

Optional Projections in Recycling Case in Eastern Indo-Aryan Languages

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Introduction: Eastern Indo-Aryan languages/ EIAL are attested nominative-accusative languages (Lahiri 2021, Ivani et al. 2021 a.o.), which are spoken in the eastern parts of South Asia. Nominative-Accusative languages have morphologically covert nominative cases, and the DP which carries the nominative case also triggers agreement with T/ Infl. Interestingly EIAL are diachronically split ergative languages, and they have lost Voice head-based ergative with time. This study shows that inside a nominative-accusative system such as EIAL’s, the erstwhile ergative case is reused via the optional voice remnant/ $Voice_{rem}$ projection without affecting the T/infl. The empirical support in this paper comes from two of the languages of EIAL- Assamese and Odia.

Puzzle: Third-person subjects of transitives are obligatorily marked with *e* in Assamese; see (1). The *e*-marked subjects trigger obligatory person agreement. Importantly, the marker goes missing on unaccusative subjects (2).

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|---|-----------------------------------|
| 1. <i>Ram-e kam kor-e/ korib-o/ koril</i> | 2. <i>Ram.∅ pore/poribo/poril</i> |
| Ram- <i>e</i> work does/will do/did | Ram fall/will fall/fell |
| ‘Ram does/will do/did the work’ | ‘Ram falls/will fall/fell’ |

This occurrence of *-e* on only transitive external arguments/agents is taken as evidence that it is an ergative marker by Amritavalli and Sarma (2002), Saha and Patgiri (2014), and Saikia and Camilleri (2019).

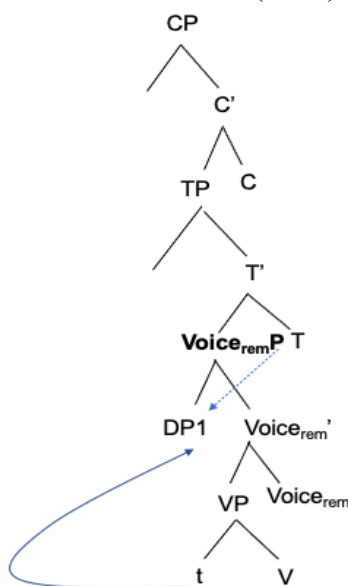


Fig.1

However, inanimate subjects of unaccusative verbs can also appear with *e*, but only when supported with appropriate contextual information. For example, in (3), the inanimate subject ‘statue’ of the unaccusative verb ‘stand’ can be marked with *-e* only when it is projected with human-like qualities. A context for (3) is: a statue is given a magical status, which can do volitional acts, including ‘climb’ or ‘get on a table’.

3. *murti-to-e table-khon-ot upor ase*
statue-CL-*e* table-CL-GEN on be.Pres-3
'The statue stood on the table'

Odia, another EIA language, shows optional marker *e*, as seen in (4). The marker can go missing in some contexts, as seen in (5). It acts as an optional animacy marker.

4. *pila-man-e/e skul-ku jaa-nti* 5. *Chatra padha-nti*
boy-Pl-E school-ALL go-Pres.3Pl student.PL study-PL
'The boys go to school' 'Students study'

Discussion: The source of these new markers is the original ergative case in EIAL. However, they have lost their original use where they were sensitive to theta roles and had object agreement in their past. Now, as the above data sets suggest, this new marker comes on the subject for various reasons, viz. as a volitional marker and animate marker in Assamese and Odia, respectively. Additionally, they are optional and restricted. Rizzi (1997) does talk about optional projections, such as FocP and TopP, contrary to core projections. This study shows that in EIAL languages, vP layer has an optional projection Voice_{cm} head available, as seen in Fig.1, where recycled morphemes are used.

Conclusion: This study shows empirical evidence about an optional projection found in EIAL where recycled morphemes are seen. This work shows new insights into optional projections

Keywords: Case; Optionality; Eastern Indo-Aryan languages, vP, Voice