

## Verb-Subject Incorporation in Bodo

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### Abstract

This is an attempt to identify some important themes and issues relating to the verb-subject incorporation in Bodo, a Tibeto-Burman language of Bodo-Garo group.

The personal pronoun occurring as a subject of a finite verb in a colloquial form of Bodo spoken in Assam and other states of NE India, West Bengal, Nepal and Bangladesh, can move and occur immediately after the verb and incorporates with the verb. During this process, the co-occurring tense, aspect and mood (TAM) and gender discourse marker (GDM) with the verb get fused with the pronoun subject. Thus, the finite verb-pronoun incorporation in Bodo can be dealt with at morphophonemic and morphosyntactic levels. Usually, this incorporation happens in case of 1<sup>st</sup> person singular pronoun subject *àŋ* 'I'. The usual structure of verb-subject incorporation is V+(TAM)+(GDM)+S.

It is observed that the regressive movement of the subject towards the final position of the construction helps in the verb-subject incorporation process.

**Keywords:** Verb-Subject incorporation; Bodo; Bodo-Garo; Tibeto-Burman; Gender discourse marker.

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## 1. Introduction

According to the classification of languages by Grierson (1927: 53-4), Bodo comes under the Bodo-Garo group of the Assam-Burmese branch under Tibeto-Burman sub-family of Tibeto-Chinese family. Again, according to a recent classification by Post & Burling (2017: 224-5), it comes under the Boro part along with Dimasa, Kokborok and Tiwa under Boro-Garo branch of Sal (Bodo-Konyak-Jingpho, Brahmaputran) languages of Tibeto-Burman family.

Generally, in 1980s, noun incorporation (NI) has been studied as the movement of the head of an object into the verb creating a complex or compound verb; e.g., a noun+verb conjunct verb. NI derives from word formation rules applying in the lexicon, presyntactically (Rosen 1989: 294). Both of these two types of NI, are found in Bodo; e.g., the noun+verb conjunct verb *lùgù mún* ‘meet’ from *lùgù* ‘friend’ incorporated to *mún* ‘find’; formation of *muidér* ‘elephant’ derived through the incorporation of the noun *mi* ‘mammal’ to *der* ‘become big’. A third type of NI is also found in Bodo which is verb-subject incorporation; it is a kind of noun incorporation where the first personal singular pronoun *àŋ* moves to the main verb and gets incorporated with it. Verb-subject incorporation in Bodo spoken by 14,82,929 people in India (Language data, June 2018; Census of India 2011), is a fresh topic of research that needs attention of several levels of linguistic studies, such as *syntax*, *morphology* and *phonology*. Hence, it also needs the attention of *morphosyntax* as well as *morphophonemics*. However, the contraction of the subject and some verb suffixes such as {-*duŋ*} and *àŋ* becoming {-*dàŋ*} as in *nó-aó-sú t<sup>h</sup>àŋ-nú p<sup>h</sup>uì-dàŋ* (home-LOC-PTL go-INF come-PFV.1SG) ‘I come (started coming) to go home’; {-*lur*} and {-*àŋ*} becoming {-*láj*} as in *nú-nánui lùŋ-nù-sù lùbui-bai-láj* (see-NF drink-NF-EMPH want-PRF-MAL.1SG) ‘Having seen (it), I wanted to drink’ and {-*har*} and {-*àŋ*} becoming {*háj*} as in *nú-nánui lùŋ-nù-sù lùbui-bai-háj* (see-NF drink-INF-EMPH want-PRF-FEM.1SG) ‘Having seen (it), I wanted to drink.’ (Brahma 2012: 180-1; Brahma 2015: 113-5).

The word order of a kernel clause in Bodo is SOV. But, if the subject of the clause is first person singular number *àŋ* ‘I’ then it can move to the final position of the clause and in certain environments it incorporates with the verbs. But the question

is that ‘How are two components or constituents separated by another constituent(s) or conjunct(s), synthesized together?’ Moreover, second and third personal pronouns also move to the co-occurring verbs where the verb-subject incorporation is not prominent as the juncture between the verbs and their respective subjects is considerably high.

## 2. Methodology

The data used in this study are taken mainly from the colloquial form of Bodo spoken in Bodoland Territorial Region of Assam. Being a native speaker of the language and as both the major dialects of it i.e. *Sànzàrí* and *Sùnábàrí* are fully intelligible to the author, the author also relies on his knowledge of the language for data elicitation. Thus, most of the data are introspective.

The data are written in IPA with the two types of registered tones in the language i.e., *high* and *low*. The rising tone is represented with the acute accent symbol whereas the grave accent symbol has been used to mark the falling tone. The data are analysed morpheme-by-morpheme in interlinearized form following *Leipzig Glossing Rules* (May 31, 2015).

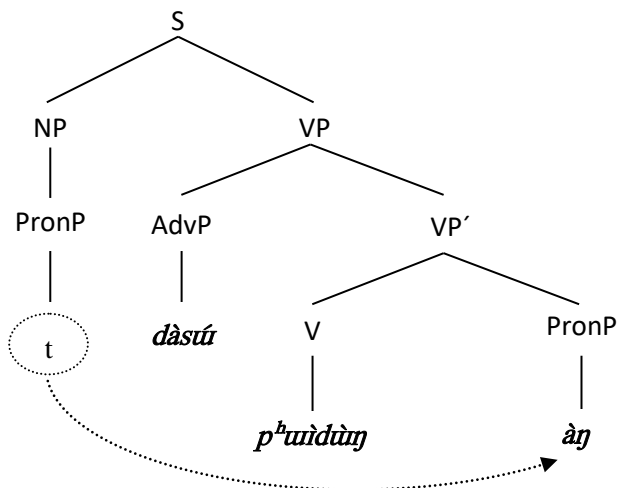
## 3. Results and Discussion

The regressive movement of the subject towards the final position of the clause helps in the verb-subject incorporation process. For examples-

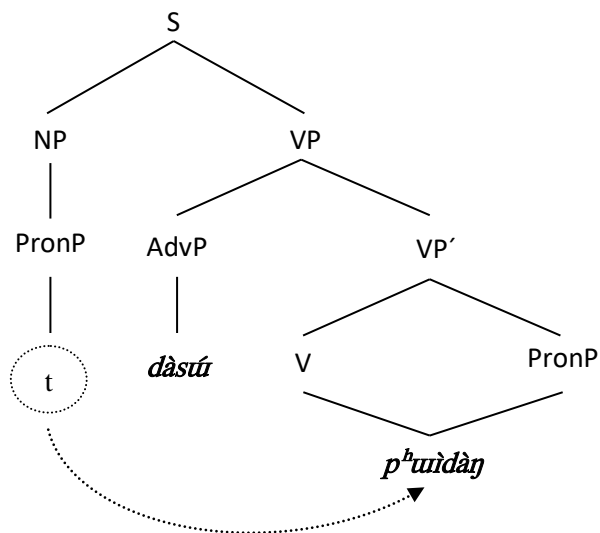
- |     |     |           |                         |                            |           |
|-----|-----|-----------|-------------------------|----------------------------|-----------|
| (1) | (a) | <i>àŋ</i> | <i>dàsú</i>             | <i>p<sup>h</sup>uì-dùŋ</i> |           |
|     |     | I         | just now                | come-PFV                   |           |
|     | >   | (b)       | <i>dàsú</i>             | <i>p<sup>h</sup>uì-dùŋ</i> | <i>àŋ</i> |
|     |     |           | just now                | come-PFV                   | I         |
|     | >   | (c)       | <i>dàsú</i>             | <i>p<sup>h</sup>uì-dàŋ</i> |           |
|     |     |           | just now                | come-PFV.I                 |           |
|     |     |           | ‘I have come just now.’ |                            |           |

The intermediate stage of verb-subject incorporation is *personal pronouns subject movement* towards the final position of the syntactic construction, which is just next to the main verb. The movement of subject from NP position to VP position can be shown in the following diagram:

Stage: (1b): Figure-1



Stage: (1c): Figure-2



After the movement, the subject occurs with the verb and the verb is fused with the subject. As soon as the fusion happens the TAM suffix of the verb and the subject undergoes morphophonological changes in stage (1c).

- (2) (a) **àŋ** *gàbùn* *tʰáŋ-nú-suí*  
 I tomorrow go-INF-TER
- > (b) *gàbùn* *tʰáŋ-nú-suí* **àŋ**  
 tomorrow go-INF-TER I
- > (c) *gàbùn* *tʰáŋ-nú-sáy*  
 tomorrow go-INF-TER.I
- > (d) *gàbùn* *tʰáŋ-ø-sáy*  
 tomorrow go-(INF)-TER.I  
 ‘I am going tomorrow.’

The kind of verb-subject incorporation is very frequently observed in *Sùnábári variety* of the language, spoken in Gossaigaon and Kokrajhar areas of the Kokrajhar district of Assam. The most interesting part in the fusion of this NI is that the infinitive marker {-*nuu*} is dropped at the final stage (2b).

- (3) (a) **àŋ** *hàtʰaí-jaó* *tʰáŋ-á-haí*  
 I market-LOC go-NEG-FDM
- > (b) *hàtʰaí-jaó* *tʰáŋ-á-haí* **àŋ**  
 market-LOC go-NEG-FDM I
- > (c) *hàtʰaí-jaó* *tʰáŋ-á-háy*  
 market-LOC go-NEG-FDM.I  
 ‘I do/will not go to the market.’
- (4) (a) **àŋ** *gúduí* *zá-nú* *bà-jù-luí*  
 I sweet eat-INF bore-HAB-MDM
- > (b) *gúduí* *zá-nú* *bà-jù-luí* **àŋ**  
 sweet eat-INF bore-HAB-MDM I
- > (c) *gúduí* *zá-nú* *bà-jù-láy*  
 sweet eat-INF bore-HAB-MDM.I  
 ‘I don’t like sweet.’
- (5) (a) **àŋ** *duì* *lábú-á*  
 I water bring-NEG

- > (b) *duì lábú-á àŋ*  
 water bring-NEG I
- > (c) *duì lábú-a:ŋ*  
 water bring-NEG.I  
 ‘I will/do not bring water.’

Here, in (5b) i.e., at the intermediate stage, a brief hiatus is observed but crasis of the identical *a* vowel is observed at (5c).

- (6) *àŋ dánijá bèdór zà-líjá*  
 I now-a-days meat eat-HAB.NEG
- > *dánijá bèdór zà-líjá àŋ*  
 now-a-days meat eat-HAB.NEG I
- > *dánijá bèdór zà-líjáŋ*  
 now-a-days meat eat-HAB.NEG.I
- > *dánijá bèdór zà-láŋ*  
 now-a-days meat eat-HAB.NEG.I  
 ‘Now-a-days, I do not use to eat meat.’

The first person singular number subject that moves to the final position of a clause does not necessarily incorporate with the verb. But, if the verb is suffixed with certain inflections such as *perfective aspectual suffix* {-*duŋ*}, *termination suffix* {-*suŋ*}, *female discourse marker suffix* {-*haŋ*}, *male discourse marker suffix* {-*luŋ*}, *declarative negative* {-*a*} and *habitual negative suffix* {-*lija/-la*}, then only the moved subject gets incorporated and fused with the verb. As per the data presented above, the environments that influence the subject-verb incorporation are discussed below:

- I. {VERB}{perfective aspectual suffix} + {first person singular}  
 {VERB}{-*duŋ*} + *àŋ*  
 {VERB}{-*daŋ*}

*Morphophonemic process:* The onset /d/ of the final incorporating suffix syllable {-*duŋ*} of the verb and the first personal pronoun subject constitute a morph {-*daŋ*} which consists of *perfective aspectual suffix* and *first person singular morphemes* respectively {-*duŋ*} and *àŋ*.

- II. {VERB}{ termination suffix } + {first person singular}  
 {VERB}{-suɪ} + àŋ  
 {VERB}{-saŋ}

*Morphophonemic process:* Only the onset /s/ of the final incorporating suffix syllable {-suɪ} of the verb and the first personal pronoun subject constitute a morph {-saŋ} which consists of *termination suffix* and *first person singular morphemes* respectively {-suɪ} and àŋ.

- III. {VERB}{female discourse marker suffix} + {first person singular}  
 {VERB}{-haɪ} + àŋ  
 {VERB}{-haŋ}

*Morphophonemic process:* Only the onset /h/ of the final incorporating suffix syllable {-haɪ} of the verb and the first personal pronoun subject constitute a morph {-haŋ} which consists of *female discourse marker suffix* and *first person singular morphemes* respectively {-haɪ} and àŋ.

- IV. {VERB}{male discourse marker suffix} + {first person singular}  
 {VERB}{-luɪ} + àŋ  
 {VERB}{-laŋ}

*Morphophonemic process:* Only the onset /l/ of the final incorporating suffix syllable {-luɪ} of the verb and the first personal pronoun subject constitute a morph {-laŋ} which consists of *male discourse marker suffix* and *first person singular morphemes* respectively {-luɪ} and àŋ.

- V. {VERB}{declarative negative suffix} + {first person singular}  
 {VERB}{-a} + àŋ  
 {VERB}{-aŋ}

*Morphophonemic process:* The final incorporating suffix {-a} of the verb gets merged with the same nucleus /a/ of the *first person singular morpheme syllable* /aŋ/.

- VI. {VERB}{habitual negative suffix} + {first person singular}  
 {VERB}{-lija/-la} + àŋ  
 {VERB}{-lian/-laŋ}

*Morphophonemic process:* Only the onset /l/ of the final incorporating suffix syllable {-lija/-la} of the verb and the first personal pronoun subject constitute a morph {-lijaŋ} which consists of *habitual negative suffix* and *first person singular morphemes* respectively {-lija/-la} and àŋ.

The second person singular number subject also moves to the final position of an imperative clause, which also incorporates with the verb. The verb in an imperative clause is either in bare form or an imperative particle {-duu} co-occurs with it. In both cases, the second person singular subject can incorporate with the verb. For examples-

- (7) (a) **núŋ** gàbù̀n **p<sup>h</sup>uì**  
2SG tomorrow come
- > (b) gàbù̀n **p<sup>h</sup>uì** **núŋ**  
tomorrow come 2SG
- > (c) gàbù̀n **p<sup>h</sup>uì-núŋ**  
tomorrow come-2SG  
'(You) come tomorrow.'
- (8) gàbù̀n nó-waó **t<sup>h</sup>áŋ-á-bí**  
tomorrow home-LOC go-NEG-s/he  
'S/he may go to home tomorrow?'
- (9) ù̀n-p<sup>h</sup>r-aó mù̀zàŋ **zà-jà-bé**  
later-PL-LOC good become-NEG-it  
'it may become good later on?'
- (10) **p<sup>h</sup>uì-k<sup>h</sup>à-gù̀n-bí**  
come-(in advance/for sure)-FUT-s/he  
'S/he is coming for sure.'

The increase in agglutination is also observed as a result of verb-subject incorporation as in (10).

#### 4. Conclusion

Verb-subject incorporation is not used in Bodo formal writing at all; a native Bodo language user is very much conscious about it. And, the absence of it in writing makes the language not undergoing any change like Tiwa.

How {-aŋ/-ŋ} person marker came into existence in other Bodo-Garo languages like Tiwa? This question is somehow related to regressive movement of subject and verb-subject incorporation. Usually, person-verb agreement is not employed in Bodo-Garo; it might be a result of verb-subject incorporation in case of Tiwa. Because, Tiwa exhibits partial person-verb agreement i.e. only first person-verb agreement. On the other hand, Tiwa has been so much influenced by Assamese where person and verb agreement is fully employed.

However, it is a case of pronominal subject movement in Bodo; when the pronominal subject moves towards the finite verb to incorporate with it, what the subject leaves behind is only the *trace* which is always covert. But it has been grammaticalized in Tiwa, because the verb of the first personal pronominal subject always takes pronominal suffix {-aŋ/-ŋ} to form a grammatically acceptable construction. In this way, the incorporation of first personal singular pronoun with the finite verb may lead to attestation of person-verb agreement rule in Bodo grammar.

#### Abbreviations

AdvP	-	Adverb Phrase
EMPH	-	Emphatic Particle
FDM	-	Feminine Discourse Marker
FEM	-	Feminine marker
FUT	-	Future Tense
HAB	-	Habitual Aspect
INF	-	Infinitive
LOC	-	Locative Case
MAL	-	Masculine marker
MDM	-	Masculine Discourse Marker
NEG	-	Negative

NF	-	Non-final
NP	-	Noun Phrase
PFV	-	Perfective Aspect
PL	-	Plural Number
PRF	-	Perfect Aspect
PronP	-	Pronoun Phrase
PTL	-	Particle
S	-	Sentence
S	-	Subject
SG	-	Singular Number
TER	-	Termination
V	-	Verb
VP	-	Verb Phrase

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