

Case Syncretism: Perspectives from Variations in Haryanavi and Mewati

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This paper attempts to investigate case syncretism patterns of two closely related Western Indo-Aryan languages- Haryanavi and Mewati. I demonstrate case syncretism in Haryanavi where the morpheme for ergative, accusative and dative cases happens to be identical (see example (1)-(3) for illustration). On the other hand, Mewati (considered to be a dialect of Haryanavi) represents its ergative with a different case morpheme (4), but shows syncretism between accusative and dative case, as in (5).

(1) tau-nε tai(*-nε) pε^hli bar dek^hi

Old man.erg Old woman.abs first time see.f.sg.perf

‘The old man saw the old woman for the first time.’

Haryanavi

(2) tau tai-nε bag-mĕ bəlave t^ha

Old man.nom old woman.acc garden-in call.prog be.m.sg.pres

‘The old man was calling old woman in the garden.’

Haryanavi

(3) tau-nε pyar ho gya

Old man.dat love happen lv.m.sg.perf

‘The old man fell in love.’

Haryanavi

(4) jon-nε məri-ku d^həmkayo

John.erg Mary.acc scold.def.perf

‘John scolded Mary.’

Mewati

(5) jon bəcca-ku məri -ku de ryo t^ho

John.nom child.acc Mary.dat give prog be.m.sg.pst

‘John was giving the child to Mary.’

Mewati

The issue of case syncretism has been at the centre of various analyses in the generative literature, with a number of proposals to account for the anomaly which allows a single morpheme to define more than one function. The present account begins with a critical analysis of the syntax-centred approach proposed by Baker & Atlamaz (2014) who suggest that such instances of syncretic cases are manifestations of one and the same oblique case. Testing the syncretic cases on the diagnostics of similar pronominal morphology and verbal agreement, I concur with the aforementioned proposal and demonstrate that the syncretic cases in Haryanavi are, indeed, the same dependent cases licensed in a special configuration. The

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dependent case analysis for both Haryanavi and Mewati ergative relies on the defective nature of perfective aspect head which triggers the process of feature inheritance among verbal heads and closes off the escape hatch for the external argument to move closer to the TP and get a nominative case. Thereby the process of feature inheritance among the vPs strands the subject DP within the vP and enables the subject DP to become eligible for the dependent case in the perfective aspect (6). Further, I utilize the morpho-syntactic theory of distributed morphology (Muller, 2004; McFadden, 2010) to show the apparent shared features of varied dependent cases which appear as the same case morpheme. In this regard, the syncretic cases share the feature of [+oblique] and an underspecified [+/- position] feature which results into case syncretism. However, Haryanavi also depicts case competition characterized by first preference to ergative, followed by dative for insertion of ‘-ne’ case morpheme. Thus, I also make use of the nano-syntactic framework (Starke, 2010; Caha, 2009) to demonstrate the case competition between the dependent cases in Haryanavi which lead to OCP effects, such that the case morpheme ‘-ne’ fails to appear on the dative indirect objects in instances where the ergative subject is present (7). As for Mewati, I demonstrate that the case morpheme ‘-ku’ is a specificity marker in the language and is borrowed from Hindi which utilizes a similar morpheme for its object cases. Here, I show that the dative ‘-ku’ as well as ergative ‘-ne’ are instantiations of dependent case.

(6) $[_{TP}[_{V1P}[_{V2P}$  $[_{VP}[_{Obj}$ $v]_{V2}]_{V1}]_T]$

(7) Comitative > Genitive > Instrumental > Dative > Ergative > Accusative > Nominative > DP

References

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