Teaching THDL Extended Wylie

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Overview

This is an instructional manual for teaching the extended Wylie transliteration system to speakers of Tibetan languages. It provides structure for instruction and suggestions for how to thoroughly teach the Wylie system. The manual has been successfully used to teach the system to speakers who have command of written Tibetan. It assumes that the person carrying out the instruction is already proficient in transliterating Tibetan. The examples draw on insights derived from actual teaching experience and incorporate feedback from these experiences. The explanations stress those areas that might prove unintuitive to speakers of Tibetan. The manual is based on the Tibetan and Himalayan Digital Library extended Wylie system as described in Nathaniel Garson and David Germano's "Extended Wylie Transliteration Scheme" (January 31, 2003 update). I thank Jiamtsen Tserang and Rinchen Dorje, whose comments made this a more valuable tool. Suggestions for improvement are welcome and will be considered in future revisions. This manual was produced during the development of the Trace Foundation's Byara Database, a comprehensive online resource for the study of periodical publications from the PRC.

The manual is divided into two parts: a teaching guide and an extended table of transliteration combinations. The guide is to be used as a blueprint for teaching. It provides a flexible sequence of exercises and highlights the material through several mutually reinforcing units. The transliteration table is to be used for quick reference and review. It includes the Tibetan alphabet, superscribed and subscribed combinations, common punctuation, retroflex characters, and combinations useful to transliterate Old Tibetan as well as words of Sanskrit and Chinese origin.

The extended Wylie system shall be presented through five sequential units that teach the Tibetan language speaker the fundamentals of this system. These units will not cover several specialized sets of characters that are presented in the transliteration table, such as the reversed vowel sign i and esoteric Sanskrit stacks. An understanding of the extended Wylie system is sufficient to understand the transliteration of these sets without further explanation. Should proficiency with transliterating words of Sanskrit origin be desired, the construction of separate instruction sheets would be necessary to develop conscientious skill with this task. This manual does not entirely exhaust the character set of the Extended Wylie Transliteration Scheme. It presents a comprehensive set of combinations that are likely to be used in contemporary contexts. Those combinations presented in the teaching guide are summarized below:

Unit 1: The Tibetan Alphabet
- consonants
- vowels and a chung

Unit 2: Syllable Elements
- superscribed and subscribed combinations
- prefixes, suffixes, and the post-suffix

Unit 3: Punctuation, g.ya vs. gya, and more a chung
- shad and tsheg
- g.ya versus gya
- a chung: as suffix and prefix, genitive use and connected syllables

Unit 4: Numerals and Sanskrit
- numerals
Unit 1: The Tibetan Alphabet

This unit groups the Tibetan alphabet in several sections according to a hierarchical order of complexity. The standard for complexity rests on the number of letters required to render a Tibetan character (e.g., the ca, cha, tsha progression) as well as deviations from the norm (e.g., nga, zha, and 'a).

Two-letter combinations are the simplest transliteration units and are introduced first. Three-letter aspirate combinations introduce a new element that is predictably transliterated. These should be taught as a group and randomly contrasted to their non-aspirate counterparts (e.g., ca and cha, ta and tha).

Three-letter non-aspirate combinations require some extra attention as the basis for their transliteration has not proved entirely intuitive, particularly in the case of nga, nya, and dza. Tsha is sometimes confused for either cha or tsa in transliteration and should be presented in contradistinction to these. Introducing the vowels remains last, although this could also be carried out with the support of a consonant (e.g., ra, re, ri, ro, ru) and followed by the individual vowels. The a chung is a constant source of confusion. Its transliteration should be clearly explained at every stage of instruction.

**TWO-LETTER COMBINATIONS**

ka ga ca ja ta da na pa ba

ma wa za ya ra la sa ha

**THREE-LETTER COMBINATIONS**

Aspirates

kha cha tha pha

Non-aspirates

ma nga nya dza
FOUR-LETTER COMBINATION

VOWELS AND A CHUNG

COMBINATIONS AND REVIEW

The introduction of the vowels and consonants proceeds swiftly and offers the first opportunity for review. During review, the instructor presents an existing word in script, which the student then transcribes. Wylie transcription-to-script exercises should be emphasized if the student requires reading fluency in Wylie. Words that exhibit random characteristics are to be given successively. Mistakes should be noted and the respective exercises repeated at intervals. Students occasionally make consistent errors with a particular transliteration. These should be followed up in further stages of instruction until the concept is thoroughly understood. The transliteration of the tsheg can be introduced here or in the next unit. Teaching the entire set of combinations outlined in this guide takes between one and two hours.

Examples:

Unit 2: Syllable Elements

SUPERSCRIBED AND SUBSCRIBED COMBINATIONS

Prefixes, Suffixes, and the Post-Suffix

Either the prefix or suffix can be taught next. Examples should first introduce a particular prefix (mgo, mdze, mdo), and then randomly present them in random fashion (‘di, mkho, gtso bo). The suffix is introduced in the same way; nan tan, sman, sngon, and gzhung, bcad, gtor. It is not necessary to emphasize every single suffix, but it is important to spend extra time on the a chung as prefix, root letter, and suffix (‘og, ‘das, mkha’, ‘ba’, ‘os, mnga’, etcetera). Occasionally, mistakes such as sogram or sgoram for sgrom, occur. Horizontal and vertical reading priorities should be explained to reinforce the order of transliteration. If students ask why a syllable such as bsil is not rendered basila, it is important to remind them that vowels are only associated with the root letter cluster. The post-suffix sa is intuitively grasped when taught in this sequence. It is also important to create gradual...
progressions of exercises that explore various letter groups and culminate in a complex cluster such as bsgrubs or brgyangs. When done carefully enough, such exercises will expose areas where the student needs more practice. I have found it useful and practical to draw out vocabulary for students out of randomly chosen Tibetan script books during instruction, but pre-prepared exercises are also an option.

Examples:

\[ g\|ya \quad g\|yang \quad r\|gyang \quad b\|rgyang \quad b\|rgyangs \]

\[ n\|gu \quad m\|gu \quad n\|gub \quad m\|gub \quad b\|rn\|gub \quad b\|rn\|gubs \]

**Unit 3: Punctuation, g.ya vs. gya, and more a chung**

**THE SHAD**

At some point, either after teaching the transliteration of complex syllables or during, the usage of the shad (i.e. / ) after words should be demonstrated. The *tsheg* can be reviewed here if necessary.

Tibetan writing will generally omit the shad when preceded by a ga (and occasionally ka and sha) syllable ending at the end of a 'clause' or 'sentence' usually terminated by a shad. In these cases, the transliteration of the shad will follow the written text character for character, mimicking possible inconsistencies and peculiarities found in the text. The transliteration must therefore preserve the original text and *not* introduce a shad where one might be tempted to place one.

Examples:

\[ \text{rta/ nor/ lug gsum/} \]

\[ \text{ri mgo na nyal na dka'/} \]

\[ g\|cig \]

**USAGE OF G.YA AND GYA**

The special use of the period (.) to indicate a ga prefixed to a ya root letter as opposed to a ga root letter with a ya subscript is unusual enough that it should be introduced separately. It is not a hard concept to understand, but it is easy to forget. It is an exception to other Wylie rules, with good reason. Repeated exercises at intervals are recommended.

Examples:

\[ g\|yu \quad g\|yo \quad g\|yul \quad g\|yang \quad g\|yeng \quad g\|yag \quad g\|ya' \quad g\|yung \quad g\|yeld \]
A CHUNG IN GENITIVE CONSTRUCTIONS AND OTHER CONNECTED SYLLABLES

The *a chung* holds vast potential for confusion due to the non-letter character used to render it in transliteration. Much of the confusion can be avoided if the student can regard the 'a as if it were a standard consonant, like na or ra. The *a chung* also presents ambiguities in that it helps form syllables that fuse to the end of other syllables (e.g., nga'i, re'u, bla ma'ang). At a quick glance the *a chung* encourages ambiguity in seemingly introducing a second root letter in the slot reserved for the suffix, as well as a second vowel. This apparent jumble is easy to transliterate unambiguously if the student can regard the cluster as two distinct syllables without the *tshog* between them (e.g., bye'u as bye and 'u without the intervening *tshog*).

**Unit 4: Numerals and Sanskrit**

**NUMERALS**

Teaching the transliteration of numerals (0-9) is straightforward. Example:

*8m-1965*

is transliterated as nga'i skyes lo1965red/. If in the text there is a space between the number and the syllables that precede and follow it, an underscore (_) is used to represent the white space. Thus,

*8m-1965*

is transliterated as nga'i skyes lo_1965_red/.

For dates, the standard convention is a *tshog* before a number but no *tshog* after a number. Thus, a statement at the end of a book’s introduction indicating that the introduction was written on November 11, 2000 is

*2000*

and it is transliterated as spyi lo 2000zla 11tshes 19la/. If there are spaces in the text itself around the numbers so that it looks like this,

*2000*

it is transliterated spyi lo _2000_zla _11_tshes _19_la/.

**SANSKRIT**

Long Vowels

Long vowels, indicative of Sanskrit works or other foreign influences, are transliterated using the capitals of the respective vowels. Long vowels are indicated in Tibetan by the presence of a small *a chung* below the root letter stack, yet another opportunity for confusion. The *a chung* in such cases does nothing else but show a very specific characteristic of the vowel. It runs contradictory to a number of rules, in that an element at the bottom of a letter stack interacts with an element at the top of the stack regardless of what is between them, and one capital letter is used to transliterate two Tibetan characters. This contradiction is partly warranted by being faithful to the Sanskrit vowels, which use one sign to indicate a sound. However, although there is no long 'e' or 'o' character in Sanskrit, these combinations continue to be useful in rendering a variety of Tibetan loan words, particularly names. The usage of capital letters in transliteration is ineffective if capitals are also used for other purposes, such as at the beginning of the sentence or to render names. Such stylistic preferences compromise transliteration accuracy. If both are necessary, the instructor will need to negotiate ad hoc usage rules.
Retroflex Letters and Non-Standard Stacks

The six retroflex letters used primarily for words of Sanskrit origin (e.g., paN+Dit a, tiSh+Tha) should also be practiced in conjunction with long vowels, even if the examples are made up for the sake of the exercise (e.g., DI, ShU, NO). It should also be pointed out that for the three-lettered retroflex letters Sha and Tha, only the first letter of the transliteration needs to be capitalized.

Consonant stacks that do not follow Tibetan grammar rules are non-standard and are indicated by a plus sign (e.g., pad+ma, lan+d+ha). It is important to point out that Sanskrit stacks often embed two or more syllables that must be skillfully extracted (e.g., rak+Sha, ut+pala). At this point, there is some potential for the student to start using the plus sign to transliterate even standard Tibetan stacks, especially when Tibetan grammar rules allow Sanskrit stacks to take on an indigenous appearance (e.g., karma pa). The special use of the plus sign will then need to be reiterated.

It is sometimes the case that Tibetan language speakers are not familiar with the pronunciation of an original Sanskrit word or stack. In these cases, explaining the pronunciation of the original Sanskrit often shows how transliteration of Sanskrit loan words really just follows the rules of transliteration the student has already learned.

Unit 5: Other Non-Standard Combinations

WORDS OF CHINESE ORIGIN

Chinese loan words and names make frequent use of the a chung joined with a vowel in place of a suffix (e.g., su'u lan, ku'o) as well as long vowels (e.g., thAn). The a chung and long vowels should be reviewed within the context of Chinese loan words, if relevant. Chinese loanwords make some use of the non-standard stack, h+pha, to indicate the 'f' sound (e.g., hra h+pha), for which there is no written convention in Tibetan. The use of the + sign should likewise be reviewed.

MISSPELLINGS AND NON-STANDARD TIBETAN

It is essential to communicate to students of the Wylie system that transliteration is an unambiguous, mechanical conversion from one set of symbols to another. Integrity during transliteration relies on faithful conversion of spelling mistakes (e.g., 'jig byed, rlang 'khor), intentional or unintentional non-standard clusters and contractions (e.g., bred, bkris), colloquialisms (e.g., rgya b+he), and orthography (e.g., 'gog/, zha/). Correcting while transliterating is part of an editing process, which is a distinct priority separate from transliteration itself. Explaining this difference early on before a project will benefit the integrity of the transliterated text.

Table of Transliteration Combinations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE THIRTY CONSONANTS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ta</td>
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<tr>
<td>pa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
THE FOUR VOWELS

EXAMPLES

ra la sha sa

ha a

i u e o

rka rnga rnya rta rna rma rdza rla
lka lga inga lca lja lta lda lha
ska snga snya sta sna spa sma stsa
dwa tshwa zhwa zwa lwa shwa hwa
kya khya gya pya phya bya mya
kra khra dra phra bra mra sra hra
kla gla bla zla rla sla
gi chu de mo tshe 'o su he
skye rgyu rje sti sdo spyi rdzi lho

khungs rgyan rnyed dwags spyod 'og rtsibs

mkha' 'gyur brjod gnang dpyid bzlos

red/ rus sbal bzhugs so// bkra shis shog
ra ma/ phag mo/ lu gu bya mo dang khyi phrug
gyang g.yang rgyal g.yu rgyud g.yung
a ma'i nga'i khyo'i bya ba'i sgo'i mda'i
le'u bye'u ste'u re'u sne'u spe'u dze'u
ra ma'ang bla ma'ang byu ru'ang nyi ma'ang
leT bzhuD rdzoT gzuD graT laD
ai au A I U -i -l

Da ru pad ma paN Di ta g.yang Ti shaShasa Thi
pad+ma maN+Dala paN+Di ta karma pa ut+pala rak+Sha gang+ga
n+na d+di k+ka T+Ta ts+tson l+lum dap+pem sh+sha a+a
in+d+ra sham+b+hala sar+b+ba r+b+h+yo kum+b+haN+De lan+d+ha
dzam+b+ha ka la pA bi ru pA lo tsA ba d+harma klrti IU hl pa
pi trA karnA meg+hash+yAma b+hUta pura tl k+ka strl
e waM oM AH hUM duHkha d+hI H A kaM
eShAMpatiSh+ThAH yud+hiSh+TharaH puMsoH puMb+haH
gats+tshagats+tshasitset+kAn+tapan+thAnaH san+tuteshiwAH
arak+ShiArAraMrAdzAnaMg+h+nan+vidoShAH
rgyal po 'jigs byed la sogs pa snyam rtsom sog po
tsong kha pa rdo grub bstan mi bred rlang 'khor sa go la
gung thang brtan sgron slob ga srung mdud skyabs 'gro
bkris blo rgyam rin rdor gur guM rgya b+he sher phyin
h+phun tun pa'o pa'e ku'o hru'u kwa kro'u khrang an

su'u lan hru'u ci ca'o thung chi khre cog tshe thAn

ma'o kru'u zhi tho la ci cang hru'u ci hra h+pha