

The diachronic study of Bangla case marking system

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Abstract

Bangla case marking is one of the least focused areas of grammatical exploration. Since this language allows an extensive set of word order variations, case marking elements of Bangla grammar are used to license their distributions in the syntactic domain. However, a few case markers have different functionality than others create complexity and ambiguity when attempting to identify case features. It raises an important query: Is there any historical data that we have access to that might explain why the Bangla case markers correlate one-to-many correspondences? From a diachronic point of view, this article examines the missing linkages among the case marking components of the Bangla language and attempts to characterise their historical evolution.

The eight-case system of Old Indo-Aryan (OIA) has been mostly lost throughout the centuries by the Indo-Aryan languages (Butt & Ahmed, 2011). Direct (the result of the merger of nominative, accusative and dative) and Oblique (mostly deriving from the Old Indo-Aryan genitive) are the only two cases that have survived however, in some languages, including Bangla, isolated traces of some other oblique cases, such as instrumental, locative, or ablative, can still be found, sometimes even within the declension paradigm (Beekes, 1995). Those bound or free morphemes of varied provenance, including many that exist in this usage already in OIA, take over for the lost cases and replenish the inventory of case markers. It's worth noting that, towards the conclusion of the Middle Indo-Aryan (MIA) era, some (oblique) case forms may become indistinguishable from bare stems because of the degradation of the nominal inflexion. Old Bangla possessed an ergative construction in the perfect aspect (Chatterji, 1970, pp. 947-8), similar to the MIA ergative clause. In contrast, modern Bangla, however, has lost this pattern by allowing the same subject case-marking for its non-perfect and perfect counterparts. New postpositions, often added to the oblique case form, have seen a dramatic growth in usage and grammaticalisation in Bangla.

- a) ami toma=ke golpo-ti bolte chai
I.NOM you=ACC story-the.DET.DAT tell.INF want.PRS
“I want to tell you the story.”
- b) ama=r toma=ke golpo-ti bolte hobe
I.GEN you=ACC story-the.DET.DAT tell.INF have.FUT
“I will have to tell you the story.”
- c) ami toma=r shonge golpo-ti niye alap korlam
I.NOM you.GEN with.PostP story-the.DET.DAT about.PostP discuss.VN do.PST
“I discussed the story with you.”

Because of this grammaticalisation, a new case can emerge from the combination of a postposition and the nominal stem or oblique case (Blake, 2001). A bulk of markers of genitive and dative containing *k-* and/or *r-*, can be found in Bangla. A detailed chronological analysis of the major turning points in the corresponding grammaticalisation scenarios, therefore, is necessary to understand the facts behind the case marking system of Bangla language.

Keywords: Case, Bangla language, Case marking elements, Grammaticalisation

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