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CONJUNCT VERB AS MARKER OF BILINGUALISM IN THE TINKAR SOCIETY

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Abstract

The paper explores the category of Conjunct Verbs in the verb-final Tibeto-Burman language, Tinkarlo, spoken by the Tinkari community both in India (Dharchula, Uttarakhand) and Nepal. The striking presence of code-mixed or bilingual conjunct verbs makes it interesting to study how the nominal or the adjectival 'host' is borrowed from other languages (used in the region, being a trading hub) while the light verb is from Tinkarlo. The paper, which is the result of a 10-day field trip, also tries to suggest as an allied objective whether certain abstract notions are absent in the Tinkari inventory or have been replaced by expressions from other languages (like Hindi) predominant in the valley.

Preliminaries

The study of conjunct verbs comprises an immensely interesting domain for South-East Asian Languages. A conjunct verb is born out of the mutual sharing of semantic features as well as the co-existence of two lexical items, out of which one obligatorily has to be a light verb. The notion and the terminology of the light verb came to light through Jespersen's work (1965). The term 'light' signifies that the verb is semantically depleted or bleached. It houses information about the aspect, the directionality or the Aktionsart of the predicate (Butt, 2010; Wiese, 2006). The majority of the semantic implication arises from the event nominal within the predicate structure (if the complex predicate is a conjunct verb) or from the polar verb (the V1, if the complex predicate is a compound verb) in the predicate structure. Broadly, combining observations, complex predicates can be roughly dissected into:

- The functional component of the CP (complex predicate)
- The semantic component of the CP (complex predicate)

The functional component (the verbal component in case of a conjunct verb) is the semantically bleached (empty) verb that supports the meaning arising from the semantic component of the predicate construction.

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The semantic component (the nominal or the adjectival or the infinitival component in case of a conjunct verb) supplies the actual meaning for the entire predicate construction.

Going back in time, Kellogg (1875) in his book 'A Grammar of the Hindi Language', employs the expression "nominal compound verbs" before the term 'conjunct verbs' came into play. Kellogg expounded on these, with respect to Hindi, in the following manner:

"Sometimes a substantive or adjective is so combined with a verb as to form, conjointly with it, but one conception. Such combinations as these have been called Nominal Compounds, of these, the largest part are formed with the verbs, करना (*karanā*) "to do", or "to make", and होना (*honā*) "to be"; but several other verbs are also employed in the same way. These may often be rendered into English by a single word : as e.g., खड़ा होना (*kharā honā*) "to stand (intr.)"; खड़ा करना (*kharā karanā*) "to stand (trans.)"; प्राप्त करना (*prāpta karanā*) "to obtain", समाप्त होना (*samāpta honā*) "to be completed"; मोल लेना (*mola lenā*) "to buy", etc. etc." (section 448, p. 271).

Kellogg further distinguishes between normal verbs and what he terms as Nominal Compound verbs, with respect to Hindi, in the following way:

"Very commonly, when it is intended to express special respect, or when, as in poetry, an elevated diction is desired, a Nominal verb, formed by the combination of a Sanskrit noun or participle with होना (*honā*) "to be" करना (*karanā*) "to do", or some other Hindi verb, is preferred to the corresponding simple verb. In such cases, the slight modification of the meaning may often be well expressed by the use in English of different words. Examples are दर्शन करना (*darśana karanā*) "to behold", for देखना (*dekhanā*) "to see"; भोजन करना (*bhojana karanā*) for खाना (*khānā*) "to eat"; गमन or गमन करना (*gamana* or *gamana karanā*) "to go", for जाना (*jānā*); प्रस्थान करना (*prasthāna karanā*) or प्रस्थित होना (*prasthita honā*) "to depart", for the more colloquial चला जाना (*calā jānā*) "to go away"; etc. etc. This matter is deserving of special attention by the student of Hindi conversation and composition" (ibid).

After Kellogg, Bailey (1956) introduced the term 'conjunct verb' to describe what Kellogg and his predecessors termed as 'nominal compound verbs'. Bailey basically dealt with Hindustani and his critical observation was in the distinction of three types of 'conjunct verbs' formed with the light verb *kārṇā* "to do". Apart from *kārṇā* "to do", Bailey (1956) also identified two types of verbal predicate formation with the light verb *ḍena* "to give".

Bahl's (1967) commentary on the works of Kellogg and Bailey is precise as he gracefully preserves the ideological uniqueness of both these scholars, yet makes them converge in their intellectual aims. According to Bahl (1967), both Kellogg and Bailey find it important to accord special status to "some noun or adjective plus verb combinations in Hindi/Urdu" (1967, p. xi) as these

combinations, when examined with respect to English grammar, “form single “concepts” (for Kellogg) and verbs (for Bailey)” (ibid). Moreover, as Bahl suggests, Bailey is unsure “whether such verbs are real verbs or are two distinct ideas” (ibid). Both Kellogg and Bailey deal with the issue of ‘nominal compound’ or ‘conjunct’ verbs “giving the similar impression that the phenomenon of compounding of verbs in modern Indo-Aryan is an important discovery, and their description of them an important methodological advance” (ibid). Their contribution towards understanding the nature of conjunct verbs “as lexical items consisting of more than one word each” (ibid), in line with their contemporary scholarly ideas, turned out to be the primary research goal of linguists belonging to the structuralist school. Bahl (ibid) conclusively opines that this has continued to generate research questions in the grammars of modern Indo-Aryan languages.

Although Kellogg and Bailey’s seminal works have opened the arena for further critical enquiries into the nature of complex predicates, scholars like Guru (1922) and Sharma (1958) are not in agreement with the ideology, that the nominal and adjectival hosts share some kind of conceptual or semantic unity with the light verbs in conjunct verb constructions. According to Guru (1922) and Sharma (1958), the term ‘conjunct verbs’ should only entail those N+V or A+V combinations, which cannot be analyzed morpho-syntactically into any other known category, and, therefore, are “residual in nature” (Bahl, 1967: p.xii).

The phenomenon of Noun Incorporation gets pertinence while examining the structure of conjunct verbs. As Mithun (1984) puts it, in noun incorporation (abbreviated as NI), “a N stem is compounded with a V stem to yield a larger, derived V stem” (1984, p.847). Mithun delineates four different types of Noun Incorporation, namely Type I NI (Lexical Compounding), Type II NI (the manipulation of case), Type III NI (the manipulation of discourse structure), and Type IV NI (Classificatory Noun Incorporation). According to her, NI “can be vastly more productive than other derivational processes, like nominalization or causativization, since it combines two potentially open sets of morphemes, N and V stems, instead of one set of stems and a limited set of affixes” (ibid, p.889). Mohanan (1994) takes up the issue of Noun Incorporation with respect to Hindi, where the puzzle lies in “its dual behavior with respect to lexicality” (p. 131).

Das (2009), explicates the issue of licensing the third argument in sentences with conjunct verb constructions. For, instance, if we consider the following sentence from Bangla:

amɪ	nomɪtɑ-ke	šahaǰǰo	korlam
I-1S-Nom	Namita-Acc	help-N	do-Pst-1
I helped Namita.			

we find the agent ‘amɪ’ (i.e. I) and the performed action of ‘šahaǰǰo’ (i.e. help). But to add to this, we find the additional argument of ‘nomɪtɑ’ (i.e.

Namita). The verb 'kɔɾɑ' (citational form of 'do') is a transitive verb and cannot license the third argument 'nomɪtɑ'. The point of concern becomes: how is the third argument getting licensed and fitting into the sentence configuration. Das (ibid) argues that "the third argument in the clause has been licensed by the complex predicate i.e. 'conjunct verb'...", which would be 'ʃɑhɑʃʃo kɔɾɑ' (i.e. an act of help), "as a single linguistic unit" (ibid, p.197).

The present Study

The present paper explores the challenges of creating an inventory of conjunct verbs that come with migrating speech communities. The focus is on a special group of people known as the Tinkar (or the Tinkaris). Tinkar is a tribe and the language being spoken by them derives the corresponding nomenclature of Tinkarlo¹.

The village where the community actually resides and centres around is also called Tinkar. Tinkarlo belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family. It is one of the many language varieties spoken across the valley-cluster in the Pithoragarh district of Uttarakhand. The Tinkari speech community originates in Nepal. The umbrella term that is applicable to the different communities settled in the valleys is 'Rang' (or 'Rung').

The Tinkaris are a migrating community. The different socio-cultural variables and world-views embedded in the register of a community present unique challenges while collecting expressions for abstract notions. Certain ideas might not exist within a close-knit community. Concepts of 'thanking', 'forgiving' and 'sinning' do not have indigenous expressions as their world view is modelled in a community-centric manner.

Speaking about the language, Tinkarlo is a verb-final language following the SOV word order. It is an ergative-absolutive language with postpositions. Tinkar-lo does not have its own script. It takes the help of the Devanagari or the Hindi script for having a written form. The classification of Tinkarlo, with respect to its familial roots, is as follows:

Sino-Tibetan Language Family → Tibeto-Burman → Western Tibeto-Burman → Bodish → Western-Himalayish → Tibeto-Kanauri → Rongpo-Almora → Almora → Rangkas

Conjunct verbs are formed when a 'light verb' shares the semantic feature of a nominal or an adjectival host to support the expression of notions that do not have suitable pure or independent verb forms. Conjunct verbs therefore reflect

¹ 'lo' as in the implication of the hindi word 'boli' meaning the mode of communication of the community

the “co-occurrence of two lexical items” and “mutual sharing of semantic features²”.

Going back in time, Kellogg (1875) in his book ‘A Grammar of the Hindi Language’, employs the expression “nominal compound verbs” before the term ‘conjunct verbs’ came into play. Complex predicates having N+V architecture, were first termed as ‘conjunct verbs’ by Bailey (1950). They may also have an adjectival host (A+V) in place of the usual event nominal. Masica (1976) describes such constructions as “compounds” of *nouns* or *adjectives* with the verbs *do* and *become*”. In recent times, we have been acknowledging that such compounding (i.e. a non-verbal with a verbal element) should better be termed or known as conjunct verbs. It is noteworthy that the event nominal (or the N host) is of abstract nature or used metaphorically. Formation of conjunct verbs fulfills shortcomings in communication, by compensating the lack of proper verbs for certain notions or expressions.

Tinkarlo presents its own challenges while documenting the state of conjunct verbs. The language is at stage 7 of Fishman’s (1991) GID scale. It is in a state of flux. There is a rich multilingual setting in Dharchula where people frequently switch and mix codes to facilitate business. In due course of time, this has affected the present generation’s knowledge of the Tinkari language. Many indigenous words have been replaced by Hindi, Urdu, Nepali words. It has had such a deep impact that the speakers no longer recall most of the indigenous Tinkari words. Collecting the actual Tinkarlo words for abstract nouns and certain adjectives is quite an ordeal, owing to the conspicuous code-mixing brought in by the locals and the nature of the community being dealt with.

1.(a). əpɑʃɛ ɡɪɡʊŋ b^hərosɑ kə-ɖ-ɖe
 father-3S-Erg me-1S-Dat trust-N Perf-do-Pst-3.S

‘(My) Father reassured me’.

In this Tinkarlo sentence, the light verb ‘do’ has shared the meaning of the nominal host, and agrees with the subject. Interestingly, the word for ‘trust’ in the verbal predicate is from Hindi.

In conjunct verb formations, the nominal host or the event nominal can operate in two separate ways. In certain cases, the host seems to undergo grammaticalization and appears to be an integral part of the complex predicate. In the other instances, it behaves as an independent lexical nominal of the clause and thereby dictates the agreement of the clause in the absence of unmarked nominal.

1.(b). bɑ sə ʃe b^hərosɑ ɖɑso
 father-3S-Erg me-1S-Dat trust-N give-Perf-Pst-3.S

‘(My) Father reassured me’.

² Das, P.K. 2006. *Grammatical Agreement in Hindi-Urdu and its major varieties*. Lincom Europa.

disillusioned by the present employment scenario. The employability criterion further endangers the prospect of learning Tinkarlo.

Most parents and elders are critical about the utility of the young ones learning the indigenous language.

- The second perspective is that of the particular abstract notion not being present in their linguistic repertoire, due to their nomadic mode of life. Their shifting way of life, struggle for survival and an essentially 'rootless' existence have made them rely heavily on each other to survive and prosper. The notion of 'trust' is so natural for them, that there might be no linguistic need to differentiate a situation where there can be a loss of 'trust'. Trusting is a way of life for these people. As language reflects and evolves according to our communicative needs, there might not have been the need to express the notion of 'trust'. Concepts of 'thanking', 'forgiving' and 'sinning' do not have indigenous expressions as their world view is modelled in a community-centric manner. It is very natural to help each-other in their surroundings; otherwise they would not survive and therefore the customary or formal gesture of 'thanking' has no place. While moving from village to village the community members keep exchanging items, as one village would have something which would not be there in the next village. So, a prominent sharing system supported their way of life.

It is debatable to actually align oneself with just one of these two perspectives, as it is also a matter of relative judgment. For certain notions, there may not be an indigenous expression, as their worldview did not have the provision for these experiences. However, for certain other notions, it might just be a case of unsuccessful transmission. The empirical evidence in favour of this claim is strong. There is neither literary resource nor linguistic inventory for young learners to rely on. It is purely on the basis of oral transmission. This makes the learning process entirely dependent on the eagerness of the population to keep passing the language on. There needs to be a focused anthropological investigation into the inventory of abstract notions with respect to the Tinkar community and the surrounding speech communities. Only then can a complete picture emerge, on the basis of which there can be comprehensive statements. The present state of work can serve as a stepping stone for future research endeavors.

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