

The Linguistic Evolution of Khortha: A Historical Perspective

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Abstract

In this study, we will attempt to provide an analysis of the development of Khortha. The purpose of this study is to highlight the historical development of Khortha, covering its origins, genetic affiliation, etymology, the ways in which Khortha is influenced by other languages. The primary goal of this work is to examine the history of Khortha and identify its origins. Khortha is the language that is most often spoken in the Indian state of Jharkhand. According to the 2011 census, approximately 8.04 million people speak Khortha. The spoken language of the tribes of Jharkhand is primarily Khortha. Speakers of Khortha demonstrate characteristics of multilingualism when they interact with members of other communities. However, scholars hold a variety of perspectives on its origin and identity. This research contributes to a better understanding of the changes occurring in Khortha and the ways in which they are influenced by the Indo-Aryan language spoken in Jharkhand. Data collection has been achieved through the use of both primary and secondary sources. Additionally, interview techniques are used to enquire about a variety of conversational and casual themes. As a result, the present research contributes to a better understanding of the cultural history and linguistic diversity of Jharkhand and plays a role in documenting the Khortha language community.

Keywords: Khortha, genetic affiliation, etymology, documenting and Linguistic Evolution

1. INTRODUCTION

As Kirby (2007) asserts, "Why is the emergence of language such a significant event?" What similarities does it share with the other significant evolutionary transitions? Maynard Smith and Szathmáry's intriguing observation is that these transitions share certain characteristics, despite their diversity. To be more specific, a significant number of transitions result in the development of a new apparatus for information transmission. Language, they contend, offers precisely this innovative mechanism, which essentially facilitates an infinite system of cultural transmission. Language may be regarded as a coding system that maps between two distinct spaces: the space of conceptions and intentions on the one hand, and the space of articulation and perception on the other (in figure 1) (Origi & Sperber, 2000).

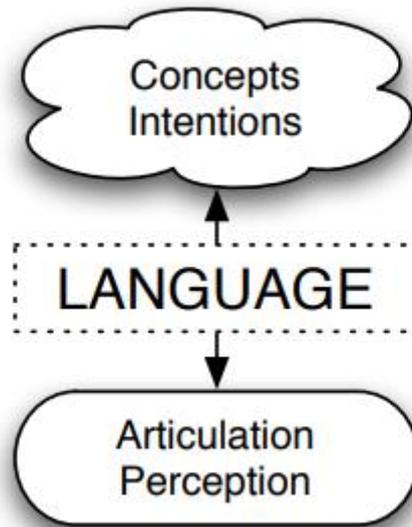


Figure 1: Language as a system that maps between concepts/intentions and perception/articulation

Source: <https://www.lel.ed.ac.uk/~simon/Papers/Kirby/The%20Evolution%20of%20Language.pdf>

The present research aims to highlight the historical development of Khortha, covering its origins, genetic affiliation, etymology, the ways in which Khortha is influenced by other languages. Khortha is the language that is most often spoken in the Indian state of Jharkhand. According to the 2011 census, approximately 8.04 million people speak Khortha. However, scholars hold a variety of perspectives on its origin and identity. As a result, there has been a debate regarding whether Khortha should be regarded as a variant of Hindi or Maithili. Kumar and Ray (2024) mentioned that “In the opinion of Prasad and Shastri (1958), Khortha is one of the varieties of Magahi, whereas in the opinion of Das (2013), it is a variety of Angika” (p. 221). As a result, the present research contributes to a better understanding of the cultural history and linguistic diversity of Khortha.

The research on Khortha suggests that little work has been done on it. The following are a few of the works: Priya and Singh (2018) discuss the urgent need to preserve the pure variety of the endangered language of India, Khortha (Khotta). In Khortha, Kumar and Ray (2023) discuss the various categories of affixes. Ray and Kumar (2022) conducted a study on the identification and analysis of person agreement in Khortha. Aman et al. (2020) investigate the phonological aspects of Khortha, while Kumari (2021) addresses ergativity and agreement in the same language. Kumar and Ray (2024) have presented a recent study on Politeness Strategies in Khortha: A Linguistic Study.

The following are some other notable studies that have been conducted on the evolution of language: Kumar (2024), on Linguistic Variation and Change in Bhojpuri, Kumar (2025) on Linguistic Variation And Stability In Angika, Basumatary (2021) on Phonology of Lexical borrowing of Indo-Aryan Languages used in Bodo, Nahar (2021) The Diverse Linguistic Impact on Assamese: An Indo -Aryan Language and Rani (2023) The evolution of Hindi: A historical analysis of how the Hindi language has

evolved over time, including its origins, influences from other languages. The current study aims to investigate the history of Khortha and determine its origins. In the subsequent section, we discuss Khortha and analyse its linguistic characteristics.

1.1. Methodology

In the present research work, a descriptive framework has been used to analyse the Khortha language to uncover the patterns, trends and the characteristics of Khortha to see the changes in grammar and script. Data collection has been conducted using both primary and secondary sources. A questionnaire has been made and distributed among the native speakers of the Khortha. Additionally, interview techniques are used to enquire about a variety of conversational and casual themes.

2. ABOUT KHORTHATHA

The language that is predominantly spoken in Jharkhand, India, is Khortha. The name Jharkhand is a combination of the words "Jhar" and "Khand," with the subjunctive meaning "forest region." This region is also known as the Chhotanagpur Plateau and the Ruhr of India. In Jharkhand, a multilingual state, the population speaks three distinct language families: the Dravidian language (Kurukh and Malto), the Aryan language (Khortha), and the Austro-Asiatic language (Mundari, Santali, Ho, and Kharia). Khortha is a member of the Indo-Aryan language family, which is a subset of the Indo-European language family. Like Hindi, Khortha is a verb-final language with an SOV grammatical structure that is a member of the Indo-Aryan language family. According to the 2011 census, Khortha has approximately 8.04 million speakers. The majority of Jharkhand's indigenous peoples speak Khortha. The Khortha language is also considered a linking language. Speakers of Khortha demonstrate characteristics of multilingualism when they interact with members of other communities. An in-depth examination reveals that the Khortha language has been shaped by a wide variety of other languages. Among the languages that have had the greatest influence on Khortha, Gulgulia, Maithili, Bengali, Hindi, and Magahi have also had an impact. Grierson has referred to this region as Magadhi, which is the eastern Magahi. There are similarities in vowel sounds between Khortha and Pali, such as the use of *i* and *u* (Ohdar, 2021). Due to the influence of neighbouring states, other languages such as Asto-Asiatic (Santhali-Mundari) and Dravidian (Kurukh-Malto) are also in use (Kumar, 2020). In the next section, we will discuss the identity of Khortha, emphasising its origins, genetic affiliation, etymology, and the ways in which Khortha is influenced by other languages.

2.1. Genetic Affiliation of Khortha

Khortha belongs to the Indo-Aryan language family. There are a significant number of vocabulary elements that are shared between Khortha and the Indo-Aryan languages spoken in India, such as Hindi, Magahi, Maithili, Bhojpuri, and others. There could be a number of reasons for this, including the fact that they are members of the same language family or that there has been extensive language interaction with the Indo-Aryan language family. The genetic affiliation of Khortha is as follows:

Based on the information shown in Figure 1, it is evident that Khortha is not a dialect of Hindi but rather a distinct language with a rich tradition and culture. Its origins may be traced back to its own historical foundations.

2.2. Origin of Khortha

Regarding the identification of Khortha, several disputes have arisen because numerous researchers have offered a range of explanations for its origin. In his book "Khortha Kathe Gaidek Khandi," Jha (2014) states that the Khortha word is derived from the ancient Indian language, Kharosthi script, and that the progression from Kharosthi to Khortha is illustrated below:



Figure 2: *Origin of Khortha*

In addition, Kumar (2020, p. 2) asserts that the etymology of the word "Khortha" is distinct.

- **Dr A.K. Jha (2022)-** The language spoken in the Indus Valley Mohenjo-Daro, the oldest civilisation in India, was Khortha, and the script used to preserve it was Kharosthi.
- **Dr. B.N. Ohdar (2021) -** Khortha derived directly from Prakrit, the earliest folk language in India, which is the foundation of the Mudari-Santali and Kudukh (Uraon) languages of the Austric clan and the Dravid clan, respectively.
- **Dr. Gajaghar Mahto Prabhakar (2022)** Khortha originated from Magadhi Apabhramsa.
- **Krishna Chandra Das Ala -** He claimed that the language of Khortha is derived from Kharthi, which is the name of the natural world in Khortha. However, a pronunciation error resulted in the name being changed to Khortha.

As shown in Figure 2, Kharosthi was the first script used for Khortha. However, in the present era, the Devanagari script is used, particularly in education and literature. An additional piece of data I have obtained indicates that they utilised the Devanagari script. The evidence demonstrates that Khortha has shifted toward standardisation, aligning itself with the other Indo-Aryan languages spoken in India.

2.3. Geographical location of Khortha

The Khortha language is spoken in 16 districts of the state of Jharkhand, which are further divided into two divisions: Santhal Pargana and North Chotanagpur. The districts are as follows: Koderma, Dhanbad, Chatra, Deoghar, Hazaribagh, Giridih, Dumka, Bokaro, Ramgarh, Palamu, Sahebganj, Jamtara, Pakur, Latehar, Garhwa and Godda (Ohdar, 2021). In the Siandi region of Santhal Parganas, which encompasses

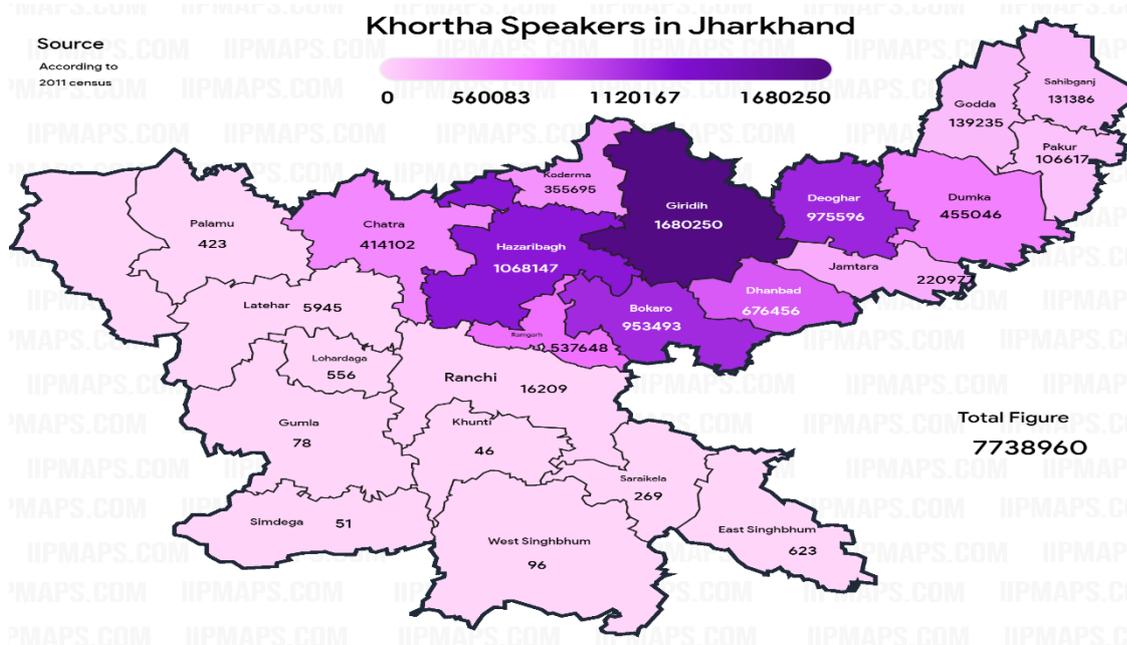


Figure 3: Khortha's speaking Districts

the northern Siandi Magahi in the northern Chotanagpur and Palamu divisions, as well as the western Siandi Bhojpuri and southern Siandi Nagpuri, Bengali influences it in the east and Angika in the north.

Source:

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/76/Khortha_Speakers_n_Jharkhand_map.png

“The geographical location of this language is 23½°58'10" to 25°19'15" north latitude and 83°20'50" to 88°4'40" east longitude” (Dangi, 2012, p. 19).

2.4. Status of Khortha

Regarding the status of Khortha, scholars have different opinions. Prasad and Shastri (1958) asserted that Khortha is a variety of Magahi, and Das (2013) holds that Khortha is a variant of Angika. There is a gradual decline in the use of Khortha in Dumka, primarily for spoken communication within families. Additionally, it is not utilised in the official and local domains. People are gradually transitioning to Hindi, a widely spoken language, which makes it less useful in formal settings. The situation exhibits typical indicators of language attrition, a phenomenon in which a language persists only in a limited number of social contexts. In light of this, future generations may see a shift in language and a move from active to passive bilingualism. Priya (2018) stated, “Like the other Indian tribal languages, Khortha is also the most vulnerable. It is vulnerable to changes, shifts, and ultimately, death” (p. 176). As a result, efforts need to be made to revitalise and conserve Khortha; otherwise, the day may come very soon when Khortha becomes a language that is either extremely endangered or critically endangered.

3. DISCUSSIONS AND FINDINGS

- There are a significant number of vocabulary elements that are shared between Khortha and the Indo-Aryan languages spoken in India, such as Hindi, Magahi, Maithili, Bhojpuri, and others.
- Khortha is not a dialect of Hindi but rather a distinct language with a rich tradition and culture.
- Kharosthi was the first script used for Khortha. However, in the present era, the Devanagari script is used, particularly in education and literature.
- Regarding the status of Khortha, efforts need to be made to revitalise and document otherwise, the day may come very soon when Khortha becomes a language that is either extremely endangered or critically endangered.

4. CONCLUSION

After going through the above conversation, we arrived at the acknowledgement that the language has its origins in ancient Indo-Aryan and has developed over many historical periods. Khortha has been influenced by a diverse array of languages, including Bengali, Angika, Maghai, and Hindi. Currently, Khortha employs the Devanagari script, which is also used in other Indo-Aryan languages. This evidence suggests that Khortha has shifted toward standardisation, aligning itself with the other Indo-Aryan languages spoken in India. The development of the Khortha language has also been significantly influenced by technological advancements and changes in the script. In conclusion, this investigation has

offered a historical examination of the development of the Hindi language, including its linguistic history, influences, and role in Indian literature.

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