

## Chapter 5

### INHERENT CASE AND AGREEMENT IN BIATE

#### 5.0 Introduction

In this Chapter, we will discuss ergative as inherent case and look into ditransitive construction. Agreement system in Biate will also be dealt within the Minimalist framework. We already have described Agreement system of Biate in Chapter 2, and have seen that Biate has subject verb agreement in terms of person and number. We will deal the agreement in both positive and negative sentences and its derivation of syntactic structure of the language.

#### 5.1 Ergative as inherent case

The phenomenon of ergativity is very distinct in each language and it is difficult to find two ergative languages having similar pattern. Of late, one can see a lot of theoretical studies carried out on analysing ergativity which comprise mostly Austronesian, Pama-Nyungan, and Indo-Aryan languages (Aldridge 2004, 2005; Coon 2010, 2012; Mahajan 2012, 2017) among many others. There is hardly any theoretical work carried out on the phenomenon of ergativity in Tibeto-Burman. Though, one can find a handful of typological work (DeLancey 1984, 1990, 2011). Most theoretical analysis on ergativity in the other language families are carried out within the Generative framework and I draw my ideas from these works to best understand and explain ergativity in Biate. Biate being a syntactically nominative-accusative language, this thesis claims Biate to be ‘shallow ergative’ entailing that ergativity does not show up in any form in syntax, other than a morpheme marking, on the nominal.

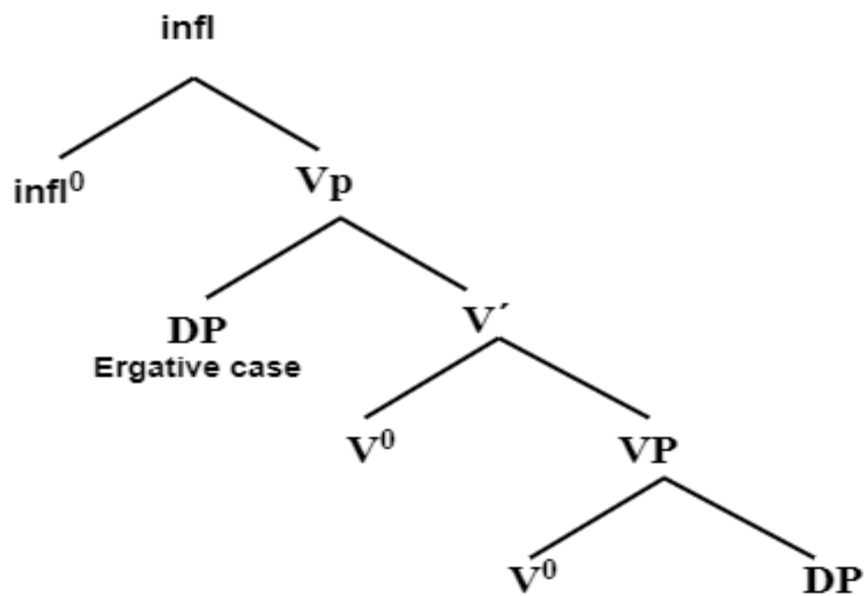
This section analyses the case marking witnessed in Chapter 2. It is also instructive to note that Biate is new to the analysis of ergativity in generative grammar. Biate exhibits two forms of case distinction on its full DPs. Nominative case is witnessed in the present tense clause and it lacks any morphological representation, as is evident from the many transitive and intransitive examples provided so far. The DP complement of the VP which bears Accusative Case also lacks morphological feature unlike what is commonly expected in a nominative-accusative case alignment. Thus, one can claim Biate displays a tense based split in its grammatical system to some extent. Present tense does not exhibit any ergative case marker, as is evident from (1). Whenever the verbal complex takes the habitual marker *ɲai*, the

subject does not take the ergative case as in (1). In (2) the ergative case is overt when the verb is in progressive.

1. ama        bu    a-nek- ηai  
    3SG       rice   3SG-eat-HAB  
    ‘S/he eats rice’.

2. ama-n      bu    a-nek-mai  
    3SG-ERG   rice   3SG-eat-PROG  
    ‘S/he is eating rice’.

Figure 5.1 is the illustration of how the general understanding of ergative case is assigned (Woolford 1997, 2006a; Legate 2008, 2012; Polinsky 2016).



**Figure 5.1**

According to Woolford 1997, 2006a; Legate 2008, 2012; Polinsky 2016 and others claim that the external argument is generated in Spec of vP and it gets inherent ergative case in situ by the same verb v which assigns theta role to it. According to this analysis Biata will have null nominative and accusative case markers and licencing of case is structural and ergative will be marked by the allomorphic variants of the ergative case *-in*, *-n* and *-an*; the licencing of the ergative case is inherent.

Aldridge (2008, 2012); Anand and Nevins (2006); Coon (2013); Legate (2008), (2012); Mahajan (1990, 2012, 2017); Woolford (1997, 2006a, 2017); Sheehan (2017) and other of the view that ergative case is an inherent. Chomsky (1986) says that the inherent case is related to theta–role assignment; the licensing of case and the assignment of theta roles is done by the same head. In structural case assignment of case and assignment of theta– role takes place independently. Inherent case assignment takes place before the structural case in deep structure.

One of the major debates on ergative case is whether it is structural or inherent. Woolford (1997, 2006b), is one of the primary proponents of ergative as inherent case. She uses a couple of diagnostic tests, to establish the inherent claim such as, A movement, raising, non-nominative subjects of tensed clauses, allowing nominative objects and theta relatedness etc. (Woolford uses the label nominative for absolutive). This test cannot be applied in Biate as Biate does not permit all type of construction. However, we can carry one type of test that is theta relatedness.

Ergative language is often related to the agent theta - role, and that is reason why many linguists treat ergative case as agentive case. We have seen in the earlier chapters that the Biate external argument besides agent theta role gets theta role like experiencer, goal, etc. The following example shows that the external argument can also take an experiencer even it is marked by the ergative case.

3. *lalrem-an            azij            a-ma-uam*  
*lalrem-ERG            dark            3SG-NEG-like*  
 ‘Lalrem does not like darkness’

Ergative case in Biate is closely associated to theta roles, particularly that of the agent theta role. But also allows for the mapping of other theta roles like experiencer, goal etc. Structural case to the external argument is licensed by T and in Biate because ergative case can occur with the external argument in a –Tense construction, it confirms that T is not responsible for the ergative case which reinforces the possibility of v. Based on the data analysis in Chapter 4 we claim that in Biate Ergative case is an inherent case.

### 5.1.1 A Minimalist Perspective of Ergative case

Following Aldridge (2007b, 2008), Legate (2012) and Woolford (1997, 2006b), working largely within the Minimalist Framework following Chomsky (1995, 2000, 2001), this section will analyse the case marking observed in Biate transitive clause.

Chomsky (2001) states, the external argument DP is merged in the specifier of vP. The internal arguments like theme and goal are merged in the VP. These external and internal argument DPs are merged with unvalued case features. TP and vP are phases. The functional heads T and v values the unvalued case features in these DPs. The features on T and v are uninterpretable and therefore must be checked off for the derivation to converge. Hence, the uninterpretable features act as probes, searching for matching goals within the c-command domain to check off its matching features. In nominative accusative languages, the first goal that a T comes across is the Subject against which it gets its uninterpretable feature checked off by copying its case feature onto the goal. This happens via agree (the activity condition). Similarly, the closest matching goal in the c-command domain of the probe v is the object which v copies its case onto and checks off its uninterpretable feature. T values the subject nominative and v values the object accusative.

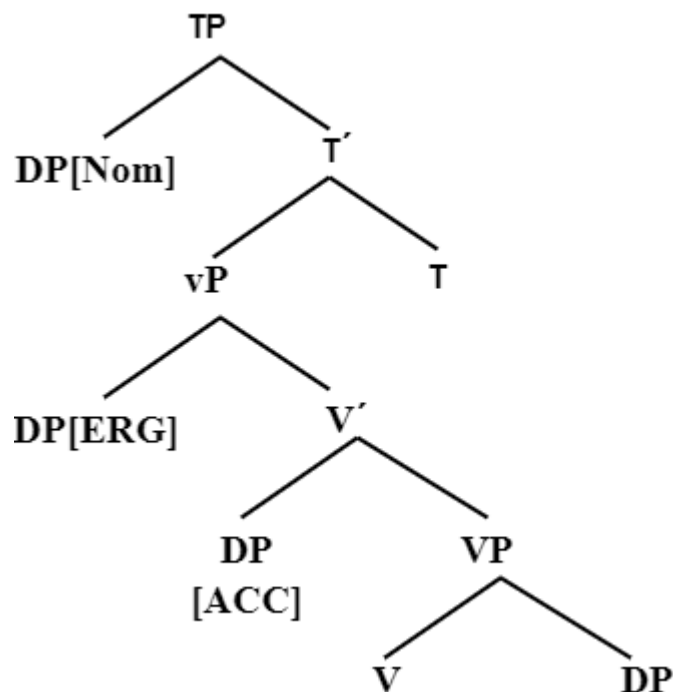


Figure 5.2

The most common approach to ergativity in the syntactic literature (Marantz 1981, 1984; Levin 1983; Murasugi 1992; Campana 1992; Bittner 1994; Bittner & Hale 1996; Manning

1996; Ura 2000) is to treat the absolutive as a subject at some level of representation and analyze its case as being licensed by the functional head responsible for nominative case in an accusative language, which is T in the framework of Chomsky (2001). However, the absolutes do not behave uniformly as subjects. Nor do they always have the properties of objects, since the absolutive S is the subject of an intransitive clause.

In Biate, ergative case on the DP mainly depends on the pragmatic reasons and also indicative of volitional, focus, habitual activity, generic statements, wilfulness and so forth. Largely, volitional and focus are responsible for an ergative to be marked or not. DP receiving an agent thematic role does not guarantee ergative marking in the language.

4. ram            school-a?    a-fe  
      ram            school-loc   3sg-go  
      ‘Ram goes/went to school’

The above example (4) indicates that *Ram* is clearly an agent, but the fact that it receives an agent theta role does not necessitate an obligatory ergative case. Inserting an ergative case with the External DP in example (4) would clearly imply some pragmatic variations.

Following the notion of Woolford 1997, 2006a; Legate 2008, 2012; Polinsky 2016 and others claim that the external argument is generated in Spec of vP and it gets inherent ergative case in situ by the same verb v which assigns theta role to it.

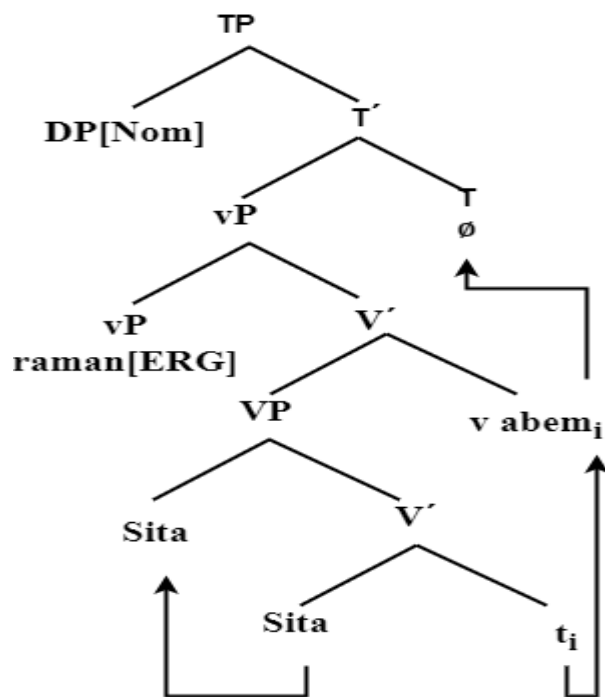


Figure 5.3

The external argument is generated at the spec of vP and the internal argument is generated in the spec of VP. These are goals whose case features needs to be valued. The external DP receives inherent case at the base position. Where the theta role has also been assigned in relation to the feature present in the light v, which in this sentence (5) is a focus feature. As discussed earlier, Biate exhibit nominative-accusative constructions. In this construction, the light verb v seen in ergative construction is redundant. So, the derivation of the sentence structure in Biate for the case checking of Nominative and accusative remain same as Chomsky proposed in (2001)

5. ram-an      sita      a-bem  
 Ram-ERG      sita      3sg-hit  
 ‘Ram hit Sita’

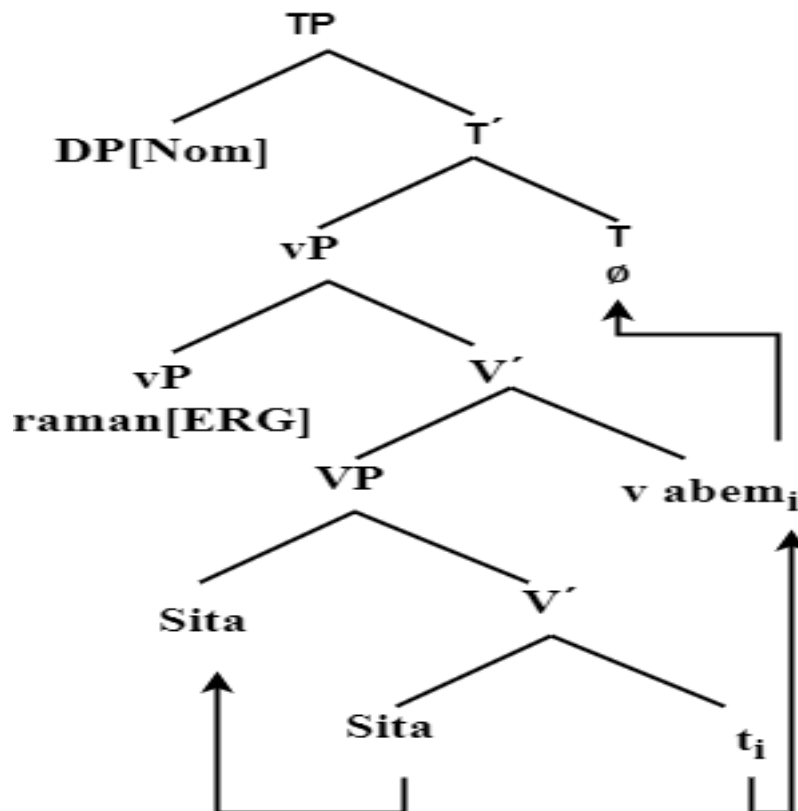


Figure: 5.4

Similarly in the above Figure 5.4 the external argument is generated at the spec of vP and the internal argument is generated at the spec of VP. The external argument 'Ram' receives inherent case in situ from the theta assigning head here. Here the subject receives an ergative case marking as it indicates the volitional act on the object 'Sita'. The subject agreement probes the raising of verb to take the marker *a-*, so, we can say that in Biate ergative case is checked in Spec of vP and the theta roles that marks Volition, Focus, Habitual activity, generic statements, wilfulness and so forth are assigned by the same v.

However, if we regard the ergative as a structural; we can argue that in Biate subject agreement is very prominent. This may suggest that the ergative case is not an inherent case rather it is a structural case; where the case is checked in T not v. The discussion of Biate ergative as structural case is out of scope of this thesis.

AGR, as a general grammatical term, is defined as that "grammatical phenomenon by which the appearance of one item in a sentence termed "the controller" in a particular form requires a second item termed "the agreeing element or the controllee1" which is grammatically linked with it to appear in a particular form" (Trask 1993:12). It occurs within the choices of one or more grammatical categories (such as number, person, gender, case, or tense), which are morphologically marked in certain form classes (such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc.). Thus, concord is AGR in gender, case, number, and person between different words that share the same reference. Therefore, AGR refers to "a syntactic process whereby one constituent must have the same value for certain grammatical features (such as person, number, and gender) as another constituent to which it bears a particular grammatical relation." (Fromkin et al. 2000:684), i.e., it is a formal relationship between sentence elements (constituents) whereby the form of one item requires a certain corresponding form of another' (Crystal 1991:13). According to Corbett (2006), agreement is a relationship between two elements where one element carries information about the other element; thus information is exchanged.

## **5.2 Di-transitive Clause**

The derivations provided so far accommodate verbs with a single complement and poses a problem for the analysis of ditransitive structures. Assuming the complements are sisters of heads, the V-bar constituent headed by V would no longer be binary-branching since it involves three separate constituents (Radford, 1997). This is shown in the following structure.

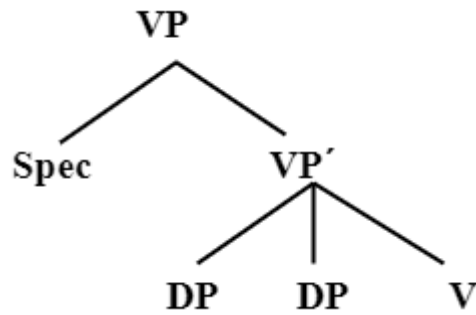


Figure 5.5

To deal with the structures involving more than one complements the VP shell analysis was put forward by Larson (1988,1990). In the VP-shell structure, the agent argument is assumed to originate in the spec vP and the internal arguments within the specifier and complement positions of the lower VP (Chomsky, 1995; Radford, 1997; Carnie, 2010). Let us see the ditransitive verbs in Biatae following Larson.

6.   lalrem-an    lasak-tu    puan        a-pek  
 Lalrem-ERG   sing-NOMZ   scarf       3SG-give  
 ‘Lalrem gave a puan to the singer’.

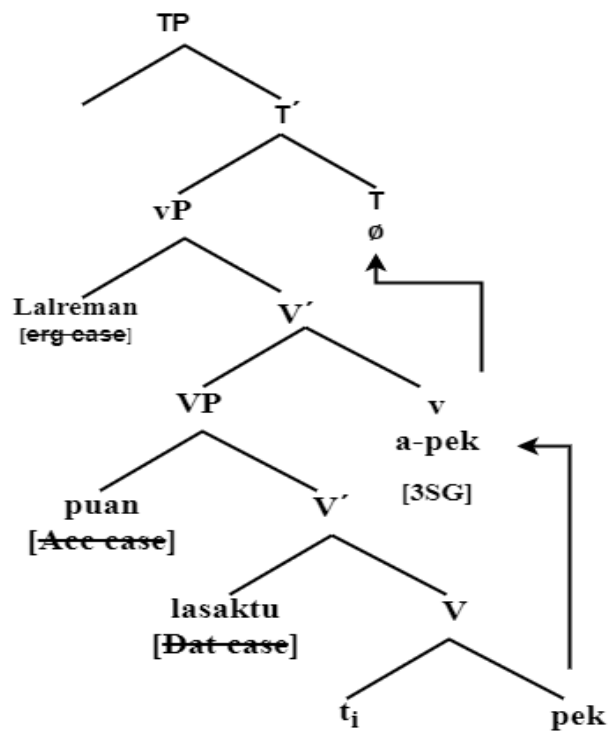


Figure 5.6



The canonical word order of ditransitive sentences is S + IO + DO in Biata. In the above figure 5.6 we can see that the word order is not maintained in the derivation. Biata follows a rigid word order and there is no adpositional phrase to assign case to DP in the construction like (10). Laltlinzo (2019; P 239) in her thesis title ‘Clause Structure in Hmar’ assumes that the verb moves to the AgrS° head for subject agreement and the subject moves to the spec AgrSP for agreement. The object then moves to the spec AgrOP for agreement. To derive the correct order of elements, it may be assumed that the movement of the object NP to spec AgrOP occurs covertly at LF.

7. Zuoli-in           vuli   lekhabu       a-pek  
 Zuoli-erg       Vuli   book           3SG-give  
 Zuoli gave Vuli a book

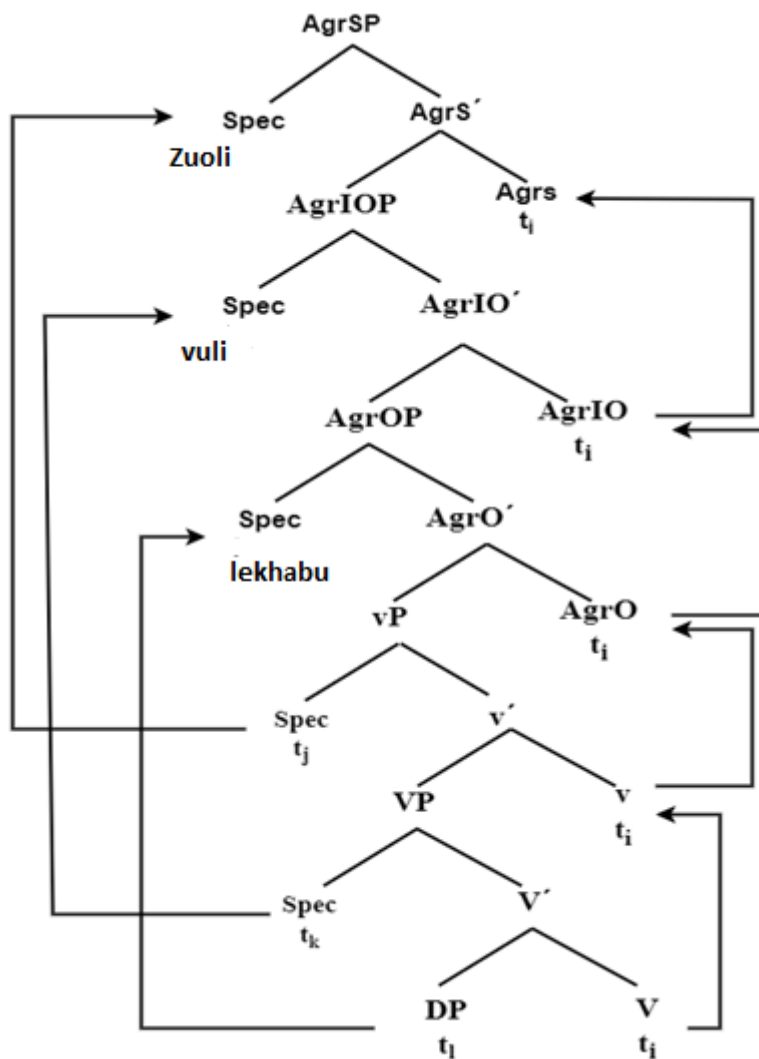


Figure 5.7

In the above Figure 5.7 we can see that the subject moves AgrSP to get the case and agreement. The object also moves from its base position to AgrOP for case and agreement. This kind of derivation is not applicable in Biatac as Biatac has no object agreement. We have no adposition phrase to assign case to the object in the derivation as well. So, the direct object in Biatac gets its case from V and its move from original position to spec of VP. The problem arises when it comes to the case assignment of indirect object in the derivation. Here we assume that the Spec of vP1 is responsible for the subject case and Spec vP2 is for indirect object. So we get the derivation as follows,

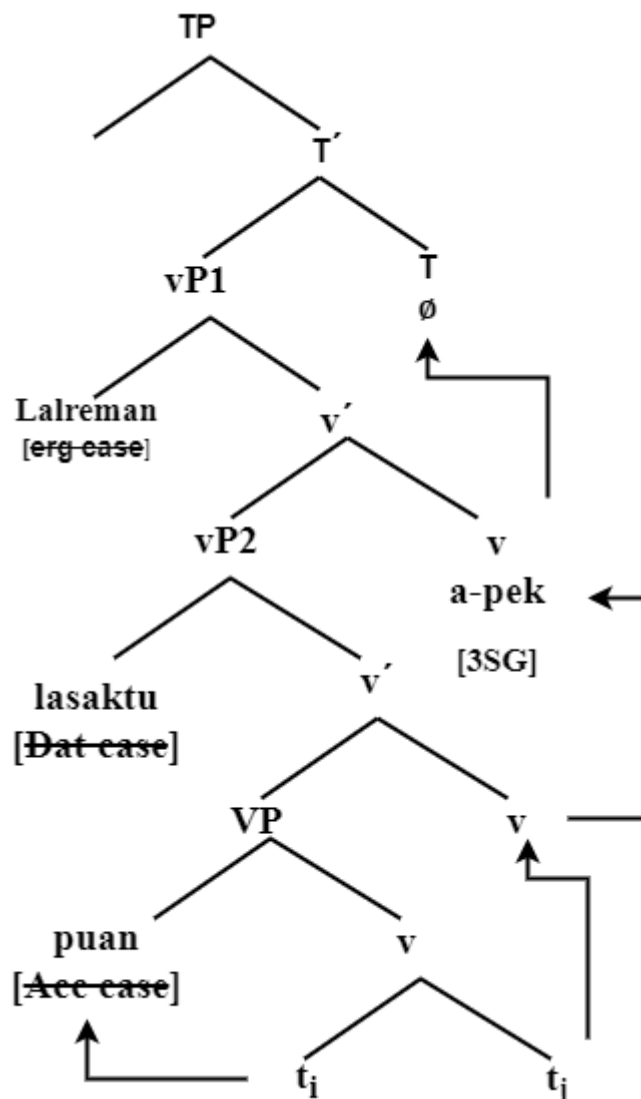


Figure 5.8

In the above derivation we assume that the lower v gives *lasaktu* dative case as well as the thematic role of recipient. The subject gets its inherent case from upper v and also the

thematic role of agent as mentioned earlier. Now, let us look into the construction where the object occurs as clitic.

8. Lalrem-an      puan              a-va-pek  
 Lalrem-ERG    scarf              3SG-3SG-give  
 ‘Lalrem gave him/her a puan’

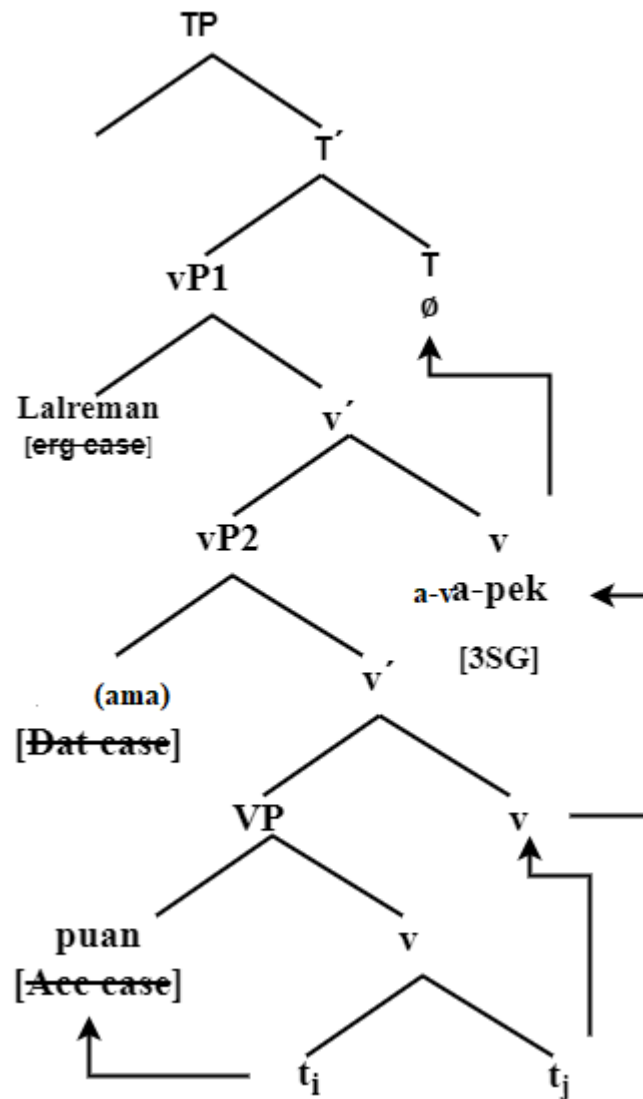


Figure 5.9

In the above example we see that object pronoun is occurs as clitic in the sentence construction. Here we assume that the object NP in vP 2 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. This empty category ‘inherits’ the properties of subcategorization and theta

marking from the co-indexed clitic. So the clitic gets the dative case and the theta role of recipient.

### 5.3 Agreement in Biate

Biate has a rich agreement system 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.

#### 5.3.1 Agreement in Positive Sentences

In positive sentences, we can get obligatory subject-verb agreement in the finite clause in Biate. The verb agrees with the subject in terms of number and person. The agreement markers are seen to preverbal. The following table shows the subject agreement in the language. Here table 2.1 from § 2.2.1 is repeated as 5.1.

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

**Table 5.1: Subject Agreement in Positive Sentences**

. Let us look into the mechanism of agreement system in Biate within the Minimalist program. As mentioned earlier we will adopt here Agr less model.

9. keima-n      ram    a-risui  
 1SG-ERG      ram    3SG-kick  
 'I kicked Ram'.

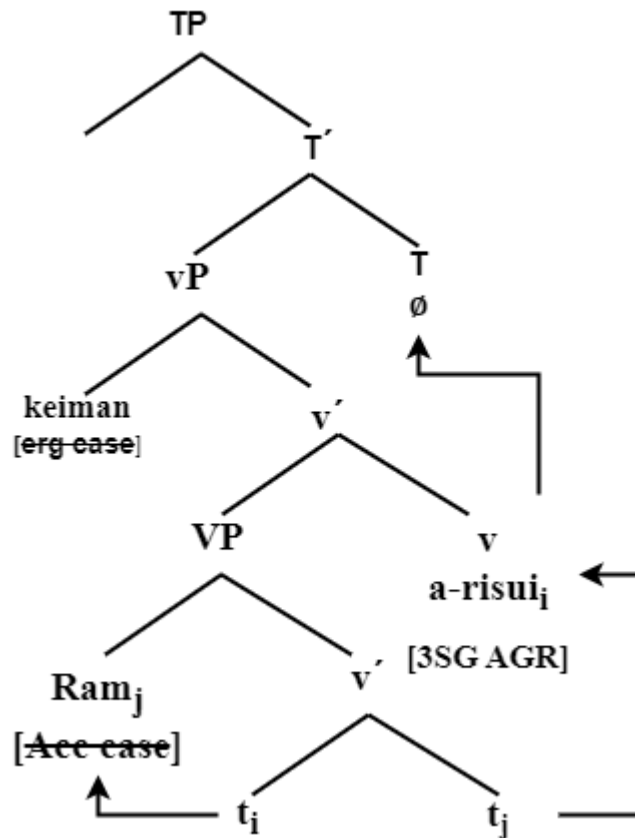


Figure 5.10

In the above derivation the null light verb is affixal, so will trigger rising of verb *risui* from V to v. Here we can see that the main verb *risui* has uninterpretable features of subject agreement. So, verb moves from V to v to establish an agreement between a predicate and its argument (subject-verb agreement). In Biate the subject agreement does not differ with respect to its Tense. As Biate follows Future vs Non future tense system; only the future tense is morphologically realized. If a sentence bears a tense marker in the sentence constructions, the verb further moves from v to T to inflect the tense marker.

### 5.3.2 Agreement in Negative Sentences

As discussed in Chapter 2, in Biate the negative marker *-ma* and *-no* is 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* occurs in the future tense construction. Here it is to be noted that the agreement markers are positioned differently from the positive

sentences. The agreement markers in the positive sentences are prefixed to the main verb as shown in previous section. Whereas, in the negative sentence the agreement markers are suffixed to the main verb. The following table is repeated from § 2.2.2.1 table 2.2.

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

**Table 5.2: Agreement in non-future negative sentences**

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

Pollock (1989), Chomsky (1989; 1995), Mahajn (1990) Dwivedi (1991), and Kumar (2006) claims that NegP is located below TP and above vP. Here if we look at the derivation of Biate syntactic structure (3) we observe that the verb merges with its complement *voksa* 'pork' to form VP. Here the object *Voksa* carries an uninterpretable case feature. VP is merged with the null light verb which will carry unvalued and uninterpretable subject agreement forming the v-bar. The null light verb identifies *voksa* as the only active goal which carries an uninterpretable case feature. As mentioned earlier the light verb is affixal, so it will trigger rising of a verb from V to v. The light verb is transitive it demands an external argument. In the above sentence *keima* 'I' is an external argument with an uninterpretable case feature forming vP. This in turn merges with negative *-ma*. The resulting NegP is merged with the finite T which carries an uninterpretable EPP feature. The EPP feature of T triggers the raising of pronoun *keima* from Spec of vP to Secp of TP. So we will have the following derivation of example (10) as shown in 5.10.

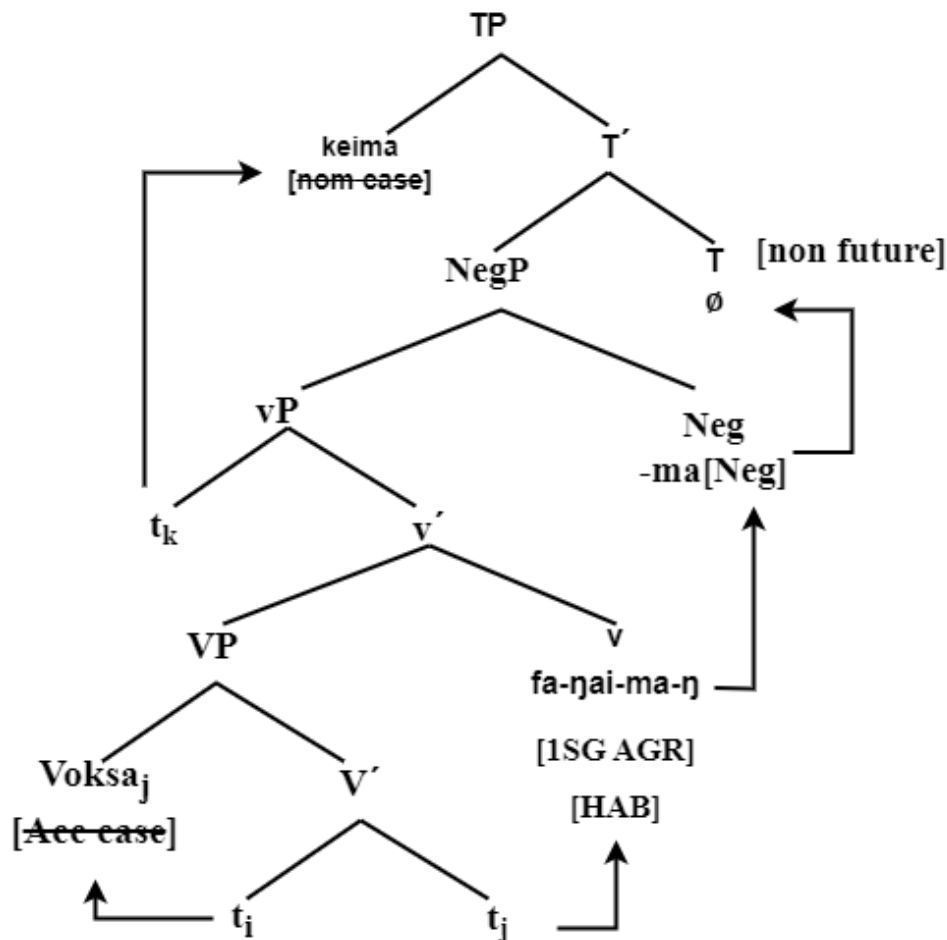


Figure 5.10

The morpheme ‘-no’ is used in the sentence construction to indicate the negation in future sense. We can also see the agreement markers which are suffixed after the negative marker are also different from the agreement markers of non-future negative sentences. The person index and the future tense forms are in fusion as is evident from the inflection of the agreement markers. Table 2.3 from § 2.2.2.2 is repeated as table 5.3 the agreement markers in future negative sentences.

Person	Singular	Plural
First	-niη ‘I’	-niηuη ‘we’
Second	-tin ‘you’	-tinu ‘you’
Third	-ni? ‘he/she/it’	- ni? ‘they’

Table 5.3: Agreement in future negative sentences

11. naŋma      haflon-a?      fe-no-tin  
 2SG          Haflong-LOC   go-NEG-2SG.FUT  
 ‘You will not go to Haflong.’

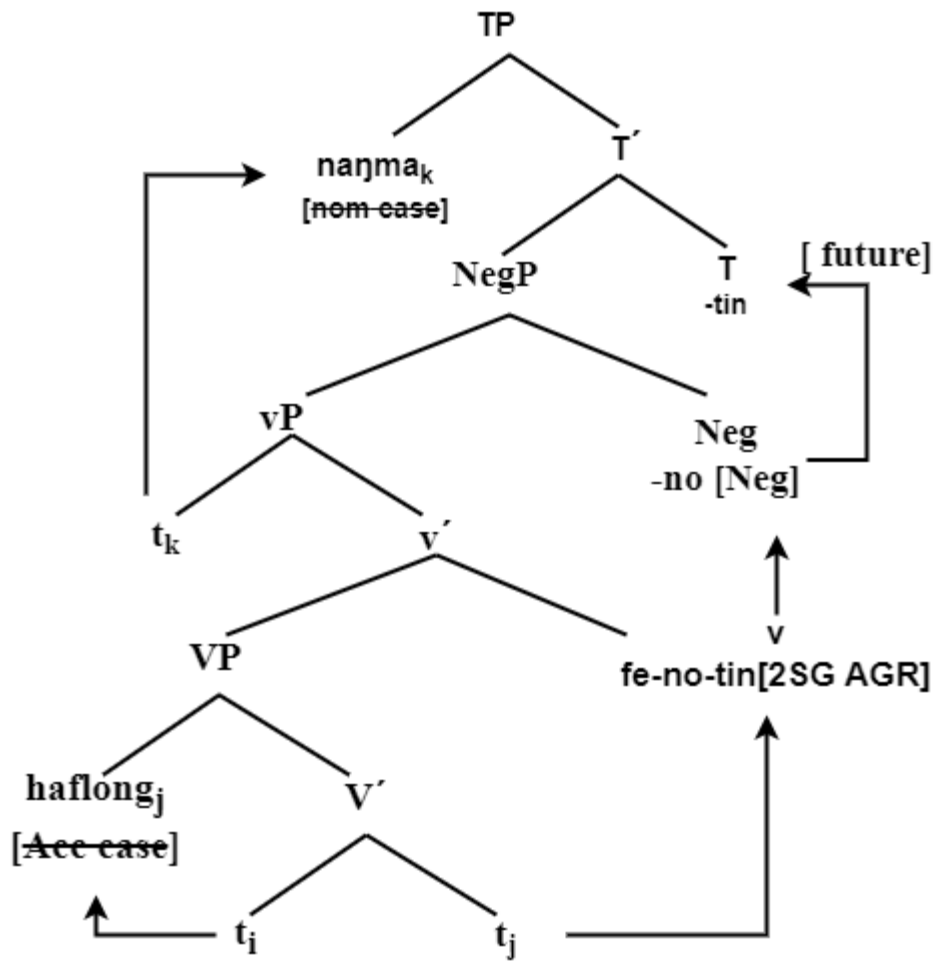


Figure 5.11

In this figure as well we can see that we get the similar construction as in 5.10. Here the light verb is affixal, so it triggers the verb to rise upwards. The verb moves from V to v to get the second person agreement and then it further moves to Neg for the negation and lastly it moves to T to get the tense feature and derive a complex verb *fe-no-tin*.



## **Conclusion**

In this chapter we have discussed the agreement system in Biate. As mentioned earlier we all know that Biate verb agrees in Person and number with the subject. We have seen that in Biate the agreement varies according to the nature of the sentences. In positive sentences we have seen that the agreement marker is prefixed and in the negative sentence it is suffixed to the verb. Again in negative sentences we have seen that there is a difference of agreement markers in negative future tense and negative non-future tense. In this chapter we tried to show the derivation of agreement in the sentence construction. We have seen that the verb in Biate is highly affixal. So, it triggers raising of verb from its original position to be affixed by the agreement markers and in negative construction we have seen that the verb again move upwards get affixed by the negative marker. The verb then ultimately moves to T gets its tense feature checked.

In the second half of the chapter we discussed about the ergative case in Biate. We showed the ergative case in Biate is not grammatical; it is pragmatic based ergative. We have claimed that Biate ergative case is inherent and the case is checked in-situ by v. This v also assigns an theta role to the similar DP.

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