

Gender Mismatch in Verbal Agreement in Lambani

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Abstract

This paper is a data based enquiry into the unusual patterns of verbal agreement in Lambani, an Indo Aryan language spoken in the vicinity of Dravidian. It first discusses the canonical agreement system with reference to gender marking and provides a description of the divergent pattern arising in the language as observed in the data. An argument is developed based on Corbett's theory of 'agreement hierarchy' and hierarchy of domains as a motivation to the unusual agreement and the situation of language contact and convergence is also explored.

Keywords: Lambani, agreement, gender

Introduction

In general agreement is defined by Steele (1978: 610) as "a systematic covariance between a semantic or formal property of one element and a formal property of another" (Corbett 203: 109). That is, word forms such as nouns, adjectives, determiners, verbs co-occurring in a clause are sensitive to each other (Wunderlich 2001: 1) that results in their matching of features - number, person, gender- through inflected forms.

Corbett states that under the influence of language internal constraints cross-linguistically there arises patterns of grammatical agreement that might be symmetrical or asymmetrical (2003: 113). In other words, these patterns are an effect of the interplay of morphological, syntactic and semantics/pragmatic aspects that languages are usually governed by. Generally, agreement relations are found in specific environments which Corbett terms as 'domains' like (a) noun phrase domain wherein feature matching occurs between determiner and noun, attribute and noun, possessor and possessed noun, (b) in a clause between subject and verb, object and verb; (c) a pronoun or anaphor and its antecedent and, (d) beyond the sentence domain.

For the purpose of this paper our focus is on (b) agreement between subject-verb and object-verb relating to the feature of gender.

Verbal Agreement and Gender Feature in Lambani and Other Indo-Aryan Languages

Before discussing the agreement system and how the feature of gender is realized a background of the gender declension system in Lambani is needed. Indo Aryan languages like Marwari, Lambani, and Hindi have a two-way gender system of masculine and feminine. Many nouns, verbs, postpositions, and nominal modifiers inflect for gender. While the gender of animate nouns corresponds to the referent's gender that is, natural gender, gender designation in inanimate nouns is distinctively arbitrary. Nominal forms are classified as either direct (nominative) or oblique (non-nominative), with the latter realised by assigning a postposition. There are attributive adjectives and other modifiers that inflect in agreement with their head noun in gender, number, and case.

With regards to case Hindi uses split ergative strategy which operates on presence of perfective and transitivity and based on the argument's semantic role assigned by verbs they are explicitly marked for realising ergative function. Nominative subject controls agreement, whereas arguments in ergative function does not control agreement since subject is blocked by the postpositional ergative marker -ne. As a result, function of agreement controller gets transferred to unmarked direct objects whose referents lack the properties of being animate, definite and specific.

Lambani on the other hand deploys a nominative-accusative alignment where the unmarked direct argument in nominative function is the controller of verb agreement. As such the verb inflects to agree in person, number, and gender with form which can be the subject of an intransitive verb and the agent of a transitive verb. The unmarked direct form is used for all subjects, for perfect and imperfect and transitive and intransitive. See from (1) to (4) below. Occasionally, if the unmarked agent of transitive is inanimate, the verb takes the unmarked third person singular masculine suffix, compare (5) and (6).

On the other hand, object of transitive verb and indirect object of di-transitive verb gets marked by the accusative postposition -n (-na variant). The object marking is influenced by semantic feature of affectedness that brings a change in the state of the object and which seems to closely correspond to dative subjects in experiencer constructions. Hence, they are form identical in case realisation.

- (1) c^hora sali-n dægər g-o
 boy(NOM) school-ACC away go-PRF-3SG-MAS
 'The boy went to school.'

- (2) baman-er hat-e-ti [gawdi mər-g-i]
 brahmin-GEN hand-OBL-INS cow (NOM) die-LV-PRF-3SG-FEM
 'The cow died in the hands of the Brahmin.' (LH:)
- (3) b^hesi mankya-n mar-i
 buffalo (NOM)-FEM man-ACC hit-PRF-3SG-FEM
 'The buffalo hit the man.'
- (4) yaḍi res^hma-n amba din-i
 mother-F (NOM) reshma-FACC mango-M (NOM)-MAS give-PRF-3SG-FEM
 'Mother gave mango to Reshma.'
- (5) i wat c^hori-wondu/u-n c^hamka-din-o
 this issue-F (NOM) girl-PL-ACC scare-LV-PRF-3SG-MAS
 'This issue scared the girls.'
- (6) i wat-e-ti [c^hori-won/u c^hamak-g-i]
 this issue-OBL-ABL girl-PL (NOM) scare-LV-PRF-3SG-FEM
 'The girls got scared by this issue.'

With subject-verb agreement system a masculine nominal referent triggers masculine gender agreement on past and non-past verb except present-habitual/future the verb (transitive and intransitive) appears in non-declinable form. For example,

- (7) jagdis^h/ mina eat
 k^ha-r-o/-i PROGRESSIVE
 k^ha-t-o/-i IMPREFFECTIVE
 k^ha-d-o/-i PERFECTIVE
- (8) jagdis^h/ mina read
 wod-a-c^h-a PRESENT-HABITUAL/ FUTURE

However, there is inconsistency in the nature of verbal agreement as observed in the recorded narrative texts of Lambani. The feature of gender marked on verbs occasionally takes a divergence that does not conform to the norms of system.

Agreement Mismatch

Mismatch is not uncommon in languages and there are instances across languages where the features of the controller and the target do not match the way they should according to their agreement systems. However, Corbett argues (2003: 114) ‘agreement specifications do not vary randomly with the target’ and proposes the theory of ‘agreement hierarchy’ which establishes a hierarchy of domains (attributive > predicative > relative pronoun > personal pronoun) and says that only targets following the controller may match agreement features. Thus we have the English example ‘the committee has/have decided’ vs. ‘that/*those committee has decided’ where the attributive adjective may show grammatical agreement and not the predicate. We find similar phenomenon in certain cases in Lambani that are discussed below.

In (9)¹ the subject is a male god called Hanuman and the object in his possession is a ring with inherent feminine gender. Considering the agreement pattern in the language we expect the verb phrase *pakaḍ-mel* to inflect for masculine since the subject controller is masculine. However, we see that the agreement in the first half of the sentence is assigned by elliptical direct object ‘ring’ whereas in the latter half the nominative subject takes control. There seems to be no reasonable argument for the split agreement pattern except that proximity of constituents (applying Corbett’s theory of agreement hierarchy) in the syntactic construction might allow feature matching while further the target moves from its controller the agreement weakens. This can be affirmed in (10) where the intransitive verb *ut* ‘rise’ in perfective does not agree in gender with its subject *bapḍi* ‘dejected woman’.

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|-----|--------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|
| (9) | hat-ri
hand-GEN-FEM | pakaḍ-mel-i-ti
hold-LV-PRF-PST.PRF-3SG-FEM | upar
above | ti
from | hãi
like this |
| | p ^h ẽk-i-ut-nak-o
throw-CP-rise-LV-PRF-3SG-MAS | hanuman
hanuman | c ^h ap-ko
onom-CP | par-gi
fall-LV-PRF-3SG-FEM | |
- ‘He had held the ring in his hand. Hanuman threw it in the air and the ring fell (in Sita’s hand).’ (R: 404 rec. 32:28)
- | | | | | | |
|------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| (10) | naw gi
bride GO-PRF-3SG-FEM | bapḍ-i
dejected woman-FEM | ...doi-re
...both-GEN | kaḍ-en
take out-CP | dek-ən
see-CP |
|------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|

¹ The following examples are cited from several oral narratives recorded by the author for her research purpose.

ha kar ut-o
 INTER CP rise-PRF-3SG-MAS

'The dejected bride went and seeing (husband's and brother's) plucked out eyes she screamed with fear.' (PS: 76-77 rec.)

We also come across instances of inconsistency in gender agreement where the verb arbitrarily takes masculine or feminine gender for the non-human subject at different places in the discourse. Compare (11) and (12). Nouns when used in compound sense like *d^harak ban* 'bow and arrow' are marked canonically third person masculine singular if not marked plural.

However, the tendency to mark feminine gender as in (12) hints at a transformation brought upon by contact influence that we shall discuss in the following example.

(11) ja-n hai hat-ri lat mel-din-o
 go-CP like this hand-GEN-FEM push-FEM place-LV-PRF-3SG-MAS

jo akas^h-en dægər-ge u sau kuntel-er u
 REL sky-DAT away-go-PRF-3PL that 100 quintal-GEN that

[d^harak ban] akas^h-en ja-n d^han ko het
 bow-MAS arrow-FEM sky-DAT go-CP onom CP below

[par-go]

fall-LV-PRF-3SG-MAS

'Going there (Lakshman) pushed with his hand that hundred quintal weight bow and arrow and it having flown in the sky fell down with a thumping sound.' (R: 83-84 rec. 7:10)

(12) ke-tanin lat-mel-o jo [d^harak ban so
 say-CP kick-LV-PRF-3SG-MAS REL bow-MAS arrow-FEM 100

kintal akas^h-en ja-n d^han ko par-gi]
 quintal sky-DAT-LOC go-CP ONOM CP fall-LV-PRF-3SG-FEM

'Saying this (Lakshman) pulled that bow which was of hundred quintal weight and it having flown in the sky fell down with a loud thumping sound.' (R: 90)

A classic example of agreement mismatch is (13) and (14) for the very obvious reason that unmarked direct subject in nominative function triggers agreement on transitive verb in

perfective is violated. We can see that matching of feature occurs between direct object and verb, a pattern normally triggered by ergative marking in Hindi. We cannot say the same for Lambani since it is outrightly nominative-accusative system. What we can hypothesise at this point is, feminine non-human and inanimate arguments (whether in subject or object function) that are primarily borrowed lexical items, tend to block agreement on the verb; the more higher on the scale of non-masculine and non-human the lexical items are the stronger is the agreement violation. Secondly, in a contact situation between a source language, Kannada (Dravidian), that assigns neuter gender for nominal forms except those that correspond to natural gender and a target language, Lambani (Indo Aryan), that classifies its nouns into the binary -masculine and feminine- gender system, the latter when borrowing lexical items classifies them according to its gender system. (13) and (14) might not be appropriate examples for this explanation since *tar* ‘wire’ is part of native vocabulary but (15) is.

(13) [ram tar daba- i] ke-mel-o-to i
 ram string-FEM pull-PRF-3SG-FEM say-LV-PRF-PST.PRF-3SG-MAS he
 He (Lakshman) had said, “Ram pulled the string.” (R: 87 rec. 7:23)

(14) [b^hiya tar daba-i] [dek rama tar daba- i]
 brother string pull-PRF-3SG- FEM look rama string pull-PRF-3SG- FEM
 “See, brother (Ram) pulled the string of the bow.” (R: 90 rec. 7:31)

The subject in (15) is Lakshman (male character from Ramayana) who checks Shakuni’s (Ravana’s sister’s) horoscope as narrated in the discourse. Again deviating from the norm the verb *kaḍ* ‘take out’ inflects for feminine thereby disagreeing with the masculine gender of its controller subject Lakshman. The borrowed noun *k^hubsa* ‘horoscope’ if in the language is classed as feminine than the verb inflects for the same.

(15) jana wu ta-r jam-e war kãi se dek-nak-o
 then that you-GEN birth-OBL month what is see-PRF-3SG-MAS
 [kaḍ-i k^hubsa]
 take out-PRF-3SG-FEM horoscope-FEM
 ‘Then, he (Lakshman) took out her (Shakuni’s) horoscope to check her zodiac month.’
 (R: 149, rec. 13:13)

Similarly, when Kannada and Marathi word for ‘hour’ *tas* is borrowed into Lambani it is nativised as a feminine noun in the target language and hence the intransitive verb tends to inflect accordingly in agreement.

(16) ha mai go jo maṭi b^har a-y-e
 INTER inside go-PRF-3SG-MAS REL male out come-PRF-3PL

koni jaldi [tas dor tas we-gi]
 NEG quickly hour one and half hour be-LV-PRF-3SG-FEM

“Ha! That person (Lakshman) who went inside has not come out yet. It has been a long time.” (R: 220-221 rec. 18:20)

c^hi:ta ‘leopard’, *va:nar* ‘monkey’, and *magarmac^h* ‘crocodile’ in Hindi are masculine nouns whereas, in Kannada these animals get marked neuter. Lambani in the process of borrowing these items classify *c^hirata* ‘leopard’ as masculine on phonological ground, corresponding to -a masculine ending, *koṭi* ‘monkey’, and *masuḷi* ‘crocodile’ as feminine corresponding to -i feminine ending. These borrowed items once nativised in the target lexicon influences associated elements participating in the agreement to reflect the controller’s features on targets.

(17) yernai juko ek aḍḍa:diḍḍi (K) [c^hiṇata (K) kar-nak-o]
 like this REL 1 chaotic leopard-MAS do-PRF-3SG-MAS

‘Like the chaotic leopard who caused havoc.’ (R: 354 rec. 28: 10)

(18) aḍḍad (K) [ko:ṭi (K) a-wa-c^h ham-ar ek ṭoṭa-r
 chaotic monkey-FEM come-PRES-AUX-3SG 1PL-GEN 1 land-GEN

mai j^har hannə hamplə k^ha-ja-c^h an meḷbuḍa kar-de-taṇin
 inside tree fruits and likes eat-LV-AUX-3SG and mating do-LV-CP

ja-ri-c^ha]

go-PRO -FEM- AUX-3SG

‘A chaotic monkey comes to our farm, it eats fruits and likes and leaves after mating.’

(R: 351-355 rec. 28:16)

(19) ham-ar-e bagic^h-e me [ek ko:ṭi (K) a-mel-i-c^ha]
 we-GEN-OBL garden-OBL in 1 monkey-FEM come-LV-PRF-FEM-AUX-3SG

‘He began to say, “See brother, a monkey has come in our garden.”’ (R: 359 rec. 28:48)

(20) wət p^hĕk-te-k^hamat mina masa|j (K) k^ha-gi
 there throw-IMPRF-moment fish crocodile-FEM eat-LV-PRF-3SG-FEM

wo-nu-n

3PL-DAT

“While throwing (the sacks containing your husbands), fishes and corocodiles ate them.” (TBT: 175 rec.)

Agreement Defaulter in the Vicinity

Agreement mismatch is witnessed in other Indo Aryan languages such as the Urdu example given below. Here the irregularity is with the case system where the typical ergative agent is replaced by the nominative subject when the verb is perfect transitive.

(21) nadya kitab la-yi (Butt’s example)
 Nadya.F.Sg.Nom book. F.Sg.Nom bring-Perf.F.Sg
 ‘Nadya brought a book.’

Butt summerises with the statement “Our notion of quirky case is extremely restricted. Quirky case is used only when there is no regularity to be captured: the case assignment is truly exceptional to the system” (Butt, sec. 4.15: 13).

Another example is from Marwari spoken in Jaipur, Rajasthan where we observe an instance of split agreement pattern. In (22) the main verb in perfective agrees with the object in gender whereas the auxiliary agrees with the subject in person. Verbeke states “the pattern is crosslinguistically unusual...marginal, but is accepted by native speakers and used in recent literature” (2013: 216).

(22) mhaim̃ sītā=ne dekh-ī+h-ũm²
 I.M Sita[F]=OBJ see-PST.F.SG+AUX-PRS.1SG
 ‘I saw Sita.’

Conclusion

Irregularities in the form of mismatch in agreement occur cross-linguistically. While there are morphological theories explaining the cause of such mismatch in languages that have been extensively researched, it is difficult to come to a reasonable conclusion with scanty data in case of Lambani. On the surface, it is evident that contact and borrowing has led to such

² Magier’s example cited by Verbeke in *Alignment and Ergativity in New Indo Aryan* (2013: 216)

mismatch but there ought to be more dimensions that can account for the variation which requires in-depth research on the issue.

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