Preliminary proposal to encode the Vai script into the SMP of the UCS:
to be presented before the Unicode Technical Committee at UTC 102

Script: Vai
Status: Working Draft
Date: 31 January 2005
Authors: Charles L. Riley, José R. Rivera, Tombekai V. Sherman, and Jason Glavy
ISO/IEC JTC 1/SC 2/WG 2
PROPOSAL SUMMARY FORM TO ACCOMPANY SUBMISSIONS
FOR ADDITIONS TO THE REPERTOIRE OF ISO/IEC 10646

Please fill all the sections A, B and C below.
Please ensure you are using the latest Form from http://www.dkuug.dk/JTC1/SC2/WG2/docs/summaryform.html.
See also http://www.dkuug.dk/JTC1/SC2/WG2/docs/roadmaps.html for latest Roadmaps.

A. Administrative

1. Title: Preliminary proposal to encode the Vai script into the SMP of the UCS
2. Requester's name: Charles L. Riley, José R. Rivera, Tombekai V. Sherman, and Jason Glavy
3. Requester type (Member body/Liaison/Individual contribution): Individual contribution
4. Submission date: 07 February 2005
5. Requester's reference (if applicable): 
6. Choose one of the following: 

| This is a complete proposal: | X |
| or, More information will be provided later: | |

B. Technical - General

1. Choose one of the following:

| a. This proposal is for a new script (set of characters): | X |
| Proposed name of script: | Vai |

| b. The proposal is for addition of character(s) to an existing block: |
| Name of the existing block: |

2. Number of characters in proposal: 223
3. Proposed category (select one from below - see section 2.2 of P&P document):

| A-Contemporary | X | B.1-Specialized (small collection) | B.2-Specialized (large collection) |
| C-Major extinct | | D-Attested extinct | E-Minor extinct |
| F-Archaic Hieroglyphic or Ideographic | | G-Obscure or questionable usage symbols |

4. Proposed Level of Implementation (1, 2 or 3) (see Annex K in P&P document): Level 1
   Is a rationale provided for the choice? No
   If Yes, reference: 

5. Is a repertoire including character names provided? Yes

   a. If YES, are the names in accordance with the “character naming guidelines” in Annex L of P&P document? Yes
   b. Are the character shapes attached in a legible form suitable for review? Yes

6. Who will provide the appropriate computerized font (ordered preference: True Type, or PostScript format) for publishing the standard? To Be Determined
   If available now, identify source(s) for the font (include address, e-mail, ftp-site, etc.) and indicate the tools used:

7. References:

   a. Are references (to other character sets, dictionaries, descriptive texts etc.) provided? Yes
   b. Are published examples of use (such as samples from newspapers, magazines, or other sources) of proposed characters attached? Yes

8. Special encoding issues:
   Does the proposal address other aspects of character data processing (if applicable) such as input, presentation, sorting, searching, indexing, transliteration etc. (if yes please enclose information)? No

9. Additional Information:
   Submitters are invited to provide any additional information about Properties of the proposed Character(s) or Script that will assist in correct understanding of and correct linguistic processing of the proposed character(s) or script. Examples of such properties are: Casing information, Numeric information, Currency information, Display behaviour information such as line breaks, widths etc., Combining behaviour, Spacing behaviour, Directional behaviour, Default Collation behaviour, relevance in Mark Up contexts, Compatibility equivalence and other Unicode normalization related information. See the Unicode standard at http://www.unicode.org for such information on other scripts. Also see http://www.unicode.org/Public/UNIDATA/UCD.html and associated Unicode Technical Reports for information needed for consideration by the Unicode Technical Committee for inclusion in the Unicode Standard.

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C. Technical - Justification

1. Has this proposal for addition of character(s) been submitted before? __ No __
   If YES explain ____________________________

2. Has contact been made to members of the user community (for example: National Body, user groups of the script or characters, other experts, etc.)? __ Yes __
   If YES, with whom? Svend E. Holsoe, John V. Singler, Tombekai V. Sherman, Mohamed B. Nyei, and others listed in the Acknowledgements
   If YES, available relevant documents: N/A

3. Information on the user community for the proposed characters (for example: size, demographics, information technology use, or publishing use) is included? __ Yes __

4. The context of use for the proposed characters (type of use; common or rare) __ Common __

5. Are the proposed characters in current use by the user community? __ Yes __

6. After giving due considerations to the principles in the P&P document must the proposed characters be entirely in the BMP? __ No __
   If YES, is a rationale provided? ____________________________
   If YES, reference: ____________________________

7. Should the proposed characters be kept together in a contiguous range (rather than being scattered)? __ Yes __

8. Can any of the proposed characters be considered a presentation form of an existing character or character sequence? __ No __
   If YES, is a rationale for its inclusion provided? ____________________________
   If YES, reference: ____________________________

9. Can any of the proposed characters be encoded using a composed character sequence of either existing characters or other proposed characters? __ No __
   If YES, is a rationale for its inclusion provided? ____________________________
   If YES, reference: ____________________________

10. Can any of the proposed character(s) be considered to be similar (in appearance or function) to an existing character? __ No __
    If YES, is a rationale for its inclusion provided? ____________________________
    If YES, reference: ____________________________

11. Does the proposal include use of combining characters and/or use of composite sequences? __ No __
    If YES, is a rationale for such use provided? ____________________________
    If YES, reference: ____________________________
    Is a list of composite sequences and their corresponding glyph images (graphic symbols) provided? ____________________________
    If YES, reference: ____________________________

12. Does the proposal contain characters with any special properties such as control function or similar semantics? __ No __
    If YES, describe in detail (include attachment if necessary) ____________________________

13. Does the proposal contain any Ideographic compatibility character(s)? __ No __
    If YES, is the equivalent corresponding unified ideographic character(s) identified? ____________________________
    If YES, reference: ____________________________
**Origins of the Vai Script**
Since Momolu Duwalu Bukele devised the Vai syllabary in the early 1800s, the Vai of Liberia and Sierra Leone have made extensive use of the script (Mafundikwa 2004). Though then an agrarian society, the Vai built an educational infrastructure that enabled the script to flourish and guaranteed its use, indeed, its dissemination amongst the Vai (Mafundikwa 2004).

Keeping written records helped Vai traders of the 19th century flourish in comparison to their Liberian competitors (Mafundikwa 2004). Negotiations could be handled via messengers, trade in valuable commodities was facilitated with a written record, and slaving, then illegal with British enforcers patrolling the coasts, continued – the ‘coded’ messages in Vai thwarting British intervention (Mafundikwa 2004).

The Vai syllabary is the oldest of the Mande (indigenous scripts of Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Mali) syllabaries.

**Document Archives**
Numerous sources exist documenting the use of the Vai script. Among these are the works of Sigismund W. Koelle, a German philologist and one of the first Europeans to document the script, and the works and personal papers of Momolu Massaquoi, Counsel General of Liberia in Hamburg.

In addition to these, there are the writings of the Vai including the numerous publications of the Institute of Liberian Languages, the Book of Rora/Ndole, folktales published in George Washington Ellis’s Negro Culture in West Africa, the archives at Indiana University’s Liberian Collections Project, and two manuscripts at the Harvard Houghton Manuscript Collection. Others are held in private hands.

**Current Usage**
Presently, Vai is spoken by over 100,000 people in northwestern Liberia and Sierra Leone (Ethnologue.com, Mafundikwa 2004). The script remains in use today, particularly amongst Vai traders (Christin 2002); the literary corpus of Vai texts is growing and includes those sources cited above as well as a translation of the Qur’an and a recent translation of the New Testament into Vai.

Supplementing these sources, Silvia Scribner and Michael Cole’s *The Psychology of Literacy* provides photographic documentation of the daily use of Vai in Vai country.

**Digital Use**
Although no national encoding standard exists, various fonts do, including those created by Jason Glavy which cover the full range of characters in David Dalby’s charts, that created by David Drevlow of Lutheran Bible Translators for their publication of a Vai New Testament, and that developed by SIL.
| 11880 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE NEH | 118A0 | 歌 | VAI SYLLABLE NGOR |
| 11881 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE NE | 118A1 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE NGO |
| 11882 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE NI | 118A2 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE NGU |
| 11883 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE NOR | 118A3 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE PA |
| 11884 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE NO | 118A4 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE PEH |
| 11885 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE NU | 118A5 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE PE |
| 11886 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE NDA | 118A6 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE PI |
| 11887 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE NDEH | 118A7 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE POR |
| 11888 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE NDE | 118A8 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE PO |
| 11889 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE NDI | 118A9 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE PU |
| 1188A | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE NDOR | 118AA | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE RA |
| 1188B | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE NDO | 118AB | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE REH |
| 1188C | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE NDU | 118AC | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE RE |
| 1188D | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE NYA | 118AD | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE RI |
| 1188E | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE NYEH | 118AE | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE ROR |
| 1188F | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE NYI | 118AF | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE RO |
| 11890 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE NYOR | 118B0 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE RU |
| 11891 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE NYU | 118B1 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE SA |
| 11892 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE NJA | 118B2 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE SEH |
| 11893 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE NJEH | 118B3 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE SE |
| 11894 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE NJE | 118B4 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE SI |
| 11895 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE NJI | 118B5 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE SOR |
| 11896 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE NJOR | 118B6 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE SO |
| 11897 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE NJO | 118B7 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE SU |
| 11898 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE NJU | 118B8 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE TA |
| 11899 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE NNA | 118B9 | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE TEH |
| 1189A | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE NNEH | 118BA | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE TE |
| 1189B | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE NNOR | 118BB | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE TI |
| 1189C | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE NGA | 118BC | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE TOR |
| 1189D | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE NGEH | 118BD | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE TO |
| 1189E | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE NGE | 118BE | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE TU |
| 1189F | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE NGI | 118BF | 言 | VAI SYLLABLE VA |
118C0  క VAI SYLLABLE VEH
118C1  ཁ VAI SYLLABLE VE
118C2  ག VAI SYLLABLE VI
118C3  གྷ VAI SYLLABLE VOR
118C4  ང VAI SYLLABLE VO
118C5  ཅ VAI SYLLABLE VU
118C6  ཆ VAI SYLLABLE WA
118C7  ཇ VAI SYLLABLE WEH
118C8  ཈ VAI SYLLABLE WE
118C9  ཉ VAI SYLLABLE WI
118CA  ཊ VAI SYLLABLE WOR
118CB  ཋ VAI SYLLABLE WO
118CC  ཌ VAI SYLLABLE WU
118CD  ད VAI SYLLABLE WAN
118CE  དྷ VAI SYLLABLE WEHN
118CF  ན VAI SYLLABLE WIN
118D0  བ VAI SYLLABLE YA
118D1  བྷ VAI SYLLABLE YEH
118D2  མ VAI SYLLABLE YE
118D3  ཙ VAI SYLLABLE YI
118D4  ཚ VAI SYLLABLE YOR
118D5  ཛ VAI SYLLABLE YO
118D6  ཛྷ VAI SYLLABLE YU
118D7  ཝ VAI SYLLABLE ZA
118D8  ཞ VAI SYLLABLE ZEH
118D9  ཟ VAI SYLLABLE ZE
118DA  འ VAI SYLLABLE ZI
118DB  ཡ VAI SYLLABLE ZOR
118DC  ར VAI SYLLABLE ZO
118DD  ལ VAI SYLLABLE ZU
118DE  ཤ VAI SYLLABIC NASAL
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Figure 1: Excerpt from the Standard Vai Script
Figure 2: Excerpt from Ellis’ *Negro Culture in West Africa*
Figure 3: Excerpt from the Book of Rora/Ndole
Figure 4: Posted Sign, from Scribner and Cole’s *The Psychology of Literacy*

Figure 5: Shop notice, from Scribner and Cole’s *The Psychology of Literacy*

Figure 6: Muslim Brotherhood banner, from Scribner and Cole’s *The Psychology of Literacy*
Figure 7: Vai letter with translation, from Scribner and Cole’s *The Psychology of Literacy*
Bibliographic References


