Classifiers and 'Measure Words' in Khortha

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Abstract

Areal patterns of numeral classifiers have been studied in several Asian languages. Emeneau (1956) was probably the first work that focused on distribution of classifiers while defining India as a 'linguistic area'. Although classifiers (except some 'measure words') are virtually absent in the western Indo-Aryan language like Hindi, they are extremely common in a number of Eastern Indo-Aryan languages, for example Bengali, Assamese, Maithili and so on. Khortha, an Eastern Indo-Aryan language spoken primarily in Jharkhand, is not an exception. Some of such classifiers are borrowed from neighboring Munda (Austro-Asiatic) languages because of the prolonged contact between the Indo-Aryan and Austro-Asiatic speakers in the eastern part of India. The classifier phenomenon in Khortha and Austro-Asiatic may profitably be seen as being part of a wider areal context, one that is out of kilter with respect to the ongoing exploration of South Asia as a linguistic area as pointed out by Emeneau. In this talk, I present a detailed description of previously unstudied classifiers, their functions and distributions in Khortha, an Eastern Indo-Aryan *lingua franca* of Jharkhand.