ROMANAGARI AN ALTERNATIVE FOR MODERN MEDIA WRITINGS

Author(s): RAHUL MHAISKAR

ROMANAGARI AN ALTERNATIVE FOR MODERN MEDIA WRITINGS

RAHUL MHAISKAR

Introduction

A writing system is a visible sign used to represent a spoken language. There are however many languages which are not written. Writing system has been developed over the ages and has been with us from a thousand of years. Many philosophers, such as Plato have acknowledged writing as a detriment to the human intellect, while Aristotle said that writing is subordinate to vocal speech. Writing was used for record keeping to correctly count agricultural products, for keeping the calendar to plant crops at the correct time. Writing was also used for religious purpose (divination and communicating with the supernatural world) and socio-political functions (reinforcing the power of the ruling elite); it is one of the "markers" of civilization.

Hindi and Marathi are traditionally written in Devanagari, which is Abugida type of alphabet in India. It writes each consonant-vowel sequence as a unit, called əkshər. It is a kind of syllabic or alphasyllabic writing system in which a main element is the syllable. With the invention of computer and technology most of the languages are written in Roman, which is termed as Romanization. Roman script is based on the letters of the classical Latin alphabet. It is kind of alphabetic writing system in which each letter represents consonants and vowels separately or phonemically. Romanagari is a vernacular word coined by bloggers and internet users, it is used when Hindi and Marathi is written in Roman in addition to traditional writing Devanagari. It is written in alphabetic Latin alphabet but sometimes omits vowel in sequence and sometimes written with the combination of phonetic segments and numbers. Numbers represent word which is almost like logographic writing system and appears as logophonetic kind of system.

Romanagari has been used by bloggers and internet users from almost 25 years with the development of short messaging service SMS 1990s and later with the email communication, online blog writings, etc. Mass media writing uses a formal style of writing except advertising media. But Romanagari is used by some news papers now a days.

This paper aims to deal with the new formation of Romanagari which is a widely used form of writing these days by Hindi and Marathi speakers in computer, mobile, email, social networking, blogs and press texting in Roman and involved a study of some English newspaper writings in Romanagari style.

The key concepts in brief

Devanagari [देवनागरी] a compound of "*devə*" and "*nagəri*", also called Nagari नागरी, is Abugida alphabet of India. It is written from left to right; it writes each consonant-vowel sequence as a unit, called *əkshər*, in which the vowel symbol functions as an obligatory diacritic to the consonant. Historically, like other native scripts of South Asia, it derives from the Brahmi alphabet of the Ashokan inscriptions (Bright 1996:384). It is the standardized script for Hindi, Nepali, Marathi, Konkani and Bodo languages. Devanagari is one of the most used and adopted writing systems in the world.

Roman script is based on the letters of the classical Latin alphabet, its history is far too ancient, too complex and too widespread and it has been formed throughout the ages. It is the most widely adopted writing system in the world. It is used in most of European languages writings, also many other languages of the world. More than any other script it is associated with the idea of the sound segment often considers the units of phonemic writing, encoding phonemes is just one of several functions that letters fulfils as graphemes of particular orthographic systems. It is also the basis of the International Phonetic Alphabet. The 26x 2 most widespread letters are the letters contained in the ISO basic Latin alphabet for character encoding.

Romanization systems have been developed in modern times for languages that were previously not written or written with other script. It is a kind of transliteration of languages using other script into the Roman such as Devanagari of Hindi and Marathi written in Roman letters. Romanization is mostly used in unofficial / informal communication, it is most prominent in computer based messaging and communication. Romanization is now becoming less essential with the invention of Unicode.

Romanagari is a portmanteau morph of 'Roman' and 'Devanagari'. It is a verna-cular word coined and used by bloggers and internet users. It refers to Hindi, Marathi, etc. text written or typed in Roman script in opposed to the standard Devanagari script. A possible reason for this is that Hindi-speaking computer and mobile users may lack tools necessary for typing in Hindi. 12 + 35 = 47 Hindi ortho-graphic written characters and 12+36 = 48 Marathi orthographic written characters are written in 26 Roman characters, which are relatively fewer to memorize. English and computer literacy is growing in India; youngsters read and write roman characters and also Roman keyboards are available everywhere which provides ease to type. As English is widely used as professional language and language of higher-education in India, availability of Devanagari keyboards is dwarfed by roman keyboards. Before Devanagari was added to Unicode, many workarounds were used to display Devanagari on the Internet, and many sites and services have continued using them despite widespread availability of Unicode

fonts supporting Devanagari (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romanagari).

Objectives

The objectives of this paper are as follows:

1. To study the invention and popularity of Romanagari in Indian internet users.

2. To explain specific characteristics of Romanagari.

3. To investigate the use of the Romanagari in modern media writings with possible explanations.

4. To find out possible reasons behind using Romanagari instead of Devanagari.

Many books have been written on writing systems. Many disciplines including Linguistics, psychology and epigraphy have also contributed a lot to our understanding of writing system and given explanation and typologically identified types of writing system. Coulmas's (2003) and Sampson's (1985, 2014) works which investigated writing system from a linguistic perspective were very well appreciated. Coulmas (2003) has not only focused on general linguistic aspects of writing but also on sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics perspectives of writing system. He has quoted the example of Hindi and Urdu which linguistically appear to be dialects of the same language and somewhat similar in their marketplace spoken forms. Both are written in different scripts. Hindi is written in Devanagari while Urdu in the Perso-Arabic script. This creates political and social tension because of the identity issues relates to religion. Romanagari can neutralize issues of script and can release some tension in this context.

Coulmas (2003) has also written on the psycholinguistic dimension of writing and reading coordination. He said that whole-word sight reading and letter-oriented phonological recoding are quite artificial. Writing and reading coordination is also depends on external hardware and the ways in which the brain works when dealing with written language (Coulman 2003: 210-216).

Very little work has been done in the past on the perspective of Romanagari. Rao et al's (2013) study examines for the first time the neurocognitive underpinnings of processing transliterated text, specifically Romanagari. College students who are proficient and prolific users of Romanagari for email and text messaging (averaging 96.7 Romanagari messages out of a daily average of 141.8 text messages, approximately 68%) are nevertheless slower and less accurate at identifying words written in Romanagari compared to their native Devanagari script. Functional neuroimaging data from the same task reveal that reading in Romanagari requires greater neural effort, as measured by larger percent changes in BOLD signal intensity as well as more spatially extended activation in brain regions that mediate both visual attention (left inferior parietal lobule and mid-cingulum) as well as word recognition (left fusiform, inferior frontal and precentral gyri). The enhanced

recruitment of brain regions involved in both orthographic (visual word form area or VWFA) as well as phonological processing (auditory-motor loop involving left inferior frontal and precentral gyri) in decoding Romanagari suggests that orthographic familiarity is a crucial mediator of the neural mechanisms of word reading.

According to Banerjee (2013) Romanised transliteration of a language can facilitate native language teaching among bilingual children in an English dominated environment, reports a new study by the faculty of the National Brain Research Centre (NBRC) in Manesar, Haryana.

From above discussion it can be said that Romanagari text induces additional cognitive demand on the brain on the perspective neurolinguistic, while psycho-linguistic and language teaching perspectives it can facilitate native language teaching among bilingual children in an English dominated environment. Phycho-linguistic and language teaching perspectives are providing the positive explanation for using Romanagari.

Basic Characteristics

1. Roman characters are less than Devanagari Characters, so long vowels and diphthongs are written in combinations of five vowels of Roman.

   Eg. अ=a, आ= aa, इ, ई=I, उ, ऊ=u ए=e, ऐ=ai, ओ=o, औ=au.

2. Retroflex signs merged with their dental or palatal letters.

   Eg. ट & त = ta, ड & द = da, ण & न = na, ष & श = sha and ळ & ल=la.

3. Devanagari has separate letters for unaspirated and their aspirated sounds but in Roman aspiration is marked by 'h'.

   Eg. ख= kha, घ= gha, and ध=dha

4. No need to use *halant, ukar* and *rafari* like diacritic marks.

5. Nasalization is marked by 'n'.

6. Conjunct letters of Devanagari are marked by combination of Roman letters.

   Eg. क्ष, = ksha ज्ञ = dnya (Marathi) gya (Hindi) .

Example

i. "Chalak lomadi ke bare mein tumne shayad nahin suna DP, apne friend se bolo ki wo aatmhatya nahin karegi, haan karwa zarur degi. Use jitani jaldi apni zindagi se bahar kar dega utna hi uske liye achha hoga. Us ladki ne tumhare dost ki kamzor nabz pakad rakhi hai.....tumhare dost ko uski kamzori uske khilaf istemal karna hoga. Slap her tightly and tell her now ur drama of love is over...."(Data accessed through Facebook).

ii. "aata nakachi srjri krto". (email p.c.)

iii. Example from Times of India dated 5th Dec, 2014. Editorial page.

Hindi-shindi

Humari national bhasha ko promote karne ki koi need nahi hai

Jug Suraiya

Pata nahin kyun we are celebrating Hindi Diwas to promote humari rashtriya bhasha. Hum sab toh Hindi 24 ×7 aur 365 days use karte hain. So special Hindi Diwas ki kya need hai? Hindustan mein sab place mein people Hindi ko understand karte hain. Aur sirf Hindustan mein hi nahin, whole world mein people Hindi ko fully understand kar sakte hain. Jab hum Hindi Sammelan members UK aur US ke tour par gaye toh humko language ki koyi difficulty experience nahi hui.

On pehle din when hoetl mein check-in kara toh humne Angrezi receptionist ko shuddh Hindi mein explain kiya ki humko six double rooms chahiye aur rooms mein attached toilet hona chahiye. Hum Indians ke liye attached toilet bahut essential hai, jaise hum PMji ke Swachh Bharat campaign se see kar sakte hain.

Woh Angrezi receptionist ne sab kuchh understand kiya, aur bilkul first class double rooms hume diye, attached toilet ke saath-saath. Aur daily jab hum McDonald's aur Pizza Hut mein lunch ya dinner karne jaate thein toh pure vegetarian dishes with Coke aur Pepsi ke saath combo order karne mein no problem tha, with small portions kiddies ke liye. Uskay baad States ka chakkar lagaya aur Disneyland visit kiya where kiddies ne bahut enjoy kiya.Phir Grand Canyon mein helicopter ride kiya. Kya awesome, man!

Isliye hum understand nahi kar sakte why humare Indian schools mein students German, aur French, aur Chinese, aur doosre foreign languages learn karne ko want karte hain. Foreign laguages learn karne ki kya need hai when puri Duniya, yani whole world, Hindi ko understand karti hai?

Hindi subse beautiful language hai, Jiski vocabulary bahut large hai, aur aise words include karti hai jaise Internet, aur Twitter, aur Whatsapp, aur Facebook, aur social media. Iske jaise words aur kaun si language mein hum find karenge?

Aur jo log say karte hain ki Hindi humari national language nahi hai waise logo ko country se kick out karna chahiye phatta-phatt, or Jaise hum SMS mein kehte hain PDQ, yani pretty damn quick.

jug.suraiya@timesgroup.com

http://blogs.timesofindia,indiatimes.com/jugglebandhi/

7. Sometimes vowels are completely omitted and only consonants are written.

Eg. "aakhir koi ise prem maa**nkr kb tk** jiyega? prem me ahankar ko koi jgh ni…" (Data accessed through Facebook)

8. Romanagari is facilitating the mixing of languages. There is no need to switch from one script to another.

Eg. **And** aa**p**ka ye **bearded look** kafi acha hai.(Data accessed through Facebook)

watsappvr **last**ch **line** bhari aahe. (Data accessed through Facebook)

Disadvantages

Romanagari is facilitating and widening the use of Hindi and Marathi especially in absence of Hindi keyboard. It has some difficulties in future.

1. Romanagari is transliterated arbitrarily to imitate English spelling; results in numerous inconsistencies. Eg. गाना can be "gaana" and "gana"

2. It is also disadvantageous to search engines, which do not classify Hindi and Marathi text in the Roman script as Hindi and Marathi corpus. This text may also not be classified as English.

3. It is hard to decipher meaning and phonetic relation of speech and writing coordination because of the inconsistency of spellings.

4. Romanized text exerts additional cognitive demand on the brain.

5. With continuous use of Romanagari one day people will not read and write the traditional script.

Conclusion

Devanagari has changed over time and the script reformers like Savarkar, Tilak, etc. Worked hard for standardizing script and suggested various suggestions to minimize the Devanagari Character for maximizing the use of Devanagari in press, typewriting and books writing etc. Romanagari is widely used these days for writing Hindi/Marathi which is harmful for development of Hindi and other Indian languages because of its inconsistency of writing. Decoding method views reading as a process that converts written forms of language to speech forms and then to meaning. On the other hand the whole word method sees reading as a form of communication that consists for the reception of information through the written form, the recovery of meaning being the essential purpose. With this view Romanagari is easy to read and write for internet users and that is one of the reasons for the popularity of the script among internet users. According to neurolinguistic perspective Romanagari text induces additional cognitive demand on the brain and also creates some difficulties but from psycholinguistic and language teaching perspectives it can facilitate native language teaching among bilingual children in an English dominated environment. Sociolinguistically it could help to neutralize language differences and facilitate universal writing scheme which can relieve language related political and social tension.

Unicode and online transliteration schemes such as Hindi Inscript keyboards and Google transliteration is facilitating the use of Devanagari. This awareness should be created among internet and technology users.

References

Agrawal, V. S. 1966. *The Devanagari Script.* In Indian Systems of Writing, New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India.

Banerjee, Ananya. April 21st, 2013. *'Romanagari' can form system for language learning.* In Indian Express news paper.Link- http:/archive. indian express. com/ news/-romanagari—can-form-system-for-language-learning/1105393/ Accessed on 02 /07/ 2015.

Coulmas, F. 2003. *Writing Systems : An introduction to their linguistic analysis.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Crystal, D. 2009. *Txtng The gr8 db8.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Daniels, P. T. and Bright, W. (Eds.) 1996. *The world's Writing Systems.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Knight, S. 1996. *The Roman Alphabet* in Daniels, P. T. and Bright, W. (Eds.). *The World's Writing Systems.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Lambert, H.M.1953. *Introduction to the Devanagari Script: for students of Sanskrit and Hindi.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Manak Hindi Wartani. Kendriya Hindi Nideshalaya, New Delhi : Government of India.

Priyadarshini, S. 2013. *Texting Hindi in English: brain doesn't like it.* Nature India: A yearly chronicle of Indian Science. Gurgaon: Nature Publishing Group.

Rao, C.et. al. 2013. *'Cost in Transliteration': The neurocognitive processing of Romanized writing.* Brain and Language, Volume 124. 3 : 205-212.

Sampson, G. 1985. *Writing Systems: A linguistic introduction.* London: Hutchinson.

Sampson, G. 2014. *Writing systems: methods for recording language.* In Keith Allan (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Linguistics.* London: Routledge.

Srivastava, R.N. 1994. *Applied Linguistics* Vol–4 of *Studies in language and linguistics.* Delhi : Kalinga Publications.