

CLASSICAL NEWARI VERBAL MORPHOLOGY A PRELIMINARY REPORT¹

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Introduction

The label "Classical Newari" was first used by the Danish scholar Hans Jorgensen to refer to a collection of late 17th century manuscripts consisting mainly of narrative texts. Jorgensen made a thorough study and analysis of these manuscripts, resulting in two significant publications, *A Dictionary of the Classical Newari* (1936) and *A Grammar of the Classical Newari* (1941) which are pioneer works on the subject. For the purpose of the present paper, Classical Newari (CN) can be defined as the language which appears in inscriptions, manuscripts and legal or land grant documents known as *tamsuk-s*, usually written on palm leaves, and these cover a period of over 600 years (i.e. 1114-1770 A.D.). The ongoing project on the CN Dictionary, now in its final stage of editing, has compiled a large database using 38 different manuscripts and old written documents as source materials. This paper seeks to provide a preliminary analysis of the CN verbal morphology based on the lexical and syntactic data drawn from these historical texts and documents. The materials that have been used obviously represent various stages in the evolution of the language, and this paper attempts to trace the morpho-phonemic developments in the CN verb roots and the inflectional/derivational morphology over a period of over six centuries of attested data.

Evolution of CN verb systems

Historically, the CN as recorded in the old chronicles and various documents differs from contemporary Newari in syllable structure, morphology and syntax. But the study of CN however has not received much attention although it may be the key area not only in understanding the earliest known Newari forms and the stages of their evolution but also in several fields of Nepalese and Asian studies. The morphological and syntactic data of CN have largely been inaccessible to most scholars, either native or foreign, and the major constructions in this important Himalayan language have so far been described inadequately. Apart from Jorgensen (1936, 1941), Kölver and Kölver (1978), Genetti (1990), Tamot (1990) and Kansakar (1992), there have not been any in-depth diachronic studies of CN. It is difficult to decide, for

instance, on the structure of verb roots or verb classes nor to make judgements on the phonological/morphological changes that have taken place in the language. Since we are dealing with a purely documented form of the language, it is often unreliable and arbitrary to deduce the morphological structure of words as this is by no means transparent in the original script. The first problem is the closely packed writing system without word breaks. Secondly, there are a large number of inconsistent orthographic variants which may not correctly reflect the phonological or morphological changes in the language. In our present total corpus of over 30,000 words we have several thousand verb forms recorded, but so far identified less than 500 attested native verb roots. We have also reconstructed some 150 infinitives on the basis of inflected and derived verb forms attested in the various manuscripts. Among these, there are about 180 Sanskrit loan verb roots attached to Newari inflectional suffixes. The verb data thus are not only important for the study of CN diachronic morphology but also provide evidence of the history of Indic influences on the language.

In an earlier paper on Verb Citation in the CN Dictionary (Kansakar 1992), I focussed on three basic problems in representing verb citation: one, the morphological composition of verb roots; two, the development in infinitive verbs; and three, a need for a diachronic perspective in formulating a system of verb classes. In any case, the system of verb classes as proposed by Jorgensen (1941) onward is still problematic in some respects and will remain so till all the facts of diachronic phonology and morphology of Newari are fully explored. We may begin by looking at the multitude of infinitival forms of CN compared to Modern Newari (MN) as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. CN and MN Infinitive forms

	CN	MN	
(a)	khañ-da	khan-e	to open
	puñ-da/puṃ-da	pun-e	to dress
		bhun-e	to wrap round
	syān-da	sen-e	to destroy
		sen-ke	to cause to destroy
(b)	cin-ja	cin-e	to tie, to compose
	tām-ja	tā-ye	to feel
	ḍam-jo	dan-e	to erect/to build
	bya-jo	byan-e	to purify ritually
(c)	di-ca	di-ye	to stop
	lhā-ca	lhā-ye	to speak
	syā-ca	syā-ye	to kill
	hva-ca ²	hon-e	to make treaty
	gā-ca-kam	gā-ye	to suffice
	dumbi-ca	dubi-ye	to enter

(d)	kā-sana ³ dhā-sana ha-sana	kā-ye dhā-ye ha-ye	to take to say, to tell to bring
(e)	kāta-ke cita-ke hāta-ke/hāra-ke tyā-ca-ke si-ca-ke/si-ta-ke yā-sa-ke	kā-ke ci-ke hā-ye-ke tyā-ke si-ke yā-ke	to cause to be pressed to cause to bind to cause to announce to get victory to cause to wash to cause to do

It is difficult to account for so many varieties of infinitive forms (-*da*, -*ja*, -*ca*, -*sa*, -*ke*) and to make definitive statements on whether these forms were in free variation at a particular point in history or *when* one form evolved into another. A plausible development in verb morphology can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Development in CN verb morphology

	MN	Finite
Past		
Class 1. /phoṇda/ > phom-ja > phoṇ-ya > phon-ye 'to beg'		phon-a
Class 2. /syāta/ > syā-ca > syā-ya > syā-ye 'to kill'		syāt-a
Class 3. /thvale/ > thul-e > thu-ya > thu-ye 'to cook'		thul-a
Class 4. */-ta/ > si-ca > *si-sa/-ra > sil-ye 'to wash'		sil-a

The earlier words in the four classes of verbs such as *phom-ja*, *syā-ca* or *si-ca* have *phom-* and *syā-* as distinct roots, and *-ja/-ca* can be interpreted as infinitive suffixes which later developed into *-n-ya/-n-ye* (from *-ja*) and *-ya/-ye/-e* (from *-ca*). The ancient infinitival forms seen in this light can be interpreted as having CV- roots which later acquired final consonants by a process of sandhi/assimilation rule (j > ṅ > ñ > n) and a rhotocism rule (c/s > r > l; or to palatal -y). The rules which cover Class 3 and Class 4 indicate a common historical origin but probably split into two classes at a later stage, although the earlier **-ta* postulated here is hypothetical and is not attested in our present corpus. Table 2 also includes a column of finite past forms to show that the finals *-n*, *-t* and *-l* of earlier words reappear as regular stem-final

C's in certain inflected forms. It is therefore evident from Table 2 that the development of *-ca* to *-yal/-yel/-e* or *-sa* to *-r/-l* is plausible in historical phonology, but that of *-ca* to *-la* (as in *si-ca > sil-e*) has remained a problem as the two consonants differ in articulatory and voicing features. Obviously there is a gap in our data and we need more evidence before we can establish a possible line of development (e.g. *-ca > -sa > -ra > -la*).

The CN data show that the *-n* final (class 1), *-t* final (Class 2) and *-l* final (classes 3 & 4) are all regular and comparable to the cognate languages such as Tibetan, Burmese and Bahing, as shown in Table 3, i.e. nasal-final root in Cl. 1, *-t/-d* final in Cl. 2 and unstable/stable *-l* final in Classes 3 and 4.

Table 3. *Verb class distinctions in cognate languages.*

	Newari	Tibetan	Burmese	Bahing	
1.	won-	on-ba	wañ-		to go
	ñan-	mñan-pa	(tu)		to be alike
	twon-	hthuñ-ba	(sok)	tũño	to drink
	khan-		khrañ-/mrañ-		to see
	phon-	hphoñs-ba	pan-/toñ:	punno	to beg
	hlam-	sloñ-ba	hlam		to stretch out/to raise
2.	pyāt-	pad-ma	krwat		to be wet
	mvāt-	mod-pa	(ne/niy)		to live
	sit-	ši-ba	se-/siy-		to die
	syāt-	gsod-pa	sat-		to kill
	hlāt-	zla-ba	(praw/hcui)		to speak
3.	khu (l-)	rku-ba	hkui:		to steal
	ña (l-)	dmyal-ba	(kuik)		to bite
4.	bi (l-)	hbul-ba	pe:		to give
	bul-	hphur-ba	sut-		to rub
	sil-	sel-ba	(hkru:)		to wash
	sel-	šes-pa	si?		to know

A logical follow-up to this analysis is to pose a question that has proved to be controversial in Classical Newari studies, i.e. Can we establish a chronological stratification of CN data into earlier and later periods of morphological development? Tamot (1990) believes such a classification is entirely possible on the basis of attested data, while Malla (1990) argues that variant roots and suffixes have been found in the same text, the same folio and at times on the same page, and therefore the etymological claim (that *-cal-ja* was the etymon of *-yal/-yel/-e* or *-ne, -le* etc) is untenable. Malla also claims that labels such as ECN or LCN cannot be meaningful unless supported by definite laws of phonological and morpho-syntactic changes based on verifiable features. While this is a valid observation, we have

adequate evidence to provide comparative data as shown in Table 4. Further, most of the source manuscripts are authentically dated, and if we can work out the relevant timings in relation to attested lexical data it does not seem to me to be impossible to arrive at roughly accurate historical stages in the development of CN verb systems.

Table 4. Earlier and Later CN verb classes, after Tamot (1990).

		ECN		LCN		
1.	root	phoñ-	phom-	phoñ-	phoñ-	(stable -n)
	inf.	phoñ-da	phom-ja	phoñ-ya	phoñ-ya	
		'to beg'				
2.	root	syāt-	syā-	syā-		(unstable -t)
	inf.	syāt-a	syā-ca	syā-ya		
		'to kill'				
3.	root	bil-	bi-	bi-		(unstable -l)
	inf.	bil-a	bi-ca	bi-ya		
		'to give'				
4.	root	sil-	si-	sil-		(stable -l)
	inf.	sil-a	si-ca	sil-ya		
		'to wash'				
5.	root	nakal-		naka-		(unstable -l)
	inf.	nakal-a		naka-ya		
		'to feed'				

The presentation of data in Table 4 serves to indicate a historical development in the form of root verbs and infinitive suffixes in the five verb classes. The Earlier and Later periods in question are distinguished by the earlier infinitival suffixes *-ja* and *-ca* which later changed to final C's *-n -l* (stable for Classes 1 and 4), and *-t -l* (unstable for Classes 2, 3 and 5). We can also see that *syā-* can be derived from *syāt-*, *bi-* from *bil-*, and *naka-* from *nakal-*. These changes are obviously important for morphological segmentation of word boundary and the development of verb classes, the two other problems which I will not elaborate here. But what needs to be pointed out is that the developments shown in Table 4 most probably did not take place in distinct/discrete stages. There were obviously overlaps in the concurrent uses of variant forms in relation to the development of stem-final consonants, as can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5. Concurrent uses of variant forms in the development of stem-final consonants.

Class 1.	ñ	↔	m	↔	ñ	↔	n
Class 2.	t	↔	c	↔	s	↔	y
Cl's 3 & 4	l	↔	c	↔	s	↔	r ↔ l

We can make some tentative observations on the probabilities presented in Table 5:

1. There is some evidence to show that the earliest attested ECN finals *-ni*, *-t*, *-l* existed as independent forms in the early manuscripts.
2. Later these stem-final consonants came to be used concurrently with finals *-m* and *-c*, i.e. *-ni* with *-m*, *-t*, with *-c*, *-l* with *-c*.
3. The loss of the ECN stem-finals may have coincided with further changes in the LCN period. i.e. *-m* now paired with *-n*, and *-c* with *-s* as concurrent forms.
4. These alternate forms continued to co-exist till *-n*, *-s* and *-s/-r* finally changed to modern *-n*, *-y* and *-l*.

Finally, the representation of inflected/derived forms too has its own problems. For example, *dhā-ya* can be glossed as 'will say', 'may say', something to be said' or 'is-to be said' thus carrying future, optative, relative participle, or verbal participle functions, and it is difficult to establish the syntactic environments which signal the change in meaning. It is therefore a sensible idea to summarize the inflectional morphology of CN verbs in conjugation tables in the manner of Jorgensen (1941) or Kölver and Kölver (1978) for all classes of verbs. Following Jorgensen we can divide CN verbs into three categories, A, B and C forms with allomorphic verbal suffixes. The conjugation of Class 1 verbs, for example, can be seen in Table 6. The A forms are what Jorgensen calls the short base/root, B forms derived from the longer base, and C forms are the compound verbs. All the attested inflectional suffixes have been listed under the three categories of verbs along with their grammatical functions.

Table 6. Inflectional and derivational morphology of CN verbs.

Root: kan- 'to tell'	Grammatical function
A. <i>kaṃ -ja/kan-ya/-e</i>	Infinitive
<i>kañ -aṃ/-o/-a</i>	Finite past
<i>-o/-wo</i>	Imperative
<i>-i/-yu -nayu/niwo</i>	Future (stative)
<i>-aṅ/-ā/-kwo</i>	Relative participle
<i>-ṅam/-laṃ</i>	Adverbial participle
<i>-syam/-sem</i>	Adverbial participle
<i>-le/-len</i>	Conjunctive participle (as, when)
<i>-kaṃ/-naṃ</i>	Conjunctive participle (after, while) (Reduplicative)
B. <i>kana -sā</i>	Conditional (if)
<i>-sā-nwom/-sā-naṃ/-sām</i>	Concessive (even if, even though)
<i>-ṅa-sem</i>	Adverbial (when, at the time)
<i>-ṅā-sa/-ṅā-wo</i>	Conjunctive participle (when, as, since, if only)
<i>-ṅā-ṅān</i>	Causal (because)

C. kana	-hune/-hñān/-ñān	Imperative
	-sane	Polite imperative
	-tole/-tale/-tolen/-talen	Adverbial (until, as long as, while)
	-tolem/-tolenom/-toleyā	
	-tunum/-tunam	Adverbial (as soon as, immediately after)
	-kāle	Adverbial (when, if)
	-wola/-vala	Adverbial (while, as long as)
	-tu/-tum	Intensives

Implications for further research

In conclusion, I would like to make brief references to the theoretical significance of this line of research on the languages of Nepal:

- (1) Any research on the diachronic morphology of CN can help to understand the history of the Newari language as recorded in ancient manuscripts, and this can throw light on several problem areas of Newari grammar, e.g. the early person agreement system of CN and the historical development of the conjunct-disjunct system.
- (2) Such research could be highly relevant for historical/comparative studies on Tibeto-Burman languages. For this purpose, a proper understanding of the oldest available Newari material is absolutely essential.
- (3) This could also lead to more reliable criteria for reconstruction of certain crucial morpho-syntactic features of Proto-Newari, and a less ambiguous placement of Newari within the genetic classification of T-B languages.
- (4) A compatible model of morphological analysis can be evolved to explain whether the morphological characteristics in Newari and other cognate languages of Nepal provide evidence for sub-grouping of languages and if these are the products of area pressure (i.e. Indo-spheric influences) or that of genetic inheritance. We all know that T-B languages of Nepal share many features with Indo-Aryan and Dravidian families.

Finally, our efforts should be towards documentation and codification of Nepalese languages through adequate lexical and grammatical descriptions. Such descriptions could contribute to area surveys similar to the Linguistic Survey of the Rai languages of Eastern Nepal (Hanson 1991), the proposed Sociolinguistic Survey of Nepal (Hale 1993), and also help to define Nepal as a subarea in South-Asian linguistics. The works of Emeneau (1956, 1974), Masica (1976), Southworth (1974) and Verma and Hill (1979) are interesting steps in this direction, but more work is obviously needed on the diachronic phonology and morphology of CN and other cognate languages (and dialects) before we can make conclusive statements on the proto-forms of the parent language.

Notes

1. This is slightly revised version of the paper presented to the 27th International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and linguistics, Paris, France, October 12-16, 1994. The paper has benefitted from comments made by various scholars including Austin Hale, James Matisoff, David Hargreaves and David Bradley. I am also grateful to Dr Bradley for supplying some of the cognate words in Burmese, listed in Table 3.
2. The evolution of the word *hva-ca* to a Class I verb form *hon-e* is highly irregular and cannot be explained in terms of the present verb class system where the suffix *-ca* is not associated with Class I verb. Historically, it is not likely that *c-* changed to *n-* and so remains an oddity in the attested data.
3. The suffix *sana* is actually a polite imperative form with an infinitival meaning where *kA-sana*, for example, can be glossed as "may you be pleased to take".

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