

A brief comment on Das Gupta's works

Graham Thurgood
California State University, Fresno

1.0 Introduction. The works of K. Das Gupta reviewed here span the course of two decades, and were written to serve as pedagogical grammars rather than as scholarly treatises on the various languages. Nonetheless, the purpose here is not to examine the merits of his work in terms of its original pedagogical intent but rather to examine its potential value to scholarship. The discussion below is designed to serve three purposes: to place each individual grammar into a diachronic context by providing as much of a genetic subgrouping as is currently available, to note the existence of other relevant works dealing with the same or similar material but often under a different name, and finally to evaluate the work itself.

In general, all the language descriptions suffer somewhat from having been written in what is essentially a single, rather traditional framework; however, it is important to note that it is just this background that the intended audience for these grammars is most likely to have. As a consequence, some reinterpretation of the materials is needed at times; fortunately, the abundance of data often allows this to be done. On the phonological level, the major flaw lies in the failure to note the tones in the tone languages---a drawback even more regrettable since it appears that Das Gupta was fully aware of the tones. In large part, however, these tonal languages are also described in available Chinese descriptions mentioned below.

2.0 The Adi languages. Many of Das Gupta's works have dealt with languages in the relatively-unknown and relatively-undescribed Adi group either individually [Galo (=Gallong) (1963; 1968b), Dafla (1969), Minyong (1977c), and Tagin (1977e; 1983)] or collectively ["Agglutination in Adi languages of Arunachal" (1976); "A few features in some of the languages of Arunachal Pradesh" (1977d); etc.]. These languages, also known as the Abor-Miri-Dafla or Mirish group, appear extremely closely-related to each other, so much so that the membership of the languages below is obvious upon inspection. Typical of this closeness is the striking parallelism of the cluster of morphological features cooccurring with the pronouns.

Chart 2.0: Adi pronominal morphology

	case	first person	second person	third person	plural marker
Eastern	'subject'	ngo	no	mi	-lu
Nishi	'object'	nga-m	na-m	mi-em	
Simon 1978	'possessive'	nga-k	na-k	mi-ge	

Apatani Simon 1978	'subject'	ngo	no	mo	-nu
	'object'	ngi-mi	ni-mi	mo-mi	
	'possessive'	ngi-ki	ni-ka	mi-ge	
Galo Simon 1978	'subject'	ngo	no	mi	-nu
	'object'	ngo-m	no-m	mi-em	
	'possessive'	ngo-kke	no-kke	mi-ge	
Galo Das Gupta 1963	'subject'	ngo	no	mi/bi	-lu
	'object'	ngo-m	no-m	mi-m/bi-m	-nu
	'possessive'	ngo-k ngo-kke	no-kke	mi-ge	
Padam Simon 1978	'subject'	ngo	no	bi	-lu
	'object'	ngo-m	no-m	bi-m	
	'possessive'	ngo-k	no-kke	bi-ke	
Hill Miri Simon 1978	'subject'	ngo	no	e/be	-lu
	'object'	ngo-m	no-m	e-m/be-m	
	'possessive'	ngo-k	no-kke	e-ke/be-ke	
Luoba Sun et al. 1980	'subject'	ngo:	no:	ko:	-lu
	'object'	ngo-m	no-m	ko-m	
	'possessive'				
Tagin Simon 1978	'subject'	ngo	no	e	-lu
	'object'	nga-m	na-m	ong -nu	
	'possessive'	ngo-ke	no-kke	e-ke-ge (?)	
Tagin Das Gupta 1983	'subject'	ngo	no	e	-nu
	'object'	nga(m)	na(m)	along	
	'possessive'	ngo-kke	no-kke	e-ke-ge	
Minyong Das Gupta 1977c	'subject'	ngo	no	bi	-lu
	'object'	ngo-m	no-m	bi-m	
	'possessive'	ngo-ke	no-ke	bi-ke	
Miri LSI 3.1. 594	'subject'	nga ¹	na	bui	-lu
	'object'	ngo-m	no-m	bui-m	
	'possessive'	nga-ka	na-ka	bui-ka	
Dafla Das Gupta 1969	'subject'	ngo	no	mi/be ²	-lu
	'object'	nga-m	na-m	mi-em ...	
	'possessive'	nga-k	na-k	mi-ge ...	
Dafla LSI 3.1.	'subject'	nga	na	ma	-lu
	'object'	nga-m	na-m	ma-m	
	'possessive'	nga nga-ka	na na-ka	mui-ga mū-ga	

It is not clear to me to what degree these stem alternations are real and to what degree they are a byproduct of the notational system used. Das Gupta classifies (p. 11) the be as a demonstrative used for third person reference.

The Gallong and Tagin grammars are particularly valuable as extensive treatments of languages otherwise sparsely attested, while the Dafla description supplements the available material in a minor way. Of these, the Gallong description is the most detailed. The note on Minyong, although quite limited, is sufficient to make the subgrouping of the language transparent. [A good description of Luoba of the above group is found in Sun, Lu, Zhang, and Ouyang (1980)].

A subgrouping note: Even from the enormously limited LSI (3.1:613-5) sample of data, it is clear that the Chulikata Mishmi [=Midu]---despite being one of the four main divisions of the Mishmi and despite the close phonological resemblance between the names Midu and Miju---must be subgrouped with these Adi languages rather than with the Miju language.

3.0 Miju and Kaman. Das Gupta's Miju (1977) is, as he notes, a tonal language and although Das Gupta's description does not record them, the description in of Kaman (=Miju) in Sun, Lu, Zhang, and Ouyang (1980:232-298) does. For the reader capable of handling the Chinese source, the Das Gupta treatment is a sometimes useful supplement. Nonetheless, for many purposes the Das Gupta treatment alone is quite serviceable.

While the identity or near identity of Miju and Kaman is quite obvious, their relationship to some higher order genetic subgroup is neither as obvious nor fully substantiated. Nonetheless, some evidence does exist (Thurgood 1985b; in press) for the configuration presented below.

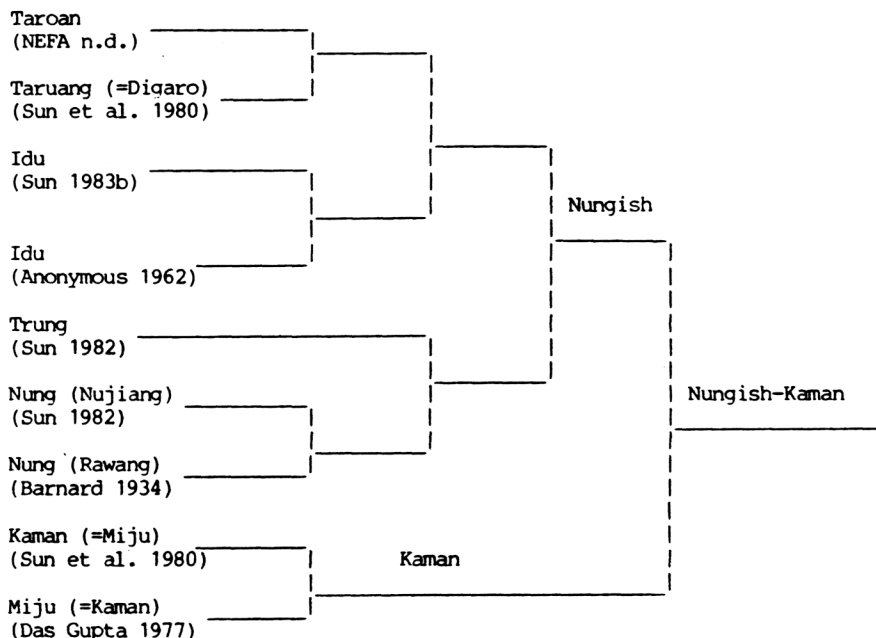


Chart 3.0: Nungish and Kaman

grouping note: The classification of Digaro with Mishmi more and more appears to be an ethnographic designation; it certainly is not a linguistic one.

4.0 Tsangla. The Central Monpa of Das Gupta (1968) and the Muotuo Monpa Sun, Lu, Zhang, and Ouyang (1980) are one and the same language as that referred to as Tsangla in the literature. Both contain information omitted on the other.

The above languages should not be connected with the Cuona Monpa also described in Sun, Lu, Zhang, and Ouyang (1980), is a quite distinct language comparable with the sparsely described Takpa of the older literature (cf. Jackson 1853; Shafer 1954).

5.0 Konyak (=Northern Naga): Nocte. Das Gupta's 1971 description of Nocte made even more valuable historically because it is one of only two reasonably complete descriptions of Konyak languages and the only such description that shows clear remnants of the earlier widespread system of verb agreement. The integrity of Konyak itself is well-established through the work of Burling and of French (1983). French, on the basis of various pieces of evidence, divides Konyak into two basic units:

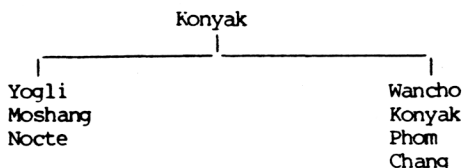


Chart 5.0: The internal subgrouping of Konyak
(French 1983:684-5)

6.0 Conclusion. Das Gupta's work although written for pedagogical purposes and thus from a pedagogically determined perspective is often quite valuable not just as a supplement but in many cases as a major source of information on a number of diachronically important languages.

Bibliography

- anonymous. 1962. A phrase book in Idu. Philological Section, Research Department, NEFA. Shillong.
- anonymous. 1959. Chingpo yu yufa gangyao [Outline of Jinghpao grammar]. Peking: Zhongguo Kexue Yuan, Shaoshu Minzu Yuyan Suo.
- Burling, J.T. 1934. A handbook of the Rawang dialect of the Nung language. Rangoon.
- French, James. 1974. Pronominal verb morphology in Tibeto-Burman. LTBA 1.1:108-55.
- . 1975. Pronouns and pronominal morphology in Tibeto-Burman. Ph.D. dissertation. Berkeley.
- . 1977. A historical perspective on ergativity in Tibeto-Burman. ms.
- . 1979. A historical perspective on ergativity in Tibeto-Burman. In Ergativity, edited by Frans Plank. Academic Press, pp. 419-34.