Gender Reflection in Number Markers:
A Case of Hindi Disyllabic Words and their Gendered Behavior

Sweta Sinha, Ph.D.
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Abstract

The concept of gender is much more complex than what it appears to be and when it is investigated through the lens of language the interrelationship appears to be both implicit as well as explicit. The present research is an attempt to reinstate the profound agreement between gender and number in Hindi (an Indo- Aryan) language with an aim to highlight the gendered behavior of numbers in this language. The investigational framework was based on three-hypotheses: (a) gender bias in Hindi being both implicit as well as explicit; (b) gender bias is observed in gender and number interaction and (c) nouns with (+ Male attribute) do not take on as many overt affixes as nouns with (+ Female attributes). Around fifty disyllabic words were chosen as part of the first phase of study in this area and they were categorized based on (+Male/ +Female), (+Human/ -Human) and (+Countable/ -Countable) attributes. Nouns with (-Human) attribute were further categorized on the basis of (+/- Animacy). Analysis of data not only established the validity of the hypotheses but it has also opened up new area of research where more studies can be carried out to investigate gender influenced morphological behavior in languages.

Keywords: Pluralization; Number Markers; Hindi; Gender and Language; Hindi Words; Disyllabic

1. Introduction

Sex is the biological characteristic of human and animals. Except for the hermaphrodites, all the living organisms (humans and animals) have distinct sexual classification of male and

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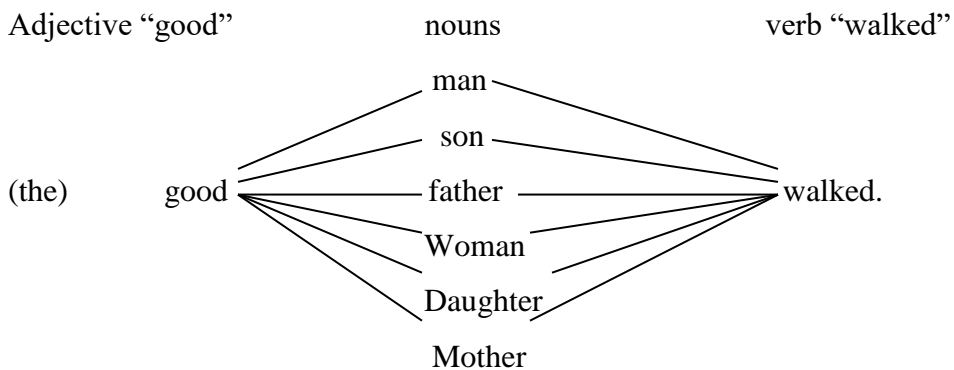Behavior   332

female. Non- living objects, therefore, are asexual. The concept of gender is much more complex than this because the culture has a lot of impact on gender assignment to almost all possible living/ non- living things under the sky. In languages with gender all nouns are categorized into either three groups (as in Sanskrit) or two (as in Hindi). The two genders that exist in all languages are "masculine" and "feminine". The third gender is called "neuter". In languages like English gender agreement is not manifested on verbs and adjectives but in Hindi the agreement is more profound. The present research is an attempt to reinstate the profound agreement between gender and number in Hindi with an aim to highlight the gendered behavior of numbers in this language.

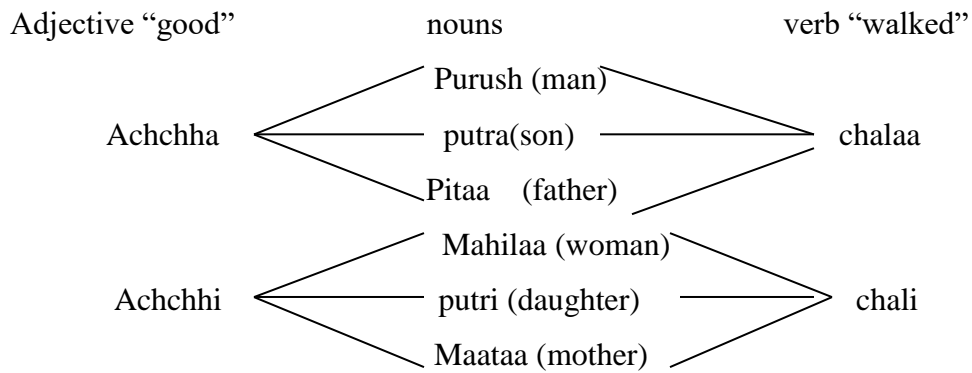This investigation is undertaken on the basis of the following three hypotheses.

(a) Hindi not only manifests its gendered bias explicitly but implicitly as well.

(b) Gender bias is observed in the interaction between gender and number.

(c) The affixation for pluralization is the maximum for nouns with + Female attribute compared to nouns with + Male attribute.

But before proceeding with the investigation let us first understand the dichotomy between noun- verb- adjective agreement in English and Hindiwith the help of the following examples.

a. English

Adjective "good"   nouns   verb "walked"

                                    man
                                    son
(the)   good   father   walked.
                                    Woman
                                    Daughter
                                    Mother

b. Hindi

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Adjective "good"            nouns            verb "walked"
                        Purush (man)
        Achchha         putra(son)          chalaa
                        Pitaa   (father)
                        Mahilaa (woman)
        Achchhi         putri (daughter)    chali
                        Maataa (mother)
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In (a) the adjective and verb are free from gender agreement. However, in (b) the adjective and the verb have to agree with the gender of the noun for permissible syntactic framework.

Linguists use existence of agreement as a criterion to judge whether a language has gender. Although a language shows that there is some categorization of nouns into groups, but there is no agreement according to the groups of nouns, the language is considered as a language without gender (Zubin, 1992; Dixon, 1986; Corbett, 1991). Categorization of nouns into genders is a phenomenon found in some languages, Hindi being one of them. According to (Charoonrojn, 1997) gender in grammar seems to be more important for Hindi speakers than sex in reality.

1.1 Literature Review

Corbett (1991) distinguished between languages with *semantic gender system* and languages with a *formal gender system.* In the first category are languages such as English and Chinese where gender is encoded in the linguistic elements only for the referents having biological sex. In the second category are Romance languages including Hindi. In these languages, according to (Vigliocco and Franck 1999) all nouns are marked for gender, either masculine or feminine. If the nouns refer to an entity with biological sex, then the gender feature of the noun will depend on whether the speaker wants to talk about a male or female entity in a manner analogous to number features. However, for nouns referring to objects, for which gender is not a semantic property, the gender of the noun is not assigned on the basis of the speaker's

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intention but stored in the lexicon as an inherent property of the lemma (Vigliocco, Antonini& Garrett, 1997).

Gumperz (1958) argued for the consideration of various variables in his study of Hindi dialects like caste, place of residence, religion, informal contacts and occupation. He also brought the notion of "context" but gender took a backseat. The field of language and gender did not really emerge until after the publication Lakoff's "Language and the Woman's Place" in 1973. In the feminist analysis of sexist language (e.g. Valentine, 1987) and the pragmatic analysis of terms of address, pronoun choice, greetings, and kinship terminology (e.g. Jain 1969, 1973; Khubchandani 1978; Mehrotra 1977, 1985a, 1985b; Vatuk 1969a, 1969b; Misra 1977), we do find a few discussions of gender as a grammatical and as a social catgory.

Standard Hindi exhibits two way gender system (Hall &Bucholtz, 1995) and the alternation between feminine and masculine reference in standard Hindi is quite easy to discern linguistically. Nominals exhibit both a two gender system of masculine and feminine as well as two- way number system of singular and plural. Hindi nominal forms are classified as either direct (nominative) or oblique (non- nominative), with the latter normally signaled by the presence of a postposition.

Studies on Hindi noun phrases (NP's) have revealed that they are generic, definite and indefinite as noted by (Verma 1966; Potterfield&Srivastav 1988 and Mohanan 1990). Hindi marks number morphologically but there is a lacuna when one tries to establish the agreement between number and gender to the extent that the gendered behavior of the language gets reflected in the number markings.

1.2 Gender Markers in Hindi - An Overview

Just like Hindi, Italian nouns are also always marked for gender (either masculine or feminine). However, in Italian the masculine words end in –o, while feminine words end in –a. In Hindi, for those masculine words that end in –a their feminine forms end in –i.

Hindi masculine	Gloss	Hindi feminine	Gloss
a. larka	boy	larki	girl
b. gadhaa	donkey	gadhi	female donkey
c. maamaa	maternal uncle	maami	maternal aunty
d. daadaa	paternal grandfather	daadi	paternal grandmother
e. burhaa	old	burhi	old

However, apart from –i inflectional suffix, -in, -ni or –aani are also used to represent female entity as in

Hindi masculine	Gloss	Hindi feminine	Gloss
f. baagh	tiger	baaghin	tigress
g. haathi	elephant	hathni	female elephant
h. sher	lion	sherni	lioness
i. naukar	servant	naukaraani	maid servant
j. mahaaraaj	emperor	mahaaraani	empress

It must be brought to light at this point that the –i marker is not only used as the female gender marker but is also used to denote the diminutives or the inferior/ smaller entities as in

k. dabbaa	big box	dabbi	small box
l. rassa	thick rope	rassi	thin rope
m. chaar	rod	chhari	stick
n. lath	thick stick	laathi	thin stick
o. pattaa	leaf	patti	leaflet

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A look at the data presented above clearly indicates that gender is a complex phenomenon in Hindi and seems to be very intrinsic and implicit in relation to morphology and subsequent agreement.

1.3 Hindi Disyllabic Words

All the nouns in the language are assigned either of the two genders. The nouns belong to various categories having binary attributes like +/- Human/ +Male or +Female/ +/- countable and the following analysis tries to investigate the relation between the singularity or plurality of nouns of each of these categories through the lens of gender for Hindi disyllabic words. The – Human category is further subdivided into +/- animate. Plural formation for oblique cases is not considered in this investigation as obliqueness is quite uniform across all categories.

A. +Human/ +Masculine/ +Countable

Singular	Plural	Gloss for singular
1. pati	pati	huband
2. maalik	maalik	master
3. dhobi	dhobi	washerman
4. purush	purush	man
5. sakha	sakha	friend

In A (1-5) there is no change or no overt difference between the singular and plural forms of this category of nouns except for oblique markers which is not being investigated for present study.

B. –Human/ +Masculine/ +Countable/+ Animate

Singular	Plural	Gloss for singular
1. bandar	Bandar	monkey
2. haathi	haathi	elephant
3. bhaalu	bhaalu	bear

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4. chitaa	chite	leopard
5. ghoraa	ghore	horse

In B (1-3) again there is no separate marker for plurality, however, for B (4-5) there is a systematic change where the word final [a] changes to [e].

C. –Human/ + Masculine/ +Countable/ -Animate

Singular	Plural	Gloss for singular
1. paudhaa	paudhe	plant
2. jhumkaa	jhumke	ear ring
3. chaaku	chaaku	knife
4. kangan	kangan	bangle
5. dholak	dholak	an Indian musical instrument

In C (1-2) the word final [a] changes to [e] but for other vowel/ consonant endings there is no difference at all.

D. –Human/ +Masculine/ - Countable/ -Animate

Singular	Plural	Gloss for singular
1. paani	paani	water
2. baadal	baadal	cloud
3. kaagaz	kaagaz	paper
4. jangal	jangal	forest
5. taaraa	tare	star

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In D(1-4) there is no morphological difference between the singular and the plural forms, however, for (5) the word- final [a] changes to [e].

E. +Human/ +Feminine/ +Countable

Singular	Plural	Gloss for singular
1. maami	maamiyaaN	maternal aunt
2. patni	patniyaaN	wife
3. dhobin	dhobineN	washerwoman
4. aurat	aurateN	woman
5. sakhi	sakhiyaaN	female friend

All [i] ending words take on [yaaN] suffix while in elsewhere condition the word take [eN] suffix.

F. +Human/ +Feminine/ +Countable +Animate

Singular	Plural	Gloss for singular
1. bandariyaa	bandariyaaN	female monkey
2. hathni	hathniyaaN	female elephant
3. ghori	ghoriyaaN	mare
4. titli	titaliyaaN	female butterfly
5. machhli	machhaliyaaN	female fish

In F(1-5) the [yaaN] suffix marks the pluralization. Interestingly, the feminine counterpart of A (3-4) does not occur except for the following forms:

6. bhaalu	nar bhaalu	maadaa bhaalu
Male bear	male bear	female bear
7. chitaa	nar chitaa	maadaa chitaa

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Male leopard   male leopard   female leopard

In order to depict the females of these animals, mere suffixation does not suffice. The generic nomenclature points out the male species while an overt female marker added to the generic terms represents the female species.

G. –Human/ +Feminine/ +Countable/ - Animate

Singular		Plural	Gloss for singular
1.	churi	churiyaaN	bangle
2.	murti	murtiyaaN	statue
3.	kalam	kalameN	pen
4.	kitaab	kitaabeN	book
5.	saaikal	saaikaleN	bicycle

One can see that in G (1-2) [yaaN] suffix is added while elsewhere [eN] suffix is added to the stem.

H. –Human/ +Feminine/ - Countable/ -Animate

Singular		Plural	Gloss for singular
1.	aawaaz	awaazeN	voice
2.	kalaa	kalaaeN	art
3.	duaa	duaaeN	prayer
4.	raushni	raushniyaaN	light

In H(1-3) the suffix that has been added is [eN] and in H(4) [yaaN] has been used as the suffix.

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1.4 Inference

A close look at the data from A to F indicates the various types of suffixes that are used to make plurals in various categories of nouns. Interestingly, Hindi not only shows gendered behavior in gender- number interaction but this preliminary study also supports a patriarchal touch to the language. The very fact that nouns of category A (+Human/ + Masculine/ + Countable) do not take on any overt marker for pluralization in disyllabic words is not surprising in isolation but the nouns of category E (+Human/ +Feminine/+Countable) are always suffixed in their plural derivation gives the entire study a very sociological dimension. The interplay of language and gender is so profound and implicit that new angles of study need to be devised to account for the phenomenon holistically. The research began based on three hypotheses. The data and its analysis support and validate the hypotheses.

1.5 Conclusion

Language is one of the most powerful tools that can influence human mind and culture. Society's distinction between men and women is reflected in its language. It is realized that there are distinct "languages" that are used by men and women separately. Consequently, the society's perceptions and stereotypes are reflected through the language associated with men and women, and in the varied ways the two genders use language. Gender differences in Hindi language use and perception is so wide that it affects the self- identity of the genders (Sinha & Sharma 2015). Every language reflects the prejudices of the society in which it evolved and as the patriarchal control over the society prevailed for a long time, the language has been organized with male-centric views. Gender neutral language has gained support from most major textbook publisher and from professional and academic groups like American Psychological Association and the Associated Press. (Romaine, 1999) At present, many law journals, psychology journals and literature journals do not print articles that use gendered language. India has still not fully awakened to this issue. Primarily, a lack of gender discrimination consciousness and awareness plays a sinister role in this case.

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