

Unaccusative vs unergative opposition in Hindi

This paper is aimed at analyzing the grammaticalization of unaccusative/unergative opposition in Hindi. The main diagnostic construction which serves to explicate the opposition of unaccusative vs unergative verbs is passive. Most Hindi grammarians believe that passive construction in Hindi is formed only by active verbs: transitive and unergative, i.e. passivizable intransitives always imply agent in their argument structure [Davison 1980, 1982], [Mohanani 1994]. Intransitive verbs usually generate passives with modal meanings, and capability meaning restricted to negative or paranegetic environments is dominating [Davison 1980; Montaut 2004]. Below, an attempt will be made to single out three semo-syntactic classes of verbs in which unaccusative vs unergative opposition manifests itself in different ways.

The first class includes initially unaccusative verbs that imply animate or inanimate patient in their argument structure: *girnā* ‘fall’, *ḍūbnā* ‘drown’, *marnā* ‘die’. Passivisation is possible when the verb acquires volitional meaning in special contexts (e.g. *fall* in a game where all players have to fall deliberately [Montaut 2004: 210]); *drown* oneself, i.e. commit suicide; *die* for Motherland’).

(1)

<i>mujh-se</i>	<i>gir-ā</i>	<i>nahī̃</i>	<i>gay-ā</i>
I.OBL-INSTR	fall-PP.M.SG	NEG	go-AOR.M.SG

I could not fall, I could not make it (in a game) [Montaut 2004: 210].

Not only the verbs denoting physical actions like *girnā* ‘fall’ but also the verbs denoting feelings and emotions like *ḍarnā* ‘be afraid’, *ghabrānā* ‘worry’ etc. may be used in passive construction:

(2)

<i>mujh-se</i>	<i>acchī tarah</i>	<i>ḍar-ā</i>	<i>nahī̃</i>	<i>jā-e-g-ā</i>
I.OBL-INSTR	good way	be scared	NEG	go-3.SG-FUT-M.SG

‘I will not be able to show that I am scared (acting in theatre-drama)’

The second class is constituted by initially unergative verbs with agentive animate subjects: *bhāgnā* ‘run’, *uṭhnā* ‘rise’. In case of inanimate subjects these verbs acquire involitional meaning: *uṭhnā* ‘rise’ (about a man – clouds, smoke). Compare with English: I like to travel in summer - The package travelled for two weeks [Perlmutter 1978:165]. Only constructions with animate subject are passivized:

(3)

<i>rām se</i>	<i>subah</i>	<i>pāc baje</i>	<i>uṭh-ā</i>	<i>nahī̃</i>	<i>jā-t-ā</i>
Ram INSTR	morning	five o’clock	get up-PP.M.SG	NEG	go-IMP.P-M.SG

‘Ram cannot bring himself to get up at five o’clock in the morning’

Impersonal passive may also be used:

(4)

<i>cal-o</i>	<i>nahāy-ā</i>	<i>jā-e</i>
move-IMPER.2.PL	bathe-PP.M.SG	go-SUBJ-3.SG

‘Let us go to bathe (for a swim)’

The third class consists of verbs (with human agent) implying either willed or unwilled actions: *milnā* (meet with somebody deliberately vs unexpectedly), *phisalnā* ‘slide’ (children slide down the hill) vs ‘slip’ (a man slipped on a banana pill), compare with English ‘slide’ [Perlmutter 1978: 163]. Passive transformation is allowed when the verb has volitional meaning:

(5)

<i>mujh-se</i>	<i>us-se</i>	<i>abhī</i>	<i>mil-ā</i>	<i>nahī</i>	<i>jā-e-g-ā</i>
I.OBL-INSTR	he-INSTR	now	meet-PP.M.SG	NEG	go-3.SG-FUT-M.SG

‘Now I will not be able to bring myself to meet with him’

Causative construction can also be used in order to distinguish between unergative and unaccusative verbs. Both unaccusative and unergative verbs can be causativized in Hindi: unergative: *bhāgnā* ‘run’ > *bhagānā* ‘drive smb. away’ > *bhagvānā* ‘organize an escape’; unaccusative: *ṭūṭnā* ‘break (Vi)’ > *toṛnā* ‘break (Vt)’ > *tuṛvānā* ‘organize breaking’.

However, only unaccusative verbs can form causatives with involitional causer:

(6) *phaṭnā* ‘crack, split (Vi)’ > *phoṛnā* ‘crack, split (Vt)’ > *phuṛvānā* ‘ask smb. to break, split’

<i>tum-ne</i>	<i>kampyūṭar</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>apn-ī</i>	<i>ākh-ē</i>	<i>phuṛ-vā</i>	<i>l-ī</i>
you-ERG	computer	INSTR	self’s-F	eye-F.PL	crack-Caus	take- PP.F.PL

‘You ruined your eyes while working on the computer’

(7) *kaṭnā* ‘be cut’ > *kāṭnā* ‘cut’ > *kaṭvānā* ‘organize cutting’

<i>khiloun-e</i>	<i>k-ī</i>	<i>talvār</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>khel-t-e</i>	<i>khel-t-e</i>
toy-M.OBL.SG	GEN-F	sword	with	play-IMP.P-M.OBL	play-IMP.P-M.OBL
<i>bacc-e</i>	<i>ne</i>	<i>apn-ī</i>	<i>ūṅgl-ī</i>	<i>kaṭ-vā</i>	<i>l-ī</i>
child-M.OBL.SG	ERG	self’s-F	finger-F	cut-CAUS	take-AOR.F.SG

While playing with a toy sword, the child cut his own finger’

Problems of compound verbs (formed by combining the main and the light components) are also analyzed in the paper. The verb *paṛnā* ‘fall’ is the only unaccusative in the list of Hindi light verbs. According to M. Butt, it does not attribute conscious control over the action to the actor [Butt 1995:108]. Contrary to this statement, our analysis demonstrates that unergative or unaccusative semantics of verbal combinations is always determined by meaning of the main verb and not by that of the light one:

(8)

<i>vah</i>	<i>ghoṛ-e</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>utar /gir</i>	<i>paṛ-ā</i>
he	horse-M.SG.OBL	ABL	get down/fall	fall-AOR.M.SG

‘He got down (deliberately)/fell (unwillingly) from the horse’.

Interestingly, *paṛnā* ‘fall’ as the light verb follows the metaphoric shift of the main verb: e.g., in (9) the unaccusative *ṭūṭnā* ‘break’ (toy broke) when combined with unaccusative light verb *paṛnā* forms unergative compound *ṭūṭ paṛnā* ‘attack’:

(9)

<i>fauj</i>	<i>duśman</i>	<i>par</i>	<i>ṭūṭ</i>	<i>paṛ-ī</i>
army	enemy	on	break	fall-AOR.F.SG

‘The army attacked the enemy’

List of abbreviations

M – masculine; F – feminine; SG – singular; PL – plural; OBL – oblique; INSTR – instrumental; ABL – ablative; 1 – first person; 3 – third person; AOR – aorist; IMP.P – imperfective participle; PP – perfective participle; PRES – present tense; FUT – future tense; NEG – negation; SUBJ – subjunctive mood

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