

GUIDE TO OFFICIAL DZONGKHA ROMANIZATION

དགེ་ཤེས་འཇམ་དབྱངས་འོད་ཟེངས།

(Dr. George van Driem)

དཔལ་ལྷན་འབྲུག་གཞུང་ཚོང་ཁ་གོང་འཕེལ་ལྷན་ཚོགས།

Dzongkha Development Commission

Royal Government of Bhutan

IMPORTANT NOTE:

All cases of capital **Z** following a vowel will be replaced by a tone dot beneath the vowel through implementation of the "Search and Change" function on the computer. This simple task has not yet been accomplished due to a minor deficiency in the present computer programme, but this situation will be remedied at Leiden University, and the improved and corrected print-out will be sent to the Dzongkha Development Commission and to SNV-Bhutan at the earliest possible convenience.

Because Roman Dzongkha makes use of only three diacritics, it is more elegant and user-friendly than the official Romanization used for Vietnamese. Moreover, since Roman Dzongkha is based on a phonological analysis of modern spoken Dzongkha, the Romanized transcription of Dzongkha is linguistically superior to the official Romanizations adopted for Chinese, Burmese or Thai.

OFFICIAL DZONGKHA ROMANIZATION

1. Definition

Dzongkha Romanization has been developed by the Dzongkha Development Commission of the Royal Government of Bhutan for the purpose of unambiguously rendering the speech sounds of modern spoken Dzongkha in the Roman alphabet. Roman Dzongkha *will not* replace the native Dzongkha script, but will serve as the one and only official standard for the Romanization of Dzongkha within the kingdom and in the international press.

Roman Dzongkha is not a transliteration of the traditional spelling of words in Dzongkha script. Dzongkha Romanization is a transcription based on the standard pronunciation of modern spoken Dzongkha. Roman Dzongkha is a reflection of Dzongkha phonology, rather than of traditional orthography. Roman Dzongkha therefore renders the sound of the modern spoken language.

Just as the standard for proper English pronunciation has traditionally been known as the King's English, so too the pronunciation of His Majesty and of the Royal Court defines the standard pronunciation of modern Dzongkha. In practice, the standard dialect of Dzongkha as spoken in ཨང་ལྷོ་མཚོ་ལྷོ་མཚོ་ལྷོ་མཚོ་ Wang (ཐིམ་ཕུག་ Thimphu) and ཐེ་མཚོ་ལྷོ་མཚོ་ལྷོ་མཚོ་ Thê (ཕུན་སེལ་ལྷོ་མཚོ་ Punakha) districts serves as the basis for official Dzongkha Romanization.

Roman Dzongkha makes use of the letters of the Roman alphabet and of three diacritic marks. These diacritics are the tone dot, the apostrophe and the circumflex accent.

2. Choeke and Roman Dzongkha

Dzongkha is the national language of Bhutan. The status of Dzongkha as the language of the royal court, government and administration is firmly rooted in Bhutanese history. However, whereas Dzongkha is the living, spoken language, the Classical Tibetan liturgical language known as Choeke (ཚེ་མཚོ་ལྷོ་མཚོ་) has for centuries been the scholarly language in which sacred Buddhist texts, medical

and scientific treatises and, indeed, all learned works have been written. The relationship between Dzongkha and Choeke in Bhutan is reminiscent of the role Latin used to play as the language of learning in mediaeval France where the spoken language had long since evolved into a language different from that spoken by the ancient Romans.

Just as Latin used to exercise and continues to exercise great influence on the vocabulary of French and English (e.g., video, multilateral, disinfectant, international, credit), so too Choeke, the language of learning and liturgy, continues to strongly influence modern spoken Dzongkha. This influence is manifest in the vocabulary where Dzongkha has acquired many words directly from Choeke. The liturgical Choeke pronunciation of some of these words differs from the modern pronunciation in the spoken language. It is important to keep in mind that Roman Dzongkha is not based on a liturgical or Choeke pronunciation, but on the standard pronunciation of modern spoken Dzongkha.

3. The sound symbols of Roman Dzongkha

The following is an inventory of the thirty-six consonant symbols used in Roman Dzongkha:

k	kh	g	
c	ch	j	
t	th	d	
p	ph	b	
ts	tsh	dz	
pc	pch	bj	
tr	thr	dr	
y	r	rh	
w	l	lh	
zh	z	sh	s
ng	ny	n	m
		h	

A Dzongkha syllable may begin with any of these thirty-six consonant symbols, but only the following eight are used at the end of a syllable:

k	p	r
ng	n	m
s	sh	

The nine vowel symbols used in Dzongkha Romanization are given in the table below. Note that the circumflex accent is used for the vowels ê and â to distinguish them from the vowels e and a.

i	ue	u
ê	oe	o
e	â	a

4. The tone symbols of Roman Dzongkha

Dzongkha has two tones: the *hard* tone and the *soft* tone. The hard tone is sometimes referred to as the high tone, and the soft tone as the low tone. The difference between the hard and soft tones is not primarily one of pitch but of phonation type. In articulatory phonetic terms, the hard tone is clear and may be glottalized, whereas the soft tone is murmured. In this way, Dzongkha tone differs from tone in Chinese, Thai or Vietnamese.

The hard tone is indicated by an apostrophe, and the soft tone is indicated by the tone dot. Tone is *not* indicated in Roman Dzongkha whenever it is predictable.

The voiceless consonants shown below are always followed by the hard tone:

k	kh
c	ch
t	th
p	ph
ts	tsh
pc	pch
tr	thr
	h
	lh
	rh

The following voiced consonants are always followed by the soft tone:

z	zh	dz	r
---	----	----	---

Therefore, neither the apostrophe nor the tone dot are ever used in conjunction with the above consonants in Roman Dzongkha.

Dzongkha syllables beginning with any other consonant as well as syllables beginning with a vowel may carry either the hard or the soft tone. In these syllables tone is indicated either by the tone dot or by the apostrophe according to the following conventions.

In syllables beginning with a voiced plosive, voiceless sibilant or a vowel, the hard tone is left unmarked, whereas the soft tone is marked by a hardly visible round tone dot beneath the vowel.

ga	gaZ
ja	jaZ
da	daZ
ba	baZ
bjā	bjāZ
dra	draZ

sha	shaZ
sa	saZ
a	aZ
â	âZ
e	eZ
ê	êZ
i	iZ
o	oZ
oe	oZeZ
u	uZ
ue	uZeZ

In certain non-standard dialects of Dzongkha, the sh and s, when followed by a soft tone, have merged with the sounds zh and z respectively. Because standard Dzongkha has retained this distinction, this difference is upheld in the official Dzongkha Romanization, e.g. བཞེར་ /zê/ "nail", ཟེ་ /sêZ/ "crest", བསེར་ /sê/ "gold".

This old three-way distinction in the language has been lost in some dialects, whereas it has been preserved in others. This old distinction will be retained in Roman Dzongkha

Similarly, in certain varieties of speech, voiced plosives followed by the soft tone are sometimes pronounced as voiceless aspirates. For example, བགོ་ "Bhutanese male dress" may be pronounced either as /goZ/ or as /khoZ/, and དེ་ རྒྱུ་ "prayer flag" is found to be pronounced either as /dâZshi/ or as /thâZshi/. The official Romanized transcription will in such cases be /goZ/ and /dâZshi/.

In syllables beginning with a nasal or liquid, the soft tone is unmarked, and the hard tone is indicated by an apostrophe at the beginning of the syllable:

nga	'nga
nya	'nya
na	'na
ma	'ma

wa	'wa
ya	'ya
la	'la

5. Roman Dzongkha and Traditional Orthography

The relationship between traditional Dzongkha orthography and the pronunciation of modern spoken Dzongkha is not straightforward. Therefore, the tables in this section are to serve as a reference list to specify the relationship between Roman Dzongkha and traditional Dzongkha spelling. The examples illustrate how a single consonant symbol may correspond to various traditional spellings in the Dzongkha script.

5.1 Initial consonants

The consonant symbols which may occur at the beginning of a syllable in Roman Dzongkha are thirty-six in number: /k, kh, g, c, ch, j, t, th, d, tr, thr, dr, p, ph, b, m, pc, pch, bj, ts, tsh, dz, y, w, r, rh, l, lh, zh, sh, z, s, h/. Tone is indicated in the two ways described in the previous section. Tone is not indicated after /k, kh, c, ch, t, th, tr, thr, p, ph, pc, pch, ts, tsh, rh, lh, h/ because these consonants are automatically followed by the clear or hard tone. Tone is likewise not indicated after /dz, r, zh, z/ because these consonants are automatically followed by the soft or murmured tone.

consonant
symbol

k

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ཀ-	ཀོ'	ko	leather
ཁ-	ཁེདཔ'	kêp	waist
ཁྱ-	ཁྱུགས་པ'	kupa	fool, foolish
ཁྲ-	ཁྲམ'	kam	dry

དག-	དག་པོ་	kâp	white
བག-	བགྲགས་	kup	bent, crooked
ཀྱ-	ཀྱི་	ki	genitive suffix
ཀྱི-	ཀྱིན་	kên	reason, cause
ལྷི-	ལྷིད་	ki	peace
དྲྭ-	དྲྭས་	ki	to don, put on (said of women's clothing)
བྲྭ-	བྲྭས་	ki	tighten, wind up
བསྐྱ-	བསྐྱས་	ki	lend

consonant
symbol

kh

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ཁ-	ཁམ་	kham	peach
	ཁམ་	khauZ	snow
མཁ-	མཁས་	khep	adept, expert
འཁ-	འཁར་	khâuZ	stick
ཕྱ-	ཕྱལ་	khe	tax
འཕྱ-	འཕྱིད་	khi	lead, guide or bring someone
མཕྱ-	མཕྱིན་	khên	know (honorific)

consonant
symbol

g

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ག-	གངས་རི་	gaZngri	snow-capped mountain
ག-	གསལ་	gep	old (of people)
ག-	གཤམ་	gangphu	balloon
ག-	གཤམ་	go	door
གཤམ་	གཤམ་	gu	wait
དག-	དགུ་	gu	nine
བག-	བགོ་/གོས་	goZ	Bhutanese male dress
མག-	མག་	gu	head
འག-	འགན་ཁལ་	genkhâ	responsibility
འགྲུ-	འགྲུར་	gi	to turn a prayer wheel
ཚྭ-	ཚྭལ་པོ་	gep	king
བཅ-	བཅའ་	ge	to cross (bridge or mountain pass), to ford (stream or river)
བཅུ-	བཅུད་	ge	eight
གྲུ-	གྲུལ་	geZ	row, queue, line

consonant
symbol

ng

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ང-	ང་	nga	1
	ངག་	ngâ	speech
རྩ-	རྩ་	'nga	drum
	རྩམ་སྲིད་སྲིད་	'ngamsisi	inept, sloppy
ལྔ-	ལྔ་	'nga	five
དང-	དངུལ་	'ngue	silver
མང-	མང་རམོ་	'ngâm	sweet
སྣ-	སྣགས་པ་	'ngakpa	shaman, ritual healer
བསྣ-	བསྣོ་	'ngo	blessing, good wish
བཏྩ-	བཏྩོ་	'ngo	fry

consonant
symbol

c

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ཅ-	ཅི་	ci	past tense marker
གཅ-	གཅད་	cê	cut
ལྷ-	ལྷགས་	câ	iron
བཅ-	བཅར་	câ	pay someone a visit (honorific)
	བཅུ་ཐམ་	cutham	ten

ཁུ-	ལྷགས་ཀྱི་	câcu	iron hook
ཚྱི-	ཚྱི་	ca	hair
ཚུ-	ཚུལ་	cap	do, perform
བཟུ-	བཟུང་	cang	straighten out
བསྐྱུ-	བསྐྱུབ་	cap	protect
དཀྱུ-	དཀྱུས་མིང་	cuering	length
དམུ-	དམུ་ལྷལ་	cathre	excise tax
ཚྱི-	ཚྱིད་པ་	coepa	behaviour

consonant
symbol

ch

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ཆ-	ཆར་པ་	châp	rain
མཆ-	མཆོངས་	chong	jump
འཆ-	འཆམ་	cham	mask dance; friendship
ཚུ-	ཚྱིད་	choe	you
	རྩ་ཚྱི་	rochi	dog
ཚུ-	འཚུ་	chu	wash
ཚུ-	ཚུགས་	châ	hand (honorific)
	ཚུགས་འཆལ་ནི་	châtsheni	prostrate oneself in obeisance
	ཚུགས་	chu	flock, herd, swarm

consonant
symbol

j

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ཇ-	ཇ་ཚང་	jaZchang	tea and drinks
ཇེ-	ཇེ་མཐུན་པོ་	jêkhembo	abbot
བཇེ-	བཇེད་	jê	forget
ཇེ-	ཇེད་	ji	weight
འཇེ-	འཇེའ་ཚོན་	jatshoen	rainbow
མཇེ-	མཇེག་མ་	juma	tail
ཇུ-	ཇུང་ས་ཁ་	jaZngkha	counting, enumeration
ཇུ-	ཇུ་	ju	property
འཇུ-	འཇུ་ཚོ་	joni	to go
བཇུ-	བཇུང་	jang	to count
བཇུ-	བཇུག་ས་	ju	running, racing
བཇུ-	བཇུ་འཇེ་	ju	change, convert, translate
ཇུ-	ཇུ་པོ་	jaoZ	beard, moustache
ཇུ-	ཇུ་མཚན་	jaZm	mercy, compassion
འཇུ-	འཇུ་ཚོན་	joen	come (honorific)
ཇུ-	ཇུ་ཚོན་པདག་	jinda	owner

consonant
symbol

ny

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ཉ-	ཉ་རྒྱུ་མཁའ་པ་	nyarop	fisherman
ཉྱ-	ཉྱིང་པ་	'nyip	old (of inanimate things)
གཉ-	གཉེན་	'nyên	relatives
མཉ-	མཉམ་གཅིག་	'nyamci	together
ཉྱ-	ཉྱིང་རྗེ་	'njingjê	mercy, pity
བཉྱ-	བཉྱམ་མཁའ་	'nyam	same, equal
བཉྱ-	བཉྱ་	'nya	borrow
ཉྱ-	ཉྱམ་མཁའ་ལྷོང་	nyamnyong	experience
དཉྱ-	དཉྱལ་བ་	'nyewaZ	hell
ཉྱ-	ཉྱུ་ལྷ་	'nyuguZ	bamboo pen, pen
ཉྱ-	ཉྱན་འཇུག་	'nyoenju	prefixed letter
དཉྱ-	དཉྱེལ་	'nyoe	sharp edge of a blade

consonant
symbol

t

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ཏ-	ཏིང་	ting	offering of seven vessels of water placed in front of the Buddha.
ཏི-	ཏིང་མ་	tim	heel
ཐ-	ཐལ་	tâ	tiger
གཏ-	གཏང་	tang	send
བཏ-	བཏུབ་	tup	OK; mince, cut into pieces or chunks
ལྷ-	ལྷོ་ཚང་	totshang	friend
	ལྷོ་བ་	têwaZ	headquarters
བལ-	བལ་བ་	tap	fold
བསྐ-	བསྐན་	tên	teach, instruct
བརྟ-	བརྟག་དཔྱད་	takcê	inspect

consonant
symbol

th

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ཐ-	ཐལ་བ་	theu	dust, ashes
མཐ-	མཐོང་	thong	see
འཐ-	འཐུང་	thung	drink

consonant
symbol

d

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ད-	དོམ་	doZm	bear
	དར་ཤིང་	dâZshi	prayer flag
ད-	དོ	do	stone
བད-	བདབ་	dap	fell, topple
མ-	མེ་མིག་	dêmi	key
བམ-	བམགས་	dâ	lick
གད-	གདོང་	dong	face
བད-	བདུན་	duen	seven
མད-	མདེའུ་	deuZ	bullet
མ-	མོད་	doe	sit
བམ-	བམམ་	dam	tied up, closed
འད-	འདམ་	dam	mud
ལྷི-	ལྷི་བ་	dauZ	moon, month
བལྷི-	བལྷིག་ཐབས་	dokthap	protective measures, prevention

consonant
symbol

n

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ན-	ནངས་པ'	nâba	tomorrow
	ནདཔ'	nep	sick person
མན-	མནའམ'	'nam	sister-in-law (i.e. brother's wife)
གན-	གནང'	'nang	give (honorific)
ནྱ-	ནྱམ་ཙེ'	'namco	ear
སྐ-	སྐག་ཚེ'	'naktshi	ink

consonant
symbol

t r

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ཀྱ-	དངུལ་ཀྱམ'	nguetram	Bhutanese currency unit
བཀྱ-	བཀྱ་ཤིས'	trashhi	good fortune
དཀྱ-	དཀྱེགས'	tro	touch
སྐྱ-	སྐྱང་ནད'	trangnê	swelling, dropsy
བསྐྱ-	བསྐྱེག'	tro	knock, clack, rattle
རྩྭ-	རྩྭམ་མཛེ'	tremdzê	pretend to work whilst whilst being idle
ཕྱ-	ཕྱ་མོ'	tramo	magic looking glass
སྐྱྱ-	སྐྱྱ་བཏོན'	trotoen	entertainment

consonant
symbol

thr

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ཐ-	ཐོམ་ཁ་	thromkha	bazar, market
མཐ-	མཐིམ་པ་	thrip	bile
འཐ-	འཐུང་མ་	thrung	be born (honorific)
ཤ-	ཤར་ཤར་	thrang-	straight, directly
འཤ-	འཤོད་	thrang thro	health

consonant
symbol

dr

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ཐ-	ཐུ་	druZ	boat
ལཱ-	ལོཔ་ཐ་རྩ་	'lopdraZ	school
མཐ-	མཐོན་ཁྱིམ་	goenchim	guest house
བཐ-	བཐེམ་པ་	drep	ex-, former, retired
འཐ-	འཐམ་འཐོ་	lamdro	successful
ཐ-	ཐོམ་	drom	box
བཐ-	བཐྱིམ་མ་	drim	concentrate
ཏ-	ཏོ་པ་	droZba	morning
	ཏམ་ཤོམ་	DrâZsho	high-ranking Bhuta- nese official

consonant
symbol

b

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
བ	བོད་པ་	boZeZp	Tibetan
བོ	བོ་ལྷ་བུ་	ba'lap	rapids, surf
ཕ	ཕ་བ་	bauZ	goitre
ཕྱ	ཕྱལ་པ་	bep	frog
འབ	འབའ་	ba	target

consonant
symbol

m

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
མ	མར་	mâ	butter
མོ	མོག་པ་	'map	husband
	མོ་	'ma	wound
མེ	མེན་	'mên	medicine
དམ	དམར་པོ་	'mâp	red
	དམག་མི་	'mâmi	soldier

འདྲ-	འདྲ་བསྐྱུས་	drashue	copy
མ-	མོ་གྲང་	phodraZng	palace
འདྲ-	འདྲུག་	dru	dragon
མ-	མེམ་ཅི་	dramci	jackfruit

consonant
symbol

p

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
པ-	པགས་ཀོ་	pako	skin
དཔ-	དཔའ་བོ་	paoZ	hero
མ-	མུག་མུགས་	tâpâ	tiger skin
མ-	མུགས་	pâ	slice of meat as a side dish

consonant
symbol

ph

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ཕ-	ཕོརཔ་	phop	bowl, cup
འཕ-	འཕརམ་	phâuZ	wolf

consonant
symbol

pc

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
པཅུ-	པཅུལམ་	pceuZ	forehead
ཕིམི-	ཕིམི་	pcimi	village representative

consonant
symbol

pch

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ཕུ-	ཕུགམ་	pchâm	broom
འཕུ-	དར་འཕུར་	dâZpchâ	to fly a prayer flag
	འཕྱིངམ་	pchêm	Tibetan rosary

consonant
symbol

bj

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
བྱ-	བྱིལི་	bjizli	cat
བྱུ-	བྱུངམ་	bjâm	insects
	སླི་བྱུངམ་	sibjâm	bees
	བྱུང་ཅག་	bjânâ	houseflies
འབྱུ-	འབྱུང་	bjâng	honey

consonant
symbol

ts

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ཙ-	ཙ་རི་	Tsari	Tsari (holy place in Tibet)
	ཙན་དན་	tsenden	Bhutanese cypress
ཙཱ-	ཙཱ་	tsa	grass
	ཙཱ་མ་འབྲོག་	tsamdro	pasture
ཙཿ-	ཙཿསཔ་	tsip	augurer, astrologer, numerologist
	ཙང་	tsang	thorn, splinter
གཙ-	གཙང་ཉོག་ཉོ་	tsangtoto	clean
	གཙག་	tsâ	rust
བཙ-	བཙོགསཔ་	tsop	dirty
	བཙོན་ཁང་	tsoenkhang	prison, gaol
བཙཱ-	བཙཱིག་	tsi	make a wall, pile up
	བཙཱམ་	tsam	make a plan

consonant
symbol

tsh

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ཚ-	ཚང་	tshang	nest
	ཚད་	tshê	measure, moderation, size

ཚ་	ཚ་	tsha	salt
འཚ་	འལ་འཚོ་	ngetsho	resting place, esp. for putting down one's burden on a trail
མཚ་	མཚམས་	tsham	border

consonant
symbol

dz

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ཇ་	ཇ་ཉི་	dzati	indigenous headache remedy
མཇ་	མཇེ་ནད་	dzênê	leprosy
འཇ་	འཇམ་གླིང་	dzam'ling	world
ཇ་	ཇོང་ཁ་	Dzongkha	Dzongkha
བཇ་	བཇམ་	dzam	earthenware pot
	ནོར་བཇི་	nodzi	cowherd

consonant
symbol

y

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ཡ་	ཡིག་ཚང་	yitsha	office
གཡ་	གཡག་	'yâ	yak
དབྱ་	འཇམ་དབྱངས་	jam'yang	Manjushri

consonant
symbol

w

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ཁ-	ཁང་	Wang	Thimphu (traditional name)
དབ-	དབང་	'wang	blessing
བ-	ལྷོ་བ་	têwaZ	capital

consonant
symbol

r

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ར-	རི་	ri	hill, mountain below the tree line
རྩ-	རྩ་ཚོ་	raco	tip of a horn

consonant
symbol

rh

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
རྩ-	རྩལ་	rhe	tear, rip
	རྩལ་པོ་	rhip	whole, entire

consonant
symbol

l

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ལ-	ལཱ་	lâ	work
	ལམ་	lam	road, way
ལུ-	ལུ་	'lu	song
	ལེདཔ་	'lêp	brain
ལཱ-	ལཱ་མོ་ཚེ་	'lamchê	elephant
	ལང་	'lang	bull, ox
ལཱ-	ལཱམ་	'lam	lama
	ལོ་	'lo	heart, mind, spirit
ལེ-	ལེད་	'lung	wind
	ལེད་ནད་	'lungnê	tuberculosis
ལེད-	ལེད་དོ་	'ledo	thigh
ལཱ-	ལཱཔ་	'lap	say, tell
ལཱལ-	ལཱལ་བུ་	'lapjaZ	advice, counsel

consonant
symbol

lh

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ལྷ-	ལྷེད་	lhoe	arrive; be loose
	ལྷ་ཁང་	lhakhang	monastery

consonant
symbol

zh

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
གཞ-	འབྲུག་གཞུང་	druzhung	Royal Government of Bhutan
	གཞོན་མ་	zhoem	young
བཞ-	བཞི་	zhi	four
	བཞག་	zhâ	put, place, set

Please note that ཞ་ with མྲོན་འདུག་.is transcribed as **zh**, whereas ཞ་ without མྲོན་འདུག་. is transcribed as **sh** followed by a vowel with the soft tone dot.

consonant
symbol

sh

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ཞ-	ཞབས་ཁྲ་	shaZpthra	dance
	ཞིང་	shiZng	field
	ཞོ་	shoZ	yoghurt, curd
ཞུ-	ཞུམ་	shaZm	hat, cap
ཞག-	ཞག་	shing	wood, log
	ཞོ་	sho	dice
ཞུའུ-	ཞུའུ་	shaoZ	antlers
ཞགའུ-	ཞགའུ་	shong	valley
ཞགའུལ་	ཞགའུལ་	she	wander, roam about

consonant
symbol

z

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
གཟ-	གཟུང་ནི་	zungni	to catch
	གཟེར་	zê	nail
བཟ-	བཟང་མ་	zâm	well-bred
	བཟོ་བ་	zouZ	carpenter

Please note that ཟ་ with ལྷོན་འདུག་ is transcribed as **z**, whereas ཟ་ without ལྷོན་འདུག་ is transcribed as **s** followed by a vowel with the soft tone dot.

consonant
symbol

s

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ཟ-	ཟམ་	saZm	bridge
	ཟོག་པ་	soZp	bad
	ཟེ་	sêZ	crest
ས-	སོ་	so	tooth
གས-	གསེར་	sê	gold
བས-	བསད་	sê	kill
སྐ-	སྐས་	se	prince
	སྐུང་མ་	sum	amulet, talisman
	སྐྱོང་མོ་	sim	younger sister (of a man)
བསྐ-	བསྐྱུག་ཀྱུག་	satraktra	hard

consonant
symbol

h

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ཧ-	ཧྱ	Hâ	Hâ (district)

5.2. Vowel symbols

The nine vowel symbols used in Roman Dzongkha are: /a, â, e, ê, i, o, oe, u, ue/. All of these vowels may occur either in the hard tone, /a, â, e, ê, i, o, oe, u, ue/, or they may occur in the soft tone /aZ, âZ, eZ, êZ, iZ, oZ, oZeZ, uZ, uZeZ/.

vowel
symbol

a

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ཨ-	ཨ་པ་	apa	father
	རྟ་	ta	horse
	ཐབ་	thap	stove
	ཐག་པ་	thap	rope
	ཏྱབ་	cap	do, perform
	དགའ་	ga	like, love
	འབའ་	ba	target
འ-	འ་རྫོང་	âZdom	jackal (Canis aureus)
	ལམ་	lam	road, way

ག་ཅི་	gaZci	what
བ་	baZ	cow
བྱ་	bjaz	bird
བྱམོ་	bjazm	hen

vowel
symbol

â

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ཅལ་	ཅལ་མཁོ་	âuz	thief
	སྟལ་	tâ	tiger
	ཆ་སྐམ་	châgam	cupboard
	གསལ་མོ་	sâp	new
	ཆ་ལ་	châp	rain
	འབྱ་	bjâ	paddy
	མག་མཁོ་	gâuZ	smith
	སྐྱུང་མ་	bjâm	insects
འ་	འར་རི་འུར་རི་	âZriuZri	crowdedness, tumult, confusion, business
	འང་མ་	lâm	sufficient
	ག་	gâZ	who
	བྱག་	bjâZ	cliff

The difference between /a/ and /â/ is neutralized before /ng/, and it is therefore becomes redundant to make the distinction between /a/ and /â/ before /ng/. Since the quality of the vowel is predictable in such cases, only /a/ is written before /ng/ in Roman Dzongkha: /ang/, never /âng/.

example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ལྷང་	'lang	bull, ox
ཆང་	chang	beer
གླང་ཕུ་	gangphu	balloon

vowel symbol

i

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ཇི་	ཇིན་	ing	is
	སྤྱི་ཅན་	dikcen	sinful
	མི་གཏེ་	'mito	eye
འི་	ཨ་འི་	aiZ	mother
	འོང་པའི་ཚོགས་	oZngbiZcho	may come
	ཁོ་གི་ཕྱིམ་	khogiZchim	his house
	མིང་	ming	name

vowel symbol

u

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ལུ་	ལུ་རྩལ་ཅན་	utshucen	persistent individual
	འུ་བུམ་	bum	one lakh
	ལུ་	'lu	song

འུ-

འུགཔ་

uZp

owl

བུམོ་

buZm

girl, daughter

འུག་

lu

sheep

vowel
symbol

ue

example
word

Roman
Dzongkha

meaning in
English

སྐུལ་

bue

snake

གཡུལ་

'yue

village

ལྷུང་

'lue

offering made in
appeasement to
deities for the
restoration of
health or pro-
perty

ལུང་

lue

manure, compost

གུས་ཞབས་

guZeZshaZp

respect

གནམ་དགུན་

'namguen

winter

vowel
symbol

ê

example
word

Roman
Dzongkha

meaning in
English

ཞེར་མ་

êma

chilli pepper

ཤེས་ནི་

shêni

know

སེར་པོ་

sêp

yellow

སེམས་

sêm

mind, feelings

སྒྲུ་མ་	sêm	lentils, dried beans
ཚེད་པ་	kêp	waist
ཚེན་	kên	palate, roof of the mouth
དེ་ཅིག་	dêZci	this much
བེད་སྤྱོད་འབད་	bêZcoebe	use, employ, utilize
ཨ་ཞེ་	ashêZ	princess (sister of the king)

vowel
symbol

e

example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ག་ཤལ་ནི་	sheni	wander, roam about
ག་ཡམས་པ་	'yep	right
བརྒྱད་	ge	eight
སྒྲུ་མེ་	sem	princess
གུལ་	geZ	queue, row, line
འབད་	be	do
བལ་	beZ	wool
བཀའ་ལན་	ken	same as བཀའ་པ་ཅིན་
དཔར་ཆས་	pâche	camera

vowel
symbol

o

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ཨོ	ཨོམ་	om	milk
	ལོ་	'lo	cough
	གོ་	go	door
	རྟོ་	jo	go
འོ	འོང་ནི་	oZngni	come
	ལོ་	lo	year, age
	བགོ་	goZ	Bhutanese male dress
	རྩོ་བདག་	joZda	owner
དོ	དོག་ནི་	oni	to scoop

vowel
symbol

oe

example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
ལག་པ་གཡོན་མ་	lap oZeZm	left hand
འོད་ཟེང་	oZeZseZ	shining, glittering
འོད་ཆེན་ཆེན་	oZeZchemche	lightning
ཨོལ་ལྗོག་	oeko	neck
མགོན་པོ་	goem	guest
སྐྱོན་	koen	scar
སློབ་དཔོན་	'loeboe	teacher

ལྷོད་	doe	sit
བོད་པ་	boZeZp	Tibetan

5.3. Syllable final consonants

There are eight consonants which may occur at the end of a Dzongkha syllable in the official Romanized transcription. These are: /ng, m, n, k, p, r, sh, s/. The syllable final consonants /k/ and /r/ require special comment, and are discussed in detail below.

In Roman Dzongkha, final /n/ or /m/ indicate that the syllable ends in the nasal consonant /n/ or /m/. However, when a syllable ends in /ng/ in Dzongkha Romanization, this generally indicates that the preceding vowel is nasalized.

consonant
symbol

n

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
-ན་	བདུན་	duen	seven
	ལྷན་	'mên	medicine
-ལ་	དཔལ་འབྱོར་	penjo	prosperity, bounty

consonant
symbol

m

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
-མ་	གསུམ་	sum	three
	མེམ་	drom	box
	ནམ་	nam	when
-མོ་	བུམོ་	buZm	girl, daughter
	བུའུ་མ་	tsuem	queen; wife of a great lama
-ནམ་	བཙོན་པ་	tsoem	prisoner

consonant
symbol

ng

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
-ང་	ཚོང་ཁང་	tshongkhang	shop
	སྤང་	'lang	bull, ox
	ཆང་	chang	beer
-ན་	ཅིན་	ing	is
	གཡོན་	oeng	left

The Roman symbols /p/, /s/ and /sh/ are used to indicate that a syllable ends in the consonants /p/, /s/ or /sh/. The occurrence of syllable final /k/ and /r/ in Roman Dzongkha is somewhat variable, and depends on the actual pronunciation of a word or phrase in modern spoken Dzongkha, not on the literary or reading pronunciation.

consonant
symbol

p

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
པ་	ཅདཔ་	chep	fine collector
	ཐལཔ་	bep	frog
ཕོ་	ཕྱེསཕོ་	cup	sour
པ་	ལྟཔ་	lhap	learn
	ཞབས་	shaZp	majesty; leg (honorific)

consonant
symbol

sh

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
མོ་ཤིག་	སྟོ་ཤིག་	'mosh	Isn't it so?
	འབག་ཤིག་ཤིག་	bâshosh	bring it here!
	བལྟ་ཤིག་	tash	look!

consonant
symbol

s

Dzongkha script	example word	Roman Dzongkha	meaning in English
སོ་	ལགས་སོ་	las, laso	all right (polite)

Final /r/

Speaking strictly in terms of the phonology of modern spoken Dzongkha, the sound /r/ is not found to occur at the end of a Dzongkha syllable. For example, the name ཀཾམ་ is pronounced /kâma/ in colloquial speech. However, the Choeke pronunciation /karma/ may also be heard in spoken Dzongkha. This variation is due to the fact that modern spoken Dzongkha is inevitably strongly influenced by the rich literary tradition of Bhutan. Whereas /karma/ is a reading pronunciation, /kâma/ is a modern colloquial pronunciation. Certain reading pronunciations occur sporadically in the spoken language. For example, the title of the well-known book འབྲུག་དཀར་པོ་ is generally pronounced /dru karpô/ and not /dru kâp/.

In general, with the exception of literary terms which retain their reading pronunciation even in the spoken language, final /r/ is not written in official Roman Dzongkha pronunciation whenever and wherever it is not actually pronounced.

Final /k/

The situation described above for final /r/ in Dzongkha holds to a large extent for final /k/ as well. Final /k/ sometimes occurs in spoken Dzongkha where a literary term retains its reading pronunciation even in the spoken language. Here again we see the influence of the liturgical and literary tradition on the spoken tongue. For example, the actual colloquial pronunciation of the name of the sacred monastery ལྷག་ཚང་ "Tiger's Nest" is /tâtshâ/, whereas the more literary pronunciation /taktshâ/ is also heard. So too, the pronunciation /otho/ for འོག་ཐོག་ "ground floor" is somewhat more usual than /oktho/. In a word such as ཚིག་མཛོད་ "dictionary", final /k/ is usually heard, /tshikdzoe/, whereas final /k/ is not pronounced in an expression like ཚིག་ལྟབ་ /tshi 'lap/ "to declare, to say". Here, the rule applies that, with the exception of literary terms which retain their reading pronunciation even in the spoken language, final /k/ is not written in official Roman Dzongkha pronunciation whenever and wherever it is not actually pronounced.