Exploring the Earlier Studies Related to Verbal Morphology of Maithili: A Brief Review

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Abstract

Maithili is an Indo-Aryan and a scheduled language of India. It is spoken in the north-eastern part of the Bihar state of India and in the tarai region of Nepal. It is the 16th most spoken language of India and the 40th most spoken language of the world. The present paper forms a part of my Ph.D. thesis which attempts to revisit the major earlier works related to verbal system of Maithili. It also investigates the way how Maithili verbs have been treated by many Linguists and points out the facts that appears quite unconvincing and further leads us to a direction in which the study of the morphology of Maithili verbs becomes a matter of reinvestigation. There are certain quarries made in this paper which makes the study highly fascinating.

Keywords- *Verbal Morphology, Tense, Chunks, Morphological Markers, Agreement*

Introduction

The earlier concepts regarding the verbal system of Maithili appear quite vague. Highlighting the tense system in Maithili, Dinabandhu Jha puts, "The tense system of languages such as Hindi and other languages follow the tense patterns of English with many sub-forms and, therefore, Maithili can also be assigned a similar pattern (Jha, 1979 pp.54)." Similarly, Dr. Yadav also points out, "Maithili verbs conjugate for three tenses: past, present, and future" and he further suggests the following tense markers for Maithili:

Past	*-al-*	
Future	*-ab-*	(first and second persons)
	-at-	(elsewhere)
Present	*-0-* (null)	

Apart from these, he also claims that no overt tense marker is used in the present tense (Yadav, 1997pp.161)." Now it appears quite unusual for a language to show markers for past and future tenses only which needs to be reinvestigated. If we have a glare on the earlier works related to verbal system of Maithili, it is observed that almost all the linguists have confined their study only at the phrasal level. In other words, these works explain the verbs at the syntactic level based on the agreement patterns in Maithili and only some of the linguists have tried to take into account the morphological analysis of these verb phrases which is also seen limited only to the prevalent tense markers in this language. Let us have a glance on the distribution of morphological markers inflected on verbs by the major Maithili linguists:

OBJECT SUBJECT	3H	3NH	2H	2MH	2NH	1
3H	*əthinh*	*əthinh*	*0*	*əthunh*	*əthunh*	*0*
3NH	*əinh*	*əik/0*	*0*	*əh*	*əuk*	*0*
2H	*iəinh*	*iəik/0*	-	-	-	*0*
2MH	*əhunh*	*əhak*	-	-	-	*0*
2NH	*əhunh*	*əhik*	-	-	-	*0*
1	*iəinh*	*iəik*	*0*	*iəh*	*iəuk*	-

Table: 1. R.Yadava's Composite Present Tense Agreement Inflections in Maithili

In table 1, Dr. Yadav has tried to show the various agreement markers for the present tense in Maithili. But these markers (or verbal chunks) have not been explained in terms of their origin or composition. Under such circumstance, it is too difficult to label the markers for their syntactic category or feature. In addition to these, in the table, one may also find certain blocks assigned as '0' (null) which means no agreement marker in such cases as per Dr. Yadav. But we do find the presence of the markers for these constructions in the standard Maithili spoken in India.

OBJECT SUBJECT	3H	3NH	2H	2MH	2NH	1
3H	*əkhinh*	*əkhinh*	*əinh*	*əkhunh*	*əkhunh*	*əinh*
	əthinh	*əthinh*	*(0)*	*əkhuhunh*	*əkhuhunh*	
	əkhihinh	*(əinh)*		*əthunh*	*əthunh*	
	əthihinh			*əthuhunh*	*əthuhunh*	
	(əkəinh)					
	(əinh)	*0*				
3NH	*əkəinh*	*əkəik*	*0*	*əkəh*	*əkəuk*	*0*

	(əinh)	*(əik)*		*(əh)*	*(əuk)*	
2H	*iəinh*	*iəik*	*-*	*-*	*-*	*0*
		0				
2MH	*əhunh*	*əhək*	*-*	*-*	*-*	*0*
	əhəh	*əhəh*				
2NH	*əhunh*	*əhik*	*-*	*-*	*-*	*0*
1	*iəinh*	*iəik*	*0*	*iəh*	*iəuk*	*-*
		(0)		*io*		

Table: 2. R.Yadava's Composite Past Tense Agreement Inflections in Maithili

Almost a similar situation can be noticed even in table 2. The verbal forms like –*akhinh* and –*akhunh*, -*akhunh* and -*athunh* are unacceptable in the present tense for Indian Maithili speakers. Dr. Yadav has used –*akhinh* and –*athinh* as a substitute for each other. But on analyzing the data, we have found that these two chunks are completely distinct from each other. However, these two may be used as a substitute for each other but only in the past tense. We shall discuss this issue in Chapter 5.

OBJECT	3H	3NH	2H	2MH	2NH	1
SUBJECT						
3H	*əinh*	**əthinh**	0	**əthunh**	**əthunh**	0
	əthinh					
3NH	*əinh*	*əik*	0	*əh*	*əuk*	0
2H	*əinh*	*əik*	-	-	-	0
2MH	*əhunh*	*əhək*	-	-	-	0
2NH	*əhunh*	*əhik*	-	-	-	0
1	*əiinh*	*əik*	0	*əh*	*əuk*	-
		(0)				

Table: 3. R.Yadava's Composite Future Tense Agreement Inflections in Maithili

On observing Dr. Yadav's composite classification of the agreement markers in the present, past, and future tenses of Maithili, one may notice after a close scrutiny that these markers appear more as a chunk of markers in itself than in its actual morphological form representing a particular feature. These chunks (such as –*athinh*, -*athunh*, -*aik*, -*ainh*, etc.) needs to be segmented further to obtain the actual result. Another aspect one may observe here is that the tables contain agreement markers mostly associated with the third person pronominals and not with the first person. Under such circumstance, it seems almost impossible to think of the present tense marker in Maithili. We are of the view that we may think of markers such as –*athinh* and –*athunh* only after we have markers like –

athi. We also claim on the basis of the analysis of the data that Maithili verbal markers show a kind of regularity in pattern and form a suitable environment for other markers to conjugate in order to form a chunk which we shall discuss later in chapter 5.

SUBJECT	NON-SUBJECT	MARKERS
1P	2P+H	*-ahun*
1P	2P MH	*-iauh*
1P	2P –H	*-iau(k)*
1P	3P +H	*-iau(k)*
1P	3P –H	*-iani(k)*
2P +H	1P	*-ahun*
2P +H	3P +H	*-iaauh*
2P +H	3P –H	*-iai(k)*
2P MH	1P	*-aha*
2P MH	3P +H	*-ahunh*
2P MH	3P –H	*-ak*
2P –H	1P	*-en*
2P –H	3P +H	*-ahunh*
3P –H	3P –H	*-hii(k)*
3P +H	2P +H	*-inh*
3P +H	2P MH	***-thunh***
3P +H	2P –H	***-thunh***
3P +H	3P +H	***-thinh***
3P +H	3P –H	***-thinh***
3P –H	1P	*-ak*

3P –H	2P +H	*-ak*
3P –H	2P MH	*-kahu*
3P –H	2P –H	*-kau(k)*
3P –H	3P +H	*-kaiuh*
3P –H	3P –H	*-k/-ai(k)*

Table: 3. U.N. Singh's Classification of Verb Inflectional Markers in Maithili

In table 3, Dr. Singh has tried to accommodate almost all the agreement markers found in Maithili. It is no doubt a great initiation for the study of the verbal system of this language but the results of Dr. Singh and Dr. Yadav are almost the same. It is again difficult here to identify the various morphological markers attached with the verbal root as these markers have not been fragmented and recognized. So far as the chunks such as *–thinh* and *–thunh* are concerned, Dr. Singh's presents a clearer picture as compared to Dr. Yadav. Moreover, his approach of presenting the chunks appears more scientific. This study is undoubtedly helpful in breaking and identifying most of the verbal markers associated to Maithili.

Honorificity	Person	Marker	Verb Form
Honorific (+H)	I	***-oN***	*ch-i*
	II	***-h***	*ch-a-h*
	III	***-thi***	*ch-*a-thi*
Non-honorific (-H)	I	*-i*	*ch-i*
	II	*-eN/-hiN*	*ch-eN / cha-hiN*
	III	*-ai/-i*	*ch-ai(k))/ ach-i*

*Here, *-a-* the 'thematic vowel' (Govind Jha, 1992).

Table: 4. G. Jha's Composite Present Tense Agreement Inflections in Maithili

Table 4 presents the present tense agreement inflectional marker by Pt. G. Jha. Though Jha has attempted to break the chunk and identify the markers, yet the breaking seems incomplete. The marker such as *–oN* is no more in use. Other markers like *–thi, -hiN, -aik,* etc. could have been broken further in order to obtain the actual result. However, his recognition to the thematic vowel *–a-* is a great contribution in itself.

Honorificity	Person	Marker	Verb Form

Honorific (+H)	I	*-huN*	*parh-*a-l-*a-huN*
	II	***-h***	*parh-a-l-a-h*
	III	***-ni***	*parh-a-l-a-ni*
Non-honorific (-H)	I	***-i***	*parh-a-l-i*
	II	*-eN/hiN*	*parh-a-l-eN/-hiN*
	III	***-k***	*parh-a-l-a-k*

*Here, *-a- huN* is the 'thematic vowel' (Govind Jha, 1992).

Table: 5. G. Jha's Composite Past Tense Agreement Inflections in Maithili

In table 5, Pt. Jha shows the agreement inflectional markers related to past tense in Maithili. The markers such as *–huN*, *-ni*, and *–hiN* needs further breaking while other markers seem close to the actual results.

Honorificity	**Person**	**Marker**	**Verb Form**
Honorific (+H)	I	*-b/-**o***	*cal-*a-b/-o*
	II	*-b-**h***	*cal-a-b-a-h*
	III	*-t-**aah***	*cal-a-t-aa-h*
Non-honorific (-H)	I	*-b*	*cal-a-b*
	II	*-b-eN/-**hiN***	*cal-a-beN*
	III	***-t***	*cal-a-t*

*Here, *-a-* is the 'thematic vowel' (Govind Jha, 1992).

Table: 6. G. Jha's Composite Future Tense Agreement Inflections in Maithili

In table 6, Pt. Jha has taken account of the future tense agreement inflections where he seems two assign two different future tense markers, -b marker for the first and second person subject NP while –t for the third person subject NP. In addition to this, the present table \also talks about the gender marker such as –aa but only confined to the masculine form. Other markers need to be revisited.

S. Jha's Classification of Personal Terminations in Modern Maithili:

I. With the nominative only:

a. 1/2P +H :   *-huN*

b. 2P –H (ordinary):   *-h*

c. 2P –H (extreme):   *-eN, -hiN, -ǽN*

d. 3P +H: *-anhi* (+Tran); *-aah, -iih* (-Tran)

e. 3P –H :   *-ak* (+Tran)

II. With the nominative and some other cases:

f. 1/2P +H: *-i*

g. 2P +H: *-ah*

h. 3P +H: ***-th/-thi***

i. 3P –H: *-ak* (+Tran)

III. With the accusative and other cases:

j. 2P –H (ordinary):   *-ahu*

k. 2P –H (extreme):   *-au*, *-auk*

l. 3P +H: *-unh, -ainh, -inh*

m. 3P –H: *-ai, -inh, -aik*

Groups	Person of the Nominative	Person of the Other Cases	Personal Termination
Aa.	1P	2P +H	*-ahuN*
Ab.	1P	2P –H (ordinary)	*-iahu*
Ac.	1P	2P –H (extreme)	*-iau, -iauk*
Ad.	1P	3P +H	*-ianhi, -ianha*
Ae.	1P	3P –H	*-iai, -iaik*
Ba.	2P +H	1P	*-ahuN*
Bb.	2P +H	3P +H	*-ianhi, -ianha*
Bc.	2P +H	3P –H	*-iai, -iaik*
Ca.	2P –H (ordinary)	1P	*-ah*
Cb.	2P –H (ordinary)	3P +H	*-ahunh*
Cc.	2P –H (ordinary)	3P –H	*-akak*
Da..	2P –H (extreme)	1P	*-eN*
Db.	2P –H (extreme)	3P +H	*-ahunh*
Dc.	2P –H (extreme)	3P –H	*-hii, -hiik*
Ea.	3P +H	1P/2P +H	*-anhi (+Tran)*
Eb.	3P +H	1P/2P +H	*-aah (-Tran)*
Ec.	3P +H	2P –H	***-thunh***
Ed.	3P +H	3P	***-thinh***
Fa.	3P –H	1P/2P +H	*-ak (+Tran)*
Fb.	3P –H	2P –H (ordinary)	*-kahu*
Fc.	3P –H	2P –H (extreme)	*-kau*

| Fd. | 3P –H | 3P +H | *-kainh* |
| Fe. | 3P –H | 3P –H | *-ai, -kaik, -kai* |

Table: 7. Subhadra Jha's composite terminations with reference to persons of two cases in a sentence

In table 7, Dr. has presents a detailed account of the possible agreement markers based on persons of two cases in a sentence. The table is no different from Dr. Singh and Dr. Yadav but the approach may be counted. One may notice the chunks presented almost in a similar way as in earlier works we just went through. We did not observe anything new here that could make this work distinct from the earlier one. However, it must be mentioned here that it was only Dr. Jha who, for the first time, came up with such an elaborated collection of the agreement chunks of Maithili. Thus, his contribution can never be kept apart.

Thus, on reviewing these noted works, one may find that the study of verbal morphology of Maithili is still incomplete. Unless these verbal chunks are broken and each of the markers is identified, either the morpho-syntactic or typological study of the verbal system of Maithili cannot be thought of. The tables (1-7) above are sufficient enough to raise many questions in the mind of a linguist. Some of the questions may be as follows:

(a) What is the basis of the claim made by Dr. Yadav regarding the absence of present tense marker in Maithili?

(b) What about the blocks which have been kept vacant? Do they really fail to form any construction that may be acceptable in Maithili?

(c) Is it really impossible to break these verbal chunks? If so, how do they claim for tense and other markers so confidently?

(d) How to decide the aspect markers in Maithili? Are they based on transitivity of verbs?

(e) Does a single morphological segment of a chunk may represent two or more features in various constructions?

(f) How to decide the role of honorificity in these complex verbal chunks?

(g) How to look for the agreement markers in Maithili? If we categorize a particular verbal chunk as an agreement marker, how to decide the other important morphological markers vested into it?

(h) Should the linguists be free of making their personal judgments according to the data available to them regarding the possibilities of various morphological markers in Maithili?

(i) Do these composition of markers do provide us any clue regarding their distribution and position in a verbal chunk?

These are some of the challenging aspects which still require the satisfactory answers. The Maithili linguists and grammarians have left this important study in a midway which vehemently waits to be resolved.

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