What differentiates what? Differential Subject and Object Marking in Manang Gurung and Gyalsumdo

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Issue

- Case is a grammatical strategy for assigning and identifying the role of NPs through **morphological-marking of dependents**, such as core arguments and adjuncts.

- Sometimes case is **(probabilistically) determinable** based on variable characteristics of the **governer** and its **governee** rather than a more straightforward mapping between the argument structure/case frame of a verb and its dependent NPs.

- Conditioned variability in case-marking can give rise to **Differential Subject Marking (DSM)** (de Hoop & de Swart 2008, Malchukov 2008) and **Differential Object Marking (DOM)** (Bossong 1985, Aissen 2003, Dalrymple and Nikolaeva 2011).

DSM and DOM in (Manang) Gurung

(1) a. tela   **ŋa-i/*ŋa**   (po-ri/*po)   hon   ta-i
         yesterday 1SG-ERG/1SG   (ground-LOC/ground)   hole   dig-PST
         'Yesterday I dug a hole in the ground.'

     b. nagai   **ŋa-i/nga**   (po-ri/*po)   hon   ta-mu
         tomorrow   1SG-ERG/1SG   (ground-LOC/ground)   hole   dig-NPST
         'Tomorrow I will dig a hole in the ground.'

(2) a. tela   adʑu   nakju-i/*adʑu nakju   ***kai-ni/kai**   tsa-i
         yesterday that   dog-ERG/that   dog   rice-DAT/rice   eat-PST
         'Yesterday the dog ate the rice.'

     b. tela   adʑu   tseto-i/*tseto   **adʑu ra-ni/adʑu   ra**   tsa-i
         yesterday that   tiger-ERG/tiger   that   goat-DAT/that   goat   eat-PST
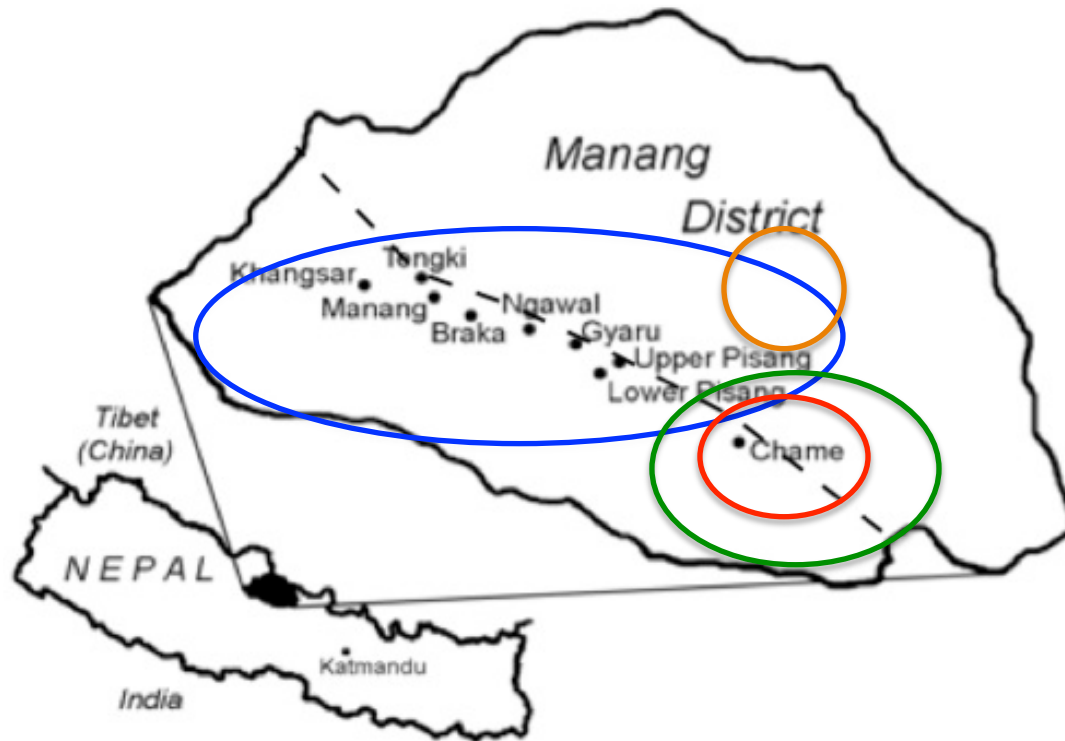   'Yesterday the tiger ate the goat.'

What differentiates what?

- DSM-DOM potential is influenced by differences in **referential density** and **case-inventory** in the languages of Manang.

- However, the differentiating function of case is determined by the interplay between the **animacy hierarchy, temporal characteristics** and the **information-structure** of the clause.

Overview

- A snapshot of Manang District, Nepal

- Differential argument marking in Manang Gurung

- Differential argument marking in Gyalsumdo

- Comparison and conclusions

Tamangic languages of Manang District, Nepal

Tamangic: Manange, Manang Gurung, Nar
Tibetan: Gyalsumdo

- This research reports on a subset of results from ongoing work on **Tamangic languages and one Tibetic language** spoken within the Tibetan Plateau Buffer Zone between the more typologically consistent Indospheric and Sinospheric Tibeto-Burman languages of the region (Matisoff 1991, Bickel and Nichols 2003, Hildebrandt 2007).

DAM in Manang database

- The study is both language comparative and context comparative.

- We use data gathered from parallel elicitation and discourse collection.

- This permits the exploration of linguistic variability, including consistencies and differences and allows for speaker judgment to place a role.

DAM in discourse overview

	Manange		Gurung		Nar		Gyalsumdo	
Verb forms	129	100%	72	100%	86	100%	99	100%
Verbs with overt A/S NPs	37	28.7%	25	34.7%	33	38.7%	41	41.4%
With ERG A/S	3	2.3%	3	4.2%	3	3.5%	4	4%
Intransitive	**92**	**71.3%**	**37**	**52.1%**	**52**	**60.5%**	**45**	**45.5%**
With overt S	26	20.2%	20	28.2%	24	27.9%	31	31.3%
With ERG S	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Complement-taking	**35**	**27.2%**	**33**	**46.5%**	**34**	**39.5%**	**54**	**54.5%**
With overt A	11	8.5%	7	9.7%	9	10.5%	10	9.9%
With ERG A	3	2.3%	3	4.2%	3	3.5%	4	4%
With overt P	25	19.4%	24	33.4%	16	20.9%	33	33.3%
With DAT P	0	0%	1	1.4%	0	0%	4	4%
Unclear	**2**	**1.6%**	**2**	**1.4%**	**0**	**0%**	**0**	**0%**

DSM and role differentiation in Tamangic

- First, we examined whether the realisation of an A/S NP (±OVERT A/S) is a predictor of discontinuation of subject reference (±SAME REF). Significant in all three languages.

- Second, we examined whether the realisation of a complement (±COMP) in clauses with (i) complement-taking verbs, and (ii) overt A NPs, is a predictor of ERG case-marking variable (±ERG). Not a significant predictor for Gurung.

Continuity of reference in Gurung			
	+ OVERT A/S	- OVERT A/S	Total
+ SAME REF	1	14	15
- SAME REF	27	29	56
Total	28	43	71
Pearson's chi-square - Significant: $X^2 (1) = 8.55$, $p < .003$			

Complementation in Gurung			
	+ ERG A	- ERG A	Total
+ COMP	2	4	6
- COMP	1	0	1
Total	3	4	7
No significant relationship (Fisher's Exact Test: $p < 0.43$)			

DSM and role differentiation in Gyalsumdo

- First, we examined whether the realisation of an A/S NP (±OVERT A/S) is a predictor of discontinuation of subject reference (±SAME REF). Significant for Gyalsumdo.

- Second, we examined whether the presence of a complement (±COMP) in clauses with (i) complement-taking verbs, and (ii) overt A NPs, is a predictor of ERG case-marking variable (±ERG). Not a significant predictor in Gyalsumdo.

Continuity of reference in Gyalsumdo			
	+ OVERT A/S	- OVERT A/S	Total
+ SAME REF	13	33	46
- SAME REF	28	25	53
Total	41	58	99
Pearson's chi-square - Significant: X^2 (1) = 6.13, $p < .001$			

Complementation in Gyalsumdo			
	+ ERG A	- ERG A	Total
+ COMP	4	6	10
- COMP	0	0	0
Total	4	6	10
No significant relationship (Fisher's Exact Test: $p = 1$)			

Differential ergative case

- Despite the low incidence of subject NPs in general (i.e. low referential density), and ERG marked NPs specifically, in the data examined, the presence of the case-marking is not strictly determined by the **grammatical function** of an NP, but also its **information-structural properties**.

- In the Tamangic languages, the use of ergative case is associated with primary topic, notably with switches between **the discourse topic and other topical protagonists,** as well as by restrictions imposed by **lexically specified case frames**.

- In Gyalsumdo, there is a **higher incidence of case marked NPs** in general (including DAT and ABL) and the presence of ERG is less clearly related to primary topic status (suggesting this may be more grammaticalised).

DAM splits in Gurung elicitation

(3) a. tela   **adʒu pjume-i**/*adʒu pjume ŋe-i

            yesterday that   boy-ERG/that   boy   jump-PST

            'Yesterday the boy jumped (once).'

  b. tela   *adʒu **ra-i**/adʒu   **ra** ŋe-i

            yesterday   that   goat-ERG/**adʒu** goat jump-PST

            'Yesterday the goat jumped (once).'

(4) a. **ŋa-i**/*ŋa   *adʒu kju-ni/adʒu kju   thun-i

            1SG-ERG/1SG that   water/that   water drink-PST

            'I drank the water.'

  b. nagai   **ŋa-i**/ŋa   adʒu kju   thun-mu

            tomorrow 1SG-ERG/1SG   that   water drink-NPST

            'I will drink the water tomorrow.'

- Some 'unergative' punctual intransitives can have an ergative subject, if it is high in **animacy**.

- Definite objects denoting higher animates/humans usually require DOM with **transitive past tense verbs**, but inanimates do not.

DOM in Gurung

- Unmarked objects of monotransitives align in case with **themes** in ditransitves, and DOM forms align with **goals**, suggesting there may be a distinction between primary and non-primary objects in Gurung.

(5)   a. aʥu   rime-i   **aʥu   pjume-ni**/*adzu pjume   phri-i

that   girl-ERG   that   boy-DAT/that   boy   hit-PST

'The girl hit the boy.'

b. ŋa-i   **ŋa-e   latshi-ri/ŋa-e   latshi**   hamare-i   tikhi phri-i

1SG-ERG   1SG-GEN   nail-LOC/1SG-GEN nail   hammer-INSTR   once   hit-PST

'I hit my nail with the hammer once (i.e. one time).'

c. aʥu   pjume-i **the   ro-ni**/*the   ro   sjau   kri   pi-i

that   boy-ERG   3SG.GEN   friend-DAT/3SG.GEN   friend   apple   one   give-PST

'The boy gave an apple to his friend.'

Could DOM also be topic marking?

- In addition to primary topics, Dalrymple and Nikolaeva (2011) present a range of evidence in favour of **secondary topics**.

- A secondary topic is "an entity such that the utterance is construed to be ABOUT the relationship between it and the primary topic" (Nikolaeva 2001:26)

- While **focused objects** provide **new information**, secondary **topic objects** are **presupposed.**

- In some languages, secondary topic status aligns with a distinction between **primary (unrestricted) objects** (OBJ), and **secondary objects** that are restricted to a more limited set of semantic roles (OBJ_θ). In such cases, OBJs are marked for case, but **OBJ_θ only receive case if a secondary topic.**

Dative marked object(!) in Gurung discourse

- Only one case-marked object appears in our discourse sample – it is the only instance of a pronominal object.

- Note that the reference of the subject of the dependent clause is **controlled by the object of the matrix clause** – a property associated with topical objects in systems that distinguish primary and non-primary objects in monotransitives (Dalrymple and Nikolaeva 2011: 147).

(6) [tikhi tikhi   bə   ja-mne]   **ŋjo-ne**   to-mu
      sometimes   forest   go-CVB.SIM   1.PL-DAT   meet-NPST
      'Sometimes when we go to forest, (the animals) meet us.'

- Further syntactic testing will be required to establish whether Gurung has a distinction between an OBJ and an OBJ$_\theta$.

DAM splits in Gyalsumdo elicitation

(7) a. **di   mi-ki/di   man**   phir-soŋ
     PROX   man-ERG/PROX man   fly-PST
     'The man flew.'

   b. ***di   *ʤaʤ-ki/di ʤaʤ(-ko)**   phir-soŋ
     PROX   plane-ERG/PROX plane(-DEF)   fly-PST
     'The plane flew.'

(8) a. **Pema-ki/*Pema** tsiriŋ-la   thoŋ-sum
     Pema-ERG/Pema   Tsiring-DAT   see-PST
     'Pema saw Tsiring.'

   b. Pema-ki/Pema   tsiriŋ-la   thoŋ-yoŋ
     Pema-ERG/Pema   Tsiring-DAT   see-NPST
     'Pema will see Tsiring.'

- High animates can be marked with ERG case in intransitives, but this is not possible with **lower animates or inanimates**.

- Gyalsumdo presents with a similar split in terms of tense with elicitation suggesting that ergative case marking **obligatory in past tense contexts.**

DOM in Gyalsumdo elicitation

- DOM in Gyalsumdo is (at least superficially) linked to a split in **definiteness**, with definite interpretations favouring Dative case-marking; this aligns with the observation that **definiteness** is a property associated with topics (and may ultimately spread to non-topical objects with this feature).

(9)   a.   Pema-ki   **kjubu**   thoŋ-sum   b.   Pema-ki   **kjubu-la**   thoŋ-sum

         Pema-ERG   dog   see-PST   Pema-ERG   dog-DAT   see-PST

         'Pema saw a dog.'   'Pema saw the dog.'

(10)   In answer to: To whom did the boy give the book?

         di   piʤa-ki   tshoe   **pomo-la**   ter-suŋ

         PROX   boy-ERG   book   girl-DAT   give-PST

         'The boy gave the book to the girl.'

Secondary topics in Gyalsumdo discourse

- In the discourse data from Gyalsumdo, the **object is always present** with ERG subjects, but may be differentially marked even given the same verb, subject, object and tense in consecutive clauses…

(11)   **ŋa**   ama-ki   soe-suŋ

      1SG   mother-ERG   bring.up-PST.DIR

      '(My) mother brought me up.'

> Non-canonical fronted object

(12)   ama-ki   tʃyma   kaŋ-la   **ŋa-la**   soe-suŋ

      mother-ERG   small   time-DAT   1SG-DAT   bring.up-PST.DIR

      '(My) mother brought me up when I was small.'

> Dative case occurs once new information about the relation between topics is established

Conclusion

- There is little evidence to suggest that case is required for the **purposes of differentiating (semantic) roles**.

- Rather, DSM and DOM have **information structural functions** (e.g. definiteness and topic marking) that permit the tracking of referents through discourse.

- Tamangic languages: ergative case in discourse is associated with primary topic function, while the Dative case marking of objects seems to align with (human) primary objects (OBJ) in secondary object function – and **possibly definite themes**.

- Gyalsumdo: subject case (ERG, DAT, ABL) is more grammaticalised, however topicality is still important in DOM as **secondary topic status** may account for Dative case alternations on monotransitive objects in discourse.

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