

ERGATIVITY IN JAPANESE, MALAYALAM, AND TAMIL

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1. Introduction

In this paper I will focus on certain aspects of participant roles of arguments in sentential structures, particularly their morphological ending. Semantic roles, “agent” and “patient” play fundamental roles in all languages. In many languages the agent is encoded in the subject (the so-called logical subject) and the patient in the object (the so-called logical object).

- (1) agent role — logical subject
- patient role — logical object

Languages which employ (1) are called nominative-accusative languages. There are also languages employing the reverse generalization in (2).

- (2) agent role — logical object
- patient role — logical subject

Languages employing (2) are called true ergative languages.

Ergativity generally refers to the syntactic relationship that holds between the object of a transitive verb and the subject of an intransitive verb (cf. Lyons 1968). In this sense, languages can be divided into nominative-accusative languages and ergative languages according to

how subjects of intransitive verbs (S), subjects of transitive verbs (A), and objects of transitive verbs (O) are encoded. The S, A, and O terminology is due to Dixon (1979). Nominative-accusative languages treat S and A identically and O differently, while ergative languages S and O identically. The ergative/nominative classification of languages presupposes the categories transitive and intransitive. As Dixon and others have shown, however, languages are not always consistent in exhibiting either totally ergative or totally nominative behavior, but often exhibit a “split” pattern. The fact that almost no language has a purely ergative system strongly suggests that ergativity is in fact a property of case markers, and not of the global case system.

Japanese, Malayalam and Tamil¹ fall under the nominative-accusative category but they also have ergative case marking systems. Basically this means that these languages share the generalization in (1) with the majorities of Indo-European languages: a verb canonically assigns patient role to the object and its predicate canonically assigns agent role to the subject. In these languages, however, some sentence patterns exhibit the ergative property. Thus, a case marking system involves a continuum rather than an accusative-ergative distinction. If our analysis is correct, ergativity is properly regarded as a property of a case marker, and not of a global case system.

2. The so-called dative subject in intransitive constructions

The subject of an intransitive or transitive verb, whether the subject is agent or not, is expressed by a noun or pronoun in the nominative case (i.e. *ga* in Japanese and the unaffixed form in Malayalam and Tamil). However, the subject is not always marked by the nominative case in Japanese, Malayalam and Tamil. In Malayalam and Tamil, for a large number of verbs taking the case relations of experiencer, or recipient, the subject is expressed in the dative. For example, consider the following sentences.

(3) Malayalam

- a. *avaḷkku taṇukkunnu.*
 She-dat cold-feel
 (She feels cold)
- b. *enikkuə viśakunnu*
 I-dat hungry feel
 (I feel hungry)
- c. *avaḷkku kuttiiỵtu dayatōnni*
 she-dat child pity felt
 (She felt pity for the child)
- d. *kuttikə wiśannu*
 child-dat hungered
 (The child was hungry.)
- e. *kuttikkə santoosam wannu*
 child-dat happiness came
 (The child was/became happy)

(4) Tamil

- a. *enakku pacikkudu*
 I-dat hunger-pres-3sn
 (I'm hungry.)
- b. *enakku daakamaa irukkutu*
 I-dat thirst-adv be-pre-3sn
 (I'm thirsty)
- c. *enakku juramaa irukkutu*
 I-dat fever-adv be-pres-3sn
 (I have a fever)
- d. *enakku kutiraa irukkutu*
 I-dat coldness-adv be-pres-3sn
 (I feel cold)
- e. *avanukku kōbamā vandadu*
 he-dat angry-adv come-pa-it
 (He becomes angry)

These examples show that in both Malayalam and Tamil the person who experiences an emotion or feeling is expressed in the dative case, when the person has no control over them. The dative NPs in these, together with the ones in two argument constructions which will be discussed in the next section, have been called “dative subjects” (Asher 1986, Phillipose 1987, Mohanan 1985, Lindholm 1985, Paramasivan 1979). As Masica (1976) notes, “ a high development of this feature (the dative subject construction) is characteristics of India—perhaps slightly more of Dravidian languages.”

In addition to the experiencer, the dative subject is used with modal verbs in Malayalam.

- (5) a. avalkku pōkām
she-dat go-ām indicates modality of permission
(She may go)
- b. avalkku pōkanam
she-dat go -aṇam indicates modality of compulsion
(She must go)
- c. avlkku vāyikkān kaliyum
she-dat read kaliyum=be able to
(She can read)
- d. kuttikkə uraṇṇanam
child-dat sleep-must
(The child wants to sleep)

These examples refer to the emotion, perception, necessity, or ability possessed by the person to do something. They do not have the deliberate intention to perform actions. Thus, if modalities show ‘intention’, ‘desire’ and ‘purpose’, then they are expressed through auxiliary verbs which take the nominative case.

- (6) a. avaḷ pōkān āgrahikkunnu.
she go-want -ikkunnú indicates modality of intention

- (She want to go)
- b. avaḷ atu ceyyān uddēśikkunnu.
she it do intend
(She intends to do it)
- c. avaḷ atu ceyyān śramikkunnu.
she it do try
(She tries to do it)
- d. avaḷ karayunnu
she weep
(she weeps)

In contrast with the auxiliary verbs in (5), an auxiliary verb *ikkunnu* takes the nominative case. The choice of auxiliary reflects volitionality; *-am*, *-anam* and *-kaliyum* occur with non-volitional actors, and *-ikkunnu* with volitional actors. Thus, the contrast between (5) and (6) shows that the subjects in (5) are non-volitional agents, while the ones in (6) volitional agents.

There is further evidence that the difference in case marking can be correlated with the volitionality of the subject. The verbs like *uranni* (slept) or *nul* (pinched) take a nominative subject as in (7a) and (8a).

- (7) a. kuṭṭi uraṅṅi
child slept
(The child slept)
- b. *kuttikkə uraṅṅi
child-dat slept
- (8) a. kuṭṭi aanaye nulli
child elephant-acc pinched
(The child pinched the elephant)
- b. *kuttikkə aanaye nulli
child-dat elephant-acc pinched

However, when these verbs take the verbal auxiliary, *nam* ‘must’ or

aam ‘may’, the acceptability of case marking for the subject NP reverse, as in (9) and (10).

- (9) a. kuṭṭikkə uraṇṇanam
 child-dat sleep-must
 (The child wants to sleep)
- b. *kuṭṭi uraṇṇanam
 child sleep-must
- (10) a. kuṭṭikkə aanaye nullāam
 child-dat elephant-acc pinch-may
 (The child may pinch the elephant)
- b. *kuṭṭi aanaye nullam
 child elephant-acc pinch-may

Here, again, the contrast between (7) and (8) on the one hand and (9) and (10) on the other hand reflects volitionality. Examples (3–10) show that the dative subjects are experiencers or recipients, involving the notion of ability, necessity, or possession, while the nominative subjects are volitional agents or initiators of the action.

Tamil observes the same contrast between nominative subjects and dative subjects.

- (11) a. avanukku koopam vantatu
 he-dat anger come-pa-3sn
 (He felt angry)
- b. avan koopam koNTaan
 he anger hold-pa-3sm
 (He became angry)

The difference between (11a) and (11b) is a clear one, the latter connotes that the action was intentionally carried out by the agent, while this connotation is absent in the former.

The distinction between nominative and dative cases for intransitive

subjects is dependent on the degree of control, in the sense of Comrie (1987), exercised by the S over the situation described. We can distinguish the different status that the participants or arguments of a predicate can have. They may be distinguished according to whether they are more/less/least/influential within the event in question; one participant may be the initiator of the event, or in control of what is happening. Thus, the case markings of intransitive subjects in Malayalam and Tamil are controlled not only by syntactic consideration, but also by a semantic factor. The question arises what evidence there should be to assume the so-called dative subject is subject. We shall return to the problem of dative subjects later on. Let us assume for a moment these dative marked NPs are subjects.

On the other hand, the intransitive subject in Japanese always has to be marked by the nominative case², and cannot take the dative case as in Malayalam and Tamil.

- (12) a. watashi ga samui
 I nom cold
 (I feel cold)
- b. *watashi ni samui
 dat
- (13) a. watashi ga arukeru
 I nom walk-can
 (I can walk)
- b. *watashi ni arukeru
 dat

These examples show that the intransitive construction in Japanese requires the nominative case on the subject, unlike the construction in Malayalam and Tamil, regardless its subject's semantic role. The case marking in the Japanese intransitive constructions is controlled only by syntactic, but not by a semantic factor. A great number of two argument sentences in Japanese, however, take the dative subject if the

predicate is stative.

3. The so-called dative subject in transitive constructions

In the previous section, a predicate requiring only one noun argument is termed intransitive. Under an approach that considers simply the number of arguments involved, a predicate requiring two or more is termed transitive. This definition is blind to the relationship between the two arguments. The subsections which follow will address the transitive construction with the dative subject in Japanese, Malayalam and Tamil.

3.1 The dat-nom pattern in Japanese

The prototypical transitive construction in Japanese is the nom-acc pattern⁸. However, certain predicates in Japanese, such as *wakaru* 'understand', *aru* 'be, have' and *iru* 'need' etc. require the subject to be in the dative and the object in the nominative. Predicates expressing some sort of possibility, desire, emotion, and liking take the dat-nom pattern (cf. Martin 1975, Kuno 1973, Shibatani 1977 among others). These include *suki(da)* 'like', *kirai(da)* 'dislike', *hosii* 'want', *kowai* 'afraid of'.

- (14) a. kanojyo ni roshiago ga wakaru
 she dat Russian nom understand
 (She understands Russian)
- b. kanojyo ni futari kyoudai ga iru
 she dat two sisters nom have
 (She has two sisters)
- c. kare ni takusan no okane ga aru
 he dat many of money nom have
 (He has much money)
- d. kare ni eigo ga sukida
 he dat English nom like
 (He likes English)

What characterizes these predicates are the unaffectedness of the object as well as the absence of volitionality in the subject. They are verbs expressing a static relationship between two entities. The relationship is static in that no change occurs in either of the two entities.

The potential, spontaneous, desirative predicates also take dative subject and nominative object in Japanese. The potential and spontaneous predicates are represented by a verb plus a verbal auxiliary of (*ar*)*eru*. The potential constructions are all concerned with the possibility of a given state of affairs arising. The spontaneous constructions express state of affairs which occur involuntarily irrespective of the subject's intention. Some of the examples are given as follows.

(15) The potential construction

- a. *watashi ni rosiago ga hanaseru*
 I dat Russian nom speak-can

(16) The spontanous construction

- a. *watashi ni sonokoto ga kuyamareru*
 I dat that thing nom regret-pon
 'I regret it'

In (15), a dative marked NP indicates the possessor (receptient) of the ability in question and a nominative marked NP the object of the ability. In (16), a dative marked NP indicates the experiencer of the events and states and a nominative marked NP a simply happening which involves no agent.

Besides the verbal auxiliaries of the potentiality and spontaneity, there are other auxiliaries which take the dat-nom construction. An adjectival auxiliary of desire, *tai*, expresses a desire to do something. A verbal auxiliary of manifestation, *garu*, expresses a situation in which a third or second person manifests his feelings. Some of these examples are given below.

(17) The desirative construction

- a. Watasshi ni mizu ga nomitai
 I dat water nom drink-desire
 (I want a water)
- (18) The manifestive construction
- a. kanojyo ni kodomo ga hosigaru
 she dat child nom want-manif
 (She wants her children)

Many of the dat-nom case pattern illustrated above alternate with nom-acc case patterns, so that, along with (15–18), we have the following sentences.

- (19) a. watashi ga sonokoto o kuyamareru
 I nom that thing acc regret-spon
 (I regret it)
- b. watashi ga rosiago o hanaseru
 I nom Russian acc speak-can
 (I can speak Russian)
- c. Watashi ga mizu o nomitai
 I nom water acc drink-desire
 (I want to drink a water)
- d. kanojyo ga kodomo o hosigaru
 nom acc want-manif
 (She wants her children)

The alternation of some of the dat-nom patterns with a nom-acc pattern is an extension of the transitive case paradigm to semantically non-paradigmatic cases. The semantic difference is that the dative subjects in (14–18) are experiencers or recipients, while the nominative subjects in (19) are volitional agents or initiators of the actions. These examples show that there is a close relationship between the dat-nom case construction and the prototypical transitive pattern construction, Nom-Acc case construction. It is plausible to claim that there is a

continuum between the dat-nom and standard transitive construction. The interesting question is why there should be any such dat-nom constructions at all. We will come back to this question later. Before we try to answer this question, let us look at the two argument constructions with dative subjects in Malayalam and Tamil.

3.2 The dat-nom (or acc) pattern in Malayalam and Tamil

As in Japanese, the prototypical transitive pattern is the nom-acc pattern in Malayalam and Tamil. We saw in the intransitive constructions of Malayalam and Tamil that the person who experiences an emotion or feeling is expressed in the dative case, when the person has no control over them. In many of the dative subject constructions, there occurs in addition to the dative experiencer, a noun in the nominative, which governs a verb predicating an action, so that the experience is viewed as coming to the experiencer. Thus, the dative subject in two argument constructions is also used in Malayalam, as shown below.

- (20) a. *avaḷkku kuṭṭiyōṭu daya tōnni*
 she-dat child pity felt
 (She felt pity for the child)
- b. *avaḷ kuṭṭiyōtu daya kāṇiccu*
 she child pity showed
 (She showed pity for the child)
- (21) a. *kuttikkə puṣṭakam weenam*
 child-dat book want
 (The child wants the book)
- b. *avaḷ avaṅōtu sahatapiccu*
 she him pitied
 (She pitied him)

These examples show that the dative subject occurs with the object of

the subject when it experiences an emotion or feeling. If the emotion or feeling is expressed with intention or voluntarily, then, as examples (20b, 21b) show, the nominative is preferred to the dative.

The dative subject is used in Malayalam with verbs corresponding to 'get' and 'have' as well as modal verbs.

- (22) a. *avaḷkku oru sammānam kiṭṭi*
 She-dat one gift got
 (She got a gift)
- b. *avaḷkku oru koṭṭāram uṇṭu*
 She-dat one palace have
 (She has a palace)
- c. *kuṭṭikke aanayə nuḷḷaam*
 child-dat elephant pinch-may
 The child may pinch the elephant.
- d. *avaḷkku pustakam vāyikkān kaḷiyum*
 she-dat book read can
 (She can read the book)

The dat-nom derivation pattern is also observed in Tamil. One set of verbs requires the subject to be in the dative and the object in the nominative. The commonest are *veent* 'want', 'need', *teri* 'know', *puri* 'understand', *piti* 'like', *kete* 'be available', 'obtain', *vali* 'hurt'. The following examples illustrate the dat-nom pattern.

- (23) a. *enakku tamiz puriyumā?*
 you-dat Tamil undersatand-ful-it-Q
 (Do you undersatnd Tamil)
- b. *enakku kappi enum*
 I-dat coffee want-it
 (I want some coffee)
- c. *enakku romba vidu irukku*
 I-dat many house be-pr-it

(I have lots of houses)

- d. onakku inda ure pitikkumaa
 you-dat this town-acc like-pres-ip
 (Do you like this town?)
- e. enakku tamiz teriyum
 I-dat Tamil know-fu-it
 (I know Tamil)
- f. enakku tale valikkudu
 I-dat head hurt-pr-it
 (I have a headache)
- g. enkalukku inke kaappi ketekumaa
 we-dat here coffee be obtained-ful-ip
 (Can we get coffee here?)

As noted in intransitive constructions, the dative subjects are experiencers or recipients. So, the dative subjects also occur with the object of the experiencer, which is viewed as an actor. In the semantic sense, the object NP is understood as the subject of its verb expressing the state of being affected by the action.

4. Semantic roles

In transitive constructions, Japanese, Malayalam and Tamil share the dat-nom pattern, which is best considered as a neutral pattern being neither accusative nor ergative. I will refer to these dative subject constructions as “intermediate patterns” (ergative pattern) to distinguish them from other transitive patterns. If we view case marking systems as involving a continuum between the accusative pattern and the ergative pattern, then the case marking patterns in Japanese Malayalam and Tamil will exhibit the ergative pattern.

The interesting question is why there should be any such dative subject constructions, distinguished from nominative subject constructions.

The participants or arguments of a predicate can have different statuses. They may be distinguished according to whether they are more/less/least influential within the event in question; one participant may be the initiator of the event, or in control of what is happening; other participants may be more/less thoroughly affected/effectuated; etc. A language like English does not have any grammatical indication of the control that the NP exercises. For example, in the sentence *we fell to the ground*, there is no grammatical indication of the control fell down (full control); it may have been the case that we fell owing to our carelessness (potential control not exercised); or it may have been the case that we were pushed (no control).

In some languages, however, it is possible to express this kind of distinction in certain constructions⁴. In languages with case marking, the assignment of case to the participants reflects these semantic differences in a systematic way. In Japanese, Malayalam and Tamil, by distinguishing case marking, it is possible, to some extent, to express the distinction of control that the participant exercises in the situation described. Languages differ in how this semantic range is encoded grammatically. English, for example, encodes it in terms of a particular position, and languages like Japanese, Malayalam and Tamil in terms of morphological marking.

Hopper and Thompson (1980) characterize the notion of transitivity in terms of a collection of parameters which include familiar notions such as agency, volitionality, and affectedness of O; those expressions with a high degree of agency on the part of A, volitional A, and totally affected O have a varied degree of transitivity. Seven of their parameters, listed here, relate directly to constructions with objects:

- (24) KINESIS: no transfer of action is involved;
 ASPECT: no event takes place that can be viewed as
 “completed”
 PUNCTUALITY: no event takes place that can be viewed
 as occurring a single point in time;

- VOLITIONALITY: there is no agent seen as acting willfully ;
- MODE: the participants in the event are typically related in a non-actual mode ;
- AGENCY: no transfer of action initiated by an agent is involved ;
- AFFECTEDNESS OF O: the object is not affected.

Each of these components is a scale ranging from high to low degrees of transitivity. For participants in an event or state, two (or more) registers higher in transitivity than one: for kinesis, the higher the predicate is in action, the higher it is in transitivity; for volitionality, volitional actions are higher than non-volitional actions; for mode, realis mode is higher than irrealis mode; for agency, the higher the agent is in potency the higher it is in transitivity; for affectedness and individuation, the more affected, distinct, or definite the object NP, the higher the transitivity. The features of predicates that take the nominative subject rank high and the features of predicates that take the dative subject rank low on this scale of transitivity. That is to say, nominative marks the subject NP of a high transitive sentence and accusative marks the object NP of a high transitivity sentence. It is clear from this list that the dat-nom pattern correlates with a low degree of transitivity.

A number of recent studies indicate that the use of the accusative case on O is correlated with a certain meaning. A well-known instance in English discussed by Anderson (1971) and Fillmore (1977) among others is the following :

- (25) a. John sprayed the wall with paint
 b. John sprayed paint on the wall

(25a) and (25b) are semantically similar expressions, but they differ in that the one with *the wall* in the accusative (or in direct object position)

implies that *the wall* is completely affected; i.e. the entire wall is covered with paint, while *the wall* in the oblique implies that it is effected by the action of paint. That is, (25a) is an example of an affected object (i.e. existing objects that are involved in the action described by the predicate), and (25b) is an example of an effected object (i.e. objects that are brought into existence by the action described in the predicate⁵).

In the case of Japanese, Malayalam and Tamil, the similar distinction of affected objects and effected objects is made in terms of the morphological marking. For example:

(26) Japanese

- a. John ga kabe o penki de nutta
 nom wall acc paint with sprayed
 (John sprayed the wall with paint)
- b. John ga penki o kabe ni nutta
 nom wall acc wall to sprayed
 (John sprayed paint on the wall)

(27) Tamil

- a. avan sevithua paint oda sprayannan
 he wall-acc paint with spray-did
 (He sprayed the wall with paint)
- b. avan painta sevithu mela sprayannan
 he paint-acc wall on spray-did
 (He sprayed paint on the wall)

These examples show that the accusative case is related to the notion of total affectedness of O. If we look back at our original problem raised by the dative subject construction, we notice that the dat-nom construction is not the prototypical transitive pattern in the sense that the assumed object is not associated with the total affectedness of O.

5. A semantic contrast of case marking in Japanese, Malayalam and Tamil

We have discussed so far that the dative subject occurs in both intransitive and transitive constructions in Malayalam and Tamil, while only in transitive constructions in Japanese. That is, the intransitive construction in Japanese requires the nominative case on the subject, unlike the situation in Malayalam and Tamil. It seems that Japanese must contain the nominative case, while Malayalam and Tamil don't need to.

We observed in the examples of Malayalam and Tamil that the intransitive subject can be case marked either with the dative or with the nominative when it express the notions of ability, necessity, and possession. For Malayalam and Tamil, the distinction between nominative and dative cases for intransitive subjects is dependent on the degree of control exercised by the S over the situation described. Case marking expresses the degree of control exercised by the case marked NP over the situation. Japanese does not show such distinction between nominative and dative cases for intransitive subjects, that is, the intransitive subject in Japanese is always expressed in nominative cases (or topic marker).

When stative predicates typically expressing the notions of ability, possession, necessity, and liking are involved, the accusative-ergative distinction is lost in these languages. We observed that the dat-nom (or acc) pattern is described as the intermediate pattern between the accusative and ergative. The dat-nom and nom-acc patterns differ in the nature of the relationship between the noun arguments. The difference is summarized in (28).

- (28) Semantic difference between nom—acc and dat-nom (or acc) pattern,⁵

Nom-ACC pattern	Dat-Nom (or Acc) pattern
Nom NP is a volitional agent.	Dat NP is a nonvolitional agent.
Predicate is nonstative.	Predicate is either stative or nonstative.
Acc NP is a patient.	Nom (or Acc) NP is unaffected.

Some of dat-nom constructions are more accurately translated into English as follows.

- (29) Japanese
 a. John ni sushi ga taberareru⁶
 dat nom eat-can
 (Sushi is eatable to John)
- (30) Malayalam
 a. kuttike pustakam weenam
 child-dat book want
 (The book is wanted to the child)
 b. enikke weedanicuu
 I-dat pain felt
 (Pain was felt to me)
- (31) Tamil
 a. enakku tamiz teiyum
 I-dat Tamil know-ful-it
 (Tamil is know to me)
 b. enakku kappi venum
 I-dat coffee want-it
 (Coffee is wanted to me)

In these examples, the second NPs are translated into the subject and the dative NP into the oblique phrases. This is expected from our observation, since the dative NP is experiencer or recipient and the object of the experiencer is viewed as an actor of being in a state, happening or entering into a state. This suggests that the nature of the dat-nom pattern is not quite transitive, thereby implying a non-

subject nature of the dative NP and non-object nature of the nominative NP.

6. Case marking, grammatical relations, and semantic roles

We discussed at the beginning of section 1 that languages are often classified as being (nominative-) accusative or as ergative depending upon how A, S and O are encoded. (Recall that the symbol S refers to the obligatory argument of an intransitive clause, and the symbols A and O refer to, respectively, the subject and the object of a transitive sentence in an accusative language). From a typological point of view, languages that case-mark S and A identically and O differently from S and A are called nominative-accusative or simply accusative, for S and A are distinguished from O by marking the latter, while leaving the former very often unmarked. Ergative languages, on the other hand, case-mark S and O identically in the absolutive (most often unmarked) and A with a special ergative marker. The following examples illustrate the two typical patterns.

(32) Accusative pattern: Quechua

a. Juan wanu-n
die-3sg

‘Juan dies’

b. Pedro Juan-ta wanu-ci-n
ACC die-Cau-3sg

‘Pedro killed Juan’

(33) Ergative pattern: Warrgamay

a. nulmburu gaga-ma
woman-ABS go-FUT

‘The woman will go’

z. maal-du nulmburu nunda-ma
man-ERGA woman-ABS see-FUT

'The man will see the woman.'

(Dixon 1980)

Nominative-accusative systems have a 'nominative' case associated with the A and S functions, and an 'accusative' associated with O function. Ergative-absolutive systems, on the other hand, have an 'absolutive' associated with O/S and an 'ergative' associated with A. Many of the so-called ergative languages have what Silverstein (1976) calls "split case marking"—a systematic display of both ergative and accusative patterns with a single language⁷. As exemplified in (33), the basic case marking pattern in ergative languages is Ergative-Absolutive. But most ergative languages exhibit various types of derivation from the basic ergative pattern; some of them are Dat-Abs, Loc-Abs, and Abs-Abs.

6.1 Two argument constructions in Japanese

As stated earlier, Japanese, Malayalam and Tamil fall under the nominative-accusative category in its case marking. That is, in these languages, the nominative case is used to case mark S and A identically and the accusative case O differently. In addition, we also observed in Section 2. the variations in case marking, so-called intermediate patterns (ergative patterns), where the two arguments are marked by dative and nominative rather than nom-acc pattern. And there is nom-dat pattern. These patterns are exemplified as follows:

(34) Nom-Acc pattern

Taro ga hanako o tataita
 nom acc hit

(Taro hit Hanako)

(35) Dat-Nom pattern

Taro ni eigo ga hanaseru
 dat English nom speak can

(Taro can speak English)

- (36) Nom-Nom pattern
 Taro ga Hanako ga sukida
 nom nom like
 (Taro likes Hanako)
- (37) Nom-Dat pattern
 Taro ga Hanako ni atta
 nom dat saw
 (Taro met Hanako.)

These examples show that O-like noun phrases (*eigo* in (35), *Hanako* in (36), are marked with *ga*, the same marker as is used to mark intransitive subjects; whereas A-like noun phrases (*Taro* in (35)) receive an oblique *ni* marking. If this were the standard marking observed in Japanese transitive clauses, Japanese could be characterized as an ergative language—*ga* would be the absolutive case particle and *ni* the ergative case particle. The fact is, however, NP *ga* NP *o* is the prototypical transitive pattern, and NP *ni* NP *ga* is an intermediate pattern (the ergative pattern). We saw that a great number of two argument sentences take the ergative sentence pattern in Japanese if the predicate is stative.

The dat-nom pattern is analogous to the ergative pattern in that O is marked by the nominative case that is usually used for S (and A), and A is marked by an oblique dative case. Some regard the existence of the dat-nom pattern as a sign of ergative in accusative languages⁸ (cf. Moravcsik 1978, Shibatani 1979).

We have seen that many of dat-nom patterns alternates with a nom-nom pattern (*ga-ga* pattern), and these patterns also alternate with a nom-acc case pattern.

- (38) a. John ga piano o hikeru
 nom piano acc play-can
 (John can play a piano)
- b. John ni piano ga hikeru
 dat nom

- c. John ga piano ga hikeru
 nom nom

These examples show that there is a close relationship between these dat-nom (and nom-nom) case pattern and the prototypical transitive construction, nom-acc case pattern. Here, we have three basic sentence patterns in Japanese.

(39) Two argument construction in Japanese

1. Intermediate pattern: Dat-Nom, Nom-Nom
2. Transitive pattern: Nom-Acc

This illustrates that in Japanese two argument construction has two types: an intermediate pattern and a prototypical transitive pattern. These two patterns differ in case marking on the object, one in which the object NP is case marked by an accusative case and another in which what appears to be the object is case marked by a nominative case. We have seen the semantic difference between these two constructions. Particularly interesting in this regard is the impossibility of the dat-acc pattern in Japanese, as shown in (40).

- (40) a. *Taro ni Hanako o tataita
 dat acc hit
 (Taro hit Hanako)
- b. *John ni roshiago o hanaseru
 dat acc speak-can
 (John can speak Russian)
- c. *John ni piano o hikeru
 dat piano acc play-can
 (John can play the piano)

The fact that the dat-acc pattern does not occur indicates that the object must take the nominative case when the subject is in the dative.⁹ Non-occurrence of the dat-acc in fact suggests the ergative nature of

dat-nom or nom—nom patterns in Japanese. The question arises whether the NP marked by nominative is a subject or an object: if it is an object, the nominative has a dual role of a subject marker and an object marker. Then, how can an object marked by accusative and an object marked by nominative differ from each other? Before we try to answer this question, let us observe the case marking pattern in Malayalam and Tamil in the following two subsections.

6.2 Two argument constructions in Malayalam

As stated in Section 1, the prototypical pattern of transitive construction is a nom-acc pattern. We observed in dative subject constructions that it is not always the case that nominative NPs are subjects, or that subjects are always nominatives. We have assumed so far that all the occurrences of the unmarked NP are nominative since the nominative is the unmarked NP (see Mohanan, 1982). But the typical occurrence of the accusative of the inanimate is also without any suffix. If all the unmarked NPs are interpreted as nominative, the nominative case is also present on the inanimate object. Observe the following sentences in Malayalam.

- (41) a. puucca eliye ṭiṇṇu.
 cat rat-acc ate
 (The cat ate the rat)
- b. *puucca eli ṭiṇṇu.
 cat rat ate
- (42) a. puucca roṭṭi ṭiṇṇu.
 cat bread ate
 (The cat ate the bread)
- b. *puucca roṭṭiye ṭiṇṇu.
 cat bread-acc ate
- (43) a. awaḷ awane kaṭṇu.

- she he saw
(She saw him)
- b. *awaḷ awan kaṇṇu
she he saw
- (44) a. awal puṣṭakaṭakam kaṇṭu.
she book saw
(She saw the book)
- b. *awaḷ puṣṭakaṭṭine kaṇṭu.
she book-acc saw

(41–44) illustrate that inanimate NPs in Malayalam must be unmarked and animate NPs are always marked for accusative when they are direct objects. Thus, if we assume that all the occurrences of unmarked are interpreted as nominative,¹⁰ we can have the following case assignment principle: The direct is accusative if animate, and nominative otherwise¹¹ (Mohanana, 1984).

Let us look at how the case assignment works in the dative subject construction in Malayalam. The examples of the two argument construction with dative subject in Malayalam are given below.

- (45) a. aḷḷkku oru sammānam kiṭṭi
she-dat one gift got
(She got a gift)
- b. aḷḷkku oru koṭṭāram uṇṭu
she-dat one palace have
(She has a palace)
- c. aḷḷkku avaṇṭu bhayam tōnni
she-dat him-for fear felt
(She felt fear for him)
- d. aḷḷkku avanoṭu śhéham tōnni
she-dat him-for love felt
(She felt love over him)

These constructions also follow the general rule in Malayalam that the inanimate object is always unmarked and the animate NP is always marked for accusative.

- (46) a. kuṭṭikke aanaye nullāam
 child-dat elephant-acc pinch-may
 (The child may pinch the elephant)
- b. *kuṭṭi aanaye nullaan
 child elephant-acc pinch-may

These show that the dative subject construction also follows the general rule in Malayalam, that is, (46b) is ungrammatical because the animate object is in the nominative case. The question is how we treat the unmarked NPs in (45). If we follow the case assignment principle stated before, they are in nominative cases. This is suggestive of the concept of the ergative case in which the subject of an intransitive verb and the direct object of a transitive verb use a common case. As already noted that semantically the dat-nom show the ergativity, but syntactically, although the dat-nom show the ergativity, the dat-acc does not.

To summarize the discussion so far: what we find is that Malayalam has the following transitive construction.

- (47) Two argument constructions in Malayalam
1. Intermediate pattern: Dat-Acc, Dat-Nom
 2. Transitive pattern: Nom-Nom, Nom-Acc

This illustrates that there are two types of two argument sentences in Malayalam, one in which the object NP is unmarked (nominative) or marked for accusative, another in which the object is unmarked (nominative) or marked for accusative depending on its animacy.

6.3 Two argument constructions in Tamil

Tamil also distinguishes case marking for animate and inanimate object NPs. In Tamil, like in Malayalam, the animate object NPs are always marked for accusative. But, in Tamil, unlike in Malayalam, the inanimate object NPs are optionally marked for accusative.

- (48) a. *kozante paale kuticcuttaan*
 child milk-acc drink-compl-past-3sm
 (The child drank up the milk)
- b. *puune paalu kutikkum*
 cat milk drink
 (A cat will drink milk)
- (49) a. *enakku avane teriyum*
 I-dat him-acc know-ful-it
 (I know him)
- b. **enakku avan teriyum*
 'I-dat he know-ful-it'

(48) above illustrates the accusative case marking of an inanimate object is optional unlike the one in Malayalam. (49) shows that the accusative case marking of an animate object is obligatory.

The dative subject constructions also follow the general rule in Tamil that the inanimate object is optionally marked for accusative and the animate object obligatorily marked for accusative.

The dative subject construction also follows the general rule in Tamil that the inanimate object is optionally marked for accusative and the animate object is obligatorily marked for accusative. Some of the examples are shown as follows:

- (50) a. *onakku mooru pitikkumaa*
 you-dat buttermilk like-ful-ip
 (Do you like buttermilk?)

- b. onkalukku inta uure pitikkutaa
 you-dat this town-acc like-pre-ip
 (Do you like this town?)
- (51) a. onakku inda viṣayam teiyum?
 you-dat this matter know-ful-it-Q
 (Do you know this matter?)
- b. onakku inda viṣayatte teriyumā?
 you-dat this matter-acc know-ful-it-Q
 (Do you know this matter?)
- (52) a. enakku avane teriyum
 me-dat him-acc know-ful-it
 'I know him'
- b. *enakku avan teriyum
 I-dat he know-ful-it

(50–52), together with (48–49), indicate that the animate object NP is explicitly marked for the accusative case and the inanimate object NP can be either unmarked or marked for the accusative case.

The question which arises is what case marker should be assigned to the unmarked (inanimate) NP. If we assume that all unmarked NPs are in the nominative in Tamil, as we did in Malayalam, Tamil would have the following transitive patterns: Nom-Acc (animate/inanimate nouns), Nom-Nom (inanimate nouns), Dat-Acc (animate/inanimate nouns), Dat-Nom (inanimate nouns). This, however, means that the same noun (i.e., inanimate noun) is assigned two different cases (i.e., accusative and nominative case). Obviously, the unmarked inanimate NP should be considered as an instance of the deletion of a case marker because the NP can be overtly marked as accusative.

By nature the function of objectivity belongs to inanimate objects and the function of the agent belongs to animate beings. Therefore, even without the suffix, the NP can occur in the accusative. But if both agent and object are unmarked, the latter has to be marked with a suffix, that is, the accusative. This leads us to the general principle

that where the meaning is made clear without any special phonetic markedness, it is unnecessary to employ such phonetic devices. Following this principle the accusative can be unmarked in above sentences. Thus, it is plausible to assume the second NP should be treated as a morphologically unrealized accusative case feature, because an inanimate NP in this place can be overtly marked as accusative.

There is further evidence to support that the unmarked object NP is in the unrealized accusative in Tamil. Though the verb is usually placed at the end of a sentence in Tamil, the subject, verb and object can freely change their positions, as shown below.

- (53) a. atap paiyan paRattaic caappittaan
 that boy fruit-acc eat-past-3sgmasc
 ‘That boy likes the fruit’
 b. antap paiyan caappittaan paRattai
 c. paRattai antap paiyan caappittaan
 d. paRattaic caappittaan antappaiyan
 e. caappittain antappaiyan paRattai
 f. caappittain paRattai antappaiyan

These permutations are possible when the accusative marker is present on the object. That is, when the object does not carry a case marker, the object must occur immediately before the verb while the subject can occur either before the object or after the verb, but not between them. This is illustrated in (54).

- (54) a. antap paiyan paRam caappittaan
 that boy fruit eat-past-3.sg.masc
 ‘That boy likes the fruit’
 b. paRam caappittaan antap paiyan
 c. *paRam antap paiyan caaouttaan
 d. *caappittaan paRam antap paiyan
 e. *caappittaan antap paiyan paRam

This free word order contrasts with the one in Malayalam. Malayalam has free word order of NPs and a verb in a sentence, so any permutation of the subject, verb, and object is possible. But, unlike in Tamil, the free word order in Malayalam is also applicable to sentences in which the object does not carry a case marker. If either the subject or the object is animate, even without morphological marking, the roles of the argument NPs can be distinguished and free word order can be maintained. On the other hand, if both the subject and the object are inanimate, the sentence structure in Malayalam also approaches the fixed order to avoid ambiguity. Let us look at a few examples.

- (55) a. paśu pullu tinnu
 cow grass ate
 (The cow ate grass)
 b. pullu paśu tinnu
 c. tinnu pullu paśu pullu
 d. tinnu pullu paśu
 e. paśu tinnu pullu
 f. pullu tinnu paśu

The contrast between (54) and (55) supports that the object NPs in Tamil and Malayalam are in different case markers, even though they are all in the unmarked in the surface structure. If we assume that the unmarked objects in Tamil (54) would be in the nominative as in Malayalam (54), we should expect that the ungrammatical sentences should be acceptable. But, if we assume that the object NPs in (55) are in the unrealized accusative case, then we can explain the contrast between (54) and (55). That is, the permutations in (55) are possible because the first NP and the second NP are not in the same case marker, so the permutations don't cause ambiguity.

Thus, unlike Malayalam, Tamil shows clear evidence that the absence of case marking in inanimate objects can be treated as a morphologically unrealized accusative case feature. This suggests that if the patient is

inanimate, it is not necessary to mark it for the accusative, as agency is naturally attributed to animate beings. The perspectives of the speaker and the context are two pragmatic elements which influence the omission of the surface case marker in such instances.

Turning back to the two argument construction in Tamil, by assuming that the inanimate object is in the unmarked accusative, we find the following case marking pattern of the two argument construction in Tamil.

(56) Two argument sentence constructions

1. Intermediate pattern: Dat-Acc, Dat-Nom
2. Transitive pattern: Nom-Nom, Nom-Acc

Before we go into the discussion of the nature of grammatical relations in the intermediate constructions, we can summarize the case marking patterns in Japanese, Malayalam, and Tamil in the next section.

7. A contrast of case marking in Japanese, Malayalam, and Tamil

From Section 2 through Section 6, we have observed the following case marking in Japanese, Malayalam and Tamil.

(57) Case marking pattern in Japanese, Malayalam, and Tamil

	Japanese	Malatalam	Tamil
one argument construction		Dat	Dat
	Nom	Nom	Nom
two argument construction	Dat-Nom	Dat-Nom	Dat-Nom
	Nom-Nom	Dat-Acc	Dat-Acc
	Nom-Dat	Nom-Nom	Nom-Acc
	Nom-Acc	Nom-Acc	

We have seen in Section 1 that Malayalam and Tamil have the dative subject pattern in one argument construction, while Japanese does not. In (57) single Nom represents the paradigmatically intransitive case pattern, and Nom-Acc (Nom) in the bottom line represents paradigmatically transitive case pattern. In between are the Dat-Nom, Nom-Nom, Dat-Acc patterns, which represent an intermediate degree of transitivity. The paradigmatically transitive case pattern and the intermediate pattern represent two argument construction, and are therefore transitive under an approach that considers simply the numbers of arguments involved. The intermediate patterns are correlated with such semantic parameters as stative aspect, unreal modality, and absence of any transfer of action (e.g., as in potential, spontaneous, desiderative constructions). We refer to the Dat-Nom and Nom-Nom in Japanese, the Dat-Nom in Malayalam and Tamil as ergative pattern.

We observed the difference in ergative patterns between Japanese on the one hand, and Malayalam and Tamil on the other hand. Japanese expresses the second NP in these patterns by means of the nominative case. Malayalam and Tamil, by contrast, express the first NP in these constructions by means of the dative case. Then, in Japanese the nominative marker is an ergative marker while in Malayalam and Tamil the dative marker is an ergative marker.

8. Case markings and Grammatical relations

So far it has been assumed that the dative NPs and the other NPs in the so-called dative subject constructions are respectively subjects and objects in Japanese, Malayalam, and Tamil. Japanese shows that the assumed object is always marked by the nominative case. In contrast, Malayalam and Tamil both show that the assumed subject is always marked by the dative case, but they differ in the case marking of the assumed object because of the difference of the general case marking principles in these languages.

As noted, in Tamil the assumed object is obligatorily case marked by the accusative cases if it is animate. This was shown in the example (45), which is repeated as (58).

- (58) a. enakku avane teriyuṁ
 I-dat him-acc know-ful-it
 (I know him)
 b. *enakku avan teriyuṁ
 I-dat he know-ful-it

This indicates that this accusative marked NP is in the object relation with the verb. In the examples discussed earlier, we found that if the second NP is inanimate, it is optionally case marked by the accusative. This is also repeated in (59).

- (59) a. onakku inda viṣayam teiyuṁ?
 you-dat this matter know-ful-it-Q
 (Do you know this matter?)
 b. onakku inda viṣayatte teriyumā?
 you-dat this matter-acc know-ful-it-Q
 (Do you know this matter?)

It was observed that the unmarked NP in (59a) can be interpreted as the unmarked accusative NP. Thus, the second NPs in (58) and (59) are equally in the object relations with the verbs.

In Malayalam, the assumed object is obligatorily case marked by the accusative case, as in Tamil.

- (60) a. puucca eliye tin̄nu.
 cat rat-acc ate
 (The cat ate the rat)
 b. *puucca eli tin̄nu.
 cat rat ate

This also indicates this accusative marked NP is in the object relation to the verb. If the second NP is inanimate, it must be in the nominative, which is shown below.

- (61) a. puucca rotti tinnu.
 cat bread ate
 (The cat ate the bread)
- b. *puucca rottiye tinnu.
 cat bread-acc ate

The question to be asked here is how to characterize the grammatical role of this nominative marked NP. In contrast with Tamil and Malayalam, Japanese does not distinguish case marking of the second NP in terms of animate/inanimate dichotomy. Also, the second NP in this construction is always marked with the nominative case. So our question in these languages is, “How do we understand the grammatical role of the nominative marked NP in the dative subject construction?”

As the discussion in the next subsection shows, there is syntactic evidence to believe that the dative NP and nominative NP are respectively subjects and objects (cf. Mohanan 1982, Kuro 1973, Shibatani 1977). However, there is also reason to suspect that the nature of these constructions is not quite transitive, as the English term usually implies. Semantically, the dative NPs in these constructions are not subjects¹² but true datives. This has been shown by the semantic or conceptual relation which is held between the verbs and arguments.

8.1 Subjecthood in dative subject constructions.

There is some evidence that the dative NP and the nominative NP in dat-nom constructions are respectively subjects and objects in Japanese, Malayalam, and Tamil. Reflexivization provides one of the arguments that these datives are indeed subjects. One of the crucial properties of reflexives in these languages is that only subjects can be the ante-

cedent (or controller) of the reflexive. This is shown in (62)–(64).

(62) Japanese

- a. oosama ga jibun no tuma o tunetta
king nom self of wife acc pinched
(The king pinched his wife)
- b. Johnny ga Mary o jibun no heya de kisusita
nom acc self of house at kissed
(Johnny kissed Mary at Johnny's/*Mary's house)
- c. oosama o jibunn no tuma ga tunetta
king acc self of wife nom pinched
(The king's wife pinched him (the king))

(63) Malayalam

- a. aaajawe swantam bhaaryaye nuli
king self's wife-acc pinched
(The king pinched his(king's) wife)
- b. jooni meeriye swantam wiittil wecco umma weccu
Johnny Mary-acc self's house at kisses put
(Johnny kissed Mary at Johnny's/*Mary's house)
- c. *raajaawine swantam bhaarya nulli
king-acc self's wife pinched
(The king's wife pinched him (the king))

(64) Tamil

- a. goovintan tan makane kuuppittaan
self's son-acc called-3sm
(Govindan called his son)
- b. raaman makanoote onkale tan paakka vantaaru
son-with you-acc self see came-3sh
(Raman came with Raman's/*your son to see you)
- c. *goovintanai tan makan kuuppittaan
-acc self's son called-3sh
(Goovintan's son called him)

The ungrammatical cases in the above sentences are all due to the fact that the antecedent of reflexives are not subjects. The examples in (65)–(67) show that the dative NP in the dat-nom construction controls reflexivization.

(65) Japanese

- a. oosama ni jibun no kodomo ga takusan iru
 king dat self of child nom many be
 (The king has many children)

(66) Malayalam

- a. raajaawine swantam bharryaye nullaṇam
 king-dat self's wife-acc pinch-want
 (The king wants to pinch his (king's) wife)
- b. raajaawine swaṭṇam bhaaryaye istamaane
 kind-dat self's wife-acc like
 (The king likes his (king's) wife)

(67) Tamil

- a. avanukk tan makene pitikkutaan
 he-dat self con-acc like
 (He likes his son)

The above examples make clear that the dative NP in the dat-nom construction controls the full range of reflexive forms, just like a nominative subject.

8.2 Subjecthood and objecthood in dative subject constructions

In the preceding subsection, we have seen some syntactic evidence that the dative NP in the dat-nom construction behaves like a subject, thereby rendering the other NP (i.e., the nominative NP) an object. However, there is also syntactic reason to suspect that the dative NP is not quite subject. Of the three languages Tamil exhibits agreement between the subject and the predicate in person, number, and gender. But the dative NP does not control verb agreement.

- (68) a. ave eteyoo paattaaan
 he something see-past-3sm (third person singlar mascu-
 line)
 (he saw something)
- b. enakku avane pidikkum
 I-dat he-acc catch-fu-it
 (I like him)

The Tamil dative NPs are clearly not subjects since they don't trigger person and number agreement with the verb.

This suggests that Tamil keeps two semantic roles (i.e., agents and experiencers) morphologically and syntactically distinct. In Malayalam and Japanese, on the other hand, these two semantic roles are collapsed into a common grammatical relation (i.e., subject), since there is no syntactic reason that the dative experiencer shouldn't be a subject. This is not to say that the Tamil dative NP can not be assigned the subject status, or the dative NP in Malayalam and Japanese can be always assigned the subject status in this position. For the former, we have just noted in the previous section that reflexivization provides evidence that these dative NPs in Tamil as well as Malayalam and Japanese are indeed subjects. For the latter, we already discussed extensively that the dat-nom pattern was not semantically prototypical transitive but rather intermediate pattern, and hence implying the non-subject nature of the dative NP and the non-object nature of the nominative NP.

At the end of Section 5, it was noted that the nature of the dat-nom construction is not quite transitive semantically, thereby implying non-subject nature of the dative NP and the non-object nature of the nominative NP. There is syntactic evidence to support this. We observed that Tamil has a general rule in case marking that the inanimate object is optionally marked for accusative and the animate object obligatorily marked for accusative. But there are some verbs with the dative subject which don't follow this general rule. They are shown below.

- (69) a. onakku inda visavam puriyuma?
 you-dat this matter understand-ful-it-Q
 (Do you understand this matter?)
 b. *onakku inda visayatte puriyuma
 you-dat this matter-acc understand-ful-it-Q
- (70) a. enkalukku inke kaappi ketekkumaa
 we-dat here coffee be obtained-ful-ip
 (Can we get coffee here?)
 b. *enkalukku inke kaappiye ketekkumaa
 we-dat here coffee-acc be obtained-ful-ip
 (Can we get coffee here)

Following the general rule in Tamil, we should expect that sentences (69b) and (70b) would be acceptable since the case marking of the inanimate object is optional. But they are not. Then, the verbs *puriyum*, *ketekkumaa* must have an idiosyncratic nature to which the general rule does not apply. The ungrammaticality of the accusative in (69b) and (70b) seems to suggest the non-object nature of that NP.

The violation of the general rule is also observed in the verb *venuum* 'want', which is exemplified in (71).

- (71) a. enakku ava dan venum
 I-dat she emph want
 (I want only her)
 b. *enakku avale tan venum
 I-dat her-acc emph want

Again, following the general rule, we should expect that (71b) would be ungrammatical, since the case marking of an animate object is obligatory. But the case is reverse. (45) shows that *venum* does not take an object and allows us to suppose that the nominative NP (i.e., the unmarked NP) is something other than an object, most likely a subject. The same test shows that *venum* 'want', *irukku* 'be' in (35)

and (36) are similar to *puriyuma* 'understand' in providing evidence of the subject nature of the second NP.

The verb *pidikkum* 'like' also show the violation of the general rule.

- (72) a. enakku avane romba podikkum
 me-dat him-acc much like-fu-it
 (I like him a lot)
- b. enakku avan romba pidikkum
 me-dat he much like-ful-it
 (I like him a lot)

Here, however, the accusative suffix is only optional even with human pronouns. This implies that the case-relational status of this NP is even more indeterminate than in the case of *teriyum* above. We cannot make a clear case for either the object or the subject status of this NP. This suggests that there are two categories in the dat-nom (or acc) in Tamil: the one which follows the general rule (i.e., if the object of a verb is a human NP it must bear an accusative case, and if it is a non-human NP it bears explicitly an accusative case), the other which does not follow the rule. The former category of the dat-nom (or acc) pattern provides evidence that the nominative (or accusative) marked NP is an object; the latter category shows the non-object nature of the nominative (or accusative) NP.

The fact that there are two categories in the dat-nom (or acc) pattern can be also found in dat-nom (or acc) pattern in Malayalam. Mohanan (1981, 1982) observed that some of the second NP in these constructions.

- (73) a. kuttikkə aanaye deesyam aayi
 child-dat elephant-acc anger became
 (The child was angry with the elephant)
- b. *kuttikkə aana deesyam aalappettu
 child-dat elephant anger become-pass-past
 (Passive of (73a))

- (74) a. kuttikkə aanayootə deesyam wannu
 child-dat elephant-dat anger came
 (The child was angry with the elephant)
- b. *kuttikkə aana deesyam warappettu
 child-dat elephant anger come-pass-past
 (Passive of (74a))

It is only primary objects that can be passivized in Malayalam. The ungrammaticality of (73b) and (74b) would follow from the assumption that 'elephant' is not a primary object in (73a) and (74a). However, the same construction with the modals that induce datives on subjects undergo passivization.

- (75) a. pooliissukaarkke kuttiye ikkiliyaakkanam
 policement-dat child-acc tickle-want
 (The policemen want to tickle the child)
- b. kuttikke poolissukaaraal ikkiliyaakkappetapam
 child-dat policemen-inst tickle-pass-want
 (The child wants to be tickled by the policemen)

The grammaticality of (75b) shows that 'child' is a primary object in (75a). Mohanan (1981) argues that Malayalam has three types of dative subjects, one of which qualifies as a quirky dative case, following Andrew (1982) and Levin and Simpson (1981). This dative subject construction with quirky case, (75), for example, behave like an intransitive construction, as it does not have a direct object, and hence it does not undergo passivization. Here the same question arises: why do some of dative subject constructions behave like transitive, and others behave like intransitive.

The similar situation can be found in the dat-nom construction in Japanese. We noted in section 4 that many of dat-nom patterns alternate with the paradigmatically transitive pattern, nom-acc pattern. The question that we raised was why certain dat-nom patterns like (76)

alternate with the nom-acc pattern and certain others like (77) don't.

- (76) a. watashi ni piano ga hikeru
 I dat piano nom play-can
 (I can play a piano)
- b. John ni nihongo ga wakaruu
 John dat Japanese nom understand
 (John can understand Japanese)
- c. John ni(wa) Mary ga sukida
 dat(top) nom like
 (John likes Mary)

The second (nominative) NPs in these examples can alternate with the accusative NPs. But the second NPs in the following example do not alternate with the accusative case.

- (77) a. watashi ni sonokoto ga kuyamareru
 I dat that thing nom regret-spon
 (I regret it)
- b. Watashi ni eigo ga dekiru
 I dat English nom can-do
- c. kanojyo ni(wa) suiei ga tokui da
 she dat swimming nom good is
 (She is good at swimming)

This suggests that there are two categories in the dat-nom pattern in Japanese, and they are not a discrete but a rather a continuum. The dat-nom pattern like (76) resembles a transitive pattern in the sense that the dative NP and the nominative NP behave like a subject and an object respectively. The dat-nom pattern like (77) resembles an intransitive construction in the sense that the nominative NP behaves like a subject.

9. Conclusion

In Japanese Malayalam, and Tamil, the agent is encoded in the subject relation and the accusative (the nominative) patient is encoded in the object relation, as predicted in nominative-accusative languages. But we discussed that the dat-nom (or acc) patterns in these languages do not show the accusative pattern. (78) indicates the correspondance among semantic roles, grammatical relations, and case marking for the dat-nom patterns.

(78) The relationship of semantic role, case marking, and grammatical relation in the dat-nom pattern

Semantic role	Case marking	Grammatical relation
experiencer	dative	subject non-subject
a state of affairs	nominative	object no-object

The dat-nom pattern shows that the dative and nominative NP do not always indicate what are identifiable as subject and object respectively. The dative experiencer is encoded in either the subject or non-subject relation, and the nominative NP is encoded in either object or non-object relation. How closely the dative NP is related to subject (or nonsubject) varies according to the languages. Thus, the dat-nom pattern is an intermediate construction in the sense that some of them are more closely related to intransitive constructions and the others are to transitive constructions. It is in this pattern that the ergative pattern is manifested most clearly across languages.

The general conclusion that can be drawn from the discussion is that it is rather misleading to speak of ergative languages, as opposed to nominative-accusative languages, since we have seen that it is possible for one phenomenon in a language to be controlled on an

ergative-absolutive basis while another phenomenon in the same language is controlled on a nominative-accusative basis. Thus we should ask rather to what extent a language is ergative-absolute or nominative-accusative, or more specifically, which constructions in a particular language operate on the one basis and which on the other. The fact that almost no language has a purely ergative system strongly suggests that ergativity is in fact a property of case markers, and not of the global case marking system. The ergativity is a matter of the assignment of ergative marker itself not of the global case marking system. The dative case in the Japanese dat-nom alternates with the nominative case. Thus, in Japanese the nominative marker is an ergative marker. Malayalam and Tamil observe the dat-acc pattern as well as the dat-nom pattern. So, in these languages, the dative marker is an ergative marker.

Footnotes

1. The data of Malayalam are taken from Agesthialingom and Kushalappa eds (1976), Agesthialingom and Varma (1980), Mohanan (1982, 1983), Philipose (1984), and the data of Tamil from Agesthialingom and Kushalappa eds (1976), Agesthialingom and Varma (1980), Asher (1986), Lindholm (1976).
2. As discussed later, an independent sentence in Japanese requires at least one nominative NP.
3. The prototypical transitive construction involves an agent intentionally performing an action which brings about a change of state in a patient. (cf. Hopper and Thompson (1980).
4. Comrie (1981 : 53) discuss that in Bats, there are two ways of translating this *We fell to the ground*. (1) has the intransitive subject in the absolutive case, and (2)—the less usual construction—has the intransitive subject in the ergative, usually reserved for transitive subjects :
 - (1) Txo (absolutivee) naizdrax kxitra
 - (2) Atxo (ergative) naizdrax kxitra
 (1) and (2) differ in how the subject exercises control: version (1) implies that we had more control over the event described, perhaps in that we deli-

berately fell, or more likely in that we should have exercised control but failed to do so; (2) cannot, however, be used to describe a situation where we fell through no fault of our own. Thus, the distinction between the ergative and absolutive cases for intransitive subject is dependent on the degree of control exercised by the S over the situation described.

5. As (25) shows, the semantic range of the English verb *spray* is covered by both the wall (affected object) and the spray (effected object). In other languages like German (cf. Hawkins 1986) or Hungarian (cf. Moravcsik 1978), different verbs are used to distinguish the difference between affected objects and effected objects.

6. If topic marker (wa) follows or replaces the dative marker, the following translation is more accurate

John (ni) wa sushi ga taberareru
 dat topic nom eat-can
 (As for John Sushi is eatable)

7. This is most obvious in the ergative languages of Australia. See Dixon (1980).

8. In fact, Kuroda (1978) call the dat-nom pattern in Japanese "ergative pattern".

9. (38) provide evidence for the assumption made in footnote (2); independent sentence must have one nominative.

10. Another possibility is to set up the abstract case feature. In this possibility, all direct objects, animate or inanimate, can be assigned the accusative case. And with a rule the accusative case is changed into nominative in the surface in the case of inanimate NPs. I shall not pursue this possibility any further.

11. It is argued in Mohanan (1983) that the absence of accusative case in animate objects cannot be treated as morphologically unrealized accusative case. Observe the following sentence.

kutti pustakattine patti aalooiccu
 child book-acc about thought
 (The child thought about the book)

If we assume that inanimate object is in the unrealized accusative case rather than in the nominative case, how shall we treat the above case in which the inanimate NP takes the accusative case. It is more natural that the inanimate object is in the nominative case and the inanimate NP does take the accusative case when required by postposition.

12. The properties characteristic of the subjects are discussed in Keenan (1976), in which the properties may be grouped under (a) coding properties (or overt

formal properties, such as case marking, verb agreement, word order); (b) behavioral properties (or the characteristic behavior of the subject NP with respect to certain transformations); and (c) semantic/pragmatic properties (such as agent-hood, topic-hood, etc).

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