A sketch about the Newar language:
Similarities and differences between Newar and Japanese

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It is often said that Newar language and Japanese have a lot in common. Of course, there are many evidences to support this perspective. The same word order system comes first when we think about the similarities. Also, these two languages have developed an elaborate and sophisticated system of the classifiers to identify various features of things. Furthermore, there are serial verb constructions in these two languages that show the similar way for cognitive partition and combination of events. However, there are also differences between them in addition to the clear difference in pronunciation. In this small passage, I would like to describe two cases of typical similarities between these languages, and point out the important difference which is buried under the surface similarities.

First of all, these two languages have developed a very elaborate system of classifiers. When we count things, we use one of the classifiers and identify a certain feature of persons or things. This is clearly different from the counting system in Western languages such as English. For example, (1) and (2) show a striking affinity between Newar and Japanese.

(1) a. macā cha-mha / macā ni-mha　(a child/ two children)
　　b. kodomo hitori / kodomo hutari
(2) a. kalam cha-pu / kalam swa-pu　(a pen /three pens)
　　b. pen ippon / pen san-bon

While Newar and Japanese require classifiers such as 'mha' or 'ri/nin' after the number describing persons, English is acceptable for marking the number required. Newar, as well as Japanese, has developed various kinds of classifiers, based on which they count people and things. The typical ones are 'mha' for animate entities or 'gu:' for inanimate entities. For inanimate things, there are other classifiers featuring their shape or function such as 'ga:/gwa:' for round things or 'pā:' for flat things. The difficult point for Japanese who are familiar with their own classifiers system and want to learn how to count things in Newar is that Newar inserts a different classifier between the adjective form denoting size, 'ta:' and 'ci:', and the modified noun. Japanese doesn't have such a counting system that is related to the size. The examples are (3) and (4).

(3) a. taː-gaː-gu thala (a big pot)

   b. ookina potto

(4) a. jigu che~ ciːhkā-gu che~ (My house is a small one.)

   b bokuno uchi wa chiisai

Japanese is acceptable only for the combination of the adjective form denoting 'big' and the noun. So, the beginners need time for processing about whether the classifier is rightly used between the size-adjective and the thing depicted. Of course, it is the matter of familiarity or being accustomed to the phenomenon, but learners have difficulty in finding the right form when they want to describe a small lump of bread or a big river in Newar, confused with 'ciː-tā mari' or 'ciː-pā mari', or 'taː-pu khusi' or 'taː-dhā khusi'.

     The second point of similarities is the usage of serial verbs. These two languages use serial verbs very often, but they actually have the delicate difference. The pair of (5) is fortunately almost same, describing going to school. However, when we depict the manner or means to walk to school, not going by bus, the difference emerges. Japanese combines the two verbs, 'aruku (to walk)' and 'iku (to go)' using the '-te' form, while Newar has the 'nyāsi-wane' that consists of a noun form(?) 'nyāsi' and the verb 'wane (to go)' as in (6).

(5) a. Ji iskuː le wanā. (I went to school.)

   b.Watasi wa gakkou ni itta.

(6) a. Ji iskuːle nyāsi-wanā.

   b. Watasi wa gakkou ni aruite itta.

In the case for entering a room or going out of a building, these two languages show the difference concerning the combination of motion verbs. Newar combines the directional adverb with the deictic verb as in (7a). In contrast, Japanese has the combination of the independent verb denoting entering and the deictic verb as in (7b,).

(7) a. Ram kwathā-e duhā~ wala. (Ram came into the room.)

   b. Ramu ga heya ni haitte-kita.

Therefore, in spite of the fact that there are a large number of similarities between the two languages, there are still big differences. The delicate differences attract researchers who are interested in where the differences of languages come from.