



# A grammatical overview of Yolmo (Tibeto-Burman)

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Yolmo is a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in Nepal. Also known as Helambu Sherpa, it is a Tibetic language. This article gives an overview of the language, including information about the dialects spoken, history of documentation, and a grammatical overview. The grammatical overview brings together work on different dialects, providing an outline of the sound system, noun phrase, verb phrase and clause structure.

## Introduction

**Yolmo** (H Yolmo), or **Helambu Sherpa**, is a Tibeto-Burman language of the Hyolmo people of Nepal (ISO 639-3: scp, GlottoCode:<sup>[1]</sup> yolm1234). Yolmo is spoken predominantly in the Helambu and Melamchi valleys in northern Nuwakot District and northwestern Sindhupalchowk District. Dialects are also spoken by smaller populations in Lamjung District and Ilam District, and also in Ramechhap District (where it is known as Syuba). It has a very high level of similarity with Kyirong Tibetan,<sup>[2]</sup> and weaker but still observable similarities to Standard Tibetan and Sherpa.<sup>[3]</sup> There are approximately 10,000 Yolmo speakers,<sup>[4]</sup> although some dialects have larger populations than others.

## Language Name

Yolmo is both the name of the language (glottonym), and the ethnic group of people who speak the language (ethnonym). Yolmo is also written *Hyolmo*, *Yholmo* or *Yohlmo*. The 'h' in all of these spellings marks that the word has low tone.<sup>[5]</sup> Sometimes the language is referred to as *Yolmo Tam*, *tam* is the Yolmo word for 'language'.<sup>[6]</sup>

The language is also referred to as Helambu Sherpa. This usage was common in the 1970s (see, for example, Clarke's work from the early 1980s).<sup>[7]</sup> This name appears to have been an attempt by Yolmo speakers to

align themselves with the widely recognised and prosperous Sherpas of the Solu-Khumbu district. While there are many cultural affinities between the two groups, the Sherpa language is not mutually intelligible with Yolmo.<sup>[3]</sup> With a growing recognition of Nepal's ethnic minorities (Janajati), Yolmo people have moved away from associating themselves with the Sherpas in recent decades.<sup>[8]</sup>

## Language Family

Yolmo is part of the family of languages called Kyirong-Kagate.<sup>[9]</sup> The languages of this family are located along the Himalayan hills and mountains mostly on the Nepal side of the border, although Kyirong is in the Tibet Autonomous Region. Along with Yolmo, Kyirong and Syuba, other languages in the family include Tsum, Nubri and Gyalsumdo.

The language family is better considered be Kyirong-Yolmo.<sup>[5]</sup> Yolmo has far more speakers (at least 10,000) than Kagate (Syuba) (1,500), Yolmo speakers are found in multiple districts, including Melamchi, Lamjung and Ilam, while Kagate speakers are based in Ramechhap. Also, *Kagate* is an exonym, and speakers now prefer the endonym *Syuba*, which carries less pejorative stigma than the caste-associated term *Kagate* ('papermaker').

This is part of a larger cluster of Tibetic languages, which all have their roots in the language that was the basis for Classical Tibetan.<sup>[10]</sup>

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## History

Yolmo speakers traditionally reside in the Helambu and Melamchi Valley regions in the Nuwakot and Sindhu Palchowk districts of Nepal. Yolmo speakers migrated to the area, across the Himalaya, from the Kyriong, in what is now Southwest Tibet, over 300 years ago.<sup>[7]</sup> This migration appears to have occurred slowly over multiple generations, rather than one large migration event.<sup>[11]</sup> Main villages where Yolmo speakers reside include Melamchi Ghyang, Tarke Ghyang, Nakote, Kangyul, Sermathang, Norbugoun, Timbu, and Kutumsang.

Yolmo speakers are Buddhist, with the role of head Lama patrilineal.<sup>[7]</sup> Yolmo Lamas are called upon to perform religious rituals for the Tamang-speaking communities that live in villages below the Yolmo-inhabited areas. This has created a strong socio-cultural link between the two groups that is reflected in traditional marriage practice where Tamang women marry into Yolmo villages.<sup>[12]</sup> There is also a distinct local tradition of *pòmbo* (often referred to as 'shamanism' in the literature on this topic<sup>[8][13]</sup>).

The *pòmbo* tradition, passed from father to son, is focused on healing, particularly with regard to 'soul

loss'.<sup>[8]</sup> This practice appears to be evolving fit with the modern focus on Buddhism among Yolmo people. For example, *pòmbo* blood sacrifices are no longer performed as commonly.<sup>[14]</sup> While there are similarities, including a shared etymology, these local practitioners are not formally associated with the Bon of Tibet.

Traditionally Yolmo people were yak herders and traders.<sup>[15]</sup> They currently practice a combination of mixed agriculture involving livestock herding, hotel management, restaurants, and trading. Although outward migrants would often return to village life,<sup>[16]</sup> speakers of Yolmo are increasing settling in Kathmandu, or moving overseas, which has an effect on transmission of the language as speakers move towards dominant languages of formal education such as Nepal and English.<sup>[17]</sup>

For more on the history of Yolmo speakers, see the [Yolmo people](#) page.

## Dialects

There are a number of dialects of Yolmo, spread throughout Nepal (Figure 1), thanks to migration in recent centuries, including in Lamjung<sup>[18]</sup> and Ilam.<sup>[19]</sup>

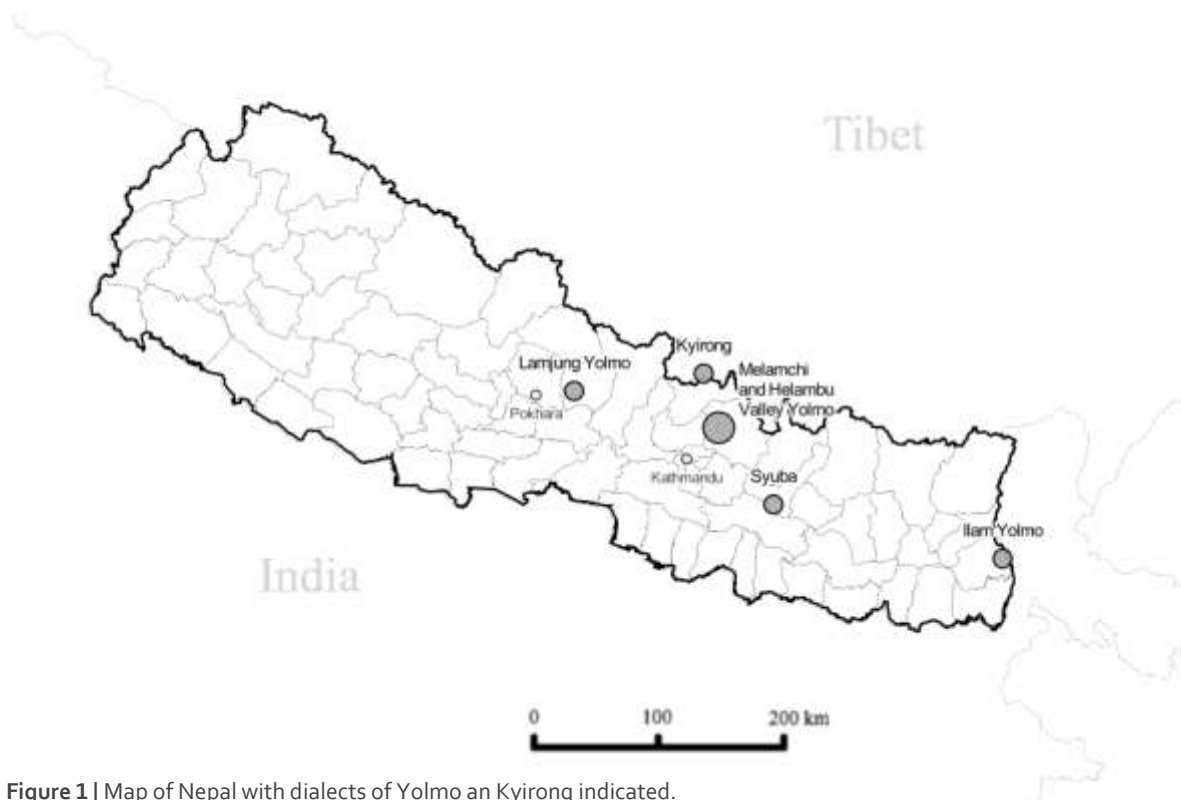


Figure 1 | Map of Nepal with dialects of Yolmo an Kyriong indicated.



There are also closely related languages that should be considered when discussing Yolmo, including [Kagate \(Syuba\)](#) and [Langtang](#). Some of these varieties have been documented in more detail than others. Some of the dialects also have more [mutual intelligibility](#), which means it is easier for the speakers to understand each other. Below is a list of established dialects, including what is known about each.

## Melamchi Valley Yolmo

The variety of Yolmo documented by Anna Marie Hari is mostly spoken in the Melamchi Valley area. Hari documented the variety of Yolmo mostly spoken around the villages of [Sermathang](#) (Figure 2) and [Chhimi](#). Hari also encountered speakers from other areas in the Melamchi and Helambu valleys, and suggested there are two dialects across this area, mostly distinguished by vocabulary. The two dialects are the 'western' dialect, mostly in [Nuwakot](#) district and the 'eastern' dialect, which Hari's work focuses on.<sup>[3]</sup> While discussing these dialects Hari also observes that the variety spoken around [Tarkeghyang](#) is different again, suggesting there may be more than two dialects spoken in the area.

Hari produced a Yolmo-Nepali-English dictionary of the language with [Chhegu Lama](#),<sup>[6]</sup> and a sketch grammar.<sup>[3]</sup> Hari also translated the [New Testament](#) of the Bible into Yolmo.<sup>[20]</sup> Original cassette recordings of her work have been digitised and archived with [PARADISEC](#).<sup>[21]</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all discussion of the grammar of Yolmo on this page is drawn from the work on Melamchi Valley Yolmo.



Figure 2 | Sermathang village with the Himalaya in the background



Figure 3 | Nayagaun, Lamjung, Nepal

## Langtang

Northwest of the Yolmo-speaking areas in the [Langtang valley](#) of the [Rasuwa District](#) are three villages that speak a language that is mutually intelligible with Yolmo.<sup>[22]</sup> This language also shares features with [Kyirong](#) and is likely part of a [dialect continuum](#) between Yolmo and [Kyirong](#).

## Lamjung Yolmo

Lamjung Yolmo is spoken by around 700 people in five villages of the [Lamjung District](#) of Nepal (Figure 3).<sup>[18]</sup> Yolmo speakers have been residing in this area for over a century.<sup>[5]</sup> [Gawne](#) has written a sketch grammar<sup>[18]</sup> (Figure 4) and a Lamjung Yolmo-Nepali-English dictionary.<sup>[23]</sup> There is also a digital archive of Lamjung Yolmo recordings archived with [PARADISEC](#).<sup>[24]</sup>

## Ilam Yolmo

A dialect of Yolmo is reportedly spoken in the [Ilam District](#) of far east Nepal.<sup>[19]</sup> There is very little documentation of this variety, but it is mutually intelligible with [Syuba](#).<sup>[25]</sup> Recordings from the dialect are available as a subset of an online collection of [Syuba](#) materials archived with [PARADISEC](#).<sup>[26]</sup>

## Syuba (Kagate)

Although [Syuba](#) has a distinct name, and a separate ISO 639-3 code (SYW), linguistically it can be considered a dialect of Yolmo.<sup>[25]</sup> [Syuba](#) speakers say their families migrated to the area more than a century ago.<sup>[25]</sup> Hari, who worked on both Yolmo<sup>[3]</sup> and [Syuba](#)<sup>[27]</sup> observes that "to quite a large extent they are mutually intelligible dialects".<sup>[3]</sup> The lexical similarity between [Syuba](#) and

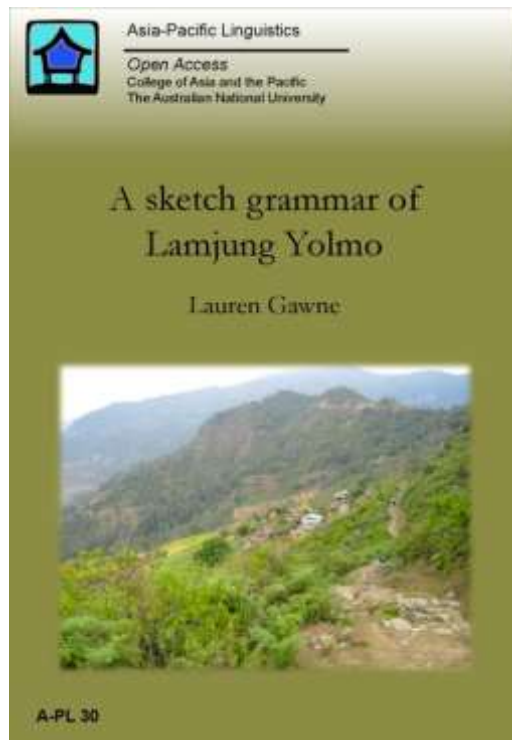


Figure 4 | Cover of Gawne 2016

Melamchi Valley Yolmo is at least 79%, with the similarity between Syuba and Lamjung Yolmo even higher (88%). There is a higher level of similarity between Yolmo and Syuba than there is between either of these languages and Kyirong.<sup>[2]</sup> This all suggests that the separated dialects may have more in common with each other than with the main dialect area.<sup>[28]</sup> In 2016 the Syuba community published a Syuba-Nepali-English dictionary.<sup>[29]</sup>

Three open access collections of Syuba, **MH1** digitised from Monika Hölig's 1970s recordings,<sup>[30]</sup> **SUY1** documentation by Lauren Gawne (2009-2016),<sup>[26]</sup> **MTC1** a 2013 **BOLD** documentation by the Mother Tongue Centre Nepal.<sup>[31]</sup>

## Language Vitality

Using the **Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale** (EGIDS), Ethnologue gives Yolmo a vitality rating of 6a 'Vigorous', but does not cite a source for this claim.<sup>[32]</sup> The vitality of the language varies depending on the location. In the Melamchi Valley area the language is spoken mostly by older adults. The younger generations having largely shifted to Nepali, though the language is being maintained for religious practices.<sup>[3]</sup> The shift towards Nepali for younger speakers has also been observed in Lamjung, as this is the language used

in schools.<sup>[33]</sup> The Syuba variety in Ramechhap is currently still spoken across all generations, including children. Mitchell & Eichentopf give it an EGIDS rating of 6a 'Vigorous', which is the likely reference for the Ethnologue rating.<sup>[34][32]</sup> This is a recent survey with primary data presented, and is in concord with the first author's own observations of this community. There is insufficient data on the Ilam or Langtang variety to assess their vitality at this stage.

## Language Contact

All Yolmo speakers who I have met have been minimally bilingual in the national language Nepali. For older speakers Nepali was mostly used for interaction with people outside their community, and they may be less proficient, while younger speakers are likely to have attended school in Nepali and are proficient and, to some degree, literate.

While there is relatively little influence of Nepali on basic vocabulary (such as the **Swadesh list** below), Nepali words are commonly adopted into Yolmo. In Hari & Lama's dictionary of over 4000 entries there are over 200 entries marked with some kind of Nepali influence.<sup>[6]</sup> The extent to which Nepali words have been reconfigured to Yolmo phonology has not been systematically studied. One observation is that Nepali verbs take a suffix *-ti* before any tense or aspect marking. This suffix is not voiced in any environment, unlike the **perfective aspect** marker *-ti*.<sup>[18]</sup>

In the Helambu area Tamang women would marry into the villages, but they appeared to move to Yolmo-speaking when they married in<sup>[12]</sup> (although contact with Tamang may account for some features of Yolmo, such as the **general fact evidential**, below).<sup>[35]</sup>

Individuals may also have other languages in their personal repertoire, through marriage to someone from a different language group, international work or engagement with tourists from different countries. English is increasingly common as a language of education.

## Orthography

Yolmo does not have a written tradition although there are attempts to develop an orthography based on **Devanagari**, the script used to write the national language **Nepali**, as seen in the publication of two dictionaries.<sup>[6][23]</sup> Syuba speakers also settled on a Devanagari orthography for their dictionary.<sup>[29]</sup> All of these dictionaries also present the languages in **Roman** orthographies.



## Devanagari

The modifications to Devanagari are minor, and are intended to ensure that all sounds in the language can be represented. None of the orthographies use the 'inherent schwa vowel', meaning that a consonant without an overt vowel is not treated as having an implied vowel. Consonants remain the same as in the existing Devanagari tradition, with the use of joined digraphs to represent additional sounds in the language, such as the combination of क (k) and य (y) for the palatal stop क्य ([c] 'kh'), स (s) and य (y) for the palatal fricative स्य ([j] 'sh'), र and ह for the voiceless liquid र्ह ([r] 'rh'), and ल and ह for the voiceless lateral ल्ह ([l] 'lh').

Vowel length is unmarked in the Syuba dictionary, in the two Yolmo dictionaries the standard Devanagari length distinctions are made, with the addition of a small diacritic below the 'a' vowel ( ा̣) to indicate a longer vowel. The Hari & Lama<sup>[6]</sup> and Gawne<sup>[23]</sup> dictionaries both use ह (h) after the vowel to mark low tone (e.g. टाह ढ़ा 'pheasant'), while in (the Syuba orthography a visarga represents the low tone (टाः ढ़ा 'pheasant'). High tone is left unmarked.

## Roman

All three dictionaries also make use of variations on a Romanised orthography, although this does not appear to be used or preferred by Yolmo speakers, and is intended for the English-literate audience of the dictionaries. Consonants predominantly take their form from the International Phonetic Alphabet, with some exception where there is a more common preference in English, such as digraphs for the palatal stops ([c] 'ky', [c<sup>h</sup>] 'khy', [j] 'gy') and non-superscript for aspiration (e.g. *phá* 'pig'). This is represented in the consonant chart in the Phonology section.

The vowels in Yolmo follow the International Phonetic Alphabet, except for [ɔ] which uses 'o' for ease of typing. Long vowels are represented by double characters, e.g. [ɲi:] 'two' is represented as *ɲii*, except in the Syuba dictionary<sup>[29]</sup> where vowel length is not indicated in either the Devanagari or Roman scripts. For tone Hari<sup>[6][3]</sup> uses a 'h' after the vowel to represent low tone, (e.g. *toh* 'stone') with high tone unmarked (e.g. *to* 'rice'), Gawne<sup>[23]</sup> uses the International Phonetic Alphabet convention of using accents over the vowel to mark high and low tone (e.g. *tó* 'rice' and *tò* 'stone'), while the Syuba dictionary uses a superscript <sup>l</sup> at the start of the

syllable to mark low tone (e.g. <sup>l</sup>*to* 'stone') with high tone unmarked.<sup>[29]</sup>

On this page the orthography mostly follows Hari's transcription,<sup>[6][3]</sup> as outlined in the phonology. Unlike Hari, representation of tone follows the International Phonetic Alphabet, with accents to mark high and low tone (e.g. *tó* 'rice' and *tò* 'stone' respectively). This avoids Hari's use of 'h' to represent both low tone and the sound [h].<sup>[33]</sup>

## Grammatical overview

The sections below contain an overview of the key features of the grammar of Yolmo. Information is mostly drawn from Hari's grammar of the language,<sup>[3]</sup> supplemented by the Yolmo-Nepali-English dictionary she co-wrote with Chhegu Lama.<sup>[6]</sup> Differences between this variety and other documented dialects are indicated where relevant. Links to other related languages will also be made where relevant.

All example sentences are presented with an interlinear gloss. This breaks down the words on a morpheme level, giving information about the meaning of each morpheme using a standard set of glossing abbreviations. All examples are cited back to the original publication they are drawn from. Some glossing has been regularised, or added where it was not included in the original.

## Phonology

### Consonants

There are 36 consonants in Yolmo, which are summarized in the table below. The form is given in IPA and then to the right in brackets is given the form used in this article, if different.<sup>[3]</sup>

Not all consonants are equally frequent. In particular [h], [r] and [l] are not particularly frequent, nor are vowel-initial words (see Table 1).

### Vowels

There are five places of articulation for vowels. There is a length distinction at each place of articulation. The form of each vowel is given in IPA and then to the right in brackets is given the form used in this article, if different.



**Main Table 1 | Consonants**

	Labial	Apico-Dental	Lamino-post-alveolar	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
<b>Voiceless stop</b>	p	t		ʈ	c (ky)	k	
<b>Aspirated stop</b>	p <sup>h</sup> (ph)	t <sup>h</sup> (th)		ʈ <sup>h</sup> (ʈh)	c <sup>h</sup> (khy)	k <sup>h</sup> (kh)	
<b>Voiced stop</b>	b	d		ɖ	ɟ (gy)	g	
<b>Voiceless fricative</b>		s	ʃ				h
<b>Voiced fricative</b>		z	ʒ				
<b>Voiceless affricate</b>		ts	tʃ				
<b>Aspirative affricate</b>		ts <sup>h</sup> (tsh)	tʃ <sup>h</sup> (tʃh)				
<b>Voiced affricate</b>		dz	dʒ				
<b>Nasal</b>	m	n			ɲ	ŋ	
<b>Voiceless liquid</b>		ɽ (rh)					
<b>Voiced liquid</b>		r					
<b>Voiceless lateral</b>		ɭ (lh)					
<b>Voiced lateral</b>		l					
<b>Semivowel</b>	w				j (y)		

	Front	Mid	Back
<b>High</b>	i i: (ii)		u u: (uu)
<b>Mid</b>	e e: (ee)		ɔ (o) ɔ: (oo)
<b>Low</b>		a a: (aa)	

Below are some minimal pairs that demonstrate the vowel length distinction. The diacritic above the vowel is the tone marker, the acute accent indicates that all of these examples are high tone. This is explained in more detail in the section on [tone](#).

- tɕí* 'one'
- tɕíí* 'what'
- tó* 'rice (cooked)'
- tóo* 'be hungry'

Vowel-length distinctions are not common across Tibetic language, but they are also attested in Syuba<sup>[27]</sup> (although Syuba speakers do not consider them salient enough to encode in the orthography<sup>[29]</sup>) and in Kyirong for open syllables.<sup>[36]</sup>

Unlike many other Tibetic languages, including [Kyirong](#), and [Standard Tibetan](#), Yolmo does not have a [front rounded](#) [ɣ]. This is true for all dialects of Yolmo documented to date, including Syuba. Langtang, however, does have this vowel.<sup>[22]</sup>

## Tone

Like other Tibetic languages, Yolmo has tone, which is located on the first vowel of a word.<sup>[37]</sup> Hari presents a four tone contrast of Melamchi Valley Yolmo; high level, high falling, low level and low falling.<sup>[3]</sup> Acoustic

evidence from Lamjung Yolmo and Kagate indicates that there is only acoustic evidence for a contrast between two tones; low and high.<sup>[23]</sup> Below are some examples of tone minimal pairs:

- pú* 'body hair'
- pù* 'son'
- kómba* 'thirsty'
- kòmba* 'temple'

Low tone words can be marked with [breathy voice](#), but this is not always the case. The practice of indicating low tone with a 'h' following the vowel in [some orthographies](#) is related to this breathy property of low-tone vowels. The high tone, which uses [modal voice](#), is left unmarked.

Tone is predictable in some environments. It is always high following [aspirated stops](#), [aspirated affricates](#) and [voiceless liquids](#) (which speakers treat as equivalent to aspirated). Examples of all of these include:

- pháa* 'pig'
- thí* 'ruler (for measuring)'
- ʈháa* 'blood'
- khyá* 'you, plural'
- khá* 'mouth'
- tshá* 'salt'
- tʃhá* 'pair'
- rhilmu* 'round'
- lhá* 'god'



Tone is always low following **voiced** stops, voiced fricatives and voiced affricates. Examples of all of these include:

<i>bù</i>	'insect'
<i>dà</i>	'arrow'
<i>qù</i>	'grain'
<i>gyàa</i>	'place'
<i>gùri</i>	'cat'
<i>dzàdi</i>	'nutmeg'
<i>dzùbu</i>	'huge/much'
<i>zà</i>	'rainbow'
<i>zèe</i>	'udder'

On words with more than one syllable the tone is marked on the initial syllable. Subsequent syllables eventually level off. Tone on all words is influenced by prosody, and may become more or less neutralised in running speech.<sup>[38]</sup>

The only prefixes in the language are the **negator** prefixes *mà-* and *mè-*. Both have low tone, however if the following root has high tone it will not change tone because of the preceding low suffix.<sup>[3]</sup>

There are no morpho-phonemic variations discussed for the language. The only related feature are a small set of verb minimal pairs where transitivity is distinguished by tone:

<i>làŋ</i>	'to rise'
<i>láŋ</i>	'to raise'
<i>tàp</i>	'to fall'
<i>táp</i>	'to be scattered'
<i>ròp</i>	'to break'
<i>róp</i>	'to break something'

### Syllable structure

Yolmo has the **syllable structure** (C)(C)V(C).<sup>[18]</sup> This means that the minimum a syllable needs is a **vowel**. Syllables can also have up to two consonants before the vowel and one after the vowel.

V	<i>óo</i>	'there'
VC	<i>ùr</i>	'fly'
CV	<i>pù</i>	'son'
CVC	<i>pùp</i>	'keep warm'

CCV	<i>prù</i>	'write'
CCVC	<i>prùl</i>	'snake'

All consonants and vowels can occur word-initial, with a restricted set able to occur in the second syllable. The set of syllable initial consonant clusters includes /pr, br, kr, py, phy, sw, kw, thw, rw/.

All vowels can occur syllable-final, and final consonants include voiceless unaspirated bilabial /b/ and velar stops /k/, voiced liquids /l,r/, the voiced labio-velar /w/ and all nasals except the palatal /m, n, ng/.

### Morphophonemic processes

There is a regular process by which the suffixes undergo a change depending on the nature of the verb that they are attached to. Suffixes that begin with a **voiceless stop**, such as the **non-past -ke**, the **imperative -toŋ** or the **hortative -ka**, all undergo regular morphophonological processes. If they occur after a syllable with a final sound that is voiced they will also be voiced, if they occur after an unvoiced final sound, or an /r/ the start of the suffix will be unvoiced. The examples below are with the **non-past -ke**:

<i>tá-ge</i>	watch-NON.PST
<i>tén-ge</i>	show-NON.PST
<i>zàp-ke</i>	dress.up-NON.PST
<i>mùr-ke</i>	chew-NON.PST

The only forms that cannot be predicted by this process is if the suffix is after /i/ or /e/, both of which are **high front vowels**. The voicing cannot be predicted in this context, and the suffix is sometimes voiced and sometimes unvoiced. Below are examples of verbs with both /i/ and /e/:

<i>pí-ge</i>	pull.out-NON.PST
<i>ǰí-ge</i>	die-NON.PST
<i>ǰé-ke</i>	tell-NON.PST
<i>kyé-ke</i>	give.birth-NON.PST

There is also a tendency for suffixes that begin with -k/ -g to omit the initial sound after a vowel. This is not as regular a process as the voicing alterations described above. Below are some examples of this process:

Form	Gloss	Translation
<i>ŋà=i</i>	1SG=GEN	'my'
<i>qò-en</i>	go-NON.PST	'go'



## Word Order

Yolmo has the basic word order of **Subject-Object-Verb**. This is common in the **Tibeto-Burman** family.

<i>ŋà=ki</i>	<i>tó</i>	<i>sà-sin</i>
1SG=ERG	rice.cooked	eat-PST
'I ate rice' (Gawne 2016: 69)		

## Nouns/nominals

	Singular	Plural
<b>First person</b>	<i>ŋà</i>	<i>òraŋ/ùu</i> (inclusive) <i>ŋì</i> (exclusive)
<b>Second person</b>	<i>khyé</i>	<i>khyá</i>
<b>Third Person</b>	<i>khó</i> (masc.) <i>mò</i> (fem.) <i>dì</i> (inanimate)	<i>Khúŋ</i> <i>díya</i> (inanimate)
<b>Reflexive</b>	<i>ràŋ</i>	

The **noun phrase** in Yolmo includes either a **noun** or a **pronoun**. The noun phrase with a noun can also include a **determiner**, **adjective** and **number marker**, while the options are more limited with a pronoun or **proper noun**. Noun suffixes include **case markers**, **plural marker** and **numeral classifiers**.

The order of the noun phrase is (Determiner) **Noun=Plural(-Focus Marker)(=Case)** (Numeral Classifier) (Number) (Adjective).<sup>[18]</sup>

### Determiners

The Yolmo **definite determiner** is *dì* the same as the third person inanimate pronoun 'it/this'. It occurs before the noun:

<i>dì</i>	<i>pèza</i>
DET	child
'The child' (Hari 2010: 31)	

The **indefinite** is marked using the numeral *təí* 'one', which comes after the noun, like other numbers:

<i>mì</i>	<i>təí</i>
person	one
'A person' (Hari 2010: 91)	

## Pronouns

Yolmo pronouns are presented in the table below. There is an **inclusive/exclusive** distinction for first person plural pronouns, a **gender** distinction for third person singular and an **animacy** distinction for third person.

The first person plural *òraŋ* is more commonly found in the Western dialects of Melamchi and Helambu Valley Yolmo, as well as Lamjung Yolmo, while *ùu* is more common in the Eastern dialects. It is possible to create a dual form by adding *ŋí* to the plural form (e.g. *khyá ŋí* 'you two'), although this is optional.

The third person plural *khúŋ* can also be used as a polite form for a single third person.

Pronouns do not take determiners, number, or adjectives.

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Pronouns do not take determiners, number, or adjectives.

## Interrogative pronouns

**Interrogative pronouns** are used to form questions. Yolmo has the following attested interrogative pronouns:

<i>sú</i>	'who'
<i>nàm</i>	'when'
<i>kàla</i>	'where'
<i>təípe, təíle, təí mée</i>	'why'
<i>təí</i>	'what'
<i>kàndi</i>	'which one'
<i>súgi</i>	'whose'
<i>súla</i>	'whom'
<i>kànqu, kànmu</i>	'how'

Hari gives both *kà* and *kàla* (*kà* with the dative suffix) as forms for 'where' in Melamchi Valley Yolmo, but only *kàla* is attested in Lamjung Yolmo.<sup>[23]</sup> There are also a number of forms for 'why', *təípe* and *təíle* are attested in





both Melamchi Valley Yolmo and Lamjung Yolmo, but only *təi mée* in Melamchi Valley Yolmo. This is because it uses the verb *mée* 'say' as part of the construction, which is not in Lamjung Yolmo (see the section on [reported speech](#), as well as the [word list](#)). The *kànmu* form of 'how' is attested in Lamjung Yolmo, while *kànqu* is used in Melamchi Valley Yolmo, with an optional *-mu* suffix to make *kànqu-mu*. Hari and Lama also note the form *kànqu-bar* in the Western regions.<sup>[39]</sup>

Note that the words *súgi* and *súla* are complex forms, *súgi* is *sú* 'who' with the genitive case suffix, and *súla* is *sú* with the dative case suffix.

For more on the structure of interrogative clauses, see the section on [question formation](#).

## Proper nouns

Proper nouns include people's names, place names and the names of deities. They do not take determiners, number, or adjectives.

## Plural

The [plural](#) marker in Melamchi and Lamjung Yolmo is *=ya*. The plural is treated as a [clitic](#) as it occurs after an [adjective](#) if there is one, rather than always attaching directly to the noun:

<i>khánba</i>	<i>tə́mbu</i>	<i>tə́mbu=ya</i>
house	big	big=PL

'The big houses' (Hari 2010: 28)

Plural marking is optional if an overt number is used with the noun, or if the number is clear from context:

<i>pèmpiza</i>	<i>súm</i>	<i>dù</i>
women	three	COP.PE

'There are three women' (Gawne 2016: 55)

The plural form in Syuba is *=kya*,<sup>[27]</sup> which is more similar to the Kyirong form,<sup>[36]</sup> suggesting the Yolmo *=ya* is an innovation.

## Focus marker

Yolmo has a nominal focus marker *-ti*. The focus marker gives prominence to the noun it is attached to. In the example below, the older brother is singled out, contrasted with other relatives who perhaps did not obtain such wealth:

<i>áda-di</i>	<i>nima</i>	<i>nédzen</i>	<i>tə́húkpu</i>	<i>kàl-di</i>	<i>oŋ-sin</i>	<i>dù</i>
older.brother-FOC	day	every	rich	went-PFV	come-PST	AUX.PE

'The older brother became richer every day.' (Hari & Lama 2004: 271)

Hari also notes for Melamchi Valley Yolmo that there is a focus marker *-ka*, which is used specifically to mark something as contrary to expectation.

<i>khánba</i>	<i>tə́hímbu</i>	<i>tə́hímbu=ya-la-ga</i>	<i>tè-ku</i>	<i>dù</i>
house	big	big=PL-LOC-FOC	reside-IPFV	AUX.PE

'I realize that they are living in big houses.' (Hari 2010: 27)

Nouns can also take the emphatic suffixes *-ni* and *-ranj*, which are also used for other parts of speech (see section on [lexical emphasis](#)).

## Case marking

Yolmo uses [post-positional](#) suffixes to mark the [case](#) of nouns. Similar to other [Tibetic](#) languages, Yolmo uses a single case form for multiple functions. Case marking is treated as a [clitic](#), as clitics come at the end of the whole noun phrase, rather than directly attaching to only the noun. Below the cases are listed with their functions.

Case marker	Function
=ki	genitive, ergative, instrumental
=la	locative, allative, dative
=le(gi)	ablative

The case markers are phonologically bound, with the *=ki* form becoming voiced in some environments, it is also reduced to *=i* in some environments. See the section on [morphophonemic processes](#) for more on this.

Where there is also a plural the case marker comes after the plural, as in the example below:

<i>tə́àm=ya=gi</i>	<i>kòŋa</i>	<i>tə́u</i>	<i>thál</i>	<i>kyée</i>	<i>dù</i>
hen=PL=ERG	egg	ten	NUM.CLF	lay	COP.PE

'The hens laid ten eggs' (Hari 2010: 23)

## Ergative case

Yolmo has optional [ergative](#) case-marking. Ergative marking means that [subjects](#) of [intransitive verbs](#) are unmarked, the same as [objects](#) of [transitive verbs](#). Subjects of transitive verbs are distinguished from both of these with the *=ki* marker (in contrast to



**nominative-accusative** languages like English, where the subjects of both intransitive and transitive verbs are marked in contrast with objects of transitive verbs).

Below is an intransitive sentence, with the subject *ŋà* taking no marking:

<i>ŋà</i>	<i>ŋù-sin</i>
1SG	cry-PST
'I cried'	

In contrast with this ergative-marked transitive, where the subject *ŋà* is marked with the ergative:

<i>ŋà=gi</i>	<i>ə̀ò</i>	<i>úp-sin</i>
1SG=ERG	yoghurt	cover-PST
'I covered the yoghurt' (Hari 2010: 39)		

Speakers do not always use the ergative case, which is why it is considered 'optional':

<i>ŋà</i>	<i>tó</i>	<i>sà-ke</i>
1SG	rice.cooked	eat-NON.PST
'I eat rice' (Gawne 2016: 69)		

Ergative marking is more common for **past tense**, and non-**habitual** actions. There also appears to be some effect of animacy, and the ergative appears to be used as a strategy in discourse to mark **agentivity**.<sup>[40]</sup> This form of optional ergativity is common across the Tibeto-Burman family.<sup>[41]</sup>

### Dative case

**Dative case** is typically used to indicate, broadly, the noun to which something is given. The Yolmo dative has this function, but it also has a function in 'dative subject' constructions. The dative subject occurs with a small set of **intransitive verbs**, and denote personal, and usually internal, states.

<i>ŋà=la</i>	<i>hé</i>	<i>kà-en</i>
1SG=DAT	potatos	like-NON.PST
'I like potatos.' (Hari 2010: 42)		

The use of dative subjects is common in languages of this area, and is also **attested more broadly**.

### Number

Yolmo has a base-20 counting system.<sup>[39]</sup> As can be seen in the examples above, **cardinal numbers** can be used in noun phrases.

The Yolmo number system is very similar to that of Standard Tibetan and other Tibetan varieties. In the table below is the Yolmo number, taken from Hari's dictionary<sup>[6]</sup>.

In Lamjung Yolmo, the base-20 system is only used by a small number of older speakers, with others using a base-10 system. For example, 'twenty' is *ŋidzu*, 'thirty' is *súmdzu*, 'forty' is *ə̀iptəu*, etc. Even then, once people reach 20 the usually switch to counting in Nepali.<sup>[18]</sup>

Ordinal numbers are formed by addition of the suffix *-pa*, or alternatively with the suffix *-pu* for ordinals relating to people, in Melamchi Yolmo. Ordinals are typically only formed up to 20.

Yolmo	English	Yolmo	English	Yolmo	English
<i>təii</i>	1	<i>khál təii təii</i>	21	<i>zipkha</i>	400
<i>ŋii</i>	2	<i>khál təii ŋii</i>	22	<i>ŋəpkya</i>	500
<i>súm</i>	3	<i>khál təii súm</i>	23	<i>tùpkya</i>	600
<i>zì</i>	4	<i>khál təii zì</i>	24	<i>tìngya</i>	700
<i>ŋá</i>	5	<i>khál təii ŋá</i>	25	<i>kyèkya</i>	800
<i>tùu</i>	6	<i>khál təii tùu</i>	26	<i>kùpkya</i>	900
<i>tìn</i>	7	<i>kál təii tìn</i>	27	<i>tónra</i>	1000
<i>kyèe</i>	8	<i>khál təii kyèe</i>	28		
<i>kù</i>	9	<i>khál təii kù</i>	29		
<i>təú</i>	10	<i>khál təii təú</i>	30		
<i>təúuzi</i>	11	<i>khál ŋii</i>	40		
<i>təiŋii</i>	12	<i>khál təú</i>	50		
<i>təúusum</i>	13	<i>khál súm</i>	60		
<i>təúpsi</i>	14	<i>khál súm təú</i>	70		
<i>təéŋa</i>	15	<i>khál zì</i>	80		
<i>təiiru</i>	16	<i>khál zì təú</i>	90		
<i>təúptin</i>	17	<i>khál ŋá</i>	100		
<i>təápkye</i>	18	<i>khál tìn təú</i>	150		
<i>təúrku</i>	19	<i>khál təú</i>	200		
<i>khál ə̀i</i>	20	<i>khál təéŋa</i>	300		

### Numeral classifiers

Yolmo also has an optional **numeral classifier** *thál*. This is used to emphasise number. In the example in the **section on case marking** above, the speaker is emphasising that the hens laid a large number of eggs.

Lamjung Yolmo also has the classifier *mènda* which can only be used with humans.<sup>[18]</sup>



## Adjectives

Adjectives occur within the noun phrase. Adjectives usually come after the noun so 'small child' would be *piza tsháme* (lit. 'child small'). Adjectives can also occur before the noun, especially in casual speech.<sup>[18]</sup> Many adjectives are derived from verb forms, and often end with *-pu*, *-po*, *-pa* or *-mu*, but they do not act as verbs, as we see in languages like Magar and Manage.<sup>[42]</sup> Hari also notes that there are some adjectives that appear to not have a known verbal origin.<sup>[43]</sup> Adjectives can occur as the head of a noun phrase, but this is very uncommon.

Yolmo	English
tshómbo	'big'
riŋbu	'long'
màrmu, màrpu	'red'
kàrpu, kàrmu	'white'
dziba	'afraid'
tòmbo	'warm'

It is possible to create a new adjective from a verb, using the *-pa* nominalising suffix. The verb stem is often reduplicated; *rùl-* 'to rot' becomes *rùl rùlba* 'rotten' and *pàŋ-* 'to be wet' becomes *pàŋ pàŋba* 'wet'.<sup>[18]</sup>

## Verbs

There are three main types of verbs in Yolmo, *lexical verbs*, *auxiliary verbs* and *copula verbs*. The lexical verbs inflect for *tense*, *aspect*, *mood* and *evidence* and can take *negation*. The infinitive form of verbs takes the suffix *-tæ*. The infinitive is used in a number of constructions, including the *habitual* and *complementation*.

## Copula verbs

The copula verbs and their functions are given in the table below. Copulas are not inflected for person, number or politeness level and many do not distinguish tense:<sup>[3][5]</sup>

	Egophoric	Dubit- ative	Perce- ptual	General Fact
Equation	<i>yin/yingen/yimba</i>	<i>yinḏo</i>	<i>dù</i>	
Existential	<i>yè/yèba</i> <i>yèken/yèba</i> (past tense)	<i>yèfo</i>	<i>dùba</i>	<i>Ōŋge</i>

Equation copulas are used to link two noun phrases, while existential copulas are used for functions of existence, location, attribution and possession.<sup>[5]</sup> Hari

describes the forms that end in *-pa* (voiced in this environment so they become *-ba*) as more emphatic, unlike lexical verbs with a *-pa* suffix they do not indicate *past tense*, and are not used exclusively in *question structures*.<sup>[3]</sup>

Some copula verbs can also be used as verbal auxiliaries, particularly in constructions *marked for aspect*, where they contribute evidential, tense or epistemic information. The negative forms of each copula are given in the section on *negation*.

Below the different *evidential* and *epistemic* functions of each copula type are discussed.

## Egophoric

The egophoric, or personal,<sup>[44]</sup> is used to indicate that the speaker has personal knowledge about the information. In the example below, the speaker would not be reading the name of the book, but already know the name as they show it to someone else:

*òo tshée=gi min gyaldzen tsemu pūnggyen má-ě yimba*  
 that book=GEN name gyaldzen tsemu pūnggyen say- COP.EGO  
 NON.PST

'This book is called 'Gyaldzen Tsemu Punggyen.' (Hari 2010: 66)

Unlike in Standard Tibetan,<sup>[45]</sup> the speaker does not need to be personally close to an individual to use the egophoric while talking about them.

Different varieties of Yolmo prefer different forms of the egophoric as the default; In Helambu they prefer *yin*, in Lamjung *yimba* and Ilam *yinge*. *yèken* is past tense forms of the existential (*yèke* in Lamjung), with the form *yèba* also often used in past tense structures, as well as questions. The past form cannot be further decomposed, as the form *-ken/-ke* is the *non-past tense suffix* for lexical verbs.

There are some structures where the egophoric is used as the default, such as *conditionals*.

## Dubitative

Unlike the other copulas, which mark evidential distinctions, the dubitative copulas are epistemic forms used for reduced certainty. They are related to the *-fo* *dubitative suffixes* for lexical verbs. In the example below, the speaker does not have any direct evidence that Ri-jan is in the house, but thinks that is where he might be:



<i>riɖʒan</i>	<i>khím=la</i>	<i>yèfo</i>
Rijan	house=DAT	COP.DUB

'Rijan is probably in the house.' (Gawne 2016: 88)

### Perceptual

The perceptual, or sensory, evidential is used to mark information acquired through direct sensory evidence, either through sight, one of the other *senses*, or internal state (such as feeling an ache).

<i>dèla</i>	<i>fháa</i>	<i>dù</i>
here	blood	COP.PE

'I see there is some blood here.' (Hari 2010: 60)

Hari calls the perceptual forms *mirative*, as indicating knowledge through sense often occurs for information recently acquired. Only the *dùba* form, with the emphatic suffix *-pa*, appears to indicate some amount of surprise or counter-expectation.

### General fact

The general fact form is used for uncontroversial and universally known facts. This verb is used in functions of existence, location, attribution and possession, and is not used in equational structures.

<i>ni</i>	<i>yùl=gi</i>	<i>hé</i>	<i>ɕimbu</i>	<i>òngen</i>
2PL.EX	village=GEN	potato	tasty	COP.DUB

'The potatoes of our village are tasty.' (Hari 2010: 52)

The form is *òngen* in Melamchi Valley Yolmo and *ònge* in Lamjung Yolmo, demonstrating a link with the *non-past tense suffix*. The verb itself is from the lexical verb *òŋ-* 'come'. It cannot be used for facts about the past. This copula is not attested in *Standard Tibetan* or any other Tibetic language outside of Yolmo.

### Lexical verb stems

The Melamchi Valley variety of Yolmo exhibit verb stem alterations in the context of some verb structures.

Verb stems with short front vowels have their vowels lengthened (e.g. /i/→/ii/), short back vowels are fronted and lengthened (e.g. /o/ and /a/→/ee/, /u/→/ii/). These changes occur mostly with *perfective* structures and *imperatives*. Below are some examples of this alternation using the verb *má-* 'say':

<i>ŋà</i>	<i>má-ke</i>
1SG	say-NON.PST

'I say' (Hari 2010: 35)

<i>ŋà</i>	<i>mée-di</i>	<i>yè</i>
1SG	say-PFV	AUX.EGO

'I have said' (Hari 2010: 35)

*mée-don*

say-IMP

'say it!' (Hari 2010: 35)

When these structures are negated, the negative prefix is lengthened rather than the verb stem, which maintains the vowel change (this does not occur in the imperative).

<i>ŋà</i>	<i>màa-mé yè</i>
1SG	say-PFV AUX.EGO

'I have not said' (Hari 2010: 35)

These alterations do not occur in Lamjung Yolmo<sup>[18]</sup> or Syuba.<sup>[5]</sup>

### Auxiliary verbs

There is a small set of auxiliary verbs in Yolmo. The auxiliary *tè-* is the same as the lexical verb *tè-* 'sit' and is used to add imperfective aspect.<sup>[3]</sup>

<i>mò</i>	<i>sà</i>	<i>tè-ku</i>	<i>dù</i>
she	eat	AUX-IPVF	AUX.PE

'she is eating'

A subset of the copulas can also be used as verbal auxiliaries; *yin*, *yè*, *yèken* and *dù*. These contribute evidential information and for *yè/yèken* also some tense information. As you can see in the example above the *dù* copula is being used as an auxiliary, so they can co-occur with the other auxiliaries.

### Tense

Yolmo has a major tense distinction between past and non-past. These are marked with suffixes on the lexical verb, *-sin* is the past tense marker and *-ke* or *-ken* is the non-past marker.<sup>[3]</sup>

### Past tense

The past tense form is *-sin*.



<i>ŋà=gi</i>	<i>ə̀ò</i>	<i>úp-sin.</i>
1SG=ERG	yoghurt	cover-PST

The past tense form *-sin* can also occur with the **perceptual evidential** *dú* in an auxiliary position. This is not possible with the non-past tense suffix, nor can any other copula be used as an auxiliary with the past tense suffix. Hari suggests this structure is inferential, in that the speaker did not have to witness the event,<sup>[3]</sup> Gawne describes it as 'narrative past'.<sup>[18]</sup>

<i>tə́hú-kúla</i>	<i>tshúr</i>	<i>gyùr-sin</i>	<i>dù</i>
water channel	this.side	change-PST	AUX.PE

'I see, the water channel has changed course to this side.' (Hari 2010: 45)

Melamchi Valley Yolmo also has a past tense form *-kyo* that Hari refers to as the 'main-point past/telling past',<sup>[3]</sup> this form is not found in Lamjung Yolmo.

There is also the form *-pa*, which Hari says is always used in **question structures**. In Lamjung Yolmo there are some examples where it is used in declaratives rather than questions, with a past-tense meaning.

<i>ŋà</i>	<i>tə́hám-pa</i>
1SG	dance-PST

'I danced.' (Gawne 2016: 107)

### Non-past tense

The non-past tense is used for both present and future constructions. Hari gives the forms *-ke* and *-ken* for Melamchi Valley Yolmo, but only *-ke* is attested in Lamjung Yolmo.

<i>ŋà=la</i>	<i>hé</i>	<i>kà-en</i>
1SG=DAT	potatos	like-NON.PST

'I like potatos.' (Hari 2010: 42)

Hari refers to this form as the 'intentional present' but it can also be used in future constructions:

<i>dì</i>	<i>kyé-e-di</i>	<i>ŋì-ti</i>	<i>pèza</i>	<i>ə̀i</i>	<i>dò-en</i>
this	be.born-PERF	2PL-EMPH	child	four	go-NON.PST

'After this one is born we will have four children.' (Hari 2010: 53)

### Aspect

There are a number of verb suffixes that are used to mark aspect, these broadly fall into categories of

**imperfective** and **perfective**, as well as **habitual**. When an aspect form is used, a **copula verb** is also used.

#### Imperfective

The imperfective is used for events that are ongoing or not complete. The *-ku* suffix is attested in both Melamchi Valley and Lamjung Yolmo. It can only be used with the *dù* **copula verb**.

<i>tiriŋ</i>	<i>kháwa là</i>	<i>thóŋ-gu</i>	<i>dù</i>
today	snow mountains	be.seen-IMPF	AUX.PE

'Today the snow mountains can be seen.' (Hari 2010: 43)

The imperfective form *-teraŋ* can be used with either the *dù* or *yè* **copula verb**. In Lumjung Yolmo some speakers pronounce it as *-tiraŋ*.<sup>[18]</sup> Hari refers to the *-teraŋ* construction as the 'perfect continuous aspect', because it can be used to refer to something that was ongoing until a particular point, as per this first example:

<i>tànda</i>	<i>sámma-ni</i>	<i>dìbu</i>	<i>tér-teraŋ</i>	<i>yè</i>
now	until-FOC	money	give-IMPF	AUX.EGO

'Up to now he has been giving money.' (Hari & Lama 2004: 278)

Gawne describes it as an imperfective, as it does not appear to have this perfect aspect function in Lamjung Yolmo, as per this example:

<i>mò</i>	<i>kòlela</i>	<i>tè-teraŋ</i>	<i>dù</i>
3SG.F	slowly	sit-IMPF	AUX.PE

'She is slowly sitting down.' (Gawne 2016: 109)

The **auxiliary verb** *tè* can also be used to mark an imperfective construction. Neither *-ku* nor *-teraŋ* are used if the negative prefix is on the main verb. The auxiliary verb can be used in negative constructions, and takes the negative prefix, rather than the main verb. In the example below, the *-teraŋ* imperfective is used as the negative prefix is on the auxiliary:

<i>ŋà</i>	<i>lèn-diraŋ</i>	<i>mà-tè</i>	<i>yè</i>
1SG	sing-IMPF	NEG.PST-AUX	AUX.EGO

'I was not singing.' (Gawne 2016: 111)

#### Perfective

The **perfective aspect** suffix is used for events that can be described as whole, without reference to the



duration like the imperfective. The perfective form in Yolmo is *-ti*.

*məŋgaŋ-la-ni thóola təhám təhímbu káp-ti yè*  
 cooking.shed- above board large cover- AUX.EGO  
 LOC-FOC PFV

'The cooking shed was covered with large boards.' (Hari & Lama 2004: 270)

Multiple verbs with perfective aspect can be used together to create a **clause chaining** structure. It is distinct from the **nominal focus suffix** *-ti*.

### Habitual

**Habitual aspect** marks that an event is usual, customary or frequent. There is no specific habitual aspect suffix for Yolmo. Speakers will either use a verb with an infinitive, or with no suffix.

*ŋà ɲima t̪əŋmarəŋ khúra sà yè*  
 1SG day every bread eat AUX.EGO

'I eat bread every day.' (Gawne 2016: 112)

### Mood

Mood is marked in Yolmo with a set of verb suffixes. The main mood suffixes are given in the table below

#### Imperative

The polite imperative suffix is *-toŋ* (voiced as *-doŋ* after voiced codas and some vowels). An overt subject is not used, and the same imperative form is used regardless of person or number:

*mée-doŋ!*  
 speak-IMP

'Speak!' (Hari 2010: 46)

The less polite form of the imperative is consists of an unmarked verb stem:

*mée!*  
 speak.IMP

'Speak!' (Hari 2010: 46)

There are also a small number of irregular imperatives that are formed without the imperative suffix, particularly *sò* 'eat!', from *sà*- 'eat'.

If there is an honorific form of the verb it can be used, unmarked, as the most polite form of the imperative:

*ə̀è*

eat.HON

'Please eat' (Hari 2010: 113)

The negative form of the imperative (the **prohibitive**) uses the *mà*- form of the **negator prefix** with the verb stem. The imperative suffix is not included.

*mà-má!*

NEG-speak

'Don't speak!' (Hari 2010: 46)

#### Hortative

Gawne notes two verbal suffix forms for the hortative in Lamjung Yolmo, a *-ka* and a *-təo*.

The *-ka* form is used with all persons except first person singular.

*òraŋ sà-ka*  
 1PL.INCL eat-HORT

'Let's eat!' (Gawne 2016: 114)

The suffix remains in negated hortatives:

Particle	Function
<i>-toŋ</i>	Imperative
<i>-ka</i> or <i>-təo/təu</i>	Hortative
<i>-ɲi</i>	Optative
<i>-tə</i>	Dubitative

*ɲi mà-təhám-ka*  
 1PL.EXCL NEG-dance-HORT

'Let's not dance!' (Gawne 2016: 114)

The *-təo* form is used with first person singular, as well as with other persons. It also remains in negative constructions.

*ŋà khím=ki lè pè-təo*  
 1PL.EXCL house=GEN work do-HORT

'Let me do the house work!' (Gawne 2016: 114)

*-təo* appears to be less strong, and tends to be used more frequently. Hari gives the form as *-təo* (she also calls it an optative, but it appears to be a hortative)

*tiriŋ khó dèla-raŋ tèt-təo*  
 today 3SG.M here-EMPH sit-HORT

'Let him stay here today.' (Hari & Lama 2004: 174)



## Optative

Hari does not list an **optative** suffix.<sup>[3]</sup> Gawne gives the optative *-ŋi* in Lamjung Yolmo.<sup>[18]</sup>

ŋà	ŋàl-ŋi	tè-ku	dù
1SG	sleep=OPT	AUX-IPFV	AUX.PE

'I want to sleep.' (Gawne 2016: 115)

Hari & Lama (2004: 146) list *ŋi-* as a verb that expresses a 'strong wish', clearly linking to the Lamjung Yolmo optative form.

## Dubitative

Hari describes the **dubitative** as 'probable future',<sup>[3]</sup> indicating the sense of decreased certainty that the dubitative mood marks. The forms *-ŋo*, *-ŋo* and *-ro* are found in Melamchi Valley Yolmo as part of the **morphophonemic voicing process**, but the *-ro* form is not found in Lamjung Yolmo.<sup>[18]</sup>

khúŋ-gi	sèn	sà-ro
3PL-ERG	corn.mash	eat-DUB

'they will probably eat corn mash' (Hari & Lama 2004: 237)

This verb suffix is related to the dubitative form of the copula.

## Negation

Negation is marked on lexical verbs by **prefix**. There are two prefix forms, *mè-* is for negation in **non-past tense** (present and future), while *mà-* is used for past tense, as well as negation of imperatives (*mà-tàp!* 'don't fall!').

ŋà	mè-tàp
1SG	NEG.NON.PST-fill

'I do not/will not fall.' (Hari 2010: 132)

ŋà	mà-tàp
1SG	NEG.PST-fill

'I did not fall.' (Hari 2010: 132)

The negated forms of copulas are slightly irregular. They are listed in the table below in brackets underneath the regular forms:

## Verb paradigm

Below are verb paradigms for two verbs, the first is the intransitive verb *ŋù* 'cry' and the second is the transitive

verb *sà* 'eat'. Both are given mostly with third person subject, although this is not particularly important as

subject person does not affect the form of the verb. For both verbs you can see the change in verb stem. For dialect specific variation, click on the link back to each specific form (See Table 2).

## Clause structure

This section outlines some of the main features of the structure of **clauses** in Yolmo.

## Nominalisation

**Nominalisation** is the process by which words undergo a change that allows them to act as nouns. While nominalisation is common process, it is particularly pervasive in **Bodic languages**, where it can be used for a variety of functions, including the formation of **complement clauses** and **relative clauses**.<sup>[46]</sup> The common Bodic nominaliser *-pa*<sup>[47]</sup> productively functions in Yolmo as a suffix that can mark **past tense**, **question structures** or **emphasis**. There are other nominalising forms in Yolmo.

Hari describes a number of nominalisers in Melamchi Valley Yolmo. The first is the nominalising suffix *-ka*:

dì	saudzi	kár-ka	yàabu	tér-ku	dù
this	shopkeeper	weight-NMLZ	good	give-IPFV	AUX.PE

'This shop keeper gives good weight.' (Hari 2010: 30)

A number of other nominalising suffixes that attach to verbs have more specific functions:

Suffix	Fuction
-naŋ	appearance of state or action
-taŋ	displaying a forceful show
-luŋ	have time for an activity
-lu	way of doing something

In Lamjung Yolmo the most productive nominaliser is *-kandi*.<sup>[18]</sup> None of the others described above have been attested. This form is not attested in Hari's description of Melamchi Valley Yolmo, but is probably related to the *-ka* form described above.

ŋà=ki	ŋilbu	yúŋ-kandi	thé-ku	dù
1sg=erg	bell	ring-nmlz	hear-ipfv	aux.pe

'I hear the ringing of bells.' (Gawne 2016: 132)



**Main Table 2 | Verb paradigm**

Form	Syuba	English	Syuba	English
Infinitive	<i>nù-dʒe</i>	'to cry'	<i>sà-tʂe</i>	'to eat'
Simple non-past	<i>khó nù-en</i>	'he cries'	<i>khói tó sà-en</i>	'he eats rice'
Simple past	<i>khó nù-sin</i>	'he cried'	<i>khói tó sà-sin</i>	'he ate rice'
'Telling' past	<i>khó nù-gyo</i>	'he cried'	<i>khói tó sà-gyo</i>	'he ate rice'
Past/question form	<i>khó nì-ba</i>	'did he cry?'/ 'he cried'	<i>khói tó sèe-ba</i>	'did he eat rice?'/ 'he ate rice'
Imperfective	<i>khó nù-gu dù</i>	'he is crying'	<i>khói tó sà-gu dù</i>	'he is eating rice'
Imperfective	<i>khó nì-deran yè</i>	'he is crying'	<i>khói tó sèe-deran yè</i>	'he is eating rice'
Imperfective (Aux)	<i>khó nì tè-ku dù</i>	'he is crying'	<i>khói tó sèe tè-ku dù</i>	'he is eating rice'
Perfective	<i>khó nì-deran yè</i>	'he has cried'	<i>khói tó sèe-di yè</i>	'he has eaten rice'
Habitual	<i>khó nù yè</i>	'he cries (every day)'	<i>khói tó sà yè</i>	'he eats rice (every day)'
Imperative	<i>nì</i>	'cry!'	<i>tó sò</i>	'eat the rice!'
Hortative	<i>nù-ka / nù-tʂo</i>	'let's cry!'	<i>sà-ka / sà-tʂo</i>	'let's eat!'
Optative	<i>nù-ni</i>	'I want to cry'	<i>sa-ni</i>	'I want to eat'
Dubitative	<i>khó nù-fo</i>	'he is probably crying'	<i>khói tó sà-ro</i>	'he is probably eating rice'
Negative, non-past	<i>khó mà-nì</i>	'he is not crying'	<i>khói tó mè-sà</i>	'he is not eating rice'
Negative, past	<i>khó mà-nì</i>	'he did not cry'	<i>khói tó mà-sèe</i>	'he did not eat rice'
Form	Syuba	English	Syuba	English

There is also a locative nominaliser *-sa*, which creates a noun that denotes location:

<i>nà dzàra sà-sa=la</i>	<i>dò-en</i>
1SG snack eat-NMLZ.LOC=LOC	go-NON.PST
'I want to go to the snack place.' (Hari 2010: 33)	

## Adverbials

An **adverbial structure** modifies the verb in some way.

### Temporal adverbial subordination

Temporal adverbs can create subordinated clauses.

<i>sà-kandi tònla nà làkpa fù-ke</i>
eat-NMLZ <b>before</b> 1SG hand wash-NON.PST
'I wash my hands before eating.' (Gawne 2016: 130)

Below is the list of temporal adverbs observed in Yolmo to date, some are independent words, and others are verbal suffixes:

Adverb	Translation	Additional information
<i>nàm</i>	'when'	
<i>gàrila</i>	'at the time'	Nepali loanword
<i>bélala</i>	'at the time'	Nepali loanword
<i>-kamu</i>	'at the time'	only attested in Lamjung Yolmo
<i>tònla</i>	'before'	
<i>tínla</i>	'after'	
<i>-tile</i>	'after'	
<i>-timaranj</i>	'after'	
<i>yindzu</i>	'since'	only attested in Melamchi Valley Yolmo

### Manner adverbs

Manner adverbs create a subordinated clause that expresses the manner of an action. The manner adverb is *lèmu* (*limu* in Lamjung).

<i>khúnj tábu límú gyùbu tʂón-ku dù</i>
3PL house <b>like</b> fast run-NMLZ AUX.PE
'He runs fast like a horse.' (Gawne 2016: 129)

The forms *tíle* and *dènmú* are also found in Lamjung Yolmo,<sup>[18]</sup> but not yet attested in other varieties.

### Conditional

**Conditional constructions** are formed through the use of the suffix *-na* on the verb in the **protasis** clause (the 'if' clause). Speakers will either use the *-na* suffix directly on the verb, or leave the verb unmarked at attach the *-na* suffix to the verb meaning 'say' (*mée* in Melamchi Valley Yolmo, *láp* in Lamjung Yolmo).

<i>nám mà-kyàp làp-na nà phíla dò-ke</i>
rain NEG.PST-fall say-COND 1SG outside go-NON.PST
'If it doesn't rain I will go outside.' (Gawne 2016: 130)

### Complementation

A **complement clause** is a clause that functions as an argument of another clause. In Yolmo the embedded complement clause takes the infinitive suffix *-tʂe*.







<i>khó-ni</i>	<i>nínǰzi</i>	<i>ǰón-gen-gi</i>	<i>pèza-raŋ</i>	<i>mimba</i>	<i>áma-gi</i>	<i>mì</i>	<i>pò-la</i>	<i>má-en</i>
3SG-FOC	love	feel	child-EMPH	COP.NEG.EMPH	mother-ERG	people	near-DAT	<b>say</b> -NON.PST

'Mother says to people nearby, "He is not a lovable child!'" (Hari & Lama 2004: 383)

The lexical verb 'say' is also used in a number of other constructions, including [conditionals](#).

### Reported speech evidential

The reported speech particle also indicates that the speaker is reporting a prior utterance, but has a different focus. The reported speech particle does not account for who the speaker was, but instead primarily serves to focus on the fact the information is reported, and not directly witnessed by the speaker. In the example below from Syuba, it is not made explicit if the report comes from Maila, or another person. The reported speech evidential occurs frequently in narratives.

<i>tírŋ</i>	<i>Maila</i>	<i>tóm</i>	<i>phré-si</i>	<i>ló</i>
today	Maila	bear	meet-PST	RS

'Today Maila met a bear.' (Höhlig 1978: 22)<sup>[50]</sup>

This is part of the wider evidential system of Yolmo, which is also found in the [copula verbs](#) above.

### Lexical emphasis

There are two emphatic suffixes that can be used with a number of word classes. This is in contrast to the [emphatic form -ti](#), which is only used with nouns. The first is *-ni*, and the second is *-raŋ*, which Hari & Lama note is a frequently used emphatic marker in informal speech.<sup>[6]</sup> The distinction between all of these forms is unclear, although Hari refers to the *-ni* form as used for 'moderate focus',<sup>[43]</sup> so it is perhaps less emphatic for nouns than the *-ti* suffix.

### Clause final particles

Yolmo has a series of sentence final [particles](#) that can be used to achieve a range of effects. The table below gives some of the particles in Yolmo and a brief description of their function.<sup>[3][5]</sup>

The reported speech marker *ló* is an [evidential](#) form, as it indicates the source of the information as someone else. This structure is described in the section on [reported speech](#).

Particle	Function
<i>ló</i>	reported speech
<i>nà</i>	emphasis/insistence
<i>yàŋ</i>	emphasis/focus
<i>làa</i>	polite
<i>lé</i>	pleading
<i>lò</i>	friendly/encouraging
<i>óo</i>	invoking/encouraging

### Honorifics

Yolmo has a subset of [honorific](#) vocabulary which is used when talking to, or about, people of higher social status, particularly [Buddhist Lamas](#). Honorific lexicon includes nouns, verbs and adjectives. The table below gives some examples, including the regular word, the honorific form, and the English translation.<sup>[3]</sup>

Regular form	Honorific form	English
<i>tér</i>	<i>nàŋ</i>	'give'
<i>ŋí lòo</i>	<i>zim</i>	'sleep'
<i>sà</i>	<i>ǰè</i>	'eat'
<i>ába</i>	<i>yàp</i>	'father'
<i>áma</i>	<i>yùm</i>	'mother'
<i>kàŋba</i>	<i>ǰàp</i>	'foot/leg'
<i>gòo</i>	<i>ú</i>	'head'
<i>ǰimbu</i>	<i>ŋéebu</i>	'tasty'

The use of honorifics in Syuba and Lamjung Yolmo is not as common, although some speakers still recognise and use these forms.<sup>[5]</sup>

### 100 word Swadesh list

Below is a 100 word [Swadesh list](#) in Yolmo. The Yolmo forms are taken from Hari and Lama,<sup>[6]</sup> who note some variation between the Eastern (E) and Western (W) varieties in the Melamchi and Helambu Valley area. Where the form is different in other varieties this is indicated in the right-hand column of the table. This variation shows that the Lamjung variety and Syuba have more in common with each other lexically than they do with the Melamchi Valley variety.



Swadesh item	English	Yolmo	Variation
1.	I	ηà	
2.	thou	khyá	
3.	we	ηi	
4.	this	di	
5.	that	òo	òodi in Lamjung Yolmo and Syuba
6.	who?	sú	
7.	what?	təí	
8.	not	mè-, mi-	
9.	all	thámdzǎi	dzàmma in Lamjung Yolmo, t <sup>h</sup> ámdze in Syuba
10.	many	màŋbu	
11.	one	təii	
12.	two	ηyii	
13.	a	təhímbu, təhómbu	only tə <sup>h</sup> ómbu reported in Lamjung Yolmo and Syuba
14.	long	riŋbu	
15.	small	təhéemu	təéemi in Lamjung YOlmo
16.	woman	piihmi	pèmpiza in Lamjung Yolmo and Syuba
17.	man	khyówa	k <sup>h</sup> yópiza in Lamjung Yolmo and Syuba
18.	person	mi	
19.	fish	ηà	
20.	bird	təà-təiwa	təádzurma in Lamjung Yolmo and Syuba
21.	dog	kyibu, khyí	khí in Lamjung Yolmo and Syuba
22.	louse	kiəikpa, kyíəi	əí in Lamjung Yolmo and Syuba
23.	tree	tòŋbo, tũŋbu	only tòŋbo reported in Lamjung Yolmo and Syuba
24.	seed	sén	
25.	leaf	làpti, lòma	
26.	root	tsárkyi, tsárnyi, tsárnŋe	
27.	bark	páko, phíko, kóldar	phába in Lamjung Yolmo
28.	skin	páaba (E), páko (W)	gòoba in Lamjung Yolmo and Syuba
29.	lesh	əá	
30.	blood	t <sup>h</sup> áa	
31.	bone	rèko, riiba (E)	ròko in Lamjung Yolmo and Syuba
32.	grease	khyákpa təháa	
33.	egg	təamu kòŋa	
34.	horn	ròwa	rùwa in Syuba
35.	tail	ηáama, ηéma	ηáamar in Lamjung Yolmo
36.	feather	tò (E), t <sup>h</sup> oo (W)	əókpa in Lamjung Yolmo
37.	hair	tá	
38.	head	gòo	
39.	ear	námdzo	
40.	eye	mii	
41.	nose	náasum (E), náрко (W)	only náasum reported in Lamjung Yolmo and Syuba
42.	mouth	khá	
43.	tooth	só	
44.	tongue	təéle	təé in Lamjung Yolmo and Syuba
45.	finger nail	sému	
46.	foot	káŋba	
47.	knee	káŋba-tshii	tshiiŋgor in Lamjung Yolmo, pimu in Syuba
48.	hand	làkpa	
49.	belly	təpa	
50.	neck	dzinba	



Swadesh item	English	Yolmo	Variation
51.	breast	<i>òma</i>	
52.	heart	<i>níŋ</i>	
53.	liver	<i>təimba</i>	
54.	drink	<i>thúŋ-</i>	
55.	eat	<i>sà-</i>	
56.	bite	<i>kàp-, áa táp-</i>	
57.	see	<i>tá, thón-</i>	
58.	hear	<i>thée-, ŋin-</i>	<i>thée-, ŋèn</i> in Lamjung Yolmo and Syuba
59.	know	<i>ǝée-</i>	
60.	sleep	<i>ŋí lòo-</i>	<i>ŋàl-</i> in Lamjung Yolmo and Syuba
61.	die	<i>ǝí-</i>	
62.	kill	<i>sé-</i>	
63.	swim	<i>təál kyàp-</i>	
64.	fly	<i>ùr-</i>	
65.	walk	<i>qò-</i>	
66.	come	<i>òŋ-</i>	
67.	lie	<i>ŋàl-</i>	
68.	sit	<i>tè-</i>	
69.	stand	<i>làŋ-di té-</i>	
70.	give	<i>tér-</i>	
71.	say	<i>má-, làp-</i>	only <i>làp-</i> in Lamjung Yolmo and Syuba
72.	sun	<i>ŋima</i>	
73.	moon	<i>dàwa, dàyum</i>	<i>dàgarmu</i> in Lamjung Yolmo and Syuba
74.	star	<i>kárma</i>	
75.	water	<i>təhú</i>	
76.	rain	<i>nám kyàp-</i>	
77.	stone	<i>tò</i>	
78.	sand	<i>pèma</i>	
79.	earth	<i>sása, thása, sáza, sáptəi</i>	<i>sébi</i> in Syuba
80.	cloud	<i>múkpa</i>	
81.	smoke	<i>típa, təpa</i>	only <i>típa</i> reported in Lamjung Yolmo and Syuba
82.	fire	<i>mè</i>	
83.	ash	<i>thála</i>	
84.	burn	<i>tii-, bàr-, tshii-</i>	
85.	path	<i>làŋ</i>	
86.	mountain	<i>kàŋ</i>	
87.	red	<i>màrmu, màrpu</i>	
88.	green	<i>ŋòmbu, ŋùmbu</i>	
89.	yellow	<i>sérpu</i>	
90.	white	<i>kàrpu, kármu</i>	
91.	black	<i>nàkpu</i>	
92.	night	<i>kùŋmu</i>	
93.	hot	<i>ʃòmo</i>	<i>ʃòmbu</i> in Lamjung Yolmo and Syuba
94.	cold	<i>ʃàŋmu</i>	
95.	full	<i>kàŋ</i>	
96.	new	<i>sámba</i>	
97.	good	<i>yàabu</i>	
98.	round	<i>kòrmu</i> (circular), <i>rhílmu</i> (spherical)	
99.	dry	<i>kámbu</i>	
100.	name	<i>mìn</i>	Unlike almost all other Tibetic languages, this word is <i>mìn</i> and not <i>míŋ</i>



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The main author has no competing interest.

## Ethics statement

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## Notes

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