

Book Review

Eystein Dahl and Krzysztof Stroński (eds.). *Indo-Aryan ergativity in typological and diachronic perspective* (Typological studies in language 112). Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2016, 267 pp., ISBN 978-90-272-06930. €99.00

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<https://doi.org/10.1515/jsall-2018-0002>

Geoffrey Haig, in the introduction to his book from 2008, notes that alignment change in Iranian has not been studied extensively and states that “[t]his is all the more surprising given that the other well-documented case of alignment change in Indo-European, the rise of ergativity in Indo-Aryan, continues to attract intense attention from linguists of all persuasions.” (Haig 2008: 2) However, while the number of studies that remark on ergativity in Indo-Aryan is indeed significant, the majority of them focus on only a few aspects (in particular, the characterization of the original Old Indo-Aryan construction that came to develop ergative characteristics). Moreover, re-iterations of examples and arguments from a handful of classical works (in particular, studies such as Benveniste 1952; Klaiman 1978; Hock 1986; Peterson 1998) continue to take centre stage. Thus, the number of publications as such should not be interpreted as a sign that ergativity in Indo-Aryan is a well-studied or well-understood research domain. In particular, large-scale corpus studies are few and far between. The papers in this volume on *Indo-Aryan Ergativity in Typological and Diachronic Perspective*, edited by Eystein Dahl and Krzysztof Stroński, address several topics that have not been discussed in any detail before, and the specialist will find some interesting material where new data is presented.

The volume consists of one introductory overview paper by the editors and seven research papers by a number of specialists on Indo-Aryan languages. Beyond the general topic of ergativity in Indo-Aryan, the papers are not interwoven particularly tightly. I will therefore begin with only a couple of general remarks, then turn to briefly discussing each paper in turn, and conclude with some comments on the over-arching question of the origins of the ergative construction.

Most papers discuss both case marking and verb agreement and some (in particular Stroński’s, but also Khokhlova’s paper) explore so-called behavioural aspects of ergativity, such as converb control and conjunction reduction. Most

papers place the study of ergativity within a broader grammatical context, e.g. in connection to other types of alignment and/or argument structure, or the tense-aspect-mood (TAM) system as a whole. Cross-linguistic research and typological terminology feature in some of the papers; in several cases however, terminology is used in a way which deviates somewhat from general usage in the literature. There are some papers in this volume which would have benefitted from more rigorous proof-reading, for instance with regard to spelling errors, style, glossing, or formatting. Overall, specialists of Indo-Aryan may be best-equipped to assess the evidence and arguments presented, and the material found in this volume might be of interest to them.

In the introductory paper “Ergativity in Indo-Aryan and beyond” (1–37), the editors offer, in their words, “an overview of the current state of the art of research on ergativity in Indo-Aryan” (p. 1). The chapter starts off with general introductory remarks on ergative alignment, drawing on a number of classical studies such as Dixon (1979), Comrie (1978), Trask (1979), and other contributions, both early as well as more recent. Some inconsistencies notwithstanding (e.g. morphological forms are compared with syntactic constructions, and syntactic roles with semantic roles), important aspects are mentioned such as the independence of case marking and verbal agreement, the distinction between morphological and syntactic ergativity, and the different etymological sources of ergative case markers. The well-known alignment splits depending on TAM values or the status of arguments on “referentiality hierarchies” are outlined. The latter are presented as closely related to differential and optional case marking, following McGregor (2010). This first section concludes with the claim of a “close formal and diachronic relationship between ergative, passive, and inverse categories across languages”, which is not, however, further substantiated (but see the discussion of Dahl’s paper below). It is not quite clear why not only passives, but also inverse constructions are characterized as de-transitivizing.

The authors go on to offer an overview of the Indo-Aryan languages, covering Old, Middle, and, in particular, New Indo-Aryan languages, and give a brief overview of the distribution of ergative alignment in contemporary Indo-Aryan. Using examples from a small handful of languages, and foreshadowing some of the contents of the papers in this volume, the authors give a taste of the heterogeneity of ergative alignment across different Indo-Aryan languages. For instance, some languages may be analyzed as displaying differential or optional case marking on top of, or instead of, ergative alignment. In other cases, it is debatable whether we are dealing with a referentiality split in addition to the TAM split that Indo-Aryan languages are known for, besides other sources of variation.

The authors then outline previous proposals regarding the origins of ergativity in Indo-Aryan, i.e. regarding the status of the construction built around the predicated *tá*-form. The classical approaches of an origin as a passive or resultative are sketched, as well as the possibility that the construction had always been ergative. While I do not agree with all of the authors' assessments, nor consider all the examples actually supportive of their points, this outline presents a useful survey of the literature. In the last section, developments through MIA (Middle Indo-Aryan) and into NIA (New Indo-Aryan) are outlined based on contributions in this volume. I refer the reader to my discussions of the individual papers below.

In their paper "Looking for ergativity in Indo-Aryan" (39–60), Saartje Verbeke and Eva De Clercq make a case against the view that New Indo-Aryan languages are "completely ergative languages". "Completely ergative" here denotes a situation where (in principle) all transitive constructions in a language show ergative patterns both in case marking and verb agreement. While it remains an open question whether anyone has ever claimed that NIA languages, or indeed any language, is "completely ergative", the shift away from focussing only on ergativity itself to the broader landscape of alignment is certainly a welcome one, as it gives a sense of how wide-spread and how dominant a pattern ergativity is in the selected NIA languages. The authors show how ergative alignment is restricted to certain TAM values and is also influenced by the status of A and O arguments on "referential hierarchies" of various kinds (see p. 41 for an enumeration of various hierarchies that have been proposed, relating to "referentiality", "animacy", "topicality" etc., all of which are said to be relevant in this study). Eight constructions in 22 languages are studied, resulting from the combinations of the parameters of perfectivity vs. imperfectivity and high and low "referentiality" of the A and O arguments. The resulting 168 constructions are then analyzed with regard to case marking and verb agreement.

It is clear that the analytical grid applied in this study is quite coarse, as various "referentiality hierarchies" are included. Similarly, agreement and cross-referencing by pronominal clitics are treated as the same phenomenon. With regard to the first point, taking into account all sorts of hierarchies leads to the classification of the same kinds of forms in quite different ways across the various languages. For instance, Table (7) lists a low value for the referentiality of O in Nepali, and the same for both O and A in Asamiya, but then the Nepali and Asamiya examples (6) and (7) involve only pronouns. Thus, it might be worth-while to explore in future studies whether there are interesting generalizations across various types of hierarchies, or whether these should rather be treated separately. In a couple of instances, the motivation for a certain conclusion is not fully transparent. For instance, it is not quite clear why the

referentiality of the O argument is said not to affect alignment (“there is no convincing association between verb agreement and the referential properties of O”, p. 48), while the authors demonstrate repeatedly throughout the chapter that there is a connection (see the figures on pp. 47–48 and the “exceptions” discussed on p. 48).

Eystein Dahl presents a study of “The origin and development of the Old Indo-Aryan predicated *-tā* construction through different historical stages of Vedic Sanskrit” (61–108). In previous studies, authors typically assumed that there is one stage prior to ergative status (if any), namely passive or resultative. Dahl, by contrast, proposes three previous stages, where “predicated deverbal adjectives develop into passive constructions, passives into inverse constructions and inverse constructions into ergatives” (p. 83), analyzing the Indo-Aryan case as modelled on Gildea’s (1997) analysis for Cariban. However, while it is very welcome that literature on other language families is drawn on, the data cited in this paper do not offer clear support for Dahl’s proposal. I restrict my remarks to the proposed passive and inverse stages.

The passive analysis fails for the same reason it has failed before, namely that the predicated *tā*-construction does not represent a detransitivizing voice. It is formed from intransitives just as much as from transitives and does not normally have a “passive” reading with the former, as has been pointed out by numerous authors. (See further my concluding remarks below.) Presupposing that Gildea’s pathway must apply to Vedic, so that dynamic instead of stative readings are automatically interpreted as evidence for passive status (p. 83), precludes alternative analyses. To include clearly resultative usages of the *tā*-form as evidence for the passive analysis, even ones where the *tā*-form is compounded, is revealing of the lack of supportive evidence (examples 16a–c). Explaining the evidence from intransitives combining with overt, even lexical arguments (and thus not allowing for an impersonal reading) by positing a split into two constructions has the appearance of a stipulation: “the simplest explanation is that the Early Vedic construction with a predicated, P-oriented verbal adjective has split into a passive construction that mainly comprises patientive two-place predicates and a marginal intransitive construction that is restricted to unaccusative verbs” (p. 88).

The argument for an inverse stage is also somewhat problematic. It rests on the idea that the predicative *tā*-construction expanded to “reflexive” and “anticausative” verbs and to verbs with low agentivity features. However, it seems that these terms may just be other words for “intransitive”, as neither a reflexive nor an anticausative analysis is self-evident. However, calling them intransitive would of course be problematic given the assumed preceding passive stage. Another difficulty is that the majority of examples in this section

strongly suggest a stative, i.e. resultative, meaning, rather than a dynamic one. Thus, instead of a development from a passive into an inverse, we may simply still be dealing with the original use as a resultative. Dahl also fails to mention what might be the “direct” construction, the expected counterpart to the “inverse” one. Overall, the quite rich counter-evidence, while pointed out by the author himself, is ignored in his analysis. Above and beyond the resultative readings, there is the low frequency of the construction (even though Dahl otherwise strongly relies on frequency in this chapter) and the frequent agent deletion, both of which are uncharacteristic for an inverse, as pointed out by the author (following Gildea). Dahl instead accepts only evidence that supports his argument, such as that instrumental-marked A arguments are often inanimate (which ignores the often animate genitive-marked A arguments).

Overall, one cannot escape the impression that a major effort has been made to mould the Indo-Aryan data into the pathway that Gildea proposed for Cariban, rather than letting the data point the way. Dahl presupposes the appropriateness of Gildea’s scenario from the start: “the real problem concerns which of these categories [i.e. deverbal adjectives, passives, or inverse constructions, all featuring in Gildea’s analysis] the Vedic *-tā* construction represents or, put otherwise, where in the chain it is located.” (p. 63) If this paper is stripped of this enforced pathway, however, and if the partially vague description and analysis are peeled away, interesting material and several insightful observations can be found, which might benefit future research into the history of ergativity in Indo-Aryan.

In his paper “On the establishment of ergative alignment during the Late Middle Indo-Aryan period” (109–131), Vít Bubeník addresses the topic of the development of case marking in the pronominal domain from Late Middle Indic into New Indic. He argues that ergativity only arose in Late Middle Indic and that the development of the absolutive case (a syncretic result of the merger of nominative and accusative) was a major milestone in the development of ergative syntax. I restrict my remarks to the core of this paper, namely Bubeník’s claims regarding the development of pronominal case marking in Middle Indic.

In reading this paper it is important to note the following terminological convention. Bubeník outlines in this article what he refers to as a “double-oblique” system for the 1st and 2nd person singular pronouns in Late Middle Indo-Aryan (Apabhraṃśa), highlighting its cross-linguistically rare occurrence. His usage of the term “double-oblique”, however, is not the usual one, where both the A and O argument of a transitive construction are marked in the same way, namely by some kind of oblique case morpheme, while S is marked differently or unmarked, a phenomenon which is indeed cross-linguistically very rare (see e.g. Song 2001: 146, Haig 2008: 226–227). Bubeník, by contrast,

applies the term to the situation where the form of the O argument in an imperfective construction is the same form as the A argument in a perfective construction. Thus, he is concerned with the identity of case markers across different constructions, whereas “double-oblique” as used normally refers to the marking of A and O within one and the same construction.

With regard to the main thrust of this paper, it is not quite clear why Bubeník argues that the syncretism of case forms into the “absolutive” case in Middle Indic was essential for the establishment of ergative alignment. Even before this syncretism, we find one marker for S and O arguments when combining with *tā*-forms, and a different one for A arguments. The question of which other arguments, in which other constructions or TAM domains, are also marked by these same markers, would seem irrelevant for the question of alignment in the perfective domain.

Irrespective of these points, the syncretisms in the pronominal, as well as nominal, domain are indeed a very interesting topic, as they follow various different paths, the exact nature of which is certainly worth exploring. The data provided in this paper offer insights into this landscape of different pathways, a topic which will hopefully continue to attract attention in the future.

Annie Montaut (“Why the ergative case in modal (in)transitive clauses? The historical evolution of aspect, modality, ergative and locative in Indo-Aryan”, 133–163) comments on similarities in the development of “pre-ergative” alignment both in the “past system” and in the “modal future system”, across both Indo-Aryan and Romance languages. Like some authors before her (e.g. Hock 1986; Kuryłowicz 1965), she notes similarities between, on the one hand, the Indic *tā*-forms and their cognates in Latin, and, on the other hand, gerunds in both branches, all of which combine with a nominative-marked O argument and an oblique-marked A argument (instrumental in Indic, dative in Latin). She goes on to (re-)interpret the Indic ergative marker (both the old inflectional instrumental morpheme, and the more recent ergative postpositional marking) as essentially locative in meaning, and to establish a general ergative-dative-locative connection by looking at syncretisms and possible etymologies of such case markers in various New Indo-Aryan languages. She posits that a locative meaning can generally be assumed to be the semantic core or origin. While the term “localist” is not used, this paper can be regarded as a synchronic and diachronic localist analysis of the ergative construction in Indo-Aryan, as well as of certain other constructions with oblique case-marked subjects, both in Indo-Aryan and in Romance. While showing certain functional and formal resemblances, it is worth noting that several of the constructions compared only show partial or no overlaps in terms of the morphological forms involved. There are a number of examples where it is not entirely clear why a locative-like interpretation is

chosen over an instrumental or agentive one (e.g. examples 33a, 33b, 34, 37). Some terminological points would call for clarification. For example, the statement that there is “little doubt about the passive morphology of the predicate in Sanskrit” (p. 137) is somewhat imprecise (“predicate” refers to the *tā*-form used predicatively) and lacks support as a claim. Some glossing mistakes (e.g. in examples 1, 19) call for a close read. For full comprehension and assessment, this paper is likely to require knowledge of Indo-Aryan historical syntax.

Liudmila V. Khokhlova in her paper “Ergative alignment in Western New Indo-Aryan languages from a historical perspective” (165–199) discusses the development of ergative alignment in Punjabi, Gujarati, and Rajasthani from the fourteenth century until today. Khokhlova outlines how the three languages at first developed in similar ways, but later grew apart. The first stage involves case syncretism in certain nominal and pronominal paradigms, leading to a partial loss of ergativity in the domain of case marking. The second stage involves the development of “special O-markers”. In the third stage, the languages develop apart with regard to whether or not a distinct ergative marker appears as well as with regard to verb agreement.

Khokhlova’s paper lays out an intricate landscape of historical pathways. I restrict my remarks to the core of the paper dealing with the so-called coding properties, i.e. case marking and verb agreement. Like some other papers in this volume, this study draws attention to the variability of ergativity across languages and across historical periods, which is a very welcome effort to expand our knowledge of the role of ergativity in Indo-Aryan. As a result, some classic assumptions about Indo-Aryan ergativity, such as Trask’s (1979) classification of Indo-Aryan as showing Type B ergativity (i.e. where the verb does not agree in person with the “direct object”), are challenged (p. 172). While the general scenario of the three developmental stages summarized above is laid out, the specifics of what patterns existed at what stage are not always straightforward to ascertain. One of the reasons is that, while many examples are provided, TAM categories are often mixed. Alignment is notoriously split along the TAM axis in Indo-Aryan languages, so that to take an intransitive example from one aspectual category and a transitive one from the other aspectual category will not tell us about the alignment in either TAM domain (e.g. in examples 8, 9a–c, 12a–c, 13a–c, 31a–c etc.) In a similar vein, in some cases, the nominal expression in question is embedded in a converb construction (example 11b) or in a complement clause (examples 13b, 14b), which also precludes a verification of the basic alignment pattern. Additionally, some more general statements are not always verifiable or clear given the evidence provided. For instance, it is claimed on p. 167 that “since the times of Proto-Indo-European, the *ta*-participle construction has demonstrated ergative

alignment”, as a justification for which Classical Sanskrit sentences are cited (see also the conflicting statements on whether ergativity is lost or not in the first paragraph on p. 179). The methodological and argumentative complications notwithstanding, several individual topics touched on in this paper are certainly of interest and deserve further exploration.

In his paper on “The restoration of the ergative case marking of ‘A’ in perfective clauses in New Indo-Aryan” (201–236), Andrea Drocco studies the history of the ergative postposition *ne*, found for instance in Hindi (Hindī) and Punjabi (Pañjābī). Drocco focuses on the apparent optionality of *ne* in seventeenth and eighteenth century Braj-bhāṣā before *ne* becomes an obligatory ergative marker; Braj-bhāṣā is believed to be one of the varieties that modern Hindi developed from. Drocco finds that *ne* is most frequent with common nouns, less so with proper nouns, and comparatively rare with nouns that combine with titles. Drocco attributes this pattern to “inherent topicality” (p. 224) and later to “animacy” (p. 231); thus, based on Drocco’s statements, the data might be interpreted as spreading from less “inherently topical” or less “animate” to more “inherently topical” or “animate”. Studying some verbs in detail, Drocco finds the additional pattern that, if the O argument is human, the probability of A arguments combining with *ne*, even regarding nouns combining with titles, is much higher. In such cases, one might speculate that the relative “inherent topicality” or “animacy” of A relative to O is decreased.

This paper presents the first detailed investigation of the development of *ne* from an “optional” into an obligatory ergative marker. Above and beyond insights into factors determining the distribution of *ne*, Drocco presents his study against the backdrop of the case syncretism of A and S argument markers in perfective clauses in both the pronominal and nominal domains. It becomes clear that the distribution of *ne* cannot be linked directly to cases where A and S marking has collapsed into the same form. For instance, the syncretic A and S marking in plural personal pronouns does not trigger marking by *ne* (as shown in examples 43, 44). Given this evidence, Drocco’s characterization of the obligatorification as “restorative”, i.e. as re-establishing distinctive marking of A and S in all pronominal and nominal forms, seems unsubstantiated. First of all, some forms, nominal and pronominal, singular and plural, always retain the A/S contrast, so that A/S contrast is always upheld on a paradigmatic level. Secondly, Drocco himself shows that factors having to do with the “inherent topicality” or “animacy” may explain the distribution of *ne*, rather than the case marking of A and S. These points of interpretation and characterization notwithstanding, Drocco’s study presents a major step forward in understanding the history of ergative marking in Hindi and neighbouring varieties, which will hopefully continue to be explored in detail. In particular, exploring further

what semantic or other parameters exactly are at work in determining the changing distribution of *ne* is likely to provide valuable insights.

Building on Bickel and Yāda (2000), Krzysztof Stroński in his paper on “Syntactic lability vs. ergativity in Indo-Aryan” (237–258) argues that certain early NIA languages are not always sensitive to an A/S pivot, despite the wide-spread assumption that modern Indo-Aryan languages are morphologically ergative, but syntactically accusative. Stroński studies conjunction reduction and converb control which, according to him, do not provide exclusive evidence for an A/S pivot, but also show sensitivity to non-A or non-A/S arguments. With regard to conjunction reduction, a difficulty with several examples cited is that it is not clear whether we are in fact dealing with complex clauses rather than with separate clauses, as there is no overt sign of co-ordination or sub-ordination. Cases like example (27) with a contrastive conjunction are the exception. Thus, the phenomena presented may simply be accounted for by the age-old propensity for zero arguments in Indo-Aryan, including zero O arguments (see pp. 245–246), instead of by conjunction reduction. In at least one case (example 21), it may be argued that the deletion pertains to two O arguments, rather than to S and O. With regard to converb control, while example 34 shows S/O control, Stroński highlights that there are many cases where there is no control by any argument of the matrix clause, but the converb clause is rather an only very loosely adjoined adverbial expression, both in the early NIA varieties and in modern Hindi (e.g. the Hindi example 38, which translates roughly into ‘The morning having happened/come, I saw [sth.]’). Thus, this construction type may not lend itself very well to testing grammatical relations in the first place. Overall, even while it is not quite clear whether several of the examples in fact provide support for the arguments proposed, I fully agree with the author that “the notion of pivot [i.e. of an A/S pivot, UR] actually does not grasp the whole array of phenomena observed in early NIA texts”.

I conclude with some general remarks relating to the central question that has been asked with regard to ergativity in Indo-Aryan both in the existing literature and in the present volume, namely of how to characterize the origins of the ergative construction. This volume does not bring us any closer to a consensus view on the age-old question of the precise nature of the construction that gave rise to ergativity in Indo-Aryan. To re-iterate, this construction has as its nucleus the so-called *tā*-form, i.e. a verbal root combining with this morpheme, (in the case of some verbal roots involving the morpheme *nā* instead), a deverbal adjectival form that seems to have usually displayed resultative meaning in the earliest stages of Old Indic. This form appears in the course of early Old Indic in the function of a main predicate, at first only with O or S arguments, and then also with genitive- or instrumental-marked A arguments when transitive; instrumental marking of A survives in Indo-Aryan (in contrast to Iranian, where genitive

marking survives). Somewhat surprisingly, most papers in this volume portray the “passive-to-ergative” analysis as the standard hypothesis for how this construction developed. A portrayal of the passive-to-ergative hypothesis as standard strongly downplays the many dissenting voices (e.g. Klaiman 1978; Hock 1986; Peterson 1998; Bynon 2005; also Haig 2008 for Iranian). These studies highlight that the OIA construction built around the predicated *tā*-form does not in fact qualify for a passive in the traditional sense of a de-transitivizing voice. It is formed not only from transitive forms, but also productively from intransitive ones, which calls into question an analysis of de-transitivization. Moreover, *tā*-forms formed from intransitives are normally interpreted in an agent-oriented way and only sometimes in an undergoer-oriented way. Intransitive *tā*-constructions also only rarely allow for impersonal readings, which is how passives that do expand into the intransitive sphere normally behave. Other points could be raised, such as the information-structural profile that does not match a passive, but I refer the reader to the literature quoted above for these and further problems with the passive hypothesis.

Overall, it seems that the choice of terminology, whether someone opts for a “passive-to-ergative” analysis or not, mainly comes down to the following. Some people use “passive” in a loose way pertaining to constructions where undergoer-like arguments possess some subject properties (in particular, are nominative-marked and control agreement). In the traditional and typological understanding, this fact does not suffice to diagnose passive status, however, since such properties of undergoer-like arguments also characterize various other types of constructions – e.g. ergative or certain resultative ones, but also other ones such as the gerund construction in Indo-Aryan outlined in Hock (1986), and yet further construction types in other languages, e.g. undergoer voice constructions in certain Austronesian languages (see Riesberg 2014).

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