

Differential Object Marking in Balochi and beyond

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This paper will illustrate some DOM patterns in Balochi (a contemporary language spoken in Pakistan, Iran, etc.) and compare them to similar patterns in other Iranian languages.

Balochi has a case system contrasting a direct case (suffix zero) with an oblique case (sg. *-ā*, pl. *-ān*) and an object case (sg. *-ārā*, pl. *-ān(r)ā*). Just as many other languages of Asia, Balochi marking of objects depends on the presence or absence of certain criteria (DOM): "the more definite and the more animate the object the more likely it is" to be marked (FARRELL 1990:65).

This means, such objects will have the suffix of the oblique or the object case in clauses that pattern nominatively (these are those with a verb form based on the present stem). It also applies to those that pattern ergatively (ergativity occurs in many Balochi dialects, it is limited to constructions with verb forms based on the past stem). Since in ergative constructions the agent is likewise in the oblique, resulting sentence patterns include those with agent and object in the same case. In a way, this is the mirror to patterns in the nominative domain in which the object is not marked because it is generic/indefinite, non-specific and inanimate is in the direct case, so agent and object would be both in the direct case (i.e. unmarked).

The criteria for an object being liable to be oblique or object case marking ("Identified Object Marking", IOM) depend on the presence of various conditions, and there is some variation among the Balochi dialects as well. Definiteness is a necessary condition for an object to be marked, while, unlike in Hindi/Urdu, [+animate] is not. In several dialects, the markers are also combinable with the clitic *-ē* (often called "indefinite article", but more adequately termed "individuation marker"), e.g. *kōh-ē-ā* "a [specific] mountain" (OBL).

For identified objects, the choice between the oblique and the object case depends on animacy. Again unlike Hindi/Urdu (which contrasts living beings with inanimates), humans may be marked by the object case suffix (and this is the predominant pattern for those objects in ergative constructions that are marked at all) while the object case is used for animals and things.

The Balochi patterns agree with those from other Iranian languages. For instance, double oblique constructions are found in Vafsi in the ergative domain when the object is animate, and human objects are marked with a directional preposition in the nominative as well as in the ergative domain in Bactrian.

Relevant literature:

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