Hierarchical Person Marking in the Rawang Language

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Abstract: Rawang (Rvwàng) is a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in the far north of Myanmar (Burma), and is closely related to the Dulong language spoken in China. Rawang manifests a kind of hierarchical person marking on the predicate which marks first person primarily (in several different ways—suffixes, change of final consonant, vowel length—and up to five times within one verb complex), and second person indirectly with a sort of marking similar to the inverse marking found in some North American languages: it appears when there is a first person participant, but that referent is not the actor, and when the second person is a participant. This system is quite different from those that reflect semantic role (e.g. Qiang) or grammatical relations (e.g. English).

Keywords: Rawang, Tibeto-Burman, person marking, agreement, inverse, Sino-Tibetan

1. Introduction

Within the Tibeto-Burman language family, a number of languages have person marking on the verb. There are generally two types of system found, semantic role based, e.g. Qiang, which has actor and non-actor marking (see LaPolla 2003b, LaPolla 2003c), and person-based, e.g. Tangut (see LaPolla 1992, 2003a). The Rawang (Rvwàng) language is a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in the far north of Myanmar (Burma), and is closely related to the Dulong language spoken in China. Rawang has a system of the latter type, with the addition of marking that functions in a way similar to inverse marking in some North American languages and within Tibeto-Burman in rGyalrong (Nagano 1984; Ebert 1987, 1990, Sun 2002, 2003), and in the Kiranti languages Khaling and Dumi (van Driem 1988, 1990, 1993; see LaPolla 2000, 2003a on the relationship of Rawang to these languages).

2. Intransitive paradigm

With intransitive verbs, if the verb has an open final, when the single direct argument of the verb is first person (the speaker), then the verb takes the suffix *-ng* (historically derived from the free pronoun *ngà)* in the singular, *-shì* in the dual, and *-ì* in the plural; when it is second person (the addressee) the prefix *è-* is added to the verb in all numbers and the suffix *-shì* is added to show dual number or *-nòng* to show plural number; no affixes are added for third person in any number (here only the non-past declarative (marked by *-ē*) verb form is given; the examples are based on *tòē* 'short' and the morphemes are separated by hyphens):[1]

(1)	1sg	*tò-**ng**-ē*	'I am short'
	1dl	*tò-**shì**-ē*	'We(dl) are short'
	1pl	*tò-**ì**-ē*	'We(pl) are short'
	2sg	*è-tò-ē*	'You(sg) are short'
	2dl	*è-tò-shì-ē*	'You(dl) are short'
	2pl	*è-tò-**nòng**-ē*	'You(pl) are short'
	3sg/dl/pl	*tò-ē*	'She/he/they are short'

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[1] I have picked this particular verb to highlight the affixes. With some other verbs there are tone and vowel differences in the different persons as well.

This is the system for open finals and those that end in *-q* (ʔ) in the present tense.[2] With the other finals *(-p, -t, -k, -m, -n, -ng, -l, -r)* the system is basically the same, but the first person singular is not marked by *-ng* on the verb, though this suffix may appear on an auxiliary verb or particle used with the verb if that auxiliary or particle has an open final, as in (2).[3]

(2) *È! Mv-ràé, lāvkuprānglé!*   (Just Chatting, p. 17)
    é   mv-rà-é   lv-vkup-rā-**ng**-lé
    EXCL   NEG-need-EXCL   may-stumble-DIR-**1sg**-EXCL
    'Eh! Never mind, I may stumble!'

In the past tense, the person markers generally affix to one of the many directional, aspectual, or past tense marking particles that follow the verb, though the suffix *-ng* can still appear on the verb. First person has the suffix *-à* in all numbers, though in the dual and plural *-à* merges with the number marker *-shì*, forming *-shà;* second person has the same prefix as in present tense, but in the singular takes the intransitive past suffix *-ì*, in the dual and plural takes *-shà;* in the third person all numbers take the intransitive past suffix *-ì*. (In (3) the verb takes the remote past marker *yàng*.[4])

(3) 1sg   *tò̀-**ng**-yv̀ng-**à***   'I was short (years ago)'
    1dl   *tò̀-yv̀ng-**shà***   'We(dl) were short'
    1pl   *tò̀-yv̀ng-**shà***   'We(pl) were short'
    2sg   ***è**-tò̀-yàng-**ì***   'You(sg) were short'
    2dl   ***è**-tò̀-yv̀ng-**shà***   'You(dl) were short'
    2pl   ***è**-tò̀-yv̀ng-**shà***   'You(pl) were short'
    3sg/dl/pl *tò̀-yàng-**ì***   'She/he/they were short'

In (4) is an elicited example where the first person is marked three times in one predicate: the 1sg marker *-ng* appears twice in the predicate (once on the verb, and once on the aspect marker), and the past tense marker used also marks a first person participant.

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[2] In the case of *-q,* the *-ng* suffix causes the *-q* to become *-k,* but often does not appear in the clause. Also, if the vowel is *-i-,* it changes to *-ø-,* as in (i):

(i) *pvngwàcé mvrìng dv́ngtē nō **vrøk** bóngà.*   (Interview, p. 39)
    pvngwà-cé   mvrìng   dv́ngtē   nō   **vriq-ng**   bó-ng-à
    five-ten   village   about   TOP   walk-1sg   PFV-1sg-1/2PAST
    'about fifty villages I went around.'

[3] In the case of the benefactive suffix *-ā,* the form *ng* will attach both before and after the benefactive marker, forming its own syllable: *ngāng,* as in (15) below. This brings up the question of whether *ng* is in fact a suffix or something else. From the fact that *-ng* does not appear on verbs that end in *-k,* but does appear on verbs that end in glottal stop (which historically derives from **-k,* and relatively recently), and from comparative evidence from other related languages with this suffix, the *-ng* form probably was orginally applied to all of the roots at one time.

[4] The vowel of the particle *yàng* appears as *-a-* when the particle has no following marker and when it is followed by *-ì*. It is *-v-* elsewhere.

(4)   *Ngà dòng bóngà.*
      *ngà   dī-**ng**   bó-**ng**-**à***
      1sg   go-**1sg**   PFV-**1sg**-**1/2PAST**
      'I went.'

3. Transitive paradigm

Just looking at the intransitive forms, we cannot be sure what is being marked, whether it is just person or some sort of grammatical relation. Let us now look at the transitive paradigm, to see what is being marked. In (5) we have the forms for first and second person singular actors (the symbol ">" means 'acts on'; in this case I am using the verb 'hit/kill' to exemplify the forms, but the pattern is the same for all transitive verbs; the full paradigm is quite long, so here I am just giving the forms for first and second person singular actor non-past to show the pattern):[5]

(5)   1sg > 2sg   *shvtn-ē*   'I kill/hit you(sg)'
       1sg > 2dl   *shvt-shì-ē*   'I kill/hit you(dl)'
       1sg > 2pl   *sha:tn-ì-ē*   'I kill/hit you(pl)'
       1sg > 3sg/dl/pl *shvtn-ò-ē*   'I kill/hit him/her/them'
       2sg > 1sg   *è-shvtn-à-ē*   'You(sg) kill/hit me'
       2sg > 1dl   *è-shvt-shà-ē* 'You(sg) kill/hit us(dl)'
       2sg > 1pl   *è-shvt-shà-ē* 'You(sg) kill/hit us(pl)'
       2sg > 3sg/dl/pl *è-sha:tn-ò-ē* 'You(sg) kill/hit him/her/them'

Here we have the same dual marker as in the intransitive paradigm, but it shows up in the 1sg > 2dl form; a form that is the same as the first person plural marker in the intransitive paradigm, but showing up in the 1sg > 2pl form; the form that marks first person dual and plural past in the intransitive paradigm, but showing up in the 2sg > 1dl and 2sg > 1pl forms; plus we have two new forms: *-à,* in the 2sg > 1sg form, and *-ò,* in the 1sg > 3sg/dl/pl and 2sg > 3sg/dl/pl forms. We also have the same prefix in the forms with the second person actor as we saw in second person intransitive forms. Based only on this, we might say this prefix is marking second person actor, *-ò* is marking third person undergoer, *-à* is marking first person singular undergoer, and *-shà* is marking first person dual and plural undergoer. But let's now look at the forms where third person singular is the actor:

(6)   3sg > 1sg   *è-shvtn-ē*   'S/he kill/hit me'
       3sg > 1dl   *è-shvt-shì-ē*   'S/he kill/hit us(dl)'
       3sg > 1pl   *è-sha:tn-ì-ē*   'S/he kill/hit us(pl)'
       3sg > 2sg   *è-shvtn-ē*   'S/he kill/hit you'
       3sg > 2dl   *è-shvt-shì-ē*   'S/he kill/hit you(dl)'
       3sg > 2pl   *è-shvt-nòng-ē* 'S/he kill/hit you(pl)'
       3sg > 3sg/dl/pl *sha:tn-ò-ē*   'S/he kill/hit him/her/them'

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[5] An epenthetic nasal appears after a stop-final verb form when it is followed by a vocalic suffix. The vowel of the verb becomes long in some cases due to the addition of particular affixes.

In these forms we find the same suffixes as in the intransitive paradigm, plus -*ò* for third person undergoer (only in the present tense), but in the case of the forms involving first and second person, the suffixes do not reflect the actor, but the undergoer, and the *è-* prefix appears before both first and second person undergoer forms. We can see then that the *è-* prefix is not marking second person, and also see that the suffixes are mainly marking person: if there is a first person participant mentioned in the clause (or understood as a participant from context), the person marking on the verb will reflect that referent, regardless of the semantic or grammatical role of that referent. If second person is mentioned in a clause without a first person participant, then there is marking of the number of second person in the case of dual and plural, and also the *è-* prefix. If second person is also mentioned in a clause with first person, then the pattern of marking varies with the situation: in the case of 1sg > 2sg we get 1sg marking, in the case of 1sg > 2dl we get dual marking, in 1sg > 2pl we get 1pl marking, which seems to include the actor and undergoer together. In the case of 2sg > 1sg/dl/pl all the forms have the suffix -*à,* with -*shì* added in the case of dual and plural, as in the past tense intransitive forms, plus the prefix *è-*. The pattern of the suffixes then is based largely on a person hierarchy, with first and second person taking precedence over third person, but when the situation includes both first and second person, the marking reflects either the number of the argument with the higher number (dual or plural as opposed to singular) or both arguments added together.[6]

A note on linguistic analysis: I have seen descriptions of such hierarchical systems (and they are not that rare within the Tibeto-Burman family) where the only data presented were those with a third person actor. This made it look like the undergoer of the clause was consistently marked, and marked the same as the single argument of the intransitive clause, and so the conclusion was that this is an ergative system. But this is incorrect. This sort of system is not ergative, as the marking is not consistently of the undergoer. It is a hierarchical system, as the marking reflects a hierarchy based on person.

It can be seen that second person is not actually marked in this system; just the number of second person arguments is marked. What then is the nature of the *è-* prefix? If the first person referent is not the A argument, then the verb takes the prefix *è-,* which I call the "non-first person actor" marker (N.1). A more exact statement of the condition for the use of this prefix is that it is used whenever there is a speech act participant mentioned in the clause, but the speaker is not the actor role argument. That is, it appears when there is a first person undergoer or dative argument, and when there is a second person actor, undergoer, or dative argument but no first person actor argument.[7]

This prefix has two allomorphs: *è-* and *nà-*. The unmarked form is *è-,* but if it appears on a verb that also takes the intransitivizing prefix *v-,* or if the first syllable of the verb is *v-* (e.g. *vmup* 'cheat'), then the two combine to form *nà-,* as in (7). If it appears with the causative prefix *(shv- ~ dv-),* then the two combine to form *shè- ~ dè-,* as in (8).

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[6] See Heath 1991, 1998 on the special forms for situations involving both first and second person arguments in North American languages.

[7] Van Driem (1988, 1990, 1993) calls the vocalic prefix that occurs in Khaling and Dumi with roughly the same distribution as Rawang *è-* the 'marked scenario' prefix.

(7) *Nà **nà** tvlē.*
    nà   ***è-v**-tvl-ē*
    2sg **N.1-INTR**-roll-N.PAST
    'You are rolling.'

(8) *(à:ng-í ngà-sv̀ng) **dè** zàngē.*
    àng-í   *ngà-sv̀ng*   ***dv-è**-zà-ng-ē*
    3sg-AGT 1sg-LOC   **CAUS-N.1-**be.ill-1sg-N.PAST
    'He caused me to be sick.'

In many cases it is only this prefix that determines the direction of the action (who is acting on whom), given that the third person is not always marked and the first person always is, regardless of the direction of action. Compare the (a) and (b) sentences in (9)-(12) below:

(9) a. *Rîîē.*   b. *Èrîîē.*
       rí-ì-ē   *è-rí-ì-ē*
       carry-1pl-N.PAST   N.1-carry-1pl-N.PAST
       'We carry them.'   'They carry us.'

(10) a. *Rőng dv́rà.*   b. *Èrőng dv́rà.*
       rí-ng   *dv́r-à*   *è-rí-ng*   *dv́r-à*
       carry-1sg TMhrs-TR.PAST   N.1-carry-1sg TMhrs-TR.PAST
       'I carried him.'   'He carried me.'

(11) a. *(Nōngmaqí àngmaqsv̀ng) dv́ngké bőshà.*
       nōngmaq-í *àngmaq-sv̀ng* *dv́ng-ké*   *bő-shà*
       1pl-AGT   3pl-LOC   finish-eat   PFV-1plpast
       'We defeated them.'

    b. *(Àngmaqí nōngmaq sv̀ng) èdv́ngké bőshà.*
       Àngmaq-í *nōngmaq-sv̀ng* *è-dv́ng-ké*   *bő-shà*
       3pl-AGT   1pl-LOC   N.1-finish-eat   PFV-1plpast
       'They defeated us.'

(12) a. *(Ngàí àngsv̀ng) shőng rőngāng bőngà.*
       ngà-í   *àng-sv̀ng* *shőng*   *rí-ng-ā-ng*   *bő-ng-à*
       1sg-AGT 3sg-LOC   wood   carry-1sg-BEN-1sg PFV-1sg-TR.PAST
       'I carried wood for him.'

    b. *(À:ngí ngàsv̀ng) shőng èrőngāng bőngà*
       àng-í   *ngà-sv̀ng* *shőng*   *è-rí-ng-ā-ng*   *bő-ng-à*
       3sg-AGT 1sg-LOC   wood   N.1-carry-1sg-BEN-1sg PFV-1sg-TR.PAST
       'He carried wood for me.'

In each of these sets the form of the verb phrase is exactly the same in the (a) and (b) examples except for the use of the non-first person actor marker in the (b) examples. This

does not work this way for all verbs and person/number combinations, but in cases like those presented in (9)-(12), as the noun phrases are optional and most often left out all together, this marker carries a heavy functional load in constraining the interpretation of the direction of action.

This prefix is then a type of **inverse** marking, that is, marking that marks the situation as one in which the direction of action is the inverse of the usual type of situation. This is usually determined by a person hierarchy in the languages that have it. This kind of marking is found in some North American languages and in some other Tibeto-Burman languages, such as rGyalrong and some Kiranti languages. In Caodeng rGyalrong (Tibeto-Burman; northern Sichuan; Sun 2002, 2003), scenarios where the actor is lower on the hierarchy (1 > 2 > 3) than the undergoer take the inverse marker -*o* (often fused with the preceding orientational/aspectual prefix, as in example (13): *tho*- < *thɐ-o).

(13)   kəkoʔ-ni-kə   ɐɹiʔ   (Sun 2003)
       3-dl-ERG   1sg
       tho-sə-wɛʔ-aŋ-ⁿdzə   ŋoʔ
       PFV:downstream:INVERSE-CAUS-come:PAST-1sg-3dl be
       'It was the two of them who made me come downstream.'

Kutenai is a language of south-eastern British Columbia, Canada which marks the representations of third person referents as obviative or proximate, and within a particular stretch of discourse that involves more than one third person referent, one of those referents will be assigned more topical status than the others, and so will be marked as proximate. As generally only one participant can be marked as proximate, all other participants will be marked as obviative, as in (14) (Dryer 1992:157-8):

(14) ʔat   qak-iɬ-ni   ka·kin-**s**
      habit   say-TRANSITIVE-INDICATIVE   wolf-**OBV**
      'He$_i$ [prox] would tell Wolf$_j$ [obv]'
      k-ʔumiȼ-ik-i   ɬan'-[ʔ]is   k-qa-taɬ   ɬaxam
      SUBOR-break-REFL-INDICATIVE   moccasins-3GEN   SUBOR-NEG-can   arrive
      'that he$_i$ [prox] wore out his$_i$ [prox] moccasins [(obv)], that he$_i$ [prox] couldn't make it there.'
      ɬaʔak'ɬak-**s**   ʔat   qa·nmiɬ   hamat-ikȼ-**aps**-i   ɬan'-**s**
      different-**OBV** habit quickly   give-DAT-**INVERSE**-INDICATIVE moccasin-**OBV**
      'He$_j$ [obv] would quickly hand$_{INVERSE}$ him$_i$ [prox] different moccasins [obv].'

In this stretch of discourse, from a story 'Chickadee, Frog, and Wolf,' Chickadee is the more topical participant, and assigned proximate status. Wolf is assigned obviate status. There is a verbal direct vs. indirect contrast that interacts with the proximate/obviate contrast, in that when the proximate referent is the actor of the clause, the verb will be marked as direct (i.e. it will be unmarked), but when an obviate referent appears as actor of the clause, as in the third line in this example, the verb is marked with the inverse marker -*aps*.

4. Conclusion

Returning to the Rawang system, we can see that this system also works according to a person hierarchy, not according to semanitc role or grammatical relation, and in this

hierarchy, clearly first person is dominant (cf. Silverstein 1976, 1981). Not only is first person the most commonly marked argument, it can often be marked several times within the same clause. And not only can the suffix *-ng* appear several times within one verb complex, first person can also be secondarily marked by the change of root-final *-q* [-ʔ] to *-k,* as in *yok* (< *yuq)* in (15), and by short vowels rather than long vowels in some of the verbs and direction markers, as with *vt* (< *at)* in (15). Because of this, first person may be marked up to five times in one predicate, as in (15):

(15) *Tì tiqgwìn èyok ngāng ngvtnà.*
    tì   tiq-gwìn   è-**yuq**   **ng**-ā-**ng**   **ng**-**v**t-à
    water one-cup   N.1-scoop 1sg-BEN-1sg   1sg-DIR+1sg-TR.PAST
    'Bring (scoop) me a cup of water.'

When we describe Tibeto-Burman languages, then, we need to be sensitive to the types of systems we might find, and not assume all marking is nominative or ergative.

Abbreviations Used

1, 2, 3	first, second, third person	N.PAST	non-past declarative marker
1/2PAST	first and second person past tense marker	NEG	negative prefix
AGT	agentive marker	OBV	obviative
BEN	benefactive suffix	PFV	perfective marker
CAUS	causitivizing prefix	pl	plural
DIR	direction marking adverb	PROX	proximate
dl	dual	REFL	reflexive marker
ERG	ergative marker	sg	singular
EXCL	exclamative particle	SUBOR	subordinator
GEN	genitive	TMhrs	marker of recent past (within a few hours)
INTR	intrasitivizing prefix	TOP	topic marking particle
LOC	locative (includes allative, dative)	TR.PAST	transitive past tense marker
N.1	non-first person actor when there is a speech act participant in the clause	N.PAST	non-past declarative marker

Note on transcription: The Rawang orthography is used in this paper. In this system, which is based on the Mvtwang variety of Rawang, most letters represent the standard pronunciations of American English, except that *i* = [i], *v* = [ə], *a* = [ɑ], *ø* = [ɯ], *q* = [ʔ], and *c* = [s] or [ts] (free variation; historically [ts]). Tones are marked with accent marks and a macron (using the letter *a* as a base): high tone: *á,* mid tone: *ā,* low tone: *à.* All syllables that end in a stop consonant *(-p, -t, -q, -k)* are in the high tone, so do not take a tone mark. Open syllables without a tone mark are unstressed. A colon marks non-basic long vowels. Four lines are used in the examples because there are many morphophonological changes that obscure the morpheme boundaries.

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日旺语的人称标志

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日旺语是缅甸北部的一种藏缅语族语言，跟中国云南省西北部的独龙语有密切关系。日旺语的谓语呈现一种认同等第人称标志系统。系统所标记的主要是第一人称，而且有几种标记方法：后缀、辅音韵尾交替、长短元音等。而且都可以同时出现在同一个谓语。此外有一种类似北美印第安人语言"反方向"标志的前缀。该前缀在两种情况下出现：说话者（第一人称）是所提到的事情的参与者，可是说话者不是所提到的事情的施事者；听话者（第二人称）是所提到的事情的参与者。这种系统跟标记语义角色的人称系统（如羌语）和标记语法关系的系统（如英语）大不一样。