Migrating to IPA from Glassman

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IAM has decided to stop using the Glassman alphabet in its publications, and start using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). Glassman has served us well over the years, but there is little point nowadays to maintaining a private alphabet, when there is an international standard available. Many of our team members will arrive having had previous experience with the IPA. The transition to IPA will not happen over night. New IAM publications with use IPA, but there are plenty of older publications in circulation that use Glassman.

This guide explains the new letters a few at a time. If you prefer, you can jump to Table 1 to see the changes laid out all at once.

1 Changes to the vowels

The Glassman alphabet used a mixture of uppercase and lowercase letters for different vowel sounds, but the IPA has only lowercase letters. So, there are some new letters to learn. If you know any language other than English, these four letters will make a lot of sense!

(1)
i	[pir]	'old'	پیر
e	[bel]	'shovel'	بیل
o	[top]	'ball'	توپ
u	[bud]	'was'	بود

But there are three new vowel letters to learn: [ʌ], [ɛ], and [ʊ].

(2)
ʌ	[dʌs]	'sickle'	داس
ɛ	[dɛl]	'heart'	دل
ʊ	[pʊt]	'hidden'	پت

As in Glassman, [a] makes the sound in [am] 'mango' ام.

2 Changes to the consonants

In IPA, the idea is to have one letter for one sound. So the sounds that were spelled with two letters before are now spelled with one.

(3)
ɣ	[ɣʌr]	'hole'	غار
ʃ	[ʃaʃ]	'six'	شش
ʒ	[ʒʌla]	'hail'	ژاله
tʃ	[tʃap]	'left'	چپ

Why does [tʃ] have two letters? Because it really has two sounds. There's the quiet [t]-sound at the beginning and the noisy [ʃ] sound when you let go of the [t].[1]

Note that getting rid of all those double letters frees up [h] to make the h-sound:

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[1] It's also possible for these letters to be written closer together: [ʧ]; or with a little tie to emphasize their unity: [t͡ʃ].

(4) h   [hal]   'solution'   حل

Two final changes. German, Finnish, and Norwegian team members will be glad to know that [j] is now making its proper sound. The sound written with 'j' in Glassman is now written [dʒ].[2]

(5)
| j | [jak] | 'one' | یک |
| dʒ | [dʒʌ] | 'place' | جا |

And we have one more consonant—which was sometimes written in Glassman with a tick mark, but usually omitted. The glottal stop [ʔ] is the sound in English 'uh-oh'. It occurs in Dari and Arabic loanwords that are being pronounced formally.

(6) ʔ   [mʊʔalɛm]   'teacher'   معلم

3 How to type IPA characters

Most people won't need to type IPA characters. If you're communicating with Afghans using the Latin alphabet, you can continue to do that. It doesn't need to be precise, it just needs to communicate. (SMS advertisements, for instance, often come in the Latin script; it's not that they're using Glassman, they're just using the letters.)

Typing with IPA characters is just like typing in a different language. You download a "keyboard" and then switch to that keyboard when you type. Apple users click here[3] for the download page, and Windows users click here[4] for the download page. A note for Windows users: the keyboard will be installed as "Icelandic"—because that's a slot that's empty for most people.

Once the keyboard is installed and you've switched to it, you can just type letters as usual. For the eight symbols that aren't on your keyboard, you press two keys to make the symbol. So for instance to type 'ʌ' you first type '>' (i.e., Shift+.) key and then the 'U' key. They keystrokes are somewhat mnemonic (i.e., =g produces something like a 'g').

(7)
ʌ	>u
ɛ	<e
ʊ	<u
ɣ	=g
ʃ	=s
ʒ	=z
tʃ	t=s
dʒ	d=z
ʔ	=?

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[2][dʒ] is one of those two-in-one sounds, like [tʃ].

[3]http://scripts.sil.org/cms/scripts/page.php?site_id=nrsi&id=ipa-sil_keyboard

[4]http://scripts.sil.org/cms/scripts/page.php?site_id=nrsi&id=uniipakeyboard#2d08bc68

Glassman	IPA
A	ʌ
E	e
e	ɛ
I	i
U	u
O	o
u	ʊ
kh	x
gh	ɣ
sh	ʃ
ch	tʃ
zh	ʒ
H	h
y	j
j	dʒ

Table 1: Master table of changes