

## Organizers



Linguistic Society of Nepal



Central Department of English  
Tribhuvan University



Central Department of Linguistics  
Tribhuvan University

## Supporters



University Grants Commission



Asmita Books Publishers  
and Distributors Pvt. Ltd.



SIL International



Parikar Catering Service

---

### Linguistic Society of Nepal

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

URL: <http://lsn.org.np>

Email: [linguisticsocietynepal@gmail.com](mailto:linguisticsocietynepal@gmail.com)

# Program and Abstracts

## 37<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of Linguistic Society of Nepal

November 26-27, 2016

CEDA Hall, Tribhuvan University  
Kirtipur, Kathmandu

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

Shinji Ido

Nagoya University, Japan

<ido@nagoya-u.jp>

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 *ā-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 *ā-a* contrast. However, unlike Nepali, in which *ā* is more open (and perhaps also more back) than *a*, Tajik has preserved the *ā-a* contrast by raising *ā* 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

- Ishii, Hiroshi. 1986. *Kiso nepārugo*. Tokyo: Daigaku Shorin. 14-15.  
Khatiwada, Rajesh. 2009. Nepali. *Journal of the International Phonetic Association* 39 (3). 373-380.  
Labov, William. 1994. *Principles of linguistic change, volume 1*. Oxford: Blackwell.  
Masica, Colin P. 1991. *The Indo-Aryan languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.  
Turner, Ralph Lilley. 1961. *A comparative and etymological dictionary of the Nepali language*. London: Routledge.  
Verma, Manindra K. 1992. Nepali. In Bright, William (ed.). *International encyclopedia of linguistics, volume 3*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 76-79.

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



Shinji Ido



1

## 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

2

## Preliminaries: the Indo-Iranian branch of IE

	Indo-Iranian lgs.	
—2000 BCE	⇓	⇓
branches	Indo-Aryan lgs.	Iranian lgs.
historical	Old Indo-Aryan, Middle Indo-Aryan, New Indo-Aryan	Old Persian, Middle Persian, New Persian, etc.
present	<b>Nepali</b> , Hindi, etc.	<b>Tajik</b> , Persian, etc.

3

## Vowel changes in Tajik and Nepali

- Close vowels

ī and i  
ū and u

opposition of quantity  
⇒ lost

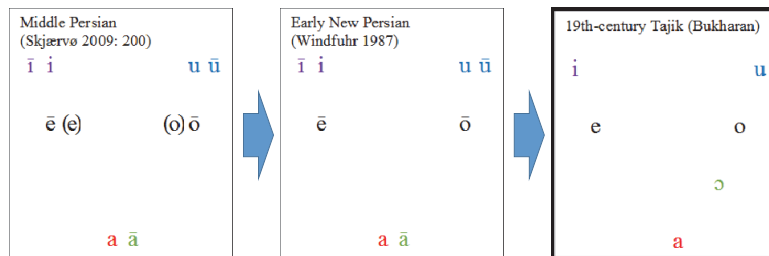
- Open vowels

ā and a

opposition of quantity  
⇒ opposition of quality

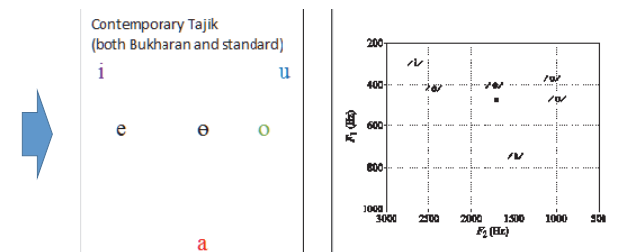
4

## Tajik vowel changes 1



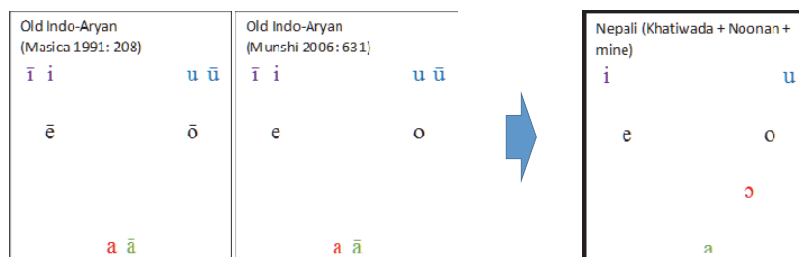
5

## Tajik vowel changes 2



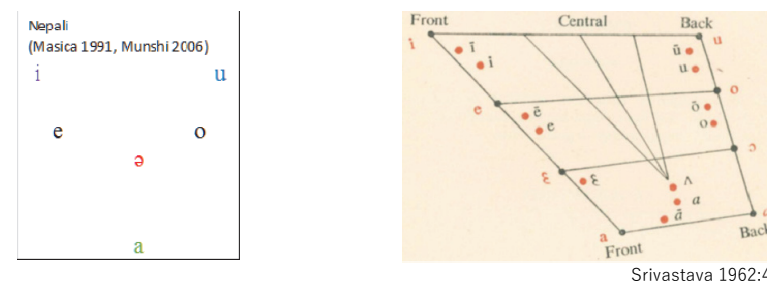
6

## Nepali vowel changes



7

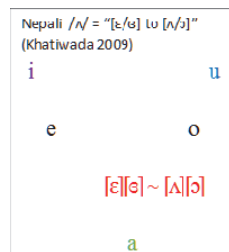
## Nepali “schwa” 1



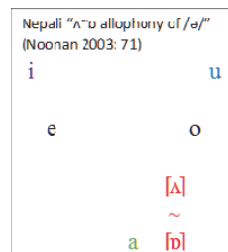
Srivastava 1962:4

8

## Nepali “schwa” 2



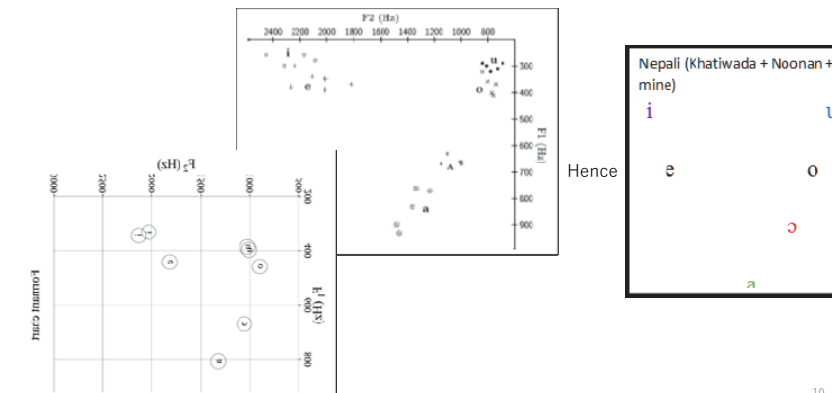
“In isolation, this sound [ʌ] is slightly rounded, and is acoustically lower and more back than a schwa, as we can see in figure 2.” “It seems to vary from [ɛ/ə] to [ʌ/ɔ].” (Khatiwada 2009: 377)



“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)

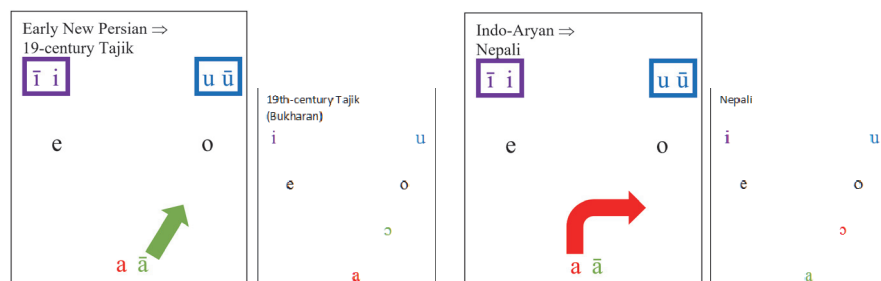
9

## Nepali “schwa” 3



10

## Tajik and Nepali vowel changes in contrast



11

## 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)
1. Self-organization of vowel systems

12

## 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)

13

## Principles of vowel change 2

- Compatible with the Tajik /ā/ => /ɔ/ shift.

### Principle I

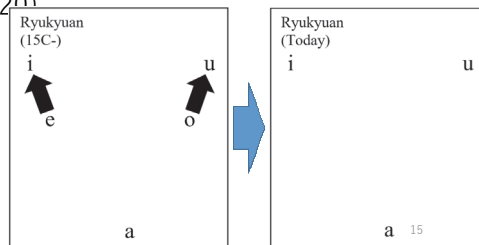
- Incompatible with the Nepali /a/ => /ɔ/ shift.

14

## Vowel shifts that are incompatible with the principles of vowel change

- “[T]his [the NZE short front vowel shift] clearly violates Principle III and Principle II.” (Labov 1994:138)
- AusE: “The principles of vowel change ... are ... challenged by ... the raising of short /ɪ/ and /ʊ/ and the fronting of non-peripheral /ɜ/. ” (Cox 1999: 20)

- The Ryukyuan vowel shifts
- ...
- The Nepali a > ɔ shift



15

## Convergence of vowel systems in Central Asia

- Language contact appears to have affected vowel systems/changes in Central Asia

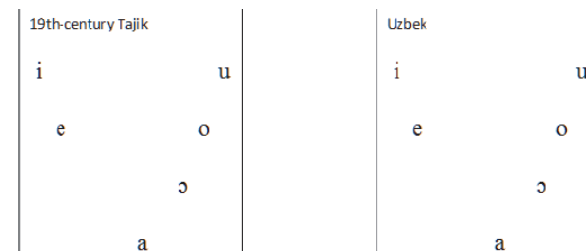
16

## Vowel inventories



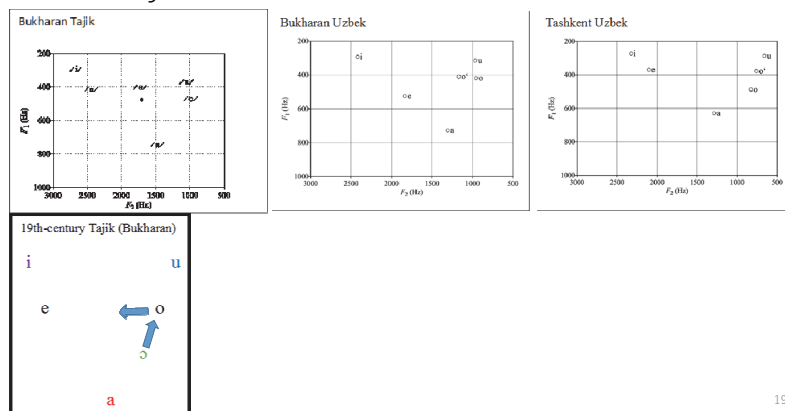
17

## Vowel systems



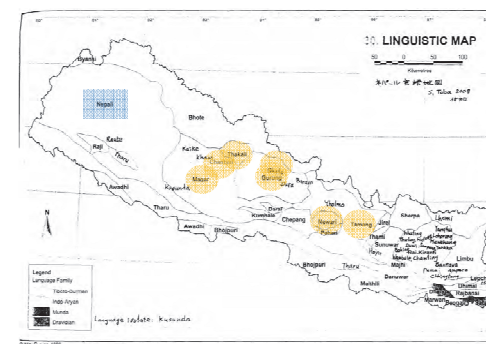
18

## Vowel systems



19

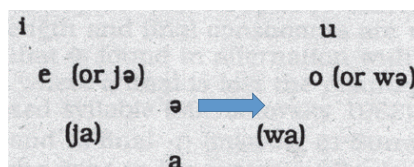
## Convergence of vowel systems in Nepal?



20

## Vowel systems

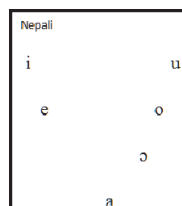
### Kathmandu Newari



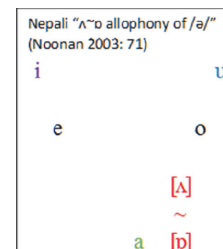
“an isosceles triangle with a central (or rather backed) schwa” (Michailovsky 1988:41)

21

### Nepali



## Vowel systems



“This feature [a~o 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)

22

## 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  $\bar{a}$  and  $\bar{u}$  have merged with their short counterparts, but  $\bar{a}$  [aː] has remained distinct from a [ə].”

(Michailovsky 1988: 41)

23

## Caveat

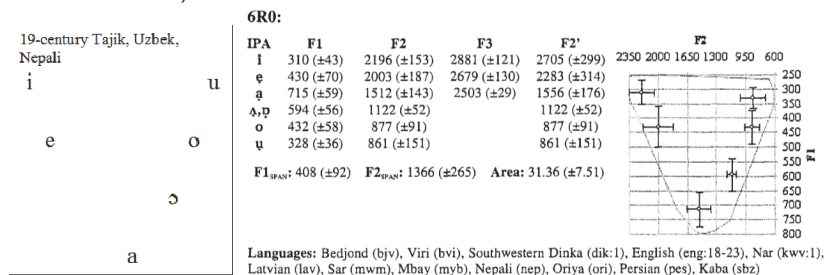
- “The vowel  $\bar{a}$  has developed a rounded and backed pronunciation ([ə > ɔ > ɔ]) in three quite distinct separate areas: the east (centering on Bengali), the northwest, and Konkani.” (Masica 1991: 207)

24



## Self-organization of vowel systems? 1

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



25

## Self-organization of vowel systems? 2

structure	languages	inventories	structure	languages	inventories	structure	languages	inventories
3S0	20	29	5S2a	14	38	7S1	6	9
3S1	7	12	6L0	8	16	7S2	12	22
4L0	7	12	6L1	8	14	7S3a	5	11
4L1	7	20	6L2	9	23	9S0	12	15
5S0	42	92	6R0	12	22	9S1	8	10
5S1	26	32	7S0	34	64			

**Table 2-3:** Generalized inventory structures that occurred in five or more different languages in the survey, with the number of languages and the number of inventories in which each structure is represented.

Becker-Kristal 2010: 52

26

## 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

27

## Sources

- Becker-Kristal, Roy. 2010. *Acoustic typology of vowel inventories and Dispersion Theory*. Doctoral dissertation. University of California Los Angeles.
- Cox, Felicity. 1999. Vowel change in Australian English. *Phonetica* 56, 1–27.
- Ishii, Hiroshi. 1986. *Kiso nepārugo*. Tokyo: Daigaku Shorin. 14–15.
- Khatiwada, Rajesh. 2009. Nepali. *Journal of the International Phonetic Association* 39(3). 373–380.
- Labov, William. 1994. *Principles of linguistic change, volume I*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Masica, Colin P. 1991. *The Indo-Aryan languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Michailovsky, Boyd. 1988. Phonological typology of Nepal languages. *Linguistics on the Tibeto-Burman Area*, 11(2). 25–50.
- Munshi, S. 2006. Indo-Aryan languages. In *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics 2nd Edition*. Elsevier. 626–632.
- Noonan, Michael. 2003. Recent language contact in the Nepal Himalaya. *Language variation*. Canberra: Pacific Linguistics. 65–87.
- Skjærvæ, Prods Oktor. 2009. Middle West Iranian. In *the Iranian languages*. Routledge. 196–278.
- Srivastava, Dayanand. 1962. *Nepali language: its history and development*. Calcutta: Calcutta University.
- Turner, Ralph Lilley. 1961. *A comparative and etymological dictionary of the Nepali language*. London: Routledge.
- Verma, Manindra K. 1992. Nepali. In Bright, William (ed.). *International encyclopedia of linguistics, volume 3*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 76–79.
- Windfuhr, Gernot L. 1987. Persian. In Bernard Comrie (ed.), *The world's major languages*. London: Routledge. 445–459.

28