

Language Universals and Syntactic Typology July 2, 2014 IIIT, Hyderabad

Kārumūri V. Subbārāo, University of Hyderabad. <kvs2811@gmail.com>

Language Universals: The Principles that are shared by all the languages of the world and, these are the principles that cannot be *structurally violated*. These Principles are genetically-coded.

Four major language families in the subcontinent are: (i) Austro-Asiatic (Mon-Khmer and Munda), (ii) Dravidian, (iii) Indo-Aryan and (iv) Tibeto-Burman.

All South Asian languages (except Khasi, which is verb-medial and Kashmiri, which is a V_2 language) are *verb-final*,

Aspects of the typology of South Asian languages

1. Some Universals shared
2. Some word order universals found in South Asian languages
3. Linguistic Area
4. Parametric variation found in South Asian languages
5. Language Contact and its effects
6. Unique syntactic features that each language family

1. Some Universals shared

An anaphor (reflexive or reciprocal) cannot occur in Subject position in any language. Only a pronoun or a referential expression (proper name, common name) can'

1. He met Radha.
2. Radha is a pretty girl.

3. * Himself met Radha.
4. *Herself is a pretty girl.

Languages differ from each other, not in innumerable number of ways, but in a limited **set of parameters**, just as human beings differ.

The pro-drop parameter: A pronoun (pro) functioning as a subject, an object, an indirect object and an oblique object is freely dropped in all South Asian languages.

Hindi-Urdu: *cale gaye* '(They) left.'

Telugu: *velli pōyēru* '(They) left.' Mizo: *an-kal-to* '3pl-go-perf' '(They) left.'

2. **'Head (Direction) Parameter'**: The complement (object) in SOV languages occurs to the *left* of the head, the verb or a postposition. Hence, the **direction of case assignment in verb-final languages** in a theory such as Government and Binding framework is from ***right to left***.

3. Free Word Order (& cf. Free traffic on roads)

4. All South Asian languages except Khasi are ***left-branching***. English is ***right-branching***.

5. **Absence of Pleonastic/Expletive Expressions**

It is raining. **There** is a tiger sitting *there in the garden*.

Typological Characteristics of South Asian languages (Word Order Universals)

South Asian languages: Verb-Final (SOV) - Subject (S) - Object (O) - Verb (V)

Hindi-Urdu (IA)

6. āp ne mujhe dekh- ā thā
 SUBJECT OBJECT VERB AUX₁ AUX₂

you erg me see- perf pst

‘You had seen me.’

(i) In South Asian languages (SALs) the **auxiliary verb follows the main verb**. V+ Aux

(ii) The indirect object (IO) precedes the direct object. **DO- IO order**

Hindi-Urdu (Indo-Aryan)

7 pallavi ne prīti ko kitāb dī

Pallvi erg Priti dat book gave
 (IO) (DO)

‘Pallavi gave a book to Priti.’

(iii) All SALs have **postpositions**. Since SOV languages have postpositions.

8 mez **par**

table on

(iv) The genitive *precedes* the head noun as predicted by the **implicational universal** for verb-final languages.

Hindi-Urdu

Telugu (Dravidian)

9. prakāśh **kā** ghar

10. rāmuḍi (yokka) illu

Prakash of home

Ram.obl of house

‘Prakash’s house’

‘Ram’s house’

- (v) Comparative and superlative constructions in all South Asian languages (except Khasi) use a postposition, comparable to *than* in English, to mark the standard of comparison. (Greenberg's word order universal 22.)

Hindi-Urdu (IA) No comparative marker with the adjective like *-er* in English

11. raghu *rādhā* *se* lambā hai

Raghu Radha **than** tall is

‘Raghu is taller than Radha.’

Some Tibeto-Burman languages such as Tenyidie, Bodo, Hmar, Mising and Sema, and the Mon-Khmer Khasi do have *bound markers* for comparison.

Hmar (TB)

12.. lali lala- nekin a- **in-** *sāṅ-* **lem**

Lali Lala- than 3s- **vr-** *tall-* **er**

‘Lala is taller than Lali.’

Sanskrit has the markers *-tar* (comparative) and *-tam* (superlative).

- (vi) Time adverbials (*T*) *precede* place adverbials (*P*) in SOV languages. Thus, the order of their occurrence is *TP*.

13 bacce **śām ko (T)** **park mē (P)** khelte hai~
children in the evening park in play

‘The children play **in the park (P) in the evening (T)**.’

- (vii) Time and place adverbials occur in *descending order* in verb-final languages (Subbarao 1984a). By *descending order*, we mean the *superordinate chunk of place or time* occurs first, then a *subordinate chunk* and

then, a chunk subordinate to that follows.

PLACE ADVERBIALS : Hindi-Urdu (IA)

14. dillī mē gāndhī mē paccīs nambar kī koṭhī kī chat par
nagar

*Delhi in Gandhi in twenty number of house of roof on
Nagar five*

‘On the roof of house number twenty-five in Gandhi Nagar in Delhi’

(Subbarao 1984a:18)

Evidence in support of ‘South Asia as a Linguistic Area’ - Some common features

- compound verbs, conjunct verbs, reduplication, echo words, conjunctive participles and the quotative.

- (i) **Compound Verbs** - “a sequence of two verbs AB ((main verb A) plus ‘vector B’).It imparts **completion** (Butt 1995) or the **attitude/feeling of the speaker towards the event.**

Hindi-Urdu (IA)

15. vah subah-subah hamāre ghar ā- baīṭhā/ āyā

he early in the morning our home **come- sat/** came

Literally: ‘He came-sat early in the morning.’

Telugu (DR)

16. (vāḍu)_i appuḍ(u)- appuḍu madhyāhnam kūḍā **vacc-** (i)
 (he) then- then afternoon also **come- cpm**
kūrcon- ṭā- ḍu_i/ vastādu
sit- imperf- 3m,s/ comes

‘Some times he comes in the afternoon, too.’

āyā ‘came’ in (8) in Hindi-Urdu and *vastāḍu* ‘comes’ in (9) in Telugu are neutral with regard to speaker’s attitude or feelings on the event. *ā baiṭhā* ‘come sat’ in (8) and *vacci kūrconṭāḍu* ‘come. cpm sit’ in (9) express speaker’s unhappiness on the event. In Tamil and Telugu (DR), two vector verbs can occur in a row.

- (ii) **Conjunct verbs** - Productive use of noun/adjective plus a light verb as predicate. It is the light verb that carries the tense, aspect and agreement markers. Eg., *telephone karnā* ‘to telephone’ in Hindi-Urdu; *telephone ceyyaḍam* ‘to telephone’ in Telugu

Hindi-Urdu (IA)

17. māī ne rām **kī** madad kī
 I erg Ram **gen** help (f.s) did.f.s.

‘I helped Ram.’

(Masica 1991)

In all the Dravidian languages and in many Indo-Aryan languages (Assamese, Bangla, and Oriya) the patient of the conjunct verb takes a dative case marker. verb.

Telugu (DR)

18. āviḍa rādha *ki/* nā.ku/ *nā sahāyam cēsin-di

she Radha *dat* I.obl.**dat/** I.gen help did-3s,nm

‘She helped Radha/me.’

(iii) **Reduplication** Adjectives, question words, verbs and adverbs all have reduplicated forms (see Abbi 1992). Reduplication normally provides **emphasis** or imparts **distributive meaning**.

Repetition of the verb stem

Marathi and Konkani (IA): “the repetition of the verb stem, which intensifies the meaning of the verb” (Pandharipande 1997: 534).

Marathi (IA)

19. tī *bol-* *bol* bol-lī

she talk- talk talk-pst.3s, f

(stem form) (stem form)

‘She talked a lot.’

(Pandharipande 1997: 534)

Adjective Reduplication: Hindi: *achī acchī kitabē* ‘good books’

Bangla: *moṭa moṭa log* ‘fat people’

Telugu: *manci manci pustkālu* ‘good books’

Adverb Reduplication: Hindi *abhī abhī*; Telugu *ippuḍ(u) ippuḍē* ‘just now’

Perfect Participle Reduplication: *baiṭh.ē baiṭh.ē* ‘having sit having sit’

Conjunctive Participle Reduplication: Telugu *nila baḍi nila baḍi* ‘having stood having stood’

Distributive meaning: Hindi: *ghar ghar mẽ* ‘in every house’

Bangla: *ghor-e ghor-e* ‘house in house in’ ‘in every house’

Telugu: *inṭi-inṭā* ‘house.obl. house-in’ ‘in every house’

Echo words: Hindi-Urdu, it is *w-*; in Kashmiri, *ṣ-*; in Bangla, *ṭa-* and in Telugu, *g-*.

Hindi-Urdu (IA)

20. *cāy* ‘tea’ *cāy-wāy* ‘tea and the like’
khānā ‘food’ *khānā-wānā* ‘food and the like’

Bangla (IA)

21. *ghor* ‘house’ *ghor-ṭor* ‘house and the like’
bhat ‘cooked rice’ *bhat-ṭat* ‘cooked rice and the like’

Telugu (DR)

22. *puli* ‘tiger’ *puli-gili* ‘tiger and the like’
ceruku ‘sugarcane’ *ceruku-giruku* ‘sugarcane and the like’

1. **Conjunctive participles:** South Asian languages have a nonfinite construction generally labeled “the conjunctive participial construction.”. See the chapter in the web material of Subbarao. <www.cup.org/Subbarao>

1 As a coordinating conjunction signaling sequential actions

Hindi-Urdu (IA)

23. [[ghar jā kar] [muh hāth dho kar]

home go cpm face hands wash cpm

[cāy pī kar] madhurī akhbār paṛhne lagegī]

tea drink cpm Madhuri newspaper reading will start

‘Having gone home, having washed her face and hands, having had tea,
Madhuri will start reading the newspaper.’

Anaphors: Nominal Anaphors and Verbal Anaphors

Nominal Anaphors

24. rādhā_i ne apne (āp)_i ko šīše mẽ dekhā

Radha erg self’s self dat mirror in saw

‘Radha saw herself in the mirror.’ (Davison 2000: 408)

Verbal Anaphor (vr)

Telugu (DR)

26. rādhā (tana- ni (tanu)) poguḍu- **kon-** di

Radha self- Acc self (nom) praise- **vr-** agr

‘Radha praised herself.’

(Subbarao and Lalitha Murthy 2000: 233)

6 The quotative

Hindi-Urdu

. ham ne sunā **ki** [s₂ramyā dillī pahunc gayī s₂]
2 we erg heaed **that** Ramya Delhi reach went
7
COMP
.
'We had heard that Ramya reached Delhi.'

Telugu

.28. mēmu [s₂ramya dillī cērindi s₂] **ani** vinnāmu
we Ramya Delhi reached **that** heard
(COMP)

Abbreviations: cpm : conjunctive participial marker, dat : dative, erg : ergative, IO- indirect object, p/pl : plural, pres : present, perf pple – perfect participle, Pst – Past, s/sg: singular, VR/vr – verbal reflexive, v rec –verbal reciprocal

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