

A Cross-linguistic Analysis of Punjabi Versus English Gender-System



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Pages: 1 – 8

DOI: 10.31703/gsr.2023(VIII-II).01

URL: [http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gsr.2023\(VIII-II\).01](http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gsr.2023(VIII-II).01)

Abstract: *The current study aimed to compare the grammatical notion of gender in Punjabi versus English. To identify the similarities and differences in gender systems of both the languages in question, multiple instances of Punjabi and English gender rendering terms and phrases were selected and compared through a comparative analytical approach. It was a text-based study that revealed that not only Punjabi nouns but also verbs and adjectives take gender markers, unlike English and also that Punjabi does have some gender-neutral words and epicenes, just like English. Findings hold implications for novice researchers attempting to explore Punjabi in terms of its gender system.*

Key Words: Epicenes, Common Gender Terms, Gender Agreement, Gender-Neutrality, Grammatical Gender

Introduction

Punjabi was ranked as the 10th most widely spoken language in 2015. It has Indo-Aryan origins and is the native language of numerous inhabitants of the subcontinent, but it is most widely spoken in Pakistan and the 11th most widely spoken language in India. It also has a remarkable presence in other states like the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and the United States of America and so on. Moreover, the literature written in Punjabi strikes the heart and mind like anything (Kaur & Saini, 2020). If compared to English, Punjabi is a language which is rich in rhymes, but English lacks that richness of rhymes. A Punjabi poem can have one rhyme for ten lines, but attempting the same in English would be reckless (Rafat, 2014). Thus, Punjabi is a rich language in terms of literary devices compared to English, in contrast to the usual belief that Punjabi might lack linguistic expressions compared to other prestigious languages like English and Urdu. Although Punjabi is such a widely

spoken language, it is still not widely studied in its different aspects. Singh (2008) emphasized the need to explore Punjabi in terms of gender marking and on the grounds of other modern linguistic constructs because a dearth of syntactical study of Punjabi is much more obvious. There exist multiple inconsistencies and idiosyncrasies of usage among Punjabi speakers, and they have not been addressed much by the researchers.

In linguistics, every language has a particular sentence structure which might or might not be shared by other languages. It is an ordering of subject, verb and object in a sentence. English follows SVO order in which the verb precedes the subject, followed by the object. English is regarded as a fixed language in terms of its word order, whereas Punjabi can be termed as a free word-order language because it allows numerous word order-ings, but still, SOV is the sentence structure that is most prevalent among the native speakers of

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Punjabi. An example of violating the SOV norm in Punjabi is as follows:

ہے لیا پکا کھانے میں
کھانا بھینے میں پکایا نہیں

Grammatical gender is just one of the grammatical categories. It refers to the values in a language given to different linguistic items that make them fall into different classes. Linguistics defines grammatical gender as marking gender on multiple linguistic aspects as a result of noun classes showing gender agreement with pronouns, adjectives, verbs or articles. This same gender system exists in one-quarter of languages around the globe. In other words, grammatical gender is defined as the class of nouns reflected in the representation of associated words in a sentence (Alexiadou, 2004). Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) described grammatical gender as having three main categories: masculine, feminine and neutral, and further classified as male and female, male, female and neutral, or inanimate and animate. In some languages, gender is usually assigned to nouns based on the natural gender (biological sex), animacy and humanness of the noun. In some cases, the gender category of the word can be in contrast with its meaning. Thus, the concept of grammatical gender can sometimes be arbitrary; for instance, either the phonology or morphology of the word can also influence the noun class it belongs to (Baron, 1986).

Grammatical gender is being taken by words when there is an agreement between nouns and other parts of speech: the gender of a noun influences determiners, adjectives or pronouns in a way that they change their form following the gender of the noun, and this phenomenon is termed as gender-agreement. Nevertheless, the way gender is marked varies from language to language (Arista, 2014). Grammatical gender can also be located in some Indo-European languages, like Russian, French, Spanish, and German, some Afro-Asiatic languages, and other language descents, such as Northeast Caucasian and Australian Aboriginal languages. On the contrary, grammatical gender is absent in some languages like Persian, Turkic, Uralic, Native American and Korean language families. In Modern English, gender is usually marked on pronouns and that too in accordance with natural gender. However, gender marking following the noun phrases is not observed in English, which the essential element of grammatical gender is as observed in most Indo-European languages (Manea, 2011).

There is still a need to conduct more research on the Punjabi language to explore its multiple dimensions. Moreover, an authentic system needs to be installed to computerize lexical resources of languages in Pakistan; especially computerizing Punjabi must be the need of the hour (Kaur et al., 2010). The present study aims to investigate some of the most prominent issues originating from the grammatical concept of gender in Punjabi while taking English as a reference language to compare its notion of gender with that of Punjabi. There is a need to clarify several queries related to confusion regarding gender marking in Punjabi with the classification of the classes being identified. Some of the classes of gender as defined in the English language are common gender, epicene and neuter gender. Thus, another idea that needs some digging in is to locate the concept of gender neutrality in Punjabi and whether there are any gender-neutral expressions in Punjabi the way we find them in English.

Genderization or gender-marking is a grammatical phenomenon in which every noun is either masculine or feminine or, in some cases, neutral (Di Sabato & Perri, 2020). The most widely known notion of having male nouns encompassing both male and female gender representations has been primarily challenged by feminists and thus, neutral gender markers have been introduced for such controversial designations where there used to be more domination of male gender markers (Jones, 2015). Thus, many default-masculine nouns have been highlighted but not yet eradicated because they have been part of the linguistic system for a long time. In English, one of the common feminine markers is 'ess', for instance, waiter/waitress, host/hostess, prince/princess, and many other such examples, but the situation is quite different in the case of Punjabi. In Punjabi, verbs and adjectives take gender affixes other than nouns.

The previous researches also mark the role of culture while assigning gender to nouns or other parts of speech. Manea (2011) stated the relationship of culture-tradition with gender markers in a particular language. Thus, tradition or culture does influence to a certain extent in determining such linguistic norms. The disagreement in English regarding preserving and sometimes promoting gender-neutral terms has been highlighted and discussed in previous literature. In English, many words do not use a special ending or specific word at the end of each word to mark it feminine. The English language has some gender-neutral words, too, that can be used for referring to both males and females, for example, friend, banker,

neighbour, teacher, lawyer, and artist. In other cases, English has distinguished words to refer to male and female nouns, for instance: actor versus actress (Papadopoulos, 2021).

Natural gender is evident that when there is a girl, she will be referred to by the pronoun 'she', similarly a boy will be referred to by the pronoun 'he', and an inanimate object or animate entities other than human beings will be referred to as 'it'. On the other hand, grammatical gender is another feature of the English language. Although English is not a very strongly inflected language in terms of grammatical gender, still some instances of gender agreement can be traced in the English language. In some instances, there exist some confusing observations regarding gender-marking too; for example, a ship is being referred to as a female 'she'. Moreover, a car is usually referred to as a female: 'Fill her up!' and that is where it takes interference of syntax (Bennet, 2016).

Boroditsky et al. (2013) explained that English mentions grammatical gender through anaphoric pronouns like he, she and it. 'He' and 'she' are being used for masculine and feminine, respectively, whereas 'it' is being used to refer to equally animate and inanimate. Thus, he, she and it are used to oppose their respective references according to the normative pattern being defined. For instance, as mentioned in these sentences: 'the girl was very pretty; she also had beautiful hazel eyes', 'Michael seemed very upset, yet she admitted that he was not as nervous as he was in his previous interview' and 'the table had one of its legs broken'. Thus, these are just the fundamental instances of marking gender on pronouns, otherwise, there are so many deviations observed in the English language (as cited in Bassetti & Nicoladis, 2016). Deviations are usually the result of speakers' attitudes towards pragmatic content and pronunciation of the utterances. Different anaphoric expressions are being used to refer to entities belonging to different genders. Using such anaphoric expressions is regarded as referential gender that helps to determine the gender class of the noun being mentioned. In other words, these can be defined as pronouns: a simple grammatical category meant to refer back to an expression mentioned earlier in a sentence, a paragraph or a text in general. For instance, he is explicitly referring to a male entity, she is used to referring to a female entity, and it is used to referring to any inanimate object or an animate being other than human beings. Moreover, they, we and us can be

used to refer to several people or entities regardless of the gender class they belong to (Malul et al., 2016).

The not-so-old uprising in the feminist movement and its interference in every aspect of life brought the issue of gender equality in terms of linguistic items being used in the English language, and so many words were being challenged for sounding sexist (Laugesen, 2019). Thus, the same wave of feminism questioned the authenticity of many honorifics, calling them prejudiced and default-masculine words. Moreover, such terms were demanded to be removed or replaced with other terms that can represent female entities. Words like 'chairman' are being used over the years without being questioned for a moment before the wave of feminism flowed in, kicking out all the rotten sexist terms (Stevens & Martell, 2016).

In Punjabi, all human beings, plants and animals perceived as male are grammatically masculine nouns, and those human beings, plants and animals perceived as female are grammatically feminine nouns. Moreover, inanimate things and abstract nouns are also perceived as either masculine or feminine. This system of gender marking is intuitively known by the native speakers of the Punjabi language or even native speakers of the Urdu language can predict the gender system of the Punjabi language because it is much similar to that of Urdu (Khan & Ali, 2017). The endings of the words usually help to determine the gender of the nouns, especially if the words end in a vowel. The words ending in 'aa' are usually masculine, whereas those ending in 'ii' are mostly feminine. Punjabi is a strongly inflected language, as is the same in case of Urdu as well. Thus, in Urdu, gender is usually not only shown through postpositions in a word but also through its relationship with other words in a language (Sevea, 2014).

The previously done research work highlighted distinction in common-gender words and epicenes. In linguistics, common gender words are defined as default-masculine terms but are frequently used to refer to both males and females. On the other hand, epicene stands for terms encompassing both masculine and feminine characteristics and thus can be used both for male and female entities. In English, we have some examples of epicene, like cousin and violinist: which can be used for both or only males and females. Moreover, there are epicene pronouns like 'they' and 'one', whereas pronouns like 'he' and 'she' are not epicene (Manea, 2011). Thus, in English, specific gender-neutral terms can be used for both

males and females, like violinist, cousin and waitperson. And still, other words have male connotations but are still used to refer to both males and females, for example, chairman. Manea (2011) differentiated epicene as gender-neutral terms while differentiating these expressions from common-gender terms that are primarily default-masculine words.

Research Questions

- i. How far does the gender system of Punjabi differ from that of English?
- ii. To what extent does the gender system of Punjabi render influence gender agreement?

Research Objectives

- i. To identify inter-linguistic variation in the Punjabi gender system.
- ii. To observe the cross-linguistic difference between epicenes and gender-neutral expressions in Punjabi vs. English.
- iii. To evaluate how different aspects of the Punjabi language are taking gender markers.

Methodology

This research aims at studying the extent to which the gender system of Punjabi differs from that of English. Hence, this section describes the theoretical underpinnings for data analysis.

Theoretical Underpinning

The procedure for analysis was derived from relevant existing theoretical work on gender marking and gender agreement in the English language. Manea (2011) explored the differences between the English and Romanian gender marking systems. She defined gender and considered the gender classes of both languages to locate the differences (2011). It was done by analyzing relevant existing literature and critically overviewing relevant approaches in the light of feminism.

Moreover, the presence of epicenes and common-gender words was identified and compared

in English versus Romanian. The results of the study showed that both the languages in question (English and Romanian) have common-gender words that are being used for both male and female entities. Moreover, the confusion between common-gender words and epicenes was cleared through this study. Thus, the study also concluded that multiple erroneous expressions exist in both languages that result from idiosyncrasies on the speaker's part. Hence, the present study investigated the gender-marking and gender-agreement system in the Punjabi language through a cross-linguistic study. The languages being selected were Punjabi and English.

Data Collection

Nature of Data

It was a data-driven and text-based study. Multiple sources, including books, research articles, Punjabi songs and blogs, were consulted to collect instances of Punjabi and English gender-rendering terms and phrases.

Research Design

The research was carried out through qualitative methods using the comparative analytical approach. In other words, the comparative analytical approach was meant to compare the different aspects of linguistic gender systems of both the languages in question, i.e., Punjabi and English, to locate, enlist and explore differences in gender-system of Punjabi in comparison with English as a reference language. While considering the situation of the Punjabi gender system, English was kept as a reference language to refer to.

Data Analysis

The present study attempted to investigate the gender-marking and gender agreement system in the Punjabi language through a cross-linguistic study. To identify the similarities and differences in gender systems of both the languages in question, multiple instances of Punjabi and English gender rendering terms and phrases were selected and compared through a comparative analytical approach.

Table I

English vs Punjabi Gender Markers

English Nouns	Punjabi nouns
Mountains	Paharh, Paharhi

Chicken	Kukar, kukri
Singular vs Plural	
Fish	Machi, machiyan
Girl, girls	Kuri, kuriyan
Boy, boys	Munda, munday
Eye, eyes	Ankh, ankhyan
Masculine vs Feminine	
It is raining	mein painda paya ae
The moon has risen	Chaand nikla hoya ae
Endings determine word-class	
Female Names	
Alaina, Anna, Bella, Charlotte	Kinza, Aleeza, Zeeniya, Maria, Zahra
(ss)	(ii)
Prince => Princess	Bakra => Barki
Waiter => Waitress	Ustaad => Ustaani
	Nokar => Nokarani
Personification (Masculine vs Feminine)	
The door was such a mess, but now I've fixed her up.	Darwaza (bua) khraab ho gaya se, me theek kr deta ae.
The ship was painted pink all over. She seemed such a wonder.	Kashti gulabi rang de se. / Hawai jahaz bot wada se.
I miss my country. She had everything to offer.	Menu apna mulk bot yad andha ae.
The goat was grazing with her kids.	Barkri kaah chardi pai se.
I've got a parrot, but I can't make her speak.	Mera tota bolda ae.
Referential Pronouns	
He, she, it	o, ay, mein, tu, asin, tusi
One, they, us, we (neutral)	
Epicenes	
Cousin, violinist, waitperson	Loki, Wazir-e-Azam, ashiq, baaghi, danishmand/daanishwar, Paindoo
Gender-Neutral Expressions	
Chairman, person	nivanah
Female Punjabi Nouns	
Ending in 'ii'	Zanani, kahani, roti, kuri, guddi, tee, chamri (skin), charbi, haddi, kursi
Ending in 'iya'	Kuriyan, titliyan
Ending in 'gi'	Zindgi
Ending in 'ish'	Saazish, numaish, laghzhish, warzish (verb)
Abstract nouns-Ending in 'na'	'Marna' => 'Maar' Uski mar khana asaan nhi
Exceptions	Dariya, molvi, dukhi (dukhiyari) Agg, , kitab, maiz
Male Punjabi Nouns	
Ending in 'alif'	Munda, taara, heera, paratha
Ending in 'ah'	Qissa, pardha, burqa, Veya
Ending with suffix 'pun'	Bachpan, apnapun
Singular and Plural (Masculine vs. Feminine)	
Karaa > karey pot	Caar > caaran car
Ustad > usaatza	Ustani > ustaaniyan
Munda > munday	Kitaab > kitaaban
Patola > Patolay	Kuri > kuriyan
Kar > Kaar	Chiri > chiryen

	Gudi > gudiyaan
Masculine Suffixes	Feminine suffixes
Pan= Bachpan	An= Jalan, Saran, ban (arm)
Paa= Burhapa	Ni= Jawani
Gender Agreement	
English Adjectives	Punjabi Adjectives
the good book	Changii kitaab
the bad boy	Ganda munda
the good girl	Changi kuri
English Verbs	Punjabi Verbs
The boy came	Munda ayaa
The girl came	Kurii ayii
English Verbs	Punjabi Verbs
The girls are studying	Kuriyan parhde payian ney
The boys are studying	Munday parhday paye ney

Discussion

Sometimes endings of the nouns determine the word class. English female Names: Alaina, Anna, and Bella do not necessarily always have any specific ending like 'aa', but in Punjabi, 'a' is usually added at the end of the female names, e.g., Kinza, Aleeza, Zeeniya, Maria, Zahra, Sana. In English, 'ess' is usually added at the end of the masculine noun to make it feminine, e.g., Prince => Princess, and 'ii' is usually added at the end of such Punjabi nouns. Epicene is usually confused with common-gender words, but it entails a notion different from the one carried by the term 'Epicene'. For instance, the Punjabi word 'Niyana' (meaning: a child) bears the connotation of a male child but is normally used to refer to both male and female children. The adjective 'Paindoo' can be a male or female, and a 'badtameez' or 'behaya' child can be a male or female child. They, their and them have been accepted as gender-neutral pronouns in English.

Manea (2011) suggested three types of deviation from the normative rules of assigning gender to nouns. The first type is 'Personification' in which inanimate objects are regarded as humans and are referred to through pronouns used for humans. This pattern might sound odd to non-native speakers. For instance, a ship, car and country are usually referred to as female entities, whereas there are few instances of referring to them as male entities. There are so many other instances too, like houses, pieces of furniture, etc.

Moreover, animals and plants are frequently personified. Sometimes plants are referred to as males, while animals are usually referred to through the general pronoun 'it', but still there are few instances where they are being upgraded through using

pronouns like 'he' or 'she' for them. Further, certain animals are termed as males regardless of their sex and are referred to through male pronouns, e.g., elephant, lion, and dog. On the contrary, cats and parrots are usually referred to as female entities most of the time. Thus, it seems the pronoun 'he' is used for strong and big animals, whereas 'she' is used for tiny and weak animals.

In Punjabi, gender is also marked on plural forms of singular nouns, unlike in English. Thus, masculine nouns have plural forms different from those of feminine nouns. Moreover, sometimes when it is confusing to determine whether a noun is masculine or feminine, its plural form can help to judge which gender class it belongs to. In Punjabi, there seems to be no agreement between nouns and pronouns, whereas there is an agreement between nouns and first-person singular pronouns in English. On the contrary, there seems to be no agreement between nouns and adjectives in both English and Punjabi. Moreover, in Punjabi, celestial bodies are masculine, whereas it varies in the case of celestial bodies and other aspects of nature in English. For example, the sun, Jupiter, mars, mountains, ocean, day, time, anger, was, love, and law are treated as male in English, whereas summer, spring, night, soul, darkness, virtue, victory, and religion are regarded as females. On the contrary, the case is quite different in Punjabi.

Limitations

The study has certain limitations too. The Punjabi expressions being mentioned in the study may vary from region to region. Moreover, most Punjabi words are so similar to those of Urdu that it is very hard to

distinguish the two; thus, many Punjabi expressions might be confused for Urdu. Further, the descriptive language used by the speakers in daily life differs from the prescriptive one: the kind of Punjabi language mentioned in the books. Since the current study was conducted on a small scale by taking a limited set of data, a similar kind of study can be applied to a more extensive set of data by studying Punjabi by comparing it to English, Urdu or any other regional language in order to come up with interesting findings and to add to the already existing body of literature on the Punjabi language.

Conclusion

The gender system of any language is of huge importance. Grammatical gender is not regarded as a prominent feature of the English language. Punjabi has a strong grammatical gender system that significantly differs from that of English but is similar to that of Urdu. Punjabi does not show any pronominal gender marking like English. Punjabi has postpositions instead of prepositions, just the way Urdu uses postpositions instead of prepositions (Jain et al., [2021](#)). In English,

gender is marked on prepositions, but that is not the case in Punjabi because it is marked on verbs and adjectives, unlike in English. Thus, in Punjabi, gender is usually not only shown through postpositions in a word but also through its relationship with other words in a language. Moreover, certain epicenes and common-gender words exist in both English and Punjabi. The ones in English have been highlighted and discussed over the years, but the ones in Punjabi have not been highlighted much. The study concluded that the sentence structure of Punjabi is quite similar to Urdu's, so the underlying rules of the gender system of Punjabi will not be different from the ones of Urdu's gender system.

Implications

The study's findings hold implications for novice researchers attempting to explore the Punjabi language in terms of its gender system. Since there has not been much research on the Punjabi language in general and on the gender system of the Punjabi language in particular, this study can serve as a reference.

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