

**Item 11 of the Provisional Agenda**

**Activities relating to the Working Group on Romanization Systems**

**GEORGIAN CONSONANTS AND THEIR ROMANIZATION \***

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\* Prepared by: Shukia Apridonidze, Georgia

## Georgian Consonants and Their Romanization

Shukia Apridonidze (Tbilisi, Georgia)

Georgian belongs to those rare languages in which the pronunciation of phonemes is adequately reflected by corresponding graphemes: one to one: 33 phonemes and the same number of graphemes. Each phoneme is rendered by a single letter, and vice versa, each letter is pronounced by a corresponding individual phoneme. There are no exceptions either in vowels (5 in all) or consonants (28).

However, this does not mean that there are no problems in transliterating Georgian phonemes in the Latin type, which has 26 graphemes: having seven graphemes in excess of Latin, the presence of specific Georgian phonemes differing from the sounds rendered in the Latin type call for a special study and solution of a number of practical tasks.

Before I present this communication, the traditions and two systems must be delimited:

1) the traditional international scientific transcription system, accepted in philological circles and based on the Latin alphabet, with specific diacritical marks, and 2) the modern system of transliteration using the Latin type but oriented to the English alphabet.

### A. The international scientific system

We shall begin with the rules of rendering common to both systems. First we shall touch on the vowels.

1. All the five vowels of the Georgian language are rendered by single Latin graphemes by both systems:

ა		ა
ე	ე	
ი	ი	
ო		ო
უ		უ

2. The same refers fully to the sonorous consonants (resonants):

ვ		ვ
ლ		ლ
მ		მ
ნ		ნ
რ		რ

3. Apart from these five resonants and two more velars (laryngeal **h** and pharyngeal **q**), the remaining 21 consonants form five triplet (15) and three doublet (6) consonant systems; each triplet system consists of homogeneous voiced and two unvoiced / voiceless – aspirate and

abruptive consonants, whereas each doublet system consists of homogeneous voiced and aspirate consonants.

The transcription systems coincide in terms of (a) homogeneous voiced and unvoiced aspirates, (b) sibilants, (c) unvoiced pharyngeal and d) laryngeal consonants:

(a)		voiced	abruptives	aspirates
	bilabials	ბ b		ფ p
	dentals	დ d		თ t
	velars	გ g		ქ k
(b)	sibilants	ზ z		ს s
(c)	pharyngeal (abruptive)		ყ q'	
(d)	laryngeal (aspirate)			ჰ h

Here the coincidences are exhausted and differences begin, presupposing a different transliteration of 13 Georgian consonants. The basic problems are connected with the rendering of 1) abruptives – simple (ჟ, ზ, ტ) and affricates (წ, ჭ); 2) hushing sibilants (ჭ, თ, ჩ, ჯ); 3) velar fricatives (ღ, ბ).

Thus, the following consonants proved to be such:

In the system of scientific transcription a dot (.) was placed under the abruptives; a tich (˘) above the sibilants (ჭ, ზ, ჯ) with a dot under the letters: ჟ, ზ, ტ, წ, ჭ; for the fricatives Greek γ and χ were used, due to the closeness of them to Georgian sounding.

Only three Latin graphemes remained unused: f, w, y.

### B. The modern system of transliteration

The basic difference between the systems under consideration lies in the number of graphemes that convey the problematic Georgian consonants. Whereas the scientific system of transcription does not abstain from the use of various diacritical marks to render specific Georgian consonants, the transliteration system, designed for more practical objectives, predominantly follows two-component combinations of Latin graphemes.

In almost all paired combinations h serves as the second componet. Here are these consonants:

hushing sounds:	voiced	unvoiced aspirates
	ჭ zh	თ sh
	ჯ j*	ჩ ch
	ღ gh	ბ kh

\*Note: only ჯ j “falls out” of the two-component pair.

The unvoiced abruptives proved most problematic as, with one exception, they are all opposed to homogeneous unvoiced aspirates. Here are the pairs of unvoiced consonants:

	<b>aspirates</b>	<b>abruptives</b>
bilabial:	<b>ᄁ p</b>	<b>ᄃ p'</b>
dental:	<b>ᄅ t</b>	<b>ᄇ t'</b>
velar:	<b>ᄉ k</b>	<b>ᄋ k'</b>
sibilant		
affricates:	<b>ᄍ ts</b>	<b>ᄏ ts'</b>
hushing		
affricates:	<b>ᄑ ch</b>	<b>ᄓ ch'</b>

The following Latin letters are most adequate for rendering Georgian aspirates by their phonetic properties:

**ᄁ – p**

**ᄉ – k**

**ᄅ – t**

As to the abruptives, they are rendered – without loss of their specific articulation properties – by the consonants as used with aspirates, with the only exception that sharpness (abruptiveness) is expressed with special diacritical marks – actually with an apostrophe, which differentiates an abruptive from aspirate, and has a clearly technical advantage: it is present in all key-boards of computers throughout the world. As a result, all the five pairs of Georgian unvoiced consonants convey the correlation between the aspirates and abruptives rendered through the apostrophe:

aspirates		abruptives	
<b>ᄁ</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>ᄃ</b>	<b>p'</b>
<b>ᄅ</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>ᄇ</b>	<b>t'</b>
<b>ᄉ</b>	<b>k</b>	<b>ᄋ</b>	<b>k'</b>
<b>ᄍ</b>	<b>ts</b>	<b>ᄏ</b>	<b>ts'</b>
<b>ᄑ</b>	<b>ch</b>	<b>ᄓ</b>	<b>ch'</b>

The phoneme **y q'** is also an abruptive, though without an aspirate correspondence.

**The Transliteration system for the Names of Geographical Features of Georgia  
into the Latin Alphabet**

ა	a
ბ	b
გ	g
დ	d
ე	e
ვ	v
ზ	z
თ	t
ი	i
კ	k'
ლ	l
მ	m
ნ	n
ო	o
პ	p'
ჟ	zh
რ	r
ს	s
ტ	t'
უ	u
ფ	p
ქ	k
ყ	gh
ღ	q'
შ	sh
ჩ	ch
ც	ts
ძ	dz
წ	ts'
ჭ	ch'
ხ	kh
ჯ	j
ჰ	h