Control in Assamese

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Assamese (ASM), Indo European
also known as Jharwa (Pidgin), Mayang, Standard Assamese, Western Assamese
spoken in India (Asia)

1   Grammar Profile[*]

1.1   Morpho-Syntax

1.1.1   Head position

Head-final. Modifiers precede nouns; complements precede verbs; etc. For example, in sentence (1) below, the head of the DP *tar bhajekok* 'his brother' is *bhajekok* 'brother' which is final, and the head of the VP is the verb *kole* 'read' which is also final.

(1)	Priyankoo-e	tar	bhayek-ok	porh-ibo-loi	ko-l-e
	P-NOM	his	brother-ACC	read-INF-DAT	say-PAST-AGR

Priyankoo told his brother to read.

1.1.2   Morphological type

The language is agglutinating/inflectional; for example,

verbs are marked for TENSE and AGREEMENT

    ko-l-e
    say-PAST-AGR

nouns are marked for DEFINITENESS and CASE

    xixu-ti-e
    child-CL-NOM

1.1.3 Case system

Subjects can be case-marked NOM, ABS, or GEN, depending on the verb.

Cases	*Morphemes*	*Allomorphs*	
		After C	After V
Absolutive	-Ø		
Nominative	-e		
Accusative	-ak	-ak	-k
Dative	-aloi	-aloi	-loi
Genitive	-ar	-ar	-r
Locative	-at	-at	-t
Instrumental	-er+e	-ere	-re

The table is adapted from Nath (2003: p. 22, (40)).

NOM and ACC are also marked –Ø when the noun is indefinite or inanimate.

1.1.4 Verbal Agreement

Only finite verbs inflect for AGR. They inflect for person (1st, 2nd, and 3rd) and honorificity (+, -, *or* Ø honorific). The language shows no object agreement.

(2)   tumi/tomaloke   parh-a
        You.s/p (ø honorific)   read-AGR
        'You read.'

(3)   tai/tahāte   parh-e
        You.s/p (-honorific)   read-AGR
        'You read.'

(4)   apuni   parh-e
        You(+honorific)   read-AGR
        'You read.'
        (Nath 2003:p. 40; (20b-d))

1.1.5 Null Arguments

Assamese is a pro-drop language. Yet, an overt pronoun is obligatory in at least one type of sentence: Copy Control structures with a matrix verb that marks its subject GEN (see Control Profile for more details):

(5)   [ram-e   khong   kor-i]
        [Ram-ERG   anger   do-CNP

        *(tar)   kosto   hoise
        (he-GEN)   trouble   being-is
        Having provoked his anger, Ram got in trouble. (closest translation)

1.1.6   Non-Finite Categories

There are at least two types of non-finite clauses in Assamese: infinitive (INF) and conjunctive participle (CNP). An INF verb is marked by *-bo* or *-ibo*:

(6)   moi   bozar   kor-ibo bisarõ
       I   market   do-INF   want
       I want to do marketing.
       (Nath 2003:p. 64, (31))

A CNP verb is marked by *–i*:

(7)   ami   gan   xun-i   bhal-paõ
       We   song   listen-CNP   like
       We like listening to music.
       (Nath 2003:p. 66, (37))

(8)   ram-e   am-to   kin-i   dhu-i   kat-i   kha-l-e
       Ram-NOM   mango-CL   buy-CNP   wash-CNP   cut-CNP   eat-PAST-AGR
       Having bought, washed and cut, Ram ate the mango.
       Or *After buying, washing and cutting, Ram ate the mango.*
       (Nath 2003:p. 66, (36))

A non-finite verb can also be marked by a gerundive (GRND) *-a*; GRND verbs may take on a classifier or a Case marker. Note the difference between the first and the second 'eat' in the following sentence:

(9)   khow-a-k   khow-a   nubul-i   ki   buliba
         eat-GRND -ACC   eat-GRND   not say-INF   what   say
         What else would you call the act of eating except eating?
          Or *If not eating, what else would you call the act of eating?*
         (Nath 2003:p. 63, (27))

1.2   Matrix Clause

1.2.1   Basic word order

SOV

1.2.2   Alternate word orders

OSV and OVS. The subject in these cases is emphatic in the former and an afterthought in the latter.

An adjunct clause (**in bold**) can intervene between the subject and the predicate.

(10)   [ram-e   **[khong uth-i]**   ghorto   bhang-il-e]]
        Ram-NOM   **[angry got-INF]**   house   break-PAST-AGR
        Having got angry, Ram broke the house.

1.3   Embedded Clause

1.3.1   Basic word order

Strictly SOV if the verb is infinitival.

1.3.2   Verbal agreement

Agreement in the embedded clause is possible as long as the verb is finite.

1.3.3   Restrictions on tense, aspect, mood

INF verbs are Tense-Dependent on the matrix clause.

1.3.4   Possible morphological categories of the embedded clause:

Non-finite clauses: Infinitival and Conjunctive Participle clauses (see above)

Clauses with Gerundive (Nominalized/Deverbal) verbs (see above)

Clauses with [-at] verbs: E.g. verb 'keep':

(11)   [ram-Or   xomoi   no-thak-at]   PrOxad-e   bhat   na-kha-l-e
         ram-GEN   time   NEG-keep-MORPH   Praxad-NOM   rice   NEG-eat-PAST-AGR
         Ram having no time, Praxad didn't eat rice.

According to Goswami (1982), [-at] "is an independent morpheme expressing the sense of 'the state or quality of, possessing the thing or quality of', etc." (p. 177). On the account of the consultant, [-at] verbs, unlike CNP verbs, have a sense of a completion. In this sense, [-at] is aspectual, and [-at] verbs can be Tense-Independent of the matrix clause.

1.3.5   ECM constructions:

ECM constructions are found in small clauses and in clauses with GRND verbs. For example, the subject of the embedded small clause in (12) is case-marked Accusative

(12)   xakalOwe   [teõk   pagol   buli]   bhabe
         everybody   [he-ACC   mad   that (COMP)]   think
         Everybody thinks him mad.
         (Nath 2003:p. 71-72 (49a))

Sentence (12) can be an ECM construction. Another possibility is that the accusative marking on the embedded subject is a characteristic of embedded small clauses (see Nath 2003:72 for more details).

A clear case of ECM is (13).

(13)   Priyankoo-e   Joseph-ok   gO-wa   xun-il-e
         P-NOM   J-ACC   sing-GRND   hear-PAST-AGR
         Priyankoo heard Joseph sing/singing.

2   Control Profile

2.1   *forward subject control into a non-finite adjunct*

2.1.1   Example structure

(14)   [bhOk   log-i]   prOxad-Ø   xu-i   thak-il
         [hunger   strike/feel-CNP]   Praxad-ABS   sleep-PAST   keep-PAST
         Having felt hungry, Praxad fell asleep.

(15)   prOxad-Ø   [bhOk   log-i]   (*xi)   xu-i   thak-il
         Praxad-ABS   [hunger   strike/feel-CNP]   (*he)   sleep-PAST   keep-PAST
         Having felt hungry, Praxad fell asleep.

2.1.2   Evidence of empty category

Praxad in (14) is considered the subject of the matrix clause for at least two reasons:

i) It is case-marked ABS; log-i 'strike/feel' would case-mark its subject GEN, as (16) shows:

(16)   prOxad-Or   bhOk   log-il
         Praxad-GEN   hunger   strike/feel-PAST
         Praxad felt hungry.

ii) The pronoun *xi* 'he' makes (15) ungrammatical, which it wouldn't if Praxad were the subject of the embedded clause as we will see in the following section.

Similarly, in (17) and (18) below the verb *bhang* 'break' case-marks its subject NOM, whereas *khong uth* 'get angry' case-marks it GEN. (17-18) are both Forward Control since in both the subject carries case that is appropriate for the matrix verb.

(17)   [ghorto bhang-i]   ram-Or   khong   uth-il
           [house break-CNP]   Ram-GEN   anger   get-PAST
           Having broken the house, Ram got angry.

(18)   ram-Or   [ghorto bhang-i]   khong uth-il
           Ram-GEN   [house break-CNP]   anger get-PAST
           Having broken the house, Ram got angry.

Compare (17-18) with (19-20) in which the matrix clause and the embedded clause switch positions. The subject in both is case-marked NOM.

(19)   [khong   uth-i]   ram-e   ghorto   bhang-il-e
           [angry   got-CNP]   Ram-NOM   house   break-PAST-AGR
           Having got angry, Ram broke the house.

(20)   ram-e   [khong uth-i]   ghorto   bhang-il-e
            Ram-NOM   angry got-CNP]   house   break-PAST-AGR
           Having got angry, Ram broke the house.

2.2   Copy subject control into a non-finite adjunct

2.2.1   Example structure

(21)   [ram-Or   khong   uth-i]   (xi)   ghorto   bhang-il-e
           [Ram-GEN   angry   got-CNP]   (he)   house   break-PAST-AGR
           Having got angry, Ram broke the house.

The subject in the adjunct clause must be a referential DP. The example below shows that a pronoun in that position is ungrammatical.

(22)   *[tar   khong   uth-i]   Ram-e   ghorto   bhang-il-e
           [he-GEN   angry   got-CNP]   Ram-NOM   house   break-PAST-AG

It is also the case that the adjunct *must* precede the matrix clause.

(23)   *Ram   ghorto   bhang-il-e   [tar   khong   uth-i]

(24)   *Ram [tar khong uth-i] ghorto   bhang-il-e

If the embedded verb does not assign the theta-role EXPERIENCER to its subject, Copy Control is not possible. (25) is the Copy-Control equivalent to (17-18):

(25)   *[ram-e   ghorto bhang-i]   tar   khong   uth-il
           Ram-NOM   house   break-INF   he-GEN anger   get-PAST
           Having broken the house, Ram got angry.

2.2.2   Predicates participating in the construction
Experiential or psychological predicates that describe physical or emotional states. These include:

Khong uth   'get angry'

bhOk log   'feel hunger'

ananda log   'feel happiness'

khong kor   'do anger'

ananda kor   'do happiness/ have fun'

dhuk kor   'do sorrow'

Assamese shows three patterns of Copy Control:

i) If neither the embedded subject nor the matrix subject is case-marked GEN, then an overt pronominal in the matrix clause is optional though not preferable.

(26)   [ram-e   khong   kor-i]   (ˀxi)   ghoroloi   no-go-l
           [Ram-NOM   anger   do-CNP]   (he)   house-DAT   NEG-go-PAST
           Having made himself angry, Ram went home.

Note that the matrix verb in (27) case-marks its subject ABS, as (27) shows:

(27)   ram- Ø   ghoroloi   no-go-l
           Ram-ABS   house-DAT   NEG-go-PAST
           Ram went home.

ii) If only the embedded subject is case-marked GEN, an overt pronominal in the matrix clause is optional and preferable.

(28)   [ram-Or   khong   uth-i]   (xi)   ghorto bhang-il-e
           [Ram-GEN   angry   got-CNP]   (he)   house   break-PAST-AGR
           Having got angry, Ram broke the house.

iii) If only the matrix subject is case-marked GEN, it has to be pronounced as an overt pronominal.

(29)   [ram-e   dukh   kor-i]   *(tar)   bhagar   log-il
           [Ram-NOM   sorrow do-CNP]   *(he-GEN)   exhausted   feel-PAST
           Having made himself sad, Ram felt exhausted.

Notice that in (26-29) above, the adjunct is sentence initial, the adjunct predicate assigns the theta-role experiencer to its subject, and the embedded subject is referential (not a pronominal). These are the three conditions for Copy Control.

Each of the following sentences is ungrammatical because it violates one of the three conditions:

Adjunct is not sentence-initial:

(30)   *Ram-e ghorto   bhang-il-e [tar khong uthi]

(31)   *Ram [tar khong uthi] ghorto bhang-il-e

(32)   *Ram ghorto [tar khong uthi]   bhang-il-e

Embedded subject is a pronominal:

(33)   *[tar khong uthi] Ram-e ghorto   bhang-il-e

Embedded predicate is not Experiential:

(34)   *[Ram-e ghorto bhangi] tar khong uthil

Copy Control can involve not only a pronominal in the matrix clause, but also a nominal:

(35)   [ram-e   khong   kor-i] ram   digdari-t   por-il
           [Ram-NOM   anger   do-CNP] Ram-ABS   trouble-LOC   fell-PAST
           Having made himself angry, Ram got in trouble.

Especially if the matrix clause is emphatic:

(36)   [ram-Or   khong   uth-i] ram-e   **tar**   ghorto bhang-il-e
           [Ram-GEN   angry   got-CNP] Ram-NOM   his   house   break-PAST-AGR
           *Having got angry, Ram broke **his own** the house.*

Or if there is an intervening expression between the embedded and the matrix clauses, making the two clauses distant:

(37) [ram-e   khong kori] **etiya** ram-or   kosto   hoise
     [Ram-NOM   anger do-CNP]   now   Ram-GEN   trouble being-is
     *Having provoked his anger, **now Ram got in trouble.***

N.B. Despite the fact that both subjects are pronounced, disjoint subjects are not allowed unless the embedded verb takes on the [-at] morpheme instead of the CNP –*i* suffix.

(38) [ram-Or   dukh   log-at] PrOxad-Ø   xu-i   thak-il
     [Ram-GEN   sad   feel-*at*] Praxad-ABS   sleep-INF   keep-PAST
     Ram having felt sad, Praxad slept.

(39) [xixu-ti-e   bhalkoi gow-at] mak-Or   bhal   log-il
     [child-CL-NOM   well   sing-*at*] mother-GEN   good   feel-PAST
     The child having sung well, the mother felt good.

References

Unless otherwise specified, all the examples are given by Priyankoo Sarmah and confirmed by Chandan Talukdar, two native speakers of Assamese and graduate (Ph.D.) students at University of Florida.

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[*] A dash (-) to mark morpheme boundaries if the morpheme is a suffix or a prefix.

NOM =   nominative

ACC =   accusative

AGR =   agreement

DAT =   dative

CL   =   classifier

GEN =   genitive

INF	=	infinitive
PRES	=	present
PAST	=	past
LOC	=	locative
POSS	=	possessive
COMP	=	complementizer
MORPH=		morpheme
EMPH	=	emphatic
CNP	=	conjunctive participle
GRND	=	Gerundive
(n)	=	nominal
p	=	plural
s	=	singular