

A Discussion of Scriptorial and Orthographic Issues of Balochi

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Dr. Tahir Hakeem

Assistant Professor, Institute of Balochi Language and Culture
University of Turbat.

Aqeel Ahmed

Assistant Professor, Institute of Balochi Language and Culture
University of Turbat

Adnan Riaz

Assistant Professor, Department of English Literature,
University of Turbat.

Abstract

Balochi Language is written in Perso-Arabic script, which is why it has a number of issues, which particularly pertain to the twelve-borrowed Perso-Arabic letters and their phones used in Balochi writing system. Moreover, Balochi has hamza [ء], diacritic and vowels related issue with this script. Because this script does not provide any other, particular, letter or sign for the diacritics and vowels, due to which a number of ambiguous and identical words are often mispronounced, misread and misunderstood.

This research paper discusses the hypothesis that the scriptorial issues of Balochi language can better be resolved by adopting the Roman Script for Balochi Language or the same Perso-Arabic script with reasonable modifications which should address the issues pertaining to the issues of the borrowed phonemes, (glottal stops) sounds, the diacritics and vowels. This research at the same time is historical, comparative and descriptive in nature.

Key Words: Balochi Language, Roman Script, Perso-Arabic Script, Orthography, scriptorial and orthographic issues

Introduction

There are a number of, orthographical, issues in the script of Balochi written language, currently in use; among them the first and most important issue is whether to retain or remove the twelve borrowed Arabic and Persian letters. The second issue is of the particle and as well as the letter *hamza* {ء}. There is a certain school in Balochi linguistics which believes that the *hamza* is a product of the new written era of Balochi language, because the Balochi orthography, prior to the new one, was devoid of such particle or letter, called and read as *hamza* {ء}. Third and one of the most important issues of the Balochi orthography is that of the diacritics and vowels. The present script lacks particular graphemes (letters) for the said

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diacritics or short vowels. The mentioned issues in Balochi orthography have resultantly created ambiguities, misunderstandings and difficulty in the fluency of reading any Balochi texts, particularly for novice learners and kids. The said issues resulted in a heated debate to shift from the Perso-Arabic to Roman script for Balochi, assuming that such orthographical issues could, automatically, be removed if the language is written in Roman script.

This research paper discusses the afore mentioned issues of the Balochi script and the paper also discusses the issue of shifting to Roman script.

Homophonic Alphabets and Their Orthographical Issues

A particular group of Balochi linguists believe that Balochi orthography must be a phonemic based. And there should be a grapheme for each phoneme, and the borrowed phones may be excluded from the script. The proponents of the said idea include *Mir Gul Khan Naseer*, *Anwar Shah Qahtani*, *Mohammad Hussain Anqa*, *Syed Zahoor Shah Hashmi* and some other seniors and experts also believe in the same idea. One of the arguments of the said school of thought is that the borrowed phones are problematic in teaching and reading Balochi. Particularly, it is confusing for students to whether write a particular word with *ش* or *چ* (both the grapheme stand for the ‘s’ sound in English), which result in misspelling of the word. Such mistakes, in the part of the students or novice learners, will keep on occurring, which are, basically, orthographical issues.

In case of the Balochi orthography, this is true that the same phonemes may be represented by more than one grapheme (polygraphy). Having more than one grapheme for a single phoneme is often confusing to differentiate between the two while writing, which, resultantly, ends in a misspelling of a word. These homophonic alphabets are:

‘ا’ and *ڦ* for the ‘a’ sound

‘ث’ and *ڦ* for the ‘th’ sound

‘س’ and *ڙ* for the ‘s’ sound

‘ه’ and *ڻ* for the ‘h’ sound

‘ز’, *ڙ* and *ڦ* for the ‘z’ sound

‘گ’ and *ڙ* for the ‘g’ sound, and

‘ک’ and *ڙ* for the ‘k’ sound.

There should be one-to-one grapheme-phoneme correspondence in the Balochi orthography, hence for the afore mentioned phonemes, it is required that one grapheme should be opted for each phoneme, and the rest may be dropped out of the orthographic system of Balochi. Syed Zahoor Shah Hashmi adopted a similar approach by retaining eight graphemes and dropping the rest of, the twelve, graphemes, declaring them as the graphemes for the ‘Arabic phones’, and assuming that no Baloch can pronounce the said phones properly, except for those who have been brought up in an Arabic environment (Hashmi, 2010).

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Moreover, yet another rationale, behind dropping these graphemes, is they are problematic while writing. However, this problem does not only pertain to Balochi language, as other languages also have the same problems in their orthographies, even in a greater frequency. English orthography is one such example. English is not a phonetic orthography, due to which one finds a great difference in what one writes and what one says.

Many scholars in the Balochi linguistic faculty believe that the debate about adopting the Roman script for Balochi is still on, is because of the presence of the borrowed phones and their Allophonic consonants, and if these phonemes are dropped, it is probable that the excuse to adopt the Roman script for Balochi will also fade away. Qahtani in this regard posits that the debate over romanizing Balochi script started because of the incorporation of the Arabic and Persian consonants in Balochi script. The more rigidly we advocate the inclusion of these consonantal phonemes in Balochi script the greater the demand for Romanization of Balochi script will get (Balochi Zuban, 1995).

About retaining the non-balochi phonemes in Balochi script Badal Khan suggests that to standardize the Balochi orthography there need some modification and adjustment in the present orthography particularly about retaining the Perso-Arabic phonemes. First of all, the issue, whether the consonants such as ش, خ, د, س, ض, ط, ل, ئ, ع, غ, ف and ق which are not Balochi should be kept in the orthography or they should be dropped out. He further suggests that dropping these consonants may create some uneasiness in the beginning but with the passage of time people will get used to the modified script, hence they should be dropped, however, if not all then ف and ئ may only be retained (Khan, 1995).

However, there is another group of Balochi linguists who believe contrary to what the first school believes. The second school believes that the orthography of Balochi must be phonetic based, and all the borrowed phones or allophones must be adjusted in the orthography. Among the proponents for the said school are *Abdul Samad Amiri, Akbar Barakzai, Syed Reference Library, Balochi Academy Quetta, and Sangat Academy of Sciences Quetta*.

The proponents of the second group believe that the actual issue is not that of the borrowed phonemes or polygraphy in the script, but the issue is that the language is not given the status of education language. If the language is taught in schools, and if the mode of teaching in schools is Balochi then there will not remain any such issues, as highlighted by the proponents of the first group. This group believes if the kids are taught about the non-balochi phonemes, and be told if the word contains these sounds then this implies that the said word is either of Arabic or Persian origin in their early schooling, then there may not occur any problem of misspelling, mispronouncing, and semantic ambiguity in the language.

Syad Hashmi Reference Library in Malir Karachi has adopted somewhat a similar approach, while devising text-books for the private schools' primary section classes. The Arabic or Persian words have been marked with an asterisk, which helps the student in differentiating between original Balochi phonemes and the borrowed phonemes from Arabic and Persian. The second school does not agree with what Syad Zahoor Shah Hashmi believes that Baloch cannot pronounce the Arabic phones properly. As Mr. Amiri opines, not all Baloch are incapable of pronouncing the Arabic phones. We have to refer to the eastern and western diaspora of Balochi, though both the eastern and western Balochi speakers are farthest in terms

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of proximity, however if we make a phonetic comparison of both the areas, we get to know that Baloch residing in both these areas can pronounce ڦ, ڻ, ڻ, ڙ and even the English ‘V’ properly, which implies that Baloch can properly pronounce these phonemes and letters which have been made bone of contention (Amiri, 1998).

Arabic itself is not a phonetic orthography. Many of the Arabic words are not pronounced as per the written spelling of the word. In some of the Arabic dialects, such as in Egypt people pronounce ڇ (j) as ڏ or ڦ (k or q). For example, they pronounce جَمِيلٌ (jameel) as ڄَمِيل (Gameel) and جَمَل (Jamal) as ڄَمَل (Gamal)...(ibid), however, the literary language throughout the Arabic world is the same.

If the suggestion, that the borrowed phonemes and their graphemes should be excluded from the Balochi orthography, be entertained then upon seeing صَدِيقٌ as written سَدِيك as ڦَادِيک, طَاهِرٌ, سَدِيقٌ as ڦَاهِرٌ, سَدِيقٌ as ڦَادِيک then this will not only surprise the reader but this will also affect the readability of the text a great deal. However, this may not be problematic for someone who is not acquainted with the Arabic or Persian letters. Most of the scholars in the Balochi linguistic faculty are in favor of retaining the said consonantal phonemes either from Arabic or from Persian into Balochi orthography.

Hamza {ء} Related Issues

One of the criticism on Balochi script, among others, is excessive use of *hamza* {ء}. Many scholars and critics of *hamza* say that the early script of Balochi was devoid of *hamza*, and to prove this they suggest to refer to the writings of the following literary and non-literary personalities of the early time, prominent among whom are *Molvi Mohammad Umar Din Pori*, *Molvi Hazoor Bakhsh Jatoi*, *Qazi Abdul Samad Sarbazi*, *Abdul Karim Mirwari*, *Malik Dinar Mirwari* and others (Barakzai, 2016).

The use of different forms of *hamza* first came in Balochi orthography during 1950s, when in Quetta a gathering of literary folks suggested the incorporation of ئ, ؤ, آ, ئ, and ؤ. Later on, another such gathering in Karachi suggested the use of ئ, ؤ and ئ. However, with the passage of time the use of a number of *hamza* forms get dropped and there only remain ئ and ؤ in the Balochi orthography to be used till this day (Amiri, *Balochi Zuban e Nebishta Rahband*, 1998).

As for the first use of the *hamza* in Balochi orthography, there are differing accounts. While some believe that first time the use of *hamza* was witnessed during 1950s, some others such as Akber Barakzai believe it was used much earlier in 1930 than 1950s (Barakzai, 2016). Razzaq Sabir even goes further and says that first time *hamza* was used by the renowned Balochi poet *Muhammad Hussain Anqa* in one of his books *Rahil Koh* published in 1929 (Sabir, 1998).

In the orthography, developed by Syed Zahoor Shah Hashmi, known as *Syed Rahband* this *hamza* is a letter which precedes the letter ڻ, and in the text book, *Balochi Bungeeji*, from the Balochistan Textbook Board it is the thirty sixth letter of Balochi (*Balochi Bungeeji*, 2015).

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Sayed Zahoor Shah Hashmi developed three signs from the letter *hamza* {،}, which are ئ, ؤ, and آ, which are being used in the Balochi orthography from the last sixty years now as objective/accusative, genitive/possessive case and as conjunction. However, many linguists from the linguistic faculty of Balochi have suggested to replace these forms of the *hamza* with ئ, ئ, and ئ, and use them in the manner as:

کراچی instead of کرچی، شپ instead of شپ، and تون instead of تون.

Although there is no *hamza* in the orthography developed and introduced by the Uppsala University Sweden, it is excessively used in the text.

Hamza, without any diacritic, can be used in two different ways. Firstly, it can be used to highlight or suggest diphthongization in words such as in the words like گئی, گئی، چئی, چئی and others (Baloch, 2016), and secondly, it is used as an infinitive marker, as used by Azat Jamaldini and Haji Abdul Qayyum like ڪئي، ڪئي، درئي، درئي. However, Sayad Zahoor Hashmi has termed this as an unnecessary use of *hamza*. He further says that such use of *hamza* has not been limited to infinitive marker, but it is also, unnecessarily, being used with nouns and words like ڪر instead of ڪور، ڪر instead of ڪور، ڪل instead of ڪل and likes which seems an overburdening of an already burdened orthography (Hashmi, 2010). However, Haji Abdul Qayyum believes that if the *hamza* is not used as an infinitive marker, it is, likely, that the verbs may lose their proper pronunciation (Bahar, 1998), but, contrary to what Haji Abdul Qayyum believes, the use of *hamza* as an infinitive marker neither fits in the orthography nor it is in accordance with the proper pronunciation of any such words, except for some dialects or sub-dialects.

Issues Related to Diacritics and Vowels

One of the most important issues in the current orthography of Balochi is that of the lack of letters for the diacritics and vowels (short vowels). The short vowels (ء, ڻ, ڻ) are simply represented by diacritic superscript or subscript marks attached to the letters of the alphabet. In practice, diacritic vowels are used in writings used by beginning readers and religious writings; short-vowels are almost always omitted from general text. Long vowels are never omitted from written text. This creates ambiguities; namely phonological, semantic, and visual-orthographic, for instance refer to the word سرگ and جن, if written without a diacritic, can possibly be read in the following three different ways as سرگ، سرگ، سرگ and جن، جن، جن.

Roman Orthography for Balochi

Because the current Balochi orthography is replete with issues and weaknesses, and because of the widespread belief that the Perso-Arabic orthography cannot resolve but escalate the issues further in Balochi writing system, a lobbying and discussion of Romanization of Balochi orthography has, time and again, been on the floors of linguistics and literary gatherings. According to Ashraf Sarbazi the Romanization of Balochi script was first suggested in a meeting held in the Magsi House, Karachi, in 1955, which was attended by literary and political notables such as Mir Gul Khan Naseer, Azat Jamaldini and others, but no one paid any special attention to this suggestion then (Sarbazi, 1995).

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Though the then politico-religious and social scenario were not in favor of shifting Balochi orthography from Perso-Arabic to Roman, however, some of the then notables suggested to shift to roman orthography in their personal capacities. Akber Barakzai, in this regard recalls that in the early days of his literary and political career he advocated the adoption of roman orthography for Balochi writing system. He further says that, addressing a huge political crowd in Chakiwara Karachi, in 1955, which was attended by notable Baloch politicians, he proposed the adoption of the roman orthography for Balochi writing system instead of the Perso-Arabic one (Barakzai, 2016).

Sayad Zahoor Shah Hashmi, during 1962, developed a system for Roman Balochi and proposed that with little and slight modifications Roman script would be the best option for Balochi writing system, which would, resultantly, solve the important issues of diacritics and cluster sounds (Hashmi, 2010).

Mir Gul Khan Naseer is also one of the proponents of the Roman script for Balochi. In his personal capacities first in 1961-1962 and then in 1972 he started lobbying for the Romanization of Balochi, but, sadly, his efforts could not win reasonable support from politico-literary circles for Romanization of Balochi writing.

Apart from Akber Barakzai, Sayad Zahoor Shah Hashmi, and Mir Gul Khan Naseer, many others from the then literary and linguistic faculty of Balochi, in their personal capacities advocated the adaption of Roman script for Balochi, among whom are *Jan Mohammad Dashti*, *Lal Baksh Rind*, *Muneer Essa*, *Ashraf Sarbazi*, *Malik Tooqi*, and some other Baloch scholars in the European countries also supported and advocated for the Roman script for Balochi. The School of Iranian Languages in Uppsala University Sweden, around two decades earlier in the year 2000, developed a Roman script for Balochi and gave this discussion, of Romanization for Balochi, a new life.

A number of supporting arguments are presented to depend the Romanization of Balochi script, which include:

- spelling related issues will be solved.
- no ambiguities in words.
- easy to write.
- better textual readability.
- Balochi will be language of education and knowledge; hence it will prosper in a better pace.

However, many scholars posit that it is not as easy and smooth to shift from Perso-Arabic to Roman script for Balochi. In practicality, other than the linguistic and orthographical issues, if only two of the non-linguistic factors and hindrances are considered and analyzed, there might not remain any further discussion for the shift of Balochi orthography to Roman, in which the first one being the contemporary national and politico-geographical scenario. Opposing the Roman orthography, Abdullah Jan Jamal Dini says that before taking any such decision we have to look into our surroundings and our neighborhood. He says the Balochi language is mainly spoken in three neighboring countries namely Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan. And in all these three countries Balochi and the other national and regional languages are being written in the Arabic or Persian script ... if in Pakistan we choose to adopt Roman script for Balochi, are we not isolating our language and breaking our linguistic ties from other contemporary and prosperous languages of these countries? Are we not depriving the Baloch diaspora other than in Pakistan from our literary creativities and achievements? (Jamaldini, 2017).

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In the light of such ground realities, most of the Balochi linguistic faculty is in favor of the current Perso-Arabic orthography for Balochi. Though Sayad Zahoor Shah Hashmi believed that the Roman script is better and problem solving for Balochi, we are not the final authority to shift from one script to another, in a situation like this, instead of drifting, we better modify and make better use of the current orthography for the Balochi writing system (Hashmi, 2010).

Carina Jahani, a prominent researcher and scholar of Balochi language and linguistics also holds similar views about the adaption of Roman script for Balochi. She believes that Roman script does not suit Balochi ... although Roman can be a phonetic orthography for Balochi, having the current scenario it is very difficult for Balochi to adopt Roman script (Jahani, 1987).

Roman orthography itself is replete with orthographic issues which cannot solve, many scriptorial and linguistic, issues. Such as there would be a state of under-differentiation if Balochi adopts the Roman script. As the Balochi phonemes are more than the Roman letters. The twenty-six letters of Roman cannot represent all the Balochi phonemes. And if some new graphemes are created from these twenty-six letters, for the remaining phonemes, as the Persian did with Arabic, developing گ from گ and چ from چ, ڙ from ڙ which will again create confusion and problems in reading and writing.

One of the weaknesses of the Roman script is it is deprived of a single grapheme for *ch* and *sh* sounds. Though these sounds are present in the English phonology, they are not represented in the Roman orthography. These sounds of English language are represented with graphemes/letters. For example, the چ is represented in three or four possible ways; short, session, motion, Christian, in all these four words the چ sound is represented by *sh*, -*ssio*, -*tio* and -*tia*. Moreover, this problem is not limited to these two sounds only, but a number of English sounds in Roman script are represented in a combination of more than one grapheme, called as diographs.

Like English, the Roman script is unable to represent all the Balochi phonemes as well, and there need to develop new graphemes for sounds like ڦ, ڻ, ڻ, ڻ and the likes, which in itself is against the definition of a standard orthography. As the definition for a standard and perfect orthography is one-to-one grapheme-morpheme correspondence.

Roman script lacks a complete and permanent system for the sounds of the letters and pronunciation of the words. Due to its weak phonological system many words cannot be pronounced properly. Many words in Roman, due to its orthography, get distorted to the extent that they hardly can be recognized to read. Let alone Balochi, Roman is unable to provide proper letters and graphemes to properly pronounce the English phonemes and words, which is why in English dictionaries each word is accompanied by its proper phonetic representation.

There is hardly any orthography in the world's languages which can claim to be complete and error free. Like other orthographies Roman, Arabic and Persian orthographies have their own weaknesses and drawbacks. However, despite weaknesses the Perso-Arabic script in Balochi has, considerably, tackled its issues and is on its way to further evolution. The current orthography in Balochi is in use for the last sixty years now, and the shifting of the orthography, now, from the present to the Roman means making an all new and fresh start for the Balochi, at this time of its evolution Balochi cannot afford such a huge shift. Moreover, such shifting of

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orthography also requires that till date all the writings in Balochi be imported from Perso-Arabic script to Roman Balochi, which in itself is an unsurmountable challenge for Balochi. All this Balochi literature in the current orthography spans for a period of two centuries, although for languages two centuries is not that a big period, however, for a struggling language like Balochi two centuries is considerably a lengthy period. It is because, as for the written language is concerned, there is nothing left with Balochi which is older than two centuries. It is for this reason that the written literature contained in these two centuries is of great importance to Balochi. And other than planning and resources this huge literature cannot be imported easily. However, Balochi cannot afford to leave all this with the Perso-Arabic orthography, and let its coming generations to find its two centuries' entire literature in museums.

Even if the highlighted, technical and orthographical, issues of the roman script are removed, yet again it is not possible to adopt the Roman script for Balochi due to the current socio-political, geographical and other factors relating to the ground realities. This matter now does not even pertain to the (socio-) linguists, phoneticians and phonologists, but this matter directly pertains to the politics of the region and to socio-economic changes in the region.

Conclusion

Possibly, there is no complete and error-free script or orthography, which can represent its language's all the phonemes perfectly. Both, Roman and Perso-Arabic are not Balochi's own script, hence both cause problems for Balochi. However, as compared to Roman, Balochi has, now, come a long way with Perso-Arabic script, and there is greater consensus for continuing the present script rather than the Roman.

The Romanization of Balochi has always been on personal levels and capacities, rather than being on institutional and collective level, which is why it never got much attention and support. Balochi in Roman script is good for the Baloch living in abroad, particularly, in the European countries. However, for the Baloch, living in the sub-continent and in the Iranian plateau, it is not possible to write in Roman script in near future. It is, therefore, suggested that further research, on how *Sayad Rahband* should be modified and developed in accordance with the need of the Balochi phones and phonemes, be carried out and be used for the literary and non-literary writing purposes in Balochi.

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