Title: Introducing the Wolof Alphabet of Assane Faye
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1 Introduction

The purpose of this document is to bring to the attention of the Unicode Technical Committee (UTC) a script for writing the Wolof language (ISO 639: wol) of Senegal. Some specimens of the script are included. An allocation for the script should be made to the roadmap of the Supplementary Multilingual Plane.

The Wolof alphabet was created by Assane Faye. Its official date of origin is January 1961. The script is based upon the Arabic model and is written linearly from right-to-left. The basic repertoire consists of 42 characters: 25 consonant letters (including a 'vowel-carrier' letter), 4 basic vowel signs, 1 vowel-length mark, 1 zero-vowel mark, 1 gemination sign, and 10 digits (see Figure 1).

The basic structure of the writing system is as follows:

- *Consonants*   Each consonant letter has an initial and a non-initial form. The specimen in Figure 2 suggests that initial forms are used only at the beginning of a sentence, not at the word level.

- *Vowels*   The script uses four basic vowel signs to represent 10 distinct vowels. Six of these vowels are written with a combination of two or more basic vowel signs. Vowels have initial and non-initial forms. Initial forms of vowels are written using the 'vowel-carrier' letter and one or more vowel signs. Non-initial vowels are written using only vowel signs.

- *Vowel length*   A long vowel is indicated by writing a vowel-length mark after a basic vowel.

- *'Zero-length' vowel*   There is a sign for indicating 'zero-length' vowel. This mark may be similar in function to the Arabic SUKUN.

- *Gemination*   The gemination sign is written after a consonant letter at the baseline.

- *Digits*   The digits represent decimal numbers and are written from left-to-right. Numbers may also be written using consonant letters, which have numeric values similar to the *abjad* system.

- *Joining*   The script has no joining features.

There are two possible models for encoding consonants and vowels:

- *Consonants*   The consonant letters may be encoded following the Arabic model, in which the initial form of a letter is the default, independent form and the non-initial form is treated as a shaping variant. The alternative is to encode both the initial and non-initial forms as independent characters.

- *Vowels*   All vowels may be represented using the four basic vowel signs. This would require that 6 vowels be written using sequences of the basic vowel signs. An alternative would be to encode each of these 6 sequences as independent characters for a total of 10 vowel signs.

Additional research is required to determine if the script is currently in use. The official script in Senegal for Wolof is Latin, although the Wolofal script (an Arabic-based script written in the 'Ajami' style) is also used.

2   References

Dalby, David. 1966. "Further Indigenous Scripts of West Africa: Manding, Wolof, and Fula Alphabets and Yoruba 'Holy' Writing." *African Language Studies* 10: 161–181.

Mafundikwa, Saki. 2004. *Afrikan Alphabets: The Story of Writing in Afrika*. West New York, N.J.: Mark Batty.

Rovenchak, Andrij. 2010. "Development of Fonts for African Scripts: Using Computer Technologies to Preserve Africa's Written Heritage." *Afrikanistik online*, Vol. 2010. `http://www.afrikanistik-online.de/archiv/2010/2760`

Table II　The Wolof Alphabet of Assane Faye										
CONSONANTS									VOWELS	
	INITIAL	NON-INIT.		INITIAL	NON-INIT.		INITIAL	NON-INIT.	(PROVISIONAL IDENTIFICATION)	
[ā] (1)	𝔰	ʃ	w (8)	ҁ	ҁ	y (40)	ᴧ	ᴧ	a	/
c (2)	⊃	⊏	l (9)	ᴪ	N	t (50)	ᴧ	ᴧ	ɛ	'
m (3)	ᴧ	ᴧ	g (10)	ᴪ	H	r (60)	ᵱ	ᵱ	e	ʃ'
k (4)	ᴡ	ᴡ	ŋg	ᴪ	Ḣ	ɲ (70)	∞	∞	ö	ʒʃ
b (5)	ᴧ	ᴧ	ŋ	ᴪ	Ḣ	f (80)	ᵱ	ᵱ	i	\
mb	ᴧ	ᴧ	d (20)	ᵱ	ᴧ	n (90)	ᵱ	[ᵱ]	ɔ	,
j (6)	ᴊ	ᴊ	nd	ᵱ	ᴧ	p (100)	ᵱ	ᵱ	o	,ʃ,
nj	ᴊ	ᴊ	x (30)	ᵱ	ᴧ	DIACRITICS			u	,ʃ
						long vowel (postscript)		—		
s (7)	ᴊ	//	ħ	ᴧ	ᴧ	zero vowel (postscript)		c	ə	/ʃ
						double consonant (superscr.)		^	ü	\ʃ
NUMERALS	1	2	3　ϟ	4　ξ	5　φ	6　φ	7　ᴽ	8　ˈ4ʹ	9　ρ	10　IO

Figure 1: Chart of Assane Faye's alphabet (from Dalby 1966: Table 2).

Asan Fay. Tēreb Nitku Nyūl. Dakār. 1966

Figure 2: Text in Wolof with Latin transliteration (from Rovenchak 2010: Figure 11).

The Wolof Alphabet

Wolof is the principal language of Senegal where it is spoken by about 3.5 million people. Assane Faye, a Senegalese artist noted for his work using re-cycled materials, created this alphabet in 1961. The alphabet is written from right to left and is reminiscent of Arabic in its graphic style and vowel usage.

Figure 3: Chart of Faye's alphabet (from Mafundikwa 2004: 130).