LIMBU NOUS AUTRES AND 1ST PERSON MORPHOLOGY

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), mōna, 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

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1 Abbreviations: CTR counter-expectancy; DF definite; ERGative; EMPHatic; INFinitive; INSTRumental; NNEGative; NOMinalizer; PAST; PLural; PREsent; PV preverb; Question; REFLexive; TOPic.
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 utterance 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:

H. A. R.. Senior (1908): Man: mané; yapmi; generic yapmísí [i.e. ‘person.PL, man.PL’].
I. S. Chemjong (n.d. ?1960): yāpmi man; yāpmi khumā to kidnap [i.e. ‘man to.steal’], yāpmi phoñmā, to agitate [i.e. ‘man to.rouse’], yāpmi keseppā, murderer [i.e. ‘man killer’], etc.
nāpmi man.

A. Weidert and B. Subba (1985): [neither form is in the vocabulary; yapmi appears in verb conjugations].

na'pmi n. man.
na'pmi pro. 1) someone else, other; 2) first person patient in 21 forms.

B. B. Subba (1989): yapmi man, person;
napmi other person. [in Nepali, both are glossed mānis ‘person, man’.]

napmi mānis [p. 127].

Table 1. Yapmi in dictionaries of Limbu

(1) “abhedaŋba mōna-si” yapmi-lle ammet [J4:10]
what.kind person-3PL.PN other-ERG say.PR.3p→1pi

Others will wonder what kind of people we are.

In my other examples, yapmi is used as a possessive modifier, “someone else’s”, without genitive case marking\(^2\). The possessed noun does not bear the usual 3rd person possessive prefix (ku-, etc.); apparently yapmi has this function:

\(^2\) But cf. van Driem’s example (1987:45) na'pmi-re-n (other-GEN-DF) “someone else’s”.
(2) yo yapmi him-thikk-ëtmu tyenaŋ below other house-one-in arrive.PA.1s

I arrived at someone’s house down below.

(3) “lo! theaŋ i-mekheksu” pha “kha-n emphelle ni?” hey why PV-tie.3p→3 COMP that-DF like.this EMPH

– “napmi himdaŋm’-ën mu taru khune” [A59]
– other wife-DF CTR bring.3s→3s he

“Hey! Why did they tie him up like this?”
“He took another man’s wife!”

The possessive construction in (2) and (3) is that of a pronoun. Compare, for example, khunchi him ‘their4th house’ with the full nominal construction:

(4) kuŋ-gwa-re ku-him-mu ‘at his uncle’s house’ 3s-uncle-GEN 3s-house-LOC

There is one curious use of yapmi as a relational noun: ku-yapmi ‘his/her spouse’, reminiscent of English other or (especially) significant other. I did not record yapmi as representing an indefinite in expressions like Chemjong’s ‘murderer’, etc. (Table 1), except in one compound, napmi-sokma ‘index finger’ [“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 us³⁵] or a-tuk [1.incl-be.ill] ‘one gets ill, you get ill’.

The above are essentially the only examples I have recorded of independent yapmi. In all it functions as a kind of indefinite quasi-pronoun ‘someone, someone else’, while mona serves as the full noun ‘person, man’. (In Nepali, the noun mânche 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 -ige 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-an çitũhi yapmi mehakte [K14]
wepe 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 phudon intervenes between yapmi and the verb, something which would be impossible with the prefixed pronominal agreement markers a-, ke-, me-. Note the impersonal form mebere, past in form, in parallel with the non-past personal form amembinen.

(6) anige ammut menn-i? ammu:tte-an kháunchi ni
uspe call.PR.3p→1pi no-Q call.PA.3p→1pi-and they EMPH
yapmi phudon mebere phogoro allo ani-an khá
us gift give.3p if now wepl-also TOP
egan utmasiŋ uhi khan purai pimasi pokse...
after call.INF.PL that same that fully give.INF.PL become.PA.3s
khunchi khann-en amembinen phogoro [K151,154]
they that-DF give.PR.3p→1pi.NEG if
They call us, right? If they call uspl and give us gifts, then later wepl too must call them and give them fully the same ... But if they don’t give uspl gifts ...

(7) him-mu pa-ma-re-an napmi mendoren kusin
house-in father-mother-ERG-also us scold.3p.NEG PV
menitt-un. embelle khá kheni kó keipsi keðei-an khá.[K243]
know.3p→3.NEG so TOP youP TOP sleep.2p arrive.2p-andTOP

[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 uspe’].