

ERGATIVE MARKING IN NYAGRONG-MINYAG (XINLONG, SICHUAN)*

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Abstract: This paper describes the usage of the ergative case in Nyagrong-Minyag, one of the rGyalrongic languages spoken in Xinlong County, Ganzi Prefecture, Sichuan. The ergative marker in this language functions as an emphatic only for the agent of the transitive verb, but has a limited use that can be classified into two aspects: 1) ergativity is not allowed for first and second person arguments; 2) an ergative marker may be optionally used on third person agents for pragmatic effects.

Keywords: Nyagrong-Minyag, rGyalrongic languages, ergative, person

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. *Definition of Nyagrong-Minyag*

Nyagrong-Minyag¹ is a Tibeto-Burman language belonging to the rGyalrongic group² of the Qiangic languages, spoken by about 1000 Tibetans³ in Xinlong [Nyag-rong]⁴ County, Ganzi [dKar-mdzes] Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan, China⁵. It has two dialects: rGyarwagshis (spoken in a part of Jialaxi [rGya-rwa-gshis] Village⁶) and Bangsmad (spoken in a part of Bomei [Bang-smad] Village⁷).

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¹ The Chinese name is 新龙木雅语 Xinlong Muyayu.

² "rGyalrongic" has been proposed by Sun (2000).

³ They are basically bilingual in this language and Khamts Tibetan (Nyagrong dialect). Some of them also speak the Sichuan dialect of Mandarin.

⁴ The Tibetan name is added in square brackets after the Chinese name.

⁵ The Chinese name is 四川省甘孜藏族自治州新龙县 Sichuansheng Ganzi Zangzu Zizhizhou Xinlongxian.

⁶ The Chinese name is 甲拉西乡 Jialaxixiang.

⁷ The Chinese name is 博美乡 Bomeixiang.

This language is generally regarded as a variety of **one** language called “Ergong⁸,” “Horpa⁹” or “Daofu (sTau),” however, this is mere speculation as there have been no data from, or descriptions of, Nyagrong-Minyag. My first article on Nyagrong-Minyag (Suzuki 2009: 65-68) proposes a language complex of at least four languages: sTau¹⁰, Geshitsa¹¹, Puxi¹² and Nyagrong-Minyag, based on two principles: “one name for one language island” and “a name supported by the autonym¹³.” Aside from these languages, the rGyalrongic group contains Situ-rGyalrong¹⁴, Japhug-rGyalrong¹⁵, Tshobdun-rGyalrong¹⁶, Showu-rGyalrong¹⁷ and Lavrung¹⁸. I have found mutual intelligibility to some extent between sTau and Nyagrong-Minyag, but this is not enough to make each speaker understood within each language.

1.2. Ergativity in Nyagrong-Minyag

The rGyalrongic languages generally have a case marking system in which the agent may be marked by the ergative (or agentive) marker and the patient is unmarked. The tendency to add the ergative marker, however, is not frequent. The distribution of the ergative marker in Nyagrong-Minyag appears to be restricted even more than in sTau and Geshitsa¹⁹. This paper explores the usage and the restriction of the ergative marker in Nyagrong-Minyag.

1.3. Data

I will examine the Shod-ring²⁰ variety of the rGyarwagshis dialect of Nyagrong-Minyag²¹. The data to be discussed were obtained mainly from two sources: oral

⁸ This word has a discriminatory sense; i.e. ‘cattle.’ I highly recommend that this term be abandoned.

⁹ This word is polysemic in Tibetan, which means ‘non-Tibetan ethnic groups inhabited in the north area to Tibet except Han Chinese,’ and the ethnic groups designated with this word are different in each era (Moriyasu 1977). It is also used as a name for a particular Tibetan dialect (Tournadre 2005). In addition, it is not an autonym for the speakers. Further consideration of its use is recommended.

¹⁰ The Chinese name is 道孚语 Daofuyu. Huang (1991) described the dGebshi dialect.

¹¹ The Chinese name is 格什扎语 Geshizayu. rDo-rje (1998) described the Geshitsa dialect.

¹² The Chinese name is 蒲西语 Puxiyu (also called 上寨语 Shangzhaiyu). Sun (2000) described the Puxi dialect.

¹³ The autonym of Nyagrong-Minyag speakers is /mə ɕa/, derived from Tibetan mi nyag, which is the same as that of Minyag speakers living in Kangding [Dar-rtse-mdo]. Because of this ambiguity, the place name is added to the self designation.

¹⁴ See Lin (1993) and Nagano (2003). Its Chinese name is 四土嘉绒语 Situ Jiarongyu.

¹⁵ See Jacques (2004, 2008). Its Chinese name is 茶堡嘉绒语 Chabao Jiarongyu.

¹⁶ See Sun (2003). Its Chinese name is 草登嘉绒语 Caodeng Jiarongyu.

¹⁷ See Sun (2004). Its Chinese name is 修梧嘉绒语 Xiuwu Jiarongyu.

¹⁸ See Huang (2007) and Yin (2007). Its Chinese name is 拉坞绒语 Lawurongyu.

¹⁹ Based on personal research.

²⁰ The Chinese name of Shod-ring is 黑日村 Heiricun.

²¹ According to the native speakers, the main dialectal difference between the two dialects of Nyagrong-Minyag, rGyarwagshis and Bangsmad, is merely on the level of the pronunciation.

translations of sentences given in Chinese (written and the Sichuan variety) and Tibetan (oral; dialects of Derge and Minyag²²), and natural conversations. Based on this data, speakers were asked to judge the grammaticality of a number of sentences.

2. CASE SYSTEM OF NYAGRONG-MINYAG

2.1. Framework of the grammatical case marking according verbs

In Nyagrang-Minyag, the basic word order is S-O-V (A-P-V) unless the clause is pragmatically marked, such as if a specific noun phrase is focused. The main case frames can be described as follows:

- intransitive verb:
 S^{+ABS} (+ additional arguments or adjuncts) V
- transitive verb:

A^{+ABS}	P^{+ABS}	V	(A is 1 st or 2 nd person)
$A^{+ERG/+ABS}$	P^{+ABS}	V	(A is 3 rd person)
- mixed category:

A^{+ABS}	2 nd argument ^{+DAT(/+ABS)}	V	(A is 1 st or 2 nd person)
$A^{+ERG/+ABS}$	2 nd argument ^{+DAT(/+ABS)}	V	(A is 3 rd person)

S is always in the absolutive case, that is, emphatic ergative marking, like in Tibetan, is not possible.

Marking of A depends on the person: when A is 1st or 2nd person, it must be in the absolutive, when it is 3rd person, absolutive or ergative marking can be selected.

P is in the absolutive.

The possible use of a dative case marker for the second argument depends entirely on verb semantics. The marker, however, tends to be omitted in natural speech. This pattern (ergative plus dative), which defies the definition of an ergative construction, is quite common in Tibeto-Burman languages, and particularly also in Tibetan (see also Zeisler, to appear). It has been mistaken as a case of primary object marking (cf. LaPolla 1992: 3) and/or as a case of differentiating object marking, where the dative marker would be triggered by definiteness, animacy, or potential ambiguity (DeLancey 1984: 70, LaPolla 1992: 5). But in Nyagrang-Minyag, as well as in Tibetan, the pattern is restricted to a particular group of verbs, where the semantic component of directionality is foregrounded. Tournadre (1996: 214) has classified this pattern as a mixed construction, Zeisler (2004: 255) as an extended intransitive construction.

²² This Tibetan “Minyag” dialect here is a variety spoken in Tagong [Lha-sgang] Village of Kangding County, it is not the same as Nyagrang-Minyag nor the Minyag language of Qiangic.

2.2. List of case markers²³

A summary of the case marking in Nyagrong-Minyag is given below²⁴:

CASE	GLOSS	CASE MARKER FORM			SEMANTIC ROLE				
		BASE	EMPHASIZED	VARIANT	S	A	P	LOCAL	OTHER
absolutive	ABS	Ø			○	○	○	○	
ergative	ERG	^{-h} ce	^{-h} ce wə			○			○
dative	DAT	^{-b} je	^{-b} je wə	^{-b} ji, -ji			○	○	○
genitive	GEN	-wə	-wu						○
comitative	COM	-p ^h ɔ							○
locative	LOC	-wu						○	
adessive	ADE	-ɛə	-ɛwə					○	
ablative	ABL	-nə						○	
comparative	CMP	^{-f} s ^h o		-s ^h o				○	
temporal	TMP	^{-h} ci	^{-h} ci wo					○	
essive	ESS	-tɕu							○

Table 1. Case markers in Nyagrong-Minyag

Several case markers have multiple forms: *base* forms are generally used without a particular intention; *emphasized* forms are derived from the base form with the help of the morpheme /-wə/, which can designate and emphasize the function of the case marker of a given noun phrase; *variant* forms can appear in fast speech.

There are two morphemes of the genitive, /-wə/ and /-wu/, the latter is identical with the locative, which does not have an allomorph /wə/.

The dative is mainly realized as /-^bje/, /-^(b)ji/ or /-^bje wə/; /-^bje/ is used for most functions, while /-^bje wə/ is generally used for a causee.

In general, these case markers do not undergo phonetic alternation. However, the genitive marker /-wu/ can be incorporated into the 1st person singular pronoun /-ʔa/ so that it is realised phonetically as /-ʔo/. The comitative is often followed by an adverb /ʔa^hton/ ‘together,’ and is then realized as /p^ha fia^hton/ or /p^ha^hton/.

Generally, the case markers are part of the same paradigm and cannot co-occur on one noun phrase. The only exception to this is the possible sequence of ADE-ABL. In addition, a topic marker can follow case markers (see (16)). There are several forms of it: /de, ʒe, ʒə/, which can follow any nominal and adverbial phrase (including its case marker) in order to topicalize a noun phrase.

3. USE OF THE ERGATIVE MARKER

Almost all data cited in this section is based on elicitation, though some examples from natural conversation have also been used. The source of such natural examples will be indicated after the corresponding English translation.

²³ From Suzuki (2010b: 37-40).

²⁴ The terms ‘local’ and ‘other’ both refer to non-grammatical (core argument) cases; ‘local’ differs from ‘other’ in that s pertain to position, destination, or origin, in particular.

3.1. Description of ergative marking

The subject of an intransitive verb is in the unmarked absolutive case, as can be seen in example (1).

- (1) a. ʼŋa-ø / -*^hce ʼjε ke tɕu ʼɕ^ha
 1-ABS/ERG over there go (R.1)
 ‘I am going/went over there.’
- b. ʼne-ø / -*^hce ʼjε ke tɕu ʼɕ^hə
 2-ABS/ERG over there go (R)
 ‘You are going/went over there.’
- c. ʼte-ø / -*^hce ʼjε ke tɕu ʼɕ^hə
 3-ABS/ERG over there go (R)
 ‘S/He is going/went over there.’

Grammatical restrictions can be determined by comparison with Tibetan. The Tibetan language, for example, in both written and spoken (Lhasa dialect), has an ergative construction (Tournadre 1996), as do the Nyagrang and the Minyag dialects. While interviewing my language collaborators, I observed that while the ergative marker found in a particular Nyagrang-Minyag sentence appears in Tibetan²⁵ in sentences of the same type, the opposite does not hold true; that is, an ergative marker of a given Tibetan sentence does not necessarily appear in similar Nyagrang-Minyag sentences. This observation demonstrates that the ergative marker is more restricted in its use in Tibetan dialects such as Nyagrang and Derge.

Statement verbs²⁶ (2, 3), existential verbs (4, 5) and predicative adjectives (6, 7) are treated like an intransitive verb.

- (2) ʼŋa-ø ʼpe-ø ʼŋa
 1-ABS Tibetan-ABS CPV.1
 ‘I am Tibetan (from Nyagrang).’ (natural speech)
- (3) ʼŋa-ø ʼpo-ø ʼ^mŋa ɦe ʼtə-ŋə
 1-ABS Tibetan-ABS CPV.NEG.1 ɦe DIR-CPV
 ‘I am not Tibetan (from elsewhere²⁷).’ (natural speech)

²⁵ The use of an ergative marker for a subject of an intransitive verb is called “rhetorical” or “pragmatic” in Tournadre (1991). For more on this usage in Kham Tibetan, see Bartee (2007: 264-268) and Suzuki (2010a: 98-99).

²⁶ A statement verb basically functions like a copula, but uses a directional prefix to express the speaker’s attitude toward the speech event. On the detailed usage of this prefix, see Suzuki (2010c).

²⁷ Nyagrang-Minyag speakers have different words for Tibetans living in Xinlong and Tibetans living in other places.

- (4) ʔsʰe ri-ø ʔa ʰqʰo ʔjo-wu ʰndzẽ
 PSN-ABS recent house-LOC EXV
 ‘Tsheri (*tshe ring*) was in the house right now.’
- (5) ʔa ʰmpʰi-ø ʔtə-ʰji
 ah snake-ABS DIR-EXV
 ‘Ugh! Here is a snake!’
- (6) ʔə du ʰnõ ɕi-ø ʔcɛ-tə-χtɕi-re
 here scenery-ABS cɛ²⁸-very-beautiful-SFP
 ‘Here the scenery is very beautiful.’
- (7) ʔne-wə ʔə-ʰsʰo ʔŋo-wə-ø ʔcʰe-rə
 2-GEN bull-CMP 1-GEN-ABS²⁹ big-SFP
 ‘The mine (my bull) is bigger than your bull.’

The agent of a transitive verb must be absolutive when it is 1st or 2nd person, as shown in (8).

- (8) a. ʔŋa-ø / -ʰce ʔptsə-ø ʔptsə-ʰte-re
 1-ABS/ERG food-ABS eat-AOR-SFP
 ‘I ate the food.’
- b. ʔne-ø / -ʰce ʔptsə-ø ʔptsə-ʰte-re
 2-ABS/ERG food-ABS eat-AOR-SFP
 ‘You ate the food.’
- c. ʔte-ø / -ʰce ʔptsə-ø ʔptsə-ʰte-re
 3-ABS/ERG food-ABS eat-AOR-SFP
 ‘S/He ate the food.’
- (9) a. ʔva-ø / -ʰce ʔptsə-ø ʔŋgə-ʰte-re
 pig-ABS/ERG food-ABS chew-AOR-SFP
 ‘The pig chewed the food.’
- b. ʔʰjõ ʰndzõ-ø / -ʰce ʔptsə-ø ʔptsə-ʰte-re
 PSN-ABS/ERG food-ABS eat-AOR-SFP
 ‘Yongdzon (*gYang-’dzom*) ate the food.’

The 3rd person agent of a transitive sentence can take either the ergative or absolutive marker, independent of whether it is a pronoun, noun or proper name. However, the use of the ergative marker is preferable, unless the agent is a pronoun. My collaborators say that ergative marking is used for special emphasis

²⁸ /-cɛ/ is a specific prefix for an adjective; however, its function has not yet been discerned.

²⁹ The form with a genitive marker can be treated as a noun phrase. In the case of this sentence, it is analyzed as an anaphoric referent of the word ‘bull’ in the preceding noun phrase.

on A, but I could not confirm in detail what motivates the addition or omission of the ergative marker. In all the examples in (10), the agent is ‘pig’ but the T(ense), A(spect), and M(ode) of the verb is changed as follows:

- (10) a. $\text{va-}\emptyset / \text{-}^h\text{ce}$ $\text{p}^h\text{tsa-}\emptyset$ $\text{ng}\text{a-re}$
 pig-ABS/ERG food-ABS chew-SFP
 ‘The pig chews the food.’ (=8c)
- b. $\text{va-}^? \emptyset / \text{-}^h\text{ce}$ $\text{p}^h\text{tsa-}\emptyset$ $\text{ng}\text{a-wa } ^h\text{t}\text{a}$
 pig-ABS/ERG food-ABS chew-PRG
 ‘The pig is chewing the food³⁰.’
- c. $\text{va-}\emptyset / \text{-}^h\text{ce}$ $\text{p}^h\text{tsa-}\emptyset$ $\text{ng}\text{a-}^h\text{te-re}$
 pig-ABS/ERG food-ABS chew-AOR-SFP
 ‘The pig chewed the food.’

In the progressive aspect, it is preferable to add the ergative marker to the agent³¹. In other aspects, both absolutive and ergative marking are acceptable depending on the various contexts.

As can be seen in (11), the definiteness of the agent does not play a role in the choice of absolutive or ergative marking.

- (11) a. $\text{va } ^h\text{me-}\emptyset / \text{-}^h\text{ce}$ $\text{p}^h\text{tsa-}\emptyset$ $\text{ng}\text{a-}^h\text{te-re}$
 sow-ABS/ERG food-ABS chew-AOR-SFP
 ‘The/One sow chewed the food.’ (=8c)
- b. $\text{va } ^h\text{me-de-}\emptyset / \text{-}^h\text{ce}$ $\text{p}^h\text{tsa-}\emptyset$ $\text{ng}\text{a-}^h\text{te-re}$
 sow-the-ABS/ERG food-ABS chew-AOR-SFP
 ‘The sow chewed the food.’
- c. ʔa de $\text{va } ^h\text{me-de-}\emptyset / \text{-}^h\text{ce}$ $\text{p}^h\text{tsa-}\emptyset$ $\text{ng}\text{a-}^h\text{te-re}$
 this sow-the-ABS/ERG food-ABS chew-AOR-SFP
 ‘This sow chewed the food.’

Also, in negative and interrogative sentences, ergative marking is optional:

- (12) a. $\text{va } ^h\text{na-de-}\emptyset / \text{-}^h\text{ce}$ $\text{p}^h\text{tsa-}\emptyset$ $\text{ng}\text{a-}^h\text{te-re}$
 piglet-the-ABS/ERG food-ABS chew-AOR-SFP
 ‘This piglet chewed the food.’ (=8c)
- b. $\text{va } ^h\text{na-de-}\emptyset / \text{-}^h\text{ce}$ $\text{p}^h\text{tsa-}\emptyset$ $\text{ma-}^h\text{ng}\text{a}$
 piglet-the-ABS/ERG food-ABS NEG-chew
 ‘This piglet did not chew the food.’

³⁰ The question mark here indicates that the collaborator felt that the usage of the absolutive was strange.

³¹ This preference is in stark contrast to many Tibetan varieties (e.g. Lhasa) where ergative marking is dispreferred in present time contexts.

- c. ʼva^{hi}ŋa-de-ø/^hce ʼptsə-ø ʼŋgə-^htsə ʼrə-ŋə
 piglet-the-ABS/ERG food-ABS chew-AOR DIR.Q-CPV
 ‘Did this piglet chew the food?’

I have been unable to discern any difference in the use of the two case markers from my collaborators in examples (11) and (12).

The following sentences, (13) to (15), exemplify other verbs which differ in transitivity and valence³²:

- (13) ʼte-ø / -^hce ʼza-ø ʼtə-^xse-^htsə
 3-ABS/ERG cock-ABS DIR-kill (R)-PFT
 ‘He killed a cock.’
- (14) ʼte-ø / -^hce ʼŋa-^bje ʼs^hə^hqe-^htsə
 3-ABS/ERG 1-DAT look (R)-PFT
 ‘He looked at me.’
- (15) ʼte-ø / -^hce ʼŋa-^bje ʼ^{hi}go^{hi}ge-ø ʼk^hu-rə
 3-ABS/ERG 1-DAT money-ABS give (R)-SFP
 ‘He gave me money.’

When the 3rd person A appears in a situation of contrast, A is generally marked with the ergative or the topic marker, as in:

- (16) ʼ^{hi}gu-^hce / -de / -ʔø ʼyza-ø ʼzɕə-re ʼryi-^hce / -de / -ʔø
 bull-ERG/TOP/ABS field-ABS plough-SFP horse-ERG/TOP/ABS
 ʼmi-zɕə-re
 NEG-plough-SFP
 ‘The bull ploughs the field, (but) the horse does not plough (it).’

According to the speaker’s interpretation of (16), this optionality of the ergative marking depends on pragmatics, especially in a contrastive situation. If the speaker wishes to emphasize the agent, then the ergative marker is used. Other situations where the ergative marker can occur will be given below.

In all of the examples presented above, the relation between A and P is evident. In the following examples the relationship between A and P is not clear without context.

In Nyagrong-Minyag, the basic word order is S-O-V (A-P-V) as cited in 2.1. If A and P are not yet introduced in the discourse, it would be unusual to mark both A and P as absolutive; an unknown A must be marked with the ergative.

³² Tournadre (1996: 213-215) shows a verb classification related to case marking in Tibetan. Note that dative marking for a second argument is not an anti-ergative marking in Nyagrong-Minyag. Cf. section 2.1.

- (17) a. ʔe kə tɕe ʔce ti-ø ʔkʰə-ø ʔtə-χce-ʰtsə
 that child-ABS dog-ABS DIR-bite-PFT
 *** (untranslatable)
- b. ʔe kə tɕe ʔce ti-ʰce ʔkʰə-ø ʔtə-χce-ʰtsə
 that child-ERG dog-ABS DIR-bite-PFT
 ‘That child has bitten the dog.’
- c. ʔe kə tɕe ʔce ti-ø ʔkʰə-ʰce ʔtə-χce-ʰtsə
 that child-ABS dog-ERG DIR-bite-PFT
 ‘That child has been bitten by the dog.’

Note that (17a) is pragmatically unacceptable. Also, (17c) is not a passive (voice distinctions do not exist in Nyagrong-Minyag), but in this word order the P argument is topicalized. The translation as a passive reflects the intention of the speaker to downgrade the agent or highlight the patient. The phrase to be topicalized is often located at the beginning of the sentence.

In causative constructions, the causer is marked with the ergative in accordance with the above-mentioned restrictions³³, as in:

- (18) ʔlaw sə-ʰce ʔne-^bje wə ʔsu ɕo-ø ʔzo-^ptʰə-re
 teacher-ERG 2-DAT math-ABS learn-let-SFP
 ‘The teacher lets you learn math.’
- (19) ʔne-wə ʔpʰo me-ʰce ʔŋa-^bje wə ʔne-^bje ʔro ʔdi ʰcə
 2-GEN parents-ERG 1-DAT 2-DAT help (IR)
 ʔnə-ŋə-re
 DIR-CPV-SFP³⁴
 ‘Your parents will let me help you.’

In examples (18) and (19), the absolutive is unacceptable for the 3rd person causer, because of the particular argument structure of the verb. The verb ‘help’ is a verb whose second argument is marked with the dative, as is determined by the nature of verb, i.e. its argument frame³⁵. But there is no verb which requires the ergative marking nor is there a system of antipassive marking.

The second argument of a verb which conveys emotions or feelings, that are the direction or focus of the feeling, is obligatorily marked by the dative. The

³³ If the causer is 1st or 2nd person, the ergative marking is disallowed. Cf. (8).

³⁴ The causative sentence does not always possess a causative auxiliary verb /^ptʰə/. Example (19) has two phrases with a dative marking, the former is a causee, the latter is a dative patient of the verb ‘help’; the interpretation is unchangeable. The collaborator says that all the sentences are in a certain context, so that there is no room for misunderstanding. In addition, it is noticeable that the emphasized form of the dative marker is used for the causee and its normal form is used for a dative patient.

³⁵ In some actual uses, the dative marker can be omitted without any change of meaning, and this phenomenon might have no relation to the pragmatics.

subject of such a verb can be marked with the ergative if it is the 3rd person as in (20).³⁶

- (20) ʼte-ø / -^hce ʰs^he yə ʼwə-rə-^htsə-tə-^bje ʰgo ʼŋə
 3-ABS/ERG newly DIR-buy-PFT-NML-DAT love CPV
 ‘He loves what he has newly bought.’

The subject of verb concatenation including a motion verb as ‘go’ and ‘come’ is not marked with the ergative, as:

- (21) ʼpə jni ʼte -ø/ -^{*h}ce ʰptsə-ø ʰptsə ʼtə-çə
 today 3-ABS/ERG food eat DIR-go (ir)
 ‘Today he will go to eat the food.’

What is important in this case is that only the absolutive is acceptable in marking the subject for the indicated reading. In other words, syntactically, ‘he’ in (21) is the S argument of /ʼçə/ ‘go’.³⁷

As mentioned above, ergative marking is restricted. We should not, however, confuse the two restrictions of ergative marking. One is the grammatical restriction based on argument structure and person, shown in (1)-(8) and (21); the other is the pragmatic necessity for marking the 3rd person which highlights the agent under certain circumstances as shown in (9)-(20).

In Section 3.2 I show that the ergative marker, in fact, has an additional use. In Section 3.3, I also discuss cases where there is another way to indicate the 1st or 2nd person agent on the verb stem itself.

3.2. *Ergative used as the instrumental*

As in Tibetan, the ergative marker is based on an instrumental marker in Nyagrong-Minyag. As an agent marker it can only be used with animate entities³⁸. When used with inanimate entities the marker indicates an instrument or the relation “with” or “by”. In this instrumental function the marker cannot be omitted. It may therefore not be necessary to include an “instrumental case” in the description of Nyagrong-Minyag³⁹.

³⁶ It is noticeable that the subject of emotion verbs such as ‘love’ and ‘hate’ in Tibetan (Nyagrong and Minyag dialects as well as Lhasa dialect) cannot be marked with the ergative.

³⁷ If (21) is intended to mean that he will go after he eats the food, this 3rd person subject will become A of /ʰptsə/ ‘eat’ and be marked with the ergative.

³⁸ It is possible that an inanimate A can be an agent, but in this case the agent is necessarily marked with the ergative. Such a construction, however, is intransitive: the relation between A and P is superficial; a verb of the intransitive form is used and the noun phrase with an ergative marking should be analyzed as an instrumental.

³⁹ We could, therefore, name this case *ergative-instrumental*. One may note that somewhat in contrast to other Tibetan dialects, the ergative and the instrumental markers differ from each other in sTau and Geshitsa (personal field notes).

- (22) ʔə də-ø-ʔe ʔʰə-ʰce ʔnə-le-ʰtsə ʔŋə
 this-ABS-TOP⁴⁰ milk-ERG DIR-make-PFT CPV
 ‘This is made of milk.’

When the ergative marker follows the interrogative pronoun for an inanimate entity, the question is not only about an instrument (‘with what’), but also about a reason (‘why’).

- (23) ʔə də-ø ʔa-ʰce ʔnə-le ʔnə-ŋə
 this-ABS what-ERG DIR-make DIR-CPV
 (a) ‘With what is this made?’
 (b) ‘Why (did you) make this?’

Returning to (9a) which showed an example of a third person pronominal argument optionally marked as an ergative, we can also analyze the data as follows if the 3rd person is an instrumental such as chopsticks or a spoon:

- (24) ʔte-ʰce ʔtsə-ø ʔtsə-ʰte-re
 3-ERG food-ABS eat-AOR-SFP
 ‘(I/You/S/He) ate the food with it.’

The omission of the ergative marker in (22)-(24) is ungrammatical for this reading.

3.3. Person marking of the verb stem

In Nyagrang-Minyag, several verbs exhibit stem alternation in realis and irrealis contexts, depending on the argument structure. For example, if 1st person is acting on 3rd person, the verb stem will have a different form than if 2nd or 3rd person is acting on 3rd person⁴¹.

While ergative marking is impossible when A is 1st or 2nd person, the verb stem inflection can indicate A, especially a 1st person A:

- (25) a. ʔŋa-ø ʔte-ø ʔŋq^hoŋ
 1-ABS 3-ABS need (IR.1>3)
 ‘I will need it.’
 b. ʔne-ø ʔte-ø ʔŋq^hu
 2-ABS 3-ABS need (IR)
 ‘You will need it.’

⁴⁰ The topic marker can follow the case marker of any given noun phrase, including the non-marker (absolutive). There are several forms of the topic marker: /də, də/ as well as /ʔe/. See (16).

⁴¹ For more detailed information, see Suzuki (2010b: 46-48).

- c. ^ptʰa ɕʰi-hce ʼte-ø ʰqʰu
 PSN-ERG 3-ABS need (IR)
 ‘Trashī (*bkra-shis*) will need it.’

When A is the 1st person, several verbs take a suffix /-ŋ/^{42,43}. Furthermore, a prefix /^{f/v}-/⁴⁴ will be added if a 3rd person patient is implied, but does not necessarily appear in the sentence. This cross-reference on the person is not obligatory, and the lack of the person marking is also acceptable. It is assumed that a suffix /-n/ exists for the 2nd person, but it is hardly used in actual speech.

4. CONCLUSION AND SOME OBSERVATIONS

This paper presented the use of the ergative marker in Nyagrōng-Minyag. The ergative marking seems optional in this language, but we can distinguish two phenomena: 1) grammatical restriction, where 1st/2nd person cannot be marked ergative vs. 3rd person, which can be marked; and 2) pragmatic optionality for 3rd person.

The first phenomenon can be omitted from the discussion of optional case marking. The pragmatic usage with 3rd persons is limited to agent-marking. Ergative marking cannot be used for agent-like S-arguments of intransitive sentences. In this respect, Nyagrōng-Minyag differs considerably from several Tibetan dialects (as described in Tournadre 1991).

As for the marking of 1st / 2nd person A and S, several verbs can take a person-marking affix on their stem, which indicates which person is A or S. In addition, the ergative marker is also used as an instrumental, which cannot be omitted.

From a typological viewpoint, split ergative marking related to person is attested in some Australian languages (Dixon 1994: 86; 2010: 137-142), whereas it is a minority in rGyalrongic languages. Multiple descriptions of the rGyalrongic languages claim that the ergative (agentive) marker is **seldom used** for 1st and 2nd persons (Lin (1993: 336-337); Sun and bsTan-blo (2002: 81) and Jacques (2008: 165)). On the other hand, the Geshitsa language possesses a more typical ergative marking system⁴⁵ (e.g. rDo-rje (1998: 96, 105-106) and personal research). sTau, as in Nyagrōng-Minyag, has a split ergative system where the 3rd person agent is obligatorily marked (personal research). Based on this description, Nyagrōng-Minyag lies in a curious position among the rGyalrongic languages.

⁴² Not all verbs in Nyagrōng-Minyag can take person affixes, but it is still unclear what distinguishes the group which can be marked from the group which cannot be marked.

⁴³ The vowel alternation also occurs. The intransitive verb takes a suffix /-a/, cf. (1a, 2, 3).

⁴⁴ In (25a), the verb has a prenasal, which merges with this prefix and becomes a prenasal labiodental sound.

⁴⁵ Ergative marking is obligatory with pronouns, and common with nouns, when they are A. S cannot receive an ergative marker.

ABBREVIATIONS

1	1 st person	EXV	existential verb
2	2 nd person	GEN	genitive
3	3 rd person	IR	irrealis
>3	3 rd person patient	LOC	locative
ABL	ablative	NEG	negative
ABS	absolutive	NML	nominaliser
ADE	adessive	PFT	perfect
AOR	aorist	PRG	progressive
CMP	comparative	PSN	person name
COM	comitative	Q	question marker
CPV	copulative verb	R	realis
DAT	dative	SFP	sentence final particle
DIR	directional marker	TMP	temporal
ERG	ergative	TOP	topic marker
ESS	essive		

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