Lesson 2

*Some basics of Classical Newari syntax – word order – ergativity –
noun phrases – sentences with nominal predicate*

Word order. Classical Newari is a SOV language: the subject (or
agent – see below) usually occupies the first slot in a sentence, the
object (or patient) the second, with the verb invariably at the end.

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Ergativity. Classical Newari is an ergative language, i.e. the patient
("logical object") of a t r a n s i t i v e verb takes the same marker as the
argument ("subject") of an i n t r a n s i t i v e verb; as in most ergative
languages, this marker is zero, and its case is conventionally known as
absolutive. The agent ("logical subject") of a transitive action is
marked for ergative case.[*]

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NB – For speakers of Nominative/Accusative ("N/A") languages such as
English, German, or Turkish, ergatives look like passive constructions,
especially in languages where the verb is usually marked for agreement with
the "subject" in person and/or number (as in Basque, though not in Classical
Newari). Note that ergative languages usually do not have a passive voice.

(2.1)   **rājā-∅**   **deṅ-a.**
        king-ABS   *SLEEP*-STAT.PTC
        "The king slept."

(2.2)   **khũ-n**   **rājā-∅**   **khan-ã.**
        thief-ERG   king-ABS   *SEE*-PERF.PST
        "The thief saw the king." ["By the thief the king (was) seen."]

Noun phrases. Classical Newari NPs are usually extended to the left:
with the notable exception of numerals – especially where they mark
indeterminacy (2.10, 11) –, any determiners ("articles", 2.3-9),
adjectives (2.4), or attributive VPs (2.5-11) come before the head. Any

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[*] This is, of course, a gross simplification; as in many other Tibeto-Burman
languages, the semantic category of controllability has as prominent a part to play as
transitivity in determining which verbs are construed with the ergative case. This
should be borne in mind when we come across sentences with dyadic verbs
expressing a non-volitional action, where both arguments are marked for absolutive
case (e.g. **rājā-∅ rasa-∅ tāl-ā** "The king (felt joy=) rejoiced").

case (2.6, 9, 11) and/or plural markers (2.8, 9), as well as postpositions (2.7), are added to the last constituent of the NP.

(2.3)   **thwo**   **rājā-∅**
DET   king-ABS
"this king"

(2.4)   **thwo   tawo**   **rājā-∅**
DET   great   king-ABS
"this great king"

(2.5)   **thwo   khū̃-n khaṅ-ā**   **rājā-∅**
DET   thief-ERG *SEE*-PERF.PTC   king-ABS
"this king that the thief saw", "this king seen by the thief"

(2.6)   **thwo   khū̃-n khaṅ-ā**   **rājā-yātã**
DET   thief-ERG *SEE*-PERF.PTC   king-DAT
"for this king that the thief saw", "for this king seen by the thief"

(2.7)   **thwo   khū̃-n khaṅ-ā**   **rājā-thẽ**
DET   thief-ERG *SEE*-PERF.PTC   king-like
"like this king that the thief saw", "like this king seen by the thief"

(2.8)   **thwo   khū̃-n khaṅ-ā**   **rājā-pani-∅**
DET   thief-ERG *SEE*-PERF.PTC   king-PL-ABS
"these kings that the thief saw", "these kings seen by the thief"

(2.9)   **thwo   khū̃-n khaṅ-ā**   **rājā-pani-stã**
DET   thief-ERG *SEE*-PERF.PTC   king-PL-DAT
"for these kings that the thief saw", "for these kings seen by the thief"

(2.10)   **khū̃-n khaṅ-ā**   **rājā cha-mhã-∅**
thief-ERG *SEE*-PERF.PTC   king one-NUM.CLASS.ANIM-ABS
"a certain king whom the thief saw", "a certain king seen by the thief"

(2.11)   **khū̃-n khaṅ-ā**   **rājā cha-mhã-yātã**
thief-ERG *SEE*-PERF.PTC   king one-NUM.CLASS.ANIM-DAT
"for a certain king whom the thief saw", "for a certain king seen by the thief"

24 **Sentences with nominal predicate.** Just as in Sanskrit or Bengali, Classical Newari sentences with a nominal predicate do not require a copula verb in order to be well-formed. If the subject is a personal pronoun, the predicate usually precedes it:

(2.12) थ्व कापालिक बिल्वफलया दाता।

thwo   kāpālika-Ø   bilbaphala-yā dātā-Ø.
DET   kāpālika-ABS   bilva fruit-GEN giver-ABS
"This kāpālika is the giver of the bilva fruits."

(2.13) क्षान्तिशील नाम कापालिक जोगी जे।

kṣāntiśīla nām   kāpālika jogī-Ø   je-Ø.
Kṣāntiśīla name   kāpālika yogī-ABS   I-ABS
"I am a kāpālika yogi by the name of Kṣāntiśīla."

Exercise 2

Translate the following sentences with the aid of the glossary:

1)   थ्वया पुत्री जे।
     thwoyā putrī je.
2)   जे पुत्र अती जुबाल।
     je putra ati jubāla.
3)   थ्व राजाया रानी सोमप्रभा नाम महादेवी।
     thwo rājāyā rāṇī somaprabhā nām mahādebī.
4)   थ्वया सखा बुद्धिशरीर नाम मन्त्रिया पुत्र।
     thwoyā sakhā buddhiśarīra nām mantriyā putra.

Notes

1)-4)   {**-yā**} is the genitive case marker. In personal pronouns, the genitive
         case marker is often zero (e.g. in **je**, sentence 2); for more details, see
         § 31 below.