A COMPARISON BETWEEN KHASI AND MANIPURI WORD ORDER

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INTRODUCTION

Manipuri (Meithei) and Khasi are languages spoken in Manipur and Meghalaya, two northeastern states of India. A number of Manipuri speakers are also found in neighboring states like Assam and Tripura and outside the country in Bangladesh and Myanmar. Manipuri belongs to the Kuki-Chin branch of the Tibeto-Burman family, and Khasi to the Mon-Khmer branch of the Austroasiatic family. The population of Khasi speakers is about half a million, while that of Manipuri is about a million as a mother tongue in Manipur state alone. Both Khasi and Manipuri are recognized as official languages in their respective states. At the national level, Manipuri is included as one of the scheduled languages in the Indian constitution. It is interesting to note that Khasi forms a linguistic island amid the Tibeto-Burman and Indo-Aryan speakers in the northeastern region of India. From the viewpoint of social organization, the Khasi and the Manipuri communities show highly diversified systems, the former matriarchal and the latter patriarchal. Since the languages belong to different families but are spoken in the same geographical area, comparison between the two is interesting.

In general, word order is defined as the sequential arrangement of words. There are six logically possible types of word order: SOV, SVO, VSO, VOS, OVS, and OSV (Greenberg 1963). Some languages, such as Latin, have a relatively free word order, while others, such as English, have a fixed one (Comrie 1981). If a language has a number of grammatically possible word orders in different types of constructions, it is questionable which one of them should be regarded as the basic word order. However, there is always an order which is dominant over the others in the natural speech of a language, and it is this order that is accepted as its basic word order. In the body of this paper, Greenberg's word order universals are referred to as necessary.

Khasi and Manipuri have different word orders with respect to basic constituent structure. Khasi has an SVO word order, whereas Manipuri has an SOV order. The latter language therefore agrees with Greenberg's Universal 4, i.e., that languages with normal SOV order are postpositional:

Khasi:[1]

(1) u   la   a:y   ya   ka   kot
     he   PAST   give   ACC   PM   book
     'He gave (someone) a book.'

(2) ka   briew   ka-n   sa   thya?
     GA   human being   GA-FUT   FUT.DEF   sleep
     'The woman will sleep.'

Manipuri:

(3) mi   pumnəmək   kəythel-də   cət-li
     human-being   all   market-LOC   go-NFUT
     'All the people went to the market.'

(4) jon-nə   sən-du-bu   cəy-nə   kəl-li
     John-NOM.   cow-DET-ACC   stick-INST   whip-NFUT
     'John whipped the cow with a stick.'

Manipuri agrees with Greenberg's Universal 7, according to which the only
alternative of a dominant SOV order would be OSV, and all the adverbial
modifiers of a verb likewise precede the verb, as in the following examples:

(5) tom-nə   phi-si   ləy   (SOV)
     Tom-NOM   cloth-DET   buy
     'Tom buys this cloth.'

(6) phi-si   tom-nə   ləy   (OSV)
     cloth-DET   Tom-NOM   buy
     'Tom buys this cloth.'

Example number (6) is the only alternative ordering to example (5).

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[1]

ACC	accusative	INST	instrumental
ADV	adverb	LOC	locative
DEF	definite	NFUT	non-future
DET	determiner	NOM	nominative
DS	distal	PAST	past tense
FUT	future	PERF	perfective
GA	gender article	PROG	progressive
INF	infinitive	REL	relative

The following examples show the positions of adverbial modifiers:

Manipuri:

(7) məhak   təpnə   cət-li
     he   slowly (ADV)   go-NFUT
     'He went slowly.'

(8) məhak   thunə   lak-kəni
     he   quickly (ADV)   come-FUT
     'He will come quickly.'

Khasi:

(9) u   la   leyt   suki
     he   PAST   go   slowly (ADV)
     'He went slowly.'

(10) ka-n   wan   klo:y
     she-FUT   come   quickly (ADV)
     'She will come quickly.'

It is clear from the above examples that adverbs follow verbs in Khasi while they precede verbs in Manipuri.

In both the languages, in general, a subordinate clause precedes the main clause:

Khasi:

(11) katba   u   la   da   thya?   ki   la   leyt   haŋtay
     while   he   PAST   PROG   sleep   they   PAST   go   there
     'They went there while he was sleeping.'

(12) inda ka   la   kepba:m depdi?   ka   la   šim ya   ka
     when she PAST   eating complete she PAST   take ACC   PM

     šaŋkwa:y   ban   ba:m   kwa:y
     betel basket   INF   eat   betelnut
     'When she finished eating she took the betel-basket to eat betelnut.'

Manipuri:

(13) məhak-nə   tum-liŋəydə   məkehoy   cət-khi
      he-NOM   sleep-while   they   go-PERF
      'They had gone while he was sleeping.'

(14) tombə-nə   skul   cət-pədə   layrik   ləy-rək-i
      Tomba-NOM   school   go-when   book   buy-DS-NFUT
      'When Tomba went to school (he) bought book(s) from there.'

Both the languages agree with what is said in Greenberg's Universal 14, namely, that the conditional clause (protasis) precedes the main clause (apodosis):

Khasi:

(15) lada   ŋi   leyt   ki-n   wan
      if   we   go   they-FUT   come
      'If we go, they will come.'

(16) əykhoy   cət-ləbədi   məkhoy   lak-kəni
      we   go-if   they   come-FUT
      'If we go, they will come.'

Discussion of word order within a noun phrase begins by observing the relation between an adjective and a noun. Khasi adjectives are found by looking for the relativizer **ba** with a noun; this construction always results in a clause-like structure. From the syntactic viewpoint, Khasi relative clauses are of two types: (1) a relative clause with an adjective, or (2) a relative clause with a verb. For convenience, however, a relative clause with an adjective will here be called simply an "adjective," and a relative clause with a verb will be called a "relative clause."

In Khasi, the adjective follows the noun, while it precedes or follows the noun in Manipuri:

Khasi:

(17) ka   miej   ba   yoŋ   (noun + adjective)
      PM   table   REL   black
      'black table'