

## A Note on Transcription

There is no commonly recognised standard for representing Classical Newari in Latin script, and anyone wishing to do so is faced with a number of (sometimes quite impossible) choices. The first of these is whether to transcribe or to transliterate, i.e. whether to represent the way the language was spoken (to the extent that it can be reconstructed), or the way it was written. If the latter, the choice is simple, since Classical Newari was written in scripts that can be unambiguously represented by the internationally recognised system of transliteration devised for Sanskrit (IATS). This was the path chosen both by the editors of the *DCN* and by Siegfried Lienhard (in his later editions), and given the high degree of orthographical variation in Classical Newari, transliteration makes perfect sense in the context of a historical dictionary or a scholarly edition.

In the context of grammatical discussion, however, orthographic variation becomes problematic, and even more so in the context of an introductory coursebook, where some degree of standardisation is clearly desirable from a didactic point of view. In this textbook, I have adopted a system of transcription (rather than transliteration) that takes its cue from the reconstructed phonology of Classical Newari: as a general rule, each phoneme of the language has been assigned one single grapheme (or digraph – exceptions are noted below). Hence, /l/ will always be represented in indigenous words by **l**, and never by **r**, **ḍ**, or **ḍ**, /s/ by **s**, not **ś** etc. On the whole, the system adopted here will be found not to differ too widely from Jørgensen's system.

In representing the phonemes /e/ and /o/, I have sought to compromise to a certain extent between phonology, phonetic realisation, and orthographic variation. It is highly probable that these phonemes were realised with a phonetic on-glide at least syllable-initially, and possibly in other environments as well (as is the case in Modern Newari).\* In

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\*) Based on the observation of orthographical variance, Jørgensen had posited an opposition /e/ < /ĕ/ and /o/ < /wo/: according to Jørgensen, “stable” /e/ is always represented by <e>, whereas /ĕ/ is variously spelt <e>~<ya>~<ye>; *mutatis mutandis*, “stable” /o/ is always represented by <o>, and /wo/ alternately by <o>~<va>~<vo>. While it is true that the spellings <ya>, <ye>, <va>, and <vo> are not usually found in some contexts, /ĕ/ and /wo/ cannot be accepted as independent phonemes for the simple reason that there are virtually no minimal pairs /e/ < /ĕ/ and /o/ < /wo/,

this book, /e/ and /o/ will always be represented as **ye** and **wo** syllable-initially. Another compromise (this time between phonology and spelling conventions) is the representation of /o/ as **wo** in a handful of words where /o/ is virtually never represented by <o> in the MSS, but always by <va>.

Note that the system of transcription adopted here, while based on the conventions for transliterating Sanskrit, differs from the latter in some respects: First of all, nasalisation is consistently indicated in indigenous words by tilde, not by **anusvāra**. In **pracalita lipi**, the phonemes /b/ and /w/ are represented by the same grapheme <v>; since the transcripts in this textbook give precedence to phonology over spelling, /b/ and /w/ are transcribed according to their phonological value (which can be easily reconstructed on the basis of MN in all instances).

The most difficult choices to be made in transcribing Classical Newari, however, must be the ones concerning the treatment of word-final “inherent” **a**. Jørgensen assumed that it was generally not pronounced, and hence transcribed **yāñ**, **gāk**, **sukh**, and **parbat** (and even **putr** and **ratn**). In this textbook, I have taken a more cautious approach and have usually retained word-final “inherent” **a** in the transcription unless apocopation of the preceding consonant in the Modern Newari cognate indicates that it was silent – thus, **bohol** “shoulder” (cf. MN **bwaha**:), but **sala** “horse” (cf. MN **sala**). In non-assimilated Sanskrit loans, “inherent” **a** has been retained throughout.

Alas, any attempt at consistency is stifled by the massive presence of Sanskrit loanwords in various stages of assimilation, which do not readily conform to Classical Newari phonology.\* Non-assimilated Sanskrit loans have generally been transcribed according to the established rules for transliteration, i.e. the distinctions between /l/ and /r/

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suggesting that the observed variance is at best phonetically conditioned, rather than phonological.

\*) Since the degree of assimilation of Skr. loans cannot be gauged from orthographic variation alone, I have treated Skr. loans as fully assimilated only where they (a) have been grammaticalised to some extent, e.g. in denominatives or compound verbs, and (b) are current as assimilated loans in Modern Newari. In all other instances, I have preferred to err on the side of caution.

and between /ś/, /ṣ/, and /s/ have been maintained; pre-consonantal **anusvāra** has been transcribed as the class nasal. Following Jørgensen, syllable-initial <v> in Sanskrit loans has been transcribed as **b**, reflecting the pronunciation of that graph word-initially. Word-medial and post-consonantal <v> has been transcribed as **w**.\*

However, in order not to let the student get too used to a standard that doesn't exist, all sample sentences, sentences for exercise, and reading passages are given twice: Once in **nāgarī**, and once in transcription. While the transcribed text is given in standardised orthography, the **nāgarī** version represents the non-standardised spelling of the MS. In the sample sentences and in the key to the exercises, moreover, the salient morpheme boundaries are usually indicated, but never in the **nāgarī** text. The serious student who intends to work with Classical Newari manuscripts at some point is strongly advised to focus first and foremost on the **nāgarī** text, and to consider the transcription as no more than a didactic aid to be dispensed with when no longer needed.

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\*) Word-medially, <v> seems to have been realised as [β]. Orthographic variance also indicates that the sequences <va> and <ya> were frequently pronounced as [o] and [e] respectively even in Skr. loans, e.g. <vyathā>~<vethā> [betha:] „affliction“, <vidyāvanta>~<vidyāonta> [bidya<sup>w</sup>ontə] „knowledgeable“.