# Exploring the Relationship of Bhujel with the Kirati Languages

**Dan Raj Regmi**

Professor, Tribhuvan University

| Abstract | Article Info |
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| This paper explores the relationship of the Bhujel language with the Kirati languages spoken in distinct geographical regions of Nepal in terms of participant reference marking from a typological perspective. Bhujel which is mainly spoken in Tanahun, Gorkha, Chitwan and Nawalpur has been genetically assumed to be closely related to Chepang, a central Himalayish language. However, unlike in Kirati, there are disagreements among the linguists in relation to the genetic membership of the Bhujel language. The Kirati languages, which are spoken in the eastern part of Nepal, are genetically affiliated with Eastern Himalayish sub-group. The Kirati languages which have been typologically described as having complex verb morphology registering person, number and clusivity in the complex of the verb in terms of the hierarchy of the participants in the clause. This paper argues that Bhujel, to a great extent, shares many of the features of participant reference with the Kirati languages. Due to contact, Bhujel also shares some participant reference features with Chepang. However, typologically, Bhujel does not significantly seem to be related with Chepang in which both agent and patient are marked at a time in a clause. In due course of time, the third person marker used in the Kirati languages has been innovated in Bhujel as direct marker. As typologically Bhujel and Kirati languages are related, the genetic membership of Bhujel necessitates being re-established/revised with the Kirati languages.

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## Introduction

This paper attempts to explore the relationship between the Bhujel and the Kirati languages by making a cross-linguistic comparison of shared formal features of the participant referencing from a typological perspective. Bhujel is an endangered Tibeto-Burman language spoken as mother tongues by 13, 086 (i.e. 10.9%) of the 120,245 ethnic Bhujel (NSO, 2023; Regmi, 2024b).[1] Prior to a detail grammatical description available in the language, there did not exist any consensus about its genetic identity. It was, moreover, assumed to be a western dialect of Chepang (Caughley, 1982; 1999). Regmi (2007, pp.32-33) placed Bhujel as a member of Eastern Himalayish sub-group on the basis of complex verb morphology as shared with the Kirati languages. However, as there lacked a cross-linguistic comparison between the Bhujel and the Kirati languages, Regmi (2012, pp.3-

4) argued for placing Bhujel as a member of the central Himalayish languages. The 2021 census records a total of 31 Kirati languages. Like Bhujel, most of them are characterized as having complex verb morphology indexing the person, number and clusivity of the participants in a clause. They are spoken in the eastern hilly districts of Nepal. Some of the well-known Kirati languages include Aathpahariya, Bantawa, Belhare, Chamling, Chintang, Dungmali, Limbu, Lohorung, Yakkha, Yampu, Chhulung, Bahing, Dumi, Khaling, Koyee, Sampang, Sunwar, Wambule, and Hayu. The verbal morphology is more complex than that of Chepang. Geographically, the distance between the Bhujel and Kirati-speaking communities is not close. Moreover, the Bhujel people consider the Bhujikhola, west of Baglung, as their ancestral home. This also makes clear the distance between the Bhujel and Kirati languages. Genetically, there is not a significant relationship between the Bhujel and the Kirati languages. The participant reference has been analyzed in Bhujel in a functional-typological framework (Regmi, 2007; 2012). In many Kirati languages, viz., Bantawa (Rai, 1988; Doornenbal, 2009), Athapaharia (Ebert, 1997; Neupane, 2001), Limbu (Driem, 1987; Tumbahang, 2011), Sunwar (Rapacha, 2005; Borchers, 2008), Dumi (Driem, 1993; Rai, 2017), Koyi (Rai, 2015) and Yakkha (Schackow, 2015), the participant reference has been comprehensively analyzed. However, a cross-linguistic comparison of participant reference within the Kirati languages has not yet been conducted. It is believed that the <-u> suffix, which denotes the third person in verbs in Kirati languages, evolved into a suffix denoting direct relation in Bhujel (Regmi, 2007). Like Bhujel, all the Kirati languages are characterized as having simple pronominalizing system. Unlike Chepang, all the Kirati languages are atonal. These facts clearly indicate that there is a significant kind of interrelationship between the Bhujel and the Kirati languages. This necessitates a revision of the genetic membership of the Bhujel and establishing its genetic relationship with the Kirati languages. However, till the date, no attempt has been made to explore and gauge the magnitude/extent of the interrelationship between the Bhujel and the Kirati languages from a typological perspective.

This paper is structured into six sections. The first section dealt with context while the second section discusses the research methodology employed. Section third critically makes a review of the genetic relationship of the Bhujel. The fourth section makes a cross-linguistic comparison of participant reference between the Bhujel and Kirati languages. The fifth section provides a functional explanation for the innovation of direct marking in Bhujel. The sixth section provides a conclusion of the paper.

## Methodology

This paper has exclusively used secondary data on the participant references in the Bhujel and Kirati languages. However, when necessary they have been cross-checked with the native speakers. The data on participant reference in Bhujel are drawn from Regmi (2007; 2012) whereas some data as well as facts based upon linguistic analysis in the Kirati languages are drawn from Hayu (Michailovsky, 2003), Bantawa (Doornenbal, 2009), Athapare (Ebert, 1997; Neupane, 2001), Limbu (Driem, 1987), Sunwar (Borchers, 2008), Dumi (Driem, 1993; Rai, 2017), Koyi (Rai, 2015) and Yakkha (Schackow, 2015). This paper has employed structural/formal typology as an approach advanced in Whaley (1997) and Croft (2003). This approach asserts that a cross-linguistic comparison of shared structural characteristics of two or more languages may form solid basis for classification of languages. This is the primary concern of typology. However, Whaley (1997, p. 12) argues clearly that typological similarity between two or more languages is the result of genetic/hereditary relationship. In this paper, adhering to this association, we argue, on the basis of shared features of participant references in the complex of the verbs, that Bhujel like other Kirati languages is a member of Eastern Himalayish languages.

## Genetic Classification

The linguistic identity and genetic membership of Bhujel was unknown till end of twentieth century. However, Chepang, which has been admitted as a related language to Bhujel, has been found genetically classified in Grierson (1909), Shafer (1966), Voegelin and Voegelin (1964) and Benedict (1972).[2] Voegelin and Voegelin (1964) and Benedict (1972) have clearly admitted that Chepang is genetically closely related to the Kirati languages on the basis of shared structural features. Caughley (1982; 1999) has regarded the Bhujel language as a western dialect of Chepang. Kansakar (1993) categorized Bhujel into the Magar Group within the Bodish-Himalayish sub-group. Bradley (2002, p.81), for the first time, clearly noted that Chepang, Bujheli and Banakariya are distinct languages forming a cluster of Chepang-Bujheli-Banakariya under Himalayan sub-branch of Western Tibeto-Burman branch of Tibeto-Burman family. Grimes (2000), following Caughley (1982;1999) came to admit Bhujel as a dialect of Chepang belonging to Kham-Magar-Chepang-Sunwari cluster under Mahakiranti section of Himalayish branch of Tibeto-Burman family. The 2001 census enlisted Bhujel/Gharti as a distinct mother tongue of Nepal for the first time. This necessitated a clear genetic classification of Bhujel based on the shared linguistic features. However, grammatical description was not available to support for the confirmation of genetic membership of the language. Despite the insufficient linguistic evidences for the classification, Yadava (2003) categorized Bhujel as a central Himalayish language. Following Bradely (2002), Regmi and Subba (2004) came to classify Bhujel as a member of Bhujel-Chepang cluster under central Himalayish. However, Noonan (2005) categorized Bhujel as a member of Hayu-Chepang cluster. Regmi (2007, p. 32) argued that genetic classification proposed solely on the basis of shared some morpho-syntactic features of Chepang, a tonal and complex pronominalized language, is not satisfactory. Moreover, (Regmi, 2007, p.32) notes that Bhujel, an atonal and simple pronominalized language, like Kirati shares complex verb morphology indexing person, number and role affixes in the complex of the verb. Additionally, Bhujel, losing the inverse marking unlike Chepang, has rather developed/innovated the 'direct' marking in transitive constructions based on the hierarchy of participants (i.e., $1\rightarrow2$, $2\rightarrow3$, $1\rightarrow3$). This has been assumed to have developed from the third person patient marking in the Kirati languages. Based on these facts, Bhujel has been proposed to be a member of east Himalayish languages. As sufficient cross-linguistic evidences were not gathered, in Regmi (2012, p.4) Bhujel has been categorized as a member of central Himalayish languages. However, in Regmi (2014, p.4) Bhujel has been categorized as a member of east Himalayish languages. In Regmi (2021, p.65) as in Regmi & Regmi (2011), Bhujel has been identified as a member of central Himalayish section under Himalayan division. Such uncertainty has to be clarified and eliminated based on the empirical facts. Thus, it necessitates a comprehensive cross-linguistic study of different components of the Bhujel and Kirati languages from a typological perspective.

Unlike Bhujel, the Kirati languages do not suffer from any crucial disagreement about the genetic classification. Gerber & Grollmann (2018) has critically made a review of different proposals of sub-grouping of the Kirati languages based on shared features to define a coherent subgroup as Kirati within Trans-Himalayan and has argued that "a single Kirati node in the Trans-Himalayan family tree cannot yet be confirmed." It has proposed three subsections, viz., central Kirati, upper Arun and greater Yakkha-Limbu under proto-central eastern Kirati. However, following Eppele et al. (2012), the Kirati languages, in this study, are supposed to have branched into Eastern and Western. Eastern Kirati includes languages such as Aathpahariya, Bantawa, Belhare, Chamling, Chintang, Dungmali, Limbu, Lohorung, Yakkha, Yampu, and Chulung. Western Kirati comprises languages such as Bahing, Dumi, Khaling, Koyi, Sampang, Sunwar, Wambule, and Hayu. Figure 1 shows the genetic relationship between the Bhujel and Kirati languages.

**Figure 1**

*Genetic Relationship between the Bhujel and Kirati Languages*

Himalayan
   Central Himalayish
      Chepang-Bhujel
      Magaric
         Kham
            Eastern Parbate
            Gamale
            Sheshi
            Western Parbate
         Magar
            Eastern
            Western
      Raji-Raute-Rawat
      Newar
      Thangmi-Baraamu
   Kiranti
      Eastern...
      Western...

## Cross-linguistic comparison

Both the Bhujel and Kirati languages are characterized as having complex verb morphology. Bhujel verbs not only have suffixes indicating tense and aspect, but also suffix indicating person, object, direct relation, and clusivity (Regmi, 2012). Similar affixes are also attached to the root of the verbs in the Kirati languages.

### Person Marking
### *Person Marking in Bhujel*

Both Bhujel and Kirati languages mark the person of speech act participants on the verb. In Bhujel, the person is marked by the suffix suffix <-ŋ> in combination with other agreement inflections (Regmi, 2009). As a simple pronominalized language, Bhujel does not mark the reference of person of agent and patient participant at a time in a transitive construction. In Bhujel, person marking sometimes encodes the agent participant and sometimes the patient but not both (Watters and Regmi, 2008). Person marking follows a hierarchical ranking of participants -1/2→ 3 (i.e. the first person or second person acting on the third person object/patient/undergoer). Such marking is not based on any semantic or grammatical roles of the participants.[3]  Following are the examples:

1) a)   ŋai dyokay dãkhaluŋ ( 1→3)

| ŋa-i | dyo-kay | dãkh-al-u-ŋ |
|---|---|---|
| 1SG-ERG | 3SG-DAT | beat-PST-DIR-1/2 |

'I beat you.'

    b)   dyokəy ŋakay dãkhalaŋ  (3→1)

| dyo-kəy | ŋa-kay | dãkh-ala-ŋ |
|---|---|---|
| 3SG-ERG | 1SG-DAT | beat-PST-1/2 |

'S/he beat me.'

In examples (1a-b) first person is the highest ranking participant in the transitive constructions. In (1a) the first person is acting on third person, the lowest ranking participant. In example (1b), third person, the lowest ranking participant, is acting on first person, the highest ranking participant). As the first person is the highest ranking participant, a transitive configuration of 1→3 or 3→1 yields

the first person agreement. The person indexed by the suffix <-ŋ> does not code the reference of third person agent participant in (1b). In terms of the ranking of the speech act participants, in a transitive configuration of 2→3 or 3→2 yields the second person agreement (also the highest ranking participant). Following are the examples:

2) a) naŋi dyokay dãkhtetaluŋ       (2→3)

naŋ-i                 dyo-kay              dãkh-te-ta-l-u-ŋ
2SG-ERG               3SG -DAT             beat-2-(2)PST-DIR-1/2
'You beat her/him.'

b) dyokəy naŋkay dãkhalaŋ       (3→2)

dyo-kəy                naŋ-kay             dãkh-ala-ŋ
3SG-ERG                2SG-DAT             beat-PST-1/2
'S/he beat you.'

In example (2a) the second person (i.e. relatively the highest ranking participant) is acting on third person (i.e. the lowest ranking participant) whereas in example (2b) third person (i.e. the lowest ranking participant) is acting on first person (i.e. the highest ranking participant). Thus, person indexed by the suffix <-ŋ> in (2a-b) codes the reference of the second person as agent and patient participants, respectively.

### Person Marking in Kirati

In Hayu (Michailovsky, 2003) a transitive/ bitransitive verb agrees with both the agent and patient participants. The person hierarchy seems to play an important role to determine specific morphemes to mark persons in Hayu as in (3).

3) a) ga                    thuŋnomi                 gon
1SG:ERG               convey:1SG→2SG:ASS        2SG
'I will take you there.'

b) ga                    ruktuŋmem
1SG:ERG               plough:1SG→3SG:APP
I ploughed it for them

In Bantawa (Doornenbal, 2009, p.153-153), person reference of the participants is indexed in terms of ranking of the participants, not in terms of syntactic roles or semantic roles.  Person hierarchy is represented as 1>2>3 in which the first person is the highest ranking participant and the third person is the lowest ranking participant.  The person hierarchy primarily determines the person suffixes in Bantawa. In principle, the verb agrees with the first or second person in preference to third and with the object where both participants first or

second person (Watters, 2002). In other words, there is correspondence between person hierarchy and the agreement. However, in practice, there are language specific variations. The third person patient is marked by <-u> in Bantawa.

In Limbu (Driem, 1987, p. 77), in a transitive configuration, in terms of the hierarchy of persons, the first person marker precedes the second person markers. These markers precede the third person markers in Limbu.

Ebert (2003, p.509) notes that a Kirati indexes both person and number in the complex of the verb. She further notes that Bantawa, Athpare and Yakkha in a configuration of 2→1 index the first and second person with distinct affixes whereas in a configuration of 1→2 these languages index the second person by a portmanteau suffix. The second person is not marked in terms of semantic role. It is marked in configurations of 2s→3s or 3s→3s irrespective of the semantic role the second person plays in a transitive clause. In Dumi (Rai, 2017, pp. 150-53), person marking has been claimed to have based on the hierarchical ranking of participants. However, the marking is not as clear and straightforward as in Bhujel and Chepang. Neupane (2001) asserts that person marking in Athpahariya is exclusively based on the hierarchical ranking of the participants. Bickel (1996, pp.256-279) provides verb inflection paradigms in which morphemes marking for person, number and role in Belhare.

Rutgers, (2002, p.121) notes that in Yamphu the first person agent and the second person patient in the transitive configuration 1→2 are marked by a single morpheme <-na/-n>. Ebert (1997, p. 23) deals with the person and number affixes in Athpare and notes that such affixes are used to mark the participants in the clauses. In Chamling, Ebert (1997, p. 16) notes the prefix <ta-> marks the second person not on the basis of semantic role and number, rather in terms of the hierarchy of the participants. Schackow (2015, p. 216) notes that Yakkha presents a complex indexing in the verb where markers for three persons ( 1,2,3 including clusivity for the first person) and three numbers ( viz., singular, dual and plural/ non-singular) and syntactic role act together.

**Number Marking**

*Number Marking in Bhujel*

Bhujel registers three categories of number of the speech act participants on the complex of the verb. They include singular, dual and plural. Singular is morphologically unmarked whereas the plural is marked by <-i> for all persons. The second person dual is marked by the suffix <-j>. However, the suffix <-c> is employed to mark the first and third person duals in Bhujel. Following are the examples:

4)  a)  ŋici kim alnaŋcə

| ŋici | kim | al-na-ŋ-cə |
|---|---|---|
| 1DU | house | go-NPST-1/2-DU |

'We (two) go home.'

b)  ŋiləm  kim alnaŋi

| ŋiləm | kim | al-na-ŋ-i |
|---|---|---|
| 1PL | house | go-NPST-1/2-PL |

'We go home.'

c)  ŋiŋji  kim altenaŋjə

| ŋiŋji | kim | al-te-na-ŋ-jə |
|---|---|---|
| 2DU | house | go-2-NPST-1/2-2DU |

'You (two) go home.'

*Number Marking in Kirati*

There are three numbers of the pronouns, viz., singular, dual and plural in the Kirati languages (Ebert, 2003, p.507). Doornenbal (2009, p.154) claims that Bantawa ranks the number from the highest to the lowest, viz., plural>dual>singular with some split pattern. Driem (1987, p. 25) presents three numbers, viz. singular, dual and plural for the personal pronouns in Limbu. He also notes that the non-singular first person distinguishes between inclusive and exclusive indexing. In Koyee, Rai (2022, p.77-78) makes a distinction

of three numbers, viz., singular, dual and plural for the first, second and third person pronouns and an exclusive-inclusive distinction for the plural personal pronouns. In Dumi, Driem (1993, p.80) provides three persons and three numbers including inclusive-exclusive distinction in the non-singular first person. Similarly, in Sunwar, Brochers (2008, p.66) distinguishes three numbers, viz., singular, dual and plural and shows a distinction between inclusive and exclusive in the first person dual and

plural. Ebert (1994, p.78) notes that some Kirati languages distinguish dual and plural for nouns and pronouns.

### Clusivity Marking

Unlike the Kirati languages Bhujel lacks distinction between inclusivity and exclusivity in free personal pronouns. However, inclusivity reference of the agent participant is indexed on the verb by the suffix <-tə> along with the common person marker in Bhujel as in (5).

5) a) ŋicikəy dyokay dãkhtəalaŋcu

| ŋici-kəy | dyo-kay | dãkh-tə-ala-ŋ-c-u |
|----------|---------|-------------------|
| 1DU-ERG | 3SG-DAT | beat-INCL-PST-1/2-1DU-DIR |

'We (two) beat you.'

b) ŋiləmi dyokay dãkhtəlaŋiu

| ŋiləm-i | dyo-kay | dãkh-tə-la-ŋ-i-u |
|---------|---------|------------------|
| 1PL-ERG | 3SG-DAT | beat-INCL-PST-1/2-1PL-DIR |

'We (plural) beat you.'

In (5a-b) the verb is indexed by the inclusive suffix <-tə> along with the common person marker in order to encode the person reference of the inclusive agent participant acting on third person

patient. However, the inclusive suffix <-cə> does not occur while third person is acting on first person inclusive as in (6).

6) a) dyokəy ŋicikay dãkhalaŋ

| dyo-kəy | ŋici-kay | dãkh-ala-ŋ |
|---------|----------|------------|
| 3SG-ERG | 1DU-DAT | beat-PST-1/2 |

'S/he beat us (two).'

b) dyokəy ŋiləmkay dãkhalaŋ

| dyo-kəy | ŋiləm-kay | dãkh-ala-ŋ |
|---------|-----------|------------|
| 3SG-ERG | 1PL-DAT | beat-PST-1/2 |

'S/he beat us.'

### 'Direct/Inverse' Marking

Caughley (1982) notes that in order to identify the semantic role of the participant Chepang has developed a direct-inverse system. The suffix <-u/-n> codes a "direct" relationship, i.e. that

the participant indexed in the verb is an agent; and the suffixes <-ta/-tha>indicates an "inverse" relationship, i.e. that the participant indexed in the verb is a patient as in (7).

7) a) ni-ci-?i ?amh je?-na- ŋ?-c-u

| 1PL-DU-ERG | food | eat-NPST-1E-DU-DIR |
|------------|------|--------------------|

'We (two) eat food.'

b)    gopal-ʔi                       ŋa-kay                      say?- ?a-ta-ŋ?
       Gopal-ERG                   1SG-DAT               hear-PST-INV-1E
       'Gopal heard me.'

In Chepang, the direct-inverse relationship is extended to 3→3 configurations as well (Watters & Regmi, 2008, p.431). In a transitive construction, an agent acts upon a patient. Such agent or patient may be either the first or the second or the third person. The first person is the highest ranking and the third person is the lowest ranking participants. The highest ranking agent participants may be acting upon the relatively lowest (i.e., second person) or the lowest ranking patient participants. Such deictic directionality is referred to as direct relationship. Sometimes, the lowest ranking agent participants may be acting upon the relatively highest (i.e., second person) or the highest ranking patient participants. Such deictic directionality is referred to as indirect/inverse relationship.

Jacques & Antonov (2014, p.3) notes that in the Kirati languages the direct/inverse markers are determined on the basis of the combination of the particular person and number. In Khaling, the direct or inverse markers are assigned for more than one function. In Khaling, the prefix <ʔi-> is used to code the second person in the complex of the intransitive verbs. This second person prefix is also used in the transitive configurations of 2→1, 3→1, 3→2 and 2→3. The inverse prefixes are clearly attested in Bantawa and other Kirati languages.

Unlike in the Kirati languages, in Bhujel, in the configurations of 1→2, 1→3, and 2→3 the verb is found being marked by the suffix <-u> apart from person and number suffixes. Nonetheless, the verb remains unmarked by this suffix in the configurations of 2→1, 3→1, or 3→2. In Bhujel, in the configuration of 3→3, this suffix does not appear in the complex of the verb. The suffix <-u>, which marks the third person patient in the Kirati languages, is found marking the direct relation of persons, viz., highest ranking participants, acting upon the relatively lowest or the lowest patient participants in transitive constructions as in (8).

8)   a)   1→2   ŋai naŋkay dākhaluŋ
                  ŋa-i                 naŋ-kay              dākh-al-u-ŋ
                  1SG-ERG           2SG-DAT             beat-PST-DIR-1/2
                  'I beat you.'

  b)   1→3   ŋai dyokay dākhaluŋ
                  ŋa-i                 dyo-kay              dākh-al-u-ŋ
                  1SG-ERG           3SG-DAT             beat-PST-DIR-1/2
                  'I beat him/her.'

  c)   2→3   naŋi dyokay dākhtetaluŋ
                  naŋ-i               dyo-kay              dākh-te-tal-u-ŋ
                  2SG-ERG           3SG-DAT            beat-2-(2)PST-DIR-1/2
                  'You beat him/her.'

In examples (8a-b), as the first person, the highest ranking participants as agents are acting upon the second and the third person participants as patients, the verbs are indexed with the suffix <-u>. So is the case with example (8c) where the second person participant as agent is acting upon the third person patient participant. The inverse relationship, unlike in Chepang, is left unmarked by the suffix<-u> as in (9).

9)  a)  2→1  naŋi ŋakay dãkhtetalaŋ

    naŋ-i            ŋa-kay           dãkh-te-tala-ŋ
    2SG-ERG          1SG-DAT          beat-2-(2)PST-1/2

    'You beat me.'

    b)  3→1  dyoi ŋakay dãkhalaŋ

    dyo-i            ŋa-kay           dãkh-ala-ŋ
    3SG-ERG          1SG-DAT          beat-PST-1/2

    'He beat me.'

    c)  3→2  dyoi naŋkay dãkhalaŋ

    dyo-i            naŋ-kay          dãkh-ala-ŋ
    3SG-ERG          2SG-DAT          beat-PST-1/2

    'S/he beat you.'

    d)  3→3  dyoi dyokay dãkhal

    dyo-i            dyo-kay          dãkh-al
    3SG-ERG          3SG-DAT          beat-PST

    'S/he beat him/her.'

The configurations in examples (9a-d) represent indirect/inverse relationships of the participants as agents and patients in terms of the hierarchy of speech-act participants in Bhujel. In examples (9a-d), relatively lowest or the lowest ranking participants are acting upon the highest or relatively highest or the lowest ranking participants. Thus, the direct marking suffix -u is absent in the complex of the verb. The examples in (8a-c) and (9a-d) motivate us to argue that, unlike in Chepang, the inverse relationships in Bhujel are unmarked and direct relationships are marked. This seems somewhat counter to universal expectations. Normally, the direct relationship should not be the marked category while inverse should be the marked category.

## Innovation of Direct Marking System in Bhujel

Direct marking is an innovation in Bhujel. The direct marking suffix <-u> may be assumed to be very likely related to the old third person patient marker found in the Kirati languages. However, in Bhujel, the use of such suffix has been extended to 1→2 and dropped in the 3→3 relationship. Originally, the suffix <-u> marked the third person patient in the Kirati languages. Regmi (2007) and Watters & Regmi (2008) have proposed an alternative functional explanation for this phenomenon attested in Bhujel.

Functionally, the suffix <-u> is used simply to disambiguate the single person index found in the verb complex. Anywhere it occurs it marks the person index as an agent, and anywhere else the person index is a patient. Thus, functionally, the suffix <-u> marks the agent as the agent is the marked category. In some Tibeto-Burman languages agent-patient disambiguation is accomplished by introducing a marker anywhere the highest ranking participant is in a patient role. It is to be noted that the suffix <-u> in Bhujel occurs wherever the ranking participant is an agent. However, in Bhujel, only one of two participants (either agent or patient) is marked in the verb. Looking at the phenomenon in this way, the 'direct' marking in Bhujel may be explained to have developed through two-step processes. They are as follows:

a)  First of all, the highest ranking participant is marked in the verb by virtue of hierarchical person marking.

b) Secondly, the person as an agent is marked by the suffix <-u>.

Thus, though the result is equal to direct marking and it disambiguates the semantic role of an agent. From this point of view, this suffix is only an agent identifier, not a direction marker. In such an interpretation, the suffix <-u> gets tied, first and foremost, to agentivity, and then to directionality only as a "derivative" category. Direction marking ('high→low,'or 'low→high') is only accidental. Only high is marked, and secondarily, the semantic role of high. In Bhujel, only a direct category has been gramaticalized. Such phenomenon is decided by the source domain of the diachronic morphological material employed. The inverse is derived from a cislocative 'come' and the direct is derived from agent marking.

The confirmed or uncontroversial genetic classification of the Tibeto-Burman languages is not an easy task. There has not yet been made a comprehensive typological comparison of such languages on the one hand, they are spoken in a great inhospitable geographical areas in contact with Nepali, an Indo-Aryan language. Besides, the basic principles for subgrouping of Kirati languages are not consistent (Gerber & Grollmann, 2018). Indeed, Bhujel and Chepang are related languages. In Chepang both inverse and direct are marked in the complex of the verb. However, in Bhujel, only direct is marked. Such marking, unlike in Chepang, does not extend to 3→3 configuration. It seems that Bhujel has gone considerably far away from Chepang typologically. Alternatively, it may be surmised that only Bhujel happened to share only some features of participant references from Chepang. The marking of person in the Kirati languages like Hayu, Dumi, Athpare, Bantawa, Khaling is mainly based on the ranking of the participants. There are language specific variations in such languages. In Dumi, person marking clearly follows the ranking of the participants. The third person patient marking <-u> in the Kirati languages functions in Bhujel first as agent marker and secondly as direct marker. This is still an interesting area for further analysis and

confirmation. Moreover, the general survey of the system of participant references in some Kirati languages indicates clearly that the features of the participant references in Bhujel including Chepang and Bankariya (Regmi, 2009) are, no matter partially or fully, have been shared from the Kirati languages. However, the confirmation as to the Kirati languages from which Bhujel shares most of the features is still a matter of further study. The new exploration has to be undergone in the light of the facts as claimed in (Gerber & Grollmann, 2018). Moreover, there are no authentic documents like inscriptions, charters or copper plates as to from where Bhujel migrated to the present locations. There are three equally competing hypothesis of association of the Bhujel language and people. The first one is Chepangic hypothesis propounded by Caughley (1982; 1999) in which Bhujel language and the people are claimed to have been ethnolinguistically associated with Chepang. This hypothesis has been strongly refuted in Regmi (2007). However, the shared structural features between the two languages are still significant. The second one may be referred to as Bhujikhole hypothesis made in Bhujel Yonjan Tamang (2001) which clearly claims that the original place of Bhujel is the Bhujikhola located in the western part of Baglung, a district within Gandaki Province. This hypothesis is based on the legendaries. The third one is Kirati hypothesis which has been articulated, though briefly, in ASBS (2014) which claims that Bhujel as people are a member of the Kirati group. It is, indeed, partially supported by the shared profession (viz., making a variety of bamboo articles as a part of livelihood) with Hayu. Unless supported by ethnolinguistic facts, these hypotheses are not likely to be easily refuted.

## Conclusion

From a typological perspective, this paper has attempted to explore the relationship of the Bhujel language with the Kirati languages in the lights of shared features in the domains of participant references. Alleged genetically related to Chepang, Bhujel recognized as an independent language for the first time in 2001 census, has not yet been

proposed an uncontroversial genetic classification. No doubt, there are a number of proposals for the sub-groupings of Kirati languages. At present, Bhujel and Kirati languages are spoken in exclusively different geographical areas. Bhujel is mainly spoken in Tanahun, Gorkha, Chitwan and Nawalpur. The Kirati languages, which are spoken in the eastern part of Nepal, are generally affiliated with Eastern Himalayish sub-group. These languages have been typologically described as having complex verb morphology registering person, number and clusivity in the complex of the verb with a number of language specific variations. In Bhujel, person marking is based on the hierarchy of the participants in the clause. Only a few descriptions in the Kirati languages explicitly refer to the basis for such marking. However, the hierarchy of the participants inherently functions as the basis for participant references in the Kirati languages though not as clearly as in Bhujel and Chepang. No doubt, Bhujel, to a great extent, shares many of the features of participant reference with the Kirati languages. However, due to contact, Bhujel shares some participant reference features with Chepang. However, typologically, Bhujel does not significantly seem to be related with Chepang in which both agent and patient are marked at a time in a clause. In due course of time, the third person marker in used in the Kirati languages has been innovated in Bhujel as direct marker. How did the Bhujel language spoken across the Narayani River come to bear the characteristics of the Kirati language spoken in the east? This study does not fully satisfactorily answer this question. A comprehensive typological study is needed for this purpose. This study, though a preliminary as well as in the form of survey in nature, brings forth some clues for claiming that there is a close genetic relationship of Bhujel, based on the shared typological features of participant references, with the Kirati languages. Such study not only motivates to re-establish/revise the genetic relationship with the Kirati languages but also to do research on migration, contact outcome, assimilation and disintegration of ethnic people like Bhujel in Nepal.

## Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 | first person |
| 1/2 | first or second person |
| 1DU | first person dual |
| 1PL | first person plural |
| 1SG | first person singular |
| 2 | second person |
| 2DU | second person dual |
| 2PL | second person plural |
| 2SG | second person singular |
| 3 | third person |
| 3DU | third person dual |
| 3PL | third person plural |
| 3SG | third person singular |
| APP | applicative |
| DAT | dative |
| DIR | direct marker |
| DU | dual |
| ERG | ergative |
| INCL | inclusive |
| INV | inverse |
| NPST | non-past |
| PST | past |

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**Notes**

1. The 2021 census records 38257 (0.13% of the total population of Nepal) people who regard the Bhujel language as their ancestral language (Regmi, 2024a).

2. These are some references mentioned in Hale (1973).

3. The languages which exhibit agreement based on a hierarchical ranking of participants–1/2→3, at the core of the system, maintains the agreement with first or second person agent in preference to third, and with the patient /object where both participants are first or second person (DeLancey, 1981; Watters, 2002).