Word-classes in MKR

2.1. Preview

The purpose of this chapter is to address mainly two aspects: the word-classes of MKR and the grammatical categories associated with specific word-classes.

The relationship between the word-classes and the grammatical categories can be described on the basis of three assumptions provided by Ferguson (1964: 881-882) in the context of all languages. According to the first assumption, every language has words which are considered as basic elements in the grammatical structure of the language. The nature of the words is exhibited in three ways: in terms of phonological and grammatical features, they are more complex than the morpheme in some instances and less complex than the sentence; in some cases, they allow other elements to occur on either side of them as well as within them. Ferguson uses the expression *maximum freedom of occurrence* to refer to those elements which allow other elements to occur on either side of them, while the expression *maximum of bondage of elements* is used to refer to the latter. The third way is words provide important clues for describing major features of the overall grammatical structure of the language. As far as the second assumption is concerned, the grammatically definable words of every language can be categorized roughly into certain classes such as nouns, verbs, adjectives etc. in terms of their syntactic and semantic functions across languages. The third assumption states that certain classes of words have some associated categories by which different kinds of grammatical information can be expressed in languages.

From these three assumptions, it is clear that grammatical categories are a set of categories which are found to attach to members of major word-classes. Any discussion of the grammatical categories of a specific language involves the discussion of the words of that language and the grammatical information associated with them. The grammatical information can be represented by affixation or by a particular set of closed class of words. Based on such affixation or the particular set of closed class, the words can be categorized into separate classes. In this case, if a set of words can take similar affixes, or if a particular set of closed class words goes with a particular set of words,
then that set of words forms a single word class. However, affixation or the closed set of words is not the only criteria for identifying word-classes. There are some other criteria through which the word-classes of a particular language can be identified (§2.2). From this discussion it can be seen that the concept of word-classes and grammatical categories are dependent on each other: grammatical categories can be identified with reference to word-classes, and word-classes can be identified in terms of categories associated with a particular word-class. In this chapter, an attempt is made to discuss the ways of identifying word-classes and grammatical categories both in language in general terms as well as more specifically, in terms of MKR. Towards this end, the chapter is organised in the following way.

The different ways of identifying word-classes in general will be discussed in §2.2. §2.3 discusses the categorization of word-classes on the basis of three linguistic criteria across languages and in MKR. A general discussion of the grammatical categories of major word-classes will be discussed in §2.4. This followed by a discussion of the grammatical categories in MKR §2.5. The categories taken up for analysis are dealt with in §2.6. Finally, the rationale behind the organisation of chapters presented in the earlier chapter will be set out in §2.7.

2.2. Different ways of identifying word-classes: a general view

The term word-classes is used by structural linguists to refer to parts of speech classification used in traditional grammar. The traditional classification of parts of speech has certain limitations in the way the categorization of words into different classes is done. For instance, the various definitions provided by traditional grammarians for identifying the word-classes are not based on formal criteria. For this reason, these definitions were widely criticized by the structuralists. As a reaction, the structuralists departed from the practice of traditional grammar by using a separate name, i.e., word classes, in place of parts of speech and evolving some formal criteria for identifying the word-classes across languages. The weaknesses of the traditional

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1 For traditional definitions of parts of speech, see Huddleston (1984: 90). These definitions are also available in many traditional grammar books.
definitions of parts of speech classification are clearly stated by Huddleston (1984). He mentions three main points in this regard:

...they do not provide criteria that justify the standard assignment of words to the various parts of speech, do not in several major cases give any indication of the kind of grammatical property that in fact distinguishes one class from another, and are not based on a sound grasp of the distinction and relation between syntactic classes and functions. (1984: 98)

In order to compensate for such weakness, the structuralists or modern grammarians have offered some formal criteria through which the words found in different languages can be identified. These criteria are: morphology, distribution, and function (Tallerman 1998: 32). The first of these is a morphological criterion, while the other two criteria are syntactic criteria. According to the first criterion, a group of words is included as members of same class if they share similar kind of affixes as mentioned in the previous section. According to the first of the two syntactic criteria, a group of words having a unique pattern of distribution is considered as members of the same class. Such distribution can be considered to be of two types. According to the first criterion, there are certain sentence slots which can only be filled by members of a particular word class. There is also a second criterion, according to which every word class has its own set of modifying elements that shows a maximum freedom of occurrence in Ferguson’s terms (1964: 881) which may occur on either side of that specific word class. (This is in opposition to the situation within the word which Ferguson (1964: 881) refers to as the maximum bondage of elements as a morphological criterion). The second syntactic criterion stated above is based on the function of words, which is determined by the particular roles that these words have in relation to the other parts of the sentence. These three criteria will be examined in the next section with the help of examples from Modern Assamese and other languages. These will then be applied to the specific context of MKR.

2.3. Categorization of word-classes

The main purpose of this section is to apply the three formal criteria mentioned in §2.2 to the data of MKR for the purpose of identifying different word classes. To accomplish this task, I will present an elaboration of the three criteria with the help of examples.
from modern Assamese and English in the next three sections (§2.3.1, §2.3.2, §2.3.3). This will be followed by a short description of the word classes found across languages in §2.3.4. This exercise will provide a basis for building the foundation for further discussion in §2.3.5 and elsewhere in this chapter for the process of identifying word classes in MKR.

2.3.1. Morphology
It was stated in the Preview (§2.1) that morphological evidence is based on affixation. Words can be grouped together into a class based on similar kind of affixes that they take. For example, the case suffix -ok 'DAT' and the plural suffix -bur can be cited from Modern Assamese. Case and number are considered as important categories of the noun. For this reason, words having case and number suffixes can be considered as members of the word class noun.

2.3.2. Distribution
According to the distributional criteria, only the members of the same word-class can occur in certain slots in a sentence, as in (1) from Modern Assamese.

(1) a. suwalizoni  
   suwali-zoni  
   girl-CLF  
   'The girl ...'

   b. pahartu  
   pahar-tu  
   hill-CLF  
   'The hill ....'

   c. kot'atu  
   kot'a-tu  
   matter-CLF  
   'The matter ...'
These three slots can be filled with certain classes of words: the first slot can be filled by words such as dunija ‘beautiful’, ukhɔ ‘tall’, sapor ‘short’, boga ‘fair’, kola ‘dark’ etc. The words ukhɔ ‘tall’, heuzia ‘green’, dunija ‘beautiful’ can occur in the second slot. The third slot can be filled by the words misa ‘false’, hosa ‘true’ etc. All these words fall into the class of adjectives, because they occur in predicative positions: only the class of nouns and adjectives can occur in predicative positions. Now, a question may arise as to the basis of the inclusion of these words in the class of adjectives since, according to the criteria mentioned above, they can also be members of nouns. However, the answer to this question is that they are adjectives and not nouns since they are used to modify nouns occurring in the attributive position as in (2) or in the predicative position as in (1) above.

(2) a. dunija suwali.
   beautiful girl
   ‘Beautiful girl.’

   b. heuzia pahar.
   green hill
   ‘Green hill.’

   c. hosa kotɔ.
   true matter
   ‘True matter.’

It may be further pointed out that not only adjectives can occur in the modifier position of a noun. A noun can also occur as a modifier of a noun as in (3).

(3) a. rotno hiqhahon.
    stone throne
    ‘Throne of stone.’

   b. ball gor.
    sand house
    ‘House of sand.’
The words underlined in the above sentences are prototypical nouns because they can take case or number inflections as other nouns, as in (4a-b).

(4)  

a.  
rotnare  
nirmito.

rotno-re  
nirmito

stone-INS  
made

'Made of stone.'

b.  
balibur  
sop'a  
kora.

bali-bur  
sop'a  
kor-a

sand-PL  
clean  
do-2FAM

'Clean the sand.'

But from a functional point of view they are not nouns but adjectives. They function as adjective modifiers of head nouns in the NPs rotno hirjhabon and baligor. The distribution of these words is similar to that of the words underlined in (2) above.

A question that arises at this point is on what grounds are the words underlined in (2) and (3) different from each other.

This question can be answered by using the second distributional criterion. According to this criterion, every word-class has its own specific set of modifying words which can or must accompany it. This criterion can be explained with the help of the examples cited in (5).

(5)  

a.  
suwalizoni  
——  
dunija.

suwali-zoni  
dunija

girl-CLF  
beautiful

'The girl is beautiful.'

b.  
pahartu  
——  
heuzia.

pahar-tu  
heuzia

hill-CLF  
green

'The hill is green.'

c.  
kot'atu  
——  
misa.

kot'a-tu  
misa

matter-CLF  
false

'The matter is false.'
Each slot of these sentences can be filled by a set of words which fall into the category of adverbs. For instance, *bor ‘very’ can occur in the first slot; *ekdom ‘totally’ can occur in the second slot while *ekbare ‘totally’ can be placed in the third slot. It is evident from these examples that an adjective can be modified by a class of adverbs whereas nouns cannot: the sentences given in (6) are ungrammatical.

\[(6)\]  
a. **bor** rot\(\text{-}\)no highahon.  
very stone throne  
‘Throne of very stone.’

b. **ekbare** bali gor.  
totally sand house  
‘Totally sand house’

Moreover, the words underlined in (3) cannot occur in predicative positions as the words did in the slots indicated in (1).

\[(7)\]  
a. *highahonk\(\text{-}\)on rot\(\text{-}\)na.  
highahon-k\(\text{-}\)on rot\(\text{-}\)na  
throne-CLF stone  
‘The throne is stone.’

c. *gortu bali.  
gor-tu bali  
house-CLF sand  
‘The house is sand.’

2.3.3. Functional criteria

The functional criteria for identifying word-classes can be applied to describe the relationship between the word-classes of adjectives and nouns as mentioned in (2) and (3). The words underlined in (2) and (3) can be included in a single word class in terms of their functions, since both sets can function as the modifiers of head nouns within the noun phrases. A similar situation is found in the identification of a noun. The word functioning as the head of any noun phrase (NP) is included in the class of nouns, as in (8).
The phrases within the square brackets in (8) are noun phrases. In the first phrase, the expression \textit{kukurtuwe} functions as the head of the phrase, and it is modified by the adjective \textit{kola}. Hence this element can be placed within the class of nouns. The second noun phrase consists of a single element which functions as head of this phrase. Unlike the first one, the second noun phrase does not contain any dependent within the phrase.

The class of nouns can be identified with the help of other functional tests. Noun phrases function as subjects, objects (direct and indirect), and complements of verbs in a clause. So the elements that occur in these positions can be nouns. For example, the word \textit{rug} 'disease' in Modern Assamese can be taken as an evidence of our contention.

In this example, the word \textit{rug} occurs as the subject of the verb \textit{k\textsuperscript{a}aise} and hence, it is noun. \textit{rug} differs from \textit{rugija} 'sick person' in several respects: firstly, \textit{rug} can take case and number inflection while \textit{rugija} cannot.

\begin{itemize}
\item[(10)]
\begin{enumerate}
\item a. \textit{rugtu} \textit{rugbur}
\textit{rug-tu} \textit{rug-bur}
disease-CLF disease-PL
‘The disease.’ ‘The diseases.’
\item b. \textit{*rugijatu} \textit{*rugijabur}
\textit{rugija-tu} \textit{rugija-bur}
sick person-CLF sick person-PL
‘The sick person.’ ‘The sick persons.’
\end{enumerate}
\end{itemize}
However, Example (10b) is possible in modern Assamese, but only as a reduced version of noun phrase *rugija lorn -tu 'sick boy-CLF'.

Secondly, *rug can be modified by an adjective but *rugija cannot be similarly modified, as (11a-b) illustrate.

(11) a. dagar rug
    dagar rug
    big disease
    ‘Big disease.’

b. *dagor rugija
    dagor rugija
    big sick
    ‘Big sick person.’

Thirdly, *rugija can be modified by an adverb. This is not possible with *rug, as can be seen in (12a-b).

(12) a. *bor rug
    bor rug
    very disease
    ‘Very disease.’

b. bor rugija
    bor rugija
    very sick person
    ‘Very sick person.’

Finally, *rug can occur in a subject position as in (9) whereas *rugija cannot as shown in (13).

(13) *rugijatue tak sepi sepi kʰaise.
    rugija-tu-e ta-k sepi sepi kʰaise.
    sick person-CLF-ERG he.INF.DST-DAT squeeze-NF squeeze-NF eat-IPFV-3
    ‘The sick person is eating into him’
Example (10) above illustrates the application of morphological criteria in determining the category status of words. On the other hand, (11) and (12) illustrate the application of distributional criteria and functional criteria respectively.

2.3.4. Applying the three criteria to languages

On the basis of three criteria discussed in previous section, words are classified into classes such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, adpositions and conjunctions. The traditional grammarian includes pronouns and interjections in this list. Among these classes, first four are considered as major word classes and the rest are categorised as minor ones.

As against the view of the traditional grammarian, descriptive linguists are reluctant to include the pronoun as a separate word class. Rather, they tend to analyse pronouns as a subclass of nouns. Their reason for doing so is based on the functional potential of this class. The function of phrases headed by a pronoun is almost similar to that of phrases headed by a proper noun or a common noun. For example, the class of pronouns functions as heads of noun phrases. The various functions of these noun phrases in the sentences can be as subjects, objects, and complements similar to the functions of other noun phrases containing common nouns or proper nouns. However, the internal structure of pronoun-headed phrases is different from that of noun-headed phrases in two respects: (i) pronouns cannot take all types of dependents that occur with noun headed phrases, and (ii) the class of pronouns is considered as closed class words as they are highly resistant to the addition of new members. On the other hand, the class of nouns consist of open class words as new members of this class are allowed to be added to the vocabulary according to the need of the speakers. However, these two differences are not sufficient to consider pronouns as a separate class from nouns. Rather, from the functional point of view, both pronoun-headed noun phrases and noun-headed noun phrases function in a similar way. Nevertheless, on the basis of the restrictions found in pronouns with respect to their ability to occur with different ranges of dependents in any noun-headed phrase, the pronouns are analysed syntactically as a distinct subclass of nouns by descriptive linguists.

Although the words are categorised into the classes mentioned above, it does not mean that the distribution of these classes is similar across languages. Nouns and verbs
are the most common classes found in almost all the languages of the world. The other classes are found to occur in some languages but not in others. The following section explores the word-classes found in MKR.

2.3.5. Sub-classification of words in MKR

The major word-classes of MKR are nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. Conjunctions are found as a minor word-class. Instead of adpositions, MKR contains a set of relator nouns. The pronoun is considered here as a sub-class of nouns instead of categorising it as a separate class. All the word-classes are distinguished by applying the three formal criteria discussed in the previous section.

MKR has a set of case markers. These are -e, -aka/-ka, -ata/-ta, and -ara/-ra. The elements found with these markers are identified as nouns, as in (14).

(14) a. adharmmaka
    adharmma-ka
    vice-DAT
    ‘The vice.’

    (Ay, Ch. 10, V. 127)

b. gagansaka
    gagan-aka
    sky-DAT
    ‘To the sky.’

    (Ar, Ch. 10, V. 30)

Similarly, the elements occurring with plural formatives -gana and -saba are distinguished as nouns, as in (15).

(15) a. ātrugana
    ātru-gana
    enemy-PL
    ‘Enemies.’

    (Ar, Ch. 17, V. 6)
b.  
śāstrasaba  
śāstra-saba  
scripture-PL

‘The scriptures’

(Su, Ch. 8, V. 2)

However, sometimes it appears that same inflectional marker is attached to both 
nouns and verbs or to other word-classes. For example, the past tense and adjectival 
suffix of English are realized by the marker \(-ed\). In such situations, the morphological 
criteria may not help to distinguish word-classes. Here, linguists use other tests such as 
distributional or functional criteria to determine the class of words. In many cases, the 
modifying elements help to identify the word-class as in (16) from English.

(16) A very beautifully decorated house.

In this sentence, the word *decorated* functions as an adjective because it occurs as a 
modifier of the noun *house*, and is modified by the adverb *beautifully*. The word 
*beautifully*, on the other hand, is modified by the intensifier *very*. Intensifiers are used 
for modifying both adverbs and adjectives in general but not nouns.

In MKR, such a situation can be seen in the case of the \(-e\) marker. This marker is 
used as a case marker as well as a third person agreement marker. Therefore, for 
distinguishing the class of elements occurring with this marker, both the distributional 
and functional criteria need to be used, as illustrated in (17).

(17)  
kuṭumbe  kuṭumbe  kānde  galāgali  kari.  
kuṭumb-e  kuṭumb-e  kānd-e  galāgali  kar-i  
relative-ERG  relative-ERG  cry-3  holding on neck  do-NF

‘The relatives are weeping holding on to each other’s neck.’

(Su, Ch. 29, V. 1)

In the example above, the word *kuṭumbe* occurs in the subject position. Only nouns 
can occur in the subject position. Therefore, *kuṭumbe* is included in the class of nouns, 
with the \(-e\) marker functioning as a subject marker here. Case markers are generally
used to mark subjects, objects and other grammatical relations. Thus, the inflection -e in *kutumbe* is an ergative case according to the case marking morphology of Assamese.

The second -e marked element is verb, because this element is modified by the adverb *galāgali kari*, and this -e functions here as a third person agreement marker.

Another word *sāphala* 'successful' is taken from MKR to identify the class of this word.

(18) *tomāra tanāya rāma sāphala jiwana.*

you.FAM-GEN son Ram success life

The life of your son, Ram became successful.'

(Ay, Ch. 2, V. 15)

(19) *tebese āmāra haibe sāphala jiwana.*

then-EMPH we-GEN be-FUT-3 success life

'Only then will our life be successful.'

(Ay, Ch. 3, V. 62)

In (18), *sāphala* appears to occur with *jiwana* 'life'. *jiwana* belongs to the class of nouns, and both the elements, *sāphala* and *jiwana*, express the head-modifier relation. *sāphala* occurs as a modifier of the head noun *jiwana* and thus it belongs to the class of adjectives.

The validity of this kind of analysis can be proved by another distributional evidence in (19). In this example, the words *āmāra jiwana* 'our life' constitute a noun phrase consisting of the head element *jiwana* along with a genitive marking pronominal modifier. The whole phrase functions as a subject here. *sāphala* is used here in predicative position to describe something about this subject. Hence, from this point of view, it is classified as a subject predicative complement. The place of subject predicative complement can be filled by words from two classes: the noun class and the adjective class. In the present instance, *sāphala* is used as an adjective both semantically and distributionally. The distribution test for its adjective status can be seen from the
explanation given in (18) above. (19) exhibits another pattern of Assamese sentence structure. Here, sāphala forms a constituent along with the verb form haibe ‘will be’. haibe occurs as a copula element. In MKR or in Modern Assamese, the copula element is overt in the future and past tenses, but covert in the present tense. haibe in (19) is a tri-morphemic word, consisting of the verb root ha ‘be’ with the future tense suffix -ib and the third person agreement marker -e.

It is evident from the discussion above that the grammatical markers attached to a specific word can help in identifying word-classes. The next section (§2.4) will be devoted to the discussion of grammatical categories of major word-classes from a general point of view. The grammatical categories of MKR will be surveyed in §2.5 in the light of the discussion provided in §2.4.

2.4. Major word-class categories: a general view

The purpose of this section is to provide a general idea of grammatical categories, i.e., how grammatical categories can be identified across languages, and what types of categories occur across languages. In the light of this discussion, the grammatical categories in MKR can then be surveyed. Such a general-level discussion has motivations for specific-level studies elsewhere also, because it is assumed that any linguistic description of a particular language can benefit from the concepts and categories provided by general linguistics. Moreover, it is believed that the insights acquired from general linguistics can provide us with different perspectives while examining the language data from various points of view.

In the previous chapter, the concept of grammatical category was presented along with an indication of what categories will be discussed in the present study. In this section, that concept will be elaborated a little more in terms of specific grammatical categories associated with particular word classes. The reason of postponing this discussion from first chapter to this section is that without the reference of word classes, the discussion of grammatical category is incomplete. Every grammatical category has a specific relation with some particular word class and this is the reason for providing a
detailed discussion of grammatical categories only after the discussion of word classes has been done.

As stated in the previous chapter, every major word-class has a typical set of grammatical categories which is found to be associated with it universally. Languages select a subset from this typical set. The grammatical categories associated with the major word-classes can be described in terms of three properties: (a) intrinsic properties of words, (b) properties based on syntactic links between words, and (c) properties based on the relationship a word or phrase has to the whole sentence. The first one of these is labelled as Inherent category, the second one is termed as Agreement category, and third one is labelled as Relational category. These categories are defined below in this order, with the help of specific examples.

Inherent categories are those categories which are found to be present intrinsically in a word. For example, in many languages, the nouns are marked according to number, i.e. according to whether they are singular or plural, as shown in the following examples. The first example is taken from Saliba, an Austronesian language, cited in Tallerman (1998: 51). The other two examples are taken from English and Assamese.

\[\text{(20) a. } \text{natu-gu} \quad \text{b. } \text{natu-gu-wao} \]
\[\text{child-my} \quad \text{child-my-PL} \]
\[\text{‘My child.’} \quad \text{‘My children.’} \]
\[\text{(Saliba)}\]

\[\text{(21) a. } \text{my dog} \quad \text{b. } \text{my dogs} \]
\[\text{my dog-s} \quad \text{my dog-PL} \]
\[\text{‘My dog.’} \quad \text{‘My children} \]
\[\text{(English)}\]

\[\text{(22) a. } \text{mur kolom} \quad \text{b. } \text{mur kolombur} \]
\[\text{mu-r kolom} \quad \text{mu-r kolombur} \]
\[\text{I-GEN pen} \quad \text{I-GEN pen-PL} \]
\[\text{‘My pen.’} \quad \text{‘My pens.’} \]
\[\text{(Assamese)}\]

\[2 \text{ The idea of organising grammatical categories in terms of these three properties is taken from Tallerman (1998: 50).}\]
The second type of property namely, agreement categories are those categories which show a syntactic link between words in a phrase or in a clause. For example, the nouns and the adjectives show agreement in terms of the grammatical category of gender within a noun phrase in languages like Sanskrit and Hindi, as illustrated in (23)-(24).

(23) \[ \text{\textit{suskai}n k\textit{\=a\=stham}} \]
\[ \text{\textit{susk\=a-n} k\textit{\=a\=stha-n}} \]
\[ \text{dry-NUT.NOM wood-NUT.NOM} \]
\[ \text{Dry wood.} \]
\[(\text{Sanskrit)}\]

(24) a. \[ \text{\textit{a\text{cc}hi} la\text{dk}i} \]
\[ \text{\textit{a\text{cc}hi} la\text{dk}i} \]
\[ \text{good.FEM girl.FEM} \]
\[ \text{Good girl.} \]
\[(\text{Hindi)}\]

b. \[ \text{\textit{a\text{cc}ha} la\text{dk}a} \]
\[ \text{\textit{a\text{cc}ha} la\text{dk}a} \]
\[ \text{boy.MAS boy.MAS} \]
\[ \text{Good boy.} \]
\[(\text{Hindi)}\]

In (23), the word \textit{k\=a\=stha} ‘wood’ is a noun. It occurs as a head of the noun phrase \textit{\=suskai}n \textit{k\=a\=stham} ‘dry wood’. The suffix -\textit{n} is used to indicate neuter gender and nominative case. The head noun \textit{k\=a\=stha} takes this suffix -\textit{n} in this phrase. \textit{\=susk\=a} ‘dry’ occurs as a modifier of the head and it also takes this suffix -\textit{m}. This indicates that in Sanskrit, the nouns and the adjectives show an agreement relation within a phrase. It can be seen also from the examples of Hindi that the head nouns and the adjectival modifiers in (24a) and (24b) show agreement within the phrase in terms of gender. Here, the examples (24a-b) exhibit feminine gender and masculine gender respectively.
In languages such as Assamese and English, the verbs within a clause agree with their subjects in terms of the grammatical category of person as shown in (25) and (26) illustrate.

(25)  

a. 
moi | bat | kʰału
moi | bat | kʰa-I-U
I | rice | eat-PST-1

'I eat rice.' (Assamese)

b. 
toi | bat | kʰa-li
toi | bat | kʰa-I-I
you.INF | rice | eat-PST-2INF

'You eat rice.' (Assamese)

c. 
tumi | bat | kʰa-la.
tumi | bat | kʰa-I-A
you.FAM | rice | eat-PST-2FAM

'You eat rice.' (Assamese)

d. 
hi | bat | kʰa-le.
he.INF.DST | rice | eat-PST-3

'He eats rice.' (Assamese)

(26) 

I like him
You like him
He likes him

(English)

In Assamese, the verbs agree with all kinds of subjects in terms of person, as shown in (25). In English, on the other hand, the verbs agree only with third person subjects as shown in the translation of (25d) and (26).

The relational categories refer to those categories which mark the relationship a word or phrase has to the whole sentence. For example, the category of case is used in Assamese, English and other many languages to identify grammatical relations in a
clause, that is, to find out whether a noun phrase is a subject or an object. This is illustrated in (27) for Assamese and in (28) for Turkish.

(27) \textit{rame} hitak kitap\textsuperscript{k}on dile.
\textit{ram-e} hita-k kitap-k\textsuperscript{k}on di-l-e
Ram-\textsc{erg} Sita-\textsc{dat} book-\textsc{clf} give-\textsc{pst-3}

'Ram gave the book to Sita.'

(Assamese)

(28) \textit{Mehmet} adam-a elma-lar-i ver-di
Mehmet.NOM man-\textsc{dat} apple-\textsc{pl-acc} give-\textsc{pst-3sg}

'Mehmet gave the apples to the man.'

(Turkish, cited in Blake (1994: 1)

In (27), the inflectional marker \textit{-e} indicates that \textit{Ram} is the subject of the verb \textit{de} 'to give'. The suffix \textit{-k} indicates that \textit{hita} is the indirect object of the verb. The occurrence of \textit{kitap\textsuperscript{k}on} 'the book' contrasts with \textit{Rame} and \textit{hitak} as it does not take any overt suffix. \textit{kitap\textsuperscript{k}on} functions as the direct object of the verb. In Assamese, the direct object of a ditransitive verb does not bear an overt suffix. On the other hand, a different situation is found in (28) where the suffix \textit{-a} indicates that \textit{adam} is the indirect object of the verb \textit{vermek} 'to give', while the suffix \textit{-r} indicates that \textit{elma\textsuperscript{lar}} is the direct object of the verb. \textit{Mehmet} does not take any overt suffix but covertly expresses the nominative case and functions as the subject of the verb. Thus, it is evident from these examples that the case suffixes help to identify different grammatical relations in a clause.

The grammatical categories of the major word-classes are identified below in terms of the three properties associated with the inherent, agreement and relational categories.

\textbf{Grammatical categories for nouns}

The grammatical categories for nouns can be described in terms of the inherent and relational categories.

(i) The inherent categories for nouns are number, gender, and definiteness.

(ii) The relational categories for nouns are case.
Grammatical categories for verbs

The grammatical categories for verbs can be analysed in terms of the three properties.

(i) The inherent categories for verbs are tense, aspect, mood, and transitivity.

(ii) The relational categories for verbs are voice.

(iii) The agreement categories for verbs are agreement with the arguments of the verb.

Grammatical categories for adjectives

The grammatical categories for adjectives can be analysed in terms of the inherent and relational categories.

(i) The inherent categories for adjectives are degrees of comparison.

(ii) The agreement categories for adjectives are the agreement of attributive adjectives with head noun and the agreement of predicative adjectives with subject.

2.5. Grammatical categories of major word-classes: in MKR

Apart from the agreement categories for the adjective class, all the categories mentioned in the previous section are found in MKR. The following subsections will deal with them accordingly.

2.5.1. Grammatical categories for nouns

2.5.1.1. Inherent categories for nouns

The inherent categories for nouns in MKR are classifiers and number. Definiteness is included under the heading of classifiers. However, even though some suffixes and lexical expressions are found to distinguish male referents from female referents, they cannot be included in the category of gender. Gender is not a grammatical category in MKR. One example from each category is cited in (29-30) in support of our contention.
Classifiers

(29) kanyājana
  kanya-ja-na
girl-CLF
  ‘The girl.’
  (Su, Ch. 14, V. 90)

Number

(30) pātragana
  pātra-gana
  king’s minister-PL
  ‘The ministers of king’
  (Laṅ, Ch. 7, V. 49)

The marker -jana functions as a classifier in (29). The marker -gana indicates plural reference in (30).

2.5.1.2. Relational categories for nouns

As a relational category, case markers play an important role in the syntax of MKR. They are used to mark grammatical relations at the clause level, as in (31).

(31) dānabe jīnila dewatāka samarata.
  dānab-e jīn-il-a dewatā-ka samar-ata
  demon-ERG defeat-PST-3 deity-DAT battle-LOC
  ‘The demons defeated the deities in the battle.’
  (Ay, Ch. 8, V. 2)

In (31), the noun phrase dānab takes the ergative marker -e, and functions as the subject of the clause. The noun phrase dewatā takes the dative marker -ka and serves to indicate the object of the clause. The noun phrase samara, on the other hand, takes the locative marker -ata and functions as the oblique argument of the clause. From this data, it can be seen that the case markers play an important role in signalling the grammatical relations in Assamese. They also help to distinguish the core arguments of the clause from the oblique arguments or adjuncts as shown in the example above.
2.5.2. Grammatical categories for verbs

2.5.2.1. Inherent categories

All the three inherent categories for verbs namely, tense, aspect, and mood are found in this text. Moreover, MKR uses negative prefixation to make polarity distinctions. Representative examples of all these categories are given in (32-35).

Tense

(32) bindhile
    bindh-il-e
    prick-PST-3
    '(He) pricked.'
    (Ar, Ch. 8, V. 133)

Aspect

(33) karicho
    kar-ich-o
    do-IPFV-1
    'I/we am doing.'
    (Lañ, Ch. 17, V. 51)

Mood

(34) karantoka
    kar-antoka
    do-3.OPT
    'I/we wish he does.'
    (Ay, Ch. 10, V. 144)

Polarity

(35) nakara
    na-kar-ā
    NEG-do-2FAM
    'You do not do.'
    (Ay, Ch. 21, V. 70)
In (32), the suffix -/\ encodes the function of past reference through the past tense. The suffix -ich in (33) expresses the category of aspect. The suffix -antoka in (34) expresses the category of mood. In (35), na- functions as a marker of polarity.

2.5.2.2. Agreement categories

Personal suffixes are found in MKR to mark agreement relations between the verb and its arguments. The verbs in MKR agree with the subject argument in terms of person but not with the object or other arguments as illustrated in (36)³.

(36) a. (mai) karō
    mai kar-ō
    I do-1
    'I do.'

b. (tai) kara
    tai kar-a
    you.INF do-2INF
    'You do.'

c. (tumi) karā
    tumi kar-ā
    you.FAM do-2FAM
    'You do.'

d. (teho) kare
    teho kar-e
    he.HON.DST do-3
    'He does.'

The verb kar in (36a) agrees with the first person subject mai and takes the first person agreement marker -ō. In (36b) the verb kar agrees with the second person inferior subject tai and takes the second person inferior agreement marker -a. Similarly,

³ Subject pronouns are cited just to show the paradigmatic contrast in the verbal paradigm in terms of person. Corresponding sentences are hard to find due to the poetic nature of the text.
the verb form of (36c) agrees with the second person familiar subject and takes the second person familiar agreement marker -ā. In (36d) the verb agrees with the third person subject and takes the third person agreement marker -e.

2.5.3. Grammatical categories for adjectives

To express the degree of comparison, most languages across the world employ the device of affixation and analytic particle with the word class of adjectives. This category is expressed in MKR by adding the -ta case marker with the analytic particle kari, as in (37).

(37) āmi pālica barise rājīta kari jyeṣṭha.
āmi pālica bariṣe rājā-ta kari jyeṣṭha
we five year king-LOC COM old

'We are five years older than the king.'

(Ay, Ch. 13, V. 15)

In this example, the sequence -ta kari is used to express the degree of comparison. Assamese behaves differently from English in this regard. To indicate the degree of comparison, English uses both analytic particles such as more, most, and suffixes -er, -est with adjectives. But in Assamese, adjectives do not take any suffixes as shown in (37). Rather, the -ta case marker is used with noun elements following the kari particle in MKR. In Modern Assamese the -koi suffix is used, as illustrated in (38).

(38) ram hitatkoi sari bōṣr dapor.
ram hita-t-koi sari bōṣr dapor
Ram Sita-LOC-COM four year elder

'Ram is four years elder than Sita.'

Irrespective of whether they occur in attributive or predicative positions, the adjectives do not show any agreement relation in MKR.

However, MKR retains three suffixes from Sanskrit similar to the -er, -est in English to express the degree of comparison. These three suffixes are -tama, -tara, and -stha, as shown in (39-41).
(39) a. درها-ترارا لکشن-ے
dhratara laksman-er
determine-COM Laksman-ERG

'More determined Laksman.'
(Lañ, Ch. 35, V. 146)

b. تیکشپاتارا مہا دبیا بآنے
tkṣapata-rara mahā dibya bān-e
sharp-COM great heavenly arrow-INS

'With the great, sharp, heavenly arrow.'
(Lañ, Ch. 36, V. 7)

c. تی لاحوتارا جانا
tai laghu-tara jana
you-INF inferior-COM people

'You are inferior people.'
(Lañ, Ch. 35, V. 104)

(40) a. سماستا لکارا اسے دھارما مکھیتاما.
samasta lok-ara ies dharma mukhyatama.
all people-GEN it-EMPH duty chief-SUP

'It is the chief duty for all the people.'
(Kis, Ch. 1, V. 5)

b. مگھے ینہا دھاکی اچے ساربیتاما تاری
meghe yena dhāk-i āch-e sarbbottama tārā
cloud-ERG like cover-NF be-3 all-SUP star

'Like the cloud covers up the most excellent stars.'
(Su, Ch. 14, V. 64)

(41) a. دارپیشثا اسورا.
darp-īṣṭha asura
proud-SUP demon

'Most proud demon.'
(Kis, Ch. 23, V. 16)
b. *balīśtha* rāwaṇa.
   *bal-īṣṭha* rāwaṇa
   strong-SUP Rawan
   ‘Strongest Rawan.’
   (Kis, Ch. 18, V. 12)

c. *kanīśtha* lakhāi.
   *kan-īṣṭha* lakhāi.
   young-SUP Lakhai
   ‘Youngest Lakhai.’
   (Ay, Ch. 3, V. 54)

However, these suffixes are not very productive, and their occurrence in MKR is quite rare.

### 2.6. The categories chosen for analysis

Though all the grammatical categories for the major word-classes are available in MKR, it has been decided to focus on only some of them for the purpose of the present study. The selection is largely based on the relative importance of the categories in both structural and functional terms, and on the availability of data. These points are taken up in greater detail below.

In the first place, it has been decided to focus only on the categories relating to the verbs and nouns, not on the adjectives, adverbs or other word classes. This has been decided for the following reasons:

(i) All the kernel clauses\(^4\) contain at least one verb and one noun.

(ii) Nouns and verbs are treated as more basic by traditional grammarians. The reason for this is that these two word classes can be defined independently of the rest. The definition of adjectives and adverbs, on the other hand, require reference to verbs and nouns.

(iii) The categories associated with verbs and nouns are used extensively in MKR.

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\(^4\) This type of clause is distinguished from others in terms of the three properties mentioned in Huddleston (1984: 15-16): it forms a sentence on its own; it is structurally complete; it is declarative, not imperative, interrogative or exclamative; and finally, it is positive, not negative.
(iv) An intensive focus on select areas of importance has been preferred as a matter of analytic and descriptive priority rather than an extensive coverage.

For the reasons cited above, the adjectives and adverbs will not be treated separately. However, relevant discussion of these two classes will be included wherever appropriate, for instance, in the description of the nominal and verbal categories.

Though the pronouns are being treated syntactically as a sub-class of nouns as mentioned in §2.3.4, they will not be discussed independently here. Rather, they will be viewed from the point of their functional potential, and will be treated structurally as noun phrases. They will be discussed in relevant chapters whenever such a discussion is required from a functional point of view.

2.7. Rationale for the organisation of chapters

The chapters of the present study have been organised according to their relative role and importance in the organisation of grammar.

For example, the verb is the most important element in the clause where it functions as the ultimate head. The most central kind of sentence, namely the simple sentence also necessarily contains the verb. Thus, the fact the verb plays an important role in two major grammatical units of a language makes it necessary to discuss it first, before taking up the discussion of nouns and other elements. Another reason for the decision to discuss the verb first is that this discussion creates the context for the discussion of other elements.

In the discussion of the verb, the agreement categories will be treated first, because the basic type of verb form seems to consist of the verbal root followed by the person agreement markers. Accordingly, the discussion of person will be given precedence before moving on to the chapter on inherent categories. The discussion of non-finite verbs will be done after the discussion of the agreement and inherent categories, because this kind of verbs occurs in multi-verb constructions.

The discussion of the nominal categories, however, has been organized in a manner that is opposite to that for the verb. The discussion of the nominal category has been organised from the bottom level of hierarchy. Thus, the inherent categories relating to the word level will be considered first. This will be followed by the discussion of the
relational categories at the syntactic level. However, in the case of the verb, the organization of chapters has been done from the top level of hierarchy. Here, the importance of the sentence-level categories will be considered first before turning to the description of the inherent categories. The rationale for this order of treatment has been set out in the beginning section of the next chapter.