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On Limbu directionals and locative expressions

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The Kiranti languages, including Limbu, are generally presented as having a three-way system of vertically oriented directional morphemes, up/down/across, used as ‘adverbs’ and, in composition with demonstratives, as deictics ‘up here’, ‘down there’, etc. In most of the languages, but not in Limbu, these morphemes have been reported as acting as vertically specified locative case markers postposed to nominals, ‘up in/at’, ‘over in/at’, ‘down in/at’, a phenomenon that has been called ‘vertical case’ (Ebert 1994). Limbu has been described as having only a general locative case marker, distinct from the directional adverbs.

The Tamarkhole dialect of Limbu contradicts this picture in two respects. First, it uses directional morphemes as locative markers on nominals in the manner described above. Second, and apparently uniquely among Kiranti languages, it has a five-way system of vertically oriented directionals, distinguishing topographic (‘uphill/upstream’ vs ‘downhill/downstream’) from gravitational (up vs down) axes. Comparable systems are found in the rGyal-rong languages of Western Sichuan.

The Tamarkhole general locative marker is different from the one that has been found in other Limbu dialects, but it is clearly related to the ‘down’ directional; this suggests an etymology, confirmed by early 20th century data, for the locative marker of the other Limbu dialects.

1 Directionals and the locative in Panchthar and Phedape

Two modern studies of Limbu dialects, Weidert and Subba (1985) (Panchthar dialect), and van Driem (1987), (Phedape), both cited by Ebert, present a three-term system of vertically specified ‘directionals’, but only a single locative case marker. It will be useful to keep this system in mind for comparison with the Tamarkhole system.

(1) Panchthar and Phedape directionals

<i>tho</i>	up
<i>yo</i>	down
<i>na</i>	on the same level

The directionals appear both independently and in a series of deictics, related to the proximal and distal demonstratives *kɔŋ* ‘this’ *khɛŋ* ‘that’, e.g. *kɔtyo~kɔʔyo* ‘down here’, *khɛʔyo* ‘down there’, etc. (glossary entries, van Driem 1987). Neither van Driem nor Weidert and Subba reports their use on lexical nouns.

(2) The Panchthar and Phedape locative suffix

Panchthar (Weidert and Subba 1985): *-o*, *-oʔ*.

Phedape (van Driem 1987: 49) *-ʔo*.

This marker, suffixed to demonstrative elements, forms vertically unspecified deictics, e.g. *kɔʔo*, *khɛʔo* ‘here, there’. On nominals it marks locative case, e.g. *himʔo~himmo* ‘in the house’ (Driem 1987: 49). I suspect that the glottal stop is the same (undefined) linking element as the *t~ʔ* of *kɔtyo~kɔʔyo* above; van Driem analyses it as part of the locative suffix.

2 Tamar Khole directionals and locatives

The Tamar Khole directionals (here represented by the Mewa Khola subdialect) are a superset of (1):

(3) Mewa Khola directionals:

<i>tho</i>	up, uphill, upstream [gloss: ‘uphill’]
<i>yo</i>	down, downhill, downstream [gloss: ‘downhill’]
<i>thəŋ</i>	up, overhead [gloss: ‘up.v’ (‘up.vertical’)]
<i>mu</i>	down, under [gloss: ‘down.v’ (‘down.vertical’)]
<i>na</i>	across, on the same level [gloss: ‘hz’ (‘horizontal’)]

These can appear suffixed to demonstratives to form vertical deictics, e.g. *kɔtthəŋ*, *kɔttho* ‘up here’, etc. In Tamarkhole as recorded in the Mewa Khola, a large variety of demonstratives is found, perhaps due to dialect mixture. Distal deictic forms based on demonstratives *ha*, *kha*, and *khɔ* ‘that’, and proximal deictics based on *ɛ* and *kɔ* ‘here’ are recorded.¹ All are followed by a linking

¹ The proximal demonstratives (and demonstrative pronouns) are *ɛn*, *kɔn*, with the definite article (*ɛ*)*n*. The distal demonstrative adjectives *khɔ* ‘that’, etc. appear without the article, the pronouns (*khɔn* ‘that one’) with it. The distal ‘there’ always carries a direction marker (e.g. *khɔtma* ‘over there’). It is possible that the directional sense is neutralized for one of these forms.

element before the directional suffix. This element is often realized as glottal stop, especially before sonorants, or assimilated to *p* before *mu*.

Vertically-specified locative case markers have the same form as the vertical deictics, but in the Mewa Khola they are only based on the deictic ε 'here'. These are suffixed to nominals. If the nominal ends in a vowel, the ε is elided, an elision which I indicate here by an (unpronounced) apostrophe: *paŋphe-'tyo* 'down in the village'.

(4) Mewa Khola locative postpositions:²

- (ε)*ttho*
- (ε)*tyo* (~ -(ε)*ʔyo*)
- (ε)*tthaŋ*
- (ε)*tmu* (~ -(ε)*ʔmu* ~ -(ε)*pmu*)
- (ε)*tna* (~ -(ε)*ʔna*)

Ebert (1994) has coined the term 'vertical case' for such vertically specified locative suffixes or postpositions on nominals, and shown many Kiranti examples. But on the basis of the descriptions of van Driem and Weidert & Subba, she has asserted (and theorized) their absence in Limbu (Ebert 1999).

I have no personal evidence of the presence or absence of this kind of expression in Limbu dialects other than Tamar Khole. On the other hand, I am quite sure that the general locative *-o* is absent from the Mewa Khola variety of Tamar Khole. We will see that a different morpheme fills this function.

2.1 The five directionals as a system

We may start with two examples which might suggest that the possibilities are exhausted by the trio *tho*, *yo*, *na*:

- | | | | |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|-----------|
| (5) <i>tho-haŋ-nu-aŋ</i> | <i>mɛ-ghɔkt-ige</i> | <i>yo-haŋ-nu-aŋ</i> | <trade41> |
| uphill-side-ABL- | 3PL-cut.off.S2- | downhill-side-ABL- | |
| CONJ | 1PL.EX | CONJ | |
| <i>mɛ-ghɔkt-ige</i> | <i>na-haŋ-nu-aŋ</i> | <i>mɛ-ghɔkt-ige</i> | |
| 3PL-cut.off.S2- | horiz-side-ABL-CONJ | 3PL-cut.off.S2- | |
| 1PL.EX | | 1PL.EX | |
| 'They cut us off from above, they cut us off from below, they cut us off on the same level.' | | | |

² The vocalic initial appears after a consonant final. Syllable-final *t* is often weakened to *ʔ* before a sonorant. It should be noted that all syllable-final stops are accompanied by glottal closure in Limbu (Driem 1987). There is some confusion in descriptions concerning the glottal stop and the glottal feature (ʔ) on vowels. For an introduction to Limbu phonology see Michailovsky 1986, 2002.

- (6) *lamdhet-εtmu* *yo-haj* *lamdhet-εtmu* *yuj-ige*, *kohi* *tho-haj*
 door-LOC downhill-side door-LOC stay.S2-1PL.EX some uphill-side
- lamdhet-εtmu* *yuj-ige*, *kohi* *na-haj* *lamdhet-εtmu*
 door-LOC stay.S2-1PL.EX some across-side door-LOC
- yuj-ige* <mari47>
 stay.S2-1PL.EX
 ‘At the door, some of us stayed on the downhill side, some of us on the uphill side, some of us directly opposite.’ [Preparation for an attempted marriage by capture.]

But what about *mu* and *thaj*? That they constitute a pair, like *yo* and *tho*, is suggested by the two compounds glossed ‘up and down’ in the Academy dictionary: *tho:yo* and *mutha:y* (Kainla 2059, entries *tho:*, *mu*)

We will see that the directionals which are shared with Panchthar and Phedap (*yo*, *tho*, *na*) appear almost exclusively as markers of topographic vertical directions (uphill/downhill/level; up/downstream; ritual higher/lower on the ground floor of the house (Sagant 1973)), while *mu* and *thaj* are less closely tied to topography (with some overlap).

The table below gives a rough count of the occurrences of the five Tamar Khole directionals in a set of 11 Mewa Khola texts (10 of these are available for consultation in the Lacito Pangloss archive).³

(7)	directional	independent	with demonstrative	with nominal
	<i>thaj</i>	30	11	4
	<i>tho</i>	89	25	9
	<i>na</i>	89	30	14
	<i>yo</i>	77	70	13
	<i>mu</i>	~18 (56) ⁴	118	200

It can be seen that the distribution of the directionals in their various uses is not uniform. There are 4 main asymmetries:

1. *thaj* ‘up’ is relatively infrequent in all uses
2. the pair *thaj/mu* is less frequent than the corresponding ‘topographic’ directionals in independent uses
3. the three topographic directionals seem to be roughly equally distributed, except that deictics with *yo* (e.g. *εtyo*) are more frequent than those with *tho* or *na*.

³ The Nepali loan *bhitrī* ‘in, inside’ also appears, twice independently and 10 times as a nominal postposition.

⁴ The count is somewhat uncertain because of the existence of a homophonous emphatic discourse particle.

4. *mu* ‘down, below’ is over 10 times more frequent than the other directionals as a postposition, and also more frequent (as is *yo* ‘down’ to a lesser extent) in deictic compositions.

The last of these is the most striking. It is explained by the fact that *-mu*, in its postpositional use, but not as an independent directional, has taken on a general locative sense ‘at, in, on’ in addition to its vertically specified sense ‘down, under, below’.

All five directionals appear in Limbu dictionaries, e.g. Cemjong n.d. [2018 VS; 1961–1962], Subba 1979 (based on the Tamar Khole variety spoken in West Sikkim), and the comprehensive, multi-dialectal Nepal Academy dictionary (Kainla 2002), but in the dictionaries they do not appear as a system, and the opposition between the two ‘up’/‘down’ pairs is not brought out.⁵ When asked (p.c. 1999), however, B. B. Subba (author of Subba 1984) unhesitatingly provided definitions similar to those given here.

2.2 Independent uses of directionals:

The five directionals can be used independently as directional/locative words, as seen in the following examples, which also illustrate the difference (and some overlap) between *tho* and *thaj*.

tho ‘uphill, upstream’

- (8) *kheni tho thaj-inne!*
 you.PL uphill come.up.s2-PL.IMP.INTR
 ‘You^p come^p on up!’ [The target of (6) invites her suitor and his party to come up to her home to negotiate with her father.] <mari39>
- (9) *tho-nu me-y’y-ε kɔrɔ . . .*
 uphill-ABL 3PL-come.down.s2-PST when
 ‘When they came down from above . . .’ <kana43>
- (10) *kohi ettho tho pandɔtluj ke-yuj-m’-aj me-way-ε*
 some up.here uphill Pandotlung ACT-stay.s1-fem 3PL-be.s2-PST
 ‘There were some women who lived up here (?) up in Pandotlung.’ [spoken in Libang, downstream from Pandotlung; cf. (14)] <dance4>

thaj ‘up’ (and sometimes ‘uphill’)

- (11) *khemsikpa yammu me-lij-ε thaj me-dha:b-ε*
 star again 3PL.SA-climb.s2-PST up.v 3PL.SA-be.seen.s2-PST
 Again the stars rose and were visible up above. <trade179>

⁵ The Academy dictionary gives ‘above, up’ for both *thaj* and *tho*, but adds a positional meaning ‘on, over (something)’ for the former, and, similarly, ‘under’ for *mu*.

- (12) *anige thay topi khu:ks-umbe-b'-en me-nis-u*
 1.PL.EX up.v cap wear.S2-1PL.EX>3-DEF 3PL.SA-see.S2-3O
 ‘They saw us wearing Nepalese caps [‘up’, i.e. on our heads].’ <trade83>
- (13) *thay tal-dhay me-ips-e*
 up.v storey-up.v 3PL.SA-sleep.S2-PST
 ‘They slept up on the upper storey.’ (cf. Nep. *talā* ‘upper storey’) <jari38>
- (14) *thay pandotlung ke-yuy-ma menchia-ha?*
 up.v Pandotlung ACT-stay.S1-FEM woman-PL
 ‘women who live up in Pandotlung’ [spoken in Libang, downstream from Pandotlung] <sogha163>

yo ‘downhill, downstream’

- (15) *atti pe-si-ay yo me-deʹr-u-i*
 where go.PST-DU-CONJ downhill 3PL.SA-take.S2-3O-Q

tho me-deʹr-u-i?
 uphill 3pl.sa-take.S2-3O-Q
 ‘[Find out] where the couple went, did they take her down or up?’ <jari19>
- (16) *yo-nu la:ks-ε-rɔ thay-ε-ay*
 below-ABL dance.S2-PA-PROG come.up.S2-PST-CONJ
 ‘Having come dancing up from below . . .’ <sogha272>

mu ‘down, downhill’

Note that our examples of the independent use of *mu* clearly have the directional sense ‘down, below’, and not ‘in’ or ‘out’ or any general sense. The sense in (17) appears to be more topographic than gravitational, however.

- (17) *a-nyuŋba kancha kɔ mu-nu thay-ε*
 1-pat.uncle youngest TOP down.v-ABL come.up.S2-PST
 ‘My youngest paternal uncle came up from below.’ <nuppa68>
- (18) *mu ɔg-ay-ay th’y-ay*
 dn.v come.off.S1-1SG.NA-CONJ fall.S2-1SG.NA
 ‘I lost hold and fell down [from a cliff].’ <naro100>
- (19) *thay siŋ-etthay kit-chiy-ay kɔ thakpa kusik mu*
 above tree-up.v coil-REFL-CONJ TOP rope like dn.v

yu-ay kɔ a-ɔ:k-pa
 come.down.S1 TOP 1PL-strike.S1-NOM
 ‘[snakes] coiling themselves up up in trees and then coming down like ropes and striking people [lit. ‘striking us (INCL.)’] . . .’ <trade129>

- (20) *siŋ-etthaŋ-nu mu mut mɛ-dha-aŋ mɛ-si-mu*
 tree-up.v-ABL down.v PRE.V 3PL-fall.S1-CONJ 3PL-die.S1-PART
 ‘They fall down to their deaths from up in trees.’ <sogha60>

na ‘across’

- (21) *uhi-sa pɸer-ɛ na-nu khunɛ kɔ*
 3.INTENS-EMPH come.level.S2-PST across-ABL 3 TOP
 ‘in the same way, he came over’ <nuppa39>
- (22) *na-ba pa:n dewəl mɛ-mett-u*
 across-NOM speech dewəl 3PL-say.S2-3O
 ‘In the language over there [in Sikkim], they say ‘dewal’ [for ‘wall’].’ <naro49>
- (23) *na c’wa:tt-etmu nanak nanak las-ige ci-dhaŋdhak*
 across water-in across.RED across.RED enter.S2-1PL.EX a.little-high.RED
c’wa:tt-ɛn thaŋ-ɛ
 water-DEF rise.S2-PST
 ‘Straight on, into the water, we went in further and further, and the water rose a bit higher.’ <trade47>

(The directionals have reduplicated forms, with a progressive sense, cf. also *yoyok*, *thodhok*.)

2.3 Postpositional uses

Postpositions formed from the directionals seem to conserve their vertical senses, except in the case of *-etmu* (see below). For *-etthaŋ*, see also (19), (20) above.

- (24) *yo keŋ-ɛ-ba tenn-etyo pe-aŋ*
 down fall.S2-PST-NOM place-downhill go.PST-CONJ
khɔ-tyo kɔ la:ks-ɛ i:r-ɛ
 there-downhill TOP dance.S2-PST turn.S2-PST
 ‘He_i [the shaman] went down to the place where he_j [the victim] had fallen and danced around down there.’ <sogha96>
- (25) *təmər khola liŋghim a-nuppa-si-rɛ-’ttho peg-aŋ-aŋ*
 Tamar river Liŋghim 1-f.in.law-PL-GEN-uphill go.S2-1SG-CONJ
way-aŋŋ-elle
 be.S2-1SG-when
 ‘When I had gone up to my father-in-law’s place in Liŋghim, in the Tamar Khola . . .’ <nuppa1>

- (26) *anige a:mbhu-'tna lɔ:nd-ige-aj*
 1PL.EX yard-LOC.HZ exit.S2-1PL.EX-CONJ
 ‘we came out [of the house] into the yard and . . .’ <sogha228>
- (27) *kohi kɔ na siŋŋ-elle ku-buŋŋ-etna i:p-masige*
 some TOP across tree-GEN 3-trunk-LOC.HZ screen.S1-REFL.1PL.EX
 ‘some of us hid ourselves over behind a tree trunk’ <trade149>
- (28) *ani-'tna tɔksɔŋ ke-wa²-ba-adi, etna kɔ seŋga*
 1PLIN-LOC.HZ highland ACT-be.S1-NOM- IPL.IN.COP PROX.LOC.HZ TOP lowland
 ‘Over at our place we’re hill-dwellers, over here [Assam] it’s lowlands.’
 <trade267>
- (29) *ekk-etthaj kɔkk-ɛn ke-bok-pa*
 back-up.v load-DEF ACT-rise.S1-NOM
 ‘carrying loads (up) on our backs’ <trade53>

In the case of *-etmu*, it is not clear in any of my text examples that it has the meaning ‘down in /down at’ as opposed to simply ‘in/at’. In (30), the potential victims are first presented as ‘up (in) trees’ (*siŋ-etthaj*); *thaj* and *-etthaj* are frequent in this context (cf. exx. 19, 20). The threat is to pull them ‘from in trees’ (*siŋŋ-etmu-nu*); *mu* clearly means ‘in’ and not ‘down’. (The verb *yak-* means ‘to be in’; it is not to be confused with *ya:kt-* ‘to stay over’ (31)). In the examples beginning with (34), the suffix is used without any physical locative sense.

- (30) *igɔrɔ siŋŋ-etthaj siŋ mɛ-dzɛpp-aj mɛ-yak-saŋ*
 or.else tree-up.v wood 3PL-cut.S1-CONJ 3PL-be.in.S1-SUB
siŋŋ-etmu-nu-saŋ u:ks-uŋsiŋ thas-uŋsiŋ
 tree-LOC.IN-ABL-also pull.S2-1SG>3NSG make.fall.S2-1SG>3NSG
 ‘Or else, if they are up in trees cutting firewood, I’ll pull them even from in the trees and make them fall. [spoken by a vengeful spirit, victim of an untimely death].’ <sogha182>
- (31) *thaj bənn-etmu dzəŋgəl-etmu ke-bek-p¹-aj ke-ya:k-pa-ha²*
 up.v forest-LOC jungle-LOC ACT-go.S1-NOM- ACT-stay.S1-NOM-CONJ-PL
 CONJ
 ‘those who had gone up and stayed over in the forest’ <ogre33>
- (32) *anige mura-'pmu nebo-'pmu c'wa:tt-ɛn las-ɛ*
 1PL.EX mouth-LOC nose-LOC water.DEF enter.S2-PST
 ‘Water got into our mouths and noses.’ <trade48>

no mention or example of vertically-specified locative marking on nominals, however.

4 Comparative remarks

Each of the five terms of the Tamarkhole vertical marking system appears to have cognates in one or another of the other Kiranti languages, as shown in the table.

	‘up’	‘down’	‘across’	LOC	source
Hayu	<i>l̃:kha,</i> <i>anikhen</i>	<i>ỹ:kha,</i> <i>utikhen</i>	<i>dokha</i>	<i>-he</i>	Michailovsky 1988: 122, 128
Bahing	<i>hateu</i>	<i>hayeu</i>	<i>re</i>	<i>-da</i>	Hodgson 1880(1): 351
Thulung	<i>-la</i>	<i>-yu</i>	<i>-nu</i>	<i>-ɕa</i>	Allen 1975: 110
Wambule	<i>twa-</i>	<i>ywa-</i>	<i>hwa-</i>	<i>-no/lo</i>	Opgenort 2004: 153, 180, 213, 215
Khaling	<i>-tü</i>	<i>-yu</i>	<i>-yo</i>	<i>-bi</i>	Toba & Toba 1975; Jacques, p. c.
Kulung	<i>-pto</i>	<i>-pu</i>	<i>-pa</i>	<i>-pi</i>	Tolsma 2006: 30
Chamling	<i>-dhi</i>	<i>-i</i>	<i>-ya</i>	<i>-da</i>	Ebert 1997a
Bantawa	<i>-du</i>	<i>-yu</i>	<i>-ya</i>	<i>-da</i>	Doornenbal 2009: 83
Athpare	<i>to</i>	<i>yo</i>	<i>ya</i>	<i>-ji</i>	Ebert 1997b: 99, 118
Chhintang	<i>to-</i>	<i>mo-</i>	<i>yo-</i>	<i>-be</i>	Rai et al. 2011: 301, 307
Mewahang	<i>-tu</i>	<i>-mu</i>	<i>-yu</i>	<i>-pi</i>	Gaenzle 1999: 150
Belhare	<i>-ttaj</i>	<i>-pmu</i>	<i>-ʔyã</i>	<i>-eC/pak</i>	Bickel 1999
Yamphu	<i>-tu</i>	<i>-mu</i>	<i>-yu</i>	<i>-peʔ</i>	Rutgers 1998: 68
Yakkha	<i>tu-</i>	<i>mu-</i>	<i>yu-</i>	<i>-pe</i>	Schackow 2014: 131, 181

Only *na* ‘across’ lacks immediately identifiable candidate cognates. As for *thaj*, it is clearly represented only in Belhare, but it is surely cognate to the Limbu verb *thaj-* ‘to come from below’, which is widely represented across Kiranti with the sense ‘to go up, ascend’. (Note the parallel with *yu* ‘down’, related to the widespread verb *yu-* ‘to come down’.)

What is not widely reported in Kiranti is the distinction between topographic and gravitational ‘up’ and ‘down’. The only mention I have found of a distinct gravitational dimension is in Chhintang (Dirksmeyer 2008: 63), but the words *bheĩ* ‘underside, under’ and *tem* ‘top, above’ are presented as somewhat apart from the basic directional paradigm, functioning as nominals referring to the top or bottom part of an object. In Tibeto-Burman, rich directional systems, with a clear distinction between ‘riverine’ (my ‘topographic’) and ‘gravitational’ dimensions, are well-known in rGyalrong. Jacques (2004) reports that all

Rgyalrong languages studied have three series of directional prefixes, up/down, upstream/downstream, and east/west, and a directionless prefix.

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