7 Nominal category II: Relational

7.1. Preview

The purpose of this chapter is to deal with the relational categories of nouns in MKR. As discussed in §2, the relational category for nouns is case. It is generally considered as one of three basic devices (word order, agreement and case marking) in languages for identifying the core grammatical relations, i.e. Subjects and objects. It fulfills the same objective in MKR also. This section deals with a general discussion on the role of case in languages before taking up various aspects of case marking in MKR in the later sections.

The role of case in organization of grammar can be explained with the help of Blake’s definition of case as “a system of marking dependent nouns for the type of relationship they bear to their heads” (1994:1). This relationship can be between a noun and a verb at the clause level, and between a noun and a preposition, postposition or another noun at the phrase level. In the former type of relationship, the verb is taken to be the head of the clause, because it is the verb that largely determines what dependents may be present. For example, *de* 'give' in modern Assamese is a three-place verb that takes three arguments: a giver, expressed by the subject in the ergative case, a gift expressed by the direct object in the absolutive case, and a recipient expressed by the indirect object in the dative case, as in (1).

(1)  
rame loru makok dile  
rame lora-tu-ø mak-ø di-l-e  
Ram-ERG boy-CLF-ABS mother-DAT give-PST-3  
'Ram gave the boy to the mother.'

(1) explains the use of case markers as an essential mechanism for identifying the grammatical relations that any NP (Noun phrase) expresses at the clause level. At the phrase level, cases mark the relationship between a head noun to another noun, as in (2). The relationship between a head noun with a relator noun, as in (3).
It is clear from Blake's definition that case markers are not only used to identify the core grammatical relations at the clause level. They are also used to mark adverbial elements, which function as oblique arguments and adjuncts in a clause. Probably observing this kind of syntactic roles expressed by case markers, Bergsland (1997) introduced the two terms adverbial case as opposed to relational case. The first term refers to the marking of adverbial elements like locative, instrumental, ablative, allative, and so on. The latter term refers to the marking of core grammatical relations, such as nominative for the subject, accusative for the direct object, and dative for the indirect object etc. Bergsland appears to have used these two terms completely on the basis of the grammatical relations which must be identified in terms of their syntactic and morphological properties, not on the basis of their semantic roles. The term semantic role is used here to highlight the point that there seems to be a certain overlap between grammatical relations and semantic roles [see Palmer (1994), Blake (ibid.), Kroeger (2005)]. Because of such an overlap, linguists like Blake (ibid.: 32) and Kroeger (ibid.: 103) have used the terms grammatical case for marking purely grammatical relations, and semantic case for encoding specific semantic roles, especially spatial relationships.

The semantic cases encode only homogenous semantic relations such as location, goal or source in contrast to grammatical cases, which are used to mark grammatical relations that can be semantically heterogeneous. For example, the grammatical relation

---

1 This term is adopted from Kroeger (2005: 57). It is used here in preference to terms or direct arguments like subject, direct object, and indirect object, in a sense that the grammatical relationship between a verb and this type of arguments is less close and significant than the relationship between the verb and its subject or two objects, but closer and more significant than the relationship between the verb and its adjuncts. The difference between an oblique argument and an adjunct is that an adjunct is always optional while an oblique argument can be either obligatory or optional.
of subject expresses a variety of semantic roles such as patient, agent, and instrument. However, languages often do not show a clear-cut distinction between grammatical case and semantic case. The reason for this is that it is very common for a syntactic case to codify a semantic relation or role that does not relate to the syntactic relation it expresses. On the other hand, there are situations where the semantic cases codify some function that is purely syntactic in nature. These two situations can be illustrated through data from MKR. For instance, the dative case -ka in MKR not only expresses the object relation, it also expresses the semantic role of destination and distance. Similarly, the locative case -ta, expresses the semantic role of location, but also marks the object relation. However, the occurrence of the latter is restricted to some personal pronouns only. For this type of inconsistent behaviour of case markers, no aforementioned cover terms will be used in this chapter to categorize the case system in MKR. Rather, traditional terms such as ergative, absolutive, dative, and so on will be used. Moreover, a case will be considered as syntactic, if its primary function is to encode a purely syntactic relation. Quite often, cases like locative, instrumental, ablative, or allative encode semantic roles such as location, instrument, source, direction, etc. Functionally, however, all the phrases containing such semantic roles are adverbials which are identified entirely in terms of syntactic relations. Along the lines of Kurylowicz's view (1964:181-3; cited in Blake ibid.: 33), we will consider that the primary function of the dative is to express the indirect object along with the only object of transitive clause, if the noun phrase indicating the object of the transitive clause is semantically animate. The other adverbial functions of dative will be considered as secondary since all the adverbial functions are determined by the context, in particular by the choice of the verb or the choice of the dative noun. The argument for our contention is that a dative of destination is found in MKR only with verbs of motion such as gaila 'go-PST-3' in mithilā-ka gaila 'went to Mithila' and a dative of extent is used only with nouns referring to a measure of distance or period of time, as choudha barisa-ka lägi 'for fourteen years' in MKR. Like dative, the function of other case markers in MKR will also be treated in a similar manner. Nevertheless, some universal features exhibited by languages of the world will be discussed as a means of
understanding the case marking system of MKR. The discussion provided below is based on Comrie (1981) and Payne (1997).

To define grammatical relations adequately, three basic semantico-syntactic roles are identified across the languages of the world: S (Only argument of intransitive verb), A (Agent-like argument of transitive verb), and P (Patient-like argument of transitive verb). The system of grouping of these three semantico-syntactic roles varies from language to language. Two basic systems of the grouping are the nominative-accusative system and the ergative-absolutive system. In the nominative-accusative system, S and A take the same case marker as opposed to P, which takes a different case marker. In such a system, S and A are marked by nominative case marker and P is marked by accusative case marker. In the ergative-absolutive system, the S and the P share the same case marker as opposed to the A, which takes a distinct case marker in contrast to S/P. Accordingly, S and P share the absolutive marker and A is marked by the ergative case in this system.

Apart from these two systems, three other logically possible case marking systems are also found in languages: the system where the same form is used for S, A, and P; the system that has distinct cases for each S, A, and P; and the system where A and P are grouped together as against S (Payne ibid.: 140). The last two systems are very rare. The first one is widespread in languages of the world. In languages where case morphology is not available for identifying S, A, and P, other means such as verb agreement and word order are used for identifying S, A, and P in those languages.

It is also seen that some languages have more than one case marking system of organizing grammatical relations, known as split systems. The two kinds of split systems found in languages are split intransitivity and split ergativity. Split intransitivity applies in the case of intransitive clauses. According to this system, the S arguments of

---

2 This term is adopted from Payne (1997: 133). The reason of using this term is that A and P are identified by the semantic notion of Agent and Patient or by the syntactic relation of subject and object.

3 As mentioned Footnote 2, the grammatical relation of subject of a transitive clause generally represents the semantic notion of Agent. But from studies of the languages of the world, it is found that the subject of a transitive clause does not always correspond to the semantic notion of Agent. In that case, the A argument is treated morphosyntactically in the same manner as prototypical Agents are treated. For that reason the term Agent-like is used here, A may not be a good Agent, but it can occur in the same way in transitive clause as any prototypical Agent.

4 The term Patient-like is used in a same way as the term Agent-like. The P relation of the transitive clause may not be a good Patient but the all noun phrases occurring in this position behave as a prototypical Patient.
an intransitive verb may be expressed in two or more morphologically distinct ways in some languages. One common split intransitive system found in languages is the system where some S arguments are expressed in the same way as transitive A arguments and other in the same way as transitive P arguments. In split ergativity, the grouping based on topic-worthiness depends on the hierarchies of animacy, empathy, potential of agency, etc. of the arguments in transitive clauses. In this system, arguments that are higher on one of these hierarchies will condition the nominative/accusative system. On the other hand, arguments that are lower on the hierarchy will condition the ergative/absolutive system. These two split systems are expressed in languages in two ways: by case marking morphology and by some syntactic processes. These syntactic processes are complement subject omission, relativization, and conjunction reduction in coordinating construction. All the three processes are not found in any one language – their presence varies from one language to the other.

An examination of the data of MKR in the light of the above discussion reveals that the case marking pattern of MKR follows both the ergative-absolutive system and the nominative-accusative system. Even though it follows the ergative-absolutive case marking system with nouns, it does not seem to exhibit pure ergativity, but split ergativity. With pronoun, it follows the nominative-accusative system. Of the three basic devices to mark the grammatical relations stated above, the case marking pattern in MKR shows only the ergative-absolutive system, while the other two devices, along with syntactic process show the nominative-accusative system. The discussion in the next section will present supporting evidence for this observation.

The next section will deal with the case markers of MKR as follows. The distribution of case markers (§7.4), functions of case markers will be considered in (§7.5), case markers in modern Assamese (§7.6) and chapter summary (§7.7). While giving a synchronic description of case markers, if some issues arise which call for explanations from historical perspectives, they will be addressed in the relevant sections.

7.2. Case markers in MKR

Four distinct markers of case relations are found in MKR. These are, -e, -ka, -ra, and -ta. Of these, -e is used to signal ergative, instrumental and locative. The reason for this kind
of merging may be related to the systems of nominative-accusative and ergative-absolutive syntax, which will be discussed in relevant sections. MKR has a separate case marker for the locative, which is realized as -\text{ta}. -\text{ka} is used as a dative, and -\text{ra} occurs as a genitive. Absolutive is unmarked in MKR. This information is summarized in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1 Case markers in MKR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Ergative</th>
<th>Dative</th>
<th>Genitive</th>
<th>Locative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-e</td>
<td>-ka</td>
<td>-ra</td>
<td>-ta</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each case marker has some orthographic variations which is graphologically conditioned. These variations are outlined in the next section.

7.3. Orthographic variation of case markers

Four orthographic variants of the -\text{e} marker are found in MKR. These are: -\text{e}, -\text{ye}, -\text{we}, and -\text{i}. -\text{e} occurs after words ending with a consonants letter, while -\text{ye} occurs after the words ending with a, i, short j, long i and u. -\text{we} occurs after a and i ending words, while -\text{i} is found to occur after a ending words.

Two orthographic variants, -\text{ka}, and -\text{aka}, are found for the -\text{ka} marker in MKR. -\text{ka} occurs after words ending with vowel letters other than a, while -\text{aka} occurs after words ending with consonants.

MKR has two variants for -\text{ra}: -\text{ra}, and -\text{ara}, and two variants for -\text{ta}: -\text{ta}, and -\text{ata}. Like -\text{ka} and -\text{aka}, -\text{ra}, and -\text{ta} occur after words ending with vowels other than a. -\text{ara} and -\text{ata} occur after words with consonant letter at the end. These orthographic variants are summarized in Table 7.2.
### Table 7.2 The orthographic variants of case markers in MKR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Suffix</th>
<th>After all consonants</th>
<th>After a, i, u</th>
<th>After a, a</th>
<th>All vowels other than a</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ERG</td>
<td>-e</td>
<td>-e</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-ye</td>
<td>-ye</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-we</td>
<td>-we</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-i</td>
<td>-i</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAT</td>
<td>-ka</td>
<td></td>
<td>-ka</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-aka</td>
<td></td>
<td>-aka</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEN</td>
<td>-ra</td>
<td></td>
<td>-ra</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-ara</td>
<td></td>
<td>-ara</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOC</td>
<td>-ta</td>
<td></td>
<td>-ta</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-ata</td>
<td></td>
<td>-ata</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 7.4. Distribution of case markers

Some common distribution patterns of case markers found in languages will be discussed first (following Blake: 1994) before proceeding to the specific discussion of the distribution of case markers in MKR.

### 7.4.1. Distribution of case markers: general observations

Case markers are normally distributed within the clause, noun phrase, word, and subordinate clause.

**A. Within the clause**

(a) Case marks the relationship of various arguments and adjuncts to the predicate. These arguments and adjuncts are usually realized by noun phrases or adverb phrases, and the predicate is usually a verb.
(b) Apart from the marking of arguments and adjuncts, case is also used to show concord between a predicative nominal or adjective and a subject. In such cases, the predicative nominal occurs either with grammatical verb or without any grammatical verb. When the predicative nominal occurs without any verb then the predicative nominal is considered as the head of the clause and the concord is of a head (predicative nominal) with a dependent (subject). Due to this agreement relation, a predicative nominal and a predicative adjective share the same case marker with the dependent subject. On the other hand, if a verb is used with a predicative nominal or adjective, then the verb will be the grammatical head of the clause, and the concord will be between the two dependents, i.e. between the subject and the predicative nominal, and between the subject and the predicative adjective.

(c) In addition to marking the relation between subjects and predicative nominals or adjectives, case suffixes mark the agreement relation between objects and predicative nominals or adjectives.

B. Within the noun phrase

(i) Case marker is used to show concord within the noun phrase. Here, case appears on the head noun of the noun phrase, and also on the adjective and the determiner.

(ii) Case markers appear on the final word in the noun phrase in phrase marking languages. It has two subtypes: (a) the final word as the head noun in the noun phrase, (b) but as dependent to the head.

(iii) Only one constituent of the noun phrase is marked, not necessarily the head or the final word in the phrase.

(iv) Case markers appear obligatorily on the head, optionally on the dependents.

(v) In some languages case marks the determiner and the noun, but not the adjective; in other languages, it marks adjectives rather than nouns.

(vi) The relationship of dependent nouns to the head noun in a noun phrase can be expressed by a variety of non-core or peripheral cases.

C. Within the word

(I) Case is more often realized by suffixes, not by prefixes.

(II) Case marking is found as a fusion with the stem.
(III) Case markers follow number or other suffixes of the noun. Alternatively, case markers precede other suffixes of the noun, such as number, possessor marker etc.

(IV) Case markers are added to stems that include a stem-forming element, often identifiable as a case marker.

(V) More than one inflectional case marker appears in a linear order.

(VI) Two or more cases are used with different scope and often with different functions.

D. Within the subordinate clause

Within the subordinate clause, case is relevant to the marking of relations within the clause, and the marking of the relation of the clause as a whole with its governing predicate.

The data of MKR will be examined in the light of above discussion throughout the following sections.

7.4.2. Distribution of case markers in MKR

The present section deals with the elements that take the case marker looks at the distribution of the case markers in clauses, phrases, and words.

Normally, the case markers occur as the rightmost elements in the head noun in MKR. But if any discourse markers are attached to the noun, then the case markers precede the discourse markers. In other situations, the case markers follow all the markers such as number, classifier etc. that are added to a noun.

The -e marker occurs overtly with nouns, but does not occur with pronouns. All the allographic variants of -e that mentioned in Table 7.2 above are attached to nouns or noun phrases marking the grammatical relation of subjects. In contrast to its other variants, -e occurs with all nouns or noun phrases encoding the relationships of subject, instrument and location.

-ka can occur with both nouns and pronouns, while -aka can occur only with nouns. Similar to -ka, the marker -ra, and -ta occur with both nouns and pronouns, while -ara,
and -ata occur with only nouns. Both nouns and pronouns take the locative -ta but pronouns does not take -e, even though it is used in a locative sense.

Distributionally, these markers are found in clauses (§7.5.1.1), phrases (§7.5.1.3) and words (§7.5.2) and where they express a variety of functions. The functional description of case markers will be discussed in the next section.

7.5. Function of case markers

The function of the case markers varies according to the nouns or pronouns, with whom they occur. For example, when dative marker -ka is used with nouns, it has both a primary and a secondary function, depending on its concurrence with objects and other adverbials. When it is used with pronouns, -ka expresses only a primary function.

Likewise, locative -ta marks oblique arguments and adjuncts when it occurs with nouns; But when it occurs with pronouns, it marks objects also. When is used, the occurrence of -e in a locative sense is restricted to nouns: in this function it does not occur with pronouns. For this reason, the case marking of nouns and pronouns will be treated differently in §7.5.1 and §7.5.2, respectively.

7.5.1. Case marking pattern of nouns

As mentioned earlier, all the four case markers that exist in MKR occur with nouns and express different functions. The functions of these case markers will be first discussed within the sentence, in the following order – clause level (§7.5.1.1.), phrase level (§7.5.1.3), subordinate clause (§7.5.1.4) and word level (§7.5.2).

7.5.1.1. At the clause level

The functions of the four case markers within the clause will be discussed in the following sequence: -e (§7.5.1.1.1), -ka (§7.5.1.1.2) -ta (§7.5.1.1.3) and -ra (§7.5.1.1.4).
7.5.1.1.1. -e marker

The -e marker serves both a primary and a secondary function as defined in §7.1. Both functions are identified in purely syntactic terms, not semantic roles. These two functions are discussed below.

(A) The Primary function of -e

In its primary function, -e marks the core grammatical relation of subject as in (4).

(4) dānabe jinila dewatāka samarata.
    dānab-e jin-il-a dewatā-ka samara-ata
    'The demons defeated the gods in the war.'

    (Ay, Ch. 8, V. 2)

In (4), dānab functions as a subject to the verb and hence it takes the ergative case.

As a subject marker, -e occurs optionally with subjects of intransitive verbs (S) and subjects of transitive verbs (A), as in (5)-(10). It occurs with transitive subjects more frequently than with intransitive subjects.

Intransitive subjects without -e

(5) daśaratha basilanta ratna sinhāsane.
    dasaratha-ś bas-il-anta ratna sinhāsan-e
    'Dasarath sat on the throne made by gold.'

    (Ay, Ch. 2, V. 9)

(6) rāma sitā laksmaṇa gailanta banamāje.
    rāma-ś sitā-ś laksmaṇa-ś ga-il-anta banamāj-e
    'Ram, Sita, and Laksman went to the middle of the forest.'

    (Ay, Ch. 27, V. 27)
Intransitive subject with -e marker

(7) sitā same rāme ṭuti āchilā ethāta.
sitā same rām-e ṣut-i āch-il-ā ethāta
Sita with Ram-ERG sleep-NF be-PST-3 here

Ram was sleeping here with Sita.'
(Ay, Ch. 32, V. 79)

(8) bandhuccheda kari rāme banabāse yāi.
bandhuccheda kar-i rām-e banabās-e yā-i
friend-break do-NF Ram-ERG exile-DlRT go-3

‘Breaking friendship, Ram is going into exile.’
(Ay, Ch. 14, V. 31)

(9) rāme āgabārhi gailā.
rām-e āgabārhi ga-il-ā
Ram-ERG precede-NF go-PST-3

‘Ram preceded.’
(Ar, Ch. 7, V. 7)

Transitive subject without -e

(10) bāpaka dekhilā rāma prasāda upare.
bāp-aka dekh-il-ā rāma prasāda upar-e
father-DAT see-PST-3 Ram residence upper-LOC

‘Ram saw his father on the upper part of the residence.’
(Ay, Ch. 3, V. 12)

The transitive subject with overt -e is shown in (4). In (5)-(6), the only argument of the intransitive verbs bas-il-anta ‘sit-PAST-3.HON’ and ga-il-anta ‘go-PST-3.HON’ occurs without overt case marker. In (7)-(8), -e occurs with the subjects of intransitive verbs sut-i ach-il-ā ‘sleep-NF be-PST-3’, yā-i ‘exile-DlRT go-3’, and āgabārhi ga-il-ā ‘precede-NF go-PST-3’. In (10), the subject of transitive verb dekh-il-ā ‘see-PST-3’ does not take overt -e marker, but in (4) it takes overt -e marker. In MKR, intransitive and transitive subjects occur both with and without an overt marker. This kind of variable use of case
marking patterns raises a question about the grammatical characteristic of the language of the time of MKR. Of the two basic case marking system, namely, nominative-accusative and ergative-absolutive, which one was followed by the language of that time? To answer this question, we first need to make some generalizations on the behaviour of subject marking pattern in MKR.

From the behaviour of subject marker in MKR, three logical possibilities can be generalized: (i) both subjects of transitive and intransitive verbs take the -e marker, (ii) neither subjects of transitive and intransitives take the overt case marker, and (iii) the subject of transitive verbs takes different marker from the subject of intransitive verbs (e.g., transitive subject takes the -e marker while intransitive subject remains unmarked). If any one of these three possibilities matches the subject marking system of MKR, we would be in a position to decide whether the case marking system of MKR follows the nominative-accusative system or the ergative-absolutive system. Otherwise, it has to be assumed that the inconsistency seen above might be due to rhyming patterns relating to stylistic reasons, since the language of the MKR belong to the poetic genre. The evidence of rhyming pattern can be exemplified by (7), where *sitā same rām-e* 'Sita with Ram-ERG' seems more musical than *sitā same rām* 'Sita with Ram'. But for this generalization, we need to examine the three possibilities mentioned above carefully.

Among the three logical possibilities stated in the previous paragraph, the first and the third one are commonly found in languages, while the occurrence of the second one is not attested. This situation can be explained by the fact that if a language has a morphological case system, whether it is nominative-accusative or ergative-absolutive, the agent of transitive subject is always marked. As mentioned earlier, a nominative-accusative system groups S and A together against P, and an ergative-absolutive system groups S and P together against A. In the latter instance, S and P generally remain unmarked while for A, a distinct marker is used. From this point of view, MKR already has a distinct marker for indicating the subject relation. But it is used optionally with both the subject of transitive verbs and the subject of intransitive verbs as stated earlier. This type of inconsistent behaviour of the subject marker in MKR leads to either of the two generalizations: (a) MKR represents a nominative-accusative system, where the subjects of both transitive and intransitive verbs are marked in a similar way, by the -e
marker, and (b) MKR represents ergative-absolutive system, where -e is used to mark only the subject of transitive verb while the subject of intransitive verb is left unmarked. However, in order to reach either of these two generalizations, we need to first identify all the markers that are used for encoding the three grammatical relations of S, A, and P in MKR. The marker used for S and A has already been figured out, but the marker for the P relation still remains to be specified.

MKR has a distinct marker for the object relation, but it is not clear whether this marker occurs with all objects of transitive and ditransitive verbs. If does not, then our next task is to find out if any pattern exists, using some tests that involve certain pragmatic and semantic factors such as animacy, human/non-human, the specific/definite and types of noun used as objects such as proper/common noun, to confirm if these influence the selection of the object marker. This information will help determine whether the case marking system of MKR represents a nominative-accusative system or an ergative-absolutive system. This issue will be dealt with in §7.5.1.1.2.

(B) Secondary function of -e

Apart from marking the subject, the -e marker also marks adverbials in MKR. It occurs with both oblique arguments and adjuncts, as illustrated in (11)-(17).

As a marker of oblique argument

(11) tomāra abhya pade pašilo šaraṇa
tomā-ra abhya pad-e paś-il-o šaraṇa
you.FAM-GEN safe foot-LOC worship-PST-1 shelter

‘(I/we) found shelter in your safe feet.’  
(Kis, Ch. 11, V. 4)

As a marker of adjunct

(12) abilambe rāghawe chedibe daśa skandha.
abilam-b-e rāghaw-e ched-ib-e daśa skandha-Ø
quickly-AVZR.TM Raghaw-ERG cut-FUT-3 ten head-ABS

‘Raghaw will cut the ten heads quickly.’  
(Ar, Ch. 13, V. 34)
(13) biṣāde kausālāyā kaikeyīka lagi cāillā
biṣād-e kausālāyā kaikeyī-ka lagi cā-il-ā
sorrow-AVZR.MNR Kausalya Kaikeyi-DAT towards see-PST-3

‘Kausalya watched towards Kaikeyi with sorrow.’
(Ay, Ch. 23, V. 1)

(14) sighrabeg-e paīleka tamasā naditīra.
sighrabeg-e pā-il-eka tamasā naditīra
fast-AVZR.TM reach-PST-3 Tamasa river-bank

‘(He/she) reached the bank of Tamasa river very fast.’
(Ay, Ch. 17, V. 11)

(15) sighrabeg-e sugriwē hānila dui śāla.
sighrabeg-e sugriw-ē hā-nil-a dui śāla
fast-AVZR.MNR Sugriw-ERG throw-PST-3 two weapon

‘Sugriw threw two weapons very fast.’
(Kis, Ch. 7, V. 31)

(16) punyayoge kāli śrīrāmakā dibō rāja.
punyayog-e kāli śrīrāma-ka di-b-o rāja-0
auspicious-moment-AVZR.TM tomorrow Śrīrama-DAT give-FUT-1 kingdom-ABS

‘(I/we) will give the kingdom to Ram at the auspicious moment of tomorrow.’
(Ay, Ch. 5, V. 43)

(17) arājak-e niranture channa hāibe rāja.
arājak-e niranture channa ha-il-ē rāja
interregnum-AVZR.MNR always destroy be-FUT-3 kingdom

‘The kingdom will be destroyed in the interregnum.’
(Ay, Ch. 23, V. 18)

Among the examples given above, in (11), -e functions as a locative and the noun phrase in which it occurs functions as an oblique argument, as the occurrence of this phrase is obligatorily required by the verbal element of the clause. For the rest, -e functions as an adverbial marker of manner and time and the noun phrases where it occurs function as adjuncts. This is due to fact that these phrases are not obligatorily
required by the verbal elements of the clauses. They are added only to provide
additional information to help with the flow of the story. Although an oblique argument
is generally considered to be obligatory, it can also be optional. The obligatory and
optional behaviour of oblique arguments is based on the degree of closeness of the
arguments with their predicates.

In addition to its function as a marker of location, manner and time, the -e marker is
also used to mark direction in MKR. This is illustrated in (18), where the noun phrase in
which it occurs functions as an obligatory oblique argument.

(18) sbarge gaila dasaratha raj mahajan.
    sbarg-e ga-il-a dasaratha raj mahajana
heaven-DRT go-PST-3 Dasarath king great-man-ABS
'The great man king Dasarath went to heaven.'
(Ay, Ch. 29, V. 58)

7.5.1.1.2. -ka marker

This marker serves to express both the primary and secondary functions as described
below.

(A) Primary function of -ka

Primarily, -ka functions as a marker of the indirect object in double object constructions.
However, it is also used to mark the direct object of transitive verbs whose referent is
either a proper noun or a noun of relationship referring to a human or animate (if the
object has the pragmatic property of animacy). Otherwise, neither the object of
transitive verbs nor the direct object of ditransitive verbs takes any case marker, as
illustrated in (19-25). As in many other NIA languages, the object marking system of
MKR, (whether it is used to mark the indirect object of a double object construction or
to mark the only object of a transitive construction) is based on pragmatic factors more
than syntactic factors. The indirect object in a double object construction usually has the
+animate feature, and all NIA languages, including the language of MKR, obligatorily
take the dative case to mark this object. This is unlike in Sanskrit, where this case may
be the accusative. From this observation it is clear that in MKR the case marker is used
to mark only animate objects irrespective of the direct object-indirect object distinction.
Syntactically however, -ka is obligatorily used to mark the indirect object in MKR. hence this case marker is treated as dative since the main function of this cased is to mark the indirect object which semantically functions as the recipient of the action denoted by the verb.

**Indirect object in double object construction**

(19) punya yoge rāmaka diyoka sabe rāja.

pusya yog-e rām-aka di-yoka sab-e rāja-ə

-ka is obligatorily used to mark the indirect object in MKR.

hence this case marker is treated as dative since the main function of this cased is to mark the indirect object which semantically functions as the recipient of the action denoted by the verb.

Object in transitive construction (with animate noun)

(20) rāmaka pindhāilā dewa yogya alaṅkāra.

rām-aka pindh-ā-il-a dewa yogy-ə alaṅkāra-ə

Ram-DAT wear-CAUS-PST-3 god "qualified ornament-ABS

'(He/she) dressed Ram in ornaments fit for the gods.'

Object in transitive verb (with non-animate noun)

(21) angadaka mārīlā aneka niśācare.

angad-aka mār-il-a aneka niśācar-e

Angad-DAT kill-PST-3 countless demon-ERG

'Countless demons killed Angad.'

(22) bāpaka dekhilā rāma prasāda upare.

bāp-aka dekh-il-a rāma prasāda upar-e

father-DAT see-PST-3 Ram residence upper-LOC

'Ram saw his father on the up of the residence.'

(23) sewāli newāli puspa dekhilā apāra.

sewāli-ə newāli-ə puspa-ə dekh-il-a apāra

Sewali-ABS Newali-ABS flower-ABS see-PST-3 endless

'(He/she) saw the endless flowers including Sewali, Newali.'
As can be seen from (19) and (20), \(-ka\) marks only one object, not two. In double objects constructions, the indirect object is marked by case marker in MKR, while the direct object is expressed by a bare noun phrase. (21) and (22) show that the only object of transitive verbs takes the \(-ka\) marker to refer animate nouns. (23)-(25) serve to illustrate that objects referring to inanimate nouns do not take the \(-ka\) marker. Therefore, these noun phrases can be said to be marked by the unmarked absolutive case.

In fact, using the same case suffix to mark the only object of transitive verbs and the indirect object of ditransitive verbs is a common feature of NIA, and it is evident from the data in Toulmin (2006: 163). For both functions, the \(-ke\) marker is used in Bhojpuri and standard colloquial Bengali, \(-ku\) in Oriya and standard colloquial Hindi, and so on.

It is also revealed from Toulmin’s study that apart from the distinct forms for accusative and dative functions in Manbhum Paharia dialect (according to Dasgupta 1978: 247, cited in Toulmin: \textit{ibid}.), all the dialects of Kamata, Rajbanshi, and northern desi Bangla use the same suffix for marking the object of transitive constructions and the indirect object of ditransitive constructions. From this point of view, we can use the label \textit{object marker (OBJ)} for glossing \(-ka\). But as mentioned earlier, without going into any terminological confusion, the traditional terminology of dative will be used to refer to \(-ka\). Moreover, there is another reason of using the label dative for \(-ka\). It is that \(-ka\) always marks recipients (functionally, the indirect object) in MKR, while it is optional
in the case of the only object of transitive verbs or direct object of ditransitive verbs.
The selection of -ka to mark the only object of transitive verbs or the first object of
ditransitive verbs depends on some semantic or pragmatic properties of the head nouns
that occur as objects.

Sometimes, however, -ka marks all kinds of objects in transitive construction in
MKR irrespective of animate and inanimate distinction of objects, as in (26). This kind
of use is not frequent in MKR.

(26) \( yaj\text{"na}-ka \) \( kar-\text{"ya} \) \( birabara \) \( indrajita. \)
\( yaj\text{"na}-ka \) \( kar-\text{"ya} \) \( birabara \) \( indrajita \)
sacrifice-DAT \( \) do-3 \( \) hero-great \( \) Indrajit

‘The great hero Indrajit is doing a ceremony of sacrifice.’

(La\text{"n}, Ch. 25, V. 8)

In (26), -ka is added to the inanimate object \( yaj\text{"na} \). This is in contrast with (21),
where -ka is added to the animate object \( a\text{"ngad}. \)

From the above observations, it is clear that apart from the exception in (26),
morphologically, MKR represents the ergative-absolutive case system. There is another
evidence in support of this claim. Further analysis of the case marking pattern in MKR
shows that the -e marker encodes the functions of instrumental and locative along with
that of the subject of a transitive construction. Moreover, it is common to find that in
ergative languages, the ergative marks peripheral functions as well as the A in a
transitive construction. Such peripheral functions are instrumental and locative (Blake
1994: 174). The use of -e marker for the subject of transitive as well as instrumental and
locative is also found in other NIA languages like Gujarati to mark these three functions
(Masica 1991: 365). Beyond NIA, such extended functions are found in other languages
that are genetically and areally unrelated, such as Pama-Nyungan and Sumerian. In
Pama-Nyungan languages, the ergative marker covers the instrumental function as well
as A, while in Sumerian it is used to express location as well (Blake \textit{ibid.}: 174).

However, many linguists do not accept the ergative-absolutive status of Assamese
(Kakati 1941; Goswami 1982: 264). Kakati writes:
The noun often takes the post-position -e in the nominative, when it is the subject of a transitive verb. In the case of the intransitive verb, the bare stem itself is used to indicate relationship in the nominative. (P. 360)

It is not clear why Kakati uses *often* to refer to the occurrence of the subject noun of a transitive verb. In Assamese, the subject of a transitive verb always takes the -e marker. On the other hand, bare stems are not always used in the case of the subjects of all intransitive verbs (§7.5.1.1.2). The use of term ‘post-position’ to refer to the case marker may be due to historical reasons, since it is generally recognized that case suffixes historically develop from adpositions and some adverbial particles. Adpositions, in turn, develop from nominal or verbal elements.

Goswami (*ibid.*) also uses the term *nominative* to refer to the -e marker of the subject of a transitive clause. He writes:

The nominative morpheme is -e and it is added to the base to express subjects of transitive and of a small group of intransitive verbs. (P. 264)

As evidence of intransitive subjects occurring with the -e marker, he cites the following examples:

(27) *manuhe*  *hahe*

‘Man laughs.’

(28) *lorabure*  *pukurit*  *haturse.*

‘The boys are swimming in the pool.’

(29) *gorai*  *begai*  *doure.*

‘Horses run fast.’

According to Goswami, “the subjects of the intransitive verbs are also in the nominative case.” But the use of the -e suffix for marking the subject of this kind of intransitive verbs in Assamese requires some explanation that is not found in Kakati (1941) and Goswami (1982). This issue will be dealt with further on in this section.

The tendency to use the term ‘nominative’ instead of ‘ergative’ to refer to the -e marker in scholarly work on Assamese appears to be due to the following reasons:
(1) For distinguishing the subject from the object of a transitive clause, two separate markers are used in modern Assamese. These are -e for the subject and -ka for the object. -ka marks the indirect object in double-object constructions and the only object in transitive constructions. However, in a real sense, the use of -ka to mark object of transitive construction is completely based on pragmatic and semantic parameters such as animacy. As stated before, the object of a transitive verb takes the -ka marker if the referent is an animate, human noun or if the referent is a proper noun. Further, the object of a transitive construction requires the -ka marker in the absence of specificity or definiteness marking classifiers in Assamese. Otherwise, in general, the object does not take any case marker.

(2) The -e suffix does not affect agreement marking on the verb. The verbs of MKR or modern Assamese always agree with all subjects regardless of transitivity.

(3) Syntactically, the language of MKR does not show an ergative-absolutive syntax, but a nominative-accusative syntax. There is evidence in support of this view. Firstly, if the transitive subject is different from the subject of intransitive, it would have been reflected in the verbal agreement, since the verb shows concord with the subject. But in MKR, the verb takes the same marker for both the subjects of the intransitive and transitive constructions regardless of transitivity (cf. Chapter 3). Secondly, if we use the syntactic test for subjecthood to find out whether the subject of the intransitive construction and the subject of the transitive construction behave differently, it can help in determining whether the language represents a nominative-accusative system or an ergative-absolutive system.

The coordination construction, in which two clauses are conjoined by using a coordinating conjunction can be used to verify the above assertion. Such a construction allows the omission of the noun phrase that is common to both clauses, in the second conjunct. Although this test cannot be applied to MKR due to limited data, the syntactic
status of nominative-accusative in Assamese can be proved by using data from modern Assamese, such as (30-33).

(30)  
\[
\text{pulis-tu-}e \quad \text{surtu-}k \quad \text{pitil-}e \\
\text{Police-CLF-ERG thief-CLF-DAT beat-PST-3}
\]

'The police beat the thief.'

(31)  
\[
\text{pulis-tu-}0 \quad \text{goroloi ahil-}e \\
\text{Police-CLF-ABS home-DIRT come-PST-3}
\]

'The police came home.'

(32)  
\[
\text{surtu-}0 \quad \text{goroloi ahil-}e \\
\text{thief-CLF-ABS home-DIRT come-PST-3}
\]

'The thief came home.'

Out of these three sentences, coordination is possible only between (30) and (31), with omission of the second occurrence of the co-referential noun phrase, but not between (30) and (32) as exemplified in (33).

(33)  
\[
\text{pulis-tu-}e \quad \text{surtu-}k \quad \text{pitil-}e \quad \text{aru} \\
\text{Police-CLF-ERG thief-CLF-DAT beat-PST-3 and}
\]

\[
\text{goroloi ahil-}e \\
\text{goroloi ahil-}e \\
\text{home-DIRT come-PST-3}
\]

'The police hit the thief and came home.'

Even though, in (33), the intransitive verb does not contain an overt subject, it is clear to every native speaker that the subject of the intransitive verb in (33) is *pulis-tu* 'police-CLF', not *surtu* 'thief-CLF'. It is evident from these examples that Assamese allows the omission of a noun phrase under two conditions. The first condition is semantic and the second one is syntactic. Semantically, the two noun phrases need to be co-referential. Syntactically, they need to be either S or A. Thus, in Assamese, S and A
are treated alike for syntactic purposes. This syntactic requirement is satisfied in the case marking system in some languages such as English. However, in MKR or modern Assamese, there is a lack of correspondence between the syntactic evidence on the one hand, and the morphological evidence of a nominative-accusative system versus an ergative-absolutive system in MKR or modern Assamese. Morphologically, both stages of Assamese seem to use the ergative-absolutive system since the subject of intransitive verbs and the object of transitive verbs take the unmarked absolutive case, while the subject of transitive verbs takes a distinct marker. However, syntactically, as discussed above, the subjects of transitive and intransitive verbs appear to be treated alike. Languages may exhibit two patterns with regard to nominative-accusative syntax and ergative-absolutive syntax. (i) In languages that follow the first pattern, syntactic difference seems to follow morphological differences. In these languages, morphologically and syntactically, the grammar of these languages exhibits either a nominative-accusative syntax or an ergative-absolutive syntax. (ii) In other languages, the second pattern is followed according to which syntactic differences do not correspond to morphological differences. Of these two patterns, the stage of Assamese at the time of MKR and modern Assamese represent the second pattern, exhibiting an ergative-absolutive syntax morphologically and a nominative-accusative syntax syntactically. However, it should be noted here that these comments are based on behavior of the case marking morphology of nouns. How this morphology behaves with regard to pronouns (§7.5.2) is yet to be seen. The irregularity observed in the use of the -e marker in optionally marking intransitive subjects and transitive subjects may be attributed to the following reasons:

1. These irregularities might be due to stylistic reasons relating to the poetic genre of the text, as discussed in §7.5.1.1.1. Example (7), repeated as (34) show the inconsistency in case marking of the subject of the intransitive verb Sut-i _sinceil-ai 'sleep-NF be-PST-3'. This intransitive verb takes a subject that is marked with -e marker, but in the example (35), the same verb takes a subject with no overt marker. If we closely examine these two sentences, it will be apparent
that in (34) rām 'Ram' takes the -e marker only to adjust the rhyming with the
preceding element same 'with'.

(34) sitā same rāme śuti āchilā ethāta.
sitā same rām-e śut-i āch-il-ā ethāta
Sita with Ram-ERG sleep-NF be-PST-3 here
'Ram was sleeping here with Sita.'

(Ay, Ch. 32, V. 79)

(35) dekhanta kaikeyī śuti āche krodhaghare
dekh-anta kaikeyī-ə śut-i āch-e krodhagar-e
see-3.HON Kaikeyee-ABS sleep-NF be-3 angry-home-LOC
'(S/he) sees that Kaikeyee is sleeping angrily at home.'

(Ay, Ch. 5, V. 34)

(2) Being a poetic text, the MKR does not represent the spontaneous use of
everyday language.

(3) Due to scribal error.

(4) As a text of the formative period of NIA languages, this kind of inconsistency
is not surprising. Except for the language of inscriptions, or the language of
Caryāpada, there was no representative Assamese text before the period of
MKR to serve as a model for the author. Therefore, the occurrence of some
irregularities in the literary works of the time is to be expected. Through the
process of development, such inconsistencies became less in the later period
during which the language took a distinct shape, as reflected in the case
marking pattern of modern Assamese.

In modern Assamese, -e marks the subject of only those intransitive verbs whose
referents involve the semantic parameters of agentivity or volitionality. Thus, if the
intransitive subject is semantically an agent, or if the intransitive predicate is controlled
by the volitional nature of the subject, then that subject takes the overt -e marker as in
(36), (37), (39) and (41). However, at times, agentivity is not able to account for some
examples. For instance, the sentences in (36)-(47) indicate that all the subjects of the
intransitive verbs in these sentences are semantically agents. Yet, the -e marker is not
uniformly used in these sentences. This suggests that in Assamese, agentivity is not the only criterion which can motivate the occurrence of -e with intransitive subjects. Rather, the choice of the -e marker in intransitive subjects appear to depend on the aspectual nature of some verbs in Assamese. For example, if certain intransitive verbs are atelic in nature, or if the situation described by an intransitive verb is dynamic, or the continuation of the situation is subject to a steady input of energy or force, then the subject of such intransitive verbs is encoded by the -e marker, as in (36), (37) and (46).

If the situation described by the verbs is telic, then those verbs do not take the -e marker as in (42) and (43). This suggests that the case marking pattern of modern Assamese involves split ergativity where atelic verbs with an agentive, active, volitional intransitive subject takes an A-like morphosyntax, while a non-agentive, stative, non-volitional intransitive subject of telic verbs takes a P-like morphosyntax.

(36) \[ \text{rame hahise.} \] 
\[ \text{Ram-ERG laugh-iPFV-3} \]
'Ram is laughing.'

(37) \[ \text{rame haturise.} \] 
\[ \text{Ram-ERG swim-iPFV-3} \]
'Ram is swimming.'

(38) \[ \text{rame bule.} \] 
\[ \text{Ram-ERG sleep-PST-3} \]
'Ram slept.'

(39) \[ \text{rame hule.} \] 
\[ \text{Ram-ERG sleep-PST-3} \]
'Ram slept.'
The subjects *ram* in (36) and (37) plays the role of agents. Hence, they take the -e marker. In addition, the verb forms of these two sentences are atelic in aspectual terms, due to which they require a subject with an overt -e marker.

On the other hand, the subjects of (38)-(41) are also agents semantically, but the -e marker appears on the subject of (39) and (41), not on the subject of (38) and (40). In these sentences, the intransitive predicates are controlled by the volitional nature of the subjects. In (39) and (41), the intransitive predicates are controlled by the volitional nature of the subjects and hence, they take the -e marker. The intransitive predicates of (38) and (40) are controlled by the non-volitional nature of their subjects and hence, the -e marker does not occur these two sentences.

Furthermore, the subjects of (42-43) are also semantically agents. However, they do not take the -e marker because of the telic nature of the verbs of these two sentences are telic in nature.

(40)  *ram*  bohil.  (Stative + non-volitional)
      *ram*-ø  boh-il
      Ram-ABS  sit-PST
      'Ram sat.'

(41)  *rame*  bohile.  (Stative + volitional)
      *ram*-ø  boh-il-e
      Ram-ERG  sit-PST-3
      'Ram sat.'
(42-43) cannot occur with the case marker -e on the subjects, as this would make them ungrammatical, as in (44) and (45).

(44) *rame ahil/ ahile.
    ram-e ah-il/ ah-il-e
    Ram-ERG come-PST/ come-PST-3
    'Ram came.'

(45) *rame gol/ gole.
    ram-e go-l/ go-l-e
    Ram-ERG go-PST/ go-PST-3
    'Ram went.'

The subject of (46) takes -e, not simply because it expresses a semantic agent, but because the situation described by the predicate of this sentence is atelic in nature. Hence, an effort or input of energy is required to continue the situation denoted by the predicate in (46).

(46) rame douri ase. (Effort and input of energy required)
    ram-e dour-i as-e
    Ram-ERG run-NF be-3
    'Ram is running.'

However, (47) is not grammatical.

(47) *ram douri ase.
    ram-e dour-i as-e
    Ram-ABS run-NF be-3
    'Ram is running.'

Again, (48) is a grammatical sentence.

(48) ram thiyo hoi ase. (State of being in a standing position)
    ram-σ thiy-o hoi as-e
    Ram-ABS stand be-NF be-3
    'Ram is standing.'

The situation described by the predicate in (48) is also atelic in nature. But it does not seem to require an -e marked subject argument, since the situation described by the
verbal sequence *thyo hoi ase* is stative, as opposed to the situation described by the verbal sequence *douri ase* in (46), which is dynamic.

This is not the feature of Assamese alone, but a universal feature which makes sense in terms of identifying functions of grammatical relations. There are no languages where subjects of non-agentive or stative intransitive verbs are treated like A arguments, while subjects of agentive or active intransitive verbs are treated like P arguments. As shown in examples (39) and (41) above, the stative intransitive verbs are not marked in Assamese, but the -e marker is present in sentences with volitional subjects.

The universality of this feature can be indicated with data from the Guaymi, a Chibchan language of Costa Rica and Panama, where the subjects of intransitive verbs that involve volition also take the suffix -gwe which usually marks the A argument of a transitive clause. When the subject of an intransitive verb does not involve volition, it may not take the -gwe suffix as exemplified in (49)-(51). (Payne 1997: 146)

(49) *Toma-gwe Dori dma-ini.* (Transitive sentence)
    Tom-ERG Doris greet-PST.1
    'Tom greeted Doris.'

(50) *Dori-gwe bli-ani.* (Intransitive sentence with volitional subject)
    Doris-ERG speak-PST.1
    'Doris spoke.'

(51) *Nu n(alveolar n) at-ani.* (Intransitive sentence with non-volitional subject)
    dog:ABS die-PST.1
    (*Nu-gwe n (ALV) at-ani)
    'The dog died.'

(B) Secondary functions of -ka

The secondary function of -ka is to mark noun phrases of destination, duration, and distance. This kind of noun phrases function as oblique arguments in MKR as exemplified in (52)-(55).
Destination

(52)  
\begin{align*}
\text{parama} & \quad \text{išbara} & \quad \text{mora} & \quad \text{āilā} & \quad \text{āśramaka} \\
\text{parama} & \quad \text{išbara-∅} & \quad \text{mo-ra} & \quad \text{ā-il-ā} & \quad \text{āśram-aka}
\end{align*}

precious god-ABS I-GEN come-PST-3 hermitage-DSTN

‘My precious god came to my hermitage.’

(Ar, Ch. 1, V. 33)

(53)  
\begin{align*}
\text{samasta} & \quad \text{nagari} & \quad \text{nandigrāmaka} & \quad \text{calila.} \\
\text{samasta} & \quad \text{nagari-∅} & \quad \text{nandigrām-aka} & \quad \text{cal-il-∅}
\end{align*}

all city-ABS Nandigram-DSTN go-PST-3

‘All the people of the city went to Nandigrama.’

(Lañ, Ch. 54, V. 114)

Duration

(54)  
\begin{align*}
\text{caudha} & \quad \text{barišaka} & \quad \text{moka} & \quad \text{paṭhāilanta} & \quad \text{bana.} \\
\text{caudha} & \quad \text{baris-aka} & \quad \text{mo-ka} & \quad \text{paṭhā-il-anta} & \quad \text{bana}
\end{align*}

fourteen year-DUR I-DAT send-PST-3.HON forest

‘(S/he) sent me to the forest for fourteen years.’

(Ay, Ch. 20, V. 36)

Distance

(55)  
\begin{align*}
\text{aneka} & \quad \text{duraka} & \quad \text{chāni} & \quad \text{basila} & \quad \text{bānara.} \\
\text{aneka} & \quad \text{dur-aka} & \quad \text{chāni} & \quad \text{bas-il-∅} & \quad \text{bānara-∅}
\end{align*}

a lot far-DIST covering sit-PST-3 monkey-ABS

‘The monkey was sitting covering a large area.’

(Su, Ch. 34, V. 18)

In (52) and (53) -ka expresses destination, in (54) it expresses duration and in (55), it expresses distance. In (52) and (53), the -ka marked noun phrases āśramaka and nandigrāmaka function as obligatory oblique arguments. In (54) and (55), the -ka marked noun phrases caudha barišaka and aneka duraka function as optional oblique arguments. The evidence of our contention is that without the -ka marked noun phrases, the clauses in (52) and (53) are grammatically incomplete, as the ungrammatical sentences in (56) and (57) illustrate. For the well-formedness of the clauses the occurrence of these two arguments is very important.
(56) \*parama isbara mora aila.
parama isbara-o mo-ra a-il-a
precious god-ABS I-GEN come-PST-3
'My precious god came…'

(57) \*samasta nagari calila.
samasta nagari-o cal-il-a
all city-ABS go-PST-3
'All the people of the city go…'

On the other hand, the arguments of (54) and (55) are optional. We can get two well-formed clauses without the -ka marked phrases in these sentences. It should be noted that what the argument structure of the verb bas-il-a ‘sit-PST-3’ in (55) requires is an obligatory noun phrase marked by the locative case, not a noun phrase indicating distance.

7.5.1.1.3. -ta marker

(A) Primary functions of -ta

Locative -ta marks both oblique arguments and adjuncts in MKR. Its use as a marker of oblique arguments is more frequent than its adjunct-marking function. Both functions are illustrated in (58-62).

(58) thapilanta grhata subarpana'ya gha'ta.
thap-il-anta grha-ta subarpana'ya gha'ta
install-PST-3.HON house-LOC golden pot
'Installed the golden pot in the house.'
(Ay, Ch. 1, V. 39)

(59) basi a'che rama'candra tpra'ra gha'ta.
bas-i a'ch-e rama'candra-o tpra-ra gha'ta
sit-NF be-3 Ramcandra-ABS grass-GEN house-LOC
'Ramcandra is sitting in the house made of grass.'
(Ay, Ch. 36, V. 4)
(60)  
$bāpekata$ $kahe$ $indrajita$ $bīrabare$.

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{llll}
\textit{bāp-ek-ata} & \textit{kahe} & \textit{indrajita} & \textit{bīrabar-e} \\
father-3(N)-LOC & tell-3 & Indrajit & hero-great-ERG
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

'The great hero Indrajita tells his father.'

(Lañ, Ch. 9, V. 201)

(61)  
$harisa$ $badane$ $kahilanta$ $bāpekata$.

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{llll}
\textit{harisa} & \textit{badan-e} & \textit{kahilanta} & \textit{bāp-ek-ata} \\
delighted & face-AVZR.MNR & tell-PST-3.HON & father-3(N)-LOC
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

'(He/she told his father with a delighted expression.)'

(Lañ, Ch. 25, V. 35)

(62)  
$tāhāna$ $garbha$ $upajilā$ $paksirāja$.

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{llll}
\textit{tāhā-na} & \textit{garbha-ta} & \textit{upaj-ilā} & \textit{paksirāja-ə} \\
she.DST-HON & womb-LOC & born-PST-3 & bird-king-ABS
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

'The king of birds was born in her womb.'

(Ar, Ch. 6, V. 7)

**Optional oblique argument**

(63)  
$anyāya$ $yuddhata$ $tāṅka$ $rāwaṇe$ $mārila$.

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{llllll}
\textit{anyāya} & \textit{yuddha-ta} & \textit{tāṅka} & \textit{rāwaṇ-e} & \textit{mār-il-a} \\
injustice & battle-LOC & he.DST-HON-DAT & Rawan-ERG & kill-PST-3
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

'Rawan killed him in an unfair battle.'

(Kis, Ch. 24, V. 71)

**Adjunct**

(64)  
$kaikeyi$kā $nṛpati$ $pūrbbata$ $dīlā$ $bara$.

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{llllll}
\textit{kaikeyi-ka} & \textit{nṛpati} & \textit{pūrbbata} & \textit{dī-lā} & \textit{bara} \\
Kaijeyi-DAT & king & earlier-LOC & give-PST-3 & boon
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

'The king gave the boon to Kaikeyi earlier.'

(Ay, Ch. 10, V. 125)

In (58)-(62), all the verbs obligatorily require the -\textit{ta} marked noun phrases as their arguments. In (63), the verb takes the -\textit{ta} marked noun phrase optionally. The optional argument status of this phrase can be proved by its occurrence as a subject as in (65).
injustice battle-ERG he.DST-HON-DAT kill-PST-3

‘He was killed in the unfair battle.’

However, this kind of evidence is not found in MKR. Even so, the intuition of the
native speaker and data from modern Assamese suggest that this sentence is correct. In
(64), the -ta marked noun phrase functions as an adjunct. The time adverbial purbata
‘earlier’ merely provides additional information that helps the hearer to understand the
flow of the story and the time of the event denoted by the verb de ‘give’. The -ta marked
noun phrases in (60) and (61) require some comment. This kind of noun phrases can be
interpreted in two ways:

(1) In (60-61), the -ta marked noun phrases are functioning as reduced forms of
postpositional phrases like bap-ek-ar agata ‘father-3(N)-GEN in front of with
the head element agata ‘in front of’ deleted, and the -ta marker attached to the
modifier bap-ek ‘father-3(N)’. The reduction of postpositional phrases by
deleting the head and case-marking the modifier is an interesting aspect of the
language of MKR.

(2) The verbal elements of (60) and (61) are ditransitive. Characteristically, a
ditransitive verb requires three arguments: subject, direct object, and indirect
object. From this point of view, the -ta marked noun phrases are functioning as
indirect objects.

The first interpretation is the preferred one, since the -ta marker always occurs with
noun phrases in MKR as an oblique argument, not as an object. Even in modern
Assamese, -ta marked noun phrases never occur as core arguments, but as oblique
arguments. However, with pronominal stems, -ta marked noun phrases occur as direct

---

5 Due to a limited corpus, extended linguistic analysis through distribution test, to prove the
functional status of many of the forms has not been possible. In corpus analysis, a linguist has to
rely on the available data with no scope to use one’s cognition or intuition as a native speaker.

6 The status of the category of postposition as a category in Assamese is open to alternative
interpretation and formulation.
objects in MKR but such occurrence is very rare (§6.3.4). The direct object in (60) and the subject and the direct object in (61) can be understood from the context.

(B) Secondary functions of -ta

Apart from the primary functions, -ta marked noun phrases in MKR occur in subject position also, to indicate temporary possession. The possessor of such a construction, takes a locative marking of some kind, preceded by the object possessed and followed by an existential verb as in (66) and (67).

(66) yabheka pañciśa tattba āmāta āchaśa.
     yabheka pañciśa tattba āmā-ta āch-āya
     how many twenty-five elements we-LOC be-3.PRS
     ‘Since we have twenty-five elements.’

(Ar, Ch. 13, V. 9)

(67) dibya astra yata yata, mohora hātata āche
     dibya astra yata yata moho-ra hāt-ata āch-e
     divine weapon how many how many I-GEN hand-LOC be-3
     ‘However many divine weapons I have....’

(Lań, Ch. 23, V. 2)

āmā-ta ‘we-LOC’ in (66) is a reduced form of the noun phrase āmā-r hāt-at ‘we-GEN hand-LOC’ or the postpositional phrase āmā-r ocar-at ‘we-GEN near-LOC’. It functions as a subject of the existential verb āch-āya ‘be-3.PRS’. In (67), the noun phrase mohor-a hāt-at ‘I-GEN hand-LOC’ functions as a subject in the clause. This kind of locative marked subject is also found in modern Assamese and in its close cognate Bengali, as in examples (68) and (69) cited in Masica (1991:358).

(68) tār hāt-at poisā nāi. (Modern Assamese)
     tā-r hāt-at poisā nāi
     he.DST-GEN hand-LOC money no
     ‘He does not have any money (with him).’
Instead of *tūr ḥātāt* of (68) and *tomār ḥāte* of (69), the phrases *ta-r usor-ot* ‘he.DST-GEN near-LOC’ and *tomār katfe* ‘you.FAM-GEN near’ can be used in Assamese and Bengali respectively. In fact, the second set is more widespread across languages than the first set. The locative expressions used in second set (*ta-r usor-ot* ‘he.DST-GEN near-LOC’ and *tomār katfe* ‘you.FAM-GEN near’) usually denote *near*, but in languages like Assamese and Bengali there is a preference for body-oriented expressions such as *tūr ḥātāt* and *tomār ḥāte*, as in (68) and (69).

### 7.5.1.4. -ra marker

- *ra* is generally marks the relationship between two nouns within a phrase. However, in MKR, it also marks the grammatical relation of the subject known as the genitive subject. The genitive subject is also found in modern Assamese as well as in Bengali and Oriya. Semantically, the genitive subject is not an agent but an experience, which occurs with predicates denoting physical sensations and conditions, psychological or mental states, including liking, perceiving etc. (70-75) illustrate this kind of genitive subjects from MKR.

#### (70)

*hena śuni birādhara parama hariṣa.*

*that hear-NF Biradh-GEN very delight*

‘Hearing that, Biradh is delighted.’

*(Ar, Ch. 2, V. 35)*

#### (71)

*kumbhakarāṇa para bara krodha jba-li gailā.*

*Kumbhakarana-GEN very angry burn-NF go-PST-3*

‘Kumbhakarana got very angry.’

*(Laṅ, Ch 19, V. 160)*

---

(69) *tomār hāte ki poeʃā āche?* (Bengali)

*you.FAM-GEN hand-LOC what money be-3*

‘Have you got (any) money?’
In (70-73), the genitive subjects occur with the predicates of psychological or mental states, while in (74), it occurs with the predicate of physical condition. The genitive subject mora in (75) occurs with the existential predicate achaya preceded by the object possessed ratnabhāṇḍāra. The verbs of (70), (72), and (74) can be understood from the context. A feature of this kind of sentences is that there is a lack of agreement between the subjects and the verbs with regard to person. Irrespective of the person of the subjects, the verbs of these sentences take only the third person marker, as in (75). Here, the verb ach takes third person agreement marker -āya irrespective of the first person subject pronoun mor.
7.5.1.2. The case marking pattern in predicative nominals

As mentioned in §7.4., case markers generally show the relationship of concord between subjects or objects and their predicative nominals, i.e., between the subject and subject complement, and between the object and object complement. However, the case markers in MKR do not exhibit any case concord at this level. The subject complements or object complements remain unmarked with regard to case, as in (76)-(78).

(76) UMMY  haibo        yubarāja.  
ai  ha-ib-o        yubarāja  
we become-FUT-1 prince  
'We will be prince.'  
(Ay, Ch. 6, V. 1)

(77)  punya  yoge    tomāka  pāṭibo    yubarāja.  
punya  yog-e    tomā-ka  pāṭ-ib-o    yubarāja  
auspicious moment-AVZR.TM you.FAM-DAT make-FUT-1 prince  
'(I) will make your prince at am auspicious moment.'  
(Ay, Ch. 3, V. 21)

(78)  daśarathe  rāmaka  karanta  yubarāja.  
Daśarathe  rām-aka  kar-anta  yubarāja  
Dasarath-ERG Ram-DAT do-3.HON prince  
'Dasarath will make you prince.'  
(Ay, Ch. 4, V. 15)

In (76), yubarāja functions as the predicative complement of the subject āmi, while in (77) and (78), it functions as the complement of the objects tomāka and rāmaka. However, the examples indicate that irrespective of whether yubarāja functions as a complement of subject or object, it does not show case concord with its subject or object. Rather, it occurs as a bare noun phrase without any case marker.
7.5.1.3. Phrase-level case marking

The role of case markers within the phrase can be considered from two points of view: internal relations and external relations. Internally, the case markers are used to mark two kinds of relationships within the phrase in MKR: the relationship of dependent nouns to the head noun in a noun phrase, and the relationship of dependent nouns to the head postposition in a postposition phrase. However, the status of postpositions in Assamese requires some comments and will be dealt with later in this section. The case functions that mark the relationship of dependent nouns to the head of NPs and to the head of PPs will be discussed next. This will be followed by a discussion of the external relations of case markers within the phrase.

7.5.1.3.1. Internal relations within the phrase

Two case markers serve to mark the relationship of dependent nouns to the head in MKR. These are the genitive -ra, and the accusative -ka.

7.5.1.3.1.1. The function of -ra within the phrase

By definition, the basic role of the genitive case is to mark nouns or noun phrases that are dependents of another noun (Matthews 1997: 144). The genitive case marker in MKR perfectly meets this definition. The genitive occurs in both NP and PP constructions to mark dependent/complements of head nouns in NP constructions, as in (79). It also marks dependent/complement of the head relator noun7 in a PP construction, as in (80).

(79) rāmara caritra śunīyoka sabe nare.
    rām-ara caritra śun-īyoka sab-e nar-e
    Ram-GEN character listen-2FAM all-ERG human-ERG

‘All people, listen about the character of Ram.’

(Ar, Ch. 8, V. 291)

---

7 The term is adopted from DeLancey (1997:56) and Blake (1994:16) to refer to such forms in MKR which generally encode spatial or locational concepts and occur in conjunction with a locative case marker preceded by a genitive marking noun as dependent. Syntactically, these words behave like head nouns in their PP construction but have a more limited syntactic distribution than ordinary nouns. For example, although ordinary noun and relator noun, both occur with genitive marking on the dependent noun, only the former can take a modifying element, whereas the latter does not. The term represents a functional label than a structural one.
The PP like *dhauliwara uparata* requires some comments. Though both phrases in (79) and (80) contain genitive dependents, the behaviour of the heads of these phrases is not similar. In (80), the locative case *-ta* signals a general location and the location word *upar* indicates the specific orientation of the located entity with reference to the location. As a postpositional phrase, it is natural to interpret the head *upar* as a postposition. But in (80), the head of the PP is not a postposition but what is known as a relator noun. The reasons of considering words like *upar* as relator nouns rather than as postpositions are the following.

1. A postposition is a word or some other syntactic element of a class, whose members typically come after a noun phrase and which basically indicate spatial relationships (Matthews *ibid.*: 292). According to this definition, the head element of *dhauliwara uparata* appears to be a postposition, since it indicates the spatial relation of location. However, from another point of view, it cannot be considered as a postposition since it does not occur immediately after a noun or a noun phrase; rather it follows a genitive marker whose function is to mark the relationship of a dependent noun to the head noun.

2. This element can be considered as a noun for the following reasons: (a) Such a word takes genitive dependents like ordinary nouns, (b) Distributionally, it occurs in the place of head nouns in genitive constructions, and (c) It occurs with case suffixes or postpositions indicating location like ordinary nouns. However, it is un-nounlike in several respects. Firstly, it cannot take a classifier as ordinary nouns. Secondly, it cannot be modified by adjectives like ordinary nouns. Thirdly, it cannot be pluralized.

3. Even though a locative case marker or postposition indicating location already follows it, this kind of element provides further locational specification.
Because of such unique behavior, these elements cannot be considered either as full-fledged nouns or as full-fledged postpositions. Rather, it is more reasonable to consider them as belonging to a small sub-class of nouns referred to as relator nouns. MKR has a special set of these elements which need a separate treatment. However, these elements will not be considered any further in this study.

7.5.1.3.1.2. The function of -ka within the phrase

Apart from the genitive, MKR has a dative -ka which is also governed by the head of PP within a PP construction. -ka functions as a genitive as well as a dative indicating direction, duration, distance, purpose, and so on, as in (81)-(85). However, the genitive interpretation of the -ka marker in the sentences below is primarily based on the combination of this element with the postposition lagi. This is because, an element like lagi (referred to as relator nouns in the preceding section) usually occurs with the genitive marker. When it is not governed by this form, -ka functions only as a dative and encodes the indirect object and the only object of a transitive clause (cf. §7.5.1.1.2), along with its function of expressing direction, duration, distance, and so on, as illustrated above in §7.5.1.1.2.

**Direction**

(81) rāmāra pāsaka lagi sitāka pathāilā.

\[ \text{rām-ara pās-aka lagi sita-ka pathā-il-a} \]

Ram-GEN near-DAT to Sita-DAT send-PST-3

'Sita was sent near to Ram.'

(Ar, Ch. 1, V. 111)

**Duration**

(82) āmi bana yāibo caudha bariṣaka lagi.

\[ \text{āmi bana yā-ilb-o caudha baris-aka lagi} \]

we forest go-FUT-1 fourteen year-DUR to

'We will go to the forest for fourteen years.'

(Ay, Ch. 9, V. 29)
Distance

(83)  
katohô  dûraka  lägi  hänilanta  bare.
katohô  dûr-aka  lägi  hän-il-anta  bar-e
how much  far-DIST  to  throw-PST-3.HON  great-ERG

‘How far the great threw (the rows).’

(Lañ, Ch. 15, V. 38)

Reason

(84)  
āśeṣa  râmaka  lägi  kândilā  gōsānī.
āśeṣa  râm-aka  lägi  kând-il-ā  gōsānī-ə
many  Ram-RESN  to  cry-PST-3  goddess-ABS

‘The goddess cried for Ram very much.’

(Su, Ch. 17, V. 104)

(85)  
bāpara  indraka  pratî  bhaṭila  krōḍha  mana.
bāp-ara  indr-ka  pratî  bha-ila-a  krōḍha  mana
father-GEN  Indra-DAT  for  become-PST-3  angry  mind

‘The father got very angry on Indra.’

(Ay, Ch. 7, V. 1)

Of the examples above, -ka functions as a dative and expresses direction in (81). In the rest of the examples, it functions as a genitive, expressing duration, distance, and purpose. According to Kakati (1941: 307), the function of -ka in a sentence like (81) is also genitive. However, in (81) or in other sentences like (81), where the -ka marker indicates direction in combination with the relator noun lägi, the -ka marker does not appear to encode a genitive function. The reason for this is that syntactically, motion verbs like yā ‘go’, āh ‘come’, pathā ‘send’ in Assamese obligatorily require an oblique argument that indicates direction. These motion verbs govern oblique arguments marking by cases such as dative or accusative in Assamese, and by certain postpositions like to in English. In (81), the intransitive verb ga-il-a ‘go-PST-3’ obligatorily requires the oblique argument rāmar pāsak lägi ‘towards Ram’, marked by the dative -ka, not by the genitive -ka. The other verbs in (82-85) optionally require the genitive marking.
arguments of duration, distance, and reason. The function of -ka as a genitive is purely historical. In this regard, Kakati's (ibid.: 306) observation provides a crucial information. According to him, the -ka dative in Assamese is related to the -ka genitive of the Magadhan dialects and this -ka is inherited from MIA postpositions kēra (kēlā) and kara, whose function is clearly genitive at that period. According to Chatterji (1926: 753), this kēra came from kārya and it came to be used in second MIA as *kāīra, before becoming kēra in MIA and kēla in Magadhi. However, Chatterji has not mentioned anything about the kēra postposition as a source of -ka genitive in the Magadhan dialects. At the same time, he has given two possible sources of the -ka genitive. According to him it might have come from MIA krta > kaa or from the MIA pleonastic < -kaa >. Of these two, he expresses his preference for the second possibility, observing that “the < ka > of the Bihari dialects would derive better form a monosyllabic < kka > rather than disyllabic < kaa >. The 'Prākṛta-Pāṅgala' (14th century) has some instances of the < -ka > genitive which would seem to be an Eastern form derived from < -kka >.”

The -ka marker is used as a genitive in old Bengali and Middle Bengali. However, in addition to the genitive, it is also used as a dative simultaneously from the period of old Bengali (Chatterji ibid.: 759). From this discussion, it is clear that whatever be the views about the source of -ka, there is no any disagreement among scholars about the genitive status of -ka in the Magadhan dialects.

7.5.1.3.2. External relations of case marker within the phrase
The first five functions of case markers mentioned in §7.3 are relevant for the external relations of case markers within the phrase. Of these five, only the second function occurs in MKR. As in most Indo-Aryan languages, case marking in MKR appears on the final word in the noun phrase, which is the head of the noun phrase. Along with the Indo-Aryan languages, this feature is also found among Papuan languages, languages of
Asia including the Turkic, Mongolian, Tungusic families north of the Himalayas as well as languages of the Dravidian family or Munda (Blake 1994: 101). However, there are considerable differences between the language of MKR and the other Indo-European languages in that as with these languages, MKR does not have case concord. In this regard, we can refer to Ancient Greek, where case serves to mark heads along with the dependents, especially adjectives. The language of MKR does not show any case concord between the head and modifier. The case marker occurs only in the final word of the phrase, and the final word is necessarily head of the phrase, as in (86). (86) illustrates that the case marker of MKR does not mark any external relations within the phrase level.

(86) \[ gokarpa \quad girira \quad sikharata \quad parilanta. \]
\[ gokarpa-\sigma \quad giri-ra \quad sikhar-ata \quad par-il-anta \]
Gokarna-ABS mountain-GEN summit-LOC fall-PST-3

‘Gokarna fell on the summit of the mountain.’

(Su, Ch. 17, V. 114)

In this example, sikhar is the head of the noun phrase \( giri-ra \ sikhar-ata \) where it is marked by the locative -\( ta \). This marker does not occur with the dependent modifier \( giri \) as mentioned above. MKR shows contrast with ancient Greek and other Indo-European languages (Blake ibid.: 100), where dependents show concord with the head with regard to case within the noun phrase.

7.5.1.4. The function of case markers within the subordinate clause

The case marking patterns to encode grammatical relations in the subordinate clause and in the independent clause are similar in MKR. For example, -\( \sigma \) marks the grammatical relation of the subject in both subordinate and independent clauses. Likewise, -\( ka \) marks the object relation in both types of clauses, and so on. (87) and (88) illustrate.
nana badya nrtya glte jagawe yahaka.
nana badya nrtya git-e jag (jag)-a-we yah-ka
various instrument dance song-INS awake-CAUS-3 who-DAT

banara catak-e abe ciya-we tahaka.
ban-ara catak-e abe ciya-we tah-ka
forest-GEN Catak-ERG now insult-3 he.DST-DAT

'He whom the various sounds of instruments, dance and songs awaken, the birds of the forest insult him now.'

(Ay, Ch. 32, V. 84)

atyanta papliyo tare yahaka sumari.
atyanta papli-yo tar-e yah-ka sumar-i
very sinner-EMPH save-3 who-DAT remind-NF

hena isbaraka de Khiloh netra bhar.
hena isbar-aka dekh-il-oh netra bhar-i
that god-DAT see-PST-1 eye fill-NF

'Filling my eyes I saw that I looked at that god to my full satisfaction, recalling whom even the worst sinners get salvation,'

(Ar, Ch. 2, V. 6)

In (87), yahaka functions as an object within the modifying clause. It takes the same -ka marker that occurs with the object tahak of the main clause, where -ka marks the object relation. The form yahak of the modifying clause and the form tahak of the main clause are correlatives.

7.5.2. Case marking pattern for pronouns

The function of case markers of pronouns is different from that of the nouns in some respects. In the first place, to mark subject relation, the nouns take the -e marker but the pronouns do not take any marker. The subject relation is expressed by bare pronominal forms, as in (89).
father-GEN order-DAT I head-LOC take-PST-1
‘I took the order of my father on my head.’

(Ar, Ch. 1, V. 94)

Secondly, with nouns, -ka marks the primary and secondary functions for nouns, but with pronouns, it marks only the primary function, as exemplified in (90).

mpatiye patbai dila moka tayu pāśa.
king-ERG send-NF give-PST-3 I-DAT you near
‘The king sent me to you.’

(Ay, Ch. 3, V. 59)

Thirdly, in general -ta marks only the oblique arguments when it occurs with nouns or noun phrases. However, with pronouns it marks both the core arguments as well as the oblique arguments, as in (91)-(92).

rsīgane kahiya acbanta mota kāya.
sage-PL-ERG tell-NF be-3.HON I-LOC work
‘The sages are talking about my work.’

(Ar, Ch. 11, V. 55)

In (91), -ta functions as a marker of the object. The status of mota as an object is known from the predicate where it occurs. The predicate kahīya achanta of this sentence is a two-place predicate requiring one argument as the subject and one as the object.

bharatata atiṣeka mota bara dāyā.
Bharat-LOC most I-LOC very kindness
‘Bharat has much kindness on me.’

(Ay, Ch. 10, V. 37)

Here, mota functions as an oblique argument, not as a core argument of the predicate.
Fourthly, the case markers are found to be fused with some pronominal stems as in (93) and (94), but when they occur with nouns, they can be easily distinguished from the stems, as in (95).

(93)  
\begin{align*}
\text{mantri} & \quad \text{purohita} & \quad \text{yata} & \quad \text{ramata} & \quad \text{bhakata}.
\end{align*}
\begin{align*}
\text{mantri} & \quad \text{purohita} & \quad \text{yata} & \quad \text{ram-ata} & \quad \text{bhakata}
\end{align*}

minister priest as many Ram-LOC devotion
‘As many ministers and priests, are devoted to Ram.’
(Ay, Ch. 2, V. 3)

(94)  
\begin{align*}
\text{ramata} & \quad \text{toma-ta} & \quad \text{pare} & \quad \text{priya} & \quad \text{ache} & \quad \text{kata}.
\end{align*}
\begin{align*}
\text{ram-ata} & \quad \text{toma-ta} & \quad \text{pare} & \quad \text{priya} & \quad \text{ach-e} & \quad \text{kata}
\end{align*}

Ram-LOC you.FAM-LOC than favourite be-3 how many
‘I have no other favorites than you and Ram.’
(Ay, Ch. 5, V. 47)

These examples make it clear that the case markers cannot be separated from the stems \textit{yata} and \textit{kata}. Without the case marker, the remaining parts of the words do not have any meaning. Here, the locative -\textit{ta} is fused with the stems. On the other hand, (95) shows that the case marker -\textit{ka} can be easily separated from the stem \textit{sita}.

(95)  
\begin{align*}
\text{dhanurbhaanga} & \quad \text{kari} & \quad \text{biha} & \quad \text{karila} & \quad \text{staka}.
\end{align*}
\begin{align*}
\text{dhanurbhaanga} & \quad \text{kar-i} & \quad \text{biha} & \quad \text{kar-il-a} & \quad \text{sita-ka}
\end{align*}

bow-break do-NF marriage do-PST-3 Sita-DAT
‘After breaking the bow, (Ram) married Sita.’
(Ay, Ch. 1, V. 6)

Fifthly, the genitive does not occur with the third person pronominal stem indicating honorific as given in (96).

(96)  
\begin{align*}
\text{hare} & \quad \text{hani} & \quad \text{nirudhilo} & \quad \text{tana} & \quad \text{sbarga} & \quad \text{patha}
\end{align*}
\begin{align*}
\text{har-e} & \quad \text{han-i} & \quad \text{nirudh-il-o} & \quad \text{t-a-na} & \quad \text{sbarga} & \quad \text{patha}
\end{align*}

arrow-INS prick-NF prevent-PST-1 he.DST-HON heaven way
‘(I) prevented his pathway to heaven by pricking with arrows.’
(Ay, Ch. 7, V. 13)
The genitive -ra does not occur with the pronominal stem tāṇa. -na functions as an honorific morpheme.

Finally, the case markers of MKR show the ergative-absolutive system, with nominal stems whereas with pronominal stems, they show the nominative-accusative case marking system. Examples (97-98) illustrate.

(97) caudhāya bariṣa lāgī tumī bana yāibā.
fourteen years to you.FAM forest go-FUT-3

‘You will go to the forest for fourteen years.’

(Ay, Ch. 12, V. 23)

(98) ekānta bhakata tumī ārādhā āmāka.
serious devotee you.FAM propitiate-2FAM we-DAT

‘You are a serious devotee, you should propitiate us.’

(Su, Ch. 40, V. 57)

The pronoun tumī is used for both the S and A roles of intransitive and transitive clauses. For the P role, the -ka marker is used with the pronominal stem āṁā- in MKR.

The nominative-accusative case morphology on pronouns and the ergative-absolutive morphology on nouns lead to the important generalization, that the case marking pattern of MKR exhibits split ergativity, not an exclusive ergative-absolutive system or a nominative-accusative system.

7.6. Case markers of MKR and modern Assamese compared

Modern Assamese has six distinct markers for assigning case relations as against the four case suffixes in MKR. These markers are -e, -ka, -e/-ere/-re, -loI/oloi, -ra, and -ta.
e stands for ergative, -ka and -loı/oloı for dative, -ra for genitive, -ta for locative, and -
ere!-re !-e for instrumental. As in MKR, absolutive is zero-marked in modern Assamese.
Like MKR, modern Assamese has no accusative case. Both objects of transitive and
ditransitive constructions take the zero-marked absolutive case in modern Assamese, as
shown in (99)-(101).

(99)  
\[
\begin{array}{lll}
\text{ram} & \text{gor-oloi} & \text{gol.} \\
\text{ram-Ø} & \text{gor-oloi} & \text{go-Ø} \\
\text{Ram-ABS} & \text{house-DIRT} & \text{go-PST} \\
\end{array}
\]
Ram-ABS house-DIRT go-PST
'Tram went home.'

(100)  
\[
\begin{array}{lll}
\text{rame} & \text{hat} & \text{kʰałe.} \\
\text{ram-e} & \text{hat-Ø} & \text{kʰa-1-Ø} \\
\text{Ram-ERG} & \text{rice-ABS} & \text{eat-PST-3} \\
\end{array}
\]
Ram-ERG rice-ABS eat-PST-3
'Tram ate rice.'

8 This marker deserves some comments. Though, this marker is analyzed as dative in the Assamese
scholarly tradition, it is primarily used to mark arguments expressing direction (towards
something) but secondarily, to mark indirect objects. In the latter case, the distribution of -loı is
similar to that of dative -ka as shown in (i-ii) below.

(i)  
\[
\begin{array}{lllll}
\text{hi} & \text{sitʰikʰən} & \text{makok} & \text{dile.} \\
\text{hi} & \text{sitʰ-kʰən-Ø} & \text{ma-k-ok} & \text{di-1-Ø} \\
\text{he.DST.INF} & \text{letter-CLF-ABS} & \text{mother-3(N)-DAT} & \text{give-PST-3} \\
\end{array}
\]
'He gave the letter to his mother.'

(ii)  
\[
\begin{array}{lllll}
\text{hi} & \text{sitʰikʰən} & \text{makoloi} & \text{dile.} \\
\text{hi} & \text{sitʰ-kʰən-Ø} & \text{ma-k-oloi} & \text{di-1-Ø} \\
\text{he.DST.INF} & \text{letter-CLF-ABS} & \text{mother-3(N)-DIRT} & \text{give-PST-3} \\
\end{array}
\]
'He gave the letter towards his mother.'

In both sentences, the noun phrases makok and makoloi semantically function as recipients. But in
(ii), the noun phrase makoloi conveys a sense of direction, i.e., towards his mother, a sense that is
not carried by the noun phrase makok in (i). Hence, this marker is better treated as a directional
marker than dative. Further, modern Assamese already has the -ka marker which is always used
to mark indirect objects of double-object constructions. On the other hand, -loı always marks
those arguments that indicate direction in Assamese.
It may be noted that -ka is considered as an accusative in all scholarly work on modern Assamese (Goswami 1982: 266). However, the main function of -ka in Assamese is to mark the indirect object, which is semantically a recipient, not to mark the only object of transitive verbs or the direct object of ditransitive verbs. The marker of indirect objects is always dative, not accusative. In contrast, the primary function of the accusative is to mark the grammatical relation of the direct objects in both transitive and ditransitive clauses. From this point of view, Assamese has no accusative case, but has dative case only. However, -ka is also used to mark the object of a transitive verb if the referent is animate. This is especially so when the object refers to a proper noun or noun of relationship, and when it expresses the specific/definite distinction. Therefore, it can be concluded that the dative -ka in Assamese marks the direct object referring to a proper noun or a noun of relationship referring to a human or animate animate noun or referring to a specific object as in (102)-(104). Alternatively, we can say that the distinction between the dative and the accusative is syncretized in Assamese in those contexts where the dative -ka is used to mark an animate object of a transitive clause.

Here, we can use the object kukurtu with or without the -ka. However, (103) is ungrammatical without -ka.

The grammatical counterpart of (103) is (104).
kola is a name of a dog, and hence it is a proper noun. In (102), although, the noun phrase kukur-tu has a specific and animate reference, this noun phrase occurs without the dative marker -ka. However, if we refer to the dog with a proper noun such as kola as in (103), the noun phrase obligatorily requires the dative marker -ka, as illustrated in (104). This proves that in Assamese, the use of the -ka marker with the only object of a transitive construction depends more on the noun-type such as common or proper, rather than the properties of animacy and specificity.

Furthermore, the examples in (99-101)) indicate that the case marking morphology of modern Assamese is similar to MKR. It seems to follow an ergative pattern, though not exclusive ergativity, but split ergativity as in MKR (cf. §7.5.1.1.2). The S of an intransitive clause and the O of a transitive clause are marked in a similar way (i.e., zero (0) marked absolutive in both instances); while the A of a transitive clause is marked in a different way. However, as in MKR, this split ergativity is only marked on nouns. In case of pronouns, modern Assamese also uses the nominative-accusative morphology like MKR as illustrated in (105) and (106).

Apart from -ka, -loi is also used as a dative in modern Assamese. This marker seems to have developed from the relator noun lāgi that occurs in MKR and was
presumably used in the Assamese language of that time. There are two arguments in support of this assumption. First, as mentioned earlier, postpositions are a source of case suffixes, and secondly, the function of \textit{lägi} in MKR is almost the same as that of \textit{loi} in modern Assamese. In this connection, Kakati (1941) observes:

In modern Assamese, \textit{-ka} is dropped before \textit{lai}: \textit{gheroloi}, \textit{ghura-lai} in the direction of home; \textit{moloi maram}, \textit{molai maram}, affection towards me, etc. (P. 307)

According to Kakati, \textit{-ka} is dropped in modern Assamese from \textit{-ka lägi} phrases of the earlier stages of the language and the postposition \textit{lägi} has developed as the \textit{-loi} case suffix. As for the source of \textit{lägi} itself, Masica (1991: 245) suggests that it may have come from verb form LAG ‘be in contact with, adhere, stick’. This assumption is plausible from two perspectives. In the first place, as mentioned earlier, case suffixes generally tend to develop from adpositions and adpositions, in their turn, develop from verbal or nominal forms. Secondly, in verb final language like Assamese, it is more likely that postpositions have developed from verbal elements (cf. Blake 1994: 99).

In case of the genitive, modern Assamese has the same \textit{-ra} form as in MKR. The function of this marker is also similar with the \textit{-ra} in MKR.

Instead of the two locative markers of MKR, modern Assamese has only the \textit{-ta} locative. The \textit{-e} locative of MKR is not found in modern Assamese. The reason is purely historical. It is worth pointing out that the use of both \textit{-e} and \textit{-ta} case markers to refer to one case relation in MKR is the result of diachronic development, since in Sanskrit, Pali and Apabhramsa we find that the same marker \textit{-e} ‘LOC’ is used to mark the locative in all the stages. However, there is no evidence of the use of the \textit{-ta} ‘LOC’ in any of these earlier stages. It is therefore likely that \textit{-ta} is a later development.

Significantly, Chatterji (1926) observes that \textit{-ta} is found in the Caryäs as well as in Old Bengali. He proposes the form \textit{<-an\textordmasculine{ta}}} as the source of this \textit{-ta}. Chatterji writes:

The form \textit{<-an\textordmasculine{ta}}} ‘was compounded with the noun-base: \textit{mil\textordmasculine{ta}} < *\textit{maga\textordmasculine{anta}} = \textit{marga} + \textit{an\textordmasculine{ta}}}’. The loss of the \textit{<-an>} here is unexpected for OB. The present participle in \textit{<-an\textordmasculine{ta}}}
still preserves the <-n->, and a post-position like <-antar-ë > for, is as yet not reduced to sur <-
-tare > (as in NB.) in language of the Caryás. The fact of the word being agglutinated with the
noun-base may have been responsible for its losing its individuality, and any intermediate stage
with the nasalized vowel, like <*mā(r)-ga-ñ-īta, *mā(r)-gāṭa > must be pre-Bengali. The <-ta >
post-position characterizes the Bengali-Assamese group only among Magadhan speeches.
This post-position would nevertheless seem to have been a Magadhan (MIA.) inheritance in
Bengali. At the present day, it occurs as <-t-> in Assamese and dialectal Bengali (North, East,
South-east). (P. 750)

It is evident from Chatterji’s comments that -ta is not found in Standard colloquial
Bengali (SCB), which uses the -e form for the locative. However, another form, -te, is
also used in SCB for the locative function which will not be discussed here. -ta is not
found in Oriya which used the -e suffix for the locative in the early stages of the
language. Modern Oriya uses the -re suffix for the locative, which is not cognate with
Assamese or Bangla. However, the -t- based locative is also found in Maithili and
Marathi. In this context, Jha observes,

The presence of the loc. forms in -ta in the Caryás suggests, at first, a connection with Bengali.

But -ta in extended forms is met with in early literary Maithili as well as in the modern eastern
Maithili dialect: of course, even there, it is no longer commonly used.....As a matter of fact, it
may be considered to be a LOC. affix current in the whole of northern, central, and eastern
Magadhan area inasmuch as it occurs in Assamese, Maithili, and Bengali [Jha 1985 (1958): 34-
5; cited in Toulmin (2006.: 166)]

If Jha’s assumption is true, then it is evident that -ta is not a development of OIA or
the earlier period of MIA. Rather, it is a development of later MIA or early NIA,
representing an inheritance of some older forms such as <-antarë > [Chatterji 1926.: 750] or < OIA antur > ‘the inside’ as suggested by Masica (1991: 213). As a feature of
the language of the period when the NIA languages started to develop from Ap, both the
old -e form and new -ta form are found in MKR, though not in the later stages of the
language. In modern Assamese it only survives with certain echo expressions such as
apade-bipade 'in times of trouble', bane-bane 'in jungle after jungle', while its rival, the innovation -\textit{ta} 'LOC', became fully established in the language.

For the instrumental, modern Assamese uses same -\textit{e} form as in MKR. However, modern Assamese contains another form -\textit{ere}. According to Kakati (1941: 303), this marker is formed by adding -\textit{e} to the pleonastic -\textit{er} to describe something accomplished by the use of some instrument or means. The -\textit{e} and -\textit{ere} can be interchanged with each other in some cases in Assamese, but this does not always happen as illustrated in (107)-(110).

(107)  
\begin{verbatim}
  hate/hatere  kora  kam.
  hat-e/hat-ere  kor-a  kam
  hand-INS/hand-INS  do-AZR  work
  'The work done by hand.'
\end{verbatim}

(108)  
\begin{verbatim}
  hate/hatere  kota  huta
  hat-e/hat-ere  kota  huta
  hand-INS/hand-INS  spin  yarn
  'Yarn spun by hand.'
\end{verbatim}

(Goswami 1982: 266)

(109)  
\begin{verbatim}
  loratu  hatere/*hate  kamtu  korile.
  lora-tu-e  hat-ere/*hat-e  kam-to  kor-il-e
  boy-CLF-ERG  hand-INS/hand-INS  work-CLF  do-PST-3
  'The boy did the work by hand.'
\end{verbatim}

(110)  
\begin{verbatim}
  rame  k\textit{\texttt{otari-k}}\textit{\texttt{on-ere}}/*k\textit{\texttt{otari-k}}\textit{\texttt{on-e}}  tamultu  katile.
  ram-e  k\textit{\texttt{otari-k}}\textit{\texttt{on-ere}}/*k\textit{\texttt{otari-k}}\textit{\texttt{on-e}}  tamul-tu  kat-il-e
  Ram-ERG  knife-CLF-INS/knife-CLF-ERG  betel-nut-CLF  cut-PST-3
  'Ram cut the betel-nut with the knife.'
\end{verbatim}

This -\textit{ere} suffix is not only found in modern Assamese, but also in cognate Oriya along with the dialect of Rajbanshi spoken in the Bongaigaon region of Assam. According to Kakati (1341: 304), Goswami (1982: 266), and Misra (1975: 61), the source of this -\textit{r-} based instrumental is the genitive -\textit{or}/-\textit{ar}. 
Misra connects this marker etymologically to the inherited genitive marker /-er, -oil extended by the locative-instrumental ending /-el/. (Toulmin 2006: 169)

The various case suffixes found in modern Assamese are summarized in Table 7.3.

### Table 7.3 Case markers in modern Assamese

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ergative</th>
<th>Absolutive</th>
<th>Dative</th>
<th>Genitive</th>
<th>Locative</th>
<th>Instrumental</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(v.) -i</td>
<td>-a</td>
<td>(v.) -k(a), (c.) -ak</td>
<td>(v.) -ra, (c.) -ar</td>
<td>(v.) -la, (c.) -lt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c.) -e</td>
<td></td>
<td>(v.) -lo(i), (c.) -lo(i)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N.B. The convention 'v_-' indicates a nominal stem ending with a vowel, and 'c_-' indicates a nominal stem ending with a consonant.

With regard to syntactic function, the case markers of modern Assamese and those of MKR vary somewhat. Of the primary and secondary functions, the -e in modern Assamese marks only the primary function, i.e. the subject of a transitive verb (A). It is also used to mark the subject of an intransitive verb (S), but in quite different circumstances (cf. §7.5.1.1.2). In the latter case, modern Assamese shows resemblance with MKR.

The function of -ka in modern Assamese and MKR is similar. It marks the indirect object of ditransitive constructions, as well as the only object of a transitive clause if the referent of this object is animate (cf. §7.5.1.1.2). However, the -ka marker of modern Assamese functions differently from the -ka of MKR in two respects. In the first place, it does not mark secondary functions such as destination, duration, distance, and so on, like MKR does. Secondly, -ka in modern Assamese encodes the subject relation also, as in (111).
The study has revealed that MKR has five distinct markers including the unmarked absolutive for assigning case relations, -er for ergative, instrumental, and locative; -ka for dative; -ra for genitive; -ta for locative and -te for absolutive. Each case marker has some orthographic variants in the text which were discussed in §7.3. The distribution of these markers was dealt with in §7.4.2 and their functions were discussed in §7.5. The functional status of these markers was identified on the basis of their usual and frequent functions such as dative -ka is usually and frequently used to mark both objects of transitive and ditransitive construction and their extended functions such as -ka also occurs with some motion verbs to mark the argument of destination, duration,
distance etc. The labels of primary function and secondary function were used to mark their usual and frequent functions and extended functions. The account of the case markers have dealt mostly with their synchronic behaviour. However, their diachronic aspects were occasionally discussed in situations where such a discussion contributed to our understanding of certain case markers. The example of the locative case markers -e and -ta can be cited in this regard.

The functions of case markers are partially different between both MKR and modern Assamese (cf. §7.6). On the basis of how grammatical relations are marked by case, it is apparent that the case marking systems of MKR and modern Assamese exhibit morphologically split ergativity. Syntactically, however, they follow a nominative-accusative syntax. Further, the case marking pattern of the pronominal systems in MKR and modern Assamese exhibits a nominative-accusative system.