

# A review of ‘Pronominality and deixis in Bangla’ by Dasgupta (1992)

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## Abstract

This document reviews the article titled ‘Pronominality and deixis in Bangla’ by Dasgupta (1992) with a special focus on the writing techniques described by Graff et al. (2021). The book recommends the use of a few techniques for bettering the quality and readability of the overall write up. Here I attempt to assess the aforementioned article and note down the writing techniques mentioned by Graff et al. (2021) which are used in this article.

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## 1 Background

In this article, Dasgupta (1992) talks about the distribution and functions of pronouns of Bangla. He addresses the core issues seen in the literature regarding

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the description of these forms. The claims are supported with appropriate examples and a better alternative analysis.

Now we take a look at the specific techniques Dasgupta (1992) uses in the article. In appendix A I have listed down all the quotations which I found relevant for the discussion on writing techniques.

## 2 Review

As Graff et al. (2021) themselves note, the single most important template that is recommended in the book is “They say, “\_\_\_\_\_”, I say, “\_\_\_\_\_””. This simply means to put our point in context of what others have already said. Dasgupta (1992) precisely seems to be following this, but not really in the order. Graff et al. (2021) also assert that the order or the *form* of the templates is not important. A better readable and more directed write up is something that is aimed at by the use of such techniques.

As can be seen in [A1] (p. 61), Dasgupta (1992) seems to pose his ‘I say’ part very clearly in the beginning. Immediately after introducing his central claim, he puts forth a context as can be seen in [A2] (p. 61). This is a move to establish what he wants to say in the context of what other researchers have already said (or have not said, in this case) regarding it. Dasgupta (1992) elaborates on his claim more in the coming paragraphs as can be seen in [A3] (p. 62). We see that the motivation for the entire article is made explicit here.

Dasgupta (1992) then introduces what Graff et al. (2021) call a ‘naysayer’ as can be seen in [A4] (p. 62). This is a naysayer since he has already proposed what he will be calling that element. Now he is trying to introduce the contesting claims to the reader. Dasgupta (1992) has put forth the contesting claims with supporting examples. After that he expresses his disagreement with those claims with [A5] (p. 63).

Later, as seen in [A6] (p. 65) and [A7] (p. 67), Dasgupta (1992) reiterates his claim. Graff et al. (2021) advise ‘repeating with a difference’, where the author tries to re-describe something and add something to it while doing this.

Following ‘repeat with difference’, Dasgupta (1992) adds a metacommentary, where he critically revisits his claim. This is another helpful technique called ‘metacommentary’ by Graff et al. (2021). Have a look at [A8] (p. 67).

After positing both the sides of the claim in an organised and structured way, Dasgupta (1992) then gives examples which re-establish his central point. All the paragraphs in the article are well connected and they share one common narrative thread throughout. Whenever this track of narrative is supposed to change, Dasgupta (1992) introduces new major sections. This is a very good way of directing the writing to a point where we, as authors, want to reach.

Dasgupta (1992) uses verbs like *report*, *argue*. These verbs signal the action that is actually supposed to be depicted in such contexts. E.g., In a context where person X is contesting person Y’s argument, if one writes, ‘Y says abcd, but X says otherwise’, it doesn’t fully describe the action. Instead if one writes ‘Y says abcd, but X contests that’ it becomes more expressive and less monotonous.

The overuse of ‘say’ verb in any informative writing becomes boring as well as less expressive. By using more expressive and apt verbs Dasgupta (1992) has avoided that problem some times. Still I believe that there are places where the writing could have been significantly better if he had chosen different verbs. Following is an attempted rewritten version of [A9] (p. 72).

The contrast between (69) and (70) *suggests* that, given a name as an antecedent, the markedly deictic proximal pronoun *er* is unavailable, and one must resort to the sequent pronoun *tar* (or to a very different option not discussed in this paper). Thus the fact that, in (67), the antecedent *e lokTa* ‘this man’ accepts coreference with the proximal pronoun *er* *warns us* that, despite the presence of the lexical noun *lokTa* ‘man’, the deictic force of the determiner *e* ‘this’ continues to operate.

Another strategy that Graff et al. (2021) recommend is of repeating key-words in order to keep the text tied as one narrative. Dasgupta (1992) constantly keeps on using the keywords such as *deixis*, *pronominal*, *augment*, *determiners*, *descriptive account* etc. to keep the flow of the text directed. Because of conscious efforts like these his article seems to be very well tied and the reader doesn’t feel lost while going through it. All the paragraphs are connected by using techniques like metacommentary, repetition with a difference and use of key-words.

According to Graff et al. (2021), title itself is a form of metacommentary. Dasgupta (1992) could have chosen a better title, because the one he has chosen barely talks about the central theme of the paper which is the distinction between the augmented and unaugmented pronouns of Bangla. A better title could have been ‘*The morpho-pragmatic relevance of of augmentation in Bangla pronouns*’. Similarly he has a section-title ‘*Unaugmented determiners work as pronouns*’. This looks like a statement which is of course in that context not backed up nicely. A better title here could have been ‘*The connection between unaugmented determiners and pronouns*’. Here the reader immediately gets an idea what they can expect in the upcoming section, but still there is no direct claim about the concerned phenomenon.

Another place where Dasgupta (1992) could have improved a bit is glossing. An example of his glossing can be seen below:

(21) *o lokTa bhabche je o jitbe*  
 that man thinks that he will-win  
 ‘*That man* thinks that *he* will win.’

Is the interlinear gloss contributing even slightly to this piece? It is identical to the free translation he has given except the hyphen seen in *will-win*. More morphological information regarding the words would have aided the reader understand nuances of Bangla words. Since Dasgupta (1992) himself mentions the connections between Bangla and other Indo-Aryan languages quite often, morphological details would have been helpful in understanding the connections between these languages.

## A Appendix of quotations

The following is a list of all the quotations taken from Dasgupta, 1992.

1. It is argued in the paper that the class of pronominals includes items specified for the deictic feature [ $\pm$ Distal] distinguishing proximal from distal expressions.
2. We may begin our account by noting the contrast – which such widely used standard Bangla grammars as Chattopadhyay, 1972 and Bender and Riccardi, 1978 pass over in silence – between the determiners in (1)–(3), which have the argument *y*, and their unaugmented counterparts in (4)–(6).
3. We must at least give a name to the *y* element which is present in the ‘enlarged’ set and absent in the basic set. Our proposal is to call that element an Augment.
4. One approach to the problem is suggested by the existence of the Emphasizer *i*, which takes the form *y* in postvocalic word-final position, and which may occur phrase-medially.
5. The fact that (12), contrary to the prediction, is acceptable, and the fact that, again contrary to what such an account would imply, (11) does not convey an emphatic meaning (as the gloss indicates), suffice to deflate the hypothesis that the Augment is to be equated with the Emphasizer *i* in a synchronic description of Bangla.
6. To say that unaugmented Determiners may be used pronominally is not merely to comment on their ability to occur without a lexical Noun and to convey the sense of ‘this person’, ‘that person’, ‘the person’.
7. To complete the account, let us repeat, as shown in (16)–(18), the augmented determiners *ey*, *oy* and *Sey* are not available as pronouns (observationally, as items unaccompanied by lexical nouns) and thus are not even eligible for a binding-theoretic test of their pronominal potential.
8. This attempt at completing the account reveals a weakness in the argument as presented so far. Suppose one were to maintain that some or all elements normally called pronouns have the detailed structure of an NP dominating a Det and an N. Suppose further that this N is a null pronominal of some sort, and that it cooccurs without trouble with unaugmented Determiners. Now, let there be some phonological or other unknown reason which prevents the null pronominal N from cooccurring with augmented Determiners. If this is so, then even if the augmented Determiners are in fact pronominal, they will have no opportunity to prove this to the satisfaction of binding Principle B, because independent factors rule out (16)–(18) and make the test impossible.
9. The contrast between (69) and (70) shows that, given a name as an antecedent, the markedly deictic proximal pronoun *er* is unavailable, and one must resort to the sequent pronoun *tar* (or to a very different option not discussed in this paper). Thus, the fact that, in (67), the antecedent *e lokTa* ‘this man’ accepts

coreference with the proximal pronoun *er* shows that, despite the presence of the lexical noun *lokTa* ‘man’, the deictic force of the determiner *e* ‘this’ continues to operate.

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