

Foreword

Since the Raji were first mentioned by George William Trail in 1828, the Rajis have remained a mystery to linguistic science. On the basis of the few words that had been recorded by diverse travelling scholars, it was only known that the language of the Raji was probably a Tibeto-Burman language, but the precise phylogenetic propinquity of the language within the Tibeto-Burman or Trans-Himalayan linguistic phylum remained unknown.

In the absence of clear comparative evidence upon which historical linguistic arguments could be based, the Raji language was conservatively treated as a subgroup unto itself, whereas some scholars ventured to 'lump' Raji together with several geographically not too distant Himalayan languages. Yet such conjectures represented no more than hunches, which in science are politely called hypotheses. Thanks to the great work of Kavita Rastogi, new more well grounded hypotheses can now be formulated regarding the linguistic position of Raji.

After years of devoted research amongst the Raji people, Kavita Rastogi has dispelled the gloom and lifted the veil of ignorance. For the first time, the international scientific community has a reliable source packed with information about the grammar and lexicon of the Raji language. Dr. Rastogi provides a valuable discussion about the language community, which reflects her love for the Raji people and her knowledge of the ethnolinguistic literature. She reports on sociolinguistic factors affecting the community and influencing the prospects for the long-term survival of the language.

Her grammatical description of Raji is a treasure trove of

entirely new information. The main markers in the nominal morphology and the previously only fragmentarily documented Raji pronominal system are described by Dr. Rastogi for the first time here in detail. What remains of the Raji numerical system has also been faithfully documented, and all other realms of nominal morphology attested in the data have been analysed with care.

Far more challenging is the task of documenting the verbal morphology of a language like Raji, which shows the remnants of a once widespread Tibeto-Burman biactantial verbal agreement system in the way in which the Raji system for person and number agreement distinguishes between transitive and intransitive verbal endings. Even taken just by itself, this first ever account of the verbal desinences of the Raji verbal conjugation constitutes a major advance in our knowledge, with implications for our understanding of Tibeto-Burman historical grammar.

Dr. Rastogi also analyses and describes other salient features of the verbal system, providing us with a deeper glimpse into the complexities of Raji grammar. Her discussion of clause structure, ranging from simple sentences to complex clauses and various types of subordination, give us a bird's eye view of Raji syntax. The rich body of data which she has amassed represents the richest corpus of Raji lexical data ever presented. In a book of less than one hundred pages, Dr. Rastogi contributes to the scientific community an astonishingly substantive account of Raji grammatical phenomena and much new analysed data, which were previously entirely undocumented.

The appearance of this long-awaited Raji grammar is a cause for great joy to linguists, ethnographers, population prehistorians and also for the Raji people themselves, whose language has now finally begun to receive the attention and study which it so highly merits. Our debt to Dr. Rastogi is great.

—George van Driem

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