

NOTES ON BRIAN HODGSON'S LIMBU PARADIGMS (1857)

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Among the papers of Brian H. Hodgson (1800-1894) conserved in the India Office Library in London is a collection of Limbu verb forms and paradigms. These occupy 25 pages of the item catalogued as no. 89, which I copied out in about 1980. Virtually all of the material, consisting of Limbu forms and Nepali glosses, is in the devanagari script. If I remember correctly, the material is in a large bound notebook, with the right-hand pages numbered. I have labeled these pages “b” and the facing left-hand pages “a”. The title page (page 1) in Nepali and English, reads as follows:

śrī
Limbu Language
liṃvu voli ko kṛyā
havalḍāra raṇa dhvaja
kā jabhāni leṣiyā
ko sam 1857 sāla
tā 023 aktuvara

“The verb of the Limbu language / transcription of the speech of Sgt. Rana Dhoj 23 October 1857”. The contents are summarized in fig. 1. The pages after p. 25 are blank.

1: title page.
2a–5b: imperatives of assorted verbs.
6a–11b: the verb <i>cā-</i> ‘to eat’; pronouns (7b, 8a).
12a–13a (top): the verb <i>thuṃ-</i> ‘to drink’.
13a–15b (top): the verb <i>cā-</i> ‘to eat’.
15b–17a (top): the verb <i>cātt-</i> ‘to feed’.
17a, 17b: the phrase <i>cā- -āṃ pek-</i> ‘having eaten go’.
18a: participial forms of <i>cā-</i> ‘to eat’.
18b–20a: the verb <i>thuṃ-</i> ‘to drink’.
20b–22b: morphological and composed causatives: <i>thuṃs-</i> ‘to make drink’ and <i>thuṃ bāṃs-</i> ‘to cause to drink’.
23a–25b: <i>hipt-</i> ‘to beat’ and (25b) <i>hip pāṃs-</i> ‘to cause to beat’.

Fig. 1: Contents of Hodgson 1857, ff 1–25.

Transitive: O →

↓A	1s	1di	1de	1pi	1pe
1s	<p>KEY:</p> <p>In each cell, the non-past form appears over the past, where they are distinct.</p> <p>PR = present stem</p> <p>PA = past stem</p> <p>N represents a nasal morphophoneme, homorganic with the stem-final; realized as a glottal stop or hiatus after a vowel.</p>				
1di					
1de					
1pi					
1pe					
2s	ke-PR-Nā ke-PA-āṃ	āke-PR āke-PA-e			
2d	ke-PR-Nāsiṃ ke-PA-āṃsiṃ	? ?			
2p	āke-PA-i				
3s	PR-Nā PA-āṃ	ā-PR-si ā-PA-esi	ā-PR-sige (ā)-PA-esige	ā-PR ā-PA-e	(ā)-PA-ige
3d	PR-Nāsiṃ PA-āṃsiṃ	ā-PR-si(si) ?	ā-PR-si(si)ge ?	āme-PR-si ā(me)-PA-esi	āme-PR-sige ā(me)-PA-esige
3p	me-PR-Nā me-PA-āṃ	āme-PR-si ?	āme-PR-sige ?	āme-PR āme-PA-e	āme-PA-ige āme-PA-esige
intransitive S →					
	PR-Nā PA-āṃ	PR-si ?	PR-sige ?	PA-i	PA-ige
reflexive S →					
	PR-Nāsiṃ	PR-nesi	PR-nesige	PR-Nāsi	PR-Nāsiḡe

Table 1: Synthesis of Limbu verb paradigms, Hodgson 1857.

Most of the forms are arranged in rough tables, with a single gloss, e. g. “you to me, present”, for the whole. The paradigms are quite complete, with items such as ‘he drinks us 2’, etc., unflinchingly recorded. However, forms with only non-singular arguments are relatively poorly represented, and sometimes the alignment, or the precise reference of *e* ‘ditto’, is not obvious. Although the writing is generally clear, there are blots which may or may not be intentional corrections. As an example, fig. 2 shows the paradigm labeled *kutyō malāī* [Nepali ‘he beat me’] as I originally copied it. The layout will be familiar to anyone who has studied Hodgson’s paradigms of Hayu and Bahing, published at the same time, in 1857-58. The sign *ṃ* (*anusvāra*) may be read as *ṅ* in all of the Limbu forms cited here. Only *ā*, never *a*, occurs in Limbu in the notes.

Transitive: O →

↓A	2s	2d	2p	3s	3d	3p
1s	PR-ne	PR-nesim̄	PR-neniṃ	PA-uṃ	PA-uṃsim̄	
1di	PR-nesige			PR-su PA-esu ¹	PR-susi PA-esusi	
1de				PR-suge PA-esuge	PR-susige PA-esusige	
1pi	PR-Nāsigē			PA-um	PA-umsi	
1pe				PA-umbige	PA-umsige	
2s				ke-PA-u	ke-PA-usi	
2d				ke-PR-su ke-PA-esu	ke-PR-susi ke-PA-esusi	
2p				ke-PA-um	ke-PA-umsi	
3s	ke-PR ke-PA-e	ke-PR-si ke-PA-esi	ke-PA-i	PA-u	PA-usi	
3d	ke-PR-si ke-PA-esi	keme-PR-si keme-PA-esi	keme-PA-i	PR-su PA-esu	PR-susi PA-esusi	
3p	keme-PR keme-PA-e	keme-PR-si keme-PA-esi	keme-PA-i	me-PA-u	me-PA-usi	

intransitive S →

	ke-PR ke-PA-e	ke-PR-si ke-PA-si	ke-PA-i	PR PA-e	PR-si PA-si	me-PR me-PA-e
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reflexive S →

	ke-PR-sim̄	ke-PR-nesi	ke-PR-Nāsi	PR-sim̄	PR-nesi	me-PR-sim̄
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Table 1 (cont.)

hiptāṃ	{ hiptesi	{ āhipte
hiptāṃsim̄	{ hiptesige	{ hiptige
mehiptāṃ	{ mehiptesi	{ āmehiptesi
	{ mehiptesige	{ āmehiptesige
	e	e

Fig. 2: The paradigm ‘he beat me’ (p. 24a).

¹ The suffix *-esu-* in dual forms (all persons) with 3d person object has an apparently free variant *-usu-*.

As far as the dialect is concerned, we may note that the 1st person singular object (and intransitive subject) non-past agreement marker is *Na* (*N* being a nasalizing morphophoneme, e.g. *hip-mā* ‘he strikes me’) in Hodgson as in the Maiwa-Mewa dialect, vs *ʔε* in van Driem’s Phedappe and *-aʔ* in Panchthar. The combinations *-ks-* and *-ʏs-* (not *-kkh-*, *-ɲgh-* as in Panchthar) occur, e.g., in *bokse* ‘lift it!’.

The present note is not an edition of the notes, but an interpretation. Even the reading of a single paradigm involves some interpretation, and for various reasons no one of the paradigms can give a satisfactory picture of the whole system. I have therefore synthesized a paradigm based on all of the recorded forms (table 1). I have left a few blanks (“?”) where the material did not seem to warrant a decision. Thus some of the forms of fig. 2 will not be found in table 1. Compared to present-day dialects²; the table shows a few interesting differences that are clearly go beyond questions of interpretation.

The first of these concerns “clusivity” and the prefix *ā-*. The forms of the 3→1dp paradigm come in bracketed pairs (see fig. 2), undoubtedly representing inclusive and exclusive. The suffix *-ige* appears on one and only one member of each pair; it is surely the mark of 1st person non-singular exclusive. It marks intransitive subjects, transitive agents and transitive objects, as in modern dialects. The prefix *ā-*, however, often occurs on both forms, sometimes on neither, and only rarely on the inclusive but not the exclusive member of the pair as in modern dialects³. The data do not permit us to identify it as an inclusive marker. It also appears (in the prefix *āke-*) in most 2→1 forms, but not in 2sd→1s forms (roughly as in modern dialects).

The second and most important point also concerns the prefix *ā-*. In Hodgson’s notes, *ā-* occurs only in transitive forms with 1st person objects. It does not occur in forms with 1st person A, or in intransitive or reflexive 1st person forms as it does in modern dialects. On this point the data are unambiguous: *ā-* is a 1st person object marker -- non-singular, only possibly inclusive. As for the other agreement prefixes, it may be noted that the second person prefix *ke-* is used without consideration of case role, as in modern dialects, and the 3d plural (or sometimes non-singular) *me-* is limited to A and S, again as in modern dialects.

A final point concerns the 1pe→3 suffix *umbige/umsige*, in modern dialects 1pe→3 *umbe/umsimbe*. Students of Limbu have assumed, logically, that *be* in these forms reflected exclusive *ige*. This finds justification in Hodgson’s notes, which show a form close to the postulated morphophonemic $|\text{um-ige}|$. This was no

² This term refers to dialects on which published material is available. There may of course be undescribed modern dialects which resemble the dialect of Hodgson’s notes.

³ As it happens, all of these possibilities are illustrated in a single paradigm in fig. 2. Table 1 indicates variation to a limited extent by the use of parentheses, but it cannot show which variants go together in individual paradigms.

doubt realized *ummige* by the Limbu rule of final gemination, reinforced to Hodgson's *umbige*, and finally contracted to modern *umbe*.

Hodgson never published any Limbu paradigms. He would probably have felt that he did not have sufficient material. In his publications on Hayu and Bahing he tried to provide examples of all possible root finals, transitive and intransitive, but his Limbu notes only cover some 5 (out of 20-odd) finals for transitives, and only one highly irregular intransitive. The notes contain numerous inconsistencies and errors which he would no doubt have caught and checked had he worked them up for publication. In the event, Hodgson left India in the summer of 1858 (Hunter 1896), the year after they were written; his last publication in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* was in that year.

REFERENCES

Hodgson, Brian Houghton. 1857. Papers. vol. 89. Conserved in the India Office Library, London.

Hunter, William Wilson. 1896. *Life of Brian Houghton Hodgson*. London.