

Linguistic Aesthetics in the Market: Evidence from Oral Business Nepali

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ABSTRACT

Communication in business is usually supposed to be precisely and directly targeted at the message. The present study was instigated to answer whether, as generally assumed, communication in business excludes the artistic or poetic use of language meant for entertainment. Using observation, recording and field notes as the study techniques, a corpus of 24000 words was collected in Nepali from the major open market sites and business hubs located within Nepal. The corpus was then translated into English. As a delimitation of the study, the aesthetic aspect of language use and usage was particularly focused and analyzed. The exploration suggests that the users of oral business Nepali (OBN) commonly entertain themselves and others side by side as they speak while conducting business transactions. They commonly achieve this end by creating art and imagination, expressing and creating humor, and making associations. A future direction would be to extend the study in terms of its scope and methodology.

Keywords Aesthetics; oral business Nepali; entertainment; business transaction; business communication

INTRODUCTION

"How could we get fatter unless you eat! Haha!"

The prelude seems to have come from some kind of literary text. Nonetheless, it was not! And again, it is rather hard to believe that it was uttered by a business person to his customer. It is mainly because it does not seem to be part of business communication which, as a rule, is clear, precise, brief, uncluttered, direct, and to the point (Bennie, 2009). Yet, it was!

The prelude is a paradox. It is not denotatively true that a certain group of people won't get fatter unless the others eat enough: how could someone ever get fatter on condition that somebody else eats? Nevertheless, connotatively one can, provided the 'eaters' are one's customers. Obviously, the more the customers eat (buy) the more profit for the seller!

Language in business, or business language, can be conceived as a register, a use-based variety (Halliday, 1989). Most of us must have observed that a business person employs it in the way it looks business-like rather than the variety used for day-to-day general communication. As Nelson (2003, mentioned in Bargiela-Chiappini, Nikerson, Planken, 2007) distinguishes, 'business English' is characterized by its typical vocabulary which 'general English' lacks. In fact, the most salient aspects which make the business variety different from another variety of the same language are the vocabulary items, language forms or structure, functions and style-all typical of the business sector. More simply, business language is 'language in business' (Harris & Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003). By the same token, we identify 'business Nepali' as the Nepali language as it is used in business. In the present study, the term 'oral business Nepali' (OBN) is employed to refer to the spoken mode of Nepali employed for conducting business transactions in markets.

When we are located amid very beautiful natural scenery, we may experience like getting lost for a moment, and transcend ourselves to an imagined scene by an act of looking towards the sky or shutting our eyes, or so, for some moments. In this case, the scenery is the object- something that is visible and concretely present; however, it leads us to something, of course, not existing at all: it just transcends us to a world of imagination through contemplated esthetic experience.

Can business language be aesthetic? Do people use language artistically while transacting in business? Do they employ it for entertainment? The general and common answer would be "no!" Yet, as this research concludes, the users of OBN do, to a large extent, at least in the context of open business centers in Nepal- more specifically, in markets and business hubs located in and around them.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Upon bringing together the relevant literature, two opposing perspectives on the use and usage of language can be established. One is that, as language is used in business, its central concern is to carry out precise communication but the other concerns the art aspect of language use and usage in which entertainment is the heart. Drawing on the relevant literature, materials have been highlighted under two broad headings in this section: the perspective on language-in-business and the linguistic-literary perspective.

Language in Business

Following Halliday's (1989) concept of 'register', business language, a variety of a given language according to use, can be formalized as a business register. This means that as a mode of discourse according to use, people involved in the business transactions also use a rhetorical mode of language suitable in the given situation including the channel (the oral channel in this study).

Complimenting Halliday's concept of register with the so-called 'rules' of business language might help generate a framework for understanding the nature of business language. Regarding the 'rules' governing business communication, Bennie (2009) recommends that "business language should be clear and precise, brief and uncluttered, direct and to the point" (p. 7). Similarly, distinguishing

'business English' from 'general English', Nelson (2003, mentioned in Bargiela-Chiappini, Nikerson, Planken, 2007) observes that the former, unlike the latter, is characterized by dynamicity, action-orientedness and the absence of emotion. According to him, it is also identified with typical vocabulary items. To synthesize, business language, unlike literary language, is far from being rhetorical, stylistic, connotative and, ultimately, aesthetic.

Linguistic-literary perspective: Poetic taste for entertainment

In contrast with the propositions made above, some linguists- specifically functionalists- claim that language provides its users with a means of entertainment as one of the macro-level functions. In his historically important theoretical work, Isenberg (1949) comprehensively discussed the esthetic function of language. He claimed that although language is not purely sensuous, unlike music or other fine arts, it is, or can be, an esthetic object. He argued that such literary genres as poetry, drama and fiction are fine arts, therefore, they are esthetic objects, par excellence. As he argued, meaning carries an idea of 'discursus'- 'a displacement of attention from the given object to an object not yet given' (p. 9). According to him, language- mostly poetic language- leads the reader from the world which is present to a world which is physically absent, or in his own words, transcends us to contemplated experience, thus an esthetic taste, mainly by such means as imagery, rhythms, and the proper management of sounds.

Similar to what Isenberg called the aesthetic function of language has been conceptualized in terms of entertainment or art by some other functionalists in linguistics. For example, through forms of poetic language such as a story, music, a play, rhymes, poetry; solving problems or mysteries, creative writers create art- a function of language Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983) call 'imaginative function'. Criper and Widdowson (1973) claim that in speech the message form itself is the focus of attention. To Jakobson (1973), it is a poetic function of language, which is message-based. Sometimes, as in children's rhymes and games, language is used for the 'power of sounds' (Crystal, 2007). Similarly, in Holmes' (2008) view, when utterances focus on the aesthetic features, they become poetic.

METHODOLOGY

This section is devoted to the methodology of data collection and the analysis of the data. The specific highlights are the underlying philosophy, approach and the research design including the field, speakers, tools, data, data collection procedure, and analysis procedure, which have been applied.

Underlying Philosophy

The pragmatist philosophy of this study. Pragmatism holds that "people are active and creative...; meanings emerge through practical actions to solve problems; and through actions people come to know the world" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 188). Pragmatists are, therefore, basically concerned with what works best in the given situation. In the context of research, pragmatism is based on the idea that the researcher's perception is a source of interpretation, and that what makes subjective realities and the researcher's perceptions meaningful and objective is context. In this study, the data, which existed to help the speakers get their things done in the business context, were interpreted dominantly by the researcher and partially by the study participants who responded to the questionnaire (see Appendix).

Approach

The study builds solely on the qualitative approach. By qualitative research we mean “research which is based on rich textual rather than numerical data” (Howitt, 2016, p. 534). In this research, the data, conversations comprising some form of linguistic aesthetics, were treated as text at both of the phases of the study process—collection and analysis of the data.

Design

The design of the study is oriented basically to the exploration of linguistic aesthetics dwelling in OBN. Conversations employed for business transactions in situ were observed, recorded, noted down as data first and then analyzed thematically.

Field

Some urban business sites and hubs locating in Nepal constituted the field of the study. Specifically, Ilam, Dharan, Kathmandu valley and Pokhara were selected as those sites. Public transport, bus counters, garages, open/roadside markets/stalls; road festivals, canteens, snack-and-tea shops, general traders', grocers' and wholesalers' located in and around the sites were the hubs from which the data were collected. While deciding on the field, it was ensured that the medium of business transactions in those sites and hubs was Nepali.

Speakers

Presumably, the users of OBN in this study were moderately educated adult speakers of the Nepali language. This means that young and old speakers of Nepali, who were not actively participating in business transactions, were automatically deprived from providing the data.

Tools

Three kinds of data collection instrument and tools were used. An audio recorder was used as an instrument for recording utterances and conversations. Besides, a diary was used for writing field notes and memos from the sites and hubs.

Data

As indicated earlier, the data for this study were the actually employed conversations and/or individual utterances in the Nepali language while carrying out business transactions in the selected sites and hubs.

Procedure Of Data Collection

A corpus of 24, 000 words was collected/recorded from OBN from the selected business sites and hubs, urban centers located within Nepal. Some other desired data, which otherwise would have been missing, were also noted down in a diary to preserve the contexts of the texts.

Data Analysis

The spoken texts were first transcribed in the Nepali language in which they had been collected. Then the process was followed by conversation analysis in which what was required as the data was separated from what was not. Thus, the entire texts were transcribed first. In the next phase, they were truncated as appropriate/necessary to obtain analyzable texts termed as 'Snippets'. Following Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) the data were coded, thereby leading to the generation of themes and their categories. In this way, three macro-level themes and four micro-

level sub-themes emerged (Figure 1). The key issues and features were also brought to the fore side by side and the contexts were explained considering the memos.

RESULTS

This section is devoted to the presentation, analysis and interpretation of the data. The conversations-in-context recorded in the natural business settings from the business hubs (market centers) in Nepal, and translated from Nepali to English, are presented as 'Snippets'.

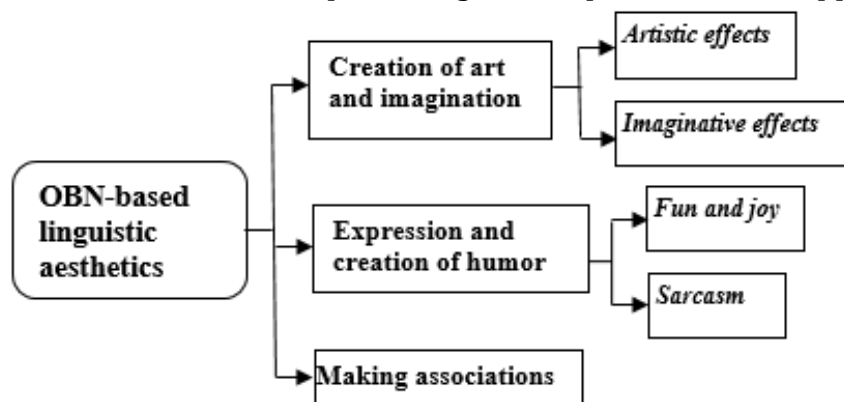


Figure 1. Themes and Sub-themes of BSON-based Linguistic Aesthetics

The data merging into three broader themes and their sub-themes as presented in Figure 1 have been treated under separate headings below.

Creation Of Art And Imagination Through OBN

Some portion of the data reveals that the speakers of OBN used utterances associated with entertainment through artistic and imaginative effects. Two categories under this theme emerged: entertainment through artistic effects and entertainment through imaginative effects.

Entertainment Through Artistic Effects

In some instances, the speakers in the business situation were found using OBN to create artistic effects. The strategy applied to this end was the proper management of sounds. Snippet 1 is an example from the data.

Snippet 1
(A fruit hawker (H) on the roadside shouts to a lady (L) passing by the road.)
H: Bananas... would you get Madam? One hundred rupees a dozen.
L: Bananas? One hundred rupees a dozen? Expensive. (Sets out)
H: OK, do come on, Madam. Well, <i>hundred rupees the price: half a dozen a prize (1)</i> , OK? Pay one hundred rupees and get one and a half dozen.
L: (Starts choosing and counting.) It occurs you are a good poet, yeah (2)? Haha!
H: Sometimes a shopkeeper; sometimes a poet. Needs to be in business, you see. Haha!
See App. 1.1

In this snippet, the key utterance (1) is poetic. In the utterance, the sounds are properly managed to the artistic effect created through the words at the end of each of the clauses (Nepali daam 'price' and inaaam 'prize') that rhyme with each other. It is also affirmed by L's response towards the end of the conversation (2).

Entertainment Through Imaginative Effects

In some other cases, it was observed that the speakers expressed and created imagination through OBN. Snippet 2 illustrates this.

Snippet 2

(A tipsy woman (W) - a familiar customer- and a shoe-maker (SM) recall their past at the shoe maker's).

W: *You look 17, Bro (1)! I can see you seem to be 17 years (2).*

SM: *Yes, but once upon a time, Sis (3).*

W: *"If I were in youth like yours", our Sir used to say (4), "I'd prefer another birth"*

SM: *OK, leave it (5). Now, what do I need to do for you (7)?*

See App. 1.2

As can be observed in Snippet 2, W, who is slightly drunk, is too imaginative to see the middle-aged man (SM) to be only 17 (1 & 2). Though sarcastically, SM recalls his past life (3). In an imaginary tone, W again recalls what her teacher used to say (4), which was itself imaginary. Having realized that they had been talking in an imaginary manner, SM attempts to deviate the talk to reality (5 & 6). Overall, this conversation exemplifies how speakers practice transcendence through OBN.

Expression and Creation of Humor through OBN

The data also reveal that the speakers expressed and created humor in some way, and thus entertained through OBN while engaging themselves in business. Fun and joy, and sarcasm were the main strategies explored.

Entertainment Through Fun And Joy

It was commonly observed that the people were also engaged in making fun and joy as they spoke while carrying out business transactions, as demonstrated in Snippet 3.

Snippet 3

(The seller (S), a buyer (B-I) and B-I's friend (B-II) talk at a road festival selling stall)

S: *How much butter would you get, Madam?*

B-I: *One kg. Please weigh.*

S: *Only one kg? Why not take 4-5 kg?*

B-I: *Oh God, what do I need that much for?*

S: *It's very nice. Get 2 kg, OK.*

B-II: *Never mind. Weigh 4 kg and then reduce 3 kg (1). Right? Haha! (All laugh)*

See App. 1.3

In this snippet, B-II's strategy is nothing other than fun for joy. In fact, B-II deliberately says the same thing that his mother (B-I) has been saying but in an indirect manner creating a repartee which changes it into a joke (1).

A short-but-sweet joke could be observed in the data (Snippet 4).

Snippet 4

(A customer (C), somehow familiar with the shoe seller (S), turns up and seeks to buy a pair of shoes.)

C: [I] need to have a look at one (a) shoe (1).

S: One shoe (2)? Who sells (3)!

C: Huh? What do you mean? I won't get on credit (4).

S: *We don't sell one shoe (5). We sell a PAIR (6). Haha!*

C: That is what... Haha!

See App. 1.4

In this mini conversation, C is communicatively acceptable in his statement (1) despite its grammaticality. S concentrates on C's wrong usage of the expression (2 & 3) but at first C can't understand his sense, so, misinterprets it (4). The penny drops when S remarks that they only sell shoes in pairs (5 & 6)! Finally, C realizes his own wrong usage of the expression and then laughs.

Entertainment Through Sarcasm

Rather than only in a business-like direct way, the OBN-speakers were sometimes found speaking in a sarcastic manner, somehow linguistically pinching the speaking partner. Snippet 5 evinces this.

Snippet 5

(A customer (C), a university student not familiar with the furniture seller (S), bargains for a bed at the 'Furniture' before she finally buys one.)

C: How much to the least would you give (sell) the bed for, Brother (1)?

S: Usually not below 4000 [rupees], but it can exactly be at 3800 if you really get (2).

C: 'Exactly'? Not for 4100 rupees (3)? Haha!

S: *You need to go to another shop for that (4). We never overcharge (5). Haha!*

C: OK, let's leave. Call the porter please.

See App. 1.5

In the beginning of the conversation, C attempts to keep the price of the bed as low as possible (1) but S tries to retain it. Then S discounts 200 rupees on the bed and uses the term 'exactly' to refer

to the reasonability of the price on condition that she really gets it (2). Yet, C mocks at him by proposing to add 100 rupees to the initially stated price. Then S presents himself a bit sarcastically (4 & 5).

Making Associations through OBN

It can be explored through the data that the speakers entertained themselves and others, most commonly the buyers, as they used OBN in the business context by making various kinds of associations, mainly involving comparisons between objects, ideas, people, and so on. Snippet 6 provides a specimen.

Snippet 6

(A customer (C) waits for his order at a crowded sweet-and-tea shop. C and the shopkeeper (S, addressed as *Sahuje* in Nepali) converse.)

S: What shall you have, Sir?

C: A tea and sweetmeat- only two pieces, OK.

S: A tea and sweetmeat, OK.

C: (After 5 minutes or so) Not yet, Sahuje (1)? Do quickly, please (2). [I] have no time (3).

S: [Please] be seated, OK. What a hurry (4)?

C: *No, no, I am now like a hungry soldier stealing a little time from the fight (5).*

S: Haha! Just coming, OK.

See App. 1.6

As this business conversation reveals, C wants to have a snack and tea at the shop but has to wait relatively long. He has a busy time, so prompts S (1, 2 & 3). Contrarily, in a hospitable manner, S wants him to delay a little (4). Then C compares his own act with that of a combatant stealing a moment from the combat for food (5).

Besides, quite remarkably, a set of individual utterances making linguistic associations are worth mentioning as in the box below. Data box 1 displays some business-related proverbial expressions.

Data box 1

A non-returning creditor promises a high interest (1).

Tomorrow never comes (2).

Borrow as a friend; pay as a foe (3).

Know the man and buy a he-goat (castrated) (4).

To estimate an elephant on condition of credit (5).

To lend meat to a jackal [with the hope of getting it back] (6).

Doing business without a profit and keeping a cow without the udder are the same (7).

Being educated does not necessarily mean being a doctor for all (8).

As can be observed in the data box, the first six of the expressions (1-6) imply the people's views on credit transactions. The remaining two (7-8), are somehow associated with their beliefs about business (7) and having success in it (8). Likewise, the first six utterances (1-6) are proverbial expressions (ukhans), and the rest are sayings (uktis). What they bear in common is the associative quality.

DISCUSSION

To reiterate, the study had started with some queries regarding the nature of oral business language. The queries inquired whether business people in action practice linguistic aesthetics as they carry out their transactions. Drawing from the results of this study, the answer is positively supported by large.

Defining register as a variety based on use (Halliday, 1989), each of the snippets looks like a form of business register. Even then each of them carries some form of linguistic esthetics. The key utterance in Snippet 1 has a poetic taste. Similarly, because the interlocutors in Snippet 2 set a world which is not readily present in Snippet 2, language in business proves to be a transcendent object (Isenberg, 1949). Likewise, forms of humor such as fun and joy (Snippet 3 and Snippet 4). Besides, the seller (S) in Snippet 4 has artistically employed repartee. In a similar vein, sarcasm has wittfully been employed by the seller (S) against the customer's (C's) mild mockery in Snippet 5. Some other figures of speech used are metaphor (Snippet 6) created through a beautiful association of people, someone's condition and the idea of war created through an artful comparison. In the same way, language art has also been focussed by the use of proverbial expressions and sayings (Data box 1) while speaking in business. Conversely, the 'rules' of business language (Bennie, 2009) are highly discarded by these use and usages explored through the BSON data. Now, it can also be argued that speakers' linguistic-cultural habits, costumes and practices, and attitudes define how people speak over what situation they are dealing with (here, business) alone.

The study was carried out around some limitations. First, it was limited to the oral mode of business Nepali taking place in open business settings, thereby excluding the formal and the written modes of business communication. Secondly, it was conducted in the selected areas where the medium of transactions was supposedly 'pure' Nepali. Therefore, the urban sites and hubs were purposively selected. Consequently, the other sites and hubs of oral business communication, particularly the rural areas were excluded. Similarly, the study only covered the adult speakers of Nepali, meaning that the young and old generation Nepali speakers were missing. Moreover, the data were viewed from the aesthetic perspective only. Therefore, as a future direction, the study might have resulted in more comprehensive and reliable findings if these pitfalls had been properly addressed and overcome.

CONCLUSION

As this BSON-based research concludes, oral business language can largely be aesthetic. The users of BSON doing their business in the open markets and business hubs in Nepal commonly use language artistically while transacting in business, meaning that they employ it for entertainment – a finding that refutes the 'rules' of business communication. This phenomenon further leads to the

argument that the habits, costumes and attitudes of the speakers- rather than the pre-determined general 'rules' of communication within a given variety- govern the way they actually speak. Based on the findings, another argument would be that, beside communication, human beings' natural love for entertainment gets echoed on their speech, too - no matter what field they are engaged in provided that they are independent speakers. Finally, as a future direction, a similar study extended in terms of its design might result in more reliable as well as valid results.

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APPENDIX

(Transcript in Nepali)

App. 1.1

(सडक-व्यापारी सडकमा हिड्दै गरेकी
महिलाको ध्यानाकर्षण गर्छ ।)

स.व्या. : केरा, केरा!... लिने हो दिदी ? दर्जनको
१०० रुपैयाँ ।

महिला : केरा ? सय रुपैयाँ दर्जन ? महगो !
(हिड्छिन्)

स.व्या.: आउनुहोस् न दिदी ! ल एक दर्जनको
दाम, आधा दर्जन इनाम । हुन्छ ? एक सय
रुपैयाँ दिएर डेड दर्जन लानुहोस् ।

महिला : (छान्न र गन्न थाल्छिन्) तपाईं त
राम्रो कवि पो हुनुहुँदो रै'छ, हा हा !!

App. 1.2

(चर्मकार (छालाजुता बनाउने व्यक्ति) को
पसलमा हल्का मातेकी महिला - जो
चर्मकारसँग चिनजानकी ग्राहक हुन् - र
चर्मकार विगतलाई स्मरण गर्दछन् ।)

महिला : तपाईं त १७ वर्षको जस्तै
देखिनुहुन्छ नि दाइ ! मलाई त तपाईं १७ वर्ष
जस्तै लाग्छ ।

च.का. : हो नि, कोही समयमा ता बैनी !

महिला : “म त तिमीहरु जस्तो बैसमा थिएँ
भने त” हाम्रो सरले भन्नुहुन्थ्यो, “बरु अर्को
जन्म लिन्थेँ।”

च.का. : ल छोडौं । तपाईंको के गर्नु पर्ने ?

App. 1.3

(बिक्रेता र दुईजना ग्राहक (ग्रा १, ग्रा २) सडक
महोत्सवको एउटा टहरामा कुराकानी गर्छन्
।)

बिक्रेता : म्याडम ! कति घिउ लगिसिन्छ ?

क्रेता १ : १ केजी । जोखौं न ।

बिक्रेता : १ केजी मात्रै ? ३-४ केजी किन
नलगिसिने ?

क्रेता १ : आम्मम ! तेरो मलाई किन चाहियो ?

बिक्रेता : सारै राम्रो छ । २ केजी लगिस्स्यो न ।

क्रेता २ : चिन्ता नगर्नुस् । ल ४ केजी तौलेर ३
केजी घटाइदिनुहोस् । हुन्छ ? हा हा ! (सबै
हाँस्छन्) ।

App. 1.4

(जुता बिक्रेतासँग सामान्य चिनजानको
ग्राहक जुता किन्न पसलमा छिर्छ र एकजोर
जुता खोज्छ ।)

ग्राहक : एउटा जुता किन्नु थियो ।

बिक्रेता : एउटा जुता ?! कसले बेच्छ र ?

ग्राहक : हँ, के भन्न खोज्नुभा'को ? उधारो
लाने होइन नि ।

बिक्रेता : हामी एउटा जुतै बेच्दैौं । एकजोर
चाहिँ बेच्छौ । हा हा !

ग्राहक : तेई त । हा हा !

App. 1.5

(एकजना ग्राहक – विश्वविद्यालयकी छात्रा,
जो बिक्रेतासँग अपरिचित छिन् – खाट किन्नु
भन्दा अघि दलाली गर्छिन् ।)

ग्राहक : कतिमा चाहिँ दिनुहुन्छ त दाइ ?

बिक्रेता : ४००० मुनि त बेच्ने गरेको होइन,
तर तपाईं साँच्चै लाने हो भने ठ्याक्कै चाहिँ
३८०० सम्म हुन सक्छ ।

ग्राहक : ठ्याक्कै पो? ४१०० गरे हुँदैन र ? हा
हा !

बिक्रेता : त्यसको लागि त तपाईं अर्कै
पसलमा जानुपर्छ । हामी बढाएर बेच्दैौं । हा
हा !

App. 1.6

(मिठाइ तथा चिया पसलमा एकजना ग्राहक
अर्डर गरेर पर्खन्छन् । ग्राहक र बिक्रेता
(साहूजी) बोलचाल गर्दछन् ।)

बिक्रेता : के लिऊँ सर ?

ग्राहक : एउटा चिया र बम्बैसन, २ पिस मात्र है
।

बिक्रेता : एउटा चिया र बम्बैसन ? हस् ।

ग्राहक : (५ मिनेट जति पछि) साहूजी, अझै
भएन ? छिटो गर्नु न । समय छैन ।

बिक्रेता : बस्नुस् न । केको हतार ?

ग्राहक : होइन होइन, म अहिले लडाईँबाट
एकछिन् लुकेर आएको भोको सिपाही जस्तै
छु ।

बिक्रेता : हा हा ! आइहाल्यो है ।

App. 1.7

(व्यापारसँग सम्बन्धित केही उखान-
उक्तिहरु)

- उधारो नतिर्ने मान्छेले धेरै ब्याज
कबुल्छ ।
- भोलि कहिल्यै आउँदैन ।

- मित्रको रुपमा सापटी लिनु, सत्रु भएर
तिर्नु ।
- मान्छे चिनेर खसी किन्नु ।
- उधारो पाउँदा हात्ती मोल्नु ।
- स्याललाई मासु पैंचो दिनु ।
- नाफा बिनाको व्यापार गर्नु र
कल्छौँडो बिनाको गाई पाल्नु एउटै हो
।
- पढेलेखेको हुँदैमा सबै डाक्टरै हुन्छन्
भन्नेछैन ।