

Analysing bare nouns in Marathi

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Abstract

This study uses translation mining methodology to analyse bare nouns in Marathi. (In)definite expressions from English were compared to their corresponding referential expressions in Marathi to understand the interpretation of bare nouns. We found that the numeral ‘one’ behaved as an indefinite article in Marathi, while bare nouns got a definite reading. Bare nouns, in cases of pseudo-incorporation, got an indefinite reading.

Keywords: Bare nouns, indefiniteness, pseudo-incorporation, Marathi, Hindi.

Introduction

Previous theories on bare nouns (BNs) lacked empirical support (Carlson, 1977; Chierchia, 1998; Dayal, 2004). Liu et al. (2023) empirically tested these theories for Hindi, Russian, and Mandarin, which are typologically different languages, and found that these articleless languages do not function similarly. However, it was unclear if the differences between them were due to typology. This study investigated how BNs function in Marathi, a traditionally articleless language, and compares it with Hindi.

Method

We employed the Translation Mining approach proposed by Bremmers et al. (2021) for our corpus study. This approach compares fragments from the source language with the target language(s) and works with the assumption that the form and meaning of expressions are kept constant throughout the text.

We conducted two studies based on two different datasets: (i) the first chapter of Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone which was a test corpus to frame a hypothesis, (ii) chapters 2 to 17 of Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone which tested the hypothesis we framed. We used the Marathi and Hindi translations of the first chapter of Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone as our data set since those were our target languages, and the source language was English. The Hindi data is adopted from Liu et al. (2023), which used the same methodology to study the distribution of BNs in Hindi, Russian, and Mandarin. We manually extracted the referential expressions, ‘the N’ and ‘a(n) N’, from

“Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone”. These referential expressions were compared to their equivalents in Hindi and Marathi.

Results

Quantitative results

‘a(n) N’ in English (n=88) aligned with the numeral ‘one’ as well as with BNs. The singular definite, ‘the N’ in English (n=138) aligned with BNs and demonstratives in Hindi and Marathi, while the singular indefinite ‘a(n) N’ in English (n=88) aligned with the numeral ‘one’ and with BNs in the two languages.

Fischer’s exact test revealed no significant differences in the distribution of BNs vs. numeral ‘one’ (singular indefinite contexts) and the distribution of BNs vs. demonstratives (singular indefinite contexts) in Hindi and Marathi ($p > .05$). See figures 1 and 2.

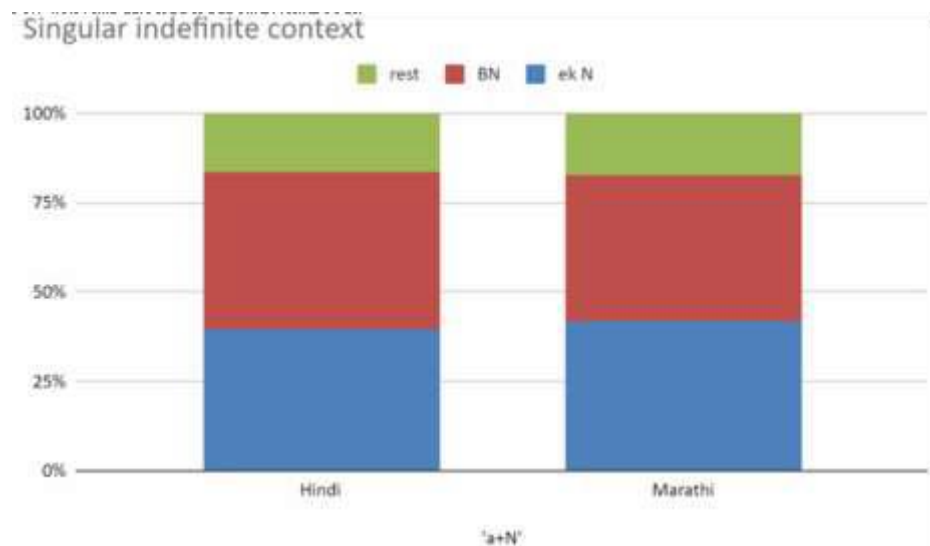


Figure 1: Relative frequencies of BN, numeral ‘one’ + N and rest translations of English indefinite singulars (a(n) + Nsg) in Hindi and Marathi.

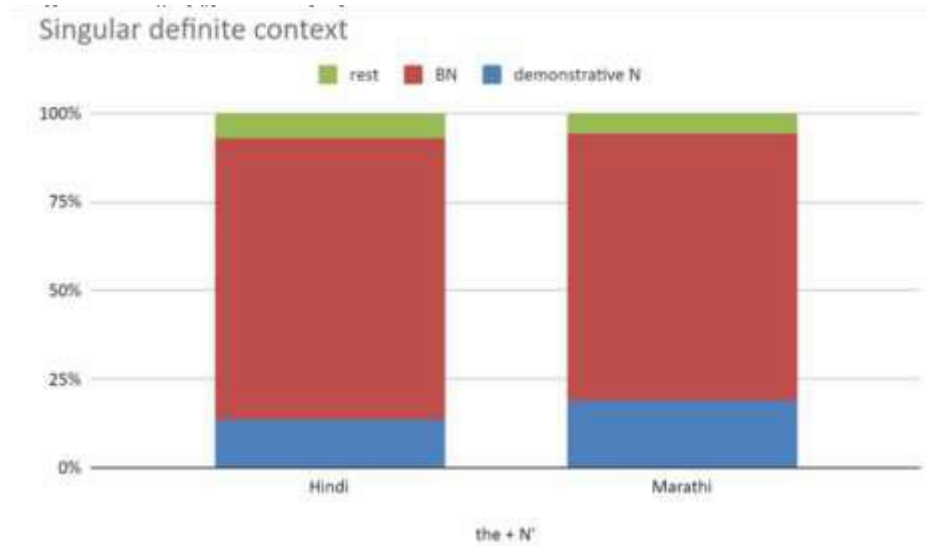


Figure 2: Relative frequencies of BN, demonstrative + N and rest translations of English definite singulars (the + Nsg) in Hindi and Marathi.

Qualitative results

Caseless BNs in object position in Hindi and Marathi have an indefinite reading as they correspond to 'a(n) N' in English. Accusative case-marked nominals have a definite reading as they correspond to 'the N' in English. However, there were also some contexts where caseless BNs received an indefinite reading. These were contexts of Pseudo Incorporation (PI); caseless BNs in object position are PIed in Hindi and Marathi and have an indefinite reading.

Discussion

Example (1) illustrates that the Marathi bare noun 'risivər' (receiver) aligns with the English definite NP 'the receiver' and gets a definite reading. However, in example (2), the Marathi bare noun 'nəkəʃə' (map) gets an indefinite reading as it gets incorporated with the verb 'vətʃ-əṛ' (reading).

- (1) t̪ja-ni r̪is̪iv̪ər punha kʰali tʰev-la.
He-ERG receiver.M again down keep-PFV.M.
'He put the receiver back down.'
- (2) r̪əst̪ja-t̪ʃja v̪əɽəŋ-a-v̪ər m̪ist̪ər d̪ursli-na p̪əh̪ili t̪ʃəm̪ət̪kar̪ik
Street-GEN corner-OBL-on mister Dursley-ERG.HON first strange
g̪oʃt̪ə d̪ʃs-li - n̪ək̪af̪a v̪at̪ʃ-ət̪ əsle-lə mand̪ʒ̪ər
thing.F see-PFV.F - Map.M read-PROG be.PROG-N cat.N.
'It was on the corner of the street that he noticed the first sign of
something peculiar- a cat reading a map.'

We conclude that, as observed for Hindi (Liu et al., 2023), Marathi also has an indefinite article: Marathi uses 'numeral one' as an indefinite article. BNs in Marathi generally have a definite interpretation unless they occur without an accusative case marking, in which cases they get PIed and have an indefinite interpretation.

This study contributes to the literature on articleless languages by showing how grammatical as well as lexical factors like typology and PI influence (in)definite interpretation of BNs.

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