Intense Action Adverbials in Sunwar:

a verbal intensifier system

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1. Introduction.

Sunwar is a pronominalized Tibeto-Burman language of the eastern hill region of Nepal, and belongs to the so-called "Kiranti" nucleus classified by Shafer as East Himalayish, and later by Benedict as Bahing-Vayu. Apart from a difference in nomenclature for the higher level nodes, all the major classifications agree fairly consistently on the constituent members of the Kiranti nucleus, and include Sunwar in that nucleus.

I propose in this paper to describe some of the main features of an adverbial system in Sunwar which is similar in some respects to what has become known in the recent literature as "expressives", following Gerard Diffloth's pioneering work in similar systems in some of the Mon-Khmer languages. Greatly hampered by the lack of library facilities in Nepal, my knowledge of expressive systems is limited to a handful of short articles on the subject. Some of the articles (esp. Ratliff 1983) hint at a near universality of related systems, citing such far-flung language families as Bantu (Africa), Japanese, Dravidian, and Austronesian. Samarín (1966, 1969, 1970, 1971a) has done extensive work on Gbeya, and has surveyed the literature on ideophones in other African languages, especially those of the Bantu family (1971b). B. M. Dahal (1974) has done similar service for Nepali.

It is common knowledge that "ideophones", or "onomatopoeic" type expressions occur frequently in the Tibeto-Burman languages of Nepal, but our knowledge of these phenomena has largely been limited to the more nearly "iconic", nonarbitrary "sound symbols" which resemble in the mind of the speaker the thing he is describing, or at least some aspect of it. The system I am describing for Sunwar includes onomatopoeia, but only as a relatively small subsystem, a semantically and syntactically distinct part of the entire system.

The real heart of the system is composed of two basic subsets, the first of which appears to involve little or no iconism, and the second of which has built into it a "magnitude symbolism" similar to the system described by Gregerson (1984) for Rengao, a Mon-Khmer language. Since in my limited reading on the topic I have gained the impression that "expressives" are supposed to be clearly iconic, I have elected in this paper to refer to the Sunwar adverbials as "intensifiers", for reasons which I hope will soon be clear, and I will leave it to others to decide whether the current etic framework of expressive systems is broad enough to include the full Sunwar system as well.
2. Sunwar Intensifiers and Onomatopoeia.

Onomatopoeic forms are mentioned here primarily in order to contrast them with intensifiers, which are the main concern of this paper. Intensifiers are both more numerous and more frequent in my data than are onomatopoeic forms and intensifiers play a far greater role in magnitude symbolism than do onomatopoeic forms.

Onomatopoeic forms in Sunwar have certain specific characteristics which distinguish them from intensive action adverbials. With respect to their syntax, onomatopoeic forms all occur with 'pa, a form of the verb, 'pat'sa "to do". 2

mu'=ktsa "to put on trousers"
gosh gosh 'pa mu'=ktsa "to put on trousers with a swishing sound (of one who is hurrying up to be presentable)"

By contrast, intensive action adverbials occur directly before the verb.

'ba'patsa "to bow down"
gu' 'ba'patsa "to prostrate oneself to the ground"

With respect to meanings, onomatopoeic forms fall into three sets, all relating to sense perception:

a. Forms that represent sounds (by far the largest set),

shap shap 'pa 'phiiktsa "to sweep with a swishing sound"
grek 'pa rooktsa "(for a door) to open with a creaking sound"

b. Forms that represent the sense of taste,

ka ka 'pa 'katsa "to be extremely bitter to the taste"

c. Forms that represent the sense of feeling.

hik hik 'pa 'bwatsa "to have a throbbing headache"

By contrast, intensifiers have a much more complex semantics, having little to do with iconic or imitative sound imagery other than by way of their involvement in the magnitude symbolism that they share with the onomatopoeic forms, as will be illustrated in section 5.

As to level of usage, onomatopoeic forms are rarely appropriate in formal speech, whereas intensifiers are not limited in this way. Onomatopoeic forms are more subject to idiolectical variation than are intensifiers. For many onomatopoeic forms there does not seem to be a "correct" form, but any one of a number of forms will do so long as it conveys the appropriate imitative phonological gesture. Variations in the way a speaker imitates a sound such as the following are frequent.
pok pok 'pa 'kyuptsa  "To empty a big bottle"
dok dok 'pa 'kyuptsa  "To empty a big bottle"

Intensive action adverbs, by contrast, are rather strictly defined, and the different forms that occur (such as forms involved in scales of magnitude) are well enough defined to be essential parts of a dictionary entry.

Onomatopoeic forms also differ from intensifiers in that only certain onomatopoeic forms can be reduplicated, and in that the semantic effect of this reduplication tends to be idiosyncratic from verb to verb. The meanings of onomatopoeic reduplicated forms will need to be listed with the relevant verbs in the dictionary.

biikts  dzidzi 'pa broob
sugarcane onom.  do tasty,3sg,non-past
"The sugarcane is very sweet."

doror 'pa gaakti
onom.  do went,1sg,past
"I went away in a hurry."

dororor 'pa gaakti
onom.  do went,1sg,past
"I went in a hurry for a long stretch."

When intensifiers are reduplicated, the semantic effect is to mark plural objects, or repeated, distributed or scattered actions.

'shooktsa  "to sow seed"
shaw 'shooktsa  "to sow seed quickly"
shaw shuw 'shooktsa  "to sow seed quickly with repeated motions of the arm"

thitsa  "to give birth"
bre' thitsa  "to give birth quickly to a big child"
bre' bru' thitsa  "to give birth quickly to big twins"

Finally, onomatopoeic forms frequently violate the phonological constraints on reduplication that apply to intensifiers. Intensifiers are phonologically restricted in that unreduplicated intensifiers consist only of a single closed syllable, whereas unreduplicated onomatopoeic forms may be bi- or trisyllabic.

ditish 'pa khroyktsa  "to spoil by cutting"
ditish ditish 'pa khroyktsa  "to spoil by cutting all up in little pieces"

korong 'pa dimtsa  "(for a tree) to fall of its own accord"
korong korong 'pa dimtsa  "(for two trees) to fall of their own accord"
brodod 'pa deptsə  "to throw mud"
brododododod 'pa deptsə  "to throw mud continuously"

Onomatopoeic forms have been observed to undergo types of reduplication such as the following which are not permitted types of reduplication for intensifiers:

a. Partial reduplication.
   
goror 'pa 'hiltsa  "to grind"
gororor 'pa 'hiltsa  "to grind round and round"

b. Exact reduplication.
   
hur hur 'pa hartsa 3  "to winnow grain against the wind"
tsek tsek 'pa heektsa  "to sift"

   pitil pitil 'pa 'himtsa  "to wag one's (small) tail"
   phitil phitil 'pa himtsa  "to wag one's (bushy) tail."

Since intensifiers are all monosyllabic there can be no question of partial reduplication, and exact reduplication of intensifiers occurs only where pluralization is used to denote deliberate intense action. In all other cases the reduplicated second syllable of an intensifier undergoes a vowel shift, following the patterns shown in Figure 1 in the following section.

3. Pluralization of Intensifiers.

Intensifiers of both single-member and multiple-member sets can be pluralized by reduplicating the monosyllabic intensifier so that it becomes bisyllabic, while at the same time changing the vowel of the second syllable according to the rules in Figure 1.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sg  --&gt;  Pl</th>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i    i ... a</td>
<td>ship</td>
<td>ship shap</td>
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<tr>
<td>u    u ... a</td>
<td>bul</td>
<td>bul bal</td>
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<tr>
<td>a    a ... u</td>
<td>pa'</td>
<td>pa' pu'</td>
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<td>e    e ... u</td>
<td>the'</td>
<td>the' thu'</td>
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<td>o    o ... u</td>
<td>to'</td>
<td>to' tu'</td>
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Figure 1. Rules for pluralization of intensifiers.