The paper deals with a phenomenon observed in a number of ergative languages where different marking is applied to transitive vs. intransitive imperatives. This is typical, for instance, of the Andian group of Nakh-Daghestanian, including Godoberi, Karata, Bagvalal, Chamalal, Akhvakh.

Godoberi (Kibrik 1996: 47–49, 106)

a. *b-it-I*  
   N-tear-IMP.INTR
   ‘tear!’

b. *usuk’-a*  
   sift-IMP.TR
   ‘sift!’

Similar formal divergence is found in Hunzib, Abkhaz, Newari, Hanis Coos, Sanuma, Paumari, Hayu, Jacaltec, and Trumai.

The central participant of an imperative situation is its most agent-like participant - the agent of a transitive situation or the only participant of an intransitive situation. It is therefore the accusative, not the ergative, strategy of argument marking which is more appropriate in the case of imperatives (A/S is opposed to P). As has been observed before, this is the reason why the imperative provides good grounds for an ergativity split (cf. for instance Dixon 1994: 131–133).

The Daghestanian data is however different. In the imperative, the argument marking is ergative (A is opposed to S/P, just as in other sentence types):

Cahur  
\[Ru\]  
*hi=w-l-e Xʷä!*

you.ERG 3=give-IMP dog

‘Give (me) the dog!’

Yet there is evidence indicating that the imperative construction is A/S oriented even though A and S carry different case markers. Thus, it is the degree of agentivity of a participant that controls the availability of the imperative for intransitive predicates in Bagvalal (Kibrik, ed. 2001: 321). In Budukh and Kryz (Daghestanian) imperatives have number agreement markers, their choice being controlled by the imperative addressee (A/S), independently of its case marking (Kibrik 2003: 581, 593). The imperative construction is thus a field where various strategies compete in treating A, P and S roles. Within this approach, one way to interpret the tendency to employ different morphological marking in transitive and intransitive imperatives in languages like Godoberi may be to consider them an example of consistently ergative treatment of core arguments (A vs. S).

The paper presents morphological patterns of divergent transitive vs. intransitive imperative marking in several ergative languages, and considers probable functional interpretations underlying this phenomenon.

REFERENCES


