

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
 I = i
 = I
 U = u
 = U
 = R
 = Ru
 E = e
 = E
 = ai
 O = o
 = O
 = au
 A = aM
 A | = a@h

Note 1. The sound produced by a stand alone aM (A) 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.

= k, k^
 = ka
 = kha
 = ga
 = gha
 M = ~ma

= ca
 = cha
 = ja
 = jha
 = ~na
 = Ta
 = Tha
 = Da
 = Dha
 N = Na
 = ta
 = tha
 = da
 = dha
 = na
 = pa
 = pha
 = ba
 = bha
 = ma
 = ya
 = ra
 = la
 = La
 = va
 = Sa
 = sha
 = sa
 = ha
 " = r"

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 .

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.

= ka
ᳵ = kA
ᳶ = ki
᳷ = kI
᳸ = ku
᳹ = kU
 = kR
ᳺ = kRu
 = ke
 = kE
 = kai

= ko
 = kO
 = kau
 = kaM

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.

š= kka
 œ kga
 ☉ kca
 ♣= kja
 §= kTa
 ©= kDa
 ⬅= kNa
 ㄱ= kta

Rule 5. Special Characters

arasunna = half circle = = @m

null operation = _ (underscore) (rts/doc/rtsdefn.dvi)

~ = tcha (allophone of c, now extinct) = ~c

~ = tja (allophone of j, now extinct) = ~j

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'.

Examples

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.

A ♣= a-mma = mother
 = A = that
 I = i-di = this
 = I-ga = fly
 U = u-ppu = salt
 = U-ru = village
 E ? = eM-ta? = how much?
 ? = E-mi-Ti? = what?
 = ai-du = five

- O = o-ka-Ti = one
 = O-Tu = vote
 = au-nu = yes
 A = aM-tA = all

 = ka-la = dream
 = ka-La = art
« = kR-shNa = Krishna
 = kaM-caM = plate, dinner plate
 = koM-ceM = some, a little bit
 = kaM-ThaM = throat, voice
☛ = kha-rcu = expenditure
 = ga-di = room
 = gha-na-ta = eminence
 = caM-pu = kill
 = cA-lA = many
ü = cha-lO-kti = joke, pun
 = ja-paM = meditation
½ = jva-raM = fever
 = jA-gu = delay
 ° = Ta-nnu = ton
 = TE-bu-lu = table
³ = Da-bbu = money
 = ta-la = head
 = dha-ra = price
½nu-vvu = you
 = nE-nu = I
 = paM-Du = fruit
 = paM-di = pig
 = baM-ti = ball
§ = bo-TTu = drop
 = bha-yaM = fear
 = pu-li = tiger
 = mI-ru = you
ì = va-jraM = diamond
 = va-la = net
Ë = Sa-tru-vu = enemy
þ = shA-ku = shock
 = sa-bha = assembly
 = hA-lu = hall
» = ha-llu = consonant

Exercises

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

NE-nu,
 nu-vvu,
 vA-Du,
 A-me,
 mI-ru,
 u-da-yaM,
 sA-yaM-kA-laM,
 rA-tri,
 ni-nna,
 rE-pu,
 Sa-la-vu,
 paM-Da-ga,
 bhA-sha,
 dha-rmaM,
 saM-ghaM,
 bA-dha,
 saM-dhya,
 a-dR-sh-TaM,
 bhA-ra-taM,
 a-rthaM,
 gAM-dhI,
 pa-TEI,
 ce-ppE-nu,
 cE-sE-nu,
 rA-sE-nu,
 vi-nnA-nu,
 ti-nnA-nu,
 i-ccE-nu,
 A-vu
 a-nna
 a-tta
 a-TTa
 cE-du
 pE-Du
 tA-Du
 be-ttaM
 ra-ktam
 mAM-saM
 A-I^iM-Di-yA
 A-liM-Di-yA
 Nish^kR-ti, ni-shkR-ti

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

a-yyA, mI-ru e-va-ru? mI pE-ru E-mi-Ti? mI-di 'U-ru? e-va-ri kO-saM vaccEru? rA-vu gA-ru U-LLO
 lEru. rEpu va-stA-ru. mI-ru rE-pu u-da-yaM raM-Di. I rO-ju I pu-sta-kaM ca-da-vaM-Di. rA-vu gA-ru

rA-tri-baM-DiO baM-da-ru ve-La-tA-ru. a-kka-Da Am-dhra jA-tI-ya ka-LA-SA-la-IO u-pa-nyA-saM I-stA-ru. e-lluM-Di rA-tri ti-ri-gi va-stA-ru.

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