

A NOTE ON THE POLYSEMOUS VERB 'TO EAT' IN NEPALI AND NEWAR

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The central idea of the present analyses of the 'eat' verb has to do with polysemy which shows diverse meaning relationships in Nepali and Newar. The multiple meanings that can be derived in various contexts have been classified and defined in terms of generative semantic rules that can derive a large number of linguistic categories in both the languages. The sources of data from Nepali and Newar also include idioms, metaphors and metonymy. These serve to indicate a typological relationship which perhaps can be extended to other Indic and Tibetic languages to illustrate the prototypical commonality between languages of the same family and those of other genetic affiliations.

Key words: *Polysemy, prototype, metaphoric content, idiomatic expressions, metonymic concepts*

1. Introduction

The infinitive verb 'to eat' in Nepali and Newar languages is commonly used by native speakers to convey multiple meanings in various contexts. These constructions often have restricted metaphorical meanings which can express various concepts or processes such as specific objects, human activities or symbolic expressions. Lakoff and Thomson (1979) in their study on the use of metaphors by speakers of English have referred to such usages as 'categorization of speech acts in terms of a set of inherent properties.' These properties can be physical or direct such as consumption of food or drinks, indirect causal or abstract notions such as 'to eat money', 'eat punishment', 'eat profit', 'eat bribe', 'eat time', 'eat air' etc. Prof. Madhav Pokharel (p.c.) expressed the view that "such abstract or symbolic usages have underlying or prototype meaning which can be extended through metaphorical rules." These extensions of meaning are often based on the pragmatics of speech to convey positive or negative attitudes, to hide true human qualities or the need to express implicit meanings beyond the reality of the contemporary social / cultural environment. The data collected for this purpose seek to highlight various categories of 'to eat' verb which express multitude of meanings in formal and informal social contexts. This paper will also seek to illustrate related topics on the use of idioms, metaphorical and metonymic expressions in the two languages as prototypical linguistic categories of social discourse.

2. EAT Master Data File with examples from Nepali and Newar

The following data on Nepali and Newar have been classified into various categories to illustrate a wide range of functions of the verb 'to eat' which are not related to one another in meaning. Lakoff (1987: 12-13) refers to these expressions as "Generativity of a prototype phenomenon which concern categories that are defined by a generator that has

Gipan 3:2. 38-47.

the status of a central or 'prototypical' category member." The central idea of the present analyses of the 'eat' verb has to do with polysemy which shows diverse meaning relationships. Lakoff defines such usages as "systematic relationships between different cognitive relations to one another. Linguistic categories in this sense are kinds of cognitive categories." The following categories (A to G) have headings that define the physical or abstract meanings. The blank spaces for Nepali or Newar indicate that certain utterances do not occur in the two languages.

Category A: 'to eat/consume food (by human or non-human)'

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|---|--|
| Nepali | Newar |
| (1) a. us-le roti khā-yo
he-Erg bread eat-Pst
'He ate the bread.' | (1) b. wa-ã mari nal-a
s/he-Erg bread eat-Pst
'S/he ate the bread' |

Category A1:

- | | |
|---|---|
| Nepali | Newar |
| (2) a. mai-le pāni khā-ye
I-Erg water eat-Pst)
'I ate water.' | (2)b. ji-ĩ la: ton-ā
I-Erg water drink-Pst
'I drank water.' |

Category A2:

- | | |
|--|---|
| Nepali | Newar |
| (3) a. birāmi-le ausadhi khā-yo
sick.person-Erg medicine eat-Pst
'The sick person ate the medicine.' | (3)b. cha-ã wāsa: na
you-Erg medicine eat.Imp
'You eat the medicine!' |

Category A3:

- | | |
|---|---|
| Nepali | Newar |
| (4) a. timi-le curoth na-khāu
you-Erg cigarette Neg-eat.Imp
'You do not eat the cigarette!' | (4)b. cha-ã curoth ton-e mate
you-Erg cigarette drink-Neg.Imp
'You do not drink the cigarette!' |

Category A4:

- | | |
|---|---|
| Nepali | Newar |
| (5) a. un-le pān khā-i
she-Erg betel.leaf eat-Fem
'She ate the betel leaf.' | (5)b. wa-ã gwā nal-a
s/he betel leaf eat-Pst
'S/he ate the betel leaf.' |

Category B: 'to eat inedible objects'

Category B1:

- | | |
|--|---|
| Nepali | Newar |
| (6) a. tyo mānche-le paisā khā-yo
that man-Erg money eat-Pst
'That man ate the money.' | (6)b. wa manu-nā dhebā nal-a
that person-Erg money eat-Pst
'That person ate the money.' |

Category B2:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Nepali | Newar |
| (7) a. us-le ghu:s khā-yeko thiyo | (7)b. imi-sā ghu:s na:-gu ju-i phu |

he bribe eat-Pst.Perfect
'He had eaten the bribe.'

they-Erg bribe eat-Nom be-Npst.may
'They may have eaten the bribe.'

Category B3:

Nepali

Newar

(8) a. āphno āmdāni khā-ye huncha
self income eat-Npst is
'It is alright to eat one's own
income.'

(8) b. ji-gu kamāi wa-ā nal-a
I-poss income s/he-Erg eat-Pst
'S/he ate my income.'

Category B4:

Nepali

Newar

(9) a. yo samasyā-le mero tāuko khā-yo
this problem-Erg my head eat-Pst b.
'This problem ate my head.'

tho lwāpu-ū jigu chyā: / nhyepu-he nal-a
this quarrel my head/brain-Emph eat-Pst
'This quarrel ate/has eaten my head/ brain.'

Category B5:

Nepali

Newar

(10) a. āmā-le baccā-lāi mwāi khā-yi
mother-Erg child-Dat kiss eat Pst.Fem
'The mother ate a kiss to the child.' =
The mother kissed the child.

(10) b. ji-ī macā-yāta cupā na-yā
I-Erg child-Dat kiss eat-Pst
'I ate a kiss to the child.'
=I kissed the child.

Category B6:

Nepali

Newar

(11) a. bepāri-le nāphā khā-yo
business.man profit eat-Pst
'The business man ate the profit.'

(11) b. tho jyā-e wa-ā yeko laba: nal-a
this work-Loc he-Erg much profit eat-Pst
'S/he ate much profit in this work.'

Category C: 'to eat temporal or abstract concepts'

Category C1:

Nepali

Newar

(12) a.

(12) b. ji-gu jyābha khatā nal-a
I-Poss tool rust eat-Pst
'My tool/s ate the rust.' = My tool has rusted.

Category C2:

(13) a. dherai tel khāne motar na-kina
much oil eat-to motor Neg-buy
'Do not buy the motor that eats
much petrol.'

(13) b. yeko cikā na-i-gu motar jhi:-ta ma-jyu
much oil eat-Npst-Nom motor we-Dat Neg-OK
'A motor car that eats much petrol is not good
for us.'

Category C3:

(14) a. yo sabhā-mā
this meeting-Loc
badhi samaya khā-yo
much time eat-Pst
This meeting ate too much
time.'

(14) b. tho jyā cha-gu-lī āpā i: nal-a
this work Num-Clf-Erg much time eat-Pst
'This work ate too much time.'

Category C4:

- (15) a. yo mahinā bhari-mā
this month duration
dherai bijuli khā-yo
much electricity eat-Pst
'Much electricity was eaten
during this month.'
- (15) b. tho mahinā-e yekwo bijuli nal-a
this month-Loc much electricity eat-Pst
'Much electricity was eaten during this month.'
- (16) a. hāwā khān-e jā-ū
air eat to go-Hor
'Let us go to eat air'=Let us go
for a stroll.)
- (16) b. hāwā na:wan-e ten-ā
air eat go-Npst about to-Pst Conj.
'I am / we are about to go to eat air.' (I am / we
are about to go for a stroll.)

Category D: 'to be eaten by physical impact'**Category D1:**

- Nepali
- (17) a. us-le dherai pitāi khā-yo
he-Erg much beating eat-Pst
'He ate much beating.'
- Newar
- (17) b. wa-ā yeko kasā nal-a
S/he much beating eat-Pst
'S/he ate much beating.'

Category D2:

- (18) a. tyo keto-le lāt khā-yeko thiyo
that boy-Erg slap eat-Pst Perf
'That boy had eaten a slap.'
- (18) b.

Category D3:

- (19) a. us-le lathi khā-yeko ho?he-Erg
stick eat-Pst Cop-evidential
'Did he eat the stick?'
= Was he beaten with a stick?
- (19) b.

Category D4:

- (20) a. us-le ghussā khā-yeko
he-Erg punch eat-Pst
hunu parcha
be.may
'He may have eaten a slap.'
- (20) b. wa-ā lāt na:gu ju-i-phu
he-Erg slap eat-Pst may
'He may have eaten a slap.'

Category D5:

- (21) a. āndolan-mā uni-le goli
revolution-Loc she-Erg bullet
khā-yeki thiyo
eat-Pst. Perf
'She had eaten a bullet at the
revolution.'
- (21) b. wa-ā goli na:-gu kha
s/he bullet eat-Nominalizer Evid
'It is true that s/he ate a bullet.'

Category D6:

- (22) a. hāmi-le mukkā khā-yeko thiye-na (22) b.
we-Erg blow eat-Pst Perf-Neg
'We had not eaten blows.'

Category D7:

- (23) a. nokar-le gāli khā-yo (23) b. cyah-nā kasā nal-a
servant-Erg scolding eat-Pst servant-Erg beating eat-Pst
'The servant ate scolding.' 'The servant ate a beating.'

Category D8:

- (24) a. bidyārthi-le saḷāi khā-yo (24) b. bwāmi-nā kasā nal-a
student-Erg punishment eat-Pst student -Erg punishment eat-Pst
'The student ate a punishment.' 'The student ate a punishment.'

Category D9:

- (25) a. Kolkatā-ko garam khān-e (25) b. kalkatā-yā tānwa naye-gu
Kolkatā-of heat eat-to Kalkatā-of heat eat-to
'To eat the heat of Kolkatā' 'To eat the heat of Kolkatā'

Category D10:

- (26) a. himāl-ko ciso khān-e (26) b. himāl-yā khwāũ naye-gu
Himalaya-of cold eat-to Himalaya-of cold eat-to
'To eat the cold of the Himalayas.' 'To eat the cold of the Himalayas.'

Category E: 'to be eaten by human neglect or parasites'

Category E1:

- Nepali Newar
(27) a. mero cakku khiyaa-le khā-yo (27) b. tho khatā na:-gu cupi ma-jyu
my knife rust-by eat-Pst this rust eat-Nom dagger Neg-be
'My knife was eaten by rust.' 'This rusted dagger is not alright.'

Category E2:

- (28) a. mero kitāb-haru kirā-le khā-yo (28) b. wasa: kilā: na-yā con-a
my book-Plu insects-by eat-Pst clothes insects-by eat Pst stay-Pst
'My books were eaten by insects.' 'The clothes have been eaten by insects.'

Category F: 'to be eaten by natural conditions'

Category F1:

- Nepali Newar
(29) a. yespāli-ko bāli tusāro-le khā-yo (29) b. wā-mā phukka khwāũ-nā nal-a
this season-of crops frost-by eat-Pst rice-plants all cold-by eat-Pst
'This season's crops were eaten by frost.' 'All the rice plants were eaten by the cold.'

Category F2:

- (30) a. phalphul-haru ciso-le khā-yo (30) b. cheri-yā aṅga: thacāl-ā
 fruit-Plu damp/cold-by eat-Pst ground.floor walls dampness-by
 'The fruits were eaten by the
 damp/cold.' nal-a
 eat-Pst
 'The ground floor walls were eaten
 by dampness.'

Category G: 'to be eaten by human weakness'**Category G1**

Nepali

Newar

- (31) a. us-le mālik-ko nu:n khā-i rahayeko cha (31) a.
 he-Erg master-of salt eat-Npst is
 'He has been eating the salt of his master.
 (= to be dependent on)

Category G2

- (32) a. (32) b. wa na-sĩ gulu-mha dhakā nã jā
 s/he eat-habitual.addicted-Nom Comp-name famous
 'S/he is well known as one addicted to eating.' (= a
 glutton)
 (32) c. wa nae dya-yāta sunā-nã patyā ma-yā
 s/he eat-god-Dat no.one-Erg trust Neg-do)
 'No one trusts a god who only eats.' (= a greedy person).

3. Idioms as metaphors

In Nepali and Newar languages there are also profuse number of idiomatic expressions which can be analyzed on the basis of social-cultural, official-unofficial, spoken-written interpretations often used informally in politics, business, social interactions and media. Lakoff (1967) refers to such expressions as 'metaphorical systematicity' or 'ontological metaphors' which serve to highlight or disguise certain common beliefs and practices. Some typical examples in the two languages can be cited here to illustrate their socio-cultural specific meanings. These are often defined as traditional sayings and euphemisms that have symbolic or metaphorical meanings. The data on Nepali idioms are from Sakhi Saran Subedi (2071 B.S. / 2015 AD).

Nepali

- (32) a. mukh-mā tālca mārnu
 mouth-in lock to kill
 'inability to speak what is necessary.'
 b. galo basnu
 throat to stay
 'to experience problems, to be speechless'

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- c. desh khānu
country to eat
'to experience a foreign country'
- d. ghar khānu
house to eat
'to take charge of household'
- e. budhi-mā birko lāgnu
intelligence-in lid to place
'inability to think properly'
- f. nām camkanu
name to brighten
'to be popular'
- g. loppā khānu
a blow to eat
'to be disgraced'
- h. parāl-ko āgo
of the straw fire
'a temporary situation'
- i. kān tātnu
the ears to become heated
'to be furious'

Newar

- (33) a. mhutu ka:mi
mouth carpenter
'one who only talks but does nothing'
- b. mhutu tapwā-mha
one with a large mouth
'a greedy person'
- c. nyi-pwā mhutu du-mha
one who has two mouths
'a habitual liar'
- d. tuti madu-mha
one who has no legs
'a very lazy person'
- e. lhā: tāhāka-mha
one who has long arms
'a habitual thief'
- f. jhaṅgah lāi-mha
one who catches birds
'a rascal, cheater'

- g. hāwā syā-mha
one whose air is spoilt
'a mad, insane person'
- h. thikae-mha kāe
an expensive son
'a birth of a son after a long wait of several daughters'
- i. tāpā khwā:
a far away face
'a person not met for a long time'
budhā nawa: mha
one who smells like an old man
'a young man who talks and behaves like an old man'
nhāe wone-gu
for a nose to go
'to lose prestige, reputation'
to land on the nose
'be compelled to do something'

4. Metonymic expressions

Lakoff (1987) defines metonymy primarily as a referential function, i.e. "it allows us to use one entity to stand for another so as to focus more specifically on certain aspects of what is being referred to." Since the concept of metonymy is directly or indirectly related to our topic of multiple meanings in 'eat verbs', it would be of interest to illustrate various metonymic categories in Nepali and Newar languages in a typological perspective:

4.1 Part for the whole/ Place for the Institution

- (34) a. Singha Durbar-le yo samashyā bisaya-mā
Singha Durbar-erg this problem matter-on
kehi bhane-ko chai-na (Nepali)
any say-Pst has-not
'Singha Durbar has not said anything about this matter.'
- b. Singha Darbar-ā tho khā-e chu dhā-gu madu-ni (Newar)
Singha Durbar-erg this matter-Loc any say-Inf not-yet
'Singha Durbar has not said anything about this matter.'

4.2 Producer for product

- (35) a. us-le ākhirmā Toyota kin-yo (Nepali)
he-erg finally Toyota buy-Pst
'He finally bought a Toyota.'
- b. wa-ā balla Toyota nyā-ta (Newar)
s/he finally Toyota buy-Pst
'He finally bought a Toyota.'

4.3 Object used for user

- (36) a. āja taxi-haru-ko hartāl cha-n (Nepali)
 today taxi-plu-of strike is-plu
 'Today the taxis are on strike.'
- b. thaũ taxi-yā hartāl du (Newar)
 today taxi-of strike is
 'Today the taxis are on strike.'

4.4 Controller for controlled

- (37) a. campus-le us-lai niskāsan gar-e (Nepali)
 campus-by s/he-to expel do-Pst
 'The campus fired him /her.'
- b. wai-ta campus-ā likāl-a (Newar)
 s/he-Dat campus-from remove-Pst
 'The campus fired him /her.'

4.5 Place for the event

- (38) a. darbār kāndā-le Nepāl-ko rājniti-mā parivartan
 palace event-by Nepal-of politics-Loc change
 lyā-yo (Nepali)
 bring-Pst
 'The palace event has brought a political change in Nepal.'
- b. darbār-yā ghatna-ā Nepā-yā rājniti-i hyupā
 palace-Dat incident-Erg Nepal-Dat politics-Loc change
 ha:-gu du (Newar)
 bring-Inf has

5. Conclusion

This brief outline of the polysemous verb 'to eat', the metaphoric content of idiomatic expressions in Nepali and Newar languages and metonymic concepts in the two languages serve to highlight the semantic and pragmatic nature of social discourse. Such uses in many ways may express informal, critical or even sarcastic meanings, and thus are normally avoided in polite conversations. The native speakers of Nepali and Newar are intuitively aware of what expressions are appropriate and acceptable in any given context and what amounts to taboo. However, the fact remains that these metaphoric and idiomatic expressions continue to be used by speakers in a creative and versatile manner.

In summary, I would like to acknowledge the seminal works of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Lakoff (1987) on cognitive semantics which they claim provides a general outline of a semantic theory in language communication. Lakoff in fact maintains that the very idea of meaning relations in our use of language asserts the view that "the grammar of a language is not independent of semantics or the rest of cognition." The uses of indirect meaning relations as shown in our data on the 'eat verbs', idioms, metaphoric

and metonymic expressions serve to illustrate the conceptual potentials of individual languages.

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