CHAPTER I

AN INTRODUCTION TO ASSAM SADRI
CHAPTER 1

An Introduction to Sadri language

1.0 Introduction: Historical background

Sadani/Sadri originated as the mother tongue of the Sadans, an Aryan group amongst the Non-Aryans in Chota Nagpur Plateau (Navarangi, 1965:5). It evolved as a link language of the Adivasis living mainly in and around Chota Nagpur Plateau that spreads over present day Bihar, Jharkhand, Chattisgarh and parts of West Bengal and Orissa. About 97 or so heterogeneous communities like the Munda, Kharia, Ho, Oraons and so on (see appendix 1) come under the umbrella term Adivasis. These communities, mostly belonging to three language families namely, Austro-Asiatic, Indo-Aryan and Dravidian used Sadri as their link language for inter and intra community communication. From pidgin, Sadri gradually evolved as a creole, primarily due to inter community marriages between the various linguistic groups amongst them. The offspring of these bilingual parents adopted this link language as their mother tongue. Goswami (1976:15) gives a list of such groups who use Nagpuria Sadri as a second language and those who use it as their mother tongue (see appendix 2). According to the 2001 Census Report there are 2,044,776 Sadri speakers in India.

When the British tea planters brought the adivasis to Assam, as labourers, in the 19th century, Sadri as a link language came along with them. The Adivasi people were brought mainly because they proved efficient and were paid lower wages compared to the local labourers. They came mostly from the Southern, Eastern and Central parts of India (for detailed information see appendix 1). These labourers were brought for an indentured period. When the period was over, the labourers had to leave the garden. Instead of going back to their original homelands after the indentured period, they settled down in villages outside the tea garden and took to cultivation and some other professions. In due course of time, the labourers employed by the tea gardens were called ‘tea-tribes’ and those who worked as the
The cultivators outside the tea gardens were called ‘ex-tea tribes’. The Tea Labourer Appointment Policies led to the emergence of these two groups. Today, the ‘tea tribes’ and the ‘ex-tea tribes’ have come together on one platform. They now call themselves Adivasi. The names ‘tea-tribes’ and ‘ex-tea tribes’, according to them are derogatory.

There are about 845 tea gardens (Toppno 1999) in Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, Nagaon, Lakhimpur, Tinsukia, Sonitpur and Kokrajhar districts of Assam. The approximate population of the adivasis in Assam has been estimated to be 70 lacs. However, the language data for the study have been collected from two of the districts, namely Sonitpur and Lakhimpur. The map below shows the areas of study in Assam, India.

**Figure 1** Map showing the areas of study in Assam, India
1.1 Socio-linguistic perspective

The adivasi immigrants lived an isolated life within the tea gardens, with hardly any interaction with the outside world. The Adivasis are known to be extremely community centric; for inter community communication they used to speak in their own mother tongue. The work place that is, the tea garden and the market place were the places where they came in contact with members of other communities. At the initial stage, they started with Sadri for intra community communication. As the communities started to interact at the social level the importance of the link language grew. Marriages between two different language communities further enhanced the need of this link language.

Over a period of two hundred years, Sadri came under tremendous influence of the dominant regional languages: Assamese in the Brahmaputra valley and Bangla in the Barrack Valley. Sadri as spoken in Assam has been labeled as Assam Sadri (henceforth AS) to distinguish it from the Sadri spoken in Chota Nagpur Plateau, better known as Nagpuria Sadri (henceforth NS). Table 1 provides a list of lexical items from NS\(^1\) and AS which shows how the two varieties differ in the choice of words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NS</th>
<th>AS</th>
<th>Assamese</th>
<th>Bangla</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>marad</td>
<td>mota</td>
<td>mota(^2)</td>
<td>fami</td>
<td>‘husband’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>djanaani</td>
<td>maiki</td>
<td>maiki</td>
<td>sri</td>
<td>‘wife’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kail</td>
<td>kali</td>
<td>kali</td>
<td>kal</td>
<td>‘tomorrow’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bhalabes</td>
<td>bhal/bes</td>
<td>bhal</td>
<td>bef</td>
<td>‘good’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kharap</td>
<td>kharap/beya</td>
<td>beya</td>
<td>kharap</td>
<td>‘bad’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) The NS lexical items have been cited from the *English-Sadri Dictionary* by Blain (1975).

\(^2\) In Assamese, the terms *mota* and *maiki* are used at the colloquial level. The standard variety uses the terms *giriek* ‘husband’ and *ghoiniek* ‘wife’.

*Phd thesis, Dept. of EFL, Tezpur University*
The words beya, maiki, mota, kali, bhal, dher show the influence of the dominant regional language Assamese as is evident in Table I. Again, words like bes ‘good/nice’ and ses ‘finish’ could be borrowed from Bangla words be (‘good/nice’ and fes ‘finish’ where the only difference is in the use of alveolar fricative /s/ instead of Bangla post alveolar fricative /ʃ/. The phonological change in AS can be noticed in the use of front open vowel /a/ in place of diphthong /ai/, in NS.

Table 2 The phonological changes in AS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NS</th>
<th>AS</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>iyaid</td>
<td>yaad</td>
<td>‘remember’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jairgan</td>
<td>Jairgan</td>
<td>‘stars’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>himmaJ</td>
<td>himmaJ</td>
<td>‘courage’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cair</td>
<td>car</td>
<td>‘four’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Again, the use of front open vowel /a/ in AS in place of front close vowel /i/ in NS in (1)

1. NS       AS       Gloss
pasind     pasand   ‘like’
rindh      randh    ‘cook’

The difference between NS and AS can be seen in terms of the use of classifiers. The classifiers implying definiteness in NS are the, go, gorh, goth,
moth, morh and har (Goswami, 1976:57). While, in AS the definiteness classifiers are the, ta and dJhan and in some cases har is also used (discussed in detail in § 1.3.2.3).

Table 3 The difference between NS and AS classifiers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NS</th>
<th>AS</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) cair-go chōra</td>
<td>car-dJhan chōra</td>
<td>'four-CL boys'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) jin got ghar</td>
<td>jin-tha ghar</td>
<td>'three-CL houses'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) dei gorh kakör</td>
<td>dei-dJhan kakör</td>
<td>'two-CL servants'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) cho morh kara</td>
<td>cho-tha kara</td>
<td>'six-CL buffaloes'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) dei har chagri</td>
<td>dei-tha/har chagri</td>
<td>'two-CL goats'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The classifier dJhan is used with definite human nominals. The classifiers with numeral one preceding the nominal imply indefiniteness. The use of dJhan can be the influence Assamese zon or Bangla djon. However, the classifiers go, gorh, moth, morh are hardly used in AS.

One possible reason behind the differences between NS and AS is the influence of the dominant languages of the region. Besides, in Assam, there are sub-varieties within AS. In different areas of Assam, Sadri speakers refer to the link language by different names: baganiya, chilo-milo, achi-jachi, aunla-jaunla. These sub-varieties emerged depending on the strength of a particular community in a given area. For instance, if the number of adivasis from the Munda community is higher in a particular garden or locality, the AS spoken in that area will have more Munda features. These sub-varieties in AS exist primarily because of the borrowing of the lexical words along with the phonological, morphological and syntactic features of their indigenous languages; in other words, their original mother tongue. Since, the migrant tea workers came from different parts of India, it is most likely that lexical items and other linguistics features could be carried over by AS, from these diverse ethnic groups too. This could explain the sub-varieties within AS. Study of the sub-varieties would be an interesting study, but it is outside the scope of this thesis.
1.1.1 Sadri literature

In Central India, specifically in Jharkhand, books and magazines in NS are published. The language is taught in the Universities (Chetti, 2005). Sadri, as Grierson (1903) has described in his ‘Linguistic Survey of India’, Vol 5 part-II, is the sub-dialect of Bhojpuri, which is a dialect of Bihari, an Indo-Aryan language. Grierson’s analysis of the language is mostly based on the first ever grammar book written on this language by Rev. E.H. Whitley. The name of the book is *Notes on the Ganwari Dialect* (1886). Suniti Kumar Chatterji (1926) while classifying Magadhan speeches grouped Sadri with Bhojpuri under western Magadhan. However, recent linguists have claimed it to be an independent language. In Assam, over a period of more than two hundred years, this language has incorporated many linguistic features of Assamese and Bangla which belong to the eastern Magadhan group of languages. Some of the books on Sadri language are listed below:

(a) *Language Handbook Sadani* by Rev. Father Henric Flour and published the District Labour Association, Kolkata (1886). This book was published mainly to help the British Authorities to communicate with the tea garden labourers employed in Assam during the colonial rule.

(b) *A Simple Sadani Grammar* and *A Sadani Reader* by P.S. Navarangi (1956).

(c) *Nagpuriya Sadani Boli Ka Biyakaran* (1965) by P.S. Navarangi. Here, he gives the description of the language along with its similarities as well as dissimilarities with other Indo-Aryan languages like Bihari, Bangali, Magahi, Nepali, Merwari and Hindi.

(d) *English Sadri Dictionary* (1975) compiled by Father Edgar Blain.

(e) *Nagpuri Bhasa* (1976) Dr. Shravan Kr. Goswami

(f) *Nagpuri (Sadani) Grammar* (2010) by Sakuntala Misra and Dr. Umesh Nand Tiwari.

Unlike NS, not much has been done on AS in Assam. Two prominent works are mentioned below.
(g) Cha Mazdur Asamia Sabd Aru Khand-Bakya Sambhar compiled by Dewram Tasha, published by Assam Sahitya Sabha (1990).

(h) Axomor cha mazdur git-mator ek hamixiyamulak addhayan or ‘A critical study of the songs of the Tea Garden Labourers in Assam’ (1999), PhD thesis by Joytsna Sarmah Bezbaruah. Here, she devotes a chapter on the description of Assam Sadri.

1.1.2 Importance of Assam Sadri

For socio-economic, socio-political and other socio-cultural reasons, most of the adivasis of Assam have opted for AS as their first language. Besides, the lingua franca provides one linguistic identity to the various adivasi groups. Since, the importance of mother tongue education at primary level cannot be ignored; many international bodies like the UNICEF, UNESCO and government institutes like SCERT, missions like Sarbashiksha Abhijan and others are publishing text books in Sadri, mainly for different adult literacy programmes. These programmes are conducted by local NGOs in collaboration with organizations like Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL). In 2010, a Sadri medium school was opened with the initiatives of some NGOs, for the adivasi children in Janubasti, in Lakhimpur district of Assam.

Navarangi (1965) states that NS, spoken in Chota Nagpur area, shares its linguistic features with languages of the Hindi speaking area like Bhojpuri, Magahi and others. In case of AS we have a different story. Assam has languages from five language families: Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Burman and Tai Kadai. Close contact of languages from these language families has given some unique linguistic features to the languages of this region. The study of AS would provide a better understanding of its areal influences.

The Adivasi Sahitya Sabha has made a policy of adopting the Roman script for Adivasiya, though at present, most writings are in Assamese and Devnagiri script.  

---

Adivasiya is a new name given by the Sabha for the creole. In their opinion, Sadri spoken in Jharkhand is the language of the Sadans or the Dikhus, literally meaning ‘outsider’. Sadri, spoken in Assam, is essentially different. The reason behind this is that, it is the product of heterogenous ethnic groups who came together to use it as a link language for socio-cultural reasons. Thus, Assam Sadri is essentially different from Nagpuria Sadri (Nagpuria) and other varieties spoken in different parts of the country.

1.2. Research methodology

For the study of the argument selection of Assam Sadri, data was collected from Sadri speakers of Sonitpur and Lakhimpur districts of Assam. These two districts are situated at the Brahmaputra valley where Assamese is the predominant language. The research methodology includes a literature review on the language, survey of the tea gardens and interaction with the native speakers. Language data have been collected from the native speakers through questionnaires and interview schedules. The informants are mainly from the age group of 20 to 50 years. Besides, data from AS L1 speakers, language data have been collected from texts and stories written in AS. For the comparative study of AS with NS, data was collected in Jharkhand. The researcher made a field trip to Ranchi, Jharkhand.

1.3. Typological characteristics

This section provides a general introduction to some of the typological features of AS. Subsequent chapters will explore some of them in detail. Here, I have briefly outlined some of the basic properties like the word order, nominal system, and the verbal system in the language under study.

4 Assamese is the official state language and the mother tongue of the Assamese people.
1.3.1. Basic word order

The basic word order of AS is S (subject) – O (object) – V (verb). The subject is always at the clause initial position followed by object and the verb in the clause final position.

2.  
\[ \text{ram \ chorı-tho ke \ dekh-l-ak} \]
  
\[ \text{ram.NOM \ girl-CL \ ACC \ see-PAST-3SG} \]

‘Ram saw the girl.’

In (2), we have a transitive construction where the subject NP \text{ram} followed by the object NP \text{chorı-tho} and the verb \text{dekh-l-ak} ‘see-PAST-3SG’.

The word order in AS is flexible and allows scrambling.

3.  
\begin{align*}
\text{(a) } & \text{ram dekh-l-ak chorı-tho ke} & \text{(SOV)} \\
\text{(b) } & \text{chorı-tho ke ram dekh-l-ak} & \text{(OVS)} \\
\text{(c) } & \text{chorı-tho ke dekh-l-ak ram} & \text{(OVS)} \\
\text{(d) } & \text{dekh-l-ak ram chorı-tho ke} & \text{(VSO)} \\
\text{(e) } & \text{dekh-l-ak chorı-tho ke ram} & \text{(VOS)}
\end{align*}

Such flexibility is possible because of the case markers that distinguish between the subject and the object NPs and the agreement features that are inflected to the verb root. The agreement markers show that the verb agrees with the subject NP in person and number. Therefore, the subject pronouns can be dropped in the language, and the status of the subject is revealed by the presence of the agreement markers.

In a sentence structure, the constituents are placed according to a set order. This applies to the order of the constituents within a phrase. A phrasal category constitutes of a head and its complements that could be another phrase. For instance, in the English construction,\textit{John kissed the girl} is a sentence consisting of the noun phrase (NP) \textit{John} and the verb phrase (VP) \textit{kissed the girl}. In an NP, the head of the phrase is always a noun, and in a VP, the head is a verb. In some
languages of the world, the subject is optional. This leads to the typology of the word order into VO and OV (Song 2001:64).

According to Dryer's Branching Direction Theory or BDT (1992:108-18), the fundamental distinction between VO and OV languages is their opposite branching direction: right and left branching respectively. That is, in VO languages for instance, in English example in figure 2 below.

\[
\text{VP} \quad \rightarrow \quad \text{V} \quad \text{NP}
\]

\[
\text{kissed} \quad \text{the girl}
\]

**Figure 2** Left branching in VO type language (English)

In figure 2, the phrasal category follows non-phrasal categories or to say, branches out towards the left. In OV languages, it is vice versa.

AS is Head Final language or OV type language. That is, the head of a phrase always occurs at the right of the complements. Consider figure 3 below.

\[
\text{VP} \quad \rightarrow \quad \text{NP} \quad \text{V}
\]

\[
\text{chõri-thë ke} \quad \text{dekh-l-ak}
\]

\[
\text{boy-CL ACC} \quad \text{see-PAST-3SG}
\]

\[
\text{'saw the boy'}
\]

**Figure 3** Right branching of Verb Phrase in (AS)

In figure 3, as per Dryer's BDT (1992) the phrasal category NP precedes the non-phrasal category. That is, the branching of the phrasal category is towards the right. In other words, the phrasal category is also called the branching category. If the phrasal category is to the right, it is called right branching, and if it is to the left, it is left branching.

This is true for other phrasal categories in the language. In figure 4, the head noun ghar 'house' follows the genitive phrase birsi ker 'Birsi’s house'.
The head noun or the non-phrasal category *ghar* follows genitive phrase *birsi ker*. Typologically, the OV languages are always propositional (Greenberg 1963b, Dryer 1992, Song 2001). Sadri, like most Indo-Aryan languages also have postposition. A postpositional phrase in the language consists of the non-phrasal postposition preceded by the phrasal category as in figure 5.

Dryer (1992:112-115) distinguishes between major and minor constituents. He states that if a constituent is immediately dominated by the node of the same category, then the constituent is ‘minor’. Like, in figure 6, the NP is immediately dominated by the constituent *chōra- gila*, which is of the same category. Hence, *chōra- gila* will be the minor category, whereas, *bhīṛh ḍhwīk awal* will be the major constituent.
The modifiers in the language constitute a major phrasal category. It precedes the non-phrasal, modified category.

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{NP} \\
\text{Rel} \\
\text{N}
\end{array}
\]

bhīre dheik aw-al chōra-gila
inside enter.CP come-PART boy-PL

'The boy who came inside……'

Figure 6 The structure of modifiers preceding modifying category in AS

In figure 6, the relative clause (participle form) is used as modifying category. It constitutes a major phrasal expression, thus precedes the head chōra-gila ‘boy-PL’.

1.3.2. Nominals

AS is an inflectional language, and we find that the nouns are inflected for case, number, definiteness and or specificity.

1.3.2.1 Case relation

Blake (2001) refers to case as ‘marking dependent nouns for the kind of relationship they bear to their heads’. In other words, the grammatical relation between various NPs in the clause structure is marked by the case markers.

4. ram sita ke bajar me dekh-l-ak
ram.NOM sita ACC market POSP see-PAST-3SG

'Ram saw Sita in the market.'

In (4), ram takes the nominative case which is unmarked, while sita, which is the direct object of the verb, takes accusative case. The marker for the accusative case is ke (discussed in detail in Chapter 4).
1.3.2.2 Number

There is a two-way number marking on the nominal or the pronominal. The singular NP takes the classifiers, while, the mass nouns and generic nouns remain unmarked. In other words, like in most Indian languages, there is no singular morpheme in AS. The plural markers are man and -gil/-gola.

5. (a) admi-tha cah bagan me kam kar-ař rah-e
   man -CL tea garden POSP work do-PROG COP.PAST.3SG
   'The man was working in the tea garden.'

   (b) admi man cah bagan me kam kar-ař rah-e
       man PL tea garden POSP work do-PROG COP.PAST.3SG
       'The men were working in the tea garden.'

   In (5a) admi-tha 'the man' is the singular definite NP in the subject position. In (5b), man is the plural marker\(^5\) that comes after the noun admi 'man'. It indicates the NP admi man 'the men' is plural in number.

   The plural marker man can occur with both animate and inanimate nouns and pronouns.

6. (a) kištap man
   book PL
   'Books'

   (b) ò-man
   3SG-PL
   'They'

\(^5\) Since Sadri in Assam do not have a proper script, so the plural marker man has been used as free morpheme in some literature, whereas, sometimes it is been used as bound morpheme specifically with pronominals u-man 'they'.
AS has another plural marker *gila/ gola* that occurs with both animate and inanimate nouns.

7. (a) *kokor-gila*
   dog-PL
   'The dogs'

   (b) *kitap-gila*
   book-PL
   'The books'

The plural marker *gila/gola* can be the influence of Bangla, which is one of the dominant languages in the region. In Bangla, the plural marker is *golo* (8).

8. *chele-golo  kheI-ch-e*
   boy-CL    play-PROG-3p
   'The boys are playing'

1.3.2.3 Classifiers

The NPs in the language are inflected for the classifier -*thel/-ta*. The classifier is suffixed to the nominal in order to indicate definiteness or specificity as in (9a-c). The classifier *thel/-ta* (*djan* or *har* for +human, + honorific nominal) is suffixed to the numeral one preceding the nominal head in the NP, in order to indicate indefiniteness as in (9d-e). In AS, the classifier *got* is also used as in *got-ek chori* 'a girl’. Here, interestingly, the numeral *ek* 'one' is suffixed to the classifier *got* to imply indefiniteness.

9. (a) *chora-thel/ta*
   'The boy'

   (b) *kitab-thel/-ta*
   'The book'
(c) kam-tha/ta
   'The work'

(d) ek/tho chôra
   'A boy'

(e) ek-djhan admi
   'A man'

According to Masica (1991:250), Bangla -ta,-ti,-khan,-khani and Assamese, -tv, zon/-zoni,-khon etc are the classifiers. When the numeral precedes the nominal head they indicate indefiniteness as in (10b, 11b), and when they follow the nominal heads they indicate definiteness as in (10a, 11a).

10. (a) mei -ti
    'the girl' [definite] Bangla

    (b) ek-ti mei
    'a girl' [indefinite]

11. (a) kitap-tu/ khon
    'the book' [definite] Assamese

    (b) ekhon kitap
    'a book' [indefinite]

1.3.3. Verbal morphology

Verbs in Indo-Aryan languages are inflected for Tense, Aspect, Mood (TAM) and agreement features. The agreement features consist of features like number, person and gender. The TAM and agreement features are usually suffixed to the verb root. According to Masica (1991), the agreement marker in Indo-Aryan languages, either precedes or follows the tense marker. Following is the formation of verbal inflection in Indo-Aryan languages (Masica, 1991:258).

Verb stem +Aspect + (concord) + Tense/Mood+ (concord)

Figure 7 Verbal inflections in Indo-Aryan languages (Masica 1991)

This can be illustrated with the help of the examples.

PhD thesis, Dept. of EFL, Tezpur University
In AS, like other Indo-Aryan languages, the agreement marker follows the TAM features as in figure 8(a). In imperfective constructions implying habitual action, the agreement marker precedes the aspect marker as in figure 8(b). This is illustrated with example (24) in §1.3.3.2.3. Thus, in AS the verbal inflection can be arranged as given in figure 8(a-b).

(a) Verb stem + Aspect + Tense/Mood+ (concord)

(b) Verb stem + (concord) + Aspect

Figure 8 (a) Verbal inflection in AS (b) Verbal inflection in imperfective aspect

The following § 1.3.3.1 discusses, in detail, the TAM (tense, aspect and mood) features in AS.

1.3.3.1 Tense

AS has a three-way tense distinction: present, past and future. The present tense is unmarked. The past tense marker is –I, and the future tense marker is –b. This is illustrated with the lexical verb kha ‘eat’ in (13 a-c).

13. (a) maNi bhag kha-o-na
1-NOM rice.NOM eat-1SG-IMPERF
‘I eat rice’
In (13a), the verb root is kha which is followed by the 1st person singular agreement marker -ʊ. The imperfective marker -na is suffixed to it. In (13b), the verb kha, is followed by the past tense marker -l and finally the 1st person singular agreement marker -ʊ. In (13c), kha is followed by the future tense marker -b and the agreement marker -o comes after it. In the case of 3rd person singular number, the future tense is not marked by a suffix as in (14).

14. 3SG kail badjar dja-i
tomorrow market go.FUT-3SG

'He will go to market tomorrow.'

Table 4 Tense inflection system in AS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Past</th>
<th>Future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SG</td>
<td>PL</td>
<td>SG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>kha-ʊ-na</td>
<td>kha-1-la</td>
<td>kha-ʊ-ʊ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>kha-b-ʊ</td>
<td>kha-b-01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>kha-2-ʊna</td>
<td>kha-2-la</td>
<td>kha-2-ʊ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>kha-b-2</td>
<td>kha-b-2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>kha-3-ʊna</td>
<td>kha-3-la</td>
<td>kha-3-ʊ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>kha-3-b-3</td>
<td>kha-3-b-3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 shows that the root verb kha takes the past tense marker -l followed by the agreement markers that vary in person and number. In the future tense paradigm, we see that the root verb kha is inflected for future tense marker -b followed by the agreement markers. In case of 3rd person singular number,
however, the future tense marker remains unmarked. The present tense is usually unmarked. The imperfective markers -na/-la/-ila that imply habitual action occur after the agreement marker. The allomorph -la occurs with front vowel -i/leon/, and the approximant /w/-ila occurs with the consonant sound /s/ of the 2nd person singular agreement marker. The imperfective marker -na occurs with nasalized back vowel /ø/ and front vowel /ɛ/.

Tense features behave differently in case of copular verbs, as there are two distinct present and past tense copular verbs in AS. Consider (15a-c).

15. (a) məi mastor hek-ː

1SG.NOM teacher COP.PRES-1SG
‘I am a teacher’

(b) məi mastor rah-ː

1SG.NOM teacher COP.PAST-1SG
‘I was a teacher.’

(c) məi mastor hɔ-b-ɔ

1SG.NOM teacher COP-FUT-3SG
‘I will be a teacher’

In (15a) hek is the copula in the present tense that occurs at the clause final position. It is followed by the 1st person singular agreement marker -ː. In (15b) rah is the copula in the past tense form followed by the 1st person singular agreement marker -ː. In (15c) the copula hɔ- is followed by the future tense marker -b and the 1st person singular agreement marker -ː. The verbal morphology of the copula hek is illustrated in Table 5 below.

---

Table 5 Tense inflection system of copula in AS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Past</th>
<th>Future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SG</td>
<td>PL</td>
<td>SG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>hek/ō</td>
<td>hek/-i</td>
<td>rah-ō</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>hek/-is</td>
<td>hek/-a</td>
<td>rah-is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>hek/-e</td>
<td>hek/-ai</td>
<td>rah-e</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 5, we see that the copula hek, which is in the present form, is substituted by rah by the process of suppletion, indicating past tense. In the future tense form, however, partial suppletion takes place where the copula retains the only initial /h/ sound.

16.(a) Present $\rightarrow$ Past
hek $\rightarrow$ rah

(b) Present $\rightarrow$ Future
hek $\rightarrow$ ho

In the future tense paradigm, however, the copula behaves like the lexical verb kha shown in Table 2. It bears the future tense marker $-b$ in case of 1st, 2nd per and with 3rd person plural number. The future tense is fused with ho- in case of 3rd per singular.

1.3.3.2. Aspects

According to Comrie (1976), ‘aspects are the different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituencies of a situation’. Going by this definition, an action or situation in AS can be seen to be either in perfective, imperfective (habitual) and progressive aspect.

1.3.3.2.1. Perfective

The perfective marker in the language is $-e/-i$, and $-ai$, occurring according to phonological conditions. The former is suffixed to the verb ending in a vowel sound while the latter occurs with after a consonant sound.
17. (a) etowa bernha hə-ə hə ə
   etowa.NOM old become-PERF COP.PRES-3SG
   'Etowa has become old/ grown old.'

(b) ə ekhn-ei khana kha-ə hə
    3SG.NOM now-EMPH meal eat-PERF COP.PRES-3SG
    'He has just had his meal/ he had his meal.

(c) ə tekhn-ei khana kha-ə rah-ə
    3SG.NOM then-EMPH meal eat-PERF COP.PAST-3SG
    'He had his meal then/ by that time.'

Simple past tense marker -l is also used to indicate present perfective aspect in certain cases. This also refers to the immediate past tense.

18. moi ekhn-ei khana kha-1-ə
    I.NOM now-EMPH meal eat-PAST-1SG
    'I had my meal just now.'

In Assamese and Bangla, we see a similar phenomenon. Here, the past tense marker indicates present perfective aspect as in (19-20).

19. moi ejia bhat kha-1-ə
    I.NOM now-EMPH meal eat-PAST-1P
    'I had meal just now.'

20. ami ekhon bhat khe-1-am
    I.NOM now-EMPH meal eat-PAST-1SG
    'I had meal just now.'

In Assamese example in (19), the verb kha is inflected for the past tense marker -l followed by the 1st per agreement marker, indicating present perfect tense. Similarly, in Bangla (20), the root verb kha undergoes morphophonemic change to khe. It is inflected for the past tense marker -l and 1st person agreement marker -um indicates present perfect tense.
1.3.3.2.2. Progressive.

The progressive marker in the language is -ŋ/-ŋt. The markers -ŋ and -ŋt are the allomorphs of the progressive morpheme. The former follows a vowel sound and the latter occurs when the verb ends with a consonant sound as in (21a-b) respectively.

21. (a) ə  bhat  kha-ŋ  h-ə
        3SG.NOM   rice.NOM   eat-PROG   COP.PRES-3SG
        ‘He/she is eating rice.’

(b) ə  nach-ŋt  h-ə
     3SG.NOM   dance-PROG   COP.PRES-3SG
     ‘He/she is dancing.’

In (21a-b) the copula h-ə is functioning as an auxiliary in the present tense and the progressive marker is -ŋ and -ŋt suffixed to the main verb kha ‘eat’ and nach ‘dance’ respectively. The verb in the past progressive aspect will have the -ŋ/-ŋt suffixed to the main verb followed by copula in the past form rah-.

22. ə  kail  guwahati  dʒa-ŋ  rah-ə
    3SG.NOM   yesterday   guwahati   go-PROG   COP.PAST-3SG
    ‘He was going to Guwahati yesterday.’

The verb in the future tense will have the -ŋ/-ŋt with the main verb and the future tense marker occurring with the auxiliary verb rah as in,

23. chaŋra-man  kail  i bhat  likh-a  porh-a  kar-ŋt
    student.M-PL tomorrow this time   write-NZR   read-NZR   do-PROG
    rah-b-en
    COP-FUT-3PL
    ‘Students will be studying by this time tomorrow.’
1.3.3.2.3. Imperfective

The imperfective aspect in the language can refer to an action that is habitual in the present or an action that was habitual for some time in the past. The present imperfective marker is -nala.

24. o rodyei bhat kha-e-la
   3SG.NOM everyday rice eat-3SG-IMPERF
   Lit: 'He takes rice every day.'

   In example (24), the root verb kha 'eat' takes the 3rd person singular agreement marker -e, and is followed by the imperfective aspect marker -nala. The marker -nala gives the present habitual reading. As shown in Table 1, the marker is -na in case 1st person singular and 3rd person plural, while it is -la for 1st person plural, 2nd person and 3rd person singular.

   In case of 3rd person, the imperfective marker could also be -el for singular as in (25a) and -en for plural number as in (25b).

25. (a) o-ker ghar-e ek-dhan admi rah-el
   3SG-GEN house-LOC one-cl man stay-IMPERF
   'A man stays in his house.'

   (b) o-ker ghar-e dher admi rah-en
   3SG-GEN house-LOC many people stay-IMPERF
   'Many people stay in his house.'

   Unlike AS, in Assamese, there is no marker to show the imperfective aspect.

26. ami hoda bhat kha-u
   we everyday rice eat-1P
   'We eat rice every day'

   In Hindi, the imperfective marker is -te that agrees with the subject in Person and Gender, followed by the auxiliary he that carries the tense marker.
27. ham roti kha-te he
we roti eat-IMPERF.PL AUX.PRES
'We eat rotis.'

In AS, past progressive is used as past imperfective, that is, the progressive marker -at/IV suffixes to the main verb followed by the auxiliary verb rah, to give the past habitual reading.

28. (a) o-man age jedpur-e rah-at rah-en
3-PL before tezpur-LOC stay-PROG COP-PAST-3PL
'They used to stay in Tezpur earlier.'
Lit: 'They were staying in Tezpur earlier.'

(b) o choto me am kha-t rah-en
3SG small (age) POSP mango eat-PROG COP.PAST-3SG
'She used to eat mango in her childhood.'
Lit: 'She was eating mango in her childhood.'

The rah- form, indicating continuous or progressive aspect, is found in many Indo-Aryan languages, particularly in the 'Hindi area' (Masica 1991:274). This is illustrated in the Hindi example (12a), in §1.3.3.

1.3.3.3. Moods/ modal in AS

Languages have mainly two types of mood: indicative and subjunctive (Comrie, 1976). The indicative mood is referred to also as realis. It is generally a statement and can be placed in any tense, past, present or future. For instance,

29. moj sain h-at dge o mo-r ghar-e a-e
I.NOM hear.CP COP.PRES-1SG that 3SG I-GEN house-LOC come-PERF c-rah-e/ a-b-e
COP.PRES-3SG/COP.PAST-3SG /come-FUT-3SG
'I heard that he has/ had/ will come to my house.'
A verb in the **subjunctive mood** expresses a condition which is doubtful or not real (Comrie, 1976). The subjunctive mood is also called **irrealis**. Moreover, the future tense in languages is marked **irrealis**. **Subjunctive mood** is often expressed in complex constructions with complementizer *dje*. We can consider optative ‘expressing a wish or pray’ as part of subjunctive in AS as in (30).

30. *hamni asra kar-a\-q h-is dje o ek-d\-\-han*
   
   we wish do-PROG COP-2SG COMP 3SG one-CL

*borka admi ho-i*

great man COP.FUT-3SG

‘We wish that he will be a great man.’

The marker for subjunctive mood in AS is –we and -ok/-aok.

31. *i-ta m\-\-r iccha hek-e dje o aid\-\-y m\-\-r*
   
   this-CL I-GEN desire COP.PRES-3SG that 3SG today I-GEN

*ghar-e a-we*

house-LOC come-SUBJ

‘It is my desire that he comes to my house today.’

32. *moi a-e h-\-d jaki o nai dar-aok*
   
   I.NOM come-PERF COP.PRES-1SG so that 3SG NEG scare-SUBJ

‘I have come so that she does not feel scared’

In (31) the verb *aa* ‘come’ takes the marker –we to indicate subjunctive mood. In (32) the verb *dar* ‘scare’ is inflected for the subjunctive mood –aok. In AS, -\-ok and -aok are allomorphs. The former occurs with a verb that ends with a vowel sound for instance in *kha-\-ok* ‘eat-SUBJ’. The latter occurs with a consonant sound as exemplified in (32). Words like *jaki* ‘so that’ can also trigger subjunctive mood in the language as in (32). Subjunctive may include conditional clauses starting with words like *djodi* ‘if’ as in (33).
33. dọdi etowa aidʒ nai a-we hamni ghar cail dża-b-oi
   if etowa today NEG come-SUBJ 1PL house go.CP go-FUT-1PL
   'If Etowa does not come today, we will go home.'

   In (33) the verb aa ‘come’ takes the subjunctive mood marked by –we. We find similar phenomenon happening in Bangla, where the subjunctive mood is indicated by the markers –e/-ok. [Bhattacharya, 1998, example 3-4]

34. ama-r icca ḍse o adʒ aS-uk
   my-GEN desire that s/he today come-SUBJ
   'It is my desire that he comes today.'

35. ami eSe-ch-i ḍṣaṭe modhu phire aS-e
   I come-have-1P so that Madhu return come-SUBJ
   'I have come so that Madhu comes back.'

   Besides, indicative and subjunctive there is also imperative mood that is indicated by the modal auxiliary pare ‘can’.

36. ḋi ekhon ḍṣa-ek par-is-la
   2SG.NOM now go-NF can-2SG-IMPERF
   'You may go now.'

1.3.3.4. Agreement

In AS, the agreement markers show that the verb agrees with the subject NP in person and number.

37. (a) moi bhạṭ kha-l-ō
   1SG rice eat-PAST-1SG
   'I ate rice.'

(b) hamni bhạṭ kha-l-i
   1PL rice eat-PAST-1PL
   'We ate rice.'
Therefore, the subject pronouns can be dropped in the language, and the status of the subject is revealed by the presence of the agreement markers. The pronoun within the brackets implies that it can be dropped.

38. (moi) kitap porh-b-ð
1SG.NOM book.NOM read-FUT-1SG
'I will read a book'

Table 6 The agreement system in AS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tense</th>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Past</th>
<th>Future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SG</td>
<td>PL</td>
<td>SG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>-ð</td>
<td>-i</td>
<td>-ð</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>-is</td>
<td>-a</td>
<td>-e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>-e</td>
<td>-ð</td>
<td>-ak/-ek</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 illustrates the agreement markers and their distributions in AS. The 1st person singular number is the nasalized back rounded vowel -ð. The 1st person plural marker is the high front vowel -i for present and past tense, and it is the diphthong -oi in future tense. In the present tense paradigm, the 2nd person singular agreement marker, is -is and the plural marker is -a/wa, depending upon the verb ending. In past and future tense paradigm, agreement marker for the 2nd person singular is -e and for the plural number is -a. The 3rd person singular marker is -e in the present tense and 3rd person plural marker is the nasalized -ð. The 3rd person singular agreement marker in the past tense is -ak/ek. Both the markers are in free variation. The 3rd person singular marker future tense is -i. The 3rd person plural agreement marker for both past and future tense is -en.

In Indo-Aryan languages, the agreement/concord markers vary in person, number, gender and honoroficity and so on.
39. (a) vah  dhā  rah-
He is leaving.
3SG.NOM  go  stay.PROG-3SG.M  AUX.PRES

(b) lark-e  khel  rah-ē
'Boys are playing.'
boy-PL  play  stay.PROG-3PL.M  AUX.PRES

In Hindi, the verb agrees with the subject in person, number and gender. In
(39a) the verb rah indicates the progressive aspect is inflected with the 3rd
person singular masculine agreement marker -a. In (39b), the verb rah, indicating
the progressive aspect, takes the 3rd person plural masculine agreement marker –ē.

40. (a) se  kadh  kor-ch-e
He is working.
3SG.NOM  work  do-PROG-3.PRES

(b) uni  kadh  kor-ch-en
'He (honorific) is working.'
3SG.HON.NOM  work  do-PROG-3(HON).PRES

In Bangla, the verb agrees with the subject in person and honorificity as is
evident in the use of two different agreement markers –e (40a) and –en (40b) to
indicate 3rd person and 3rd person honorific pronominals, respectively.

1.3.3.5 Non finite –ek

The marker –ek7 in AS is suffixed to the verb root to give non finite implication.
The marker can function as infinitival (41) and nominalised verb (42)8.

7 The non finite –ek is different from the 3rd person agreement marker –ek
8 Source: Borah, and Dey, Nominalisation in Sadri: Some Observation, Paper presented in the
National seminar on minor languages of the North-East Region (11th -12th Jan) organised by Tezpur
University, Tezpur, and funded by CIIIL, Mysore.
41. moi machri kha-ek bhal pa-ô
I.NOM fish eat-NF good get-1SG
'I like to eat fish'

42. eţina kha-ek-ta kharap ah-e
too much eat-NF-CLF bad COP.PRES-3SG
'Too much eating is bad'.

In (41) the marker -ek is suffixed to the verb kha 'eat' to give the infinitival reading. It is a complex construction with a finite main clause moi bhal paô 'I like' and infinitival subordinate clause machri kha-ek 'to eat fish'. In (42), the non finite -ek is suffixed to the verb kha 'eat'. It functions as a nominal and is followed by the classifier -ta. Nominalised verb can also take -a as in (23)⁹, in § 1.3.3.2.2. The non finite -ek can also function as passive morphology in impersonal passives in the language (see § 5.3.1), in Chapter 5.

1.3.4. Complex predicates

Complex predicates usually consist of combinations of more than one verb implying a single action. In AS, complex predicates can be of two kinds: (i) conjunct and (ii) compound.

1.3.4.1. Conjunct verb

The combination of noun and verbs or adjective and verb is called conjunct. The verbs, following the nouns and adjectives in a verbal conjunct, are also called 'light verbs'.

43. mo-ke o-ker se dar lag-qi h-e
I-DAT 3SG-GEN POSP scare feel-PROG COP.PRES-3SG
Lit: 'I am feeling frightened of him'.

⁹ Nominalization in AS needs further investigation and is not dealt in detail in this thesis.
In (43) dar ‘scare is a noun that is followed by a light verb lag ‘feel’ that carries the progressive aspect marker -af. This is followed by the auxiliary verb h-e, which is in the present tense and carries the default agreement marker -e. Consider the list of a few conjunct verbs in AS.

Table 7 List of a few conjunct verbs in AS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AS</th>
<th>NOUN+VERB</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sandeh kor</td>
<td>doubt do</td>
<td>‘doubt’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>asra kor</td>
<td>wish do</td>
<td>‘wish’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ses kor</td>
<td>finish do</td>
<td>‘finish’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bhuk lag</td>
<td>hunger feel</td>
<td>‘to be hungry’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dar lag</td>
<td>scare feel</td>
<td>‘to be scared’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chabi lag/mar</td>
<td>key attach/hit</td>
<td>‘lock’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AS</th>
<th>Adj+Verb</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bhal pa</td>
<td>good get</td>
<td>‘love’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>berya pa</td>
<td>bad get</td>
<td>‘dislike’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is a common phenomenon in many Indo-Aryan languages. Like, in Assamese, we have the N+V conjunct and Adj+Verb conjunct as exemplified in (44a) and (44a), respectively.

44.(a) hondeh kor ‘doubt do’ = ‘to doubt’

(b) bhal pa ‘good get’ = ‘to like’

1.3.4.2. Compound verb

Compound verb constructions consist of a main verb (also called primary/polar or V1) with a participial ending, followed by a simple auxiliary verb (vector / light verb or V2). The combination of vector verb and primary verb denote one situation. Vector verbs do not change the semantics of the primary verb rather add aspectual characteristics.
In AS, compound verbs comprising of a main or polar verb in the non finite form, is followed by a vector verb or light verb.

45. \( \text{chari/cak} \text{ se } \text{am-} \text{ta } \text{kait de-l-} \text{ak} \)

3SG.NOM knife POSP mango-CL cut.CP give-PAST-3SG

‘He/she cut the mango with a knife’

In (45), \( \text{kait de-l-ak ‘cut.cp give-past-3sg} \) is the compound verb. The polar verb verb \( \text{kat ‘cut}} \) is in non finite form, as it carries the conjunctive participle marker. This is evident by the change of the front low vowel /a/ to a diphthong /ai/ in \( \text{kait ‘cut}, \) and /o/ to /oi/ in \( \text{toir ‘break) as illustrated in Table 8. However, there is exception to this rule as in \( \text{dyap mara, in Table 8. In the compound verbs, it is normally the light verb or the vector verb that carries the tense and the agreement features. Consider the following list of a few compound verbs in AS.}

Table 8 Shows the list of compound verbs in AS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb root</th>
<th>AS</th>
<th>verb +verb</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>\text{kat}</td>
<td>\text{kait de}</td>
<td>cut give</td>
<td>‘cut’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>\text{tor}</td>
<td>\text{toir de}</td>
<td>break give</td>
<td>‘break’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>\text{chor}</td>
<td>\text{choir de}</td>
<td>leave give</td>
<td>‘leave’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>\text{tan}</td>
<td>\text{tain de}</td>
<td>pull give</td>
<td>‘pull’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>\text{dyap}</td>
<td>\text{dyap mara}</td>
<td>jump hit</td>
<td>‘jump’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the above list, it is seen that, the root verb \( \text{dyap ‘jump) does not undergo change in the vowel sound.

Complex predicates are very common in Indo-Aryan languages. Paul (2003) discusses the composition of compound verbs in Bangla using V2 or light verbs like \( \text{bofechi ‘sit-perf de ‘give phe}l ‘throw) and so on. Examples of Assamese compound verbs are shown in (46).
46. (a) *kat* *kat-i de* ‘cut give’
   (b) *bhaq* *bhaq-i de* ‘break give’

In (46a-b), the verb root takes the conjunctive participle –*i* in the verbal compounds followed by the light verb *de ‘give’*.

1.3.5. Participle

Every language has a mechanism to modify nouns by adding adjectives or by the use of participles. In English, for example, a noun can be modified by a verb followed by either (i) imperfective participle marker ‘running train’, or (ii) perfective marker ‘broken chair’.

In AS, nouns are modified by the participle marker -*al*-wal that is suffixed to the verb root. This can function as imperfective participle as in (47a) and perfective participle as in (47b)

47. (a) *σ* *cal-al* *gari* *sē* *kōd-l-ak*
   3SG.NOM run-IMPPL vehicle POSP jump-PAST-3SG
   ‘He jumped from the running train.’

(b) *caor* *bhang-al* *khirki* *sē* *dhuik* *rah-ε*
   thief.NOM break-PPL window POSP enter.CP COP-PAST-3SG
   ‘The thief had entered through the broken window.’

(c) *caor* *bhain* *dża-wal* *khirki-thə* *sē* *dhuik*
   thief.NOM break.CP go-PPL window-CL POSP enter.CP
   rah-ε
   be.PAST-3SG
   ‘The thief entered through the broken window.’

In (47c), the verb root *bhaq* ‘break’ takes the conjunctive participle form in *bhain* ‘break.cp’ (discussed in detail in § 1.3.6), followed by the auxiliary verb *dża*
‘go’ that takes the perfective participle marker -wal. The expression bhaiy dja-wal together modifies the NP khirk-i-t o ‘the window’.

The use of participle to modify nouns is a common feature in Indo-Aryan languages. In Hindi, the use of participles can be seen as imperfective participle chalti gari as in (48a) and perfective participle tutaa darwazaa as in (48b).

48. (a) chalti gari ‘running vehicle’
(b) tutaa darwazaa ‘broken door’

1.3.6 Conjunctive participle form ke

In AS, the conjunctive participle form ke follows the verb and gives the perfective participle reading as in (49).

49. (a) kor+ ke → koir ke ‘having done’
(b) kat+ ke → kait ke ‘having cut’
(c) dhuk+ ke → dhuik ke ‘having entered’

The conjunctive participle construction, in AS, consists of morpho-phonemic change in the vowel sound of the verb just as shown in compound verbs (see § 1.3.4.2). The verb taking such change of vowel sound, henceforth, will be glossed as ‘verb.cp’. This conjunctive participle form is also used in perfective aspect.

50. ə ghar-e choil ge-l-ak
3SG.NOM home-LOC walk.CP go-PAST-3SG
‘He has gone home’

In (50) the root verb is in the CP form of the chal ‘walk’ followed by the auxiliary verb dja ‘go’ that is suffixed by the past tense marker –l followed by the 3rd person singular marker –ak/-ek.

Such conjunctive participle form is seen in the Indo-Aryan language Maithili (Yadav, 2001 example 10 and 11).

51. (a) uth+kə→ uthi kə→ uithkə ‘having arisen’
(b) *aan+ kə=aani kə=aain kə* ‘having brought’

According to Yadav (2001:271), when the conjunctive morphology *kə* is affixed to the verb it triggers a change in the verb shape. In consonant ending verb stem /i/ is inserted at the end. In pronunciation, however, /i/ is pronounced prior to the consonant ending leading to diphthongization in Maithili.

1.3.7 Nominative–accusative case system

The term ‘subject’, traditionally, refers to the only NP or ‘S’ of an intransitive sentence, and the first NP, preceding the verb or ‘A’, of an active transitive verb. Whereas, the term ‘object’ refers to the NP in the O position if required by the transitive verb (Comrie, 1976, Song, 2001). Typologically, Sadri is grouped as a Nominative –Accusative language, in the sense that, the S and A are in unmarked nominative case, different from the marking of the O which takes the accusative case (discussed in detail in Chapter 3).

52. *birsI* etowa-ke *pit-l-ak*
   birsi.NOM etowa-ACC beat-PAST-3SG
   ‘Birsi beat Etowa.’

53. *chora-thos ekhon nach-at h-e*
   boy-CL.NOM now dance-PROG COP.PRES-3SG
   ‘The boy is now dancing.’

In (52), the NP *birsI* ‘Birsi’ is in subject position and the predicate which is a transitive verb *pit* ‘beat’ requires another NP *etowa* in the object position. In (53), the NP *chora-thos* is in subject position of intransitive predicate *nach* ‘dance’ and does not require another NP. In (52) the NP in the O position is marked differently from the S and A in (52) and (53), respectively.

1.4. Aims and objectives

Palmer (1994) states there are two key assumptions for a typological study of predicates and arguments across languages. First, the predicate structure is
applicable to all languages. Secondly, the arguments both (i) differ in their semantic relationship to their predicator and (ii) are clearly distinguished from one another through grammatical marking. Considering, this linguistic hypothesis, my aim in writing this thesis is to come up with a syntactic description of the Sadri language spoken in Assam, focusing on:

(i) The grammatical marking and semantic relationship of the verb with the core arguments (ASO) in AS.

(ii) To show that the grammar of argument marking in AS is not arbitrary, but it is organized in a hierarchy.

(iii) To assess the influence of the dominant regional language, Assamese, in the argument marking in AS.

1.5. Organisation of the thesis

The thesis is divided into six chapters. They are summarized in the following way.

Chapter 1 gives the historical background of Sadri language, its emergence in Assam, its importance from the sociolinguistic perspective, its existing literature and provides a typological description.

Chapter 2 discusses the syntactic and semantics aspects of arguments and predicates in a sentence and gives an overview of the argument marking in some of the Indo-Aryan languages.

Chapter 3 deals with subject case in AS

Chapter 4 deals with object case in AS

Chapter 5 deals with grammatical function changing rules, namely, causatives and passives in AS

Chapter 6 brings forth some of the differences between AS and NS and the influence of the dominant language in the argument marking in AS followed by the overall conclusion.