Inverse Marking in Nyagrong Minyag

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Abstract

This study explores the inverse marking system found in the Bangsmad dialect of Nyagrong Minyag, an under-documented language spoken in Xinlong County, Ganzi Prefecture, Sichuan. Typologically intriguing, while the rGyarwagshis dialect of Nyagrong Minyag does not employ an inverse pattern (Suzuki 2008), the Bangsmad dialect exhibits an inverse-marking mechanism which is rather different from that of other rGyalrogic and Qiangic languages (e.g. Japhug rGyalrong (Jacques 2010), Caodeng rGyalrong (Sun and Shi 2002) and Shixing (Chirkova 2008)). The inverse-marking mechanism of the Bangsmad dialect is typologically special in several aspects: i) it is sensitive to sentence type, and ii) the type of split on the Empathy Hierarchy is rather different from the areal majority.

In declarative constructions of Nyagrong Minyag, a sentence is treated as "direct" only when the agent is a first-person argument. Inverse marking occurs to the left of the verb stem whereever the agent is a non-first-person argument, including " $3\rightarrow2$ ", " $3\rightarrow1$ ", " $2\rightarrow1$ ", and also " $2\rightarrow3$ " and " $3\rightarrow3$ ", as illustrated in Examples (1)-(5) and Figure 1. In *wh*-questions and imperative sentences, however, this language exhibits a distinct "1>2>3" hierarchy, in which a " $2\rightarrow3$ " sentence does not carry an inverse marking, as in (6)-(7) and Figure 2. The inverse pattern appears to be sensitive to different sentence types.

We claim that the inverse pattern in declarative sentences presents the language's strong preference of "first-person prominence" (i.e. 1 > 2/3). This phenomenon is also observed in Nyagrong Minyag's person agreement system and copula forms, in which specific forms of aspect marking/verbal morphology are employed for sentences that involves a first-person argument. Descriptively, this type of "first person dominant" marking mechanism is similar to that of Rawang (LaPolla 2010).

While many rGyalrongic languages exhibit a "SAP > non-SAP" hierarchy and distinguish among the degree of animacy in third person, Nyagrong Minyag is clearly not a member of these types. The split on the EH in its declarative sentence falls between first and second person, and no distinction among third person human, animate and inanimate is attested.

(1)
$$\theta = \theta$$
 $\theta = \theta$ $\theta = \theta$ (3 $\theta = \theta$) 3SG 1SG-ACC INV-beat₁ COP.1 'He is beating me (now).'

- (2) nalə na Lozom-də tu (1→3) tomorrow 1SG PN-ACC beat₁.1A 'Tomorrow I will beat Lozom.'
- (4) məgə ŋa-də də-β-zwa (<u>3</u>→1) yesterday 1SG-ACC PFV-INV-push₂.1O 'Yesterday I was pushed (by somebody).'
- (5) məgə ni Lozom-də də-v-li (2→3) yesterday 2SG PN-ACC PFV-INV-release 'You released Lozom yesterday. (You don't remember.)'
- (6) na sha-da da-tha na $(2\rightarrow\underline{3})$ 2SG who-ACC PFV-beat2 INT 'Who did you beat?'
- (7) Lozom-də gə tə! $(2\rightarrow\underline{3})$ PN-ACC IMP beat₁ '(You) beat Lozom! (imperative)'

Figure 1: Inverse marking in declarative sen

imperative sentences



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^{*}In the examples above, stem₁ indicates imperfective verh forms and stem₂ for perfective verh forms $5/1 \equiv 5/2 \equiv 5/2 \equiv 5/3 \equiv 5/4 \approx 5/$