

Published as:

Gawne, Lauren. 2011. Reported speech in Lamjung Yolmo. *Nepalese Linguistics* 26: 25-35.

Reported Speech in Lamjung Yolmo

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Lamjung Yolmo, like many Tibeto-Burman languages, has two strategies for reporting speech; a verb of saying and a reported speech particle. Although reported speech particles have been reported for many Tibeto-Burman languages they are often under-described. This paper gives a fuller description of the reported speech particle in Lamjung Yolmo.

1 Introduction

When reporting speech in Lamjung Yolmo¹, speakers have two strategies at their disposal. The first is to use a verb of saying (*lâp-*), the second is to use a reported speech particle (*lò*). This is similar to many other Tibeto-Burman languages. This paper is divided into four sections. In the introduction I will briefly outline the language of Lamjung Yolmo. Next I will outline the existent literature on reported speech constructions in related Tibeto-Burman languages. In the third section I will show how the reported speech particle in Lamjung Yolmo is used and how it differs to the verb of saying. The final section will be the conclusion.

Lamjung Yolmo is an isolated dialect of the Yolmo language. It has been spoken in six villages in the Lamjung District in the west of Nepal since its speakers migrated from the Helambu and Melamchi Valley areas around 200 years ago (see Hari and Lama 2004 and Hari 2010 for a description of Melamchi Valley Yolmo). It retains strong lexical affinity with the Yolmo spoken in Melamchi Valley (Gawne 2010), however there are enough differences in key areas, including the copula system, for it to be worthwhile to analyse these dialects separately.

2 Background

In Tibeto-Burman languages there are often two reported speech constructions. The first is using a verb of saying, which is a strategy found in many of the world's language. The second is to use a reported speech marker or particle. This is an utterance final particle that has different syntactic and pragmatic features to constructions using a verb of saying. Frequently, languages with reported speech particles will employ a verb of saying construction as well. Reported speech particles occur often in the Bodic branch of Tibeto-Burman but they do occur in other branches of the Tibeto-Burman family as well; Matisoff (1982, p. 377-380) describes a reported speech particle in Lahu, which is a member of the Lolo-Burmese branch of Tibeto-Burman, which is separate to Bodic (De Lancey 1990, p. 72).

The reported speech particles in Tibeto-Burman languages are often small, unanalysable, clause final particles that have a different syntactic structure and pragmatic effect from more standard reported speech constructions. However despite the strong cross-linguistic similarity there appears to be no consistency in the description of the reported speech particle's function or relationship to other features of a language, such as the evidential system.

¹ Yolmo is also known as Yohlmo, Hyolmo and Helambu Sherpa.

van Driem called the reported speech particle in Limbu a subordinator (1987), and in his 1993 grammar of Dumi refers to the same structure as a hearsay evidential, most likely influenced by the Chafe and Nichols (1986) volume on evidentiality. These labels give them different relationships to the evidential system, however we don't know if this is actually reflected in the languages.

Genetti (2007, p. 258) states that for Dolakha Newari the reported speech particle has evidential weight, while Goldstein and Nornang (1978, p. 164) for Tibetan and Hale and Shrestha (2006, p. 218) for Kathmandu Newari refer to it as a “quotative particle” which reduces the semantic load by making no reference to an evidential system. Zeisler (2004, pp. 889, 890) states the RS particle in Lhasa and Ladakhi requires the “appropriate evidential particle followed by the quote particle” which would indicate the evidential information is carried in the previous morpheme, but then puts them into the evidential category in a table on the very next page (p. 891). The most nuanced analysis of the relationship between the reported speech particle and the evidential system is Watters’ (1997, p. 603) grammar of Kham, in which he explains that the reported speech particle reports hearsay “but makes no claim about the truth of the statement”, instead he argues that the mirative particle carries the inferential weight.

Another notable language with a reported speech particle is Nepali (Acharya 1991, p. 183). As an Indo-Aryan language this makes Nepali unusual for its family, but it does mean that it patterns with areal neighbours. Like its Tibeto-Burman neighbours, the Nepali reported speech particle is a single unanalysable clause final particle, and Acharya analyses it as meaning something like “they say that.”

2 Reported speech in Lamjung Yolmo

Lamjung Yolmo has two reported speech strategies. The first is to use a verb of saying (VoS), the second is to use a reported speech (RS) particle. In this section I will first give a brief outline of the VoS constructions to show how they differ to RS particle constructions. I will then discuss the reported speech particle in more detail. This will include looking at the syntactic structure of reported speech constructions, the use of reported speech particles in naturalistic contexts and some manipulations of its usage.

2.1 Verb of saying (VoS)

The Lamjung Yolmo verb of saying (VoS) is *lâp*² which is used in reported speech constructions:

- (1) *ɲà =ki nòmo =ki ɲà nàti làp -sin*
 1s =GEN sister =ERG 1s ill say -PST
 ‘my sister said “I am sick”’ (AL 101013-01)³

Above we see a direct reported speech act, but the verb of saying can also be used with indirect reported speech as well:

² Lamjung Yolmo has tone system with a binary tone distinction of high and low on the initial syllable of a word. This is presented in the orthography with acute and grave accents on the vowel of the initial syllable.

³ All examples given include references to the original data. The first two letters refer to the speaker, the number after refers to the file name. If the text is taken from a non-elicited naturalistic recording then the time code is also given in minutes and seconds. So this example is from speaker AL and the file is 101013-01. Examples with no file name were taken from natural conversation or unrecorded discussion.

- (2) ɲà =ki nòmo =ki nàti dù
 1s =GEN sister =ERG ill COP

láp -ti láp -ku dù
 say -PERF say -IPFV COP
 'my sister said she is sick' (AL 101013-01)

In the example above not only is there an indirect reported speech construction, but also a repetition of the VoS, which is another feature of reported speech constructions in Lamjung Yolmo. This has also been observed in Dolakha Newar (Genetti 2007, p. 422). In elicited constructions speakers will often give the two verbs of saying, although this does not occur as frequently in more naturalistic utterances.

The VoS in naturalistic speech is often moved from the clause final position to before the reported speech:

- (3) lùndi láp -sin khé lú nèn jée yè
 jackal say -PST 2s song sing know COP
 'the jackal said "you know how to sing"
 (RL 101027-01 02:14)⁴

Often it is difficult to tell if a speech act is being reported directly or not. This is either the case because the reported speech act itself does not make this clear (as in example 4) or because Lamjung Yolmo speakers are prone to drop the subject if it is clear from context (as in example 5):

- (4) khó =ki táfi dèle láp -sin
 3s.m =ERG hello say -PST
 'he said "hello"' (AL 101001-01)

- (5) mè- thúŋ láp siŋ dù
 NEG drink say PST -PST
 '(he said) "(I) don't drink"' (AL 101001-01)

2.2 Reported speech (RS) particle

The reported speech (RS) particle gives speakers of Lamjung Yolmo a second option for reporting speech. The reported speech particle is *lò*.

The example below is taken from a naturalistic context. The speaker and a cousin were doing an activity placing picture cards into the order of a story. They were having a discussion about the exact nature of the task (which was deliberately left open-ended) and AL made to move the cards into a particular configuration while asserting that this was what the researcher (myself) had requested:

- (5) òodi pè -tonj ló
 that do -IMP RS
 'please do that' (she said) (AL 091108-01 38:40)

⁴ Lamjung Yolmo has optional ergativity, and as such the ergative marking is often not expressed in naturalistic speech.

In this example we see several of the features of the RS particle that differ from the VoS. The first difference is that the RS particle does not conjugate like verbs do. Although it occurs in the same clause final location as verbs it does not conjugate for tense, aspect or mood.

The second difference is that the RS particle is always final. Although the examples of the VoS above all have the verb in the final position in the clause this is not always the case. As shown in example 3 above, in naturalistic speech it is common for the VoS to be brought up near the subject and then the reported speech component to be uttered after the verb. Although this is a common strategy for VoS it never happens with RS particles, which are always utterance final; another argument for treating them as a different category to verbs.

The third difference is that it does not require a subject. While we saw above that VoS does not always have an overt subject, the RS particle never takes a subject. Instead, the subject is always determined from context.

The reported speech that is being framed with the RS particle is indirectly reported. Of course, this is difficult to determine in situations where there is no indication, but in situations where there are deictic elements these always reorient. So if a child said to their mother:

- (6) yíbi òŋ -ke
 grandmother come -PRES
 'grandmother is coming' (RL 091108-01)

Then the mother would report to her sister:

- (7) áma òŋ -ke ló
 mother come -PRES RS
 'mother is coming (she said)' (AL 091108-01)

From this and other examples it appears that the RS particle is not intended as a verbatim quote marker, but to give the salient content of the original utterance, and to indicate that the speaker of the information is not the originator.

The RS particle thus functions as a reported evidential. As it must always point back to an original and specific speech act is not a hearsay particle as in Van Driem's (1993) analysis of Dumi, Genetti's analysis of Dolakha Newar (2007, p. 258) or Watters analysis of Kham (1997, p. 603), or Nepali for that matter. In the example below the speaker reports that the food is tasty, not because they have eaten it, or because it is the general consensus, but because a friend had told them it was:

- (8) tó ʃimbu dù ló
 rice tasty COP RS
 'the rice is tasty' (she said) (AL 110215-01 38:40)

It should be pointed out that speakers can still use the RS particle for their own speech, if that speech is reheard on something like a recording or read out from a letter. In this regard it is more like a perceptual evidential, which Aikhenvald (2004) notes can often be used in such situations.

In Lamjung Yolmo the majority of evidential distinctions are carried out in the copula system, as it is with Melamchi Valley Yolmo (Hari 2010). Thus the RS particle isn't part of the evidential system in a narrow sense, but in a broader sense it allows speakers to make another distinction as to what evidence they are basing their utterance on.

There is still work to be done to ascertain what the discourse function of the RS particle is in Lamjung Yolmo. In discussions of reported speech there is often an assumption that marking these speech types indicates that the speaker is less certain of the reliability of the reported content. This is not always true, as Michel (2008, p.181) argues in relation to Nanti, an Arawak language spoken in the Peruvian Amazon. He argues that the use of a reported speech construction emphasizes the validity of an utterance.

This also appears to be the case in Lamjung Yolmo. At a wedding event the guests were being served dinner, and my friend said of me to the person serving:

- (9) já mè- sà yè ló
 mea NEG- eat COP RS
 t
 'she doesn't eat rice' (she said) (KL)

Here the use of the RS particle appears to validate the utterance, and prevents the appearance that my friend is preventing the person serving from giving me meat.

One interesting extended use that I have observed is in past tense utterances involving general facts. Lamjung Yolmo has a verb that is used for general facts *òŋ* - much like some uses of the Nepali verb *hunchha*. This general fact copula can only be used for present tense utterances. So if a speaker wanted to say that a person who is now dead was a good person, and that this was a generally known fact they would be unable to use the general fact copula. Instead, speakers use the RS particle with the past tense copula:

- (10) kàpu yàabu yèke ló
 old.animate good COP.PST RS
 'that old man was a good man' (they say) (VL 101224-01)

This is different to the other examples above as this does not require that the utterance relates to a recently utterance from a single person. Instead, the speech that is being reported is a more general "they said" or "it is said" type usage found in Nepali and other languages.

3 Conclusion

This paper has been an opportunity to present some initial findings on the reported speech particle in Lamjung Yolmo. I have shown how the RS particle is different to VoS constructions. It is different structurally in that the verb of saying requires a speaker as a subject but a reported speech particle requires that the speaker be inferred from context. It also appears to carry an evidential weight that is different to the hearsay or quotative analysis put forward for other Bodic languages. This study serves as a starting point for a further investigation into reported speech in Lamjung Yolmo (Gawne forthcoming), and hopefully as the interesting feature of Tibeto-Burman languages receives more attention it can also serve as a starting point for a more nuanced cross-linguistic comparison.

Abbreviations

- 1 First person
- 2 Second person
- 3 Third person

AUX	Auxiliary
COP	Copula
ERG	Ergative
GEN	Genitive
IMP	Imperative
IPFV	Imperfective
NEG	Negative
PERF	Perfective
PRES	Present
PST	Past tense
RS	Reported speech part.
SG	Singular

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