

ROMANIZATION SYSTEM FOR JAPANESE KANA

Modified Hepburn system
BGN/PCGN 1976 Agreement

The modified Hepburn system for the romanization of Japanese has been in use by the U.S. Board on Geographic Names and the U.K. Permanent Committee on Geographical Names since the 1930s and has been used extensively in the romanization of Japanese geographic names. The system is well adapted to the general needs of speakers of English and is the most widely used system for the romanization of Japanese.

The Japanese language is written in two forms: in kanji, which are Sino-Japanese characters, and in kana, which are syllabic symbols. There are two styles of kana, namely katakana, the squared form, and hiragana, the cursive form. Katakana symbols were originally derived from parts of kanji characters and today are used primarily for the phonetic transcription of foreign words and as the equivalent of italics. Hiragana symbols, on the other hand, were originally created by simplifying the strokes of whole kanji characters and are used to represent grammatical particles and suffixes. Running text is usually written in kanji with kana interspersed. Geographic names, personal names, and words written in isolation are usually written in kanji with or without the addition of small-script kana equivalents, which, when used for that purpose, are referred to as furigana.

Many alternate kana forms were abolished in a post-World War II language reform. If reference to these forms is required, the traditional Hepburn system for Japanese should be consulted¹.

Kanji may be romanized with the aid of Japanese-English dictionaries that utilize the modified Hepburn system². A familiarity with the grammatical structure of the Japanese language, as well as with the Japanese writing system, is essential for the correct romanization of kanji.

¹ The system was first presented in A Japanese and English Dictionary; with an English and Japanese Index, J C Hepburn, Shanghai, American Presbyterian Mission Press, 1867.

² e.g., Beginners' Dictionary of Chinese-Japanese Characters, compiled by Arthur Rose-Innes and published by Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1944.

Basic Forms

[hiragana | katakana | romaji]

| | Vowels | K | S | T | N | H | M | Glides | R | W | -n |
|---|---------|----------------|---------|------------|--------|----------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------------|
| A | あ ア a | か カ ka | さ サ sa | た タ ta | な ナ na | は ハ ha (wa)[1] | ま マ ma | や ヤ ya | ら ラ ra | わ ワ wa | ん ン n (n) [3] |
| I | い イ i | き キ ki | し シ shi | ち チ chi | に ニ ni | ひ ヒ hi | み ミ mi | | り リ ri | | |
| U | う ウ u | く ク ku | す ス su | つ ツ tsu[4] | ぬ ヌ nu | ふ フ fu | む ム mu | ゆ ユ yu | る ル ru | | |
| E | え エ e | け ケ ke (ga[2]) | せ セ se | て テ te | ね ネ ne | へ ヘ he (e)[1] | め メ me | | れ レ re | | |
| O | お オ o | こ コ ko | そ ソ so | と ト to | の ノ no | ほ ホ ho | も モ mo | よ ヨ yo | ろ ロ ro | を ヲ wo | |
| A | | が ガ ga | ざ ザ za | だ ダ da | | ば バ ba | | | | | |
| I | | ぎ ギ gi | じ ジ ji | ち チ ji | | び ビ bi | | | | | |
| U | ヴ v [5] | ぐ グ gu | ず ズ zu | づ ヅ zu | | ぶ ブ bu | | | | | |
| E | | げ ゲ ge | ぜ ゼ ze | で デ de | | べ ベ be | | | | | |
| O | | ご ゴ go | ぞ ゾ zo | ど ド do | | ぼ ボ bo | | | | | |
| A | | | | | | ぱ パ pa | | | | | |
| I | | | | | | ぴ ピ pi | | | | | |
| U | | | | | | ぷ プ pu | | | | | |
| E | | | | | | ぺ ペ pe | | | | | |
| O | | | | | | ぽ ポ po | | | | | |

Combined Forms

[hiragana | katakana | romaji]

| Vowels | K | S | T | N | H | M | Glides | R |
|---------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|----------|-------------|
| | きゃ キヤ kya | しゃ シヤ sha | ちゃ チャ cha | にゃ ニヤ nya | ひゃ ヒヤ hya | みゃ ミヤ mya | | りゃ リヤ rya |
| | きゅ キユ kyu | しゅ シユ shu | ちゅ チュ chu | にゅ ニユ nyu | ひゅ ヒユ hyu | みゅ ミユ myu | | りゅ リュ ryu |
| | きゅう キユウ kyū | しゅう シユウ shū | ちゅう チュウ chū | にゅう ニユウ nyū | ひゅう ヒユウ hyū | みゅう ミユウ myū | | りゅう リュウ ryū |
| | きょ キョ kyo | しよ シヨ sho | ちよ チヨ cho | にょ ニョ nyo | ひょ ヒヨ hyo | みょ ミヨ myo | | りょ リヨ ryo |
| おう オウ ō | きょう キョウ kyō | しょう シヨウ shō | ちょう チヨウ chō | にょう ニョウ nyō | ひょう ヒヨウ hyō | みょう ミヨウ myō | | りょう リヨウ ryō |
| | こう コウ kō | そう ソウ sō | とう トウ tō | のう ノウ nō | ほう ホウ hō(ō) | もう モウ mō | よう ヨウ yō | ろう ロウ rō |
| | ぎゃ ギヤ gya | じゃ ジャ ja | どう ドウ dō | | びゃ ビヤ bya | | | |
| | ぎゅ ギユ gyu | じゅ ジュ ju | | | びゅ ビユ byu | | | |
| | ぎゅう ギユウ gyū | じゅう ジュウ jū | | | びゅう ビユウ byū | | | |
| | ぎょ ギョ gyo | じょ ジヨ jo | | | びょ ビヨ byo | | | |
| | ぎょう ギョウ gyō | じょう ジヨウ jō | | | びょう ビヨウ byō | | | |
| | ごう ゴウ gō | ぞう ゾウ zō | | | ぼう ボウ bō | | | |
| | | | | | びゃ ビヤ pya | | | |
| | | | | | びゅ ビユ pyu | | | |
| | | | | | びゅう ビユウ pyū | | | |
| | | | | | びょ ビヨ pyo | | | |
| | | | | | びょう ビヨウ pyō | | | |
| | | | | | ぼう ボウ pō | | | |

— Lengthens preceding vowel in *katakana*

[1] (wa) and (e) are used when (ha) and (he) are used as grammatical particles.

[2] The symbol looking much like a katakana (ke) becomes (ga) when placed between two kanji characters in place names (Seki ga Hara).

[3] n' is used before y-glide or a vowel letter:

[4] A small-script tsu form (っ or っ) is inserted between kana symbols to indicate a double consonant and is romanized as k before k; as s before s or sh; as t before t, ts, or ch; and as p before p.

[5] This katakana symbol is used only in the transcription of foreign words.