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Gender assignment is rule-governed: A comparative analysis of Punjabi and English

Abstract:

Gender is a complicated term in linguistics and the debatable issue is that gender allocation system is rule governed or a random activity. Corbett (2006) established that gender assignment is based on certain criteria, which vary in different languages. According to Corbett (2006), two main criteria are found universally i.e. semantic and formal. The basic aim of this study is to investigate the gender allocation to noun is rule-governed or random in English and Punjabi languages. English has a natural gender system while Punjabi has a grammatical gender system. The findings show that gender allocation to noun is rule-governed in English language; whereas, it is somehow random in Punjabi language. In English language, semantic criterion is used to assign gender while formal criterion is also used to allocate gender to some nouns while in Punjabi both semantic and formal criteria are use side by side to allocate gender to noun.

Keywords: *Gender-Assignment, Punjabi, Corbett's Model, Rule-Governed, Semantic Criterion, Formal Criterion*

Introduction

Gender is a very complicated term. It is a grammatical category of noun in linguistics. It is a partial category in Indo-European and Dravidian languages but on the other hand, it is absent in Uralic languages. Different ways are used to denote gender to noun in different languages.

Some languages have a very simple system of gender allocation to noun and others have a complex system. Languages differ in categorizing gender terminology like there are languages having two gender system, some other have three gender system and even there are languages which work with four domains in gender like abstract gender, masculine vs. feminine gender and animate vs. inanimate gender systems.

The basic point of concern is that gender is assigned under some rules like we can say that is an activity which is governed by some specific rules or it is randomly marked to distinguish genders by the language. There are different schools of thought like one school of thought have a staunch belief that the process of assigning gender to nouns is a random process and there is definitely no intrinsic or extrinsic rules behind that allocation. They are of the view that this process is totally arbitrary and it depends upon the speaker to select masculinity or femininity for the noun, which means there is no causal consideration to utter some noun as a masculine or feminine. Conversely speaking, the other school of thought believed that there is no arbitrariness in the allocation of gender to a noun as it has some kind of intrinsic rules which are governing that behavior though that is not clear that this rule governing thing is mentally systematic or socially constructed.

In various languages, gender assignment system to noun is based on certain rules. Most of the languages use two types of criterion for gender assignment to noun; one is semantic and other is formal. The semantic system deals with meaning while formal system bases on form of the noun for assigning gender.

English is a West Germanic language and has a natural gender system. English gender allocation system is based on three types; masculine, feminine and neutral. The nouns which denote male human or animals are called masculine while nouns those denote female human or animals are called feminine. All inanimate things are considered as neutral gender.

Punjabi language is an Indo-European language and based on grammatical gender. Its gender system has two types of gender

masculine and feminine. All nouns which denote male human or animals are masculine and nouns those denote female human or animal are feminine. In Punjabi language, inanimate things are also divided into masculine and feminine gender.

This study will investigate the gender assignment system in English and Punjabi language and which language has a rule-governed gender system or gender is based on random marking.

Statement of the problem

There are different studies available to know about gender phenomenon and its working in different languages of the world. Most of the local languages of Pakistan are still unexplored. There is no work available in any domain what-so-ever. The current aims at finding out the gender assignment system to noun in Punjabi and English languages and either the language has a rule-governed gender allocation system to noun or randomly working.

Research objectives

- To investigate the gender allocation system to noun in Punjabi and English languages.
- To find out the gender allocation system to noun is rule-governed or random in Punjabi and English languages.

Research questions

- What is the criterion for gender allocation to noun in Punjabi and English languages?
- How the gender allocation system is working in Punjabi and English languages?
- Whether the gender allocation system in Punjabi and English languages is rule-governed or randomly working?

Literature Review

A gender assignment system exists in most of the languages of the world. In some of the languages it is quite easy and comprehensive but it is also very complex in some other languages. When we study the researches

available in this domain regarding gender assignment system in the languages of world, a question occurs in the minds of the readers that whether there is any mechanism which allow gender to work on different noun or it is a random process and depends upon the speakers of that language to decide whether to use gender marker or not.

There are two schools of thought in this respect one school of thought is in favor of random assignment. They are of the view that gender is arbitrary and there is no specific system working behind the scene. A study conducted by Bloomfield resulted that there is no criterion working behind gender assignment. The study was conducted to know gender allocation rules in Latin, French and German languages (1933). Another researcher of German language argued the same opinion that the classification of gendered nouns in German language has no sound or practical base for gender allocation. The only feasible idea could be human cognitive system of the natives which is working behind this seemingly arbitrary system (Maratos, 1979).

The opposite idea is also propagated by Zubin&Kopche, who selected German language too to study its gender allocation system. Their results have put them in the other school of thought as their study resulted in some traces of phonological, morphological and semantic peculiarities working behind gender allocation (1984). The research of Prof. Greville Corbett (1991) is also very practical and helping in this regard too as he also conducted different studies to know gender allocation system working in different languages of the world and his studies hinted that there is a rule-governed system available. In this regard, he proposed three major points to support his claim:

- No native speaker commits a mistake in allocating gender to the nouns of his/her native language.
- Borrowed words also acquire the gender, which means there is a system working to assign gender otherwise one has to remember which noun is masculine and which is feminine and that would be too hard for the natives to hint gender.

- If a native speaker is asked to invent a word, one can not only invent it but also assign gender to it and the same gender is assigned by almost all of the natives, which means there is a gender allocation system working in the minds of natives through which they assign gender to the noun. (2011)

Kramer investigated gender system in Amharic language from morpho-syntactic perspective. He is of the point that morpho-syntactic analysis of gender system is quite new. He basically analyzed that there is any cross-linguistic effect on gender agreement or assignment. He concluded that both natural and grammatical gender are systematically working on Amharic language (2014).

Kupisch, Akpinar, &Stohr (2013), studied the effect of bilingualism on gender assignment on the speaker of French and concluded that gender agreement is acquired by adult French learners but for assignment of gender, there was a mild difference of acquiring assigning that supported the claim that gender assignment is rule-governed (Mohring, 2001). Montanari (2014) also conducted the study but on the multilingual German children and resulted that the German bilingual children feel difficulty in acquiring gender and that is due to the system because if it is arbitrary, there should not be any kind of difficulty. Another experimental study was conducted to examine the development of gender in Greek children. That was for English-Greek and German-Greek bilingual children which resulted that there are multiple factors involved in gender agreement and gender assignment and based upon those factors one can decide about its feasibility (Kaltsa, Tsimpli, &Argyri, 2013)

Gender assignment systems show verity in all over the world's languages. It is a partial element of some languages while absent in some. Vanhove (2012) has conducted a survey about gender assignment system of 256 languages all over the world. He examined that 56% languages are genderless while 44% languages have grammatical gender (p. 79).

In systematic gender assignment, rationality is considered as the first criterion for allocating gender to noun for Tamil languages as in Tamil

nouns are distributed based upon rational and non-rational. The first category of rational is about humans and godly things; whereas non-rational is supposed to represent animals and all other nouns which represent non-human things. Masculine and feminine are two further categories to show rational gender but for the non-rational there is only one category i.e. neuter gender which is assigned to all animals and non-human things which are assigned non-rational gender. *civaN* means shiva which is the name of a god, so it is assigned male gender based upon rationality and from the same coin, *kaali* which is the name of female goddess is also assigned feminine gender based upon rationality. Now look at the other non-rational things like *viitu* (house), *maram* (tree) both of these words have neuter gender (Corbett, 1991).

Size is also considered another criterion, which is used in Archi language to assign gender. Archi belongs to a subgroup of NE Caucasian languages which is named as Lezgian group. The criterion is called diminutive and is based upon four gender types: Gender I, Gender II, Gender III and Gender IV. Gender I is for male humans and gods, gender II is for female humans and supernatural creatures, gender III is used for domestic animals and last gender IV is for all the birds. *Dija* (father), and *Allah* (God) are masculine gender i.e. Gender I, *dozba* (grandmother) and *quart* (witch) are female gender representing Gender II. *Sahru* (town) is from gender III and *xlor* (village) is from gender IV (Corbett, 1991).

There are some languages which use accent for the allocation of gender. One such language is Qafar. In this language which belongs to East Cushitic family of languages, position of accent is used to allocate gender. This language only uses two differentiations: masculine, and feminine; in which, all animals and male humans are considered masculine like *baqla* (husband) and all other animals and female humans are given feminine gender like *barra* (woman/wife) (Corbett & Frazer, 2000).

Pashto language operates two genders mainly masculine and feminine. Most of the noun has the ending of diphthong /aj/ i.e. the letter “آ” or on a consonant, whereas the nouns ending on either of the following like /ə/,

/e/, or /əy/ represents feminine gender (David, 2014). In Pashto, mostly power, strength and bravery is attached with male gender hence all such words belong to masculine and for the female there are only two places either home or grave (Khan, 2017), so the terms which show weakness belong to feminine gender.

English is a West Germanic language and its gender assignment system is based on natural gender in which gender is divided into three types; masculine, feminine and neuter. All male humans and animals are masculine likewise all female human and animals are feminine while all others include in neuter gender.

Punjabi is an Indo-European language and has a grammatical gender, which is very complex. Its gender system based on only two types of gender masculine and feminine. All males and animals are masculine while all female human and animals are feminine. There is a complicated issue, which is related to inanimate. All inanimate also divided into masculine and feminine.

Research Design

This study is theoretical and descriptive in nature. This design helps the research to remain impartial while selecting data from Punjabi language. Corbett’s gender allocation system is used to analyze the collected data.

Data Collection

A particular set of data is required for every study so that it will be analyzed according to the set principles. This study is based on gender assignment system in Punjabi language; therefore, the researcher collects data from Punjabi written books and grammars.

Data Analysis

The collected data has been analyzed through subjective understanding regarding gender assignment to the nouns. As the researchers are natives of Punjabi so subjective understanding is also workable regarding its being rule-governed system or working randomly.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is based on Corbett’s gender allocation system. According to Corbett (2006) and Doleschal (2000)

gender assignment system to noun bases on two major types: one is semantic system and other is formal system: in system regarding semantics, different factors which have semantic outlook are enough for gender assignment; whereas, in second system which is formal, in which form plays a prime role about assigning gender. He further pointed that no pure formal system can work in a language but pure semantic systems are working in different languages.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Gender allocate to noun through two criteria:

1. Semantic criteria
2. Formal criteria

Semantic criteria

Corbett (2006) has stated that in semantic criteria the meaning of noun is enough to show the gender. Schwichtenberg & Schiller, (2004) also worked to analyze semantic regularities working in the domain of gender assignment and they also favored that semantic factors are very viable to determine gender assignment rules in a language.

English and semantic criteria

English works in assigning gender into three types, neuter, feminine and masculine. All those nouns which represent male humans and male animals are considered masculine while those related to female humans or animals are feminine and all inanimate are come under the neuter gender category.

The nouns those show feminine and masculine genders in humans are like father (M), Mother (F), daughter (F), son (M). The nouns denoting masculine and feminine gender in animals are like bull, rooster, ram all are masculine (M) and cow, hen, eve, are feminine (F). same like this in neuter gender, the nouns are inanimate like, toy, ball, star, pen, fan, stool are neuter (N). All these nouns either related to masculine, feminine or neuter, and their gender can be cleared through the meaning or we can say that to know their gender meanings are the better clue.

Punjabi and semantic criteria

In Punjabi language, gender allocation system is based on two types masculine and feminine. Nouns representing male are masculine and those representing female are feminine.

Masculine		Feminine	
Piyo (پيو)	‘father’	maan ماں	‘mother’
Banda (بندہ)	‘husband’	zanani زنانی	‘wife’
nawab (نواب)	‘landlord’	begum بیگم	‘landlady’
badshah (بادشاہ)	‘king’	malka ملکہ	‘queen’

The nouns those denote masculine and feminine gender in animals:

Masculine		Feminine	
daand (داند)	‘oxen’	gaan (گان)	‘cow’
medha (مینڈھا)	‘ram’	bheed (بھیڈ)	‘ewe’
saanh (سانھ)	‘buffalo bull’	muj (مچ)	‘buffalo cow’

In Punjabi language, inanimate nouns are divided into masculine and feminine.

Masculine		Feminine	
maiz (میز)	‘table’	kari (کڑی)	‘clock’
bastaa (بستہ)	‘bag’	katab (کتاب)	‘book’
palang (پلنگ)	‘bed’	dawaar (دوار)	‘wall’

Formal Criteria

In this criterion, the form is considered enough to represent its gender or for allocation of gender to the noun. Corbett (2006) has described that gender is defined through the form of noun.

English and formal criteria

Formal criterion is used in gender allocation system of English language. Gender is defined through the form of word. In English, suffix –ess is used to define gender to a noun from masculine to feminine such as

Masculine	Feminine
waiter	waitress
author	authoress
master	mistress
count	countess

actor actress

There are few animal names which also work on the same pattern

Masculine	Feminine
lion	lioness
tiger	tigress

Punjabi and formal criteria

In Punjabi language, formal criterion is also used and gender is define through the form of a noun. A common rule which is applied in Punjabitakes the suffix *alif* of masculine noun and sometimes it is replaced with *yeeor* sometimes one yee is taken by feminine gender like

Masculine	Feminine
munda (منڈا) ‘boy’	kuri(کڑی) ‘girl’
putara (پترا) ‘son’	dhi(دھی) ‘daughter’
pota(پوتا) ‘grandson’	poti(پوتی) ‘granddaughter’
phupha(پھوپھا) ‘uncle’	phuphi(پھوپھی) ‘aunti’

This rule is worked in the names of animals such as

Masculine	Feminine
Bakra (بکرا) ‘he goat’	bakri(بکری) ‘she goat’
billa (بلی) ‘tom’	billi(بلی) ‘cat’

Names of inanimate things follow the same rule on the basis of size

Masculine	Feminine
hathora(ہتھوڑا) ‘hammer’	hathori(ہتھوڑی) ‘small hammer’
ghara (گھڑا) ‘earthen vessel’	ghari(گھڑی) ‘earthen vessel’

Another rule is applied in Punjabi language to define the gender of a noun from masculine to feminine like suffix –nee is used like

Masculine	Feminine
mula(ملا) ‘priest’	mulani (ملانی) ‘female priest’
ustad (استاد) ‘teacher’	ustani (استانی) ‘female teacher’

In animals nouns same rule also exists such as

Masculine	Feminine
Mor (مور) ‘he peacock’	morni (مورنی) ‘she peacock’
sheer (شیر) ‘lion’	sheerni (شیرنی) ‘lioness’

In Punjabi language suffixes nur- ‘male’ and madh- ‘female’ are used to define the gender of animals like

Masculine	Feminine
nurmachar(نرمچھر) ‘mosquito’	madhmachar(مدھ مچھر)
nurchita(نر چیتا) ‘leopard’	madhchita(مدھ چیتا)
nurulluu(الو) ‘owl’	madhulluu(مدھ الو)

Discussion

Gender allocation to noun is complex process in English and Punjabi languages. As Corbett (2006) has stated that a gender assigning system to noun may be based only on semantic criterion but it is not possible that the whole system of any language based on formal criteria rather than the semantic and formal go side by side. However, the semantic and formal criteria to assign gender to English and Punjabi nouns working hand in hand in both English and Punjabi languages.

Semantic criteria

Corbett (2006) has described that in semantic criteria the meaning of a noun is enough to define gender. The meaning of a noun itself express either it is masculine or feminine.

Semantic criteria and English language

English language is based on natural gender. Gender allocation system to noun is divided into three types: masculine, feminine and neuter. Nouns those are used for male are masculine like father, son, uncle and man are masculine because their meanings are enough to show that they are masculine while on the other hand nouns those denote gender of female are feminine such as mother, daughter, aunt and woman. The all nouns, which related to the nonliving things are belonged to neuter gender for instance, ball, bat, wall, and table.

Semantic criteria and Punjabi language

Punjabi language is based on grammatical gender and has two types of genders: feminine and masculine. In criterion using semantic clues the meaning of the noun is enough to show the gender such as piyo ‘father’, putar ‘son’ and banda ‘man’ are masculine. The nouns maan ‘mother’, dhi ‘daughter’ and aurat ‘woman’ are feminine.

In Punjabi language, gender allocation to noun becomes more complex when inanimate things also divided into masculine and feminine. This distinction is not based on the sex rather than size of object considered or that have and specific badge of a gender category. Such as maiz ‘table’ bastaa ‘bag’ and palang ‘bed’ are taken under masculine gender while ghari ‘clock’, katab ‘book’ and dawaar ‘wall’ are taken as feminine.

Formal criteria

In formal criteria, gender is describes through the form of word. As Corbett has stated that, several languages have formal criteria for allocating gender to noun along with semantic criteria.

Formal criteria and English language

English gender allocation system to noun is mostly based on semantic criteria while the formal criteria is also worked side by side. In English, suffixes and prefixes are used to show the masculine and feminine gender. The suffix –ess is used to donate gender from masculine to feminine. For instance, waiter is masculine while to express the feminine gender the suffix –ess is used like waitress, which is used for feminine. same like that author – authoress, master – mistress and count – countess. This rule is also applied in animal names like tiger – tigress and lion – lioness.

Formal criteria and Punjabi language

Formal criterion exists in Punjabi language for denoting gender to noun. In Punjabi, the last alphabet of masculine noun replaced with other alphabet to express the feminine gender. For instance, most of the nouns which end on -alif alphabet are masculine so to show the feminine gender alif is replced with –yee like munda ‘boy’ is a masculine noun so for making its feminine the last alphabet alif is replaced with –yee such as kuri ‘girl’ which is a feminine noun. Same like this putra ‘son’ – dhi ‘daughter’ and pota ‘grandson’ – poti ‘granddaughter’. Same rule is applied on animal’s names such as bakra ‘he goat’ - bakri ‘she goat’, billa ‘tom’ – billi ‘cat’ and murgha ‘rooster’ – murghi ‘hen’.

This rule is existed in inanimate things. This distinction is not based on sex rather than the size. Such as big things are considered as masculine while the small things are taken as feminine such as hathora ‘hammer’ - hathori ‘small hammer’ and ghara ‘earthen vessel’ - ghari ‘earthen vessel’.

Another rule is applied in Punjabi language to define the gender of a noun from masculine to feminine like suffix –nee is used. For instance, mula ‘priest’ – mulani ‘female priest’ and ustad ‘teacher’ – ustani ‘female teacher’

In animals nouns, same rule also exists such as mor ‘ he peacock’ – morni ‘she peacock’ and sheer ‘lion’ - sheerni ‘lioness’. In Punjabi suffixes nur- ‘male’ and madh- ‘female’ are used to define the gender of animals like nurmachar ‘mosquito’ - madhmachar ‘mosquito’ and nurulluu ‘owl’ - madhulluu ‘owl’.

Conclusion

The current study was started to decide whether gender assignment is working based upon some particular rules are it is a random based arbitrary mechanism in Punjabi and English languages. The investigations show that gender allocation to nouns in both languages is rule-governed. English language has three types of gender neuter, feminine and masculine while Punjabi has two types of genders masculine and feminine. English and Punjabi languages follow both semantic and formal criteria.

Recommendations

- This study can be replicable for other languages, which are spoken in Pakistan like Saraiki, Pashto, Sindhi or Balochi
- This study can be examined with some other theoretical framework.

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