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# Personal and possessive pronouns in Puma (Southern Kiranti)

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## 1. Introduction

Puma is one of the endangered Kiranti languages of Nepal spoken by an ethnic group of the same name (ISO 639-3 code: pum). Puma people call their mother tongue *rokunja* or *rokonja*, in which *la* refers to 'language'. Puma is spoken in Diplung, Mauwabote, Devisthan, Pauwasera and Chisapani VDCs of Khotang district. It is also spoken in Beltar, Madibas, Siddipur, Basaha and Chaudandi VDCs of Udayapur district. From what we found in recent fieldwork, the areas with the highest concentration of Puma speakers appear to be Diplung, Mauwabote and Devisthan VDCs. Besides Khotang and Udayapur, Puma speakers also live in other districts of Nepal, like Panchthar, Ilam, Jhapa, Sankhuwasabha, Morang, Bhojpur and Kathmandu. Puma people living outside Khotang and Udayapur generally have not retained their language. CBS (2001) reports 4,310 Puma speaker in Nepal which is 0.02 percent of the total population of Nepal. However this figure seems too conservative. Puma people living in the core areas claim that there should be at least 10,000 Puma people and out of them there should be more than 6,000 Puma native speaker.

In terms of subgrouping, Puma shows similar innovations as Chamling (most prominently, voicing of preglottalized initials and merger of the back and front rhotics) and thus can be classified as part of the Southern group of Central Kiranti (in agreement with van Driem 2001; cf., e.g., Puma *buŋwa* 'flower', *bok* 'pig', *duŋ-* 'drink', *dem* 'how, what',

all from stems with preglottalized initials; and *rum* ‘salt’, *ram* ‘body’, *rom-t-* ‘weak’, *ri-* ‘laugh’ all from stems with initial < \*R-; vs. *ruks-* ‘shake’, *rok-oŋ* ‘Puma’ etc. from stems with < \*r->).

This paper describes the personal and possessive pronouns in the Puma language based on ongoing fieldwork as part of the *Chintang and Puma Documentation Project* (CPDP), which aims at the linguistic and ethnographic documentation of Chintang and Puma.<sup>1</sup> Though Puma is almost totally undocumented, some preliminary (and unpublished) research has been carried out by Novel Kishore Rai and Madhav Pokharel from Tribhuvan University.

## 2. Puma personal pronouns

Puma personal pronouns are divided into three persons – first, second, and third. These are illustrated below.

### 2.1 First person pronouns

First person pronouns refer to the speaker or the addresser. In Puma, there are five first person pronouns – singular, two dual, and two plural. Puma distinguishes inclusive and exclusive of hearer distinction in first person dual and plural pronouns. The following examples illustrate this:<sup>2</sup>

(1) *ŋa*        *roŋ*    *ca-ŋa*  
 1sNOM    rice    eat-1sS/P.NPST  
 ‘I eat rice.’

(2) *keci*        *roŋ*    *ca-ci*  
 1diNOM    rice    eat-d  
 ‘We eat rice.’

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<sup>2</sup> To facilitate, and since we do not discuss the verb agreement system of Puma in this paper, all examples are in the antipassive, which has a semantically generic object, licenses nominative (instead of ergative) case on subjects, and does not trigger agreement; also see Bickel et al. 2005; Stutz 2005.

(3) *ke roŋ ce-e*  
 1piNOM rice eat-1p  
 'We eat rice.'

(4) *keciKa roŋ ca-ci-ka*  
 1deNOM rice eat-d-e  
 'We eat rice.'

(5) *keka roŋ ce-e-ka*  
 1peNOM rice eat-1p-e  
 'We eat rice.'

In examples (1-5), we find first person singular in (1), first person dual inclusive in (2), first person plural inclusive in (3), first person dual exclusive in (4), and first person plural exclusive in (5). Dual number is marked by *-ci* and *-ka* is an exclusive marker, as shown in (4) and (5). The plural is construed as a non-dual non-singular form: the pronominal stem *ke* denotes nonsingular number and enters an obligatory paradigmatic contrast between the dual *ke-ci* and the zero-marked non-dual *ke*.

## 2.2 Second person pronouns

Second person pronouns refer to the hearer or the addressee. There are three second person pronouns – singular, dual, and plural in the Puma language. The following examples show these pronouns.

(6) *khanna roŋ tɪ-ca*  
 2sNOM rice 2-eat  
 'You eat rice.'

(7) *khanna roŋ tɪ-ca-ci*  
 2dNOM rice 2-eat-d  
 'You eat rice.'

- (8) *khannanin roŋ tɪ-ce-e*  
 2pNOM rice 2-eat-2p  
 'You eat rice.'

Examples (6), (7) and (8) illustrate second person singular, second person dual and second person plural, respectively. As with first person, dual is indicated by *-ci*, but unlike first person pronouns, there is no stem difference between singular and nonsingular second person pronouns. As a result, the plural is indicated not by a zero morpheme, but by a specific suffix, *-nin*.

### 2.3 Third person pronouns

Third person pronouns refer to the person or thing other than the speaker and addresser or hearer or addressee. While first and second person distinguish dual and plural, this difference is neutralized in the third person pronoun. The ambiguity is resolved by verb agreement forms:

- (9) *khokku roŋ ca*  
 3sNOM rice eat  
 'He eats rice.'

- (10) *khokkuci roŋ pɪ-ca-ci*  
 3dNOM rice 3S/A-eat-d  
 'They (dual) eat rice.'

- (11) *khokkuci roŋ mɪ-ca*  
 3pNOM rice 3pS/A-eat  
 'They eat rice.'

Unlike with first and second person pronouns, the suffix *-ci* here stands for nonsingular (i.e. dual and plural) number — replicating a dual/nonsingular homophony that is widespread in Kiranti languages. Dual and plural number are differentiated in (10) and (11) in the verb agreement system: the prefix *pɪ-* in (10) occurs in the agreement

paradigm with third person intransitive (S) or transitive (A) subjects regardless of their number, but the dual suffix *-ci* establishes the form as indexing a third person dual subject. The verb form in (11) is marked by the prefix *mi-*, which occurs only with third person S or A plural forms, and thus clearly establishes plural subject reference here. (See Bickel et al. 2005, Stutz 2005 for paradigms and an analysis of the agreement system.)

### 3. Possessive pronouns and possessive agreement

Kiranti languages generally have possessive person markers that are at least in some persons distinct from regular personal pronouns, but the languages vary as to whether these markers are themselves pronominal stems or prefixes. In general, pronouns differ from prefixes in that they can be inflected for case and head a dependent NP. Prefixes cannot be inflected for case, they strictly subcategorize for nominal stems, and they cannot occur without such a stem; prefixes can also be phrasal, and then they subcategorize for phrases instead of stems. Orthogonal to this distinction, pronouns and prefixes can be free or bound with regard to morphophonological interaction with their host (Bickel & Nichols 2006). These two variables (stem vs. prefix; phonologically free vs. bound) probably reflect various stages of historical developments of free pronouns into bound agreement markers.

Hayu (Michailovsky 1988), Bantawa (N.K. Rai 1984), Thulung (Lahaussois 2003), Dumi (van Driem 1993), and Yamphu (Rutgers 1998) are examples where the possessive person markers are pronouns: they can bear a genitive case or a nominalizer, but like other dependent nominals, they can also be used attributively without a genitive.

Belhare (Bickel 2003), Athpare (Ebert 1997b) and Limbu (van Driem 1987) are examples of languages where the possessive person markers are prefixes: as such, they cannot be case-marked, and they can only occur with a nominal stem. A noun phrase containing them may be expanded by a dependent noun or personal pronoun in the genitive. Wambule (Opgenort 2004) exemplifies phrasal prefixes that precede entire noun phrases.

Like its sister language Chamling (Ebert 1997a, V.S. Rai 2003), Puma combines properties of both types: the possessive markers of the first and second person function

as pronominal stems, while those of the third person function as prefixes. Table 1 gives an overview.

	Absolutive		Genitive
	Personal pronoun	Possessive marker	
1s	<i>ŋa</i>	<i>uŋ-</i>	<i>uŋ-bo</i>
1di	<i>keci</i>	<i>enci-</i>	<i>enci-bo</i>
1pi	<i>ke</i>	<i>en-</i>	<i>en-bo</i>
1de	<i>keci(ɿ)ka</i>	<i>aci-</i>	<i>aci-bo</i>
1pe	<i>keka</i>	<i>a-</i>	<i>a-bo</i>
2s	<i>khanna</i>	<i>ka-</i>	<i>ka-bo</i>
2d	<i>khannaci</i>	<i>kenci-</i>	<i>kenci-bo</i>
2p	<i>khannamin</i>	<i>ken-</i>	<i>ken-bo</i>
3s	<i>kho(kku)</i>	<i>kɿ-</i>	<i>kho(kku)-bo</i>
3ns <sup>3</sup>	<i>khoci</i>	<i>kɿ-</i>	<i>khoci-bo</i>

Table 1: Personal pronouns and possessive markers in Puma

All possessive markers are phonologically bound, i.e. procliticized, as indicated by the hyphen in Table 1. Those denoting a first or second person behaves like regular noun stems and can therefore be inflected by the genitive in *-bo*, just like any other noun. But the same markers can also be procliticized to the head noun without a genitive. In fact, both possibilities can occur in a single NP, as in the following examples:

- (12) *uŋ-bo*                      *uŋ-khim*  
 1sPOSS-GEN                  1sPOSS-house  
 ‘My house’
- (13) *enci-bo*                      *enci-khim*  
 1diPOSS-GEN                  1diPOSS-house  
 ‘Our house’
- (14) *en-bo*                         *en-khim*  
 1piPOSS-GEN                  1piPOSS-house  
 ‘Our house’

<sup>3</sup> Dual and plural can be disambiguated by the numeral *ɿɿɿoŋ* ‘two’, as in *khokkucibo ɿɿɿoŋ kɿcikhim* ‘their (dual) house’.

- (15) *aci-bo*                      *aci-khim*  
 1dePOSS-GEN      1dePOSS-house  
 'Our house'
- (16) *a-bo*                              *a-khim*  
 1pePOSS-GEN      1pePOSS-house  
 'Our house'
- (17) *ka-bo*                              *ka-khim*  
 2sPOSS-GEN      2sPOSS-house  
 'Your house'
- (18) *kenci-bo*                      *kenci-khim*  
 2dPOSS-GEN      2dPOSS-house  
 'Your house'
- (19) *ken-bo*                              *ken-khim*  
 2pPOSS-GEN      2pPOSS-house  
 'Your house'

The third person markers, by contrast, do not allow genitive marking (*\*kɛ-bo*, *\*kɛci-bo*) and appear to have been reanalyzed as prefixes. If a pronominal genitive-marked dependent is to be expressed, the regular personal pronouns based on the stem *khokku* are used instead:

- (20) *khokku-bo*    *kɛ-khim*  
 3s-GEN      3sPOSS-house  
 'His house'
- (21) *khokkuci-bo*    *kɛci-khim*  
 3ns-GEN      3nsPOSS-house  
 'Their house'

Regardless of person and their status as stems or prefixes, possessive markers are obligatory constituents in NPs containing a genitive-marked pronoun. Thus, in (12-21), it is possible to leave out the genitive-marked but not the procliticized pronoun:

- (23) a. *\*uŋbo khim*  
 b. *uŋkhim*

- (24) a. \**encibo khim*  
b. *encikhim*
- (25) a. \**enbo khim*  
b. *enkhim*
- (26) a. \**acibo khim*  
b. *acikhim*
- (27) a. \**abo khim*  
b. *akhim*
- (28) a. \**kabo khim*  
b. *kakhim*
- (29) a. \**kencibo khim*  
b. *kencikhim*
- (30) a. \**kenbo khim*  
b. *kenkhim*
- (31) a. \**khokkubo khim*  
b. *kakhim*
- (32) a. \**khokkucibo khim*  
b. *kakikhim*
- (33) a. \**khokkucibo khim*  
b. *kakikhim*

This constraint is not found in other Southern Kiranti languages (cf. Ebert 1994), but it may suggest that Puma went one step further in the grammaticalization of possessive pronouns into possessive prefixes: the fact that the possessive markers can still be inflected shows that they are still pronouns, but their obligatory use makes them similar to prefixes.

#### 4. Conclusion

Like many other Kiranti languages, the Puma language has eleven pronouns, three persons (1st, 2nd, and 3rd), three numbers (singular, dual, plural), and also an inclusive and exclusive of addressee distinction in dual and plural first person. Similar to a number of other Kiranti languages, Puma has also a distinct set of possessive pronouns, but in Puma they appear to have started to undergo a process of grammaticalization into

possessive agreement prefixes of the kind found in some (but not all) Eastern Kiranti languages.

## Abbreviations

A-	Agent	p-	Plural
d-	Dual	POSS-	Possessive
e-	Exclusive	S-	Single argument of intransitives
GEN	Genitive	s-	singular
i-	Inclusive	1-	First person
ns	non-singular	2-	Second person
NOM-	Nominative	3-	Third person

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