

A Comparative study of the Classifiers ‘-ta’ in Bangla and ‘-t^he’ in Bhojpuri

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Abstract: *The paper provides a detailed comparative study of the properties of two particular Classifiers from two Indo-Aryan Languages; the Bangla Classifier ‘-ta’ and the Bhojpuri Classifier ‘-t^he’. The two languages Bhojpuri and Bangla share a lot of Linguistic resemblance that motivated me to conduct a relative study of their Classifier system. Although the Bangla Classifier system has been thoroughly researched, the properties of the Bhojpuri Classifier system are yet to be documented. Both ‘-ta’ in Bangla and ‘-t^he’ in Bhojpuri are Numeral Classifiers that attach with the Numeral preceding the Nominal entity in Cardinal DPs regardless of the gender, animacy, shape or size of the Nominal. The paper reveals the comparison between the two Classifiers in terms of their syntactic structure, compatibility with other elements in the DP, occurrence and absence in different environments etc.*

Keywords: Numeral Classifiers, Bangla, Bhojpuri, properties, compatibility with other elements, Cardinal DPs

1. Introduction

Classifiers are inflectional affixes that categorize nominal entities under distinct classes on the basis of shared characteristics. These serve as a typical feature of many Asian, American and African languages. However, it is not a characteristic property frequently visible in Indo-European Languages except a few like Oriya, Bangla, Assamese, Maithili etc. which exhibit a fairly well-defined structure of functional classifiers. Emeneau and Masica pointed out that the classifier system is not canonically associated with the Indo-Aryan languages but it might be the result of the areal influence of the Southeast Asian Languages. The co-existence of the different language families in the same geographical area for over a considerable period of time has led to such convergence of features in between the constituent languages.

Bangla, an Indo Aryan Language, is spoken in West Bengal, Tripura and is the official Language of Bangladesh. Bangla directly descends from Magadhi Apabramsa and Magadhi Prakrit which have been originated from Sanskrit. It is recognised for its well-structured classifier system unlike most of the other languages in its genetic group. However, the classifier system does not characterise Bangla to be unique among languages. There is a significant number of languages in the region, from different language families, where classifiers are witnessed.

Amongst the several unofficial languages of India which are not yet listed in the Constitution as ‘Scheduled’ Languages, Bhojpuri deserves a special mention. Bhojpuri is considered as a dialect of Hindi for years due to its socio-cultural history although it shares a lot of linguistic resemblance with Bangla.

The language is widely spoken in States like Bihar, North-west of Jharkhand along with regions of Uttar Pradesh. It is also used in some parts of Assam, Delhi, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal. Although Bhojpuri is a well-acclaimed language in India, there exists a lot of scope for its linguistic

research as very less investigation has been carried out about the language.

Bhojpuri DPs exhibit an extremely productive Numeral Classifier that remains unaccounted for in the existing literature of Bhojpuri linguistics. The Bhojpuri Numeral Classifier ‘-t^he’ or ‘-t^ho’ or ‘-go’ varying regionally or phonetically, exhibits interesting properties that are not yet recognized.

The paper attempts to conduct a comparative study in order to point out some similarities and differences between the Bangla Classifier ‘-ta’ and the Bhojpuri Classifier ‘-t^he’.

2. Background

Classifiers are affixes which categorize nouns into classes on the basis of shared, objectively perceived characteristic properties of entities they denote. In Bangla, they make a semantic classification of NPs based on shape, size, countability, definiteness etc. The most frequently used Classifiers of Bangla are listed below:

Ta: the most widely used classifier with alloforms ‘to’ (with ‘du’:two), ‘te’ (with ‘tin’:three and ‘car’:four) and diminutive form ‘ti’

Gulo: the plural form of ‘ta’ and its diminutive form ‘guli’

Ra: the plural associative human classifier

Khana: for things with flat surfaces and its diminutive form ‘khani’

Jon: for human NPs

The focus of study is the Classifier ‘-ta’ from the given list and the rest are not being addressed for this particular paper. The Classifier ‘-ta’ is the most productive classifier in Bangla and also the most widely explored among the entire list.

Let us look at some examples:

1. *Du-to* boi ache Two-CL book be

Two books are here/I have two books.

2. *Chele-ta* khub dushtu. Boy-CL very naughty The boy is very naughty

3. *Ami tin-te* aam kheychi

I three-CL mango eat.PST I ate three mangoes.

Bhojpuri, on the other hand, is not yet explored well enough and its linguistic system still remains undocumented. Therefore no linguistic analysis of the Bhojpuri Classifier system is recorded according to my knowledge so far. However, Bhojpuri DPs exhibit an extremely productive Numeral Classifier. The Numeral Classifier ‘-*the*’ or ‘-*tho*’ or ‘-*go*’ varying regionally or phonetically, exhibits interesting properties which displays a lot of linguistic resemblance with Bangla.

The following are some examples of the way the Classifier is used in the language:

4. *Ek-the* laiki aail hain one-CL girl come.be.PRS One girl has come

5. *ram-wa du-the bag* laile ha ram-? Two-CL bag bring.PRS Ram has brought two bags.

Hence, the motivation of this paper is to perform a comparative study between the structures and behavior of the Bangla Classifier ‘-*ta*’ and the Bhojpuri Classifier ‘-*the*’ as to find out the resemblances and differences in between the two classifiers.

3. Discussion

Classifiers are attached directly to a noun only when they denote a unique object. When denoting a sum of homogenous objects a classifier is attached to a numeral (definite or indefinite). A numeral plus a classifier constitute a numeral classifier in which the numeral gives a number of classified objects.

The Numeral Classifier ‘-*ta*’ in Bangla and ‘-*the*’ in Bhojpuri occur regularly in most Cardinal DP constructions regardless of their gender, animacy, shape or size. The Classifier directly attaches with the Numeral like an affix and refers to an atomic set of classified entities. In Bangla, the Classifier ‘-*ta*’ can be directly attached with Nouns (also other categories in special cases) as well as mass nouns but the Bhojpuri ‘-*the*’ is purely a Numeral Classifier which is only compatible with Numerals and nothing else.

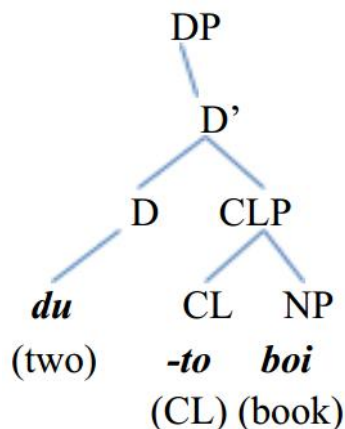
	Bangla	Bhojpuri
Numeral-Classifier-NP	6. <i>pac-ta</i> phal <i>five-CL fruit five fruits</i>	7. <i>pac-the</i> phal <i>five-CL fruit five fruits</i>
NP-Classifier	8. <i>phal-ta</i> fruit-CL <i>The fruit</i>	Not available

The Numeral Classifier ‘-*ta*’ in Bangla and ‘-*tho*’ in Bhojpuri occur regularly in most Cardinal DP constructions regardless of their gender, animacy, shape or size.

The basic structure that is visible in Bangla is **Numeral-Classifier-NP**

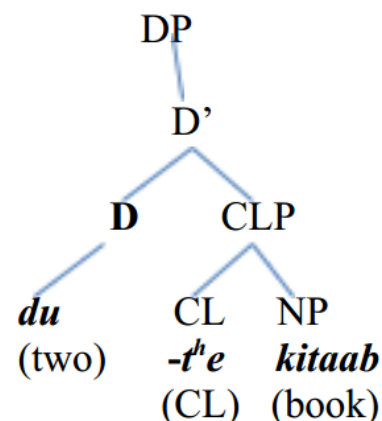
9. *tin-te* lok

Three-CL man Three men



This structure is defined to be the indefinite classifier construction in Bangla. The basic structure of Bhojpuri DP is also **Numeral-Classifier-NP**

10. *du-the* kitaab Two-CL book Two books



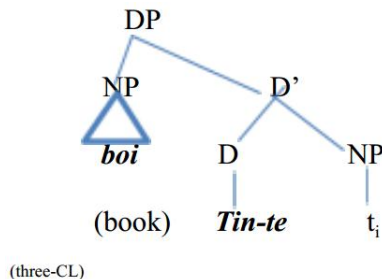
Both the Bangla and the Bhojpuri Numeral Classifiers are atomic in nature denoting a count of the individual nominal entities with the help of the Numeral preceding it (the Bangla Classifier ‘-*ta*’ can also be attached mass nouns but

that has a different interpretation which is not relevant to this study). Bhojpuri, just like Bangla, does not express singular or plural number marking on the nominal in Cardinal DPs.

The definite structure or the 'NP raised structure' is NP-Num-Classifier.

11. *lok tin-te*

man Three-CL Three men



The Bangla construction in the order Numeral-Classifier-Noun denotes the indefinite DP structure of Bangla whereas, for the definite DP construction the word order changes to Noun-Numeral-Classifier where the Noun is raised to the Spec of DP.

In Bhojpuri both the definite and indefinite structures bearing the Numeral Classifier '*-t^he*' are expressed in the same order Numeral-Classifier-Noun and no raising of the Noun is witnessed.

3.1 Adjectives

In Bangla and Bhojpuri, whenever an adjective is added the order would be: Numeral-Classifier-Adjective-NP Bangla:

	Bangla	Bhojpuri
Demonstrative	14. <i>oi tin-te lomba lok</i> <i>those three-CL tall man</i> <i>Those three tall men</i>	15. <i>U tin-t^he lamba admi</i> <i>Those three-CL tall man</i> <i>Those three tall men</i>
Possessive pronoun	16. <i>Amar tin-te boi</i> <i>My three-CL book</i> <i>Three of my books</i>	17. <i>Hamre tin-t^he kitaab</i> <i>My three-CL book</i> <i>Three of my books</i>
Possessive noun	18. <i>Ram-er tin-te boi</i> <i>Ram-GEN three-CL book</i> <i>Three of my books</i>	19. <i>Ram-ka tin-t^he kitaab</i> <i>Ram-GEN three-CL book</i> <i>Three of my books</i>

12. *tin-te lomba lok Three-CL tall man Three tall men*

Bhojpuri:

13. *tin-t^he lamba admi three-CL tall man three tall men*

A similar word order pattern is observed in Bangla Cardinal DPs and Bhojpuri Cardinal DPs when an adjective is added to each of them.

3.2 Demonstrative, possessive pronoun or noun

Demonstrative, possessive pronoun or noun in the Genitive case playing the role of an attribute usually precede a numeral classifier in the phrase:

Both the Classifiers are compatible with Demonstrative, possessive pronoun or noun and structurally display the same word order in the DPs.

3.3 Questions:

The attachment the Classifiers with interrogative sentences is a little complex. The Bangla Numeral Classifiers '*-ta*' seems to be compatible with some WH elements and gets attached directly with them to form acceptable interrogative sentences but is not allowed with others. However, Bhojpuri '*-t^he*' occurs only with one. Let us observe the following table:

Bangla:

19. *Ko-ta lok eshecchilo? How-CL people come.PST How many people came?*

20. *Kon-ta neben? Which-CL take.PRS.2*

Which one will you take?

Bhojpuri:

21. *Kai-t^{he} admi ailan?*

How-CL people came.PST? How many people came?

WH elements like 'what', 'where', 'when', 'why', 'how' do not take classifiers in any of the mentioned languages. But with 'ko-' in Bangla and 'kai-' in Bhojpuri meaning 'how many' in both the languages, the numeral Classifiers '-ta' and '-t^{he}' are added in Bangla and Bhojpuri respectively. The reason being these WH expressions can only be replaced with numerals as an answer to the question asked.

Bangla:

(Q) Ko-ta lok eshecchilo? How-CL people come.PST How many people came?

*(A) pac-ta lok eshecchilo
five-CL people come.PST Five people came.*

Bhojpuri:

*(Q) Kai-t^{he} admi ailan?
How-CL people came.PST? How many people came?*

*(A) pac-t^{he} admi ailan?
five-CL people come.PST Five people came.*

In Bangla, the Classifier can also be added with another WH expression which is 'kon-' meaning 'which'. This is because the Bangla Classifier '-ta' is not only a Numeral Classifier but it can also be attached with Nominals to denote unique objects unlike Bhojpuri Classifier '-t^{he}'. The answer to 'kon-' or which can only be a unique object or set of objects. Hence, Bangla allows the Classifier in this case and Bhojpuri does not.

3.4 Classifier-less DPs

Bangla and Bhojpuri possess two kinds of Cardinal DPs on the basis of presence or absence of Classifiers;

Classifier-compatible DPs and Classifier-less DPs. All the above examples fall in the former category. However, there exists a significant number of DPs in both the languages that comprises the Numeral and the Noun but lacks the Classifier intermediating between the two. These are termed as Classifier-less DPs. In this paper, we are concentrating on the Classifier-less DPs that lacks the two Classifiers in discussion i.e., The Bangla Numeral Classifier '-ta' and the Bhojpuri Numeral Classifier '-t^{he}'.

Das Gupta identifies some of these DPs which bear cardinals as well as NPs but no classifiers in Bangla. He terms such class of NPs as measure words or calendrical NPs. In Dasgupta (1983), the author mentions that "measure words"

do not normally take classifiers, except to achieve certain referential or contextual effects. Bhojpuri which shares linguistic likeness with Bangla, also disallows occurrence of the Numeral Classifier '-t^{he}' with units, measure words and calendrical words.

Measure words are generally used to measure uncountable or mass nouns that cannot be individuated atomically like countable nouns. They express some kind of a measuring standard.

Bangla:

22. *Lok ta du-hat dure dariya chilo
Man-CL two-arm far stand.PST.PROG
The man was standing at two arms distance*

23. *Tin balti jol niye esho.
Three bucket water bring come.PRS Bring two buckets of water.*

Bhojpuri:

24. *U car katori sabzi kha lelas
He four bowl vegetables eat do.PST He ate four bowls of vegetables*

25. *Gita ek bori chawal de gail biya Gita one sack rice give be.PST Gita has given one sack of rice*

So it is observed that measure words are blocking the Classifiers both in Bangla and Bhojpuri. Terms that are usually associated with a calendar are known as Calendrical terms.

Bangla:

26. *Tin din khub byasto thakbo Three days very busy stay.FUT
I will be very busy for three days*

27. *Ek muhurto deri kore jabe na One moment late do neg.PRS
We can't be late for one more moment*

Bhojpuri:

28. *Raj c^{he} mairina pahile eha rahat rahe Raj six months ago here stay be.PST Raj used to stay here six months ago*

29. *I car saal pehle ki baat hav
This four before ago GEN matter be.PRS This is a matter of four years before.*

Hence the above examples confirm that Classifiers are generally not allowed in Calendrical DPs.

Units are standards of measurement and the following data displays that units also do not allow occurrence of Classifiers. Bangla:

30. *Car mitar kapor ano Four meter cloth bring Bring four meters cloth*

31. *Ek kilo atta kinlam.*

One-kg wheat buy.PST.1 I bought one kg wheat.

Bhojpuri:

32. *Waha pac litre ka bottle rakhal hav There five litre GEN bottle keep be.PRS A five litres bottle is kept there.*

33. *Hum pac meter kapra kharidli I five meter cloth buy.PST*

I bought 5 metres of cloth

Thus it can be concluded that measure words, calendrical NPs and Units do not generally take Classifiers in Bangla and Bhojpuri as they occupy the position of the Classifier in these DPs.

3.5 Relational terms

Classifiers are not allowed in DPs that denote relational terms in Bangla. For example,

34. *Priya du-bondhu-ke boi upohar debe. Priya two friend-DAT book gift give.FUT Priya will gift books to her two friends*

35. *Onar du-chele bidesh-e ache he-GEN two-son abroad-LOC be.PRS Two of his sons are in abroad.*

But Bhojpuri differs in Bangla in this aspect. Classifiers can be attached with the numeral in a cardinal DP that is denoting a relational term.

For example,

36. *Ukar du-^{he} chacha hauan He.GEN two-CL uncle be.PRS He has two uncles.*

It is observed from the above examples that Bangla does not allow occurrence of Classifiers with Relational terms unlike Bhojpuri which brings forward another point of difference between the two Classifiers in discussion.

4. Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to execute a comparative research on the structure and characteristics of the two Numeral Classifiers ‘-ta’ in Bangla and ‘-^{he}’ in Bhojpuri and observe the similarities and differences in between the two. These two languages are chosen for the study because Bangla and Bhojpuri are believed to share linguistic resemblances in many aspects. Bangla is a well-documented language and its Classifier system has been meticulously studied over the years. But linguistic research in Bhojpuri is very less and a lot of scope for its linguistic development is yet to be done. However, this paper attempted to document some of the important properties of the two Classifiers by comparing their structure, compatibility with other sentential elements, occurrence and absence in different environments etc.

It was observed that the Bangla Classifier ‘-ta’ is not only a Numeral Classifier but can also be attached directly with a nominal denoting a unique object unlike the Bhojpuri Classifier ‘-^{he}’ which is solely a Numeral Classifier. Structurally the basic indefinite construction of the Bangla DP is similar to the basic Bhojpuri DP construction. Both the Classifiers exhibit almost identical behaviour with an adjective, Demonstrative, possessive pronoun or noun, WH expressions. The Classifiers are necessarily blocked by measure words, units and Calendrical terms. However the Classifiers behave oppositely while denoting Relational terms. The paper succeeded to address some significant properties of the two Classifiers. It also created platform for further research in this area, especially about Bhojpuri Linguistics.

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