Split Ergativity in Newari, a Verb-Movement Approach

Recent approaches to split ergativity postulate that progressives delimit a boundary for dependent case-marking (Laka 2006; Coon 2013; Marantz 1991). This analysis appears to be too powerful for Newari, in which progressives do not block ergative assignment, but allow either ergative or absolutive for subjects of agentive verbs (Givón 1980), (1)–(2). We argue that this optionality stems from an optionality in verb movement. When the verb moves to a higher position, the relevant case domain is extended, through a mechanism like den Dikken's (2007) phase-sliding. This extends the case domain beyond *v*P, which permits ergative assignment to the subject, (3).

(1)   *Rām-*(na)   me   hā-u*
        Ram-ERG   song   sing-PRF.CNJ
        "Ram sang."
(2)   *Rām-(na)   me   hāl cwan -a   -(du)*
        Ram-ERG   song   sing PROG-PRF.CNJ-EXT
        "Ram is singing."
(3)   [TP *Rām-(na)* [voiP PRO [*v*P *me h~~āl~~*]] *hāl-cwan-a-(du)*]
        "Ram is singing."

First, we argue that the case in (1–3) is assigned by the verb, not the progressive. Verbs that do not assign ergative in the perfective aspect resist ergative morphology in progressive, (4), and verbs that assign dative in the perfective assign dative in the progressive, (5). Thus, the optionality of ergative assignment in progressives is specific to this case, suggesting it is a dependent case (Marantz 1991) that is mediated by the verb and *v*/voi.

(4)   a. *Rām-(*na)   skul   wan-a*
           Ram-ERG   school   go-PRF
           "Ram went to school."
        b. *Rām-(*na)   skul   wan cwan -a   -(du)*
           Ram-ERG   school   go   PROG-PRF-EXT
           'Ram is going to school.'
(5)   a. *Sitā-*(ta) wakwak   wo -u*
           Sita-DAT nauseous   feel-PRF.DSJ
           'Sita felt nauseous.'
        b. *Sitā-*(ta) wakwak   way-ā   cwan -a   -(du)*
           Sita-DAT nauseous feel-INF PROG-PRG-EXT
           'Sita is feeling nauseous.'

Subjects are outside of the VP in Newari, regardless of case. All subjects control *conjunct agreement*, or agreement with a perspective holder. We take conjunct agreement to occur when a DP is local to a *pro* in the CP-layer indexed with a perspective holder, (6) (Speas & Tenny 2003; Zu 2016; DeLancey 1992). Because conjunct agreement is allowed regardless of the case on the subject, the optionality is in the size of case domain, not position of the subject.

(6)   *Rām-na$_i$ dhā-u*   [CP pro$_i$ [TP *wa(-ṃ$_i$) oṃ   no-i   cwan-u*]]
        Ram-ERG   say-PST.CNJ   he-ERG   mango eat-INF PROG-PRF.CNJ

Following Laka (2006) & Coon (2013), progressive aspect splits are induced because they delimit a case assignment domain, in effect making the subject of a progressive transitive verb functionally "intransitive", as the object is in the VP but the subject is outside. Conversely, in Newari, the verb raises to a higher projection, which we argue extends the case domain to include the subject. Because Newari is head-final, V-raising is not apparent in the string. However, we submit that V-raising is observed in ellipsis structures. We analyze Newari as a V-raising VP-ellipsis language (Otani & Whitman 1991), as in (7)–(8). This is because the remnant must contain all elided arguments of the verb (9), and because yes/no questions involve repetition of the main verb, (10), suggesting that the verb may be as high as C. This provides the independent parameter that distinguishes progressives in Newari on one hand from Hindi/Basque/Chol on the other.

(7)   *ji-ṃ   jā   na-yā   āle Sitā-ṃ   -na na-u*
        1Sg-ERG rice eat-PRF.CNJ   and Sita -ERG-also eat-PRF.DSJ
        'I ate rice, and Sita did too'

(8)   *… āle   Sitā-ṃ-na [$_{v}$P ~~ja na-u~~] na-u*

(9)   a. *Rām-na   kitāb tebil-e   to -u   ale Sitā-ṃ   -no to -u*
           Ram-ERG book table-LOC put-PRF.DSJ and Sita-ERG also put-PRF.DSJ
           'Ram put a book on the table and Sita also put [a book on the table].'

        b. *Rām-na   kitāb yākana bwan-a   ale Sitā-ṃ   na   bwan-a*
           Ram-ERG book   quickly read -PRS.DSJ and Sita-ERG also read -PRS.DSJ
           'Ram reads a book quickly and Sita also reads [a book quickly]'

(10)   a. *Shyām-na   jāki nyā-ta   lā*
           Shyam-ERG rice buy-PRF Q
           'Did Shyam buy rice?'

        b. *nyā-ta*
           buy-PRF
           'yes'

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