A NEW ANALYSIS OF THE LIMBU VERB

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1. THE LIMBU VERB

Limbu is a Kiranti language native to eastern Nepal and the western fringe of Sikkim. The author devoted the fourth chapter of his 1987 grammar of the Phedāppe dialect of Limbu to a morphological analysis of the Limbu simplex verb (van Driem 1987). Simplicia are non-periphrastic finite indicative verb forms, from which the various Limbu periphrastic tense forms, gerunds, participles, adhortative and optative forms are derived. Limbu distinguishes eleven pronominal categories: first, second and third person, singular, dual and plural number, and an inclusive–exclusive distinction in the first person dual and plural. The Limbu transitive verb shows agreement with both *agent* (transitive subject) and *patient* (transitive object or beneficiary), and the transitive paradigm distinguishes 44 different forms, as shown in Tables 2 and 3. Limbu intransitive and reflexive verbs agree with the *subject* (intransitive or reflexive subject), and the intransitive and reflexive paradigm distinguishes eleven different forms, as shown in Table 1.

After I had completed the manuscript for the Limbu grammar in the summer of 1986, Professor Emeritus Carl Ebeling of the University of Amsterdam and Caucasologist Rieks Smeets of Leiden University suggested that alternative analyses of Limbu conjugational morphology were possible, some of which might require positing fewer slots or functional positions. Since I was eager to start my work on the Dumi language in the late summer of 1986, I did not give the matter high priority at the time. In subsequent comparative work on conjugational morphology in Kiranti and other Tibeto-Burman languages, I proposed morphological analyses for the conjugations of other languages, none of which, as it turned out, presumed as many suffixal slots as my Limbu analysis. Even the morphological analysis of the older Bahing paradigm, the transitive conjugation of which distinguished as many as 64 of the 75 theoretically possible forms, presumed fewer slots than the Limbu analysis. As time went on, my dissatisfaction with the 1987 analysis grew, and I began to assign the students of my Limbu course at Leiden University the task of revising my 1987 morphological analysis, an exercise which proved both instructive and entertaining. Recently, Ebert (1991, 1992) presented papers, which included diagrams of morphemic analyses of Limbu, Chamling and Athpare simplicia. The complete Chamling and Athpare data have not been made available, but her Limbu diagram represents an insufficient analysis. Because of the relevance of Limbu conjugational morphology to the comparative study of Tibeto-Burman verbal flexion, therefore, I felt it was high time to present a new morphological analysis of verbal agreement in the Limbu simplex.

TABLE 1: LIMBU AFFIRMATIVE AND NEGATIVE INTRANSITIVE
AND REFLEXIVE SIMPLEX CONJUGATIONS IN THE
NON-PRETERITE AND PRETERITE TENSES

(In each box the negative form is listed below the corresponding affirmative form.)

INTRANSITIVE

	NPT	PT
1SG	Σ-ʔε / me-Σ-ʔεn	Σ-aŋ / me-Σ-aŋnεn
1DU.INC	a-Σ-si / an-Σ-sin	a-Σ-etchi / an-Σ-etchin
1DU.EXC	Σ-sige / me-Σ-sigen	Σ-etchige / me-Σ-etchigen
1PL.INC	a-Σ / an-Σ-nεn	a-Σ-ε / an-Σ-εn
1PL.EXC	Σ-ige / me-Σ-igen	Σ-mʔna / men-Σ-mʔna
2SG	ke-Σ / ken-Σ-nεn	ke-Σ-ε / ken-Σ-εn
2DU	ke-Σ-si / ken-Σ-sin	ke-Σ-etchi / ken-Σ-etchin
2PL	ke-Σ-i / ken-Σ-in	ke-Σ-i / ken-Σ-in
3SG	Σ / me-Σ-nεn	Σ-ε / me-Σ-εn
3DU	Σ-si / me-Σ-sin	Σ-etchi / me-Σ-etchin
3PL	me-Σ / men-Σ-nεn	me-Σ-ε / men-Σ-εn

REFLEXIVE

	NPT	PT
1SG	Σ-siŋʔε / me-Σ-siŋʔεn	Σ-siŋaŋ / me-Σ-siŋaŋnεn
1DL.INC	a-Σ-netchi / an-Σ-netchin	a-Σ-netchi / an-Σ-netchin
1DU.EXC	Σ-netchige / me-Σ-netchigen	Σ-netchige / me-Σ-netchigen
1PL.INC	a-Σ-siŋ / an-Σ-siŋnεn	a-Σ-siŋε / an-Σ-siŋεn
1PL.EXC	Σ-siŋige / me-Σ-siŋigen	Σ-siŋʔna / men-Σ-siŋʔna
2SG	ke-Σ-siŋ / ken-Σ-siŋnεn	ke-Σ-siŋε / ken-Σ-siŋεn
2DU	ke-Σ-netchi / ken-Σ-netchin	ke-Σ-netchi / ken-Σ-netchin
2PL	ke-Σ-siŋi / ken-Σ-siŋin	ke-Σ-siŋi / ken-Σ-siŋin
3SG	Σ-siŋ / me-Σ-siŋnεn	Σ-siŋε / me-Σ-siŋεn
3DU	Σ-netchi / me-Σ-netchin	Σ-netchi / me-Σ-netchin
3PL	me-Σ-siŋ / men-Σ-siŋnεn	me-Σ-siŋε / men-Σ-siŋεn

(The vertical label at the left margin of the intransitive table reads: s u b j e c t.)

In the following, I shall use the words 'old' and 'new' to refer respectively to the morphemes, morpheme labels and slots of the 1987 analysis and of the new analysis proposed here. New slots are proposed, and some old slots have been abolished. Certain morpheme labels have been made more precise. Zero morphemes have been reassessed, and the problem of negation is discussed. Implications of the new analysis for the diachronic view of conjugational morphology in Kiranti and in Tibeto-Burman are discussed.

Abbreviations used in this paper are:

1, 2, 3	first, second, third person	PL	plural
AG	agent of a transitive verb	PT	preterite
DU	dual	REF	reflexive
EXC	exclusive	S	subject of an intransitive or
INC	inclusive		reflexive verb
NDU	non-dual	SF	suffixal slot
NEG	negative	SG	singular
NPT	non-preterite	→	indicates the direction of a
NSG	non-singular or		transitive relationship
PAT	patient of a transitive verb	Σ	verb stem
PF	prefixal slot		

2. THE PREFIXAL CHAIN EXPANDED

A flaw in the old analysis is that the old prefixal slot PF1 could be occupied by two morphemes, viz. any combination of the first person prefix *a-*, the second person prefix *kɛ-* and an old third person zero morpheme *∅*. Slots are functional positions in the affixal string of a verb, each of which can be occupied by a definable set of morphemes. The morphemes sharing a position in a string define the function of that position. There appears to be a general tendency for semantically related morphemes to occupy the same slot. Slots are language-specific and analysis-dependent and represent the non-random sequential ordering of morphemes in conjugated verb forms. To have more than one morpheme occupying a slot defeats the purpose of having slots in the first place and necessitates making statements about the relative position of two morphemes within a single slot, something which is not ascertainable in those cases in which one of these is a zero morph. Conversely, attempts at slot reduction may not be allowed to supersede the goal of formulating a maximally explanatory analysis.

The first person prefix *a-* always precedes the second person prefix *kɛ-* and therefore must be analysed as occupying an anterior slot. This prefix indicates first person in forms in which first person involvement is not indicated by some portmanteau. It now seems a bit overwrought to have posited a zero allomorph of this morpheme in forms containing the exclusive suffix *-ge ~ -be* (see Sprigg 1989). It is reasonable to say that the meaning of the exclusive suffix comprises the sense of first person involvement in addition to exclusion of the person or persons addressed. Michailovsky (1989:472) proposes to analyse the prefix *a-* as a first person non-singular inclusive morpheme despite its occurrence in 2→1 forms in which Michailovsky maintains that the opposition between inclusive and exclusive is effectively 'neutralised'. 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.

The second person prefix *kɛ-* indexes second person in forms in which second person involvement is not indexed by some portmanteau. The old third person zero morpheme may be abolished by a more precise labelling of two other morphemes in old prefixal slot PF2: The old non-singular agent/subject morpheme *mɛ- ~ m-* specifically marks the involvement of a *third person* non-singular agent or subject, and should therefore be relabelled as (3NSG.AG.S). Its abbreviated allomorph *m-* occurs between a preceding prefix and the root

TABLE 2: LIMBU AFFIRMATIVE TRANSITIVE SIMPLEX CONJUGATION IN THE NON-PRETERITE AND PRETERITE TENSES

(In each box the preterite form is listed below the corresponding non-preterite form.)

a g e n t ＼ p a t i e n t	1SG	1DU.INC	1DU.EXC	1PL.INC	1PL.EXC	2SG	2DU	2PL	3SG	3D	3PL
1SG						Σ-ne / Σ-ne	Σ-netchiŋ / Σ-netchiŋ	Σ-niŋ / Σ-niŋ	Σ-uŋ / Σ-uŋ	Σ-upsiŋ / Σ-upsiŋ	Σ-upsiŋ / Σ-upsiŋ
1DU.INC									a-Σ-su / a-Σ-etchu	a-Σ-susi / a-Σ-etchusi	a-Σ-susi / a-Σ-etchusi
1DU.EXC						Σ-netchige / Σ-netchige	Σ-netchige / Σ-netchige		Σ-suge / Σ-etchuge	Σ-susige / Σ-etchusige	Σ-susige / Σ-etchusige
1PL.INC									a-Σ-um / a-Σ-um	a-Σ-umsim / a-Σ-umsim	a-Σ-umsim / a-Σ-umsim
1PL.EXC						Σ-netchige / Σ-netchige	Σ-netchige / Σ-netchige		Σ-umbe / Σ-mʔna	Σ-umsimbe / Σ-mʔnasi	Σ-umsimbe / Σ-mʔnasi
2SG	ke-Σ-ʔε / ke-Σ-aŋ								ke-Σ-u / ke-Σ-u	ke-Σ-usi / ke-Σ-usi	ke-Σ-usi / ke-Σ-usi
2DU	age-Σ / age-Σ-ε		age-Σ / age-Σ-ε		age-Σ / age-Σ-ε				ke-Σ-su / ke-Σ-etchu	ke-Σ-susi / ke-Σ-etchusi	ke-Σ-susi / ke-Σ-etchusi
2PL	Σ-ʔε / Σ-aŋ		Σ-sige / Σ-etchige		Σ-ige / Σ-ige				ke-Σ-um / ke-Σ-um	ke-Σ-umsim / ke-Σ-umsim	ke-Σ-umsim / ke-Σ-umsim
3SG	Σ-ʔε / Σ-aŋ	a-Σ-si / a-Σ-etchi	me-Σ-sige / me-Σ-etchige	a-Σ / a-Σ-ε	me-Σ-ige / me-Σ-ige	ke-Σ / ke-Σ-ε	ke-Σ-si / ke-Σ-etchi	ke-Σ-i / ke-Σ-i	Σ-u / Σ-u	Σ-usi / Σ-usi	Σ-usi / Σ-usi
3DU	me-Σ-ʔε / me-Σ-aŋ	am-Σ-si / am-Σ-etchi	me-Σ-sige / me-Σ-etchige	am-Σ / am-Σ-ε	me-Σ-ige / me-Σ-ige	kem-Σ / kem-Σ-ε	kem-Σ-si / kem-Σ-etchi	kem-Σ-i / kem-Σ-i	Σ-su / Σ-etchu	Σ-susi / Σ-etchusi	Σ-susi / Σ-etchusi
3PL	me-Σ-ʔε / me-Σ-aŋ	am-Σ-si / am-Σ-etchi	me-Σ-sige / me-Σ-etchige	am-Σ / am-Σ-ε	me-Σ-ige / me-Σ-ige	kem-Σ / kem-Σ-ε	kem-Σ-si / kem-Σ-etchi	kem-Σ-i / kem-Σ-i	me-Σ-u / me-Σ-u	me-Σ-usi / me-Σ-usi	me-Σ-usi / me-Σ-usi