

# The Nar-Phu Language<sup>1</sup>

Michael Noonan

*University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Nar-Phu language is spoken by the 800 people of the villages of Nar and Phu, located in the Valley of the Nar Khola in the Manang District of Nepal. The territory they inhabit is very high [the lowest point in their territory is approximately 3500 meters in altitude] and their main occupations are yak herding and small scale farming.

By the standards of other languages in Nepal, the influence of Nepali on the Nar-Phu language has been relatively small. However, contact with Tibet and Tibetans has been fairly extensive over the years – there is a large monastery in Nar which houses a number of Tibetans – and as a result there are a large number of Tibetan borrowings in Nar-Phu. Contact with Tibetans continues and there is some literacy in Tibetan: the people of the Nar and Phu villages are adherents of a version of Tibetan Buddhism and literacy in Tibetan is mainly achieved for the purpose of reading religious texts. The influence of Nepali is growing, however, as the school established twelve years ago and operated intermittently since introduces Nepali literacy to the population. Further, increasing numbers of people spend at least part of the year in Nepali speaking areas and the association of competency in Nepali and economic betterment has grown in the minds of the people.

The Nar-Phu language is a member of the Tamangic group [along with Chantyal, Gurung, Manangba, Tamang, and Thakali]. There are a number of phonological and lexical differences between the dialects of Nar and Phu. This paper describes the Nar dialect only. The dialects of the two villages are part of a dialect continuum with the dialects of the Manangba language and from a purely linguistic perspective it is not obvious that the dialects of Nar and Phu should be accorded the status of a separate language. The primary justifications for doing so are sociological: the people of the two villages see themselves as being a group apart from the Manangis [and the local Gurungs as well]. They even share a ‘secret language’, the point of which is to confound Manangis and Gurungs who might otherwise understand their conversations. The Manangis, apparently, share the view that the people of Nar and Phu are not Manangis, so in deference to local feelings I will consider the speech of the villages of Nar and Phu as an independent language. The decision to call the language Nar-Phu [as opposed to ‘Narpa’, which is perceived as the Manangba designation] was made in consultation with native speakers.

## 2. PHONOLOGY

*Vowels:* The vowel system of Nar is somewhat unusual relative to the Tamangic norm. There are, for example, an unusually large number of front vowels, nasal vowels are marginal to the system and may be resolvable to vowel + nasal consonant, and long

---

<sup>1</sup> Work on Nar-Phu has been supported by the National Science Foundation, grant no. SBR-9600717.

vowels seem always to come about via some phonological process and thus appear not to be lexical. The system of simple vowels can be displayed as follows:

i	u
e	o
ɛ œ	
æ	a

The status of [œ] as an independent vowel is not clear. In what follows, it is always written /wɛ/, a transcription that reflects, in part, its pronunciation – it is typically pronounced [wœ] or [yœ] – and the fact that the sequence [wɛ] otherwise does not occur.

With /ɛ/ a preceding glide [y] is often heard in open, stressed syllables. Word final /ɛ/, especially in the suffix /-pɛ/, sounds similar to /a/ in very slow speech. /e/ and /ɛ/ contrast in open syllables, but are neutralized to [ɛ] in closed syllables: <ɛ> is written in these cases as this corresponds to what is heard. This /ɛ/, however, never has the [jɛ] alternative pronunciation. [This reflects the fact that in /ɛ/ in closed syllables derives historically from \*/e/ whereas /ɛ/ in open unstressed syllables derives historically from \*/a/.]

/æ/ is a very low front-central vowel.

Nasal vowels seem always, with three exceptions so far, to be resolvable into a V plus nasal C, the latter pronounced as a consonant [usually /ŋ/] in careful speech. The two native exceptions are [hrãre] ‘millet’ and [khẽro] ‘uphill’; the other word is a borrowing from Nepali, [bãsi] ‘bamboo’. These words have been transcribed with a sequence of vowel + consonant: /hranre/, /khenro/, and /bansi/. [Notice that the two native words have the nasal vowel before /r/: perhaps there’s a rule that deletes nasals and nasalizes vowels in such cases. No other instances of /nr/ have been found and only one instance of /ns/, /mfunse/ ‘all night’, have been recorded.]

Long vowels come about as a result of phonological or morphological processes: the loss [always (?) restorable in slow pronunciation] of syllable final /k/, /p/, or /r/ in Tibetan borrowings, and the coalescence of a final front vowel in nouns with the genitive: *lamɛ-ɛ* ‘lama’s’, *ŋɛ-ɛ* ‘my’. In a very few cases, long vowels were recorded which do not appear to be the product of any phonological process, e.g. *khee-* ‘move further away’: in these cases the long vowel may be lexical. A few borrowed words have long vowels: *amrikaa* ‘America, English [language]’.

The following diphthongs have been recorded – leaving out of consideration here onglides with /y/ and /w/ [recall the special status of /wɛ/, discussed above]:

ae  
ay  
ow  
aw  
uy  
wey

With /ae/, the first element is hard to hear and seems to vary in quality: sometimes it is a back, unrounded vowel, either [ʌ] or [ɤ]; in some cases it appears to be a velar fricative [ɣ]. This diphthong is distinct from the rare [syllable-final] /ay/, wherein the first

element is a low back vowel and the glide a trajector toward the high front position: this diphthong seems to occur only in Nepali borrowings and onomatopoeic words. /wey/ represents [œø], [œy], [ɣœø], or [ɣœy]. The conditions under which [ɣ] appears in /wey/ and /wɛ/ are not clear since it is sometimes present and sometimes not, likely being conditioned by the preceding consonant.

*Consonants:* There does not appear to be distinctive voicing among stops and fricatives [though see below], though there is with liquids: [l] and [r] contrast with [l̥] and [r̥]. Murmur is distinctive, but is best considered part of the tone system [see below]. Five points of articulation are attested: bilabial, lamino-dental, retroflex, alveolo-palatal, and velar. The glottal stop appears to be marginally distinctive only in a few Tibetan borrowings. Aspiration is distinctive for [oral] stops and affricates.

PHONETICALLY					IN TRANSCRIPTION				
p	t	t̥	k	ʔ	p	t	t̥	k	ʔ
p <sup>h</sup>	t <sup>h</sup>	t <sup>h</sup>	k <sup>h</sup>		ph	th	t <sup>h</sup>	k	
	ts		tʃ			c		č	
	ts <sup>h</sup>		tʃ <sup>h</sup>			ch		čh	
	s		ʃ			s		š	
m	n		ɲ	ŋ	m	n		ny	ŋ
	l					l			
	l̥					hl			
	r					r			
	r̥					hr			
w		j	ɥ		w		y		[see below]

The rhotic consonants are sometimes produced as taps [ɾ], sometimes glides [ɹ]. [ɹ̥] has a not-too-common variant [ɹ̥̥], an alveolar lateral fricative.

[ɥ] replaces [w] in some speech styles for some speakers. [ɥ] or [ɣ] also occurs in the diphthong /æ/, e.g. in ‘load’ [tʰɣê] /tʰâê/.

[ʔ] seems to occur non-redundantly only in some Tibetan forms, where it alternates with /k/ and /p/ or a lengthened vowel in morpheme final position: /k/ and /p/ are written when this is the case. In such cases it seems to reflect Tibetan falling tone. [In the word kʰêpɛ ‘8<sup>th</sup>’, a [ʔ] has been recorded – though not consistently: [kʰêʔpɛ]. This does not alternate with /k/, /p/, or /t/ [though the last is what occurs in the written Tibetan], but a long vowel may be heard instead.]

Distinctively voiced stops are found in initial position in recent borrowings only. These words may contain other atypical features, e.g. distinctively nasalized vowels: [bãsi] ‘bamboo’. In words with the murmured tones 3 and 4, the murmured voice extends, typically, to the initial consonant, so that /kʰe/ ‘work’ is often [gʰe]. In this respect, Nar-Phu differs from its relative Chantyal, in which initial voiceless stops and affricates remain voiceless in murmured syllables.

*Tone:* Four tones are distinguished. Two of the tones contain murmur as a distinctive part of the realization of the tone: murmur is transcribed with the character <ɦ>. Two

of the tones have falling pitch: falling pitch is transcribed with the character <^>. So as to facilitate comparison, the numbering of the tones corresponds to that used for etymological sets for other Tamangic languages by Martine Mazaudon.

TONE NUMBER	PITCH CONTOUR	EXAMPLE
1	53	nâŋ 'reciprocal obligation'
2	44	naŋ 'full'
3	12	nŋaŋ 'planted in rows'
4	21 or 31	nŋâŋ 'in'

Tones 1 and 4 are falling; tones 3 and 4 are murmured. Tone 2 is distinguished by its clear, high quality. There is a certain amount of variation from speaker to speaker in the pitch contours associated with these tones, but the distinctive elements – plain *vs* murmured voice and falling *vs* level or rising pitch – appear to remain constant from speaker to speaker.

Murmured tones may occur with any sort of initial consonant except the aspirated stops and affricates and the voiceless liquids /hl/ and /hr/.

The pitch contours are ordinarily distributed over entire words; that is, they distribute over a root and any affixes it may take. In general, affixes have no independent tone, but a few, recently developed from verbal or nominal roots, do possess independent tone. In compounds, however, each element has its own tone.

*Stress:* Words are stressed on the first syllable of the root; this is true also of compounds, which are stressed on the first element of the compound.

*Phonotactics and Phonological Alternations:* All consonants may occur in initial position. There are initial clusters with /r/ and /l/; the following are attested:

pr	tr	kr
phr	thr	khr
mr		
pl		kl
phl		
ml		

Initial clusters with the glides /w/ and /y/ are also attested:

pw	tw	cw	čw	
	thw	chw	čhw	khw
mw	nw			ŋw
			šw	
	rw			
py				ky
phy				khy
my				ŋy

In word final position, nasals, liquids, and unaspirated stops may occur. Affricates and retroflex stops do not occur in final position in native words, but the retroflex stop occurs word-finally in a few borrowings from English and Nepali, as do /s/ and /š/.

Medial clusters of consonants occur in compounds: in such cases, any combination of final and initial consonant [including consonant clusters] is possible. Words

synchronically analyzable as polysyllabic – if native – are derived historically from polymorphemic words. As a result, all the cluster types allowable in compounds are allowable in such words.

Unaspirated consonants are voiced intervocalically [including internally within compounds], and, intervocalically, aspirated stops are pronounced with aspiration in slow, careful pronunciation, but lose their aspiration in casual speech.

Except in some recent borrowings from English, /æ/ occurs only in word final position. In compounds, it becomes variously /a/ or /o/ when it is in the first element [nɦâ ‘ear’, nɦaci tɪŋtɪŋ ‘area in front of the ear’, nɦokli ‘earwax’]; when it is the final element, it usually becomes /ɛ/ [tæ ‘horse’, phôrtɛ ‘gelding’, môrtɛ ‘mare’], though there are apparent exceptions. In inflection, /æ/ becomes /a/ [ŋâ ‘I’, ŋâ-se ‘I [ERGATIVE]’. All other vowels occur initially, finally, and medially, though some vowel changes occur [apparently] irregularly in the first component of noun compounds.

In compounds, consonants which have been lost in free standing forms may surface: tæ ‘horse’, phôrtɛ ‘gelding’, môrtɛ ‘mare’ [Written Tibetan has rta ‘horse’]; nôw ‘snot’, nopšu ‘handkerchief’.

### 3. MORPHOLOGY

*Generalizations:* Nar-Phu is overwhelmingly suffixing and agglutinative. The only prefix is negative a-: a-câ-w ‘don’t eat it!’.

*Nouns:* Nouns in Nar-Phu are marked as plural by means of the clitics -cuke and -ce. The form -ce behaves as an ordinary clitic and has no independent tone; -cuke, on the other hand, always has tone 2 and generally behaves like the second element of a compound. Notionally plural NPs with count noun heads are not obligatorily marked for plurality, but usually are. NPs whose heads are quantified by numerals, however, are not marked for plurality.

The plural morphemes are phrase final clitics and thus attach to the last word of the NP:

nôkyu-cuke ‘dogs’  
 nôkyu mɦɪlaŋ-cuke ‘black dogs’

Case is marked with a relatively small set of case clitics. Like the plural clitics, these forms are NP-final. When a plural clitic and a case clitic are found in the same NP, the case clitic is last:

nôkyu-cuke-re ‘to the dogs’

The case clitics are listed below:

ABSOLUTE	-Ø
ERGATIVE, INSTRUMENTAL, ABLATIVE	-se
DATIVE, LOCATIVE	-re
GENITIVE	-(y)e, -i
INDEPENDENT GENITIVE	-nê
COMITATIVE	-tɛn

The absolutive case is unmarked: it is used with intransitive subjects, [many] direct objects, and predicate nominals.

The ergative/instrumental/ablative serves a variety of functions: it marks transitive subjects [fairly consistently: see below] as well as NPs understood as instruments and those indicating source [ablative]. It is possible to have more than one NP marked with this suffix in a given clause provided that each instance is understood as coding a different relation.

The dative/locative is used with indirect objects, with certain direct objects [most human referents], with NPs having allative [motion toward] senses, and with locatives with a static 'location at' sense.

The genitive is used to code any sort of attributive relation subordinating one NP to another; it is often omitted. The independent genitive is used to code headless genitival relations [e.g. *John's beat mine*], including those functioning as predicate nominals.

The comitative is used to code the comitative 'with' relation.

Partitive relations are expressed without any special case marking: the substance measured is followed by the measure noun, which in turn is followed by any numerals:

čhæ šô som  
tea cup three  
'three cups of tea'

The case of objects of postpositions is governed by the postposition and is, depending on the postposition, the absolutive, the genitive, or either.

There are no concord classes [genders] in Nar-Phu. There is, however, a system of suffixes used to create nouns which refer explicitly to male or female people or animals and even, in a few cases, to castrated males. A few examples follow:

UNGENDERED NOUN	MALE	CASTRATED MALE	FEMALE
rño 'bond friend'	rñope		rñoŋe
nôkyu 'dog'	nôkyupho		nôkyumo
rê 'goat'	râpho	râpe	râmo
tæ 'horse'	photyen	phôrte	môrte

*Honorific Vocabulary:* Nar-Phu has sets of honorific nouns and verbs which are used when referring to people to whom special respect is due, such as lamas, important government officials, etc. In addition, there are two verbs which are specifically 'humble', *i.e.* are used by the speaker as a means of showing special deference to an honored addressee. In many cases, the honorific vocabulary bears no phonological [or etymological] relation to the ordinary term.

Honorific noun counterparts of ordinary nouns are found only for names of food items, body-parts, and items of clothing. When no special honorific exists, a set of morphemes may be employed to create new forms: šhe [food items], čha [body parts], šhep [clothing]. The resulting honorific may still display considerable phonological idiosyncrasy. Some examples follow:

	ORDINARY	HONORIFIC
'beard'	kyôw	šalcham
'body'	čhû	kûsuk
'boot'	khyô	šhepkhyô
'butter'	mfiar	šhemfiar
'chang [Tibetan beer]'	phow	čhwečhân

'eye'	mi	čên	
'face'	ηotoŋ	šhâl	

Honorific verbs are illustrated below:

	ORDINARY	HONORIFIC	HUMBLE
'be sick'	na-	nyûŋ-	
'buy', 'take'	kîn-	shî-	
'get up, stand'	re-	šhâŋ-	
'give'	pîŋ-	nâŋ-, nâŋ kê-	phûl-
'smell' [tr]	naŋ-	naŋ-	sûl-

*Numerals:* Nar-Phu cardinal numbers have been greatly influenced by Tibetan, especially the higher numbers. The numerous irregularities are largely the product of borrowing from Central Tibetan: CT low tone is borrowed as the murmured tone 4.

CARDINAL NUMBERS:

1	khrî	11	cûkhrî		100	khyâ	
2	ηhî	12	cûŋhi	20	ηhyûšu	200	ηhî khyâ
3	som	13	cwêysôm	30	sômču	300	som khyâ
4	phlî	14	cûlte, cûlphli	40	phliču	400	šipkye
5	ηhâ	15	cûŋha	50	ηhaču	500	ηhapkye
6	ŋhûk	16	cûŋhuk	60	ŋhukču	600	ŋhupkye [sic]
7	ηi	17	cwêyηi	70	ηiču	700	tŋŋkye
8	phrê	18	côphre	80	phreču	800	phrekye
9	ku	19	cûrku	90	kûču	900	kupkye
10	ču					1000	ŋŋŋta
100,000		lak, phum					
10,000,000		tŋŋčur, tŋŋkur					

Internal to the number phrase itself, numbers follow the order of larger-smaller when additive [*forty + seven = 47*], smaller-larger when multiplicative [*four + hundred = 400*], except after ŋŋŋta '1000', which is treated as a noun and therefore followed by the numerals that quantify it. The only other complication with numbers lies with the use of the ergative/instrumental/ablative suffix -se following hundreds and thousands:

47	phliču ηi
439	šipkye-se sômču ku
1996	ŋŋŋta khrî-se kupkye-se kûču ŋhûk
67,735	ŋŋŋta ŋhukču ηi-se tŋŋkye-se sômču ηhâ
347 dogs	nôkyu som khyâ-se phliču ηi

The ordinal numbers are entirely borrowed from Central Tibetan. They evidence numerous complexities and only the first three decades are given below:

ORDINAL NUMBERS:

		10 <sup>th</sup>	čupe	20 <sup>th</sup>	ηhyûšupe
1 <sup>st</sup>	tŋŋŋpe		čupcîkpe		ηhyûšu cakcîkpe
2 <sup>nd</sup>	ηhîpe		čuŋîkpe		ηhyûšu canŋîkpe
3 <sup>rd</sup>	sûmpe		čuksumpe		ηhyûšu caksûmpe
4 <sup>th</sup>	šhîpe		čupšhîpe		ηhyûšu capšhîpe
5 <sup>th</sup>	ηhâpe		ceŋhâkpe		ηhyûšu ceŋhâkpe
6 <sup>th</sup>	ŋhûkpe		čuŋhûkpe		ηhyûšu ceŋhûkpe
7 <sup>th</sup>	tŋŋŋpe		čuptenpe		ηhyûšu captŋŋŋpe
8 <sup>th</sup>	khrêpe		cepkrêpe		ηhyûšu capkrêpe
9 <sup>th</sup>	khrûpe		curkupe		ηhyûšu capkupe

Nar-Phu does not have a system of classifiers.

*Pronouns, Demonstratives and Articles:* The paradigms for the personal pronouns are displayed below:

	<u>1<sup>st</sup> sg</u>	<u>1<sup>st</sup> emph</u>	<u>1<sup>st</sup> pl incl</u>	<u>1<sup>st</sup> pl incl</u>	<u>1<sup>st</sup> pl excl</u>
ABS	ŋâ	ŋhâ	ŋhî	ŋhî-cuke	ŋhyân
GEN	ŋê-e	ŋhâ-æ	ŋhî-i	ŋhî-cuke-e	ŋhyân-e
IGEN	ŋê-e-nê	ŋhâ-nê	ŋhî-i-nê	ŋhî-cuke-nê	ŋhyân-nê
E/I/A	ŋâ-se	ŋhâ-se	ŋhî-se	ŋhî-cuke-se	ŋhyân-se
D/L	ŋâ-re	ŋhâ-re	ŋhî-re	ŋhî-cuke-re	ŋhyân-re
COM	ŋâ-tên	ŋhâ-tên	ŋhî-tên	ŋhî-cuke-tên	ŋhyân-tên

	<u>1<sup>st</sup> pl excl</u>	<u>1<sup>st</sup> pl partn</u>
ABS	ŋhyân-cuke	kuŋ
GEN	ŋhyân-cuke-e	kuŋ-e
IGEN	ŋhyân-cuke-nê	kuŋ-nê
E/I/A	ŋhyân-cuke-se	kuŋ-se
D/L	ŋhyân-cuke-re	kuŋ-re
COM	ŋhyân-cuke-tên	kuŋ-tên

	<u>2<sup>nd</sup> sg fam</u>	<u>2<sup>nd</sup> pl fam</u>	<u>2<sup>nd</sup> sg</u>	<u>2<sup>nd</sup> pl</u>
ABS	nuŋaŋ	nuŋaŋ-cuke	khyañ	khin-cuke
GEN	nuŋaŋ-e	nuŋaŋ-cuke-e	khi-i/ye	khin-cuke-e
IGEN	nuŋaŋ-nê	nuŋaŋ-cuke-nê	khyañ-nê, khi-i-nê	khin-cuke-nê
E/I/A	nuŋaŋ-se	nuŋaŋ-cuke-se	khyañ-se	khin-cuke-se
D/L	nuŋaŋ-re	nuŋaŋ-cuke-re	khyañ-re	khin-cuke-re
COM	nuŋaŋ-tên	nuŋaŋ-cuke-tên	khyañ-tên	khin-cuke-tên

	<u>3<sup>rd</sup> sg fam</u>	<u>3<sup>rd</sup> sg</u>	<u>3<sup>rd</sup> resp</u>	<u>3<sup>rd</sup> pl fam</u>	<u>3<sup>rd</sup> pl</u>	<u>3<sup>rd</sup> gen</u>
ABS	nuŋ	cû	hota	nuŋyɛ	cû-cuke	cɛ
GEN	nwɛ-ye	cû-i	hota-e	nuŋyɛ-ye	cû-cuke-e	cɛ-ye
IGEN	nuŋ-nê	cû-i-nê, cû-nê	hota-nê	nuŋyɛ-nê	cû-cuke-nê	cɛ-nê
E/I/A	nuŋ-se	cû-se	hota-se	nuŋyɛ-se	cû-cuke-se	cɛ-se
D/L	nuŋ-re	cû-re	hota-re	nuŋyɛ-re	cû-cuke-re	cɛ-re
COM	nuŋ-tên	cû-tên	hota-tên	nuŋyɛ-tên	cû-cuke-tên	cɛ-tên

In the first person, inclusive and exclusive forms are distinguished in the plural. Both plural forms can combine with the plural morpheme -cuke, which seems to be used in cases of three or more where the individuality of the members of the group is emphasized, as opposed to the membership in a collectivity. In the first person there is also a special 'emphatic' form, used primarily when the first person referent is in contrastive focus: it is neutral between singular and plural readings. Further there is a special 'partnership' pronoun, which implies action as a partnership or collectivity.

In the second person, there is a truly 'familiar' form, used only with family members. It is not, for example, used with servants or others for whom little social respect is due: in such cases the noun would substitute for the pronoun if an overt reference is required contextually and the ordinary second person pronoun is thought inap



appropriate. The familiar pronoun has a plural counterpart, formed with the regular plural suffix. There is also a non-familiar second person pronoun, used for most other second person referents, *i.e.* for people with whom one is not related and for whom special respect or low respect is due: this form also has a plural formed with the regular plural suffix. Where high respect is due, as with people entitled to honorific nominal and verbal forms, the appropriate noun [and, therefore, third person reference] is used instead of a second person pronoun.

In the third person, a familiar form is distinguished from a neutral form and an honorific form. The last has no special plural: there is no form \*fnota-cuke. The other third person pronouns have plurals formed with the regular plural morpheme. The generic third person pronoun translates 'one': it can be used to refer to both human and non-human referents.

The interrogative pronouns are listed below:

'what'	tê
'who'	sû
'where'	khana
'which'	khoncu
'how much/many'	kfiate

These forms are used with the interrogative forms of the verb:

čhæ kfiate	mu-pɛ
tea	how.much be-INTERROGATIVE
'How much tea is this?'	

Interrogative pronouns are not fronted within their clause, being placed ordinarily in the slot appropriate to their grammatical role:

lakpɛ-sɛ	sû-re	mraŋ-pɛ
Lakpa-ERGATIVE	who-DAT/LOC	see-INTERROGATIVE
'Who did Lakpa see?'		

Determiners constitute a simple set from an areal perspective: proximal *cû* contrasts with distal *têta* [fast speech] and *tʰeta* [slow, careful speech]. These forms are used attributively and pronominally. The generic 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronoun *cɛ* also has a definite article-like function and lacks any sense of spatial deixis; it follows the nouns it determines: *pʰâlpe cɛ* 'the toad', *thɛ-pɛ cɛ-se* 'the big one'.

There is an indefinite singular article *-ri*, derived historically from the numeral *kʰrî* 'one'. It is an NP-final clitic. It is not used with all indefinite singular NPs, however. Rather, its use parallels the use of 'this' as an indefinite specific article in spoken English, introducing topical referents into discourse:

ŋê mʰi-ri	mraŋ-cin
I	person-INDEFINITE see-PAST
'I saw a certain person' ≈ 'I saw this guy'	

The implication is that the referent so introduced will be the topic of the following discourse.

*Verbs:* Verbs are inflected for tense, aspect, mood. Negative verbal forms involve the negative prefix *a-* and, often, the suffix *-i* substituting for a positive tense-aspect suffix. There is a special interrogative suffix *-pɛ*. Periphrastic verbal constructions are com

mon: the auxiliary verb is always a copular verb. Verbs may be nominalized [becoming verbal nouns] and adverbialized [becoming converbs, that is non-finite verbals having adverbial functions]. Verbs are not inflected for agreement with arguments, for direction, or for voice; they do not demonstrate a conjunct/disjunct distinction [but see the next paragraph]. Verbs are not morphologically marked for transitivity.

Central to the organization of the verbal paradigm is the 'direct/indirect' distinction. Direct forms are used to report situations that the speaker has witnessed; indirect forms are used to report situations that the speaker has indirect knowledge of, that is has come to know of the situation second-hand through hearsay, through inference, and so on. Sentences with first person subjects are ordinarily direct, though if the speaker were, for example, sleepwalking and were told of his/her actions by another, an indirect verb form would be used.

The main tense-aspect forms are given below:

	DIRECT		INDIRECT	
	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
PAST	V-čin	a-V-i	V-či(n) mû	a-V-i mû
AORIST	V-se	a-V-i	V-se mû	a-V-i mû
PRESENT	V (mû)	a-V mû	V(-pɛ/te) mûmu	a-V(-pɛ/te) mûmu, V(-pɛ/te) hârmu
DURATIVE	V-pɛ/te mû	a-V-i	V-pɛ/te mûmu	a-V-i mûmu

[In the table above, 'V' is used for any verbal root.] In general, the indirect forms are identical to the direct forms with the addition of a copula [see below for discussion of the copular verbs]: if a copula is already associated with a direct form, a sort of double copula is used with the corresponding indirect.

The 'past' is used to refer to situations in the non-immediate past. It ordinarily is associated with perfective aspect. The 'aorist' refers to the immediate past and the future; it also has a perfective sense. The aorist suffix is likely derived from the converbal suffix -se. The durative is a present tense form and is used with progressive senses and in cases where the on-going nature of habitual actions or states is emphasized.

Main clause modal affixes include:

IMPERATIVE: SINGULAR SUBJECT	-(t)aw
IMPERATIVE: PLURAL SUBJECT	-(t)ow
HORTATIVE:	-šo
POTENTIAL:	-kî

Subordinate clause affixes include the following:

SEQUENTIAL CONVERB	-se
CONDITIONAL:	-reme, -teme
INDETERMINATE NOMINALIZER	-pɛ
DETERMINATE NOMINALIZER	-te
POTENTIAL NOMINALIZER	-ne
PAST RELATIVE	-pi
NON-PAST RELATIVE	-pɛ

The distinction between the indeterminate and determinate nominalizers is one of aspect: the determinate nominalizer has a more completive sense, whereas the indeterminate nominalizer has a more progressive sense. This distinction involves a number of complexities, but can be illustrated simply with the following pair of sentences:

ŋâ-se lakpɛ-re fîkɛ p̄f̄ri-pɛ mraŋ-č̄in  
 I-ERGATIVE Lakpa-DAT/LOC letter write-NOMINALIZER see-PAST  
 'I saw Lakpa writing the letter'  
 ŋâ-se lakpɛ-re fîkɛ p̄f̄ri-te mraŋ-č̄in  
 I-ERGATIVE Lakpa-DAT/LOC letter write-NOMINALIZER see-PAST  
 'I saw Lakpa write the letter'

The first sentence, with the indeterminate nominalizer, makes no claim that the writing of the letter was ever completed. The second sentence, which involves the determinate nominalizer, implies that the writing was completed.

There is also an unaffixed subordinate verb form which is used in constructions with a range of meanings, including ingressive and egressive senses and causative senses. The generic name for this sort of construction is 'verb concatenation'. The last verb in the concatenation chain is inflected; there may be up to four verbs in the concatenation chain. A few examples follow:

p̄fra ni-w  
 walk go-IMPERATIVE  
 'go for a walk!'  
 kyâŋ lâ-w  
 reach do-IMPERATIVE  
 'Reach for it!'  
 târ kyû pi ni-w  
 be.in.order run go.fast go-IMPERATIVE  
 'Run in order!'  
 nôkyu cɛ-se t̄huŋ nâpraŋ č̄hâŋ cɛ pi tɛ lâ-č̄in  
 dog DEF-ERGATIVE bee nest DEF go.fast fall do-PAST  
 'the dog unwittingly knocked down the beehive'

*Copular Verbs:* There are two copular verbs, one of which, *n̄f̄e*, is defective in lacking past forms and in lacking a contrast between direct and indirect forms. The two copular verbs are listed below:

	<u>mû</u>		<u>n̄f̄e</u>
	DIRECT	INDIRECT	
DECLARATIVE	mû	mûmu	n̄f̄e
NEGATIVE	f̄are	f̄ârmu	f̄a-in
INTERROGATIVE	mu-pɛ	mu-pɛ	f̄in-pɛ [> f̄impe > mɛ]
NEGATIVE INTERROGATIVE	f̄ar-pɛ	f̄ar-pɛ	f̄a-in-pɛ
DECLARATIVE PAST	mû	mû-i	
NEGATIVE PAST	f̄are	f̄are	

In terms of use, *mû* is the unmarked form and is the form used in verbal periphrasis. It's basic use is in clauses asserting identity, but it has encroached on the territory of *n̄f̄e*, whose basic use is the expression of location. In the past tense, *mû* is used exclusively.

*Adjectives:* Adjectives can be distinguished from verbs in that, when they are predicates, they do not take verbal inflections and require a copular verb, and, when they are attributive, they follow their heads rather than precede them as relative clauses do.

A few adjectives have the nominalizing suffix -pɛ as a fixed component, but the suffix is not a regular part of Nar-Phu adjectival morphology.

*Expressive Vocabulary:* Like its relative Chantyal, Nar-Phu has an extensive set of lexical items which I will refer to as 'expressive vocabulary'. These words describe sounds [often onomatopoeically], the appearance of things, modes of action, physical sensations, or some combination of these factors. The words are usually full reduplications and are overwhelmingly in tones 2 and 3. Some examples follow:

čharcar	'falling down'
thokthok	'rapping, pounding'
khusti	'in a joking manner'

An example is provided showing the use of the expressive vocabulary in a sentence:

thô	čharcar	tæ-pɛ	mû
saliva	falling.down	become-NOMINALIZER	be-PRESENT
'he's slobbering'			

*Verb Particles:* Nar-Phu has a set of particles which express senses ranging from evidentiality to emotional reaction to the state of affairs expressed in the sentence. They are referred to as verb particles because they attach as clitics to the finite verb. The two most common are kâ, which has a contrastive emphatic sense, and ri, which indicates that the statement is factual, *i.e.* is not hearsay.

#### 4. WORD FORMATION

*Derivation:* Nar-Phu is not particularly rich in derivational morphology. Apart from the nominalizer and converbal affixes, there is relatively little. The gender affixes on nouns have been discussed above. There is also the suffix -tɛn, which means 'one from': čhupruŋ-tɛn 'one from Nar', pɦâlpɛ-tɛn 'one from Kathmandu'.

*Compounding:* Compounding is productive in Nar-Phu and an important morphological process. Both noun-noun compounds and noun-verb compounds exist. A few examples of noun-noun compounds:

mɦilaŋkhuŋ	'throat [ <small>&lt; mɦilaŋ 'black' + khuŋ 'hole'</small> ]
mêphra	'ash' [ <small>&lt; mê 'fire' + pɦrâ 'flour'</small> ]
kɦrêmsô	'molar' [ <small>&lt; kɦrêm 'cheek' + sô 'tooth'</small> ]
hlačhwɛ-	'pray, worship' [ <small>&lt; hla 'god' + čhwɛ- 'pray'</small> ]

As these examples show, a number of phonological processes are associated with the compounding process, though these are not yet fully understood.

#### 5. SYNTAX

*The Structure of the Noun Phrase:* The canonical order is as follows:

RELATIVE CLAUSE + DEMONSTRATIVE/GENITIVE + HEAD NOUN + ADJECTIVE + NUMERAL

This order is fairly consistently maintained, with one exception: in a very few cases adjectives precede their heads, *e.g.* pûtlu mɦi 'short person'. These cases may, on closer inspection, turn out to be compounds since the order within compounds is always

head-final. Plural and case markers are all NP-final clitics: where both are present, the plural marker precedes the case marker. Some examples follow:

cû nâwar čhi-pi                      cû nôkyu anye thepe  
 this cat    bite-RELATIVE.PAST this dog    very big  
 'this very big dog that bit this cat'  
 lame thepe-cuke-e                      che-cuke  
 lama big-PLURAL-GENITIVE child-PLURAL  
 'the important lamas' children'

*The Structure of the Clause:* In the overwhelming majority of cases, the verb complex [the semantic predicate and any auxiliaries and verb particles] will come last in the clause. As for the other constituents, orienting information [locative or temporal] comes first, followed by the rest of the constituents arranged according to their rank on the empathy hierarchy, which is reproduced below:

SPEECH ACT PRONOUNS [FIRST AND SECOND PERSON]  
 THIRD PERSON PRONOUNS  
 PERSONAL NAMES  
 OTHER HUMAN REFERENTS  
 ANIMATE NON-HUMANS  
 INANIMATES

In general, the higher a referent is on the hierarchy, the closer to the beginning of the clause it will appear. When there are two referents of equal rank, the subject will precede the object, and the object will precede obliques. Deviations from this arrangement are usually attributable to considerations like focus: topicalized items may be placed first in the clause.

Nar-Phu is rather less consistent than Chantyal in marking subjects of transitive clauses as ergative; still, most transitive subjects are so marked. The lack of ergative marking is not conditioned in any straightforward manner by tense-aspect or volitional-ity of the subject: the matter requires further study. Direct objects are, by default, in the absolutive case, but direct objects high on the empathy hierarchy are marked as datives. This sort of dative marking [*aka* 'anti-dative' shift] is obligatory for personal pronouns, virtually so for proper nouns, but is very unusual for NPs representing inanimates.

Two examples follow:

ŋâ-se            lakpe-re                      mraŋ-čin  
 I-ERGATIVE Lakpa-DAT/LOC see-PAST  
 'I saw Lakpa'  
 ŋâ-se            hîke mraŋ-čin  
 I-ERGATIVE letter see-PAST  
 'I saw the letter'

*Copular Clauses:* Copular verbs are, for the most part, obligatory in clauses with non-verbal predicates, though examples with no copular verb have been encountered in simple identification clauses:

ŋê-e            mîn lakpe  
 I-GENITIVE name Lakpa  
 'my name is Lakpa'

Ordinarily, though, a copular verb is present and comes last in the clause:

PREDICATE NOMINAL

kɰyaŋ tʃhâpɛ mûmu  
 you novice.monk be+PRESENT  
 'You're a novice monk [I've been told]'

PREDICATE ADJECTIVE

ŋâ khaŋ mû  
 I cold be+PRESENT  
 'I'm cold'

OBLIQUE CASE-MARKED NP FUNCTIONING AS PREDICATE

ŋâ thosor pʃhâlpe-re mû  
 I now Kathmandu-DAT/LOC be+PRESENT  
 'I'm in Kathmandu right now'

*Negative Clauses:* The negative prefix is a-, which assimilates to the tone of the verbal root, becoming murmured if the root has murmur. When a verb is negated, finite indicative suffixes are replaced by -i, as is shown in the paradigms above. Other verbal suffixes – either subordinate or non-indicative – are not replaced by -i:

lame a-kha-kî  
 lama NEGATIVE-COME-POTENTIAL  
 'the lama may not come'

No negative indefinite pronouns or adverbs [*i.e.* words like 'never', 'nothing'] have yet been found.

*Interrogative Clauses:* YES/NO QUESTIONS can be formed in several ways. Most simply, they can be formed from the corresponding statement through the substitution of an appropriate interrogative intonational contour. They can also be formed by the addition of the suffix -pɛ to the verb. This suffix usually replaces finite indicative verbal morphology,

tile lakpe čhæ thuŋ-pɛ  
 yesterday Lakpa tea drink-INTERROGATIVE  
 'Did Lakpa drink tea yesterday?'

but sometimes is used in addition to these suffixes:

ni-se-pɛ  
 go-AORIST-INTERROGATIVE  
 'Did he go?'

A construction involving positive and negative interrogative verbs is commonly encountered:

cû kyû thuŋ-pɛ a-thuŋ-pɛ  
 this water drink-INTERROGATIVE NEGATIVE-drink-INTERROGATIVE  
 'Did he drink water?'

INFORMATION questions are formed with an interrogative pronoun which is placed in the usual position within the clause that a corresponding non-interrogative form would take, *i.e.* the pronoun is not obligatorily fronted. The interrogative suffix is found in such sentences:

čhæ sû-se thuŋ-pɛ  
 tea who-ERGATIVE drink-INTERROGATIVE  
 'Who drank the tea?'

*Complement [Nominal] Clauses:* The two nominalizer suffixes, the ‘indeterminate’ -pɛ and the ‘determinate’ -te, were described briefly above. Both suffixes can be used to nominalize clauses so that they can fill nominal slots, either subject

hlekɛ hlô-pɛ                      cû-i                      kheyaj kâ  
 book read-NOMINALIZER this-GENITIVE work      EMPHATIC  
 ‘Reading books is his profession’

or direct object:

phô sê-te                              mraj-čin  
 game kill-NOMINALIZER see-PAST  
 ‘I saw the game shot’

In addition, there is also the suffix -ne, referred to as the ‘potential’ nominalizer. Verbs marked with this suffix also fill nominal slots and have an interpretation that marks them as coding unfulfilled, potential events or states:

ɲâ ɲhûn-ne                              tɛn mû  
 I sleep-NOMINALIZER desire be+PRESENT  
 ‘I want to sleep’

All three nominalizers are used extensively in verbal periphrasis.

There are no finite subordinate clauses except as direct quote complements of phi- ‘say’.

*Adjectival [Relative] Clauses:* Adjectival clauses, clauses that modify nouns, are clearly related to nominalizations. There are two relative suffixes, the present -pɛ and the past -pi: the present is no doubt identical to the indeterminate nominalizer -pɛ, the past is probably -pɛ plus an additional suffix, -i. -i could be identical to the -i suffix found in the verbal paradigm in negative clauses; it is also possible that it is a reflex of genitive suffix -(y)e, reflecting a regionally familiar pattern of genitive-marked nominalizers functioning as adjectival clauses. While tempting, the difficulty with the latter lies in explaining why the genitive should persist only in clauses with a past tense interpretation. Examples of relative clauses follow:

ɲâ-se                      šî-pi                              tfulthun mraj-čin  
 I-ERGATIVE die-PAST.RELATIVE snake.body see-PAST  
 ‘I saw a dead snake’  
 mîn te-ne                              a-tâ-pɛ                              pfuluɲ  
 name call-NOMINALIZER NEGATIVE-become-PRESENT.RELATIVE insect  
 ‘centipede’ [‘the insect whose name isn't called’]

*Adverbial Clauses:* Adverbial clauses in Nar-Phu are grammatically of two types: they are either nominalizations with an appropriate case marker which provides their semantic interpretation, or they are CONVERBS, specialized adverbial clause types.

Case marked nominalizations are used for a number of adverbial functions, including the expression of purpose. The nominalizers -pɛ and -te can occur with case suffixes.

ɲâ-se                      ɲliš                      hlô-te-re,                              ni-čin  
 I-ERGATIVE English teach-NOMINALIZER-DAT/LOC go-PAST  
 ‘In order to teach English, I went’

Converbal clauses are used to code a variety of senses, including condition

kfi-i laki-re nhô câ-reme tano mû  
 you-GENITIVE sake-DAT/LOC garlic eat-CONDITIONAL good be+PRESENT  
 'If you eat garlic, it's good for you'

and temporal sequence:

mfiyê câ-pe-re ni-se, mfiyê a-yân-se,  
 COW eat-NOMINALIZER-DAT/LOC GO-CONVERB COW NEGATIVE-find-CONVERB  
 fiyul-re yê ni-čin  
 village-DAT/LOC return go-PAST  
 'The cow having gone in order to eat, the cow having not been found, the man  
 returned to the village'

Overt conjunction of clauses is hardly used in Nar-Phu; instead, other devices, most particularly the sequential converb, are used.

## 6. REFERENCES

There is very little published on the Nar-Phu language. Martine Mazaudon has published an article on aspects of the historical phonology of the Nar-Phu dialects: she is the only other linguist [to my knowledge] who has investigated Nar-Phu. Besides her article, there is only one other publication to provide information about the Nar-Phu language, a book by the geographer and ethno-botanist Perdita Pohle, in which some botanical vocabulary from the Nar and Phu dialects is given, together with botanical descriptions of the plants and discussions of their use in local medicine. Tones are not marked, the transcription is only approximate, and some of the alleged Nar and Phu terms are, in fact, Tibetan. Still the book is a useful introduction to the regional ethnobotany and contains valuable data. References to these two works are given below:

Mazaudon, Martine. 1997. 'An outline of the historical phonology of the dialects of Nar-Phu (Nepal).' *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* 19.1:103-114.

Pohle, Perdita. 1990. *Useful Plants of Manang District: A Contribution to the Ethnobotany of the Nepal - Himalaya*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag.

A grammatical description of Nar-Phu is in preparation by the author.