

BOOK REVIEW

The Newari Language: A Working Outline by Kamal P. Malla. Monumenta Serindica 141. Published by University of Foreign Studies, Tokyo, 1985.

Malla presents an account of contemporary Newari with a complete survey of its structure on all levels of description ranging from phonology to syntax. Up to now, studies of Newari, as far as they were written in English, usually have been special investigations of limited sections of its grammar, such as phonology or morphological structure or clause patterns. Broader, more comprehensive outlines, on the other hand have been available only in the medium of Newari itself which, of course, bars access to the linguist unfamiliar with the language. Therefore, Malla's book fills a substantial gap, as it provides an easily readable account, especially for the foreign student. This account is based both on the intuition of the native speaker and on an extensive study of the available linguistic literature in Newari and English. Thus his work, rather than advancing completely new theories about Newari, faithfully and carefully puts forth and sums up the different stages which have so far been reached in exploring the language. In this respect, the author places at our disposal a most valuable tool for getting familiar with Newari, both for its own sake and as a specimen of one branch of the Tibeto-Burman family. At the same time, it can be used as a guide to previous investigations since Malla also gives an extensive bibliography. A survey of this kind is certainly not only welcome to linguists, but also to scholars in various other fields. For Newari, after all, has been one of the media of the rich cultural tradition of the Valley of Kathmandu which quite a number of foreign scholars have become interested in over the last two decades. Exploration of this cultural tradition necessarily leads to an involvement, not only with Sanskrit or New Indo-Aryan, but quite essentially with Newari too.

The book is subdivided into six chapters, each dealing with a separate level of analysis and description:

In Chapter 1, the author gives a survey of phonology. Particular attention is directed towards the tricky question of the phonematic status of the rich variety of Newari vowels. In this field, previous work had been done chiefly by Austin and Margrit Hale (1969) and by L. Friedman, T. R. Kansakar, J. Tuladhar and A. Hale (1983). The author presents a solution largely coinciding with the latter mentioned study. It still seems hard to assess which of the different solutions offered so far is the most adequate one: further progress in this field could perhaps be gained by a special critical evaluation of these previous studies (preferably done by a native speaker). The material basis Malla provides here would serve as an excellent starting point.

Chapter 2 deals with morphology. It briefly describes the form of Newari roots and then goes on to illustrate the various processes of word formation.

In Chapter 3, the author gives a survey of the inflectional formations of the different word categories and their formally different sub-classes. While these morphological distinctions by and large warrant fairly clear recognition of the separate parts of speech, there still is at least one special problem, viz., the formal distinction between verbs and adjectives. This would seem to deserve closer study than given here within the scope of a survey: there seems to be a comparably small group of genuine adjectives in Newari, discernable by both morphological and syntactic criteria (cf. A. Hale *et al.* 1971, *Conversational Newari*), while many lexemes equivalent to adjectives in English, formally do not seem to be distinct from verbs in Newari. Here, a native speaker's insight might have helped the foreign student. The author does maintain the distinction between adjectives and verbs; yet, in this respect, a more differentiated treatment might have been clarifying.

Chapter 4, dedicated to morphophonology, to a certain extent borders on questions of historical grammar. Among other things, it documents the strong tendencies in Newari of dropping final consonants with subsequent changes in the vowels -- a process which apparently has been going on repeatedly. The problem deserves to be explored in more detail from a diachronic perspective.

Chapter 5, on morphosyntax presents a survey of the various parts of speech and illustrates morphological and semantic distinctions relevant in Newari, such as the animate/inanimate distinction which manifests itself throughout the entire nominal system. The subclassifications within each major word class are illustrated fairly extensively.

The last chapter deals with syntactic constructions on the different hierarchical levels of phrase, clause, and sentence respectively. It includes a survey of clause types in terms of the different case frames governed by different kinds of predications. In addition, the author gives an account of clause structure in terms of the semantic roles involved, such as actor, undergoer, etc. This approach, ultimately going back to the work of Fillmore ('The Case for Case', in *Universals in Linguistic Theory* [London: 1968]) had been worked out for Newari in various contributions by Hale, Hale and Manandhar, Hale and Watters (see Malla's Bibliography). Malla's survey of syntax also deals with processes of nominalization, a characteristic and all-pervading feature of Newari, together with word order, focus, concord, etc. It goes on illustrating the various modes of the sentence and rounds off the picture by a cursory treatment of complex sentences, both coordinating and subordinating ones. Finally, the author very briefly reverts attention to the typological assignment of Newari as an ergative language. This typological characterization might, of course, have been worked out in terms of a set of, possibly, interconnecting features, such as word order, animacy hierarchy, nominalization processes, etc. but these, of course, are typological questions still to be explored for Newari, thus the important and well known concept of ergativity certainly is the obvious first step towards an overall typological characterization.

Malla very modestly and prudently calls his book a 'working outline' thus implying that he does not yet regard it as something like a reference grammar. This certainly does him credit: in linguist literature there are many works of comparable scope and length which have unhesitatingly been called a 'grammar'. By calling it a 'working outline' he indicates the desirability and necessity of future special studies in many fields, and he probably wants to challenge such further studies. As it stands, the book is a careful and comprehensive

exposition of the general conclusions reached so far. It should be greatly hoped that it acts, indeed, as the stimulus the author wants it to be, especially within the community of Newar scholars themselves.

Apart from the special studies of problematical details, such a suggested above, the next major step in exploring Newari should now be towards a closer examination of complex sentences and their interconnection at discourse level, or, more simply, of sentences in a context. Some work in the direction has been started in recent times by the American linguist D. Hargreaves whose results are still to be expected. Otherwise, all grammatical descriptions so far treat clause and sentential constructions in isolation. This is certainly a necessary first step; it does not suffice, however, to capture the complex syntactical devices occurring in connected texts. Therefore, further progress in this direction seems to be urgently desirable. Once again, studies on the level of description should ideally come forth from the native speakers themselves.

A last point I should like to mention is the specific 'languages-in-contact' - situation in which the Newar community has lived for a number of generations and which seems to develop a growing impact on the speech of the present generations. This contact situation, which probably affects, not only the vocabulary, but also syntactic patterns, would also require special linguistic attention. Malla's account does not explicitly deal with this phenomenon at all--which is understandable: after all, his primary aim was to describe Newari as a language in its own right, irrespective of the influences which gave it its present form. So he is certainly justified in not raising the problem of what is genuinely Newari and what is foreign impact from Indo-Aryan, chiefly Nepali. However, in a situation where most speakers, at least in the Valley of Kathmandu, are bilingual from their childhood, a thorough enquiry into this bilingual situation would certainly be relevant beyond mere scholarly linguistic interest. As I happen to know, the author himself does not maintain any unrealistic 'purist' tendencies and thus would probably agree with my opinion that the existing contact situation should be taken into account as it is. Here, linguistic investigation, done in the unemotional spirit of scientific interest, might help towards a clearer recognition and, consequently, towards easier coping with problems that inevitably arise in a multilingual country on its way towards a feeling of national unity.

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