

## A Comparative Study of Participles in Mech and Rajbanshi

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### Abstract

Mech and Rajbanshi are the two lesser-known languages available mostly in the Eastern zone of the Indian subcontinent and Nepal. Their originations are anticipated to have evolved from two different ancestral genealogies, such as Tibeto-Burman and Indo-Aryan language families respectively. This paper provides a putative comparative study of participles in the two alluded languages. The highlighted distinctions in desententialization, conjunctive participles, and reduplication in the two mentioned languages have been discussed.

**Keywords:** Mech, Rajbanshi, participles, desententialisation, deranked, reduplication, comparative study.

### Introduction

Participles are morphologically deranked verbs used for adnominal modifications (Shagal 2007). A linguistic dictionary Crystal (2003) defines it as a 'traditional grammatical term of a word derived from a verb and used as an adjective; in linguistics, the term is restricted to non-finite forms of verbs other than infinitives. Haspelmath (1994) defines participles as 'traditionally verb forms that behave like adjectives with respect to morphology and external syntax'. It has always been observed that defining participles, in general, is quite challenging as the formation varies with respective varying languages. The formation of participles among languages differs on various levels. The non-finite form of the verb such as participle differs from the finite form in its 'deranked' (Stassen 1985) nature. The non-finite verb loses certain characteristics which were otherwise present in the finite verb. There is a state of reduction in the clausal level. This process of reduction in the subordinate clause is

known as desententialisation (Lehmann, 1982). The main characteristics of participles lie in being desententialised or deranked and the degree to which it takes place varies differently in different languages.

Participles are indeed non-finite inflectional verb forms which are mostly cross-linguistically affixal. There is an ongoing controversy regarding participles being derivational or inflectional forms of the verb. Haspelmath (1996) has claimed that participles are word class-changing inflectional morphemes. The word participle is used as an umbrella term to express both adjectival participles and converbs in this study. Converbs are non-finite forms of verbs that serve to express adverbial sub-ordinates.

This paper is a comparative study of participles between Mech and Rajbanshi found in the eastern zone of the Indian subcontinent and Nepal belonging to two different genealogical language families of Tibeto-Burman and Indo-Aryan languages families respectively.

### **General Idea on Rajbanshi and Mech Speech Community**

The ancestors of the Rajbanshi speech community are longed back to the Koch tribe. The verbal tale goes back to such as in 1912 they performed a sacred thread ceremony at Rangpur to convert themselves to Khatriya Hindus and started calling themselves Rajbanshis ((Mondal), 2016). Rajbanshi is spoken in south-eastern Nepal and north-eastern India, mainly in the state of West Bengal (Cooch Bihar, Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri) and possibly western Assam. Though Rajbanshi as a language is considered genealogically to be an Indo-Aryan language, its anthropological history proclaims that it is a descendant of the Bodo tribe which is a Tibeto-Burman-speaking speech community (Singh, 1988). The Census of India (2011) indicates that approximately 4,75,861 individuals in India speak Rajbanshi.

The Tibeto-Burman-speaking Indo-Mongoloid tribe the Bodos, migrated into India through the Patkoi Hills between India and Burma and gradually spread themselves into the whole of modern Assam and North Bengal. The Bodos are “the largest in the Tista-Brahmaputra valley comprising western Assam and a pervasive tract of North Bengal specially the Dooars of Jalpaiguri, the northern part of Cooch Behar, and the plains of Darjeeling districts”. (Debnath, 2010:81.). They were further subdivided into four classes, Mech, Koch, Rabha, and Garo. They are known by different names in different areas. Those who settled in

the North Bengal area of West Bengal are commonly recognized as the Mech. The Meches belonging to the Asura dynasty gradually settled at the Duars. At present, Mech is a highly endangered language. The study is based on extensive fieldwork at the Chyakamari village in Madarihat, Alipurduar. The village constitutes around 200 houses with Mech households. According to the Census of India (2011), the estimated number of Mech speakers in the country is approximately 11,546 individuals.

### **Desententialisation**

The process of desententialisation was introduced by Lehmann (1982). During the clause-linking process, the subordinate clause either reduces or expands. In the process of reduction, it loses some of its properties which had specific reference to some state of affairs that were otherwise present in the independent clause. When the component of the clause that otherwise had a specific state of affairs gets detached, the state is typified. Simultaneously, the clause acquires internal and external nominalization, and the end of which, it becomes a nominal or adverbial constituent of the matrix clause (Lehmann, 1982). This process of reduction is known as desententialisation. Eventually, the dependent clause is structurally different from the independent clause. A similar kind of concept was introduced by Stassen (1985) with the idea of deranking. When the predicate of the subordinate clause is structurally different from the main clause, the concept is recognized as deranked construction. The opposite of derank is balanced construction where the predicate of the subordinate clause and the main clause is structurally similar or balanced. Participial clauses lose their lexical or grammatical categories to make them deranked and desententialised.

	status	sententiality	→	desententialization	→	nominality/ (adjectivity/ adverbiality)
<b>properties</b> \						
<b>category</b>		finite subordinate clause		non-finite construction		deverbal stem
<b>internal properties</b>		shrinking / leveling of functional sentence perspective				
		no illocutionary force				
		constraints on illocutionary elements				
		constraints on/loss of modal elements and mood				
		constraints on/loss of tense and aspect				
		dispensability of complements				
		loss of personal conjugation				
		conversion of subject into oblique slot				
		no polarity				
		conversion of verbal into nominal government				
		dispensability of subject				
		constraints on complements				
<b>combinable with</b>		adposition		agglutinative case affix		flexive case affix

Table 1: Lehmann (1988)

The table above represents the order in which a subordinate clause loses its semantic components and categories.

Both Rajbanshi and Mech participles go through the process of desententialisation. One thing that is common in both Mech and Rajbanshi is both are devoid of personal and number conjugation on the subordinate predicate. The observation of the limited primary data of Mech showed no sign of possible modality or a modal element attached to the participial clauses. The constraint in which the two languages, Mech and Rajbanshi differ is the availability of aspectual and modal meaning on the participial predicate in the subordinate clause. It has been observed from some of the secondary data of Rajbanshi that a few of the sentences retain their aspectual meaning whereas others do not.

1. ar ja-ene ekdΛm kan-is

and go-CONJ.PRT very cry-SUBJ2sg

'having gone, cry really hard' (Wilde, 2008)

2. kam-la kΛr-ihin ja-m-i-n

work-PL do-CONJ.PTCL[EMPH] go-FUT-SA3-1sg

'I will (certainly) finish work (on his/her/their behalf) and then leave.' (Wilde, 2008)

The examples above indicate an aspectual function of the participle. On the contrary, there is evidence of Rajbanshi data found which do not have the aspectual function in their meaning. Instead, they represent manners and instruments in their function.

3. mui cʌk<sup>h</sup>u-la muj<sup>h</sup>-ie bera-c-u (representing manner)

1sg[pro] eyes-PL close-CONJ.PTCL walk-PRES-1sg

'I walk / am walking with my eyes closed.' (Wild, 2008)

- has-ie pagʌl (hʌ-c-it), d<sup>h</sup>udi c<sup>h</sup>agʌl (representing instrument)

laugh-CONJ.PTCL madman (be-PRES-2sg), female goat (Wilde, 2008)

The collected primary data in Mech shows no such deviations. Usually, they are devoid of any kind of tense aspect mood constraints on the participial forms available.

4. bi khamani məunin məunin bæi faraijə

3<sup>rd</sup>SG work do.CONT book study

'She reads book while working'

Both languages are devoid of tense constraints. The temporal characteristics in participle clauses are deranged from the traditional tense characteristics of finite clauses. Lehmann's (1988) concept of desentailisation entails that any language which doesn't have a specific internal property doesn't have any other above it on the list provided in the table given above. Both the concerned languages are shown to follow the mentioned order.

### Conjunctive Participle

Conjunctive participles in general are clause-linking devices. They link sequences of events and are a predominant character in South-Asian languages. One of the primary functions that the conjunctive participle performs is to denote sequential actions (Subbarao & Arora, 2009). One of the prominent rules for conjunctive participle is the same subject constraint. The rule states that the participial clause can only be formed when the

subject of the subordinate clause and the subject of the matrix clause are co-referential. Here in this paper, the formation of conjunctive participles in Mech and Rajbanshi will be observed.

The participial suffix for different dialects of Rajbanshi is found to be varying. In general, the participial suffix for Rajbanshi is –ei. It has an allomorph –e when used with stem final words. The Northern Jhapa dialect uses the suffix –iene, the Rangeli dialect uses –(i)ena and Dadar Bairia dialect use the form –(e)ke respectively for conjunctive participle formation (Wilde, 2008).

3. mui cʌk<sup>h</sup>u-la muj<sup>h</sup>-ie bera-c-u  
 1sg[pro] eys-PL close-CONJ.PTCL walk-PRES-1sg

'I walk / am walking with my eyes closed.' (Wilde, 2008)

It is already mentioned above that conjunctive participles are a prominent character in South Asian languages and one of the predominant rules for the formation of conjunctive participle is the same subject constraints. The rule demands the subjects of the matrix clause and the participial clause should be co-referential. An exception to this rule has been observed in the secondary data of Rajbanshi.

4. k<sup>h</sup>ʌnjʌra-ɖʌ-t g<sup>h</sup>ās rak<sup>h</sup>-ie gʌru b<sup>h</sup>ʌis-la-k  
 feeding\_trough-NCLS-LOC grass put-CONJ.PTCL bullock water\_buffalo-PL-DAT

5. k<sup>h</sup>il-a ja-c<sup>h</sup>e  
 feed-PST.PTCL PASS.AUX-PRES-3

'The cattle are fed by putting grass or straw in to the feeding trough.' (Wilde, 2008)

6. Jehene bag<sup>h</sup>-ɖʌ t<sup>h</sup>ipr-iene ja-c-ki sor-ɖʌ-r pʌr  
 when tiger-NCLS jump-CONJ.PTCL go-PRES-SA3 pig-NCLS-GEN on\_top

'When the tiger jumped (lit. went by jumping) onto the boar...!' (Wilde, 2008)

So, it can be concluded from the above examples that when the subjects are non-human, there is a possibility of exception of the same subject rule in Rajbanshi. Such exceptions are not observed in Mech. The conjunctive participial suffix form for Mech is –ra.

7. bini bæi dɔŋra be?na bi lambai

3<sup>rd</sup>SG book kept.CON.JPTCL bag.SPE 3SG take.PRF

‘She took the bag in which she had kept books.

This section jots down the conjunctive participial forms of Mech and Rajbanshi perfectly well. The comparative difference between the two languages is in the same subject constraint rule. Mech follows the same subject constraint parameter perfectly well whereas exception is sometimes found in Rajbanshi with non-human subjects.

## Reduplication

Reduplication is a word formation process in which all or part of a word is repeated and the range of patterns varies from a single segment being copied to an entire phrase to convey some form of meaning (Urbanczyk, 2017). It stands for the repetition of all or part of a lexical item carrying a semantic modification (Abbi, 1990). Reduplication is a predominant characteristic found in South Asian languages. Reduplicated verbal adverbs and adjectives employ aspects of Indian languages. Reduplication based on aspect can be divided into continuity, simultaneity, iteration, and non-precipitation (Abbi, 1990). An important phenomenon of participles is reduplication.

The suffix that denotes reduplication in Rajbanshi is –te. It is the imperfective form of the participle. It denotes two simultaneous actions taking place emphasizing the action. The action is the highlight of the discourse.

8. eneŋ=e                      kʌr-te                      kʌr-te

ike\_this=EMPH do-CONT.PTCL do-CONT.PTCL

While continuing like this...’ (Wilde, 2008)

9. gʌt-la=e                      b<sup>h</sup>uk-te                      b<sup>h</sup>uk-te                      k<sup>h</sup>eŋia-la-k                      piŋa-e l-  
i<sup>h</sup>-e

all-PL=EMPH bark-CONT.PTCL bark-CONT.PTCL jackal-PL-DAT chase-  
ABSAUX-PERF-3

They all chased the jackals while barking and barking.’ (Wilde, 2008)

Imperfective participles in Rajbanshi are sometimes attached to auxiliary. In these cases, they are not reduplicated.

10. sʌmʌe sʌmʌe-t as-te rʌh-is  
time time-LOC come-CONT.PTCL AUX(CONT)-SUBJ2sg  
'Keep visiting once in a while.' (Lit. 'keep coming') (Wilde, 2008)

Reduplication in Mech is denoted by –in. It is the imperfective participle marker in Mech and all the imperfective participles can be reduplicated in Mech.

11. bi khamani məunin məunin bæi faraijə  
3<sup>rd</sup>SG work do.CONT book study  
'She reads a book while working'

The suffix for adjectival participle in Rajbanshi is -al. It has a variant -a in Rajbanshi. They are devoid of the TAM paradigm and can be used for reduplication.

12. sʌr-a(l) alu-la  
rot-PST.PTCL potatoes-PL  
'rotten potatoes' (Wilde, 2008)
13. usn-a(l) usn-a(l) kʌcu-la  
boil-PST.PTCL boil-PST.PTCL[kacu] vegetable-PL  
'boiled [kacu] vegetables' (Wilde, 2)

The major difference that surfaces in the formation of participles in Mech and Rajbanshi is in the occurrence of reduplication. Only the imperfective participles in Mech can be reduplicated whereas both the imperfective and adjectival participles in Rajbanshi can be reduplicated with the exception when the imperfective participles are followed by auxiliaries.

## Conclusion

Rajbanshi and Mech are the two lesser-known languages generally found in a close looming proximal geographical area. The evident discussion foretells variant distinctions in the



formation of participles in the mentioned languages. The perceptible reason can be surmised due to their descending from two different genealogical families with different inherent morpho-syntactic characteristics.

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