Program and Abstracts

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The oral monophthongal vowel system of Nepali is commonly described as a 6-member vowel system that has lost the \( i-i \) and \( u-u \) contrasts of Sanskrit while qualitatively retaining its \( a\-a \) contrast (e.g. Turner 1961: xvii, Masica 1991: 109, Verma 1992: 77, Ishii 1986: 14, Khatiwada 2009: 377-378). Similarly, the vowel system of Tajik, a variety of New Persian, has lost the \( i-i \) and \( u-u \) contrasts of Early New Persian while qualitatively retaining its \( a\-a \) contrast. However, unlike Nepali, in which \( a \) is more open (and perhaps also more back) than \( a \), Tajik has preserved the \( a\-a \) contrast by raising \( a \) above \( a \). Despite this, data exist that suggest that, in the late 19th to early 20th century, Tajik had a 6-vowel triangular system very similar to that of present-day Nepali. This presentation contrasts the vowel systems of Nepali and Tajik as well as those of the languages with which the two languages have been in intensive contact, and discusses the implications their parallel and differential developments may have for the typology of vowel systems and Labov’s (1994: 116) supposedly universal principles of vowel shifting.

References

A vowel shift (or lack thereof) in two Indo-Iranian languages

Shinji Ido

What’s in this presentation

1. Tajik and Nepali vowel changes in contrast
2. The Nepali vowel shift $a > ɔ$ and Labov’s principles of vowel change
3. Tajik and Nepali vowel changes in relation with language contact and the typology of vowel systems

Preliminaries: the Indo-Iranian branch of IE

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<tr>
<td>Old Indo-Aryan, Middle Indo-Aryan, New Indo-Aryan</td>
<td>Old Persian, Middle Persian, New Persian, etc.</td>
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Vowel changes in Tajik and Nepali

- Close vowels
  - $i$ and $i$
  - $u$ and $u$

- Open vowels
  - $a$ and $a$

opposition of quantity $⇒$ lost

opposition of quantity $⇒$ opposition of quality
Tajik vowel changes 1

Middle Persian (Sigurda 2000: 200)

Early New Persian (Wendt 1997)

19th-century Tajik (Bakhtiyari)

Contemporary Tajik (both Bukharian and standard)

Nepali vowel changes

Old Indo-Aryan (Masica 1991: 208)

Old Indo-Aryan (Munshi 2004: 631)

Nepali (Khatiwada and Neuman-Pathak)

Srivastava 1962:4

Nepali “schwa” 1

Srivastava 1962:4
Nepali “schwa” 2

“In isolation, this sound [ʌ] is slightly rounded, and is acoustically lower and more back than a schwa, as we can see in figure 2.” “It seems to vary from [ɛ/ɞ] to [ʌ/ɔ].” (Khatiwada 2009: 377)

Nepali “schwa” 3

“In Nepali, the mid-central phoneme /ə/ has two allophones, a mid-central vowel and a low back rounded vowel in more or less free variation.” (Noonan 2003: 71)

Tajik and Nepali vowel changes in contrast

Parallel and differential developments in the vowel systems of Tajik and Nepali

I’ll look at:

1. “Principles of vowel change”
2. Language contact
   (convergence of vowel systems, sharing of vowel changes)
3. Self-organization of vowel systems
Principles of vowel change 1

1. In chain shifts, **long vowels rise.**
2. In chain shifts, **short vowels fall.**
3. In chain shifts, **the nuclei of upgliding diphthongs fall.**
4. In chain shifts, **back vowels move to the front.**

Labov (1994: 116)

• “Though these principles are stated in terms of chain shifts, I will not hesitate to use them to describe and classify individual movements where they apply.” (ibid: 117)

Principles of vowel change 2

• **Compatible with the Tajik /ā/ => /ɔ/ shift.**

Principle I

• **Incompatible with the Nepali /a/ => /ɔ/ shift.**

Vowel shifts that are incompatible with the principles of vowel change


• AusE: “The principles of vowel change ... are ... challenged by ... the raising of short /ɪ/ and /ɒ/ and the fronting of non-peripheral /ɔ/.” (Cox 1999: 20)

• The Ryukyuan vowel shifts

• The Nepali a > ɔ shift

Convergence of vowel systems in Central Asia

• Language contact appears to have affected vowel systems/changes in Central Asia
Vowel inventories

Vowel systems

Convergence of vowel systems in Nepal?
Vowel systems

Kathmandu Newari

“an isosceles triangle with a central (or rather backed) schwa”
(Michailovsky 1988:41)

Nepali

“[ə~ɒ allophony of /ə/] has been borrowed in Thakali, Chantyal, Ghale, Syngja Magar, and Kathmandu Newari, all of which have evolved 6-member vowel systems like Nepali’s.” (Noonan 2003: 71)

Vowel changes

“Thakali has completely lost the opposition of quantity, transphonologizing the opposition between long and short into a distinction of quality; other long vowels have simply merged with their short counterparts.”

“This development has also occurred for some E. Tamang speakers (Mazaudon 1973a:121) and apparently in Gurung (Glover 1974:xx).”

“Essentially the same development has taken place in Nepali, where IA ī and ū have merged with their short counterparts, but ā [aˑ] has remained distinct from a [ə].”

(Michailovsky 1988: 41)

Caveat

• “The vowel a has developed a rounded and backed pronunciation ([a > ə > ɔ]) in three quite distinct separate areas: the east (centering on Bengali), the northwest, and Konkani.” (Masica 1991: 207)
Self-organization of vowel systems? 1

- 6R0 in an acoustic typology of vowel inventories (Becker-Kristal 2010).

Parallel and differential developments in the vowel systems of Tajik and Nepali

I have looked at:

1. “Principles of vowel change”
   Not really useful
2. Language contact (convergence of vowel systems, sharing of vowel changes)
   Possibly useful
3. Self-organization of vowel systems
   Possibly useful

Sources