

## A Note on Perfect Aspect in Newari

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### 1 Introduction

In Comrie (1976), ‘perfect’ aspect is discussed in detail mainly with examples from English. Comrie distinguishes the term ‘perfect’ from the other similar term ‘perfective’, which is often confused in grammars of English. According to Comrie, perfective presents a situation in its totality, and contrasts with the ‘imperfective’ aspect, which in turn looks at a situation from inside. On the other hand, ‘perfect’ is rather different from these two dichotomies in capturing a situation; it relates two time-points,” on the one hand the time of the state resulting from a prior situation, and on the other the time of that prior situation (*ibid.* p. 52).”

Comrie argues that there are four types of perfect: perfect of result, experiential perfect, perfect of persistent situation, and perfect of recent past. Here are some examples of the four types of perfect in English according to Comrie (1976):

- (1) a. *John has gone to America.*  
b. *Bill has been to America.*  
c. *I've shopped there for three years.*  
d. *I have recently learned that the match is to be postponed.*

(1a) expresses perfect of result, implying that as a result of John's going to America, he is not here. (1b) expresses Bill's experience of going to America. (1c), as the time adverbial shows, expresses the first person subject's persistent action throughout the three years. (1d) expresses a recent past event.

In Newari, an auxiliary verb *dhune* seems to be used

to express some of the above perfect meanings.<sup>1)</sup>

This paper is a brief descriptive study of the perfect aspect in Newari, Tibeto-Burman language spoken in and around Kathmandu Valley, Nepal.<sup>2,3)</sup> In the next section, we briefly look at the tense/aspect system in Newari. In Section 3, we will discuss various types of perfect in conjunction with the aspectual auxiliary verbs *dhune* and *taye*.

### 2 Verb conjugation and tense / aspect in Newari

Newari verbs show two dichotomies of conjugation with respect to subject and tense/aspect. The first dichotomy is based on the evidentiality status of the subject. If the subject is evidential, and the event depicted by the verb is controllable by the subject, the verb appears in what is called the ‘conjunct’ form. Otherwise, what is called the ‘disjunct’ form is used (Malla, 1985). As a basic rule of thumb, a first person subject in an controllable event takes the conjunct form of a verb, whereas a third person subject takes the disjunct form of a verb.

- (2) a. *jī:*                    *khicā-yāta dāyā.*  
1sg.ERG    dog-DAT    hit.PC  
‘I hit a dog.’  
b. *wā:*                    *khicā-yāta dāla.*  
3sg.ERG    dog-DAT    hit.PD  
‘I hit a dog.’

However, if it is the case that the subject agent does not know what he did, and that he was informed of what he did by someone else, the verb can be in disjunct form:

- (3) *jī:*                    *khicā-yāta dāla khani:sā.*  
1sg.ERG dog-DAT    hit.PD likely

‘I seem to have hit a dog.’

The second dichotomy of verb conjugation in Newari has to do with tense. In the literature, such as Malla (1985), Joshi (1992), among others, the tense distinction is made between past and non-past. The past form of the verb expresses an event in the past, while the non-past form expresses an event in the future. The non-past form also expresses a habitual event in the past or present.<sup>4)</sup>

(4) a. *ji Asan-e wanā.*

1sg.ABS Asan-LOC go.PC

‘I went to Asan.’

b. *Rām isku:l-e basā: wana.*

Ram.ABS school-LOC bus-INST go.PD

‘Ram went to school by bus.’

(5) a. *ji Asan-e wanā waye.*

1sg.ABS Asan-LOC go.PC come.FC

‘I’m going to go to Asan and come back.’

b. *Rām isku:l-e basā: wani:.*

Ram.ABS school-LOC bus-INST go.FD

‘Ram’s going to go to school by bus./Ram goes to school by bus.’

In reality, however, a situation other than the habitual can be expressed by a combination of verb plus aspectual auxiliary:<sup>5)</sup>

(6) *wā: ā: jā thuyā cwana.*

3sg.ERG now rice.ABS cook.PC stay.PD

‘He is steaming the rice now.’

Even though the auxiliary verb is in a past form, the sentence can be interpreted either as an on-going event in the past or present, provided there is no time adverb.

In the next section, we will discuss the usages of the aspectual auxiliary verb *dhune*.

### 3 Perfect usages of *dhune*

The auxiliary verb *dhune* usually functions to express the completion of a situation. The alleged lexical meaning is ‘to be finished’, although in this sense *dhune* is never used as a main verb; another lexical verb *sidhaye* is used.<sup>6)</sup>

The conjugation of the auxiliary verb is irregular in comparison with other verbs. The conjunct form is *dhuna* while the disjunct form is a kind of causativized form, *dhū:kala*.<sup>7)</sup>

The main verb preceding the auxiliary verb appears in the Non-Past Conjunct form.<sup>8)</sup>

(7) a. *ji wane dhuna.*

1sg.ABS go.NPC finish.PC

‘I have been there.’

b. *wa wane dhū:kala.*

3sg.ABS go.NPC finish.PD

‘She has been there.’

The relevant aspectual meanings that the auxiliary verb *dhune* expresses are the perfect of result and the experiential perfect. I will illustrate these functions in the following subsections, including the completion of event.

#### 3.1 Completion of event

As a basic usage, *dhune* is used to focus on completion of the event depicted by the main verb. When marked in the simple past, the event is construed as occurring in a certain past. On the other hand, when marked with *dhune*, the final stage of the event is focused.

(8) a. *jī: jyā yānā.*

1sg.ERG work.ABS do.PC

‘I did my job.’

b. *jī: jyā yāe dhuna.*

1sg.ERG work.ABS do.NPC finish.PC

‘I’ve done my job.’

Although *dhune* is used to emphasize the completion of a situation, unlike English, it can occur with past-time adverbials, and in turn cannot express the recent past. Now consider the following examples with adverbs:

(9) a. *Rām nhāca:he ma:ma:*

Ram.ERG already dumplings.ABS

*nae dhū:kala.*

eat.NPC finish.PD

‘Ram has already eaten his dumplings.’

b. \**Rām nakatini ma:ma:*

Ram.ERG just now dumplings.ABS

*nae dhū:kala.*

eat.NPC finish.PD

‘Ram has just now eaten his dumplings.’

c. *Rām mhiga: ma:ma:*

Ram.ERG yesterday dumplings.ABS

*nae dhū:kala.*

eat.NPC finish.PD

‘Ram ate his dumplings yesterday.’

The time adverbial which expresses the recent past, *nakatini* ‘just now’, cannot appear with *dhune*, although the English Perfect can take such an adverb. The completion of a situation expressed by *dhune* must be in the more remote past.

Furthermore, the fact that it can take a specific past-time adverbial such as *mhiga*: ‘yesterday’ shows that the auxiliary verb is not fully grammaticalized and still holds the lexical meaning ‘to finish.’

When used with a past-time adverb, a verb plus *dhune* contrasts with the simple past in that the former presupposes a high degree of certainty of the establishment of the event depicted by the main verb. This point is typically found in a dialogue. Let us consider the following example:

(10) A: *Rām mhiga: wala lā?*

Ram.ABS yesterday come.PD Q

‘Did Ram come yesterday?’

B: *wae dhū:kala.*

come.NPC finish.PD

‘He did come.’

B’: *wala.*

come.PD

He came.’

If speaker B knows that A is asking with certainty whether Ram did come yesterday, he answers saying *wae dhū:kala*; on the other hand, if speaker B knows that A is simply asking whether Ram came yesterday or not, he

answers in the simple past.

The difference also comes from the function of *dhune* to emphasize completion of the event: in the latter scenario, speaker A is simply asking if the event occurred whereas in the former speaker A is sure that Ram came and is confirming it.

### 3.2 Perfect of result

As discussed above, the difference between a sentence with the auxiliary verb *dhune* and one without is that the former focuses on the completion of an event while the latter does not have such a connotation. When there is no past-time adverb in the sentence, *dhune* is construed as expressing perfect of result pragmatically. Look at the following examples:

(11) a. *Rām wala.*

Ram.ABS come.PD

‘Ram came.’

b. *Rām wae dhū:kala*

Ram.ABS come.NPC finish.PD

‘Ram has come.’

(11a) simply states a single past event in which Ram came to the speaker’s place, regardless of whether he is still there at the moment of utterance. On the other hand, (11b) states that Ram came to the speaker’s place some time ago, and is still there. This is similar to the perfect of result in English in that it correlates two time-points, stating the current state by referring to the prior situation.

Below are more examples:

(12) a. *Rām nhāca: he lihā-wane dhū:kala.*

Ram already EMPH back-go.NPC finish.PD

‘Ram has already gone back home.’

b. *ji eyarport-e thyā: -bale hawāi jahāj*

1sg.ABS airport-LOC arrive.ST-when airplane

*bwaye dhū:kala.*

fly.NPC finish.PD

‘When I arrived at the airport, the airplane had gone.’

In (12a), Ram’s going back home occurred prior to the moment of speech, and implies that Ram is not there anymore. In the same manner, (12b) expresses the fact that the speaker arrived at the airport after the airplane had already flown away, implying that he was unable to catch it.

In the next example—since the current state of motherhood is emphasized—*dhune* is used to present a past situation relevant to the moment of speech:

- (13) *mā:*        *juī*            *dhū:ku: -mhe-siyāgu*  
 mother.ABS become.NPC finish.ST-NL-GEN  
*khā. chā:*    *thāū: -tale ma-syu:-ni*        *lā?*  
 story 2sg.ERG today-till NEG-know.ST-PART Q  
 ‘Everyone who has become a mother knows the story. Didn’t you know that until today?’

### 3.3 Expressing past experience

Another property that *dhune* shares with the English perfect is the meaning of past experience, especially when there is an adverbial phrase that shows its frequency:

- (14) a. *Rām*    *Jāpān-e yakwa wane*  
 Ram.ABS Japan-LOC many times go.NPC  
*dhū:kala.*  
 finish.PD  
 ‘Ram has been to Japan many times.’  
 b. *chi*    *Nepāl-e cwane dhuna lā?*  
 you. ABS Nepal-LOC live. NPC finish. PC Q  
 ‘Have you ever lived in Nepal?’

Newari *dhune* sentences can take an adverbial phrase which refers to a specific past time, unlike English present perfect sentences.

- (15) *swa-dā nhya: jī*        *wa philm swae*  
 three-year before 1sg.ABS that movie.ABS watch.NPC  
*dhuna.*  
 finish.PC  
 ‘I had the experience of watching the movie three years ago.’

As for the inflection of *dhune*, it follows the inflection

pattern of the main verb. Look at the following examples:

- (16) a. *jī*        *lā-e*        *kutū:wana.*  
 1sg.ABS road-LOC fall.PC  
 ‘I (accidentally) fell down on the road.’  
 b. *jī*        *lā-e*        *kutū:wane dhū:kala.*  
 1sg.ABS road-LOC fall.NPC        finish. PD  
 ‘I have (accidentally) fallen down on the road.’

When an event with a first person subject is construed as accidental, the verb must be in the disjunct form, as in (16a). The inflection pattern is succeeded in the case of the experiential past with *dhune* as in (16b).

Certain verbs cannot take *dhū:kala*, however, even when the events with first person subjects are construed as accidental. Here is an example.

- (17) a. *jī:*        *lā-e wanā cwanā-bale,*  
 1sg.ERG road. go.PC stay.PC-when  
*Rām-yāta nāpalāta.*  
 Ram-DAT meet.PD  
 ‘When I was walking on the street, I came across Ram.’  
 b. *\*nhāpā jī:*    *lā-e wanā cwanā-bale,*  
 before 1sg.ERG road. go.PC stay.PC-when  
*Rām-yāta nāpalāe dhū:kala.*  
 Ram-DAT meet.NPC finish.PD  
 ‘I met Ram when I was walking on the street before.’

In this case, the accidental meeting of Ram can be expressed by a different construction:<sup>9)</sup>

- (18) *jī:*        *lā-e*        *wanā cwanā-bale,*  
 1sg.ERG road-LOC go.PC stay.PC-when  
*Rām-yāta nāpalā: -gu du.*  
 Ram-DAT meet.ST-NL exist.ST  
 ‘When I was going on the street, I met Ram.’

It seems to be that *dhune* is not compatible with an unmarkedly volitional event verb. The difference between *kutū:wane* ‘to fall down’ and *nāpalāye* ‘to meet’ is that the former is unmarkedly ambiguous as to volitionality whereas the latter is unmarkedly construed as a volitional event.

In Newari, there are other ways to express past experience.

- (19) *swa-dā nhyā: ana wanā tae dhuna.*  
 three-year before there go.PC put.NPC finish.PC  
 ‘I had the experience of going there three years ago.’

The *tae dhune* construction is also used to express past experience, but this is different from the simple *dhune* construction in that the former always takes a control event, whereas the latter does not have such a restriction as discussed above. Furthermore, the *tae dhune* construction does not simply express past experience, but implies the experiencer is under the effect brought about by the past event: in the above case, for example, the sentence implies that the subject knows how to go there. In English, this sort of difference is not clearly observed. The effect implication of the *tae dhune* construction is due to the meaning of *taye*.<sup>10</sup>

### 3.4 *Ni* particle and negative perfect

In the previous subsections, we looked only at affirmative sentences. In English, the negative form of Perfect expresses a situation in which the action described by the main verb has not yet taken place. In Newari, a *ni* particle is used in the negative to express such a situation.

Following a VP, a *ni* particle expresses a continuous situation which has the possibility to terminate at a later stage. It can be used in both affirmative and negative sentences, as in the following:

- (20) a. *hiti: la: wa: -ni.*  
 tap water.ABS come.ST-PART  
 ‘The tap-water still comes out.’  
 b. *hiti: la: ma-wa: -ni.*  
 tap water.ABS NEG-come.ST-PART  
 ‘The tap-water hasn’t come out yet.’

Joshi (1992, 153) [romanizedd by the author]

The negative version is semantically opposite to *wae dhuna* ‘has come’.

The negative plus *ni* construction also expresses

experiential perfect:

- (21) “*ma:ma: nae dhuna lā?*”  
 dumplings.ABS eat.NPC finish.PC Q  
 “*ma-nayā ni.*”  
 NEG-eat.PC PART  
 ‘“Have you eaten dumplings?” “No, I haven’t.”’

The particle *ni* can be used with *dhune* in negative sentences as well, but the combination is limited to a certain context. Now consider the following examples:<sup>11</sup>

- (22) “*nae dhuna lā?*” “*ma-nayā ni /\*nae*  
 eat.NPC finish.PC Q NEG-eat.PC PART eat.NPC  
*ma-dhuna-ni.*”  
 NEG-finish.PC-PART  
 ‘“Have you eaten?” “No, I haven’t.”’

According to my informants, *nae ma-dhuna-ni* sounds awkward as a reply to the question “Have you eaten?”. This particular form can be used in the following contexts:

- (23) *jā nae ma-dhuna-ni. aesā: nae*  
 rice.ABS eat.NPC NEG-finish.PC but eat.NPC  
*maste-ma-wa: -ni*  
 desire-NEG-come.ST-PART  
 ‘I haven’t eaten yet, but I haven’t been hungry yet.’

It seems to be the case that a sentence with *ma-dhuna-ni* pragmatically functions as a preceding event and requires a sentence to follow which expresses an opposite consequence of the prior event.

Another point worth mentioning here is that in sentences with *ma-dhuna-ni*, *dhune* will not be construed as meaning ‘to finish’, hence the sentence in (23) cannot be interpreted as ‘I haven’t finished eating’ although in affirmative sentences it does focus on the accomplishment of the events.

## 4 Conclusion

In this paper, we have discussed the meanings of the aspectual auxiliary verb *dhune* in Newari. The types of perfect aspect that the auxiliary verb *dhune* expresses are perfect of result and experiential perfect. These two

meanings are motivated by the lexical meaning of *dhune* ‘to finish’ in terms of pragmatic inference. It could be argued that the different usages of *dhune* overlap with perfect aspectual meaning, but the lexical meaning is still strong. As it is less grammaticalized in that sense, the verb can be used with adverbials which express past time, whereas English *have* plus past participle appear to be even more grammaticalized.

#### Abbreviations

ABS – absolutive	NPC – Non–Past Conjunct
DAT – dative	NPD – Non–Past Disjunct
ERG – ergative	PART – particle
INST – instrumental	PC – Past Conjunct
LOC – locative	PD – Past Disjunct
NEG – negation	Q – question particle
NL – nominalizer	ST – stative

#### Notes

- 1 Westgaard (1988) regards *dhune* as expressing ‘perfective aspect’. As pointed out at the beginning, however, the two terms should be treated separately; he thus seems to be confusing ‘perfective’ with ‘perfect’.
- 2 The language is classified as a language belonging to the Himalaish language group under the Tibeto-Burman.
- 3 I would like to express my gratitude to my informants, Manik Latna Shakya, Lenu Shakya, and Lata Shakya. They are all from Patan, or Yala in Nepal. The research on the topic dealt with in this paper was financially supported by a Sasagawa Scientific Research Grant from The Japan Science Society.
- 4 A habitual event by a first-person subject is expressed by Past Conjunct.
- 5 For a detailed analysis of the aspectual auxiliary verb *cwane*, see Kiryu (1999).
- 6 *Sidhaye* is also used as an auxiliary verb to emphasize the completion of an event. Compared to *dhune*, it is more of a lexical verb like ‘to finish doing’ in English, and it can be used with a time adverb expressing recent past, unlike *dhune*.
- 7 Hargreaves (1991) discusses the causativized form *dhū:kala* in terms of types of verbs.
- 8 Although Malla (1985) and Westgaard (1988) note that the form of the main verb is infinitive, Tej R. Kansakar (p.c.) suggests

that it is phonologically identical with the Non-Past Conjunct form, and that the so-called infinitive will never appear in actual speech. The forms claimed to be infinitive are used as dictionary entry forms, but as Kansakar suggests, they do not actually appear. Although I am not sure if they appeared in this particular form before *dhune* in Old Newari, the forms of a verb before *dhune* are obviously different from the dictionary entry form. This is true especially when verbs whose stem vowel is either / u / or / i / . For example, *khuye* ‘to steal’ and *biye* ‘to give’ are realized as *khui* and *bi:* respectively before *dhune*. Kansakar’s observation is thus more descriptively adequate, and I reflect his idea in the glosses in this paper.

9 Past plus *-gu du* is also used to express past experience, but it is usually used to attract hearer’s attention when the speaker starts talking about his/her experience.

10 See Kiryu (1999) for detailed usages of *taye*.

11 In colloquial speech, *ma-dhuna-ni* is often pronounced as *ma-dhu:-ni*.

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