Conclusion

8.1. Introduction

The present study has been undertaken with two kinds of researchers in mind. Firstly, an historical linguist, who will be primarily interested in the discussion of language change in Assamese from the old period to the modern period through various stages of development. Secondly, a corpus linguist, who will be primarily interested in the process of creating a corpus of Assamese, and who will be interested in conducting any linguistic research on the basis of corpora in Assamese. It is hoped that the discussion provided in the various chapters will be of some help for both kinds of researcher.

In this final chapter, conclusions and implications are presented so as to address separately the concerns of the two kinds of researcher. The two sections of the conclusion will deal with the concerns of historical linguists (§8.2) and the concerns of corpus linguists (§8.3). The intention of this chapter is not to repeat the discussions in the preceding chapters on these two aspects, but to reflect on the future implications of this work for studying historical development of Assamese on the one hand, and for the analysis of an Assamese corpus using different software's and concordancing programs, on the other.

In addition to matters of interest for historical linguists and corpus linguists, this study has served to bring up some interesting areas of research for descriptive linguists. The future prospect for descriptive linguists in this area will be set out in §8.4.

The next section takes a brief retrospective look at the areas covered in this work (§8.2) before moving on to the prospective scenario (§8.3).

8.2. Retrospect

This study shows that a clear grammatical structure of the Assamese language evolving into the present-day Assamese, had developed at the time of MKR. Before starting the analysis of the text, an initial assumption was that the language of MKR might have a significantly different grammatical structure from the present day Assamese. Such an
assumption was based on the fact that the MKR represented a specimen of the language immediately after the Apabhramsa stage, of the time when the NIA languages started to diverge from their common ancestor. Moreover, because of poetic nature of the text, some structural irregularities were anticipated. But after the analysis, it was found that there is a pattern in all cases. It is true that due to poetic language, the author of the text seems to have followed a fairly flexible word order in the interest of the rhyming pattern. However, this does not seem to have much affected the grammatical structure of the text.

From the viewpoint of grammatical categories, almost all the categories for nouns and verbs occurring in the present-day Assamese were found in MKR. For example, of the six case suffixes of modern Assamese, four suffixes were developed at that time (§7). Likewise, most of the classifiers in modern Assamese were in use at the time of MKR as well. Moreover, of the three suffixes indicating the relationship of personal deixis between relational nouns, two already existed at the time of MKR. Furthermore, a well-formed structure of the NP also existed at that time which consisted of a head noun with a preceding adjective, intensifier, and different kinds of determiners. In the use of classifiers, there was a more flexible order than in modern Assamese. The classifiers of MKR occurred both as suffixes and as separate items in MKR. In contrast, the classifiers in modern Assamese occur only as suffixes (§6).

As with nouns, most categories relating to verbs in modern Assamese also existed at the time of MKR. With regard to the grammatical category of tense, the suffixes -/-il for the past and -b/-ib for the future tense were in use at that time. Like tense, the imperfective aspectual suffix -ich existed during that period (§4). The personal suffixes available in present day Assamese were present at the time of MKR. However, many of personal suffixes of MKR no longer exist today (§3). The negative marker -na and the causative markers -a and -uwa also existed at the time of MKR (§4). The order of verb word found today also existed at the language of MKR. It is evident, therefore, that the structure of present day Assamese had taken a definitive shape during the period when MKR was written. It is true that the shape of linguistic forms have evolved and changed from MKR to modern Assamese, and this is a natural behaviour of language. For example, the use of verb forms such as khāilanta ‘ate’, gailanta ‘went’, dileka ‘gave’
are a typical feature of old Assamese and such usage does not occur in present day Assamese. Instead, present-day speakers use *khole* ‘ate’, *gol* ‘went’, *dile* ‘gave’.

However, despite such changes, a comparison of the two stages of the language separated by six centuries reveals a continuous process of evolution underlying the change of grammatical forms and the functions encoded by these forms.

The second observation relates to the issue of delimiting the scope of this research. As a study concerned with a specimen of Assamese from the formative period of NIA languages, the present work relies upon information on the closely related languages in order to arrive at certain conclusions regarding the analysis of the grammatical categories of MKR. Moreover, an analytic perspective from Sanskrit as the parent language of Assamese is also a prerequisite for this study. By highlighting the different stages of development leading up to the formation of the NIA languages, such a perspective can potentially contribute to our understanding of the behavior of some forms. This kind of insight is helpful in deciding whether the language of the period in question carried innovative features or simply retained features from its parent language. However, the present researcher has had to delimit the scope of the research undertaken by consciously leaving out these two potentially relevant but broader areas in order to be able to bring greater focus into the chosen area of research. Moreover, because of their considerably broader scope of investigation, these two areas merit their own separate and independent treatment.

8.3. Prospect

8.3.1. Conclusions for historical linguists

The present study offers three possibilities of further research for historical linguists. These are (a) the reconstruction of proto-Assamese forms, (b) the historical development of Assamese from the time of MKR till modern Assamese, and (c) research on the existing linguistic area at the time of MKR.

Our first concern is to discuss how this study offers a possibility for doing research on the reconstruction of proto-Assamese forms. Scholars seek to locate the beginnings of the Assamese language at a time that is much earlier than the 13th or 14th century to which the earliest written records of Assamese are attributed. Chinese traveler Hiuen
Ts’ang’s remarks (Kakati 1941: 5) about the language of Kamarupa being slightly different from that of Mid-India may be interpreted as referring to the language of early Assamese (§1.1). Hiuen Ts’ang visited Kāmarupa in the 7th century. If Kakati’s surmise is true, then the time of early Assamese language may go back to the 5th or 6th century. However, without written evidence or proper investigation we cannot come to a conclusion like this. In such a situation, reconstruction of the earlier forms of the language by using the comparative method would enable us to get a clear picture. However, this approach requires the researcher to collect written or spoken text from the language that is being reconstructed, along with written or spoken texts from its close cognates within that particular time frame. After that, comparative method is applied among those cognates so as to find out the common ancestor from which they may have emerged. It is believed that the NIA languages started to split from around the 12th or 13th century. The Rāmāyana of Mādhav Kandali and other Assamese texts written at that time provide clear evidence of this state of affairs. It is also believed that Assamese had achieved a full-fledged form and status in the Rāmāyana of Mādhav Kandali. From this perspective, the Rāmāyana may be a good source for reconstructing proto-forms taking into account other texts within same time frame from related languages such as Bengali, Maithili and Oriya. By comparing the contemporary language of these cognates written, linguists would be able to reconstruct the proto-forms. This, in turn, may be able to confirm the common hypothesis that languages like Assamese, Bengali, Maithili and Oriya derive from the same Eastern Magadhi variety and hence, share many structural features. It may also help to settle the dispute among scholars of Bengali and Assamese regarding the ownership of two texts the Carya and Kṛṣṇa Kirtan texts that go back to a period before the 13th or 14th century. Moreover, this kind of comparative study is likely to help reduce the range of variation in the orthography of old texts like MKR and thereby, to arrive at a stable orthographic system.

Secondly, this study may be able to contribute towards studies on the historical development of various stages of Assamese from the time of MKR up to the present time. Each grammatical category correlating with the two major word-classes of nouns and verbs has been elaborately discussed. The information available as a result can be of help in carrying out a comparative study with the later stages of Assamese. Though the purpose of this study is not to describe the process of diachronic change of Assamese,
some discussions of the historical processes have been provided according to the needs of some forms. These may potentially open up some new line of thought and fresh perspectives for conducting further research in this area.

Furthermore, as stated in the introductory chapter, spoken evidence of the language of MKR is not available to us. Because of this reason, it is still unknown as to what kinds of sounds were actually produced in speech at the time when MKR was written. It was also mentioned that any effort to understand the nature of the sounds produced at that time has to use the process of phonological reconstruction by using comparative method. This would make it necessary to collect data from several varieties of modern Assamese and compare them so as to make an approximation of the sound inventory of MKR. This approach can be further strengthen with the help of data collected from the cognate languages of Assamese. This is a promising area of research which will be rewarding in terms of its potential outcome.

Finally, this study is relevant for investigating the diffusion of structural features across the boundaries of languages found within the geographical boundary of Kamrup at that time. It is known from history that Assamese has been surrounded by many languages of Tibeto-Burman family such as Bodo, Tiwa, Kachari, Rabha, Koch etc. from the earliest time known to us. In a true sense, Assamese has been going through the process of development right in the middle of these languages. From this point of view, it is very natural for some linguistic features to enter from one language group to another. The question as to what features these languages share with each other is an topic worthy of investigation in its own right. In this regard, the language of Rāmāyana can be a good starting point for studying areal influence among the languages within in the geographical boundary of old Kamrupa. This is because the Rāmāyana contains structural features such as relator nouns, classifiers, case markers with multiple functions and serial verb constructions, which are very common in many languages of the Bodo-Garo group.

In addition, there are other features in the language of MKR which are found in some dialects of north Bengal, present Koch Behar, and some dialects of Bihar, especially in the Kishanganj variety, to name a few. Through a systematic study of these common features, the extent to which these languages share common traits due to a common ancestry and genetic-relatedness can be investigated.
8.3.2. Conclusions for Corpus linguists

The present study is relevant for developing a foundation for corpus analysis in Assamese. It suggests possibilities for corpus linguists to conduct further research on old Assamese. Three and promising prospects for corpus linguists can be pointed out. These relate to compiling a dictionary of old Assamese, creating a reference grammar of old Assamese and creating further corpora for studying the historical development of Assamese from MKR to modern Assamese.

It was stated in the introductory chapter that the corpus of MKR has been analyzed by using the software program called Toolbox. As it was pointed out, a major advantage of Toolbox is that it creates facilities for compiling a dictionary. In the process of interlinearization, a dictionary plays an important role in Toolbox. For analyzing grammatical categories through interlinearization, the present researcher was required to enter every word and morphemes into a dictionary, put all information such as parts of speech, the underlying form of a word, gloss, different senses of a word, definition or notes etc., so that the process of interlinearization works efficiently. Thus, almost all the words used in MKR have been entered into the dictionary with their relevant information. This dictionary can be exported into MS word from Toolbox using the multi-dictionary format, in a form that is ready for publication. However, before publishing the dictionary, some more corpora written within the time-frame of the 14th century should be created, so that the dictionary can represent the language of old Assamese in a more comprehensive manner. If any dictionary maker wants to make a dictionary of old Assamese, s/he cannot rely on the information obtained from only one text. For that purpose, a corpus containing many texts samples from old Assamese will have to be created first, so that the information is reliable or the hypothesis is strong. After creating such corpora, the relevant information can be entered into the dictionary either through the process of interlinearization or by manually typing directly into the dictionary of Toolbox, or with the help of other dictionary making softwares like WESAY. For typing the data manually, anybody can use the concordance facility of Toolbox or some other concordancing facility provided by CQPweb or any other software program.

This study can also contribute to efforts on writing a reference grammar of old Assamese. MKR is only text of 14th century that is large in size in comparison to other
texts of that time. It contains many structural features of Assamese which represents not only the language of old Assamese but reflects the structure of modern Assamese as well. If any researcher wants to write a reference grammar for old Assamese, this study will help the researcher with the analytic descriptions of some aspects of the language as it existed in the 14th century. However, as in the case of compiling a dictionary, it is essential to study other corpora of the 14th century so that the generalizations made are validated by a bigger and more comprehensive range of data.

The third prospect of this study within the framework of corpus linguistics is about creating further corpora for studying historical development of Assamese from the stage of MKR to modern Assamese. Linguistic forms investigated in this study show a clear link with modern Assamese forms. For example, three sets of forms are used as first person and second person agreement markers in MKR: -ô and -ôhô for the first person, -a, -sa, and -ha for the second person inferior, -â and -âhâ for the second person familiar. Modern Assamese retains only first form of each set. The other forms have gone out of use in the course of the evolution of the language from the time of MKR to modern Assamese. Similarly, of the two optatives -antoka and -oka in MKR, Modern Assamese has retained -oka but lost the use of -antoka at some point of time (§3).

Finally, of the two locative case markers in MKR -e and -ta, only the latter survives in modern Assamese. The -e marker has gone out of use almost entirely, except with a few expressions such as bipode-apode ‘at times of danger’, maze-hamoye ‘now and then’, etc. but this kind of use is not very frequent (§7). By creating and analyzing different corpora from various stages of Assamese after the MKR stage until modern Assamese, the interested researcher can attempt to identify the period when such forms started to went out of use. Moreover, by studying different corpora from the different stages of the language, fresh innovations in the shape of new forms and structures in Assamese after the time of MKR can be investigated.

The three perspectives for research offered by the corpus oriented approach of the present study relate more to research areas. However, it has been pointed out that corpus linguistics is a methodology or a means of doing linguistics rather than a specific subject area of linguistics ((Leech 1992: 105; cited in Meyer 2002: preface (xi))). In this


light, one more prospect for future research facilitated by the present study can be pointed out. The grammatical information that has resulted from this research on MKR can contribute towards efforts to develop a tagset for old Assamese. The introductory chapter discussed how computer programs such as Toolbox and CQPweb offer researchers an opportunity to analyze any linguistic data by providing an opportunity to analyze a word by segmenting it into different morphemes and to insert relevant information like gloss, parts of speech under each word. This kind of analysis helps the researcher to develop a tagset which can be further used to develop software programs like Toolbox. The major advantage of a software program developed on the basis of a tagset created from a thorough analysis of a corpus of a language is that it will be more suitable for conducting any kind of analysis of that particular language. It should be noted that the data of MKR has been tagged on a word-to-word and morpheme-to-morpheme basis through the process of interlinearization carried out as part of the present research. The tagset that has emerged as a result of this effort will be able to help any researcher in developing a tagset for old Assamese. However, further corpora of the Assamese language of the 14th century will be necessary for this enterprise, so that it can match all kind of data falling within that time frame.

Finally, this study offers the possibility of settling the disputes among different scholars regarding the ownership of Āḍikāṇḍa and Uttarākāṇḍa. It was mentioned in the introductory chapter that the original manuscripts of Āḍikāṇḍa and Uttarākāṇḍa written by Mādhav Kandali have not been found. It is assumed that the manuscripts of these two kāṇḍas available today were written by Sankardeva and Mādhavdeva. Scholars offer different arguments in support of their individual positions. However, it does not appear that these arguments draw upon potential evidence of a linguistic nature. Yet, linguistic evidence can be of assistance in determining the issue of authorship of these kāṇḍas. Through the analysis of corpora containing all available texts from the 14th century, as well as the five kāṇḍas of Rāmāyana on one hand and the Āḍikāṇḍa and the Uttarākāṇḍa on the other, there is a reasonable chance of figuring out whether the latter two kāṇḍas available today were written by Mādhav Kandali or whether they were written by Sankardeva and Mādhavdeva. Such a comparison would take into account the lexical, morphological and syntactic features of the concerned texts.
8.4.3. Conclusions for descriptive linguists

The present study offers options for descriptive linguists to conduct further research on MKR. One such option is to study the behaviour of relator nouns. MKR has a small set of members referred to as relator nouns as has been described in §7.4.3.2.1.1. Two kinds of surface patterns of the relator noun are found in MKR. One is followed by the locative case marker –ata (locative postposition) as in (1), and the other one is without any marker, as shown in (2).

(1) dhaúliwara uparata cátila yubati.
    dhaúliwa-raj upar-ata cáril-a yubati
white cloth-GEN top-LOC climb-PST-3 girl

    ‘The young girls got on the white cloth.’
    (Ay, Ch. 1, V. 24)

(2) sabáre cak̪̄ṣura pará bahe jaladhāra.
    sabá-raj cak̪̄su-ra pará bah-e jaladhāra
all-GEN-EMPH eye-GEN from float-PST-3 stream of water

    ‘A stream of water is floating from the eyes of all people.’
    (Ay, Ch. 36, V. 10)

This kind of relator noun construction is also found in Bodo language. Relator nouns refer to a functional subclass of nouns or a class of function words which historically derived from nouns, and which continue to resemble nouns in significant respects (Post 2007: 374). It can be an interesting area of research to investigate questions such as how relator nouns occur in Assamese, what type of variations are found in their use or if relator nouns are derived historically from lexical nouns through the process of grammaticalization, then how did this process work in Assamese.

MKR has a set of interrogative, relative and demonstrative (proximal and distal) words. The term correlative, as used by Ferguson (1962: 884), can be adopted to refer to this set of words. Depending on their function, each correlative can be a member of another word-class as pronoun, adjective, determiner etc. This discussion of this kind of elements was left out from the present work as they are not directly related to the present research project. However, this is a potentially promising area of research especially since this kind of study has not been conducted in Assamese so far.
This study offers another prospect of doing research on the serial verb construction\(^1\) in MKR. This possibility can be explained with the help of the examples in (3-8).

(3) *birādhaka māri pesō yamara nagari.*
    *birādh-aka mār-i pes-ō yam-ara nagari*
    Biradh-DAT kill-NF send-1 Yam-GEN city
    ‘I will kill and send Biradh to the city of Yama.’
    (Ar, Ch. 2, V. 56)

(4) *mānuṣi sitāka etikṣape māri khāō.*
    *mānuṣi sitā-ka etikṣape mār-i khā-ō*
    human being Sita-DAT in this moment kill-NF eat-1
    ‘(I/we) will kill and eat the human Sita.’
    (Ar, Ch. 6, V. 55)

(5) *kāndaṇte āchanta sbāni marāṇa tarāśe.*
    *kāndaṇte āch-anta sbāni marāṇa tarāś-e*
    cry-NF be-3.HON husband death fear-LOC
    ‘The husband is crying because of the fear of death.’
    (Ar, Ch. 12, V. 53)

(6) *sinhāsana basiyā āchanta daśaratha.*
    *sinhāsana bas-iyā āch-anta daśaratha*
    throne-LOC sit-NF be-3.HON Dasarath
    ‘Dasaratha is sitting on the throne.’
    (Ay, Ch. 2, V. 5)

(7) *sakale byḵsara phala phula gaila khasi.*
    *sakal-e byḵṣa-ra phala phula ga-il-a khas-i*
    all-EMPH tree-GEN fruit flower go-PST-3 fall-NF
    ‘The fruits and flowers of all trees fell down.’
    (Ay, Ch. 40, V. 40)

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\(^1\) For this discussion, I am deeply indebted to Post (2004). As far as I am aware, this is the only discussion on verb serialisation in Assamese which sheds new light on the verbal structure of Assamese, and which encouraged me to look for the verb serialisation patterns in the language at the time of MKR.
Several of the verbal sequences in the examples above meet most of the typical characteristics of the serial verb construction found cross-linguistically. Firstly, they share the same subject as shown in the English translation. Secondly, they share the same TAM specification. For instance, all the examples given above show that morphological markers of tense and aspect are suffixed to the chain-final verb only and have scope over all preceding verbs in the clause, i.e., the interpretation of first verb of each series depends on the TAM specification of the chain-final verb. Thirdly, they share the same polarity as shown in (8). This example shows that the negation of the chain-final verb nagaila has scope over all the verbs in the clause. In addition to these prototypical properties, another strong tendency of the serial verb construction is to code a single event and a tightly bound sequence of temporally or analytically distinct events. These two features are also present in the MKR Assamese data cited. In (3) and (4), the verbal sequence indicates a pair of events in a temporal sequence. In contrast, the verbal sequence in (5) and (6) indicate a single event, not an event sequence. The reason is that in (3) and (4), the two verbs in series are semantically distinct, since they retain their own lexical characteristics in this construction. But in (5) and (6), the first verbs, kändante and basiyä, contain more lexical characteristic and form the semantic core of the predicate, while the second verb of the series, əchanta, exhibits more functional properties, and appear to modify the semantic core with the aspectual connotation of continuation. However, verbal sequences of the type cited above do not match with one other important and salient prototypical feature of the serial verb construction. According to this feature, verbs in series are capable of standing alone as the single verb of a simplex predicate, with the semantic values given. When they occur
in a serial verb construction, they neither subordinate to nor coordinate with a main verb. The examples in MKR given above diverge from this feature in two respects: Firstly, the non-finite endings make the first verbs of the verbal sequences in all the examples as subordinate to the main verbs. Secondly, Assamese has an independent marker of conjunction aru ‘and’ which can occur as the replacement of i in (3) and (4). For this reason, some scholars do not want to consider this kind of constructions as serial verb constructions for the following reason. If i and aru can replace each other, then i coordinates one verb in the series with the other and thus the construction fails to match the prototypical feature of serial construction found cross-linguistically as described above. It should be noted that the i of (3) and (4) can be replaced by aru but not the i of (7)-(8). This is because i serves to conjoin the two clauses in (3) and (4), but not in (7)-(8). For this reason, the i can be considered as conjunctive participle in (3) and (4) but not in (7)-(8). The observation made by Post in this connection is noteworthy. According to him, cross-linguistically, serial verb constructions allow a single subject while true conjunctive participle constructions tend to be somewhat looser as shown the Japanese examples cited in Post (2004). In Japanese, either a different or a same subject may intervene between the conjoined predicate. However, this type of intervention is not permitted in Assamese. From this point of view, the verb sequences cited in (5-8) can be reasonably considered as serial verb constructions. Moreover, from a diachronic perspective also, these constructions meet the definition of serial verb

\[2\] The element used for conjoining two verbal elements in a series is called a conjunctive participle in the south Asian Linguistic tradition. In Assamese, the suffix -i is labeled as a conjunctive participle, because it can be used to conjoin two elements instead of the coordinating conjunction aru as shown in the examples below (a-b) from modern Assamese.

(a) rame ga guile bat k’al skuloi gol.
ram-e ga gu-i bat k’al skuloi go-l
Ram-ERG body wash-CONJ rice eat-CONJ school-DIRT go-PST
‘Ram bathed, had his meal (and) went to school.’

(b) rame ga guile aru bat k’al aru skuloi gol.
ram-e ga gu-i-e aru bat k’al-e aru skuloi go-l
Ram-ERG body wash-PST-3 and rice eat-PST-3 and school-DIRT go-PST
‘Ram bathed and ate rice and went to school.’
constructions. According to Givon (1991, 1995; cited in Post: 2004), serial verb constructions emerge diachronically through clause-integration. When consequent clauses among chained clauses share some features in common such as subject, TAM, and polarity, the speakers tend to omit overt reference of common elements, and the result is a serial verb construction. The present researcher has dealt with the forms like the ones in (5-8), while discussing aspect in §4 and non-finite forms in §5. However, these were not considered from the point of verb serialisation in those chapters since this area lies outside the immediate scope of the present research project. Even the brief discussion of the issues above on Verb serialisation in the language of MKR will have served to indicate that more investigation and serious attention needs to be directed at this promising area of research within the descriptive tradition of linguistics.