

CONNECTIVES IN ASUR: A NORTH MUNDA LANGUAGE

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Abstract

Asur is an endangered North Munda language with fewer than ten thousand speakers which has remained largely unexplored by documentary linguists. This research draws on primary linguistic data of Asur to document and describe the connectives in the language. While the term *connective* is often treated as synonymous with conjunctions, it encompasses a broader range of grammatical elements, including pre-/post-positions, adverbs, and particles, all of which serve the semantic role of linking constituents within a sentence. The study explores the various constructions in the Asur language that fall under the umbrella term *connectives*. Within this broad category of connectives, Asur has postpositions, particles, and conjunctive particles that function to connect constituents in a sentence, either through coordination or subordination. The discussion highlights different semantic and syntactic types of connectives in Asur, including additive, adversative, alternative, and illative conjunctions, as well as quotatives, relativizers, and conjunctive participles. Particular attention is given to particles such as *ci* and *ho?*, which serve as connectives in Asur. In addition to native constructions, the discussion addresses borrowed connective structures and words from Hindi and highlights similarities of connective words and structures (syntactic and semantic) with related Munda languages.

Keywords: connectives, conjunctions, Asuri, North Munda, particles

ISO 639-3 codes: asr

1 Introduction

Asur is an endangered Austroasiatic language spoken in Jharkhand. Little language documentation work has been done on this language, and therefore, the topic of connectives in the language has also remained largely unexplored. Asur (ISO-639-3:asr) is a North Munda Language of the Austroasiatic family of languages that has fewer than 10,000 speakers (Eberhard et al., 2024) and has been categorized as an endangered language (van Driem 2007:322). The language is also called Ashree, Asura, Assur, Asuri, Maleta, Mundari, and Mundari-Ho. The native speakers are found mostly in Gumla, Palamu, Latehar, and Ranchi districts of Jharkhand (Hammarström et al., n.d.). The language is mutually intelligible with other North Munda languages like Ho, Santali, and especially Mundari. There is hardly any published research on the connectives of Asur. The paper aims to study the connectives in the Asur language using mostly primary data, which therefore places the work within the broad category of documentation and description of the language. Within the category of connectives, it attempts to capture the various kinds of coordinate and subordinate conjunctions, the coordinating and subordinating role of particle *ci*, quotatives, relativizers and conjunctive participles (which are a typical feature of Indian languages) in Asur. Given Asur's extensive borrowing of lexical and grammatical items from the Indo-Aryan language Hindi, a morphological and semantic comparison of conjunctions in both languages is undertaken. The next section provides an explanation of the term *connectives* and further sections proceed to illustrate the connectives present in the Asur language and attempts to provide a syntactic and semantic description of the same.

2 Connectives

Connectives and conjunctions are often understood to be synonymous. However, many scholars have considered connectives to be a broader category that entails conjunctions along with other words that have connective functions. Blühdorn (2017:1) considers connectives to be “inclusive of conjunctions, prepositions, adverbs and other particles” which perform the “function of encoding semantic relations between sentences”. According to Blühdorn (2017:2), connectives are defined as uninflected words which join simple sentences or simple sentences in a complex sentence and are very akin to particles. Fielder (2008:80) uses the term “connective” because it subsumes both the terms “conjunctions” and “discourse marker” within a single category and also “adequately describes what these words do: they connect”. Therefore, the term “connectives” is particularly useful when discussing the semantic category of words that connect because very often in languages, discourse markers function as connectives, which can cause them to be considered homonymous or homophonous lexical items with two different meanings. This would be an inaccurate description for a lexical item that could be better described as “multi-functional polysemous connectives” (Fielder 2008:80). Conjunctions, which according to traditional grammar are words which connect words, phrases and clauses, are quite obvious categories of connectives, but prepositions, adverbs and especially particles which perform similar functions of coordination and subordination often remain ignored when considering connectives.

The previous concepts are applied to the study of Asur connectives. The following sections show various types of connectives in Asur, including cumulative conjunctions, adversative conjunctions, illative conjunctions, alternative conjunctions, relativizers, quotatives, and conjunctive participles.

2.1 Cumulative/ Copulative / Additive conjunctions

Copulative or cumulative conjunctions are the conjunctions which facilitate the concept of adding elements to syntactically equal elements and in which the relation with the added syntactic element is not adversative or alternative, but additive. In Grierson’s (1906:141) specimen of Asur, a similar additive conjunction *hed* can be found. In Asur, words *he?* and *heṭra* are used as connectives to join two grammatically equivalent phrases or clauses, and both *he?* and *heṭra* are used as connective ‘and’. These two conjunctions in the Asur language can be used interchangeably in all contexts. Examples 1 to 4 show the use of *he?* and *heṭra* in the Asur language.

1. *siṭa he?/heṭra vikas gaṭi~gaṭi oṛa? sen-ne-n=akin*
Sita **and.CONJ** Vikas together~together home go-PST=3D
‘Sita and Vikas went home together.’
2. *iṅ ke bariya pen he?/heṭra miyaḍ kiṭab cahiye*
1S DAT two pen **and.CONJ** one book want
‘I want two pens and one book.’
3. *huni oṛa? sen-ne-n=ae he?/heṭra niṅḍ-n=ae*
3S house Go-PST-n=3S **and.CONJ** sleep-n=3S
‘He went home and slept.’
4. *bajar ṭara b^hejri alwa penj he?/heṭra b^henjra agui=m-e*
market ABL tomato potato onion **and.CONJ** lady’s finger bring=2S=IMP
‘Bring tomato, potato, onion and lady’s finger from the market.’

Examples 1 to 4 show syndetic conjunctions, in which conjunctions are overtly present to connect the coordinates. The conjunctions *he?* or *heṭra* can be used interchangeably. In example 1, the conjunction joins the noun phrases in the subject slot. In example 2, the conjunction is used to connect nouns in the object slot. In example 3, the additive conjunctions join two verb phrases. In example 4, it can be seen that multiple nouns are conjoined by this additive conjunction, and just like in English, Hindi and many languages crosslinguistically, the conjunction occurs only before the last noun phrase.

Asur also heavily borrows words and grammatical structures from Hindi. In Grierson's (1906:140–143) specimen of Asuri language, there are *āru* and *oro* as additive conjunctions. The Hindi additive conjunction *aur* is frequently used by Asuri speakers. Example 4 shows the use of *aur* in Asur.

5. *iŋ ke bariya ul aur miyaq ʔamras em=m-e*
 1S DAT two mango and.CONJ one guava give=2S-IMP
 ‘Give me two mangos and one guava.’

Other than the additive conjunction mentioned above, a similar semantic function is also performed by the comitative marker *loʔ* in Asur. The comitative *loʔ* in Mundari is expressed by “postposing *loʔ* after a noun or pronoun” (Osada 2008:109). The comitative *loʔ* in Asur seems to perform the semantic function similar to an additive conjunction, which can be seen in example 6, adapted from (Khalid 2020:42)). However, comitative words are not the same as additive conjunctions.

6. *ceŋa bilai loʔ eneʔ-ʔan=ae*
 child cat COM play-PROG=3S
 ‘The child is playing with the cat.’

Although similar, comitative markers do not function syntactically or semantically in the same way as additive conjunctions. The comitative marker can be translated as “with” and an additive conjunction as “and”. In Asur, comitative and additive conjunctions in Asur are different in the following ways. Firstly, universally, regarding the conjunction “and”, both the NPs are in equal control, whereas in case of comitative markers, the second NP acts as a “co-actor” and only the first NP is in control (Haspelmath 2004:12). Secondly, this is why in comitative constructions, the verb agrees with only the first NP, as can be seen in example 6, unlike the additive conjunction, which case the verb agrees with the first and second NP combined, as in example 1, in which the verb has dual agreement when both the first NP and the second NP are singular. Thirdly, when there are two NPs, comitative markers in Asur follow the two NPs, unlike the additive conjunction which occurs in the middle of two NPs. Fourthly, when coordinating multiple NPs, an additive conjunction precedes the last NP, whereas comitative markers connect only two NPs and the latter NP is syntactically an adjunct.

Comitative markers, along with inclusive emphatic particles, also perform an additive conjunction-like function as shown in example 7, but they are different syntactically and semantically.

7. *raj hoʔ am loʔ sen-kw=ae*
 Raj INP 2s COM go-FUT=3S
 ‘Raj will also go with you.’

The position of *raj hoʔ* and *am loʔ* in example 7 can be swapped without causing any change in meaning. The inclusive emphatic particle *hoʔ* bears the sense of ‘also’ and is similar to the Hindi inclusive emphatic particle *b^{hi}* (Kachru 2003; Agnihotri 2023).¹ The verb agrees with the first NP preceding the inclusive particle, which is the subject, not the object after the comitative marker.

2.2 Alternative conjunctions

Alternative or disjunctive conjunctions present an alternative or choice between two or more syntactically equal elements. Alternative constructions are often asyndetic in Asur, meaning in these constructions, coordinator is absent, yet coordination is indicated. Example 8 shows asyndetic disjunctive conjunction in Asur. In many cases, ‘or’ is implied and is not lexically expressed in Asur, as shown in Example 8.

¹ Hindi has three emphatic particles: *b^{hi}* “also”(inclusive emphatic), *hi* “only”(exclusive emphatic) and *ʔo* “indicates either presuppositionally shared information or shift in thematic orientation)” (contrastive focus/topic) (Kachru 2006: 108). Asur also has these three emphatic particles: *hoʔ* (inclusive emphatic), *gi* (exclusive emphatic) and *ʔo* (contrastive focus/topic) which have very similar semantic functions to the Hindi emphatic particles.

8. *huni d̥uba re² bariya peya saikal eḡna*
 3S.DIST close LOC two three cycle be.PRS
 ‘He has two or three cycles.’

Alternative conjunctions in Asur are *cahe* and *ya*, which are borrowed from Hindi. These are shown in examples 9 to 12.

9. *sim cahe merom cahe anḡa ke doho k^heḡe pujae=abu*
 hen or.CONJ goat or.CONJ egg ACC keep CPM pray=3P.INC
 ‘We keep hen, or goat, or egg and pray.’

10. *huni sen=ae cahe kae sen=ae iḡ jarur kalkatta sen=iḡ*
 3S go=3S or.CONJ NEG go=3S 1S definitely Kolkata go=1S
 ‘Whether he goes or not, I will definitely go to Calcutta.’

11. *iḡ =ala kiḡab almari ya tebul teḡ re eḡna*
 1S=POSS.Inanimate book cupboard or.CONJ table top LOC be.PRS
 ‘My book is in the cupboard or on top of the table.’

12. *kami=m-e ya giḡi[?]-ḡahin=m-e*
 work=2S-IMP or.CONJ lay-stay=2S-IMP
 ‘Work or stay lying down.’

From the examples, it can be seen that both *cahe* and *ya* are prepositive coordinators. In example 9, *cahe* is used multiple times to connect the object NP coordinands. In example 11, *ya* connect NP coordinands in the object. In examples 10 and 12, verb phrases are connected by *cahe* and *ya* respectively.

Besides the above-mentioned disjunctive coordinators, the particle *ci* also seems to perform a similar semantic function, but not the same. Osada (2008:148) has categorized *ci* in Mundari as a coordinating conjunction. Examples 13 and 14 show how the particle *ci* appears as an interrogative disjunction in Asur.

13. *am ke lal juḡa pasand ci nila*
 2S DAT red shoes like ci blue
 ‘Do you like red shoes or blue?’

14. *am cai nue=am ci ḡa?*
 2S tea drink=2S ci water
 ‘Will you drink tea or water?’

A more significant distinction is that the particle *ci* appears only in interrogative sentences and also exists as polar question particle. 15 is an example of an interrogative sentence which has both disjunctive conjunction *ya* and question particle *ci*.

15. *am ke lal juḡa pasand ya nila ci*
 2S DAT red shoes like or.CONJ blue ci
 ‘Do you like red shoes or blue?’

In example 15, the particle *ci* has an interrogative function and does not appear related to the function of coordination.

² Locative markers *re* and *re* are allomorphs.

2.3 Adversative conjunctions

Adversative conjunctions are coordinating conjunctions that establish the relationship of contrast between the two clauses the join. Lakoff (1971) describes the semantic function that adversative conjunctions perform as “denial-of-expectations” along with “semantic opposition” (cited in Malchukov 2004:179). Adversative conjunctions can be defined as coordinating conjunctions that connect two clauses and have two semantic components: they deny expectations and establish a relationship of contrast between two clauses. In English, ‘but’ is an adversative conjunction, and in Hindi *lekin* is an adversative conjunction.

In Asur, the word *makil*, which can be translated as ‘but’, functions as a conjunction as shown in example 16. These are prepositive coordinators which occur between two clauses.

16. *raj hiʔg-ne-n=ae makil sohan k=ae hiʔg-ne-n=ae*
 Raj come-PST-n=3S **but.CONJ** Sohan NEG=3S come-PST-n=3S
 ‘Raj came, but Sohan did not come.’

Asur also uses the borrowed adversative conjunction *lekin* from Hindi, which can be used interchangeably with *makil*.

2.4 Reason or Illative Conjunction

Illative conjunctions introduce clauses which semantically express a reason, whether inferred or concluded.

In Asur, *etalaeʔ ci* as shown in example 17 is used as ‘because’ or ‘that is why’, where *etalaeʔ* means ‘why’ and *ci* is a particle, as discussed in Section 2.2.

17. *ij ir=ij kamiya etalaeʔ ci ij ala jiw t=ij bes kanoa*
 1S NEG=1S work **why** **ci** 1S GEN body GEN=1S good NEG.COP
 ‘I will not work because I am not well.’

The question word *etalaeʔ* and the particle *ci* are used together in the context of providing reason or explanation. This appears to be a loan translation from Hindi’s lexical compound *kyū-ki* or *cū-ki*, which roughly translates to ‘why’ with a particle *ki*. In Mundari, the word *ciaʔ.ci* has been considered a calque of the Hindi source phrase (Osada 2008:148).

2.5 Quotatives

Quotatives are particles that allow the introduction of verbatim quotes in speech, which is often used along with reporting verbs. In the Gtaʔ language, which is a South Munda language, *-ce* is the form of the verb *ɖak*, which has been grammaticalized as a quotative and complementizer (Anderson 2008:732). In Asur, the particle *ci* also acts like a quotative among various other functions.

18. *huni kehri-l=ae (ci) bajar ir=ij sen-n-a etalaeʔ ci*
 3S say-PST=3S **(ci)** market NEG=1S go-n-IND because **ci**
muruk situŋ-tan-a
 very hot-PROG-IND
 ‘He said, “I will not go to the market because it is very hot.”’
19. *lamta kehri-l=ae (ci) ceŋa ku kiŋtab paŋʰa-o-ne-n=aku*
 Lamta say-PST=3S **(ci)** child PL book read-PASS-PST-n=PL
 ‘Lamta said, “Children have read the book.”’
20. *kandri lamta ke kehri-l=ae (ci) ij lae cay banae=m-e*
 Kandri Lamta ACC say-PST=3S **(ci)** 1S for tea make=2S-IMP
 ‘Kandri said to Lamta, “Make tea for me”.’

Examples 18 to 20 show that the quotative use of particle *ci* is optional in Asur, and it attaches in a prepositional position of the subordinate clause.

The particle *ci* of Asur performs various functions which are very similar to the functions performed by particle *ki* in Hindi and can therefore be considered calque of Hindi. Particles across languages do not possess exactly the same range of functions, but there are some similarities and overlapping patterns that can be witnessed. Some of the functions that *ci* in Asur performs which semantically overlap with the *ki* of Hindi are that it acts as complementizer, quotative, and alternating conjunctions and in conjunctions which introduce a reason clause (e.g., *kyūki* in Hindi and *etalae? ci* in Asur). In Hindi, this particle performs other connective functions such as the introduction of purpose adverbs, resultative clauses, simile clauses, extent clauses, and address clause (Sinha & Thakur, 2005). A further investigation into the properties and usages of *ci* in Asur should give a clearer idea of the semantic overlap of Hindi *ki* and Asur *ci*.

2.6 Relativization

Relativization is the process of creating a relative clause which is a subordinate clause of a specific kind. Relative clauses can be distinguished from other subordinate clauses in that there is a direct link between an element in the relative clause and the matrix clause (de Vries 2002:1). There is an anaphoric relation between the subject of the relative clause and the main clause.

21. *koṛa hola hi?g-ṭahi-n=ae huni iṅ-li bokom hake*
 boy yesterday come-AUX-n=3S 3S.DIST 1S-GEN brother be.PRS
 ‘The boy who came yesterday is my brother.’

Example 21 is an example of relativization where a relative pronoun is absent. In examples 22 to 24, adapted from (Khalid 2021:63-64), the relative pronoun *je* occurs before the subordinate clause. The use of borrowed relative pronoun *je* is quite common and can also be found in Grierson's (e.g., 1906:142) Asuri data.

22. *je kiṭab am kirij-l=am hona baṛ^hiya eḍna*
 REL book 2S buy-PST=2S 3S.DIST good be.PRS
 ‘The book that you bought is very good.’
23. *je koṛa ke iṅ kiṭab ema-ṭahi-l=iṅ huni koṛa iṅ-ali*
 REL boy DAT 1S book give-AUX-PST=1S 3S.DIST boy 1S-GEN
 saṅji eḍna
 friend be.PRS
 ‘The boy whom I gave a book is my friend.’
24. *je bilai-ala calom k^haṛa-ṭan-a huni nir-l=ae*
 REL cat-GEN tail cut-PROG-IND 3S.DIST run-PST=3S
 ‘The cat, whose tail is cut, ran away.’

The relative pronoun *je* allows the addition of a subordinate clause which acts as an adjective describing the subject of the matrix clause. Some neighboring Indo-Aryan languages, such as Sadri, Kurmali, Bengali and Odia, have the relative pronoun form *je*.

2.7 Conjunctive participle constructions

A participle is a form of non-finite verb which acts as an adjective or adverb. Conjunctive participles are present in most Indian languages and perform various functions. They may act like time adverbs, manner adverbs, or reason adverbs. They may also join clauses and give the sense of actions being performed sequentially. The conjunctive participle marker in Asur is *k^heṭe* and *k^he*, which can be used interchangeably, although the frequency of occurrence of *k^heṭe* is higher. The conjunctive participle marker in Asur, very much like Hindi conjunctive participle markers *ke* and *kār*, is attached postpositive to the non-finite subordinate clause. The conjunctive participle markers of Hindi are grammaticalized forms of the verb *karna*

‘to do’ (Das 2015:70). The following subsections present examples of types of semantic functions performed by conjunctive participles in Asur.

2.7.1 Sequential action adverb

A conjunctive participle marker is used in Asur to join a sequence of actions in which the subject is the same for each verb and multiple clauses can be embedded using a conjunctive participle marker.

25. *huni paŋ^hao k^he g^hofo jom k^he gitiŋg-n=ae*
 3S study CPM food eat CPM sleep-n=3S
 ‘After studying, and having food, he slept.’

In example 25, two non-finite subordinate clauses are embedded in the main clause to give the sense of sequential action.

2.7.2 Manner adverb

In Asur, a conjunctive participle can make a subordinate clause act as a manner adverb. In the following examples, the conjunctive participles connect the verbs and function to describe the manner of the actions

26. *iŋ diŋoŋ k^heŋe hiŋg*
 1S walk CPM come.
 ‘We came walking.’
27. *huni k^haŋpa solom k^he haŋ senoŋ-ŋan=ae*
 3S slippers wear CPM house go-PROG=3S
 ‘He was going to house, wearing slippers’
28. *huni nir k^he senoŋ-n=ae*
 3S run CPM go-n=3S
 ‘He went home running.’

While example 26 denotes the manner of the coming in that sentence, in examples 27 and 28 denote the manner of the going in them.

2.7.3 Time adverb

Like Hindi, Asur also uses conjunctive participle markers when there is a need to express time in hours and minutes. A conjunctive participle marker in this case acts as a linker of hours and minutes. In example 29, *k^heŋe* is used to express time.

29. *ale hola niŋa ŋin bajao k^heŋe ŋis minaŋ re nin-ne-n=ale*
 1P yesterday night three strike CPM thirty minute LOC sleep-PST-n=1P
 ‘We slept at three thirty yesterday night.’

2.7.4 ‘Instead of’ interpretation

A conjunctive participle marker along with the negation marker *ka* gives the meaning ‘instead of’ in Asur. Example 30 shows the construction with an ‘instead of’ interpretation using a conjunctive participle marker.

30. *huni iskul ka sen k^he bajar seno-n=ae*
 3S school NEG go CPM market go-n=3S
 ‘Instead of going to school, he went to the market.’

The use of negation particle along with a conjunctive participle marker is possible in Hind as well (*na* + conjunctive participial clause) which also gives a sense of ‘instead of’.

2.7.5 ‘Even though/despite’ interpretation

In Asur, when a conjunctive participle is followed by the inclusive marker *ho?*, it gives an ‘even though/despite’ interpretation. Similarly, in Hindi, the inclusive particle *b^{hi}* can be used with the conjunctive participle marker *ke/kar* to impart the same semantic interpretation of ‘even though’ or ‘despite’. Example 31 shows the use of *ho?* along with a conjunctive participle marker in Asur.

31. *huni bemaṛ k^he ho? kami-d=ae*
 3S sick CPM INP work-d=3S
 ‘Despite being sick, he is working.’

It is observable that in Hindi, all the above kinds of conjunctive participial constructions are also possible.

3 Summary and Conclusion

This study has examined the connectives in the Asur language, focusing on their forms, functions, and sources. A concise summary of the connectives is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of connectives in Asur

FORM	FUNCTION	SOURCE
<i>aur</i>	Additive conjunction	Hindi
<i>he?/ heṭra</i>	Additive conjunctions	Native
<i>makil</i>	Adversative conjunction	Native
<i>ci</i>	Alternating conjunction in interrogatives, polar question particle, and quotative marker. Functions similar to the Hindi particle <i>ki</i> .	Native
<i>cahe, ya</i>	Alternating conjunctions	Hindi
<i>lo</i>	Comitative postposition marker giving ‘with’ meaning, establishing connection between two noun phrases (appears similar to an additive conjunction but differs syntactically and semantically)	Native
<i>k^he/k^heṭe</i>	Conjunctive participle connecting sequential actions and various adverbial functions. Its functions are very similar to conjunctive participles in Hindi.	Native
<i>eṭalae? ci</i>	Illative conjunction	Native
<i>ho?</i>	Inclusive particle <i>ho?</i> , along with comitative marker <i>lo</i> , conveys an ‘also-with’ interpretation. When used with conjunctive participle <i>k^he/k^heṭe</i> , it provides an ‘even though’ interpretation.	Native
<i>je</i>	Relative pronoun used for relativization	Indo-Aryan

Further investigation into the particle *ci* and other particles in the Asur language could unveil a broader spectrum of connectives and their diverse functions. Grounded in primary linguistic data, this study has provided an initial analysis of the connectives in Asur, contributing to the documentation of this underexplored language. However, a more comprehensive and in-depth examination is necessary to deepen our understanding not only of these connectives but also of the overall grammatical structure of Asur, which remains largely undocumented. Such research is vital for preserving and advancing linguistic knowledge of this language.

Abbreviations

INP= Emphatic inclusive particle
 CPM= Conjunctive participle marker
 DIST= Distal demonstrative

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