Navlipi 1: A New, Universal, Script ("Alphabet") Accommodating The Phonemic Idiosyncrasies of All World's Languages. Volume 1, Another Look At Phonic and Phonemic Classification
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Reviewed by

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This amazing book is a welcome addition to the literature on phonetics. It addresses meticulously the problems of phonemic idiosyncrasy across language families. Previous research and books on phonetics have mostly focused on a particular phonetics system of a language. This book sheds light on the world of phonetics; it pays formal attention to phonemic idiosyncrasy by examining and considering the problems in all the world's languages. Most of the materials discussed in the book are suitable for all levels of readers, i.e. from a beginner student of linguistics to the layman. However, I think there are some chapters, mostly in part three, for which need readers to have a basic knowledge of phonetics before reading them so that they can then easily follow the discussion.

The secondary aims of the book are to provide a universal script for India that links the 'Aaryan/ Dravidian' (North/ South) divide. These two parts of India, as claimed by the author, have different ways of pronouncing aspirated and unaspirated plosives. In a Dravidian South Indian language variety such as Tamil, aspirated and unaspirated plosives like [t] and [th], respectively, are claimed to have no distinction between them. We are most likely to hear a word like *tatta* 'a hit' pronounced as *thatta* by speakers from this part of India. As these phonemes have no distinction when pronouncing them, therefore speakers might have difficulty in distinguishing aspirated and unaspirated phones, in contrast to northern India where the aspirated and unaspirated phonemes are clearly distinct. On top of that, this book also seeks to address existing Romanised transcriptions which are still inadequate. The considerable adaptation of Chinese ancient ideographic script to twenty-first century use is said not to be sufficient for use in intellectual discourse. Many of today's Chinese have requested a new 'Romanised' script which is more easy and palatable to learn. Besides that, the book also seeks potential new markets, e.g. for Turkic languages.

The book engages in a very good phonetics discussion which considers the problems raised by phonemic idiosyncrasy across languages. The author brings up the idea that phonemic idiosyncrasy can also lead to variations or accents in human utterances. In phonology, for example, variation has largely been discussed as a phenomenon of different grammar having different phonological systems. Thus, they are differences in pronouncing words. Variation was initially seen from the viewpoint of sociolinguistics, i.e. it was due to external factors such as sex, age, style, register and social class (Anttila 2002, p. 206). As well as external factors, variation is also due to internal factors, such as morphology, phonology, syntax and lexicon (Anttila 2002). Phonemic idiosyncrasy, which is a topic of discussion in phonetics, could be one of the internal factors which is also a conditioning

variation. The author puts forth this great idea. The book stresses the importance of having a single writing system or universal orthography in order to comprehend other languages. A universal orthography would be able to assist non-native speakers, e.g. English speakers, in that [v] can also be pronounced as [w] when reading Hindi/Urdu. The book is divided into four parts which consist of ten chapters altogether. The first part of the book summarises all the Navlipi tables. Second is the Introduction, which comprises three chapters, Chapters 1 to 3. The third part is a presentation and discussion of NAVLIPI. Finally, fourth is the part of the book containing the glossary, literature cited, index and details about the author. Here now is an overview of what each of the first three parts discusses.

Part 1: The reader is provided with all the NAVLIPI tables before going any further. A summary of the tables is presented in this part in the hope that the readers will get an overview of what the discussion in the book focuses on. In the middle of the discussion, particularly in Part 3, the reader is asked to refer to the summary tables presented earlier for a better picture of the topic discussed.

Part 2: Chapter 1 mainly focuses on the need for a universal orthography (script) for all of the world's languages, as well as discussing and presenting critically the drawbacks of earlier orthographies such as those of Graham, Watt, Lepsius and many others. In discussing the need for a universal script for all of the world's languages, the book raises the so-called phonemic idiosyncrasy, which is defined by the author as the existence of very different sets (usually pairs) of phones, whereby allophones of the same phoneme in one language exist as distinct phonemes in another language. The idea of phonemic idiosyncrasy, which is discussed in depth in the book, offers a different point of view regarding the different pronunciations produced by different speakers. For example, the English word *fly* may be pronounced as *fry* by a Japanese speaker, as the alveolar lateral [l] is said not to exist in Japanese phonemes. This phoneme is thus always replaced by the alveolar central flap [r]. Based on the example given, I am in agreement with what the author claims. A similar situation occurs in Malay, when Malay speakers pronounce Arabic words like *'fikr'* and *'fahm'*. Since the labial fricative [f] does not exist in Malay inventory phonemes, the words are therefore pronounced as [piker] and [paham], respectively, by Malay speakers.

Meanwhile, Chapter 2 highlights the objective of a universal orthography and how NAVLIPI satisfies this. This chapter discusses ten major requirements that a universal orthography must have in some detail. These requirements are: universality and completeness, recognisability, distinctiveness, simplicity and intuitive nature, ease and rapidity of transcription from three points of view – keyboard, cursive and print, systematic scientific classification and accuracy, discretization, practical phonemics rather than phonics, voice recognition compatibility and the ability to accommodate the phonemic idiosyncrasies of all the world's languages. The discussion of each requirement is supported by the drawbacks found with earlier orthography systems, such as that of the International Phonetic Association (IPA). As all the requirements are well discussed, it explains why a new universal script for all the world's languages is required.

New scripts which are based on a scientific or systematic classification of phones as well as those which are newly created or entail considerable new innovations are also discussed in the book. Tibetan, South-East Asian (Khmer, Thai, Burmese, etc.), Mongolian

Phagspa and also Haangul (or Hangul) scripts are examples which are included of this type. Haangul, for instance, is claimed to be an innovative and scientific Asian script, as it has several major advances, startling and innovative features. The use of a specific symbol which is iconic or notational for a specific phonic property is one of the scientific elements of the script. The script does however have some drawbacks, as proven by the author, as it lacks recognisability and the cursive forms of writing Haangul. Another example is the Graham alphabet. It has been shown that the Graham alphabet is an incomplete script, since the vowel sounds occurring in English in the words *air* and *ale,* or *up* and *cur,* are given the same glyph. The vowels in these words should have been given a correct glyph according to the way they are pronounced. There are many examples to be found in the chapter as we go further. All the three chapters discussed in Part 1 convincingly demonstrate the deficiencies found in earlier orthographies, which have posed quite a number of problems in terms of representing phonetics forms of human speech sounds.

Part 3: The third part is the kernel of the book. It consists of seven chapters altogether, i.e. Chapters 4 to 10, which present and discuss NAVLIPI. The discussion begins with how a new NAVLIPI script was made. A shell matrix or template, comprising a phonological classification, was used before choosing letters. At this stage, appropriate examples of words are given in an empty matrix to illustrate phones, but no glyphs (letters or symbols) are assigned to phones yet. Once the shell matrix is full, only then will glyphs of the phones be chosen carefully. A five-dimensional vowel classification matrix and a sixth variable for vowel duration are also taken into account in the new script of NAVLIPI, as they have caused some difficulties. In order to construct the new script, five types of example scripts, i.e. a geometric script, a script based entirely on POST-OPS, i.e. post-positional operators, a simple version and a complex version or adaptation of DEWANAAGARI script and an adaptation of PITMAN SHORTHAND, were tested. None of the example scripts above has achieved the aims of a new universal NAVLIPI script as they lack universality and recognisability criteria, except POST-OPS. This script was therefore referred to when constructing the new universal NAVLIPI script. In NAVLIPI, however, a limited number of post-ops is used. It uses fewer new letters than other scripts.

The book is well structured and organised, as it begins by presenting all the problems with earlier orthographies (scripts) for the world's languages before discussing the proposed NAVLIPI script. This presentation makes it easy for the reader to follow and understand the discussion, and yet still be able to see the advantages in proposing NAVLIPI. In the course of the discussion, the book provides plausible and critical arguments and the reasons for selecting the letters for NAVLIPI. In short, every glyph that was chosen for the new universal script of NAVLIPI is clarified and its selection justified.

This new universal NAVLIPI script has come at the right time, as the IPA Revised 1993 (International Phonetic Alphabet), which has undergone quite a number of revisions, does indeed need to be replaced by a complete set of phonetics symbols. The IPA chart is seen to have many drawbacks in presenting the sound systems of a number of languages. This most likely results from the intention when IPA was first created with the original alphabet being based on spellings in English. With the aim of making it usable for other languages, the symbols in IPA were then allowed to vary.

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