

THE FUNCTION OF *-teʔ* IN CHEPANG

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*There has been considerable discussion in the past concerning the function of an unusual morpheme *-teʔ* that occurs in Chepang and its relationship to a proposed Proto-Tibeto-Burman 2nd person prefix #ta¹. Its unusualness comes from its distribution and function in Chepang clauses. This paper discusses the full extent of the distribution and function of *-teʔ*, also the question as to whether it can be regarded as a 2nd person marker in Chepang and a suggestion as to how it may have originated for this language. This study is based on the West Makwanpur variety of Chepang, where the morpheme has some of its most distinctive features.*

Keywords: Tibeto-Burman, grammar, pronouns, pronominal affixes, pronoun origins

1. Introduction

Chepang and Bhujel are very closely related Tibeto-Burman languages of a region lying to the southwest of Kathmandu, in the lower foothills of central Nepal. Geographically, Chepang is found to the east, and Bhujel to the west of the Narayani, a major river in central Nepal. But there is also a group of villages east of this river, within the Chepang area, where a language, usually called Rumlingya or Runlingya², is spoken. This latter language is essentially identical to Bhujel and will not be discussed separately from Bhujel, except where relevant.

¹ For example, Bauman (1975, p.204ff); DeLancey (1980, 2011, 2014); Jacques (2012), van Driem (1993) and Pons (2021).

² Phonemically these names are /rumlingya/ and /runlingya/. There are other variations of these names. Some speakers call the language Rulungiya. Since the –(ŋ)g(i)ya ending is a suffix found widely in South Asia, signifying a people group (as in Bahingya, Rohingya), the name is equivalent to the ‘Rumling/Rulung people’. Both the Bhujel and the Rumlingya regard themselves as separate from the Chepang people.

Both Chepang and Bhujel use the morpheme *-teʔ* discussed in this paper, though to very different extents and the form is *-te* in Bhujel (without the final glottal plosive)³. It has been said that the Chepang morpheme has no final glottal (Pons, 2022 footnote p.555). It is true that it is difficult to identify the phoneme because *-teʔ* is a short syllable, it only occurs as a final enclitic or affix, so is not in a position of primary stress (the initial syllable of a word) and like other syllable coda is subject to full or partial loss. But there are examples of a word final *-teʔ* being followed by a glottal release, it tends to keep the high tone typical of syllables with a final glottal and when occurring before a glottal initial syllable there is the strong laryngealisation associated with this combination (see Caughley, 2022).

This paper includes some data that was not available to those who have earlier written on this subject – data that was briefly mentioned in Caughley (1982), but not elaborated there because it involved rarely occurring verbal constructions (see further Section 2). The question as to whether these, and other features are innovations restricted to this area or whether they are retentions of an older system, is discussed in section 5 below.

2. The distribution of *-teʔ* in a clause

The morpheme *-teʔ* is usually found in clauses where the addressee (i.e. 2nd Person) is involved in the action or state referred to by the clause that is, the addressee is a participant⁴ in the

³ For its occurrence in Bhujel see Regmi (2012, p.95; 2007; 2014).

⁴ For the purposes of this paper a ‘participant’ is some entity that has a particular role in a situation. It may be multiple such as “people” or complex as “cats and dogs and rabbits” or an abstract situation as in “John’s walking on ice”.

2 / The function of ...

clausal situation⁵. For states and intransitive situations where only one role is involved *-te?* can always (though not necessarily) be included, except for imperatives. But the situation is more complex for situations where there are participants with different roles, such as in transitive and ditransitive situations. Here *-te?* can always be used if the only participants are 2nd and 3rd person and for a 2nd person participant acting on a 1st person. But it is not used for a 1st person to 2nd person (1>2) situation or for imperatives (except one particular negative imperative, which comes from an indefinite future)⁶.

Some examples of this morpheme are, with *-te?* glossed as CIF:⁷

- (1) a. ləw naŋ-ma-te? ŋa-kaj?-te?
 So you-also-CIF I-Gl -CIF
 ma?-ti-te? to-te?-na-ŋi
 lie-TLV-CIF tell-CIF-NPST-2>1
 ‘So you also lie to me?’
 b. k^he?lə ŋa-?i naŋ-kaj?
 no, I-A you-GOA
 ma?-ti to-naŋ-lə
 lie- TLV tell-1>2 -NEG
 ‘No, I did not lie to you.’ Cht199

But not:

k^he?lə, ŋa-?i naŋ-kaj?-*te? ma?-ti to-*te?-naŋ-lə
 where *-te?* cannot occur in the answer because it is a 1>2 situation.

- (2) dʒe?ga-paj bəj?-ne?-naŋ -to
 food -DIF give -NP-1>2-SLV
 dohhajti-te? naŋ-te?

⁵ Though *-te* occurs in Bhujel, Regmi regards it, when in the verb, as encoding “the second person pronoun used as actor.” or, where it occurs as an enclitic outside the verb, as having a mirative function (2012, p.152). This present study, as mentioned, is based on the language as spoken in west Makwanpur where the repetition of *-te?* in a clause is especially common. For more references, See Caughley(1999, 2000, 2008).

⁶ In this case a warning “You might fall.” becomes effectively a negative imperative “Don’t fall.” For Chepang, the word *tonte?ya* can have either meaning, as in example (8).

⁷ See Appendix 1 for a list of glosses. The CIF gloss comes from Caughley (1982) and is briefly explained below (Section 3).

why-CIF you-CIF
 greŋ-ti-te? ?al-te?- ?a
 thin-TLV-CIF go-CIF-PST
 ‘I give you food, why did you get thinner’
 Cht092

where again *-te?* cannot occur in the first clause (which is 1>2) but multiple times in the second, a statement about the hearer.

- (3) ?i manta- ?i niŋ-kaj?
 this person-A you-GOA
 g^han-te?-te?-?aka-j-ja
 beat-CIF-CIF-PST-PL-INT
 Did this person beat you all?’ Cht341

where the reduplication of *-te?* indicates the question is to a plurality of hearers.

Looking at these examples and others like them it seems fairly clear that, as noted above, *-te?* is used in situations (both actions and states) where the hearer is involved, except for actions initiated by the speaker, and can occur multiple times in a sentence. It can even be reduplicated as a verbal affix when more than one hearer is significantly involved, though this is not common.

The following is a list of the relevant features of this morpheme, in particular its occurrence in a clause:

- i. It can occur enclitic to the regular free pronoun itself as in example (1a).
- ii. Its distribution in a clause is nothing like that of a normal pronoun – it can be a verbal suffix or an enclitic, or both in the same sentence, as in example (1a). It is true that it is often the only indication that a sentence refers to a situation involving the hearer, but not necessarily occurring as a verbal suffix, it may be only an enclitic. And not uncommonly it is used along with the free pronoun⁸.

⁸ Though in Bhujel *te* occurs much less frequently it can occur redundantly along with the free pronoun as in:

naŋ gahaŋ-te al-na
 you where-CIF go-NPST
 ‘Where are you going?’ BGr49

- iii. It can occur multiple times in a clause, even with every constituent (example (2), second clause).
- iv. Also there are situations where *-teʔ* can occur but the free pronoun cannot. One such situation is when reporting statements about the hearer, in the Chepang equivalent of indirect speech. In this case the free 2nd person pronoun cannot be used since others are talking about the hearer, not to him/her. Here however *-teʔ* can be used, since the situation does involve the hearer.
- (4) *naŋ-kajʔ* 'kam pe-to
you-GOL work good-SLV
dʒaŋ^h-taŋʔ-teʔ-nə-w, tə
do-IIF-CIF-NPST-A EQU
sajʔ -ʔala-ŋ
hear-PST-1
'I heard concerning you "He works well."'

Another example, this time from Bhujel as in (5).

- (5) *kajhli,* *sajhli,* *kaŋʔ^hi*
kay^hli, *say^hli,* *kanchi*
su-te-a *wah-naʔ*
who.CIF-Em go-NPST
'Kayhli, Sayhli, Kanchi, who (of you)
will go?' Cht191

Here also the free pronoun *naŋ* could not be used since Chepang and Bhujel do not have a partitive genitive construction 'who of you'.

- v. Except for one form of negative imperative it never occurs in imperatives, though other pronominal elements such as number do occur. This one negative imperative is derived from warnings using the Indefinite Future tense form *-faʔ*.
- (6) *ʔal-dʒə* but not **ʔal-teʔ-dʒə*
go-2DU

And occasionally it may be reduplicated in that language:

- kos-te-te-lə* *ap^hu-ləm*
sated-CIF-CIF-NEG *brother-PL*
'Are you (all) not satisfied, brothers?' Cht183

'You two go!'

An example of its occurrence in a clause which can be taken as either a warning or a negative imperative is:

- (7) *niŋ-dʒi* *siŋʔ-səj*
You-2DIU tree-ABL
ton-teʔ-faʔ-dʒjə
fall-CIF-IFU-2DU
'You two may fall out of the tree /Don't
you two fall out of the tree!'
- vi. It never occurs in 1st person to 2nd person situations, such as the first clause of example (2).
- vii. In the verb it does not occur in the same position as other pronominal elements, immediately after the tense suffix - it does not even have to directly precede this suffix though it often does. It may occur on any clause constituent and does not have to occur in the verb. It can be separated by other affixes, such as the Emotive *-dʒe(?)* (example (8), also from Bhujel). Instead its distribution is the same as two other morphemes *-paj* and *taŋʔ* which can be enclitic to almost any sentence element, or as suffixes close to the the verb stem.
- (8) *naŋ-paj* *tos-a-te-dʒe-na*
you-DIF throw-EMP-CIF-EMO-NPST
'You will be thrown off (indeed)!' Cht194

- viii. It may be reduplicated in the verb for a non-singular 2nd person participant (example (3)). This is the feature that has not been discussed by other authors because the data has not been presented before. The reason is that the situations where these constructions are used are very rare, being ones where the normal participant hierarchy (1/2>3 person) mentioned in Caughley (1978, p.171; 1982, p.82) and DeLancey (1981, p.85), is not observed, since they are overridden by other features of the situation. Another situation is where there is more than one person being addressed and the speaker wants to get attention from all of them.

3. Nature and function of *-teʔ*

These facts, listed in section 2, seem to argue against the suggestion that *-teʔ* is a pronominal form for 2nd person, an argument supported by DeLancey (2011, p.7) who, noting the facts listed in 2 above, that ‘neither of these behaviours is compatible with the idea that *teʔ* is a direct reflex of a PTB prefix...’ agreed with a proposal of Jacques (2012, p.204) that ‘in order to keep the pronominal origin of *-teʔ* in the light of its multiple occurrence in a clause, the present day Chepang *teʔ* comes from the fusion of an original 2nd person prefix #*tV-* with a “focalizer” *leʔ* (originally a copular) which can occur more than once in a clause and both within and outside the verbal construction, and that the #*tl* > #*t*, the result being a form *-teʔ*, which can occur, like *-leʔ*, more than once in a clause and both within and outside the verb.’

However in present-day Chepang *-teʔ* is not a focalizer /emphatic, as can be seen from its occurrence on every clausal constituent (as in example 2, second clause)⁹, since one can hardly have all but one constituent focussed on! And the two, (*-teʔ* and *-leʔ*) can occur together (something noted by Jacques, but regarded by him as a later development).

Also *leʔ*, can occur in any 1>2 situation as mentioned in 3 above, but *-teʔ* cannot¹⁰.

- (9) *naŋ-kajʔ ŋa-ʔi*
 You-GOL I-A
bəjʔ-leʔ-neʔ-naŋ
 give-EMP-NPST-2
ŋa-koʔ dʒan-paj
 I -POSS body-DIF

⁹ Though if there is only a single occurrence of *-teʔ* it is normally placed with the most significant constituent of the clause, something indicated in Caughley (1982, p.89) and on which Jacques based his statement of *-teʔ* having a focalizing function (2012, p.103)

¹⁰ It might be suggested that *-teʔ* did originally occur in 1>2 situations, but, similar to Jacques argument, fused with the following tense forms to give the unexpected *neʔ/ceʔ* forms (not *-naʔ*, *ʃaʔ* as elsewhere). But *-teʔ* never occurs in other 1>2 expressions, where there is no tense, such as the tenseless negative or nominative forms. The emphatics *-leʔ* and *-dʒeʔ* do occur before the regular tense forms.

‘I will give it to you, my body.’ Cht335

On the other hand *-teʔ* can occur many times in the one clause and can be reduplicated in the verb but *-leʔ*, can occur only two times (rarely three) and is never reduplicated like *-teʔ*. Occasionally a single verb may have more than one instance of an emphatic, but these are always enclitic to different affixes. Since then, *-teʔ* can occur in places where *-leʔ*, cannot, but which are more appropriate to participant reference, it is a complex argument to suggest the *-teʔ* originated from a pronominal prefix that fused with a copular which does not have multiple (above two or three times) or reduplicated occurrence but then took on again features that are more typically those of a pronoun, such as reduplication for plurality of a participant.

Any focusing function it has now (cf. Jacques, 2012, p.103) is very much a secondary one. If it occurs only once then it is placed enclitic to a significant element of the clause, and as shown, this is not necessarily the verb. Often it is a constituent conveying new information. The fact that it can occur on every constituent shows that focus is a secondary concern.

Jacques, noting the fact that *-teʔ* does not occur in imperatives, says that this is not an argument against its pronoun origins (2012, p.104) (presumably because other languages often do not include 2nd person in imperatives?), but its absence in imperatives (where 2nd person number suffixes do occur), along with its absence in 1>2 situations does argue against such origins. An even stronger argument against its pronominal nature is that *teʔ* can occur where pronouns cannot, as in example (5).

4. Original 2nd person suffix

Taking the simpler hypothesis, that *-teʔ* never was a 2nd person pronoun (though it is becoming more like one today) what was the original 2nd person suffix?

In my published thesis (Caughley 1982, p.168) I suggested that the original form was *nə* and that the present day free pronoun *naŋ* was originally an inclusive 2+1 form *nə + ŋə*, with the final vowel being lost and the nucleus lowering and

fronting to give *naŋ*. At a stage in the development of the Chepang verb, when pronouns were repeated after the verb this 2nd person post verbal particle would be *na* (A being a mid to low, central to front unrounded vowel). But this would conflict with the non-past, also *na* and therefore lead to the pronoun being replaced by *teʔ*.

In support of this, *na* is the 2nd person free pronoun in other Tibeto-Burman languages, such as Dhimal and Nung (Benedict 1972, p.93) And it also can account for the anomalous Chepang 1-2 verb affixation as in:

- (10) *ŋa-ʔi bəjʔ-ʃeʔ-na-ŋ*
I-A give-IFU-2-1
'I will give you (it).'

Here *na* cannot be the non-past suffix, since the non-past never elsewhere occurs along with an indefinite future in Chepang.

Also in:

- (11) *ŋa-ʔi bəjʔ-na-ŋ-lə*
I-A give-2-1-NEG
'I did not/will not give you it.'

Where again *na* cannot be a non-past tense affix¹¹ since negative verbs do not have tense in this language.

5. Origins of *-teʔ*

So assuming that *-teʔ* never was a 2nd person pronoun what was it originally? In my thesis (Caughley, 1982, p.85) I proposed that *-teʔ* indicated "a flow of information contrary to what is expected since it occurs where the speaker is

telling the hearer something about him/herself"¹². In a more recent paper (Caughley, 2009) I noted that: "It indicates that the hearer is involved in the situation described by the information" and "It is clear that *-teʔ* also has some sort of attention-getting function because its phonetic shape, a sharp staccato sound, does draw attention to the words"

If the main function of *-teʔ* is, as suggested above, to draw the hearer's attention to the fact that he/she is involved in the situation being spoken about, then this gives rise to the possibility that *-teʔ* originated as a warning signal (somewhat like the English "Hey!" in "Hey! Watch out!"). Warnings are important for those hunting or gathering on the steep jungle-covered hillsides. In particular it would be important in childhood, when a child would spend much of its time in the company of an older person (parent, older sibling) and a good deal of this would be accompanying the older person on foraging expeditions to the forest, often for much of the day. This would also be a time when the child was learning its parents' language as well as jungle lore. This time would, of course, involve many warnings especially when on the steep, jungle covered hillsides. And *-teʔ* is admirably suited to be a warning signal, because of its sharp sound, as noted earlier, and it may be repeated in a single sentence, emphasising the warning. This is in marked contrast to the free pronoun which has the phonetic form *nVŋ*, beginning and ending with nasals and which occurs only once in a sentence.

Such an origin for *-teʔ* is much more likely than that proposed by Pons (2021 p.256), as a politely respectful way of avoiding the use of *naŋ*¹³. Incidentally the common presence

¹¹ Pons (2021) however does analyse it as a non-past suffix, overlooking the contrary evidence outlined here in order to deal with an inconsistency in the positive past 1>2 form of the verb:

ŋa-ʔi bəyʔ-neʔ-ʔa-laŋ
I-Ag give -1>2-PST-1
'I gave it to you.'

This is, however, evidently a form created by Chepang speakers in mistaken analogy with the more common non-1>2 situations which have, for past:

ŋa-ʔi bəyʔ-ʔala-ŋ
I-A give-PST-1
'I gave it (to someone).'

¹² In Caughley (1982, p.85) *-teʔ* was proposed as one of a set of three, which were called "Information flow affixes", two of which, *-taŋʔ* and *-paŋ*, were clearly evidential in nature, the first a reportative, the second what has been termed "egophoric", indicating information emanating from the speaker.

¹³ Pons (2021) suggests that #*tV*- constructions (the proto-form of *-teʔ*) "were used at the PTH (Proto Trans-Himalayan) level to indirectly address 2nd Person" and that this "was linked with politeness and distanciation". Nothing could have been further from the case when I encountered Chepang society in the mid-20th century, though this may be changing now,

together of an older person and a child also accounts for the existence of dual number in Chepang and other Tibeto-Burman languages.

It is possible then, that *-teʔ* originated as a warning indicator for Chepang, and other languages, especially for warning of imminent danger or consequences. From this it progressed from a simple warning to scolding and later to indicate information concerning the hearer. Situations where the speaker is acting on the hearer (1>2 situation) do not normally require immediate action from the latter and this is in fact, where *-teʔ* does not occur.

6. Innovation or retention ?

Since other varieties of Chepang, and Bhujel and Rumlingya do not use *-teʔ* with anything like the frequency with which it is found in west Makwanpur, it is reasonable to suggest that what is described above may be an innovation in the western area. However the Chepang of this region is grammatically conservative in other ways, such as the retention of a wider set of grammatical auxiliaries (*-khəyʔ* incipient, *-kheʔ* inchoative, *-jhuŋ* repetitive) that are rarer or non-existent elsewhere. It also has a much freer verb structure, including, the double pronominalisation noted in Caughley (1982a, p.23) which could indicate an earlier stage of the language where there was a much freer association of clausal elements with the verb.

Phonemically this area retains the glottal stop, which also is less common elsewhere. Again it could be argued that in all these areas it has innovated. But it is significant that west Makwanpur is an area that has had considerably less contact with speakers of Nepali and other languages. and all these grammatical differences are ones that would be very different from the grammar of that language. And although this does not affect the linguistic argument it is noteworthy and culturally significant that it is an area that retains a greater variety of hunting and gathering skills than other areas, including the fact that it is the last area that still hunted with the bow and arrow - items known throughout

with much increased contact with a very different outside society.

the area but not usually used¹⁴. Also people in that area used a type of whistled speech for hunting (Caughley, 1976). Again, in religion the shamanism practised there is evidently less influenced by Nepali than that, for instance, described by Diana Riboli (2000).

Abbreviations

1>2	1 st Person to 2 nd Person
1E	1 st Person exclusive
1st	1 st Person
2>1	2 nd Person to 1 st Person
2DU	2 nd Person dual
2 nd	2 nd Person
2ry	Secondary level verb
3ry	Tertiary level verb
AF	Agent focus
A	Agent
CIF	Contrary Information flow
DIF	Direct Information flow
EMP	Emphatic
EQ	Equative
GF	Goal focus
GOA	Goal
IFU	Indefinite future
IIF	Indirect Information flow
Int	Interrogative
NEG	Negative
NP	non-Past
Pl	Plural
PST	Past

A fuller explanation of these gloss abbreviations can be found in Caughley (1982).

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¹⁴ In some instances in the north and west of the Chepang-Bhujel area the word for "arrow" *laʔ* was not by itself known, only the combination *laʔluŋʔ* 'bow and arrow'.

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History of article

Received: June 27, 2024
 Revised: October 10, 2024
 Accepted: 05 November, 2024