

Received 11 April 2023.

Accepted 6 September 2023.

Published July 2025.

DOI: 10.1344/DIALECTOLOGIA.35.6

CONTACT INDUCED CASE MARKING SYSTEM IN KHORTHÁ

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Abstract

The paper focuses on the grammatical relations and case marking in Khortha, a language spoken in the Malda District of West Bengal. The study employs a lexico-structural approach to analyze the noun phrases in Khortha. It also examines the impact of language contact on the evolution of the case marking system in Khortha, which has shown intense contact with Hindi and Bangla spoken in the region. The data suggests that Khortha's structural cases follow Syntax of Bangla, while inherent cases borrow strategies from both Hindi and Bangla. The language exhibits ACC-DAT-GEN syncretism, not attested in either Hindi or Bangla. The study highlights an interesting pattern in the use of oblique case markers, where speakers use markers from both Hindi and Bangla, depending on whether the noun phrase is headed by a pronoun or a noun. The research concludes that Khortha's case marking system has evolved as a result of language contact.

Keywords: case marking, case morphology, patterns of case-marking, grammatical relation, language contact

SISTEMA DE MARCATGE DE CAS PER CONTACTE INDUÏT EN KHORTHÁ

Resum

L'article se centra en les relacions gramaticals i en el marcatge de cas en khortha, una llengua parlada en el districte de Malda, a Bengala Occidental. L'estudi utilitza un enfocament lexicoestructural per

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analitzar els sintagmes nominals en khortha. També examina l'impacte del contacte lingüístic en l'evolució del sistema de marcatge de casos en khortha, que ha mostrat un contacte intens amb l'hindi i el bangla que es parlen a la regió. Les dades suggereixen que els casos estructurals de khortha segueixen la sintaxi del bangla, mentre que els casos inherents manlleva estratègies tant de l'hindi com del bangla. La llengua presenta sincretisme AC-DAT-GEN, que no es troba ni en hindi ni en bangla. L'estudi destaca un patró interessant en l'ús de marcadors de casos oblics, en el quals els parlants utilitzen marcadors tant de l'hindi com del bangla, depenent de si el sintagma nominal està encapçalat per un pronom o un substantiu. La investigació conclou que el sistema de marcatge de casos de khortha ha evolucionat com a resultat del contacte lingüístic.

Paraules clau: marcatge de cas, morfologia de cas, patrons de marcatge de cas, relació gramatical, contacte lingüístic

SISTEMA DE MARCACIÓN DE CASO POR CONTACTO INDUCIDO EN KHORTHHA

Resumen

El artículo se centra en las relaciones gramaticales y en el marcaje de caso en khortha, lengua hablada en el distrito de Malda, Bengala Occidental. El estudio emplea un enfoque léxico-estructural para analizar las frases nominales en khortha. También examina el impacto del contacto lingüístico en la evolución del sistema de marcación de caso en khortha, que ha mostrado un intenso contacto con el hindi y el bengalí hablados en la región. Los datos sugieren que los casos estructurales de khortha siguen la sintaxis del bengalí, mientras que los casos inherentes adoptan estrategias tanto del hindi como del bengalí. La lengua exhibe sincretismo AC-DAT-GEN, no atestiguado ni en hindi ni en bengalí. El estudio destaca un patrón interesante en el uso de marcadores de caso oblicuos, donde los hablantes utilizan marcadores tanto del hindi como del bengalí, dependiendo de si la frase nominal está encabezada por un pronombre o un sustantivo. La investigación concluye que el sistema de marcación de caso de khortha ha evolucionado como resultado del contacto lingüístico.

Palabras clave: marcación de caso, morfología de caso, patrones de marcado de caso, relación gramatical, contacto lingüístico

1. Introduction

The paper probes into the case marking system of Khortha, a lesser-known language spoken in Malda, and in contact with both Bangla and Hindi. Genetic affiliation indicates that the language belongs to the Eastern Indic of the Indo-Aryan language family. Khortha is also classified as a variety of Maithili by (Prasad & Shastri 1958: 9), while others consider it a sub-variant of Hindi (Census 2001, 2011). Etymologically, '*Khortha*' refers to a corrupt or impure form of a language (Prasad & Shastri 1958: 9).

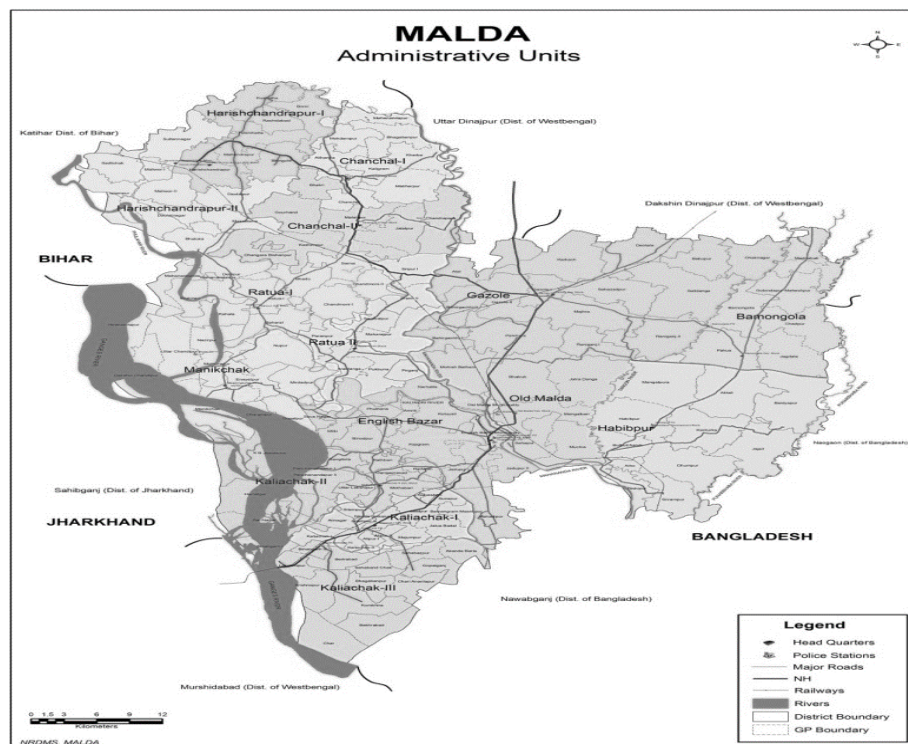
Jha (as cited by Ohdar 2012) argued that the word *Khortha* evolved from the name of the ancient script Kharosthi due to some phonological changes. The paper explores two different ways in which Kharosthi may have evolved into Khortha, as proposed by Jha.

Option 1: Kharostʰi > Kharotʰi > Kharotʰa > Khorʰa

Option 2: Kharostʰi > Kharotʰi > Khalotʰi > Khorʰa

Khortha is a language spoken in the northern part of Jharkhand, as well as in some parts of West Bengal and Bihar. According to the Census 2001, it is officially recognized as the second most spoken language in Jharkhand, with Hindi being the first. It is estimated that around 4,725,927 people speak Khortha as their first language. The language is mainly spoken in the northern districts of Jharkhand, including Hazaribagh, Koderma, Giridih, Bokaro, Dhanbad, Chatra, Ramgarh, Deoghar, Dumka, Sahebganj, Pakur, Godda, and Jamtara. There are several varieties of Khortha, as reported by Banshi (1998.) These include *Shikhriya*, *Khaspailiya*, *Golbari*, *Ramgadia*, and *Devghariya*.

The focus of this paper is on investigating the case marking system used in a specific variation of Khortha that is predominantly spoken in language contact areas located in the Malda District of West Bengal, India. Although Khortha is spoken in several regions across Jharkhand and West Bengal (total speakers 154,766) as per the Census of India 2011, the language is primarily spoken by a small population in areas such as EnglishBazar, Kaliachak, Old Malda, Habibpur, Ratua, Manichak, Khorba (now Chanchal), Harishchandrapur, Gazole, and Bamongola of Malda district. These areas are situated near the state borders of Bihar and Jharkhand, making them susceptible to social, linguistic, and cultural exchange.

Figure 1 Map of Malda District¹

The data has been collected and validated by the L1 speakers of the language. We have also collected secondary data from the Khortha documents, such as books, articles, folklore, lectures, and literary works. The paper focuses on two aspects of Khortha:

1. The structural and inherent case marking
2. Mixed case system due to language contact

2. Patterns of case-marking

Dixon (1994: 24, 29-30) divides the Case marking system in world languages into two categories: the semantically based system that marks NPs according to semantic function (agent, patient, etc.) and the syntactically based system that marks NPs according to function. According to Blake (2001: 1), "Case is a system of marking

¹ Retrieved from <https://www.malda.gov.in/maps> on 22 Sep. 2022.

dependent nouns for the type of relationship they bear to their heads'. Each form is examined in terms of a specific range of structural functions and meaning; for example, nominative refers to the grammatical subject of the sentence, whereas genitive relates to concepts such as possession, origin, and so on.

Chomsky (1981) incorporates the conventional notion of 'case' as a surface structure phenomenon but differs from traditional grammar in that it considers case to be an abstract universal feature of all NPs, whether or not they are morphologically marked. It is a highly modular theory based on principles rather than rules, and where syntactic relationships are structural. The case is assigned under terms of government, for instance, the nominative case is valued by the finite tense (T) head, and the accusative case is licensed by the little (Chomsky 1995) under *Agree*. Cases like Genitive and Dative are considered to be lexically specified.

Blevins (2008) identifies three patterns in case systems: 1) extensive case inventories with a split system, 2) declension-internal patterns, and 3) implicational structure based on the relative informativeness of case forms.

To summarize, two major case-marking patterns exist across languages (Blake 2001). The nominative-accusative (or simply: accusative) case-marking system is defined as a grammatical pattern in which the subject of an intransitive verb (S) gets the same morphological treatment *as the subject of a transitive verb (A)* while the object of the transitive verb (P) is treated differently. But, in the ergative-absolutive (or simply: ergative) system, the subject of an intransitive verb gets the same morphological treatment as the object of a transitive verb, while the subject of a transitive verb is treated differently (Dixon 1994).

The neutral case marking system in which all of S, A, and P are marked in the same way can be illustrated by Mandarin examples (1a-b), here it is noticed that neither the one-place intransitive predicate S of (1a) ('the person') nor the two-place transitive predicate A of (1b) ('Zhangsan') and P of (1b) ('Lisi') receives any case marking.

(1a) rén lái le Mandarin (Li & Thompson 1981: 20)

person come CRS

The person has come.

Note (CRS: Currently Relevant State)

(1b) zhāngsān mà lǐsì le ma
Zhangsan scold Lisi CRS Q (Question Marker)

The person has come.

Consider the accusative case-marking system as in the Bangla examples (2a-b), in which S ('bird') and A ('boy') are marked alike, while P ('bird') is marked differently.

(2a) pak^{hi}-ta-Ø ur-tʰi-l-o (Bangla)

bird-CLF-NOM fly-CONT-PST-3

The bird was flying.

(2b) tʰele-ta-Ø pak^{hi}-ta-ke āk-tʰi-l-o

child-CLF-NOM bird-CLF-ACC draw-CONT-PST=3

The boy was drawing a bird.

The ergative case marking system can be noticed in Dyirbal examples (3a-b).

(3a) ŋuma-Ø banaga-nyu Dyirbal (Dixon 1994: 160)

father-ABS return-Nfut

Father returned.

(3b) ŋuma-Ø yabu-ŋgu bura-n.

father-ABS mother-ERG see-Nfut

Mother saw father.

Now consider the following examples from Khortha Spoken in Malda.

Intransitive

(4) c^houra-ʈa ɖouɽle

boy-CLF run-PST-3SG

'The boy ran.'

Transitive

- (5) c^houra-ṭa okə-r b^hai-ke dek^hke
 Boy-CLF her/his-GEN brother-ACC see-PST-1
 The boy saw her brother.

As we can see in (4-5), in Malda's Khortha S and A behave in the same way (e.g., both are Nominative) while P is different (e.g., Accusative). Therefore, the case system in Malda's Khortha can be described as a nominative-accusative system. However, in other varieties of Khortha spoken in Jharkhand, the ergative pattern (Das 2013), Kumari (2021) is noticed.

In his study, Das (2013) investigated the morphosyntactic alignment of Khortha, a language spoken in Jharkhand, and observed the use of the ergative marking.

Examples 6(a-c) explicate intransitive sentences (Das 2013: 3).

- (6a) c^hōṛa g^hor gel-o (Jharkhand variety)
 boy-3MS-NOM house-LOC go-PERF-3M
 'The boy went home.'
- (6b) c^hōri kohē gel c^he
 girl-3FS-NOM somewhere go be-IMPRF-PRST-3FS
 'The girl has gone somewhere.'
- (6c) həmsəb āḡənwa-mə beṭ^hwa-mə
 we-1PI-NOM courtyard-LOC sit-be-IMPRF-PST-1PL
 'We were sitting in the courtyard.'

Transitive sentences are shown in 7(a-d).

- (7a) chōṛāṭa kṛtəba pəṛ^hə-l-ke (Khortha: Jharkhand variety)
 boy-3MS-ERGthat book read-PERF-PRST-3S
 'The boy has read that book.' (Das 2013: 4)
- (7b) həmə ṛṭa kṛtəba pəṛ^hə-l-ke
 1S-ERG this book read-PERF-PRST-1S
 'I have read this book.'
- (7c) tohē ṣṭa kṭāa pəṛ^h-l-i-hi
 you-2SH-ERG that book read-PERF-PRST-2SH
 'You have read that book.'

- (7d) c^hoŋi iṭa cṭṛia lik^hə-lə hot-e
 girl-3FS-ERG this letter write-PERF BE-FUT-3S
 The girl must have written this letter.

The following examples of Khortha (Jharkhand variety) show that the nasalization on the final syllable of the subject indicates ergativity in transitive sentences, as seen in examples 7 (a-d). Moreover, in a transitive sentence, ‘-ě’ is used for consonant ending words like ‘to^h’, ‘you’, and ‘hām’, ‘l,’ and ‘-~’ for vowel ending words like ‘chōṛǎ’ ‘boy, and ‘chōṛɪ’ ‘girl’. Thus, it can be noted that the Jharkhand variety of Khortha displays an Ergative-absolutive pattern, while the Malda variety exhibits a Nominative-accusative alignment.

2.1 Case and Declensional Paradigms

Declension modifies words through inflection to indicate their function in a sentence. It conveys information like number, case, gender, and person. Case markers play a crucial role in creating case paradigms, which form the structure of declensional paradigms. These paradigms vary in structure due to the diverse features of cases and the influence of the case system patterns. (Blevins 2008).

According to Greenberg (1963), pronominals usually include a minimum of three persons and two numbers. “In many languages, in the majority, there is some kind of pronominal representation of certain core grammatical relations quite apart from their representation via noun phrases” (Blake 2004: 13). The pronominal declension chart of Khortha has been provided in the below table.

	NOM	ACC/DAT/GEN	LOC
1SG	həmma- Ø	həmmə-r	həmmər mē
1PL	həmmə-səni	həmmər-səni-ke	həmmər-səni-mē
2SG	ṭu	ṭə-r	ṭər -mē
2PL	ṭər- səni	ṭər-səni-ke	ṭər-səni -mē
3SG	u	əkə-r	əkər- mē
3PL	u- səni	əkər - səni-ke	əkər - səni- mē

Table 1. Pronominal Declension Chart

From the table, it can be argued that - *sāni* is used for marking the plural in all three persons. The pronominals are marked with -*r*. When the pronoun is pluralized with- *sāni*, -*ke* shows up as the case marker for all three types.

Compare this with Bangla in Table 2.

Number	NOM	ACC/DAT	GEN	LOC
1SG	ami-∅	ama-ke	ama-r	ama-j
1PL	am-ra	ama- <i>ḡer</i> -ke	ama <i>ḡer</i>	-
2SG	tui-∅	tō-ke	tō-r	tō- <i>ṭe</i>
2PL	tō-ra	tō <i>ḡer</i> -ke	tō <i>ḡer</i>	-
3SG	je-∅	tā-ke	tar	tā- <i>ṭe</i>
3PL	tā-ra	tā- <i>ḡer</i> -ke	tā <i>ḡer</i>	-

Table 2. Pronominal Declension Chart in Bangla

In Bangla, a Dative-Accusative case syncretism is observed, while the Genitive case is marked distinctly. In plural NPs, a portmanteau morph (-*ḡer*) stands for both plural and genitive. Generic Pronouns in Bangla take the plural suffix ‘-*ra*,’ but unlike in Khortha, the locative case cannot occur with plural NPs. When comparing Khortha and Bangla pronouns, we see that the suffix ‘-*r*’ is used for marking the Genitive case. However, in Khortha, the suffix ‘-*r*’ is used syncretically for all three case markers - Dative, Genitive, and Accusative. In the presence of a plural suffix on Khortha pronouns, the marker changes to ‘-*ke*,’ which is the Accusative-Dative case marker coming from Bangla. In Hindi, the Genitive case marker (-*ka/-ki*) agrees with the gender of the governing noun, but Khortha lacks grammatical gender marking. The case markers on the pronominals in the Malda variety of Khortha show a clear resemblance to the neighboring Bangla language. We will discuss the case marking patterns in Khortha in sections 2.2 and 2.3. We will show the contact-induced changes in section 3.

2.2 Grammatical case

The morphological case is the surface case form assigned to either a noun phrase or a pronoun phrase depending on its occurrence within a sentence (Sobin 2011: 157). This type of case marking is referred to as grammatical case marking, in contrast with Semantic Case marking, which is determined by semantic roles, and encodes semantics relations between DP and the governing head (Wunderlich & Lakämper 2001: 4-7).

Grammatical cases are generally used for structural relations, such as position, number, and ranking of arguments, realized at most once in a clause to avoid ambiguity. Moreover, languages tend to use morphological mechanisms to distinguish between two types of direct objects. Some direct objects are marked with a morphological Case, whereas others are left unmarked or marked with a different case (Comrie 1979, de Hoop 1996, Kiparsky 1998, Aissen 2003). For example, a case marker is used to mark the transitive verb's direct object and indicate the goal of motion in a clause, which is traditionally referred to as the Accusative case.

2.2.1 External Argument

Let's consider the following example of Malda's variety of Khortha. This variety shows Nominative-Accusative alignment unlike the Jharkhand Variety as shown in section 0.

- (8) sɪtə kʰushi həi
 Sita-3SG happy be-PRS-3
 Sita is happy.

- (9) sita sukʰ mǝ həi
 sita happy LOC be.PERF
 Sita has been happy.

Khortha does not exhibit split ergativity unlike Hindi, which show nominative-accusative alignment in non-perfective aspects and ergative-absolutive pattern in

perfective aspect. The nominative-accusative alignment does not get affected due to changes in the aspect as in habitual (8) or continuous (10) or perfective as in (11).

- (10) ram rahul-ke pit-te hə-l-e
 Ram -NOM-3S Rahul-ACC beat-CONT be-PST-3
 Ram was beating Rahul.

- (11) sita jən-ke pəsin kar-k-e
 Sita John-ACC like do-PERF.PRS-3
 Sita has liked John.

2.2.2 Internal argument

Accusative markers show a different marking system. The case marker /ke/ in example (12) indicates the accusative case when the direct object appears as a Noun phrase.

- (12) ram kailas-ke pit-te hə-l-e
 Ram -NOM Kailash-ACC beat-CONT be-PST-3
 Ram was beating Kailash.

If the direct object is a pronoun, then it is marked with /-r/ as in (13).

- (13) ram həmmar pit-te hə-l-e
 Ram -NOM I-ACC beat-CONT be-PST-3
 Ram was beating me.

Split in the realization of direct objects is often categorized as *Differential Object Marking* (DOM), found cross-linguistically Comrie (1989), Levin (2019). The factors identified for DOM are Animacy, definiteness, and specificity. In example (16) the accusative case is wrongly invoked on the inanimate direct object NPs and leads to ungrammaticality.

- (14) *kərim čay-ke/-r pi-l-ke
 Karim-NOM Tea-ACC Drink-PST-3
 Karim drank tea.

Inanimate direct object NPs are optionally case marked as in the example (17). Basically *-ke* values the feature of specificity rather than the case.

- (15) tu boi-gəla-(ke) rəkʰi-rəhəl-li
 you-NOM book-PL-ACC keep- CONT-2
 You are keeping the books.

The morphological accusative case does not show up on an animate direct object NPs on generic reading as in example (16).

- (16) həmə cʰoura kʰəji-rəhəl-iyə
 I-NOM-1S boy search-CONT-1
 I am searching for (any) boy.

2.2.3 Non-nominative external arguments

Many Languages mark external arguments with case markers other than the nominative. Typically, In Hindi, such external arguments are marked by dative case.

- (17) rəhim-ko bukʰar he
 rahim-DAT fever AUX.PRS
 Rahim has fever.

According to Bhat (2003), although the dative case is typically used to mark experiencer subjects, not all languages follow this pattern. In Bangla, for instance, the experiencer subject is marked with the genitive case instead. For Dative Subject Constructions we call it DSC and for Experiencer Subject Constructions we call it ESC.

- (18) rohim-er gʰum peje-tʃʰ-e (Bangla, ESC)
 Rahim-GEN sleep get-PERF-3
 Rahim fell asleep.

- (19) ram-ke ʃkul-e ʃete hobe (Bangla, DSC)
Ram-DAT school-LOC go AUX-FUT
Ram will have to go to School.

However, Khortha shows interesting facts in marking the non-nominative subjects. In table 1 of section 2.1, it was noted that Khortha Exhibits an ACC-DAT-GEN syncretism when it comes to marking. We found two separate case markers *-r* and *-ke* which are consistent with the following facts

I. All NPs occupied by the pronouns show *-r* marking for Dative, Accusative, and Genitive marking

II. All NPs occupied by plural pronominals and proper nouns get marked with *-ke*.

For the notational purpose, we will gloss *-r* as genitive and *-ke* as dative.

Let us consider I & II in the light of the following examples:

- (20) həmmar nin α gele (Pronoun subject, ESC)
I-GEN sleep come go-PST-3
I fell asleep.
- (21) rəɦim-ke nin α gele (proper noun Subject, ESC)
Rahim-DAT sleep come go-PST-3
Rahim fell asleep. (lit. Sleep came to Rahim.)
- (22) tər-səni-ke roʃ tʰana abela hua (Plural Pronoun Subject, DSC)
you-PL-DAT daily police station come-INF Aux.PRS
You all have to come police station every day.
- (23) ram-ke aj skul-mě jabela hua (Proper noun Subject, DSC)
Ram-DAT Today school-LOC go-INF was
Ram had to go school today.

The case facts for non-nominative constructions can be summarized as the following:

Hindi	Bangla	Khortha
Dative and Experiencer subjects both are marked with DAT case. GEN case is not possible on Experiencer Subjects.	DAT subjects are DAT case marked. Experiencer subjects are marked with GEN case.	Experiencer subjects that are singular pronouns get marked with GEN case marker of Bangla. DSC and ESC subjects occupied by proper nouns and plural NPs are marked by Dative Case.

Interestingly, the ACC-DAT case marker in Hindi is *-ko* and *-ke* in Bangla. The Khortha spoken in this region seems to have preferred the marker phonologically similar to Bangla. The genitive case of Bangla has been borrowed only in the case of experiencer subject constructions filled with pronouns.

2.2.4 Internal arguments in ditransitive

Let us consider the ditransitive construction in Khortha in (24).

- (24) hamma jən-ke sita-ke sange p^hecan kər-ɑ-li-ye
 I-NOM John-ACC Sita-OBL with introduce do-CAUS-PST-3
 I introduced John to Sita.

Both the direct and the indirect objects are marked by the *-ke* suffix in (26). We can argue that the accusative case (ke_1) has been assigned by the little *v* on John and an oblique case (ke_2) appears on Sita since postpositions are non-projecting categories following Spencer (2005). This follows the semantic case configuration and the locality restrictions of theta role assignment. The reason for arguing in favor of these two types of *-ke* in Khortha is because the oblique case *-ke₂* shows a complementary distribution.

Consider the following ditransitive construction where the indirect object is occupied by a pronoun as in (25).

- (25) hamma jən-ke okə-r sange p^hecan kər-ɑ-li-ye
 I-NOM John-ACC Sita-OBL with introduce do-CAUS-PST-3
 I introduced John to him.

In (25) the same oblique argument gets marked by the /-r/ suffix following the dichotomy of Noun and Pronoun case markings in Khortha.

2.3 Semantic case

Semantic cases (for example, genitive, dative, instrumental, ablative, locative) need compatibility with the semantic class of the verb.

2.3.1 Dative

In some languages, the dative case is used to indicate the recipient or beneficiary of an action. The dative case can also appear on the subject of a sentence in languages such as Georgian and Hindustani (Hindi-Urdu). In Khortha, the dative case also shows up in the subject position. The /ke/ suffix in Khortha, as in examples (26-27), marks the non-nominative subject and the indirect object, the dative case.

- | | | | |
|------|------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| (26) | rəhɪm-ke | bok ^h ar həi | |
| | Rahim-DAT | fever | has-PRES-3 |
| | Rahim has fever. | | |
| (27) | rəmes | mohən-ke | həlwa de-l-ke |
| | Ramesh-NOM | Mohan-DAT | sweet Give-PST-3 |
| | Ramesh gave sweets to Mohan. | | |

However, in the case of ESC, if the external argument is occupied by a singular pronoun, it shows genitive marking.

- | | | | | |
|-----|----------------|-------|------|----------|
| 28) | həmmar | nin | ɑ | gele |
| | I-GEN | sleep | come | go-PST-3 |
| | I fell asleep. | | | |

2.3.2 Locative

Semantic cases are used to mark oblique arguments and adjuncts through prepositions or postpositions (Kroeger 2005). In Khortha, the post position /mẽ/ in (29) and (30) indicates spatial and temporal paths similar to Hindi.

- (29) gɪtə həmə-r gʰər mẽ rəhə
 Gita-NOM I-GEN House PP Stay-PRES-3
 Gita stays in my house.

- (30) həmə cər ʃəl mẽ ekbar gʰər əy-e
 I-NOM four year-LOCPP once House come-PRES-1
 I come home once in four years.

2.3.3 Ablative and instrumental

In the case of Ablative case constructions, postposition *se* is used.

- (31) gacʰ se pətta gida
 Tree PP leaf fall-PERF.PRS
 Leaves are falling from the tree.'

Khortha also marks Instrumental with /se/. For example,

- (32) həmmə caku se am kət-l-iyē (Khortha)
 I-NOM knife PP mango cut-PST-1SG
 I cut mango with a knife.

2.3.4 Genitive

Now let us turn to the genitive case assignment in Malda's Khortha. If the governing noun is a noun phrase the marker shows up as *-ke* as in the following examples (33-35).

- | | | | |
|------|------------------------|-------|--------------|
| (33) | sita-ke | caca | |
| | Sita-GEN | Uncle | (Kinship) |
| | Sita's uncle. | | |
| (34) | rames-ke | kələm | |
| | Ramesh-GEN | pen | (Possession) |
| | Ramesh's pen. | | |
| (35) | pok ^h ər-ke | pani | |
| | Pond-GEN | Water | (Source) |
| | Pond's water. | | |

Noteworthy unlike Hindi, the genitive case is not controlled by grammatical gender.

- | | | | |
|------|----------------------|-------|-----------|
| (36) | sita-ki/ram-ka | caca | (Hindi) |
| | Sita-GEN.F/Ram-GEN.M | Uncle | (Kinship) |
| | Sita/Ram's uncle. | | |

We also notice the use of the /-r/ suffix in the case of singular pronominals to yield the genitive case in Malda's Khortha.

- | | | | |
|------|-----------|-------------------|-------------|
| (37) | həmmə-r | g ^h ər | |
| | 1SG-GEN | house | (Ownership) |
| | My house. | | |

The default Genitive case suffix is -ke albeit further specified by the -r suffix only in case of singular pronoun. The marking does not alter irrespective of whether the pronoun occurs in the subject, direct object, or indirect object positions.

- | | | | |
|------|--------------------|--------|--|
| (38) | rad ^h a | okə-r | b ^h alobasa/ b ^h aləbasa |
| | Radha-NOM | 3P-GEN | love-PRES-3 |
| | 'Radha loves her. | | |

Let us now consider the case hierarchy in Khortha.

2.4 Case hierarchy

According to Blake (2001: 86), “Various types of case marker can be ordered in terms of their formal properties (e.g., free vs. bound), and these formal properties can be shown with the hierarchical ordering of cases and grammatical relation”. Blake (2001) has also argued that the inflectional case systems tend to be built up in the following order.

NOM	ACC/ERG	GEN	DAT	LOC	ABL/INST	OTHERS
Case suffix				post positions		

Figure 2. Order of inflectional case systems and split in Khortha

Malda’s Khortha language, like many other languages in the Indian subcontinent, exhibits a case marking system that utilizes both postpositions and inflectional case endings. Blake (2001: 89) also interpreted the case hierarchy as follows.

(1) If a language has a locative case, it will almost always have a nominative, at least one additional basic case, a genitive, and a dative.

(2) It usually has a nominative, accusative, or ergative or both, genitive, dative, and locative, and so on, if it has an instrumental or ablative.

In Khortha, the Nominative, Accusative, Dative, and Genitive cases are marked with case suffixes, while the Instrumental, Locative, and Ablative cases are marked with postpositions.

Whaley (1997) has suggested the following hierarchy to elicit the relationship between case and agreement markers.

Subject>direct object> indirect object >other	
Agreement < ----- >	
	< ----- > Case

Whaley (1997) argues that subjects are the most salient entity in terms of the agreement. Subjects usually agree with the verbs in terms of Person, Number, or

Gender features. This is the reason nominative case often does not get marked with overt morphology. Elements that do not agree with the verb in terms of agreement features often get licensed by theta marking and case marking. In order to establish the grammatical relations, the case needs to be overtly marked from right to the left on the above scale. In Khortha, Subjects agree with the verbs for person. Direct objects, indirect objects, and other noun phrases are marked by case.

The next section elaborates on the nature and possible reasons for the mixed case system in the Malda variety of Khortha.

3. Mixed case system due to language contact

In this section, we describe the (i) contact situation and the (ii) reasons and effects of language contact. Finally, we discuss (iii) the contact-induced changes in the Khortha case system.

3.1 Demographical contact

The significance of morphology in language contact situations has grown in importance for both morphology and language contact research since Wilkins (1996). The focus of contact morphology study program was initiated on the borrowability of morphological elements, which demonstrated that contact-induced morphological changes often occur between languages. To illustrate the impact of neighboring languages such as Bengali and Hindi on Malda's Khortha, it is crucial to examine the linguistic situation in Malda. Malda is bordered by Murshidabad district to the south, North Dinajpur and South Dinajpur to the north, and the Bangladesh border to the east. In this region, various Bangla dialects are spoken, with the most intriguing sociolinguistic characteristics found in the western region of Malda. This linguistic area is surrounded by Austroasiatic languages (e.g., Munda, Santali) and Indo-Aryan

languages (e.g., Hindi, Bhojpuri) and Eastern Indic languages (e.g., Maithili, Khortha) as it borders Purnia in Bihar and Santhal Parganas in Jharkhand.

3.2 Language and prestige

While several languages can interact and influence one another, Bengali and Hindi are considered the most prestigious or 'correct' in this region due to language contact, resulting in their significant influence on Malda's Khortha. Furthermore, Hindi has a widespread presence in society through movies, television broadcasting, and social media. Bengali also serves as a lingua franca in this region, with less prestigious languages like Munda languages being significantly influenced by it, but not vice versa.

In the case of Khortha, close contact with other languages in this region has led to widespread bilingualism among its speakers, resulting in elements from one language transferring to or influencing the other. Case marking is no exception to this linguistic exchange. However, due to the prestige and lack of social contact between speech communities, linguistic exchange between Munda languages (e.g., Santali) and Khortha is almost nonexistent in this region. Speakers of Khortha primarily use Bengali and Hindi in social activities, while Santali is almost absent in social life, and very little use of Khortha can be seen. Therefore, linguistic exchange between these speech communities is almost nonexistent.

Bhojpuri has entered West Bengal, including Malda, through various types of Bhojpuri songs, but linguistic exchange remains silent. Maithili is almost unused in any sphere of society in Malda and may remain limited to a few families. As a result, the exchange of linguistic elements between Maithili and Khortha or other languages in this area is close to nonexistent.

3.3 Contact induced changes

Case marking in language contact situations is a multifaceted issue that involves various complex phenomena both structurally and semantically. As previously mentioned, the case system in Malda's Khortha is expressed and marked by case

suffixes and postpositions similar to Bengali and Hindi. Therefore, it shares some structural similarities with these languages. To better understand the similarities and differences in the case of marking between Malda's Khortha, Bengali, and Hindi, a comparative chart is presented below.

Case markers in Hindi, Bengali, and Malda's Khortha						
Case	Hindi		Bengali		Khortha	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
NOM	∅	∅	∅	∅	∅	∅
ERG	-ne					
ACC						
DAT	-ko		-ke	-ḍer-ke	-r,-ke	sāni-ke
GEN	-ki/ -ka		-er, r	-ḍer		
ABL	se		hoṭe, ṭheke		se	
LOC	Mē, pər		-e, -ṭe, -j		mē	
INST	se		ḍije		se	

Table 3. Case Markers in Language Contact

What is observable in table 3 is that the structural case pattern shows a preference for the Bangla system both in terms of syntax (nominative-accusative alignment) and phonology (a marker for ACC-DAT). The semantic or inherent case markers (ablative, dative, instrumental, locative) in Khortha are similar to Hindi. In the case of Genitive, the borrowing of case markers exhibits a distinction between singular pronouns and other kinds of Noun phrases. For singular pronouns, the marker is identical to that of Bangla; for other kinds of NPs the marker has been adopted from Hindi but the grammatical agreement is lost. This argument is further illustrated in the form of case syncretism and direct, oblique, and vocative case forms in Khortha.

3.3.1 Case syncretism

Case syncretism is a typical occurrence in the case system of South Asian languages. Masica (1991: 238) notes that “[i]f generally in the AG/INSTR/SOC/ABL cases that categories may be variously collapsed: e.g., Hindi combines Instrumental,

Sociative, and Ablative *se* while differentiating Agentive *ne*". Consider the *instrumental-ablative* syncretism in Hindi.

- (39) ram kələm se ek cit^hi lek^hla (Hindi)
 Ram pen PP one letter write-PST-3P
 Ram wrote a letter with a pen.
- (40) peṛo se patta girṭa he
 tree PP leaves fall.SG AUX-PRS
 The leaves fall from the tree.

Khortha also marks Instrumental (41) and Ablative (42) with a single form /se/.
 For example,

- (40) həmmə caku se am kət-l-iyə (Khortha)
 I-NOM knife PP mango cut-PST-1SG
 I cut mango with a knife.
- (41) dud^h se dəhi huə
 milk PP curd AUX.PRS
 The curd is made from milk.

The case suffixes of Khortha are summarized below:

	Case Name	Suffix	Function
GRAMMATICAL CASES	Nominative	Ø	Subject/External argument
	Accusative	-ke (with NP and Plural) -r (with Pronominals)	Direct object +Animate +Specific
	Ergative	X	Not visible
SEMANTIC CASES	Dative Genitive	-ke,-r Just like the Accusative distribution	Non-Nominative subjects, Indirect objects
	Instrumental	se	Instrument
	Locative	mē	Location
	Ablative	se	Displacement
	Vocative	re, ho, ge	

Table 4. The Case suffixes of Khortha

Case syncretism is also present in Khortha, particularly in the ACC-DAT-GEN and Instrumental-Ablative cases, where multiple cases are expressed by the same morphological form. In terms of the genitive case, Khortha exhibits marking similar to both Bangla and Hindi, but unlike Hindi, the genitive marking in Khortha does not agree with the gender of the possessor.

- (43) sɪta-ke caca
 Sita-GEN Uncle
 Sita's uncle.
- (44) rames-ke kələm
 Ramesh-GEN pen
 Ramesh's pen.

3.3.2 Co-occurrence and ditransitive

Let's consider the co-occurrence of case suffixes and postpositions in all three languages.

- (45) laʃke-ne laʃki-ke saṭʰ larai kija t̪ʰa
 boy-ERG girl-OBLwith fight do AUX-PST
 The boy fought with the girl.
- (46) maa bəcce-ke liye kʰana lijnaṭʰa
 mother child-OBL PP food take AUX-PST
 Mother too food for child.

The examples show, in Hindi, the oblique case suffix can be present with a postposition. Spencer (2005) argues postpositions in Hindi fail to project. In a postpositional phrase, the case property of the head noun is inherent. He further states that any noun phrase marked with a postposition expresses an oblique case in the language.

Khortha behaves similarly to Hindi but differently with Bangla as in (47).

- (47) c^houra-ta c^houri-ke sɔŋe ləɾəi kəɾ-ke
 boy-CLF girl-DAT PP fight do-PST-3SG
 The boy fought with the girl.

In Bangla, the indirect object gets case marked with a genitive for the same construction (48).

- (48) c^heleta meye-ti-r sɔŋge lɔrai kɔɾ-l-o
 boy-CLF girl-CLF-GEN PP work do--PST-3
 The boy made the girl work.

We argue in favor of Spencer (2005) that this apparent case syncretism for accusative, genitive, and dative suggests that they are inherent DP/NP marked and not valued by the corresponding postpositions. The difference is in terms of marking on the indirect object we found a complimentary distribution between two markers (-*r* and -*ke*) in Khortha which is a contact-induced language (Matras 2007, 2009) or mixed language (Matras & Bakker 2003), Velupillai (2015).

Let us revisit the ditransitive structures from Hindi, Bangla, and Khortha.

- (49) ɾam-ne ʃən-ko siṭa-ke saṭ^h pəɾichəj kəɾ-wa-ja (Hindi)
 Ram-ERG Sita-ACC sita-OBL PP introduction do-CAUS-PST.3
 Ram introduced John to Sita.

In Hindi, the direct object is marked with DOM, -*ko*, and the indirect object appears in oblique form with a postposition. The structure in (49) has an alternate structure as shown in (50).

- (50) ɾam-ne ʃən-ko muʃ^h se pəɾichəj kəɾ-wa-ja (Hindi)
 Ram-ERG Sita-ACC I-OBL PP introduction do-CAUS-PST.3
 Ram introduced John to Sita.

We argue that if the postposition does not co-occur with case suffixes, then the indirect object in Hindi appears in the oblique case. The indirect object cannot be marked with -*ke* in this construction.

On the other hand, in Bangla, the indirect object appears with the Genitive as in (51).

- (51) ram ʃiʈa-ke ʃɔn-er ʃɔŋge poritʃɔj kɔra-l-o
ram sita-ACC John-GEN PP introduce do-CAUS-PST-3
Ram introduced Sita to John.

In Khortha we see both the DO and IO are marked with *-ke* but we argue that these two markers are not identical and the oblique *-ke* (52) suffix shows a complementary distribution with the *-r* suffix in (53).

- (52) həmma ʃən-ke sita-**ke** səŋge pʰeɕan kər-ɑ-li-ye
I-NOM John-ACC Sita-OBL PP introduce do-CAUS-PST-3
I introduced John to Sita.
- (53) həmma ʃən-ke t̪ə-**r** səŋge pʰeɕan kər-ɑ-li-ye
I-NOM John-ACC you-OBL PP introduce do-CAUS-PST-3
I introduced John to you.

3.3.3 Direct, oblique and vocative

In South Asian languages, the subject can take either the direct form (nominative case) or the oblique form (non-nominative case). Hindi, also marks the nouns for number and gender. Below is an example of Hindi inflections in the subject position.

HINDI	Masc	Fem
SG. Direct	ləɾk-a	ləɾk-i
SG. Oblique	ləɾk-e	ləɾk-i
PL. Direct	ləɾke	ləɾki-ā
PL. Oblique	ləɾk-ō	ləɾki-ō

Table 5. Hindi inflections in subject position

Hindi nouns are allocated dative case in the oblique form when it comes to non-nominative subjects, where *ləɾka* changes to *ləɾke* before taking up the *-ko* suffix. However, as seen in the example (54) and (55) from Bangla, some Indo-Aryan languages do not change into oblique form before a case is valued.

- (54) chele-ṭa kʰe-l-o
 boy-CLF eat-PST-3
 The boy ate.
- (55) chele-ṭa-r ʃɔr hoye-cʰe
 boy-CLF-GEN fever be-PRF.PRS.3
 The boy is suffering from fever.

It is not necessary to change the noun into an oblique form in Malda's Khortha, similar to Bangla. For example,

- (56) cʰoura-ta kʰa-l-ke (Khortha)
 boy-CLF eat-PST-3
 The boy ate.
- (57) cʰoura-ta-ke ʃʰərɪ-me bʰiʃnəi əccʰa ləg-l-e
 boy-CLF-DAT rain-LOC wet-INFgood like-PST-3
 The boy liked to get wet in the rain.

However, the second- and third-person pronoun forms in Khortha change into oblique before getting case marked.

	NOM	OBL (DAT/GEN/ACC)
1P	həmma- Ø	həmmə-r
	həmmə-səni	həmmər-səni-ke
2P	<u>t</u> u	<u>tə</u> -r
	tər- səni	tər-səni-ke
3P	u	əkə-r
	u- səni	əkər - səni-ke

Table 6. Oblique forms in Khortha

We have found three different vocative case suffix in Malda's Khortha as in (58).

- | | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| (58a) re cʰɔɾa | (58b) ho bʰaɪya | (58c) ge cʰɔɾɪ |
| VOC boy | VOC brother | VOC girl |
| Hey boy | Hey brother | Hey girl |

Therefore, we note that Khortha differentiates the direct and vocative cases. The oblique case does not require the nouns to appear in oblique form with exceptions to

second and third person pronouns. We argue that this system follows the Bangla declension system.

4. Conclusion

Malda's Khortha language displays a complex case system that blends and separates different markers. For instance, in non-nominative subject positions, it employs markers from both languages. A similar overlap is evident in ditransitive constructions. Moreover, Khortha uses the Bangla genitive case marker /-r/ and the Hindi /ki, -ka/ marker, but replaces the -ki/-ka gender agreement with /-ke/. In terms of structural case assignment, Khortha follows the Bangla NOM-ACC alignment, whereas the Jharkhand variety adopts the ERG-ABS pattern typical of Hindi, the dominant language of the area. Case syncretism in Khortha entails three-way syncretism, except for singular pronouns. Khortha does not show oblique noun alteration, unlike Hindi except for second and third person pronouns. The two oblique case suffixes /-r/ and /-ke/, used for marking ACC-DAT-GEN in Khortha, come with the following feature specifications.

- a. {+singular, +Pronoun} → -r
- b. {+singular, + Noun} → -ke
- c. {+plural + Noun/ Pronoun} → -ke

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