RESEARCH NOTE

CASE MARKERS IN THE CHHATHARE LIMBU

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Introduction

Limbu has four major dialects – Panthare, Phedappe, Taplejunge and Chhathare. Among them, the Chhathare dialect is quite distinct from other dialects because its speakers can easily understand other dialects but the speakers of other dialects can hardly understand it. It is spoken in the Chhathar area which covers parts of the Dhankuta district that includes villages such as Jitpur, Marek Katahare, Hatikharka, Murtidhungga, Dhankuta municipality, Bhirgaun, Tangkhuwa, Teliya, Parewadin etc, and the Terhathum district which includes villages such as Pancha Kanya, Hamurjang, Okhre, Dangapa and so on. It belongs to the Kiranti group of the Tibeto–Burman family of languages. Both native and non–native speakers have ignored this dialect because it has no status as a lingua franca within the Limbu community, nor is it used in religious ceremonies or socio–cultural exchanges. So far, some works viz. Widert and Subba (1985), van Driem (1987) and Michailovsky (2001) have done on the Panchthare, Phedappe and Taplejunge dialects respectively but until now, no work has been done on the Chhathare dialect. This article is an attempt to explore the case markers of the Chhathare dialect of Limbu.

Case

Case is a grammatical category used in the analysis of word classes or phrases to identify the syntactic relationship between words. In the Chhathare dialect, it is indicated by variations in the morphological forms of the word. Nouns and parts of speech used as nominals can be inflected for case. Chhathare Limbu includes the following cases:

Absolutive: Absolutive is a term used in grammatical description of languages, which has an ergative system. This system has a formal parallel between the object of a transitive verb and the subject of an intransitive one, and these are referred to as 'absolutive'. For example,

(1) a. napmi –ngaa pu ser-u
  man-Erg bird kill-3.Sg. A3SgP Pret
  "A man killed a bird."

b. yangbaa-ngaa suba teps-u
   cat-Erg rat catch-3.Sg.A.3Sg P Pret
   "A cat caught a rat."

c. kaap-phaang-ngaa naapmi laps-u
   your uncle –Erg man beat- 3. Sg.A.3.Sg P Pret
   "Your uncle beat a man."

In sentences given above in (1a,b,c) *seru, teps-u* and *laps-u* are all transitive verbs and *pu, suba* and *naapmi* are objects which are unmarked. These unmarked objects can occur in the subject position without any change.

For example,

(2) a. pu pe
    bird- fly-3Sg.A. non-Pret
    "A bird flies."

b. suba lokk-a
   rat run-3.Sg.A- Pret
   "A rat ran."

c. napmi pher-aa
   man- come-3Sg.A- Pret
   "A man came."

The sentences in (2a,b,c) contain *pe, lokk-a* and *pher-aa* which are intransitive verbs and *pu, suba* and *napmi* are their subjects. They are unmarked. Between the object of the transitive verb and the subject of the intransitive verb, there is a formal parallel that is marked by *<-ing>* when definite but unmarked when it is indefinite. For example,

(3) a. a-ppaa taa
    my-father come-3.Sg.A. non-Pret
    "My father comes."

b. pu pey-aa
   bird fly-3.Sg.A-Pret
   "A bird flew."

c. henjaa kay-aa
   child fall-3.Sg.A- Pret
   "A child fell."

d. a-ppaa-ing taa
   my-father-Def come-3.Sg.A. non-Pret
   "My father comes."

e. pu-ing pey-aa
   bird-Def fly-3.Sg.A -Pret
   "The bird flew."

f. henjaa-ing kay-aa
   child-Def fall-3.Sg.P- Pret
   "The child fell."

The above sentences in (3a,b,c) contain the unmarked *a-ppa, pu* and *henjaa* as subjects to the transitive verbs *taa, pey-aa* and *kay-aa* respectively. They are indefinite subjects but the sentences in (3d,e,f) have definite subjects marked by the suffix <*-ing*>. Similarly, the objects of the following transitive verbs are unmarked when indefinite:

(4) a. koco-ngaa mendaak haar-u
        dog-ERG goat bite-3.Sg.A-3.Sg.P. Pret
        "A dog bit a goat."

   b. kaat-tuba-ngaa phaak cepp-u
      your-grandfather-Erg pig cut-3Sg.A-3.Sg.P.Pret
      "Your grandfather cut a pig."

   c. pit-naa naapmi thoks-u
      cow-Erg man horn-3.Sg.A-3Sg.P. Pret
      "A cow horned a man."

   d. koco-ngaa mendak-ing har-u
      dog-Erg goat-Def kill-3.Sg.A-3.Sg.P. Pret
      "A dog bit the goat."

   e. kaat-tuba-ngaa phaak-ing cep-pu
      your-grand father-Erg pig-Def cut-3.Sg.A-3.Sg.P.Pret
      "Your grandfather cut the pig."

   f. pit-naa napmi-ing thoks-u
      cow-Erg man-Def horn-3.Sg.A-3.Sg.P. Pret
      "A cow horned the man."

In the sentences (4a,b,c), *mendaak, phaak* and *naapmi* are unmarked objects to the verbs *haar-u, cepp-u* and *thoks-u* respectively, and they are indefinite. However, in the sentences (4d,e,f) they are definite objects marked by the suffix *<-ing>*.

The definite marker suffix *<-ing>* undergoes some morphophonological changes. After the voiceless stops /p/, /t/ /k/ and /?/ the case ending is realized as /-ming/, e.g. *baa cep-ming cuk-paa cuk* "This basket is small.", as /-ning/ e.g. *baa sawet-ning yam-baa cuk* "This buffalo is big", as /-nging/ e.g. *phaak-nging pheraa* "The pig came" etc. These variations are only in deference to homorganic assimilation of the stem-final consonant with the definite marker on the basis of the place of articulation in the fast speech made without any pause to the syllable break. The normal speech with a natural syllable break contains the clear definite marker *<-ing >*as in *baa cep-ing cuk-paa cuk* "This basket is small." After the vowels except /i/ basic form of the ending doesn't change, e.g. *waa-ing phe-raa* "The chicken came," *myangbaa-ing pind-aa* "The cat jumped", *koco-ing yaat-aa* "The dog whined" etc. However, after /i/, the definite marker suffix *<-ing>* is realized as /-ng/ lengthening the preceding vowel, e.g. *naapmi:ng pheraa* "The man came."

Ergative: The ergative case marks the agent of a transitive verb. The ergative suffix is *<-ngaa >*.

(5) a. am-ma-ngaa yaang thag-u
        my-mother-Erg money earn-3.Sg.A-3.Sg.P. Pret
        "My mother earned money."

   b. phaak-ngaa caa ca
        pig-Erg food eat-3.Sg.A.Pret
        "A pig ate food."

   c. an-na cwaat thung-u
        horse-Erg water drink-3.Sg.A-3.Sg.P. Pret
        "A horse drank water."

The sentences in (5a,b,c) contain transitive verbs *thag-u, ca* and *thung-u* respectively with the corresponding agents *am-maa, phaak* and *an*. The agents are marked by ergative suffix *<-ngaa>*. The ergative suffix is also divided into definite and indefinite. The indefinite ergative is unmarked as in (5a,b,c) but the definite ergative is marked by *<-i>*

(6) a. koco-ngaa-i naapmi haar-u
        dog- Erg-Def man bite-3.Sg.A-3.Sg. P.Pret
        "The dog bit a man."

b. kap-paa-ngaa-i baa sapla theks-u
   your father-Erg-Def this book tear-3Sg.A.3.Sg.P.Pret
   "Your father tore this book."

c. ku-phaang-ngaa-i baa laaje thoks-u
   his uncle –Erg –Def this land plough-3.Sg.A-3.Sg. P.Pret
   "His uncle ploughed this land."

d. koco-i-ngaa naapmi haar-u
   dog-Def-Erg man bite-3.Sg.A-3.Sg.P. Pret
   "A dog bit a man."

e. kaap-paa-i-ngaa baa saplaa theks-u
   your father –Def Erg this book tear-3.Sg.A-3.Sg.P.Pret
   "Your father tore this book."

f. kup-phaang-i-ngaa baa laaje thoks-u
   his uncle-DEF ERG this land plough-3.Sg.A-3.Sg.P. Pret
   "His uncle ploughed this man."

In the sentences (6a,b,c) the ergative suffix <-ngaa> is followed by the definite suffix <-i> and in rest of the sentences (6d,e,f) it is preceded by the definite marker<-i>.

Instrumental: The instrumental suffix <-ngaa > is a form taken by a noun phrase when it expresses a notion like 'by means of'. For example,

(7) a. khune yang-ngaa aambe ing-u
      he money-Inst mango buy-3.Sg.A-3.Sg.Thm-.Pret
      "He bought a mango with money."

b. aa khebak -ngaa laamdhet hand-u-ng
   I key-Inst door open-3.Sg.P- 1.Sg. A. Pret
   "I opened the door with a key."

c. khene phejaa-ngaa ka-jepp-u
   you dagger-Inst 2.Sg.A–cut-3.Sg.P
   "You cut it with a dagger."

In the sentences given in (7a,b,c) instruments *yaang, khebak* and *phejaa* are marked by <–*ngaa*>. Though the instrument marker is identical to the ergative marker in form, the two are quite distinct in function.

The genitive: The genitive case expresses possessive relationship by means of inflections. Limbu genitive case is marked by the suffix *<-ngaang>*.

(8) a. aa-ppa-ngaang ku-baang
　　　my father-Gen his-house
　　　"My father's house."

　　b. naapmi-ngaang ku-saaplaa
　　　man-Gen his-book
　　　"Man's book".

　　c. pu-ngaang ku-haap
　　　bird-Gen his-nest
　　　"Bird's nest."

The phrases in (8a,b,c) contain noun phrase like *aap-paa* or simply nouns such as *naapmi* and *pu*. They are marked by genitive suffix *<-ngaang>* which, in turn is followed by the third person possessive prefix *<ku->* in the singular. However, in the case of the dual and plural nouns the third person singular possessive prefix <ku-> takes only one possessive form such as< *khunchi-* >, which is called a non-singular possessive prefix.

(9) a. pu-ghaachi-ngaang khunchi-haap
　　　bird-dl -Gen-their-nest
　　　"Birds' nest."

　　b. pu-ghaa-ngaang khunchi-haap
　　　bird-pl -Gen their-nest
　　　"Birds' nest."

In the phrases in (9a,b), the dual number marker *<-ghaachi>* and the plural number marker *<-ghaa>* occur with the 3rd person non-singular possessive prefix< *khuchi->*

Vocative: Vocative is a case form taken by a noun when it is used in the form of address. This case is marked by *<-o>* or *<-e>* as in aa-ppaa-o or aa-ppaa-e but they are not interchangeable in all contexts.

(10) a. aa-mmaa-e aa-mmaa-o
　　　 my-mother-Voc my-mother-Voc
　　　 "O my mother" "O my mother"

b. aat-tubaa-e aa-ttubaa-o
   my-grandfather-Voc my-grandfather-Voc
   "O my grandfather" "O my grandfather"

c. sebaa-e sebaa-o
   friend-Voc friend-Voc
   "O friend " "O friend"

d. naapmi-e # naapmi-o
   man-VOC
   "O man "

e. pu-e #pu-o
   bird-VOC
   "O bird "
   (# indicates that the form is unacceptable.)

The examples cited in (10a,b, c) show that /-o/ can substitute /-e/ only in the context of low open back vowel /aa/ immediately preceding it but when high, close, front vowel /i/ or high close back vowel /u/ precedes the vocative case ending, /-o/ can't substitute it.

Locative: Locative refers to the form taken by a noun when it typically expresses the idea of location of an entity or an action. This case is marked by <-o> .

(11) a. kuc-chaa aa-baang-o waa
         his-son my-house-Loc is
         "His son is in my house."

   b. saa aa-haa-o khipp-u
         meat my-tooth-Loc stick-3.Sg. A-3.Sg.P. Pret
         "The meat is stuck to my tooth."

   c. tare-baa yuknaa-o yung
         guest-male bed-Loc sit-3.Sg.A.non-Pret
         "The guest sits on the bed."

   d. khune kuk-ku-si-o teg-aa
         he his-maternal uncles-Loc go-3.Sg.A Pret
         "He went to his maternal uncle's house."

e. khene kaap-paa-o kaa-de-i
   you your-father-Loc you-go-QUES
   "Do you go to your father's house?'

The locative suffix <-o> in (11a,b,c) indicates location of an entity whereas the locative suffix in (11d,e) indicates that of action.

The comitative: The comitative is a case form taken by a noun when it expresses the meaning "along with" or "accompanied by". It is marked by the suffix <-nung >"with", "along with" or "accompanied by".

(12) a. khene aap-paa-nung kaa-de
      you my-father-Com 2.Sg.A. go-.non-Pret
      "You go with my father."

   b. aa khene-nung phen-naa
      I you-Com come-1.Sg.A.non-Pret
      "I come with you."

   c. aac-cha ku-dak-nung paangwaa
      my-son his-friend-Com play-3.Sg.A.non-Pret
      "My child plays with his friend."

The marker <-nung> in sentences(12a,b,c) is the comitative case marker because it carries the meaning "accompanied by"or "with" . The comitative suffix <-nung> is used to coordinate nominal groups as a conjunction "and". For example,

(13). a. pit nung sawet   b. yum nung macci
         cow and buffalo   salt and chilli

    c. wad nung phaak   d. tak nung sumbaak
       chicken and pig   rice and scup

The nominal groups in (13a,b,c,d) are coordinated by the comitative case marker <-nung>.

The meditative: The mediative case is used in the sense of an abstract medium.

(14) a. panibaa paan-laam   b. yaakthungbaa paan-laam
        nepali lanuage-Med   limbu language-Med
       "Through the Nepali language"   "Through the Limbu language"

c. panibaa paan-nung
   nepali language-Med
   "Through the Nepali language"

d. yaakthungbaa paan-nung
   limbu language-Med
   "Through the Limbu language"

The phrases in (14a,b) contain a case marker <- *laam* > and those in (14c,d) contain a case marker <-*nung* >. They express abstract media. They can be used in the sense of a simple medium.

(15) a. khangbe-laam
        boatMed
        "Through the boat"

b. paangbhe-laam
   village-Med
   "Through the village"

c. khangbe-nung
   boat-Med
   "Through the boat"

d. paangbhe-nung
   village-Med
   "Through the village"

The examples in (15a,,c,d) indicate the use of <-*laam* >and <-*nung*> as expressions of simple media.

Ablative: Ablative case is a form taken by a noun phrase to express a range of locative meaning 'from'. It is marked by the suffixes <-nung> and <-laam>.

(16) a. kaathmandu-laam
        kathmandu-Abl
        "From Kathmandu"

b. pyaangsi-laam
   paddy-field-Abl
   "From the paddy-field"

c. kaathmandu-nung
   kathmandu-Abl
   "From Kathmandu"

d. pyaangsi-nung
   paddy-field-Abl
   "From the paddy-field"

The ablative case markers <- *laam* > and <-*nung* > in (16a,b,c,d) indicate the original space.

Sometimes, locative suffix <-o> and ablative suffix <-laam> or <-nung> are combined to specify the location. For example:

(17) a. khune paangbhe-o- laam/nung taah-aa
        . he village-Loc-Abl come-3.Sg.A.-Pret
        "He came from the village."

   b. aa syaa paang-o-laam/nung taar-u-ng
      I rice house-Loc-Abs bring-3Sg.Thm-1.Sg.APret
      "I brought rice from the house."

c. laahaang-ngaa sing taambʰung-o-laam/nung taar-u
   lahang-Erg firewood forest-Loc-Abl bring-3.Sg.A/3.SgThm.Pret
   "Lahang brought firewood from the forest."

The sentences (17a,b,c) contain compound case marker *<-o-laam/nung>* which is the combination of the locative case marker *<-o>* and ablative case marker *<-laam/nung>*. This case marker is suffixed to the nouns, *paangbhe* 'village', *paang* 'house' and *taangbhung* 'forest'.

Allative: Allative refers to a type of inflection, which expresses the meaning of motion 'to', 'towards' or 'as far as'. It is marked by the suffixes *<-lekhaang>* or *<-naang>* 'to' or 'toward' and *<-dhaarik>* 'as far as'.

(18) a. aa paangbhe- dhaarik tek- ngaa
     I village-Allt go-1.Sg.A.non-Pret
     "I will go as far as the village."

   b. khune aa aa-baang-dhaarik aa-saadhaa-ng
      he me my-house-Allt 1P-accompany-3.Sg.A.Pret
      "He accompanied me as far as my house."

   c. khune pyaangsi-naang/lekhaang teg-aa
      he paddy-field- Allt go-3.Sg.A.Pret
      "He went to/towards the field."

   d. khune aa-baang-naang/lekhang pher-aa
      he my-house- Allt come-3.Sg.A.Pret
      "He came to/ towards my house."

The sentences in (18a,b) contain an allative marker *<-dhaarik >*and those in (18c,d) contain allative markers *<-naang >* and *<-lekhaang>*, which are interchangeable.

The Comparative Degree: The comparative degree is indicated by a suffix *<-aang>* affixed to the nominal head to be compared. For example:

(19) a. khune-aang kembaa khene kaa-juk
     he- than tall you 2.Sg.A-be non-Pret
     "You are taller than he."

   b. khene-aang nubaa aa cuk-ngaa
      you-than handsome I be-1.Sg.A. non-Pret
      "I am more handsome than you."

c. aa-aang tumbaa khune cuk
   I-than old he be-3.Sg.A..non-Pret
   "He is older than I"

In the above sentences the suffix <-*aang*> affixed to the pronominal heads is a comparative suffix.

The case forms of the nominal kaa-ghup-paa 'one who steals' are summarised in the table below.

Summary of case markers the Chhathare Limbu in the singular, dual and plural contexts

	case	singular	dual	plural
1	Absolutive	Kaa-ghup-paa	Kaa-ghup-paa-ghaachi	Kaa-ghup-paa-ghaa
2	Ergative	Kaa-ghup-paa-ngaa	Kaa-ghup-paa-ghaachi-ngaa	Kaa-ghup-paa-ghaa-ngaa
3	Instrumental	kaa-ghup-paa-ngaa	kaa-ghup-paa-ghaachi-ngaa	kaa-ghup-paa-ghaa-ngaa
4	Genitive	kaa-ghup-paa-ngaa-ng	kaa-ghup-paa-ghaachi-ngaa-ng	kaa-ghup-paa-ghaa-ngaa-ng
5	Vocative	kaa-ghup-paa-e	kaa-ghup-paa-ghaachi-e	kaa-ghup-paa-ghaa-e
6	Locative	kaa-ghup-paa-o	kaa-ghup-paa-ghaa-chi-o	kaa-ghup-paa-gha-o
7	Comitative	kaa-ghup-paa-nung	kaa-ghup-paa-ghaa-chi-nung	kaa-ghup-paa-ghaa-nung
8	Mediative	kaa-ghup-paa-laam/nung	kaa-ghup-paa-gha-chi- laam/nung	kaa-ghup-paa-ghaa-laam/nung
9	Ablative	kaa-ghup-paa-laam/nung	kaa-ghup-paa-gha-chi- laam/nung	kaa-ghup-paa-ghaa-laam/nung
10	Allative	kaa-ghup-paa-dhaarik	kaa-ghup-paa-ghaa-chi- dhaarik	kaa-ghup-paa-ghaa-dhaarik
11	Comparative	kaa-ghup-paa-aang	kaa-ghup-paa-ghaa-chi-aang	kaa-ghup-paa-ghaa-aang

Conclusion

The Chhathare Limbu has eleven case markers. They are absolutive, ergative, instrumental, genitive, vocative, comitative, locative, mediative, ablative, allative and comparative. The nominals of Chhathare Limbu inflect case.

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