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Linguistic Variation And Stability In Angika

Ranjan Kumar
Ph.D Scholar of Linguistics
University of Delhi
Assistant Professor of English
ANS College, Barh

ABSTRACT

Angika is a Bihari language which belongs to the Eastern Indo-Aryan language family. Traditionally, it has been considered a dialect of Maithili. Over the years, it began to be called Angika. Two copular verbs, *chh* and *chhik* have been attested in Angika as per Grierson's Linguistic Survey of India, 1903. However, Grierson's study is just a pilot study that doesn't study the variation in copular forms in the light of extra-linguistic factors. In this study, we have taken a diachronic sociohistorical variationist approach to study the long-attested linguistic variation in the Angika language.

Keywords: Language Variation, Language Identity, Language contact and Age-graded change.

INTRODUCTION

This paper provides a variationist study of the copula in Angika. Angika is a Bihari language which belongs to the same Eastern Indo-Aryan language family to which Bhojpuri, Bajjika, Maithili and Magahi are related. The Bhagalpur dialect of Angika was called "Chhika-Chhiki Boli"¹ and Grierson considered it a dialect of Maithili (1903: 13).

Angika is spoken in the "Anga region" of India within an approx. 158000 km area roughly that falls within the states of Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal of India. It is spoken by approx. 15 million population in India and is considered to be one of the oldest languages in the world.

Angika is primarily spoken in the districts of Araria, Katihar, Purnia, Kishanganj, Jamui, Madhepura, Saharsa, Supaul, Bhagalpur, Banka, Munger, Lakhisarai, Begusarai, Sheikhpura and Khagaria in the state of Bihar.

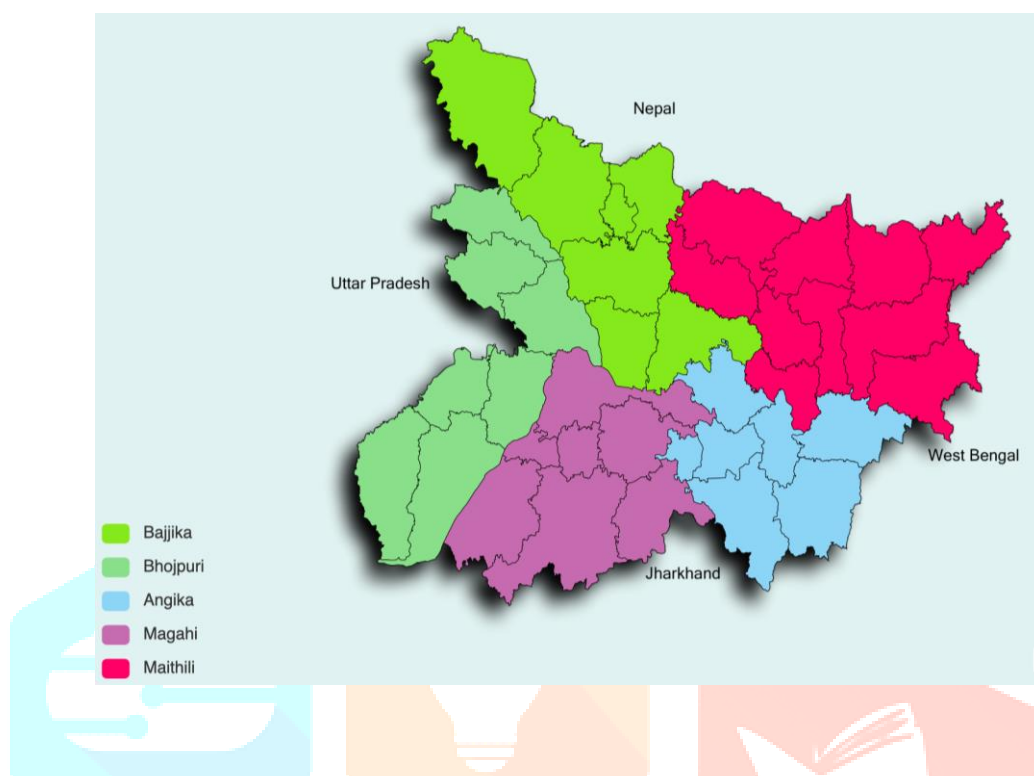
Though Grierson called Angika a dialect of Maithili (Grierson, 1903: 13), the Angika speakers believe that it is a separate language and not a dialect of Maithili. It has been seen earlier that when the Maithili language speakers asked the Government to include the use of Maithili in primary education in the early twentieth century, the Angikas did not support them, and instead favoured Hindi-medium education. (Jha, 2017).

In the 1960s and the 1970s, when the Maithili speakers demanded a separate Mithila State, the Angika and Bajjika speakers made counter-demands for recognition of their languages (Jha, 2017).

¹ It is called Chhika-chhiki boli owing to the frequency with which the verb *chhik-ai* meaning , he is and its congeners is used. See Grierson (1903: 95) for more discussion.

Angika is not listed within the 8th schedule (which is related to language) of the Constitution of India. Currently, a petition requesting the inclusion of Angika in the 8th schedule of the Constitution is pending with the Government (Thakur, 2002).

The present study is based on Angika spoken in the two districts of the state of Bihar —Bhagalpur and Begusarai. The following map locates the two districts in Bihar:



Map: Linguistic Map of Bihari Languages (Angika)

So far as copular verbs are concerned, Angika has the following be verbs:

Present Tense: *chh~chhik*

Past Tense: *rah~chhel*

Future Tense : *ho*

However, we will deal with the Present Tense copula in this paper only.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The present study has made use of the following types of data:

- We have conducted face-to-face sociolinguistic interviews first in selected medium-sized cities to narrow the gaps left by the earlier study (Grierson 1903)
- We have conducted a few telephone interviews in the areas where it was not possible to conduct sociolinguistic fieldwork for some reason.
- Finally, we also conducted some additional in-person interviews in certain communities which were near the dialect boundaries for the sake of getting more contact-induced features.

Thus the mixed methodology used in the current work allowed us to achieve both of our goals-

1. Sampling both a geographically broad set of communities.
2. And sampling communities near dialect boundaries in particular so that we can get more information.

This study investigates linguistic data collected from both urban and rural areas, specifically focusing on Bhagalpur and Begusarai. The research is founded on two primary data sources:

1. Historical texts from the early 20th century, derived from the Linguistic Survey of India, edited by George Abraham Grierson in 1903. This compilation includes 66 specimens representing the three main dialects of the Bihari language: Maithili (including its sub-dialects Chhika-chhiki, now recognized as Angika, and western Maithili, known as Bajjika), as well as Bhojpuri and Magahi.
2. Contemporary conversational data on Angika, obtained through structured interviews and questionnaires across Bhagalpur and Begusarai. The data encompasses contributions from 8 speakers, representing two distinct age groups: younger and older generations.

COPULA VARIATION IN PRESENT TENSE

We find alternative forms in the present tense and the past tense; the future tense has a single copular verb so that will not be discussed in much detail in the current study. Our main focus will be on the variation in the present tense only.

From the earlier text on Angika, Grierson (1903)² the specimen from Bhagalpur district lists the alternating *be* verbs:

Region	<i>chh</i>	<i>chhik</i>	Total
Bhagalpur	10 (50%)	10 (50%)	20
Total	10	10	20

Table 1: Regional Data from Grierson (1903) in Angika

So, based on Grierson (1903), we can say that Angika has equally competent *be* verbs historically and this variation has been in Angika over the years and still both the forms survive; a piece of evidence that these are the stable variables. What was missing from Grierson (1903) were social factors that he didn't say anything about any social factor about Angika apart from regional variation.

The current work studies the variation *chh~chhik* in much detail. We have divided the copula into the following copula types and found that both *chh* and *chhik* are all-purpose copulas:

Copula-type	<i>chhik</i>	<i>chh</i>	Total
Adjectival	31 (20.5%)	120 (79.5%)	151
Possessive	21 (48.8%)	22 (51.2%)	43
Existential	9 (36%)	16 (64%)	25

² The specimen 11 is collected from the District of Bhagalpur. (See Grierson 1903.)

Equative	107 (71.8%)	42 (28.2%)	149
Locational	3 (17.6%)	14 (82.4%)	17
Total	171	214	385

Table 2: Distribution of the Copulas across Different Copular Constructions in Angika

This is an interesting factor group as both the copulas are competing with each other in different copula types. In the Equative copular clause, *chhik*³(72%) occurs more frequently than *chh* (28%). On the other hand, *chh* (82.4%) occurs more frequently than *chhik* (17.6%) in locational clauses. In the existential clause as well, *chh* (64%) is more frequent than *chhik* (36%). In possessive copular construction, both *chh* (51%) and *chhik* (49%) more or less are in quilibrium. In adjectival clauses, also *chh* (79.5%) is much more frequent than *chhik* (20.5%). So, *chh* has the upper hand over *chhik* in three copula types —existential, adjectival and locational while *chhik* is ahead in equative copular clause.

Overall *chh* is much more frequent than *chhik* in all copula types except for the equatives. However, both are all-purpose copulas.

Data

Kamjor ch-i-ai inglis me thoraa bas. (adjectival)
 Weak PRES.COP-1.S English-LOC little-bit FOC
 ‘I am a little weak in English.’

Hamm-e kaam kere-leli taiyar chhik-i-ai. (adjectival)
 1.NOM work doing-for ready PRES.COP-1.S
 ‘I am ready for doing the work.’

I ham-ro mamta chhek-ae. (possessive)
 3NH.PROX.NOM 1-GEN Mamta PRES.COP-3NH.S
 ‘This is my Mamta.’

³ *Chhik* is restricted to copular function only while *chh* performs both copular as well as auxiliary functions.

Ham-re hath-me kae-go seb chh-ae? (possessive)

1-GEN hand-LOC how many-CLAS apples PRES.COP-3NH.S

‘How many apples are there in my hand?’

Sagaro jagho hariyali chh-ae. (locational)

All place-LOC greenery PRES.COP-3NH.S

‘There is greenery everywhere.’

Sach bole-me raahat chek-ae. (existential)

Truth-telling-LOC comfort PRES.COP-3NH.S

‘There is comfort in telling the truth.’

U ham-ar mehman chhik-thin. (possessive/equative)

3H.NOM 1-GEN guest PRES.COP-3H.S

‘He is my guest.’

I pensil chhik-ae. (equative)

3NH.PROX.NOM. pencil PRES.COP-3NH.S

‘This is a pencil.’

Ham bihar-e-me chhik-i-ai. (locational)

1.NOM Bihar-FOC-LOC PRES.COP-1.S

‘I am in Bihar.’

Manager-ke cabin kahan chh-e? (locational)

Manager-GEN cabin where PRES.COP-3NH.S

‘Where is the manager’s cabin?’

In general, Angika just like the other languages of the group has an inflectional morphology. The copular verb gets inflected for all person and honorificity grades⁴.

This again is interesting. If the clause is a two-place predicate, then both the copulas *chh* and *chhik* are somewhat similarly frequent, with *chh* (53.4%) having a slight edge over *chhik* (46.6%). But importantly, if the clause is one place predicate then *chh* (85%) is much more frequent than *chhik* (15%). *Chhik* is partially found in one place predicate-clause. This is a great linguistic conditioning on *chhik*. Both *chh* and *chhik* are all-purpose copulas which are inflected for all person:

⁴ Though Angika in general has an inflectional morphology but Bhagalpurian Angika is different from the Begusaraian Angika in the sense that the latter alone gets inflected for honorificity grades while in the former honorificity hierarchy is non-existent. The sam form is used for both senior or junior, inferior or superior.

Person	<i>chhik</i>	<i>chh</i>	Total
1	27 (41.5%)	38 (58.5%)	65
2	18 (64.3%)	10 (35.7%)	28
3	126 (43.2%)	166 (56.8%)	292
Total	171	214	385

Table 3: Distribution of the copulas across persons in Angika

Both *chh* and *chhik* are all-purpose copulas occurring in all persons 1st, 2nd and 3rd. *Chh* is much more frequent than *chhik* in all persons except 2nd person where *chhik* (64.3%) reverses the pattern with having more frequency than *chh* (35.7%). It's the 3rd person⁵ in which most of the examples are concentrated.

The next factor group which is very interesting is the dialect boundary or simply region. We find that in the case of the copulas in the present tense, we don't find region emerging as the important factor group but yeah the results are interesting:

Region	<i>chhik</i>	<i>chh</i>	Total
Bhagalpur	103 (42%)	142 (58%)	245
Begusarai	68 (48.6%)	72 (51.4%)	140
Total	171	214	385

Table 4: Distribution of the copulas across regions in Angika

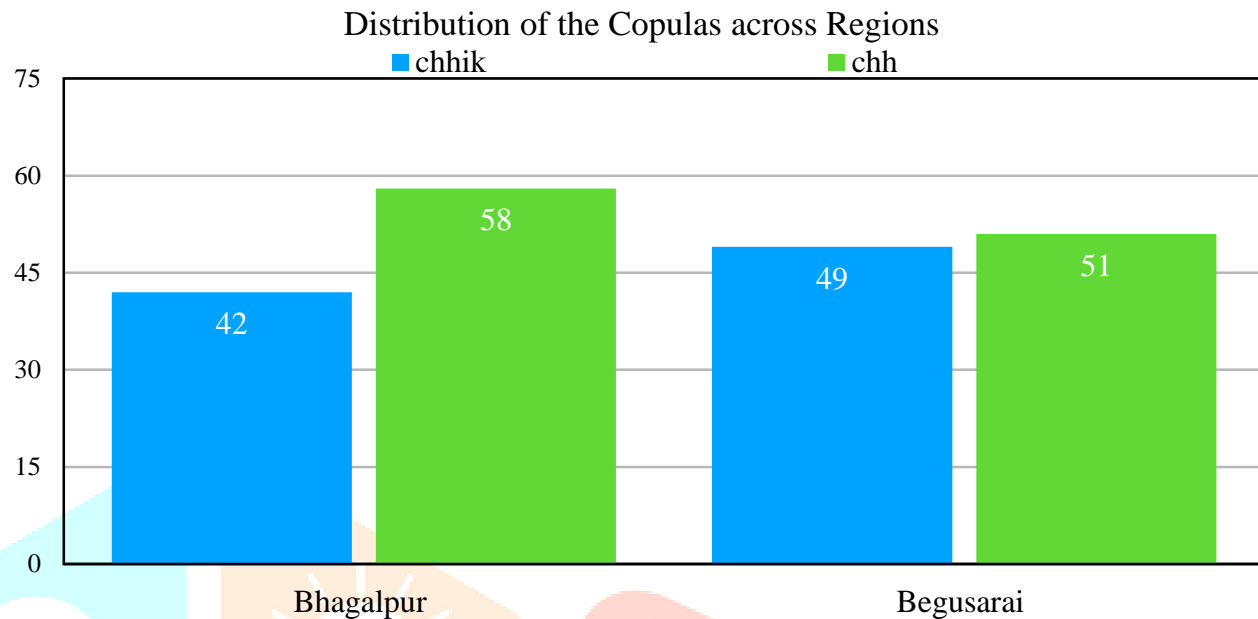
Linguistic boundaries/regions don't condition this variation too much as we can see that both *chh* and *chhik* are found in both regions. *Chh* forms are more frequently occurring forms in both Bhagalpur and Begusarai.⁶ Yes, there is some regional effect as we can see that *chhik* is more frequent in Begusarai (48.6%) than in

⁵ Similar to Maithili in Angika as well most of the variations in person markings show variation in 3rd person.

⁶ Begusarai and Bhagalpur forms a linguistic continuum so far as the *chh*~*rah* is concerned.

Bhagalpur (42%) but the difference is not too much and so we can say that Angika shows little regional difference so far as copulas in the present tense are concerned.

Chart: Distribution of the copulas across regions in Angika



Instead of region, we find a generation-based change in progress in the Angika as a whole; generation has stood as a very significant factor group:

Generation	<i>chhik</i>	<i>chh</i>	Total
Young generation	125 (66.8%)	62 (33.2%)	187
Old generation	46 (23.2%)	152 (76.8%)	198
Total	171	214	385

Table 5: Distribution of the copulas across age groups in Angika

Generation seems to be much more important. The older generation (77%) leans more towards the *chh* than the younger generation (33%).⁷ Note that until recently Angika has been considered as a dialect of Maithili and in Maithili *chh* is the most frequently and representative copular verb. The most plausible answer as to why the older age groups prefer *chh* and not *chhik* forms lies in the fact that the older generation still associates themselves with the older Maithili community given that Angika is a recent identity.

The younger generation on the other hand is more conscious of the new Angika identity and so they seem to break away from their older counterparts in orientation. Their orientation is not old, conservative and Maithili-based but rather modern, new and Angika-identity-based. This might be the reason why the youngsters use more *chhik* (67%) forms than *chh* (33%) in contrast with the old age groups who use more *chh* (77%) than *chhik* (23%).

Chhik, in modern times, is the most representative verb of Angika just like *chh* is of Maithili, *ba* is of Bhojpuri and *h* is of Magahi and Bajjika (See, Kumar, 2024a,b &c).

⁷ The results can be interpreted as the marking of Angika identity which is more evident in the linguistic behaviour of the younger generation.

Do the age groups behave differently on the region axis? Does region interact with generation? To test this possibility region is cross-tabulated with Generation:

Generation-Region	Copula	Bhagalpur	Begusarai	Total
Young generation	<i>chhik</i>	75 (69%)	50 (63%)	125
	<i>chh</i>	33 (31%)	29 (37%)	62
Total		108	79	187
Old generation	<i>chhik</i>	28 (20%)	18 (30%)	46
	<i>chh</i>	109 (80%)	43 (70%)	152
Total		137	68	214
Grand total		245	140	385

Table 6: Cross Tabulation of Region and Generation in Angika

The cross-tabulation of generation and region shows that region interacts with generation. The linguistic pattern that the youngsters follow in Bhagalpur is significantly different from the old age groups. The youngsters use significantly more *chhik* (69%) than *chh* (33%) while the older age groups reverse the pattern and use more *chh* (80%) than *chhik* (20%).⁸ This is the result of the orientation that the youngsters in Bhagalpur have. Bhagalpur is sociolinguistically changing its landscape. So far as the linguistic difference between the old age-groups and young age groups in Begusarai is concerned it is significant as well. The youngsters use more *chhik* (63%) than the old age groups (30%) almost more than double. The pattern conforms with the Bhagalpurian pattern.

BROAD OBSERVATIONS

- Both *chh* and *chhik* forms compete with each other, with the *chh* form being more frequent than the *chhik* form, overall.
- The *chh* and *chhik* forms are conditioned by many linguistic factors; one of them is the type of copula. In equative copular construction, *chhik* is more frequent than *chh* while in the other copular types like adjectival, locational and existential *chh* gets the upper hand. In possessive both *chhik* and *chh* behave somewhat similarly and are equally frequent.
- *Chh* and *chhik* forms seem to be constrained partially by person; while in 1st and 3rd persons *chh* is much more frequent than *chhik*; in the 2nd person *chhik* is more frequent.
- Another significant factor is predicate type. In the place predicate, both *chh* and *chhik* almost behave similarly; both are equally frequent. In the one-place predicate, *chh* is almost near categorical with *chhik* having only 4 tokens.
- Both the copulas *chh* and *chhik* are inflected for all persons and honorificity grades, giving a shred of evidence that Angika has an inflectional morphology just like the other languages of the group.
- The generation has stood very important and a change in progress is indicated. The older generation tends to use the older, conservative form *chh* because of their orientation and identification of themselves as essentially Maithils, while the younger generation has broken away with the older Maithili ties and

⁸ The reversal of pattern indicates the different orientation that the youngster and the old age groups have.

- represents themselves as new Angika-identity —this is manifest in the fact that the younger generation behaves significantly different from the older counterparts.
- Women use more *chhik* than *chh* —a piece of evidence that women are more conscious of the Angika-based orientation in the speech community; they are ahead of men in associating themselves with the newer Angika identity.
 - Lastly, we have found that individuals are behaving differently (intra-speaker variation). Out of the eight speakers, two groups are formed —the one who are leaders in the use of *chhik* and the one who are leaders in the *chh*.

CONCLUSION

We have coded data altogether for 14 factors and have filtered out some of the factors because of the knockouts. We have found two linguistic factors: (a) Copula types and (b) predicate type, and one social factor generation, standing significant by the Varbrul program. Equative clauses (0.77) are more likely to use *chhik* than existential clauses (0.55) and existential clauses are more likely to use *chhik* than possessive clauses. In adjectival, possessives and locational it's the *chh* which is much more frequent and so *chhik* has lesser probabilities (0.27), (0.42) and (0.20) subsequently. Two place predicates (0.52) are more likely to use *chhik* (0.19) than one place predicates. The latter takes *chh* more frequently than *chhik*. Generation is the only social factor which has stood significant. Youngsters (0.71) have more probability of using the *chhik* form than the *chh* form in comparison with the old generation.

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