

Tej K. Bhatia and Kazuhiko Machida
The Oldest Grammar of Hindustānī
Content, Communication and Colonial Legacy
Volume 1: Historical and Cross-Cultural Contexts:
Grammar Corpus and Analysis
Volume 2: Lexical Corpus and Analysis [Ketelaar's
Section 1-45]
Volume 3: Ketelaar: Original Manuscript [1698
A.D.]

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Reviewed by *Ghanshyam Sharma*

In spite of the fact that India had been home to great grammarians and philosophers of language such as Pāṇini, Patañjali and Bhartṛhari and despite the fact that the Sanskrit language had a very rich grammatical tradition in ancient times, the Hindi language to a large extent remained unstudied for a long time and was consequently subject to very little grammatical treatment, if any, until the seventeenth century. In fact, for various socio-political and cultural reasons—which require further in-depth research—the Hindi grammatical tradition did not make effective use of the rich heritage of the Sanskrit grammatical tradition and thus was instead destined to be a by-product of the colonial era which started after the arrival of Europeans in India. In their quest to establish the native theory, some Indian scholars are known to have until very recently devoted their efforts towards establishing that the first Hindi grammar ever written was Mirza Khan in 1676, while opponents of this claim have ignored the grammar's existence altogether. Be that as it may, due to lack of reliable proof the native claim has been widely disputed; and siding with the non-native hypothesis, some scholars have argued that the first ever grammar of Hindi was instead written by a European. Nothing other than an authoritative

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work such as the present one could have shed decisive light on such a controversial issue. Tej K. Bhatia and Kazuhiko Machida (the Authors, hereafter) have not only undertaken an arduous task, they have also been very successful in accomplishing it. Not only have the Authors discovered the manuscript of the first ever grammar of the Hindustānī language written in Dutch by J. J. Ketelaar—a German from Elbing on the Baltic Sea (now in Poland) who worked with the Dutch East-India Company in India towards the end of the 17th century—they have critically assessed its possible contribution to future Hindi grammar studies, furnishing Hindi scholars with an invaluable document which doubtlessly opens up a new chapter in the history of Hindi grammars. As said above, the three volume book under review is dedicated to the oldest Hindustānī Grammar, written by Ketelaar (claimed to have been completed by 1698). The first volume includes a survey of the Hindi grammatical tradition by T. K. Bhatia and then presents the grammatical section (parts 46 through 53) of Ketelaar’s grammar. The second volume contains Ketelaar’s Hindustānī lexicon. The third volume reproduces the entire original manuscript—discovered by the Authors in the archives at The Hague (Algemeen Rijksarchief)—from its microfilm version with a xerox version of the original.

The first volume of the book begins with a succinct introduction to the Hindi grammatical tradition (p. 1-63) by T. K. Bhatia which in my view is the most important part of this publication. Bhatia has authoritatively presented the historical and cross-cultural contexts of the Hindi grammatical tradition. He has very accurately defined various terms such as Hindi, Hindustani, Hindavi, Rexta, Urdu which have always been a source of great confusion in the history of Hindi grammar. Pages 63 through 181 are composed of Ketelaar’s section 46-53. Ketelaar’s sections 46-47 deal with some aspects of Persian grammar whereas sections 48-49 present Hindi conjugation. The rest of the section is dedicated to the analysis of different types of vocabulary and terminology. A careful look at the conjugation tables presented by Ketelaar reveals how difficult it was for a European to rightly transcribe certain peculiar sounds of Hindustānī and to establish the ‘standard’ form of Hindustānī spoken in the seventeenth century. Ketelaar was aiming to analyze and present a standard form of *lingua franca* which was composed of different dialects spoken in a very wide area, starting from Agra, Delhi, Lahore to Lucknow and thus, in my view, cannot be considered similar to modern Khari boli, Bhatia’s claim notwithstanding: “In spite of the mixed lexicon, Ketelaar’s forms are primarily *kʰarī bolī* Hindī.” (p. 50). If one looks carefully at the uninflected masculine nouns in the nominal paradigms presented by Ketelaar—for example declension of

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बेटा presented by Ketelaar on page 89—one will have to recognize that the Hindustānī Ketelaar had in mind was not in total agreement with what has come to be known as modern standard Hindi, which is derived mainly from Khari boli. Many of the characteristics of Ketelaar’s grammar and variation in his data can be properly understood only through comparison with Hindi dialects other than Khari boli, and I believe that the Authors have failed to recognize the need to carry out such a comparison. Further enquiry into the topic will undoubtedly help us understand how Khari boli was able to tower over the different varieties of Hindustānī that were struggling to come into being despite being overshadowed by the influence of local dialects.

The second volume of the book entitled “Lexical Corpus and Analysis” deals with sections (1-45) of Ketelaar’s grammar and consists of two parts: (I) Lexical corpus [Ketelaar’s Original Order] and (II) Lexical Corpus [English Alphabetic Order]. Let us look at the first part first. Notice that Ketelaar’s manuscript contains two columns only: (1) list of Dutch words (2) their equivalents in Hindi transcribed into Dutch. In order to supplement Ketelaar’s original word lists with phonetic, semantic and etymological details, the Authors have wisely chosen to add seven more columns, making the volume an extremely useful tool for further research. The first column gives the page number of the manuscript while the second indicates the section number. The third column contains Dutch words deciphered from the original by the Authors with the help of native Dutch speakers. In the fourth column the Authors provide English translations of the Dutch words. In the fifth column the Authors provide Hindustānī words as deciphered and transliterated into Dutch with the help of Dutch speakers. The sixth column contains the Hindi target word, in Devanagari, as the perceived form of the original Hindustānī words transliterated into Dutch. In the seventh column the authors have chosen to transliterate the Hindi target forms. In the eighth column the Authors have provided etymological and cultural notes and finally, in the ninth column they have chosen to provide a Persian equivalent. Although the Authors have critically analyzed the corpus and meticulously provided all the relevant information to evaluate Ketelaar’s original lists of Hindustānī words, I have found the fifth column incomplete in that what is needed here is not only the Hindustānī word written in Dutch, but also its exact pronunciation transcribed in IPA, preferably with the help of a Dutch speaker. On the other hand, the Authors could have eliminated the seventh column, as it only contains a transliteration of the Hindi target form. For example, I find the information about schwa deletion in Hindi—which is not marked accurately

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everywhere (see, for example, the transliterated form ‘qalāmatārāsā’ on page 44 which should instead be ‘qalamātarāsā’)—totally superfluous in the present volume. Furthermore, the transliteration does not always adhere to Authors’ own transliteration principles, as outlined in the chart on page iii. See, for example, *bandūqā* p. 50, *nāraṅgī* [*nāraṅjī*] p. 61 and *naṅgā* p. 74 which according to the Authors’ own scheme should be transliterated as *bandūqā*, *nāraṅgī* [*nāraṅjī*], *naṅgā*, respectively. Similarly, I find the Hindi target forms provided in the sixth column misleading. For example, on page 43 for the Dutch word ‘pack’ (English ‘pack’) the Authors have furnished modern standard Hindi form ‘गठरी’ as the target form. But most of the Hindi dialects Ketelaar is known to have come into contact with have ‘गॉठ’ or ‘गॉठरी’ which are exactly what Ketelaar had in mind to transcribe through Dutch spelling. Similarly, for the Dutch word ‘handmeule’ (English ‘Hand mill’) on page 47, most of the Hindi dialects spoken in Hindi area have ‘चकिया’, as transcribed by Ketelaar and not the Hindi target form ‘चक्की’, as suggested by the Authors. In a similar vein, the Hindi dialects have ‘गॉडा’ for the Dutch word ‘zuijker rielt’ (English ‘sugar-cane’) on page 54, as transcribed by Ketelaar, not the Hindi target form ‘गन्ना’, as suggested by the Authors. Similarly, for the Dutch word ‘een ruijn’ (English ‘milkman’) the Authors have awkwardly suggested ‘खस्सी’ as Hindi target on page 26, whereas it has to be ‘घोसी’. Likewise, I fail to understand the Hindi target form ‘*बूज़ी’ for the Dutch ‘boot’ (English ‘boat’) on page 60 since the Hindi dialects have ‘बेड़ा’ or ‘बेड़ी’ which is exactly what Ketelaar was trying to transcribe. Non one would disagree that the Hindustānī words heard by Ketelaar in the seventeenth century had very little resemblance to the modern Hindi target forms furnished in the sixth column. What is the purpose, then, of providing the Hindi target forms? I believe that a comparison between Ketelaar’s forms and their equivalents in different Hindi dialects —spoken in Ujjain, Agra, Lucknow and Delhi area—would have improved the quality of the volume immensely.

Now let us consider the second part of the second volume in which the Authors, with the help of Excel, have re-arranged the Ketelaar’s original order according to English alphabetical order. I find it of no use whatsoever. I believe that an English index would have been of a great help instead. On the technical side, as a reader, I would have appreciated column headers on every page.

To conclude, I think that the Authors have been pioneers in bringing out the manuscript of the Oldest Grammar of Hindustānī written in 1698 by J. J. Ketelaar. The Authors have been successful in carefully analyzing and

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providing a clear commentary on the manuscript. Although Ketelaar's grammar is not exactly what we have come to know as a grammar of language in modern days—be that descriptive or prescriptive—it nonetheless provides Hindi scholars with an important source of information, both linguistic as well as pedagogical, and opens up new directions in the history of the Hindi grammatical tradition. The Authors have chosen to analyze Ketelaar's data in the light of Old Indo Aryan languages and modern standard Hindi only. I believe that it would have been extremely important to evaluate and analyze Ketelaar's data in the light of Middle Indo Aryan languages as well as different dialects of the Hindi language: it would have helped us understand what form of Hindustānī Ketelaar had in mind. The term Hindustānī has been very vaguely applied by different authors to refer to different varieties of the language, and thus it is of utmost importance that further studies on the topic shed some light on the form of Hindustānī Ketelaar was referring to. Leaving this unexplored aspect of Hindustānī grammar for further research, Hindi/Urdu scholars should undoubtedly be grateful to the Authors for the immense quantity of work they have put into it. There is no doubt that through the Authors' intelligent and arduous work Ketelaar's grammar has become an invaluable document and a major research tool not only for researchers of the Hindi/Urdu language, but also for historians of Hindi/Hindustānī grammar interested in the historical aspects of seventeenth century India.