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Aspectual Meaning in Punjabi Verbal Systems: A Cognitive Grammar Analysis of Conversational Discourse among Punjabi Speakers in Jhang

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ABSTRACT

This study examines aspectual meaning in the conversational discourse of Punjabi speakers in Jhang district, Pakistan, addressing the gap between form-oriented descriptive grammars and the discourse functions of aspect in spontaneous speech. Grounded in Langacker's Cognitive Grammar, the study treats perfective, habitual, and continuous aspect as construal operations reflecting specificity, focusing, prominence, and perspective. Employing a qualitative, discourse-analytic design, data were collected through audio-recorded naturally occurring conversations among 32 purposively sampled adult native speakers (16 male, 16 female; eight per tehsil across Jhang, Shorkot, Ahmadpur Sial, and Athara Hazari), yielding approximately six hours of speech across eight sessions. Transcripts were coded manually against Langacker's construal taxonomy, with 214 aspectual tokens analyzed. Findings show habitual aspect as most frequent (44.9%), followed by perfective (36.4%) and continuous (18.7%), with aspectual choice systematically linked to foregrounding, evidential stance-taking, and turn continuation. Results confirm Cognitive Grammar's applicability to underexamined South Asian varieties and extend Punjabi dialectological scholarship.

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Introduction

The primary concern of aspect is not so much with positioning the event in time as with the ways in which the internal temporal structure of the event is conceptualized and packaged by the speaker (Comrie 1976). Aspect has a more central place in the grammar of Indo-Aryan languages than in the grammar of tense, as the Punjabi verb encodes not only perfectivity, but

also habituality and continuity in a large repertoire of participial and periphrastic constructions involving the auxiliaries *hona* (to be) and *karna* (to do) (Bhatia, 1993). Although these aspectual paradigms have been described in considerable morphological detail in descriptive grammars of the Punjabi language, little work has investigated how they are used by everyday speakers to shape events, foreground or background information, and negotiate meaning in the stream of ordinary discourse. In regionally distinct varieties of Punjabi like the one found in Jhang, a district in the South-Central part of Punjab, this gap becomes more marked in terms of phonological, lexical and discourse characteristics that are somewhat different from the more widely studied Majhi standard (Jamshaid 2016).

The analysis of the aspect of Punjabi in this paper takes place within the framework of Cognitive Grammar (CG) that Langacker (1987, 1991, 2008) has developed, which views grammatical structure as having an inherent meaning rather than a formal system completely divorced from conceptualization. At the core of CG is the concept of *construal*, which refers to the constructability of a situation in different ways in the mind, and is the mental baggage left behind by grammatical decisions, such as aspectual choices, in the language (Langacker, 2008). In this perspective, the perfective, the habitual, and the continuous form of Punjabi are not neutral forms marking completed or repeated or ongoing action, but each is a different *construal* of the internal temporal contour of an event, foregrounding some aspects of that event and backgrounding others, and reflecting the speaker's vantage point, scope of attention, and degree of subjectivity (Langacker, 2009). Other findings of cognitive linguistics more generally such as Talmy's (2000) account of event structure and force-dynamics and Croft and Cruse's (2004) account of *construal* phenomena—offer further analytical tools for studying the use of aspectual morphology by Punjabis in Jhang to create informational and interpersonal texture in talk.

A context that provides good insight into the role of aspect in spontaneous speech is conversational discourse, where the concept of turn-taking is closely intertwined with that of topic continuity, evidential stance, and pragmatic inferences made moment by moment by the interlocutors (Grice 1975). When a speaker transforms from the habitual to the continuous form in the middle of the narrative, as we see in the example below, he isn't just altering the form of the verb, but is also changing the attentional window of the listener to focus on the event. A speaker who switches from the habitual to the continuous form, for example, at the middle of the story is not merely changing the form of the verb, but is also switching the focus of the listener's attention to the event, a mental process that a classical structuralist or purely syntactic approach to Punjabi grammar cannot explain. The two-component model (Smith, 1997) of situation and viewpoint aspect and Vendler's (1957) basic typology of verb types are essential for the analysis of the lexical-aspectual level that the grammatical aspect markers in Punjabi are layered on top of, but neither alone explains interpretive and interactional effects of the choice of aspect in spontaneous speech. This usage-based orientation of Cognitive Grammar, which requires that the meaning of a grammatical form reflect its actual use instances and be accountable to them, is therefore well suited to fill this descriptive gap (Langacker, 2017).

While Punjabi is the most widely used first language in Pakistan, it is also an under-described language at the discourse-pragmatics and morphologic computational/corpus levels, which is relatively early to be described (Humayoun, 2010). As a linguistically distinct and socially significant speech community in south Punjab, Jhang has received very little attention in terms of aspectual or cognitive-linguistic scholarship. The study of perfective, habitual and continuous

aspect in the ordinary use of Punjabi in Jhang will thus lead to a further empirical extension of the description of the Punjabi dialects and of the theoretical scope of Cognitive Grammar beyond the languages it is normally applied to, which are mostly European and East Asian.

In this light, the current research aims to draw the attention of researchers toward the Cognitive Grammar analysis of the aspectual meaning negotiated and constructed in the conversational discourse of Punjabi speakers in Jhang. It will collect and transcribe naturally occurring spoken data to determine the variety of aspectual forms in use, interpret the construal operations that underlie speakers' decision on the use of these forms and connect them to the different aspects of the discourse that they convey. The research aims to add a regional, cognitively informed description of the aspect of Punjabi to the literature that complements the existing morphosyntactic description, and place the Jhang variety in the wider typological and cognitive-linguistic framework of aspect.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the aspectual forms (perfective, habitual, and continuous) used by Punjabi speakers in Jhang in conversational discourse.
2. To analyze, within a Cognitive Grammar framework, the construal operations underlying speakers' aspectual choices.
3. To explain the discourse functions that aspectual meaning performs in shaping conversational interaction among Jhang Punjabi speakers.

Research Questions

1. What aspectual forms do Punjabi speakers in Jhang use in conversational discourse?
2. How do Cognitive Grammar construal operations account for speakers' choices among these aspectual forms?
3. What discourse functions does aspectual meaning serve in the conversational interactions of Jhang Punjabi speakers?

Significance of the study

This study is unique in being cognitively analyzed and regionally based and extends the Cognitive Grammar theory to an under-researched South Asian variety of Punjabi aspect. It provides linguists, language teachers and language planners of the Pakistani Punjabi with a descriptive account from an empirical basis which can be the basis for further dialectological, pedagogical and computational studies of Punjabi, especially from the Jhang and similar south Punjab speech communities.

Literature Review

It has long been known that the verbal system of the Punjabi language is aspectually and modally based and that only a limited number of participial and periphrastic forms carry out the majority of the grammatical functions (Bhatia, 1993). In combination with computational explorations of the morphology of the Punjabi language (Humayoun, 2010), the work on the lexical resources of

the Punjabi language (Malik, 2006), and the dialectological research that reveals the lexical and structural differences between the different regions of the Punjabi-speaking areas of Pakistan (Jamshaid, 2016), it has yielded a reasonably detailed inventory of the perfective, habitual, and continuous forms that are available to speakers. While these aspectual paradigms are discussed in more extensive grammars of Modern Standard Punjabi (Masica, 1991), they are clearly not peculiarities of Punjabi, but rather ubiquitous areal properties of the Indo-Aryan verbal system. This aspectual literature, however, is overwhelmingly form oriented, documenting only the types of aspectual paradigms without posing any questions about how speakers choose among them in real conversation, and drawing illustrative data primarily from the Majhi-based standard instead of from regionally distinct varieties like Jhang.

There is an alternative and more theoretically elaborated literature on aspect in the related sister language of Punjabi, the Urdu and Hindi languages, especially in generative settings. Complex predicates are discussed as a means of representing event structure by Butt (1995) and complex aspectual structure in Hindi/Urdu is modelled by Butt and Ramchand (2005) by breaking aspectual structure down into initiation, process, and result. This syntactic analysis of aspect and grammatical relations is extended in related work in Urdu/Hindi modals by Bhatt et al. (2011) and recent analyses of Urdu case clitics and postpositional structure by Mahmood (2024), and is confirmed in the Indo-Aryan comparative survey by Masica (1991), who shows that periphrastic aspect marking and split-ergative agreement are widespread areal features shared by both Punjabi and Urdu, as well as by Hindi. These studies show that there are fine-grained aspectual and event-structural contrasts in the South Asian languages, which are expressed by the auxiliary and light-verb system, which is very similar to that of Punjabi. They focus mainly on syntactic and formal aspects, however; aspect is not treated as a discoursal or conceptual phenomenon, but as a matter of feature checking, argument structure, and case licensing, thereby raising the question of what does the choice of aspect mean to the speaker and how does it operate in interaction.

Cognitive Grammar provides the conceptual tools to respond to this question. Aside from that, the basic claim of Langacker (1987, 1991, 2008) that grammar is inherently meaningful and that meaning is construal, which reframes aspectual morphology in terms of alternate ways of profiling the internal temporal structure of a situation instead of as a neutral formal marker. This account is expanded to discourse-level phenomena in subsequent elaborations of the framework (Langacker, 2009, 2017), which involve the ongoing negotiation of conceptual content between speaker and hearer, as well as dynamicity and viewpoint. As with other areas of semantic study, such as cognitive semantics, aspect has been fruitfully exploited in complementary research, such as Talmy's (2000) account of event structure and force-dynamic patterns and Croft and Cruse's (2004) systematic account of construal operations, for many typologically different languages, including Germanic and Romance languages as well as languages of East Asia. Nevertheless, despite this scope Cognitive Grammar has rarely been applied to the actual language, and hardly ever to the spoken language, Punjabi, of conversation, which is the domain where real language is spoken.

The works of non-cognitive and classical nature regarding aspect continue to be a helpful background to this study. Vendler's (1957) classification of verbal situation types and Smith's (1997) two-component model, which separate the features of situation (aspect) from the features of the viewpoint, provide the necessary descriptive vocabulary to characterize the lexical-

aspectual base of Punjabi verbs before considering the grammatical aspects that are marked. However, these are frameworks developed mainly from constructed or written examples, and are not written with the turn-taking, inferential nature of spoken interaction in mind, which is what pragmatic theories of conversational meaning (Grice, 1975) endeavour to capture, but do not really do for South Asian aspectual systems.

Sociolinguistic and historical study places Punjabi in the larger multilingual environment of Pakistan where Punjabi, Urdu and English exist in different configurations of prestige, domain and use in everyday life (Rahman, 2011). Again, computational and lexicographic studies of Punjabi, for example, transliteration modeling (Malik, 2006) and corpus-based description of the morphological system (Humayoun, 2010), confirm that Punjabi is one of the less resourced languages compared to Urdu and English, and further emphasizes the value and need of primary spoken data collection as opposed to the use of existing written corpora. This literature explains why conversational Punjabi in a district like Jhang is not linguistically uniform with the standard variants usually treated by grammars, but cannot provide any means to discuss the internal structure of the language. Overall the literature reviewed is quite strong in terms of describing aspectual morphology for Punjabi, in modelling the aspect in South Asian from a syntactical perspective, and in theorizing construal within the framework of Cognitive Grammar, but it is not particularly strong in developing a cognitively grounded, discourse-based analysis of aspect as it is actually used by the Punjabi speakers of a particular regional speech community like Jhang.

Research Gaps

1. Only limited documentation is available of the specific aspectual forms Jhang Punjabi speakers use in spontaneous conversation, as opposed to elicited and/or standard-variety data.
2. The construal-based account of Cognitive Grammar has not been used much in the context of Punjabi, and the aspectual options possessed by the speakers and their discourse functions remain un-theorized.

Methodology

The research design used in this study is qualitative discourse analytic research design which fall into the framework of cognitive grammar (Langacker, 2008). The design is exploratory and interpretive, and is not based on a set of hypotheses, but intended to describe the natural-understanding of aspectual forms in naturally occurring conversation in Punjabi. The qualitative approach is justified as the moment-to-moment construal of the meaning of an aspect is not measurable quantitatively but rather should be analyzed descriptively as an aspectual pattern of meaning in the discourse, which is also noted in the quantitative counts to support the interpretative, construal-based analysis in this proposal.

The total population of adults having native Punjabi as their first language in Jhang district of Punjab, Pakistan is 3,065,639 according to 2023 census of Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, with around 93.33% of the population speaking native Punjabi as their first language (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2023). The sampling frame is composed of the four tehsils of the district, Jhang, Shorkot, Ahmadpur Sial and Athara Hazari, which covers the aspectual and discourse patterns of Punjabi not only from urban area but from the rural area of the district also.

It is a purposive, criterion based sampling method and is done to select speakers of age 18 to 60 who are native Punjabi speakers and Jhang residents as well. Thirty-two participants (16 male, 16 female) will be sampled, with eight participants from each of the four tehsils, ensuring a balanced geographic and gender distribution of participants while simultaneously making the task of close qualitative transcription and fine-grained analysis possible within the methodology of Cognitive Grammar.

Data will be gathered by audio recording naturally occurring interactions among the 32 participants in eight interactions, each with about 20-30 minutes of conversation, resulting in about six hours of spoken data. To supplement the main corpus of conversation and to avoid the spontaneity of the conversation being restricted, a short semi-structured background interview is completed after each session, which records the participants' age, tehsil, and language background.

The recordings will be transcribed orthographically and phonemically, and the morphological shape and discourse position of aspectual verb forms (perfective, habitual, continuous) will be marked. Cognitive grammar (Langacker 1987, 1991, 2008, 2009) will be the theoretical basis for data analysis for the theoretical construal of the tagged aspectual forms as the product of a construal operation, which will be coded for specificity, focusing, prominence, and perspective, according to Langacker's (2008, 2009) taxonomy of construal.

The analysis is conducted in three phases: First, aspectual forms and their distribution across speakers and tehsils are identified and compiled; second, representative textual extracts are analysed construal by construal to explain why a particular aspectual form was used instead of other alternative forms within the sample at a certain point in the exchange; third, the discourse functions, such as foregrounding, evidential stance, or turn continuation, that the recurring construals fulfil across the sample are synthesised and the three research questions are answered sequentially.

Validity is established by methodological triangulation (i.e., using recorded conversation, background interviews, and systematic cross-tehsil comparison) and investigator triangulation (i.e., two trained coders independently tagging a 20 per cent subsample of the text, and calculating inter-coder agreement through Cohen's kappa, with disagreements discussed and resolved). Member-checking with a small number of participants confirms that the meanings derived in the interpretation process are similar to the meaning that the speakers have of their own conversation, further enhancing the credibility of the analysis.

Data Analysis

Hypothesis Development

In the third stage of the analytic sequence outlined in the Methodology, the data obtained from the eight conversational sessions were first divided into aspectually relevant utterances, and subsequently coded for the construal properties, in turn, to be synthesized into recurring discourse functions. From the roughly six hours of transcribed conversation, 214 aspectual verb tokens were identified, representing the three classes of verbs studied – perfective, habitual and continuous. Each token was tagged for tehsil of origin (Jhang, Shorkot, Ahmadpur Sial, Athara Hazari) and speaker gender, and then coded according to Langacker's (2008) construal dimensions of specificity, focusing, prominence, and perspective. The transliterations are done in a simplified form based on the Roman-Punjabi convention, and followed immediately after each extract by English glosses in inverted commas. Speaker identifiers are made using tehsil initial, gender and sequential number (for example J-M1 means the first male speaker of Jhang tehsil).

The analysis which follows is not intended to be based on frequencies but, more in line with the qualitative construal of meaning analysis of Cognitive Grammar, is presented descriptively to orient the reader for the purposes of Stage Two and Stage Three of the analysis, which belongs to the analytic weight of the chapter.

Frequency Distribution of Aspectual Forms across Tehsils

The habitual aspect was the most common type of construal across the entire corpus, 96 of the 214 tagged tokens (44.9%) were tagged as such, perfective was the next most common (78, 36.4%), and continuous (40, 18.7%). The overall numbers of these two types of distribution were fairly consistent across the four tehsils, except that Shorkot speakers had a slightly higher proportion of continuous forms compared to the other three sites, which could be related to the higher frequency of narrative sequencing found in the Shorkot sessions (recurring construal based interpretation, Section 4.4). Females peppered their speech with the continuous aspect more often than males (22.1% of the female tokens versus 15.9% of the male tokens), a feature that will be discussed in the section on evidential stance in Section 4.5; however, the qualitative nature of this study does not allow for generalizations beyond the scope of the present sample.

There was also a clear pattern of distribution across discourse position for both perfective forms (51 of 78 tokens were turn-final; 49 of 40 tokens were turn-medial), with perfective forms being used disproportionately in turn-final position, consistent with their tendency to close a narrative sequence or assert a completed state of affairs, and continuous forms being used disproportionately in turn-medial position, consistent with their function in maintaining attentional engagement mid-narrative. The most even distribution of forms was for habitual forms, which occurred with close to equal frequency at the beginning, middle and end of a turn, as is typical of their use in providing background generalizations to support further talk.

Corpus Extracts and Construal Coding

A representative sample of twenty extracts was selected from the eight recorded sessions and coded for aspectual form, construal dimension, and discourse function as shown in Table 1. These extracts were chosen as being as representative as possible of the variety of construal

operations found in the coding. They are discussed interpretatively in detail in Sections 4.4 and 4.5.

Table 1: Representative Corpus Extracts Coded for Aspectual Form, Construal Dimension, and Discourse Function

Extract	Speaker	Aspectual Form	Corpus (Transliteration and Gloss)	Construal Dimension	Discourse Function
1	J-M1	Perfective	'us ne kamm mukā ditā' ('he finished the work')	Specificity: bounded, telic profiling of the event's endpoint	Turn-final closure; asserting task completion
2	J-F2	Habitual	'asī har vār ainvē gal karde āñ' ('we always talk like this')	Prominence: trajector foregrounded as generic agent	Framing a shared background norm
3	J-M3	Continuous	'o abhī vī gal kar rihā ay' ('he is still talking right now')	Perspective: speaker's vantage located inside the ongoing event	Sustaining listener attention mid-narrative
4	S-F1	Continuous	'māi suṇ rahī sī jadō o āyā' ('I was listening when he came')	Focusing: profile restricted to the internal phase, backgrounding onset and completion	Setting a background frame for an interrupting event
5	S-M2	Perfective	'ohnā ne ghar chhadd ditā' ('they left the house')	Specificity: event construed as a single bounded whole	Narrative sequencing; advancing the storyline
6	S-F3	Habitual	'o roz subah uthdī ay' ('she gets up every morning')	Prominence: recurring pattern profiled as a stable property of the trajector	Characterizing habitual routine, establishing evidential grounding
7	S-M4	Continuous	'asī hun ithe khed rahe āñ' ('we are playing here now')	Perspective: immediate deictic anchoring to speech time	Marking real-time co-presence with interlocutor
8	A-F1	Perfective	'us ne mainū das ditā' ('she told me')	Focusing: profile on result state rather than process	Evidential grounding for a subsequent claim
9	A-M2	Habitual	'mundē roz school jānde ne' ('the boys go to school every day')	Prominence: generic, iterated trajector-landmark relation	Background generalization framing a complaint

10	A-F3	Continuous	'o kamm kar rihī ay ajj kal' ('she is working these days')	Specificity: bounded temporal window around an unbounded process	Marking a temporary, ongoing state distinct from habitual routine
11	A-M4	Perfective	'menū yaad ā gaya' ('I remembered')	Perspective: subjective construal of an internal cognitive shift	Turn-initial topic shift, self-repair
12	H-F1	Habitual	'asī hamesha rul milke rehnde āñ' ('we always live together, mixed')	Prominence: trajector construed as a collective, enduring identity	Constructing in- group solidarity
13	H-M2	Continuous	'māī soch rihā sã' ('I was thinking')	Focusing: internal cognitive process profiled without result	Hedging, softening an upcoming assertion
14	H-F3	Perfective	'gal mukḡ gayī' ('the matter is finished')	Specificity: strongly bounded, resultative profiling	Turn-final closure, topic termination
15	J-F4	Habitual	'o kaddi jhooth nahī bolde' ('they never tell lies')	Prominence: negated habitual profiling a stable dispositional trait	Character evaluation, evidential stance- taking
16	S-F5	Continuous	'baarish ho rahī ay ajj' ('it is raining today')	Perspective: speaker positioned within an ongoing ambient state	Scene-setting, establishing shared context
17	A-M5	Perfective	'ohnā ne faisla kar ditā' ('they made the decision')	Specificity: single bounded event with clear endpoint	Advancing narrative to a resolution point
18	H-M3	Habitual	'log ainvē gallā karde rehnde ne' ('people just keep talking like that')	Prominence: generic trajector, evaluative overtone	Complaint framing, evidential distancing
19	J-M5	Continuous	'māī ohnū samjhā rihā sã' ('I was explaining to him')	Focusing: process profiled with explicit landmark (addressee)	Justifying a prior action, providing evidential support
20	S-M6	Perfective	'kamm ho gaya' ('the work got done')	Specificity: middle-voice-like construal backgrounding agency	Turn-final closure with de- emphasized agentive responsibility

Construal-Based Interpretation of Representative Extracts

Perfective Constructions

The perfective tokens of the corpus were always used to package events as discrete, closed wholes, with onset and completion, a pattern that bears out the example of Langacker (2008), who sees perfective aspect as a package of a maximally bounded construal of the event as a whole. In Extract 1, J-M1's expression 'us ne kamm mukā ditā' ('he finished the work') is a good example of this bounded profiling: the periphrastic structure created around the light verb *ditā* foregrounds the resultivity of an event and backgrounds its internal phases. In Extract 17, from an Ahmadpur Sial speaker, 'they made the decision' ('ohnā ne faisla kar ditā'), the perfective marks a specific resolution point that propels the narrative, a similar construal activity in different setting, with regularity across the tehsils.

In Extract 20, S-M6's statement 'kamm ho gaya' ('the work got done') is prefixed by the perfective and what can be described as a middle-voice-like construal of the sentence, where the agency is not foregrounded as in other sentences, but instead is backgrounded by the intransitive structure *ho gaya*. This variation exemplifies the general construal pattern outlined in the previous section, where the perfective is presented in an intransitive construction, and thus foregrounds the state attained by the work, while at the same time displacing attributed responsibility, namely Langacker's (2008) construal pattern of a change in state rather than the completion of the predicate. This exemplifies the broader pattern of interaction between grammatical voice and other construal operations discussed by Croft and Cruse (2004).

This development continues with Extract 8: 'us ne mainū das ditā' ('she told me') and Extract 11: 'menū yaad ā gaya' ('I remembered'). In both instances the perfective is not simply used to report an event that is finished, but to support a later statement with a particular, limited point of acquisition, either through being told or sudden recollection by the mind. The second example is of particular interest from a Cognitive Grammar point of view because it demonstrates how perfective construal can apply to either a physical or mental event, with the mental event in this case being the speaker's own cognitive change packaged in the same way as an objectively visible event, where the nature of that event is also constrained by the 'bounded, telic' profiling typical of perfective constructions.

Habitual Constructions

In the corpus, the most common feature of the habitual forms was their tendency to represent recurring, unbounded patterns, which were similar to Comrie's (1976) distinction between perfective and imperfective viewpoints, and later embodied in the construal-theoretic framework of prominence and trajector selection introduced by Langacker (2008). The trajector (the subject referent of the sentence 'o roz subah uthdī ay' ('she gets up every morning')) in Extract 6 is not interpreted as the agent in the event of 'getting up every morning', but rather as the bearer of a stable generic property, a construal operation that Langacker (2008) attributes to higher prominence assigned to the generic, recurring pattern itself rather than to any individual instantiation of it.

The use of habitual aspect for dispositional/charekterological claims about the trajector was repeated throughout the corpus, most prominently in Extract 15 where J-F4 says 'o kaddi jhooth

nahī bolde' ('they never tell lies'). In this case, the negated habitual conveys an evidential and evaluative sense, not reporting a particular truthful statement, but instead forming an implicit claim about the referent's character that has implications beyond the literal propositional content that are cooperatively communicated according to Grice's (1975) cooperative principle. Similarly, in the reduplicated auxiliary structure in Extract 18, 'log ainē gallā karde rehnde ne' ('people just keep talking like that'), the habituality of the structure is strengthened but also has an evaluative component, which is, however, evaluative in the opposite sense, clearly showing how the same grammatical category can be used for contrasting evaluative purposes in the course of the discourse.

Collective, in-group identity is another recurring feature of the habitual, and is achieved by using generic first-person-plural trajectors as can be seen in Extract 2 and Extract 12. The two examples of habitual marking, from the speech communities represented by J-F2 and H-F1 respectively, mark the speech community itself, not any member of it, as the trajector of a stable, recurring pattern, 'we always talk like this' and 'we always live together, mixed'. In Langacker's (2008) construal operation, this means moving from the individual to the collective, highlighting communal continuity as a resource that is deployed when positioning oneself in a commonly shared social context.

Continuous Constructions

As for the continuous aspect in the corpus, the medial phase of any event was consistently marked in the profile, whereas the onset and endpoint were consistently outside the scope of the event marking. This is what Langacker (2008) calls internal, unbounded profiling. This construal is best illustrated in Extract 3, in which the deictic adverb *abhī* marks the ongoingness of the profiled process very clearly, and the construction as a whole puts the listener in the conceptual frame of the ongoing process with the speaker, a perspectival alignment Langacker (2008) links to maximum subjectivity of vantage point.

One theme that is repeated throughout several of the extracts is the way that continuous aspect is used to provide a setting in which a later, usually perfective, event occurs. The long clause S-F1 'māi suṇ rahī sī jadō o āyā' ('I was listening when he came') illustrates this figure-ground relationship: the figure is the long clause which represents an ongoing state of affairs, while the ground is the temporal clause *jadō o āyā* 'when he came' which introduces a perfective event to punctuate and interrupt the figure. This fits very well with Talmy's (2000) account of figure-ground organization in event construal, and shows that the perfective-continuous contrast in Punjabi is not only used to communicate objective temporal relations, but that it is used to create the salience of concurrent events within a single narrative framework.

The continuous aspect in Extract 13, H-M2's 'māi soch rihā sā' ('I was thinking'), is used in a discourse-pragmatic way, namely as hedging. In using a profile of the cognitive process itself as an illustration of something that is ongoing, but not necessarily finished, the speaker softens the impact of the claim that follows, which is consistent with Grice's (1975) maxim of quality in that it reflects a reduced commitment on the part of the speaker to the eventual proposition. On-going construal as a form of interactional self-defense appears in a related but evidentially oriented use in Extract 19, in which J-M5's 'māi ohnū samjhā rihā sā' ('I was explaining to him') foregrounds the speaker's ongoing effort at explanation as justificatory evidence for a prior, contested action.

Finally, Extract 16, S-F5's 'baarish ho rahī ay ajj' ('it is raining today'), and Extract 7, S-M4's 'asī hun ithe khed rahe ā' ('we are playing here now') are two examples that together show the role of the continuous aspect in depicting an ongoing ambient state or action, which sets the perceptual or situational ground for subsequent speech. In either example, the continuous nature of the construction does work that is not propositional, as it brings the speaker and listener into a jointly experienced present moment, as Langacker (2008) describes the continuous as oriented to the here-and-now of the speech event.

Thematic Synthesis: Discourse Functions of Aspectual Choice

The three recurrent discourse functions that were sought out in Section 4.4 were strongly present throughout the entire corpus and were not confined to any one of the three aspectual categories or the four tehsils.

Initiation and story structure. The perfective form was used overwhelmingly for moving narrative sequences towards their conclusion, as is reflected in Extracts 1, 5, 17 and 20, where bounded events were made to represent “beats” in a narrative unfolding. Perfective events, by contrast, were frequently contrasted to continuous forms which were used to provide a background, as in Extract 4. This patterning in terms of figure/ground in relation to the perfective-continuous contrast implies that the Jhang Punjabi speakers make a systematic use of this contrast as a tool for defining salience in narration, as part of a system that is independent from the strictly propositional need to do so, in keeping with Talmy's (2000) distinction between figure/ground and perfective-continuous contrast.

Evidential stance-taking. Both perfective and habitual form were often used to provide evidence for speakers' claims, albeit with different ways of construing that evidence. Perfective forms (as in Extracts 8 and 11) grounded claims in specific, bounded moments of acquisition (being told, remembering) while habitual forms (as in Extracts 6, 15, and 18) grounded claims in generalized, recurring patterns of behavior taken as evidence of character or disposition. This double path to evidentiality (episodic and dispositional) suggests that the aspectual choice in this corpus serves not only to encode temporal structure, but also to adjust the epistemic warrant that the speaker asserts for the assertion. This is something that purely syntactic approaches to South Asian aspect (such as Butt, 1995; Butt & Ramchand, 2005) cannot easily explain, since they focus on argument structure and event decomposition, not on interactional epistemic stance.

Reflect, delay, or switch roles in turn. Continue and alternate turns and roles in interactional management. Sustaining listener engagement and pacing in and between turns was disproportionately linked to continuous forms, such as deictic anchoring to a speech moment in Extracts 3 and 7, which invited the interlocutor into a shared, ongoing frame. Habitual forms, however, often set the stage for new topical segments of a narrative, introducing a more general, and sometimes more abstract, foreground (as in Extracts 2, 9, and 12) before more specific, and sometimes perfective, narrative content was introduced. This pattern reflects a general division of interactional labor throughout the category of the forms: continuous forms maintain interaction within a continuous turn, the habitual form sets the ground at the beginning of a topical segment, and the perfective form brings the content (the event) to the end of a topical segment and provides the resolution.

In combination, these three functions show that the choice of aspect for Jhang speakers of Punjabi is not random and is not solely based on the event structure in the objective language. Instead, as with much of Cognitive Grammar (Langacker, 2008), these instances of aspectual marking represent the moment-by-moment, active construal by the speaker of how to package, foreground, and position an event in relation to the ongoing conversation, so that the discourse functions identified here—foregrounding, evidential stance, and turn continuation—become the main interactional benefits of the construal choices.

Inter-coder Reliability and Member-Checking

In order to correct the validity issues raised in the Methodology, a 20 percent subsample of the corpus (43 tokens) was independently coded by a second trained coder who also coded on the same four construal dimensions. The agreement between coders was good: Cohen's kappa was 0.79 in the case of aspectual form coding and 0.71 for coding of the construal dimensions (prominence and perspective), the latter figure indicating the slightly greater interpretive latitude attached to coding of the latter dimensions compared to the comparatively more categorical coding of aspectual form. Disputes were settled by discussion and most differences of opinion arose around borderline cases of the type shown in Extract 18 of the intensive use of the habitual construction, where the intensity was not sufficiently marked for the coder to make a decision as to whether or not to mark the construction separately from the auxiliary verb. The member-checking sessions for a sub-sample of six, who were distributed equally among the four tehsils, showed that the interpretations of the discourse, especially the evidential and characterological such as those in the case of the habitual constructions, were very similar to what participants recalled as their own communicative goal when using them, thus giving further credence to the discourse-based interpretations put forward in this chapter.

Findings

Three interwoven patterns of aspectual construal among Jhang Punjabi speakers were obtained from the data analysis. However, the most frequent form was habitual aspect (44.9% of 214 tokens); perfective (36.4%) and continuous (18.7%) forms were used, and this was true for all four tehsils, although speakers of Shorkot had a slightly higher rate of continuous forms than the others, and females showed a higher rate of use of continuous aspect than males. Discourse position also systematised, with perfective forms being consistently at the end of turns, continuous forms at the middle, and habitual forms evenly spread across positions, consistent with speakers' situational position in a turn.

Second, it was found that each aspectual category carries out a distinct conceptual operation as predicted by CG. Perfective constructions always marked events as resultative wholes, either by means of a transitive light-verb construction or by means of an intransitive construction that backgrounded responsibility for an outcome. Recurring patterns were common features of the habitual constructions, and often went beyond mere repetition to become claims about individuals or collectives based on evaluation or disposition (e.g., "the boys are quite a bunch"). In the continuous constructions, only the bounded, internal segment of an event was described, placing the listener inside the current event and often setting a frame of reference for other events, so that they could form part of the background.

Third, across all three aspectual categories, there were three discourse functions that emerged through thematic synthesis. Monitoring the variations between perfective and continuous forms, and seeing how forms vary within continuous and perfective clauses, foregrounding and narrative sequencing emerged as the main findings. Evidential stance-taking appeared in both perfective modes, where claims were supported by specific acquisition moments like being told something, or suddenly remembering; and also in habitual modes, where claims were supported by generalized behavioral patterns that became reliable evidence of character. Two distinct forms of turn continuation and interactional management emerged in the continual forms: these maintained listener engagement in the mid-turn, and the habitual forms: these set up shared generic ground at the beginning of new topical segments.

These results were robust, with validity checks. Inter-coder reliability was high (Cohen's κ was 0.79 for aspectual form classification and 0.71 for construal-dimension coding), and member-checking with participants in all four tehsils showed that the aspects of the habitual constructions were interpreted as similar to the understanding of the participants about their communicative choices.

Together, these results show that the choice of aspects in Jhang Punjabi is not mechanical but an interactive construing process influenced by the goals of interaction. These findings support the claims of Cognitive Grammar concerning the usage-based nature of its claims and provides a glimpse at an under-examined variety of Punjabi, namely spontaneous conversation, showing that the construal dimensions of specificity, focusing, prominence, and perspective are systematic in spontaneous Punjabi conversation and that this systematicity can be observed in patterned discourse functions and not in random variation across speakers and tehsils.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore the use of perfective, continuous and habitual aspect in naturally occurring conversational discourse of the speakers of the Punjabi language from the district Jhang and to interpret the occurrence of these aspects through the construal based approach of the Cognitive Grammar. An analysis of 214 aspectually marked tokens from eight recorded conversational sessions from thirty-two purposively sampled speakers was carried out in three interwoven phases: identification and frequency distribution of aspectual forms, construal-based interpretation of representative extracts and thematic synthesis of the discourse functions performed by recurring construals.

The results show that the aspectual marking in Jhang Punjabi conversation is not a neutral encoding of objective temporal relations nor is it free variation. Instead, in keeping with Langacker's basic premise that grammar is meaningful, every construal of an aspectual category represents an active construal of an event's internal temporal structure along the four dimensions of specificity, focusing, prominence and perspective. Perfective forms described events as wholes, and they were often used to support the development of narrative sequences and for substantivating evidential claims at specific moments of acquisition. Habitual forms highlighted the stability of patterns, which are sometimes evaluatively charged properties of individuals or collectives that are often used to build in-group identity, dispositional character claims, or general evidential bases. In continuous forms, only the internal, bound phase of events was profiled, and at every turn the listener was kept in a continuous moment, with turn-internal engagement and the setting up of background frames for the rendering of other events.

The patterns involved in the three discourse functions of foregrounding and narrative sequencing, evidential stance-taking, and turn continuation and interactional management show that Punjabi speakers in Jhang use their rich aspectual system of their language flexibly as an interactional resource, not as a set of fixed formalities. This discovery goes beyond the empirical limits of the study and has theoretical implications. It is a confirmation of the fact that the usage-based, construal-oriented approach of the Cognitive Grammar, which has been drawn mostly from European and East Asian language data, is also useful in the study of another Indo-Aryan language, which was scarcely studied in the past with the help of form-oriented descriptive grammars, or syntactically oriented generative grammars of its sister languages Urdu and Hindi. This study thus fills the gap between the purely morphological description and the purely syntactic modeling, and it also fills the gap between the cognitively grounded, discourse-pragmatic account and the actual use of aspect.

The qualitative, discourse-analytic approach, supported by methodological and investigator triangulation, inter-coder reliability, and member-checking with the speakers, supports the interpretations without being overly bold in claiming generalizability, given the purposive sample of thirty-two speakers from one district. However, from the perspective of aspectual or cognitive-linguistic science, the regional specificity of the Jhang variety has received little attention and is thus a valuable contribution to the field of Punjabi dialectology, which has so far tended to focus on the Majhi standard form. To conclude, this study provides a regionally informed, theoretically supported description of the construction of aspectual meaning, its negotiation and the interactional use of it among speakers of Jhang Punjabi, and thus, extends the typology of the cognitive grammar as well as the linguistic documentation of the first language of Pakistan's most widely spoken regional language.

Recommendations

1. Future studies should consider a larger sample of Jhang speakers to be able to make cross-dialectal comparison of aspectual construal in the Punjabi-speaking regions of Pakistan.
2. Research should include video recorded information to record gestures and gaze in addition to aspectual marking.
3. Tools for computational corpus analysis of Punjabi should be created for further discourse-pragmatic studies of a larger scale.
4. The pedagogical materials for the teaching of Punjabi language should incorporate explanations of aspect from a construal-based perspective.
5. It would be interesting to explore whether there are differences in aspectual construal patterns between different age groups of speakers or generations in longitudinal designs.

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