Bahá'í orthography

Bahá'í orthography refers to the standardized system of Romanization of the Persian or Arabic words and names contained in the literature of the Bahá'í Faith. The set of guidelines uses certain accents and dots when transliterating the Arabic script that allows for a near-accurate representation of the original noun.

Bahá'ís use a particular and fairly precise system standardized by Shoghi Effendi, which he initiated in a general letter on March 20, 1925.[1] The Bahá'í transliteration scheme was based on a standard adopted by the Tenth International Congress of Orientalists which took place in Geneva in September 1894.[2] Shoghi Effendi changed some details of the Congress's system, most notably in the use of digraphs in certain cases (e.g. _sh_ instead of š), and in incorporating the solar letters when writing the definite article _al-_ (Arabic: ‏ال‎) according to pronunciation (e.g. _ar-Raḥím_, _aṣ-Ṣaddíq_, instead of _al-Raḥím_, _al-Ṣaddíq_).

Contents

Basic Arabic alphabet

Arabic letter	Arabic Name	Transliteration	Value (IPA) [a]
ا	alif	á, a	/aː/; and others (Arabic)
ب	bá'	b	[b]
ت	tá'	t	/t/
ث	thá'	th	/θ/ (Arabic); [s] (Persian)
ج	jím	j	/d͡ʒ/
ح	ḥá'	ḥ	/ħ/ (Arabic); [h] (Persian)
خ	khá'	kh	/x/
د	dál	d	/d/
ذ	dhál	dh	/ð/ (Arabic); [z] (Persian)
ر	rá'	r	/r/
ز	záy	z	[z]
س	sín	s	[s]
ش	shín	sh	[ʃ]
ص	ṣád	ṣ	/sˤ/ (Arabic); [s] (Persian)
ض	ḍád	ḍ	/dˤ/ (Arabic); [z] (Persian)
ط	ṭá'	ṭ	/tˤ/ (Arabic); [t] (Persian)
ظ	ẓá'	ẓ	/ðˤ/ (Arabic); [z] (Persian)
ع	`ayn	`	/ʕ/ (Arabic); [ʔ] (Persian)
غ	ghayn	gh	/ɣ/ (Arabic); [ɣ]~[ɢ] (Persian)
ف	fá'	f	[f]
ق	qáf	q	/q/ (Arabic); [ɢ]~[ɣ] (Persian)
ك ک (Persian)	káf	k	[k]
ل	lám	l	[l]
م	mím	m	[m]
ن	nún	n	[n]
ه	há'	h	[h]
و	wáw	ú, w, v	/uː/; [w] (Arabic); [v] (Persian)
ي [b] ی (Persian)	yá'	í, y	/iː/, [j]

- **^a** Real phonetic values of Arabic vary regionally and the table mostly demonstrates the abstract Arabic phonemes.

- **^b** In Persian, the final form of the letter is written undotted.

Modified letters

The following are not actually full letters but phonemic diacritics or different orthographical shapes for Arabic letters.

Arabic letter	Arabic Name	Transliteration	Value [a]
ء	hamzah	'	[ʔ]
آ	alif maddah	'á	/ʔaː/
ة	tá' marbúṭah	h / t	/a/, /at/
ى	alif maqṣúrah	á	/aː/

Since the Bahá'ís adopted their system in 1927, Middle Eastern scholars have modified the standard academic system adopted in 1894 in various ways, and have created a separate, related system for writing Persian (a principal change being use of e and o to write certain vowels, which have a different sound in Persian than in Arabic). The Bahá'í system, however, has now been used to print thousands of books and thousands of pamphlets and booklets in dozens of languages, hence modifying it would create confusion and force authors to use two different spelling systems (one in passages being quoted exactly, the other in the rest of the text). For this reason, many academics have come to accept and use the Bahá'í system.

According to Bahá'í transliteration standards, the correct forms used in the writings of the Bahá'í Faith referring to its name and central figures are "Bahá'í," "Bahá'ís," "Báb," "Bahá'u'lláh," and "`Abdu'l-Bahá." Because of typographic limitations, the forms "Bahai," "Bahais," "Bab," and "Bahaullah" are often used as a common spelling and are satisfactory for certain electronic uses.

The acute accent on a vowel letter indicates that the vowel is long in its original Persian (or Arabic) form, and is perhaps the most obvious trait that distinguishes it from other Romanizations, which usually use a macron instead. This may or may not have any bearing on its anglicised pronunciation

Comparison to standard romanizations

The Bahá'í transliteration can often differ markedly from more common standard transliterations that are now in use.

Bahá'í Orthography	Standard Transliteration	Persian pronunciation	Arabic pronunciation	Perso-Arabic Spelling
Ádhirbáyján[3]	Azerbaijan	[ɒzerbɒːjˈdʒɒːn]	[ʔæðeɾbiːˈdʒæːn]	آذربایجان
Fáṭimih[4]	Fatima	[fɒːteˈme]	[fɑːˈtˤɪmæ, ˈfɑːtˤɪmæ]	فاطمه
Shoghí[5]	Shawki	[ˈʃoːɣi]	[ˈʃæwʔi, ˈʃawqi]	شوقی
Siyyid[6]	Sayyid	[sejˈjed]	[ˈsæjjɪd]	سید

While the accent and phonemic diacritic marks in the word "Bahá'í" indicate a three syllable pronunciation as [bæhɒːˈʔiː], the official pronunciation guide of the Bahá'í World News Service gives a two syllable pronunciation of "Ba-High," /bəˈhaɪ/.[7][note 1]

Notes

1. In English, "Bahá'í" /bəˈhaɪ/ is pronounced with two syllables according to the pronunciation guide (http://news.bahai.org/media-information/style-guide/) on the Bahá'í World News Service Website (Bahá'í: *Ba-HIGH*). In Persian, Persian: بهائی [bæhɒːˈʔiː] is pronounced with three syllables. The exact realization of the English pronunciation varies. The Oxford English Dictionary has /bæˈhɑːiː/ *ba-HAH-ee*, Merriam-Webster has /bɑːˈhɑːiː/ *bah-HAH-ee*, and the Random House Dictionary has /bəˈhɑːiː/ *bə-HAH-ee*, all with three syllables. See Banani, Amin, *A Baha'i*

Glossary and Pronunciation Guide (https://archive.org/details/ABahaiGlossaryAndPronunciationGuide) (MP3), Bahá'i Study and Shahrokh, Darius, "Windows to the Past Series" (http://bahai-library.com/wttp/programs.html) *Bahá'í Library* – A Guide to Pronunciation part 1 and 2, for more pronunciation instructions.

References

1. Effendi, Shoghi (1974). *Bahá'í Administration* (http://reference.bahai.org/en/t/se/BA/ba-33.html) Wilmette, Illinois, USA: Bahá'í Publishing Trust. p. 43. ISBN 0-87743-166-3
2. Plunkett, G. T. (1894). *Report of the Transliteration Committee* (http://bahai-library.com/plunkett_transliteraton_congress_orientalists). Tenth International Congress of Orientalists. Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society. Geneva. pp. 879-892.
3. http://glossary.bahaiq.com/words/adhirbayjan
4. http://glossary.bahaiq.com/words/fatimih
5. http://glossary.bahaiq.com/words/shoghi+effendi
6. http://glossary.bahaiq.com/words/siyyid
7. http://news.bahai.org/media-information/style-guide

External links

- Transliteration, an essay by Bahá'í scholar Moojan Momen on the history and practical application of the Bahá'í transcription standard.
- Dying for God, contains an introductory summary of Bahá'í terminology and transliteration used in academic literature.
- Bahá'í Style Guide, guidelines for published references to the Bahá'í faith in the United States.
- Arabic, Proper pronunciation of, by the Universal House of Justice.
- All Words - Baha'i Glossary, a Spoken Dictionary of Baha'i Words and Phrases - BahaIQ