2. The RTS System for Transliterating Telugu

Writing about pronunciation is at best approximate. There are two difficulties here. First, how to
describe sounds using words? Second, how to represent the sound in print? There are many
transliteration schemes to represent, in Roman script, the sounds produced in any world language. We
have chosen to adopt the RTS system because of the convenience it gives if one is confined to using the
standard characters available on a standard keyboard – a convenience not to be taken lightly in these
days of computers and desktop publishing. Also there are computer programs that can translate text
written in RTS into Telugu using any of the popular Telugu fonts.

The RTS (Rice University's Reverse Transliteration System) for the transliteration of Telugu using
Roman script is defined below.

Rule 1. Represent short vowels by the lower case English character and long vowels by the
corresponding upper case character. Please note that there are exceptions.

A = a
@ = A
l = i
α = I
U = u
→ = U
- = R
® = Ru
E = e
± = E
½ = ai
O = o
³ = O
˙ = au
AM = aM
AP = a@h

Note 1. The sound produced by a stand alone aM (Am) has the distinct flavor of the bilabial stop ‘m’.
However when this occurs in the middle of a word, it is almost always pronounced as an ‘n’. The people
who designed the RTS system struggled with this issue and finally decided to use the ‘m’ sound.

Rule 2. Unaspirated consonant-vowel pairs are represented by a lowercase letter followed by a suitable
vowel. Aspirated consonants are represented by the the lower case letter, followed by the letter ‘h’,
followed by a suitable vowel.

ù = k, k^  
w= ka  
W= kha  
S = ga  
\ = gha  
M= ~ma
Note 2. If you wish to produce a pure consonant sound in the middle of a word (such a need arises while transliterating English words using Telugu script), then use a carrot symbol right after the consonant. For example, by k^ for Û.

Rule 3. A complete set of consonant-vowel combinations for the first consonant is shown below. The same pattern is followed by the other consonants.
Rule 4. A sample set of consonant-consonant combinations for the first consonant is shown below. The same pattern is followed by the other consonants.

\[ \text{Rule 4.} \]

\[ \text{Rule 5. Special Characters} \]

\[ \text{Summary. Typically, lower case Roman characters represent short vowels and the corresponding upper cases represent long vowels. The only upper case consonants one encounters are L, M, N, D, T, R and S. Of these D and T are close to their respective English sounds. L and N represent sounds that are not commonly found in English; they can be produced by folding the tongue back and then trying to pronounce the English l and n. That leaves R and S. The closest S sound is the one in Saxons or Sampson. The closest R sound is that of ri in ‘Hare Krishna’.} \]

\[ \text{Examples} \]

\[ \text{In all these examples and throughout this book, a hyphen (a small dash) is used to separate the syllables to facilitate reading. These hyphens are NOT a part of the RTS definition and computer programs do not recognize the hyphen. It is only used to help the reader figure out where the syllable boundaries are.} \]

\[ \text{Ay Ū=} \text{a-mma = mother} \]
\[ \text{a} = \text{A = that} \]
\[ \text{l Ū=} \text{i-di = this} \]
\[ \text{»} = \text{l-ga = fly} \]
\[ \text{U} \text{˘} = \text{u-ppu = salt} \]
\[ \text{˘} \text{¬} = \text{U-ru = village} \]
\[ \text{E} \text{rm}? = \text{eM-ta? = how much?} \]
\[ \text{˘} \text{˘} = \text{E-mi-Ti? = what?} \]
\[ \text{˘} \text{˘} \text{˘} = \text{ai-du = five} \]
Exercises

1. Read the following words, written in RTS, aloud. Ask an associate to help you with the correct pronunciation.
2. Read the following paragraph, written in RTS, aloud. Ask an associate to help you with the correct pronunciation.