

Phonological Features of the Kashmiri Language: A Comprehensive and Detailed Exploration

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Abstract

Kashmiri, which belongs to the Dardic sub-group within the Indo-Aryan language family, is primarily spoken as a mother tongue by most of the people in the Kashmir Valley. It is also spoken by a small number of individuals in various regions across India and Pakistan. Kashmiri possesses several distinct phonological and morphological features that distinguish it from other Indo-Aryan languages. To offer a comprehensive overview of its phonological structure, this paper carefully details the vowel and consonant phonemes of Kashmiri. Nasalization, a phonemic feature in Kashmiri, plays a significant role in its phonetic arrangement. The paper seeks to explain various phonological phenomena such as nasalization, vowel length, syllabic structure, stress patterns, intonation, palatalization, and homophony through relevant examples. Additionally, this study aims to compile, analyze, and present a broad catalogue of Kashmiri words, providing numerous examples to enhance the understanding of these phonological aspects.

Keywords: Indo-Aryan Family of Languages, Phonological Structure, Phonetic Organization, nasalization, Vowel Length, Syllabic Structure, Stress Patterns, Intonation, Palatalization, Homophony

1. Introduction

The Kashmiri language, locally known as koṢUr or kə:Ṣtr zaba:n by its native speakers, belongs to Dardic sub-group within the Indo-Aryan family of languages. Unlike other languages in the Indian subcontinent, such as Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Tibeto-Burman, and Austro-Asiatic, Kashmiri lacks a well-defined territory and boundary in terms of its usage. While the majority of Kashmiri speakers are concentrated in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, particularly in the Kashmir Valley, there are also smaller communities of speakers scattered across India and in various countries worldwide. Kashmiri serves as the primary regional language and is the dominant mother tongue of the Kashmir Valley, spoken by the entire population, which number around 7 million (2011 Census.) Despite many Kashmiri speakers having resettled outside the valley due to the region's unsettled conditions, they continue to maintain their language.

Based on specific linguistic traits, there has been a consensus among some historical linguists such as Grierson (1919), Morgenstierne (1961), Fussman (1972) that Kashmiri belongs to Dardic a sub-group of Indo-Aryan family of languages. Kachru (1969), Strand (1973), and Koul and Schmidt (1984) have undertaken reviews of the classification of Kashmiri and other Dardic languages each with different objectives and perspectives. Kachru's study delved into the linguistic characteristics of Kashmiri, while Strand focused on Kafir languages. Koul and Schmidt, on the other hand, examined the literature on Dardic languages and investigated their linguistic features, with a particular emphasis on Kashmiri and Shina.

According to O.N. Koul (2003), Kashmiri exhibits significant linguistic similarities with Shina and some other north-western languages. Koul (2003) asserts that Kashmiri is different from all

other Indo-Aryan languages in certain phonological, morphological, and syntactic aspects. For example, Kashmiri has a set of central vowels / ɛ, ɛ:, ə, ə:/ which are not found in other Indo-Aryan languages. Koul (2004: pp 1) further maintains that “in a similar way, in Kashmiri the finite verb always occurs in the second position with the exception in relative clause constructions. The word order in Kashmiri, thus, resembles the one in German, Dutch, Icelandic, Yiddish, and a few other languages. These languages form a distinct set and are currently known as Verb Second (V-2) languages.

Spoken Kashmiri encompasses two main types of dialects: regional dialects and social dialects. Regional dialects can be further categorized into those spoken within the valley of Kashmir and those spoken outside the valley. Within the valley, the Kashmiri-speaking area is semantically divided into three regions: Maraz (southern and south-eastern), Kamraz (northern and north-western), and Srinagar and its neighbouring areas. While there are minor linguistic variations, mainly at the phonological and lexical levels, Kashmiri spoken in these regions remains mutually intelligible and relatively homogeneous. These dialectal variations can however be considered different stylistic expressions of the same language. Kashmiri spoken in and around Srinagar has acquired social prestige and is considered the standard variety. This variety is used in literature, mass media, and education. Style switching is a common phenomenon among educated speakers, where there is observed a frequent transition from Marazi or Kamrazi styles to the style of speech used in Srinagar and its neighbouring areas. This is because the variety spoken in Srinagar and its surroundings maintains its status as the standard variety and is employed in mass media and literary contexts.

In earlier studies, starting with Grierson (1919), a distinction has been drawn between two speech varieties among Hindus and Muslims. Kachru (1969) introduced the terms "Sanskritized Kashmiri" and "Persianized Kashmiri" to denote the stylistic differences based on variations in pronunciation, morphology, and vocabulary commonly found among Hindus and Muslims. It is observed that the Kashmiri spoken by Hindu speakers predominantly incorporates Sanskrit vocabulary, whereas that spoken by Muslims is influenced by Persian and Arabic sources. A phenomenon of style switching between speakers of these two dialects is noticeable in various situations and contexts. The frequency of this style switching process among the speakers of these two communities largely depends on different social, educational, and professional interactions and the periods of contact between them. (Koul, 1984, pp.1)

Throughout its historical development, Kashmiri has embraced various scripts for its written representation. These include Sharda, Devanagari, Roman, and Perso-Arabic scripts. The oldest among these is the Sharda script, which emerged around the 10th century. However, due to its inability to fully represent all phonetic characteristics of the Kashmiri language, its usage is now limited to certain purposes, primarily by the priestly class of the Kashmiri Pandit community residing outside the valley of Kashmir. The Devanagari script, supplemented with diacritical marks, has also been utilized for writing Kashmiri by authors and researchers in their works in Hindi. However, there has been some inconsistency in the usage of diacritic signs, prompting a need for standardization. The Roman script has also been employed for Kashmiri, but it failed to gain popularity and faced certain shortcomings. In contrast, the Perso-Arabic script, supplemented with additional diacritical marks and now recognized as the official script for Kashmiri by the Jammu and Kashmir Government, is widely used in publications in the language. Nevertheless, this script still lacks standardization (Koul, 1996). The typical word order of Kashmiri is Subject-Verb-Object (SVO). However, it is noteworthy that Kashmiri stands out among Indo-Aryan languages in possessing a verb-second (V2) word order as well, (Koul & Wali, 2006b).

2. Phonology

Kashmiri has a typical phonological system that makes it peculiar/distinctive among other Indo-Aryan languages. The phonemic inventory of Kashmiri can be outlined as follows:

2.1. Segmentals

The inventory of the distinctive sound segments of Kashmiri is given under Vowels and Consonants below:

Vowel Inventory of Kashmiri

	Front	Central	Back
High	i:	ɨ:	u:
Lower high	i	ʏ	ʊ
Mid	e e:	ə ə:	o o:
Lower mid		a	ɔ:
Low		a:	

It should be noted that there are two short and two long central vowels (/ɨ /, /ɨ: /, /ə/ and /ə:/) in Kashmiri which are not found in other South Asian languages.

2.1.1.1. Oral vowels

In the articulation of vowel phonemes in Kashmiri, there is a contrast of the position of the tongue, height of the tongue and the rounding of lips:

/i/ (high front unrounded short vowel):

(y) intitiza:r `wait', dil `heart', kani `stones'.

/i:/ (high front unrounded long vowel):

(y) i:ma:n `faith' pi:r `a Muslim saint', gəli:: `street'.

/e/ (mid front unrounded short vowel):

beh `sit imp', khe `eat imp'.

/e:/ (mid front unrounded long vowel):

phe:r `turn imp' ne:r `go imp'

/ɨ/ (high central unrounded short vowel):

sabtr `patience', Ča~ dt̪ `pocket'

/ɨ:/ (high central unrounded long vowel):

ṭhim `eighth', tt̪:r `cold'

/ə/ (mid central unrounded short vowel):

əḌij `bone', nər `arm'.

/ə:/ (mid central unrounded long vowel):

ə:r `pulum', gə:r `stranger', də:r `window'.

/a/ (low central unrounded short vowel):

akh `one', khar `ass', na `no'.

/a:/ (low central unrounded long vowel):

a:m `general', Ša:m `evening', vopha: `loyalty'

/U/ (high back rounded short vowel):

anUn `bring (imp.)', hU `that/he'.

/u:/ (high back rounded long vowel):

u:trt `day before yesterday', mu:d `he died'

/o/ (mid back rounded short vowel):

on `blind', non `visible'

/o:/ (mid back rounded long vowel):

o:m `mas. Unbaked/raw', mo:l `father', valo: `come (imp)'

/ɔ:/ (low back rounded short vowel):

gɔ:ph `cave', Šɔ:~g `sleep (imp)' sɔ: `she'

2.1.1.2. Nasal vowels

Nasalization is phonemic in Kashmiri. All the vowels can be nasalized.

/i:~/ khri:~ts `a little she mouse' pi:~tsh `a little (f.s.)'

/e~/ ke~h `some', ke~htsha: `something/anything'

/e:~/ Še:~kh `conch', me:~kh `nail/peg'

/t:~/ kt:~tsh `youngest (f.s.)'

/ə~/ ə~z `goose' pə~z `she monkey'.

/ə:~/ ə:~nT `stone of a fruit' gə:~Th `eagle'

/a~/ a~gre:z `an English man' /a:~/ a:~gUn `compound'

/a:/ da:~d `bull'

/U~/ kU~z `key'

/u:~/ vu:~Th `camel', ts u:~Th `apple'

/o~/ ko~d `thorn' lo~g `a lame man/paraplegic'

/o:~/ go:~d `gum'

/ɔ:~/ srɔ:~η `alley'

2.1.1.3. Distribution of vowels

The vowels /ə /, /o/ and /ɔ:/ do not occur in the word final position. The short vowels /t/, /U/, and //ɔ:/ do not occur in the word-initial position. Usually, the semi-vowel /y/ is added in the initial position of the words beginning with /i/, /i:/, /e/ and /e:/. Similarly, the semi-vowel /v/ is added to the words beginning with /U /, and /u:/.

The following pairs of words are in free variation:
intiza:r → yintiza:r `wait' ekhteyar → yekhtiya:r `option/authority' ehsha:n → yehsha:n `kindness' e:la:n → ye:la:n `announcement' Uja:Dt → vuja:Dt `deserted' u:~Th → vu:~Th `camel'

Only some educated people who are conscious about the original pronunciation of the Hindi-Urdu borrowed words in Kashmiri and are influenced by Hindi-Urdu pronunciation, make efforts to pronounce some of such words without the semi-vowel in the word initial position.

2.1.1.4. Sequences of (syllabic) vowels

Sequences of vowels do not occur in Kashmiri. The combinations of some vowel sequences like /ut/, /u:t/, and /o:ə / can be treated as diphthongs. Their occurrence is restricted to the word initial and medial positions only.

shUtr `child' (f.s)

gu:tr `milkmaid'

o:əl `nest'

go:əl `round'

2. 1. 2. Consonants

Consonants are classified into different groups based on their manner and place of articulation.

2.1.2.1. Inventory of Consonants

	Bilabi al	Dental	Retrofle x	palatal	Vela r	Glotta l
Stops						
vl. Unasp	P	T	ṭ		k	
vl. asp	Ph	Th	ṭh		kh	
vd.unasp		D	ḍ		g	
Affricates						
vl. unasp		Ts		č		
vl. asp		Tsh		čh		
vd.unasp				J		
Nasal	m	N			ṇ	
Trill			r			
Lateral			l			
Fricatives						
vl.		S		š		h
vd.				z		
Semi-vowels	v			Y		

Examples are given below:

/p/ (voiceless unaspirated bilabial stop):

panUn `own', apUz `lie', tshop `less talkative'.

/ph/ (voiceless aspirated bilabial stop):

phastil `crop', mUphi:d `useful', ta:ph `sun shine'

/b/ (voiced unaspirated bilabial stop):

ba:g `garden', kabar `grave', rab `mud'

/t/ (voiceless unaspirated dental stop):

ta:r `wire', batt `cooked rice', lot `light'

/th/ (voiceless aspirated dental stop):

tha:l `plate', katht `talks', path `last'

/d/ (voiced unaspirated dental stop):

darwa:z `door', dodUr `rotten', da:~ d `bull/ox'

/ṭ/ (voiceless unaspirated retroflex stop):

ṭa~g `pear', tsaṭUn `to torn', noṭ `pitcher'.

/Ṭh/ (voiceless aspirated retroflex stop):

Ṭha~Ḍ `ducken', baṬht `dent / killin', Ṣo:~ Ṭh `ginger'

/Ḍ/ (voiced unaspirated retroflex stop):

Ḍakh `support', ga:Ḍt `fish', / Ḍṑ:Ḍ `one and half'

/k/ (voiceless unaspirated velar stop):

kə:m `work', Ḍṑ:kUr `hamer', tsok `sour/bottom'.

/kh/ (voiceless aspirated velar stop):

khasUn `to climb', Ṣakhits `person/fellow', Ṣakh `doubt' pakh `wing'

/g/ (voiced unaspirated velar stop):

ga:m `village', pagah `tomorrow', dag `pain'

Affricates

/ts/ (voiceless unaspirated dental affricate):

tša:man `cheese' matsar `madness', təts `hot fem'

/tsh/ (voiceless aspirated dental affricate):

tsha:vUl `he goat', latshUl `broom', gatsh `go imp'

/č/ (voiceless unaspirated palato-alveolar stop)

Ča:la:kh `clever', haČuv `made of wood', khoČ `a big boat'

/Čh/ (voiceless aspirated palato-alveolar affricate):

Čha:n `carpenter', vUČhUn `to see', əČh `eye'.

/j/ (voiced unaspirated palato-alveolar affricate)

java:b `answer', ba:jɛ `band', mo:əj `mother'

Fricatives

/s/ (voiceless alveolar fricative):

so:n `our' kəsmat `luck', mas `hair'

/z/ (voiced alveolar fricative):

zə:lim `cruel', thazar `hieght', poz `true'

/ʃ/ (voiceless palato-alveolar fricative):

ʃa:l `jackal', məʃkil `difficulty', ga:ʃ `light'

/h/ (voiceless glottal fricative):

hoʈ `throat', ʃahar `city', beh `sit imp'

Nasals

/m/ (voiced bilabial nasal):

maka:n `house', imka:n `probability', nam `nail'

/n/ (voiced alveolar nasal):

nər `arm' vanUn `to say', son `deep'

/ŋ/ (voiced velar nasal):

ma~ŋUn `to as for ', ra~ŋ `color', ko~ŋ `saffron'

Trill

/r/ (voiced alveolar trill):

rab `mud', garɽm `hot', də:r `window'

Lateral

/l/ (voiced alveolar lateral):

lab `wall', mə:likh `owner', ba:l `mountain'

Semi-vowels

/v/ (voiced bilabial semi-vowel):

va:tUl `cobbler', ha:vUn `to show', ga:v `cow'

/y/ (voiced palatal semi-vowel):

yintiza:r `wait', yakhtiya:r `right', Ča:y `tea'

2.1.2.2. Palatalization

Palatalization in Kashmiri not only serves as a phonemic feature that alters the meaning of words but also influences the pluralization of nouns. It changes the number (from singular to plural) of nouns. This dual characteristic, unique to Kashmiri, distinguishes it from other languages within its linguistic group. In Kashmiri, all non-palatal consonants have the potential to undergo palatalization.

It's noteworthy that during the process of plural formation under the influence of palatalization, the mid back rounded short vowel /o/ preceding the final consonant transforms into the mid central unrounded short vowel /ə/, while the mid back rounded long vowel /o:/ preceding the final consonant changes to the mid central unrounded long vowel /ə:/. Examples illustrating this phenomenon are provided below:

Table 1

Non-Palatal Vowels		Palatal Vowels	
Word	Gloss	Word	Gloss
Pan	`thread'	p'an	'fall'
Bon	heap'	b'on	Separate
thakUn	to be tired	tha'kUn	to boast/show f
Dal	Discussion	d'al	Bark
həṭ	piece of ood	həṭ'	Throats
ṭə:ṭh	dear one (f)	ṭə:ṭh'	dear ones n.p.)
bəḍ	big (f.s.)	bəḍ'	big ones
Khav	a ditch	kh'av	ate
Tsal	run (imp)	ts'al	pressure
tshoṭ	Short	tsh'oṭ	garbage
ə:m	unbaked s.)	ə:m'	unbaked n.p)
nu:l	Mongoose	n'u:l	blue
mə:l	Appetite	mə:l'	fathers
parUn	to read	par'un	sieve

Table 1.2

Non-palatal vowels (Singular)		Palatal vowels (Plural)	
gUr	Horse	gUr'	horses
kUl	Tree	kUl'	Trees
ŠUr	Child	ŠUr'	children
latsUl	Broom	latshtl'	brooms
kor	Bangle	kər'	bangles
on	Blind	ən'	blind (pl)
hos	Elephant	həs'	elephants
Phol	Grain	phəl'	grains
ko~D	Thorn	kə~D'	thorns
nor	Sleeve	nər'	sleeves
n'ov	new one	nəv'	new ones
Kol	Dumb	kəl'	dumb pl.
oD	Half	əD'	halves
God	Hole	gəd'	holes
lo~g	Lame	lə~g'	lame pl.
po~z	Monkey	pə~z'	monkeys
Zor	Deaf	zər'	deaf (pl.)
Votsh	Calf	vətsh'	Calves
Potsh	Guest	pətsh'	guests
voT	Gallery	vəT'	galleries
hoT	Throat	həT'	throats
noT	Pitcher	nəT'	pitchers
loT	Tail	ləT	tails
Dob	washer man	dəb'	washer men
Čo:r	Dumb	Čə:r'	dumb (pl)

mo:l	fFather	mə:l'	fathers
o:l	nest	ə:l'	nests
no:r	channel	nə:r'	channels
Čo: ~ṭ	mouth	Čə:ṭ'	mouths
do:d	Disease	də:d'	Diseases
po:tsh	a additional Kashmiri garment	pə:tsh'	traditional Kashmiri garment (pl.)
ko:n	Blind	kə:n'	blind (pl.)

2.1.2.3. Phonological changes in loanwords

The voiced aspirated consonant phonemes like /bh/, /dh/, /Ḍh/, /jh/, and /gh/ are de-aspirated as /b/, /d/, /Ḍ/, /j/, and /g/ respectively in Kashmiri in quite a good number of Perso-Arabic and Hindi-Urdu borrowed words such as bha:i: 'brother', du:dh 'milk', Ḍhaba 'tea stall', jharna: 'water fall' and ghar 'home'. Similarly, the Perso-Arabic uvular stop /q/ is replaced by /k/ as in qa:nu:n → ka:nu:n 'law', and fricatives /f/, /x/, and /G/ are replaced by /ph/, /kh/, and /g/ as in words faraq → pharak 'difference', xu:n → khu:n 'blood', Gam → gam 'sadness' respectively. The voiceless unaspirated stops /p/, /t/, /ṭ/, and /k/ in the borrowed words are aspirated in the word final position in Kashmiri:

Hindi-Urdu	Gloss	Kashmiri
na:p	'measurement'	na:ph
ra:t	'night'	ra:th
pa:ṭ	'part'	paṭh
Ḍa:k	'mail'	Ḍa:kh
ta:k	'window'	ta:kh
pa:k	'pious'	pa:kh

2.1.2.4. Consonant Clusters

2.1.2.4.1. Word-initial Consonant Cluster

In Kashmiri, the consonant clusters at word-initial, word-medial and the word-final positions occur almost with the same frequency and the frequency of their occurrence is very high. The second member of a consonant cluster which occurs in the word-initial position is always voiced alveolar trill /r/. The first consonant may be a stop, an affricate, or a fricative.

Table 2

Cluste	Word	Gloss
/Šr/	Šra:kh	a big knife

/dr/	dra:g	famine
/kr/	Krakh	cry
/kr/	kra~z	Skeleton
/Šr/	Šra~z	clamp
/pr/	pre: ~ŋ	finial (a distinctive section or ornament the apex of roof of a building)
/kr/	kre: ~kh	head/crown of a ring
/tr/	tra:m	copper
/tr/	trə:m	plate
/tr/	trakh	a unit of 5 kg.
/tr/	tro~mb	prick
/tr/	troŠ	unbendable/stiff
/br/	Brakh	press
/pr/	Prah	psychosis
/tr/	/traṬh/	Thunder
/tr/	/tra:l/	name of a town in Kasmir
/gr/	gra~d	counting
/kr/	kra:l	potter
/dr/	dra:l	broker
/gr/	gra:kh	customer
/pr/	pra:n	shallot
/tr/	trakUr	stiff/ hard (mas.)
/tr/	Traktr	weight scale
/sr/	sra:n	Bath
/tr/	tra:s	crack
/dr/	drog	expensive
/sr/	srog	cheap

/sr/	srɔ: ~ŋ	alley
/pr/	pro'n	fair colored
/pr/	pro:n	old
/tr/	tro~ ŋ	bunch
/tr/	tram	hole
/pr/	prasUn	to give birth
/phr/	phras	poplar tree
/br/	bram	illusion
/tr/	tre	three
/sr/	srod	joint

2.1.2.4.2. Word-medial consonant cluster

Like the word-initial position consonant clusters, the word- medial position consonant clusters also occur with a very high frequency in Kashmiri. Most of these clusters occur across syllable or morpheme boundaries. It is important to point out that some of these consonant clusters are broken optionally by the insertion of the high central unrounded short vowel / ɪ /. It is pertinent to mention that the following conditions prevail during the formation of these consonant clusters: (i) No consonant cluster is formed by the combination of two aspirated consonants, (ii) No consonant cluster involves the voiceless aspirated palato-alveolar affricate /čh/ in its formation, (iii) No consonant cluster includes the voiced unaspirated retroflex stop /Ḍ/ as its second sound/member. Examples of such consonant clusters are given below:

Table 3

Cluster	Word	Gloss
/rb/	kharbUz	melon
/mz/	kamzo:r	weak
pT	kapTan	tailoring
/rk/	markaz	centre
/Šk/	mʈŠkʈl	difficult
/gr/	a~grez	English man
/rb/	gUrbath	poverty
/dv/	he~dva~d	watermelon
/skh/	maskhar	joker

/sk/	m̩tski:n	poor
/sm/	ktsmat	luck
/kd/	takdi:r	fate
/pht /	daphtar	office
/dʃ/	pa:dʃa	King
/khb/	akhba:r	newspaper
/phs/	taphsi:l	detail
/ʃk /	maʃku:r	thankful
/ʃg/	maʃgu:l	busy
/nz/	tanzi:m	organization
/nk/	inka:r	refusal
/phr/	naphrat	hatred
/sb/	nesbath	ratio
/tl/	matlab	meaning
/ks/	maksad	purpose
/rn/	khatarna:k	dangerous
/rd/	gardan	neck
/rd/	sardi:	cold
/rm/	garmi:	heat
/rd/	vardi:	uniform
/rm/	narmi:	humbleness softness
/rd/	gardan	neck
/ms/	hamsa:yi	neighbour
/nd/	dUka:nda:r	shopkeeper

2.1.2.4.3. Word-final consonant cluster

Consonant clusters in Kashmiri are nearly as prevalent in word-final positions as they are in word-initial and word-medial positions. Typically, the first sound or member of these

consonant clusters is either of the two nasal consonants /m/ or /n/, while the second member is commonly the voiced alveolar fricative /z/, or one of the following stops: /b/, /d/, /g/, /Ḍ/, /Ṭ/, or /Ṫh/.

Table 4

Final cluster	Word	Gloss
/nḌ /	ganḌ	to tie
/ nḌ /	konḌ	thorn
/nḌ/	lənḌ	branch
/ng/	Mong	green gram beans
/ng/	Kong	Saffron
/ng/	Rong	clove
/ng/	Šong	slept (mas)
/ng/	Trong	bunch
/ng/	Tang	pear
/nz/	Enz	swam
/nz/	Ponz	monkey
/nz/	ku:nz	key
/nz/	Šranz	clamp
/nz/	Manz	inside
/mb/	Thamb	pillar
/mb/	Amb	Mango
/mb/	Tromb	Prick
/mb /	phamb	cotton
/mb/	ČombUn	thrashing
/nd/	da:nd	ox/bull
/nd/	Rand	Rag
/nd/	Gond	banquet
/nṪ/	ə:nṪ	stone inside an apricot

/nṭ/	u:nṭ	camel
/nṭh/	g ə:nṭh	eagle
/nṭh/	tsu:nṭh	apple
/nčh/	ma:nčh	honey
/ng/	Heng	horn

2.1.2.5. Syllable structure

Kashmiri has (C) (C) V (C)(C) syllable structure. Vowel initial syllables are found only in the initial position of the words. The first consonant of the medial cluster is assigned to the preceding syllable and the remaining elements of the unit to the following syllable. In the following examples the syllable boundary is marked with [+] signs.

maj + bu:r	‘helpless’
gar + dan	‘neck’
khar + go:š	‘hare’
mən + zɬl	‘destination’
kts + mat	‘fate/luck’
tak + li:ph	‘trouble’

2. 2. Suprasegmentals

2.2.1. Length

Length is phonemic in Kashmiri. Kashmiri has seven pairs of short and long vowels that contrast in length and change the meaning of the words they occur in. The consonantal phonemes do not contrast in length. The following minimal pairs illustrate the contrast in the length of the vowels:

sir	‘secret’	si:r	‘brick’
tser	‘patience’	tse:r	‘late’
ttr	‘a piece of cloth’	tṭ:r	‘cold’
dər	‘hard’ (fem)	də:r	‘window’
nər	‘arm’	nə:r	‘jug’
khar	‘donkey’	kha:r	‘blacksmith’
khUr	‘spiral’	khu:r	‘shaving blade’
shUr	‘kid’	shu:r	‘made up’
gol	‘inner corners of the mouth’	go:l	‘round’

2.2.2. Stress

Stress is neither a distinctive feature nor is in phonemic contrast in Kashmiri. Kashmiri being a syllable timed language, sometimes individual words are stressed for emphasis.

2.2.3. Intonation

There are four major types of intonational patterns: (1) High - fall, (2) High - rise, (3) Rise & fall, (4) Mid - level. Intonations have syntactic rather than emotional content. Statements have 'High - fall' intonation pattern. Intonation peaks are generally positioned on the penultimate word or on the negative particle, if any.

1. sU ČhU sra:n kara:n
he is bath take-p
'He is taking a bath.'
2. Kita:bt Čhant alma:rt ma~z
books are-neg cupboard-in dat `
The books are not in the cupboard.'

Yes-no questions and tag questions have a 'High-rise' intonation.

3. tsi gokha: sɔ:ku:l ra:th
you go school -qm yesterday
'Did you go to school yesterday?'
4. tɔm' kUn maka:n, kUnUn na:
he the house-ab sold neg-q
'He sold the house. Didn't he?'

Information questions have 'Rise and fall' intonation in Kashmiri. The rise in intonation is registered on the question word and fall is attained gradually.

5. toh't kar ən'nvɪ nəv ka:r
you when brought new car
'When did you buy the new car?'

In Kashmiri, commands generally follow the mid-level intonational pattern.

6. atht kar khaDa: hand do raise 'raise your hands'
7. kamri ma~zt ni:riv nebar room in go out 'get out of the room'

2.2.4. Homophony

According to Leech (Leech, 1974) a group of lexical items is said to be homophonous when they share the same morphological and/or syntactic specifications. These lexical items may belong to same or different word categories. In homophony, each of the two or more words has the same pronunciation but different meanings. Interestingly the phenomenon of homophony is typically homographic (words with same spelling but different meaning) in Kashmiri. Examples:

Lexical Item	Gloss
ma:l	'wealth/garland'
kha:r	'blacksmith/ a unit of 80 kg'
ta:r	'wire/ a river crossing'
khu:r	'shaving blade/ tool for moving a boat'

du:r	‘ear rings/ far away’
Ša:l	‘jackal/ shawl’
ə:r	‘plum/ a tool used in embroidery work’
tse:r	‘late/apricot’
Ṭu:r	‘a pot/ a petal of a flower’
ka:r	‘car/ work’
və:r	‘kitchen garden/ a pot’
na:v	‘name / boat’
a:m	‘general/ intestinal round worms’
tsok	‘bottom/ sour’
loṬh	‘braid/ a wooden stick’
pan	‘thread/ leaves of trees’

Conclusion

Kashmiri has a distinctive phonological system that makes it peculiar among other Indo-Aryan languages. 15 vowel and 25 consonantal phonemes, altogether 40 segmental phonemes are found in Kashmiri. There are 2 short and 2 long unrounded central vowels (/ɪ /, / ɛ: /, /ə/ and /ə:/) in Kashmiri which are not found in other South Asian languages. Nasalization is phonemic, and all vowels can be nasalized. Out of 25, only 6 consonant phonemes such as /p/, /t/, /Ṭ/, /k/, /ts/, and /Č/ have their aspirated counterparts such as /ph/, /th/, /Ṭh/, /kh/, /tsh/, and /Čh/ respectively, and all other 19 consonant sound segments are unaspirated in Kashmiri. Palatalization is phonemic in Kashmiri and alters the meaning of the resultant words. In Perso-Arabic and Hindi-Urdu borrowed words in Kashmiri, the voiced aspirated consonant sounds /bh/, /dh/, /Dh/, /jh/ and /gh/ are de-aspirated as /b/, /d/, /D/, /j/ and /g/ respectively in Kashmiri. Similarly, the Perso-Arabic uvular stop /q/ is replaced by /k/, and fricatives /f/, /x/, and /G/ are substituted by /ph/, /kh/, and /g/ respectively. Moreover, the presence of voiceless unaspirated dental affricate /ts/ and its aspirated counterpart /tsh/, typical to Kashmiri phonemic system contributes to the peculiarity of Kashmiri among other languages of the group. The consonant clusters at the word-initial, word-medial, and word-final positions with their considerable frequency of occurrence has also been found as a striking feature of the Kashmiri language. In case of word-initial consonant clusters, the second member/sound of the cluster which occurs at the initial position is always voiced alveolar trill /r/. The word-medial consonant clusters mostly occur across syllable or morpheme boundaries, and some of these clusters are broken optionally by the insertion of high central unrounded short vowel /ɪ/. Similarly, in the word-final consonant clusters, the first sound segment/member of the cluster is either of the two nasal consonants /m, n/, and the second member is the voiced alveolar fricative /z /, or any of the stops /b/, /d/, /g/D/, /Ṭ/ and /Ṭh/. Kashmiri has (C) (C)V(C)(C) syllable structure. Vowel initial syllables are found only in the initial position of the words. The first consonant sound of the medial cluster is assigned to the preceding syllable and the remaining elements of the unit to the following syllable. In Kashmiri, the suprasegmental feature ‘length’ is phonemic in nature, distinguishing meaning in the words it occurs in. There are seven pairs of short and long vowels that contrast in length and create a difference in the meaning of the resultant words. Stress, however, is not distinctive or phonemically contrastive in Kashmiri. Occasionally, individual words in Kashmiri are emphasized through stress. High-fall, high-rise, rise & fall, mid-level intonations convey syntactic rather than emotional content. Commands typically follow a mid-level intonational pattern. Homophony which is homographic (words with same spelling but different meaning) has been found to be typical to Kashmiri, setting it apart from other Indo-Aryan languages.

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