Burushaski is a language isolate spoken in the Northern Areas of Pakistan. Historically analyzed as an ergative language (Lorimer, 1935; Morin & Tiffou, 1988; Tiffou & Morin, 1982), careful analysis of textual data taken from storytelling and discourse suggests that agent marking in Burushaski can be used optionally and pragmatically. Rather than explicitly marking the agent of a transitive sentence, agent marking is used to show volitionality as well as to mark emphasis or de-emphasis. Further, Burushaski has historically been described as having a split in its ergativity (Lorimer, 1935; Tiffou & Morin, 1982), with the ergative marker appearing in non-future tenses and being absent in future tense. I also present textual data gathered from storytelling and natural discourse which shows the agent marker being used in the future tense. This suggest that an updated analysis of Burushaski case marking must include accounts of the agent markers optional usage and its appearance in future tense constructions as shown by textual data.

In addition to pragmatic usage of the agent marker, Burushaski also marks the affected participant of a construction on its verb morphology (Munshi, 2006; Bashir, 1985). Prefixes on the Burushaski verb mark the “affected animate argument” of the construction. It is also compatible with differential object marking, where the verb agrees with a noun phrase if the noun phrase constitutes a “surprise”. Syntactic definitions of the prefix are not satisfactory. Burushaski double marks the subjects of intransitive sentences with an “unaccusative” verb. There is no double marking if the intransitive verb is “unergative”. Experiencers are marked with prefix agreement. Recipients are marked with prefix agreement. Inanimate patients are NOT marked with prefix agreement. Causees are marked with prefix agreement. These tendencies can be shown in the following chart:

- the prefix agrees with the animate patient
- in theme/recipient constructions, the prefix agrees with the recipient
- in stimulus/experiencer constructions, the prefix agrees with the experiencer
- if none of these requirements are met, there is no prefix

The morphology here marks “animacy surprises” determined by a native speakers expectations of the animacy of patients. Universally, patients are by far most commonly inanimate. In constructions with an animate patient, this constitutes a surprise and is thus marked.
REFERENCES


