Rationale for changes between the 1997 and 2012 proposed version of the
ALA-LC Romanization table for Lepcha
Following Plaisier, 2011

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ṅga (for U+1C05, LEPCHA LETTER NGA):

The 1997 ALA-LC Romanization table used 'ṅa' for this character, slightly modified from the value used (ṅă)
in a transcription system created by Albert Grünwedel (1898). Other transcription systems—Mainwaring
(1876) and Támsáng (1980)—have tended to prefer 'nga', and Plaisier (2007, 2011) follows this preference in
her proposed modification of the 1997 table.

nya (for U+1C09, LEPCHA LETTER NYA):

Among transcription systems for Lepcha, the ALA-LC 1997 table is the only one known to use the tilded n as
the Romanized value for this character. Others have regularly used 'nya', or in Grünwedel's case, 'nyă'.

sa (for U+1C20, LEPCHA LETTER SA):

The ALA-LC 1997 table uses 'śa' for this character (sə) and 'sa' for the one that follows it in the table (ʃə). It
is unclear why. Other transcription systems use 'sa' or 'să' for sə, and 'sha', 'shya', or 'šă' for ʃə. Plaisier's
recommendation to use 'sa' for this character appears to be based on its prevalence in usage across
transcription systems.

sha (for U+1C21, LEPCHA LETTER SHA):

This recommendation is complementary to the one above.

í (for U+1C27, LEPCHA VOWEL SIGN I with U+1C36, LEPCHA SIGN RAN):

Here, Plaisier follows Grünwedel; the ALA-LC usage of 'ï' is not used in the other systems she analyzes.

ú (for U+1C2B, LEPCHA VOWEL SIGN UU):

Where ALA-LC (1997) uses 'ū', contrasting with 'u', other systems have used 'ú', 'u', and 'aoo', contrasting
with 'u', 'ŭ', and 'au', respectively. In this case, Plaisier recommends following Mainwaring (1876), and using
'ú' to contrast with 'u'. The result would not be completely unambiguous, given that Grünwedel's system
used 'u' for this character, but the option of following Támsáng here would be unwieldy: 'aoo' in this case,
with possible implications for Romanization of other vowels by inserting an initial 'a' to maintain consistency.

ó (for U+1C29, LEPCHA VOWEL SIGN OO):

ALA-LC (1997) uses 'ŏ' to contrast with 'o', where other systems have consistently used 'ó'. Plaisier recommends using 'ó', consistent with other transcription methods.

a-á-â (for U+1C23, LEPCHA LETTER A; U+1C26, LEPCHA VOWEL SIGN AA; and U+1C23, LEPCHA LETTER A with U+1C36, LEPCHA SIGN RAN):

ALA-LC (1997) uses 'a', 'ā', and 'ă', but with no clear rationale. Except for Támsáng (1980), other systems have recognized the need for fully differentiating between the three Lepcha characters that these romanized values are used for, but there is no consensus about what their exact representation in Latin script should be. Whether the differential use of these related characters in Lepcha orthography has more to do with phonology, stress, or closed syllables is a matter of some debate, but has little impact on a decision for representing them in Romanized text.

But for Grünwedel, all the systems analyzed here use 'a' for the first character. The second character is represented as 'a', 'aa', or 'á' under different systems; Plaisier opts to follow Mainwaring, which is the latter. The third character is what Plaisier describes as the "*rân* 'circumflex' sign… a diacritic flourish written over a consonant sign or over a vowel sign." She notes its function has varied in usage. Támsáng doesn't distinguish it in Romanized text from the first character, while Mainwaring preserves it, as a Lepcha script diacritic, and applies it to Romanized text in his system. Plaisier proposes using the Latin circumflex diacritic as a transcription of the *rân* flourish, "in line with the approach originally suggested by Mainwaring" (Plaisier, 2011).

tra-[n/a]-dra-thra (for U+1C00, LEPCHA LETTER KA, with U+1C25, LEPCHA SUBJOINED LETTER RA, and U+1C37, LEPCHA SIGN NUKTA; [U+1C02, LEPCHA LETTER KRA with U+1C25, LEPCHA SUBJOINED LETTER RA and U+1C37, LEPCHA SIGN NUKTA]; U+1C03, LEPCHA LETTER GA with U+1C25, LEPCHA SUBJOINED LETTER RA and U+1C37, LEPCHA SIGN NUKTA; and U+1C1D, LEPCHA LETTER HA with U+1C25, LEPCHA SUBJOINED LETTER RA and U+1C37, LEPCHA SIGN NUKTA):

There is a group of four cerebral consonants (or retroflex consonants) where the shapes of glyphs used in Lepcha script is patterned on those used for the guttural consonants *ka*, *kha*, *ga*, and the aspirate *ha*. Early transcription systems (Mainwaring 1876 and Grünwedel 1898) kept the Romanized values of the cerebrals close to those of their corresponding gutturals. Later methods (Támsáng 1980 and Plaisier 2011) gave them Romanized values that followed a pattern more closely identified with a set of dental consonants. The ALA-LC 1997 table falls well within this later model; it would work as well as Plaisier's does to differentiate more clearly than Támsáng does against 'ta' and 'da'. Plaisier notes that the character combination represented in the table by 'ṭa' (U+1C02 with U+1C25 and U+1C37) is no longer used. Adoption of her recommendation to insert '-r-' in these cases instead of a combining dot below would be mostly a matter of stylistic choice—although where one might expect her to have used 'dhra', she prescribes 'thra' instead, having not used this for the character combination for 'ṭa'. Following Plaisier here would free up 'ṭa', 'ṭha' and 'ḍa' for use in representing U+1C4D, U+1C4E, and U+1C4F, which Everson (2005) notes are recently introduced letters for retroflexes, appearing in a book published in Kathmandu, although it is not yet clear whether they will need to be distinguished from others in Romanization.

kang (in the example from the table, U+1C00, LEPCHA LETTER KA with U+1C35, LEPCHA CONSONANT SIGN KANG):

The use of 'kaṅ' in the 1997 table is unattested from the other systems that Plaisier reviews, and she recommends following the more commonly used 'kang' instead.

References:

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