A Descriptive Analysis of the Morphosyntactic Features of Dhundhari: Structure, Agreement and Order

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Abstract

This study is an attempt to find out key morphosyntactic features of Dhundhari, focusing on the major morphological, verbal, agreement, and typological description of the language by following Payne's idea of Morphosyntax (1997). Findings show that Dhundhari has the dominant SOV order, reflecting a head final structure. The structure of the words combines both agglutinating and fusional features. The language has two genders, two numbers, and three persons. Gender differentiation is also possible in terms of [-animate] objects. Case markers are also inflectional markers and except for the nominative case, other case markers are overtly marked. Tense, aspect and mood are distinctly visible, and it plays an important role in understanding the nature of an action. Aspect and mood are also distinguished in the verb forms. Using examples and structural description of the language, this study highlights the regional morphosyntactic features of Dhundhari while placing it within the larger Indo-Aryan group of languages. Further theoretical and comparative research on Rajasthani variations is made possible by the findings, which further advance descriptive Indo-Aryan linguistics.

Keywords: Dhundhari; morphosyntactic features; tense-aspect-mood; descriptive Study

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:2 February 2026**
Rijushna Gogoi and Dhanapati Shougrakpam
A Descriptive Analysis of the Morphosyntactic Features of Dhundhari: Structure, Agreement and Order   82

INTRODUCTION

Morphosyntax is one of the core areas of Linguistics that studies the interface between morphology and syntax. It shows how grammatical meaning is examined through word formation and structural analysis. Morphosyntactic features include several grammatical features including tense and aspect, number, gender and person, case markers, argument structures etc., which are all seen by syntactic relations or inflections Dhundhari. This study seeks to investigate how Dhundhari's morphosyntactic elements are realized and how they influence word order, meaning, and sentence structure.

Dhundhari [dʱʊndʱaɾi], also known as Jaipuri, is one of the major Central Indo-Aryan languages spoken in Rajasthan. It comes under Rajasthani subgroups. The language is spoken in Jaipur, Tonk, Dudu, Sawai Madhopur, Dausa, and a few parts of Ajmer. One of the oldest groups of people to live in Rajasthan were the Dhundhari native speakers. There are 1.8 million people in the speech community, according to the 2011 Census. "It is the second widely spoken variety of Rajasthani group of languages after Marwari" (Gogoi & Shougrakpam, 2025: 199). According to the locals, the term Dhundhari is derived from the name of a mountain known as *Dhundhakriti;* whereas another opinion holds that the name 'Dhundhari' has come from the *Dhund* river that flows across the region. Grierson (1908) has mentioned several other names of Dhundhari that includes Dhundhari- Jaipuri, Dhundhali, Dhundhahdi, Jhadshahiboli and Kai-kui boli, and it is alternatively termed as 'Dhundhari' by the natives of Rajasthan. "Alternative names for Dhundari include Dhundari-Marwari, Dhundhali, Dhundhahdi, Jhadshahi boli, Kai-kui boli, and Jaipuri" (Benjamin et.el, 2012).

Grierson's Linguistic Survey of India (1908) is one of the earliest non-linguistic accounts labeling the genetic classification of the languages. According to Ethnologue, Dhundhari is a language of zone descendant of Indo-Aryan language family.
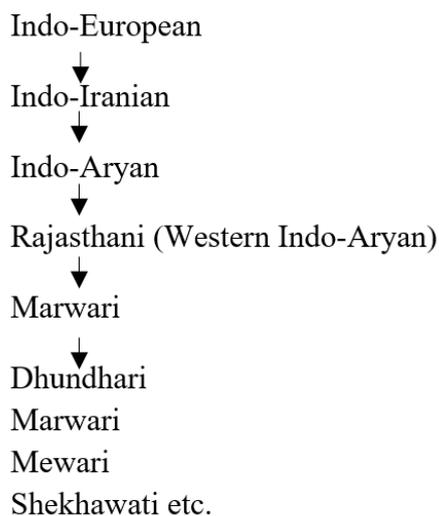
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Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:2 February 2026**
Rijushna Gogoi and Dhanapati Shougrakpam
A Descriptive Analysis of the Morphosyntactic Features of Dhundhari: Structure, Agreement and Order   83

Indo-European

Indo-Iranian

Indo-Aryan

Rajasthani (Western Indo-Aryan)

Marwari

Dhundhari
Marwari
Mewari
Shekhawati etc.

Fig 1: Genetic Classification of Dhundhari (https://www.ethnologue.com/subgroup/3/)

There are several other varieties that come under the umbrella term 'Rajasthani'. Some of the dialects are highly mutually intelligible, whereas others are not. As part of a series of sociolinguistic studies of the selected Rajasthani dialects, Benjamin and Ngwazah conducted a sociolinguistic survey and found that Hindi appears to have invaded the linguistic space.

OBJECTIVES

It is crucial to understand the basic linguistic elements of a language to create words, phrases, clauses, and eventually sentences in a language. These characteristics hold significance not just in the study of syntax and morphology but also in other areas of linguistics. The goal of this study is to find out the basic linguistic characteristics. Primary goal of this research is to:

(a) To find out the key morphosyntactic features of Dhundhari

(b) To understand how syntactic structure and word formation processes interact to generate the correct grammatical structures of the language.

DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS

For this study, primary data has been collected from the native speakers of Dhundhari. Data has been gathered through structured and semi structured interviews in formal and informal settings. Participants are the native speakers of Dhundhari, inhabitants of Jaipur

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:2 February 2026**
Rijushna Gogoi and Dhanapati Shougrakpam
A Descriptive Analysis of the Morphosyntactic Features of Dhundhari: Structure, Agreement and Order   84

region. Their mother tongue is Dhundhari and they use Dhundhari in everyday life. Neither the occupation nor any other factors such as gender, age, and other such variables were focused on.

Secondary data have been collected from various existing sources. Even though the amount of secondary data is very little in number, it is found to be very helpful in understanding the basic features of Dhundhari.

This nature of the work is descriptive-qualitative. For data transcription, International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) were followed. Since this work is limited but not restricted to fundamental morphosyntactic analysis of the language, phonemic transcription was not given significant attention. The Leipzig Glossing Rules (updated version, February 2008) were used for the glossing of data.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The study has framed the idea of morphosyntax from the book '*Describing Morphosyntax: A Guide for Field Linguists'* by Thomas E. Payne (1997). Payne has conceptualized Morphosyntax as one of the major domains of language studies. Rather than treating morphology and syntax as separate areas, Payne has proposed his idea of morphosyntax which not only studies prefixes, suffixes, stems, and roots but also concerns the rules governing the arrangement of words in phrases and sentences. Morphosyntax, therefore, addresses how morphological elements (e.g., inflections) are integrated into syntactic structures. The two components are deeply interrelated, as morphemes often determine the syntactic relations in a sentence. This study focuses on the subject-verb agreement, case marking, and TAM features (tense, aspect, mood) which plays a major role in building the morphosyntax of the language. According to Payne, morphosyntax is a form and function mapping system that illustrates how languages use grammatical mechanisms at the word and phrase levels to order meaning.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Typological Features

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:2 February 2026
Rijushna Gogoi and Dhanapati Shougrakpam
A Descriptive Analysis of the Morphosyntactic Features of Dhundhari: Structure, Agreement and Order   85

Typology classifies the languages into different types, based on the formation of word and sentence structures. "A Typology is simply a division of a range of phenomenon into types" (Payne, 1997). It includes word order typology as well as morphological typology.

Word Order Typology

Among the six logically possible constituent orders, Dhundhari follows the dominant word order Subject-Verb-Object like most of the Indo-Aryan Languages. "Descriptive linguists have long observed that individual languages structure their clauses in characteristic ways; some languages tend to place the verb at the end of a clause, others at the beginning, still others place it somewhere in the middle."(Payne 1997: 71).

In Dhundhari, the subject appears at the beginning of the sentence whereas verb appears at the end of the phrase.

1. mə roti kʰa-u

   I   chapati eat-HAB.1PRS.SG

   'I eat chapati.'

In the above example, the subject *mə* 'I' is sitting at the sentence initial position whereas verb *kʰa* 'eat' is positioned at the final. This is not restricted to SOV word order. Since Dhundhari is a free word ordered language, word scrambling is also possible according to the context. In addition to SOV, Dhundhari has the other possible word orders SVO, OVS, VOS, OSV, and VSO.

Morphological Typology

Morphological typology classifies languages according to the structure of the morphemes and their bindings. Words are agglutinating and fusional in Dhundhari. Some words can be easily segmented into morphemes whereas in some words a morpheme may carry multiple meanings.

Agglutinating features

2. roti-ĵa   (Noun+Plural Marker)

   chapati-PL

   'Chapatis'

3. gʰər-mə   (Home+ Locative Marker)

   home-LOC

   'At home'

Fusional Features

4. (a) cʰoro gəjo

       boy go.3PST.M.SG

       'The boy went.'

   (b) cʰori gi

       girl go.3PST.F.SG

       'The girl went.'

In (4a) the verb is marked with the features -3rd Person, Singular, Masculine, Past tense

In (4b) the verb is marked with the features -3rd Person, Singular, Feminine, Past tense

Person, Number and Gender

"The most common number distinctions are singular vs. plural; less common are singular, dual, and plural" (Payne, 1997). Dhundhari uses a three-tier person distinction (first, second, and third) and a two-tier number system (singular and plural).

Table 1 Representation of Person, Number and Gender in Dhundhari Personal Pronouns

Person	SG (Masc)	SG(Fem)	PL(Masc)	PL(Fem)
1st	mə	mə	mʰe (Incl.)	mʰe (Incl.)
			apa (Excl.)	apa (Excl.)
2nd	tu	tu	tʰe	tʰe
3rd	o	a	e	e
	bo	ba	e	be

One distinguishable feature of Dhundhari pronoun is that the first-person plural form has two forms *mʰe* and *apa*. When the speaker and the addressee are not a member of the same group *apa* is used and when the addressee and the speaker are the members of the same group they use *mʰe* 'we'. To show the proximity Dhundhari uses different terms in case of pronouns.

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:2 February 2026
Rijushna Gogoi and Dhanapati Shougrakpam
A Descriptive Analysis of the Morphosyntactic Features of Dhundhari: Structure, Agreement and Order   87

Gender and Number Differentiation

For the [+animate] things, Dhundhari differentiates gender based on biological evidence. It also differentiates gender of the [-animate] things which are based on native speaker's intuition. Sometimes it depends on the shape, size and uses of the object.

Table 2 Gender Differentiation of [-animate] objects

Noun [-animate]	Gender	Intuition
gəɖi 'car'	Feminine	Small Vehicle
truk 'Truck'	Masculine	Larger Vehicle
dʒʰopɽi 'Mudhouse'	Feminine	Typically smaller in size, constructed using wood, leaves, cow dung, and other organic elements
məhəl 'Palace'	Masculine	Palaces are bigger in sizes, with multiple rooms
haveli 'Mansion'	Feminine	Traditional mansion or large residence, thick walls and carved wooden or stone doors
ɽoʈi 'Chapati'	Feminine	Food item of thin layer and typically round shaped sheet made of different types of flours
ɽoʈ 'Chapati'	Masculine	Typically, thicker than usual chapati, bigger in size and shape
aŋgən 'Courtyard'	Masculine	An open courtyard area within a house, covered with rooms

CASE MARKING

Case markers build the relationship between the arguments of the verb. In Dhundhari, case markers are always inflectional markers, always associated with the nouns. Case markers in Dhundhari are of three types: Nominative, Objective or oblique and postpositional.

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:2 February 2026
Rijushna Gogoi and Dhanapati Shougrakpam
A Descriptive Analysis of the Morphosyntactic Features of Dhundhari: Structure, Agreement and Order   88

Table 3: Case Markers and uses

Case	Markers	Use	Example
Nominative	Ø	Subjects of intransitive verbs and subjects of imperfective transitive verbs	cʰoro aːjo the boy comes. 3PST.SG.M 'The boy came.'
Accusative	nə	Marks on objects	mə biːnə dekʰjo I him.ACC see-PST 'I saw him.'
Dative	nə	Marked on the indirect object of ditransitive verbs, which is the recipient or beneficiary	mə rama nə ik kitab dijo I ram.DAT one book give.3PST 'I gave a book to Rama.'
Instrumental	sjũ	To show the instrument used to perform an action.	cʰori bəs sjũ gi Girl bus by go.3PST.F 'The girl went by bus.'
Locative	mə, maɭe, pəɾ	To show the location	kələm kursi maɭe cʰe pen chair on be.3PRS 'The pen is on the chair.'
Possessive/ Genitive	ɾo, ɾi, ko, ki	To show possession or genetic relation. It agrees to the gender and number of the possessum.	ram-ro gʰər Ram's house

Stronski (2010) argues that old Rajasthani has clear evidence of ergative case markers that can be found in old Rajasthani scripts. But in the modern period this feature is disappearing from the Rajasthani language. Omitting the ergative case marker still makes sense and it can show the argument relationship. The marker *nə* is used as both ergative and dative or accusative marker in Dhundhari.

5.   (a)   *tabaɾ nə has dijo

baby.ERG laugh do-PERF

'The baby laughed.'

(b)   tabaɾ has dijo

baby laugh do-PERF

'The baby laughed.'

TENSE, ASPECT, MOOD

Dhundhari expresses tense, aspect, and mood through verb inflections. Based on the use of tenses, verbs are categorized into two types: finite and non-finite. Finite forms of verbs are marked with tense, whereas non-finite forms of verbs are not marked with tense.

Tense

According to Comrie (1985:09), "Tense is grammaticalized expression of location in time." It is used to denote the time of the action. Dhundhari has a tree-tire tense system-Past, Present and Future. Tense is either marked on the main verb, or on the auxiliary may carry the tense. "Tense is the grammatical expression of the time of an event to some reference point of time, usually the moment the clause in uttered" (Payne, 1997).

6.   (a)   mə   ɽoʈi   kʰau   (Present)

I.NOM   chapati eat.1.PRS

'I eat chapati.'

(b)   mə   ɽoʈi   kʰa-jo   (Past)

I.NOM chapati eat.1PST

'I ate chapati.'

(c)   mə   ɽoʈi   kʰau-la   (Future)

I.NOM chapati eat.FUT

I will eat chapati.'

In the above examples the tense is in simple form. In (6a) tense is marked on the main verb with the present tense first person inflectional marker *-u.* in (6b) Past tense marker -o is marked on the main verb which is also inflected for number and person. Similarly, in (6c), the main verb is marked with past tense, which is also marked for person and number

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:2 February 2026**
Rijushna Gogoi and Dhanapati Shougrakpam
A Descriptive Analysis of the Morphosyntactic Features of Dhundhari: Structure, Agreement and Order   90

features. This is the case of simple forms. There are several forms in which tense is denoted with aspectual systems.

Aspect

"Aspects are different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation" (Comrie 1976:03). Aspect denotes the nature of the action, whether it is ongoing complete, or habitual action. Aspects describe the nature of an action and the internal temporal structure of an event. Comrie (1976) has divided aspect into two major categories: Imperfective and Perfective. "In Jaipuri language two types of aspects namely perfect and progressive are present" (Vedamanickam, 2011:391).

(i) Perfective Aspect

"There is a strong tendency for PFV categories to be restricted to past time reference" (Dahl, 1985:79). Perfectivity indicates the completion of an action rather look into the ongoing or continuation of an action. Grammatical gender is marked in the perfect marker *lijo* for masculine and *li* for feminine. The perfect aspect marker immediately follows the main verb.

8.   rama   ɽoti   kʰa li

     Rama chapati eat take.3PERF.F

     'Rama ate chapati.

(ii)   Imperfective Aspect

Imperfective aspect denotes the actions which are not completed. It may include habitual or ongoing actions. "The Habitual/Continuous distinction, which appears to be spreading, is found in Hindi, Nepali, Bhojpuri, Magahi, Bengali, Oriya, Marathi, Eastern Rajasthani, Lamani, Gojri, Braj (optional), Bundeli, Punjabi, a few West Pahari dialects (Klilui, Mandeali) , Sindhi, and, with some qualification, in Assamese" (Masica 1991:269)

Habitual imperfective aspect is used to denote the regular or repetitive nature of an action

7.   rama roti kʰa-ve

     rama chapati eat-3PST.HAB

     'Rama eats chapati.'

Continuity of an action is denoted with the continuative aspect which is denoted with the progressive participle.

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Language in India <u>www.languageinindia.com</u> **ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:2 February 2026**
Rijushna Gogoi and Dhanapati Shougrakpam
A Descriptive Analysis of the Morphosyntactic Features of Dhundhari: Structure, Agreement and Order   91

8.   rama ʈoti   kʰa   ri   cʰo

       rama chapati eat PROG.F be.3PST.SG

       'Ram is eating chapati.'

In the above example, the action is progressive from in the past. There is no indication of beginning and ending point of an action, rather it talks about the progression which is denoted with the progressive participle *ri*. It agrees to the gender of the object in transitive constructions. Past tense is marked on the auxiliary verb.

Mood

One of the grammatical categories of verbs that conveys the attitude of the speakers toward the action is mood. It indicates if the sentence is a statement of fact, a condition, a wish, an order, or a query. According to Payne (1997: 244) "Mode is the speaker's attitude toward a situation including the speaker's belief in its reality or likelihood". "It is best defined in relation to an ' unmarked' class of sentences which express simple statements of fact, unqualified with respect to the attitude of the speaker towards what he is saying" (Lyon, 1968:307). It is thought of as a process that uses verb conjugation to alter the verb form.

(i) Imperative: Imperative mood is used to give command or order or instructions.

9.   tu ʤa

       you go

       'You go.'

10.   ʈoti kʰa ɭe

       chapati eat take

       'Eat the chapati.'

(**ii) Subjunctive:** To express inferences, guesses, suggestions, assumptions, subjunctive mood is used.

11.   ho səko cʰe bo kəl ʤepər ʤave

       be could be.PRS he tomorrow Jaipur go.3HAB.PRS

       'If possible, he might go to Jaipur tomorrow.'

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:2 February 2026**
Rijushna Gogoi and Dhanapati Shougrakpam
A Descriptive Analysis of the Morphosyntactic Features of Dhundhari: Structure, Agreement and Order   92

(iii) Conditional: Conditional mood is used to express conditional statements. It is formed with conditional particles like when, whenever, if etc.

12.   ʤd   tu aːve   mə kʰuʃ ho ʤau

        whenever you come.HAB I happy be go.1PRS

        'Whenever you come, I become happy.'

CONCLUSION

The study has provided a descriptive overview of the morphosyntactic features of Dhundhari. It shows that the language exhibits predominantly agglutinating and fusional morphology, where single inflectional marker may have one or multiple grammatical information such as number, tense, gender, and person. The nominal system has a clear distinction between masculine and feminine gender in non-animate objects as well. The presence of number, person, and gender is demonstrated by nouns and personal pronouns. The language has a tree-way tense system-past, present, and future. Aspect marking plays an important role in the verbal system which is reflected through verbal morphology and particles. Aspectual marking is found to be of two-types -imperfective and perfective. While the language has its own regional characteristics in its agreement system and TAM marking, it allies similarities with the other Western Indo-Aryan languages. This study contributes to the structural description of Dhundhari and lays groundwork for future comparative, theoretical, and functional studies in Rajasthani morphosyntax.

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:2 February 2026**
Rijushna Gogoi and Dhanapati Shougrakpam
A Descriptive Analysis of the Morphosyntactic Features of Dhundhari: Structure, Agreement and Order   94