

Variation and Change in Copula in Maithili in Real and Apparent Time

Ranjan Kumar

Assistant (Guest) Professor of English
A.N.S College, Barh

Abstract

The study reports on variation and change in the use of present copula (h- and chh-) forms in Maithili, an Indo-Aryan language spoken in Bihar, India. Maithili is one of the five closely related and yet distinct linguistic varieties spoken in Bihar. Maithili is unique among these varieties as it has a long literary history; it also enjoys the status of a scheduled language as per the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. It coexists with the state official language, Hindi (not to mention English and other Bihari languages), extensively used alongside Maithili.

Drawing upon the diachronic written materials from the 14th and 19th centuries and the current natural speech data (obtained through sociolinguistic interviews from a geographically and socially stratified large sample, out of which data from 9 speakers is utilised), the study provides evidence of an ongoing change in real time and apparent time. Further, comparing data from a rural and an adjacent urban location, the findings suggest that the change is more robust in the urban area. The innovative form (h) is being led by the younger generation, in particular, younger, educated women with greater exposure to major urban centres. In contrast, the traditional form (chh) is more commonly used by older speakers and those from rural areas.

To account for variation and change, the data was statistically tested for several linguistic factors, and social factors such as age, gender, mobility, exposure to urban area, education and region. The results suggest a complex interplay between social, geographical, and linguistic factors.

The study contributes to the small but growing number of socio-historical linguistics studies in India and the study of regional variation.

Keywords: Regional variation, geographical factors, statistical Testing, ongoing change, diachronic materials.

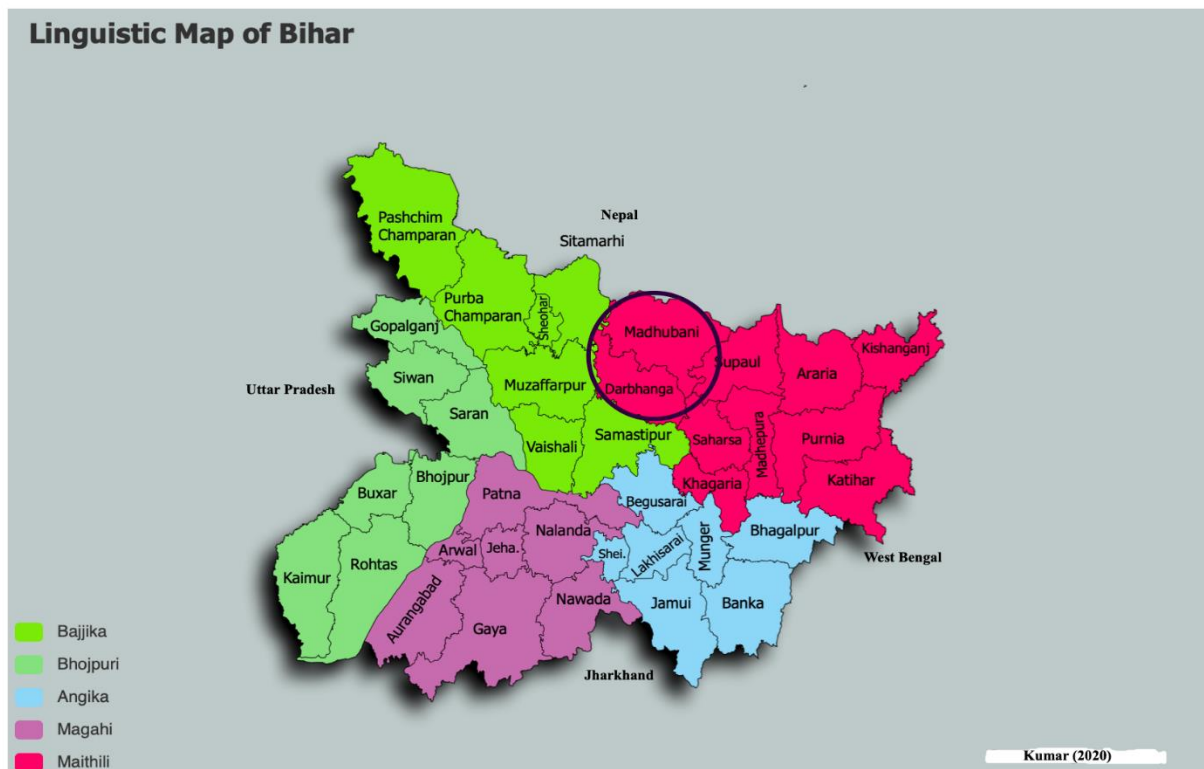
1. Introduction

The sociolinguistic landscape of India is marked by a rich tapestry of languages and dialects, each reflecting the cultural and historical nuances of the communities that speak them. Among these,

Maithili stands out as a significant language within the Eastern group of Bihari languages. Spoken predominantly in the districts of Darbhanga and Madhubani, along with several other regions in Bihar, Maithili boasts a vibrant speaker base of approximately 33 million, according to the Ethnologue (2016). The importance of Maithili extends beyond mere communication; it serves as a vital marker of identity and heritage for its speakers, intricately woven into the social fabric of the region.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the study of Maithili opens up avenues to examine language use in its sociocultural context, including factors such as language maintenance, shift, and language policy within a multilingual society. The presence of Maithili in both traditional and modern domains—ranging from literature and folk arts to contemporary media—illustrates the dynamic interplay between language, identity, and societal change.

This research focuses specifically on the Madhubani and Darbhanga districts, where the language not only thrives but also faces challenges due to urbanisation. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for recognising how language functions as both a cultural repository and a medium for social interaction in this region, leading us to delve deeper into the sociolinguistic patterns that characterize the Maithili-speaking community.



Map 1: Linguistic Map of Bihar

Literature Review of Language Variation Studies in Maithili

Language variation studies in Maithili have garnered scholarly attention, particularly in the context of sociolinguistics, historical linguistics, and language policy, reflecting the dynamic interplay between language, identity, and societal changes. This literature review seeks to outline key contributions in the field, focusing on the various factors influencing language variation, including geographical, social, and historical contexts.

Research on Maithili's linguistic features has roots in early 20th-century scholarship, notably by George Grierson, whose linguistic survey highlighted the phonological and morphological aspects of Maithili (Grierson, 1903; 1909). His findings laid the groundwork for later investigations by documenting variations in verb forms, including the copula. Grierson's analysis of the copular verb (chh) remains fundamental, presenting it as a versatile element indicative of varying honorificity and morphology within the language.

Following Grierson, subsequent studies have expanded on the complexity of copula usage in Maithili. More recent linguistic analyses have utilised a combination of sociolinguistic frameworks and quantitative methodologies to capture the evolving nature of the language. Such studies have emphasised the relevance of diachronic approaches, examining historical texts alongside contemporary spoken forms (e.g., Khan, 2014; Singh, 2018).

Sociolinguistic studies in Maithili have emphasised the significance of social factors like age, gender, education, and urbanisation in language variation. Research by Das and Sharma (2015) indicates that younger speakers, especially those with access to urban educational institutions, exhibit a linguistic shift toward the innovative copular form "h." This has been linked to a greater exposure to Hindi and English media, suggesting a blending of linguistic attributes within a multilingual environment.

Conversely, older generations demonstrate a preference for traditional forms, illustrating a continuity of linguistic heritage. The differential use of the copular verb (chh) among rural speakers corroborates this observation, marking it as a feature of linguistic conservative behavior tied to social identity and regional pride (Pandey, 2017). Studies highlight how the traditional form serves as a marker of authenticity and cultural connection within rural communities.

Geographical studies of Maithili have examined regional dialects and their distinctive features. Research conducted by Kumar (2016) underscores how urban centres like Madhubani and Darbhanga exhibit distinct phonological and morphological patterns compared to their rural counterparts. This urban-rural divide affects language use and identity; in urban settings, there is a marked trend toward linguistic innovation, influenced by migration and exposure to diverse linguistic practices.

Maps and surveys indicating linguistic diversity within the Maithili-speaking regions have proven invaluable (e.g., Ethnologue, 2016). Such research reveals a rich tapestry of dialects and linguistic practices, highlighting regional variations that challenge the notion of a monolithic Maithili language.

The relationship between language and identity is a prominent theme in Maithili studies. Scholars such as Jha (2013) have argued that Maithili serves not merely as a means of communication but also embodies cultural identity and pride. The use of Maithili in literature, folk arts, and media reinforces community solidarity and helps resist cultural homogenization under the pressures of globalisation.

This perspective aligns with variationist approaches, which interpret linguistic features as symbols of social grouping and identity. As urban migration and interactions increase, the language's role in identity negotiation becomes crucial, often leading to code-switching and code-mixing phenomena, which further complicates traditional linguistic boundaries (Sinha, 2020).

The recognition of Maithili as a scheduled language in India has prompted additional studies into language policy, particularly concerning its promotion and preservation. Researchers have investigated the implications of this status on language usage in educational, administrative, and cultural contexts (Bihar Government Reports, 2019). Efforts to standardise Maithili and promote its use in official domains reflect broader sociopolitical dynamics, making language variation studies critical for understanding policy impacts on linguistic diversity.

The body of literature on language variation in Maithili presents a multifaceted view of the language as it navigates historical legacies, social dynamics, and contemporary changes. The studies reflect the intricate ties between linguistic forms and their social meanings, underscoring the relevance of Maithili in broader discussions of identity, culture, and sociolinguistic change in India. Future research can build on these foundations to explore the continuing evolution of Maithili in an increasingly globalised world, further examining the interplay of traditional and innovative linguistic forms among its speakers.

Research Methodology

The current paper is based on two types of data:

1. Early 20th-century texts from the Linguistic Survey of India, compiled and edited by George Abraham Grierson in 1903. This data includes ten specimens representing Maithili and its sub-dialects: Chhika-chhiki Boli (known today as Angika) and western Maithili (known as Bajjika).
2. Apparent-time conversational data on Maithili, collected through interviews, questionnaires, and narratives from the Maithili regions of Madhubani and Darbhanga. Data was gathered from nine speakers across two language regions, representing two age groups: the younger generation and the older generation.

This study aims to define the overall morphosyntactic features of the concerned languages from a socio-historical dialectological perspective. However, a more detailed analysis of the dialectological status of the Bihari speech communities will be necessary in the future.

Data collection for this study involved several methods:

1. Face-to-face sociolinguistic interviews were conducted in selected medium-sized cities to address gaps left by the earlier study (Grierson 1903).
2. A few telephone interviews were conducted in areas where sociolinguistic fieldwork was not feasible for various reasons.
3. Additional in-person interviews in certain communities located near dialect boundaries to gather more contact-induced features.

The mixed methodology used in this research allowed us to accomplish both of our goals: sampling a geographically broad set of communities and specifically focusing on communities near dialect boundaries to obtain more information.

Data was collected from both urban and rural areas using the following techniques:

1. **Questionnaires:** Designed with a focus on verbal morphology, these aimed to gather extensive information about different verbal paradigms. The questionnaire consisted of a list of lexical verbs organised by their functions in the language.
2. **Sociolinguistic interviews:** This method is crucial for data collection in linguistics. Our study employed this technique to interview informants on various casual and conversational topics.

The tools used for data collection included audio recorders:

1. Zoom H5 Digital Audio Recorder
2. iPhone 12Pro Max audio recorder

Following the recording process, the data was transcribed, and a Mac was used to prepare codes to facilitate statistical analysis using the Goldvarb program.

Lastly, we employed interlinear morpheme-by-morpheme glossing, segmenting the morphemes with hyphens throughout the text. The abbreviations used are similar to those in the 'Leipzig Glossing Rule' of the Department of Linguistics of the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig.

Copular Verbs

This section presents a variationist analysis of copular verbs in the Maithili language. Languages exhibit significant differences in their utilisation of copulas; for instance, English, French, and German employ a singular copular verb, while Spanish and Portuguese utilise multiple forms (*ser* and *estar*). Certain languages, such as Turkic and Korean, may incorporate suffixes as copulas, whereas others, including Arabic and Quechua, rely on demonstratives or pronouns. Furthermore, Japanese, Polish, and various Austronesian languages adopt mixed strategies or particles. Notably, both Russian and Turkish demonstrate the absence of a copula in specific contexts.

The investigation of copula constructions has been addressed in historical works by Meillet (1906) and Benveniste (1950). More recent scholarly contributions have prioritised semantics and typology, including research conducted by Declerck (1988), Hengeveld (1992), and Stassen (1997). This paper specifically analyses the various forms of "be" in Maithili, with a focus on their copular functions. It is important to note that Maithili verbs inflect for person and honorificity, yet do not exhibit markings for gender and number.

Higgins (1979) categorises copular verbs into four semantic types: Predicational, Specificational, Equative, and Identificational. In 2019, Ghosh expanded this framework for Eastern Indo-Aryan

languages by proposing three additional categories: existential, locative, and relational copular clauses.

The current study advocates for a semantic-syntactic classification of copular sentences, which includes five distinct categories:

1. Existential copula: Indicates the existence of a noun (e.g., "There is a cinema hall").
2. Equative/Nominal copula: Equates two expressions (e.g., "She is Kanchan").
3. Possessive copula: Denotes possession (e.g., "The girl has the book").
4. Adjectival/Predicational copula: Expresses a property (e.g., "The girl is cute").
5. Locational copula: Places a referent geographically (e.g., "The beauty queen is in Vaishali").

Copula Variation in Maithili: chh ~h

Oitham	ek-Ta	nadi	bhi	chh-ae.
That place-LOC	one-CLAS	river	also	PRES.COP-3NH.S
'There is also a river there.'				
Oi-tham	ek-Ta	nadi	bhi	h-ae.
That place-LOC	one-CLAS	river	also	PRES.COP-3NH.S
"There is also a river there"				

Hamm-ar	daant-me	dard	h-ae.
1-GEN.	teeth-LOC.	pain	PRES.COP-3NH.S
"There is pain in my teeth."			

Hamm-ar	daant-me	dard	chh-ae.
1-GEN.	teeth-LOC.	pain	PRES.COP-3NH.S
"There is pain in my teeth."			

In the Maithili language, the primary copular verb used is "chh," which is thought to originate from the root "achh," as noted by linguist Grierson in his study of 1909. This verb is quite versatile; it can be inflected according to tense, person, and the level of honorificity, which showcases the complex system of verbal inflection characteristic of Maithili. An interesting aspect of the language is its lack of distinction between number (singular and plural) and gender in its verb conjugations. Grierson (1903) highlights that for each grammatical person across various tenses, there can be as many as seven or eight distinct forms, illustrating the rich morphological structure of Maithili verbs. Although contemporary Maithili does not maintain a number distinction, it compensates for this in its usage of distinct levels of language, superior or honorific forms versus inferior or non-honorific forms.

When examining the morphological structure of Maithili, one finds a wealth of both verbal and nominal formations. The copular verb (chh) functions as a be-verb and is inflected in the present tense to align with the person and honorificity associated with the subject, object, and addressee. This reflects the language's social nuances, emphasising respect and hierarchy in communication. Additionally, an alternative form of the copular verb, "h," is frequently employed in everyday conversation. Grierson (1903) posits that this form might be linked to the Hindi verb "hai," which translates to "is," and is based on the root "ah," denoting existence or being. However, (h) is regarded as somewhat defective compared to "chh," as it inflects in a more restricted set of contexts, limiting its versatility in the language. This distinction between the two forms adds another layer of complexity to the verbal landscape of Maithili, highlighting its unique linguistic features.

Despite Grierson's work from 1903, which provides extensive insights into the variations of the copula in Maithili, there is a notable absence of any documented examples featuring the token 'h.' This gap raises questions about the historical usage of this element in the language.

In the Table, which is based on Grierson's study (1903), one can observe a systematic analysis of the copulative forms used throughout the language's evolution. Interestingly, when we examine earlier literary works, particularly those of the renowned poet Vidyapati, we encounter a consistent and clear application of the copula 'chh.' This suggests that the usage patterns of copulas may have varied significantly over time, highlighting the importance of such literary sources in understanding the linguistic landscape of Maithili.

Thus, the examination of both Grierson's findings and Vidyapati's writings provides a rich context for exploring the complexities and the historical shifts seen in the Maithili language.

Table 1: Copula Variation (Grierson 1903) in Maithili

Copula verb	<i>ha</i>	<i>chh</i>	<i>thik</i>	Total
Tokens	0	20	1	21
Percentage	0%	95.2%	4.8%	
Total	0	20	1	21

In earlier literary works, such as those authored by Vidyapati, there is a clear and distinct application of the term (chh). These texts not only highlight the significance of this term but also demonstrate its intricate usage within the broader narrative and thematic structure of the literature. Vidyapati's poetry, renowned for its lyrical depth and emotional resonance, showcases (chh) as a pivotal element that enriches the overall experience of the reader, allowing for a deeper engagement with the themes of love, nature, and spiritual reflection present in his works.

“तीलक लगौने धनुष कान्ह पर टूटा बालक ठाढ़ छै”

Tilak Lagaune dhanush Kanh par tuta Balak Thadh chh-ae

“A boy stands with a broken bow on his shoulder”

Table 2: Copula Variation (Vidyapati, 14th century) in Maithili

Copula	Token	Percentage
<i>chh</i>	54	100%
<i>h</i>	0	-

According to a report from the Maithili Samachar segment on Janata Television, aired in May 2018, it is evident that the focus on the (chh) sound in the Maithili language is significant and well-defined. This segment highlighted how (chh) plays a crucial role in the phonetic structure and cultural nuances of Maithili, demonstrating its importance in communication and linguistic identity. The channel provided in-depth analysis and examples, which underscored the categorical nature of this sound, making it clear that it is an essential component of the language's distinct characteristics:

Table 3: Copula Variation (Janta Television, 2018) in Maithili

Copula	Token	Percentage
<i>chh</i>	42	100%
<i>h</i>	0	-

This study presents a comprehensive analysis that differentiates between five distinct types of copular verbs, informed by both syntactic and semantic factors. From a syntactic perspective, equative, relational, identificational, and possessive copulas exhibit notable similarities; however, there exist significant semantic distinctions among them. As a result, the research consolidates some of these copular classifications, focusing primarily on the following five types: Existential, Equative, Adjectival, Locational, and Possessive.

A key finding from this investigation is the observation that the copulas identified as (h) and (chh) function as versatile, all-purpose copulas. These two forms are found to occur across all the specified copula types, demonstrating their broad applicability in different contexts. This analysis highlights not only the complexity of copular verbs but also their pivotal role in conveying various relational meanings within language.

Table 4: Types of Copular Construction in Maithili

Copula-type	<i>h</i>	<i>chh</i>	Total
Adjectival	10 (18.9%)	43 (81.1%)	53
Possessive	9 (28.1%)	23 (71.9%)	32
Existential	3 (3.0%)	96 (97.0%)	99
Locational	3 (6.4%)	44 (93.6%)	47
Equative	4 (4.9%)	77 (95.1%)	81
Total	29	283	312

In our analysis, we observe that the copula (*chh*) remains the most commonly utilised copula within the language. Conversely, the copula (*h*) is gradually making its way into everyday usage. "H" serves as a versatile copula, particularly prominent in possessive constructions where it signifies relationships of ownership, as well as in adjectival contexts where it links subjects to descriptive phrases. However, its presence is quite limited in other copula categories, such as existential statements, locational phrases, and equative expressions, where it appears to be marginally employed.

A significant point of variation between (*chh*) and (*h*) lies specifically within the third person. The use of (*h*) is confined exclusively to third-person contexts, distinguishing it from "*chh*," which appears more broadly across different subjects. This delineation highlights a specific syntactic and functional role that (*h*) plays in the linguistic landscape, particularly concerning its application in third-person references.

Table 5: Distribution of Copulas across Persons in Maithili

Person	<i>h</i>	<i>chh</i>	Total
1	0	15 (100%)	15
2	0	12 (100%)	12
3	29 (10.2%)	256 (89.8%)	285
Total	29	283	312

The analysis reveals a crucial linguistic constraint related to the usage of the copula (h) in Maithili, which is highly influenced by the concept of honorificity. Notably, the copula (h) is exclusively utilised within 3rd person non-honorific contexts, indicating that its application is restricted to situations where no honorific respect is required. This limitation highlights the distinct linguistic boundaries maintained in Maithili concerning politeness and formality.

In this table, we explore how different copulas are distributed across various contexts, illustrating their specific uses and variations in formality levels. Through a detailed examination, we aim to uncover deeper insights into the relationship between the copular forms and the honorific status of the subjects they describe in Maithili.

By expanding on these elements, we hope to provide a clearer understanding of the role that honorificity plays in the structure and usage of copulas within this language.

Table 6: Distribution of Copulas across honorific grades in Maithili

Honorificity	<i>h</i>	<i>chh</i>	Total
Non-honorific	29 (11.0%)	235 (89%)	264
Honorific	0	48 (100%)	48
Total	29	283	312

The table presents the distribution of copulas across various honorific grades in the Maithili language. It is observed that the copula (h) is specifically restricted to contexts involving third-person non-honorific forms. In contrast, the copula (chh) exhibits a more extensive range of applications, indicating its broader use across different contexts. This distinction serves as evidence that (h) may represent a relatively recent addition to the language, likely introduced from an external linguistic source. Such findings highlight the dynamic nature of language evolution within Maithili, revealing how new forms can emerge and coexist with traditional usage.

Chh operates on a broader geographical scale, encompassing a wide range of locations, whereas h is predominantly concentrated in the Darbhanga area. The influence of geography and regional boundaries has proven to be a significant limiting factor for h, restricting its reach and potential for expansion. In contrast, Chh's extensive spread allows for greater adaptability and a wider audience, highlighting the stark variation in operational scope between the two entities.

Table 7: Distribution of Copulas across Regions in Maithili

Copula	<i>ha</i>	<i>chh</i>	Total
Region			
Darbhangha	27 (24.5%)	83 (75.5%)	110 (35.3%)
Madhubani	2 (1.0%)	200 (99%)	202 (64.7%)
Total	29	283	312

Darbhangha, with a striking 24.5% prevalence of the linguistic token "h," surpasses Madhubani, where it appears a mere 1% of the time. This notable disparity can be attributed to the intricate tapestry of linguistic and geographic influences that Darbhanga shares with the Bajjika region, particularly Muzaffarpur. Bajjika, fundamentally a hub for the (h) token, suggests a compelling narrative of linguistic diffusion, where (h) has seamlessly flowed from the vibrant neighbouring area into the dialect of Darbhanga.

However, an intriguing distinction emerges in this linguistic landscape: the gradual loss of structural nuances. In the Bajjika and Magahi regions, the (h) token remains vibrant, adapting through inflections that denote various numbers of individuals and honorific levels. In stark contrast, within the boundaries of the Maithili regions of both Darbhanga and Madhubani, this linguistic richness is curtailed. Here, (h) is confined solely to the 3rd person non-honorific context, stripping away layers of complexity that once characterised its usage. This shift paints a vivid picture of the evolving dynamics of language in this culturally rich region.

Geography alone cannot fully account for the complexities of any variable under study. To gain a more nuanced understanding of the results, it is essential to analyse geographic regions in conjunction with various social factors. This approach involves cross-tabulating regional data with demographic, economic, and cultural variables, allowing for a comprehensive examination of how these elements interact and influence one another. By doing so, we can uncover deeper insights and patterns that might otherwise go unnoticed, ultimately enhancing our understanding of the underlying dynamics at play.

Table 8: Cross Tabulation of region with generation in Maithili

Generation	Copula	Darbhnaga	Madhubani	Total
Younger generation	<i>h</i>	26 (28%)	2 (8%)	28
	<i>chh</i>	67 (72%)	23 (92%)	89

Total		93	25	118
Older generation	<i>h</i>	1 (6%)	0	1
	<i>chh</i>	16 (94%)	177 (100%)	193
Total		27	202	194
Grand total		110	202	312

The findings reveal compelling evidence that the usage of (h) is predominantly confined to the younger age groups, with a notable 28% of this demographic adopting it. In stark contrast, only a mere 6% of older individuals have embraced this linguistic trend. Interestingly, among the older speakers, there is just one who has utilised (h)—and notably, this individual is in close contact with ST, the driving force behind this innovation. We will delve into this phenomenon in greater detail later. It appears that (h) is a fresh linguistic development, emerging from the vibrant and dynamic community of college students.

Table 9: Cross Tabulation of Region and Gender in Maithili

Gender Region	Copula	Darbhanga	Madhubani	Total
Female	<i>h</i>	23 (24%)	2 (4%)	25 (17)
	<i>chh</i>	73 (76%)	52 (96%)	125 (83)
Male	<i>h</i>	4 (29%)	0	0 (0%)
	<i>chh</i>	10 (71%)	148 (100%)	200 (100%)
Total		110	202	312

In the rich linguistic landscape of Madhubani, a notable observation is evident: the phonetic element (h) is predominantly employed by female speakers, representing a mere 4% of total instances. This form appears to be primarily adopted by women, while male speakers predominantly favor the traditional variant, (chh). Importantly, there is no recorded use of (h) among male speakers in Madhubani, indicating a distinct linguistic divergence.

In contrast, an exploration of the neighboring region of Darbhanga reveals a different linguistic pattern. Here, both men and women utilize the modern variation of (h); however, a significant trend emerges wherein women utilize this newer form with markedly greater frequency than their male counterparts.

To gain a deeper understanding of these compelling findings and to identify the specific demographics associated with the adoption of this contemporary phonetic variant, a thorough analysis is conducted. This analysis involves the intersection of gender with various age groups and generations, aiming to ascertain whether it is women across all age categories—young, middle-aged, and older—or predominantly younger women who are driving this linguistic evolution.

Table 10: Cross Tabulation of Gender and Age Groups in Maithili

Gender Generation	Copula	Younger generation	Old generation	Total
Female	<i>ha</i>	25 (25%)	0	25 (17%)
	<i>chh</i>	74 (75%)	51 (100%)	125 (83%)
Male	<i>ha</i>	3 (16%)	1 (1%)	4 (2%)
	<i>chh</i>	16 (84%)	142 (99%)	158 (98%)
Total		118	194	312

In the intricate landscape of language usage, a notable trend emerges among women: it is primarily the younger generation that exclusively adopts the newer linguistic form referred to as "h." Likewise, this youthful inclination is markedly more pronounced among men; for instance, 16% of younger men utilise (h) in their speech, in stark contrast to merely 1% of their older counterparts. This observation underscores a distinct pattern: the younger generation prominently distinguishes their language from that of preceding eras through their use of (h).

In contrast, when examining the form "Chh," an intriguing reversal is observed. This particular linguistic variant is favoured to a greater extent by the older generations than by the youth. For example, a significant 99% of older men employ "Chh," while only 84% of younger men do so. This trend is similarly reflected among women, with 83% of older women using (chh) compared to 75% of their younger counterparts.

A critical inquiry arises: do the youthful speakers from Madhubani and Darbhanga uniformly adopt this newer form, or do they demonstrate a complex array of individual variations in their language choices? To explore this question, we conducted a cross-tabulation of individual speakers and their respective regions, aiming to uncover the diverse linguistic nuances present within these vibrant communities.

Table 11: Intra-speaker Variation in Maithili

Speakers	Copula	Madhubani	Darbhangha	Total
MD	<i>h</i>	0	0	0
	<i>chh</i>	41 (100%)	0	41
Total		41	0	41
KJ	<i>h</i>	0		0
	<i>chh</i>	65 (100%)	0	65
Total		65	0	65
KT	<i>h</i>	0	0	0
	<i>chh</i>	0	10 (100%)	10
Total		0	10	10
DM	<i>h</i>	0	1 (14%)	1
	<i>chh</i>	0	6 (86%)	6
Total		0	7	7
KM	<i>h</i>	2 (15%)	0	2
	<i>chh</i>	11 (85%)	0	11
Total		13	0	13
RJ	<i>h</i>	0	0	0
	<i>chh</i>	12	0	12

		(100%)		
Total		12	0	12
LM	<i>h</i>	0	3 (43%)	3
	<i>chh</i>	0	4 (57%)	4
Total		0	7	7
PJ	<i>h</i>	0	0	0
	<i>chh</i>	71 (100%)	0	71
Total		71	0	71
ST	<i>h</i>	0	23 (27%)	23
	<i>chh</i>	0	63 (73%)	63
Total		0	86	86
Grand total		202	110	312

Among the nine speakers surveyed, four distinct voices embraced the use of the 'h' sound. This group included two males and two females, with a notable trend emerging: women employed the 'h' sound more frequently than their male counterparts. The remaining speakers adhered to the more traditional 'chh' pronunciation.

Regional influences played a significant role in these linguistic choices. Madhubani, characterised by its rural heritage and tight-knit community, contrasts sharply with the urban dynamism of Darbhanga. This disparity is evident in the speaker demographics—only one woman from Madhubani adopted the more modern 'h' form. In stark contrast, all other enthusiasts of the 'h' sound hailed from the bustling streets of Darbhanga, illustrating the interplay between individual identity and regional culture.

Leading the charge in 'h' usage is ST, a dynamic young woman who embodies this linguistic evolution. Having spent five transformative years in Patna for her higher education, she immersed herself in a world where the 'h' sound thrives alongside the vibrant urban culture. Upon returning to her roots in Darbhanga after completing her degree, she brought with her not just academic knowledge but also the linguistic nuances of Patna, Muzaffarpur, and Vaishali—regions where the 'h'

form reigns supreme. Her journey encapsulates the rich tapestry of language and identity woven through the landscapes of Bihar.

To gain deeper insights into the results, we've decided to analyze the data by cross-tabulating regions with years of mobility. This approach will help us uncover patterns and trends that are essential for a comprehensive understanding.

Table 12: Cross Tabulation of Region and Mobility

Years of mobility	Copula	Madhubani	Darbhanga	Total
0	<i>h</i>	0	0	0
	<i>chh</i>	106 (100%)	10 (100%)	116
Total		106	10	116
1-2	<i>h</i>	2 (15%)	1 (14%)	3
	<i>chh</i>	11 (85%)	6 (86%)	17
Total		13	7	20
3-4	<i>h</i>	0	3 (43%)	3
	<i>chh</i>	12 (100%)	4 (57%)	16
Total		12	7	19
5	<i>h</i>	0	23 (27%)	23
	<i>chh</i>	71 (100%)	63 (73%)	134
Total		71	86	157
Grand Total		202	110	312

There is compelling evidence indicating a notable interaction between regional characteristics and individual behaviour. Our analysis reveals that residents of Darbhanga exhibit a higher level of innovation compared to their counterparts from Madhubani. Despite both groups having spent a

similar duration away from their native districts, individuals from Darbhanga demonstrate distinctly different behavioural patterns than those from Madhubani.

This discrepancy can be largely attributed to the contrasting socio-cultural environments of the two regions. Darbhanga, characterised as an urban area, fosters a society that is more adaptable and open to change, encouraging innovative thinking and diverse expressions of creativity. In contrast, Madhubani retains its identity as a culturally rich village, deeply rooted in tradition and local customs. This conservative outlook, combined with the community's strong ties to their cultural heritage, often results in a more rigid approach to innovation and change. The differences in urban and rural life further highlight how regional contexts shape individual behaviours and tendencies toward creativity.

The Varbrul statistical analysis of the copula has revealed critical insights, highlighting the significance of two influential factor groups: region and age groups. Understanding these factors is essential for comprehensively analysing linguistic variations and their broader implications.

Table 13: Quantitative Analysis (h) in Maithili

1. Region	Total	Probability
Darbhangha	110	0.776
Madhubani	202	0.337
2. Generation		
Younger gen.	118	0.853
Older gen.	193	0.255

Convergence at Iteration 8

Input 0.019

Log likelihood = -66.967 Significance = 0.005

The analysis provides a clear depiction of Madhubani as a predominantly conservative region, demonstrated by a lower factor weight of 0.337. Inhabitants of this community often exhibit a reluctance to embrace novel forms of expression, resulting in an environment deeply rooted in tradition. There exists a pronounced preference for familiar customs, as residents remain closely aligned with their cultural heritage. In stark contrast, Darbhanga emanates a vibrant and progressive ethos, characterised by a higher factor weight of 0.776. This region is marked by an openness and enthusiasm for innovative ideas that resonate with modern life.

Moreover, a compelling aspect arises when examining generational influence: the younger demographic displays a significantly greater willingness to explore and adopt innovative modes of expression, reflected in a factor weight of 0.853. This younger cohort is breaking free from

conventional norms, underscoring a notable generational divide. The disparity highlights the varying degrees of openness to change, showcasing a distinct contrast between the youthful eagerness for modernity and the more cautious perspectives typically held by older generations.

Comprehensive Observations on Linguistic Variations in Maithili

1. The linguistic form (chh) exhibits a significantly higher prevalence within the Madhubani district compared to Darbhanga, indicating a potential regional distinction in usage patterns.
2. In terms of overall occurrence, the phoneme (h) is notably less frequent than "chh," suggesting a potential difference in linguistic preference or social dynamics within these communities.
3. The application of (h) is limited strictly to the third person, while (chh) displays greater versatility by inflecting across all grammatical persons—this inflection varies based on the honorific statuses of the subject, object, and addressee involved in the discourse.
4. While (h) finds its application solely within the confines of third-person non-honorific contexts, (chh) seamlessly operates in both honorific and non-honorific situations, reflecting a broader range of social interactions.
5. Geographic distribution indicates that (h) is more commonly encountered in the more urbanised Darbhanga area as compared to the quieter, rural setting of Madhubani, hinting at urban influences on language use.
6. It is plausible to hypothesise that (h) represents a linguistic form that may have migrated from other urban regions. This shift might correlate with the movement of young individuals who attend college in cities and subsequently return to their hometowns, bringing back these new linguistic features.
7. Observational data suggest that (h) appears to have been introduced into local usage primarily by younger students who have spent considerable time in Patna—a recognised h-region in the linguistic landscape—and have consequently reintegrated this feature into their speech upon returning home.
8. This hypothesis finds support when considering the generational differences in (h) usage; the younger demographic emerges as the predominant users of "h," with studies indicating that women also tend to utilise this form more frequently than their male counterparts.
9. As (h) diffused into the linguistic environments of both Madhubani and Darbhanga, it appears to have undergone significant structural simplification, aligning with Labov's (2003) predictions regarding language evolution. In h-regions such as Patna, Muzaffarpur, and Vaishali, (h) retains its inflectional character, conforming to the same honorific-grade-based inflection system as (chh). In contrast, in the communities of Darbhanga and Madhubani, (h) remains restricted solely to the third person, illustrating a stark divergence in its functional application.

Conclusion

The Maithili language community is currently in the midst of a fascinating transformation, embracing modern linguistic trends such as the introduction of the copular verb (h). This change is accompanied by a marked consistent use of (chh) over the years, as evidenced by historical and diachronic data. Urban centres like Darbhanga are witnessing this shift more intensely compared to the calmer, rural landscape of Madhubani. It seems plausible that the emergence of (h) has roots in other regions, particularly urban areas where young adults venture for higher education, only to return to their hometowns with new linguistic influences.

This speculation gains weight when we observe the generational and gender-based disparities in the adoption of (h). Predominantly, it is the younger generation that employs the sound, with women embracing it even more than men. As (h) spreads into the linguistic fabric of Madhubani and Darbhanga, it appears to shed many of its structural nuances, aligning with predictions made by Labov in 2003. In the h-regions of Patna, Muzaffarpur, and Vaishali, (h) functions inflectionally, adapting in a manner akin to (chh) tailored to various honorific distinctions among subjects, objects, and addressees. However, in Darbhanga and Madhubani, (h) has primarily found its place within third-person non-honorific contexts.

One significant factor contributing to the limited scope of (h) is the strong presence of "chh," which has long fulfilled the same linguistic roles. As an urban hub, Darbhanga is more susceptible to linguistic evolution than the tranquil environment of Madhubani.

Crucially, social mobility plays a monumental role in the adoption of (h) across both regions. The driving force behind this change is predominantly a cohort of young, college-educated women. Intriguingly, the only instances of (h) detected in Madhubani are solely found in the dialogue of young women who have returned home from Patna after their academic pursuits.

Our findings underscore that mobility has different impacts on the linguistic variables at play: it is the movement of individuals that facilitates the spread of (h) within the Maithili community, with women acting as pivotal agents in this linguistic evolution.

In conclusion, geography alone cannot account for the rich tapestry of variation observed in Maithili. Instead, it interacts dynamically with factors of gender, age, and mobility. It is the young women from Darbhanga—armed with their educational experiences from h-regions—who stand at the forefront, championing the innovative use of (h) within their community.

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