

### Agreement in Biate: Subjects Agree, Objects Cliticize

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Boro (2024) discusses agreement in Biate, a Sino-Tibetan language of the Kuki-Chin branch based on their original fieldwork. In this abstract, we present some of the findings of Boro (2024) and point out open questions which our ongoing fieldwork is currently addressing. The open questions concern the behavior of pronouns in ditransitives and relate to the proper formulation of pronominal licensing and the Person Case Constraint.

**Subject Agreement:** Biate is a subject *pro*-drop language with subject agreement, which is not affected by whether the subject is overtly realized or not or by whether the subject is a pronoun or not.

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| <p>(1) nai-te/Chonge <b>a</b>-in<br/>         child-DIM 3SG-sleep<br/>         ‘The child/Chonge slept.’</p> | <p>(2) (keima) mizan bazar-a? <b>ki</b>-fe<br/>         I yesterday bazar-LOC 1SG-go<br/>         ‘I went to market yesterday.’</p> |
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Subject agreement in positive sentences is prefixal. The distinction between past/present is not morphologically marked but there is an overt suffixal morpheme *-rang* for the future.

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| <p>(3) bazar-a? <b>ai</b>-fe<br/>         bazar-LOC 3SG-go<br/>         ‘He/she goes/went to the market.’</p> | <p>(4) bazar-a? <b>ai</b>-fe-rang<br/>         bazar-LOC 3SG-go-FUT<br/>         ‘He/she will go to market.’</p> |
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Subject agreement becomes suffixal in the presence of negation. While the prefixal exponents of subject agreement are the same for plain positive declaratives and positive future declaratives, the suffixal exponents in plain negative sentences and in future negative sentences are distinct. In fact, the exponent of negation is also distinct in plain negative sentences (*-ma-*) and in future negative sentences (*-no-*).

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| <p>(5) vok-sa fa-ngai-ma-ng<br/>         pig-meat eat-HAB-NEG-1SG.NEG<br/>         ‘I don’t eat pork.’</p> | <p>(6) vuansun zu in-no-ning<br/>         today wine drink-NEG.FUT-1SG.NEG.FUT<br/>         ‘I will not drink wine today.’</p> |
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		SINGULAR	PLURAL
1	PRONOUN	<i>keima</i>	<i>keima-ni</i>
1	SUBJ.AGREEMENT	<i>ki-</i>	<i>ki-n-</i>
1	NEGATION-SUBJ.AGREEMENT	<i>-ma-ng</i>	<i>-ma-ngunge</i>
1	FUTURE.NEGATION-SUBJ.AGREEMENT	<i>-no-ning</i>	<i>-no-ningunge</i>
2	PRONOUN	<i>nangma</i>	<i>nangma-ni</i>
2	SUBJ.AGREEMENT	<i>ni-</i>	<i>ni-n-</i>
2	NEGATION-SUBJ.AGREEMENT	<i>-ma-ktshe</i>	<i>-ma-ktshe</i>
2	FUTURE.NEGATION-SUBJ.AGREEMENT	<i>-no-tin</i>	<i>-no-tinu</i>
3	PRONOUN	<i>ama</i>	<i>anma-ni</i>
3	SUBJ.AGREEMENT	<i>a(i)-</i>	<i>a-n-</i>
3	NEGATION-SUBJ.AGREEMENT	<i>-ma-ke</i>	<i>-ma-ke</i>
3	FUTURE.NEGATION-SUBJ.AGREEMENT	<i>-no-ni?</i>	<i>-no-ni?</i>

The realization of subject agreement points to the following clausal architecture:

- (7) . . . Verb] Aspect] Future] Polarity] Agreement]

In the absence of negation, agreement is realized as a prefix. Future raises to the Polarity head. If the Pol head is Negation, it further raises to Agreement and influences its realization (as a suffix). The combination of the Future with the Pol head creates a portmanteaux which influences both the realization of negation and of subject agreement (still a suffix as determined by negation but with a distinct exponent).

**Object Agreement:** With object agreement, we find complementarity between overt arguments and their coding on the verb. This is quite different from subject agreement which is obligatory irrespective of whether the subject is overt or covert.

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| <p>(8) keima ram ki-(*va)-mu<br/>         1SG Ram 1SG-3-see<br/>         ‘I see Ram.’ <b>overt DO, no ObjAgr</b></p> | <p>(9) keima ki-va-mu<br/>         1SG 1SG-3-see<br/>         ‘I see him/her/them.’ <b>overt ObjAgr, covert DO</b></p> |
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Moreover we find a person split. 1st and 3rd person pronominal direct objects are never overt; they are coded as prefixes on the verb (1 as *ne-*, 3 as *fa/va-*). 2nd person objects are, however, never coded on the verb and are realized as overt arguments.

- (10) keima nang/ram ki-dit  
 1SG 2/Ram 1SG-like  
 ‘I like you/Ram.’

When subject agreement and object agreement appear together, subject agreement precedes object agreement. For singular subjects, we have found the following combinations: *ki-va-* ‘1SG-3’, *ni-ne-* ‘2SG-1’, *ni-va-* ‘2SG-3’, and *a-ne-* ‘3SG-1’. We analyze object agreement as cliticization. 1st and 3rd person pronouns are weak elements that obligatorily undergo head movement to the verb and are realized on it as prefixes. Subject agreement follows and is realized ‘outside’ the object prefixes. 2nd person object pronouns are not weak and do not move to the verb. As a result there is no 2nd person object ‘agreement’.

**Ditransitives:** How does object cliticization work in ditransitives? Can the IO cliticize on to the verb? This is indeed possible. In (11), the IO is an overt non-pronominal DP and it does not cliticize but in (12), it is a 3rd person pronoun which cliticizes.

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| <p>(11) jon-an mari lekhabu a-pek<br/>         John-ERG Mary book 3SG-give<br/>         ‘John gives/gave a book to Mary.’</p> | <p>(12) jon-an lekhabu a-va-pek<br/>         John-ERG book 3SG-3-give<br/>         ‘John gives/gave a book to him/her/them.’</p> |
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IOs are not marked by a special case and they seem to behave like direct objects. If they are weak elements (1 and 3), they cliticize. Otherwise they are overt. This much is clear but now we turn to what we are currently investigating. In all of the ditransitives in Boro (2024), the DO is an overt NP! This means we cannot test what happens if a weak pronoun (1/3) appears as a DO. We also cannot tell what happens if the DO is any kind of pronoun (1/2/3). It is possible that the gaps in our existing data set are due to a version of the Person Case Constraint which forbids all pronouns from the DO position in a ditransitive. It is also possible that the presence of an IO blocks DO cliticization thereby making the DO position in a ditransitive unviable for 1/3 pronouns which being weak must cliticize. The crucial data would be sentences like ‘John gave you to me’, ‘John gave me to you’, ‘John gave me to him’, and ‘John gave me to him’. A further possibility is that the ‘must cliticize’ restriction is not strictly obligatory – rather it is in the way of constraints that must apply if they can but which can be violated if they can’t. It is possible that in ditransitives, 1/3 person DOs will be surface overtly without cliticization. So far we only have preliminary results concerning ‘John gave you to me’/‘John gave me to you’.

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| <p>(13) jon-an nangma a-ne-pek<br/>         John-ERG 2 3SG-1-give<br/>         ‘John gave you to me.’</p> | <p>(14) jon-an keimah nang a-pek<br/>         John-ERG 1 2 3SG-give<br/>         ‘John gave me to you.’</p> |
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Please note that (13-14) are from only one speaker and further data might change our analysis. But they seem to suggest that a 1st person IO can cliticize in the presence of a 2nd person DO, that a 2nd person IO blocks a 1st person DO from cliticizing, and that in this configuration a 1st person object pronoun can be overt. If this interpretation is correct, we would expect that 3IO/1DO and 1IO/3DO combinations will be grammatical with the IO cliticizing allowing the 1/3 pronominal DO to be overt.