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## Case-Marking System in Saptariya Tharu: A Typological Perspective

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### Abstract

*This paper explores the system of case marking in the Saptariya Tharu spoken in various districts of Nepal. Saptariya Tharu is identified as a nominative and accusative language, and studies are conducted to explore its case markers and postpositions. The paper discusses nominative case, accusative-dative case, locative case, genitive case, ablative case, instrumental case, and comitative case and highlights their use and examples. In addition, the paper compares the Saptariya Tharu case marking system with other Indo-Aryan languages spoken in Nepal's Terai region. It points out that most languages in this region also have nomenclature-accusation patterns. Furthermore, this article notes the similarities between these languages, emphasizing the absence of ergative case markers and the differences between instrumental, genitive, dative, and locative markers. The research concludes that it reveals a rich case-marking system of Saptariya Tharu in a broader context of the Indo-Aryan languages spoken in Nepal's terai region, highlighting its unique linguistic characteristics and typological similarities with neighboring languages.*

**Keywords:** Saptariya Tharu, Case Marking System, Nominative-accusative, Indo-Aryan languages, Typological Similarities

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### Introduction

Tharu is an Indo-Aryan language spoken by an ethnic community known as Tharu. The total Tharu population in Nepal is 1807124 (National Statistics Office, 2023). Whereas the Tharu speakers are 17,14,91. These people are scattered in the provinces of Koshi, Madhesh, Bagmati, Lumbini, and far-western Nepal. All Tharus living in different places do not speak the same language. Due to geographical distance and language contact, they have created various Tharus dialects. There are five kinds of dialects: Rana, Dagoura, Chitwaniya, Morgiya, and Kochila (Chaudhary, 2005). Scholars have classified this ethnic community and its language by region, including Saptariya (Kochila) in Saptari and surrounding districts, Chitoniya in Chitwan and the eastern part of Nawalparasi district, Dangaura in the western Terai districts, and Rana Tharu in Kailali and Kanchanpur districts. The purpose of this study is to describe the Case System in the Tharu language spoken in Saptari, Sunsari, Siraha, and Udaypur districts. As a result, it focuses on data rather than models. Language materials for this paper were gathered from native speakers of Terhauta and Sitapur villages in the Saptari District.

### Methodology

#### Data Collection

The data collection technique comprised recording spoken language samples, eliciting sentences and phrases, and interviewing native Saptariya Tharu speakers.

### **Data Gathering Techniques**

The technique of gathering the data included capturing spoken language samples, eliciting sentences and phrases, and conducting interviews with native Saptariya Tharu speakers.

### **Transcription and Standardization**

To achieve an accurate depiction of the spoken language, recorded language samples were translated into a uniform phonetic alphabet. Phonological details and morphological features were carefully recorded.

### **Corpus Development**

A corpus was created from the transcriptions, and this corpus served as the foundation for linguistic analysis.

### **Linguistic Analysis**

The linguistic analysis concentrated on Saptariya Tharu's case marking scheme. This involved locating and classifying the various case markers and postpositions that were present in the language.

Case marking patterns for nominative, accusative-dative, locative, genitive, ablative, instrumental, and comitative cases were identified by analyzing sentences and phrases from the corpus.

### **Typological Comparison**

A typological comparison was conducted with other Indo-Aryan languages spoken in Nepal's Terai region. It was made to offer a wider context. For this, existing language literature and resources were used.

Comparing Saptariya Tharu with its neighboring languages' case-marking conventions sought to highlight similarities and distinctions. To get findings on Saptariya Tharu's case-marking system, the collected linguistic data, as well as typological comparisons, were methodically analyzed and evaluated.

### **Data Interpretation**

This interpretation took into account linguistic details such as the existence of distinct instrumental, genitive, dative-accusative, locative, ablative, and comitative markers as well as the absence of ergative case indicators.

### **Conclusion and Implication**

To shed light on Saptariya Tharu's linguistic traits and its role in the Terai region's linguistic environment, the study's conclusions were summarised. The research's implications were highlighted, highlighting how important it is to preserve and investigate languages like Saptariya Tharu to better understand linguistic variety and typology.

### **Case Marking System**

Case marking in languages around the world varies remarkably amongst them typologically. Givon (2001) notes the three systems that are now in use: nominative-accusative (coding pragmatic function), ergative-absolutive (coding transitivity), and active-stative (coding semantic roles). Because of its close neighbors, Chitoniya Tharu uses the pragmatically oriented nominative-accusative case-marking technique (Poudyal, 2013).

Saptariya Tharu is a nominative-accusative language, as shown by case markers and postpositions. The case marking system is classified as a morpho-syntactic category in Indo-Aryan languages (Masica 1991). Before we go into case markers, let's take a look at Saptariya Tharu's case marking method. We will distinguish between the grammatical relationships of subject (S), agent (A), and patient (P). Such principles are derived from (Payne, 1997). The Saptariya Tharu is an Indo-Aryan language that follows the nominative/accusative case marking system. In example (1) the subject and the agent in example (2) are the same, VIZ, həm 'I'. The patient in (2) is okəra 'him'.

- (1) a. həm b<sup>h</sup>aig geliəi  
 həm bhaig ge-l-əi  
 I-SG run go PST.ISG  
 'I ran away.'
- (2) a. həm okəra kitab deliəi  
 həm ok-ra kitab de-l-əi  
 I-SG he-DAT book give – PST.ISG  
 'I gave him a book.'

In these instances (1-2), the subject of the intransitive sentence and the agent of the transitive clause are marked identically, but the object or patient is marked differently. In other words, the subject and agent are morphologically marked similarly, but the object or patient is designated. The patient argument in example (2) is distinguished by an additional marker-ra'DAT'.

### Case Markers

According to Blake (1994), the Case marking system categorizes dependent nouns according to the connection they have with their heads. The term normally relates to inflectional marking, with the case typically denoting the link between a noun and a verb at the sentence level or between a noun and a preposition, postposition, or another noun at the phrase level.

This section focuses on the case markers in Saptariya Tharu. The case indicators include dative-accusative, locative, genitive, instrumental, and ablative.

### Nominative Case

Saptariya Tharu's nominative case is unmarked or lacks an inflection. I used - $\emptyset$  as the subject complement in copular clauses. Nominative nouns appear in the subject position of intransitive sentences (3-4), and they do not use case markers. As previously stated, some objects take case markers, whereas others do not. For example (3), the subject 'Kələm' (pen) inanimate things in Saptariya Tharu have no case markers.

- (3) a. həm - $\emptyset$  kələm - $\emptyset$  kinliəi  
 həm kələm kin-l-əi  
 I-SG pen buy -PST.ISG  
 'I bought pen.'
- (4) a. həm - $\emptyset$  b<sup>h</sup>at- $\emptyset$  k<sup>h</sup>eliə  
 həm - $\emptyset$  b<sup>h</sup>at- $\emptyset$  k<sup>h</sup>a-l-əi  
 I SG rice eat- PST.ISG  
 'I ate rice.'

*Dative -Accusative*

The accusative is the case of the direct object of the transitive verb the patient the dative is the case of the indirect object of a ditransitive predicate, which is the recipient. According to Masica (1991), "there is no accusative case in NIA" and the accusative marker has merged with the nominative in all NIA languages. Saptariya Tharu uses the accusative-dative case marker 'ke', which is marked to the root stem of the noun, in example (5a) but to the oblique stems of the pronouns as the form of -ra, in example (5b). In the accusative-dative case, pronouns have oblique stems (Dhakal, 2013).

- (5) a. ram burhiyake dek<sup>h</sup>ələkəi  
 ram burhiya-ke dek<sup>h</sup>-l-kəi  
 Ram old woman- DAT see-PST-3SG  
 'Ram saw an old woman.'  
 b. sita həmra t<sup>h</sup>əgləkəi  
 sita həm-ra t<sup>h</sup>əg-l-kəi  
 Sita I-SG.OBL-DAT cheat-PST-3SG

Saptariya Tharu distinguishes between human and non-human Patients. Human patients are obligatorily marked for the accusative case with -ke (5a-b). Whereas non-human patients are distinguished based on the animacy hierarchy. Similarly, inanimate patients are always unmarked (6a) but the animate non-human Patients are optionally marked with-ke(6b-c).

- (6) a. ai u guriya kinlkəi  
 ai u guriya kin-l-kə  
 Today 3SG doll buy-PST-3SG  
 'Today he bought a doll.'  
 b. burhiya ekṭa tsirəi palnets<sup>h</sup>əi  
 burhiya ek-ṭa tsirəi pal-ne ts<sup>h</sup>-əi  
 old woman one-CLF bird keep-PRF be-3SG  
 'The old woman had kept a bird.'  
 c. u piṭte piṭte narhiyake wahaṭ<sup>h</sup>ina mardelkəi  
 u piṭ-te piṭ-te narhiya-ke wahaṭ<sup>h</sup>ina mar-de-l-kəi  
 3SG beat-SIM jackel-DAT there kill-give-PST-3SG  
 'He killed the jackal at the spot by beating .

The above examples justify that the animate Patient Guriya 'doll' in(6a) is not marked for a dative case. Similarly, the animate Patient tsirəi' bird' is not marked in(6b). but in example (6c) narhiya'jackal'-DAT is marked.

If a ditransitive verb has two human objects, the indirect object is marked for the dative case; the direct object is never marked. For example :

- (7) a. ram həmra apən beṭa delkəi  
 ram həm-ra apən beṭa de -l-kəi  
 Ram ISG-DAT REFL son give-PST-3SG  
 'Ram gave me his son.'

The dative-accusative marker-ke has its allomorph -ra which is marked only with the possessive pronoun as a dative marker in example (8a).

- (8) a. okəra dui gora piṭlkəi  
 ok-ra dui-gora piṭ-l-kəi  
 3SG-DAT two-NCFL beat-PST-3SG  
 ‘Two people beat him.’

The object yekərə-kə uses the case marker -ra/rə instead of -ke.

The Dative-Accusative marking system is similar in other NIA languages, including Bhojpuri, Maithili, Punjabi, and Bengali. Maithili distinguishes between humans and non-humans, as well as between living and non-living things. In these languages, the use of dative with non-personal animates conveys a decisive meaning.

### *Locative Case*

The locative is essentially the ‘in-case,’ the case indicating circumstance or position, but its range of application has been substantially broadened to touch and overlap the limits of other cases, for which it initially appeared to be a replacement (Whitney, 1962).

In Saptariya Tharu, the locative markers are encoded in the form of -me, and -e. The locative marker is used to situate something in space or in time. Examples 9-10 demonstrate how the locative marker locates things in space.

- (9) a. bilai konme g<sup>h</sup>osərləi  
 bilai kon-me ghosə-l-əi  
 cat corner-LOC hide-PST.3SG  
 ‘The cat hide in the corner.’

- (10) b. bouwa g<sup>h</sup>ərme st<sup>h</sup>əi  
 bouwa g<sup>h</sup>ər-me st<sup>h</sup>-əi  
 son house-LOC be-PERS.3SG  
 ‘The younger brother is in the house.’

In addition to the locative -me, the suffix -e is used as a locative marker as well as an emphatic locative, which is marked -e as in (11) in Saptariya Tharu.

- (11) a. lədi ərakate kət<sup>h</sup>i ct<sup>h</sup>eləi  
 lədi-ke ərakat-e kət<sup>h</sup>i ct<sup>h</sup>e-l-əi  
 river -GEN bank-LOC.EMPH what be-PST.3SG  
 ‘What was there on the side of the river?’

In (11), the emphatic locative marker -e indicates that the bank of the riverside shows the particular place. In other words, it refers edge of the river.

### *Genitive*

Chatterji (1926) considers the remnant of -kka of the MIA and says it is used -k in northern Bengal and Assam. Typologically, he claims that the Maithili genitive postposition -ke, Magahi genitive-ke Bhojpuriya genitive-ke are all identical to the Bengali postposition. This historical reference shows that the genitive-ər Saptariya Tharu is typologically similar to other NIA languages such as Maithili, Magahi, Bengali, and Bhojpuri.

The genitive marker is attached to the possessor. The pronouns use the genitive marker -ər, while nouns use the genitive suffix -‘ke’. When the possessor and possessed words are combined in genitive phrases, the possessor appears first. There are the following instances.

- (12) a. okər beṭi rajbirajme cʰəi  
 ok-ər beṭi rajbiraj-me cʰ-əi  
 he-GEN son Rajbiraj-LOC be-PERS.ISG  
 ‘His daughter is in Rajbiraj.’
- (13) okər nam kətʰi tsiyəu  
 ok-ər nam kəthi tsi-əu  
 he-GEN name What be-PERS.2PL  
 ‘What is his name?’

### ***Ablative***

To convey removal, separation, differentiation, problem, and similar concepts, the ablative case is utilized (Whitney, 1962). The Saptariya Tharu's ablative function is realized as -se, which is identical to the instrumental marker -se.

Ablative -se Source is expressed by ablative marker –se ‘from’ to refer from. Somewhere as in (14) as from time as in (15), this indicates the source of action. The source is spatial (14) or temporal (15).

- (14) a. həm gamse bədzar eltsəi  
 həm gam-se bədzar e-l-tsi-əi  
 I-SG village-ABL market come-PST-be.ISG  
 ‘I came market from village.’
- (15) a. həm aise okərlel bʰat ninʰtsəi  
 həm ai-se o k-ər -lel bhat ninʰ-tsi-əi  
 I-SG today-ABL he/she -GEN for rice cook-be.ISG  
 ‘I have to cook rice for him starting today.’

In addition to these, -se has a few further applications. The case marker -se is used to indicate the transition from one stage to the next, as illustrated in (16).

- (16) a. u sipahise həwəldar bʰeləi  
 u sipahi-se həwəlda bʰe-l-əi  
 3SG soldier-ABL military post become-PST-3SG  
 ‘He became military from soldier.’

### ***Instrumental Case***

The with-case was originally known as an instrument case. Despite being employed to describe the idea of adjacency, accompaniment, and affiliation in OIA ( Whitney, 1962 ), along with the method and instrument, Saptariya Tharu has only kept it in the meaning of a tool or method. The case marking is visible on the instrument case. se.

-Se is an instrumental marker that is the same as ablative in Saptariya Tharu. In examples (17) and (18) the instrumental marker is connected to 'həsuwa' ‘sickle’ and dzəribuṭi ‘herbs’, respectively.

- (17) a. u həsuwase gʰās kaṭlkəi  
 u həsuwa-se gʰās kaṭ-l-kəi  
 3SG stick-INST snake-ACC cut-PST.3SG  
 ‘He cut the grass with the sickle.’

- ( 18 ) a.      dzəribuʈise ya matrə adəmi bətsət              rəhəi  
                  dzəribuʈi-se ya matrə adəmi bəts-ət              rəh-əi  
                  herbs-INST or only    man    be-safe-HAB    be-PST.3SG  
                  ‘The herbs or spell used to save the people.’

### *Comitative*

Saptariya Tharu uses the comitative marker *-səŋge* with Comitative case denotes accompaniment. As an example,

- ( 19 ) a.    həm okər səŋge bədzar geliəi  
                  həm ok-ər-səŋge bədzar ge-l-əi  
                  I-SG he/she –GEN -COM market go-PST.ISG  
                  ‘I went to market with him.’

### **Saptariya Case Marking with a Typological Perspective**

This section examines the case markers and marking system of Saptariya Tharu from an areal typological framework. We should compare the case markers to the Tharu variants spoken from east to west in Nepal. In addition to the Tharu variants, there are numerous more nearby Indo-Aryan languages. The typological comparison will be based on limited information. Appendix A provides a summary of case indication in many IA languages

The languages described in the Appendix A use nominative-accusative case marking systems. On the other hand, a considerable number of Indo-Aryan languages lack the ergative marker and instead exhibit these characteristics.

A large number of languages follow this system, Nepalese Tharu variations, for example, use nominative-accusative case marking. Maithili (Yadav, 1996), Bhojpuri (Shukla, 1981), Bajjika (Mahato et al., 2009; Roy (2010), and Rajbanshi (Wilde, 2008) all have similar characteristics. This contrasts with the ergative-absolutive languages spoken in the region. The Appendix B contains a significant number of languages, including Nepali, Bote, and Darai, along with the ergative-absolutive case assignment. Saptariya Tharu lacks an ergative marker.

The ergative case marking system of all languages evaluated in Nepal has yet to be investigated and requires additional research. Split ergativity in Nepal is based on tense and aspect, whereas split ergativity in Darai and Majhi is founded on nominal hierarchy. Masica (1991) observes that split ergativity is a widespread feature in Indo-Aryan languages.

The languages without ergative case markers have different or distinct instrumental case markers. For instance, *-Se* is an instrumental marker that can be characterized as follows (a) *Se-* (Saptariya Tharu, Chitwania Tharu, Rana Tharu, Bajjika, Bhojpuri).

Some of these languages contain two genitive markers beginning with *-k* and *-r*, whereas others have only one marker. Maithili and Majhi, which are geographically located in eastern Nepal, have only one genitive marker, *-r*. However, Dangora Tharu only uses one of the genitive suffixes, *-k*.

In many languages, the dative-accusative case begins with *-k*. However, in Nepali, Majhi, and Danuwar, they are *-lai* dative, accusative case indicators. All other languages employ the dative *-o* case marker, most often *-ke*, while some start with *-k*.

The locative case marker starts with *-m* in the majority of languages. The only language that stands out in this regard is Majhi, which has a separate kind of locative marker, viz. *-ka*, *-*

ra.. In addition, Saptariya Tharu has additional locative markers –pər, -e like the Bhojpuri language.

Furthermore, the ablative case marker is mainly formed in two ways, either –sear bat. Masica (1991) observes that the suffix -se appears in numerous forms in Hindi from Bihar to Rajasthan. Saptariya Tharu uses the ablative marker -se, which is shared by several languages. Similarly, languages that have the ablative marker -baṭə. The ablative case marking is correct; baṭ is slightly different phonologically.

Finally, all languages save Bhojpuri have a sociative postposition (or marker). The sociative marker ‘səŋge’ is significant in various IA languages. Many languages also share instrumental and sociative cases such as Bhojpuri, Darai, and Rana Tharu.

### Conclusion

Saptariya Tharu is identified as a nomenclature-accusative language. It shows distinct case markers and postpositions to show different grammatical relationships within sentences. The study places Saptariya Tharu in the larger framework of Indo-Aryan languages spoken in the Terai region of Nepal. It points out that most of these languages, including Saptariya Tharu, follow a nomenclature-accusation case marking model. In these languages, ergative case markers are particularly absent. This paper presents a comparison analysis of case markers of Saptariya Tharu with other neighboring Indo-Aryan languages in the region. It reveals the similarities in instrument, genitive, dative-accusative, and locative markers, demonstrating the typological connections between these languages. The article discusses various case markers, including nominative (without a label), accusative-dative (with a label), locative (with a label, "-me", and "-e"), genitive (with a label, "-r" for nouns and "-ke" for nouns), abbreviated (with a label, "-se"), instrumental (also with a label, "-s") and comitative (with -s). The study emphasizes that Saptariya Tharu shows a rich case productivity, further strengthening its linguistic complexity in a broader typological landscape.


Finally, the paper provides a valuable perspective on the language features of the Saptariya Tharu and its position in the Indo-Aryan language of the Nepalese terai region. This study helps to understand the diversity and typology of languages in this language context and emphasizes the importance of maintaining and studying such languages to enrich our knowledge of human communication.



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**Appendix A**  
**Case indicators in Indo-Aryan languages of Terai, Nepal**

<b>Languages</b> 	Rana Tharu	Dagauna Tharu	Nepali	Chitwania Tharu	Bote	Darai	Bhojpuri	Bajjika	Maithili	Saptariya Tharu	Rajbanshi
<b>Ergative</b>	-	-	-le	-	-ĩ	-ĩ	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Instrumental</b>	-se	-seŋ	-le	-se, ma hẽ	-ĩ	-ĩ	-se	-se	-s -sə	-se	-de
<b>Dative-accusative</b>	-ke	-hənə	-lai	-ke, -k	-ke	-ke	-ke	-ke	-ke	-ke	-k
<b>Genitive</b>	-ko, -ro	-ək	-ko, -ro	-rə, -kə	-ko	-kə , -rə	-ke -ər -r	-ke -ər	-ək -ər	-ke, -ra	-er
<b>Locative</b>	-me, -ke	-mə -the	-ma	-ma -me	-me	-jə	-e -me -pər	-pər -me	-me	-me -e -pər	-pər, mikhi, biti, tina
<b>Ablative</b>	-se	-se	batə dekh i	-se	bhəi	-se	-se	?	-sə -sə	-se	-se
<b>Sociative</b>	-səŋ	-səŋ	səŋə	səŋe	sin	-se, -sə ŋ	-ke/ka jore	sathe	səŋge	səŋge	səŋe

Note: The absence of a marker is indicated by (-) and the gaps by (?). ( Dhakal,2013)

## **Appendix B**

### **Abbreviations**

1. First person
  2. Second person
  3. Third person
- |      |                          |
|------|--------------------------|
| ABL  | Ablative case marker     |
| ACC  | Accusative case marker   |
| COM  | commutative case marker  |
| DAT  | Dative case marker       |
| DIR  | Directive case marker    |
| EMPH | Emphatic                 |
| GEN  | Genitive case marker     |
| IA   | Indo-Aryan               |
| INS  | Instrumental case marker |
| LOC  | Locative case marker     |
| MIA  | Middle Indo-Aryan        |
| NIA  | New Indo-Aryan           |
| OIA  | Old Indo-Aryan           |
| PST  | Past tense               |
| SG   | Singular                 |
| PERS | Present                  |