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Book Review


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The grammar is a comprehensive and holistic description of the language. Though arguably no language has been exhaustively described, for all intents and purposes Seino van Breugel’s

1 The world’s second most populous language family was originally known as Tibeto-Burman and is now called Trans-Himalayan. Proponents of a certain family tree model have for several decades also called the family ‘Sino-Tibetan’, but as of today no evidence has ever been adduced for that particular phylogenetic model. The new term Trans-Himalayan, with its agnostic phylogeny incorporating only recognised and newly validated subgroups, has been adopted in Chinese as 跨喜马拉雅语系 Kuà xǐmǎlāyà yǔxì (George van Driem. 2014. ‘Trans-Himalayan’, pp. 11–40 in Nathan Hill and Thomas Owen-Smith, eds., *Trans-Himalayan Linguistics*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter; Wú Wó. 2015. ‘Kuà xǐmǎlāyà yǔxì: Jiān lùn běn pǔxī shuō dui shìqián rěnqūn qiānì yì zhì qīfā’ [“The Trans-Himalayan language family: A neutral name based on the geography of prehistoric migrations of subgroups”], *Hàn Zàn Yǔ Xuébào*, 8: 10–20).
grammar is quite a remarkably thorough account of a language which had hitherto been completely undocumented.

The grammar is tidily and logically organised, lucidly presented and well written. Despite being so all-encompassing, the grammar is completely accessible, and the presentation is user-friendly. The grammar is a veritable treasure trove replete with language data. Analytically, the grammatical account is both sophisticated and lucid throughout. The table of contents is well structured, complete and detailed, and reflects the outline of a well-organised language description. The list of abbreviations is complete and consistent. The glosses and abbreviations are entirely transparent and well chosen.

The cross-referencing is thorough, yet not overdone, so that the user can make his way through the grammar, navigating back and forth to gain insight into different aspects of related grammatical phenomena in the language. The interlinear glossing and translation are used properly and intelligently, maximising the utility of the grammar. A highly respectable volume of lexicon is presented on this previously entirely undocumented language. The corpus of texts is sizable, and the meticulous morpheme-by-morpheme glosses and savvy translations render the text corpus a major contribution of enduring value in and of itself.

The introduction provides a succinct but rigorous overview of the language community, the relevant linguistic family and subgroup, and the geography and ethnolinguistically pertinent history of the region. The discussion of the linguistic literature and the intelligent listing of relevant sources throughout the main body of the grammar contextualises all facets of the presentation within the current linguistic state of the art without resorting to superfluous gobbledygook.

This grammar of Atong is everything that a detailed and comprehensive account of a hitherto completely undocumented language should be. The savvy and rigorous presentation takes the reader by the hand, captivates, instructs and enlightens. The description contains a wealth of data, and these data are insightfully analysed, glossed and explained. The grammatical regularities of the language at all levels of description are analysed, explained and presented in a sophisticated and insightful fashion. This grammar is truly a monument to the author’s scholarship, an enduring contribution to linguistics and to the Atong language community, to whom the author has dedicated the book. This work contributes not just to our understanding of the Atong language but also to our knowledge of the Trans-Himalayan language family as a whole.