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) 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 kəyθel-da cat-li
    human-being all market-LOC go-NFUT
    'All the people went to the market.'

(4) jon-na sən-du-bu cəy-na 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-na phi-si lay (SOV)
    Tom-NOM cloth-DET buy
    'Tom buys this cloth.'

(6) phi-si tom-na lay (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  infinitiveREL  relative
The following examples show the positions of adverbial modifiers:

**Manipuri:**

(7) mohak tapnɔ cɔt-li
he slowly (ADV) go-NFUT
‘He went slowly.’

(8) mohak thunɔ lak-kɔni
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-na tum-liŋyəda məkehoy cət-khi
he-NOM sleep-while they go-PERF
‘They had gone while he was sleeping.’

(14) tomba-na skul cət-pədə layrik lay-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) øykho y cət-lobədi məkho y 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 yon (noun + adjective)
PM table REL black
‘black table’