Nominalization and its various uses in Thulung Rai

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The phenomenon of extensive nominalization in Sino-Tibetan languages is a pattern whose extent was first described by Matisoff for Lahu (Matisoff 1972), and has been described as typical of Sino-Tibetan nominalization (Bickel 1999), with the same morpheme found in languages throughout Tibeto-Burman marking nominalization, relativization, and sometimes expressing a genitive relationship.

For Lahu, this pattern is seen in the various uses of ve in the following examples (all from Matisoff 1972).

Genitive:

1. ḵà ve mǐ-čɔ
   I shoulder-bag
   ‘my shoulder-bag’

Relativization:

2. vāʔ qhe chu ve Pîcʰɔ-па ᵃ tᵉ yā
   pig as fat Shan that one person
   ‘That Shan over there who’s fat as a pig.’

Nominalization:

3. ᵋ-št tɔʔ ᵃ la ve thâʔ nɔ mû ya mɔ lâ
   blood emerge come ACC you NEG get see Q
   ‘Didn’t you see blood was coming out?’

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1. This paper has benefitted greatly from discussion with Boyd Michailovsky, Martine Mazaudon, Scott DeLancey, Jim Matisoff, and two anonymous reviewers. This paper extends the presentation given at the Berkeley Linguistics Society in 2002, adding -pa to the list of nominalizers and identifying a wider distribution for the nominalizers discussed.
The relationship between these functions and their development from an original nominalizer has also been discussed by DeLancey (1989, 1999, in press) and Noonan (1997). DeLancey describes the relationship between nominalization and relativization as follows: "relativization in TB is a subspecies of clausal nominalization. The modifying clause is nominalized, and then stands in either a genitive or an appositional relation to the head noun" (in press). As for genitivization, he states that it is "far from a universal TB feature" but still found in a number of languages, such as Jingpaw, Southern Chin, Chantyal (to cite but a few.) Noonan concurs with DeLancey’s proposals and suggests that the ‘genitival’ use of nominalizers may be an extension of the attributive sense which was associated with nominalizers through use in relative clauses.

This pattern is found extensively in Thulung Rai, a language spoken by about a thousand people in Eastern Nepal and grouped with other Rai languages (Ebert 2003). The purpose of this paper is to describe the extent of nominalization in Thulung, and see how the work of nominalization is divided among the various nominalizers. There are two main classes of these ‘nominalizers’ in Thulung: the simpler one is the nominalier -pa (which DeLancey shows is found throughout the Bodic Branch, and which may have a variant in -p in Thulung), and the other is a group of nominalizers all sharing an initial bilabial nasal.

The uses of the two sets of nominalizers are laid out in the following table. Of the two nominalizers, the -M set is by far the more common, with -pa much more limited in the scope of its nominalization. In fact, while -m (and variants) can combine with a variety of

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2. Like Noonan, I use the term for the apparently related morphemes which participate in this pattern.
parts of speech to form a nominal element, the input for nominalization with -\textit{pa} is always a verb.

Table 1. Distribution of nominalizer functions in Thulung.

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<th>-M : -m, -mim, -ma, -mu</th>
<th>-pa</th>
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<td>formation of case markers from other case markers (-\textit{m})</td>
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<tr>
<td>(locative nominals in -\textit{khom}?)</td>
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I begin by discussing the class of nominalizers with an -M element, as these cover a more extensive role of functions, and also include among them prototypical examples of nominalization.

-\textbf{M}

Nominalization often involves verbs, and most instances of complex distributions of nominalizers involve finite verbs. As a result, a brief description of the finite verb system is given as background to the discussion.
Thulung Rai is one of the complex pronominalizing languages of Nepal, with finite verbs taking agreement markers indicating the person and number of up to two arguments. The suffixes which mark the person/number combinations constitute large paradigms, which exist for past and non-past forms. The marking of tense is a fairly complex matter, with differences between the past and non-past person/number paradigms generally reflecting what appears to be an original /t/-like past marker. In addition to the differences in the past/non-past agreement markers Thulung also has a system of verb stem alternation.\(^3\) Generally speaking, there are two stems for each verb root, and these stems are selected more or less according to tense. (An expanded explanation of this complicated situation is given in Lahaussois 2003.) As a general rule, the least complex transitive verb forms will be those with a non-past 3s or 1pi agent and a 3s patient. These are the combinations which result in mono-syllabic verb forms.

1. Infinitive form of verbs
The infinitive suffix is -\textit{mu} in si-\textit{mu} ‘to die’ and po-\textit{mu} ‘to eat’. In addition, so-called infinitive forms are found in -\textit{mmi} or -\textit{mutsi}, with plural and dual patients/recipients respectively:

- 1pi, 2sP, 2p, 3sP, 3p: infinitive form in -\textit{mmi}
- 1de, 1di, 2d, 3d: infinitive form in -\textit{mutsi}

These forms are transparently the infinitive marker followed by an additional argument number marker.

2. Clause nominalization
Entire clauses can be nominalized, and can then be case-marked, to express cause or purpose, or as complements to a verb. This nominalization occurs by means of the suffixes -\textit{mu}, -\textit{mim} or -\textit{m}.

\(^3\) These alternations do not occur with all verbs, but are nevertheless an important part of the grammar.