NOUN CASES IN NYISHI

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Introduction: Nyishi, the Tribe

• Nyishi is also known as Bangni, Dafla, Daphla, Lel, Nil, Nisi and Nyising (retrieved from http://www.ethnologue.com/ on 25th May 2013).

• It is language of the Nyishi tribe, one of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh.

• Arunachal Pradesh (‘land of rising sun’ in Sanskrit) is thinly populated hilly tract in the extreme northeastern part of India.
Map: Nyishi Speaking Region
Introduction: the Tribe

- People dwelling in between Nyem (men of hills; Tibetan region) and Nyepak (men of plain; Assam) are called Nyishi.

- Nyi means ‘man’ and Shi means ‘high land’ so Nyishi means ‘upland man’. Nyishi also means ‘human beings’.

- They believe themselves to be descendent of Abo Tani (first man) so they call themselves part of Tani group.
Introduction: Nyshi, the Language

• It is spoken by 118,111 speakers in India, according to the census conducted by the government of India in 2001.

• UNESCO (Atlas of World’s Languages in Danger, 2010) marks Nyishi as one of the vulnerable languages.

Case System

• Cases are generally multifunctional in languages around the world.

• But the foremost function of case is that of “marking dependent nouns for the type of relationship they bear to their heads” Blake(2001).

• In Nyishi case only performs this function. But one form is used to realize many relations.
Case through Cognitive Grammar

• CG highlights that “all grammatical forms have a meaning that could explain their usage” (Luraghi, 2008), which includes cases.

• Using CG extension from one case to another (plenty in Nyishi) can be easily understood.

• Instrumental and locative (Wackernagel’s 1982), Comitative and instrumental (Lakoff & Johnson 1980).
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Possessive

• Possessive case marker is /gə/ which is used when the possessor is +human. But not when the possessor is –human.

1. ɲo-gə  nam
   I-GEN house
   My house.

2. mulu-gə  se
   our-GEN cattle
   Our cattle.
Possessive

• Like a typical Tibeto-Berman language, Nyishi too forms compound noun when both the non–human possessor and the possessive come together in a possessive relation.

3. ik əmi
   dog  tail
   Dog’s tail

4. sen ahi
   tree  fruit
   Tree’s fruit.
Possessive

• But it is interesting to note that if the possessor is –human (typically a place) and the possessed is +human then the possessive marker is used. In such sentences the place is perceived to possess the human.

5. no hugəlo-ɡə
   you where-GEN
   Where are you from?

6. ṇo biharə-ɡə
   I Bihar-Gen
   I am from Bihar.
Object Marking

• One action can be perceived as a chain of action. The action starts or initiates from the source passes through the path and reaches the goal.

• One participant is more active (Agent) than the other one (Object or Beneficiary).

• Objective- The goal where the action meets after coming out from the source. This action may or may not effect or change the goal.
Objective

- Objective (OBJ) is used here to mark the objects which are involved in some action but they do not initiates the action but they may suffer change during the process.

7. *iki-əm apiŋe biŋo*
dog-OBJ food give
Give food to the dog.

8. *raju raŋa-ŋe apiŋe be-pana*
Raju Raja-OBJ food give-TAM
Raju gave food to Raja.
Benefactive

• Benefactive- “When the indirect object gets benefit of the situation or when the indirect object is the goal to which the direct object reaches” (Kittilä & Zúñiga 2010).

• Benefactive case has often been taken as a part of dative case. “Somewhat more concrete cases related to datives are benefactive” (Haspelmath 2006).
Benefactive

• Abraham while describing the case system marks the Beneficiaery as Dative “dative case is used when the NP is the recipient of benefaction”.

9. ṇo so pumə no-gabo anəgə-pan
I these flowers you-BEN bring-TAM
I bought these flowers for you.

10. ṇo-gə ko-ŋəm-gəb ɬi-t ɬɔ
I-POSS child-female-BEN money give-TAM
Give me money for my daughter.
Causative

• The cause of an action gets marked in Nyishi by the marker /tolo/.

• Generally one noun and one verb together form a compound word to which the causal marker is attached to mark it as the cause for some other action.
Causative

11. ɲiɗo-ho-ɗolo ɲo ɲeŋeɗo-kome-mo
     rain-fall-CAU I reach-TAM-NEG
     Due to rain I could not reach.

12. kao-kap-ɗolo aŋe hoci-liŋe-ɗo
     child-cry-CAU mother angry-get-TAM
     Due to child’s crying mother got angry.
Locative

- Locative cases mark the location of an object in relation to another object.

- Locative case is used in these languages to mark the static position of an object.

- Abraham marks “the locative marker is /–o/. It is fused together with the deictic word to form a single lexical item”.
Locative

• There are various suffix markers for location in this language. Mostly the use depends on the shape and size of the location.
  - /alo/ or /a/- in, around.
  - /bo/- inside
  - /ao/- on, above
  - /be/- under

13. ḋo loko-loko pukuri-alo ja-ọona
    I often pond-LOC swim-TAM
    I often swim in the pond.
14. no ugu-alo re ɖuŋ-pa
    you house-LOC INTER be-TAM
    Are you in the house?

15. Himi kuŋa-bo joʔlək-paku
    boy well-LOC fell-TAM
    The boy felt inside the well.

16. kiṭabətebil ao
    book table LOC
    The book is on the table
Locative

17. ño milo-si ɑo
   I roof-CLA LOC
   I am on the roof.

18. ño milo-ga ɑo-ɭolo ɭoh-па
   I roof-POSS LOC-CLA be-TAM
   I am on the roof.

• The location takes GEN which is followed by the LOC. Can be seen in many languages. The location is perceived as being a part (possessed) of the larger location. Like, the roof has many sides (parts) like bottom, top, corner and top is just one of it.
There are few postpositions too which are used to mark the location. When these are used then the use of locative marker becomes optional.

- **ureu**- inside
- **bair**- near
- **peŋo**- in between
- **đeko**- under

19. *asa tebil-ga đeko-(be) đopa*
cat table-POSS under-LOC TAM

The cat is under the table.
Instrumental

• There are two markers /galo/ & /ləgi/ for the instrumental case which are used both with human and non-human entities.

20. *ram raban-ne opo-ari-ləgi miŋə-pa*
   Ram Ravan-OBJ bow-arrow-INST kill-TAM
   Ram killed Ravan with bow and arrow.

21. *ŋo sītə-galo ram-ne aŋiŋ ḍo-ge-pena*
   I Sita-INST Ram-OBJ food make-eat-TAM
   I made Sita feed Ram.
Comitative

• The Marker /galo/ is also used to mark companionship or comitative (COMI) case.

• The relationship shared between the instrument and the companion is perceived as one in many languages as both accompanies the agent.

• COMI- When it accompanies the agent to fulfill the same role.

• INST: One participant serves as the tool with which another participant carries out an action. (Stolz, Stroh & Urdze, 2006).
Comitative

22. ram mira-galo duğunu-paku
   Ram Mira-COMI sit-TAM
   Ram is sitting with Mira.

- Interestingly the COMI is also used for instances where there is a presence but the speaker talks about the absence of the shared companionship.

23. ņo no-galo ანერინჰ ნაჰ-მო
    I you-COMI away TAM-NEG
    I do not want to go away from you.
    (Talking about –COMI)
Ablative

• The relationship between the source and the object is called ablative case. There is a motion from the source which ends at the goal.

• In Nyishi this source is perceived in two ways.
  ▪ The source is perceived as the cause of the motion: the CAU is used.
  ▪ The source is perceived as another location from where the journey of the object begins: LOC is used.
Ablative

24. səŋəne-tolo oko julo- doPost
    tree-(CAU) ABL leaves fall-ndo
    Leaves are falling from the tree.

25. paŋa rəseŋ-p-alo ɬərni-kun
    bird nest-LOC flew-TAM
    Birds flew away from the nest.
Ablative

• As marked earlier, a place is generally perceived to possess the human so if the source (place) of a person’s journey generally take possessive marking.

26. ņo ḍeli ho-ge hoḍu-ḍen
    I Delhi place-POSS come-TAM
    I am coming from Delhi.
Interrogatives

• In interrogative sentences these case markers can come without a host to form a question.

27. gabo?
   BEN
   For whom?

28. ga barikə?
   POSS for
   For Whom?

• There seems to be absence of indefinite pronoun in Nyishi so the case markers come independently in absence of definite pronoun.
Polysemy

• It was seen that generally in Nyishi one marker has more than one case relation attached to it.

POSS

ga

ABL (+Human)

CAU

tolo

ABL

LOC

alo

ABL

INST

galo

COMI

SEALS23, Bangkok
Ablative: Case without marker

Diagram 1: Showing the case markers of the Ablative case
Conclusion

• CG focuses on the idea that languages show the perception of the speakers which is revealed through the case system as well.

• Some of the following findings can be concluded from the description of the case system of Nyishi.

  ▪ There is no animacy hierarchy as cases do not work as DOM or Index marker. No different case marker for +Animate and –Animate
Conclusion

• “Possession seems to be one of the central concepts of human cognition... In possessive constructions the entity coded as the possessor is always the more salient entity in a given situation and thus the reference point. It serves to ensure identification of the possessed, which is the target entity” (Mitkovska, 2004).

- But POSS can be used with humans only as humans are perceived to be able to possess only which seems quite logical.
Conclusion

• Land is equated to Human. In some way it is greater to Human as it can possess the human. It is a nature worshipping tribe so this idea can find support in its culture.

• This is a primary work which needs more to be explored.
References

Thank you!