

NOTES ON BRIAN HODGSON'S LIMBU PARADIGMS (1857)

Boyd Michailovsky
Lacito/CNRS, Paris

Among the papers of Brian H. Hodgson (1800-1894) conserved in the India Office Library in London is a collection of Limbu verb forms and paradigms. These occupy 25 pages of the item catalogued as no. 89, which I copied out around 1980. Virtually all of the material, consisting of Limbu forms and Nepali glosses, is in the *devanāgarī* script. If I remember correctly, the material is in a large bound notebook, with the right-hand pages numbered. I have labeled these pages "b" and the facing left-hand pages "a". The title page (page 1) in Nepali and English, reads as follows:

śrī
Limbu Language
liṃvu voli ko kṛyā
havalḍāra raṇa dhvaja
kā jabhāni leṣiyā
ko sam 1857 sāla
tā 023 aktuvara

"The verb of the Limbu language / transcription of the speech of Sgt. Rana Dhoj 23 October 1857". The contents are summarized in fig. 1. The pages after p. 25 are blank.

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| • 1: | title page. |
| • 2a–5b: | imperatives of assorted verbs. |
| • 6a–11b: | the verb <i>cā-</i> 'to eat'; pronouns (7b, 8a). |
| • 12a–13a (top): | the verb <i>thum-</i> 'to drink'. |
| • 13a–15b (top): | the verb <i>cā-</i> 'to eat'. |
| • 15b–17a (top): | the verb <i>cātt-</i> 'to feed'. |
| • 17a, 17b: | the phrase <i>cā- -ām pek-</i> 'having eaten go'. |
| • 18a: | participial forms of <i>cā-</i> 'to eat'. |
| • 18b–20a: | the verb <i>thum-</i> 'to drink'. |
| • 20b–22b: | morphological and composed causatives: <i>thums-</i> 'to make drink' and <i>thum bāms-</i> 'to cause to drink'. |
| • 23a–25b: | <i>hipt-</i> 'to beat' and (25b) <i>hip pāms-</i> 'to cause to beat'. |

Fig. 1: Contents of Hodgson 1857, ff 1–25.

Transitive: O ->

A	1s	1di	1de	1pi	1pe
1s	KEY: In each cell, the non-past form appears over the past, where they are distinct. PR = present stem PA = past stem N represents a nasal morphophoneme, homorganic with the stem-final; realized as a glottal stop or hiatus after a vowel.				
1di					
1de					
1pi					
1pe					
2s	ke-PR-Nā ke-PA-ām	āke-PR āke-PA-e			
2d	ke-PR-Nāsim ke-PA-āmsim	? ?			
2p	āke-PA-i				
3s	PR-Nā PA-ām	ā-PR-si ā-PA-esi	ā-PR-sige (ā)-PA-esige	ā-PR ā-PA-e	(ā)-PA-ige
3d	PR-Nāsim PA-āmsim	ā-PR-si(si) ?	ā-PR-si(si)ge ?	āme-PR-si ā(me)-PA-esi	āme-PR-sige ā(me)-PA-esige
3p	me-PR-Nā me-PA-ām	āme-PR-si ?	āme-PR-sige ?	āme-PR āme-PA-e	āme-PA-ige āme-PA-esige
intransitive S ->					
	PR-Nā PA-ām	PR-si ?	PR-sige ?	PA-i	PA-ige
reflexive S ->					
	PR-Nāsim	PR-nesi	PR-nesige	PR-Nāsi	PR-Nāsige

Table 1: Synthesis of Limbu verb paradigms, Hodgson 1857.

Most of the forms are arranged in rough tables, with a single gloss, e.g. “you to me, present”, for the whole. The paradigms are quite complete, with items such as ‘he drinks us 2’, etc., unflinchingly recorded. However, forms with only non-singular arguments are relatively poorly represented, and sometimes the alignment, or the precise reference of *e* ‘ditto’, is not obvious. Although the writing is generally clear, there are blots which may or may not be intentional corrections. As an example, Fig. 2 shows the paradigm labeled *kutyo malāi* [Nepali ‘he beat me’] as I originally copied it. The layout will be familiar to anyone who has studied Hodgson’s paradigms of Hayu and Bahing,

published at the same time, in 1857-58. The sign *m̐* (*anusvāra*) may be read as *ṃ* in all of the Limbu forms cited here. Only *ā*, never *a*, occurs in Limbu in the notes.

Transitive: O ->

A	2s	2d	2p	3s	3d	3p
1s	PR-ne	PR-nesim̐	PR-nenim̐	PA-um̐	PA-umsim̐	
1di	PR-nesige			PR-su PA-esu ¹	PR-susi PA-esusi	
1de				PR-suge PA-esuge	PR-susige PA-esusige	
1pi	PR-Nāsige			PA-um	PA-umsi	
1pe				PA-umbige	PA-umsige	
2s				ke-PA-u	ke-PA-usi	
2d				ke-PR-su ke-PA-esu	ke-PR-susi ke-PA-esusi	
2p				ke-PA-um	ke-PA-umsi	
3s	ke-PR ke-PA-e	ke-PR-si ke-PA-esi	ke-PA-i	PA-u	PA-usi	
3d	ke-PR-si ke-PA-esi	keme-PR-si keme-PA-esi	keme-PA-i	PR-su PA-esu	PR-susi PA-esusi	
3p	keme-PR keme-PA-e	keme-PR-si keme-PA-esi	keme-PA-i	me-PA-u	me-PA-usi	
intransitive S ->						
	ke-PR ke-PA-e	ke-PR-si ke-PA-si	ke-PA-i	PR PA-e	PR-si PA-si	me-PR me-PA-e
reflexive S ->						
	ke-PR-sim̐	ke-PR-nesi	ke-PR-Nāsi	PR-sim̐	PR-nesi	me-PR-sim̐

Table 1 (cont.)

hiptām	hiptesi	āhipte
hiptāmsim̐	hiptesige	hiptige
mehiptām	mehiptesi	āmehiptesi
	mehiptesige	āmehiptesige
e	e	

Fig. 2: The paradigm 'he beat me' (p. 24a).

¹ The suffix *-esu-* in dual forms (all persons) with 3d person object has an apparently free variant *-usu-*.

As far as the dialect is concerned, we may note that the 1st person singular object (and intransitive subject) non-past agreement marker is *Na* (*N* being a nasalizing morphophoneme, e.g. *hip-mā* 'he strikes me') in Hodgson as in the Maiwa-Mewa dialect, vs *ʔe* in van Driem's Phedappe and *-aʔ* in Panchthar. The combinations *-ks-* and *-ʔs-* (not *-kkh-*, *-ʔgh-* as in Panchthar) occur, e.g., in *bokse* 'lift it!'.²

The present note is not an edition of the notes, but an interpretation. Even the reading of a single paradigm involves some interpretation, and for various reasons no single paradigm can give a satisfactory picture of the whole system. I have therefore synthesized a paradigm based on all of the recorded forms (Table 1). I have left a few blanks ("??") where the material did not seem to warrant a decision. Thus some of the forms of Fig. 2 will not be found in Table 1. Compared to present-day dialects,² the table shows a few interesting differences that clearly go beyond questions of interpretation.

The first of these concerns "clusivity" and the prefix *ā-*. The forms of the 3→1dp paradigm come in bracketed pairs (see Fig. 2), undoubtedly representing inclusive and exclusive. The suffix *-ige* appears on only one member of each pair; it is surely the mark of 1st person non-singular exclusive. It marks intransitive subjects, transitive agents and transitive objects, as in modern dialects. The prefix *ā-*, however, often occurs on both forms, sometimes on neither, and only rarely on the inclusive but not the exclusive member of the pair as in modern dialects³. The data do not permit us to identify it as an inclusive marker. It also appears (in the prefix *āke-*) in most 2→1 forms, but not in 2sd→1s forms (roughly as in modern dialects).

The second and most important point also concerns the prefix *ā-*. In Hodgson's notes, *ā-* occurs only in transitive forms with 1st person objects. It does not occur in forms with 1st person A, or in intransitive or reflexive 1st person forms as it does in modern dialects. On this point the data are unambiguous: *ā-* is a 1st person object marker -- non-singular, only possibly inclusive. As for the other agreement prefixes, it may be noted that the second person prefix *ke-* is used without consideration of case role, as in modern dialects, and the 3d plural (or sometimes non-singular) *me-* is limited to A and S, again as in modern dialects.

A final point concerns the 1pe→3 suffix *umbigelumsige*, in modern dialects 1pe→3 *umbe/umsimbe*. Students of Limbu have assumed, logically, that *be* in these forms reflected exclusive *ige*. This finds justification in Hodgson's notes,

² This term refers to dialects on which published material is available. There may of course be undescribed modern dialects which resemble the dialect of Hodgson's notes.

³ As it happens, all of these possibilities are illustrated in a single paradigm in Fig. 2. Table 1 indicates variation to a limited extent by the use of parentheses, but it cannot show which variants go together in individual paradigms.

which show a form close to the postulated morphophonemic lum-igel. This was no doubt realized as *ummige* by the Limbu rule of final gemination, reinforced to Hodgson's *umbige*, and finally contracted to modern *umbe*.

Hodgson never published any Limbu paradigms. He would probably have felt that he did not have sufficient material. In his publications on Hayu and Bahing he tried to provide examples of all possible root finals, transitive and intransitive, but his Limbu notes only cover some 5 (out of 20-odd) finals for transitives, and only one highly irregular intransitive. The notes contain numerous inconsistencies and errors which he would no doubt have caught and checked had he worked them up for publication. In the event, Hodgson left India in the summer of 1858 (Hunter 1896), the year after they were written; his last publication in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* was in that year.

REFERENCES

- HODGSON, Brian Houghton. 1857. Papers, Vol. 89. Conserved in the India Office Library, London.
- HUNTER, William Wilson. 1896. *Life of Brian Houghton Hodgson*. London.