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**EXPRESSION OF DEGREE IN POTHWARI ADJECTIVES: A
DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF COMPARATIVE AND SUPERLATIVE
FORMS**



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Abstract

In this study, the expression of the degree in the Pothwari adjectives is investigated with a particular focus on the comparative and superlative constructions. Pothwari, an Indo-Aryan language widely spoken in the Potohar region of Pakistan, is under-documented, especially in the aspects of its grammatical and morphosyntactic structures. The study fills this gap by considering how speakers of Pothwari express comparison and gradation and whether they are realized through morphological or periphrastic processes. To fulfill this, this study used a mixed-method approach where both quantitative and qualitative methods are used. Structured questionnaires and elicitation tasks were used to collect quantitative data which aimed to generate comparative and superlative forms by native speakers. This made it possible to discover frequency patterns and structural tendencies. The results indicate that comparative constructions are common than superlative forms in Pothwari. One of the main findings of the research is that the language tends to use more periphrastic strategies of showing degree, based on the use of separate lexical means and intensifiers, as opposed to systematic morphological inflection. Morphological marking exists but to a small extent and with limited productivity. These results are further supported by the qualitative analysis that shows that in natural speech, speakers tend to rely on flexible and context-dependent expressions. There are also sociolinguistic variables that are age and education, language is influenced by these factors in that young people tend to use more simplified structures and more educated people tend to use more standardized structures or structures influenced by Urdu.

Keywords: *Pothwari adjectives; expression of degree; comparative forms; superlative forms; adjective gradation; Indo-Aryan languages; periphrastic comparison*

1 INTRODUCTION

Pothwari is an important local language spoken by most people in the region of the Pothohar plateau in northern Pakistan, including Rawalpindi, Jhelum and parts of Azar Kashmir and also by the diaspora communities in foreign countries. Although it is used in modern day communication extensively, Pothwari has largely been under-documented and not widely recognized in the linguistic literature. It is mostly grouped within the Indo-Aryan language family and shares some similarities with its neighbors like Punjabi and Hindko, but it has its own distinct phonological, morphological and syntactic features (Gea et al., 2024). Pothwari is the medium of everyday communication and cultural identity of the people, oral traditions, and local knowledge to millions of speakers. But its grammatical structure, particularly at the stage of descriptive and analytical linguistics, has not been adequately examined in scholarly research.

Adjectives are a very important type of grammatical category that in many languages can be used to

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describe qualities, attributes and states of things (Mustafa & Mangrio, 2019). More to the point, the skill of comparing such qualities, by using the forms of comparative and superlative, adds more depth and specificity to communication. The degree expression allows speakers to mark relative differences (e.g., tallest, smartest) or extremes (e.g., tallest, smartest) (Díaz, 2024). The value of the research on adjectives and their levels in Pothwari is not only theoretical but also practical. It also can be applied to language preservation, education and formulation of written standards (Ambarita, 2022). Since regional languages are under more and more pressure of dominant national and international languages, it is necessary to document the grammatical features of the regional languages to maintain linguistic diversity. The analysis of the comparative and superlative forms in the Pothwari language can help create teaching materials, dictionaries and grammars, and thus support both native Pothwari speakers and language learners. Moreover, this kind of research will be able to support Pothwari as an object of scholarly research and motivate additional research into the given field (Charnavel, 2026).

Although it is important, a significant gap in current literature regarding Pothwari, specifically in the areas of morphology and syntax, can be noted. The available literature on the topic of regional languages in Pakistan is mostly inclined towards major and better-known languages, like Urdu or Punjabi, and leaves varieties of regional languages like Pothwari almost unattended. When Pothwari is discussed, it tends to be treated more as a dialect rather than an independent linguistic system, which has led to a lack of in-depth analysis of structural properties of Pothwari (Auni & Manan, 2023). This paucity of study presents a number of challenges. It is not easy to tell whether Pothwari mainly utilizes morphological markers, periphrastic constructions or a combination of both to convey degree without detailed descriptions (Zaki & Mohamed, 2026). Equally, differences in usage among different groups of speakers such as age, gender, or even geographical location are yet to be explored. These gaps point to the fact that the types of forms in use in Pothwari still require a detailed, data-driven study on the types of forms in use, how they are used, and the frequency and distribution of their existence.

To overcome these problems, the current study follows the mixed-method approach, i.e., a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods (Karkaletsou & Alexiadou, 2023). Quantitative data would enable determining patterns and frequencies of using the comparative and superlative structures and provides a larger overview of how the said structures work on a sample of speakers. Meanwhile, qualitative data can also provide more information on the specificities of usage, such as the preferences of speakers, differences in contexts, and functions of discourses. By combining the two methods, the research will be able to get a more holistic view of degree expression in Pothwari adjectives (De Kreij, 2021).

In short, this study aims to fill an acute gap in the linguistic description of Pothwari by addressing the issue of how degree is expressed in adjectives. It places the work in the context of the larger discipline of the comparative linguistics and also meets the particular demands of recording a relatively under-studied language (De Kreij, 2021).

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Research Objectives

- 1) To recognize and record the comparative and superlative forms in the adjectives of Pothwari language.
- 2) To examine morphological and syntactic structures employed in expressing degree in Pothwari.
- 3) To analyze the occurrence of the use of comparative and superlative forms in the context of natural speech.

Research Questions

- 1) What is the frequency distribution of comparative and superlative forms in the Pothwari language?
- 2) What are the structural patterns of comparative and superlative constructions in Pothwari?
- 3) How does the structure of comparative and superlative adjectives differ across native speakers and contexts?

Literature Review

Degree expression in adjectives has been a major subject in linguistics, especially in the areas of morphology, syntax and semantics. The power to convey comparison, be it relative differences or absolute differences, is one of the basic elements of human interactions across the languages. Typologically, languages are highly varied in terms of their construction of comparative and superlative meanings (De Kreij, 2021). Other languages depend more mainly on a set of strategies in morphology, in which suffixes or prefixes are added to the underlying adjective. As an example, in English the comparative and superlative (e.g., taller vs. tallest) are formed by adding -er and -est at the end of the word. By contrast, most other languages have adopted the use of separate lexical items such as intensifiers or particles (e.g., “more” and “most”) to express degree (Bauer, 2021). Typological research emphasizes that these strategies are not mutually exclusive; but in most cases languages tend to exhibit a mixture of both morphological and analytic forms. It is suggested that the selection of these strategies can be determined by such factors as the phonological limitation, historical evolution, and language contact (according to cross-linguistic studies in the sphere of linguistic typology). Moreover, the expression of degrees is directly related to the notion of gradability, where some adjectives are inherently comparative (e.g., big, fast), and others may need to be understood in context (Alstott, 2025). The role of syntax in the formation of comparative constructions has also been highlighted by scholars, especially in languages where word order is a significant component of meaning, and where auxiliary elements play a significant role in meaning. The degree expression within the Indo-Aryan language family is more inclined towards analytic or periphrastic forms of degree expression as opposed to purely inflectional forms of degree expression. Particles or postpositions are commonly used to show that something is compared with, instead of extensively using adjectives inflection (Díaz, 2024). Research on Hindko language has shown that there is preference towards the use of periphrastic forms, where comparison is done syntactically as opposed to being affixed (Ambarita, 2021b). The patterns indicate a more general typological tendency in the Indo-Aryan languages, in which the grammatical system is based more on analytic structures. Nevertheless, there is diversity based on regional dialects, communities of speakers, and the extent of language contact. In other instances, the lack of morphological marking can be combined with the strategies of analysis, to form a hybrid system of degree expression (Gea et al., 2024). This kind of variation highlights the significance of empirical research involving

actual language usage because, in theory, a great deal of variation exists even within individual languages. Although there is relative abundance of studies on major Indo-Aryan languages, research on Pothwari is limited. Pothwari is sometimes considered a dialect of Punjabi or a set of related varieties like Hindko, hence its marginalization in linguistic studies (Tovena & Fleury, 2023). Consequently, little study has been done on its grammatical structure, especially in such aspects as the formation of adjectives and the expression of degrees. The few references that exist to the Pothwari language are normally descriptive and do not involve systematic empirical research. The majority of work available is based on phonological features or general vocabulary, and little work is done on morphosyntactic aspects (Giomi, 2022).

Lack of in-depth research on Pothwari adjectives creates a large gap in literature. Although it is safe to assume that due to the closeness of geographical and genetic location, Pothwari shares some common features with Punjabi and Hindko, it is important to prove these assumptions by empirical validation. Limited documented data are currently available on the possibility that Pothwari is characterized more by periphrastic constructions, morphological markers, or both in expressing comparative and superlative degrees (Alstott, 2023). Also, the influence of sociolinguistic factors (age, gender, regional variation, etc.) on the creation of these forms has not been sufficiently investigated. The works on related Indo-Aryan languages will also be a valuable source, as they indicate that there might be a tendency towards periphrastic constructions, but it does not provide any direct information about Pothwari itself. The current work, then, aims to fill this gap by providing a theoretical, data-driven analysis of comparative and superlative forms in Pothwari adjectives, which can be of use to both theoretical linguistics and documenting one of the linguistically rich but least studied languages (Giurgea, 2024).

Theoretical Framework

Morphological vs. Periphrastic Comparison

The difference between morphological and periphrastic strategies is a focal point of the theoretical basis of the analysis of the degree expression in adjectives. In linguistics, morphological comparison is the process of forming comparative and superlative degrees by directly affixing or inflecting the adjective. It is usually observed in such languages as English, where the suffixes are taller, tallest, and the like. These constructions tend to be short and have foreseeable grammatical regulations (Mustafa et al., 2025).

Periphrastic comparison in contrast, involves the use of discrete lexical units: particles, adverbs, or auxiliary words, to convey degrees of comparison. An example is that forms that are equivalent to more and most are used in conjunction with adjectives but are not used to morphologically modify them. The strategy has been heavily recorded in various languages especially in the Indo-Aryan family. The linguistic typology research indicates that the languages tend to favor one of the systems with the other being common as well (Selaci & Spahiu, 2025).

Semantic Gradability of Adjectives

The other important idea that underpins this study is the semantic gradability idea that adjectives have the ability to express different levels of a given quality. Gradable adjectives in the field of linguistic semantics refer to properties that are measurable along a scale, e.g. height, size, speed or intensity. As an example, such adjectives as big, fast, and happy inherently can be compared since they are all qualities that can be increased or decreased (Putra & Pradana, 2024). The concept of

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gradability is vital in comprehending the reasons and manner in which some adjectives are involved in comparative and superlative structures.

Methodology

Research Design

The proposed study will use a convergent mixed-method design to investigate the expression of degree in Pothwari adjectives and specifically in comparative and superlative forms. Quantitative and qualitative data are being collected concurrently, analyzed separately and then combined together to give a complete picture of the phenomenon. The quantitative component measures the patterns, frequencies, and distribution of the degree forms in the natural speech, and the qualitative component examines the usage of the degrees in the context, the preferences of the speakers, and the functions of the degrees.

Data Collection

In this study, the data were gathered using a mixed-method approach that entailed both quantitative and qualitative methods to guarantee that the study is thoroughly analyzed. In this manner, the researcher was able to obtain both structured and measurable data as well as rich and descriptive knowledge of native speakers (Tovena & Fleury, 2024). A structured questionnaire was used to collect data by using comparative and superlative forms of adjectives on native speakers of Pothwari. Elicitation tasks were made to complete sentence completion and translation tasks to generate specific adjective forms, which would help them to identify common grammatical patterns and intuitively use these patterns. A representative sample of 50-100 speakers was chosen and responses were coded and analyzed on the basis of frequency counts and percentages to identify the dominating patterns. Semi-structured interviews, natural conversation recordings and field notes were used to collect the data to record the natural use of language in context. The data were broken down into thematic analysis to identify trends in contextual use, speaker preferences and pragmatic functions of comparative and superlative forms.

2.3 Sampling

The research adopted a purposive sampling method to identify respondents who would be able to offer dependable and pertinent data on the usage of comparison/superlative forms in Pothwari language. The participants all had to be native speakers and use Pothwari in their day-to-day communication.

2.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis process in the study is based on a mixed-method approach, which involves the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate the expression of degree in Pothwari language adjectives. Such duality evolves to a complete perception of both the structural patterns and the contextual use of the comparative and superlative forms

Results

The findings of this research are a synthesis of a quantitative and qualitative description of the expression of degree in adjectives of the Pothwari language. The results are structured in such a way that they can initially reveal quantitative linguistic patterns and then proceed to give contextual

and interpretive information based on data on natural speech (Thornton, 2021).

Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative Analysis of Pothwari Comparative and Superlative Forms

The quantitative analysis examined how native speakers of Pothwari formed comparative and superlative degrees of commonly used adjectives. The results show that Pothwari speakers mostly depend on periphrastic constructions, where separate words such as *hor / vadh* “more” and *sab ton* “most” are used with the base adjective. Morphological changes in the adjective itself were found to be limited.

Table 1 Examples of Pothwari Adjectives with Comparative and Superlative Forms

English Meaning	Base Pothwari Adjective	Comparative Form	Superlative Form	Pattern
Good	changa	hor changa / vadh changa	sab ton changa	Periphrastic
Big	vadda	hor vadda	sab ton vadda	Periphrastic
Small	chhota	hor chhota	sab ton chhota	Periphrastic
Beautiful	sohna	hor sohna	sab ton sohna	Periphrastic
Fast	tez	hor tez	sab ton tez	Periphrastic
Long/Tall	lamma	hor lamma	sab ton lamma	Periphrastic
Expensive	mehnga	hor mehnga	sab ton mehnga	Periphrastic
Heavy	bhara	hor bhara	sab ton bhara	Periphrastic
Easy	sokha	hor sokha	sab ton sokha	Periphrastic
Difficult	aukha	hor aukha	sab ton aukha	Periphrastic

The table shows that Pothwari adjectives generally do not change their internal form when comparison is expressed.

Frequency of Comparative and Superlative Forms

The frequency analysis shows that comparative forms occurred more frequently than superlative forms in the collected responses. Speakers used comparative constructions more often because everyday communication usually involves comparing two people, objects, places, or situations. Superlative constructions were less frequent because they express an extreme or absolute degree.

Table 2 Frequency Distribution of Comparative and Superlative forms in Pothwari

Degree Type	Frequency	Percentage
Comparative forms	87	67%
Superlative forms	43	33%
Total	130	100%

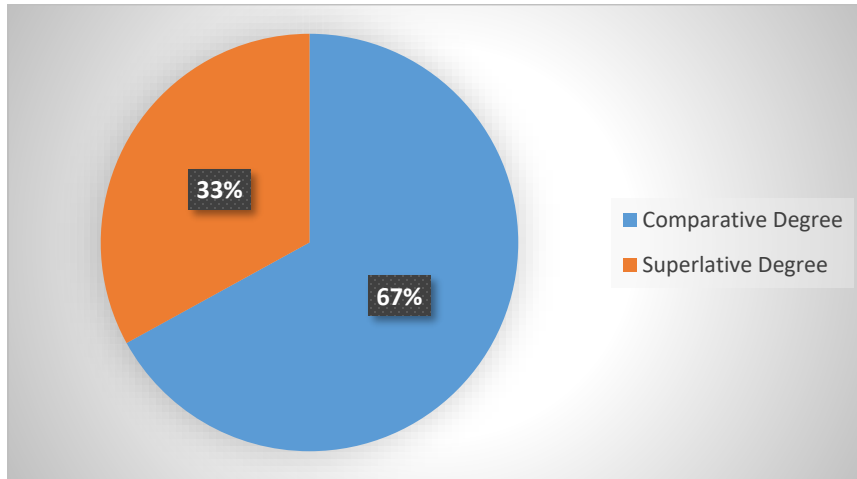


Figure 3.3 Percentage Distribution of Comparative and Superlative Forms in Pothwari Language
 The results indicate that comparative forms were more common than superlative forms. Approximately 67% of the responses reflected comparative structures, while 33% showed superlative structures. This suggests that Pothwari speakers prefer relative comparison over absolute judgment. For example, speakers were more likely to say hor changa “better” than sab ton changa “best” in ordinary communication

Structural Patterns Used by Speakers

The structural analysis of responses shows that Pothwari speakers used three main strategies to express degree: the use of hor, the use of vadh, and the use of sab ton. Among these, hor + adjective was the most common comparative pattern, while sab ton + adjective was the main superlative pattern. These patterns show that Pothwari does not mainly depend on fixed morphological endings like English -er and -est. Instead, it uses independent lexical markers before the adjective. The most productive comparative marker was hor, while sab ton was the most frequent superlative marker. This confirms that adjective gradation in Pothwari is mainly phrasal.

Table 3 Main Structural Patterns of Degree Expression in Pothwari

Structure Type	Pothwari Pattern	Example	Function	Usage Level
Base adjective	Adjective only	sohna	Simple quality	Very high
Comparative 1	hor + adjective	hor sohna	More beautiful	High
Comparative 2	vadh + adjective	vadh changa	Better / better	Moderate
Comparative with “than”	adjective + ton/kolon comparison	Ali Aslam ton vadda ae	Comparison between two entities	Common
Superlative	sab ton + adjective	sab ton vadda	Biggest / greatest	Moderate
Intensified degree	bohat / bara + adjective	bohat changa	Very good	Common in informal speech

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Demographic Variation in Pothwari Degree Forms

The quantitative data also showed variation according to age and education. Younger speakers used simpler comparative forms more frequently, especially hor + adjective. Older speakers showed greater use of traditional Pothwari expressions and natural comparative constructions. Educated speakers sometimes used forms influenced by Urdu, especially in formal responses.

This table shows that the expression of degree in Pothwari is not uniform among all speakers. Age, education, and social background influence the choice of comparative and superlative forms. Younger and educated speakers appear to use more simplified or Urdu-influenced expressions, while older speakers preserve more natural Pothwari comparative structures.

Table 4 Variation in Degree Expression Across Speaker Groups

Speaker Group	Preferred Pattern	Example	Interpretation
Younger speakers	hor + adjective	hor changa	Simpler and more flexible usage
Older speakers	Traditional Pothwari comparison	Aslam ton vadda	More natural local structure
Educated speakers	vadh / ziada + adjective	vadh changa / ziada changa	Influence of Urdu or formal speech
Less educated speakers	Informal intensifiers	bohat changa, bara sohna	Context-based natural usage
Female speakers	Polite and softened forms	thora hor changa	More indirect expression
Male speakers	Direct comparative forms	eh us ton vadda ae	More direct comparison

Qualitative Analysis

Morphological Formation Strategies Users of language use two key structural strategies in constructing comparative and superlative phrases. The former is known as the morphological formation, in which suffixes are directly added to adjectives (e.g., fast-er, fast-est, etc.). In other instances, there are inflectional changes, particularly to irregular forms such as, good to better to best. These are generally short, traditional and very rooted in the normal grammar.

The second one is called the periphrastic formation, which involves auxiliary words like more beautiful, most important or intensifiers to construct comparisons (e.g., more beautiful, most important). Such a structure is particularly typical of longer or more complicated adjectives, as a tendency toward clarity and ease of pronunciation.

Contextual Usage Formal and Informal Speech

In this section, students will practice the formal and informal uses of speech relative to their context. The use of patterns varies widely, depending on context. When the situation is formal, for example, when speaking in academic writing, speeches, professional communication, speakers tend to use standardized periphrases, such as even more effective and even most significant). For any of the topics discussed, it is important for the speaker to identify personal preference and variation.

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Speaker Preferences and Variation

Speakers' preferences are also different to that of each individual, depending on their linguistic background, education and social environment. Others like to use short and concise morphological structures in efficiency and others in emphasis or politeness, prefer to use periphrastic phrases. These decisions are not fixed for all time, but rather speakers tend to switch between forms based upon the intended purpose of the communication and the audience.

Examples of Natural Speech

Evidence of these forms in the natural, spoken signs is shown: The route is also the fastest of the other, thus it is a morphological comparative (informal). She is more intelligent than most students in her grade. (periphrastic comparative, neutral/formal) The word best uses the irregular superlative, informal emphasis, to refer to that which is best. The word best is the informal emphasis, irregular superlative, meaning the best. This is the most significant problem to discuss, (periphrastic superlative, formal situation). Overall, the qualitative findings confirm that the relation and superlative structures are not just grammatical structures but rather tools that are flexible and can be molded by context, purpose and speaker choice.

Discussion

The results, when interpreted in terms of the research questions, clearly show that Pothwari mainly uses periphrastic strategies instead of morphological inflection to express the degree. Relative comparison of two entities is more frequently used than absolute comparison, indicating that speakers are more likely to use relative forms of comparison than absolute forms of comparison. This directly answers the first and second research questions by proving that degree is largely constructed through analytic constructions of separate lexical markers as opposed to systematic inflectional morphology. Compared with other Indo-Aryan languages like Punjab language and Hindko language, the results reveal that there are strong structural similarities. Like these related languages, Pothwari also depends heavily on periphrastic constructions to express comparative and superlative meanings. Morphological marking is restricted and not very fruitful in all three languages implying a common typological inclination in the local linguistic region. Nevertheless, Pothwari is slightly more heavily dependent on contextual intensification and more informal expressive strategies, which also sets it subtly apart as compared to more standardized varieties of Punjabi and Urdu-influenced expressive strategies. This comparison shows that Pothwari can be both fitted into the larger Indo-Aryan pattern, and also have specific pragmatic and stylistic traits. Finally, a detailed picture of the phenomenon is achieved from quantitative and qualitative findings integration.

5 Conclusion

The research finds that the expression of degree in Pothwari adjectives is largely periphrastic and that speakers of Pothwari use lexical markers and intensifiers instead of morphological inflection to express comparative and superlative senses. Quantitative and qualitative results all point to a strong preference of comparative over superlative structures in everyday speech, which is indicative of relational comparison in everyday communication. These findings allow placing Pothwari in the context of larger typological groups that are also found in the Indo-Aryan languages, in which analytic structures have a predominant role in grammatical expression. In addition, the paper brings

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to light the sociolinguistic factors which affect language use i.e. age, education and the communicative context. The changes in expression show that Pothwari is a living and changing language, which is influenced by both the internal linguistic characteristics and the external factors, such as contact with the dominant languages, such as Urdu. Further studies can build on these findings by investigating the dialectal variation, historical development and cross-linguistic comparisons to further establish the linguistic identity of Pothwari.

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