Sampang is a Kiranti language spoken in eastern Nepal, in the north-eastern part of Khoṭāṅg district and in a few pockets in Bhojpur district. The morphology of Sampang simplex verb forms clearly indicates that Sampang is a Kiranti language, where transitive verbs show agreement both with the agent, i.e. transitive subject, and the patient, i.e. undergoer, recipient or beneficiary. Sampang intransitive verbs agree with their only argument, the subject, i.e. intransitive or reflexive subject. Within Tibeto-Burman, the Kiranti languages stand out on account of their complex verbal paradigms, a feature which explains the epithets of ‘pronominalised’ or ‘complex pronominalising’ commonly used to characterise them. The term describes a process whereby verbal affixes derive from ancient independent pronouns.

Pronominalisation in Kiranti languages was first attributed to sub-stratal influence from an Austroasiatic Munda language. Most linguists accepted the Munda substratum hypothesis until the question was finally settled by Bauman (1975), who convincingly showed that the complex transitive conjugations of the Kiranti languages do not correspond in any way to the relatively straightforward conjugations attested in Munda languages. Furthermore, any Munda substratal influence on Tibeto-Burman must have been at a sufficiently remote time, probably dating back to Proto-Austroasiatic, while the incorporation of pronouns into the Munda verb is considered to be a much more recent development. Today, the Munda substratum hypothesis has been largely discarded and the pronominalisation attested in Tibeto-Burman languages has been reconstructed to the Proto-Tibeto-Burman level by van Driem (1993a).

A Sampang simplex is a non-periphrastic indicative verb form marked for tense, person, number and grammatical relations of the arguments to the verb. A simplex may or may not be negated and may be marked for reflexive voice.

The morphology of Sampang simplicia is elaborate and contains several fused or portmanteau morphemes. As in most other Kiranti languages, the Sampang verb shows copy morphemes in a number of
forms. In total, there are eleven pronominal categories in Sampang, as is common for a Kiranti language. There is singular, dual and plural number for first, second and third person actants and, in addition, non-singular first person actants can be inclusive or exclusive. Many morphemes have different allomorphs and sometimes zero allomorphs. For the reader’s comfort, instead of providing the full allomorphy each time I mention an affix, I shall choose one allomorph as the basic one. Unless the discussion at hand concerns a specific allomorph, the reader is referred to Section 3 for a detailed description of the allomorphic variation of each and every affix in the Sampang verbal agreement system. In this article, the following abbreviations are used:

1, 2, 3 first, second, third person
A agent
AUX auxiliary
d dual
e exclusive
i inclusive
NG negative
NPT non-preterite
n1s not first person singular
ns non-singular
np non-plural

1, 2, 3 patient
p plural
pf prefixal slot
PT preterite
RFL reflexive
S subject
s singular
sf suffixal slot
→ indicates the direction
of a transitive relationship

1. CONJUGATIONS OF SAMPANG SIMPLICIA

Tables 1, 2 and 3 show the affirmative intransitive, reflexive and transitive conjugations of Sampang simplicia. Reflexive forms are expressed with the reflexive discontinuous morpheme or simulfix <-n ... -ici> (RFL) occurring immediately after the stem. In reflexive forms with first person singular and with second and third person non-plural subjects, the reflexive simulfix <-n ... -ici> (RFL) is felt to be totally acceptable by Sampang speakers. In all other forms, viz. the reflexive 1di, 1de, 1pi, 1pe, 2p and 3p forms, language consultants tolerate the use of the reflexive simulfix <-n ... -ici> (RFL), but prefer to use the transitive 1di→3, 1de→3, 1pi→3, 1pe→3, 2p→3 and 3p→3 forms instead. The reflexive 1di form and the reflexive 3sd form are homophonous.