

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

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PhD coursework examination
Paper I: Linguistic analysis
Term-paper submission 1
January 30, 2024

Abstract

This document reviews ‘Pronominality and deixis in Bangla’ (Dasgupta, 1992). First, I attempt to assess this article and note down the writing techniques of Graff et al. (2021) which the author has used in the article. Further, I critically review author’s claims regarding the nature of Bangla determiners. Both pronouns and demonstratives are deictic word-categories which exhibit differences in their distributional and syntactic features. E.g., ‘* *he boy*’ is an ungrammatical English phrase, but a similar syntactic-frame yields acceptable constructions in some other languages. A few Indo-Aryan languages prove this claim as they don’t have any formal distinction in demonstratives and pronouns. This multi-functional form is often called a ‘*demonstrative*’ when followed by a noun and a ‘*pronoun*’ when standalone. This categorisation demands independent justification with empirical support. An investigation of this category with a special focus on a few Indo-Aryan languages is carried out in this paper.

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This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution ShareAlike International 4.0 license. URL: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/legalcode.txt>. It falls under the paradigm of ‘reproducible research’. I share all the tools used in the production of this research. Resources used to produce this work can be found in the comprehensive repository of my research. URL: <https://puszcza.gnu.org.ua/projects/niranjan-rr>.

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I Critical review of the writing techniques

In this article, Dasgupta (1992) talks about the distribution and functions of Bangla pronouns. He addresses the core issues seen in the literature regarding the description of these forms. The claims are supported with appropriate examples and a better alternative analysis. 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 this discussion.

As Graff et al. (2021) note, the most important writing technique that is recommended in the book is to write in a dialogue form. ‘They say, “_____”, I say, “_____”’ is a template which they recommend. It simply means to put our point in context of what others have already said. Dasgupta (1992) seems to be following this, but not really in the order.

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 light of what other researchers had already said (or *had 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 objective of the 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. Here, he is trying to introduce the contesting claims. Dasgupta (1992) has put forth even the contesting claims with good supporting examples. After that he poses his disagreement with those claims as seen in [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) critically revisits his own claim. Graff et al. (2021) call this technique ‘metacommentary’. 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 support his central point. All

the paragraphs in the article are well connected and they share one common narrative throughout. Whenever this track of narrative is supposed to change, Dasgupta (1992) introduces new major sections. With this, he efficiently directs his writing to a point where he wants to reach.

Dasgupta (1992) uses verbs like *report*, *argue* instead of repetitive verbs like *say*. These verbs signal the action that is actually supposed to be depicted in such contexts. E.g., In a context where X is contesting person Y's argument, if one writes, 'Y says abcd, but X says otherwise', it only partially describes the event. Instead when one writes 'Y *proposes* 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 it is less expressive. By using better and apt verbs Dasgupta (1992) has avoided this problem most of the times. Still I believe that there are places where the writing could have been significantly bettered if he had chosen other 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 reading 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. The title of this article isn't perfectly representative of the content. Dasgupta (1992) could have chosen a better title. 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 full statement. 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 while there is no unsupported claim about the phenomenon.

Another place where Dasgupta (1992) could have improved a bit is in the interlinear glossing of the examples. 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.'

Here, the interlinear gloss doesn't contribute anything 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.

Overall, we may conclude that the author has heavily used writing techniques for making the article readable. His theoretical analyses are comprehensible to the reader without much efforts. Specifically, the natural flow of the article is helpful in this regard. Now, in the upcoming sections we analyse the theoretical claims made in this article.

2 Pronouns and demonstratives

There is a deep rooted discrepancy in the general usage and understanding of the term *pronoun* and its theoretical description. The general usage of this term involves forms representing all the person values of the language, but theoretical literature on pronouns often has a split between the first, second person and third person forms along with other types of pronouns. This split is observed based on the striking similarities between the third person forms and a few other classes of pronouns like demonstratives, interrogatives etc. In the following section we will have a closer look at the literature and see how these forms are described for Indo-Aryan languages.

2.1 Literature review

The theoretical literature on pronouns often distinguishes between the forms used for first, second persons and the third person. While discussing pronouns, Bhat (2004) asserts that it is impossible to group all the types of pronouns (as understood generally) under one category. He argues that the first and second person forms denote speech roles, but the rest have a cluster of functions including deixis, interrogation and so on. The former are called '*pronouns*', whereas the latter are called '*proforms*' in his work. Harley and Ritter (2002) also have proposed a similar split in the features of these forms. Why I find this worth mentioning here is because it shouldn't be very surprising that the proforms show formal as well as semantic overlap in some languages. The functional similarities of these two classes can very well reflect in the formal makeup of the language. We will now have a look at the literature on some Indo-Aryan languages which talks about these forms.

Dhongde and Wali (2009, Marathi), Kachru (2006, Hindi), Suthar (2003, Gujarati), Doctor (2004, Gujarati), Miranda (2003, Konkani) propose a categorical distinction between pronouns and demonstratives of the respective languages. These analyses follow a system in which pronouns are called demonstratives when they are followed by nouns. Shackle (2003, Punjabi) seems to be talking about a system which might be similar to the one I am proposing, as they say, “true pronominals only exist in the first two pronouns”, but they don’t provide any detailed argumentation for this claim.

We will now have a look at some data from a few Indo-Aryan languages with a focus on pronouns and demonstratives. This data uses a specific frame which demonstrates the formal similarity between pronouns and demonstratives. There are some special cases which we will see in the upcoming section.

2.2 Data from Indo-Aryan languages

We have seen in section 2.1 that whenever the pronouns are followed by nouns, typically they are called demonstratives in these languages. Till we establish a better alternative we will keep following this classification in this paper too. Hence in all of the following sentences the bare demonstratives are glossed as 3-(F)SG.

All the instances of the so called pronouns of Marathi, Hindi and Kashur (Kashmiri) are form-identical with the respective demonstratives.

(1) a. ही आंबा खाते. [Marathi]

h-i amba k^ha-t̥-e
3.PROX-FSG mango eat-IPFV-AGR

She (PROX) eats mango.

b. ही मुलगी आंबा खाते.

h-i mulgi amba k^ha-t̥-e
DEM.PROX-AGR girl.FSG mango eat-IPFV-AGR

This girl eats mango.

(2) a. ये आम खाती है। [Hindi]

je am k^ha-t̥-i hɛ
3.PROX.SG mango eat-IPFV-AGR AUX.PRS

Same as 1a.

b. ये लड़की आम खाती है।

je ləɽki am k^ha-t̥-i hɛ
DEM.PROX girl.FSG mango eat-IPFV-AGR AUX.PRS

Same as 1b.

(3) a. پہ جھپے اُم کھوان [Kashur]

ji tʃʰə am khja-van
3.PROX.SG AUX.PRS mango eat-IPFV

Same as 1a.

b. $\text{پہ کور جھپے اُم کھوان}$

ji ku:ɾə tʃʰə am khja-van
DEM.PROX girl AUX.PRS mango eat-IPFV

Same as 1b.

(Courtesy: Data by Sadiya Tariq, p.c. 2023-03-20; transcription by Anusha Ramasubramoney, p.c. 2023-03-23)

Punjabi shows optional oblique-marking of demonstratives. The Punjabi equivalents of ‘that boy’s mother’ are ‘ਉਸ ਮੁਣਡੇ ਦੀ ਮਾਂ’ (/us muṇḍe di mā/) or ‘ਉਹ ਮੁਣਡੇ ਦੀ ਮਾਂ’ (/o muṇḍe di mā/). Both of them mean the same, but interestingly even if the nominals from these phrases are dropped, the constructions stand acceptable, i.e., ‘ਉਸ ਦੀ ਮਾਂ’ (/us di mā/) or ‘ਉਹ ਦੀ ਮਾਂ’ (/o di mā/). In some varieties of Hindi too, optional oblique-marking is marginally accepted, but only with overt nouns, i.e., with the same meanings, the first two Punjabi phrases may be ‘उस लड़के की माँ’ (/us ləɽke ki mā/) and ‘वो लड़के की माँ’ (/vo ləɽke ki mā/) in some varieties of Hindi. This is worth mentioning because in most other Indo-Aryan languages which have obliques, they are seen obligatorily in demonstratives. Despite this, it is important to notice that the pattern regarding the usage of pronouns and demonstratives still remains the same and raises the same concerns. Thus for Punjabi too, we are sticking to the frame we have used so far.

(4) a. ਇਹ ਅੰਬ ਖਾਂਦੀ ਹੈ [Punjabi]

e əmbʰ kʰa-n-ɖ-i ɛ
3.PROX.SG mango eat-AUG-IPFV-AGR AUX.PRS

Same as 1a.

b. $\text{ਇਹ ਕੁੜੀ ਅੰਬ ਖਾਂਦੀ ਹੈ}$

e kuɽi əmbʰ kʰa-n-ɖ-i ɛ
DEM.PROX girl.FSG mango eat-AUG-IPFV-AGR AUX.PRS

Same as 1b.

(Courtesy: Ekadish Bal, p.c. 2023-03-20)

Some varieties of Gujarati show an independent pronominal form which doesn’t accept nouns after it and shows gender distinction, i.e., ‘તે’ (/te/, M) and ‘તેણી’ (/teɳi/, F). In some varieties the gender distinction in this form vanishes and it accepts nouns too. Except these varieties, some varieties of Gujarati at least show the common Indo-Aryan pattern that we have observed so far. For

that Gujarati has ‘અ’ (/a/, PROX) and ‘ઇ’ (/i/, DIST) as demonstratives. We can observe that in the following examples.

(5) a. આ કેરી ખાય છે. [Gujarati]

a kerī k^ha-j tʃ^h-e
3.PROX.SG mango eat-IPFV AUX.PRS

Same as 1a.

b. આ છોકરી કેરી ખાય છે.

a tʃ^hokri kerī k^ha-j tʃ^h-e
DEM.PROX girl.FSG mango eat-IPFV AUX.PRS

Same as 1b.

(Courtesy: Sahil Patel, p.c. 2023-03-20)

In all these examples, we see 3.PROX in X -a¹ sentences and DEM.PROX in X -b sentences. In the upcoming sections we will establish an alternative way of describing these forms.

2.3 Covert nouns

I propose that in all X -a examples demonstratives are used with covert nouns after them. So the so called pronominal usage from our primary example, 1b, can instead be glossed as follows:

(6) ही (मुलगी) आंबा खाते. [Marathi]

h-i (mulgi) amba k^ha-t^h-e
DEM.PROX-AGR (girl.FSG) mango eat-IPFV-AGR

This (girl) eats mango.

A strong motivation for this proposal comes from the fact that all the forms, from all the languages demonstrated so far, allow uttering the covert noun explicitly. Since most of these languages allow pro-drop, it’s not very hard to imagine a covert noun there. The moment we do that, we get all the X -b sentences. Dasgupta (1992) has anticipated this contestation. He has pointed out a potential problem with this way of looking at pronouns (at least for Bangla pronouns) with the following examples:

(7) a. এ লোকটা ভাবছে যে এ জিতবে। [Bangla]

e lok={a_i b^hab-tʃ^h-e tʃe e_{i/j} tʃit-b-e
DEM.PROX person=CLF think-IPFV-AGR COMP 3.PROX win-IRR-AGR

This man thinks that he (PROX) will win.

¹where X stands for any number between 1–5.

- b. এ ভাবছে যে এ লোকটা জিতবে।
 e_i b^fab-tʃ^h-e ʈe e lok=t_a*_{i/j} ʈit-b-e
 3.PROX think-IPFV-AGR COMP DEM.PROX person=CLF win-IRR-AGR
 He (PROX) thinks that this man will win.
 (Dasgupta, 1992, p. 66².)

Although his claim is mainly about Bangla, one may easily extend it to the languages which we have discussed; as the pattern seems to be persistent there too. Marathi equivalents which demonstrate this are as follows:

- (8) a. ह्या माणसाला वाटतं की हा जिकेल. [Marathi]
 h-ja maŋs-a=la_i waʈ-t-ə ki
 DEM.PROX.AGR-OBL person.M-OBL=DAT feel-IPFV-DFT COMP
 ha_{i/j} ʈiŋk-el
 3.PROX.MSG win-IRR-AGR
 Same as 7a.
- b. ह्याला वाटतं की हा माणूस जिकेल.
 h-ja=la_i waʈ-t-ə ki ha
 3.PROX.MSG-OBL=DAT feel-IPFV-DFT COMP DEM.PROX.AGR
 maŋus*_{i/j} ʈiŋk-el
 person.MSG win-IRR-AGR
 Same as 7b.

With these examples, Dasgupta (1992) is trying to say that if we have a bare DEM in the embedded clause, it can refer back to a noun of matrix clause (cf. 7a, 8a). On the other hand, if we have a bare DEM in the matrix clause and a DEM+noun in the embedded clause, the latter cannot refer back to the former, i.e., they can't be co-indexed (cf. 7b, 8b). This tries to counter the claim that every demonstrative has an overt noun after it. Dasgupta (1992) inserted an overt noun in the embedded clause to differentiate between pronominal and demonstrative usage. Based on binding interpretations he has ruled out the possibility which I have proposed. He also demonstrates the same with distal forms at both the places and those examples too have the exact same consequences in the languages under discussion.

The question that needs to be asked to this method is what is the motivation for only considering the noun 'लोक' (/lok/), which means 'a person'? This question is relevant because in the covert noun position, all these languages allow the usage of their respective reflexives. If we covertly have reflexives there instead of the noun for 'a person', the binding readings are accounted for correctly. No

²I modified transcription and glossing for consistency.

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.

Glossary

3	Third person 5–9	F	Feminine 5–7
AGR	Agreement 5–9	IPFV	Imperfective 5–9
AUG	Augment 6	IRR	Irrealis 7–9
AUX	Auxiliary 5–7	M	Masculine 6, 8, 9
CLF	Classifier 7	OBL	Oblique 8, 9
COMP	Complementizer 7–9	PROX	Proximal 5–9
DAT	Dative 8, 9	PRS	Present 5–7
DEM	Demonstrative 5–9	REFL	Reflexive 9
DFT	Default gender 8, 9	SG	Singular 5–9
DIST	Distal 6		

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