

Copula Construction in Kathariya Tharu¹

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Abstract

Kathariya Tharu is one of the least studied Indo-Aryan languages spoken by the Kathariya Tharu community living in Kailali district of Nepal and Gorakhpur, Gonda, Lakhimpur, and Khiri districts of India. This is a preliminary study which analyses the morphosyntactic structure of copula construction in this language. The linguistic data for this study were collected from Ghodaghodi municipality, ward no. 9, Sisaiya, ward no.12, Kota and Kailari rural municipality, ward no. 8, Lausa and were analyzed with the help of the Toolbox software. R. M. W. Dixon's Basic Linguistic Theory has been employed as analytical tool, though insights have also been taken from other linguists. Kathariya Tharu employs the verbal copula construction strategy with three copula verbs- ho, ba, and rəh. Unlike other NIA languages in which the relation between the copula subject and copula complement is prominent, in Kathariya Tharu, it is the copula subject that determines the selection of the copula verb. However, the person, relation and function distinctions between the copula subject and copula complement disappears in the past tense and so, the same copula rəh is used with all the subjects.

Keywords: Non-verbal predicate, nominal predicate, predicative adjective, predicative locative, predicative possession.

Introduction

Tharu is the largest indigenous community in Nepal. As the Tharu habitat extends from Mechi, the eastern most zone, to Mahakali, the western most zone, of Nepal and cross-border districts like Gonda, Kheri, Nainital, Pilibhit, Baharaich, Gorakhpur and Bijnor (Jeff, 1993, p.5) of India, it is natural for this community to have cultivated distinct variations in its language and culture. Based on the linguistic and cultural variations,

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the Tharu community has broadly been classified into Rana, Dangaura, Chitoniya and Kochila Tharu (Paudyal, 2014, pp. 7-8), though each of these groups, except Rana, have their sub-groups, with slight variations in their language. However, the 24th edition of Ethnologue (2021, pp. 54-6) has reclassified the languages of this community as Tharu Dangaura, Tharu Kathariya, Tharu Central, Tharu Mid-Eastern, and Tharu Rana. Since Kathariya Tharu is the least studied, Tharu variety and this article is concentrating on the morpho-syntactic structure of the copula constructions in this language, it is desirable to introduce the community as well as the language they speak in brief before we get into the discussion proper.

Kathariya Tharu, the language, is closely related to Dangaura Tharu (Jeff, 1993, p. 4; Paudyal, 2014, p. 7) and the people are found “living approximately the same areas as Dangauras” (Jeff, 1993, p. 2). Krouskoff (1995) finds “Kathariya mostly concentrated in India, south of Dangaura’s habitat, and in Kailali district” of Nepal (p. 186). McDonough (1984) agrees with Krouskoff and adds “and probably, in Bardiya, and Banke, one also finds Kathariya” (p. 27). Quoting Turner (1931, p. 600) McDonough (1984) states that in Gorakhpur region Dangaura and Kathariya Tharus are found but “there the majority were Kathariya” (27). Similarly, even in Kheri, Baharaich and Gonda districts of India “Kathariya and Dangaura are major groupings” (McDonough, 1984, p. 27). In Nepal this community concentrates “in the 46 villages in ten VDCs of Kailali district: Hasuliya, Udasipur, Pahalmanpur, Lalbhoji, Thapapur, Joshipur, Munuwa, Durgauli, Patharaiya, and Chuha” (Echintoff & Michelle, 2012, p. 47). A recent study of Kathariya Tharu shows that this community resides in the Lamki Chuha, Bhajani, Tikapur, Ghodaghodi, and Gauriganga municipalities and Joshipur, Janaki, Bardagoriya, and Kailari rural municipalities of Kailali district and Rajapur municipality, Ward No. 2, Nayagau of Bardiya district (Paudyal, 2077 BS., p. 4). In the same study, Paudyal also reports that the villages like Bela Parsuwa, Mudnochni, Ghuskiya, Maura, Gurghipurawa, Dhakhainipurawa, Chaupheri, Jauwapurawa and Gulbhujiya of Lakhimpur district of India are densely populated by this community (Paudyal, 2077 BS., p. 4). Thus, apart from the Kailali and Bardiya districts of Nepal, Kathariya Tharus are found in Gorakhpur, Gonda, Baharaich, Kheri, Pilibhit, Nainital and Bijnor districts of India.

The Population and Housing Census 2011 makes no distinction in the Tharu community and mentions none of the Tharu groups and their languages separately. The exact number of their population, therefore, is not available, though Echintoff and Michelle (2012, p. 47) report one old man in Pabera village, one of the Kathariya Tharu villages in Kailali, estimating that the speakers of Kathariya Tharu are between 12000 and 17000 in Kailali. Eberhad David M. et al. (eds) in the 24th edition of Ethnologue (2021) mention the population of Kathariya Tharu to be 106,000 (2006) in Nepal. However, Paudyal

(2077 B. S., p. 6), reporting the chairperson of Kathariya Society, Nepal's estimation, claims that the overall population of Kathariya Tharu is not less than 200,000. But since no census has listed the population of this Tharu group, it is difficult to state the exact number of this community.

The genetic classification of this language, according to the 24th edition of Ethnologue, is Indo- European, Indo- Iranian, Indo-Aryan, Intermediate Divisions, Western, Unclassified.

Research Methodology

This article aims at introducing Kathariya Tharu and the morpho-syntactic structures of the copula constructions in this language. The linguistic data for the study were collected in Ghodaghodi municipality, ward no. 9, Sisaiya, Ghodaghodi- 12, Kota, and Kailari -8, Lausa. The recorded texts were transcribed and translated with the help of a language consultant. The transcribed texts with morpheme breaks and glosses were input in the Toolbox software, and interlinearized. This article is prepared by analyzing the interlinearized texts. As it is not possible to incorporate all the language structures in natural texts, for some structures, the linguistic data were elicited and interlinearized in the Toolbox. Being a preliminary study of this language, the majority of the examples are from the elicited data. The examples consist of four lines: the first line presents the Kathariya expressions, second the morpheme breaks, third morpheme by morpheme glosses and the fourth line presents the free translation of the expression.

The study has been organized in 5 sections. The first section introduces the Kathariya Tharu people and language. The research methodology used to conduct this study is explained in the second section. The third section introduces the core concept of the paper, the morpho-syntactic structures of the copula construction in this language. This section has been subdivided into four subsections: Identity, Attribution, Location and Benefaction. The fourth section presents the copula construction in the past tense, and the article is concluded with its fifth section- conclusion. For the conceptual discussion and theoretical guidelines, RMW Dixon's Basic Linguistic Theory (2010, 2012) has been, though insights from various scholars have also been shared.

Non-verbal predication

Dryer (2007, p. 224) classifies clauses into two types based on the types of predicates they contain: those with verbal predicates and those with non-verbal ones. By verbal predicates, he means the predicates beginning with lexical verbs encoding distinct meanings, whereas non-verbal predicates refer to the predicative slot of a clause which does not contain such a verb loaded with a specific sense. Non-verbal predication can also be defined on the basis of the number of arguments it requires, and the constituent

that plays a significant role in the clause. According to Hengeveld (1992), in non-verbal predication, the verb element is not significant. It is the non-verbal predicate i. e. nominal, adjectival or locational that is significant in such constructions, as in many of the world languages, the verb element (copula) is not required to connect the subject and predicate in a clause. In such languages, the subject and predicate constituents are merely juxtaposed. As copula verbs are considered to be “auxiliaries accompanying a non-verbal predicate and its arguments” (Hengeveld, 1992, p. 32) and “semantically empty, inflectional supports, light verbs” (Arche et al., 2018, p. 2), copula constructions are categorized as non-verbal predicate constructions.

Copula constructions

The languages of the world vary in expressing the internal relationship between the copula subject and copula complement. According to Curnow (1999, p. 1-2), copula construction is considered “the most basic construction or constructions” used “to encode the notions of identity and group membership”. He further claims that “existence, location, possession are often encoded with this construction”. Based on the study of the “grammatical description of approximately seventy languages”, Curnow (1999, pp. 2-4) formulates four strategies of copula construction that different languages use to express copula relations: (i) verbal copula construction, using a copula verb to encode the relationship between the copula subject and copula complement, (ii) particle copula construction, using a particle other than a verb, to encode such a relationship, (iii) inflectional copula construction that “treats the copula complement as though it were a verb”, and (iv) zero copula construction in which the copula subject and the copula complement are simply juxtaposed. Although languages use different constructions to link the subject to its complement predicate, “mostly copular verbs are used to connect the subject and predicate” (Turker, 2014, p. 194). Similar to many of the IA languages like Hindi, Maithili, Bhojpuri, Chitoniya Tharu, Dangaura Tharu, Darai and Bote, Kathariya Tharu employs copula verbs to encode the relationship between the copula subject and copula complement, and so, in Curnow’s (1999, pp. 2-4) classification, it follows the verbal copula construction strategy.

Copula construction in Kathariya Tharu

A copula verb is mostly defined on the functional basis. It has a relational meaning, indicating a relation between CS (Copula Subject) and CC (Copula Complement) (Dixon 2010:100-01). It is “a term used in grammatical description to refer to linking verb ... whose main function is to relate other elements of clause structure, especially subject and complement” (Crystal, 1980, p. 93 qtd.in Pustet, 2003, p.3). Arche et al. (2008) discuss four properties that are prototypically associated with copula. According

to them, (i) copulas carry verbal inflections, (ii) copulas appear in the context where the predicate is not verbal, (iii) copulas are elements used to link the predicate and the subject, and (iv) copulas are semantically light, possibly empty. Kathariya Tharu exhibits some verbs like *ho*, *ba*, *rəh* which possess all these properties, and so, are copula verbs. Since copula verbs are used “to encode the meaning of identity... existence, location and possession” (Curnow, 1999, pp. 2-3) in non-verbal predicate constructions, this section discusses the morphosyntactic structures of the copula constructions in Kathariya Tharu.

Identity relation / Nominal predicate

There are many languages in which “the constituents are merely juxtaposed, and no copula verb is used” (Attia, 2008, p. 6). In a cross-linguistic study regarding copula construction, Stassen (2013) found that out of 386 languages he studied “zero copula is possible in 175 languages”. These references prove that languages use different strategies to express the predicative relationship. Even in the languages where copula verbs exist, there is variation in the number of copula used in such constructions. Curnow (1999) reports that out of 70 languages he studied “approximately half of the languages have only one copula construction, while the others have two or sometimes three different constructions” (2). Stassen (2013) claims that there are some languages like Egyptian, Arabic, Hungarian, Babungo, Jamaican creole, Lango, Ngalakan and Imbabura Quechua, and Turkish (Hegenveld, 1992, pp. 206, 29), and Russian (Attia, 2008) which do not require a copula verb in the present tense. We find a single copula ‘to be’ in English, and *hona* ‘to be’ in Hindi (Kachru, 2006) which are used with all the copula constructions whether it is nominal predicate, adjectival predicate or locative predicate. Dangaura Tharu exhibits two copulas- *huina* and *ba* ‘to be’ in the present and a single copula *rəhəna* in the past tense. Similarly, Chitoniya Tharu attests two copulas- *hək^h* and *bəq* ‘to be’ in the present and *rəhə* in the past. Kathariya Tharu shares the copulas with Dangaura Tharu.

Kathariya Tharu has two copula verbs in the present tense- *ho* and *ba* ‘to be’, and ‘*rəh*’ in the past and future tenses. The present form *ho* is very close to the only copula in Hindi but the inflectional suffixes are quite different. Languages have different strategies in the use of copula verbs. Unlike English and Hindi, there are languages which use different copula forms for different types of copulas predicates. There are languages like Mauka, a Mande language, in which the copula used with a predicate adjective is not used with a predicate nominal or a predicate locative (Dryer, 2007, p. 231). In some languages, the nominal and adjectival predicates share the same copula but the locative predicate requires a different copula. Similarly, there are some languages, in which a predicate adjective does not require a copula verb but a predicate nominal does (Dryer,

2007, p. 229). In the languages like Nepali, Chitoniya Tharu, and Dangaura Tharu, the locative and adjectival predicate share the same copula but a nominal predicate requires a different one. In Dryer's study, it was found very common for a language using different copula in locative predicates (Dryer, 2007, p. 239) but the nominal and adjectival predicates sharing the same copula.

Kathariya Tharu employs quite different strategies from other Tharu languages like Chitoniya Tharu, Dangaura Tharu, Rana Tharu and Saptariya Tharu in the copula constructions. Rana Tharu and Saptariya Tharu have a single copula in the present tense (Dhakal, 2013, pp. 154-5; Thakur, 2012, pp. 57-79), whereas Dangaura and Chitoniya Tharu have two copula verbs, but in these languages, locative and adjectival predicates share the same copula and nominal predicate requires a different one. Kathariya Tharu is different in the sense that the type of predicate does not play a significant role here. The unique feature of this language is that it is the person of the subject argument that triggers the selection of copula. It exhibits a copula *-ho* in the first and third persons but *-ba* in the second person, as illustrated in the examples (1a-c) and (2a-c).

- (1) a. *māi kisənma hāi*
 māi kisənma ho -ū
 1SG farmer be.PRS -1SG
 'I am a farmer.' (ELCTD.0010)
- b. *həmre əbbe k^{het}me hoi*
 həmre əbbe k^{het}-me ho -i
 1PL now field -LOC be.PRE -1PL
 'We are in the fields now.' (ELCTD.0014)
- c. *u həmmər b^{həlmənsa} hāi*
 u həmmər b^{həlmənsa} ho- ĩ
 3SG 1PL.GEN village head be.PRS -3PL
 'He is our village chief.' (ELCTD.0030)
- (2) a. *tāi mor b^{həi}ya baṭe*
 tāi mor b^{həi}ya baṭ -e
 2SG.NH 1SG.GEN younger brother be.PRS -2SG.NH
 'You are my brother.' (ELCTD.0016)
- b. *toine kəhā baṭo?*
 toine kəhā baṭ -o
 2PL where be.PRS -2PL
 'Where are you?' (ELCTD.0019)
- c. *tum dubbər baṭo*
 tum dubbər baṭ -o
 2SG.HON thin be.PRS -2PL

‘You are thin.’

(ELCTD.0024)

The examples in (1a-c) and (2a-c) clearly illustrate how the person of the subject argument determines the selection of the copula. The examples in (1) have the first- and third-person subject arguments: *məĩ* ‘1SG’, *həmre* ‘1PL’ (1a-b) and *u* ‘3SG’ (1c) and the copula forms are *həũ* ‘be -1SG’, *hoi* ‘be -1PL’ and *həĩ* ‘be.3PL’ respectively. Similarly, as the subject arguments in (2) belong to the second person, the copula forms they concord with are different from the one the first- and third-person subject arguments take. In this case *baṭe* ‘be -2SG.NH’, *baṭo* ‘be -2PL’, and *baṭo* ‘be -2PL’ respectively.

Kathariya Tharu seems to have a close relation with Maithili in which the copula shows person distinction. It attests two copula verbs *-ch-* and *-əich-*. With all the types of predicates, third person non-honorific, demonstratives, pronominal subjects, and in the dative construction with the first- and second-person subject argument, the copula *-əich* is used, whereas with other arguments, the copula *-ch-*, is used (Yadav, 1997, pp. 218-9).

Attributive relation / Adjectival predicate

The attributive relation between the subject argument and the predicate is presented through copula construction in Kathariya Tharu too. As Kathariya Tharu copula constructions show person distinction, it is the person of the subject argument that triggers the selection of the copula. As in identity relation, the same copula *-ho* and *-ba* are used in the present tense even to express the attributive relation. In attributive relation, the predicate constituent is an adjective which in many languages shares the same copula with nominal predicates (Dryer, 2007, p. 213). The examples in (3) have first and third person subject arguments and the copula verb is *ho* ‘be.PRS’ and in (4), the subject arguments are in second person and the copula verb is *ba* ‘be.PRS’.

(3) a. *məĩ d^heŋ əur t^hul^ha həũ*
məĩ d^heŋ əur t^hul^ha ho -ũ
 1SG tall and fat be.PRS -1SG
 ‘I am tall and fat.’ (ELCTD.0012)

b. *həmre sud^h əur bəlgər hoi*
həmre sud^h əur bəlgər ho -i
 1PL simple and strong be.PRS -1PL
 ‘We are simple and strong.’ (ELCTD.0015)

c. *u ləũd̪iyab^hər bəhut məja həĩ*
u ləũd̪iya -b^hər bəhut məja həĩ
 3SG girl -PL many good be.PRS.3PL
 ‘Those girls are very beautiful.’ (ELCTD.0038)

(4) a. *təĩ birami baṭe*

- b. *tum dubbər baṭo*
 tum dubbər baṭ -o
 2SG.HON thin be -2PL
 ‘You are thin.’ (ELCTD.0024)
- c. *toine bəlgər baṭo*
 toine bəlgər baṭ -o
 2PL strong be -2PL
 ‘You are strong.’ (ELCTD.0025)

Locative relation / Predicate locative

In this language, we do not find a separate copula for expressing the locative relation as Dyer (2007, p. 213) claims for many languages cross-linguistically. As in the constructions with predicative nominals and predicative adjectives, in locative predicate constructions the same copula *-ho* and *-ba* are used in the present tense and the selection is controlled by the person of the subject argument. The number, gender, and honorificity do not play any role in the selection as we find in Maithili where honorificity controls the selection of copula in the third person. The examples in (5) and (6) illustrate the situation.

- (5) a. *oine əbbe g^hərme nahĩ həĩ*
 oine əbbe g^hər -me nahĩ həĩ
 they now house -LOC NEG be.prs.3pl
 ‘They are not at home now.’ (ELCTD.0032)
- b. *məĩ g^hərme həũ*
 məĩ g^hər -me ho -ũ
 1SG house -LOC be.prs -1sg
 ‘I am at home.’ (ELCTD.0011)
- c. *həmre əbbe k^hetme hoi*
 həmre əbbe k^het -me ho -i
 1PL now field -LOC be.prs -1pl
 ‘We are in the fields now.’ (ELCTD.0014)
- (6) a. *tum a^jh həmmər g^həre baṭo*
 tum a^jh həmmər g^hər -e baṭ -o
 2sg.hon today my house -3sg be.prs -2pl
 ‘You are at our home today.’ (ELCTD.0006)
- b. *ətne jun təĩ kəhã baṭe?*

- c. *mor tin ləḍka həĩ*
mor tin ləḍka həĩ
1SG.GEN three son be.PRS.3PL
‘I have three sons.’ (SRK_PLS..016)

The agreement pattern in these examples show that the possessor NP in Kathariya Tharu is marked with Genitive case and the possessed NP is used as the subject of the copula verb. In the examples (7a & 7b), the copula verbs *həe* ‘be.PRS.3PS’ agree with the NPs *ḍ bigaha jəgga* ‘8 measure of land land’ and *k^het bag* ‘field unirrigated land’, whereas the verb *həĩ* ‘be.PRS.3PL’ in (7c) agrees with the possessor NP *mor tin ləḍka* ‘1SG.GEN three son’, a third person plural NP.

Kathariya Tharu also employs another copular verb *ahe* in singular and *hĩ* or *ahĩ* in plural to indicate predicate possession, as illustrated in (8a-c).

- (8) a. *ohəka didik k^hirici mirici dukan ahe*
ohəka didi -k k^hirici mirici dukan ahe
3SG.GEN elder sister -GEN grocery shop be.PRS.3SG
‘His elder sister has a grocery shop.’ (ELCTD.0199)
- b. *mor pāc t^hor bəkəriya hĩ*
mor pāc t^hor bəkəriya hĩ
1SG.GEN five NCLF goat be.PRS.3PL
‘I have five goats.’ (ELCTD.0191)
- c. *mor cunni b^hewak tin t^hor ləũḍiya ahĩ*
mor cunni b^hewa -k tin t^hor ləũḍiya ahĩ
1SG.GEN small brother -GEN three NCLF daughter be.PRS.3PL
‘My small brother has 3 daughters.’ (ELCTD.0194)

Apart from expressing identity relation, attributive relation, locative relation and benefactive relation between the copula subject and copula complement in a sentence, a copula verb can also perform a descriptive function. Kathariya Tharu employs a distinct copula *rəh* ‘remain’ for this function, as illustrated in (9a-c).

- (9) a. *p^hula sugg^hər rəhəta*
p^hula sugg^hər rəhəta
flower beautiful be.PRS.3SG
‘Flowers are beautiful.’ (ELCTD.0043)
- b. *ihāk p^həlp^hul bəhut rəsgər rəhəta*
ihā -k p^həlp^hul bəhut rəsgər rəhəta
here -GEN fruits much juicy be.PRS.3SG
‘The fruits of this place are very juicy.’ (ELCTD.0046)
- c. *t^haru ləũḍiya b^hər bənnā sərmil rəhətiyā*
t^haru ləũḍiya -b^hər bənnā sərmil rəh -tiyā

Tharu girl -PL much shy be.PRS -PRS.3PL
 ‘Tharu girls are very shy.’ (ELCTD.0049)

These examples describe how the flowers look (9a), how juicy the fruits are (9b) and how shy the Tharu girls are (9c).

Copula construction in the past

The person distinction attested in the selection of copula verb in the present tense is not employed in the past tense. Analogous to many of the IA languages like Chitoniya Tharu, Dangaura Tharu, Darai, and Nepali, the person or relation distinction disappears, and the same copula *rəh* ‘be.pst’ is used to express identity relation, attributive relation, locative relation or benefactive relation irrespective to the person of the copula subject. The examples in (10a-c) will clarify the situation.

- (10) a. *həmmər baba kisan rəhe*
 həmmər baba kisan rəh -e
 1PL.GEN father farmer be.PST -3SG
 ‘My father was a farmer.’ (ELCTD.0003)
- b. *pərəũka tum dubbər rəho*
 pərəũka tum dubbər rəh -o
 last year 2SG.HON thin be.PST -2PL
 ‘You were thin three years ago.’ (ELCTD.0200)
- c. *kal^h məĩ citwənmə rəhũ*
 kal^h məĩ citwən -me rəh -ũ
 yesterday 1SG Chitwan -LOC be.pst -1SG
 ‘I was in Chitwan yesterday.’ (ELCTD.0005)

All these examples show different relations between the copula subject and copula complement. The example in (10a) shows the identity relation, the example in (10b) shows the attributive relation, and the example in (10c) shows the locative relation. Even then the copula verb is the same *rəh* ‘be.pst’ which indicates that the person or relation distinction present in the present tense disappears in the past tense in Kathariya Tharu.

Conclusion

Kathariya Tharu is one of the least studied Indo-Aryan languages in our country. It is spoken by the Kathariya Tharu community living in Kailali district of Nepal and Gorakhpur, Gonda, Lakhimpur, and Khiri districts of India. Based on the preliminary study of this language, this article may not have gone to the depth of copula constructions. Kathariya Tharu employs the verbal copula construction strategy to indicate the relation between the copula subject and copula complement. The copula construction in this

language is comparatively simple. It attests three copula verbs *ba* and *ho* in the present and *rəh* in the past tense. Unlike in Dangaura and Chitoniya Tharu, Kathariya Tharu distinguishes the copula verbs on the basis of the person of the copula subject. It is the copula subject that determines the selection of the copula verb. For the first- and third-person subjects, the copula verb is *ho* which has different forms to concord with the subject. But for the second person subject, it is *ba* with different inflectional suffixes. For the descriptive function of the copula verb, a separate verb *rəh* is used. However, the person, relation and function distinction between the copula subject and copula complement disappears in the past and so, the same copula *rəh* is used with all the subjects.

Abbreviations and symbols

1	first person	2	second person	3	third person
ACC	accusative	ADJ	adjective	AGR	agreement
CAUS	causative	NCLF	numeral classifier	DAT	dative
EMPH	emphatic	GEN	genitive	HON.	honorific
LOC	locative	NEG	negative	NH	non-honorific
NIA	New Indo-Aryan	NP	noun phrase	PL	plural
PRF	perfect	PRS	present	PRT	particle
PST	past	SG	singular	VOC	vocative

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