Chapter 2

FINITE CLAUSE STRUCTURE IN BIATE

2.0 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the finite clause structure in Biate language. We will discuss the declarative sentences in Biate, primarily to see the verbal inflections like tense aspect, mood and agreement features. We shall examine both positive and negative sentences in the language. The prime focus will be on the components and the structural pattern of the finite clauses with regards case and agreement.

Typologically, Biate exhibits the following features.

1. Biate is canonically an SOV language.
2. Morphologically, it is agglutinating and partly inflectional.
3. Biate has future versus non-future tense system.
4. Tense-Aspect-Mood (TAM) features inflect to the verb.
5. Biate has a rich agreement system. The agreement markers are prefixed to finite verbs, in positive sentences. In negative sentences, the agreement markers suffix to the finite verbs. The agreement markers for future varies from that of the non-future in negative sentences,
6. Biate is a pro-drop language. The status of the subject pronoun is determined by their corresponding agreement markers. The subject argument agrees with the verb for person and number. Except for the second and third person subjects of non-future negative sentences which agrees only for person. The subjects of the future negative sentences in third person agrees for person only.
7. Biate shows Nominative-Accusative case system with split-ergativity

The ensuing sections examines these features in the language in detail.

2.1 Biate Verbal Morphology

The class verb in any language is a grammatical category that includes lexemes which express the least time stable concept, e.g. events such as *die, run, break etc*. (Givon 1984:51, 55). Morphosyntactic properties of verbs fall into two groups: distributional and structural. Distributional properties have to do with how words function in phrases and clauses. For

example, a verb can serve as head of verb phrase and predicate of the clause. Structural properties have to do with the internal structure of the verb itself. For example, in some languages, verbs exhibit tense, aspect, mood and agreement marking.

2.1.1 Tense – Aspect – Mood (TAM) features

In Biate, tense and aspect are realized on the verb by inflectional suffixes. Biate has a future versus non future tense system. Future tense is denoted by the future tense marker *-ɾaŋ.* The non-future tense does not have overt morphological markers. To distinguish between the present and the past tenses, the temporal adverbs are used.

2.1.1 Future Tense

The future tense marker *-ɾaŋ* suffixes with the main verbs (1a-e) to denote future time events in the language. The verb *ife* 'go' is disyllabic VCV having two open syllables. In (1a) the first syllable *i* is dropped when the first person singular index *ki-* prefixes to the verb. In contrast in (1b) we find the first person plural agreement marker *kin-* and the second person plural *nin-* (1d) are closed syllables, in these examples the *ife* does not undergo any morpho-phonemic change. In (1e), we get to see when the third person singular *a-* prefixes to the intransitive verb *ife* ; the first syllable *i* does not get dropped. In case of the third person plural marker *–an*, an open syllable in (1f) which has a VC structure, the verb *ife* retains its full form.

1 a. bazar-aʔ ki-fe-ɾaŋ
market-LOC 1SG-go-FUT
'I will go to market.'

1 b. bazaɾ-aʔ kin-ife-ɾaŋ
market-LOC 1PL-go-FUT
'We will go to market.'

1 c. bazaɾ-aʔ ni-fe-ɾaŋ
market-LOC 2PL-go-FUT
'You will go to market.'

1d. bazaɾ-aʔ nin-ife-ɾaŋ
market-LOC 2PL-go-FUT
'You all will go to market.'

1 e. bazaɾ-aʔ a -ife-ɾaŋ
market-LOC 3SG-go-FUT
'He/She will go to market.'

1 f. bazaɾ-aʔ an-ife-ɾaŋ
market-LOC 3PL-go-FUT
'They will go to the market.'

2.1.2 Non-future Tense

For the present and past tenses, there are no overt morphological tense markers in Biate. The past and present events are sometimes shown with the help of temporal adverbs like *sontin* 'everyday' (2a) and *mizan* 'yesterday' (2b).

2a. sontin sikul-aʔ ki-fe
everyday school-loc 1SG-go
'I go to school everyday.'

2b. mizan hafloŋ-aʔ ki-fe
yesterday haflong-LOC 1SG-go
'I went to Haflong yesterday.'

2.1.3 Aspect

Biate has three aspectual markers: (i) the habitual marker *–ŋai*, (ii) the perfect marker *–tak* and (iii) the progressive marker *–mai*. The habitual marker *-–ŋai* is semantically driven while the perfect *-tak* and the progressive *-mai* are syntactically driven. These aspectual markers suffix to the main verbs. The language does not use any auxiliary verb to release the aspectual features. In (3a) the habitual marker - *ŋai* suffixes to the main verb *ife* 'go', in (3b) the progressive marker – *mai* suffixes to *ife* and in (3c) the progressive and the habitual markers suffixes to *ife*. The progressive *–mai* precedes the habitual marker – *ŋai*.

3a. bazaar-a ki-fe-ŋai
market-LOC 1SG-go-HAB
'I go to the market.'

3b. bazaar-a ki-fe-mai
market-LOC 1SG-go-PROG
'I am going to the market.'

3c. bazaar-a ki-fe-mai-ŋai
market-LOC 1SG-go-PROG-HAB
'I am always going to the market.'

To indicate completion of an action the perfect *-tak* is suffixed to the main verb as shown in (4a). The adverb of time is used specifically to indicate or give the perfective reading like English (4b)

4a. t^{h}eihai ki-fak-tak
mango 1SG-eat-PRF
'I ate the mango'.

4b. mizan theihai ki-fak-tak
yesterday mango 1SG-eat-PRF
'I had eaten the mango yesterday.'

2.1.4 Mood

In Biate to indicate mood like ability, the modal verb *thei* 'çan' is preceded by the mood marker *tho* 'ábility' as in (5). To indicate probability the mood marker *khom* 'probability' precedes the copula *ni* 'be' in (6). The main verb *ni* 'be' takes the third person singular marker *a-* and the declarative marker *–t* and is followed by the modal verb *thei* 'can'.

5. ama - hiʔ tho thei **Ability**
3SG - PROX MOD can
'S/He/ can do this.'

6. ruasur k^{h}om a-ni-t thei **Probability**
rain MOD 3SG-be-DECL can
Lit: 'Rain can be.'
'It is likely to rain.'

To indicate obligation the modal verb *ŋet* 'obligation' takes the future tense marker *–raŋ* as shown in (7) whereas the main verb *hoŋ* 'çome' takes the second Person Singular agreement marker *ni-* to indicate the status of the subject.

7. ni-hoŋ ŋet-raŋ **Obligation**
2sg-come MOD-FUT
'You should / must come.'

In (8) the modal verb *anaŋ* 'need' follows the intransitive verb *ife* 'go'. The main verb *ife* 'go' takes the second person singular agreement marker *ni-*.

8. ni-fe anaŋ **Necessity**
2SG-go need
'You need to go.'

2.2 Agreement in Biate

Like most of the Kuki-Chin branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family, Biate has a system of particles accompanying finite verbs which show agreement with the subject. Agreement in Biate can be classified into person agreement and number agreement. Both pre-verbal and post-verbal agreement paradigms are found in Biate.

2.2.1 Agreement in Positive sentences

From our accounting of the verbal features in positive clauses in Biate, we observe that there is an obligatorily subject – verb agreement for person and number. The language has a rich agreement system. In Table 2.1 we have the agreement markers of positive sentences in the language.

Person	**Singular**		**Plural**	
First	ki-	'I'	kin- ei-	'we (exclusive)' 'we (inclusive)'
Second	ni-	'you'	nin-	'you (plural)'
Third	a-	'he/she/it'	an-	'they'

Table 2.1. Agreement markers in positive sentences

We have sentences showing the agreement markers in the language from first to third person in singular and plural forms. The sentences given below are in non-future tense form in (9a-f).

9a. bazar-aʔ ki-fe
market-LOC 1SG-go
'I go/went to market.'

9b. bazaɾ-aʔ kin-ife
market-LOC 1PL-go
'We go/ went to market'

9c. bazaɾ-aʔ ni-fe
market-LOC 2PL-go
'You go/ went/went to market'.

9d. bazaɾ-aʔ nin-ife
market-LOC 2PL-go
'You all go/went to market'

9e. bazaɾ-aʔ ai-fe
market-LOC 3SG-go
'He/She goes/went to market'

9f. bazaɾ-aʔ an-ife
market-LOC 3PL-go
'They go/went to the market'

In (10a-f), we have Biate declarative sentences in the future tense.

10a. bazar-aʔ ki-fe-ɾaŋ
market-LOC 1SG-go-FUT
'I will go to market.'

10b. bazaɾ-aʔ kin-ife-ɾaŋ
market-LOC 1PL-go-FUT
'We will go to market'

10c. bazaɾ-aʔ ni-fe-ɾaŋ
market-LOC 2PL-go-FUT
'You will go to market'.

10d. bazaɾ-aʔ nin-ife-ɾaŋ
market-LOC 2PL-go-FUT
'You all will go to market'

10e. bazaɾ-aʔ ai-fe-ɾaŋ
market-LOC 3SG-go-FUT
'He/She will go to market'

10f. bazaɾ-aʔ an-ife-ɾaŋ
market-LOC 3PL-go-FUT
'They will go to the market'

From (9a-f) and (10a-f) it is evident that the agreement markers in Biate positive declarative sentences are pre-verbal. The sentences in (9a-f) and (10a-f) also indicate that Biate is a prodrop language and this is indicated by the subject-verb agreement in person and number. In all these examples the pronominal subjects are obligatorily dropped.

The agreement markers in positive sentences are homophonous with the possessive pronoun in Biate. In other words, the agreement markers and the possessive markers are similar in spelling and pronunciation. We can ascertain the function of these markers as verbal and nominal by the distribution of the agreement markers and possessive pronouns. The agreement markers precede the verbs in positive declarative sentences (1-10) in the language as seen in the declarative sentences from (1-10). In case of the possessive pronoun, the possessive markers precede a nominal head as shown in (11a-f).

11a. ki-lek^{h}abu
1SG-book
'My book'

11b. kin-lek^{h}abu
1PL - book
'Our book'

11c. ni-lek^{h}abu
2SG-book
'Your book'

11d. nin-lek^{h}abu
2PL-book
'Your book'

11e. a-lek^{h}abu
3SG-book
'His/her book'

11f. an-lek^{h}abu
3PL-lekhabu
'Their book'

2.2.2 Agreement markers in negative sentences

A negative sentence is a sentence which negates a statement or a declaration. In English, we create negative sentences by adding the adverb 'not' after the auxiliary or helping verb. In Biate the negative markers *-ma* and *-no* are suffixed to the main verb. The negative marker *–ma* is suffixed to the main verb when the sentence is in non-future tense and the negative marker *–no* suffixed to the main verb occurs in the future tense construction.

2.2.2.1 Agreement markers in non-future negative sentences

In Table 2.2, we have the agreement markers of the non-future negative sentences.

Person	**Singular**	**Plural**
First	-ŋ 'I'	-ŋuŋe 'we'
Second	- kʧe 'you'	-kʧe 'you'
Third	-ke 'he/she/it'	-ke 'they'

Table 2.2. Agreement in non-future negative sentences

The verbal complex in the negative sentences in Biate have the following constituent order: **matrix verb – habitual marker- negative marker- agreement marker** for non-future tense as shown in (12a-d). Whenever, the habitual marker – *ŋai* occurs in the verbal complex as in (12a-d) we get a present tense reading. In (12e-f) the habitual marker – *ŋai* is not present; thus, these sentences can give either present or past tense reading as per the context.

12a. (keima) vok-sa fa-ŋai-ma-ŋ
I.SG pig-meat eat-HAB-NEG-1SG
'I don't eat pork'

12b. (keima-ni) vok-sa fa-ŋai-ma-ŋuŋe
I-PLU pig-meat eat-HAB-NEG-1PL
'We don't eat pork'

12c. (naŋma) ʧatui in-ŋai-ma-kʧe
You.SG tea drink-HAB - NEG-2P
'You don't drink tea.'

12d. (naŋma-ni) ʧatui in-ŋai-ma-kʧe

you-PL tea drink-HAB - NEG-2P

'You all don't drink tea.'

12e. ama-hiʔ vuansun sin t^{h}o-ma-ke

3P-PROX today work do-NEG-3P

'He doesn't / didn't work today.'

12f. anma-ni-n vuansun sin t^{h}o-ma-ke

3P-PL-ERG today work do-NEG-3P

'They don't / didn't work today.

In Table 2.2 we observe that the second person subject (12c-d) and third person subject (12 e-f) agree with the verb in person; unlike the subject in first person (12a-b), where we have subject-verb agreement for both person and number. In order to show this distinction, the subject pronouns are shown within parenthesis in (12a-f). Native speakers normally drop the pronominal subject and from context specific situations can discern the status of the subjects.

2.2.2.2 Agreement markers in future negative sentences

The future negative construction in Biate is marked by the morpheme *'-no*'. We can also see the agreement markers which are suffixed after the negative marker vary from the agreement markers of non-future negative sentences. Table 2.3 shows the agreement markers in future negative sentences.

Person	**Singular**	**Plural**
First	-niŋ 'I'	-niŋuŋ 'we'
Second	-tin 'you'	-tinu 'you'
Third	-niʔ 'he/she/it'	- niʔ 'they'

Table2.3. Agreement in future negative sentences

In (13a- f) we find the negative sentences in the future tense forms take the agreement markers shown in Table 2.3. In these examples the agreement markers and the future tense

feature are fused as is evident from the inflection of these markers. The future negative agreement markers show subject – verb agreement for both person and number for first and second person as in (13a-d). In case of the third person agreement is only for person as in (13e-f).The constituent order of the verbal morphology in negative future tense is **main verb – negative marker -tense.agreement**.

13a. vuansun zu in-no-niŋ
today wine drink-NEG-1SG.FUT
'I will not drink wine today.'

13b. vuansun zu in-no-niŋuŋe
today wine drink-NEG-1PL.FUT
'We will not drink wine today.'

13c. hafloŋ-aʔ fe-no-tin
Haflong-loc go-NEG-2SG.FUT
'You will not go to Haflong.'

13d. haflong-aʔ fe-no-tinu
Haflong-LOC go-NEG-2PL.FUT
'You (PL) will not go to Haflong.'

13e. him-pa-hiʔ vuansun zu in-no-niʔ
3P-M-PROX today wine drink-NEG-3P.FUT
'He will not drink wine today.'

13f. anma-ni-n vuansun zu in-no-niʔ
3P-PL-ERG today wine drink-NEG-3P.FUT
'They will not drink wine today.'

2.3 . Transitivity

Transitivity refers to the tendency of verb selecting arguments in a clause. Clauses with transitivity can be divided into intransitive and transitive clause. An intransitive clause has a single argument, that is, the subject of the clause. A transitive clause can have two or more arguments. A mono-transitive clause has a subject argument and a single direct object argument. A ditransitive verb can have a subject argument and two object arguments: a direct

object and an indirect object. Nominal arguments which occupy the position of subject, direct and indirect object are considered as core arguments of a verbal predicate. In addition, a verbal predicate in a clause can also take some non-core arguments like postpositional phrases. These non-core arguments are also known as marginal arguments or oblique arguments.

2.3.1 Intransitive

Intransitive clause contains a single argument. Some of the intransitive verbs are shown below:

14a. nai - te a-in
child-DIM 3SG-sleep
'Baby slept'

14b. (keima) mizan bazar-aʔ ki-fe
I yesterday bazar-LOC 1SG-go
'I went to market yesterday'

18c. ʧoŋe mizan bazar-aʔ a-fe
Chonge yesterday bazar-LOC 3SG-go
'Chonge went to market yesterday'

In the above examples the intransitive verbs have a single argument. The matrix pronominal subject is obligatorily dropped as shown in (14b). The status of the pronominal subject in the intransitive sentence in (14b) is identified from the first-person singular agreement marker *ki-* . In (14c) the nominal subject *chonge* is overt and the nominal subject takes the third person singular agreement marker *-a*. Although intransitive takes a single argument, they can take modifiers like adverbs as in (15).

15. nai - te a-in atra-tak
child-DIM 3SG-sleep good-INT
Lit: 'Baby slept very good'
'The baby slept very nicely.'

2.3.2 Mono-transitive

As discussed earlier, a mono-transitive clause has two core arguments: a subject NP and a direct object NP. It is called mono-transitive as the verb can take a single direct object NP. The Biate verbs like *nek* ‘eat’ and *risu* ‘kick’ are mono-transitive verbs can take a direct object NP as argument. The mono-transitive sentences in (16a) shows the pronominal subject *keima* ‘I’ is dropped, whereas in (16b) the nominal subject *ʧoŋe* ‘Chonge’ is obligatorily overt.

16a.	(keima)	bu	ki-nek	16b.	ʧoŋe	bu	a-nek
	(I)	rice	1SG-eat		chonge	rice	3SG-eat
		‘I eat rice’			‘Chonge eats rice.’		

In (17a) the nominal subject *jon* takes the ergative case, where as in (17b) the pronominal subject *himpa* ‘he.masc’ does not take ergative case it is followed by the proximal marker -*hiʔ*. Comparing examples (17a) with (17b) we can state that the ergative case marker -*an* /-*n* and the proximal marker -*hiʔ* occur in mutually exclusive as environment, i.e., these markers cannot co-occur.

17a.	jon-an	ʧoŋe	a-risui
	John-ERG	Chonge	3SG-kick
	‘John kicks / kicked Chonge.’		

17b.	(himpa-hiʔ)	a-va-risui
	he.MASC-PROX	3SG- him-kick
	‘He kicks / kicked him’.	

In (17b) we observe *himpa* obligatorily takes the proximal *hiʔ*. In case of the third person pronoun *ama* ‘s/he’, it can take the ergative case as shown in (18a) and the proximal marker *hiʔ* as shown in (18b) repeated here from (5). In §2.1.4 example (5) the pronominal *ama* ‘s/he’ takes the proximal marker - *hiʔ*. The alternate occurrence of the ergative and the proximal marker clearly indicates that these markings are pragmatically based.

18a. (ama-an) a- va-risui
s/he.ERG 3SG-him-kick
'S/he kicks / kicked him'.

18b. (ama - hiʔ) tho thei
3SG - PROX MOD can
'S/he can do this.'

The mono-transitive sentence in (17b) has the following clause structure after the pronominal subjects is pro-dropped, as shown in (19). The third person clitic object pronoun *va-* prefixes to the verbal complex, the third person subject agreement marker *-a* precedes *va-* to form the verbal complex.

19. a-va-risui
3SG-him/her-kick
'S/he kicks / kicked him/ her'.

In (20) we have the second person object pronoun *naŋ* 'you', unlike the clitic object pronouns *ne* 'me / us' in first person and *va-* 'him / them' in third person; occurs in the canonical position. In Chapter 1, §1.4.2.6.2 we have discussed the object pronouns in Biate. See Table 1.8. for detail.

20. nang a-risui
you 3SG-kick
'S/he kicks /kicked you.'

2.3.3 Ditransitive

In di-transitive sentences, we have three core arguments, namely, subject, direct object and indirect object. In (21) we have a ditransitive sentence with nominal arguments in the subject, direct object and indirect object positions. All the three core arguments in (21) are nominals, they are obligatorily overt and occur in their canonical word order positions subject-indirect object-direct object-verb.

21. jon-an mari lekhabu a-pek
John-ERG Mary book 3SG-give
'John gives / gave a book to Mary.'

In (22a) and (22b) when we have pronominal subjects like *him-nu 'he-masc'* and *ama* 's/he' the pronominal subjects are obligatorily dropped as is typical of a pro-drop language. The direct object *lekhabu* is a nominal argument and is overt and the indirect object pronoun in both the examples is the pro-clitic *va-* 'him / her' which has the thematic role of a *recipient*. The indirect object 'mary' in (21) has the thematic role of a recipient too and it occurs in the canonical position. But the clitic object pronoun *va-* in (22a-b) requires a host and so it prefixes to the finite main verb. In (22a-b) the word order is **subject-direct object -indirect object clitic-verb.** The pronominal subjects in (22a-b) are obligatorily dropped. In (22c) we have the clause structure of the ditransitive sentence where the pronominal subject is pro-dropped, the direct object NP *lekhabu* is overt, the indirect object clitic prefixes to the verb and the third person agreement marker precedes the clitic *va-*. The three core arguments of the ditransitive sentences in (21, 22a-c) has the thematic roles of agent (subject), theme (direct object) and recipient (indirect object) respectively.

22a. (himnu- hiʔ) lekhabu a-va-pek
She.FEM-PROX book 3SG-him/her-give
'She gave the book to him/her.'

22b. (ama-an) lekhabu a-va-pek
S/he.ERG book 3SG-him/her-give
'S/he gives/gave the book to him/her.'

22c. lekhabu a-va-pek
book 3SG-him/her-give
'S/he gives/gave the book to him/her.'

In case of the second person pronoun *naŋ* 'you' which is a free form, it occurs in the canonical position of an indirect object and has the thematic role of a recipient, as shown in (23).

23. jon-an naŋ lekhabu a-pek
John-ERG you book 3SG-give
'John gives / gave the book to you.'

2.4 Case in Biate

According to Dryer (2007, 251), “in languages with ergative case systems, the transitive subjects occur in the ergative case while the intransitive subjects occur in the same case as objects, i.e., the absolutive case and there are languages in which the ergative case is overtly marked, while the absolutive case is a zero case” But there are also languages in which both ergative and absolutive are overtly marked (see Dryer (2007, 251).

Different scholars use different labels for subjects of intransitive and transitive clauses. Dixon (1979, 1994) employs ‘S’ for intransitive subject, ‘A’ for transitive subject and, ‘O’ for transitive object. Dryer (2007, 252) uses ‘S’ for the single argument of an intransitive verb, ‘A’ for the more agent-like argument in a transitive clause and ‘P’ for the more patient-like argument.

According to Dryer (2007, 253) accusative languages are distinguished from ergative languages on the basis of their respective grouping of A, P and S. In ergative-absolutive languages, Ss and Ps are grouped together as absolutive, while As are grouped separately as ergative. In nominative-accusative languages the As and Ss are grouped together and treated as nominatives both holding the same subject grammatical status while the Ps called the objects are treated as accusatives distinct from As and Ss.

So we can say that in the languages with ergative alignment, the subject of an intransitive verb is marked in the same way as the direct object of a transitive verb, while the subject of a transitive verb is marked differently. Whereas in languages with accusative alignment, the subjects of both transitive and intransitive verbs are marked the same way, while the direct object is marked differently. However, in some languages the alignment varies depending on factors such as tense, aspect, or the presence of certain grammatical elements. For example syntactic ergative split and semantic ergative split. Bernard Comrie (1978) first introduced a term ‘split ergativity’ in his book titled "Ergativity: Toward a Theory of Grammatical Relations”, introduced this term to describe the phenomenon where a language shows both ergative and accusative alignment in different contexts or with different verb forms.

2.4.1 Case in Core Arguments

In the study of a clause structure, it is crucial to study the grammatical relation of the core arguments in a clause. Normally, the grammatical relation of the arguments is

established by the case markers which help establish the functional roles of the NPs in a given clause. In the preceding sections we have observed that in the Biate overt morphological case marker usually occurs on subject NPs that is the ergative case *-n*/*-an* under certain context specific conditions. An intransitive verb like *fe* 'go' in the progressive aspect shows the subject (S) *keima* 'I' is overt it takes the ergative case *-n* in (24a). In (24b) since the pronominal subject is dropped, the ergative case is covert.

24a. keima-n bazaar-aʔ ki-fe-mai
I-ERG market-LOC 1SG-go-PROG
'I am/ was going to the market.'

24b. bazaar-aʔ ki-fe-mai
market-LOC 1SG-go-PROG
I am / was going to the market.'

Similarly, with the intransitive verb *hoŋ* 'come' in (25a-b) both the nominal subject *jon* (25a) and *ama-an* 's/he-erg' take ergative case. The intransitive verb *hoŋ* 'come' is in the non-future tense form, where the action of the matrix verb can be interpreted as either in present or past tense depending on the context.

25a. naktuk jon-an a-hoŋ t^hei
Tomorrow John-ERG 3SG-come MOD
'John may / might come tomorrow.'

25b. natuk (ama-n) a-hoŋ t^hei
Tomorrow s/he-ERG 3SG-come MOD
'S/he may / might come tomorrow.

In (25a) the nominal subject takes the ergative case *-an*, and, in (25b) the pronominal subject ama 's/he' takes the ergative case *-n*. The ergative case markers *-an* and *-n* are allomorphs. From (24) and (25) examples, it is evident that ergativity in Biate is not syntactically or grammatically conditioned. Further evidence comes from the experiencer verb *mu* 'see' where the experiencer subject is in the ergative case

26. John-an ui-neʔ va-ridai-mai a-mu-tak
John-ERG dog-ASSOC 3PL-play-PROG 3SG-see-PRF
'John has / had seen them playing with the dog'

Interestingly, a verb of action like *nek* 'eat' does not take the ergative case. Both the pronominal subject *keima* 'I' and the nominal subject *ʧoŋe* 'Chonge' are not case marked with ergative case.

27a. (keima) bu ki-nek
(I) rice 1SG-eat
'I eat rice'

27b. ʧoŋe bu a-nek
Chonge rice 3SG-eat
'Chonge eats rice.'

Whereas when we have an action verb like *risui* 'kick'; both the nominal and pronominal subjects take the ergative case.

28a. jon-an ʧoŋe a-risui
John-ERG Chonge 3SG-kick
'John kicks / kicked Chonge'

28b. (ama-an) va-a-risui
S/he-ERG him-3SG-kick
'S/he kicks / kicked him'

Both in (27a-b) and (28a-b) the verbs are in the non-future form. If the ergative case marking is grammatically conditioned; subjects (A) of all transitive sentences should obligatorily take the ergative case when there is an action verb. However, we observe that is not the case in Biate. In (29) we have examples from the ditransitive sentences where we can see that the three core arguments are NPs and the subject NP *jon* (29a) and the pronominal subject *ama* (29b) are overtly case marked as ergative. The direct and indirect objects are covertly marked for accusative and dative cases. The example in (29a) is repeated from (21) from §2.3.3.

29a. jon-an mari lekhabu a-pek
John-ERG Mary book 3SG-give
'John gives / gave a book to Mary.'

29b. (ama-an) lekhabu va-a-pek
S/he.ERG book him/her-3SG-give
'He gives/gave the book to her.'

In the lines of DeLancey (2013b) we would like to state that the ergative case in Biate is *pragmatically* determined. Before we move further on this subject let us look at the case and case markers of the core NPs in Table 2.4.

Case	**Case markers**
Nominative	Ø
Ergative	-n. -an,
Accusative	Ø
Dative	Ø
Genitive	Ø

Table 2.4 Core case markers in Biate

Table 2.4 clearly shows except for the ergative case; nominative, accusative, dative and genitive cases in Biate are null. In other words, the core arguments are not overtly case marked for the nominative, accusative and dative subjects and objects. In (30 a-b)) we have instances of how a possessive pronoun is prefixed to the nominal head *lekhabu* (30a) and a possessive nominal *raju* is juxtaposed with the nominal head *soldaŋ* 'umbrella' in (30b).

30a. him.pa-hiʔ ki-lekhabu a-ru-tak
He.MASC-PROX 1SG-book 3SG-steal-PRF
'He stole my book.'

30b. raju soldaŋ a-lian a-ni-t
Raju umbrella ADJM-big 3SG-be-DECL
'Raju's umbrella is big.'

2.4.1 Split-Ergativity in Biate

Tibeto-Burman languages of northeast India typically exhibit split-ergativity. Comrie (1989:112) uses the test of coordination to determine whether a language has a nominative-accusative or an ergative-absolutive case system. In a nominative-accusative case system the subject of an intransitive clause (S) coordinates with the subject of a transitive clause (A); whereas in an absolutive-ergative case the subject of an intransitive clause (S) coordinates with the direct object (P) of a transitive clause. To establish the case system of Biate, we have intransitive sentences in (31) and in (32) transitive sentences of Biate.

31a) jon bazar-aʔ a-hoŋ
John bazaar-LOC 3SG-come
'John came to the market.'

31b) (keima) bazar-aʔ ki-hoŋ
I bazaar-LOC 1SG-3SG-come
'I came to the market.'

31c) jon-an ne-a-hoŋ
John-ERG me-3SG-hit
'John hit me.'

When a compound sentence is formed between the intransitive and transitive sentences, the conjunct *neʔ* 'and' combines the intransitive in (31a) with (31c) to form (32) where we find the transitive subject (A) *jon* 'John' coordinates with the intransitive subject (S) as is evident from the third person singular agreement marker *-a* which is prefixed to both *beŋ* 'hit' and *hoŋ* 'come' and the clitic object pronoun *ne-* prefixes to the matrix verb *beŋ* 'hit'. The clitic *ne-* precedes the third person agreement marker *a-* in the verbal complex formed *ne-a-beŋ*.

32. jon-an ne-a-beŋ neʔ bazar-aʔ a-hoŋ
John -ERG me-3SG-hit and bazaar-LOC 3SG-come
'John hit me and (he) came to the market.'

Alternatively, we can have a compound sentence where the subject (S) *keima* 'I' in (41b) coordinates with the pro-clitic direct object (P) *ne-* as shown in (33).

33. * jon-an ne-a-beŋ neʔ bazar-aʔ ki-hoŋ
John -ERG me-3SG-hit and bazaar-LOC 1SG-come
'John hit me and (I) came to the market.'

From the native speaker's judgement on the grammaticality of (32) and (33); the native speakers consider (32) to be correct and acceptable and not (33). From the grammatical judgement of the native speakers, we establish that the case system in Biate is that of nominative versus accusative. Split ergative is seen under certain conditions. We have observed that Biate tends to drop the ergative case marker when the sentence is in declarative form (see example 13). The subject of a sentence is also not marked by the ergative case when the sentence is marked by the mood marker in the language (example 5). While indicating common habitual action like eating rice, drinking tea among the community, subject is not marked in the language (see 27a-b). Further, Biate finite clauses show subject-verb agreement, this establishes that Biate has a nominative-accusative case system.

2.4.2 Oblique case in Biate:

In Table 2.5 we have the case markers of the oblique cases in Biate. In examples (34-

Oblique case	Case markers
Dative	*-aʔ*
Ablative	*-ta*
Comitative	*- neʔ*
Instrumental	*-n*
Locative	*-aʔ*

Table:2.5 Oblique case in Biate

34. jon naktuk in- aʔ a-fe
John yesterday home-DAT 3SG-go
'John went home yesterday.'

In (34) the dative case marker *-aʔ* is suffixed to the oblique argument in 'home' which has the thematic role of goal. In the ditransitive sentences (21-23) we have seen the indirect objects are in dative case with the thematic role of a recipient. The difference between the two dative cases is that the dative case in the core argument is null, whereas the dative case in the oblique argument is overt.

35. ama- hiʔ soŋkhol-k^{h}a Delhi-aʔ-ta ki-ɾiʧok
3SG-PROX dress-DEF Delhi-LOC-ABL 1SG-buy
Lit: 'I bought this dress from Delhi.'
'I got this dress from Delhi.'

In (35) oblique argument *delhi-aʔ-ta* takes the ablative case *–ta* followed by the locative case *- aʔ* to indicate the location from where the dress has been bought.

36. ʧoŋe-n saɾa-neʔ an- fe-ɾaŋ
Chonge-ERG sara-COM 3PL- go-FUT
'Chonga will go with Sara.'

In example (36) the comitative case marker - *neʔ* is suffixed to the oblique argument 'Sara'.

37. sapbal ʧemte-n ke-ɾʧan
potato knife-INS 1SG
'I cut the potato with the knife.'

In (37) the instrumental case marker *–n* suffixes to the oblique argument *ʧemte* 'knife'.

38. tui-aʔ iŋa an-om-ŋai
water-LOC fish 3SG-stay-HAB
'Fish live in water.'

In (38) to indicate location, the locative case marker - *aʔ* suffixes to the oblique argument *tui* 'water'. In (39) the postposition *suŋ* 'inside' takes the locative case marker - *aʔ* to indicate the location. The locative case marker can suffix to an NP as in (38) and it can suffix to a postposition as in (39).

39. t^{h}lana ʧontan suŋ-aʔ a-om
thlana room inside-LOC 3SG-EXT
'Thlana is inside the room'

In Tibeto-Burman languages syncretism with regards case markers is a regular phenomena. In Biate we have two instances: (i) the case marker *aʔ* functions as a dative case and in (38-39) as locative case. The case marker *-n* we have observed is an ergative case when it occurs with the subject of a transitive clause. In (37) we observe the instrumental case is -n and it suffixes to the oblique argument *ʧemte* 'knife'.

2.5 Semantic roles

"The semantic role of an NP argument depends on what verb it is an argument of", Tallerman (2005, 40). Payne (1997, 47) defined Semantic roles as "conceptual relationships in the, message world "…they are part of the "content" of linguistic messages rather than categories of linguistic form. Ideally, semantic roles are the roles that participants play in message world situations. So, for example, if in some real or imagined situation, someone named John purposely hits someone named Bill, then John is the agent and Bill is the patient of the hitting event, regardless of whether any observer ever utters a clause like John hit Bill" to describe the event.

According to Andrews (2007, 138-139) The class of two-argument verbs taking an agent and a patient are called "primary transitive verbs" (PTVs). If an NP serving as an argument of a two-argument verb, and receiving a morphological and syntactic treatment normally accorded to an agent of a PTV, that NP has the grammatical function A; if it is an argument of a verb with two or more arguments receiving a treatment normally accorded to the patient of a PTV, it has the grammatical function P. A sentence is said to be "transitive" if it has A and P functions in its syntactic structure, "intransitive" if one or both of these is missing. When an NP in an intransitive sentence receives the treatment normally accorded to the single argument

of a one-argument predicate, that NP is said to have S function. Languages always seem to have A and P functions, in the sense of having a uniform treatment of agent and patient of a primary transitive verbs (PTV).

As for instance like as a verb takes a non-agent A and a non-patient P. e.g.

40. John likes Mary

In (40) above John is not an agent and Mary is not a patient, but John is an A and Mary is a P, as these NPs are getting the same grammatical treatment as an agent and a patient of a PTV. The description of an entity's participation in a situation by any given sentence in different ways is termed as semantic functions, also often called semantic roles (ibid, 132). This is illustrated in example 40 given below.

41. The girl broke the mirror.

Here the verb break designates a situation in which one entity is broken by another; breaker and broken are the two semantic roles identified in the given sentence, the former role assumed by the referent of the preverbal NP the girl and the latter role played by the post verbal NP, the mirror respectively. In order for the sentence to be true, the entities referred to by these NPs must act or be acted upon in accord with these roles. Semantic roles are thus an aspect of the relation between given clauses and the situations they refer to. In Figure 2.1 we have the division of semantic roles into participatory and circumstantial.

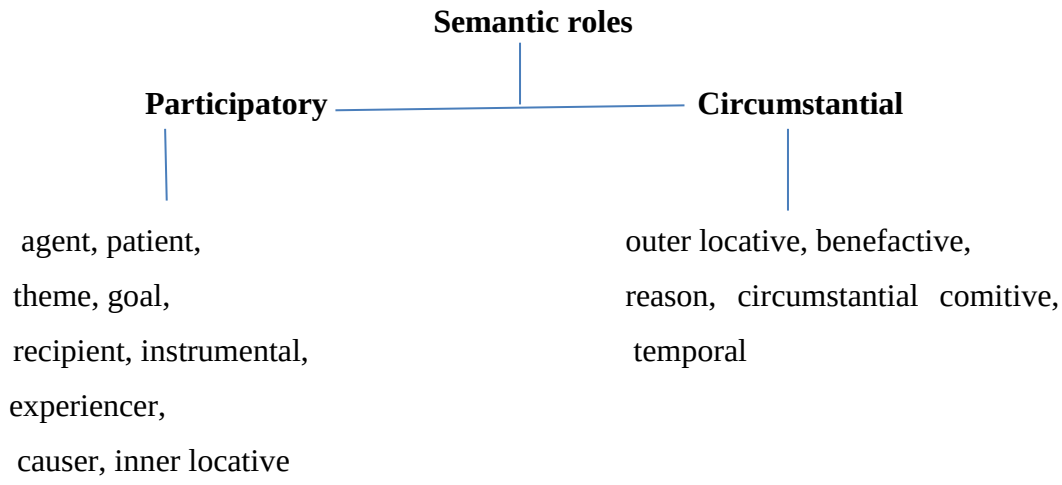

Figure 2.1: Participatory and circumstantial semantic roles

(From Andrews 2007:140)

Tallerman (2005, 40) stated “a theme undergoes motion.” According to Andrews (2007, 140), “a theme is a participant which is characterized as being in a state or position, or changing its state or position, sometimes treated as a kind of patient. For instance, in John sent the letter, the NP the letter is the theme”. “A recipient is a participant who gets something” (ibid). The semantic relation refers to the meanings of the arguments in the clause structure namely agent, patient, experiencer, beneficiary, recipient, causer etc. as shown in figure 1 above. The grammatical relations of subject, object, and indirect object in natural languages express some common semantic roles such as agent, force, instrument, experiencer, recipient and patient Payne (1997, 48-49).

2.5.1 Syntactic roles:

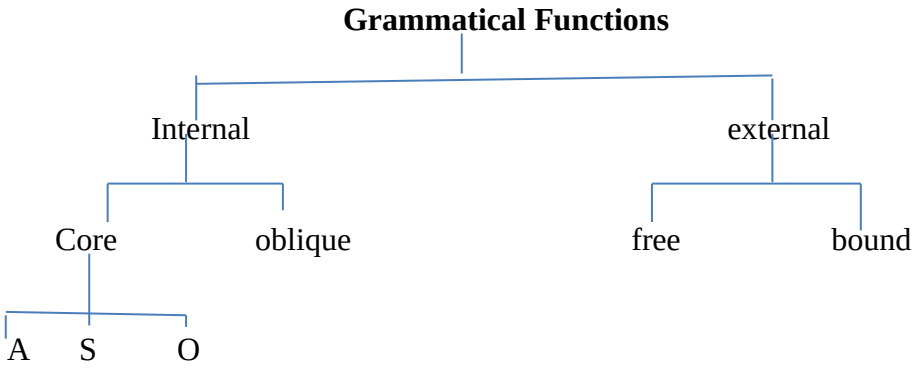

Figure 2.2: Taxonomy of grammatical functions (Andrews 2007, 152)

According to traditional grammar, the core arguments i.e., A, S and O, as shown in Figure 2.2 above, are the grammatical relations or the grammatical functions. At the grammatical level the arguments are case marked while at the semantic level these case-marked arguments are mapped with specific semantic role. In other words, the relationship between the predicates and their arguments bears both syntactic and semantic relations. At the syntactic level, the terms subject, object and indirect object are syntactic relations. According to Tallerman (2005, 41), syntactic functions of NPs are often known as grammatical relations, as they define NPs in terms of their relationships with the verbs of which they are argument of. Subject and object are the two most important grammatical relations. Let’s illustrate the notion of Grammatical relations of NP arguments with the help of example (40) repeated here as (42).

42. The girl broke the mirror

In (42) the preverbal NP the girl is the grammatical relation "subject", while the post verbal NP the mirror the grammatical relation "object". "There is a rule for using the verb break which says that the subject should express the breaker role and the object the broken role. The semantic role of an NP is thus determined jointly by the verb and the grammatical function of the NP" Andrews (2007, 133).

Now let us take some examples of Biate to discuss the thematic roles,

43a. nai-te a-in
child-DIM 3SG-sleep
'Baby slept.'

43b. ram a-lam-mai
Ram 3SG-dance-PROG
'Ram is dancing.'

In (43a) the NP *naite* is the subject 'S' and the verb *in* 'sleep' is a stative verb which gives the NP a semantic role of Topic. As the subject naite has got no control over the verb the sole NP gets the topic semantic role. Whereas in (43b) NP gets Agent semantic role as the verb *lam* is an action verb; here the action on the subject *Ram* as *lam* 'dance' is an intransitive verb.

44. ram-an ui a-bem
Ram–ERG dog 3SG-hit
'Ram hit the dog'.

45. keima-n naŋ ke-dit
1SG-ERG 2SG 1SG-like
'I like you'.

In transitive sentence (44) the verb 'hit' is an action verb and it demands an Agent in a sentence. So, the subject *Ram* gets the Agent semantic role. The object of the sentence gets the theme semantic role. The action is inflected by the subject on the object. Where as in (45) which is also an transitive sentence; the semantic role the subject NP is that of an experiencer as the verb *dit* 'like' is an verb of emotion.

46a. naŋma-n ki-lekhabu ni-nuam
2SG-ERG 1SG-book 2SG-want
'you want my book'.

46b. ama-n ki-lekhabu a-nuam
3SG-ERG 1SG-book 3SG-want
'He/she wants my book'.

In example (46a and 46b) we can see that the verb ‘want’ and the grammatical subject and the object NPs determines the semantic role of subject *naŋma* in (46a) and *aman* in (46b) has the semantic role of Goal and the object NP *lekhabu* ‘book’ is the theme.

47. ama-n lekhabu a-va-pek
    3SG-ERG book 3SG-him/her-give
    ‘He/she gave a book to him/her’

Di-transitive sentences always take the direct object and indirect object. In (47) we see that the object ‘book’ and the indirect object ‘him/her’ gets the different semantic roles. In this sentence the subject NP receives an Agent semantic role as the verb ‘give’ is an action verb. The direct object gets theme and recipient semantic roles respectively.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter we tried to discuss the finite clause of Bite by looking at the simple sentences in both positive and negative form. In the initial section of chapter we have looked into the verbal inflections. We have seen that Biate verbs can inflect for tense aspect and mood. The finite verb also can be affixed by the person agreement marker depending on the positive or negative sense of the sentence. we have seen that subject agreement markers of positive sentences are different from the negative counterpart. Again, in negative counterpart subject agreement varies among tense i.e. future and non-future. We also have discussed the nature of transitivity in the language. Intransitive verbs take only one argument, mono transitive takes two argument and ditransitive takes three arguments. We have broadly dissed the case system of Biate where we can see that Biate follows the nominative versus accusative case system with the notion of split ergativity. We observed that the marking of subject NPs with ergative case mainly depends on its pragmatic reasons. Lastly, we looked into the thematic roles and the syntactic roles of language.

References

Andrews, A. D. (2007, 132). The major functions of the noun phrase in Language Typology and Syntactic Description 2nd edition Vol.1 Clause Structure, edited by Timothy Shopen. Cambridge University Press, the Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK.

Baker, M. (1988). *Incorporation: A Theory of Grammatical Function Changing*. University of Chicago Press.

Boro, R.R and Barbora, M. (2017). 'Biate Syntax' in *The Syntax of Biate, Hrangkhol, Khelma, Onaeme, Purum, Liangmai and Yimchunger . Lesser Studied Languages Series: Vol III.* M. Barbora and G.K. Borah (Eds). 1-38. Centre for Endangered languages, Tezpur University

Comrie, Bernard. (1976). *Aspect*. Cambridge University Press.

…….. (1985). *Tense*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Comrie, B. (1976, 115-156). The Syntax of Causative Constructions: Cross-language similarities and divergencies. In: Shibatani Ed. The Grammar of causative constructions. (Syntax and Semntics, 6) New York, Academic Press.

…….(1981). Language Universals and Linguistics Typology: Syntax and Morphology. The University Press of Chicago.

……(1989). Language Universal and Linguistic Typology. Oxford, Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Dixon, R.M.W. (1994). Ergativity. Cambridge University Press.

…….(2012, 242). Basic Linguistic Theory. Vol.3 Further Grammatical Topics. Oxford University Press. Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP United Kingdom.

Dixon, R.M.W and Aikhenvald, A.Y.. (2000). Changing Valency Case Studies in Transitivity. Cambridge University Press. Dryer, M. S. (1985). "Tlingit: an object-initial language?" Canadian Journal of Linguistics 30: 1-13

…….. (2007). „Clause Types" in Language Typology and Syntactic Description vol.1Clause Structure (2nd Edition) Editor Thimothy Shopen.CUP

Payne, Thomas E. (2006) *Exploring Language Structure*. Cambridge University Press.

Payne, Thomas E. (1997) *Describing Morphosyntax*. Cambridge University Press

Shopen, T. (2007). *Language Typology and Syntactic Description.* volume I. Cambridge University Press.

……. (2007). *Language Typology and Syntactic Description.* volume III. Cambridge University Press.

Thurgood, Graham & Lapolla Randy J (2007) *The Sino-Tibetan Languages*. Routledge