Agreement in Lesser-known Indo-Aryan Languages: Contrastive Analysis of Bagri, Brajbhasha, Bhojpuri, and Khortha

Keywords: Indo-aryan; agreement; case; honorificity; allocutivity.

Agreement patterns in Indo-Aryan languages exhibit a great deal of variation, particularly among lesser-known languages spoken in different regions across North India. This study presents a contrastive analysis of agreement patterns in four such languages – Bagri, Bhojpuri, Brajbhasha, and Khortha. While these languages share a common Indo-Aryan ancestry, they exhibit distinct agreement systems influenced by regional and historical factors. This research aims to identify and compare the grammatical agreement mechanisms in these languages, highlighting their similarities and differences.

Agreement in Indo-Aryan languages typically involves subject-verb agreement, object-verb agreement and, in some cases, default agreement, influenced by features such as gender, number, person, case marking, animacy, and honorificity. This study examines how the aforementioned features interact in the four selected languages. Here are some of the major findings along with relevant example sentences.

Bagri projects interesting agreement patterns based on alignment. Verbs in Bagri agree with subject for number and person but not gender; whereas with object in transitive sentences, they agree for gender and number but not person (Example 1). Moreover, Bagri shows object-verb agreement despite the presence of case marker on accusative object in perfective aspect (Example 2). This contrasts with the general case marker-agreement blocking rule prevalent in Indo-Aryan languages, specifically in the superstrate language Hindi (Das, 2006).

(1) rekʰɑ kelɑ kʰajɑ
Rekha.3FS.NOM banana.3**MP**.ACC eat.**MP**.PST.PERF
'Rekha ate bananas.'

(2) rɑm sɪt̪ɑ-nɛ dekʰi
Ram.3MS.NOM Rekha.3**FS**.ACC Rekha.**FS**.PST.PERF
'Ram saw Sita.'

Brajbhasha, spoken in the central Indo-Aryan region, exhibits agreement patterns that align more closely with the superstrate Hindi but still retain unique morphosyntactic features. Likewise in Hindi, Brajbhasha shows split-ergativity in perfective aspect. Furthermore, the language has an anomaly in accusative marking not found in any other known Indo-Aryan language. In ergative constructions in the language, [+human] accusative objects do not require a marker and consequently influence verb agreement [Example 3].

(3) sjɑm-ne rɑd̪ʰɑ-Φ bʊlɑi
Shyam.3MS-ERG Radha.3FS.**ACC** call.3FS.PRF
'Shyam called Radha.'

Next, Bhojpuri shows rich and complex agreement patterns based on honorificity but lacks number and inanimate NP agreement in all alignment patterns. Verbs in Bhojpuri agree with the honorific value of the NPs at three levels – high, mid, and low honorific. Interestingly, gender agreement with low honorific NPs is optional and can be omitted. Bhojpuri also demonstrates a rare phenomenon of addressee agreement, also known as allocutivity (Examples 4-7).

[LHA – *low honorific agreement*; MHA – *medium honorific agreement*; HHA – *high honorific agreement*]

(4) həm jɑt bɑɽi
1MS.NOM go be.1MS.PRS.PROG
'I am going.' (said to anyone – not specified)

(5) həm jɑt bɑɽɪ-əu
1MS.NOM go be.1MS.PRS.PROG.**LHA**
'I am going.' (said to a friend)

(6) həm jɑt bɑɽɪ-əe
1MS.NOM go be.1MS.PRS.PROG.**MHA**
'I am going.' (said to father)

(7) həm jɑt bɑɽɪ-əi
1MS.NOM go be.1MS.PRS.PROG.**HHA**
'I am going.' (said to teacher)

Khortha does not have ergativity and, thus demonstrates subject-verb agreement in nominative subject constructions and default agreement in non-nominative subject constructions. Verbs in Khortha do not agree with the object under any condition (Example 8). Furthermore, number agreement is not present for the subject in the 1st and 2nd person but occurs only for the subject in the 3rd person (Example 9-10).

[DFN – *definiteness*]

(8) səmɪr-vɑ-ke bɪləɪ-jɑ notʃ-l-o
Samir.3MS-DFN-DAT cat.3FS-DFN scratch-3S-PST
'Samir was scratched by the cat.'

(9) həm gʰər ʤɑ-vo h-ɪjo
1S.NOM house.3S.LOC go-PRES be-1S-PRES
'I go home.'

(10) həm-ɪn gʰər ʤɑ-vo h-ɪjo
1P.NOM house.3S.LOC go-PRES be-1S-PRES
'We go home.'

This study contributes to the broader understanding of agreement in Indo-Aryan languages by documenting lesser-known varieties and highlighting their morphosyntactic diversity. By examining how these languages diverge from or align with well-studied Indo-Aryan languages like Hindi, this research provides insights into language contact, historical developments, and typological variation. Additionally, it offers valuable data for comparative linguistics and strengthens efforts in documenting and analysing understudied languages.

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