Conditions on Differential Ergative Case Marking

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1. Overview
In many dependent-marking languages of the Tibeto-Burman area, Differential Subject Marking (DSM) (de Hoop & de Swart 2008, Malchukov 2008) is manifested through case marking of core arguments that is conditional (in the sense of Corbett 2012) rather than invariably governed.

Variables associated with DEM (based on Chelliah and Hyslop 2011)

Agent/NP properties:
person, number, animacy, humanness, definiteness, specificity, referentiality, agent volition, agent control, 'heavy' NPs

Discourse structure:
contrastive focus, switch in agent. speech predicates

Verbal/clausal properties:
predicate valence, clause polarity, aspect/tense/mood

Subjectivity:
subjective judgment of speaker, socially unexpected action

2. Conditions on case-marking
We examined the distribution of Differential Ergative Case Marking (DEM) strategies in three Tamangic languages (Gurung, Manange and Nar) to determine (statistically supported) conditional patterns underlying the distribution of covert, ergative and unmarked (absolutive) subjects.

(1)　Animacy conditions in elicited Manang Gurung intransitives
　　a. tela　　**adʒu pjume-i/*adʒu pjume**　ŋe-l
　　　Yesterday that boy-ERG/that boy　jump-PST
　　　'Yesterday the boy jumped (once).'

　　b. tela　　***adʒu ra-i/adʒu　　ra** ŋe-l
　　　Yesterday that goat-ERG/that goat jump-PST
　　　'Yesterday the boy jumped (once).'

(2)　TAM conditions in elicited Manang Gurung transitives
　　a. **ŋa-i/*ŋa**　adʒu kju　thun-i
　　　1SG-ERG/1SG that water drink-PST
　　　'I drank the water.'

　　b. **ŋa-i/ŋa**　adʒu kju　thun-mu
　　　1SG-ERG/1SG that water drink-NPST
　　　'I will drink the water.'

(3)　Overidden animacy/tense constraints in Manang Gurung discourse
　　a. Se-ni　**sipai dəpha**　se-jae
　　　louse-DAT **soldier all**　kill-PST
　　　'The soldiers killed the louse.'

　　b. rĩp lə-l　kjom pi-si　tsə　**kope-l**　pi
　　　good do-PURP should give-SEQ have **bedbug-ERG** say
　　　'The bedbug said "You should behave well".'

- In Manang Gurung, animacy is not a major factor for DEM since protagonists in transitives can be inanimate and receive ergative marking.
- Past tense forms may be unmarked for ergative case, unlike in elicitation.

	Manange		Gurung		Nar		Gyalsumdo	
Verb forms	129	100%	292	100%	86	100%	99	**100%**
With overt A/S NPs	37	28.7%	116	39.7%	33	38.7%	41	41.4%
With ERG A/S	3	2.3%	26	8.9%	3	3.5%	4	4%
Intransitive	**92**	**71.3%**	145	49.7%	52	60.5%	45	45.5%
With overt S	26	20.2%	62	21.2%	24	27.9%	31	31.3%
With ERG S	0	0%	1	0.3%	0	0%	0	0%
Complement-taking	**35**	**27.2%**	147	50.3%	34	39.5%	54	54.5%
With overt A	11	8.5%	54	18.5%	9	10.5%	10	9.9%
With ERG A	3	2.3%	27	9.2%	3	3.5%	4	4%
With overt P	25	19.4%	101	34.6%	16	20.9%	33	33.3%
With DAT P	0	0%	2	0.7%	0	0%	4	4%
Unclear	**2**	**1.6%**	0	**0%**	0	**0%**	0	**0%**

Table 1. Summary descriptive statistics of the distribution of ERG and DAT marked subjects in discourse for four languages of Manang district, Nepal.

3. Can DEM variables be used as predictors of ergative case?
The low incidence of argument NPs in Tamangic discourse (see Table 1) in general means that a very large body of data is likely to be needed to investigate multiple variables. However, initial statistical investigation suggests that some tentative conclusions are possible.

Overt subject as a predictor of discontinuity of reference (Pearson's Chi square):
Manange:　　p .0005
Nar:　　　　p .0014
Gurung:　　p .0629

For the Manange and Nar data investigated, there is a highly statistically significant relationship between the the occurrence of an NP and discontinuity of reference. This does not identify the same pattern in Gurung, probably because it cannot account for the large number of covert contextually identified subject referents.

Discontinuity of reference as a predictor of ergative case (Fisher's exact test):
Manange:　p .2286
Nar:　　　p .2330
Gurung:　　p .3929

The statistical data does not identify any relationship between discontinuity and reference and the occurrence of ergative case on the A's of verbs that can take complements. This demonstrates that an analysis strictly motivated by 'switches' cannot be correct.

Overt complement as a predictor of ergative case (Fisher's exact test):
Manange:　p 1.000
Nar:　　　p .0476
Gurung:　　p .4635

The distribution of ergative case in relation to the presence of an overt complement in Nar indicates that ergative case is significantly related to the presence of another argument . If this trend turns out to be sustained in a larger sample, it suggests the factors underlying case in Nar are very different from its sister languages.
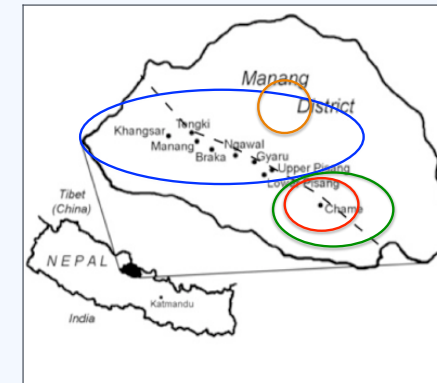
Map 1. Map showing the location of the four four main Tibeto-Burman languages of Manang

Tamangic:
Manange (NMM): *<5000 speakers*

Manang Gurung (GVR): *2000 speakers*

Nar (NPA): *400 speakers*

Tibetic:
Gyalsumdo: 200 speakers

4. Other factors underlying DEM distribution in Tamangic discourse
While DEM potential is influenced by differences in the referential density and case-inventory of each language, the overall distribution of ergative case is determined primarily by the information-structure of the clause. Most noticeably, ergative marking in Manange and Gurung is typically found with verbs of speech, and although this is a facet of discourse structure as speech verbs do not consistently behave in this way.

Manange: All the predicates in our small sample (n = 3) occur with predicates expressing communication: *say, curse and give a curse*. However, not all speech predicates have ergative marking.
- Of the nine instances of pi 'say' only two have overt subjects, one of which is ergative marked, while the other is absolutive demonstrating that this is not an instance of lexically governed case.

Gurung: Of the complement-taking verbs with ergative case marking in our sample (n = 27), 63% are with verbs of speech/psych verbs.
- 48% (n = 13) are the verb pi 'say', while other predicates of communication or thought account for an additional 15% (n = 4) are *se* 'know (a person)' and *ənurodh la* 'make a request'.

5. Summary
For some languages, discourse-structural features (such as information structure) are a more important factor for case marking than structural relations.

This is highlighted by the fact that the conditions underlying DEM that are revealed through elicitation only provide the contexts in which variability is most likely – not the actual distribution of case in discourse.

In Manange and Nar, the presence of an S/A argument significantly correlates with a switch in reference, and in Nar ergative case also correlates with the presence of two overt arguments. In Gurung we observe a more complex situation and it is likely that additional discourse pragmatic factors will reveal the conditions that determine DEM.

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