Possessors, Experiencers and the Dative-like Genitive in Sanskrit

The original case system found in the Old Indo-Aryan period (Vedic and Classical Sanskrit) is lost in the Middle Indo-Aryan period (Pāli and Prākrits) and rebuilt in the New Indo-Aryan period (modern Indo-Aryan languages). Both Noun and Verb modifications are followed by a shift of the alignment system, from a Nominative-Accusative system in OIA to a (split) Ergative-Absolutive system in many NIA languages.

So far, researchers have mainly investigated either NIA languages (providing synchronic and theoretical interpretations of the new alignment system), or the relation between MIA and NIA, making hypotheses on the origin of the ergative case marker and the development of such a new system (for an overview see Verma 1976, Bhaskararao & Subbarao 2000, Verma & Mohanan 1990).

But, despite its importance for the study of the evolution of Indo-Aryan languages’ alignment system, the changes in the case system happened in the OIA period have been almost completely neglected. The aim of this presentation is to fill this gap and to trace the evolution of the case marking system in the history of Indo-Aryan languages, mainly focussing on the question:

How did datives become genitives in Sanskrit?

In fact, while the dative is regularly employed in Vedic, it is going to vanish in the Sanskrit literature and the genitive absorbs the traditional functions of the dative. This tendency is noticeable in the Epic Sanskrit and it mainly affects the dative of persons. The process is completed in MIA where the dative is used only to indicate a purpose (Speijer 1886, Oberlies 2003).

With the help of the Semantic Map Model (Croft 2001, Haspelmath 2003, Barðdal 2007, Cysouw, Haspelmath & Malchukov 2010, Barðdal et al. 2012), I will analyse the overlap between dative and genitive and the replacement of the dative with the genitive. My purpose is to examine to what extent this phenomenon depends on the existence of a relationship of similarity between different conceptual situations that is perceived by speakers and is part of a speaker’s mental representation. We will see that the notions of POSSESSION and EXPERIENCE are closely related (Langacker 1991) and that they play a crucial role in this process of merging.

The analysis is led in the following domains:

- **The Oblique Subject construction:**
  I will focus on those cases where the genitive and the dative are interchangeable to some extent. In fact, it has been shown (Hock 1991) that in Sanskrit genitive-marked possessor noun-phrases exhibit subject properties according to such criteria as word order, absolutive formation (1) and reflexivization (2).
  Hock notes that possessive agents are usually beneficiaries and that they are the most animate, agentive or affected entities of the clause (’svasti’ exists /comes about for them). In this perspective, possessive agents share some features with oblique experiencers and might be considered as a special subtype of the oblique subject construction.
  Now, in Sanskrit both possessors (3) and experiencers (4) are expressed through the dative, and what is remarkable is the semantic similarity between dative and genitive and the fact that they enter the same constructions.

- **The so-called ‘dative-like genitive’** (Speijer 1886:96ff; Meenakṣi 1991):
  I will focus on those cases where the genitive extends to uses which are typical of the dative: in direct object function with verbs of emotion, sentiment; in indirect object function with verbs of giving/sending/offering/telling/speaking etc.; and with adjectives of friendship/enmity/fitness/unfitness/good/evil.

As a result, the analysis of this syncretism process will shed light on of the genitive case in Classical Sanskrit, and especially on its function in the creation of a new alignment system in MIA.
Examples

(1) svasti vācayitvā svasti ha _ eŚām bhavati
svasti:ACC cause.to.be.recited:ABS svasti:NOM indeed they:GEN is
‘Having caused “svasti” to be recited, “svasti” is theirs = they have “svasti”’ (ŚB 6.1.5.)

(2) (párehi pāntḥāṁ) yās te svā(ḥ)
go.away:IMPV road:ACC which:NOM you:GEN REFL.NOM
‘(Go away on the road) which is your own = which you have your own’ (RV 10.18.1)

(3) índra tūḥ yam ... nuttaṁ ... vīṛyāṁ /
   Indra:NOM you:DAT unconquered:NOM power:NOM
   ‘O Indra, to you is unconquered power = ‘You have unconquered power’ (RV 1.80.7)

(4) [...]tēbhya cŚā lokō ‘chandayat
   they:DAT this:NOM world:NOM seemed.good
   ‘To/for them this world was pleasant = They liked this world’ (ŚB 8, 3, 1, 2)

Some References:


