EQUIPOLLENT DIFFERENTIAL PARTICIPANT MARKING

ELENA MASLOVA & TATIANA NIKITINA
Fremont, USA

This paper examines a special class of differential participant marking (DPM), i.e. of case marking patterns in which the encoding of core participant roles depends on semantic and/or referential properties of NPs (sometimes in addition to other factors). Typological and theoretical accounts of such dependencies have been concerned primarily with a class of DPM patterns that can be referred to as privative, where the presence of an overt role marker is opposed to a form unmarked for participant role. The goal of this paper is to explore the theoretical ramifications of equipollent DPM patterns, in which all competing encoding options involve overt morphological marking.

The empirical core of the paper is formed by two case studies of equipollent DPM from the Paleo-Siberian group of languages: the differential A marking in the Chukotko-Kamchatkan languages and the differential O marking in the Yukaghir languages. In spite of being diametrically opposed in terms of participant-role semantics of overt case markers, these DPM patterns are very similar in their paradigmatic makeup: in both systems, the competing role-marking forms are synchronically identical and/or diachronically related to the Locative and Instrumental case forms of their respective language families. In each case, the distribution of these marking options lends itself very naturally, with minor adjustments, to a description in terms of the universal animacy/topicality hierarchy (ATH), as established on the basis of cross-linguistic investigations of privative DPM patterns (Silverstein 1976; inter alia). Insofar as privative and equipollent DPM patterns appear to invoke essentially the same clusters of semantic and referential distinctions, it seems plausible to hypothesize that the reason(s) why these distinctions can be relevant for case-marking systems must also have something in common.

In the privative DPM systems, the higher-ranked NPs are more likely to be overtly marked for the O role and less likely to be marked for the A role; in other words, case marking tends to be confined to those situations where the actual participant role differs from the one expected for the given animacy/topicality value. Such distributions are widely taken to reveal a universal constraint against superfluous structural elements, or, in more general terms, the functional pressure towards economy of expression. This type of explanation cannot directly account for equipollent DMP patterns. In the systems under investigation, it is the Locative-like encoding that is associated with the higher end of ATH, while the Instrumental-like encoding is reserved for its lower end, independently of the participant role (A vs. O) being marked. A preliminary cross-linguistic survey suggests that the same holds true if a Locative-like or an Instrumental-like encoding participates in a privative DPM system. In our view, this strongly supports the need to complement economy-based accounts with the analysis of diachronic routes by which different oblique case markers can enter the domain of A vs. O marking (cf. Garrett 1990 on Instrumental-to-Ergative route via the lower end of ATH in Anatolian and Gorokan). In particular, we hypothesize that locative markers enter this domain through the higher end of ATH, since this development is closely associated with the semantic extension involved in the combination of locative with animate NPs.

REFERENCES