INTRODUCTION

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The existence of various writing systems would mean that there have to be standardized ways of representing geographical names originating in languages with other writing systems. It would be technically feasible to standardize names within a group of languages using the same writing system, e.g. those using Roman script. But for names from languages outside the group there are often different methods of representing them in Roman letters. One and the same non-Roman name might be rendered differently, depending on the target language, tradition and purpose of the text. A single Russian place name may serve as a good example of confusion created by various language-oriented renderings:

What happens with language-oriented conversions?

RUSSIAN	TRANSCRIPTION	LANGUAGE
Шахты	*Shakhty*	English
Šahty [UN]	*Šahtõ*	Estonian
ʃaxtɨ [phon.]	*Šahty*	Finnish
	Chakhty	French
	Schachty	German
	Sahti	Hungarian
	Szachty	Polish
	Sjachty	Swedish
	Şahtı	Turkish
	etc. etc.	

Although the name contains only five sounds, they have in this table 17 different graphic representations in Roman letters. The phoneme [ʃ] is represented by eight letters or letter combinations (ch, s, š, s, sch, sh, sj, sz), [x] by three (ch, h, kh) and [ɨ] by four (i, i, õ,y).

What happens with method-oriented conversions?

Apart from country-oriented conversion methods, there are also different conversion methods that don't target specific countries, but are based on specific scientific viewpoints or institutional traditions.

For the conversion of Arabic names, for instance, there are systems developed by ISO (233), by UNGEGN, by DIN and others. Wikipedia gives an overview (see Romanization of Arabic).

Letter	Unicode	Name	UNGEGN	ALA-LC	DIN	ISO	ISO/R	SAS	SM	IPA	BATR	ArabTeX	chat
ئ ؤ إ أ ء	0621	hamzah	’		ʾ	ʾ ʿ	’	ʾ	'	ʔ	e	'	2
ا	0627	ʾalif	ā		ʾ	ā	ā	a, i, u; ā	aa	a:	aa or A	a	a/e/é
ب	0628	bā’	b							b	b		
ت	062A	tā’	t							t	t		
ث	062B	ṯā’	th		ṯ				ç	θ	c	_t	s/th
ج	062C	ǧīm	j		ǧ			ŷ	j	dʒ/g/ʒ	j	^g	j/g/dj
ح	062D	ḥā’	ḫ	ḥ						ħ	H	.h	7
خ	062E	ḫā’	kh		ḫ	ḥ		j	x	x/χ	K	_h	kh/7'/5

د	062F	dāl	d						d	d			
ذ	0630	ḏāl	dh		ḏ			ð	z'	_d	z/dh/th		
ر	0631	rā'	r						r	r			
ز	0632	zayn/zāy	z						z	z			
س	0633	sīn	s						s	s			
ش	0634	šīn	sh		š				ʃ	x	^s	sh/ch	
ص	0635	ṣād	ṣ	ṣ					sˁ	S	.s	s/9	
ض	0636	ḍād	ḍ	ḍ					dˁ	D	.d	d/9'	
ط	0637	ṭā'	ṭ	ṭ					tˁ	T	.t	t/6	
ظ	0638	ẓā'	ẓ	ẓ			ð̣	ðˁ/zˁ	Z	.z	z/dh/6'		
ع	0639	ʿayn	ʿ		ʿ		ɾ	ʕ	E	`	3		
غ	063A	ġayn	gh		g	ǧ	ġ	ǧ	ɣ/ʁ	g	.g	gh/3'	
ف	0641	fā'	f						f	f			
ق	0642	qāf	q						q	q		2/g/q	
ك	0643	kāf	k						k	k			
ل	0644	lām	l						l	l			
م	0645	mīm	m						m	m			
ن	0646	nūn	n						n	n			
ه	0647	hā'	h						h	h			
و	0648	wāw	w	w; ū			w; o		w, u:	w or uu	w	w; o; ou/u/oo	
ي	064A	yā'	y	y; ī			y; e		j, i:	y or ii	y	y; i/ee; ei/ai	
آ	0622	ʾalif maddah	ā	ā, ʾā	ʾā	ʾâ	ā, ʾā	ā	ʾaa	ʔa:	eaa	'A	2a/aa
ة	0629	tā' marbūṭah	h, t		ṯ	ʰ, ∅	t; —	t	a/at	t'	T	a/e(h); et/at	
ى	0649	ʾalif maqṣūrah	y	á	ā	ẏ		à	à	a:	aaa	_A	a; i/y
ال		ʾalif lām	al-			ʾal	al-		al-; ál-	(var.)	Al-	al-	el/e+double consonant

Source: Wikipedia - Romanization of Arabic

The existence of different methodological systems also would result in different name versions in the Roman alphabet for the same Arab name:

What happens with method-oriented conversions?* - continued)

ARABIC	*UN method*	*ISO method*	*etc.*
وَهْرَن	*Wahrān*	*Wahrān*	
غَرْدَايَة	*Ghardāyah*	*Ğardāyaẗ*	
ٱلجزائر	*al-Jazā ʿir*	*ʾal Gazā ʿir*	

So, even if these systems are not language-oriented, there still are sizable differences.

*) Differences between the UN-system and the ISO system

The transliteration **ISO 233:1984** gives every character and diacritic sign a unique equivalent and e.g. long vowels in Arabic *ā, ī* and *ū* are consequently written *a', iy* and *uw* respectively in the ISO transliteration. Other main correspondences:

UN	ISO				
ā (ī)	= â	gh	= ġ	kh	= ḫ
á	= ay	h (ā)	= t̄	ṣ	= ṣ
aⁿ	= á	ḫ	= ḫ	sh	= š
ḍ	= ḍ	iⁿ	= í	ṭ	= ṭ
dh	= d̲	j	= ǧ	th	= t̲