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A Comparative Study of Phonological Variation in Gojri: Suran Valley (Poonch) and Fakeer Gojri (Srinagar)

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Abstract

This research explores the phonological variation within the Gojri language, an Indo-Aryan language mainly spoken by the Gujjar community in Jammu and Kashmir, through a detailed comparative study of two dialects: The Suran Valley dialect of Poonch District and the Fakir Gojri dialect of Srinagar. Using foundational works such as J.C. Sharma's Gojri Grammar and recent descriptive field data by Hassan, Rashid, and Bhat, the study analyses the consonantal and vocalic inventories, phonemic contrasts, syllable structures, and morphophonemic processes characterising each dialect. Findings indicate that the Fakir Gojri dialect has a phoneme inventory of 30 consonants and 11 vowels, while the Suran Valley dialect includes 32 consonants and 10 vowels, with distinctive phonological features such as voicing contrasts, aspiration, gemination, and suprasegmental tonal distinctions. Morphological markers, especially those conveying number, gender, and case in nouns and verbs, show dialectal variation that correlates with phonological differences. Despite mutual intelligibility and sharing a common Indo-Aryan linguistic heritage, both dialects display adaptations shaped by their unique geographical and sociolinguistic contexts. This comparative phonological analysis not only enhances the descriptive understanding of Gojri's internal diversity but also provides a foundation for further linguistic and sociolinguistic research into this understudied language.

Keywords: Gojri language, Indo-Aryan language, Phonology, Dialectal variation, Sociolinguistics, Tribal language, Gujjar community, Archaeology.

Introduction:

The Gujjar and Bakarwal communities form the third largest population group in Jammu and Kashmir, accounting for 8.1% of the state's total population and constituting the most populous scheduled tribes (Mohd. Tufail, 2014; Dar, 2017). These semi-nomadic pastoral groups are believed to have migrated from Gujarat through Rajasthan, likely during the 5th and 6th centuries A.D., due to severe droughts, eventually settling in the Siwaliks and Himalayan regions (Mohd. Tufail, 2014). They mainly inhabit and move within the Kandi areas of Kashmir, including districts such as Baramulla and Rajouri (Rao, 2020; Mohammad Taufique & Ikram, 2020). The community speaks Gojri, locally known as "Gujjari," which is linguistically connected to the Rajasthani language and its dialects (Mohd. Tufail, 2014; Rao, 2020). Gujjars comprise 72 endogamous sub-groups with diverse dialects, dietary habits, and customs depending on their locality (Rao, 2020). Their transhumant lifestyle poses significant challenges for formal education due to frequent seasonal migrations (Mohd. Tufail, 2014).

Research on languages in the Himalayan and surrounding regions reveals complex patterns of dialectal variation and language contact phenomena. Gojri demonstrates significant influence from geographical contiguity and borrowing from neighbouring languages, being surrounded by speakers of Western Pahari dialects, Dogri, Punjabi, and Kashmiri, which affects its phonological development while maintaining morphological features shared with Rajasthani dialects (Sharma, 2002). Similarly, Kashmiri exhibits linguistic variation at phonological and lexical levels according to social variables including religion, education, region, age, and occupation, reflecting the social heterogeneity of its speech community (Koka, 2014). Contact-induced change is further exemplified in trilingual contexts, where Burushaski in Srinagar shows lexical borrowing from Urdu and structural borrowing from Kashmiri, with different sociolinguistic factors influencing these distinct contact phenomena (Munshi, 2010). The Himalayan region's linguistic diversity and widespread multilingualism provide rich empirical data for studying language contact and areal linguistics (Saxena, 2004).

The research on the Gojri language and the Gujjar community reveals significant ethnolinguistic and socio-cultural dimensions. Gojri serves as a repository of socio-cultural rituals among Gujjars in Jammu and Kashmir, with specific terminology describing religious and cultural practices (Bashir & Khan, 2015). The Gujjar and Bakarwal communities constitute 8.1% of Jammu and Kashmir's population, with their Gojri language closely linked to Rajasthani dialects, reflecting their historical migration from Gujarat via Rajasthan in the 5th-6th centuries AD (Tufail, 2014). Their transhumant lifestyle presents challenges for formal education due to seasonal migrations (Tufail, 2014). Recent lexicographic work includes Dr Rafeeq Anjum's Concise Gojri-English Dictionary, which has been analysed using statistical methods, revealing specific linguistic patterns characterised by magnetisation curves and yielding a naturalness number of one for the Gojri language (Biswas, 2022). These studies collectively contribute to understanding Gojri's linguistic structure and cultural significance. These four papers examine linguistic variation and comparative analysis across different language families and contexts. Zhao Yue provides a systematic review of English linguistic variation, examining phonological, lexical, morphological, and syntactic dimensions while highlighting the importance of dialectal variation in sociolinguistic studies. Chipanda Simon investigates phonological processes in verb conjugation, particularly in Bantu languages, revealing transformations such as elision, assimilation, and palatalisation that demonstrate the dynamic relationship between morphology and phonology. Lama Bergstrand Othman explores Arabic diglossia, examining phonological and lexical distances between Modern Standard Arabic and Spoken Arabic and their effects on reading and phonological awareness tasks. Gilazova et al. conduct a systematic review of Turkic mythonymy research, identifying ethnolinguistic and comparative approaches while noting gaps in comparative analysis across Turkic systems. These studies collectively emphasise the need for comprehensive comparative analyses to understand phonological distinctions and morphological processes across regional dialects and language varieties.

The Himalayan region presents a complex linguistic landscape characterised by significant diversity and areal features that transcend phylogenetic boundaries. Liljegren (2020) demonstrates that while basic lexicon aligns with established phylogenetic classifications in the Hindu Kush-Karakoram region, structural similarities cluster geographically across 59 language varieties, suggesting distinct layers of areality linked to historical periods. This region exhibits phonological and lexical features specific to the area, while morphosyntactic properties align with broader macro-areal distributions (Liljegren, 2020). Saxena (2004) emphasises the Himalayan region as a treasure trove for linguistic research, particularly in language contact and areal linguistics studies. The documentation of variation in endangered languages requires innovative methodological approaches, as traditional sociolinguistic variables may not apply uniformly across minority language communities (Hildebrandt et al., 2017). Spatial factors, including "social space," prove as explanatory as traditional social variables in understanding language attitudes and practices in multilingual Himalayan communities (Hildebrandt & Hu, 2017).

Extent of Gojri Variations in Gojri, According to Area:

The research papers provide contextual background for understanding linguistic variation in South Asia, particularly relevant to Gojri dialectal studies. Jammu and Kashmir represents a geographically diverse region spanning altitudes from 220 to 8611 meters, with distinct climatic zones from subtropical Jammu to temperate Kashmir, supporting a population of 12.55 million across 22 districts with rich cultural diversity (Romshoo et al., 2020). This geographical complexity creates ideal conditions for linguistic variation, as geolinguistics demonstrates how spatial patterns influence language location and processes leading to language change (Hoch & Hayes, 2010). The incorporation of Geographic Information Systems in linguistic studies has proven valuable for analysing spatial language data and mapping dialectal variations (Hoch & Hayes, 2010). South Asia's linguistic landscape encompasses at least five major language phyla that have been interacting over millennia, with significant regional complexity and numerous lesser-documented languages (Osada & Blench, 2008). This multilingual environment, combined with varied topography and cultural diversity, provides the foundation for understanding how geographical distribution correlates with phonological and morphological variations in languages like Gojri.

The Indo-Aryan languages of the Hindukush-Karakoram region display distinctive phonological characteristics that distinguish them from other Indo-Aryan varieties. Liljegren (2017) identifies a "hard core" of features in this mountainous region, including large consonant inventories, tripartite affricate differentiation, retroflexion across several subsets, aspiration contrasts involving only voiceless consonants, and tonal contrasts. These features cluster at the centre of the region and gradually fade toward the peripheries. The geographical isolation of these areas has contributed to the preservation of unique phonological patterns (Liljegren, 2017). Cross-linguistic studies demonstrate the empirical robustness of phonological contrasts, including retroflex consonants, across Indo-Aryan languages (Johny et al., 2019). The broader Indo-Aryan family encompasses 226 languages with significant dialectal diversity, occupying much of the Indian subcontinent (Deo, 2017). Gojri, as documented in lexicographic studies, represents one example of this linguistic diversity within the Indo-Aryan continuum (Biswas, 2022).

These papers examine language contact and variation in multilingual contexts, particularly in South Asian urban environments. Munshi (2010) analyses contact-induced change in Burushaski spoken in Srinagar, demonstrating how simultaneous contact with Kashmiri and Urdu produces different outcomes: lexical borrowing from Urdu and structural borrowing from Kashmiri, with these processes operating independently under different sociolinguistic factors. Siemund (2013) provides a comprehensive overview of multilingualism in urban areas, covering language acquisition, contact, change, identity formation, and educational implications across various contexts. Koka (2014) investigates linguistic variation in Kashmiri, examining how social variables, including religion, education, region, age, and occupation, influence phonological and lexical variation within the speech community. Liljegren (2017) presents a typological profile of 31 Indo-Aryan languages in the Hindukush-Karakoram region, identifying distinctive features such as large consonant inventories, tripartite alignment systems, and tonal contrasts that cluster in the region's core areas.

The Greater Hindukush region exhibits significant morphological diversity, particularly in Indo-Aryan languages, where contact-induced changes reflect influences from Persian, Tibetan, and Hindi-Urdu linguistic areas (Liljegren, 2014). Contact phenomena manifest differently across languages, as demonstrated in Burushaski, where lexical borrowing from Urdu and structural borrowing from Kashmiri occur independently, influenced by distinct sociolinguistic factors in trilingual contexts (Munshi, 2010). Morphological complexity varies

considerably across language families, with Niger-Congo languages displaying rich verbal morphology and complex gender-number systems that cannot isolate number from gender marking, while nominal forms remain less morphologically complex than verbal forms (Creissels, 2019). Similarly, Pashto dialects demonstrate substantial morphological variation, particularly in verbal formation and pronominal systems, with Middle dialects like Waziri showing distinctive features alongside other major dialect groups, reflecting the complex interplay between contact effects and dialectal preservation (David, 2013).

Research on Gojri and Himalayan languages reveals complex patterns of linguistic variation shaped by geographical and socio-cultural factors. Sharma (2002) demonstrates that Gojri's classification is complicated by its geographical position, showing phonological similarities with Punjabi and neighbouring languages while retaining morphological features of Rajasthani dialects, emphasising that contact with surrounding languages like Urdu, Dogri, and Kashmiri influences its development. The Himalayan region's linguistic diversity provides rich data for studying language contact and areal linguistics (Saxena, 2004). Broader research supports the role of environmental factors in dialectal divergence, with Honkola et al. (2018) finding that environmental and cultural differences contribute markedly to dialect group separation, suggesting that cultural adaptations to local environments create barriers limiting inter-group communication. Palmer et al. (2017) further demonstrate that spatial language shows sensitivity to topographic features, mediated by speakers' interactions with their landscape, proposing a sociotopographic model linking language structure, environment, cultural practices, and language use.

Scope of Dialectical study at the regional level:

Dialectological research at the regional level provides comprehensive insights into linguistic variation within specific geographic and sociocultural contexts. Dialectology examines varieties of language that differ in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar, exploring regional, social, and historical variations to understand how and why linguistic differences occur (Jangam & Salunkhe). This field has evolved from traditional eighteenth-century mapping approaches that correlated language features with physical and institutional boundaries to incorporate modern sociolinguistic techniques that examine speakers' orientations to place (Montgomery & Moore, 2018). Contemporary dialectological research encompasses four key areas: processes of language variation and change across time and space, methods and datasets for regional analysis, perceptions of locality in language research, and ideological representations of place (Montgomery & Moore, 2018). The integration of sociolinguistic theory and methods with geographical approaches enhances descriptions of geographical language variation and provides more adequate explanations for the social and spatial characteristics of linguistic change (Trudgill, 1974).

The provided papers examine linguistic variation and social stratification in South Asian communities, though none directly address Gojri dialectology in Jammu and Kashmir. Koka (2014) investigates how social variables, including religion, education, region, age, and occupation, influence phonological and lexical variation among Kashmiri speakers, demonstrating that social heterogeneity creates systematic linguistic differences. Gumperz (1958) establishes foundational principles showing that dialect differences correlate with patterns of social interaction and communication density, with subgroups separated by geographical and social boundaries. Chambers (2000) develops the Regionality Index to measure how mobility and non-native speakers affect regional language variation, emphasising that region is no longer the primary determinant of linguistic variation in contemporary dialectology. Tufail (2014) provides demographic context for Gujjars and Bakarwals in Jammu and

Kashmir, noting their distinct cultural and linguistic identity, with the Gojri language linked to Rajasthani dialects, though transhumance practices create educational challenges that may impact language maintenance.

Regional dialect studies encompass comprehensive analyses of phonological, morphological, and syntactic variations across dialectal varieties. Research demonstrates significant phonological shifts, including vowel pronunciation changes and consonant usage patterns, as documented in American English dialects such as Southern English, AAVE, and the Northern Cities Shift (Kazakova & Abduhamidova). Fieldwork methodologies remain central to data collection, utilising individual speaker elicitation, audio recordings, and questionnaire-based approaches to capture authentic linguistic variation (Hinskens, 2020; Krug & Schlüter, 2013).

Contemporary dialectometry applies computational and statistical analyses to identify representative features and areal classifications, moving beyond purely geographical explanations to incorporate linguistic and social factors (Wieling & Nerbonne, 2015). Studies reveal that resistant dialect features share properties related to geographical distribution, socio-emblematic nature, and structural coherence (Hinskens, 2020). The field increasingly addresses historical developments and dialect levelling processes, with research expanding from traditional lexical and phonological focus to include morphosyntactic analyses (Wieling & Nerbonne, 2015).

Regional dialect studies provide crucial empirical foundations for understanding language vitality, maintenance, and shift patterns, particularly in multilingual contexts. Research demonstrates that language maintenance and shift occur within complex ecological frameworks where dominant languages interact with minority varieties (Yu et al.). In Indonesia, the relationship between biological and linguistic diversity highlights the interconnected nature of ecological and language preservation efforts, with transdisciplinary approaches proving essential for maintenance strategies (Collins, 2019). Studies reveal linguistic dualism in multilingual communities, where national languages dominate formal contexts while regional languages persist in daily interactions, influenced by social context, education, and work environment factors (Amalia et al.). The northern Pakistan case illustrates how approximately 30 distinct languages exist within multilingual regions, requiring systematic evaluation of language vitality (Liljegren & Akhunzada, 2017). These findings collectively demonstrate that regional language studies provide essential evidence for policymakers developing language revitalisation programs and contribute to theoretical understanding across linguistics, sociolinguistics, and anthropology.

Regional dialectal studies provide crucial frameworks for understanding linguistic diversity and language ecology at multiple levels. Language ecology research demonstrates how micro- and macro-level sociolinguistic processes interconnect, requiring simultaneous analysis of individual linguistic behaviours and broader social contexts to fully comprehend language maintenance and change (Enfield, 2005; Hult, 2009). Comparative dialectal analysis reveals how phonological, morphological, and socio-cultural dimensions shape regional variations, with factors such as ethnic background, social lineage, and environmental context significantly influencing linguistic choices (Belmekki). These micro-level processes aggregate into macro-level patterns that can be mapped through dialect atlases and isoglosses to visualise the geographical distribution of linguistic features. Understanding language endangerment dynamics requires examining how contact between communities with different power structures disrupts language ecologies, leading to language shift and diversity loss, while also identifying mechanisms for maintaining linguistic diversity through regulated inter-community relations (Wendel & Heinrich, 2012).

Review of Literature:

The linguistic investigation of the Gojri language has been significantly shaped by Grierson's foundational work and subsequent scholarly reexaminations. Grierson's Linguistic Survey of India established Gojri as a Central

Indo-Aryan language, classifying it as a dialect of Rajasthani with particular closeness to Mewati and resemblance to Mewari (Sharma, 2002). However, Sharma (2002) challenges this classification, arguing that Gojri's geographic location among speakers of Western Pahari dialects, Punjabi, Kashmiri, and Urdu has resulted in significant phonological borrowing while retaining morphological features exclusive to Rajasthani dialects. This suggests that single-criterion classification approaches are inadequate and comprehensive grammatical analysis is necessary (Sharma, 2002). The broader context of Indo-Aryan dialectology reveals the complexity of classifying languages within this diverse family of 226 languages spoken by approximately 1.5 billion people across the Indian subcontinent (Deo, 2017). Grierson's Survey remains a foundational resource, though it contributed to language-based nationalism in the subcontinent (Majeed, 2018).

Sharma (2002) examines Grierson's classification of Gojri as a Rajasthani dialect, noting its closeness to Mewati and resemblance to Mewari, while arguing that single-criterion classifications are misleading due to Gojri's complex linguistic environment surrounded by Urdu, Western Pahari dialects, Punjabi, and Kashmiri influences. Bailey's broader linguistic work is documented in his collection "The Languages of the Northern Himalayas" (Bailey, 2010), which covered twenty-six Himalayan dialects with detailed grammar and vocabulary analysis, representing pioneering research in previously unstudied dialects. Lorimer (1939) reviews Bailey's "Studies in North Indian Languages," highlighting his expertise in the phonetics of Northern Indian languages, including Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, and others. However, none of these sources specifically references Bailey's 1903 comparative work on Gojri varieties mentioned in the query.

The research papers examine various aspects of the Gojri language classification and documentation. Sharma (2002) challenges Grierson's classification of Gojri as a Rajasthani dialect, arguing that single-criterion classification is misleading. He demonstrates that while Gojri shares phonological features with Punjabi and neighbouring languages due to geographical contiguity and borrowing, it retains exclusive morphological features with Rajasthani dialects. Sharma emphasises that phonological features change faster than morphological ones and advocates for comprehensive grammatical analysis in language classification. Kaul & Aklujkar (2008) present a collection connecting past and future linguistic work in Kashmir through contributions from veteran and emerging researchers. Singh (2007) introduces the Annual Review of South Asian Languages and Linguistics as an international forum for exchanging ideas among linguists working on South Asian languages. Biswas (2022) conducts a statistical analysis of Dr Rafeeq Anjum's Concise Gojri-English Dictionary, applying mathematical models to characterise the dictionary's structure and determining the naturalness number of the Gojri language.

Research on the Gojri language and Gujjar communities reveals significant sociolinguistic dimensions. Gojri serves as a repository of socio-cultural rituals among Gujjars in Jammu and Kashmir, with specific terminology describing religious and cultural practices (Bashir & Khan, 2015). The Gujjar and Bakarwal community constitutes the third largest group in Jammu and Kashmir at 8.1% of the population, with historical migration patterns from Gujarat via Rajasthan in the 5th-6th centuries AD (Tufail, 2014). Their transhumance lifestyle presents educational challenges, while the Gojri language shows links to Rajasthani dialects (Tufail, 2014). Gojri ranks as the third most spoken language after Kashmiri and Dogri in the region, with script modifications made by the Jammu and Kashmir Academy to accommodate unique phonetic features (Hussain, 2017). Contemporary research on diaspora communities highlights broader patterns of language shift and maintenance, where second-generation speakers face heritage language loss despite community preservation efforts (Islam & Tila).

Biswas (2022) conducted a statistical analysis of Dr Rafeeq Anjum's Concise Gojri-English Dictionary, applying mathematical modelling to characterise the dictionary's structure using the Bethe-Peierls approximation of the Ising model. Liljegren (2017) provided a comprehensive typological profile of 31 Indo-Aryan languages in the

Hindukush-Karakoram region, identifying distinctive features including large consonant inventories, tripartite pronominal case alignment, and tonal contrasts that form a regional "hard core" pattern. Munshi (2010) analysed contact-induced language change in Srinagar Burushaski, demonstrating how simultaneous contact with Kashmiri and Urdu results in different borrowing patterns lexical from Urdu and structural from Kashmiri, within a trilingual dominance hierarchy. Sharma (2022) examined morphophonemic variation in Assamese nominal morphology, focusing on how phonological variations within morphemes are triggered by deictic inflexions, case inflexions, and word-formation processes.

Research on the Gujjar community reveals their complex ethnolinguistic identity and cultural transformations. The Gojri language serves as a repository of socio-cultural rituals, with specific terminology describing religious and cultural practices among Gujjars in Jammu and Kashmir (Syed Iram Bashir & Khan, 2015). The community constitutes 8.1% of Jammu and Kashmir's population, with origins traced to Gujarat via Rajasthan, likely migrating during the 5th-6th century droughts (Tufail, 2014). Their Gojri language shows connections to Rajasthani dialects, while transhumance practices significantly impact educational access (Tufail, 2014).

Contemporary Gujjar communities face substantial occupational shifts from traditional pastoralism toward agriculture, business, and public service due to modernisation and policy changes, leading to transformed family structures and increased women's workforce participation (Nizami & Keshlata). The Van Gujjars represent a specialised pastoral subgroup, living as forest-dwelling buffalo milk producers who remain socially marginalised despite their persistent traditional lifestyle (Gooch, 2004).

Research on Gojri and related Indo-Aryan languages reveals complex linguistic relationships shaped by geographical and ecological factors. Sharma (2002) challenges Grierson's classification of Gojri as merely a Rajasthani dialect, demonstrating that while Gojri shares morphological features with Rajasthani, it exhibits significant phonological similarities with Punjabi and Western Pahari languages due to geographical contiguity and contact phenomena. Liljegren (2017) identifies distinctive phonological patterns in the Hindukush-Karakoram region, including large consonant inventories, aspiration contrasts involving only voiceless consonants, and tonal contrasts that form a regional "hard core." Environmental influences on phonological development are supported by Everett (2017), who demonstrates that ambient humidity affects vowel usage rates across languages. Ghai (1980) provides a detailed analysis of consonant gemination and vowel distribution patterns in Dogri, illustrating the complex phonetic manifestations characteristic of these regional varieties and their morphophonemic adaptations.

These scholarly works provide a comprehensive framework for understanding Gojri within the Indo-Aryan linguistic landscape. Sharma (2002) challenges Grierson's classification of Gojri as a Rajasthani dialect, arguing that while Gojri shares morphological features with Rajasthani dialects, it also exhibits phonological similarities with Punjabi and neighbouring languages due to geographical contiguity and borrowing. This suggests that single-criterion classification approaches are inadequate for proper linguistic categorisation. Deo (2017) contextualises this complexity within the broader Indo-Aryan family, which encompasses 226 languages across the Indian subcontinent, emphasising the historical depth and geographical breadth that contribute to dialectal diversity. Tufail (2014) provides an ethnographic context, noting that Gujjars and Bakarwals constitute 8.1% of Jammu and Kashmir's population, with their Gojri language linked to Rajasthani while maintaining distinct cultural and linguistic identity. Kaul & Aklujkar (2008) contribute to the broader understanding of Kashmir's linguistic traditions, connecting past research with future investigations.

The linguistic classification of Gojri has evolved through scholarly debate regarding its relationship with other Indo-Aryan languages. Sharma (2002) reconsiders Grierson's classification of Gojri as a Rajasthani dialect, noting

that while Gojri shares morphological features exclusively with Rajasthani dialects, it also exhibits phonological similarities with Punjabi and other neighbouring languages due to geographical contiguity and borrowing. This suggests that single-criterion classification approaches are misleading and comprehensive grammatical analysis is needed (Sharma, 2002). The language demonstrates significant connections with Urdu, sharing syntactic structures, vocabulary, and literary genres Tufail (2014) confirms the link between Gojri and Rajasthani languages and dialects, noting that Gujjar and Bakarwal speakers migrated from Gujarat via Rajasthan, likely in the 5th-6th centuries AD. Within the broader Indo-Aryan family context, Gojri represents one of 226 diverse languages spanning the Indian subcontinent, reflecting the complex dialectological landscape shaped by historical migrations and geographical distribution (Deo, 2017).

J.C. Sharma's extensive fieldwork in the 1970s, documented in his Gojri Grammar (1973, 1975, 1982), provided an in-depth analysis of the Suran Valley dialect's phonology and morphology, noting 32 consonants and 10 vowels, and highlighting conservative phonological features and morphological markers. Sociolinguistic perspectives by Rensch et al. (1992) and Hugoniot and Polster (1997) examined language vitality and contact effects in relation to Kashmiri, Dogri, and Pahari.

More recent descriptive studies by Hassan, Rashid, and Bhat (2019) focused on the Fakir Gojri dialect near Srinagar, documenting 30 consonants and 11 vowels with notable phonological divergences from the Poonch dialect, such as a lack of voiced aspirated stops and vowel-length contrasts, alongside detailed morphophonemic alternations expressing number, gender, and case.

Research on the Gojri language reveals its complex ethnolinguistic characteristics within the Indo-Aryan family. Bashir & Khan (2015) demonstrate that Gojri serves as a repository of Gujjar socio-cultural rituals in Jammu and Kashmir, with specific linguistic terms describing religious and cultural practices. The language's Indo-Aryan heritage is contextualised within the broader dialectological landscape, where Indo-Aryan languages exhibit significant diversity across 226 languages spoken by approximately 1.5 billion people (Deo, 2017). Tufail (2014) establishes the demographic and cultural foundation, noting that Gujjars and Bakarwals constitute 8.1% of Jammu and Kashmir's population, with their Gojri language linked to Rajasthani dialects, reflecting historical migration patterns from Gujarat via Rajasthan in the 5th-6th centuries AD. Gumperz (1961) provides theoretical grounding for understanding speech variation within complex civilisations, emphasising how dialectological research reveals relationships between linguistic features and cultural geography, supporting the framework for analysing regional linguistic adaptations in Gojri dialects.

Research Methodology and Methodologies:

Research Objectives:

The Fakir Gujjars study aims to analyse the phonology and noun morphology of the Gojri language as spoken in the Fakir Gojri area of Srinagar.

It attempts to document the phonemes (consonants and vowels), syllable structures, and noun inflexions for number, gender, and case.

The study also seeks to contribute to descriptive linguistic knowledge of Gojri, a less-researched Indo-Aryan language variety.

The Poonch Grammar work aims to provide a detailed grammatical description of the Gojri language spoken in the Poonch District, covering phonology, morphology, syntax, and more for educational and linguistic purposes.

Methodologies:

The Fakir Gujar's research collected data in July-August 2019 from native Gojri speakers through direct questioning using prepared wordlists and sentence lists; the data were then analysed descriptively for phonology and morphology.

The Poonch Grammar project's data was collected in the field in 1973 and 1975 through elicitation with word and sentence lists from native speakers in several villages.

Both studies use descriptive and qualitative linguistic methods, relying on native speaker elicitation, minimal pairs for phonemic analysis, and morphosyntactic analysis based on collected linguistic data.

Phonology: A comparative study

Comparative Phonology Key Aspects:

Aspect	Description	Example Features Compared
Phoneme Inventory	Total consonant and vowel phonemes	In terms of phonemic inventory, Gojri comprises 30 consonants and 10 vowels, whereas English contains approximately 24 consonants and 20 vowels
Place of Articulation	Classification of consonants by articulation (bilabial, dental, retroflex, etc.)	The phonological system is characterized by the presence of aspirated stops, retroflex consonants, and other marked segmental features
Vowel Quality	Vowel height, backness, rounding	The language exhibits a systematic distinction between short and long vowels, as well as the presence of nasalized vowel phonemes
Phonemic Contrast	Minimal pairs showing distinct phonemes	The language displays a phonemic contrast between aspirated and unaspirated stop consonants.
Suprasegmentals	Tone, stress, length, nasalization	The language may exhibit a tonal system, distinguishing meaning through pitch, in contrast to non-tonal languages where pitch does not serve a phonemic function.

Phonotactics	Allowed syllable structures and consonant clusters	The language permits a maximum of [X] consonants in the onset and [Y] consonants in the coda positions of syllables.
Morphophonemic Processes	Rules governing changes in sounds due to morphological context	The language exhibits phonological processes such as vowel harmony, assimilation, and gemination, which contribute to its systematic sound patterns

Example Comparative Table of Consonant Inventories:

Place/Manner	**Gojri (Fakir Gujjars)**	**Gojri (Poonch District)**	**English (Received Pronunciation)**
Voiceless Stops	p, t, ʈ, k	p, t, ʈ, k	p, t, k
Voiced Stops	b, d, ɖ, g	b, d, ɖ, g	b, d, ɡ
Aspirated Stops	p^h, t^h, $ʈ^h$, k^h	p^h, t^h, $ʈ^h$, k^h	(No phonemic aspiration)
Fricatives	s, z, ʃ, h, x, ɢ	s, z, ʃ, h, x	f, v, θ, ð, s, z, ʃ, ʒ, h
Nasals	m, n, ɳ	m, n, ɳ	m, n, ŋ
Laterals	l, ɭ	l, ɭ	l
Trills & Flaps	r, ɽ	r, ɽ	r (approximant)
Semi-vowels	w, j	w, j	w, j

Example Comparative Table of Vowel Systems:

Vowel Type	**Gojri (Fakir Gujjars) Vowels**	**English (RP) Vowels**
High Front	i, iː	i, ɪ
Mid Front	e, eː	e, ɛ
Low Central	a, aː	ɑ, ʌ
Back Rounded	u, uː, o, ɔ	u, ʊ, ɔ, ɒ
Central Mid	ə	ə
Nasalization	Present (contrastive)	Not contrastive
Length	Contrastive length in vowels	Contrast mostly in tense/lax pairs

Phonotactic Comparison Examples:

Feature	Feature	English (RP)
Max syllable onset	Up to 2 consonants (clusters like /pr/, /kw/)	Up to 3 consonants (e.g., /str/, /spl/)
Max syllable coda	Up to 2 consonants (e.g., /mp/, /nd/)	Up to 4 consonants (e.g., /lkst/)
Syllable structures	V, VC, CV, CVC, CCV, CVCV	V, VC, CV, CVC, CCV, CCCV, etc.

Summary:

Such comparative phonological studies facilitate understanding of language relationships, typology, and linguistic universals. They also aid language teaching, reconstruction of proto-languages, and phonetic improvement.

Comparison between Two Dialects of the Gojri Language:

Feature	Fakir Gujjars Gojri	Poonch Gojri	Remarks / Differences
Total Consonants	30 phonemic consonants	32 phonemic consonants	Poonch Gojri exhibits a slightly expanded consonant inventory, characterized by the inclusion of certain marginal phonemes.
Stops	p, b, pʰ, t, d, tʰ, ʈ, ɖ, ʈʰ, k, g, kʰ	p, b, pʰ, t, d, tʰ, ʈ, ɖ, ʈʰ, k, g, kʰ, + /q/	The Poonch variety of Gojri includes the marginal uvular phoneme /q/ in its consonantal system.
Fricatives	s, z, ʃ, x, ɢ, h	s, z, ʃ, x, ɣ, h	The Fakir variety of Gojri features the voiced uvular stop /ɢ/, whereas the Poonch variety realizes /ɣ/, reflecting a slightly different place and manner of articulation.
Affricates	tʃ, dʒ, tʃʰ	c (voiceless), ch (aspirated), j (voiced)	Both varieties exhibit comparable affricate systems.
Nasals	m, n, ɳ	m, n, ɳ, ŋ	The Poonch variety reports the presence of an additional velar nasal phoneme /ŋ/ in its consonant inventory.

Laterals	l, ɭ	l, ɭ	The lateral phonemic inventory is identical across the two varieties.
Trills / Flaps	r (trill), ɽ (flap)	r (trill), ɽ (flap)	equivalent
Semi-vowels	w, j	w, j	equivalent
Vowels (Total)	11 vowels	10 vowels	The vowel inventories of the two varieties show slight differences: the Fakir variety comprises 11 vowels, whereas the Poonch variety consists of 10 vowels with the addition of nasalization."
Vowel Qualities	i, iː, e, eː, ə, a, aː, o, ɔ, u, uː	i, ɪ, e, ɛ, ə, a, o, ɔ, ʊ, u	Variation is observed in the realization of mid and low vowels, with vowel length being more prominently marked in the Fakir variety.
Nasalization	Not analysed	Phonemic and contrastive	The Poonch variety explicitly reports the presence of nasalized vowels in its vowel system**.**
Tone	Not analysed	Low, Mid, High tones	Tonal distinctions have been documented exclusively in the Poonch variety.
Phonotactics	Max 2 consonants in onset/coda	Max 3 consonants in onset, up to 3 medial	The Poonch variety permits a wider range of complex consonant clusters.
Aspiration	Phonemic aspiration of voiceless stops	Same	Both varieties exhibit contrasts between aspirated and unaspirated consonants.
Syllable Structure	V, VC, CV, CVC, CCV, CVCCV	Same, with medial clusters of up to three	The Poonch variety permits more complex syllable structures.

Summary of Key Differences:

The comparative analysis demonstrates that the Poonch Gojri dialect possesses a slightly larger consonant inventory, incorporating marginal phonemes such as the uvular stop /q/ and the velar nasal /ŋ/, in addition to exhibiting more complex consonant cluster phonotactics. By contrast, the Fakir Gojri dialect provides clearer evidence of aspiration and vowel length contrasts but does not offer a detailed account of suprasegmental phenomena, leaving tonal features largely unexamined.

A further point of divergence concerns prosodic features: tone has been explicitly documented in the Poonch dialect, with distinctions between low, mid, and high tonal categories, whereas the Fakir Gojri description postpones such analysis to future research. Likewise, nasalised vowels are identified as phonemically contrastive in the Poonch dialect, a feature less clearly attested in Fakir Gojri. Despite these phonological differences, both dialects maintain the two-gender system (masculine/feminine) and display broadly similar noun morphology, although some variation is evident in the use of morphological suffixes.

Conclusion:

The present research has provided a comparative account of phonological variation in Gojri, focusing on two dialectal varieties spoken in Jammu and Kashmir: Fakir Gojri of Srinagar and the Suran Valley dialect of Poonch. The analysis demonstrates that while both dialects share a common Indo-Aryan foundation and maintain mutual intelligibility, they diverge significantly in certain phonological domains. Fakir Gojri displays a phonemic system characterised by 30 consonants and 11 vowels, with aspiration and vowel length contrasts as salient features, whereas Poonch Gojri incorporates a larger consonantal inventory, including marginal phonemes such as the uvular /q/ and velar nasal /ŋ/, alongside a more complex phonotactic structure. Importantly, tonal distinctions and phonemic nasalisation are robustly attested in the Poonch variety, in contrast to their limited treatment in Fakir Gojri.

At the morphological level, both dialects preserve a two-gender system and broadly similar inflectional patterns, though differences in suffixation and pluralisation strategies reflect micro-variation shaped by regional and sociolinguistic factors. These findings underscore the role of contact with Kashmiri, Dogri, and Pahari, as well as patterns of migration and settlement, in influencing dialectal development. By situating Gojri within the Central Indo-Aryan continuum, this study highlights both the linguistic richness and internal diversity of a language that remains underrepresented in scholarly literature.

In sum, the research contributes to Indo-Aryan dialectology, enhances the descriptive record of Gojri, and establishes a foundation for future inquiry into its phonological, morphological, and sociolinguistic dimensions. It further affirms the importance of systematic documentation for safeguarding minority and tribal languages, particularly in multilingual and culturally complex regions such as Jammu and Kashmir.

Beyond its descriptive and comparative significance, this research also emphasises the cultural and heritage value of Gojri as a marker of Gujjar identity in Jammu and Kashmir. As a language of oral traditions, folk narratives, and collective memory, Gojri embodies not only linguistic diversity but also the historical experiences and social practices of its speakers. Documenting its dialectal variation is therefore not simply an academic exercise but an act of cultural preservation. By situating the Fakir and Poonch varieties within broader Indo-Aryan studies, this work aspires to encourage further research, community-based documentation, and revitalisation initiatives, ensuring that Gojri continues to thrive as both a communicative medium and a vital element of South Asia's intangible cultural heritage.

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