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Languages and Peoples of the Eastern Himalayan Region (LPEHR)

Auxiliary Verbs of Nocte, Khappa, Ollo and Tutsa

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Auxiliary Verbs of Nocte, Khappa, Ollo and Tutsa¹

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1. Introduction

In most languages of Arunachal Pradesh auxiliary verbs show an inclination to grammaticalize lexical verbs. There is not ‘any specific language-independent formal definition’ (Al-Horais 2012) to characterise auxiliary verbs. In certain languages, there is a clear demarcation between auxiliary and lexical verbs, resulting in a ‘mono-clausal verb phrase’ (Anderson 2006:5) while in certain other languages, lexical verbs undergo clines of grammaticalization or (lexical) semantic bleaching. Syntactically, auxiliary verbs define predicates and not arguments (Berman 1980:17). In most Tibeto-Burman languages of Arunachal Pradesh — including Nyishi, Singpho, Galo, Nocte, Ollo, and Tutsa — we find auxiliary verbs being derived from lexical verbs like ‘sit’, ‘live/stay’.

NYISHI

In Nyishi, *do* ‘live’ is used as an auxiliary verb in existential constructions.

- (1) ngo itanagar lo do pa
1SG Itanagar PP live-PRES
‘I live in Itanagar.’

- (2) afrika ge nyora elo abang pate do pa
Africa PP forest there elder.brother tiger BE-PRES
‘There are tigers in the forests of Africa.’

SINGPHO

In Singpho, *ŋa* ‘live’ is also used as an auxiliary verb in both existential and possessive constructions.

¹ I express my infinite gratitude to the native speakers of the five languages. Thanks to the Nocte informants Nokte Panka, Wangse Hosai, Hatey Hosai, Rangkap Aran. I am thankful to Wancho informants Gangdiap Gangsa and Sephua Wangsu. I am thankful to Khappa informants Chimkha Suayang, Awang Ngoapo, Saphua. I am thankful to Ollo informants Wanglet Wangsa, Kijen Homtok, Nali Janpi, Moirin Moinak. I am thankful to Tutsa informants Sonam Socia, Telem Kitnya, Kangwang Luwang. I am also grateful to Nyishi informant Stephen Taku and Singpho informant Chau Ja Maiyo.

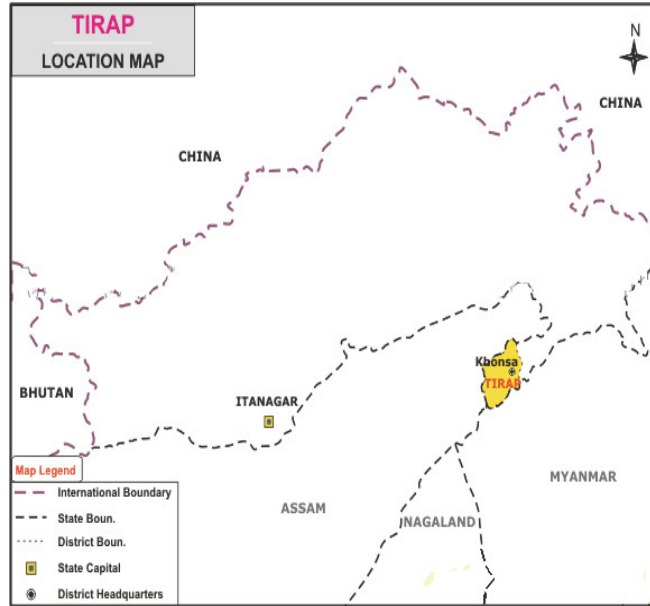
- (3) *ngə-i dilli-ko ηa-de/əi*
 1SG Delhi-PP live-PRES
 ‘I live in Delhi’
- (4) *afrika mun ko shr:ŋ gəi/grəi ηa-əi/ηa-re*
 Africa country PP tiger PL BE-PRES
 ‘There are tigers in the forests of Africa.’
- (5) *ηe gui n-kboŋ ηa-dəi*
 1SG dog two BE-PAST
 ‘I had two dogs.’

The lexical verb ‘live’ performs the function of existential verbs in Nyishi, Galo and Singpho. In the languages of Tirap District of Arunachal Pradesh, we find the lexical verb ‘sit’ (*toŋ* in Nocte) or ‘live’ (*dan* and *nyi* in Nocte and Khappa respectively) is used both as a content (lexical verb) and function (auxiliary verb) word in one language or a function word in another.

1. *Demography*

The present study focuses on the languages of Tirap district of Arunachal Pradesh. The district lies in the south-eastern part of the state, with its neighbouring states Assam in the north-west and Nagaland in the south-west; and shares an international border in the south-east with Myanmar. Once a larger single district, Tirap has since been divided into two additional districts, Changlang created on 14th November, 1987 and Longding formed in 2013. These border what remains of Tirap district today. Noctes form the bulk of population of Tirap District. Hence, they constitute the dominant group in the district headquarter Khonsa. This study probes the so-called sub-tribes of Nocte, namely Ollo and Khappa. The Khappa variety is regarded as a literary medium of Noctes; hence the variety is used in composing songs and poetry. Ollo — presently categorized as a sub-tribe of Nocte — seeks to be an independently recognized tribe in near future. Tutsa was regarded as a sub-tribe of Nocte until 1991 at which time it became registered as an independent tribe. The dominance of Noctes can be further understood while a section of linguistic community in Tirap categorises themselves as “Wancho speaking Noctes”, the Wancho population is culturally distinct and mainly concentrated in Longding.

Field-work conducted in June 2017 was mainly concentrated in Khonsa, the headquarters of Tirap district. The study involved Nocte including nominal sub-tribes Ollo and Khappa, as well as Tutsa and Wancho.



Map 1: Arunachal Pradesh with district Tirap marked.

2. Cognates of the five languages of Tirap

The five languages spoken in Tirap show some mutual intelligibility regarding their cognate lexemes. People of other linguistic communities who are residing in Khonsa for several years show some amount of intelligibility with Nocte. These people generally communicate in Hindi or Assamese with other language communities.

Tutsa	Ollo	Khappa	Nocte	Wancho	Gloss
woh	wo-tsa	u	noh	au, o	bird
woh-nuh	wo-nu	u-nya	woh-niyon	o-nyu, a-nyu	hen
woh-poŋ	wo-poŋ	u-poŋ	woh-poŋ	o-poŋ, a-poŋ	cock
sah	sah	ha-be	sah	thla-nu, tha-nu, ca-nu	tiger
man-nuh	su-nu	ma-hü	man-nyon	mai-du, mai-hu	cow
man-poŋ	su-poŋ	hü-poŋ	man-poŋ	mai-du-poŋ	ox
hui	hü	kui	hu	kih, hi	dog
mok	mok	mok	mok	mahn	horse
raho	yu, waŋ	ke-ma	karo	ŋo-yu, pəi-pu	come
woŋ	woŋ	yon	woŋ	goŋ, boŋ, woŋ	rice

bəŋ/buŋ	bəŋ	pə	bəŋ	pən	tree
rəŋ-sa/ ruŋ-sa	sein	raŋ-sa	sən	gəŋ-tan, gəŋ-han, jəŋ-han	sun
rəŋ/ ruŋ	yaŋ	raŋ	rəŋ-kho	gəŋ	sky
hah	hah	ka	hah	ka-kha, ha-kha	land
joŋ	loŋ	loŋ	loŋ	loŋ	stones
weh	wən	In	wən	gən, bən, wən	fire
poŋ	yaŋ- poŋ	raŋ-hak	poŋ	gəŋ-in, jəŋ-win	wind
ha-daŋ	ha-daŋ	nok	nok, ha- daŋ	nok, tiŋ, ciŋ	village
nok	hom	kam	həm	hum	house

Table 1: Cognates of the five languages

These five languages are categorized under the Northern Naga group. Nocte and Tutsa form a sub-group with Tangsa languages (French 1983) and these might reveal a “dialect chain” (Morey, 2013); while Wancho shows affinity with Chang (French, 1983). However, based on its vocabulary, Wancho “might be equally inclined to align with the Tangsa-Nocte-Tutsa group” (Post & Burling, 2017).

The present study examines how the cognates of a lexical verbs in one languages are used as auxiliary verbs in another. While in one language a posture verb retains its content meaning and at the same time functions as an auxiliary verb, in other sister languages the posture verb only performs the function of an auxiliary verb. The study also exemplifies a characteristic feature of auxiliary verbs with regards to its evolution. These languages bear the feature that auxiliary verbs in some languages are derived from lexical verbs of its sister languages.

The following sections dwell on the auxiliary verbs as used in existential and possessive constructions, with reference to present and past tense, negative constructions and inchoative constructions.

2. Existential and Possessive constructions

The auxiliary verbs are derived from the posture verbs ‘sit’ (*toŋ* in Nocte) and ‘live’ (*daŋ*, and *nyi* in Nocte and Khappa respectively). The use of the same auxiliary verb might alter with which tense is used. In existential and possessive constructions with reference to present, the verb *toŋ* (Nocte ‘sit’) is used in Nocte and Khappa; while in Ollo the verb *toŋ* is used with reference to both present and past. Apparently in Khappa, which functions as the literary language of Nocte, the verb *toŋ* is

grammaticalized and *coŋ* denotes the verb 'sit'. The lexical verb *nyi* 'live' has retained its content meaning in Khappa, and also performs the function of an auxiliary verb in existential and possessive constructions with reference to the past. However, these languages also use an altered auxiliary verb with reference to past and future tense (which is also used in negative construction, as for instance, *dəŋ* 'to live' in Nocte). The following sections illustrate the use of the existential verbs *toŋ* 'to sit', *nyi* 'to live', *je* 'to exist', *dəŋ* 'to live', *ʃəŋ* 'BE verb' in the respective languages.

3. Use of *toŋ* 'sit'

NOCTE

The verb *toŋ* 'sit' in Nocte has retained its content meaning:

- (6) *te ɲa ta/ke ko toŋ ta*
 3SG 1SG near PP sit PAST.3SG
 'He sat beside me'.

The examples below show *toŋ* used in existential constructions in Nocte, Khappa and Ollo. While Nocte and Khappa use an altered verb with reference to the past (*nyi* 'to live' / *ʃəŋ* 'BE verb' in Khappa and *dəŋ* 'to live' in Nocte), Ollo uses the verb *toŋ* both to refer to present (e.g.13 & 15) and past(e.g. 14 &16).

NOCTE

- (7) *africa wun nəŋ sab toŋ-a*
 Africa forest LOC tigers exist-AGR
 'There are tigers in the forests of Africa'.
- (8) *ɲa cha wanthe toŋ-a*
 1SG offspring one exist-AGR
 'I have one son'.

KHAPPA

- (9) *ɲa kam taŋ ko ipo-roh toŋ*
 1SG house back side PP flower-garden exist
 'There is a flower garden behind my house'.
- (10) *ɲa no ʃəŋəŋ kenyi toŋ*
 1SG sibling male two have
 'I have two brothers.'

- (11) *ote/ate kam ge ton ja?*
 3SG house PP exist Q
 ‘Is he at home?’

OLLO

The verb *ton* ‘sit’ in Ollo has retained its content meaning:

- (12) *katēpah ηe phaη tab-ton ab*
 3SG 1SG with PAST-sit BE
 ‘He sat beside me.’

The verb *ton* ‘sit’ is also used as an auxiliary verb in existential and possessive constructions with reference to present and past tenses.

- (13) *afrika wun-ne sa-wuk ton-a*
 Africa forest-LOC tiger-PL exist-PRES
 ‘There are tigers in the forests of Africa.’

- (14) *afrika wun-ne sa-wuk ton a-wa*
 Africa forest-LOC tiger-PL exist PSAT
 ‘There were tigers in the forests of Africa.’

- (15) *ηa phaη ηe thi sa nub ki-nyi ton ab*
 1SG with brotherelder and younger two exist BE
 ‘I have two brothers – elder and younger.’

- (16) *ηa phaη ηe thi sa nub ki-nyi ton a-wa*
 1SG with brotherelder and younger two exist PAST
 ‘I had two brothers.’

2. Use of *je* ‘exist’

In Tutsa, the auxiliary verb *je* ‘exist’ is used in existential and possessive constructions with reference to present tense. The following Tutsa constructions illustrate the use of the verb:

TUTSA

- (17) *heb nok ni e-je təma?*
 3SG house LOC exist Q
 ‘Is he at home?’

- (18) *nok ni ta je-ka*
house LOC NEG exist
'Nobody is at home.'
- (19) *ηa nok li ni pa je la*
1SG house back PP garden exist
'There is a garden behind my house.'
- (20) *ηa sab esit je-la*
1SG son one exist
'I have one son.'

3. Use of *nyi* 'live/stay'

In Khappa, *nyi* 'live/stay' has retained the content meaning but it is also used as a copula to express present tense. In addition, the verb *nyi* also is used for existential and possessive constructions, with reference to the past.

In Khappa, both *nyi* and *dəŋ* means 'live/stay'. Generally, *nyi* is used to denote 'to stay'; and *əŋ* 'to live'.

KHAPPA

- (21) *nəŋ merage nyi/dəŋ?*
2SG where stay/live
'Where do you stay/live in?'
- (22) *ηa arante nyi*
1SG teacher BE
'I am a teacher.'
- (23) *nəŋ keme arante nyi*
2SG good teacher stay
'You are a good teacher.'
- (24) *kim kam taŋ ko ipo-rob nyi-ηa*
1SG house back-side PP flower-garden stay-PAST
'There was a garden behind my house.'
- (25) *ηa no phajon kenyi nyi-ηa*
1SG sibling male two stay-PAST
'I had two brothers.'

- (26) *ηa dilli junivɛrsəti ge student nyi-ηa*
 1SG Delhi University PP student stay-PAST
 ‘I was student of Delhi University.’
- (27) *aterebu dilli junivɛrsəti ge students nyi-ηa*
 3PL Delhi University PP students stay-PAST
 ‘They were students of DU.’

4. Use of *ʃəŋ* ‘BE verb’

KHAPPA

In Khappa, *ʃəŋ* ‘BE verb’ functions as a copula and an auxiliary verb in existential and possessive constructions with reference to past tense.

- (28) *ate arante ʃəŋ-ηa*
 3SG teacher BE-PAST
 ‘He was a teacher.’
- (29) *kim kam taŋ ko ipo-rob ʃəŋ-ηa*
 1SG house back-side PP flower-garden exist-PAST
 ‘There was a garden behind my house.’
- (30) *ηa no phajon kenyi ʃəŋ-ηa*
 1SG sibling male two POSS-PAST
 ‘I had two brothers.’

5. Use of *dəŋ* ‘to live’

Khappa retains the content meaning of *dəŋ* ‘live’. In Nocte *dəŋ* ‘to live’ is more grammaticalised. There it is used as a copula in both declarative and negative sentences while employing the verb *soŋ* ‘live’ as the replacing content word.

NOCTE

The language employs *soŋ* ‘live’ as a content verb; the rest of the examples illustrate the use of the verb *dəŋ* ‘to live’ as a function word.

- (31) *nga khonsa naŋ soŋ k-əŋ*
 1SG Khonsa PP live PRES.AGR
 ‘I live in Khonsa.’

Nocte exhibits *dəŋ* in copulative constructions:

- (32) *ŋa nyap-hetbo-te dəŋ*
 1SG book-teach-AGT BE
 'I am a teacher.'
- (33) *ŋa nyap-hetbo-te dəŋ-wa*
 1SG book-teach-AGT BE-PAST
 'I was a teacher.'
- (34) *ŋa doctor dəŋ-min*
 1SG doctor BE-FUT
 'I will be a doctor.'
- (35) *teb/hi ŋa na dəŋ ma*
 3SG 1SG brother BE NEG
 'He is not my brother.'

Nocte uses *dəŋ* in past existential and possessive constructions:

- (36) *ni hum tok-di ko began dəŋ-wa*
 1PL house back-side LOC garden BE-PAST
 'There was a garden behind our house.'
- (37) *ate/ati cha de-biyak wanthe dəŋ-wa*
 3SG offspring daughter one BE-PAST
 'She had a daughter.'
- (38) *ŋa hom wanthe dəŋ/co wa*
 1SG house one BE/own PAST
 'I possessed a house.'

6. Use of verb *diəŋ* 'to BE'

In Olo, the verb *diəŋ* is only found in negative copulative constructions:

- (39) *ŋe sat ta diəŋ-a*
 1SG teacher NEG BE
 'I am not a teacher.'
- (40) *aya ŋe yonpon ta diəŋ-wa*
 3SG 1SG friend NEG BE-PAST
 'He was not my friend.'

- (41) *aya* *ŋe* *yonpon* *ta-ŋen* *diəŋ-a*
 3SG 1SG friend NEG-MOD BE
 ‘He will not be my friend.’

7. *Use of verb əŋ ‘to BE’*

In Tutsa, the verb *əŋ* ‘BE verb’ functions as a copula both in declarative and negative constructions.

TUTSA

- (42) *ŋa-(a)* *enyot-te* *əŋ*
 1SG teach-AGT 1SG
 ‘I am a teacher.’
- (43) *ŋa-(a)* *enyot-te* *əŋ-taŋ*
 1SG teach-AGT BE-PAST
 ‘I was a teacher.’
- (44) *heb* *le-enyot-te* *əŋ-ta*
 3SG book-teach-AGT BE-PAST
 ‘He was a teacher.’
- (45) *heb* *doctor* *əŋ-ab/əŋ-teh²/hon-teh*
 3SG doctor BE-FUT
 ‘He will be a doctor.’
- (46) *heb* *ŋa* *jonte* *ta-əŋ* *ka*
 3SG 1SG friend NEG BE
 ‘He is not my friend.’
- (47) *heb* *le-nyot-te* *ta-əŋ* *ka*
 3SG book-teach-AGT NEG BE
 ‘He is not a teacher.’

3. Inchoative Verbs

These verbs denote the beginning of an action, state or occurrence. The following sections deal with the verb *hon* ‘to be’ as it is used in Ollo and Tutsa.

8. Use of Verb *hon* 'BE inchoative'

In Ollo and Tutsa, the verb *hon* 'to BE' functions as inchoative, i.e., 'to become'. The following examples illustrate the use of the verb as an auxiliary.

TUTSA

- (48) *namlak imein ihon/hon la³*
 leaves yellow BE-inchoative 3.PRES.PROG
 'The leaves are turning yellow.'perilla
- (49) *seŋ wiku-tekaŋ ihon/hon li*
 1PL old(F)-old(M) BE-inchoative 1.PRES.PROG G
 'We are becoming old.'
- (50) *seŋ wiku-tekaŋ ihon/hon te*
 1PL old(F)-old(M) BE inchoative FUT
 'We will become old.'
- (51) *ŋa jonte wiku ihon/hon ta*
 1SG friend old(F) BE-inchoative PAST
 'My friend became old.'

In Ollo, the verb *hon* denotes 'to become' with reference to all tenses. It functions as an inchoative verb.

OLLO

- (52) = *baŋdyak-wuk a kahtchak ləka hon-ra*
 leaves-PL BE yellow PERF BE.inchoative-3SG.PRES.PROG
 'The leaves are turning yellow.'
- (53) *aya sat aka-hon-a*
 3SG teacher FUT-BE.inchoative-3
 'He will be a teacher.'
- (54) *yə doctor taŋen kə-hon-a*
 3SG doctor NEG FUT-BE.inchoative-3
 'He will not become a doctor.'

³ -la '3person.PRES PROG', -li '1person, PRES PROG', -lo '2person, PRES PROG'

(55) *kü-nyi wiku ləka hon-rit*
 2PL old(F) PERF become-1PL
 ‘We are becoming old.’

(56) *ŋe yonpon ah wiku ləka-hon-ra*
 1SG friend BE old PERF-BEInchoative-3
 ‘My friend became old.’

4. Summary

The languages discussed above show structural resemblances, along with lexical cognates as listed in Table 1. The languages Nocte, Tutsa and Ollo show greater affinity to each other compared to Khappa and Wancho, both spoken in the same district.

Table 3 provides a summary of the auxiliary verbs, some of which are cognates and is interestingly used as a content word or/and a function/grammatical word among Nocte, Khappa, Ollo and Tutsa. Table 3 provides us with an understanding not only of the cognates which is interestingly shared among the five languages; but also, the usages of content and function words shared by the same. In Nocte *toŋ* retains the lexical meaning of ‘sit’, at the same time it performs the functions of an auxiliary verb in existential and possessive constructions with reference to present tense. But in Khappa, *toŋ* is used solely as a function word with reference to present tense. In Ollo, *toŋ* is used as a function word with reference to both present and past tense. In Khappa, *dəŋ* ‘live’ solely performs the role of a lexical verb; while in Nocte *dəŋ* performs the function of an auxiliary verb in existential and possessive constructions. In Khappa, the verbs *nyi/dəŋ* mean ‘live/stay’. The content word *nyi* also functions as verb ‘to be’ in copular constructions. In addition, the verb is used in existential and possessive constructions with reference to the past; and can also be alternatively used with the verb *ʃəŋ* ‘to be’. The verb *ʃəŋ* is used in past, future and negative constructions in Khappa.

The languages use multiple auxiliary verbs for specific functions; some of which are content words in the same or in the neighbouring languages.

Languages	PRESENT	PAST	FUTURE	Grammatical Functions
NOCTE	toŋ	dəŋ	dəŋ	Existential & Possessive constructions
KHAPPA	toŋ ʃəŋ	nyi ʃəŋ	ʃəŋ	toŋ (existential & possessive constructions) ʃəŋ (Be-Inchoative, Verb ‘to be’, Negation) nyi (existential & possessive constructions)
TUTSA	je əŋ hon	əŋ hon	əŋ hon	je (existential & possessive constructions) əŋ (Verb ‘to be’, possessive constructions, Negation) hon (Be-Inchoative)

OLLO	toŋ	toŋ	hon	toŋ (existential & possessive constructions)
	hon	hon		hon (Be-Inchoative)

Table 3: Existential, Possessive and Inchoative verbs in the four languages of Tirap district

ABBREVIATIONS

AGR	Verb agreement
AGT	Agentive
BE	BE verb
FUT	Future
LOC	Locative
NEG	Negative
PL	Plural
PERF	Perfective
POSS	Possessive
PRES	Present
PROG	Progressive
SG	Singular

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