MODALITY IN THARU: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the morphosyntactic structures characterizing the notion of modality in two different Tharu languages: Dangaura and Chitoniya, from a comparative perspective. Being the members of the same language family, both of these languages share the vector verbs sāk used to express the notions of possibility, ability and permission, and pār expressing that of necessity and obligation, though there are other verbs like chai/cahī to indicate necessity and pā for the notion of permission. However, they exhibit completely different system in the selection and distribution of devices to express the secondhand knowledge about which the speaker is not sure. Besides, they have a distinct agreement system of their own.

KEYWORDS: Possibility, Ability, Permission, Obligation, Necessity and Hearsay

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1.0. INTRODUCTION

Tharu, the largest indigenous community of the nation, is one of the components of the multi-ethnicity in Nepal. Although the population of the Tharu in Nepal is reported to be 1,737,470, only 1,529,875 of them speak this language (CBS 2012:4, 144). The ethnonym ‘Tharu’ stands for the ethnic group and the language they speak. As the habitat of this ethnic group extends from Mechi to Mahakali, a considerable variation is attested in their language and culture. Based on the differences observed in the linguistic and cultural practices, this ethnic group along with their language has been broadly classified into four varieties: Rana, Dangaura, Chitoniya, and Kochila Tharu have been spoken in different Terai and inner Terai districts of Nepal (Paudyal 2014:7-8). The principal concern of this paper is to examine the morphosyntactic structures used to express Modality, a grammatical category, in Chitoniya and Dangaura Tharu languages from a comparative perspective.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This paper is basically a descriptive presentation of the two Tharu languages from a comparative perspective. The data for Dangaura Tharu were taken from the selected Tharu communities in the Tulasipur municipality of Dang district, whereas the data for Chitoniya Tharu were collected from Ratnanagar and Khairahani Municipalities, and Gardi VDC of Chitwan district. The collected data, mainly the recorded texts, were transcribed with the help of Audacity, and made an entry in the Toolbox, where the natural texts were translated and interlinearized. The natural texts were glossed and broken into morphemes following the Leipzig glossing rules. The grammatical description has been supported with the examples presented as the interlinearized text with four lines: first the text, second the morpheme breaks, third glosses in English and fourth free translations. The figures at the end of the examples indicate the references of the corpus.
3.0 MODALITY

Modality is a grammatical category used to indicate the speaker’s attitude. According to Givón (2001a:300), the speaker’s attitude is based on Epistemic judgment, which is concerned with truth, probability, certainty, belief, and evidence, and Evaluative (deontic) judgment concerned with desirability, preference, intent, ability, and obligation. For Watters (2002:285) modality “includes the kinds of notions translated by the words like ‘can’, ‘must’ and ‘should’” in English. Modality is expressed morphologically, syntactically or by using modal verbs or separate particles or simply intonation in different languages (Bybee and Fleischman 1995:2; Palmer 1985:18). However, modality in both of these Tharu varieties- Chitoniya and Dangaura Tharu- is realized in the form of modal verbs and, sometimes, in the use of separate particles. This paper makes a comparative study of the grammatical structures used to express the modalities such as possibility, permission, ability, necessity and obligation in these Tharu languages.

3.1 Possibility

The notion of modality in both of these Tharu languages is primarily expressed through the modal verbs used as vector verbs in complex predicates. The vector verb used to embody the notion of possibility in both of these languages is approximately the same: sek/syak in Dangaura and s'k 'be able to' in Chitoniya Tharu. It is the modal verb that carries the tense and agreement markers in both of these languages, as exemplified in (1a-d).

(1) a. \( \text{pani} b^h i\text{tar} \, t\, k\, hui \, syak\, t^h \, a \) (Danguara)

\begin{align*}
\text{pani} & -k \\
b^h \text{itar} & -t \\
k & -h \\
hui & \text{sek} -t^h -a \\
\text{water} & -\text{GEN} \\
\text{in} & \text{PRT} \\
thorn & \text{be} \\
\text{can} & -\text{PRS} -3\text{SG.NH}
\end{align*}

‘There may be thorns in the water.’ (FR_YRC.054)

b. \( \text{ʌṭʰʌ} \text{willa} \, hui \, sek\, i \) (Danguara)

\begin{align*}
\text{ʌṭʰʌ} & \text{willa} \\
hui & \text{sek} -i \\
or & \text{be} \\
\text{can} & -3\text{SG.NH}
\end{align*}

‘Or there may be nails.’ (FR_YRC.055)

c. \( \text{yi} \, \text{bilkawa} \, b^i\text{tara} \, hak\, e \, sakbiy} \)

\begin{align*}
\text{yi} & \\
\text{bilkawa} & -b^i\text{tara} \\
hak & -e \\
sak & -b -i\text{ya}
\end{align*}

\text{this} \\
\text{hole} \\
\text{in} \text{be.PR} \\
\text{can} -\text{FUT} -3\text{SG}

‘It might be in this hole.’(FS_DR&RM.083)

d. \( \text{kat}^b \text{hak\, e} \, sak\, t\, iy} \, jani \, marad\, ki? \)

\begin{align*}
\text{kat}^b & \text{hak\, e} -e \\
sak & -t -\text{iy} \\
jani & \text{marad} \\
\text{ki} & \\
\text{what} & \text{be.PR} -\text{INF} \\
\text{can} & -\text{FUT} -3\text{PL} \\
\text{wife} & \text{husband} \\
or &
\end{align*}

‘What might have been (the relationship between them), husband and wife?’ (FS_DR&RM.196)

\footnote{Typologically, sak is the common vector verb used to express possibility in most of the Indo-Aryan languages such as Hindi, Nepali, Bhojpuri, and Maithili. *aj waris ho sokti he* (Hindi) *aja pani pora sake\, s\, (Nepali) ‘It may rain today.’}
The modal verbs *syakʰa* 'can -PRS -3SG.NH' (1a), *seki* 'can -3SG.NH' (1b), *sakbiya* 'can -FUT -3SG' (1c) and *saktayi* 'can -FUT -3PL' (1d) express possibility of the actions expressed by the lexical verbs in respective examples.

### 3.2 Permission

In both of these Tharu languages, the explicators *pa* ‘be allowed to’ and *sʌk/ syak/ sek/* are commonly used to express the notion of permission. These explicators are preceded by the base or purposive form of the content verbs. The vector verbs are used to carry the modal function and the agreement markers, as illustrated in (2a-d).

(2) a. *yi jangalma sakkusna gʰās kaṭa paiṭan*  
   *(Dangaura)*  
   yi jangal -MA sakkü -JADA gʰās kaṭ -A pa -tʰ -AN  
   this forest -LOC all -NCLF grass cut -PURP be allowed to -PRS -PL  
   ‘Everyone is allowed to mow in this jungle.’ *(ELCTD_ PG.458)*  

b. *ab ṭai kʰyala sekbya*  
   *(Dangaura)*  
   ab ṭai kʰel -A sek -b -ya  
   now 2SG.NH play -PURP can -FUT -2SG.NH  
   ‘Now you can play’. *(ELCTD_ PG.456)*  

c. *bina rahadanise wahawā haine jaye pawaiyi*  
   *(Chitoniya)*  
   bina rahadani -se wahawā haine ja -e pa -yi  
   without passport -ABL there NEG go -INF get -PST.HAB  
   ‘No one was allowed to go there without a passport.’ *(PLS.JRC-70.194)*  

d. *yi kamawā worake tohara gʰar ja sakbhā*  
   *(Chitoniya)*  
   yi kamawā wora -KE tohara gʰar ja sak -b -ha  
   this work finish -SEQ 2SG.PL house go can -FUT -2PL  
   ‘You can go home after finishing this work.’ *(ELCTD_BM.281)*  

In these examples, the vector verbs *paiṭan* (2a), *sekbya* (2b), *pawaiyi* (2c), and *sakbhā* (2d) express the notion of permission. They carry the concord markers and are preceded by the infinitival, purposive or base forms of the main verbs *kaṭa* ‘cut -PURP’, *kʰyala* ‘play -PURP’, *jaye* ‘go -INF’, and *ja* ‘go’ respectively.

### 3.3 Ability

The explicator *sak* ‘be able to’ is a most productive vector verb in many of the Indo-Aryan languages like Hindi, Nepali, Maithili, Bhojpuri and all the Tharu varieties. It can function as a device to express possibility, permission and physical or mental ability. In Chitoniya Tharu we find the basic form that is used in most of IA languages, but in Dangaura Tharu it gets simple morphophonemic modifications and becomes *sek* or *syak*. In this case also, it is preceded by the purposive, infinitival or base form of the content verb, as demonstrated in (3a-d).

(3) a. *kaisin baṭ kara sekbo?*  
   *(Dangaura)*
kaisin baṭ kar -ʌ sek -b -o
how talk do -PURP be able to -FUT -2PL.MH

‘How will you be able to talk (to her)?’  (FR_MRC.175)

b. ṣpna sekbi ki nā kara kam?
(Dangaura)

ṣpna sek -b -i ki nāi kar -ʌ kam
2SG.HON be able to -FUT -2H or NEG do -INF work

‘Can you do the work or not?’  (FR_MRC.196)

c. pacʰe kah-yi ‘baba naḥi sakbasu paḍʰe’ (Chitoniya)
pacʰe kah -yi baba naḥi sak -b -su paḍʰ -e
later say -PROG father NEG can -FUT -1SG read -INF

‘Later he said, ‘father, I can’t study.’  (PLS.JRC-70.109)

d. kunō haine sakṣiyi girawe
(Chitoniya)
kunō haine sak -l -ayi gir -a -e
any NEG can -PST -3PL fall -CAUS -INF

‘None of them could make it (the target) fall.’ (JF.BM-78.0202)

Both types of abilities are expressed in these examples. The modal sek or sak expresses the notion of mental ability in (3a) and (3c) and physical ability in (3b) and (3d).

3.4 Necessity

Epistemic necessity in both of these Tharu languages is realized in the form of a vector verb par which can be preceded by an infinitival or participial form of the content verb.² Necessity can also be expressed through the use of a verb cahi (Dangaura) and cahi (Chitoniya) ‘is needed’ but it is mostly preceded by a participial or infinitival form of the content verb or an NP. The examples in (4a-d) clarify the case.

(4) a. ṭa u pʰula gʰalai pari
(Dangaura)

ṭa u pʰula gʰal -a -i pari -i
PRT that flower wear -CAUS -NMLZ have to -3SG.NH

‘(You) have to put that flower upon me.’  (FR_MRC.100)

b. ūhon cahi kalase msi baloim
(Dangaura)

ṭuɾʰa -hana cahi kalase msi bala -m
2PL -DAT need if 1SG call -1SG.FUT

² The vector verb par ‘is needed to’ is also a common verb in many of the Indo-Aryan languages. In Nepali, it is simply par but in Hindi it becomes paḍ, as timile yo kam garna paḍe’s (Nepali) tumče ye kam karna paḍega (Hindi) ‘You will have to do this work’.
‘If I need you I will call you.’ (FR_MRC.123)

c. ʌre yawa dewa. boke nahî partayi  (Chitoniya)

ʌre   ya       -ʌ de -ʌ bok -e nahî pʌr -t -ʌyi

VOC       come       -INF give       -IMP carry       -INF      NEG have to       -FUT       -3PL.

‘Let him come. We will not have to carry him (on our back).’ (JF.BM-78.0111)

d.  mor  pʰʌl cahî  (Chitoniya)

mor        pʰʌl        cahî

1SG.GEN      fruit       need

‘I need fruits.’ (JF.BM-78.0323)

3.5 Obligation

The vector verb pûr also embodies a denotes obligation in both of these Tharu languages. Even in this case, it is preceded by the infinitival or purposive form of the content verb. As usual, the inflectional suffixes are affixed to the vector verb pûr, as illustrated in (5a-b).

(5) a.  nahî bâtohî part’a  (Dangaura)

nahî      bâta       -hi        pûr       -tʰ        -a

NEG      tell       -EMPH      have to       -PRS       -3SG.NH

‘No, you must tell.’ (FR_YRC.091)

b.  jaye partayi, behan bʰelayi  (Chitoniya)

ja       -e        pûr        -l        -ʌyi        behan        bʰe       -l       -ʌyi

go       -INF      have to       -PST       -3PL      morning become       -PST       -3PL.

‘It has become morning, I must go now.’ (JOW.BRM-56.019)

Here we can notice that both the notions of epistemic necessity and deontic obligation are encoded in the same morphological structure in both of these Tharu languages, though necessity can also be embodied in the form of cahî or cahî in Danguara and Chitoniya Tharu respectively.

3.6 Hearsay

The modality of Hearsay refers to the way how the notion of second hand knowledge is expressed. Both of these Tharu languages embody this notion differently. Dangaura Tharu realizes the notion with a particle hû ‘it is said’, whereas a distinct lexical item sunte ‘it is heard’ is used in Chitoniya Tharu for the purpose. They are also different from the distribution of these devices: the particle hû always concludes the sentence, whereas sunte generally introduces one. However, there are evidences in our corpus where it is distributed differently. We have plenty of such expressions as it is so frequently used in narrative discourses. The examples in (6a-d) illustrate the situations.
(6) a. \(\text{ek}^\text{ṭʰ} \text{ra} \text{jwa} \text{ra} \text{h}^\text{ʌ} \text{h}^\text{ũ}\) (Dangaura)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ek</td>
<td>one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ṭʰ</td>
<td>-NCLF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jwa</td>
<td>remain</td>
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<tr>
<td>r</td>
<td>-3SG.NH HRS</td>
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'It is said that there was a king.' (FR_MRC.006)

b. \(\text{hi} \text{kahar} \text{s}^\text{akku} \text{b}^\text{u} \text{ṭ} \text{a} \text{swans}^{\text{ak}} \text{ra} \text{h} \text{l i} \text{h}^\text{ũ}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>kahar</td>
<td>3SG.GEN all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s</td>
<td>hair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ak</td>
<td>gold -GEN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>swan</td>
<td>live -PST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ra</td>
<td>-3SG.NH HRS</td>
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</table>

'Her hair was all made up of gold.' (SR_PRC.010)

c. \(\text{sunte} \text{b}^\text{ag} \text{la} \text{c}^{\text{mi}} \text{j}^\text{ʌ} \text{g}^\text{ʌ} \text{d}^{\text{a}} \text{ba} \text{ʌ} \text{da} \text{lag}^{\text{ʌ}}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sun -te</td>
<td>hear -HRS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>2SG.NH HRS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>1SG.GEN daughter -INS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>Bhagya Laxmi -GEN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m</td>
<td>quarrel -PR.R</td>
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</table>

'It is heard that there is a quarrel between Bhagya and Laxmi.' (BL.FM-79.023)

d. \(\text{are} \text{b} \text{b} \text{u} \text{wa} \text{tu} \text{sun} \text{te} \text{mor} \text{be} \text{ti} \text{y} \text{a} \text{se} \text{bya} \text{h} \text{a} \text{k} \text{α} \text{yi} \text{ko} \text{ey} \text{yi}\) (Chitoniya)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>are</td>
<td>VOC baby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>2SG.NH HRS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>buwa</td>
<td>1SG.GEN daughter -INS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu</td>
<td>marriage do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sun -te</td>
<td>-PROG search</td>
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</table>

'Hey baby, I hear that you want to marry my daughter.' (BL.FM-79.089)

The use of \(\text{h}^\text{ũ}\) and \(\text{sunte}\) in these examples indicate that speakers are not sure about the propositions they are going to make. They are saying so based on what they have heard. This feature is used to distinguish the firsthand knowledge of the second hand information.

4.0 SUMMARY

As both of these Tharu languages belong to the same- Indo- Aryan- language family, there are many lexical and grammatical similarities, especially in the use of vector verbs to express different modalities. We have noticed that not only in these Tharu languages, but also in many of the Indo-Aryan languages like Hindi, Nepali, Bhojpuri, Maithili, the notion of possibility, permission, and ability are embodied with the same vector verb \(\text{sa} \text{k}\) ‘be able to’, and that of necessity and obligation are characterized in the form of \(\text{p} \text{ar}\) ‘is needed’. In both of these languages the concord markers are carried by the vector verbs which are attached to the infinitive, purposive, or base form of the content verbs. However, in the case of Hearsay, they are completely different in the selection and distribution of the devices: a particle \(\text{h}^\text{ũ}\), which is distributed at the sentence final position, is attested in Dangaura, whereas Chitoniya Tharu characterizes a lexical item \(\text{sunte}\), which is distributed at the sentence initial position. Although we find some similarities in lexical items, they are completely different in the grammatical systems like person, gender, and agreement.
ABBREVIATIONS

~    nasalization  1   First person       2   Second person
3   Third person   ABL   Ablative   ACC   Accusative
CAUS Causative   COND  Conditional   DAT   Dative
EMPH Emphatic   FUT   Future   HRS   Hearsay
Hon- Honorific   HORT  Hortative   GEN   Genitive
IMP  Imperative   INF   Infinitive   LOC   Locative
NEG  Negative   NH   Non-honorific   NCLF  Numeral classifier
NMLZ Nominalizer   OBL   Oblique   PRT   Particle
PL   Plural   PRF   Perfect   PRS   Present
PROG Progressive   PST   Past   PST.HAB  Past habit
PTCP Participial  REFL  Reflexive   SEQ   Sequential
SG   Singular   VOC   Vocative

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