

Case marking in Kokborok

Samir Debbarma
samirdebbarma85@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper provides an overview of case system of Kokborok (Tripuri) language spoken mainly in the North Eastern State of Tripura. Case relations in Tibeto-Burman and Bodo-Garo are expressed by case suffixes and ad positions. The paper focuses on the system of case marking in Kokborok – that is, the morphemes that specify the syntactic function of the noun phrase. Case relation in Kokborok is expressed by means of case suffixes.

1. Introduction

Kokborok is a Bodo-Garo language of the Tibeto-Burman language family. The Kokborok speaking communities are the scheduled tribes of North East India. They live mainly in Tripura and some parts of Assam and Mizoram and in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh. Kokborok is the language of wider communication originally spoken in Tripura where Kokborok speaking population is majority. Like most of the Tibeto-Burman languages, Kokborok is a highly agglutinating language. The indigenous Kokborok speaking people are ethnically, linguistically and culturally close to other Bodo-Garo languages of North East India. According to 2011 Census of India the total population of Kokborok speakers in the state of Tripura was 9,17,900.

2. Overview of case marking in Bodo-Garo

There must have existed a nominative suffix **-a* that has been abandoned completely by Rabha, retained as an optional nominative-determinative indicator in Bodo and preserved in a fossilized form on the pronouns of Garo (Joseph; 2007). Other than Boro and Garo, the other modern languages have also completely lost the nominative case ending suffix **-a* as illustrated in the table 1. The accusative suffixes, bear close phonemic similarity across the languages; Garo, Bodo, Dimasa and Ruga. The dative and genitive suffixes, also bear close phonemic similarity across the languages; Garo, Bodo, Dimasa and Ruga as illustrated in the table 1. Case syncretism is found in almost all the Bodo-Garo languages viz. Garo, Boro, Kokborok, Dimasa, Rabha and Ruga.

	Garó	Boró	Deuri	Kokborok	Tiwá	Dimasa	Rabha	Atong	Ruga	*PB G
NOM	-Ø -a	-Ø -a	-Ø	-Ø		-Ø	-Ø	-Ø	-Ø	*-a
ACC	-ko	-khow	-	-no	-go	-khɔ -khe	-o	-aw ~ -taw	-ko	*-kho
DAT	-na	-nə	-na	-no	-na	-ne	-na		-no	*-na
GEN	-ni	-ni	-o	-ni	-ne	-ni	-ni	-ni -mi	-ni	*-ni
ABL	-ni	-níphray	-capi	-ni	-	-niphəraŋ	-ni para	-mi	-ani, -oni	*-ni
LOC	-o	-ao, -ha	-(h)o	-o	-o	-ha	-i	-ci	-chi, -sung	*- ao/aw
INST	-cha	-zwng	-coŋ	-bai	-re	-jaŋ	peke	sung	-chi, -sung	*-caŋ
COM	baksa	-zwng	-	-bai		-jaŋ	peke	mu ~ mung		
PER	gita	zwng	-	-tui			-koro, -tokoro	təkəy		

Table 1: case marking in Bodo-Garó

3. Case marking in Kokborok

The term ‘case marking’ refers to the marking of an NP determined by the syntactic function it has in the clause or phrase (cf. Haspelmath 2009). Case marking is done by suffixes and the case relation in Kokborok is shown by case markers. Case in Kokborok can be marked on nouns, pronouns, adjectives and postpositions. Kokborok is a nominative-accusative language where nominative case is unmarked like other Bodo-Garó languages as can be seen in table 1.

The case markers determine and characterise clearly the relationship between noun phrases and verbs. In a noun phrase the case markers can be suffixed to nouns and nominals such as pronouns and nominalised nouns. Case markers are suffixed to the final element in the noun phrase, followed by a postposition if it is present. Case syncretism’s in nominals (nouns, pronouns, and adjectives) are common in Tibeto-Burman languages. Case syncretism is found in accusative/ dative, genitive/ablative and instrumental /comitative. There are nine cases in Kokborok. The nominative, accusative, dative, genitive, ablative, instrumental, comitative, perlativ and locative immediately follow the head noun or its classifier.

The nominative case is used for the actor, the active agent. The accusative marks the things acted upon, the dative marks the recipient. Table 2 gives an overview of the case markers in Kokborok:

Case Markers	Meaning
/-ø/	nominative
/-no/	Accusative
/-no/	Dative
/-ni/	genitive
/-ni/	ablative
/-bai/	instrumental
/-bai/	comitative
/-tui/	perlative
/-o/	locative

Table 2: case markers of Kokborok

3.1 Nominative case -ø

The nominative in Kokborok is morphologically unmarked case which is primarily used for the subjects (noun and Pronoun) of a sentence or clause. The subjects or agents of both the transitive and intransitive clauses do not take any case marker as seen in (1) – (6). The demonstratives too are unmarked as in (7). Whereas Bodo and Garo are the only two languages of Bodo-Garo where the demonstratives can take the nominative case marker.

- (1) *bo-ø kap-kha*
 he-NOM cry-PST
 'He cried'
- (2) *aŋ-ø bo-no nuk-kha*
 I-NOM he-ACC see-PRES
 'I saw him'
- (3) *Mothoray-ø kami-ni kiphil-kha*
 Mothoray-NOM village-GEN return-PST
 'Mothoray returned from the village'
- (5) *Isiri-ø munui-ya*
 Queen-NOM laugh-NEG
 'The queen didn't laugh'
- (6) *Aphuray-ø thu-k^ha*
 Aphuray-NOM sleep-PST
 'Aphuray slept'
- (7) *i-ø tokma kosom*
 this-NOM hen black
 'This hen is black'

3.2 Accusative -no

The accusative case marker *-no*, marks the direct object of a transitive verb in finite and non-finite clauses. It is used for patients of transitive verbs. Not all the objects can be marked with accusative case marker. Kinship terms, proper names, pronouns and animate nouns (humans) can be marked by the accusative case marker *-no*.

- (8) *Hutu Atu-no bu-kha*
 Hutu Atu-ACC beat-PST
 'Hutu beat Atu'
- (9) *Hapingray bo-no nuk-kha*
 Hapingray he-ACC see-PST
 'Hapingray saw him'

However, patient of intransitive clause can also be marked by accusative marker by changing the valency of the verb with the causative affixes.

- (10) *aŋ bo-no kap-ri-kha*
 I he-ACC cry-CAUS-PST
 'I made him to cry'
- (11) *aŋ bo-no mu-thu-kha*
 I he-ACC CAUS-sleep-PST
 'I made him to sleep'

Interrogative pronouns in Kokborok can also take case markers. The interrogative pronoun 'whom' is formed by adding *-no* to the pronoun *sabo* 'who' as in (12) and (13). In the same way 'whose' is formed by suffixing *-ni* to the pronoun *sabo* 'who' as in (14).

- (12) *bo sabo-no ring*
 who who-ACC call
 'Whom did he call?'
- (13) *Atu sabo-no sa*
 Atu who-ACC say
 'Whom did Atu tell?'
- (14) *sabo-ni nok naithok*
 who-GEN house beautiful
 'Whose house is beautiful?'

There are many instances where accusative case is dropped. The inanimate objects, objects that belong to non-human nouns etc. are unmarked as given in (15) – (17).

- (15) *oro mai-ø tubu-di*
 here rice-ACC bring-IMP
 'bring the rice here'
- (16) *bo aming-ø nuk-kha*
 He cat-ACC see-PST
 'He saw the cat'

- (17) *bo tok ma-sa pai-kha*
 he bird CLF-num buy-PST
 'he bought one bird'

3.3 Dative -no

The dative case is marked by the same marker as accusative marker *-no*. The dative marks all recipients of ditransitive verbs. The primary use of the dative case is to mark the indirect object, especially the recipient of some action. The indirect is always being marked by the marker *-no* while the direct object remains unmarked. The indirect object always precedes the direct object.

- (18) *Alin Khumpairai-no bijap ri-kha*
 Alin Khumpairai-DAT book give-PST
 'Alin gave a book to Khumpairai'
- (19) *Tokhirai bo-no nok phunuk-kha*
 Tokhirai he-DAT house show-PST
 'Tokhirai showed a house to him'
- (20) *Lokti Thenta-no khum bak-kha*
 Lokti Thenta-DAT flower distribute-PST
 'Lokti distributed flower to Thenta'

3.4 Locative case -o,

Both temporal and spatial locations are marked by the locative case. The locative case expresses the location of the subject and it is marked by the case ending suffix *-o* occasionally preceded by postposition if present as in (22) and (23).

- (21) *Tini nog-o than-nai*
 Today house-LOC go-FUT
 'Will go home today'
- (22) *aming phaklai sakaw-o*
 bird beam top-LOC
 'The cat is on the top of the beam'
- (23) *kenjuwa hakor bisin-o*
 earthworm hole inside-LOC
 'Earthworm is in the hole'
- (24) *tok buphan beceng-o*
 bird tree twig-LOC
 'The bird is on the twig'
- (25) *pun bolong-o than-kha*
 goat forest-LOC go-PST
 'The goat went to the forest'
- (26) *an bó-ni kamiw-o than-nai*
 I he-GEN village-LOC go-FUT

‘I will go to his village’

- (27) *hór -o phantok sok-di*
 fire-LOC eggplant burn-IMP
 ‘Burn the eggplant in the fire’
- (28) *tui wasung-o*
 water bamboo tube-LOC
 ‘Water is in the bamboo tube’
- (29) *Hunu-ni bokhorog-o thuk ton-na*
 Hunu-GEN head-LOC louse have-PRE
 ‘There might be louse in Hunu’s head’

3.5 Ablative -ni

The ablative case conveys source i.e., ‘from’ or ‘out of’ of an action. It is expressed by the marker *-ni*.

- (30) *bó Aguli-ni kamiw-o thán-kha*
 he Agartala-ABL village-LOC go-PST
 ‘He went from Agartala to village’
- (31) *Tokhiray rungnok-ni kiphil-kha*
 Tokhiray school-ABL kiphil-PST
 ‘Tokhiray returned from school’
- (32) *Hatu nukhun saka-ni bahar-kha*
 Hatu roof above-ABL jump-PST
 ‘Hatu jumped from the roof’
- (33) *sor tak-nai sor-ni da sinam-kha*
 iron make-NOMZ iron-ABL chopper make-PST
 ‘Blacksmith made sickle out of iron’

3.6 Instrumental -bai

NPs marked with *-bai* can also refer to an instrument used in an action. The instrumental case indicates that the noun is the instrument or means by or with which the subject achieves or accomplishes an action.

- (24) *bo wapham-bai phai-kha*
 he raft-INST come-PST
 ‘He came by raft’
- (35) *silai-bai wak kok-di*
 gun-INST pig shoot-IMP
 ‘Shoot the pig with the gun’
- (36) *bó tharuk-bai mai bok-kha*
 he ladle-INST rice distribute-PST

- ‘He distributed the rice with ladle’
 (37) *Anal malkung-bai phai-kha*
 Anal car-INST come-PST
 ‘Anal came by car’
 (38) *yakuṇ-bai ka-di*
 leg-INST walk-IMP
 ‘Step with leg’
 (39) *dá-bai tan-di*
 chopper-INST cut-IMP
 ‘Cut with chopper’
 (40) *aṇ buwa-bai war-kha*
 I teeth-INST bite-PST
 ‘I bite with teeth’

3.7 Comitative -bai

The comitative suffix *-bai* expresses the meaning of ‘with’ or ‘accompanied by’. The postposition *baksa* ‘along/together’ follows the comitative nouns or pronouns (44) and (45).

- (41) *bó-bai phai-di*
 he-COM come-IMP
 ‘Come with him’
 (41) *David Amal-bai himlái-kha*
 David Amal-COM walk-PST
 ‘David walked with Amal’
 (42) *bó Siri-bai Assam-o thán-nai*
 he Siri-COM Assam-LOC go-FUT
 ‘He will go to Assam with Siri’
 (43) *Tini nu-ma-bai him-di*
 he 3-mother-COM walk-IMP
 ‘Walk with your mother today’
 (44) *bo aṇ-bai baksa kiphil-kha*
 he I-COM along return-PST
 ‘He returned along with me’
 (45) *bó aṇ-bai baksa thán-nai*
 he I-COM along go-DEF.FUT
 ‘He will go along with me’

3.8 Genitive case

The main function of the genitive on lexical nouns is the expression of a possessor. Genitive in Kokborok is expressed by the marker *-ni*. It can be attached to a noun or pronoun. The genitive

case expresses the meaning of possession of something by the noun or pronoun. The genitive always precedes the thing that is being possessed.

- (46) *Mothoray-ni nok kotor*
mothoray-GEN nok big
'Mothoray's house is big'
- (47) *bó-ni bukung*
he-GEN nose
'His nose'
- (48) *a-ni nok Aguli-o*
1-GEN house Agartala-LOC
'My house is at Agartala'
- (49) *sabo-ni nok*
who-GEN house
'Whose house?'
- (50) *Tokhiray-ni malkhung dera-kha*
Tokhiray-GEN car spoil-pst
'Tokhiray's car got spoiled'
- (51) *phung-ni nobar*
Morning-GEN air
'The air of morning'



3.9 Perlative -tui

The perlative case indicates the medium through which the action is performed. It is expressed in Kokborok by suffixing the marker *-tui* to the nouns. The suffix *-tui* expresses the meaning of 'via or through'.

- (52) *aŋ Imphal-o Silchar-tui thán-kha*
I Imphal-LOC Silchar- PER go-PST
'I went to Imphal via Silchar'
- (53) *bó a-ni yak-tui Amal-no raŋ ho-kha*
he 1-GEN hand-PER Amal-DAT money send-PST
'He sent money to Amal through my hand'
- (54) *bó lama kicar-tui him-kha*
he road middle-PER walk-PST
'He walks through the middle of the road'
- (55) *Tripura-ni borók Manipur-o Silchar-tui thán-g-o*
Tripura-GEN people Manipur-LOC Silchar-PER go-DECL
'People of Tripura go to Manipur via Silchar'
- (56) *David-ni yak-tui a-ni manui ho-di*
David-GEN hand-PER 1PM-GEN thing send-IMP

- ‘Send my thing through David’s hand’
- (57) *Atu Lali-ni kami-tui phai-na naŋ-nai*
 Atu Lali-GEN village-PER come-INF need-FUT
 ‘Atu will have to come via Lali’s village’

4. Conclusion

Cases are generally used on noun phrases. Kokborok has generally eight case markers where there is one more case: nominative which remain unmarked. One case marker may indicate more than one case relation. Case morphemes always occur at the end of the noun phrase. Cases are marked predominantly with suffixes. Like many Tibeto-Burman languages, case syncretism is also common in Kokborok. Syncretism of core and non-core cases between accusative/dative, genitive/ablative and instrumental/comitative is evident in the above examples as illustrated. There are nine cases in Kokborok.

Abbreviations

1	first person singular	DAT	dative
3	third person singular	DEM	demonstrative
ABL	ablative	DECL	declarative
ACC	accusative	FUT	future
CAUS	causative	GEN	genitive
COM	comitative	IMP	imperative
COM	comitative	INF	infinitive
CLF	classifier	INST	instrument
LOC	locative	NF	nonfinite
NOM	nominative	PRE	presumptive
PST	Past		

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