Universal Multiple-Octet Coded Character Set
International Organization for Standardization
Organisation Internationale de Normalisation
Международная организация по стандартизации

Doc Type: **Working Group Document**
Title: **Proposal to encode the Osmanya script in Plane 1 of the UCS**
Source: **Michael Everson**
Status: **Expert Contribution**
Action: **For consideration by JTC1/SC2/WG2**
Date: **1999-01-25**

A. Administrative

1. Title
Proposal to encode the Osmanya script in Plane 1 of the UCS.
2. Requester's name
Michael Everson, EGT (WG2 member for Ireland).
3. Requester type
Expert contribution.
4. Submission date
1999-01-25.
5. Requester's reference
6a. Completion
This is a complete proposal.
6b. More information to be provided?
No.

B. Technical – General

1a. New script? Name?
Yes. Osmanya.
1b. Addition of characters to existing block? Name?
No.
2. Number of characters
27.
3. Proposed category
Category B.1.
4. Proposed level of implementation and rationale
As a simple left-to-right alphabetic script, Osmanya requires Level 1.
5a. Character names included in proposal?
Yes.
5b. Character names in accordance with guidelines?
Yes.
5c. Character shapes reviewable?
Yes (see below).
6a. Who will provide computerized font?
Michael Everson.
6b. Font currently available?
Yes.

6c. Font format?
TrueType.
7a. Are references (to other character sets, dictionaries, descriptive texts, etc.) provided?
Yes. See the bibliography below.
7b. Are published examples (such as samples from newspapers, magazines, or other sources) of use of proposed characters attached?
Yes, see below.
8. Does the proposal address other aspects of character data processing?
Yes; see Unicode properties below.

C. Technical – Justification

1. Contact with the user community?
No.
2. Information on the user community?
Probably only the scholarly and library communities, since the script was abandoned in 1973 in favour of Latin orthography for Somali.
3a. The context of use for the proposed characters?
Used to write Somali, especially from 1961–1973 (when Osmanya enjoyed official sanction); Osmanya was devised in 1920–22.
3b. Reference
See bibliography below.
4a. Proposed characters in current use?
Yes.
4b. Where?
By scholars and librarians; there could possibly still be some native use.
5a. Characters should be encoded entirely in BMP?
No.
5b. Rationale
Accordance with the Roadmap.
6. Should characters be kept in a continuous range?
Yes.
7a. Can the characters be considered a presentation form of an existing character or character sequence?
No.
7b. Where?
7c. Reference
8a. Can any of the characters be considered to be similar (in appearance or function) to an existing character?
No.
8b. Where?
8c. Reference
9a. Combining characters or use of composite sequences included?
No.
9b. List of composite sequences and their corresponding glyph images provided?
No.
10. Characters with any special properties such as control function, etc. included?
No.

E. Proposal

The Osmanya script, called in Somali *far Soomaali* 'Somali writing' or *Ismanya*, was devised in 1920–1922 by Cismaan Yuusuf Keenadiid to represent the Somali language. It replaced an attempt by

Sheikh Uweys of the Confraternity Qadiriyyah (died 1909) to devise an Arabic-based orthography for Somali. It has in turn been replaced by the Latin orthography of Muuse Xaaji Ismaaciil Galaal (1914-1980). In 1961 both the Latin and Osmanya scripts were adopted for use in Somalia, but in 1969 there was a coup, with one of its stated aims the resolution of the debate over the country's writing system. Latin orthography was adopted finally in 1973. Gregersen said in 1977 that some 20,000 or more people use Osmanya in private correspondance and in bookkeeping and that several books and a fortnightly journal *Horseed* ('*Vanguard*') was published, all "cyclostyped" which I take to be equivalent to "cyclostyled" and to mean 'mimeographed'.
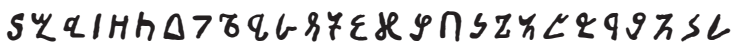
Structure

Osmanya is a simple alphabetic script, read from left to right in horizontal lines running from top to bottom. It has 22 consonants and five vowels. Long vowels are written with Arabic conventions: by the addition of ALEF to A; by the addition of WAW to U and O; by the addition of YEE to E and I. Long EE and OO can also be represented by doubling the signs.

Ordering

Alphabetical ordering follows the order of the Arabic alphabet, except that AIN (CAIN) and GHAIN (GAIN) appear to be reversed. This ordering, given in Diringer 1996, has been followed here. Diringer gives only the transliteration of the characters; in the names list below I have used the names of the Arabic letters of the alphabet, written in modern Latin Somali orthography. There may be errors in the spelling of the names.

Issues

Gregerson 1977 says the alphabet has 29 signs including 10 vowels, which doesn't quite tally with the way I'd interpret the data. It would help if I could see Cerulli 1932 and Maino 1951, but all I have is Gregersen. Gregersen says that Cerulli describes long-vowel representation as represented here in this proposal (and which was also presented in Diringer 1947). He also says that Maino describes "special symbols, which were modifications of those used for the corresponding short vowels" as being used to represent long vowels. These sound to me like ligatures, but they are probably fixed ligature-letters like æ and œ, not contextual ligatures as in Arabic. The alphabets Gregersen gives are presented below in Annex A. He shows the following orders:

Cerulli: �
? b t j x *kh* d r s *sh dh* g c f q k l m n w h y i u o a e

Maino: ꞏicon
b t j x *kh* d r s *sh dh* g c f q k l m n h i u o a e y w o a e

Where the two differ is that *alef*, *waw* and *yee* are considered long vowels, not consonants, and *o* and *e* have unique long forms as well. So it may be that there were two orthographies used. The sample given in Nakanishi shows its second-to-last character as what looks like an *i-alef* ligature. Gregersen says that Cismaan Yuusuf "himself denied ever using the system reported by Cerulli".

Code positions proposed in the table are based on my Roadmap to the BMP, version 3.0, 1999-01-23.

Unicode Character Properties

Spacing letters, category "Lo", bidi category "L" (strong left to right)
      0001 2000 - 0001 201A

Bibliography

Cerulli, Enrico. 1932. "Tentativo indigeno di formare un alfabeta somalo", in *Oriente Maderno*

    12:212–13.

Diringer, David. 1996 (1947). *The alphabet: a key to the history of mankind.* Munshiram Manoharlal. ISBN 81-215-0748-0

Gaur, Albertine. 1992. *A history of writing.* London: British Library. ISBN 0-7123-0270-0

Gregersen, Edgar A. 1977. *Language in Africa: an introductory survey.* New York: Gordon and Breach. ISBN 0-677-04380-5

Maino, Mario. 1951. "L'alfabeta 'Osmania' in Somalia", in *Rassegna di Studi Etopici* 10:108–21.

Nakanishi, Akira. 1990. *Writing systems of the world: alphabets, syllabaries, pictograms.* Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle. ISBN 0-8048-1654-9

Annex A

Sample from Nakanishi 1990.

Transcription:

dal *dh*eyr low gu aa guwrsado *shish*aye low gu aa de*iio*

Sample from Gaur 1990.

Transcription:

*dh*eyr low gu aa guwrsadw *sh*ay

This text is suspect; it appears to be derived from the sample in Nakanishi 1990.

To the right is shown Cerulli and Maino's alphabets as given in Gregersen 1977.

	Cerulli 1932	Maino 1951
ʔ		
b		
t		
j		
ħ		
x		
d		
r		
s		
ʃ		
ɖ		
g		
ɢ		
f		
q		
k		
l		
m		
n		
w		
h		
y		
i		
u		
o		
a		
e		
y, ii		
w, uu		
oo		
aa		
ee		

TABLE XXX - Row 20: OSMANYA

	200	201
0	ട	∩
1	Ч	ʃ
2	ɑ	Z
3	l	ⱪ
4	H	∠
5	ђ	ɣ
6	◬	ɋ
7	7	ɡ
8	ȣ	ⱬ
9	ɋ	ꙅ
A	৮	∠
B	ꝁ	ꭷ
C	ꝼ	ꙇ
D	Ɛ	
E	ℋ	
F	ꝫ	

G = 00
P = 01

TABLE XXX - Row 20: OSMANYA

dec	hex	Name		dec	hex	Name
	00	OSMANYA LETTER ALEF				
	01	OSMANYA LETTER BEE				
	02	OSMANYA LETTER TEE				
	03	OSMANYA LETTER JIIM				
	04	OSMANYA LETTER XAA				
	05	OSMANYA LETTER KHAA				
	06	OSMANYA LETTER DAL				
	07	OSMANYA LETTER REE				
	08	OSMANYA LETTER SIIN				
	09	OSMANYA LETTER SHIIN				
	0A	OSMANYA LETTER DHAD				
	0B	OSMANYA LETTER GAIN				
	0C	OSMANYA LETTER CAIN				
	0D	OSMANYA LETTER FEE				
	0E	OSMANYA LETTER QAF				
	0F	OSMANYA LETTER KAF				
	10	OSMANYA LETTER LAM				
	11	OSMANYA LETTER MIIM				
	12	OSMANYA LETTER NUN				
	13	OSMANYA LETTER WAW				
	14	OSMANYA LETTER HEE				
	15	OSMANYA LETTER YEE				
	16	OSMANYA LETTER I				
	17	OSMANYA LETTER U				
	18	OSMANYA LETTER O				
	19	OSMANYA LETTER A				
	1A	OSMANYA LETTER E				
	1B	OSMANYA LETTER OO ?????				
	1C	OSMANYA LETTER EE ?????				
	1D	(This position shall not be used)				
	1E	(This position shall not be used)				
	1F	(This position shall not be used)				