Notes on Yakkha grammar

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Chapter 1

Grammatical overview

1.1 Clausal syntax

1.1.1 Clause types

Clause-level coordination and subordination

> **Box 1.1: Coordination and subordination**
>
> - Types of coordination
>
> - Sharing subject
>
> - Scope of topic and adverbial clause?

Information packaging   Topicalization is done by fronting (Schackow, 2015, p. 387).

> **Box 1.2: Information packaging and clause type**
>
> Is information packaging only compatible with sentential clauses?

1.1.2 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.*

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 reprocical pronouns so this test doesn't work.

- *Omitted argument in control construction.* TODO: why is a property of argument structure?

1.2 Tense, aspect, mood, and all that

Primary tense   The category of primary tense establishes the relation between the speech time and a reference time, the latter then being compared with the event time to determine the secondary tense. Yakkha has the distinction between past and non-past primary tense.

Secondary tense

Point of view aspect   Yakkha has a progressive aspect, which is not compatible with the perfect secondary tense (thus, English *have been doing* doesn't have a direct Yakkha counterpart), probably because of semantic implicational reasons: the perfect usually implies that the event is viewed from the outside, and hence naturally has a perfective meaning.

1.3 Core argument structures

The standard monotransitive construction   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.

Psych-verbs   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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