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# PALATALIZATION IN KASHMIRI: AN OVERVIEW

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In phonetic science palatalization is recognized as a process wherein front vowels and palatal approximants exert their influence over adjacent consonants resulting in the raising of the tongue body towards hard palate during the production of the consonant. This raising of the tongue and the resultant effects are recognized as additional articulatory features, over and above the normal defining articulatory maneouvers. Such consonants are said to be palatalized. Palatalization in this sense is an assimilatory process and is studied under the concept of secondary or complex articulation. In many languages like English, palatalization is treated as a secondary process in the sense that the native speakers hardly pay any attention to this activity. Consider the following English examples

    1)  cool / ku:l/        2)  key /ki:/    3) kite /kait/

In (2) the velar plosive is articulated at the position far forward than the normal position for the velar plosives as is the case in (1) and (3). The influence of the front high vowel on the preceding velar plosive in case of (2) can be considered an event of palatalization. However a front vowel or a palatal approximant may not always palatalize an adjacent consonant and a palatal consonant can exist without a front vowel or a palatal approximant.

An interesting case of palatalization is presented by Erzya, a Finno-Ugric language as reported by Crowley (1997).In this language a palatal or a palatal consonant exerts influence over following vowel, due to which palatalized consonants are followed by a vowel that is an allophone of what is normally present after a non-palatalized

consonant. The example quoted by Crowley (Ibid p.33-34) is the name of the language itself i.e. "Erzya"

      4) Erzya   /erʒʲæ/

Phonologically, the process of palatalization has been effectively utilized by several languages to create a distinctive opposition between a palatalized and a non-palatalized phoneme, capable of changing the semantic meaning. As such, these languages have considerably enriched their sound inventories, by making it as a distinctive feature of the sounds. Unlike languages like English where it is only a phonetic feature, capable of creating only allophonic variation, distinctive use of palatalization in these languages has put a question mark on the generally accepted notion that palatalization as process can only be secondary in nature in comparison to the more essential and primary processes of articulation. The phonetic difference between (1) and (2) is hardly noticed by any native or non-native speaker of English. While as in languages like Russian, Irish, and several Baltic languages and of course Kashmiri, palatalization and the consequent difference between a palatalized and a non-palatalized sound is the benchmark for meaning difference.

Consider the examples from Kashmiri

      (5a)   /naːn /        bread

      (5b)  /naːnʲ/       grandmother

The only phonetic (articulatory) difference between (5 a) and (5b) is that the word final nasal in the latter is articulated with the tongue body raised towards the hard palate. This minute feature that may not have any relevance in the grammar of English language, for it being too trivial of a feature for its speakers, is highly influential in case of Kashmiri, because of its significance in affecting the semantic content of the word.

Kashmiri presents a typical case of Palatalization. Virtually every consonant phoneme can be palatalized in Kashmiri, thereby resulting in the generation of a parallel phoneme, in the scheme of minimal pair of words. Plosives, fricates, affricates, flaps, laterals, retroflex coupled with different places of articulation like bilabial, alveolar, velar, glottal are amenable to palatalization. With the feature of palatalization added to these consonants, the number of consonant phonemes in Kashmiri is exactly the double of what would be minus this feature.

Consider some examples:

  (6) /kul/                tree

/kul$^j$/                    trees


(7) /kul/                    tree

/k$^j$ul/                    nail


(8) /pakɪ/               (I will) walk

/pak$^j$i/              (He will) walk

Examples (6), (7) and (8) represent the palatalization of the phoneme /k/ in all the three conditions i.e. word finally, word medially and word finally. The word pair in each of the above examples forms a minimal pair of words. However in (9) the central high vowel /ɪ/ turns into high front vowel /i/ in /pak$^j$i/. This may be a consequence of the palatalization (raising of the tongue) in the preceding plosive. Similarly any other consonant phoneme can be palatalized, with accompanying meaning change, in all the three positions of the word.

(9) /pɪav/      defeated/excelled

(with feminine object)

/pɪav$^j$/       Steps, defeated/excel over

(10) haːvan       Steps, defeated/excel over

haːv$^j$an     (He) showed

(11)  /vod/        (he/they) wept

/v$^j$od/      familiar

(12)  /mɪal/         appetite

/mɪal$^j$/      father (plural)

(13)  /kɔlɪ/       streams

/kɔl$^j$i/       (of the) stream

(14)  /lav/            shower of (rain)

      /lʲav/           (you) lick


The only and obvious exceptions to the palatalization are sounds like /j/, /tʃ/, /tʃh/ and /ʃ/. All of these are palatal sounds and phonetically it is impossible to palatalize a sound that has as hard palate as its place of articulation. The view has been upheld by majority of the scholars like Bhat (1987), Shauq (2008) and others.

Judging from the above examples, it won't be anomalous to say that phonological palatalization cannot be considered as solely the outcome of assimilatory phonetic palatalization, given that both high and low vowels, coupled with the parameter of front and back can follow or precede a palatalized sound.

In the phonemic analysis of any language, the criterion of selecting some sounds as distinct phonemes and others as merely the allophones (of a single underlying phoneme) rests on two conditions.

Firstly phoneme is to be taken as a minimal distinctive unit capable of changing the semantic meaning.

Secondly two sounds are to be treated as allophones of a single phoneme, if they are "phonetically similar' to a fair degree. This criterion is to be satisfied over and above the condition of complimentary distribution that these sounds must satisfy. Phonetic similarity prevents what Durand calls "absurd groupings" from taking place. Highlighting the significance of phonetic similarity in the phonemic analysis of a language Durand (ibid) observes the following.

"It has been pointed that [h] and [ŋ] could be analyzed as realizations of one phoneme on the grounds that [h] always occurs at the beginning of the syllable whereas [ŋ] as always occurs at the end of a syllable. The reason why this grouping has never been seriously entertained is that phonetically [h] and [ŋ] show very little similarity apart from the fact that they are consonants". (1990: 18 ).

Both these requirements are met by the palatalized consonants of Kashmiri and hence create a paradox. They are phonemes as per the first requirement given the fact that they are minimal distinctive units capable of changing the semantic meaning, as can be seen from the minimal pairs presented in the all the above examples of Kashmiri. At the same time the palatalized consonants and their plain (non-palatalized) counterparts are phonetically too similar and (each such pair) may be equally taken as the allophones of a single underlying phoneme. However the

condition first is more powerful and the palatalized consonants cannot be taken as the allophones at par with their plain (non-palatalized) counterparts. One immediate conclusion that can be drawn from this situation is that phonetic similarity as a criterion for the phonemic analysis has to be language specific. There cannot be a universal definition of Phonetic similarity applicable to each and every language. Each phonological system is to set its own parameters for fixing the condition of phonetic similarity.

Coming back to our original problem, an unaddressed theoretical issue related to the status of palatalized sounds in Kashmiri phonological system viz a viz the general phonological theory stares us in the eye. While acceding to the notion that phonemes have a psychological reality (taken as underlying level), the question arises, should the palatalized consonants of Kashmiri be taken as part of the phonemic inventory ( that has a psychological reality) or a mere product of phonological rules. In the second scheme of things the plain (non-palatalized) consonant would serve as the input to  the phonological component of the grammar, as systematic phonemic representation; a phonological rule would then apply to the underlying sound, turning it into a palatalized sound that will be the output  of the component in the form of systematic phonetic representation. This can be represented as follows:

**Systematic Phonemic Representation**

Input

Phonological
Component

**Phonological Rule**

**(Palatalization Rule)**

Output

**Systematic Phonetic Representation**
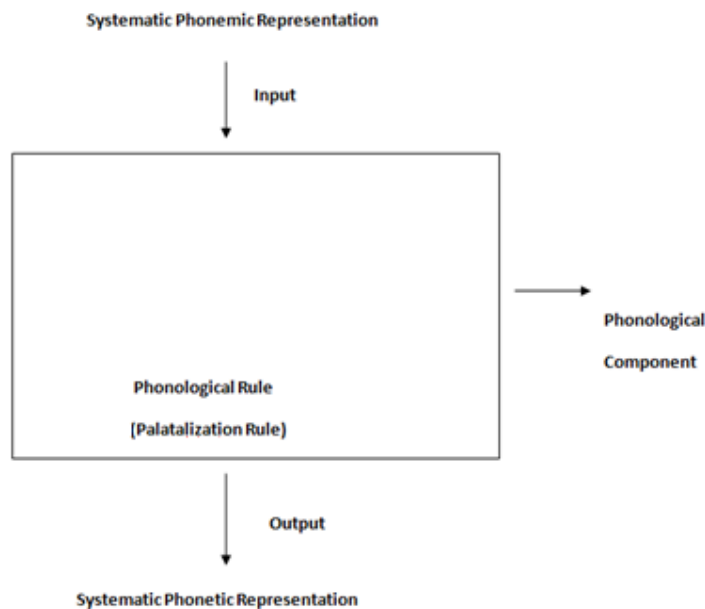
However there seems to be a remote possibility of this scheme of things because of the following two reasons:

Firstly Phonological rules are not powered to change the semantic meaning, given that palatalization in Kashmiri is distinctive

Secondly phonological rules are context sensitive and consonant phonemes in Kashmiri are palatalized word-initially, medially and finally without any regard to nature of the vowels, following or preceding such consonants.

In this scenario, it would be plausible to state that palatalized consonants in Kashmiri like plain (non- palatalized) ones form part of the original phoneme inventory that exits at the underlying psychological level. This doubles the number of the consonant phonemes in the psychological inventories of native Kashmiri speakers. However, simply doubling the number of consonant phonemes at the psychological level seems to be more of avoiding the problem rather than facing the problem and finding an optimal solution. Problems of similar nature have been a challenge to the scholars working on several Indo-Aryan languages. Aspiration in Indo-Aryan languages like Urdu and Hindi is one such phenomenon. In these languages Aspiration is distinctive in the same manner as palatalization is in Kashmiri. Addition of the feature, Aspiration, to plosives in these languages changes the semantic meaning. Here again phonological rules cannot account for this process for the same reason that these rules don't hold sway over the meaning. In these languages then the number of consonant phonemes will be higher, with the inclusion of aspirated plosives. To account for cases like these is a serious challenge for any phonological theory.

In the search for an optimal solution to what seems to be a paradox, a third possibility emerges and that is to perceive the problem in diachronic perspective. A cursory look at the lexical stock of Kashmiri language reveals that the borrowed lexical items in Kashmiri, in general rarely carry palatalized consonants. Kashmiri languages in its historical course have borrowed extensively from languages like Persian, Arabic, Turkish, and Uzbek and lately from languages like Urdu and English. Although these words have been fully nativized (phonologically, morphologically and semantically) in Kashmiri, yet these borrowed words (in the process of nativization), have shown little tendency for palatalized sounds. In certain cases nativization has taken place in such a manner that phonologically variant forms of a single word are available. Consider the following Kashmiri word borrowed from Persian:

(15)   /trɑːmiː/                  Large Plate        (Persian)

      /trɪam/, /trɪamʲ/        Large Copper Plate                  (Kashmiri)

In (15) the palatalization (on the final nasal sound) in one of the two variant forms stands in a non-distinctive opposition with the plain (non-palatalized) nasal in the other variant.  Both these phonsological forms are equally frequent, with some people using the first form while others preferring the latter. However it seems more reasonable to state that the original form might have been the one, without the palatalized sound i.e. /trɪam/. The second seems to be the creation of some historical accident whatsoever, but in any case the accident being subsequent to the prevalence of the first variant.

Based on the above observations, we feel that the palatalization of consonants has a historical reality and as such should be reflected in any phonological theory, as such. There seems to have been a historical split, resulting in the creation of palatalized consonants.

**Plain (non-Palatalized)**

**Consonant
Phonemes**

**Palatalized Consonants**
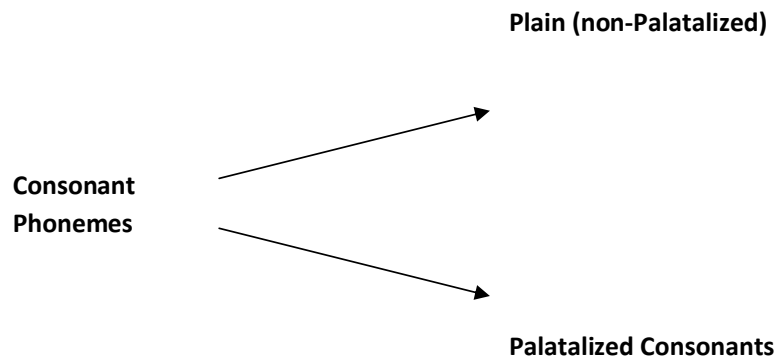
To account for the above, we may imagine a historical point at which Kashmiri language had only non-distinctive palatalization, with its effect restricted to

allophonic variation. This might be thought of as a stage where the language had only phonetic palatalization. In the course of time this might have given rise to phonological palatalization, turning the process from non-distinctive to distinctive. Phonetic palatalization as been explained earlier is usually triggered by a high-front vowel or a palatal approximant and this might be taken the case with Kashmiri. However as is the case with many English sounds, where phonetic palatalization has permanently changed the nature of the sound, in Kashmiri, instead palatalization might have become functional instead of changing the sound permanently. The consequences of historical changes triggered by palatalization have been presented as follows:

"…… English examples of cognate words distinguished by historical palatalization are *church* vs. *kirk*, *witch* vs*. wicca*, *ditch* vs*. dike* and *shirt* vs*. skirt*. In *witch/wicca* the latter form is a spelling pronunciation based on unfamiliarity with Old English spelling conventions (wicca was presumably [ˌˈwɪtʃ : a] < *wikja*); in the other cases the words come from related dialects or languages (*skirt* from Danish) which differed in the place and degree of plalatization. More recently, the original /t/ of *question* and *nature* have come from to be pronounced as [tʃ] before [j] in some English dialects and similarily the original /d/ of *soldier* and *procedure* have come to be pronounced as [dʒ]. This effect can also be seen in casual speech in some dialects, where *Do you want to go?* Comes out as [dʒu : wʌnə gʊ], and *Did you eat yet*? As [dɪdʒə ˈi : tʃɛt]." (Palatalization - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia http://enWikipedia.org/wiki/Palatalization )

The generalization that can be drawn from the above is that phonetic palatalization at times can become functional resulting in the change in the nature of the sound. In the same manner we propose that at a historical stage the phonetic palatalization in Kashmiri might have become functional giving rise to palatalized sounds, used to distinguish the meaning in the language.
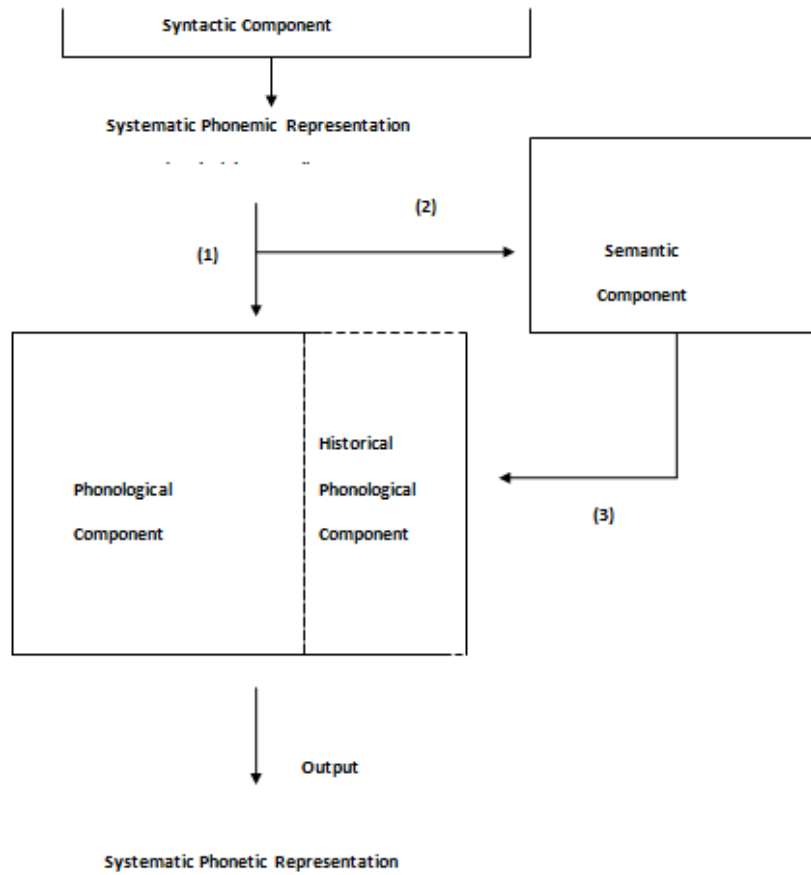
Coming to the question of giving due place to the distinctive palatalization in the general phonological theory, the following scheme is proposed:

Palatalized phonemes may not be treated as part of original phonemic inventory with a psychological reality; instead a proper niche in the phonological component of the Grammar may be created. The process of palatalizing a phoneme may be treated as a rule guided process, governed by the semantic component of the grammar. In other words the rules of palatalization in Kashmiri shall be somehow made sensitive to the meaning component of the grammar. This sub-component of the phonological component may be labeled as the Historical-Phonological component. This Historical-Phonological component may be linked to the semantic component of the grammar in such a manner that any meaning change in the underlying string of the phonemes

shall trigger the rules for palatalization placed in the Historical-Phonological component. In the absence of the any semantic clue the underlying string may skip the Historical-Phonological component, and enter the main phonological component for the relevant phonological changes other than palatalization.

Diagrammatically the scheme may somewhat look like as follows:

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        ┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
        │          Syntactic Component            │
        └─────────────────────┬───────────────────┘
                              │
                              ▼
           Systematic Phonemic Representation

                                                    ┌──────────────────┐
                              (2)                   │                  │
            (1)      ┌──────────────────────────────▶    Semantic      │
                     │                              │                  │
                     │                              │   Component      │
                     ▼                              │                  │
        ┌──────────────────┬───────────────────┐   └─────────┬────────┘
        │                  ┊                   │             │
        │                  ┊   Historical      │             │
        │  Phonological    ┊   Phonological    ◀─────────────┘
        │                  ┊                   │     (3)
        │  Component       ┊   Component       │
        │                  ┊                   │
        └──────────────────┴───────────────────┘
                     │
                     ▼
                  Output


           Systematic Phonetic Representation
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In the above scheme of things arrow (1) represents the input to the phonological component wherein the underlying string doesn't carry any phoneme that is liable to palatalization and the phonemic string completely skips the Historical-Phonological component. If the underlying string contains any such consonant phoneme then it may take the route of arrow (2), entering the semantic component. If the string has potentially more than one meaning then it shall pass into the Historical-Phonological component via route indicated by arrow (3). After undergoing the palatalization rule the underlying string may pass into the main phonological component for further modification. The string then comes out of the component in the form of surface representation. The Historical-Phonological component can be effectively utilized to explain variegated distinctive phonological processes in different languages, like Aspiration in Urdu and Hindi.

The historical-phonological component can be thought of as a part of  phonological component (the dotted line separating the main phonological component and the Historical-Phonological component is indicative of this relationship)except for that that the main component shall take care of all the non-distinctive phonological changes, effective through the application of the usual phonological rules and the Historical- Phonological component shall take the responsibility of the distinctive phonological changes. These changes shall also be effected through phonological rules of similar nature as that of the general phonological rules except for that the latter shall be triggered by certain semantic clues. However the nature of the relationship between the semantic component and the Historical-Phonological component has to worked out and is beyond the scope of this paper. The role of the semantic component shall be restricted to some kind of triggering of the palatalization rules. In the absence of any such model wherein such a relation has been shown the task of determining the nature of this kind of triggering is really a challenging task.

The above scheme is a tentative format and is open for further development and modification. In fact the whole concept shall be treated as a tentative generalization and can be nullified in the face of evidence and also is equally open for further development with corroboratory studies from languages like Urdu and Hindi.

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