

Middle and Early New Indo-Aryan: a crucial period for linguistic development?

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The time frame of the Indo-Aryan languages is generally divided in three periods:

Old Indo-Aryan 1500 BCE – 600 BCE

Middle Indo-Aryan 600 BCE – 1000 CE

New Indo-Aryan 1000 CE -

Grammatical constructions in the Old Indo-Aryan period, with its main exponents of Sanskrit and Vedic, have been well-known and described (cf. Speijer 1886, Hock 1991, Jamison 1983, Kulikov 2012, Dahl 2010 amongst others). New Indo-Aryan languages are also relatively well-studied, in particular with regard to case and agreement patterns.

The evolution and the realization of the ergative pattern in Indo-Aryan has received due attention in general overviews as well as in specific studies (Butt 2006, Deo and Sharma 2006, Hock 1986, Hook 1991, Stroński 2009, Verbeke and De Cuypere 2009), as well as non-canonical subject patterns (Hook 1990, Montaut 1996, Verbeke, Kulikov and Willems 2015). In such studies of the development of the languages, the Late Middle to Early New Indo-Aryan period is considered a transitional period, during which the Indo-Aryan morphosyntax has undergone crucial changes, but only few studies exclusively focus on this stage. For instance, with regard to the evolution of ergativity, Bubenik (1998) has suggested that in Apabhraṃśa, the shift from an accusative to an ergative alignment pattern occurred, whereas Khokhlova (1992, 2000, 2001, 2006) argues that this steady drift from an ergative alignment via so called tripartite alignment to accusative alignment took place in Old Rajasthani. Montaut (1996, 2004, 2006) upholds that the change from a synthetic future to a periphrastic future, from conjunctive to present, has also happened in this time frame. The objective postpositional case marker of Hindi-Urdu is argued to have originated in this period, just like the non-canonical marking of experiencer subjects, which was absent from earlier stages in the language (Drocco 2008, Strnad 2013). The pronominal system also changed dramatically in this period, as was shown by Bubenik and Paranjape (1996).

Besides important morphosyntactic changes, this is also the period that the geography of the modern languages was redrawn. From broad sociolects spoken according to social strata, such as Sanskrit, Maharashtri Prakrit and Apabhraṃśa (Pollock 2009, De Clercq 2010) the written language changes to regiolects. The languages diversify and grow closer to the spoken variety. This is the stage where Rajasthani splits from Gujarati, where literary Bengali grows from Magahi Prakrit. In this respect, studies of lesser-known languages are complementary to diachronic studies, as they might reveal possible pathways of language change which deviate from the patterns of the better known languages. Recent years have seen a rise in studies on these minority languages, yet more is to be done (Liljegren 2008, Phillips 2014, Stroński 2014).

In short, the period knows a tremendous evolution and dynamics. It is a highly informative period to trace grammaticalization processes, yet extensive data-based studies have not been undertaken.

Stroński, Tokaj and Verbeke (SLE 2015) was one of the first steps in the direction to assemble corpus data in order to make well-founded claims on the evolution of constructions involving non-finite verbal forms in Early New Indo-Aryan. However, other grammatical patterns could as well benefit by similar undertakings.

In our workshop, we aim to enlighten this “dark” stage in the language development with data to embed the theoretical claims in. We welcome abstracts on the following topics:

- Studies on morphosyntactic and semantic evolutions with a particular emphasis on Middle Indo-Aryan and/or Early New Indo-Aryan
- Studies on Modern Indo-Aryan (with particular emphasis on lesser known vernaculars) with hypotheses reaching out to earlier stages of the language
- Historical sociolinguistic studies which aim at sketching the linguistic situation in a particular area or a particular language group
- Studies which clarify genetical relations between the Middle Indo-Aryan languages
- Studies which are focused on data collection and corpus creation of Indo-Aryan languages

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