TYPOLOGICAL VIEW
OF LANGUAGES

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Introduction

It is important to know something about what is called language typology. It is the study of why the order of words in sentences differs from one language to another. This paper tries to discuss about the verb-final languages (SOV) which is prevalent in this part of the world. English and other European languages are the languages known as SVO languages contrasted to the SOV languages. The place where the verb comes in the sentence usually tells where the other words will come as well. The word order differences from one language to another are largely predictable. This is because languages try to be clear and efficient. Things which cause confusion are changed around, until over the generations the easiest word order emerges. It has been found that this has resulted in similar word orders in each language type in regard to where the verb stands.

Verb-final languages, that is, languages in which the verb normally comes last in the sentence, makes up around 30% of the world's languages, and share many of the same structures whether they are in Asia, Africa or the Americas. What are some of the differences between verb-final languages and those languages with the verb near the beginning of the sentence? I will discuss such differences one by one. Knowing why things are arranged differently can help us to think through what the natural order is likely be in our own language. Of course every language has some peculiarities and exceptions from the normal patterns.

Case marking

The relationship of a noun to the verb in the sentence is called "case". In order to connect nouns to verbs, languages with verbs before the

object have the markers in front of the nouns such as the object marker. This makes the marker come between the two, such as in "go to town." In contrast, languages with verbs at the end have the case markers attached to the end of nouns. This makes the connection between nouns of all cases come between them and their verb, such as "ghar-maa gaen." It is important to get to know this differences. The change took place from prepositions to postpositions. English has a strict word order of subject-verb-object (SVO). It has dropped most subject and object case markers since the word order tells whether the noun is a subject or an object. This always forces the subject slot to be filled in English. So if the subject noun is not used, it will be replaced by a pronoun. If the word order is not strongly fixed in the language there is probably no need to always have such pronoun subjects since the case markers identify whether the noun is subject or object. In fact, if a verb-final language does not require the subject, it will probably develop some way to show whether the noun is subject or object. This is useful, since both subject and object come before the verb, and sentences such as "bird ate" will be ambiguous as to whether the bird was eater or eaten.

Emphatic pronouns and word order

The situation in English mentioned above, where pronouns are used as subject markers, presents another problem. In most verb-final languages which have case marked by actual words or particles rather than by word order, pronouns which are fully written are normally emphatic. Emphasis is given in different ways in different languages. For example, if an English speaker wants to emphasize a pronoun he can pronounce it with more stress. Moving words out of their natural order also makes them emphatic. Word order changes are very common in both Greek and Hebrew to give emphasis. For example, by moving a direct object to the beginning of the sentence it becomes prominent. Again, English with its fixed word order is not as free to move things around for emphasis. However, many verb-final languages do have sufficient person agreement and case markers to allow the same function of fronting or other word order changes to give emphasis.

Verbal auxiliaries

The general preference in verb-final languages for suffixes over prefixes is also seen with verbal auxiliaries. In the languages mentioned above they normally come before the verb as in the English "has said", while in verb-final languages they follow the verb as in Nepali "garnu bhayo". There seems to be a function of the auxiliary in verb-final

languages to tie the sentence together. This is seen in some verb-final languages which like to string gerunds or participles together.

The question particle

Another result of the preference for suffixes in verb-final languages is the position of the question particle. In Hebrew it comes first in the sentence, as is normal for languages with prefixes. But verb-final languages have the question particle at the end of the sentence. English use other devices such as word order change marking the beginning of the question sentence. "He will go" becomes "Will he go" without any special particles. Khaling, one of the Rai languages, uses the question particle "wo" as "ikam khoestae wo" "Did you go home?"

Adverbs

Verb-final languages have adverbs before the verb. This is expected since the verb must be at the end of the sentence. Languages which are not verb-final normally have adverbs after verbs and objects. Example in Khaling: am waetaa khwai (he slowly go) "He goes slowly."

Genetives

Genetives or possessives are another type of noun modifier and regularly come before the noun is verb-final languages. Many languages with the verb before the object have the genetive after the head noun in line with greater efficiency in not coming between nouns and verbs. English has two genetive forms: "son of man" and "man's son". The verb-final languages use the second type only.

Adjectives

As with genitives and relatives, adjectives in verb-final languages usually come before the noun they qualify. Some exceptions occur where verbally derived adjectives follow the pattern of subject-verb. In spite of English and German which have kept their original pattern with adjectives first, the other languages have developed adjectives after nouns as in Hebrew, Spanish and Greek when the article is repeated.

Relative clause

A relative clause is a clause which modifies a noun. In English such clauses are usually introduced by "who", "which", or "that", as in

(1) she is the girl who came

English prefer to have the clause after the noun. However, verb-final languages generally prefer having noun modifiers before the noun. Khalings would say:

(2) am pi-pae melsem (he/she come-relativiser girl)

There seems to be less problems in understanding if noun modifiers do not come between the verb and its object. The main words are kept closer by having modifier on the edge in both language types:

modifier   - object - verb and
verb-   - object - modifier.

In many languages there are specific reasons for moving the relative to the other side of the head. For example, if the clause has another noun of its own and is preceded by another relative clause, it will probably not be clear whether the first clause modifies the head noun or the noun in the second relative.

(3) the table which is big which is covered with a cloth

becomes "which is big cloth covered table", meaning either "big table" or "big cloth". Some languages in such cases allow one relative clause to move behind the noun.

Subordinate clauses

Verb-final languages normally have dependent clauses before the main clause, keeping the main verb at the end of the sentence. English prefer to have the main clause first. However, the order of clauses may be reversed in most languages for emphasis. For example,

(4) He studied because he had a test.

should normally be expressed in verb-final languages,

(5) Because he had a test he studied.

Japanese, one of the verb-final language as Nepali or Khaling follows the above pattern,

(6)   Shiken ga atta node benkyo-shita (test Sub. was Reason Object case maker study-Past)

Khaling expresses similar way,

> (7)　Am-po u-jaac go-tae naa pareiman-tae-si (he-Gen. he-Pos. test is-Past Reason study-Past-Self)

Most languages also allow for emphatic reasons to be stated in a separate clause such as,

> (8)　He studied,, the reason is that he had a test.

This pattern may be normal in Nepali, even though coloqual Nepali would say as follows:

> (9)　us-ko jaanc bhaeko-le poD-yo (he-Gen. test is-Past-Reason study-Past)

Negatives

Negative markers normally develop from two possible sources. The first is from adverbs like "not". The other source of negatives is from special verbs which give a negative meaning to other verb. In this case the negativizing verb is normally the main verb of the sentence. For verb-final languages it will come last, and for others it will normally come before the subordinate verb. The order then is the opposite in the two types of languages. Note the following English (10) and Japanese (11).

> (10)　He refused to go.

> (11)　ikunowo kotowa-tta (to-go refuse-Past)

As I know there is no such word expressing negative meaning in one word in Nepali or Khaling. It seems to me that these languages can use negative freely as in (12), (13). See Khaling example in (14).

> (12)　us-le jaanu manjur gar-e-na (he-Agent to-go agreement do-Past-Neg.)

> (13)　us-le jaanu be-manjur gar-e (he-Agent to-go Neg.-agreement do-Past)

> (14)　am khwaannae mu-ghaang-we (he to-go Neg.-agree-Neg. Past)

In languages like English where the word order of verb in second place is strongly established, the negative comes between the helping verb (or modal) and the main verb in the order of

(15)   He did not go.

Compare this with German which is closely related to English.

(16)   Er ging nicht (he go-Past Neg.)

Another problem comes with infinitives. Sentence like

(17)   He decided not to go.

are likely to be confused with "he didn't decide to go".

Topicalization

A universal tendency in communication is that topical or assumed information comes first and new information follows. This is seen on the sentence level where the subject is the most topical element and normally comes first. Usually if a direct object of a sentence becomes the topic it will move to the subject position. In SVO languages this often done with the passive voice. However, in verb-final languages the passive voice is not as common, and in some languages, for instance, Khaling, it does not exist at all.

Topicality can also be noted in other positions than subject. Even a dative which stands before other objects is probably there because it has higher topicality. The ability to move words around is especially obvious in Greek. Many verb-final languages have this same option, so there is real value in studying the original word order. The tendency to have known elements first favors the verb-final language pattern of having dependent clause first. This is because dependent clauses are normally more topical than main clauses. However, the structure of SVO languages often has topical dependent clauses following the main clause with its new information. In this respect literary Nepali has same pattern. I shall not discuss why so in this paper. Clause order and discourse structure should follow topicality patterns in those languages where they are normal. "Because", "in order to", "after" "before" "while" and other similar words are clues of high topicality. They should logically precede new information. To summarize this;

SVO   main clause   + dependent clause
SOV   dependent   + main clause
      (topical)

Positive–negative contrast

One application of the above principle of known or assumed information coming first in the sentence is found in the positive-negative contrast. In languages with the verb near the beginning, the negative often comes before the positive, as in

(18)   He did not come, but I kept waiting.

Verb-final languages, however, are quite regular in preferring the positive first. Note the following Nepali example.

(19)   Mai-le us-laai parkhi raheko thi-e-tara u aa-e-na (I-Agent he-Patient wait keeping was but he come-Past–Neg.)

If the positive and negative are both stated, the logical expectation is to have the presupposed or assumed statement first and the negative new information second. The fact that verb-final languages prefer this order provides an example where practical considerations determine structure. Most languages seem to allow either order.

Logical progression in paragraphs

Language typology also raises the question of the discourse structure at the paragraph level. The logical sequence for verb-final languages is to put the generalities and background evidence first, and then give the conclusion while the logic of non-verb-final languages usually puts the main point first, and then give the evidence. I often heard this fact when a Japanese news reporters did their work. Western reporters would give the same news items quite opposite. Namely they give important conclusions first and then expand more detail later.

General and specific

The study of language types can also offer some insights on what comes first in ordering, general or specific. In non–verb–final languages the normal pattern is specific before general, such as "London of England" "Mary Smith" "Solomon the son of David" and "rebekah his mother". This is to be expected where the whole language set-up puts the main point first and explanations afterwards. Main clauses come before dependent clause and head

nouns come before relatives and other modifiers. Verb-final languages have just the opposite: qualifier and explanations before the main point.

Gapping

Gapping refers to what happens when two sentences with the same verb are combined and repeated verb is deleted. This "gap" comes in the second clause in English. For example:

(20)   John bought paper and Mary a pen.

However in verb-final languages the gap must come in the first clause since the final verb cannot be deleted.

(21)   Sita-le euTa pensil raa Raam-le kalaam kin-yo (Sita- Ag. a pencil and Ram-Ag. pen buy-Past)

Direct or indirect speech

Verb-final languages favor direct speech while non-verb-final languages with indirect speech. Verb-final languages generally prefer stringing basic clauses together on an equal level without the subordination. An example would be:

(22)   aaja paani parcha bhaannu bhaayo (today rain fall say-Inf. Honourific)

Nepali can take "that" clause also. In this way Nepali is changing into SVO pattern as Hindi and other Indic languages.

Coordination by participles and gerunds

Another variation in languages follows from the above mentioned preference for verb-final languages to sting clause together.Verb-final languages will string clause together with participles or gerunds rather than put in subordinate relationships or omit any connectors. Especially in stories or narrative discourse a series of gerunds may go on for a dozen or more clauses in typical verb-final language.

(23)   uhaan kaam gardai iskul-maa paDcha (he work doing school-at study)

Conclusion

We have seen many aspect of language structure comparing different language types such as SVO and SOV in particular. In many respects they

appear to be opposite of a scale. Thus we see a mirror image as look at them side by side. After the subject of the sentence, practically everything is reversed, and even the position of the noun subject must be switched if the dependent clause subject is the same as in the main clause which now comes at the end. Every additional structural complication, such as more subordinate clauses, infinitives and relatives, will result in an additional reversal of order in the clauses.

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