

Ergative/Nominative Alternations in Manipuri Intransitive Constructions

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Nominative/ergative alternations on the subjects of intransitive constructions in Manipuri are interesting in many respects. First, the subjects of perfective unergative clauses get ergative marking but the subjects of the perfective unaccusative get nominative marking. Second, in the generic statements (imperfective aspects), the subjects of the individual level predicates receive the ergative marking whereas the subjects of the stage level predicates get nominative case. Third, Manipuri does not have the distinct category of adjective. The notion of adjective is realized by stative verbs, which also subdivide into individual level and stage level predicates leading to ergative/nominative alternations on the subjects.

In this paper we develop the tests to determine the unergative/unaccusative distinction in the language. We suggest Manipuri has four such language internal tests: viz, the test of nominalization, the test of turning the clause into hortative constructions, the test of locative *-taa (daa)* in causative constructions, and the test of (in)ability constructions. Consider the following minimal pair:

- 1a. huraan-ba-naa maang-kh-re
steal-NOM-Erg disappear-Evd-Ant.Real
The thief got lost. <Ergative case, Unergative perfective>
- 1b. ma-pot maang-kh-re
3.Sg-thing disappear-Evd-Ant.Real
'His things got lost.' <Nominative case, Unergative perfective>

Next we observe the Manipuri data on the basis of cross-linguistic individual/stage level diagnostics and show that ergative aligns with individual level and nominative with stage level predicates. The following minimal pair illustrates this point:

- 2a. pok-pa-daa ngai-ri-pa angaang-naa yaam tum-i
bear-NOM-Loc remain-DUR-NOM child-Erg much sleep-Real
'The newly born babies sleep much.' <Individual level predicate>
- 2b. angaang tum-i
child sleep-Real
'The child is asleep.' <Stage level predicate>

This distinction of individual/stage level extends further to stative intransitive verbs that are semantic equivalent with adjectives in familiar languages like English. For example:

- 3a. tomba-naa wang-i
Tomba-Erg tall-Real
'Tomba is tall.' <Individual level>
- 3b. tomba haraaui
Tomba happy-Real
'Tomba is happy.' <Stage level>

The data observed in this paper show that the ergative is associated with initiation of the action or the possession of certain inherent permanent property. On the other hand, failure to initiate the action or possession of certain transitory but not permanent property of the subject leads to nominative marking.