

Differential Subject Marking in Georgian

Abstract:

The talk presents an analysis of differential subject marking (DSM) in Georgian. In many languages DSM take many forms and does not constitute a unified phenomenon. Languages differentiate their subjects on the basis of formal, semantic or clausal features, and there are different approaches of analysing DSMs, including functional, optimality-based, morphological and syntactic approaches. Subjects may have different cases, agree differently or occur in different positions. In Georgian language some subjects are morphologically marked for ergative and dative, while others for nominative.

- | | | | |
|-----|---|---------------------------------------|--|
| (1) | <i>gogona-∅</i>
girl- NOM
'The girl sends a parcel' | <i>amanat-s</i>
parcel- DAT | <i>a-gzavn-i-s</i>
PV-send-THM-3SG.SBJ |
| (2) | <i>gogona-m</i>
girl- ERG
'The girl sent a parcel' | <i>amanat-i</i>
parcel- NOM | <i>ga-a-gzavn-a</i>
PR-PV-send.PFV-PST.3SG.SBJ |
| (3) | <i>gogona-s</i>
girl- DAT
'The girl has sent a parcel' | <i>amanat-i</i>
parcel- NOM | <i>ga-u-gzavn-i-a</i>
PR[3SG.SBJ]-PV-send-PRF-3SG.OBJ |

The same patterns exist in other languages as well, such as Hindi or Basque.

Functionally, the differentiation is often, yet not always, related to a difference in prominence of the arguments. That is generally to avoid ambiguity as to what is the subject and what is the object. Morphological case is more likely to be assigned to those subjects which are low in prominence (i.e. less typical subjects, those that are not relatively prominent on one of various dimensions, e.g. semantic role, animacy, definiteness etc.).

However, there are some languages in which on the contrary the subjects high in prominence are marked rather than the low-prominent ones, among others Hindi where ergative case is used for subjects of perfective highly transitive predicates and Turkish where only specific subjects of nominal clauses bear genitive case. Georgian also marks high-prominent subjects (more agentive, animate) for ergative case. Moreover, there are examples in Georgian where DSM can occur in subjects of intransitive verbs and that requires case marking on typical subjects.

- | | | |
|-----|--|--|
| (4) | <i>k'ats-ma</i>
man- ERG
'The man danced' | <i>i-cek'v-a</i>
SV-dance.PFV-PST.3SG.SBJ |
|-----|--|--|

cf.

- | | | |
|-----|--|--|
| (5) | <i>k'ats-i</i>
man- NOM
'The man died.' | <i>mo-k'vd-a</i>
PR-die.PFV-PST.3SG.SBJ |
|-----|--|--|

The examples with intransitive verbs are important because they provide evidence that DSM is not always driven by the necessity to disambiguate subjects from objects.

The main research question addressed in this talk is what triggers DSM in Georgian. The analysis is based on two points: (1) differential marking on NPs i.e. morphological case (morphology on the NP determined by the properties of a nearby verb), and (2) differential marking on Vs i.e. agreement (morphology on the verb determined by features of a nearby NP). More specifically there are different factors that trigger DSM in Georgian, including not only formal, like tense, aspect and transitivity, but also semantic as animacy/person scale and volitionality.