## The Ergative Morphosyntax in Danuwar

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**Abstract**

*This article is an attempt to analyse ergativity in Danuwar clauses. It is organized into four sections. First section provides the theoretical background where attempts are made to explain the concept of ergativity. The next section deals with the morphology of ergativity in Danuwar. Then after, efforts are made to analyse the syntax of ergativity in the language in terms of constituent order, transitivity, verb agreement, control site, case demotion, and coordinate construction. Finally, the main findings of the paper are summarized.*

***Keywords***: Ergativity, morphosyntax, transitivity, converbal clause.

**Introduction**

Danuwar is one of the languages belonging to Indo-Aryan branch of indo-European language family. It is spoken in Nepal by an ethnic group of the same name as their mother tongue. The 2011 Census report shows out of 48,650 people, 45,800 can speak this language. The language has developed different dialects because of geographical distance and the influence of other surrounding languages. Mainly, it shows influence of Nepali, Tharu, Maithili, Bhojpuri, and Hindi. In the hilly region, some influence of Tibeto-Burman languages can also be observed

**Theoretical Background**

Case and agreement markers are not always in a one to one correspondence with grammatical relations. There are many language in which certain verbs required special case marking for their subjects and objects. In other languages, the marking of subjects depends on the transitivity of the clause: transitive subjects are marked one way, while intransitive subjects are marked another way. Most languages that have grammatical case markers follow one of two basic patterns The more common of these patterns can be observed in English, As we know case marking in modern English is found only in pronouns, consider the following examples that are focused on the distribution of the pronominal forms.

(1)   a.   I dance.

b.   He dances

    c.      I like him.

    d.      He likes me.

These examples illustrate, subject pronouns have the same form ('I' and 'He') whether the clause is intransitive, as in (la) and (lb). Following standard terminology, we sould call this the nominative form. Direct object occurs in different form ('me' and 'him'). We could call this the accusative form. This pattern of case marking is referred to as a Nominative-Accusative system, or Accusative for short. Example (2), showing the distribution.

(2)    INTRANSITIVE   SUBJECT : I, he

        TRANSITIVE      SUBJECT : I, he     OBJECT : me, him

             [Nominative]     [Accusative]

    Now let's imagine that following utterances of Pigdin English Spoken in a south Pacific Island have been recorded:

(3)    a.     mi dans     'I dance.'

       b.     him dans    'He dances.'

       c.     ai laik him   'I like him.'

       d.     hi laik mi    'He likes me.'

    In these examples, we see that direct objects of transitive clauses take the same form as subjects of intransitive clauses, viz. mi or him subjects of transitive clauses take a special form, ai or hi. This kind of case marking pattern summarized in (4) is referred to as an Ergative-Absolutive system, or ergative for short. The form used for transitive subjects is called ergative case, while the form used for transitive objects and intransitives subjects are called absolutive case.

(4)    INTRANSITIVE   SUBJECT : mi, him

        TRANSITIVE      SUBJECT : ai, hi   OBJECT : mi, him

             [ergative     [absolutive]

Now, let's have a look at these Danuwar sentences:

(5)    a.     raam -ɸ aai-lak

           Ram -NOM  come - PT 3 SG-M

           'Ram came.'

       b.     raam-e      kitaab-ɸ     paDhi-lak

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

'Ram read a book'.

In these examples, (5a) is an intransitive clause having a single argument (ram) and it is unmarked. But (5b) is a transitive clause with two arguments, one as a subject (raam-e) and another as an object (kitaab). In this clause, object is alos unmarked as subject argument in (5a), but subject is marked differently, viz, with the ergative case marker-e. So, this language is ergative language.

This pattern of Danuwar language is displayed in (6)

(6)    INTRANSITIVE                    SUBJECT : ϕ

TRANSITIVE            SUBJECT :eOBJECT : ϕ

[ergative]            [abosolutive]

**The morphology of Ergativitgy in Danuwar**

As it is exemplified, in Danuwar, the ergative subject is marked with the case influection-e.

(7)    a. raam-e        bhaat            khaai-lak

Ram -ERG        rice            eat - PT 3 SGM

'Ram ate rice.'

b.    Sita -I    bhaat        khaai-lik

Sita-ERG        rice        eat -PT3 SGF

'Sita are rice.'

c.    keTi        bhaat            khaai-lik

girl.ERG        rice            eat-PT 3 SGF

'The girl late rice.'

In the above examples, raam (7a) inflect with -e without any change in their form. But when we attach the ergative -e to sitta in (7b), it changes to I and the final aa (7a) which ends with a vowel -I remains same, i.e. keTi. SUjch morphophonemic alternations occur with other cases, as well.

The case of pronominal ergative subjects, however, is different, The following table (Table 1) reveals the ergative marking on pronominals in Danuwar.

Table 1:

Ergative Marking on Danuwar Pronominals

| Pronomianl Roots | | Ergative Marking |
|---|---|---|
| mui | 'I' | mui |
| haamai | 'we | haamai |
| tui | 'you.np sg' | tui |
| tolok | ' you.np pl' | tolokhe |
| aaphnakelok | 'you.p pl' | aaphnakelokhe |
| u | 'he/she' | oi |
| olok | 'they' | olokhe |

In Table I we can see that when the ergative case marking -e is suffixed to pronouns like mui, tui, kaamai, and aaphnake, their forms have remained same whereas tolok, aaphnankelok, u and olok have change into tolokhe, aaphnakelokeh, oi and olokhe, respectively. This observation indicates that the pronouns ending with the vowel sounds / I / and / e' remain same in ergative case, the pronouns ending with consonant take-e and the stem u changes o and the erative maker-e becomes i.

Apart from ergatie marking, the nominals (but not pronominal) in Danuwar also show inflection for number. The relative position of the inflectional categories affixed to these nominal is ]

(8)     Noun-Number ERG

It is exemplified in (9)

(9)     a.     betyaak-lok-e       macho marr-ti            ra-chat

              son-PL-ERG       fish    kill-PROG   be-NTP 3PL

       'SOns are fishing.'

       b. maanus -lok-e    baaT        kheni-laa

       man-PL-ERG              road          dig-PTPL

       The men constructed road.

       c. ChhaTE-lok-e    piTho         boi-khaai-laa

       child-PL-ERG             chapatti     EG-eatPT3PL

'The children did not eat chapatti.'

In these examples, the ergative case maker-e is suffixed to number inflections (i.e. plural marker-lok) following the nominals, viz. be Tyaak, maanus and chaaTe in (9a), (9b) and (9c) respectively.

It is to be noted that the ergative marker-e is homophonous with the instrument marker -3, For example, consider the following sentence.

(10)   saap-e        data-e        kapta-chat

       snake -ERG  teeth-INSTR bite-NPT3PL

       'Snake bite with teeth.'

It is a widespread phenomenon is several south Asian language.

**The Syntax of Ergativity in Danuwar**

In this section, attempts are made to analysis the properties characterizing ergativity at clausal/ sentential level in Danuar. Cases and grammatical relations (subject/object) often have no one-to -one relation in Indo-Aryan language including Danuwar. Thus. not all nominative nominals are subjects and conversely, not all subjects are nominative nominals. However, ergative case in unique in the sense that it always has unidirectional relation with the subject. That is to say, all ergative nonimals are subjects through all subjects are not ergative, as shown in (11).

       (11)   a. ERG    →subject

              b. * ERG ↔ Subject

This formulation implies that all ergative nominals must be subject. If so, then we assume that all the properties so subjectivehood (proposed by keenan, 1976 will naturally follow. This section examines the sytactic behaviour of ergative subject in the various facts about Danuwar syntax. They include the following:

       Constituent order.
       Transitivity
       Verb agreement
       Control site
       case demotion
       Coordinate construction

**Constituent Order**

We assume that the basic constituent in a Danuwar transitive clause is SOV. This assumption implies that the nominals with ergative marking -e, which are subjects, occur clause initially. However, for special semantic and pragmatic effects the basic constituent order can be permuted. For example, consider the following examples in (12).

(12)   a.     raam-e          hari-lai          bheTi-lak

Ram-ERG    Hari-ACC    meet-PT3SGM

'Ram met Hari.'

   b.     hari-lai          raam-e          bheTi-lak

Hari-ACC    Ram-ERG    meet -PT3SGM

'Ram met Hari.'

   c.     bheTi-lak          raam-e          hari-lal

meet-PT3SGM     Ram-ERG    Hari-ACC

'Ram met Hari.'

Sentence (12a) is normal utterance in Danuwar. (12b) is used to emphasize that it was Ram (nobody else) who met Hari. Similary, (12c) is uttered to mean that, perhaps Ram had been trying to meet Hari for a long time and he was successful.

**Transitivity**

Danuwar ergative marking-e on the subject is associated with transitivity of its verb : if the verb in the ergative clause is transitive, the subject NP must get ergative marking, on the contrary the NP of an intransitive clause does not get ergative marking. Consider the following examples in (13) and (14)

(13)   a. resam-e          ekTaa          kukraa          maar-la     ra-lok

Resham-ERG          one. CLF     dog          kill-PERF     be-P3SGM

'Reshan had killed a dog'

$a_1$. * ream etTaa Kukraa maar-lara-lak

   b.   ajit-e          dhulikhel-maa ghar          baanaai-rai-lak

ajit-ERG     Dhulikhel-LOC house          build-be-PT3SGM

'Ajit has built a house in Dhulikhel.'

b1   ajit dhulikhel-maaghar  banaai-rai-lak

c.   sujit-e        chThi        lekh-ti              ra-is

Sujit-ERG   letter         write -PROG        be NPT3SG

'Sujit is writing a letter'.

c1   *Sujit ciThi lekh -tira-is

Through (13a), (13b) and (13c) are in different tenses and aspects, they are all transitive clause. So, the subject NPS in all these three clauses must take the ergative marker-e. That's why, (13a1), (13b) and (13c) are unacceptable utterances.

(14) a      kedaar            dilli          jai-la         ra-lak

kedar             delhi         go-PERF     be-PT3SGM

'Kedar had gone to Delhi.'

a1    *kedaar-e dilli jai-la ra-lak

sitta aai-ra-lik

Sita come-be-PT3SGF

'Sita has come.'

b1    *Sita-i aai-ra-lik

d     syaam        kaad-ti            ra-is

shyam        weep-PROg be-NPT3SG

c1    *syaamekaaD-tira-is

Although (14a) is in past tense and perfective aspect, (14b) is in non-past tense and perfective aspect, and (14c) is in non-past tense and progressive aspect, similar to (13a), (13b) and (13c), respectively, all these utterances are intransitive ones. So, the NPS in all these three clauses con not take the ergative marker. They must be unmarked. Therefore, (14a1), (14b1) and (14c[1]) are ill formed utterances.

The ergative marking can not always be attributed to transitivity in Danuwar. Consider the following examples in this regard.

(15)a. raam-e              iskul              u-yaa9            parchi

Ram-ERG         School            go-INF         OBL

'Ram must go to school'

b.  o-I            ghar-maa        bas-e          parlaar

    he/she-ERG house-LOC  stay-INF       PROB

    'He/she might stay at house.'

In both these examples, the verbs are intransitive marked with non past tense and non-perfective aspect and yet they cause ergative marking on their subjects. It seems we need to look for some semantic explanations like 'necessity' / 'obligation' for the choice of an ergative subject. Suppose that this semantic basis is encoded by denotic modality. If so then the morphosyntactic factors combining for the choice of the ergative subject fall into two disjunctive groups: transitivity vs. deontic modality. This leads to the generalization that Danuwar has split ergativity. This analysis has been undertaken on the basis of limited data so further investigation is necessary in this area.

## Verb Agreement

Like nominative subjects, ergative subjects also control the verb agreement in Danuwar, eg.

(16)  a.      raam-e              sitaa-lai            man            paraai-lak

        Ram-ERG    Sita-ACC          heart          fall-PT3SGM

        'Ram liked Sita.'

    b.      Sita-I        raam-lai            man            paraai-lik

        Sita-ERG    Ram-ACC          heart          fall-PT3SGM

        'Sita liked Ram.'

It is to be noted that the subjects associated with eases other than nominative and ergative do not trigger the verb agreement in Danuwar. Danuwar, thus, contrasts with Hindi, in which an ergative subject can not control verb agreement, e.g.

(17)  a.      raam          roTi          khaataa        hai

        Ram            chapatti      eat              be RP3SG

        'Ram eats chapatti.'

    b.      raam-ne      roTi          khaa-yii

        Ram-ERG    chapatti      eat-PT3SGF

        'Ram ate chapatti.'

**Control Site**

As in other languages, the control site in a Danuwar converbal construction is the ergative or other types of subject of the matrix clause. e.g.

(18)    raam-e            hari-lai            [PRO$_i$git    baj-e]        baaji-lak

          Ram-ERG    Hari-Dat    song        tell-INF    tell-PT3SGM

          'Ram told Hari to sing a son.'

**Case Demotion**

Danuwar is different from Hindi or Maithili in overtly allowing subjects without enforcing any case demotion rule. Both nominative and ergative are fine in complement (19) attribute (20) and converb (21) clauses:

(19)    a.    [raam                ghar            j-yaal]        thik            boike

                Raam. NOM        home        go-INF        right        be.NEG.NPT

                'It is not good for Ram to drink alcohol.'

(20)    a.    [[bhim hoski-la] din]

                Bhim. NOM laugh PT day

                'The day Bhim laughed'

          b.    [[bhim-e baanaai-la] ghar]

                Bhim.ERG build-PT house

                'The house Bhim built.'

(21)    a.    [ajit                    kaanu        nai-aai-ku]    kunnu    kaam

                Ajit.NOM                tomorrow    NEG-come-CONv    any work. N

                                                                            nai-hokh-is

                                                                            NEG-be NPT3SG

'Unless Ajit comes tomorrow, there won't be any work.'

          b.    [baaba-I            baaji-ku        tani]o-I        yl        kaam kari-lak

                fathr-ERG        tell-CONV        only h-ERG    this        work do-PT3SGM

                'He did this work only because fathr told him/her so.'

**Coordinate construction**

Except for the presence of PRo- element, conduction reduction has similar properties as converbal chaining (and earlier literaturer often conflates the two, e.g kachru et a1, 1976). In the programmatically unmarked case, the dropped element (PRO) can be ergative subject (22a), but this is not a syntactic constraint. The example (22b) shows that under some conditions, the dropped element can also be the object.

(22)     a.     bhim-e          kitaab          kini-lak          ra malaai di-lak

              Bhim-ERG   book              buy-PT3SGM   and me give PT3SGM

              'Bhim bought a book and gave me.'

        b.     bhim           aai-lak          ra mui            piTi-nu

              Bhim.NOM    come-PT3SGM and I            beat-PT 1SG

              'Bhim came and I beat him.'

**Conclusion**

To sum up, the ergative morpho-syntax in Danuwar is characterized by a set of properties. It is morphologically marked with the case particle-e. In an unmarked construction, the ergative subject appears clause initially in transitive clause. Like  the nominative subject, it shows agreement with the verb. The control site in a Danuwar converbal construction in the ergative or other types of subject. Danuwar overtly allows subjects without enforcing any case demotion rule. In the  pragmatically unmarked case, the dropped element (PRO) can be an ergative subject, but this is not a syntactic constraint in PRO drop language.

**Abbreviations**

ɸ zero element

1 : first person                    NO: number

2: second person  NOM: nominative case

3: third person                 NP: noun phrase

ACC: accusative case          NPT: non-past tense

CLF: classifier              OBL: obligation marker

CONV: converb  PAT:perfective aspect

DAT:dating case PERF: perfective aspect

ERG: ergative case            PL:plural

F: feminine

PR: present tense

INF: infinitive marker

PRO: dropped element

NSTR: instrumental case

PROB:  probality marker

LOC: locative case

PROG: progressive aspect

M: masculine

PT: Past tense

N: noun

SG: singular

NEG: negative

VP: verb phrase

NH: non-honorific

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