

Language Contact and Morpho-Syntactic Change in Bajjika: A Sociolinguistic Study of Auxiliary Verb Variation

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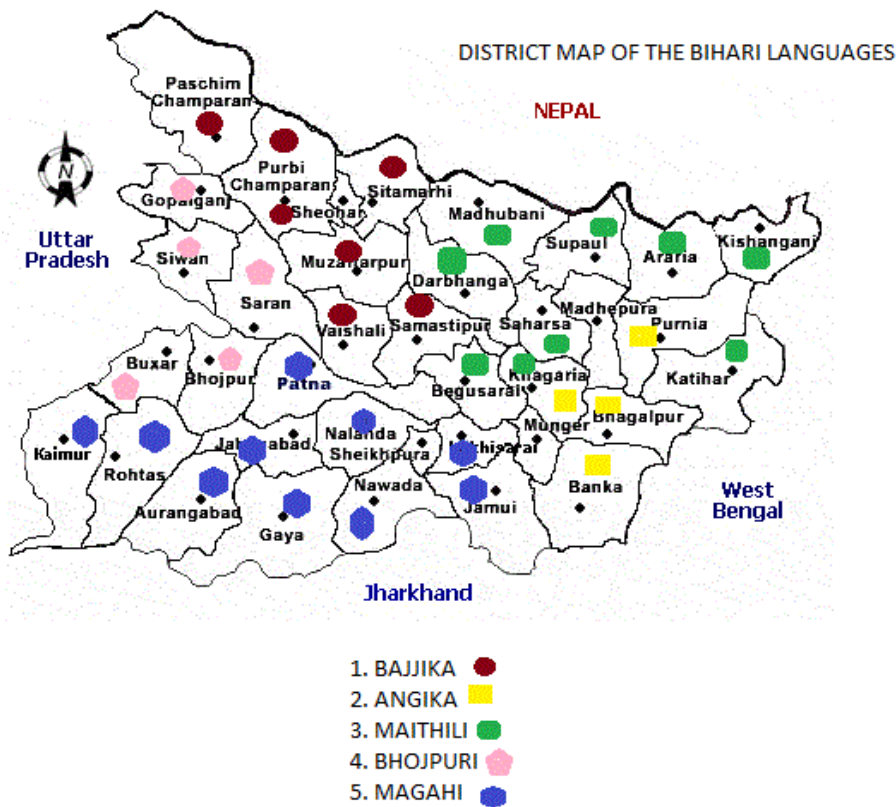
Abstract

This study examines the impact of language contact on morpho-syntactic change in Bajjika, a minority language spoken in the north-western districts of Bihar, India. Specifically, we investigate the adoption of the Bhojpuri auxiliary verb *hawe* in Bajjika, and its implications for language variation and change. Our analysis is based on a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data from 12 speakers across four age groups. The findings suggest that language contact with Bhojpuri has led to the diffusion of new auxiliary verb forms in Bajjika, particularly among adult speakers. Interestingly, our data reveal a conflict-driven motivation for this language change, with Bajjika speakers adopting Bhojpuri forms as a means of distancing themselves from Maithili, a language closely associated with the Brahmin castes in Bihar. Our study contributes to a nuanced understanding of language contact, variation, and change, and highlights the complex interplay between social, cultural, and linguistic factors in shaping language use.

Keywords: Language Contact, Morpho-Syntactic Change, Bajjika, Bhojpuri, Maithili, Auxiliary Verb Variation, Sociolinguistics

INTRODUCTION

Bajjika, a minority language spoken in the north-western districts of Bihar, India, and adjacent areas in Nepal, has long been a subject of debate regarding its linguistic status. Classified as a dialect of Maithili by some (Grierson, 1903; Ethnologue, Lewis et al., 2013), Bajjika has also been recognized as an independent language in Nepal's national censuses (2001, 2011) and accorded national language status through the Constitution of Nepal (2015). Despite its significant speaker population of around 15 million, Bajjika remains marginalized, lacking institutional and educational recognition in India.



This paper aims to contribute to the understanding of Bajjika's linguistic dynamics, exploring the morpho-syntactic changes that have occurred in the language over time, particularly in the context of language contact with neighboring languages, including Angika, Maithili, Bhojpuri, and Magahi. By examining the social motivations underlying these changes, this study seeks to shed light on the complex interplay between language, identity, and power in the Bajjika speech community.

Through a quantitative and qualitative analysis of language use across different age groups, this research investigates the extent to which Bajjika has undergone morpho-syntactic changes, and the social factors driving these changes. The findings of this study will not only enhance our understanding of Bajjika's linguistic structure and sociolinguistic context but also contribute to the broader discussion on language contact, variation, and change in multilingual societies.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Language variation in Bajjika, a minority language spoken in the north-western districts of Bihar, India, and adjacent areas in Nepal, has been a subject of interest among linguists and sociolinguists. This review aims to provide an overview of the existing literature on language variation in Bajjika, highlighting the key findings, methodologies, and gaps in the current research.

Early Studies

Early studies on Bajjika language focused on its linguistic classification and dialectology. Grierson (1903) classified Bajjika as a dialect of Maithili, while other linguists, such as Chatterji (1926),

recognized it as a distinct language. These early studies laid the foundation for further research on Bajjika language and its variation.

Sociolinguistic Studies

Sociolinguistic studies on Bajjika language have explored its variation in relation to social factors such as caste, age, and education. For example, a study by Arun (1972) found that Bajjika speakers from different castes exhibited distinct linguistic features. Similarly, a study by Prasad (2000) revealed that age and education were significant factors influencing language variation in Bajjika.

Language Contact and Variation

Language contact has been identified as a significant factor influencing language variation in Bajjika. Studies have shown that Bajjika has undergone significant changes due to contact with other languages, such as Maithili, Bhojpuri, and Hindi (Kashyap, 2014; Singh, 2017). For example, a study by Singh (2017) found that Bajjika speakers had adopted linguistic features from Bhojpuri, particularly in the domains of vocabulary and grammar.

My earlier work(Kumar, 2024c) provides a nuanced understanding of the impact of dialect contact on language structure and highlights the importance of considering social factors in the analysis of language change. This study is a valuable resource for scholars and researchers interested in language contact, dialectology, and sociolinguistics

Gaps in the Current Research

Despite the existing research on language variation in Bajjika, there are several gaps that need to be addressed. Firstly, most studies have focused on the linguistic aspects of language variation, with little attention paid to the social and cultural contexts in which language is used. Secondly, there is a need for more empirical research on language variation in Bajjika, particularly in the context of language contact and change. Finally, there is a need for more interdisciplinary research that draws on insights from linguistics, anthropology, and sociology to understand the complex dynamics of language variation in Bajjika.

In conclusion, the existing literature on language variation in Bajjika language highlights the complex and dynamic nature of language use in this minority language community. While significant progress has been made in understanding the linguistic aspects of language variation, there is a need for more research that takes into account the social and cultural contexts of language use. By addressing the gaps in the current research, future studies can provide a more nuanced understanding of language variation in Bajjika and its implications for language documentation, preservation, and education.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods to collect and analyze data. The research design involved a combination of:

1. **Archival research:** The study utilized Grierson's Linguistic Survey of India (1903) as a primary source for old data.

2. **Fieldwork:** Recent data on Bajjika was collected in 2019 through interviews and recordings of conversations with 12 speakers from four age groups.
3. **Experimental design:** Perception tests were conducted to gather data on speakers' perceptions.
4. **Survey research:** Questionnaires with basic Hindi sentences were administered to 12 speakers for translation into Bajjika.

Data Collection Methods

The study employed the following data collection methods:

1. **Transliteration and glossing:** Grierson's data was transliterated and glossed with the guidance of experts.
2. **Audio recordings:** Conversational data was collected through audio recordings of interviews and conversations.
3. **Transcription:** Audio recordings were transcribed using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).
4. **Elan software:** Elan software was used for glossing and annotating the transcribed data.
5. **Questionnaires:** Questionnaires were administered to collect data on speakers' translations of Hindi sentences into Bajjika.

Sampling Strategy

The study employed a non-probability sampling strategy, selecting 12 speakers from four age groups:

1. Old speakers (60-70 years): 3 speakers
2. Middle-aged speakers (40-50 years): 3 speakers
3. Adult speakers (18-35 years): 2 speakers
4. Younger speakers (14-18 years): 2 speakers
5. Children (8-12 years): 2 speakers

Data Analysis Methods

The study employed the following data analysis methods:

1. **Qualitative analysis:** Conversational data was analyzed qualitatively to identify patterns and trends.
2. **Quantitative analysis:** Perception test data was analyzed quantitatively to identify statistical patterns.
3. **Software analysis:** Saymore, Elan, and Goldvarb software were used to analyze and annotate the data.

Limitations

The study has several limitations:

1. **Small sample size:** The sample size of 12 speakers may not be representative of the entire Bajjika-speaking population.
2. **Limited geographical scope:** The study only focused on Vaishali and Muzaffarpur districts of Bihar.
3. **Dependence on archival data:** The study relied heavily on Grierson's Linguistic Survey of India (1903), which may not reflect the current linguistic situation.

MORPHO-SYNTACTIC VARIATION IN AUXILIARY VERB SELECTION

The paper examines the morpho-syntactic variation in the selection of auxiliary verbs in Bajjika, a dialect of Maithili. Specifically, it investigates the variation between three auxiliary verb forms: *ha*, *hawe*, and *chh*.

Historical Context

Grierson's (1903-28) Linguistic Survey of India provides the historical context for the study. According to Grierson, the *ha* form of the auxiliary verb had the widest scope, occurring in various contexts and construction types, including:

1. Copular constructions: Equative and Existential constructions
2. Auxiliary verb constructions: Progressive and Perfective constructions

In contrast, the *hawe* form was restricted to Equative Copular constructions, while the *chh* form was used as a copular verb and auxiliary verb in various constructions.

Current Trends

The study reveals that the usage patterns of these auxiliary verb forms have changed over time. Specifically:

1. *Hawe*: Emerged as a competitive form, replacing *chh* in various construction types.
2. *Chh*: Restricted to Present Progressive construction in Western Maithili.

Copular construction

Je kuchh hammar hawe se toh-ar chh-au. (Specimen 16, Grierson 1903)

Whatever Mine be-AUX that your be-AUX-1.S

‘Whatever is mine is yours.’

Imperfective/Progressive

Ham bhukh-e mar-ai chh-i (Grierson 1903)

Ham bhukh sa marai-chh-i.

I hunger-From die-PROG-AUX-1.S

‘I am dying from hunger.’

Ham bhukh-e mar-ait-ha-t-i. (Specimen 16, Grierson 1903)

I hunger-From die-PROG-AUX-1.S

‘I am dying from hunger.’

Implications

The study's findings have implications for our understanding of language change and variation. The shift in usage patterns of auxiliary verb forms reflects the dynamic nature of language and the influence of social and linguistic factors on language use.

Research Questions

The study raises several research questions, including:

1. What social and linguistic factors have contributed to the changes in auxiliary verb usage?
2. How do these changes reflect the broader linguistic and cultural context of Bajjika speakers?

The study provides a nuanced understanding of morpho-syntactic variation in auxiliary verb selection in Bajjika. The findings highlight the importance of considering language change and variation in the context of social and linguistic factors:

Table: 1 (Linguistic Constraints on be-Forms)

Linguistic Constraints on be-Forms (Grierson 1903)				
Person	Chh(9)	Ha(13)	Hawe(2)	total
1 st	Chh-I (4) 80%	Hat-i (1) 20%	- 0%	5
2 nd	Chh-e(4) 80%	Hat-e (1) 20%	- 0%	5
3 rd	Chh-ai(1) 7%	h-ai (11) 79%	Hawe(2) 14%	14
Linguistic Constraints on be-Forms in 2019				
	Chh(55)	Ha(205)	Hawe(94)	Total
1 st	Chh-I (20) 29%	Hat-i(50) 71%	- 0%	70
2 nd	Chh-e (20) 17%	Hat-e(54) 47%	Hawe(40) 35%	114
3 rd	Chh-ai (15) 9%	h-ai (101) 59%	Hawe(54) 32%	170

Table 2: Major Shifts in Auxiliary Verb Usage

Functions of be forms (based on texts in Grierson, 1903)

	<i>Chh(9)</i>	<i>Ha(13)</i>	<i>Hawe(2)</i>	<i>Total</i>
Aux	(6)	(8)	0	14
Pres. Prog.	(5) 71%	(2) 29%	0 0%	7
Pres. Perf.	(1) 14%	(6) 86%	0 0%	7
Copula	(3)	(6)	(2)	11
Equative	(3) 33%	(4) 44%	(2) 22%	9
Exist.	0 0%	(2) 100%	0 0%	2

Functions of be forms based on Apparent Time Data (2019)

	<i>Chh(55)</i>	<i>Ha(205)</i>	<i>Hawe(94)</i>	<i>354</i>
Aux	55	125	54	234
Pres. Prog.	(55) 27.5%	(95) 47.5%	(50) 25%	200
Pres. Perf.	(0) 0%	(30) 88%	(4) 12%	34
Copula	0 0%	(40) 78%	(15) 22%	55
Equative	0 0%	(22) 71%	(9) 29%	31
Exist.	0 0%	(18) 75%	(6) 25%	24

Over the years, the usage of auxiliary verbs in Bajjika has undergone significant changes. The following shifts have been observed:

1. Loss of Copular Use of Chh

The auxiliary verb form "chh" has lost its copular use, which was previously documented by Grierson (1903). This shift indicates a reduction in the functional scope of "chh".

2. Restriction of Chh to Present Progressive

Concurrently, the use of "chh" has been restricted to the present progressive construction. This restriction suggests that "chh" has become more specialized in its usage.

3. Emergence of Hawe as a Competitive Form

The auxiliary verb form "hawe" has emerged as a competitive form, expanding its usage beyond its previously restricted copular construction. This development indicates a shift in the linguistic preferences of Bajjika speakers.

4. Extension of Hawe to Non-Copular Constructions

Grierson (1903) noted that "hawe" was restricted to copular constructions. However, current usage patterns reveal that "hawe" has extended its scope to non-copular constructions, increasing its functional versatility.

5. Stability of Ha in Copular and Non-Copular Constructions

In contrast to the shifts observed in "chh" and "hawe", the auxiliary verb form "hai" has remained stable in both its copular and non-copular uses. This stability suggests that "hai" has maintained its established functional role in Bajjika.

These shifts in auxiliary verb usage reflect the dynamic nature of language and the adaptability of Bajjika speakers to changing linguistic and social contexts.

VARIATION IN BE FORMS IN IMPERFECTIVE/PROGRESSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS

Research Focus

This paper focuses on the variation in be forms in Imperfective/Progressive constructions, which exhibit significant variability across different generations of speakers.

Significance of Imperfective/Progressive Constructions

Imperfective/Progressive constructions are a crucial area of investigation, as they demonstrate a high degree of variability in the use of be forms among speakers of different age groups.

Variability Across Generations

The data reveals that different generations of speakers exhibit distinct preferences for specific be forms in Imperfective/Progressive constructions. This variation suggests that language change is underway, with younger speakers potentially driving the shift towards new forms.

Research Questions

The study raises several research questions, including:

1. What are the specific be forms used in Imperfective/Progressive constructions by different generations of speakers?
2. What are the social and linguistic factors contributing to the variation in be forms across generations?

3. How do these changes reflect the broader linguistic and cultural context of Bajjika speakers?

Expected Outcomes

The study aims to provide a detailed understanding of the variation in be forms in Imperfective/Progressive constructions, shedding light on the dynamics of language change and the role of social and linguistic factors in shaping linguistic preferences:

Table 3. Extra-Linguistics Factors to understand the Variation

Age-group	<i>Ha</i>	<i>Chh</i>	<i>Hawe</i>	Total
Children	(23) 46%	(14) 28%	(13) 26%	50
Adolescents	(24) 48%	(10) 20%	(16) 32%	50
Adults	(28) 56%	(7) 14%	(15) 30%	50
Middle Gen.	22 44%	20 40%	8 16%	50
Old Gen.	20 40%	24 48%	6 12%	50
Total tokens	117 47%	75 30%	58 23%	250

SUMMARY

The analysis of the data reveals an interesting trend in the usage of the be-forms *ha*, *hawe*, and *chhai* across different age groups. While *ha* has remained stable, *hawe* has shown a significant increase in frequency over the past century, and *chhai* has declined in usage.

Driving Forces Behind the Trend

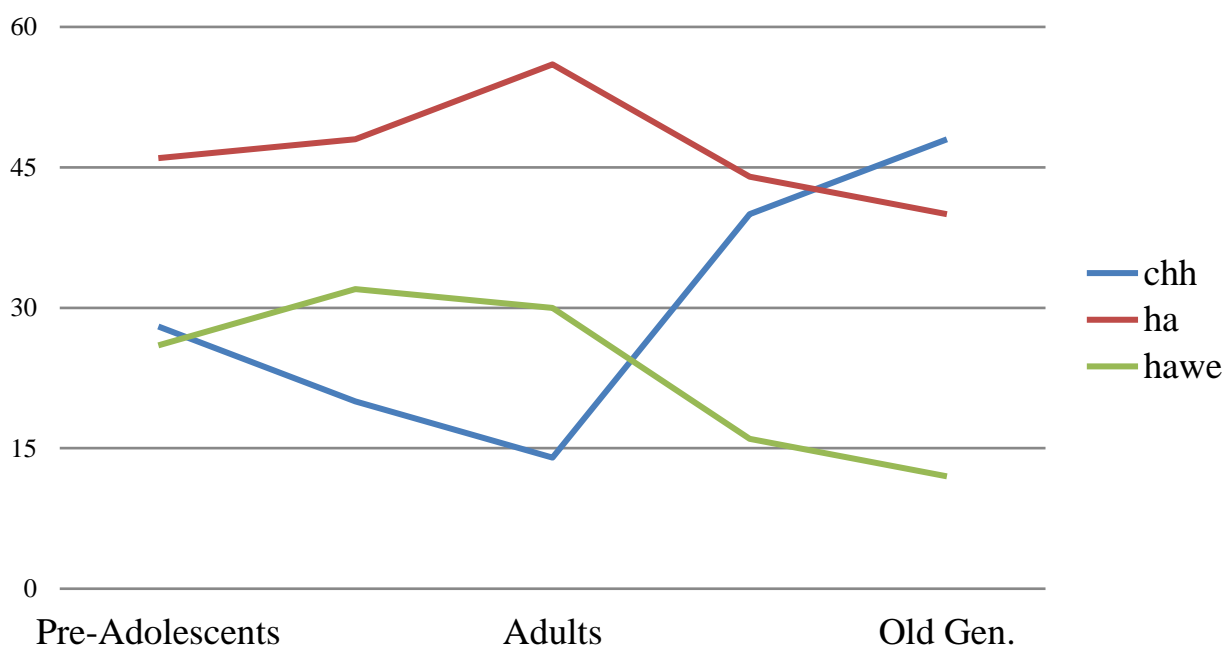
Several factors contribute to this trend:

- 1. Emergence of Vajji Identity:** The Western Maithili speaking regions have developed a new Vajji identity, leading to a breakaway from the old Mithilanchal identity. This shift in identity may be driving the increase in *hawe* usage.
- 2. Social Networks and Language Contact:** Adult traders, who establish wide social networks within and outside their community, are leading the use of *hawe*. Their contact with Bhojpuri speakers through trade and migration may be influencing their language use.

3. **Education and Urbanization:** The growth of Hajipur and Muzaffarpur as educational centers has led to an influx of youths from neighboring areas, potentially contributing to language change.

Dominance of Ha(i)

Despite the changes in usage patterns, hai remains the most dominant be-form among the three variants. Its widespread use in the 20th century has continued to the present day. The analysis highlights the complex interplay of social, economic, and cultural factors driving language change in the region. The emergence of a new Vajji identity, language contact through trade and migration, and education and urbanization are all contributing to the shifting usage patterns of be-forms in the region:



CONCLUSION

This study has investigated the morphosyntactic variation in the auxiliary verbs of Bajjika, a dialect of Maithili spoken in the northwestern districts of Bihar, India. The findings of this research reveal significant diachronic shifts in the usage patterns of the auxiliary verbs chh, hawe, and hai.

Key Findings

1. **Language Contact:** The study suggests that the auxiliary verb hawe may have been borrowed from Bhojpuri into Western Maithili (Bajjika) in the late 19th century, as noted by Grierson (1903). This finding highlights the importance of language contact in shaping the grammatical structures of Bajjika.
2. **Morphosyntactic Change:** The research reveals a significant reduction in the use of chh, which has lost its copular function and is now mainly used in present progressive constructions. In contrast, hawe has emerged as a competitive form among the three be-forms.
3. **Sociolinguistic Factors:** The study demonstrates that sociolinguistic factors, such as age, social networks, and cultural identity, play a crucial role in shaping the usage patterns of the auxiliary verbs.

Adults, who have broad social networks and are socially, commercially, and politically active, show a peak in the use of *hai* and *hawe*.

4. **Language Acquisition and Socialization:** The research highlights the importance of language socialization in shaping the language use patterns of children. Children in the Bajjika community are raised by their grandparents, which influences their language use. As they grow up, they transition to the dominant adult pattern.

Implications

The findings of this study have significant implications for our understanding of language contact, morphosyntactic change, and sociolinguistic factors in shaping language use. The research contributes to the growing body of literature on the dynamics of language change and variation in multilingual societies.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

While this study provides valuable insights into the morphosyntactic variation in Bajjika, further research is needed to fully understand the complexities of language contact and change in this region. Future studies could investigate the following:

1. **Language Contact and Convergence:** Further research could explore the mechanisms of language contact and convergence between Bajjika and other languages, such as Bhojpuri and Hindi.
2. **Sociolinguistic Factors and Language Change:** Additional studies could investigate the role of sociolinguistic factors, such as social class, education, and cultural identity, in shaping language change and variation in Bajjika.
3. **Language Acquisition and Socialization:** Future research could examine the processes of language acquisition and socialization in the Bajjika community, exploring how children and adults acquire and use language in different social contexts.

In conclusion, this study has provided a nuanced understanding of the morphosyntactic variation in Bajjika, highlighting the complex interplay between language contact, sociolinguistic factors, and language change. The findings of this research contribute to our understanding of the dynamics of language change and variation in multilingual societies, and provide a foundation for future research in this area.

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