



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### DEMONSTRATIVE PRONOUNS IN ASSAMESE

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#### ABSTRACT

Demonstrative pronouns are placed under the category of central pronoun in Assamese a Neo-Indo Aryan language used in India. They are resultant from a derivational process and are derived by suffixation of a set of plural markers or classifiers to the demonstrative particles- *ei* 'this', *hei* 'that' and *hɔɔ* 'that' encoding proximal, distal and far distal differences respectively. The semantic differences of animacy and humanness reflected in the demonstrative pronouns emanate from the specific classifiers and plural markers suffixed to them. There is a set of unique form of demonstrative pronouns, which are derived by the suffixation of the bound morphemes *-ja* and *-wa* to the demonstrative particles *ei*, *hei* and *hɔɔ*. The methodology adopted for the study are the set of questionnaires followed by interview and the analysis of both primary and secondary data collected. The study describes the demonstrative pronouns with its complexity and unique features in Assamese and put emphasis on the morphological, syntactic and semantic properties. The study reveals that demonstrative pronouns play important role in the language. The term pronoun is used in the sense of the nominal expression and the substitution in the nominal slot only.

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## INTRODUCTION

The present study is a modest attempt at description of the pronominal system in Asamiya, popularly known as Assamese. Assamese is a Neo-Indo Aryan language, recognized by the constitution of India as one of the official languages spoken in Assam, situated in the Brahmaputra valley of North-East India spreading an area of 78,438.00 square kilometers, comprising 35 districts. According to census report of 2011, the population of Assam is 31,169,272, the total number of native speakers of Assamese being 16.8 million. The other languages spoken in Assam belong to different language families, viz., Hindi, Bengali, Bhojpuri, Nepali, Sadri etc., of Neo Indo-Aryan family; Bodo, Karbi, Rabha, Mising, Tiwa, Dimasa, Deuri etc. of Tibeto-Burman family; Turung, Khamti, Phake, Aiton etc. of the Tai group of Sino-Tibetan family; Chautal, Munda, Kurukh, Vili, Shabar etc. of Austro-Asiatic family; Tamil, Telegu, Malayalam and so on of Dravidian family. Assamese has been used as a lingua-franca among the non-native speakers of Assam for centuries in respect of trade and commerce, monetary transactions and social contacts. It is reported that at present Assamese is spoken by over 20 million people belonging to heterogeneous speech communities living together.

## Research methodology

The methodology adopted for the research is descriptive. It is corpus-based. The main goal of this type of research is to describe the data collected from various sources. As Nida (1957:1) observes 'Descriptive analysis must be based upon what people say.' The researcher has collected data from real life situations. The spoken and the written sources are considered as the primary and the secondary data respectively. The actual utterances are recorded without regularizing or evaluating them. In other words, the study is based on what native speakers say rather than what some people think they should say. The speakers were from various socio-economic, educational, racial backgrounds with variation in gender, age and social status. During the collection of the primary data, the researcher paid several visits to academic institutions, research centers, offices, hostels, residential colonies / flats, parks, canteens, restaurants and so on. Valuable information from native speakers' speech habits in informal situations were drawn from the public places like bazars, shopping malls, railway and bus stations etc. Telephonic conversations were also made to obtain more indepth information. The secondary data were gathered from recorded interviews, from libraries on various subjects of science, arts and commerce and other written materials like newspapers, magazines, books of short stories, dramas, novels, children's literature, personal letters etc., and by watching plays, films and programmes telecast by T.V. channels and broadcast by radio. The data thus collected were sifted, organized, synthesized to be presented in relevant

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sections of this work for analysis. The study has used the terminologies conventionally used in general linguistic studies. In certain cases the terms are defined with relevant examples for clarity. The examples in Asamiya are transcribed in italics using IPA symbols showing morphemic breaks. Each morpheme is glossed in the following line representing its lexical and grammatical information. It is then followed by free translations in English. The information regarding classification of pronouns in the reviewed literature of the language as well the findings of the various aspects of the study are displayed in tabular forms for sake of clarity. As the descriptive study is not dependent upon historical findings, any diachronic references are eschewed.

### Demonstrative pronouns

The demonstrative pronouns as one of the subtypes of central pronoun are the most frequently used pronouns. They are resultant from a derivational process and are derived by suffixation of a set of plural markers or classifiers to the demonstrative particles- *ei* 'this', *hei* 'that' and *hou* 'that' encoding proximal, distal and far distal differences respectively. The semantic differences of animacy and humanness reflected in the demonstrative pronouns emanate from the specific classifiers suffixed to them. Some examples of classifiers used in forming demonstrative pronouns are *-to*, *-dal*, *-zon*, *-k<sup>h</sup>on* etc., as in *hei-zon* 'that one' [+HUM], *ei-k<sup>h</sup>on* 'this one' [-AN] etc. Again, *ei-k<sup>h</sup>ini* 'this', *hei-bor* 'those', *hou-bilak* 'those' are the examples of demonstrative pronouns with plural markers. The pronouns *hi* and *teo* used as singular 3<sub>3</sub> and 3<sub>2</sub> are also used as demonstrative pronouns in correlative constructions. However, demonstrative pronouns need to be distinguished from nominal modifiers as in *ei-k<sup>h</sup>onkitap* 'this book' and *hei-k<sup>h</sup>onsobi* 'that picture.' There is a set of unique form of demonstrative pronouns, which does not require suffixation of plural markers or classifiers. They are derived by the suffixation of the bound morphemes *-ja* and *-wa* to the demonstrative particles *ei*, *hei* and *hou*. Table 1 displays these unique forms of demonstrative pronouns.

Table 1. Unique demonstrative pronouns

Proximal	Distal	Far distal
<i>ei-ja</i>	<i>hei-ja</i>	<i>hou-wa</i>

Demonstratives are used as pre modifiers to indicate the spatial distance between the referent and the speaker. e.g., *i* 'this' (referent is near to the hearer) / *ei* 'this' (referent is very near to both speaker and hearer), *hi* / *hei* 'that' (remote), *hou* 'that' (far remote). Following are few examples where the demonstrative are functioning as pre-modifiers of common nouns.

- (1) [*hei*] *saki-k<sup>h</sup>on*  
DEM chair-CL  
'that chair.'

The following shows a combination of a demonstrative and a quantifier as pre- head modifier of a common noun.

- (2) [*hou*][*sari-zon*] *lora*  
DEMfour-CL(SG:M)boy  
'those four boys.'

The demonstrative pronoun *eitv* 'it' as the head may be modified by a content subordinate clause as in the following example.

- (3) [*teo- $\phi$ ze n-ah-e*] *ei-tozan -is-il-o*  
3<sub>2</sub>SG-NOM thatNEG-come-3 DEM know-IPFV-PST-1  
'I knew it that he will not come.'

In the example (3) the demonstrative pronoun *eitv* 'it' functioning as the head is the reduced version of the full NP *eik<sup>h</sup>a-to* 'this matter /fact /idea' after ellipsis of the common noun head.

As evidenced, only a subset of pronouns as the head NP in general restrictively takes dependents. While personal pronouns may take pronominal epithet and universal pronoun as post-head modifiers, indefinite pronouns may take adjective (both pre and post head positions), nominal appositive and quantifier, demonstrative pronouns may take relative and content clause as pre modifiers. The use of demonstrative pronouns in different syntactic positions in sentences are exemplified in the following. Demonstrative pronouns occurring in subject positions may be overtly marked or unmarked depending on the feature of animacy as shown by (4) and (5).

- (4) *hou-zoni-eko-is-il*  
DEM.-CL.(SG:F)-NOM say-IPFV-PST.3  
'That one (she) said.'

- (5) *hei - k<sup>h</sup>onmo-r kitap*  
DEM- CL 1SG-GEN book  
'That one is my book.'

As a subject of a copular sentence the demonstrative subject is unmarked for nominative case. In the following example (6) the demonstrative pronoun *hei-zon* 'that one' functions as the object of the sentence.

- (6) *hei-zon - $\phi$ kk<sup>o</sup>-a*  
DEM-CL(SG:M)-ACCsay-IMP.2<sub>2</sub>  
'Tell (this) to that one (him).'

The following exemplifies the use of the unique demonstrative pronouns composed of a deictic particle and a bound form *-ja* or *-wa* respectively used in the subject position.

- (7) *ejam<sup>o</sup>-r ek matr<sup>o</sup>honiniti*  
DEM1SG-GEN one only younger sister Niti  
'This is my only younger sister Niti.'

However, when it is used in combination with personal pronoun it encodes a spatial or locational interpretation. e.g.,

- (8) *houat<sup>o</sup>- $\phi$ ah-is-e*  
DEM 3<sub>2</sub>SG:NOM come-IPFV-3  
'There! He is coming.'

### Morphology of Demonstrative Pronouns

The demonstrative pronouns are pluralized by the process of suffixation only. e.g.,

Suffixation of classifiers :

- ei- /hei -/ hou - to* > *ei- /hei- / hou -zor*  
'this /that (SG)' > 'this / that (DU)'

Suffixation of plural markers :

- i-/ei-, hi- /hei-, hou- to* > *i-/ei-, hi- /hei- / hou -bor /-bilak*  
'this / that' > 'these / those.'

In case of demonstrative pronouns gender is distinguished on the basis of whether the masculine classifier *-zɔn*, *-tɔ* or the feminine classifier *-zɔni* is used as its final constituent, e.g.,  
*ei -zɔn* ‘this one (M)’ > *ei -zɔni* ‘this one (F)’;  
*hei-zɔn* ‘that one (M)’ > *hei-zɔni* ‘that one (F)’;  
*hɔu -zɔn* ‘that one (M)’ > *hɔu -zɔni* ‘that one (F)’;

The demonstrative pronoun as the subject may be in agreement with the predicative complement as shown below.

(9) *ei -zɔnimɔ -rsɔali*  
 DEM-CL(SG:F) 1SG-GEN girl  
 ‘This is my daughter.’

(10) *ei-tɔmɔ -r lora*  
 DEM-CL(SG:M) 1SG-GEN boy  
 ‘This is my son.’

The interchange of the demonstrative pronoun between the two sentences will make the sentences ungrammatical.

(11) \* *ei-tɔmɔ -rsɔali*  
 DEM-CL(SG:M) 1SG-GEN girl

(12) \* *ei-zɔnimɔ -r lora*  
 DEM-CL(SG:F) 1SG-GEN boy

Demonstrative pronouns are basically deictic, but they are used anaphorically in correlative constructions, where it is in coreferential relationship with the relative clause. e.g.,

(13) [*zi- k<sup>h</sup>ɔnkitap-ɔtsobi as-e*] *mɔ-k*  
 REL-CL book-LOC picture be-3 1SG-ACC  
*hei-k<sup>h</sup>ɔn lag-e*  
 DEM-CL want-3  
 ‘I want that book which contains the pictures.’

Here the demonstrative pronoun *hei-k<sup>h</sup>ɔn* ‘that one’ which is coreferential with the relative pronoun *zik<sup>h</sup>ɔnkitap* ‘which book’ is anaphorically related to the subordinate relative clause as a whole. A demonstrative pronoun encodes a generic sense in a correlative construction and is anaphorically related to the relative pronoun. In the following the default 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronoun is functioning as the demonstrative pronoun.

(14) [*nanadehp<sup>h</sup>ur -e zi -φ*]  
 differentcountry travel-3 REL-NOM  
*nanakɔ<sup>h</sup>ahik-e hi-φ*  
 different matter learn-3 DEM-NOM

‘The one who travels different countries, learns a lot.’  
 The same holds true in the case of its case marked suppletive form as in the following.

Table 2. Componential analysis of demonstrative pronouns

PRO	AN	HUM	M	HON	Number			Spatial deixis			
					SG	DU	PL	PROX	DIST	FAR DIST	
<i>eik<sup>h</sup>ɔn</i>					+				+		
<i>eizɔr</i>	±	-	±			+			+		
<i>eizɔn</i>	+	+	+	+	+				+		
<i>heizɔni</i>	+	+		-	+					+	
<i>heizak</i>	+	±	±				+		+		
<i>hɔubɔr</i>	±	±	±	-			+				+
<i>hɔugɔraki</i>	+	+	±	+	+						+
<i>eija</i>	±	±	±					+			
<i>heija</i>	±	±	±						+		
<i>hɔuɔa</i>	±	±	±								+

Semantics of Demonstrative pronouns

A demonstrative pronoun is always definite and encodes semantic distinction of animacy, humanness, honorificity, sex, number and spatial deixis. A three term distinction of spatial deixis is a characteristic feature of demonstrative pronouns lacking in other pronouns. The spatial deixis in demonstrative pronouns like personal pronouns is inherently associated with the initial element which combines to form such pronouns. For example, the initial component *ei-* ‘this’ encodes proximity to the speaker, *hei-* ‘that’ signals meaning of distance from the speaker and *hɔu-* implies meaning of far distance from the speaker. The classifiers or plural markers of various types used as final component of demonstrative pronouns connote distinctions of animacy, humanness, social status / honorificity (in case of human), sex, and number as in *eitɔ* ‘this one (±AN:±HUM:SG:ORD:M:PROX)’, *eik<sup>h</sup>ɔn* ‘this one (-AN:-HUM:SG:PROX)’, *heizɔn* ‘that one (+AN:+HUM:SG:+HON:M:DIST)’, *hɔuzɔni* ‘that one female (+AN:±HUM:SG:ORD:F:DIST)’, *eibilak* ‘these ones (-AN:-HUM:PL:PROX)’, *heibɔr* ‘those ones (-AN:-HUM:PL:DIST)’, *hɔuk<sup>h</sup>ini* ‘that ones (-AN-HUM:PL:DIST)’, *eizɔr* ‘this pair (±AN:-HUM:DU:PROX)’, *heizak* ‘that flock (-AN:-HUM:PL:DIST)’, *hɔugɔraki* ‘that one (+AN:HUM:SG:HON:DIST) etc. exhibit deictic features.

(15) [*za-r pɔra an-is -il-a*] *ta-k-ei*  
 REL-OBL from bring-IPFV-PST-2<sub>2</sub>DEM-ACC-EMPH  
*di-a go-i*  
 give-IMP.2<sub>2</sub> go -NF

‘Return (it) to him/ her from whom you have brought.’

In both the examples above, the demonstrative pronouns signal a generic sense.

However, a demonstrative pronoun may encode a specific sense depending on the context as in the following.

(16) [*tumi -φza-rkot<sup>h</sup>ako-is-il-a*]  
 2<sub>2</sub>SG-NOM REL-GEN matter say-IPFV-PST-2<sub>2</sub>  
*tɔv -φah-is-e*  
 DEM-NOM come-IPFV-3

‘The one you have been talking about has come.’

The semantic differences among the demonstrative pronouns can be stated explicitly in terms of componential analysis as in the following Table 2 where the empty boxes indicate absence of the respective features.

## Conclusion

It has been argued that demonstratives constitute a special class of linguistic expressions that are essential for the communicative interaction between the speech participants and the organization of discourse and development of grammar. All the above study shows that demonstrative pronouns are derived forms and they play an important role in the language.

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