



Case and tense

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Optimal Communication

Case in and across languages//SKY



DSM (de Hoop and de Swart 2008)

DSM is more varied than DOM.

- ▶ Volitionality

Hindi/Urdu (Butt & Poudel 2007)

- (1) a. *ram k^hãs-a*
 Ram.M.NOM cough-PERF.M.SG
 'Ram coughed.'
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DSM more varied than DOM.

- ▶ Volitionality
- ▶ Tense/Aspect split

Marathi

- (2)
- a. *lili pustək vac-ət ahe*
 lili.NOM book read-PRS is
 'Lili is reading a book'
- b. *lili-ne pustək vac-l-e*
 lili-ERG book read-PST-3SG
 'Lili read a book'



What is ergative case?

Marker of agentivity? But why would the agent in the past be different in agentivity than the agent in the present?

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- (3) *ram=ne k^hãs-a*
 Ram=ERG cough-PERF.M.SG
 'Ram coughed (purposefully).'

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Kittilä (2009: 364): “The relation of tense and aspect of transitivity is rather transparent, which makes it easy to see why these features make a contribution to the formal transitivity of clauses. For example, only events in the past tense have a salient result and a thoroughly affected patient, and the patients of successfully completed events (perfective aspect) are more thoroughly affected than patients of ongoing events (imperfective aspect). This kind of tense/aspect-conditioned splits in case marking is very typical cross-linguistically.”



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Case as a marker of individual level properties

Poudel (2008): ergative case is used to distinguish individual level predications from stage level predications, in Manipuri and Nepali, in non-past clauses.

- ▶ Stage level predication says something about the property of a referent that only holds momentarily
- ▶ Individual level predicates predicates an inherent property of a referent
- ▶ (Individual level properties are sets of stage level properties)



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Nepali (Butt and Poudel 2007)

- (5) a. *Raam=le (#aajaa) angreji jaan-da-cha*
 Raam-ERG today English know-IMPF-NONPAST.M.3SG
 'Ram knows English (#today)' (individual level)
- b. *Raam (aajaa) angreji bod-da-cha*
 Raam today English speak-IMPF-NONPAST.M.3SG
 'Ram will speak English (today)' (stage level)



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Individual level predication entails a presuppositional interpretation, whereas stage level predication correlates with an existential assertion.

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- (6) a. *caalak=le gaari calaa-cha*
 driver=ERG vehicle drive-NONPAST.M.3SG
 'The driver drives the vehicles' (presuppositional)
- b. *guru gaari calaa-cha*
 teacher vehicle drive-NONPAST.M.3SG
 'The teacher is driving/will drive the vehicle' (existential)



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+perf		-perf	
(Stage)	(Stage)	Indiv	Stage
+ERG	+ERG	+ERG	-ERG

Table: Case, tense and predication type

- ▶ Poudel: in the past individual level predication → stage level predication (Carlson 1977, Kratzer 1995); (We: hearer cannot check the agent in the past.)
- ▶ Poudel cannot explain why many languages do make difference between past and presence in the use of ergative case marking, but not between stage and individual level predication in the present



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A bidirectional perspective

De Swart (2007): differential use of case-marking is motivated by an assessment of the speaker of the recoverability of the intended meaning. If the speaker thinks that there are enough semantic and/or syntactic cues for the hearer to get to the right interpretation, he will avoid the use of morphological case for economy reasons.



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Fore (de Swart 2007)

- (7) *Yaga: wá aegúye.*
 pig man 3SG.OBJ.hit.3SG.SU.IND
 'The man kills the pig.' not: 'The big attacks the man.'
- (8) a. *mási wá ágaye*
 boy man 3SG.OBJ.see.3SG.SU.IND
 'The boy sees the man.' not: 'The man sees the boy.'
- b. *wá mási ágaye*
 man boy 3SG.OBJ.see.3SG.SU.IND
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 'The man kills the pig.' not: 'The big attacks the man.'
- (10) *Yaga:-wama wá aegúye.*
 pig-WAMA man 3SG.OBJ.hit.3SG.SU.IND
 'The man kills the pig.' not: 'The big attacks the man.'



A bidirectional perspective

Fore (de Swart 2007)

- (11) *mási wá ágaye*
 boy man 3SG.OBJ.see.3SG.SU.IND
 'The boy sees the man.' not: 'The man sees the boy.'
- (12) *mási wá-má ágaye*
 boy man-MA 3SG.OBJ.see.3SG.SU.IND
 'The man sees the boy.'



Have a little faith in me

- ▶ If the speaker thinks the hearer has enough cues to get to the right interpretation, he will not use ergative case.
- ▶ Ergative case says: you cannot check this right now (or you may not have thought this), but you can take my word on it.
- ▶ By definition then, we capture at least all instances Poudel can account for (as you can only empirically check stage level properties)



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Alternative: Contextually restricted faithfulness constraints

Woolford (2008):

- (13) IDENT_{Perfective} (ERGATIVE): preserve ergative case in the perfective aspect.
- (14) IDENT_{Perfective} (ERGATIVE) \gg *ERGATIVE \gg IDENT (ERGATIVE)



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Mothers cook food

Manipuri (Poudel 2008)

- (15) a. *imaa=naa caak t^hong-i*
 mother=ERG food cook-REAL
 'mother cooks food'
- b. *imaa caak t^hong-i*
 mother food cook-REAL
 'mother is cooking food'



Agent in the past cannot be checked

Marathi (Pandharipande 1997)

- (16) a. *lili pustək vac-ət ahe*
lili.NOM book read-PRS is
'Lili is reading a book'
- b. *lili-ne pustək vac-l-e*
lili-ERG book read-PST-3SG
'Lili read a book'



Agent in the past cannot be checked

Manipuri (Poudel 2008)

- (17)
- a. *tomba=naa cithi amaa i-ra-e*
 tomba=ERG letter one write-ANT-REAL
 'Tomba has written a letter' (perfective)
 - b. *tomba=naa cithi amaa i-i*
 tomba=ERG letter one write-REAL
 'Tomba wrote a letter' (past)
 - c. *tomba cithi i-i*
 tomba letter write-ANT-REAL
 'Tomba writes letters' (present)
 - d. *tomba cithi amaa i-gani*
 tomba letter one write-IRR
 'Tomba will write a letter' (future)



Confidence versus hearsay

Georgian (De Lancey 1981: 648)

- (18)
- a. *kaceb-i çer-en çeril-s*
 men-NOM write letter-DAT
 'The men are writing a letter.' (imperfect)
- b. *kaceb-ma da-çer-es çeril-i*
 men-ERG AOR-write-3PL letter-NOM
 'The men wrote a letter.' (aorist)
- c. *kaceb-s u-çer-is-t çeril-i*
 men-DAT 3RD-write-PERF-PL letter-NOM
 'The men have [apparently] written a letter.' (perfect)



See for yourself

Manipuri (Poudel 2008)

- (19) a. *Tomba iruja-re* *aikhoi cat-si*
 Tomba bathe-ANT.REAL 1PL move-HORT
 'Tomba has taken a bath let's move'
- b. *Tomba=naa iruja-re* *adugaa Imphal*
 Tomba=ERG bathe-ANT.REAL and Imphal
cat-le
 go-ANT.REAL
 'Tomba has taken a bath and went to Imphal'



Future

Nepali (Poudel 2008)

- (20) a. *Jiban bholi gani padhaaû-chan*
 Jiban tomorrow math teach-NONPAST.MH
 ‘Jiban will teach math tomorrow’
- b. *Jiban=le bholi gani padhaaû-ne chan*
 Jiban=ERG tomorrow math teach-POT AUX.NONPAST.MH
 ‘(It is certain that) Jiban will teach math tomorrow’

Poudel: difference in control; we: speaker says “believe me”.



Possible extension: volitionality

Hindi/Urdu (Butt & Poudel 2007)

- (21) a. *ram* *k^hãs-a*
 Ram.M.NOM cough-PERF.M.SG
 'Ram coughed.'
- b. *ram=ne* *k^hãs-a*
 Ram=ERG cough-PERF.M.SG
 'Ram coughed (purposefully).'

If the hearer cannot check the truth of the proposition, the speaker uses ergative case.



Possible extension: volitionality

Manipuri (Poudel 2008)

- (22) a. *Tomba=naa teba=daa t^heng-i*
 Tomba=ERG table=LOC touch-REAL
 'Tomba touched the table (intentionally)'
- b. *Tomba teba=daa t^heng-i*
 Tomba.NOM table=LOC touch-REAL
 'Tomba touched the table (unintentionally)'



Summary

- ▶ What happens in the present, can be checked (in reality).
- ▶ What happened in the past cannot be checked.



Conclusion

- ▶ In the present tense, there is less need to mark the agent, as the hearer can check who does what.
- ▶ In the past tense, one needs to mark the agent, as it is not clear in the presence why and how who did what.
- ▶ In addition to factors like prominence and word order, the here and now is of importance for DSM.



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