



Case Declensions in Khortha (Malda Variety)

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ABSTRACT

Khortha (also known as Khotta) is a language found in different regions of Jharkhand and scattered in parts of West Bengal. Khortha does not have any standard variety as of now [Bhowmik, 2018, p. 322]. Khortha is recognised as one of the varieties of Hindi according to Census [2011]. The fieldwork was conducted in a village named Bhajjana in Harischandrapur, Malda. The focus of this paper is based on the language structure especially the case declensions and case markings including the non-nominative subject construction. Khortha has certain features as a result of undergoing through several morphological changes like other South Asian languages which has been discussed thoroughly in this paper.

1.0 Introduction

Khortha (also known as Khotta) is a language found in different regions of Jharkhand and scattered in parts of West Bengal. Khortha does not have any standard variety as of now [Bhowmik, 2018, p. 322]. There has been an ensuing debate on Khortha whether it should be considered as a variety of Maithili or Hindi. Khortha is a variety of Angika, which is a variety of Maithili¹. Maithili, erstwhile listed as a variety of Hindi in Census [2001] got listed as a scheduled language in 2003. Currently, Khortha is recognised as one of the varieties of Hindi according to Census [2011].

2.0 Objective of the Study

The main approach of this paper is to explore the language by positing direct attention to the language structure especially the case declension. The main objective is to analyse the data on Khortha based on the fieldwork conducted in the village named *Bhajjana* and to study the noun morphology of Khortha.

1 Refer [Jha, 1985]



Figure 1: Malda District Map ¹

3.0 Methodology

The research was designed for the purpose of writing the M.Phil dissertation named “A Comparative Study of Khortha and Bangla with a Focus on the Noun Morphology”. The research aimed to work on the noun morphology in Khortha. The fieldwork was conducted in a village named Bhajjana in Harischandrapur, Malda. The focus of this paper is based on the case declensions which required scheduled elicitation i.e. translational. It is important to note that the questionnaire was prepared to analyse the data as a list of questions as prescribed. The observation was made by eliciting data with the help of a word list [Swadesh, 1971] and basic sentences list [Abbi, 2001] in Bhajjana. Another important factor played a role in easy fieldwork [Vaux & Cooper, 2005, p. 10]. The Khortha speakers in Bhajjana were mostly bilingual and some of them were also multilingual speakers. A biscriptal questionnaire was designed accordingly.

1. The linguistic composition of the speech community: Khortha
2. The language of the investigator: Bangla

There is a general thumb rule to choose the first informant being a NORM i.e. Native Old Rural Male and it was also applied during this fieldwork while choosing informants among the seventeen families residing in Bhajjana, Harischandrapur, Malda. It was noted that there was a distinct difference in the usage of speech among the male and female speakers of Khortha in the Jharkhand variety [Priya & Singh, 2016]. There was no such difference seen for the male and female speakers in terms of language use in the Harischandrapur region i.e. the Malda variety. The female speakers of Malda variety were multilingual and were quite fluent in Bangla unlike the female speakers of Khortha in Jharkhand who were not exposed to different societies as compared to their male counterparts resulting in non-distinctive speech.

4.0 Data description and Analysis

“Case is a system of marking dependent nouns for the type of relationship they bear to their heads. Traditionally the term refers to inflectional marking, and, typically, the case marks the relationship of a noun to a verb at the clause level or of a noun to a preposition, postposition or another noun at the phrase level.” [Blake, 2004, p. 1]. “It is a universal feature of human languages to establish the relations of nominal arguments in a clause. Cases exhibit the relation between verbs and nouns (or pronouns) in a sentence. It may also indicate the relationship between two nouns. Sometimes it is

1 Retrieved from <http://malda.gov.in/maps.htm> on 24th March 2018

demonstrated by adpositions known as pre- or postpositions occurring with or without any morphological change in the nouns they are attached to.”[Abbi, 2001, p. 127]. In South Asian languages, the nature of case markers are inflectional. The Indo-Aryan language family has undergone the loss of inherited inflections and new forms have developed along with indirect case marking suffixes and postpositions are used for most cases (e.g. instrumental, ablative, some genitive and locative) i.e. except for Nominative and Accusative [Masica, 1991, p. 230].

4.1 Nominative¹

“The term nominative is generally used for the S (single argument of intransitive clause) and A (most agent-like argument of the transitive clause), and in most languages, this is also the (zero-coded) citation form of the noun”[Haspelmath, 2006, p. 6]. The subject in South Asian languages behaves in two patterns, either by direct form, i.e. nominative or by oblique form, i.e. non-nominative subjects. Some South Asian languages like Hindi nouns may inflect for both number and form [Spencer, 2005].

HINDI	Singular	Plural
Direct	ləɽka	ləɽke
Oblique	ləɽke	ləɽkō

Table 1: Hindi inflections in subject position

Example: Hindi data

[Abbi, 2001, p. 127]

(1) ləɽka gəya

‘the boy went’

(2) ləɽke-ko accha læga

‘the boy-Dat. felt good’

In Hindi, *ləɽka-ko is ungrammatical. In case of non-nominative subjects, Hindi nouns are assigned dative case in the oblique form as shown in example (2), ləɽka changes to ləɽke before taking up –ko affix. But some Indo-Aryan languages like Bangla do not change into oblique form before taking a case marker in general as explained in the examples below.

Example: Bangla data

(3) chele-ɽage-l-o

boy-CLF go-PST-3SG

‘The boy went.’

(4) chele-ɽa-r bhalo lag-l-o

boy-CLF-DAT good feel-PST-3SG

‘The boy felt good.’

Khortha like Bangla does not take up any marker to change into oblique form to exhibit case. It has no marker in Nominative case.

Example: Khortha data

(5) choura-ɽa ekɽa kela kha-le-l-ko

boy-CLF one banana eat-take-PST-3P

‘The boy ate a banana.’

(6) ram-ke laɽ lagi ge-l-e

ram-DAT shy feel go-PST-3P

‘Ram felt shy.’

Therefore, nouns and pronouns in Khortha remain in its direct form and takes case marking. Though, Abbi (2001) states that this feature where nouns and pronouns change into the oblique

¹ Refer Case in *A Comparative Study of Khortha and Bangla with a Focus on the Noun Morphology*.

form before taking a case marker is what distinguishes Indo-Aryan family from others. S.K. Chatterji [1985] stated that the usage of oblique has become rare with time compared to earlier forms. He attested that such use has become gradually restrictive in nature for Bangla and other eastern languages (and maybe in some cases dialects). This oblique form in Bangla has become identical with the locative but seems to be recognised in case of usage of other markers. Thus, the oblique form in Khortha is now obsolete as it has become identical with all its' case markers.

4.2 Accusative

South Asian languages though have accusative case relations; in general, they carry no inflection in the accusative case. But, in some sentences, it is seen that Hindi uses –ko affix to show accusative case relations. Similarly Bangla uses –ke affix for accusative case relations. The presence of such an accusative case marker is based on the information provided by the subject and this case marking is function based i.e. it is based on the semanticity of the sentence rather than the morphological concept of structural case system ¹. [Butt & King, 2003, p. 77] Thus, the accusative case is represented through the –ko/-ke affix to put emphasis on the object; i.e. if it is not specific ('any') there is no –ko/-ke marked noun phrase, but if it is about a 'particular' object then this is ensured by the –ko/-ke marked noun phrase.

ko (CASE) = ACC [Butt & King, 2003, p. 77]
 (OBJ)
 (sem – str SPECIFICITY) = +

The following examples are given from Hindi followed up with data from Bangla.

Example: Hindi data

- (7) bacce-ne apne behən-ko nei mar-a
 child.OBL-ERG his sister-ACC.SG NEG hit-PST
 'The child did not hit his sister.'
 (8) ghore-ko cara de-do
 horse.OBL-DAT food-ACC.SG give-PRS
 'Give the horse the feed.'

Hindi shows split ergativity (-ne) and take up '-ko' suffix as seen in example (7) and there is the presence of no marker in example (8). Bangla shows a similar pattern like Hindi by taking up '-ke' suffix in example (9) and having no accusative marker in the following sentence i.e. example (10).

Example: Bangla data

- (9) bacca-ṭa niṛer bon-ke mar-e-ni
 child-CLF his sister-ACC hit-PST-NEG
 'The child did not hit his sister.'
 (10) ghora-ke khabar-ṭa da-o
 horse-DAT food.ACC-CLF give-PRS-2P
 'Give the horse the feed.'

Khortha is different from both the languages as Khortha is one of those exceptions and retains its accusative markers and exhibits them with the accusative marker '-ke' irrespective of specificity. Examples from Khortha are given below i.e. examples (11) and (12).

Example: Khortha data

- (11) bacca-ṭa appan bahin-ke nai mar-k-o

¹ Ram-ne jirafdek^h-i
 Ram-ERG giraffe.F.NOM see-PERF.F.SG
 'Ram saw a/some giraffe.'

Ram-ne jiraf-kodek^ha-a
 Ram-ERG giraffe.F-ACC see-PERF.M.SG
 'Ram saw the (particular) giraffe.'

child-CLF his sister-ACC NEG hit-PST-3P
'The child did not hit his sister.'

- (12) ghora-ke khabe-ke de
horse-DAT food-ACC give-PRS
'Give the horse the feed.'

With the exception of the nominative and accusative case, it is usually seen that the other cases mark indirectly in the sentences. This indirect case marking has been functional and is found in quite a few South Asian languages.

4.3 Instrumental

The presence of Instrumental case does exist in South Asian languages, but its markers are many in number and like other categories of case, instrumental too show syncretism. The problem is that the combination of the merge of the instrumental case with other cases is different and varies from language to language [Masica, 1991, pp. 231-248]. "It is generally in the Ag/Instr/Soc/Abl area that categories may be variously collapsed: e.g., Hindi combines Instrumental, Sociative, and Ablative (One) while differentiating Agentive (One)." [Masica, 1991, p. 238]. In some languages, postpositions may or may not be used along with the instrumental suffix. For example, Hindi uses '-se' suffix, Bangla uses '-e' affix in rare cases but mostly uses postpositions. Khortha behaves like Hindi instrumental suffix and uses '-se' marker. Examples from Hindi, Bangla and Khortha are given below.

Example: Hindi data

- (13) hanuman-ne apne pucch-se lanka-ko jal-aj-a
Hanuman-ERG his tail-INS Lanka-ACC burn-PST-3P
'Hanuman burnt Lanka with his tail.'

Example: Bangla data

- (14) hanuman nijer laj diye lanka jala-l-o
hanuman his tail with lanka-ACC burn-PST-3P
'Hanuman burnt Lanka with his tail.'

Example: Khortha data

- (15) hanuman pucchi-se lanka jaral-k-e
hanuman tail-INS lanka burn-PST-3P
'Hanuman burnt Lanka with his tail.'

4.4 Ablative

It is natural for inflecting languages to have case syncretism. South Asian languages have a myriad range of inflections and syncretism in cases happens to be one of them. Khortha like other South Asian languages also displays case syncretism. Case syncretism, thus another typological feature is present in Khortha and quite a number of South Asian languages. Hindi too shows instrumental-ablative syncretism quite prominently like Khortha. But, in this scenario, Khortha does not seem to have many similarities with reference to Bangla. Bangla, on the other hand, expresses ablative by using postpositions like 'theke' 'from'. Examples from all these three languages are stated here.

Example: Hindi data

- (16) dudh-se dahi ban-ta he
milk-ABL curd make-COND AUX-PRS
'Curd is made from milk.'
- (17) pero-se patte pat jhar me gir-te he
tree-ABL leaves.OBL autumn at fall-COND AUX-PRS
'The leaves fall from trees in autumn.'

Example: Bangla data

- (18) dudh theke doi hoi
 milk from curd AUX-COND
 'The curd is made from milk.'
- (19) j̄rot-er jom̄oy gach theke pata jhare
 autumn-LOC time tree from leaves fall-COND
 'The leaves fall from trees in autumn.'
- Example: Khortha data
- (20) dudh-se dahi hu-a
 milk-ABL curd AUX-COND
 'The curd is made from milk.'
- (21) fit-ke samaj m̄e gach-se patta jhari jaha
 cold-LOC time at tree-ABL leaves fall go-COND
 'The leaves fall from trees in autumn.'

4.5 Locative

South Asian languages though are typologically similar, but the concept of location varies in different Indian communities [Abbi, 2001, p. 193]. Khortha shows case syncretism in a wider range, the locative case is no different. The examples for (17), (19), and (21) have been used in Ablative. Hindi does not use any locative marker as can be seen in example (17). Bangla and Khortha use locative marker –er and –ke respectively.

4.6 Dative

In some of the South Asian languages, it is found that the marker used for dative is similar in nature. Especially the Eastern Indo Aryan languages and also in Sindhi [Chatterji, 1985, pp. 760-762], it is found that the dative suffix is almost the same, i.e. it can be said as a variation of '–ke', Sindhi uses '–khe', Oriya '–ku' and so on.

Example: Hindi data

- (22) ram-ne apne ma-ko kal khat lik-kha tha
 ram-ERG his mother-DAT yesterday letter write-PST AUX.PST
 'Ram wrote a letter to his mother yesterday.'
- (23) ravan-ne ram-ke sang larai ki-ja tha
 Ravan-ERG Ram.DAT with fight do-PST AUX.PST
 'Ravan fought with Ram.'

Examples (22) and (23) are from Hindi which shows that dative suffix can be present with or without postpositions. The '–ko' marker in (22) has been used without any other postposition; whereas example (23) shows the use of postposition along with the dative suffix. The following data is of Bangla and it has '–ke' as its dative suffix in example (24) but in the following example i.e. (25) it can be seen that a genitive marker '–er' is attached to the post position 'j̄nge' and it behaves as a dative and serves the purpose. Whereas, Khortha does not use any other affix except '–ke' for its dative marker.

Examples from Bangla and Khortha are stated below.

Example: Bangla data

- (24) ram gotokal nijer ma-ke ciṭhi likhe-ch-e
 ram yesterday his mother-DAT letter write-PST-3P
 'Ram wrote a letter to his mother yesterday.'
- (25) ravan ram-er j̄nge larai k̄r-l-o
 ravan.NOM ram-DAT with fight do-PST-3P
 'Ravan fought with Ram.'

Example: Khortha data

- (26) ram kalkhin appan ma-ke ciṭhi likk-o

ram yesterday his mother-DAT letter write-PST.3P

‘Ram wrote a letter to his mother yesterday.’

(27) raban ram –ke sange larai kar-k-o

ravan.NOM ram-DAT with fight do-PST-3P

‘Ravan fought with Ram.’

4.7 Genitive

The function of genitive is used to determine the relationship between two nouns (or pronouns) in general. South Asian languages exhibit interesting fact regarding genitives is that in many of the genitive morphemes exhibit agreement for other features like gender and number of the head [Abbi, 2001, p. 130]. Examples from such a language are given below to demonstrate the use of agreement features with the head, i.e. in most cases noun based on the function of the genitive morpheme.

Example: Hindi data

(28) ram-ki behən-ki jaadi kal hē

Ram-GEN.AGR sister-GEN.AGR wedding AUX-PRS tomorrow

‘Ram’s sister wedding is tomorrow.’

(29) ram-ki ṭopi nil-i hē

Ram-GEN.AGR cap blue-AGR AUX-PRS

‘Ram’s cap is blue.’

(30) paccis rupaje-ki cini kharid-o

twenty five rupee-GEN.AGR sugar buy-FUT.IMP

‘Buy twenty five rupees sugar.’

All of the above examples exhibit this agreement. But if the noun was of masculine gender, for example, ‘ram ka g^hər’ [Abbi, 2001, p. 193], here instead of ‘-ki’ the genitive morpheme ‘-ka’ is used. But, especially in eastern Indo Aryan languages, the genitive morpheme is only used as possessive markers like Bangla. The situation in Khortha shows that it is similar in case of the use of a genitive marker, i.e. it is used for possessives, but the genitive case marker is ‘-ke’ in general which is another example of case syncretism. Khortha does have another genitive marker, the ‘-r’ morpheme. The only use of the ‘-r’ morpheme is found in case of personal pronouns. Examples from both Bangla and Khortha are given here to show the usage of a genitive morpheme.

Example: Bangla data

(31) kal ram-er bon-er bije

tomorrow ram-GEN sister-GEN wedding

‘Ram’s sister wedding is tomorrow.’

(32) ram-er ṭupi-ṭa nil rōṅ-er

ram-GEN cap-CLF blue color-GEN

‘Ram’s cap is blue.’

(33) pōcif ṭaka-r cini kin-o

twenty five rupee-GEN sugar buy-FUT.IMP

‘Buy twenty five rupees’ sugar.’

Example: Khortha data

(34) kalkhin ram-ke bahin-ke biha hau

tomorrow ram-GEN sister-GEN wedding AUX-PRS

‘Ram’s sister wedding is tomorrow.’

(35) ram-ke ṭopi nil hau

ram-GEN cap blue AUX-PRS

‘Ram’s cap is blue.’

(36) paccis ṭaka-ke cini kini-an

twenty five rupee-GEN sugar buy-FUT.IMP

‘Buy twenty five rupees’ sugar.’

5.0 Results and Discussion

Khortha has used either the single marker ‘-ke’ for most cases or ‘-se’ case marker in two types of case marking system. Khortha has also used a few post positions to serve the purpose which has been discussed in details throughout in the previous section.

CASE	SUFFIX	POSTPOSITION
NOMINATIVE	∅	∅
ACCUSATIVE	ke	∅
INSTRUMENTAL	se	∅
DATIVE	ke	sange
ABLATIVE	se	∅
GENITIVE	ke; r	∅
LOCATIVE	ke	∅

Table 2: Khortha Declension

5.1 Case Structure

Khortha uses ‘-ke’ marker in general as a result of case syncretism. It can be seen that personal pronouns allow both ‘-r’ and ‘-ke’ markers in the case structure with an exception in the case of third person plural. The ‘-r’ marker denotes the personal pronoun possessive for both first person and second person irrespective of the number as seen in ‘hammar’, and ‘tor’, i.e. the ‘-r’ marker functions as a genitive morpheme. The differentiation process in the first person and second person possessives is done by adding the classifier ‘sab’ to denote plurality. But, after adding the ‘sab’ to denote plurality the genitive morpheme ‘-r’ triggers vocabulary insertion and adds ‘-ke’ marker to denote it as a genitive. Here, in this case, it seems that it acts like a genitive though the appropriate function is of the functioning of dative; whereas, in the case of the third person the accusative instead of the genitive acts like a dative. This has been explained by discussing the layers of case structures in morphology.

In case of singular,

hamma + GEN = hammar

i.e., hamma + SG > hamma + ∅

(no overt SG marker)

hamma + SG + GEN > hammar + ∅

(genitive do not attach to ∅)

In case of plural,

hamma + PL + GEN

i.e., hamma + PL > hamma sab

(PL marker ‘sab’ is a free morpheme)

hamma + PL + GEN = hamma + r + sab

Now, this word ‘hammar sab’ though have both morphemes of plural and genitive, it is ungrammatical. Therefore,

hamma + PL + GEN + ACCU = hamma + r + sab + ke

i.e. *hammar sab + ke

Thus, it can be seen that the case follows through two layers, one where the structure assigns the ‘-r’ marker for genitive and adds ‘sab’ as a plural morpheme and the inner layer case is formed, then the other one i.e. outer layer case adds the ‘-ke’ marker to give this a form and meaning. As, ‘-r’ is limited to the use of personal pronouns it cannot attach to ‘sab’ to form the outer layer case structure. This same thing happens with the second person pronoun.

tāi + r = tor tor + sab = *tor sab *tor sab + ke = tor sab ke

But, in the case of third person pronoun, this does not happen. The third person pronoun behaves in a little different way.

Therefore, u + SG + GEN = okar and, u + PL + GEN = u sab ke i.e. u + GEN = okar

Hypothetically speaking, the reason for this might have happened as a result of the addition of both ‘-ke’ and ‘-r’ marker.

okar + sab = *okar sab

*okar sab + ke = u sab ke

i.e., u + GEN > okar + PL > *okar sab > [*okar sab] + -ke> [*okar sab + deletion] + ke> [u sab] + ke> u sab ke

Here, it can be seen that unlike the other two personal pronouns, the form does not become *okar sab ke to denote the form and meaning. Therefore, this finding shows that Khortha undergoes two layers of case structure in case of personal pronouns.

5.2 Non-Nominative Constructions

Non-nominative subject constructions, i.e. dative subject constructions are typically found in South Asian languages. Though, as the name suggests the languages take up the dative case in general, other case markings like instrumental and genitive are also found. The constructions are non-agentive in nature and the subjects are received as ‘involuntary’, ‘experiencer’, ‘benefactor’, or ‘recipient’ [Abbi, 2001, p. 193]. Khortha does not take up dative marking in non-nominative subject constructions. Examples are given below.

Example: Khortha data

- (37) ahmed-ke sãhas hẽ
 Ahmed-GEN courage AUX-PRS
 ‘Ahmed has courage.’
- (38) ghar-ke du-ṭa darwajja hẽ
 house-GEN two-CLF door AUX-PRS
 ‘The house has two doors.’
- (39) hammar laj laga
 1SG shy feel-PRS
 ‘I feel shy.’

Thus, it can be seen that Khortha takes up the genitive markers ‘-r’ and ‘-ke’ for non-nominative subjects.

6.0 Conclusion

Khortha uses ‘-ke’ marker in general as a result of case syncretism; this happened because of undergoing several morphological changes like other South Asian languages. It can be seen that this is where it can be seen that personal pronouns allow both ‘-r’ and ‘-ke’ markers in the case structure with an exception in case of third person plural. Khortha, unlike other South Asian languages, does not take up the common route, i.e. dative marking in case of non-nominative subject constructions. Khortha rather takes up genitive marking for non-nominative subject constructions.

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