

## Ergativity in Khorṭha: an enigmatic phenomenon

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### Abstract:

*Khorṭha (a variety of Angika) is spoken in the western part of Jharkhand and Bihar. The languages that are spoken in the neighboring areas where Khorṭha is spoken are Bangla, Magahi, Maithili and Santhali. Hindi functions as the lingua franca in the area and is mainly used by the literate people. The languages (except Hindi) that are used as 'contact-languages' in the area do not have any trace of 'ergativity.' The 'grammatical gender' is also not present in Khorṭha nor is the linguistic feature of any language that is spoken in the area. Hindi is again an exception to this. Khorṭha also does not show any syntactic environment where the 'object-verb agreement' can be mediated as a separate system of agreement as is the case in Hindi.*

*The linguistic features such as availability of 'grammatical gender' and marking 'object-verb agreement' as an independent system of agreement are some of the core factors (i.e. in some cases all of these factors or one of these factors) for marking the 'split-ergativity' in most of the Indian languages. The languages like Hmar, Mizo, Halam etc. from Tibeto-Burman family are such where the 'ergativity' is marked in a full scale as defined by (Dixon 1994:1).*

*Khorṭha displays 'ergative case' with the subject NPs either by a phonological material i.e. nasalization of the vowel of the word or by the placement of '-ē' if the subject NP ends in a consonant sound. This ergative case in Khorṭha appears in the sentence only when the verb in the sentence is transitive and not when the verb is intransitive, meaning as per Dixon's definition of 'ergativity'. Moreover, Khorṭha goes beyond the system of 'split-ergative marking' as is the case in most of the Indo-Aryan languages and it seems to have the marking of ergativity as a fully-ergative language. Thus, Khorṭha comes very close to Hmar, Mizo and Halam from Tibeto-Burman family of languages in India and Basque, Dyrbal and Eskimo in the world with regard to the marking of ergativity. Khorṭha also behaves very different with regard to the system of agreement if we compare it with Hindi and some other Indo-Aryan languages that have 'split-ergativity.'*

*The present paper treats ergativity and agreement as two different linguistic constructs and thus it demonstrates as to how agreement is erroneously equated with ergativity. Dixon (1979:94) or Comrie (1978) or anyone who characterized the notion of 'ergativity' never claimed that ergative and agreement should be treated as 'part and parcel' as it has been misconceived by some scholars working on Indo-Aryan languages.*

*The ergative case marker in Khorṭha is phonologically realized or marked on the subject NP by suffixing 'ē' as soon as the verb changes from an intransitive to transitive. This is why Khorṭha will be compared in the paper with Hmar and Basque to make the point clear. The appearance of the 'ergative' case with the subject NP is conditioned with the ± transitivity of the verb in the language. This shows a contrast when we compare the structure of Khorṭha with 'Punjabi, 'kangri' and other Indo-Aryan languages that allow marking for ergative either covert or overt with the subject NP in some conditioned syntactic environments such as 'past simple tense, perfective aspect, only with subject in third person etc.*

*The paper is titled as ergativity in Khorṭha as 'enigmatic phenomenon' because I have no answer to the question, 'from where did this ergativity come to Khorṭha which is surrounded with languages with no 'ergative-case'? The question is a full-fledged topic for a good piece of research work in diachronic linguistics and the present paper can function as a path-guider for the future research work.*

Key words: Khorṭha, ergative-case, split-ergative, agreement feature, object-verb agreement, contact-language, lingua-franca, diachronic linguistics.

## **1. Introduction:**

Khortha is one of the varieties of Angika. Angika itself is called the dialect of Maithili, which, in turn, was a dialect of Hindi until 2003 when Maithili, via the 92nd Constitutional amendment, became one of the languages of the Eighth Schedule to the constitution of India. Khortha is spoken in more than fifty villages in at least five to six districts of Jharkhand and Bihar. It is often mistaken with another variety of Hindi spoken elsewhere in Bihar named ‘Bajjika.’

There is a website dedicated to this language<sup>1</sup>. Khortha is now an optional language paper in JPSC (Jharkhand Public Service Commission) and is taught even at the M.A. level in Ranchi University. I come from a village named Bara Sanghra in Madhupur subdivision and it comes under Deoghar district in Jharkhand state. The representative samples for the data of Khortha have been verified with other native speakers of the area despite the fact that it is my mother-tongue. Khortha has a pattern of SOV language and it possesses most of the typological characteristics such as post-position, negation preceding the main verb, auxiliaries following the main verb, marker of comparison following the standard of comparison etc. of a verb final language.

### **1.1 Ergativity in Khortha:**

In order to maintain the clarity in the presentation, I want to divide the paper in three sections. In section one, I will discuss the structure of Khortha and prove that it has ‘ergativity’ which is marked phonologically if the subject NP ends in a vowel and by a suffix ‘-ẽ’ when the subject NP ends in a consonant sound. In the second section, I will argue with the help of data from Khortha that it does not merely have ‘ergativity’, but it has ‘full-ergative system’ as defined by Dixon (1994). I will explain the phenomenon of ‘full-ergativity’ in different languages and compare them with Khortha. In the third section, I will present the fact of ‘ergativity and agreement’ in Khortha and will argue that ‘ergativity and ‘agreement’ do not have to be interdependent linguistic features for all the languages. They are coincidentally together and more importantly they are implicational features in some Indian languages. This should not mean that we start treating ‘ergativity and agreement’ as the part and parcel of each other. The last part of the third section will interweave the whole issue of ‘ergativity’ and agreement in Khortha and will conclude it with a final note that it has ‘full-ergative system’ as it is available

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<sup>1</sup> <http://khortha.in/index.php> dated 12/01/2013

in some other Indian languages from Tibeto-Burman family of language such as Hmar, Mizo and Halam.

I have already mentioned this earlier that the languages which are spoken in the neighboring areas of Khorṭha such as Maithili, Magahi, Bangla and Santhali etc. do not have any reference to ‘ergativity.’ Hindi is used as the lingua franca in the area and it serves as the second language for the literate-class. It is, therefore, difficult to believe that Khorṭha may have borrowed the ergativity from Hindi especially when no other language in the area has any influence of it. However, we need to wonder as to what could be source of this ‘ergative’ marking in Khorṭha! I don’t have any concrete answer to give at the moment, but I will certainly suggest something important at the end of the paper and that can serve as the topic of future and further research directions in the language. Let us first examine the structure of the ‘ergative’ marking in Khorṭha:

### 1.1.2 Ergativity in Khorṭha:

In this section, we will examine the case of ‘ergativity’ in Khorṭha in different types of sentences with intransitive and transitive verbs:

### 1.1.3 Subject in intransitive sentences:

1. c<sup>h</sup>õṛa            g<sup>h</sup>õr            gel-o  
boy-3MS-Nom    house-Loc    go-perf-3M  
‘The boy went home.’
2. c<sup>h</sup>õri            kohẽ            gel c<sup>h</sup>e  
girl-3FS-Nom    somewhere    go    be-imprf-prst-3FS  
‘The girl has gone somewhere.’
3. hãmsãb        ãgãnwa-mã    beṭ<sup>h</sup>ãl c<sup>h</sup>eIye  
we-1Pl-Nom    courtyard-Loc    sit        be-imprf-pst-1Pl  
‘We were sitting in the courtyard.’
4. u                kãhã    jẽ    rãhãl c<sup>h</sup>e  
S/he-3S-Nom    where    go    cont.    be-imprf-prst-3S  
‘Where is s/he going?’

The examples (1-4) from Khorṭha show that the verbs in these sentences are intransitive and the subject NPs in these examples are case marked with a covert nominative (i.e. zero case form) as the gloss of the subject NPs shows.

However, let us see examples with transitive verbs in Khorṭha and explain the form and function of the case marker that comes with the subject NPs in such examples.

#### 1.1.4 Subject in transitive sentences:

5. c<sup>h</sup>ōṛā            uṭa    kīṭaba    pəṛ<sup>h</sup>ə-l-ke  
boy-3MS-Erg    that book    read-perf-prst-3S  
'The boy has read that book.'
6. həmə            ṛṭa    kīṭaba    pəṛ<sup>h</sup>ə-l-ṛ-ye  
I-1S-Erg    this book    read-perf-prst-1S  
'I have read this book.'
7. toḥē            uṭa    kīṭaba    pəṛ<sup>h</sup>-l-ṛ-hi  
you-2SH-Erg    that book    read-perf-prst-2SH  
'You have read that book.'
8. c<sup>h</sup>oṛī            ṛṭa    cīṭ<sup>h</sup>īya    līk<sup>h</sup>ə-lə    hot-e  
girl-3FS-Erg    this letter    write-perf    be-fut-3S  
'The girl must have written this letter.'

The above examples (5-8) show a different pattern of the case on the subject NPs. The pattern is slightly difficult to discern here without some hint. The subject-NPs bear a phonological marking i.e. a marker of nasalization, when the verbs changed into transitive in these examples. The verb agreement<sup>2</sup>, however, does not show any change even when this phonological marker appears with the subject NPs. The phonological material that appears with the subject NPs has been termed, classified and discussed in Das (2006) as an ergative marker in Angika (Khorṭha).

The pattern of this ergativity in Khorṭha is very different from the pattern of ergativity that we find in Hindi and in some other Indo-Aryan languages such as Marathi, Punjabi etc. The ergative case marker on the subject NPs in Khorṭha does not function as a blocker for the agreement between the verb and the subject. This pattern of agreement and ergativity has been observed in many other languages. The present paper will also show in the third section that ergative case marked subject NPs can also show agreement with the verb in many languages. However, we must try to explain and claim this phonological marker with the subject NP as 'ergative case' marker.

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<sup>2</sup> I will take up this issue and discuss in detail in third section of the paper. The change of the agreement from the subject to object NPs due to appearance of the ergative case with the subject NPs is true for some Indo-Aryan languages but it does not have to be a condition for all languages that has ergativity.

Let us see the following examples:

9. ham əb sət-bo  
I-1S-Nom now Sleep-fut-imperf-1S  
'I will sleep now.'

\*9a. ham-ẽ əb sət-bo  
I-1S-Nom now Sleep-fut-imperf-1S  
'I will sleep now.'

10. ham-ẽ abe əpən kəma kər-bo  
I-1S-Nom now own work do-fut-imperf-1S  
'I will do my work now.'

\*10a. ham abe əpən kəma kər-bo  
I-1S-Nom now own work do-fut-imperf-1S  
'I will do my work now.'

The above examples (9-9a & 10-10a) are very helpful in order to decide the nature and function of the ergative marker in Khorṭha. The marker appears in two forms i.e. ' -ẽ & ~ ' ; meaning if the subject NP ends in a vowel such as 'c<sup>h</sup>oṛa', 'boy' and 'c<sup>h</sup>oṛi', 'girl' and they occur with a transitive verb in the sentence, the ergativity is marked using a marker of nasalization as we see in examples (5 and 8). However, if the subject NP ends in a consonant, the ergative marker appears with a nasalized vowel i.e. '-ẽ' when the verb is a transitive one in the sentence. This is what we see in examples (6-7 & 9-10). The ungrammaticality of (9a-10a) ensures that this extra phonological material and nasalized vowel in Khorṭha must be very important from the point of view of the structure of the language. On the basis of the above discussion, we can claim that the markers (i.e. ' -ẽ & ~ ') that appears with the subject NP with the transitive verb is an ergative marker in Khorṭha.

Moreover, the example (10) adds up to another important point for the marking of the ergativity in Khorṭha. The example (10) has a transitive verb and it is conjugated with a future indefinite tense, and it still shows the ergative case with the subject NP. This is something very unusual with regard to the availability of ergative-case in some Indo-Aryan languages is concerned. It hints towards the fact that Khorṭha does not follow the 'split-system of ergativity' that Hindi and some other Indo-Aryan languages have. Let us compare this sentence of Khorṭha with that of Hindi in the following example:

11. mē                    əb   əpna   kam   kər-ũ-g-a  
 I-1MS-Nom   now   own   work   do-fut-imperf-1MS  
 ‘I will do my work now.’

The example (11) from Hindi has been cited here for the comparison of the future indefinite tense conjugation and the case association with the subject NP in the sentence. The case that occurs with the subject NP is nominative case in Hindi. The ‘split-system of ergativity’ in Hindi is conditioned not only with the transitivity of the verb but also with the tense and aspect in which the transitive verbs appear in the sentence. The ergative case in Hindi can occur in a sentence with a transitive verb only when that verb is conjugated either in ‘past simple tense’ or in ‘perfective aspect’ of any tense. For example:

- 12 mē-ne       kam   kiy-a                    /kiy-a hē                    kiy-a t<sup>h</sup>a                    kiy-a hog-a  
 I-1MS-Erg   work   do-3MS-pst-sple   do-3MS-perf- prest   do-3MS-perf-pst   do-3MS-perf-fut  
 ‘I did the work/ I have done the work/ I had done the work/ I will have done the work.’

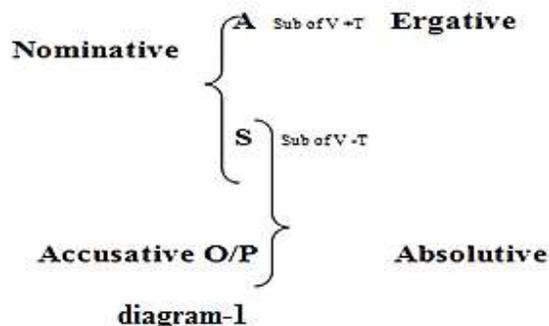
The above example (12) shows that the ergative-case in Hindi is marked only when the transitive verb is either in past simple tense or the same verb is in perfective aspect of any tense. Other than these instances, the subject of even a transitive verb is marked with ‘nominative case’ as we saw in earlier example (11). It is because of this parametric variation and requirement that the ergative-system in Hindi and some other languages is called ‘Split-ergative system.’ Coming back to the marking of ergativity in ‘Khorṭha’, we saw that the ‘ergative-case marking’ does not align with that of Hindi and other Indo-Aryan languages, and thus we must treat the ergativity in Khorṭha differently.

## 2. Khorṭha as a ‘full-ergative language’:

Let us reiterate the definition of ergativity by Dixon (1979: 1994). He has defined ergativity as ‘...a grammatical pattern in which the subject of an intransitive clause is treated in the same way as the object of a transitive clause, and differently from transitive subject.’ (Dixon 1994:1)

After this definition of ergativity by Dixon, languages of the world can be grouped into two<sup>3</sup> major types names ‘**Nominative-Accusative**’ and ‘**Ergative-Absolutive**’ languages. The simplest way to explain this would be through a diagram as given below:

<sup>3</sup> Haspelmath M. (2001) divides the languages in six different types on the basis of case-marking systems in languages in his work on ‘Argument marking in ditransitive alignment types’, paper available at <http://wwwstaff.eva.mpg.de/~haspelmt/DitransitiveAlignment.pdf> date 27/11/2012



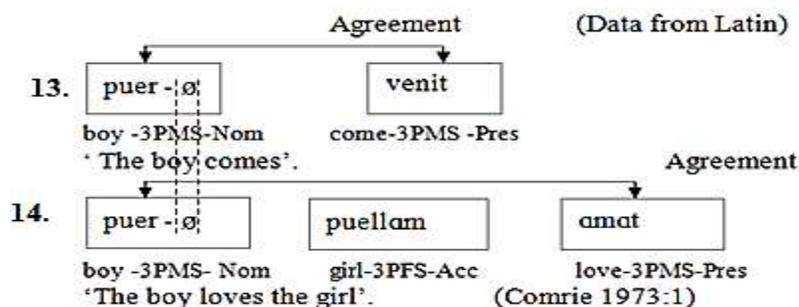
Adopted from Das (2006)

The above given diagram states that languages which are called ‘Nominative-Accusative’ mark the single argument of an intransitive sentence (S) same as the grammatical marking of the agent of an active transitive one (A) (Palmer 1994: Pp. 11), and if there is an object (direct object) in a transitive sentence it is marked with an accusative case. English and many other languages will fall into this group.

### 2.1 Nominative-Accusative type of languages:

There are many languages from Europe and other parts of the world that fall into this group. However, I would like to give an example from Latin as it has been cited by many scholars in linguistic literature to justify the example of ‘Nominative-Accusative’ type of language.

Example from Latin<sup>4</sup>:



The examples given above (13-14) show that Latin must be classified as a ‘Nominative-Accusative type’ of language as it marks the subject of both intransitive and transitive sentences as nominative and the direct object, in a transitive or a di-transitive sentence, is marked with an accusative case.

On the basis of the above case marking schemata for subject [=Nom] and direct object[=Acc], the languages are classified as ‘Nominative-Accusative’ type.

<sup>4</sup> Comrie, B. (1973) The ergative: variations on a theme. *Lingua* 32: 239–253.



which have been classified as ‘fully ergative’ languages. The term ‘fully ergative’ means that the parameters of ergative axiom that Dixon (ibid) has established in his definition for ergativity is obeyed or followed across all tenses, aspects and PNG features of the subject NP in the above mentioned languages. Some examples are necessary to make better sense of what I said about ‘fully ergative’ languages:

### 2.2.1.1 Ergativity in Basque:

17. emakume-a hurbil-tzen da  
woman-DET get/near-IMPF is  
‘The woman gets closer.’
18. emakume-a hurbil-tze-n ari da  
woman-DET get/near-NOM-LOC engaged is  
‘The woman is (engaged in) getting closer.’
- 19a. gu hurbil-tzen ari gara  
we-A get/close-IMPF PROG 3plA-be  
‘We are getting close.’
- \*20. gu-k hurbil-tzen ari gara  
we-E get/close-IMPF PROG 3plA-be  
‘We are getting close.’

(Data taken from Laka, I. 2006)

The above examples (17-20) from Basque justify the fact which Dixon (1994: Pp. 1) has outlined the requirement of ‘ergativity.’ There is an intransitive verb that has been used as the predicate in all these sentences. The subject NPs in these sentences are thus case marked with ‘nominative case’ which is realized as a zero suffix i.e. absolutive form. The examples (19-20) have been cited here from Laka (2006) to prove the point that the sentence (20) turns out to be ungrammatical if we place an ergative case marker with the subject NP if the verb is intransitive. However, let us now see examples of Basque with transitive verbs:

### 2.2.1.2 Ergativity in Basque:

21. emakume-a-k ogi-ak ja-ten du  
woman- DET-E bread-DET.PL eat-IMPF 3A-PL-have-3E  
‘The woman eats (the) breads.’

22. gazteri-a-k pilota uz-ten ari du  
 youth-DET-E ball-DET leave-IMPF PROG has  
 ‘The youth is leaving the ball’ (Lit: Young people are leaving jai-alai playing.)
23. emakume-a-k ogi-ak ja-n d-it-u  
 woman- DET-E bread-DET.PL eat-PRF 3A-PL-have3E  
 ‘The woman has eaten (the) breads.’
24. emakume-a-k ogi-ak ja-ngo du-it-u  
 woman- DET-E bread-DET.PL eat-IRR 3A-PL-have/3E  
 ‘The woman will eat (the) breads.’

(Data taken from Laka, I. 2006)

The above examples (21-24) from Basque show the full adaptation of Dixon’s articulation of ergativity. The earlier examples (17-20) had intransitive verbs and thus the subject NPs were marked with nominative case in different tenses. However, examples (20-24) show different kind of marking with the subject NPs because the verbs in these examples are transitive ones. What is important to note here is the *tense* and *aspect* of the sentences. The verbs have been used in present simple, present continuous, present perfect, future simple in these sentences. There are much more complex morphology to explain when we try to examine the auxiliaries with different inflectional markers in Basque, but this is not our main concern, thus, I will pay more attention to our main concern i.e. the case marking system in Basque.

So, despite the fact that the verbs are in different tenses and aspects, the subject NPs in all the sentences get marked with ergative case. This is what would be the classic example of ‘fully ergative’ type of languages. The aboriginal language in Australia called Dyirbal also shows similar phenomenon, and so is the case of Mizo and Hmar<sup>5</sup> spoken in Northeastern part of India. Let us first see some examples from Dyirbal and then we will talk about ergativity in Hmar:

### 2.2.2 Ergativity in Dyirbal: (The language has OSV as the word-order)

Example in Dyirbal with an **intransitive subject**

25. bayi yaóa walmanyu  
 NC1.there.Abs Man.Abs got up  
 ‘Man got up’.

<sup>5</sup> These two languages are the only examples, according to my knowledge, which show a **full-fledged system of ergativity** according to Dixon’s definition.

Example in Dyirbal with a transitive subject in **present progressive**

26. ngayguna ba-nggul yaóá-nggu balgan  
me-Acc NC1.there-Erg Man-Erg hit.NFut  
'Man is hitting me.'

Example in Dyirbal with a transitive subject in **past simple**

27. yabu nguma-nggu gigan banagay-gu  
mother-Acc father-Erg tell-to-do-NFut return-purp  
'Father told mother to return.'

(Dixon 1994)

The above examples (25-27) from Dyirbal show that the adaptation of Dixon's 'ergativity' in Dyirbal language is also in a full scale. The basic distinction of 'ergative' vs. 'absolutive' case is just the transitivity of the verb and nothing else i.e. the parameterization of 'ergativity' is not conditioned to any form of tense and aspect and the difference of the PNG<sup>6</sup>. Dyirbal is also quoted as a language with 'full-ergative' system.

There are some languages in India such as Hmar, Mizo and Halam that also show 'full-ergative' system as per the marking of the subjects in transitive and intransitive sentences are concerned. I would like to present the instance of Hmar and its case marking as a 'full-ergative system'. The examples from Hmar will help us to establish a similar fact and pattern in Khorṭha language:

### 2.2.3 Ergativity in Hmar

Let us examine the structure of ergativity in Hmar:

#### 2.2.3.1 Subject in Intransitive clauses:

28. kei ka tlan  
I-1S-Nom 1SAgr run  
'I run.'
29. kei-ni kan tlan  
I-1Pl-Nom 1PlAgr run  
'We run.'
30. kei skol-a ka p<sup>h</sup>e  
I-1S-Nom school-Loc 1SAgr go  
'I go to school.'

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<sup>6</sup> These parameters have been important ones to determine the occurrence of 'ergative case' in different Indo-Aryan languages such as Punjabi, Kangari, Kinnauri and some other languages.

31. naute chu a trap  
 baby-3S-Nom Det 3SAgr cry  
 ‘The baby cries.’

Darhmingthang, J. (2010)

The above examples from Hmar show that the subject NP is marked with nominative case because the verb in these examples is intransitive. The nominative case is displayed in these examples with ‘zero case suffix’ i.e. the absolutive case form. This is what Dixon has said when he said that the subject of intransitive verb and the direct object of the transitive verb will be case marked in the same case form i.e. the absolutive case, and the subject of the transitive verb will be case marked differently, and that is with the ‘ergative case’. Now, let us examine some examples with transitive verb in Hmar language:

**2.2.3.2 Subjects in transitive clauses:**

32. kei-in lek<sup>h</sup>at<sup>h</sup>ɔn ka zi:k  
 I.1S-Erg letter 1-SAgr Write-impf  
 ‘I write a letter.’
33. kei-ni-in lek<sup>h</sup>at<sup>h</sup>ɔn ei zi:k-tah  
 I-Pl-Erg Letter 1Pl.Agr write-pst  
 ‘We wrote a letter.’
34. kei-in lek<sup>h</sup>at<sup>h</sup>ɔn ka zi:k-diŋ  
 I.1S-Erg letter 1-SAgr Write-fut  
 ‘I will write a letter.’
35. kei-in lek<sup>h</sup>at<sup>h</sup>ɔn ka zi:k-jiŋ-diŋ  
 I.1S-Erg letter 1-SAgr Write-cont-fut  
 ‘I will be writing a letter.’
36. kei-in lek<sup>h</sup>at<sup>h</sup>ɔn ka lo-zi:k-anih  
 I.1S-Erg letter 1-SAgr pst-write-cont-be  
 ‘I was writing a letter.’
37. kei-in lek<sup>h</sup>at<sup>h</sup>ɔn ka zi:k-laime:k-anih  
 I.1S-Erg letter 1-SAgr write-cont-be  
 ‘I am writing a letter.’

38. kɛi-in lek<sup>h</sup>at<sup>h</sup>ɔn ka lo-zi:k-tah  
 I.1S-Erg letter 1-SAgr pst-write-perf  
 'I have written a letter.'

39. kɛi-in lek<sup>h</sup>at<sup>h</sup>ɔn ka zi:k-ta-diŋ-ana  
 I.1S-Erg letter 1-SAgr Write-fut-be  
 'I will have written a letter.'

Darhmingthang, J. (2010)

The above examples (32-39) from Hmar are with transitive verbs and these verbs have been used in different tenses and aspects. These examples also depict the fact that the subject of these examples are case marked differently i.e. with the ergative case. If we compare these examples to that of the earlier examples with intransitive verbs, we will find that the subjects of different verbs are not case marked in uniform manner in Hmar, meaning the subjects of different verbs i.e. transitive and intransitive verbs, are case marked differently. Since we find the ergative case with the subject NP in all these sentences in different tenses and aspects, we can justify that Hmar is a 'Fully ergative' language.

The direct objects in the examples (32-39) are in the same case form which is similar to that of the subject NPs of earlier examples (28-31) where the verb was intransitive. These two linguistic elements (i.e. the subject of intransitive sentences and the direct object of transitive sentences) are in 'absolutive' form, and this absolutive form is nothing but the zero case marked NPs. And as we would expect to happen, the subject NPs in the examples (32-39) are case marked with 'ergative' case and thus bring another type of languages called 'Ergative-Absolutive' languages. With the above background discussion on the nature and function of 'full-system of ergativity', we must examine the case of 'ergativity' in Khorṭha.

### **2.3. 'Full ergative system in Khorṭha':**

40. dineswā iskula-mə bəturwən<sup>h</sup>i-k pəɾ<sup>h</sup>a-we-c<sup>h</sup>e  
 Dinesh-3MS-Erg school-Loc child-Pl-Dat teach-impf-Prst-3S  
 'Dinesh teaches the children in the school.'

41. rek<sup>h</sup>əwā əpən dostəniyāk ciṭṭ<sup>h</sup>iya lɪk<sup>h</sup>ɪ rəhəl c<sup>h</sup>e  
 Rekha-3FS-Erg her friend-3FS-Dat letter-3S-Abs write-impf stay-cont be-Prst-3S  
 'Rekha is writing a letter to her friend'.

42. kəbitəwā      gūdəriya      k<sup>h</sup>iči      rəhəl      c<sup>h</sup>e-l-e  
 Kavita-FS-Erg clothes-Abs wash-prst stay-cont be-Pst-3S  
 ‘Kavita was washing clothes.’
43. həm-ē      kəl      okər      ɖ<sup>h</sup>eɔwɑ      g<sup>h</sup>umε      də-b-e  
 I-1S-Erg tomorrow his money-Abs return-impf give-Fut-1S  
 ‘I will return his money tomorrow.’
44. həməɾ      bəp-ā      kohen      kəm      kər-i      rəhəl-ə      ho-t-e  
 my father-3S-Erg somewhere work-Abs do-impf stay-Fut be-Fut-3S  
 ‘My father must be working somewhere.’

The above examples (40-44) show the similar facts with regard to the case marking on the subject NPs and this is what we have seen in case of Basque, Dyirbal and Hmar. The sentences (39-43) have transitive verbs and thus the case-suffix that occurs with the subject NPs is ergative case.

The examples (1-4) in Khorṭha that we have examined in the beginning of the paper have intransitive verbs, and thus the case-suffix that occurs with the subject NPs is the nominative one. The other set of examples (5-8) that we examined after these examples show that the verbs that have been used in these example are transitive ones. The change of the verb type i.e. from intransitive to transitive bring a clear change in the marking of the case-suffixes with the subject NPs in two sets of above mentioned sentences.

This change in the case-suffix is what has been outlined in the definition of ergativity by Dixon (1994). The establishment of the ‘ergativity’ Khorṭha is done on the basis of the contrast of the examples (9-10) and the corresponding ungrammatical sentences. The next thing that remains to be verified with regard to the ergativity in Khorṭha is whether the ‘pattern of ergativity’ is a ‘Split-system of ergativity’ or a ‘Full-system of ergativity’.

The last set of examples (40-44) is meant to prove the fact that Khorṭha must be classified as a ‘full-ergative language’ with regard to the marking of the case-suffix of the subject NPs in the sentences with transitive verbs. The tenses and aspects that have been used in these sentences are the ‘present simple, present progressive, past progressive, future simple and future progressive’. The above tenses and aspects are not the syntactic or morphological domains where we get ‘ergative-case’ in any Indo-Aryan languages. Thus, the corresponding and equivalent sentences of (39-43) do not bring the context where the subject NPs can get ‘ergative-case’ in Hindi and

other Indo-Aryan languages. However, the above examples (39-43) are somewhat similar to the examples of Basque, Hmar and Dyirbal which are all ‘full-ergative languages’. Khorṭha can be claimed as a ‘full-ergative language’ on the basis of the comparison of the syntactic structure of these languages and the pattern of ‘ergativity’ in these languages. The ergativity is marked in these languages on the basis of the alternation of the intransitive and transitive verbs.

Let us finally see the last set of examples from Khorṭha which provides the domain of ‘split-ergative system’ in Hindi and many other Indo-Aryan languages.

### **2.3.1 Ergativity in Khorṭha in past simple tense and perfective aspect:**

45. kṣīyā            kūyāwa            kəṭwa-l-k-e  
Kanshi-3S-Erg water-well-Abs dig-Caus-pst-3S  
‘Kanshi got the water-well digged.’
46. b<sup>h</sup>usənā            əpən    kəpəṛwa    kač-i/p<sup>h</sup>ič-i    le-l-k-e  
Bhushan-3S-Erg self clothes wash-V<sub>1</sub> take-V<sub>2</sub>-perf-prst-3S  
‘Bhushan has washed his clothes.’
47. pər            səl    kəleswā            ego    gε            kɪnəl    c<sup>h</sup>e-l-e  
previous year Kailash-3S-Erg one cow-Abs buy-perf be-pst-3S  
‘Kailash had bought a cow last year’.
48. sunɪlwā            əpən    kəma            kəri    lē-le    ho-t-e  
sunil-3MS-Erg self work-Abs do- V<sub>1</sub> take-V<sub>2</sub> be-perf-Fut-3S  
‘Sunil must have done his work.’

The above examples (45-48) are the instances which bring the domain of ‘ergativity’ in the form of ‘split-ergative system’ in Hindi and other Indo-Aryan languages. Khorṭha shows a system of ergativity that is classified as ‘full-ergative system’. The syntactic and morphological domain of ‘full-ergativity’ is higher than that of the ‘split-ergativity’. Therefore, it is not surprising that the subject NPs of the above examples show ‘ergative-case suffix’. The requirement of ergativity in Khorṭha is the alternation of  $\pm$  transitivity of the sentence. The above sentences (45-48) are all with the transitive verbs, and the tenses and aspects are co-incidentally the ones where we get the ‘ergative case suffix’ in Hindi and other Indo-Aryan languages. These examples, however, prove something else in Khorṭha. The ‘ergative-case suffix’ occurs in all the tenses and aspects in Khorṭha provided the verb of the sentence is transitive. We can conclude the section by saying that Khorṭha belongs to the ‘full-ergative case’.

### 3. Ergativity and agreement in Khorṭha:

I want to discuss the facts of ‘agreement system’ in Khorṭha before I conclude the paper. If we compare the patterns of agreement in Khorṭha to that of Hindi, we would say that there is a great difference between two types of languages. The first type of languages are those in which the ‘subject-verb agreement’ and ‘object-verb agreement’ alternates on the basis of some syntactic environments. Hindi and some other Indo-Aryan languages such as Marathi, Punjabi, Kangri etc. are the languages in which the occurrence of a ‘case-marker’ with an NP works as a blocker between the verb and that NP for the agreement. It is in this context that when an ergative case occurs with the subject NP, the verb ceases to agree with the subject NP and it agrees with the object NP if it is unmarked<sup>7</sup>. The syntactic environment is changed from ‘subject-verb agreement’ to the ‘object-verb agreement’ that has been brought out by the postpositions e.g. ‘ergative, accusative and dative etc.’. Das (2006) has classified this type of languages as the languages with a *dual-system of agreement*.

There is another type of languages where the occurrence of the case-suffixes with the subject or object NPs does not function as the blocker for the agreement between the subject and verb. The subject-verb agreement is *the primary system of agreement* in these languages. The agreement system does not change the syntactic environments in these languages. In other words, there is no alternation of ‘subject-verb agreement’ to ‘object-verb agreement’ in these languages, and thus these languages have been classified as *single-system of agreement* in Das(2006)<sup>8</sup>. Khorṭha belongs to a ‘*single-system of agreement*’ and it is for this reason that the occurrence of ‘ergative case-suffix’ with the subject NP does not block the agreement between the verb and the subject. This is not something very new to acknowledge. The agreement fact of Hmar in the present paper also displays the similar pattern. The subject NPs are all ergative case marked and yet the verb agrees with the case-marked subject in all these examples (32-39). There is another important fact that I want to mention here.

Even in the languages which show ‘dual-system of agreement’ such as Nepali, Gujarati and some other languages display the patterns where the case markers with the subject and object

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<sup>7</sup> However, if the direct object is also case marked, the verb occurs in a default form e.g. 3MS.

<sup>8</sup> It does not mean that the verb cannot bear any other reference of other noun phrases in such languages. But these references are marked on the verb simultaneously and along with the reference of the subject NP in these languages.

NPs don't always function as the blocker for the agreement. I will present some examples from Gujarati and Nepali to prove the point:

**3.1. Gujarati: (adopted from Mistry 2003):**

49. šilaa-e kaagaL lakh-y-o  
S.(F)-ERG letter (M) write-PF-M  
'Sheela wrote a letter'.
50. šilaa-e raaj-ne jagaaD-y-o  
S.(F)-ERG R.(M)-Acc awake-PF-M  
'Sheela woke up Raj'.

These two examples (49-50) from Gujarati exemplify that the verb can agree with a case marked nominals in Gujarati. This strengthens the above-mentioned facts of 'agreement pattern' in Khorṭha. In example (49) the direct object is unmarked and it is a third person singular nominal entity and that is what the inflection on the verb shows. So, one can mistake this as a similar pattern that is found in Hindi, Punjabi and Marathi where verb agrees with the left most nominal element only if that nominal is not case marked. However, when we compare (50) with (49), we have to change this view. The verb in (50) still agrees with the direct object inspite of the fact that the direct object bears an overt case. Let us see one more example in Gujarati to arrive at a better conclusion because one can argue that the example (50) might be a case of 'default agreement' in Gujarati.

Consider the following example:

51. raaj-e šeela-ne jagaaD-y-i  
R.(M)-ERG S.(F)-Acc awake-PF-F  
'Raj woke up Sheela'.

The above example (51) leaves no space for any doubt regarding the agreement of the verb in Gujarati with a case marked direct object, and this pattern has been made available because the subject NP is ergative case marked. The verb does not agree with the ergative-case marked subject NP in Gujarati<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> One can ask a naïve question why does not the verb agree with ergative-case marked subject in Gujarati? I guess there is no answer to such a question. The linguists have never been out there to answer a question that starts with 'why', they have at best been able to answer a question that starts with 'how'.

Let us also examine an instance of Nepali and its agreement pattern in ergative construction. This will really enrich the future research work in the area and widen up the horizon of the research topic on ‘ergativity and agreement’ with myriad diversification.

### **3.2 Nepali: (adopted from Poudel, T. 2006)**

52. čitrəkār-le            d<sup>h</sup>erai    čitrə    bəṅa-yo  
painter-3MS-Erg    many    picture    make-pst-3MS  
‘The painter made many pictures’.

53. mai-le            sod<sup>h</sup>pətrə            lek<sup>h</sup>-y-e  
I-1MS-Erg    research paper    write-pst-1MS  
‘I wrote a research paper’.

These examples (52-53) help us to wind up the discussion on the issue of ergative-case marked nominal and its agreement with the verb in Nepali. It is an Indo-Aryan language and it shows the pattern of agreement where ‘the ergative case’ does not work as a blocker for the agreement between the subject and the verb in the sentence.

It must be mentioned here that Dixon (1994) never mentioned about ‘agreement’ as the part and parcel for ‘ergativity’ in languages. His definition for ergativity never hints at any reference to the agreement system of different types of languages. It is due to the coincidental implication of ‘ergativity and agreement’ in Hindi and some other Indo-Aryan languages that these two linguistic features have structural dependencies and happen to facilitate the syntactic environments which bring two distinct systems of agreement i.e. ‘subject-verb agreement’ and ‘object-verb agreement’.

The researchers working on Hindi and some other Indo-Aryan languages have presented these two linguistic features in a way that these linguistic features look dependent on each other. The present paper tries to arrest the attention of the researchers and tries to request them to examine the instances of ‘ergativity’ and ‘agreement’ separately. This will definitely enrich the research directions in the area.

### **4. Conclusion:**

The present paper can be concluded by stating the following findings in Khorṭha. The ergativity in Khorṭha is an enigmatic phenomenon. This is enigmatic because it is not very clear as to where did this ‘ergativity’ come in Khorṭha from! The languages that are spoken in the

neighbouring areas do not have any reference to ‘ergativity’. The appearance of ‘ergative case suffix’ with the subject NPs in Khorṭha in exactly the similar environment that Dixon (1994) has mentioned in his definition for ergativity remains a great mystery. I have mentioned in the beginning of the paper that I don’t have any concrete answer to this question. But I would certainly hint at a clue for this mysterious manifestation of ‘ergative case’ in Khorṭha.

There is a script called ‘Kaithi’ which finds some reference in the areas where Khorṭha is spoken. It is said that this ‘Kaithi script’ was used by a learned-class called ‘kaith or kayasth<sup>10</sup>’, ‘..those who know how to maintain an account in king’s palace, princely states or even in big landlord’s place. This is not known or recorded in any document whether this script was just a script or was also used in the form of a language. However, this much can be definitely speculated that ‘Kaithi’ writing had the reference to ‘ergativity’, it could be the case that Khorṭha still retains this ‘ergativity’ and it retains the marker in its full-scale i.e. a full fledged ergative system as it was articulated by Dixon (1994). This, however, is just a speculation in this regard and it remains a future research topic that can be undertaken with a diachronic perspective to it and have some concrete answer to the question as to where did the ‘ergativity’ come from in Khorṭha, especially when no other languages that are spoken in the area have any reference to this? But till then, on the basis of the arguments and facts that I have presented in the paper, Khorṭha should be called a ‘full-ergative’ language from Indo-Aryan language family.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://peoplegroupsindia.com/profiles/kayasth>

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