GRAMMATICAL MARKING OF SPEECH ACT PARTICIPANTS IN TIBETO-BURMAN

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This paper shows how Tibeto-Burman languages mark a pragmatic category (speech act participation) in the syntactic structure of a sentence. Data are from Tangut, Jyarong and, especially, Chamling.

1. Introduction

It is well known that the empathy hierarchy plays a crucial role for the syntactic organization of the sentence in a number of languages. The purpose of this paper is to show how the upper part of the empathy scale, i.e. the speech situation with:

Speaker	>	*Hearer*	>	*3. Person*
center of the speech act		speech act participant		non-participants

is reflected in the grammar of some Tibeto-Burman languages. Its relevance will be shown for (a) agreement (see section 2); (b) role marking (see section 3), and (c) direction marking on the verb (see section 4).

2. Agreement

A striking characteristic of many Tibeto-Burman languages is the agreement with speech act participants (SAP) independently of semantic roles or grammatical functions.

Subj[1]	Obj	Tangut	Chamling		Jyarong	
1st	3rd	-ŋa		-u-ŋa		-ŋ
3rd	1st	-ŋa	pa-	-u-ŋa	wu-	-ŋ
2nd	3rd	-na	ta-	-u	tə-	-u
3rd	2nd	-na	ta-		tə-u-	-n
1st	2nd	-na		-na	lə-a-	-n
2nd	1st	-ŋa	ta-	-u-ŋa	kə-u-	-ŋ
3rd	3rd	∅		-u		-u

A very clear example is Tangut, the extinct language of the Hsi Hsia empire that was conquered by Chingis Khan in 1209. The suffixes *ŋa* and *na* are common Tibeto-Burman pronouns for 1st and 2nd person. The verb always agrees with a SAP in Tangut. If both subject and object are SAP, the verb agrees with the object; if neither is SAP there is no agreement at all.

A less straightforward, though more typical example is Chamling,[2] a language of the Rai cluster in Eastern Nepal. The suffixes *-ŋa* and *-na* are the same as in Tangut. The languages are not considered to be closely related; nor are Chamling and Jyarong (Szechuan), which nevertheless have strikingly similar agreement patterns (more similar than Rai languages among themselves). In Chamling *-ŋa* marks speaker participation except where the speaker is subject and the hearer object. In that case — and only in that case — the pronominal root *-na* is used. All other cases with hearer participation have the prefix *ta-*:

(1) kaŋa khu -lai khaŋ-u- ŋa.
    I   he-DAT see-   1st
    'I saw him.'
(2) khu-wa kaŋa-lai pa-khaŋ-u- ŋa.
    he-ERG I-DAT 3A-see-   1st
    'He saw me.'
(3) khana khu-lai   ta-khaŋ-u.
    you   he-DAT 2nd-see-DIR
    'You saw him.'
(4) khu-wa khana-lai ta-khaŋ-a.
    he-ERG you-DAT 2nd-see-PAST
    'He saw you.'

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[1] I use the terms *subject* and *object* for the sake of convenience, although Chamling at least has no *subject* in the syntactic sense.
[2] The Chamling data were collected during my field work in Eastern Nepal, sponsored by the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*. As I have the most detailed information on Chamling, the majority of my examples will be taken from this language.

(5) kaŋa khana-lai khõ-na.
    I   you-DAT see-2nd
    'I saw you.'
(6) khana kaŋa-lai ta-khaŋ-u- ŋa.
    you   I-DAT 2nd-see- 1st
    'You saw me.'
(7) khu-wa khu-lai khaŋ-u
    he-ERG he-DAT see-DIR
    'He saw him.'

In Jyarong hearer participation is always indicated by a prefix *tə-* (*kə-* with 2nd→1st); 3rd→2nd and 1st→2nd have an additional *n*-suffix. For Jyarong examples see (14)–(20).

I have restricted the presentation here to singular forms. It is not necessary for the present purpose to discuss all the agreement forms — more than 100 for each tense, if all possible combinations of singular, dual, plural, inclusive and exclusive in subject and object position are taken into account. Analogous systems exist in languages of other sub-branches of Tibeto-Burman.

3. Role marking

Chamling and other languages of the family belong to a split ergative type with ergative syntax in transitive sentences with a 3rd person subject and accusative syntax with 1st or 2nd person subjects. This means that only 3rd persons are marked as actors, and that in sentences with a 3rd person actor the verb agrees with the object. In Chamling situations where both subject and object are SAPs form a special category. Thus, we get the following picture:

Chamling
Subj   *Obj*
SAP → 3rd : agreement with subj   = accusative pattern
3rd   → SAP: agreement with obj   = ergative pattern
SAP → SAP: agreement with obj, or
            with both subj and obj = neither ergative nor accusative

(In Tangut SAP→SAP is clearly ergative, though.)

The agreement patterns have their analogue in the marking of the subject noun. The typical ergative syntax is shown in (8) and (9) with zero-marking of intransitive subject and transitive object, and ergative marking of transitive subject.

(8) capca kholi-da   waŋa.
    tiger forest-LOC go up
    'The tiger went into the forest.'
(9) capca-wa   bose lhap-u.
    tiger-ERG pig catch-DIR
    'The tiger caught a pig.'

Likewise we have used the ergative suffix -*wa* in (2), (4) and (7) with a 3rd person subject, but not in the rest of the examples with SAP subjects. The split is however not that clear, as -*wa* may also be used with SAP pronouns. But the higher an NP is on the empathy hierarchy, the less frequently it is marked as ergative. On top of this graded empathy hierarchy split, Chamling has a tense split (probably taken over from Nepali). In the non-past the ergative marker is used less than in the past. The average distribution of the ergative marker with different persons and tenses in 50 Chamling questionnaires is as follows:

	Past	*Nonpast*
1st	16.2%	3.0%
2nd	40.6%	15.2%
3rd	94.6%	40.0%

Little research has been carried out so far on ergativity in Tibeto-Burman, but the few data available show that there is much variation between languages. Among those spoken in Nepal we find:

- ergative marking with all persons (Gurung, Vayu, Thulung-Ribdung),
- ergative marking only with 3rd person (Kham, Thulung-Mukli), and
- ergative marking with all persons in the past, with 2nd and 3rd person in the non-past (Sherpa) (cf. Baumann (1980), for Sherpa see also Givón (1980)).

The Sherpa case is especially interesting as the empathy hierarchy split is manifested only in the non-past and it is placed higher up in the hierarchy than usual; it sets the speaker apart from all other participants. Thus Sherpa – together with the distribution of ergative markers in Chamling – provides evidence for the ranking of Speaker over Hearer, as we would predict.[3]

Role markers may vary quite a bit from language to language and seem to be replaced quite easily in Tibeto-Burman,[4] whereas verbal morphology is conservative. The verb patterns of Chamling and other languages clearly reflect the priority of the empathy hierarchy over the tense split: ergative pattern with 3rd subject, accusative pattern with SAP subject.

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[3] This is, however, not universally the case; cf. Silverstein (1976). DeLancey (1981) considers 1st > 2nd and 2nd > 1st to be variations of the universally valid ranking SAP > 3rd.
[4] Cf. also the borrowing of Nepali -*lai* as a marker of animate undergoers in many Tibeto-Burman languages of Nepal.

An interpretation of the empathy hierarchy split has been suggested by Silverstein (1976) and Comrie (1978). NP types higher in the hierarchy are more likely to be agents than NPs lower in the hierarchy, and NPs that are natural agents need not be marked for semantic role. It can, however, be objected against the natural agency theory that – as 3rd humans are just as likely agents as speaker or hearer – one would expect the split to occur between human and non-human, and not where it is found most often, namely between SAP and non-SAP.

4. Direction marking

This speaker/hearer-centrism (rather than ego-centrism) manifests itself in still another characteristic of Tibeto-Burman verb morphology. The verb often contains a marker that differentiates *direct* actions initiated by a SAP and directed towards the outside, and *inverse* (cf. figure 1 on p. 479). A widespread marker for direct is the suffix *-u*. In our Chamling examples it is present in (3) and (7), marking H→3rd and 3rd→3rd, and also in (1), marking S→3rd. However, as the insertion of *-u* before *-ŋa* '1st' has been generalized (cf. (2)) it can synchronically no longer be interpreted as a direction marker. A direct marker is also present in the plural forms:

(10) khaŋ-u-m
      'We (incl) saw him.'
(11) ta-khaŋ-u-m
      'You (pl) saw him.'

as against:

(12) pa-khaŋ-i
      'He saw us (incl).'
(13) ta-khaŋ-i
      'He saw you (pl).'

where both *-m* and *-i* probably derive from *mi*, a common plural marker in Tibeto-Burman languages of Nepal. Jyarong has *-u* in H→3rd, and *u-* prefixed to the verb as inverse marker:

(14) mə kə   ŋa u-nasŋo-ŋ
      he ERG I   INV-scold-1st
      'He scolds me.'
(15) mə kə   no tə- u-   nasŋo-n
      he ERG you 2nd- INV- scold-2nd
      'He scolds you.'

(16) no   kə   ŋa kə- u-   nasŋo-ŋ
     you ERG I   2nd- INV- scold-1st
     'You scold me.'

Cf. direct:

(17) ŋa mə nasŋo-ŋ
     'I scold him.'
(18) no mə tə-nasŋo-u
     'You scold him.'
(19) ŋa no ta-nasŋo-n
     'I scold you.'
(Examples from Jin et al. (1958: 94f.).)

Note that in Jyarong, as in Chamling, only the actor of inverse constructions is marked. The exception is 3rd→3rd, which is ergative but direct (cf. (7)):

(20) mə kə mə nasŋo-u
     'He scolds him.'

H→S is unambiguously treated as inverse, which confirms once more that S is higher on the empathy scale than H. The form is, however, highly marked, as the prefix kə- occurs only here.
   The central Chamling dialect has instead of the ŋa-marked forms a kha-prefix for actions directed towards the speaker:

(21) kha-ida
     'he gave me'
     kha-ta-ida
     'you gave me'

It cannot yet be decided whether the prefix kha- is related to Jyarong kə- or to the ka- of Kuki-Chin languages that marks speaker participation. Synchronically it has the function of an inverse marker restricted to a speaker goal. The case of pa- in the Northern and Southern dialect is not that clear; in pa-khaŋuŋa (2) and pa-khaŋi (12) one might want to interpret it as an inverse marker; it is, however, also used to indicate plural actor in 3rd→3rd:

(22) pa-khaŋa
     'they saw it'

   Some languages have a clear inverse marker, but no direct marker, e.g. Nocte (North East India, cf. DeLancey (1981)):

(23) ŋa-ma   ate hetho-aŋ
      I-ERG he   teach-1st
(24) ate-ma   ŋa-naŋ hetho-h-aŋ
      he-ERG I-ACC teach-INV-1st

Direction may also play a role in other parts of grammar. Thus e.g. Limbu
(Eastern Nepal) marks tense only for inverse (DeLancey (1980: 94)).

5. Interpretation

The data presented in this paper cannot be adequately described in terms such
as subject/object, agent/patient or active/passive. Verbal 'agreement' is not
tied to a subject function, but indicates speaker or hearer participation. As
pronouns are usually omitted it should probably not be called agreement at all.
The NP marked as ergative can be agent, instrument, or experiencer. The cover
term 'actor' might seem useful, but is not very happy for an experiencer. The
characterization *'starting point'* used by DeLancey (1981) reflects best what to
my understanding is the function of the first NP in unmarked word order in
Tibeto-Burman sentences. All events are seen as movements on a social scene,
the center of which is the speech situation. Speaker and hearer look from their
place towards the 'outside world'. Events with speaker or hearer as starting
point take the same direction.
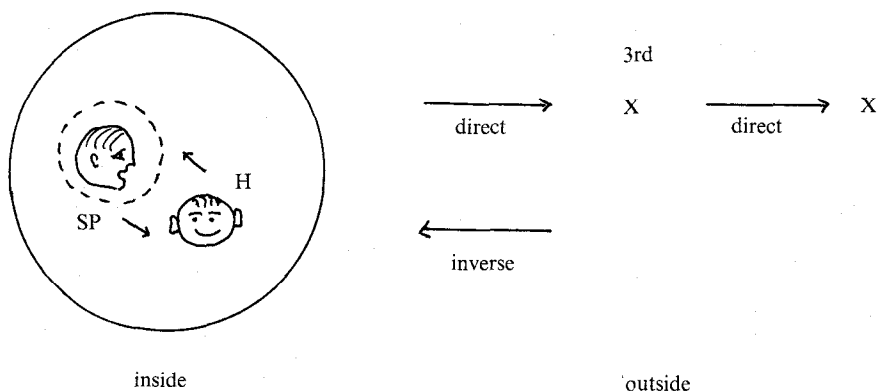
If the starting point is not inside the speech situation, attention has to be
directed towards it, and the starting point is marked by the ergative suffix. It
follows from this interpretation that the direction 3rd→3rd has to be marked

as ergative, as is the case in the split systems – even though it is interpreted as direct (cf. examples (7) and (20)).

Events, seen as movements in social space, 'go' from a starting point inside the speech situation to a target outside, or they 'come' from a starting point outside towards the speech situation. At least the latter, inverse direction is usually marked in Tibeto-Burman.

Speaker and hearer have equal status as SAPs, but not as starting points. The hearer is marked more often for starting point than the speaker in Chamling, and the direction H→S is interpreted as inverse in all languages considered.

The paradigms given initially now lend themselves to an alternative, more pragmatically oriented interpretation. The terms 1st and 2nd person have been abandoned, as they make the three persons appear to be of equal status. But at least in Tibeto-Burman it is crucial to distinguish SAP and Non-SAP as grammatical categories. The importance of making clear who is participating is apparent also in the so-called '1st plural' forms. Tibeto-Burman languages usually distinguish:

S + H	so-called	1.dl. inclusive
S + 3rd		1.dl. exclusive
S + H + 3rd(s)		1.pl. inclusive
S + 3rds		1.pl. exclusive

The latter three behave like 3rd in regard to the marking of starting point and as SAP in regard to participant marking.

The verbal morphology indicates in part speaker/hearer participation, in part direction of events. The latter must be seen in close interrelation with the marking of starting point. An ideal Tibeto-Burman system might take the following shape:

			Starting point	Direction	S/H participation
S	→	3rd	∅	-u	-ŋa
S	←	3rd	-wa	u-	-ŋa
H	→	3rd	∅	-u	-na
H	←	3rd	-wa	u-	-na
S	→	H	∅	-u	-na
S	←	H	∅	u-	-ŋa
3rd	→	3rd	-wa	-u	∅

The Chamling and Jyarong data interpreted against this model would look as follows.

Chamling

			Starting point	*Direction*	*S/H participation*
S	→	3rd	$\emptyset$	(-u)	-ŋa
S	←	3rd	-wa	$\begin{cases} \text{pa-} \\ \text{kha-} \end{cases}$	$\left.\begin{matrix} \text{-ŋa} \\ \emptyset \end{matrix}\right\}$
H	→	3rd	$\emptyset$/-wa	-u	ta-
H	←	3rd	-wa	$\emptyset$	ta-
S	→	H	$\emptyset$	$\emptyset$	-na
S	←	H	$\emptyset$/-wa	$\begin{cases} \emptyset \\ \text{kha-} \end{cases}$	$\left.\begin{matrix} \text{ta- -ŋa} \\ \text{ta-} \end{matrix}\right\}$
3rd	→	3rd	-wa	-u	$\emptyset$

Jyarong

			Starting point	*Direction*	*S/H participation*
S	→	3rd	$\emptyset$	$\emptyset$	-ŋ
S	←	3rd	kə	u-	-ŋ
H	→	3rd	$\emptyset$	-u	tə-
H	←	3rd	kə	u-	tə- -n
S	→	H	$\emptyset$	a-	tə- -n
S	←	H	$\emptyset$	u-	kə- -ŋ
3rd	→	3rd	kə	-u	$\emptyset$

Participation reflects the left part of the arrow representation, i.e. participation of someone inside the speech act circle. The arrow is represented by the *direction* marker. The non-participants (outsiders) are represented only if they are *starting points* (as ergative markers).

Some questions remain. I have ignored the tense split in my model. I think it is foreign to Tibeto-Burman; at least it does not affect the S > H > Non-SAP hierarchy and the interplay of the three pragmatic factors introduced. Also, I have not explained the prefix *ta-*, which would require material from many more languages.[5] I think, however, that ergativity and 'agreement' in Tibeto-Burman will be better understood and thereby seem more natural when described in terms of participation and direction. Also, I think that the study of languages like Chamling and Jyarong will add to our understanding of language and the close interwovenness of grammar and pragmatics.

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[5] Baumann (1975) believes *ta-* to be originally an evidential marker. For different functions in present Tibeto-Burman languages see also DeLancey (1980).

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