Case Marker in Khasi

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Abstract

   The present paper investigates the case markers in Khasi. In Khasi, case is realised in the form of prepositions. These prepositions take nouns structurally to form phrases; therefore they are called prepositional phrases. Prepositional phrases are built up of a preposition followed by a noun phrase. Though prepositions are syntactically bound elements, when they occur with nouns and pronouns, they constitute phrase instead of words. However, when they occur with demonstratives, they constitute word. A few prepositional phrases take bound elements to constitute larger words which function as prepositions when they occur before nouns. They function as adverbials when they occur elsewhere. So, they are called prepositional adverbials.

1. Introduction

       The North-eastern region of India comprises the states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. Meghalaya is located between 25^o1N- 26^o5Nlatitude and 85^o49 E to 92^o52E longitude. To the North of Meghalaya is the state of Assam and to its south is the country Bangladesh. The state is located closer to the Tropic of Cancer. It is a small hilly state located in the North-eastern region of India .The northern boundary

of the state is shared with Goalpara and Kamrup districts of Assam; Goalpara and Ranjpur districts in west and Mymensingh and Sylhet districts of Bangladesh in south. In east shares its boundary with Cachar and Karbi-Anglong (Assam). Meghalaya is closer to some other countries also besides Bangladesh. They are Bhutan, China and Nepal. Meghalaya occupies 22,429km^2 of area. It stretches 300 km long from east to west and 100km north to south. There are 12 town and 526 villages in Meghalaya. The population of Meghalaya is 2.3 million. Khasi is currently spoken in the district of Khasi and Jaintia Hills in the state of Meghalaya, in the district of North Cachar Hills in the state of Assam and in the district of Sylhet in Bangladesh.

Khasi is spoken in Meghalaya. Khasi is the only language of Mon-Khmer branch which is spoken in India. The Munda and the Nicobarese branches too are spoken in India. It is interesting to note that all the languages belonging to this family which are spoken in India are spoken by the people who inhabit only the hilly tracks and mountainous regions.

An attempt has been made here to discuss the case system in Khasi. So far only a few attempts (K.S.Nagaraja 1985) have been made to study the case markers in Khasi.

The aim of the present paper is to offer a description of the case markers in Khasi spoken in and around Shillong town, head quarters and capital Meghalaya. The data for this paper have been collected from the native speakers of Khasi residing in and around Shillong town. Besides I, myself being a native speaker of Khasi, have cross-checked the data provided by others. This study, I hope, will create interest among the young scholars in this variety.

2. The Language and The People

The term 'Khasi' stands for both the tribe and the language. The Khasi people are one of the several tribes inhabiting the south-central part section of the Khasi and Jaintia hills of Meghalaya with a population of about 3,84,606 speakers including speakers of various dialects. According to Grierson (1902) Khasi has four major dialects (Pnar or Jaintia, War, Bhoi, Lyngam). Khasi belongs to the Mon-Khmer branch of Austro-Asiatic language family. Khasi proper which is considered as the standard language and employed for all literary purposes is spoken in and around Cherrapunjee. As Grierson (1966) observed Khasi was the language of the court and was recognised by Calcutta University as a subject of study as a second language even in those days. It is now taught as a subject up to post graduate level and also as medium of instruction in the schools and an associate official language in the state of Meghalaya.

3. Prepositional Phrases Marking Case

Prepositional phrases help to indicate various factors regarding a particular action denoted by the verb.

There are eight prepositional phrases which are recognised for Khasi and they mark case. The null phrase marks nominative. All of them could be presented as under:

1. Ø- phrase marks nominative

2. ya- phrase marks accusative
3. ha- phrase marks locative
4. na- phrase marks ablative
5. ša - phrase marks dative
6. bad - phrase marks associative
7. ǰoŋ- phrase marks genetive
8. da - phrase marks instrumental

Note: pm. denotes pronominal marker.

3.1. Nominative Case

From the above list it will be clear that nominative (agentive) case is unmarked. A nominal element without any overt marker preceding the verb phrase will be in nominative case.

(i)　u　　Ø　　daŋ　　　leʔkay
　　he　nom.　prog.mrk　play
　　'He is playing'

(ii)　ka　　myaw　　Ø　　ka　　diʔ　　du:d
　　pm.　cat　　　nom. pm.　　drink　milk
　　'The cat drinks milk'

3.2. Accusative Case

/ya- / phrase marks accusative case. The phrase is built up placing /ya-/ before a noun phrase. It indicates that the following noun is the grammatical object.

(i) /u　　la　　a:y　ya　　u　　sɔʔ-pʰoʔ/

　he　　past t.　give　acc.　pm.　fruit-pear

　'He gave a pear'

(ii) /ŋa　itʰuh　ya　　u/

　I　　know　acc.　him

　'I know him'

(iii)　/ŋ-ɨn　　　yoʔi　ya　　ki/

I-future.t   see   acc.   them

'I will see them'

/ya-/ also can occur with /lade/ 'reflexive marker'

(iv) / ŋa   peyt   ya lade(hi)/

    I   watch acc.self

    'I watch myself'

(v) /ka   la   šɔŋ   ya lade(hi)/

    she   past t. sit   acc. self

    'She sat herself'

/ya-/ can also take interrogative element /-no/ . Then both constitute a word.

(vi) /ŋi   šoʔ   ya-no/

    we   beat   acc.wh.

    'We beat whom'

(vii) /ki   la   yoʔi   ya-no/

    they   past t. see   acc. wh.

    'They saw whom'

(viii) /pʰi-n   jied   ya-no/

    you- future t. choose acc. wh.

    'You will choose whom'

3.3. Locative Case

/ha-/ phrase marks locative marker and indirect object as well. The phrase is built up by placing the element /ha-/ before a noun phrase. This marker has two distinct functions -(i) marker

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of location in space or time; and (ii) marker of indirect object when it occurs with certain verbs like /a:y/ 'to give', /pʰaʔ/ 'to send', etc. (with ditransitive/ causative verbs).

(i)   /ha   kane   ka   kamra/

        loc.   this   pm.   room

        'in this room'

(ii)   /ŋa   šoŋ   ha   ka   kali/

        I   sit   loc.   pm   vehicle

        'I sit in/on the vehicle'

(iii)   /ha   kano   ka   binta   ka   kali   ka   la   hap/

        loc.   wh.   pm.   part   pm.   vehicle   pm. past t.   fall

        'In which part did this vehicle fell'

(iv)   /ha   ka   por   la:y   baǰe/

        loc.   pm.   time   three   o'clock

        'At three o'clock'

(v)   /ha   ka   sŋi   ka   ba   niŋkoŋ/

        loc.   pm.   day   pm.   relativizer   first

        'on the first day '

(v)   /u   la   a:y   ya   u   kʰulo:m   ha   ŋa/

        he   pst.   give   acc.   pm.   pen   loc.   me

        'He gave a pen to me'

3. 4. Ablative Case

/na-/ phrase marks ablative case. The phrase is built up by placing /na-/ before a noun phrase. It indicates that the source as denoted by the noun phrase whose relation to the action is that of a fixed point, i.e., the source from which the movement or action takes place.

(i)   /na   ka   kʰɨnde:w/

         abl.   pm.   earth

         'from the earth'

(ii)   /u   sɔʔ   u   la   ha:p   na   une   u   di̤eŋ/

         pm.   fruit   pm.   pst.   fall   abl.   this   pm.   tree

         'The fruit fell from this tree'

(iii)   / na   ka   binta   ka   lawe:y/

         abl.   pm.   sake   pm.   future

         'for the sake of the future'

3. 5. Dative Case

/ša-/ phrase marks dative case. The phrase is built up by placing /ša/ before a noun phrase. It indicates that the action denoted by the verb is directed towards the object or thing denoted by the verb. It emphasizes the 'motion' part rather than the exact location.

(i)   /ša   ka   surɔk/

         dat.   pm.   road

         'to the road'

(ii)   / ša   u   bnay/

         dat.   pm.   moon

         'to the moon'

(iv)   ŋa   pʰaʔ   ya   ki   kʰu:n   ša   yieŋ

         I   send   acc.   pm. (plural)   child   dat.   house

'I send the children home'

/ša-/ is used to indicate the direction also. A bound form /pʰaŋ/ is used with it.

(vi) /u   la   šoŋ   šapʰaŋ   sepŋi/

      he   past t. sit   toward s   west

      'He sat towards the west'

3. 6. Associative Case

/bad-/ phrase marks associative case. The phrase is built up by placing the element /bad-/ before a noun phrase. It conveys a sense of 'with/ associative of '.

(i)   /ŋa-n   leyt   bad   ka   sima/

      I-fut. go   ass.   pm.   sima

      'I will go with Sima'

(ii) /ŋa   la   leyt   bad   u   riẹwbʰa/

      I   past t. go   ass.   pm.   good man

           'I went with the good man'

(iv) /u-n   sa   leyt   bad   ka   para   kʰatduh/

      he-fut. fut.definite   go   ass.   pm.   sister youngest

      'He will go with his youngest sister'

3. 7. Genitive Case

/ǰoŋ-/ phrase marks genitive case. The phrase is built by placing /ǰoŋ-/ after a noun phrase. It relates two noun phrases in a clause. It can occur only as a part of another phrase, but never can be constituents of a clause.

(i)   /ka   kot   ǰoŋ   u   sam/

      pm   book   gen.   pm   sam

'Sam's book'

(ii)   /ka   kali   ǰoŋ   ŋa/

pm.   vehicle gen.   I

'my car'

(iii)   /u   kpa   ǰoŋ   u   sam/

pm.   father gen.   pm.   sam

'Sam's father'

3. 8. Instrumental Case

/da-/ phrase marks instrumental case. The phrase is built up by placing the /da-/ element before a noun phrase. It indicates that the following noun phrase is the instrument (inanimate force or object) or the mean by which an action denoted by the verb is accomplished. Examples:

(i)   /ŋa   la   wan   da   ka   kali/

I   past t.   come   inst.   pm.   vehicles

'I came with a vehicles'

(ii)   /u   tịẹd   da   u   dịẹŋ/

he   hit   inst.   pm.   stick

'He hits with the stick'

(iv)   /phi-m   laʔ   ban   thoʔ   da   une/

you-neg.   can   infinitive   write   inst.   this

'you cannot write with this'

/da-/ also occurs with /lade/ (reflexive marker).

(v)   / ma   u   da-lade(hi) u   loŋ u   ba   stad/

emp. he   inst-self   pm. is pm. relativizer   intelligent

'He is intelligent by himself'

4. Conclusion

From above it becomes clear that Khasi manifests a neat and clear system of morphological realisation of case. The nominative case is conspicuous by the preferred sentence initial occurrence of the nouns, and because of this redundancy the nominative is unmarked. Other cases are clearly marked and in most cases they are prepositional placement of the case marker which are discrete forms rather than affixes. The understanding of the case system in Khasi, therefore, should not pose any learning problem for non-native learners of Khasi.

Colophon

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