

## Cultural formalism and spatial language in Belhara

When looking at ethnographies of Himalayan societies, one is impressed by the recurrent relevance and importance of spatial notions in cultural domains from shamanism to architecture, from belief systems to everyday behaviour, from religion to grammar. This is also the case of the Belhare people, i. e., of the autochthonous inhabitants of the Belhara (Nep. *Belhārā*) hill in Eastern Nepal (see the map on page 29), and in this essay I want to explore where this impression comes from and what kind of cognitive reality it may be assigned to.

The Belhara people number about two thousand and live as farmers scattered in relatively isolated hamlets around the hill, interspersed with more recent settlements of Indo-Aryan, Newar, Magar and Tamang stock. The autochthonous inhabitants are of Kiranti (Sino-Tibetan) descent and form a close social and cultural unity with the Athpare (Nep. *Āthpāre* or, in Sanskritizing language, *Āthpahariya*) of neighbouring Dhankuta (Nep. *Dhankuṭā*) bazaar. Linguistically, however, the Belhara people are distinct and have recently become known under the loonym 'Belhare' (Nep. *Belhāre*) introduced by the Linguistic Survey of Nepal (Hanßon 1991, also cf. Dahal 1985, Vikal and Rāī 2051).<sup>1</sup> The Athpare community as a whole is usually perceived by outsiders as part of the large Rai (*Rāī*) group spread over Eastern Nepal, but this identification is sometimes rejected by Athpares, which fits with the observation that the Athpare do not share the creation and origin myths that are characteristic of Rai communities.

Living with Belhare people, one sometimes overhears utterances like the following.<sup>2</sup>

(1) *ai Jantare! cia thuj-dhany-itt-u!* <G5.8b>

INTERJ fifth.born tea set.up.to.cook-go.UPWARDS-ACCELERATIVE-3U  
'Hey Jantare! Go up and cook up some tea!'

What is crucial about examples like (1) is that the spatial relationships expressed could not be structured differently from the way they are conceptualized linguistically. Irrespective of the house in which the utterance in (1) is produced, it would successfully refer to the location of the kitchen as being 'up' since, as a general rule, the hearth is positioned in such a way that it falls into the uphill or northern side of the house. Analogous generalisations hold in the following instances.

- (2) a. *gundri*      *thaŋ-ma*                      *khe-yu*. <G5.41a>  
 straw.mat    take.UPWARDS-INF    must-NPT  
 'One should install the *gundri* [warp] upwards.'

- b. *lakhe!*    *beula*    *cuptaŋ*,    *beuli*    *phɛŋsaŋ!*...    *beula*    *na-pmu!* <G3.90a>  
 INTERJ    groom    RIGHT    bride    LEFT            groom    this-DOWN  
 'Wait a minute! The groom to the right, the bride to the left!... The groom down here!'

Thus, when in (2a) a mother directs her daughter in installing a loom, she is following the general rule that the warp must align with an uphill or north trajectory. The imperative in (2b), too, reflects a general rule about spatial layouts. In this case, however, it is a rule also involving 'left' and 'right', rather than only 'up' and 'down'. In line with other Kiranti societies, patterns and regulations invoking 'left' and 'right' are markedly less common than those relying on 'up' and 'down', but they do exist.

Whereas the utterances in (1) and (2) invoke spatial relations in very concrete practical situations, the following instances report on the perceived spatial structure of psychological experiences.

- (3) a. *yok-siu-t-i*                      *bhane*,    *samet*                      *phok-ma*    *khe-yu*.  
 shock-die-NPT-1p    if            clan.related.soul    raise-INF    must-NPT  
*male-naa*    *laua*                      *a-ha?-yu*. <G5.4b>  
 not-if            personal.soul    fall-TELIC-PT  
 'If one is shocked to death (i. e., if s/he experiences a severe shock), s/he must raise his/her *samet*. Otherwise, the *laua* falls forever.'
- b. *u-laua*                                      *ai-ŋe*. <K26b>  
 3POSS-personal.soul    fall-RESULTATIVE.PERFECT  
 'His *laua* is [fallen] down (i. e., he is sick).'

- c. *Retchami*                    *pog-a-ai!*  
 Rodua.clan.samet rise-IMPERATIVE-EMPHATIC  
 'Retchami, arise!'

The first two examples describe the way strong experiences such as a shock (3a), or a severe illness (3b), are felt, viz. as *ama* 'falling down' of one's *laua* 'personal aspect of soul'. The only way to make sure that a fallen *laua* does not get lost, is to invoke the more public, clan-related aspect of one's soul. This is done by directly addressing the clan-specific name of this aspect of one's soul, called the *samet*, and imploring it to rise again (3c). This practice is called 'raising the *samet*' (*samet phokma*), a concept reminiscent of what has been described for other Kiranti groups (Allen 1972, Sagant 1981, Hardman 1981, n. d.; Gaenszle 1991, this volume). If somebody fails to do that properly, only a shaman can retrieve the fallen *laua* by invoking the *mundhum* 'history, codex, ritual song' of the community as a whole (cf. (4)); the incident then becomes public and very costly. Notice that the verb *kopma* in (4) is specialized for picking up something from below (Nep. *tala bāṭa ṭipnu*).

- (4) *dhami-chi-ṭa*            *mundhum-lamma laua*            *ṭ-kopt-u,*  
 shaman-ns-ERG    m.-MED                    personal.soul    3nsA-pick.up-NPT-3U  
*samet-lamma*            *makkha.*    *ṭke-etlo*    *samet-lamma*  
 public.soul-MED    not            1pi-ONLY    public.soul-MED  
*phog-a*                    *hiu-t-u-m* <G5.5a>  
 raise-SUBJUNCTIVE    can-NPT-3U-1pA  
 'The shamans pick up *lauas* through the *mundhum*, not through the *samet*.  
 Only we can raise [the *laua*] through the *samet*.'

Spatial organisation is not only dominant when referring to architectural standards as in (1) or when talking about practical behaviour as in (2) or psychological experience as in (3), but it is also characteristic of Belhare cosmology and mythology. People seem to assume a cosmology similar to what has been described for the Mewahang Rai by Gaenszle (1991, this volume). There are two layers projected off our own world, a netherworld populated by small humanoids and lit by the sun at night, and a heaven-like upper world inhabited by our ancestors and other deities. The following utterance relies on this spatial conception:

- (5) a. *ekket-leṭ*                    *ṭ-khai-ṭa-ha*            *tu-ba*            *samuha-e*            *lik-ma*  
 wrong.side-DIR    3nsS-go-PERF-N    UP-LOC            group-LOC            enter-INF

*mi-ŋ-piu-t-u-n-chi-n.* <G5.22a>

3nsA-NEG-allow-NPT-3U-NEG-nsU-NEG

'Those who went (i. e., died) in a wrong way, will not be allowed to join the group up there.'

- b. *bhauan-na*      *ciŋ-s-u-chi-ha* [...]      *tu!*((pointing up))  
 deity-ERG      teach-TRANSITIVE.PERF-nsU-N      UP  
*bhauan*      *mu!* <G4.36a>  
 deity      OBVIOUSLY  
 'A god has taught them... up there! a god, of course!'

A 'wrong' (*ekketleŋ*) death is one due to, among other things, having fallen down, drowning, murder or suicide (cf. below, Section 2.1).

Also mythological accounts abound in spatial details building especially on 'up' and 'down' trajectories. The following is a typical instance (see example (9) below for another illustration of the same pattern).

- (6) *Siri*      *Marga Tu-ba*      *Taŋ-ba-chi*      *na-lam-do*  
 HONORIFIC M.      UP-LOC      plant-MASC-ns      this-MED-ID  
*na Tribeni-lamma, Tribeni-lamma*      *khe* ((pointing))      *ŋ-kar-he.* <XII23>  
 thisT.-MED      T.-MED      like.this      3nsS-come.UP-PT  
 'Śrī Mārgā Tuba Taŋba and his [people/court] came up this way, via this Tribeŋī (i. e., the confluence of Sun Kośī, Aruŋ and Tamar), like this they came up via Tribeŋī.'

This short extract from a myth recounting the way the ancestors/gods (*maŋchi*) came to settle Belhara brings together in one sentence the importance of a general upward path with the specific epithet *tuba taŋba* 'a male plant up there' of the most senior and most venerated god in the Athpare pantheon, *Marga*.

In all examples, the use of spatial terms can be seen as an instance of a straightforward metaphor equating 'up' and 'right' with 'good, strong, beneficial, etc.' — a metaphor similar to what has been reported for other Kiranti societies (e. g., Allen 1972, Sagant 1981) and also quite similar to what we are accustomed to in European societies. While this metaphorical function may provide us with a unique key to underlying value systems, it is also important to notice that the examples in the preceding simply refer to 'the way things are' in Belhara, and how people commonly reason about issues like illness, death or origin. That is, the utterances point

to a certain spatial structure of doing things, perceiving experiences and reasoning about the world in a 'Belhare way'.

In this paper, I am first and foremost interested in this formal structure of 'the Belhare way', rather than in the grand exegesis of the metaphors and symbolic classifications it realizes and enacts. To facilitate reference, I am adopting the term 'cultural formalism' as a cover term for both static and dynamic patterns insofar as they are culturally regimented, i. e., that they exhibit characteristics that are socially fixed and, in the case of concrete physical patterns and procedures, that transcend the immediate technical needs, or, to use Leach's (1954: 12) telling phrase, that have "technically superfluous frills and decorations". Thus, the term applies both to practices such as weaving or reasoning and to cultural 'engravings' or 'inscriptions' such as a religiously loaded landscape, socioculturally determined aspects of architecture, or a mythological text. Both of these types of formalism are important carriers of cultural regimentation, if only in different representational modes. Whereas practices rely on individual mental representations that allow their enactment, inscriptions represent cultural norms in an externalized, public manner, which helps guarantee that individuals will continually be aware of these norms and, with that, continue to enact the related practices.

In the following, before beginning with the main analysis, I would like to briefly discuss what we can gain from concentrating on the formal side of cultural practice and patterns rather than on their functions and associated values (Section 1). In Section 2, I describe and analyze the specific spatial structures that characterise 'the Belhare way' of practice and inscription and in Section 3 I briefly compare this to the way spatial structure is expressed in Belhare grammar, focusing on the observation that both language and cultural formalism rely on the same constant awareness and cognition of landscape that is perhaps one of the most prominent hallmarks of Himalayan life. Section 4 summarizes the findings.

Before proceeding, a caveat seems in order. By talking about 'Belhare formalism' or by invoking the phrase 'the Belhare way of doing things', I do not intend to reify 'the Belhare/Athpare culture' — I am simply using the phrase as a more readable substitute of 'their way of doing things', where 'they' is a variable ranging over all possible ethnic and social identities that are important for Belhare people. We will see, however, that some practices and inscriptions have a quite distinctive flavour and closely tie in with the local language, the most distinctive of all features of Belhare identity.

## 1. Knowing and talking about cultural formalism

It is obvious that talking about doing things, or feeling, or reasoning, is not the same as actually doing things, feeling and reasoning. Although it is perfectly possible to represent practical and procedural knowledge, such as knowledge about installing a loom, in linguistic propositions, there is no reason to assume that such a representation is cognitively necessary, let alone activated, when actually engaging in the practice (cf. Bloch 1991). Typically, propositional explication of practical knowledge, as illustrated by the examples in the preceding, arises when teaching somebody a practice or, perhaps even more typically, when talking to an ethnographer. In everyday engagement, however, practical knowledge is as tacit and implicit as grammatical knowledge. Similarly, the experience of inscriptions, say, of the culturally determined placement of the hearth in a house, can be described by linguistic propositions, but usually it passes unnoticed. Inscriptions form a tacit background that makes people feel at home and help replicate the cultural norms, and the associated behaviour, that are realized by them. This tacit quality of practices and inscriptions is the very reason why one needs much reflection, if not the development of a technical ethnographic discourse, in order to transform the knowledge of cultural practice into a propositional description.

The tacit knowledge underlying culturally regimented practices and inscriptions is of a different type than what anthropology has traditionally seen as its ultimate goal, viz. a grand perspective on social organisation and cosmological understanding. While the technical details of the formal structure of a practice may not be the prime window on how a society functions, it is perhaps the only non-experimental window there is on culture-specific cognitive patterns, and therein lies its methodological importance (cf. Bickel 1997). Typically, grand cultural perspectives are not known by every member of a society, or at least not to equal degrees. By contrast, to know how to do certain things belongs typically to what everybody must learn in order to behave as a respected member of his or her society.<sup>3</sup> The acquisition and maintenance of this practical knowledge is greatly facilitated by the public representations that are found in inscriptions, not only in the literal sense of a text such as a myth, but also, or even more so, in architectural and socio-geographic forms. This kind of 'inscribing' or 'engraving' social and religious patterns into the landscape is an important means of structuring the background against which everyday practice is understood. It is a core constituent in defining what Bourdieu (1980: 88) calls the *habitus* that shapes and guides practice and forms the

*"opus operatum"* ('performed work') that is dialectically connected with the *"modus operandi"* ('mode of performing') of a specific life-style.

Practice and 'inscriptions' constitute a complex body of knowledge that is, apart from language, the only kind of knowledge which is socially fixed but at the same time represented in and replicated by individual minds. It is this combined power of fluctuant practice and socioculturally engraved landscape that motivates setting up a cover category — 'cultural formalism' — of all phenomena subject to cultural regimentation, and this chapter describes a case in which such a formalism is characterised by a highly constrained and unified structure.

Such a 'formalist' perspective is complementary to a more content-oriented view of culture, just as phonology and semantics are complementary perspectives on language. In the same vein, just as the sound shape of a word need not diachronically co-vary with its content, the exegesis and functional analysis of cultural practices can change quite independently of their formal structure. This is amply illustrated by Leach's (1954) study of the different ways in which people can associate different social ideas with similar formal symbolism, by Bloch's (1986) work on the historical change in the interpretation and function of symbolic practices, or by Toren's (1993) analysis of the change in children's understanding and cognitive construction of formality. This all results from the fact that — as with words — form and function are usually independent of each other. Therefore, in analyzing the formal structure of Belhare practices and inscriptions, we will not learn much about how and why formalized practices can have the cultural efficacy they have. Rather, we will learn about the complex ways in which 'culture' is tacitly known by people as regimented ways of behaviour, thought and experience, ways that in certain respects are no less complex than the formal structure of a grammar.

## 2. Spatial operations underlying cultural formalism

There are many ways in which a society may fix practices to cultural norm, but using spatial arrangements seems to figure most prominently again and again (cf., for example, Parkin 1992), and this is particularly true of Belhare or any other Himalayan society. Most practices that are subject to a specific cultural regimentation can be analysed in terms of a closed set of basic geometrical operations, differing from each other by the 'anchor' element from which a spatial trajectory is computed (see Bickel 1994 for a theoretical and cross-linguistic foundation) and by

the terms that are used to categorise the operations when talking about them (UP/DOWN, FRONT/BACK or LEFT/RIGHT). This amounts to claiming that various sorts of practices and inscriptions incorporate the same recurrent types of spatial operations — just as the formal side of the words of a language draw on a closed set of recurrent phonological features. The spatial operations are summarized in Table 1. Terminologically, the anchor is captured by suffixing *-morphic* to the domain it belongs to.

## 2.1 Ecomorphic space

An ecomorphically computed spatial trajectory is one where a perceived spatial division in the environment anchors the formal realisation of practices and cultural inscription. This is the case, for instance, when the interior of a house is divided into differently valued zones that fix spatial trajectories. In Belhare houses this is established by a symbolic definition of ‘back’ (Belh. *eṅsua* or *pachāḍī*, a Nepali loanword) and ‘front’ (*agāḍī*). The pure and sacred side, where the hearth and the family altar (*maṅ dil*) are and where only Athpare people themselves are allowed to enter is the ‘back’ side. On the less protected and less pure front side near the main

<i>Operation</i>	<i>Anchor</i>	<i>Category</i>
ecomorphic	conceptual orientation in the environment	up/down, front/back
large-scale geomorphic	region, defined by global hill inclination, as goal of a trajectory	up/down only
small-scale geomorphic	region, defined by local hill inclination, as goal of a trajectory	up/down only
aristomorphic	socially important region (Dhankuta)	up/down only
physiomorphic	an object with intrinsic orientation features (e. g., a human body)	up/down, left/right

Table 1: Overview of spatial operations



entrance door, well-known fellow Kiranti visitors are seated. (If they are not known well enough or if they are from a different ethnic group, they are not allowed to enter the house at all). It is also the place reserved for menstruating women or people having fallen impure (Nep. *juṭho*) for other reasons (e. g., because of marriage with a non-Athpare without having performed the necessary (and expensive) purificational ritual).

The most common variety of ecomorphic operations, however, is one that takes perceived gravitational force as an environmentally given anchor and thereby imposes a vertical UP/DOWN orientation upon practices and inscriptions. This kind of practice is instantiated by multiple examples. We have already seen in example (3) that strong experiences are felt as a downward falling of one's *laua* and example (5) showed that thinking about our fate after death involves a vertical division of the universe. Both of these conceptual schemes emphasize the vertical axis and this appears to bring with it a highly marked fear of stumbling and falling, sometimes well beyond the real hazard given by the steepness of the terrain. Especially during the final ceremony (*Samitay*) of the annual *Warajmet* festival falling and stumbling are said to be extremely dangerous. This is symbolically enhanced by a dramatic tension between this danger and the challenge that younger people take on in arriving first on the ritual ground: everybody runs in a big hurry to arrive before the others — doing their best not to fall. If one falls, the *laua* may get lost and caught by the spirits that are omnipresent on the occasion. Another consequence of the vertical conception of the universe, illustrated by (5), is that if somebody dies a 'wrong (Belh. *ekketlen*) death', the corpse is not buried face up but face down, facing away as it were from the upper world of the ancestors. 'Wrong' deaths are mostly associated with downward movements, such as falling down a rock or drowning in a river, but the concept also extends to socially marked events such as suicide or murder (cf. Dahal 1985: 95). (Another important element of burying after a 'wrong death' is that stones for the grave may not be collected an even number of times, emphasising again 'oddness'.)

Vertical notions of UP and DOWN have other manifestations, too. It is pervasive, for instance, in everyday practices of thanking and venerating. Like other Tibeto-Burman peoples of the Himalayas, the Belhare usually express gratitude by a non-verbal action of hand-raising. With the received thing in the folded hands, one raises both hands in a gentle curve towards the forehead. A similar practice is part of a ritual that a householder performs for his guests after a sacrifice at his home. In this case, the up-down curve is emphasized by touching first the other's feet and raising the folded hands all the way up to one's own forehead. (The same practice

is also observed on various occasions by the son-in-law's family in front of his wife's *māiti*, but, due to Hindu influence, it is becoming more common for the latter to perform the ritual.).

Finally, verticality is inscribed into the architecture of altars. In every house, there is a *maṅ-dil* 'god-terrace', a slightly elevated platform on which *pūjās* are performed. The top of the Belhara hill is marked by a big round *stūpa* of about 1.5m height and 2m diameter, called the *Jimthan* (< Nep. *jimī* 'land' and *thān* 'temple, shrine'), or, after its associated goddess, *Mura* temple (Figure 1). The *stūpa* is characterised by a vertical wooden pole in the middle of the platform. Only a specialised priest is allowed to worship on the top of the platform. He does this by squatting on the southern side of the platform and facing north. This direction is highly marked since it is the only situation where a prayer is not addressed towards Dhankuta in the east (see the map on page 28/29). The northern direction is a different use of an 'up' notion than what we found in the vertically oriented patterns that we have looked at so far. This other implementation of 'up' is the topic of the next section.



Figure 1: Official stamp depicting the *Jimthan*, also known as *thāni mandir*. The stamp was produced in fall 1993 to give receipts to people who sponsored restoration work.

## 2.2 Geomorphic space

It is important to distinguish between an ecomorphic, or 'gravitation-based' application of the UP/DOWN dimension and a geomorphic, geography-based, application of the same basic dimension. For it is quite different whether you orient a prayer to the sky or in the direction where you would have to climb up the highest peaks of the Himalayas, i. e., north (cf. the map). Depending on where you are, the latter may have the effect that you look straight ahead, or even downwards, rather than upwards.

Such a contextualization occurs, for instance, when the *Mura* priest performs his duties on the *stūpa* described above. The same direction is observed when the *Mura* priest opens the celebration of communal rituals by worshipping in the jungle north of the village. Another formalism regimented by geomorphic mapping is a detail attended to when setting up a temporary altar for sacrifices. The priest lays out a series of *chukuma* 'shorea robusta' (Nep. *sāl*) or *ṅatlabu* 'banana' leaves in front of him. The tips of these leaves must point north. The north-bound trajectory is relevant again in the conceptualisation of the two halves of the year, *uthayma* 'the rising [time] (celebrated at the *Lakhim pūjā* in Spring)' and *uyuma* 'the descending [time] (celebrated after the *Samitanj pūjā* in Fall)' that the Belhare share with other Nepalese groups (see Allen 1972, Sagant 1981, Gaenszle, this volume).

In the instances looked at so far the direction of up and down is determined on the basis of the overall inclination of the Himalayan range. Another option is to take the inclination of the local hill as the anchor on which to fix 'up' and 'down'. In the first case, which I call 'large-scale geomorphic orientation', the trajectory falls together with a north/south axis. In the second case, 'small-scale geomorphic orientation', this need not be so since the trajectory is aligned towards a local hill-top, wherever this happens to be. As illustrated by the examples in (1) and (2a) above, there are some cultural formalisms that require an up/down orientation. The hearth (*hutluṅ*, Nep. *culo*) in a house is the ritual centre and the most 'pure' and protected place in a household; it is a place inhabited by ancestors, to be touched only by Athpare and prohibited even to Belhare women, if they have touched and used a non-Athpare kitchen without a subsequent purificational ritual. This valuation of the *hutluṅ/culo* is very much alive in everyday thinking, which is clearly illustrated by the following utterance:

- (7) *culo*    *u-khuk*            *khot-ma*    *ka-ṅ-piu-?-ni!* <G4.47a>  
 hearth    3POSS-below    touch-INF    1piU-3nsA-allow-NPT-NEG

'They won't allow us to touch the hearth!'

This was offered to me by a Belhara woman as an explanation why women are extremely reluctant to join 'women development programmes' that try to introduce new cooking techniques by practical training in programme-sponsored kitchens. 'They' (*ŋ-*) refers to her people at home.

The *huttuj* is not only placed 'at the back' of the house (cf. Section 2.1), but also in such way that it is 'UP'. Depending on the actual topography of the site of the house, this can mean either that the hearth is in the uphill (by 'small-scale' mapping) or in the northern (by 'large-scale' mapping) corner of the house. The two can coincide, but sometimes, the hearth is in the southwestern but uphill corner, in other places, the hearth faces the hill's traverse rather than uphill side, but is clearly in the northern corner. Similarly, weaving straw mats (Nep. *gundri*) needs to be done in an upward direction (cf. (2a) above) — at least if the mat is going to be used by living people; if the mat is woven for a corpse in a funeral, it is woven downwards. Depending on the local geography, the directional norm is either satisfied by the north/south or the uphill/downhill trajectory. The same ambiguity is found again in a rule of behaviour: after having eaten sacrificial food, people are supposed to throw away their empty leaf plates 'downward', i. e., to the south if downhill is uneasy or downhill if there is an obstacle in the south.

Small-scale geomorphic anchoring of a trajectory is recruited for yet another formalism, albeit a very static one. There are two highly important *cautārs* with stone relief tablets. These *cautārs* are thought of as providing resting places for gods/ancestors (*maŋchi*) on their journeys to and from Belhara since time immemorial. Both are built in an 'uphill' way. One of them, ca. 1m high, 2.5m wide and 9m long, is decorated with a votive tablet featuring sun and moon symbols and is placed on the very top of the Belhara hill. (The tablet itself faces Dhankuta, on which see below, Section 2.3). The other *cautār* (ca. 1.5m high, 2.2m wide and 4m long) has a votive tablet on top of it that shows on both sides a kind of human shape with a huge head and long ears facing uphill (Figure 2). The result of these slightly different variations of the 'UPHILL' theme is that, while both *cautārs* comply with the same basic spatial trajectory concept, one of the them is still more 'up' than the other. This reflects an important valuation difference: the upper *cautār* is *Bokrohaŋ*'s, the primordial owner/king/ancestor (*haŋ*) and first settler of Belhara, the lower one is associated with goddess *Mura*, who is said to have arrived much later and taken over parts of the land from *Bokrohaŋ* (see below). It is possible that



*Figure 2: Tablet found on goddess Mura's cautār in Belhara.*

the shapes depicted on the tablets symbolize the deity associated with the respective *cautārs*, but this is not confirmed by any current native theory.

This distribution of *cautārs* on the hill directly inscribes into landscape the mythological past and, thereby, power relations derived from it. The terrain of the Belhara hill is not empty space, but is full of such inscriptions. This usually forms the static background and horizon of everyday life, but it is important to notice that the sociocultural loading of landscape can also be brought to the fore through specific political acts. As mentioned in the preceding section, the top of the hill features an important *stūpa*, the Jimthan, with a powerful goddess, Mura. The dominance of this temple has recently been challenged by some people who objected to the Mura priest's way of caring for the temple and performing the rituals. After a long period of contests and fights about the proper way of honoring the old Jimthan, some traditionalists erected a new Jimthan in the spring 1997, claiming that the old one had become impure. Part of the social background of this incident is an increasing division in Belhare society between people on the roadside and people living turned away from the road.<sup>4</sup> The road from Dharan to Dhankuta has not only brought easy travelling but also a business company involved in pine sap collection, and many Belhare work for this company, including the Mura priest. From the traditionalists' point of view, this brings him too close to modern life and too easily into contact with things forbidden: according to traditional rule, the heads of households are not supposed to accept core food items such as rice and oil and other important goods such as clothes or thread produced by non-Athpare people. The new Jimthan is located far away from the road, near Mura's *cautār*, on the west side of the hill, i. e., more protected from modern life.

The new distribution of temples also tunes the cultural loading of landscape closer to the socio-economic pattern that currently structures the Belhara hill. The Indo-Aryan, Newar, Magar and Tamang immigrants tend to live on higher altitudes of the hill and strongly cluster on the hill top, near the old Jimthan. Belhare settlements, by contrast, are scattered more on the lower slopes, on steeper and less fertile terrain. Bringing the Jimthan 'down' is therefore also a certain adaptation to new social realities. Geography is put into action and reiterates thereby the geomorphic nature of much spatial formalism — or, in Bourdieu's (1980) terms, the *opus operatum* of a socioculturally charged landscape guides the *modus operandi* of a politically meaningful act.

### 2.3 Aristomorphic space

Another important layout of spatial trajectories is an aristomorphic anchoring of UP/DOWN notions.<sup>5</sup> In this type of anchoring space, a socially or culturally dominant place is assigned an 'upmost' value, thereby always being 'up' irrespective of the actual location in terms of ecomorphic or geomorphic space. Examples of this are the French habit of always 'going up to Paris' (*monter à Paris*), the preference for placing Mecca on top of a map in medieval Arabic cartography (see Woodward 1987), or, in the Himalayan region, the use of 'upward' deictics for a 'spatialization of respect' in Lhasa Tibetan (Agha 1996). In Belhare, the socioculturally upmost place is Dhankuta, and utterances like the following by no means presuppose that the speaker is actually on a lower altitude than Dhankuta bazaar:

- (8) *tu!* *baʃarr-ek-kha* *yaj* *nau-kha-eʔwa* *li-har-e-ga!* <G5.24b>  
 UP bazaar-LOC-N DISTRIBUTIVE ask.for-NPT:N-LIKE be-TELIC-PT-2  
 'You became like the beggar up there in the bazaar!'

The importance of Dhankuta is manifold. Most obviously, its importance is established by the fact that the town is the district capital and the closest market and trading place for Belhare people. This political and economic salience is reflected by the mythological interpretation of the relationship between the Belhara-Athpare and the Dhankuta-Athpare. The most venerated Athpare deity of Dhankuta is called Marga (cf. Dahal 1985: 107), who is worshipped in a temple on the bazaar ground. Mura, the goddess of the *Jimthan* mentioned above, is the younger sister of Marga. A popular and often narrated myth explains why Marga is in Dhankuta but Mura in Belhara:

One day, Mura was going to the Himalayas. Midway, she meets her elder brother Marga who tells her that there is no need to go further north. Rather, she should go to Belhara and take hold of land there (*ripma* 'stand on, make a step on and thereby take possession of', Nep. *ʃeknu*). Marga and Mura came back down to Sanne (a place on the western fringe of Dhankuta), from where Marga sent his younger sister over to Belhara. In Belhara, everything belonged to Bokrohan, the 'Royal Fortress of Four Borders' (*Car-Killa Raja-Ran*<sup>6</sup>), who, however, did not allow Mura to take hold of land. And so Mura went back to her brother who sent her over again, telling her that she should only ask 'to make one step', and then another one and yet another one. The Royal Fortress

of Four Borders agreed to one step, but she went on to make two more steps, thereby snatching away three parts of the land. Mura thus became *Tin-Killa* 'the Fortress of three Borders' and left for Bokrohaṅ, though still called *Car-Killa* 'Fortress of Four Borders', only one single part.

This myth codifies the seniority of Marga over Mura and consolidates the fact that Belhara is a dependent of Dhankuta.<sup>7</sup> This is further expressed by marriage rules. The Athpare traditionally intermarry only among themselves; marrying other Nepalese, including Rāi or Limbu, requires an expensive purification ritual. Whereas a Belhare man can marry a Dhankuteli Athpare without difficulty, a Belhare woman needs to be ritually purified first if she is going to be married to a Dhankuteli man. The seniority of the Marga people is manifest, too, by the designations *nou-pʌgari* (Nep. *nau-pagādī* 'nine-turbans' for the Dhankuteli Athpare and *ath-pʌgari* (Nep. *āṭh-pagādī* 'eight-turbans') for the Belhare Athpare. White turbans were a power symbol given to higher administrative officers in eastern Nepal before the unification (Dahal 1985), and the numerical difference directly mirrors the hierarchy.

The most obvious expression of the hierarchy, however, is the association of 'UP' with Dhankuta and 'down' with Belhara, although Belhara is not on a lower altitude than the town, nor is it to its south. A common epithet of Marga is *Tuba Taṅba*, literally 'the male plant up there' (cf. example (6) above). As mentioned in the preceding section, the votive tablet of Bokrohaṅ's *cautār* faces Dhankuta, too, paying deference, as it were, to Marga who, by sending his sister over, conquered three parts of Belhara. It is probably no accident that in the original version of the myth recounted above, the second encounter of Mura and Bokrohaṅ is conceptualized in a specific spatial arrangement. Mura takes her brother's advice and asks Bokrohaṅ for 'one step', thereby luring him into a fatal agreement:

- (9) *'ek paila tek-ap cok-ma ka-pi-ga-tlo-nno!'*  
 one step stand.on-INTEGR AUX-INF 1sU-allow-2-ONLY-CONF  
*Mura-a-bu mu! Car Killa Raja Rani lur-he.* <MM3>  
 M-ERG-REP DOWN four fortress king queen tell-PT  
 'Allow me to make one step!' Mura asked the Royal Fortress of Four  
 Borders down there.'

There is no physical aspect of the landscape involved that would necessarily place Mura 'above' Bokrohaṅ. Indeed, in the text Mura is said to have been sent over



(*paṅ-bheī-se* 'send-ACROSS-RESULTATIVE.PERFECT') from her *maiti-ṅya* 'paternal.home-ACROSS', with the same-level Aktionsart modifier *-bheī-* in the one expression, and a same-level case desinence *-ṅya* in the other. The interjection *mu!* in (9), pronounced with a sharp rising intonation, serves another function: it vividly entails and thus creates a social hierarchy between Mura and Bokrohaṅ. Interjections like *mu!* for downward pointing, or *tu!* and *yu!* for upward and level pointing, are very common in everyday language, where they are constant indexes of spatial situations. They create a completely different attention to landscape and social space than what is achieved in Nepali by the undifferentiated interjection *u!*, which only poorly translates the Belhare interjections.

While no physical aspect underlies the choice of *mu!* in (9), it indexes a spatial pattern that is clearly expressed by the respective positioning of Mura's old temple, the Jimthan above the village, and Bokrohaṅ's *cautār*, which, although it is on the same altitude, is to the south of the Jimthan. The mythological text and the experience of temple geography engage the same formalism, they both inscribe the same relations of seniority and power into space.

The aristomorphic nature of such formalisms, however, has recently become challenged by increasing Hinduization. When people perform their personal, family or clan *pūjās*, they are traditionally said to do this 'upwards', which means facing Dhankuta bazaar. However, some younger people claim that the direction is fixed as 'east', which has the same formal effect, since Dhankuta is east of Belhara, but relies on a completely different cognitive representation: the aristomorphic 'up' notion is replaced by a geomorphic 'east' pattern. Cultural practices are not fixed forever, but are constantly open to negotiation, and the detailed way in which 'up' is understood in a practice can index a whole attitude towards tradition and modernity.

## 2.4 Physiomorphic space

The last type of anchoring spatial trajectories relies on the intrinsic featuredness of a body (cf. Allen's (1972) 'bodily space'). In this 'physio-morphic' determination of space, 'up' is whatever is defined by a canonical upright position. For instance, the head of an animal is 'up' — irrespective of its position in other interpretations of 'up'. Such a spatial formalism is present in the high valuation of a pig's head. This is manifest when the bridegroom's family offers pig heads to the future in-laws (Figure 3), or when the meat of a pig's head is eaten, together with *kubīṅḍo* pump-

kin, during the most important annual festival, the *Warajmet*. Physiomorphic use of the 'up' vs. 'down' opposition is also relevant for the structure of a symbolic dream that people sometimes report on. If you dream that you loose a tooth, someone in your (patrilineal) clan (*pāchā*) will die. Loosing an upper tooth means that somebody older than you will die; a lower tooth is associated with younger people. This of course reiterates the social valuation associated with 'up' and 'down' present also in the other uses that we have looked at.

While occurring with the up/down axis, physiomorphic anchoring is more typical of left/right notions. The human body is assigned a left and right side — a spatial division that is recruited for cultural formalism in societies all around the globe (Hertz 1909). Apart from the perhaps more technically than culturally induced designation of the right hand for eating and the left hand for unclean actions, the left/right dichotomy is clearly manifest in Belhare in the rule expressed in (2b) regulating the respective position of bride and groom in a marriage and in an important rule of circumambulation. Ritual circumambulation is done around the Jimthan *stūpa* by individuals visiting the temple or by the whole community during the *Warajmet* festival. At marriages, both the bride's and the bride-groom's family's houses are circumambulated, too. In all cases, circumambulation is counter-clockwise, which is conceived of as *cuṭṭaṅṅamma* 'via the right' side (of a building). The direction is thus in strong opposition to the general Indic practice but takes up a theme of the Bon tradition.<sup>8</sup> In Belhara, all other communities and castes comply with the general clockwise rule, thus marking off the Belhare practice as a distinctive feature of ethnicity. However, the Belhare rule is often threatened and needs to be explicitly told again and again by the elders because younger people rapidly assimilate the Hinduist and Buddhist (Tamang) practice. Nor is it uncommon for heated discussions to arise when a marriage procession, led by Hindu *damāi* ('tailor') musicians, circumambulated in the 'wrong', i. e., clockwise direction.

Notice, however, that the Belhare conception of a counterclockwise direction, *cuṭṭaṅṅamma*, relies on the same reference to the 'right' side that also defines the Hinduist clockwise direction, the *pradakṣiṇa* (cf. Toffin, this volume). The Sanskrit term simply involves another conceptualization, viz. the idea of having one's right hand oriented towards the centre of the circumambulation. In both languages, the direction is 'right'.



*Figure 3: Pig head and alcohol (jāṛ, raksi) offerings from the bridegroom's to the bride's family. This marriage ritual is performed at the bride's home place and is accompanied by poetic speeches praising the bride's family and the match between groom and bride.*

## **2.5 Spatialised cultural formalism in Belhara: conclusions**

Let us take stock: cultural formalism in Belhara draws upon five basic spatial operation types, each with its own geometry. These operation types are realised in terms of three different concepts of space: the most prominent is the 'up/down' distinction, while the other two are the 'front/back' and the 'left/right' distinction (Table 1). While the utilization of these three concepts in cultural formalism is extremely widespread around the globe (noted long ago by Hertz 1909), the strong preference for 'up/down' may be a Himalayan peculiarity, matched elsewhere only occasionally (e. g., by the Tzeltal, a Mayan society in the Mesoamerican Highlands; cf. Brown and Levinson 1993, Levinson and Brown 1994).

It is important to note, however, that 'up' and 'down' are class terms and gloss over rather different ways of anchoring spatial trajectories. The main emphasis of Belhara formalism appears, as in other Kiranti societies, on geomorphic and ecomorphic ways of setting up trajectories. In some respects, this is markedly different, for instance, from what has been described for the Indo-Aryan Chetri-Bahun (Gaborieau 1981, Bouillier 1981). Both for the Belhara and the Chetri-Bahun there is

always an upper side inside the house and for both this coincides with the most interior, most protected, purest place, where the hearth also is located. However, for the Belhare, the upper side is towards the north or the next hill-top, whereas for the Chetri-Bahun, the upper side does not appear to be determined by geography but rather by social practices relying ultimately on an aristomorphic conception of space, on the classic metaphor that equates the pure with the high. This association induces a division of a house into an interior upper space with the *māthillo ochyān* 'upper bed' for the parents, the hearth, and the gods and an exterior lower space with the *tallo ochyān* 'lower bed' and the impure, where children eat and sleep before initiation, where women are restricted to when menstruating or when giving birth, or where lower caste visitors are seated (see Gaborieau 1981: 53f). In practice this house division is probably shaped in terms of a highly specialized ecomorphic anchoring of 'up' inside and 'down' outside, short-circuiting its context-bound aristomorphic and metaphorical computation. Even further engraving the ecomorphic nature of the anchor, the ground of the *tallo ochyān* is sometimes physically lowered (*loc. cit.*).<sup>9</sup>

Yet another realization of the up/down distinction is found with the Newar, where the most protected part of the house, the hearth and the gods, is 'up' in a vertical sense, *viz.*, on the top floor. This ecomorphic anchoring of 'up' and 'down' bears resemblance to the Belhare or Kiranti formalism in relying on physical rather than social determinants. It is quite distinct in practical experience, however, since there is no special effort in reaching a Belhare kitchen, but there is quite some effort needed in a Newar house. Ecomorphic anchoring on the basis of gravitational verticality is manifest again, however, in other Belhare formalities, as we saw in Section 2.1.

### 3. Thinking for speaking and behaving: linguistic and cultural space

From a cognitive point of view, one of the most important effects of cultural formalism is the constant repetition and recall of the notions it employs. The personal experience of a *laua* falling, the direction of weaving a *gundri*, the proper way of performing a *pūjā* — all these practices emphasize a special awareness of verticality and geography. And, in turn, the position of an upper and a lower *cautār*, the position of the hearth 'up there', the mythological placement of ancestors 'up there', and other such spatial inscriptions, reiterate and thus further enliven on a cognitive level the physical and daily experienced 'up' and 'down' of landscape.

Elaborating on Boas's (1938) view of grammatical meaning, Jakobson (1971) pointed out that the (obligatory) grammatical categories of the language we speak force us to attend to the experiences codified and classified by them, they force upon us a specific 'thinking for speaking', as Slobin (1996) recently termed it. In parallel with this, cultural formalisms have the effect of forcing our cognition into the mould of the experiential patterns they use, for instance, landscape, verticality, bodily division, etc. — a case of 'thinking for behaving'.

From this point of view, it does not come as a surprise that spatial language and spatialised cultural formalism rely on similar patterns of cognition and build upon a similar importance of verticality and geography. This is indeed what we find if we compare Belhare spatial language to what was described above for cultural formalism.

### 3.1 Spatial language: UP/DOWN/ACROSS

The most commonly used system of deictic terms in Belhare consists of a series of morphemes all incorporating a notion of 'up', 'down', or 'across', summarized in Table 2 (for the difference between the *u*- and *o*- demonstratives, cf. Bickel, in press). As shown in Bickel (1997), these morphemes are systematically ambiguous and can be used in the same ways as was found in cultural formalism. Additionally they can be used in a temporal ('across' as 'later' and 'earlier', depending on the context), a mensural ('up' as 'more') and in a special person-based sense, which equates 'up' with 'further away from the speaker'. These three uses do not seem to correlate with cultural formalism. The other uses, however, replicate the ecomorphic, geomorphic, aristomorphic, and physiomorphic realizations of the 'up/down' notions that we found in the preceding sections.

An ecomorphic use, where the ditransitive (benefactive) Aktionsart modifier *-att* denotes a vertical downward movement, is illustrated by example (10).

- (10) *na anghuthik letd-att-u* <VII62b>  
 this finger.ring let-DOWN-3U  
 'Let this ring fall down!'

The following examples illustrate small-scale (11a) and large-scale (11b) geomorphic uses of spatial terms.

- (11) a. *la, tu! m-ma-ttaŋ* *khar-a-ai!* <G5.16b>  
 OK UP 2POSS-mother-UP go-IMPERATIVE-EMPH  
 'Go up to your mother now!'
- b. *bas-cha ŋ-katd-at-ni.* <IX.4.19>  
 bus-EVEN NEG-come.UP-PT-NEG  
 'Not a single bus came up (from the south).'

In (11a), location is specified on a plain ground. The speaker and the mother are sitting in the same room, but the mother is on the hill-side of the room, therefore 'up'. (11b) refers to a road which runs downhill at the place of utterance. The spatial direction, however, is determined by long-distance busses coming 'up' from the southern plains. Aristomorphic use of spatial deixis was illustrated by example (8) above. Physiomorphic use, finally, is rare but is found in the following case, where the location of a tooth is specified relative to the body's up (head) and down (feet):

- (12) *na-ttaŋŋ-ha ŋ-key* <G5.36a>  
 this-UP-GEN 2POSS-tooth  
 'your upper tooth'

### 3.2 Spatial language: FRONT/BACK and LEFT/RIGHT

While the 'up/down/across' system is certainly the most common one, terms for 'front/back' and 'left/right' also exist in Belhare. For 'front' and 'back', the Nepali

	interj.	demonstr.	noun	case	Aktionsart modifier			motion verb	
					intrans.	trans.	ditrans.	intrans.	trans.
UP	<i>tu!</i>	<i>tu-, to-</i>	<i>tem</i>	<i>-ttaŋ</i>	<i>-thajs</i>	<i>-thajs</i>	<i>-thakt</i>	<i>thaŋma</i>	<i>thakma</i>
					<i>-kat</i>	<i>-kattā</i>	—	<i>katma</i>	<i>katma</i>
DOWN	<i>mu!</i>	<i>mu-, mo-</i>	<i>khuk</i>	<i>-pmu</i>	<i>-at</i>	<i>-and</i>	<i>-att</i>	<i>yuma</i>	<i>yutma</i>
					<i>uŋs</i>	<i>-ukt</i>	—	<i>uŋma</i>	<i>ukma</i>
ACR.	<i>yu!</i>	<i>yu-, yo-</i>	-	<i>-ŋya</i>	<i>-pheĩs</i>	<i>-pheĩs</i>	<i>-phett</i>	<i>phenma</i>	<i>phetma</i>
					<i>-ap</i>	<i>-apt</i>	—	<i>apma</i>	<i>apma</i>

Table 2: Morphemes used for 'up/down/across' reference

loan-words *ʌgari* and *pʌchari*, respectively, are normally used, but the native term *eɲsua* 'back' can be heard as well. What is important to notice is that these terms basically denote a sequence rather than a static spatial arrangement. Thus, as soon as one views a situation in such a way that one object is prior (temporally or conceptually) to another one, it is *ʌgari* — even in cases where we might think of it as 'left' or 'right'. The following is an excerpt from an experiment where I asked people to describe an arrangement of toy objects in such a way that another person can re-build the same arrangement without seeing the original (see de León 1991 and references therein). In the context of (13), the toy tree is further away from the speaker than the trough:

- (13) *phak koj yuɲs-u!* [...] *ina u-eɲsua-e siŋ taŋ*  
 pig trough keep-3U that 3POSS-BACK-LOC wood plant  
*yuɲs-u!* <V5.35:27ff>  
 keep-3U  
 'Put down the pig trough [...] behind/after that, place the tree!'

The speaker first put down the trough and then, simultaneously directing her partner with the words in (13), placed the tree. This *ad hoc* sequence in time is responsible for the tree being 'behind' the trough. In another situation it could just be the other way round.

Thus, the words for 'front' and 'back' are monosemous in a way that fits in with the related concepts in cultural formalism. In section 2.1 we saw that the interior of a house is ecomorphically divided into a front and a back. The distribution of terms follows the logic of entering the house: first, in the front, comes the general public sphere, later, in the back, is the sacred and private domain.

The terms for 'left' and 'right', i. e., *phɛɲsaŋ* and *cuptaŋ*, can be used in either of two meanings, but one of them recapitulates the logic encountered in cultural formalism. Just as when regimenting ritual circumambulation (section 2.4), *phɛɲsaŋ* and *cuptaŋ* can simply refer to the 'left' and 'right' side the body. Apart from this physiomorphic, i. e., 'body-determined' use, *phɛɲsaŋ* and *cuptaŋ* can be used in a more abstract sense as well. Just as in English, left and right can be applied to locate objects far away, say the sun and a mountain peak at the horizon, which are not literally to the speaker's side. Rather, the speaker's sides divide the visual field into two halves that conflate differences of perceptual depth (see, among others, Herskovits 1986, Bickel 1994 for discussion). There does not seem to be any analogue of this in Belhare cultural formalism, though.

Like 'front' and 'back', 'left' and 'right' concepts are not very frequently used, and people prefer to talk about space in terms of the 'up/down/across' system. A telling example of this is (2b) in the introductory section. The rule invoked is based on a *phensan/cuptan* 'left/right' arrangement, but the speaker does not seem to have much confidence in people's correct understanding of these concepts. In order to make himself clear and get everybody at the right place, he adds *beula napmu* 'the groom [should be] down here', using a demonstrative (*na*) with the 'downhill' case suffix *-pmu*.

#### 4. Conclusions

The brief survey of spatial language in the preceding section suggests that most spatial operations that determine the structure of Belhare formalisms recur in language. The homology is not perfect since there are some linguistic uses that are not mirrored in culture, but the majority does show a striking parallelism. Specifically, the emphasis on the 'up/down/across' system over the 'left/right' and 'front/back' systems clearly takes up a cultural theme. And, within the 'up/down/across' system the importance attached to ecomorphic (vertical) and geomorphic (hill-based, Himalaya-based) uses parallels the bias in cultural formalism towards structures based on environment and geography.

There are differences, too. Most importantly, the 'across' dimension does not seem to play a role in cultural formalism — it is 'up' and 'down' that are the crucial directions structuring practices and inscriptions. In language, the 'across' axis constitutes an important dimension of its own and is subject to an internal division into a side 'across here', expressed by a neutral demonstrative root (*na-*) plus a spatial case affix (*-ʔya*), and a side 'across there', represented by a spatial demonstrative (*yo-*) and a neutral case (*-ba*) (see Bickel, in press). This distinction does not seem to have any repercussions for cultural formalism.

The similarities are thus not found in the abstract grammatical structure but rather in the different meanings that the morphemes are used in. The reason for this probably lies in the fact that both linguistic and non-linguistic cultural practice draw on the same cognitive background. As much as spatialised formalism requires a certain tuning of people's minds to a specific type of spatial cognition, so does spatial language force one to be constantly aware of landscape and verticality (cf. Levinson 1997). This is especially important when it comes to interjections, which, as mentioned before, obligatorily differentiate in Belhare between an excl-



mation with regard to an object *tu!* 'up there' (or 'uphill' or 'north', as the case may be), *mu!* 'down there' ('downhill', 'south') or *yu!* 'over there' ('on the hill's traverse', 'east', 'west'). In order to appropriately use these interjections, especially when it comes to a use of *tu!* in a geomorphic 'uphill' sense on the floor inside a house as in (11a), one needs to be intimately acquainted with the local landscape surrounding the house.

This intimate awareness is repeated time and again by the spatialised practices in weaving, praying, dreaming, etc., and is further maintained and represented by spatial inscriptions in form of house divisions, geographical distributions of religious landmarks (*cautārs*) or mythological texts. If there is a homology between cultural formalism and language it is probably not due to a monodirectional Whorfian effect, but rather, the homology relies on a common cognitive world, which in turn is closely linked to the daily physical experience of people who do not travel much beyond the limits of their hill. The up and down of landscape thus provides the most natural form on which to build a network of practices and inscriptions and create much of what is characteristic of the Belhare way of life.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The Dhankuteli term *Khālsālī* mentioned by Dahal (1985: 30) is not used in Belhara and is also a bit misleading because *Khālsā* is an area much larger than the one inhabited by the Belhare people.

<sup>2</sup> I am using the following abbreviations to explicate the grammatical structure of examples: A 'actor', CONF 'confirmatory force indicator', DIR 'directional case', e 'exclusive (of addressee)', EMPH 'emphatic', ERG 'ergative', i 'inclusive (of addressee)', GEN 'genitive', ID '(focusing) identifier', INF 'infinitive desinence',

INTEGR 'integrator (of loanwords)', INTERJ 'interjection', IPFV 'imperfective aspect', LOC 'locative', MASC 'masculine', MED 'mediative (via, through, from)', N 'nominalizer' (forming relative and complement clauses as well as focus constructions), NEG 'negative', NPT 'non-past tense', ns 'non-singular', p 'plural', PERF 'perfect', POSS 'possessive', PT 'past tense', REP 'reportative', S 'single argument of an intransitive verb', SEQ 'sequential', U 'undergoer'. The numerals 1 to 3 indicate person. An exclamation mark signals a high rising intonation pitch that is characteristic of some interjections.

<sup>3</sup> This relies of course on Goodenough's famous definition: "As I see it, a society's culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members, and do so in any role that they accept for any one of themselves." (1964: 36)

<sup>4</sup> See Bickel (in press) for a study on how this is becoming linguistically codified.

<sup>5</sup> For reasons of space, this anchoring type was not covered by the survey included in Bickel (1997).

<sup>6</sup> In modern Nepali *cār-killā* refers to the boundaries of a piece of land, and occurs, for instance, in the set phrase *cār-killā khulāunu* 'to open the boundaries' which denotes the act of registering land in the governmental land-register after a transaction (Yogendraprasād Yādava, p.c.). *Killā* itself is a fortress or just any 'place surrounded by a protecting fence in four [*sic!*] directions serving as a powerful guard' (Pokharel *et al.* 2040, s.v.). In Belhare mythology, Car-Killa is personified as Bokrohaṅ, the ancestral king (*haṅ*) in Belhara. Therefore, *Car-Killa Raja-Rani* refers simultaneously to the land and its protector/owner.

<sup>7</sup> The relationship established between Marga, Mura, and Bokrohaṅ (= Car-Killa) might reflect history, too. The Belhare language is part of a dialect continuum with Rai groups in the adjacent north-west, but not including the Athpare language from Dhankuta in the east. According to the speculative hypothesis put forward in Vikal and Rāī (2051), the Belhare were originally a Rāī people, associating themselves to Bokrohaṅ, but were conquered and culturally assimilated by the Athpare from Dhankuta. This would explain why the Belhare fall under the cultural but not the linguistic definition of Athpare identity — a phenomenon that is most striking when it comes to members of one and the same clan (*pāchā*) speaking mutually unintelligible languages!

<sup>8</sup> Among other Kirantis, e. g., the Lohorung (Hardman, n. d., 344f) or the Kulunge (McDougal 1979: 65) the counter-clockwise direction is limited to inauspicious occasions.

<sup>9</sup> Notice also that if the divisions were strictly aristomorphic and context-dependent, they could be implemented wherever people of different status gather. This seems to be the case in some Polynesian societies (Toren 1990: 111ff), but for Nepalese high castes the up/down division seems to be largely confined to the house.

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