

## General Aspects of Coordination in Assamese

Juri Saikia

Ph.D. Scholar, Department of linguistics, Assam University, Silchar, Assam, 788011, India

### \*Corresponding Author:

Juri Saikia

Email: [juri.saikia@yahoo.co.in](mailto:juri.saikia@yahoo.co.in)

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**Abstract:** Assamese is an Eastern Indo-Aryan language used mainly in the state of Assam, where it is an official language. In an area of great linguistic diversity, it is frequently used as lingua-franca in Assam and neighbouring north-eastern states of India. The word Assamese is an English formation built on the same principle as Japanese. The people call their state as *Oxom* and their language *Oxomiya*. In the past, it was the court language of the Ahom kingdom from 17<sup>th</sup> century. As per details from Census 2001, of the total population of 26,655,528 persons, 13, 010,478 persons were Assamese speakers in Assam. From linguistic point of view, Coordination is a term in grammatical analysis to refer to the process or result of linking linguistic units which are usually of equivalent syntactic status such as clause-clause, phrase – phrase etc. Coordinators have important roles in coordination and these are basically conjunction and disjunction. From socio-linguistic point of view, coordinators show stylistic differences also as some coordinators are used in formal environment and some are used in friendly and informal environment. Instead of it, we are discussing different aspects of coordination in the context of Assamese language like reduction, open-endedness. Thereafter, we are discussing different types of coordination like syndetic coordination, asyndetic coordination and polysyndetic coordination. Combinatory and segregatory meanings are also discussed in coordinated constructions in Assamese.

**Keywords:** coordinator, reduction, open-endedness, syndetic, asyndetic, polysyndetic, combinatory and segregatory meaning.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION:

This study is intended to shed some light on coordination in Assamese. In the words of Quirk *et al.* ‘Coordination is a type of construction where two or more units of the grammatical hierarchy may constitute a single unit of the same kind and which is typically signaled by a link word termed a coordinator [1].

There are different types of coordination – phrase – level coordination, clause – level coordination. Here, the area of investigation is to study some general aspects of coordination in relation to Assamese’.

For this study we have reviewed books and literature[2-5]. The study has been divided into six sections. The second, third and fourth sections are preliminary and basic to the subject under investigation. These are general topics related to coordination. In the sections two, we are discussed about coordinator, its functions and its different usage. In the section three, we discuss the relation between reduction and coordination. In the section four, we try to shed light on open-endedness quality of coordination. In section five, different types of coordination are briefly discussed under further subsections. The final two sections are the concluding section.

### 2. COORDINATOR:

Coordination prototypically contains one or more special markers which belong to a distinct class of words and these words are called coordinators. Coordinators have some semantic roles. One of its most basic semantic roles is that it expresses the logical relation of conjunction and disjunction. In terms of Rodney Huddleston[6], if two propositions ‘p and q’ are conjoined by conjunction, the proposition will be true if both component positions are true and false otherwise. Conversely, if ‘p and q’ are joined by disjunction, resultant coordination will be true if either component position is true and false if both of them are false.

For example,

#### 1. Conjunction:

[ram aru həri] ah-ibə 1(a)  
[ram and-COORD həri] come -3 FUT  
‘Ram and Hari will come.’

#### 2. Disjunction:

[həri naiba tumi] ah-iba 1(b)  
[həri or- COORD you] come-2FUT  
‘Hari or you will come.’

## 2.1. STYLISTIC DIFFERENCES:

At the very beginning, style is a socio-linguistic aspect. The term is often used to signify the variation in speech (or writing) from more formal to more casual. Style would be varied according to the speech situation. A more formal style would be used at ceremonies, public functions, formal discussions whereas a more casual style would be more appropriate for conversation with friends, fellow students or at home. These stylistic differences are also evident in the usage of coordinators. They have formal as well as casual usage in coordinated constructions.

### 2. 1. (i) Formal Usage:

Some coordinators are typically used in formal speech and writing. For example-

(a) kimba 'or'

hāhākīyā hesatei kimba sə-issatei 2(a)  
ruling pressure or – COORD self-intention  
'either because of ruling pressure or because of self intention'

(b) to t<sup>h</sup>a 'and':

dan-bərəṅṅəni tətha ənudan 2 (b)  
contribution and- COORD donation  
'contribution and donation'

**2.I. (ii) Informal Usage:** some coordinators have only informal usage.

a) nəhəle 'or'

[ram-ək nəhəle həri-k] mat-iba 3(a)  
ram-OBJ or-COORD həri-OBJ] call-2 FUT  
'Call either Ram or Hari.'

There are other coordinators like ət<sup>h</sup>əba 'or', ba 'or', kintu 'but' etc. which have popular usage in informal speech or writing.

### 2. II. SPECIFIC USAGE:

Coordinators which are used to coordinate constituents of some status have some other usage also. The following are some examples-

The word /kintu/ 'but' is used not only as coordinator but also as an emphatic element like

tərkari khən teṅa kintu huwad 4(a)  
curry-CL sour but-COORD delicious  
'The curry is sour but tasty.'

tumi ah-ibo-i lag-ibo kintu 4 (b)  
you-SG come-FUT-E must-FUT but-E  
'But you must come.'

### 3. REDUCTION AND COORDINATION:

When we coordinate two or more units, we duplicate the same kind of structure. For example, clause + clause, noun phrase + noun phrase. This kind of duplication does not normally occur without a parallelism of meaning or function between the

conjoins. Such parallelism, in turn implies an overlap of content. For example,

ram-e bhat kha-le 5(a)  
ram-NOM rice eat-3PAST  
'Ram ate rice.'

həri-e bhat kha-le 5 (b)  
həri-NOM rice eat- 3PAST  
'Hari ate rice.'

The sentences in example '5' share a common structure of SOV. They also show the repetition of the words themselves. Both sentences in (5) contain the word sequence -/bhat kha-le/. This sharing of common lexical content is a typical condition under which the reduced alternative is chosen. Not only can (5) be expressed as a single unreduced sentence by the device of coordination as in 6 (a) but it can also be reduced to a more compact form by ellipsis of the first verb with its object like 6 (b). The following examples 6 (a) and 6 (b) will give a better idea of it.

[ram-e bhat kha-le] aru [həri-e bhat kha-le] 6 (a)  
[ram-NOM rice eat-3PAST] and-COORD [həri-NOM rice eat-PAST]  
'Ram ate rice and Hari ate rice.'

[ram and həri]-e b<sup>h</sup>at k<sup>h</sup>a-le 6 (b)  
[ram and-COORD Hari] –NOM rice eat-3PAST  
'Ram and Hari ate rice.'

### 4. OPEN ENDEDNESS:

There is no grammatical limit to the number of constituents which can be coordinated. For example-

[ram aru həri] bhal bəndhu 7 (a)  
[ram and-COORD həri] good friend  
'Ram and Hari are good friends.'

[ram, həri, zədu, mədhu aru nəbi] ah-ibə 7 (b)  
[ram, həri, zədu, məd<sup>h</sup>u and-COORD nəbi]  
come-3FUT  
'Ram, Hari, Madhu and Nabi will come.'

Though, there is no limit to the number of constituents to be coordinated, it is found that in such coordination, the coordinator is used before the last constituent as seen in 7 (b).

### 5. TYPES OF COORDINATION:

#### 5.I. SYNETIC COORDINATION:

Normally, a coordinator is present in coordinated construction. This type of coordination is called syndetic coordination. Assamese has lots of syndetic coordinated constructions like the examples below-

ram aru rəhim ahibə 8 (a)  
Ram and-COORD Rahim come-3FUT  
'Ram and Rahim will come.'

hāh naiba murgi aniba 8 (b)  
 duck or-COORD chicken bring-2FUT  
 ‘Bring duck or chicken.’

\* hita e-hal hukhi dāmpōti 11 (b)  
 Sita a-CL happy family  
 ‘Sita is a happy family.’ (not possible)

### 5. II. ASYNDETTIC COORDINATION:

In some coordination, the coordinator is absent from the construction. This type of coordination is known asyndetic coordination. Semantically, it is evident though coordinator is absent.

For example-  
 [ma-deuta] ah-ibā 9 (a)  
 [mother (and- COORD)father] come -3 FUT  
 ‘parents will come.’

lāra-sowali 9 (b)  
 boy (and-COORD) girl  
 ‘Children’

tamol – pan 9 (c)  
 bittle nut (and– COORD) a kind of leaf  
 ‘ A mouth refreshner’

Let us now take the example of 12. It illustrates the segregatory coordination. We can simply paraphrase it into two different meaningful clauses like 12 (a) and 12 (b).

[ram aru rāhim]-e uttār-to zan-e 12  
 [ ram and-COORD rāhim]- NOM answer-the  
 know-3PRES  
 ‘Ram and Rahim know the answer.’

ram-e uttār-to zan-e 12 (a)  
 ram-NOM answer – the know-3PRES  
 ‘Ram knows the answer

rāhim-e uttār-to zan-e 12(b)  
 rahim-NOM answer-the know-3PRES  
 ‘Rahim knows the answer.’

### 5. III. POLYSYNDETTIC COORDINATION:

Polysyndetic coordinations are those coordinations where more than one coordinator is used to conjoin linguistic units. In Assamese, we have polysyndetic coordinated constructions like –

For example  
 [e-ta kələm aru dui –dista bāhi aru e-dal pensil] an-  
 iba 10  
 [a-CL pen and – COORD two – CL note book and  
 – COORD a- CL pencil] bring-2FUT  
 ‘Bring a pen, two note books and a pencil.’

Many conjoined NPs are ambiguous between a combinatory and segregatory interpretation. For example-

[ram aru rāhim]-e e-ta purāskar pa-le 13  
 [Ram and-COORD Rahim]-NOM a-CL prize get-  
 3PAST  
 ‘Ram and Rahim got a prize.’

This may mean either (a) that Ram or Rahim each got a prize or (b) that the prize was awarded jointly to them.

### 5.IV. COMBINATORY AND SEGREGATORY MEANING:

When phrases are linked by ‘and’ coordinator in the clause, they may express combinatory or segregatory meaning. Combinatory coordination is coordination for which it is inappropriate to provide a paraphrase in terms of coordinated clauses. This is because the coordinators function in combination with respect to the rest of the clause. When coordination is segregatory, on the other hand, we can paraphrase it by clause coordination but is clear with noun phrases.

For illustration, we can take the following example of combinatory coordination

[ram aru hita] ehal hukhi dāmpōti 11  
 [Ram and- COORD Sita] a-CL happy couple  
 ‘Ram and Sita are a happy couple.’

We cannot paraphrase it to simple clause like -

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ram e-hal hukhi dāmpōti 11(a)  
 ram a-CL happy couple  
 ‘Ram is a happy couple.’ (not possible)

### 6. CONCLUSION:

In this investigation, we have looked at different general aspects of coordination in relation to Assamese language. It has been observed that ellipsis is the key motive of coordination. When we coordinate two or more phrases of the same status, the coordinated structure reduces to a more compact form through the process of ellipsis. In addition to it, the coordinators as a linking word play a vital role in coordination. At the same time, we can express coordination without the existence of the coordinator in some constructions. Admittedly, there remains a lot more to be done in this area. But, it is hoped that a modest beginning has been done.

#### Abbreviations:

COORD	COORDINATOR
FUT	FUTURE TENSE
PAST	PAST TENSE
PRES	PRESENT TENSE
PRES PRF	PRESENT PERFECT
1	FIRST PERSON
2	SECOND PERSON

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3	THIRD PERSON
NOM	NOMINATIVE CASE
OBJ	OBJECTIVE CASE
CL	CLASSIFIER
NEG	NEGATIVE PREFIX
E	EMPHATIC MARKER
SUB	SUBJECT
COMP	COMPLEMENT
G	GENITIVE CASE
LOC	LOCATIVE CASE
POSS	POSSESSIVE CASE
PL	PLURAL
DET	DETERMINER
N	NEGATIVE MARKER
NF	NON-FINITE VERB FORM
PP	POST POSITION PHRASE
disj	DISJUNCTION

N.B. Asterisk\* above a sentence makes it ungrammatical.

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