Bengali

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Bengali
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Bengali

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SOAS London

Cover illustration: Dressing up for Durga Puja in rural Bangladesh, Jonail, Boraigram,
Photo: Keith Thompson, 1992

Table of contents

Preface

This book aims to give a linguistic description of the Eastern Indo-Aryan language Bangla. In the West the language is perhaps better known as Bengali, but when one of the leading Indian linguists Probal Dasgupta refers to it as "Bangla (also known by its colonial name Bengali)",[1] we ought to take the hint and change to "Bangla" as the more appropriate name for the language. In this book the region where Bangla is spoken as a mother tongue (Bangladesh and the Indian province of West Bengal) is referred to as Bengal and the speakers of Bangla as Bengalis. Bangla is a fascinating and colourful language which provides a rich field of engagement for linguists and researchers.

Bangla is a diglossic language (more on this in the Introduction under (4), p. 4). Bengalis on the whole are still very much in awe of high literary language as superior to the language they themselves speak. European and American scholars whose primary interests have been Bangla literature or Bengali history have sometimes inadvertently contributed to this value judgement on language. It is time to do away with this hierarchical thinking. In order to keep the connection with the living language, I have stayed away from traditional grammar examples in this book and have instead taken sentences from spoken language, letters, contemporary journals, newspapers, adverts, high and low literature and non-fiction.

The language described in this book is, quite deliberately, a non-specific Standard Colloquial Bangla. While the divide between Bangladesh and West Bengal is an undeniable political reality, there is no significant divide on the linguistic front. Existing differences have been indicated in the relevant sections.

My own involvement with Bangla goes back more than twenty years to when I moved to Bangladesh for three years in the early 1990s. The language with its beautiful sounds and rhythms almost instantly cast its spell over me and has not let me go since. Although its structures are not particularly complicated – there is, unlike in Hindi, no grammatical gender and verbal conjugation is wonderfully regular – Bangla has a number of characteristics which remind us that a language is much more than the sum of its dissectable categories and mechanisms, and that even a precise and systematic analysis of a language is still a long way from capturing its energy and momentum. On the one hand, Bangla operates with minimal redundancy: plural indication occurs only once in a noun phrase, *many birds* in Bangla is ɔnek pakhi *many bird*; pro-drop occurs regularly with subject pronouns where the verb endings give

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1.   Probal Dasgupta, *Some Non-Nominative Subjects in Bangla*, Centre for Applied Linguistics & Translation Studies University of Hyderabad, 2000.

us the necessary information: se ki bôleche? kichu bɔleni. *What did he say? Didn't say anything.* Tense use is intuitive and directly related to real time rather than to other tenses. Non-finite verb forms and their combinations play a crucial role in reducing the need for complex sentence structures. On the other hand Bangla has extensive reduplication and a rich inventory of onomatopoeic expressions which add a playful element. The bounce and tensions between these and other characteristics create the dynamics which give the language a power of expression far beyond word-formation and sentence structures.

It is impossible to give adequate thanks to all the people who have helped me to learn, teach and research this language but I want to express my gratitude to William Radice, Probal Dasgupta, Monsur Musa, Mina Dan, Swarocish Sarkar, Niladri Shekhar Dash, Anisuzzaman, Fazlul Alam, Hayat Mamud and Protima Dutt for their various contributions to my journey, their Mitdenken and their challenges.

My particular thanks also go to Thea Bynon for her faith in my ability to write this book and her invaluable comments and suggestions during the editing process. My work on Bangla will go on but for the moment I am in the process of leaving academic life at SOAS in London, not entirely without regret but with new horizons to explore.

Hanne-Ruth Thompson
Freetown, Sierra Leone, 30 May 2012

Abbreviations

ADJ	adjective	NUM	numeral
ADV	adverb	O	object
baVN	ba forms of the verbal noun, eg kɔrbar do.baVN.GEN, debar give.baVN.GEN	OBJ	objective (case)
		ONOM	onomatopoeia
		ORD	ordinary
C	complement	PC	pro-copula
CL	classifier	P.C	past continuous
CM	compound maker	P.HABIT	past habitual
con	consonant	P.PERF	past perfect
CONC	concessive	P.S	simple past
CONJ	conjunction	PL	plural
CP	conditional participle	POL	polite
CR	correlative	POS	positive/affirmative
CV	compound verb	POSS	possessive
EMP	emphasiser	POSTP	postposition
F	familiar	PP	perfective participle
FUT	future	PR	present
FUT.IMP	future imperative	PR.C	present continuous
GEN	genitive	PR.IMP	present imperfective
H, HON	honorific	PR.PERF	present perfect
HABIT	habitual	PR.S	present simple
I	intimate	PRED	predicate
IMP	imperative	PRON	pronoun
INAN	inanimate	PS	person
INT	interjection	R	relative
IP	imperfective participle	S	subject
LOC	locative	SG	singular
N	noun	V	verb
NEG	negative	VA	verbal adjective
NOM	nominative	VN	verbal noun
NP	noun phrase		

An asterisk *indicates that an example is ungrammatical.

Glosses

Nouns

ṭa, ṭi, jɔn, khana, ṭuku are marked as .ᴄʟ (classifiers), gulo and guli as .ᴄʟ.ᴘʟ (plural classifier) ra and der are marked as .ᴘʟ (plural) and .ᴘʟ.ᴄᴀsᴇ (plural-case) respectively.

Pronouns

Grammatical information in the glosses is kept to the minimum. This means that if a 3rd person pronoun is present in the gloss, only the 3H (honorific) label is marked. In all other cases, the pronoun is ordinary. With second person pronouns tumi is unmarked, apni and tui are marked 2H and 2I respectively. Singular is unmarked, plural is marked. Case is only given where case endings are present.

Bangla does not distinguish gender in its personal pronouns. In the translations, gender has to be assigned and I have variously assigned he, she or it.

In cases where a genitive pronoun is clearly attributive and followed directly by a noun phrase, I have given my, your, our rather than ɪ.ɢᴇɴ, you.ɢᴇɴ etc.

Verbs

For conjugated verb forms, the following abbreviations are used:

1	first person ami, amra
2I	second person intimate tui, tora
2	second person familiar tumi, tomra
3	third person ordinary se, o, e, tara, ora, era
2H, 3H	second person polite apni, apnara and third person honorific tini, uni, ini and tãra, õra, ẽra

tenses		
	PR.S	present simple
	PR.C	present continuous
	PR.IMP	present imperative
	PR.PERF	present perfect
	FUT	future tense
	FUT.IMP	future imperative
	P.S	past simple

P.C	past continuous
P.PERF	past perfect
P.HABIT	past habitual

non-finites	VN and baVN	verbal noun, eg bojha: understand.VN, dekhbar: see.baVN.GEN
	VA	verbal adjective
	IP	imperfective participle
	PP	perfective participle
	CP	conditional participle

Verb glosses are always given in full except with some particular forms of incomplete verbs: forms of ach- [exists] or [is present], the invariable nei [is absent] and nɔŷ [is not], chilô [was] are given in square brackets. The different persons are marked as follows:

1st	achi	[is present].1 or [exists].1	chilam	[was].1	nôi	[is not].1
2nd familiar	achô	[is present].2 or [exists].2	chile	[was].2	nɔo	[is not].2
2nd intimate	achis	[is present].2I or [exists].2I	chili	[was].2I	nôs	[is not].2I
3rd ordinary	ache	[is present] or [exists]	chilô	[was]	nɔŷ	[is not]
2nd and 3rd honorific	achen	[is present].2H or [is present].3H or [exists].2H or [exists].3H	chilen	[was].2H or [was].3H	nɔn	[is not].2H or [is not].3H

Verb forms with a following ni (negation of present and past perfect) are given as
not verb.PERSON.TENSE   rather than   verb.PERSON.TENSE not
to show the close connection between the verb and the negation.

For conjunct verbs the noun/adjective and verb are linked with a hyphen, eg

pôriṣkar   kɔrle
clean-   do.CP

Pro-copula forms of hɔoŷa be, become are given as PC.PERSON.TENSE

Correlatives

Relative (R) and correlative (CR) pronouns and conjunctions are marked as such only where they are the topic of discussion.

Emphasisers

o, to and i are all given as .ᴇᴍᴘ (emphasiser) except when they are the topic of discussion. When o is used as a conjunction it is given as also or even.

Glosses are given where they are deemed helpful in understanding sentence structures.

Transliteration

The transliteration used in this book is based on the standard system for Sanskrit with the few extras required for Bangla. A transliteration represents the spellings of a language. This means that for every Bangla letter a distinct symbol is given in the transliteration. Below are the symbols with their Bangla letters. They are given in alphabetical order. Read the columns from top to bottom, left to right.

vowels		kh	খ	th	থ
ɔ/ô	অ	g	গ	d	দ
a	আ, া	gh	ঘ	dh	ধ
i	ই, ি	ṅ	ঙ	n	ন
ī	ঈ, ী	c	চ	p	প
u	উ, ু	ch	ছ	ph	ফ
ū	ঊ, ূ	j	জ	b	ব
ṙ	ঋ, ৃ	jh	ঝ	bh	ভ
e/æ	এ, ে	ñ		m	ম
oi	ঐ, ৈ	ṭ	ট	y	য
o	ও, ে cons া	ṭh	ঠ	ŷ	য়
ou	ঔ, ে cons ৗ	ḍ	ড	r	র
other symbols		ṛ	ড়	l	ল
ṁ	ং	ḍh	ঢ	ś	শ
ḥ	ঃ	ṛh	ঢ়	ṣ	ষ
~	ঁ	ṇ	ণ	s	স
consonants		t	ত	h	হ
k	ক	ṯ	ৎ		

	additional symbols	
v	ব bophola	
y	্য yophola	

the inherent vowel

The inherent vowel (see also Chapter 2.5) has two different pronunciations, either ɔ as in British English *pot* or ô as in Italian *Roma*. The pronunciation of ô is identical to that of o (Bangla letter ও). These distinctions are given in the transliteration.

aspirates:

Some authors choose to give aspirate letters as kʰ, cʰ, bʰ etc. to indicate that these are single letters in Bangla. I have decided to use kh, ch, bh etc instead as I find that the system with superscripted letters creates a rather restless textual image. Readers therefore have to keep the existence of aspirated letters in mind. There are very few instances in Bangla where h follows another consonant without an intervening vowel. In those cases I have given an apostrophy before the h, eg

abha = আভা *glow, shine* but ab'haoẏa আবহাওয়া *weather*

"silent letters":

b ব, m ম and y ্য can appear as second components in conjuncts where they do not retain their own pronunciation but are either silent or serve to double the preceding consonant, eg আত্মা atma is pronounced atta. The bophola ("silent" b) gains an extra symbol v because it is derived from a different Sanskrit letter and because svamī looks better than sbamī. The pronunciation of the word *husband* in Bangla is, in fact, shami.

Transliteration and Pronunciation (Quick Reference)

Vowels

Bangla vowels are pure single sounds that can be open (or short) as in *pat, pet, pit, pot, put*, or closed (long).

ɔ	open as in *hot*	bɔla
ô	closed as in Spanish *como*	môn
a	short a as in *samba*	ranna

	long a as in *llama*	am
i	open i as in *hit* or	jinis
	closed i as in *bee*	id
ī	open i as in *hit* or	dīrghô
	closed i as in *bee*	nīl
u	short u as in *put* or	mukti
	long u as in *moon*	dudh
ū	short u as in *put* or	mūllô
	long u as in *moon*	dūr

The distinction in writing between 'short' and 'long' i and 'short' and 'long' u respectively is no longer mirrored in the pronunciation of these vowels. For both sets the 'short' letters are much more common in writing than their 'long' counterparts.

ṙ	ri		pṙthibī *pron* prithibi

Note that, even though this letter counts as a vowel for historical reasons, its pronunciation is always ri.

e	open e as in *met*	kena
	closed e as in French *née*	se
æ	open æ as in *cat*	dækha

The pronunciation of as æ is given in the transliteration as distinct from e. Note that the jophola y or the combination of jophola plus a can have the same pronunciation as æ (see below).

oi	diphthong: closed o followed by i as in Italian *boic*otto	toiri
o	closed o as in Spanish como	lok

Note that the same pronunciation (closed, long o) can also be produced by the inherent vowel ô.

ou	diphthong: closed o followed by u	poune

Consonants

Bangla distinguishes between aspirated and unaspirated, as well as voiced and voiceless consonants. It also distinguishes between palatal and dental sounds.

k	soft k, no aspiration	kɔla
kh	aspirated k, k + h	khæla

g	soft g, no aspiration	gɔla
gh	aspirated g = g + h	ghɔr
ṅ	ng as in *singer* or *finger*	bhaṅa *pron* bhanga
	The pronunciation of this consonant as either ng *singer* or ngg *finger* can vary from speaker to speaker . There is also, however, a conjunct ṅg whose pronunciation is always ngg.	
c	ch as in *chip*	cabi
ch	ch + h	chôbi
j	j as in *jam*	jɔl
jh	aspirated j, j + h	jhal
ñ	nasal n, only used in conjunction with other letters, eg (ñ)+ (c)= (ñc)	cɔñcɔl
ṭ	palatal t, similar to English t as in *top*, but with the tongue slightly further back in the mouth	ṭaka
ṭh	aspirated palatal t	ṭhæla
ḍ	palatal d, similar to English d as in *day,* but with the tongue slightly further back in the mouth	ḍal
ṛ	flapped r	aṛai
ḍh	aspirated palatal d	ḍhala
ṛh	aspirated flapped r	gaṛhô
ṇ	pronounced as n	karôṇ
t	dental	tumi
t̲	pronounced as dental t, occurs at the end of syllables where no inherent vowel is pronounced	sɔt̲
th	aspirated dental t + h	thama
d	soft dental d as in Italian *dio*	dɔl
dh	aspirated dental d + h	dhan
n	n as in *not*	na
p	as English p, but without aspiration	pan
ph	pronounced as pf or f	phɔl

These are regional variants between West Bengal (pf) and Bangladesh (f).

b	as English b in *bit*	baba
bh	aspirated b, b + h	bhul
m	as English m in *man*	mama

y   The symbol y essentially represents three different uses of the same Bangla letter.

    1. pronounced as j in *jam*   yôdi *pron* jodi
    2. the shortened form of this letter is called *jophola*.
    It appears after consonants and has a doubling
    effect except when it (rarely) follows the initial
    consonant of a word where it has no effect on the
    pronunciation, eg jonyo is pronounced jonno, but
    jyôt̲sna is pronounced jôtsna   jônyô
    3. As a vowel it is pronounced æ or, when followed
    by a high vowel, e.   bytha *pron* bætha
                                          bykti *pron* bekti

ya, yæ   Followed by a: pronunciation varies between a and æ –
    this difference is incorporated into the transliteration,
    ie the symbols ya and yæ both stand for jophola plus a.   bidya *pron* bidda
                                          byæpar *pron* bæpar

ŷ   semivowel (glide) used between vowels,   meŷe
    pronounced y as in *mayor* or w as in *away*,   haoŷa *pron* haowa
    ŷ also appears at the end of words following a vowel
    and is pronounced /e/ after o, a or /æ/, eg hɔy,
    yay, and dæy are pronounced hɔe, jae, and dæe
    respectively.   hɔŷ
                                          yaŷ
                                          dæŷ

r   rolled r, similar to Italian r   rag
l   as English initial l *line*, formed at the front
    of the mouth   lal
ś   pronounced as sh in *shine*, in some conjuncts
    as s in *sun*   śak
ṣ   pronounced as sh in *shine*   ṣolô
s   pronounced as sh in *shine*, in some conjuncts
    as s in *sun*   sap
    Both ś and s can change their pronuciation
    to /s/ as in sun when they occur as the first
    element of a conjunct.
h   h as in *hot*   hat

extra symbols

ṁ	ng as in *sing*, used instead of ṅ when no vowel follows	ɔṁsô *pron* ɔngshô
ḥ	a spelling convention with little effect on pronunciation: sometimes the preceding vowel is shortened, sometimes the subsequent consonant is doubled.	baḥ duḥkhô *pron* dukkho
~	nasal: indicates nasalisation of the vowel as in French *pain*, *bon*	cãd
v	*bophola*, underneath a consonant, doubles the sound of this consonant. When used with the initial consonant of a word or with a conjunct, it has no effect on pronunciation.	bisvô *pron* bisshô jvɔr *pron* jɔr santvôna *pron* shantôna
m	*mophola*, underneath a consonant, doubles the sound of this consonant. When used with the initial consonant of a word, it has no effect on the pronunciation.	atma *pron* atta smɔrôṇ *pron* shɔrôn

conjuncts

Consonant sequences are pronounced in the expected way: k + t = kt with the following exceptions:

transliteration	pronunciation	
k + ṣ	kh, kkh	kh initially: kṣɔma *pron* khɔma; kkh between vowels: ôkṣôr *pron* okkhor
j + ñ	g, gg	g initially: jñan *pron* gæn; gg between vowels: kṙtɔjñô pron kritɔggo When jñ is followed by the vowel a, the pronunciation of the sequence varies between g(g)a, eg jijñasa *pron* jiggasha and g(g)æ, eg jñan *pron* gæn. These pronunciations are indicated in the transliteration.
h + n	nh	nh, as in cihnô *pron* cinho
h + y	jjh	jjh, as in sôhyô *pron* sojjho

Introduction

1.1   Bangla and its speakers

Bangla is a world language. In terms of numbers of speakers it ranks fifth or sixth among the world's languages. Bangla is the national language of Bangladesh with a population of over 150 million people. It is one of the official languages of India with about 80 million speakers in West Bengal. There are substantial Bengali communities in the USA, Europe, Australia and the Middle East. Although Bangladesh has been politically separated from West Bengal for over sixty years, the Bangla language belongs to both Bangladesh and West Bengal equally.

Bengal is situated in the low-lying Ganges–Brahmaputra river delta, the world's largest delta and one of the most fertile areas on earth. Bengal is densely populated but its lush vegetation, its villages, vast rivers and open fields make it a place of great natural beauty. Bengal has borders with Assam, Sikhim, Bhutan and Myanmar (Burma) in the east and Orissa, Bihar, Jharkand and Nepal in the west. In terms of land use most of both Bangladesh and West Bengal are rural, with the main crops rice, jute, tea, wheat and sugar-cane. The two capitals are Kolkata in West Bengal with a population of almost eight million and Dhaka in Bangladesh with a population of six and a half million. Poverty and illiteracy are still pressing problem in both Bangladesh and West Bengal.

What Bengal lacks in material wealth it makes up a hundredfold in the richness of its literature and culture, the energy and zest for life of its people and the enchanting beauty of its language. Bengalis are very aware of this beauty, and pride in their language is an inalienable part of their identity. This is equally true for West Bengal and for Bangladesh, but it was particularly visible in the early years after Indian independence in 1947.

India was split into two countries, India and Pakistan. East Bengal – then East Pakistan, now Bangladesh – became one of the provinces of the new Muslim state of Pakistan. This was at first welcomed by East Bengali Muslims but the geographical distance between them and the rest of the country – with the whole of India between the two halves of the country – as well as economic inequalities soon started to cause discontent and resentment in East Pakistan. Much more divisive, however, was the language question.

Having Urdu as the only state language in Pakistan imposed on them by the Pakistan government woke East Bengali Muslims up to their own identity. From 1948 onwards a language movement started, led by students and professors of Dhaka University, with the express purpose of making Bangla a state language. This movement culminated in a violent clash between protestors and the police on 21 February 1952 in which five students were killed. This was the first time in Bengali history that lives were lost in the cause of a language. In the immediate wake of these events, all throughout the province, a new Bengali consciousness emerged, based on language and culture rather than on religion. Bangla became a state language of Pakistan in 1956 but it was another 15 years later, in 1971, that Bangladesh became an independent country with a secular constitution. 21 February is still celebrated in Bangladesh every year and in 1999 it was made International Mother Language Day by the UNESCO in memory of the events in 1952 and to promote linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism.

1.2   History (language and literature)

The Bangla language is, like most other Indian languages, a descendant of Sanskrit, one of the oldest known languages with records dating back as far as 1500–1000 BC. It is not very clear where Sanskrit originated, but scholars place it in the Indus Valley, in what is now Pakistan and northwestern India. Sanskrit is an Indio-Aryan language and the relationship between Bangla and Sanskrit in terms of grammar and vocabulary is comparable to the relationship between French and Classical Latin. Although Sanskrit still counts as one of the official languages of India, it was always more a scholarly and devotional language rather than a means of communication. The Rig Veda, the oldest sacred writing of Hinduism, was written in an early form of Sanskrit, now called Vedic Sanskrit.

Sometime around the fifth century BC the grammarian Panini standardised the language into a new form, referred to as Classical Sanskrit, and wrote what we now consider the first scientific grammar. In addition to this, many religious works, influential poetry and drama, and early scientific and mathematical documents were written in Sanskrit.

From this mainly written and scholarly language, spoken or vernacular forms developed between 500 BC and 500 AD. While Sanskrit sɔṁkṙtô *put together, composed* was described by Panini as correctly and perfectly formed in all its elements, roots and suffixes, these off-shoots are called Prakrits (prôkṙti = *nature*), indicating that they were closer to actual language. They are divided into three major branches Sauraseni, Magadhi and Maharashtri. Bangla, alongside Assamese, Oriya and Bhojpuri (Bihari) developed out of the Magadhi branch, also known as Eastern Indo-Aryan.

The Bangla language can be dated back as far as 1000 years ago. The oldest texts which can be identified as being written in Bangla were found in Nepal by the Bengali scholar Haraprasad Shastri and published in 1909. They are Buddhist devotional songs known as *Charyapada* and dated between 900 and 1100 AD. It was during this period that Assamese, Oriya and Bangla split off from Sanskrit and from one another. The reasons for claiming the Charyapada for Bangla rather than for Assamese or Oriya are related to word formation, pronouns, case endings and emerging postpositions which seem to point the way for later forms in Bangla. This period, between 900 and 1400 AD, is called Old Bengali. Verb inflections were starting to appear and pronouns like ami and tumi were formed. Also around that time the Bengali script started to develop its own characteristic features, separating it from Devanagari. Both Devanagari and the Bangla script were designed and used primarily for writing Sanskrit.

Following the 13th century invasion of Bengal (and other parts of India) by Muslim Turks whose court language was Persian, many Arabic and Persian words were absorbed into the speech of the people of Bengal, and Bengal as a region developed further in commercial importance.

The Middle Bengali period is dated between the fifteenth and the eighteenth century. The earliest examples of Middle Bengali literature are *Sri Krishna Kirtan* and Vaishnava religious love poems by Chandidas and Vidyapati. During the later middle period Mangal Kabya and Persian-influenced romances were written.

With the advent of the British and the start of British Rule in India after the Battle of Plassey in 1757, a new era began which changed not only the political and educational system but also brought about a significant growth of literature in Bangla. The British established themselves first in Kolkata and then expanded their sphere of influence and power throughout the whole of the sub-continent during the 18th and 19th century.

During the 19th and 20th century a large portion of India's most celebrated works of poetry were created in Bangla during a literary renaissance led by figures such as Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1834–1873) and Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838–1898), the founders of modern Bangla literature. Madhusudan was a great admirer and diligent student of European literature, from Dante, to Milton to Shakespeare and, in a great leap of faith, set out to create comparably great literature in Bangla. He was the first to compose sonnets in Bangla and he also introduced blank verse. An endeavour of this kind at that time required, above all, faith in the potential of the Bangla language. Madhusudan's masterpiece Meghnadbadh Kabya is not only the greatest epic that has ever been written in Bangla but also world class literature.

As Europeans, we tend to underestimate the influence individual writers and poets have on the development of a language. But there is no doubt that for Bangla it was people like Bankim Chandra, Madhusudan Dutt and soon after them Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) who not only gave the language status and credibility

through their literature but had a tremendous and lasting effect on the structure and vocabulary of the language.

Tagore was a poet, novelist, short-story writer, dramatist, essayist and educator as well as a musician and a painter. The sheer volume of his work remains an unprecedented achievement, and he continues to occupy an almost God-like status among Bengalis due to the profound understanding of human nature displayed in all his writings. Poetry and song have always played a central role in Bengali cultural life and Tagore provided the nation with countless haunting and expressive songs that spoke, and still speak, to people in a personal way. Tagore was the first non-European ever to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. He was largely responsible for Bangla literature gaining considerable international prestige and for Bangla being accredited a unique standing among the languages of India. What is, among all these achievements, less well known about Tagore is his deep interest in and engagement with his language. In his book Bangla bhasha poricoy (1938) he combines systematic description with intuitive observation in a way that is more congenial to the language than a purely analytical approach.

Standard Colloquial Bengali (calit bhasha) took over from sadhu bhasha (see under (4) below) as the main version of written as well as spoken Bangla during Tagore's lifetime in the early years of the 20th century. This move helped to standardise and unify the language.

Tagore was such a giant figure in literary terms that the writers and poets who were his contemporaries or who came after him were inevitably influenced, inspired or, in some cases, overwhelmed by him.

Some important writers and poets of the 20th century are Jibanananda Das (1899–1954); Kazi Nazrul Islam, the national poet of Bangladesh (1899–1976); Buddhadeva Bose (1908–1974); Syed Waliullah (1922–1979); Shamsur Rahman (1929–2006); Sunil Gangopadhyay (born 1934); Syed Shamsul Haque (born 1935); Hasan Azizul Haq (born 1939); Akhtaruzzaman Ilias (1943–1997).

1.3   The Bangla lexicon

Bangla has a vast vocabulary. The great majority of lexical items are derived more or less directly from Sanskrit. Linguists distinguish two different kinds of derivations. Sanskrit words which are used in Bangla in their pure form are called tatsama. About half of the Bangla lexicon consists of Sankrit tatsama words. A further quarter are words which come from Sanskrit but have undergone some changes or have been adapted to the phonological patterns of Bangla. These words are called tadbhava. These facts establish without doubt that the relationship between Bangla and Sanskrit is not one of cross-linguistic borrowing but one of direct descent.

These figures do not, however, reflect actual language use. Many tatsama words are archaic and so formal that they are not suitable for communication. It is estimated

that in actual use today the percentages for tatsama and tadbhava words are reversed. About 65% of the active vocabulary are tadbhava and only 25% tatsama words.

The rest of the Bangla lexicon is made up of so-called *deshi* (indigenous) and *bideshi* (foreign) words. Neighbouring languages like Hindi and Assamese have contributed to the Bangla lexicon. Through centuries of contact with and/or invasions by Turks, Arabs, Persians, Afghans and Europeans Bangla has absorbed words from all of these languages and made them an integral part of the language as it stands today. They are no longer felt to be foreign in any way by the ordinary speaker.

The lists below give an impression of where some everyday Bangla words come from. Bangla words are given phonetically, not in the transliteration which is used throughout the book.

deshi (indigenous)

alu	*potato*	khõj	*search*	ṭhæng	*thigh*
kala	*deaf*	cal/caul	*rice grain*	ḍhol	*dhol, drum*
kuṛi	*twenty*	ciṇgṛi	*shrimp*	peṭ	*belly*
khuki	*girl*	cula	*oven, stove*	boba	*mute*
khoka	*boy*	jhinuk	*shell*	maṭh	*field, open land*
khõca	*stab*	jhol	*gravy*	muṛi	*puffed rice*

Hindi

accha	*OK*	kahini	*story*	caca	*father's brother*
cahida	*demand*	pɔchondo	*like*	phaltu	*useless*

Arabic

akkel	*wisdom*	khæyal	*consideration*	phokir	*poor person*
alada	*separate*	gorib	*poor*	boi	*book*
ashol	*real*	jɔbab	*answer*	bɔdol	*exchange*
elaka	*area*	jɔma	*collect*	baki	*remainder*
ojon	*weight*	jinish	*thing*	mɔshla	*spice*
kɔbor	*grave*	tarikh	*date*	shaheb	*sir*
khɔbor	*news*	dunia	*world*	hishab	*calculation*
khali	*empty*	nɔkol	*imitation*		

Persian

aoyaj	*sound*	aste	*slowly*	gɔrom	*hot*
andaj	*guess*	kagoj	*paper*	cɔshma	*glasses*
ayna	*mirror*	kharap	*bad*	cakri	*job*
aram	*comfort*	khub	*very*	cador	*blanket*

jayga	*place*	pɔrda	*curtain*	mɔja	*fun*
dɔm	*breath*	bɔd	*bad*	rasta	*road*
deri	*late*	bagan	*garden*	roj	*everyday*
dokan	*store*	bacca	*child*	shɔsta	*cheap*

Turkish

kãci	*scissors*	dada	*paternal grandfather*	baba	*father*
korma	*karma*	nani	*maternal grandmother*	baburci	*cook, chef*
cɔkmɔk	*sparkle*			begom	*lady*

Portuguese

almari	*cupboard*	tamak	*tobacco*	balti	*bucket*
istri	*iron*	toyale	*towel*	behala	*violin*
kamij	*shirt*	perek	*nail*	botam	*button*
cabi	*key*	phita	*ribbon*	shaban	*soap*
janala	*window*	baranda	*verandah*		

English

apish	*office*	ceyar	*chair*	bas	*bus*
injin	*engine*	ṭibhi	*TV*	biskut	*biscuit*
iskul	*school*	ṭebil	*table*	bænk	*bank*
isṭeshon	*station*	ṭeliphon	*telephone*	masṭar	*master*
kopi	*coffee*	ṭren	*train*	moṭor	*motor*
kap	*cup*	ḍaktar	*doctor*	rel	*rail*
kek	*cake*	pulish	*police*	sharṭ	*shirt*
gelash	*glass*	pænṭ	*trousers*	hoṭel	*hotel*

Bangla has absorbed all these and many more foreign words easily into its vocabulary and has made them part of the language. They use the same classifiers and case endings as nouns derived from Sanskrit and ultimately enrich the language.

1.4   Sadhu bhasha

Bangla counts as a diglossic language. This means that the language has a high level used in formal writing and a low level for ordinary spoken language. The gap between these

two levels of Bangla was particularly visible and actively promoted in the 19th century when the so-called sadhu bhasha = *pure language* came to be used for literary writing.

Soon after the publication of Nathaniel Brassey Halhed's first Bangla grammar (1778), this new style of literary writing emerged. Halhed had expressed the view that the Arabic and Persian vocabulary used in Bangla was having a detrimental effect on the language and that Bangla would be strengthened by a closer association with Sanskrit. The new literary style was taken up and developed by writers like Rammohun Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, who felt that high literature needed a more elevated style of writing. The characteristics of the sadhu bhasha were a flowery style of writing, a highly Sanskritised vocabulary, fuller forms in pronouns and verb conjugation (see below) and a number of archaic postpositions. The style of writing was modelled on the Middle Bengali of the sixteenth century.

At the beginning of the 20th century the influence of sadhu bhasha started to wane. Writers felt that the gulf between the language they used in writing and their own spoken language was too big. They changed over to a simpler style of writing, the calit bhasha *colloquial language.* The calit bhasha was first seriously taken up by Pramatha Chaudhuri at the suggestion of Rabindranath Tagore in around 1914–15. Tagore himself changed over to calit bhasha in the course of writing his short stories and novels. While calit bhasha was at first also a particular style of writing, it paved the way for a closer link between written and spoken language. The so-called Standard Colloquial Bengali (SCB), based on the educated speech of Kolkata, gradually emerged from it.

Sadhu basha is not dealt with in this book but the differences in pronouns and in verb-formation are given below.

sadhu bhasha pronouns

nominative	singular		plural	
1st ps	ami, mui	*I*	mora	*we*
2nd ps familiar	tumi	*you*	tomra	*you*
2nd ps intimate	tui	*you*	tora	*you*
2nd ps polite	apni	*you*	apnara	*you*
3rd ps inanimate near	iha	*this*	ihara	*they*
3rd ps inanimate far	uha	*that*	uhara	*they*
3rd ps inanimate neutral	taha	*that*	segulo	*they*
3rd ps animate	se	*he, she*	tahara	*they*
3rd ps honorific	tini	*he, she*	tāhara	*they*

genitive	singular		plural	
1st ps	amar	*my*	amadiger	*our*
2nd ps familiar	tomar	*your*	tomadiger	*your*

2nd ps intimate	tor	*your*	todiger	*your*
2nd ps polite	apnar	*your*	apnadiger	*your*
3rd ps near	ihar	*his/her*	ihadiger	*their*
3rd ps far	uhar	*his/her*	uhadiger	*their*
3rd ps neutral	tahar	*his/her*	tahadiger	*their*
3rd ps honorific	tãhar	*his/her*	tãhadiger	*their*

objective	singular		plural	
1st ps	amake	*me*	amadigôke	*us*
2nd ps familiar	tomake	*you*	tomadigôke	*you*
2nd ps intimate	toke	*you*	todigôke	*you*
2nd ps polite	apnake	*you*	apnadigôke	*you*
3rd ps ord near	ihake	*him/her*	ihadigôke	*them*
3rd ps ord far	uhake	*him/her*	uhadigôke	*them*
3rd ps ord neutral	tahake	*him/her*	tahadigôke	*them*
3rd ps honorific	tãhake	*him/her*	tãhadigôke	*them*

locative

1st ps	amaŷ, amate	*in me*
2nd ps familiar	tomaŷ, tomate	*in you*
2nd ps intimate	tote	*in you*
2nd ps polite	apnate	*in you*
3rd ps ord near	ihate	*in it/him/her*
3rd ps ord far	uhate	*in it/him/her*
3rd ps ord neutral	tahate	*in it/him/her*
3rd ps honorific	tãhate	*in him/her*

sadhu bhasha verb conjugation

Here is a sample verb chart for the contemporary verb lekha (then likha) *write*

tenses	ami	tumi	tui	se	apni,tini
present simple	likhi	likhô	likhis	likhe	likhen
present continuous	likhitechi	likhitechô	likhitechis	likhiteche	likhitechen
present perfect	likhiŷachi	likhiŷachô	likhiŷachis	likhiŷache	likhiŷachen
future	likhibô	likhibe	likhibi	likhibe	likhiben
past simple	likhilam	likhile	likhili	likhilô	likhilen
past continuous	likhitechilam	likhitechile	likhitechili	likhitechilô	likhitechilen
past perfect	likhiŷachilam	likhiŷachile	likhiŷachili	likhiŷachilô	likhiŷachilen
past habitual	likhitam	likhite	likhitis	likhitô	likhiten

verbal noun (VN)	ba verbal noun	imperfective participle (IP)	perfective participle (PP)	conditional participle (CP)
likha	likhba	likhite	likhiẏa	likhile

and here are some lexical comparisons:

	sadhu	calit		sadhu	calit
boy	putrô	chele	*tree*	bṙkṣô	gach
give	dan kɔra	deoŷa	*take*	lɔoŷa	neoŷa
hot	tɔptô	gɔrôm	*bite*	dɔṁśôn	kamôṛ
eye	côkṣu	cokh	*arrival*	agômôn	asa
moon	côndrô	cãd	*hand*	hɔstô	hat
wheel	côkru	caka	*towards*	prôti	dike
goose, swan	hɔṁsô	hãs	*except, without*	byætireke	chaṛa
light	jyoti	alo	*near*	sônnidhane	kache
snake	sɔrpô	sap	*with*	sôhit	sɔṅge

sadhu	calit	
amadigôke dan kôriẏachen	amader diẏechen	*he gave us*

1.5 Bengali linguistics

In 1778, *A Grammar of the Bengal Language* was written by Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, a British philologist. The title of the book suggests that the name Bengali for the language was not yet entirely fixed. It was for the production of this book that the first printing press was developed for writing Bangla. The New Bengali period starts around this time.

Earlier in the 18th century, between 1734 and 1742 Portuguese missionaries, notably Manuel da Assumpção, compiled a Bengali-Portuguese dictionary with some grammar notes. It was written in Portuguese and published in Portugal, so it was much less known in India than Halhed's book. Assumpção's interpretation of Bengali has been criticised for being overly influenced by his reliance on Greek and Latin language structures.

Halhed, on the other hand, emphasised the importance of Sanskrit for the structures of Bangla. This spurred Bengali linguists into action and possibly also had an influence on the promotion of the sadhu bhasha for literary purposes at the end of the 18th century.

The production of grammars in the first half of the 19th century quickly divided into two distinct categories: books written in English with the aim to help foreigners

learn the language, and those written in Bangla by Bengali writers for use as school texts. Prominent among the English grammarians were William Carey (1761–1834), Graves Chamney Haughton, William Yates and John Wenger. The first Bengali to write a grammar in 1826 was the social reformer Rammohun Roy (1772–1833).

The second half of the 19th century saw a great increase in the numbers of Bangla grammar books. Of special significance was Shyamacharan Sarker's (1814–82) *Introduction to the Bengalee Language* (1850) and the Bangla version *Bangala byakoron* (1852). Shyamacharan followed Rammohun in focusing on the Bangla language rather than on its Sanskritic origins. Shyamacharan was the first to discuss the local dialects of Bangla and the presence of foreign loan words. Other grammars were written by Nandakumar Roy (1852), Rajendralal Mitra (1862), Krishnakishore Banerji (1877) and Haraprasad Shastri (1882).

The Bangla word "byakoron" (*grammar*) refers to a field of study which differs considerably from what we today understand grammar to be. Not only does it focus mainly on phonology and morphology but it is almost exclusively historic, tracing developments from earlier to later forms of the language, and it is largely canonical. The patterns and rules of the language, identified and fixed in the second half of the 19th century, have found their way into the school syllabi and have remained largely unchanged until today. The teaching of "byakoron" to Bengali school children is rarely anything more than an acquisition of difficult terminology and an exercise in memorisation.

Suniti Kumar Chattopadhyay produced his momentous and ground-breaking *Origin and Development of the Bengali Language* in 1926. This opus constitutes the most comprehensive systematic analysis of the development of Bangla phonology and morphology even to the present day but it contains little syntax and even less semantics.

Modern Bengali linguists (from about the 1970s onwards) have taken a giant leap away from traditional, historic, Sanskrit-oriented grammar and have adopted Western formal grammar models to test the structures of Bangla. This has resulted in a considerable body of impressive work on particular features of Bangla, which however is highly technical in its language and largely inaccessible to non-linguists.

Some of the important Bengali linguists of the last two decades are Humayun Azad, Probal Dasgupta, Pabitra Sarkar, Swarocish Sarker, Abul Kalam Manjoor Morshed, Animesh Kanti Pal, Uday Narayan Singh, Monsur Musa, Maniruzzaman, Mahbubul Haque, Rashida Begum.

The Bangla Academies in Dhaka and in Kolkata have just published a new standardised grammar as a joint effort (Promito bangla bhashar byakoron, published January 2012) and it is hoped that collaborative efforts of this kind will encourage and inspire future linguists to work on this language.

Sound system

2.1 Phonemes

Before we go into the details of individual sounds, here is an overview of how and where in the mouth the sounds of Bangla are produced. The positioning of consonants in the mouth also gives us a way to classify these sounds.

Bangla phonemes
vowels

	front		mid			back	
high	i						u
high mid		e				o	
low mid			æ		ɔ		
low				a			

consonants

front of the mouth _back of the mouth

	labial	dental	retroflex (cerebral)	palatal	velar	post-velar
plosives (stops)						
voiceless						
unaspirated	p	t	ṭ	c	k	
aspirated	ph	th	ṭh	ch	kh	
voiced						
unaspirated	b	d	ḍ	j	g	
aspirated	bh	dh	ḍh	jh	gh	
nasals	m	n	n	ñ	ng (ṅ, ṁ)	
flaps		r	ṛ			
lateral		l				
spirants		s	sh	sh		h

stops (plosives) only – this is an extract of the previous chart, arranged according to the Bangla alphabet

	voiceless		voiced	
	unaspirated	aspirated	unaspirated	aspirated
velar	k	kh	g	gh
palatal	c	ch	j	jh
cerebral	ṭ	ṭh	ḍ	ḍh
dental	t	th	d	dh
labial	p	ph	b	bh

The individual phonemes of Bangla are given in the following order:

2.1.1   single vowels (listed by their position in the mouth)
2.1.2   vowel sequences
2.1.3   nasalised vowels
2.1.4   semivowel (glide)
2.1.5   consonants
2.1.6   consonant sequences (clusters)

The phonetic transcript in this section represents the sounds of Bangla. For the remainder of the book a transliteration is used which reflects the spellings.

2.1.1   Single vowels

Note on pronunciation: Bangla vowels are pure single sounds which can be open (short) as in *pat, pet, pit, pot, put* or closed (long).

Bangla has seven single vowel phonemes:

/ i/	i	as in *bin*		i:	as in *seen*
/e/	e	as in *pen*		e:	as in French *chez*
/æ/	æ	as in *can* (Southern English accent)			
/a/	a	as in *samba*		a:	as in *llama*
/ɔ/		as in *pot*			
/o/		as in French *mot*			
/u/	u	as in *put*		u:	as in *rude*

The variation between i and i:, e and e:, a and a:, u and u: is distributional, i.e. in monosyllabic words the vowel is lengthened, e.g. amta *stuttering* but a:m *mango*. This does not affect the phonemic status of these vowels.

/i/ a high front vowel which can be either short as in kintu *but* or long as in di:n *day*.

/i/ can form minimal pairs with /e/ (ki: *what* – ke: *who*) or /a/ (di:n *day* – da:n *gift*) but the distinction between i and i: is purely distributional. /i/ can appear at the beginning, in the middle or at the end of words:

initial   medial   final
iti *end*   ciṭhi *letter*   tumi *you*

/e/ a mid-high front vowel which can be open as in kena *buy* or closed as in ke: *who*.

/e/ can form minimal pairs with /a/ (cepe *having suppressed* – cape *under pressure*). The distinction between e and e: is distributional.

initial   medial   final
ekṭi *one*   cena *know*   mejhe *floor*

/æ/ a mid-low front open vowel as in kænô *why*. /æ/ forms minimal pairs with /e/ (mæla *fair* – mela *open*). It occurs in initial and medial position.

initial   medial
æk *one*   kæmon *how*

/a/ a low vowel which can be long as in a:m *mango* or short as in badam *nut*.

/a/ can form minimal pairs with /ɔ/ kal *time* – kɔl *machine*). The difference between long and short /a/ is distributional. Monosyllabic words take long a: (ma:l *goods*), two-syllable words take the short vowel (mala *string*). /a/ can appear in all positions.

initial   medial   final
amar *mine*   bhalo *good*   mɔja *fun*

/ɔ/ a mid-low mid-back open vowel as in *pot*. bɔla *say, speak*, bɔnna *flood*. This sound represents one of the two possible pronunciations of the inherent vowel in Bangla. It forms minimal pairs with /a/ (cɔla *move* – cala *thatch*) and with /o/ (mɔja *fun* – moja *socks*). It can occur in initial and medial position.

initial   medial
ɔlpo *a little*   gɔlpo *story*

/o/ a mid-high, closed, mid-back vowel as in French *mot*. chôbi *picture*, moṭ *total*, môdhu *honey*. This sound can be produced by either the inherent vowel ô or by o. It can form minimal pairs with /ɔ/ mon *mind* – mɔn *maund* and /u/ goṛ *base, root* – guṛ *molasses*. Can occur in all positions.

initial	medial	final
oti *too much*	kobi *poet*	gɔto *last, previous*
ojon *weight*	bon *sister*	alo *light*

/u/   a high back vowel which can be pronounced either open *(as in put)*: mukti *freedom*
or closed *(as in food)*: mu:kh *face*. It can contrast with /o/ tula *cotton* – tola *lift* and
can appear in all postions. The distinction between open /u/ and closed /u:/ is not
phonemic but distributional. This vowel can occur in all positions.

initial	medial	final
unun *oven*	kukur *dog*	goru *cow*

2.1.2   Vowel sequences

The following vowel sequences appear in Bangla.

vowel sequence	sound	English
i – i	dii	*give.*1.PR.S
i – e	niŷe	t*ake.*PP
i – a	kriŷa	*work*
i – o	priŷo	*dear*
i – u	iŷurop	*Europe*
e – i	ei, nei	*this, is absent*
e – e	meŷe	*girl*
e – a	kheŷal	*care*
e – o	deor	*brother-in-law*
e – u	keu	*someone*
æ – e	næe	*take.*3.PR.S
a – i	jai	*go.*1.PR.S
a – o	dao	*give.*2.PR.IMP
a – u	kauke	*someone.*OBJ
a – ŷ	khae	*eat.*3.PR.S
ɔ – ŷ	hɔe	*be.*3.PR.S
ɔ – o	hɔo	*be.*2.PR.IMP
o – i	boi	*book*
o – o	shoo	*lie down.*2.PR.IMP
o – u	bou	*wife*
o – ŷ	dhoe	*wash.*3.PR.S
u – i	dui	*two*
u – e	dhue	*wash.*PP