

The periphery of the P demotion domain: The Indo-Aryan (IA) languages in a typological perspective

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This study aims to explore a class of alternations that preserve the argument structure of a verb but modify its morphosyntactic structure through the syntactic demotion of the P (object) argument. We will investigate factors responsible for the linguistic diversity of P demotion clauses across languages, with particular attention to IA languages, based on their formal and functional characteristics. This will allow us to estimate to what extent the P demotion of IA is unique in its behavior and properties when compared to other languages.

The P demotion operation involves a change of P coding properties such as indexation and flagging. The 'P demotion' class may include but is not limited to antipassive (1), conative, transitivity discord, noun stripping, and object incorporation. In ergative languages, they involve a change of A (subject) flagging from ergative to absolutive, the presence of a voice marker, and the P demotion to a peripheral (OBL) status.

(1) a. ʔaaček-a kimitʔ-ən ne-nlʔetet-ən
youth-ERG load-ABS 3PL.SBJ-carry-AOR.3SG.OBJ 'The young men carried away the load.'

b. ʔaacek-ət ine-nlʔetet-gʔe-t kimitʔ-e
youth-ABS ANTIP-carry-AOR.3SG.SBJ-PL load-INS
'The young men carried away a load.' (Kozinsky et al. 1988: 652)

(Chukchi)

Some scholars assume that P demotion to OBL is sufficient to consider a construction as in (2b) antipassive (Kozinsky et al. 1988: 654). However, as (2) shows, the verb systematically requires ERG flagging of the subject. In (2a), P is unflagged and agrees with the verb. In (2b), it receives DAT/ACC flagging and the agreement is blocked (for exceptions in agreement blocking cf. author 2010).

(2) a. rām ne ciṭṭī likhī
R.M. ERG letter.F.SG write.PAST.F.SG 'Ram wrote a letter.'

b. rām ne laṛkī ko dekhā
R.M. ERG girl.F.SG DAT/ACC see.PAST.M.SG 'Ram saw the girl.'

(Hindi)

Ex. (2b) shows a widespread phenomenon in IA languages, traditionally analyzed under the umbrella term of DOM (Montaut 2018). Conversely, such alternations are discussed as semi-transitive from a functional-typological perspective (Zúñiga & Kittilä 2019: 208).

IA also has verb-coded P demotion alternations. But unlike many languages, they do not contain a synthetic voice marker, (cf. 1b). Instead, they have analytical voice-marking. They use vector verbs that parallel functionally to synthetic voice-marking. This type of construction has at least two features that make them possible to be analyzed as (pseudo)antipasives: change of A flagging ERG> NOM(or ABS) and change of verb valency signaled by the intransitive vector, e.g. 'go' in (3b). Moreover, a verbal agreement is with P in (3a), and with A in (3b).

(3) a. rām ne khānā khāyā (Hindi) R.M ERG food eat.PAST.M.SG

'Ram ate food/meal.'

b. rām khānā khā gayā

R.M food eat go.PAST.M.SG 'Ram ate up meal.'

In (3b), however, P does not have demotion features as it remains unflagged. Flagging is possible if P is animate or definite but then it has the same flagging as in a transitive construction.

So far, we have inspected 25 languages. The preliminary results show that either P is demoted to oblique or ultimately demoted through verb incorporation or omission. Interestingly, the type of P demoting alternation, where valency-changing operation is indicated by an analytical voice-marking is observed only in one language: Cavineña (Pano-Tacanan).

We will conduct our research on approximately 50 genealogically unrelated languages. The collected will be analyzed within the multivariate typology by Bickel (2010). Each P demotion construction will be thus decomposed into formal and functional variables, focusing on the P objecthood properties in particular. This will allow detecting potential correlations and patterns, and skewings from the prevalent patterns. Moreover, we will inspect IA historical corpora (Jaworski 2015) to capture how typologically rare pattern has occurred.

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Word count (excluding references, title and examples): 500 words