

Ergativity in Modern and Middle Indo-Aryan: A Critical Digest

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1. Introduction

Ergativity in Indo-Aryan languages has been a much-discussed issue for a several decades. Not only has ergativity been particularly well described with regard to Hindi (cf. Kachru and Pandharipande 1979; Comrie 1984; Saksena 1985; Hook 1985; Mohanan 1994; Montaut 2001, 2006; Butt 2006), but much has also been written about the origin of the ergative pattern in Indo-Aryan from a historical point of view (cf. Hock 1986; Bubenik 1989; Butt 2001; Stronski 2009; Verbeke and De Cuypere 2009, among others). The Late Middle Indic stage of Apabhramśa in particular has turned out to be crucial in the alleged development of the accusative to ergative alignment (cf. Bubenik 1998). However, in the study of this transition, various problems have arisen. For instance, the early explanation that the ergative construction stems from an Old Indo-Aryan passive construction has lost favor (cf. Hook 1991; Peterson 1998; Stronski 2009), and the more fundamental issue of whether it is possible at all to study alignment in Late Middle Indic has been called into question based on the literary and artificial nature of the language (cf. Tieken 2000).

In this paper, we will provide evidence that no Indo-Aryan language is an ergative language. It will be argued that ergativity, as a classifying property of languages (cf. its traditional definition established by Dixon 1979 and Comrie 1978), does not consistently apply to the Modern Indo-Aryan languages. At the same time, however, we will show that there are various features resembling the ergative pattern that do occur in Modern Indo-Aryan. For instance, Hindi has long been considered a prototypical example of a split ergative language, with a split in alignment based on Tense-Aspect-Mood (TAM) (cf. Comrie 1978; Mohanan 1994; Dixon 1994).¹ However, Hindi also displays certain features that are irregular for (split) ergative languages, which suggests that Hindi is not,

¹ In his recent survey of case marking alignment in the *World Atlas of Language Structures Online* (2008: Ch. 98), Comrie changed his view and included Hindi as a language with a tripartite case marking pattern. There is no mention of agreement.

strictly speaking, a split ergative language. We therefore propose that the terms ‘ergative language’ and ‘split ergativity’ be abandoned with respect to Hindi and other Indo-Aryan languages in favor of the more empirically valid view that these languages possess a number of ergative features, in particular, agentive case marking and/or object agreement. These features may be labeled ‘ergative’ insofar as they bear a structural resemblance to certain constructions in true-to-type ergative languages, but *not* because they illustrate the concept of ergativity as a counterpart to accusativity. If this view of ergative features in Modern Indo-Aryan is also applied to Middle Indo-Aryan, then the assumption that neither Apabhraṃśa nor the Modern Indo-Aryan languages are ‘ergative languages’ gains credence as well. On the other hand, even in Apabhraṃśa there are certain morphological and syntactic features that resemble the ergative features found in Modern Indo-Aryan.

From the foregoing it is clear that we favor a narrow definition of ergativity. In particular, we consider the existence of the ergative case (or object agreement or word order, for that matter) to be only a specific feature of a language, which does not imply that the entire language should be labeled ‘ergative’ (cf. Palmer 1994: 14). One could, of course, argue that if a language contained even one ergative feature, it should be assumed to be an ‘ergative language’. Viewed from this perspective, Middle Indo-Aryan and New Indo-Aryan would have to be classified as ergative languages. However, for a number of reasons, we do not adopt such a view. First, any broad definition of ergativity leads to a number of undesirable generalizations. For instance, French would have to be considered an ergative language because of the agreement between the *participe passé* and the O (e.g., *Je l’ai vue* ‘I have seen her’ vs. *Je l’ai vu* ‘I have seen him’). Similarly, languages in which there are ergative nominalization patterns or ‘ambitransitive’ verbs (e.g., *to break*, *to sink*), such as English, would also qualify as ergative (cf. Matthews 1997: 117). A second drawback of a broad definition is that it is bound to be applied arbitrarily. For example, there is no obvious reason why the label ‘ergative language’ should refer to languages in which there is an ergative case but not to languages without an ergative case but with other ergative features. For these reasons, and because we are convinced that the definition of a descriptive category such as ‘ergativity’ should be as specific as possible if it is not to become vacuous, we have chosen to adopt Dixon’s 1994 definition of ‘ergativity’ and to apply it in a parsimonious way.

This paper is organized as follows. In the next section, the concept of ergativity, as defined by Dixon (1994), is introduced and briefly discussed. Section 3 is devoted to Modern Indo-Aryan. We focus on a number of languages to illustrate the wide variety of ergative features in this language group. We conclude that

many languages display one or several ergative features, but none of them qualifies as a fully ergative language. Section 4 focuses on Late Middle-Indic. Because of the variation in Apabhraṃśa, it is impossible to give a full account of this language. Our observations are therefore restricted to the Apabhraṃśa of Svayambhudeva's Paūmcariu, from which we provide a correct rendering of a number of instances in a wide array of examples.

2. Theoretical background: the traditional definition of ergativity

According to Dixon (1994: 1), “ergativity’ is used, in its most generally accepted sense, to describe 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.” ‘Ergativity’ not only refers to the grammatical pattern of a construction but has also come to indicate the “ergative system” of a language, thus being a categorization used to discern a particular “type” of language. Since Dixon (1979), the symbols A, S and O have been used to indicate the subject of a transitive clause (A), the subject of an intransitive clause (S), and the object of a transitive clause (O). This convention will be followed throughout this paper.² The term ‘subject’ refers to the only argument of intransitive verbs and to the most agent-like argument of transitive verbs. In general, the “treatment” of A, S and O refers to the way these arguments are marked with cases (case marking) and/or are cross-referenced on the verb (verb agreement). Case marking and verb agreement together are referred to as alignment (cf. Bickel and Nichols 2009).

As far as case marking in an ergative language is concerned, the most important distinguishing feature is that S and O are treated differently from A. A takes a special marking, which is the ergative case. This does not necessarily imply that there is a morphological case that functions only as a marker of A. In several languages, the same form is used for other semantic functions, for instance, as a marker of a recipient, place, or means. However, it is crucial that A be marked differently, and preferably in a formally more explicit way, than S and O. With respect to verb agreement, the characteristic feature of an ergative language is that the verb agrees with O (object agreement) in a transitive sentence but with S (subject agreement) in an intransitive sentence.

The above characterization of an ergative language seems straightforward, given that ergative marking and alternating agreement are readily observable. However, the issue is complicated by the fact that in every ergative language there are exceptions to the general grammatical pattern outlined above. Excep-

² Several authors prefer the abbreviation P instead of O.

tional constructions generally follow the accusative pattern, which means that A is then treated in the same way as S, but differently from O. This phenomenon has been called ‘split ergativity’. The different alignment patterns are not random, being either semantically or grammatically determined. Some of the most frequently attested “splits” are those determined by the “semantics of the NP” (Dixon 1994: 83ff.): constructions with pronominal subjects tend to pattern accusatively in contrast to the ergative patterning of nouns.³ Another kind of split is based on Tense, Aspect and/or Mood (TAM) and is most often illustrated with Hindi. This split implies that the tense, aspect or mood of the verb determines the kind of (ergative or accusative) alignment. There is a strong tendency in the TAM split ergative languages for the ergative construction to co-occur with perfective tense/aspect, while the accusative construction co-occurs with present or non-perfective tense/aspect (cf. Dixon 1994: 99). Languages with split ergativity are still considered ergative languages by most scholars: they possess constructions in which S is treated in the same way as O and differently from A, and these constructions occur on a regular basis and are grammatically fixed.

In the following section, we show that the criterion of regular, formally “perfect” ergative constructions is never fulfilled in the Modern Indo-Aryan languages.

3. Ergativity in Modern Indo-Aryan

Because Hindi is the best-studied Indo-Aryan language with regard to the concept of ergativity, we shall discuss this language first. Hindi has been considered a TAM split ergative language because the ergative features only occur in constructions with perfective verb forms, as illustrated in (1), (2) and (3) below.⁴

- | | | | | |
|-----|---|--------------|----------------|-------------|
| (1) | <i>maiṃ</i> | <i>kitāb</i> | <i>paṛh-tā</i> | <i>h-uṃ</i> |
| | I.M | book.F.SG | read-PRS.M.SG | be-PRS.1SG |
| | ‘I am reading a book’ / ‘I read a book’ | | | |

³ Note that the boundary may simply lie between pronouns and nouns or, somewhat more complicated, between the pronouns referring to Speech Act Participants (SAP) and other pronouns and nouns.

⁴ The abbreviations used in the glosses are the following: ABL: ablative; ACC: accusative; CS: causative; CV: converb; ERG: ergative; F: feminine; GEN: genitive; IMP: imperative; INS: instrumental; LOC: locative; M: masculine; NOM: nominative; PART: participle; PL: plural; PRF: perfect; PRS: present; SG: singular.

- (2) *maim=ne kal kitāb parh-ī*
 I.M=ERG yesterday book.F.SG read-PRF.F.SG
 ‘I read a book yesterday’
- (3) *larkī so-yī*
 girl.F.SG sleep-PRF.F.SG
 ‘The girl slept’

From these examples it is clear that in a transitive construction with a perfective verb from (2), A receives an additional ergative marking in the form of the postposition *ne*, whereas the verb agrees with O in gender and number. Conversely, in (1), a present tense construction, the verb agrees with the unmarked A. O in (2) is treated in the same way as S in (3), i.e., it is unmarked and cross-referenced on the verb for gender and number. On the face of it, Hindi would appear to be a perfect example of a split ergative language, were it not for examples such as (4).

- (4) *maim=ne larkī=ko dekh-ā*
 I.M=ERG girl.F=ACC see-PRF.M.SG
 ‘I saw the girl’

In (4), O is marked with the accusative/dative postposition *ko* and is thus clearly different from S in (3). The marking of O depends on criteria of animacy and definiteness (cf. Comrie 1984; Mohanan 1994). The agreement pattern of the verb in (4) may be said to be ‘default’, in the sense that the verb *dekh-ā* does not agree with any argument in the clause and possesses a form that is always masculine singular.

The preceding observations show that it is not entirely convincing to consider Hindi as a split ergative language. The ergative construction does not occur on a regular syntactic basis because it does not occur with all perfective forms. On the contrary, examples such as (4) are common in the language, and they even constitute the prototypical transitive construction according to Hopper and Thompson’s (1980) framework.⁵ It therefore seems preferable to say that Hindi is not an ergative language but rather a language displaying a number of ergative

⁵ According to Hopper & Thompson (1980), constructions with both A and O that are high in animacy are more transitive than constructions with A high and O low in animacy. Their theory contrasts with what is most often argued in markedness theory, viz., that objects are supposed to be low in animacy (for a good review of the problem, cf. Naess 2004).

features: first, there is an ergative marker of A in the form of the postposition *ne*, and second, there is *limited* object agreement in the form of gender and number agreement between the verb and the unmarked O. Both these features occur only in constructions with a verb in a perfective verb form.

The Rajasthani languages are part of a language group that is closely related to Hindi. However, their alignment is completely different from that of Hindi, and there is also variation among the different Rajasthani languages. The two examples discussed below are from Marwari (5) and Harauti (6):

- (5) *mhaiṃ śaraṇ=naiṃ dekh-ī*
 I.M Sharan.F=ACC see-PRF.F.SG
 ‘I saw Sharan’

- (6) *tīn-cyār jaṇ-ā=naiṃ kaṇḍakṭar=sū bāt kah+d-ī*
 three-four people.M-PL=ACC conductor=ABL thing.F say+give-PRF.F.SG
 ‘Three-four people told the conductor the following...’

The form of the postposition *naiṃ* immediately reminds us of the ergative marker *ne* in Hindi (there is strong evidence that both markers are historically related). However, *naiṃ* in Marwari is the marker of the dative/accusative, not an ergative marker. In Marwari there is no morpheme exclusively used to mark the ergative. This implies that A and S are marked with the same case, viz. the nominative, whereas the animate/definite O is invariably marked with *naiṃ*. However, there is variation in the marking of A in Marwari, which points to the existence of an ergative marking in the form of an oblique case in an earlier stage of the language (cf. Khokhlova 2001). Because this variation is currently also found in the marking of S, there is no reason to think that A and S are marked differently in Marwari.

The postposition *naiṃ* also occurs in Harauti, but its behavior is different. *naiṃ* in Harauti is used for three different functions: (i) as an ergative marker (cf. 6), (ii) as a marker of the animate/definite O, and (iii) as a marker of the experiencer subject (EXP). Its occurrence is determined by a functional hierarchy: *naiṃ* marks A whenever the construction is transitive and construed with a perfective verb form; it is assigned to EXP whenever there is one; finally, when the sentence does not contain either of the two aforementioned arguments and when O is animate/definite, *naiṃ* marks O. Thus, the difference between Marwari and Harauti amounts to the following: in Marwari, *naiṃ* is the accusative/dative postposition, and in Harauti, it is a multifunctional postposition whose occurrence is determined by both semantic and syntactic factors.

When we take a closer look at agreement in the Rajasthani languages, we once again find a different situation. In both Marwari and Harauti, the transitive perfective verb form always agrees with O in gender and number, irrespective of whether it is unmarked or marked (in complete contrast to Hindi). This is exemplified in (5) and (6). In some Jodhpuri variants of Marwari, agreement is even more complicated. In (7) below, the participle of the complex verb agrees with O, whereas the auxiliary verb agrees with the unmarked A (cf. Magier 1985).

- (7) *mhaiṃ sītā=naiṃ dekh-ī h-ūṃ*
 I.M Sita=ACC see-PRF.F.SG be-PRS.1SG
 ‘I have seen Sita’

Judging from the evidence presented above, one can reasonably conclude that the Rajasthani languages do not qualify as ergative languages. Their main ergative-like feature is agreement between the verb and O, where O may be marked or unmarked. However, even this feature appears to be subject to variation in some varieties of Marwari.

Kashmiri deviates from most other Indo-Aryan languages, resulting in a number of interesting alignment features. In Kashmiri, the case marking consists of case inflections (unlike the previously mentioned Hindi and Rajasthani, where case marking is rendered by postpositions). There is a so-called “ergative” case whose function is to mark A in perfect and past tense constructions, as in (8).

- (8) *rāth l’ukh me akh nov āfsāni*
 yesterday write.PAST.M.3SG I.ERG one new short story.M.SG
 ‘Yesterday I wrote a new short story’

In contrast to the marking of A, the case of S and O is the same in the past and perfect constructions. As a matter of fact, Kashmiri is the only Indo-Aryan language in which there is no differential marking of O depending on animacy/definiteness in the past and perfect constructions but in which animate/definite and inanimate/indefinite O’s are marked differently in the present tense. S and O are thus treated in the same way for case marking, but only in past and perfect tense constructions. An even more intriguing irregularity of Kashmiri lies in its agreement pattern. In past and perfect constructions there is object agreement in gender and number; but if A is a pronoun, the verb can also agree with A by adding a pronominal suffix (cf. Koul and Wali 2006, Hook and Koul 2002). Compare (9) with (8).

- (9) *tse* *əni-th* *zi* *me:z*
 YOU.ERG.SG bring.PAST.M.3PL-2SG two table.M.PL
 ‘You brought two tables.’

Thus, although Kashmiri seems to fulfill the prerequisites of a split ergative language, with its consistent object agreement and ergative case marking in the past and perfect constructions, there is also subject agreement, given that A is optionally marked on the verb. This verb marking by pronominal suffixes is even obligatory when A is a second person pronoun.

The other extreme is found in the Northern and Eastern Indo-Aryan languages. In these languages it is hard to find any ergative features. In Bengali and Oriya, for instance, there is always subject agreement, and A and S are expressed by the same case for all tenses. In Assamese, on the other hand, we find A marked with the case ending *-e* as exemplified in (10) below. The agreement is however uninfluenced by the marking and always remains with the subject.⁶

- (10) *rām-e* *pona-k* *kām* *kor-ow-ai*
 Ram-ERG Pona-ACC work do.PRS-CS-3SG
 ‘Ram makes Pona do the work’

Although S is in the unmarked case in Assamese, only A receives an extra marking, irrespective of the tense and aspect of the verb. However, exceptions to this rule are rather common. For example, intransitive subjects may be marked with the suffix *-e* when they are associated with control or volitionality. Sentence (11), for example, implies that Ram willingly stayed up late.⁷

- (11) *rām-e* *āzi* *derikoisu-l-e*
 Ram-ERG today late sleep-PAST-3SG
 ‘Ram went to bed late today’

The marking and agreement patterns in Nepali resemble those in Assamese. Nepali has an ergative postposition *le*, used to mark A of a perfective verb form; the agreement is always with the subject, irrespective of whether it is marked or unmarked, as seen, for example, in (12) below. Compare this with the agreement in Marwari and Harauti, where the verb always agrees with O, again irrespective

⁶ Note that transitive and intransitive verbs take different endings for the third person singular in Assamese.

⁷ We are indebted to Jyotiprakash Tamuli for providing us with this example.

of its marking. The agreement in Nepali, Marwari, and Harauti is thus case-insensitive, but it is directed towards the grammatical relation of subject in Nepali and O in Marwari and Harauti.

- (12) *tuṅtuṅtī=le āphno guṃḍ banā-ī*
 bird.F=ERG her own nest.M make-PRF.F.SG
 ‘The bird made her own nest’

The *le* marking in Nepali is found with all tenses and hence is not restricted to constructions with perfective verb forms. However, with a perfective verb form, *le* is required, whereas it is optional with the other tenses. Moreover, Hutt and Subedi (1999) note that it is also determined by discourse-semantic criteria such as emphasis.

We have found a wide array of different features in the various languages discussed so far. The marking of A occurs in all the languages considered, except in Marwari (but recall that in an earlier stage of this language the oblique case was used to mark A). Object agreement is found in all languages except in Eastern and Northern varieties. However, in most languages the object agreement seems to be under constant threat. In Hindi, it is absent when O is marked. In Kashmiri, it is adjusted with pronominal suffixes, which express agreement with the ergative-marked subject. Marwari and Harauti both seem to have a strong object agreement. In some varieties of Marwari, the agreement is split, and part of the verb form agrees with O while the other part agrees with A.

Similar examples from other Modern Indo-Aryan languages could also be adduced. They all point in the same direction: not one Indo-Aryan language is in complete agreement with the definition of an ergative language discussed in Section 2. Moreover, not even the definition of a split ergative language is applicable to the Indo-Aryan languages without further qualification, as the alignment is split in more than one way in different languages. The TAM split proves to be pervasive, but the marking of O also displays a split based on semantic criteria, and even the agreement of some verb forms is split. We therefore conclude that it is pointless to treat the Indo-Aryan languages as ‘ergative languages’ in a taxonomic way. This is not to say that analyzing and comparing the different ergative features is pointless, of course. However, it is clear that, e.g., the multifunctionality of the postposition *ne* in Hindi, Marwari, and Harauti can only be fully understood if it is not considered against the background of the syntactic constraints imposed by the ergative marker in an ‘ergative language’ but rather as a device to mark specific semantic relations. Similarly, the ergative marking in Assamese and Nepali, which may be analyzed as an extension from transitive

verbs to intransitive volitional verbs, seems to indicate that in these languages particular importance is attached to a clear indication of the transitivity of the verb and to the semantic parameters associated with transitivity along the lines of Hopper and Thompson (1980).⁸

The heart of the matter may be formulated as follows: Why would the occurrence of features traditionally labeled ‘ergative’, in particular the marking of A and object agreement, be the decisive factor for the inclusion of a language into a certain “type” of language (e.g., the ergative type) when the same language also displays features that are not typically ergative? To be sure, the combination of a marked A with subject agreement or of a marked O with object agreement both contradict any pattern to be found in prototypical ergative languages, yet (Indo-Aryan) languages displaying such idiosyncratic features have consistently been labeled ergative. Recall that the prototypical pattern of an ergative language system is based on the Australian language Dyirbal, as described by Dixon (1979). Although this system resembles patterns found in Caucasian, North American, and other languages, none of the alignment systems found in these latter languages is identical to the Dyrbal system. With respect to the Indo-Aryan languages in particular, the superficial resemblance of a number of features to a prototypical ergative system may lead to a lack of attention to other important cross-linguistic features, in particular, the above-mentioned influence of transitivity and various semantic factors. Finally, it seems that the older, more restricted notion of an ergative case as a marker of A might turn out to be of greater comparative value with respect to Indo-Aryan than the notion of a fully fledged ‘ergative system’ (cf. also DeLancey 2006).

In the next section, we provide evidence that the conclusion we have reached in this section can be extrapolated to Late Middle Indo-Aryan, viz. Apabhramśa, and that Apabhramśa is not to be regarded as an ergative language. Again, this is not to deny that features similar to those in ergative languages can be discerned in this language as well and that establishing these features through careful analysis may help to gain a better understanding of the multifaceted nature of alignment.

⁸ Hopper and Thompson (1980) list ten components of transitivity, among which ‘volitionality’, ‘aspect’, ‘agency’, ‘affectedness’, and ‘individuation’ of O are particularly relevant with respect to the Indo-Aryan languages, considering that many of these languages show a different alignment pattern for perfective and imperfective constructions (aspect) and different markings for animate/definite and inanimate/indefinite core arguments (affectedness and individuation, cf. Naess 2004). A detailed discussion of how each aspect influences the alignment patterns in the various languages is beyond the scope of this article.

4. Ergative features in Late Middle-Indic

As mentioned in the introduction, this section focuses on Apabhraṃśa as it is found in Svayambhudeva's Paūmcarīu, which was composed around the 10th-11th century in South India (cf. De Clercq 2003: xxvi). The language in the Paūmcarīu is that of a single author, so a certain level of consistency in language use and grammar may be expected. In Apabhraṃśa, the past tense is always expressed by means of a past participle. Although active in meaning, the transitive construction with a past participle resembles a passive construction insofar as the agent, if overt, receives an instrumental case ending, whereas the patient remains unmarked. Conversely, with a non-past verb tense, the agent is unmarked and the patient is marked in the accusative case. Note that instead of A and O we use the terms 'agent' and 'patient' to describe the arguments of the past participle construction for reasons that will become clear at the end of this section.

Apabhraṃśa is a language with inflectional case marking. A formerly three-fold opposition in Old Indo-Aryan developed into a two-fold opposition between a 'direct' and an 'oblique' case in Apabhraṃśa due to syncretism of the nominative and accusative with nouns and third person pronouns, as shown in Table 1.⁹

Table 1: Case syncretism in *Apabhraṃśa*: nouns and third person pronouns

<i>OIA</i>	<i>Apabhraṃśa</i>
nominative	direct
accusative	
instrumental	oblique

The direct case is the unmarked case of the subject, whereas the oblique case is the case of the agent in the construction with the past participle and in addition signals other semantic roles such as the instrumental and locative. The merging of the nominative and accusative has not led to ambiguity in a construction with a past participle because the accusative case is not used in such a construction, the patient being assigned the direct case. Bubenik (1998: 142) views the direct case in Apabhraṃśa past constructions as the absolutive case because it is in formal and semantic opposition to the instrumental case, which in turn marks the

⁹ For a detailed overview of all the possible case markings in Apabhraṃśa, see De Clercq (2010). Third person pronouns in Indo-Aryan are formally identical with demonstrative pronouns.

A of transitive constructions in the past tenses. S and O are thus treated alike, as opposed to A, which fits the definition of an ergative system. In present or non-perfect tenses, the syncretism of accusative and nominative could potentially cause problems because both A and O would be in the same case. However, word order and other mechanisms, such as agreement, prevent this potential ambiguity from surfacing.

The case marking of the first and second person pronouns is another story altogether. Here, it is the accusative and instrumental cases that have merged, as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: Case syncretism in *Apabhraṃśa*: first and second person pronouns

<i>OIA</i>	<i>Apabhraṃśa</i>
nominative	nominative
accusative	accusative/instrumental
instrumental	

The syncretism of the accusative and the instrumental again does not cause ambiguity, given that there is no accusative object in constructions with a past participle. The nominative and instrumental never merge. The different patterns of syncretism we encounter with nouns and third person pronouns, on the one hand, and first and second person pronouns, on the other, are explained in the typological literature by pointing out that pronominal forms tend to prefer accusative rather than ergative patterning (cf. Dixon 1994: 84). Consequently, in *Apabhraṃśa*, the motivation to retain the opposition between nominative and accusative forms may be stronger for first and second person pronouns, whereas nouns and third person pronouns prefer ergative case markings, singling out the instrumental case of the agent as a different case vis-à-vis the nominative and accusative.

Below, a few examples of past tense constructions from *Apabhraṃśa* are presented in which the past participle is used in an active sentence. It is striking that these examples differ little from the patterns seen in the Modern Indo-Aryan languages discussed in the previous section. We prefer to label the participle as a ‘past participle’ in all the examples, although it might also be understood as a finite verb. Furthermore, the terms ‘direct’ and ‘oblique’ case have been replaced by ‘nominative’ (or ‘absolute’ according to Bubenik (1998)) and ‘ergative’ to bring the ergative features of *Apabhraṃśa* to the fore. Note that the agreement pattern in *Apabhraṃśa* is consistently with the patient, and that, contrary to

Hindi, the patient in Apabhraṃśa is never marked for definiteness or animacy, so that the agreement is never influenced by the presence of a postposition. In (13) below, for instance, the patient is an animate being, i.e., *dū-u* ‘messenger’, but it is in the unmarked (nominative) case. The agent in this verse is not overtly expressed (the expression of the agent is in general not obligatory in Apabhraṃśa). Conversely, in the second verse of (13), the agent is explicitly mentioned by means of the relative pronoun *jeṇa*.

(13) Paü. 14.1.3.

<i>phagguṇa-khal-ahō</i>	<i>dū-u</i>	<i>ñīsāri-u</i>	
winter-mean.GEN.SG	messenger-NOM.M.SG	send away.PART.PAST.CS-NOM.M.SG	
<i>j-eṇa</i>	<i>virahi-jaṇ-u</i>	<i>kaha va ṇa</i>	<i>māri-u</i>
who-ERG.M.SG	separated-people.NOM.M.SG	however if not	kill.PART.PAST.CS-NOM.M.SG.

‘It [spring] sent away the messenger of the mean winter month, who did not kill [all] the lonely people’

The next example (14) is a typical construction with a past participle; *pañsant-eṃ* *vasant-eṃ* is the agent (ergative), and *maṅgala-kalas-u* is the patient (nominative).

(14) Paü. 14.1.2.

<i>ja ya-har-ě</i>	<i>pañsāri-u</i>	<i>pañsant-eṃ</i>
world-house-LOC.M.SG	bring in.PART.PAST.CS-NOM.M.SG	enter.PART.PR-ERG.M.SG
<i>ṇāvai</i>	<i>maṅgala-kalas-u</i>	<i>vasant-eṃ</i>
as	festival-jug-NOM.M.SG	spring-ERG.M.SG

‘Inside the house of the world, the arriving spring brought something as a festival jug.’

Example (15) has an intransitive verb meaning ‘to go + into’. The subject *vasantu* is in the nominative. It is clear that the marking of the arguments in Apabhraṃśa is determined by the transitivity of the verb.

(15) Paü. 14.2.1.

<i>dolā-toraṇa-vār-ě</i>	<i>pañhar-ě</i>	
swing-door-door-LOC.M.SG	vast-LOC.M.SG	
<i>pañṭh-u</i>	<i>vasant-u</i>	<i>vasanta-sirī-har-ě</i>
enter.PART.PAST-NOM.M.SG	spring-NOM.M.SG	spring-head-house-LOC.M.SG

‘Through the vast swing door spring entered the house of the head of the spring.’

In (16), the participle is again intransitive, meaning ‘come back’, and the subject is in the nominative. The construction has two converbs, one of which is transitive and means ‘embrace’. However, their presence has no influence on the form of the subject of the participle.

(16) Paü. 14.5.1.

<i>sahasakiraṇ-u</i>	<i>sahasatti</i>	<i>ṇiuddēvi</i>			
S.NOM.M.SG	suddenly	sink.CV			
<i>ā-u</i>		<i>ṇāī</i>	<i>mahi-vah-u</i>	<i>avaruṇḍēvi</i>	
come back.PART.PAST-NOM.M.SG	if	earth-bride-NOM.F.SG	embrace.CV		

‘Sahasrakirana suddenly sank and as if after embracing his bride the earth, he came back.’

In this example, *sahasakiraṇ-u* is the subject of all three verbs and is in the nominative, given that the main verb, *ṇiuddēvi*, is intransitive. The use of a transitive converb entails the presence of a direct object, *mahi-vah-u*. This object is in the direct case. Although originally an accusative, the direct case is no longer formally different from nominative case endings in Apabhraṃśa (compare *mahi-vah-u* with the nominative of the subject *sahasakiraṇ-u*). Converbs are not marked for tense or aspect.

Examples with first or second person pronouns are more difficult to find in a lyrical text, and if they occur, one generally finds them in combination with a present tense rather than a past participle. In (17) below, the agent is a first person singular, yet it is not overtly expressed. The verb is a transitive past participle and does not agree with the agent. Given that there is no overt patient either, there is no obvious agreement between the verb and any of the arguments. In (18), by contrast, the agent is a second person pronoun and it is in the instrumental. The verb agrees with its object *kaṇṇ-a* ‘girl’.

(17) Paü. 8.6.9

<i>ettiu</i>	<i>kālu</i>	<i>ṇa</i>	<i>vujjhiy-aṃ</i>		
all	time	not	understand.PAST.PART.-NOM.N.SG		
<i>tuhū</i>	<i>kavaṇahū</i>	<i>indahū</i>	<i>indu</i>	<i>kah-e</i>	
you.NOM	which.GEN.M.PL	Indra.GEN.M.PL	Indra.NOM.M.SG	tell-IMP.2SG.	

‘After all that time I haven’t understood it. Tell [us], of which Indras are you the Indra?’

(18) Paü. 29.8.4

kaḥī *paĩ* *kaṇṇ-a* *laddh-a*
 where you.INS.SG girl-NOM.F.SG find.PART.PAST-NOM.F.SG.
 ‘Where have you found this girl?’

These few examples suffice to show that Apabhraṃśa offers a more complete instantiation of an ‘ergative system’ than the Modern Indo-Aryan languages. All the constructions with a past participle occur with object agreement and a special (oblique) marking of the agent. However, there are other features that are not so easily explained as ‘ergative’, especially those relating to case marking, although the fact that agents and patients are frequently covert renders it difficult to draw definitive conclusions. Furthermore, the range of possible case endings is considerable and somewhat confusing. Although the case endings have merged for certain cases, each case may be marked in many different ways. For instance, the direct case-ending of masculine and neuter singular nouns with stems in *-a* may be *-u*, *-ū*, *-aii*, *-aiū*, *-aiim*, *-a*, *-o*, *-ao*, *-am*, *-e*, *-ē*, *-aě* or *-āe* (cf. De Clercq 2010: 51-52). Case-endings of non-core arguments, e.g. the locative, display a similar range of formal variation. Which ending is used depends not only on (the history of) the noun but also, to a large extent, on the personal choice of the writer. He may prefer a Prakritism or a Magadhan form or choose a form required by the meter, etc. In later stages of the language, the number of endings decreased considerably, and potential confusion was at least in part resolved by the introduction of postpositions.

The interpretation of the past participle construction in Apabhraṃśa gives rise to a further problem. There is a general consensus that the ergative construction in Modern Indo-Aryan stems from an adjectival participial construction in which the participle agrees in number and gender with the (pro)noun it modifies. In light of this fact, the intermediate Apabhraṃśa stage can be interpreted in two ways. Either the participle in Apabhraṃśa can be analyzed as an adjective, in line with the artificial, embellished and literary character of Apabhraṃśa, i.e., as a non-finite, passive participial verb with an instrumental agent and a nominative patient. Alternatively, given that languages without active past tense verbs are typologically rare, and considering that Apabhraṃśa does not have any way to express a past tense other than through the participle, one may prefer to interpret it as an active finite verb with an ergative agent and nominative patient. This is why we prefer to use the terms ‘agent’/‘patient’ rather than A/O with respect to Apabhraṃśa. A and O unambiguously refer to subject and object, respectively. However, as the examples above illustrate, the agent in Apabhraṃśa can be interpreted as an instrumental argument rather than as a subject. The same rea-

soning applies to the patient, which can either be interpreted as the object of a finite ergative construction or as the subject of a non-finite, participial construction. The question as to whether Apabhraṃśa is a split ergative language is therefore open to interpretation. Formally, it could be argued that Apabhraṃśa is an ergative language, but for historical reasons, in particular in view of the literary nature of the texts, one could also embrace a more literal, adjectival translation of the past participle constructions.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to show that applying the concept of ergativity without further qualification to Indo-Aryan languages (both Modern and Late Middle Indo-Aryan languages) is bound to lead to confusion. We believe that no Modern Indo-Aryan language qualifies as fully ergative. Although some constructions in Hindi and Kashmiri can be analyzed as ergative, at least superficially, they occur too irregularly to support the view that these languages are systematically ergative. Neither can it be reasonably claimed that Indo-Aryan languages are consistently split ergative, because they lack a regular pattern of ergative marking and agreement. We do, however, find certain ergative features in Indo-Aryan, in particular the agentive markings on transitive subjects and partial or full agreement with O. It is important to note that these features occur under strict conditions and that they appear to be triggered by factors other than a straightforward development of an alignment pattern toward ergativity. From a historical point of view, we have demonstrated that some of the aforementioned features may be found in Apabhraṃśa as well, in particular the agreement pattern that is typical of ergative languages. Agreement in Apabhraṃśa takes place between the participle and the argument it modifies, which in most cases functions as a patient. It may not be entirely adequate to analyze Apabhraṃśa as a natural language with ergative features, given its literary and partly artificial nature; and it could be argued that the participles are better analyzed as adjectives than as verbs agreeing with O (cf. Tieken 2000). However, agents in Apabhraṃśa may be explicitly mentioned, even when they are inanimate, which is a fairly strong indication that these participles possess an active verbal meaning. If this were not the case, there would be no agent in the clause, which would be surprising from a typological point of view. Finally, the pattern of object agreement and/or marking of A found in some Modern Indo-Aryan languages has evolved from the past tense construction developed in Middle Indo-Aryan. It should be borne in mind that, although a comparison of the alignment features in the different branches of the Modern Indo-Aryan languages is rendered possible because of well-established genealogical relations, structural exceptions to

the ergative pattern are equally demonstrably rooted in the history of the Indo-Aryan languages.

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