

# THE POSSESSIVE OF EXPERIENCE IN BELHARE

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## 1. INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Bodily, emotional and cognitive states are likely to constitute a particular form class in linguistic coding. Well-known instances of this are dative subjects ('experiencer subjects') in South Asia (Masica 1976, Gupta & Tuladhar 1979, Verma & Mohanan 1990) or uncontrolled states/events ('experiential clauses') in Papuan languages (Reesink 1983, Foley 1986). What is common in such construction types is that the experiencing person (the one who feels or thinks) is marked as an oblique relation (in form of a case or verbal role marker). At the same time, however, the experiencer has subject properties to a certain degree. Depending on the language, the experiencer is treated like a regular subject (of intransitives and of active transitives) in cross-clausal coreference, verb agreement, reflexivisation, nominalisation, relativisation, and so on. The following examples are from Nepali<sup>2</sup> (Indo-Aryan; Wallace 1985:137) and Amele (Madang-Adalbert Range Stock; Roberts 1987:300), respectively. In both cases the experiencer, which is encoded as dative desinence in Nepali and as an undergoer marking affix in Amele, is accessible for cross-clausal same-subject marking:

- (1) a. *Din bhari dāurā kāṭ-era ma-lāi tirkha lāg-cha.*  
day full wood cut-SEQ.SS 1SG-DAT thirst strike-3SG.NPT  
After cutting wood the whole day, I am getting thirsty.

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<sup>2</sup> Nepali is transliterated according to indological tradition except that, following van Driem (1987), mute *a* is not written even if it is not deleted by a *virām*. In Himālayan languages 'c' and 'j' represent alveolar (e.g. in Belhare) or (lamino-)postalveolar (e.g. in Limbu or Nepali) affricates.

- b. *Ija bim-ig wen te-i-a.*  
 1SG come.up-1SG.SS hunger 1SG.U-3SG.A-TODAY'S.PT  
 I came up and I became hungry.

Although dative subjects are typical for South Asia as a linguistic area, the Kiranti languages of eastern Nepal deviate from this pattern. Rather, these languages encode the experiencer as a possessor of the subject. The subject noun itself denotes an experience, or, more in line with Southeast Asian languages, the “*receptacle* or *arena*” (Matisoff 1986:8) where a physiological or psychological experience unfolds. The verb, which agrees with the noun, expresses the way in which the experiencer is affected. In some cases the verb is downgraded to an empty auxiliary. The pattern is illustrated by the following examples from Thulung (Western Kiranti; Allen 1975:99), Camling<sup>3</sup> (Central Kiranti), Limbu (Eastern Kiranti; van Driem 1987, s.v. *yu:ma*<sup>?</sup>) and Belhare (also Eastern Kiranti). The past inflection is used here for present states because the lexical *Aktionsart* of the verbs involved includes not only a stative but also an inchoative reading. Thus, a literal translation of, say, example (5) would be ‘her mind became hurt’, which potentially implies that it still hurts. On a stative interpretation, the translation would be ‘her mind was hurt’ without possible implications about the subject’s present state.

- (2) *A-bhrem liūra.*  
 1SG.POSS-laziness affected  
 I am lazy.
- (3) *M-bulma la-e.*  
 3SG.POSS-anger AUX-PT  
 He is angry.
- (4) *A-lem yu:s-ε.*  
 1SG.POSS-kidney activated-PT  
 I don’t have the courage.
- (5) *U-niūa tug-he.*  
 3SG.POSS-mind hurt-PT  
 She feels offended.

I call this construction ‘possessive of experience’ construction. It does not seem to be widespread in the languages of the world. The only well-documented<sup>4</sup> parallel I am aware of is found in some Papuan and Austronesian languages of New Guinea and Irian Jaya (see McElhanon 1975, 1977, 1992). As an alternative to the dative subject construction in example (1b), Amele has also possessive constructions like (6) (Roberts 1987:176). Example (7) is from Kâte (Finisterre-Huon Stock; McElhanon 1992:242) and (8) from Mangap Mbula (Austronesian; Bugenhagen 1990:202).

- (6) *Uqa gema-g be-i-a.*  
 3SG liver-3SG.POSS come.up-3SG-TODAY'S.PT  
 He became angry.

<sup>3</sup> I am indebted to Karen H. Ebert, Zürich, for giving me access to her work in progress.

<sup>4</sup> Masica (1976:164) mentions that Persian has “a few expressions of puzzling structure involving adjectives + suffixed possessive pronouns + 3SG ‘be’”: e.g. *gorosn-am-e* = ‘hungry-my-is’ = ‘I’m hungry’.” In a survey on experiencers in South Asia, Hook (1990:329) cites an example from Shina (Dardic; Pakistan) as involving a “genitive-of-experience”: *kitāp bodi par-ē mei gaar val-ar-ēgi* (book much read-and my dizziness bring-CAUS-3SG.F.PT) ‘I felt dizzy from reading the book (so) much’.

- (7) *Maŋ-ne* *biaŋke-ka?*  
 thoracic.cavity-3SG.POSS be.well-3SG.PRES  
 She is happy.
- (8) *Ni-ŋ* *i-saana.*  
 body-1SG.POSS 3SG-go.bad  
 I am exhausted.

In this paper I explore the possessive of experience in Belhare. In §2 I shall first define the construction and then (§3) discuss the lexical properties of the nouns and verbs involved. Section 4 is devoted to the syntactic properties of the possessive of experience. I shall demonstrate that the possessor in these constructions has subject properties. This is compared to the syntactic behaviour of the rare dative subject and unaccusative constructions that occur in Belhare (§5). Section 6 summarises the findings and puts them in a typological perspective.

The abbreviations used are:

|        |               |                  |   |
|--------|---------------|------------------|---|
| A      | actor         | NOML             | nominaliser                                 |
| ADD    | additive      | NPT              | non-past                                    |
| CAUS   | causal (case) | NS               | non-singular                                |
| CIT    | citation form | PERF             | perfect                                     |
| COM    | comitative    | POSS             | possessive                                  |
| CONTR  | contrastive   | PT               | past  |
| COP    | copula        | Q                | interrogative                               |
| DIR    | directive     | REP              | report marker                               |
| DISC   | discovery     | RES              | resultative                                 |
| DL     | dual          | S                | subject of intransitives                    |
| EXC    | exclusive     | SEQ              | sequential                                  |
| F      | feminine      | SIM              | simultaneous                                |
| ID     | identifier    | SS               | same subject                                |
| IMPERS | impersonal    | SUB              | subjunctive                                 |
| INC    | inclusive     | TEL              | telic                                       |
| INV    | inverse       | U                | undergoer                                   |
| IPFV   | imperfective  | (X)              | eideme motivated by<br>meaning (category) X |
| M      | masculine     |                  |   |
| MED    | mediative     | I, II, III, etc. | noun class labels                           |

## 2. THE POSSESSIVE OF EXPERIENCE AND ITS DIAGNOSIS

The test that identifies a possessive of experience and separates it from ordinary possessives is found in a construction that renders 'as if' statements. In these constructions, the verb appears in the subjunctive past, marked by *-a* (as in example (9a)), or in the subjunctive non-past, signalled by zero (as in (9b)).

- (9) a. *Namniŋ* *khar-a-ŋ-ha-eʔwa* *lui-ʔ-ŋa.*  
 last.year go-SUB.PT-EXC-NOML-like feel-NPT-EXC  
 It seems to me as if I went last year. (but I am not sure any more)
- b. *Cippa* *nus-i-ha-eʔwa* *lu-het-na.*  
 a.bit cure-1PL-NOML-like feel-IPFV-EXC  
 I think it is getting better. (lit. I feel like one who is getting better.)

In example (9b), the person marker *-i*, literally a sign for first person plural inclusive,<sup>5</sup> has impersonal reference. It is a general rule in Belhare to use inclusive markers for impersonal reference. For instance, (10) can be used with reference to speaker and addressee as well as with non-specific reference.

- (10) *Lik-ma ka-ŋ-piu-ʔ-ni.*  
 enter-CIT INC.U-3NS.A-allow-NPT-NEG  
 They don't allow us to enter. *or*: Entering is not allowed.

The impersonal use of the first person plural inclusive marker *-i* in example (9b) has been generalised with uncontrollable predicates such as weather expressions (11a) or, indeed, statements about bodily or emotional states with a possessive of experience (11b, c):

- (11) a. *Wet ta-i-ha-eʔwa cog-yu.*  
 rain rain-IMPERS-NOML-like do-NPT  
 It looks as if it is raining.
- b. *A-hi hond-i-ha-eʔwa lu-het-na.*  
 1SG.POSS-shit appear-IMPERS-NOML-like feel-IPFV-EXC  
 It is as if I had to shit.
- c. *A-niūa tug-i-ha-eʔwa lu-het-na.*  
 1SG.POSS-mind hurt-IMPERS-NOML-like feel-IPFV-EXC  
 It feels like I am sad.

The use of *-i* in (11) contradicts all agreement rules unless *-i* is synchronically analysed as a specialised marker for impersonal reference. The distribution of this marker serves as syntactic test for possessive of experience constructions: a possessor is in 'experience function' if and only if it is compatible with impersonal *-i* in the construction type exemplified by (11).

### 3. LEXICAL CHARACTERISTICS

The definition of the possessive of experience in the preceding section identifies the range of expressions collected in the following table. It is these terms that are used in possessive of experience constructions. In brackets I indicate the rough translation that would appear if a possessive of experience construction were to be put into English. For instance, *uniūa habhe*, literally 'his mind began to cry', translates idiomatically as 'he feels sorry, pity, sympathetic' or 'he is desperate (about all the things he has to do)'. Notice that I do not attempt here any full-fledged semantic analysis. A detailed inquiry into Belhare emotion semantics would presuppose anthropological analyses far beyond the scope of this chapter.

In the table some nouns are compatible with more than one verb. Along with, say, *aniūa tahe* (literally 'my mind became positively activated'), which denotes a state of happiness and joy, there is *aniūa tise* (literally 'my mind became pleased') which implies an object towards which the good feeling is directed, that is something that I like. I have classified the terms according to verbal valences. First, there are valence fields with body parts, or more accurately 'parts of a person'.<sup>6</sup> Next come fields that include body products (such as breath, sweat and excrements) and more and more purely experiential phenomena ('psychological'

<sup>5</sup> See Bickel (1995) for a morpheme analysis of Belhare verb inflection.

<sup>6</sup> Also from a cross-linguistic perspective, person is "a better candidate for the unique beginner in this domain" than body (Wilkins 1996:271).