

FPMT Education Department  
Basic Phonetics Key – Tibetan Language into English  
[NB: This key is not workable to transliterate Tibetanized Sanskrit mantras into English.]  
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ཀ	ka	ཕ	pha
ཁ	kha	བ	ba
ག	ga	མ	ma
ང	nga	ཙ	tza
ཅ	cha	མ་	tsha
ཆ	chha	རྩ	dza
ཇ	ja	ཤ	wa or va
ཉ	nya	ཞ	zha
ཏ	ta	ཟ	za
ཐ	tha	འ	a
ད	da	ར	ra
ན	na	ལ	la
པ	pa	ཤ	sha

ས sa

ཧ ha

ཨ a

ཀ kya

ཁ khya

ག gya

ཅ cha

ཆ chha

ཇ ja

ཉ nya

ཏ tra

ཐ thra

ཌ dra

ཎ tra

ཏ thra

ཌ dra

ཎ tra

ཏ thra

ཌ dra

ཎ ma

ཏ shra

ཎ sa

ཧ hra

ཎ la

ཎ da

ཏྟ DHIH

ཏྟ OM

ཏྟ AH

ཏྟ HUM

འབྲུག་ bha

མུ་ mu

ཀཤམ་ ksha

ཏེ་ tre

རཏྟ་ ratna

ཕམ་ PHAIM

ཅུ་ chhu

འབྲུག་ BHRUM

འུ་ u

In certain cases, the preceding or following letters in Tibetan will change how one phoneticizes the vowels, specifically a, o, and u. Generally the change that is made is that we add an umlaut above the vowel letter, as in ä, ö, or ü.

The “a” vowel sound is implicit in every Tibetan letter. When that sound is followed by the following consonants,

ད ར ལ ས

or by the following vowel combination in the same syllable:

འེ

then the simple “ah” sound becomes more like “eh” or even “ay” and is indicated by ä.

(On a PC, alt-0228 with NumLock on. On a Mac, opt-u then a.)

For example:

ལན་ län (pronounced “len”)

ཅན་ chä (pronounced “ch eh”)

གྱས་ gyä (pronounced “gyay”)

གྱལ་ gyäl (pronounced “gyel”)

པའི་ päi

In the case of “o”, when it is followed by those same letters or combinations:

ད ན ལ ས འི

then the sound changes to something close to the German sound “oe” as in Goethe, and should be phoneticized as ö.

(On a PC, alt-0246 with NumLock on. On a Mac, opt-u then o.)

ཅོད་ chö or sometimes chöd

ཅོས་ chö

ཏོན་ tön

ཐོལ་ dröl

པོའི་ pöi

In the case of “u”, when it is followed by those same letters or combinations:

ད ན ལ ས འི

then the sound changes to something close to a French “u” (with puckered lips) and is phoneticized as ü.

(On a PC, alt-0252 with NumLock on. On a Mac, opt-u then u.)

ལྷུན་ lhün

ཐུལ་ thrül

ལུས་ lü

བཅུད་ chü

ལུའི་ lü or sometimes lüi

N.B.: When creating phonetics, one pays no attention to the many letters in Tibetan that are unpronounced. Phonetics are only for the purpose of helping people to approximate the pronunciation of pujas, texts, etc. for recitation. Phoneticizing and transliterating are not the same activity. An entirely different key is needed when one wishes to correctly transliterate mantras according to their Sanskrit forms. This key is only workable for the process of creating English-language phonetics for pronunciation of Tibetan texts.