

Limbu

Tibeto-Burman, Kiranti, spoken in Nepal.

0 Morphosyntactic features relevant to syncretism

0.1 Repertory of morphosyntactic features

Number

sg	singular
du	dual
pl	plural

Case

nom	nominative
gen	genitive
abs	absolutive
erg	ergative

Definiteness

def	definite
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Gender

female
other

Person

1	first (exclusive)
1i	first inclusive
2	second
3	third

Tense

non-past
past

Negation

	non-negative
neg	negative

0.2 Distribution of morphosyntactic features

Nouns

sg nom	pl nom	sg nom def
sg gen	pl gen	sg gen def
sg abs	pl abs	sg abs def
sg erg	pl erg	sg erg def

Adjectives

female
other

Verbs

1sg						1sg-2sg	1sg-2d	1sg-2pl	1sg-3sg	1sg-3pl
1du						1pl-2			1du-3sg	1du-3pl
1pl									1pl-3sg	1pl-3pl
1i du									1i du-3sg	1i du-3pl
1i pl									1i pl-3sg	1i pl-3pl
2sg	2sg-1sg	2-1pl							2sg-3sg	2sg-3pl
2du	2pl-1sg								2du-3sg	2du-3pl
2pl									2pl-3sg	2pl-3pl
3sg	3sg-1sg	3sg-1du	3-1pl	3sg-1i du	3sg-1i pl	3sg-2sg	3sg-2du	3sg-2pl	3sg-3sg	3sg-3pl
3du	3pl-1sg	3pl-1du		3pl-1i du	3pl-1i pl	3pl-2sg	3pl-2du	3pl-2pl	3du-3sg	3du-3pl
3pl									3pl-3sg	3pl-3pl

1 Nouns

Van Driem (1987) lists absolutive, ergative/instrumental, genitive, vocative, locative, comitative and mediative as the primary cases; further cases involve combinations of these affixes either with each other or with other elements. All are clearly distinct except for the first three.

Plural may be marked by the suffix *-ha?*, but is not obligatory. There is a definite article, but Driem discusses it only in relation to the absolutive, ergative/instrumental and genitive.

The absolutive, ergative/instrumental and genitive are quite similar to each other; Wiedert and Subba (1985) do not even recognize the distinction. The information given by van Driem can be summarized as follows:

	vocalic stem			stem in derivational -a			consonantal stem		
	sg	sg def	pl	sg	sg def	pl	sg	sg def	pl
abs	Ø	-n	Ø	Ø	-n	Ø	Ø	-ʔin	Ø
erg	-lle	-ʔille	-le	-lle	-ʔille	-le	-le	-ʔille	-le
gen				-le					

Note that a plural marker *-ha?* (added directly after stem) is optional.

- Driem states that the definite article/absolutive affix is not found after plural affix *-ha?*:

kɛ:b-ɛn ‘the dumb one’

kɛ:b-ha? ‘the dumb ones’ (= indefinite, presumably?)

He does not say whether it may be found after a plural which is *not* marked by the plural affix (note that he does point out that the article isn’t found in the plural ergative/instrumental, regardless of whether *-ha?* is present or not)

2 Adjectives

Adjectives mark agreement with animate feminines, whereby the adjectival suffix *-pa* → *-ma*. Adjectives lacking this suffix remain unchanged (e.g. those with the diminutive suffix *-sa*, and negative participles). Thus:

yəmba yəmbitcha	‘big man’	yəmma mənchuma	‘big lady’
cukpa piʔl	‘small bull/cow’	cukma pitma	‘small cow’
cuksa thanben	‘tiny lad’	cuksa mənchya	‘tiny lass’

3 Verbs

Stems may be intransitive, transitive or reflexive/reciprocal. Verbs mark both subject and object. Various moods are built on the two tenses (past and non-past), but do not affect the pattern of syncretism. *Transitive and intransitive stems are divided into regular and irregular (apophonic), which exhibit slightly different patterns of syncretism in the intransitive paradigms [note: do reflexive/reciprocals have irregular stems too?]*.

Stems may exhibit an automatic alternation depending on whether they are followed by a consonant-initial suffix or not (e.g. in the regular intransitive example *nu:ks* vs. *nu:ŋ*). A small set of stems, labelled here “alternating stems”, display a stem-vowel alternation between the non-past and past (originally the result of the absorption of the past tense marker *-ε-*), and take a slightly different set of endings as well.

Regular stem intransitive

nu:ŋ ‘return’	non-past	past	neg non-past	neg past
1sg	nu:ŋ -ʔε	nu:ks -aŋ	mε- nu:ŋ -εn	mε- nu:ks -aŋnən
1 du	nu:ŋ -siŋe	nu:ks -etchiŋe	mε- nu:ŋ -siŋen	mε- nu:ks -etchiŋen
1 pl	nu:ks -iŋe	nu:ŋ -mʔna*	mε- nu:ks -iŋen	mən- nu:ŋ -mʔna*
1i du	a- nu:ŋ -si	a- nu:ks -etchi	an- nu:ŋ -sin	an- nu:ks -etchin
1i pl	a- nu:ŋ	a- nu:ks -ε	an- nu:ŋ -nən	an- nu:ks -εn
2sg	kε- nu:ŋ	kε- nu:ks -ε	kən- nu:ŋ -nən	kən- nu:ks -εn
2du	kε- nu:ŋ -si	kε- nu:ks -etchi	kən- nu:ŋ -sin	kən- nu:ks -etchin
2pl	kε- nu:ks -i		kən- nu:ks -in	
3sg	nu:ŋ	nu:ks -ε	mε- nu:ŋ -nən	mε- nu:ks -εn
3du	nu:ŋ -si	nu:ks -etchi	mε- nu:ŋ -sin	mε- nu:ks -etchin
3pl	mε- nu:ŋ	mε- nu:ks -ε	mən- nu:ŋ -nən	mən- nu:ks -εn

*mŋ → ŋŋ

Alternating stem intransitives

ca: ‘perform’	non-past	past	neg non-past	neg past
1sg	ca: -ʔε	cya -aŋ*	mε- dza: -ʔ- -εn	mε- dzya: -ŋnən/ mən- dza: -baŋ
1du	ca: -si	ce: -si	mε- dza: -sin	mε- dze: -sin
1pl	ce: -ʔ- -iŋe	ca: -mʔna	mε- dze: -ʔ- -iŋen	mən- dza: -mʔna
1i du	a- dza: -si	a- dze: -si	an- dza: -sin	an- dze: -sin
1i pl	a- dza:	a- dze:	am- dza: -nən	am- dze: -nən
2sg	kε- dza:	kε- dze:	kən- dza: -nən	kən- dze: -nən

2du	ke- dza: -si	ke- dze: -si	ken- dza: -sin	ken- dze: -sin
2pl	ke dza: -ʔ- -i	ke- dze: -ʔ -i	ken- dza: -ʔ- -in	ken- dze: -ʔ- -in
3sg	ca:	ce:	mε- dza: -nen	mε- dze: -nen
3du	ca: -si	ce: -si	mε- dza: -sin	mε- dze: -sin
3pl	mε- dza:	mε- dze:	mεn- dza: -nen	mεn- dze: -nen

*aa → a:

Regular stem transitive

huʔ 'teach'	non-past		past		neg non-past		neg past	
1sg-2sg	huʔ -nε				mε- huʔ -nen			
1sg-2du	huʔ -netchiŋ				mε- huʔ -netchiŋnen			
1sg-2pl	huʔ -niŋ				mε- huʔ -niŋnen			
1sg-3sg	huʔ -ruŋ				mε- huʔ -ʔen		mεn- huʔ -baŋ	
1sg-3pl	huʔ -ruŋsiŋ				mε- huʔ -ʔenchiŋ		mεn- huʔ -baŋsiŋ	
1i du-3sg	a- huʔ -su	a- huʔ -retchu			an- huʔ -sun		an- huʔ -retchun	
1i du-3pl	a- huʔ -susi	a- huʔ -retchusi			an- huʔ -susin		an- huʔ -retchusin	
1pl-2	huʔ -netchige				mε- huʔ -netchigen			
1du-3sg	huʔ -suge	huʔ -retchuge			mε- huʔ -sugen		mε- huʔ -retchugen	
1du-3pl	huʔ -susige	huʔ -retchusige			mε- huʔ -susigen		mε- huʔ -retchusigen	
1i pl-3sg	a- huʔ -rum				an- huʔ -rumnen			
1i pl-3pl	a- huʔ -rumsim				an- huʔ -rumsimnen			
1pl-3sg	huʔ -rumbe	huʔ -mʔna			mε- huʔ -rumben		mεn- huʔ -mʔna	
1pl-3pl	huʔ -rumsimbe	huʔ -mʔnasi			mε- huʔ -rumsimben		mεn- huʔ -mʔnasi	
2sg-1sg	ke- huʔ -ʔε	ke- huʔ -raŋ			ken- huʔ -ʔen		ken- huʔ -raŋnen	
2-1pl 2pl-1sg	age- huʔ	age- huʔ -rε			agen- huʔ -nen		agen- huʔ -ren	
2sg-3sg	ke- huʔ -ru				ken- huʔ -run			
2sg-3pl	ke- huʔ -rusi				ken- huʔ -rusin			
2du-3sg	ke- huʔ -su	ke- huʔ -retchu			ken- huʔ -sun		ken- huʔ -retchun	
2du-3pl	ke- huʔ -susi	ke- huʔ -retchusi			ken- huʔ -susin		ken- huʔ -retchusin	
2pl-3sg	ke- huʔ -rum				ken- huʔ -rumnen			
2pl-3pl	ke- huʔ -rumsim				ken- huʔ -rumsimnen			
3sg-1sg	huʔ -ʔε	huʔ -raŋ			mε- huʔ -ʔen		mε- huʔ -raŋnen	
3sg-1i du	a- huʔ -si	a- huʔ -retchi			an- huʔ -sin		an- huʔ -retchin	
3sg-1du	huʔ -sige	huʔ -retchige			mε- huʔ -sigen		mε- huʔ -retchigen	
3sg-1i pl	a- huʔ	a- huʔ -rε			an- huʔ -nen		an- huʔ -ren	
3sg-1pl	huʔ -rige				mε- huʔ -rigen			
3sg-2sg	ke- huʔ	ke- huʔ -rε			ken- huʔ -nen		ken- huʔ -ren	
3sg-2du	ke- huʔ -si	ke- huʔ -retchi			ken- huʔ -sin		ken- huʔ -retchin	
3sg-2pl	ke- huʔ -ri				ken- huʔ -rin			
3sg-3sg	huʔ -ru				mε- huʔ -run			
3sg-3pl	huʔ -rusi				mε- huʔ -rusin			
3du-3sg	huʔ -su	huʔ -retchu			mε- huʔ -sun		mε- huʔ -retchun	
3du-3pl	huʔ -susi	huʔ -retchusi			mε- huʔ -susin		mε- huʔ -retchusin	

3pl-1sg	mɛ- huʔ -ʔɛ	mɛ- huʔ -raŋ	mɛn- huʔ -ʔɛn	mɛn- huʔ -raŋnɛn
3pl-1i du	am- huʔ -si	am- huʔ -retchi	amen- huʔ -sin	amen- huʔ -retchin
3pl-1e du	mɛ- huʔ -sige	mɛ- huʔ -retchige	mɛn- huʔ -sigen	mɛn- huʔ -retchigen
3pl-1i pl	am- huʔ	am- huʔ -rɛ	amen- huʔ -nɛn	amen- huʔ -rɛn
3-1pl	mɛ- huʔ -rige		mɛn- huʔ -rigen	
3pl-2sg	kɛm- huʔ	kɛm- huʔ -rɛ	kɛmɛn- huʔ -nɛn	kɛmɛn- huʔ -rɛn
3pl-2du	kɛm- huʔ -si	kɛm- huʔ -retchi	kɛmɛn- huʔ -sin	kɛmɛn- huʔ -retchin
3pl-2pl	kɛm- huʔ -ri		kɛmɛn- huʔ -rin	
3pl-3sg	mɛ- huʔ -ru		mɛn- huʔ -run	
3pl-3pl	mɛ- huʔ -rusi		mɛn- huʔ -rusin	

Reflexive/reciprocal

lɛŋ 'return'	non-past	past	neg non-past	neg past
1sg	lɛŋ -siŋʔɛ	lɛŋ -siŋaŋ	mɛ- lɛŋ -siŋʔɛn	mɛ- lɛŋ -siŋaŋnɛn
1du	lɛŋ -netchige		mɛ- lɛŋnetchigen	
1pl	lɛŋ -siŋige	lɛŋ -siŋŋʔna	mɛ- lɛŋ -siŋigen	mɛn- lɛŋ -siŋŋʔna*
1i du	a- lɛŋ -netchi		a- lɛŋ -netchin	
1i pl	a- lɛŋ -siŋ	a- lɛŋ -siŋɛ	an- lɛŋ -siŋnɛn*	an- lɛŋ -siŋɛn*
2sg	kɛ- lɛŋ -siŋ	kɛ- lɛŋ -siŋɛ	kɛn- lɛŋ -siŋnɛn*	kɛn- lɛŋ -siŋɛn*
2du	kɛ- lɛŋ -netchi		kɛn- lɛŋ -netchin*	
2pl	kɛ- lɛŋ -siŋi		kɛn- lɛŋ -siŋin*	
3sg	lɛŋ -siŋ	lɛŋ -siŋɛ	mɛ- lɛŋ -siŋnɛn	mɛ- lɛŋ -siŋɛn
3du	lɛŋ -netchi		mɛ- lɛŋ -netchin	
3pl	mɛ- lɛŋ -siŋ	mɛ- lɛŋ -siŋɛ	mɛn- lɛŋ -siŋnɛn*	mɛn- lɛŋ -siŋɛn*

* nɪ → ɪɪ

References

- van Driem, George. 1987. *A grammar of Limbu*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
Wiedert, Alfons and B. Subba. 1985. *Concise Limbu grammar and dictionary*. Amsterdam: Lobster.