# Spatial Deixis: A typological study in Kharia, Santhali, Khasi and Pnar

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## Abstract

This paper studies the expressions in a language that make references to the spatial location of entities in relation to that of the speaker. The target languages that will be studied belong to Munda and Non-Munda group of languages. The primary aim of the research is to discuss the validity of language family and the similarities and differences among the languages. In addition to this, it will also explore the notions that are expressed by the deictic categories. The paper will briefly study the Buhler's theory of deixis. It is then followed by an introduction to the Austro-Asiatic Family. Further, I discuss my methodology, theoretical issues concerning spatial deixis, an introduction to target languages, literature reviews and my hypothesis. Towards the end, I present the data along with my analysis. Finally, I supply my findings and thereafter a conclusion.

## Key words:

## 1. Introduction

Language manifests the way human perceive the world, its immediate surroundings, the situations around it. Thus, spatial deixis denotes the space and location. The concept of 'space' is specific to an individual or to a community. Deixis is one of the most important device to integrate information in a language. The term 'deixis' comes from a Greek word meaning pointing or indicating. The recognition of deixis as an area worthy of investigation came only in 1934 in the form of a theory put forward by the German Philosopher, Karl Buhler. The meaning of deictic expressions depends on the – when, where and by whom they are uttered.

## 2. Buhler and His Theory

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Buhler observes that the deictic interpretation of words depends on the zero-point of the utterance – the origo, which comprises the 'I' (the speaker), the 'here' (the place of utterance) and the 'now' (the time of utterance). In other words, "the canonical situation of the utterance is ego-centric." The speaker almost always takes himself as the 'ego' and relates everything to his view-point, taking the above mentioned three axes as the basic co-ordinates for reference. Hence, there are three major categories of deixis: person deixis, spatial deixis and temporal deixis as illustrated in figure 1. These are complemented by social and discourse deixis.
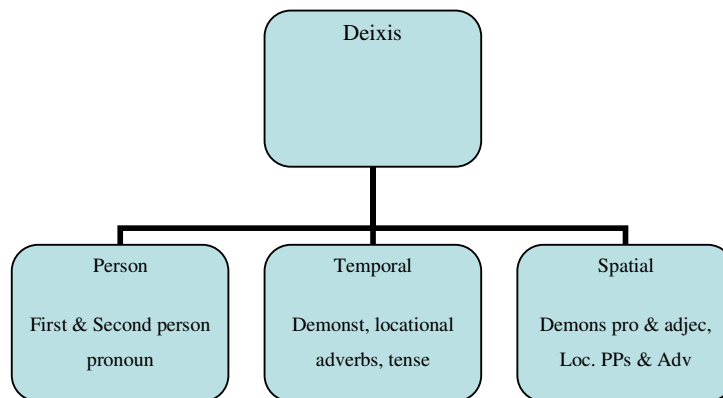


**Figure 1- Classification of Deixis**

Figure 1 clearly explains that Person Deixis refers to the speakers. The first and the second person pronouns fall under this category of deictic expressions. Further, those expressions that refer to time relative to that of the speech-event fall under temporal deixis. References to time in respect to the time of speaking- the now – can be represented in grammar in various ways; through demonstratives used in spatial deixis, locational adverbs like 'here' and 'there'. The most common way to realize time distinction is through the verbal category of tense. Other than these two, languages also use number of lexical items that can be used as temporal deixis.

**3. Spatial Deixis**

The spatial location is expressed by some basic grammatical categories such as demonstrative pronouns and demonstrative adjectives. It also includes locative post-positions and locative adverbs. The spatial location is always measured with reference to that of the

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speaker, which may not hold true worldwide but is an acceptable phenomenon in Indian languages.

### 3.1. Demonstrative Pronouns

In many languages, the demonstrative pronouns incorporate several features into their lexical composition to serve the grammatical function of the third person personal pronoun. In most of the Indian languages the distance is incorporated into the lexical form of third person pronoun. These pronouns are important in two ways. Firstly, they present locative information and secondly they may also include semantic-syntactic features such as number, gender, animacy and human etc.

### 3.2 Demonstrative Adjectives

These are same demonstrative bases that are used as demonstrative pronouns. They appear before head nouns in a noun-phase and are used as attributes and modifiers. The grammatical functions of these are essentially different but the semantic pragmatic function of the demonstratives remains the same i.e. to point out some entity in space in relation to the speaker's position. They agree with the head of the noun in respect to person, number and gender. In addition to demonstratives, there are two other grammatical categories, locative post-positions and locative adverbs, to express spatial deictic notions.

### 3.3 Locative Post-Position and Adverbs

Typically, the two specify the location of one entity in respect to that of another, where the first can be called figure and the second a Ground – (Fillmore 1982: 42-43). The 'Ground' can be either animate or inanimate. The location of a figure is generally both ascribed and described in reference to the position of the 'ground'. We can demonstrate it in sentence 1:

1. The house     is *near* the     lake

   Figure       LOC. ADV    Ground.

### 3.4 Compound Locative Expression

It is an expression where the locative PP is used in conjunction with locative adverbs and genitive PP's.

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**3.5 Adverbial Deictic**

These might be taken as a sub-section within the grammatical category of locative adverbs. The locative adverbs denote the location of an object in question in a spatial term. They refer to a place in space and need not be inherently deictic though they can be used deictically. On the other hand, adverbial deixis or the deictic adverbs have the function of locating an object in space in relation to the location of the speaker and/ or addressee's location in a speech-event.

Language can have variety, but it is believed that all the variation can be at distal and proximal deictic. Though, there has been debate on two issues. Some believe that as human conception of the basic co-ordinates of spatial orientation takes ego as the central deictic reference point. Taking this thought they believe that the spatial orientations are universal. But other side believes that "universal trait generally under determine the range of possible cognitive systems, leaving wide latitude for contingent human experience, in the form of language and culture, to play a guiding role in spatial cognition." – Foley 1997: 215.

The rest of the paper will be about a brief introduction about the target languages and the related hypotheses and findings.

**4. The Austro-Asiatic Language**

These languages are represented by three major branches, Mon-Khmer, Munda and Nicobarese. Khasi, spoken in the eastern part of hilly India, represents the Mon Khmer. Indigenous groups in various pockets of Central India and Eastern India speak Munda languages. It is spoken in India only. Nicobarese is spoken in Nicobar Islands. Some linguists (Grierson 1915, Vol. 1:34) established this language as a real link between Khasi (Mon Khmer) and the Munda languages of this family. Grierson also follows the same concept in his "linguistic survey of India." He also divides the Austro-Asiatic family into Munda and Non-Munda.

**4.1. Santhali and Kharia: Munda Group**

Santhali belongs to the Northern Munda languages who were earlier with other Munda languages. They parted their ways after they reached Chota Nagpur from the West. Now Santhals speakers are at Dhanbad, Giridih etc.

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Kharia is spoken in southern Bihar which is now Jharkhand, some parts of Orissa, Madhya Pradesh. It falls under the central speaking group of Munda languages. Kharia were among three clans Dudh, Dhelki and Hill Kharias. The last one seemed to have lost it.

### 4.2. Khasi and Pnar: Non-Munda Group

These two languages form the non-munda group of languages. Meghalaya, where these are spoken is predominantly inhabited by three tribes, the Garo, the Khasi and the Jayantia. Jayantia call their language Pnar. It is not officially recognized and is regarded as a dialect of Khasi. Khasi is one of only language that has SVO order other than Kashmiri.

### 5. Literature Review

Grierson's gives the account of the structure of Kharia in linguistic survey of India. He doesn't talk about 'deixis' categorically, but it does cover about demonstratives. There are lots of grammars for Santhali and Kharia. But not many talk about deictic expressions. Anderson and Keenan, at the outset of their article 'Deixis', in Timothy Shopen discusses in details the spatial deixis as a system with various contrasts on all co-ordinates. Nagaraja discussed a little about Kharia commenting on the formation of deixis with other elements.

Further, if we talk about Khasi and Pnar then these languages have not been worked upon very extensively due to the remote location of the places these are spoken at. Nagaraja's work which again was not deixis-specific reports of variation in the dialects of Khasi that do not strictly adhere to SVO pattern. Pnar has always been seen as a dialect of Khasi thus it has not been studied at length in past.

### 6. Research Questions

Keeping this in mind, I move ahead with various research questions, which I will explore throughout my discussion these are:

- If deixis is about space, then why is it not similar for every human being? What determines it?
- How far is the notion of language families relevant? (in the light of breaking/ fading boundaries)

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- Is it just about language, perception and cognition? What all ways is the notion of deixis revealed in the languages. And what all does it reveal?

## 7. Methodology

The research work for this paper started with reading the theoretical issues concerning the topic. Having done that, I started collecting data from the available literature. This includes Grierson's Linguistic Survey of India and the research works such as Avtans (2004), Koshy (2007), Malhotra (1982), Som (2002). Following this I made an elaborate questionnaire for the demonstratives, locative PP and Adverbs based on the available literature such as Talmy (1983) and Wilkins (1999). I have tested along both vertical and horizontal axis and covered 10 Kharia and Santhali and 10 Pnar and Khasi speakers each. This was followed by a close data analysis and also a comparison with the past works.

## 8. Hypotheses

I have following three hypotheses:

1. I feel that other than the spatial information, these structures give a lot more descriptive information, such as animacy, gender etc.
2. No matter how close these languages are, they ought to have some major variations.
3. For non-munda group, I believe that there are many variations across the axis, both vertical and horizontal. Since these are hilly areas their geography ought to reflect in their languages.

## 9. Data and Findings

Based on the data that I collected, I found out that in Santhali the third person pronouns are derived from the demonstrative pronouns and are deictic. This is because the information of distance is incorporated into their lexical form. Santhali is speaker oriented. As aforementioned, while referring to the location of an entity or a person in relation to that of the speaker, the physical universe is divided on the basis of the degrees of distance from the speaker. Thus, in Santhali it is a two-way distinction i.e.; proximate and remote. Though, there is not any superimposed criterion of visibility, audibility etc. in Santhali. Santhali demonstrative pronouns distinguish three numbers and are divided on the lines of animacy. In number system, the singular number is left unmarked. The dual number is marked with the morpheme /-*kin*/ and the plural number is marked by/-*ku*/. These number markers are

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suffixed to the root morpheme of the demonstrative pronouns. The animate pronouns are marked with/-*i*/ after the root morpheme and the inanimate pronouns are marked with /-*a*/ after the root morpheme of the demonstrative pronouns. The animacy marker in the demonstrative /-*i*/ is omitted in the animate demonstratives, whereas in case of the inanimate objects the inanimate marker /-*a*/ is left unchanged.

According to past researches Santhali has three root morphemes representing the three distances. These are:

| | |
|---|---|
| /*nu*-/ | proximate |
| /*un*-/ | distant |
| /*han*-/ | most distant or remote |

But my research showed that there exists only two-way distinction with the use of only two morphemes of proximal and distant. /*un*-/ and /*han*-/ are both used for remoteness. But I found that /*han*-/ is losing its meaning. This can be because of 'areal pressure.' We can see Santhali demonstratives in the sentences 2-6.

2. *nua*      *dɔ*      *iɲǝk*      *disǝm*      *kǝna.*
   Dem.prox      TOM    1.sg.gen      country      be.

   (This is my country.)

3. *ona*      *ma*      *amrika*      *riyǝk ǰǝhaǰ kan.*
   Dem.Rem      particular      America      GEN    plane    be.
   (That is an American aeroplane.)

4. *nua*      *dɔ*      *uni*      *emay mɛ.*
   dem.prox      ToM    3.sg.acc      give    imp.
   (Give it to him.)
   The idea of near and what is far is relative and context-dependent.

5. *ona*      *dɔ*      *iɲǝk*    *ɔrak*    *kǝna.*
   Dem.rem      TOM    GEN    house    be-prs.
   (That is my house.)

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6.  *ona          buru          taynom          rɛ    dɔ    ǰola.*
    Dem.rem    mountain    behind          loc.PP ToM  lake.
    (There is a lake behind that mountain.)

| | +Animate | | | -Animate | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Sg | Du | Pl | Sg | Du | Pl |
| D1 | *nui* | *nu-kin* | *nu-ku* | *nua* | *nua-kin* | *nuə-ku* |
| D2 | *uni* | *un-kin* | *un-ku* | *ona* | *ona-kin* | *ona-ku* |
| D2 | *huni* | *hun-kin* | *hun-ku* | *həna* | *həna-kin* | *həna-ku* |

**Table 1: Santhali demonstratives**

Table 1 show that D1 is proximate demonstrative and D2 is remote demonstrative. It is important to convey here that /*huni*/ was not used by many informants but /*hana*/ is quite common.

Further talking about Demonstrative Adjectives, they and the head nouns agree on gender and number. If the head noun refers to an animate entity, the demonstrative used will be marked likewise. We can see it below in 7 &8:

7.  *nui          gidrə.*
    This (animate) child.
    (This child.)

8.  *nua                buru*
    This (inanimate)    mountain
    (That mountain.)

When the noun is in singular number, the form of the demonstrative adjective is also singular as can be seen in above examples.

The locative post-position /*rɛ*/ in Santhali is used after the head noun representing the Ground. The PP conveys the sense of 'containing' and there is no change whether 'contained'

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object is physically placed in or out of the container i.e; 'on' or 'inside' as illustrated below in 9-12:

9. *dibba rɛ      buluŋ minak̃a.*

   box     loc.pp  salt     be.prs.inanmt

   (The box is in the salt.)

10. *ǰəlapuri      rɛ      ləuka  cəlak̃ kəna.*

    Sea           loc. pp boat   go     be-prs-cont.

    (The boat is floating in the sea.)

    Hence, /-rɛ/ is constant.

The locative PP is suffixed with the locative Adverb to create the Santhali spatial expressions.

11. *ona          buru          cɔt   rɛ     iɲək  ɔrak̃  minak̃a*

    dem.rem       mountain       top   loc.pp 1.sg.genhouse be-inanmt.

    (My house is on the top of that mountain.)

It is difficult to mention the location of dynamic objects, so /tɛ/ is used as an ablative marker.

12. *udəgədi      taor  cɛtan tɛ      čəlak kəna.*

    aeroplane     tower above abl    go     be.prs.cont.

    (The aeroplane is (going) flying above the tower.)

Towards the end we can say that Santhali also has adverbial deictics. These are:

   *nɔndɛ*               Here

   *ɔndɛ*                There

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| | |
|---|---|
| *handɛ* | There (further) |
| *nɔndɛ-kʰɔn* | From here |
| *ɔndɛ-həbič* | Till there (goal) |

The first three are main. /*ɔndɛ*/ and /*handɛ*/ are used on same place. So the three-way distinction has reduced to two-way.

Kharia distinguishes its demonstratives in terms of a four-way proximate-remote distinction. The four-way system is /*u*/ - proximate, and expresses increasing degrees of remoteness. This maximal four-way distinction is very limited and is used only in third person pronominal reference. Like Santhali, here also the lexical form of demonstrative is connected with the third person pronoun. Though, these days the speakers prefer to use, only first two and use the last ones very rarely, provided its some idiom, song etc. We can see the usage in the sentence 13 as follows:

13. *iɲ-aʔ   poʔda  dʰənɛl aĩ̌     ho    poʔda kalən  naʔ   -te*
    my      village dhanel is      that  village kaalan near   -to

    *aĩ̌.*
    is.

    (My village is dhanel. It is near kaalan.)

In Kharia also the third person pronoun is derived from demonstratives. The person marker is suffixed to demonstrative e.g. /*u-kaɽ*/ 'third, person singular proximate. Dual and plural third person are derived by attaching number suffix. Postpositions may be compounded with spatio-temporal adverbs and co-occur with nominal arguments usually of genitival character.

'-*te*' is the positional adverb, indicating the area within which an action takes place. There is a three-way proximate-remote distinction in the expression of deictic locatives, formed by postposing /-*te*/ to the demonstratives.

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/*u-te*/ proximate, /*ho-te*/, /*han-te*/, indicates remoteness from the speaker. Kharia is also speaker oriented. All this illustrated in 14-18.

14. *hante ute    pʰərk pʰurk auki*

there   here   differences    were.

(There were differences here and there.)

/*-te*/ can also be post-posed to locative interrogative marker. It is put after nouns of location also.

15. *goŋg-na      čari-te        saǰu         un-oʔ.*

Cooking        room-in        utensils        kept

(He kept utensils in the kitchen.)

/*-te*/ covers both vertical and horizontal axis such as /*hinte*/ 'on', /*tuta-te*/ 'under of '/*kundab-te*/ 'back of'. It indicates the source from which an activity originates. Also interestingly adverbs of location may be reduplicated and then are not marked overtly by post positions.

16. *mugam        mugam        baŋklui        čol-ki*

Front        front        stork        went

(The stork went in front.)

/*-tay*/ and /*-te*/ are used to express movement /*tĩ̌*/ indicates direction.

17. *idaʔ          magra poʔda tay    delki*

Yesterday      Magra village from    came

(Yesterday Magra came from the village.)

/*boʔ*/ limits the space as in:

18. *iɲ-aʔ  boʔ    dam-na-gud  tuɲ-e*

Shoot so that it reaches (till) me.

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Hence, even though the two language Kharia and Santhali belong to same language family and are placed nearby, even then there are so many variations. This fulfills the idea of diversity and raises questions the idea of language family.

Further, now we move on to Khasi and Pnar. In Pnar also the lexical form of 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronoun and demonstrative are same. The demonstrative pronoun here enters the configurationally properties of the nominal it modifies and incorporates the modified nominals gender/ number feature in its form. In proximal deixis, it has only one form /-ni/, which appears with the proclitic as shown in 19 & 20:

19. *ham*        *pɨn-yap*        *ya-kɨ-ni*        -*ki*        -*sim.*

PRO.NEG        caus-die        acc-3.pl.cl-Dem.prox-3.pl.cl-bird.

(Do not kill these birds.)

It maintains a 3-way distinction in distal deixis. The [procl-*taɩ*] is used when object is within reach.

20. *ɩ-yuŋ*        *yɔŋ-ŋa*        *em-i*        *čʰa-den*

3.f.sg-cl.        home        gen-1.sg        have-3.f.sg.cl  behind

*u-taɩ.*

3.m.sg.cl-dem.dist

(My house is behind that mountain.)

Others are /*u-tɛ*/when object is not visible. The last is [procl-*tu*], when object is invisible to the speaker but nearer to the hearer.

Pnar distinguishes two numbers in demonstratives where plurality is marked by /*kɨ-*/ attaching to root morphemes. For gender there are two forms and one for unmarked gender. Demonstrative adjectives behave similar to pronouns. Locative preposition as it is SVO are of two types:

        /*ha-*/   +visible        in/on/to

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/*čʰa*-/  -visible        in/on/to

A typical Pnar compound locative expressions would be of following structure.

LOC = LOC PP + LOC ADV.

*haɟrɔn* = *ha* + *ɟrɔn* = above

There are different forms of Adverbial deictics. The proximal adverbs are:

*hɛini*  (*ha-i-ni*)

*čʰɛini* (*čʰa-i-ni*)

*nɛini*  (*na-i-ni*)

The distal markers use all distal demonstrative pronouns along with 3 case markers /*ha*/, /*čʰa*/ and /*na*/ standing for locative, Allative and Ablative. So various forms are:

| *hɛitai* | *ha-i-tai* |
|---|---|
| *čʰɛitai* | *čʰa-i-tai* |
| *nɛitai* | *na-i-tai* |

The locative prepositions are also numerous and as we correctly hypothesized, there are various forms for different positions and locations as illustrated in the table below.

| at | *ha* | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| to | | *čʰa* | |
| from | | | *na* |
| on | *ha* | *haɟnɔŋ* | |
| in | *ha* | *hapɔʔ* | *čʰapɔʔ* |
| into | *hapɔʔ* | *čʰapɔʔ* | *napɔʔ* |

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Hence, there is a variety of spaces and each has a marker. The visibility becomes an important criterion here.

In Khasi, people do not expect much variation. But there are several relevant changes. It again enters the similar configurationally and incorporates modified nominal's gender/ number. In the proximal deixis, Khasi has only one form i.e.; /-ne/. But it maintains 6 way distinctions in the Distal Deixis having one of the following forms. This can be illustrated in sentences 21-23:

21. *pait*   *ya-ka-tai*              *ka*              *-dur*
    look   acc-3.f.sg.cl-dem.dist  3.f.sg.cl        -picture
    (Look at that picture.)


This form is used when the object is visible and within one's reach.

22. *peit*   *ya-ka -tei*             *ka*              *-briyau*
    look   acc-3.f.sg.cl-dem.dist  3.f.sg.cl        -person

    *ka-ba-yɛŋ*              *haŋ-tɛi.*
    3.f.sg-R.P-stand        there.
    (Look at the lady who is standing there.)


This form is used when an object is the above speaker in space.

23. *ka-iyɛŋ*       *ɟɔŋ-a*       *ka*       *-don   ha-diɛn*
    3.f.sg.cl-house gen-1.sg       3.f.sg.cl-have  behind

    *u-tʰie*                *u-lom*
    3.m.sg.cl-dem.dist    3.m.sg.cl-hill
    (My house is behind that hill.)

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It is used, when an object is below the speaker in spatial orientation.

There are other forms such as:

[-*ta*] It is used when object talked about is remote and may or may not be visible.

[-*to*] It is used when object used is nearer to hearer than to the speaker.

[-*tu*] It is used when an object is out of reach.

Khasi has 3 sets of Proximate demonstrative and 2 sets of distal demonstratives. With the locative [*ha*], Ablative [*na*] or Allative [*fä*] followed by 3rd person marker [*i-*] and then followed by 2 different proximate demonstratives. These are:

> *ha-ŋ-ne*          Anybody here.
>
> *na-ŋ-ne* ———— From here.
>
> *ša-ne*

The distal form has many combinations such as:

*ha-ŋ-tei* and *ša-tei*

*ha-ŋ-tai* and *ša-tai*

*ha-ŋ-to* and *ša-to*

It is interesting to note here that locative and ablative have a form /-*ŋ*-/ but the allative doesn't have any. For if we look at the prepositions (locatives) the range is as wide as Pnar.

Thus, we saw that considering Pnar as just a dialect of Khasi would be belittling the language. It has its own categories. Deixis lies at the community's heart so it has proved that since these are two separate communities so the linguistic typology is also distinct. We can briefly look at the findings as below.

**10. Summary of Findings**

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To begin with, all these languages are speaker oriented where demonstratives undergo a configuration to form 3$^{rd}$ Person pronoun or 3$^{rd}$ person pronoun undergoes to form demonstrative. We can study the findings as follows, keeping the above fact in mind:

- When the configuration takes place the demonstrative no longer just talks about space. It reveals other information also such as number, animacy, gender. This satisfies my first hypotheses.

- When we talk about geographical closeness, then it is not essential that languages have to share all the features. For e.g. Kharia is more Aryanised than Santhali and Khasi has many variations from Pnar in lexical stock, deictic inventory etc. This hence satisfies my second hypothesis also.

- It is true that Khasi and Pnar are hilly languages so the deictic variations and range has to be wide. But even between each other Khasi has 6-way distinction whereas Pnar has 3-way distinction in distal demonstratives. Hence, this justifies the second and third, both hypotheses.

- Other than this there is a lot of neutralization that has taken place, especially in Munda languages. The distal forms have neutralized and coupled as one. This is because of Aryan influence. Also it is not that the communities can no longer perceive space but the human needs have changed and they no longer require to think about wide distances. It can be because commuting has become easier.

- When we talk about Aryanisation then we have the evidence in the form of loss of Locative Post-Position marker in an event of reduplicated adverb. This only happens again in Kharia and not Santhali. In addition to this, there are forms such as /boʔ/ in Kharia denoting limiting the space as 'till'. It is similar to IA, but it is missing in Santhali. Hence, it looks very interesting that in the course of finding differences within same language families, we have support for the similarities among various language families (across language families). Thus, it undoubtedly raises a question on the relevance of the concept of language family. In addition to this, it throws light on the strong relation due to contact across languages, where the areal linguistics plays its role.

## 11. Conclusion

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Does a particular usage by a community lies in the social set-up or is it because of cultural influences? Is it geography of a community or something else? Though, the above marked things can all be clubbed under human society and its configuration. The concept of language family is actually a construct of macro-level similarities (other than from language contact) and micro-level differences. So similar languages can be kept together and further separated. Taking this as a base I talked about Santhali, Kharia, Khasi and Pnar, where all of these belong to one language family and are further divided. They go under another division of Munda and Non-Munda and then results into what languages they are.

Though, Santhali and Kharia are placed together but only Kharia seems to have a more Indo-Aryan influence. For Khasi and Pnar, the speakers do believe that they are similar but on the close observation one can see the clear differences. There is a variation in the type of deictic marking. This lessens the load of the justification for them being similar. But we can for sure see that it is more about the human needs and utility through which they assert individualism.

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