

Grammatical relations in Puma

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This paper investigates the grammatical relations in Puma, a Tibeto-Burman language of the Kiranti subgroup spoken by approximately 4,000 people in Nepal. Puma is a polysynthetic and complex pronominalised language where words can consist of a series of morphemes. Verbal agreement, where verbs agree with subjects and objects, is very complex, and differs strikingly from the case-marking system used with independent noun phrases. Case-marking of nouns and pronouns is split between nominative-accusative and ergative-absolutive-dative. Intransitive subjects also exhibit characteristics of a split-S pattern: some intransitive subjects display grammatical properties similar to those of transitive objects, while others do not:

- (1) (a) *ŋa* *puks-oŋ*
1SG.ABS go-1SG.S/P.PST
'I went.'
- (b) *comoloŋma-di=ku* *hiŋ* *yumt-i/*a*
Mount Everest-UP.LOC=NMLZ snow.ABS melt-3P/[3SG.]PST
'The snow melted on the Mount Everest.'
- (2) (a) *ŋa-a* *khim* *hud-u-ŋ*
1SG-ERG house.ABS buy-3P-1SG.A
'I bought the house.'
- (b) *mala₁-a* *khipa₂-lai* *set-i*
Mala-ERG dog-DAT kill-3SG.P
'Mala kills the dog.'
- (c) *ŋa₁-a* *yoŋni₂-lai* *chetkuma₃* *itd-u-ŋ*
1SG-ERG friend-DAT clan.sister.ABS give-3P-1SG.A
'I gave my sister to a friend (in marriage).'

The syntactic pivot for both inter-clausal and intra-clausal syntax is 'subject', comprising the single argument of intransitive verbs and the agent-like argument of transitive verbs. Interestingly, the morphology does not treat these in a consistent way but the syntax does. The syntactic pivot for inter-clausal and intra-clausal syntax in Puma is S/A. The overview summary of all five grammatical relations in Puma is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Grammatical relations

Arguments	Cases		Agreement
	Inanimate	Animate	
S	ABSOLUTIVE		ABSOLUTIVE
A	ERGATIVE		ERGATIVE
P	ABSOLUTIVE	DATIVE	ABSOLUTIVE/DATIVE
T	ABSOLUTIVE		*
G	DATIVE		DATIVE

Relativisation distinguishes between S, A and P, and is neither syntactically ergative-absolutive (treating S/P in one way and A another) nor syntactically nominative-accusative (treating S/A one way and P another), as in:

- (3) (a) [*sAŋpwa* *ka-bha=pa₁*] *uŋ-pa*
tree.ABS ACT.PTCP-cut=MASC 1SG.POSS-father.ABS
'The tree cutter is my father.' or 'The man who cut the tree is my father.'

- (b) [ase puks-a=ku/ kλ-puŋ] thoroncha si-a
 yesterday go-PST=NMLZ/ ACT.PTCP-go boy.ABS die-PST
 ‘The boy who went yesterday died.’
- (c) [ŋa-a dher-u-ŋ=ku] marcha puks-a
 1SG-ERG beat-3P-1SG.A=NMLZ woman.ABS go-PST
 ‘The woman whom I beat went.’

Table 2: Relativisation strategy in Puma

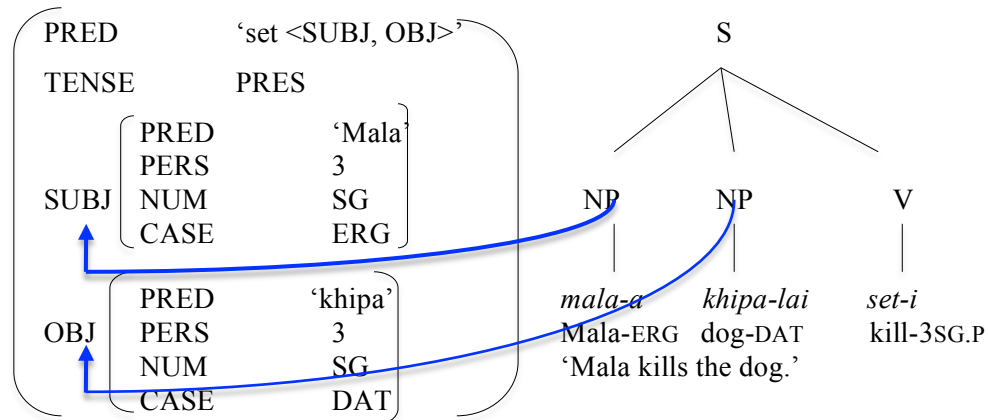
GR	Relativisation strategy
A	$k\lambda$ -V
S human	$k\lambda$ -V or V= ku
S non-human	V= ku
P	V= ku

I argue that how arguments are mapped from a-structure onto f-structure based on Lexical-Functional Grammar (LFG) (Kaplan & Bresnan 1982, Dalrymple 2001, Falk 2001, Bresnan 2001, Kroeger 2004), as in (4) - (6). In LFG, since each language has a different c-structure but they all have the same f-structure (Van Valin, 2001; Butt 2006), it is simple to illustrate how individual languages differ and resemble structurally at the same time. In (2b) the verb set ‘kill’ is the head of the entire matrix f-structure, takes two arguments as in (4).

(4) **a-structure:** set <agent, patient>

(5) **f-structure:**

(6) **c-structure:**



The findings reveal that the anaphoric coreference pattern in Puma is also A/S = A/S.

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