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Review of *The Languages and Linguistics of South Asia: A Contemporary Guide*

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1 Introduction

With its amazing linguistic diversity and the language contact situation caused by centuries of migration, invasion, and cultural incorporation, South Asia offers an excellent opportunity for linguists to exercise their skill and challenge established theoretical linguistic claims. South Asian languages, with their unique array of linguistic features, have offered interesting challenges to prevalent formal linguistic theories and emphasized the need to expand their horizons and modify their theoretical assumptions.

This book is the 7th volume of The World of Linguistics series edited by Hans Heinrich Hock. The current book is jointly edited by Hans Heinrich Hock and Elena Bashir, two excellent South Asian linguists with extensive experience of working in the field on a number of South Asian languages.

At more than 900 pages, the volume is divided into ten sections pertaining to different linguistic levels (morphology, phonetics and phonology, syntax and semantics), grammatical traditions to study South Asian languages, sociological phenomena (contact and convergence) and sociolinguistics of South Asia, writing systems, as well as the use of computational linguistics approach to study South Asian languages in the twentieth century. Each section offers an introduction to the main theme by one of the editors who also are main contributors to the sections they edited. The sections further branch into chapters and sub-chapters to offer greater detail about the topic at hand. Each section ends with a list of bibliographic references.

2 Summary

2.1 Introduction

In their introduction, the editors clarify the vision involved in the compilation of this volume in the series, and aim to provide a detailed survey of work available on South Asian languages. Here they present a brief overview of the book including a description of its sections as well as an inventory of phonetic symbols used to describe the phonemic inventory of South Asian languages. In the following paragraphs, I present brief summaries of each section in the book followed by a critical evaluation of the book.

2.2 Section 01: The languages, their histories, and their genetic classification

This section was edited and introduced by Hans Heinrich Hock, who contributed chapters on Old and Middle Indo-Aryan as well as on some language isolates. The section also includes chapters written by James Gair, Agnes Korn, Richard Strand, Suresh Kolichala, Gregory Anderson, Carol Genetti, Anvita Abbi, Étienne Tiffou, and Norman Zide.

The longest and most detailed section in the book, it offers comprehensive discussions on different branches of Indo-European languages used in South Asia. This section is rich with historical evidence for the analyses offered. There are chapters on the historical development of Indo-Iranian, Indo-Aryan, Iranian, Nuristani, Dravidian, Austroasiatic, Tibeto-Burman, and Daic languages. A chapter on language isolates offers details on Burushaski, Kusunda, Nihali, and Andaman languages.

As mentioned in the introduction and elsewhere in the book, it's important to distinguish between features internally developed in a language and the features acquired by language contact. One way to investigate this distinction is to group languages into families and study their genetic classification. This further leads to the classification of features shared by languages in the same family and the features developed by unrelated languages that grew in the same geographical region or the languages that were brought into contact due to social, cultural, religious and/or economic reasons. This classification, however, is far from straightforward and centuries of inward and outward migration has muddied the distinction even further.

In order to trace the historical development of Indo-Iranian, Hock brings in evidence from Vedic Sanskrit, Avestan, and Old Persian. His arguments are based on references from mythologies as well as phonological processes (palatalization, vowel merger, (de)aspiration, fricativization, RUKI etc.) that distinguish Indo-Iranian from other branches of Indo-European family. Using this evidence, he further divides Indo-Iranian into Indo-Aryan, Iranian, Nuristani, and Mitanni (with inconclusive evidence in favor of the latter). He also offers a detailed discussion of Old and Middle Indo-Aryan and describes the morphological, morpho-syntactic, and phonological processes that mark the development from Old to Middle Indo-Aryan. He also discusses the social scenario that led to diglossia and koiné between Sanskrit and various Prakrits and coexistence of various vernaculars in the same region.

This is followed by chapters on the identification and classification of modern Indo-Aryan, Iranian, Nuristani, Dravidian, Austroasiatic, Tibeto-Burman, and Daic languages as well as a chapter on isolates. Each chapter is further divided into sub-chapters dealing with the historical development as well as formal phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexical features found in each sub-family. These sub-families are further discussed individually along temporal and geographical dimensions and a detailed discussion of development along every dimension is offered.

As Gair mentions, the attempts at this classification are mired by local and national politics, ethnic identity, and lack of agreement among linguists and survey developers on what constitutes a language vs. a dialect.

2.3 Section 02: Contact and convergence

Elena Bashir edited this section on language contact and linguistic conversion in South Asia. This section includes contributions by Bashir herself as well as by Hans Heinrich Hock, Franklin Southworth, Colin Masica, Lutz Rzehak, Shobhana Chelliah, and Nicholas Lester.

Colin Masica offers a brief introduction to language contact and convergence scenarios in South Asia. The further sub-chapters in the section are divided into temporal and geographical groups. The temporal dimension includes discussion of language contact in the ancient pre-Vedic as well as post-Vedic times. In the modern times, the discussion revolves around the pre-Partition (before 1947) and post-Partition periods in Pakistan. The geographical areas under discussion are mainly the northwestern region of present-day Pakistan (Pamir-Hindukush-Karakoram-Kohistan-Kashmir and Balochistan) and Afghanistan. There is a short chapter on the influence of English, via trade and colonization, on South Asian languages.

The partition of the Subcontinent in 1947 dramatically altered its linguistic landscape. This led

Bashir to divide her discussion of languages in northwest Pakistan and Afghanistan into pre- and post-1947. These regions are rich with languages from Iranian and Indo-Aryan descent as well as languages of undetermined lineage such as Burushaski. Bashir offers an interesting account of this mix of Brahui, Burushaski, Baluchi, Persian, Bengali, Punjabi, Kashmiri and other South Asian languages in the pre-1947 era. Industrialization, economic migration, and inter-regional displacements caused by wars and floods have led to further language contact between migrants from northwest Pakistan and Afghanistan with speakers of languages from the southeast plains and further south. Bashir discusses the mutual impact of these languages in the post-1947 Pakistan and Afghanistan. In such a complicated and diverse linguistic scenario, English as the language of former colonial masters and the language of prestige serves as a lingua franca as well as the official language along with Hindi, Hindi, and Pashto in India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan respectively. This has resulted in mutual exchange of features between the lingua franca and the local languages that come into contact with each other.

Due to its long history of foreign invasions and colonization, South Asia offers an excellent opportunity to explore language contact and the direction of impact on the languages involved in the process. While Bashir stresses the need to distinguish between inherited features and the features acquired via contact with other languages, Masica provides a list of syntactic, phonological, grammatical, and semantic traits shared by South Asian languages.

In their discussion of language contact in ancient times, Hock and Southworth bring evidence of migrations and thus language contact from references to objects and events in Vedic texts. Southworth's discussion is based on the incorporation of lexical items from Dravidian and Munda/Austroasiatic languages as well as an inferred "Indus" language into Old Indo-Aryan. Hock further brings in the structural and geographical evidence to determine the substratum influence on South Asian languages.

2.4 Section 03: Phonetics and phonology

This section is edited by Hock who also made major contribution to the section along with a chapter on phonetics by Peri Bhaskararao. This is one of the smallest sections in the volume, thus indirectly emphasizing the need for more research in the phonetics and phonology of South Asian languages. Hock himself is aware of the fact and points, in the introduction to this section, to the dearth of relevant literature in the field.

The chapter on phonetics, written by Bhaskararao, mainly lists works investigating the phonetic features in a number of South Asian languages. He discussed the fascinating variation shown in articulation, airstream mechanism and phonation types, voice onset time (VOT), and nasality in South Asia. His discussion of suprasegmental features is rather limited and focuses mainly on the inventory and types of lexical tones in Punjabi, Shina, and Kalami-type languages. His list of recent works on tones in Punjabi is far from complete, though, and references to recent works such as Kanwal and Ritchart (2015) are missing.

In the chapter on phonology, Hock has discussed the phonology and phrasal prosody of South Asian languages in more detail. He offers brief discussions on phonological processes such as sandhi, retroflex assimilation, gemination, syncope, vowel and consonant harmony, and palatalization. He then goes on to discuss the prosody of South Asian languages and mentions a number of recent and earlier works to problematize the issues of stress and accent placement and their interaction with each other in languages spoken in South Asia. Hock states that all the prosodic investigations of these languages report the presence of a series of LH contours in fundamental frequency (f₀) across a sentence.

However, he does not point out the uncertainty surrounding the interpretation of this LH contour as a bitonal unit vs. a monotone low pitch accent (L*) followed by a high phonological phrase boundary tone (H). He does refer to Féry (2010) for an account of Hindi prosody but it would have been interesting to discuss the typological claims forwarded in this work. Féry has discussed lexical stress or its lack thereof to claim that South Asian languages form a fourth typology of languages

(the other three being tonal, pitch accent, and intonational) called ‘Intonational Phrase languages’: languages that lack lexical stress and parse each syntactic phrase as a separate phonological phrase. This idea is new in the field and has not been discussed extensively by South Asian linguists. In fact, the latest works on Hindi prosody produced by Féry and her collaborators (Féry and Schubö 2010, Féry and Kentner 2010, Gryllia et al. 2015) as well as a detailed discussion of Tamil prosody by Keane (2014) are also missing.

Hock’s discussion of South Asian prosody mainly revolves around the alignment of L and H tones with the stressed syllables, the placement of lexical stress and its relation with syllable weight in languages such as Bangla, Hindi, Punjabi, Telugu, Gujarati, Nepali, Maithili, and Hindi-Urdu. He concludes the chapter with a brief overview of discussion on rhythm in Munda and Tibeto-Burman languages.

2.5 Section 04: Morphology

This section is written and edited by Hock with contributions by Bashir and K. V. Subbarao. After introducing the section, Hock goes on to discuss the typological, theoretical, and morphological issues relevant for a discussion of the morphology of South Asian languages. There are sub-chapters on agent, object, and agreement marking. Hock has devoted separate sub-chapters to list publications on the morphology of Indo-Aryan and Dravidian languages as well as a brief list of works on Munda, Tibeto-Burman, and Burushaski languages. Then follows the main discussion revolving around the typological issues involving morphological processes such as agglutination, incorporation, affixation, reduplication, noun inflections and case markings as well as alternation of roots marked mainly by vowel alternations. His overview of theoretical issues refers to the contributions made by Tamil grammatical tradition and the influence of Panini in the field.

The chapter on morphosyntactic issues by Bashir provides a discussion of agentive case marking and transitivity in Indo-Aryan, Indo-Iranian, and Tibeto-Burman branches of South Asian languages. Subbarao’s discussion of case marking on objects presents general observations about theme and focus type markings in South Asian languages and then offers brief descriptions of cases in Tamil and Malayalam. The most detailed discussion in the section is offered by Hock regarding agreement markings in relation with ergativity, cliticization, honorificity, complex vs. auxiliary verbs and word classes.

2.6 Section 05: Syntax and semantics

This section, edited by Hock, includes chapters by Hock, Alice Davison, Rajesh Bhatt, Taylor Roberts, Bhuvana Narasimhan, E. Annamalai, Benjamin Slade, and Scott DeLancey. The syntax of South Asian languages has offered major challenges to formal syntactic theories. This section offers chapters on generative syntactic work on South Asian languages as well as contributions on Minimalist approach and Cognitive Linguistic approach. The discussion of Lexical Functional Grammar (LFG) and Head-driven Phrase Structure Grammar (HPSG) approaches to South Asian languages is missing, although there is sizable literature found on LFG-based discussions of word order, case marking, complex verb predicates, and information structure in South Asian languages. However the absence of these approaches may be attributed to lack of contribution to this section from the practitioners of the said theories. The chapters revolve around discussions of long, short, and intermediate scrambling, case and agreement marking, movement of constituents, and wh-movement and its relation with scope marking.

Narasimhan’s section on Cognitive Linguistics includes references to the psycholinguistic research conducted on South Asian languages. The section offers a brief discussion of background assumptions in the theory and how the psycholinguistic work on South Asian languages has led to a wider understanding of cognitive processes. Most of the researches cited in the section are recent and limited to certain areas of interest in Hindi and Tamil. The chapter ends with the author’s emphasis on the need for more psycholinguistic investigations on varied topics in a greater variety of South Asian languages.

Then follows a very detailed chapter on the morphosyntactic typology that offers discussions on oblique experiencer vs. oblique subjects, structure of complex verbs, and finite and non-finite subordination. In the midst of this discussion is inserted a brief chapter on the semantics of South Asian languages. The discussion is carried out in the context of complex verbs and ends with an emphasis on the need for more research in the field. The last chapter in this section is based on morphosemantic typology and offers discussion on evidentiality marking in different South Asian languages.

2.7 Section 06: Sociolinguistics

Edited by Bashir, this section offers chapters written by Anvita Abbi with input by Carol Genetti and Gregory Anderson, Harold Schiffman, Probal Dasgupta, E. Annamalai, Ian Smith, and Tej Bhatia. The sub-chapters include discussion about the sociolinguistic situation in and around India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. The section also includes discussions on language policy in South Asia as well as diglossia in Bangla and some Dravidian languages. Further contributions include a chapter on South Asian creoles and pidgins and one on the status and usage of South Asian languages in diaspora.

The linguistic scene in South Asia is complicated and offers ample opportunities to study the emergence of languages and dialects and their death or relegation to the status of socially inferior languages. It's no wonder that many linguistic investigations in Pakistan are sociolinguistic in nature and discuss language attitudes and the social status of regional languages vs. the status of English and Urdu. This section in the book presents some of the pressing sociolinguistic issues in South Asia, namely language endangerment (discussed language family-wise), language documentation and the role of local governments in the process, language policy and planning, language attitudes leading to diglossia, and various pidgins and creoles that have sprouted due to language contact. This discussion is organized on the basis of language families and countries as well as individual languages. Some issues relevant for multilingual societies such as code-switching and -mixing, language identity and power, and language and gender are also discussed briefly.

Some chapters in the section merely list the endangered languages in a sub-family without identifying the causes whereas others discuss the geographical spread of a sub-family and identify reasons for the endangerment of that particular sub-family. The commonly identified causes are the shift to another language that may or may not have been caused by the change in government policies, contact with outsiders, and the influence of English. The most common characteristic of 'safe' languages is claimed to be the isolation from speakers of other languages and using a language in as many social and official domains as possible. Bashir identifies that the education policies in Pakistan and Afghanistan have also contributed to the language shift and the situation is further exacerbated due to lack of efforts for language revival and maintenance. Some languages are threatened because a large number of its speakers die in wars or local/regional conflicts (e.g. in northeast India) or because of the stigmatization of a culture and its associated language (e.g. Kalasha).

The chapter on language policy offers interesting insight in the issue starting from the classical period and moving on to discuss the impact of British colonization and the language policies in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh after Partition as well as in post-colonial Nepal and Sri Lanka. What is missing but would be interesting to know is how the long periods of foreign invasions and contact with Central Asian and Pakistani tribes have influenced the linguistic landscape of Afghanistan. Moreover, a discussion of how the invasion and subsequent settlement of India by the Central Asian rulers affected the local languages is never discussed in most accounts of the linguistic history of Indian colonization, and this section is no exception.

Diglossia is inevitable in multilingual societies. Paolillo (2000) claims that many prominent South Asian languages are or have been diglossic. For Tamil, (the heading of the chapter promises to discuss diglossia in Dravidian languages, but the discussion solely revolves around Tamil), this situation involves having a high literary, written variety vs. a low, spoken, daily life variety. The chapter on pidgins and creoles discusses a few products of colonization (Indo-Portuguese by Portuguese

colonization and Sri Lanka Malay created by East-Indies soldiers brought in by Dutch colonizers) as well as trade with neighboring areas (Nagamese), lack of a lingua franca (Bazaar Hindi and Veddah), and contact with colonizers' language (Butler English). The section ends with a brief list of researches and journals discussing the linguistic usage of the South Asian diaspora.

2.8 Section 07: Indigenous South Asian grammatical traditions

This section is edited by Hock, with contributions from Hock and E. Annamalai. The former wrote the chapter on Indo-Aryan grammatical traditions while the latter contributed a chapter on Tamil and Dravidian grammatical traditions. The smallest section in the volume, this section offers an insight into the grammatical traditions prevalent in the study of South Asian languages.

Hock introduces the topic with an emphasis on the importance of traditional grammars of South Asian languages and considers them on a par with the modern grammars written under the influence of Western grammatical theories. Apart from Indo-Aryan grammatical tradition based on Sanskrit and Prakrits and the Dravidian tradition, he identifies two other traditions, namely Tibetan and Sidat Sangara. This section contains chapters on the first two traditions only. Hock also discusses a number of early grammatical activities based on the analysis of Vedic texts. These activities include the phonetic analysis of Vedic texts and the sandhi rules, the etymological analysis of word meanings, and the most distinct of all (according to him), the grammatical analysis starting with Panini's work. The chapter on phonetics describes briefly the incorporation of some early phonetic categorization of voicing and retroflexion from the early Indo-Aryan grammars into modern phonetic literature. Hock's discussion of Indo-Aryan grammar revolves mainly around Panini's grammar which he dubs the "crown jewel" of this grammatical tradition. Although Hock states that the main discussion in Panini's grammar is concerned with the phonology of words rather than syntax, Hock, in this chapter, has explained the syntactic issues such as agreement and sentencehood, case, and verbal affixes. He also points out the lack of explicit rule application in Panini's work although these applications have been offered by subsequent grammars and commentaries based on Panini's work. Hock concludes the chapter with a brief description of grammatical issues raised by Old Indo-Aryan philosophers. These issues include (online) language processing, language priming triggered by word "connectivity" (collocation/word association), distinction between agentive and non-agentive subjects, and the "conventional" (arbitrary) vs. the "eternal" (non-arbitrary) association between words and their meanings.

The chapter on Dravidian grammatical tradition offers a discussion of grammars written for Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam, and Telugu. These grammars are based on Paninian model and use Sanskrit as a guide to describe the grammars of their target languages. This is reminiscent of the Latin-based analysis of European languages in the Western grammatical tradition. After offering a brief introduction on Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam grammatical traditions, Annamalai offers further details on each of these traditions separately. The section ends with a brief note on the contribution of indigenous grammatical traditions in the colonial grammars of South Asian languages.

2.9 Section 08: Applications of modern technology to South Asian languages

A very useful feature for a comprehensive guide such as the one under discussion, this section edited by Bashir includes chapters written by Bashir, Niladri Shekhar Dash, Amba Kulkarni, Yogendra Yadava, and Rajesh Bhatt. This section offers a brief history of computational linguistic work on South Asian languages and presents corpora and lexical resources produced and developed in India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Bangladesh in the last few decades. In the end, Bashir offers a description of applications developed for localizing and enabling South Asian languages on technology.

In her discussion on localization, Bashir offers details about the Pan Asian Networking Localization Project involving five South Asian countries namely Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Although this project involved only one or two major languages from each participating country, the contribution of individual research teams for developing resources in their target

language(s) is immense. The resources developed for these languages can later be used as models to work on localization projects for other South Asian languages. The rest of the section includes historical development of corpora and lexical resources as well as brief details about computational resources for Sanskrit, Urdu, Nepali, and Bangla. Then follows a country-wise summary of applications developed using those computational resources in India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. The section ends with short notes on the localization efforts, or the lack thereof, in under-resourced languages in the Subcontinent, i.e. Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, and Kashmiri.

2.10 Section 09: Writing systems

This section, primarily written and edited by Bashir, also includes two chapters by Stefan Baums. This is an interesting discussion on the historical development of different scripts and orthographic traditions found in South Asia as well as recent research on the topic at hand. Bashir discusses the colonial and cultural issues that led to the adoption of Perso-Arabic script for South Asian languages.

Baums offers a detailed discussion of different scripts for South Asian languages starting from Asoka's edicts to the modern Unicode system. He offers discussions on Kharosthi, different stages of Brahmi, Devanagari and Gujarati, Gurmukhi and Khojki, and Bangla and Oriya, plus a chapter on the development of South Indian scripts for Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, and Malayalam, as well as brief chapters on Sinhala, Dhivehi, and the use of Latin script for Konkani. He then briefly discusses the numeral and punctuation system in Kharosthi and Brahmi. Baums ends this section with a brief history of attempts to decipher the Indus inscription system.

In the subsequent chapters, Bashir offers a historical account of the adoption of Persio-Arabic script for South Asian languages such as Urdu, Punjabi, Kashmiri, Pashto, Sindhi, Balochi, Brahui, and Khovar. She also offers brief notes on the recent attempt at the adoption of writing system for a number of languages from northern Pakistan and also for Saraiki. She points out that the desire to maintain cultural and linguistic identity motivates these linguistic communities to use distinctive orthographic symbols for the same speech sounds. Bashir ends the discussion by pointing out a number of interesting research areas awaiting further work in the field.

2.11 Section 10: Sources and Resources

One important feature of the collection is this section listing available sources and resources on South Asian languages. The list is far from exhaustive and, like any such list, is slightly outdated. It includes print (journals, periodicals, handbooks, etc.) as well as electronic resources (online dictionaries, corpora, and other digital resources) available for South Asian languages. The list also offers resources separately for each language family. This means that some resources are duplicated but this facilitates the search for language-specific resources.

3 Evaluation

The book is a rich resource on South Asian languages and linguistics. The chapters on the historical evolution of different linguistic features in South Asian languages are fascinating and offer valuable insight in the development of these languages. This guide is valuable as it offers scholarly analyses of different linguistic features in South Asian languages as well as lists other resources to enable further research in the field. There are few such comprehensive guides to South Asian languages and this book is a valuable addition to the field.

This guide offers descriptive, typological, and formal analyses of different branches of linguistics in the framework of South Asian languages. Of course it does not cover all the research areas as a discussion on the semantics and pragmatics of South Asian languages (work done by Gambhir (1981), Han and Romero (2004), Bhatt and Dayal (2014), Dalrymple and Mycock (2011), Butt and King (1996, 1997) etc.) is missing. Similarly, work on South Asian varieties of English and the research in the field of Applied Linguistics is also not discussed in the book.

As mentioned above, this book offers formal analyses of linguistic phenomena. Yet some contributions read like lists of works on South Asian linguistics and fail to offer a critical insight into the

theoretical assumptions and analyses presented in the cited works. These may be best used as references to further access the cited works. Moreover, in some sections, the chapters and sub-chapters are not organized in an optimal way and the reader finds themselves jumping from one topic to another only to return to the previous topic again in the discussion. This is distracting and could have been easily avoided.

However, the book is generally organized in a practical and easy format. The language and subject-wise indices make the search for a particular language or topic easy, as do the bibliographic references at the end of each section. The country-wise discussion of languages is also very helpful if one is working on languages in a certain geographical region.

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