PARSILextractsForFriends15MAY2015Ch1

1. PARSIL: An Overview

Since the readership of this book is likely to include scholarly linguists as well as lay readers, the subject area of PARSIL necessitates discussion on two different levels. Therefore, this first chapter is written for the benefit of common readers who could be otherwise well-educated but not academically familiar with the subjects of linguistics and phonetics. And yet, hopefully, the contents of this chapter would help even the scholarly linguists get a better overview of the book. The second chapter, although written mainly for scholars, is likely to be of interest to all readers since it provides a gateway into the field of writing systems.

**What is PARSIL?**

PARSIL is an acronym for Phonetic Alphabet for Romanization of Spellings in Indian Languages. (According to the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English OUP 1974, an acronym is a “word formed from the initial letters of words in a set phrase”). For example, IPA is the acronym for International Phonetic Alphabet, BCCI for ‘Board of Control for Cricket in India, POP for Plaster of Paris, IMF for International Monetary Fund and so on. PARSIL is a newly proposed writing system which, in essence, is an enriched and expanded Roman alphabet. The Roman alphabet is the alphabet used as the writing system in many modern-day languages, including English. PARSIL may be used for transcribing (graphically representing) Indian Language (IL) sounds as one hears them or for the transliteration of Indian Language (IL) texts (changing the script of IL texts to the PARSIL script). The aim of introducing PARSIL to the English-knowing users of Indian languages is two-fold:

a. to preserve the sounds of Indian language (IL) words when they are Romanized;

b. to bring India’s north and south closer phonetically.

General Layout of the Book

While the Table of Contents functions as a primer of the book’s contents, a quick description of the general layout of the book is provided below for the benefit of the readers.

There are ten chapters and ten appendices [Appendices A to J].

This chapter, Chapter One of the book, is devoted to enlightening the lay readers about the general concept and design of the book and the basics of the subject of Phonetics (which forms the basis of this book and with which many readers may not be very familiar). Chapter Two is intended primarily for scholars, but it should be accessible to non-professional readers as well, as mentioned earlier.

Chapter Three lists, describes and discusses, in detail, the PARSIL symbols.

Chapter Four presents a case, in greater detail, for the importance of PARSIL. Chapter Five tries to respectfully note the idiosyncrasies of the speakers of Indian English (English-speaking Indians with a background of their rich grammatical traditions).

Chapter Six attempts to identify the root cause for the wrong pronunciation of IL words after they are transliterated into the Roman script. Chapter seven provides the full chart of PARSIL.

While Chapter Eight explains how PARSIL does not adversely affect pure English writing, Chapter Nine demonstrates PARSIL in praxis by providing examples that should allay possible doubts about its viability. Most readers would greatly benefit by reading Chapter Nine after having understood the PARSIL symbols given in Chapter Three.

Chapter Ten is devoted to the attainment of one of the primary reasons for introducing PARSIL to the English-knowing users of Indian languages: to bring India’s north and south closer, phonetically. For this, the chapter takes as an example, a female name spelt with slight difference by north Indians and south Indians as ‘Sujata’ and ‘Sujatha’ respectively (the use of ‘ta’ and ‘tha’ being the difference between the two). The chapter shows how PARSIL can innovatively help both the north Indians and the south Indians in spelling the same name with complete linguistic validity, in one and the same way, as ‘Sujāтā’, where the smallcap letter ‘т’ is used in place of ‘t’ of ‘Sujata’ and ‘th’ of ‘Sujatha’. Similarly, all other words like ‘Sujata’/’Sujatha’ (involving ‘t’ and ‘th’ in their spellings) can be now spelt with complete linguistic purity by using the smallcap ‘т’ in place of ‘t’ and ‘th’ in the spellings. The chapter further tries to point out that the difference in graphic representation comes about because of one sound: the un-aspirated unvoiced dental plosive, which is not heard in RP English and for which the normal 26-letter Roman alphabet cannot provide a common, truly representative symbol. (The expression ‘dental plosive’ is explained later in this chapter as well as in Appendix A. ) PARSIL provides the missing phonetic symbol and the name in question can now be spelt in one and the same way, with complete linguistic purity. Similarly, as mentioned above, this would apply to hundreds of similar words like: ‘Geeta’/’Geetha’, ‘Neeta’/’Neetha’ and others, which could then be spelt ‘Gīтȁ’, ‘Nīтā’ and the like, without loss of linguistic and phonetic purity.

After the chapters of the book, ten appendices follow, which will hopefully be of great help to readers. For example, Appendix G provides a tabulated chart for the comparison of alphabets of various writing systems; Appendix F demonstrates how the author has short-cut saved the PARSIL symbols on his keyboard (with the suggestion that the readers may use their own method for short-cut saving the required PARSIL symbols on their keyboards). In Appendix I the reader will find the full chart of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). Appendix J discusses the inclusion in PARSIL of symbols for non-IL sounds that have crept in and have virtually got absorbed into the ILs and may very well be relevant in the future.

(After many paragraphs…..)

Limitations of the English Alphabet for IL transliteration

The Sanskrit alphabet has 49 characters (some Indian languages have more), whereas the English alphabet has only 26 characters and thus, transliterating Indian language words into English has naturally proved problematic. Yet, it must be acknowledged here that the currently used phonetic alphabets like IAST have brilliantly tackled the problem. They have used various diacritic marks with the help of which the same letter of the Roman alphabet can be (and is being) used for representing different Sanskrit sounds (and the Devanagari characters used for representing them). For example, in the International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration (IAST), which is the most popular academic standard for the Romanization of Sanskrit, the normal ‘n’ stands for the dental nasal, ‘n’ with a dot above it [ṅ] stands for the velar nasal, ‘n’ with a dot below it [ṇ] stands for the retroflex nasal, and so on. Unlike most Indian languages, the RP variety of English does not have the sounds represented by the last two symbols [ṅ] and [ṇ].

(After many paragraphs….)

It needs to be mentioned here that the term ‘common reader’ does not stand for an ‘uneducated person’. The book assumes the ‘common reader’ to be an English-knowing user of Indian Languages. He/she would normally know how to use a dictionary and to read the pronunciation usually provided between two slanting lines after the relevant entry of the word in the dictionary.

(After any paragraphs….)

For the practical use of this book, however, the reader may follow the steps enumerated below:

a. proceed directly to Appendix G, which gives a comparison of PARSIL with other writing systems currently used for the Romanization of Indian language words.

b. refer to the chapter titled ‘Full PARSIL Chart’;

c. see Appendix D, which provides examples of PARSIL phonetic symbols in use;

d. refer to the IPA Chart at Appendix I (‘I’ for ‘India’);

e. academically oriented readers may further refer to Appendix A of the book for explanation of terms that are used in the book.

It is hoped that the above introductory explanation would help readers in understanding the design of PARSIL symbols and in using them effectively.

End of Chapter one (15 pages)