

LIMBU *NOUS AUTRES* AND 1ST PERSON MORPHOLOGY¹

Boyd Michailovsky
Lacito/CNRS, Paris

In a number of Eastern Kiranti languages, verb forms for 1st person patient scenarios have been replaced, in some cases optionally, by a construction in which a word for “man” represents the 1st person patient, and the verb form lacks the usual 1st person markers to index the object. This micro-areal phenomenon has been described by Ebert (1991:86-88; 1994:28-29) and named “impersonal 1st person patient marking”. The precise extent of such marking, its integration into the verbal morphology, and the particular morphemes used vary from language to language. I will discuss this phenomenon in the Maiwa-Mewa Khola dialect, with reference to Limbu 1st person marking in general, including some evidence from the notes of Brian Hodgson (see accompanying article).

In Limbu, two morphemes are used in this construction: *yapmi* and *napmi*. It is not entirely clear from the sources if these form a doublet in all dialects, but this appears to be the case in the dialect of the Maiwa and Mewa Khola valleys (MM) on which I did fieldwork in 1987-88; they will not be distinguished here. Their uses fall into two categories: (1) as an independent quasi-pronoun meaning ‘a person, someone, someone else’, and (2) as a 1st person patient marker. I will begin with the first use, of which the second appears to be a grammaticalized extension.

Independent *yapmi*

Table 1 shows the definitions of *yapmi* and *napmi* in the available Limbu dictionaries and vocabularies. The definitions center around Nepali *mānche* and English ‘man, person’, but Subba and van Driem both cite the meaning ‘other, someone else’. In fact, there is another Limbu word (possibly of Indo-Aryan origin), *mɔna*, glossed ‘man, human being’ by Subba, which is used when definite reference (‘that man’), or reference to the quality of a person as a human being (‘what kind of man’, example (1) below) is intended. This word appears also in the examples and texts of Weidert and Subba (e.g. 1985:121), van Driem, and the LSI, sources in which I have found only one example (see note 2 below) of independent *yapmi~napmi*, apart from van Driem’s vocabulary entry. Example (1) is the only example in my materials in which *yapmi* functions as transitive A. It is marked in the ergative case. In this respect it does not look like a pronoun, since pronouns in Limbu do not take case markers:

¹ Abbreviations: CTR counter-expectancy; DF definite; ERGative; EMPHatic; INFinitive; INSTRu-mental; NEGative; NOMinalizer; PAST; PLural; PREsent; PV preverb; Question; REFLEXive; TOPic.

[“other-pointer”]. Often, as has been remarked in other Kiranti languages, the indefinite person is represented by the 1st person inclusive, for example in *a-mu-mu-ba* [1.incl-poison-poison-NOM] ‘poisonous’ [lit. ‘which poisons us^{pi}’] or *a-tuk* [1.incl-be.ill] ‘one gets ill, you get ill’.

The above are essentially the only examples I recorded of independent *yapmi*. In all it functions as a kind of indefinite quasi-pronoun ‘someone, someone else’, while *mɔna* serves as the full noun ‘person, man’. (In Nepali, the noun *mānche* can be used in both senses.) I suspect this is the case in other Limbu dialects as well. Note, however, that the same word *yapmi* in Athpare and in Yamphu, languages closely related to Limbu, is clearly a full noun ‘person, man’ (Ebert 1997, Rutgers 1998:95).

1st person object *yapmi*

The other use of *yapmi* is as a 1st person non-singular object pronoun. In this construction, the transitive verb has what looks like an intransitive form because it shows no object agreement (unless one takes *yapmi* itself as an agreement marker): it bears neither of the 1st person markers *a-* or *-igε* nor the 3rd person object-marking suffix *-u*. This is the only condition under which a transitive verb has the indicative form PA-ε, the regular 3rd person past for intransitives (table 2). Only past stem forms have been recorded in the Maiwa-Mewa dialect.

In the Maiwa-Mewa and Phedappe dialects, this construction coexists with the more common regular finite transitive indicative forms, which have personal agreement affixes showing agreement with the 1st person non-singular object, often in the same sentence:

- (5) anige nurik memettige-aŋ ciŋhī yapmi mehakte [K14]
 we^{pe} well do.3p→1pe-and letter us send.3p
 They treated us well and they sent us letters.
 [cf. (**anige**) **mehaktige** ‘they sent to us^{pe}’].

In the following, the second object *phudoŋ* intervenes between *yapmi* and the verb, something which would be impossible with the prefixed pronominal agreement markers *a-*, *kε-*, *mε-*. Note the impersonal form *mεbere*, past in form, in parallel with the non-past personal form *amembinen*.

- (6) anige ammu:t mε:n-n-i? ammu:tte-aŋ khunchi ni
 us^{pe} call.PR.3p→1pi no-Q call.PA.3p→1pi-and they EMPH
yapmi phudoŋ **mεbere** phogoro allo **ani**-aŋ kɔ
 us gift give.3p if now we^{pi}-also TOP
 egaŋ u:tmasiŋ uhi khan purai pipasi pokse...
 after call.INF.PL that.same that fully give.INF.PL become.PA.3s
 khunchi khann-εn **amembinen** phogoro... [K151,154]
 they that-DF give.PR.3p→1pi.NEG if
 They call us, right? If they call us^{pi} and give us gifts, then later we^{pi} too
 must call them and give them fully the same... But if they don’t give us^{pi}
 gifts ...

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-Na ke-PA-aŋ	<p>ake-PR</p> <p>ake-PA-ε</p>			
2d					
2p					
3s	PR-Na PA-aŋ	a-PR-si a-PA-εsi	PR-sige PA-εsige	a-PR a-PA-ε	PA-ige
3d	mε-PR-Na mε-PA-aŋ	am-PR-si am-PA-εsi	mε-PR-sige mε-PA-εsige	am-PR am-PA-ε	mε-PA-ige
3p					

Intransitive: S →

	PR-Na PA-aŋ	a-PR-si a-PA-εsi	PR-sige PA-εsige	a-PR a-PA-ε	PA-ige
--	----------------	---------------------	---------------------	----------------	--------

Reflexive: S →

	PR-Nasiŋŋa	a-PR-neŋsi	PR-neŋsige	a-PR-Nasi	PR-Nasiŋe
--	------------	------------	------------	-----------	-----------

Table 2: Maiwa-Mewa Khola affirmative indicative verb paradigm.

Transitive		Intrans.		Reflexive		
↓A/S	O →1S	1D/P	3S	3D/P	—	—
2S	PA-aŋŋe		PA-ε		PA-ε	PR-siŋŋe
2D		a-PA-ε		PA-εse	PA-εse	PR-neŋe
2P		a-PA-inne	PA-amme	PA-ams(imm)ε	PA-inne	PR-Nasiŋne

Table 3: Mewa Khola affirmative imperatives

- (7) him-mu pa-ma-re-aŋ **napmi mendoren** kusiŋ
house-in father-mother-ERG-also scold.3p.NEG PV
menni:ttun. embhelle kə kheni kə keipsi kedεi-aŋ kə. [K243]
know.3p→3.NEG so TOP you^P TOP sleep.2p arrive.2p-and TOP

Transitive: O →

↓A	2s	2d	2p	3s	3d	3p
1s	PR-nε	PR-nεsiŋ	PR-(nε)niŋ	PA-uŋ	PA-uŋsiŋ	
1di	PR-nεsigε			a-PR-su	a-PR-susi	
1de				PR-suŋε	PR-susigε	PA-usigε
1pi	PR-Nasigε (PR-nεsigε)			a-PA-um	PA-umsim	
1pe				PA-umbe	PA-umsigε	
2s				kε-PA-u	kε-PA-usi	
2d				kε-PR-su	kε-PR-susi	
2p				kε-PA-um	kε-PA-umsi	
3s	kε-PR kε-PA-ε	kε-PR-si kε-PA-εsi	kε-PA-i	PA-u	PA-usi	
3d	kεm-PR kεm-PA-ε			PR-su	PR-susi	
3p				kεm-PR-si kεm-PA-εsi	kεm-PA-i	mε-PA-u

Intransitive: S →

	kε-PR kε-PA-ε	kε-PR-si kε-PA-si	kε-PA-i	PR PA-ε	PR-si PA-si	mε-PR mε-PA-ε
--	------------------	----------------------	---------	------------	----------------	------------------

Reflexive S: →

	kε-PR-siŋ	kε-PR-nεsi	kε-PR-Nasi	PR-siŋ	PR-nεsi	mε-PR-siŋ
--	-----------	------------	------------	--------	---------	-----------

Table 2 (cont.)

[We used to sneak back into the house after dancing and go to work normally, so] at home our parents didn't scold us – they didn't know. But you guys just sleep after getting home.

[cf. (**anige**) **mendorigen** 'they do/did not scold us^{pe}'].

In the following, *yapmi* bears the definite singular/topic marker *-n*, again impossible for a pronominal prefix:

- (8) khombheaj ni kha simal-khe-lle kə yapmi medakten
 then EMPH that kapok-yam-ERG TOP us support.3s.NEG
ekdam muyaj – **yapmi-n muyε** *simal-khe-lle*
 very intoxicate.PA.3→1s – us-DF intoxicate.PA.3s kapok-yam-ERG

yapmi-n muye-aŋ kə *ekdam* **peʔasige** [Hb2:00]
 us-DF intoxicate.PA.3s-and TOP very vomit.REFL.1pe

But afterward that manioc wasn't good for us. I was badly intoxicated – we were poisoned by the manioc. It poisoned us and we^{pe} vomited a lot.

- (9) *na-nu sardār-en phere. phere-aŋ kə yapmi teʔre*
 there-from contractor-DF come.PA.3s come.PA.3s-and TOP us take.3s

khombha bhādā yapmi thekte-aŋ kə khombhe-aŋ Siliguri yammu
 then pay us pay.3s-and TOP then S. again

pegige [Hb2:20]

go.1pe

The contractor came from over there [in Assam] and took us away from there. He paid us our wages and we^{pe} went back to Siliguri.

[cf. **teʔrige**, **thektige** 'he took us^{pe}, he paid us^{pe}']

In the following, *napmi* acts like a pronominal prefix in separating the pre-verb *sen* from the root:

- (10) *lo kheni akkhe pokse-aŋ kenu:ksi phe-aŋ kə*
 well you^p how become.3s-and return.2p COMP TOP
yammu sen napmi medose-lle ni [G10:10/132]
 again PV us ask.3p-when EMPH

When they asked us, "Well! Why did you come back?" ...

- (11) *paisā rokwā medzogu-aŋ kə yapmi memberen* [Ia4:00]
 money stop do.3p→3s-and TOP us give.3p.NEG

They stopped the money and and they didn't give it to us.

[cf. (**anige**) **memberigen** 'they did not give to us^{pe}']

- (12) *khon-haʔ-re galla napmi medzoge napmi meteʔre*
 that-PL-ERG recruitment us do.3p us take.3p
bhartī poŋse khombhelle belā [O44 (Tembe)]
 enlistment effect.3p then time

At that time they [soldiers on leave] used to recruit us and take us off and get us enlisted.

In the above examples from the MM dialect, *yapmi~napmi* is seen to occur sporadically for a 1st non-singular object with a 3rd person agent. Where forms in the surrounding context distinguish exclusive from inclusive, these are exclusive, except in 6, which is rather anomalous: after the first word ('we^{pe}') the speaker switches from exclusive to an apparently empathetic inclusive. The context is notionally exclusive — a younger man explaining to a older one how the new generation functions. *yapmi* never represents a 1st singular argument, and it does not appear in 2→1 scenarios or imperatives, although there are many of these in the corpus.

Other dialects

Descriptions of other Limbu dialects present somewhat different conditions for the use of 1st person *yapmi*. For the dialect of Phedap, Van Driem writes:

“The first person morpheme <*a-*> is often dropped from 2→1 forms and replaced by the word <*na'pmi*> which immediately precedes the verb. The word *na'pmi* also occurs as a non-bound morph in the meaning ‘someone else’, whence the restricted usage to signal a first person actant probably derives.” (1987:78).

There are two major differences with the MM dialect: use for 2→1 (including imperatives) rather than 3→1 forms, and use for 1st singular object, even for 2s→1s (where, incidentally, it cannot be said to replace the prefix *a-*, because this prefix does not occur in the regular finite form). The impersonal verb form may be either past or non-past.

Weidert and Subba (Panchthar dialect) present forms with *yapmi* as the only ones for most 1st person object scenarios except those with specifically INCLUSIVE 1st person objects (necessarily with 3rd person agent). As in Phedappe, the impersonal verb form may be either past or non-past. Without going into a fully detailed analysis, *yapmi* forms are used in the following parts of the paradigm (1985:60 and paradigms 43, 68, 69; paradigm 42 differs in minor details):

- (1) 2→1 except 2s→1s; imperative 2→1dp.
- (2) 3→1dpe.
- (3) 3d→1s.

In a few cases, non-*yapmi* forms are listed as alternatives: 2p→1s present *ke-PA-igya?* (resembling Myanglung Phedappe — see below), 2p→1p present *ake-PR-?*, and 3p→1pe present *me-PA-igya?* (Weidert and Subba 1985:60, 183). It is possible that a complete personal paradigm without *yapmi* forms exists in Panchthar as in the other Limbu dialects, but the impersonal form appears to be more frequent there than elsewhere.

In older sources for Limbu morphology — the LSI (1908) and Hodgson’s notes (1857), both of which contain extensive paradigms — *yapmi* does not occur. This is a clear indication that *yapmi* forms had not replaced the regular paradigm. It is possible, however, that such forms did exist but were either not recorded or not judged to be part of the verbal morphology proper, since *yapmi* may have been taken as an independent word in an idiomatic construction.

We may resume the use of *yapmi*-forms in Limbu dialects as follows:

Mewa/Maiwa	Phedap (van Driem 1987)	Panchthar (Weidert and Subba, 1985)
3→1dpe	2→1	3→1dpe, 3d→1s (not 3s→1s) 2→1 (except 2s→1s)

Impersonal *yapmi*-forms and 1st person morphology

A number of factors may have contributed to the replacement of first person morphology by *yapmi*. It has often been noted that the non-singular parts of the you-and-me paradigms are the most difficult to elicit in Kiranti languages, with informants frequently resorting to non-finite forms even in spontaneous speech (Allen 1975:49, Michailovsky 1988:105, Ebert 1994:25-26). The development of

impersonal *yapmi* forms may reflect this. But why should this part of the paradigm be more problematic than others?

The reason may be, as Ebert suggests, that in these forms the finite paradigm does not allow marking of the number of both speech act participants. The *yapmi* forms at least sidestep this problem, if they do not solve it.

For Limbu, it is possible that the presence of *a-*, the inclusive³ marker, is felt to be anomalous in 2→1dp forms, in which the 1st person argument is notionally exclusive, even if it is not structurally in opposition with an inclusive category. (Note that 1dp→2 forms all bear the exclusive marker *-ige*.) This would explain the replacement of 2→1dp finite forms, marked by the prefix *age-*, by impersonal-object forms (*yapmi ke-*) forms in Panchthar and (optionally) Phedap. It also explains the divergent evolution in the Myanglung Phedappe dialect mentioned by van Driem (1987:78n), where 2→1dp forms bear the 2nd person prefix *ke-* and the EXCLUSIVE suffix *-ige*⁴.

If *a-* is felt to be anomalous in 2→1dp forms, it may be wondered why it is there in the first place. One possibility is that it was originally a 1st person (?non-singular) marker, unmarked for “clusivity”. Another is that it was originally an 1st person (non-singular) object marker of some kind. This hypothesis could find support in Hodgson’s paradigms (see accompanying article), where *a-* occurs only in transitive 1st person object forms.

³ Van Driem and I have been carrying on a low-intensity debate on the significance of *a-*, which he considers to mean ‘1st person’ (Michailovsky 1989:472, van Driem 1994:159). My reasons for considering *a-* to be a 1st person (non-singular) inclusive — and not general 1st person — marker are the following (valid for the MM, Panchthar, and Phedap dialects at least):

a- does not occur in ANY 1st person form with only singular arguments, that is 1s intransitive, 1s reflexive, 1s→2s, 1s→3s, 2s→1s, or 3s→1s, i.e. in any basic 1st person form.

a- occurs in ALL 1st person non-singular forms which are distinctively inclusive, and in NO form that is distinctively exclusive. These include all non-singular 1st person intransitive forms, and all transitive 1dp→3 and 3→1dp forms.

Van Driem replies, “I cannot concur with this view, as the prefix clearly functions as a marker of first person, not only in 2→1 forms, but also in non-finite forms such as the supine” (1994:159). The first assertion does not contradict my analysis, while the new argument, concerning the supine, is apparently irrelevant, because what is prefixed to the supine, as van Driem explains elsewhere (1987:212), is the oblique (or possessive) pronoun, a different paradigm of 12 forms. Of course, the possibility that the 1st person singular possessive pronoun *a-* (and the element *a-* in other 1st person pronouns) has the same etymological origin as the verbal prefix *a-* cannot be excluded.

⁴ For van Driem, *a-* “has been reanalysed as the inclusive morpheme” in this dialect.

REFERENCES

- Allen, N. 1975. *Sketch of Thulung Grammar*. Ithaca. Cornell University.
- Bradley, D., ed. 1994. *Tibeto-Burman Languages of the Himalayas*. Papers in Southeast Asian Linguistics, No. 14. *Pacific Linguistics*. Canberra.
- Chemjong, I. S. 1965. *Limbu-Nepali-English Dictionary*. Kathmandu, Royal Nepal Academy. [Limbu in devanagari script.]
- Ebert, K. 1991. "Inverse and pseudo-inverse prefixes in Kiranti languages: evidence from Belhare, Athpare, and Dungmali". *LTBA* 14.1:73-92.
- . 1994. *The structure of Kiranti languages*. Arbeiten des Seminars für allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft 13. Universität Zürich.
- . 1997. *A Grammar of Athpare*. München, Newcastle. Lingcom Europa.
- Hodgson, Brian Houghton. 1857. Papers. vol. 89. Conserved in the India Office Library, London.
- Michailovsky, B. 1988. *La langue hayu*. Paris. Editions du CNRS.
- . 1989. review of van Driem 1987. *BSLP* 84.2:470-473.
- Rutgers, Roland. 1998. *Yamphu*. Research School CNWS. Leiden.
- Senior, H. W. R. 1908. *A Vocabulary of the Limbu Language*. [English-Limbu. Roman script. Reprint 1977, Kathmandu, Ratna Pustak Bhandar.]
- Subba, B. B. 1979. *Limbu Nepali English Dictionary*. Government of Sikkim. Gangtok. [Limbu in Limbu and Devanagari scripts.]
- Van Dreim, George. 1987. *A Grammar of Limbu*. Berlin. Mouton de Gruyter.
- . 1994. "A new analysis of the Limbu verb". Bradley (1994) 153-173.
- Weidert, Alfons, et B. Subba. 1985. *Concise Limbu Grammar and Dictionary*. Amsterdam. Lobster Publications.
- Yonghang, Khel Raj. 2052 B.S. [1995]. *limbū-nepālī śabdakoś*. [Limbu-Nepali Dictionary] ?Lalitpur. [Limbu-Nepali, by semantic categories. Limbu in Limbu script.]

ERRATA, *LTBA* 24.1 "Limbu *nous autres* and 1st person morphology".

I would like to correct errors in Tables 2 (p. 149) and 3 (p. 150).

In Table 2, the forms in the 1st dual exclusive ("1de") column are incorrect, as the intransitive and 3d person agent forms should not have the inclusive prefix *a-*. The corrected forms:

Transitive : O →

↓A	1de
3s	PR-sige PA-εsige
3d	mε-PR-sige mε-PA-εsige
3p	

intransitive:

	PR-sige PA-εsige
--	---------------------

Table 2: Maiwa-Mewa Khola affirmative indicative verb paradigm (partial)

In Table 3, "Mewa Khola affirmative imperatives", the plural intransitive and first person object imperatives, which in the Mewa Khola dialect have the suffix *-inne*, were omitted. These forms are interesting because in Tembe, Phedap (van Driem 187) and Panchthar (Weidert and Subba) the plural intransitive imperative has the same suffix as the transitive. The corrected table:

↓A/S	Transitive				Intrans.	Reflexive
	O →1s	1dp	3s	3dp		
2s	PA-aŋŋε		PA-ε		PA-ε	PR-siŋŋε
2d		a-PA-ε		PA-εε	PA-εε	PR-neεε
2p		a-PA-inne	PA-ammε	PA-ams(imm)ε	PA-inne	PR-Nasinne

Table 3: Mewa Khola affirmative imperatives

— Boyd Michailovsky