

## CHAPTER 6

### WRITING SYSTEM

#### 6.0 Outline

This chapter deals with the writing system for the Bhujel language.<sup>1</sup> It consists of three sections. In section 6.1 we briefly discuss the issue of script in general. Section 6.2 attempts to propose the Devanagari script for the Bhujel language. In section 6.3 we summarize the findings of the chapter.

#### 6.1 The issue of the script

Choosing a script for more than 120 preliterate languages spoken in Nepal has been raised as an issue in recent years. According to Glover (2002) a detailed phonemic analysis and a detailed study of the dialectal variations of the language are required to suggest a script for the language. There are three script choices, viz. Tibetan, Devanagari and Roman for the unwritten Tibeto-Burman languages in Nepal. He notes that the Devanagari script may be the most suitable choice among the three. Chamberlain (2001) discusses orthography issues in the minority unwritten languages. He notes that the Tibetan script is suitable for a language which has a high level of cognates with Tibetan and a sizable or influential population literate in Tibetan. For the rest of the Tibeto-Burman languages spoken in Nepal the Devanagari script can be adapted for writing. Hari (2002) notes that the Tibetan script is not able to represent the tonal features of a language like Yohlmo, a Tibeto-Burman language (Helambu Sherpa). She suggests the Devanagari script for the Tibeto-Burman languages like Yohlmo. The Devanagari script has been used in Yohlmo-Nepali-English dictionary published in 2004.

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<sup>1</sup> Bhujel is a preliterate language. Developing a writing system for a preliterate language has been taken as difficult matter, though feasible. Writing system is necessary not only for the literacy and primary education in the mother tongue but also for the promotion of writing in the language. Nowadays writing system is not considered only a linguistic reality. It is also a social convention, to be adopted and used by a community of speakers with their particular history, social relations, political context and cultural heritage (Robinson, 2003).

Noonan (2005) discusses the practical problems in proposing a writing system for unwritten languages of Nepal. He notes that though there may be other alternative scripts the Devanagari script can be adapted for all the unwritten Tibeto-Burman languages of Nepal.

Choosing orthography for the Bhujel language may a great issue in the present context of Nepal. Robinson (2003) rightly notes that writing system is not only a linguistic reality. It is also a social convention, to be adopted and used by a community of speakers with their particular history, social relations, political context and cultural heritage. We do not propose the Roman script, though easy to follow, for Bhujel because it is not practically adapted to any Tibeto-Burman languages in Nepal. At present we are not motivated to propose the Tibetan script for Bhujel. The first reason is that the speakers do not consider themselves to be Tibetan. The second reason is that no Bhujel is literate in Tibetan language. The Bhujel follows Buddhism. However, they do not follow Lamaism. Thus, they do not require learning Tibetan script and language. Nowadays, in Nepal, the issue of the orthography has been seriously taken not only as socio-political matter but also as symbol of ethnic identity of the speakers. Nevertheless, the Devanagari script seems only the appropriate choice for the Bhujel language.

## **6.2 Devanagari script**

In this section we first discuss the motivations for the choice of the Devanagari script for the Bhujel language and then we critically examine how far it is possible to accommodate the phonological system in the Devanagari script. Finally, we will discuss the testing of the orthography.

### ***6.2.1 Motivations***

There are basically two motivations for the choice of a script for Bhujel. The first is the linguistic reality and the second is the social convention which includes the history, social relations, political context and cultural heritage of the speakers. We further elaborate these motivations as follows:

- a) Tone and glottal stop are generally considered as the major difficult aspects of the phonological system of language. Bhujel lacks both tone and phonemic

glottal stop. The only difficult phonological distinctions which seem difficult to accommodate in the Devanagari script is the breathy phonemes. They can also be accommodated in the Devanagari script well.

- b) The Bhujel who are literate are basically literate in the contact language Nepali. Thus, it is easy to follow for them.
- c) During the field study the language consultants in Tanahun have provided the text data written in the Devanagari script.
- d) Many words related to different semantic domains have been heavily borrowed from Nepali. They do not pose any difficulty to be written in Nepali.
- e) Some languages like Newar and Maithili which retain their own traditional scripts are also motivated to use Devanagari script and the Devanagari script has been proposed and adopted for the Tibeto-Burman languages of Nepal except a few languages like Limbu and Magar.
- f) The numerals in Bhujel can easily be represented in the Devanagari script.
- g) Any one among the Tibeto-Burman hill castes, ethnic communities, including the Bhujel, even marginally literate, is familiar with the Devanagari characters.

### ***6.2.2 Accommodations***

In this subsection we first compare the phonological systems which the Devanagari script can easily represent without modifications or additions in the basic character set with the Bhujel phonological system and then we show how the phonemes in Bhujel are represented in the Devanagari script. Finally we will discuss how the Devanagari script can be adapted for the Bhujel phonology.

#### **i. Comparison**

Table 6.1 presents the phonological system which the Devanagari script can represent without additions, or modification and/or reinterpretation of the basic character set.

(<<sup>h</sup>> indicates aspiration, <fi> murmur):

**Table 6.1: Phonological system which the Devanagari script can represent**

<b>Consonants</b>	Labial	Den-Alv	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Unaspirated stop/affricate	p	t	ʈ	c	k	
Aspirated stop/affricate	p <sup>h</sup>	t <sup>h</sup>	ʈ <sup>h</sup>	c <sup>h</sup>	k <sup>h</sup>	
Voiced stop/affricate	b	d	ɖ	j	g	
Murmured stop/affricate	bʱ	dʱ	ɖʱ	jʱ	gʱ	
Voiced nasal stop	m	n	ɳ	ɲ	ŋ	
Voiced lateral Approximant		l	ɭ			
Voiced tap		r				
Voiced tap		r				
Voiceless fricative		s	ʂ	ʃ		
Murmured voice [Glottal fricative]						h
Glide				y	w/v	
<b>Oral Vowels</b>						
	i i: ī ṛī			u ū: u ṛū:		
	e ē		a ā		o ō	
			ɐ ă			
<b>Diphthongs</b>	ay	āy		aw	āw	
<b>Syllabic liquids</b>	ɾ	ɾ:	ɭ	ɭ:		

We have discussed the major phonological features of the Bhujel languages in chapter 3. When we compare the major phonological features of the Bhujel to that of given in Table 6.1 it would be obvious that the following breathy features cannot be directly represented by the Devanagari script. Such features are reproduced in Table 6.2.

**Table 6.2: Breathy distinctions in Bhujel**

<b>Consonants</b>	Bilabial	Dental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar
Voiced nasal stop	m	n			ŋ
Breathy nasal stop	m <sup>h</sup>	n <sup>h</sup>			ŋ <sup>h</sup>
Voiced lateral			l		
Breathy lateral			l <sup>h</sup>		
Voiced tap			r		
Breathy tap			r <sup>h</sup>		
Glide	w			y	
Breathy glide	w <sup>h</sup>			y <sup>h</sup>	

Table 6.2 shows that the breathy distinctions are realized in nasals, lateral, tap and glides in Bhujel.

## **ii. Representation**

We first present a tentative orthography for the non- breathy consonants of Bhujel in Devanagari script and then vowels in the Bhujel.

### **a) Non-breathy consonant sounds**

The non-breathy consonants can be represented in the Devanagari script. It is exemplified in (1).

(1)	<u>Consonants</u>	<u>Devanagari script</u>
a.	p	प
b.	p <sup>h</sup>	फ
c.	b	ब
d.	b <sup>h</sup>	भ
e.	t	त
f.	t <sup>h</sup>	थ
g.	d	द
h.	d <sup>h</sup>	ध
i.	c	च
j.	c <sup>h</sup>	छ
k.	j	ज
l.	r	र
m.	l	ल
n.	n	न
o.	ŋ	ङ
p.	s	स
q.	r	र
r.	l	ल
s.	m	म
t.	n	न
u.	ŋ	ङ
v.	s	स
w.	h	ह
x.	y	य
y.	k	क
z.	k <sup>h</sup>	ख

aa.	g	ग
bb.	g <sup>h</sup>	घ

## b) Breathy consonant sounds

The breathy consonant phonemes which require unconventional representations in the Devanagari script are r<sup>h</sup>, l<sup>h</sup>, m<sup>h</sup>, n<sup>h</sup>, ŋ<sup>h</sup>, w<sup>h</sup> and y<sup>h</sup>. In Bhujel breathy is not a concomitant of tone. It is a property of the syllable. They can be accommodated quite well in the Devanagari script. The breathy can be transcribed with the character < ह >. The syllable initial consonant can be written in its conjunct form as in (2).

(2)

	<u>Consonants</u>	<u>Devanagari script</u>
a.	r <sup>h</sup>	रह
b.	l <sup>h</sup>	लह
c.	m <sup>h</sup>	मह
d.	n <sup>h</sup>	नह
e.	ŋ <sup>h</sup>	उह
f.	y <sup>h</sup>	ह्य
g.	w <sup>h</sup>	ह्व

The transcription of the breathy phonemes in (2) may look unpleasant with the character < ह >. We can solve this problem by proposing an alternative way in which the Devanagari script can be adapted for the breathy sounds in Bhujel. The alternative way is to use a subscript dot indicate breathy consonant sounds as in (3)

(3)

	<u>Consonants</u>	<u>Devanagari script</u>
a.	r <sup>h</sup>	र̣
b.	l <sup>h</sup>	ल̣
c.	m <sup>h</sup>	म̣
d.	n <sup>h</sup>	न̣

e.	ŋ <sup>h</sup>	ङ
f.	y <sup>h</sup>	य
g.	w <sup>h</sup>	व

### c) The vowels

The oral, nasal and diphthongs in Bhujel can be represented in Devanagari script as well.

#### Oral vowels

They are exemplified in (4).

(4)

	<u>Oral vowels</u>	<u>Devanagari characters</u>
a.	i	इ
b.	e	ए
c.	a	आ
d.	ʌ	अ
e.	o	ओ
f.	u	उ

#### Nasal vowels

Vowel nasalization is indicated by means of a diacritic known as the *candra bindu* (◌̣) homorganic nasals can be transcribed with the *anusvara*. They are presented in (5)

(5)

	<u>Nasal vowels</u>	<u>Devanagari characters</u>
a.	ĩ	अँ
b.	ẽ	इँ
c.	ũ	उँ
d.	ẽ	एँ



The diphthongs in the Bhujel language are represented in the Devanagari script as in (6)

a.	ai	ऐ	maisa	मैसा	'banana'
b.	au	औ	hau	है	'light'
c.	ai	आइ	ai	आइ	'grand-mother'
d.	au	आउ	k <sup>h</sup> ryau	ख्याउ	'play'
e.	oi	ओइ	woy	ओइ	'blood'
f.	ui	उइ	muik	मुइक्	'eye'

Special allographs are often required for consonant clusters, often for the first consonant, sometimes for the second as well. These special allographs are referred to as *conjunct* or *combining* forms. The consonant clusters in Devanagari script can be represented as in (7)

(7)

a.	pr-	प्र	prok	प्रोक्	'lung'
b.	br-	ब्र	brauto	ब्राउतो	'large'
c.	br-	ब्र	brauto	ब्राउतो	'large'
d.	pr-	प्र	prok	प्रोक्	'lung'
e.	br-	ब्र	brauto	ब्राउतो	'large'
f.	tr-	त्र	trak	त्राक्	'penis'
g.	kr-	क	krut	कुत्	'hand'
h.	k <sup>h</sup> r-	ख	k <sup>h</sup> ryau	ख्याउ	'play'
i.	gr-	ग्र	gruti	गुती	'sick'
j.	pl-	प्ल	pla	प्लअ	'break'
k.	bl-	ब्ल	bla	ब्ला	'swim'
l.	kl-	क्ल	kli	क्ली	'stool'
m.	sr-	स्र	srok	स्रोक्	'sour'
n.	py-	प्य	pyak	प्याक्	'pig'

o.	p <sup>h</sup> y-	फ्य	p <sup>h</sup> yan	फ्यान्	'put off'
p.	by-	ब्य	byak <sup>h</sup>	ब्याख्	'lung'
q.	ty-	त्य	tyan	त्यान्	'cause to float'
r.	dy-	दय	dyur	दयुर्	'spit'
s.	d <sup>h</sup> y-	ध्य	d <sup>h</sup> yo	ध्यो	'mark '
t.	cy-	च्य	cyas	च्यास्	'splits'
u.	c <sup>h</sup> y-	छ्य	c <sup>h</sup> yuṅ	छ्युङ्	'deep'
v.	j y-	ज्य	jyuṅ	ज्युङ्	'cold'
w.	ry-	रय	ryan	रयाङ्	'wasp'
x.	r <sup>h</sup> y-	रह्या	r <sup>h</sup> yao	रह्याओ	'worn'
y.	ly-	ल्ह	lyam	लह्याम्	'road'
z.	l <sup>h</sup> y-	लह्य	l <sup>h</sup> yuṅ	लह्युङ्	'climb down'
aa.	my-	म्य	myan	म्यान्	'hair '
bb.	ny-	न्य	nyam	न्याम्	'sun'
cc.	sy-	स्य	syas	स्यास्	'dance'
dd.	hy-	ह्य	hyuṅ	ह्युङ्	'flea'
ee.	ky-	क्य	kyak <sup>h</sup>	क्याख्	'weave'
ff.	gy-	ग्य	gyap	ग्याप्	'needle'
gg.	gw-	ग्व	gwano	ग्वानो	'which one'
hh.	kry-	कय	kryap	कर्याप्	'cry'

In (7) where the consonant has no conjunct vowel there has been used the punctuation stroke referred to as *halanta* ( \ ).

In Bhujel the first three native cardinal numerals in Bhujel have been attested. They can be represented in the Devanagari script as follows:

(8)			<u>Devanagari</u> <u>characters</u>
a.	sunna	'zero'	०
b.	at	'one'	१

- |    |     |         |   |
|----|-----|---------|---|
| c. | nis | 'two'   | २ |
| d. | sum | 'Three' | ३ |

The rest have been borrowed from Nepali. The following are the examples.

(9)				<u>Devanagari script</u>
a.	car	'four'		४
b.	pāc	'five'		५
c.	c <sup>h</sup> a	'six'		६
d.	sat	'seven'		७
e.	at <sup>h</sup>	'eight'		८
f.	nau	'nine'		९
g.	das	'ten'		१०

### 6.2.3 Testing of the orthography<sup>2</sup>

The script and the language are considered as the symbol of the ethnic identity. Thus, no writing system can be suggested or prescribed without the full consent of the ethnic group. Moreover, the writing system proposed basically on linguistic analysis of the language must be field-tested to discover how adequate it is, how easy it is to read and to write and what kinds of problems may emerge. For this purpose the language, though not fully representative, the two speakers, namely Govind Bahadur and Kisan Bhujel were asked to read the text written in the Devanagari script. Both of them did not have any difficulty in reading. When they were asked to write on how to fish in the river, they found difficulty in the representation of the breathy sounds in the conjunct form. When they were advised to write the breathy by using the subscript dot they easily did so. After this we also adjusted in the orthography for them. However, it is the fact that if it is to be used in the education it is up to the speakers which orthography is to be adopted or developed.

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<sup>2</sup> Bhujel is a large ethnic group living in scattered areas of Nrpal. The Bhujel who are literate in Nepali in Andimul and Banitar village were very excited to write their language in the Devanagari script. Right now in Nepal it is very difficult to find unanimous voice as to the matter of script. However, the Bhujel in Tanahun do not find any problem in the use of Devanagari script in writing their language.

### 6.3 Summary

In this chapter we tried to suggest the Devanagari for the Bhujel language basically on the basis of linguistic analysis of the language. As the language is atonal there did not appear any serious problem in the Devanagari script to accommodate the phonology of the language. Only the breathy distinctions posed the problem. However, they were easily accommodated in the Devanagari script in two ways. The first way was to write them in conjunct form. However, it looked unpleasant and difficult to write. Then we proposed an alternative way. The alternative way was to write them with a subscript dot.

Finally, if the language is to be written in the Devanagari script Bhujel does not require follow the *hraswo* and *dirgha* system of the orthography of Devanaagari as the language does not distinguish the length. Thus there is a choice between *hraswo* or *dirgha* pattern. However, the *dirgha* pattern is easier in case of *ikar* and *hraswo* pattern is easier in case of *ukar*. It sounds better to follow *dirgha* pattern practically and scientifically in the syllabic writing system like the Devanagari.