ERGATIVITY IN KUNDAL SHAHI, KASHMIRI AND HINDKO

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INTRODUCTION

The present paper focuses on ergative patterns in three languages—Kundal Shahi, Kashmiri and Hindko—as they are spoken in the district of Neelam in Pakistan-administered Kashmir. The estimated population of the region is 154,000,1 while according to the 1998 Census of Pakistan, the population was 124,000. The total length of the valley is about 150 kilometers. Both banks of the river Neelam are populated, with a few villages on the left bank under Indian control.

The languages spoken in the area include Hindko, Kashmiri, Kundal Shahi, Gojri, Pashto, Shina of Phulwei and Guresi Shina. Hindko is the predominant language of the district and virtually all members of the other language groups are bilingual in Hindko (Akhtar and Rehman 2007).

This linguistically rich area has long been inaccessible to linguists. Before partition, the region was inaccessible due to the absence of a road link; after partition, and until the recent devastating earthquake, outsiders (and foreigners in particular) were not allowed access to the region for security reasons. Therefore, no baseline linguistic literature is available on the languages and language varieties spoken in the region, and the area is not covered in Grierson’s (1915) or O’Leary’s (1992) surveys.

Most of the Indo-Aryan languages spoken in the Indian subcontinent are characterised by split ergativity (Butt and Deo 2001, Masica 1991). In this article, I investigate to what extent the language varieties of the Neelam Valley conform to the patterns of ergativity found in the wider region.

In a split ergative system, ergative and accusative alignment alternates within a given language, depending on one of several possible factors (Holmer 2001: 104). Many of the languages spoken in South Asia show morphological ergativity (Butt and Deo 2001) which mani-

fests itself through marking the lone argument of an intransitive verb (S) in the same way as the less agent-like argument of a transitive verb (O), namely in the Absolutive case, with different marking for the more agent-like argument of a transitive verb (A), namely in the Ergative case (Dixon 1994: 16). Essentially, when there is a morphological case distinction between ergative and absolutive (Peeters 1995), we may speak of morphological ergativity. Moreover, the verb in an ergative clause is likely to agree with the absolutive argument. However, in northern Pakistan, quite a few languages have ergative marking in which the verb agrees with the A and not with the O.

This is a first attempt to describe and compare the ergative patterns of these languages. We will see that they share the feature of split ergativity based on aspect, that is, A is marked with the ergative case when the verb form is in perfective aspect (simple past and all perfect tenses), while a nominative-accusative pattern occurs elsewhere. However, there are also differences among these languages concerning agreement patterns, the use of the ergative markers, ergative marking with certain intransitive verbs, and alternation between the dative and ergative marking in certain constructions. The data reveal some interesting patterns which are distinct from other languages in the area.

KUNDAL SHAHI

Kundal Shahi is a village located in the Neelam Valley, 74 kilometers from Muzaffarabad, the capital city of Pakistan-administered Kashmir, and seven kilometers from Athmuqam, the district headquarters. An ethnic group known as the Qureshi, speaking the Kundal Shahi language makes up the majority population in Kundal Shahi village. The language is named after the village (Rehman and Baart 2005). There are also some other communities, but they do not speak the language as their mother tongue. The Qureshi claim to have migrated from the town of Tajjar in Indian-administered Kashmir some three centuries ago (Rehman and Baart 2005, Akhtar and Rehman 2007). However, in summer 2008 I conducted a detailed survey of the community in which some of the members claim that their ancestors either came from Chilas or Muzaffarabad rather than the Valley of Kashmir. No other variety of the language is known. While a first publication on the language suggests that the community comprises approximately