

Problem Set 4

Due October 9 before class. Submit on Luminus > Files > Student Submission > PS4.

This problem is about the distribution of the case marker *-e* in Assamese.¹ I will refer to the case of NPs with *-e* as “E” and the case of NPs without *-e* “default” (DEF). Consider the following data:

- (1) Ram-*(e) kaam-(*e) kor-e.

Ram-E work.DEF do-PRES

‘Ram does work.’

Other verbs like this: *maar-* ‘beat/kill,’ *saa-* ‘see,’ *kaT-* ‘cut,’ *khaa-* ‘eat’...

- (2) Ram-(*e) por-e.

Ram.DEF fall-PRES

‘Ram falls.’

Other verbs like this: *xuu-* ‘sleep,’ *mor-* ‘die,’ *aah-* ‘come,’ *jie-* ‘live’...

- (3) Ram-*(e) dour-e.

Ram-E run-PRES

‘Ram runs.’

Other verbs like this: *naas-* ‘dance,’ *xator-* ‘swim,’ *hããh-* ‘laugh,’ *juuj-* ‘fight’...

Recall: (*e) means the case marker *-e* cannot be used; *(e) means the case marker *must* be used.

- i. What is the generalization for which NPs take *-e* and which do not? Is this language nominative/accusative, ergative/absolutive, or neither?
- ii. Use the lexical items below to build example (1). Give a tree and the sequence of Merge and Agree steps.

Assume Assamese is head-final: Merge(H,XP) of head H with XP will return $\begin{array}{c} \text{HP} \\ \diagup \quad \diagdown \\ \text{XP} \quad \text{H} \end{array}$.

Lexicon:

- [N, uCase:___] *Ram*
- [N, uCase:___] *kaam* work
- [V, uN] *kor-* ‘do’
- [*v*, uN, Case:DEF] (unpronounced)
- [T, Infl:PRES, Case:E] *-e* ← the tense suffix *-e*, not to be confused with the case marker

¹Data here comes from (2002) Sarma & Amritavalli but don't look it up!

(There is also V-to-*v* and *v*-to-T movement to get the verb to be pronounced together with the present tense marker *-e*. You do not need to show this.)

- iii. The lexicon above can grammatically derive (1), but it can also derive (with additional verbs) many ungrammatical sentences, such as the following:

- (4) a. * Ram kaam-e kor-e.
Ram.DEF WORK-E DO-PRES
- b. * Ram-e por-e.
Ram-E fall-PRES
- c. * Ram dour-e.
Ram.DEF RUN-PRES

Now consider the hypothesis in (5).

- (5) Case-assignment in Assamese is always *downwards*: from a c-commanding head with a [Case:...] feature to a c-commanded N with [uCase:___].

Does this hypothesis in (5) help us predict the ungrammaticality of the examples in (4)? Which ones? Explain.

- iv. **For EL5101R students only:** Also consider the hypothesis in (6).

- (6) $Agree(\alpha, \beta; F)$ must take place *as soon as possible* in the derivation; i.e. as soon as α and β are in the same tree and α c-commands β .

How does the hypothesis in (6) fare in comparison to (5) above? Consider all the Assamese data above.