

## (How) do underdeveloped writing systems distort grammar?

### Written Burushaski ‘words’ in transcription

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Burushaski (bsk: ISO 639-3) is a language without any convention of writing, mainly spoken in northern Pakistan. Most native speakers do not write the language, and rather they employ Urdu, the national language of Pakistan, to write something in daily life (shopping memoranda, scribbling on flat walls, notifications for locals, etc.). Some individual speakers or groups have tried to transcribe the language and published a handful of books and booklets in their own transcription methods for about a half century. They are all Muslims, and so, for the most part, they want to employ Perso-Arabic letters. While they are not linguists, and so there are many problems with their writing systems. I use data mainly from the thickest Burushaski book, a translation of the Qur'an (Hunzāi (transl.) 2007), to discuss (i) repeatedly produced asymmetries in spelling; (ii) bad relations between abjad systems and languages with distinctive accent; (iii) problems on how to identify and treat loanwords; and (iv) grammatical errors which emerged from writing. And I will conclude my presentation as follows. All the advocates prepare special letters for Burushaski specific pronunciations which are not found in Urdu, whereas it causes the good symmetry in the Urdu spelling to become disarrayed. Burushaski has a distinctive pitch accent, but they ignore it and then their spellings are insufficient to distinguish different words. They want to write loanwords with the original spellings in the source language, provided and within that they think the words are so. The author-translator cannot write his language as he speaks, while avoiding inescapable influences from the Urdu writing system. Because he used it as the foundation of his Burushaski writing system with no notice of grammatical differences between the languages. If such underdeveloped writing systems exercised their authority, several consequent grammatical changes and reanalyses might be caused.

Keywords: Burushaski, morphological unit, transcription, Perso-Arabic abjad

Hunzāi, Ghulām ud-Dīn Ghulām [ہنزائی، غلام الدین غلام] (transl.). 2007. *Al-Qur'ān al-Karīm: Burūshaskī tarjumā* [القرآن الكريم: بروشسکی ترجمہ] ('The Noble Qur'an: Burushaski Translation'). Gilgit: Oxford Gilgit Printers & Gilgit Kashmir Printers.