

Teaching THDL Extended Wylie

by ALEXANDRU ANTON-LUCA

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

- long vowels
- retroflex letters and common Sanskrit stacks

Unit 5: Other Non-Standard Combinations

- Chinese words
- misspellings and non-standard orthography

Extended Wylie Teaching Guide

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

ཀ	ག	ཅ	ཇ	ཉ	ད	ན	པ	བ
ka	ga	ca	ja	ta	da	na	pa	ba
མ	ཚ	ལ	ཡ	ར	ལ	ས	ཏ	
ma	wa	za	ya	ra	la	sa	ha	

THREE-LETTER COMBINATIONS

Aspirates

ཁ	ཅ	ཐ	ཕ
kha	cha	tha	pha

Non-aspirates

ར	ཏ	ཙ	ཇ	ཞ	མ
---	---	---	---	---	---

nga nya tsa dza zha sha

FOUR-LETTER COMBINATION

མ

tsha

VOWELS AND A CHUNG

ཨ	ཨི	ཨུ	ཨེ	ཨོ	ཨ་
a	i	u	e	o	'a

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:

ལོ	བུ	རེ་	མི	ཚོ	དུ	རི	ཇོ་	དེ	སུ	ཨ་		
lo	bu	re	ba	mi	tsho	du	ri	jo	bo	de	su	'o

Unit 2: Syllable Elements

SUPERSCRIBED AND SUBSCRIBED COMBINATIONS

Superscribed (ra mgo, la mgo, and sa mgo) or subscribed (ya rtags, ra rtags, la rtags, and wa rtags) combinations can be introduced first and then combined, with or without vowels. Progressions such as spa, spya, spyi and rka, rkya, rkyo are useful drills. Students often need assistance with the transliteration of vowels, which becomes noticeable at this stage. *skyao* written instead of skyo or *sbua* written instead of sbu are common mistakes. Errors in transliterating syllables without vowels can arise right after teaching the vowels (e.g., *sk* for sku and *smr* for smra). I found it helpful telling students to place the vowel after the root letter if there is one or an 'a' if there is not.

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:

ག	གང་	རྒྱང་	བརྒྱང་	བརྒྱངས་
gya	gyang	rgyang	brgyang	brgyangs

ངུ་	མགུ་	རུབ་	རུབ་	བརུབ་	བརུབས་
ngu	mgu	ngub	rngub	brngub	brngubs

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:

ར།	ནོར།	ལུག་གཟུང།
rta/	nor/	lug gsum/

རི་མགོ་ན་ཉལ་ན་དཀའ།
ri mgo na nyal na dka/

གཅིག
gcig

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:

གཡུ་	གཡོ་	གཡུལ་	གཡང་	གཡིང་	གཡག་	གཡའ་	གཡུང་	གཡིལ་ད་
g.yu	g.yo	g.yul	g.yang	g.yeng	g.yag	g.ya'	g.yung	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 *tsheg* between them (e.g., bye'u as bye and 'u without the intervening *tsheg*).

Unit 4: Numerals and Sanskrit

NUMERALS

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

ངང་སྐྱེས་ལོ་༡༩༦༥་རེད།

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,

ངང་སྐྱེས་ལོ་ ༡༩༦༥ າ ຢེད།

is transliterated as nga'i skyes lo_1965_red/.

For dates, the standard convention is a *tsheg* before a number but no *tsheg* 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

སྤྱི་ལོ་༢༠༠༠་ཟླ་༡༡་ཚེས་༡༩་ལ།

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,

སྤྱི་ལོ་ ༢༠༠༠ ຟླ་ ༡༡ ຢེས་ ༡༩ ຣ།

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+Dita, 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

THE THIRTY CONSONANTS

ཀ	ཁ	ག	ང
ka	kha	ga	nga
ཅ	ཆ	ཇ	ཉ
ca	cha	ja	nya
ཏ	ཐ	ད	ན
ta	tha	da	na
པ	ཕ	བ	མ
pa	pha	ba	ma

ཅ	ཇ	ཁ	ཐ
tsa	tsha	dza	wa
ཞ	ཟ	འ	ཡ
zha	za	'a	ya
ར	ལ	ཤ	ས
ra	la	sha	sa
	ཧ	ཨ	
	ha	a	

THE FOUR VOWELS

ཨི	ཨུ	ཨེ	ཨོ
i	u	e	o

EXAMPLES

རྐ	རྎ	རྣ	རྏ	རྑ	རྤ	རྦ	རྨ
rka	rnga	rnya	rta	rna	rma	rdza	rla
ལྐ	ལྎ	ལྣ	ལྏ	ལྑ	ལྤ	ལྦ	ལྨ
lka	lga	lnga	lca	lja	lta	lda	lha
སྐ	སྎ	སྣ	སྏ	སྑ	སྤ	སྦ	སྨ
ska	snga	snya	sta	sna	spa	sma	stsa

དྡ	ཇྡ	ཞྡ	ཟྡ	འྡ	ཡྡ	ཨྡ
dwa	tshwa	zhwa	zwa	lwa	shwa	hwa

ཀྲ	ཁྲ	གྲ	པྲ	ཕྲ	བྲ	མྲ
kya	khya	gya	pya	phya	bya	mya

ཀྲ	ཁྲ	དྲ	ཕྲ	བྲ	མྲ	སྲ	ཨྲ
kra	khra	dra	phra	bra	mra	sra	hra

	ཀླ	གླ	བླ	ཟླ	རླ	སླ	
	kla	gla	bla	zla	rla	sla	
གི	ཅུ	དེ	མོ	ཚེ	འོ	སུ	ཧེ
gi	chu	de	mo	tshe	'o	su	he
སྐྱེ	རྒྱ	རྗེ	སྡི	སྡོ	སྐྱི	རྗེ	ལྡོ
skye	rgyu	rje	sti	sdo	spyi	rdzi	lho

ཁུངས་ཀྱི་རྩེད་དྲུགས་སྤྱོད་འོག་རྩིབས་

khungs rgyan rnyed dwags spyod 'og rtsibs

མཁའ་འགྲུར་བརྗོད་གནང་དཔྱིད་བརྗོས་

mkha' 'gyur brjod gngang dpyid bzlos

རེད། རུས་སྐལ་ བཞུགས་སོ།། བགྲུ་ཤིས་ཤོག

red/ rus sbal bzhugs so// bkra shis shog

ར་མ། ཕག་མོ། ལུ་གུ བྱ་མོ་དང་ཁྱི་ཕུག

ra ma/ phag mo/ lu gu bya mo dang khyi phrug

གྲང་ གཡང་ རྒྱལ་ གཡུ་ རྒྱུད་ གཡུང་

gyang g.yang rgyal g.yu rgyud g.yung

ཨ་མའི་ ངའི་ ཁྱོའི་ བྱ་བའི་ སྐོའི་ མདའི་

a ma'i nga'i khyo'i bya ba'i sgo'i mda'i

ལེའུ་ བྱེའུ་ སྡེའུ་ རེའུ་ སྐེའུ་ སྤེའུ་ དེའུ་

le'u bye'u ste'u re'u sne'u spe'u dze'u

ར་མའང་ ལྷ་མའང་ བྱ་རུའང་ ཉི་མའང་

ra ma'ang bla ma'ang byu ru'ang nyi ma'ang

ལེཏ་ བཞུཏ་ རྫོཏ་ གཞུཏ་ གཱཏ་ ལཏ་

leT bzhuD rdzoT gzuD graT laD

ཨི་ ཨུ་ ཨཱ་ ཨི་ ཨུ་ ཨི་ ཨུ་

ai au A I U -i -I

ཧྲ་ ཧྲོ་ ཧྲོ་

& ! |

༠ ༡ ༢ ༣ ༤ ༥ ༦ ༧ ༨ ༩

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

ར་རུ་ བད་མ་ བཤ་ཏི་ཏ་ གཡང་ཏི་ སྐཤ་ས་ ཐི

Da ru pad ma paN Di ta g.yang Ti shaShasa Thi

པད་མ་ མཚུལ་ བཤི་ཏ་ ཀམ་པ་ ལུ་ཏུལ་ རྐ་ གཱང་

pad+ma maN+Dala paN+Di ta karma pa ut+pala rak+Sha gang+ga

མ་ ཏི་ ཀ་ ཏ་ མཚོ་ ལུ་མ་ དཔེ་མ་ ས་ ཨ་

n+na d+di k+ka T+Ta ts+tson l+lum dap+pem sh+sha a+a

ཨི་ཏ་ རྐལ་པ་ ས་པ་ ར་པ་ ལུ་མ་ ལུ་མ་ ལུ་མ་

in+d+ra sham+b+hala sar+b+ba r+b+h+yo kum+b+haN+De lan+d+ha

ཇམ་མཉམ་ ཀ་ལ་པ་ བི་རུ་པ་ ལོ་ཙ་བ་ དམ་གྱི་རི་ ལུ་འི་པ་

dzam+b+ha ka la pA bi ru pA lo tsA ba d+harma klrti IU hl pa

པི་ཏ་ ཀ་རྩ་ མི་གྲུ་མ་ ལུ་ཏ་པུར་ ཏི་ཀ་ སཏྲི་

pi trA karnA meg+hash+yAma b+hUta pura tl k+ka strl

ཨི་མེ་ ཨོ་ ཨུ་ ཨུ་ དུ་ཁ་ ཨུ་ཏི་ ཨུ་ཀ་

e waM oM AH hUM duHkha d+hIH A kaM

ཨོཾ་པཎི་ཤ་ཏཱ་ཨུ་ ཡུ་ཤི་ཏཱ་ར་ ཕུ་སོ་ ཕུ་མ་

eShAMpatiSh+ThAH yud+hiSh+TharaH puMsoH puMb+haH

གཏམ་གཏམ་མི་ཙོ་ཏྲ་པ་ཏྲ་མ་ ས་ཏུ་ཤེ་ཨུ་

gats+tshagats+tshasitset+kAn+tapan+thAnaH san+tuteshiwAH

ཨ་ར་གྱི་ཏུ་རི་ཏུ་ཏུ་མི་ཏུ་ཏུ་ཏུ་ཏུ་

arak+ShitAraMrAdzAnaMg+h+nan+tidoShAH

རྒྱལ་པོ་ འཇིགས་བྱེད་ ལ་སོགས་པ་ སྐྱམ་རྩོམ་ སོག་པོ་

rgyal po 'jigs byed la sogs pa snyam rtsom sog po

ཙོང་ཁ་པ་ རྩོ་གུབ་བསྟན་མི་ བྱེད་ རྩང་འཁོར་ ས་གོ་ལ་

tsong kha pa rdo grub bstan mi bred rlang 'khor sa go la

གུང་ཐང་བརྟན་སྟོན་ སྟོབ་ག་ སྟུང་མདུད་ སྟུབས་འགྲོ་

gung thang brtan sgron slob ga srung mdud skyabs 'gro

བཀྲིས་ བློ་རྒྱམ་ རིན་རྩོད་ གུར་གུམ་ རྒྱ་མེ་ ཤེར་ཕྱིན་

bkris blo rgyam rin rdor gur guM rgya b+he sher phyin

ཐུན	ཏུན	པའོ	པའེ	ཀའོ	ཏུའུ	ཀའོའུ	ཁྲང་ཨན་
h+phun	tun	pa'o	pa'e	ku'o	hru'u	kwa kro'u	khrang an
སུའུ་ལན་	ཏུའུ་ཅི་	ཅའོ་ཐུང་	ཅི་ཁྲེ་	ཅོག་ཚེ་	ཐུན་		
su'u lan	hru'u ci	ca'o thung	chi khre	cog tshe	thAn		
མའོ་ཀའུ་ཞི་	ཐོ་ལ་ཅི་	ཅང་ཏུའུ་ཅི་	མ་མྱ་				
ma'o kru'u zhi	tho la ci	cang hru'u ci	hra h+pha				