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GRAMMATICALIZATION AND THE HINDI ERGATIVE CONSTRUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

The main topic of this paper is the ergative construction in Hindi. This construction occurs in the perfect tenses and is constructed with the ergative postposition ne. The historical development of this construction is a much debated subject. The ancestor language of Hindi is Sanskrit, and this language does not possess an ergative construction. Hence, the ergative construction is apparently a recent development of the New Indo-Aryan languages. Yet different opinions are circulating. We will focus here on how its historical evolution has been explained by the theory of grammaticalization. The grammaticalizationist account of this particular change is however based in earlier linguistic theories. It will be necessary to briefly touch upon these too. We will start this paper by outlining the features of grammaticalization theory which are of importance when we relate them later with the development of the ergative construction. In the next section we consider what has been said about this development in grammaticalization literature. Following, we will focus more particularly on the evolution of the postposition *ne*. Three different theories about the origin of *ne* are discerned, of which two are related with grammaticalization theory. In the final section, we offer a conclusion.

GRAMMATICALIZATION THEORY: A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF ITS FEATURES

Grammaticalization theory is a quite recent theory about language change and its regularities. The theory is especially popular in functional linguistics, and standard works about grammaticalization are Hopper and Traugott (1993), Heine & Kuteva (2002), and the works of Christian Lehmann (2002). They refer to an article of Meillet

(1912) as the first reference to grammaticalization. Grammaticalization in its simple definition is the phenomenon that a change in a language has a certain directionality. The direction of any change is the same, therefore phenomena of grammaticalization are called 'unidirectional'. This direction is in particular the change of a lexical item into a (more) grammatical and less lexical item. The change is gradual, as there are several steps perceived, forming a diachronic continuum from lexicality to grammaticality.

A famous example is the negation in French. In Standard French one uses the double negation. The negation consists of two elements. One element *ne* (neg-1) is placed before the verb, *pas* (neg-2) follows the verb, as is exemplified in (1).

(1) *Je   ne   vois   pas   Marie.*
    I-subj   neg-1   see   neg-2   Mary-obj

    "I don't see Mary."

In colloquial unofficial French, the first negation element *ne* even disappears sometimes, as is illustrated in (2).

(2) *Je   la   vois   pas.*
    I-subj   her-obj   see   neg

    "I don't see her."

The origins of these negation particles can be traced back in data from old French. The *ne* element is the original negation. It has been there from the start of the language, probably it has evolved from the Latin *non*. The second element *pas* has a completely different evolution. In origin it was a noun, meaning "step" (coming from the Latin *passum*). *pas* was first used as an extra emphasis on the negation of a verb of movement, in the sense of 'I did not advance a step'. It clearly retained a lexical meaning here. However, in later examples *pas* became generalized to all environments and it was used with every verb, regardless the meaning of the verb. Hence it lost its original lexical sense of "step" to become a grammatical particle expressing negation.

Another similar example is the English "going to". Originally this construction was used to express a movement and an action following that movement. For example, "I am going to wash the dishes" meant earlier that I leave the building and I walk towards the kitchen and there I wash the dishes. Nowadays, the construction with "going to" expresses a future meaning. It has lost its original lexical meaning which the verb "to go" still has today. The particular construction with "going to" refers nowadays to something to be done in the near future.

It is often remarked that an example of grammaticalization should consist of a correlation of a formal and a semantic change. The semantic change refers to the loss of lexical meaning a grammaticalized construction displays. However, the construction gains a more grammatical meaning. The formal change is often called erosion, in the sense of a simplification or shortening of the form. The grammaticalized element changes into a simpler form. For instance in English one often hears "I'm gonna" instead of the earlier form "I'm going to". The construction with "I'm gonna" is only used in the sense of a near future expression. The relation with the verb "to go" is obscured here, the lexical meaning of movement has completely disappeared. Semantic changes thus go hand in hand with formal changes. Of course, when analyzing a grammaticalization phenomenon, it is important to take into consideration that there are different stages in a grammaticalization process. The semantic change could be already there, while a formal change is still lacking.

GRAMMATICALIZATION THEORY APPLIED TO THE EVOLUTION OF THE ERGATIVE CONSTRUCTION IN HINDI

The principles underlying grammaticalization theory are in se easily applicable to different kinds of language change. While doing synchronic research on the ergative construction in certain modern Indo-Aryan languages, I considered it important to understand the diachronic origins of the ergative *ne* construction. The grammaticalization approach could offer an interesting perspective on the change of an accusative into an ergative construction.

There are some opinions about this change in grammaticalization literature, although it has not been treated extensively. Christian Lehmann (2002) mentions it in his 'Thoughts on grammaticalization'. He treats it when dealing with grammaticalization of cases. He focuses in the first place on the ergative case, not on the construction itself. Heine & Kuteva (2002) consider the appearance of the ergative in Indo-Aryan languages as an example of grammaticalization in their 'World lexicon of grammaticalization'. Before proceeding to these accounts, in the following section an overview of the historical past of the ergative construction in Hindi is given.

A SHORT OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORICAL ORIGIN OF THE ERGATIVE CONSTRUCTION

The ergative construction in Hindi appears when a perfect tense is used. In that case, the verb agrees with the logical object (when inanimate and indefinite) in gender and number, while the logical subject takes the ergative case marking in the form of the postposition *ne*. An example is given in (3).

(3) *maiM-ne*   *kitAb*   *parh-I.*
    I-Erg   book-Nom.f.sg. read-Perf. Nom.f.sg.

   "I read a book"

It is generally accepted that that the historical origin of the ergative construction in Hindi is the Old Indo-Aryan construction with the past passive participle ending on –*ta*, as exemplified in (4).

(4) *devadatt-ena*   *kat-aH*   *kRt-aH*
    D.-Ins   mat-Nom.m.sg. made-Nom.m.sg.

   "The mat was made by D."

The verb is here a participle with a passive meaning, viz. "made". Hence it agrees with its object *kat-aH.* If the agent is expressed, then it takes an instrumental case ending, and it appears as the instrumental agent added to a passive construction. The pattern of agreement in these two constructions (3) and (4) is almost identical. The difference is in the interpretation. Example (3) is treated as an active construction, while example (4) is generally considered a passive construction with a non-active verb.

In the transition of the past passive participle construction to the ergative construction two changes are involved. First, the past passive participle gets reanalyzed as the normal form to express past tense, losing its passive connotation all together (cf. Harris & Campbell 1998). Therefore, the perfect verb in Hindi is nowadays considered as an active conjugated verb. Secondly, a marker for the ergative case appears in the form of the postposition *ne*. *ne* is totally absent in the language stages before Early Hindi.

THE RECEPTION OF THIS TRANSITION IN GRAMMATICALIZATION THEORY

In grammaticalization literature, an immediate distinction is made between the emergence of the ergative marker and the change of passive to active construction. It is remarkable that only the change of the marker is considered as an instance of grammaticalization. The change in construction is not labeled as grammaticalization because one important feature of grammaticalization is lacking: the unidirectionality claim is not valid for the change of an ergative to an accusative construction. The change from accusative patterning to ergative patterning in any language is not an instance of grammaticalization, as this change is not unidirectional, because the change from ergative patterning to accusative patterning is equally possible (Heine & Kuteva 2002: 180). The claim of grammaticalization is thus immediately restricted to the change of the ergative marker.

Lehmann (2002) treats in this respect the appearance of the ergative marker as an instance of grammaticalization of cases. He also does not take into account the change of the full pattern of the construction. Lehmann's channel of the grammaticalization of cases considers each case on a different level in a grammaticalization continuum. He discerns first of all semantic cases and grammatical cases. Grammatical cases are the ones more grammaticalized. Semantic cases retain a large part of their lexical meaning. Examples of semantic cases are ablative, genitive, dative, instrumental etc. All of these express in a sense lexical meaning. The genitive stands for possession, while the instrumental represents means, and so forth. There are basically four grammatical cases; nominative, accusative, ergative and absolutive. The ergative and accusative are still less grammatical than the nominative and absolutive. As such, every case finds its place in Lehmann's channel. He discerns a cline from the instrumental case to the ergative case, he believes the instrumental has evolved into an ergative.

Now, if we take a closer look at the origin of this marker in Indo-Aryan, we might wonder why these grammaticalizationists consider the emergence of the Hindi postposition *ne* as an example of grammaticalization. We will look at some earlier theories about the origin of *ne*. The earliest theories about the emergence of *ne* by Western scholars conjecture that *ne* is a further evolution of the Sanskrit instrumental case-ending *-ena*. The ergative construction in Hindi finds its origins in the Old Indo-Aryan construction with the past passive participle ending on *–ta*, where the agent of the sentence, when it is present, is sometimes expressed by an instrumental case (cf. supra). As the ergative construction comes from this past participle construction, early scholars like Monier-Williams (1858) thought that the ergative marker in particular comes from the instrumental case marker. In later studies (Beames 1872-1879, Kellogg 1938) however, this has been rejected, as it is phonologically not very likely that a form like *-ena* becomes a postposition *ne*. Now we see that in grammaticalization literature, exactly this old theory about the origin of the ergative marker is used to prove the relation between instrumental and ergative. It is supposed that the ergative case is the result of the grammaticalization of the instrumental case.

Semantically, it can indeed be argued that an instrumental case has more lexical meaning than an ergative case, which is purely used as a syntactic agent. However, formally, there is no reason to accept a relation between ergative and instrumental, both the case marker and the postposition are unrelated.

So although the cline from instrumental to ergative does not exist, and hence is not an example of grammaticalization, there is another way we could speak of

grammaticalization related to case markers. Scholars of the early twentieth century, like Hoernle (1880) and Chatterji (1926), also did not accept the instrumental to ergative theory. They proposed that the origin of the *ne* postposition could be found in a lexical word, like the Sanskrit forms *karnena*, *janiye*, *lagi* etc… (This theory has been repeated by Butt 2001, where she considers *janiye* as the origin of *ne*.) Here we do see a correlation between formal and semantic 'erosion'. These words would have formally eroded to the short postposition *ne*, while they evolved on a semantic level to the grammatical value of case marker. Obviously, this sounds like an example of grammaticalization, be it in another way than as a grammaticalization of cases. This is the pure grammaticalization of a lexical item into a grammatical one. However, this evolution is not completely acceptable. First of all, Lehmann (2002) remarked that it is quite unusual that grammatical cases like nominative and ergative find their origin in a lexical item. Semantic cases come from a lexical item, eg. *ke upper* in Hindi is a locative case marker which comes from an adverb. According to Lehmann, the case markers of grammatical cases should come from semantic cases, as he posited the cline from instrumental to ergative.

Secondly, there are no attestations of any of these propositions of lexical words which were regularly added to the phrase used to express the agent of the sentence. Although the lack of attestations does not make a lexical origin of *ne* impossible, it may be not a very likely origin.

A third option to explain the origin of *ne* is the theory of borrowing. Again, this theory is remarkably old, it was first proposed by Hoernle (1880). Hoernle thought that the ergative postposition *ne* in Hindi was borrowed from Old Gujarati, where they used *ne* as a dative postposition. After the case markings in Prakrit and Early Hindi gradually disappeared, new postpositions came up. These postposition were first used to mark semantic cases, then they were also employed to mark the object case. Postpositions might have appeared because it was in some sentences unclear which phrase the object or subject of the sentence was. There was no different marking of subject and object in these sentences. In analogy with the other postpositions, a postposition for the ergative case was looked for, and was found in Gujarati *ne*. Hindi already possessed the *ko* postposition for the dative/accusative case, so it was possible to borrow this Gujarati postposition to mark the ergative case.

This possibility has nothing to do with grammaticalization, however, analogy and borrowing are the key concepts. It was only because postpositions were used for other cases that the *ne* postposition gained its place in the paradigm of case postpositions, in analogy with those other postpositions.

CONCLUSION

Of all three possibilities, we think that the borrowing theory is most likely, and it is most in accordance with the construction. After the past participle construction got reanalyzed to the normal way to express a perfect tense, an ergative case was created in this construction. It took the oblique case. However, after severe case syncretism it was not clear at all which role it played in the sentence. Therefore, a gap was created in the system, and this gap was filled with the ergative case marker, a postposition which was borrowed from Gujarati. This borrowed postposition thus functioned as a reinforcement of the oblique case-ending of the ergative subject.

Grammaticalization has as such in our opinion nothing to do with the change towards an ergative construction in Hindi, against earlier opinions. The change in construction itself was a case of reanalysis, as there is no unidirectionality involved. And the emergence of the marker is a case of borrowing, where analogy played a determining role.

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