

Grammatical Gender: An Overview of Gender Assignment in Garhwali

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Abstract

This paper examines the grammatical gender assignment system in Garhwali using both phonological and semantic principles. In the semantic assignment rules, nouns for sex-differentiable male humans, male animals, and male deities in Garhwali are masculine, while the nouns for sex-differentiable female humans, female animals, and female deities are feminine. The assignment of all the nouns in the language to the two grammatical genders cannot be explained by these semantic assignment rules alone and results in a large residue of nouns which are also analyzed through the phonological assignment rules. Based on an empirical analysis, the author concludes that most nouns ending in front unrounded vowels in Garhwali are feminine except those ending in /i/. In contrast, the majority of those ending in back rounded vowels and the back unrounded vowel /a/ are masculine.

Keywords: Grammatical Gender, Gender Assignment, Indo-Aryan, Central Pahari, Garhwali.

Introduction

According to Hockett (1958:231), grammatical gender is defined as classes of nouns that are mirrored in the behaviour of related words. As stated by Corbett (1991: 1), this categorization of grammatical gender often, though not always, correlates to a real-world biological sex distinction, at least in part. Kramer (2020: 46) defines grammatical gender as the categorization of nouns into two or more classes based on criteria such as animacy, humanness, social gender for people, and/or biological sex for animals, or both, for at least some animate noun and reflected by agreement patterns on other elements in the clause. Therefore, agreement is a crucial concept in grammatical gender. The existence of grammatical gender and the number of genders in a language are proven by evidence of agreement, implying that grammatical gender depends on the form. However, grammatical gender has a “semantic core” (Aksenov 1984 cited in Corbett 1991) and is not solely dependent on form. As a result, even though their precise functions vary from language to language, gender is concerned with both form and meaning. Grammatical gender can be determined in certain languages solely by meaning, whereas in others, it can be determined by a combination of both meaning and form.

Gender Assignment

How do native speakers of a language determine the grammatical gender of hundreds of Nouns? Both linguists and non-linguists have always considered this subject to be intriguing. Corbett (1991: 7) states that native speakers are able to assign nouns a grammatical gender systematically. He offers three justifications for this. First, it is acceptable to presume that native speakers do not remember the nouns individually since else they would make more mistakes in gender usage. Second, words that have been acquired from other languages take on gender, demonstrating that gender may be assigned and not only remembered. Third, speakers assign invented words gender and do so with a high degree of precision. Native speakers are, therefore, able to assign grammatical gender to nouns in a systematic way.

In this paper, I will attempt to analyze the system of grammatical gender assignment in Garhwali in two ways- through its semantics and formal aspects. Traditional grammars of Garhwali and other linguistic works on the language simply state the existence of two genders, masculine and feminine, based on biological sex and as evident by their morphology and not through their agreement with other elements in the clause. This paper attempts to study the assignment of grammatical gender as defined in the previous section, including both semantic and formal aspects.

Semantic Assignment in Garhwali

As noted above, all languages have a semantic core to their gender assignment system, even if they may not always be conclusive. On analysis of Garhwali nouns, it becomes amply clear that semantic assignment rules alone are inconclusive to account for the assignment of all the nouns in the language. Based on my analysis, the semantic assignment rules in Garhwali may be described as follows:

Semantic Assignment Rule in Garhwali

1. All sex-differentiable nouns denoting male animates (male humans and male animals) and male deities are masculine.
2. All sex-differentiable nouns denoting female animates (female humans and female animals) and female deities are feminine.

Thus, words for male humans, male animals, and male deities are masculine in Garhwali, whereas those for female humans, female animals, and female deities are feminine. In addition, some inanimates, such as the sun and earth, are assigned a gender based on their mythological treatment as gods and goddesses. Accordingly, /sɔɾj/ 'Sun' is masculine, and /pɪɾtʰɪ/ 'Earth' is feminine.

These semantic rules leave us with a sizeable semantic residue of nouns whose assignment cannot be accounted for by strict semantic criteria. This residue consists of all inanimate nouns. The neuter gender is absent in Garhwali, unlike some other Indo-Aryan languages, which have preserved the three-gender system of their ancestral language Sanskrit.

All these nouns in the semantic residue are assigned one of the two genders in Garhwali, and their assignment criteria are based on formal rules, as we shall explore ahead.

Table 1: The semantic assignment of nouns in Garhwali

Masculine gender	Feminine gender
<i>male humans</i> E.g., /nɔnɔ/ ‘boy’ /mɛs/ ‘man’	<i>female humans</i> E.g., /nɔni/ ‘girl’ /kəʃʌn/ ‘woman/wife’
<i>male animals/birds/insects</i> E.g., /bəɖ/ ‘bull’ /kɔkɔr/ ‘dog’	<i>female animals/birds/insects</i> E.g., /gʰɔgʰɔʈi/ ‘Dove’ /bakʰri/ ‘she-goat’
<i>male deities</i> E.g., /bʰɛro/ ‘Bhairav’ /sɔɽ/ ‘Sun’	<i>female deities</i> E.g., /ləcʰmi/ ‘Lakshmi’ /kəlika/ ‘Kali’
Residue	
<i>all non-sex differentiable nouns</i> E.g., /cɔk/ ‘Courtyard’ /kɔʰar/ ‘Grain house’ /sari/ ‘field’ /kɔɽi/ ‘house’	

The residue in both these classes cannot be classified based on an additional semantic criterion, primarily because of the presence of ‘Variable Gender’ in Garhwali. Many animates (and inanimates) have words in both genders, irrespective of their biological gender. For instance, ‘Cow’ which is biologically female, has two words in Garhwali-/gɔɽɔ/ (grammatically masculine) and /gɔɽi/ (grammatically feminine). It is not possible through semantic criteria to account for the gender assignment of such words. It, therefore, requires a formal system based on morphological or phonological criteria to account for the assignment of all nouns comprehensively.

Formal Assignment

As we saw above, sex-differentiable nouns are assigned gender according to their semantic roles. However, in many languages, it is not possible to account for the assignment of all the nouns into genders solely on the basis of their meanings. Nouns that are not sex-differentiable are assigned gender on the basis of form resulting in a large number of nouns that fall outside the semantic assignment rules, and in such languages, it is imperative to identify those formal assignment rules (Corbett 1991). Corbett (1991) divides these rules into

morphological and phonological, the latter referring to just the segment and the former to the morphemes.

Phonological Assignment in Garhwali

It is generally known that in Indo-Aryan languages, phonological rules play a significant role in gender assignment, but this study aims to study it empirically.

To study the phonological assignment system of Garhwali in a limited time, I have employed the random sampling method by studying every tenth page of a dictionary written by native speakers (Purohit & Benjwal 2007) and classified all marked nouns on the basis of their last vowel. It is to be noted that Indo-Aryan languages have two types of nouns: nouns that have overt markers (suffixes) and nouns that have lost their suffixes in the course of the development of Modern Indo-Aryan languages from Old Indo-Aryan via Pali/Prakrit/Apabhramsa (Masica 1991). The latter end in a consonant, and the former usually has the same suffixes as their qualifiers in agreement. However, the gender assigned to certain nouns in the Modern Indo-Aryan languages is not the same as in Sanskrit.

To systematically analyze the assignment of nouns to grammatical genders in this study, I classified and analyzed all nouns that appear on every tenth page of this dictionary. As the dictionary labels every noun as masculine or feminine, I have used that as a benchmark to differentiate between them. I have omitted all the nouns that are marked as borrowed (usually from English and Persian) in the dictionary. This dictionary also includes, albeit with labels, words from the Jaunsari and Bhotia languages due to the authors' perception of these being varieties of Garhwali only. For the present study, I have omitted them since Bhotia is a group of Tibeto-Burman languages, and the claim of Jaunsari being a variety of Garhwali is disputed by some linguists, including Grierson (1904) who had classified it under West Pahari languages. Many borrowed Hindi-Urdu words have not been labelled as such in the dictionary. I have tried to identify and omit many such words from the data, but some might have been included in the data and can, thus, affect the results.

I separated the nouns ending in different vowels and listed them according to their endings. This gave me an actual breakup of the percentage of each such class representing masculine and feminine nouns ending in different vowels. It is to be noted that while classifying the words, I constantly marked the nouns with variable gender differently but did not segregate them from other nouns for the study of the assignment. They are easily identifiable in the dictionary since nouns with masculine and feminine forms are found nearby.

Although this method involves only ten percent of all nouns in the dictionary, it gives a fair idea of the language's assignment system, which can be further analyzed by studying all nouns in the dictionary, including those that end in a consonant, in the future.

The resulting data, segregated into masculine and feminine words with different endings, give an exact number of words that end in each vowel, which is shown below in the table and the chart:

Table 2: Distribution of Nouns ending in a vowel.

Final vowel	Total number	Number of masculine nouns	%Masculine	Number of feminine nouns	%Feminine
/u/	03	03	100	-	-
/o/	04	04	100	-	-
/ʊ/	144	142	98.61	02	1.39
/ɔ/	11	10	90.91	01	9.07
/a/	84	72	85.72	12	14.28
/i/	10	07	70	03	30
/ɛ/	15	02	13.33	13	86.66
/ɪ/	120	15	11.54	105	80.76
/e/	00	-	-	-	-

The resulting data shows a pattern of phonological assignment in this language. As the above table and chart show, all nouns that end in the vowels /u/ and /o/ are masculine, and a majority of nouns ending in /ʊ/, /a/, /i/, and /ɔ/ are also masculine. On the other hand, a majority of nouns that end in /ɪ/ and /ɛ/ are feminine, and no nouns end in /e/.

It is suitable to make generalizations about the Garhwali gender assignment on the basis of the above data. However, it has its limitations and may be better enforced by a detailed study involving all nouns in the dictionary in the future.

Almost all nouns ending in a back rounded vowel (/ʊ/, /u/, /o/, and /ɔ/) are masculine, with just three feminine exceptions. With 85.72%, most nouns ending in back unrounded vowel /a/ are also masculine, although the demarcation here is less sharp; the exceptions are 14.28% which are feminine. A majority of nouns ending in front unrounded vowels (/i/ and /ɛ/) are feminine, although those ending in /i/ are exceptions to this pattern. 70% of nouns ending in /i/ are masculine as opposed to 30%, which are feminine. I did not encounter any noun ending in the consonant /e/. Also interesting is the fact that masculine nouns end in almost all the vowels; the space of feminine nouns is limited since there is no feminine noun ending in the vowels /u/, /e/, and /o/ in the data and only two of them end in /ʊ/ and just one ends in /ɔ/. Thus, almost no noun ending in back rounded vowels is feminine, making it the exclusive space of masculine nouns. In concrete numbers, a significant number of all nouns end in the three vowels /a/, /ɪ/, and /ʊ/- 144 alone in /ʊ/, 130 in /ɪ/ and 84 in /a/.

In the case of feminine nouns, it is clear that their dominant form is with the ending /ɪ/, as very few nouns (in concrete numbers) end in /ɛ/. Nouns that end in /a/ may occur in either

masculine or feminine, even though a majority of them are also masculine. The distribution of feminine nouns ending in a vowel is represented as a pie chart in Figure 1.

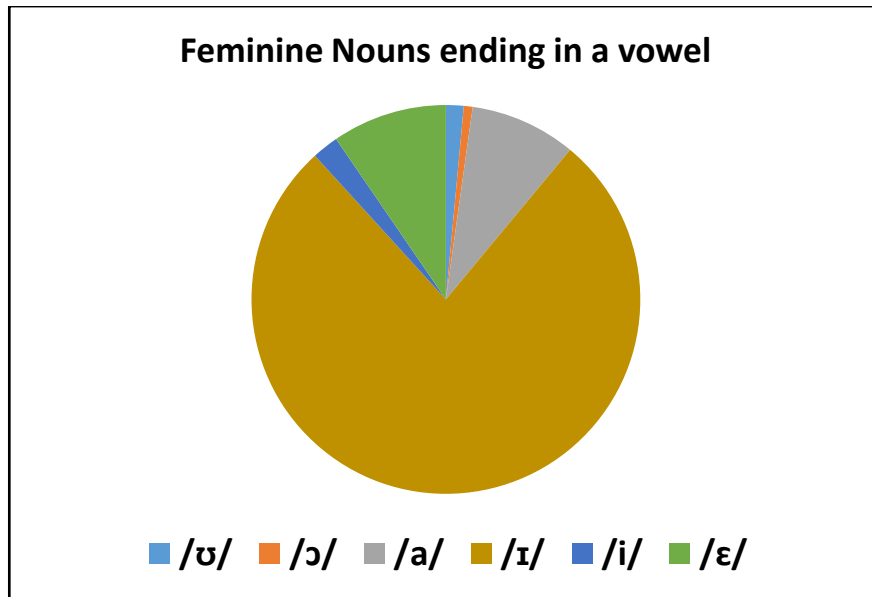


Figure 1: Distribution of feminine nouns ending in a vowel in Garhwali

In the case of masculine nouns, the form ending in /ʊ/ seems to be the dominant pattern. That this pattern is indeed the dominant pattern is also reinforced by the study of foreign words, which are adapted into Garhwali by adding /ʊ/ in the masculine and /ɪ/ in the feminine. Also, as the previous section shows, most sex-differentiable masculine nouns end in /ʊ/. The distribution of masculine nouns ending in a vowel is represented as a pie chart in Figure 2.

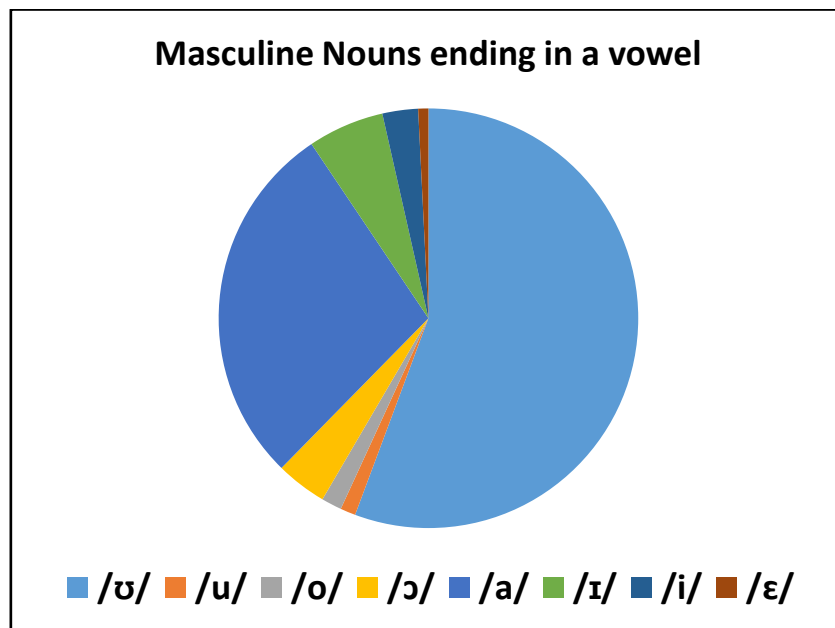


Figure 2: Distribution of masculine nouns ending in a vowel in Garhwali

Thus, the dominant pattern frequently attested is the masculine noun usually ending in /ʊ/ and the feminine noun ending in /i/. Such words form around 63.17% of all nouns ending in vowels. In masculine nouns, 55.68% end in /ʊ/, whereas 44.32% end in other vowels. In feminine nouns, a whopping 77.20% end in /i/, and just 22.80% end in other vowels. I call this basic form of masculine words ending in /ʊ/ and feminine words ending in /i/ the dominant pattern. 63.17% of all nouns ending in a vowel are regular, i.e., confirm the dominant pattern.

Thus, on the basis of the above results, the complete assignment system in Garhwali can be generalized by the following phonological rules, albeit with some exceptions:

Phonological Assignment in Garhwali

1. All nouns ending in back rounded vowels are masculine.
2. Most nouns ending in the back unrounded vowel /a/ are also masculine.
3. Most of the nouns ending in front unrounded vowels are feminine except those ending in /i/.

A limitation of this study is that these phonological rules are not exhaustive and have some exceptions. Nevertheless, they give an idea about the system of grammatical gender assignment in Garhwali. A more detailed study involving a more extensive data set can shed more light on this system. Since the Garhwali speakers are almost certainly bilingual in Hindi, it is difficult to segregate native and borrowed words, many of which are frequently used by the speakers. Another factor that I believe limits the result of this study is the regional variation; a dictionary collects words from various varieties of the language, and some varieties on the periphery may have more borrowed words from their neighbouring languages. Nevertheless, this study presents interesting empirical evidence to analyze the system of grammatical gender assignment in Garhwali.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have analyzed the system of grammatical gender assignment in Garhwali in two ways- through semantic rules and phonological rules. The semantic assignment rules in Garhwali that we have arrived at are that nouns referring to sex-differentiable animates (male humans, male animals) and male deities are masculine, whereas the nouns referring to sex-differentiable animates (female humans, female animals) and female deities are feminine. The semantic assignment rules alone are inconclusive to account for the assignment of all the nouns in the language. Based on this study, the phonological assignment rules in Garhwali are that all nouns ending in back rounded vowels are masculine; most of the nouns ending in back unrounded vowel /a/ are also masculine; and most of the nouns ending in front unrounded vowels are feminine except those ending in /i/.

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