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 sʌk used to express the notions of possibility, ability and permission, and pʌr expressing that of necessity and obligation, though there are other verbs like chai/cahĩ to indicate necessity and pa 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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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, the Tharus living in different Terai and inner Terai districts of Nepal, and the languages they speak have been broadly classified into four varieties: Rana Tharu, Dangaura Tharu, Chitoniya Tharu and Kochila Tharu (Paudyal 2014:7-8). This paper, however, attempts to examine the morphosyntactic structures used to express Modality, a grammatical category, in Chitoniya and Dangaura Tharu languages from a comparative perspective.

METHODS

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 Lamahi municipality, Tulasipur municipality, Saudiyar, Rampur and Hekui VDCs of Dang district, whereas the data for Chitoniya Tharu were collected from Ratnanagar, Khairahani and Mandi Municipalities of Chitwan district.1 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

1 I would like to thank all the Tharu community members who directly or indirectly supported me to collect the linguistic data for the study.

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glosses in English and fourth free translations. The figures at the end of the examples indicate the references of the corpus.

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.

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 sʌk ‘be able to’ in Chitoniya Tharu.\(^2\) It is the modal verb that carries the tense and agreement markers in both of these languages, as exemplified in (1a-d).

(1) a. \(\text{pani b}^\text{h} \text{itar} \text{t} \text{a k}^\text{h} \text{t hui syak}^\text{b} \text{a}\) (Danguara)
   \(\text{water -GEN in PRT thorn be can -PRS -3SG.NH}\)
   ‘There may be thorns in the water.’  \(\text{(FR_YRC.054)}\)

b. \(\text{ʌ}^\text{b} \text{awa killa hui seki}\) (Danguara)
   \(\text{or nail be can -FUT.3SG.NH}\)
   ‘Or there may be nails.’  \(\text{(FR_YRC.055)}\)

c. \(\text{yi bilukawa b}^\text{aitara hak}^\text{b} \text{e sakbiy}^\text{a}\) (Chitoniya)
   \(\text{this hole in be.PRS -INF can -FUT -3SG}\)
   ‘It might be in this hole.’  \(\text{(FS_DR&RM.083)}\)

d. \(\text{k}^\text{a} \text{t} \text{i hak}^\text{b} \text{e saktiy jani manad ki?}\) (Chitoniya)
   \(\text{what be.PRS -INF can -FUT -3PL wife husband or}\)

\(^2\) Typologically, sək is the common vector verb used to express possibility in most of the Indo-Aryan languages such as Hindi, Nepali, Bhojpuri, and Maithili. \(\text{aj waris ho sakti he (Hindi) aja pani parna sakte}^\text{a} \text{(Nepali)} \) ‘It may rain today.’
‘What might have been (the relationship between them), husband and wife?’  
(FS_DR&RM.196)

The modal verbs syakʰa ‘can -PRS -3SG.NH’ (1a), seki ‘can -FUT -3SG.NH’ (1b), sakkʰya ‘can -FUT -3SG’ (1c) and sakkʰyi ‘can -FUT -3PL’ (1d) express possibility of the actions expressed by the lexical verbs in respective examples.

Permission

In both of these Tharu languages, the explicators pa ‘be allowed to’ and sak/ syak/ sek/ ‘be able to’ 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 sakkujana gʰâs kaṭa païšan  
(Dangaura)

yi jangal -ma sakku -jâna gʰâs kaṭ -ʌ pa -ṭʰ -ʌn

this forest -LOC all -NCLF grass cut -PURP get -PRS -PL

‘Everyone is allowed to mow in this jungle.’  
(ELCTD_PG.458)

b. ab tâĩ kʰyal sekkya  
(Dangaura)

ab tâĩ kʰel -ʌ sek -b -ya

now 2SG.NH play -PURP can -FUT -2SG.NH

‘Now you can play’.  
(ELCTD_PG.456)

c. bina rahadani wâhâwâ hai ne javi pâwâyi  
(Chitoniya)

bina rahadani -se wâhâwâ hai ne 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 kamâwâ worake tohara gʰâr ja sakkâha  
(Chitoniya)

yi kamâwâ wora -ke tohara gʰâr ja sak -b -hâ

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 païšan (2a), sekkya (2b), pâwâyi (2c), and sakkâha (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’, kʰyal ‘play -PURP’, javi ‘go -INF’, and ja ‘go’ respectively.

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).
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).

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. 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. \( \text{ṭ}a \ u \ p^b \text{ula} \ g^b \text{alai pari} \)  
\( \text{ṭ}a \ u \ p^b \text{ula} \ g^b \text{al} \ -a \ -i \ par \ -i \)  
PRT that flower wear -CAUS -NMLZ have to -FUT.3SG.NH  
‘(You) will have to put that flower upon me.’  
(FR_MRC.100)

b. \( \text{ṭ}ū\text{ha} \text{n cahi} \ kā\text{la} \text{se} \ \text{mai} \ boloim} \)  
\( \text{ṭu}^b \text{a} \ -\text{ha}na \ cahi \ kā\text{la} \text{se} \ \text{mai} \ bala \ -m \)  
(Dangaura)

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3 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 par, as \( \text{timile yo kam garna parc}^{c} \text{(Nepali)} \) \( \text{tum}^{c} \text{e ye kam karna podega} \text{(Hindi)} \) ‘You will have to do this work’.
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2PL -DAT need if 1SG call -1SG.FUT

‘If I need you I will call you.’  (FR_MRC.123)

c. are yawa dewa, boke nahē partayi

are ya -A de -A bok -e nahē par -t -AYI

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 pʰal cahi

mor pʰal cahi

1SG.GEN fruit need

‘I need fruits.’  (JF.BM-78.0323)

Obligation

The vector verb par also embodies the notion of 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 par, as illustrated in (5a-b).

(5)  a. nahē bαthi partʰa

nahē bαta -HI par -tʰ -A

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

‘No, you must tell.’  (FR_YRC.091)

b. jaye partayi, behan bʰelayi

jɑ -e par -l -AYI behan bʰe -l -AYI

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 cahi or cahi in Danguara and Chitoniya Tharu respectively.

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. Danguara Tharu realizes the notion with a particle hũ ‘it is said’, whereas a distinct lexical item suntē ‘it is heard’ is used in Chitoniya Tharu for the purpose. They are also different from the distribution of these devices: the particle hũ always concludes the sentence, whereas suntē 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. \( ek\, \text{ra}j\, w_{\text{a}}\, r_{\text{a}}h_{\text{u}} \) (Dangaura)

\[
\begin{align*}
ek & -\text{NCLF} & \text{king} & \text{remain} & -3\text{SG.NH HRS} \\
\text{one} & & & & \\
\text{‘It is said that there was a king.’} & (\text{FR}_{-\text{MRC.006}})
\end{align*}
\]

b. \( h_{\text{u}}k\, a\, h_{\text{a}}r\, s_{\text{k}}k_{\text{u}}\, b_{\text{u}}\text{t}_{\text{l}}\, a\, s_{\text{w}_{\text{a}}n}_{\text{s}} \, r_{\text{a}}h_{\text{-i}}\, h_{\text{u}} \) (Dangaura)

\[
\begin{align*}
h_{\text{u}}k\, a\, h_{\text{a}}r & -3\text{SG.GEN} & \text{all} & \text{hair} & \text{gold} -\text{GEN live} -\text{PST} & -3\text{SG.NH HRS} \\
\text{‘Her hair was all made up of gold.’} & (\text{SR}_{-\text{PRC.010}})
\end{align*}
\]

c. \( s_{\text{u}}n_{\text{t}}e\, b_{\text{a}}g\, l_{\text{a}}c_{\text{h}}\, m_{\text{i}}\, j_{\text{a}}^{\text{g}_{\text{a}}\text{d}_{\text{a}}\text{a}}\, b_{\text{a}}\, d_{\text{a}}\, l_{\text{a}}g_{\text{a}}\, l_{\text{a}} \) (Chitoniya)

\[
\begin{align*}
s_{\text{u}}n_{\text{t}}e\, b_{\text{a}}g\, l_{\text{a}}c_{\text{h}}\, m_{\text{i}} & -3\text{SG.NH HRS} & \text{hear} & \text{Bhagya Laxmi} -\text{GEN quarrel} & \text{be.PRS} -\text{3PL start} -\text{PTCP} \\
\text{‘It is heard that there is a quarrel between Bhagya and Laxmi.’} & (\text{BL}_{-\text{FM-79.023}})
\end{align*}
\]

d. \( a_{\text{r}}\, b_{\text{a}}\text{b}_{\text{u}}\text{w}_{\text{a}}\, t_{\text{u}}\, s_{\text{u}}n_{\text{t}}e\, m_{\text{or}}\, b_{\text{e}}\text{t}_{\text{y}}\text{i}a\, k_{\text{a}}\text{r}_{\text{a}}\text{y}_{\text{i}}\, k_{\text{a}}\text{r}_{\text{o}}\text{j}_{\text{y}} \) (Chitoniya)

\[
\begin{align*}
a_{\text{r}}\, b_{\text{a}}\text{b}_{\text{u}}\text{w}_{\text{a}}\, t_{\text{u}} & -\text{INS} & s_{\text{u}}n_{\text{t}}e & \text{mor} & b_{\text{e}}\text{t}_{\text{y}}\text{i}a & -\text{INS} \\
VOC \text{ baby} & -2\text{SG.NH HRS} & 1\text{SG.GEN daughter} & -\text{INS} \\
\text{byah}_{\text{a}} & -\text{INS} & \text{k}_{\text{a}}\text{r} & -\text{INS} & k_{\text{o}}\text{j}_{\text{y}} & -\text{INS} \\
\text{marriage} & \text{do} & -\text{PROG search} & -\text{PROG} \\
\text{‘Hey baby, I hear that you want to marry my daughter.’} & (\text{BL}_{-\text{FM-79.089}})
\end{align*}
\]

The use of \( h_{\text{u}} \) and \( s_{\text{u}}n_{\text{t}}e \) 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 from the second hand information.

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 \( s_{\text{u}}k \) ‘be able to’, and that of necessity and obligation are characterized in the form of \( p_{\text{a}}r \) ‘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 \( h_{\text{u}} \), which is distributed at the sentence final position, is attested in Dangaura, whereas Chitoniya Tharu characterizes a lexical item \( s_{\text{u}}n_{\text{t}}e \), 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

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<td>~</td>
<td>nasalization</td>
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REFERENCES


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