Abstract

The primary concern of this study is to study some grammatical aspects of the Ramayana written by Madhav Kandali (MKR) and to develop a methodological framework in the process for doing corpus analysis in Assamese. This framework involves the process of creating a computer corpus and of conducting a linguistic analysis on the given corpus. To accomplish this task, the data of Madhav Kandali's Ramayana was taken as an experimental base where the different methodological approaches introduced by corpus linguists have been applied. The reason for implementing these approaches in Assamese is the growing interest in corpus linguistics as one of the approaches to linguistic studies on one hand and its ability to elicit actual behaviour of a particular language on the other. Furthermore, the multi-dimensional functions of corpus linguistics such as the ability to make a dictionary, annotating texts, developing a tagset, writing a descriptive grammar, studying the historical development of the language concerned etc., are other motivating factors for deciding to apply a corpus based methodology to the Assamese language. The more important benefit of corpus linguistics is that once a corpus is created, it can be used for multi-disciplinary studies. Thus, computational linguists can use language corpora for the purpose of natural language processing, i.e., for purpose of modeling human behavior and cognition, anthropologists can use it for studying the culture and society of any community, sociolinguists can use corpora for studying social behaviour expressed through language, theoretical linguists can use corpora for developing linguistic theory, descriptive linguists can use corpora for doing synchronic analysis of any particular grammatical construction or to write a descriptive grammar of some language. This is the one of other reason for deciding to apply a corpus based methodology on Assamese. However, among these multi-disciplinary activities, the present project is concerned only with the synchronic analysis of the grammatical categories associated with major word-classes in MKR. For this purpose, dedicated language analysis software such as Toolbox and CQPweb have been used.

Grammatical category refers to a set of linguistic categories which are associated with specific word classes and which carry different kinds of grammatical information
relating to specific word classes. Grammatical information can be expressed in two ways: by affixation and by using a set of closed class words. For example, the grammatical category of aspect is represented on verbs in Assamese in both ways: by adding imperfective suffix -is to the verbal base such as huise 'has slept/is sleeping', khaise 'has eaten/is eating', and by using a grammatical aspectual auxiliary verb as 'be' as in kha ai ase 'is eating', hui ase 'is sleeping'.

Grammatical categories can be identified in terms of three properties: (a) Inherent properties that a word intrinsically has or does not have such as number and gender of a noun (b) Agreement properties which show syntactic links between words such as a verb agreeing with its subject and object, and (c) Relational properties which mark the relationship between a word or phrase to the whole sentence such as a case marker, which is used to mark the grammatical relationships in a clause. An attempt has been made in the present study to identify the grammatical categories in MKR on the basis of these three properties. However, the chosen area of research has not covered all the categories attached to every word class. Rather, it has been further delimited to the investigation of the grammatical categories of the two major word classes of the Noun and the Verb. There are three reasons for such a delimitation. The first reason is related to the special status of nouns and verbs in the kernel clause. All kernel clauses contain at least one verb and one noun. Secondly, Nouns and verbs are considered as more basic word classes than others due to their ability to be defined independently of the rest, while the word classes of adjective and adverb can only be defined with the reference to nouns and verbs. Finally, nouns and verbs in MKR are rich in the instances of grammatical categories that are attached to nouns and verbs compared to other word classes.

Two kinds of categories are found for nouns in MKR: Inherent and Relational categories. Inherent categories for nouns cover the categories of number and classifiers, while Relational categories cover the category of case. In addition, a third category, that of personal deixis, occurs with a subset of nouns called relational nouns.

Two kinds of categories are found in verbs in MKR: Inherent category and Agreement category. Inherent categories for verbs cover tense, aspect, and mood. The Agreement categories include agreement relations between verbs and their arguments.
Between the two word classes of the noun and the verb, it is the latter that functions as the ultimate head of the clause, with the most central kind of sentence having the form of a clause. Due to its highest importance in the organization of the grammar, the discussion of the grammatical categories correlatable to the verb has been given precedence over the discussion of those correlatable with the noun. This relative priority is reflected in the organizational plan for the various chapters of the present work.

The Introduction (Chapter One) discusses the main objective of this study along with a brief survey of Madhav Kandali and his times. This survey also presents a brief survey of the authors who contributed to Assamese literature during the period when MKR was written. A critique of previous research along with methodological approaches adopted for the analysis is also presented in this chapter. The introduction concludes with a discussion of the theoretical framework adopted for the present research, along with an overview of the contents of the various chapters.

Chapter Two (Word-classes in MKR) provides a brief discussion of word classes found across languages along with their defining criteria, and then moves on to apply these criteria to the MKR data for identifying the major word classes found therein. Subsequently, this chapter presents a general overview of grammatical categories in general before dealing with the grammatical categories found specifically in MKR. A brief note on the regularity underlying the forms is also presented here. This chapter ends with the discussion of certain issues encountered during the time of analysis.

Chapter Three (Verbal category I: Agreement) is devoted to the treatment of the grammatical category of person – its relation to verbs on one hand and to personal pronouns on the other. The verbs in MKR are found to agree with subjects according to person, and this is what this chapter attempts to show. A brief comparison between MKR and modern Assamese with regard to the category of person is also presented in this chapter so as to highlight the similarity and differences between these two stages.

Chapter Four (Verbal category II: Inherent) takes up the discussion of inherent categories for verbs. This chapter begins by considering the category of tense, and then deals with aspect and mood. A brief note on how each of these categories exist in modern Assamese is also presented alongside, in order to show the distance between these two stages as mentioned in the previous paragraph. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the causatives and negatives in MKR.
Chapter Five (Non-finite verbs) embodies a comprehensive discussion of non-finite verbs. This chapter starts with an overview, followed by a brief description of the non-finite markers found in MKR. The functions of each marker are also discussed in some detail.

Chapter Six (Nominal category I: Inherent) presents a discussion of the various inherent categories for nouns. It offers a detailed discussion of the category of classifiers in the first place. This is followed by a description of the category of number, the complex situation relating to gender, and a discussion of personal deixis. Subsequently, this chapter surveys the functions of noun words at the phrase level. It also includes a discussion of various dependents of nouns. This chapter concludes with a brief comparison between MKR and modern Assamese regarding the structure of the NP.

Chapter Seven (Nominal category II: Relational) is devoted to the discussion of the relational category for nouns. This chapter begins with a general overview of case marking system across languages, and then turns to the discussion of case markers used in MKR. This chapter concludes with a brief comparison between MKR and modern Assamese in terms of the use of case markers.

Chapter Eight (Conclusion) takes a look back at the overall work presented in the body of the thesis and points out some possible directions in which the line of study undertaken can be extended by future researchers.