

*The Indo-Aryan languages.* By Colin P. Masica, pp. xvi, 539. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991. £65.00.

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This book is a deeply impressive account of the current state of knowledge about the history and development of Indo-Aryan. It offers both a synopsis and a critique of previous treatments of its subject, embracing an enormously broad range of linguistic data and material, and provides at last an accessible and comprehensive guide to this highly complex field. The necessarily regional or theoretical specializations through which most scholars approach this area are here transcended by a global conspectus which few could match, and Masica's book seems destined to remain the standard survey (which term is in no way intended to minimize the often very detailed character of its discussions) of Indo-Aryan linguistics for many years to come. While certain chapters of the book call upon a relatively sophisticated knowledge of linguistics on the part of the reader, many of the earlier sections and the appendices will be of immediate value to all those interested in the character of the Indo-Aryan languages; and Masica's generous (and mostly very careful) use of examples in roman transliteration in any case offers a practical and reassuring foothold to those less than fully confident on the higher gradients of linguistic analysis. The book therefore meets the various needs of a wide readership.

Masica's approach is comparative, the material being organized on a topic-by-topic basis rather than by language or language group; this ensures a clear sight of the wood, despite the very large numbers (not to mention distinct sub-species) of trees crowding into view. Fortunately, the author's confident expectation that the indexes will facilitate access to the main features of any individual language is well founded, and this characteristic is aided by the very practical and clear organisation of the data. There is little danger of the material being swamped by abstract theorizing, for as a prefatory note explains, 'priority has been given to simple presentation of facts rather than to the different theoretical analyses those facts may inspire' (p.xii). Following a general chapter surveying the Indo-Aryan field as a whole, the chapter-wise topics are: the development of IA; the NIA lexicon (including non-Indian loans); descriptive phonology; scripts; historical phonology; nominal forms; the verb; and syntax.

The almost encyclopaedic range of topics covered here makes it difficult to know which features of the book to pull out for specific mention, but most readers are likely to find much of particular interest in Masica's discussion of the subject (or rather, 'the problem of subject') in NIA; Masica's observation (p.361) that 'in the case of the Ergative constructions, the claim of the Agent on Subject status is especially strong' will recommend itself particularly to anyone who has ever had to teach such constructions to a class of bemused and resistant Hindi-Urdu students. The discussion of the lexicon in chapter four is one of the most readable parts of the book, and together with the closely complementary discussion of the Hindi-Urdu question is of great value not only for its technical analysis but also with respect to social and communal issues of the moment. Likewise the discussion of 'writing systems' in chapter six not only investigates convincingly the complex question of the origins of India's various scripts, but also gives a very important reminder of the fact that writing was not 'regarded as particularly sacrosanct by the religious establishment' in pre-modern times, being 'associated rather with commercial record-keeping' (p.143); the relatively recent date of Nagari's rise to ascendancy as the standard vehicle for Sanskrit is also made plain. These points, while not claiming to be original scholarly conclusions, are an important antidote to frequently-represented assumptions about contemporary manifestations of Indian culture as being ageless, eternal and unchanging. It might be said that Masica's distinction between Hindi and Urdu is drawn too boldly on p. 92 (especially if one follows him in accepting Ohala's definition of 'Standard Hindi' as 'the dialect spoken by educated urban speakers in casual conversation'); it is an oversimplification to suggest that the 'purely Sanskrit' segment /n/ is 'confined to Formal Literary Hindi', and that the 'purely Perso-Arabic segments /q ʒ ʃ/' are 'confined to Urdu speakers'. The influence on (e.g.) Hindi of the ever-present English language, not simply in terms of loans, calques and the formation of Sanskritic neologisms but also in syntax, could also have been developed further here. But such minor dissatisfactions derive in the main from an individual reader's own agenda, and must yield to a recognition of the masterful way in which Masica has made such a success of a marshalling of linguistic data on a scale rarely attempted in the NIA context.

Nearly a hundred pages of the book are given over to appendixes, notes and bibliography. The appendixes comprise an inventory of NIA languages and dialects (cf. a discussion of these two terms, and their IA equivalents *bhāṣā* and *bolī*, on p.23; how confusing it is that the 'dialect' of Braj Bhāṣā stands subordinate to the 'language' of Khaṛī Bolī as 'Modern Standard Hindi/Urdu!); and a detailed discussion of 'Schemes of NIA subclassification'. The

extensive bibliography is organised by language (or rather, dialect), with an initial general section, and includes a few NIA titles. Conventions used throughout the book are standard and/or readily comprehensible, even if the innovative marking of vowel nasality by a tilde to the right of the vowel (as in *hāthiyo~ me~*, p.359) takes some getting used to. Such a small effort is certainly worthwhile, for this book is a superb example of deep but also widely accessible scholarship.

Rupert Snell