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On the Origin and Function of the Ergative Postposition in Hindi and its Varieties¹

Abstract

The aim of the present paper is to give a brief overview of the old and current hypotheses on the origin of the agentive postposition *-ne* in Hindi and its dialects. The problem has remained unsolved and the opinions among Indian and Western scholars regarding it differ considerably. The present author attempts to show the possible source of the *-ne* postposition taking into consideration its vast array of functions in selected varieties of Hindi. The material has been selected from different sources – vernacular grammars, texts and the author's own field notes.

Introduction

The problem of the origin of *ne*, which is crucial in understanding the history and the nature of the split ergativity not only in Hindi but also in other IA languages, has not been solved so far. There are several hypotheses put forward by Indian and Western scholars. Some of these will be discussed here within the context of cross-dialectal data showing the use and distribution of the agentive postposition in selected varieties² of Hindi.

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² The problem whether the so-called dialects or varieties of Hindi have already acquired the status of separate languages is undoubtedly an interesting topic, but it has been considered irrelevant for the purpose of the present examination.

Main hypotheses

I. From the Skt. Instr. *-ena* of the vowel stems ending in ‘-a’ (Kāmtāprasāda 2060: 189–190, see also in Sharmā 1995: 54–55).

This hypothesis has been rejected by most scholars, since the postposition could not originate from a case ending and the continuation of the Skt. *-ena* can be traced e.g. in Marwari (the oblique-agentive ending *-e* of the masculine nouns in *-o*), Kului (the agentive ending *-e*) (cf. Thākura 1975: 238–239; Masica 1993: 247; Lālas 1997: 45).³

II. From the Skt. *-lagya* indecl. part. perf. from *lag* – ‘to stick, adhere’.

Thus the proposed path of development is as follows: Skt. *lag* > Prkrt. *laggiyo* > Old Hin., *lagi* > *lai* > *le* > *ne*. (Beames [1872–1879] 1970: 262–272, Kellog [1875] 1972: 131–132). Some contemporary scholars seem to subscribe to this hypothesis (Bubenik 1989b: 382; see also the discussion in Montaut 2004: 65–66). Support for this proposal can also be found in the form of the Erg. postposition in Garhwali, Kumauni *le*, *l* or Nepali *le*. The participial form *-lagya* could be formed only with e.g. preverb *a-lag* ‘to adhere, cling’ > *a-lagya* and it is not attested in Vedic but only in classical Sanskrit (Whitney [1885] 1995: 144).

Zakharyin (1979: 62–64) considers Dakkhini data to be an important factor allowing the establishment of the origin of the *ne* postposition. It is the Erg. and Dat. (i.e. occurring in obligatory constructions) marker in classical Dakkhini (1), (2):

(1)

ashik-ne	kya	karna
lover-Post. Dat.	what	do.inf.

What should the lover do? (Šamatov 1974: 169)

(2)

un-ne	mujh-sū	yū	kāre	bat
He.pl.Obl.-Post.Erg	I.Obl-Post.Instr./Abl.	this	do.PPP.pl	speech.fem.sg.

He told me so. (Šamatov 1974: 233)

³ I cannot agree with the view that the agentive ending *-n* in Garhwali belongs to the so-called Layer I, being thus a direct continuation of the Skt. Instr. (Masica 1993: 247). It is beyond any doubt an abbreviated version of the agentive *-ne* postposition (cf. Sharma 1987: 51).

The same distribution of *ne* is observable also in Punjabi and Rajasthani.⁴ Kumauni and Garhwali show the same distribution⁵ of the *-le/-la/-na* postposition (cf. (1) and (3); (2) and (4), (5)) which in most of the dialects of Kumauni became a consonantal suffix *-l*.⁶ In Garhwali the obligatory construction conveys additionally the meaning of future tense (cf. (6) and J u y a l 1973: 116).

(3)

mi-l	ya	kam	karaṇ	chu
I.Obl.-Dat.	this	work	do.inf.	be.aux.3sg.

I have to do this work. (Kumauni)

(4)

cyala-l	ek	kyev	kha	halo
I.Obl.-Erg.	one	banana	eat	aux.masc.sg

A boy has eaten one banana. (Kumauni)

(5)

rama-n	dvi	kitab	kharidin
Ram-Erg.	two	book	buy.PPP.pl.

Ram bought two books. (Garhwali)

(6)

ēsu-ka	hayud	mī-la	ḍillī	jaṇ	chu
This year-Gen.pl	winter	I.Obl.-Dat.	Delhi	go.inf.	is

This year in winter I have to go/ I will go to Delhi. (Garhwali) (B i ṣ t & J o ś ī 2005: 14)

The variant *le* of the *ne* postposition, which is attested in the earlier literary works (XVI century) in Dakhini, is also observed in Nepali (cf. Z a k h a r y i n 1979: 63), Kumauni, Chattisgarhi, Halbi. The *n:l* variation in Kumauni is explained by the influence of the preceding nasal element e.g. *mē* 'I' > *mēni* 'I.erg.' (S h a r m a 1987: 51). The postposition *le* is supposed to be derived from the OIA absolutive of *le-* 'to take' (T u r n e r 1931: 560) or from *lagne* > *lagge* > *lagi* > *lai* > *le* / *le* but some scholars prefer the derivation from the OIA *lagita* > *laia* > *lai* > *le* (S h a r m a 1987: 51).

⁴ It is now, presumably, under the influence of Punjabi, spreading also in modern Hindi-Urdu (cf. B a s h i r 1999).

⁵ Such distribution is attested too in Nepali which has optionally employed it in non-perfective tenses (R i c c a r d i 2007: 557). The spread of the *-le* marker to non-perfective tenses is nevertheless a recent development, i.e. end of 18th and early 19th centuries (cf. W a l l a c e 1982: 166).

⁶ However the agentive *-l* suffix used in the obligatory construction is sometimes replaced by the Acc./Dat. postposition *-ke* following thus the pattern of standard Hindi.

There is a strong connection between agentivity and instrumentality which is manifested by the distribution of the *-le/-la* postposition in Kumauni and Garhwali (Ag. and Instr.),⁷ Chattisgarhi (*-ne* Ag. and *-le* Instr./Abl.), Halbi (*-ne* and *-le* Instr.), Batri (Instr./Abl.) (Telang 1966: 118, 409–413, 491–493), and even in fully nominative Bhojpuri (Abl.) (Tiwāri 1954: 186, 193).

(7)

bamaṇḍ-l	u-kē	adarḍ-l	bheṭa
brahman.Obl.-Ag.	he-Acc.	respect.Obl.-Inst.	sit.caus.masc.sg.

With respect brahman made him sit. (Kumauni) (Pant 2006: 22)

(8)

MI-la	ve-te	dhūṅga-la	mare
I.Obl.-Ag.	he.Obl.-Acc.	stone-Inst.	hit.PPP.masc.sg.

I hit him with a stone. (Garhwali)

Thus at least in Kumauni, Chattisgarhi, Halbi and Old Dakhini we have the variation *l/n* and in Nepali the agentive postposition *le* also seems to be connected with the Maithili postposition *lae* ‘with’ (cf. Jha 1985 [1958]: 344).

It is worth mentioning that a similar derivation from the OIA *lag* has also been postulated for Kumauni *le* ‘till’, which has its counterpart in the Nepali *lāi* ‘Acc./Dat. Post.’, the Mewati *lu* ‘Acc./Dat. Post.’ the Old Braj *lauṇ* ‘up to’, the Avadhi *lai* ‘up to’, the Bundeli *lo* ‘up to’, the Bhojpuri *lagi* ‘for’, the Maithili *lel* ‘Dat. Post.’, the Magahi *la* ‘Dat. Post.’, the Chattisgarhi *la* ‘Dat. Post.’ (Saxena 1971 [1937]: 229–231; Tiwāri 1954: 197; Jha 1997: 177; Tripāthi 1993: 186–7; Telang 1966: 118; Agrawal 1963: 85; Gusain 2003: 18). In early Old Braj (15th–17th centuries) *lagi* ‘Dat. Post.’ was used frequently. The possible antecedents taken into consideration are the OIA *lābhe* ‘on the profit’ or the absolutive or infinitive of the OIA *lāgayati*, the MIA *lāium*, and the Ap. *lāivi* (Turner 1931: 551). The derivation from *labdha-* might seem tempting, since one of the forms attested in Old Braj is *lahuṇ* (McGregor 1968: 190) but the earlier form *lagi* would rather point towards the OIA *lāgayati* (cf. Singh 1958: 119).

The Kumauni forms *lag/lage* ‘till’ are of the same origin as the Awadhi *lage* ‘near, up to’, *lag* ‘up to’, the Old Avadhi *lāgi/lagi* ‘up to’, the Bhojpuri *lage* ‘near’, the Old Western Rajastani *lagai*, *lagī* ‘Abl. Post., up to, from, because of’ and they have the same antecedent as *le* (cf. Kellog 1972 [1975]: 132–133). Sharma (1987: 58) derives Kumauni forms from *lagne*, following Tessitori (1979 [1914–1916]: 82), remarks on Rajasthani forms (from Ap. *laggahim* < OIA **lagasmin* (<*labne*). Sakseena (1971

⁷ The same pertains to Nepali. In Marathi the affinity of instrumental and agentive meaning is manifested by the distribution of the suffix *-ne* while in Gujarati by the suffix *-e*.

[1937]: 229–230) derives Avadhi forms from *lagna*, namely from the derivatives *lagnake* and *laga*,

III. Skt. *karṇa* ‘ear’ > MIA *kanna* > Apbhr. Loc. *kaṇṇahi* > *kanai* > *kane* > *ne* (Tessitori 1913: 556–560; Tessitori 1979 [1914–1916]: 73–74; 1914: 216; Chatterji 1960: 124).

According to the adherents of this theory, the above path of development is justified by the existence of the postposition *kəne*, *kəne* ‘near’ in Marwari and Kannauji, e.g.:

- (9)
- | | | |
|--------|------|----------------|
| mhare | kəne | av (Marwari) |
| mere | kəne | ao (Kannauji) |
| I.Obl. | near | come-imp.2.sg. |
- Come to me.

Old Western Rajasthani had the Dat. and Loc. (and also marginal Abl. with verbs like ‘ask’, ‘ask for’, ‘listen’, ‘obtain’) postposition *kanhaiṃ* from Ap. *kaṇṇahiṃ* OIA **karṇasmin* < *karṇe* (Tessitori 1979 [1914–1916]: 73–77). In contemporary dialects there are the following continuants: in Marwari *kəne*, in Mewari *kənē*, in Bagri *kəne* ‘Loc. Post.’, in Kumauni *kəṇi*, *gəṇi*, *kʰəṇi* (see ex. (10)) and in Garhwali *koṇi*, *kʰoṇi* ‘Dat./Acc. Post.’, in Magahi *ne*, *kane* ‘Loc.Post’, in Bhatari *āne* ‘Loc. Post.’, and in Halbi *ne* ‘Loc. Post’ (cf. Tripāthi 1993: 182; Telang 1966: 413, 493).

- (10)
- | | | | | |
|----|--------------|----------------|----------|------------------|
| mē | garibən | kən | dən | dītʰu |
| I | poor.Obl.pl. | Post.Dat./Acc. | donation | give.is.aux.1.sg |
- I give donation to the poor people. (Kumauni) (Bisṭ & Jośī 2005: 38)

Although there is a cross dialectal connection Loc. and Acc./Dat. (cf. Tessitori 1979 [1916]: 73–74; Sharma 1987: 49), the agentive postposition is very unlikely to be derived from the same source as the locative one (cf. Lālas 1994: 41; and Montaut 2006: 383 for an entirely opposite opinion; and Tessitori (1913: 557–559) who tried to bind Loc. with Abl. meanings in favour of the derivation of *nai* from *kanhai*). However Tessitori had already proposed that *nai* could be derived from *kanhai* on the strength of the phonetic law which was operational during the transition time from Apabhramśa to NIA, namely that in “some very usual words beginning with *k* the entire initial syllable was often dropped” (Tessitori 1913: 553).

IV. The Kumauni postposition *huṇi*, *həṇi* (and its reduced forms) ‘towards’ and the Garhwali *saṇi*, ‘Dat./Acc. Post.’ which are also adduced as possible antecedents of *ne* (cf. Montaut 2004: 65–66) have their antecedents in the Ap. *hunto*/*hunte*, present participial forms of the verb substantive *hun*, *ho* cf. the Old Western Rajasthani *hūntī*

hūnti hūnto ‘Abl. Post.’ (Tessitori 1979 [1916]: 78, 83). Thus they are not from the same source as *kəṇṭ* (Sharma 1987: 49) and cannot be taken as a possible source of the *ne* postposition.

V. Apbhr. *taṇe* or Avh. *saṇe* (postp. Instr.) > Hin. *ne* (Bahri 2000: 61).

A century old Grierson’s proposal (1903: 484–485) deriving the agentive *nai* from the Apabhramsa *taṇai* via Instr. *taṇē* (Grierson 1903: 483–485) had been rejected by Tessitori as historically unjustified, especially in respect of the sound change – the shift from cerebral to dental cannot be explained (Tessitori 1913: 560). Bahri, being a proponent of the above mentioned derivation, gives counterexamples indicating the agentive postposition *ne* as existing already in Avahattha (Bahri 2000: 44; see also Sharma 2004: 76). This path of development is historically unmotivated (in respect of the meaning, sound change etc.).

Similarly the Ap. postposition *taṇaya* as a source of the Hin. *ne* has been given by Schwarzschild (1991: 93). It is an extension of the postposition *taṇa* ‘pertaining to’, which is used with the Instr. *taṇaya*- used in masc. and neut. Dir. (9 times) and in fem. Gen. (once) and in Loc. (3 times) and is not used in Instr. (Tagare 1987 [1948]: 196–197).

This derivation seems to be untenable – there is the Hin. *tan* ‘towards’ which is either derived from the Ap. Gen. Post. *taṇau*, or Instr.(Dat.) Post. *taṇem*. The postposition *taṇau* can be derived from *tanaya* or it could be a vernacular (deśī) word, attested in Old Braj. *tana* ‘towards’ (cf. McGregor 1968: 191–192) and also in Marwari *taṇai* ‘Gen. Post.’, Chattisgarhi *tanī* (Telang 1966: 174). It seems that the anlaut stop *t* is strong enough to be preserved and the meaning of the postposition is more connected with the Gen. The connection between this postposition and *tāmī* – the Loc. Post. in Old Western Rajasthani and the Dat. Post. in Marwari (but only pronominal) is not clear (cf. Tessitori 1979 [1914–1916]: 87).

VI. Skt. of *janiye* (Loc. *janiyā*) > Hin. *ne* which is at least doubtful since the grammaticalized meaning given by Butt (Butt 2001: 21; 2005a: 10; 2005b: 19) ‘for the sake of, because of’ should be derived from the root *jan* ‘to generate, produce’. This derivation is also historically unmotivated in respect of the sound change.

Early attestations and contemporary contexts

The postposition *ne* is said to be of recent origin and it is said to be attested in Hindi only from the 17th century although the ergative or rather a quasi-ergative alignment was also present earlier, e.g. in the works of Kabir or Tulsidas. The postposition *ne* is not attested in Braj until the beginning of the 15th century. The only example from Chand Bardai’s ‘Prithviraj Rasau’ (end of 12th century) does not seem to be convincing (Singh 1958: 119). In the works of Surdas there are only two occurrences of *ne* attested in the agentive function (Tandon 1962: 59):

(11)

diyau	sirpāv	nṛparāv	nai	mahar	kau
give.PPP.masc.sg.	royal dress	king Rao	Post.Ag.	master	Post.Acc./Dat.
āpu	pahirāvane	sab	dikhāe		
own	gift.pl	all	see.PPP.caus.pl		

King Rao has given to the master (i.e. Krshna) royal dress, all his own garments has shown to everybody.

(12)

tahā	tāhi	viṣhar	nai	khāi
there	this	snake	Post.Ag.	eat.PPP.sg.
girī dharani	uhī	Ṭhaur		
Krshna	this	place		

There this snake has eaten Krshna on this place

In Vidyapati's 'Kirtīlātā' (14th/15th centuries), which is an example of Avahatṭha (cf. Chatterji 1970 [1926]: 104), there are only a few occurrences of *ne* restricted to pronouns (two of them can be seen below):

(13)

jenne	jācak jan	rañjia
who.Obl.Ag. pl.	beggar	serve PPP.masc.sg.

Who served the beggar.

(14)

jenhe	saraṇ	pariharia
who.Obl.Ag.sg.	shelter	abandon.PPP.masc.sg.

Who abandoned the shelter. (Singh 1988 [1955]: 88)

It has not been proved so far to what extent we can rely on the authenticity of Nāmdēv (13th/14th centuries) poetry passages composed in Dehlavi which contain a few occurrences of *ne*, e.g.

(15)

un-ne	mārā	un-ne	tārā
he.Obl.pl.Ag.	kill.PPP.masc.sg.	he.Obl. pl.Ag.	save.PPP.masc.sg.

He killed, he saved. (Jāysavāl 1979: 331–332).

The Old Western Rajasthani *naim* is an Acc./Dat. postposition (the set of Acc. postpositions is included in the set of Dat. postpositions and syncretism of Acc./Dat. postposition is a feature of the majority of the modern Indo-Aryan languages).

(16)

mātāg	hnaī	sīhāsani	baisāri	vidyā	liyo
outcast	Post.Acc.	throne.Loc	sit.caus.absl.	knowledge	take.imp.

(Abhaykumar said), making the outcast seated on the throne, take the knowledge.

15th c. (RG 15)

What is more, there are also instances of the usage of *naiṁ* as a Gen. marker:

(17)

vidyā-naī	balī
knowledge.Gen.	power.Instr.

By the power of knowledge, 15th c. (R.G. 15)

In all major contemporary Rajasthani dialects there is a direct descendant of the Old Rajasthani form *nai/naiṁ* functioning as an Acc./Dat. marker (although it can be of secondary usage as in Bagri). The agentive function of *naiṁ* is definitely a secondary development. Tessitori gives only two examples of the employment of *nai* in the agentive function from Old Western Rajasthani (Tessitori 1979 [1914–1916]: 71) and today one can still observe its absence in some of the contemporary dialects (e.g. Bagri and Mewari although Bagri preserves Erg. marking on pronouns). It is not included in the grammars of standard Marwari (cf. Lālas 1997: 44–45) although it is being recently employed in spoken Marwari (cf. Gusain 2004: 61–62; my field notes confirm this trend as well). Other dialects of Rajasthan (Shekhawati, Mewati, Harauti, Malvi) employ *nai* also in the agentive function and since it marks both the agent and the patient, the Dat./Acc. and Ag. usages are in complementary distribution (e.g. for Harauti cf. Sharmā 1991: 161). There are however instances of double employment of the *nai* postposition in one sentence as a marker of the agent and the patient (for Mewati cf. Gusain 2003: 58; my Shekawati and Harauti respondents were not unanimous in judging such usages but most of them rejected them as ungrammatical). The situation is also labile in Bangaru and Ahirvati where such double employment of *nai* is attested (Khaṇḍelvāl 1980: 220; Yādav 2008). It must be however emphasized that the same A and O marking in contrast to S marking is extremely rare and is usually constrained to certain contexts (aspect, tense etc.).⁸

As we can see from the dialectal data presented above, the *ne* postposition can function as an Acc.-Dat. or Acc.-Dat.-Erg. or Instr.-Erg. marker. Separate agentive postposition in Hindi could result from the ambiguity caused by such syncretism. The question of whether this hypothesis could be extended to other IA languages is a matter of much more detailed investigation, although some attempts have already been made (Butt

⁸ The existence of A = O and S alignment has been rejected by some typologists (cf. Comrie 1978: 329–335), although it has been attested at least in Pamir languages and in Kashmiri (cf. Bubenik 1989a: 182; Payne 1980; Skalmowski 1974).

2001: 20–21; 2005a: 10). On the other hand, some of the scholars even openly neglect the possibility of further study on the origin of *ne* (Tiwāri 2005: 142).

So far the best justified is the derivation of the postposition *le* (from *-lagya*) which we could observe in II. The only alternative, i.e. from *karṇa* has certain deficiencies which are very rarely taken into consideration, namely the unexplained disappearance of the anlaut stop *k* (although we have seen that Tessitori tried to explain the derivation of *nai* by the apheresis of *ka-* in *kanhai*). The majority of the postpositions existing in the contemporary IA languages have their antecedents reconstructed and it is almost always the auslaut element which has been affected by sound change and assimilation processes.

Let us have a look at the suggested origin of the Acc./Dat. postposition *ko* in Hindi – it is derived from Skt. *kṛta* > *kritya* > *kiya* > *kaa*, *ko* (thus it can be of the same origin as Gen. postposition – cf. Montaut 2004: 65 and the criticism in Oberlies 2005: 28) or Skt. *kakṣam* > *kākhūm* > (Braj) *kahūm*, *kaum* > (Hin.) *ko*. Both derivations are based on the assumption that it is the end of the autosemantic word which is more susceptible to sound changes than the beginning. The same pertains to Loc. Post. *mē* which is usually derived from Skt. Loc. sg. *madhye* ‘middle’ > **mājhi* > (Braj) *māhim* > (Hin.) *mē*. The CV initial clusters have very often been preserved intact – one can observe spirantisation of *k* in *k+V* initial groups or plosivisation of *b* in *b+V* initial groups, etc., but despite the change of its value it still remains a consonant. Certainly from the point of view of the articulatory distance initial cluster Stop+V is far more stable than Liquid+V or Nasal+V and it can be observed in the course of the history of the IA languages. The possible stability of the latter one (like in *le* < *lagya*) assumes a certain stability of the former. On the other hand, final CV (and some initial VC – cf. Hin. *par* < Skt. *upari*) are more likely to be affected. Thus, if the shape of the Hindi postpositions results from the reduction of the final elements of the autosemantic word (as it has been postulated for almost all of them including *le*), the development of *ne* from *karṇa* seems unjustified.

The existence of nasal resonance in *ne* in some dialects (e.g. Western) actually testifies against all the presented hypotheses (cf. the development of Gujarati Instr. ending skt *-ena* > *ē* > *e*) although one cannot exclude the irregular sound change due to frequency as it probably happened in the case of the personal pronoun ‘I’ cf. Skt. *mayā* > Apabh. *mai* > Avahattha *maĩ* > Hin. *maĩ* (cf. Masica 1991: 252–253; although see Montaut 2004: 73). There is on the other hand variation *n:l*, inherited from MIA, mirrored now crossdialectally, e.g. in Kumauni (*lun* / *nun* < Skt. *lavaṇa-* with some of the existing alternations being morphologically motivated like *nhego* / *lhago* ‘he has gone’) or Maithili (*lagara* < Skt. *nagara-* ‘town’). Even later on this variation appeared to be operational when adopting foreign words, e.g. in Kumauni *lambar* / *nambar* and Maithili *lammār^a* ‘number’ (Sharma 1985: 129, 148, 195; Jha 1985 [1954]: 187). Such a free variation has been explained by means of the influence of the nasal element, e.g. *lun* / *nun* (Sharma 1985: 170). This would have required a nasal element in the proposed antecedent of the agentive postposition following the I+V cluster, which is not contradictory with the

derivation from Skt. *lagne*. Was the MIA development *lagge* followed by the reduction of the geminate and the final vowel, spontaneous nasalisation and auslaut consonant dropping, i.e. *lagge* > *lāge* (laŋe) > *lāg* (laŋg) > *lā* (laŋ), the nasal element could influence the initial consonant.

In the light of the above remarks it seems that *ne* and *le* have the same origin and the explanation of the diverse functions of these postpositions will require further study of the problem.

Abbreviations

Abl. – ablative	Loc. – locative
Abs. – absolutive (case)	masc. – masculine
Absl. – absolutive (conjunctive participle)	neut. – neuter
Acc. – acusative	Nom. – nominative
Ag. – agentive	O/M/NIA – Old/Middle/New Indo-Aryan
Ap. – Apabhramśa	Obl. – oblique
aux. – auxiliary	opt. – optative
caus. – causative	pass. – passive
Dat. – dative	part. – participle
Dir. – direct case	past. – past tense
Erg. – ergative	perf. – perfect
fem. – feminine	pl. – plural
Gen. – genitive	Post. – postposition
Hin. – Hindi	PPP – passive perfect participle
imp. – imperative	Prkrt – Prakrit
indecl. – indeclinable	sg. – singular
inf. – infinitive	Skt. – Sanskrit
Instr. – instrumental	

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