Memo for the Development of the ADLaM Romanization Table
Aug. 19. 2023
To: ALA-LC Romanization Tables Review Board
From: Review Subcommittee

Subcommittee Members:

- Jessalyn Zoom, Review Board Member – Library of Congress
- Charles Riley, Table Creator – Yale University
- Abdoulaye Barry, Script co-creator
- Ibrahima Barry, Script co-creator
- Erin Freas-Smith, Chair, Review Subcommittee – Library of Congress
- Edward Miner, Review Subcommittee Member – Library of Congress
- Laverne Page, Review Subcommittee Member – Library of Congress

Script overview:

Ibrahima and Abdoulaye Barry began developing the ADLaM script in the late 1980s in order to write the Fulani language more accurately than with Arabic characters. The script spread organically through Fulani-speaking countries in West Africa through small classes and grassroots excitement. The limitation of the script was that it could not be typed and replicated electronically and relied upon handwritten characters published via scanning. The ADLaM alphabet was added to the Unicode Standard in June 2016 (Unicode 9.0) and updated with the Windows 10 release in October 2018.

In response to the marked increase in publications utilizing the ADLaM script, Charles Riley created the draft table independently over a few years culminating in most recent draft submitted to subcommittee in June 2022.

Subcommittee timeline:

July 1: Subcommittee meeting 1: set priorities, roles, and created timeline
July 15: Subcommittee meeting 2: reviewed table, compiled list of relevant reviewers
August 12: Subcommittee meeting 3: reviewed table, compiled list of relevant reviewers, and reviewed transliteration tools
Aug. 15-24: compiling subcommittee review memo; posting table to online forums and targeted emails for review
Aug. 24-Oct. 7: Outside review period
Oct. 14: subcommittee will reconvene to discuss comments and finalize draft table.

Summary of key discussion points:
1. The subcommittee agreed that it is important to follow regional orthography trends to represent the most correct and most easily recognizable transliteration of characters. For example, the utilization of **ny** over **ñ** for the Latin transliteration. See, for example, established transliteration for Pular.
2. The ADLaM script was developed over many years and included several stylistic changes until the final version was set in 2018. This led to the common use of two similar scripts. Initially the draft table incorporated both version to be as inclusive and clear as possible for the users of the table, and to account for any materials published before 2018. The subcommittee resolved that

the scripts were similar enough so that a table note explaining the slight differences that table users might encounter in earlier published materials could circumvent any confusion.

3. The subcommittee agreed that alignment with transliteration software is paramount to the successful usage of Romanization tables when possible. Existing transliteration tools were tested, and an additional transliteration tool is in development in consultation with the subcommittee, utilizing the draft table. Currently this tool has an estimated 80% accuracy rate due to two factors: default settings for uniform usage of uppercase or lowercase Latin characters during the ADLaM to Latin transliteration; and the use of three letter clusters for more complex ADLaM characters. In both instances, the resultant Latin transliteration is cosmetically different, but the combined characters can be read as intended (ex. q instead of k represented, which does not change the meaning of the word). In addition, the static table serves as a reference point to users of this transliteration tool to help clarify any unintended cosmetic variances.

4. Finally, the focus of the subcommittee was to render and disseminate an acceptable and mostly complete Romanization table in order to rely upon the script user community to suggest and inform the final draft. Recognizing the widespread utilization of the script, and the inherent superiority of native language speakers in the development of transliterated character usage, the subcommittee looks forward to a greater level of granular discussion and suggestions on the draft table.