Differential subject marking in Kashmiri

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Differential subject marking (hereafter, DSM) is a phenomenon where a subset of arguments in the subject position takes different case marking (or lack of it). One primary characteristic of constructions of DSM is that subject argument takes different or alternating case endings. This study theoretically examines characteristics of DSM with empirical evidence from Kashmiri language. Kashmiri is a non-tonal, verb-second language from Dardic group of languages with SVO word order. It is a split ergative language in its past tense. It shows differential subjects with nominative, ergative, dative, and genitive markings. For example:

(1) sur_i-e   vutS^h penin brer
    Children-ERG see.Pst self$_{i/*j}$-GEN cat
    "The children$_i$ saw/looked at self 's$_{i/*j}$ cat".

(2) sur_i-en   a:yi.   panin brer at^{hj}
    Children-DAT come self$_{i/*j}$-GEN cat see-Pst
    "The children$_i$(have) caught sight/seen self 's$_{i/*j}$ cat."

(3) bu go:s tSo:n da:k parit^h
    I-NOM go-Pst your mail read
    "I read your mail inadvertently."

(4) baʃiras   pazi   kə:m kar\i{}n
    Bashir-DAT must-mod work do-Prs
    "Bashir must do the work"

(5) temsund ba:zar gatsun chun\i{} meh pasand
    he-GEN market go-Inf neg. I-ERG like
    "I don't like his going to market"

Sentence (1) takes ergative subject, while (2) and (4) take dative case. Nominative case subjects are seen in (3). The non-null subject of gerundial constructions takes genitive subjects as seen in (5).

Theoretically, case is related to operation Agree (Chomsky 1995, 2000 a.o.) where the functional head and DPs involved, participate in the process of Agree where the case and agreement are closely tied. On the other hand, the relationship between case and agreement are dissociated, according to some scholars (Marantz 1991, Bobaljik 2008 a.o.) where case marking is essentially a post-syntactic phenomenon. Departing from this debate, DSM analysis in Kashmiri plays an important role in such debate to determine how the process of marking the differential subjects can be defined theoretically.

DSM in Kashmiri depends on the "nature" of the argument or DPs involved. For example, it may or may not vary according to pronominal or animacy status of the arguments. Simultaneously, DSM can depend on nature of verb or verb complex involved. Apart from these, the tense-aspect also play a significant role in determining DSM properties. Along with these, we test the subject properties of Kashmiri argument via four diagnostics: subject oriented reflexive binding, co-indexation of embedded null PRO and matrix subject, passivization and rules of auxiliaries. This study also describes how each verb types of unergative, unaccusative, transitives and ditransitive interact with subjects in Kashmiri.

(6) ro:hnas   chi   pond a:muts

Rohan-DAT be-Prs sneeze-F come-Perf
"Rohan has sneezed"

(7) *ro:hnan   chu osmut*
Rohan-ERG be-Prs laugh-Perf
"Rohan has laughed"

(8) *haptan   kho:tsnəy shurʲ s*
Bear-ERG frighten-Pst child-pl
"The bear frightened the children "

(9) *bashiran   dits   meh   kita:b*
Bashir-ERG give-Pst   me   book-F-sg
Bashir gave the book to me

(10) *bashir   chu.   meh dohai ropaj diva:n*
Bashir.NOM be-Prs me everyday penny give-Prs
Bashir gives me a penny every day

In (6-7), we see that sneeze-type unergative take dative case marked subject, whereas laugh-type unergative take ergative-marked subjects respectively. In (9-10), the ditransitive verb 'give' takes subject with the unmarked nominative case in the former in the present tense, but the ergative marked subject in the past tense. The transitive in (8) takes ergative subject in the past tense. These are some evidence of variations found in subject marking in Kashmiri. Therefore, the influence of all the C, T and v functional heads are seen here. Thus, this study theoretically examines all these characteristics of DSM with empirical evidence from Kashmiri language.

Selected Reference:

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