PARSILForewordByDrBell

**Foreword**

I have watched the development of the ideas underlying this publication for more than a year now and have, in the process, become increasingly impressed by the need for such a system and by the author’s dedication and sophistication. He has, I know, faced and dealt with tough questioning of his intentions and his solutions to the inherent problems of an enterprise such as this and, as a result, has come up with something which he can be proud of and which has substantial potential for positive change in the linguistic ecology of India.

The purpose of this foreword is to place this publication in its historical context. It is important to understand that what you are about to read is not just another pedestrian publication about writing systems and transliteration. It sits squarely in processes of development and language planning stretching over many thousands of years within which, I would suggest, it finds a very significant place.

For tens of thousands of years, the verbal system progressively replaced the gestural as the prime vehicle for the expression of cognitive meaning which it reduced to the subordinate level of “paralanguage”: a secondary, non conceptual, emotionally charged means of communication.

From this point on, “language” came to mean the *spoken* language and, in terms of prestige, after the reduction of speech to writing (only a few thousand years ago), the *written* language.

There is, necessarily, no direct link between the sound units of speech and those of any writing system devised to represent them. Sounds are continuous, ephemeral and broadcast multi-dimensionally in the air: letters (or their equivalents) are discontinuous, potentially permanent and represented in two dimensional texts.

The challenge for the creator of a writing system is to find a user friendly way of bridging the gap between the continuous aural nature of speech and the discontinuous visual nature of writing.

Writing systems are not, as might be supposed, straightforward devices for representing sounds. Many of them possess culturally significant value for the communities which use them. The choice of a writing system is far from being a neutral matter. It is a powerful cultural and political issue.

There are many examples world wide: a major symbol of Kemal Attaturk’s modernizing revolution in Turkey in the 1920s was the replacement of Arabic by the roman alphabet; in the former Yugoslavia, Croatian and Serbian were combined as “Serbo-Croat”, with the first being written in the Roman and the second in the Cyrillic alphabet; “Malay” (in contemporary Malaysia) can be written either in Rumi (based on the roman alphabet) or Jawi (based on Arabic); in pre-Independence India (and present day India and Pakistan) Hindi is written in the Devanagari and Urdu in an Arabic-based script.

Every language in the world is a spoken tongue: the medium of communication within a speech community and the repository of its culture.

The written forms of Indian languages can trace their origins back over millennia and therefore possess enormous cultural value for their speech communities. Any attempt to replace, for whatever reason, these time-honoured writing systems must clash head on with ancient tradition. This is what, bravely (or recklessly, however you wish to look at it) the author of this book has attempted to do.

While accepting and celebrating the traditional writing systems, he has recognized the impediment they place before those attempting to learn a language with a different script from their own and offers a very user friendly system for transliterating Indian (and in principle other languages) into a common system.

The proposal is not in any way intended to devalue or replace the original writing systems but to provide a bridge between languages and cultures and, as a result, a mechanism for bringing Indians, whatever their linguistic and cultural backgrounds, together in the movement towards their recognition of a single, though marvellously diversified, society.

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