

Marlborough's Bengali

Frans Plank

Universität Konstanz – Somerville College, University of Oxford

125th Birth Anniversary Celebration of Professor Suniti Kumar Chatterji

Department of Linguistics, University of Calcutta

22 December 2015

1. INTRODUCTION

The titles in *Marlborough's Self-Taught Series of European and Oriental Languages*, appearing from ca. 1900 onwards, were “designed primarily for tourists and travellers in Foreign lands who, without previous knowledge of the Language and without the drudgery of prolonged study, desire to express themselves sufficiently to be understood”. (But they were advertised as “also form[ing] a good foundation for the more seriously minded student”.)

Few of these teaching aids had such an eminent linguist as their author as Suniti Kumar Chatterji, who covered Bengali for the series. I propose therefore to read *Bengali Self-Taught* of 1927 less as a would-be polyglot traveller than as a linguist, and in particular as a typologist keen to square his understanding of crosslinguistic diversity and unity with information about particular languages, here so succinctly provided for his mother-tongue by S. K. Chatterji, author almost simultaneously of the compendious *Origin and Development of the Bengali Language*, in two fat volumes.

My questions:

- What does Bengali-as-described-by-Chatterji teach us (well, me) about this particular language and thereby about crosslinguistic diversity?
(And for practical reasons I will here limit myself to noun inflection.)
- Are there lessons to be drawn from this language-particular description for (the pursuit of) linguistic unity, and vice versa?

2. TYPOLOGY

... is **not** language classification.

Its focus is less languages as such than on individual parameters of variation and the relations between them: Do they vary independently or do they co-vary, so that predictions can be made from one to the other?

Typology's remit is simple in principle, though beset with huge practical difficulties: it is (a) to chart linguistic **diversity** and (b) to seek out **order** or even **unity** in diversity and to make sense of it.

Just how diverse languages are has long been underestimated, and many typological generalisations have in light of improved crosslinguistic knowledge turned out to be premature. Once you care to look at it (or indeed to first document and describe it), every particular language will show you something that it doesn't share with many other languages, or indeed any.

Just how orderly diversity is and to what extent it is reined in by universals continues to be debated among typologists. (Though recently the universals deniers have clearly gone over the top.)

Patterns of variation can sometimes be made sense of linguistically (in some formal or functional manner), but sometimes they result from population-historical contingencies – and the difficulty here is to know which is which.

Methodologically, typology can be done in various ways. We have elsewhere distinguished “macroscopic” and “microscopic” typology.

Microscopic typology involves **in-depth analysis** (including experimental evidence), or “thick” description, and comparison will for obvious practical reasons be focused on a few languages – on languages the typologist is reasonably familiar with.

Macroscopic typology is admittedly more superficial and inspects variables whose values are easy to determine **at a glance** even if you are yourself wholly unfamiliar with a language; typically, these inspections would cover large language **samples** – and the problems here are (a) to construct samples which are **representative** of crosslinguistic diversity and (b) to tap sources of information for unfamiliar languages which are **reliable**.

Since languages are as diverse and uniform as they have **become over time** (during the lifespan of individual speakers; across generations of language acquirers; through contacts between speech communities; in the evolution of our species), typology's closest ally and rival is **developmental linguistics**. To the extent that linguistic diversity is systematic rather than random, what is shaping it could be **timeless typological laws** and/or **laws of historical change and stability**.

The typological(-cum-historical) research programme has been under way for centuries now and has gained unprecedented momentum in recent decades. Typology had long been a specialist enclave, but these days descriptive and theoretical linguistics, in whatever structural domain (from phonetics to pragmatics, not to forget the lexicon) and in whatever framework, is rarely done unaware of the aims and achievements of the typological programme. In this respect it is clear that typology is no longer only for typologists: linguistics has become typologically infused at its core.

3. TYPOLOGY AND LANGUAGE-PARTICULAR DESCRIPTION

What a typologist would like to have from a language-particular grammarian:

- (a) **reliable information** about the language concerned, enabling that language to participate in the charting of diversity and the search for order and unity
- (b) if no comprehensive account is to be had, a typological(ly-informed) **sketch/profile** of a language, focusing on those traits which are most **characteristic** (most distinctive/unique? or shared with some but not all other languages?) and giving an impression how the language compares with others on **salient** parameters of variation (such parameters as allow predictions for other parameters or also ones which represent presumed crosslinguistic rarities)

(OV vs. VO vs. free basic word order, nom-acc vs. erg-abs vs. act-inact vs. neutral alignment, analytic vs. synthetic vs. polysynthetic, agglutination vs. flexion/fusion, verbyness vs. nounyness, tone vs. pitch-accent vs. neither, clicks vs. non-clicks, /θ, ð/ vs. lack of /θ, ð/, ...)

- (c) whether comprehensive or sketchy, an accurate description of that language **in its own terms** – but executed with a view to cross-language **comparability**: experience tells that the lower-level the descriptive concepts, the more appropriate they are as *tertium comparationis* (higher-level concepts are less commonly identifiable across languages)

Questions:

- (i) Do the languages that have figured in typological research meet these requirements, guaranteeing the validity of inductive typological generalisations made on this basis (provided the sample was representative)?
- (ii) Are languages that have **not** (prominently) figured in typological research ones which do **not** meet these requirements?

For **question (i)**, the answers can be disappointing.

As a kind of a test case, I have previously looked at one language in a widely cited piece of collective typological research that continues to be in popular use, the *World Atlas of Language Structures* (WALS). The WALS database (online since 2008 at <http://wals.info/>, editors Matthew S. Dryer & Martin Haspelmath; earlier in book form: Oxford University Press, 2005) currently surveys 192+ “features” (= variables of crosslinguistic variation) and gives information for 2,679 languages overall (not all features are specified for each language: the minimum for each feature is a core sample of 100 languages).

WALS documents diversity and perhaps helps with the recognition of certain patterns of variation. It remains for the user to seek out unity – such as implicational universals linking individual parameters of variation. Presumed universals, sought out on whatever empirical basis, have been documented in THE UNIVERSALS ARCHIVE, available online at <http://typo.uni-konstanz.de/archive/intro/>

In terms of *WALS*, **German** is typologically reasonably prominent: it figures in surveys of 157 features.

However, taking a closer look at what *WALS* has made of German, it turns out that about a third of the descriptive assumptions made are problematic: they are factually erroneous; arbitrary or uncertain analytic decisions; valid for some regional/social varieties only; or unclear about what has been coded (Plank 2009; the *WALS* features then only numbered some 140).

German surely counts among the well-described languages; but curiously the source for much of the information used by *WALS* authors are L2 learners' grammars such as this:

Lederer, Herbert. 1969. *Reference Grammar of the German Language*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. (Based on *Grammatik der Deutschen Sprache*, by Dora Schulz and Heinz Griesbach.)

Bengali is not nearly as present in *WALS* as is German: it currently figures in 53 surveys out of 192+.

(For comparison: English 159, Hindi 144, a member of the 100-languages sample, Urdu 42, Gujarati 40, Sinhala 45, Malayalam 68, Tamil 83, Persian 147, Burmese 140, both also in the 100-sample, Chinese/Mandarin 153, Malay 4, Japanese 151, Turkish 154, Finnish 155, Egyptian Arabic 145, Irish 106.)

And it would seem that *WALS* is not the only typological enterprise where Bengali has been getting short shrift. Morphological typology has always had a focus on the quantitative parameter of analysis – synthesis – polysynthesis and on the qualitative parameter of agglutination – flexion/fusion; major issues in syntactic typology have long been word order correlations and relational alignment (and related matters such as noun incorporation and differential object marking); phonological/phonetic typology has always been preoccupied with inventories, but prosody has been attended to, too. Nowhere does Bengali seem to have played an inspirational role – although it **could** have been an important stimulant in many of these areas just mentioned.

Which recalls **question (ii)**, above:

Does Bengali not meet the requirements even for macroscopic typology?

Do typologists lack reliable information about Bengali; typologically informed sketches/profiles of this language; descriptions of it conducive to comparison?

Here is in summary what *WALS* does have about Bengali:

http://wals.info/languoid/lect/wals_code_ben

Language Bengali

WALS code: ben

Fid	Value	Feature	Source	Area
1A	Moderately large	Consonant Inventories	Ferguson and Chowdhury 1960; Klaiman 1990	Phonology
2A	Large (7-14)	Vowel Quality Inventories	Klaiman 1990; Ferguson and Chowdhury 1960	Phonology
3A	Average	Consonant-Vowel Ratio	Klaiman 1990; Ferguson and Chowdhury 1960	Phonology
4A	In plosives alone	Voicing in Plosives and Fricatives	Klaiman 1990; Ferguson and Chowdhury 1960	Phonology
5A	None missing in /p t k b d g/	Voicing and Gaps in Plosive Systems	Ferguson and Chowdhury 1960; Klaiman 1990	Phonology
6A	None	Uvular Consonants	Klaiman 1990; Ferguson and	Phonology

<u>7A</u>	<u>No glottalized consonants</u>	<u>Glottalized Consonants</u>	<u>Chowdhury 1960</u> <u>Klaiman 1990;</u> <u>Ferguson and</u> <u>Chowdhury 1960</u>	Phonology
<u>8A</u>	<u>/l/, no obstruent laterals</u>	<u>Lateral Consonants</u>	<u>Klaiman 1990;</u> <u>Ferguson and</u> <u>Chowdhury 1960</u>	Phonology
<u>11A</u>	<u>None</u>	<u>Front Rounded Vowels</u>	<u>Ferguson and</u> <u>Chowdhury 1960;</u> <u>Klaiman 1990</u>	Phonology
<u>12A</u>	<u>Complex</u>	<u>Syllable Structure</u>	<u>Klaiman 1990;</u> <u>Ferguson and</u> <u>Chowdhury 1960</u>	Phonology
<u>13A</u>	<u>No tones</u>	<u>Tone</u>	<u>Ferguson and</u> <u>Chowdhury 1960;</u> <u>Klaiman 1990</u>	Phonology
<u>14A</u>	<u>Initial</u>	<u>Fixed Stress Locations</u>	<u>Bykova 1981</u>	Phonology
<u>15A</u>	<u>Fixed stress (no weight-sensitivity)</u>	<u>Weight-Sensitive Stress</u>	<u>Bykova 1981</u>	Phonology
<u>16A</u>	<u>No weight</u>	<u>Weight Factors in Weight-Sensitive Stress Systems</u>	<u>Bykova 1981</u>	Phonology
<u>17A</u>	<u>No rhythmic stress</u>	<u>Rhythm Types</u>	<u>Bykova 1981</u> <u>Klaiman 1990;</u>	Phonology
<u>18A</u>	<u>All present</u>	<u>Absence of Common Consonants</u>	<u>Ferguson and</u> <u>Chowdhury 1960</u> <u>Klaiman 1990;</u>	Phonology
<u>19A</u>	<u>None</u>	<u>Presence of Uncommon Consonants</u>	<u>Ferguson and</u> <u>Chowdhury 1960</u>	Phonology

36A	Unique affixal associative plural	The Associative Plural		Nominal Categories
47A	Identical	Intensifiers and Reflexive Pronouns		Nominal Categories
51A	Case suffixes	Position of Case Affixes	Dasgupta 2003: 364	Nominal Categories
53A	First, two-th, three-th	Ordinal Numerals	Radice 1994	Nominal Categories
54A	Marked by reduplication	Distributive Numerals	Abbi 1992: 79	Nominal Categories
55A	Obligatory	Numeral Classifiers		Nominal Categories
65A	No grammatical marking	Perfective/Imperfective Aspect	Dahl 1985: 167	Verbal Categories
66A	Present, no remoteness distinctions	The Past Tense	Dahl 1985: 167	Verbal Categories
67A	Inflectional future exists	The Future Tense	Dahl 1985: 167	Verbal Categories
68A	Other perfect	The Perfect	Dahl 1985: 167	Verbal Categories
79A	Tense and aspect	Suppletion According to Tense and Aspect	Radice 1994: 50-55; Dimock 1965: 191	Verbal Categories
79B	None (= no suppletive imperatives reported in the reference material)	Suppletion in Imperatives and Hortatives		Verbal Categories
80A	None	Verbal Number and Suppletion	Radice 1994; Dimock 1965	Verbal Categories
81A	SOV	Order of Subject, Object and Verb	Dasgupta 2003: 375	Word Order

82A SV	Order of Subject and Verb	Dasgupta 2003 : 375	Word Order
83A OV	Order of Object and Verb	Dasgupta 2003 : 375	Word Order
84A XO V	Order of Object, Oblique, and Verb	Dasgupta 2003 : 375	Word Order
112A Negative particle	Negative Morphemes	Dasgupta 2003 : passim	Simple Clauses
117A Genitive	Predicative Possession	Ferguson 1972	Simple Clauses
118A Nonverbal encoding	Predicative Adjectives	Ferguson 1972	Simple Clauses
119A Identical	Nominal and Locational Predication	Ferguson 1972	Simple Clauses
120A Possible	Zero Copula for Predicate Nominals	Ferguson 1972	Simple Clauses
124A Subject is left implicit	'Want' Complement Subjects	Dasgupta 2003	Complex Sentences
138A Words derived from Sinitic cha	Tea	Malherbe and Rosenberg 1996 : 623	Lexicon
142A Logical meanings	Para-Linguistic Usages of Clicks		Other
143A VNeg	Order of Negative Morpheme and Verb	Dasgupta 2003 : 375	Word Order
143E None	Preverbal Negative Morphemes	Dasgupta 2003 : 375	Word Order
143F VNeg	Postverbal Negative Morphemes	Dasgupta 2003 : 375	Word Order
143G None	Minor morphological means of signaling negation	Dasgupta 2003 : 375	Word Order
144A SOV Neg	Position of Negative Word With Respect to Subject, Object, and Verb	Dasgupta 2003 : 375	Word Order
144B Immed postverbal	Position of negative words relative to	Dasgupta 2003 : 375	Word Order

144L SOVNeg	beginning and end of clause and with respect to adjacency to verb	The Position of Negative Morphemes in SOV Languages	Dasgupta 2003: 375	Word Order
144P No NegSOV	NegSOV Order		Dasgupta 2003: 375	Word Order
144QNo SNegOV	SNegOV Order		Dasgupta 2003: 375	Word Order
144RNo SONegV	SONegV Order		Dasgupta 2003: 375	Word Order
144S Word&NoDoubleNeg	SOVNeg Order		Dasgupta 2003: 375	Word Order

Showing 1 to 53 of 53 entries

- Glottocode:
- ISO 639-3:

Coordinates [WGS84](#) 24°N, 90°E
24.00, 90.00

Spoken in: [Bangladesh](#),
[India](#)

Alternative names

Ruhlen: Bengali
Other: Bangla
Ethnologue: Bengali

Sources

[Abbi 1992](#)

Reduplication in South Asian Languages. An Areal, Typological and Historical Study

[Bykova 1981](#)

The Bengali Language. Translation of Bengalskii jazyk. Languages of Asia and Africa

[Dahl 1985](#)

Tense and Aspect Systems

[Dasgupta 2003](#)

Bangla

[Dimock 1965](#)

Introduction to Bengali

[Ferguson 1972](#)

Verbs of 'being' in Bengali, with a note on Amharic

[Ferguson and Chowdhury 1960](#)

The phonemes of Bengali

[Klaiman 1990](#)

Bengali

[Malherbe and Rosenberg 1996](#)

Les langages de l'humanité: une encyclopédie des 3000 langues parlées dans le monde

[Radice 1994](#)

Bengali. A complete course for beginners

And here are a few of its own (morphological) variables about whose values for Bengali *WALS* remains silent:

- 20A Fusion of selected inflectional formatives
exclusively concatenative; excl isolating; excl tonal; tonal/isolating;
tonal/concatenative; ablaut/concatenative; **isolating/concatenative**
- 21A Exponence of selected inflectional formatives
monoexponential case; **case+number**; **case+referentiality**; case+TAM;
no case
- 25A Locus of marking: Whole-language typology
consistently head-marking; **cons dependent-marking**; cons double-marking;
cons zero-marking; inconsistent marking or other type
- 25B Zero marking of A and P arguments
zero-marking; **non-zero-marking**
- 26A Prefixing vs. suffixing in inflectional morphology
little or no inflectional morphology; **predominantly suffixing**;
moderate preference for suffixing; approx equal suffixing and prefixing;
mod pref for prefixing; predom prefixing

- 28A Case syncretism
no or minimal inflectional case marking; **syncretic for core cases only**;
syncretic for core and non-core cases; never syncretic
- 30A Number of genders
none; **two**; **three**; four; five or more
- 33A Coding of nominal plurality
prefix; **suffix**; stem change; tone; complete reduplication;
no morphological method primary; **PL word**; **PL clitic**; no PL
- 34A **Occurrence of nominal plurality**
no nominal PL; only human nouns, optional; only human nouns, obligatory;
all nouns, always optional; all nouns, optional in inanimates;
all nouns, always obligatory
- 36A Associative plural
= additive PL; **special bound ASSOC marker**; **special non-bound ASSOC marker**;
no ASSOC
- 37A **Definite articles**
DEF word = DEM word; DEF word \neq DEM word; **DEF affix on noun**;
no DEF article, but INDEF article; neither DEF nor INDEF article

38A Indefinite articles

INDEF word ≠ numeral 'one'; numeral 'one' = INDEF article; INDEF affix on noun; no INDEF article, but DEF article; neither INDEF nor DEF article

49A Number of cases

no morphological case-marking; 2 cases; 3; 4; 5; 6-7; 8-9; 10 or more; exclusively borderline morphological case-marking

51A Position of case affixes

suffixes; prefixes; tone; changes within noun stem; mixed, with no method predominant; postpositional clitics: prepositional clitics; inpositional clitics; neither affixes nor adpositional clitics

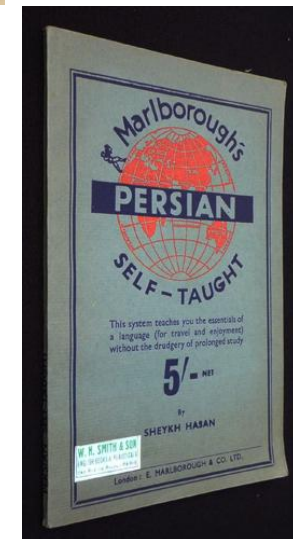
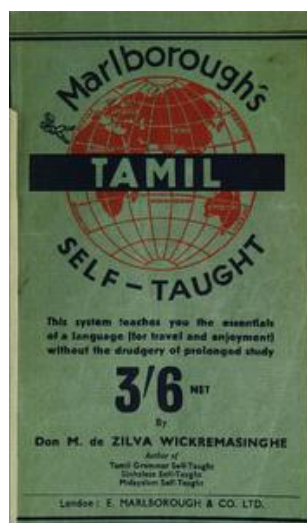
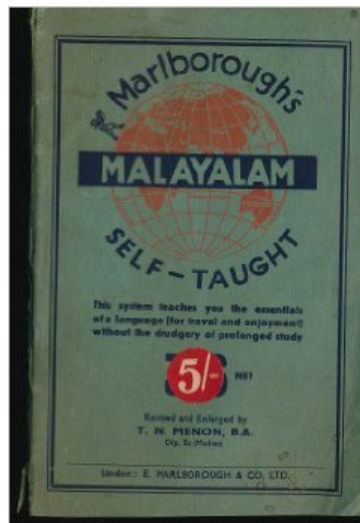
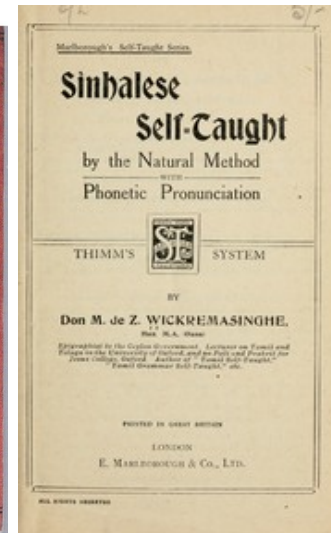
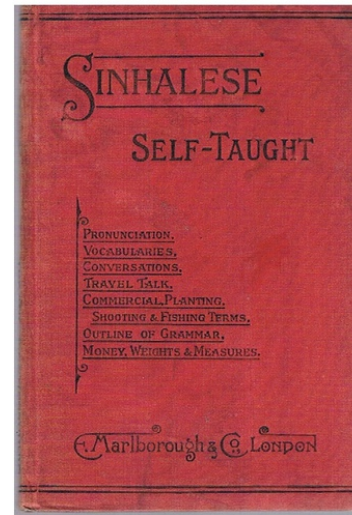
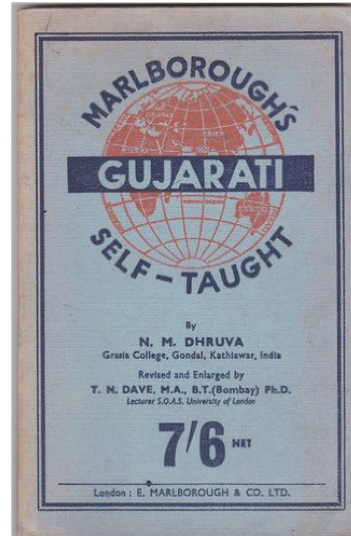
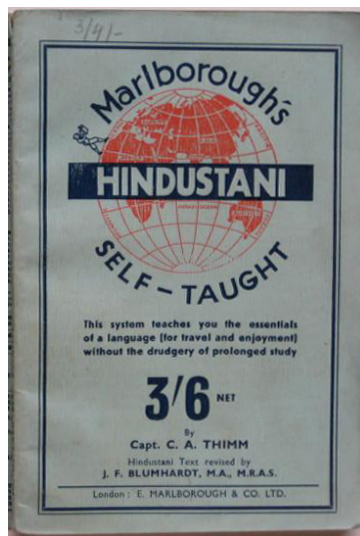
55A Numeral classifiers

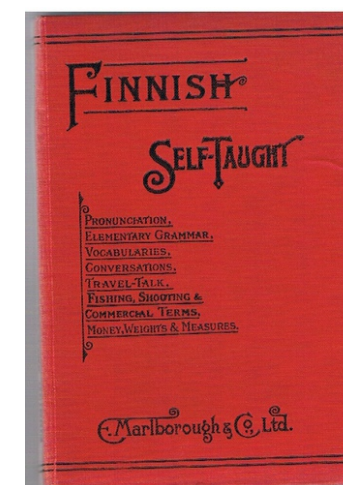
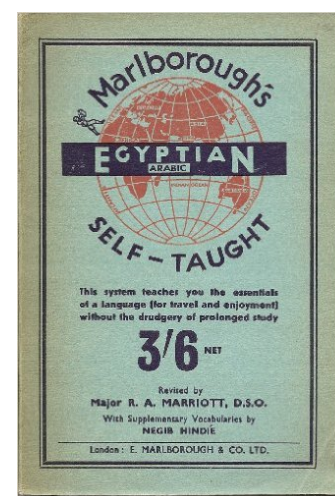
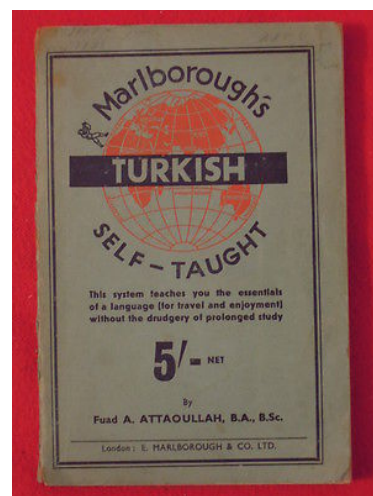
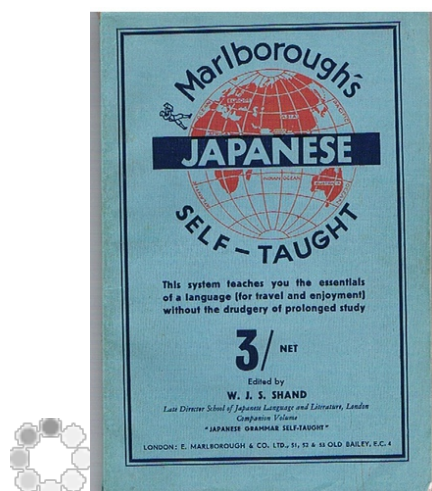
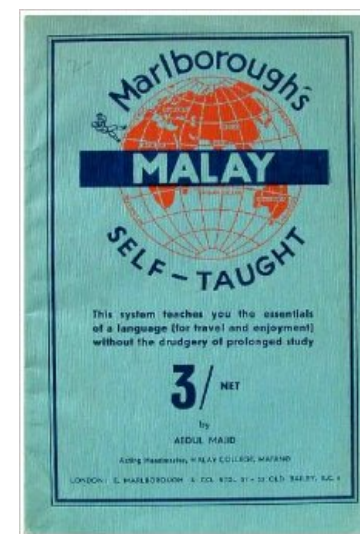
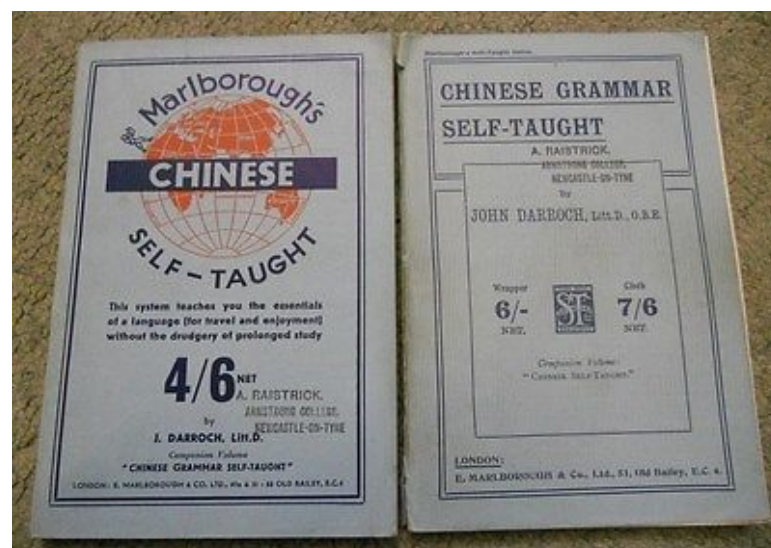
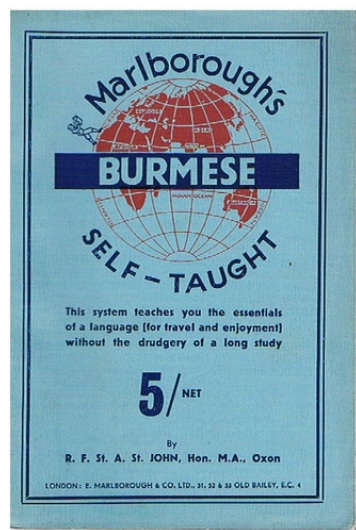
absent; optional; obligatory

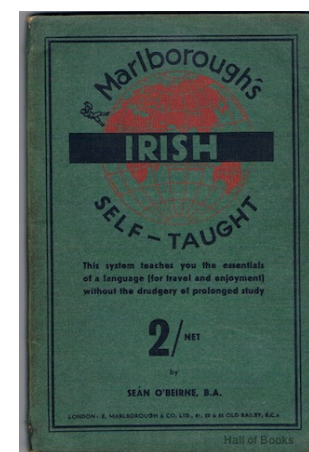
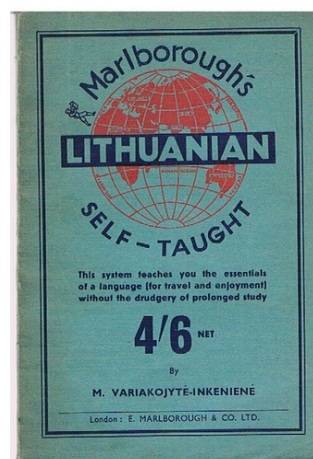
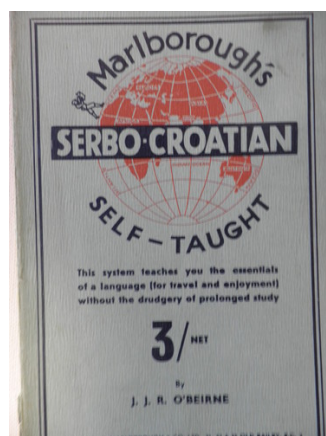
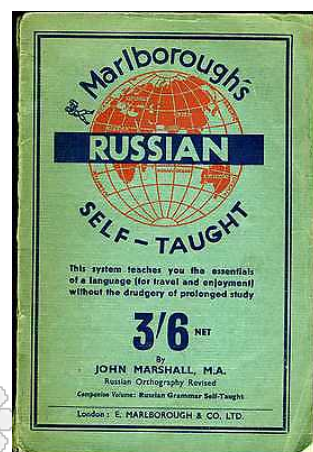
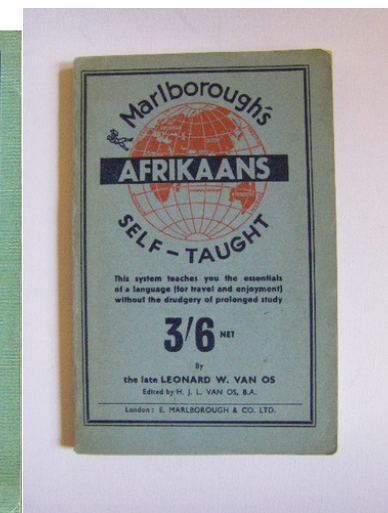
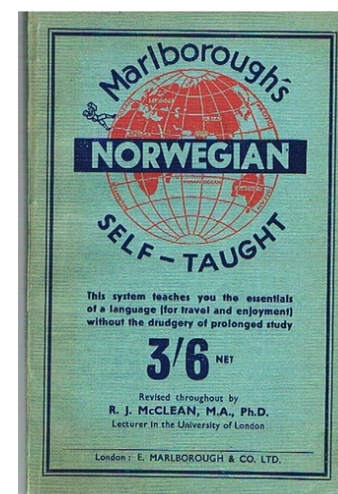
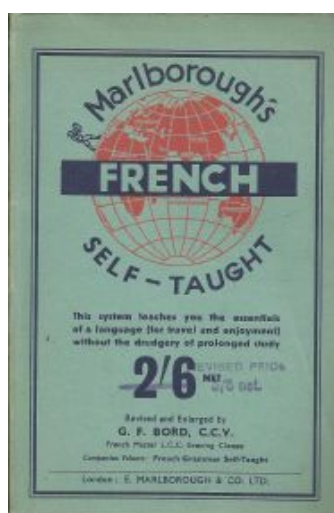
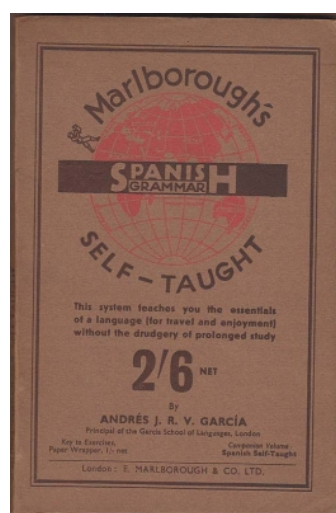
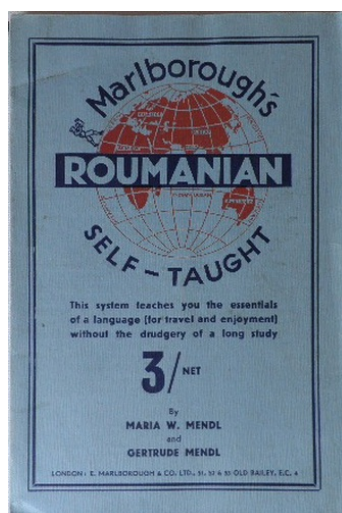
Could a macroscopic sampling typologist at a glance get such gaps filled for Bengali, rapidly helping *WALS* to even more data-points?

Well, there obviously **are** sources – and have been for some time – which are hardly inferior to the *Grammatik der Deutschen Sprache* by Dora Schulz & Heinz Griesbach.

4. *Marlborough's Self-Taught Series of European and Oriental Languages*







etc.

Marlborough's
Self-Taught Series
 of
European and Oriental Languages

DESIGNED primarily for TOURISTS and TRAVELERS in Foreign lands who, without previous knowledge of the Language, desire to express themselves sufficiently to be understood, these books also form a good foundation for the more seriously minded student.

The Method followed throughout the Series is to give Classified vocabularies and Conversational Phrases under Subjects, arranged in three columns giving first the English word or phrase, second the Foreign equivalent, and third the English phonetic pronunciation. This latter column makes correct pronunciation a simple matter. A section on Elementary Grammar is included in most cases and deals with the construction of sentences and any special peculiarities of the language, such as Genders, Tenses, Conjugation of Verbs, etc. For the more important languages a separate volume on Grammar is published containing, in addition to a thorough treatise on Grammar, Exercises for translation.

These books can be obtained through any bookseller.

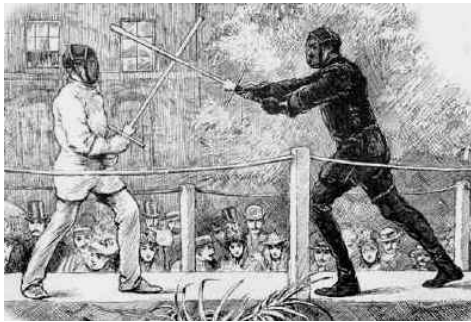
mission statement:

This popular self-instructional foreign language learning series first appeared before World War I, long before today's series such *Teach Yourself*, *Linguaphone*, etc. It was based on the “Natural” or “Direct” Method (pioneered by Trübner, Hartleben, and Gaspey-Otto-Sauer) and employed Marlborough's own system of phonetics.

<http://www.publishinghistory.com/marlboroughs-self-taught.html>

PS:

Regardless of sales figures, is there evidence that anybody has ever succeeded to teach her/himself any of the 37+ Marlborough languages, to the extent that they were able to express themselves sufficiently to be understood?
(Or for that matter any language covered in any other later teach-yourself series.)



An 1893 demonstration in Britain ... very likely by Hutton's own group
<http://www.thearma.org/essays/BritLegacy.htm#.VnaGx3sqYaA>

The Marlborough Method, aka “**Thimm’s System**”:

Carl A[lbert] Thimm (? – ?)

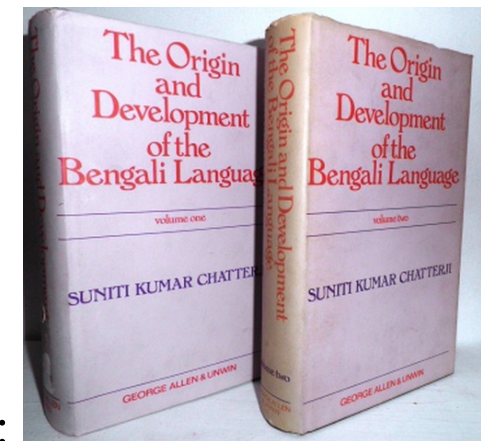
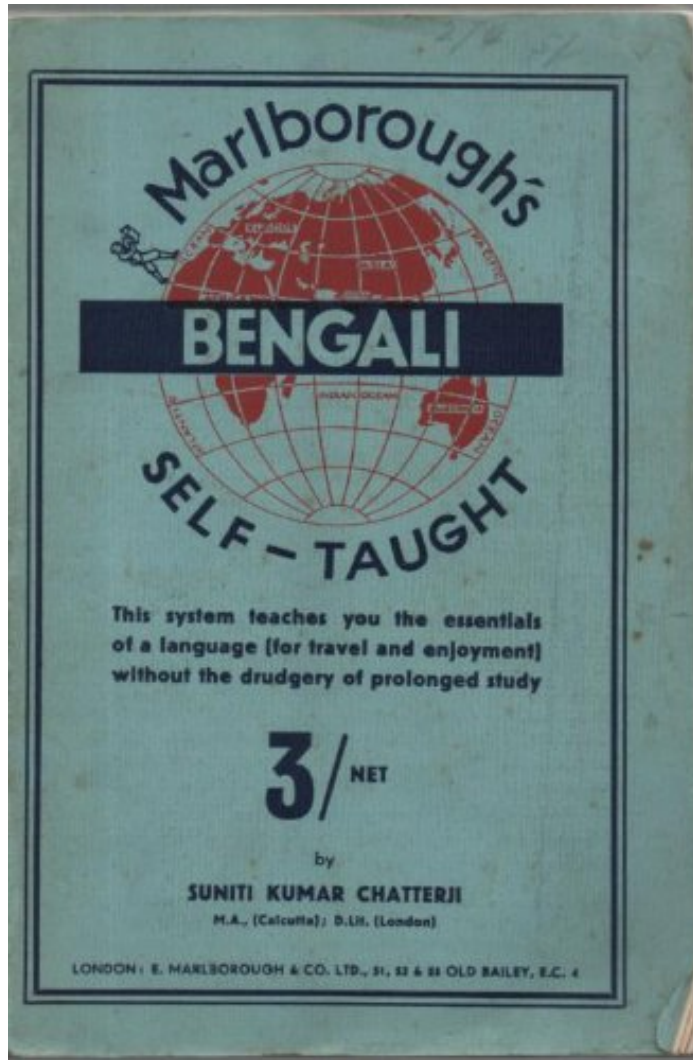
Author of Marlborough’s *Norwegian* (1900), *Swedish* (1901), *Dutch* (1904), *Arabic/Syrian* (1905), *Arabic/Egyptian* (19??), *German* (19??), *Italian* (1906), *Hindustani* (1908), *Russian* (19??), *Turkish* (19??) *Self-Taught*, and perhaps others.

An 1891 book, *A Complete Bibliography of the Art of Fence*, names as its author a
 CARL A THIMM FRGS late Captain 2nd London Rifles, (P.S.) Hon Librarian Inventors
 Institute London Librarian International Health Exhibition London 1884 Member of the
 Library Association of the United Kingdom Author of *Organ Bibliography*

In *Dutch Self-Taught*, Thimm signs the 1904 Preface: “*Captain, late I.Y., South African Field Forces*”.

https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Author_talk:Carl_Albert_Thimm

The highlight of the Marlborough Series:



Why a highlight? Therefore:

from the *Foreword*:

- “Bengali may be said to be the most important language in India after Hindustani (Hindi or Urdu)”: important culturally (one of the two languages of the British Empire possessing first-class literature), commercially, administratively (some 49 million speakers [then; now some 190 million])
- “The speech employed is that of the educated people of Calcutta”
- diglossia: printed/literary, spoken/colloquial:
“In the *Outline of Grammar* has been made the first systematic attempt to describe the essential features of Colloquial Bengali, always keeping as a convenient background the literary language”; “apparently erratic phonetic habits of the colloquial”
- a language “with a comparatively simple grammar”, but “a wealth of idiom”
- framework of presentation: “Marlborough’s System (modified to some extent)”
framework of description: Basic (pre-Structuralist) Linguistic Theory?

- “This book is intended to be practical, but it is hoped that it may serve as an introduction to a serious (and it may be, scientific) study of the language, which, in the words of one of its English admirers, ‘unites the mellifluousness of Italian with the power possessed by German of rendering complex ideas’.” [Typologically mixed “feminine” and “masculine”, as Jespersen would have it, see below.]

Is Bengali important also for the study of crosslinguistic diversity and unity?

Well, **every** language is – but, given the status quo of typology at a time, some are prone to extend the current sense of diversity further than others, and some are prone to question currently accepted assumptions about uniqueness more worryingly than others.

4a. For comparison, not a Marlborough author: Otto Jespersen (1860–1943)

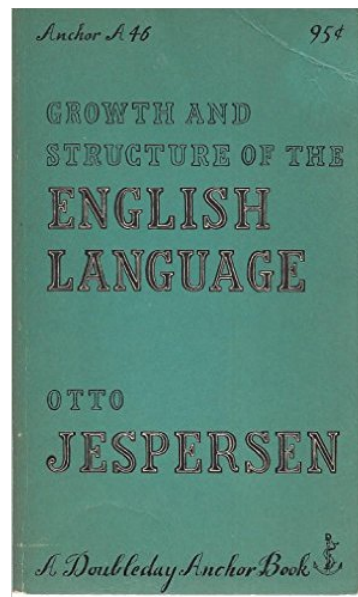
whose celebrated writings include:

Growth and Structure of the English Language (1905, ²1912)

(awarded the Volney Prize of the Institut de France for 1906)

A Modern English Grammar on Historical Principles, 7 volumes (1909–49)

Sprogundervisning (1901; *How to Teach a Foreign Language*)



Growth and Structure “a sketch ... of the chief peculiarities of the English language” (“how it strikes a foreigner”)

Phonology

- consonants well defined:
clear contrasts; neat symmetry of system;
little modification of a consonant by the surrounding vowels;
vowels likewise comparatively independent of their surroundings;
- word-final consonants and consonant clusters (of two or more consonants) (“vigour and energy in a people speaking such a language”, still, language not “harsh or rough”: “a male energy, but not brutal force”);
- inflectional endings reduced, done away with altogether:
conciseness and terseness – masculine.
- bisyllabic words reduced to monosyllables: male rimes, abrupt force, effect of strength;
- frequent omission of short ‘empty words’ such as the definite article;
- “business-like shortness”: convenient abbreviations of sentences, telegraphic speech (e.g., *While [he was] fighting in Germany he was taken prisoner; We had no idea what [we were] to do*), = syntactical correspondences to morphological shortenings (e.g., *cab[riole]*);

- sobriety in expression: dislike of strong or hyperbolic expressions, no showing of strong emotions;
- no violent changes in intonation, no excessive use of emotional tonic accent.

Morphology

- few diminutives, used sparingly.

Syntax

- word-order: no hide-and-seek of words, ideas that by right belong together are not widely sundered;
- word-order: order and consistency, uniform SVO, few inversions other than for emphasis – “business-like, virile qualities”;
- highly logical: consistent difference between past and present perfect; wonderfully precise and logically valuable distinction between non-progressive and progressive, uniformly expressed with all verbs;
- free from narrow-minded pedantry elsewhere often sacrificing the logic of facts to the logic of grammar: mass nouns grammatically singular, but

may take plural agreement (“liberty of choice”: *the clergy ... it/they*); inversely, plurals can be conceived of as unities (e.g., *a quiet twenty minutes; three years is but short*);

- freedom from pedantry: passives also from non-transitives; adverbs or prepositional complexes or whole phrases and sentences used attributively; (“the English for centuries great respecters of the liberties of each individual”).

Lexicon

- larger number of words than those of any other nation; enormous richness of the English vocabulary due to the masculinity of the English nation: “women move in narrower circles in the vocabulary, in which they attain to perfect mastery so that the flow of words is always natural and, above all, never needs to stop, while men know more words and always want to be more precise in choosing the exact word with which to render their idea, the consequence being often less fluency and more hesitation” (indeed, stammering and stuttering).

Characterised in one formula:

English is “positively and expressly *masculine*, ... the language of a grown up man, ... very little childish or feminine about it; the language is more manly than any other language I know”;

“The English language is a methodical, energetic, business-like and sober language, that does not care much for finery and elegance, but does care for logical consistency and is opposed to any attempt to narrow-in life by police regulations and strict rules either of grammar or of lexicon. As the language, so also is the nation.”

– a typological sketch?

co-variation of a whole range of individual, logically independent variables; all structural manifestations of one dominant ethno-/individual-psychological variable, “masculinity”

Compare Chatterji’s “mellifluousness, but expressive power”

5. BENGALI-AS-DESCRIBED-BY-CHATTERJI (-AND-MEANT-TO-BE-SELF-TEACHING)

colour-coding:

I don't understand **variance** here

I don't understand **segmentation** here

I don't understand whether or not syncretic

Bengali noun inflection according to Chatterji's *Bengali Self-Taught*

Case		Number
	SG	PL
NOM	mānuṣ(a)(-Ø), <u>mānuṣ-e</u> , <u>mānuṣ-e-te</u>	mānuṣ-erā; mānuṣ(a)-gulo, mānuṣ(a)-guli; mānuṣ(a)-sakal(a) etc.
GEN	mānuṣ-er(a)	mānuṣ(a)-der(a) [mānuṣ(a)-(e)d-er(a) ?]; †mānuṣ(a)-dig-er(a); <u>mānuṣ-gulo-r(a)</u>
DAT/ACC	mānuṣ(a)-ke; mānuṣ-e;	mānuṣ(a)-di-ke; †mānuṣ(a)-diga-ke; mānuṣ(a)-dig-e

†mānuṣ-ere

DAT mānuṣ-er(a)=tare, =janya

INS mānuṣ-e, mānuṣ-e-te;

mānuṣ(a)=diyā;

mānuṣ-ke=diyā;

mānuṣ(a)=dwārā;

mānuṣ-er(a)=dwārā

etc.

†mānuṣ(a)-dig-ere;

mānuṣ(a)-der(a);

mānuṣ(a)-gulā-ke, mānuṣ-gulā-re;

mānuṣ(a)-sakal(a)-ke

mānuṣ(a)-der(a)=tare, etc.;

†mānuṣ(a)-dig-er(a)=janya

mānuṣ(a)-gulā-r(a)

mānuṣ(a)-dig-er=dwārā;

mānuṣ(a)-d-er=dwārā;

†mānuṣ(a)-dig-a=dwārā;

†mānuṣ(a)-dig-er=dwārā

LOC	<u>mānuṣ-e, mānuṣ-e-te</u>	†mānuṣ(a)-diga-te, †mānuṣ(a)-dig-e-te; mānuṣ(a)-gulā-te; mānuṣ(a)-sakal(a)-te etc.
ABL	mānuṣ-er(a)=theke, etc.	mānuṣ(a)-d-er(a)=theke

NB concerning Gender:

1. Natural gender, not grammatically recognised.

But: a large number of nouns for females in *-ī/-i* and *-nī/-ni*.

(**Declensions** through stem formatives?)

Also: In elevated style, adjectives take “feminine” suffixes *-ā*, *-ī*, *-inī* when qualifying nouns referring to females

(**Genders** in the sense of **agreement classes**?)

NB concerning PL:

1. No PL inflection is added when the noun is qualified by a numeral.
(see below, Noun classification)
2. PL *-rā/-erā* generally restricted to nouns for intelligent beings (humans, gods); *-gulā/-gulo/-guli* are used for both animate (including intelligent) and inanimate nouns.
(Declensions? Noun classes/Genders?)
3. PL *-gulā/-gulo* are used to express contempt, *-guli* to express endearment.
(Evaluative inflection through suffixes: AUG vs. DIM?)
4. PL *-rā/-erā* is only found in the NOM Case; for other Cases, PL is *-dig* or *d-*.
(Cumulative Number.Case: *-rā/-erā* PL.NOM, *-dig* or *d-* PL.OBL?
Or grammatically conditioned allomorphy/variance of separative PL marker?)
5. PL *-gulā/-gulo/-guli* implies a certain amount of **definiteness**, which is absent in other PL suffixes and words. PL *-gulā/-gulo/-guli* is thus in Number contrast with SG *-ṭā/-ṭī* in definiteness.

(Cumulation of DEF and PL? Less HUMAN, but more DEF???)

6. PL *sakal(a)*, *samūh(a)*, *samasta*, *sab(a)*, *gaṇ(a)* are words, meaning ‘all, group’, not affixes, and they form compounds with the nouns they are in construction with.
7. In the OBLIQUE Cases (OBL = all Cases other than NOM?), *-diga* and *-der(a)* are preferred to these PL compound nouns.
(*-d-er(a)* separative PL-GEN, or cumulative *-der(a)* PL.GEN?)
8. The meaning ‘etcetera, and similar things’ (**Associative?**) is expressed through repetition compounding with onset variation, with /ṭ/ as the replacing consonant: e.g., *hāt(a)-ṭāt(a)* ‘hand etc. (feet, face, ...)’

Further category: **Definiteness**

1. Affixes or words for DEF: *ṭā/ṭī*, *khān(ā/a)/khāni*, *gāch(ā/a)/gāchi*
 – of which the first is the most common.
 (Are they **Classifiers**? Cumulative CLASS.DEF, or just Classifiers inducing Definiteness, or DEF Articles co-occurring with different covert semantic classes of nouns? see below)
2. Position of DEF in the noun template: stem-DEF-PL-CASE=Postposition
 e.g., *mānuṣ(a)-ṭā-ke* man-DEF-DAT
chele-ṭi-r(a)-kāch(a)=theke boy-DEF-GEN-PL from
3. **Evaluative** marking through final vowel distinction (suffixes?) of definites:
ṭā, *khān(ā/a)*, *gāch(ā/a)*: AUGMENTATIVE
ṭī, *khāni*, *gāchi*: DIMINUTIVE
4. PL *-gulā/-gulo/-guli* (with the same **Evaluative** distinctions) implies a certain amount of **definiteness**, which is absent in other PL suffixes and words.
 PL *-gulā/-gulo/-guli* is thus in contrast with SG definite *-ṭā/-ṭī*.

5. **Noun classification** through definites:
khān(ā/a)/khāni: ‘piece’, classifier for oblong, flat objects;
gāch(ā/a)/gāchi: ‘tree’, classifier for long, stick-like objects
6. INDEF: *ek(a)* ‘one’ (numeral), e.g. *ek(a) mānuṣ(a)* ‘a man’;
 also used in combination with DEF word/affix: *ek(a)-ṭā mānuṣ(a)* ‘a man’.
7. Apparently a sense of SPECIFIC REFERENCE when *ek(a)* is used with a **noun-classifying** word/affix:
ek(a)-jan(a) mānuṣ(a) ‘a certain man’

Further category: **Noun Classification**, in particular **numeral classifiers**

1. In construction with numerals: Classifier obligatory, no PL marking on noun
pāc(a)-jan(a) mānuṣ(a) ‘five-CLASS man’ (PERSON)
daś(a)-khānā bāṛī ‘ten-CLASS house’ (OBLONG)
tin(a)-ṭā ghorā ‘three-CLASS horse’ (the most common DEF marker a neutral classifier?)
2. FEMININE stem formatives *-ī/-i* and *-nī/-ni*.
 Also: Adj FEM agreement in “elevated” style.
3. Animacy distinctions:
 - a. Different PL markers for INTELLIGENT and ANIM/INANIM
 - b. ACC/DAT Case *-ke* only for ANIM;
 for INANIM ACC/DAT = NOM as far as Case is concerned,
 PL being *-dig/-der*, while PL in NOM is *-erā*
 - c. HUM nouns resist being case-marked LOC, instead: postpositions

Summary

Categories**Terms**

Case

direct

NOM

oblique

GEN

DAT/ACC

role of **Animacy**? *-ke* only ANIM?

LOC

separate from INS concerning suffix?

INS

separate from LOC concerning suffix?

postpositional

ABL

-GEN=Postposition

Number

SG

Are nouns in basic form MENSURAL or
SORTAL/MASS?

PL

Is PL marking obligatory if reference is to
sets with cardinality >1 ?

ASSOC

Definiteness

INDEF

DEF(-SPEC)

expressed through Classifiers;
 also through DAT/ACC *-ke* without Class;
 also through order (Bhattacharya 2000):

Num=Class N: INDEF

N Num=Class: DEF

SPECIFIC INDEF

Classification

GENERIC

all simultaneously DEF

HUMAN

OBLONG/FLAT shape

LONG/STICK-LIKE shape

non-HUMAN PL

(*-gulo*)

Evaluative

DIM

in association with PL and DEF/CLASS

AUG

in association with PL and DEF/CLASS

Animacy	INTELLIGENT ANIMATE INANIMATE	without own exponents, but influence on selection of DAT/ACC and LOC Case, PL marker in NOM Case
Gender?	FEM non-FEM	
Declension?	FEM non-FEM	

5a. For comparison: Some further, more recent Bengali grammar sketches for the benefit of the hurried typologist ...

Bengali

LINGUISTIC SKETCH

The Bengali phoneme inventory is comprised of 7 vowels and 29 consonants, depending on the analysis. Although word-initial vowels may be nasalized, nasalization is neither obligatory nor contrastive. Vowel length is also non-contrastive in Bengali. Aspiration, on the other hand, is contrastive in the language. In fact, 10 of the 29 consonant phonemes may be aspirated. Bengali makes use of a number of retroflex consonant articulations, as expected given its linguistic affiliation. Native Bengali words do not allow word-initial or post-vocalic consonant clusters, though clusters may occur in borrowed words. Speakers differ with respect to if and how clusters are repaired. Geminates, on the other hand, are widely attested. The syllable structure of the language adhered to by most Bengali speakers is (C)V(C).

The majority of Bengali words are trochaic, that is, the primary stress falls on the initial syllable of a word, with secondary stress falling on all odd-numbered syllables thereafter. The addition of prefixes to a word generally shifts stress to the left. Bengali declarative sentences are characterized by a distinct intonation pattern. With the exception of the last word in a declarative utterance, which is pronounced with a low pitch, virtually every word in the utterance is produced with a rising pitch contour, lending a song-like quality to the sentence.

Bengali is a head-final language whose main word order is SOV. Possessors, numerals, and adjectives precede nouns, while determiners and articles follow the head noun. Wh- question words appear in focus position, that is, in either the initial or second position in the sentence. Postpositions are attested. Negation is encoded by way of an auxiliary suffix on the verb.

Bengali **nouns and verbs are highly inflected**, unlike adjectives. Nouns inflect for **case (nominative, accusative, genitive, locative)** and **number/measure**. Gender is not grammatically encoded in the language. Bengali verbs can be divided into two classes: finite and non-finite. Finite verb forms inflect for person (first, second, third), tense (past, present, future), aspect (simple, progressive, perfect), mood (indicative, conditional, imperative), and honor (intimate, familiar, formal), but do not inflect for

number. Non-finite verbs, on the other hand, do not inflect for either person, tense, aspect, honor, or number. Reduplication is a productive morphological process in the language. Both prefixation and suffixation are attested.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, J.D. 1962. A Manual of the Bengali Language. New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company.
- Bandyopadhyay, Anita. 1998. First Bengali Grammar. A Comparative Analysis. Calcutta: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar.
- Gordon, Raymond G., Jr. (Editor). 2005. Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Fifteenth Edition. Dallas: SIL International.
- Mojumder, Atindra. 1973. Bengali Language Historical Grammar. Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay.
- Ray, Punya Sloka, Muhammad Abdul Hai, and Lila Ray. 1966. Bengali Language Handbook. Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics.

Wikipedia, s.v. Bengali language

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bengali_language

Nouns

Nouns and pronouns are inflected for case, including nominative, objective, genitive (possessive), and locative. The case marking pattern for each noun being inflected depends on the noun's degree of animacy. When a definite article such as -টা *-ṭa* (singular) or -গুলা *-gula* (plural) is added, nouns are also inflected for number.

Singular noun inflection

	Animate	Inanimate
	ছাত্রটা	জুতাটা
Nominative	chatrô-ṭa the student	juta-ṭa the shoe
	ছাত্রটাকে	জুতাটা
Objective	chatrô-ṭa-ke the student	juta-ṭa the shoe
	ছাত্রটার	জুতাটার
Genitive	chatrô-ṭa-r the student's	juta-ṭa-r the shoe's
		জুতায়
Locative	—	juta-ṭa-y on/in the shoe

Plural noun inflection

	Animate	Inanimate
	ছাত্ররা	জুতাগুলা/জুতোগুলো
Nominative	chatrô-ra the students	juta-gula/juto-gulo the shoes
	ছাত্রদের(কে)	জুতাগুলা/জুতোগুলো
Objective	chatrô-der(ke) the students	juta-gula/juto-gulo the shoes
	ছাত্রদের	জুতাগুলা/জুতোগুলোর
Genitive	chatrô-der the students'	juta-gula/juto-gulo-r the shoes'
		জুতাগুলা/জুতোগুলোতে
Locative	—	juta-gula/juto-gulo-te on/in the shoes

When counted, nouns take one of a small set of [measure words](#). Similar to [Japanese](#), the nouns in Bengali cannot be counted by adding the numeral directly adjacent to the noun. The noun's measure word (**MW**) must be used between the numeral and the noun. Most nouns take the generic measure word -টা *-ṭa*, though other measure words indicate semantic classes (e.g. -জন *-jôn* for humans).

Measure words			
Bengali	Bengali transliteration	Literal translation	English translation
নয়টা গরু	Nôy-ṭa goru	Nine- MW cow	Nine cows
কয়টা বালিশ	Kôy-ṭa balish	How many- MW pillow	How many pillows
অনেকেজন লোক	Ônek-jôn lok	Many- MW person	Many people
চার-পাঁচজন শিক্ষক	Car-păc-jôn shikkhôk	Four-five- MW teacher	Four or five teachers

Measuring nouns in Bengali without their corresponding measure words (e.g. আট বড়ি়াল *at biral* instead of আটটা বড়ি়াল *at-ta biral* "eight cats") would typically be considered ungrammatical. However, when the semantic class of the noun is understood from the measure word, the noun is often omitted and only the measure word is used, e.g. শুধু একজন থাকবে। *Shudhu êk-jôn thakbe*. (lit. "Only one-MW will remain.") would be understood to mean "Only one **person** will remain.", given the semantic class implicit in -জন *-jôn*.

In this sense, all nouns in Bengali, unlike most other Indo-European languages, are similar to mass nouns.

Bhattacharya, T (2000). "Bengali". In Gary, J. and Rubino. C. [*Encyclopedia of World's Languages: Past and Present \(Facts About the World's Languages\)*](#) (PDF). WW Wilson, New York. [ISBN 0-8242-0970-2](#). Archived from [the original](#) (PDF) on 25 June 2006.

https://web.archive.org/web/20060625045854/http://www.homepages.ucl.ac.uk/~uclyara/bong_us.pdf

Basic Morphology

(a) Noun Morphology:

Case

Nominative: *bari* ‘house’; Accusative-Dative (Objective): *bari-ke*; Genitive: *bari-r*; Locative: *bari-te*. The genitive suffix is *-er* when the noun ends in a consonant as in *bon-er* ‘sister’s’, the Locative suffix is *-e* when the noun ends in a consonant and can be either *-e* or *-te* when the noun ends in a non-high vowel as in *tebil-e* ‘on/ in the table’ and *alo-e* or *alo-te* ‘in the light’ respectively.

Non-human nouns, and non-honorific human nouns generally take a Nominative (zero), Objective *-ke* [??? – FP], Genitive *-(e)r*, or Locative *-(t)e* suffix after the enclitic counting expression (or pluralizer *gulo*), if any; *tak-gulo-te* ‘on the shelves’. But human nouns even here resist the Locative plural; *chele-gulo-te* for ‘among the boys’, is not possible.

Number

Nominative *-ra* and objective/genetive *-der* constitute a human plural marker whose use is possible only when the noun is not counted, and is obligatory with personal pronouns; while *chele* means ‘boy(s)’, *o* means ‘this person’, never ‘these persons’. Its absence signifies singularity also in the case of possessed or pointed-at nouns: *amar bhai* ‘my¹ brother²’, *ei kormocari* ‘this¹ employee²’. **Other human nouns can have a plural meaning without the plural marker:** *mee afbe na*, *judhuchele* ‘girls¹ won’t³ come², only⁴ boys⁵’. The plural marker *-ra -der* carries an overtone of definiteness, though less consistently than *gulo*. These facts indicate that plurality is less distinct for indefinite nouns.

As a special case of the process of definiteness *gulo* may be used as a definitive plural “general” (not specifically human) suffix, as in *chele-gulo* ‘the boys’. But *gulo* is also a classifier, as in: *onek-gulo boi* ‘many¹ books²’, *kotok-gulo kolom* ‘so many¹ pens²’.

Classifiers

Barring exceptions like *dui defer moittri* ‘Two¹ countries’² friendship³’, the relation of a number word (or other quantity) to the noun it counts is mediated by a classifier enclitic like the human classifier *jon* in *du-jon montri* ‘Two¹ ministers²’. A counted noun never has a plural ending. The other two important classifiers are the general classifier *ta* and **the piece-classifier *khana* which signals single objects**. Compare *æk-ta mach* and *æk-khana mach* for ‘a¹ fish²’. Only the former can refer to a living fish. *ti*, a slightly literary version of *ta*, carries diminutive and feminine overtones. *to* and *te* are conditioned variants of *ta*.

Definiteness/Specificity

Definiteness/Specificity is expressed by (from Bhattacharya 1999):

(i) using a Num(eral)/Q(uantifier)-Cla(ssifier): *du-to thala* ‘two₁ plates₂’ (Indefinite) vs *thala du-to* ‘the two₂ plates₁’. When the sequence is *æk-ta* or *æk-khana*, *æk* ‘one’ is understood: *æk-ta thala* ‘one/a₁ plate₂’ *thala-ta* ‘the (one) plate’. A noun followed by an inanimate (animacy-neutral) classifier conveys definiteness: *gramta* ‘the village’, *ciṭhikhana* ‘the letter’. The nonhuman classifier *gulo* combines this positional definiteness with plurality: *khamgulo* ‘the envelopes’

(ii) using Dem(onstrative): *thala* ‘plate’ vs *oi thala* ‘that₁ plate₂’ and a Q as in *boi* ‘book’ *kono boi* ‘some₁ book₂’. However, this definiteness is a matter of true or insinuated prior familiarity, not of the demonstrative type. Thus *oi du-to thala* ‘those₁ two₂ plates₃’ and its near paraphrase, *oi thala du-to* both use demonstratives but only the latter expresses knownness.

(iii) Case marking: *beral* ‘cat’ (nonspecific/ generic) vs *beral-ke* ‘cat-DAT’ (definite/specific).

Determiners

The *e o je* elements of the third person paradigm serve as Determiners: *e boi* ‘This₁ book₂’, *o kaj* ‘That₁ job₂’, *je jini* ‘That₁ thing₂’. These Determiners optionally add an augment /i/: *ei boi*, *oi kaj*, *fei jini*. The Interrogative Determiners are: *ki* ‘What’, *kon* ‘Which’, *je* ‘Which’ etc.

Determiners are invariables.

Agreement

Bangla exhibits no case or number agreement, and **no grammatical gender phenomena at all.**

Basic Syntax

(b) Case marking of major constituents:

(i) Subject case can be Nom (zero) (*mɔdon afe* ‘Modon₁ comes₂’), Genitive for experiencer subjects (*ama-r matha dhoreche* ‘my₁ head₂ is aching₃ (Lit: my head is-held)’), Locative (*lok-e bole* ‘people say’)

(ii) Objects are marked as Dative for animates (*robin chele-ke dekhlo* ‘Robin₁ saw₃ the boy₂’), Accusative (zero) (*ami phol khacchi* ‘I₁ am eating₃ fruits₂’)

(iii) Adpositions mark their complement

(a) Genitive (*tebil-er nice/ upore/ pafe* ‘under/ on/ beside₂ the table₁’)

(b) Objective (-ke or zero) (*bhai-ke/ boi nie/die* ‘With/ by₂ brother/ book₁’)

(c) Locative (*hat-e kore* ‘with₂ hand₁’)

M. H. Klaiman, Bengali

International Encyclopedia of Linguistics, vol. 4, 2003

https://books.google.de/books?id=sl_dDVctycgC&pg=PA217&lpg=PA217&dq=klaiman+bengali+comrie&source=bl&ots=4Y5z88UdcT&sig=F7IvCo_d80UU14Wq9KEJsGkm4EY&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjTgefp-drJAhXr73IKHQYkDX4Q6AEIMjAE#v=onepage&q=klaiman%20bengali%20comrie&f=false

M. H. Klaiman, Bengali

B. Comrie (ed.), The World's Major Languages, 1987

<https://books.google.de/books?id=4DR-AgAAQBAJ&pg=PA417&lpg=PA417&dq=klaiman+bengali+comrie&source=bl&ots=aivRsIj-CR&sig=cYvGHxJKRPzDNGDdUXeBeT12EMo&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjs97OW-9rJAhULnXIKHZumBYo4ChDoAQgeMAA#v=onepage&q=klaiman%20bengali%20comrie&f=false>

6. Moral

The craft of describing particular languages – and I mean “thick description”, based on careful observation and penetrating analysis – isn’t an easy one. And however well-crafted, grammars will always leak.

Although sample-based macroscopic comparison has its uses, doing typology-at-a-glance has its severe limitations – at least if our ambition is to make sense of diversity and unity. However reliable the typologist’s sources, s/he will have to contribute her/his share of in-depth analysis, too.

And Bengali is not unique, in its inflectional morphology and elsewhere, in the way its complex structures – however expertly described in descriptive grammars or aptly profiled in typologically-aware grammar sketches – are bound to defeat simplistic conceptions of grammars-as-checklists.

While checklists like to separate and isolate, it is precisely the way morphological categories **interact** that seems to me the toughest nut in the nominal domain, for the grammarian as well as the typologist – but also the most rewarding one to crack.