

Aspectual Ergative as Perfective Oblique

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1. Introduction/Background

- ▶ Ergative systems often exhibit **splits** in case alignment
- ▶ Such splits are often based on clausal **aspect** (Silverstein, 1976; Moravcsik, 1978)
- ▶ Recent proposals link such splits to special properties of **imperfective** syntax (Laka, 2006; Coon, 2010)
- ▶ I argue instead that at least some ergatives are directly licensed by **perfective** syntax (partially returning to Mahajan, 1997's analysis): these "ergatives" are in fact obliques licensed by a prepositional Asp⁰ head.

2. Background

- ▶ Aspectual splits occur along a uniform hierarchy:
ERG/ABS alignment ← → NOM/ACC alignment
PERFECT ≫ PFV ≫ IMPF ≫ PROG

Exemplified by perfective-ergative link in Hindi:

- (1) Raam-ne vah kitaabē paṛhū hē
Ram-ERG those books read-PERF be-PRES
"Ram has read those books."
- (2) Raam vah kitaabē paṛhtaā thaa
Ram.NOM those books read-IMPF be-PRES
"Ram used to read those books."
[Mahajan 1997: (5), (9)]

- ▶ Two ways such splits have been accounted for:

1. Perfective is Special (Mahajan, 1997)

- ▶ Following Kayne (1993), perfect/perfective syntax contains a P⁰ involved in licensing the external argument.
- ▶ This P⁰ can incorporate to auxiliary BE to yield HAVE.
- ▶ In languages like Hindi this same P⁰ surfaces as ergative (=adpositional oblique) case.

2. Imperfective is Special (Laka, 2006; Coon, 2010)

- ▶ Following Laka's analysis of Basque progressives, Coon proposes that imperfective aspect is uniformly associated with larger/more marked structures than the perfective.
- ▶ These larger structures disrupt ergative case assignment by dividing clause into two separate case domains.
- ▶ Universal *directionality* of splits attributed to universal association between progressives/imperfectives and (larger) prepositional/locative syntax.
- ▶ Latter account is attractive, but depends on universally smaller structure in perfect/perfective.
 - ▶ This absence is typologically unjustified: perfectives are not universally unmarked (Comrie, 1976; Dahl, 1985), and are widely argued to include prepositional structure (Kayne, 1993, et seq.)

3. Oblique Perfects

- ▶ Mahajan (1997): the Hindi perfective-linked ergative is adpositional, i.e. **oblique** (as are many ergative markers: Anderson, 1976; Dixon, 1979, a.o.)
 - ▶ Can be separated from DP by an emphatic particle
 - ▶ Appears after both members of coordinated DP
- ▶ Kayne (1993): auxiliary HAVE reflects the presence of a prepositional element in the perfect.
 - ▶ Much evidence that possessive HAVE corresponds to BE + P⁰ (Benveniste, 1966; Freeze, 1992; Levinson, 2011, a.o.)
 - ▶ The fact that HAVE alternates with BE as a perfect auxiliary argues that the same P⁰ occurs in the syntax of the perfect
- ▶ **Yet More Striking:** Oblique subjects in "possessive perfects" Periphrastic perfects in Estonian and several Balto-Slavic languages require oblique marking on the clausal subject.

- (3) *Estonian* [Lindström and Trigel 2010:381]
- a. Mu-l on auto pes-tud.
I-ADE be.3SG car wash-PASS.PTCP
'My car is/has been washed.'/'I have washed the car.'
- b. Mu-l on juba maga-tud.
I-ADE be.3SG already sleep-PASS.PTCP
'I have already slept.'
- (4) *North Russian* [Kuz'mina and Nemčenko 1971:27]
- U lisicy uneseno kuročka.
at fox:GEN carried-off-NO chicken:NOM.F
'A fox has carried off a chicken.'

- ▶ Further evidence that perfect/perfective syntax provides a source for oblique case.
- ▶ Resemble Hindi ergative, but without ergative alignment.

Converging evidence that perfect/perfective syntax includes a prepositional element P⁰: in some languages P⁰ realized via auxiliary HAVE (Kayne, 1993); in others as oblique subject marking (Mahajan, 1997).

5. Conclusion & Implications

Core of the Proposal: Perfect/perfective Asp⁰ can directly license oblique subject marking.

- ▶ In some languages (e.g. Hindi) the same mechanisms that result in HAVE/BE selection give rise to a split ergative pattern for this oblique marking.
- ▶ **However**, this cannot be the **only** source of aspect-based splits: fails if ergative is clearly non-oblique, or if split falls between progressive and imperfective.

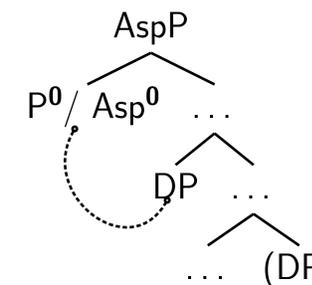
4. Asp⁰ Itself Licenses Oblique Subjects

Further Questions: Where does P⁰ come from? And whence ergative alignment?

Proposal: P⁰ is itself the head that contributes the semantics of perfect/perfective (cf. proposals of deep identity between temporal and locative relations: Demirdache and Uribe-Etxebarria, 2000; Ritter and Wiltschko, 2009, a.o..)

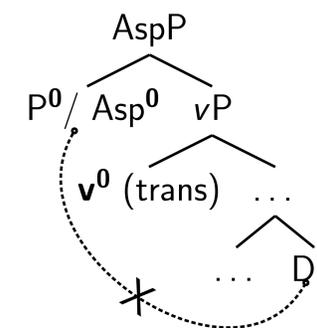
$$P^0 \approx Asp^0$$

- ▶ In "possessive perfects" Asp⁰/P⁰ licenses oblique on the highest DP in its complement—i.e. the surface subject—just as some prepositions license oblique marking on their DP complement.
- ▶ Thus the aspectual **split**: oblique licensed only by perfect/perfective Asp⁰.



- ▶ What gives rise to ergative alignment of oblique in languages like Hindi?
- ▶ Back to Mahajan (1997): striking parallel with HAVE/BE alternations

	Aux HAVE	ERG/OBL for Subj
Uniform	<i>English, Spanish</i>	<i>Estonian, North Russian</i>
Only in Transitive	<i>Italian, Dutch</i>	<i>Hindi</i>



- ▶ Bjorkman (2011): alternation between HAVE and BE arises because transitive syntax blocks relationship between Asp⁰/P⁰ and some lower element.
- ▶ Extension to Hindi ergative/oblique: transitive syntax blocks relationship between Asp⁰/P⁰ and an internal argument.

Some Remaining Issues:

- ▶ What is the relationship between Asp⁰/P⁰ and possessive P⁰?
- ▶ Why is Asp⁰/P⁰ realized sometimes via HAVE and sometimes via oblique?
- ▶ If the sources of split ergative are heterogenous, why do they give rise to the same hierarchy?

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For a complete list of references, please consult the accompanying handout, available on my website.