

Dative subjects and Differential Object Marking

Miriam Butt – University of Konstanz
miriam.butt@uni-konstanz.de

1 Introduction

The literature on Differential Case Marking (DCM) has been studied from various different perspectives and with respect to a wide range of languages. Klaus von Heusinger has been a central contributor to the discussions, pushing the state of the art with respect to both analyses and languages covered, with a central theme being the underlying semantics governing DCM (e.g., von Heusinger & Kaiser 2011, Klein et al. 2012, von Heusinger 2018, von Heusinger & Tigãu 2019, von Heusinger & Sadeghpour 2020, Caro Reina et al. 2021). One example comes from Turkish, as illustrated in (1) from von Heusinger & Kornfilt (2021: 277) for which they argue in a series of papers (along with several co-authors) that overt accusative marking on indefinites signals epistemic specificity (von Heusinger & Kornfilt 2005, Kornfilt & von Heusinger 2009, von Heusinger & Bamyacı 2017, von Heusinger & Kornfilt 2017, Krause & von Heusinger 2019, von Heusinger et al. 2019), also citing experimental evidence from true partitives.

- (1) a. Mustafa bir sandalye satın al-dı-Ø
Mustafa a chair buy-PST-3.SG
'Mustafa bought a chair.'
- b. Mustafa bir sandalye-yi satın al-dı-Ø
Mustafa a chair-ACC buy-PST-3.SG
'Mustafa bought (certain) a chair.'

While DCM clearly has semantic underpinnings, a different strand of research has focused mainly on structural factors to explain the distribution of case in a language. Two influential but very different approaches have been formulated in terms of Optimality Theory (OT; Aissen 1999, 2003) and Dependent Case (Baker 2015). Within these two overall approaches, some work has focused specifically on case in Urdu/Hindi, which presents a satisfyingly complex problem.

This small contribution engages with the papers on Urdu/Hindi case by de Hoop & Narasimhan (2005) and Baker (2021) and focuses on claims made with respect to the interaction of dative subjects and DCM. The position taken in this paper is that while structural factors surely play a role in understanding the distribution of case in a language, they cannot provide a full account. Rather, systematic properties governing the relationship between arguments and the event structure of a predicate play a crucial role.

2 Claims and data

Both the Dependent Case and OT Approach to DCM were originally concerned with accounting for patterns of ergative vs. accusative alignment across languages (see Butt 2006 for a general discussion/overview of case alignment). For both approaches, the rather complex case marking patterns in Urdu/Hindi provide a challenge. In attempting to meet this challenge, de Hoop & Narasimhan (2005) formulate an account in terms of constraints that ensure Distinguishability of two core arguments on the one hand, but also serve the purpose of the Indexing/Identification of types of argument roles and their specific semantic contribution on the other hand. Identificational constraints ensure, for example, that agents are to be

preferentially associated with ergative marking and that prototypical patients are to be associated with accusative case.

While the identificational constraints do refer to systematic semantic factors, they are set up within a fundamentally binary opposition of agents vs. patients, whereby both agents and patients can also have weak (less prominent) or strong (more prominent) characteristics. Baker’s system also works in terms of a fundamentally binary opposition between two argument NPs, but the contrast is articulated strictly in terms of a structural relationship (c-command) between two NP arguments by which one argument is assigned overt marking (either accusative or ergative) while the other (dependent) argument remains unmarked.

Urdu/Hindi presents a challenging case for both the OT and Dependent Case approach because it questions this fundamentally binary, mutually dependent view of case organization. Data as in (2) and (3) taken together show that the Differential Object Marking (DOM) found with an unmarked (nominative) vs. accusative (*ko*-marked) opposition appears to be largely independent of whether the subject is ergative or not. The DOM is governed by a number of factors, the two most central ones being: 1) animate objects generally require the *ko*; 2) inanimate *ko* marked objects are to be interpreted as specific – the semantics of this are very close to that argued for for Turkish by von Stechow and co-authors over the years.

- (2) a. yasin=ne kamputar xarid-a
 Yassin.M.SG=ERG computer.M.SG.NOM buy-PERF.M.SG
 ‘Yassin bought a/some computer.’
- b. yasin=ne kamputar=ko xarid-a
 Yassin.M.SG=ERG computer.M.SG=ACC buy-PERF.M.SG
 ‘Yassin bought a (certain)/the computer.’
- (3) a. yasin kamputar xarid-e-g-a
 Yassin.M.SG.NOM computer.M.SG.NOM buy-3.SG-FUT-M.SG
 ‘Yassin will buy a/some computer.’
- b. yasin kamputar=ko xarid-e-g-a
 Yassin.M.SG.NOM computer.M.SG=ACC buy-3.SG-FUT-M.SG
 ‘Yassin bought a (certain)/the computer.’

For approaches in which the case marking of one argument is taken to be dependent on another, the overt accusative in the presence of an ergative is unexpected. In order to nevertheless account for the Urdu/Hindi data, Baker (2021) proposes to make use of the established idea that objects come in at least two versions, one of which is closer to the verb (within the VP, also termed “weak” object), the other of which may be found outside of the VP (also termed “strong” object). These two types of objects have crosslinguistically been associated with different types of semantics, with the “strong” object associated with definiteness/specificity and greater syntactic mobility within the clause (e.g., Diesing 1992, de Hoop 1996, Ramchand 1997, see also Butt 1993, Bhatt & Anagnostopoulou 1996, Butt & King 1996 on Urdu/Hindi specifically). Baker thus posits an object position outside of the immediate VP to which an originally nominative object can move and receive accusative case – this provides the necessary leeway in his system for both the assignment of ergative due to an original ergative-nominative structural configuration and the additional appearance of an accusative. de Hoop & Narasimhan (2005) similarly appeal to a difference between “weak” and “strong” arguments, building on de Hoop’s (1996) original work. In the spirit of that work, they appeal directly to semantics in their OT analysis, for example via the constraint which requires “strong” patients as in both (2b) and (3b) to be marked overtly with *ko*.

Of interest for this paper is that both de Hoop & Narasimhan (2005) and Baker (2021) present data from dative experiencer subjects to bolster their argumentation. As shown in (4) (based on Baker 2021) and (5)–(6) (based on de Hoop & Narasimhan 2005: 329), DOM of the type illustrated by (2) and (3) does not occur in dative subject experiencer clauses. In each case, only the unmarked (nominative) version is acceptable. Example (6) is particularly remarkable because Urdu/Hindi nominative/accusative DOM generally requires animate objects to be marked with *ko*, but this is completely ungrammatical in conjunction with a dative subject.¹

- (4) a. anu=ko bag^h=mē g^haṛi mil-i
 Anu.F.SG=DAT garden.M.SG=in watch.F.SG.NOM come.upon-PERF.F.SG
 ‘Anu found a/some watch in the garden.’
- b. *anu=ko bag^h=mē g^haṛi=ko mil-a
 Anu.F.SG=DAT garden.M.SG=in watch.F.SG=ACC come.upon-PERF.M.SG
 Intended: ‘Anu found a (certain)/the watch in the garden.’
- (5) a. ram=ko halva pasand he
 Ram.M.SG=DAT halva.M.SG.NOM liking.M be.PRES.3.SG
 ‘Ram likes halva.’
- b. *ram=ko halva=ko pasand he
 Ram.M.SG=DAT halva.M.SG=ACC liking.M be.PRES.3.SG
 Intended: ‘Ram likes halva.’
- (6) a. ram=ko vo laṛki pasand he
 Ram.M.SG=DAT that.OBL girl.F.SG=NOM liking.M be.PRES.3.SG
 ‘Ram likes that girl.’
- b. *ram=ko vs laṛki=ko pasand he
 Ram.M.SG=DAT that.NOM girl.F.SG=ACC liking.M be.PRES.3.SG
 Intended: ‘Ram likes that girl.’

De Hoop & Narasimhan (2005) propose that there is a partial dependency between subject and object case marking on the basis of the observation that DOM seems to be allowed only when Differential Subject Marking (DSM) is also possible: The agentive predicates as in (2-b) and (3-b) allow for both ergative and nominative subjects, so DOM can occur correspondingly. However, dative subjects are taken to not engage in DSM so there is no possibility for DOM is posited.

Baker (2021) entertains Davison’s (2004) proposal that an explanation can be found in terms of the semantic roles that are involved, but dismisses this by arguing that the right generalization for understanding DOM is in terms of grammatical relations (only pertains to objects), rather than the semantic role of undergoer/patient, which can be found in other contexts such as unaccusatives and does not exhibit DOM there. Rather, Baker (2021) sees the basic pattern of marked dative subject vs. unmarked nominative object as a case in point for the fundamentally binary Dependent Case approach.²

However, one does find dative-ergative DSM (contra de Hoop & Narasimhan 2005) and one does find patterns other than the dative-nominative in experiencer predicates (contra Baker

¹ Urdu/Hindi *ko* is polysemous and can mark either datives or accusatives. Evidence for these two distinct functions is adduced in Butt & King (2004).

² Mohanan (1994) notes that generally Urdu/Hindi disprefers clauses in which two (or more) of the same type of overt case marker co-occur, positing an Obligatory Contour Principle (OCP) for case in Urdu/Hindi. However, Mohanan’s Case OCP does not completely rule out two *ko*-marked arguments co-occurring in a clause so we put this perspective aside for the purposes of this paper.

2021). An example of ergative-dative DSM is given in (7), where the choice of case marker is conditioned by the choice of light verb, much as the ergative/nominative DSM above is governed by the tense/aspect of the verb (perfective morphology allows for ergatives).

- (7) a. nadya=ne kahani yad k-i
 Nadya.F.SG=ERG story.F.SG.NOM memory do-PERF.F.SG
 ‘Nadya remembered a/the story.’ (lit.: ‘Nadya did memory of the story.’)
 b. nadya=ko kahani yad a-yi
 Nadya.F.SG=DAT story.F.SG.NOM memory come-PERF.F.SG
 ‘Nadya remembered a/the story.’ (lit.: ‘Memory of the story came to Nadya.’)

Dative experiencer predicates with a further non-nominative core argument are shown in (8). As can be seen, the comitative *se*³ can appear on both animate and inanimate arguments in the N-V psych complex predicate ‘hate’, which is structurally equivalent to the N-V with ‘liking’ in (6).

- (8) a. ram=ko us lar̄ki=se nafrat he
 Ram.M.SG=DAT that.OBL girl.F.SG=COM hate.F be.PRES.3.SG
 ‘Ram hates that girl.’ (lit. ‘Hate of that girl is to Ram.’)
 b. ram=ko sigarət=se nafrat he
 Ram.M.SG=DAT cigarette.F=COM hate.F be.PRES.3.SG
 ‘Ram hates cigarettes.’

In seeking an explanation for this phenomenon, it is interesting to note that the agentive versions of (8) do allow for a type of DOM in which the *se* alternates with *ko*, as shown in (9) and (10). However, this DOM is again not available with the dative experiencer version, see (11).

- (9) ram us lar̄ki=se/ko nafrat kar-ta he
 Ram.M.SG=DAT that.OBL girl.F.SG=COM/ACC hate.F do-IMPF.M.SG be.PRES.3.SG
 ‘Ram hates that girl.’

- (10) ram sigarət=se/ko nafrat kar-ta he
 Ram.M.SG=DAT cigarette.F=COM/ACC hate.F do-IMPF.M.SG be.PRES.3.SG
 ‘Ram hates cigarettes.’

- (11) a. *ram=ko us lar̄ki=ko nafrat he
 Ram.M.SG=DAT that.OBL girl.F.SG=ACC hate.F be.PRES.3.SG
 Intended: ‘Ram hates/loves that girl.’ (lit. ‘Hate of that girl is to Ram.’)
 b. *ram=ko sigarət=ko nafrat he
 Ram.M.SG=DAT cigarette.F=ACC hate.F be.PRES.3.SG
 Intended: ‘Ram hates cigarettes.’

The (necessarily brief) explanation offered in this paper for these patterns is that case marking in Urdu/Hindi results from a combination of structural and semantic factors, as previously argued for in Butt & King (2003, 2004). Ergatives are confined to subjects and are subject to a

³ *se* has a number of functions in Urdu, prominently among them also the instrumental, see Butt & Ahmed (2011) for some discussion.

tense/aspect split, but necessarily express agentive/initiator semantics. Datives are associated with goal or experiencer semantics. Accusatives are confined to objects, but signal a particular type of semantics. We have seen that the accusative DOM is associated with specificity and animacy and I suggest that the unavailability of the *ko*-marked objects in experiencer predicates is not centrally due to a mutual dependence of case marking between core arguments, but due to the ability of the object to be a quantized. Seminal work by Krifka (1992) and Verkuyl (1993) has shown that quantizability of the change undergone by a referent or the progress along a path plays a central role in the interpretation and marking of objects (cf. also the discussion with respect to “strong” vs. “weak” objects above), also leading to telic vs. atelic interpretations of the overall predicate. Butt & Ahmed (2011) show that *ko* alternates with other case markers in Old Urdu to indicate completed paths, indicating an original association with quantizedness in the Krifka/Verkuyl sense that today plays out mostly in terms of specificity (and by extension animacy).

3 Summary

The suggestion made by this contribution is therefore that the absence of DOM in dative experiencer predicates is best explained in terms of the semantics of those predicates. Examples as in (4), (5), (6) and (8) do not allow for *ko*-marked objects because these predicates do not allow for their objects to be interpreted as quantized entities. The perceived mutual dependence between subject and object case marking is thus only an indirect effect due to the overall event semantics, but not the locus of explanation. Rather, the deeper explanation for the complex patterns of case marking that can be observed in languages such as Urdu/Hindi are due to semantic effects, as von Heusinger and his co-authors have been demonstrating with respect to DOM for several different languages over the years. The data from Urdu/Hindi only serves to confirm their findings.

Author note

I came to know Klaus von Heusinger at the University of Konstanz when he had just finished his dissertation and I was close to finishing mine. In a sense we grew up together in Konstanz, but I also learned quite a bit from Klaus on how to navigate the German research and funding landscape and how to stay true to one’s original interests and intents in the plethora of possibilities offered up to one. I am pleased to be able to contribute a short piece on a topic of long-term mutual interest: the semantics of case. This work was supported by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) – Project-ID 251654672 – TRR 161 and I would like to thank Saira Bano and Benazir Mumtaz on working through the data with me.

References

- Aissen, Judith. 1999. Markedness and subject choice in Optimality Theory. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 17. 673–711.
- Aissen, Judith. 2003. Differential object marking: Iconicity vs. economy. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 21. 435–483.
- Baker, Mark. 2015. *Case: Its principles and its parameters*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Baker, Mark. 2021. On dependent case and the sometimes-independence of ergativity and differential object marking. To appear. In Christina Sevdali et al. (eds), *The place of case in grammar*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Bhatt, Rajesh & Elena Anagnostopoulou. 1996. Object shift and specificity: Evidence from *ko-phrases* in Hindi. In Lise Dobrin, Kora Singer & Lisa McNair (eds.), *Papers from the Main Session of the Chicago Linguistics Society (CLS) 32*, 11–22. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- Butt, Miriam. 1993. Object specificity and agreement in Hindi/Urdu. In *Papers from the 29th Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society (CLS)*, vol. 1, 80–103.
- Butt, Miriam. 2006. *Theories of case*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Butt, Miriam & Tafseer Ahmed. 2011. The redevelopment of Indo-Aryan case systems from a lexical semantic perspective. *Morphology* 21(3). 545–572.
- Butt, Miriam & Tracy H. King. 1996. Structural topic and focus without movement. In Miriam Butt & Tracy H. King (eds.), *Proceedings of the First LFG Conference*. Stanford: CSLI Publications.
- Butt, Miriam & Tracy Holloway King. 2003. Case systems: Beyond structural distinctions. In Ellen Brandner & Heike Zinsmeister (eds.), *New perspectives on case theory*, 53–87. Stanford: CSLI Publications.
- Butt, Miriam & Tracy Holloway King. 2004. The status of case. In Veneeta Dayal & Anoop Mahajan (eds.), *Clause structure in South Asian languages*, 153–198. Berlin: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Caro Reina, Javier, Marco García García & Klaus von Heusinger. 2021. Differential Object Marking in Cuban Spanish. In Johannes Kabatek, Philipp Obrist & Albert Wall (eds.), *Differential Object Marking in Romance – The third wave (Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie)*, 339–368. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Davison, Alice. 2004. Non-nominative subjects in Hindi-Urdu: VP structure and case parameters. In Peri Bhaskararao & Karumuri Venkata Subbarao (eds.), *Non-nominative subjects*, 141–168. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- de Hoop, Helen & Bhuvana Narasimhan. 2005. Differential case-marking in Hindi. In Mengistu Amberber & Helen de Hoop (eds.), *Competition and variation in natural languages: The case for case*, 321–346. Amsterdam: Elsevier.
- Diesing, Molly. 1992. *Indefinites*. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- von Heusinger, Klaus. 2018. The diachronic development of Differential Object Marking in Spanish ditransitive constructions. In Ilja A. Seržant, Alena Witzlack-Makarevich & Kelsey Mann (eds.), *Diachrony of differential argument marking*, 315–344. Berlin: Language Science Press.
- von Heusinger, Klaus & Elif Bamyacı. 2017. Specificity effects of Turkish Differential Object Marking. In Leyla Zidani-Eroğlu, Matthew Ciscel & Elena Koulidobrova (eds.), *Proceedings of the 12th Workshop on Altaic Formal Linguistics (WAFSL 12)*, 309–319. Cambridge: The MIT Press. <http://mitwpl.mit.edu/catalog/mwpl83/>.
- von Heusinger, Klaus & Georg A. Kaiser. 2011. Affectedness and Differential Object Marking in Spanish. *Morphology* 21(3–4). 593–617.
- von Heusinger, Klaus & Jaklin Kornfilt. 2005. The case of the direct object in Turkish: Semantics, syntax and morphology. *Turkic Languages* 9. 3–44. http://www.digizeitschriften.de/dms/img/?PID=PPN666048797_0009%7CLOG_0014.
- von Heusinger, Klaus & Jaklin Kornfilt. 2017. Partitivity and case marking in Turkish and related languages. *Glossa* 2(1). 1–40.
- von Heusinger, Klaus & Jaklin Kornfilt. 2021. Turkish partitive constructions and (non-)exhaustivity. In Petra Sleeman & Giuliana Giusti (eds.), *Partitive determiners, partitive pronouns and partitive case*, 263–94. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- von Heusinger, Klaus, Jaklin Kornfilt & Semra Kizilkaya. 2019. Differential Object Marking, partitivity and specificity in Turkish. In Tanya Bondarenko, Justin Colley, Colin Davis &

- Mitya Privoznov (eds.), *Proceedings of the 14th Workshop on Altaic Formal Linguistics (WAFL 14)*, 145–156. Cambridge: The MIT Press.
- von Heusinger, Klaus & Roya Sadeghpour. 2020. The specificity marker *-e* with indefinite noun phrases in Modern Colloquial Persian. In Kata Balogh, Anja Latrouite & Robert D. Van Valin Jr. (eds.), *Nominal anchoring*, 115–147. Berlin: Language Science Press.
- von Heusinger, Klaus & Alina Tigău. 2019. Clitic doubling and Differential Object Marking in non-specific contexts in Romanian. *Revue Roumaine de Linguistique* LXIV(4). 409–430.
- de Hoop, Helen. 1996. *Case configuration and noun phrase interpretation*. New York: Garland.
- Klein, Udo, Dolgor Guntsetseg & Klaus von Heusinger. 2012. Case in conflict: Embedded subjects in Mongolian. In Monique Lamers & Peter de Swart (eds.), *Case, word order and prominence. interacting cues in language production and comprehension*, 43–64. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Kornfilt, Jaklin & Klaus von Heusinger. 2009. Specificity and partitivity in some Altaic languages. In Ryosuke Shibagaki & Reiko Vermeulen (eds.), *Proceedings of the 5th Workshop on Formal Altaic Linguistics (WAFL 5)*, 19–40. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Krause, Elif & Klaus von Heusinger. 2019. Gradient effects of animacy on Differential Object Marking in Turkish. *Open Linguistics* 5(1). 171–190.
- Krifka, Manfred. 1992. Thematic relations as links between nominal reference and temporal constitution. In Ivan A. Sag & Anna Szabolcsi (eds.), *Lexical matters*, 29–53. Stanford: CSLI Publications.
- Mohanan, Tara. 1994. Case OCP: A constraint on word order in Hindi. In Miriam Butt, Tracy Holloway King & Gillian Ramchand (eds.), *Theoretical perspectives on word order in South Asian languages*. Stanford: CSLI Publications.
- Ramchand, Gillian. 1997. *Aspect and predication*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Verkuyl, Henk. 1993. *A theory of aspectuality*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.