

HR THOMPSON BIO-DATA

Hanne-Ruth Thompson divides her time between teaching Bengali at SOAS in London and her research work on Bengali language issues. She did her MA at Freiburg University, Germany. After living in Bangladesh for almost four years she wrote *Essential Everyday Bengali*, a short grammar and dictionary of colloquial Bengali for foreigners. This led straight into her doctoral thesis at SOAS on selected grammatical structures of Bengali. Since obtaining her PhD in 2004 she has written various academic articles and a Practical Bengali Dictionary for Hippocrene in New York. Her main work *Bengali: A Comprehensive Grammar* was published in April 2010 by Routledge, Oxford. With this book Dr Thompson offers an exciting, modern and consistent approach to Bengali language structures. Her work is equally important for learners of Bengali as a foreign language and for linguists and researchers dealing with the Bengali language.

Lecture 22 9 2010 - Abstract:

Unencumbered grammar – a new way of thinking about Bengali

Many Bangla grammar books written in Bangla start with the expressed demand for a grammar which is suitable for Bangla, not one entangled in Sanskrit forms or one determined by English categories. One way of doing this is to move away from historical linguistics, to observe the language and to give a descriptive account of Bengali language structures as they are used today.

My lecture will be divided into three parts:

Part I Language and grammar

We will look at the relationship between language and grammar, the scope and purpose of grammatical interpretation and the ways in which grammatical thinking can help us to understand language better.

Part II The Burdens of Bengali

- (a) the burden of history:
 - (i) সংস্কৃতের আঁচল ধরে,
 - (ii) old example sentences: হিন্দুদের বিধবা বিবাহ করতে নেই।
- (b) the burden of prescriptivism: *'the art of speaking and writing correctly'*
- (c) the burden of formal grammar:
"Since movement in the framework adopted for this purpose is feature-driven, the default option would be to formulate a mechanism for the movement observed in (4) in terms of a

feature." Tanmoy Bhattacharya, *DP-Internal NP Movement*, *UCL Working Papers in Linguistics* 10 (1998), p 3

- (d) What do we gain and what do we lose when we free the Bengali language from these burdens?

Part III Observation and Description

- (a) levels of language (sound, morphology, word classes, parts of sentences, sentence structure, semantics)
(b) observation and analysis: where do the examples come from?
(c) discoveries: non-finites, reduplication, modals

Conclusions: A new way forward together

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