

## Labile morphological causatives/denominatives in Middle and Modern Bengali

Most Bengali verbs with the suffix *-ā-* are considered to have a causative or at least a transitive meaning. However, the same suffix is used for forming denominatives which are generally intransitive in Bengali. Some verbs with the suffix *-ā-* (both causatives and denominatives) are labile, like *bikāno* ‘to sell/to be sold’, *balāno* ‘to call/to be called’, *janmāno* ‘to give birth/to be born’, *nib(h)āno* ‘to die (of fire), to set out (fire)’. This could result both from a causative losing its transitivity or a denominative acquiring one. In Modern Bengali most of those labile verbs become purely transitive or intransitive, sometimes changing their main agreement pattern, for instance, when a verb that was mostly transitive at the Middle Bengali stage becomes mostly or purely intransitive in Modern Bengali. For example, *janmāno* ‘to give birth/to be born’:

Middle Bengali (transitive):

1. putra chāri ṣaṭi kanyā **janmāilā** dakṣa

Instead of sons, Daksha gave birth to 60 daughters

Middle Bengali (intransitive):

2. apara **janmāla** yata dakṣer santati

The rest of Daksha’s offspring that was born

In Modern Bengali the transitive usage is found in missionary literature (translated from English), and it is not entirely clear whether it is really transitive or intransitive with an ellipsis:

3. leṅā sbakāle putrabatī haṅā sapta santān **janmāila**

Leah who conceived in due time became the mother of seven children

Modern Bengali (intransitive):

4. tāhār garbhe **janmāila** andha dhṛtarāṣṭra

Blind Dhritarashtra was born from her womb

Transitive verbs agree with the object in the direct case (inanimate/indefinite nouns) or the object case (animate/definite nouns). The use of the object case is often optional even with animate nouns if they are indefinite, which sometimes makes one doubt whether the verb is used as transitive or intransitive (especially if the subject is omitted and the object is in the direct case).

The paper follows the development of several verbs that are labile in Middle Bengali but become mostly transitive or mostly intransitive in Modern Bengali.

### References

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