

Specialised sense: transcription from one language to another

In a more specialised sense, a transcription is (a system of) writing the sounds of a word in one language using the script of another language. Any reader of the latter language should be able to pronounce the transcribed word (almost) correctly. As the word may contain sounds that are unknown in the latter language, this goal is not always reached completely.

Transcription can be distinguished from [transliteration](#), which creates a mapping from one script to another that is designed to match the original script as directly as possible. Transcription and transliteration are different only in a subtle way, and the two terms are sometimes used synonymously. In general, transcriptions are used to write for the general public, as in newspapers or a general-purpose encyclopedia. Transliterations tend to be used by linguistic researchers and learners of a language who have not yet mastered the language's writing system.

The same words are likely to be transcribed differently under different systems. For example, the [Mandarin Chinese](#) name for the capital of the [People's Republic of China](#) is *Beijing* in the commonly-used contemporary system [Hanyu Pinyin](#), and in the historically significant [Wade Giles](#) system, it is written *Pei-Ching*.

See also [transcription of Chinese](#), [transcription of Russian](#).

Example:

Russian text	Борис Николаевич Ельцин
Official (GOST) transliteration	Boris Nikolaevič El'cin
English transcription	Boris Nikolayevitch Yeltsin
French transcription	Boris Nikolaïevitch Ieltsine
German transcription	Boris Nikolajewitsch Jelzin
Italian transcription	Boris Nikolaevic Eltsin
Dutch transcription	Boris Nikolajewitsj Jeltsin
Spanish transcription	Bor□Nikol□ vich Yeltsin
Romanian transcription	Boris Nikolaevici Elț□
Hebrew transcription	בוריס ניקולאייביץ' יילצין

Transcription can be done into a non-alphabetic language too. For example, in a Hong Kong Newspaper, [George Bush](#)'s name is transliterated into two [Chinese characters](#) that sounds like "Bou-sū" (布殊) by using the characters that mean "cloth" and "special".

Similarly, many words from English and other Western European languages are borrowed in [Japanese](#) and are transcribed using [Katakana](#), one of the Japanese [syllabaries](#).

After transcribing

After transcribing a word from one language to the script of another language:

- one or both languages may develop further. The original correspondence between the sounds of the two languages may change, and so the pronunciation of the transcribed word develops in a different direction than the original pronunciation.
- the transcribed word may be adopted as a loan word in another language with the same script. This often leads to a different pronunciation and spelling than a direct transcription.

Especially evident is this for Greek loan words and proper names. Greek words are normally first transcribed to Latin (according to their old pronunciations), and then loaned into other languages, and finally the loan word has developed according to the rules of the goal language. For example, *Aristotle* is the currently used English form of the name of the philosopher whose name in Greek is spelled Ἀριστοτέλης (*Aristotélēs*), which was transcribed to Latin *Aristóteles*, from where it was loaned into other languages and followed their linguistic development. (In "classical" Greek of Aristotle's time, lower-case letters were not used, and the name was spelled ΑΡΙΣΤΟΤΕΛΗΣ.)

Pliocene comes from the Greek words πλεῖον (*pleîon*, "more") and καινός (*kainós*, "new"), which were first transcribed (latinised) to *plion* and *caenus* and then loaned into other languages. The historicising latinisation of <κ> by refers to the times where Latin pronounced <c> as [k](#) in all contexts.

When this process continues over several languages, it may fail miserably in conveying the original pronunciation. One ancient example is the [Sanskrit](#) word *dhyāna* which transcribed into the Chinese word *Ch'an* through Buddhist scriptures. *Ch'an* (禪 Zen Buddhism) was transcribed from Japanese (ゼン *zen*) to *Zen* in English. *dhyāna* to *Zen* is quite a change.

Another complex problem is the subsequent change in "preferred" transcription. For instance, the word describing a philosophy or religion in China was popularized in English as [Tao](#) and given the termination **-ism** to produce an English word **Taoism**. That transcription reflects the [Wade-Giles](#) system. More recent [Pinyin](#) transliterations produce [Dao](#) and **Daoism**. (See also [Daoism versus Taoism](#).)

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