3 The verb root

3.0 Preview

This is the first of five chapters on the Bodo verb – its form and distribution. This chapter deals with the most essential component of the verb - the verb root. However, before taking up this relatively more specific aspects of the Bodo verb, a broader perspective on this category will be attempted by enumerating some of the well-known properties of verbs in Tibeto-Burman (TB) languages in general and Bodo-Garo (BG) languages in particular in Section 3.1. The class of verbs in Bodo is defined next in Section 3.2 on the basis of its morphological behavior and syntactic function. Section 3.3 deals with the verb roots with respect to its syllable shape, borrowed verbs, and transitivity of verbs. Section 3.4 presents a summary of the chapter.

3.1 Verb in TB and BG

The word class of verb is apparently a universal word class, besides the class of nouns. In syntactic terms, the verb is considered the central element of a clause in that it is what establishes the relations among the nominal participants, and it is what completes the predication. Moreover, most clause types are verbal. The centrality of the verb in a clause in TB languages is often even more emphasized due to the fact that it is the only obligatory element in a clause. In other words, in spontaneous speech, the arguments of a verb are often dropped when they are recoverable from the context. In this section, we will enumerate some of the commonly known properties of verbs in Tibeto-Burman in general and in Bodo-Garo languages in particular.

Tibeto-Burman languages are known to have a verb final sentence structure. The verb is usually the last element in a sentence. The verbs in Tibeto-Burman languages are characterized by different types of syntactic categories. However, some of them are more characteristic of Tibeto-Burman as a language family. Causative prefix $s-$, for instance, is widespread and even productive in some TB languages, such as Tibetan and Jingpho (Matisoff 2003:101). Bodo has a small number of verbs that take this causative prefix. Many TB languages also have alternation in the manner (voicing) of the initial consonants in intransitive-transitive pairs. This alternation is considered to be a relic of disappearance of the causative prefix $s^{-}$. Bodo has a small number of verbs that undergo
this kind of manner alternation of the initial consonant, especially of stops, in intransitive-transitive pair. Moreover, such alternation on the stem is also present in causativisation through prefix *s- in Bodo. Another well-known prefix on the TB verbs is a **prohibitive prefix**. The prohibitive form is very ancient; the prefix *da~*ta is an inheritance from Proto-Tibeto-Burman (DeLancey (in preparation)). Bodo has preserved this prefix as *da-.*

There are some other well-known syntactic categories found on TB verbs, which either the Bodo verb has lost or was never there. Languages in several branches of TB such as Bodo-Konyak-Jinghpaw, Mizo-Kuki-Chin and East Himalayan (among others) are characterized by **verb agreement** marking. Some Tibeto-Burman languages such as Nocte and Jinghpaw have a very complex hierarchical agreement marking system (DeLancey 2011). It has been demonstrated that this syntactic category goes as far back as PTB (DeLancey 2010). Bodo, including the other related languages of Bodo-Garo, has lost this category. There is no trace of verb agreement on Bodo verbs. The Bodo-Garo languages are hypothesized to have lost agreement marking due to intense contact (DeLancey 2014).

Another prominent syntactic category on TB verbs is the **direction marking**, found in the languages of the Qiangic branch and the Tani branch (LaPolla 2003: 30; Post 2007: 251). Such direction markers encode information such as up-river, down-river, inward, outward, towards the speaker, away from the speaker, up-hill, down-hill, towards mountain, away from mountain, and so on. Bodo does not have and probably never had any such directional markings on the verbs.

**Evidential marking** is another syntactic category found in some TB languages, prominent among which is the various dialects of Tibetan. Other TB languages with evidential marking are Qiang, Newar, Akha (LaPolla 2003:35). Bodo does not have an evidential system. There is just a hearsay marker -*mu* which we treat as a quotative morpheme in this work (see Chapter 5, Section 5.6.2).

Finally, **reflexive marking** on the verb is also common throughout the family, such as in Rawang, Kiranti, Kham, Western Himalayan languages, and Tani languages (LaPolla 2003:36). Bodo does not have reflexive marking on verb. However, Bodo has developed a reciprocal/middle marking system through verb serialization.

The **Bodo-Garo** branch, which consists of Deori, Kokborok, Tiwa, Dimasa, Kachari, Bodo, Mech, Garo, Rabha, A’ tong, Ruga, and Koch, stands out among TB languages due
to its agglutinating morphological type, especially on the verb. Burling (2003:173) notes that ‘verbs can be particularly complex, with negative and interrogative particles and various sorts of adverbial and tense affixes’. Primarily one-syllable-long morphemes are simply concatenated one after another without any noticeable changes in the shapes of the morphemes. In other words, multi-morphemic words, such as verbs, can be chunked clearly into several meaningful units without any difficulty, unlike in Assamese for instance. An interesting morphological feature of the Bodo-Garo languages is the presence of ‘adverbial affixes’ or ‘event specifiers’ or ‘lexical suffixes’. The number of such suffixes ranges from around 20 to above 100 depending on the language (cf. Burling 2004:95 on Garo; Joseph 2007:181 on Rabha; Breugel 2008:449 on A’ tong). The morphological structure of Bodo verbs is agglutinating – a string of multiple suffixes is found on verbs, most of which come from the class of adverbial suffixes. Bodo has more than hundred adverbial suffixes, most of which we have been able to list, define and exemplify.

3.2 Bodo verb

The open classes in Bodo are Nouns, Verbs, Adjectives and Adverbs. Verbs are clearly a distinct word class in Bodo, although it shares certain features with both Nouns and Adjectives. Syntactically we can define the verb class as a group of words which functions as the predicate of a clause or a sentence. Although Nouns and Adjectives also take part in predication, they can take copulas in the affirmative and require a copula in the negative. Thus, we can easily distinguish between a verbal and a non-verbal predicate. Compare the following examples.

3-1 (a) gobla-ja sase pʰurungiri (noŋ-gou).
   PN-SUB one teacher COP-AFF
   ‘Gobla is a teacher.’

(b) gobla-ja tʰaj-bai.
   PN-SUB go-PERF
   ‘Gobla left.’

3-2 (a) gobla-ja sase pʰurungiri noŋ-a.
PN-SUB one teacher COP-NEG
‘Gobla is not a teacher.’

(b) gobla-ja tʰay-a.
PN-SUB go-NEG
‘Gobla doesn’t leave.’

The above examples illustrate nominal predication in the (a) examples and verbal predication in the (b) examples. The affirmative predications in 3-1 consist of a noun in (a) and a verb in (b). In the affirmative nominal predication we can have a copula, if we add a corrective sense to the utterance, as in 3-1(a). In the negative predication in 3-2(a), on the other hand, the nominal predication requires the copula obligatorily. The verbal predication does not require, either in affirmative or negative sentences, any such form (i.e. a copulative form). The distribution of adjectives is identical with that of nouns in an adjectival clause.

The Bodo verbs are morphologically distinct from both nouns and adjectives, although they share some morphology. Among the morphology that the verbs share with nouns and adjectives as predicates, are the form -mum which adds a past or a counterfactual sense depending on its morphological position and the form -gum which adds a future or a dubitative sense depending on its morphological position. Compare the following examples.

3-3 (a) gobla-ja sase pʰurungiri-mum.
PN-SUB one teacher-MWN
Gobla was a teacher.

(b) nuy tʰay-mum.
you go-MWN
‘You should have left.’

The morpheme -mum has a past meaning with a non-verbal clause, while as a first position inflection on a verb, it adds a counterfactual imperative form with a second person subject (only) in a verbal clause. The morpheme -mum does add a past meaning in
a verbal clause as well but only as a second position inflection marker along with the realis -duŋ, as illustrated below in (c).

(c)  
gobla-ja  
t⁵ay-duŋ-mun.
PN-SUB  go-REAL-MWN
‘Gobla went.’

The form -gun adds a dubitative sense in a non-verbal clause as in 3-4(a). When this form is directly attached to a verb stem, it adds a future sense, as in 3-4(b). However, it does add a dubitative sense with verbal clauses as well when it follows another inflectional suffix, as in 3-4(c).

3-4 (a)  
gobla-ja  
sase  
p⁵urungiri-gun.
PN-SUB  one  teacher-GWN
‘Gobla is perhaps a teacher.’
(b)  
gobla-ja  
t⁵ay-gun.
PN-SUB  go-GWN
‘Gobla will leave.’
(c)  
gobla-ja  
t⁵ay-duŋ-gun.
PN-SUB  go-REAL-GWN
‘Gobla probably left.’

Verbs also share certain morphemes with just the Adjectives. These forms have a sense of comparison or intensity. Consider the following examples.

3-5 (a)  
be  
gon-a  
gualo-sín.
this  stick-SUB  long-COMP
‘This stick is longer (than that one).’
(b)  
be  
gon-a  
gualo-drai.
this  stick-SUB  long-too.much
‘This stick is too long.’
3-6 (a) *a*guŋ*-ni-kʰ*ruí  *ma*lo*ti*-ni  *ud*ui*-ja

earlier-GEN-than  pn-GEN  stomach-SUB
der-*sin-bai.*

be.big-COMP-PERF

‘Malotí’s stomach has grown bigger than before.’

[659: 2.48]

(b) *b*í-*ni  *b*aḥadúri-*a  b*áŋ-*drái-bai.*

3SG-GEN  arrogance-SUB  be.more-too.much-PERF

‘He got too arrogant (for his physical power).’

[272: 4.3]

We have adjectival predicate clauses in 3-5 and verbal predicate clauses in 3-6. In both types of clauses we find the forms -*sin* ‘more’ and -*drai* ‘too much’.

There is a good number of affixes which are unique to verbs. Several morphemes which code TAM categories are unique to the class of verbs, such as the realis -*daung*; the perfect -*bai*, the habitual -*u*, negatives -*a*, -*akʰ*ruí, -*lia*, -*dia*, imperatives -*tʰ*uŋ, -*ni*, -*dini*, and many more. Moreover, the class of adverbial suffixes which contain more than hundred members is unique to verbs.

Verbs are morphologically distinct from Nouns and Adjectives in another way. The Bodo verb is the most complex morphologically among the word classes in terms of the number of possible affixes on a verb root. Verbs take (i) causative prefixes, (ii) the prohibitive prefix, (iii) adverbial suffixes, and (iv) inflectional suffixes. A particular verb may contain a causative prefix, multiple adverbial suffixes and up to three inflectional suffixes. Thus, at the more extreme end of the scale, a verb word may be as long as 8 or 9 morphemes, although typically, it is shorter. Other word classes are much more simple compared to the verbs. The following diagram presents a very generalized morphological structure of Bodo verbs.

*Figure 3.1*

*Morphological structure of the Bodo verb*

{Causative/Prohibitive} - {Root} - {Adverbial suffixes} - {Inflectional suffixes}
Adverbial suffixes are, of course, optional. They are stem formatives. The language allows the verbs to take multiple adverbial suffixes and multiple inflectional suffixes in a row.

3.3 The verb root in Bodo

The verb roots in Bodo are mostly monosyllabic. They are free morphemes in that they can be used independent of any other formatives in a sentence, as in imperative sentences. The roots may form the simplest stems and take inflectional morphemes, such as tense/aspect markers. We can also build progressively complex stems by adding one or more morphological formatives to which inflectional morphemes can be added. Consider the following examples.

3-7  nuŋ  no-oŋ  tʰaŋ.
    you  home-LOC  go
    ‘You go home!’

3-8  bi  no-oŋ  tʰaŋ-bai.
    3SG  home-LOC  go-PERF
    ‘S/he went home.’

3-9  aŋ  no-oŋ  tʰaŋ-pʰin-gun.
    1sg  home-loc  go-again-fut
    ‘I will go back home.’

The verb form tʰaŋ ‘go’ in (3-7) consists of just the root and is functioning as the predicate of the sentence in (3-7). An inflectional morpheme, -bai ‘perfect’ is added to the verb tʰaŋ ‘go’ in (3-8) to form an inflected verbal form. The non-inflected forms, as in (3-7), can be used only in an imperative sentence. Verbs need to be inflected for certain grammatical categories, such as tense/aspect as in (3-8) in all other sentence types in order for them to function as predicates of non-imperative clauses. A complex stem has been formed in (3-9) by adding the formative -pʰin ‘again’ on the verb root tʰaŋ ‘go’. The complex stem tʰaŋ-pʰin
‘go-again’ needs to be inflected in order for it to be used in non-imperative clauses, just like the roots.

3.3.1 Syllable size/structure

The syllable size of verb roots in Bodo is simple like in many other Bodo-Garo languages. The roots are mostly monosyllabic and the polysyllabic verb roots are mostly disyllabic. Trisyllabic verb roots are rare in Bodo as we will see in Section (3.3.1.3).

3.3.1.1 Monosyllabic verb roots

Monosyllabic verb roots constitute the majority of the Bodo verbs. These roots are also monomorphemic. Monosyllabic monomorphemic verb roots constitute the basic building blocks of the class of verb roots in Bodo. A few representative examples for each syllable type are given below:

- **VV** co ‘to fry’
- **CVV** gao ‘be split’
  - zao ‘to dig’
  - sao ‘to burn’
  - bao ‘to forget, to offer’
  - bai ‘be broken, to buy’
  - lao ‘be long’
- **DAO** dao ‘to swim (of fish, snake, etc.)’
  - hui ‘go and give’
- **VC** un ‘to sharpen such as the blade of a knife or axe’
- ur ‘to till’ (as a swine does)
- er ‘to stir’
- on ‘to love’
- or ‘to bite, be wide’
- en ‘to remove/retire from one’s back/lap, such as a baby’
CV  
me   ‘to roast something inside embers’ (such as a potato)

p′hće  ‘to get drunk’
zọ  ‘to sit’
mụ  ‘to see’
sa  ‘to pain’
bi  ‘to ask, beg’
p′hụ  ‘to sow’

CVC  
zen  ‘be defeated’
benj  ‘to encircle’
ser  ‘to press’
mej  ‘be tired’
k′anja  ‘to raise, adopt’
bar  ‘to jump’
san  ‘to count’
man  ‘to itch’
han  ‘to pluck’
gan  ‘to wear’

3.3.1.2 Polysyllabic verb roots

The available polysyllabic verb roots in Bodo can be divided under disyllabic and trisyllabic verb roots. There is a good stock of disyllabic verb roots in Bodo, but trisyllabic verb roots are rare. A list of disyllabic monomorphemic verb roots is given below.

a) Disyllabic monomorphemic verb roots:

CV-CV  
gu-mu  ‘to be astonished’

ru mu  ‘to become yellowish’

gu-zu  ‘to become tight and even (of sand/soil)’
p′hụ-la  ‘to cheat’
su-la ‘to lick’
na-za ‘to try’
la-zi ‘to be shy’

CV-CVV
bo-rai ‘to welcome ceremoniously’
zo-rai ‘to join, to connect relation with opposite sex to tease’
ba-hai ‘to use’
su-lai ‘to change’
bu-huai ‘to flow’
gu-zao ‘to float’

kʰu-luai ‘to cause to fall’

buu-rai ‘to become old (man)’
bu-ruai ‘to be old (woman)’

CV-CVC
muu-nam ‘to smell’
muu-duum ‘to feel fragrance’
swu-nar ‘to lean on’
sa-nar ‘roll slightly while laying/sleeping’
gu-mur ‘to be extinguished’
su-raj ‘to dawn’

CV-CCV
ge-ble ‘to be shattered, damaged’
go-blo ‘to grow fat’ (as a child or infant)
tʰo-blo ‘to dive down water’

CV-CCVV
pʰe-kʰrai ‘to gallop’
mo-srai ‘to twist’
go-brai ‘to fall and get stuck in a ditch unknowingly’
da-brai ‘to make cattle run fast’
ba-kʰnai  ‘to praise, appreciate’

tʰe-kʰlai  ‘to hit someone on the head with bent fingers’

CV-CCVC  
gu-bram  ‘to talk/murmur in one’s sleep’
tʰo-kʰrob  ‘to furl as of umbrella or leaves’

ba-brab  ‘to shake violently to be free’
kʰu-glub  ‘to turn face downwards’

CVV-CV  
neo-si  ‘to disrespect’
sou-tʰu  ‘to tumble’
sai-kʰo  ‘to select’
zou-ga  ‘to be developed’

CVV-CVV  
kʰao-lat  ‘to invite, appeal’
sou-dao  ‘to stumble, bang’
pʰao-sai  ‘to retreat, go backward’

CVC-CV  
tʰuŋ-ge  ‘to come to end’
sur-kʰi  ‘to pierce through’

bar-ga  ‘to cross limit’

CVC-CVV  
kʰon-sai  ‘to pick something up as it is valuable’
bur-kʰai  ‘to pacify, soften’
zon-kʰai  ‘to tease’
kʰen-kʰai  ‘to groan in pain’
pʰan-dai  ‘to entangle’

CVC-CCV  
gab-zri  ‘to call someone in a loud voice’
san-sri  ‘to swim’

CVC-CCVC  
hon-kʰrod  ‘to snore’
kʰan-gray  ‘to turn face upwards’
CVC-CCVV  *han-k³rai*  ‘to invite, urge’

*han-grai*  ‘to close/fasten a door with a pole’

*son-grai*  ‘to put a harness’

V-CV  *u-zi*  ‘to take birth’

*u-si*  ‘to overflow’

V-CCV  *e-bre*  ‘to push oneself in, enter’

V-CCVV  *a-zao*  ‘to accept or hold something with hands’

*e-dao*  ‘to tease’

*u-dai*  ‘to be useful’

*u-k⁶uai*  ‘to be hungry, starve’

V-CCVV  *u-drai*  ‘to get purified socially’

*u-k³rai*  ‘to struggle to be free’ (as of animals in trap)

*a-glai*  ‘to be surplus’

V-CCVC  *a-zloŋ*  ‘to stand on one’s toes’

VV-CV  *ao-li*  ‘to melt’

VV-CCVV  *ao-rai*  ‘to recite, start talking’

*ao-t⁶ai*  ‘to put something at a proper place’

*ao-lai*  ‘to irritate, startle’

*ao-gai*  ‘to move forward’

VC-CV  *un-du*  ‘to sleep’

*eg-t⁷u*  ‘to tickle’

*er-sut*  ‘to push in’

*er-k⁶e*  ‘to move a little/slightly’

VC-CVC  *en-gar*  ‘discard, be free from responsibility’
unj-kar ‘to come out, to get/climb down’

VC-CVV an-gai ‘to be satiated’
on-sai ‘to have mercy’
an-dai ‘to lose direction’

VC-CCVV an-zrai ‘to hide something from someone’

b) Trisyllabic monomorphemic verb roots

Like in many other Bodo-Garo languages (Joseph 2007), trisyllabic monomorphemic roots are rare in Bodo. The few that exists in the language present possibilities of analyzability. Some of these roots are shown below.

CV-CV-CV mi-tbi-gu ‘choke while drinking/eating’

CV-CV-CV sa-tbi-kbo ‘to feel trembling sensation momentarily, struggle to be free from one’s hold’

CV-CVC-CV be-len-da ‘to roll upside down in water as of fish’

There are a lot of unanalyzable disyllabic verb stems as well, such as t’abai ‘walk’, gosoy ‘stand’, zirai ‘take rest’, buzi ‘understand’, etc. These consist of a single morpheme and they cannot be further divided into smaller meaningful units. Many of these, such as buzi are borrowings from Assamese.

3.3.2 Compound verbs

Certain verbs are analysable into two component verbs or one verb with a bound morpheme. However, it is reasonable to say that they are not treated as analysable by the native speakers either because there is considerable change in form or because part of word is bound and unproductive.

As an illustration, the case of verbs consisting of two verb roots are being considered here. The most productive of these compounds involves the ‘verb bur pull’. The verb bur ‘pull’ combines with another verb. The vowel of bur ‘pull’ harmonizes with the vowel of the following verb, as illustrated below.
bisi    ‘tear’ (< bu ‘pull’; zi ‘tear’ (intr.))
bizir    ‘peel’ (< bu ‘pull’; zi ‘peel’ (tr.))
boso    ‘break in half’ (< bu ‘pull’; zo ‘break’ (intr.))
bup’h{u}    ‘uproot’ (< bu ‘pull’; p’h{u} ‘uproot’) (Kamrupia dialect)
but’am    ‘collect, gather’ (< bu ‘pull’; l’um ‘put in’)
bu{k}’a    ‘detach’ (< bu ‘pull’; ga ‘detach’ (intr.))
bu{k}’lai    ‘pull down’ (< bu ‘pull’; gu{l}ai ‘fall’ (intr.))
buslai    ‘change’ (< bu ‘pull’; sulai ‘change’)
bu{k}’ar    ‘separate’ (< bu ‘pull’; gar ‘discard’)
bup’lai    ‘break’ (< bu ‘pull’; p’lai < bai ‘break (intr.))
be{k}’eo    ‘open’ (> bu ‘pull’; k’eo ‘open’(tr.))

A word like bisi ‘tear’ would not be recognized as consisting of two meaningful units by naive native speakers (although someone with linguistic training would be able to).

The verb bu ‘pull’ behaves a lot like the prefixal causativizer pV- and sV- in Bodo (see Section 4.1.1 in Chapter 4). First of all, there is a devoicing of the initial consonant of the following verb, such that zi ‘tear’ (intr.) becomes si following bu ‘pull’. Second, all resultant compound verbs are transitive. However, there are two differences between the causativizers that we will take up in Chapter Four and the above compound verbs. First, the prefixal causativizers in Bodo are very old and has no trace of their origin in the language. But the first morpheme in the above words is recognizable to a linguist transparently as the verb bu. Second, some of the verbs that combine with bu are already transitive, such as p’h{u} ‘uproot’, and gar ‘discard’. The prefixal causativizers are found only with intransitive roots. Moreover, we do not have a sense of causativization in those cases. Rather, we have some sense of the manner in which something is uprooted or discarded.

Some other compound verbs consisting of two verb roots are listed below.

hom-day    ‘realize, understand’ (< hom ‘catch’; day ‘touch’)

k’tuna-sog    ‘listen’ (< k’tuna ‘hear’; sog ‘search’)


bizir-sog  ‘research’  (< bizir ‘analyze’; sog ‘search’)

nai-bizir  ‘research’  (< nai ‘look’; bizir ‘analyze’)

sou-tʰu  ‘tumble’  (< sou ‘punch’; tʰu ‘poke’)

sou-pʰu  ‘arrive,’ (< sou ‘punch’; pʰu ‘come’)

sou-huai  ‘reach’  (< sou ‘punch’; huai ‘go and give’)

mum-huai  ‘reach’  (< mum ‘get’; huai ‘go and give’)

mum-pʰuai  ‘arrive’ (< mum ‘get’; pʰuai ‘come’)

sor-sum  ‘topple’ (< sor ‘tie a bundle’; sum ‘dip’)

bar-sum  ‘jump into’  (< bar ‘jump’; sum ‘dip’)

sou-si  ‘clear a path’  (< sou ‘puch’; zi ‘tear’)

er-su  ‘enter into forcibly’ (< er ‘stir’; su ‘put inside’)

ur-su  ‘fall with nose hitting the ground’ (< ur ‘to dig’; su ‘put inside’)

kʰon-sai  ‘to pick up something valuable’ (< kʰon ‘to pick up’; sai ‘to clean vegetables’)

sai-kʰo  ‘to select’ (< sai ‘to clean vegetables’; go ‘to be free from’)

gai-kʰu  ‘to climb’ (< gai ‘to tread’; kʰu ‘to pile earth’)

en-gar  ‘to discard, detach’ (< en ‘retire from back’; gar ‘discard’)

da-zab  ‘to add’ (< da ‘weave, build a statue’; zab ‘pile’)

We now turn to cases which involve verbs consisting of an identifiable verb root and a bound suffix (which is unproductive). The most productive of these compounds are the ones involving tʰar, which is a bound suffix that adds the sense of ‘killing’. The verb that precedes tʰar adds the specific manner in which the killing takes place. Consider the following examples.

bu-tʰar  ‘kill by beating’ (< bu ‘beat’; tʰar ‘kill’)

su-tʰar  ‘kill by stabbing’ (< su ‘pierce’; tʰar ‘kill’)

\textit{ga-t\textsuperscript{b}ar} \textsuperscript{1} ‘kill by treading’ \textit{(ga ‘tread’; \textit{t\textsuperscript{b}ar} ‘kill’)}

\textit{gau-t\textsuperscript{b}ar} ‘kill by shooting’ \textit{(gau ‘shoot’; \textit{t\textsuperscript{b}ar} ‘kill’)}

\textit{dan-t\textsuperscript{b}ar} ‘kill by cutting’ \textit{(dan ‘cut’; \textit{t\textsuperscript{b}ar} ‘kill’)}

\textit{zur-t\textsuperscript{b}ar} ‘kill by kicking’ \textit{(zur ‘kick’; \textit{t\textsuperscript{b}ar} ‘kill’)}

The verb \textit{but\textsuperscript{b}ar} does not necessarily mean beating someone to death. This verb has become the general word for ‘kill’, although it transparently consists of the verb \textit{bu} ‘beat’ and \textit{t\textsuperscript{b}ar} ‘kill’. All other subsequent verbs denote specific types of killing. The form \textit{t\textsuperscript{b}ar} is not productive as it is found only in a limited set of lexical items. For instance, if I push someone off a building or cliff and kill the person, I could not use either \textit{nar-t\textsuperscript{b}ar} ‘push-kill’ or \textit{k\textsuperscript{d}ulai-t\textsuperscript{b}ar} ‘drop-kill’. Thus, \textit{t\textsuperscript{b}ar} is now an inherent part of certain lexical items, and not a productive formative of the language.

Some more cases of compounds with bound forms are given below.

\textit{sou-dau} ‘stumble/bang’ \textit{\textsuperscript{(}> sou ‘punch’; dau ‘swim’)}

\textit{sou-grau} ‘stumble’ \textit{\textsuperscript{(}> sou ‘puch’; grau ‘ONOM’)}

\textit{gab-zri} ‘call out’ \textit{\textsuperscript{(}> gab ‘cry’; zri ‘ONOM’)}

\subsection{Borrowed roots}

Many verbs have been borrowed from other languages, mostly from Assamese. The following list presents borrowings from other languages.

Borrowings from Assamese:

\textit{s\textsuperscript{h}ik\textsuperscript{h}ai} ‘to train’

\textit{sazai} ‘to decorate’

\textit{sazi} ‘to suit’

\textit{mani} ‘to obey’

\textit{p\textsuperscript{h}at\textsuperscript{h}i} ‘to set up, to select’

\textit{p\textsuperscript{h}at\textsuperscript{h}ai} ‘to send’

\textit{k\textsuperscript{h}omai} ‘to lessen’
p̄arai  ‘to read’
salai  ‘to drive/ride’
zuzi  ‘to fight, dare to fight’
kuli  ‘to open’
p̄uzi  ‘to pray’
bagrai  ‘to wrestle’
p̄utai  ‘to turn upside’
aorai  ‘to recite’
utai  ‘to raise, to lift’
mosrai  ‘to twist’
zorai  ‘to join, to connect’
basai  ‘to escape’
gili  ‘to met’
suli  ‘to be useful, to manage life’
akhi  ‘to paint, draw’
zasi  ‘to offer something’

Borrowings from Hindi:

kamai  ‘to earn’
barai  ‘to increase’
p̄urmai  ‘to inform’

Borrowed verbs are mostly bisyllabic since they are morphologically complex in the source language. For instance, p̄orai ‘read’ consists of p̄ ‘read’ and -or ‘non-finite’ in the source language Assamese. However, in the Target language they are treated as morphologically simple.

The morphosyntactic behaviour of the borrowed verbs is very similar to that of the Bodo verbs. For example, the borrowed verbs can take all inflectional suffixes. They, like
most of the Bodo verbs, do not take the causative prefixes, the \( p^hV \)-causative and the \( sV \)-causative.

3.3.4 Transitivity of verb roots

Verbs are generally classified into different classes according to their transitivity, such as intransitive, transitive, ditransitive verbs. Transitivity is coded in different ways in different languages – morphologically on the verbs, verb agreement, through case marking, and so on. In this section we will deal with the transitivity of Bodo verb roots.

3.3.4.1 Morphological coding of transitivity

There is no morphological coding of transitivity on the verbs per se in Bodo. However, most verbs do require morphological coding when they take part in clauses with different valency. Intransitive verbs (semantically and syntactically) take morphological marking when they occur in a transitive clause. Similarly, transitive verbs (semantically and syntactically) take morphological marking when they occur in an intransitive clause. Only a couple of verbs are ambitransitive – i.e. they participate in both intransitive and transitive syntax, without any overt marking on the verb. There are several morphological causativizing processes, which are used only with intransitive verbs (see Chapter 4, Section 4.1.1) when they occur in a transitive clauses. The following examples illustrate one of the causativization processes, namely \( sV \)-prefixation (see Chapter 4, Section 4.1.1.1).

3-10  \textit{got}'\textit{o}-\textit{a}  \textit{gab-dunj}.
  \begin{tabular}{lr}
  child-SUB & cry-REAL \\
  \end{tabular}
  ‘The child is crying.’

3-11  \textit{bi}  \textit{got}'\textit{o}-\textit{k}'\textit{ou}  \textit{sur-gab-dunj}.
  \begin{tabular}{lll}
  3SG & child-OBJ & CAUS-cry-REAL \\
  \end{tabular}
  ‘S/he made the child cry.’

3-12  *\textit{bi}  \textit{got}'\textit{o}-\textit{k}'\textit{ou}  \textit{gab-dunj}.
In the above examples, the verb *gab* ‘cry’ is used intransitively in (3-10) and transitively in (3-11) with the prefixation of *sur*. We cannot use the verb *gab* ‘cry’ without the prefix, as shown in (3-12).

There is only one valence decreasing process in Bodo which is similar to **passivization** in European languages, although it has its own characteristics that we do not see in European passives. This process involves the use of the ‘versatile verb’ *za* ‘happen, become, take place’ as a serial verb with another lexical verb in the predicate. When we add *za* to a transitive verb, syntactically it behaves like an intransitive verb in that the argument structure changes from that of a transitive to that of an intransitive: one of the arguments, namely the subject, is ‘demoted’ to the status of an ‘instrumental argument’. Consider the following examples.

3-13  

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
bi & ay-k\text{'ou}bu-du\text{ug}.\\
3SG & 1SG-OBJ & \text{beat-REAL} \\
& \text{‘He beat me.’} \\
3-14 & ay & bi-za\text{ug} & bu-za-du\text{ug}.\\
1SG & 3SG-INSTR & \text{beat-PASS-REAL} \\
& \text{‘I was beaten by him.’}
\end{array}
\]

The verb *bu* ‘beat’ is a transitive verb, which takes two core arguments – the subject *bi* ‘s/he’ and the object *ay* ‘I’ marked with the object marker -\text{'ou}, as illustrated in (3-13). When we add the versatile verb *za* ‘happen, become, take place’ to the verb *bu* ‘beat’, it no longer takes an object argument; instead, it codes the patient participant as the subject argument and the agent participant as an oblique instrumental argument, as illustrated in (3-14). Thus, there is change in the number of core valence in the *za* marked clause.

There are a couple of **ambitransitive** verbs in Bodo, which can occur in both intransitive and transitive clause types without any morphological coding on the verb. The following are some of the ambitransitive verbs in Bodo.

\[
\begin{array}{l}
k\text{'eb} & \text{‘squeeze, pinch’} \\
gi & \text{‘fear, be afraid of’} \\
or & \text{‘bite’}
\end{array}
\]
$p^\flat$orai ‘study’

tir ‘write’

sung ‘bark’

$t^\flat$abai ‘walk’

$k^\flat$ar ‘run’

$k^\flat$am ‘burn’

gel ‘play’

The following examples illustrate the ambitransitive nature of the above verbs.

3-15  

\[ \text{ani} \quad ak^\flat\text{ai-jak}^\flat\text{cb-bai}. \]

1SG-GEN  hand-SUB  squeeze-PERF

‘My hand got squeezed.’

3-16  

\[ \text{do}rza-ja \quad \text{ani} \quad ak^\flat\text{ai-k}^\flat\text{ou} \quad k^\flat\text{cb-bai}. \]

door-SUB  1SG-GEN  hand-OBJ  squeeze-PERF

‘The door squeezed my hand.’

In the above examples, the verb $k^\flat$cb ‘squeeze’ is used intransitively with the patient participant coded as the subject argument in (3-15) and transitively with two arguments in (3-16) – the agent participant $do$rza ‘door’ and the patient participant $ani$ $ak^\flat$ai ‘my hand’ coded as subject and object respectively. In the former example the agent participant, the participant that squeezed the hand, remains unspecified, and thus it is non-anaphoric.

3-17  

\[ \text{ani} \quad \text{gi-jiu}. \]

1SG  fear-HAB

‘I am afraid (of something) or I am scared.’

3-18  

\[ \text{ani} \quad m\text{udai-k}^\flat\text{ou} \quad \text{gi-jiu}. \]

1SG  ghost-OBJ  fear-HAB

‘I am afraid of ghosts.’

One context for Example (3-17) is this: we ask an individual to go out in the dark to fetch something, but the person is timid. In this context, the object of fear is unspecified in Example (3-17), i.e. it is not clear exactly what the person is afraid of – ghosts, animals, strangers, etc. On the other hand, Example (3-18) makes it clear what the person is afraid
of, namely ghosts. Not all verbs allow the omission of an object in situations in which the referent of the object remains unspecified, as illustrated by the following example.

3-19  
\[ \text{aŋ} \quad \text{za-ju}\. \]
\[ 1SG \quad \text{eat-HAB} \]
‘I eat (it).’

In this example, the referent of the covert patient participant has to be specific – an edible item which is understood/identified by the interlocutors even though it is not mentioned. The sentence in (3-19) is unacceptable unless it follows a question like ‘Do you eat fish?’. In other words, the unexpressed patient participant in Example (3-17) is non-anaphoric (i.e. does not have a referent), while the unexpressed object in Example (3-19) is anaphoric (i.e. a referent is understood from the context). This semantic difference between anaphoric unexpressed argument and non-anaphoric unexpressed argument in Bodo is very crucial, especially in the treatment of passive-like constructions. The following examples illustrate the ambitransitive nature of the verb or ‘bite’.

3-20  
\[ \text{be} \quad \text{suima-ja} \quad \text{or-uu}. \]
\[ \text{this} \quad \text{dog-SUB} \quad \text{bite-HAB} \]
‘This dog bites.’

3-21  
\[ \text{be} \quad \text{suima-ja} \quad \text{aŋ-k\textsuperscript{b}ouor-duŋ}. \]
\[ \text{this} \quad \text{dog-SUB} \quad 1SG-OBJ \quad \text{bite-REAL} \]
‘This dog bit me.’

The patient participant in (3-20) is unspecified, whereas in (3-21) it is specified. The following examples illustrate the ambitransitive nature of the verb \( p^{b}\text{orai} \) ‘read/study’.

3-22  
\[ \text{aŋ} \quad (\text{skul-ao}) \quad p^{b}\text{orai-ju}. \]
\[ 1SG \quad \text{school-LOC} \quad \text{study-HAB} \]
‘I go to school.’ ‘I study at school.’

3-23  
\[ \text{aŋ} \quad \text{be} \quad \text{bizab-k\textsuperscript{b}ou} \quad \text{sanp\textsuperscript{b}rum = ba}p^{b}\text{orai-ju}. \]
\[ 1SG \quad \text{this} \quad \text{book-OBJ} \quad \text{everyday=also} \quad \text{read-HAB} \]
‘I read this book every day.’
The intransitive use of $p^\text{b}orai$ in (3-22) has the sense of ‘study’, i.e. taking education, whereas the transitive use of $p^\text{b}orai$ in (3-23) has the sense of reading a particular book or article.

In sum, most verbs in Boro require some kind of verbal morphology when they take part in a clause type with a valency different than the valency of the verb root. A few verbs like $seb$ ‘squeeze’ and $p^\text{b}orai$ ‘read/study’ on the other hand do not take any morphology when they occur in clause types with different valency. Hopefully it has become clear from the existence of various valence increasing and valence decreasing morphological processes, that the distinction of transitive and intransitive verbs in Bodo is crucial at the lexical level. However, it is not always easy to spot one in spontaneous speech as transitivity coding morphosyntactic devices, such as argument structure (i.e. number of overt core arguments and the case marking of the core arguments), code other functions such as definiteness, specificity, and so on.

3.3.4.2 Transitivity and argument structure

An intransitive verb is usually defined as a verb that takes one core argument and transitive verb as one that takes two core arguments. As indicated in the above discussion, the verbal arguments are often dropped off a clause if it is retrievable from the previous discourse or from the speech context. Thus, a verb may or may not have its arguments overtly expressed, as illustrated by the following example.

3-24  

owa  mura-ja-su  grub  zek^bai-jao

bambooroot-SUB-CONTR  sound.sym  fishing.device-LOC

$hab\cdot p^\text{b}ai\cdot ju\cdot u.$

enter-come-HAB

‘The bamboo root enters into the fishing device.’

$p^\text{b}inzr\alpha b$  gar-hor-\text{\textit{u}}  buri-a\text{\textit{o}}.

sound.sym  throw-send-HAB  land-LOC

(\textit{She}) throws (the bamboo root) to the land.

$mabr\alpha i$  $p^\text{b}ui\cdot ju\cdot i\text{\textit{a}}i$  ar\text{\textit{u}}  $hab\cdot p^\text{b}ui\cdot lai\cdot bai$.

how  come-HAB-wonder  again  enter-come-again-PERF

Somehow, (the bamboo root) comes back and enters into (the fishing device).
In the first sentence of the above excerpt the participant *owa mura* ‘bamboo root’ (coded as subject) and *zekba*‘fishing device’ (coded as locative) are mentioned overtly. These two participants are referred back again in the following two sentences (‘bamboo root’ – as patient participant of the verb *gard*‘throw’ in the second sentence and as an agent participant of the verb *hab* ‘enter’ in the final sentence; ‘fishing device’ as a locative argument of the verb *hab*‘enter’ in the final sentence), but they are not overtly mentioned. We can guess from the context that the thing being thrown in the second sentence has to be the bamboo root and the location in which the bamboo root enters has to be the fishing device. *The point is that we cannot use the number of overt core arguments as a criterion for transitivity in Bodo, because sometimes there are no overt arguments at all, as in the second sentence above.* We can, of course, modify the criterion of transitivity as **number of overt core arguments and anaphoric zeroes.** However, sometimes it may be difficult to decide whether a zero is anaphoric or non-anaphoric.

Assuming that all participants are overtly mentioned, transitivity can be expressed by another aspect of argument structure, namely **case marking.** In an accusative alignment system like that of Bodo, we would expect that the S and A argument be marked with a subject marker (zero or otherwise) and the P argument be marked with an object marker. In fact, Bodo does have a dedicated subject marker *-a/*aw (nominal/pronominal subject markers) and a dedicated object marker *-kaw/-kou* (dialectal variants). However, like overt argument expression, **overt case marking** is also variable. The variation in case marking on the core arguments is dependent on various semantic-pragmatic features. The case marking of the S and A argument is mostly dependent on definiteness, **among other things which are yet to be discovered.** Definite nominal S arguments are overtly marked, while indefinite nominal S arguments are unmarked. However, the function of variable case marking on the nominal A argument and the case marking on pronominal S and A arguments are yet to be explained – since we do not know as yet when they are marked, and when they are not. Consider the following examples.

3-25  *pulis*  *p^bui-duŋ*.

    police  come-REAL

    ‘There is a police at the door.’
3-26  *pulis-a*  *pʰui-duŋ*.

    police    come-real

    ‘The police is here.’

The police in Example (3-25) is some unidentified police, whereas the police in (3-26) is an identifiable individual.

3-27  *aŋ-kʰoutʰampʰui*  *or-duŋ*.

    1SG-OBJ  mosquito  bite-REAL

    ‘Mosquito bit me.’

3-28  *aŋ-kʰoutʰampʰui-a*  *or-duŋ*.

    1SG-OBJ  mosquito  bite-REAL

    ‘A mosquito bit me.’

The semantic distinction between the above two examples is not clear to us yet. In any event, we have no case marking on the subject argument in (3-27), but we have it on example (3-28). We see similar variation on the pronominal subjects and the function of the variable case marking is not yet understood.

The case marking on the P arguments is mostly dependent on the ‘person hierarchy’. Higher nominal participants in the person hierarchy, such as personal pronouns, personal names, and definite/specific NPs, are marked, while lower nominal participants, such as indefinite/non-specific NPs, are unmarked, as illustrated by the following examples.

3-29  *aŋ*  *nuŋ-kʰou*  *sinai-juu*.

    1SG  2SG-OBJ  recognize-HAB

    ‘I recognize you.’

3-30  *aŋ*  *sase*  *mansi*  *luغو*  *mun-duŋ-mun*.

    1SG  one  person  friend  get-REAL-PAST

    ‘I met a person.’

The personal pronoun *nuŋ* ‘you’ in Example (3-29) is obligatorily marked, while the indefinite NP *sase mansi* ‘one person’ in (3-30) is unmarked.
In sum, it is possible to identify transitivity of verbs by looking at the argument types (subject, object, etc.) taken by a particular verb, as they (i.e. the arguments) are coded with different case markers. Thus, assuming all (semantically selected) arguments of a verb are overt, a verb with just the subject marked argument can be classified as an intransitive verb, and the verb with both subject and object marked participants can be classified as a transitive verb. Although it may sound contradictory, the variability of case marking also can be employed to identify transitivity because case marking is variable only for the core arguments. All oblique arguments are obligatorily case marked. What this means is that the unmarked arguments would count towards the number of core arguments of the verb. Thus, a verb with subject marked argument and an unmarked argument would count as a transitive verb, and so on.

On the basis of the above discussion we can conclude that it is indeed possible to distinguish between transitive and intransitive verbs at the root level of Bodo verbs based on (i) the morphology they take (such as valence increasing and decreasing morphology), (ii) the number of overt arguments and anaphoric zero arguments, and (iii) case marking on the overt arguments (zero or otherwise).

It is arguable whether there is a class of ditransitive verbs. Semantically ditransitive verbs, such as *hur ‘give’, *hui ‘go and give, deliver’, *hor ‘send’, take an additional argument that we do not see in either intransitive or transitive verbs, namely a recipient R, which is marked with the suffix -nu. However, the R arguments behave more like other oblique arguments than the core arguments in that the R argument is obligatorily marked. Consider the following examples.

3-31  \(ap^ba-ja \quad an-nu \quad ran \quad hur-bai.\)

father-SUB 1SG-DAT money give-PERF

‘Father gave me some money.’

It is not possible to say the following.

3-32  \(*ap^ba-ja \quad an \quad ran \quad hur-bai.\)
Moreover, the suffix -nuu also codes the subject argument of the nag ‘need, want’. Thus, it can be argued that -nuu codes the semantic category of a recipient, rather than the grammatical category of another object (i.e. beside the object of a transitive clause).

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter we have enumerated some of the well-known properties of TB and BG languages, such as existence of causatives like φ, alternation in the manner of initial consonants in intransitive-transitive pairs of verbs, which we find in Bodo. Bodo does not preserve or does not have some of the well-known grammatical properties of TB languages, such as verb agreement, direction marker, evidential marking, and reflexive marking. At the same time, Bodo is representative of the BG languages in that it has agglutinating morphological structure, especially on the verb and it has what is called adverbial suffixes or event specifiers. Next, Bodo verbs were defined as a word class based on syntactic properties – its function as a predicaitor, and on the basis of the presence of various morphological markings on the verb. Verbs share some features with Nouns and Adjectives, but they are essentially distinct from both of them. After defining the class of verbs, we talked about verb roots in Bodo. In this regard, we focused on the syllable structure of verb roots and observed that most verb roots are monosyllabic and that polysyllabic roots are rare. Some borrowed verbs from Assamese, Hindi, and Bengali were also taken into account. Finally the transitivity of Bodo verbs was discussed. We noted that the notion of transitivity is not straightforward in Bodo. First, there is no morphological coding of transitivity on the verb. Second, both case marking and overt expression of arguments is variable. However, an understanding of the case marking system and consideration of anaphoric and non-anaphoric zeroes help us decide on the transitivity of verbs.