Non-Canonical Argument Marking: Beyond Volitionality, Specificity and Animacy

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To date, two major factors influencing the function, interpretation and historical development of case have been identified: 1) agency and affectedness (e.g., Van Valin 2004, Dowty 1991) or transitivity in the sense of Hopper and Thompson (1980); 2) spatial relations (e.g., as in the Localist Tradition and subsequent developments). Interestingly, though, accounts of case marking and the interaction of case marking with word order and prominence tend to focus on factors falling into one of these two areas, but not both. In this paper we argue that in order to achieve a better understanding of case in interaction with word order and prominence, factors from both of these major areas need to be considered simultaneously, rather than separately (i.e., factors such as animacy, volitionality, affectedness, specificity/definiteness in combination with spatial relations such as source, goal, location, accompaniment).

Much of previous work on non-canonical argument marking in Urdu/Hindi has focused on ergativity, dative subjects, the semantic import of specificity and/or animacy of the accusative/dative marker ko and the affectedness alternation found in causatives between the instrumental se and the ko marker (e.g., see Butt and King 2005 for a brief overview). In this paper, in contrast, we focus on case markers expressing argument (not adjunct) relations such as ‘with, by, through, on, from’. We analyze data from Urdu/Hindi and compare it with patterns of usage in the closely related languages Punjabi and Nepali. The table in (1) shows the different types of case markers used in these languages. As can be seen, Urdu/Hindi uses se for instrumental as well as ablative and comitative uses, Punjabi uses the marker nal for both comitative and instrument uses, whereas Nepali has instantiated a different marker for each of these uses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Ablative</th>
<th>Comitative</th>
<th>Instrument</th>
<th>Dative/Accusative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urdu/Hindi</td>
<td>se</td>
<td>se</td>
<td>se</td>
<td>ko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punjabi</td>
<td>tô</td>
<td>nal</td>
<td>nal</td>
<td>nũ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepali</td>
<td>baṭɔ</td>
<td>sαngα</td>
<td>le</td>
<td>lai</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Urdu/Hindi, Punjabi and Nepali are New Indo-Aryan languages. All of the case markers in table (1) are derived from spatial postpositions already available in Middle Indo-Aryan. We claim that as these originally spatial relations were pressed
into service to mark the arguments of a verb as in the examples in (2), they are simultaneously interpreted with respect to the transitivity dimension.

(2) a. \text{ram=ne} \text{ sita=se} \text{ sadi} \text{ ki} \\
\text{Ram.M=ERG} \text{ Sita.F=COM} \text{ marriage.F} \text{ do.PERF.F.SG} \\
‘Ram married Sita.’ (Urdu/Hindi)

b. \text{ram=ne} \text{ sita=nal} \text{ sadi} \text{ ki-ti} \\
\text{Ram.M=ERG} \text{ Sita.F=COM} \text{ marriage.F} \text{ do-PAST.F.SG} \\
‘Ram married Sita.’ (Punjabi)

c. \text{ram=le} \text{ sita=s\text{\textalpha}ng\text{\textalpha}} \text{ biha} \text{ g\text{\textalpha}r-\text{\textalpha}} \\
\text{Ram.M=ERG} \text{ Sita.F=COM} \text{ marriage} \text{ do.PERF.M.SG} \\
‘Ram married Sita.’ (Nepali)

Evidence for this claim comes from a close investigation of the case marking patterns found with both simple verbs and complex predications (as in (2)) that express meanings such as ‘fear’, ‘ask/beg’, ‘bless/capture’, ‘trust/doubt’, ‘talk/marry’ and ‘love/hate’. All in all we identify six relevant subclasses of verbs (the six listed above) and show that the case marking patterns can be analyzed systematically by means of the following semantic features 1) spatially motivated features: source, attached; 2) transitivity features: volitional, affected, logically impinged/touched but not affected (cf. Beavers 2006 for this latter property).

In sum, a major contribution of this paper to the workshop would be the presentation of a set of synchronic comparative data that has not been investigated before. This is coupled with a look at the historical developments (as far as they can be traced) and the proposal that originally spatial concepts are generally (re)interpreted with respect to a transitivity dimension, which leads to a range of non-canonical case markings of core verbal arguments. With respect to word order, we show that word order is only implicated with respect to non-canonical marking of subjects, via the notion of topicality (topics are generally clause-initial in the South Asian languages). Finally, and most importantly, we argue that an understanding of the synchronic and historical patterns of case use can only be understood by making reference to semantic factors that are drawn in parallel from concepts that encode space and agency/affectedness, respectively.

References