

## Chapter 4

### MINIMALIST ACCOUNT OF BIATE CLAUSE TYPES

#### 4.0 Introduction

This Chapter looks into the clause structure of declarative sentences in Biate, within the Minimalist framework. Going by the data analysis § 2.4 of Chapter 2, we find the transitivity depends on the verbs. The intransitive verbs like *go, come, sleep, dance etc.* can take a single argument; where the subject S occurs as an external argument. The transitive verbs like *hit, kick, eat, bring etc.* take two arguments. Where the subject is labelled as A and the direct object is labelled as P and is selected via C-Selection by the matrix verb. In case of Di-transitive verb like *give, put, send etc.* We have seen that the verb C-selects two internal arguments P (direct object) and R (indirect object). We have also noted that Biate has a Nominative-Accusative case system with split ergativity.

This chapter is mainly divided into two parts. The first part of the chapter discusses finite clause structure of Biate and in the half we shall discuss the case system in Biate.

#### 4.1 Architecture of Biate Clause Structure

Typologically Biate has Subject-verb agreement in person and number. In case of intransitive sentence like (1) we can see that the finite verb assigns inherent case ‘ergative’ and a theta role of agent. Here the object *Chone* is assigned a structural case ‘accusative’ and receives a theta role of theme. The below example is repeated here from chapter 2

1. jon-an	ʃoŋe	a-risui
John-ERG	Chonge	3SG-kick

‘John kicks / kicked Chonga’.

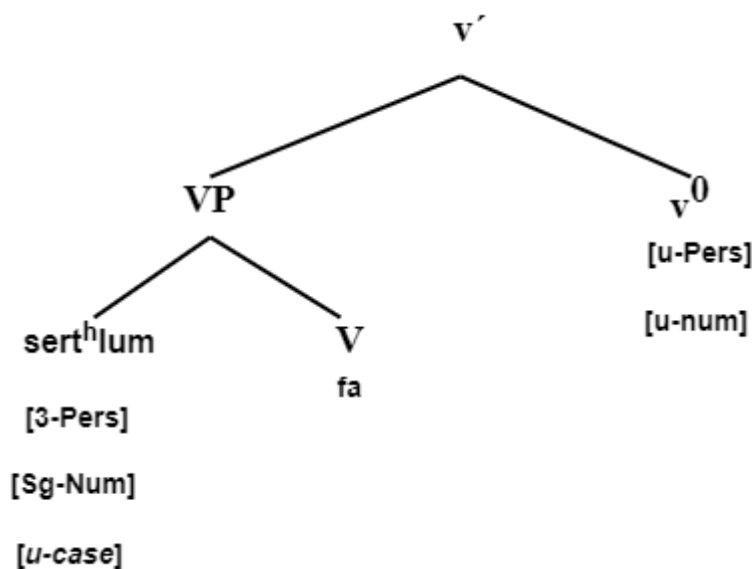
In case of ditransitive construction we can see that direct object and indirect object gets the structural case and their designated thematic roles accordingly. However, when the object is pronoun we get it in a clitic form in case of first person and third person. So, these two object clitic pronoun also must get the structural case and its theta roles. The presence of the clitic object pronoun *ne* ‘first person’ and *va* ‘third person’ shown in § 2.3.3 examples 17 b, 18 and 19, shows the direct object gets the structural case. The second person pronoun *naŋ* a free morpheme as shown in § 2.3.4.1 also gets the structural case. When the object is nominal we

see no clitic affixed to the verb which correspond the nominal. This is enough evident to claim that Biate has no object agreement.

As per Biate data analysis we can say that Agr model is not suitable for Biate as it has got no object agreement. Again, Chomsky (1995 b) agreeing with Hale and Keyser's (1993) proposal; and came out with a new model to deal with case and agreement. Chomsky assumes that there are two verb shells; in the projections of the null light verb *v*, and the lower is the projection of the lexical verb. The light verb assigns an external theta role and checks accusative case on direct object. The internal theta roles are assigned by the main verb *V*. Further, the subject moves form Spec of *v* to Spec of TP. Following Chomsk(1995) let us see what happens in the Biate clause structure.

2. ama            sert<sup>h</sup>um            a-fa-mai  
     3SG            orange            3SG-eat-PROG  
     ‘He/She is eating orange’.

Here the verb *fa* ‘eat’ is merged with the complement *sert<sup>h</sup>um* ‘orange’ to form the VP. The pronoun bears interpretable third person, singular number features and uninterpretable case features. The resulting VP is then merged with a null transitive light verb which will carry unvalued and uninterpretable feature person/number features forming a v-bar as shown in



**Figure 4.1**

The null light verb probes and identifies *sert<sup>h</sup>lum* as the active goal which carries and uninterpretable case features. The goal *sert<sup>h</sup>lum* values the person/number f-features of the light verb probe. The transitive light verb values case feature *sert<sup>h</sup>lum* and deletes it as shown in the below figure:

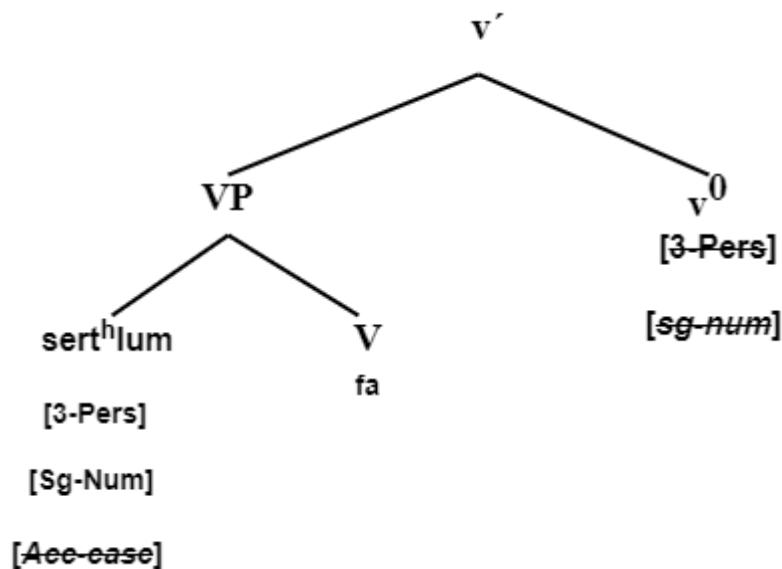


Figure 4.2

The null light – verb is affixal, so it will trigger rising of verb *fa* from V to v to get affixed with subject agreement marker. Since the causative light verb in (2) is transitive it demands an external argument ‘Agent’. In (2) the external argument is *ama*, and this comes in the derivation with the interpretable third person and a singular number features. It has got unvalued case feature. So, we get the following structure.

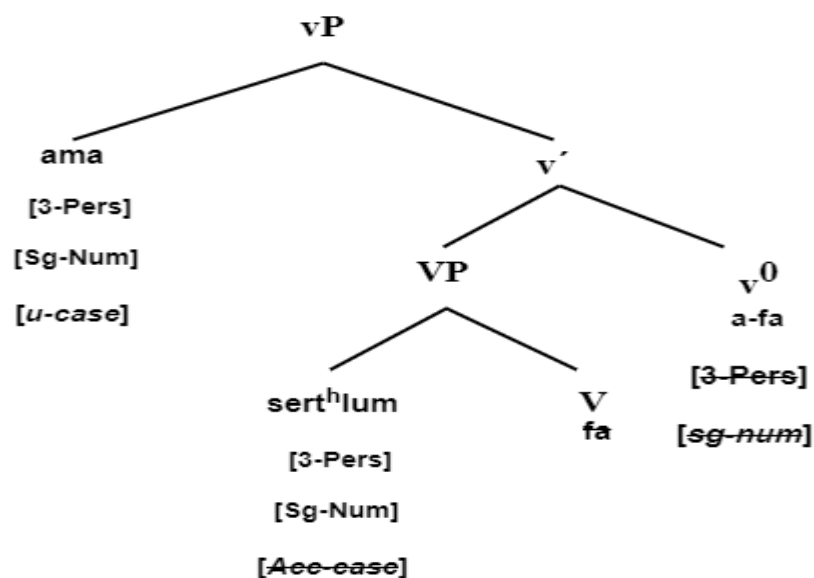


Figure 4.3

The above derivation will again merge with the progressive *-mai* to form ProgP. Further, this derived structure will merge with T which contains no tense marker. However the sentence (2) gives the reading of ‘He was eating orange’ or ‘He is eating orange’ in the language. Sentences with the future tense reading in Biatae are overtly marked by the future tense *-raŋ* as we have already seen in Chapter 2. In derivation of sentence (2) we have uninterpretable tense feature and an uninterpretable [EPP] feature. Merging T with its ProgP complement derives the following structure.

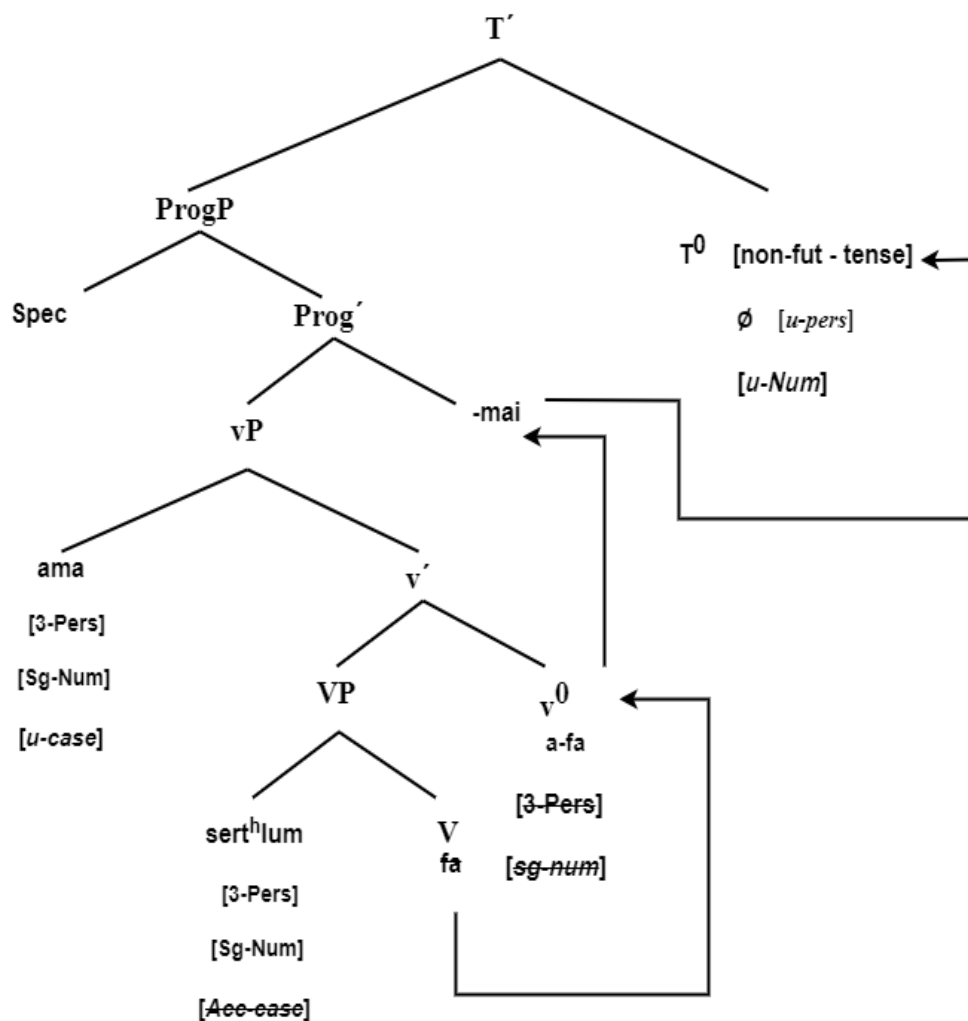


Figure 4.4

T probes and identifies the pronoun *ama* as the active goal with an unvalued feature within the c-command domain. This result in the pronoun valuing and deleting the person/number features of the T. T finally values the pronoun *ama* a case feature, nominative. The EPP

feature of T triggers raising of the pronoun *ama* from Spec vp to Spec TP deriving the following structure.

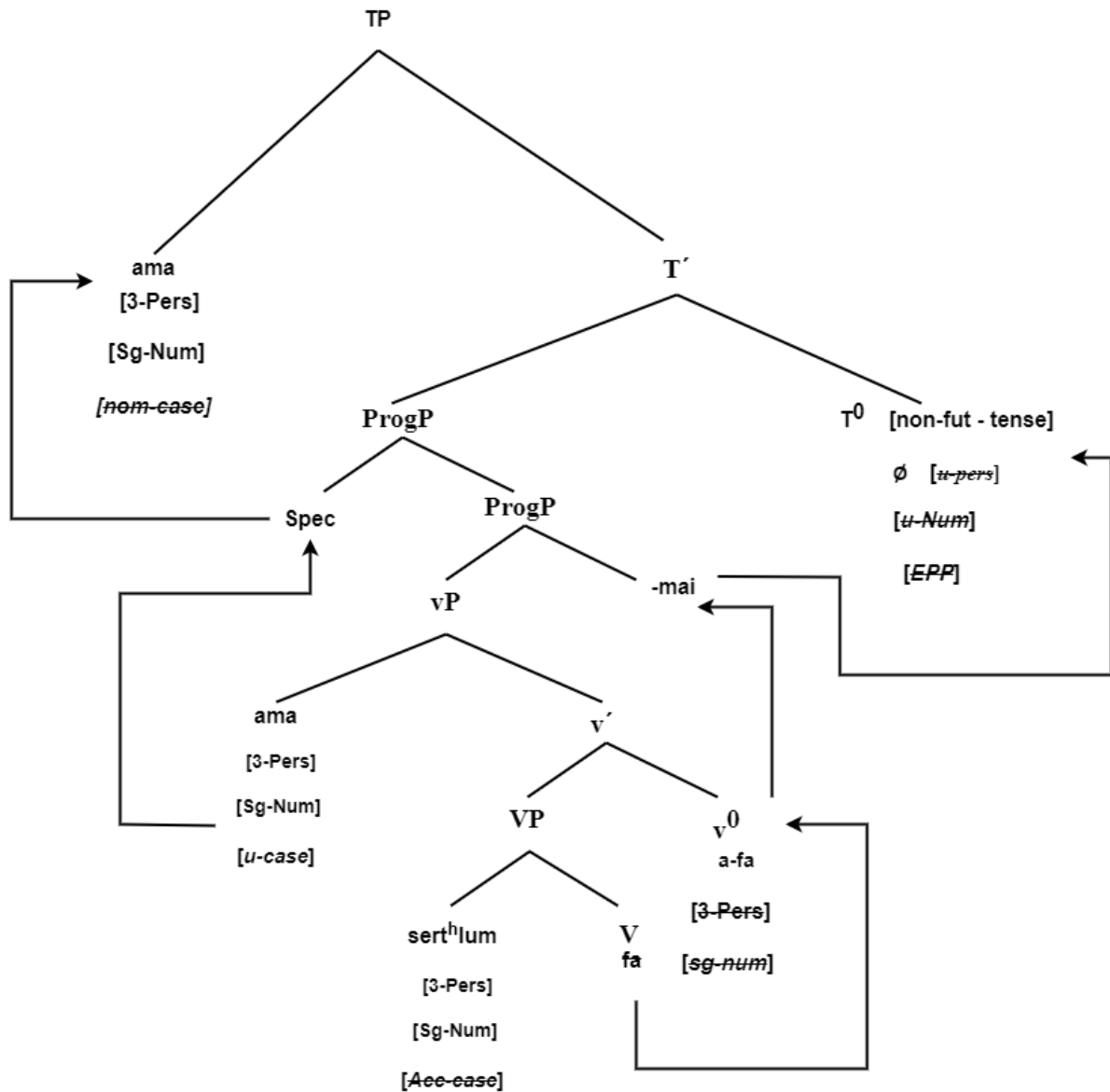


Figure 4.5

#### 4.2 Double VP Shell Hypothesis

We now all know that Agr model was mainly introduced for the manifestation of subject and object agreement; provided a language displayed both subject or object agreement. There is no other reason for these projections to be present in the syntactic structure. Chomsky (1995 b) agreeing with Hale and Keyser's (1993) proposal; came out

with a new model to deal with relation between case and agreement. Chomsky assumes that there are two verb shells; the upper shell is a projection of the null light verb *v*, and the lower shell is a projection of the lexical verb. The light verb *v* assigns an external theta role and checks accusative case on the direct object. The internal theta roles are assigned by the main verb *V*. Further, the subject movement occurs from Spec *v* to Spec TP. This model directly resembles the Burzio's Generalization. Burzio statement about the role of light verb *v* in the derivation of syntactic structures is that *v* assigns the external theta role as well as checking of accusative case. As Chomsky (1995b) claims that a given category can have number of specifiers. So, we can claim that we need not have postulate and extra AgrO to derive accusative case checking.

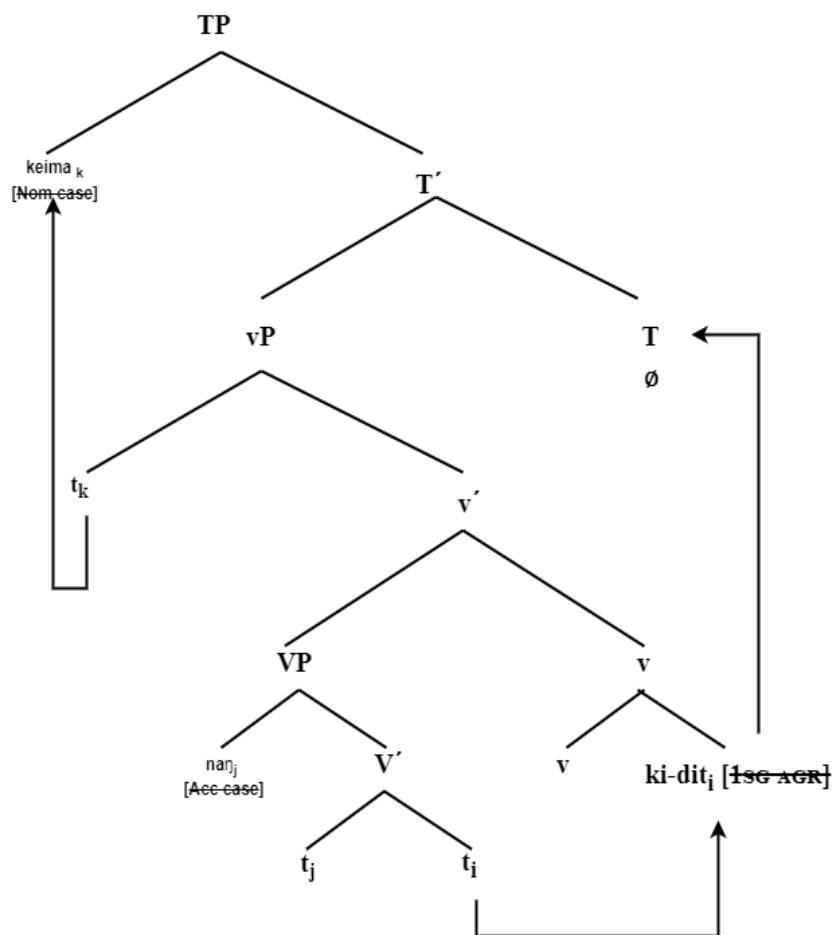
Later, Chomsky (2000) slightly modified the way of checking relation. Here we were introduced to the operation known as Agree. Case checking is formulated in a probe-goal relationship through this operation. It is assumed that interpretable features have a complete specification in the lexicon on the other side the uninterpretable features get their values in the course of derivation. The core functional category having uninterpretable features acts as probe which looks for a matching goal within c-command domain. This process of matching features includes Agree, through which its uninterpretable features are valued and further deleted. This operation is known as Agree operation as checking is matching of agreeing of features.

In the earlier sections we have looked into structures of transitive and sentences in Biate. We did not find any difficulty in the derivation of sentence structure. As mentioned earlier the Biate verb inflects of Subject agreement and Tense-Aspect-Mood. There is no object agreement. The object pronouns are clitics as mentioned earlier. This clitics are often confused as an agreement. The second person object pronoun *naŋ* is free form in the sentence structure and we find no agreement marker in verb which correspond the object pronoun *naŋ* as in (6). This proves that the object pronouns in Biate language are clitics except *naŋ* 'you'.

For example:

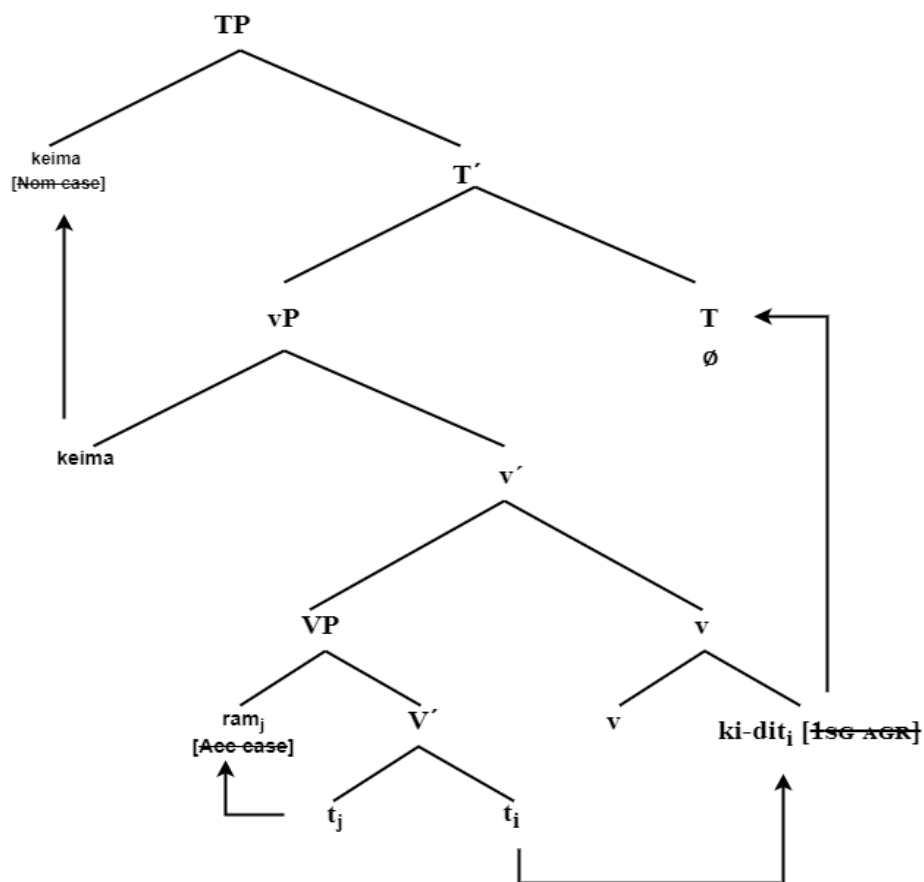
- 3a. keima    naŋ    ki-dit  
       1SG        2SG/PL 1SG-like  
       'I like you'.
- 3b. keima    ram    ki-dit  
       1sg        ram    1sg-like  
       'I like Ram'

Here, in the above examples we have taken a pronominal object *naŋ* in (3a) and nominal object *ram* in (3b) we can see that both the object is taking the similar position in the derivation of the sentence structure. Now let us look into the structure of (3a) and (3b) in Figure 4.6.



**Figure 4.6**

In the above structure we can see that when *v* is merged in the structure, the uninterpretable phi-features activate it as a probe. The *v* within its c-command domain finds the matching interpretable features as its goal and they come to agree relation. Assuming *v* has a strong D-feature on it triggers the movement of the object *naŋ* which has uninterpretable feature accusative case features to its specifier position. Again T has an uninterpretable features and it probes down and finds the subject DP *keima* which has uninterpretable features of nominative case. They ultimately establishes an agree relation to it and gets deleted. The object ‘*naŋ*’ in (3a) also takes the similar position in a derivation of transitive construction.



**Figure 4.7**

In figure 4.7 we can see that the configuration of the derivation is very similar to that of figure 4.6. So we can say that we have no change in the object position in derivation irrespective of nominal or pronominal. As mentioned earlier, Biata has got object pronoun clitic which get affixed to the finite verb. In the above derivation we have dealt with the free pronoun *naŋ* ‘you’. In the next section we will be discussing the position of object argument where we will deal with the object clitic in the derivation.

#### **4.2.1 Position of Object Argument**

In transitive (3a) and (3b) sentence have seen that *v* has a strong D-feature on it and triggers the movement of the object which has uninterpretable accusative case features to its specifier position. Now let us take some example where the objects are clitics.



4a. meri        a-ne-dit  
    Meri        3SG-1SG-like  
    ‘Meri likes me’

4b. naŋma      ni-va-dit  
    2SG        2SG-3SG-like  
    ‘You like him/her’

In the above examples we can see that the objects *ne* and *va* are in clitic form and it is affixed with the verb. In this kind of construction we may have different type of derivation of the structure. As mentioned by Chomsky (1985, P 275) clitic features of the languages which present cliticization are sufficiently ‘strong’ to allow recoverability when the NP position is empty. In this account the object NP is ungoverned and co-indexed with the clitic and, as a consequence of this, when the object NP is omitted, the position is occupied by small *pro*, following Jaeggli (1982). This empty category ‘inherits’ the properties of subcategorization and theta marking from the co-indexed clitic. This is of course entirely parallel to the role that AGR in INFL plays in pro-drop languages. On the other hand, as Burzio (1986) points out, there are certain distributional analogies between clitics and null subjects, namely ‘languages that have null subjects also have clitics; both null subjects and cliticization correspond to lack of contrastive stress; syntactic constructions that require cliticization for objects correspondingly require null subjects.’ (Burzio 1986, p. 164).

The approaches to the analysis of clitics can be classified into two broad classes: those following a syntactic approach, and those following a non-syntactic approach. In the syntactic approach we can find two main approaches that have come to be known as the Movement and Base Generation approaches. The Movement approach has seen its main exponents in Kayne (1975, 1989, 1990, 1995), and Sportiche (1989, 1990). A pioneering proposal within the Movement approach can be found in Kayne (1975). In this account clitics are pronouns which are generated in the positions of the verb complement at D-structure. This provides an explanation for the role of clitics as arguments; what is left to be accounted for is their S-structure position.

In the following examples we can see that the full NP and object clitic cannot co-occur in Biate and we see no movement. According to Kayne's (1975) account, the trigger for the movement of the clitic is either its weak phonological nature (it can never be stressed) or its affixal nature (it is a bound morpheme).

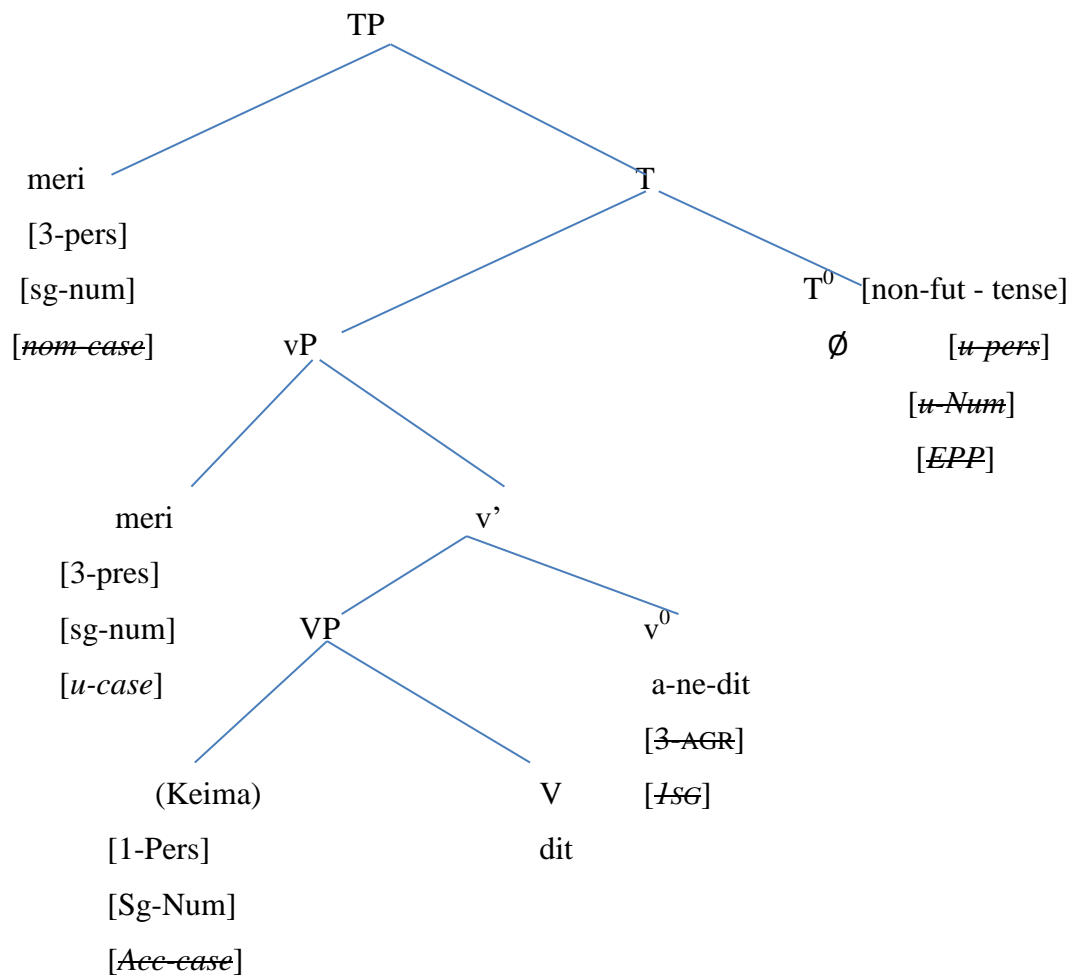
5a. keima ram ki-mu  
 1SG Ram 1SG-see  
 'I see Ram'

5b. keima ki-va-mu  
 1SG 1SG-3SG-see  
 'I see him/her'

5c. \*keima ram ki-va-mu  
 1SG ram 1SG-3SG-mu  
 'I see Ram'

In example (5c) we see that object pronoun is occurring as clitic in the sentence construction. Here we assume that the object NP is ungoverned and co-indexed with the clitic, as a consequence of this, when the object NP is omitted, the position is occupied by *pro*, following Jaeggli (1982). This empty category 'inherits' the properties of subcategorization and theta marking from the co-indexed clitic. So we can say that, the indirect object in (5) is co-indexed by the object is in original position. As verb is highly affixial in Biate it further moves from its original position to get a status of complex verb. Verb in Biate agrees with subject; so it initially moves for subject-verb agreement, aspect and then tense in the derivation along with the indirect object clitic.

Assuming that Biate objects are base generated as assumed by Suner (1973), Strozer (1975), Rivas (1977), Jaeggli (1982, 1986), Bouchard (1982), Borer (1984a), Aoun (1985), Burzio (1986), Suner (1988), Roberge (1990), Dobrovie-Sorin (1990), among others. As Hendrick (1995) points out, this position often involves treating clitics as some kind of agreement morpheme that identifies the phonologically null pronominal in argument position (see Borer, 1984a and Suner, 1988).



**Figure 4.8**

Here we assume that the object NP is ungoverned and co-indexed with the clitic and, as a consequence of this, when the object NP is omitted, the position is occupied by Pro, following Jaeggli (1982). This empty category ‘inherits’ the properties of subcategorization and theta marking from the co-indexed clitic. So we can say that, the indirect object in (4.9) is co-indexed by the object is in original position. As verb is highly affixial in Biate it further moves from its original position to get a status of complex verb. Verb in Biate agrees with subject; so it initially moves for subject-verb agreement, aspect and then tense in the derivation along with the indirect object clitic.

### 4.3 Case in Biate

We gave a brief description of case system of Biate in Chapter 2. As mentioned earlier Biate follows the case system of Nominative-Accusative with split ergative. In this section let us look into the cases present in Biate finite clauses mainly focusing on the split ergativity.

#### 4.3.1 Nominative Case

Mohanan (1994) claims that if a language has two distinct cases associated with the Subject, one inflected and the other uninflected, nominative typically refers to the Case of uninflected nominal. Here in case of Biate as well we can see that there is no morphological marking in the subject of the intransitive sentences given below.

7a.   nai - te           a-in  
      child-DIM       3SG-sleep  
      ‘Baby slept’

In above two sentences we see no phonological manifestation. Following Lasnik (1993) and Chomsky (1995) we can argue that nominative case in Biate is an abstract case which is an uninterpretable case feature on the subject or DP checked by the finite head T. In (7a) we see that the subject *naite* bears an abstract nominative case and controls phi-agreement features on main verb *-in*. In this construction the subject gets topic argument.

7b.   ram   a-lam-mai  
      ram    3SG-dance-PROG  
      ‘Ram is dancing’

In the above example an action verb ‘dance’ gives a thematic role Agent. The subject *ram* bears an abstract nominative case features. In the process of derivation, T has uninterpretable features, and it acts as a probe and finds a matching goal to agree with. So, it finds *ram* which has an uninterpretable case feature with matching interpretable features as its goal and establishes an agree relation to it.

### 4.3.2 Accusative case

In Biate, there is no morphological marking for the object as shown in the figure 4.11. As we are following Agr less model, it is the transitive light verb  $v$  on a DP that gets into an Agree relation to it. Let us take some examples:

8. ram        ui        a-t<sup>h</sup>at-tak  
    Ram        dog        3SG-kill-PRF  
    ‘Ram killed the dog’.

We assume that the object DP *ui* is assigned the accusative case by the light verb  $v$ . The accusative case is abstract in the language. As mentioned earlier the light verb  $v$  assigns an external theta role and checks accusative case on the direct object. Here it is to be noted that there is no morphological marking in case of object whatsoever in case of Biate. In the above sentence we get the accusative reading as the light verb  $v$  assigns the accusative case to the object DP in the sentence construction. The marking of accusative case in the language does not depend on animacy.

### 4.3.3 Ergative case

Ergativity is something which treats transitive subject distinctly from intransitive ones., treat object like intransitive subjects, or treat unergative subjects, unlike unaccusative and transitive subjects. Many Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-Burman languages within the Indian sub-continent are split ergative languages. The most common kinds of splits found are the NP split and the tense/aspect split. Many Indo-Aryan languages show consistent ergative marked subjects of the transitive clause in the perfective aspect. Biate does not always mark the external argument with ergative case, indicating some kind of split. But, the nature of the split in Biate is rather uncertain. The ergative morpheme *-in* seems to occur on a highly irregular basis. The use of the ergative marker in many sentences appears to be optional, without affecting the grammaticality or the meaning. And in certain contexts, with certain sentences and verbs, grammaticality or semantics get affected.

Split ergativity is a widely accepted term for a language (ergative languages) that shows an ergative-absolutive pattern in one portion of the grammar and nominative accusative in another. In other words most ergative languages display their ergative characteristics only

within certain domain. The ergative system which has been discussed very often throughout the thesis operates only in certain constructions and a different system applies elsewhere which mostly would be nominative-accusative. And in many ergative languages the split is determined either lexically or grammatically (agreement). It is also crucial to note that ‘split ergativity’ is restricted only to morphological ergativity and is not usually a term to label a language which shows morphological ergativity with an accusative syntax. This morphological split is manifested in ergative languages in different ways and in various constructions. Some languages may manifest their splits in terms of a morphological marker whereas in some languages the split is manifested in terms of agreement. It is in fact known that no ergative language is entirely consistent with the ergative alignment all through its syntax or grammar. There is no known language so far which concurs completely with the ergative configuration. Such claims have also been made by Silverstein (1976), Moravcsik (1978, 273), Dixon (1979, 1994) among many others and is now widely accepted and standard.

This common knowledge that no ergative language is fully ergative can raise questions, as to why two terms or notions such as ‘ergativity’ and ‘split-ergativity’ are required to refer to a particular phenomenon, given that the split is a feature of all ergative languages. Thus, the name split ergative is a misnomer in a certain sense. When all ergative languages entail some kind of split, there hardly seems a need to label split ergativity as distinct from ergativity. Split is also attested only in ergative languages and there is hardly any split attested in nominative-accusative languages. Recently, Coon and Preminger (2017) claims that even nominative-accusative languages have splits. Coon posits that the factors that trigger split ergativity, namely a difference in structure results in the thematic A argument being realised as either an intransitive subject or a possessor are present cross-linguistically in erg-abs and nom-acc languages alike. In a nom-acc languages the split will not be apparent on the subjects themselves since transitive and intransitive subjects are alike (i.e. nominative). Split ergativity is a part of the ergativity package, and ever since ergativity caught interest of the linguist, it has had direct impact on the study of split-ergativity. Aldridge (2007a) uses the late insertion model of Distributed Morphology to account for split-ergativity and defends ergativity as merely a morphological phenomenon.

As per the Dixonian approach; the label S stands for the subject of an intransitive verb; A is the subject of a transitive verb and O is the direct object of a transitive verb. A/ O are grouped

together, based on transitivity of the subject of NP. In such languages, an ergative case appears at the subject position in contrast to a nominative case. An ergative type language receives an overt case at the subject position of nominal phrase in perfective and nominative in imperfective aspect while the verb is in agreement with its core arguments in the clause. Ergative case assignment encourages object agreement in the clause which is in contrast to the patterning of case and agreement in an accusative language which marks the subject with a nominative case and encourages subject agreement.

Biate nominal subjects of the transitive sentence tend to take the ergative marker as shown in example (9) repeated from (17a) in §2.3.2.

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

The pronominal subjects, the first person (10a) and third person (10b) do not take the ergative case. Example (10a) repeated from (16a) and (10-b) is repeated from (20) §2.3.2.

- 10a. keima    bu    ki-nek  
       1SG    rice    1SG-eat  
       ‘I eat rice.’

- 10b. naŋ      a-risui  
       2SG    3SG-kick  
       ‘S/he kicks/kicked you.’

Whereas action verbs like *come, give, hit, go etc.* the subject is always marked by the ergative marker. Here, it is to be noted that when a speaker is indicating specificity with regards the subject i.e. the proximal marker; we see ergative case marker cannot co-occur with the proximal. In other words, these markers are mutually exclusive, example (17b) from §2.3.2 repeated here as (11).

11.    him-pa-hi?                    a-va-risui  
       3SG-M-PROX                3SG-him/her-kick  
       ‘He kicks/kicked him/her’.

Observing the mono-transitive (10a-b) and (11) we can say that there is no grammatical condition in case of marking ergative case. In (10a) *John* is marked with the ergative case, in (10b) the subject is pro-dropped and the ergative case suffixed to the subject NP get dropped too. While both the subject bears the same verb and gives the similar reading. Again when the subject is in third person singular; it is marked by the ergative marker. This shows that Biate exhibits optional ergativity.

11a.   jon-an           ʃɔŋe           a-risui  
           John-ERG      Chonge          3SG-kick  
           ‘John kicks / kicked Chonge’.

11b.   (him-pa-hi?)           va-a-risui  
           he-MASC-PROX      him-3SG-kick  
           ‘He kicks / kicked him’.

In ditransitive sentences (21 & 22b) from § 2.3.3, the subject is obligatorily marked by the ergative case irrespective of nominal or pronominal as shown in (12a-b). Here, again we see that the proximal *hi?* occurs with *himpa* in (22a) repeated here as (12c); subject is not marked by ergative case.

12a.   jon-an           mari   lekhabu           a-pek  
           John-ERG      Mary   book              3SG-give  
           ‘John gives / gave a book to Mary.’

12b.   (ama-an)           lekhabu           a-va-pek  
           S/he.ERG      book              3SG-him/her-give  
           ‘S/he gives/gave the book to him/her.’

12c.   (him-nu- hi?)           lekhabu           a-va-pek  
           she - FEM-PROX      book              3SG-him/her-give  
           ‘She gave the book to him/her.’

As mentioned earlier the marking of ergativity can also be seen as optional phenomenon. In the example given below we can see that the marking or not marking of ergative does not



affect the meaning but the interpretation depending on the marker may vary. This shows that Biate exhibits the notion of optional ergativity. Here, the verb ‘do’ is an action verb; usually, the subject of an action verb normally takes the ergative case and has the theta role of an agent. The sentences in (13a-b) indicates the ergative case is optional.

13a. ama        vansun        sin        tho-ma-ke  
       3SG        today            work do-NEG-3SG  
       ‘He does not work today’

13b. ama-n    vansun        sin        tho-ma-ke  
       3SG-ERG    today            work do-NEG-3SG  
       ‘He does not work today’

Based on the data we have mentioned in the previous chapters let us look into the variation of marking ergative in the language.

Verb	Nominative	Ergative	Demonstrative	Example (from chapter 2)
Go	✓	✓		2a and 2b
Eat	✓	✓	✓	12a, 12e, and 12f
Do		✓	✓	5, 18a and 18b
Drink		✓	✓	13e and 13f
Kick		✓	✓	17a and 17b
Sleep	✓			14a and 15
Give		✓	✓	21 and 22a-b

**Table: 4.1 Subject Case Markers**

Table 4.1 shows the marking of ergative case as per the data we have discussed. We can see that verb like *go*, *eat*, and *drink* can assign both nominative and ergative to its subject in a sentence; whereas verb like *sleep* which is an intransitive verb can assign only nominative case to its subject. The verb *kick* can give ergative case to its subject. We have also shown the

proximal column in the table as Biate tend to use the proximal in the language to indicate specificity in the language. The ergative case and the proximal markers are mutually exclusive that is they can't occur in the same environment as seen in the unacceptable DP \*ama-n- hi?. Based on the data provided we can say that we can say that Biate ergative is not grammatical; the marking of ergative is determined by the pragmatic reasons of the sentence.

The approach of ergativity in ditransitive sentence within the minimalist will be discussed in the Chapter 5 in detail. Feature checking of cases will also be discussed in the Chapter 5.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

In this Chapter we have discuss the finite clause of Biate within the Minimalist program. In the initial section we discussed the Agr model where we have seen that all arguments are base-generated VP internally, we argued that the verb theta-marks its arguments inside the VP. The subject of a transitive verb in Biate always has an inherent ergative case marked by the suffix *-in*. The object NP, on the other hand, is assumed to be structurally case marked by the verb. In the later section we have discussed double VP shell hypotheses where Chomsky assumes that there are two verb shells; the upper shell is a projection of the null light verb *v*, and the lower shell is a projection of the lexical verb. The light verb *v* assigns an external theta role and checks accusative case on the direct object. The internal theta roles are assigned by the main verb *V*. Further, the subject movement occurs from Spec *v* to Spec TP. At the end of the section we looked into the Case in Biate and how it gets assigned in the derivation of sentence structure.

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