DIFFERENTIAL SUBJECT MARKING IN NESU

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ABSTRACT. *Differential object marking* is reported in about 300 languages worldwide (Bossong, 1985, 1991; Aissen 1999, 2003). The direct object is marked if and only if it or its containing clause exhibits certain referential properties such as the following:

- the animate direct object is marked, e.g. in Sinhalese (Gair, 1970);
- the definite direct object is marked, e.g. in Hebrew (Givón 1978);
- the direct object that is semantically ambiguous with the subject is marked, e.g. in Lolo (Gerner 2008);
- the direct object of a clause with resultative state is marked, e.g. in Chinese (Li & Thompson 1981:466).

By analogy, *differential subject marking* is a pattern in which the subject is marked if and only if it or its containing clause displays certain referential properties. The Nesu language (Tibeto-Burman, Gejiu County, China) does not mark the direct object but exhibits differential subject marking imposed by resultative aspect. The subject must be case-marked, if the simple clause encodes a resultative state; it can be case-marked if the clause is perfective without implying a result; it cannot be case-marked if the clause is imperfective.

Nesu (Tibeto-Burman family: China, Yunnan Province)

(1) $\text{kə}^{55}\text{hə}^{33}$ $\boxed{\text{ka}^{55}}$ $\text{dzi}^{21}\text{mo}^{21}$ kə^{55} $\quad$ $\text{tɕ}^{h}\text{e}^{21}$ pə^{55} dʑe^{21} $\text{p}^{h}\text{a}^{21}$ wa^{33}. $\qquad$ Obligatory in resultative clauses
3P PL $\quad$ NOM wolf $\qquad$ DEM:DIST NUM:1 CL $\quad$ drive $\quad$ flee $\quad$ DP

'They put the wolf pack to flight.'

(2) ŋo^{33} $\boxed{\text{(ka}^{55}\text{)}}$ dzo^{21} $\quad$ dzɣ^{33} wa^{33}. $\qquad$ Optional in perfective clauses
1P SG $\quad$ NOM $\quad$ rice, food eat $\quad$ DP

'I have eaten rice.'

(3) kə^{55} $\boxed{\text{(*ka}^{55}\text{)}}$ $\text{a}^{55}\text{sə}^{21}$ $\quad$ sə^{21} $\quad$ dzə^{21}. $\qquad$ Forbidden in imperfective clauses
3P SG $\quad$ NOM $\quad$ love song sing $\quad$ PROG

'He is singing a love song.'

For two reasons, this pattern should not be viewed as passive marking. First, there is no morphological marking on the verb as in languages with passive marking (Haspelmath, 1990). Second, for resultative and imperfective clauses there is no pragmatic choice between active versus passive voice. For perfective clauses with optional case-marking, the pragmatic status of the directed object is not promoted nor that of the subject demoted.

Case marking is incompatible with negated clauses. This is not a general property of differential subject marking but rather imposed by the reinterpretation of negated clauses as imperfective clauses.

(4) kə^{55} $\boxed{\text{(*ka}^{55}\text{)}}$ ma^{21} du̠^{33} wo^{33}. $\qquad$ Forbidden in negated clauses
3P SG $\quad$ NOM $\quad$ NEG kick NEG-DP

'He hasn't kicked me.'

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