



## **A Phonological Analysis of Marital Kinship Terms in Maithili and Bengali Languages: A Descriptive Study**

**Mohammad Asad\***

### **Abstract**

*The present paper is a descriptive and comparative study of marital kinship terms in Maithili and Bengali in terms of phonological pattern. The author mainly attempts to reveal a phonemic structure of the marital kinship terms that start with alveolar fricative /s/ (𑒧) and palate-alveolar fricative /sh/ (𑒧𑒪) consonant sounds in Maithili and Bengali, respectively. Historically, these languages are derived from the eastern Indo-Aryan language family and genetically belong to the same group of Magadhi-Apabhramsa (Grierson 1883a; Chatterji 1926). The marital kinship terminology is basically based on marriage, made by the marriage system and used for marital relations in society. The marital kinship terms are socially used to identify the relations between married couples, their parents, and their siblings of both sides. The findings of the present study reveal that almost all the marital kinship terms start with the alveolar fricative /s/ (𑒧) and palate-alveolar fricative /sh/ (𑒧𑒪) consonant sounds in Maithili and Bengali, respectively, when the marital kinship is established between the husband and his wife's family (includes herself, her siblings and her parents) through the wife's side, but through the husband's side, a few marital kinship terms are noticed that begin with the same sound.*

**Keywords:** *Marital Kinship Terms, Maithili, Bengali.*

### **Introduction to Kinship Terminology**

It is a universal truth that man is a social creature by his nature and behaviour. Therefore, Aristotle says that "Human being is a social animal". Humans in fact, cannot live in a vacuum and outside society but inside the society. In society, he establishes the web of many types of relationships with different type of persons. The most significant of these relationships is well known as kinship. Kinship is a method of forming relationships. It is fairly a social bond initiated by genetic or blood ties as well as marriage. Kinship ties are fundamental importance in every society all over the world. In each corner of the world, it is

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\*Former Assistant Professor, Department of Linguistics, Central University of Karnataka, Kalaburagi, Karnataka, India. Email: mdsad.jnu@gmail.com

a social recognition and expression of family relationships formed on the basis of marriage, procreation, and adoption. As matter of fact, a social recognition of a relationship is more important than the biological bond. If a relationship socially is not recognized or accepted, then it is not included within the realm of kinship. 'Kinship term as an anthropological object is considered in the mid of nineteenth century. The constituting of kinship is not a divine creation but a human and social creation' (Trautmann 2000).

Kinship bio-linguistically abodes in unconscious knowledge and is directly available to consciousness for the articulation in speech. Morgan (1871) suggests that kinship terminologies are aspects of language because they are logically ordered and hence more resistant to change, are more conservative than both the vocabulary and grammar of a language, constituting a new instrument for ethnology, more powerful than the comparison of vocabularies and grammars in uncovering historic relations among people. He further says that kinship terminology exists deep in the heart of language (Morgan 1871). According to Murdock (1949: 97-99), Kinship terms are technically classified into three different ways namely, by their mode of use, by their linguistic structure, and by their range of application. With respect to their use, two kinds of terms such as a term of address and a term of reference are employed. In the term of linguistic structure, kinship terms are classified as elementary, derivative and descriptive and as regards their range of application, they are differentiated as classificatory and denotative.

Kinship is commonly defined on the basis of genealogy. The notion of kinship, based on genealogy was made explicit by Rivers (1924: 53) who defined "kinship...as a relationship which is determined and can be described by means of genealogies" as cited in Read (2001). Scheffler and Lounsbury (1971: 38-39) used the same idea in their comments that "where the distributional criteria are genealogical and egocentric, we speak of relations of kinship" and refer to "relations of genealogical connection" as "kinship proper". Fortes (1969: 52) also saw the fundamental aspect of kinship to be genealogical connections since these are universally utilized in building up kinship relations and categories. Robin Fox (1967) states that the study of kinship is the study of what man does with these basic facts of life-mating, gestation, parenthood, socialization and siblingship, etc. Human society is unique, he argues in that we are working with the same raw materials as exists in the animal world, but we can conceptualize and categorize it to serve social ends. These social ends include the socialization of children, and the formation of basic economic, political and religious groups.

Broadly speaking, kinship patterns may be considered to include people related by both descent and marriage. In some cultures, kinship relationships may be considered to extend out to people and an individual has economic or political relationships with or other forms of social connections. Kinship can also refer to a principle by which individuals or groups of individuals are organized into social groups, roles, categories, and genealogy by means of kinship terms. In a more general sense, kinship may refer to a similarity or affinity between entities on the basis of some or all of their characteristics that are under focus. This

may be due to a shared ontological origin, a shared historical or cultural connection, or some other perceived shared features that connect the two entities.

### **Types of Kinship**

There are two types of kinship within a family, i.e. Consanguineal and Affinal or marital kinship. Both consanguineal and affinal relations with their kinship terms are largely found in Maithili and Bengali. However, for the present study, I would restrict myself to describe only the marital kinship terms and their phonological patterns in both languages.

#### ***a) Consanguineal Kinship***

This type of kinship is based on the descent is called consanguineal kinship, commonly known as a blood relation. The relationship between a child and his parents, between children of the same set of parents, between uncles and nephews/nieces are examples of consanguineous kinship. Blood relationship or consanguineous kinship is based on the biological fact of genetic relationship between parents and children. The relationship between mother and child is the starting point of consanguineal kinship, which in its extended form includes the child's father, grandparents, uncles, cousins, and so forth. The kinship relations are made in different ways. One of them is consanguineal relation which is made by blood. It is the relation among the same stock or common ancestors. The consanguineal relations can be classified into two types of relation, namely core and peripheral. The core relation consists of one's parents, siblings, and offspring, whereas the peripheral relation consists of parent's brothers and sisters.

#### ***b) Affinal or Marital Kinship Terms***

This type of kinship generally is based on marriage. This relation is made by marriage. Marriage is a socially or ritually recognized union or a legal contract between spouses that establishes rights and obligations between them, between them and their children, and between them and their in-laws. The most primary affinal relationship is the one between a husband and a wife which in its extended form includes parents and siblings of both sides and their spouses and children. Hence, the relationship between son-in-law and father-in-law is an example of affinal kinship. Similarly, one's brothers-in-laws and their children are also examples of affinal kinship.

### **Aims and Objectives**

For the present work, I have gone through the literature review and found that several works have been conducted in the area of Kinship Terminology in many languages, such as in Hindi (Vatuk 1969; Jamous 1991; Koul 2008; Syryanarayan and Larina 2012), in Punjabi (Vatuk 1972; Leaf 1971), in Assamese (Sarma et al. 2005), in Lambada (Maloth 2014), in Bengali (Inden and Nichola 2005) and so forth. It was noticed that most of the above works provided an insightful observation for the study of kinship terminologies in general and also showed that the kinship terminologies are closely similar to the Hindi language. Some of the above works discussed the kinship terminologies in terms of a reference and an address. However, in my opinion, no study has been conducted yet in Maithili and Bengali to explore the phonological structures of marital kinship terms that run through the wife's side and also

the husband's side. In order to understand the phonological structure of the marital kinship terminology, it is obligatory to investigate the topic.

The major goals of the present paper are as follows.

- a) To explore the similarities and differences of the marital kinship terms found in Maithili and Bengali languages.
- b) To exhibit that almost all the major marital kinship terms phonologically start with the alveolar fricative phoneme /s/ (स) in Maithili and the palate-alveolar fricative phoneme /sh/ (শ) in Bengali, when the kinship relations run from the husband's side (includes himself, his parents) to the wife's family (includes herself, her siblings and parents) through the wife's side.
- c) To show that a few major marital kinship terms phonologically begin with the alveolar fricative phoneme /s/ (स) in Maithili and the palate-alveolar fricative phoneme /sh/ (শ) in Bengali, when the kinship relations run from the wife's side (includes herself, and her parents) to her husband's side (includes himself, his siblings, and parents) through the husband's side.

### **Methodology**

The Bengali data for the present paper was collected at the JNU campus, New Delhi from 10 Bengali speakers who belong to Kolkata in India, whereas the Maithili data for the same was collected at R. K. College, Madhubani from 10 Maithili speakers who all belong to the countryside of Madhubani, Bihar. The author himself is a native speaker of Maithili and reconfirmed the authenticity of the collected data. All of the informants were literate and native speakers of these languages. None of the participants had any kind of speaking, hearing disorder, and neurological symptoms. The data elicitation of the marital kinship terms was conducted through the interview process. The secondary data has also been considered for the present study. After that, it was analyzed linguistically.

### **Marital Kinship Terms in Maithili and Bengali**

The relationships that are made by the marriage system are called affinal relations. In this way, there are two major ways to establish the relations although there are other ways for establishing the relation. Similar to the consanguineal relations, the affinal relations also have further two types. They are core and peripheral affinal relations which are described below. The core affinal relation consists of one's parents, siblings, and offspring and the peripheral affinal relation consists of parent's brothers, and sisters. Here, I primarily focus only on core affinal kinship terms, not a peripheral one.

For convenience and better understanding, the most standard and common ethnological abbreviations are used for the present paper.

Table 1: Standard and Common Ethnological Abbreviations for the kinship

Mother	(M)	Father	(F)
Sister	(Z)	Brother	(B)
Daughter	(D)	Son	(S)
Wife	(W)	Husband	(H)
Elder	(E)	Younger	(Y)
First	(F)	Second	(S)

e.g. WyZ = Wife's younger Sister

**[A] Core Affinal Kinship Terms: Through Wife's side**

This section is divided into three sub-sections. Firstly, we see the core kinship terms used to identify relationships between the husband and his wife's family (includes herself, her siblings, and parents) through the wife's side. Secondly, the kinship terms are used for the bond relationship between the husband's parents and the wife's parents, and thirdly, the kinship terms are used to identify the relationships between the first wife and the second wife.

**a) Core Affinal Kinship Terms: Marital Relationship between Husband and Wife's Family**

In this section, we look at the main core kinship terms used in Maithili and Bengali to identify the relationship between the husband and his wife's family (includes herself, her parents, and siblings) through the wife's side. The data is represented in table 2 below which presents all the possible marital kinship terms found in both languages.

Note that for the better comprehension and understanding of the kinship terms, the Roman Letters stand for the Devanagari letters are as presented here, such as, /a/ 'अ', /aa/ 'आ', /o/ 'ओ', /s/ 'स', /sh/ 'श', /chh/ 'छ', /t/ 'त', /T/ 'ट', /Th/ 'ठ', /dh/ 'ध' and /j/ 'ज'

Table 2: Core Marital Kinship Terms: Marital Relationship between Husband and Wife Family through Wife's side

Sl. No	Kinship Relations	Kinship Terms in Maithili	Kinship Terms in Bengali	English Meanings
1.	WF's home	saasur	shoshurbaari	father-in-law's home
2.	WF	sasur	shoshur	father-in-law
3.	WM	saaus	shaashuri	mother-in-law
4.	WyB	saalaa/saar (chhoTkaa)	shaalaa (chhoTo)	brother-in-law (younger)
5.	WeB	saalaa/saar (barkaa)	shaalaa (boro)	brother-in-law (elder)
6.	WyBW	sarhojini (chhoTki)	shaalaabou (chhoTo)	brother-in-law's wife (younger)
7.	WeBW	sarhojini (jeThki)	shaalaabou (boro)	brother in law's wife (elder)

8.	WBS	sarbeTaa	shaalaarchhele	brother-in-law's son
9.	WBD	sarbeTi	shaalaarmeye	brother-in-law's daughter
10.	WyZ	saair/saali (chhoTki)	shaali (chhoTo)	sister-in-law (younger)
11.	WeZ	saair (jeThki)	shaali (boro)	sister-in-law (elder)
12.	WyZH	saarhu (chhoTkaa)	shaarur(chhoTo)	sister-in-law's husband (younger)
13.	WeZH	saarhu (barkaa)	shaarur (boro)	sister-in-law's husband (elder)
14.	WZS	saairbeTaa	shaalirchhele	sister-in-law's son
15.	WZD	saairbeTi	shaalirmeye	sister-in-law's daughter

In the above table 2, it is found that there is a total of 15 marital kinship terms that run from the husband to his wife's family in both languages. All the affinal/marital kinship terms phonologically are started with the alveolar fricative consonant sound /s/ in Maithili and with the palate-alveolar fricative consonant sound/sh/in Bengali.

We can easily read the kinship relation terms in this way such as "WF's home" wife's father's home means 'the house of wife's father'. We can't say the house of wife (WH) because the house of wife could be ambiguous, i.e., the house of the wife's father and the house of the husband. I simply wrote WF's home that unambiguously indicates the house belongs to the wife's father, not the husband's house.

***b) Core Affinal Kinship Terms: Marital Relationship between Husband's Parents and Wife's Parents through Son's Wife (Daughter-in-law)***

In this section, we have here the kinship terms being used to identify a bond of relationship between the husband's parents and the wife's parents. The data is presented in table 3 below.

Table 3: Core Affinal Kinship Terms: Marital Relationship between Husband's Parents and Wife's Parents through son's wife (daughter-in-law)

Sl. No	Kinship Relations	Kinship Terms in Maithili	Kinship Terms in Bengali	English Meanings
1.	SWF	samdhi	beyyai	father of son's wife
2.	SWM	samdhini	beyaan	mother of son's wife
3.	SWFS, SWMS	samdhautbeTaa	.....	brother of son's wife
4.	SWFD, SWMD	samdhautbeTi	.....	sister of son's wife

In the table 3, it is observed that the marital kinship terms showing the marital relationship between the husband's parents and the wife's parents through the son's wife,

start phonologically with /s/ in Maithili and with /b/ in Bengali. The observation shows that Bengali has different marital kinship terms, establish the kinship relations between the husband's parents and the wife's parents through the son's wife. Therefore, both languages show different kinship terms for the kinship relationships. Further, note that no kinship terms are found in Bengali for the SWFS/SWMS and SWFD/SWMD kinship relations.

**c) Core Affinal Kinship Terms: Marital Relationship between Husband's First Wife and Second Wife**

In this section, we notice the marital relationship between the first wife and the second wife. There are kinship terms in Maithili for the re-marriage and the relationships between two wives (the first wife and the second or eloped wife). The data is displayed in table 4 below.

Table 4: Core Affinal Kinship Terms: Marital Relationship between Husband's First Wife and Second Wife

Sl. No	Kinship Relations	Kinship Terms in Maithili	Kinship Terms in Bengali	English Meanings
1.	sW	sagaai	.....	re-marriage
2.	sW	sag-hi	.....	second wife
3.	fWsW	sautin	shotin	relation between first and second wife
4.	sW/H+ relations	sautelaa(beTaa/be Ti, /bhaai/bahin)	shot chhele/meye, bhaai/bon	step wife/husband + relations (son, daughter, brother/sister etc.)

The above table 4 clearly illustrates that Maithili has marital kinship terms for the re-marriage and the second or eloped wife, but Bengali does not have (sl no. 1 and 2). Further, notice that both Maithili and Bengali contain the kinship terms namely, “*sautin*” and “*shotin*”, respectively to identify the marital kinship relation between the first wife and second wife. Furthermore, the kinship terms “*sautelaa*” in Maithili and “*shot*” in Bengali are used to address the blood relationships between the second wife/husband and their children.

**[B] Core Affinal Kinship Terms: Through Husband's Side**

This section is divided into three sub-sections. Firstly, we see the core kinship terms used to identify relations between the wife and the husband's family (includes himself, and his siblings) through the husband's side. Secondly, the kinship terms are used for the bond marital relationship between the wife's parents and the husband's parents through daughter's husband, i.e. son-in-law and Thirdly, the kinship term creating the relationship between the first and second husband does not exists in both languages.

**a) Core Affinal Kinship Terms: Marital Relationship between Wife and Husband's Family through Husband's side**

In this section, we notice that the core kinship terms are used to establish the



relationship between the wife (includes herself and her siblings) and her husband's family (includes himself, his parents, and his siblings) through the husband's side in Maithili and Bengali. The data is shown in table 5 below.

Table 5: Core Affinal Kinship Terms: Marital Relationship between Wife and Husband's Family through Husband's side

Sl. No	Kinship Relations	Kinship Terms in Maithili	Kinship Terms in Bengali	English Meanings
1.	HF's home	sasuraa	shoshurbaari	father-in-law's home
2.	HF	saasur	shoshur	father-in-law
3.	HM	saasus	shaashuri	mother-in-law
4.	HyB	diyur	deor	brother-in-law (younger)
5.	HeB	bhainsur	bhaansur	brother-in-law (elder)
6.	HyZ	nanad	nonod	sister-in-law (younger)
7.	HeZ	jeTh	nonod	sister-in-law (elder)
8.	HZH	pahunaa	nondaai	sister-in-law's husband
9.	HBS	jaidhi	deorko	brother-in-law's son
10.	HBD	jaidhi	deorji	brother-in-law's daughter
11.	HSS	bhaignaa	bhaignaa	sister-in-law's son
12.	HSD	bhaigni	bhaigni	sister-in-law's daughter

In the above table 5, we notice that there are only three marital kinship terms (for HF's home, HM and HM) starts phonologically with the fricative sound /s/ and /sh/ in Maithili and Bengali, respectively. The rest kinship terms occur with different phonemes namely, /d, bh, n, j, and p/ in both Maithili and Bengali. The findings show that the marital kinship terms originated through husband's side hardly are initially occurred with fricative sound /s/ and /sh/ in both languages.

***b) Core Affinal Kinship Terms: Marital Relationship between Wife's Parents and Husband's Parents through Daughter's Husband (Son-in-law)***

In this section, we observe the kinship terms being used to identify a bond of relationships between the wife's parents and the husband's parents through the daughter's husband i.e. son-in-law phonologically begin with the fricative sound /s/ in Maithili, but not in Bengali. The data observation exhibits that the kinship terms used to address the relationship between the wife's parents and husband's parents through son-in-law (daughter's husband) sides begin with the stop bilabial sound /b/ phonologically in Bengali. The data is represented in table 6 below.



Table 6: Core Affinal Kinship Terms: Marital Relationship between Wife's Parents and Husband's Parents through Daughter's Husband (Son-in-law)

Sl. No	Kinship Relations	Kinship Terms in Maithili	Kinship Terms in Bengali	English Meanings
1	DHF	samdhi	beyaa	father of daughter's husband
2.	DHM	samdhini	beyaan	mother of daughter's husband
3.	DHFS,DHMS	samdhautbeTaa	.....	brother of daughter's husband
4.	DHFD,DHMD	samdhautbeTi	.....	sister of daughter's husband

The above table 6 represents that the kinship terms showing the marital relationship between the wife's parents and the husband's parents through the daughter's husband, i.e. son-in-law, are started with fricative sound /s/ in Maithili and with stop sound /b/ in Bengali. Further, it is also observed that Bengali has different kinship terms to address the relations between the wife's parents and the husband's parents through the daughter's husband side. Furthermore, one more point is to note here that that Bengali does not have any kinship terms for these kinship relations i.e. DHFS/DHMS and DHFD/DHMD.

**c) Core Affinal Kinship Terms: \*Marital Relationship between Wife's First Husband and Second Husband**

In Mithila and Bengali culture, a man can have more than one wife, but it is prohibited for a wife to have more than one husband. There is a legal as well as a religious provision that polyandry is completely prohibited in society, except few tribes in India. That's why, no kinship terms were detected linguistically to address the relationship between the first husband and the second husband in both languages.

**Result**

The present study is an effort to explore the marital kinship terms that run from the husband (includes himself, and his parents) to his wife's family (including herself, her siblings, and parents) and vice-versa. Generally, two types of kinship terms are seen in the world's languages i.e. Consanguineal and Affinal. These two consanguineal and affinal kinship terms are further subdivided into Core and Peripheral kinships. For the present paper, an attempt was made to investigate only core affinal kinship terms that used to establish and address the relationship between the wife and her husband's family through the husband's side and vice-versa in both Maithili and Bengali.

One of the major goals of the paper was to explore the similarities and differences of the marital kinship items in both Maithili and Bengali languages. The findings stated that many similarities of the marital kinship terms (see table 2) were discovered in both languages. These kinship terms phonemically begin with the fricative sound /s/ and /sh/ in

Maithili and Bengali, respectively, when the kinship relations are established between the husband (including himself and his parents) and his wife's family (includes herself, her siblings, and parents) through the wife's side. However, these marital kinship terms are pronounced differently due to the sound systems of these languages. Further, it was also discovered that all the marital kinship items, except few establish kinship relations between the wife (including herself, and her parents) and her husband (including himself, his siblings, and parents) through the husband's side in both languages are similar, but they are pronounced differently because these languages have the different sound systems.

Furthermore, it was noted that the kinship terms that identify the kinship relations between the husband's parents and the wife's parents through the wife's side and the husband's side are different in these languages. These kinship terms start with /s/ sound in Maithili, but not in Bengali (see tables 3 and 6). Additionally, it was also observed that no kinship terms were found in Bengali for the kinship relations, i.e., SWFS/SWMS and SWFD/SWMD (see table 3), and for the kinship relations, i.e. DHFS/DHMS and DHFD/DHMD, (see table 6). Apart from that, it also revealed that Bengali did not have any kinship term for these kinship relations i.e. to get re-married (sW) and the second or eloped wife (sW) as well, as Maithili did (see table 4). Therefore, the findings stated that there are a total of 39 and 33 marital kinship terms in Maithili and Bengali, respectively. The arithmetic analysis shows that Maithili and Bengali share around 70% of the similar and 24% of the different marital kinship terms, on average. Around 6% of the marital kinship terms are not found in Bengali as compared to Maithili.

The second main objective of the current study was to show that all the main marital kinship terms establishing the kinship relations between the husband (including himself, and his parents) and his wife (including herself, her siblings, and parents) through the wife's side start with the fricative sound /s/ in Maithili and /sh/ in Bengali. The present result explored that a total of 23 and 19 marital kinship terms was found in Maithili and Bengali, respectively (see tables 2, 3, and 4). Further, it also investigated that all the total 23 marital kinship terms start with the fricative sound /s/ in Maithili, whereas 17 out of 19 affinal kinship terms begin with the fricative sound /sh/ in Bengali phonologically. Hence, 100% and 89% of the marital kinship terms started with /s/ and /sh/ sounds in Maithili and Bengali, respectively. Therefore, the main findings of the present study exhibit that on average, around 95% of marital kinship terms initially occurred with /s/ sound in Maithili and /sh/ sound in Bengali.

The third aim of the current paper was to reveal that a few marital kinship terms that establish the kinship relations between the wife (including herself, and her parents) and her husband's family (includes himself, his siblings, and parents) through the husband's side, start with the fricative sound /s/ in Maithili and /sh/ in Bengali. The findings revealed that when the kinship relations establish between the wife (including herself, and her parents) and her husband family (including himself, his siblings, and parents), then only 3 out of 12 kinship terms start with the fricative sound /s/ and /sh/in Maithili and Bengali, respectively (see table 05). So, only 25% of the kinship terms in both Maithili and Bengali phonologically started with the fricative sounds /s/ and /sh/, respectively.

## Summary and Conclusion

The current paper elaborately discussed the kinship terms, especially the core marital kinship terms, in both Maithili and Bengali languages. Based on the present observations, the findings can be summarized and concluded in the following bullet points.

- Kinship is a method of accepting and forming the relationship based on genetics, or blood and marriage.
- Kinship enhances group solidarity, organizes the group against enemies, and controls religious and social interaction, including marriage and gathering on rituals and religious ceremonies.
- Two types of kinship terms are found in a language, i.e. the Consanguineal kinship (based on blood/genetics) and the Affinal kinship (based on marriage). These are further subdivided into the Core and Peripheral kinship.
- Like other languages, many affinal kinship terms are explored in Maithili and Bengali. These two languages show around 70% of the similar and 24% of the different marital kinship terms, on average. The kinship terms like languages get changed slightly from region to region.
- 100% and 89% of the marital kinship terms phonologically start with the fricative sounds /s/ and /sh/ in Maithili and Bengali, respectively, when the kinship terms identify the kinship relations between the husband (including himself, and his parents) and his wife's family (including herself, her siblings, and her parents) through the wife's side.
- Only 25% of the marital kinship terms are phonologically started with the fricative phonemes /s/ and /sh/ in Maithili and Bengali, respectively, when the kinship relations run from the wife (including herself and her parents) to the husband's family (including himself, his siblings, and his parents) through the husband's side.
- The present result also provides a socio-cultural and traditional beauty that the word 'shaadi' (marriage) itself starts with the fricative sound /sh/ in Maithili and Bengali. After the marriage, the core marital kinship terms also start with the same sounds /s/ and /sh/ in both languages.

## Future Projection

Based on the present observations and findings, it may be hypothesized that the occurrence of the fricative sound /s/ and /sh/ at the initial position of the marital kinship terminologies in Maithili and Bengali, respectively may be a feature of the eastern languages or Indo-Aryan languages. It needs to be investigated with the larger data.

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