THE SINGPHO AGENTIVE – FUNCTIONS AND MEANINGS*

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Abstract: This paper examines the Singpho noun phrase particle *i*, which functions both as a marker of agentive and also as an adverbial particle, marking locationals, temporals and causals. Based on a careful examination of our text corpus, the distribution of the agentive use of this particle, which is not obligatory, is compared with that of the obligatory anti-agentive, that marks animate patients, recipients/beneficiaries and experiencers. Its use is found to only weakly correlate with either the transitivity of the verb or the definiteness of the agent referent, being slightly more likely to be employed with verbs of stronger transitivity and agents of less definiteness. It is however very frequently employed with speech act verbs.

Keywords: Tibeto-Burman languages, agentive, anti-agentive, adverbial, Singpho

1. INTRODUCTION

Many languages of the Tibeto-Burman family have in their inventory a marker of the actor (or subject) in a transitive clause. This marker is variously referred to as agent or agentive (Chelliah 1997; Coupe 2007; LaPolla 2003) or ergative (Hyslop 2010; LaPolla 1995a), though these two terms essentially refer to the same thing. In this paper we prefer ‘agentive’ because it has fewer implications of being paradigmatic than ‘ergative’. Many languages of the family do not have such marking at all (van Breugel 2008; Post 2007), and some have a nominative marker (Burling 2004; Joseph 2007).

In the Tibeto-Burman languages that have agentive marking, it is not obligatory and is used for functions such as emphasis of agentivity and marked constituent order (Qiang, LaPolla 2003, 2011), situations contrary to real world expectations (Mongsen Ao, Coupe 2007), or disambiguating two potential agents and marking contrastive focus (Kurtöp, Hyslop 2010).

This paper discusses the agentive marking in the Numhpuk variety of Singpho. Four varieties of Singpho (Bodo-Konyak-Jinghpaw/Tibeto-Burman) are identified by Singpho speakers in Northeast India, three of which are spoken in Upper Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, and are named for the rivers on which they are

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1 Post (2007: 720) does report that “highly individuated referents” can be marked with the topic marker to indicate a higher level of agentivity or volitionality.
spoken: the Numhpuk, Tieng and Diyun respectively. The fourth variety, Turung, is spoken in the middle Brahmaputra valley (see Morey 2010 for a full description of Turung). There are perhaps 10,000 Singpho speakers in India.

Singpho is closely related to the Jinghpaw language spoken in Kachin State, Burma (Hanson 1896, 1906; Maran 1971; Matisoff 1974a, 1974b) and in China (Dai 1992 and Dai and Diehl 2003). One of the features of Jinghpaw is a highly complex set of 'sentence final words' (SFW), which "embody such grammatical meanings of the sentential predicate as mood, subject person and number, direction and aspect" (Dai and Diehl 2003: 407). These sentence final words are not found in Singpho, the verb being marked instead by one of a number of verbal particles, the most common of which are given in (1):

(1) \( de \sim re \ (/{de}^1/) \sim (/{re}^1/) \) ‘REAL’
    \( ma \ (/{maa}^1/) \) ‘FUT’
    \( haq \ (/{ha}^2^2/) \) ‘DECL’
    \( uq \ (/{u}^2^2/) \) ‘IMP’

Noun phrases are marked by several particles, including the definite marker \( wa \), the agentive \( i \) and the anti-agentive \( hpe \). The particle \( wa \) is discussed in detail in Morey (2011) and exemplified in (2), where it refers to the Naga, an entity introduced in the previous line, in the form \( Naga \ wa \) ‘Naga DEF’.

(2) \( hki \ wa \ hka \ goi \ he. \)
    \( khi^2 \ waa^1 \ kha^3 \ goi^4 \ he^3 \)

   3SG DEF water at PRT
    ‘He was in the water.’

\emph{Story of the Buddha and the Naga (SDM08-2006-056), told by Gumgi Gumthoi, (19)}

For \( i \) and \( hpe \), following LaPolla (1992, 1995a, 1995b), the terms ‘agentive’ and ‘anti-agentive’ are preferred to ‘ergative’ and ‘accusative’ because the marking is not syntactically paradigmatic, but rather semantic in nature.

In (3) we see a clause with both agent and patient realised by noun phrases, the agent marked by the agentive \( i \) and the patient by the anti-agentive \( phe \). This example is from the Turung variety:

\( \* \)

\( 2 \) The tones of the varieties Singpho are shown by means of superscript numerals. In Numhpuk Singpho tone 1 is low falling, tone 2 low and stopped, tone 3 high and stopped, tone 4 mid level and tone 5 high falling. In example (3) and others from the Turung variety of Singpho, tone 1 is low falling, tone 2 high falling and tone 3 mid level. For further discussion of tones in the Turung variety of Singpho, see Morey 2010: 167. The practical orthographies for Turung and Numhpuk Singpho differ and are still under development. These are discussed in Morey 2010: 99.

\( 3 \) In this example the asterisk marks Assamese words.
The Singpho agentive functions and meanings

(3) dai ksa i dai jan phe biya* korai* hah.
   dai³ kəsaa² ii³ dai³ jan³ phee³ biya korai haʔ¹

[that son AG]ₐ [that girl A.AG]ₒ marry do DECL
‘... and so the son married that very girl.’

Story of the clever daughter-in-law (SDM07-200304-001), told by Jogen Shyam (Ai Mya Ko), (19)

Examples like (3), in which both i and agentive phe (spelled hpe in Numhpuk Singpho and also Kachin Jinghpaw) are found together in the same clause, are quite infrequent.

The function of hpe is to mark animate non-agents, most frequently patients, beneficiaries and experiencers, and hpe is almost obligatory with such animate arguments. (See Morey 2010: 350 for a discussion of the anti-agentive in the Turung variety of Singpho.) The experiencer function of hpe with deontic ‘should’ or desiderative ‘want’ is grammaticalised to the point that a verb is not required to convey this sense, as in (4):

(4) ngai hpe māgui māri gaw law bawng di ...
   ŋai¹ phee⁴ māgui¹ mārii¹ go¹ loo¹ boŋ⁴ dii¹ ...

1SG A.AG elephant buy TOP PRT combine GV ...
‘I should join (with him) to buy an elephant.’

Travels to Burma (SDM08-2006-101), told by Kiyang La, (197)

Since the anti-agentive can mark both patients and beneficiaries, it can appear twice if both these arguments are animate, demonstrated in (5), an example from Turung, where ‘another person, or emissary’ is sent to ‘the father of the bride’ and both those arguments are marked by hpe (here written phe).

(5) numsa maang na gwa phe ...
   num³saa² maan² naa³ gə-waa¹ phee³ ...

[girl youth POSS AR-FA A.AG]ₐ BEN ...

lasa maang na gnu wa ...

[young man youth POSS AR-MO DEF]ₐ ...

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4 This example has been substantially edited for presentation here, but the marking of both patient and beneficiary has been retained as in the original, the full transcription of which can be seen in Morey (2010: 352).
chumphoh gleng aima phe san joh dat.
cum¹ pho¹ gəleŋ³ ai² maa¹ phee³ san¹ jo?¹ dat¹
[person other one  A.AG|PAT ask  PURP send
‘(Then), the father of the groom will send another person, to ask either the
mother of the bride ....’

Turung Wedding Customs (SDM07-200309-009), told by Aishu Shyam, (7)

While the anti-agentive is almost always found with animate non-agent
arguments, the agenteive marker i, on the other hand, is not obligatory and
frequently does not appear, even when the agent argument is expressed by a full
noun phrase or a pronoun, as we will see below. Moreover, the particle i marks
other functions, which we will group together under the heading ‘adverbial’, more
frequently found than its agenteive function. Such adverbial uses mark locationals,
temporals, causals and purposives, discussed and exemplified below in Section 4.
In Jinghpaw, as described by Dai and Diehl (2003), the forms of the agenteive and
anti-agentive are [e³¹] and [eʔ⁵⁵] respectively, being described as ‘structural
particles’.

2. QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

We have examined our corpus of texts⁵ in both the Turung and Numhpuk
varieties of Singpho and counted the raw number of occurrences of hpe, as well as
each of the main functions of the particle i. I present these findings in Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variety</th>
<th>Turung</th>
<th>Numhpuk Singpho</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corpus Size (time)</td>
<td>11.5 hours</td>
<td>4 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corpus Size (number of lines)⁶</td>
<td>10,596</td>
<td>3,741</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occurrence of hpe/phe ‘A.AG’</td>
<td>877</td>
<td>477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occurrence of i ‘AG’</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occurrence of i ‘ADV’</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>754</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Frequency of agentive and anti-agentive markers in two Singpho varieties

Table 1 shows that the anti-agentive particle is somewhat more frequent than
the agenteive. This can, in part, be explained by the fact that the agent is more

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⁵ The full corpus can be searched at the Tai and Tibeto-Burman Languages of Assam website (http://sealang.net/assam).

⁶ Both databases consist of a range of texts, such as stories, personal histories, cultural
information and some procedural texts. The corpus does not include any elicitation or prompted
texts such as Pear Stories or Frog Stories. The main difference between the Turung and
Numhpuk Singpho corpora is that the latter contains a significant number of traditional songs.
When this corpus was assembled, the text was divided into ‘sentences’, based upon the native
speaker’s intuitions of what formed a complete grammatical utterance. So these are not single
clauses, but may be more complex structures containing multiple subordinate clauses followed
by a main or matrix clause, or they may be as short as a single exclamation. See Morey (2010:
552) for a discussion of the ‘sentence’ in the Turung variety of Singpho.
likely to be a topical element, and consequently can be omitted, whereas the non-agent arguments are more likely to be focal and need to be spelled out. Topical elements usually appear before the focus although topical agents are also found after the verb in a position we term ‘additional topic’ (see Morey 2010: 508 for a discussion of topic and focus in the Turung variety of Singpho).

Arguments marked by the anti-agentive only make up a portion of all patient arguments, because the anti-agentive only marks animate patients and probably a higher proportion of patient arguments are non-animate. On the other hand it marks almost all beneficiaries and recipients because these are almost always animate.7

A second explanation for the lower number of agentive markers is that many agents in the corpus are not marked by \( i \). We have not quantified this across the whole corpus, although in Section 3 below we make a detailed study of a single text in which most overtly expressed agents are not marked by \( i \).

What we can see from Table 1 is that the frequency of agentive and adverbial uses of the particle \( i \) is considerably less in the Turung variety than in Numhpuk Singpho, whereas the frequency of the use of the anti-agentive is more or less the same (the Turung corpus being much larger).

We can also see that in the Numhpuk variety the adverbial function of \( i \) accounts for a large majority. Out of 982 tokens of \( i \) in Table 1, 228 (23.2%) were marking the agentive and the remaining 754 (76.8%) are adverbial in function. We will now proceed to discuss the agentive function, with the adverbial function treated in section 4.

3. THE SINGPHO AGENTIVE \( i \)

The agentive is demonstrated in (6), which consists of three clauses: (1) a matrix clause with a speech act verb on the first line, with the agent (the speakers) marked with agentive \( i \), (2) a complex clause with two verbs, nown ‘bring’ and ngu ‘say’, the agent of both being the pronoun nang ‘2SG’ marked with \( i \), and (3) the main clause of the speech without any overt arguments. The blind men referred to were introduced earlier in the story and are a salient reference in this discourse.

\[
\begin{align*}
(6) & \quad \text{... miqdi } hteng \ i \ nga \ re \\
& \quad \text{... miŋ³di³⁴ theŋ¹ ii⁴ ŋaa⁵ re¹} \\
& \quad \text{... blind } \text{PL AG say REAL} \\
& \quad \text{a nang } \text{i nawn sa kawq ngu yawng gaw} \\
& \quad \text{a¹ naŋ¹ ii⁴ non⁴ saa¹ ko³ ŋuu¹ yoŋ⁵ go¹} \\
& \quad \text{EXCL 2SG AG bring go FUT.IMM say when TOP}
\end{align*}
\]

7 One exception to this is in fixed phrases like nat jawq ‘spirit give’, literally meaning to ‘give to the spirits’, ‘to propitiate the spirits’.
‘... those blind men said “If you say that you will lead us, you may do so.”’

*Story of the Blind Men* (SDM08-20050801-002), told by Bhupeswar Ningda, (33)

Both of the agentive-marked arguments in this example are co-occurring with speech act verbs. This appears to be the single most frequent usage of the agentive marker in modern spoken Numhpuk Singpho.

The agentive is found in subordinate clauses, as we see in (7), where the clause *gawgin i gāwaq naw māchiq naw* ‘being in pain from the ant’s biting’ modifies the frog (*suqlaq*), also an entity introduced earlier in the discourse.

(7) *dai¹ yawng gaw suqlaq wa*
    *dai¹ yoŋ⁵ go¹ suʔ³laʔ³ waa¹*
    that when TOP frog DEF

*gawgin i gāwaq naw māchiq naw lāgan yawng ...*
*goo¹gin¹ ii⁴ gɔwaʔ² noo⁴ mɔciʔ² noo⁴ lɔgaan¹ yoŋ⁵ ...*

‘And then the frog, being in pain from the ant’s biting, having jumped up ...’

*Story of the Ant and the Frog* (SDM08-20060801PN-005), told by Sam Awn Laq, (35)

Agentive marking is frequently omitted, as in (8). This example consists of two clauses, the first of which takes up the first two lines of the transcription and with a verbal complex *dāru dat* ‘attack’ and the agent argument *nga* ‘buffalo’ marked by the definite marker. The second clause, which is the third line of transcription, has a verb complex *lung dat* ‘go up’ with the agent *hkiq* marked also by the definite marker. While not perhaps as salient an entity in this text as the blind men in (6) or the ant in (7), both of which those stories are about, the buffalo in (8) was nevertheless introduced several lines earlier. From this we conclude that saliency is not a factor in the decision of whether to use the agentive marking.

(8) *nga wa gaw hkautang sākau hpe chum*
    *ŋaa¹ waa¹ go¹ khau’taŋ¹ sākau⁴ phee⁴ cum¹*
    buffalo DEF TOP PN caste name A.AG PRT

*gānoi ri dāru dat aq*
*go noi⁴ rii¹ dɔruu⁴ dat² aʔ²*
*narrowly escape LV attack put DECL*
The Singpho agentive – functions and meanings

hkiq wa htaw n-hpan wa lung dat dāgaw.
khiṭ² waa¹ tho⁵ m⁴phan¹ waa¹ luŋ⁴ dat² ṭo = go¹
2SG DEF yonder fence DEF go up put REAL=TOP

‘That buffalo attacked Hkautang Sākau, and he just narrowly escaped that attack by climbing up yonder fence.’

*Travels to Burma* (SDM08-2006-101), told by Kiyang Laq, (63)

The verbs in both (7) and (8), gāwaq ‘bite’ and dāru ‘attack’ respectively, are both strongly transitive, but one has an agent marked by i and the other does not. There does appear to be some correlation between the transitivity of the verb and the presence of i. All three expressed agents of the verb gāwaq ‘bite’ in the corpus have agentive marking, as do five out of seven overtly expressed agents of various verbs meaning ‘send’. Most of the expressed agents of the verb sārin ‘teach’ on the other hand were not marked with i, although the interrogative kāma ‘who’ was marked every time it occurred. This suggests that levels of transitivity and definiteness might play a role in determining the presence or absence of i, but neither is of itself a sufficient condition for its presence.

A detailed study of overt agents – expressed with nouns, pronouns or proper nouns – was done on a single text, *Travels to Burma*, spoken by Kiyang Laq.⁸ Of 19 minutes duration and containing 273 lines, this text contained 29 overt agents, of which 11 were marked with the agentive, and 18 unmarked. Of the unmarked agents, none were arguments of speech act verbs, as compared with 5 out of 11 of the marked agents.

When we consider the word class type of the agent, we see that pronouns and proper nouns are slightly more likely to be unmarked, while full nouns are slightly more likely to be marked, as we see in Table 2. Since pronouns and proper nouns are always definite and referential, whereas other nouns may not be, this suggests that less referential elements are more likely to have agentive marking.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Agent</th>
<th>Without agentive i</th>
<th>With agentive i</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pronoun</td>
<td>10 (62.5%)</td>
<td>6 (37.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proper Noun</td>
<td>5 (83.3%)</td>
<td>1 (16.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Noun</td>
<td>3 (42.9%)</td>
<td>4 (57.1%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Word classes marked by the agentive particle i in Numhpuk Singpho

While this is based on a very small sample, a study of the whole corpus shows agentive marking more frequently on the 2nd person singular pronoun nang (40 tokens) than on either the 1st person singular ngai or the 3rd person singular hkiq (both 5 tokens). Since the 1st and 3rd person pronouns have a final vowel -i, the agentive marker does not always show up clearly in those cases. However there

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⁸ Text number SDM08-2006-101.
are clear examples of *ngai i* and *hkiq i* in the corpus. In the whole corpus, a number of the cases of 2nd person agent marked by *i* were not transitive, as in (9).

(9) a  nang   i  sālawng  gai  sākawng   re.
  aa¹  naŋ¹  ii⁴  səloŋ  gai⁴  səkoŋ¹  re¹
EXCL  2SG  AG  ERR  very  proud  REAL

‘Ah, you are very proud’, (they said to the elephant).

*Story of the bad elephant* (SDM08-20050801-021), told by Bisa Lat Nawng, (48)

The function of the agentive here is to convey that the interlocutors of the direct speech, a group of other animals and birds, are affected by the elephant’s pride.

Returning to the text *Travels in Burma*, where the agent of a speech act verb is stated, that agent was always marked by the agentive *i*. Given that the speaker of this text is very elderly (born in 1916), this may represent an older form of the language. We have examined two shorter stories by younger speakers, and these show that agentive marking is not required with speech act verbs. This might suggest that the agentive marker is being used less frequently by younger speakers, something that we impressionistically feel after several years working with these languages.

Let us now consider the examples where a stated agent was not marked by the agentive. In Table 3 we present all of the examples from the text *Travels to Burma* which have agents that are unmarked by the agentive. We show the form, the main verb, which is always transitive or ditransitive, and details of the patient argument.

As we can see from Table 3, when the agent is not marked with *i*, the patient argument may be unstated, as in line (105), may be in a topic position, either before the agent, as in line (57), or postverbal, as in (244), or both agent and patient may be stated and in the pragmatically neutral ‘canonical’ AOV order. Where the patient is stated and animate, it is marked by the anti-agentive *hpe*, as in line (262).

Moreover, the agent that is not marked with *i* may or may not carry the definite marker (see Morey 2011 for further discussion of the definite in

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9 The marking of agents with speech act verbs appears to be common in Tibeto-Burman. Coupe (2007: 164) reports that the only intransitive verbs that consistently occur with agentive marking are “verbs of vocalization” such as ‘bark’, ‘shout’, ‘scream’, ‘reply’.

10 We have fewer texts spoken by younger people in our Singpho corpus. In text SDM08-2006-056, *Lord Buddha and the Naga*, spoken by Gumgi Gumhtoi, aged around 50, there are three speech verbs with expressed agents, one of which is marked by the agentive and the other two by the definite *wa* only, and in SDM08-2006-186, *Buddhist Story*, told by N-bawng Nawng, aged around 55, there are four speech act verbs with expressed agents, three of which are marked by the definite and agentive (*wa+i*) and one by the definite marker only.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example No.</th>
<th>Agent</th>
<th>Main Verb</th>
<th>Patient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(13)</td>
<td>niyon ‘2DL’</td>
<td>jawq ‘give’</td>
<td>nat ‘spirit’ this is part of a fixed form nat jawq, ‘propitiate the spirits’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(49)</td>
<td>niyon wa ‘2DL DEF’</td>
<td>yawn ‘carry’</td>
<td>canonical AOV order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(48)</td>
<td>iyon wa ‘1DL DEF’</td>
<td>unstated verb ‘carry’</td>
<td>no stated patient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(57)</td>
<td>hkiq ‘3SG’</td>
<td>la ‘take’</td>
<td>patient stated, but in pre-agent topical position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(70)</td>
<td>hkiq ‘3SG’</td>
<td>dan ‘pull’</td>
<td>no stated patient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(196)</td>
<td>ngai ‘1SG’</td>
<td>unstated verb ‘do’</td>
<td>both agent and patient (marked by phe) are in post-verbal position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(262)</td>
<td>ngai ‘1SG’</td>
<td>särin ‘teach’</td>
<td>no stated patient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(89)</td>
<td>hkini ‘3PL’</td>
<td>gālaw ‘prepare’</td>
<td>patient stated, but in post-verbal additional topic position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(105)</td>
<td>hki ni ga w ‘3PL TOP’</td>
<td>gālaw ‘prepare’</td>
<td>no stated patient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(29)</td>
<td>unmarked</td>
<td>mādun ‘show’</td>
<td>canonical AOV order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(45)</td>
<td>unmarked</td>
<td>jawq ‘give’</td>
<td>nat ‘spirit’ this is part of a fixed form nat jawq, ‘propitiate the spirits’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(80)</td>
<td>unmarked</td>
<td>dan ‘cut’</td>
<td>canonical AOV order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(244)</td>
<td>unmarked</td>
<td>grim ‘catch’</td>
<td>patient stated, but in post-verbal additional topic position</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(42)</td>
<td>+ wa ‘DEF’</td>
<td>la ‘take’</td>
<td>canonical AOV order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(63)</td>
<td>+ wa gaw ‘DEF TOP’</td>
<td>dāru ‘attack’</td>
<td>canonical AOV order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(152)</td>
<td>+ wa ‘DEF’</td>
<td>māgaq ‘touch’</td>
<td>canonical AOV order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(253)</td>
<td>unmarked</td>
<td>phoq ‘open’</td>
<td>canonical AOV order</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Unmarked agents, form, function and syntax

Numhpuk Singpho). Thus, neither the status of the patient, nor whether the agent is marked for definiteness, is a predictor of whether the agent will be marked by i.

We have already seen lack of agent marking in example (8) above. Example (10) is another case of the absence of agent marking, this time with negative polarity. In this example there are effectively two patients, ngai hpe ‘1SG A.AG’ ‘me’ and látaq ‘hand’. It appears that Kiyang Laq changed his mind about the patient after commencing the line.
4. ADVERBIAL USE OF I

A smaller portion of the Numhpuk Singpho corpus, a subset of 16 texts, consisting of 1,146 lines (approximately 85 minutes of recorded text), was examined in detail for the adverbial uses of $i$. In that portion of text, there were a total of 181 uses of $i$, of which 55 (30.4%) were marking the agent and 126 (69.6%) were marking adverbials. Table 4 presents a breakdown of the different kinds of adverbial functions recorded.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Number of Occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adverbial, Temporal</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverbial, Locational</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverbial, Causal</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverbial, Purposive</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverbial, Numeral</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Functions of the particle $i$ in Numhpuk Singpho

As we can see from Table 4, temporal and locational uses are the most frequent of the ‘adverbial’ functions of $i$. In its temporal function, $i$ can appear marking a temporal relator noun, as $\text{singdim } i$ ‘after ADV’ or a temporal noun as $\text{m\text{\u0131}nap } i$ ‘morning ADV’. It can also mark a subordinate clause, as we see in the first line of (11). This usage of marking a subordinate clause with $i$ is not found, as far as we know, in the Turung variety of Singpho.

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11 These texts are those numbered SDM08-200308-002; SDM08-20040802-014; SDM08-20040803-013; SDM08-20050801-002; SDM08-20050801-021; SDM08-2006-032; SDM08-2006-056; SDM08-2006-057; SDM08-2006-058; SDM08-2006-059; SDM08-2006-071; SDM08-2006-087; SDM08-2006-094; SDM08-2006-098; SDM08-2006-100 and SDM08-2006-101. They are archived at ELAR (http://elar.soas.ac.uk) and can be searched at the Tai and Tibeto-Burman Languages of Assam website (http://sealang.net/assam).
The Singpho agentive—functions and meanings

(11) miqdi hteng hpe san yang i
  mi?3 dii4 theeŋ1 phee4 san4 yaŋ5 ii4
  blind PL A.AG ask when ADV

miqdi hteng wa i nga re.
  mi?3 dii4 theeŋ1 waa¹ ii¹ ηaa¹ re¹
  blind PL DEF AG say REAL

‘When the blind people were asked, they said.’

Story of the blind men (SDM08-20050801-002), told by Bhipeswar Ningdaq, (25)

A related form is the common connective dai htum na i (that+end+SEQ+ADV), which can be translated simply as ‘after that’ or ‘then’, but is literally ‘that being ended ...’.

In its locational function, the adverbial appears with nouns, as in (12):

(12) htaw n-diu hkaq i yawng mu sākau ni
  thɔ⁵ n² diu⁵ kha?³ ii⁴ yοŋ⁴ muu¹ səkau⁴ nii¹
  yonder PN water ADV all also caste.name PN

bawk n-diu hkaq nga re he ti.
  bok² n⁴ diu⁵ kha?³ ηaa⁵ re¹ he¹ tii¹
  all PN water stay REAL STILL PRT

‘At yonder Ndiu River, all the Sākau people are staying at the Ndiu river ...’

Travels to Burma (SDM08-2006-101), told by Kiyang Laq (10)

In its locational function, the particle i is also found in traditional Singpho songs. In some songs, the function of i appears to be more euphonic, as in (13):

(13) law n la na yawng gaw na manmu
  loo¹ n⁴ laa⁴ naa⁴ yοŋ⁵ go naa man⁴ muu⁴
  EXCL NEG take SEQ when TOP POSS knife

saw di htau da i law htau da i.
  so?³ dii¹ thau⁴ daa⁴ ii⁴ loo¹ thau⁴ daa⁴ ii⁴
  withdraw LV cut keep ADV EXCL cut keep ADV

‘If I cannot bring you, I will take out (my) knife and cut off (my head).’

Love song (SDM08-20040803-013), sung by Kiyang Laq (8)

It also occurs with causals, as in the common phrase dai ninghkan i ‘that cause ADV’, translated as ‘because of this’ as in (14):
The adverbial usage of \textit{i} can also occur with patients, as in (15), in which the noun \textit{lātāq} ‘hand’ is marked by \textit{i}, and where \textit{n̥e numnang wa na lātāq i jum} is literally ‘grab (on) the hand of my friend’.

(15)\textit{rai} yawng gaw n̥e numnang wa hpe jum
\textit{rai}^{1} yon^{5} go^{1} nyee^{4} num^{4}n̥anj^{1} waa^{1} phee^{4} jum^{1}
then TOP 1SG.POSS friend DEF A.AG grab
\textit{n̥e} numnang wa na lātāq i jum u na
nyee^{4} num^{4}n̥anj^{1} waa^{1} n̥aa^{4} lātā^{2} ii^{4} jum^{1} u^{3} n̥aa^{5}
[1SG.POSS friend DEF POSS hand] AG grab IMP IMP.POL
dai ngu na gaw.
dai^{1} n̥uu^{1} n̥aa^{4} go^{1}
that say SEQ TOP
‘Then he said “Take my friend here, grab my friend (by) the hand!”’
\textit{The story of the blind men} (SDM08-20050801-002), told by Bhupeswar Ningda, No (53).

In this function the locational use of \textit{i} can even end up on a \textit{hpe} marked argument, as in (16):

(16)\textit{chiqkaw} wa ahkaiq ngu re yaq
\textit{cii}^{3}ko^{3} wa = ii^{4} a^{4}khai^{2} n̥uu^{1} re^{1} ya^{2^{2}}
fly DEF=AG wait! say REAL now
The Singpho agentive –functions and meanings

5. CONCLUSION

We have seen that the Singpho agentive, *i*, is not obligatory to mark agents, whereas non-agent animate arguments are almost always marked by anti-agentive *hpe*. Where the marker does occur, it is more frequent with speech act verbs than some other verbs, particularly in the speech of the oldest generation. The agentive is also present with some high transitivity verbs but again, not in an obligatory way, and is a little more common with less definite agents. The more frequent function of this morpheme is the adverbial (most often locational and temporal). We hesitate to term this ‘locative’, a function carried by *goi*, exemplified in (2).

What then was the original function of *i*? LaPolla (1995b) showed that the general direction of change in Tibeto Burman languages was from oblique case markers to more core functions, namely that the agentive developed largely from ablative marking and the anti-agentive from allative/locative marking. We do not have language internal evidence for such change in Singpho and moreover after working with these languages for several years our impression is that the agentive use of *i* is falling out of use, in other words is less frequent with younger speakers. However, since our corpus is almost all texts spoken by middle aged or older speakers, we are not in a position to make any quantified claims about the direction of change in the function of this particle.

ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>agent-like argument of transitive verb</th>
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<tr>
<td>AR</td>
<td>another’s relative (non 1st singular)</td>
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<tr>
<td>A.AG</td>
<td>anti-agentive</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADV</td>
<td>adverbialiser (extended use of the morpheme <em>i</em>)</td>
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<td>AG</td>
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<td>BENF</td>
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<td>NEG</td>
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<td>O</td>
<td>patient-like argument of a transitive verb</td>
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<td>PAT</td>
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REFERENCES


