

Oblique case-marking in Indo-Aryan experiencer constructions: Historical roots and synchronic variation



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Abstract

This article addresses the variable alignment properties of experiencer constructions in Indo-Aryan (IA) languages in the light of the available historical data from Vedic Sanskrit onwards. The first aim of the article is to shed light on the possible historical sources, emergence and expansion of constructions with non-canonically marked arguments in Old IA in general. The second aim is to gain a better understanding of the variation in case marking and agreement patterns that can be attested in New IA experiencer constructions, given that the interplay among morphological cases, semantic roles and additional semantic motivations poses many unsolved questions.

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1. Introduction

In languages with a basic sentence structure of agent–patient, accompanied by a nominative-accusative or ergative–absolutive case pattern, “oblique” (or “non-canonical”) subjects are “different” in the sense that they are not in the nominative (unmarked) or ergative case; instead, a case that normally does not mark subjects is used, often an accusative, dative, genitive, or instrumental (cf. Verma and Mohanan, 1990; Bossong, 1998; Aikhenvald et al., 2001; Bhaskararao and Subbarao, 2004; Bickel et al., 2014). Oblique subject marking is associated with the semantic role of “experiencer” as opposed to “agent”. The following examples from Hindi illustrate the experiencer construction: whereas (1) is an agent–patient construction with a nominative case marking pattern, (2) shows an experiencer subject in a non-nominative (oblique) case, *mujhe*.

- (1) Hindi
mair̥ laṛkī=ko dekh-tā hū̃m
I.NOM girl=ACC see-PTCP.PRS AUX.1SG¹
'I'm watching the girl.'

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¹ The following grammatical abbreviations are used in this article in the glosses: ABL, ablative; ACC, accusative; ACT, active; AOR, aorist; AUX, auxiliary; CV, converb; DAT, dative; EMPH, emphasis marker; ERG, ergative; F, feminine; FUT, future; GEN, genitive; H, honorific; IMP, imperative; INF, infinitive; INJ, injunctive; INS, instrumental; LOC, locative; M, masculine; MED.PASS, mediopassive; MID, middle voice; N, neuter; NOM, nominative; OBL, oblique; OPT, optative; PASS, passive; PL, plural; PRF, perfect; PROG, progressive; PRS, present; PST, past; PTCP, participle; SBJV, subjunctive; SG, singular; STAT, stative. The abbreviations of the texts are: AV, Atharvaveda, Śaunakīya recension; AVP, AV, Paippalāda recension; RV, R̥gveda; RVKh., R̥gveda-Khilāni; Sū., Sūtras; TS, Taittirīya-Saṃhitā; YV, Yajurveda.

- (2) Hindi
mujhe bũkh lag-ĩ
 I.OBL hunger.NOM.F is attached-F.SG
 ‘I am hungry.’

Experiencer constructions with non-canonical argument marking are found in many Indo-European (IE) languages (cf. Eythórsson and Barðdal, 2005), and recently there has been a surge in interest for the Proto-Indo-European origins of these constructions (cf. Eythórsson and Barðdal, 2011). Following this trend, we examine the diachronic evolution of the alignment properties of constructions with non-canonically marked arguments in the Indo-Aryan (IA) branch of the Indo-European languages. In modern IA languages, the oblique subject construction is very frequent, to what degree depends on the language (cf. Hook, 1990a). Counterparts of the above example from Hindi are found in almost every modern IA language, as we will show below. However, the evidence for oblique subject constructions in Old IA is, to say the least, scant, and the few available data are open to misinterpretations. The disappearance of tenses and case mergers are the two most important systemic factors that contribute to the emergence of oblique subject constructions in New IA (parallel to the origins of the ergative construction in IA).

We follow a chronological order in this article. Section 2 discusses the evidence for oblique subjects in Vedic and further evolutions in Middle IA. Section 3 describes the extensive range of variation in oblique subject constructions in New IA, followed by a conclusion in section 4.

2. Evidence for oblique subjects in Old Indo-Aryan?

The main focus of the discussion on experiencer constructions in IE over the last 30 years has been whether the argument in the experiencer role possesses enough “subject properties” to be considered a real subject (cf. Cole et al., 1980; Andrews, 2001; Eythórsson, 2000; Faarlund, 2001; Barðdal and Eythórsson, 2003; Bayer, 2004; Eythórsson and Barðdal, 2005; Malchukov and Spencer, 2009; Barðdal, 2011, among others). The common morphological properties of a subject, viz., being the argument in an unmarked case and controlling verb agreement, obviously do not apply to oblique subjects. However, it has been noted (cf. Keenan, 1976; Barðdal and Eythórsson, 2003) that non-canonical arguments may possess certain syntactic “behavior-and-control” properties that do qualify them as subjects, in particular with respect to conjunction reduction, coordination, and reflexivization. This observation suggests that arguments marked with an oblique case may be said to function as subjects on a syntactic level although they are morphologically and semantically different from subjects in a canonical morphological case. On the other hand, certain scholars argue that non-canonically marked arguments in experiencer constructions are in fact objects, or at least derived from object arguments (cf. Cole et al., 1980; Faarlund, 2001; Barðdal and Eythórsson, 2009 for discussion). Recent typological linguistics is generally inclined to consider “subject” as a language-specific category (cf. Haspelmath, 2010). The existence of “subject properties” is considered as leading to a kind of “common base” to identify the subject in each and every language on a cross-linguistic basis, but the number of properties present, or necessary, varies across languages. In the following section, we will focus on Keenan’s behavior-and-control properties to investigate whether or not oblique subjects were a reality in Old IA.

The rise and development of oblique subject constructions in the history of IA is a matter of discussion. There is no consensus on a number of diachronic issues such as: Where do the non-canonical patterns come from? When do they first appear in the history of IE and IA? Are the patterns New IA innovations or can their roots be traced back to earlier language stages – or perhaps even to Proto-IE? In what follows, we trace the evolution of experiencer constructions throughout the history of IA. We follow the commonly accepted dating of the various stages of IA:

Old Indo-Aryan (Vedic, Classical Sanskrit): 1500–600 BCE;
 Middle Indo-Aryan (Prakrits, Apabhramśa): 600 BCE–1000 CE;
 New Indo-Aryan (Hindi, Bangla, Nepali, etc.): 1000 CE–present.

We first review the evidence for constructions with non-canonically marked arguments in Old IA. Not only is this evidence fragmentary, the few attested examples that have been provided in the literature are moreover contentious.

2.1. Constructions with oblique experiencer subjects in Old Indo-Aryan?

The situation in earlier periods of IA, well-documented throughout its three millennia of history, raises several interesting questions. Evidence for the existence of oblique subjects in the earliest attested IA language, Vedic Sanskrit, is scarce (see, for instance, Hock, 1990; Dahl and Fedriani, 2012; Montaut, 2013). Moreover, the historical data require careful interpretation, which is of course not easy in view of the lack of native speakers. Let us take a closer look at the

constructions discussed at length by Hock (1990), with the possessor argument encoded by the genitive. Hock draws attention to the following examples:

- (3) Early Vedic (AV 12.4.27) (Hock, 1990:123)
nā- asya śru-tvā gṛhé vaset
 not he.GEN hear-CV house.LOC.SG dwell.PRS.3SG.OPT.ACT
 ‘After (he_i) has heard [the verses], she (= the cow) should not dwell in his_i house.’
- (4) Early Vedic (RV 10.18.1) (Hock, 1990:124)
pārehi pānthām yás te svá[h]
 go.away.IMP path.ACC.SG which.NOM.SG.M you.GEN/DAT own.NOM.SG.M
 ‘Go away to the path which is your own.’
- (5) Middle Vedic (TS 5.6.8.2) (Hock, 1990:124)
pāpīyasy asya- ātmānaḥ prajā syāt
 worse.NOM.SG.F he.GEN self.GEN offspring.NOM.SG be.PRS.3SG.OPT.ACT
 ‘His_i self’s_i offspring would be worse.’

Hock refers to two behavioral subjecthood criteria (cf. Keenan, 1976) that allegedly identify the genitive NPs from these examples as subjects: a subject should control the non-finite predication (or converb), as in (3), and it should exercise control of reflexivization, as in (4–5). However, on closer examination, the above examples cannot serve as reliable evidence for these subject-identifying properties. First, the reflexive criterion fails to apply in (4–5). In (4), *svá-* ‘own’ is not necessarily controlled by the subject but, rather, by the (implicit) topic (see Vine, 1997). The verb form *pārehi* is an imperative without an explicit (nominative) subject. For (5), the reflexivity test does not work either, since *ātmān-* is here used not as a reflexive pronoun proper but as an emphatic reflexive, or intensifier, which is not necessarily controlled by the subject, as illustrated in the following example (Kulikov, 2007:1424):

- (6) Early Vedic (AV 1.13.2 = RVKh. 4.4.2)
mṛḍáyā nas tanūbhyo máyas tokébhyas kṛdhi
 be.gracious.PRS.2SG.IMP.ACT we.GEN/DAT self.DAT.PL pleasure.ACC.SG offspring.DAT.PL make.AOR.2SG.IMP.ACT
 ‘Be gracious towards ourselves, make pleasure for [our] offspring.’

With respect to example (3), constructions with converbs (or “absolutives”, in the traditional Sanskrit terminology) do not provide sufficient evidence for subject properties of genitive NPs, since, as noticed by Hock himself (1990:122), “Sanskrit offers a fair number of ‘sloppy’ absolute structures, that is, occasional structures in which absolutives are controlled by constituents that do not otherwise exhibit subject properties”. Converbs in Old IA can be controlled by any prominent NP or topic of a sentence, in other words, also by objects. According to Bickel and Yadava (2000), tests with conjunction reduction and control verbs often fail to identify the subject in New IA as well because, in their opinion, the patterns of coreference and reflexivization are determined by semantic constraints rather than syntactic constraints on case marking or grammatical role. Bickel (2001) offers the following examples (7–8) to illustrate the “free” coreference and reflexivization patterns in Nepali²:

- (7) Nepali
rām=le svasnī=lāi aphno sari di-yo
 Ram=ERG wife=DAT one’s own sari.NOM.SG give-PST.3SG
 ‘Ram gave his wife her own sari.’
- (8) Nepali
mai=le gilās phyām̐k-em ra phuṭ-yo
 I=ERG glas.NOM.SG throw-PST.1SG and break-PST.3SG
 ‘I threw the glass and it broke.’

² Note that the same examples occur in Bickel and Yadava (2000) but translated to Hindi. However, these sentences are considered as entirely ungrammatical by the native speakers of Hindi we asked for grammaticality judgments. It is clear that coreference and control properties are language-specific.

Similar to the Vedic evidence, the reflexivization in (7) and the coreferential deletion in (8) are determined by the topic rather than by the subject (cf. Montaut, 2004:259).

Still weaker is the evidence for oblique subject marking provided by the bulk of experienter verbs in OIA. As Hock (1990:125) rightly notes, many experienter verbs, for which one might expect oblique subject marking in analogy with many modern Indo-European languages such as Icelandic or Russian, unanimously attest nominative experienter subjects. This list includes a good deal of verbs denoting physical and mental states with present stems with the suffix *-ya-* and thematic aorists (discussed at length in Kulikov, 2012), including *tamī* (pres. *tāmya*-^{ti} YV^P+) ‘be exhausted’, *krudh* (pres. *krūdhya*-^{ti} RVKh.+) ‘be angry’, *kṣudh* (pres. *kṣūdhya*-^{ti} RV+) ‘be hungry’, *tuṣ* (pres. *tuṣya*-^{ti} AVP, Sū.+) ‘be satisfied’, *trṣ* (pres. *trṣya*-^{ti} RV+) ‘be thirsty’.

For the few examples with arguments encoded in the accusative, dative or genitive quoted by Hock, the subject status of the oblique nouns is, again, questionable. Consider example (9) below:

- (9) Vedic (RV 2.30.7) (Hock, 1990:127)
- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <i>ná mā tamat</i> | <i>ná śraman</i> | <i>ná- utā tandrat</i> |
| not I.ACC exhaust.AOR.3SG.INJ.ACT | not tire.AOR.3SG.INJ.ACT | not and make.weary.AOR.3SG.INJ.ACT |
- ‘Let [this ritual] neither exhaust me, nor tire me, nor make me weary.’

Geldner (1951:I, 314) translated this construction as transitive, with an unexpressed subject (‘Nicht soll [es] mich erschöpfen noch ermüden, noch mich verdrießen’), and his interpretation is also adopted by Elizarenkova (1989:271, 681) and by Witzel (see Witzel and Goto, 2007:401). By contrast, Delbrück (1900:5), followed by Renou (1967:97), saw here an isolated example of an impersonal construction with an accusative subject, probably considering this case an isolated relic of this hypothetical argument realization pattern (‘May I not become exhausted’). However, the aorist form of the verb *tam* is not incompatible with a transitive interpretation (‘exhaust’), in contrast to other attested non-aoristic forms of *tam* (present *tāmya*-^{ti}, perfect *tatāma*) which only allow for the intransitive interpretation ‘be exhausted’. Hence, the transitive use of *tamat* in (9) points primarily to the labile (alternating intransitive/transitive) syntax of the verb, not necessarily to an oblique subject. This alternation is possible for thematic aorists in Early Vedic (cf. RV 1.94.1 *mā riṣāma* (1pl.) ‘may we not be hurt’ ~ RV 1.12.5 *riṣant-* (participle) ‘hurting, harmer’), but its occurrence decreased dramatically, for this and several other verb forms, from the end of the early Vedic period onwards (see Kulikov, 1999:232; Kulikov, 2003). By contrast, apart from (9) the aorist (*a*)*tamat* is only attested once in a Middle Vedic text, *Taittirīya-Brāhmaṇa*, where we find the normal intransitive construction with a nominative subject:

- (10) Vedic (Taittirīya-Brāhmaṇa 3.7.2.7)
- | | | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>mā tamo</i> | <i>mā yajñās</i> | <i>taman</i> | <i>mā yājamānas</i> |
| not exhaust.AOR.2SG.INJ.ACT | not sacrifice.NOM.SG | exhaust.AOR.3SG.INJ.ACT | not sacrificer.NOM.SG |
- tamat*
exhaust.AOR.3SG.INJ.ACT
- ‘Do not be exhausted, [O charcoal], let the sacrifice not be exhausted, let the sacrificer not be exhausted.’

If Delbrück and Renou are correct, one might assume that such a pattern could have given rise to oblique subject constructions in New IA. However, as long as no similar examples are found, either with the aorist (*a*)*tamat* or with other verbs of physical state in later (Middle Vedic) texts, a diachronic scenario along this line remains doubtful.

The subject analysis is also unlikely for the accusative noun in (11):

- (11) Vedic (Maitrāyaṇī Samhitā 3.7.5)
- | | | | | | |
|--------------|-----------|---------------|------------------------|-------------|------------------|
| <i>yām</i> | <i>hī</i> | <i>vāg</i> | <i>juṣāte,</i> | <i>sá</i> | <i>kṣatriyaḥ</i> |
| who.ACC.SG.M | since | speech.NOM.SG | enjoy.AOR.3SG.SUBJ.MID | he.NOM.SG.M | kṣatriya.NOM.SG |
- ‘For he whom speech pleases, is a kṣatriya.’ (Hock, 1990:128)

First, Hock’s translation is not entirely accurate. The verb *juṣ* ‘enjoy’ takes the experienter of enjoyment as a subject in the nominative while the stimulus is in the accusative, which is also the case, e.g., in (12):

- (12) Vedic (RV 7.86.2)
- | | | | | |
|---------------|-----------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>kīm</i> | <i>me</i> | <i>havyām</i> | <i>á-hṛṇāno</i> | <i>juṣeta</i> |
| what.ACC.SG.N | my | oblation.ACC.SG | not-angry.NOM.SG.M | enjoy.AOR.3SG.OPT.MID |
- ‘What oblation of mine would [the god Varuṇa], not being angry, enjoy?’

A literally more accurate rendering of (11) would therefore be: ‘the one whom the [good] speech enjoys [and, by virtue of that, comes to him], is a kṣatriya’ (i.e., a member of military and ruling elite of the Vedic society). That is, a person who is readily taught by learned people and whom learned/good speech readily reaches becomes a ruler.³ *vāg* ‘speech’ is here the experiencer that enjoys the stimulus expressed in *yām*. Second, the clause-initial position of the relative pronoun *yām* in (11) can hardly be considered reliable evidence for subjecthood in Vedic. Vedic is characterized by free word order and relative clauses starting with a relative pronoun are quite common. Moreover, relative sentences in Indo-European languages have the relative pronoun/word in sentence-initial position in an overwhelming majority of instances, irrespective of the grammatical function/case marking of the relative pronoun. So there is no reason why the nominative *vāg*, which controls the verbal agreement, should not be regarded as the subject of the clause, in accordance with the traditional analysis.

Finally, a few examples are taken as instantiating oblique subjects in the dative case. Consider (13):

- (13) Middle Vedic (Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa 3.5.3.16)
yadā vāi striy-āi ca puṃs-ās ca saṃtap-yá-té, 'tha rétaḥ sic-ya-te
 when PTCL woman-DAT.SG and man-GEN/ABL.SG and heat-PRS-3SG.MID then semen.NOM.SG pour-PRS.PASS-3SG
 ‘For when the heat [of love] rises between a man and a woman, then the semen pours [out].’

This sentence is translated by [Delbrück \(1888:5\)](#) as ‘wenn der Frau und dem Manne warm wird, dann fließt der Same’; likewise [Eggeling \(1885\)](#): ‘for when woman and man become heated, the seed flows’. The first clause has been repeatedly quoted in syntactic studies on Vedic as an example of an experienter construction characterized by a verb of physical state in combination with a genitive argument and without a nominative argument.⁴ On the face of it, it seems plausible to qualify this example as a construction with an oblique (genitive) subject. However, a remarkable feature of the example, which casts some doubts on such an analysis, is the coordination of the alleged genitive noun (*puṃs-ās*) with the dative of the woman (*striy-āi*). Encoding another participant of the situation, which is arguably also an experiencer, with a different case, although not entirely impossible, seems unusual, especially in a text written by one author within the limits of one and the same sentence.⁵ A more convincing analysis of (13) might be obtained if we assume that *puṃs-ās* is not a genitive but an ablative referring to the source of the feeling (an emotional process), which can be supplied, in this example, as the subject of *saṃtapyáte* ‘warms up’ (of love, lust), while the second noun in the dative refers to its goal, the woman. Under this view, the translation would be:

‘Verily, when [the love] arises (lit. warms up) both from a man and towards a woman, then the semen pours [out]/is poured ...’

To sum up, although the examples from Hock are thought-provoking and not all of them can be straightforwardly discarded, evidence for non-canonical constructions with an oblique subject in Vedic turns out to be less than clear-cut, so that the existence of this type of construction in Old IA appears dubious.

2.2. Genitive NPs as subjects in Vedic

Despite the lack of unambiguous constructions with oblique subject marking, there are reasons to assume that constructions with subject-like genitive NPs did exist as early as in Old IA (Vedic). These constructions were first identified in a short but insightful (yet, unfortunately, largely forgotten) study by [Andersen \(1986\)](#).⁶

It is well-known that Old IA has passive constructions with the passive agent in the instrumental, in which the verbal predicate surfaces either as a finite form (most commonly a present formation with the suffix *-ya-*) or as a participle (perfect passive participle or gerundive, also known as future passive participle). The following constructed examples (14) illustrate this rule:

³ We would like to thank Kyoko Amano for valuable clarifications on the meaning of sentence (11).

⁴ See [Delbrück \(1888:5\)](#), [Oertel \(1939:653 \[= Kl. Schr.: I, 497\]\)](#), (1944:72 [= Kl. Schr.: I, 541]). In Delbrück’s formulation: “Verba, welche Vorgänge an Menschen bezeichnen, haben den Betroffenen im Acc. oder Gen. bei sich. [...] In P[ro]sa erscheint wohl nur der Genitiv” [Verbs denoting processes that happen to human beings have the experiencer in the accusative or genitive. In prose only the genitive seems to occur]. Cf. also [Jamison \(1996:124\)](#).

⁵ As E. Dahl has pointed to us (p.c.), the alternation between the genitive/ablative and the dative might reflect the tendency to replace the dative by the genitive in middle and late Vedic.

⁶ See also [Timberlake \(1976\)](#) for a similar pattern in North Russian dialects.

- (14) Sanskrit
- a. *vṛtro devena han-ya-te*
 dragon.NOM.SG god.INS.SG kill-PRS.PASS-3SG.MID
 'The dragon is (being) killed by the god.'
- b. *vṛtro devena ha-taḥ*
 dragon.NOM.SG god.INS.SG kill-PRF.PASS.PTCP.NOM.SG.M
 'The dragon is killed by the god.'
- c. *vṛtro devena han-tavyaḥ*
 dragon.NOM.SG god.INS.SG kill-GERUNDIVE.NOM.SG.M
 'The dragon is to be killed/will be killed by the god.'

Alongside constructions with instrumental agents illustrated in (15–16), there is also a rarer syntactic pattern with the passive agent encoded by the genitive, as in (17–20) (examples from Andersen, 1986).

- (15) Vedic (RV 1.92.7)
divá stave duhitā gótamebhiḥ
 heaven.GEN.SG praise.STAT.3SG daughter.NOM.SG Gotama.INS.PL
 'The daughter of heaven is praised by the Gotamas.'
- (16) Vedic (RV 1.77.5)
eva- ágnir ... víprebhir astoṣṭa
 thus Agni.NOM.SG inspired.poet.INS.PL praise.AOR.3SG.MID
 'Thus has Agni been praised by the inspired poets.'
- (17) Vedic (RV 1.61.15)
asmā id u tyád ánu dāyḥ eṣām
 he.DAT very this.NOM.SG.N grant.MED.PASS.AOR.3SG they.GEN
 'This has been granted by them to him only.'
- (18) Vedic (RV 10.93.4)
rudró nṛṇāṃ stutó
 Rudra.NOM.SG man.GEN.PL praise.PTCP.PRF.PASS.NOM.SG.M
 'Rudra, praised by men ...'
- (19) Vedic (RV 10.155.4)
hatā indrasya śatṛavaḥ
 kill.PTCP.PRF.PASS.NOM.PL.M Indra.GEN.SG enemy.NOM.PL
 'The rivals killed by Indra' (or: 'Indra's rivals (were) killed ...?')
- (20) Vedic (AV 4.16.5)
sámkhyātā asya nimíṣo jánānām
 COUNT.PTCP.PRF.PASS.NOM.PL.M he.GEN eyeblink.NOM.PL man.GEN.PL
 'He has counted the men's eyeblinks.'

Andersen (1986) compared these two types of passive constructions and demonstrated convincingly that genitive NPs show a number of subject properties. The subjecthood features of the genitive NPs identified by Andersen are:

- (i) Genitive agents often render old information, as opposed to instrumental agents which typically render new information.
- (ii) Genitive agents usually have definite referential status.
- (iii) Genitive agents are normally higher on the animacy hierarchy – e.g., very often expressed by (personal) pronouns, as in (17) and (20) – than instrumental agents.

To these three features advanced by Andersen (1986), another one may be added:

- (iv) Genitive agents frequently appear in the clause-initial position, whereas instrumental agents more often appear in non-initial positions (although word order in early Vedic is relatively free, this fact cannot be neglected).

The argumentative force of examples such as (17–20) is somewhat weakened by the fact that both the agentive and possessor interpretation of genitive nouns may be possible, as, e.g., 'the rivals killed by Indra' vs. 'Indra's rivals (were)

killed' in example (19). However, at the same time, this ambiguity may be a clue to the problem of the origin of this type of non-canonical construction, to which we turn below.

Not only does the genitive agent resemble the instrumental agent, there is also variation with the dative in Old IA. In example (21), two similar attestations are given, in which one NP is first dative, then genitive, without any apparent semantic difference.

- (21) Middle Vedic (Oertel, 1937:117–128)
- a. (Pañcaviṃśa-Brāhmaṇa 6.9.13)
- ...*iti bahubhyaḥ pratipadam kuryāt*
 thus many.DAT.PL opening.ACC.SG make.PRS.3SG.OPT.ACT
 '... he should take this [verse] as opening for many [sacrificers].'
- b. (Jaiminīya-Brāhmaṇa 1.94)
- ...*iti bahūnām saṃyajamānām pratipadam kuryāt*
 thus many.GEN.PL sacrificer.GEN.PL opening.ACC.SG make.PRS.3SG.OPT.ACT
 '... he should take this [verse] as opening for many sacrificers.'

From the Vedic prose period onwards, there is a merger of the genitive-ablative and dative forms of the *ā*-declension under certain sandhi conditions (for details of this process, see Oertel, 1936; Witzel, 1989:132ff.). This development resulted in the dative becoming obsolete until it eventually completely merged with other non-nominative cases in Middle IA.

2.3. Late Old Indo-Aryan and Middle Indo-Aryan developments

Later, from the end of the Old IA period onwards and throughout the Middle Indic period, we observe a number of crucial changes in the grammatical system of IA languages. Among these changes are the restructuring of the tense system and the expansion of the new periphrastic perfect based on the Sanskrit participles in *-ta/-na-*, on the one hand, and the merging of the Old IA nominative (in *-s*) and accusative (in *-m*), as opposed to the well-preserved instrumental in *-ena*, attested in some Middle IA dialects (in particular, in Niya Prakrits), on the other. It seems that these processes resulted in the following developments in case syntax.

On the one hand, a number of the subject-like features of the Old IA instrumentals could be delegated to the increased use of (historical) passive participles to express a general past tense, giving rise to an ergative agreement pattern in some Middle and New IA languages (see, e.g., Bubeník, 1993; Peterson, 1998; Butt, 2001). The following examples from Pāli and Niya Prakrits show that the ergative pattern can be found throughout the whole Middle IA period. While the ergative pattern of agreement with the argument in the nominative (subject or direct object) is clear, the interpretation of the instrumental case as an ergative case is still a matter of debate (cf. Verbeke and De Cuyper, 2009), compare:

- (22) Pāli, c. 5th century BC (Peterson, 1998)
- a. (Mahāvagga 3.5.1)
- udena vihāro kārāpito hoti*
 Udena.INS.SG monastery.NOM.SG make.CAUS.PASS.PTCP.NOM.SG.M is
 'Udena has had a monastery built.'
- b. (Mahāvagga 2.9.1)
- bhikkhusaṃgho sannipatito hoti*
 community.of.monks.NOM.SG assemble.CAUS.PASS.PTCP.NOM.SG.M is
 'The community of monks has assembled.'
- (23) Niya Prakrits, c. 3rd century AD (Jamison, 2000)
- a. *Tatigēna dajha picavida*
 Tatiga.INS/ERG.SG slave.NOM.SG hand.over.PST.SG.M
 'Tatiga handed over a slave.'
- b. *lymina mṛda*
 Lymina.NOM.SG die.PST.SG.M
 'Lymina died.'

In the transition from Late Middle IA to New IA, the instrumental case marking merged with other cases to give rise to a two-fold case marking system: nominative vs. oblique. In New IA languages, this two-fold inflectional system is still pervasive, e.g. Hindi m.sg. nouns ending in a vowel take a nominative in *-ā*, the oblique in *-e*. However, gradually a postpositional system replaced the older case marking system. For instance, in Hindi one finds the postposition *ko* to indicate an object, *ne* to

indicate an ergative, *se* to indicate an ablative function. A similar postpositional system is found in Nepali, Marwari, Marathi, from the Western end to the Eastern end of the Indo-Aryan language spectrum. All languages have of course their particularities, and some of them retained an inflectional system, such as Kashmiri. The construction with the experiencer in the dative/accusative case first appears in the Early New Indo-Aryan period, when the use of postpositions becomes more and more frequent. [Strnad \(2013:343\)](#) gives the following examples from Old Hindi (ca. 16th century).

- (24) Old Hindi
tā=kūṃ bahuri na lāgī piyāsa
 he=DAT again not be attached.PST.F.SG thirst.NOM.F.SG
 'He never got thirsty again.'
- (25) Old Hindi
yā pada=kūṃ būjhai, tā=kūṃ tīnyūṃ trībhuvana sūjh-ai
 this verse=DAT solve-PRS.3SG he=DAT three three-worlds.NOM.M.SG understand-PRS.3SG
 '[Who] solves this verse, he will understand the three worlds.'

These are some of the earliest clear traces of experiencers marked with the dative/accusative case. Cognates of the verbs *lāg* 'to be attached' and *sūjh* 'to understand' or 'to be comprehensible' frequently occur with oblique subjects in many New IA languages.

Thus it would appear that the predominance of the past participle construction at the expense of other finite tense constructions created the possibility for a subject to be expressed in a non-nominative case. In the early attestations from Sanskrit, this subject was either an instrumental (in the increasingly frequent passive construction) or a genitive. The merging of case morphology in Middle IA stages led to the appearance of "oblique subjects", i.e. subjects with a case marking which was quite generally "non-nominative". Because of the case syncretism it was impossible to identify this non-nominative marking as genitive, instrumental or dative purely on a formal basis – in short, it is "oblique". In most IA languages, the semantic role of agent (in a broad meaning) has been reinforced by an "ergative" postposition, for instance *ne* in Hindi. However, the reinforcement of marking the semantic role of agent leads to a problem with verbs which are not typically agentive, but rather experience-based, with a semantic mapping of experiencer and stimulus instead of agent and patient. There are significant semantic differences between, on the one hand, agent and agent/patient constructions and, on the other hand, experiencer and experiencer/stimulus constructions. Considering that the use of an ergative postposition indicated a reinforcement of the agent role, it seems likely that the ergative was not preferred for experiencer constructions. Instead, experiencer subjects were indicated with other case markers, such as the dative/accusative postposition.

The influence of Dravidian might have been a factor in facilitating this process. The oblique subject experiencer construction has been suggested as one indicator of the "linguistic area" of South Asia (cf. [Masica, 1976](#); [Emeneau, 1956](#)). It occurs not only in Modern Indo-Aryan, but in the Dravidian languages as well (cf. [Mohan and Mohan, 1990](#); [Ulrich, 1990](#); [Jayaseelan, 1990](#); [2004](#), [Amritavalli, 2004](#); [Subbarao and Bhaskararao, 2004](#); [Rani and Sailaja, 2004](#)). For instance, consider the following examples from Kannada ([Amritavalli, 2004:3](#)) and from Malayalam ([Jayaseelan, 2004:229](#)):

- (26) Kannada
makk-aL-ige jvara ban-t-u
 child-PL-DAT fever come-PST-3SG.N
 'The children became ill.'
- (27) Malayalam
avaṇ-ə viś'akk-unnu
 he-DAT hunger-PRS
 'He is hungry.' (Lit.: 'To him, (it) hungers.')

The structure of these constructions is very similar to that of NIA experiencer constructions: the experiencer takes the dative case, the verb is in a third person default form. It is more than likely that contact with Dravidian has influenced the experiencer construction in NIA. However, to what degree and in which direction the changes have spread, remains unclear and requires a thorough comparison with early Dravidian texts and examples from a reconstructed Proto-Dravidian stage, an undertaking which is beyond the aims of this article.⁷

⁷ In general, to determine the influence from Dravidian to Indo-Aryan or the other way round is precarious, because much of the evidence is either lacking or open to interpretation, see e.g. the excellent overview by [Hock \(1975\)](#).

The need to reinforce the semantic roles with case postpositions, after the pervasive reduction of the case paradigm, possibly in combination with Dravidian contact, has led to an increase in oblique subject constructions in NIA. In general, oblique subjects do not take the agent role. However, there is considerable variation among oblique arguments themselves, both with respect to the semantic roles they represent and the constructional patterns in which they are used. Although experiencer verbs are the most frequent to occur in non-canonical constructions, the term “experiencer” does not equally apply to all oblique subject-like arguments. It should not come as a surprise, then, to find several non-canonical constructions varying considerably in their case marking and agreement patterns. New IA languages show different ways to express this difference. As a consequence, there is a lot of variation among the possible experiencer constructions in New IA, and each language has developed its own kind of oblique subject construction. That the variation in constructions is indeed abundant, will be shown in the next section.

3. Non-canonical subject marking and agreement in New Indo-Aryan

3.1. The default pattern: oblique subjects in Hindi

In IA languages, the postposition or the case which indicates indirect objects and, if animate/definite, objects is the “default” case of the non-canonically marked experiencer argument. The following examples of experiencer constructions are from Hindi; the first two are very commonly heard expressions, the third one is taken from [McGregor \(1995\)](#). In Hindi, the dative/accusative marker is *ko*.

- (28) Hindi
yah kitāb mujh-e pasand ā+rah-ī+h-ai
 this book.NOM.F.SG I-DAT approval⁸ come+PROG-F.SG+AUX-PRS.3SG
 ‘I like this book.’

- (29) Hindi
mujh-e būkh lag-ī
 I-DAT hunger.NOM.F.SG be attached-PST.F.SG⁹
 ‘I am hungry.’

- (30) Hindi ([McGregor, 1995:132](#))
us-e tīn aurat-eṃ acānak dikhāī d-ī
 he-DAT three woman-NOM.F.PL suddenly appearance give-PST.F
 ‘He suddenly saw three women.’ or ‘Three women suddenly appeared to him.’

The pattern illustrated in these examples is quite straightforward. The experiencer roles – *mujhe* in (28) and (29) and *use* in (30) – are in the dative/accusative case, whereas the stimulus roles – *kitāb*, *būkh* and *aurateṃ* – are nominative and control the agreement. Semantically, all three Hindi constructions are “experience-based”, including the use of verbs of emotion (‘to like’, ‘to be hungry’) and a compound verb of perception (‘to see/to be visible’). Note that in sentence (30), the action designated by *dikhāī dī* is said to occur unexpectedly (*acānak*), with the experiencer argument being profiled as a witness rather than an agentively involved person.

If no unexpected circumstances are involved and the action of seeing is actively performed, then a regular construction with the perception verb *dekhna* (‘to see/to look at’) would be used, as in (31). Note that in Hindi the subject (e.g., *us=ne* in 31) is obligatorily in the ergative whenever the predicate comprises a perfect participle expressing past tense (*dekhī*).

- (31) Hindi
us=ne tīn aurat-eṃ dekh-ī
 he=ERG three woman-NOM.F.PL see-PST.F
 ‘He saw/looked at three women.’

⁸ The noun *pasand* (f.) ‘approval’ occurs only as part of the construction *pasand ānā* ‘to like’, and is rarely used as a free substantive in modern Hindi, being a bare noun that never takes a case marker. The compound verb construction is considered the standard way to express ‘liking’.

⁹ In Hindi, verbs in the past tense only agree in gender and number, not in person. Moreover, with feminine forms, there is no difference between the singular and plural form of the past tense verb.

The dative/accusative case, which is the one generally associated with the indirect object, is the case that is most commonly used to indicate non-canonical subjects in Hindi. From the standpoint of a “semantic map”, this Hindi case choice appears to be logical, as the recipient argument is semantically close to the experiencer argument (see, e.g., Haspelmath, 2003).

Experiencer constructions occur in most IA languages, to various degrees, irrespective of the presence of an ergative pattern in these languages.

3.2. Non-canonical subject marking in Eastern Indo-Aryan

Whereas in Hindi the oblique subject is typically marked with the dative/accusative, in the Eastern IA languages there is more case variation. For instance, in Asamiya (also known as Assamese, spoken in the Indian state of Assam and neighboring states), oblique subjects can be marked with the dative/accusative or the genitive, yet the genitive is more common. The genitive occurs with verbs of emotion, attitude, cognition, and bodily states; again, the verbs agree with the nominative argument, e.g.:

- (32) Asamiya (Baruah, 1980:193)
cowāc-on, tomā-r pacand ha-ich-e ne?
 look-IMP you-GEN approval.NOM.SG be-PRF-3¹⁰ EMPH
 ‘Look, do you like it?’
- (33) Asamiya (Baruah, 1980:212)
rātul rinti-r bar ānando lāg-ich-e
 Ratul Rinti-GEN very joy.NOM.SG be attached-PRF-3
 ‘Ratul and Rinti are feeling very happy.’
- (34) Asamiya (Kakoti, 2011:6)
mo-r mana-t āch-e...
 I-GEN mind-LOC.SG be-PRS.3
 ‘Then I remember...’
- (35) Asamiya (Kakoti, 2011:6)
to-r topani ahā nāi?
 you-GEN sleep.NOM.SG coming not be.PRS
 ‘Are you not able to sleep?’
- (36) Asamiya (Kakoti, 2011:7)
ketiyābā tā-r dhāranā hay...
 sometimes he-GEN assumption be.PRS
 ‘Sometimes he feels...’
- (37) Asamiya (Kakoti, 2011:6)
mainā=lai tā-r maram lāgi+ga’l.
 Moina=DAT he-GEN love.NOM.SG be attached+become.PST.3
 ‘He felt love for Moina.’

Although the genitive is most often used in non-canonical experiencer constructions, Asamiya shows some non-canonical dative/accusative constructions as well. The dative/accusative marker is the suffix *-k*. The following two examples are constructed with the same verb *lāg*. Irrespective of whether there is a stimulus argument present, the verb always occurs in the third person.

- (38) Asamiya (Baruah, 1980:157)
teom-r=kārane mo-k etā ausadh lāg-e
 he-GEN=for I-DAT now medicine.NOM.SG be attached-PRS.3
 ‘I need a medicine for him.’

¹⁰ A perfective verb form is also used to express the progressive aspect in Asamiya (Goswami, 1982:112).

- (39) Asamiya (Kakoti, 2011:7)
sihaṁta-k māchahe lāg-e
 they-DAT fish.NOM.PL be attached-PRS.3
 ‘They want fish.’

Compared to the previous examples (32–37) which feature a non-canonical genitive argument and generally express feelings such as joy or love, examples (38) and (39) make reference to a desire (wanting). The difference between these two categories is obviously fuzzy. More pertinently perhaps, the genitive and dative/accusative constructions further differ in that only the genitive is used with compound verbs, e.g., *ānando lāg*, an idiomatic combination meaning ‘to feel happy’. Conversely, the dative/accusative is used when there is an independent object rather than a nominal or adverbial part of a compound verb.

In Bangla, the genitive is also the common case marking the experiencer:

- (40) Bangla (Radice, 2007:145)
āmā-r ām bhālo lag-e
 I-GEN mango.NOM good be attached-PRS.3
 ‘I like mangoes.’

In contrast to Asamiya, the dative/accusative is rarely used in non-canonical constructions. Desires are generally expressed by means of a canonical construction. Compare the following Bangla example (41) with ex. (42) from Hindi (*cāhiye* is an invariable verb form that does not display any agreement with an argument):

- (41) Bangla
āmi āiskrīm cāi
 I.NOM ice cream.NOM want.PRS.1
 ‘I want ice cream.’

- (42) Hindi
mujh-e mithāī cāhiye
 I-DAT sweet.NOM want.3SG
 ‘I want candy.’

Onishi (2001:123) reports three instances where the dative/accusative case is used in Bangla as marker of the non-canonical construction: with the verb *dekh-a-* + adverb, meaning ‘to look’, with the verb *mana-* ‘to suit’, and finally, remarkably, with verbs of obligation:

- (43) Bangla
ām-ār iṅgrejhi bhāsā sakhā-r prayojhan
 I-GEN English language learning-GEN necessity
 ‘I must learn English.’

Compare this example with the following one from Hindi:

- (44) Hindi
mujh-e angrezī sikh-nī zarūrī h-ai
 I-DAT English learn-INF.F necessity be-PRS.3SG
 ‘I must learn English.’

There are constructions in Bangla with the dative/accusative case which resemble the Hindi pattern more closely. Below is one of the few instances where a dative/accusative case is used for the experiencer argument in Bangla (ex. from Onishi, 2001:123):

- (45) Bangla
ama-ke nije kaj-ṭa kor-te ho-ech-e
 I-DAT [emphasis] work-DEF do-INF become-PRF.PRS-3
 ‘I had to do the work by myself.’

According to Masica (1990:336), in Asamiya an obligation can also be expressed by means of a highly peculiar construction classified as an “impersonal construction” by Baruah (1980:620). Its most striking feature is that although the subject is in the nominative case, the verb does not agree with that subject, e.g.,:

- (46) Asamiya
mai zā-bo+lāg-e
 I.NOM go-INF+be attached-PRS.3
 ‘I have to go.’

In general, constructions of obligation occur in various forms in IA. In Hindi, the dative/accusative case is the regular case used to mark the subject of an obligational construction (cf. ex. 42). However, it has been reported that the obligational construction also occurs with the ergative case marker *ne*, specifically in the Hindi variety spoken around Lahore and Delhi (cf. Butt and King, 2004:6; Bashir, 1999). Butt and King (2004:6) argue that a subject marked with the postposition *ne* “is interpreted as *wanting* to perform the action”. Conversely, if the dative/accusative postposition *ko* is used (which is the unmarked form), then the subject “*must* perform the action”. Butt and King (2004:6) provide the following contrasting examples to illustrate this semantic difference:

- (47) Hindi
nadya=ne zu jā-nā h-ai
 N=ERG zoo go-INF be.PRS-3SG
 ‘Nadya wants to go to the zoo.’

- (48) Hindi
nadya=ko zu jā-nā h-ai
 N=DAT zoo go-INF be.PRS-3SG
 ‘Nadya must go to the zoo.’

In standard Hindi (as well as Urdu), this particular volitional use of the marker *ne* is rather unusual. Because the postposition *ne*, which is the common marker of the ergative in Punjabi, can also be used in constructions of obligation in Punjabi, it is assumed that Hindi borrowed this use of the ergative postposition from Punjabi through language contact. The marker *ko* does not exist in Punjabi, with the Punjabi postposition for the dative/accusative case being *nūṁ*. In an obligational construction, the experiencer argument normally takes the dative/accusative case in Punjabi, as illustrated by *muṇḍe=nūṁ* in the following example:

- (49) Punjabi (Bhatia, 1993:37)
muṇḍe=nūṁ katāb par-nī pav-egī
 boy=DAT book.NOM.F.SG read-INF.F compel-FUT.F.3SG
 ‘The boy will have to read a book.’

According to Masica (1990:335), when *ne* marks the experiencer of a construction of obligation in Punjabi, it expresses “weak compulsion”, yet it cannot be used in combination with a first or second person pronoun. Compare the following examples:

- (50) Punjabi (Masica, 1990:335)
muṇḍe=ne jāṇā ai
 boy=ERG go-INF be.PRS.3SG
 ‘The boy has to go.’ (This sentence cannot be translated as ‘The boy *must/ought* to go’.)

- (51) Punjabi (Masica, 1990:335)
maiṁ jāṇā ai
 I.NOM go-INF be.PRS.3SG
 ‘I have to go.’

If a “strong compulsion” is meant, then the dative/accusative postposition *nūṁ* must be used as in ex. (49). This finding is in line with Butt and King’s observation (2004:6) that in Hindi and Punjabi, dative/accusative postpositions are used for strong obligations, whereas the ergative postposition invariably denotes a lesser degree of compulsion. Constructions

with an obligational meaning clearly constitute a separate category in the IA languages that is characterized by a strong tendency toward a non-canonical alignment. In contrast to the experiencer constructions discussed in the previous sections, in constructions of obligation not only dative/accusative postpositions but also ergative postpositions can mark the subject. It is a language-specific feature where exactly the boundaries between obligation and emotion are drawn, illustrated by the different constructions expressing obligation or desire, as found in Hindi and Punjabi.¹¹ There is obviously a continuum: whereas Hindi and Punjabi draw the boundary of case marking between ‘must’ and ‘want’, a different case marking is found in Asamiya between verbs expressing a pure obligation (nominative), desire (dative/accusative) and feeling (genitive). In Bengali there is yet another pattern, with a preference for nominative marking.

Because Bangla and Asamiya are genetically very close, the differences in oblique subject constructions are remarkable. A third language shows again a different pattern. In Bhojpuri, a language spoken between the Central IA area (whose main representative is Hindi) and the Eastern IA area, the genitive is not used at all to indicate a non-canonical subject, although the language possesses a genitive case. According to Verma (1990:86), experiencer arguments in Bhojpuri are rendered in an oblique case that is different from the genitive and normally occurs in combination with a postposition. Example (52) below is a typical experiencer construction with the oblique case. Ex. (53) is a possessive construction that also makes use of the same oblique case. Finally, in ex. (54) the genitive is used; however, the meaning of the sentence is not identical to that of (53). According to Verma (1990), ex. (54) does not primarily express possession; rather, the son is the topic of the discourse, and it is therefore likely that the sentence will be continued by a relative clause referring to *laikā* (cf. Verma, 1990:87–89):

- (52) Bhojpuri
ham-rā sardī b-ā
 I-OBL cold to be-PRS.3
 ‘I feel cold.’
- (53) Bhojpuri
ham-rā ego laikā b-ā
 I-OBL one boy.NOM.SG to be-PRS.3
 ‘I have a son.’
- (54) Bhojpuri
ham-ār ego laikā b-ā (je...)
 I-GEN one boy.NOM.SG to be-PRS.3 REL
 ‘There is a son of mine (who...).’

These few examples suffice to show that there is a continuum in the IA languages ranging from a clear preference for marking the non-canonical subject by means of the dative/accusative case to a clear preference for marking the same argument by means of the genitive. In between these two ends of the continuum, there are languages such as Asamiya in which both the genitive and the dative/accusative are used to mark experiencer subjects. As far as agreement is concerned, it is noteworthy that in the Eastern IA languages verbs in experiencer constructions are predominantly in the third person, which is most logically explained as agreement with the stimulus. However, because the agreement marker only indicates person, not gender and number, it is a matter of contention whether the verb form arises from agreement with the stimulus or is a kind of default form. In the next section, it will be shown that in other IA languages agreement in experiencer constructions is not necessarily with the unmarked stimulus.¹²

3.3. Non-canonical subject marking and agreement in Western Indo-Aryan

It has long been established that experiencer arguments in Icelandic can control agreement under certain circumstances. An exceptional agreement pattern with experiencer verbs can be found in IA as well, namely, in two varieties of the language Shina (a Western IA language spoken in the Himalayan border region between India and Pakistan). The two language varieties are known as the Shina of Skurda and the Shina of Gultari (cf. Hook, 1990a, 1990b, 1996). In both varieties, the experiencer verb agrees with the argument marked with the dative/accusative case, which is

¹¹ An anonymous reviewer notes that Lamani also has oblique subjects for constructions of obligation, as evidenced in Trail (1970), and they are also found in Russian and French to a certain extent.

¹² This is perhaps comparable with Nepali subject agreement in perfective transitive constructions, which is also not with the unmarked argument, but obligatorily with the ergative-marked argument.

the experiencer. This is illustrated in the following examples from Shina of Skardu (Hook, 1990a: 327) in which the verbs agree with the dative/accusative arguments *mo=re* and *salime=re*:

- (55) Shina
mo=re a cis paś-emus
 I=DAT that mountain.NOM.SG see-PRS.M.1SG
 'I see that mountain.'
- (56) Shina
salime=re agrezi kitāb-e si-e daṣṭ-om
 Salim=DAT English book.NOM.F.PL good-F.PL seem-PRS.M.3SG
 'Salim likes English books.'

In Shina of Gultari, on the other hand, the dative/accusative marking of the experiencer alternates with an ergative marking involving "little or no change in meaning", according to Hook (1996). The stimulus argument, which in Hindi is always in the nominative case, can be marked either in the nominative or in the dative/accusative in Shina (Hook, 1996). Note that in both Shina varieties, all verbs invariably agree with the subject, irrespective of whether it is in the nominative or the ergative. The following example from Shina of Gultari is an illustration of the verb agreeing in number and gender with the experiencer argument, with the stimulus argument in the dative/accusative (Hook, 1990a:328):

- (57) Shina
kulsumi=re ikbāl-e paś-i
 Kulthum=DAT Iqbal-ACC see-PST.F.3SG
 'Kulthum saw Iqbal.'

Hook (1990b:82) maintains that the agreement pattern in sentences such as (57) can be considered the historical result of the experiencer argument acquiring subject features. The stimulus argument is in the nominative in most non-canonical constructions, but in Shina of Gultari, it can be in the dative/accusative as well (cf. *ikbāl-e* in (57)). Following Hook, the case marking of the stimulus could be changing in the direction of a canonical construction, perhaps under the influence of the canonical agreement pattern involving verbs and experiencer subjects.

Although the alignment pattern with experiencer agreement and dative/accusative marking of the stimulus does not seem to occur in any other IA language except for Shina, there are certain patterns in the neighboring languages that give rise to the question as to whether the agreement with the experiencer argument is purely a matter of the experiencer argument "acquiring" a subject property or whether more traceable historical developments are involved. For instance, it could be that the use of so-called "pronominal suffixes" has contributed to the rise of experiencer agreement in Shina. Pronominal suffixes are a typical phenomenon of Western IA languages. They are added to the verb and refer to pronominal "core" arguments, which may or may not be overt. Depending on the language, pronominal suffixes are either optional or obligatory. In Kashmiri, for instance, the ergative subject, as well as any object in the dative/accusative case, can be marked on the verb with a pronominal suffix. The following two examples are non-canonical constructions in Kashmiri. Contrary to ex. (58), where all core arguments are overt, in ex. (59) the pronoun in the dative/accusative case has been dropped, leaving the (optional) pronominal suffix on the verb to indicate the person of the pronoun:

- (58) Kashmiri (Koul and Wali, 2006:116)
temis āv asun
 he.DAT come.PST.3SG laughing
 'He laughed.'
- (59) Kashmiri (Koul and Wali, 2006:116)
asun ā-s
 laughing come.PST.3SG-3SG
 'He laughed.'

There is only a small step from pronominal suffixation to person agreement between the verb and one or more core arguments, the only difference being that verb agreement is obligatory, whereas pronominal suffixes are generally optional.

Recall that the experiencer argument is also a rather "salient" one in the argument structure of a sentence. It hardly comes as a surprise, then, to find languages in which the verb agrees with an experiencer argument.

4. Conclusion

In this article, we adopted a chronological approach to the occurrence of non-canonical patterns in experiencer constructions in IA. We first established that the evidence for oblique subject constructions in Old IA is extremely limited. We then observed that the disappearance and merging of tenses and case markers in the Middle IA stage have led to a “gap” which gave rise to a new kind of case marking. The clearest way in which the gap is filled is by an ergative marker for the typical agent of a sentence, as in Hindi and other central New IA languages, or by turning to subject agreement, as in Nepali and Eastern IA languages such as Bangla and Asamiya. However, considering the fact that non-canonical constructions occur most often with experiencer verbs, New IA languages show a different marking for these experiencers, in the form of dative/accusative or genitive marking, depending on the case available in the case paradigm of the individual language. The recent origin of oblique subject marking is illustrated by the extensive variation in constructions found in New IA languages. The vast range of morphological cases and agreement patterns that we came across provides evidence for the conclusion that there is neither a one-to-one relationship between an experiencer argument and a morphological case nor between an experiencer construction and a particular agreement pattern. A comparative synchronic focus on the IA languages therefore shows that speaking of a single, homogeneous category of “experiencer argument” in IA languages is inadequate.

The fact that alignment is not exclusively nominative-accusative in Old IA may have constituted the fertile ground on which the various patterns of the experiencer construction took root in later stages of the IA languages. The historical ‘bifurcation’ of the syntactic pattern with the non-canonical (genitive/instrumental) encoding of the subject, which goes back to the Old IA ergative-like genitive, was probably responsible for the emergence of the two basic types of non-nominative subjects in the New IA syntax, i.e. oblique and ergative. At the same time, this bifurcation could account for the fact that only in some parts of the IA linguistic continuum a well-elaborated construction with an oblique subject is currently attested.

It would be interesting to compare the IA evolution investigated in this article with other IE branches, such as Scandinavian (cf. Barðdal, 2011; Hrafnbjargarson, 2004; Bubenik, 2012). We leave this issue for further research.

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