Optional ergative case-marking in Ṭuroyo (South-Eastern Turkey)

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Introduction

- **Data**: Ṭuroyo language (Semitic > Neo-Aramaic), folklore text data (1960s)
- **Problem**: Agents of transitive verbs occur both with the case-marker *l* and without it.

(1) Reḥ-ux qṭi-le-lan
smell-POSS.2MS kill-PRET.3MS-OBJ.1PL
'Your smell is killing (lit. killed) us.' (RT I 29/425)

(2) L-u reḥ-ano
ERG-ART.3MS smell-DEM.3MS
qṭi-le-lan
kill-PRET.3MS-OBJ.1PL
'This smell is killing (lit. killed) us.' (RT I 29/436)

- (Diem 2012, p. 45): Case-marked A NPs occur more often in **post-verbal** position
- (Waltisberg 2016, p. 177): Marked forms occur by **salient and most definite constituents**

Morphosyntactic alignment in Ṭuroyo

- Past-tense transitive verbs have different infixes (3ms, 3fs, 3pl) when O is anaphoric, otherwise the 3ms-infix is used

(3) Səm-ø-li i ʕrayt-ayḏi
make-OBJ.3MS-PRET.1S ART.FS lunch-POSS.1S
mḥaḏr-o-li
prepare-OBJ.3FS-PRET.1S
'I made my lunch, prepared it.' JL 06.10.6

- Thus Ṭuroyo has partial ergative alignment in past-tense clauses, cf. with the example above:

(4) Damix-o
sleep-PRET.3FS
'She fell asleep.'

- Both nouns and pronouns can take ergative case-marking, but anaphoric subjects are usually ellipsed
- Ergative case-marking of A is possible also for all types of non-transitive clauses

Goals

- Explore the corpus to single out the parameters influencing the presence of the case-marker
- Test the correlation between the discovered parameters

Data and methods for exploration

- Sample from H. Ritter's folklore texts (Ritter 1967) and one recent interview (Beṯ-Şawoce 1995)
- Speakers who preferred strongly either marked or unmarked forms were ommitted (cutoff point = 0.8)
- 187 transitive clauses with overt subjects (pronominal overt subjects excluded)
- Variables included:
  - CASE-MARKING: marked or unmarked A
  - OBJECT: noun or pronominal object
  - WORD ORDER: SV or VS
  - ANIMACY OF A: animate or inanimate
  - DEFINITENESS OF A: definite or indefinite
- **Method**: *hierarchical configural frequency analysis* (HCFA), testing all combinations of five variables

Data and methods for testing

- Random sample (50% of total size) from H. Ritter's vol. 3 (Ritter 1971)
- 198 transitive clauses with overt subjects
- Clauses with the same verb, subject and/or object occuring near to each other (1-2 clauses) were removed as possibly influencing the independence of the observations
- Variables: WORD ORDER and CASE-MARKING
- **Hypothesis**: WORD ORDER and CASE-MARKING are correlated: SV is correlated with unmarked forms, while VS is correlated with case-marking.
- **Method**: binary logistic regression with word order as the predictor and markedness as the outcome variable

Exploration

- **Exploration**: configurations ANIMACY X CASE-MARKING and DEFINITENESS X CASE-MARKING are non-significant

Variables	χ^2	*df*	*p*
WORD ORDER X CASE-MARKING	40.216	1	< 0.001
OBJECT X CASE-MARKING	10.387	1	0.001
WORD ORDER X OBJECT X CASE-MARKING	54.91	4	< 0.001

Fig. 1: Significant configurations of variables in the exploration sample

- **Types**: UNMARKED X SV (p_{Holm} = 0.006, Q = 0.165) and MARKED X VS (p_{Holm} < 0.001, Q = 0.126).
- **Anti-types**: UNMARKED X VS (p_{Holm} = 0.004, Q = 0.162) and MARKED X SV (p_{Holm} < 0.001, Q = 0.126).
- Individual configurations of three-level interaction CASE-MARKING X WORD ORDER X OBJECT are significant, but the preference is either the same or weaker than for CASE-MARKING and WORD ORDER alone.

Results

- There is a highly significant but weak correlation between word order and agent case-marking: G = 30.82, df = 1, p < 0.001, Nagelkerke's R^2 = 0.207, C = 0.666

Fig. 2: Predicted probabilities for marked forms and their 95% confidence interval bars

- Two datasets are different:

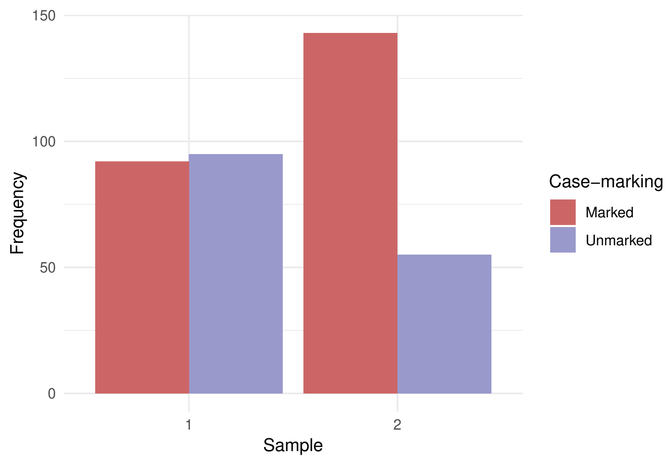

Fig. 3: Frequencies of marked forms in two samples

Discussion

- Possible explanation: VS order is indirect, and marking removes ambiguity:

(5) Maṭmaʕ-le u šex l-u
seduce-PRET.3MS ART.MS sheikh ERG-ART.MS
tağər-ano
merchant-DEM.3S
'The merchant seduced the sheikh.' (RT I 26/92)

- For 3ms pronominal objects there may be even stronger ambiguity without case-marking

(6) Ḥze-le u zʕuro
see-PRET.3MS ART.MS boy
'He saw the boy. / ? The boy saw him.'

(7) U zʕuro ḥze-le
ART.MS boy see-PRET.3MS
'The boy saw him. / ? He saw the boy.'

Conclusions

- Word order and case-marking of agents are significantly correlated
- But the correlation is not strong, and the presence of SV word-order does not predict the absence or presence of marking well
- Second sample: perhaps more conservative dialects
- **Further research**: We have to explain either why case-marking on agents is so frequent for SV word-order or find additional parameters which would explain the absence of case-marking

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Abbreviations

1, 2, 3 — 1, 2 and & 3 Person, ART — article, DEM — demonstrative ERG — ergative, M, F — masculine, feminine, OBJ — direct object, PL, S — plural, singular, POSS — possessive, PRET — preterite
RT I — Ritter 1967, JL — Jastrow 1992

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