RESEARCH NOTE

A TYPOLOGICAL COMPARISON OF NEPALI AND JAPANESE

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Introduction

The kingdom of Nepal is situated very far from Japan, yet some aspects of culture share common features. Similarity is found even in language. If languages have something in common because of geographical proximity, it is understandable, but one wonders why these two which are so far apart areawise have such similarity. Is it just coincidence?

When a Japanese learns Nepali, s/he finds it easier to master it than English, perhaps due to similar syntactic structure. In this paper we will look at some of the similarities in the two languages on the clause and phrase levels.

Clause Level

Structure of the Clause: The clause is a grammatical unit usually consisting of constituents such as subject, object and verb. The order of the major constituents differs from language to language.

The order of constituents of the clause is one of the most important word-order typological parameters. The parameter characterizes the relative order of subject (S), object (O), and verb (V), giving rise to six logically possible types, namely:
1. SOV (found in Japanese, Turkish)
2. SVO (English, French, Chinese)
3. VSO (Welsh, Biblical Hebrew)
4. VOS (Malagasy)
5. OVS (Hirakaryana in Brazil)
6. OSV (not found yet)

Among the six types, Nepali is an example of the first type, i.e. SOV, it can also be described as a verb-final language. If there are only S and V in a clause, the S always comes before the V. Japanese works exactly
the same. Consider the following examples (Part (a) of the example is in Nepali, and part (b) in Japanese.)

1) a. Aamaa aayo
   S: mother V: came
   b. Naha-ga kita
   S: mother-sub.mk V: came
   'Mother came.'

When all three constituents are present, the order is SOV.

2) a. Pitaa-le bhaat khaanubhayo
   S: father-ag.mk O: rice V: ate
   b. cici-wa gohan-wo tabemasita
   S: father-ag.mk. O: rice-ob.mk. V: ate
   'Father had his rice.'

In both languages the subject can be deleted when it is a pronoun, as it is clear from the verb morphology or context of the clause who the subject is. In some cases both the subject and the object can be deleted, leaving only the verb in the clause, for example in answer to a question like:

   O: food V: ate (I ate).
   O: food-ob.mk V: ate ate
   'Did (you) eat? Yes, I did.'

In the above example the answer could also have been simply, 'aa' (Nepali) or 'hai' (Japanese) as an affirmative response to the question.

Objective complements have the same position as that of a simple nominal object, as in examples 4 and 5:

4) a. raaj-le kathaa bhanyo
   S: Raj-ag.mk O: story V: told
   'Raj told a story.'
   b. taro-wa monogatari-o hanasita
   S: Taro-ag.mk O: story V: told
   'Taro told a story.'
5) a. raaj-le sitaa-le ghar banaayo bhanera bhanyo
   Raj-ag.mk. Sita-ag.mk. house built saying said
Or: raaj-le sitaa-le ghar banaayo bhanyo
   Raj-ag.mk. Sita-ag.mk. house built said
   'Raj said that Sita built a house.'

b. taro-wa jiro-ga³ ie-wo tateta to itta
   Taro-ag.mk. Jiro-ag.mk. house-ob.mk. built that said
   'Taro said that Jiro built a house.'

In Example 5 we find a grammatical difference between Nepali and Japanese, namely that in Japanese sentence 'to' is obligatory while in Nepali 'bhanera' is optional and is often deleted.

Case Markers
Agentive Case Markers: In both Nepali and Japanese, the agent of a transitive clause is marked when the verb is in the perfective aspect or past tense. The agentive case marker follows the agent.
6) a. raam-le bhaat khaayo
    Ram-ag.mk. rice ate
    'Ram ate rice.'

b. taro-wa gohan-wo tabeta
   Taro-ag.mk. rice-ob.mk. ate
   'Taro ate rice.'

Regarding case marking, Japanese differs from Nepali in that in Japanese intransitive subjects are also marked. The subject marker for an intransitive clause is the same as the agent marker for a transitive clause.

7) taro-wa ie-ni imasu
   Taro-sub.mk. house-in is
   'Taro is in the house.'

Object Case Markers: In Nepali, the object takes '-laai' if it is animate, otherwise it does not, while in Japanese the object takes a marker regardless of animity. This is another difference between the two languages, so a Nepali learning Japanese has to be aware of the fact that the object marker '-wo' should always be added to the object.
The Noun Phrase

Modifiers Preceding the Noun: In both Japanese and Nepali nominal phrases, modifiers such as adjectives, demonstratives, numerals, genitives, and embedded clauses come before the noun they modify. For Example:

Adjectives:
8) a. seto parbat  
   white mountain  
   'White mountain'  

b. siroi yama  
   white mountain  
   'White mountain'

Demonstratives:
9) a. tyo maanche  
    that man  
    'That man'  

b. sono hito  
    that man  
    'That man'

Numerals:
10) a. das paisaa  
    ten pice  
    'Ten pice'  

b. jyu yen  
    ten yen  
    'Ten yen'

When adjectives, demonstratives and numerals are all present, the order is as follows: demonstratives first, numerals second and adjectives third.

11) a. ti caar thulo ghar-haru  
    those four big house-s  

b. korera yottuno ookina ie  
    those four big house  
    'Those four big houses.'

Genitives:
12) a. nepaal-ko ghar  
    Nepal-of house  

b. neparu-no ie  
    Nepal-of house  
    'House of Nepal'

Multiple genitive noun phrases are also common in both languages:

13) a. nepaal-ko raajaa-ko ghar-ko dhokaa  
    Nepal-of king-of house-of gate  

b. neparu-no oo-no ie-no mon  
    Nepal-of king-of house-of gate  
    'the gate of the king of Nepal's house'
Embedded Clauses:
14) a. timi-le dieko paisaa
    you-ag.mk gave money
b. omae-ga kureta okane
    you-ag.mk. gave money
    'the money you gave'

Postpositions: In Nepali postpositions like '-maa', 'samma', 'tira' come after the head noun. Such postpositions appear in the same position in Japanese.
15) a. ghar-maa house-in
    'in the house'
    b. kurumano-naka car inside
    'in the car'

The Verb Phrase: Adverbs that qualify the verb such as adverbs of manner, place and time always precede the verb.

Manner:
16) a. bistaarai jaanchu slowly go (I)
    b. yuukuri ikimasu slowly go (I)
    '(I) go slowly.'

Place:
17) a. ghar-bhitra jaanubhayo house-inside went (he)
    b. ie-nonakani ikimasita house-inside went (he)
    '(He) went inside the house.'

Time:
18) a. u ahile ghar-maa cha he now house-in is
    'He is in the house now.'
    b. kanojo-wa ima ie-ni imasu she-ag.mk. now house-in is
    'She is in the house now.'

Conclusion
Although there exist many differences in phonology, lexicon and morphology, it is interesting to find some similarity in the syntax of these
two languages. This similarity helps the Japanese to learn Nepali faster; likewise, it enables the Nepalese to pick up Japanese easily.

Notes
1. Pradhan (1982) presents word order structure in Nepali. In my paper only basic word order is discussed, thus topicalization or emphatic word order variants are not included.
2. Hale (1982) states, “The order OV is ... a patten which typifies not only the Dravidian and Indo- Aryan languages of South Asia, but also the Tibeto-Burman.... There is a large area including a block of languages extending to the Hamitic and Semitic languages of Ethiopia ... and to Korean, Japanese.” (p. 57).
3. In Japanese, ‘-wa’ and ‘-ga’, though both labeled as agent market have separate functions in discourse.

References