

Notes on Yakkha grammar

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Chapter 1

Grammatical overview

1.1 Clausal dependents and constituent orders

Clausal pivot, or “subject” It’s claimed in [Schackow \(2015, p. 387\)](#) that Yakkha lacks a unit like the verb phrase (verb plus complements). This is a frequent claim in typological works, but usually it’s merely due to differences in notation: there are usually some evidence suggesting that we can define a syntactic pivot – essentially the subject, although it’s not necessarily agentive in syntactically ergative languages – which is somehow “higher” in the clause structure and “more distant” from the main verb; and the verb phrase now can be defined as the rest, more tightly integrated parts of a clause. Here I examine the following tests for a syntactic pivot or “subject”:

- *Coordination*. It seems that [Schackow \(2015\)](#) doesn’t mention sentential coordination. In a book review ([Rapacha, 2005](#)), it is claimed that the claim made by the reviewed publication that “Kiranti has no coordination of sentence” can be “partially justified”, although no justification is given. On the other hand, [Rapacha \(2008\)](#) (by the same author?), a report on Bayung Lo, another Kiranti language and a cousin of Yakkha, claims that a coordinator *ko* is attested and it seems to be that it agrees quite well with the usual impression of a coordinator linking two verb phrases (p. 57).
- *Movement of verb plus complements*.
- *Relation between tense, aspect, mood (TAM) categories and the pivot*.
- *Relativization*.
- *Topicalization*.

(Deep) argument structures Besides the tests for the clause-level syntactic pivot, there are also tests for the argument structure-level pivot:

- *Reflexive constructions*. the subject is expected to control the object; but Yakkha lacks reflexive and reciprocal pronouns so this test doesn’t work.
- *Omitted argument in control construction*. TODO: why is a property of argument structure?

The standard monotransitive construction seems to be a typical morphologically ergative construction: the A argument receives an inherent case, but is still active as the default clause pivot.

The so-called experiencer-as-object construction (Rapacha, 2008, p. 334) seems to be a morphologically ergative construction plus promotion of the absolutive argument to a pivot position; the latter may be understood as a VP-internal information structure construction or a special voice where the ergative CAUSER is suppressed for any further syntactic operations, and the absolutive argument is promoted to the pivot position. (Note that the definition of the A label seems to be a “surface” one in Dixon’s words: it corresponds to what appears as the pivot in constructions containing prototypical S and A)

References

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