languages, seems to have developed from the passive to ergative through reanalysis and gave rise to split-based ergativity. Garhwali attests ergativity, so the subject of an intransitive clause behaves in the same manner as the

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object of a transitive clause and not like the subject of a transitive clause. The agreement patterns in terms of gender, number, and person show that these subjects are treated differently. As in most IA languages, ergative in Garhwali attests a split primarily based on the perfective aspect, i.e., ergativity is attested when the verb in the relevant clause is in the perfective aspect. Synchronically, Garhwali attests a variation in the form of the ergative marker, and this seems to be based on two different routes of the evolution of the two variant markers.

Diachronic facts point to the possibility that Garhwali had a single ergative marker /le/ at some point in its history, and after that period, two different ergative markers could have evolved through two different routes of evolution. While /-l/ in the Southern varieties seems to be inherited from the earlier common marker /le/, as was the case with Kumauni and Nepali, the /-n/ in the Western varieties seems to have developed in the same manner as other Indo-Aryan languages which lie geographically to the West of Garhwal due to common inheritance from the Middle Indo-Aryan languages.

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