

# CASE AND ROLE IN NEWARI: A COGNITIVE-GRAMMAR APPROACH

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## 1. Introduction

It is commonly observed that morphological case-marking (in languages that have it) seldom correlates fully with grammatical relations. While there is admittedly a great deal that is idiosyncratic and unpredictable in every language, the present paper will attempt to show how semantic case-roles can go a long way towards providing a reasonably unified and motivated account of the case-marking facts of Newari, a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in Nepal.

The six case-inflections of Newari are listed in Table 1. The names of these cases are traditional ones that I have adopted out of convenience and without any necessary theoretical assumptions:

Table 1. Newari Case Inflections[1]:

ABSOLUTE (0):	manu	'man'	motar	'car'
ERGATIVE (-an):	manu-nan		motar-an	
DATIVE (-yaata):	manu-yaata		motar-yaata	
GENITIVE (-yaa):	manu-yaa		motar-yaa	
COMITATIVE (-yaake):	manu-yaake		- -	
LOCATIVE (-e):	- -		motar-e	

These cases are exemplified by sentences (1) to (8):

- (1) wa macaa dyanaa cona.  
the child-ABS sleep-IMP be  
'The child is sleeping'
- (2) Raam-an bal thwaala.  
-ERG ball-ABS kick-PERF  
'R. kicked the ball'
- (3) Baburaajaa-n wa-yaagu motar sila.  
-ERG he-GEN car-ABS wash-PERF  
'B. washed his car'
- (4) ji-n Raam-yaata kath-in daayaa.  
I-ERG -DAT stick-ERG hit-PERF  
'I beat R. with a stick'
- (5) Raam-an baenk-an dhibaa kaala.  
-ERG bank-ERG money-ABS take-PERF  
'R. took money from the bank'

- (6) Gitaa-n Baburaaajaa-yaata kitaab chola.  
       -ERG                   -DAT book-ABS send-PERF  
       'G. sent B. the book'
- (7) Raam-yaake khicaa chama du.  
       -COM dog-ABS one-CL be  
       'R. has a dog'
- (8) ji wa gaam-e thyanaa.  
       I-ABS the village-LOC arrive-PERF  
       'I arrived in the village'

Superficially, Newari fits the pattern of an "Ergative" language as defined by Dixon[2]: the subject of an intransitive clause (e.g. 'the child' in (1)) and the direct object of a transitive clause (e.g. 'ball' in (2)) are both marked Absolutive, as opposed to the subject of a transitive clause (e.g. 'Raam' in (2)), which is marked Ergative. This Ergative-Absolutive system contrasts with the much more common Nominative-Accusative system, in which the subjects of both transitive and intransitive clauses are marked identically (Nominative), in opposition to direct objects (Accusative).

It is well-known however that virtually no language exhibits a purely Ergative-Absolutive case-marking system, and much discussion has been devoted to so-called "split Ergativity".[3] In Newari, for instance, the subjects of some transitive clauses with progressive aspect are optionally marked Absolutive, e.g. 'the woman' in (10), as opposed to (9), which is perfective and requires an Ergative-marked subject:

- (9) wa misaa-n pau cola.  
       the woman-ERG letter-ABS write-PERF  
       'The woman wrote a letter'
- (10) wa misaa(-n) pau coyaa cona.  
       the woman-ABS/ERG letter write-IMP be  
       'The woman is writing a letter'

In (11) the transitive subject 'Raam' is marked Absolutive if it is given, non-focused information, e.g. in reply to the question 'What's Raam doing?':

- (11) Raam jaa thuyaa cona.  
       -ABS rice-ABS cook-IMP be  
       'R. is cooking the rice'

but obligatorily Ergative if it is focused, e.g. in reply to 'Who's cooking the rice?'[4].

On the other hand, even in some sentences lacking an overt object, the subject may still be marked Ergative, as in (12):

- (12) Raam-an tona.  
       -ERG smoke-PERF  
       'R. smoked'

The last example may lead some to consider an alternative case-marking system, namely Agent-Patient, which has been proposed for languages like Choctaw and Lakhotla[5], in which subjects which are Agent-like, whether of transitive verbs (like 'kick') or intransitive ones (like 'jump'), are marked with the same case (Agent), while non-Agent-like intransitive subjects are marked like Patients. Though this may fit examples like (12) in Newari, the subjects of some other high-energy and high-volition verbs, like 'jump' and 'run', are marked Absolutive and not Ergative, while the subjects of some verbs of apparently low energy and volition, like 'see', are marked Ergative, as in (13-14):

- (13) Raam            tinnhula.  
       -ABS        jump-PERF  
       'R. jumped'

- (14) Raam-an        wa    motar        khana.  
       -ERG        the car-ABS    see-PERF  
       'R. saw the car'

To return to "split" case-marking, it is attested in Newari not only by subjects but by direct objects: inanimate objects are marked Absolutive, e.g. 'ball' in (2) and 'car' in (3), but animate objects are generally marked Dative, e.g. 'Raam' in (4). To complicate matters further, the animate objects of some verbs are optionally Absolutive, e.g. 'woman' in (15):

- (15) Raam-an        wa    misaa(-yaata)    khana.  
       -ERG        the woman-ABS/DAT    see-PERF  
       'R. saw the woman'

Furthermore, certain intransitive verbs require Dative-marked subjects, rather than the expected Absolutive, as in (16):

- (16) Raam-yaata    cikula.  
       -DAT        cold-become  
       'R. is cold'

These and other deviations from a canonical case-marking system are clearly problematic for a unified analysis[6]. At the same time, it would be difficult to believe that they are largely fortuitous and unmotivated.

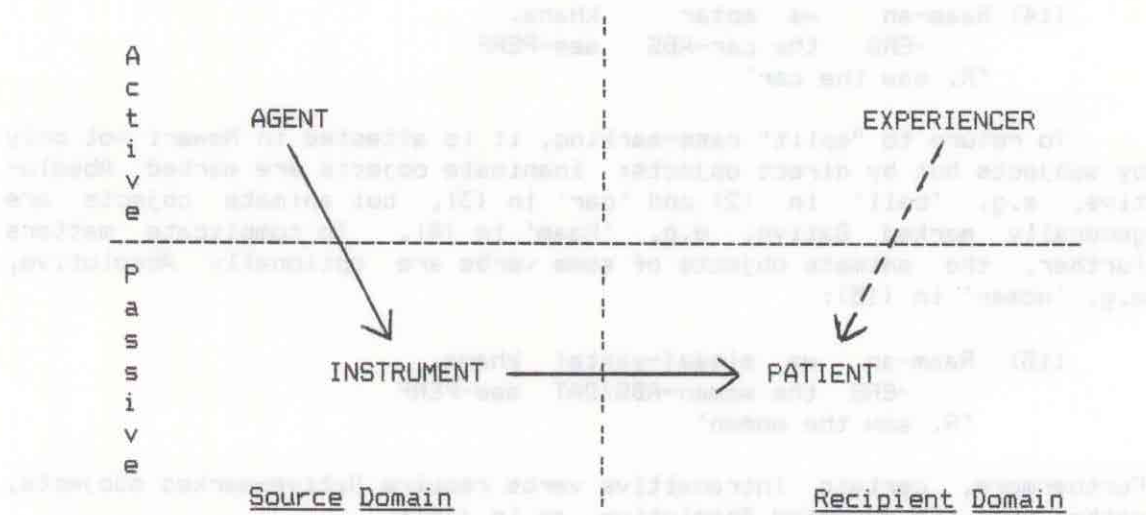
## 2. Archetypal Case Roles

It is a tenet of Cognitive Grammar (Langacker 1987) that a grammar makes use only of symbolic units, each with a semantic pole and a phonetic pole. Instead of being semantically empty units, case-markers contribute separate semantic predications of their own, which specify the type of role that a nominal entity plays with respect to some relation.[7] Though such roles are potentially numerous, a few stand out by their cognitive salience and cross-linguistic significance, and can appropriately be considered "archetypal". These role archetypes derive



from our conception of events in the world typically as action chains involving two or more participants. At the head of the chain is a typically animate, volitional Agent who initiates a flow of energy, which is directed at a typically inanimate, passive Patient which undergoes some motion or change of state as a result. They instantiate a four-way contrast: Source vs. Recipient, Active vs. Passive. Other participants may also, overtly or not, be involved in the action chain, including an inanimate Instrument, which can be viewed as an extension of the Agent in the Source Domain, and an animate Experiencer who stands in some kind of abstract or mental relationship to the Patient in the Recipient Domain. These role archetypes are represented in Figure 1, though it must be emphasized that not all the participants are present in every action chain, and that not all are necessarily profiled in a given sentence.

Figure 1. Archetypal Action Chain and Case Roles



Newari case-marking exemplifies this archetypal conception in several interesting ways. To begin with, the unifying notion of a "Source Domain" appears to have considerable generality, as reflected by the identical case-marking (Ergative) of both the Agent (like 'I' and 'Raam' in (4) and (5)) and the Instrument (like 'stick' in (4)), as well as of a third role which we may identify as "Ergative-Ablative" (or locative source), like 'bank' in (5). I would claim that the Ergative case in Newari marks participants in the Source Domain of an event chain, particularly the Agent.[8]

Though the action chain typically involves the transfer of physical energy from Agent to Patient, as in sentences (2) and (3), it is natural to extend this concept to the abstract domain, whereby the Agent is construed as initiating and directing some abstract or mental energy at the Patient, as in (17) and (18):

- (17) Raam-an Gitaa-yaata khyaa-i.  
           -ERG       -DAT       scare-F  
       'R. will scare G.'

- (18) Raam-an wa manu(-yaata) khana.  
 -ERG the man (-ABS/DAT) see-PERF  
 'R. saw the man'

where 'Raam' is marked Ergative. On the other hand, there is not even an abstract construal of any such transfer in:

- (19) Raam Baburaaajaa thaen con.  
 -ABS -ABS like be  
 'R. resembles B.'

so neither NP is Ergative-marked.

The cognitive salience of the action chain model is further attested by sentences like (20) and (21), which have Ergative subjects but no overt objects:

- (20) Raam-an tona.  
 -ERG smoke-PERF  
 'R. smoked'

- (21) Raam-an nala.  
 -ERG eat-PERF  
 'R. ate'

Here the notion of energy directed at a Patient is entailed, though the latter is not overtly expressed. Such examples suggest that, in a language like Newari, case-marking correlates more with semantic roles than with grammatical relations per se.

Subjects of true intransitive clauses, though they may be Agent-like in initiating an energy flow, as in (13) ('Raam jumped'), do not invoke the action chain model with an Agent transferring energy to a Patient, and are therefore not Ergative-marked. An alternative interpretation of this fact is that the Agent in this case is also the Patient, who undergoes some motion of change of state as a result of the energy flow, and that the Patient-marking (Accusative) predominates, being the endpoint of the action chain.[9]

The subjects of a few verbs, including 'love', 'remember', and 'forget' are construed as either volitional Agents exercising mental energy, as in (22), or, more commonly, as Experiencers, as in (23). In (22) the subject is in the Ergative case and the verb takes on the transitivity morpheme -k-; in (23) the subject is in the Dative case.

- (22) ji-n chan-ta lumanke.  
 I -ERG you -DAT remember-TRAN-F  
 'I'll remember you'

- (23) ji-ta cha luman.  
 I -DAT you-ABS remember  
 'I remember you'

In sentences like (10) and (11) cited earlier, the Ergative marking of the Agent is optional if the aspect is imperfective or if the Agent is non-focused. Apparently, an incomplete event (signalled by imperfective aspect) and lack of focus both detract from the saliency of the Agent role and from its maximal opposition to the Patient.

Turning now from the Source to the Recipient Domain, the central figure is typically an inanimate and passive Patient which absorbs the transfer of energy and undergoes some motion or change of state. In Newari the Patient role is marked Absolutive, e.g. 'curtain' in (24), even when it functions as the subject of a sentence, as in (25):

- (24) Ken-an parjaa sankala.  
-ERG curtain-ABS move-CAUS-PERF  
'K. moved the curtain'

- (25) parjaa sana.  
curtain-ABS move-PERF  
'The curtain moved'

Animate Patients are, however, generally marked Dative rather than Absolutive. The Dative case in Newari, as in several other languages, is by far the most semantically and functionally heterogeneous, and I would not claim that any single characterization is capable of capturing them satisfactorily. Nevertheless, the role of "Experiencer" in the action chain may be argued as the most prototypical and inclusive notion, to which most of the other meanings of the Dative can be related. Too much should not be read into the term "Experiencer" itself; it conveniently denotes an animate (or putatively animate) participant in the Recipient Domain of an action chain, which stands in some kind of abstract or mental relationship (such as perception, possession, affectedness, etc.) to the Patient. It is the potentially active member of the Recipient Domain, as opposed to the archetypal Patient, which is passive.

The prototypical, and most obligatory, use of the Dative is to mark an animate Recipient, when both it and an inanimate Patient are present in the Recipient Domain of an action chain. Its role then is like that indicated in Figure 1, as a sentient entity experiencing the transfer of energy indirectly or abstractly, and standing in an abstract relationship (as a Benefactive, Possessor, etc.) to the Patient, like 'Gitaa' in (26-28):

- (26) ji-n Gitaa-yaata pau choyaa.  
I-ERG -DAT letter-ABS send-PERF  
'I sent G. a letter'

- (27) Raam-an Gitaa-yaata baakhan kana.  
-ERG -DAT story-ABS speak-PERF  
'R. told G. a story'

- (28) Raam-an Gitaa-yaata motar silaa bila.  
-ERG -DAT car-ABS wash give-PERF  
'R. washed the car for G.'



Animate Patients (such as 'Raam' in (4)) are usually marked Dative rather than Absolutive. To account for this I would invoke the intuitive notion that an animate Patient is not merely a passive Recipient of the transfer of energy, but an active Experiencer of it as well. In a manner of speaking, the Patient and Experiencer roles merge into one. This construal receives some support from the varying degrees of optionality of Dative-marking on the objects of verbs of various kinds of physical and abstract energy. At the top of the scale are verbs depicting high physical energy, such as 'hit' and 'kick' in:

- (29) Raam-an wa manu-yaata daala.  
-ERG the man-DAT hit-PERF  
'R. hit the man'

- (30) Raam-an wa khicaa-yaata pyankala.  
-ERG the dog-DAT kick-PERF  
'R. kicked the dog'

where the Dative marking on 'man' and 'dog' is obligatory. Near the bottom of the scale are verbs like 'see', as in:

- (31) ji-n wa misaa(-yaata) khanaa.  
I-ERG the woman-ABS/DAT see-PERF  
'I saw the woman'

where the Dative marking on 'woman' is optional, presumably because she is less affected by the action and experiences it only marginally if at all. The effect of definiteness in this respect is similarly motivated: the more definite and specific an animate Patient is, the more likely it is to be marked Dative, as in (32-34) which are graded in a descending order:

- (32) ji-n Gitaa-yaata khanaa.  
I-ERG -DAT see-PERF  
'I saw G.' (DAT preferred)

- (33) ji-n wa misaa(-yaata) khanaa.  
I-ERG the woman-ABS/DAT see-PERF  
'I saw the woman' (DAT optional)

- (34) ji-n misaa chama khanaa.  
I-ERG woman-ABS one-CL see-PERF  
'I saw a woman' (ABS preferred)

The motivation seems to be that the more individuated and well-known an animate Patient is, the easier it is to empathize with and attribute sentient experience to it.

I would not however claim that "Experiencer" is the only notion relevant to the Dative marking of Patients in Newari, as other notions such as that of a path-like flow of physical or abstract energy being effectively directed at a goal may also be involved.[10]

Perhaps the clearest instantiations of the Dative marking of the

Experiencer role come from sentences with Dative subjects. These sentences typically involve verbs of sensation or non-volitional mental experience, and the subjects are thus construed not as Agents but as Experiencers. (Schematically, only the Recipient Domain of the action chain in Figure 1 is invoked and profiled.) Instances include such sensations or perceptions as cold and tiredness and pain, as in (35-38):

(35) Raam-yaata cikula.  
-DAT cold-become  
'R. is cold'

(36) ji-ta tyaannula.  
I-DAT tired-become  
'I'm tired'

(37) Raam-yaata syaata.  
-DAT hurt-PERF  
'R. felt a pain'

(38) ji-ta cha ya.  
I-DAT you-ABS like  
'I like you'

Of particular interest are alternative construals of basically the same event, with the subject construed either as an Experiencer or as an Agent. In addition to examples already cited with 'remember' (22-23), sentence (39),

(39) Raam-yaata motar chaga maa.  
-DAT car-ABS one-CL need  
'R. needs a car'

with a Dative-marked subject, emphasizes the experiential nature of 'need', while (40),

(40) Raam-an motar chaga maalaa cona.  
-ERG car-ABS one-CL need-TRAN be  
'R. is looking for a car'

with an Ergative subject and a transitivized verb, is best translated as 'Raam is looking for a car'.

The conception of the Experiencer as an animate and potentially active participant in the Recipient Domain is also consistent with the fact that "lower subjects" in Causative constructions in Newari are Dative-marked if they are animate (and thus capable of being active Agents in their own right in the lower clause), but Absolutive if inanimate:

(41) ji-n Raam-yaata me haeke.  
I-ERG -DAT song-ABS sing-CAUS-F  
'I'll make R. sing'



- (42) ji-n Baaburaajaa-yaata nyaasi waekaa.  
I-ERG -DAT walk come-CAUS-PERF  
'I made B. walk'
- (43) ji-n anga haakukaa.  
I-ERG wall-ABS black-CAUS-PERF  
'I made the wall black'
- (44) Ken-an motar dikala.  
-ERG car-ABS stop-CAUS-PERF  
'K. stopped the car (made the car stop)'

### 3. The Locative Cases

I have left the Locative and Comitative cases, as well as the Ergative-Ablative (which we may for the moment treat as a separate case), to the last as they form a three-way contrast that can best be understood in a unified fashion. These are peripheral roles in the archetypal action chain, whose prototypical relationships can be characterized by the same notions of Source vs Recipient domain, and of Active vs Passive participants.

The contrast between Ergative-Ablative and Locative, which are the two purely locative cases of Newari, is essentially that of Source vs. Recipient. This is clearly illustrated by the following examples:

- (45) khusi taal-e bage jui.  
river-ABS lake-LOC flow happen  
'The river flows into a lake'
- (46) khusi taal-an bage jui.  
river-ABS lake-ERG flow happen  
'The river flows from a lake'
- (47) dhun pahaad-e dwaan wana.  
tiger-ABS mountain-LOC into go-PERF  
'The tiger went into the mountain'
- (48) dhun pahaad-an pyaan wala.  
tiger-ABS mountain-ERG out come-PERF  
'The tiger came out of the mountain'
- (49) ji-n wa gaam-e pau choyaa.  
I-ERG the village-LOC letter-ABS send-PERF  
'I sent a letter to that village'
- (50) ji-n wa gaam-an pau choyaa.  
I-ERG the village-ERG letter-ABS send-PERF  
'I sent a letter from that village'

Neither of these cases can be used in their locative senses with animate nouns.[11] It seems reasonable to regard locative-marked nouns like the above as locative (and necessarily inanimate) "participants" in

the Source and Recipient Domains respectively.

Though the Comitative case traditionally signifies some such notion as "accompaniment", it is best understood in relation to the locatives in Newari. It is the only case in Newari that marks only animate nouns, and is hence in complementary distribution with the Locative case (which uniquely marks only inanimate nouns). The final -e of the Comitative case-marker -yaake may in fact be the same morpheme as the Locative case-marker -e. Their connection is certainly suggested by the following existential sentences, where inanimate locations are Locative-marked while animate ones are Comitative:

(51) wa tebal-e bhugin chama du.  
the table-LOC fly-ABS one-CL be  
'There's a fly on the table'

(52) wa khicaa-yaake bhugin chama du.  
the dog-COM fly-ABS one-CL be  
'There's a fly on the dog'

(53) che:n khicaa chama du.  
house-LOC dog-ABS one-CL be  
'There's a dog in the house'

(54) ji-ke khicaa chama du.  
I-COM dog-ABS one-CL be  
'I have a dog'

(55) ji-gu mhica-e cupi chapu du.  
I-GEN pocket-LOC knife-ABS one-CL be  
'There's a knife in my pocket'

(56) ji-ke mhica-e cupi chapu du.  
I-COM pocket-LOC knife-ABS one-CL be  
'I have a knife in my pocket'

That there is a frequent connection between existential, locative and possessive constructions in languages has been noted elsewhere.[12] In Chinese, for instance, all three functions are subsumed by you:

(57) wo you shu.  
I have book  
'I have a book'

(58) zhuo shang you shu.  
table LOC have book  
'There's a book on the table'

Evidently, the Comitative case in Newari codes a possessive-locative function (like you in (57)) for animate nouns, and the Locative case a parallel existential-locative function (like (58)) for inanimate nouns. The two are differentiated essentially by the Active/Passive dichotomy: Comitative marks nouns which are animate and capable of a possessive relationship with the Absolutive-marked noun (the -yaa- in the Comitative marker -yaake may well be the same morpheme as the Genetive -yaa), while

Locative case marks inanimate nouns which stand in a neutrally locative and passively existential relationship to the latter.

Superficially similar parallels and contrasts can be drawn between the Comitative and Ergative-Ablative cases, as the following examples suggest:

(59) ji-n Raam-yaake kitaab chagu tyaekaayaa.  
I-ERG -COM book-ABS one-CL borrow-PERF  
'I borrowed a book from R.'

(60) Raam-an khicaa-yaake kwe:n laakkaala.  
-ERG dog-COM bone-ABS take -PERF  
'R. took the bone from the dog'

(61) Raam-an baenk-an dhibaa kaala.  
-ERG bank-ERG money-ABS take-PERF  
'R. took money from the bank'

(62) ji-n tebal-an cupi kaayaa.  
I-ERG table-ERG knife-ABS take-PERF  
'I took the knife from the table'

There are definite limits to the parallels here. Ergative-Ablative marks the neutral and inanimate locative source out of which an entity moves. Comitative codes not so much the "source-ness" as the immediately relevant possessive relationship (and therefore implied location) that the Comitative-marked noun bears to the entity that moves. That the Comitative case does not mark an animate "Source" *per se* can be seen in such contexts as 'The letter came from the woman', which has to be expressed periphrastically, as

(63) wa misaa-yaa paakhen pau wala.  
the woman-GEN from letter-ABS come-PERF  
'The letter came from the woman'

A generalization that can be drawn from the above data is that a Comitative-marked noun stands in an abstract, Experiencer-type relationship (of possession and, by extension, location), while the Locative or Ergative-Ablative-marked noun stands in a concrete relationship (of passive, neutral location) to the Patient.[13]



FOOTNOTES

\* This is a fuller version of a paper that I gave at the Southern California Conference on General Linguistics, UCSD, April 26-27, 1986. I am most grateful to Ron Langacker, Ken Cook and Steve Poteet for their valuable comments and suggestions. The many shortcomings of the paper are, needless to say, entirely my own.

[1] The morphophonology of case inflections in Newari is too complicated to go into here, and is in any case not germane to our present purposes. It is sufficient to note that for pronouns, these inflections are often reduced, e.g. from "-yaata" to "-ta", "-yaaake" to "-ke".

[2] See Dixon 1979. He points out that almost no language has three different case markings for transitive subject (A), intransitive subject (S), and transitive object (O). They are grouped either into (1) Nominative (A/S) vs. Accusative (O), as in Latin, or (2) Ergative (A) vs. Absolutive (S/O), as in Dyirbal.

[3] See, e.g., Dixon 1979, DeLancey 1981, Hopper and Thompson 1980, Givón 1983a/b.

[4] Similar examples are cited in Givón 1983a/b.

[5] See Dahlstrom 1981.

[6] Hence previous analyses have tended to be exhaustive and somewhat disjointed catalogs of cases and roles, e.g. Hale and Manandhar 1973.

[7] For the semantics of case and the action chain model, see especially Langacker 1986.

[8] DeLancey (1981, p.634) has made a similar observation, and accounts for it with his notion of "Attention Flow": Agentive, Instrumental and Ablative all mark natural starting points in the temporal construal of events.

[9] Part of the explanation may also be purely functional, as suggested by Comrie 1981: since the subject of an intransitive clause is typically its only NP, there is no need to mark it morphologically to distinguish its role from that of any other.

[10] A comprehensive and consistent explanation of the optionality of the Dative-marking of animate Patients in Newari has proved elusive, suggesting that there are probably a multiplicity of factors. See Cook's paper in this volume.

[11] E.g., while 'The letter came from Japan' has the Ergative-Ablative marking on 'Japan':

(i) wa pau Jaapaan-an wala  
the letter-ABS Japan-ERG come-PERF

'The letter came from the woman' has to be expressed as:

(ii) wa misaa-yaa paakhen pau wala  
the woman-GEN from letter-ABS come-PERF

with a periphrastic expression, and not with an Ergative-Ablative marking:

- (iii) \* wa pau misaa-n wala.  
woman-ERG

[12] In English, this existential-locative-possessive connection is exemplified by these parallel sentences:

- (i) There is a book on the table.  
(ii) A book is on the table.  
(iii) The table has a book on it.

For a perceptive treatment of this theme, see Lyons (1968) chapter 8.

[13] The foregoing comparisons of the Comitative, Locative and Ergative-Ablative cases are somewhat simplified to bring out prototypical symmetries among them. The Locative in particular has wider applications, such as to indicate a locative setting within which an event takes place.

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