

## Language as Cultural Expression: The Case of Limbu Mundhum and Ritual\*

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### Abstract

*An anthropological study of 'religious /ritual language' concerns the relationship between the study of language and the study of culture. This article, using ethnolinguistics and ethnographies of communication as tools of study, examines how the Mundhum language distinctively maintains ethnographic communication by use of the ritual language, and communicates the social worldviews and cultural cognition of Limbu community. The Limbu, known also by endonym "Yakthung", are one of historically notable indigenous communities of Nepal. They have their own distinctive culture based on traditional ritual performances guided by Mundhum. The Mundhum is narrated and recited by Limbu ritual/religious actants/officiants in cultural/ritual observations, that is, rituals from pre-birth to after death. The study focuses on the issue how the Mundhum language, also known as Ritual Language (RL), is distinctive to the everyday language or Ordinary Language (OL) and helps express their cultural perceptions, behaviours and way of life. In doing so, it also shows the way this ritual/liturgical language influences not merely the kinds of speech but also the aspects of tradition, culture and way of life.*

**Keywords:** Cultural expression, High Variety language, Limbu Mundhum, Low Variety language, ritual language.

### Introduction

The Limbu, who mainly live in the eastern part of Nepal, have their own language called 'Limbu' or 'Yakthung pan', script 'Sirijanga', religion 'Yuma samyo' (Yuma religion) and 'Kirat', based on their own oral and written religious scripture Mundhums, traditional/ animistic belief systems, teachings and practices, mythology, beliefs on philosophy of life and after life. J. R.

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Subba asserts that “Like any other religion of the world, Yumaism consists of faith, devotion, love, spiritual yearnings, intensive divine feelings and all that is associated with heart” (1). A few Limbu people also follow 'Kirat hangsam samyo' known as 'Satyahang samyo' which was initiated by Mahaguru Phalgunanda, and is currently run by the religious institution named *Kirat dharma tatha sahitya utthan sangh* (Federation for uplifting Kirat religion and culture).

Traditionally, *Phedangma, samba, yeba, yema, yuma* and *angsi* are authentic Limbu priests and shamans who are known as the sacred and incarnate ritual practitioners. They perform religious functions, ceremonies and lifecycle rituals narrating and reciting the Mundhum. According to the Mundhum, Limbu have their own concepts of gods and goddesses, myths of origin of universe, earth, planets, creations of flora and fauna, creation of human beings, etc. In the form of orality, the Mundhum is deep-seated cultural phenomenon. The Mundhumic performance provides its adherents with yearnings of faith, devotion, love, spirituality, divine feelings and all that is associated with heart and head. The Mundhum tradition is their way of life being continued from generations to generations through priesthood/shamanistic system. Mainly, *tuttugen tumyahang/tumyahangma* (the well knowledgeable persons or those who are well-versed in Mundhum) and the incarnate practitioners (such as *phedangma, samba, yeba/yema, yuma, ongshi*, etc.) use the language of *mundhum* while observing religious/ritual activities, cultural ceremonies, and *mundhumic* performances.

Language is a social phenomenon, and plays a very vital role in human lives. One of the main goals of language is to communicate with people and to understand them. We use language in many different ways, such as, "the informational, the expressive, the directive, the phatic, and the aesthetic" (Leech 40-42). We use language and it is a part of society. Semiotics is the study of sign process (semiosis), which involves signs, that communicates a meaning, through any of the senses -- visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, or gustatory.

Amongst the approaches to the scientific study of human language include phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and so on. On the other way, study of language also takes in theoretical linguistics, historical linguistics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, applied linguistics, computational linguistics, etc. Further, ethnolinguistics and ethnography of communication are also the methods of studying language.

Ethnolinguistics, sometimes called cultural linguistics, is a field of linguistics that "studies the relationship between language and culture and how different ethnic group perceive the world" (Ferraro 21). Being combined ethnology with linguistics, it studies the way language influences perception and conceptualization, and shows how that is linked to different cultures and societies. Cultural linguistics examines "how various features of human languages encode cultural conceptualizations, including cultural schemas, cultural categories, and cultural

metaphors" (Sharifian 5-6). In Cultural Linguistics, language is viewed as deeply entrenched in the group-level, and thereby a cultural cognition of communities of speakers. Sociolinguistics is the study of social and cultural effects on language while ethnolinguistics is the field of linguistic anthropology which studies the language of a specific ethnic group.

Ethnography of communication (EC) is a multidisciplinary research approach that employs ethnographic accounts of actual communication events and occasions, in order to understand distinct cultural and contextual dimensions of communication. Dell Hymes developed an approach, popularly known as SPEAKING<sup>1</sup> model, to study of language called *the ethnography of communication* whose central unit of analysis is the communicative event. The aim of the ethnography of communication, according to Hymes, is "to detect patterns of language use that help members of particular socio-cultural groups to create and reflect their social world in particular contexts" (in Hall 142). EC supplies both rich theoretical foundations and detailed methodological procedures to the analysis and understanding of discursal and other communication sign systems in everyday interactions and mediated rituals (Noy 1). Hence, ethnographic study can reveal many of the communicative processes and practices assumed to be culturally unique and conventional as the language code. An essential feature of all ethnography emerges from this process as valuable by-product which is a deeper understanding of cultural relativism between diglossia and dinomia.

Diglossia is a situation in which two or more languages (or varieties of the same language) in a speech community are used in different social functions and contexts. The term was coined by Charles Ferguson, who used it initially to refer only to the use of two or more varieties of the same language by speakers under different conditions. It was extended by Fishman to include the use of more than one language.

Ferguson contends that most (but not all) of the features characterized monolingual diglossia are also true of multilingual situations. There is a comparable specialization of function for High (H) and Low (L) languages. The H language generally has more prestige, and L is learned at home, whereas, H at school. Also, although the L language in a multilingual society may well have a literary heritage, tradition of grammatical study and established norms and orthography, these often are not known to its speakers in a diglossic situation. The only clear differences between monolingual and multilingual diglossia are "those that relate to the structures of the codes themselves: i.e. the relationship of their grammars, vocabularies, and phonological systems" (Saville-Troike 46). Diglossia has a close nexus with dinomia, as bilingualism has with biculturalism. Dinomia is a state of having coexistence and complementary use within the same society of two cultural systems, one of which is the dominant culture of the larger society and the other a subordinate and less prestigious subculture from within that same society.

Dinomia, like diglossia, may apply to situations where there is an indigenous tradition of differences in sociocultural strata and to situations resulting in from migration or conquest. A society in which an entirely different set of cultural norms governs behaviour is considered dinomic. As the main function of human language is communication, and since linguistics is the scientific study of language, the study of communication is one of the major goals of linguistics. Schiffrin asserts that "the understanding of communication is ... important for anthropologists: the way we communicate is part of our cultural repertoire for making sense of – and interacting with – the world" (138). At this juncture, this article endeavours to show how the Mundhum language is distinctive from the ordinary Limbu language and also sheds light on how the language has been an expression of culture.

### Review of Literature

Different historical documents reveal that the ethnonym 'Limbu' was used by Gurkha (Nepal) administration after 1774. The decrees and letters of Sen rulers before the unification of Nepal and the genealogies of various clans of Limbu also divulge that the Yakthung leaders were conferred the titles of Raya and thus were known as Raya. Limbu also seems to be recent use of Susuwa Lilim Yakthungs or Yakthungbas. In Limbu language the term 'Yakthung' denotes "heroes of the hills" (*Yak* – hills, *thung*- heroes or mighty warriors). Although Limbus and Rais have separate entities, they share some common tradition, customs and way of life. The groups of ten chiefs were called *Thibong Yakthung* or ten Limbus and the land which they won with the help of Li or bow and arrows were called Limbuwan (Chemjong 5). The descendants of Lilimhang of Susuwaden (capital in the east Nepal or within the region of seven rivers) or the progeny of Limbukhang, the great grandson of Lilimhang, were known as Limbus (Mabohang & Dhungel 6). Gorkha rulers might have called the inhabitants living around the ranges of Limbusringam, the sanskritized version of Lumbasumba (Kanchanjunga) as Limbu (Kandangwa 45). Literally, "Lingba" denotes "self-grown or emerged" and some of the Limbu language experts believe that "Limbu" may have been derived from "Lingba" and there is also a place named Lingba in Limbuwan which also supports this assumption (Kainla 22).

A number of anthropologists and researchers such as Jones (1994), Reinhard (1994), Sagant (1996), Webster (1999), Gaenszle (2002), among others have conducted field studies on Limbu rituals, culture and ritual actants such as *phedangma*, *samba*, *yeba* in Nepal, and given us many accounts about them. However, their studies were focused only on preconceived notion of shamanism and spirit possession. They failed to understand belief system of "yetchham" (eight soul tradition), incarnate status of the *phedangma*, *samba*, *yeba/yema* and their recognition procedures, etc. In the field of grammar, George Lodewijk van Driem (1987) studied the Phedāpe language and categorised Limbu language into four dialects: Phedāpe, Pācthare, Chathare and Tāplejunge (or Tamarkhole). Probing various aspects of language,

specifically of Chhatare Limbu speakers, Govinda Tumbahang has published a grammar of Chhatare Limbu in 2017.

The documentations of Limbu Mundhum and culture include basically in the works of Chemjong (1961), Kainla (1990, 1994, 1995, 1999, 2005, & 2013), Sereng (1992), Subba (1995), Menyangbo (2005), Menyangbo and Mabuhang (2009), Phago (2010), Pangma (2019) and among others. When looked at these voluminous collections, Kainla's books have, to some extent, paid attention to the linguistic aspects of Mundhum language. In study of the Limbu Mundhum language, Angdembe (2013) has made a substantive contribution by incorporating appositive, lexical, aesthetic, figurative and grammatical aspects. Likewise, Tumbahang (2013) has carried out linguistic study of Limbu Mundhum and attempted to divulge the issue why this Mundhum variety is commonly thought to be a very obscure and distinctly different from the ordinary speech variety.

We find that the most of the Rai communities of Nepal also use similar nomenclatures to their ritual scriptures (oral or written) akin to the Limbu term *Mundhum*. For example, Chintang, Bantawa and Belhare Rai communities call *mundum*, Mewahang and Bantawa call it *muddum/mu□dum*. Alike, Yakkha name it *munum*, Yamphu call *mindum*, Kulung *ridum*, Chamling *dum la*, Thulung *diumla*, Lohorung *pe-lam*, Khaling *t□mr□*, Sunuwar *mukdum* (Rai et al. 21; Rai 2).

Whatever be the name given to it, the word Mundhum, for Chemjong, means "the power of great strength and the Kirat people of east Nepal take it to be a true, holy and a powerful scripture" (5). The Mundhum is generically a narrative oral poetic scripture. It is the source of inspiration, information and enlightenment for the Limbu and the way of their life, customs, rites and rituals. They provide an insight into their inner intricacy of Limbu tradition, ritual, culture and philosophy. It requires a shift in focus, as Hymes notes, "away from linguistic code '*la langue*' to actual speech, '*la parole*'...for the primacy of language function, and for a shift from imagining the referential function of language as the primary one to seeing it as one of many" (cited in Johnstone 2). Rituals, often regarded as sacred performances, provide the clue for the correct exegesis of the Mundhum and demonstrate their symbolic values, functional importance and social sequences. Each ritual action, instrument and fetish or object may have several meanings and needs a long range of painstaking pursuit in order to get a comprehensive insight into it.

### **Methodology**

Informed by the interdisciplinary approach to ethnolinguistics and ethnography of communication, the study attempts to investigate the situation how Limbu Mundhum language embodies a distinctive level of language while compared with the common or ordinary language. A qualitative research method of inquiry is employed to gather an understanding of

the use of High level language, and its reflection on Limbu culture. Apart from related reference materials, the major sources of data analysis of this work center on written Mundhums and oral texts. As being a part of discourse on ethnolinguistic and ethnographic inquiry, this study endeavors to expound major specialties of the Mundhumic languages such as appositives or paired expressions, periphrastic forms, parallelisms, uses of figurative, registers, among others.

### **The Limbu Mundhum**

The Mundhum is an accumulation of prior socio-cultural as well as religious narrative texts that consists of mythological stories, legends, prehistoric accounts, pragmatic and philosophical exhortations, and so on in oral poetic form. The Limbu have a strong belief that the Mundhum is an eternal truth, holy and the most powerful scripture (Chemjong 3). The Mundhum is also known as *bācā* (Nep "promise"). According to Chemjong, it has been divided mainly into two major types. They are (i) *Thuy-sap baca* or Mundhum and (ii) *Peysap* (?-write) *baca* or Mundhum. The first '*Thuy-sap baca*' (drink-write) is the original form that has been transmitted orally from generation to generations since the time immemorial. Later on, when the writing system was developed, the Mundhum was also available in the book form. *Samba* or the Limbu priests usually recite in certain ritual ceremonies and occasions. Thus, the *Sambas* are regarded as the authentic transmitter and sources of the Mundhum. The next type of the Mundhum is *Peysap Mundhum*. As Chemjong puts it, a Limbu named Phakosekma of Phedap region wrote mundhums dividing into four divisions. They are (i) *səksək mundhum* (ii) *Yehang mundhum* (iii) *sap-ci mundhum* and (iv) *sap mundhum*. Among them, the *səksək mundhum* deals with the myth of creation, the creation of mankind and evil spirits. Mainly, it consists of the creation of the universe; the origin of human being; origin of the sin, its reasons and effects; the origin of anger, jealousy, contempt; the reason of infancy death and its measures of prevention and so forth. *Yehang mundhum* is about the teaching of primeval culture hero called Yehang on social customs, spiritual knowledge and ethical values and importance in human life. Hence, it consists of knowledge of spiritualism, ethics, code and conducts. Likewise, the *sap-ci mundhum* deals with the existence of Tagera Ningwaphuma, the Supreme power of knowledge, as the symbol of light and fire, good and evil spirits as well as their consequences on human beings and earth. The *sap mundhum* is said to be a written Mundhum about the inspiring spirits which motivate for the well being and progress of the human kinds. Usually, the Mundhum is by nature in oral form or *thuy-sap* and cannot simply be categorized into four types as the four Vedas in Hinduism. In the context of such categorization, Angdembe finds Chemjong to have been "influenced by Hinduism" and got "lost in the jungle of chaos" (5).

The concept of God in Mundhum tradition is henotheist or kathenotheist which believes in a single supreme God/Goddess known as "Tagera Ningwaphuma" and popularly identified as

"Yuma". The other gods and goddesses are said to be created by Her as Her envoys and aides to accomplish the tasks of creation of the universe, the earth, planets, the entire living and non-living things, and its preservation, sustenance and development. Tagera Ningwaphuma is the ultimate Supreme Knowledge and is Omniscient, Omnipresent, Omnipotent, Infinite, and Eternal Force, Light or Power of Existence.

In accordance with the philosophy of the Mundhum, the concept of life is believed to be "biogenesis". It means life comes only from the life or life can be obtained only with the blessing of Yuma. It is evident from the Mundhum of creation of human beings. It believes in the concept that every living being has soul in it but not is non-living materials. Hence, uses of images or idols in worship of gods and goddesses made of materials are forbidden. The Mundhum accounts that the creator god Porokmi Yamphami could not succeeded to create human beings with gold, silver, bronze or any other materials during the creation of human being in the beginning. Thus, the adherents of the Mundhum believe that idols made up of such materials cannot have souls for worship.

Above all, the Mundhum is guideline of Limbu culture as it prescribes to the community about the manners and ways of living that they come across with. The value and meaning of it begins right from pre-birth stage of an infant to after death. A certain ritual called *sappok chomen* or 'worship for safe delivery of child' is performed wishing the safety and well-being of the baby to be born. The rituals begin from the period of pregnancy and go on to the period even after death. The main rituals performed are from the naming of the newly born baby, *yangdang phongma* (literally, to set into cradle) or naming/baptizing, the purification of the child-bearing mother, marital ritual *mekhim chokma thim*, and death and purification rituals including burying and *khauma* after the death.

### **The Language of Mundhum**

The mostly spoken languages of Nepal, as per National Population Census 2011, are either Indo-European (82.10%) or Sino-Tibetan (17.31%), while only a very few of them are Austro-Asiatic (0.17%), Dravidian (0.13%) and others (0.27%). Besides, Kusunda language has been recently described as a language isolate spoken by a handful of people in western and central Nepal.

Limbu is one of the national languages of Nepal with its own rich linguistic and cultural tradition. This language falls under the rubric of Tibeto-Burman language of Sino-Tibetan family of languages. Languages belonging to this group in Nepal are Tamang, Sherpa, Newari (Nepal Bhasa), Magar, Limbu, Gurung, Rai, Sunuwar, etc. The language of Limbu rituals is called the language of Mundhum. It is also called *khe?-ba:n* in Limbu [OL *kheda?* 'myth, story,' and *pa:n* 'language']. Jeff Webster calls the Mundhum language 'classical register' (558), whereas, Gaenzle regards it "as a distinct language like Latin in Catholic liturgy or Vedic

Sanskrit in Hindu ritual"(48). Limbu language can be classified into ordinary (colloquial), cultural and ritual (Mundhumic) language.

The Mundhum language appears apparently distinct from the language variety used in the daily communication. This is used, by and large, in special occasions, ceremonies, rituals, customary and religious functions. The Limbu community uses two different language varieties depending on the context and the situation. In ritual language, the paired term *samdzik mundhum* is used which means myth, ritual, tradition or ritual scripture of Limbu but only said *mu:ndhum* in ordinary language (OL). Similarly, the ritual idiom *sikkum niṅwa* is used for the ordinary language *niṅwa*, 'mind'. The language variety which is used in special purposes is in fact a High Variety language in a diglossic situation. Thus the ritual (*mundhumic*) language is distinct from the ordinary (colloquial/common/daily use) language. Angdembe (2013) furnishes many reasons of being distinctive between the two levels of languages. According to him, the use of appositives and paired expressions, longish/periphrastic forms, lexical parallelism, aesthetics, figurative, grammatical parallelism, among others make ritual language distinctive to the ordinary language. According to him, the Mundhum language can be analysed as a special register, a secret, a divine and, a language of High Variety. Correspondingly, Tambahang (2013) avers the Mundhum language as a liturgical, ritual, doctrinal, a special register, a language of preaching, private affirmation, a High Variety (diglossic), the loyalty to the seniors, and the matrimonial code and conduct.

### Composition of the Mundhum Language

Most of the ritual languages and speech registers of the world are rich in the use of paired expressions. In Limbu, such expression is called *kubuṅ-phekwa* (*kubuṅ*, stem, root and *phekwa*, twig/leaf), or head and tail respectively. They are attributed with distinctive linguistic patterns such as parallelisms, appositives, figurative expressions, periphrastic forms, binomials and so on. The idiomatic words for the paired expression is also denoted by "twin words," "word pairs," "paired terms," "polar expressions," "synonymenbinom," and, in the case of nouns, "paired nouns," "linked nouns," or "compound nouns" (Gaenszle et. al. 265). Parallelism is a wide spread feature of ritual language. Russian-American linguist and literary theorist Roman Jakobson has noted that 'the linguistic study of poetry has a double door'(485) -- the study of the relations and functions of verbal signs as well as to the study of these same signs as vehicles of cultural expression.

Two similar compounds or words -- lexical parallelism and canonical parallelism -- are used in Limbu language. In parallel expression of two similar compounds, as Angdembe notes, "the first compound involves the use of the tail word and the second one that of the headword" (10). For example, the creation is called *cə?i:t* in ordinary Limbu, and the ritual noun for 'earth' is *iksa khambek*. The ritual language of creation of earth/world is *iksa cə?i:t // khambek cə?i:t*,



where the first *iksa+cə?i:t* is headed by the tail word *iksa* of ritual language *iksa cə?i:t* 'creation' and the second compound *khambek+cə?i:t* by the headword *khāmbek* 'earth'. There are numerous such compounds or paired words found in Limbu.

Having an independent meaning of some of the paired words and usually occurring word pairs together in ritual language is a pervasive feature of "many ritual languages around the world" (Gaenszle et al. 11) including other Kirati languages. Jakobson terms it as "canonical parallelism" in which "certain similarities between successive verbal sequences are compulsory or enjoy high preference" (399). The use of paired words such as *khamdziri khambonba* (lit. 'the people who originated along with soil/earth') and *luṅdziri luṅbonba* (lit. 'the people who originated along with rock') both denote that they belong to aborigine, autochthon or indigene. Another example of canonical parallelism is *muhəŋliŋ khəhəŋliŋ* 'the void space (of the universe)' in which the first and the second components of expressions are not compounds but always occur together in an order of sequence.

The other usual type of parallelism pervasive in Limbu ritual language is grammatical parallelism, that is, repetition of the pairing of words, similar clauses, phrases or lines. For example, we can take the paired words *isksa+hopt-ε//khambek+hopt-ε* [*iksa+be.not-PT//earth+be.not-PT*] 'there was no *iksa*, there was no earth,' which means 'there was no earth.' In this, the first clause with the tail word *iksa* (i.e. *isksa+hopt-ε*) is parallel to the second clause with the head word *khambek* (i.e. *khambek+hopt-ε*). In *təṛəŋ+hopt-ε//tansaŋ+hopt-ε* [*təṛəŋ+be.not-PT//sky+be.not-PT*] 'there was no *təṛəŋ*, there was no sky', the first clause with the tail word *təṛəŋ* (i.e. *təṛəŋ+hopt-ε*) is parallel to the second clause with the head word *tānsaŋ* (i.e. *tansaŋ+hopt-ε*).

The Mundhum language also constitutes a pair of words known as appositive. In general, an appositive is a noun or noun phrase that renames another noun right beside it. It can be both essential (restrictive) and nonessential (nonrestrictive) appositive in which the meaning of expression would be clear without the use of nonrestrictive or nonessential appositives, too. But, the use of appositive in the Mundhum language is unique and differs from the appositive used in other languages including English, Nepali, etc. The use of such unique appositives or tail words (*kubun-phekwa*) is essential in Mundhum. For example, the ordinary word *thəkla* 'life' takes in the appositive *nasin* and forms the Mundhum idiom *nasin#thəkla* [app#life/body] 'life/body.' Here, the first word *nasin* is appositive or tail word and the second word *thəkla* is the head word. Similarly, some other such paired idioms are *meri#men-da* [app#goat], 'goat'; *sawan#yukphuŋ* [app#habitat, village] 'dwelling place, village'; *niṅdzum#niṅwa* [app#mind] 'mind' or *sikkum#niṅwa* [app#mind] noun 'mind' [OL *niṅwa*] also *nendzun#neŋwa*.

For a matter of politeness and of showing cultural etiquette, the Mundhum language involves the use of periphrastic forms. It is mostly used on formal occasions specially while

revering ancestors, gods and goddesses, deities, guests, and so on. In this, for instance, the clause *tijdiŋ#nahɛn+mɛ?t-ma* [app#envy+do-INF] 'to envy' is used for ordinary verb *nahɛp-ma*. Similarly, the phrase *hukso((-gɛn)#peli,+phakma* [*noun-verb* compound lit. 'to fold hands'] meaning 'to make a humble request' is used for simple form *huk+phakma*. This sort of language is a manner of speaking that uses more words than necessary or long and roundabout form of expression or circumlocution to evoke a certain meaning. Hence, it is also called a use of longish.

The use of lexical difference is another feature of ritual language and ordinary language. In ritual language, *yo-miŋ* is used but in ordinary language only *miŋ* is used for 'name'. Likewise, *ap-pha* is used for 'what' or 'how' in ritual language while *ak-khɛ* is used in ordinary language. Mundhum ritual language also involves binomials with pair of alliteration and rhyming pairs and the word order of the binomial pair is usually fixed. In this, the both components are nouns and always occur in pairs as in *muhəŋliŋ+ne:s-ɛ//khɛhəŋliŋ+ne:s-ɛ* [*mu#void+be-PT//khɛ#void+be-PT*] 'was great void or space (in the universe)', *porok-mi//yəmpħa?-mi* [*porok-man//yəmpħa?-man*] 'God who created man on earth', *mudzo?-luŋ//khɛdzo?-luŋ* [*mu-creator//khɛ-creator*] 'creator', *mudzi?-na//kheyoŋ-na* (name of the first mother of human being), etc.

Studying the binomials of Chhingtang Puma Rai of Nepal, Gaenszle et al. argue that "the relatively high noun-to-verb ratio in ritual speech is a direct inversion of the situation of ordinary speech, where the noun-to-verb ratio is relatively low" (366). However, there is no one to one correspondence between "the mundhum language of Limbu and that of Kirat" (Angdembe 40). This shows that though both of the communities share pairs of binomials they do not fit the same patterns.

The use of rhymed melody in idiom/phrase highly enriches language of the Mundhum, including figurative like alliteration, assonance, simile and metaphor. Some examples of such idioms are *haŋ-dziri#haŋ+sit-laŋ* (*noun noun compound*) the main pillar of house [OL *haŋ+sit-laŋ*], *niŋdzum#niŋwa* (*noun*) mind [OL *niŋwa*], *ac-cum#ap-pha* (*interrogative pronoun*) like what, how [OL *ak-khɛ*], *menni#maŋ/mendħa#maŋ* (*adjective+noun*) unseen god/eternal god, *thak-ke+luŋ//khi-be+luŋ* [loom+stone//thread/string +stone] also *thak-cum#thak-pe* (*noun extended*) loom, also symbol of life force (*co?-luŋ*) of the female in the Limbu society, *sapma#maŋde/yakla#ħaŋde* (*noun+noun*) god's curse/king's curse, *parokmi/yəmpħa?mi* (*noun*) name of a creator god to whom the almighty god, Tagera Ningwaphu (*Tagera Niŋwaphu*), created him and asked him to create human beings on the earth. Similarly, *haŋ-wa//maŋ-wa* [king-?//god-?] (*noun*) royalty or divinity, used especially in blessings, to be endowed with royal or divine blessings. As a rhymed alliteration, *saŋ-go sonchiŋ-aŋ/sakma sonchiŋ-aŋ* (*noun compound*) waning of energy, *phɛdzik-kum#phɛdaŋma*

'ritual priest' [OL *phedajmā*], *yεbhun#yεba* 'shaman' [OL *yεba*] are alliterative appositives. As metaphor, *netti(-gen)#phun* [app#flower] 'youth' [OL *phun*] is used.

The *kubun phakwa* or tail word is also attached to nouns referring to position and kinships in ritual or formal language such as *tutu(-gen/dij)#tumyahang* [app+gen/dij-suffix+senior man/knowledgeable man] 'senior/knowledgeable man' for OL *tumyahang*, *yakla(-gen/dij)#suhang/suhangma* [app+gen/dij-suffix+gentleman/ladies] for gentleman/ ladies, *nali(-gen)#thangben* [app+gen-suffix+adult/young (male)] 'young man' for *thangben*, *sis(-gen)#menchhi* [app+gen-suffix+adult/young (female) for 'young girl', *tεt-le#pangli* [app+in-law (female) for 'daughter-in-law/sister-in-law', *chinu#mencha/anu mencha* [app+grandchild] for 'grandchild'. Hence, the Mundhum ritual language is very rich in paired expressions which are also called correlative conjunctions. It shows that the Mundhum ritual language is distinctive to the ordinary Limbu language in terms of its linguistic structure and constituents.

### The Mundhum Language and Culture

The Mundhum language is primarily based on orality and used particularly by *phedangma* (ritual priests), *yεba/samba* (shamans), and *tumyahang/tumyahangma* (well-versed gentlemen/ladies in the Mundhum). This language is taken as a special register since it is typically associated with a configuration of situational features. It is used mainly in priestly rituals and ceremonial dialogues or customary discourses. It includes poetic genre and mode of aesthetic, rhetoric, narrative, didactic, persuasive, phatic texts. There remains the role of interaction, the set of relevant social relations, permanent and temporary, among the participants involved. The Mundhum ritual register involves two concepts of coherence, that is, coherence with respect to the context of situation and coherence with respect to itself.

For example, we can take the context of contacts being established directly with the Almighty God/Goddess *Tagera Niŋwaphu* whether be it by *Porokmi Yεmpha?mi* (the creator of *mencham(-gen) yapmi* or human being), *Mudzi?-na Kheyε:ŋ-na* (the creator mother), *Sodhun(-gen) Lεpmuhan* (a Limbu culture hero), or others. The moment they encountered any intricacies and impediments, the Almighty *Tagera Niŋwaphu* would let them sleep nearby her feet and get the solution in their dream. Then, they would resolve the problem as per the guidance of sermons, communication and messages that were obtained in the dream. This has helped in establishing a notion that seeking of knowledge and ideas from Gods, Goddesses and senior *tumyahangs* and *tumyahangmas* is a mandatory tradition and culture in Limbu community.

*je... Tagera maŋ-lε//Niŋwaphu maŋ-lε*  
 VOC Tagera God(dess)-ASS//Niŋwaphu God(dess)-ASS  
 (Almighty) God(dess) Tagera Niŋwaphu  
*tadi-mu piru-ro//sepmang-mu piru-ro*  
 app#in give/PT-ASS//dream in give/PT-ASS

gave in the dream  
*siwa mət-tu-ro//kha?un mət-tu-ro*  
 app#tell/PT-ASS//sermon tell/PT-ASS  
 told (made) sermon  
*səkwa səs-u-ro//mu-i:ng səs-u-ro*  
 app#disseminate/PT-ASS//message disseminate/PT-ASS  
 message/news disseminated

There is also a Mundhum narrative that the first human mother *Muzingnama Kheyongnama* sought the help of Tagera Niṅwaphu whilst she was pregnant. She is supposed to have asexually been created and her pregnancy is also narrated to have been resulted in through the wind (*suri:t/sammi:t*). At that time, she got various knowledge and skills from Tagera Niṅwaphu. She learnt how to prepare a cradle for the baby to be born, going over the jungle and bringing bamboo canes as well as how to rear a child.

*Yam-mu-*  
 Again-  
*kə?-i nɛmɛt-tho//phanjəŋ nɛmɛt-tho*  
 app#place lie-INF over//jungle lie-INF over  
 At the place lying over the jungle.  
*sidi: yaŋdaŋ-ha?//madi yaŋdaŋ-ha?*  
 app#cradle-PL//app#cradle-PL  
 The cradles  
*huk-so phondɛ-o//taŋe phondɛ-o*  
 hand-with hang-2P/IMP//hand-with hang-2P/IMP  
 Hang the cradle with (your) hands.  
*Khəŋcha-*  
 That is-  
*thiŋdaŋ yaŋdaŋ-lo//kɛ.sa yaŋdaŋ-lo*  
 app#cradle-ASS//your son-POSS cradle-ASS  
 That is the cradle for your son.

This language of Mundhum is related to *yaŋdaŋ phoŋma thim* or naming ritual. Similarly, all other rituals and ceremonies including *təndham mekxim* (marriage ceremony), *sam sa:ma/kha?-uma* (death ritual), etc. are all set in accordance with the Mundhum.

Human beings can learn a great deal of knowledge, ideas and skills for living a life from the teachings of Tagera Niṅwaphu. She teaches how to live an environment friendly life by planting and protecting flora and fauna, how to plant crops, how to weave clothes, how to cook food and prepare home brewed alcohol and use it to pacify the pain when a woman goes

to labour pain at the time of child delivery. This is a symbolic communication of the skills, knowledge, attitudes, values, and motives that are transmitted from the past generation to the present. Eventually, later on, these knowledge and skills obtained for Her become their culture and philosophy of life. Just for an instance, we can have a look the way Tagera Niṅwaphu suggests to Muzingnama Kheyongnama for planting *sali:ma* crop and to cook for food and prepare home brewed alcohol.

kən-gə-  
 This is-  
*minuri: tək-ro//sali:ma tək-ro*  
 app#rice-ASS//*sali:ma* rice-ASS  
 This is the *sali:ma* rice.  
*Al-lə,*  
 Now  
*mawa thoktə-o//kəthi thoktə-o*  
 app#cook/2P-ASS//your brewed rice cook/2P-ASS  
 Now, prepare your brewed alcohol.

Not only Tagera Niṅwaphumanṅ but also many other Mundhum mythical characters have taught many kinds of knowledge, skills and ideals which ultimately have been tradition, culture and ideology of Limbu community. For example, one of the popular female mythical characters, Khappura Məlləṅ-haṅma<sup>2</sup>, teaches many things to her two odd twin sons Namsami (human) and Kesami (tiger). She teaches them to which fruit, roots, flowers, reptiles, plants, birds, insects, ferns, mushrooms, yams, shoots, animals, etc. are edible and which are not safe to eat. Here, we just look at an example.

kən-gə-  
 This is-  
*minuri pu:-ro//taṅle-wa pu:-ro*  
 app#bird-ASS//head bald-3PT bird-ASS  
 This is bald-headed bird.  
*minuri pu:-ro//taṅkhak-pa pu:-ro*  
 app#bird-ASS//head/horn-cut off bird-ASS  
 This is the horn-cut off bird.  
*chamən-na pu:-ro //məndza-ma pu:-ro*  
 eat- NEG bird-ASS//eat-NEG bird-ASS  
 This is not the edible bird.

This way, Mundhum ritual language is a speech act and element of communication that may consist of sentences or phrases, usually grouped in pairs called adjacency pairs. As there is

intrinsic relationship of language and culture, patterning of communicative behavior interrelates with that of cultural systems and "the concept of culture has its impact on the concept of man" (Geertz 13). When the text-producer, who is a Limbu actant, involves himself/herself in a narrative enchantment and ritual performance of Mundhums, s/he dramatically, physically and verbally interacts with a large number of addressees; s/he speaks to them, communicates some information repeatedly to them and pleads them for some help, and so on (Edingo 174). Language is said to be "the bearer of culture," or "the vehicle of culture," and the like, which show its social significance. But when utterances are correctly understood then only they are symbols of cultural phenomena.

### Conclusion

As many other Ritual Languages (RL) of the world, the Yakthung Limbu Mundhum language is distinctive to Ordinary Language (OL) due to the use of High verity and Low verity of languages or diglossia, respectively. These two language varieties are used under different conditions within the Limbu community by the same speakers. The High verity of language is generally more prestigious than the everyday used ordinary language. It is also poetic and highly melodious due to the use of *kubuy-phakwa* or paired expressions in the Mundhum language with unique linguistic patterns such as parallelisms, appositives, figurative expressions, periphrastic forms, binomials and so on. Hence, the Mundhum language is also known as a special register, secret, ritual and divine language.

Being the Mundhum a religious scripture and a socio-cultural guideline of Limbu community, the mythical narratives and its language patterns have great influence on their lives. Their rituals, customs, festivals and way of life are based on the Mundhum. The Mundhum "holds great religio-historical value and socio-cultural importance in the Limbu community" (Limbu 25). Its implication begins right from the pre-birth stage of an infant, that is, before a baby is born, when a certain ritual called *sappok chomen* is performed wishing the safety and well-being of the 'would be' baby. Hence, the performance of rituals begins from the period of pregnancy and goes on to the period even after one's death. The main rituals performed during the life period are from the *Yangdang phongma* (naming ceremony) and the purification of the child-bearing mother, *mekhim chokma thim* (marital ceremony) and *sam sa:ma* and *khauma* or death rituals along with purification rituals after death. Many other social, cultural and ritual ceremonies and observations that do take place in Limbu community with use of the Mundhum language are left for areas of future inquiries.

Through this investigation, it can be stated that as language is the bearer of culture, the Mundhum narratives have great influence on Limbu community, and thereby their socio-cultural lives including customs, behaviours (social etiquettes), ethics, etc. are "all guided by the Mundhum as Hindu *Dharma Shastra* guided the Hindu society" (Angdembe 5). The

Mundhum texts even serve as customary laws in the community. Likewise, as the Mundhum ritual is the part and parcel of Limbu community, it has been a deep-seated cultural phenomenon identifying them as a distinctive community with distinctive history, language, culture and way of life.

### Notes

Abbreviations: The given grammatical abbreviations are used (in accordance with the Leipzig Glossing Rules: [www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/resources/glossing-rules.php](http://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/resources/glossing-rules.php)): 2 = second person; IMP = imperative; INF = infinitive; PT = past tense; 3PT = past participle; PL = plural; NEG = negative marker; VOC = vocative.

1. The eight components of the SPEAKING mnemonic are: (S) Setting including the time and place, physical aspects of the situation such as arrangement of furniture in the classroom; (P) participant identity including personal characteristics such as age and sex, social status, relationship with each other; (E) ends including the purpose of the event itself as well as the individual goals of the participants; (A) act, sequence or how speech acts are organized within a speech event and what topic/s are addressed; (K) key or the tone and manner in which something is said or written; (I) instrumentalities or the linguistic code i.e. language, dialect, variety and channel i.e. speech or writing; (N) norm or the standard socio-cultural rules of interaction and interpretation; and (G) genre or type of event such as lecture, poem, letter.

2. In Mundhum myth, Khappura Məlləŋ-haŋma is one of the popular female characters and is referred to with the names such as Sakphara Tigəndzoŋna and Ipnaso Səraŋthəŋna. She is also said to have got pregnant without physical relation with any male but drinking water of the two potholes she found in the forest.

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