



On Case Marking in Assamese Bengali and Oriya

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Abstract

Case is a grammatical category determined by the syntactic or semantic function of a noun or pronoun. Trask (1997) said that “Any one of the forms which a noun or noun phrase may assume in order to represent its grammatical and semantic relation to the rest of the sentence” (p.35). The present paper aims to explore the case marking in Assamese, Bengali spoken in Assam and Oriya in Orissa. In all three languages case is realized in the form of postpositions, when these postpositions take nouns structurally form phrases. Therefore, they are called postpositional phrases. Postpositional phrases are made up of a noun phrase followed by a postposition.

Keywords: Case marking

1. Introduction

Assamese is one of the linguistic groups in the state of Assam. Assamese is an Indo-Aryan language as well as the official language of Assam. This language has close affinity with Bengali and Oriya. Assamese is spoken by more than 13 million people. It is primarily spoken in the northeastern state of Assam, but outside Assam, the language is spoken in Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh. Outside India, language is spoken by a good number of people in Bangladesh and Bhutan. It is also used by diverse linguistic communities of Assam to verbalize among them as a means of inter lingual communication. More than a few regional dialects are typically recognized. However for the present study I have concentrated on Kamrupi Assamese (KA) is spoken in the districts of Kamrup, Assam.

Assam is known as the settling ground for many civilizations. It is a largest state consists of Brahmaputra Valley and Barak Valley. The Barak Valley stands in the bank of river Barak. The valley is located in the South Assam has three district in its jurisdiction and they are Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi where Sylheti Bengali is spoken extensively. Sylheti is a dialect of Bengali. It is found out that though Sylheti is a dialect of Bengali, it is using a few different case markers for the purpose that are different from modern Bengali. It is observed that not only lexically but syntactically also this dialect is different from Standard Bengali. So for the present analysis, I have concentrated only on Sylheti Bengali (SB).

Oriya is the official language in the state of Orissa. The Oriya language is an Eastern branch of Indo-Aryan family of languages. The total population of Oriya is 33,017,446 (2001 Census of India). It has close affinity with Assamese and Bengali languages. In the state of Orissa following seven dialects of Oriya are spoken. They are: Midnapori Oriya, Singhbhum Oriya, Baleswar/Baleswari Oriya, Ganjami Oriya, Desiya Oriya, Sambalpur Oriya and Bhatari. Of these dialects, my study will focus on the Baleswari Oriya (BO) spoken in Baleswar District of Orissa. The Oriya language spoken in Baleswar is to some extent different from the standard Oriya spoken in Cuttak and Puri.

1.1 Objective and aim of the study

The aim and objective of this proposed paper is to investigate how case is formed in Kamrupi Assamese, Sylheti Bengali and in Baleswari Oriya. It mainly undertakes a study of case as a nominal inflectional category in Kamrupi Assamese, Sylheti Bengali and Baleswari Oriya and accounts for the morphological and syntactic features of case and case marking with special emphasis on their semantic significance.



2. Review of literature

As far as earlier works are concerned Kamrupi Assamese, Sylheti Bengali and Baleswari Oriya varieties are in infant stage i.e., the extensive description or documentation of these varieties has not done by any linguist so far. The following are the major related works found in these three varieties that includes:

Review of Assamese literature shows: i) Manmee Bhattacharjya “Case Marking in Assamese: Morpho-syntactic and Semantic Analysis.” EFLU- Hyderabad. (2012). ii) Amritavalli, R and Sarma, P.P. “A Case Distinction Between Unaccusative and Unergative Subjects in Assamese”, Snippets. (2002). iii) Marry Pujari “Case Marking in Assamese” *Languages of the North East*. CIIL, India Publication. (1997). In Sylheti Bengali i) Tunga, S.S. (1995). *Bengali and other related dialects of South Assam*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications. ii) Baishya, Ajit. “Case Marking in Sylheti” LSI. Vol-68. (2007). The related works available on Oriya is i) Mahapatra, P.B. (2007). *A Synchronic Grammar of Oriya (Standard spoken and written)*. CIIL, Mysore-5760007. ii) Bira Chandra Singh “Ontology for Word-form Generation in Oriya” *Language in India*. Volume:5 (2005). After surveying of existing literature it was found that no work related to the present varieties are not undertaken so far by any scholar. Manmee was talking in her paper about mixed nominative and ergative case in Assamese, Baishya also stated same formation in Sylheti Bengali. My study reveals only nominative case existence in these two varieties. Neither of these above mentioned works clearly did not emphasize on these three varieties nor any work is done on Baleswari Oriya. Moreover no comparative work has ever done by any scholar till date. Therefore more study on this subject matter is highly required to find out the exact case inflection in these varieties. Hence the proposed study is essential to analyze the existing case system in Kamrupi Assamese, Sylheti Bengali and Baleswari Oriya.

3. Methodology

For the present work I have followed interview method. I procured the data through direct communication with respondents through personal interview. The present work is based on the data collected in three field trips during the summer of 2011 June, in Silchar, Cachar, Assam from the Sylheti dialect of Bengali. In the following month Assamese data were procured from Guwahati, Assam for Kamrupi Assamese. In the same year during winter I visited Baleswar District of Orissa, where Oriya data have been collected. For the present analysis the speakers from both the sexes including different age groups have also been concerned. Primary data of three varieties have been elicited through sentence list related to case construction. They were then cross checked with some other informants of the same varieties.

4. Case

Blake (1994:1:1) defines case as a “Case is a system of marking dependent nouns for the type of relationship they bear to their heads”. Case is considered as an inflectional category basically of nouns and pronouns which typically marks their role in relation to other parts of a sentence. It is true that case system has developed from the Sanskrit language. Case system was prevalent in the Old Indo Aryan (OIA) lost in the Middle Indo-Aryan (MIA), redeveloped in New Indo-Aryan languages similar to OIA. (“The redevelopment of Indo-Aryan case systems from a lexical semantic perspective.” By: Miriam Butt & Tafseer Ahmed 4 February 2010) New Indo Aryan (NIA) languages like Assamese, Bengali, Hindi, Oriya, Punjabi etc. are ultimately descended from (versions of) Sanskrit, which had an inflectional declensional case paradigm. The present paper aims to explore the different case marking in Assamese, Bengali and Baleswari Oriya. From my analysis seven cases are realized in Kamrupi Assamese (KA) and Sylheti Bengali (SB) and Baleswari Oriya (BO).

- i) Nominative
- ii) Accusative
- iii) Dative
- iv) Genitive
- v) Ablative
- vi) Instrumental and
- vii) Locative

4.1 Nominative Case

Sarma (2002) argued that “Assamese is an ergative-absolutive language”. Baishya (2007) stated that Sylheti Bengali has both nominative and ergative. The present study reveals that in both the Kamrupi Assamese (KA) and Sylheti Bengali (SB) nominative case is prevalent.

4.1.1 Kamrupi Assamese

The most common function of the nominative case is to mark the subject in a sentence. The subject of finite verb receives -e marker in Kamrupi Assamese (KA)

rita -e douriyase
 ram-Nom run- Pre.cont.
 'rita is running '
 ram-e rabon-ok marile
 ram -Nom ravan-Acc kill-Pst
 'ram killed ravan'

4.1.2 Sylheti Bengali

The same marker is also prevalent in SB.

rita -e dourər
 ram-Nom run- Pre cont.
 'rita is runing'
 ram-e rabon -re marse
 ram -Nom ravan-Acc kill-Pst
 'ram killed ravan'

4.1.3 Baleswari Oriya

In Baleswari Oriya (BO) the nominative case receives -ϕ marker. However, the noun in Nominative case may be an actor or agent of the verb.

rita-ϕ daudu-ču
 ram-Nom run-Pre cont.
 'ram is running'
 rama-ϕ ravan- ku marilə
 ram-Nom ravan-Acc kill-Pst
 'rama killed ravana'

The Nominative Case discussed above is summarized in the following table 1.

Table1. Case Inflection

Case	Marker	Meaning
Nominative		
KA	-e	Subject of finite verb
SB	-e	
BO	-ϕ	

4.2 Accusative Case

The accusative case defines the object of a verb. So noun or pronoun can be said to be in the accusative case when it is the direct object of the verb. Considering the following examples:

4.2.1 Kamrupi Assamese

This case is marked by a suffix /-ok/ in Kamrupi Assamese, (the vowel drops when the root ends with a vowel)

moy rani-k ko-lu
 I rani-Acc say-Pst
 'I said to rani'
 ami ihət- ok janu
 we them-Acc know
 'we know them'

4.2.2 Sylheti Bengali

The accusative marker in Sylheti Bengali is /-re/

ami rani-re koi-si
 I rani-Acc say-Pst
 'I said to rani'
 a:mra tara-re jani
 we they-Acc know
 'we know them'

4.2.3 Baleswari Oriya

The accusative case is marked by a suffix /-ku/ in Baleswari Oriya

mu rani-ku koh-li
 i rani-Acc say-Pst
 'I said to rani'
 ame semanoN-ku janu
 we them-Acc know
 'we know them'

It is to be noted that in all the three varieties KA, SB and BO drop its accusative case marking when the object is inanimate.

kolom-k^hon k^harahi-r -pəra loə (KA)
 pen -Cl basket-Gen -Abl take
 'take the pen from the basket'
 *kolom-k^hon-ok k^harahi-r -pəra loə

kolom-ta j^huri-r -t^hekiya lo (SB)
 pen -Cl basket-Gen -Abl take
 'take the pen from the basket'
 *kolom-k^hon-ok k^harahi-r -pəra loə

kalama-ta pač^hia-ru niya (BO)
 book -Cl basket -Abl take
 'take the pen from the basket'
 *kalama-ti-ku pač^hia-ru nia

The Accusative Case discussed above is summarized in the following table 2.

Table 2. Accusative Case

Case	Marker	Meaning
Accusative		
KA	-ok	Direct object
SB	-re	
BO	-ku	

4.3 Dative case

The basic role for dative case is to distinguish the recipient of something given, transferred, etc. (Matthews 1917:87). It usually expressed the indirect object relation as well as a range of meaning which is similar to the meaning expressed by English 'to' or 'for'. Examples:

4.3.1 Kamrupi Assamese

The dative case marker in Kamrupi Assamese is -ok just like accusative case marker.

hi tar b^honi-k e-ta putola dise



he his sister-Dat one-Cl doll gave
 he gave a doll to his sister'
 manuh-jən- ok dan kora
 man-Cl-Dat offer do
 'offer to this man'

4.3.2 Sylheti Bengali

The accusative marker /-re/ is also acts as a dative in Sylheti.

he tar boin-re ek-ta putul dise
 he his sister-Dat one-Cl doll gave
 he gave a doll to his sister '
 manush-ta-re dan koro
 man-Cl-Dat offer do
 'offer to this man'

4.3.3 Baleswari Oriya

Accusative marker /-ku/ act as a dative.

se tarə b^hauni-ku gote k^helana delə
 he his sister-Dat lone doll gave
 'he gave a doll to his sister'
 ei manushya-ku dano karə
 this man -Dat offer do
 'offer to this man'

The Dative Case is summarized below in the table 3.

Table 3. Case Inflection

Case	Marker	Meaning
Accusative		
KA	-ok	indirect object
SB	-re	
BO	-ku	

4.4 Genitive Case

This case indicates the possessive relationship of noun and pronoun. It indicates the possession of a thing or the relationship of a particular object with another object.

4.4.1 Kamrupi Assamese

The genitive case marker in Kamrupi Assamese is /-r/ that occurs after a word ending with a vowel. It has an alternate /-or/ that occurs if the word ends with a consonant. Considered the following examples:

rahul- or iskul
 rahul -Gen school
 'rahul's school'

tebul- or b^hori
 table-Gen leg
 'table's leg'

4.4.2 Sylheti Bengali

Like Kamrupi same conditioned can also be applicable in Sylheti Bengali but consonant ending suffix is /-er/

rahul- er iskul



rahul -Gen school

‘rahul’s school’

tebil-er pa

table-Gen leg

‘this is my house’

4.4.3 Baleswari Oriya

The genitive case is marked only in human noun realized as /-ro/ where as for non-human noun the marker receives /-φ/

ramo-ro iskul

ram-Gen iskul

‘ram’s school’

tabil- φ godə

table-Gen leg

‘table house’

The Genitive Case is summarized below in the table 4.

Table 4: Genitive Case

Case	Marker	Meaning
Accusative		
KA	-r/-or	Of 's
SB	-r/-er	
BO	-ro/-φ	

4.5 Instrumental case

When an object helps in doing a work then it takes instrumental case in these three languages. This defines the instrument to carry out the action or cause of the action identified by the verb.

4.5.1 Kamrupi Assamese

Kamrupi Asamiya by suffix /-re/ or /-di/ when the object is inanimate & /-dara/ when the object is animate.

moy kudal-di (-re) kam koru

I spade-Inst work do

‘I work with spade’

moy tar-dara ei kam-tu korisu

moy he-Inst this work-CI done

‘I have done the work by him’

4.5.2 Sylheti Bengali

In Sylheti Bengali when the object is inanimate then the postposition /-diya/ is used. But when the object is animate then /-dara/ is used.

ami kudal-diya kam kori

I spade-Inst work do

‘I work by spade’

ami tar-dara ei kam-ta koraisi

moy he-Inst this work-CI done

‘I have done the work by him’



4.5.3 Baleswari Oriya

The marker for instrumental case marker in Baleswari Oriya is /-re/ when the object is inanimate and /-dwara/ for animate object.

mu kudal-re kama kare
 i spade-Inst. work do
 ‘I work by spade’
 ta-dwara mu kama kareineli
 he-Inst i work done
 ‘I have done the work by him’

The Instrumental Case is examined below in the table 5.

Table 5. Instrumental Case

Case	Marker	Meaning
Accusative		
KA	-re/-dara	By
SB	-diya/dara	
BO	-re/-dwara	

4.6 Ablative case

The basic role of ablative case is to indicate movement away from some location (Metthews1997:1). Therefore ablative is the case of separation from the source in performing the action carried by the verb.

4.6.1 Kamrupi Assamese

In Kamrupi Assamese, ablative is marked with ‘r’ + pəra. The genitive marker /-r/ (referred to point 2.4) is used before / - pəra /.

ami nodi-r- pəra pani pau
 I river-Gen -Abl water get
 ‘we get water from the river’
 ei -tu-r- pəra ta-k kisu lobo diya
 this -Cl.-Gen-Abl he-Acc some take give
 ‘let him take something from this’

4.6.2 Sylheti Bengali

In Sylheti Bengali the ablative case is realized as /-t^hekiya/. The genitive always precedes the ablative suffix in a sentence and it acts as postposition as in the following examples:

a:mra nodi-r-t^hekiya jol pai
 I river-Gen -Abl water get
 ‘we get water from the river’
 ei -ta-r- t^hekiya ta-re kich^hu loite deo
 this -Cl.-Gen-Abl he-Acc some take give
 ‘let him take something from this’

4.6.3 Baleswari Oriya

The marker ablative in Baleswari Oriya is /-ru/.

nōdi-ru ame pani anu
 river-Abl we water bring
 ‘we bring water from the river’
 ei-ta-ru ta-ku kič^hi nabaku diə

this-Cl-Abl his-Acc something take give
 'let him take something from this'

The Ablative Case discussed above is summarized below in the table 6.

Table 6. Ablative Case

Case	Marker	Meaning
Accusative		
KA	-pəra	From
SB	-t ^h ekiya	
BO	-ru	

4.7 Locative case

The locative case generally marks the location with both the spatial and temporal reference. This case indicates the location of the event/action identified by the verb. A part from this; it also used to serve to locate something. Let us consider the following examples:

4.7.1 Kamrupi Assamese

The locative case markers in Kamrupi Assamese are /-ot/ and /-t/. /-ot/ occurs if the word end with a consonant and /-t/ if ends with vowel.

ram e-ta gəau-t t^həke
 ram one Cl.village-Loc live
 'ram lives in a village'
 hi g^hor-ot ase
 he house-Loc present
 'he is at home'

4.7.2 Sylheti Bengali

The locative case is marked by a marker /-o/ in Sylheti Bengali. But it has variant /-t/. /-o/ occurs if a word ends with a consonant and /-t/ occurs after vowel ending words.

rame ek-ta gəau-t t^həke
 ram one-Cl village-Loc live
 'ram lives in the village'
 hi g^hor-ot ase
 he house-Loc present
 'he is at home'

4.7.3 Baleswari Oriya

The markers for locative case in Baleswari Oriya are /-re/ and /-e/. Considered the following examples:

rama go^{ta} gramə-re rahe
 ram one village-Loc live
 'ram lives in a village'

Like ablative, a few high frequency words like g^horo, uporo, bit^h oro etc take only /-e/.

se g^hor-e ač^hi
 he house-Loc present
 'he is at home'

The Locative Case is exemplified below in the table 7.

Table 7. Locative Case

Case	Marker	Meaning
Accusative		
KA	-ot/-t	at, in, on
SB	-e/-t	
BO	-re/-e	



5. Findings and discussion

The main implication of my finding is to show the similarities and differences between all the three varieties. Secondly, it marks the primary case and its grammatical relations. Thirdly, the case marking also shows the semantic/ thematic roles.

5.1 Similarities and differences

5.1.1 Similarities

- i) Case system has developed from Sanskrit language in all three varieties like KA, SB and BO.
- ii) Case inflection is postpositional in all three varieties.
- iii) Dative case inflection is similar with accusative case inflection in all three varieties.
- iv) It is to be noted that in all the three varieties KA, SB and BO drop its accusative case marking when the object is inanimate.
- v) Feature of differentiating animate and inanimate object through case marking is highly noticeable for instrumental case.

5.1.2 Differences

- i) Nominative case is unmarked in Baleswari Oriya whereas in Kamrupi Assamese and Sylheti Bengali it is overtly marked.
- ii) Baleswari Oriya genitive case marker distinguishes between human and non-human. For human /- ro/ suffix is used and /-ϕ/ is for non-human, while for other two varieties no such difference is noticed.
- iii) The locative case marker has two variants in Kamrupi Assamese and Sylheti Bengali where as Baleswari Oriya has two different suffixes.

The Usage Case Marking

The primary usage of case in all three varieties is to mark grammatical relations. e.g.

manuh-tu-e	tiruta -jəni-k	dek ^h -ise	(Kamrupi Assamese)
manush-ta-e	beti-ta-re	dek ^h -se	(Sylheti Bengali)
man-CI-Nom	woman-CI-Acc	see- Pre. Pref.	
manushya-ta-ϕ	mahila-ku	dek ^h i-lə	(Baleswari Oriya)
man-CI-Nom	woman-Acc	see- Pre. Pref.	
Subject	object	verb	
The man	the woman	have seen	

‘the man has seen the woman’

Case marking indicates semantic/thematic roles:

tiruta-bilak-e	g ^h or-tu	mus-ile
mohila-gula-e	g ^h or-ta	mus-ch ^h e
mahila-mane-ϕ	g ^h or -ti	sap ^h a-karchati
woman-pl-nom	house-cl	clean- Pre.Perf.
Agent/doer	patient	action
The women	the house	have cleaned

“The query of what counts as a case is one which has not been at the forefront of existing morphosyntactic research, yet it remains one of the more confusing questions in theoretical Linguistics.” (Andrew Spencer: 2005) Cases show perception of the language so the same relation between two objects in different languages is realized through different cases. The KA, SB and BO exhibit an inflecting nature. Thus, it bore enough scope to have an interesting glance at the case inflection system in these three varieties. Case or case-marking is a morpho-syntactic device or mechanism that is used to indicate who is doing what to whom. This paper is an effort to analyze various aspects of Assamese, Sylheti and Oriya case system. However the above mentioned case pattern may vary in



different dialects. Before I finish, I can say that all the three varieties maintain the characteristics that Greenburg (1963) has endorsed to SOV languages that language with normal SOV order are post-positional.

Note: The bold t and d are retroflex stops

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Abbreviation

- Acc - Accusative
Abl - Ablative
Cl - Classifier
Dat - Dative
Gen - Genitive
Loc - Locative
Inst - Instrumental
Nom- Nominative
Pre Cont- Present Continuous
Pre. Pref- Present Perfect
Pst - Past tense