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Case innovation and agentive marking: A comparative overview of Central Indo-Aryan

Abstract: A split-ergative construction had developed during the late MIA period (Bubenik 1998; Peterson 1998) in which subjects of perfective transitive clauses were marked ergative by an oblique form, in contrast with the nominative form for non-ergative subjects. Later in the NIA period, most NIA languages (e.g. Urdu/Hindi) developed a postpositional clitic that was added to the oblique suffix, while others (e.g. Sindhi) continued to mark ergative subjects with a generic oblique suffix. This paper focuses on one exceptional case: the Dehwali language of Gujarat. Dehwali has an ergative marker that is a fusional suffix (i.e. layer I – Masica 1991: 231) and appears to inflect to agree in number and gender with the subject it marks.

I will present two possible scenarios as to the origin of the Dehwali ergative marker: that it may be the remnant of an archaic MIA oblique form, or that it may be a more recent innovation as the result of increased contact with neighbouring varieties. Based on theories of grammaticalisation, I argue that the former hypothesis is more likely. These theories show that it is not uncommon for oblique case forms (i.e. ablative; genitive) to carry agentive properties.

Keywords: ergative marking, diachronic attrition, typology, Indo-Aryan languages

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1 Introduction

The genesis of the New Indo-Aryan (NIA) case system has been the subject of debate since descriptive work began on this language family in the late nineteenth century (e.g. Beames 1966 [1872–1879]; Kellogg 1990 [1893], 1938), and continues to attract attention from historical linguists interested in the changing function of case morphology. The transition from late Middle Indo-Aryan (MIA) Apabhramsa

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languages to NIA – roughly between 1000–1300 CE – remains particularly significant. This stage witnessed the culmination of developments that began with the MIA Prakrits and resulted in the formation of the basic Indo-Aryan subfamilies, from which emerged the NIA languages of present-day South Asia (Kachru 2008: 81–82).

This paper reviews the theories of diachronic case development in NIA, in particular ergative case marking, before presenting "problematic" examples from Dehwali Bhili. Though internally rather heterogeneous in its form, the basic root of the Dehwali Bhili ergative marker is unique in NIA. The historical origin and development of this feature is potentially revealing of how languages may re-employ certain case clitics in their inventory – or those borrowed from a proximate language – and reanalyse them in different grammatical roles.

Bhili refers to the spoken language of communities self-identified as "Bhil" – a tribe populating the border region between the states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharasthra. The variety known as Dehwali is spoken by a community of Bhils in eastern Gujarat and western Maharashtra. Speakers identify two broad dialect groups within Dehwali: Mevasi, spoken primarily in Gujarat, and Kholchi, spoken in Maharashtra (Waswa, p.c. 2013). Prior to Grierson (1968 [1907]), no record remains of the original language of the Bhil tribes. The current language is one that has been "superimposed" on the region through the influence of neighbouring languages such as Gujarati, Rajasthani, and Hindi (Naik 1969: 23). As a result, the language today displays an amalgam of features incorporated from its surrounding linguistic environment. Having assumed the non-Indo-Aryan ethnic origin of the Bhils, Grierson describes the Bhili dialects as being "mixed" in character, similar to other tribal languages that have gradually adopted the speech of neighbouring NIA languages (Grierson 1968 [1907]). While he acknowledges the lack of conclusive evidence as to their ancestry, Grierson does list a handful of Bhili words that appear to be derived from Munda and/or to have Dravidian origins. Regardless of such speculation, however, modern day Bhili is unmistakably Indo-Aryan in terms of grammar and lexicon.

This article is structured as follows: Section 2 provides a brief description of the diachronic development of alignment and case morphology in Indo-Aryan (IA); Section 2.2 reviews several theories of the origin of the split-ergative construction and marking in NIA. With this as a background I present examples of ergativity in Dehwali in Section 3, and show how the ergative marker appears to be unique in NIA as it changes its form according to the number and gender of the subject that it marks. In Section 4 I review theories of diachronic case development, and then examine possible scenarios that could explain the emergence of this morpheme; in particular the possibility that it may be an archaic form left over from Western Apabhramsa – a branch of late MIA – or alternatively that it

may be a more recent borrowing of an originally ablative or genitive marker. I argue that, while lacking conclusive evidence, the former is the more plausible based on theories discussed earlier.

2 Historical origin of ergativity

In early research on languages such as Basque, Greenlandic, and Polynesian, ergative alignment was often looked upon as a type of passive, since the A-argument in both types of constructions is linked to a non-nominative NP (Schuchardt 1896, cf. Butt 2006: 76). This notion was further supported by the observation that, cross-linguistically, ergative and instrumental case markers tend to resemble one another formally in languages such as Classical Tibetan, Dyirbal, and Avar (Lehmann 2002 [1998]: 98). Yet it has since been established quite decisively that ergative constructions are inherently *active* rather than passive, and therefore must be treated independently. Anderson (1976: 317–357) shows that in most morphologically ergative languages the grammatical subject aligns to A and S roles when subjected to syntactic tests. While few still hold on to the notion that ergative constructions are a type of passive, there remains a widely held theory that ergative systems tend to be the diachronic result of passives, and Indo-Aryan is commonly seen as the classic example of such a development (e.g. Comrie 1978: 371; Dik 1978: 157–170; Dixon 1994: 190; Garrett 1990: 263; Bubenik 1998).

In the following section I will review some of the main theories pertaining to the origin of ergativity in NIA.

2.1 Origin of the ergative construction: original passive?

Dixon (1994: 189) lays out the following syntactic changes that must take place to result in a shift from passive to ergative. First, the A-argument must become normal or obligatory with its oblique marking. The passive becomes normal with transitive verbs in that particular syntactic environment, and the original active construction fades from use. The original passive is then no longer treated as a derivation but as the basic, unmarked construction. Oblique marking on the A is reinterpreted as ergative and the originally derived verb form becomes the basic active form. Dixon sees the fact that in split-ergative languages ergativity occurs in perfective aspect or past tense as supporting this lineage, as he quotes Anderson (1977: 336): “passive constructions are semantically close to perfect

in that they generally present a state resulting from a complete action". This view is also supported by Comrie (1976: 85–86) and Hopper and Thompson (1980: 271).

In Sanskrit (i.e. OIA), one means – later to become the only means – of expressing the perfective aspect was by an apparently analytic passive construction in which the verb took a non-finite, participle form, characterised by the suffix *-ta*, while the agent was marked instrumental (Dixon 1994: 190). This construction began to be reinterpreted as active in the MIA period, as in the sequence from (1a) to (1b):

(1) *ahi-r* *indr-ena* *ha-ta-h*
a. serpent-NOM.SG Indra-INSTR.SG kill-PTCPL-NOM.SG [Sanskrit]
'the serpent has been killed by Indra.'
b. serpent-ABS.SG Indra-ERG.SG kill-PF-NOM.SG [Sanskrit]
'Indra has killed the serpent.'
(Garrett 1990: 263)

The passively interpreted construction in (1a) is reinterpreted as active perfect in (1b). This is accompanied by a reinterpretation of case forms as the logical subject is no longer an oblique instrumental agent, but an ergatively marked grammatical subject. The unmarked patient has gone from being nominative – the case typically associated with promoted objects in the passive – to absolutive, indicating it is the O-argument.

A new type of periphrastic passive construction began to appear in early MIA, with *jana* 'to go' functioning as a tensed auxiliary; it existed simultaneously with the participial passive of (1) (Bubenik 1998: 134). The latter would become the standard passive and the former the ergative in NIA, with the two constructions using different case markers for the agent. This is demonstrated in the equivalent examples from Modern Hindi in (2a) and (2b):

(2) a. *ʊs-ne* *kɪya*
3rdPRO-ERG do.PF [Hindi]
'He made (it).'
b. *ʊs-ke* *dvara* *kɪya* *gəya*
3rdPRO-GEN INSTR do.PF go.PST [Hindi]
'(it) was made by him.'
(Bubenik 1998: 134)

Bubenik presents the Hindi construction in (2a) as representing the outcome of the old analytic passive that used a past participle and an instrumental agent.

Example (2b) represents the periphrastic passive that arose to take the place of the former.

According to Bubenik (1998: 134), late MIA still had no active past perfective construction, as the participle construction "followed the rules applied to the non-finite passives of OIA" – i.e. verb agreement with the patient subject, an optionally overt agent, and in general the syntactic properties associated with subjects being mapped onto the 'goal' and not the 'agent' phrase. However, as there was no longer any active counterpart for this purpose, Bubenik suggests that there would have been pressure to reinterpret the oblique agent as a subject and the goal as an object. Therefore, subject properties (i.e. topic position, reflexive control, etc.) may have shifted to the agent from the passivised patient (Hock 1986: 21–24; Hook 1992, cf. Khokhlova 2001: 172). Furthermore, similar to other ergative languages of Australia (Dixon 1994: 218) and the Caucasus (Kibrik 1992), the ergative agent in late MIA and early NIA could be freely omitted from the clause (cf. Khokhlova 2001: 172).

In OIA both finite passive and non-finite participle clauses could have an overt instrumentally marked agent, while only the latter could have a genitive agent. The choice of agent marking in the participle construction was determined by the semantics of the verb: instrumental with active, and genitive with ingestive verbs (Bubenik 1998: 137). Moreover, the genitive was restricted to animate subjects, while the instrumental was not (Butt 2006: 79). This construction remained in MIA after the disappearance of the OIA passive as shown in examples (3) and (4) from the early MIA Aśokan Prakrits:

(3) *ɪyəm* *dʰəmməlɪpi* *devanəmpɪyena* *pɪyədesɪma*
this dhamma-inscription.NOM devananpiya.INSTR piyadasina.INSTR
lajma *lɪkʰapɪ**ta***
king.INSTR write.CAUS.PTCPL [Aśokan Prakrits]
'This dhamma-inscription was caused to be written by king Devananpiya Piyadasin.'

(4) *əʰi-pi-cu* *ekətɪya* *səmaja* *sadʰuməta* *devanəmpɪyəsa*
is-also-and certain meetings good-considered D.GEN
pɪyədəsine *lajme*
P.GEN king.GEN [Aśokan Prakrits]
'But there are also certain festival meetings (which are) considered meritorious by king Devananpiya Piyadasin.'
(Bubenik 1998: 138)

The use of this adjectival participle construction became increasingly frequent towards the late MIA stage, along with the overt use of the agent in this

construction (Gonda 1951: 107–108). Eventually this construction became the common means of expressing the perfective aspect (cf. Verbeke and De Cuypere 2009: 14). Late MIA also saw a general syncretisation of the inflectional case morphology where instrumental, dative, genitive, ablative, and locative cases merged together to become a generic *oblique* form (Bubenik 1996: 69). This can be seen in (5) where the direct object of the first clause, and the instrumental agent of the participle verb in the second main clause, are both second-person pronouns that take the same oblique form:

(5) *həũ:* *pəĩ:* *pucc^{h}ɪmi . . .* *dɪtt^{h}i* *pɪa* *pəĩ:* *sanmuha*
I you.OBL ask.1SG seen.F beloved.F you.OBL in front
jənti
passing [Apabhramsa]
'I ask you . . . have you seen [my] beloved, while passing in front [of you]?'
(Kalidasa) (cf. Bubenik 1998: 90)

Bubenik (1998: 142) argues that the emergence of a truly ergative pattern began only with the appearance of absolutive case as a result of nominative/accusative syncretisation into a single *direct* (i.e. *non-oblique*) form in the late MIA Apabhramsa. Example (6) shows that while in OIA the O is accusative and the S nominative, in the Apabhramsa pair in (7) both O and S are in direct, absolutive case:

(6) *nərəm* *əhənəm* vs. *nərəH* *cərəti*
man.ACC kill.PF.1SG man.NOM walk.3SG [OIA]
'I killed the man.' 'The man walks.'

(7) *mae* *nəru* *mari(y)a(u)* vs. *nəru* *cəlai*
I.INSTR man.ABS killed.MS man.ABS walk.3SG [Apabhramsa]
'I killed the man.' 'The man walks.'
(Bubenik 1998: 142)

The shift of subject properties from patient back to agent – as suggested by Comrie (1978: 371) – assumes that the original participle construction had all the characteristics of a passive. However, Peterson (1998: 189) argues that the properties of the A and O of the Pali (MIA) participle constructions are that of subject and object respectively. He observes, for examples, that in Pali (MIA) only in rare cases – one out of fifty-nine – is the agent of a finite passive construction explicitly known, while the agent of the participle construction is explicit in 68% of cases. Furthermore, when applying control operations commonly used to test for subjecthood properties, such as the possibility for an NP to be fronted to clause-

initial position, Peterson maintains that "there does not appear to be any reason to assume that this has changed in the development from OIA to MIA" (Peterson 1998: 189). He also points out that if the NIA ergative had in fact developed from a passive construction, one would expect the O to still control a number of these subjecthood tests, which it does not (see Peterson 1998 for detailed analysis).

Peterson's analysis suggests that the instrumental agent of a finite passive may have been an adjunct, while the agent of an adjectival participle construction may in fact have functioned as an argument of the non-finite verb, the latter to become the modern transitive perfective form (Butt 2006: 79).

2.2 OIA-NIA case morphology

The OIA case inventory of fusional suffixes had greatly deteriorated by the late MIA period. As mentioned in the previous section, this simplification resulted in a general distinction of *direct* / *oblique*, as can be seen in Table 1 of the Apabhramsa (late MIA) case system.

Nominative and accusative, i.e. direct case, had become phonologically identical, and were distinct in form from instrumental, dative, genitive, ablative, and locative, i.e. oblique case. This direct ≠ oblique distinction remains the only remnant of the old case system in NIA (see Hewson and Bubenik 2006).

While the transition from OIA to the MIA Prakrits is characterised by the syncretisation of the case-marking inventory of fusional suffixes, the transition from late MIA Apabhramsa to early NIA ca. 1000–1300 (Kachru 2008: 81–82) saw the introduction of postpositional clitics. These would take over from the now nearly

Table 1: Apabhramsa case inventory

	SG	PL
NOM	*-u*	*-a*
ACC	*-u*	*-a*
INSTR	*-ẽ*	*-ahĩ/ehĩ*
DAT	*-aho/-ahu*	*-ahã*
GEN	*-aho/ahu*	*-ahã*
ABL	*-ahe/ahu*	*-ahũ/ahã*
LOC	*-i,-e*	*-ahĩ*

(Hewson and Bubenik 2006: 112)

Table 2: Core argument markers in NIA

	dative (subjects and objects)	ergative (subjects only)
Hindi/Urdu	*ko*	*ne*
Panjabi	*nũ*	*ne*
Sindhi	*kʰe*	*OBLIQUE INFLECTION*
Gujarati	*ne/nẽ*	*-e (old -nẽ)*
Marathi	*la*	*ne/ni*
Bengali	*ke*	*NONE*
Oriya	*kʊ*	*NONE*
Assamese	*ko/no*	*-e*
Nepali	*lɛ*	*Le*

(Butt 2006: 81)

extinct case system (Hewson and Bubenik 2006: 112), and remain to this day the main carriers of case information.[1]

Table 2 shows the general consistency of form for core-argument markers in NIA.

One can observe a general pattern in form, as well as a certain amount of overlap, between the dative and ergative markers; most dative markers have the *-kV* form, while most ergative markers exhibit some variation of *-ne*. The latter also shows up as a dative marker in some Central Indo-Aryan (CIA) languages such as Gujarati and most Rajasthani dialects, where it most likely originated as a locative form that would later take on both dative and ablative functions (see Tessitori 1913: 558–559; Butt and Ahmed 2011: 563).

Different theories have emerged to explain the etymological origins of these clitics – often tracing them back to a lexical root. For example, the Hindi dative marker *-ko* has been attributed to the Sanskrit past participle *krta-* 'done' (Montaut 2004: 64) as well as to the Sanskrit noun *kakua* 'sides, armpit' (Beames 1966 [1872–1879]: 257–267). Beames (1966 [1872–1879]: 267) suggests that the adjective *lagi* 'attached to' may have developed into *lɛ* and *nɛ* and later *le* and *ne*. *lɛ* is the ergative case form in Nepali and *ne* the ergative in Hindi and several other NIA languages. Chatterji (1975 [1926]: 968) gives *karṇena* 'by the ear, side agency' as a possible source, though this essentially assumes the continuity of the instrumental *-ena*, which is doubtful as this form had disappeared by the late MIA period (see Table 1).

1 See Masica (1991: 230–248) for discussion of the three "case layers" in NIA.

One explanation for the relatively recent emergence of the ergative *-ne* in Hindi/Urdu is that it was adopted through contact with other local languages. This hypothesis was first suggested by Beames (1966 [1872–1879]: 270) who proposed that *-ne* in Urdu may have developed from the nasalised *-nẽ*, which was originally a dative marker in the vernacular spoken by Hindu administrators in the court of the seventeenth-century Moghul Emperor Shah Jahan. Hoernle (1880: 224–225) further suggested the connection between this marker and the *-ne* or *-nɛ* dative/accusative marker in the neighbouring Rajasthani dialects. In fact, most modern Rajasthani, Gujarati, and northern Bhili dialects still use *-ne* as a dative/accusative marker (for further discussion see Butt 2001: 116, 2006: 83; Butt and Ahmed 2011; and Montaut 2003, 2006, 2009).

Tessitori (1913: 559) traces the Rajasthani *-n-* to the older locative form *kanhai* 'near' – derived from the Sanskrit noun 'ear' *karne* – which in Old Western Rajasthani would later take on simultaneously ablative and dative functions. He supports this derivation by pointing to two phonological changes common to the Apabhramsa period: the loss of the initial syllable in postpositions beginning with *-k-*; and the loss of the murmured consonant *nh* > *n*. *kanhai* may have thereby developed into *kanai* and further into *nai*, both of which he claims are used in contrastive distribution in Modern (i.e. early twentieth century) Marwari and 'Jaipuri'[2] (Tessitori 1913: 558). In short, Tessitori concludes that the locative postposition developed into a multifunctional dative/accusative and ablative marker (*ka*)*n*(*h*)*ai*, the latter's function being the more likely channel for the development of the agentive *-ne* marking in Urdu/Hindi (Tessitori 1913: 559). This derivation is illustrated in Figure 1.

This figure indicates that the originally locative postposition – derived from the noun *karne* 'ear' – later extended its function in Old Rajasthani to ablative NPs (which would later be further extended to agentive use) and dative (also extended to certain types of accusatives). It should be noted that this multifunctional use of *-ne* is still present in many Rajasthani dialects. In Wagdi, however,

Sanskrit noun 'ear' > locative 'near'
- > ablative 'from' > agentive
- > dative (includes accusative)

Fig. 1: Lexical Derivation of *-ne* (cf. Butt and Ahmed 2011: 563).

2 Jaipuri presumably refers to Dhundhari, the Rajasthani dialect spoken around the city of Jaipur.

the dative/accusative *-ne* is used to mark the object of many such verbs despite having a separate postposition specific to ablative function. Considering that South Asian languages maintain a close connection between ablative and dative case, and verbs of 'asking', 'speaking' (Khan 2009: 81, cf. Butt and Ahmed 2011: 563), Butt and Ahmed (2011: 565) suggest a path from ablative to agentive meaning "via an agent as source metaphor" to be a plausible explanation. Tessitori's explanation of a reanalysis of an ablative form could potentially explain the current situation in Gujarati, Rajasthani, and certain western Hindi dialects, where one case marker – e.g. *-ne*, or some derivative thereof – functions as an ergative as well as dative/accusative and comitative marker.

Hindi/Urdu uses *-ne* as an ergative marker, yet has the separate accusative/dative marker *-ko*. The latter is a much older development, the earliest forms of which appeared in the thirteenth century. This can be seen in the writings of Baba Farid of Multan, as shown in (8)–(10) where *-ko* alternates with the archaic form *kũ* / *ko* (cf. Butt and Ahmed 2011: 564–565):

(8) *jɪmdu* *kũ* *səmjʰai*
life DAT/ACC teaches [Old Urdu/Panjabi]
'(it) teaches to life'
(Verse 1, from Khan 2001: 142)

(9) *farid* *mɛ* *janja* *dʊkʰ* *mʊjʰ* *ko*
Farid I know grief/pain I.OBL DAT/ACC [Old Urdu/Panjabi]
'Farid, I know I have grief . . . (lit. grief is to/at me)'
(Verse 81, from Khan 2001: 226)

(10) *ḍʰʊnḍen* *dɪye* *sʊhag* *kũ*
seek give husband DAT/ACC [Old Urdu/Panjabi]
'(you) are seeking a husband . . .'
(Verse 114, from Khan 2001: 263)

The functions of *-kũ* demonstrated in examples (8)–(10) parallel those of modern Hindi/Urdu *-ko*, i.e. as dative in (8), dative experiencer in (9), and accusative in (10) (Butt and Ahmed 2011). Following the assumption that both *-ne* and *-ko* have their origins as postpositions marking space – 'near' and 'from' in the case of the former and the latter as a marker of goals and recipients – Butt and Ahmed support the position that new case markers may be adopted by a language to reinforce semantic contrasts. Hind/Urdu originally innovated *-ko* to mark 'goal', and "unattained or abstract endpoints" (Butt and Ahmed 2011: 566). Neighbouring languages, such as Rajasthani, Gujarati, and Haryani all use some form of *-ne* for ergative, dative/accusative, as well as certain ablative functions. It is logical

then that *-ne* might have been adopted to mark volitional subjects due to its agentive/ablative properties, and since its 'objective' properties would have been redundant as this role was already filled by *-ko*.

Butt and Ahmed (2011: 567) cite the examples in (11) and (12) to demonstrate the alternating use of *-ne* and *-ko* as reinforcers of semantic contrasts:

(11) *nadya-ne* *zu* *ja-na* *hɛ*
Nadya.FS-ERG zoo.MS.LOC go-INF.MS AUX.PRS.3.SG [Urdu]
'Nadya wants to go to the zoo.'

(12) *nadya-ko* *zu* *ja-na* *hɛ*
Nadya.FS-DAT zoo.MS.LOC go-INF.MS AUX.PRS.3.SG [Urdu]
'Nadya has/wants to go to the zoo.'

Butt and Ahmed explain that in modal infinitival constructions such as those in (11) and (12), an event is "placed in relationship with the subject ('Nadya') via the copula *hɛ*", resulting in the literal interpretation of (11) and (12) that " 'zoo going' is 'to' or 'at' Nadya". The subject of an infinitival clause that takes ergative case makes clear that the relationship with the 'something' is desired (e.g. *got a present* vs. *got a cold*) (Butt and Ahmed 2011: 569).

It should be noted however that examples (11) and (12), where *-ne* is used on subjects as a means of indicating greater volition than the alternative *-ko,* are based on the variety of Urdu spoken in Delhi and Lahore – areas where Panjabi influence is strong (Butt and King 2004: 6). While this alternation may indicate the continuum of agentive versus goal/recipient properties of the two respective case markers in Hindi/Urdu, it may also be due to the influence of western Hindi dialects such as Bangru, spoken in rural areas of Haryana state adjacent to Delhi (Singh 1970). In Bangru, the same *-nɛ̃* form is used as a dative marker as well as a marker for ergative subject as in (13) and (14):

(13) *ram-nɛ* *kaṭya* *sɛ*
Ram-ERG cut.PF AUX.PRS [Bangru]
'Ram has cut.'

(14) *ram-nɛ* *kaṭna* *sɛ*
Ram-DAT cut.INF AUX.PRS [Bangru]
'Ram has to cut.'
(Singh 1970: 80)

One might suspect that the occurrence of *-ne* in the position normally occupied by *-ko* in Urdu examples such as (12) may simply be the result of influence from

local languages such as Bangru. The *-ne* in (11) may, therefore, be simply a dative marker that was adopted by this variety of Urdu and happens to have a form that is homophonous with the ergative marker. Masica notes as well that in Panjabi, the experiencer argument in obligation constructions equivalent to (13) and (14) will take the ergative rather than dative case, and that this tendency has been partly adopted in the "Urdu of Pakistan" and "Hindi of Delhi". Masica cites the example *main-ne jaana hai* ('I must go'). The semantic effect of this apparently common alternative is to weaken the sense of compulsion and add "scope for the initiative (i.e. agentivity) of the Experiencer" (1991: 332).

2.3 Summary

While evidence suggests that an ergative construction did in fact exist in MIA based on the resultative *-ta* participle construction, separate ergative subject markers seem to have appeared only later, in early NIA (see Bubenik 1998; Peterson 1998). As late as the medieval period, Hindi/Urdu used the general oblique nominal form to mark the subject of a perfect transitive clause (Butt 2006: 77–78) – as do modern Rajasthani dialects, such as Marwari, where overt ergative marking has all but entirely disappeared (Magier 1983: 310; Bubenik 1998). However, by the seventeenth century, Urdu/Hindi had introduced the *-ne* clitic to reinforce the oblique marker on ergative subjects. Beames (1966 [1872–1879]) suggests that this *-ne* clitic might have been introduced into the Urdu language of the Moghul royal court as a result of contact with a provincial dialect of Hindi using *-nɛ̃* as the dative marker. On the basis of Beames's theory, Butt and King (2004: 31) consider the plausible scenario that the dative *-nɛ̃ː*, instead of replacing the already existent dative marker *-ko*, became a non-nominative subject marker that signalled greater control (i.e. agency). Butt (2006: 80–86) argues that this change in function is explainable based on the semantic properties commonly associated with both dative and ergative cases.

Considering that the semantic properties of case markers may determine their changing grammatical function, the Dehwali ergative marker may provide a useful parallel story in testing this theory. This raises the question of whether the Dehwali ergative construction, similar to Hindi, was reinforced through the introduction of a new case marker; and if so, through what channel did it emerge? In the following sections I present examples of ergative marking in Dehwali, and then consider the several possibilities as to its etymology: (1) that it may have originated internal to the language as a former oblique suffix; or (2) that it was adopted into Dehwali from a neighbouring variety, and similar to Urdu/Hindi, reanalysed in its present role.

3 Ergative marking in Dehwali

As in most NIA languages, morphological ergativity in Dehwali is limited to perfective, transitive clauses. The subject is marked by a form rooted in the consonant *-h-* and the verb agrees in gender and number with the direct object:[3]

(15) *maheh kam keteh*
men.MP work do.IMPF [Dehwali]
'The men work.'

(16) *maha-hã kam keyo*
men.MP-ERG work.MS do.PF.MS [Dehwali]
'The men worked.'

(17) *maha-h poyranh-ne hue-y-a*
man.MS-ERG boys-ACC see-PF-MP [Dehwali]
'The man saw the boys.'

(18) *yaki-h poyra-l kʰəvav-y-o*
Mother.FS-ERG son-ACC feed-PF-MS [Dehwali]
'Mother fed (her) son.'

(19) *nɔkorũ-hũ hapta-le ṭok-ya*
servant.N-ERG snake-ACC hit-PF.F [Dehwali]
'The servant killed the snake.'

Examples (15) and (16) show the contrast in marking between the subjects of a transitive imperfective and transitive perfective clause. In examples (17)–(19), the form of the ergative marker itself changes depending on the number and gender with the subject NP. Compare (17)–(19), where the form of the ergative marker differentiates between neuter and masculine/feminine NPs that it modifies, with the plural counterparts in (20)–(22), where the plural form 'agrees' with the three corresponding genders:

3 It should be noted that in Dehwali, similar to Gujarati and Rajasthani but unlike most other NIA languages, including Hindi, accusative marking on the direct object does not block verb agreement in the ergative construction. There also appear to be two different accusative suffixes, one with the root consonant *-n-* and the other with *-l-*. I assume here that these two forms function interchangeably, and that while the former is more common in Bhili dialects, the latter is due to Marathi influence (Grierson 1968 [1907]: 3/158).

(20) *maha-hã* *poyranh-ne* *hue-y-a*
men.MP-ERG boys-ACC see-PF-MP [Dehwali]
'The men saw the boys.'

(21) *yaki-hĩ* *poyra-l* *kʰəvav-y-o*
mothers.FP-ERG son-ACC feed-PF-MS [Dehwali]
'Mothers fed the boy.'

(22) *nɔkorũ-hũ* *hapta-le* *ʈok-ya*
servants.N-ERG snake-ACC hit-PF.F [Dehwali]
'The servants killed the snake.'

Notice that, in the plural, the suffix attached to 'man' in (20) changes to *-hã:* and the suffix attached to 'mother' in (18) to *-hĩ* (21), while 'servant' in (19) and (22) takes the same invariant neuter form *-hũ* for both singular and plural.

One indication to suggest that the properties of gender are controlling this inflection is the fact that in Dehwali, as in most Bhili dialects and in Gujarati, the vowel endings *-a-*, *-i-*, and *-u-* are common to masculine, feminine, and neuter genders respectively.[4] To the best of the author's knowledge, no other NIA language has an ergative marker that inflects according to properties of the NP to which it attaches. However, this apparent inflection does not always perfectly correspond to the gender of the subject, as in (23)–(27):

(23) *khetara-h* / *khetara-hã* *hãpa-l* *ɖogla-ki*
farmer.MS-ERG / farmer.MP-ERG snake-ACC stone-INSTR
ʈʰok-ya
kill-PF.F [Dehwali]
'The farmer/farmers killed the snake with a stone.'

(24) *bandu-h* / *bandu-hũ* *kʰetara-l* *ma-yo*
dacoit.MS-ERG[5] / dacoits.MP-ERG farmer-ACC killed-PF.MS [Dehwali]
'The dacoit/dacoits killed the farmer.'

4 Waswa (p.c., 2010) confirms that there are dialectical differences in the Dehwali gender systems. The examples used here are of the Mevasi dialect, which is closer to the Gujarati speaking region. The Kholchi dialect, which is closer in geographical proximity to Marathi, uses one form, *-hũ*, for masculine and neuter and *-hĩ* for feminine.

5 Notice that, unlike in previous examples (19) and (22) where the neuter form of the ergative marker is *-hũ* in both singular and plural, in (24) there does seem to be a number distinction. This inconsistency may be due to dialect variation, speaker idiolect, or other explanations for which one would require data which is not now available.

(25) *jitu-hũ* *kʰub* *homjavyhã*
Jitu.MS-ERG much explain.PF.MP [Dehwali]
'Jitu explained much.'

(26) *anilu-hũ* *naukoru-l* *bhoralyo*
Anil.MS-ERG servant-ACC send.PF.MS [Dehwali]
'Anil sent the servant.'

(27) *pardi-h* / *pardi-hĩ* *bɪlkʰhã* *solyã*
hunter.MS-ERG / hunter.MP-ERG arrows shoot.PF.MP [Dehwali]
'The hunter/hunters shot the arrow.'

As was discussed in Section 2, the new case suffixes in NIA are clitics that attached to the oblique stem of the noun, as opposed to the inflectional suffixes of MIA (Table 1). Most NIA languages have a distinct case clitic to mark the ergative subject with exceptions such as Sindhi, in which it is a general oblique inflection (Table 2). In Dehwali, however, this marker appears to be a fusional suffix rather than an independent clitic. In each sentence in (28)–(30), the subject NP is a coordinate phrase in which both coordinated nouns take an ergative marker that is inflected accordingly:

(28) *poyra-hã* *an* *poliswalan-hã* *ma-n* *dekʰ-lo*
boys.MP-ERG and police.MP-ERG I-ACC see-PF.MS [Dehwali]
'The boys and the police saw me.'

(29) *yahki-hĩ* *an* *nɔkoru-hũ* *poyra-l* *kʰavav-yõ*
mothers.FP-ERG and servants.MP-ERG boy-ACC feed-PF.MP [Dehwali]
'The mothers and servants feed the boys.'

(30) *ʃila-hã* *an* *Ramun-hũ* *dʰogda* *fek-ya*
Sheela.F-ERG and Ram.N-ERG stones throw-PF.MP [Dehwali]
'Sheela and Rama threw stones.'

This is contrasted in (31) with the distribution of the Hindi ergative clitic *-ne*, which, as an independent clitic, attaches only to the final NP in a coordinate phrase:

(31) *ləḍke* *aur* *poliswalõ-ne* *mʊjʰ-ko* *dekʰ-a*
boy.OBL and police.OBL.PL-ERG I.OBL-ACC see-PF.MS [Hindi]
'The boy and the police officers saw me.'

4 Semantic case and historical change

Assuming that the Dehwali ergative construction predates the current ergative subject marker, as in most NIA, the later may have followed a path comparable to that of the Urdu/Hindi *-ne*, which appeared in the seventeenth century to reinforce an already existing ergative construction. Based on semantic properties, we must consider the likelihood of different types of markers being reanalysed in an ergative function.

Illustrated in Table 3, Butt (2006: 84) provides a case hierarchy based on the semantic properties of space and agency. This implies that the higher the case is on the hierarchy, the more its control/volition, thereby making it more suitable as an agent marker:

Table 3: Control/Volition Hierarchy

MORE CONTROL	PLACE	PATH
Ergative	X	
Genitive	X	
Instrumental	X	X
Dative	X	
Accusative		X
LESS CONTROL		

(Butt 2006: 84)

Table 3 offers a potential formula for predicting diachronic language variation. Butt (2006) argues that case systems of languages may incorporate new markings over time, and may slot these markings into use according to the spatial dimensions most closely identified with them (Butt 2006: 83–85).

Although not specified in Table 3, ablative case has been known to show agentive properties that allow it to compete with the ergative in NIA. However, the table puts genitive case as the next most suitable agentive case to ergative. According to Lehmann's (2002: 99) grammaticalisation channels, ablative bears a close relation to – and indeed is frequently the origin of – genitive case, as in the case of the romance attributor *de*, which evolved from the Latin *dɛ* '(down) from'.

Ahmed (2007) demonstrates that in Urdu (i.e. Urdu/Hindi), in a construction with a "base (transitive) verb" (i.e. a transitive verb that has not been made causative by stem alternation), the agent is marked ergative, as in (32):

(32) *məzdurõ-ne* *gʰər* *bən-a-y-a*
labourers-ERG house.MS make-TRS-PF-MS [Urdu]
'The labourers built the house.'
(Ahmed 2007: 13)

However, when the causative morphology is added to the verb stem it requires a second agent, resulting in "two sources of action" (Ahmed 2007: 13). In (33) the third-person pronoun has been added as the *causer*, which accomplishes the action by means of the *causee*, i.e. 'the labourers':

(33) *ʊs-ne* *məzdurõ-se* *gʰər* *bən-wa-y-a*
3rdPRO-ERG labourers-ABL house.MS make-CAUS-PF-MS [Urdu]
'He caused the labourers to build the house.'
(Ahmed 2007: 13)

In (33) the initial agent from the transitive clause is now demoted as the second agent, and marked ablative. Regarding the causer and causee, Ahmed (2007: 13) observes that "[b]oth of these arguments have sentience and volition", yet as "the causer has initiation and control" and is therefore more volitional, it takes "the more agentive ergative marker, while the intermediate agent is marked by the other available source of action maker, i.e. ablative".

Ahmed's analysis, however, assumes that the *-se* marker in (33) is marking ablative case, while – as he himself makes clear earlier in the same paper – it is a marker that is used in several different functions, notably instrumental. NIA does, in fact, tend to syncretise instrumental/sociative/ablative, as well as ergative case markers (Masica 1991: 246). Moreover, the distinction between features such as instrument and source is often blurred, which raises the question of whether instrumental and ablative should be collapsed into a "single case feature" as suggested by Mohanan (1994: 67).

Some cross-linguistic examples attest to the potential of both ablative and instrumental functioning as agent markers, as in the Japanese sentence in (34) and (35):

(34) *John-kara* *Mary-ni* *kekka-o* *osie-ta*.
John-from Mary-DAT result-ACC teach-PST [Japanese]
'John told the results to Mary.'

(35) *kodomo-tati-de* *ason-da*.
child-PL-with play-PST [Japanese]
'The children played.'
(Kishimoto 2010: 649)

According to Kishimoto (2010: 694), the subject marker *-kara*, in (34), is "possible, because John is thematically construed as a source (as well as an agent)", while in (35) 'children' may be considered an instrumental subject because *-de* "most typically" functions as a marker of instrument (Kishimoto 2010: 649).

Richa (2008: 162–165), however, argues for a distinction between *-se* marked causees and *-se* marked instrumentals in Hindi/Urdu, the latter being possible with any verb form while the former requires a base transitive verb with causative morphology, as shown in (36)–(39):

(36) *ram-ne* (*caku-se*) *mina-ko* *mar-a*
Ram-ERG knife-INSTR Mina-ACC kill-PF.MS [Hindi]
'Ram killed Mina (with a knife).'

(37) **ram-ne* (*mohan-se*) *mina-ko* *mar-a*
Ram-ERG Mohan-INSTR Mina-ACC kill-PF.MS [Hindi]
'Ram killed Mina (through Mohan).'

(38) *ram-ne* (*mohan-se*) *mina-ko* *mər-wa-y-a*
Ram-ERG (Mohan-INSTR) Mina-ACC kill-CAUS-PF-MS [Hindi]
'Ram made Mohan kill Mina.'

(39) *ram-ne* (*mohan-se*) (*caku-se*) *mina-ko* *mər-wa-y-a*
Ram-ERG Mohan-INSTR knife-INSTR Mina-ACC kill-CAUS-PF-MS [Hindi]
'Ram made Mohan kill Mina with a knife.'
(Richa 2008: 163)

Example (36) is a regular transitive clause with a subject, object, and inanimate *-se* NP. Example (37) is the same clause, except that now it contains an animate *-se* marked NP, and is as a result ungrammatical. In (38) and (39) the verb has been causativised, with the result that both with the animate causee and instrumental adjunct are optional.

Richa demonstrates the difference in distribution of the *-se* marked instrumental which is unrestricted with verb forms, and the *-se* marked causee which requires causative morphology on the verb. It therefore cannot be reduced to the factor of animacy, but of argument structure as shown in (40)–(44):

(40) *tʊm-ne* *kəmpyuṭər* *se* *əpni* *ãkʰẽ* *pʰʊḍwa* *li*
you-ERG computer INSTR REFL eyes break.CAUS take.PF [Hindi]
'You spoiled your eyes through the computer.'

(41) *tʊm-ne ram-se əpni ãkʰẽ pʰʊɖwa li*
you-ERG Ram-INSTR REFL eyes break.CAUS take.PF [Hindi]
'You spoiled your eyes through Ram.'

(42) **tʊm-ne kəmpyuṭar-se əpni ãkʰẽ pʰoɖ li*
you-ERG computer-INSTR REFL eyes break.TRS take.PF [Hindi]
'You spoiled your eyes through the computer.'

(43) **tʊm-ne ram-se əpni ãkʰẽ pʰoɖ li*
you-ERG Ram-INSTR REFL eyes break.TRS take.PF [Hindi]
'You spoiled your eyes through Ram.'
(Richa 2008: 163–164)

It appears that the *-se* marked causee and *-se* marked instrumental have a different interpretive as well as syntactic status. This prediction holds up when tested with reflexive binding:

(44) *zubi-ne ram-se mɪlkər əpni kɪtab li*
Zoobi-ERG ram-INSTR meet.CONJ.PTCP REFL book take.PF [Hindi]
'Zoobi took her/*his book after she met Ram.'

(45) *ram$_{i}$-ne moni$_{j}$-se əpni$_{i/j}$ man ko pɪṭ-waya*
Ram-ERG Moni-INSTR REFL mother ACC beat-CAUS.PF [Hindi]
'Ram made Moni hit his/her mother.'
(Richa 2008: 164)

In (44) it is the subject of the transitive verb and not the *-se* marked NP (which Richa identifies as instrumental) that can bind the reflexive. However, in (45), with a causitivised transitive verb, the *-se* marked causee can also bind the reflexive, indicating that the causee is in fact part of the argument structure of the verb, while the instrumentally marked NP functions as an adjunct.

Examples (32)–(45) demonstrate that while the instrumental/ablative form, such as Hindi *-se* (and other NIA equivalents), is commonly associated with oblique instruments, it also marks demoted agents as well as second agent causees that carry subjecthood properties. Ablative and genitive also share similar properties, as the former frequently marks the source, or origin of an event (Lehmann 2002: 99). With this background, the following section considers possible explanations for the Dehwali form.

Table 4: Apabhramsa case inventory

	SG	PL
NOM	*-u*	*-a*
ACC	*-u*	*-a*
INSTR	*-ẽ*	*-ahĩ/ehĩ*
DAT	*-aho/-ahu*	*-ahã*
GEN	*-aho/ahu*	*-ahã*
ABL	*-ahe/ahu*	*-ahũ/ahã*
LOC	*-i/-e*	*-ahĩ*

(Hewson and Bubenik 2006: 112)

4.1 Apabhramsa descent

As mentioned in the introduction, the first known descriptive documentation of Dehwali was Grierson (1968 [1907]). Therefore, determining its historical development remains a matter of speculation. What can be assumed with confidence is that Dehwali – along with its close relatives Gujarati and Rajasthani, as well as other Bhili dialects – is descended from Western Apabhramsa, a vernacular that emerged during that late Middle Indo-Aryan period around 300 A.D. Later, between 500–1200 A.D., it served as a literary medium for the Jain poets of the region roughly corresponding to modern day Rajasthan and Gujarat states. Apabhramsa marks one of the last major stages of MIA prior to the appearance of early NIA (Tagare 1948: 1–4; Bubenik 1996: 16–17).

Recall from Table 1 (repeated as Table 4), that the late MIA period is characterised by syncretisation of the case inflectional system – already greatly simplified from OIA – into the general dichotomy of *direct* (nominative, accusative) vs. *oblique* (instrumental, dative, genitive, ablative, locative) (Bubenik 1996: 69). Of the latter, we find forms that resemble those of the modern Dehwali ergative marker, as shown in Table 4.

Based on the paradigm in Table 4, one could easily suspect a connection between the *-h-* rooted Dehwali ergative marker and that of the oblique cases in Apabhramsa, in which the basic root *-h-* with its final nasalized vowel in the plural would be preserved. The Dehwali pattern of apparent gender agreement could be explained as vowel copying.

Several facts seem to support this hypothesis. First, the Apabhramsa case markers, as shown in Table 4, were fusional suffixes while most case information in NIA is carried by postpositional clitics. Based on available data, the *-h*(*VN*)

Dehwali ergative marker appears to function like an fusional nominal suffix (e.g. examples 28–30) rather than as an independent clitic as with the Hindi *-ne* in example (31) (and like most NIA with the exception of Sindhi (see Table 2). This implies that while the morpheme may have undergone a shift in grammatical function, its status – i.e. that of a dependent suffix – would have remained unchanged.[6]

The Kholchi dialect of Dehwali has retained a similar suffix for other oblique cases. In (46) the *-ha* suffix appears to form the oblique – layer I (see Masica 1991) – base against which postpositional clitics are added:

(46) *pəhlya gəwa-ha-m veca jail*
nearby village-OBL.PL-LOC send go.PF [Kholchi Dehwali]
'He would be sent to nearby villages.'

(47) *mã moro pəwuhu maldar loka-hi rehlo*
I.SG.GEN big brother rich people-LOC stay.PF [Kholchi Dehwali]
'My older brother stayed with rich people.'

(48) *rəṭʰwa-hã bʰaʃya an kəla*
Rathwa-GEN language and art [Kholchi Dehwali]
'Language and art of Rathwa.'

In (46) the plural noun is marked by a locative postposition which is added to the oblique plural suffix *-ha*.[7] In (47) the form *-hi* is a locative position. Based on Table 4, this form seems reminiscent of the Apabhramsa locative suffix (singular *-i/-e*, and plural *-ahĩ*). Examples (48) shows the *-hã* suffix functioning as a genitive marker, again similar to the genitive plural *-ahã* from Apabhramsa.

While in other NIA languages the original oblique inflectional suffixes have been reduced to a basic direct/oblique distinction, and case information is mostly carried by cliticised postpositions that were introduced at a later stage, it appears, based on examples (46)–(48), that Kholchi Dehwali, while using layer II clitics as in Table 4, has retained a more elaborate use of oblique suffixes. Similar examples of apparently archaic layer I marking in Rangari Khandeśi will be presented in the following section.

6 One argument Butt (2006: 77) makes against the theory that *-ne* is derived from the OIA instrumental suffix *-ina* is the unlikelihood of an affix becoming an independent clitic.

7 Other NIA languages, such as Hindi, have a specific layer I ending for plural nouns taking a postposition. In Hindi, for examples, this form is *-õ*.

4.2 Regional ablative

A possible alternative explanation for the Dehwali ergative *-h*(*VN*) form is that it was borrowed more recently through contact. In Grierson's (1968 [1907]: 158–165) sketch of Dehwali, ergative subjects are marked by the oblique nominal form with no postposed clitic, similar to old Hindi. Considering that Grierson's data corpus is limited to a few transliterated passages and does not take into account dialect variation, it cannot be asserted whether or not the ergative *-h*(*VN*) existed prior that time. Nevertheless it is possible, given the increasing exposure of tribal languages to outside linguistic influences, that such changes would have accelerated as the language became progressively less isolated.

Based on Grierson's data, similar forms appear in other Bhili and Khandeśi dialects. The one that most closely resembles the Dehwali ergative markers is in the Rangari variety of Khandeśi, as spoken in Akola District of present-day Maharashtra state (Grierson 1968 [1907]: 229–233).

In Rangari Khandeśi, *-hã* or *-hũ* is added as a suffix to certain plural nouns and pronouns:

(49) *mɔləkəri-hũ-na*
labourers-hũ-DAT [Khandeśi; Rangari dialect]
'to the labourers'

(50) *gəḍi-hũ-na-sənga*
friends-hũ-GEN-with [Khandeśi; Rangari dialect]
'with friends'

(51) *cakərɔ-hã-na*
servants-hũ-DAT [Khandeśi; Rangari dialect]
'to the servants'

(52) *te-hũ-na*
3rdPRO-hũ-DAT [Khandeśi; Rangari dialect]
'to them'
(Grierson 1968 [1907]: 229–233)

In examples (49)–(52), *-h(V)N* appears to mark a kind of oblique form on plural nominals – and third-person pronouns as in (52) – that occur with the postposition *-na*. It seems, however, that this form does not occur with other postpositions, as shown in (53) and (54):

(53) *cakər-ma-tin*
servants-in-from [Khandeśi; Rangari dialect]
'from among the servants'

(53) *kɪjəbən-səng*
'with harlots' [Khandeśi; Rangari dialect]
(Grierson 1968 [1907]: 229–233)

In (53) the plural noun *cakər* is marked with a locative postposition, and in contrast with (51) it appears without the oblique *-h(V)N* suffix or the stem vowel ending *-o-*. In (54) the nominal *kɪjəbən* is marked with the sociative postposition and takes no *-h(V)N* suffix.

Due to the lack of essential synchronic as well as diachronic evidence, no argument can be made at this point for a connection between this Rangari Khandeśi plural oblique form and the Dehwali ergative marker. It is possible though that the former, also a descendant of Western Apabhramsa, has also retained the old *-h(V)N* form that was particular to plural oblique cases, and continues to appear on oblique nominals now with the re-enforcement of post-positioned clitics. This is the same with Hindi (and many other NIA languages) in which the oblique form has become a simple *-e* in the singular and *-õ* in the plural. Hence, Rangari Khandeśi may have retained an archaic oblique form, and unlike Dehwali, did not reanalyse this form to mark ergative subjects.

The *-h-* rooted marker is potentially misleading in other Bhil dialects, such as those spoken in the former kingdom of Mahikantha (Thompson 1895, cf. Grierson 1968 [1907]: 11–28). Mahikantha Bhili according to Grierson uses a glottal fricative *-ẖ-* as the ablative marker. This marker inflects according to the following NP, as in (54)–(56):

(54) *gɛr-ẖũ*
house-ABL.NS [Mahikantha Bhili]
'from the house'

(55) *gɛr-ẖɔ* *ẖəro*
house-ABL.MS liquor.MS [Mahikantha Bhili]
'liquor from the shop'

(56) *gɛr-ẖa* *mabap*
house-ABL.MP parents [Mahikantha Bhili]
'parents from the house'
(Grierson 1968 [1907]: 15–19)

The -*h*- is a local variation of -*s*- in borrowed words (Grierson 1968 [1907]: 2), indicating that the -*hV(N)* in Mahikantha Bhili may correspond to the Gujarati ablative/sociative marker -*s(y)ũ* (Turner 1969–1985: 13310; Wright, p.c. 2010). There is some indication in Grierson that the Gujarati [s] becomes an ordinary [h] in Dehwali (Grierson 1968 [1907]: 2/158), and if so it must be considered that the Dehwali ergative marker may have had its origin in the Gujarati ablative/sociative.

4.3 Summary

This section reviewed several theories of case change and grammaticalisation. It was shown that it is not uncommon for oblique case forms to carry agentive properties. In NIA oblique forms of instrumental and ablative tend to share the same multifunctional form (e.g. Hindi -*se*), and this form is generally used in causative constructions for the second agent (causee). I presented the likely scenario that the Dehwali ergative morphology may have originated as an archaic oblique form. This is supported by the fact that the Dehwali ergative marker shares the -*h*- root with the oblique markers of late Apabhramsa, that the vowel nucleus in both changes according to the noun it marks, and that the plural form ends in a nasalized vowel. Furthermore, both appear to be inflectional (layer I) suffixes, as opposed to postpositioned clitics, the latter being the main carriers of case information in NIA.

Similar case forms appear in other regional varieties, such as Rangari Khandeśi, which uses a -*h(V)N* form to mark oblique plurals in certain cases. This form most likely shares the same origin as the Dehwali ergative, however, its use has not been extended to marking perfective A-arguments. Another -*h(VN)* case form appears as an ablative marker in Mahikantha Bhili of modern-day Gujarat.

5 Conclusion

This paper reviews the near disappearance of the Old Indo-Aryan inflectional case system and its re-enforcement by a new inventory of case clitics. It was shown that an ergative construction had developed out of a non-finite participle and that ergative subjects in most early NIA languages continued to be marked by an oblique form of the noun. In many NIA languages, such as Urdu/Hindi, an additional postposition was later added to the oblique suffix, thereby reinforcing the ergative construction. While ergative marking in most NIA languages is formally rather consistent (see Table 2), the Dehwali language has an ergative

marker that is a layer I (see Masica 1991: 231) fusional suffix and appears to inflect to agree in number and gender with the subject it marks. In this paper I have suggested two possible scenarios to explain the origin of this form, concluding that it is most likely a relic of the Apabhramsa oblique suffix, rather than a recent borrowing. In fact, it seems that a number of Bhili and Khandesi varieties have retained an oblique form rooted in a glottal fricative consonant and nasalised vowel, yet Dehwali appears to be the only variety in which this form can appear on perfective A-arguments (i.e. ergative case). More dominant regional languages, such as Gujarati and Marathi, which also descend from Western Apabhramsa, have all lost this fricative oblique. Based on the form, one could easily draw a parallel to the MIA genitive/ablative/dative marker, which became a generic oblique marker in the late MIA Apabhramsa. I have shown in section 4 that genitive and ablative in particular are frequently associated with the role of agent as the source of action, and therefore suitable to fill the function of ergative marking.

Bhili dialects such as Dehwali, as well as certain Khandeśi dialects, appear to carry remnants of an older inflectional system that has since died out in more standardised varieties of NIA, perhaps due to their relative geographical and social isolation. Similarly the so-called "Dardic" languages of the Hindu Kush, Swat and Indus Kohistan, Karakoram, and Western Himalayas, comprise a group of NIA that has been relatively cut off from the languages of the plains. As a result, Dardic languages such as Shina have avoided many of the phono-morphological and syntactic changes that characterise the Middle Indo-Aryan (MIA) period, and thereby retain many archaic features that can be attributed to Old Indo-Aryan (OIA) (Bashir 2003: 822). By researching such isolated varieties one may observe alternative courses of development, independent of the general trend that was followed since the MIA Prakrits.

List of abbreviations

A	Subject of transitive verb
ABL	Ablative
ABS	Absolutive
ACC	Accusative
AUX	Auxiliary
CAUS	Causative
CIA	Central Indo-Aryan
CONJ	Conjunctive
DAT	Dative
ERG	Ergative
FS	Feminine Singular
GEN	Genitive
IMPF	Imperfective
INF	Infinitive
INSTR	Instrumental
LOC	Locative
MIA	Middle Indo-Aryan
MS	Masculine Singular

MP	Masculine Plural	PRO	Pronoun
N	Neuter	PRS	Present
NIA	New Indo-Aryan	PST	Past
NOM	Nominative	PTcPL	Participle
O	Object of transitive verb	REFL	Reflexive
OBL	Oblique	S	Subject of intransitive verb
OIA	Old Indo-Aryan	SG	Singular
PF	Perfective	TRS	Transitive
PL	Plural		

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