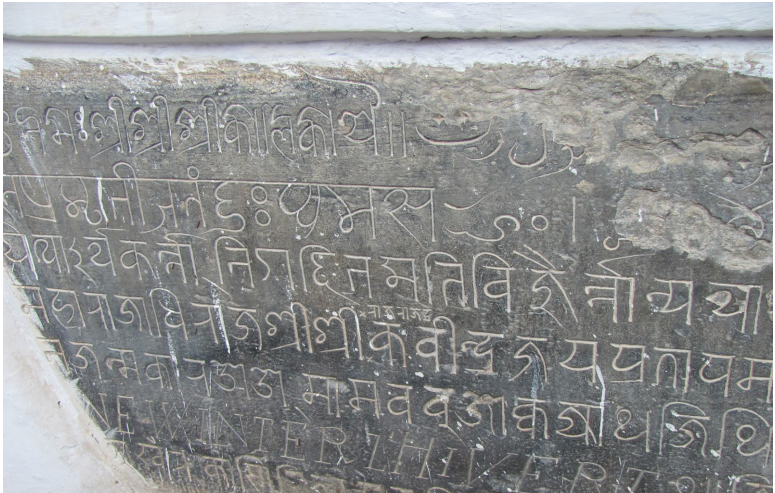


Nepali *-le* as a Marker of Categorical Subjecthood

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Introduction

- Many Indo-Aryan languages have a split in ergative marking conditioned by aspect.
- In general, there is a nominative-accusative pattern of case-marking with verbal agreement in the imperfective domain, and an ergative pattern of case-marking and verbal agreement in the perfective domain.
- We can see this pattern as it occurs in Hindi (examples from Deo and Sharma 2006:376):

Introduction: Hindi

- (1) **rām-ne** **cidiyā** **dekh-ī**
ram.M-ERG sparrow.F.NOM see-PERF.F.SG
'Ram saw a sparrow.'
- (2) **sita** **rām-ko** **dekh-t-ī** **h-ai**
sita.F.NOM ram.M-ACC see-IMPF-F.SG be-PRES.3.SG
'Sita sees Ram.'

Introduction: Nepali

- (3) **rām-le** **cidi** **dekh-yo**
ram.M-ERG sparrow.NOM see-PERF.3.SG
'Ram saw a sparrow.'
- (4) **sita** / **sita-le** **rām-lāi** **dekh-chin**
sita.F.NOM / sita.F-ERG ram-ACC see-PRES.F.3.SG
'Sita sees Ram.'

Puzzle: What does *-le* contribute in imperfective clauses?

- Emphasis (Grierson 1904, Clark 1963, Masica 1991)
- Disambiguation (Abadie 1974)
- Differential Subject Marking (Li 2007, Bickel 2011)
- Individual-Level Predication (Butt and Poudel 2007)

Disambiguation

- (5) a. yo gāi-le khā-ncha
this cow-ERG eat-PRES.3.SG
'This cow eats.'
- b. yo gāi khā-ncha
this cow eat-PRES.3.SG
'This cow eats/This (one) eats cow.'

Disambiguation

- This seems to be true for cases like (5). Speakers will tend to interpret “cow” as a subject in (5a) and as an object in (5b).
- But *-le* may be found in many situations where we cannot say that leaving it off would lead to ambiguity:

Disambiguation

- (6) gāi-(le) yo khān-cha
cow-(ERG) this eat-PRES.3.SG
'A/The cow eats this.'

Individual-Level Predication

Examples from Butt and Poudel 2007:

- (7) a. cālak-le gāḍi calāun-cha
driver-ERG car drive-PRES.3.SG
'The driver drives the vehicles.'
- b. guru gāḍi calāun-cha
teacher car drive-PRES.3.SG
'The teacher is driving/will drive the vehicle.'

Problems with the Individual-Predication Account

It is possible for an individual-level predicate to have an unmarked subject:

- (8) cālak gāḍi calāun-cha
driver-ERG car drive-PRES.3.SG
'The driver drives the vehicles.'

It is possible for a stage-level predicate to have a /e-marked subject:

- (9) guru-le gāḍi calāun-dai-cha
teacher-ERG car drive-CONT-PRES.3.SG
'The teacher is driving/will drive the vehicle.'

Analysis

My suggestion: *-le* marks the subject of a categorical proposition

- Kuroda 1972 proposed a grammaticalized categorical/thetic division as an analysis of Japanese topic markers.
- These notions come from the theories of judgment propounded by the 19th century philosophers Brentano and Marty.
- A judgment may be expressed by either a thetic or a categorical proposition.

Thetic/Categorical Judgments

- A **thetic proposition** is a description of an entity or an eventuality, with no element of the sentence given particular discourse prominence.
- A **categorical proposition** is a double judgment.
 - An entity is presented. The existence of this entity must be presupposed.
 - Then, a property is predicated of this entity.

Predictions

- For a Subject marked with *-le*:
 - The referent is a **Topic** (the referent's existence is presupposed)
 - The determiner phrase is strongly construed
- The Predicate of the clause:
 - may be Stage-Level or Individual-Level (cf. Ladusaw 1994, Kuroda 1990, contra Butt and Poudel 2007)

Evidence from Discourse Context

Context: I hear a loud bang. I notice my friend looking out the window and out into the woods.

Evidence from Discourse Context

(10) What is happening outside? (*Bahira ke hundaicha?*)

- a. shikāri / shikāri-le mrigā
hunter / hunter-(ERG) deer
samāt-dai-cha
catch-CONT-PRES.3.SG

‘The/A hunter is hunting a deer.’

(11) What is that hunter doing? (*Shikāri-le ke gardaicha?*)

- a. #shikāri / shikari-le mrigā
hunter / hunter-ERG deer
samāt-dai-cha
catch-CONT-PRES.3.SG

‘The hunter is hunting a deer.’

Evidence from Discourse Context

- In general, “hunter” cannot be marked if the existence of a hunter has not been previously established.
- If the question concerns a state of affairs, *-le* is optional. (The speaker can choose to respond thetically or categorically)
- If the question concerns an entity like the hunter, then *-le* is obligatory.

Strong and Weak Readings of Ambiguous Quantifiers

- Following the notion of strong/weak construal of ambiguous quantifiers and examples from Partee 1983:
 - (12) a. Some unicorns entered the garden.
 - b. Many people were at the party.
- Nepali quantifiers which appear to be similarly ambiguous include *dherai* 'many', and *kohi* 'some', (among others).
- A **strong** construal presupposes the existence of a set.
- A **weak** construal is indefinite, may be found inthetic propositions

Ambiguity with Unmarked 'Many'

Context: The students in the class work very hard on their studies.

- (13) **dherai** biddyaarathi din-ko dui-tin ghanṭā
many student day-GEN two-three hour
sik-chan
learn-PRES.3.PL

'Many students / Many of the students study 2-3 hours a day.'

Strong Construal with Marked 'Many'

Context: The students in the class work very hard on their studies.

- (14) **dherai** biddyaar^{thi}-**le** din-ko dui-tin ghanṭā
many student-LE day-GEN two-three hour
sik-chan
learn-PRES.3.PL

'Many of the students study 2-3 hours a day.'

Ambiguity with Unmarked 'Some'

Context: The students in the class work very hard on their studies.

- (15) **kohi.kohi** biddyaarathi din-ko dui-tin ghanṭā
some.RED student day-GEN two-three hour
sik-chan
learn-PRES.3.PL

'Some students / Some of the students study 2-3 hours a day.'

Strong Construal with Unmarked Marked 'Some'

Context: The students in the class work very hard on their studies.

- (16) **kohi.kohi** biddyaar^{hi}-**le** din-ko dui-tin ghanṭā
some.RED student-LE day-GEN two-three hour
sik-chan
learn-PRES.3.PL

'Some of the students study 2-3 hours a day.'

Strong Construal with Unmarked 'Most'

Context: The students in the class work very hard on their studies.

- (17) **dheraijaso** bidhyaarathi din-ko dui-tin ghanṭā
most student day-GEN two-three hour
sik-chan
learn-PRES.3.PL
'Most of the students study 2-3 hours a day.'

Strong Construal with Unmarked Marked 'Most'

Context: The students in the class work very hard on their studies.

- (18) **dheraijaso** biddyaar^{hi}-**le** din-ko dui-tin ghanṭā
most student-LE day-GEN two-three hour
sik-chan
learn-PRES.3.PL
'Most of the students study 2-3 hours a day.'

Strong and Weak Readings of Quantifiers

	Weak	Strong
<i>dherai</i> N	Yes	Yes
<i>dherai</i> N- <i>le</i>	No	Yes
<i>kohi</i> N	Yes	Yes
<i>kohi</i> N- <i>le</i>	No	Yes
<i>dheraijaso</i> N	No	Yes
<i>dheraijaso</i> N- <i>le</i>	No	Yes

Strong Readings with Elided Subjects

Context: If I'm going to house sit, I need to know about the dietary restrictions of all of your house cats.

(19) kohi.kohi / kohi.kohi-le māca khān-chan
some.RED / some.RED-ERG fish eat-PRES.3.PL
'Some (of the cats) eat fish.'

(20) dherai / dherai-le māca khān-chan
many / many-ERG fish eat-PRES.3.PL
'Many (of the cats) eat fish.'

(21) #dheraijaso / dheraijaso-le māca khān-cha
#most / most-ERG fish eat-PRES.3.SG
'Most (of the cats) eat fish.'

Quantifier Readings with Elided Nouns

	Weak	Strong
<i>dherai</i>	No	Yes
<i>dherai-le</i>	No	Yes
<i>kohi</i>	No	Yes
<i>kohi-le</i>	No	Yes
<i>dheraijaso</i>	No	No
<i>dheraijaso-le</i>	No	Yes

Conclusions and Questions

- In a discourse, *-le* is felicitous if the subject relates directly to the question under discussion
- The evidence from quantifiers tell us that a *le*-marked noun phrase must have strong construal
- This fits with the notion that *-le* is a topic marker
- More evidence is needed to determine the semantic difference between bare *dherai* and *dherai-le*, which both have strong construal
- Why is *-le* obligatory for *dheraijaso* when the noun is elided?

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