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Ergative case and hidden argument structure: Studies in Indo-Aryan

by

Shweta Akolkar

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

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University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Amy Rose Deal, Chair

Professor Line Mikkelsen

Professor Peter Jenks

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Ergative case and hidden argument structure: Studies in Indo-Aryan

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Abstract

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Shweta Akolkar

Doctor of Philosophy in Linguistics

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Amy Rose Deal, Chair

This dissertation examines the occurrence of ergative marking outside of overtly transitive clauses, arguing through case studies in two Indo-Aryan languages that such marking can reveal hidden argument structure. The first case study centers on Marathi modal clauses, which exceptionally allow ergative case on intransitive subjects. The second focuses on subject case marking in Bishnupriya Manipuri, a fluid-S language in which agentive intransitive subjects generally bear ergative case. In both languages, I argue that ergative marking appears on an intransitive subject only when that subject is linked to multiple thematic positions in a single case domain, creating a covertly transitive configuration. I examine the interpretive effects of these structures across modal and non-modal domains, and consider implications for argument structure in each language. Additionally, given the limited prior grammatical description of Bishnupriya Manipuri, I provide a grammar sketch to situate the analytical chapter within a broader descriptive context.

Dedicated to my parents

—

माझी माय सरसोती
माले शिकवते बोली
लेक बहिनाच्या, मनी
किती गुपीतं पेरली!

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This dissertation probes the nature of morphological ergativity by examining languages and constructions in which ergative case departs from its canonical distribution. It asks what gives rise to these non-canonical patterns. Do they reflect a different mechanism for assigning ergative case, or a difference in underlying structures? I focus on environments in which ergative case has both an **extended** distribution, appearing with apparently intransitive predicates, and a **semantically constrained** distribution, with its presence partly conditioned by the interpretation of the subject. These patterns give rise to a form of differential subject marking with ergative case: in at least some environments, ergative marking tracks semantic properties of the subject.

I argue that, in the environments investigated in this dissertation, the extended distribution of ergative case and its interpretive effects do not follow from a dedicated semantic case assignment mechanism. Instead, they arise from hidden transitivity. More specifically, I propose that an apparently intransitive subject can be linked to multiple thematic positions within a single case domain. This creates a covertly transitive configuration, with all the structural ingredients needed for ergative case assignment. Thus, the non-canonical distribution of ergative case reveals that clauses may be structurally transitive even when they are not outwardly so. The particular structural proposal I put forward also allows us to decompose the special interpretations associated with extended ergative marking, thereby characterizing them more precisely.

I develop this proposal through two case studies of extended ergative marking in Indo-Aryan, from Marathi (Southern Indo-Aryan) and Bishnupriya Manipuri (Eastern Indo-Aryan). **Chapter 2** focuses on modal clauses in Marathi. In a significant subset of Marathi modal clauses, apparently intransitive subjects alternate between ergative and zero marking, while transitive subjects are invariably ergative. With intransitive predicates, the choice of subject case corresponds to a distinction in modal interpretation: only zero-marked subjects are compatible with epistemic readings, and only ergative-marked subjects are compatible with canonical root readings in which the subject is construed as the bearer of obligation. I argue that this interpretive contrast arises from the presence of a causative head below the modal

in canonical root clauses, which introduces the subject as a causer. The same subject also binds a null pronoun in the position associated with its ordinary thematic role with respect to the embedded predicate. This configuration derives the semantic contrast between the two types of modal clauses and, for the purposes of ergative case assignment, constitutes a transitive clause.

Chapter 3 turns to the fluid-S alignment system of Bishnupriya Manipuri, where ergative marking on apparently intransitive subjects is available across a wide range of grammatical environments rather than being confined to a particular domain, such as modal clauses. In this language, ergative marking on subjects of intransitive predicates is broadly associated with a more agentive interpretation, whereas overtly transitive subjects are obligatorily ergative regardless of their thematic interpretation. I propose an analysis parallel to the one developed for Marathi: ergative-marked subjects of intransitive predicates are introduced as causers which bind a null pronoun in a lower thematic position. The additional causer role gives rise to the effect of increased agentivity, while the resulting configuration provides the structural conditions for ergative case assignment.

There is limited prior grammatical description of Bishnupriya Manipuri. Accordingly in **Chapter 4**, I present a grammar sketch based on data I have collected from 2019–2026. The chapter focuses especially on the distribution of core functional morphology in the language, with the aim of providing a descriptive reference for the examples in the preceding chapter and for future work on Bishnupriya Manipuri grammar. The appendix provides an additional resource in the form of two glossed Bishnupriya Manipuri texts, which I draw on for examples throughout Chapters 3–4.

Chapter 2

Extended ergative case in Marathi modal clauses

1 Introduction

According to an influential early view, epistemic and deontic modals differ crucially in their syntactic properties: the former are one-place (raising) predicates that take a clause as their sole argument, while the latter are two-place (control) predicates that take both a clause and a nominal subject as arguments (Ross 1969; Perlmutter 1971; Jackendoff 1972, a.o.). Consider the English epistemic and deontic statements in (1a–1b), formed with the flavor-flexible modal *must*.

- | | | |
|-----|--|------------------|
| (1) | a. Rucha must be home (according to the evidence). | <i>Epistemic</i> |
| | b. Rucha must be home (according to the rules). | <i>Deontic</i> |

Without the parenthetical material, which is included only to disambiguate the modal flavor, the two sentences are surface-identical. The classic analysis nevertheless assigns them different underlying structures: in (1a), the subject bears no thematic relation to the modal and reaches the subject position via athematic raising; in (1b), by contrast, the subject originates as an argument of the modal, where it receives a theta role along the lines of ‘bearer of obligation’, and is also understood as an argument of the embedded predicate. Brennan (1993) refines the classic analysis, arguing that deontic statements do not all attribute obligation (or permission) to the subject, and only those that do have control structures. With this revised view, the relevant dividing line is not modal flavor itself, but rather the interpretation of the subject.

Following Bhatt 1998, Hackl 1998, Wurmbrand 1999, and Hacquard 2006, which argue that modal clauses uniformly involve raising, the idea that certain modal readings require control structures has largely fallen out of favor. For languages like English, where many of the same modal forms (e.g. *may*, *should*, *must*) allow both epistemic and deontic readings, the control analysis comes at a considerable cost: it requires positing two distinct lexical

entries for each modal—one that assigns an additional theta role to the subject and one that does not. By contrast, the now standard approach following Kratzer (1981, 1991) derives variability in modal flavor from context sensitivity, with the context supplying the modal base and ordering source. On this view, flavor-flexible modals have a single lexical entry, and the bearer of obligation or permission is identified by other means, such as pragmatic inference (Bhatt 1998) or via the event argument referenced by the modal (Hacquard 2006).

This chapter draws on novel data from Marathi (Southern Indo-Aryan) to argue that the early view on syntactic ambiguity in modal clauses is in fact partially correct: epistemic readings arise from raising structures, while prototypical deontic readings require control structures. In Marathi, this distinction is overtly signaled by the case marking of the subject, as previewed in (2): both sentences contain the flavor-flexible weak necessity modal *-aw*, but the epistemic statement requires an unmarked subject, while the root modal statement in which the subject is the bearer of obligation requires an ergative subject.

- (2) a. *Context: I see that Rucha's house lights are on around the time she usually gets home from work. I conclude:*
 ruca(#-ni) ghər-i əs-aw-i/ə.
 Rucha-ERG home-LOC be-WN.MOD-AGR
 ‘Rucha should be home.’
- b. *Context: I think it would be best for Rucha to be home when the electrician comes by so that she can explain the issue clearly to them. In my view:*
 ruca#(-ni) ghər-i əs-aw-i/ə.
 Rucha-ERG home-LOC be-WN.MOD-AGR
 ‘Rucha should be home.’

In line with earlier work, I argue that sentences like (2a) do not involve control, and those like (2b) do. The relevant control predicate, however, is not the modal but a distinct functional head, $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$, which identifies the subject as causally involved in the vP event. A root modal scopes over $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}P$, with the result that the subject is construed with the derived semantic role of ‘bearer of obligation/permission’, or a parallel role associated with other root flavors. I argue that this causative functional projection is required to achieve certain root modal readings. The analysis not only captures the Marathi data but also addresses most of the objections to control analyses of English modal clauses, leaving open the possibility that the same structural ambiguity is present in English. Importantly, the analysis avoids positing homophonous modals: the relevant alternation lies in the presence or absence of $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}P$, not in the modal itself.

The proposed structural distinction also derives the case alternation in Marathi modal clauses. In a number of languages, modal clauses exhibit subject case alternations correlated with semantic properties of the subject (e.g. in Finnish, Hindi-Urdu, and Turkish; see Narrog (2010) for a survey), and case in such environments is often treated as idiosyncratic (e.g. Laitinen et al. 1993; Butt and King 2004). I argue instead that a dependent case analysis predicts

the full distribution of ergative case in Marathi, including in modal clauses. In particular, I propose that ergative case is assigned to subjects of configurationally transitive clauses, and that causative control clauses are necessarily transitive in this sense. The proposal aligns with recent work arguing that apparent semantic case, that is, case associated with a semantic role, may still have an underlyingly configurational source (Baker 2014, 2024; Nash 2021).

The chapter is organized as follows. Section 2 provides an overview of subject case marking in Marathi across both non-modal and modal clauses. Section 3 shows that subject case marking in modal clauses correlates systematically with interpretation, where one case pattern tracks a subset of root modal readings and another occurs with all other readings. Section 4 then reviews the mixed evidence for a traditional control analysis of root modal clauses and proposes an alternative in which the control predicate is located below the modal. Section 5 develops the semantics of the proposed structure and accounts for the observed interpretive contrast. Section 6 returns to case and derives the observed alternation. Section 7 concludes by highlighting the theoretical and crosslinguistic implications of the account.

2 Ergative and unmarked subjects in Marathi

This section begins by outlining the sources of data for the chapter (§2.1) and then turns to subject case marking. As previewed in the introduction, the Marathi ergative case marker has a different distribution in modal clauses than elsewhere in the language, appearing even on subjects of intransitive verbs. I first establish the baseline pattern in standard finite realis clauses (§2.2) and then introduce the non-canonical pattern found in modal clauses, which will be central to the rest of the chapter (§2.3).

2.1 Data sources and conventions

Marathi is a Southern Indo-Aryan language and the official state language of Maharashtra, India, with an estimated 83 million speakers (Eberhard et al. 2023). Most examples in this chapter are based on the author’s judgments and have been independently verified through targeted elicitation with two to three native speaker consultants. A small number of examples are drawn from online text or audio sources; each such example is accompanied by a link to the original source.

Examples are given in a broad phonemic transcription using modified IPA.¹ For sentences taken from online written sources, I also include the original Devanagari. Where there is interspeaker variation in the form of a morpheme, the IPA reflects its source; my own examples reflect my variety, while cited examples follow the recorded speaker (or, for written sources, the orthographic convention). Relevant for this chapter, the Marathi ergative marker may

¹Departures from standard IPA: $c = [ts]$ or $[tʃ]$, $j = [dz]$ or $[dʒ]$, $y = [j]$.

be realized as *-ne*, *-na*, or *-ni*, depending on register and variety; in my own examples, I use *-ni*.

2.2 Ergative case in finite realis clauses

Marathi is a morphologically ergative language with an aspect split (Pandharipande 1998; Dhongde and Wali 2009, a.o.).² In perfective finite realis clauses, intransitive subjects are unmarked (3a), while transitive subjects take ergative case (3b). Subjects of imperfective finite realis clauses, on the other hand, are always unmarked (4).³

- (3) a. əmol cid-la.
Amol.M get.angry-PFV.3SG.M
'Amol got angry.'
- b. əmol-ni polya laṭ-lya.
Amol.M-ERG roti.F.PL roll.out-PFV.3PL.F
'Amol rolled out rotis.'
- (4) a. əmol cid-to.
Amol.M get.angry-IPFV.SG.M
'Amol gets angry.'
- b. əmol polya laṭ-to.
Amol.M roti.F.PL roll.out-IPFV.SG.M
'Amol rolls out rotis.'

As will be evident in examples throughout the chapter, verbal agreement in Marathi is sensitive to the case of the subject (Pandharipande 1998; Dhongde and Wali 2009, a.o.). Agreement morphology reflects the features of the highest nominal in the clause that is unmarked for case.⁴ Thus, when the subject is unmarked, agreement targets the subject, as in

²There is also an apparent person split: first and second person transitive subjects do not bear overt ergative morphology (Pandharipande 1998; Dhongde and Wali 2009). I treat these pronominal subjects as underlyingly ergative, in line with Legate (2014a), based on two diagnostics. First, like overtly ergative subjects, they fail to control verbal agreement. Second, when they occur with quantifiers that show case concord, the quantifier bears overt ergative morphology. Both points are illustrated in (i).

- (i) amhi (doghan(-ni)) sinema pah-ila.
1PL.EXCL both.ANIM-ERG movie.M see-PFV.3SG.M
'We (both) saw a movie.'

³Throughout this discussion, I set aside dative-marked experiencer subjects and focus on the distribution of ergative and unmarked subjects.

⁴The relevant domain for verbal agreement is specifically the finite clause: Marathi permits long-distance agreement into nonfinite clauses, but not into finite ones, as shown in (ii). Additionally, scrambling does not affect agreement.

(3a), (4a), and (4b). When the subject bears ergative case but the object is unmarked, agreement instead targets the object, as in (3b). If all nominal arguments in the clause are overtly case-marked, as in the transitive perfective clause in (5), the verb surfaces with default third person singular neuter agreement. This pattern closely parallels the better-known Hindi-Urdu verbal agreement system (Pandharipande and Kachru 1977; Mahajan 1990; Bhatt 2005, a.o.).

- (5) ruca-ni mula-la ucəl-lə.
 Rucha.F-ERG child.M-ACC lift-3SG.N
 ‘Rucha picked up the child.’

Subject case marking in finite realis clauses is not optional: switching an unmarked subject to an ergative one (or vice versa) results in ungrammaticality, as shown in (6)–(7). Note that in the ungrammatical examples, the verbal agreement morphology has been adjusted to conform to the expected pattern.

- (6) a. *əmol-ni ciḍ-lə.
 Amol.M-ERG get.angry-PFV.3SG.N
 Int: ‘Amol got angry.’
 b. *əmol polya laṭ-la.
 Amol.M roti.F.PL roll.out-PFV.3SG.M
 Int: ‘Amol rolled out rotis.’
- (7) a. *əmol-ni ciḍ-tə.
 Amol.M-ERG get.angry-IPFV.3SG.N
 Int: ‘Amol gets angry.’
 b. *əmol-ni polya laṭ-tat.
 Amol.M-ERG roti.F.PL roll.out-IPFV.3PL
 Int: ‘Amol rolls out rotis.’

To my knowledge, there are no genuine exceptions to the generalization that intransitive subjects are unmarked in Marathi finite realis clauses. In Hindi-Urdu, by contrast, a small class of intransitive verbs including *khāś* ‘cough’ and *ro* ‘cry’ optionally take ergative subjects. Ergative marking in these cases correlates with a more agentive or volitional construal of the subject (Kachru 1980; Davison 1999). The corresponding verbs in Marathi, however,

-
- (ii) a. ruca-ni [khiḍkya ughəḍ-ayla] sangit-lyā.
 Rucha.F-ERG window.F.PL open-NONFIN tell-PFV.3PL.F
 ‘Rucha said to open the windows.’
 b. ruca-ni sangit-lə/*lyā [ki khiḍkya ughəḍya ah-et.]
 Rucha.F-ERG tell-PFV.3SG.N/PFV.3PL.F C window.F.PL open.F.PL be.PRS-3PL
 ‘Rucha said that the windows are open.’

obligatorily take unmarked subjects (8). Thus, ergative marking in Marathi perfective realis clauses is strictly conditioned by transitivity.⁵

- (8) a. *baɭ(*-ani) khok-lə.*
 baby.N-ERG cough-PFV.3SG.N
 ‘The baby coughed.’
 b. *baɭ(*-ani) rəɖ-lə.*
 baby.N-ERG cry-PFV.3SG.N
 ‘The baby cried.’

2.3 Ergative case in modal clauses

A wide range of clauses which contain or are embedded under a modal display a non-standard pattern of subject case marking. For ease of exposition, I refer to these simply as modal clauses, although strictly speaking, the pattern does not extend to every clause in the scope of a modal.

In modal clauses, subjects of intransitive verbs may be unmarked or ergative-marked, while subjects of transitive verbs are uniformly ergative-marked. Agreement behaves as in finite realis clauses: ergative subjects, even with intransitive verbs, cannot control agreement. This pattern has been noted in the descriptive literature (Joshi 1900; Pandharipande 1998; Wali 2004; Dhongde and Wali 2009; Montaut 2016), but to my knowledge it has not been examined in detail. It is illustrated in (9)–(10) for clauses containing the weak necessity modal suffix *-aw*.⁶

- (9) a. *ruca ghər-i y-awi.*
 Rucha home-LOC come-WN.MOD.3SG.F
 ‘Rucha should come home.’
 b. *ruca-ni ghər-i y-awə.*
 Rucha-ERG home-LOC come-WN.MOD.3SG.N
 ‘Rucha should come home.’

⁵A few notionally transitive verbs allow or require unmarked subjects in the perfective aspect, such as *ga* ‘sing’ (obligatorily unmarked) and *mhəŋ* ‘say’ (optionally unmarked). These apparent exceptions have plausible explanations that do not undermine a transitivity-based characterization of ergative marking in the language. For instance, the notional objects of these verbs may be incorporated, or they may be modifiers rather than true arguments, as has been proposed for clauses embedded by speech verbs (Moulton 2009; Elliott 2020; Bondarenko 2022).

⁶This suffix has appeared under various labels in the literature, including subjunctive, optative, desiderative, and obligative (Dhongde and Wali 2009; Montaut 2016; Ozarkar 2020). I treat it as a modal because it occurs exclusively in modal statements and does not require the presence of another modal element. Section 3 develops a more detailed characterization of *-aw*.

- (10) a. *ruca ləkʃə dy-awi.
 Rucha attention give-WN.MOD.3SG.F
 Int: ‘Rucha should pay attention.’
 b. ruca-**ni** ləkʃə dy-awə.
 Rucha-ERG attention give-WN.MOD.3SG.N
 ‘Rucha should pay attention.’

Several different modals give rise to the same pattern, including *həwə* ‘wanted, should’ (11) and *pahije* ‘needed, must’ (12), which embed nonfinite clauses. Just as in *-aw* clauses, it is the subject thematically linked to the main (non-modal) predicate—in this case, the notional embedded subject—that participates in the case alternation.

- (11) a. mə-la ruca(-**ni**) ghər-i y-ayla **həwi/ə** ah-e.
 1SG-DAT Rucha-ERG home-LOC come-NONFIN wanted.SG.F/N be.PRS-SG
 ‘I want Rucha to come home.’
 b. mə-la ruca*(-**ni**) ləkʃə dy-ayla **həwə/i** ah-e.
 1SG-DAT Rucha-ERG attention give-NONFIN wanted.SG.N/F be.PRS-SG
 ‘I want Rucha to pay attention.’
- (12) a. ruca(-**ni**) ghər-i y-ayla **pahije**.
 Rucha-ERG home-LOC come-NONFIN must
 ‘Rucha must come home.’
 b. ruca*(-**ni**) ləkʃə dy-ayla **pahije**.
 Rucha-ERG attention give-NONFIN must
 ‘Rucha must pay attention.’

I introduce additional types of modal clauses with this case pattern in later sections.

The modal clauses presented so far differ from finite realis clauses in that they lack overt aspectual morphology. In the postverbal position where aspectual suffixes ordinarily appear, we instead find either the modal itself (as in (9)-(10)), or nonfinite morphology (as in (11)-(12)). The familiar generalization that ergative case in Marathi is restricted to the perfective aspect is therefore incomplete: ergative marking also occurs in modal clauses where overt aspect is absent. Interactions between overt aspectual morphology and modal clauses will be addressed in §6.2.2.

In sum, ergative marking in Marathi finite realis clauses is confined to perfective transitive subjects; all other subjects are obligatorily unmarked. In modal clauses, by contrast, ergative case is licensed even in the absence of overt aspect. It remains obligatory on transitive subjects, reflecting the continued relevance of transitivity, but becomes optionally available on intransitive subjects. The next section shows that this optionality is not unconstrained: the choice between ergative and unmarked subjects in intransitive modal clauses correlates systematically with a semantic contrast.

3 Correlations between case and interpretation

Subject case marking in Marathi modal clauses is sensitive to interpretation. The case alternation reflects two distinct alignment patterns—*standard ergative* and *extended ergative* (terminology from Dixon 1979)—licensed in different semantic contexts. Under the standard ergative pattern, subjects of intransitive verbs are unmarked while subjects of transitive verbs bear ergative case. Under the extended ergative pattern, the subject bears ergative case regardless of the verb’s valency. The two patterns are distinguishable with intransitive predicates but converge with transitive ones. Sections §3.1–§3.3 examine how different modal flavors and their subtypes restrict the availability of each pattern. I argue that extended ergative alignment arises when the subject is interpreted with a particular semantic role, which takes different guises depending on the modal flavor. Otherwise, the clause exhibits standard ergative alignment.

Examples in this section all contain the same modal, the verbal suffix *-aw*, which expresses weak necessity and is compatible with a wide range of modal flavors (glossed WN.MOD for ‘weak necessity modal’). I keep the modal constant to control for differences in interpretation that might otherwise arise from the semantics of the modals themselves. To my knowledge, the generalizations developed here extend equally to other modals that license the same case alternation. As a brief justification for classifying *-aw* as a weak necessity modal, consider (13). An *-aw* claim can be felicitously followed by the negation of a stronger necessity claim, indicating that it is weaker: if *-aw* expressed strong necessity, the subsequent denial would be contradictory (von Stechow 2008; Rubinstein 2012).

- (13) *tya-ni bhandi dhu-awit paṇ dhu-ayla-c pahije-t əsə nahi*
 3SG.M-ERG dishes wash-WN.MOD.3PL.N but wash-NONFIN-EMPH must-PL SO NEG
ah-e.
 be.PRS-SG
 ‘He should wash the dishes but he doesn’t have to.’

At the same time, *-aw* is stronger than a possibility modal. Unlike possibility modals, it does not permit the conjunction of mutually exclusive propositions (Rubinstein 2012); instead, such conjunctions result in contradiction (14).

- (14) *#tya-ni mula-la aṇ-awə aṇi mula-la ghər-i*
 3SG.M-ERG child-ACC bring-WN.MOD.SG.N and child-ACC home-LOC
ṭhew-awə.
 keep-WN.MOD.SG.N
 ‘He should bring the child and he should leave the child at home.’

A final preliminary point concerns the temporal interpretation of *-aw*. In the absence of overt aspectual morphology, *-aw* is construed with future orientation in verbal clauses and present or future orientation in copular clauses, as the upcoming examples will illustrate.

Since the temporal interpretation of modal clauses is not a focus of this chapter, I simply note this generalization without attempting to derive it.

3.1 Epistemic readings

Modal *-aw* permits epistemic interpretations. As (15)–(16) show, intransitive subjects are obligatorily unmarked in epistemic statements; ergative marking is infelicitous.⁷

- (15) *Context: I see that Rucha's house lights are on around the time she usually gets home from work. I conclude:*

- a. ruca ghər-i əs-aw-i.
Rucha house-LOC be-WN.MOD.3SG.F
'Rucha should be home.'
- b. #ruca-ni ghər-i əs-aw-ə.
Rucha-ERG house-LOC be-WN.MOD.3SG.N

- (16) *Context: You are watching a competitive swimming race. You don't want Gauri to win and you don't think it would be fair for her to win, but still you predict she'll win. When asked to comment on the outcome of the race, you answer:*

- a. (majha əndaz ah-e ki) gəwri jink-awi.
1SG.GEN estimate be.PRS-SG C Gauri win-WN.MOD.SG.F
'(My estimate is that) Gauri should win.'
- b. #(majha əndaz ah-e ki) gəwri-ni jink-awə.
1SG.GEN estimate be.PRS-SG C Gauri-ERG win-WN.MOD.SG.N

In epistemic statements with transitive predicates, the subject must bear ergative case (17). The unmarked variant is not merely infelicitous but ungrammatical: under no scenario is an unmarked transitive subject acceptable.

- (17) *Context: Amol usually calls you every week. You don't care for his calls or think he needs to call you. Since it's been about a week since your last call, you think:*

- a. tya-ni puḍh-cya kahi diwəs-at phon kər-awa.
3SG.M-ERG ahead-GEN some days-LOC phone do-WN.MOD.SG.M
'He should call in the next few days.'

⁷Intransitive subjects *can* surface with ergative case in statements expressing predictions, but I take these to be root rather than epistemic statements. Ergative marking becomes acceptable precisely when the speaker's prediction aligns with their wishes or assessment of what is fair, normal, or manageable in view of the circumstances. For example, (16b) can be used (especially when the parenthetical component is omitted) to convey the prediction that Gauri will win in a scenario where the speaker also wants her to win or considers that outcome to be right.

- b. *to pudh-cya kahi diwəs-at phon kər-awa.
 3SG.M ahead-GEN some days-LOC phone do-WN.MOD.SG.M

In other words, subject case marking in aspectless epistemic modal clauses follows the standard ergative pattern, as summarized in Table 2.1.

	Epistemic
Intransitive subject	∅
Transitive subject	ERG

Table 2.1: Subject case in epistemic modal clauses

3.2 Deontic and teleological readings

Modal *-aw* is also compatible with a range of root modal interpretations, including deontic and teleological readings. These divide into two categories with respect to subject case marking, along the lines of the *ought-to-do/ought-to-be* contrast.

The *ought-to-do/ought-to-be* distinction has a long history in the philosophy literature (e.g. Chisholm 1964; Feldman 1986) and was brought into linguistic theory by Brennan (1993). *Ought-to-do* statements express both that a certain eventuality ought to hold and that some individual is obligated to bring it about. *Ought-to-be* statements, on the other hand, merely express that an event or state ought to hold, without obligating any particular individual. Early accounts ascribing control structures to deontic modals restrict their attention to *ought-to-do* statements, perhaps because they are the more frequent or salient subtype. Brennan (1993), considering both subtypes, argues that *ought-to-do* statements have control structures, while *ought-to-be* statements pattern with epistemics in having raising structures. Although the *ought-to-do/ought-to-be* distinction is typically discussed in connection with deontic modality, it extends naturally to teleological readings as well: in both cases, we can distinguish contexts in which the subject is held responsible for ensuring that the relevant rules or goals are satisfied from those in which no such responsibility is attributed.

In Marathi, *ought-to-do* statements exhibit the extended ergative pattern: the subject bears ergative case regardless of whether the predicate is transitive or intransitive. Examples (18) and (19) illustrate the intransitive cases under teleological and deontic readings, respectively. In both examples, the context indicates that the requirement is directed at the subject, enforcing an *ought-to-do* interpretation.

- (18) *Context (teleological): Rucha is sick and wants to get better quickly. The doctor passes on the following advice for her:*

- a. təbyət bəri ho-ŋya-saṭhi ruca-**ni** bhərpur jhop-awə.
health well become-INF-for Rucha-ERG plenty sleep-WN.MOD.SG.N
'In order to get better, Rucha should sleep plenty.'
- b. #təbyət bəri ho-ŋya-saṭhi ruca bhərpur jhop-awi.
health well become-INF-for Rucha plenty sleep-WN.MOD.SG.F

- (19) *Context (deontic): You are discussing the daily routines that your teacher has instructed everyone to follow. You say:*

- a. gurujin-cya adefa-prəmaṇe sərwan-**ni** pəhaṭ-e uṭh-awə.
guru.RESP-GEN order-as.per all-ERG dawn-LOC rise-WN.MOD.SG.N
'As per the Guru's instructions, everyone should wake up at dawn.'
- b. #gurujin-cya adefa-prəmaṇe sərwə pəhaṭ-e uṭh-awet.
guru.RESP-GEN order-as.per all dawn-LOC rise-WN.MOD.3PL

Example (20) presents a parallel transitive *ought-to-do* statement, where ergative marking remains obligatory, and an unmarked subject results in ungrammaticality.

- (20) *Context (deontic): A school has introduced a new uniform. Students are encouraged to begin wearing it tomorrow. The official announcement reads:*

- a. udyā-pasun sərwan-**ni** nəwin gəṇəvef ɣhal-awet.
tomorrow-from all-ERG new uniform.PL wear-WN.MOD.3PL
'Starting tomorrow, everyone should wear the new uniforms.'
- b. *udyā-pasun sərwə nəwin gəṇəvef ɣhal-awet.
tomorrow-from all new uniform.PL wear-WN.MOD.3PL

Ought-to-be statements, by contrast, pattern with epistemic statements in their case-marking behavior. They display standard ergative alignment, where intransitive subjects are obligatorily unmarked, as in (21), and transitive subjects obligatorily bear ergative case, as in (22). These *ought-to-be* examples state a requirement or ideal outcome without directing responsibility to any particular individual.

- (21) *Context: You believe that in a law abiding society, criminals ought to be caught and punished by the authorities. For example...* (Adapted from Hacquard 2006)

- a. khuni lokə turung-at ja-wet.
murderous people prison-LOC go-WN.MOD.3PL
'Murderers should go to prison.'
- b. #khuni lokan-**ni** turung-at ja-wə.
murderous people-ERG prison-LOC go-WN.MOD.3SG.N

(22) *Context: You believe that society should move away from marriage practices in which families choose partners on individuals' behalf. You think that in an ideal society...*

- a. maṇṣa-**ni** aḷya pəsənti-cya vyəkṭi-ḷi ləgnə kər-awə.
 man-ERG REFL.GEN liking-GEN person-COM marriage do-WN.MOD.SG.N
 'A person should marry who they choose.'
- b. *maṇṣ aḷya pəsənti-cya vyəkṭi-ḷi ləgnə kər-awa.
 man REFL.GEN liking-GEN person-COM marriage do-WN.MOD.SG.M

The distribution of ergative and unmarked subjects across deontic and teleological root modal contexts is summarized in Table 2.2.

	Deontic/teleological	
	<i>Ought-to-do</i>	<i>Ought-to-be</i>
Intransitive subject	ERG	Ø
Transitive subject	ERG	ERG

Table 2.2: Subject case in deontic and teleological modal clauses

3.3 Bouletic readings

Modal *-aw* also occurs in bouletic statements expressing wishes or desires. As with other root readings, bouletic readings give rise to a split in subject case marking. This split tracks two subtypes of bouletic interpretation that differ in the subject's relation to the desired eventuality, paralleling the *ought-to-be/ought-to-do* contrast. I refer to these as the *may-it-be* and *make-it-be* readings.

The *may-it-be* reading expresses a wish for an eventuality to hold, with no further implication concerning the subject. In English, optative *may* appears to be restricted to this interpretation. The sentence in (23), for example, expresses a wish for an outcome in which the subject remains calm, without holding her responsible for that outcome. If the intended wish is instead for the subject to manage her behavior so as to remain calm, (23) is not the most appropriate choice.

(23) May she remain calm!

The *make-it-be* reading, on the other hand, expresses a wish not only for an eventuality to hold, but also for the subject to participate in bringing it about. English *want*-clauses are compatible with both bouletic subtypes. For instance, (24) is true in a situation where Amol hopes only for the outcome of his dog remaining calm (the *may-it-be* reading), and one where he wishes specifically for his dog to behave in a way that keeps her calm (the *make-it-be* reading).

- (24) Amol wants his dog to remain calm.

May-it-be bouletic statements in Marathi exhibit the standard ergative pattern, like epistemic and *ought-to-be* statements, while *make-it-be* bouletic statements follow the extended ergative pattern, aligning with *ought-to-do* statements. The distinction between these readings is subtle; many contexts are compatible with both, creating the impression of optional subject case marking. However, in targeted scenarios where the subject is incapable of bringing about the desired eventuality, or on the other hand, explicitly expected to do so, the contrast becomes clear. Example (25) isolates the *may-it-be* reading: the speaker expresses a malicious wish for a negative outcome beyond anyone's control, least of all the subject's. Given the intransitive predicate, the subject is obligatorily unmarked.

- (25) Context: *Someone wishes of their enemy...*

- a. ti weḍi wha-wi!
 3SG.F crazy.F be-WN.MOD.3SG.F
 'May she go crazy!'
- b. #ti-**ni** weḍə wha-wə!
 3SG.F-ERG crazy.F be-WN.MOD.3SG.N

A transitive target sentence in a *may-it-be* scenario requires an ergative subject (26).⁸

- (26) Context: *You're returning your foster cat to the shelter before leaving for vacation. You don't know the shelter workers but you imagine they are overworked, so you have no particular expectations for their actions. You just pray that...*

- a. tyan-**ni** ti-ci niṭ kalji ghy-awi.
 3PL-ERG 3SG.F-GEN proper care take-WN.MOD.SG.F
 'May they take good care of her.'
- b. *te ti-ci niṭ kalji ghy-awet.
 3PL 3SG.F-GEN proper care take-WN.MOD.3PL

To isolate the *make-it-be* reading, we must consider contexts in which the speaker's wish includes the subject taking action toward realizing the desired eventuality. In (27), for instance, Rucha has previously asked Amol to laugh at her joke, and she now hopes that he complies with this request. Here, the intransitive subject must bear ergative case. The variant with an unmarked subject in (27b) would instead be felicitous in a context where the speaker wishes for Amol to laugh spontaneously, or where the spontaneity of the laughter is irrelevant.

⁸Dhongde and Wali (2009) describe *may-it-be* bouletic clauses formed with *-aw* as instances of an "optative mood" and report that this mood is restricted to intransitive predicates (p. 205). Example (26) shows that the *may-it-be* reading is also available with transitive predicates; it simply triggers different subject case marking. This reading may be easier to overlook with transitive predicates because it is expressed by the same surface string as the *make-it-be* reading.

- (27) *Context: Rucha has asked Amol to make her look good by laughing when she tells a joke at a party. She would say...*

- a. *tya-ni həs-awə (əʃi ma-jhi iccha ah-e).*
 3SG.M-ERG laugh-WN.MOD.3SG.N SO 1SG-GEN wish be.PRS-SG
 ‘(It’s my wish that) he should laugh.’
- b. *#to həs-awa (əʃi ma-jhi iccha ah-e).*
 3SG.M laugh-WN.MOD.3SG.M SO 1SG-GEN wish be.PRS-SG

A *make-it-be* transitive clause, like all other transitive clauses we have seen, requires an ergative marked subject (28).

- (28) *Context: Amol asks Rucha to drive him to the airport. He hopes she’ll say yes so that he doesn’t have to figure out parking.*

- a. *ruca-ni əmol-la wimantə[a-la nya-wə (əʃi tya-ci iccha*
Rucha-ERG Amol-ACC airport-DAT take-WN.MOD.3SG.N SO 3SG.M-GEN wish
ah-e).
be.PRS-SG
 ‘(It’s his wish that) Rucha should take Amol to the airport.’
- b. **ruca əmol-la wimantə[a-la nya-wi.*
Rucha Amol-ACC airport-DAT take-WN.MOD.3SG.F

The subject case marking patterns in bouletic clauses are summarized in Table 2.3.

	Bouletic	
	<i>May-it-be</i>	<i>Make-it-be</i>
Intransitive subject	Ø	ERG
Transitive subject	ERG	ERG

Table 2.3: Subject case in bouletic modal clauses

3.4 Section summary

Table 2.4 presents the subject case marking patterns observed across all flavors. The extended ergative pattern surfaces in *ought-to-do* and *make-it-be* statements—both root modal subtypes in which the subject is interpreted with an additional semantic role. Generalizing across readings, the subject’s role can be characterized as that of a *responsible actor*, or *R.A.* for short: an individual who—according to the relevant rules, goals, or desires—is responsible for bringing about the eventuality. By contrast, the standard ergative pattern occurs

in epistemic, *ought-to-be*, and *may-it-be* statements, which do not attribute responsibility to the subject.

	Epistemic (subject $\neq$ R.A.)	Root	
		subject $\neq$ R.A.	subject = R.A.
Intransitive subject	$\emptyset$	$\emptyset$	ERG
Transitive subject	ERG	ERG	ERG

Table 2.4: Subject case across modal clauses

I will refer to the special interpretation of subjects in extended ergative clauses as the *R.A.* semantic role. This is a purely descriptive label—not a claim about the mechanism that gives rise to the interpretation. In particular, I do not assume that *R.A.* is a syntactically represented theta role, although I consider that possibility in the next section. Prior work has characterized the semantic role associated with (some) deontic subjects using obligation-based labels such as *bearer of obligation* or *obligee* (Bhatt 1998; Wurmbrand 1999). I intend the *R.A.* role to be a more general notion, subsuming the *bearer of obligation* role while extending to other root modal flavors. Obligation-based terminology does not readily carry over to bouletic statements, as wishes do not impose obligations. Responsibility, by contrast, is broad enough to apply across root flavors: in deontic and bouletic contexts alike, one can identify an individual who is responsible for compliance with a rule or for the realization of a wish.

4 The structure of Marathi modal clauses

The extended ergative case marking pattern in Marathi correlates systematically with the subject’s construal as an *R.A.* On the assumption that case marking reflects syntactic structure—for instance, the presence of a case-assigning head or another nominal in a relevant position—this correlation implies a structural difference between clauses with and without an *R.A.* subject. It follows that a purely pragmatic account of how this role is assigned, as Bhatt (1998) proposes for the *bearer of obligation* role in English modal clauses, cannot be maintained for Marathi. The next two subsections, §4.1 and §4.2, evaluate whether the two case marking patterns reduce to a raising–control contrast, along the lines of Brennan’s (1993) account. The diagnostics yield mixed results, motivating the novel proposal in §4.3.

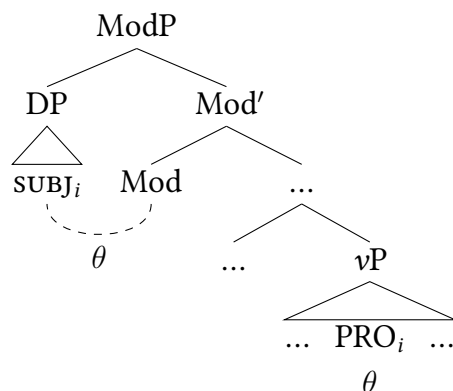
4.1 Evidence in favor of a raising–control distinction

The patterns discussed in §3 raise the possibility that the Marathi case split reflects a raising–control distinction among modal clauses, as in the classic analysis (Jackendoff 1972; Brennan 1993, a.o.). To evaluate this hypothesis, I first spell out how the classic analysis would be

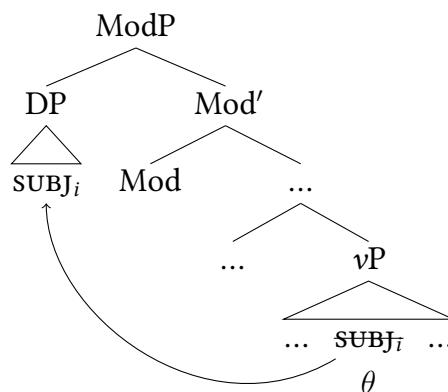
formulated under more current assumptions. Each modal that participates in the case alternation would have two underlying variants: a control variant, which introduces the subject in its specifier and assigns it a theta role, and a raising variant, which assigns no theta role. Assuming a non-movement theory of control,⁹ the subject in the control structure would bind PRO in the highest argument position of the ν P. PRO would receive its theta role from the embedded predicate (*agent* with transitive and unergative predicates; *patient/theme* with unaccusative predicates). Meanwhile the subject in the raising structure would originate inside the ν P, receive its theta role there, and undergo athematic movement to Spec,ModP. The hypothesized configurations are schematized in (29).

(29) *Modal control and raising structures under the classic analysis*

a. Control structure



b. Raising structure



If this analysis is correct for Marathi, then modal clauses with extended ergative alignment instantiate the control structure in (29a), while those with standard ergative alignment instantiate the raising structure in (29b). The *R.A.* construal of subjects in extended ergative clauses then follows straightforwardly: the theta role assigned to the subject by the control variant of the modal is simply the *R.A.* role. This analysis initially seems promising, receiving support from symmetric predicates and subject idiom chunks.

4.1.1 Evidence from symmetric predicates

Symmetric predicates, like *shake hands with*, *date*, and *be as tall as*, describe inherently reciprocal relations. The truth of basic sentences containing them is therefore insensitive to argument order. A raising predicate is expected to preserve symmetry, but a control predicate is not; the latter attributes additional properties to the argument it introduces, disrupting the

⁹On a movement theory of control (Hornstein 1999; Boeckx and Hornstein 2004; Boeckx et al. 2010, a.o.), the analysis would be reformulated as follows: in both the raising and control structures, the subject originates within ν P and raises to Spec,ModP, but in control structure, the modal also assigns the moved subject an additional theta role.

equivalence. In Marathi modal clauses with intransitive symmetric predicates, we find that an unmarked subject preserves symmetry¹⁰—yielding mutual entailment between (30a) and (30b)—but an ergative subject disturbs it, so neither (31a) entails (31b) nor vice versa. This result is unsurprising in light of the data discussed so far: it simply confirms that extended ergative subjects carry additional semantic entailments that standard ergative subjects do not.

(30) *Mutual entailment: (30a) ⇔ (30b)*

- a. ruca əmol-bərobər y-awi.
Rucha Amol-with come-WN.MOD.3SG.F
'It is likely/right/desirable for Rucha to come with Amol.'
- b. əmol ruca-bərobər y-awa.
Amol Rucha-with come-WN.MOD.3SG.M
'It is likely/right/desirable for Amol to come with Rucha.'

(31) *No entailment: (31a) ⇏ (31b); (31b) ⇏ (31a)*

- a. ruca-ni əmol-bərobər y-awə.
Rucha-ERG Amol-with come-WN.MOD.3SG.N
'Rucha should come with Amol.'
- b. əmol-ni ruca-bərobər y-awə.
Amol-ERG Rucha-with come-WN.MOD.3SG.N
'Amol should come with Rucha.'

The truth-conditional distinction between (31a) and (31b) is clearest in scenarios like the following. Suppose Amol's parents have a rule for Amol that he must walk home from school with an older student, but they do not require any particular older student to accompany him. On a day when the only older student walking his way is Rucha, (31b) is true, as the rule bears on Amol and can only be satisfied if he walks with her; however, (31a) need not be true, since the rule imposes no requirement on Rucha.

4.1.2 Evidence from idiom connectivity

Another well-established diagnostic for distinguishing raising from control is idiom connectivity. Idiomatic meanings are taken to be non-compositional, associated with the idiom as a whole rather than derived from the ordinary meanings of its parts. An idiomatic reading is therefore available only when the idiom's components are generated together within a single domain and no syntactic dependency forces one component to be construed independently. With sentential idioms, raising preserves connectivity, since the subject originates inside the ν P with the rest of the idiom, and receives no additional theta role in its higher

¹⁰Some minor asymmetries remain, since reversing the arguments affects information structure (e.g. which participant is foregrounded or backgrounded) but the two sentences are truth-conditionally equivalent.

position. Control, by contrast, disrupts idiom connectivity, either because the controller is introduced outside the idiomatic unit (on non-movement theories of control) or because the control predicate imposes an additional thematic requirement on the subject, forcing it to be interpreted independently (on any theory of control).

In Marathi, standard ergative modal clauses preserve idiomatic readings, while extended ergative clauses disrupt them, again suggesting a raising/control split. I illustrate this with the idiom in (32).¹¹ Though the idiom contains a possessor gap (filled here by a third person plural pronoun), crucially, the subject is an invariable part of the idiom. The aspectual suffix on the main verb is not fixed; the expression retains its figurative meaning across tenses and aspects.

- (32) ləkʃmi tyan-cya ghər-i calət a-li.
 Laxmi 3PL-GEN house-LOC walking come-PFV.3SG.F
 Fig ✓: ‘They acquired wealth easily.’
 Lit ✓: ‘Laxmi came walking to their house.’

The idiom can be incorporated into a modal clause by replacing the aspectual suffix with modal *-aw*. The idiomatic interpretation is preserved as long as the subject remains unmarked, i.e. under standard ergative alignment (33a); it is lost when the subject bears ergative case, i.e. under extended ergative alignment (33b). (I focus on bouletic readings in the example translations, which are most natural with this idiom.)

- (33) a. ləkʃmi tyan-cya ghər-i calət y-awi.
 Laxmi 3PL-GEN house-LOC walking come-WN.MOD.3SG.F
 Fig ✓: ‘May they acquire wealth easily.’
 Lit ✓: ‘May Laxmi come walking to their house.’
 b. ləkʃmi-ni tyan-cya ghər-i calət y-awə.
 Lakshmi-ERG 3PL-GEN house-LOC walking come-WN.MOD.3SG.N
 Fig ✗: ‘(It’s my wish that) they should acquire wealth easily.’
 Lit ✓: ‘(It’s my wish that) Laxmi should come walking to their house.’

4.2 A challenge to the classic analysis: Subjects originate low

Other diagnostics provide evidence against the classic raising–control analysis, showing that modal subjects either occur in or can reconstruct to a position *below* the modal, regardless of case. This indicates that extended ergative subjects are not introduced, or assigned an additional theta role, as high as the specifier of the modal.

¹¹Laxmi is the Hindu goddess of wealth, and her symbolic arrival to one’s home signals good fortune. While the expression’s origins are mythologically literal, the participial modifier *calət* ‘walking’ makes clear that its use in ordinary discourse is idiomatic: speakers are not typically describing what they believe to be an event of the goddess physically walking to someone’s home.

4.2.1 Evidence from scope

The scope of a quantified subject relative to a modal can diagnose whether the subject's thematic position lies above or below the modal. If the subject originates in Spec,ModP or receives an additional theta role in that position, as in the classic modal control analysis, it should be unable to take scope below the modal.¹² In Marathi, however, quantified subjects of intransitive modal clauses can take narrow scope with respect to the modal, regardless of their case. In (34), the existentially quantified subject *kahi mulə* 'some children' admits both narrow and wide scope readings with respect to weak necessity *-aw*, whether the subject is unmarked (34a) or ergative (34b).

- (34) a. *kahi mulə dusrya ja[-et ja-we.*
 some children second school-LOC go-WN.MOD.3PL
 'It ought to be/May it be that some children go to a different school.'
- b. *kahi mulan-ni dusrya ja[-et ja-wə.*
 some children-ERG second school-LOC go-WN.MOD.SG.N
 'Some children should go to a different school.'

Readings for (a)–(b):

- ($\exists > \forall$) ✓: The speaker wants certain misbehaving children to go to a different school.
 ($\forall > \exists$) ✓: The speaker wants some (any) children to go to a different school because the school is over-enrolled.

The availability of the narrow scope reading suggests that the subject's highest thematic position lies below the modal in both case marking patterns.

4.2.2 Evidence from scrambling

Evidence from scrambling further supports the view that modal subjects, regardless of their case, are not thematic arguments of the modal. This diagnostic applies to biclausal modal constructions like those formed with *həwə əsɳə* 'to be wanted', which embed a nonfinite clause. Support for the biclausality of this construction comes from its ability to host two temporal adverbs, as in (35). In this example, the case-alternating 'modal subject' is the notional embedded subject (*Rucha*). The construction also contains a dative-marked 'wanter' argument (1SG), which I refer to as the experiencer or attitude holder.

- (35) *kal mə-la ruca(-ni) aj nigh-ayla həwi/ə ho-ti/ə.*
 yesterday 1SG-DAT Ruca-ERG today leave-NONFIN wanted.AGR be-PST.AGR
 'Yesterday, I wanted Rucha to leave today.'

¹²How this prediction is derived depends on the theory of control. On non-movement analyses, it follows straightforwardly from the absence of a lower copy of the controller. Movement analyses require an additional restriction, such as the stipulation that movement to a theta position does not reconstruct; see Lyutikova (2025) for discussion.

Let us consider two possible parses for *həwə əʃə* constructions, differing in the position of the modal subject. On one parse, this nominal is in the embedded clause (36a); on the other, it is a matrix argument that controls PRO in the embedded subject position (36b).¹³ If the modal subject is ever a thematic argument of the modal, it should, in those instances, occupy a matrix position as in (36b).

- (36) a. [EXPER-DAT [nonfinite **SUBJ**(-ERG) (OBJ) V] modal]
 b. [EXPER-DAT **SUBJ**_i(-ERG) [nonfinite PRO_i (OBJ) V] modal]

Scrambling offers a way to tell these two structures apart. Marathi generally allows embedded nonfinite clauses to scramble to sentence initial position. This property can be used to identify clause boundaries: elements that must be included in the fronted constituent belong to the embedded clause, while those that can remain behind are external to it. Applying this test to biclausal modal constructions, we find that the embedded subject obligatorily fronts with the embedded clause, whether it is ergative or unmarked (37a). Fronting the remainder of the clause while leaving the embedded subject in situ is ungrammatical (37b).

- (37) a. [**ruca**-(**ni**) ləwkər nigh-ayla] mə-la həwi/ə ah-e.
 Rucha-ERG soon leave-NONFIN 1SG-DAT wanted.SG.F/N be.PRS-SG
 b. *[ləwkər nigh-ayla] mə-la **ruca**-(**ni**) həwi/ə ah-e.
 soon leave-NONFIN 1SG-DAT Rucha-ERG want.SG.F/N be.PRS-SG
 ‘I want Rucha to leave soon.’

Genuine object control constructions, as a point of comparison, allow the argument thematically linked to the embedded subject position to remain in situ when the embedded clause is fronted. Example (38a) illustrates the baseline word order and hypothesized control relation for one such construction, and (38b) shows that the nonfinite clause can scramble to the left edge independently of the dative-marked controller. This is consistent with the controller being a matrix argument.

- (38) a. mi ruca_i-la [PRO_i (ləwkər) nigh-ayla] sangit-lə.
 1SG Rucha-DAT soon leave-NONFIN tell-PFV.3SG.N
 b. [PRO_i (ləwkər) nigh-ayla] mi ruca_i-la sangit-lə.
 soon leave-NONFIN 1SG Rucha-DAT tell-PFV.3SG.N
 ‘I told Rucha to leave (soon).’

The fact that the notional embedded subject in biclausal modal configurations does not replicate this behavior suggests that it is genuinely part of the embedded clause.

¹³I do not take a position on whether the controller would be a matrix subject or object in this configuration. The answer would depend on the structural position of the dative experiencer, which I leave unanalyzed.

4.2.3 Evidence from opaque readings

A further argument that modal subjects occupy a position below the modal comes from opaque readings in the same *həwə əʃə* ‘to be wanted’ construction. In (39), the notional embedded subject permits an opaque (de dicto) construal, where the restrictor *Canadian* is evaluated with respect to the attitude holder’s bouletic alternatives, regardless of whether the clause shows standard or extended ergative alignment. Accordingly, the sentence can be judged true even if there is no actual Canadian competitor in the race. This reading would be unexpected if the notional embedded subject were introduced outside the scope of the attitude predicate; nominals merged outside of attitude clauses (e.g. proleptic objects) are reported to disallow de dicto construals (Salzmann 2017; Deal 2018; Dawson and Deal 2019).¹⁴ Both sentences in (39) also allow transparent (here, de re) readings in which the restrictor is evaluated with respect to the matrix evaluation world. However, the availability of transparent readings is not diagnostic of the subject’s syntactic position: several mechanisms have been proposed to derive transparent interpretations of expressions embedded under attitude predicates (e.g. covert *res*-movement, (Heim 1994), indexed world variables (Percus 2000), replacement/substitution (Schwager 2009; Sudo 2014)).

(39) *Context: Amol is watching the Olympic 10km swimming championship.*

- a. əmol-la (ek) kəneḍiyən maṛus jink-ayla həwə ah-e.
Amol-DAT one Canadian man win-NONFIN wanted be.PRS-SG
- b. əmol-la (eka) kəneḍiyən maṛsa-ni jink-ayla həwə ah-e.
Amol-DAT one Canadian man-ERG win-NONFIN wanted be.PRS-SG

‘Amol wants a Canadian person to win.’

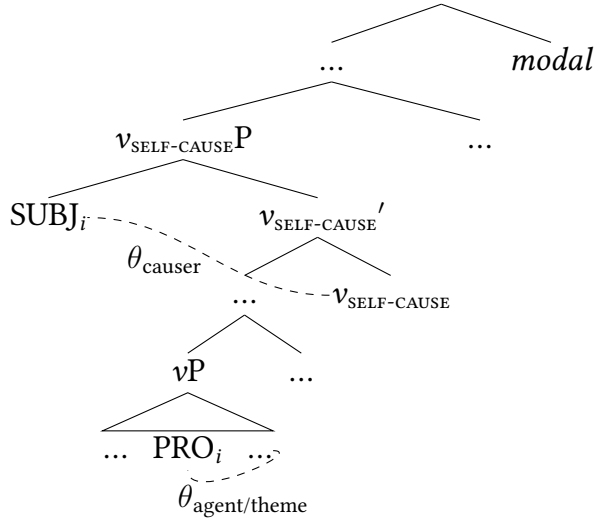
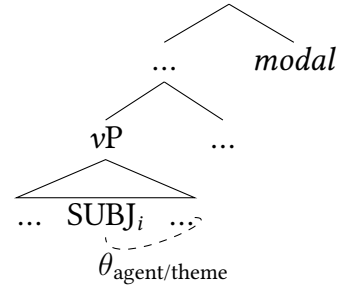
Classic de dicto ✓: Amol would like for a Canadian swimmer to win, though he has no one particular in mind. In fact, there is no Canadian in the race.

Classic de re ✓: There is a particular swimmer who Amol hopes will win. He thinks that swimmer is from Denmark, but in fact he is from Canada.

4.3 Proposal: A lower locus for the control dependency

Two properties of extended ergative subjects must be reconciled: they are associated with specific semantic entailments, and their (highest) thematic position lies below the modal. I propose that extended ergative clauses instantiate a control configuration in which the control predicate is not the modal, but a lower functional head; meanwhile, standard ergative clauses do not involve control. This proposal preserves the intuition from the classic analysis that some root modal clauses introduce an additional thematic dependency, but relocates its source to a lower position.

¹⁴Tsilia (2023) claims that proleptic objects can be read de dicto in an attitudinal construction in Modern Greek, but in more recent work Tsilia (2025) argues that these objects remain within the scope of the attitude predicate.

(40) a. Extended ERG: Low controlb. Standard ERG: No control

I take the control predicate to be a functional head $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$, present in extended but not standard ergative clauses. This head introduces a nominal argument and identifies it as a causer of the eventuality described by the lower vP . The $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}P$ projection also establishes a control dependency between that causer and the highest argument position in the lower vP , enforced by the semantics of $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$ (spelled out in §5.2). The label ‘self-cause’ thus reflects the contribution of $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$: it introduces a causer who is simultaneously a core participant in the caused event. On this account, *R.A.* is not a theta role assigned by the modal; rather, the *R.A.* construal arises when the causer role introduced by $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$ is interpreted across modal alternatives. The underlying intuition is that requiring or desiring that the subject stand in a causal relation to the vP eventuality amounts to attributing responsibility to that subject for bringing the eventuality about; §5.2 makes this semantic proposal explicit.

Syntactically, I represent the control dependency as a binding relationship between the causer and PRO in the lower vP .¹⁵ PRO receives its theta role within the vP , where it may be an agent (with transitive or unergative predicates) or a patient/theme (with unaccusative predicates). Meanwhile, in standard ergative clauses, the subject itself originates within the vP and receives its usual theta role there. Whereas the classic analysis treats modals as lexically ambiguous, the current analysis locates the ambiguity in a different part of the structure—namely, in the presence or absence of $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}P$.

I assume that in both configurations the subject undergoes further athematic movement to a higher position, such as Spec,TP, since there is no evidence that one type of subject ends up structurally higher than the other. Both control and non-control subjects can bind the subject-oriented reflexive *swātaha*, as shown in (41) (for evidence of subject orientation, see Wali 2000). If the ability to bind a subject-oriented reflexive diagnoses structural

¹⁵Nothing in the discussion so far hinges on a non-movement analysis of control. However, in Section 6 I argue that a non-movement implementation yields a more elegant analysis of ergative case.

subjecthood—in particular, whether a nominal occupies a sufficiently high A-position (e.g. Poole 2016)—then this pattern suggests that both types of subjects occur in similarly high positions in the clause.

- (41) a. *ruca swətaha-cya kam-at ruḷ-awī.*
 Rucha REFL-GEN work-LOC settle.in-WN.MOD.3SG.F
 b. *ruca-nī swətaha-cya kam-at ruḷ-awə.*
 Rucha-ERG REFL-GEN work-LOC settle.in-WN.MOD.3SG.N
 ‘Rucha_i should settle into her_i new work quickly.’

The position of TP relative to the modal may vary by modal type. The weak necessity suffix *-aw* is part of the extended verbal projection and may surface below TP, as is commonly assumed for root modals (Cinque 1999; Hacquard 2006, a.o.). Modal predicates like *həwə* (*əsnə*) ‘(to be) wanted, should’, on the other hand, embed a full nonfinite clause containing the case-alternating subject. Assuming these nonfinite clauses project TP, the modal predicate must be higher than the embedded TP. The possible configurations after subject movement are represented in (42) and (43).

(42) Extended ERG (revised from (40a)): Low control + raising to Spec,TP

a. *TP is above the modal*

... [TP SUBJ_i ... [modalP ... [v_{SELF-CAUSE}P SUBJ_i ... [vP ... PRO_i ...] ...] ...] ...



b. *TP is below the modal*

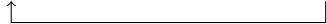
... [modalP ... [TP SUBJ_i ... [v_{SELF-CAUSE}P SUBJ_i ... [vP ... PRO_i ...] ...] ...] ...



(43) Standard ERG (revised from (40b)): No control + raising to Spec,TP

a. *TP is above the modal*

... [TP SUBJ_i ... [modalP ... [vP ... SUBJ_i ...] ...] ...] ...



b. *TP is below the modal*

... [modalP ... [TP SUBJ_i ... [vP ... SUBJ_i ...] ...] ...] ...



5 Refining the analysis: Interpretation and licensing

This section expands on two components of the analysis: the semantic contribution of $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$, and the source of its restricted distribution. I first lay out additional empirical properties that the analysis of $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$ must capture in §5.1, then present a formal analysis in §5.2. Finally, I compare the proposal to alternatives in §5.3.

5.1 Semantic properties of $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$

Before turning to the semantic analysis, I discuss three further interpretive properties of modal control clauses: the animacy restriction on subjects, the dissociation between extended ergative case and vP -agenthood, and the absence of temporal restrictions on the causing event.

5.1.1 Animacy restriction on extended ergative subjects

The extended ergative pattern is generally unavailable with inanimate modal subjects, as illustrated in (44).¹⁶

- (44) dar(#-ani) bəndə wh-aw-ə.
 door-ERG closed become-WN.MOD-3SG.N
 ‘The door should close.’

This restriction suggests that extended ergative subjects are not merely causers, but required to be capable of volitional action.

5.1.2 Independence of extended ergative case and vP -agenthood

The subject’s thematic role within the vP is independent of its case marking: vP -agenthood is neither necessary nor sufficient for licensing extended ergative alignment. First, unaccusative subjects can bear ergative case in modal clauses, both in copular clauses (45) and with unaccusative verbs like *mər* ‘die’ (46).

- (45) माणसाने सुई सारखं असावं टोचणारं पण जोडणारं.
 maṇsa-**ne** sui sarkhə əs-awə tɔc-ṇarə pəṇ joḍ-ṇarə.
 man-ERG needle like be-WN.MOD.3SG.N prick-PTCP but join-PTCP
 ‘A person should be like a needle, pricking but joining (things together).’
 Source: A short motivational video¹⁷

¹⁶There are apparent exceptions: nouns denoting natural forces (e.g. *paus* ‘rain’, *wara* ‘wind’, *wadaḷ* ‘storm’, *nədi* ‘river’) and vehicles (e.g. *gaḍi* ‘car’) sometimes permit extended ergative marking (iii). I assume that these cases involve either personification (e.g. a river construed as volitional) or metonymy (e.g. a car standing for its driver or occupants).

(iii) nədi(-ni) wah-at rah-aw-i/ə.
 river-ERG flow-IPFV keep-WN.MOD-AGR
 ‘I hope the river keeps flowing.’

¹⁷<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/R3QMHnyBqjs?app=desktop>

- (46) mār-aycə tər [maŋsa-nə] jəy bhim gərj-ət mār-awə.
 die-NONFIN then man-ERG victory Bhim roar-IPFV.CVB die-WN.MOD.3SG.N
 ‘If one is to die, then one should die shouting “Jai Bhim”.’¹⁸
 Source: A Marathi song¹⁹

An unaccusative subject bearing ergative case is not construed as the agent of the *vP* eventuality. In (46), for instance, the obligation is not for the subject to be the agent of the dying event, i.e. to kill themselves. Rather, the sentence conveys that, given the contextual premise that death is inevitable, one ought to die righteously, fighting for one’s beliefs (literally, shouting “Jai Bhim,” a slogan invoking social reformer B. R. Ambedkar). The extended ergative subject is thus better understood as the agent of a distinct eventuality that leads to their own death, presumably at someone else’s hands.

Conversely, unergative predicates do not require ergative subjects in modal clauses, even though their sole argument is an agent. In (47), the peacock is the agent of the unergative verbs *orəḍ* ‘shout’ and *nac* ‘dance’, yet the pronouns referring to the peacock remain unmarked. The absence of ergative marking is directly visible on the overt pronominal subject of *orəḍ*, and can be inferred for the pro-dropped subject of *nac* from the masculine (rather than default neuter) agreement on the verb.

- (47) मोर जगावा , तो ओरडावा , मनसोक्त नाचावा...
 mor jəg-awa, to orəḍ-awa, mənəsoktə
 peacock live-WN.MOD.3SG.M, 3SG.M shout-WN.MOD.3SG.M, to.one’s.heart’s.content
 nac-awa...
 dance-WN.MOD.3SG.M
 ‘May the peacock live, may it cry out, may it dance to its heart’s content...’
 Source: A Dainik Lokmanthan article, नाचरे मोरा... ‘Dance O Peacock’²⁰

The absence of ergative marking corresponds with the absence of an *R.A.* construal. In the given context—an article discussing the importance of protecting peacocks—the peacock is not presented as responsible for bringing about its own shouting or dancing. If responsibility is assigned at all, it is assigned to humans collectively.

These data show that extended ergative marking is not tied to the thematic structure of the embedded predicate: it can appear with unaccusatives and fail to appear with unergatives. This dissociation suggests that the extended ergative subject is construed as a volitional causer (or agent) not of the *vP* event itself, but of a distinct causing event, motivating a bieventive analysis of *v*_{SELF-CAUSE}. Example (47) also demonstrates that extended ergative

¹⁸I have added the bracketed subject to the example; in the original song, this argument is dropped and understood contextually to have an impersonal interpretation. The omitted subject’s underlyingly ergative status is nevertheless evident from the default 3SG.N verbal agreement.

¹⁹<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EqfmX6E8Yy8>

²⁰<https://lokmanthan.com/dance-peacock/>

marking is sensitive to a contextually restricted notion of causation. Even when an argument is, in a fine-grained sense, a necessary causer of the νP event (e.g. as a peacock must be a causer of its own shouting) that causal relation may not be relevant for the licensing of $\nu_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$.

5.1.3 Temporal flexibility of the causing event

Finally, the causing event in extended ergative clauses need not be placed in the future; it may precede or follow utterance time. Much of the discussion in Section 3, and in prior work on the ‘bearer of obligation’ role in certain modal clauses, focuses on examples where the relevant responsibility concerns a future course of action. A closer look at Marathi shows that no such temporal restriction is warranted: the relevant causing event can be in the past, provided it is contextually salient.

In (48), for example, the most natural candidate for the causing event is the subject’s past sequence of crimes; nonetheless, extended ergative marking is licensed.

- (48) *tya-ni itke əpəradh ke-le ah-et [ki tya-ni turung-at*
 3SG.M-ERG so.many offense do-PFV.PL.M be.PRS-3PL C 3SG.M-ERG prison-LOC
ja-yla-c pahije].
 go-NONFIN-EMPH needed
 ‘He has committed so many offenses that he must go to prison.’

This sentence does not convey that the subject is responsible for any further action to bring about his imprisonment, like committing another crime or turning himself in. The contextually salient past offenses supply the causal anchor needed to license extended ergative case. The analysis must therefore allow the causing event introduced by $\nu_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$ to be temporally unrestricted, even when the νP eventuality is located in the future (as is typically the case under null aspect).

5.2 Formal implementation

I present an analysis of $\nu_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$ which captures both its restriction to root modal environments (§5.2.1), and its causal contribution (§5.2.2-5.2.3). Because of the syntactic heterogeneity of the root modal contexts that license extended ergative subjects, I pursue a semantic rather than purely structural account of the licensing restriction. Section 5.3, which argues against alternative analyses (especially Hacquard 2006, 2010), also highlights the challenges faced by syntactic licensing accounts.

5.2.1 Deriving the licensing restriction

To capture the restriction of the modal control structure, and hence of $\nu_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$, to root modal contexts, I propose that $\nu_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$ imposes a presuppositional restriction on the modal

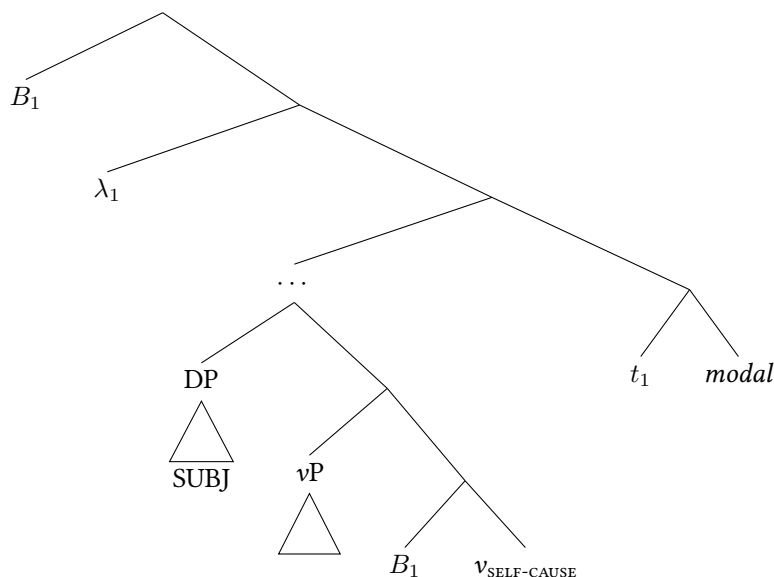
base of the embedding modal.²¹ I assume a Kratzerian system with two main types of modal bases, epistemic and circumstantial, where root modality is uniformly associated with a circumstantial base. Given a world, a circumstantial modal base supplies a set of propositions characterizing relevant circumstances in that world. This is the type of modal base employed in deontic, teleological, and bouletic modality—the flavors which, as shown in §3, allow the extended ergative pattern analyzed here as involving $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$.²² I therefore take $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$ to presuppose that the modal base associated with the embedding modal is circumstantial.

How does $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$ access the modal base of the modal that embeds it? Following von Fintel and Iatridou (2005) and von Fintel and Gillies (2007), among others, I assume that the modal base is syntactically represented as a pronominal argument of the modal. Let this pronoun be B_i , of type $\langle s, \langle st, t \rangle \rangle$. Like other pronouns, B_i may receive its value from the assignment function g :

$$(49) \quad \llbracket B_i \rrbracket^{C,g} = g(i)$$

I propose that $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$ also takes a modal base argument, which is obligatorily interpreted as a bound variable. This binding requirement is satisfied by movement of the higher modal base pronoun. Movement triggers abstraction over its index, binding both the trace of the moved pronoun and the lower modal base pronoun bearing the same index. The modal and $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$ are therefore necessarily interpreted relative to the same modal base. The structure that establishes this binding relation is shown in (50).

(50)



²¹This proposal has parallels with analyses of verbal mood in Portner (1997) and Matthewson (2010), where mood morphology is likewise argued to be licensed only in modal contexts with particular types of conversational backgrounds. However, the implementation of this restriction differs from what is proposed here.

²²Differences among these root modal flavors are encoded in the ordering source, which ranks the worlds compatible with the modal base relative to an ideal. Since the ordering source does not bear on the availability of $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$, I abstract away from it in this discussion.

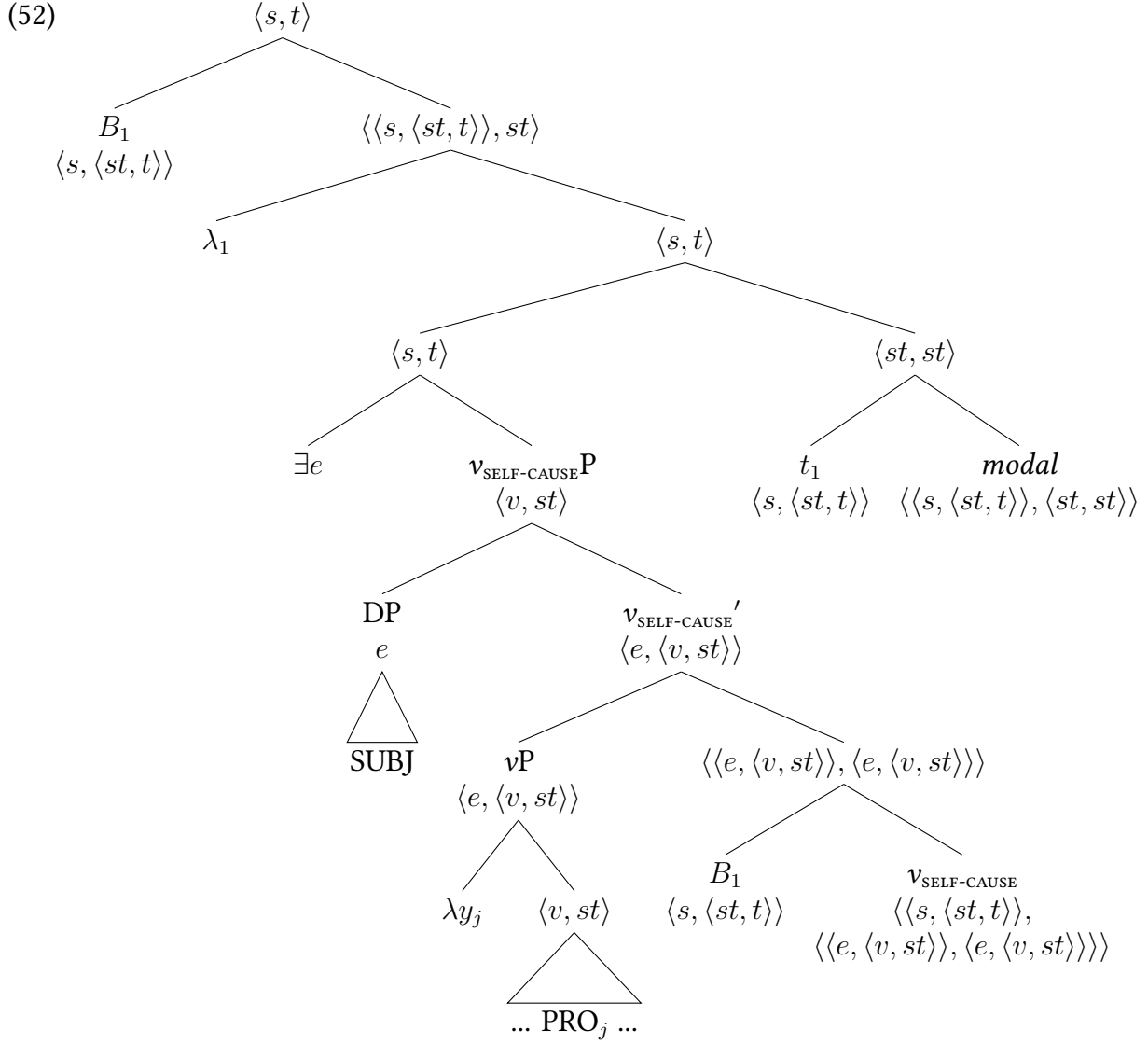
The restriction of $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$ to root modality can then be stated as a presuppositional restriction on its modal base argument:

$$(51) \quad \llbracket v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}} \rrbracket^{C,g}(B)(P)(x)(e)(w) \text{ is defined only if } B \text{ is a circumstantial modal base}$$

5.2.2 Causal contribution of $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$

I take $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$ to be of type $\langle\langle s, \langle st, t \rangle \rangle, \langle\langle e, \langle v, st \rangle \rangle, \langle e, \langle v, st \rangle \rangle \rangle\rangle$. It first composes with a modal base pronoun and then with a property of individuals and events, returning a property of the same type. Thus $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$ is compatible with a vP only when it denotes such a property. I assume that a vP has this property type when it contains PRO, which is bound by an individual abstractor at the vP edge as sketched in (154).²³ The semantic type of $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$ thus guarantees a gap in its vP complement, making it available in control configurations but not when all vP argument positions are saturated without subsequent abstraction.

²³The same vP type can be derived without PRO by simply leaving the subject argument unsaturated. The two implementations are interchangeable for the purposes of the semantic analysis, but the next section argues that positing PRO enables a unified analysis of ergative case.



I propose the denotation for $\nu_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$ in (53).²⁴

$$(53) \quad \llbracket \nu_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}} \rrbracket^C = \lambda B_{\langle s, \langle st, t \rangle \rangle} : B \text{ is a circumstantial modal base. } \lambda P_{\langle e, \langle v, st \rangle \rangle} . \lambda x . \lambda e . \lambda w . \\ P(x)(e)(w) \wedge \exists e' [\text{CAUSE}_w^C(e')(e) \wedge \text{AGENT}_w(e')(x)] \\ \text{where } \text{CAUSE}_w^C(e')(e) \text{ holds iff } e' \text{ causes } e \text{ in } w \text{ and the causal relation is salient in } C$$

On this denotation, $\nu_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$ is defined only if its modal base argument is circumstantial, as proposed in the previous section. When defined, it functions as a modifier of νP properties. Applied to a property P , it returns a strengthened property that holds of an individual x and

²⁴This denotation abstracts away from the projective status of the causal contribution, treating it as asserted. In §5.2.3, I present evidence that this contribution is not at-issue and consider how the analysis can be refined accordingly.

an eventuality e in a world w just in case (i) P is true of x and e in w , (ii) there is an eventuality e' which stands in a contextually salient causal relation to e in w , and (iii) x is the agent of e' in w . Informally, $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$ introduces a contextually salient causing event and identifies its agent with the unsaturated subject argument of the vP . Tsilia (2025) argues for a similar covert causative element in Modern Greek that scopes below attitude verbs and introduces a causer argument that is obligatorily identified with an argument of the lower predicate.

Above $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}P$, the vP event variable e is existentially closed, plausibly by an aspectual head when one is present; I set aside the details of aspect here. This yields a proposition which can serve as the modal's prejacent. Because the modal scopes over $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}P$, the subject's causer role is evaluated only in the modal alternatives. This modalization of the causer role gives rise to the *R.A.* interpretation: an individual whose causal contribution is required in order to comply with the rules, achieve goals, or satisfy wishes is construed as bearing a responsibility.

This analysis derives the three properties of modal control clauses established in the previous subsection. First, the animacy restriction follows from identifying the subject as agent of the causing event (e'); insofar as agentivity presupposes animacy, inanimate subjects are correctly excluded. Second, the bieventive treatment, which distinguishes the causing event (e') from the vP event (e), captures the dissociation between extended ergative marking and the subject's vP -internal theta role: case tracks the subject's role in e' rather than e . Third, the denotation imposes no temporal constraint on e' , so it may precede utterance time. Aspect may locate e , but e' is existentially bound within $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$ and therefore not directly constrained by aspect.

5.2.3 An open issue: projectivity of the causal contribution

The denotation given in the previous section treats the causal contribution of $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$ as part of its asserted content. There is evidence, however, that this contribution is not at-issue. In (54), a negated extended ergative clause is conjoined with a corresponding affirmative standard ergative clause. Since the predicate is intransitive, the subject is overtly ergative in the extended ergative clause but unmarked in the standard ergative clause. The sentence is contradictory: the intended reading where negation targets only Rucha's causal role is unavailable. This suggests that the causal contribution of $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$ projects.

- (54) #mə-la ruca-ni hər-ayla nəko ah-e, pəŋ ti hər-ayla
 1SG-DAT Rucha-ERG lose-NONFIN not.wanted be.PRS-SG but 3SG.F lose-NONFIN
 həwi ah-e.
 wanted be.PRS-SG

Int: 'I don't want Rucha to cause herself to lose, but I want the outcome that she loses.'

This projective behavior must be reconciled with the modal anchoring of the causal contribution. We have observed that the causal role in extended ergative clauses is evaluated

relative to the relevant modal alternatives, giving rise to (different flavors of) the *R.A.* role. If this contribution projects, its modal anchoring cannot simply be derived from its being interpreted within the scope of a modal. One way to capture both properties is to treat the causal component as a conditionalized presupposition. As a starting point, consider the denotation in (55), where R^C is a contextually determined set of relevant worlds.

$$(55) \quad \llbracket v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}} \rrbracket^C = \lambda B_{\langle s, \langle st, t \rangle \rangle} : B \text{ is a circumstantial modal base. } \lambda P_{\langle e, \langle v, st \rangle \rangle} . \lambda x . \lambda e . \lambda w : \\ \forall w' \in R^C \left[\exists e_2 [P(x)(e_2)(w')] \rightarrow \exists e_3 [\text{CAUSE}_{w'}^C(e_3)(e_2) \wedge \text{AGENT}_{w'}(e_3)(x)] \right] . P(x)(e)(w)$$

On this denotation, $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$ imposes two presuppositional requirements. First, as before, its modal base argument must be circumstantial. Second, in every relevant world, if there is an eventuality satisfying the description provided by the vP , the subject must be the agent of a distinct eventuality that stands in a contextually salient causal relation to the vP eventuality.²⁵ The at-issue contribution of $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$ is simply to return the vP denotation.

If the contextual determination of R^C is appropriately sensitive to the modal alternatives, this analysis could capture the required modal anchoring. Determining how R^C should be resolved across different contexts requires closer examination of the data, and this work is still underway. Here I offer some preliminary observations. In cases involving universal modal quantification, identifying R^C with the set of worlds in the restrictor of the modal appears to make the right predictions. Consider (56).

- (56) ruca-ni y-awə.
 Rucha-ERG come-WN.MOD.3SG.N
 ‘Rucha should come.’

Suppose that in the given context, the modal in (56) quantifies over the deontically best worlds, and that R^C is identified with this same set of worlds. The sentence then asserts that Rucha comes in all of the deontically best worlds and presupposes that, in each such world in which she comes, she plays a salient causal role in her coming. This appears to capture its interpretation.

The picture is slightly more complicated with existential quantification. Consider (57).

- (57) ruca-ni a-lelə cal-el.
 Rucha-ERG come-PFV.PTCP.3SG.N be.ok-FUT.3SG
 ‘It’s ok for Rucha to come.’

Here, if R^C were identified with the full set of deontic alternatives, (57) would assert that there some such world in which Rucha comes, while presupposing that in every deontic

²⁵As written, the occurrence of e_2 in the consequent lies outside the scope of the existential quantifier in the antecedent. The intended interpretation is anaphoric: the event referred to in the consequent is the event introduced in the antecedent. This dependency could be captured formally in a dynamic framework, such as dynamic predicate logic; I leave its implementation aside here.

alternative in which she comes, she causes her own coming. This would incorrectly imply that there are no deontically accessible worlds in which Rucha comes without causing her own coming. (57) does not appear to have this implication. Rather, it seems to express that, among the deontic alternatives in which Rucha comes, there are some in which she causes herself to come, and that those are the worlds under discussion. Perhaps in such cases, R^C corresponds not to the modal's entire domain of quantification but to a subset of it deemed contextually relevant. The unwanted implication would then not arise: there could be deontically accessible worlds in which Rucha comes without causing her own coming, but those would not be the worlds relevant to the discussion.

Another context to consider is when negation scopes over a modal, as in (58).

- (58) ruca-ni a-lelə cal-ŋar nahi.
 Rucha-ERG come-PFV.PTCP.3SG.N be.ok-FUT NEG
 'It is not ok for Rucha to come.'

Here, R^C cannot be identified with the modal's quantificational domain, or even with a subset of it. Since (58) asserts that there are no deontically accessible worlds in which Rucha comes, if R^C were restricted to deontically accessible worlds, there would be no world in R^C in which the antecedent of the conditional presupposition is satisfied. The presupposition would therefore impose no constraint on Rucha's causal role. This does not capture the interpretation of (58), which seems to require that, in the contextually relevant (necessarily non-deontically accessible) worlds in which Rucha comes, she causes herself to come. In such cases, R^C must therefore include worlds outside the modal's quantificational domain.

Further work is needed to determine whether this approach is on the right track and, if so, how the context supplies a value for R^C . I leave a closer examination of the projective behavior of the causal contribution of $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$ for future work.

5.3 Comparison with alternative approaches

5.3.1 Is control necessary?

The analysis developed here aligns with Brennan (1993) and earlier control analyses in maintaining that subjects of (a subset of) root modal clauses are interpreted with an additional theta role that subjects of epistemic modal clauses are not. A prominent alternative that aims to capture the same 'subject-orientation' of some modals without appealing to control or explicit theta role assignment is Hacquard (2006, 2010). Hacquard argues that the contrast between subject-oriented and non-subject-oriented readings arises from a difference in the event argument with respect to which the modal is evaluated. She proposes that flavor-flexible modals can merge at one of two heights: a low position below AspP, or a high position above TP. In the low position, the modal's eventuality argument is bound by aspect, which relativizes the modal's interpretation to the vP event; this produces subject-orientation (or possibly, anchoring to another vP event participant). In the high position, it

is bound by the default speech event binder, which anchors the modal to the speech event; this produces speaker- or addressee-oriented readings.²⁶

This event relativization mechanism cannot derive the Marathi case alternation or the semantic contrast it tracks. In Hacquard’s system, ‘orientation’ is implemented by having the modal base depend on an event argument, which supplies an individual anchor. This can be seen in her denotation for English *must* in (59), where the modal base function f takes an event argument e as input. If e is bound by aspect in a low structural position, $f(e)$ yields a circumstantial base relativized to the circumstances of the νP event and one of its participants, typically the subject (60a). If instead e is bound by the default speech-event binder in a high position, $f(e)$ yields an epistemic base relativized to the knowledge of a speech-act participant, usually the speaker (60b).²⁷ Thus, this mechanism determines whose circumstances or knowledge restrict the modal base, but it does not specify any particular role for the individual anchor.

$$(59) \quad \llbracket \text{must} \rrbracket = \lambda f_{\langle \varepsilon, stt \rangle} \lambda g_{\langle \varepsilon, stt \rangle} \lambda q_{\langle st \rangle} \lambda e. \forall w' \in \max_{g(e)} (\cap f(e)) : q(w') = 1$$

(Hacquard 2010:95)

$$(60) \quad \begin{aligned} \text{a. } \cap f_{\text{circ}}(e) &= \{ w' : w' \text{ is compatible with the circumstances of } e \} \\ \text{b. } \cap f_{\text{epis}}(e) &= \{ w' : w' \text{ is compatible with what is known in } e \text{ (by } Ag(e) \text{ at } time(e)) \} \end{aligned}$$

(Hacquard 2010:96)

Marathi extended ergative subjects are not merely modal base anchors of this kind: they are interpreted with a specific agentive causer role. Moreover, this role is unique to extended ergative clauses; it is not simply assigned to a different individual (i.e. the speaker or addressee) in standard ergative clauses. For instance, although epistemic modals are typically speaker-oriented, the speaker is not construed as a causer. Because Hacquard’s account treats individual anchoring as parallel across modal readings, it is too weak to capture the Marathi pattern. The Marathi case alternation instead points to an analysis where extended ergative clauses involve an additional semantic ingredient that is simply absent from standard ergative clauses.

Another issue with extending Hacquard’s account to Marathi is that it leaves the overt case alternation unexplained. On her analysis, the only syntactic difference between modal clauses with subject-oriented and non-subject-oriented readings is the height at which the modal is merged. It is unclear why this difference in position would have an impact on case assignment. The control/non-control approach, on the other hand, provides a clearer route to the overt morphology, as will be discussed in Section 6.

Finally, a height-based account does not easily generalize to the full range of modal expressions that license the Marathi case alternation. There is substantial crosslinguistic

²⁶I set aside Hacquard’s discussion of binding by a matrix aspect in embedded contexts, which on her 2010 account produces relativization to attitude events.

²⁷Hacquard also treats *ought-to-be* deontics (in her terms, addressee-oriented deontics) as speech-event-relative; I set these aside for simplicity.

evidence that modal auxiliaries of different flavors are associated with different structural heights (Cinque 1999; Kush 2011, a.o.). But in Marathi, the case alternation is not confined to clauses with modal auxiliaries; it also occurs in clauses embedded under modal verbs, adjectives, and nouns. We have seen that the licensing modal may be a clause-embedding predicate like *hawa* (*asna*) ‘(to be) wanted, should’ or *pahije* (*asna*) ‘(to be) needed, must’ (61a). A broader range of lexical modal predicates, which embed nonfinite clauses built on perfective participial or infinitival morphology, also allow extended ergative subjects (61b, 61c). Predicates of this type include *calna* ‘to be acceptable’, *awasyak asna* ‘to be necessary’, *bārobār asna* ‘to be right’, *cukica asna* ‘to be wrong’, and *apekṣit asna* ‘to be expected’.²⁸

- (61) a. [ti(-ni) y-ayla] pahije (ah-e).
 3SG.F-ERG come-NONFIN needed be.PRS-SG
 ‘She should/must come.’
 b. [ti(-ni) a-lel-ə/i] cal-el.
 3SG.F-ERG come-PFV.PTCP-N.SG/F.SG be.acceptable-FUT.3SG
 ‘It’s ok for her to come.’ (Lit: ‘Her having come will be ok.’)
 c. [ti*(-ni) ye-ṇə] cukica ah-e.
 3SG.F-ERG come-INF wrong be.PRS-SG
 ‘Her coming is wrong.’ or ‘It is wrong for her to come.’

Modal nouns, like *apekṣa* ‘expectation’, *ṣakyata* ‘possibility’, *gərāj* ‘need’, and *iccha* ‘wish’, likewise license extended ergative marking on the subjects of their nonfinite clausal modifiers, as shown in (62).

- (62) [am-ci [ti-ni pərət y-ayci] iccha] kəmi ho-ṇar nahi.
 1PL.EXCL-GEN 3SG.F-ERG again come-NONFIN.GEN wish less become-FUT NEG
 ‘Our wish that she return will not subside.’

There are two reasons Hacquard’s height-based analysis is difficult to extend beyond modal auxiliaries. First, the account predicts that the case alternation should correlate with complement size: a ‘low’ modal must compose with a smaller constituent than a ‘high’ modal.

²⁸Some of these predicates allow the subject’s case to alternate (61a, 61b), much like modal auxiliaries, while others require an extended ergative subject (61c). I suggest that the latter pattern may arise when the lexical semantics of the modal predicate forces an *RA* construal. On the type of analysis developed in §5.2.3, this could occur when the presuppositional requirements of $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$ are necessarily satisfied in the clausal complements of particular modals. Lexical modals may also impose restrictions in the opposite direction. The epistemic modal *disat asna* ‘to seem/appear’, for example, takes the same type of clausal argument as in (61b) but requires a standard ergative subject (iv). Thus, the semantics of particular modals may be sufficiently restrictive to allow only one of the two structures.

- (iv) [ti*(-ni) a-lel-i/ə] dis-t-e/ə ah-e.
 3SG.F-ERG come-PFV.PTCP-F.SG/N.SG seem-IPFV-F.SG/N.SG be.PRS-SG
 ‘She seems to have come.’

Yet there is no indication that embedded extended ergative complements are smaller than standard ergative complements under the same modal predicates. In (61a) and (61b), the same nonfinite or participial suffix is available regardless of the embedded subject's case. Moreover, (61b) shows that both standard and extended ergative complements can contain perfective morphology, indicating that the modal can merge above AspP even with an extended ergative complement. This is unexpected if subject-orientation depends on the modal merging below aspect. Second, even setting complement size aside, the event relativization mechanism is difficult to implement when the modal sits in a higher clause than the subject whose interpretation is at issue. In such configurations, the nearest binder for the modal's event argument is in the matrix clause. As a result, the modal can be anchored to the matrix vP event or to the speech event, but not to the embedded vP event in which the extended ergative subject is a participant. One could attempt to rescue the account by positing a silent modal inside the embedded nonfinite clause that is not independently interpreted but rather participates in a kind of modal concord with the overt modal. The height of this covert auxiliary could then be made responsible for flavor and orientation. However, this move requires positing null modal structure across a wide range of embedded clause types which is not even interpreted with its own quantificational force. Given these costs, alongside the independent problems noted above, this line of analysis does not seem worth pursuing. I conclude that Hacquard's proposal is not sufficient to explain the Marathi alternation, whereas a control-based analysis captures the interpretive contrast fully and offers natural explanations for the case morphology, as will be discussed in Section 6.

5.3.2 Could licensing be syntactic?

In §5.2.1, I derive the restriction of $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$ to root modal contexts from a presupposition on its bound modal base argument. An alternative would be to model the restriction as purely syntactic. I briefly explain why I do not pursue this route, considering both selection-based and agreement-based licensing accounts.

A selection-based licensing account would require there to be an immediately adjacent head that selects for $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$. However, the modals that license extended ergative case are often not so local. We have seen that they occur in wide-ranging syntactic positions, many of which are not plausibly adjacent to $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$. In extended ergative complement clauses to modal predicates, overt material that is likely higher than $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$, including nonfinite morphology (61a) and aspectual marking (61b), can intervene between the modal and $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$. Nor is there an obvious alternative local licenser: extended ergative clauses have no shared verbal morphology that could be responsible for licensing in place of the modal. These facts make it difficult to formulate a non-stipulative selection-based licensing condition.

An agreement-based account, where a modal head is required to Agree with $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$ in order to license it, would allow for greater distance between the licenser and $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$. Modal heads have independently been argued to participate in Agree, for instance in analyses of modal concord (Zeijlstra 2007). However, this type of analysis faces a different kind of

difficulty: there is no principled way to distinguish root from epistemic modals so that only the former serve as licensors. One option is to encode modal flavor directly in the syntax—for instance, by positing a feature distinguishing root from epistemic uses—but this forfeits an advantage of the current proposal, namely that flavor-flexible modals need not be treated as lexically ambiguous. Given these considerations, I implement the licensing condition in the semantics.

6 Ergative case in modal clauses and beyond

I now turn to the final component of the analysis: deriving the case alternation from the proposed control and non-control structures. Ergative case in Marathi remains understudied and lacks a settled analysis; theoretical work is limited, though see Wali (2004) and Nayudu (2008). For Hindi-Urdu, whose ergative pattern in finite realis clauses closely parallels that of Marathi, the literature is substantial but likewise unsettled: proposals include inherent case analyses (Anand and Nevins 2006; Ura 2006; Legate 2008; Kidwai 2024), a dependent case analysis (Baker 2024), and other morphosyntactic accounts (Keine 2007; Mahajan 2012; Sinha 2017; Bjorkman 2018). Marathi modal clauses offer a useful testing ground: identifying which analyses derive the unexpected distribution of ergative case narrows the range of plausible accounts.

I argue that ergative case in Marathi is a dependent case (Marantz 1991; Baker and Vinokurova 2010; Baker 2014, 2015, a.o.), assigned to the higher of two nominal arguments within a specified domain. The logic of the proposal is as follows. In non-control clauses, two nominals co-occur within the relevant domain only when the predicate is transitive; hence, ergative case is restricted to transitive subjects. In modal control clauses, by contrast, the relevant domain minimally includes both the subject and PRO. The conditions for ergative case assignment are therefore met regardless of whether an object is also present, giving rise to the extended ergative pattern. I further demonstrate that an inherent case analysis, while initially appealing, requires stipulations about aspect and transitivity that weaken its explanatory force. In this respect, the present account aligns with recent skepticism about inherent case treatments of morphological ergativity (Baker and Bobaljik 2017; Deal 2019; Zompì 2019, a.o.).

6.1 Marathi *ERG* as a dependent case

I adopt the dependent case schema in (63) for ergative assignment in Marathi, following (Baker 2015: 111, 131). I set aside the aspect split for the moment but return to it in §6.3.

- (63) If a nominal expression *XP* c-commands another nominal expression *ZP* within a local TP domain, *XP* is assigned ergative case.

This schema straightforwardly captures ergative case on transitive subjects, where the object

is the lower nominal whose presence triggers ergative case.²⁹ I argue that it also derives ergative case across modal control clauses, where PRO plays the same role.

First, the domain requirement is satisfied. The control predicate $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$ merges above vP but below root modal auxiliaries (which are standardly taken to be below TP, e.g. in Cinque 1999; Hacquard 2006). As a result, the overt subject introduced by $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$ and PRO in the embedded vP are contained within a single TP. This contrasts with canonical control configurations where the matrix predicate embeds a larger clause and the controller and controllee are likely separated by an embedded TP.

Second, on theories of control that posit PRO, the controllee is a pronominal element distinct from the controller; its referential dependence should not restrict its visibility to the dependent case schema. For Landau (2015), PRO is a bound minimal pronoun in the sense of Kratzer (2009), whose surface realization is determined by its syntactic environment; the same underlying element may surface elsewhere as a reflexive, an overt bound pronoun, a resumptive pronoun, and so on. Landau's view predicts that PRO should behave like other bound nominals in the language with respect to dependent case computation. Reflexive objects in Marathi *do* license ergative case on the subject (64), indicating that a bound argument, even when covalued with the subject, still counts as distinct from the subject for the purposes of case.

- (64) ruca-**ni** swətaha-la niwəḍ-lə.
 Rucha-ERG REFL-ACC select-PFV.3SG.N
 'Rucha chose herself.'

Third, there is evidence that PRO is visible to the dependent case mechanism in other languages. Baker (2015) argues that the null subject of a nonfinite control clause triggers dependent accusative case on objects in Amharic, Sakha, Turkish, and Tamil; a Sakha example is given in (65). It is therefore plausible that Marathi PRO also has the necessary properties to serve as a case competitor.

- (65) Masha [kinigie-**ni** aaq-ar-yn] astyn-ar.
 Masha book-ACC read-AOR-3SP.ACC enjoy-AOR.3ss
 'Masha likes to read the book.' (Baker 2015: 202)

While this analysis fits naturally with non-movement theories of control, it is less straightforward under the movement theory of control (Hornstein 1999, and subsequent work), according to which the controllee is an unpronounced lower copy of the controller. Dependent case theory has assumed since its inception that nominals belonging to the same A-chain are not evaluated independently for case (Marantz 1991).³⁰ This restriction is needed to prevent

²⁹Note that this rule does not exclude already case-marked nominals from serving as case competitors. Subjects of perfective and modal transitive clauses bear ergative case whether the object is unmarked or shows differential object marking.

³⁰The formal implementation of this assumption remains underdeveloped in the literature.

the overapplication of dependent case in raising configurations. The present analysis could be reconciled with the movement theory of control by stipulating that identical DPs bearing distinct theta roles are evaluated separately for dependent case. Such a stipulation amounts to treating the controller and controllee as syntactically distinct. There is also evidence that the two arguments behave as semantically distinct, rather than as part of a movement chain: as shown in §4.2.1, the controller cannot reconstruct to the position of the controllee. Once the controller and controllee must be treated as distinct arguments for both case assignment and interpretation, representing them as copies in a movement chain offers no clear explanatory advantage. I therefore maintain that, at least in Marathi modal control clauses, the controllee is a covert anaphor rather than a lower copy of the controller.

This analysis treats $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$ as valency-increasing, like a typical morphological causative head, rendering a clause configurationally transitive even when the main predicate is intransitive. As a point of comparison, overt morphological causatives in Marathi have the same effect on case: the causer subject bears ergative case (in the perfective aspect) regardless of the valency of the base predicate (66).

- (66) əmol*(-ni) mula-la həs-əw-lə/la.
 Amol-ERG child-ACC laugh-CAUS-PFV.3SG.N/M
 ‘Amol made the child laugh.’

Although the causee in modal control clauses is silent and obligatorily bound, it remains visible to dependent case computation in the same way as the overt causee in (66).

6.2 Why not inherent case?

An alternative is to analyze Marathi ergative as an inherent case, assigned alongside a theta role (Woolford 1997, 2006; Ura 2006, a.o.). Because extended ergative marking correlates with the subject bearing a particular theta role—the agent of a causing event—an inherent case analysis may initially seem attractive. Although it is possible to formulate an inherent case account, doing so requires unmotivated stipulations to capture the full range of data. I maintain instead that the close connection between extended ergative marking and semantic role is indirect: the interpretive contrast corresponds to a difference in syntactic structure, and it is the structure that determines subject case.

6.2.1 A preliminary inherent case analysis

A common implementation of inherent ergative case takes v to assign ergative in situ to its specifier argument, together with a theta role (Woolford 2006; Anand and Nevins 2006, a.o.). To capture “true” ergative systems, where ergative case is assigned to transitive subjects but not unergative ones, the analysis must additionally impose a transitivity condition. This condition has been implemented in various ways; sometimes it is simply stated to match the empirical facts (see Baker and Bobaljik 2017, for discussion). For concreteness, I will assume

that *v* heads are specified for transitivity (as in Legate 2008; Mahajan 2012): transitive and intransitive verbs select for distinct flavors of *v*, and only transitive *v* assigns ergative case to its external argument. Although a similar restriction is required by any inherent case analysis of “true” morphological ergativity, it remains stipulative: nothing in the inherent case machinery motivates the connection between ergative assignment and transitive *v*. As Baker and Bobaljik (2017) note, an analogous system in which only unergative subjects bear a special morphological case is unattested, though it is equally derivable on an inherent case analysis.

If we take transitive *v* to assign ergative case to the DP it introduces, the standard ergative case pattern in realis and non-control modal clauses follows. To derive the extended ergative pattern in modal control clauses, $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$ must also assign ergative to its external argument. The resulting system thus contains two distinct ergative-assigning heads, *v* and $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$, only one of which is sensitive to transitivity. While descriptively adequate, this analysis largely restates the distribution in theoretical terms rather than explaining it. It also requires two separate sources of ergative case; all else equal, a unified account would be theoretically preferable.

6.2.2 Accounting for the aspect split

The inherent case analysis faces additional challenges once we take the aspect split into account. So far, we have observed ergative case primarily in finite perfective realis clauses and in aspectless (or null-aspect) modal clauses. Marathi also allows overt aspectual morphology inside modal clauses, and when aspect is expressed, it continues to restrict the availability of ergative case. In perfective modal clauses, ergative marking remains available and patterns as in aspectless modal clauses: with intransitive predicates, ergative marking is optional (and correlates with an interpretive contrast); with transitive predicates, ergative marking is obligatory (67; see also 61b).³¹

- (67) a. *ti(-ni) we|e-wər uʈh-li/ə pahije.*
 3SG.F-ERG time-on wake.up-PFV.3SG.F/N must
 ‘She must wake up on time.’
 b. *ti*(-ni) əbhyas ke-la/i pahije.*
 3SG.F-ERG study do-PFV.3SG.M/F must
 ‘She must do her homework.’

By contrast, ergative case never occurs in modal clauses with overt imperfective morphology, regardless of the embedded predicate’s transitivity. Imperfective aspect is more restricted

³¹The semantic contribution of perfective aspect in modal clauses requires further investigation. Although the English translations in (67) do not distinguish these modal clauses from their aspectless counterparts (cf. 12, 61a), there is a subtle contrast. As a first approximation, it seems that the perfective *pahije* statements in (67) describe an obligation with respect to a result (roughly: ‘She must end up awake’), whereas the aspectless variants in (12) and (61b) describe an obligation with respect to a process (roughly: ‘She must undergo the process of waking up’).

under root modals; one cannot form minimal pairs with (67) by simply substituting imperfective for perfective morphology. Instead, imperfective aspect appears in more complex structures, like (68), in which the lexical verb takes the imperfective suffix and is obligatorily followed by a copula bearing perfective morphology.³² Once imperfective aspect is introduced, ergative case is unavailable.

- (68) a. *ti(*-ni) roj ya we|j pə|-ət əs-li/ə pahije.*
 3SG.F-ERG daily DEM.PROX time.LOC run-IPFV be-PFV.3SG.F/N must
 ‘She must be running at this time every day.’
- b. *ti(*-ni) səka|-i əbhyas kər-ət əs-li/ə pahije.*
 3SG.F morning-LOC study do-IPFV be-PFV.3SG.F/N must
 ‘She must be studying (lit: doing studies) in the mornings.’

Table 2.5 summarizes the interaction between aspect and ergative case across clause types. These patterns call into question the bipartite analysis of the previous subsection, which posits two distinct ergative-assigning heads. The shared aspect sensitivity of ergative marking across realis and modal clauses instead suggests a unified source.

		<i>Aspect</i>		
		Null	Perfective	Imperfective
<i>Realis</i>	Intransitive	-	∅	∅
	Transitive	-	ERG	∅
<i>Modal</i>	Intransitive	ERG/∅	ERG/∅	∅
	Transitive	ERG	ERG	∅

Table 2.5: Subject case marking by clause type, transitivity, and aspect

In inherent case accounts, aspect splits are commonly captured by restricting ergative-assigning *v* to particular aspectual environments, for example via selectional requirements that reference a feature on *Asp* (e.g. Ura 2006; Mahajan 2012). The difficulty with extending such an analysis to Marathi is that the two aspects that are compatible with ergative case—perfective and null aspect—do not form an obvious natural class. There is no clear positive feature unifying them to the exclusion of the imperfective. If null aspect reflects the absence of *AspP*, then the lack of a shared property is even more apparent. The more natural generalization, then, is that imperfective aspect blocks ergative case, rather than that perfective and null aspect license it.³³

³²See footnote 31 on the interpretation of the perfective.

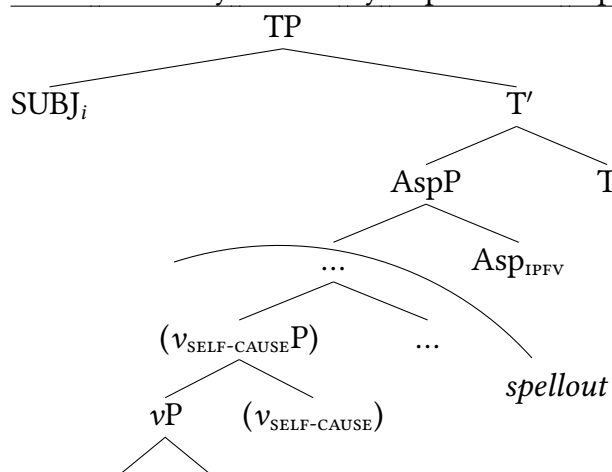
³³Finite future clauses also disallow ergative subjects. I leave their analysis for future work.

One could nevertheless pursue a selectional approach by stipulating that ergative is assigned only by those flavors of transitive v and $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$ that are *not* selected by Asp_{IPFV} . This yields three ergative-assigning heads: $v_{[\text{TRANS, PFV}]}$, $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}[\text{PFV}]}$, and $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}[\text{NULL}]}$. The analysis requires null aspect to be syntactically represented and to bear a feature that can figure into selection, which I label [NULL] without committing to a more substantive characterization. Although this account captures the data, it treats two generalizations as accidental: that ergative case is similarly aspect-sensitive across modal and realis clauses, and that its sensitivity to transitivity differs between them. The analysis reproduces the facts but offers little explanatory insight.

6.3 An alternative, single source for the aspect split

On a dependent case analysis, aspect can affect case by partitioning nominals into separate domains for case computation. Adopting Baker’s (2015) approach to aspect splits, I propose that Marathi $\text{Asp}_{[\text{IPFV}]}$ is a phase head that triggers the spellout of its complement, as represented in (69). In particular, $\text{Asp}_{[\text{IPFV}]}$ is a ‘hard’ phase head which renders material in its complement invisible to dependent case computed in higher domains. Marathi ergative case is evaluated over the TP domain (cf. 63). Assuming AspP is merged below TP—where the subject surfaces—but above $v\text{P}$ and $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}\text{P}$, this phase boundary seals off any potential case competitors to the subject. Consequently, when TP is spelled out and the ergative case schema applies, PRO and any objects within $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}\text{P}/v\text{P}$ are inaccessible, and the subject remains unmarked.

(69) Phase boundary created by imperfective aspect



Why might imperfective aspect—but not other aspects—introduce a phase boundary? Coon (2013) argues that, crosslinguistically, imperfective aspect often involves a more complex structure than perfective aspect, and that this added complexity is a major source of aspect-based ergative splits. In many languages, imperfective aspect is realized in a biclausal

configuration that places the subject in a separate clause from the object, such that imperfective subjects are never truly transitive. Marathi imperfective clauses do not show evidence of biclausality, but in closely related languages such as Hindi-Urdu and Gujarati, imperfective clauses require an additional auxiliary while perfective clauses do not (Coon 2013). I do not take this contrast as evidence that Marathi imperfectives are biclausal, but it does suggest that the imperfective aspect may be associated with extra syntactic structure.

A weakened version of Coon's proposal offers a plausible explanation of the Marathi pattern. Even if imperfective aspect does not induce biclausality in Marathi, it may still introduce additional syntactic material—covert in Marathi but overt in other Indo-Aryan languages—that creates a phase boundary.³⁴ On this account, the aspect split follows from a general property of the imperfective, rather than from language-particular stipulations about the aspect sensitivity of individual functional heads.

6.4 Implications of the case proposal

Descriptively, Marathi displays a localized fluid-S pattern: ergative marking occurs not only on subjects of transitive predicates but also, under specific semantic conditions, on subjects of intransitive predicates. The low-control analysis developed here makes it possible to understand this pattern in terms of transitivity. Ergative marking on an apparently intransitive subject may diagnose concealed transitivity at the configurational level, arising when a controlled PRO occurs within the same case domain. I argue in Chapter 3 that this analysis can be extended to subject case marking Bishnupriya Manipuri, which exhibits a much broader fluid-S pattern. In Bishnupriya Manipuri, many intransitive predicates allow their subjects to be either ergative-marked or unmarked even in ordinary realis clauses, while overtly transitive subjects are uniformly ergative.

A similar analysis may extend to split-S systems if the low-control structure can be shown to be obligatory with unergative predicates but unavailable with unaccusative predicates. Nash (2021) develops a closely related account for Georgian split-S, arguing that perfective unergative clauses have covertly transitive structures, containing an overt subject introduced within a causative projection and a silent reflexive in a lower external argument position. A different family of accounts derives split-S patterns from another type of hidden argument. Baker and Bobaljik (2017) and Öztürk (2021) argue that seemingly intransitive predicates that take ergative subjects in Basque and Laz are in fact transitive predicates whose object is either null or realized only by verbal morphology. Together, these proposals suggest that ergative marking on apparently intransitive subjects may reflect concealed transitivity more often than is typically assumed.

³⁴Coon's original proposal is also compatible with an inherent case analysis of ergative. In Coon (2010), imperfective aspect is treated as a one-place predicate that introduces only the subject within a biclausal structure. As an intransitive predicate, it fails to assign inherent ergative case. Because Marathi shows no evidence of biclausality in the imperfective, this implementation would be poorly motivated here.

7 Conclusion & crosslinguistic outlook

This chapter began from the observation that Marathi modal clauses overtly realize a semantic contrast that has been discussed for English and, on some accounts, attributed to an underlying structural ambiguity. Although the syntactic ambiguity view has been problematized for English modal clauses, I argued that Marathi nonetheless provides compelling evidence for a genuine structural alternation. I proposed two structures for Marathi modal clauses—a causative control structure and a non-control structure—which capture the observed semantic and morphological contrasts. I now conclude by briefly considering the evidence for whether this same contrast is present in modal clauses in other languages, particularly English.

Much of the evidence used to argue against a canonical control analysis of modal clauses, where the modal itself is the control predicate, is not problematic for the causative control account. Some arguments rest simply on the observation that the subject is not always construed as the bearer of obligation in deontic clauses. Authors cite examples where a non-subject seems to bear the responsibility (70), or where the subject is an expletive and therefore athematic (71).

- (70) a. John has to eat an apple today. (as said as an instruction to John's caretaker at the day-care)
 b. Bill has to be consulted by John on every decision. (*John* being the bearer of obligation) (Bhatt 1998:27)
- (71) There may be singing but no dancing on my premises. (Wurmbrand 1999:601)

These data are perfectly compatible with the present proposal (as with Brennan's), according to which root modals do not occur exclusively in control structures, but alternate between control and non-control configurations. Bhatt (1998) argues that a pragmatic mechanism is independently needed to identify the bearer of obligation in sentences like (70)-(71), so it is unnecessary to posit a separate mechanism for cases where the subject bears that role. However, the fact that Marathi marks clauses differently when the subject bears this role indicates that a distinct grammatical mechanism is available in some languages. This option should therefore not be ruled out on conceptual grounds for other languages.

A second set of arguments against the control analysis shows that modal auxiliaries themselves are not control predicates. The causative control analysis is again compatible with these data, since it locates the control predicate below the modal. Wurmbrand (1999) considers data from German, where only transitive and unergative predicates—those that introduce an external argument—can be passivized. She takes the observation that modals cannot be passivized, as shown for German and English in (72), as evidence that they do not introduce an external argument.

- (72) *weil der Kaviar essen gemußt / gekonnt wurde
 since the caviar eat must-PART / can-PART was
 *‘since the caviar was musted/canned to eat’
 ‘since somebody had to eat/can the caviar’ (Wurmbrand 1999:603)

This diagnostic is potentially confounded: the ungrammaticality of (72) could instead be due to the modal’s status as an auxiliary rather than a lexical verb. Regardless, the claim poses no issues for the current account, on which modal auxiliaries are not required to introduce arguments. Wurmbrand (1999) also presents evidence that in English root modal clauses, the subject can scope below the modal, paralleling the behavior of Marathi extended ergative subjects in (34). She takes (73a) to have a wide scope reading for the subject and (73b), a narrow scope reading. The availability of the narrow scope reading suggests that the subject is introduced lower than the modal.³⁵

- (73) a. Two Austrian skiers must win the next race (in order for either of them to win the World Cup)
 b. An Austrian must win the next race (in order for Austria to have the most gold medals) (Wurmbrand 1999:608)

A final argument that has been made against control analyses comes from case connectivity. Wurmbrand (1999) shows that quirky case in Icelandic is preserved in root modal clauses (74). More generally in the language, quirky case distinguishes raising from control: it is preserved under raising but overwritten under control.

- (74) Haraldi / *Haraldur verður að líka hamborgarar
 Harold-DAT / *Harold-NOM must to like hamburgers
 ‘Harold must like hamburgers’ (in order to be accepted by his new American in-laws)
 (Wurmbrand 1999:603)

We find similar data in Marathi with subjects of a closed class of experiencer predicates, including *thandī wajṇə* ‘to feel cold’, *bhiti waṭṇə* ‘to feel afraid’, and *awəḍṇə* ‘to like’, which take dative case (Pandharipande 1998; Dhongde and Wali 2009). Examples are given in (75). In modal clauses, these subjects remain dative-marked; they cannot occur with the ergative marking associated with causative control structures (76).

- (75) a. ruca-la bhiti waṭ-li.
 Rucha-DAT fear feel-PFV.3SG.F
 ‘Rucha felt afraid.’

³⁵Ideally, these examples would have controlled for the *ought-to-do* reading, as that is the reading hypothesized to involve a control structure.

- b. ruca-la pustāk awəḍ-lə.
 Rucha-DAT book like-PFV.3SG.N
 ‘Rucha liked the book.’
- (76) a. ruca-la/*ni bhiti waṭ-awī.
 Rucha-DAT/ERG fear feel-WN.MOD.3SG.F
 ‘Rucha should feel afraid.’
- b. ruca-la/*ni pustāk awəḍ-awə.
 Rucha-DAT/ERG book like-WN.MOD.3SG.N
 ‘Rucha should like the book.’

These facts are less straightforward for the current proposal, but they remain compatible with it. I take the preservation of idiosyncratic case to be strong evidence for raising and agree that sentences like (74) and (76) must instantiate raising structures. The question, then, is why causative control is unavailable. I suggest that the restriction may stem from an incompatibility between the structures that give rise to idiosyncratic case and causative control. One possibility is that quirky subjects are introduced in a position higher than $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}^P$, preventing a control relationship from forming. As evidence in this direction, experiencer subjects also fail to participate in the standard morphological causative construction (77). This suggests a more general co-occurrence restriction between causatives and experiencer subjects.

- (77) a. *ruca-ni əmol-la thəṇḍi waj-əw-li.
 Rucha-ERG Amol-DAT cold ring-CAUS-PFV.3SG.F
 Int: ‘Rucha made Amol feel cold.’
- b. *əmol-ni mə-la pustāk awəḍ-əw-lə.
 amol-ERG 1SG-DAT book like-CAUS-PFV.3SG.N
 Int: ‘Amol made me like the book.’

Another possibility is that quirky subjects originate as obliques and therefore lack some of the subject properties needed to serve as PRO. This account is promising for Marathi, where experiencer subjects are generally unavailable as controlled subjects (as is also the case in Hindi-Urdu; see Davison 2008), but it may be less well suited to Icelandic, where quirky subjects can occur as the understood subjects of control complements (Sigurðsson 1991). In Marathi control constructions with *prayātnā kār* ‘try’, for instance, embedding a non-experiencer predicate is well-formed (78a), but embedding an experiencer predicate is ungrammatical (78b)–(78c).

- (78) a. əmol_i-ni [PRO_i pustāk wac-ayca] prayātnā ke-la.
 Amol-ERG book read-NONFIN.GEN.M.SG attempt do-PFV.3SG.M
 ‘Amol tried to read the book.’

- b. *əmol_i-ni [PRO_i bhiti waʈ-ayca] prəyətnə ke-la.
 Amol-ERG fear feel-NONFIN.GEN.M.SG attempt do-PFV.3SG.M
 Int: ‘Amol tried to feel afraid.’
- c. *əmol_i-ni [PRO_i pustək awəɖ-ayca] prəyətnə ke-la.
 Amol-ERG book like-NONFIN.GEN.M.SG attempt do-PFV.3SG.M
 Int: ‘Amol tried to like the book.’

In sum, the discussion in the earlier literature leaves open the possibility that the structural alternation proposed for Marathi modal clauses is also present in other languages, including English. Extending the analysis to English has empirical payoffs as well. It can capture the observation that *ought-to-do* root modals disrupt idiom connectivity (79) and fail to preserve predicate symmetry (80) (Brennan 1993), paralleling the Marathi data in §4.1.

(79) #The cat has to be out of the bag. (Int: *ought-to-do*)

(80) He should shake hands with his boss. $\nRightarrow$ His boss should shake hands with him.

English also has modal constructions that preclude an *R.A.* construal of the subject. Optative *may*-clauses like (81), briefly discussed in §3.3, are an example: they express a wish, but do not support a reading where the subject is responsible for its fulfillment.

(81) May Rucha catch many fish!

Such examples suggest that, even in English, assignment of the *R.A.* role is not purely a matter of contextual resolution, but can be grammatically constrained. This chapter has identified one grammatical route to fixing the *R.A.* construal: causative control.

Chapter 3

Fluid-S alignment in Bishnupriya Manipuri

Note: This chapter is co-authored with Uttam Singha, the primary language consultant for this project.

This chapter turns to Bishnupriya Manipuri, another Indo-Aryan language in which ergative case extends beyond outwardly transitive clauses. Whereas the extended ergative pattern in Marathi is restricted to a subset of modal clauses, in Bishnupriya Manipuri it is considerably more general, occurring broadly across clause types. In both languages, the alternation between zero and ergative marking on apparently intransitive subjects correlates with differences in the construal of the subject. We first describe the Bishnupriya Manipuri pattern in detail and then argue that it can be captured by a low-control analysis parallel to the one developed for Marathi.

1 Introduction

Bishnupriya Manipuri (Eastern Indo-Aryan) exhibits fluid-S case alignment: the sole argument of a broad class of intransitive predicates alternates between ergative (A-like) and zero (P-like) marking, with the choice seemingly tracking the subject's degree of agentivity. Unlike in split-S systems, where subject case is typically fixed for a given predicate, the choice in Bishnupriya Manipuri is often flexible and context-sensitive. An example illustrating the optionality of case marking in an intransitive clause is given in (82), while (83) demonstrates the obligatoriness of ergative marking in a transitive clause. Fluid-S systems of this kind have been characterized as typologically rare (Dixon 1994; Nichols 1992, 2006) and remain understudied.

(82) Intransitive clause (S is ERG or unmarked)

raju(=e) at-er.
 Raju=ERG walk-IPFV.3SG

‘Raju walks/is walking.’

(83) Transitive clause (A is ERG; P is unmarked)

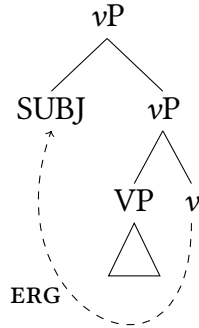
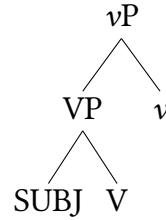
raju*(=e) ca pi-er.
 Raju=ERG tea drink-IPFV.3SG

‘Raju drinks/is drinking tea.’

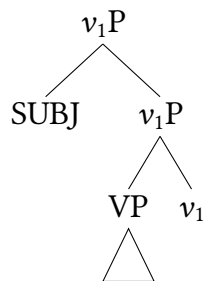
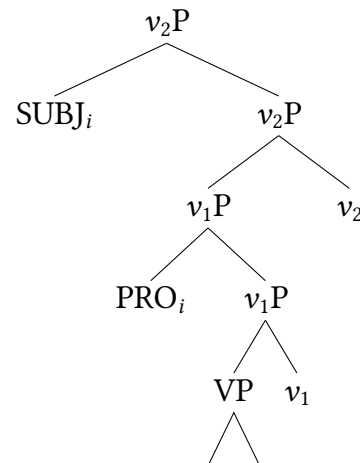
Active case marking systems—which we take to encompass both fluid-S and split-S patterns, following Dixon (1979)—are especially relevant to debates about the nature of ergative case. A central issue in recent work is whether ergative case is best analyzed as an inherent case, assigned to agents or external arguments in connection with their theta role (Woolford 1997, 2006, Aldridge 2004, Legate 2008, 2012, Anand and Nevins 2006, Mahajan 2012, Coon 2013, a.m.o.), or as a dependent case, assigned in the presence of a lower competing argument (Marantz 1991, Baker 2014, 2015, Baker and Bobaljik 2017, Clem and Deal 2024, a.o.). Canonical ergative systems, where ergative case is restricted to overtly transitive subjects, have increasingly been analyzed in dependent case terms (Baker 2014, 2017, 2024; Yuan 2018; Ershova 2019; Clem and Deal 2024; Deal and O’Hagan 2025, a.o.). Active languages, however, appear to present a stronger case for the inherent approach. Because ergative marking extends to agentive intransitive subjects in these languages (Mithun 1991), it is especially plausible that ergative case targets a class of arguments defined by their thematic properties rather than by transitivity. Indeed, inherent case analyses are often taken to underlie active systems, even though the crucial structural premise—that marked intransitive subjects occupy an external argument position and unmarked ones do not—is often assumed rather than demonstrated (e.g. Woolford 2015, Laka 2017, Neu 2026:21–22).

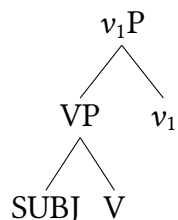
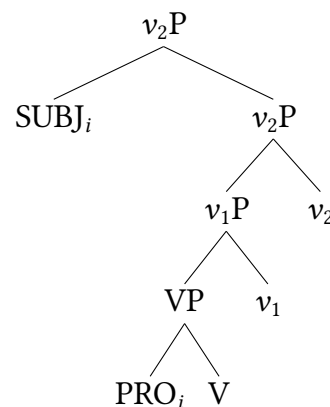
This chapter argues that the fluid-S pattern in Bishnupriya Manipuri, despite initial appearances, does not support an inherent case analysis of the ergative marker. While ergative case in the language is sensitive to interpretation, it does not straightforwardly track external argumenthood or any single theta role. In other words, it is not the case that all ergative-marked intransitive subjects are external arguments while all unmarked intransitive subjects are internal arguments, as the ‘default’ inherent case view represented in (84) would predict.¹

¹Here and throughout the chapter, I represent the lowest verbal projection with the label VP. Nothing in the analysis hinges on whether it is instead analyzed as $\sqrt{P}$, or as $\sqrt{P}$ along with a categorizing projection.

(84) Structure-case correlation on an inherent case accounta. *Unergative* $\leftrightarrow$ ERGb. *Unaccusative* $\leftrightarrow$ $\emptyset$ 

We argue instead for an analysis parallel to the one developed for Marathi in Chapter 2: ergative case in Bishnupriya Manipuri is a dependent case, and its occurrence on intransitive subjects follows from a covert control(-like) structure in which the overt subject is introduced in a higher thematic position and binds a null pronoun in a lower position. The proposal is schematized in (85). The analysis builds on Massam (2009); Tollan (2018); Tollan and Oxford (2018); Tollan and Massam (2022); Burukina and Polinsky (2025) in positing an articulated thematic domain with two distinct external argument positions. For the moment, we refer to these positions with the stand-in labels Spec, v_1P and Spec, v_2P . Whereas these earlier analyses tie the distinction between the two positions to transitivity, we take subject height to correlate directly with interpretation. The special interpretation of ergative-marked intransitive subjects arises because the subject is construed with both the thematic role assigned in the higher external argument position, and the role assigned to the lower bound pronoun.

(85) Proposed dependent case analysisa. *Unergative*(i) No case competitor $\leftrightarrow$ $\emptyset$ (ii) Case competitor $\leftrightarrow$ ERG

b. *Unaccusative*(i) No case competitor $\leftrightarrow \emptyset$ (ii) Case competitor $\leftrightarrow \text{ERG}$ 

On the proposed analysis, subjects of intransitive predicates remain unmarked when they occur in either of the (i) structures in (85), but receive ergative case when they occur in either of the (ii) structures. In the latter configurations, the overt subject c-commands a lower pronominal element, and this local structural relation licenses dependent ergative case. Meanwhile subjects of transitive predicates receive ergative case regardless of their structural height, since the object already supplies the lower nominal competitor required for dependent case assignment. A broader implication of this proposal is that fluid-S languages do not require a fundamentally different mechanism for ergative case assignment. The distinctive distribution of ergative case can instead be derived from structural contrasts among apparently intransitive clauses.

The chapter will proceed as follows. Section 2 provides background on Bishnupriya Manipuri, including the language context and relevant morphosyntactic properties. Section 3 presents an overview of the distribution of ergative and unmarked subjects. Section 4 then introduces the inherent case analysis as a baseline and identifies the challenges it faces in accounting for the Bishnupriya Manipuri pattern. Section 5 develops and motivates the alternative dependent case analysis. Finally, Section 6 considers broader implications of the proposal, including its crosslinguistic applicability and the conditions under which fluid-S systems arise.

2 Language background

2.1 Language and speakers

Bishnupriya Manipuri is an Eastern Indo-Aryan language spoken primarily in the northeastern Indian states of Assam and Tripura and in the Sylhet division of Bangladesh. The total speaker population is roughly estimated to be 100,000-120,000, based on figures from the 2011 Census of India and a 2008 SIL sociolinguistic survey of Bishnupriya Manipuri speakers in

Bangladesh (Census of India 2011; Kim and Kim 2008). Within the speech community, the language is often referred to simply as Manipuri; in broader discussion, however, the name Bishnupriya Manipuri is generally used to distinguish it from Meitei, a Tibeto-Burman language that is also commonly called Manipuri.

Bishnupriya Manipuri was once spoken in the Indian state of Manipur alongside Meitei, but almost no speakers remain there today (Sinha 1984).² The language shows clear evidence of contact with Meitei, and possibly with other neighboring Tibeto-Burman languages, both in terms of lexical borrowing and shared grammatical properties. At the same time, the language retains a clearly Indo-Aryan core, including substantial inherited derivational and inflectional morphology.

Bishnupriya Manipuri shows considerable variation across speaker groups. Speakers widely recognize two dialects, *Mā dai Gāng* (MG) ‘Queen’s village’ and *Rā jar Gāng* (RG) ‘King’s village’, which are thought to trace back to distinct localities in Manipur. Today, MG and RG villages remain distinct, but they are geographically dispersed rather than organized into contiguous dialect areas. A speaker’s present-day locality is also a significant factor conditioning variation.

The data discussed in this chapter come from Uttam Singha, a speaker of the MG variety originally from the village of Tilakpur in Kamalganj Upazila, Moulvibazar District, Sylhet Division, Bangladesh. The data were collected between 2019 and 2026, primarily through remote and in-person elicitation sessions. Examples are presented in simplified IPA. Each example has also been checked with another speaker from the same region, and the broader fluid-S pattern has been corroborated with three additional speakers: two RG speakers from Assam and one MG speaker from Tripura. However, we have worked with two individuals whose distribution of ergative case differs substantially from the pattern described here. We therefore acknowledge that the description we present does not extend to all speakers of Bishnupriya Manipuri. The reader is referred to Chapter 4, §4.5.1 for further discussion of this variation.

2.2 Basic morphosyntax

We briefly overview the morphosyntactic properties of Bishnupriya Manipuri that are most relevant to this chapter. A broader grammatical description can be found in Chapter 4. The basic constituent order in Bishnupriya Manipuri is SOV, though word order is quite flexible and is often manipulated to express information structural distinctions. Core arguments are case-marked as follows. Subjects bear the ergative marker =*e* in transitive clauses, and appear either unmarked or with ergative case in intransitive clauses; the details of this distribution will be addressed in the next section. Direct objects may be unmarked or differ-

²Many aspects of the history of the Bishnupriya Manipuri people remain uncertain or politically contested. According to one widely held view, Bishnupriya Manipuris were displaced from Manipur in multiple waves of conflict in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, leading to their settlement in the neighboring regions where they reside today. Those who remained in Manipur have shifted to the state’s dominant language, Meitei.

entially marked with $=(\text{o})re$ (86). The factors conditioning this alternation are not central to the present discussion, but include animacy as well as other subtler distinctions; see Chapter 4, §4.5.2 for further discussion. Indirect objects are marked with either $=(\text{o})re$ or $=(\text{o})raŋ$ (87). Since $=(\text{o})re$ marks both direct and indirect objects, we refer to it as the *dative-accusative* ‘DAT.ACC’ case. In addition to marking indirect objects, $=(\text{o})raŋ$ also marks animate locations (88), so we refer to it as the *dative-locative* ‘DAT.LOC’ case.

Case	Form
Ergative	$=e$
Dative-Accusative	$=(\text{o})re$
Dative-Locative	$=(\text{o})raŋ$

Table 3.1: Case markers that occur on core arguments

- (86) uttom= e kupaŋ=han($=ore$) bag- e bel-lo.
 Uttam=ERG plate=CLF=DAT.ACC break-NONFIN drop-PST.3SG
 ‘Uttam broke the plate.’
- (87) manu go= i mo= $re/raŋ$ lerik a=han udari di-lo.
 man CLF=ERG 1SG=DAT.ACC/DAT.LOC book one=CLF on.loan give-PST.3SG
 ‘The man lent me a book.’
- (88) mi to= $raŋ$ mo= r baba= re dekh-uri.
 1SG 2SG=DAT.LOC 1SG=GEN father=DAT.ACC see-IPFV.1SG
 ‘I see my father in you.’

Finite verbs in Bishnupriya Manipuri minimally take a TAM suffix that agrees with the subject in person, number, and sometimes gender, whether the subject is ergative or unmarked (89). Verbs may occur with additional morphology as well, such as a causative marker, an (additional) aspectual marker, negation, or a directional. An example with a more morphologically complex verb is given in (90).

- (89) sorojuni($=e$) at- iri .
 Sorojini=ERG walk-IPFV.3SG.F
 ‘Sorojini walks/is walking.’
- (90) sou= $g=i$ iskol= e na-gi-as-ila-ga thaŋ?
 child=CLF=PL school=LOC NEG-go-PERF-PST.3PL-DIR Q
 ‘Had the children not gone to school?’

Nominal expressions in Bishnupriya Manipuri commonly include numeral classifiers (glossed ‘CLF’), which can indicate the semantic category of the noun and constrain its number and definiteness interpretations. There are two main classifiers used with count nouns, =*go* and =*han*, and one used with mass nouns, (sub)kinds, and count nouns in large quantities, =*ta* (see Chapter 4, §4.2 and Akolkar 2023). Their properties will not be directly relevant in this chapter, but it should be noted that they will occur frequently in examples, including in nominal expressions without overt numerals. An example illustrating each of the three classifiers is given in (91).

- (91) otithi a=*go*=i kundo ak=*ta* bari=*ha*=t dek-lo.
 guest one=CLF=ERG jasmine one=CLF garden=CLF=LOC see-PST.3SG
 ‘A guest saw a type of jasmine in the garden.’

3 Overview of subject case marking

Subjects in Bishnupriya Manipuri typically either bear ergative case, realized as the enclitic =*e* (with the phonologically conditioned allomorph =*i*), or remain unmarked. A small class of experiencer predicates instead occurs with noncanonically marked subjects, which bear genitive or, less commonly, dative-locative case (see Chapter 4, §4.5.3-4.5.4). Noncanonically marked experiencer subjects are well-attested across Indo-Aryan and South Asian languages more generally (e.g. Verma and Mohanan 1990; Verbeke et al. 2015). The case marking of these experiencer subjects falls outside the scope of this chapter, so they are set aside for the remainder of the chapter.

3.1 Transitive subjects: always ergative

Transitive subjects in Bishnupriya Manipuri obligatorily bear ergative case, with few exceptions. Unlike in other Indo-Aryan languages, including Hindi-Urdu (Mohan 1994) and Nepali (Li 2007), subject case marking in Bishnupriya Manipuri is insensitive to tense and aspect. Accordingly, across the range of tense–aspect–mood categories illustrated in (92), transitive subjects must appear with ergative morphology.³

³Exceptions to this generalization arise in certain information-structurally marked contexts. In answers to *wh*-questions, a focused transitive subject sometimes appears unmarked, as in (v). In these contexts, the subject is produced with special intonation followed by an intonational break; speakers also sometimes provide biclausal translations. These observations suggest that such subjects may be base-generated in a left-peripheral position or in a cleft-like structure, where the usual case assignment mechanism might not apply.

- (v) *Response to the question ‘Who didn’t do his work?’*

oja=*go*, ta=*r* kam na-kor-is-e.
 teacher=CLF 3SG.M=GEN work NEG-do-PERF-PRES.3SG
 Offered translation: ‘It’s the teacher, he didn’t do his work.’

(92) a. Past⁴

bonok=go*(=i) aji byan=e kocu lag-ilo.
 sister=CLF=ERG today morning=LOC taro plant-PST.3SG
 ‘Sister planted taro this morning.’

b. Imperfective

sou o=g-i*(=e) {epaga / haddin} nondal khel-tara.
 child DEM.DIST=CLF-PL=ERG now daily nondal play-3SG.IPFV
 ‘Those kids are playing nondal right now.’ / ‘Those kids play nondal every day.’

c. Future

manu a=go*(=i) kalika to=re hukana mas lua
 person one=CLF=ERG adjacent.day 2SG=DAT.ACC dried fish buy.NONFIN
 di-toi.
 give-FUT.3SG
 ‘Someone will buy you dried fish tomorrow.’

d. Imperative

onita*(=i) ira=re ca-khai kor-ok.
 Onita=ERG Ira=DAT.ACC tea-food do-IMP.3SG
 ‘Onita should take care of Ira.’

A second exception arises with transitive subjects bearing the scalar/additive focus marker =u, which may likewise occur without overt ergative marking (vi). It remains unclear whether this pattern reflects a distinct syntax for focused subjects or a morphological interaction between the focus and ergative enclitics. Our goal in this chapter is to account for the core pattern of subject case marking, so we set these cases aside and avoid examples involving narrow focus on subjects.

- (vi) ak=go=u mas=or hou na-kha-s-i.
 one=CLF=SCAL.FOC fish=GEN curry NEG-eat-PERF-PRES.3PL
 ‘No one ate the fish curry.’

⁴In other Indo-Aryan languages, cognate *l*-based verbal suffixes are standardly analyzed as perfective markers (e.g. Masica 1991, 269–270, 278). We take the *l*-suffixes in Bishnupriya Manipuri to mark past tense because they also occur in past imperfective and copular clauses (vii), as discussed in Chapter 4, §5.3.2.

- (vii) sunil jepaga hukarj is-il o=ha=t ta haddin lerik pakor-lo.
 Sunil REL.TEMP small COP-PST.3SG DEM.DIST=CLF=LOC 3SG.M daily book read-PST.3SG
 ‘When Sunil was young, he would read every day.’

e. Subjunctive

horop*(=e) to=re kamar-ba ce-is!
 snake=ERG 2SG=DAT.ACC bite-SBJV.3SG look-DEL.IMP.2SG
 ‘Watch out, lest snakes bite you!’

3.2 Pronominal subjects: ergative is never overt

Ergative case is never overtly realized on personal pronouns (93a). However, when a nominal modifier follows a pronominal transitive subject—quantificational elements may appear in this position—ergative marking does surface on the modifier (94). This pattern suggests that ergative case is underlyingly present with pronominal subjects as well, but is realized as null immediately following a pronoun. When other material is available to host the suffix, it can be pronounced.

- (93) a. tei(*=e) senkum pi-ri.
 3SG.F=ERG milk drink-IPFV.3SG
 ‘She is drinking milk.’
 b. ami(*=e) por-is-e sopa o=ta gus-ilan.
 1PL=ERG fall-PERF-PRES.3SG tree DEM.DIST=CLF remove-PST.1PL
 ‘We removed the fallen trees.’
- (94) a. ami di-o=g-i=e lohon kor-tanai.
 1PL two-DEF=CLF-PL=ERG marriage do-FUT.1PL
 ‘We two are going to get married.’
 b. tumi habbi=e lerik e=han pakor-lai=go?
 2PL all=ERG book DEM.PROX=CLF read-PST.3PL=PQ
 ‘Have you all read this book?’

Following Legate (2014a), we take the absence of overt ergative marking on pronouns to reflect morphological syncretism between ergative and unmarked forms, rather than a deeper syntactic difference. Throughout the remainder of the chapter, examples in which subject case marking is relevant use non-pronominal subjects, so that ergative case morphology remains visible.

3.3 Intransitive subjects: (mostly) variable subject marking

Intransitive subjects may bear ergative case, like transitive subjects, or they may be unmarked. Apparently intransitive predicates fall into three classes with respect to subject case marking. The first class requires an unmarked subject; the second, and largest, allows either an unmarked or an ergative subject; and the third requires an ergative subject. Within the second class, individual predicates may have a tendency toward one pattern over the other. Table 3.2 presents representative verbs from each class.

Subject case	Predicate
A. Obligatorily $\emptyset$	<i>sat</i> ‘bloom’, <i>bag</i> ‘break’, <i>φut</i> ‘explode’
B. Optional	① S tends to be $\emptyset$ <i>kah</i> ‘ascend’, <i>khaŋ</i> ‘be startled’, <i>ŋak</i> ‘be surprised’, <i>pur</i> ‘burn’, <i>ah</i> ‘come’, <i>mor</i> ‘die’, <i>maŋ</i> ‘disappear, be lost’, <i>gol</i> ‘dissolve, melt’, <i>homil</i> ‘enter’, <i>por</i> ‘fall’, <i>ja</i> ‘go’, <i>daŋor</i> ‘grow (up)’, <i>nikul</i> ‘leave’, <i>bur</i> ‘sink, drown’, <i>tha</i> ‘stay’ ② No strong tendency <i>hin</i> ‘bathe’, <i>at</i> ‘be compressed, get cornered’, <i>okor</i> ‘begin’, <i>φurd</i> ‘fly’, <i>tiksou</i> ‘get angry’, <i>luk</i> ‘hide’, <i>ruh</i> ‘make sound’, <i>boh</i> ‘sit’, <i>guma</i> ‘sleep’, <i>uba</i> ‘stand’, <i>at</i> ‘walk’ ③ S tends to be ERG <i>nac</i> ‘dance’, <i>kad</i> ‘cry’, <i>dabd</i> ‘run’, <i>hatur</i> ‘swim’
C. Obligatorily ERG	<i>kah</i> ‘cough’, <i>ag</i> ‘defecate’, <i>ah</i> ‘laugh’, <i>loud</i> ‘shout’, <i>haksia</i> ‘sneeze’, <i>boŋ</i> ‘vomit’, <i>amia</i> ‘yawn’

Table 3.2: Subject case marking with apparently intransitive predicates

The organization of these predicates suggests a correspondence between subject case marking and the unaccusative/unergative distinction. Predicates that require or tend to take unmarked subjects are those whose sole argument is not typically interpreted as agentive, making them plausible candidates for unaccusatives. Predicates that tend to take ergative subjects, by contrast, generally have canonically agentive sole arguments and are thus plausibly unergative. The predicates that require ergative subjects, however, are not necessarily those with the most agentive subjects. Some describe bodily processes that are often involuntary, although such predicates do tend to pattern with unergatives crosslinguistically (Perlmutter 1978). We discuss each class in turn below.

3.3.1 Obligatorily unmarked subjects

Predicates that require unmarked subjects are those whose subjects are necessarily non-agents. Most verbs in this category, including *bag* ‘break’ and *φut* ‘explode’, require their subject to be inanimate (95).

- (95) a. *kupaŋ=han(*=e) bag-is-e.*
 plate=CLF=ERG break-PERF-PRES.3SG
 ‘The plate has/is broken.’
 b. *#sorojini(=e) bag-is-e.*
 Sorojini=ERG break-PERF-PRES.3SG
 Int: ‘Sorojini has/is broken.’

Other predicates in this class, like *sat* ‘bloom’, have metaphorical uses which allow animate subjects (96). Nevertheless, they retain the non-volitional, non-controlled change-of-state meanings of their literal uses, and their subjects must remain unmarked.

- (96) *sunil(*=e) aji jomaj=e sat-or.*
 Sunil=ERG today society=LOC bloom-IPFV.3SG
 ‘Sunil is blossoming in today’s society.’

3.3.2 Optionally marked subjects

Predicates that allow either unmarked or ergative subjects are wide ranging. The degree of flexibility varies considerably across predicates and contexts. With some predicates, only one case marking pattern is accepted in neutral or out-of-the-blue contexts, while the other requires a fairly specific contextual setup. Other predicates allow both case marking options across a much wider range of contexts.

For the verbs listed under subgroup ① in Table 3.2, unmarked subjects are the clear default. Ergative marking becomes acceptable only under conditions that encourage a more agentive or volitional interpretation of the subject, as shown in (97). Modifiers like *harpa harpa* ‘knowingly’ and *hada peia* ‘willingly’, as well as clausal modifiers describing an agentive manner of action, also facilitate ergative marking (98).

- (97) a. *sou=go(#/?=i) por-il.*
 child=CLF=ERG fall-PST.3SG
 ‘The child fell.’
 b. *matou kor-te-ga sou=go=i por-il.*
 child.act do-while.IPFV-DIR child=CLF=ERG fall-PST.3SG
 ‘The child (fake) fell while playing pretend.’
 (98) *manu=go=i hada pe-ia maŋu-is-e=ta.*
 man=CLF=ERG like get-CVB be.lost-PERF-PRES.3SG=CLF
 ‘The man has intentionally disappeared.’

Some predicates in this subgroup, like *daŋor* ‘grow (up)’, are especially resistant to ergative marking. These predicates describe eventualities that cannot in any normal state of affairs be brought about by a volitional agent. Nevertheless, ergative marking becomes possible in

contexts that suspend real-world assumptions and allow the subject to be construed as agentive, as in (99). Other predicates like *gol* ‘dissolve, melt’ typically take unmarked inanimate subjects, but allow ergative marking in certain metaphorical uses where the subject is able to receive an agentive interpretation (100).

(99) *Context: There is a magic pill a child can take to grow up.*

(hojok ak=ta khe-ia) khan̄da sou=go(=i) dan̄or-il.
 medicine one=CLF eat-CVB suddenly child=CLF=ERG grow-PST.3SG

‘(Having taken a type of medicine,) the child suddenly grew.’

Speaker comment: ‘Only in this scenario [is ergative possible with this predicate].’

(100) raju(=e) soukora=ha=t g-ia gol=il.
 Raju=ERG heat=CLF=LOC go-CVB melt-PST.3SG

‘Raju melted from going out in the heat.’

The verbs in subgroup ② allow both subject case marking patterns, even in out-of-the-blue contexts. Speakers typically report a difference in interpretation between the two options, though the contrast can be subtle and difficult to articulate. Their comments often suggest that ergative marking correlates with more active involvement on the part of the subject, as in (101).

(101) sunil(=e) hin-ilo.
 Sunil=ERG bathe-PST.3SG

‘Sunil bathed’

Speaker comment: ‘[With ergative marking, it sounds like] he did more action.’

Conversely, unmarked subjects are favored when the subject is construed as affected by external circumstances, and thus less of an agent. For example, zero marking is natural in scenarios like (102) which specify or imply an independent cause.

(102) to=r kotha=no uttom tiksou-il.
 2SG=GEN word=INS Uttam get.angry-PST.3SG

‘Uttam got angry because of your words/actions.’

The same pattern extends to predicates in subgroup ③, which tend strongly toward ergative marked subjects. In out-of-the-blue contexts, unmarked subjects may be difficult for speakers to accept, as shown in (103). They become possible, however, in contexts where the subject’s action is construed as less volitional or less self-directed. In (104), for example, the fox’s running is framed not as a self-initiated action, but as a reaction to being beaten.

- (103) jela=go#/(=i) dabd-ilo.
 woman=CLF=ERG run-PST.3SG
 ‘The woman ran.’

Consultant comment: ‘I don’t see a use for [the version with the unmarked subject].’

- (104) *Context (from a folk tale): A fox was caught trying to deceive an old couple. As punishment, the old woman began beating him, so he quickly apologized and fled.*

lamui o=go bel-ia dabd-ilo.
 fox DEM.DIST=CLF drop-CVB run-PST.3SG

‘That fox ran off.’

(Appendix, Text 1: ex. 497)

Unmarked subjects are also more likely when the type of individual the subject refers to is not readily construed as acting intentionally. For instance, with a predicate like *kad* ‘cry’, an unmarked subject is especially natural when the subject refers to a baby, as in (105).

- (105) sou=go kad-lo.
 child=CLF cry-PST.3SG
 ‘The baby cried.’

Speaker comment: ‘More common to use [this case marking] for a baby.’

Up to this point, we have seen that ergative marking on intransitive subjects is closely tied to agentivity. The main difference across predicates lies in how readily their subjects can be construed as agentive, and in what kinds of contexts bring out an agentive reading. With some predicates, an agentive construal is readily available, making ergative marking common or even preferred; with others, it is difficult to obtain, making ergative marking rare and highly context dependent. Similar facts are reported for the distribution of ergative case on intransitive subjects in the fluid-S system of Tsova-Tush (Holisky 1987).⁵

3.3.3 Predicates with obligatorily ergative-marked subjects

The predicates that require ergative subjects form a coherent semantic class: all are bodily emission and/or sound emission predicates.⁶ Ergative marking is obligatory with these predicates even in contexts that favor a non-agentive construal of the subject (106).

⁵There are also parallels with optional ergative/agentive marking in Tibeto-Burman languages, including varieties of Tibetan (DeLancey 2011) and Tshangla (Andvik 2010), where ergative marking on intransitive subjects is at least partly conditioned by semantic factors such as agentivity and control. The systems are not identical, however: ergative/agentive marking in Tibeto-Burman is also reported to be sensitive to aspect and discourse-pragmatic factors, and is not always obligatory even with transitive subjects.

⁶Intransitive verbs in this semantic class are also among the main predicates that permit ergative subjects in some varieties of Hindi-Urdu, an otherwise ‘standard’ ergative language (Poornima 2012, a.o.).

- (106) sunil*(=e) besepia kah-ilo.
 Sunil=ERG without.occasion cough-PST.3SG
 ‘Sunil coughed unintentionally’

We propose that these verbs are covertly transitive, and that the obligatory ergative marking of their subjects arises through the same mechanism that assigns ergative case to subjects of overtly transitive predicates. In particular, we suggest that what appears to be a simple intransitive verb is actually a phonologically reduced light verb construction containing a nominal object (Hale and Keyser 1993).

For each predicate in this class, there is a corresponding noun that is either segmentally identical to the verbal stem or differs only in the presence of final /a/: *kaha* ‘cough(s)’, *aga* ‘bowel movement(s)’, *aha* ‘laugh(s)’, *louda* ‘shout(s)’, *haksia* ‘sneeze(s)’, *boŋa* ‘act(s) of vomiting’, and *amia* ‘yawn(s)’. Each of these nouns can participate in an N+V light verb construction with *de* ‘give’, producing a complex predicate similar in meaning to the apparently simple predicate. This correspondence is illustrated in (107).

- (107) a. onupom*(=e) {kaha / aha / louda / haksia / amia} *(a=han) d-ilo.
 Onupom=ERG cough laugh shout sneeze yawn one=CLF give-PST.3SG
 ‘Onupom coughed/laughed/shouted/sneezed/yawned (once).’
 b. onupom*(=e) {kah / ah / loud / haksi / ami}-ilo.
 Onupom=ERG cough laugh shout sneeze yawn-PST.3SG
 ‘Onupom coughed/laughed/shouted/sneezed/yawned.’

We suggest that both predicate types in (107) are underlyingly N+V light verb constructions, but that when the nominal component is bare, the construction undergoes phonological reduction and surfaces as a single phonological word. The interpretations of the two predicate types support this analysis. In (107a), the noun occurs with *a=han* ‘one=CLF’, producing a reading in which the event consists of a single cough, laugh, shout, and so on. In (107b), by contrast, the predicate has a more general activity reading compatible with one or more coughs, laughs, etc. This contrast is expected if the predicate in (107b) contains a bare nominal component, as bare nouns in Bishnupriya Manipuri are number-neutral (108); see Chapter 4, §4.3 and Akolkar (2023) for further discussion.

- (108) mi gelga mari lerik lu-ilu ere dukan e=go=t=to.
 1SG past year book buy-PST.1SG DEM.PROX store DEM.PROX=CLF=LOC=ABL
 ‘Last year I bought (one or multiple) books from this store.’

There is preliminary phonological support for this analysis as well. In light verb constructions with *de* ‘give’ more broadly, the initial /d/ of *de* may be deleted following a vowel, as shown in (109). When deletion occurs, typically only the TAM suffix of the light verb remains overt, and it forms a prosodic unit with the preceding word. Notably, the nouns

corresponding to the predicates in this class are all vowel-final. If these predicates are indeed underlyingly light verb constructions built from the corresponding nouns, then at least the /d/-deletion component of the proposed reduction may reflect the more general postvocalic deletion process independently attested with *de*.

- (109) ta kam=han kor-e (d)-ilo.
 3SG.M work=CLF do-NONFIN give-PST.3SG
 ‘He finished doing the work.’

Although the precise mechanics and conditioning of the phonological reduction require further investigation, the data strongly suggest a connection between the obligatorily ergative class of predicates and the corresponding light verb constructions. If these predicates are reduced light verb constructions, the obligatory ergative marking of their subjects follows: despite appearing intransitive on the surface, they are in fact structurally transitive, containing a nominal object. We therefore treat them as transitive in the remainder of the chapter. Among genuinely intransitive predicates, by contrast, subject case is broadly conditioned by agentivity. We now turn to possible analyses of this predominantly fluid-S pattern.

4 The null hypothesis: Inherent case & variable unaccusativity

We have seen that subject case marking in Bishnupriya Manipuri, like in other active languages, is closely tied to semantic role. Inherent case approaches are designed to capture patterns precisely of this kind. Accordingly, ergative case in a number of active languages has been analyzed as inherent (Laka 2006 for Basque; Woolford 2015 for Basque, Batsbi/Tsova Tush, Georgian, Ingush, Kashmiri, and Udi; Nash 1996 for Georgian; Mohanan 1994; Anand and Nevins 2006; Mahajan 2012 for Hindi-Urdu⁷). More recently, some authors have argued against inherent case analyses of ergative case even in active languages (Rezac et al. 2014 for Basque; Nash 2021 for Georgian; Baker 2024 for Hindi-Urdu). Still, an inherent case analysis remains a natural starting point for a language in which ergative marking is so closely linked with agentive interpretation.

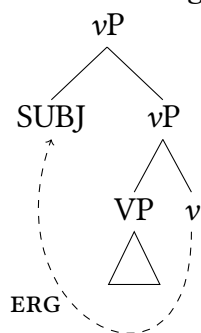
Extending an inherent case analysis to a fluid-S language in particular requires an explanation for why many intransitive predicates can occur with either ergative or unmarked subjects, rather than showing the more lexically determined distribution of split-S systems. One possibility is that individual intransitive predicates in these languages vary in their unergativity/unaccusativity, allowing their sole arguments to be introduced as external or internal arguments (Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995; Sorace 2004; Neu 2026, a.o.). If this view is correct, then the simple inherent case analysis represented in (110) could account for

⁷Hindi-Urdu is not truly an active language, but it has nevertheless figured prominently in this literature because ergative marking optionally extends to a limited class of intransitive subjects, where its presence correlates with the subject’s volitionality (Butt and King 1991; Mohanan 1994).

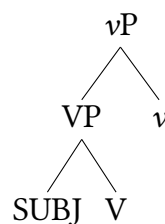
the subject case pattern: in transitive and unergative structures, v assigns ergative case to the subject in its specifier, and in an unaccusative structures, the subject remains unmarked.

(110) The null hypothesis: inherent ERG

a. *Transitive/unergative* $\leftrightarrow$ ERG



b. *Unaccusative* $\leftrightarrow \emptyset$



Variable unaccusativity has recently been defended by Neu (2026) on the basis of independent evidence from causatives in Hindi-Urdu, Turkish, and Sason Arabic. In each of these languages, predicates typically classified as unergative can undergo direct causativization. Assuming that direct causatives have only a single external argument position, Neu argues that these predicates must project an unaccusative structure in causatives, with the causee realized as an internal argument. This amounts to an argument for variability in at least one direction: predicates that are prototypically unergative may nonetheless occur with unaccusative syntax.

We take the combination of these two ideas—that ergative case is assigned inherently and that variation in subject case arises from variable unaccusativity—to constitute the null hypothesis analysis of subject case in Bishnupriya Manipuri. In the remainder of this section, we argue that this analysis is less attractive than it may initially appear and ultimately cannot be maintained. First, we show that the relationship between thematic role and ergative case is weaker than expected on an inherent case analysis (§4.1). There is an asymmetry in the distribution of ergative case in transitive and intransitive clauses that the analysis on its own does not explain. Second, we show that Bishnupriya Manipuri provides a reliable diagnostic for unaccusativity, which reveals a rather stable distinction between unergative and unaccusative predicates in the language (§4.2). Crucially, this distinction does not align with subject case marking: predicates identified as unaccusative can take ergative subjects, while those identified as unergative can take unmarked subjects. We conclude that ergative case cannot simply track whether the subject is introduced as an internal or external argument; it must be sensitive to an independent distinction.

4.1 Ergative case does not (strictly) track semantic role

The relationship between ergative case and semantic role in Bishnupriya Manipuri is less uniform than it may initially appear. Although ergative marking in intransitive clauses is

generally correlated with agentivity, this correlation does not extend to transitive clauses, where ergative marking is obligatory regardless of the subject's thematic role or degree of agentivity. Transitive ergative subjects may be experiencers (111), attitude holders (112), recipients (113), or patients (114). They may also be inanimate (115). Whenever the predicate is transitive, ergative case is required.

- (111) a. *uttom*(=e) bat bok pa-r.*
 Uttam=ERG rice hunger get-IPFV.3SG
 'Uttam is hungry.'
- b. *sumit*(=e) to=r naŋ=han pahur-lo.*
 Sumit=ERG 2SG=GEN name=CLF forget-PST.3SG
 'Sumit forgot your name.'
- (112) *sorujini*(=e) har-pa-s-e [ira=i hatur-a par-iri*
 Sorujini=ERG knowledge-get-PERF-PRES.3SG Ira=ERG swim-PTCP be.able-IPFV.3SG.F
o=han].
 DEM.DIST=CLF
 'Sorujini knows that Ira can swim.'
- (113) *oja=go*(=i) barton a=han pe-ilo.*
 guru=CLF=ERG invitation one=CLF get-PST.3SG
 'The teacher received an invitation.'
- (114) *raju*(=e) dukhani=han sojjo kor-er.*
 Raju=ERG pain=CLF bear do-IPFV.3SG
 'Raju bears the pain.'
- (115) *gula a=han*(=e) gaŋ=han buŋi-lo.*
 flood one=CLF=ERG village=CLF sink.TR-PST.3SG
 'A flood inundated the village.'

With intransitive predicates, ergative case is much more tightly constrained. As shown in the previous section, an ergative-marked intransitive subject must receive an agentive or volitional construal. Intransitive experiencer subjects therefore bear ergative case only in contexts that support such a construal and are otherwise unmarked (116). In addition, inanimate subjects never appear with ergative case in intransitive clauses (117).

- (116) a. *porua=g-i tiksou-itai.*
 student=CLF-PL be.angry-FUT.3PL
 'The students will be angry.'
- Consultant comment: 'Because of someone else's action, they will be upset.'

- b. porua=g-i=e tiksou-itai.
 student=CLF-PL=ERG be.angry-FUT.3PL
 ‘The students will be angry.’
 Consultant comment: ‘They will take the action of getting angry.’
- (117) gula a=han(*=e) ah-il.
 flood one=CLF=ERG come-PST.3SG
 ‘A flood came.’

This asymmetry indicates that transitivity remains relevant to the distribution of ergative case even in an active system. Though ergative case is not confined to subjects of transitive predicates, it is only in overtly transitive clauses that ergative case is assigned independently of the subject’s semantic role. In the literature motivating inherent case analyses of ergative, it is often proposed that ergative case is not assigned strictly to agents, but rather to bearers of a more abstract external argument role, or simply to the nominal in the external argument position (see especially Woolford 2006). Even on this broader view, an explanation is still needed for why the range of semantic roles available to external arguments is so broad in transitive clauses, but much narrower in intransitive clauses. Additionally, Section 5.1 presents evidence that transitive subjects do not all occupy the same syntactic position; some, particularly less agentive transitive subjects like those in (111)–(115), are introduced lower. This further challenges the view that ergative case is tied to a single syntactic position.

4.2 Ergative case does not track external argumenthood

Bishnupriya Manipuri verbal morphology overtly distinguishes unaccusatives from other predicate types. In simple past tense clauses, unaccusative predicates take different past tense suffixes than unergative and transitive predicates.⁸ We argue that this alternation tracks the presence or absence of an external argument introducing head. Contrary to the predictions of a variable unaccusativity account, this diagnostic identifies a fixed class of unaccusatives, with little variability. Moreover, the form of the past tense suffix does not correlate with the availability of ergative case. We conclude from this data that subject case marking is independent of the unaccusative/unergative distinction.

The morphological contrast occurs in the third person singular form of the past tense suffix.⁹ In all other TAM-agreement combinations, the distinction is neutralized. The alternating forms are *-(i)lo* and *-(i)l* (M)/*-(i)li* (F). Transitive verbs uniformly take *-(i)lo*, as illustrated in (118).

⁸The alternation bears at least a superficial resemblance to HAVE/BE auxiliary selection in some Germanic and Romance languages, where the realization of material in the tense-aspect domain is likewise sensitive to unaccusativity (Burzio 1986; Sorace 2000; Bjorkman 2011, a.o.).

⁹Although we refer to the alternating suffix as third person *singular*, it is also used with plural inanimate subjects; plural agreement is triggered only by animate subjects.

- (118) a. *nonde*for=e *mas huki-lo/*il*.
 Nondeshor=ERG fish dry.TRANS-PST.3SG
 ‘Nondeshor dried fish.’
 b. *onita*=i *raju*=re *dek(h)-lo/*li*.
 Raju=ERG *Onita*=DAT.ACC see-PST.3SG
 ‘Onita saw Raju.’

Intransitive predicates whose interpretations align with canonical unergatives also obligatorily take *-(i)lo* (119). This class includes *hin* ‘bathe’, *kad* ‘cry’, *nac* ‘dance’, *ruh* ‘make sound’, *dabd* ‘run’, *hatur* ‘swim’, and *at* ‘walk’. Relating back to the subject case marking-based classification in Table 3.2, this class includes all of the intransitive predicates listed as tending toward ergative subject marking, as well as several of the predicates that show no strong case marking tendency. Predicates that require ergative subjects such as *boŋ* ‘vomit’ and *haksi* ‘sneeze’ also obligatorily take *-(i)lo*, as expected if they are underlyingly transitive (120).

- (119) a. *jela*=go(=i) *dabd-ilo/*ili*.
 woman=CLF=ERG run-PST.3SG
 ‘The woman ran.’
 b. *sunil*(=e) *kad-lo/*il*.
 Sunil=ERG cry-PST.3SG
 ‘Sunil cried.’
 (120) a. *ta* *boŋ-lo/*il*.
 3SG.M vomit-PST.3SG
 ‘He vomited.’
 b. *ta* *haksi-ilo/*il*.
 3SG.M sneeze-PST.3SG
 ‘He sneezed.’

By contrast, intransitive predicates whose meanings align with canonical unaccusatives standardly take *-(i)l* when the subject is non-feminine, and *-(i)li* when the subject is feminine (121). This class includes *bag* ‘break’, *puɽ* ‘burn’, *ah* ‘come’, *maŋ* ‘disappear’, *por* ‘fall’, *daŋor* ‘grow’, *gol* ‘melt, dissolve’, *nikul* ‘leave’, *buɽ* ‘sink, drown’, and *tha* ‘stay’. All predicates listed in Table 3.2 as requiring or having a strong tendency toward unmarked subjects belong to the *-(i)l*/*-(i)li* class, as do many of the predicates with no strong case marking tendency.

- (121) a. *mas*=go *huk-il*.
 fish=CLF dry-PST.3SG
 ‘The fish dried.’
 b. *ta* *tha-il*.
 3SG.M stay-PST.3SG
 ‘He stayed.’

- c. *tei the-ili.*
 3SG.F stay-PST.3SG.F
 ‘She stayed.’
- d. *sou=go=r kukur=go(=i) dabd-ia ge-l-ga.*
 child=CLF=GEN dog.M=CLF=ERG run-CVB go-PST.3SG-DIR
 ‘The child’s dog left running.’

Importantly, the form of the past tense suffix does not determine subject case marking: unmarked subjects are possible with intransitive predicates that take *-(i)lo*, as in (119), and ergative subjects are possible with predicates that take *-(i)l/-(i)li*, as in (121d). If the *-(i)lo* vs. *-(i)l/-(i)li* alternation genuinely diagnoses unaccusativity, then ergative case in Bishnupriya Manipuri cannot be an inherent case assigned to all and only external arguments.

So what does this morphological alternation track? We put forward a preliminary analysis which will be refined in the next section once we adopt a more articulated argument structure. Assuming for now a simple distinction between an external argument position, where unergative and transitive subjects are introduced, and an internal argument position, where unaccusative subjects and objects are introduced, we propose that *-(i)lo* realizes $T_{[PST, 3SG]}$ in the context of an adjacent external argument introducing head, v_{ext} , while *-il* is the elsewhere form, as formalized in (122). The feminine form *-(i)li* is derived by the addition of the feminine suffix *-i* to *-(i)l*. Within the third person singular past paradigm, the feminine feature is overtly realized after *-(i)l* but has no overt realization after *-(i)lo*. Since the feminine feature is likewise unrealized after many other TAM suffixes (see Table 4.9 for the full TAM paradigms), we propose that $\emptyset$ is its elsewhere exponent, as represented in (123).¹⁰

(122) Third person singular past tense allomorphy (Preliminary)

- a. $T_{[PST, 3SG]} \leftrightarrow -(i)lo / v_{ext} \text{ —}$
 b. $T_{[PST, 3SG]} \leftrightarrow -(i)l$

(123) Exponence of [FEM] in the third person singular past

- a. $[FEM] \leftrightarrow -i / -(i)l \text{ —}$
 b. $[FEM] \leftrightarrow \emptyset$

The unaccusativity diagnostic in Bishnupriya Manipuri can therefore be stated as in (124):

(124) Bishnupriya Manipuri unaccusativity diagnostic

If a verb can take *-(i)l/-(i)li* in the simple past tense, it is unaccusative. (If it cannot, it is unergative or transitive.)

¹⁰Gender is morphologically distinguished only in the second and third person imperfective and the third person past. In each case, the overt feminine exponent is *-i*. Because the present discussion is restricted to the third person singular past, (123) abstracts away from the other environments in which *-i* is overtly realized.

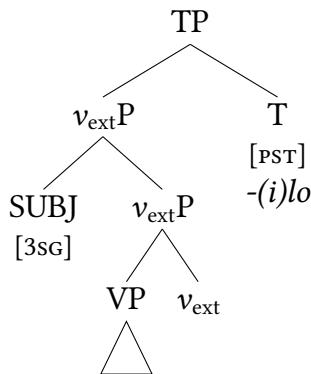
Evidence that the realization of $T_{[PST, 3SG]}$ is conditioned by adjacency to v_{ext} comes from the effect of intervening aspectual morphology. When the perfect aspect marker occurs between the verb stem and the past tense suffix, $T_{[PST, 3SG]}$ must be realized as $-(i)l$ (followed by the feminine suffix $-i$ where applicable), even with predicates that take $-(i)lo$ in the simple past (125). The past perfect thus neutralizes the contrast between $-(i)lo$ and $-(i)l$: in this environment, the choice between the two exponents no longer diagnoses unaccusativity. The diagnostic in (124) is therefore restricted to the simple past.

- (125) a. ta sunil=ore duk(h)-lo/*il.
 3SG.M Sunil=DAT.ACC hurt-PST.3SG
 ‘He hurt Sunil.’
 b. ta sunil=ore dukh-is-il/*ilo.
 3SG.M Sunil=DAT.ACC hurt-PERF-PST.3SG
 ‘He had hurt Sunil.’

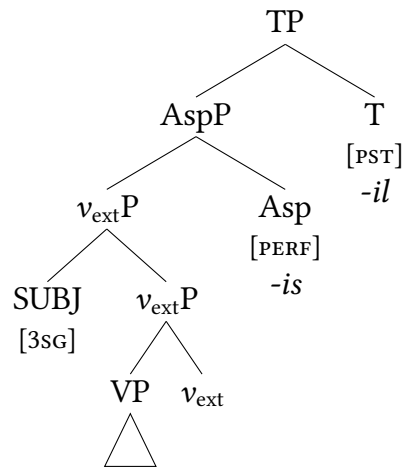
The trees in (126) illustrate three possible structural contexts in which $T_{[PST, 3SG]}$ may occur. Only the configuration in (126a), where $T_{[PST, 3SG]}$ is adjacent to v_{ext} , triggers the $-(i)lo$ form. If aspect intervenes between the two heads, as in (126b), or if v_{ext} is absent altogether, as in (126c), $T_{[PST, 3SG]}$ is realized as $-(i)l$.

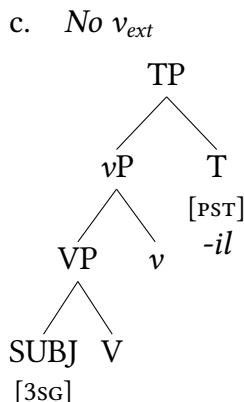
(126) Realizations of $T_{[PST, 3SG]}$ in different structural contexts

a. *Adjacent T and v_{ext}*



b. *Non-adjacent T and v_{ext}*





Morphological causatives and zero-marked ‘defective’ causatives offer further evidence that *-(i)lo* tracks the presence of an external argument. In standard morphological causatives, which introduce an overt causer, the third person singular past tense suffix always surfaces as *-(i)lo* in the simple past, even when the embedded predicate on its own belongs to the *-(i)l* class (127). This pattern is expected if the causative head is itself a subtype of an external argument introducing head, or is accompanied by one (Pylkkänen 2000, 2008).

- (127) a. *ta tha-il.*
 3SG.M stay-PST.3SG
 ‘He stayed.’
- b. *mi tha-na hada na-pa-s-ilu=go he, ta mo=re*
 1SG stay-INF like NEG-get-PERF-PST.1SG=CLF FOC 3SG.M 1SG=DAT.ACC
 tha-u-ilo.
 stay-CAUS-PST.3SG
 ‘I didn’t want to stay; he made me stay.’

In restricted contexts, predicates that otherwise take *-(i)l/-(i)li* may appear with *-(i)lo* even in the absence of overt causative morphology. We refer to these as zero-marked defective causative constructions. These constructions require the verbal event to be interpreted as involving a salient cause or agent, although this cause cannot be expressed as an overt argument. Instead, it must be supplied by some other means—often by a clausal modifier or by the immediate discourse context. Two representative examples are given in (128).¹¹ Without such contextual support, consultants often judge examples with *-(i)lo* on *-(i)l*-compatible verbs as incomplete, as indicated by the consultant comments in (129). Because unaccusative predicates exhibit this flexibility, albeit highly restricted, in the suffixal form they permit, the diagnostic in (124) is stated in terms of which predicates allow *-(i)l/-(i)li*: although unaccusatives may exceptionally surface with *-(i)lo* in defective causative environments, unergatives and transitives never take *-(i)l/-(i)li*.

¹¹The restrictions on this use of *-(i)lo* are complex, and more work is needed to characterize them precisely.

- (128) a. *pani ne-ia mas=go mor-lo/il.*
 water NEG.COP-CVB fish=CLF die-PST.3SG
 ‘The fish died from lack of water.’
 b. *bodi=han aku-is-e aro nouka=go buɽ-lo/il.*
 weight=CLF exceed-PERF-PRES.3SG so boat=CLF sink-PST.3SG
 ‘The boat sank because the weight was too much.’
- (129) #*mas=go mor-lo.*
 fish=CLF die-PST.3SG
 Int: ‘The fish died.’
 Speaker comments: “This verb is looking for a cause, for example ‘fish died because of the water.’” “Doesn’t look like a complete sentence.”

We suggest that these defective causatives involve a special *v* head that introduces an implicit external argument, which also licenses the *-(i)lo* form. The analysis can be modeled on accounts of certain passive and middle voice constructions, following Alexiadou et al. (2015), where a defective *v* head introduces an external argument variable, together with an instruction to interpret that variable as a cause(r), but does not provide a syntactic position in which the argument can be realized.¹² The appearance of *-(i)lo* in both overt and defective causative environments supports the idea that this suffix is tied to the presence of an external argument introducing head, whether the external argument itself is overtly realized or implicit.¹³

This section has shown that the distribution of *-(i)l/- (i)li* and *-(i)lo* distinguishes clauses in which the subject is introduced as an external argument from clauses in which it is not. This diagnostic reveals a stable class of unaccusative predicates that do not alternate freely with unergative structures. Alternations in this suffix arise only in causative structures, which add an external argument to the clause. If the null hypothesis were correct and all intransitive predicates permitting variable subject marking could freely occur in either unaccusative or unergative configurations, we would expect considerably greater flexibility in the verbal morphology than is attested. So far, we have identified only one intransitive verb that alternates between *-(i)l/- (i)li* and *-(i)lo* without the introduction of a distinct overt or implied causer: *guma* ‘sleep’, shown in (130). This isolated case suggests that only a very small number of intransitive predicates allow their subjects to be introduced either as internal or external arguments, perhaps due to homophonous lexical entries. The vast majority

¹² A fuller analysis would need to specify how the contextual requirements of this head are satisfied, and how the individual variable it introduces is bound. One possibility is that the defective causative head existentially binds the variable itself, while some other mechanism ensures that the cause is recoverable from the context. Another is that the external argument variable is somehow directly identified with a cause supplied by an adjoined expression. We leave these questions open here.

¹³ Bishnupriya Manipuri does not have a morphologically marked passive or middle construction which licenses omission of the external argument. It is therefore not possible to compare the properties of the implicit argument in defective causative constructions with those of an implicit argument in a passive construction. See Chapter 4, §5.2 for discussion of how passive-like meanings are expressed in the language.

are fixed with respect to this distinction. Variable subject marking in Bishnupriya Manipuri therefore cannot be reduced to variable unaccusativity.

- (130) a. *uttom(*/?=e) gum-il.*
 Uttom=ERG sleep-PST.3SG
 ‘Uttam slept.’
 b. *uttom(=e) asta rati=han gum-ilo.*
 Uttom=ERG whole night=CLF sleep-PST.3SG
 ‘Uttam slept the whole night.’
 Consultant comment: “This one is more like an action.”

5 An alternative analysis: Covert configurational transitivity

Given the challenges that the null hypothesis analysis faces in capturing the distribution of ergative case in Bishnupriya Manipuri, we pursue an alternative that assumes a dependent case mechanism. On a dependent case approach, ergative case is assigned to the higher of two nominal arguments within a local domain (Marantz 1991; Baker 2014, 2015; Baker and Bobaljik 2017, a.m.o.). We argue that apparently intransitive clauses with ergative subjects satisfy this condition, because in addition to the overt subject, they contain a lower silent argument that serves as a case competitor.

The analysis has two central components. First, we propose that Bishnupriya Manipuri has two positions in which external arguments may be introduced, building on Massam (2009); Tollan (2018); Tollan and Oxford (2018); Tollan and Massam (2022); Burukina and Polinsky (2025). These positions are associated with distinct thematic interpretations. Arguments introduced in the higher position, $\text{Spec}, \nu_{\text{caus}}\text{P}$, are interpreted as causers. Those introduced in the lower position, $\text{Spec}, \nu_{\text{ext}}\text{P}$, receive a more general external argument role, encompassing roles such as actor and, in some cases, experiencer.^{14,15} Our proposal differs from earlier work positing multiple external argument positions in that the contrast between the two positions is not tied to transitivity, but to thematic interpretation.

Second, we propose that an argument introduced in $\text{Spec}, \nu_{\text{caus}}\text{P}$ may bind a silent pronoun in a lower thematic position. In such cases, ν_{caus} does not introduce a distinct participant into the clause; rather, it contributes additional entailments about an argument that is also interpreted in a structurally lower position. Many predicates, including most intransitives, allow their subjects to be introduced in this higher position, provided their basic thematic requirements are also satisfied: unergative predicates require an actor/experiencer in the

¹⁴Alternatively, there may be different flavors of ν_{ext} that assign different roles.

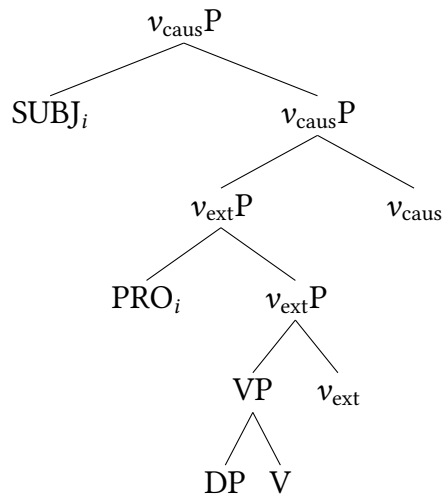
¹⁵As mentioned briefly in Section 3, some experiencer constructions in the language have a distinct morphosyntax, in which the subject takes noncanonical genitive or dative-locative case. We do not make any claims about the positions in which these arguments are introduced.

lower external argument position, while unaccusative predicates require a patient/theme in the internal argument position. Because the overt subject in Spec, $v_{\text{caus}}P$ c-commands the silent pronoun it binds, and both arguments fall within the same case domain, this configuration gives rise to ergative marking even on subjects of intransitive predicates. The ‘extra agentive’ interpretation of ergative-marked intransitive subjects follows from the fact that they are interpreted as causers in addition to bearing their ordinary thematic roles.

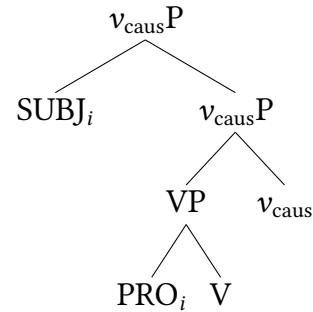
The structures that give rise to ergative marking on unergative and unaccusative subjects are represented in (131). We label the null bound pronoun PRO, though we discuss alternative treatments for this pronominal element in §5.3.1.

(131) Configurations that license ERG on apparent intransitive subjects

a. *Unergative predicate*



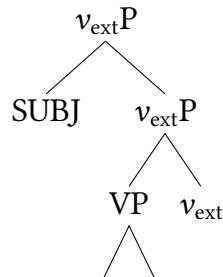
b. *Unaccusative predicate*



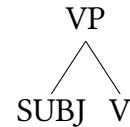
Meanwhile, intransitive subjects remain unmarked when, in the absence of the v_{caus} layer, the sole overt argument is simply introduced in a lower external or internal argument position, as in (132). With no competing lower argument, ergative case is not assigned.

(132) Configurations that produce unmarked intransitive subjects

a. *Unergative predicate*



b. *Unaccusative predicate*



This analysis explains why ergative case is obligatory on transitive subjects but variable with many intransitive predicates. Transitive subjects bear ergative case regardless of their interpretation because they always locally c-command an object. In intransitive clauses, by contrast, the conditions on dependent ergative case assignment are met only in a particular configuration—one that also gives rise to a more agentive interpretation of the subject. The remainder of the section develops the empirical motivation for this analysis, drawing first on restrictions on morphological causativization (§5.1), and then on the interpretation of ergative-marked intransitive subjects (§5.2). Section 5.3 then fills in details of the analysis and addresses remaining implementation questions.

5.1 Evidence for two external argument positions from morphological causatives

Here we discuss the empirical motivation for distinguishing two external argument positions, $\text{Spec}, v_{\text{ext}}$ and $\text{Spec}, v_{\text{caus}}$. A number of languages are reported to have a causativization strategy that is available with intransitive predicates, including unergatives, but unavailable with transitive predicates (Massam 2009; Tollan 2018; Tollan and Oxford 2018; Kouneli 2021; Nash 2021; Krishnan and Sarma 2023; Burukina and Polinsky 2025; Neu 2026). For several of these languages, this asymmetry has been taken to show that transitive and unergative subjects occupy distinct external argument positions: transitive subjects are introduced higher, in $\text{Spec}, \text{VoiceP}$, while unergative subjects are introduced lower, in $\text{Spec}, v\text{P}$ (Massam 2009; Tollan 2018; Tollan and Oxford 2018; Burukina and Polinsky 2025). A causative head that selects for $v\text{P}$ can therefore have an unergative subject in its complement, construed as a causee, but it cannot have a transitive subject as transitive subjects are introduced too high.

Bishnupriya Manipuri shows a related restriction on direct causativization. Unlike what has been reported for the languages just discussed, the division is not primarily between transitive and intransitive predicates. Instead, it correlates with the interpretation of the predicate. Direct causativization is blocked with predicates whose lexical semantics already includes a causing subevent and whose subject is interpreted as the causer. Extending the logic of analyses that posit two external argument positions, we take this restriction to show that Bishnupriya Manipuri likewise distinguishes a higher and lower external argument position, but with the higher position reserved for causers.

Morphological causatives in Bishnupriya Manipuri are formed with the highly productive verbal suffix *-u*.¹⁶ We distinguish two causativization strategies involving *-u*, which differ in how the causee is encoded. In direct causatives, the causee is realized as an argument and bears dative-accusative case, like an animate direct object. In indirect causatives, the causee instead appears inside an adjunct. The labels reflect the interpretations of the two

¹⁶Another causativization strategy uses the suffix *-ua*, which plausibly builds on causative *-u*. We do not discuss this strategy here, but it appears to obey the same restrictions. This is expected if both strategies involve the same causative head, and therefore the same selectional requirements.

constructions: direct causatives require close integration between the causing and caused events, while indirect causatives allow a less immediate relation between them.

Direct causativization is possible with unaccusative predicates:

- (133) onita=i mo=re {por / tiksou / ja}-u-ilo.
 Onita=ERG 1SG=DAT.ACC fall get.angry go-CAUS-PST.3SG
 ‘Onita made me fall/get angry/go.’

It is also possible with unergative predicates:

- (134) bapok=e sou=go=re {hin / nac / hatur}-u-ilo.
 father=ERG 1SG=DAT.ACC bathe dance swim-CAUS-PST.3SG
 ‘Father made the child bathe/dance/swim.’

Transitive predicates are divided. Direct causativization is possible with predicates whose subjects are less prototypically agentive, including experiencer, perception, cognition, communication, and acquisition predicates. Examples include *sojjo kor* ‘bear, withstand’, *bokpa* ‘crave (food)’, *pahur* ‘forget’, *pa* ‘get, receive’, *hun* ‘hear’, *harpa* ‘know/understand’, *hik* ‘learn’, *hada par* ‘like’, *mat* ‘say’, and *dekh* ‘see’.

- (135) Experience

Context: Onita describes a delicious dessert.

tei mo=re bat bokp-u-as-ili.
 3SG.F 1SG=DAT.ACC rice crave-CAUS-PERF-PST.3SG.F
 ‘She made me hungry (lit: crave rice).’

- (136) Perception

uttom=e ta=re ta=r asol rup=han dekh-u-ilo.
 Uttam=ERG 3SG=DAT.ACC 3SG=GEN true form=CLF see-CAUS-PST.3SG
 ‘Uttam showed him (lit: caused him to see) his true nature.’

- (137) Communication

mastor=go=i porua=go=re ta=r mot=han mat-u-ilo.
 teacher=CLF=ERG student=CLF=DAT.ACC 3SG.M=GEN opinion=CLF say-CAUS-PST.3SG
 ‘The teacher got the student to give his opinion.’

Direct causativization is also possible with many transitive activity predicates whose subjects are prototypically agentive, including *bo* ‘carry’, *pi* ‘drink’, *kha* ‘eat’, *khel* ‘play’, *thel* ‘push’, *pakor* ‘read’, and *kam kor* ‘work’ (lit. ‘do work’).¹⁷

(138) Activity

- a. ta uttom=ore kobad̥i siŋna a=han khel-u-ilo.
 3SG.M Uttam=DAT.ACC kabadi competition one=CLF play-CAUS-PST.3SG
 ‘He made Uttam play a kobadi match.’
- b. raju=re ama=r jinif=han=i **bo**-u-ik.
 Raju=DAT.ACC 1PL=GEN thing=CLF=PL carry-CAUS-1PL.IMP
 ‘Let’s have Raju carry our things.’

However, direct causativization is unavailable with another class of transitive predicates which also take prototypically agentive subjects. This class includes *an* ‘bring’, *pur* ‘burn (TR)’, *cal* ‘drive’, *huk* ‘dry (TR)’, *mar* ‘kill’, *hoŋkor* ‘make’, *pis* ‘pound, crush’, and *corkor* ‘steal’.

- (139) a. *onita=i tei=r pitok=ore horop=go mar-u-ilo.
 Onita=ERG 3SG.F=GEN son-DAT.ACC snake=CLF kill-CAUS-PST.3SG
 Int: ‘Onita made her son kill the snake.’
- b. *raju=e taŋ=ore poisa cor-kor-u-ilo.
 Raju=ERG 3PL=DAT.ACC money steal-do-CAUS-PST.3SG
 Int: ‘Raju made them steal the money.’
- c. *ami beyok=ore ca hoŋ-kor-u-itaŋai.
 1PL brother=DAT.ACC tea make-do-CAUS-FUT.1PL
 Int: ‘We will make our brother make tea.’

These predicates instead allow only indirect causativization. The causee may appear inside a small adverbial clause along with the verb *de* ‘give’ in its converbial form, as in (140). We take *de* here to be semantically bleached, providing a position for the causee within the adverbial

¹⁷Causees in causatives of transitives have sometimes been analyzed as applied arguments introduced in ApplP (e.g. Legate 2014b). If this analysis extended to Bishnupriya Manipuri, we might expect such causees to pattern morphologically with other applied arguments, including indirect objects. They do not: while indirect objects can take either dative-accusative or dative-locative case, causees obligatorily bear dative-accusative case and cannot appear with dative-locative case, regardless of whether the predicate is transitive or intransitive (viii). In this respect, causees are more like animate direct objects, which under many predicates require dative-accusative case but never allow dative-locative.

- (viii) *ta uttom=oraŋ {por / hin / ki=ta ak=ta dekh / siŋna a=han
 3SG.M Uttam=DAT.LOC fall bathe what=CLF one=CLF see competition one=CLF
 khel}-u-ilo.
 play-CAUS-PST.3SG
 ‘He made Uttam fall/bathe/see something/play a match.’

clause; the adverbial clause is in turn adjoined somewhere within $v_{\text{ext}}P$. Alternatively, the causee may surface as an oblique with instrumental marking, as in (141).¹⁸

- (140) a. onita=i [tei=r pitok=ore d-ia] horop=go mar-u-ilo.
 Onita=ERG 3SG.F=GEN son-DAT.ACC give-CVB snake=CLF kill-CAUS-PST.3SG
 ‘Onita had the snake killed by her son.’
 b. raju=e [taŋ=ore d-ia] poisa cor-kor-u-ilo.
 Raju=ERG 3PL=DAT.ACC give-CVB money steal-do-CAUS-PST.3SG
 ‘Raju had the money stolen by them.’
- (141) ami beyok=ore=no ca hoŋ-kor-u-itaŋai.
 1PL brother=DAT.ACC=INS tea make-do-CAUS-FUT.1PL
 ‘We will get tea made by our brother.’

We propose that the predicates that disallow direct causativization form a semantic class: their event structure already includes a causing subevent, with the subject identified as the agent or causer of that subevent. The causativization-resistant class of predicates includes externally caused change-of-state verbs like *mar* ‘kill’, creation predicates like *hoŋkor* ‘make’, and predicates of caused impact or motion like *pis* ‘pound, crush’ and *cal* ‘drive’.¹⁹ By contrast, the experience and activity predicates that allow direct causativization can be understood as lacking an obligatory causing subevent in their event structure, as is commonly assumed for these predicate types (Rappaport Hovav and Levin 1998, 2001). This group includes unergatives, which are traditionally classified as activity predicates (Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995). Some unaccusatives may be analyzed as involving a causal component, as in decompositional analyses of change-of-state predicates like *open* and *melt* (e.g. Alexiadou et al. 2015). But crucially, the sole argument of these predicates is associated with the resulting state, not with the causing event.

Assuming that the meaning of a predicate is determined compositionally by its structure, we propose that the subjects of these lexically causative transitive predicates must occupy the higher external argument position, $\text{Spec}, v_{\text{caus}}P$, in order to receive a causer interpretation. The restriction on direct causativization then follows if the morphological causative head realized as *-u* selects $v_{\text{ext}}P$ as its complement: arguments that are required to occupy a position higher than $v_{\text{ext}}P$ cannot fall within the complement of the causative head, and therefore cannot be realized as direct causees. Indirect causativization is not sensitive to subject height in the same way, because the causee is introduced inside an adjunct rather than as an argument of the causativized predicate.

This analysis suggests a close connection between the morphological causative head realized as *-u* and the high external argument introducing head v_{caus} . In the configurations we

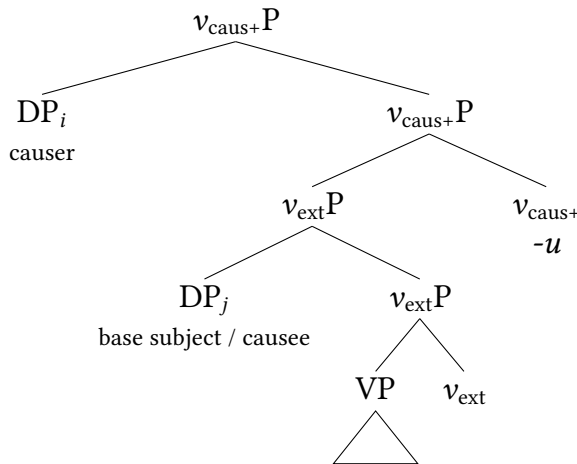
¹⁸When the instrumental marker combines with an animate nominal, it must follow the dative-accusative marker *=re*, as discussed in Chapter 4, §4.5.5.

¹⁹Although English *drive* is often grouped with activity predicates, Bishnupriya Manipuri *cal* is the transitive, or lexical-causative, counterpart of *col* ‘move’. Its meaning is therefore closer to ‘cause to move’.

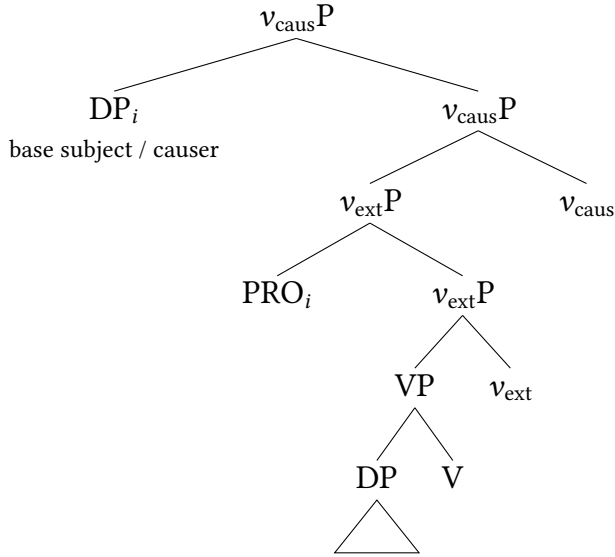
have described, the two heads are in complementary distribution (both taking v_{ext} as their complement), and both contribute causative semantics. They may therefore be understood as two flavors of the same functional head, differing in whether they introduce a new causer argument into the clause, or introduce a causer that is also identified with an argument of the lower predicate. We refer to the morphological causative head as $v_{\text{caus+}}$, with the plus sign indicating the introduction of this additional independent argument. In §5.3.1, we explain the distinction between v_{caus} and $v_{\text{caus+}}$ in terms of the semantic type of the complement each selects, which determines whether the subject must be co-construed with a lower argument or not.

The tree in (142) schematizes the structure of direct causatives of unergative and non-lexically causative transitive predicates. The external argument of the base predicate is in $\text{Spec}, v_{\text{ext}}P$, which allows $v_{\text{caus+}}$ to merge above it and introduce a distinct higher causer. Meanwhile (143) represents the structure of a lexically causative transitive predicate. Here, the base subject itself is introduced in $\text{Spec}, v_{\text{caus}}P$, which blocks the introduction of a distinct causer. Because this subject is interpreted not only as the causer but also as the actor who carries out the verbal eventuality, we propose that it binds PRO in $\text{Spec}, v_{\text{ext}}P$.

- (142) *Causativization with -u: Possible with unergative & non-lexically causative transitive predicates*



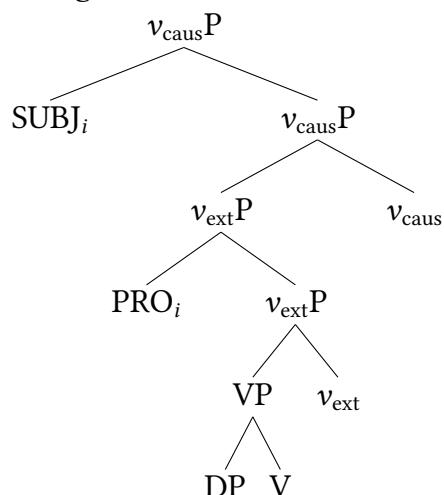
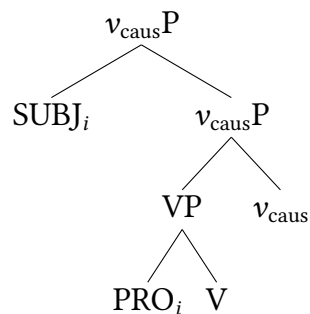
(143) *Structure of lexically causative transitive predicates: Incompatible with -u*



We take the restrictions on direct causativization to provide evidence for two distinct external argument positions. Although only a subset of transitive predicates *require* their subjects to be introduced in the higher external argument position, we propose that this position is *optionally* available to a wider range of predicates, including most intransitives. We now turn to the evidence for this broader availability.

5.2 Dual role interpretations of ergative-marked intransitive subjects

In §3.3 and §4.1, we observed that ergative marking on intransitive subjects correlates with a more agentive construal of the subject. We now show that this construal is better understood as a dual-role interpretation, in which the subject is associated both with the entailments of its ordinary thematic role and with those of a causer role. This interpretive pattern provides evidence that subjects of intransitive predicates can also be introduced in Spec, $v_{caus}P$, resulting in the configurations proposed in (131), repeated here as (144).

(144) Configurations licensing ERG on apparent intransitive subjectsa. *Unergative base*b. *Unaccusative base*

The semantic effect of ergative marking on intransitive subjects is not uniform across predicate classes. With unaccusatives, as diagnosed by (124), ergative marking gives rise to a reflexive causative interpretation: the sole argument is understood both as the undergoer of the event and as its direct causer. This is precisely the interpretation predicted by the structure in (144b). The pattern is illustrated in (145) and (146), where the unaccusative predicates *mor* ‘die’ and *por* ‘fall’ are compatible with unmarked subjects across a range of scenarios, but allow ergative marking only when the subject is both a direct causer and undergoer.²⁰

²⁰It is generally not possible to obtain a reflexive causative interpretation by overtly causativizing the predicate using *-u* and realizing the causee as a reflexive object. Speakers have rejected this configuration across several predicates, including the example in (ix). They instead offer sentences such as (x), which are like (145)–(146) in that the verb is not overtly causativized, and the subject bears ergative case. They differ only in including an additional adverbial modifier containing a reflexive, further emphasizes the self-causing interpretation. Reflexives in the language are often formed through pronoun doubling; see Chapter 4, §3.6 for further discussion.

(ix) #onita=i tei=re tei por-u-ilo.
 Onita=ERG 3SG.F=GEN 3SG.F fall-CAUS-PST.3SG.F
 Int: ‘Onita made herself fall.’

(x) onita=i tei=r=tuno tei por-li.
 Onita=ERG 3SG.F=GEN=with 3SG.F fall-PST.3SG.F
 ‘Onita fell on her own.’

- (145) a. horop=go mor-il.
snake=CLF die-PST.3SG
- b. horop=go=i mor-il.
snake=CLF=ERG die-PST.3SG
'The snake died.'

Scenarios:

- | | a. | b. |
|--|----|----|
| 1. S IS NOT A CAUSER/AGENT: The snake got an infection and died. | ✓ | ✗ |
| 2. S IS AN INDIRECT CAUSER: The snake refused to leave the water. It got too cold overnight, so it died. | ✓ | ✗ |
| 3. S IS AN AGENT; NOT OF DYING: The snake fought hard to hold on to life, but ultimately died. | ✓ | ✗ |
| 4. S IS A DIRECT CAUSER: The snake sacrificed itself by jumping into the fire and died. | ✓ | ✓ |

- (146) a. onita por-li.
Onita fall-PST.3SG.F
- b. onita=i por-li.
Onita=ERG fall-PST.3SG.F
'Onita fell.'

Scenarios:

- | | a. | b. |
|---|----|----|
| 1. S IS NOT A CAUSER/AGENT: Somebody pushed Onita and she fell. | ✓ | ✗ |
| 2. S IS AN INDIRECT CAUSER: Onita stepped on a loose rock, which slid, so she fell. | ✓ | ✗ |
| 3. S IS AN AGENT; NOT OF FALLING: Onita and her opponent were wrestling; ultimately Onita was knocked down. | ✓ | ✗ |
| 4. S IS A DIRECT CAUSER: Onita fell down on purpose for attention. | ✓ | ✓ |

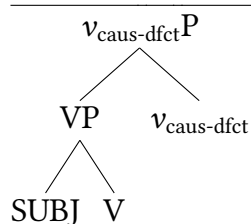
With unergative predicates, the contrast between ergative and unmarked subjects is usually more subtle, and consultants often find it harder to characterize. This too follows from the analysis. Whatever the precise content of the low external argument role, it is more similar to a causer role than is the patient-like role of an internal argument. We therefore expect the addition of a causer role to produce a less pronounced interpretive shift with unergatives than with unaccusatives. Still, there are clear tendencies: ergative marking is more likely when the subject's role in initiating or bringing about their own action is made salient, as in (147a), but it is often optional with simple activity readings, as in (147b). Moreover, ergative marking becomes less likely when a distinct cause or causer is made salient, as briefly noted in §3.3. On the present analysis, this effect can be understood as stemming from the fact that the subject is less readily construed as the causer of its own action when another cause(r) is salient in the context. The preference for an unmarked subject is especially clear in scenarios

where the subject is possessed or otherwise controlled by another individual, as illustrated in (148) with the verb *nac* ‘dance’.

- (147) a. onita#(=i) job=go=r pis=kha=t g-ia luk-ilo-ga.
 Onita=ERG bush=CLF-GEN behind=CLF=LOC go-CVB hide-PST.3SG-DIR
 ‘Onita crouched behind the bush and hid.’
 b. *Context: Some kids are playing hide and seek. One says:*
 onita(=i) luk-ilo, tumi tei=re bisar-ei!
 Onita=ERG hide-PST.3SG 2PL 3SG.F=DAT.ACC look.for-IM.IMP.2PL
 ‘Onita hid, go look for her!’
- (148) *Context: A deity has entered a woman’s body.*
 jela a=go(#=i) dou=e dor-ia hudda nac-iri.
 woman one=CLF=ERG god=ERG catch-CVB only dance-IPFV.3SG.F
 ‘A deity having possessed her, a woman is doing nothing but dancing.’

A related argument comes from zero-marked defective causative constructions. As discussed in §4.2, unaccusative verbs may occur with the past tense suffix *-(i)lo*, otherwise characteristic of transitives and unergatives, in restricted contexts that supply a salient cause, usually via an adverbial clause. We analyzed these cases as involving a defective external argument introducing head, which introduces a causer variable but does not project a specifier. In the present system, this head can be identified as a defective v_{caus} , which we refer to as $v_{\text{caus-dfct}}$. The structure of a defective causative formed with an unaccusative predicate is schematized in (149), with any adjoined modifiers omitted. Since no argument can occupy Spec, $v_{\text{caus-dfct}}P$, the analysis predicts that the intransitive subject in these configurations should be unable to receive ergative case. This prediction is borne out: ergative marking is ungrammatical on the subject of an unaccusative predicate bearing *-(i)lo*, as shown in (150).

(149) Structure of defective causatives of unaccusatives



- (150) nondeffor(*=e) (coktha ia) por-lo.
 Nondeshhor=ERG tired COP.CVB fall-PST.3SG
 ‘Nondeshhor fell (from being tired).’

These data support the view that an intransitive subject is marked ergative only when it bears a causer role in addition to its ordinary thematic role. When the subject is prevented from occupying the causer position and receiving this construal, ergative marking is unavailable.

5.3 Completing the analysis

We have argued that Bishnupriya Manipuri distinguishes two external argument positions. The lower position, $\text{Spec}, v_{\text{ext}}P$, introduces ordinary external arguments, while the higher position, $\text{Spec}, v_{\text{caus}}P$, is associated specifically with causers. Intransitive subjects are marked ergative when they are introduced in the higher position and bind a silent pronoun in the lower external or internal argument position, thereby satisfying the argument structural requirements of the predicate. This configuration has both semantic and syntactic consequences. Semantically, the subject is interpreted as bearing two roles: a causer role from v_{caus} , and another role associated with the position of the silent pronoun. Syntactically, these clauses are covertly transitive. The null pronoun creates the two-nominal configuration needed to feed dependent ergative case.

Dependent case can be implemented in different ways, including configurational approaches (Marantz 1991; Baker and Vinokurova 2010; Baker 2014, 2015) and Agree-based approaches (Clem and Deal 2024; Poole 2024; Deal and O’Hagan 2025). We do not take a position on the choice between these implementations, but for concreteness, we state the analysis in configurational terms. We assume the dependent ergative case rule in (151), understood as applying at spellout of TP, following Baker (2015).

- (151) If a nominal expression XP c-commands another nominal expression ZP within a local TP domain, XP is assigned ergative case.

In ordinary transitive clauses and ergative-marked intransitive clauses alike, the overt subject c-commands a lower nominal expression—an object or silent pronoun—that can serve as a case competitor. Both configurations therefore satisfy the conditions for dependent ergative assignment.^{21,22}

The remainder of this section makes explicit two components of the analysis that have so far been left open. First, we spell out the nature of the silent pronoun and the mechanism by which it is bound by the higher subject. Second, we clarify the interactions between the

²¹Morphological causatives of transitive predicates introduce a complication, since they contain three overt nominals: the causer, the causee, and the internal argument of the base predicate. In such configurations, the causee obligatorily bears dative-accusative rather than ergative case. With a configurational implementation, this can be handled by ordering case assignment so that dative-accusative case is assigned to the causee before dependent ergative case is calculated. A dative-accusative causee may still serve as a case competitor for the higher causer, but, having already received case, it is not itself eligible for ergative case assignment.

²²An Agree-based implementation would require additional assumptions. On Clem and Deal’s (2024) analysis of dependent ergative case, a probe on v agrees first with a nominal in its c-command domain and then, after cyclic expansion, with the subject in its specifier; ergative morphology realizes this second agreement relation. Such an approach could capture the distribution of subject case in most Bishnupriya Manipuri configurations if the case assigning probe is located on the highest v head. The main challenge comes from three-nominal configurations, including morphological causatives of transitives and transitive clauses whose subjects occupy the high external argument position. In these structures, additional assumptions are needed to ensure that the second goal is the high external argument rather than the internal argument. We leave the full implementation of an Agree-based analysis open.

different external argument introducing heads, their morphology, and the morphology they condition. In particular, we return to the third person singular past tense suffixes discussed in §4.2, and revise our earlier analysis so that it is compatible with the additional structure now posited between v_{ext} and T.

5.3.1 Obligatory binding and the null pronoun

The analysis proposed here relies on a silent pronominal element in the complement of v_{caus} that is obligatorily bound by the argument in $\text{Spec}, v_{\text{caus}}\text{P}$. We consider two ways of implementing this dependency. The first is an extension of the low-control analysis put forward in Chapter 2, in which v_{caus} is the functional head counterpart of a control predicate: it introduces an argument that must bind PRO in its complement. This implementation is attractive because the covert pronoun has a PRO-like distribution. It must occupy the highest argument position in the complement of v_{caus} , just as PRO occupies the highest argument position in a control infinitive. Bishnupriya Manipuri does not permit a configuration in which both external argument positions are overtly filled and the higher argument binds a null object pronoun. Thus, the sentence in (152) cannot have the intended reflexive causative reading.

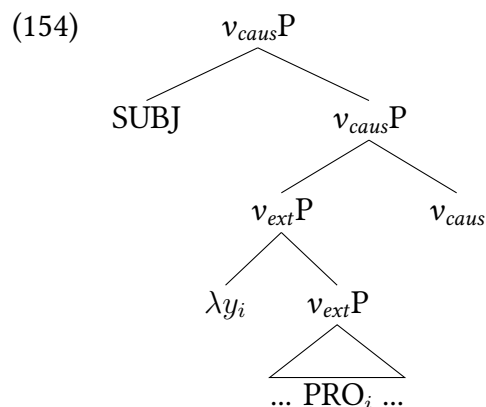
- (152) #sorojini=e uttom=ore dek-lo.
 Sorojini=ERG Uttom=DAT.ACC see-PST.3SG
 Int: ‘Sorojini_i caused Uttam to see her_i.’

The requirement that null v_{caus} select a complement containing a gap also parallels the behavior of certain lexical control predicates. English *try*, for example, does not allow the embedded subject position to be filled by an overt pronoun in place of PRO (unlike *want*) (153).

- (153) a. Sorojini tried (*her/*herself) to win the race.
 b. Sorojini wanted (her/herself) to win the race.

The restriction illustrated with *try* has received various explanations in the literature. We adopt a semantic account that can also capture the corresponding restriction on the complement of null v_{caus} . Following Montague (1974); Dowty (1985); Chierchia (1989), among others, we take control complements to denote properties of individuals. A predicate that composes with such a complement must therefore differ in semantic type from one that composes with a fully saturated nonfinite clause. The two complement types are consequently not expected to be interchangeable, although a single phonological form may be associated with more than one lexical specification, as may be the case with English *want*. In Bishnupriya Manipuri, we propose that the two variants of v_{caus} differ in precisely this respect: the null variant, which functions as a control predicate, combines with a property-denoting complement, whereas the overt morphological causative, realized as *-u*, combines with a saturated complement. A property denotation can still be derived while positing a nominal element in the gapped position if PRO is obligatorily bound by an individual abstractor at the edge of its clause, as

proposed in Chapter 2. The requirement that PRO be the highest nominal expression in the complement of v_{caus} could follow from a restriction on this individual abstractor, whereby it must bind the highest nominal expression in its c-command domain.²³



A potential concern for the low-control analysis is whether PRO has the necessary properties to count as a distinct nominal in the calculation of dependent case. Extending the arguments developed in Chapter 2, we propose that it does. On theories of control that posit PRO, PRO is a pronominal element distinct from the controller, despite being referentially dependent. For Landau (2015), for example, PRO is a bound minimal pronoun in the sense of Kratzer (2009), whose surface realization is determined by its syntactic environment. The same underlying element may surface elsewhere as a reflexive, an overt bound pronoun, a resumptive pronoun, and so on. From this perspective, there is no reason to expect PRO to differ from other bound nominals in the language in its ability to participate in dependent case. Reflexive objects in Bishnupriya Manipuri trigger ergative case on the subject, as shown in (155);²⁴ we therefore expect PRO to do so as well.

- (155) sorojini*(=e) gelga kali tei=re-tei bas-is-e.
 Sorojini=ERG past adjacent.day 3SG.F=DAT.ACC-3SG.F select-PERF-PRES.3SG
 ‘Sorojini voted for herself yesterday.’ (Lit: selected herself)

Crosslinguistic evidence discussed in Chapter 2 also provides support for the visibility of PRO to dependent case. Baker (2015) argues that the null subject of a nonfinite control

²³Landau (2015) similarly derives the restriction of PRO to subject position from locality principles. On his account, control infinitives contain a special Fin head that agrees with and attracts the highest DP in its c-command domain—PRO—to its specifier. It is this movement that triggers abstraction over PRO, enabling the clause to have a predicative denotation. The complement of v_{caus} in Bishnupriya Manipuri is considerably smaller and is therefore unlikely to project a FinP. We can nonetheless maintain the central insight that abstraction is triggered by movement to the edge of the control complement, and that a locality restriction limits the availability of this movement to the highest nominal in the complement. We leave open here the precise source of this locality restriction in Bishnupriya Manipuri.

²⁴See Chapter 4, §3.6 for a discussion of the reflexivization strategy shown in (155), which involves the doubling of a pronominal element.

clause triggers dependent accusative case on objects in languages including Amharic, Sakha, Turkish, and Tamil. The Sakha example in (156) shows this pattern. Such examples indicate that, at least in these languages, PRO has the syntactic properties required to enter into dependent case calculations.

- (156) Masha [kinigie-**ni** aaq-ar-yn] astyn-ar.
 Masha book-ACC read-AOR-3SP.ACC enjoy-AOR.3SS
 ‘Masha likes to read the book.’ (Sakha; Baker 2015: 202)

The configuration in (156) differs from the one proposed for Bishnupriya Manipuri in that PRO serves as a case competitor for a noncoreferential object, rather than for the DP that binds it. Moreover, in languages with dependent ergative case, PRO often does not trigger dependent ergative marking on its controller. The Marathi control construction in (157) provides one such example. We propose that PRO fails to affect the case of its controller in ordinary biclausal control constructions because the two belong to separate case domains. The low-control configuration proposed here differs precisely in this respect. PRO and its binder occur within the same case domain, allowing PRO to serve as a case competitor for the binder.

- (157) ruca(*-ni) [PRO saman ucəl-ayla] ge-li/ə.
 Rucha-ERG luggage lift-NONFIN go-PFV.3SG.F/N
 ‘Rucha tried to lift the luggage.’ (Marathi)

An alternative is to analyze the silent element as a null reflexive rather than as PRO, following Nash (2021). Nash develops a dependent case analysis of Georgian split-S by positing a null reflexive below ergative-marked unergative subjects. Her analysis does not require a locality restriction on the null element, because the relevant configuration is proposed to arise only in intransitive clauses. Extending a similar analysis to Bishnupriya Manipuri would require an additional mechanism to ensure that the null pronoun occupies the highest argument position in $v_{\text{ext}}P$. Once such a mechanism is in place, the null reflexive and low-control implementations become largely interchangeable. This is especially true on a Landau-style view where reflexives and PRO are both instantiations of bound minimal pronouns. For approaches that maintain a sharper distinction between PRO and reflexives, or that reject PRO altogether, the null reflexive analysis is a possible alternative.

5.3.2 Inventory of external argument introducing heads and their interactions with past tense morphology

Throughout the chapter, we have proposed several v heads in Bishnupriya Manipuri that introduce external arguments. Multiple of these heads contribute causative semantics, but they differ in their syntactic and semantic properties, and in their interaction with past tense morphology. In addition to the low and high external argument introducing heads v_{ext} and v_{caus} , we have discussed two causative heads which we suggested could be a distinct flavors

of v_{caus} . First is the morphological causative head $v_{\text{caus+}}$, realized as *-u*, which introduces an overt causer argument that is independent of the causee. Second is the defective causative head $v_{\text{caus-dfct}}$, which introduces a causer variable but does not project a position for an overt argument. Table 3.3 summarizes this inventory and the type of argument introduced by each head.

Head	Introduces...
v_{ext}	Non-causer
v_{caus}	Causer + controller
$v_{\text{caus+}}$	Causer + non-controller
$v_{\text{caus-dfct}}$	Implicit cause(r)

Table 3.3: Inventory of external argument introducing heads

In §4.2, we proposed that $T_{[\text{PST}, 3\text{SG}]}$ is realized as *-(i)lo* when adjacent to an external argument introducing v head, and as *-(i)l* elsewhere.²⁵ At that stage of the analysis, we used the label v_{ext} for all external argument introducing heads. We had not yet established the richer inventory of v heads summarized in Table 3.3, nor that some of these heads co-occur (e.g. v_{ext} and $v_{\text{caus}(+)}$). The more articulated inventory and structural analysis that we have now put forward require us to refine our analysis of $T_{[\text{PST}, 3\text{SG}]}$ allomorphy.

The correct generalization cannot simply be that adjacency to any external argument introducing head licenses *-(i)lo*. On our analysis, every intransitive clause with an ergative subject contains v_{caus} , yet the third person singular simple past form is not uniformly *-(i)lo* across such clauses. When the base predicate is unaccusative, $T_{[\text{PST}, 3\text{SG}]}$ is realized as *-(i)l*, as shown in (158) [= (121d)], but when it is unergative, $T_{[\text{PST}, 3\text{SG}]}$ is realized as *-(i)lo* (159) [= (103)]. This shows that v_{caus} does not itself trigger the *-(i)lo* allomorph, but neither does it block a lower v_{ext} from triggering *-(i)lo*. In other words, v_{caus} is transparent for third person past tense allomorphy: when it intervenes between $T_{[\text{PST}, 3\text{SG}]}$ and the next lower head, the choice between *-(i)lo* and *-(i)l* depends on whether that lower head is v_{ext} . This contrasts with the perfect aspect, which does block the conditioning relation between v_{ext} and $T_{[\text{PST}, 3\text{SG}]}$, as shown in (160) [= (125)]. The other causative heads pattern like v_{ext} : as shown in §4.2, morphological and defective causatives obligatorily trigger *-(i)lo* in the simple past. Thus, v_{caus} is the only external argument introducing head whose behavior departs from the general pattern.

²⁵As described in §4.2, *-(i)l* additionally inflects for feminine gender. We maintain the analysis of the feminine suffix from §4.2, so we do not factor it into the discussion here, which focuses on the forms that realize only third person singular past tense.

- (158) sou=go=r kukur=go(=i) dabd-ia ge-l-ga.
 child=CLF=GEN dog.M=CLF=ERG run-CVB go-PST.3SG-DIR
 ‘The child’s dog left running.’
- (159) jela=go#/(=i) dabd-ilo.
 woman=CLF=ERG run-PST.3SG
 ‘The woman ran.’
- (160) a. ta sunil=ore duk(h)-lo/*il.
 3SG.M Sunil=DAT.ACC hurt-PST.3SG
 ‘He hurt Sunil.’
 b. ta sunil=ore dukh-is-il/*ilo.
 3SG.M Sunil=DAT.ACC hurt-PERF-PST.3SG
 ‘He had hurt Sunil.’

We suggest two possible ways of accounting for the transparency of v_{caus} for past tense allomorphy, though other implementations are likely possible as well. The first involves the morphological operation Pruning, which removes certain null nodes from the concatenation statement, allowing linear relations to hold across them (Embick 2010). For this implementation, we assume the vocabulary items in (161), where [EA] is a feature shared by all heads that introduce an external argument variable. All four heads in Table 3.3 therefore bear the feature that licenses $-(i)lo$.

- (161) Third person singular past tense allomorphy (Final; Option 1)
 a. $T_{[\text{PST}, 3\text{SG}]} \leftrightarrow -(i)lo / [\text{EA}] \text{ —}$
 b. $T_{[\text{PST}, 3\text{SG}]} \leftrightarrow -(i)l$

Although v_{caus} bears [EA], its null realization makes it eligible for Pruning. Pruning v_{caus} would remove this node from the linearization statement and trigger reconcatenation. The effect of pruning in the two relevant cases is schematized in (162). With an unaccusative predicate, pruning renders V adjacent to $T_{[\text{PST}, 3\text{SG}]}$. Since V does not bear [EA], the elsewhere form $-(i)l$ is inserted. With an unergative predicate, it instead renders v_{ext} adjacent to $T_{[\text{PST}, 3\text{SG}]}$. Since v_{ext} bears [EA], $-(i)lo$ is inserted.

- (162) Pruning of v_{caus}
 a. *Unaccusative predicate*
 $V \frown [v_{\text{caus}}, -\emptyset], [v_{\text{caus}}, -\emptyset] \frown T_{[\text{PST}, 3\text{SG}]} \longrightarrow V \frown T_{[\text{PST}, 3\text{SG}]}$
 b. *Unergative predicate*
 $v_{\text{ext}} \frown [v_{\text{caus}}, -\emptyset], [v_{\text{caus}}, -\emptyset] \frown T_{[\text{PST}, 3\text{SG}]} \longrightarrow v_{\text{ext}} \frown T_{[\text{PST}, 3\text{SG}]}$

The same derivation is not available when the intervener is the perfect aspect, which has an overt exponent and therefore cannot be pruned.²⁶

A second possible implementation makes use of span-conditioned allomorphy (Merchant 2015). This approach allows allomorph selection to be conditioned by the featural content of an adjacent span, rather than only by the immediately adjacent node. For this analysis, we distinguish v_{caus} from the other external argument introducing heads by means of the feature [INDEP], which we propose occurs on heads that introduce an independent argument, rather than one that is obligatorily identified with a lower argument position. Thus, v_{ext} , $v_{\text{caus}+}$, and $v_{\text{caus-dfct}}$ bear [INDEP], while v_{caus} does not. If the low-control analysis from §5.3.1 is adopted, [INDEP] characterizes external argument introducing heads that compose with a semantically saturated complement. The vocabulary items for $T_{[\text{PST}, 3\text{SG}]}$ that we assume for this analysis are given in (163).

(163) Third person singular past tense allomorphy (Final; Option 2)

- a. $T_{[\text{PST}, 3\text{SG}]} \leftrightarrow -(i)lo / [\text{INDEP}] \text{ —}$
- b. $T_{[\text{PST}, 3\text{SG}]} \leftrightarrow -(i)l$

We then assume that a contiguous sequence of v heads forms a span in Bishnupriya Manipuri. The realization of $T_{[\text{PST}, 3\text{SG}]}$ is therefore sensitive to whether the adjacent span contains [INDEP]. A span consisting only of v_{caus} therefore does not license the $-(i)lo$ allomorph. When v_{caus} occurs together with v_{ext} , however, the two form a span, allowing the [INDEP] feature of v_{ext} to condition the realization of $T_{[\text{PST}, 3\text{SG}]}$. Perfect aspect differs because, by assumption, it does not belong to the span formed by the v heads. When it intervenes between $T_{[\text{PST}, 3\text{SG}]}$ and a span containing [INDEP], that span is no longer adjacent to $T_{[\text{PST}, 3\text{SG}]}$, and $-(i)lo$ is not licensed.

6 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that whenever ergative marking appears outside of overtly transitive clauses in Bishnupriya Manipuri, its presence is conditioned by interpretation. We have argued that this connection is due to a particular structural configuration, which both restricts the subject's interpretation and renders the clause covertly transitive. A consequence of the proposal is that even in an active language, ergative case need not be inherent. In active systems where ergative case marks agentive intransitive subjects, it should not be assumed that ergative case is assigned directly on the basis of an agent or external argument role. Instead, the relationship between case and interpretation may be indirect. If configurations that enable a subject to be construed with multiple roles can give rise to covert transitivity,

²⁶This implementation requires an additional assumption about why v_{caus} is pruned while v_{ext} , which is also null, remains visible for the purposes of conditioning $T_{[\text{PST}, 3\text{SG}]}$ allomorphy. Pruning-based approaches generally assume that pruning applies only to a subset of null nodes, so this distinction is not in itself unexpected, but its precise source remains unexplained here.

as we have argued, then dependent case analyses can be extended even to systems in which ergative marking appears to be semantically conditioned.

Another finding of this chapter is that languages may distinguish two external argument positions on the basis of semantic role, without a strict correlation with transitivity. Restrictions on causativization should therefore be investigated across a wide range of predicates—not just across broad valency classes—in order to determine whether any semantic generalizations emerge. We proposed that in Bishnupriya Manipuri, causers are unique in being introduced in a higher external argument position. The same split may be found in other languages, or the external argument domain may be partitioned differently; the possibilities remain open for investigation.

We conclude by considering what gives rise to fluid-S alignment as opposed to canonical ergative or split-S alignment. On the analysis developed here, ergative marking has an extended distribution in Bishnupriya Manipuri because intransitive predicates can occur in covertly transitive low-control structures. There are several ways in which a language could fail to show this pattern, and therefore display canonical ergative alignment. For example, low-control configurations may simply be unavailable, or they may involve a silent pronoun that lacks the properties needed to enter into the dependent case calculation. Ergative case has a fluid distribution in Bishnupriya Manipuri because the covertly transitive configuration arises in semantically constrained contexts, rather than in fixed grammatical environments. This contrasts with the analysis of Georgian in Nash (2021), where unergative predicates in a particular aspectual context obligatorily bind a lower silent reflexive. In the Georgian system, covert transitivity is argued to be inherent to the predicate type and syntactic environment, rather than tied to an optional interpretation. Such differences in the contexts that give rise to covert transitivity may be what distinguishes different types of active alignment systems.

Chapter 4

Grammar sketch of Bishnupriya Manipuri

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1 Preliminaries

This chapter provides a selective grammatical description of Bishnupriya Manipuri, with particular attention to the distribution and interpretation of various functional morphemes. In addition to serving as a descriptive resource, it provides a guide to the transcription, glossing, and translation choices used in Chapter 3 and in the texts included in the appendix.

1.1 Language consultants & variation

This grammatical description draws on data from nine speakers that I have worked with since 2019. I have worked most extensively with Uttam Singha, and this chapter therefore centers on his variety. Wherever I am aware of variation across speakers and dialects, I note it. However, given the extent of variation within Bishnupriya Manipuri, and the fact that some speakers are more extensively represented in my data than others, my ability to comment on variation is necessarily limited. The majority of examples come from elicitation sessions conducted both in person and remotely. Other examples come from texts, including the two in the appendix, and are marked as such.

Uttam Singha is a speaker of the Mā dai Gā ng dialect of Bishnupriya Manipuri. He is from Nagar/Tilakpur, a village in the Mouvlī bazar district of the Sylhet division of Bangladesh. Today he lives in Queens, NY where he is part of a small Bishnupriya Manipuri community in the greater New York City area. Singha has played, and continues to play, an important role in Bishnupriya Manipuri language and cultural preservation. As a young adult, he founded the first Bishnupriya Manipuri newspaper and magazine, and he is currently developing an online resource devoted to documenting the language. He brings extensive cultural and historical knowledge to our collaborations, much of it gained through conversations with Bishnupriya Manipuri elders in his youth and early adulthood.

The other eight speakers, whom I identify by their initials, come from various Bishnupriya Manipuri-speaking areas in India and Bangladesh: Cachar District, Assam (A.S., M.R., R.S., S.S.); Hailakandi District, Assam (D.S.); Karimganj District, Assam (B.S.); and Moulvibazar District, Sylhet (A.S., S.S.). Five now live in the broader New York City and New Jersey area, two live elsewhere in the United States, and one continues to live in Sylhet, Bangladesh. The group includes four Mā dai Gā ng and four Rā jar Gā ng speakers.

Bishnupriya Manipuri shows variation conditioned by a number of different factors. Speakers widely recognize two major dialects, Mā dai Gā ng (MG) ‘Queen’s village’ and Rā jar Gā ng (RG) ‘King’s village’, a distinction understood to trace back to different localities in Manipur. Today, although MG and RG villages remain distinct, they are geographically dispersed rather than concentrated in contiguous areas. Considerable variation has therefore emerged within these dialect groups as well. Since MG and RG are the two widely recognized dialect categories, speakers sometimes attribute forms or constructions outside of their own variety to the other major dialect group. In my data, however, not all variation that speakers intuitively describe in these terms maps straightforwardly onto the MG/RG distinction. I therefore use the labels MG and RG cautiously, and only where patterns across multiple speakers support an analysis in terms of this dialect divide.

1.2 Existing grammatical descriptions

Existing grammatical descriptions of Bishnupriya Manipuri are limited, but include a supplemental chapter in G.A. Grierson’s *Linguistic Survey of India*, Vol. V (Grierson 1903), and grammar sketches by K. P. Sinha (Sinha 1981) and Mathura Sinha (Sinha 2022).

In the supplemental chapter of the *Linguistic Survey of India*, the language is listed under the name Mayang, a historical Meitei designation not used by Bishnupriya Manipuri speakers themselves. Of the 28-page supplement, seven pages are devoted to background on the speakers, vocabulary items showing evidence of Tibeto-Burman influence, and an overview of selected phonological and grammatical properties. The remainder consists of four brief texts, two collected from speakers in Sylhet and two from speakers in Manipur, followed by a word and phrase list. K. P. Sinha’s (1981) grammar sketch offers a broader grammatical description. Its primary focus is on phonology, especially comparative and historical phonology. Its discussion of morphology is likewise concerned in large part with etymology and historical development. It treats derivational and inflectional morphology in considerably greater detail than Grierson’s supplement. Syntax and semantics receive comparatively little attention. Mathura Sinha’s (2022) grammar sketch is written in Bishnupriya Manipuri using the Eastern Nagari script. I have not been able to read it and cannot comment on its contents.

The present chapter is intended to supplement these earlier descriptions.

2 Phonemic inventory

In this section, I list the consonant and vowel phonemes in the language and the symbols used to represent each of them. Bishnupriya Manipuri examples throughout this dissertation are transcribed using simplified IPA-based symbols that correspond to contrastive phonemes in the language. I use a broad, phonologically informed surface transcription. This means that I abstract away from low-level allophonic variation, but do not always represent underlying

forms. When a phonological process substantially affects the pronounced form, I transcribe the surface form.

A note on orthography: Bishnupriya Manipuri is written using the Eastern Nagari (i.e. Bengali-Assamese) script, but the orthography is not fully standardized. Spellings vary across speakers, and individual speakers may also write the same words in more than one way. A major source of variation is the tension between spelling words as they are pronounced and spelling them in a way that preserves their connection to cognate forms, even when this requires representing distinctions that are not present in the spoken language. Phonetic spelling is itself not straightforward, since pronunciation varies considerably across dialects. Given this lack of standardization, I use IPA-based transcriptions as the primary representation for examples. The texts in the appendix are an exception; for these, I provide an orthographic version alongside a broad phonetic transcription.

2.1 Consonants

Table 4.1 provides the phonemic consonant inventory of the language. Each phoneme is represented by the IPA-based symbol used in the transcription system, with the range of typical pronunciations associated with that phoneme given directly below.

Table 4.1: Consonant symbols used in this dissertation

	Labial	Dental/Alveolar	Postalveolar/Palatal	Retroflex	Velar	Glottal
Stops	p b [p] [b]	t th d [t] [tʰ] [d]		ʈ ʈʰ ɖ [ʈ] [ʈʰ] [ɖ]	k kh g [k] [kʰ] [g]	
Affricates			c j [tʃ~tʃ̥] [dʒ~dʒ̥]			
Fricatives	ɸ [ɸ]	s [s~ç]	ʃ [ʃ]			h [h]
Nasals	m [m]	n [n]			ŋ [ŋ]	
Liquids		l r [l] [r, ɾ, ɽ]				
Glides	w [w]		y [j]			

As evidence that these are contrastive phonemes, I provide (near) minimal pairs in (164).

(164) Examples illustrating phonemic consonants

p	paŋ	‘strength’	j	jaŋ	‘foot’
b	baŋ	‘bamboo carrying pole’	ɸ	ɸaŋ	‘face’
t	taŋ	‘taste’	s	saŋ	‘room’
th	thaŋ	‘respect’	ʃ	ʃaŋ	‘shawl’
d	daŋ	‘donate’	h	haŋ	‘hyperactive’
ʈ	ʈaŋ	‘wooden fishing lure’	m	maŋ	‘impure, inauspicious’
ʈh	ʈheŋ	‘leg’	n	naŋ	‘name’
ɖ	ɖaŋor	‘big’	ŋ	ŋaŋ	‘brightness’
k	kaŋ	‘chariot’	l	laŋ	‘mischief, bad behavior’
kh	khaŋ	‘surprise’	r	raŋa	‘red’
g	gaŋ	‘village’	w	wahi	‘word’
c	caŋ	‘odd number’	y	yaŋ	‘backbone’

I note a few points of variation below:

- Some speakers also have the voiced aspirated stops *bh*, *dh*, *ɖh*, and *gh*. For those speakers, voiced aspirates appear only in words with close cognates in neighboring Indo-Aryan languages—sometimes only a small subset of them.
- The phonemic status of the retroflex stops varies across dialects. In some varieties, retroflex and dental stops are not contrastive. One consultant produces retroflex stops only occasionally, typically in careful speech. It is plausible that these realizations are the result of orthographic influence or awareness of pronunciations found in other varieties. For other speakers, however, retroflex stops are consistently contrastive.
- Some newer Bengali loans may be pronounced with the aspirated voiceless affricate *ch*, but its distribution is very limited.
- The status of *ʃ* is also somewhat intermediate. The phoneme represented here as *s* may be realized along a range from [s] to [ç] or [ʃ], depending on the phonological environment. Clear instances of [ʃ] outside these expected environments occur only in a limited set of words, including Sanskritic borrowings via Bengali, such as [biʃfo] ‘world’. I include *ʃ* in the consonant table because it is frequent for some speakers, and in some borrowing-heavy lexical domains, but it seems to be a marginal phoneme for others.

2.2 Vowels

Bishnupriya Manipuri has a five vowel inventory, as shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Vowel symbols used in this dissertation

	Front	Central	Back
High	i		u
	[i]		[u]
Mid	e		o
	[ɛ~e]		[ɔ~o]
Low		a	
		[a]	

Near-minimal pairs illustrating the contrastive status of these vowels are given in (165).

(165) *Examples illustrating phonemic vowels*

i	biŋ	‘left’
u	muŋ	‘east, front’
e	beŋ	‘frog’
o	boŋ	‘vomit’
a	baŋ	‘bamboo carrying pole’

Closely related Indo-Aryan languages, including standard Bengali and Assamese, distinguish /ɔ/ and /o/, a contrast also reflected in the Eastern Nagari orthography. I have not found evidence, however, that this contrast is phonemic in the varieties of Bishnupriya Manipuri represented in my data. In playback tasks involving orthographic minimal pairs that differed only in this vowel, speakers were not able to reliably distinguish the two. I therefore assume only one phonemic mid back vowel.

I represent diphthongs in Bishnupriya Manipuri with consecutive vowel symbols. The language has six diphthongs: *ai*, *au*, *ei*, *oi*, *ou*, and *ui*. Disyllabic vowel sequences are also written with vowel symbols (e.g. *io*, *ua*) rather than with a transitional glide (e.g. *iyo*, *uwa*). The symbols *y* and *w* are used only when the glide is not predictable from an adjacent vowel.

3 Pro-forms

3.1 Personal pronouns

Personal pronouns in Bishnupriya Manipuri are distinguished on the basis of person and number. In the third person singular, there is also a gender distinction. Some pronouns have

a slightly different form when they are marked for case as opposed to unmarked. Both sets of pronominal forms are listed in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Personal pronouns

	Independent pronoun	Case-bearing stem
1SG	<i>mi</i>	<i>mo-</i>
2SG	<i>ti</i>	<i>to-</i>
3SG.M	<i>ta</i>	<i>ta-</i>
3SG.F	<i>tei</i>	<i>tei-</i>
1PL	<i>ami</i>	<i>ama-</i>
2PL	<i>tumi</i>	<i>tuma-</i>
3PL	<i>taŋi</i> (MG), <i>tanu</i> (RG)	<i>taŋo-</i> (MG), <i>tanu-</i> (RG)

Only the third person plural pronoun varies across dialect groups. Generally, MG speakers use *taŋi*, while RG speakers use *tanu*. The plural personal pronouns are sometimes used with singular reference to convey respect. This use appears to be relatively limited, especially in comparison with neighboring languages which have more highly stratified honorific systems.

3.2 Demonstratives

Demonstratives in Bishnupriya Manipuri can be formed with the proximal *e/ei* or distal *o/ou/u*. The choice between *e* and *ei*, and among *o*, *ou*, and *u* is a matter of dialectal variation. These demonstrative ‘bases’ can combine with a range of elements, including classifiers and other semi-functional morphemes to create different demonstrative pro-forms. Table 4.4 provides a non-exhaustive list.

Table 4.4: Demonstratives

	Proximal	Distal
Pronoun	<i>e=go/gi</i> , <i>e=han(i)</i> , <i>e=ta</i>	<i>o=go/gi</i> , <i>o=han(i)</i> , <i>o=ta</i>
Adjective	<i>ere</i> , <i>e</i>	<i>ore</i> , <i>ou</i>
Manner/quality	<i>esade/esare</i>	<i>osade/osare</i>
Temporal	<i>epaga/ebaka</i>	<i>opaga/obaka</i>
Quantity	<i>eto</i>	<i>oto</i>

The demonstrative pronouns consist of a demonstrative base combining with a classifier; classifiers are discussed in greater detail in §4.2. These forms may function as pronouns, standing in place of a nominal expression (166), or as modifiers, occurring in nominal expressions already containing an overt noun (167). By contrast, the forms classified in Table 4.4 as demonstrative adjectives function exclusively as nominal modifiers. They may co-occur with a demonstrative pronoun in a nominal expression containing an overt noun, as in (167), or they may be the sole element expressing a demonstrative meaning within the nominal phrase, as in (168).

- (166) a. **e=han** kha!
 DEM.PROX=CLF eat
 ‘Eat this!’
- b. epaga mi hoba-kor-e dek-lu **o=go**, epaga
 DEM.PROX.TEMP 1SG well-do-NONFIN saw-PST.1SG DEM.DIST=CLF DEM.PROX.TEMP
 dou ia pol-ga-ta?
 god COP.CVB fall.PST.3SG-DIR=clf
 ‘I just saw him doing well, and now he’s dead?’ (Appendix, Text 1: ex. 489)
- (167) (**ou/ore**) gor **o=go=t=to** jobdo nikul-er.
 DEM.DIST house DEM.DIST=CLF=LOC=ABL sound leave-PRES.3SG
 ‘A sound is coming from that house.’
- (168) **ere** habbi kheer jat=han-i hoba is-e.
 DEM.PROX all kheer type=CLF-PL good COP-PRES.3SG
 ‘All of these types of kheer are good.’

An example with a manner/quality demonstrative is given in (169); a temporal demonstrative was illustrated above in (166b); and a quantity demonstrative is shown in (170).

- (169) dango, ar=ta mi esare na-kor-im.
 grandma other=CLF.TIME 1SG DEM.PROX.MANNER NEG-do-SBJV.1SG
 ‘Grandma, I won’t do something like this again.’ (Appendix, Text 1: ex. 494)
- (170) jinif e=ha=r dam eto.
 thing DEM.PROX=CLF=GEN price DEM.PROX.QUANT
 ‘This item costs this much.’

3.3 Interrogative pro-forms

The interrogative pro-forms are built from *k*-initial bases, as is common across Indo-Aryan languages. The two principle interrogative bases in Bishnupriya Manipuri are *kuŋ* and *ki*. The former is generally associated with animates and the latter with inanimates, although

the distinction is not strict. Like the bases used to form demonstrative pro-forms, these interrogative bases combine with classifiers, postpositions, and other semi-functional elements to form a range of interrogative expressions. Table 4.5 provides a non-exhaustive list.

Table 4.5: Interrogative pro-forms

Form	Translation
<i>ki, kuŋ</i>	‘which’
<i>kuŋ=go/gi</i>	‘who (SG/PL)’
<i>ki=go/gi, kuŋ=han(i), ki=han(i), ki=ta</i>	‘what’
<i>kisade/kisare</i>	‘which, how’
<i>kime</i>	‘how’
<i>kumpaga/kumbaka</i>	‘when’
<i>kuraŋ</i>	‘where’
<i>kumpe(i)</i>	‘where’
<i>kui=go, kui=han</i>	‘how many’
<i>koti, koti=go, koti=han</i>	‘how much, how many’
<i>kidia</i>	‘why’

Examples of some of these forms in interrogative clauses are provided in (171)–(174). *Wh*-questions do not involve any obligatory change in word order: any deviations from the usual SOV order in these examples are not required for *wh*-question formation. The presence of a postverbal classifier, however, is obligatory for many speakers (see §5.8).

- (171) **kuŋ=go=i ki=han mat-lo=go?**
 who-CLF=ERG what=CLF say-PST.3SG=CLF
 ‘Who said what?’

- (172) a. **kisare heinu=go ti khe-ile=go?**
 which mango=CLF 2SG eat-PST.2SG=CLF
 ‘Which mango did you eat?’
 b. **heinu=go ti kisare khe-ile=go?**
 mango=CLF 2SG how eat-PST.2SG=CLF
 ‘How did you eat the mango?’ (e.g. did you peel it, cut it, etc.)

- (173) e=ha=t kui=go manu as-i=ta?
 DEM.PROX=CLF=LOC how.many=CLF person COP-PRES.3PL=CLF
 ‘How many people are here?’
- (174) kidia sou=go=i iskul=e na-gi-as-e-ga=ta?
 why child=CLF=ERG school=LOC NEG-go-PERF-PRES.3SG-DIR=CLF
 ‘Why has the child not gone to school?’

3.4 Relative pro-forms

Bishnupriya Manipuri has at least three strategies for forming relative clauses. The first is a correlative strategy, in which a relative pro-form occurs in the correlative clause and a corresponding distal demonstrative pro-form occurs in the matrix clause. Examples are given in (175)–(176).

- (175) [je=go=i iskul=e lerik dan kor-lo] o=go fuṣil.
 REL=CLF=ERG school=LOC book donation do-PST.3SG DEM.DIST=CLF fuṣil
 ‘The one who donated books to the school is Sushil.’
- (176) [e=ha=t je=ta dukh-as-i] manu o=ta=re
 DEM.PROX=CLF=LOC REL=CLF get.hurt-PERF-PRES.3PL person DEM.DIST=CLF=DAT.ACC
 mi cin-uri=go he.
 1SG recognize-IPFV.1SG=CLF FOC
 ‘I know the people who got hurt here.’

In the second strategy, a relative clause containing a relative pro-form is obligatorily right-extraposed and interpreted as modifying a nominal expression in the matrix clause. No corresponding demonstrative is required. An example is given in (177).

- (177) mi manu a=go=re cin-uri [je=go dukh-as-e].
 1SG person one=CLF-DAT.ACC recognize-IPFV.1SG REL=CLF get.hurt-PERF-PRES.3SG
 ‘I know a person who got hurt.’

The third strategy involves no overt relative pro-form. It is a prenominal relative clause construction, in which the head noun occurs at the right edge of a gapped finite clause, as in (178). All three strategies are widely used.

- (178) mi [gajor kha-r horop a=go] bisar-auri.
 1SG carrot eat-IPFV.3SG snake one=CLF look.for-IPFV.1SG
 ‘I’m looking for a snake that eats carrots.’

The relative pro-forms are built from the base *je*, which combines with the same types of functional and semi-functional elements as the bases of demonstrative pro-forms. A non-exhaustive list of relative pro-forms is given in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6: Relative pro-forms

Form	Translation
<i>je</i>	‘which’
<i>je=go/gi, je=han(i), je=ta</i>	‘who, what’
<i>jesade/jesare</i>	‘how’
<i>jepaga/jebaka</i>	‘when’
<i>jepe(i)</i>	‘where’
<i>joto</i>	‘how many’

Examples of correlative clauses with different relative pro-forms are given below. The relative pro-form can sometimes be omitted under relative–demonstrative matching—that is, when the relative pro-form in the correlative clause and the corresponding demonstrative in the matrix clause are morphologically identical apart from their relative and demonstrative bases (180). When the two forms do not match in this way, omission is often ruled out (181).

- (179) *mi joto-mau to=re una-is-ilu, oto-mau ti*
 1SG REL.QUANT-FREQ 2SG=DAT.ACC meet-PERF-PST.1SG DEM.DIST.QUANT-FREQ 2SG
cuna is-ile.
 beautiful COP-PST.2SG

‘You looked nice the all the times I met with you.’

- (180) *(jesare) manu e=ta jin̄ta=ta, osare sopa*
 REL.MANNER human DEM.PROX=CLF alive=CLF DEM.DIST.MANNER tree
e=ta=u jin̄ta=ta.
 DEM.PROX=CLF=SCAL.FOC alive=CLF

‘Just as humans are alive, trees too are alive.’

- (181) *muni-sou=go-i *(je=han=no) narikon kap-lo, o=han cokha*
 male-child=CLF=ERG REL=CLF=INS coconut cut-PST.3SG DEM.DIST=CLF sharp
is-e.
 COP-PRES.3SG

‘What the boy cut the coconut with is sharp.’

3.5 Indefinite pronouns

Indefinite expressions with meanings corresponding to ‘somebody’ and ‘something’, as well as their plural counterparts, can be formed by combining *a(k)* ‘one’ or *koto* ‘some, a few’

with a classifier, as in (182). Adding an interrogative pro-form before an *a(k)*- or *koto*-based indefinite produces an epistemic indefinite, which indicates that the speaker does not know exactly who or what satisfies the existential claim. Example (183a) is therefore odd out of context, since speakers ordinarily know the identity of someone they have met. The sentence becomes acceptable in (183b), where the continuation makes clear that the speaker met someone whom they still do not recognize.

- (182) a. **a=go** hobbe riksa=ha=r bitor=e boh-er.
 one=CLF just.now rickshaw=CLF=GEN inside=LOC sit-IPFV.3SG
 ‘Someone is just now sitting inside the rickshaw.’
 b. mi dek-lu **koto=go** ṅalto bel-ia ge-la-ga.
 1SG see-PST.1SG few=CLF early drop-CVB go-PST.3PL-DIR
 ‘I saw some people leaving early.’
- (183) a. #mi kuṅ=go a=go=re una-ilu.
 1SG who=CLF one=CLF=DAT.ACC meet-PST.1SG
 Int: ‘I met with someone.’
 b. mi **kuṅ=go** a=go=re una-ilu, o=go=re
 1SG who=CLF one=CLF=DAT.ACC meet-PST.1SG DEM.DIST=CLF=DAT.ACC
 na-cin-is-u. ti chobi ki=ta koto=go dekh-a
 NEG-recognize-PERF-PRES.1SG 2SG picture what=CLF some=CLF see-NONFIN
 di-le, cin-e par-tou.
 give-COND recognize-NONFIN be.able-FUT.1SG
 ‘I met with someone I don’t know. If you show me some pictures or something else, I will be able to identify him.’

An indefinite pronoun interpreted within the scope of negation must bear the scalar/additive focus marker *=(o)u*, as in (184a). Without *=(o)u*, the indefinite is necessarily interpreted outside the scope of negation (184b). Since this use of *=(o)u* is unavailable in positive polarity environments, as shown in (184c), *=(o)u* can be understood as forming negative polarity items (NPIs). In negative polarity environments, interrogative pronouns marked with *=(o)u* can likewise function as indefinite pronouns, without combining with an *ak*- or *koto*-based form, as shown in (185).

- (184) a. mi ak=go=re=ou na-cin-uri.
 1SG one=CLF=DAT.ACC=SCAL.FOC NEG-recognize-IPFV.1SG
 ‘I don’t know anyone.’
 b. mi ak=go=re na-cin-uri.
 1SG one=CLF=DAT.ACC NEG-recognize-IPFV.1SG
 ‘There is someone I don’t know.’

- c. *mi ak=go=re=ou cin-uri.
 1SG one=CLF=DAT.ACC=SCAL.FOC recognize-IPFV.1SG
 Int: ‘I know someone.’
- (185) mi kuŋ=go=re*(=ou) na-cin-uri.
 1SG who=CLF=DAT.ACC=SCAL.FOC NEG-recognize-IPFV.1SG
 ‘I don’t know anyone.’

3.6 Reflexives & reciprocal pronouns

This section provides a preliminary overview of strategies for expressing reflexive and reciprocal meanings in Bishnupriya Manipuri. Anaphoric expressions in the language often exhibit case copying: the anaphor consists of two occurrences of the same element, one bearing the case appropriate to its syntactic position and the other matching the case of its antecedent. In reflexive constructions, the doubled element may be either a personal pronoun or *nije* ‘self’. In reciprocal constructions, the doubled element is the indefinite pronoun *a=go* ‘one=CLF’. Case-copying anaphors are also attested in other South Asian languages, including several Dravidian languages (Subbarao and Saxena 1987; Messick and Raghotham 2025), Assamese (Chowdhary 2013), and Meitei (Devi and Subbarao 2002).

In Bishnupriya Manipuri, which member of the doubled expression matches the case of the antecedent depends on the syntactic position of the anaphor. Beginning with case-copying reciprocals, when the reciprocal occurs in object position, it is the second member of the doubled expression that bears the same case as the antecedent, as in (186). In fact, the copying is not limited to case morphology: when the antecedent is a genitive-marked noncanonical subject followed by the obligatory classifier *=ta* (see 4.5.4), the second member copies both the genitive marker and the classifier, as in (187).

- (186) sunil baro onita=i a=go=re a=go=i bana pe-itara.
 Sunil and Onita one=CLF=DAT.ACC one=CLF=ERG affection get-IPFV.3PL
 ‘Sunil and Onita love each other.’
- (187) taŋ=**or=ta** a=go=re a=go=**r=ta** lag-toi.
 3PL=GEN=CLF one=CLF=DAT.ACC one=CLF=GEN=CLF need-FUT.3PL
 ‘They need each other.’

When the reciprocal instead occurs as a possessor, it is the first member of the doubled expression that copies the case of its antecedent (188), as well as any classifier that follows the case marker (189).

- (188) a. sou=g-i=e mo=re a=go=i a=go=r lu-kotha
 child=CLF-PL=ERG 1SG=DAT.ACC one=CLF=ERG one=CLF=GEN secret-story
 mat-la=go he.
 say-PST.3PL=CLF FOC
 ‘The children told me each other’s secrets.’
- b. mi taŋ=ore a=go=re a=go=r lu-kotha mat-lu=go
 1SG 3PL=DAT.ACC one=CLF=DAT.ACC one=CLF=GEN secret-story say-PST.1SG=CLF
 he.
 FOC
 ‘I told them each other’s secrets.’
- c. mi taŋ=oraŋ a=go=raŋ a=go=r lu-kotha mat-lu=go
 1SG 3PL=DAT.LOC one=CLF=DAT.LOC one=CLF=GEN secret-story say-PST.1SG=CLF
 he.
 FOC
 ‘I told them each other’s secrets.’
- (189) taŋ=or=ta a=go=r*(=ta) a=go=r thikana lag-toi.
 3SG=GEN=CLF one=CLF=GEN=CLF one=CLF=GEN address need-FUT.3SG
 ‘They need each other’s addresses.’

The evidence for case copying in reflexives formed from personal pronouns or *nije* is more limited. These reflexives appear to be subject-oriented, requiring their antecedent to be the subject of the same clause. Because subjects are typically either ergative or unmarked, and neither personal pronouns nor *nije* has a distinct ergative form, the second member of the doubled expression generally surfaces without overt case marking, as in (190). Reflexives with noncanonical subject antecedents, however, show that case copying is possible in these constructions as well (191). Predicates that both take noncanonical subjects and permit animate objects are highly restricted, so the examples that reveal this pattern are sometimes semantically unusual.

- (190) ira=i {nij=ore **nije** / tei=re **tei**} khoma kor-is-e.
 Ira=ERG self=DAT.ACC self 3SG.F=DAT.ACC 3SG.F forgiveness do-PERF-PRES.3SG
 ‘Ira has forgiven herself.’
- (191) ira=r=ta {nij=ore nij=**or=ta** / tei=re tei=**r=ta**}
 Ira=GEN=CLF self=DAT.ACC self=GEN=CLF 3SG.F=DAT.ACC 3SG.F=GEN=CLF
 lag-toi.
 need-FUT.3SG
 ‘Ira needs herself.’

When a *nije*-based reflexive occurs in possessor position, the order of the two members changes in the same way as with reciprocals: the first member matches the antecedent in

case marking (192). I have not yet found evidence that doubled reflexives formed from personal pronouns can occur in this position. Speakers instead use a single pronoun in this environment (193).

- (192) onita *(nije) nij=or meipa=go.
 Onita self self=GEN doctor=CLF
 ‘Onita is her own doctor.’
- (193) sorojini=e onita=re (*tei) tei=r lerik=han di-lo.
 Sorojini=ERG Onita=DAT.ACC 3SG.F 3SG.F=GEN book=CLF give-PST.3SG
 ‘Sorojini_i gave Onita_j her_{i,j,k} book.’

Another strategy, available only with *nije*, involves a single occurrence of the reflexive. In the single reflexive strategy, *nije* bears the case associated with its syntactic position (194). With singular antecedents, the single and doubled reflexive strategies appear to yield similar interpretations. With plural antecedents, they diverge: the doubled reflexive gives rise to a distributive reading, under which each individual stands in a reflexive relation to themselves (195a), while the single reflexive produces a collective reading (195b). A further illustration of this contrast comes from contexts in which the antecedent contains the quantifier *hari* ‘every’. Since *hari* forces a distributive interpretation, the single reflexive strategy is judged to be semantically anomalous in this environment (196).

- (194) sorujini=e nij=ore mensesel=ha=t dekh-iri.
 Sorujini=ERG self=DAT.ACC mirror=CLF=LOC see-IPFV.3SG.F
 ‘Sorujini sees herself in the mirror.’
- (195) a. habbi=e nij=ore nije bana pe-itara.
 all=ERG self=DAT.ACC self affection get-IPFV.3SG.F
 ‘Each person (individually) loves himself/herself/themselves.’
 b. habbi=e nij=ore bana pe-itara.
 all=ERG self=DAT.ACC affection get-IPFV.3SG.F
 ‘They all love themselves (all).’
- (196) a. hari manu=e nij=ore nije bana pe-itara.
 every person=ERG self=DAT.ACC self affection get-IPFV.3SG.F
 ‘Every person (individually) loves himself/herself/themselves.’
 b. #hari manu=e nij=ore bana pe-itara.
 every person=ERG self=DAT.ACC affection get-IPFV.3SG.F
 ‘Int: ‘Every person (individually) loves himself/herself/themselves.’

4 Nominal domain

4.1 Gender

Like other Eastern Indo-Aryan languages, Bishnupriya Manipuri does not classify nouns according to grammatical gender. Some nouns denoting animates, however, alternate between masculine and feminine forms reflecting natural gender. The only productive gender marker is the feminine suffix *-i*, which attaches directly to nouns. This suffix also occurs with the deverbal agent nominalizing suffix *-(k)ura*, as shown in (199). Masculine forms sometimes end in *-a*, but this is not a general or fully productive masculine marker.

- | | | |
|-------|--|---|
| (197) | a. mekur
cat
'cat (M)' | b. mekur-i
cat-F
'cat (F)' |
| (198) | a. cinpa
hero
'hero (M)' | b. cinp-i
hero-F
'heroine (F)' |
| (199) | a. kad-ura=go
cry-AG.NMLZ=CLF
'crybaby (lit: cryer) (M)' | b. kad-ur-i=go
cry-AG.NMLZ-F=CLF
'crybaby (lit: cryer) (F)' |

4.2 Classifiers

Bishnupriya Manipuri has three main classifiers: *=go*, *=(k)han*, and *=ta*. These classifiers occur in a wide range of nominal expressions and interact with their number and definiteness interpretations. The discussion in this section largely follows Akolkar (2023), to which the reader is referred for a more detailed description and analysis of the classifier system.

Table 4.7: Classifier inventory

Classifier	Type	Semantic conditions	Example nouns
<i>=go</i>	individual	animate, round, contained	<i>manu</i> 'person', <i>pakhia</i> 'bird', <i>gutham</i> 'button', <i>gor</i> 'house'
<i>=(k)han</i>	individual	inanimate, flat, uncontained	<i>pata</i> 'leaf', <i>at</i> 'hand', <i>gan</i> 'village', <i>kumei</i> 'festival'
<i>=ta</i>	group / subkind	unrestricted	any

The classifiers =go and =(k)han are individual classifiers: they count individual entities, or specimens of a kind. The choice between them depends on the semantic properties of the entities treated as individual units of what the noun describes. The classifier =go is used with all animate individuals. Inanimate individuals are divided: =go is used with those that are round, small, and/or contained, whereas =(k)han is used with those that are flat, large, and/or uncontained. For many count nouns, the unit of individuation is sufficiently conventionalized that the noun is strongly associated with one classifier. This is the case for the nouns listed in Table 4.7 as well as those illustrated in (200). When different units of individuation are available for the same noun, either classifier may be possible, with the choice giving rise to a different interpretation, as shown in (201).

- (200) a. horop=go
snake=CLF
'the snake'
- b. lerik=han
book=CLF
'the book'
- (201) a. mas=han
fish=CLF
'the piece of fish'
- b. mas=go
fish=CLF
'the whole fish'

The classifier =ta can combine with count nouns and give rise to subkind, group, or undifferentiated quantity readings (202a). It may also occur with mass nouns, in which case it is ambiguous between a substance and subkind reading (202b).

- (202) a. φol e=ta
fruit DEM.PROX=CLF
'this kind of fruit,' 'this set of fruits,' or 'these uncountable fruits'; NOT 'this fruit'
- b. ca e=ta
tea DEM.PROX=CLF
'this tea' or 'this kind of tea'

Classifiers occur obligatorily in all numeral/cardinal expressions (203) and definite/demonstrative expressions (200), (204). They are also obligatory components of nominal interrogative and relative pro-forms (see §3.3–§3.4). Their role in the expression of number and definiteness is discussed in greater detail in the following sections, §4.3–4.4.

- (203) a. horop tin=go
snake three=CLF
'three snakes'
- b. horop koto=go
snake few=CLF
'a few snakes'
- c. horop a=go
snake one=CLF
'a snake'

- (204) a. lerik e=han
book DEM.PROX=CLF
'this book'
- b. lerik o=han-i
book DEM.DIST=CLF-PL
'those books'

Only in cardinal expressions can the classifier precede the noun, together with the numeral or cardinal quantifier it attaches to (205). Elsewhere, the classifier must follow the noun.

- (205) a. tin=go horop
three=CLF snake
'three snakes'
- b. koto=go horop
few=CLF snake
'a few snakes'

The classifier =*ta* differs from =*go* and =(k)*han* in that it cannot attach directly to a noun to form a bare classifier phrase (206; cf. 200). Instead, it must attach to a some other element within the nominal expression, such as a demonstrative (202) or numeral (207).

- (206) *ca=ta
tea=CLF
Int: 'the tea'
- (207) tei tin=ta phol tan̄kor-lo.
3SG.F three=CLF fruit buy-PST.3SG
'She tried three types of fruit.'

4.3 Number

Nominal expressions in Bishnupriya Manipuri exhibit a three-way number contrast: depending on their morphosyntax, they may receive number-neutral, singular, or plural interpretations. I first discuss the main strategies for expressing these interpretations, drawing on Akolkar (2023), and then turn to two more restricted plural markers.

Bare nouns receive number-neutral interpretations. Thus (208) is true whether the speaker purchased one book or multiple, and (209) is true whether the speaker has a single child or more than one. As the latter example also shows, animate bare nouns trigger plural verbal agreement, but this agreement does not rule out a singular reading.

- (208) mi gelga mari lerik lu-ilu ere dukan e=go=t=to.
1SG past year book buy-PST.1SG DEM.PROX store DEM.PROX=CLF=LOC=ABL
'Last year I bought (one or multiple) books from this store.'
- (209) mo=r=ta iskul=e j-itara-ga sou as-i.
1SG=GEN=CLF school=LOC go-IPFV.3PL-DIR child COP-PRES.3PL
'I have a child/children that go to school.'

Singular interpretations arise in three contexts: when a noun combines with a bare individual classifier (210a); with a demonstrative and a classifier but no plural marker (210b); or with *a(k)* ‘one’ and a classifier (210c).

- (210) a. *jela=go*
 woman=CLF
 ‘the woman’
 b. *jela o=go*
 woman DEM.DIST=CLF
 ‘that woman’
 c. *jela a=go*
 woman one=CLF
 ‘a/one woman’

Plural readings are commonly expressed with the plural suffix *-i*. This suffix attaches to one of the individual classifiers, not directly to the noun. It gives rise to plural readings in bare classifier phrases and demonstrative phrases (211), as well as in certain interrogative and indefinite expressions, as in (212).

- (211) a. *jela=g-i*
 woman=CLF-PL
 ‘the women’
 b. *jela o=g-i*
 woman DEM.DIST=CLF-PL
 ‘those women’

- (212) a. *kuŋ=g-i ah-ila=go?*
 who=CLF-PL come-PST.3PL-CLF
 ‘Who (PL) came?’
 b. *ti park=go=t ak=g-i=re=u dek-le=go?*
 2SG park=CLF-LOC one=CLF-PL=DAT.ACC=SCAL.FOC see-PST.2SG=CLF
 ‘Did you see multiple people at the park?’

The same plural marker also occurs in expressions with numerals and other cardinal quantifiers, but here it is restricted to definite contexts. Indefinite cardinal expressions (typically those lacking the definite suffix *-o*) cannot occur with *-i*, but still receive plural interpretations whenever their cardinality exceeds one.

- (213) a. *jela tin-o=g-i*
 woman three-DEF=CLF-PL
 ‘the three women’
 b. *jela tin=go*
 woman three=CLF
 ‘three women’
 c. **jela tin=g-i*
 woman three=CLF-PL
 Int: ‘three women’

The classifier *=ta* also often gives rise to plural(-like) interpretations, since it is associated with group and undifferentiated quantity readings.

- (214) e=mari=kar mukhi e=ta jobor huat ise.
 DEM.PROX-year=GEN taro.corm DEM.PROX=CLF very tasty COP-PRES.3SG
 ‘This year’s taro corms are very tasty.’

There are also two minor plural markers, *-noki* and *-(g)asi*. The former is restricted to kinship terms and attaches directly to the noun. It is compatible with nearly all kinship terms, but as far as I have observed, not with any other class of nouns. Plurals of kinship terms may also be formed using the more general *-i* strategy. I have not identified any difference in interpretation between the two strategies. In both examples in (215), the fathers need not have traveled together (showing that *-noki* does not require a group reading), and every member of the plurality must be a father (showing that *-noki* is not an associative plural marker).

- (215) *Context: A few students are living together.*
- a. taŋ=or bapok-noki=e taŋ=ore can-at ah-is-ila.
 3PL=GEN father-KIN.PL=ERG 3PL=DAT.ACC see-NONFIN come-PERF-PST.3PL
 ‘Their fathers came to visit them.’
- b. taŋ=or bapok=g-i=e taŋ=ore can-at ah-is-ila.
 3PL=GEN father=CLF-PL=ERG 3PL=DAT.ACC see-NONFIN come-PERF-PST.3PL
 ‘Their fathers came to visit them.’

The latter marker, *-(g)asi*, is an associative plural marker. It combines with a referential expression to form a plurality consisting of the individual denoted by that expression and other contextually associated individuals. The marker is pronounced *-asi* by some speakers and *-gasi* by others.

- (216) mi hobbe suborna-asi=re dek-lu.
 1SG just.now Subarna-ASSOC.PL=DAT.ACC see-PST.1SG
 ‘I just saw Subarna and her group.’

4.4 Definiteness

This section examines the definiteness interpretations available to four types of nominal expressions: bare nouns, bare classifier phrases, demonstrative phrases, and cardinal expressions. Some of the diagnostics used here are adapted from Dawson and Jenks (2023); see that work for further discussion.

Bare nouns are compatible with both indefinite readings (217) and unique definite readings (218). Indefinite bare nouns are scopeless: they obligatorily take narrow scope relative to other quantificational elements, as illustrated by their behavior with respect to negation in (219).

- (217) mi mo=r=loge pani an-is-e.
 1SG 1SG=GEN=with water bring-PERF-PRES.3SG
 ‘I’ve brought some water with me.’
- (218) *Context: You just jumped into a lake with a friend. You comment:*
 pani inu-is-e.
 water cold-COP-PRES.3SG
 ‘The water is cold.’
- (219) tei gelga rati lerik na-pakor-lo.
 3SG.F past night book NEG-read-PST.3SG
 ‘She did not read a book/books last night.’
 Scenario 1: She didn’t read at all ($\neg > \exists$) ✓
 Scenario 2: She read some books but not others ($\exists > \neg$) ✗

Bare classifier phrases obligatorily receive a unique definite interpretation (220). This uniqueness requirement gives rise to consistency effects, as shown in (221). In this example, each occurrence of *sou=go* must pick out the unique contextually relevant child. The two occurrences therefore cannot be used to refer to different children, making the sentence contradictory.

- (220) beni=go=r nal=han jobor danor is-e aji.
 sun=CLF=GEN light=CLF very big COP-PRES.3SG today
 ‘The sun is bright today.’
- (221) #sou=go gum-as-e kintu sou=go na-gum-as-e.
 child=CLF sleep-PERF-PRES.3SG but child=CLF NEG-sleep-PERF-PRES.3SG
 Int: ‘This child is sleeping but that child is not.’

Demonstrative phrases, which generally also include a classifier, are compatible with both anaphoric and exophoric definite interpretations. On an anaphoric interpretation, the phrase refers to an entity already established in the discourse, as in (222). On an exophoric interpretation, it refers to an entity identifiable from the extralinguistic context, often through an accompanying gesture such as pointing, as in (223).

- (222) mo=r=ta pani=e senkum=e as-il, kintu mi senkum #(o=ta)
 1SG=GEN=CLF water=CONJ milk=CONJ COP-PST.3SG but 1SG milk DEM.DIST=CLF
 pi-lu.
 drink-PST.1SG
 ‘I had water and milk, but I drank the milk.’

- (223) sou o=go gum-as-e kintu o=go
 child DEM.DIST=CLF sleep-PERF-PRES.3SG but DEM.DIST=CLF
 na-gum-as-e.
 NEG-sleep-PERF-PRES.3SG
 ‘That child [*gesture to child 1*] is sleeping, but that one [*gesture to child 2*] is not.’

Cardinal phrases, which include a numeral or another type of cardinal quantifier, are interpreted as definite when marked as such, and indefinite otherwise. Singular cardinal phrases containing *a(k)* ‘one’ are necessarily interpreted as indefinite; the corresponding singular definite meaning is expressed instead by a bare classifier phrase or a demonstrative classifier phrase. Plural cardinal phrases without overt definite marking are also interpreted as indefinite. Unlike bare nouns, both singular and plural cardinal indefinites can take scope, as shown by the availability of the wide scope reading in (224)–(225). The absence of the narrow scope reading in (224) is due to the independent fact that *a(k)*-based indefinites occurring within the scope of negation must bear the scalar focus particle =*u*, with which they form an NPI.

- (224) tei aspatal a=go na-bisar-lo.
 3SG.F hospital one=CLF NEG-find-PST.3SG
 ‘She did not find a hospital.’
 Scenario 1: She did not find any hospital. ($\neg > \exists$) ✗
 Scenario 2: There was one particular hospital she didn’t find. ($\exists > \neg$) ✓
- (225) tei aspatal tin=go na-bisar-lo.
 3SG.F hospital three=CLF NEG-find-PST.3SG
 ‘She did not find three hospitals.’
 Scenario 1: She hoped to find any three hospitals, but couldn’t. ($\neg > \exists$) ✓
 Scenario 2: There were three hospitals on her list that she couldn’t find. ($\exists > \neg$) ✓

A cardinal phrase receives a definite interpretation when it bears the definite suffix -*o*, as in the second sentence in (226). This suffix occurs only in cardinal expressions. Although it resembles the distal demonstrative *o-*, it does not alternate with a proximal form. The plural suffix -*i* provides an additional morphological indication of definiteness: as discussed in §4.3, -*i* occurs only in definite cardinal phrases.

- (226) mi tin=go raṇa baro pac=go ondira heinu lui-lu. mi tin-o=g-i
 1SG three=CLF red and five=CLF yellow mango buy-PST.1SG. 1SG three-DEF=CLF-PL
 (/#tin=go) raṇa heinu khe-ilu.
 three=CLF red mango eat-PST.1SG
 ‘I bought three red and five yellow mangoes. I ate the three red mangoes.’

4.5 Case markers

Bishnupriya Manipuri has several case markers which attach to nominal expressions and provide information about their syntactic position and/or semantic role. As in many Indo-Aryan languages, the boundary between case markers and postpositions is not always clear (see, e.g., Masica 1991). In Bishnupriya Manipuri, postpositions generally combine with nominal expressions that are already case-marked, most often with the genitive. The forms listed in Table 4.8 are treated here as case markers because they are semantically bleached, do not require genitive-marked complements, and occur across a broad range of grammatical contexts. The final column indicates whether each case marker attaches to a nominal that already bears case, and if so, which case.

Table 4.8: Bishnupriya Manipuri case markers

Case	Form	Preceding case
Ergative	<i>=e</i>	–
Dative-accusative	<i>=(o)re</i>	–
Dative-locative	<i>=(o)raŋ</i>	–
Genitive	<i>=(o)r</i>	–
Instrumental 1	<i>=no</i> (MG), <i>=lo</i> (RG)	(DAT.ACC)
Instrumental 2	<i>=e</i>	
Locative	<i>=e / =t</i> _□	–
Ablative	<i>=to</i> _□	LOC / DAT.LOC

I represent these forms as enclitics because they attach to the right edge of the nominal phrase, regardless of its internal syntax. Numeral expressions may occur either before or after the noun; in both orders, the case marker follows the final element of the nominal phrase, as shown in (227).

- (227) a. [manu di=o=g-i]=e kam e=han kor-la=ta.
 person two-DEF=CLF-PL=ERG work DEM.PROX=CLF do-PST.3PL=CLF
 ‘These two people did it.’
 b. [di-o=g=i manu]=e kam e=han kor-la=ta.
 two-DEF=CLF-PL person=CLF work DEM.PROX=CLF do-PST.3PL=CLF
 ‘These two people did it.’

I now discuss each case marker and describe aspects of its distribution.

4.5.1 Ergative

The ergative marker is realized as [j] after low and mid vowels, and as [e] elsewhere. In the transcription system used here, these realizations are represented as =*i* and =*e*, respectively.

For many speakers, ergative marking is required on transitive subjects and variable across a broad range of intransitive subjects, as described in detail in Chapter 3, §3. I briefly summarize the central descriptive generalizations from that section here before turning to a discussion of variation. In the variety that is the primary focus of this description, transitive subjects are obligatorily marked ergative across tense, aspect, and mood categories (228).

- (228) horop=go*(=i) to=re kamar-lo/-toi/-er/-ok.
 snake=CLF=ERG 2SG=DAT.ACC bite-PST.3SG/FUT.3SG/IPFV.3SG/IMP.3SG
 ‘The snake bit/will bite/is biting/should bite you.’

Ergative cases is not realized on personal pronouns. Overt =*e* appears only on non-pronominal third person subjects.

- (229) a. tei(*=e) seŋkum pi-ri.
 3SG.F=ERG milk drink-IPFV.3SG.F
 ‘She is drinking milk.’
 b. ami(*=e) por-is-e sopa o=ta gus-ilan.
 1PL=ERG fall-PERF-PRES.3SG tree DEM.DIST=CLF remove-PST.1PL
 ‘We removed the fallen trees.’

Subjects of prototypical unaccusative predicates are usually unmarked. However, they may bear ergative case in restricted contexts where they are construed as agentive, volitional, or as causers of their own change of state.

- (230) a. kupan=han(*=e) bag-is-e.
 plate=CLF=ERG break-PERF-PRES.3SG
 ‘The plate has broken.’
 b. sou=go(#/?=i) por-il.
 child=CLF=ERG fall-PST.3SG
 ‘The child fell.’
 (231) a. manu=go#(=i) harpa harpa bur-il.
 man=CLF=ERG knowing knowing sink-PST.3SG
 ‘The man drowned knowingly/on purpose.’
 b. matou kor-te-ga sou=go=i por-il.
 child.act do-CONT-DIR child=CLF=ERG fall-PST.3SG
 ‘The child (fake) fell while playing pretend.’

With prototypically unergative predicates, subject marking varies. Some predicates take ergative-marked subjects by default in out-of-the-blue contexts, with others readily allow both ergative and unmarked subjects. In either case, the choice of subject marking context-sensitive. Subjects are more likely to bear ergative case when they are construed as agentive, and more likely to be unmarked when they are construed as less agentive, or as affected by an external cause or causer.

(232) sunil(=e) hin-ilo.

Sunil=ERG bathe-PST.3SG

‘Sunil bathed’

Speaker comment: ‘[With ergative marking, it sounds like] he did more action.’

(233) jela=go#/(=i) dabd-ilo.

woman=CLF=ERG run-PST.3SG

‘The woman ran.’

Consultant comment: ‘I don’t see a use for [the version with the unmarked subject].’

(234) *Context: A fox was caught trying to deceive an old couple. As punishment, the old woman began beating him, so he quickly apologized and fled.*

lamui o=go bel-ia dabd-ilo.

fox DEM.DIST=CLF drop-CVB run-PST.3SG

‘That fox ran off.’

(Appendix, Text 1: ex. 497)

There is also a class of apparently intransitive verbs that require ergative subjects, regardless of the subject’s degree of agentivity. These include bodily emission and sound emission predicates such as *kah* ‘cough’, *loud* ‘shout’, *boŋ* ‘vomit’, and *amia* ‘yawn’. See Chapter 3, §3.3.3 for arguments that these predicates are covertly transitive.

(235) sunil*(=e) besepia kah-ilo.

Sunil=ERG without.occasion cough-PST.3SG

‘Sunil coughed unintentionally’

The description above reflects the pattern I have observed across five speakers. There is also evidence of an active alignment system from four Bishnupriya Manipuri texts published in Grierson (1903), which constitute the earliest written documentation of the language (discussed in §1.2).¹ Across these four texts, transitive (non-pronominal) subjects are nearly always marked ergative, while intransitive subjects show a split distribution. The exceptional cases in which a transitive subject appears unmarked have plausible independent explanations. As discussed in footnote 3 of Chapter 3, subjects may be unmarked in certain

¹Two texts are from Sylhet and were collected in 1900; two are from Manipur, with no date given. It is unclear whether the texts from each region were produced by the same individual or distinct individuals.

focused contexts, even when they are transitive. In addition, I have found that in narratives containing long sequences of converbial clauses, where the subject is linearly far from the finite inflected verb, the subject of a transitive finite verb may appear unmarked. An example of this kind from one of the Grierson texts is given in (236). In elicitation contexts with converbial clauses, subject marking tracks the properties of the main verb: if the main verb is transitive, the subject must bear ergative case, even when an intervening converbial clause is formed with an intransitive predicate, as shown in (237). I suggest that the unmarked transitive subjects found in the context of stacked converbial clauses may arise from a special structure or reflect processing pressures associated with the distance between the subject and the finite verb. Focus and stacked-converbial contexts plausibly account for the few unmarked transitive subjects found in the texts.

- (236) Source: Grierson (1903, Specimen III); bracketing, glosses, and translation are mine

[Koto din thāyā] **putā khulāigō** [tār don autā habi loiyā]
 few day stay.CVB son younger.CLF 3SG.M.GEN wealth DEM.DIST.CLF all take.CVB
 [dūrai fam akhnāt maje giyā] tār don autā habi [oknai
 distant place one.CLF.LOC inside go.CVB 3SG.M.GEN wealth DEM.DIST.CLF all wicked
 kām koriyā] **mang-koilō**.
 work do.CVB waste-do.PST.3SG

‘A few days remaining, the younger son took all his wealth and went to a distant place and did wicked work, wasting all that wealth.’

- (237) lamui=go*(=i) ah-ia habi=re thok-ilo.
 fox=CLF=ERG come-CVB all=DAT.ACC trick-PST.3SG
 ‘The fox came and tricked everyone.’

That said, the fluid-S pattern does not extend to all speakers. I worked briefly with two speakers, one from Tripura and one from Sylhet, whose patterns of ergative marking differed considerably from the one described above. Both permitted overtly transitive subjects to remain unmarked in at least some non-focus contexts. Because my data are limited, I cannot yet generalize about the contexts that license unmarked transitive subjects for either speaker or how closely the patterns in their varieties resemble one another. As discussed in §1.1, there is considerable variation within Bishnupriya Manipuri, as well as rapid ongoing change. It may be relevant that Sylheti, another Eastern Indo-Aryan language in close contact with Bishnupriya Manipuri, has an *-e* subject marker that is also reported to have a varied distribution across speakers. Thaut et al. (2020) describe Sylheti as having a split-S system, in which *-e*, treated by them as an agentive marker, tends to mark more agent-like arguments, while more patient-like arguments are unmarked. They note interspeaker variation in whether *-e* is obligatory on transitive subjects. For some speakers, omitting this marker results in ungrammaticality, while for others it is allowed. More work is needed to better understand the variation in subject marking patterns both in Bishnupriya Manipuri and in other Eastern Indo-Aryan languages with similar subject markers.

4.5.2 Dative-accusative

The dative-accusative case can mark both direct and indirect objects. As is common in Indo-Aryan languages, direct objects exhibit differential object marking. They may be unmarked or bear dative-accusative case depending on their semantic properties. Examples of both patterns are given in (238)–(239).

- (238) sorujini=e lerik=han pakor-is-e.
 Sorujini=ERG book=CLF read-PERF-PRES.3SG
 ‘Sorujini has read the book.’
- (239) kukur=go=i mekur=go=re tal-kor-er.
 dog=CLF=ERG cat=CLF=DAT.ACC chase.off-do-IPFV.3SG
 ‘The dog is chasing off the cat.’

As is often the case with differential object marking, the factors that condition object marking are multifaceted, and the interpretive effects of marking or non-marking can be subtle. Animacy is one clearly relevant factor. Animate objects are much more likely to be marked, and with some predicates they must be marked (240). Where marking is optional, individuation also appears to play a role; dative-accusative marking is generally unavailable with inanimate mass nouns, as shown in (241). Another factor seems to be whether the object is the target toward which the subject’s action is directed, as suggested by the contrast in (242). Whereas the sentence in (242a) is compatible with either an accidental or an intentional breaking, the marked object in (242b) makes salient a reading in which the subject deliberately acts on the plate. As discussed in §4.4, bare classifier phrases consisting of only a noun and classifier, like the objects in (242), are obligatorily interpreted as definite. The contrast in (242) therefore cannot be reduced to a difference in definiteness.

- (240) bador=go=i uttom*(=ore) pe-ilo.
 monkey=CLF=ERG Uttam=DAT.ACC get-PST.3SG
 ‘The monkey found Uttam.’
- (241) bador=go=i pani(*=re) pi-er.
 monkey=CLF=ERG water=DAT.ACC drink-IPFV.3SG
 ‘The monkey is drinking water.’
- (242) a. uttom=e kupaŋ=han bak-lo.
 Uttam=ERG plate=CLF break-PST.3SG
 ‘Uttam broke the plate.’
 b. uttom=e kupaŋ=han=ore bak-lo.
 Uttam=ERG plate=CLF=DAT.ACC break-PST.3SG
 ‘Uttam broke the plate on purpose.’

The dative-accusative marker also occurs with indirect objects. Indirect objects must be overtly marked, either with this marker or with dative-locative =*raŋ*. The dative-accusative marker appears to be the more general of the two, while =*raŋ* has a somewhat more restricted distribution, though both are common. An example with a marked indirect object is given in (243). Additional examples are presented in §4.5.3, where this marker is compared with the dative-locative marker. As shown in (244), it is also possible for both objects in a ditransitive clause to bear =*re*. In such cases, the first object is typically interpreted as the indirect object, though this ordering does not appear to be obligatory.

- (243) ti mo=*re* lerik a=*han* di-as-ile.
 2SG 1SG=DAT.ACC book one=CLF give-PERF-PST.2SG
 ‘You gave me a book.’
- (244) sunil=*e* ta=*re* tei=*re* dekha d-ilo.
 Sunil=ERG 3SG.M=DAT.ACC 3SG.F=DAT.ACC show.NONFIN give-PST.3SG
 ‘Sunil showed him her.’

4.5.3 Dative-locative

The dative-locative case, like the dative-accusative, productively marks indirect objects. With many ditransitive predicates, the indirect object may bear either the dative-accusative or the dative-locative marker, as shown in (245)–(247), though the choice can give rise to interpretive differences. Some verbs, however, allow only one of the two markers, as in (248)–(249).

- (245) uttom=*e* mo=*re/raŋ* lerik a=*han* d-ilo.
 Uttam=ERG 1SG=DAT.ACC/DAT.LOC book one=CLF give-PST.3SG
 ‘Uttam gave me a book.’
- (246) sorojini=*e* ta=*re/raŋ* mekur=*go* ane d-ilo.
 Sorojini=ERG 3SG=DAT.ACC/DAT.LOC cat=CLF bring.NONFIN give-PST.3SG
 ‘Sorojini brought him the cat.’
- (247) tei ama=*re/raŋ* gupon kotha a=*han* mat-lo.
 3SG.F 1PL=DAT.ACC/DAT.LOC secret word one=CLF say-PST.3SG
 ‘She told us a secret.’
- (248) mi julak=*han=oraŋ/*ore* bor mag-uri.
 1SG moon=CLF=DAT.LOC/DAT.ACC blessing request-IPFV.1SG
 ‘I am asking the moon for blessings.’
- (249) taŋi mo=*re/*raŋ* lerik a=*han* lua d-ila.
 3PL 1SG=DAT.ACC/DAT.LOC book one=CLF buy.NONFIN give-PST.3PL
 ‘They bought me a book.’

This case also marks animate locations, as shown in (250)–(252).

- (250) mi to=**raŋ** gi-as-ilu.
 1SG 2SG=DAT.LOC go-PERF-PST.1SG
 ‘I went to you.’
- (251) mo=r lerik onita=**raŋ**.
 1SG=GEN book Onita=DAT.LOC
 ‘My books are with Onita.’
- (252) mi to=**raŋ** mo=r baba=re dekh-uri.
 1SG 2SG=DAT.LOC 1SG=GEN father=DAT.ACC see-IPFV.1SG
 ‘I see my father in you.’

There is evidence that =*raŋ* is formally a locative marker as well. As will be discussed in §4.5.7, the ablative marker attaches to nouns in their locative forms, and with animate nouns, it must attach to the =*raŋ*-marked form.

Noncanonical subjects are also sometimes marked with =*raŋ*. In many cases, this marking can be understood as extension of =*raŋ*’s locative function. For instance, in predicative possession constructions like in (253)–(254), which are based on the existential construction (discussed briefly in §5.4), the notional subject is in an abstract sense a location. The example with a modal verb in (255), however, less clearly involves any locative meaning.

- (253) ama=**raŋ** kukur du=go as-i.
 1PL=DAT.LOC dog two=CLF COP-PRES.3PL
 ‘We have two dogs.’
- (254) sou=go=**raŋ** tap=han as-e.
 child=CLF=DAT.LOC fever=CLF COP-PRES.3SG
 ‘The child has a fever.’
- (255) mo=**raŋ** kah-ani lag-toi.
 1SG=DAT.LOC cough-INF need-FUT.3SG
 ‘I need to cough.’

4.5.4 Genitive

The genitive case marks both inalienable possessors (256) and alienable possessors (257).

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>(256) a. mo=r at=khan
 1SG=GEN hand=CLF
 ‘my hand’</p> | <p>b. sorojini=r beyok a=go
 Sorojini=GEN brother one=CLF
 ‘a brother of Sorojini’s’</p> |
| <p>c. oja=go=r naŋ=han
 teacher=CLF=GEN name=CLF
 ‘the teacher’s name’</p> | <p>d. lerik=ha=r kheipok=han
 book=CLF=GEN half=CLF
 ‘half of the book’</p> |

- (257) a. to=r digala marup di-o=g-i
 2SG=GEN long friend two-DEF=CLF-PL
 ‘your two tall friends’
 b. taŋ=or taŋkha
 3PL=GEN money
 ‘their money’

In addition, the nominal complement of a postposition is typically genitive-marked, as illustrated in (258)–(260). Postpositions that show this pattern include *goje* ‘above, on top’, *age* ‘before’, *pise* ‘behind, after’, *kaje* ‘for, because of’, *mune* ‘in front of’, *bitore* ‘inside’, *sade* ‘like, similar to’, *bare* ‘outside’, *tole* ‘under, below’, and *loge* ‘with’.

- (258) masi boksa mo=r heinu=r=goje cor-is-i.
 fly many 1SG=GEN mango=on.top mount-PERF-PRES.3PL
 ‘There are many flies on my mangoes.’
 (259) tei nij=or=kaje lerik lo-iri.
 3SG.F self=GEN=for book buy-IPFV.3SG.F
 ‘She is buying books for herself.’
 (260) ta=r=loge otar-ani nuŋi is-e.
 3SG.M=GEN=with talk-INF pleasant COP-PRES.3SG
 ‘Talking with him is nice.’

Noncanonical subjects may also appear with genitive case. When they do, the genitive marker is invariably followed by the classifier =*ta*. The position of =*ta* differs from the usual position of classifiers, which precede case marking. Classifiers may occur in both positions simultaneously, as in (262) and (263), but only the classifier preceding the genitive marker varies with the interpretation of the noun. Genitive-marked noncanonical subjects occur in predicative possession, experiencer, and modal constructions.

- (261) mo=r=ta sou du=go as-i.
 1SG=GEN=CLF child two=CLF COP-PRES.3PL
 ‘I have two children.’
 (262) sopa e=ha=r=ta danor pata as-e.
 tree DEM.PROX=CLF=GEN=CLF big leaf COP-PRES.3SG
 ‘This tree has big leaves.’
 (263) sou=go=r=ta kahura lag-is-e.
 child=CLF=GEN=CLF cough/cold touch-PERF-PRES.3SG
 ‘The child has a cold.’

- (264) mo=r=ta jobor gum ah-er.
 1SG=GEN=CLF much sleep come-IPFV.3SG
 ‘I am very sleepy.’
- (265) daho kor-ani=r age sorojini=r=ta bapok=ore dekh-ani
 burning do-INF=GEN before Sorojini=GEN=CLF father=DAT.ACC see-INF
 lag-toi.
 need-FUT.3SG
 ‘Sorojini needs to see her father before he is cremated.’

4.5.5 Instrumental

The language has two instrumental markers, =*lo/no* and =*e*. The first has the dialectal variants =*lo* and =*no*, used by RG and MG speakers respectively. With inanimate nouns, =*lo/no* attaches directly to the noun; with animate nouns, it must be preceded by the dative-accusative marker =*re*. Meanwhile, =*e*, which is homophonous with the ergative marker, attaches directly to nouns regardless of animacy.

The marker =*lo/no* is commonly used with instruments (266a), means of transportation (266b), and material sources (266c).

- (266) a. muni-sou=go=i narikon=go dahan=**no**/*e kap-lo.
 male-child=CLF=ERG coconut=CLF knife=INS cut-PST.3SG
 ‘The boy cut the coconut with a knife.’
- b. ti jesare=u rikʃa=han=**no**/*e ja-na lag-toi.
 2SG REL.MANNER=SCAL.FOC rickshaw=CLF-INS go-INF need-FUT.3SG
 ‘You need to go by rickshaw.’
- c. keirak e=han luk=**no**/*e hon-kor-is-i=han he.
 ladder DEM.PROX=CLF wood=INS make-do-PERF-PRES.3PL=CLF FOC
 ‘This ladder is made of wood.’

Beyond its core instrumental and related uses, =*no/lo* can also mark the stimulus (267), subject matter (268), or comitative participant (269).

- (267) raju=r=ta mo=re=**no** dor a=han lag-er.
 Raju=GEN=CLF 1SG=DAT.ACC=INS fear one=CLF touch-IPFV.3SG
 ‘Raju is worrying about me.’
- (268) aji-ka=r matek=han onko=**no**.
 today-TIME=GEN speech=CLF math=INS
 ‘Today’s lecture is on math.’

- (269) ti sorojini=re=no ja-ga.
 2SG Sorojini=DAT.ACC=INS go.IM.IMP-DIR
 ‘Go with Sorojini.’

Meanwhile, instrumental =*e* marks causes, as shown in (270). There are a number of indications that the =*e*-marked nominals in these examples are instrumental adjuncts rather than ergative subjects. First, each predicate in (270) is intransitive, indicating that the accompanying unmarked nominal must be the sole argument of the predicate. By contrast, a transitive sentence in which the cause is the subject would use a transitive verb form, as in (271). In addition, the affected argument in a transitive clause would have the option of bearing dative-accusative case, as it does in (271), reflecting its status as the direct object. This option is not available for the unmarked arguments in the intransitive examples (272).

- (270) a. pepura=go inj=han=*e*/*no mor-il.
 ant=CLF cold=CLF=INS die-PST.3SG
 ‘The ant died from the cold.’
 b. rud=go=r ak=han=*e*/*no mas=go calak kore huko
 heat.of.sunCLF=GEN excess=CLF=INS fish=CLF quick do.NONFIN dry.NONFIN
 por-il-ga.
 fell-PST.3SG-DIR
 ‘By the strength of the sun, the fish finished drying quickly.’
 c. raju jobdo=han=*e* khañu-il.
 Raju sound=CLF=INS be.surprised-PST.3SG
 ‘Raju was surprised by the sound.’
- (271) jobdo=han=*e* raju=re khañ-kor-lo.
 sound=CLF=ERG Raju=DAT.ACC surprise-do-PST.3SG
 ‘The sound surprised Raju.’
- (272) *jobdo=han=*e* raju=re khañu-il.
 sound=CLF=INS Raju=DAT.ACC be.surprised-PST.3SG
 Int: ‘Raju was surprised by the sound.’

An =*e*-marked instrument may also co-occur with an ergative subject, as in (273). Despite their identical marking, the two nominals can be distinguished by the conditions under which they may be left unexpressed: the instrumental phrase can be omitted freely, whereas the subject can only be unpronounced under the more restricted conditions that license pro-drop—namely, when subject’s referent is recoverable from the discourse context.

- (273) raju=*e* (dukhani=han=*e*) loud-er.
 Raju=ERG pain=CLF=INS shout-IPFV.3SG
 ‘Raju is shouting (from the pain).’

The locative marker has two suppletive allomorphs, *=e* and *=t*. The conditioning of the allomorphy is straightforward: *=e* surfaces after consonants, and *=t* surfaces after vowels. There are few exceptions to this pattern.

- The locative marker is used for spatial and temporal locations, both literal and metaphorical. It is restricted to inanimate nominals; animate locations instead bear the dative-locative marker discussed in §4.5.3.

- The ablative case marker attaches to a locative-marked nominal when the nominal is inanimate and to a dative-locative-marked nominal when it is animate. Its canonical use is to mark motion away from a location or to indicate a source. It also has a temporal use, marking the starting point of an interval.

- (279) e=ha=t yom-is-i manu e=ta biffɔ=r nanan
 DEM.PROX=CLF=LOC gather-PERF-PRES.3PL person DEM.PROX=CLF world various
 def=e=tto ah-is-i=ta.
 country=LOC=ABL come-PERF-PRES.3PL=CLF
 ‘The people gathered here are from different countries all over the world.’

- (280) gelga kali mi to=raŋ=to dek a=go ni-lu-ga.
 past adjacent.day 1SG 2SG=DAT.LOC=ABL pot one=CLF take-PST.1SG-DIR
 ‘Yesterday, I took a pot from you.’
- (281) sunil=e ta=r oja=go=raŋ=to dak bar-ani
 Sunil=ERG 3SG.M=GEN teacher=CLF=DAT.LOC=ABL mridang play-INF
 hik-is-e.
 learn-PERF-PRES.3SG
 ‘Sunil has learned to play the mridang from his teacher.’
- (282) onita=i khepat palo-ni=r pis=e=tto ar=ta
 Onita=ERG injury come.about=INF=GEN after=LOC=ABL other=CLF.TIME
 na-hatura-s-e.
 NEG-swim-PERF-PRES.3SG
 ‘Ever since her injury, Onita hasn’t swum again.’

The ablative marker is also used in comparatives to mark the standard of comparison.

- (283) mor beyok mo=raŋ=to calak is-e.
 1SG=GEN brother 1SG=DAT.LOC=ABL clever COP-PRES.3SG
 ‘My brother is smarter than me.’

5 Verbal domain

5.1 Causative morphology

Morphological causatives in Bishnupriya Manipuri build on one of two causative markers, *-u* and *-ua*. The suffix *-u* attaches directly to the verb stem and precedes any TAM morphology. It is compatible with both intransitive predicates (284) and transitive predicates (285). Causatives formed with *-u* allow both coercive and enabling interpretations (286a); the adverbial expression *jur koria* ‘forcefully’ can be added to restrict the interpretation to the coercive reading (286b).

- (284) uttom=e sou=go=re ja-u-ilo.
 Uttam=ERG child=CLF=DAT.ACC go-CAUS-PST.3SG
 ‘Uttam made the child leave.’
- (285) onita=i raju=re kam kor-u-iri.
 Onita=ERG Raju=DAT.ACC work do-CAUS-IPFV.3SG.F
 ‘Onita makes Raju work.’
- (286) a. mi ta=re ta=r mot=han mat-u-ilu.
 1SG 3SG.M=DAT.ACC 3SG.M=GEN opinion=CLF say-CAUS-PST.1SG
 ‘I made him/enabled him to state his opinion.’

- b. mi ta=re jur kor-ia ta=r mot=han mat-u-ilu.
 1SG 3SG.M=DAT.ACC force do-CVB 3SG.M=GEN opinion=CLF say-CAUS-PST.1SG
 ‘I forced him to state his opinion.’

In the preceding examples, the causee is realized as a core argument bearing dative-accusative case. See Chapter 3, §5.1, for discussion of the restrictions on realizing the causee as an argument. With some verbs, the causee may instead be introduced outside the core argument structure, either in an adverbial clause containing the light verb *de* ‘give’ (287) or as an instrumental-marked oblique (288). These structures typically yield an indirect causative interpretation, in which the causer arranges for or directs the causee to carry out the event rather than being construed as its immediate cause. The causee need not be overtly expressed: the causee-containing adjunct may be omitted altogether.

- (287) onita=i ([tei=r pitok=ore d-ia]) horop=go mar-u-ilo.
 Onita=ERG 3SG.F=GEN son=DAT.ACC give-CVB snake=CLF kill-CAUS-PST.3SG
 ‘Onita had the snake killed (by her son).’
- (288) ami (beyok=ore=no) ca hoŋ-kor-u-itaŋai.
 1PL brother=DAT.ACC=INS tea make-do-CAUS-FUT.1PL
 ‘We will get tea made (by our brother).’

The second causative marker, *-ua*, occurs in a complex verbal construction with the light verb *de*. It suffixes a verb stem and is immediately followed by an inflected form of *de* ‘give’. The initial /d/ of *de* may be dropped; when it is, the TAM morphology associated with *de* follows the causativized verb directly, and the two are pronounced together as a single word. The form *-ua* can plausibly be decomposed into the causative suffix *-u* and the nonfinite suffix *-a*, consistent with the general requirement that the lexical verb in a light verb construction appear in a nonfinite form. I assume this decomposition in the glosses below. This construction differs subtly in interpretation from the *-u* causatives described above, but given the available data, I am not yet able to formulate a generalization about the contrast.

- (289) mi nondeffor=ore kad-u-a (d)-ilu.
 1SG Nondeshhor=DAT.ACC cry-CAUS-NONFIN give-PST.1SG
 ‘I made Nondeshhor cry.’

As with *-u* causatives, the causee may, with some predicates, be introduced within an adjunct rather than realized as a core argument (290).

- (290) nondeffor=e [mo=re d-ia] mas huk-u-a-ilo.
 Nondeshhor=ERG 1SG=DAT.ACC give-CVB fish dry-CAUS-NONFIN-give.PST.3SG
 ‘Nondeshhor had me dry the fish.’

5.2 Other valency alternations

Apart from the causative suffix *-u*, Bishnupriya Manipuri does not have dedicated valency-altering verbal morphology. Comparable interpretive effects are instead achieved through different morphosyntactic strategies.

There is no morphologically marked passive or middle construction in the language. Passive-like meanings are instead expressed simply by leaving the subject unpronounced, as in (291) and the first sentence of (292). The verb in these examples bears third person plural agreement—the same agreement triggered by *kungo* ‘somebody’ in subject position, as shown in the second sentence of (292). Since third person plural agreement is not a default elsewhere in the language, this suggests that these clauses may simply be active clauses with a pro-dropped plural agreement-triggering subject, like *kungo* ‘somebody’, rather than true passive structures.

- (291) oja=go=re kam=e=tto nikala di-la.
 teacher=CLF=DAT.ACC job=LOC=ABL remove.NONFIN give-PST.3PL
 ‘The teacher got fired.’
- (292) sou=go=re dukan=go=t dekh-is-i. kunj=go=i
 child=CLF=DAT.ACC store=CLF=LOC see-PERF-PRES.3PL who=CLF=ERG
 dekh-is-i=han=te mi na-har-pa-s-u.
 see-PERF-PRES.3PL=CLF=TOP 1SG NEG-knowledge-get-PERF-PRES.1SG
 ‘The child was seen at the store. I don’t know who saw [him/her].’

Bishnupriya Manipuri also lacks applicative morphology. Participants such as instruments, benefactors, and locations are introduced by case- or postposition-bearing nominals, as discussed in §4.5, which behave as modifiers rather than arguments. A major strategy for adding a genuine argument to a clause is the use of a light verb construction. The semantically bleached finite verb in a light verb construction may allow for the introduction of an argument that could not occur with the more contentful verb on its own. This is illustrated in (293): *loud* ‘shout’ cannot independently take an object, but in a light verb construction with *mat* ‘say’, the additional argument is possible.

- (293) a. *sunil=e ki=han a=han loud-ilo.
 Sunil=ERG what=CLF one=CLF shout-PST.3SG
 Int: ‘Sunil shouted something.’
- b. sunil=e ki=han a=han loud-ia mat-lo.
 Sunil=ERG what=CLF one=CLF scream-CVB say-PST.3SG
 ‘Sunil said shouted something.’ Lit: ‘Sunil said something shouting.’

The language may have an external possession construction in which a possessor is realized as a clausal argument rather than as a part of the nominal expression containing the possessum. Possessors in Bishnupriya Manipuri bear genitive case, as discussed in §4.5.4.

In some contexts, a genitive-marked possessor may additionally be followed by the classifier *=ta*, as in (294). This additional classifier does not replace any classifier independently required by the noun; the latter remains in its usual position before the case marker. Thus, *jela=go=r* ‘woman=CLF=GEN’, translating to ‘the woman’s’, appears as *jela=go=r=ta* ‘woman=CLF=GEN=CLF’ when *=ta* is added.

Possessors marked with *=ta* exhibit properties that distinguish them from ordinary DP-internal possessors. First, they may occur with morphology that is otherwise unavailable to possessors. For instance, the focus marker *he* can generally follow a nominal argument but not a DP-internal possessor. When *=ta* is present, however, *he* may follow the possessor (295). Second, *=ta*-marked possessors display greater freedom of word order. While a DP-internal possessor must precede the possessum, a *=ta*-marked possessor may also follow it (296). Such word order flexibility is characteristic of nominal arguments but is not typically available to possessors. These facts suggest that clauses containing *=ta*-marked possessors may have increased valency, with the possessor realized as an additional clausal argument.

- (294) *mo=r(=ta) at=khan mor-is-il.*
 1SG=GEN=CLF hand=CLF die-PERF-PST.3SG
 ‘My hand was numb.’

- (295) *Context: I mention that I heard your wife struggled during the movie because her hand got numb. You correct me, saying:*
mo=r(=ta) he at=khan mor-is-il.*
 1SG=GEN=CLF FOC hand=CLF die-PERF-PST.3SG
 ‘It’s my hand that got numb.’

- (296) *at=khan mo=r*(=ta) mor-is-il.*
 hand=CLF 1SG=GEN=CLF die-PERF-PST.3SG
 ‘My hand was numb.’

The same genitive-*=ta* sequence also marks certain experiencer and modal subjects, as discussed in §4.5.4, raising the possibility that these constructions share aspects of their underlying syntax.

5.3 Tense, aspect, and mood

Verbs in Bishnupriya Manipuri inflect for a range of tense, aspect, and mood (TAM) categories. These inflectional forms vary based on the person, number, and, in some cases, gender features of the clausal subject whenever the subject is unmarked or bears ergative *=e* (297). In clauses where the notional subject is noncanonically case marked, bearing genitive or dative-locative case, the agreement pattern varies. In some constructions, verbal agreement reflects the features of the notional object (298a); in others, the TAM suffix appears in a third person singular form by default (298b). Further work is needed to determine the syntax of these constructions and the source of the difference in agreement.

- (297) a. *ami di-o=g-i=e mas=or hou khe-ilan.*
 1PL two-DEF=CLF-PL=ERG fish=GEN curry eat-PST.1PL
 ‘The two of us ate fish curry.’
- b. *sou koto=go sopa=ha=t kah-itarā.*
 child few=CLF tree=CLF=T climb-IPFV.3PL
 ‘Some children are climbing trees.’
- (298) a. *mo=r=ta sou du=go as-i/*e.*
 1SG=GEN=CLF child two-CLF CLF-PRES.3PL/PRES.3SG
 ‘I have two children.’
- b. *mo=r=ta mo=r daktor=g-i lag-toi/*tai.*
 1SG=GEN=CLF 1SG=GEN doctor=CLF-PL need-FUT.3SG/FUT.3PL
 ‘I need my doctors.’

Across the paradigm, plural inflectional suffixes are triggered only by agreement with animate nominals. Plural inanimate nominals instead trigger third person singular agreement forms, as shown in (299).

- (299) a. *φul e=ta cuna is-il/*ila=ta.*
 flower DEM.PROX=CLF beautiful COP-PST.3SG/PST.3PL=CLF
 ‘These flowers were beautiful (but now they’ve wilted).’
- b. *mo=r=ta heinu du=go as-e/*i.*
 1SG=GEN=CLF mango two-CLF CLF-PRES.3SG/PRES.3PL
 ‘I have two mangoes.’

Bishnupriya Manipuri distinguishes nine inflectional TAM categories. Their regular forms are presented in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9: TAM inflection

	1SG	2SG	3SG	1PL	2PL	3PL
Imperfective	-uri	-(o)r; -uri (F)	-er; -iri (F)	-(o)raŋ (MG)/ -(i)yar (RG)	-(o)rai	-itara
Past	-(i)lu	-(i)le	-(i)lo; -(i)l (UNACC); -(i)li (F.UNACC)	-(i)laŋ	-(i)lai	-(i)la
Present perfect	-(i)su	-(i)sot	-(i)se	-(i)si	-(i)so	-(i)si
Past perfect	-(i)silu	-(i)sile	-(i)sil; -(i)sili (F)	-(i)silaŋ	-(i)silai	-(i)sila
Future	-(i)tou	-(i)tei	-(i)toi	-(i)taŋai	-(i)tau	-(i)tai
Subjunctive	-(i)m	-(i)be	-(i)bo	-(i)baŋ	-(i)bai	-(i)ba
Precative	-(i)tu	-(i)te	-(i)to	-(i)taŋ	-(i)tai	-(i)ta
Imperative	$\begin{cases} \text{IM} \\ \text{DEL} \end{cases}$	$\begin{cases} -\emptyset \\ -i(s) \end{cases}$	-(o)k	-ik	$\begin{cases} -ei \\ -io \end{cases}$	-(o)ka

I now discuss the forms and interpretations associated with each category.

5.3.1 Imperfective

The imperfective suffixes distinguish gender in the second and third persons. In addition, there are two distinct first person plural suffixes, *-(o)raŋ* and *-iyar*, used by different groups of speakers. The former is associated with the MG dialect and the latter with the RG dialect.

The imperfective aspect is compatible with both present habitual and event-in-progress readings, as shown in (300)–(301).

(300) onita=i haddin hature-iri.

Onita=ERG every.day swim-IPFV.3SG.F

‘Onita swims every day.’

(301) a. Q: o danŋo danŋo, ki=ta kor-orai=ta?

voc grandmother grandmother what=CLF do-IPFV.2PL=CLF

‘Grandma, grandma, what are you (PL) doing?’

b. A: kosu lag-orai=ta he, baba.

taro place-IPFV.1PL=CLF FOC dear

‘We are planting taro, dear.’

(Appendix, Text 1: ex. 457–458)

The imperfective is also compatible with past event in progress readings (302). However, it is not used for past habitual readings, which are instead expressed with the past tense (303).

- (302) ti mo=re kol di-le somoi o=ha=t mi sobi a=han
 2SG 1SG=DAT.ACC call give-PST.2SG time DEM.DIST=CLF=LOC 1SG picture one=CLF
 ca-uri=ta.
 see-IPFV.1SG=CLF
 ‘When you called me, I was watching a movie.’
- (303) jepaga sunil hukan is-il o=ha=t ta haddin lerik
 REL.TEMP Sunil small COP-PST.3SG DEM.DIST=CLF=LOC 3SG every.day book
 pakor-lo/#er.
 read-PST.3SG/IPFV.3SG
 ‘When Sunil was young, he would read every day.’

Imperfective aspect is used in generic statements (304).

- (304) gaḍi o=ta petrol=no col-er=ta.
 car DEM.DIST=CLF petrol=INS function-IPFV.3SG=CLF
 ‘Cars run on gas.’

It also has a restricted futurate use, available when the subject is expected to carry out an action imminently.

- (305) *Context: Someone asks, ‘Can you bring me water?’*
 hai, ane de-uri.
 yes bring.NONFIN give-IPFV.1SG
 ‘Yes, I’ll bring it (now).’

5.3.2 Past

The past tense marker has a few different third person singular forms. Broadly speaking, unaccusative predicates are marked with *-(i)li* when the subject is feminine and *-(i)l* otherwise (306); unergative and transitive predicates take *-(i)lo* (307). See §4.2 of Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of the distribution of *-(i)l*/*-(i)li* and *-(i)lo*, including exceptions to this generalization.

- | | |
|--|---|
| (306) a. tei the-ili.
3SG.F stay-PST.3SG.F
‘She stayed.’ | b. ta tha-il.
3SG.M stay-PST.3SG
‘He stayed.’ |
|--|---|

- (307) a. *tei/ta hatur-lo.*
 3SG.F/M swim-PST.3SG
 ‘(S)he swam.’
- b. *tei/ta pantei khe-ilo.*
 3SG.F/M pantei eat-PST.3SG
 ‘(S)he ate pantei.’

The past tense is used with both recent and distant past events. In some contexts, it can give rise to a recency inference, perhaps because it competes with the past perfect, which is more commonly used for events completed in the more remote past. The examples in (308) and (309) illustrate past tense marking with a recent and a more distant past event, respectively.

- (308) *ira=r homaji=g-i ah-ila.*
 Ira=GEN friend.F=CLF-PL come-PST.3PL
 ‘Ira’s friends (just) arrived.’
- (309) *mi gelga mari lerik lu-ilu ere dukan e=go=t=to.*
 1SG past year book buy-PST.1SG DEM.PROX store DEM.PROX=CLF=LOC=ABL
 ‘Last year I bought a book/books from this store.’

Examples (310) and (311) show that past tense is also compatible with past imperfective interpretations.

- (310) *jepaga sunil hukan is-il, o=ha=t ta haddin lerik*
 REL.TEMP Sunil small COP-PST.3SG DEM.DIST=CLF=LOC 3SG every.day book
pakor-lo.
 read-PST.3SG
 ‘When Sunil was young, he would read every day.’
- (311) *mi onko hada pe-ilu=go he.*
 1SG math like get-PST.1SG=CLF FOC
 ‘I used to like math.’

In addition to verbal clauses, the past tense markers also occur on copulas in non-verbal clauses, as illustrated by the temporal clause in (310).

5.3.3 Present perfect

The present perfect suffixes are identical to the present tense forms of one of the two copulas in the language; see §5.4 for further discussion of the copulas. Present tense is not included as a separate inflectional category in Table 4.9, as present tense inflection occurs direct only on copulas, not lexical verbs. The present perfect is compatible with result-state readings, in which a change that took place in the past results in a state that continues to hold at utterance time.

- (312) sou o=go por-is-e.
 child DEM.DIST=CLF fall-PERF-PRES.3SG
 ‘That child has fallen.’
 Consultant comment: “He’s still on the ground.”

It is also compatible with experiential readings, which assert that an event occurred at least once before utterance time.

- (313) a. Q: kuŋ=go=i lerik e=han pakor-is-i=go?
 who=CLF=ERG book DEM.PROX=CLF read-PERF-PRES.3PL=CLF
 ‘Who has read this book (before)?’
 b. A: mi lerik e=han pakor-is-u=go he.
 1SG book DEM.PROX=CLF read-PERF-PRES.1SG-CLF FOC
 ‘I have read this book.’

The present perfect can co-occur with definite past-time adverbials, but only when the past event has current relevance. Thus, a definite adverbial such as *gelga kali* ‘yesterday’ is acceptable when the QUD is whether the relevant event has been completed by now, but not when the QUD is simply what happened at the specified past time (314).

- (314) tei gelga kali tei=re-tei bas-is-e.
 3SG.F past adjacent.day 3SG.F=DAT.ACC-3SG.F select-PERF-PRES.3SG
 ‘She voted for herself yesterday.’
 Scenario 1: You are answering the question, ‘Has Sorujini voted yet?’ ✓
 Scenario 2: You are answering the question, ‘What did Sorujini do yesterday?’ ✗

5.3.4 Past perfect

The past perfect suffixes can be decomposed into the perfect morpheme *-(i)s*, also found in the present perfect, followed by a regular past tense suffix. There is one suffix that is part of the simple past paradigm but does not occur in the past perfect: third person singular *-(i)lo*. Recall from §5.3.2 that in the simple past, *-ilo* is restricted to unergative and transitive predicates. There is no corresponding past perfect form *-(i)silo* (see Chapter 3, §4.2 for an account of this restriction). Instead, third person singular past perfect forms exhibit only a two-way distinction that tracks the gender of the subject, as illustrated in (315).

- (315) a. tei pantei kha-s-ili.
 3SG.F pantei eat-PERF-PST.3SG.F
 ‘She ate pantei.’
 b. ta pantei kha-s-il.
 3SG.M pantei eat-PERF-PST.3SG
 ‘He ate pantei.’

The morphological composition of this inflectional category motivates the label ‘past perfect’. Semantically, however, these suffixes do not appear to consistently impose the temporal ordering commonly associated with perfect aspect, in which the verbal event precedes the topic time (Klein 1994; Kratzer 1998). In (316), for instance, *kalika* ‘yesterday’ establishes the topic time, yet the event may be understood as occurring within that interval rather than before it. To convey that an event was completed prior to the topic time, speakers instead use combine the past perfect with a light verb, as in the construction with *bel* ‘drop’ in (317).

(316) *Context: Someone asks, ‘What did you do yesterday?’ You answer:*

mi kalika mondir=e gi-as-**ilu**-ga.
 1SG adjacent.day temple=LOC go-PERF-PST.1SG-DIR
 ‘I went to the temple yesterday.’

(317) mi jepaga gor=e ah-ilu, tei kha#(-**bel**)-as-ili.
 1SG REL.TEMP house=LOC come-PST.1SG 3SG.F eat-drop-PERF-PST.3SG.F
 ‘When I came home, she had already eaten.’

The past perfect can also occur in contexts in which no past topic time appears to be salient (318a). Consultants have expressed the intuition that this suffix is associated with remote past events, and in some contexts involving such events, they reject the simple past tense (318b). As discussed in §5.3.2, however, the simple past is not categorically excluded from distant past contexts.

(318) *Context: Someone asks, ‘Tell me something interesting about you.’ You answer:*

- a. nonjsanj bosor age mi bimol sinho=r=log_e tilu-**is-ilu**.
 long.time year before 1SG Bimol Sinha meet-PERF-PST.1SG
 ‘Many years ago, I met Bimol Sinha.’
- b. #nonjsanj bosor age mi bimol sinho=r=log_e tilu-ilu.
 long.time year before 1SG Bimol Sinha meet-PST.1SG
 Int: ‘Many years ago, I met Bimol Singha.’
 Consultant comment: Doesn’t work because you said long time ago

Further work is needed to establish more precise generalizations about the distribution and interpretation of this form.

5.3.5 Future

The future suffixes have a broad distribution. They are compatible with both imminent and distant future events, as illustrated in (319) and (320), respectively.

- (319) *Context: A group of students are waiting to be picked up.*

taŋ=or bapok ba manok-noki e=ha=t hekkose
 3PL.GEN father DISJ mother-ASSOC.PL DEM.PROX=CLF=LOC soon
 ah-itai=go he.
 come-FUT.3PL=CLF FOC

‘Their parents will be here soon.’

- (320) ta daŋor-itoi o=ha=t jobor digol i-toi.
 3SG.M grow-FUT.3SG DEM.DIST=CLF=LOC very long COP-FUT.3SG
 ‘When he grows up, he will be very tall.’

They are acceptable discourse-initially, as shown in (321).

- (321) *Context: You step outside. Seeing dark clouds, you say:*

boron por-toi.
 rain fall-FUT.3SG

‘It’s going to rain.’

The future suffixes can also be used in offers, as in (322).

- (322) *Context: You were out so long you missed your afternoon tea. When you get home, your brother says:*

mi to=re ca khuti hoŋkor-e d-itou.
 1SG 2SG=DAT.ACC tea some make-PTCP give-FUT.1SG

‘I’ll make you some tea.’

In warning contexts, the future permits both implicit conditional and non-conditional readings. Example (323) illustrates the conditional reading, while (324) shows that both readings are available.

- (323) o=ta na-khe-i! nuara i-tei!
 DEM.DIST=CLF NEG-eat-DEL.IMP.2SG sick COP-FUT.2SG

‘Don’t eat that! You will get sick (if you eat it)!’

- (324) duar=han na-aŋ-kor-i, bom=go φaŋ-toi!
 door=CLF NEG-open-do-DEL.IMP.2SG bomb-CLF explode-FUT.3SG

‘Don’t open the door! The bomb will/is going to explode.’

Scenario 1: The bomb is connected to the door; it will explode if the door opens. ✓

Scenario 2: The bomb is timed; it will go off soon no matter what. ✓

5.3.6 Subjunctive

The subjunctive suffixes occur in a diverse range of future-oriented contexts. One such environment is under negation: subjunctive marking is possible both in clauses containing the clausal negator *na-* (325a) and in embedded clauses within the scope of higher negation (326). Subjunctive marking is not required in these environments and alternates with future marking. By contrast, an affirmative subjunctive clause presented without an appropriate context is infelicitous; consultants report that such clauses sound incomplete (325b).

- (325) a. *ta na-hij-ibo/-itoi, tei hij-itoi.*
 3SG.M NEG-cook-SBJV.3SG/FUT.3SG 3SG.F cook-FUT.3SG
 ‘He will not cook, she will cook.’
 b. *#ta hij-ibo.*
 3SG.M cook-SBJV.3SG
 Int: ‘He will/might cook.’
- (326) [*boron por-bo bulia*] *mi na-khal-kor-is-u.*
 rain fall-SBJV.3SG C 1SG NEG-thought-do-PERF-PRES.1SG
 ‘I wasn’t thinking that it would rain.’

The subjunctive is also licensed in clauses embedded under attitude predicates such as *son-deho* as ‘have doubt’ and *dorpa* ‘fear’, which do not commit the attitude holder to the truth of the embedded proposition.

- (327) *sorojini=r=ta fondeho as-e [ira=i pantei hada pe-ibo bulia].*
 Sorojini=GEN=CLF doubt COP-PRES.3SG Ira=ERG pantei like get-SBJV.3SG C
 ‘Sorojini doubts that Ira likes pantei.’
- (328) *tani dor-p-itarra [horop=e kamar-ba bulia].*
 3PL fear-get-IPFV.3PL snake=ERG bite-SBJV.3PL C
 ‘They fear that snakes may bite.’

The subjunctive marker also has an apprehensional use: it can convey that an individual should exercise caution to prevent the undesirable eventuality described in the clause. This use may be licensed by a warning expression, such as an imperative form of *ca* ‘look’ or *khyal tho* ‘take care’, or by exclamatory intonation.

- (329) *mi setu ia por-im (ce-is)!*
 1SG slippery COP.CV fall-SBJV.1SG watch-IMP.2SG
 ‘Watch out (for me), lest I slip and fall!’

The subjunctive is also licensed in rationale and purpose clauses, as shown in (330) and (331).

- (330) mi khawon e=ta khe-**im** bulia baba=i an-e
 1SG food DEM.PROX=CLF eat-SBJV.1SG C father=ERG bring-NONFIN
 di-as-e=ta he.
 give-PERF-PRES.3SG=CLF FOC
 ‘Father brought me these snacks so that I could/would eat them.’
- (331) mi kali j-**im**-ga=ta bulia mosa bad-uri=ta.
 1SG adjacent.day go-SBJV.1SG=CLF C bundle tie-IPFV.1SG=CLF
 ‘I am packing because I’m leaving tomorrow.’

In addition, the subjunctive may occur in the consequent of a future conditional, where the standard future marker is also available.

- (332) ta tiket lua di-le, mi j-**im**/itou-ga.
 3SG ticket buy.NONFIN give-COND 1SG go-SBJV.1SG/FUT.1SG-DIR
 ‘If he buys the ticket, then I will go.’

Finally, subjunctive inflection appears in epistemic modal statements. One of the language’s major strategies for expressing epistemic modality involves a nonfinite verb followed by the auxiliary *tha* bearing subjunctive inflection. (As a lexical verb, *tha* means ‘stay’.) No other TAM marker is possible on *tha* in these epistemic contexts.

- (333) gelga kali boron por-e tha-**ibo**/*itoi.
 past adjacent.day rain fall-NONFIN AUX-SBJV.3SG/FUT.3SG
 ‘It might/must have rained yesterday.’

5.3.7 Precative

The precative is a grammatical mood used to express requests (for this use of the term, see e.g. Matthews 2014). In Bishnupriya Manipuri, matrix clauses containing precative morphology can generally be interpreted as requests, as in (334). With second person subjects, they may additionally receive an interrogative offer interpretation, as in (335). Although interrogative clauses in the language generally require a postverbal classifier (see §5.8), this marker is not permitted in matrix precative questions.

- (334) j-**itu**-ga(*=go)?
 go-PREC.1SG-DIR=CLF
 ‘May I go?’
- (335) ti khe-ite?
 2SG hit-PREC.2PL
 ‘Would you like to eat?’ (offer) / ‘Can you eat?’ (request)

Precative morphology is largely restricted to interrogative contexts. The question–answer pair in (336) demonstrates this restriction: the precative is licensed in the question but not in the corresponding affirmative response, which instead requires an imperative verb form. The only noninterrogative context in which I have found precative morphology to occur is the exclamative construction in (337).

- (336) a. Q: ta hij-ito?
 3SG.M cook-PREC.3SG
 ‘May he cook?’
 b. A: hai ta hij-ak/*ito.
 yes 3SG.M cook-IMP.3SG/PREC.3SG
 ‘Yes, he may cook.’

- (337) taŋi ta=re duk-ta (ko)!
 3PL 3SG=DAT.ACC hit-PREC.3SG EXCL
 ‘I wonder how they hit him!’ / ‘How dare they hit him!’

Precative morphology may also occur in clauses embedded under the bouletic predicate *ca* ‘want’ when the matrix clause is interrogative (338). In this construction, a postverbal classifier is obligatory on the matrix verb. The matrix clause is therefore independently marked as interrogative, unlike a matrix precative clause, which receives an interrogative interpretation without a postverbal classifier. In the corresponding declarative bouletic construction, the embedded verb instead takes an imperative form, as discussed in §5.3.8.

- (338) [taŋi dukh-ita o=han] ti ca-uri*(=go)?
 3PL get.hurt-PREC.3PL DEM.DIST=CLF 2SG want-IPFV.2SG.F=CLF
 ‘Do you wish them to get hurt?’

5.3.8 Imperative

The imperative paradigm distinguishes all combinations of person and number. Second person imperatives additionally distinguish immediate and delayed forms, whereas first and third person imperatives do not morphologically encode this contrast. The first person singular marker varies across speakers between *-(o)ŋ* and *-iŋ*. The final /s/ of the second person singular delayed imperative suffix is sometimes omitted. Second person singular immediate imperatives are typically zero-marked; following stems ending in /h/, however, an epenthetic *-o* is inserted to satisfy the language’s phonotactic requirements, as illustrated in (339).

- (339) a. at!
 walk.IM.IMP.2SG
 ‘Walk!’
 b. ah-o!
 laugh-IM.IMP.2SG
 ‘Laugh!’

Second person immediate imperatives indicate that the commanded action is to be carried out at once. First and third person imperatives, which are underspecified for the immediate-delayed distinction, are also compatible with this interpretation.

- (340) eppaga=i ti e=ha=t ai, ta
 DEM.PROX.TEMP=EMPH 2SG DEM.PROX=CLF=LOC come.IM.IMP.2SG 3SG.M
 o=ha=t ja-g-ga.
 DEM.DIST=CLF=LOC go-IMP.3SG=DIR
 ‘Right now, you come here, he goes there.’

Second person delayed imperatives allow the commanded action to be carried out at a later time, as illustrated by the contrast in (341). When the context explicitly locates the timing of the commanded action in the more distant future, the immediate form is rejected and the delayed form is required, as shown in (342). First and third person imperatives are also compatible with delayed interpretations, as shown in (343).

- (341) a. e=han ne-ga.
 DEM.PROX=CLF take.IM.IMP.2SG-DIR
 ‘Take this now.’
 b. e=han n-is-ga.
 DEM.PROX=CLF take-DEL.IMP.2SG-DIR
 ‘Take this any time.’
- (342) ti gor=e ah-ile mo=re kol a=han
 2SG house=LOC come-COND 1SG=DAT.ACC call one=CLF
 d-is/#de.
 give-DEL.IMP.2SG/give.IM.IMP.2SG
 ‘When you get home, call me.’
- (343) ta gor=e ah-ile mo=re kol a=han de-k.
 3SG.M house=LOC come-COND 1SG=DAT.ACC call one=CLF give-IMP.3SG
 ‘When he gets home, he should call me/have him call me.’

Imperative morphology also has a range of modal uses. Depending on the discourse context, imperative forms may express meanings that in English can be conveyed with *let*, *should*, or *may*, as illustrated in (344)–(346). Imperative forms also occur in embedded clauses under predicates such as *ca* ‘want’, *bor de* ‘pray’, *aŋkor* ‘request’, and *yathan de* ‘give permission’. Examples are given in (347)–(349).

- (344) ce-ia at-oŋ na-dukh-im=ta.
 watch-CVB walk-IMP.1SG NEG-hurt-SBJV.1SG=CLF
 ‘I should walk carefully to not get hurt.’

- (345) ja-ka-ga.
go-IMP.3PL-DIR
'Let them go.'
- (346) mi khela=han jir-ong!
1SG game=CLF win-IMP.1SG
'May I win the game!' / 'I hope I win the game.'
- (347) [ta dukha-k o=han] mi ca-uri.
3SG.M hurt-IMP.3SG DEM.DIST=CLF 1SG want-IPFV.1SG
'I want him to get hurt.'
- (348) mi bor de-uri [tumi khela=han jir-io].
1SG blessing give-IPFV.1SG 2PL game=CLF win-DEL.IMP.2PL
'I wish that you all will win the game.'
- (349) [sunil=e ira=re ca=k bulia] mi ankhor-lu.
Sunil=ERG Ira=DAT.ACC see=IMP.3SG C 1SG ask-PST.1SG
'I asked for Sunil to see Ira.'

Second person immediate imperatives cannot be negated; negative commands instead use the delayed imperative forms, as shown in (350). First and third person imperatives are compatible with negation (351).

- (350) a. *na-ja-ga!
NEG-go.IM.IMP.2SG-DIR
Int: 'Don't go!'
b. na-j-is-ga!
NEG-go-DEL.IMP.2SG-DIR
'Don't go!'
- (351) tei ce-iri [ami na-j-ig-ga bulia].
3SG.F want-IPFV.3SG.F 1PL NEG-go-IMP.1PL-DIR C
'She wants us to not go.'

5.4 Copulas

Copular clauses may contain one of two overt inflecting copulas, *as* and *is/os*, or no overt copula. In this section, the two overt copulas are glossed as COP1 and COP2, respectively; elsewhere in the dissertation, both are glossed simply as COP. The alternation between *is* and *os* for COP2 reflects dialectal variation. The choice among *as*, *is/os*, and a null copula depends on tense and on properties of the non-verbal predicate, including its syntactic category and its interpretation as individual- or stage-level. The discussion below considers copular clauses with nominal, adjectival, and locative predicates.

In present tense copular clauses with nominal predicates, the copula may be null or realized as *is/os*; *as* is not possible. The null copula is typically associated with an individual-level

interpretation of the predicate, while overt *is/os* is associated with a stage-level interpretation (352). The overt copula may also be used to express verum focus, including when the predicate receives an individual-level interpretation (353).

- (352) a. *ami jela (*as-i), tumi muni (*as-o).*
 1PL woman COP1-PRES.1PL 2PL man COP1-PRES.2PL
 ‘We are women, you are men.’
 b. *naʔok=ha=t ami jela is-i.*
 play=CLF=LOC 1PL woman COP2-PRES.3PL
 ‘In the play, we are (acting as) women.’
- (353) *Context: Someone doubts that Onita is kind. You disagree and are defending her.*
tei bitt=or hoba jela=go is-e.
 3SG.F inside=GEN good woman=CLF COP2-PRES.3SG
 ‘She is a kind-natured woman.’

In past tense copular clauses with nominal predicates, both *as* and *is* are possible, while a null copula is generally unavailable. In this environment, *as* is associated with an individual-level interpretation, and *is* retains its association with a stage-level interpretation. The individual-/stage-level distinction relevant to copula choice is context-dependent rather than lexically fixed. For example, both sentences in (354) are judged as natural, but they are appropriate in different contexts. The fact that the null copula and *as* are both associated with individual-level interpretations and occur in complementary distribution suggests that they may be distinct realizations of the same underlying copula, with the null form occurring in the present tense and *as* in the past.

- (354) a. *mi meipa a=go #(as-ilu).*
 1SG doctor one=CLF COP1-PST.1SG
 ‘I was a doctor,’ ‘I was in the medical profession.’
 b. *mi meipa a=go #(is-ilu).*
 1SG doctor one=CLF COP2-PST.1SG
 ‘I was a doctor,’ ‘I was being/acting as a doctor.’

In future tense copular clauses, the distinction between the two overt copulas is neutralized: there is only one future tense copular form, and it more closely resembles COP2 (355). For speakers whose COP2 form is *os*, the copula in (355) would be *oitou*. Clauses without an overt copula generally do not permit a future interpretation.

- (355) *mi meipa a=go #(i-tou).*
 1SG doctor one=CLF COP-FUT.1SG
 ‘I will be a doctor.’
 Speaker comment: “No other way to say it.”

When the predicate of a copular clause is adjectival, the copula obligatorily takes the form *is*, regardless of whether the predicate describes an individual-level property (356) or a stage-level property (357); neither *as* nor a null copula is possible. This pattern holds in the present and past tenses; in the future tense, the single future copular form is used (358). The unavailability of copula omission with adjectival predicates runs counter to the proposed quasi-universal that, if a language permits copula omission with nominal predicates, it also permits it with adjectival predicates under the same conditions (Pustet 2003, p. 37).

- (356) a. *lerik=han digol is-e.*
 book=CLF long COP2-PRES.3SG
 ‘The book is long.’
 b. **lerik=han digol (as-e).*
 book=CLF long COP1-PRES.3SG
- (357) a. *mi nuara is-u/ilu.*
 1SG sick COP2-PRES.1SG/PST.1SG
 ‘I am/was sick.’
 b. **mi nuara (as-u/ilu).*
 1SG sick COP1-PRES.1SG/PST.1SG
- (358) *ta daɲor-itoi o=ha=t jobor digol *(i-toi).*
 3SG.M grow-FUT.3SG DEM.DIST=CLF=LOC very long COP-FUT.3SG
 ‘When he grows up, he will be very tall.’

Copular clauses with locative-marked nominal predicates require overt *as* in both the present and past tenses.

- (359) a. *mo=r lerik=han e=ha=t as-e/il.*
 1SG=GEN book=CLF DEM.PROX=CLF=LOC COP1-PRES.3SG/PST.3SG
 ‘My book is/was here.’
 b. **mo=r lerik=han e=ha=t (is-e/il).*
 1SG=GEN book=CLF DEM.PROX=CLF=LOC COP2-PRES.3SG/PST.3SG
 Int: ‘My book is/was here.’

I suggest that the obligatoriness of overt *as* in this environment, including in the present tense, reflects the existence of two homophonous *as* morphemes. One is the copula, which has a null realization in the present tense; the other is an existential predicate, which is always overt. The latter occurs both in clauses that specify the location of the subject, as in (359a) above, and in clauses that assert the existence of an entity, as in (360).

- (360) *taɲ=or gor=e kukur koto=go as-i.*
 3PL=GEN house=LOC dog few=CLF COP1-PRES.3PL
 ‘There are dogs at their house.’

The behavior of these clauses in the future tense supports the analysis that both involve the same existential predicate. Neither type of clause uses the future copula to express a future interpretation; instead, both require a future form of *tha* ‘stay’. Examples are given in (361)–(362), alongside their present tense counterparts for comparison.

- (361) a. ta gor=e as-e.
3SG.M house=LOC COP1-PRES.3SG
‘He is at home.’
b. ta gor=e tha-itoi/*i-toi.
3SG.M house=LOC stay-FUT.3SG/COP-FUT.3SG
‘He will be at home.’
- (362) a. tarj=oranj pakor-ani=r=ta aboksa lerik as-e=go he.
3PL=DAT.LOC read-INF=GEN=CLF many book COP1-PRES.3SG=CLF FOC
‘There are many books to read at their place.’
b. tarj=oranj pakor-ani=r=ta aboksa lerik
3PL=DAT.LOC read-INF=GEN=CLF many book
tha-itoi=go/*i-toi=go he.
stay-FUT.3SG=CLF/COP1-FUT.3SG=CLF FOC
‘There will be many books to read at their place.’

Finally, copula omission is more broadly available in narrative contexts. It is possible in environments that would otherwise require an overt form, including past tense clauses with nominal predicates and clauses with adjectival predicates. An example is given in (363).

- (363) ki=ta-para def a=ha=t rajkumar a=go as-il=ta.
what=CLF-APPROX land one=CLF=LOC prince one=CLF COP-PST.3SG=CLF
o=go danor judda a=go (as-il) baro ta
DEM.DIST=CLF big warrior one=CLF COP1-PST.3SG and 3SG.M
dek-te=u cuna (is-il).
see-NONFIN=ADD.FOC attractive COP2-PST.3SG
‘In a certain land, there lived a prince. He was a great warrior, and he was handsome too.’

5.5 Negation

I discuss three productive negative forms in the language: *na-*, *nabe/nagoi*, and *nei*. The prefix *na-*, shown in (364)–(365), is the general marker of clausal negation and occurs immediately before a verb or auxiliary stem. As shown in (365), it may take scope over the entire clause, including a universally quantified subject.

- (364) *tei epaga gum-iri=ta, na na-gum-iri=ta?*
 3SG.F DEM.PROX.TEMP sleep-IPFV.3SG.F=CLF or NEG-sleep-IPFV.3SG.F=CLF
 ‘Is she sleeping right now or not?’
- (365) *habbi sou iskol=e na-gi-as-i-ga, kintu koto=go gi-as-i-ga.*
 all child school=LOC NEG-go-PERF-PRES.3PL-DIR few=CLF house=LOC COP-PST.3PL
 ‘Not all of the children have gone to school, but a few have.’

In some cases, *na-* fuses with the following verb or auxiliary stem. For example, its combination with *par* ‘be able to’ yields the negative stem *nuar*, as illustrated in (366).

- (366) *bhut=e to=re dor-e nuar-ba.*
 ghost=ERG 2SG=DAT.ACC hold-NONFIN NEG.be.able-SBJV.3PL
 ‘Ghosts cannot catch/touch you.’

In constructions containing multiple potential hosts for negation, such as light verb and modal constructions, the position of *na-* can reflect its scope. For instance, in (366) above, negation attaches to the modal and takes scope over it, whereas in (367), it attaches to the lower verb and takes scope below the modal.

- (367) *bhut=e to=re na-dor-te pare.*
 ghost=ERG 2SG=DAT.ACC NEG-hold-NONFIN MOD.POSS
 ‘It is possible for ghosts to not catch you.’
 Suggested context: You are so ugly they might not go after you!

There are also construction-specific restrictions on the position of negation in multiverb and verb-auxiliary constructions. For example, in the epistemic modal construction with the auxiliary *tha*, negation must attach to the lexical verb rather than to the auxiliary, and accordingly, it obligatorily scopes below the modal.

- (368) *mi nijsa na-dakh-e tha-im.*
 1SG breath NEG-call-NONFIN EPIST-SBJV.1SG
 ‘I probably don’t snore/am not snoring.’ / ‘I think I don’t snore/am not snoring.’
- (369) **mi nijsa dakh-e na-tha-im.*
 1SG breath call-NONFIN NEG-EPIST-SBJV.1SG

The second negation morpheme has two variants, *nabe* and *nagoi*, used by different speakers. It is a negative copula that occurs specifically in clauses containing two nominal expressions (370). It may also follow a single nominal expression when the other component of the copular relation is recoverable from the context (372). *Nabe/nagoi* is plausibly the non-inflecting negative counterpart of the copula *as* (which is null in the present tense; see §5.8).

- (370) (370) raju hoba oja a=go nabe.
 Raju good teacher=CLF one=CLF NEG.COP
 ‘Raju is not a good teacher.’
- (371) mi onita nabe.
 1SG Onita NEG.COP
 ‘I am not Onita’
- (372) Context: A parent asks, ‘Who made this mess?’ A child answers:
 mi nabe.
 1SG NEG.COP
 ‘Not me.’

Nabe/nagoi may also negate clauses ending in a postverbal classifier, which are plausibly nominalized (see §5.8), yielding the interpretation that the proposition expressed by the clause is not true.

- (373) harou e=ta nonṣaŋ-ia tha-r=ta nabe.
 happiness DEM.PROX=CLF long.time-COP.CVB stay=IPFV.3SG=CLF NEG.COP
 ‘Happiness doesn’t last long.’

Meanwhile, clauses with formed with the copula *is* in the affirmative are negated by prefixing the regular negation marker *na-* to the copula, as in (374).

- (374) a. sunil digol is-e.
 Sunil tall COP-PRES.3SG
 ‘Sunil is tall.’
- b. sunil digol na-is-e/*nabe.
 Sunil tall NEG-COP-PRES.3SG/NEG.COP
 ‘Sunil is not tall.’

The third and final negative form, *nei*, has two distinct functions. First, it serves as a negative existential predicate—the negative counterpart to existential *as* (see §5.4)—as illustrated in (375). Example (375c) shows that bare *nei* alternates with an inflected form that takes same suffixes as the affirmative copulas. Second, *nei* marks adjectival negation with a restricted set of adjectives, as in (376). These two functions likely correspond to two distinct underlying *nei* morphemes. As an adjectival negator, *nei* appears to form a single phonological word with the adjective it negates.

- (375) a. gutham=go lerik=ha=r kada=ha=t nei.
 button=CLF book=CLF=GEN side=CLF=LOC NEG.EXIST
 ‘The button is not next to the book.’

- b. ama=r bopa mor-is-e... kade din=go=u nei.
 1PL=GEN grandpa die=PERF-PRES.3SG cry.NONFIN ?=CLF=SCAL.FOC NEG.EXIST
 ‘Our grandpa has died... there is no one to cry for him.’ (Appendix, Text 1: ex. 485)
- c. e=ha=t kukur ak=go=u nei(s-i).
 DEM.PROX=CLF=LOC dog one=CLF=SCAL.FOC NEG.EXIST-PRES.3PL
 ‘There aren’t any dogs here.’
- (376) a. ta cuna-nei manu a=go.
 3SG.M attractive-NEG person one=CLF
 ‘He is not a good-looking person.’
- b. ere lerik e=han=i hoba=ta, ere lerik e=han=i
 DEM.PROX book DEM.PROV=CLF=PL good=CLF DEM.PROX book DEM.PROV=CLF=PL
 hoba-nei=ta.
 good-NEG=CLF
 ‘These books are good ones, these books are bad ones.’

5.6 Nonfinite verb forms

This section discusses verbal suffixes that occur in place of the finite agreeing TAM markers. Bishnupriya Manipuri has a number of such nonfinite verb forms.

5.6.1 Infinitive

The infinitive is realized as either *-ani*, the more productive form, or *-na*, which has a more restricted distribution but is common with high-frequency verbs. Examples of *-ani* forms include *mor-ani* ‘die-INF’, *kor-ani* ‘do-INF’, *pakor-ani* ‘read-INF’, and *dabd-ani* ‘run-INF’. Examples of *-na* forms include *ja-na* ‘go-INF’, *de-na* ‘give-INF’, and *tho-na* ‘keep-INF’. Some environments where infinitival clauses occur are illustrated below.

- (377) mi ira=re ca-na lep-kor-lu.
 1SG Ira=DAT.ACC see-INF certain-do-PST.1SG
 ‘I decided to see Ira.’
- (378) mo=re tha-na de.
 1SG=DAT.ACC stay-INF give.IM.IMP.2SG
 ‘Let me stay.’
- (379) ami ela de-na okor-lanj.
 1PL song give-INF start-PST.1PL
 ‘We started to sing.’

- (380) boron por-ani bita-is-e.
 rain fall-INF be.about.to-PERF-PRES.3SG
 ‘It’s about to rain.’

5.6.2 Converb

The converbial suffix *-ia* marks verbs in nonfinite adverbial clauses. These clauses relate the event they describe to the main clause event. Depending on the context, the event described by the converbial clause may be interpreted as merely preceding the main-clause event (381), causing it (382), or specifying the manner in which it takes place (383).

- (381) o=ha=t lamui o=go=i ah-ia mukhi o=ta
 DEM.DIST=CLF=LOC fox DEM.DIST=CLF=ERG come-CVB taro.corm DEM.DIST=CLF
 habi pho-kor=ia n-ilo-ga.
 all uproot-do-CVB take-PST.3SG-DIR
 ‘Then the fox came, uprooted all the taro corms, and took them.’ (Appendix, Text 1: ex. 469)
- (382) sorujini=e tei=r manok=ore ninʃiŋ-ia kad-iri.
 Sorojini=ERG 3SG.F=GEN mother=DAT.ACC remember-CVB cry-IPFV.3SG.F
 ‘Sorujini cries remembering her mother.’
- (383) sou=go=r kukur=go dabd-ia ge-l-ga.
 child=CLF=GEN dog=CLF run-CVB go-PST.3SG-DIR
 ‘The child’s dog ran away.’

5.6.3 Continuous marker *-(i)te*

Another nonfinite verbal suffix is the continuous marker *-(i)te*. It marks verbs in simultaneous temporal adjunct clauses, with meanings comparable to those of English *while* and *as* clauses. It can also occur in a light verb construction with a finite form of *tha* ‘stay’, producing a continuative reading.

- (384) mekur=go=i seŋkum pi-te udur=go litu-il.
 cat=CLF=ERG milk drink-CONT mouse=CLF escape-PST.3SG
 ‘The mouse escaped while the cat was drinking milk.’
- (385) mi ela di-te tha-ilu.
 1SG song give-CONT stay-PST.1SG
 ‘I kept singing.’

5.6.4 Perfect participle

The perfect participle is formed by attaching the suffix *-a* to the verb stem. It occurs in nonfinite relative clauses, where it contributes a perfect interpretation: the participial event is interpreted as occurring prior to the time established by the tense of the matrix clause.

- (386) sorojini=e tei=r ikor-a lerik=han tei pakor-iri.
 Sorojini=ERG 3SG.F=GEN write-PF.PTCP book=CLF 3SG.F read-IPFV.3SG.F
 ‘Sorojini is reading the book she wrote.’
- (387) e=ta cor-kor-a jinif ia tha-ibo.
 DEM.PROX=CLF steal-do-PF.PTCP thing COP.NONFIN AUX-SBJV.3SG
 ‘These may be stolen goods.’
- (388) tei=r maŋ-kor-a thabak=han ami pe-ilan.
 3SG.F=GEN be.lost-do-PF.PTCP necklace=CLF 1PL get-PST.1PL
 ‘We found her lost necklace.’

5.6.5 Conditional marker *-(i)le*

There are two major strategies for expressing conditional meanings in Bishnupriya Manipuri, both of which have correlates in other Eastern Indo-Aryan languages (Sharma 2020, Guha 2022). In one nonfinite strategy, the verb inside the conditional antecedent bears the invariant suffix *-(i)le* in place of any TAM morphology. The consequent is an ordinary finite clause. This construction is compatible with both conditional and temporal interpretations, corresponding to English *if* and *when* clauses.

- (389) *Context: Raju has bet on a horse, Montu.*
 monṭu=e jin-**le**, raju=e taŋkha pe-itoi.
 Montu=ERG win-COND Raju=ERG money get-FUT.3SG
 ‘If Montu wins, Raju will get some money.’
- (390) pepura=i mor-ani bita-**ile** φurd-itara.
 ant=ERG die-INF be.about.to-COND fly-IPFV.3PL
 ‘Ants fly when they are about to die.’

The conditional antecedent may receive a future (389), past (391), or present (392) interpretation depending on the context.

- (391) sorojini=e age nikul-**le**, epaga thuŋ-itoi-ga.
 Sorojini=ERG before leave-COND DEM.PROX.TEMP reach-FUT.3SG-DIR
 ‘If Sorojini got out earlier, she will arrive now.’

- (392) sorojini=e coktha i-le, bat na-hij-ibo.
 Sorojini=ERG tired COP-COND rice NEG-cook-SBJV.3SG
 ‘If Sorojini is tired, she will not cook.’

The second strategy is a bipartite construction with a finite antecedent and consequent. The antecedent contains *jodi* ‘if’, and its verb may bear the full range of TAM morphology. The consequent contains *o=ta-i-le* ‘then’, literally ‘if that is’ (DEM.DIST=CLF-COP-COND), whose final element is the same conditional suffix *-(i)le* found in the nonfinite construction.

- (393) ti jodi hojok kha-r, o=ta-i-le nuara bala i-tei.
 2SG if medicine eat-IPFV.2SG DEM.DIST=CLF-COP-COND sickness good COP-FUT.2SG
 ‘If you take medicine, you will get better.’

5.6.6 Other nonfinite forms

Bishnupriya Manipuri has additional markers of nonfiniteness whose distributions and functions require further investigation, including suffixes *-e*, *-o*, and *-at*. I use NONFIN as an umbrella gloss for all of these forms. The examples below illustrate some of their varied uses.

- (394) a. mi theŋ=han bag-e bel-lu.
 1SG leg=CLF break-NONFIN drop-PST.1SG
 ‘I broke my leg.’
 b. ti niŋsa dakh-e tha-ibe.
 2SG breath call-NONFIN AUX-SBJV.2SG
 ‘You might/must snore.’
- (395) pepura=go khaŋda mor-o por-il-ga.
 ant=CKF suddenly die-NONFIN fall-PST.3SG-DIR
 ‘The ant suddenly died.’
- (396) khetual=go=i kocu lag-at gi-as-e-ga.
 farmer=CLF=ERG taro place-NONFIN go-PERF-PRES.3SG-DIR
 ‘The farmer went to plant taro.’

5.7 Directional *-ga*

Bishnupriya Manipuri has a single directional suffix, *-ga*, which occurs on finite verbs immediately following TAM morphology. The suffix is translocative, indicating that, at a relevant reference point, the subject moves away from or is spatially separated from a contextually determined ground. A plausible diachronic source for the suffix is *ja* ‘go’, whose past, perfect, and converbial forms have an irregular *g-* stem.

This directional marker is compatible with a wide range of predicates but occurs frequently with verbs of motion, location, and transfer of possession, including *ja* ‘go’, *ah*

‘come’, *hom* ‘enter’, *thun* ‘reach’, *tha* ‘stay’, *de* ‘give’, and *ni* ‘take away’. With finite forms of *ja* ‘go’ and *ni* ‘take away’, *-ga* is obligatory in most contexts.

- (397) *tei at(h)=ta=r fomoy ofi=e je-iri*(-ga).*
 3SG.F eight=CLF.TIME=GEN time office=LOC go-IPFV.3SG.F-DIR
 ‘She goes to the office at 8 o’clock.’

- (398) gelga kali mi to=raŋ=to dek a=go ni-lu*(-ga).
 past adjacent.day 1SG 2SG=DAT.LOC=ABL pot one=CLF take-PST.1SG-DIR
 ‘Yesterday, I took a pot from you.’

With predicates that do not themselves lexicalize motion away, *-ga* is generally optional. Its presence can indicate that motion away from the perspectival center precedes or overlaps with the eventuality described by the verb (399). It can also indicate that the subject is temporarily located at a distance from the speaker (400).

- (399) a. mi ah-uri.
 1SG come-IPFV.1SG
 ‘I’m coming.’
 b. mi ahuri-ga.
 1SG come-IPFV.1SG-DIR
 ‘I’m going and coming back.’
- (400) *Context: The speaker is in Sylhet, and Onita usually lives in Sylhet.*
 onita silcor=e as-e-ga.
 Onita Silchor=LOC COP-PRES.3SG-DIR
 ‘Onita is in Silchor for the time being.’

Although less frequent, *-ga* also occurs with predicates outside the domains of motion, location, and transfer. The following example illustrates its use with *bokpa/boppa* ‘be hungry’.

- (401) mi kam=or jaga=t bat bop-pa-uri(-ga).
 1SG work=GEN place=LOC rice hunger-get-IPFV.1SG-DIR
 ‘I get hungry at work.’
- (402) mi eppaga bat bop-pa-uri(*-ga).
 1SG DEM.PROX.TEMP rice hunger-get-IPFV.1SG-DIR
 ‘I am hungry now.’

In finite clauses containing *ja* ‘go’, *-ga* is obligatory except in the perfect, where its presence is sensitive to interpretation: *-ga* is unavailable under an experiential reading of the perfect (403) but permitted under a result-state reading (404).

- (403) *Context: Friends are discussing places they have visited. Someone asks whether you have ever been to Tokyo.*
 mi gi-as-u(#-ga).
 1SG go-PERF-PRES.1SG-DIR
 ‘I have gone (to Tokyo).’

- (404) *Context: You're informing your friend on the phone that you went to Tokyo and you're currently there.*

mi gi-as-u-ga.

1SG go-PERF-PRES.1SG-DIR

'I have gone (to Tokyo).'

This contrast suggests that *-ga* is sensitive not simply to the occurrence of a motion event, but to whether the subject remains spatially separated from the relevant ground in the topic situation. On the experiential reading, the separation does not persist into the present topic situation—the subject has presumably returned—whereas on the result-state reading, it does.

The directional suffix is incompatible with certain nonfinite verb forms, as shown by the ill-formedness of infinitival and converbial forms of *ja* 'go' with *-ga* (405). It can occur, however, with the nonfinite continuous marker, as well as with finite imperative and subjunctive forms (406). This restricted distribution may indicate that *-ga* occupies a relatively high structural position that is absent from some nonfinite clauses.

- | | | |
|-------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| (405) | a. *ja-na-ga
go-INF-DIR | b. *g-iy-a-ga
go-CVB-DIR |
| (406) | a. ji-te-ga
go-CONT-DIR | b. ja-ga
go.IM.IMP.2SG-DIR |
| | c. j-ibo-ga
go-SBJV.3SG-DIR | |

Sinha (1981) characterizes *-ga*, *-ta*, and *-gata* as pleonastic verbal suffixes. The data presented here show that *-ga* is not semantically vacuous, although its precise interpretation requires further investigation. I take *-ta* to instantiate a different type of functional element, discussed in the next section (§5.8), and *-gata* to be a complex form resulting from the combination of *-ga* and *-ta*.

5.8 Postverbal classifiers

Classifiers in Bishnupriya Manipuri occur frequently not only inside nominal expressions, but also at the right edge of the inflected verb word. I refer to classifiers in this position as postverbal classifiers (PVCs). PVCs occur after TAM morphology and the directional suffix *-ga*, but before clause-final focus markers and the complementizer *buliya*. They are one of the major morphological reflexes of information-structural distinctions in the language, though it is likely that several distinct phenomena give rise to the observed patterns. In this section, I provide only an initial overview of the environments in which PVCs occur;

more work is needed to characterize the patterns found within each environment. There is also considerable interspeaker variation in this domain. In my work on interrogatives in particular, I have found that speakers vary in which classifier they select in a given context, but agree much more closely on the environments in which a PVC may appear at all.

I discuss four environments in which PVCs occur: polar questions, *wh*-questions, declarative focus contexts, and right extraposition. The PVCs are identical to the nominal classifiers. They include the singular and plural individual classifiers *go/gi* and *han/hani*, as well as the (sub)kind/group classifier *ta*.

First, a PVC may occur in polar questions, either on its own or together with the question particle *than*, discussed in §6.1.2. Polar questions may also be formed with *than* alone. The classifiers that appear in polar questions are *=go* and *=ta*. The choice between these forms does not seem to depend on the classifier class of any nominal in the clause. While *=go* appears to be broadly available across contexts, *=ta* is somewhat more restricted.

- (407) ti gelga kali senkum loi-le=**go**?
 2SG past adjacent.day milk buy-PST.2SG=CLF
 ‘Did you buy milk yesterday?’
- (408) tuma=r gor=e pal-a kukur as-i=**ta**?
 2PL=GEN house=LOC keep-PF.PTCP dog COP-PRES.3PL=CLF
 ‘Do you have pet dogs?’
- (409) ti mas kha-uri=**go** than?
 2SG fish eat-IPFV.3SG.F=CLF Q
 ‘Do you (F) eat fish?’

In *wh*-questions, a PVC is obligatory for some speakers; without it, the sentence can receive only an echo question interpretation. Other speakers allow *wh*-questions without a PVC. The question particle *than* may occur in these clauses as well. When a PVC is present, its form varies across contexts. In some cases, it matches the classifier associated with the *wh*-word. This matching relation is clearest with plural classifiers, which occur as PVCs only in matching contexts and are never available as default forms. In many cases, however, *=go* and/or *=ta* are also possible, even when they are not the matching forms. The choice between a matching classifier and an apparent default form correlates with subtle information-structural differences. In the examples in (410), I list all PVC forms accepted by one consultant for each question; forms not listed were judged infelicitous or ungrammatical. These examples are intended to provide a glimpse of the pattern, rather than to support a clear generalization. The internal complexity of the clause, as well as the presence and position of the question particle, also affect which forms are available.

- (410) a. ki=han por-il=**han/ta/go**?
 what=CLF fall-PST.3SG=CLF
 ‘What fell?’

- b. ki=ta por-il=**ta**/go?
 what=CLF fall-PST.3SG=CLF
 ‘What fell?’
- c. ki=go por-il=**go**?
 what=CLF fall-PST.3SG=CLF
 ‘What fell?’
- d. ki=g-i por-il=**g-i**?
 what=CLF-PL fall-PST.3SG=CLF-PL
 ‘What things fell?’
- e. ki=han-i por-il=**han-i**?
 what=CLF-PL fall-PST.3SG=CLF-PL
 ‘What things fell?’

PVCs also occur in declarative focus contexts, including in clauses containing *hudda* ‘only’. In such clauses, the PVC must match the properties of the associate of *hudda*. For example, when *hudda* associates with a first person singular pronoun, the PVC must be =go, the singular animate classifier. When it associates with a first person plural pronoun, the PVC must be either =gi, the animate plural classifier, or =ta, the group classifier. When *hudda* associates with an element bearing the classifier =han, the PVC must also be =han. Classifiers not listed in the examples were judged ungrammatical or infelicitous.

- (411) a. hudda mi jiŋ=ta is-u=**go**.
 only 1SG alive=CLF COP-PRES.1SG=CLF
 ‘Only I am alive.’
- b. hudda ami jiŋ=ta is-i=**g-i/ta**.
 only 1PL alive=CLF COP-PRES.1PL=CLF.PL/=CLF.GROUP/=CLF-PL/CLF
 ‘Only we are alive.’
- c. hudda sopa=han jiŋ=ta is-e=**han**.
 only tree=CLF alive=CLF COP-PRES.3SG=CLF
 ‘Only the tree is alive.’

PVCs also occur in clauses containing the declarative focus marker *he*, which can appear either immediately after the focused constituent or at the right edge of the clause. In such clauses, the form of the PVC does not appear to be determined by the properties of the focused constituent.

- (412) a. sunil=e he dak bara nuar-er=**go**/**ta**.
 Sunil=ERG FOC mridang play.NONFIN NEG.be.able-IPFV.3SG=CLF
 ‘Sunil cannot play the mridang.’

- b. sunil=e dak bara nuar-er=**go/ta** he.
 Sunil=ERG mridang play.NONFIN NEG.be.able-IPFV.3SG=CLF FOC
 ‘Sunil *cannot* play the mridang.’

PVCs can also occur in focus contexts without any overt focus marker. In one subtype of copular clause with two nominal expressions, a PVC may appear after the copula when one of the nominals is focused. The PVC matches the classifier class of the focused nominal. Since equated nominals normally belong to the same classifier class, the PVC will usually match both nominals.

- (413) a. jela e=go jobor nan̄kapa (jela)=go as-ili=**go**.
 woman DEM.PROX=CLF very famous woman=CLF COP-PST.3SG.F=CLF
 ‘This woman was very famous.’
 b. lerik e=han-i mo=r oja=r=han-i as-il=**han-i**.
 book DEM.PROX=CLF-PL 1SG=GEN teacher=GEN=CLF-PL COP-PST.3SG=CLF-PL
 ‘These books were my teacher’s.’

The final environment I discuss involves right-extraposed clauses. Complement clauses in Bishnupriya Manipuri may either precede or follow the embedding verb. When a complement clause follows the verb, the embedding verb often bears the PVC =*ta*, although it is not obligatory.

- (414) sorojini=e mat-lo=**ta** [tei bhut a=go dekh-is-e bulia].
 Sorojini=ERG say-PST.3SG=CLF 3SG.F ghost one=CLF see-PERF-PRES.3SG C
 ‘Sorojini said she saw a ghost.’

Finite clauses modifying nominal expressions may surface sentence-finally, following the matrix verb. In this configuration, the matrix verb must be followed either by the PVC =*ta* or by an intonational break. Omission of =*ta* in the absence of such a break results in ungrammaticality.

- (415) mi pou pe-ilu*(=**ta**) [onita=i lohon kor-e
 1SG information get-PST.3SG=CLF Onita=ERG marriage do-NONFIN
 bel-as-e bulia].
 drop-PERF-PRES.3SG C
 ‘I got the news that Onita got married.’

The occurrence of PVCs across this range of environments is striking. Their distribution and interpretation merit further investigation.

6 Questions and information structure

6.1 Focus markers

6.1.1 Declarative focus markers *he* and *nai*

I discuss two declarative focus markers, *he* and *nai*. The marker *he* can occur either immediately after a focused expression or at the right edge of a clause. When *he* immediately follows the focused expression and no postverbal classifier is present, its use appears to be restricted to corrective focus contexts (416). In the presence of a postverbal classifier, broader contrastive focus readings are also available (417).

- (416) a. *Context: I thought Sunil and his brother both played mridang, but I was wrong; only his brother plays. You tell me:*

sunil=e **he** dak bara nuar-er.
 Sunil=ERG FOC mridang play.NONFIN NEG.be.able-IPFV.3SG

Sunil cannot play mridang.

- b. *Context: I am thinking of inviting Sunil to sing and play the mridang, but you know he can't play the mridang. You say:*

sunil, dak **he** bara nuar-er.
 Sunil mridang FOC play.NONFIN NEG.be.able-IPFV.3SG

'Mridang, he can't play.' (implying that he can sing).

- (417) *Someone asks: Who ate the banana, Uttam or Sunil?*

uttom=e **he** kola=go kha-s-e=ta, sunil=e nabe.
 Uttom=ERG FOC banana=CLF eat-PERF-PRES.3SG=CLF Sunil=ERG NEG.COP

'Uttam ate the banana, not Sunil.'

When *he* occurs clause-finally, it can associate with different types of foci. In this position, it must co-occur with a postverbal classifier. Clause-final *he* is compatible with corrective verum focus contexts (418), contrastive focus on a nominal expression (419), and broad new information focus (420). This range of possible interpretations makes clause-final *he* relatively frequent.

- (418) *Context: Sunil can't play mridang, right?*

na na, ta=te dak bar-ani par-er=go **he**.
 NEG NEG 3SG.M-TOP mridang play-INF be.able-3SG.M=CLF FOC
'No, he can play mridang.'

- (419) Context: Someone asks, ‘Do you want mangoes or jackfruit?’ You answer:

mi heinu hada pa-uri=ta he.
 1SG mango like get-IPFV.1SG=CLF FOC
 ‘I would like *mangoes*.’

- (420) Context: Someone asks, ‘What is that farmer doing?’ You answer:

ta kosu lag-ar=ta he.
 3SG.M taro place-IPFV.3SG=CLF FOC
 ‘He is *planting taro*.’

I have few examples of the second declarative focus marker *nai* in my data. It appears to overlap at least partially in distribution with *he* and to allow exhaustive focus readings. The question-answer pair in (421) illustrates this use.

- (421) a. Q: kuŋ=go=i iskul=e lerik dan kor-lo=go?
 who=CLF=ERG school=LOC book donate do-PST.3SG=CLF
 ‘Who donated books to the school?’
 b. A: lerik dan kor-lo o=go sumit nai/he.
 book donate do-PST.3SG DEM.DIST=CLF Sumit FOC
 ‘The one who donated books is *Sumit*.’

6.1.2 Interrogative focus marker *than*

The interrogative particle *than* can occur in both polar questions and *wh*-questions. In polar questions, it appears at the right edge of the clause (422) or, in fragment questions, at the right edge of the fragment (423). Either *than* or a postverbal classifier are required for a question interpretation, and the two can co-occur as well (424).

- (422) ti lerik tam-por-le than?
 2SG book study-do-PST.2SG Q
 ‘Did you study?’

- (423) Context: Your friend says, ‘Let’s study at a coffee shop.’ To clarify which one, you ask:

mi ja-uri-ga o=han than?
 1SG go-IPFV.1SG-DIR DEM.DIST=CLF Q
 ‘The place where I go?’

- (424) ti j-itei-ga=go than?
 2SG go-FUT.2SG-DIR=CLF Q
 ‘Are you going to go?’

In *wh*-questions, *than̩* has a distribution similar to that of the declarative focus marker *he*: it can occur either immediately after the focused expression—in this case the *wh*-expression—or at the right edge of the clause. For speakers who require a postverbal classifier in *wh*-questions, *than̩* therefore co-occurs with the PVC. Example (425) illustrates the two possible positions of *than̩*, which cannot be occupied simultaneously.

- (425) *kuŋ=go=i (than̩) mas=or hou khe-ilo=go (than̩)?*
 who=CLF=ERG ERG fish=GEN curry eat-PST.3SG=CLF Q
 ‘Who ate the fish curry?’

6.1.3 Scalar/additive focus marker *=(o)u*

The marker *=(o)u* can convey either additive or scalar focus (426)–(427). I gloss the marker according to its interpretation in each clause. In addition to combining with nominal expressions, *=(o)u* can also attach to certain adverbial elements (428).

- (426) *Context: Raju is distributing sweets to lots of people, and I am among them.*
raju=e mo=re=u miŋti di-lo.
Sunil=ERG 1SG=DAT.ACC=ADD.FOC sweets give-PST.3SG
 ‘Raju gave me sweets too.’
- (427) *Context: You and a friend are talking about how everyone seems to be writing poems these days. Sunil is one of the last people you would expect to write poetry.*
sunil=e=u kobita ikor-er.
Sunil=ERG=SCAL.FOC poem write-IPFV.3SG
 ‘Even Sunil writes poems.’
- (428) *Context: You expected your neighbor’s tree to have died by now because it wasn’t doing well previously. You’re surprised to learn it might still be alive.*
sopa=han=te epaga=u jiŋ=ta ia as-e=ta?
tree=CLF=TOP DEM.PROX.TEMP=SCAL.FOC alive=CLF COP.NONFIN COP-PRES.3SG=CLF
 ‘Is the tree still alive?’

This marker forms negative polarity items when it combines with indefinite expressions (see also §3.5). In positive polarity contexts, it is ungrammatical for an indefinite expression to be marked with *=(o)u*.

- (429) *mi kuŋ=go=re=ou *(na-)cin-uri.*
 1SG who=CLF=DAT.ACC=SCAL.FOC NEG-recognize-IPFV.1SG
 ‘I don’t know anyone.’
- (430) *mi peris=e ak-mu=ou *(na-)deh-es-u.*
 1SG Paris=LOC one-time=SCAL.FOC NEG-see-PERF-PRES.1SG
 ‘I haven’t seen Paris yet/even once.’

6.1.4 Emphatic particle =(o)i

The particle -(o)i has an emphatic function. It can give rise to varied interpretations depending on the context and type of element it attaches to. Some examples are given below.

- (431) ϕol hari=g-i=i huat is-e.
 fruit every=CLF=PL=EMPH tasty COP-PRES.3SG
 ‘Each and every fruit is tasty.’
- (432) ti di-as-ile ci η hi o=ta=r mi kuno=han=oi
 2SG give-PERF-PST.2SG letter DEM.DIST=CLF=GEN 1SG any=CLF=EMPH
 na-pakor-is-u.
 NEG-read-PERF-PRES.1SG
 ‘Of the letters you sent me, I haven’t read any at all.’
- (433) *Context: You invited Raju and his wife to an event and said that if he can’t come, at least his wife should come. Raju shows up and says:*
 mi=oi ah-ilu.
 1SG=EMPH come-PST.1SG
 ‘I myself came.’

6.2 Topic marker =te

The marker =te generally occurs with discourse-familiar referents. I therefore label it a topic marker. In the question-answer scenarios in (434)–(435), =te marks the participant that is already established in the discourse and backgrounded relative to the new information.

- (434) *Context: Someone asks, ‘Did your teacher receive both invitations?’ You answer:*
 oja=i=te hudda poila-ka=r barton o=han pe-ilo.
 teacher=ERG=TOP only first-time=GEN invitation DEM.DIST=CLF get-PST.3SG
 ‘Teacher only received the first invitation.’
- (435) *Context: Your neighbor asks, ‘Can I borrow your ladder?’ You answer:*
 hai mi=te de-na hada pa-s-ilu, kintu keirak=han=te
 yes 1SG=TOP give-INF like get-PERF-PST.1SG but ladder=CLF=TOP
 bag-is-e=han he.
 break-PERF-PRES.3SG=CLF FOC
 ‘Yes I would like to give it to you, but it’s already broken.’

The marker is also used with terms of address, where it conveys politeness.

- (436) *kaka=te boli is-o=ta?*
 paternal.uncle=TOP strong COP-PRES.2PL=CLF
 ‘Are you well, Uncle?’

Although *wh*-expressions are typically associated with focus, they can be marked with *=te* in contexts where another element of the clause is also focused (437).

- (437) *Context: Someone took your book. You’ve asked around and can’t figure out who did it. You think to yourself ‘Sunil didn’t take it, Ruhit didn’t take it...’*
kun=go=i=te lerik=han ni-as-e-ga=go?
 who=CLF=ERG=TOP book=CLF take-PERF-PRES.3SG-DIR=CLF
 ‘Who *did* take the book?’

7 Clause embedding

Several clause embedding strategies have already been introduced in this chapter in connection with their associated morphology. Nonfinite embedded clauses are discussed in §5.6 on nonfinite morphology, and relative clauses are briefly discussed in §3.4 on relative pronouns. The present section turns to a selection of finite clause embedding strategies, focusing particularly on the complementizer-like elements that occur in each of them.

7.1 Notional complement clauses

Finite clauses embedded under speech or attitude predicates may contain the complementizer *bulia/bunia* or the clausal demonstrative *o=han* ‘DEM.DIST=CLF’, or they may lack an overt complementizer-like element altogether (438). The forms *bulia* and *bunia* are variants used by different speakers. Some speakers additionally allow the clause-initial complementizer *je* (439), while others do not. The use of *je* has been described by some consultants as a relatively recent development resulting from contact with Bengali and Sylheti. Since *je*-clauses are not part of my primary consultant’s grammar, I do not discuss them further.

- (438) *sorujini=e har-pa-s-e [ram=e kheer kha-s-e*
 Sorojini=ERG knowledge-get-PERF-PRES.3SG Ram=ERG kheer eat-PERF-PRES.3SG
bulia/o=han/∅].
 C/DEM.DIST=CLF/∅
 ‘Sorojini knows that Ram has eaten kheer.’
- (439) *sorujini=e har-pa-s-e [je ram=e kheer kha-s-e].*
 Sorojini=ERG knowledge-get-PERF-PRES.3SG JE Ram=ERG kheer eat-PERF-PRES.3SG
 ‘Sorojini knows that Ram has eaten kheer.’

When an overt complementizer or clausal demonstrative is present, the embedded clause can occur in several positions. In addition to the clause-final position illustrated above, it may appear before the subject or between the subject and the verb, as shown in (440). Embedded clauses without an overt complementizer or clausal demonstrative, however, are possible only in the clause-final position. Speakers generally prefer the embedded clause to occur at one of the two edges of the matrix clause, either before the matrix subject or after the matrix verb. This preference is especially strong with heavier embedded clauses and in structures involving multiple levels of embedding.

- (440) a. [ram=e kheer kha-s-e bulia/o=han/*Ø] sorujini=e
 Ram=ERG kheer eat-PERF-PRES.3SG C/DEM.DIST=CLF/Ø Sorojini=ERG
 har-pa-s-e.
 knowledge-get-PERF-PRES.3SG
 ‘Sorojini knows that Ram has eaten kheer.’
- b. sorujini=e [ram=e kheer kha-s-e bulia/o=han/*Ø]
 Sorojini=ERG Ram=ERG kheer eat-PERF-PRES.3SG C/DEM.DIST=CLF/Ø
 har-pa-s-e.
 knowledge-get-PERF-PRES.3SG
 ‘Sorojini knows that Ram has eaten kheer.’

Embedding predicates differ in which complementizer-like elements may occur in their notional complement clauses. The null complementizer patterns with *bulia*: it is available under predicates that permit *bulia*, but not under those that permit only *o=han*. The predicate *khalkor* ‘think’, for example, allows either *bulia* or a null complementizer in its complement, but not the clausal demonstrative *o=han*.

- (441) suborna=i khal-kor-iri [ira bel-ia ge-li-ga
 Subarna=ERG thought-do-IPFV.3SG.F Ira drop-CVB go-PST.3SG.F-DIR
 bulia/Ø/*o=han]
 C/Ø/DEM.DIST=CLF
 ‘Subarna thinks that Ira left.’

Both *bulia* and *o=han* are permitted in the complements of *mat* ‘say’, *hun* ‘hear’, *harpa* ‘know/realize’, *niŋkor* ‘desire’, and *ca* ‘want’.

- (442) [ta=r baba ah-itoi bulia/o=han] sou=go=i hun-lo.
 3SG.M=GEN father come-FUT.3SG C/DEM.DIST=CLF child=CLF=ERG hear-PST.3SG
 ‘The child heard that his father is coming.’

Meanwhile, *pahur* ‘forget’ and *niŋsiŋiri* ‘remember’ permit only *o=han*.

- (443) [boron porisil o=han/*bulia] mi pahor-e bel-as-u.
 rain fall-PERF-PST.3SG DEM.DIST=CLF/C 1SG forget-NONFIN drop-PERF-PRES.1SG
 ‘I forgot that it rained.’

The complementizer *bulia* is homophonous with the converbial form of the verb *bul* ‘say’ (*bul-ia* ‘say-CVB’). It is unclear whether the form occurring in notional complement clauses is synchronically decomposable as *bul-ia* or has been reanalyzed as a single morpheme. I gloss *bulia* as ‘C’ when it occurs within a notional complement clause, and as ‘say-CVB’ when it receives the type of interpretation characteristic of converbs, roughly translating to ‘having said X’. The verb *bul* differs from other speech and attitude predicates in the language in that the clause it embeds can contain neither *bulia* nor *o=han* (444). In addition, the embedded clause must occur between the subject and verb; clause-initial and clause-final orders are not permitted (445). The distribution of *bul* is therefore narrower than that of the speech verb *mat* ‘say’. Impressionistically, *bul* is also much less frequently used as a main verb.

- (444) tei [ruhit gor=e as-e (*bulia/*o=han)] bul-lo.
 3SG.F Ruhit house=LOC COP-PRES.3SG C/DEM.DIST=CLF say-PST.3SG
 ‘She said that Ruhit is home.’
- (445) a. *[ruhit gor=e as-e (bulia/o=han)] tei bul-lo.
 Ruhit house=LOC COP-PRES.3SG C/DEM.DIST=CLF 3SG.F say-PST.3SG
 Int: ‘She said that Ruhit is home.’
- b. *tei bul-lo [ruhit gor=e as-e (bulia/o=han)].
 3SG.F say-PST.3SG Ruhit house=LOC COP-PRES.3SG C/DEM.DIST=CLF
 ‘She said that Ruhit is home.’

The form *bulia* also occurs in finite reason and purpose clauses, as shown in (446)–(447). Another derivative of *bul*, *buli*, functions as a reportative marker and is discussed in §7.2.

- (446) [ti na-mat-is-ot bulia] mi hua n-an-lu.
 2SG NEG-say-PERF-PRES.2SG C 1SG cucumber NEG-bring-PST.1SG
 ‘Because you didn’t say so, I didn’t bring cucumber.’
- (447) [ti mo=re lerik koto=han d-itei bulia] mi bera
 2SG 1SG=DAT.ACC book few=CLF give-FUT.2SG C 1SG trouble
 na-kor-uri=ta.
 NEG-do-IPFV.1SG=CLF
 ‘I am behaving well so that you give me some books.’

7.2 Reportative marker *buli/buni*

The form *buli*, with the variant *buni*, functions as a reportative marker. It occurs at the end right edge of a clause and indicates that the proposition expressed by that clause is based on

hearsay evidence. This marker also hedges the speaker's commitment to the proposition; it is not used when the speaker confidently believes the proposition to be true.

- (448) *nun̄si-hojok khe-ile peʈ=or nuara bala o-r buli.*
 fragrant-medicine eat-COND stomach=GEN sickness good become-IPFV.3SG RPRT
 'It's said that if one eats (a type of) mint, one's stomach ailments go away.'

The source of the reported information cannot be specified within the *buli*-clause itself (449). A reported speaker can be introduced only by embedding the *buli*-clause under a speech predicate, as in (450). In embedded contexts, the evidential and epistemic contribution of *buli* may be anchored either to the current speaker or to the attitude holder, depending on the embedding predicate. Under *mat* 'say', *buli* is anchored to the current speaker: it conveys that the current speaker has only hearsay evidence for the embedded proposition and is not fully committed to it (450). Under *hun* 'hear', by contrast, *buli* is anchored to the hearer: it expresses that this individual has hearsay evidence for the proposition and is not fully committed to it (451).

- (449) **uttom=e ti iskul=e na-j-itei-ga buli.*
 Uttam=ERG 2SG school=LOC NEG-go-FUT.2SG-DIR RPRT
 Int: 'Uttam said you didn't go to school.'
- (450) *suborna=i mat-lo=ta [ta digol is-e buli].*
 Subarna=ERG say-PST.3SG=CLF 3SG.M tall COP-PRES.3SG RPRT
 'Subarna said he is tall (though I have not verified this myself).'
- (451) *suborna=i hun-is-e=ta [ti mo=re bana na-pa-r*
 Subarna=ERG hear-PERF-PRES.3SG=CLF 2SG 1SG=DAT.ACC affection NEG-get-IPFV.2SG
buli].
 RPRT
 'Subarna has heard that you don't love me (though she has not verified this herself).'

Chapter 5

Conclusion

This dissertation has proposed a mechanism for deriving a case marking pattern found in both Marathi and Bishnupriya Manipuri, though in different empirical domains. In the relevant environments in both languages, apparently intransitive subjects may bear ergative case depending on their interpretation, while subjects of overtly transitive clauses bear ergative case obligatorily. I have argued that the case alternation in apparently intransitive clauses reflects an underlying structural contrast. When the subject is ergative, it occupies a position above its ordinary theta position, where it receives a theta role, and binds a null pronoun in the lower theta position. Each expression receives the theta role associated with its own position, but because the two are covalued, the referent of the overt subject is understood as bearing both roles. The resulting structure is covertly transitive: it contains two syntactically distinct (though covalued) nominal expressions. This covert transitivity licenses dependent ergative case. In overtly transitive clauses, the same structural contrast is not reflected in subject case, because the presence of an overt object independently satisfies the conditions for dependent ergative case.

I have characterized this configuration as involving ‘low control’. It differs from standard control in that the control predicate is a functional head whose complement is relatively small—in both case studies, a type of vP . This smaller complement makes the control relation more local, allowing the controller and the null controlled argument to fall within a single domain for dependent case assignment.

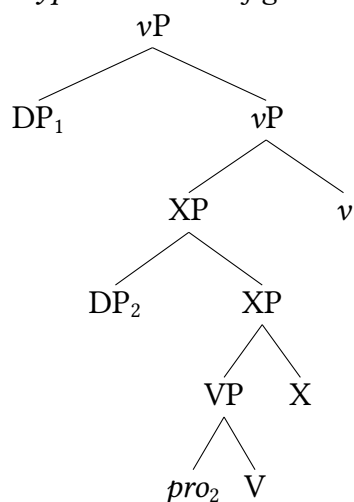
In both languages, the higher theta role assigning head was analyzed as a type of causative. The two causative heads are not identical, however. Marathi $v_{\text{SELF-CAUSE}}$, in addition to being restricted to modal environments, permits an indirect causal relation between the subject and the event described by its complement. Bishnupriya Manipuri v_{CAUS} , by contrast, requires a close connection between the causing and caused events. Consequently, the interpretation associated with extended ergative marking in Bishnupriya Manipuri is more idiosyncratic, sensitive to the lexical semantics of the predicate.

One might ask whether it is purely coincidental that both case studies involve a causative head. The low control analysis itself places no restriction on the theta role assigned to

the overt subject: in principle, the higher head could assign any role. Causative heads are nonetheless natural candidates for this configuration because they commonly occur above the projection that introduces ordinary external arguments. We would predict other argument-introducing functional heads to be able to participate in low control structures only if they can occupy a similarly high position.

The low control mechanism may also interact with dependent cases other than ergative, although the label *control* would be less intuitive in such cases, since the bound pronoun would not be a subject. Suppose, for example, that a theta role assigning head were merged lower in the structure, above VP but below the external argument introducing projection. If this head introduced an argument that bound a null pronoun in the complement of V, as schematized in (452), the resulting configuration could place that argument in the structural relation required for dependent dative case: it would c-command a distinct nominal expression within a lower case domain than the one relevant for ergative. Applicative heads commonly occur in this position, making applicative constructions a natural domain in which to look for such a pattern. In such a configuration, the object would be construed both as a patient/theme and as bearing a role typically associated with applicatives, such as beneficiary. Whether such cases are attested remains a question for future work

(452) *Hypothesized configuration for ‘extended dative’ marking*



Broadly, the proposal developed in this dissertation offers a different way of thinking about so-called semantic case. Such patterns are often analyzed in terms of inherent case, with the same head responsible for both a nominal’s thematic interpretation and its case. I have argued that at least some apparent instances of semantic case can instead be unified with the broader distribution of the same case elsewhere in the grammar, with the association between case and interpretation mediated by a difference in underlying structure. If analyses of this kind prove more generally applicable, there may be little need for dedicated mechanisms of semantic case assignment.

Appendix A

Bishnupriya Manipuri texts

1 Text 1: The Old Couple's Taro Planting (বুড়া-বুড়ির কচু লাগানি)

This text is an oral folk story narrated by Uttam Singha on May 21, 2019 at an event hosted by the Endangered Language Alliance in New York City. I developed the glosses and translations in close consultation with Uttam Singha. He provided the Eastern Nagari orthographic representation for each line of the text.

(453) অৱেতে অৱেনাইতে।

ore=te ore nai=te.
DEM.DIST=TOP DEM.DIST FOC=TOP

‘Once upon a time...’¹

(454) দেশ আহাত বুড়া-বুড়ি হেইমাক আহান আসিলাত।

deʃ a=ha=t bura-buri heimak a=han as-ila=ta.
land one=CLF=LOC old.man-old.woman couple one=CLF COP-PST.3PL=CLF

‘In a certain land, there lived an old couple.’

(455) অতাই কচু লাগাত গিয়াসিগা।

o=ta=i kosu lag-at gi-as-i-ga.
DEM.DIST=CLF=ERG taro place-NONFIN go-PERF-PRES.3PL-DIR

‘They went to plant taro.’

¹This is a conventional phrase used to begin oral folk stories.

- (456) অহাভে লামুই আগৈ দেখিয়া মাতেরতা,

o=ha=t=te lamui a=go=i dekh-ia mat-er=ta,
 DEM.DIST=CLF=LOC=TOP fox one=CLF=ERG see-CVB say-IPFV.3SG=CLF
 ‘Then, a fox saw them and said,’

- (457) ‘ও দাঙ্গ দাঙ্গ, কিতা কররায়তা?’

‘o danggo danggo, ki=ta kor-orai=ta?’
 VOC grandma grandma what=CLF do-IPFV.2PL=CLF
 ‘Grandma, Grandma, what are you two doing?’

- (458) — ‘কচু লাগরাঙতা হে, বাবা।’

— ‘kosu lag-oran=ta he, baba.’
 taro place-IPFV.1PL=CLF FOC dear
 — ‘We are planting taro, dear.’

- (459) ‘ও! অসারে নাবে, অসারে নাবে। মি বুদ্ধি আহান বাগাদেঙ।

‘o! osare nabe, osare nabe. mi buddi a=han
 EXCL DEM.DIST.MANNER NEG.COP DEM.DIST.MANNER NEG.COP 1SG advice one=CLF
 бага de-ŋ.
 inform.NONFIN give-IMP.1SG
 ‘Oh! Not like that, not like that. Let me give you some advice.’

- (460) মোর বুদ্ধিহান হনলে ইমে কালিকা তুমার কচু অতাত মুখি দরিয়া তুমি হউ হিজিয়া খা পারতাউ।’

mo=r buddi=han hun-le ime kalika tuma=r kosu
 1SG=GEN advice=CLF hear-COND then adjacent.day 2PL=GEN taro
 o=ta=t mukhi dor-ia tumi hou hij-ia kha
 DEM.DIST=CLF=LOC taro.corm hold-CVB 2PL curry cook-CVB eat.NONFIN
 par-tau.
 be.able-FUT.2PL

‘If you follow my advice, then by tomorrow your taro will have corms and you will be able to cook them in a curry and eat them.’

- (461) — ‘ও, অতাইলেতে হবা ইসে নাই বাবা। বাগাদে কিহান করানি।’

— ‘o, o=ta-i-le=te hoba is-e nai baba. бага
EXCL DEM.DIST=CLF-COP-COND=TOP good COP-PRES.3SG FOC dear inform.NONFIN
de ki=han kor-ani.’
give.IM.IMP.2SG what=CLF do-INF
‘Oh, that would be good, dear. Tell us what to do.’

- (462) ‘হাই। মুখি আঁগৈ, বাতৰ চিপা আঁগৈ, পুৱা চেঙ আঁগৈ, অহাভ পানি খুতিয়ে।’

‘hai. mukhi a=go=i, bat=or cipa a=go=i, pura
yes taro.corm one=CLF=CONJ rice=GEN press.NMLZ one=CLF=CONJ burn.PF.PTCP
ceŋ a=go=i, o=ha=t=to pani khuti=e.’
cheng.fish one=CLF=CONJ DEM.DIST=CLF=LOC=ABL water some=CONJ
‘Yes. A taro corm, a rice ball, a burnt cheng fish, and a little water.’

- (463) — ‘ও, আমিতে অতা নানিয়া আহিসি নাই বাবা।

— ‘o, ami=te o=ta n-an-ia ah-is-i nai baba.
EXCL 1PL=TOP DEM.DIST=CLF NEG-bring-CVB come-PERF-PRES.1PL FOC dear
‘Oh, we didn’t bring those with us dear.’

- (464) গৱেত্ত অনিয়া আহিগ্লা।’

gor=e=tto an-ia ah-ig-ga.’
house=LOC=ABL bring-CVB come-IMP.1PL-DIR
‘Let us go home and bring them.’

- (465) বুলিয়া তাঙি গৱেত্ত গিয়া জুগত কৰে বাত, পুৱা চেঙ, পানি অনিয়া আহিলাগা।

bul-ia taŋi gor=e=tto g-ia jugot kor-e bat, pura
say-CVB 3PL house=LOC=ABL go-CVB arrangement do-NONFIN rice burn.PF.PTCP
ceŋ, pani an-ia ah-ila-ga.
cheng.fish water bring-CVB come-PST.3PL-DIR

‘With that, they went home to gather rice, burnt cheng fish, and water, and brought them back.’

- (466) আনিয়া আহিয়া লামুইগৈ জেসারে বুদ্ধি দিল অসারে তাঙি লাগিলা ।

an-ia ah-ia lamui=go=i jesare buddi d-ilo
bring-CVB come-CVB fox=CLF=ERG REL.MANNER advice give-PST.3SG
osare tanji lag-ila.
DEM.DIST.MANNER 3PL place-PST.3PL

‘Once they brought them back, they planted them as the fox had advised.’

- (467) মুখি আগৈ, বাতর চিপা আগৈ, পুরা চেঙ আগৈ, অহান্ত পানি ।

mukhi a=go=i, bat=or cipa a=go=i, pura
taro.corm one=CLF=CONJ rice=GEN press.NMLZ one=CLF=CONJ burn.PF.PTCP
ceŋ a=go=i, o=ha=t=to pani.
cheng.fish one=CLF=CONJ DEM.DIST=CLF=LOC=ABL water

‘A taro corm, a rice ball, a burnt cheng fish, and water.’

- (468) লাগিয়া লমিয়া, রাতিহান ইল আর তাঙি ঘরে গিয়া ঘুমিলাগা ।

lag-ia lom-ia, rati=han il ar tanji gor=e g-ia
place-CVB finish-CVB night=CLF COP.PST.3SG so 3PL home=LOC go-CVB
gum-ila-ga.
sleep-PST.3PL-DIR

‘By the time they finished planting, night had fallen, so they went home and slept.’

- (469) অহাত লামুই অগৈ আহিয়া মুখি অতা হাবি ফকরিয়া নিলগা ।

o=ha=t lamui o=go=i ah-ia mukhi o=ta
DEM.DIST=CLF=LOC fox DEM.DIST=CLF=ERG come-CVB taro.corm DEM.DIST=CLF
habi pho-kor-ia n-ilo-ga.
all uproot-do-CVB take-PST.3SG-DIR

‘Then the fox came, uprooted all the taro corms, and took them away.’

- (470) অহাভাউরি ভাতর চিপা অতা পুরা চেঙন হয়াত করে খেইয়া, তেঙারাত্ত গিয়া আরা কচু, হাতারামান কচু, নাবেনাবে কচু, অতা আনিয়া লাগা দিয়া থুওয়া দিলগা।

ohattouri bat=or cipa o=ta pura ceŋ=no huat
 after.that rice=GEN press.NMLZ DEM.DIST=CLF burn.PF.PTCP cheng.fish=INS tasty
 kor-e khe-ia, teŋara=t=to g-ia ara kosu, hataraman kosu,
 do-NONFIN eat-CVB hill=LOC=ABL go-CVB ara taro hataraman taro
 nabe-nabe kosu, o=ta an-ia laga d-ia th-ua
 NEG.COP-NEG.COP taro DEM.DIST=CLF bring-CVB place.NONFIN give-CVB keep-CAUS
 d-ilo-ga.
 give-PST.3SG-DIR

‘After that, he ate the rice balls and burnt cheng fish with great enjoyment, then went to the hill to gather ara taro, hataraman taro, and various other kinds of taro that were of no use, brought them back, and planted them.’

- (471) বুড়া-বুড়িয়ে বিয়ানত উঠিয়া দেখলাতা তাঙর কচু অতা জবর দাঙর দিগল ইয়া পরসেগা।

bura-buri=e byanto uʰh-ia dek-la=ta taŋ=or kosu
 old.man-old.woman=ERG in.the.morning get.up-CVB see-PST.3PL=CLF 3PL=GEN taro
 o=ta jobor daŋor digol ia por-s-e-ga.
 DEM.DIST=CLF very big long COP.CVB fall-PERF-PRES.3SG-DIR

‘The old man and woman woke up in the morning and saw that their taro had grown big and tall.’

- (472) তাঙি বার হারৌহানে আকুয়া কচু অতা সিরিয়া আনিয়া অতার মুখি অতান হউ হিজিয়া খেইলা।

taŋi baro harou=han=e aku-ia kosu o=ta sir-ia an-ia
 3PL again happiness=CLF=INS exceed-CVB taro DEM.DIST=CLF pluck-CVB bring-CVB
 o=ta=r mukhi o=ta=no hou hij-ia khe-ila.
 DEM.DIST=CLF=GEN taro.corm DEM.DIST=CLF=INS curry cook-CVB eat-PST.3PL

‘Delighted, they dug up the taro, brought it back, made a curry with the corms, and ate it.’

- (473) হউ হিজিয়া খেইতেতে কুতকুতিয়া বুড়া অগ মরানি বিতা ইল।

hou hij-ia khe-ite-te kut-kut-ia bura o=go mor-ani
 curry cook-CVB eat-DUR-DUR itch-itch-CVB old.man DEM.DIST=CLF die-INF
 bita il.
 be.about.to COP.PST.3SG

‘After cooking the curry, the old man began eating it, and started itching as though he were going to die.’

- (474) অহাত দাঙ্গ অগৈ হারপিল কিহান ইসেহান।

o=ha=t dango o=go=i har-p-ilo ki=han
 DEM.DIST=CLF=LOC grandma DEM.DIST=CLF=ERG knowledge-get-PST.3SG what=CLF
 is-e=han.
 COP-PRES.3SG=CLF

‘Then the old woman understood what had happened.’

- (475) — ‘হা! লামুই শৌ অগৈ আমাৰে কত থকিল নায়ো!’

— ‘ha! lamui sou o=go=i ama=re koto thok-ilo naye!’
 EXCL fox child DEM.DIST=CLF=ERG 1PL=DAT.ACC some cheat-PST.3SG FOC.EMPH

‘Wow, that young fox really tricked us!’

- (476) বুলিয়া তেই তিক এহানে বুড়া অগৰে হিদমাস আগ পুরিয়া কিতা দিয়াইল আৰ অগ খেইয়া তৰতা কুতকুতানিহান খানি বালাইল।

bul-ia tei tik e=han=e bura o=go=re
 say-CVB 3SG.F anger DEM.PROX=CLF=INS old.man DEM.DIST=CLF=DAT.ACC
 hidomas a=go pur-ia ki=ta d-ia-ilo aro
 fermented.dried.fish one=CLF burn-CVB what=CLF give-CVB-(give).PST.3SG so
 o=go khe-ia ta=r=ta kut-kut-ani=han khani bala-il.
 DEM.DIST=CLF eat-CVB 3SG.M=GEN=CLF itch-itch-INF=CLF little improve-PST.3SG

‘Saying this, she angrily burned a fermented dried fish and gave some to the old man to ease his itching a little.’

- (477) অহাত তাঙি বুদ্ধি আহান করলা:

o=ha=t tanji buddi a=han kor-la:
 DEM.DIST=CLF=LOC 3PL advice one=CLF do-PST.3PL

‘Then, they came up with a plan.’

- (478) — ‘লামুই এগৰেতে আমাৰতা হবা কৰে হিকা দেনা লাগতৈ।’

— ‘lamui e=go=re=te ama=r=ta hoba kor-e hika
 fox DEM.PROX=CLF=DAT.ACC=TOP 1PL=GEN=CLF good do-NONFIN lesson
 de-na lag-toi.’
 give-INF need-FUT.3SG

‘We’re going to have to teach this fox a lesson.’

(479) বুলিয়া বুড়া অগরে মাতল,

bul-ia bura o=go=re mat-lo,
say-CVB old.man DEM.DIST=CLF=DAT.ACC say-PST.3SG

‘With that, she said to the old man.’

(480) — ‘বুড়াগ, তি মরাগ পাৰা ইয়া ইঙগ ইয়া পৰিয়া থাক।

— ‘bura=go, ti mor-a=go para ia in=go ia por-ia
old.man=CLF 2SG die-PF.PTCP=CLF similar COP.CVB cold=CLF COP.CVB fall-CVB
thak.
stay.IM.IMP.2SG

‘Old man, lie still without moving or speaking, as if you were dead.’

(481) মি কাদিয়া লৌদিতৌতাহে। অহাত লামুইগ আহিতৈতাহে।

mi kad-ia loud-itou=ta he. o=ha=t lamui=go
1SG cry-CVB shout-FUT.1SG=CLF FOC DEM.DIST=CLF=LOC fox=CLF
ah-itoi=ta he.
come-FUT.3SG=CLF FOC

‘I will cry and shout. Then the fox will come.’

(482) আহিলে আমি তारे হবা করে বারিতাঙাই।’

ah-ile ami ta=re hoba kor-e bar-itanjai.
come-COND 1PL 3SG.M=DAT.ACC good do-NONFIN beat-FUT.1PL

‘When he comes, we will give him a good beating.’

(483) বুলিয়া বুড়া অগ অৰু পৰিয়া থাইল।

bul-ia bura o=go okko por-ia tha-il.
say-CVB old.man DEM.DIST=CLF DEM.DIST.MANNER fall-CVB stay-PST.3SG

‘After that, the old man laid down as she instructed.’

(484) অহাত দাঙ্গ অগ কাদিয়া এলা দেনা অকরল।

o=ha=t danggo o=go kad-ia ela de-na okor-lo.
DEM.DIST=CLF=LOC grandma DEM.DIST=CLF cry-CVB song give-INF start-PST.3SG

‘Then the old woman began to sing in a tearful voice.’

- (485) — ‘আমার বপা মরিসে। কাদে দিনগৌ নেই।’

— ‘ama=r bopa mor-is-e. kad-e din=go=u
 1PL=GEN grandfather die-PERF-PRES.3SG cry-NONFIN give.NONFIN=CLF=SCAL.FOC
 nei.’
 NEG.EXIST

‘Our grandfather has died. There is no one even to cry for him.’

- (486) বুলিয়া অক্ক কাদিরি অহাত লামুই অগৈ আহিয়া মাতেরগা,

bul-ia okko kad-iri o=ha=t lamui o=go=i
 say-CVB DEM.DIST.MANNER cry-IPFV DEM.DIST=CLF=LOC fox DEM.DIST=CLF
 ah-ia mat-er-ga,
 come-CVB say-IPFV.3SG-DIR

‘As she cried like this, the fox came and said,’

- (487) ‘দাঙ্গ দাঙ্গ, কিতা ইহেথাঙ, কিতা ইহেথাঙ?’

‘dango dango, ki=ta ih-e than, ki=ta ih-e
 grandmother grandmother what=CLF COP-PRES.3SG Q what=CLF COP-PRES.3SG
 than?’
 Q

‘Grandma, grandma, what happened? What happened?’

- (488) — ‘হাই বাবা, তোর বপা অগতে দৌ ইয়া পলগা নাই।’

— ‘hai baba, to=r bopa o=go=te dou ia pol-ga
 yes dear 2SG=GEN grandfather DEM.DIST=CLF=TOP god COP.CVB fall.PST.3SG-DIR
 nai.’
 FOC

‘Yes dear, your grandfather passed away.’

- (489) ‘হা! কিহান মাতুরিগ? এপাগা মি হবাকরে দেখলু অগ, এপাগা দৌ ইয়া পলগাতা?’

‘ha! ki=han mat-uri=go? epaga mi hoba-kor-e
 EXCL what=CLF say-IPFV.2SG.F=CLF DEM.PROX.TEMP 1SG good-do-NONFIN
 dek-lu o=go, epaga dou ia pol-ga-ta?’
 see-PST.1SG DEM.DIST=CLF DEM.PROX.TEMP god COP.CVB fall.PST.3SG-DIR=CLF

‘What? What are you saying? I just saw him perfectly well, and now he has passed away?’

- (490) বুলিয়া লামুই অগৌ বুড়া অগরে কলকরিয়া কাদানি অকরল।

bul-ia lamui o=go=u bura o=go=re
 say-CVB fox DEM.DIST=CLF=ADD.FOC old.man DEM.DIST=CLF=DAT.ACC
 kol-kor-ia kad-ani okor-lo.
 embrace-do-CVB cry-INF start-PST.3SG

‘With that, the fox embraced the old man and began to cry too.’

- (491) ‘আমার বপা মরিসে। কাদে দিনগৌ নেই।’ বুলিয়া

‘ama=r bopa mor-is-e. kad-e din=go=u
 1PL=GEN grandfather die-PERF-PRES.3SG cry-NONFIN give.NONFIN=CLF=SCAL.FOC
 nei.’ bul-ia
 NEG.EXIST say-CVB

‘Our grandfather has died. There is no one even to cry for him,’ he said.

- (492) অহাত খাঙদা বুড়ি অগই আনিয়া হবাকরে লাঠি আগন দুমদুমদুম বারিল।

o=ha=t kharḍa buri o=go=i an-ia
 DEM.DIST=CLF=LOC suddenly old.woman DEM.DIST=CLF=ERG bring-CVB
 hoba-kor-e laṭhi a=go=no dum-dum-dum bar-ilo.
 good-do-NONFIN stick one=CLF=INS thwack-thwack-thwack beat-PST.3SG

‘Then suddenly the old woman grabbed a stick and gave him a good beating—thwack thwack thwack!’

- (493) অহাত লামুই অগৈ,

o=ha=t lamui o=go=i,
 DEM.DIST=CLF=LOC fox DEM.DIST=CLF=ERG

‘Then the fox (said),’

- (494) ‘মরলু মরলু মরলু! দাঙ্গ, আরতা মি এসারে নাকরিম।

‘mor-lu mor-lu mor-lu! dango, ar=ta mi
 die-PST.1SG die-PST.1SG die-PST.1SG grandma other=CLF.TIME 1SG
 esare na-kor-im.
 DEM.PROX.MANNER NEG-do-SBJV.1SG

‘I’m dying! I’m dying! I’m dying! Grandma, I will not do it again.’

- (495) মি লাল পরলুগা। মোরে লালুইলেউ ঙাক্বরেদে।

mi lalo por-lu-ga. mo=re lalu-ile=u
 1SG cross.NONFIN fall-PST.1SG-DIR 1SG=DAT.ACC cross-COND=SCAL.FOC
 ŋak-kor-e-de.
 forgive-do-NONFIN-give.IM.IMP.2SG
 ‘I made a mistake. Even if I did wrong, please forgive me.’

- (496) মি আরতা অসারে নাকরিম!’

mi ar=ta osare na-kor-im!’
 1SG other=CLF.TIME DEM.DIST.MANNER NEG-do-SBJV.1SG
 ‘I will not do that again!’

- (497) বুলিয়া লামুই অগ বেলিয়া দাবদিল।

bul-ia lamui o=go bel-ia dabd-ilo.
 say-CVB fox DEM.DIST=CLF drop-CVB run-PST.3SG
 ‘Saying this, the fox ran off.’

2 Text 2: The North Wind & the Sun (ঔয়াঙেদের বৌহান বারো বেনিগ)

This text comes from a translation task conducted in 2019. Uttam Singha was provided with an English version of “The North Wind & the Sun”, which he translated and then recited. The version presented here follows his recitation, with only minor edits to remove restarts and correct errors. The glosses and translations were developed in close consultation with Uttam Singha, who also provided the orthographic representation of the text.

- (498) কিতাপাৱা দিন আহাত ঔয়াঙেদের বৌহানে বারো বেনীগই কোঙগই জিঙ বুলিয়া কৌলি আহান লাগ্না ।

ki=ta-para din a=ha=t owaŋ=e=de=r bou=han=e baro
what=CLF-APPROX day one=CLF=LOC north=LOC=along=GEN wind=CLF=ERG and
beni=go=i kuŋ=go=i jin bulia kouli a=han lag-la.
sun=CLF=ERG who=CLF=ERG winner C quarrel one=CLF start-PST.3PL

‘One day, the North Wind and the Sun started a quarrel over who was stronger.’

- (499) তাঙি যেপাগা বেনীগর তপ্তাহান না বৌহানর বুলুনিহানে জিং বুলিয়া লাগিয়া মেইক্ষু ইসি,

taji jepaga beni=go=r topta=han na bou=ha=r buluni=han=e jin
3PL REL.TIME sun=CLF=GEN heat=CLF or wind=CLF=GEN gust=CLF=ERG winner
bulia lag-ia meikk^hu is-i,
C start-CVB engaged COP-PRES.3PL

‘As they argued over whether the Sun’s heat or the Wind’s gusts were stronger,’

- (500) ঔরে হের অহাত মাঠা আহান উরিয়া মানু আগ পথহান্দে য়ারগা ।

ore her o=ha=t matha a=han ur-ia manu a=go
DEM.DIST gap DEM.DIST=CLF=LOC cloak one=CLF wear-CVB person one=CLF
poth=han=de ja-r-ga.
path=CLF=along go-IPFV.3SG-DIR

‘a man wearing a cloak was passing by along the path.’

- (501) "আমি এহান একরিক" বুলিয়া বেনীগই মাতল,

“ami e=han ekor-ik” bul-ia beni=go=i mat-lo,
1PL DEM.PROX=CLF agree-IMP.1PL say-CVB sun=CLF=ERG say-PST.3SG

“‘Let’s agree on this,’ said the Sun:’

- (502) "যেগই অরে যাত্রিক অগর মাঠাহান কারিয়া বেলাদে পারতই অগই জিঙ" ।

“je=go=i ore jatrik o=go=r matha=han kar-ia
REL=CLF=ERG DEM.DIST traveler DEM.DIST=CLF=GEN cloak=CLF remove-CVB
bela-de par-toi o=go=i jin.”
drop.NONFIN-give.NONFIN be.able-FUT.3SG DEM.DIST=CLF=ERG winner
“whoever is able to remove that traveler’s cloak is stronger.”

- (503) "জবর হবা ইসে" বুলিয়া বৌহানে বুলুনি আহান দিয়া ইঙপা বৌ আহান যাত্রিক অগর বারাদে বুলন দিল ।

“jobor hoba is-e” bul-ia bou=han=e buluni a=han d-ia
very good COP-PRES.3SG say-CVB wind=CLF=ERG gust one=CLF give-CVB
in-pa bou a=han jatrik o=go=r bara=de bulon d-ilo.
cold-ADJZ wind one=CLF traveler DEM.DIST=CLF=GEN side=along gust give-PST.3SG
‘Saying “very well,” the Wind blew hard, sending a cold gust toward the traveler.’

- (504) বৌর বুলুনিহানে যাত্রিক অগর গারিগন্ত মাঠাহান পরিন মাতিক ইল ।

bou=r buluni=han=e jatrik o=go=r gari=go=t=to
wind=GEN gust=CLF=INS traveler DEM.DIST=CLF=GEN body=CLF=LOC=ABL
matha=han por-in matik il.
cloak=CLF fall-NONFIN suitable COP.PST.3SG
‘The gust of wind nearly blew the traveler’s cloak off.’

- (505) কিন্তু তা তরাকরে মাঠাহান চেতকরে দরিয়া গারিগত নাপকরিয়া পেচা বেল্প ।

kintu ta tora-kor-e matha=han cet-kor-e dor-ia
but 3SG.M haste-do-NONFIN cloak=CLF close-do-NONFIN hold-CVB
gari=go=t nap-kor-ia pesa bel-lo.
body=CLF=LOC stick-do-CVB wrap.NONFIN drop-PST.3SG
‘But he quickly grabbed the cloak, pulled it close, and wrapped it tightly around his body.’

- (506) বুলুনিহান যতহান জবর ইল তা অতহান চেতকরে মাঠাহান পেচার ।

buluni=han joto=han jobor il, ta oto=han
wind=CLF REL.QUANT=CLF strong COP.PST.3SG 3SG.M DEM.DIST.QUANT=CLF
cet-kor-e matha=han pec-ar.
close-do-NONFIN cloak=CLF wrap-IPFV.3SG
‘The stronger the wind blew, the more tightly he wrapped the cloak around himself.’

- (507) ঔয়াঙেদের বৌহানে তিকহানে মাথাহান ফারেদে নেরগা, কিন্তু বৌহার হতনাহান সুল্লেদে গেঞ্জা।

owaŋ=e=de=r bou=han=e tik=han=e matha=han
north=LOC=along=GEN wind=CLF=ERG anger=CLF=INS cloak=CLF
ɸar-e-de ne-r-ga, kintu bou=ha=r
tear-NONFIN-give.NONFIN take.away-IPFV.3SG-DIR but wind=CLF=GEN
hotna=han sull=e=de ge-l-ga.
attempt=CLF emptiness=LOC=along go-PST.3SG-DIR

‘The North Wind angrily tried to tear the cloak away, but his efforts were in vain.’

- (508) অহার থাঙনাত বেনিগই রৌমেলিয়া রোদগ দিল।

o=ha=r thaŋna=t beni=go=i roumelia rud=go d-ilo.
DEM.DIST=CLF=GEN next=LOC sun=CLF=ERG intensely sunlight=CLF give-PST.3SG

‘Then the Sun shone intensely.’

- (509) পইলাকা বেলির মাঙাল অতা চিকইয়া পরানি অকরল,

poila-ka beli=go=r maŋal o=ta ciko-ia por-ani okor-lo,
first-TEMP sun=CLF=GEN light DEM.DIST=CLF be.gentle-CVB fall-INF start-PST.3SG
‘At first the Sun’s rays shone gently.’

- (510) ইঙপা বৌবুলুনির পিছে উন্তিরা রুদগ হেদিয়া যাত্রিক অগ নুঙিহানে গারিগর মাঠাহান কারিয়া লেম্পালহাত লাল্লাম করল।

iŋ-pa bou buluni=r pise untira rud=go hed-ia jatrik
cold-ADJZ wind gust=GEN after warm sunlight=CLF apply.heat-CVB traveler
o=go nuŋi=han=e gari=go=r matha=han kar-ia
DEM.DIST=CLF happiness=CLF=INS body=CLF=GEN cloak=CLF remove-CVB
lempal=ha=t lallam kor-lo.
shoulder=CLF=LOC hanging do-PST.3SG

‘After the cold gusts of wind, the warm sunlight warmed him, and the traveler happily took off his cloak and draped it over his shoulder.’

- (511) বেনিগর তপ্তাহান বারানি অকরল।

beni=go=r topta=han bar-ani okor-lo.
sun=CLF=GEN heat=CLF increase-INF start-PST.3SG

‘The Sun’s heat began to grow stronger.’

- (512) মানু অগই তার তকিগ কারিয়া পিচুমগি পুসানি অকরল ।

manu o=go=i ta=r toki=go kar-ia picuŋ=g-i pus-ani
 man DEM.DIST=CLF=ERG 3SG.M=GEN hat=CLF remove-CVB sweat=CLF-PL wipe-INF
 okor-lo.
 start-PST.3SG

‘The man removed his hat and began wiping away his sweat.’

- (513) লমিতেগা সউকরাহানে আকুইয়া মানু অগই তার উরিসে মাঠাহান কারিয়া পথহার কাদাত আসে সপা অহার ছায়াগত হমিল্লা ।

lom-ite-ga soukora=han=e aku-ia manu o=go=i ta=r
 finish-CONT-DIR heat=CLF=INS exceed-CVB man DEM.DIST=CLF=ERG 3SG.M=GEN
 ur-is-e matha=han kar-ia poth=ha=r kada=ha=t
 wear-PERF-PRES.3SG cloak=CLF remove-CVB path=CLF=GEN side=CLF=LOC
 as-e sopa o=ha=r chaya=go=t hom-il-ga.
 COP-PRES.3SG tree DEM.DIST=CLF=GEN shade=CLF=LOC enter-PST.3SG-DIR

‘Eventually, overcome by the heat, the man took off his cloak and sought shade under a tree by the roadside.’

- (514) নিরাই বার তাপথা ইয়া যে কুন কাম করলে ফলের, বল বারো পাঞ্চালন করলে নার ।

nirai baro taptha ia je kuno kam kor-le φol-er. bol
 quiet and slow COP.CVB REL any work do-COND come.to.fruition-IPFV.3SG force
 baro paŋkal=no kor-le na-r.
 and vigor=INS do-COND NEG.get-IPFV.3SG

‘What one does with gentleness and patience succeeds; what one does with force and vigor does not.’

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