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Review

A Sketch Grammar of Yohlmo
By Anna Maria Hari
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A Sketch Grammar of Yohlmo written by Anna Maria Hari is a brief study of the most salient features of Yohlmo, a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in Nepal. This language is also referred to in the literature as Hyolmo, Helambu Sherpa or, as Kagate (Lewis 2009). The author has been working with Yohlmo for the past twenty seven years. She hopes that "the language will be one of the better documented languages minority languages of Nepal". Some parts of this grammatical sketch have appeared in the *Yohlmo–Nepali–English Dictionary* (Hari and Lama 2004).

The present grammar, which employs the typological-functional approach, consists of six sections. This includes a section on basic vocabulary. Section 1 provides the background information. Yohlmo belongs to the Central Tibetan group. It is closely related to Lhasa Tibetan. On the basis of lexical similarity calculations Yohlmo is suggested to have much closer genetic relationship with Central Tibetan languages than with Solu-Khumbu Sherpa. The name Helambu is supposed to have been derived from Yohlmo. Yohlmo is spoken mainly in the north of Kathmandu - in the area around Sermā and Chhmi. It is used predominantly in the home domain. Due to intensive language contact situation with Nepali, the dominant language, its linguistic structure shows signs of convergence. There is almost no or very little older written literature in the language. This is, however, undergoing a change, as there is an increasing trend to produce written materials in Yohlmo in Devanagari. Some more background details are provided in section 1.

Section 2 deals with the phonology of the language. Yohlmo has 36 consonants. There are bilabial, dental, palatal and velar plosives. The consonant inventory is smaller in Yohlmo than in Sherpa (Genetti ed., 2004). Affricates (lamino-alveopalatal, alveolar, sibilant and uvular), semivowels and liquids are also attested in this language. There are five vowels in this language, viz. *i, u, e, o, a*. The syllable structure is simple, viz. (C)(L)V(C) and (C)(L)VV(N) (in which L = liquid, N = Nasal). There are some restrictions on the coda syllable type. The domain for the contrastive tones is the morphemes. It is the first syllable which is most significant for the realization of tone contours. The basic suprasegmental contrast is the register contrast: high and low registers. Secondary suprasegmental contrast is realized by different pitch contours. Yolhmo is close to central Tibetan in tonogenesis. Register and tone contrast came from the same source. Historically, the register contrast is derived from the original voicing status and cluster compositions of the morpheme initial consonant margins. Morpheme initial original voices stops, voiced fricatives and sonorants gave rise to low register; after other sounds and sound combination in the initial margin the register stayed high. Further, sufixes are generally, but not always, assimilated to the stem final segment for voicing. Similarly, the suffixes which begin with initial affricates in intervocalic position result in the fricativization of affricates.

Inflectional and derivational morphology of Yohlmo is discussed in section 3. Noun morphology is dealt with in subsection 3.1. The plural marker <*-ya*> is used sparingly. If the number distinction can be gathered from the context, the plural marker does not occur

explicitly. This is also the case in several other languages of Nepal. The nominal classifier is added to the nominal. There are several 'primarily nominal clitics and suffixes'. For example, as case markers as well as other markers which describe, for example, 'topical highlighting', emphasis, 'etcetra and like'. For a more detailed discussion on the nominal suffixes, the author refers to her dictionary (Hari 2004). Pronouns in Yohlmo are generally used to refer to human argument, but they also occur in some restricted contexts to refer to animals, e.g. the context when the animals are personified in stories. Pronouns in Yohlmo make the distinctions between singular and dual, inclusive and exclusive - a typical characteristic found in several Tibeto-Burman languages (section 3.2). Yohlmo adjectives are mainly derived from verbs, though there are also some simple adjectives, viz. *yaah* 'bear fruit' : *yaahbu* 'good, nice'; *'tehk* 'sit, stay, live' and *'tehmu* 'comfortable'. Yohlmo is a head-final language where adjectives follow the head nouns, but for some stylistic reasons, they may also precede the head nouns. The latter is due to the influence of Nepali on Yohlmo. Interestingly, the adjectives generally end in <-u> but exclamatory adjectives end in <-a>, *³khyaa-bu* 'cold' → *³khyaa-ba*; *²zaŋbu* 'generous' → *zaŋ*; *³khyukpu* 'industrious' → *³khyuga*. The adjectives are summarized in subsection 3.3.

The verb morphology including some syntactic features of the verbs is discussed in section (3.5). Verbs in Yohlmo are not marked for the person agreement or the conjunct-disjunct distinction. There are alternate verb stem bases which are found in some definable contexts. Further, the author states that semantic roles such as actor, undergoer and goal are more prominent in this language than grammatical relations such as subject, object and indirect object. This section also discusses verb classes based on transitivity. Verbs are thus classified into active and receptive (of which receptive are further classified into direceptive verbs, receptive verbs and semi-receptive verbs). The language contains three copulas for identification and existence/location and a distinct copula for mirative/inferential. The copulas are obligatory in copular constructions. Tense is expressed with the verb stem and an auxiliary which follows it. The categories of tense are intentional present, decided future and past (telling past, emphatic past, dramatic past and present, unreal past, success-in-adverse circumstances past and repetitive past). The verbs also inflect for several categories of aspects such as conditional, imperfective, etc, and moods such as optative, desiderative, etc. Mirativity is mainly found in the present tense context by means of copulas. The distinctions here include close observation, remote observation and present continuous mirative. Similarly, evidentials are also attested in the language. The actual transitive verb is used as an auxiliary verb to construct causative or permissive clause. The notion conjunct-disjunct distinction characterized in several Tibetan languages is missing in Yohlmo. Yohlmo has no special morpheme to show the passive voice, but is expressed by the omission of the actor phrase. The author also illustrates that the ergative marker is found in Yohlmo, but its occurrence is optional in certain contexts, for example, in the interactional present tense, viz. *'kho-gi 'meh 'tuuh-sin* 'he-ERG fire expose-NPST' (He wanted to warm himself) but *'kho(-gi) 'meh 'tuuh-w 'du* 'he-ERG fire expose-IMPF' AUX.MIR (Oh, he is warming himself by the fire.) Similarly, there are instances in Yohlmo where there is a suppression of the argument markers by the focus marker <-ni>. In this case the ergative marker <-ki> or goal marker <-la> is suppressed by this focus marker (p.44).

Word formation is analyzed in section 4. Yohlmo has a small number of derivational suffixes. The words are also derived by means of aspiration and voicing. The author claims that it is common in several Bodic languages. Aside from derivation, a large number of compound nouns are formed. Tibetan languages have honorific vocabulary related to body

parts, foods and housing. The honorific forms are generally used for elders and lamas. The language characterizes this feature although there are no honorific pronouns in Yohlmo.

Section 5 deals with Yohlmo syntax. The possible constituents in a noun phrase are demonstrative, intensifier, modifier (1), noun, modifier (2) and quantifier in that order. Prenominal relative clauses are formed by the relativizer <-*ken*> (-*g*) or <-*kjo*> (-*gi*). In this case (-*gi*) is optional. Complement clauses fill the object slot of the main clause. The complement clauses have the nominalized form. Any clause constituent in Yohlmo may be postposed, especially the postposing of the actors to achieve a dramatic focus. The postposed constituents provide clarifications as well as functioning as after-thoughts. Similarly, the clauses may be topicalized by moving the focussed constituent to the beginning of the clause, accompanied by the clitic <-*ti*>. Furthermore, a variety of other clause-types occur in natural discourse. Reduplicating the verb stem, for example, is one such example. Similarly, consecutive actions are expressed through three suffixes which serve as clause chaining markers, where the actor of the non-final clauses is the same as the final clause. Concomitant action is expressed with <-*kemu*>.

The direct affirmative clause is the basic sentence type. Negation is expressed with a prefix on the verb stem. The negative prefix becomes long when it is prefixed to a verb stem base with a long vowel, and the base itself becomes short. The negative forms become long when they are prefixed to a verb stem base with long vowel; consequently, the prefixed verb stem base becomes short. Affirmative declarative statements have a slight down-drift in the second half of the statement, and the last syllable ends in a fall. In content questions, the phonological nucleus falls onto the question word and the rest of the string also shows down-drift and a fall on the last syllable. For *yes/no* questions the main feature which distinguishes questions from affirmative declaratives in the intonation accompanied by the prefixes <*pa-* ~ -*ba*>. A characteristic feature of Yohlmo is the occurrence of the attitude particles placed at the sentence-final position.

The final section of the book deals with Yohlmo basic vocabulary comprising Swadesh 100 wordlist, social role and culture list, verbs related to social dimension and travelling, social interaction, and social infringements and amendments. It can be useful for those beginning to learn and/or study the language.

To sum up, this grammar is one of the very few grammars on Nepal's languages and can serve as a model for describing other undescribed languages which are on the verge of extinction. It is to be noted that works like this can be an asset for the Linguistic Survey of Nepal (LinSuN) which aims to produce such sketch grammars. This may also serve as a textbook for introducing Yohlmo as medium of instruction for Yohlmo children in basic education at a time when multilingual education (MLE) has been implemented in the country. There are, however, a few typos (e.g. on page 4, three dots). Further, at times, the meaning of some morphemes or clitics (p. 25-26) are not discussed explicitly, which makes it a bit more difficult to understand the examples provided. Lastly, the present version of the grammar lacks annotated texts. The readers would have benefitted even more if this grammatical sketch had included some annotated texts. Despite these minor issues, this grammar is a role model as to how an undocumented language can be described.

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Yogendra P. Yadava   Dubi Nanda Dhakal
ypyadava@gmail.com   dndhakal@yahoo.com