Main argument marking in Medieval Rajasthani

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There has been a number of studies devoted to postpositions and agreement in New Indo-Aryan languages. A vast majority of the studies focus on ergative case, however DAT/ACC case was studied as well (Khokhlova (1992; 1995; 2000; 2001; 2002; 2006; 2016); Montaut (2009) Stroński (2010); Verbeke (2010); Butt & Ahmed (2011) among many others). Tessitori (1914-16) investigated Old Western Rajasthani from the 13th to 16th century giving a thorough analysis of postpositions attested in the language.

The present paper is an attempt to provide an overview of main argument marking in Medieval Rajasthani[1] by focusing mainly on the object marking of several transitive verbs. Previous research on this matter (Khokhlova (1992); Stroński (2011)) has shown that there is a certain variation in the nominal and pronominal systems with respect to the marking of main arguments such as the subject of a transitive verb (A) and the object (O) (Dixon 1979; 1994). It also appears that pronominal A marking is more conservative than nominal A marking, i.e. pronouns preserve A marking. This coincides with the animacy hierarchy described by Silverstein (1976): pronouns lying to the right of the hierarchy 1st person, 2nd person and 3rd person are more prone to ergative marking. On the other hand, O marking does not always follow the animacy hierarchy and definiteness hierarchy either what would be expected from the rules governing Differential Object Marking (cf. Aissen 2003).

In order to determine the marking strategies in Medieval Rajasthani, I have selected a corpus compiled of early Rajasthani prose texts from the 15th to 18th centuries (Bhānāvat and Kamal 1997-1998). A pilot study has already been performed based on the three oldest texts of this corpus (14th/15th c.). The corpus has been annotated by means of IATagger (Jaworski 2015) at the level of morphosyntax and semantics. Firstly, all the postpositions (+/- 1000) in the corpus were generated. Secondly, I analyzed all of the attestations of postpositional marking, by focusing on verbs which trigger postpositional marking (mainly ACC/DAT), e.g. x DAT/ACC + *kah-* [to say]. Thirdly, I went through all the other occurrences of those verbs to check if they always take postpositions, and if not, in which cases they do not. The following verbs were investigated: *kah-* [to say]; *bhaṇ-* [to say]; *de-* [to give]; *le-* [to take]; *kar-* [to do]; *dekh-* [to see]; *puch-* [to ask].

The aim of this research is to study the paths of development of argument marking in Medieval Rajasthani throughout the centuries. I plan to analyze the entire corpus. The pilot study has so far determined that in present tense A is in nominative case. In perfective aspect A is usually marked with the instrumental case marker. When turning to the objects, these tend to be marked with ACC/DAT postpositions in present tense and in future. Animate objects of transitive verbs in perfective aspect are usually marked with ACC/DAT postpositions. Both inanimate objects of transitive verbs in perfective aspect and inanimate objects of non-finite transitive verbs are unmarked. Animate objects of non-finite transitive verbs are usually unmarked at this stage of language development, i.e. 14th/15th c.

Based on these findings, I suggest that the main cause for object marking in the investigated texts is the animacy hierarchy (as proposed by Silverstein in 1976). A marking at this stage is conditioned by aspect: perfective aspect of transitive verbs triggers ergative alignment. To gain a broader understanding of development of argument marking in Medieval Rajasthani further study is needed. A full analysis of the texts in the corpus I selected, could be a first step in this direction.

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[1] I use the term Medieval Rajasthani to indicate the time period of the texts which I worked on. Historically Rajasthani literature can be divided into three periods: 1. Early period (1100-1450 A.D.); 2. Medieval period (1450-1850 A.D.); 3. Modern period (1850 A.D. till now). The majority of texts which are part of my corpus come from the XV century onwards.

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