

Synchronic Variation and Diachronic Change in Dialects of Marathi

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1. Introduction: dialectology vis-à-vis linguistic theory

This paper investigates linguistic variation and change in Marathi at the synchrony-diachrony interface.² Specifically it aims to address the issue of whether and to what extent synchronic variation in contemporary regional varieties of Marathi reflects diachronic developments in the language.

Saussure, who introduced the synchrony-diachrony dichotomy, laid the foundation of a ‘synchronic linguistics’ and nineteenth century linguists grappled with the Saussurean dilemma of studying either language structure OR language history. Subsequently, linguistics witnessed an ideological turn as a consequence of which synchrony and diachrony came to be seen as complementary aspects of language analysis. “Structured heterogeneity” (cf. Weinreich, Labov and Herzog 1968) in language became the key to understanding language change. It became possible to envision a discipline which would be structural and historical at the same time (p. 198). An integration of the two dimensions of language study into a single analytical framework has been reported to be fruitful in investigating language change (e.g. Croft 2003, Kulkarni-Joshi 2016). Actuation and transmission of language change became central concerns not only in historical linguistics but also in sociolinguistics (e.g. Weinreich et al’s seminal 1968 publication). Dialectology in the eighteenth century had been but a handmaiden to historical linguistics. The role of dialectology vis-à-vis linguistic theory has undergone a change in the past hundred years or so. Dialectology as a sub-discipline of linguistics too is transformed. While traditional dialectology had focused on invariant, archaic, rural forms of language, today’s dialectology is informed by the methods of sociolinguistics: it incorporates variationist / sociolinguistic methods of sampling and also the quantitative methods of analysis based on data from large corpora (e.g. Siewierska and Bakker 2006). Dialectology has forged interfaces with other sub-disciplines in Linguistics too. Dialectology (whether regional or social) has focussed attention on non-standard speech varieties; typological linguistics and syntax, on the other hand, have tended to focus attention on standard languages. These latter sub-disciplines are now turning attention to variation in language. We are witnessing today a cross-fertilisation of methods from sub-disciplines of linguistics - dialectology, historical linguistics, typology and contact linguistics - in mutually beneficial ways (e.g. Bisang 2004; Chamoreau et al 2006). This development has led to fresh opportunities for explaining language change using dialectological data. Our exploration of spatial and temporal variation in the development of Marathi will be located within a framework which integrates the synchronic and diachronic aspects of language change.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows: Section 2 begins with an overview of Marathi dialectology till date. This is followed by a discussion of the methodology used

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² This is a working paper based on preliminary data from the Marathi Dialect Survey Project.

for obtaining data for this study. Data on synchronic variation in the use of accusative-dative case markers at various developmental stages of Marathi is presented in section 3. A discussion of the observations regarding synchronic variation and its implications for diachronic diffusion of the linguistic feature is presented in section 4. Section 5 provides a conclusion by placing variation in Marathi within the synchrony-diachrony framework.

1.2 Dialectology of Marathi

The paper draws data from a dialectological project undertaken at the Deccan College, Pune less than a year ago to document regional variation in the Marathi language as it is spoken in Maharashtra today. We describe below previous dialectological studies of the language.

1.2.1 Previous sources

Dialectology in India has two synonyms: Grierson and the LSI (Linguistic Survey of India). The nineteen parts of the LSI spread over eight thousand pages published in eleven volumes remains an indispensable resource for (almost) any sort of language documentation in the country (more so for the Indo-Aryan languages). The scale and design of the LSI (1903-1928) were monumental and we are yet to replicate the task in independent India. (Majeed 2011; Mesthrie forthcoming; the latter describes Grierson as *post-modern* dialectologist.) Grierson's contribution to dialectology in India probably remains singular. For a fact, a comparable database of spoken Indian languages has not been created in independent India. A comprehensive database of spoken forms is certainly a desideratum for Marathi. The language is fortunate to have reliable written sources representing the old and medieval stages of its development. The availability of an electronic corpus of the spoken forms of the language will broaden the knowledge on the language and make it amenable to comparative, cross-linguistic and intra-linguistic study.

The LSI is an important source of information on the spoken forms of Marathi early in the twentieth century. Volume seven of the LSI presents samples of the language spoken in -

- i. the Dekhan (Poona, Kolhapur, Buldana as well as the "broken" dialects in Bijapur and Dharwar);
- ii. a plethora of non-standard speeches in the Konkan – nomenclature for these varieties include references to region (e.g. Sangameshwari, Bankoti, Ghati, Kudali), religion (e.g. Kristav), profession (e.g. Machhimari Koli, Koli, Koshti, Kunbi, Dhangari) and caste (e.g. Karhadi, Chitpavni)
- iii. the Berar and Central Provinces (Varhad, Nagpur, Wardha, Chanda, Bhandara, Akola). Halabi spoken in eastern part of the Marathi-speaking region is also included in this volume.

Ahirani / Khandeshi too is deemed today a dialect of Marathi: Grierson includes a description of Khandeshi in Vol. IX, part 3 of the *LSI* (1907) along with the Bhil languages. In Grierson's view, Konkani was the only true dialect of Marathi (1905:1).

The *LSI* includes a translation of the story, The Prodigal Son, into "every known dialect and subdialect spoken in the area covered by the operations", an original passage "selected on the spot and taken down from the mouth of the speaker" and a standard list of 241 words and test sentences for translation originally drawn up in 1866 for the Asiatic Society of Bengal by Sir George Campbell (cf. Mesthrie forthcoming).

Other dialectological sources for Marathi include A.M. Ghatage's *Survey of Marathi Dialects* (1963-1973) which includes monographs on seven varieties of Konkani (including

Kudali, Kasargode, Gawdi and Warli spoken in the Konkan coast of Maharashtra³). Each monograph contains a description of the phonology and morphology of the variety, a list of words, sentences and transcribed texts with English translations. Ghatage's selection of regional varieties suggests that he too considered Konkani (alone) to be a dialect of Marathi.

In 1995 R.V. Dhongde led a survey of Marathi Dialects which was funded by the Government of Maharashtra. The survey team collected speech samples in eight "centres": Kolhapur, Ratnagiri, Nasik, Dhule, Nagpur, Chandrapur, Gadchiroli and Nanded. The survey resulted in a publication, *Marathicha Bhashik Nakasha: Purvatayari* [A Dialect Atlas of Marathi: A Pilot Study] in 2013. The survey used a list of lexical items arranged into thirty-five semantic fields.

The Maharashtra volume of the People's Linguistic Survey of India (PLSI), edited by Jakhade was published in 2013. The volume includes speech varieties which were identified by the speakers themselves as dialects (p.x). The varieties described in the volume include languages spoken by tribal communities, nomadic communities and caste groups in Maharashtra. (It does not include descriptions of regional variations in Marathi.) Each description contains information about the community, some grammatical features, a list of lexical items, a passage in Devanagari (which is a useful resource) and its translation into standard Marathi.

1.2. The Marathi Dialect Survey or MDS (2017 -)

The MDS project is funded by the government of Maharashtra. It began by recruiting fourteen Marathi-knowing postgraduates for a three months' training programme which was run at the Deccan College, Pune. (The participants were paid a monthly stipend for participating in the training programme). At the end of the training, a team of two coordinators and eight project assistants was recruited to carry out the project. The team developed a set of about seventy video clips to be used as elicitation tools in the survey. A sociolinguistic questionnaire is also used in eliciting data. The data includes –

- i. Responses to the questionnaire
- ii. Responses to visuals (pictures and videos) to elicit lexical items
- iii. Responses to videos to elicit grammatical categories and target constructions
- iv. Personal Narratives
- v. Narrations of traditional Marathi stories

Thus the data collection procedure combines spontaneous speech, narratives, conversations, and some specific morphosyntactic questionnaires. A pilot study was conducted in April 2018 in Kolhapur district to try out the data collection tool kit. So far data has been collected in twelve (of the thirty-six) districts of Maharashtra. Translation was not used a major tool for data elicitation; (compare this with the use of translation as a data elicitation technique in the *Linguistic Survey of India*).

The sampling procedure: in each district, talukas (tehsils) were selected depending on their distance from the main city/town in the district. Data were collected in village communities from men and women (preferably, those who had lived in the village since birth) belonging to three age groups (18-30, 31-54, 55 and older). It is ensured that all the main castes / tribes in the village demography are included in the sample. This information is

³ The remaining descriptions include Konkani of the Konkan, Konkani of Kasargode and Konkani of Cochin.

retrieved from the 2011 Census. Till date, data have been collected in 110 villages (i.e. 988 speakers). The data collected by the team who took part in the project was compiled, translated, and classified in a large database.

2. Methodology for the present study

Our discussion of dialectology at the synchrony-diachrony interface will focus on variation in the objective (accusative-dative) case marker in Marathi.

The present paper considers synchronic dialectal data from: Chandgad (Dist. Kolhapur), Malwan (Dist. Sindhudurg), Sangameshwar (Dist. Ratnagiri), Trimbakeshwar (Dist. Nasik), Dhule (Dist. Dhule), Udgir (Dist. Latur) and Akkalkot (Dist. Solapur). (Please refer to the map in Figure 1; map not to scale).



Fig. 1 Sampling areas from the Marathi Dialect Survey used for the present study

Diachronic data are gleaned from written, historical sources. The historical sources used for this study include:

- i. Old Marathi (12th to 13th centuries) represented by verses by the saints Dnyaneshwar, Chokhamela, Savta Mali, Janabai, Muktabai, Namdeo (verse) and Līlācharita (prose).
- ii. Medieval Marathi (14th to 17th centuries) represented by a text from the Panchatantra, letters of Shivaji's period, *bakhar* literature (all prose) and verses by Saint Tukaram.
- iii. Early Modern Marathi (18th to early 20th centuries) represented by the writings of Ram Ganesh Gadkari, Mahatma Jotiba Phule, Vishnushastri Chiplunkar, Veer Savarkar.

Two historical records of spoken dialectal data are used in this study:

- iv. Grierson's *Linguistic Survey of India*-Vol. VII (1905) and Vol. IX (Pt.3) (1907)
- v. Ghatage's *Survey of Marathi Dialects* (1965-72).

2.1 The Linguistic Feature: dialectal and diachronic perspectives

The objective⁴ case in present-day standard Marathi is marked by the marker *-la*. In discussing the probable etymology for *-la* Bloch (1914:211) points to the Marathi

⁴ Marathi shows accusative-dative case syncretism.

postposition *lagĩ* ‘near, towards’ with cognates in NIA in Sinhala *laṅga* ‘near’, Gujarati *lagu* ‘near’, Nepali *lagi* ‘for, on account of’ also *lai* ‘to, for’, Sindhi *lage* ‘in view of’, Hindi and Bihari, old Bengali *lagi* ‘for’. Bloch further suggests that this form is a locative of the past participle in Prakrit *lagga* from the root ‘to fall’. Dialectal variants of this marker in Marathi include *-le* (in Ahirani) and *-li* (Mahadeo Koli), cf. LSI Vol. VII, p.81. The following semantic functions of the dative – canonical and non-canonical - are marked by *-la*: recipient,

Sl.	District	Speech Variety	No. of tokens analysed	SEMANTIC ROLES				
				RECIP BENEF EXPER GOAL	LOC- PHY	LOC- ABS	PUR	PREDIC POSS
1	---	Std. Marathi	---	<i>-la</i>	<i>-la</i>	<i>-la</i>	<i>-la</i>	<i>-la</i>
2	Solapur	Akkalkot	38	<i>-la</i>	<i>-la</i>	<i>-la</i>	<i>-la</i>	<i>-la</i>
3	Latur	Udgir	39	<i>-la</i>	<i>-la</i>	NA	<i>-la</i>	NA
4	Nasik	Trimbakeshwar	17	<i>-la</i>	<i>-la</i>	<i>-la</i>	NA	<i>-la</i>
5	Sindhudurg	Malwan	46	<i>-k, -ka</i>	<i>-k</i>	<i>-k</i>	<i>-k</i>	<i>-ka</i>
6	Kolhapur	Chandgad	36	<i>-s, -snə, -la, , -l</i>	<i>-s, -la</i>	<i>-s, -la</i>	<i>-s, -l(a)</i>	<i>-dz, -la</i>
7	Ratnagiri	Sangameshwar	36	<i>-ka, -la</i>	<i>-ka, -la,</i>	<i>-ka, -la</i>	NA	<i>-ka, -la</i>

beneficiary, experiencer, purpose, direction, predicative possessor, source/percept. However, in particular regional varieties of Marathi we find that these functions have different markers (see Table 1 below).

					<i>-fi</i>			
8	Dhule	Ahirani	39	<i>-sle, -le, -l/la, -ne/-na</i>	<i>-le, -la</i>	<i>-le, -l/-la</i>	<i>-le</i>	NA

Table 1. Dative markers and dative functions in selected regional varieties of Marathi
(source: Based on Deshpande and Kulkarni-Joshi, forthcoming; NA : data not available)

Among the selected dialectal varieties, we observe intra-variety variation in the Konkani varieties (Malwan, Chandgad and Sangameshwar) and in Ahirani⁵. The Konkani varieties have the markers *-k(a)*, *-s*, and *-la*. Katre (1967) and Ghatage describe *-k(a)* as the Konkani dative maker. Katre (1942:109) derives Konkani *-k(a)* from Skt. *kṛte, kṛta*. (Later, this linguistic distinction becomes the basis for his observation that Konkani is a separate language from Marathi and not merely a dialectal variation of the latter; 1942:151-2.) Further, he relates the variation between *-k* and *-ka* in varieties of Konkani to syllabic weight – disyllabic words having *-ka* and polysyllabic words having *-k*. Katre’s description of the dative in Konkani does not include *-la*: this marker is presumably an influence of the standard dialect with the spread of formal education in the latter variety. Ahirani of Dhule district has the dative markers *-le* and *-la*. While *-le* is attested in the speech sample of Ahirani in the LSI, *-la* seems to be a later addition, presumably the influence of standard Marathi. Idiolectal variation too is observed within these regional varieties. No variation in markers of the objective case is observed in the speech samples collected in the ‘Deshi’ varieties of Nasik, Solapur and Latur districts: all semantic functions are marked by *-la*.

2.2 Research questions

In the light of the synchronic variation noted above, the specific aim of the present paper will be to address the following questions:

1. How can the present-day idiolectal and regional variation in object marking in Marathi be explained in terms of the diachronic development of the dative in Marathi?
2. What is the trajectory of the object case marker in Marathi from the Old Marathi stage until present-day Marathi?

3. Analysis

In order to trace the diachrony of the markers of the objective case in present-day regional varieties of Marathi, we began by noting the markers in each attested developmental stage of the language.

3.1 Occurrence of the *-s* and *-la* markers of the objective case in written sources

Sl.	Year	Source text / Author / Type of text	Tokens analysed <i>n</i>	Frequency of occurrence of variants (%)	
				- <i>s</i>	- <i>la</i>
Old Marathi					

⁵ Note that Grierson has described Konkani to be the only true dialect of Marathi; Ahirani (Khandeshi) has been described as an Indo-Aryan variety intermediate between Marathi and Gujarati.

1	1290 AD	Dnyāneshwari (verse)	60	100%	0
2	late 13 th century	Līlācharitra (prose)	50	100%	0
Middle Marathi					
3	N.A.	Panchatantra Story (source: Tulpule 1949:49)	14	93%	7%
4	1778 AD	Letter (source: Tulpule 1949:139)	25	92%	8%
5	1761 AD	Panipat chi Bakhar [chronicle]	50	100%	0
Early Modern Marathi					
6	1855	Trutiya Ratna [Drama] by Jotiba Phule	60	40%	60%
7	1895	Smrutichitre by Laxmibai Tilak [sample analysed: letter]	52	48%	52%
8	1919	Ekach Pyala by Ram Ganesh Gadkari [drama]	50	0	100%
9	1922	Kalidasa by Vishnushastri Chiplunkar [Essay]	30	100%	0
10	1930-35	Newspaper article Savarkar-A	60	100%	0
11	1930s	Essay by Savarkar-B	50	40%	60%
12	1959	Fakira – a novel by Annabhau Sathe	50	0	100%

Table 2: Occurrence of the case markers *-s* and *-la* in historical sources for (written) Marathi

- i. In Old Marathi⁶, both theme / patient objects and possessor/goal objects were marked predominantly by the oblique and also by the markers *-tē*, *-sī* and *-la*. The first person singular pronominal forms in Old Marathi constitute a variant pooling including *mədz*, *mədz²-lagi*, *mədz²-la* and *məla* (=to me). It is important to note that the *-la* variant which becomes predominant in present-day Marathi, already had a peripheral presence in Old Marathi (see examples in (1) and (2) below. This has often not been noted by previous scholars. But see Bloch 1914:210.)

(1) [verse by Nərhəri Sonar 1313 - ?; Old Marathi]

əiravət bəhu thor tyala ākushacha mar
vyaghrə bəhu bhəyānkər tyala sāmplā ho thor

⁶ Accusative and dative case markers in Old Marathi (Source: Tulpule 1973: 255-256; 259-260)

OLD MARATHI								
	FIRST PERSON			SECOND PERSON			THIRD PERSON	
	Singular	Plural		Singular	Plural		Singular	Plural
Acc.	mədz	amhā		tudz	tumhā		dʒē, teya dʒiye, tiye	--
Dat.	mədz, mədzsi, matē	amtē, amhā, amsī		tudz, tutē, tusi:	tumhā, tumhasi, tumtē		dʒeya-te, -si tea-te, -si dʒiye-te, -si tiye-te, -si	dʒeyā-te, -si teā-te, -si dʒiyā-te, -si tiyā-te, -si

‘The big Airavat has to suffer being curbed; the tiger is ferocious but a big trap awaits him.’

(2) [Verse by Jəṇabai, ~1280-1350 A.D; Old Marathi]

aisa bhāktisī bhul^{la} nīc kamē kārū lag^{la}

jāni mhāṇe viṭhoba-la kay ut^{ra} rāi hoū tu-la

‘He fell for her devotion and started doing lowly jobs; Jani says to Vitthal, how can I pay you back?’

The occurrence of *-la* was the greatest in the second and third person personal pronouns: *tula* and *tyala* respectively.

- ii. In Middle Marathi, *-sī* becomes the predominant marker of both types of object while *-la* has a low frequency of occurrence. (These observations are corroborated by Deo et al 2016.)
- iii. In early modern Marathi, both types of object are marked predominantly by the marker *-sī* but the frequency of *-la* increases considerably as compared with that in Middle Marathi. In this stage of the language, *-s* occurs more frequently in the formal, written style and *-la* occurs more frequently in the informal, colloquial style (refer to occurrences in the plays by Mahatma Jotiba Phule and Ram Ganesh Gadkari as shown in Table 2 above).
- iv. In present-day Marathi, *-s* occurs predominantly in the formal, written style.
 - e.g.1 *radha hīs ānek āśirvad*
Radha 3Sg.F.DAT many blessings
‘Blessings to Radha’
 - e.g.2 *lagna-s*
‘to the wedding’

3.2 Occurrence of the objective case markers in the LSI

Next, we compared the occurrence of particular markers of the objective case and their functions in the regional varieties attested in the LSI, viz. Poona Marathi (= standard dialect), Malwan/Kudal, Sangameshwar and Ahirani / Khandeshi with data samples collected in the Marathi Dialect Survey [MDS].

- i. Poona variety (LSI sample No. 1, p.35): 24 tokens of the dative; *-s*:11 and *-la*:13 of which 11 are used to mark recipient/ beneficiary.
- ii. Malwan/Kudal variety (LSI sample No. 46, p.200)

Malwan / Kudal			
	LSI	Ghatage p. 67	MDS
	<i>n</i> = 10	<i>n</i> = 26	<i>n</i> = 36
<i>-s</i>	0	0	0
<i>-la</i>	0	0	0
<i>-k</i>	4 (40%)	14 (54%)	17 (47%)
<i>-ka</i>	6 (60%)	12 (46%)	19 (53%)

Table 3: Comparing occurrence of the markers of objective case in the Kudal/Malwan variety

iii. Sangameshwar variety (LSI sample No. 30, p.125)

Sangameshwar		
	LSI	MDS
	<i>n</i> = 25	<i>n</i> = 34
-s	18 (72%)	0
-la	05 (20%)	26 (76%)
-ka	0	08 (24%)

Table 4: Comparing occurrence of the dative case markers in the Sangameshwar variety

iv. Khandeshi/Ahirani variety (LSI, Vol. IX.3, sample No. 65, p. 210)

Ahirani		
	LSI	MDS
	<i>n</i> = 23	<i>n</i> = 41
-s	0	0
-la	1 (4%)	10 (24%)
-le	22 (96%)	25 (61%)

Table 5: Comparing occurrence of the dative case markers in the Khandesh/Ahirani variety

4. Discussion

Although language change cannot be observed directly, juxtaposition of synchronic variation in various developmental stages of the language serves as a useful methodological tool to uncover transitions in the diffusion of a linguistic feature. Based on this assumption, our data analysis (admittedly based on a limited number of tokens) focused on describing the synchronic variation in marking of the accusative-dative case across time in representative written sources and in selected spoken, regional varieties of Marathi.

- (1) Historically, we witness accusative-dative case syncretism in medieval Marathi (discussed by Deo et al 2016). The peripheral marker of the dative in written Old Marathi sources, *-la*, became the dominant marker by the early modern Marathi stage. The transition probably occurred between 1930 and 1940 as suggested by the written sources sampled for the study. *-si* increasingly was shunted to the periphery and in present-day Marathi it is retained as a stylistic marker – it marks a very formal written style.
- (2) The first person singular pronominal forms *mədz*, *mədz^ə-lagi*, *mədz^ə-la* and *məla* (= to me) attested in old Marathi indicate a grammaticalisation cline: *lagi* ‘near, toward’ > *-la* ‘case marker’.
- (3) Comparison of spoken Marathi in selected regional varieties from the MDS with the *LSI* revealed varying patterns of diffusion of the *-la* marker, an innovation in Old Marathi. While *-la* had made incursions into the speech varieties of Sangameshwar and Dhule in a span of one hundred years, the Malwan/ Kudal variety remains impervious to *-la* (as revealed by comparisons of MDS data with data from the *LSI* and Ghatage’s monograph).
- (4) The diachronic comparison of historical sources (i.e. of written Marathi) revealed accusative-dative forms of personal pronouns such as *mədz*, *mədz^əla* and *məla* ‘to me’, *tudz*, *tudz^əla* and *tula* ‘to you’. As with the intermediate forms *mədz^əla* and *tudz^əla*, the MDS data revealed other fused, double-dative forms: *tyas-ni*, *tyas-nə* and *tyas-la*.

- (5) The comparison of dialectal sources also indicates that the *-la* marker emerged first to mark the semantic function of RECIPIENT/BENEFICIARY (cf. Poona sample in the LSI). In the extension of the *-la* marker to mark further semantic functions (PREDICATIVE POSSESSOR, DIRECTION/GOAL, PURPOSE) we witness the principle of gradualness (= diachronic change). A larger corpus of tokens must be examined to determine the trajectory / an implicational scale (if any) in the spread of the use of a new dative/accusative marker to mark canonical and non-canonical semantic functions across dialects in time.

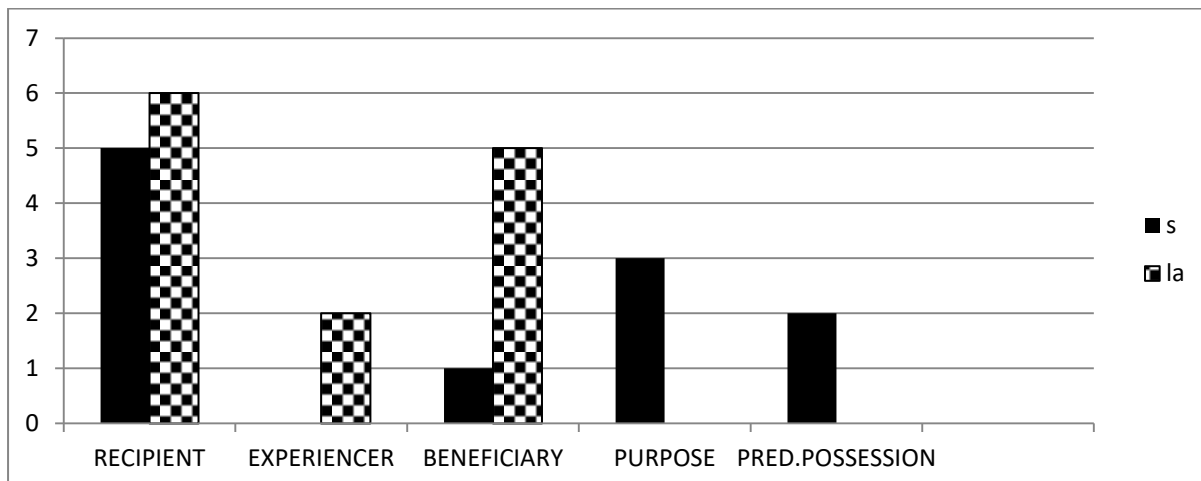


Fig. 2. Relative occurrence of *-s* and *-la* for dative functions in LSI-Poona sample-1 ($n = 24$)

- (6) Diachronic comparison of synchronic states, which are attested in records of spoken data, were restricted largely to the *LSI*. As in the written sources, we noted variation in synchronic states represented by the *LSI* as well as the *MDS*. Such variation was greater in the Konkani varieties of Marathi and in Ahirani / Khandeshi. The comparison leads to the following observations:
- i. Of the Konkani varieties, phonologically conditioned variants *-k* and *-ka* (cf. Katre 1942) are used as dative case markers in Malwani. Both the markers and their use have remained fairly stable across time. The dative variant of the standard dialect, *-la* has not entered this speech variety.
 - ii. The second of the Konkani varieties, the Sangameshwar variety (Ratnagiri district), reveals change. The dominant dative marker *-s* in the *LSI* sample is missing altogether in the *MDS* sample, while *-la*, which had a moderate presence in the *LSI* sample, is very frequently used in the *MDS* sample. Further, the *MDS* documents the variant *-ka* also found in the Malwani variety of Sindhudurg district in the Konkani. The *-ka* variant is absent in the Sangameshwar variety sampled in the *LSI*.
 - iii. Ahirani, which was regarded by Grierson as being a speech form intermediate between Marathi and Gujarati (cf. *Dhedguri*), continues to use *-le* predominantly as the object case marker. *-la* had a minor presence in the *LSI*-Ahirani sample, but it has an increased presence in the *MDS* sample. Variation in both Ahirani and Sangameshwar appear to be influenced by contact with the standard dialect of Marathi, largely through formal education.

5. Conclusion

Not all variability and heterogeneity in language structure involves change; but all language change involves variability and heterogeneity (Weinreich et al 1968:188). Mufwene (forthcoming) assumes that language evolution is variational (like biological evolution), proceeding by competition and selection among competing linguistic alternatives: A and B (and C), with A or B (or C, or A and C, or B and C) prevailing because they were favoured by particular ecological factors. Weinreich et al (1968) too make the following observation regarding the embedding of linguistic variants: The linguistic change itself is rarely a movement of one entire system into another. Instead we find that a limited set of variables in one system shift their modal values gradually from one pole to another. Within the theoretical framework used in the present analysis, too, the examination of synchronic points in a spatial continuum were expected to open an important observational window into language change in progress (cf. Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 2012:713).

We examined the synchronic variation in marking the object-marking case in Marathi within this framework. In the formal development of *-la* as a case marker, we see gradualness in terms of the development of individual, intermediate forms as a result of increased grammaticalisation of the lexical item *lagi* into a case marker *-la*: *mədz*, *mədz²-lagi*, *mədz²-la* and *məla*. We also observe gradualness in the development of semantic functions of *-la* from RECIPIENT, BENEFICIARY, to LOCATION-PHYSICAL, LOCATION-ABSTRACT and PREDICATIVE POSSESSOR, PURPOSE. A study based on a much larger corpus is needed to confirm this trajectory. Thus, the case of the Marathi case marker confirms the relation between synchronic gradience (i.e. fluctuations in the system) and diachronic gradualness in language change. The study also demonstrated that synchronic gradience was both the result and the cause of diachronic gradualness. Our preliminary investigation of spatial and historical variation in dative case marking reveals the developmental micro-steps summarised in Table 6.

	Developmental stage	Marker of theme, patient objects	Marker of recipient, possessor, goal objects	Comment
Stage 1	Earliest stage of Marathi	oblique	oblique	This feature was inherited from MIA ⁷
Stage 2	Old Marathi	oblique, <i>-te</i>	oblique, <i>-s(i)</i>	<i>-la</i> occurs (though infrequently) in the verses of some saints; esp. <i>məla</i> ‘to me’
Stage 3	Middle Marathi	<i>-s(i)</i>	<i>-s(i)</i>	<i>-s(i)</i> is the dominant object marker; <i>-la</i> is infrequent
Stage 4	Early Modern	<i>-s(i)</i> , <i>-la</i>	<i>-s(i)</i> , <i>-la</i>	<i>-s(i)</i> develops as a stylistic variant – more

⁷ cf. Deo et al 2016.

	Marathi			frequent in the formal style of writing
Stage 5	Modern Marathi	-la	-la	-s(i) occurs only in the very formal style

Table 6. Progress in the development of the case marker *-la*

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