Assamese (ASM), Indo European
also known as Jharwa (Pidgin), Mayang, Standard Assamese, Western Assamese
spoken in India (Asia)

1 Grammar Profile

1.1 Morpho-Syntax

1.1.1 Head position
Head-final. Modifiers precede nouns; complements precede verbs; etc. For example, in sentence (1) below, the head of the DP tar bhajekok ‘his brother’ is bhajekok ‘brother’ which is final, and the head of the VP is the verb kole ‘read’ which is also final.

(1) Priyankoo-e tar bhayek-ok porh-ibo-loi ko-l-e
   P-NOM his brother-ACC read-INF-DAT say-PAST-AGR

Priyankoo told his brother to read.

1.1.2 Morphological type
The language is agglutinating/inflectional; for example, verbs are marked for TENSE and AGREEMENT

ko-l-e
   say-PAST-AGR

nouns are marked for DEFINITENESS and CASE

xixu-ti-e
   child-CL-NOM
1.1.3 Case system
Subjects can be case-marked NOM, ABS, or GEN, depending on the verb.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cases</th>
<th>Morphemes</th>
<th>Allomorphs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absolutive</td>
<td>-Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nominative</td>
<td>-e</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accusative</td>
<td>-ak</td>
<td>-ak -k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dative</td>
<td>-aloi</td>
<td>-aloi -loi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genitive</td>
<td>-ar</td>
<td>-ar -r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locative</td>
<td>-at</td>
<td>-at -t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental</td>
<td>-er+e</td>
<td>-ere -re</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table is adapted from Nath (2003: p. 22, (40)).

NOM and ACC are also marked –Ø when the noun is indefinite or inanimate.

1.1.4 Verbal Agreement
Only finite verbs inflect for AGR. They inflect for person (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup>) and honorificity (+, -, or Ø honorific). The language shows no object agreement.

(2) tumi/tomaloke   parh-a
You.s/p (ø honorific)    read-AGR
‘You read.’

(3) tai/tahâte   parh-e
You.s/p (-honorific)    read-AGR
‘You read.’

(4) apuni    parh-e
You(+honorific)    read-AGR
‘You read.’
(Nath 2003:p. 40; (20b-d))

1.1.5 Null Arguments
Assamese is a pro-drop language. Yet, an overt pronoun is obligatory in at least one type of sentence: Copy Control structures with a matrix verb that marks its subject GEN (see Control Profile for more details):

(5) [ram-e khong kor-i]
[Ram-ERG anger do-CNP
*(tar) kosto hoise
(he-GEN) trouble being-is
Having provoked his anger, Ram got in trouble. (closest translation)
1.1.6 Non-Finite Categories

There are at least two types of non-finite clauses in Assamese: infinitive (INF) and conjunctive participle (CNP). An INF verb is marked by -bo or -ibo:

(6) moi bozar kor-ibo bisarõ
    I market do-INF want
    I want to do marketing.
    (Nath 2003:p. 64, (31))

A CNP verb is marked by -i:

(7) ami gan xun-i bhal-paõ
    We song listen-CNP like
    We like listening to music.
    (Nath 2003:p. 66, (37))

(8) ram-e am-to kin-i dhu-i kat-i kha-l-e
    Ram-NOM mango-CL buy-CNP wash-CNP cut-CNP eat-PAST-AGR
    Having bought, washed and cut, Ram ate the mango.
    Or After buying, washing and cutting, Ram ate the mango.
    (Nath 2003:p. 66, (36))

A non-finite verb can also be marked by a gerundive (GRND) -a; GRND verbs may take on a classifier or a Case marker. Note the difference between the first and the second ‘eat’ in the following sentence:

(9) khow-a-k khow-a nubul-i ki buliba
    eat-GRND -ACC eat-GRND not say-INF what say
    What else would you call the act of eating except eating?
    Or If not eating, what else would you call the act of eating?
    (Nath 2003:p. 63, (27))

1.2 Matrix Clause

1.2.1 Basic word order

SOV

1.2.2 Alternate word orders

OSV and OVS. The subject in these cases is emphatic in the former and an afterthought in the latter. An adjunct clause (in bold) can intervene between the subject and the predicate.

(10) [ram-e [khong uth-i] gherto bhang-il-e ]
    Ram-NOM [angry got-INF] house break-PAST-AGR
    Having got angry, Ram broke the house.

1.3 Embedded Clause

1.3.1 Basic word order

Strictly SOV if the verb is infinitival.

1.3.2 Verbal agreement

Agreement in the embedded clause is possible as long as the verb is finite.

1.3.3 Restrictions on tense, aspect, mood

INF verbs are Tense-Dependent on the matrix clause.
1.3.4 Possible morphological categories of the embedded clause:

Non-finite clauses: Infinitival and Conjunctive Participle clauses (see above)

Clauses with Gerundive (Nominalized/Deverbal) verbs (see above)

Clauses with [-at] verbs: E.g. verb ‘keep’:

(11) [ram-Or xomoi no-thak-at] PrOxad-e bhat na-kha-l-e
    ram-GEN time NEG-keep-MORPH Praxad-NOM rice NEG-eat-PAST-AGR
    Ram having no time, Praxad didn’t eat rice.

According to Goswami (1982), [-at] “is an independent morpheme expressing the sense of ‘the state or quality of, possessing the thing or quality of’, etc.” (p. 177). On the account of the consultant, [-at] verbs, unlike CNP verbs, have a sense of a completion. In this sense, [-at] is aspectual, and [-at] verbs can be Tense-Independent of the matrix clause.

1.3.5 ECM constructions:

ECM constructions are found in small clauses and in clauses with GRND verbs. For example, the subject of the embedded small clause in (12) is case-marked Accusative

(12) xakalOwe [teõk pagol buli] bhabe
    everybody [he-ACC mad that (COMP)] think
    Everybody thinks him mad.
    (Nath 2003:p. 71-72 (49a))

Sentence (12) can be an ECM construction. Another possibility is that the accusative marking on the embedded subject is a characteristic of embedded small clauses (see Nath 2003:72 for more details).

A clear case of ECM is (13).

(13) Priyankoo-e Joseph-ok gO-wa xun-il-e
    P-NOM J-ACC sing-GRND hear-PAST-AGR
    Priyankoo heard Joseph sing/singing.

2 Control Profile

2.1 forward subject control into a non-finite adjunct

2.1.1 Example structure

(14) [bhOk log-i] prOxad-Ø xu-i thak-il
    [hunger strike/feel-CNP] Praxad-ABS sleep-PAST keep-PAST
    Having felt hungry, Praxad fell asleep.

(15) prOxad-Ø [bhOk log-i] (*xi) xu-i thak-il
    Praxad-ABS [hunger strike/feel-CNP] (*he) sleep-PAST keep-PAST
    Having felt hungry, Praxad fell asleep.

2.1.2 Evidence of empty category

Praxad in (14) is considered the subject of the matrix clause for at least two reasons:

i) It is case-marked ABS; log-i ‘strike/feel’ would case-mark its subject GEN, as (16) shows:

(16) prOxad-Or bhOk log-il
    Praxad-GEN hunger strike/feel-PAST
    Praxad felt hungry.

ii) The pronoun *xi ‘he’ makes (15) ungrammatical, which it wouldn’t if Praxad were the subject of the embedded clause as we will see in the following section.
Similarly, in (17) and (18) below the verb *bhang* ‘break’ case-marks its subject NOM, whereas *khong uth* ‘get angry’ case-marks it GEN. (17-18) are both Forward Control since in both the subject carries case that is appropriate for the matrix verb.

(17) [ghorto bhang-i] ram-Or khong uth-il
    [house break-CNP] Ram-GEN anger get-PAST
    *Having broken the house, Ram got angry.*

(18) ram-Or [ghorto bhang-i] khong uth-il
    Ram-GEN [house break-CNP] anger get-PAST
    *Having broken the house, Ram got angry.*

Compare (17-18) with (19-20) in which the matrix clause and the embedded clause switch positions. The subject in both is case-marked NOM.

(19) [khong uth-i] ram-e ghorto bhang-il-e
    [angry got-CNP] Ram-NOM house break-PAST-AGR
    *Having got angry, Ram broke the house.*

(20) ram-e [khong uth-i] ghorto bhang-il-e
    Ram-NOM angry got-CNP house break-PAST-AGR
    *Having got angry, Ram broke the house.*

2.2 *Copy subject control into a non-finite adjunct*

2.2.1 *Example structure*

(21) [ram-Or khong uth-i] (xi) ghorto bhang-il-e
    [Ram-GEN angry got-CNP] (he) house break-PAST-AGR
    *Having got angry, Ram broke the house.*

The subject in the adjunct clause must be a referential DP. The example below shows that a pronoun in that position is ungrammatical.

(22) *[tar khong uth-i] ram-e ghorto bhang-il-e
    [he-GEN angry got-CNP] Ram-NOM house break-PAST-AGR

It is also the case that the adjunct *must* precede the matrix clause.

(23) *Ram ghorto bhang-il-e [tar khong uth-i]
(24) *Ram [tar khong uth-i] ghorto bhang-il-e

If the embedded verb does not assign the theta-role EXPERIENCER to its subject, Copy Control is not possible. (25) is the Copy-Control equivalent to (17-18):

(25) *[ram-e ghorto bhang-i] tar khong uth-il
    Ram-NOM house break-INF he-GEN anger get-PAST
    *Having broken the house, Ram got angry.*

2.2.2 *Predicates participating in the construction*

Experiential or psychological predicates that describe physical or emotional states. These include:

*Khong uth* ‘get angry’
*bhOk log* ‘feel hunger’
*ananda log* ‘feel happiness’
*khong kor* ‘do anger’
*ananda kor* ‘do happiness/ have fun’
Assamese shows three patterns of Copy Control:

i) If neither the embedded subject nor the matrix subject is case-marked GEN, then an overt pronominal in the matrix clause is optional though not preferable.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(26)} & \quad \text{[ram-e khong kor-i] (xi) ghoroloi no-go-l} \\
& \quad \text{[Ram-NOM anger do-CNP] (he) house-DAT NEG-go-PAST}
\end{align*}
\]

Having made himself angry, Ram went home.

Note that the matrix verb in (27) case-marks its subject ABS, as (27) shows:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(27)} & \quad \text{ram-Ø ghoroloi no-go-l} \\
& \quad \text{Ram-ABS house-DAT NEG-go-PAST}
\end{align*}
\]

Ram went home.

ii) If only the embedded subject is case-marked GEN, an overt pronominal in the matrix clause is optional and preferable.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(28)} & \quad \text{[ram-Or khong uth-i] (xi) ghorto bhang-il-e} \\
& \quad \text{[Ram-GEN angry got-CNP] (he) house break-PAST-AGR}
\end{align*}
\]

Having got angry, Ram broke the house.

iii) If only the matrix subject is case-marked GEN, it has to be pronounced as an overt pronominal.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(29)} & \quad \text{[ram-e dukh kor-i] *(tar) bhagar log-il} \\
& \quad \text{[Ram-NOM sorrow do-CNP] *(he-GEN) exhausted feel-PAST}
\end{align*}
\]

Having made himself sad, Ram felt exhausted.

Notice that in (26-29) above, the adjunct is sentence initial, the adjunct predicate assigns the theta-role experiencer to its subject, and the embedded subject is referential (not a pronominal). These are the three conditions for Copy Control.

Each of the following sentences is ungrammatical because it violates one of the three conditions:

Adjunct is not sentence-initial:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(30)} & \quad *\text{Ram-e ghorto bhang-il-e [tar khong uthi]} \\
\text{(31)} & \quad *\text{Ram [tar khong uthi] ghorto bhang-il-e} \\
\text{(32)} & \quad *\text{Ram ghorto [tar khong uthi] bhang-il-e}
\end{align*}
\]

Embedded subject is a pronominal:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(33)} & \quad *[\text{tar khong uthi}] \text{Ram-e ghorto bhang-il-e}
\end{align*}
\]

Embedded predicate is not Experiential:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(34)} & \quad *[\text{Ram-e ghorto bhangi}] \text{tar khong uthil}
\end{align*}
\]

Copy Control can involve not only a pronominal in the matrix clause, but also a nominal:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(35)} & \quad \text{[ram-e khong kor-i] ram digdari-t por-il} \\
& \quad \text{[Ram-NOM anger do-CNP] Ram-ABS trouble-LOC fell-PAST}
\end{align*}
\]

Having made himself angry, Ram got in trouble.

Especially if the matrix clause is emphatic:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(36)} & \quad \text{[ram-Or khong uth-i] ram-e tar ghorto bhang-il-e} \\
& \quad \text{[Ram-GEN angry got-CNP] Ram-NOM his house break-PAST-AGR}
\end{align*}
\]

Having got angry, Ram broke his own the house.

Or if there is an intervening expression between the embedded and the matrix clauses, making the two clauses distant:
Having provoked his anger, now Ram got in trouble.

N.B. Despite the fact that both subjects are pronounced, disjoint subjects are not allowed unless the embedded verb takes on the [-at] morpheme instead of the CNP –i suffix.

Ram having felt sad, Praxad slept.

The child having sung well, the mother felt good.

References

Unless otherwise specified, all the examples are given by Priyankoo Sarmah and confirmed by Chandan Talukdar, two native speakers of Assamese and graduate (Ph.D.) students at University of Florida.


Goswami, Golockchandra. 1982. Structure of Assamese. Calcutta: Gauhati University, Department of Publication.


Youssef A. Haddad
Department of Linguistics
University of Florida
Gainesville, Florida, USA
yah-ufl.edu
http://plaza.ufl.edu/yah/

* A dash (-) to mark morpheme boundaries if the morpheme is a suffix or a prefix.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NOM</td>
<td>nominative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC</td>
<td>accusative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGR</td>
<td>agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAT</td>
<td>dative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CL</td>
<td>classifier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEN</td>
<td>genitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INF</td>
<td>infinitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRES</td>
<td>present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAST</td>
<td>past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOC</td>
<td>locative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POSS</td>
<td>possessive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMP</td>
<td>complementizer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MORPH=</td>
<td>morpheme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMPH</td>
<td>emphatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNP</td>
<td>conjunctive participle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRND</td>
<td>Gerundive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n)</td>
<td>nominal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>plural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s</td>
<td>singular</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>