

Dzongkha

No romanization systems for Dzongkha have been put forward at the United Nations conferences on the standardization of geographical names or at sessions of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.

In 1991 the first phonological romanization for Dzongkha was introduced by the Dzongkha Development Commission. Roman Dzongkha as it was called, was intended to accurately and adequately represent the phonology of the living language and to serve as a standard for representing Dzongkha names and words in the international media. However, the system was not implemented, and later a simplified version of Roman Dzongkha was devised by the same Commission. Bhutan's Ministry of Home Affairs approved the implementation of Roman Dzongkha on May 29, 1997 and made it mandatory for all government institutions to use standardized spellings of geographical names and the guidelines for romanization.

Dzongkha uses an alphasyllabic script (*Uchen*) which occurs in two main forms. The printed or uncial writing (*tshum*) is actually the same as is used in Tibetan. But Bhutanese longhand writing (formal version, *jotshum*, and cursive version, *joyi*) is unique to Dzongkha, making ample use of ligatures. Below only the printed form of characters is presented, for longhand writing one should refer to Dzongkha language manuals¹. Relationship between script and pronunciation is complex and romanized names cannot be reverted to their original script forms.

System of romanization

The **official romanization (1997)** is as follows².

1 ཀ ka	9 ཏ ta	17 ཅ tsa	25 ར ra ^C
2 ཁ kha	10 ཐ tha	18 ཆ tsha	26 ལ la
3 ག ga	11 ད da	19 ཇ dza	27 ཅ sha
4 ང nga	12 ན na	20 ས wa ^A	28 ལ sa
5 ཅ cha	13 ལ pa	21 ཉ zha	29 ཏ ha
6 ཆ chha	14 ཌྷ pha	22 ཟ za	30 ཏ a
7 ཇ ja	15 འ ba, wa	23 ི a	
8 ཉ nya	16 ཡ ma	24 ལ ya ^B	

¹ See e.g. *Dzongkha* by George van Driem with the collaboration of Karma Tshering of Gaselô. Research School CNWS, School of Asian, African, and Amerindian Studies. Leiden, The Netherlands 1998.

² Adapted from *Samples for Geographical names of Bhutan in dzongkha and roman dzongkha with brief Guidelines*. Dzongkha Development Commission, Royal Government of Bhutan, June 1997.

^A Subscript variant of the character ་ is not romanized: ་ ka, ་ da, ་ tsha.

^B Subscript variant of the character ་ is ་, e.g. ་; for romanizations see Table II.

^C Superscript variant of the character ་ is not romanized: ་ ka, ་ da, ་ dza. Subscript variant of the character is ་, e.g. ་; for romanizations see Table II.

II. Syllable-initial consonant combinations

The list is not complete. Mainly those romanized differently from general rules are given. See also notes to the main table and note 1 at the end.

1 ་ cha, ka ^A	7 ་ ya	13 ་ thra	19 ་ sa
2 ་ chha, kha ^A	8 ་ nya	14 ་ dra	20 ་ hra
3 ་ ja, gya ^A	9 ་ tra	15 ་ tra	21 ་ wa ^B
4 ་ cha, pcha	10 ་ thra	16 ་ thra	22 ་ da
5 ་ chha, pchha	11 ་ dra	17 ་ dra	23 ་ lha
6 ་ ja, bja	12 ་ tra	18 ་ shra	

^A Palatal variants *ch*, *chh*, *j* are generally used before *a*, *o* and *u*.

^B Not romanized if followed by any other vowel than *a*.

III. Vowel characters (• stands for any consonant character)

1 • a, e/ay ^A	2 • i	3 • u, ue/u ^B	4 • e	5 • o, oe/o ^C
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^A Romanized *e* or *ay* if followed by a suffix ་ ་ ་ ་: ་ ་ ་ ་ *Sephu*, ་ ་ ་ ་ *Emiray*.

^B Romanized *ue* or *u* if followed by a suffix ་ ་ ་ ་: ་ ་ ་ ་ *Lhuentse*, ་ ་ ་ ་ *Suntale*.

^C Romanized *oe* or *o* if followed by a suffix ་ ་ ་ ་: ་ ་ ་ ་ *Soe*, ་ ་ ་ ་ *Doteng*.

IV. Syllable endings (suffixes)

1 ་ <i>g</i> , <i>k</i> or not romanized	6 ་ <i>m</i>
2 ་ <i>ng</i> , or not romanized	7 ་ not romanized
3 ་ not romanized, except <i>thed</i>	8 ་ <i>r</i> , or not romanized
4 ་ <i>n</i> , or not romanized	9 ་ <i>l</i> , or not romanized
5 ་ <i>b</i> , <i>p</i>	10 ་ not romanized

Notes

1. Dzongkha words are divided into syllables, separated by a special symbol, e.g. ཐིམ་ཕུ *Thimphu*. A graphical syllable may be composed of several elements, including prefixed, superscript and subscript consonant characters that are used syllable-initially, and suffixed consonant characters (one or more) used syllable-finally. This may result in consonants being stacked up on top of the other, e.g. སྐྱི (transliterated *skya*). As a rule, prefixed consonants are not romanized: གཏུང་བག གཏུང་ *Dungna*, མགར་ས མགར་ *Gasa*. Superscript consonants are not romanized, with the exception of ལྷ ལྷ *lha*: འོ་སྐྱོ་ཡ འོ་སྐྱོ་ *Nangkor*, སྤང་སྲི་སྦྱི་ས སྤང་སྲི་སྦྱི་ *Tangsibji*. Suffixed consonants are romanized or not romanized based on local pronunciation, e.g. འུང་ཁག འུང་ཁག *Drungkhag* (subdivision), འབང་ཕུག འབང་ཕུག *Wangchhuk* (personal name), སྦྱག སྦྱག *Ta* (tiger), etc. Secondary suffixed consonants are not romanized, although there are some exceptions: བར་མཚམས བར་མཚམས *Bartsham*, འངས་ཚུ འངས་ཚུ *Dangchhu*, but གཞམ་ལམ་སྐྱང གཞམ་ལམ་སྐྱང *Zhemgang*.
2. Additional characters that are found mainly in words of Indic provenance, are romanized as follows: འ tra, འ thra, འ dra, འ na, འ kha, འ chha.
3. Pronunciation of Dzongkha names may vary according to local usage and there are several exceptions to the present romanization guidelines.