THE SEMANTICS OF THE ERGATIVE IN NEPALI

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The semantics of the ergative in Nepali, a modern Indo-Aryan language spoken in Nepal, Bhutan and in some states of India, differs from other New Indo-Aryan languages of the region. In the Western and Central New Indo-Aryan languages (e.g., Hindi-Urdu, Panjabi, etc.), aspectual split determines the ergative system (Beames 1872-79, Kellogg 1893, Hook 1992, Dixon 1994, Peterson 1998, Bynon 2005, Butt 2006). In these languages such as Hindi-Urdu, the (agentive) subject in the perfective transitive clauses gets ergative marking and the verb agrees with the object. However, Nepali defies these prevalent trends of ergative marking of New Indo-Aryan languages. In several contexts, the Nepali ergative is typologically unexpected, for example, arguments of participialized clauses or nominalizations. Unlike its sister languages, in some contexts, the subjects of transitive clauses in non-past tenses get ergative marking whereas, in some other contexts, they are marked with nominative case. This split ergative system in non-past tenses can be explained in terms of semantic notions of individual-level and stage-level predications.

1. Introduction

An ergative construction is one in which the subject of a transitive clause (A) is marked differently from the subject of intransitive clause (S) and the object of the transitive clause (O) (Plank 1979:4, Dixon 1994:9). But with ergative languages like Nepali this definition does not fit properly. Nepali marks subjects of some unergative intransitive clauses in perfective aspect like the subject of transitive clause and subjects of some transitive clauses in imperfective aspect are marked like the subjects of intransitive clauses. In the meantime it is also important to note that the existing literature on ergativity does not address the semantics of the Nepali ergative. These features of ergative system in Nepali will be evident as we proceed.

The phenomenon of ergativity in Nepali has been a real and puzzling problem for both linguists (Abadie 1974; Klaiman 1987) and grammar writers (Ayton 1820: Pokharel 1998) alike. Either they elide with passing remarks or try to interpret it from the perspective of other New Indo-Aryan languages like Hindi/Urdu, Marathi, Gujarati, etc. (Deo and Sharma 2006).

Turner (1931:560) states that the Nepali ergative marker *le* always follows the subject of a transitive verb. A cursory look at the data shows that Turner is right as in many instances majority of the subjects of transitive clauses have ergative marking as in (1a-b), but there are many counter examples as in (1c-d). The example sentence in (1c) is intransitive but marked with ergative marker and the sentence in (1d) is transitive but does not have ergative marking. Therefore, Turner's mere generalization, that all subjects

of transitive clauses in Nepali are marked with ergativity, does not work and we need to incorporate data as in (1c-d) for the valid and convincing theory of the ergativity in Nepali.

(1) a. *usle mero nām mā ujur garyo* (Turner 1931)

    us   le   mero   nām   mā   ujur   gar -yo

    3.SG ERG   my   name -LOC complaint do   -PT.3.SG.M

    'He formulated a complaint against me.'

  b. *jotisi le cinā herchan*

    jotisi   le   cinā   her   -chan

    astrologer ERG   horoscope see   -NPT.3.PL

    'Astrologers see horoscopes.'

  c. *goru le mutyo*

    goru le   mut   -yo

    bull ERG   urinate -PT.3.SG.M

    'The bull urinated.'

  d. *ma shodhpatra lekhchu*

    ma   shodhpatra   lekh   -chu

    1.SG research paper   write   -NPT.1.SG.

    'I will write a research paper/I write research papers.'

The study of ergativity in Nepali is usually motivated through the perspective of other New Indo-Aryan languages, particularly Hindi-Urdu. The subjects of perfective transitive clauses are marked with ergative marker *ne* in Hindi-Urdu as in (2a) and the subjects of some unergative intransitive clauses are marked with ergativity to show the contrast between volitionality and non-volitionality as in (2b-c) (Butt 2001). The subjects of all the other types of clauses in Hind-Urdu are nominative. Similar generalizations have been thought to be operating in Nepali.

 (2) a. *mai ne usko piṭā*

    mai ne   us   ko   piṭ   -ā

    1.SG ERG   3.SG   ACC   beat -PT.3.SG

    'I beat him.'

  b. *mai khãsā* (Butt 2001)

    mai khãs   -ā

    1.SG cough   -PT.3.SG.M

    'I coughed.'

   c.   *mai ne khằsā*(Butt 2001)

      mai   ne   khẫs   -ā

      1.SG ERG   cough -PT.3.SG.M

      'I coughed (intentionally).'

Such eargative-nominative alternation based on intentional and non-intentional is not in operation in Nepali. In Nepali, although subjects of transitive clauses in perfective aspect are marked with ergativity as in (3a):

(3)   *rām le kitāb paḍhyo*

      rām   le   kitāb   paḍh   -yo

      Ram ERG book   read   -PT.3.SG.M

      'Ram read a book.'

Ergativity is in free variation in non-past perfective aspect as evidenced by the minimal pair in (4). The sentences in (4) mean same thing as shown by the English translations and they are not because of dailectal variation as they are found in the standard dialect of Kathmandu and in literature.

(4) a. *us le kuwā bāta pāni ubhāi raheko cha*

      us   le   kuwā bāṭa pāni ubhāi rah -eko   cha

      3.SG ERG well   ABL   water draw   stay -PPART be.NPT.3.SG.M

      'He has been drawing water from the well.'

   b. u *kuwā bāṭa pāni ubhāi raheko cha*

      u   kuwā bāṭa pāni ubhāi rah -eko   cha

      3.SG well   ABL   water draw   stay -PPART be.NPT.3.SG.M

      'He has been drawing water from the well.'

In Nepali all the agentive subjects of unergative intransitive clauses as in (5a) and some intransitive verbs that take instrumental NPs as their subjects (5b) are also marked with ergativity.

(5) a. *goru le mutyo*

      goru le   mut   -yo

      bull ERG urinate -PT.3.SG.M

      'The bull urinated.'

   b. *kalam le lekhyo*

      kalam le   lekh -yo

      pen   ERG write -PT.3.SG.M

      'The pen wrote.'

In the imperfective aspect ergativity is determined by the semantic factors such as individual level vs. stage level distinction. The minimal pair in (6a-b) illustrates this point. In (6), the sentence in (6a), which has its subject in nominative, has a stage level reading and the sentence in (6b), which has its subject in ergative case, has an individual

level reading. The sentence in (6a) means the action of teaching takes place after the speech time, hence, it has futuristic denotation. On the other hand, the sentence in (6b) refers to essential property of the teacher in general, which is not limited to space and time. The sentence is still grammatical even if the direct object is deleted but the sentence in (6a) turns ungrammatical if the object NP is deleted.

(6) a. *guru bidyārthi lāi paḍhāuchan*

    guru   bidyārthi   laai   paḍhāu   -chan

    teacher student   ACC   teach   -NPT.3.SG.MH

    'The teacher will teach his students.' <Stage level reading>

   b. *gurule bidyārthi lāi paḍhāuchan*

    guru   le   bidyārthi   lāi   paḍhāu   -chan

    teacher ERG   student   ACC   teach   -NPT.3.SG.MH

    'The teacher teaches students.   <Individual-level reading>

So far we have seen that, in Nepali, the subjects of some transitive clauses in perfective aspect, the subjects of unergative intransitive predicates, the subjects of intransitive verbs that take instrumental NPs as their subjects and individual level predicates in imperfective aspect are marked with ergative marker *le*. We have also seen that, in Nepali, both agentive, for example (5a) and instrumental, for example, (5b) subjects are marked with ergativity. Besides, ergativity is also used to make modal distinction of obligation and intentionality. Let's consider the minimal pair in (7). The sentence in (7a) means that the speaker has some obligations, say social or related to his job, etc. and he has to go to office and, if he does not go there, consequences may be severe. Such meaning is not expressed through the sentence in (7b).

(7) a. *mai le aḍḍā jānu parcha*

    ma   le   aḍḍā   jā   -nu   par   -cha

    1.SG ERG   office   go   -INF   fall   -NPT.3SG

    'I must go to office.'

   b. *ma aḍḍā jānu parcha*

    ma   aḍḍā   jā   -nu   par   -cha

    1.SG office   go   -INF   fall   -NPT.3SG

    'I will have to do it.'

Thus far we have seen that Nepali has a wider range of ergative marking and this feature of Nepali makes it typologically distinct from other New Indo-Aryan languages such as Hindi/Urdu, Marathi, Gujarati, etc. This wider distribution of ergativity in Nepali has been deemed to be an intractable problem and often has been left aside considering it as a matter of dialectal variation. However, we propose that a majority of data can be explained on semantic grounds such as stage level and individual level predicates.

In section 2, we discuss the ergative marking in both perfective transitive and intranstive clauses and provide systematic explanations. We also show that the subjects of all transitive clauses, particularly a non-finite clause marked with a conjunctive participle (converb) are not marked with the ergative. In section 3, we take up imperfective aspect and discuss the distribution of ergativity in clauses marked by imperfective suffixes. Section 4 develops the tests to distinguish stage level predicates from individual level predicates for Nepali data and explain them in relation to ergative marking. Finally, we present the conclusions in section 5.

2. The perfective aspect

By perfective aspect, we mean that an action is terminated or the state is over by the reference time (usually the speech time) (Comrie 1976). The action or the state may have current relevance or not at the reference time. The default reference time is the speech time. Languages have different ways of marking it with adverbail clauses, for example the sub ordinate clause *ma āũdā...* 'When I came...' serves the reference time for the matrix clause in (7):

(7) *ma āũdā gāḍi gai sakeko thyo*

    ma āũ - dā gāḍi ga -i   sak -eko   thyo
    1.SG come -CNV train go -COMPL finish -PPART be.PT.3.SG
    'When I came, the train had already left.'

Nepali has distinct ways of marking perfectivity and imperfectivity. For example, Nepali verb for *go* has two distinct root forms for attaching perfective and imperfective suffixes. The root form *ga-* 'go' gets attached with five perfective suffixes. They are –y (and its allomorphs as it is context sensitive) the past perfective marker, *-eko* past participial marker plus copula, *–i* completive marker, *-era* sequential converb marker, and *-i* (kana) sequential converb in negation. A more traditional term for converbal construction is conjunctive participle (Masica 1976). It functions like an adverbial clause in the clause chaining system, marking the sequential or simultaneous event to the event of the matrix clause, in many South Asian languages.

The past perfective marker –y is the only perfective finite marker in Nepali. All the transitive clauses, which are marked with –y (and its allomorphs as it is context sensitive, for detail see Poudel 2006), and the verbs listed in (9) and (11) below, have ergative subjects. Semantically the subjects may be agentive NPs as in (8a) or instrumental NPs as in (8b). There are no exceptions.

(8) a. *keṭā le thāl kacyāk-kucukpāri diyo*(Turner 1931)

        keṭā le   thāl   kacyāk-kucuk   pār   -yo
        boy   ERG   plate   into pieces   make -PT.3SG.M
        'The boy broke the plate into pieces.'

b. *cora lāi ghussai ghussā le piṭe* (Turner 1931)

cora	lāi	ghussai-ghussā	le	piṭ	-e
thief	DAT	fists	INS	beat	-PT.3.SG.M

'(They) blowed the theif with the fist.'

Now let's turn to the intransitive clauses in perfective aspect. Intransitive verbs are usually divided in two semantic classes of unergative and unaccusative (Perlmutter 1978). Perlmutter's Unaccusative Hypothesis claims that the underlying sytactic configuration of an unaccusative verb is that its surface subject is the direct object in its transitive counterpart and the subject of an unergative verb is the subject of underlying transitive counterpart.

Ergativity in Nepali is sensitive to the semantic factor of unaccusative and unergative distinction. The subjects of the unergative intransitive verbs listed in (9) below take ergative marking but the subjects of the unaccusative intransitives are usually in nominative case. The verbs listed by Davison (1999:186) for Hindi are semantically somehow similar to the list given below. In Nepali these verbs do not need a cognate object to mark ergative on the their subjects as Davison argues for Hindi.

(9)   a.   *paḍh*-'read', *dohoryāu*-'revise', *lekh*-'write'.
        b.   *gāu*-'sing', *nāch*-'dance', *gar*-'act',
        c.   *siu*-'sew', *bun*-'knit'
        d.   *pakāu*-'cook', *dhu*-'wash', *baḍār*-'sweep',
        e.   *khā*-'eat', *chus*-'suck', *piu*-'drink',
        f.   *rop*-'sow', *jot*-'plough',
        g.   *khok*-cough', *mut*- 'piss', *hag*-'pass stool', *nuhāu*-'bathe', *pasinā kāḍh*- 'sweat', *thuk*- 'spit', etc.

All these verbs take agentive subjects. When these verbs are used intransitively, their objects are easily recoverable from the context. The explicitness of the direct object makes it delete to avoid redundancy. These predictable objects are always non-specific, for example *paḍh*-'read' means the agent is involved in deciphering the letters, words or sentences from any printed-paper. When we say *gāu*- 'sing', it is understood as a song. Similarly, in normal context, the default object of the verb *pakāu*-'cook' is *bhāt* 'meal' and so on. If the direct object is not recoverable from the context, these verbs cannot be used intransitively. This means the notion of degree of transitiveness (Hopper and Thompson 1980) is correlated to ergative system of Nepali. These verbs have some key semantic properties of transitivity such as agency, although syntactically they are intransitive. In Nepali, a transitive clause is one:

- In which the verb takes an agentive or an instrumental NP as its subject and a patient as its direct object.
- The patient must be a direct object in accusative, which is marked by the case clitic *–lāi* if higher in animacy hierarchy and unmarked if low in animacy hierarchy, but not an adverb.

- The object of the active transitive clause gets raised to the position of subject when the clause is passivized and the subject is in oblique case or deleted.

It is to be noted that unaccusative intransitive verbs in Nepali do not passivize but verbs of motion do, for example, the sentence in (10a) has got motion verb *go* in active form and (10b) is its passive form.

(10) a. *ma kāthmānḍu gaẽ, ho ṭelmā base*

    ma   kāthmānḍu   ga   -ẽ   hoṭel mā   bas   -ẽ

    1.SG Kathmandu   go   -PT.1.SG hotel LOC   stay -PT.1.SG

    netāko bhāsan sunẽ

    netā   ko   bhāsan   sun   -ẽ

    leader GEN   speech   listen -PT.1.SG

    'I went to Kathmandu, stayed in a hotel and listened to the speech of leaders.'

  b. *kāthmānḍu gaiyo hoṭel mā*

    kāthmānḍu   ga   -i   -yo   hoṭel mā   bas   -i

    Kathmandu   go   -PASS -PT.3.SG hotel LOC   stay -PASS

    basiyo netāko bhāsan suniyo

    -yo   netā   ko   bhāsan   sun   -i   -yo

    -PT.3.SG leader GEN   speech   listen -PASS -PT.3.SG

    'I got gone to Kathmandu, got stayed in a hotel and got listened to the speech of leaders.'

The verbs listed in (9) fulfil these transitivity tests. They take agentive subject and their objects are recoverable from the appropriate contexts. That means they have objects in underlying structure. Passivization is not limited to transitive clauses in Nepali and when the clauses with these verbs are passivized, the object is not raised into subject position because the object is not in the surface structure. Hence, they are semantically transitive and syntactically intransitive.

Another group of intransitive verbs, whose subject is marked with ergativity, is the ones that take semantically instrumental NPs as their subjects. Here is the list.

(11) *ghoc-*'to pierce', *jot-*'to plough', *khan-* 'to dig', *bagāu-*'to sweep away', *kāt-* 'to cut', *bãdh-*'to tie', *lekh-*'to write', *pakā-*'to cook', *dukhāu-*'to cause pain', *matāu-*'to intoxicate', *pis-*'to grind', *chinā-*'to cut off', *kic-*'to run over', *ḍaḍaḍu-*'to burn', *pagāl-*'to melt'.

Unlike the verbs in (9), these verbs can also take instrumental NPs as their subjects. But they are similar to them in many respects. Like the verbs in (9), the subjects of these verbs are marked by ergativity. The object can be recovered from the appropriate context and, if the object is not recoverable from the context, they cannot be used intransitively.

The past participial suffix *–eko* never marks a finite clause. In a finite clause it precedes the existential copula *cha* or its past form *thyo*. It is not necessary that a situation to be

telic to take ergative marking by the subject and the situation need not be terminative. The past participial suffix *–eko* in the main verb is enough to receive ergative subject provided the clause is transitive or the clause has any of the verbs listed in (9) and (11).

(12)   a. *us le tyo cij kiteko cha* (Turner 1931)

us	le	tyo	cij	kit	-eko	cha
3.SG	ERG	that	thing	specify	-PPART	be.NPT.3.SG.M

'He has particularly named that thing.'

    b. *guru le āja pã̃c pānā pāh diekā chan* (Turner 1931)

guru	le	āja	pã̃c	pānā	pāth	di	-ekā	chan
teacher	ERG	today	five	page	lesson	give	-PPART	be.NPT.3.MH

'The teacher has set aside five pages of the lesson for to-day.'

The sentences in (12a-b) imply that the action has terminated but the action has current relavance at the time of speech. On the other hand, the action in (13a-b) is still going on at the time of speech; it has been going on from a fixed point in time in the past. The sentences do not imply cessation of the action.

(13)a.   *u kuwā bāṭa pāni ubhāi raheko cha*

u	kuwā	bāṭa	pātni	ubhāi	rah	-eko	cha
3.SG	well	ABL	water	draw	stay	-PPART	be.NPT.3.SG.M

'He is drawing water from the well.'

    b. *us le kuwā bāṭa pāni ubhāi raheko cha*

us	le	kuwā	bāṭa	pāni	ubhāi	rah	-eko	cha
3.SG	ERG	well	ABL	water	draw	stay	-PPART	be.NPT.3.SG.M

'He is drawing water from the well.'

The past participial suffix *–eko* also triggers ergative marker of a non-finite clause as in (14a). This suffix *–eko* is also used to mean attributive function in a nominalized construction indicated by the subject NPs *āphu le pāleko carā* 'The bird brought up by oneself' in (14b) and *cora le coreko dasi* 'The stolen article' in (14c).

(14)   a. *maile miṭhāi khāeko dekhera*

mai	le	miṭhāi	khā	-eko	dekh	-era
1.SG	ERG	sweet	eat	-PPART	see	-CNV

tyas le thuk ghuṭukkanilyo (Turner 1931)

tyas	le	thuk	ghuṭukka	nil	-yo
that	ERG	saliva	gulp	swallow	-PT.3.SG.M

'Seeing me eat sweets made his mouth water. (lit. he swallowed his saliva with a gulp.)'

   b. *āphu le pāleko carā le āphnai ãkhāʈhungcha*(Turner 1931)

      āphu le pāl -eko carā le āphnai ākhā ʈhung -cha
      REFL ERG bring up -PPART bird ERG REFL eye peck -NPT.
      'The bird brought up by oneself pecks out one's own eyes.'

   c. *cora le coreko dasi phelā paryo*(Turner 1931)

      cora le cor -eko dasi phelā par -yo
      thief ERG steal -PPART article trace fall -PT.3.SG.M
      'The stolen article has been traced.'

This helps us to explain the nominative ergative alternations in the minimal pair of (13). The phrase in (13a) *kuwā bāʈa pāni ubhāi raheko* was considered to be the nominal complement of the copula verb *cha* as usually done in equative sentences, hence, the subject is nominative. The phrase *kuwā bāʈa pāni ubhāi raheko* in (13a) was considered syntactically and functionally equal to the phrases *āphu le pāleko carā*'The bird brought up by oneself' in (14b) and *cora le coreko dasi*'The stolen article' in (14c). But on the other hand, in the sentence in (13b) the verbal group was considered as a unit with the verb *ubhāi*'draw' as the main verb. The light verb *rah-* 'stay' has lost its progressive meaning because of the past perfective marker *–eko* and through reanalysis the sentence was considered as transitive and perfective, hence, the senetence has ergative subject.

Another perfective marker in Nepali is completive marker *–i*. A verb marked by completive suffix *-i* is always followed by one of the light verbs listed in (15).

(15) *hāl-* 'to put, to pour', *sak-*, 'to finish', *di-*'to give', *rah-*'to stay, to remain', *chāḍ-* 'to leave', *rākh-*'to keep', *her-*'to see', *māŋ-* 'to ask for, to demand', *ā-* 'to come'.

The light verbs that combine with the main verb in completive suffix *-i* do not detemine the ergative marking in their subjects. It is determined by the verb that gets completive suffix-*i*, if it is transitive, it gets ergative subject otherwise not. The light verbs should be in perfective aspect to receive ergative subject. Consider the minimal pair in (16).

(16)a. *u yurop gai heryo*

      u yurop ga -i her -yo
      3.SG Europe go -COMPL see -PT.3.SG
      'He tried going to Europe.'

   b. *usle pasal kholi heryo*

      us le pasal khol -i her -yo
      3.SG ERG shop opening -COMPL see -PT.3.SG
      'He tried opening a shop.'

The remaining two perfective suffixes *–era* and *–i (kana)* do not mark ergativity. The transitivity status of the matrix clause determines the ergative marking on the subject. Such converbal constructions have co-referential subjects to their matrix clasues. The subject in (17a) is marked with ergativity because the matrix verb *khā-* 'eat' is transitive but the subject in (17b) does not have ergative marking because its verb *sut-* 'sleep' in the

matrix clause is intransitive, although the verb *khā-* 'eat' in the converbal clause is transitive. Same explanation holds true for *–i(kana)* constructions.

(17)   a. *rāmle ghara gaera bhāt khāyo*
        rām le   ghara ga -era   bhāt   khā   -yo
        Ram ERG   home go -CNV meal   eat   -PT.3.SG
         'Having gone home, Ram had his meal.'
        b. *rām bhāt khāera sutyo*
        rām bhāt   khā   -era   sut   -yo
        Ram meal   eat   -CNV   sleep -PT.3.SG
        'Having eaten his food, Ram slept.'

3. Imperfective aspect

In section 2, we noted that certain verbs in Nepali have different forms for perfective and imperfective aspectual suffixes to be combined with. Such one verb is the verb for *go*. Its *ga-* 'go' form combines with the suffixes expressing perfective meanings and its *jaa-*'go' form combines with suffixes expressing impefective meanings. Nepali has following imperfective aspectual suffixes:

(18)   a.   *jā-dā*   'go-imperfective'
        b.   *jā-dai*   'go-progressive'
        c.   *jā-nu*   'go-infinitive'
        d.   *jā-ne*   'go-potential'
        e.   *jā-nā*   'go-infinive'
        f.   *jā-*   'go-imperative'
        g.   *jā-(n)thyo*   'go-habitual'
        h.   *jā-(n)cha*   'go-nonpast'

The form of the verb in (18a) has ergative marking in its subject if it is transitive and the matrix clause has perfective or past time reference. As it is non-finite form, its temporal reference is determined by its matrix clause. The transitive verb and past time reference of the non-finite clause, which it gets from its matrix clause, in (19a) are enough conditions for its subject to be marked with ergative *le*. On the other hand, the non-finite clause in (19b) has a transitive verb but lacks the past time reference, so it does not receive ergative subject.

(19)   a. *hāmi le paḍhdā usko bhāi sangai iskul jānthyo*
        hāmi le   paḍh -dā   us ko   bhāi   sangai   iskul
        1.PL   ERG   study -IMPER 3.SG GEN brother together school
        jā -(n)th -yo
        go -HAB   -PT.3.SG
        'While we were studying, his brother used to go to school with us.'

b.*ma MA paḍhdā meri chori pani iskul jānchin holā*

ma	MA	paḍh	-dā	meri	chori	pani	iskul
1.SG	MA	study	-IMPERF	my	daughter	also	school

jā	-(n)chin	holā
go	-NPT.3.SGF	POSS

'While I will be studying MA, my daughter will possibly go to school.'

The progressive verb form in (18b) usually does not take ergative subject except in individual level reading. We will discuss it in detail in Section 1.4. The infinitive verb form in (18c) gets modal meanings when combined with the modal verb *par-,* which is derived from the lexical verb of the same root meaning 'fall, lie'. The sentence in (20a) with ergative subject expresses very strong obligation, say social or personal, and it means that it is extremely necessary for the speaker that he must go to the office. If he fails to go to the office, he is sure to face severe consequences. On the other hand, the sentence in (20b) without the ergative subject even in the past modal simply expresses intention of the speaker to go to the office.

(20)   a. *maile āja aḍḍā jānu parcha*

mai	le	āja	aḍḍā	jā	-nu	par	-cha
1.SG	ERG	today	office	go	-INF	fall	-NPT.3.SG.M

'I must/have to go to office today.'

   b. *ma aba aḍḍā jānu paryo*

ma	aba	aḍḍā	jā	-nu	par	-yo
1.SG	now	office	go	-INF	fall	-PT.3.SG.M

'Now I will go to office.'

The potential verb form in (18d) functions as a potential marker and as a present participial. If the *–ne* potential marker occurs with a transitive verb and the subject is not a speech act participant (SAP), the subject of the clause is in ergative case. In (20a), the speaker is very sure, perhaps by observing the nature of Ram and his way of study, that he expresses the proposition with complete certainty. In (20b-c), also have similar degree of certainty but the subjects are in nominative because the subjects are SAP. As a present participial, it has ergative subject if it attributes to a patient argument i.e., the head of the NP as in (21a) and nominative subject if it attributes to an agent argument i.e., the head of the NP as in (21b). The nominalized construction must be transitive to have a subject with an ergative marking.

(21a)   a. *rām le dherai paḍhne cha*

rām	le	dherai	paḍh	-ne	cha
Ram	ERG	much	study	-POT	be.NPT.3.SG.M

'Ram will study a lot.'

    b. *ma cār baje ghara jāne chu*

ma	cār	baje	ghara	jā	-ne	chu
1.SG	four	o'clock	home	go	-POT	be.NPT.1.SG.

'I will go home at 4 o'clock.'

c. *timi yo kām garne chau*

timi	yo	kām	gar	-ne	chau
2.MH	this	work	do	-POT	be.NPT.2.MH

'You will do this work.'

(21b)   a. *bidyārthi le paḍhne kitāb*

bidyārthi	le	paḍh	-ne	kitāb
student	ERG	read	-POT	book

'Books to be read by students…'

b. *kitāb paḍhne bidyārthi*

kitāb	paḍh	-ne	bidyārthi
books	read	-POT	students

'Students, who will study books…'

The imperfective form *–nā* in (18e) is completely deverbal and realized as a nominal. It functions like a core argument such as subject as in (22a) or an adjunct expressing reason as in (22b). In both cases it is marked by ergativity. Marking a reason clause with ergativity is typologically very rare in New Indo-Aryan languages.

(22)   a. *bihān hĩḍnā le swāsthya rāmro huncha*

bihān	hĩḍ	-nā	le	swāsthya	rāmro	hun	-cha
morning	walk	-INF	ERG	health	good	become	-NPT.3.SG.M

'Walking in the morning is good for health.'

b. *pāhunā āunā le ma timro bihā mā jāna pāĩna*

pāhunā	āu	-nā	le	ma	timro	bihā	mā	jā
guests	come	-INF	ERG	1.SG	your	wedding	LOC	go

-na	pā	*-ĩna*
-INF	get	-PT.1.SG

'Because of guests' coming I could not go to your wedding.'

The imperative form deletes the subject and there is no question of marking. In Nepali, imperative is zero marked. The last two forms listed in (18) will be discussed in next section.

4. Stage level and individual level predicates

In this section we investigate the distinction between stage level and individual level predicates. We will base our discussion on the earlier studies of Kratzer (1995), Chierchia (1995), Ogawa (2001), Jaegar (2004). We will also show that, in Nepali, ergativity has

alignment with individual level predicates and nominative alignment with stage level predicates.

Kratzer considers that stage level and individual level predicates differ in argument structure. She argues that stage level predicates have an extra position for spatio-temporal argument in their inherent semantic structure but individual level predicates lack this position. Kratzer's findings are compatible with the data from Nepali. Nepali makes a distinction between individual level and stage level predicates in equative sentences. Nepali has two copula verbs *ho* 'be' and *cha* 'be' in non-past tense. In the past, *thyo* 'be.PT.3.SG.M' substitutes for the both non-past forms. The copula verb *ho* 'be' is called identificational and the copula *cha* 'be' is called existential (Sharma 1980). The copula verb *ho* 'be' gives the individual level reading and *cha* 'be' gives the stage level reading. The sentence with *ho* 'be' is not compatible with a spatial adverb as in (23a) but sentence with the *cha* 'be' easily accepts spatial adverb as in (23b):

(23)   a. (*kāthmāndu mā) yo mero ghar ho.
          kāthmāndu   mā   yo   mero   ghar   ho
          Kathmandu   LOC   this   my   house   be.NPT.3.SG.M
          '(*In Kathmandu) this is my house.'
         b. kāthmāndu mā mero ghar cha
          kāthmāndu   mā   mero   ghar   cha
          Kathmandu   LOC   my   house   be.NPT.3.SG.M
          'I have a house in Kathmandu.'

This distinction also holds with event transitive clauses. Carlson (1977) established that the verbs 'know' and 'speak' are prototypical individual and stage level predicates respectively. In Nepali, too, the verb *jānnu* 'to know' is individual level whereas *bolnu* 'to speak' is a stage level predicate as the following sentences show:

(24)   a. rām le (*āja) angreji jāndacha.
          rām le   (*āja)   angreji   jān   -da   -cha
          Ram ERG (*today)   English   know -IMPERF -NPT.3.SG.M
           'Ram know English (*today).
         b. rām āja angreji bolcha
          rām   āja   angreji   bol   -cha
          Ram   today   English   speak -NPT.3.SG.M
          'Ram speaks English today.'

When the sentences in (24) are changed into perfective or past time reference, the individual level vs. stage level distinction does not hold because individual level predicate is inherently generic (Chierchia 1995), and generic sentences are always in non-past tense in Nepali. The subject gets ergative marking not because of the property of individual level predicates but because of the facts discussed in section 1.3. The sentences in (25) show this.

(25)   a. *rām le (*hijo) angreji jānyo.*
        rām le   (*hijo)   angreji   jān   -yo
        Ram ERG (*yesterday) English know -PT.3.SG.M
        'Ram knew English (*yesterday).
        b. *rām le hijo angreji bolyo*
        rām le   hijo   angreji   bol   -yo
        Ram ERG yesterday English speak -PT.3.SG.M
        'Ram spoke English yesterday.'

Kratzer also argues that, the transitive protasis of a *when*-conditional sentence does not accept its both arguments as specific NPs if the clause is an individual level predicate. To make the sentence grammatical, one of the argument NPs needs to be non-specific for the individual level predicates but such restrictions do not hold with the stage level predicates. As we have established in (24) that a verb like *jān* 'know' is an individual level predicate and a verb like *bol* 'speak' is a stage level predicate in Nepali, let's test this diagnostic of Kratzer with the following sentences from Nepali.

(26)   a.*jaba pallawi angreji jāndache,*
        jaba pallawi angreji jān   -da   -che
        when P   English know   -IMPERF -NPT.3.SG.F
        u yo rāmrari jāndache.
        u   yo   rāmrari jān   -da   -che
        3.SG this fluently know -IMPERF -NPT.3.SG.F
        '*When Pallawi knows English, she knows it well.'
        b. *jaba pallawi angreji bolche,*
        jaba pallawi angreji bol   -che
        when P   English speak -NPT.3.SG.F
        u yo rāmrari bolche.
        u   yo   ramrari bol   -che
        3.SG this fluently speak -NPT.3.SG.F
        'When Pallavi speaks English, she speaks it well.'

The sentence in (26a) is not grammatical because the verbs *jān* 'know' is an individual level predicate and its arguments Pallavi and English are both specific as both of them are proper names but the sentence in (26b) is grammatical because the verb *bol*- 'speak' is a stage level predicate and a stage level predicate can take any type of NPs as its arguments. If we change one of the NPs of (26a) into non-specific or bare plural, the sentence becomes grammatical, for instance:

(27)   *jaba nepāli le angreji jāndachan,*
        jaba nepāli le   angreji jān -da   -chan
        when Nepali ERG English know -IMPERF -NPT.3.PL

uniharu yo rāmrari jāndachan.

uni -haru yo rāmrari jān -da -chan

3 -PL this fluently know -IMPERF -NPT.3.PL

'When Nepalese know English, they know it well.'

It is to be noted that definite or specific NPs are semantically in contradiction with individual level predicates as specific or definite NPs are bound by spatio-temporal limitations. Following Carlson (1977) we call the specific or definite NPs as object referring and generic NPs as kind referring NPs. This distinction is important because an individual level predicate does not take object-referring NPs as all of its arguments as shown in the minimal pair in (26). The NPs *the potato* and *potatoes* in (28a-b) are the examples of kind-referring NPs and potato in (28c) is an example of object referring:

(26) a. The potato was first cultivated in South America.

   b. Potatoes were introduced into Ireland by the end of the 17th century. (From Krifka et al 1995:2)

   c. The potato I bought yesterday was very cheap.

A kind-referring NP does not refer to an individual member or object of the kind but to the whole of its kind. The notion of kind referring can be expressed by a definite NP as in (26a) or by a bare plural NP as in (26b) in a language like English. In these examples the *potato* and *potatoes* refer to the kind potato irrespective of any particular member or members of that kind introduced in the discourse universe of the speaker and listener. On the other hand, the object referring NPs refer to an individual member or object of the kind. The speaker and the listener introduce them in the discourse universe as shared as illustrated by the sentence in (26c). The verbal predicate of kind referring NPs need not be stative as illustrated by the sentence in (26c).

(27) The panda is dying out.

Carlson (1977) argues that bare plurals are names of kinds. Kind NPs are prototypically default arguments of individual level predicates. They are semantically in contradiction with stage level because a stage is the slice of individuals and kinds refer to whole of the class. Let's consider the following sentence.

(28) *rāute le jangal ko kandamul khānchan*

   rāute le jangle ko kandamul khā -(n)chan

   Raute ERG forest GEN wild edibles eat -NPT.3.PL

   'The Rautes eat the wild edibles found in the forest.'

Individual level predicates do not only take kind NPs, but also take definite generic[1] NPs, as their arguments, as in (29).

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[1]Nepali does not have similar marker of definiteness to that of English definite article but it seems Nepali employs ergativity for the purpose of marking definiteness, other than its sole function of

(29)　*kukur le māsu khāncha.*
　　　　kukur　le　　māsu　khān　-cha
　　　　dog　　ERG　meat　eat　　-NPT.3.SG.M
　　　　'The dog eats meat.'

In Nepali, stage level and individual level predicates show different behaviour with the two classes of intransitive verbs—unaccusative and unergative. If the clause is unergative intransitive, the stage level predicates have an agent argument, which is specific, and an optional locative argument as in (30a). The sentence in (30a) expresses an episodic event of Rājan's activity that he will perform after the time of speech. If the clause is unaccusative intransitive, the stage level predicates have a theme argument, which is specific as in (30b). The appropriate context for the sentence in (30b) is somehow like this. The bull is sick and there is no any sign of its recovery. After this observation the speaker makes this prediction about the bull.

(30)　a. *rājan bhittā mā hirkāũcha*
　　　　rājan　bhittā　mā　　　hirkāũ　-cha
　　　　Rajan　wall　　LOC　　hit　　　-NPT.3.SG.M
　　　　'Rajan will hit on the wall.'
　　b.　*goru marcha.*
　　　　goru　mar　-cha
　　　　bull　die　-NPT.3.SG.M
　　　　'The bull will die.'

On the other hand, the individual level predicates have different story with the two classes of intransitive verbs. If the clause is unergative intransitive, the individual level predicates have an agent argument, which may be specific, but the context provides appropriate clues for the inferrability of the patient, which is non-specific and deletable as in (31a-b). The sentences in (31a-b) express a kind of regularity in the habit of the subjects and the predicates predicate the essential properties of the subjects. The verbs listed in (9) above belong to this class. If the clause is unaccusative intransitive, the individual level predicates have a theme argument as the subject, which is never specific as in (31c).

(31)　a.*āmā le pakāunu huncha*
　　　　āmā　le　　　pakāu　-nu　　hun　-cha
　　　　mother ERG　cook　-INF　be　　-NPT.3.SG.M
　　　　'Mother cooks.'
　　　b. *māobādi le mārchan*
　　　　māobādi　le　　mār　-chan
　　　　Maoists　　ERG　kill　-NPT.3.PL

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marking the clause as individual level predicate, but this hypothesis is not supported by any research findings as we are not aware of any research in this line till date.

'Maoists kill.'
c. *ek singe gaiḍā māsidai chan*

ek singe gaiḍā māsi -dai chan
one horned rhino become extinct -PROG be.NPT.3.PL
'One horned rhinos are becoming extinct.'

The examples in (30) and (31) show that the semantic factors such as individual level predicates and stage level predicates determine the use of ergativity in non-past tense in Nepali. But in the same time, it is to be noted that to trigger the ergative marking in the subjects, the verbs must have INIT(iator) in its inherent semantic feature (Ramchand 2006)[2]. The individual predicates are not enough in themselves to trigger ergativity in their subjects, but the verb must contain the INIT feature. The lack of INIT feature of an individual predicate gets nominative subject as illustrated by the sentence in (31c). This INIT feature of verb in itself does not turn the subject into ergative case; if the clause is a stage level predicate, the subject is in nominative case as illustrated by the sentence in (30a). The small class of verbs listed in (11) further support this line of argument. All these verbs take instrumental NPs as their subjects and can be syntactically transitive or intransitive. If they are intransitive, there is a kind of inferrability of their patients through the contexts. This property of inferrability makes the patient deletable, turning the surface sentence into intransitive. All the verbs listed in (11) above have individual level predicates, if they are used with instrumental NPs as their subjects in non-past tense. For instance, the sentence in (32a) turns ungrammatical if used with spatio-temporal argument as shown in (32b).

(32) a. *kãḍā le ghoccha*

kãḍā le ghoc -cha
thorn ERG pierce -NPT.3.SG.M
'The thorn/thorns pierces/pierce.'
b. *kãḍā le(*āja) (*khet mā) ghoccha*

kãḍā le (*āja) (*khet mā) ghoc -cha
thorn ERG (*today) (*in the paddy field) pierce -NPT.3.SG.M
'The thorn/thorns pierces/pierce (*today) (*in the field).'

Chierchia (1995) considers individual level predicates are inherently generic. They are permanent and tendentially stable. On the other hand, stage level predicates have episodic properties. Individual level predicates are aspectually stative and they are not compatible

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[2]According to Ramchand, a verb in natural languages can be lexically decomposed into three components of INIT, UND (ergoer) and RES (ult). The INIT component initiates some kind of action as common in transitive and unergative intransitive verbs. The component of UND refers to those verbs that have the feature of containing the patient of transitive and unaccusative intransitive verbs. The component of RES is that semantic feature of verbal decomposition that refers to the result state as in 'He *hammered the metal flat*'.

with progressive. If they occur with progressive, they turn the predicate to stage level or ungrammatical. Stage level predicates can be the complement of perception verbs but individual level predicates cannot. For instance:

(33)   a. *mai le us lāi budhimāni dekhẽ

mai	le	us	lāi	budhimāni	dekh	-ẽ
1.SG	ERG	3.SG	ACC	intelligent	see	-PT.1.SG

'*I saw him intelligent.'
b. mai le us lāi birāmi dekhē .

mai	le	us	lāi	birāmi	dekh	-ẽ
1.SG	ERG	3.SG	ACC	sick	see	-PT.1.SG

'I saw him sick.'

The usual explanation, as observed by Carlson (1977) and Jaeger (2001), for this contrast is that an individual level predicate like *intelligent* codes essential and permanent properties and a stage level predicate such as *sick* codes transitional and accidental properties. The adjective in (33a) *budhimāni* 'intelligent' is an individual level predicate, which cannot go with a perception verb. Hence, the sentence is ungrammatical. On the other hand, the adjective *birāmi* 'sick' in (33b) is stage level predicate. Being intelligent is a permanent property of an individual but being sick is temporary quality. One can be well after some time.

Kearns (2001:22) correlates individual level predicates and stage level predicates with Ladusaw's (1994) categorical and thetic propositions. Basing his argument on Brentano (1874, 1924) and Kuroda (1972, 1992), Ladusaw (1994) argues that in a categorical proposition an entity is presented to the attention and a property is attributed to it. On the other hand, in a thetic proposition a state of affair is simply presented all at once. If it is the case, it is clear that the subjects of individual level predicates have pre-suppositional interpretation and the subjects of stage level predicates have existential interpretation. After establishing a correlation between individual level predicates and categorical propositions, and stage level predicates and thetic propositions, Kearns argues that the subject of an individual level predicate is presupposed and an individual level predicate characterizes the entity in a non-eventive way. It is true that the subjects of individual level predicates such as proper names, common names, objects, etc. exist in time and space but they are not presented as spatially or temporally located because the subjects of individual level predicates receive a property as a whole, not in parts.

Based on the discussion in the previous paragraph, consider the sentences in (34). The subject of the sentence in (34a) is marked with the ergative marker *le* because it is an individual level predicate and its subject is presupposed. On the contrary the sentence in (34b) is a stage level predicates as it is presented all at once without any prior presupposition. The verbal suffix –*n* in these two sentences is different in meaning. This suffix in (34a) agrees with the plural subject and in (34b) it agrees with the subject in honorificity, not in number.

(34) a. *pradhānmantri le pul ko udghāṭan garchan*

pradhān mantri	le	pul	ko	udghāṭan	gar	-chan
Prime minister	ERG	bridge	GEN	inauguration	do	-NPT.3.PL

'Prime ministers inaugurate bridges.'

    b. *pradhānmantri pul ko udghāṭan garchan*

pradhānmantri	pul	ko	udghāṭan	gar	-chan
Prime minister	bridge	GEN	inauguration	do	-NPT.3.MH

'Prime minister inaugurates the bridge.'

These two sentences differ in their meanings. In (34a) *pradhān mantri* 'Prime minister' is a kind NP and it refers to the whole kind of prime ministers and it is inherent property of prime ministers that they inaugurate bridges. To put it other way, the speech community has the mindset that the activity of inaugurating of bridges distinguishes the kind NP prime ministers from kind NP ministers or kind NP general public just like the activity of dancing and teaching distinguishes the kind NP dancer from kind NP teacher. Therefore usually (34a) does not refer to a particular prime minister of the country, let's say, Girija Prasad Koirala. If it does then, the speech community understands that inaugurating bridges is a characteristic feature of Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, just like other activities of him such as addressing the House of Representation, formulating policies of the nation, etc. This sentence does not refer to a particular event of bridge inauguration but generalisations over the series of bridge inauguration events. The speech community has observed such events for a long period of time, and has come to this generalization. This generalization holds true for most of the prime ministers, if not to each and every prime minister. Still the sentence has individual level reading because exceptions are usual in this type of generalizations.   On the other hand, the case of (34b) is different. Here the prime minister is a particular person and he holds that position at the time of speech. The time of event takes place after the time of speech, and the speaker is sure the action referred to is a single event and it will take place at a specific time, say according the time schedule of the prime minister. The event will take place in a place already fixed. Hence, the situation described by the predicate is spatially and temporally bound and not permanent and tendentially stable. Therefore it is a stage level predicate.

Let's consider Kearns correlation once again. A categorical proposition (individual level predicate) has a subject and predicate. If it is transitive, it is possible that the predicate is individual level for the subject and stage level predicate for the object argument. Agentive nouns serve good examples to make our point more concrete. These nouns such as smoker, writer, driver, etc. are typically kind referring NPs and their predicate is also individual level. In the sentences in (40) the predicates predicate the dispositional or essential properties of *gāyak* 'singer', *cālak* 'driver' and *guru* 'teacher' respectively. Hence they are individual level and get ergative marking. But in the same time, it is possible that the object NPs can be existentially interpreted. The object NPs *git* 'song' in (35a), *gāḍi* 'vehicle' in (35b) and the inferable *bidyārthi* 'students' in (35c) can be a particular song, a particular vehicle and particular students.

(35)   a. *gāyak le git gāũcha*

        gāyak   le   git   gāũ   -cha
        singer   ERG   song   sing   -NPT.3.SG.M
        'The singer sings songs.'

        b. *cālak le gāḍi calāũcha*

        cālak   le   gāḍi   calāũ   -cha
        driver   ERG   vehicle drive   -NPT.3.SG.M
        'The driver drives the vehicles'

    c.   *guru le paḍhāunu huncha*

        guru   le   paḍhāu   -nu   hun   -cha
        teacher ERG   teach   -INF be   -NPT.3.SG.M
        'The teacher teaches.'

On the other hand, let's consider the sentence in (36). Unlike the sentences in (35), the sentences in (36) do not express the essential properties of the agentive nouns *gāyak* 'singer' and *guru* 'teacher' hence they are not individual but stage level predicates as they express accidental episodes. Writing poems is not the essential property of a singer and similarly driving does not define the characteristic feature of a teacher.

(36) a. *gāyak kabitā lekhchan*

        gāyak   kabitā   lekh   -chan
        singer   poem   write   -NPT.3.SG.MH
        'The singer writes poems.'

      b. *shikshak gāḍi calāũchan*

        shikshak gāḍi   calāũ   -chan
        teacher vehicle drive   -NPT.3.SG.MH
        'The teacher drives the vehicles'

Let's consider a situation. Mr. Mohan is a principal of a school. The essential properties of the principal of a school are different. Therefore, they cannot be predicated with a single predicate as in (35). If the speaker means the sentences in (37) to be the essential properties of Mohan as the principal of the school, he uses ergative marker but, if the speaker thinks they are the accidental activities of Mohan, the subject will be in nominative case.

(37)   a. *mohan le bidyālaya ko bārsik pratibedan pes garchan*

        mohan le   bidyālaya   ko   bārsik   pratibedan pes
        Mohan ERG   school   GEN   annual   report   submission
        gar -chan
        do -NPT.3.SG.MH
        'Mohan submits the annual report of the school.'

b. *mohan le māsik sikchak sabhā sancālan garchan*

mohan le	māsik	sikchak sabhā	sancālan	gar	-chan
Mohan ERG	monthly	teacher meeting	conduct	do	-NPT.3.SG.MH

'Mohan conducts monthly teacher meetings. '

The sentences in (37) have ergative marker *le* and this marking makes the sentences individual level predicates. The sentences in (37) have strong presupposition sense as the activities described are expected because of the position of Mohan as the principal of the school. The speech act participants (SAP) have the knowledge that Mohan is the principal of the school, and he is expected to do these activities as part of his duty. If the ergative marker *le* is deleted from the sentences in (37), it is not necessary that Mohan is the principal and the presentation of the proposition will be all at once.

If someone is well known personality in particular area of certain expertise, the subject is marked with ergativity to express the activities related to his expertise. For example, Saru Bhakta is a well-known poet and novelist in Nepal. Hence, the subject in sentence (38a) is marked with ergativity marker *le* but the subject in (38b) is nominative because Numaraj is not a well-known poet. But Numaraj is a well-known teacher, hence the subject of the sentence in (38c) marked with ergative *le*.

(38)   a. *saru bhakta le kabitā lekhchan*

saru bhakta	le	kabitā	lekh	-chan
Saru Bhakta	ERG	poems	write	-NPT.3.SG.MH

'Saru Bhakta writes poems.'

b. *numaraj kabitā lekhchan*

numaraj	kabitā	lekh	-chan
N	poems	write	-NPT.3.SG.MH

'Numaraj writes poems.'

c. *numaraj le paḍhāuchan*

numaraj	le	paḍhāu	-chan
Numaraj	ERG	teach	-NPT.3.SG.MH

'Numaraj teaches.'

In the beginning of this section, I have argued that the copula verb *ho* 'be' expresses individual level predicate. This test is highly consistent in the distinction of individual level and stage level predicates. The sentences, which characterize the well-known personality in the speech community as in (38a) and (38c), are always individual level and they can be converted into *ho* 'be' equative sentence, which takes agentive NPs as the predicate. Such correlation is not possible with the stage level predicates as illustrated by the sentences in (38b) and (39b). The sentence in (39b) is only true if Numaraj is a celebrated/ well-known poet but such entailment is not possible from the sentence in (38b). The sentence in (38a) entails (39a) but (38b) does not entail (39b) but the sentence in (38c) entails (39c).

(39)   a. *saru bhakta kabi hun*

      saru bhakta   kabi   hun

      Saru Bhakta   poet   be.NPT.3.MH

      'Saru Bhakta is a poet.'

      b. *numaraj kabi hun*

      numaraj kabi   hun

      N   poet   be.NPT.3.MH

      'Numaraj is a poet.'

      c. *numaraj le paḍhāuchan*

      numaraj paḍhāu   chan

      Numaraj teach   NPT.3.MH

      'Numaraj teaches.'

Let's further reconfirm our claim that individual level predicates realign with ergative marking in non-past tense. Consider the sentences in (40). Let's imagine that the school inspector visits the school and he asks the student the sentence in (40a) and the students reply the sentence in (40b), which entails (40c).

(40)   a.*timiharu lāi physics kas le paḍhāũcha*

      timi -haru lāi   physics kas   le   paḍhāu   -cha

      2.MH -PL   DAT physics who ERG   teach   -NPT.3.SG.M

      'Who teaches you physics?'

      b.*jivan sir le paḍhāunu huncha*

      jivan sir   le   paḍhāu -nu   hun -cha

      jivan teacher ERG   teach   -INF be   -NPT.3.SG.M

      'Jivan teaches (us physics.)'

      c. *jivan sir physics kā sikshak hun*

      jivan sir   physics kā   sikshak   hun

      jivan teacher   physics GEN   teacher   be.NPT.3.MH

      'Jivan is a physics teacher.'

Now let the context be like this. Jivan is on sick leave for two days. He asked his friend Pramesh to take his class instead and Jivan tells his student that he is on sick leave for two days and Pramesh will take his class instead, although Pramesh is not a teacher of physics but of mathematics. Then the principal goes to the class and ask the students as in (41a). Mark that he does not use the question word with ergative but uses *ko* 'who'. The students answer this as in (41b). These two sentences do not entail the sentence in (41c) as in (40):

(41) a. *timiharu lāi dui din physics ko paḍhāũcha*

      timi -haru lāi   dui   din   physics ko   paḍhāũ   -cha

      2.MH -PL   DAT two day physics who teach   -NPT.3.SG.M

      'Who will teach you physics for two days.'

    b. *pramesh sir paḍhāunu huncha*

      pramesh sir   paḍhāu -nu   hun -cha

      Pramesh teacher   teach   -INF   be - NPT.3.SG.M

      'Pramesh will teach (us).'

    c. *pramesh physics kā sikshak hun*

      pramesh physics kā   sikshak hun

      Pramesh physics GEN teacher   be.NPT.3.MH

      'Pramesh is a physics teacher.'

Agentive nouns such as smoker, writer, driver, etc. are good candidates for the typical subjects of individual level predicates because all of them are kind referring NPs. In the sentences in (42) the predicates predicate the essential properties of *gāyak* 'singer', *cālak* 'driver' and *guru* 'teacher' respectively. Hence they are individual level and get ergative marking.

(42)   a. *gāyak le git gāũcha*

      gāyak   le   git   gāũ   -cha

      singer ERG song sing   -NPT.3.SG.M

      'The singer sings songs.'

    b. *cālak le gāḍi calāũcha*

      cālak   le   gāḍi   calāũ   -cha

      driver ERG vehicle drive   -NPT.3.SG.M

      'The driver drives the vehicles'

    c. *guru le paḍhāunu huncha*

      guru   le   paḍhāu   -nu   hun -cha

      teacher ERG teach   -INF   be -NPT.3.SG.M

      'The teacher teaches.'

Ergativity is acceptable even in progressive if it occurs in a predicate that expresses the essential properties of such agentive subjects. Consider the sentences in (43). The sentence in (43a) expresses that driving vehicle is the essential property of a driver and the sentence has individual level predicate as its subject is marked by ergativity. On the other hand, the predicate in (43b) is stage level as it expresses an episodic event, which, the speaker is sure, will come to an end shortly in future. Hence its subject is in nominative.

(43) a. *cālak le gāḍi calāŭdai chan*

  cālak le gāḍi calāŭ -dai chan

  driver ERG vehicle drive -PROG be.NPT3.MH

  'The driver is driving the vehicle/vehicles.'

  b. *guru gāḍi calāŭdai chan*

  guru gāḍi calāŭ -dai chan

  teacher vehicle drive -PROG be.NPT.3.SG.MH

  'The teacher is driving the vehicle'

5. Conclusion

Based on the discussion so far we conclude that, the use of the ergative is semantically determined in Nepali. The semantic notions of perfectivity, obligation and individual level predication condition the use of ergative marking. Like other New Indo- Aryan languages such as Hindi-Urdu, the subject argument of a transitive clause in perfective aspect gets ergative marking in Nepali as well. In Nepali, perfectivity is defined in terms of high transitivity, telicity, affectedness of the patient argument, intentionality of the agent argument, etc. These semantic notions have been cross-linguistically identified as decisive in triggering ergative marking. However, the use of ergative marking is not restricted to transitivity and perfectivity in Nepali. The subject of unergative predicates also get ergative marking. The subject of the predicate of a modal obligation alternates between nominative and ergative-nominative aligns with internal obligation and ergative with external obligation. Typologically split ergative systems conditioned by perfectivity (Dixon 1994), person (Silverstein 1976) have been reported in ergative literature. The data presented in this paper show that Nepali has a split ergative system conditioned by predication types of individual level and stage level. The ergative aligns with individual level predications and nominative with stage level ones. It is also significant to note that ergativity is encompassing wider semantic domains in languages like Nepali unlike the earlier claim of its elimination from existing semantic domains (Bubenik 1989).

Abbreviations

1 = First person	INF = Infinitive
3 = Third person	INS = Instrumental
ABL = Ablative	LOC = Locative
ACC = Accusative	MH = Middle honorific
COMPL = Completive	NPT = Nonpast
CNV = Converb	PL = Plural
DAT = Dative	POSS = Possibility
ERG = Ergative	PPART = Past participle
GEN = Genitive	PROG = Progressive
HAB = Habitual	PT = Past
IMPER = Imperative	REFL = Reflexive
IMPERF = Imperfective	SG = Singular

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