

The UK Linguistics Olympiad 2018



The N'ko script was invented (or rediscovered, depending on sources) by the Guinean Souleymane Kanté in 1949. Today, N'ko is still used to write Mandinka, as well as Dyula and Bambaré, which are all languages from the Mande language family spoken across a range of West African nations: Burkina Faso, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Mali, Senegal, and Sierra Leone. These are all tone languages, but the tones (which are usually indicated by accents) have been omitted in this problem to make it simpler. The symbol 'o' represents a vowel pronounced like the 'o' in 'hot'. The script's name (N'ko) means 'I speak', and in N'ko it is written **𞤅𞤲𞤸**, while its inventor's surname is written **𞤅𞤲𞤸𞤴𞤸**.



Name in transcription		Description
1	Konakiri	Conakry (capital of Guinea)
2	Kindia	town in Guinea
3	N'sérégbédé	city in Guinea
4	Soromaya	town in Guinea
5	Faranna	city in Guinea
6	Djigoué	town in Burkina Faso
7	Tomboutou	Timbuktu (city in Mali)
8	Bisawo	Bissau (as in Guinea-Bissau)
9	Abidjan	city in Côte d'Ivoire
10	M'praeso	town in Ghana
11	Gbésoba	town in Guinea
12	Guekedou	city in Guinea

Name in N'Ko	
𞤲𞤵𞤮𞤳	A
𞤵𞤴𞤳𞤸	B
𞤲𞤴𞤴𞤳	C
𞤲𞤴𞤳𞤴	D
𞤸𞤴𞤴𞤴𞤴	E
𞤴𞤸𞤴𞤴	F
𞤵𞤴𞤴𞤴𞤴	G
𞤴𞤴𞤴𞤴𞤴	H
𞤴𞤴𞤴𞤴𞤴𞤴	I
𞤴𞤴𞤴𞤴𞤴𞤴	J
𞤴𞤴𞤴𞤴𞤴𞤴𞤴	K
𞤴𞤴𞤴𞤴𞤴𞤴𞤴𞤴	L

[illegible]

Your name:

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Solution and marking.

Scoring

- 1 for each correct letter (max 12)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
E	H	K	D	C	L	J	B	F	G	A	I

Your name:

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Commentary

Key to transliteration

A	B	D	DJ	E	É	F	G	GB	K	KH	L	M	N	O	OU	P	R	S	T	Y	Z	M'	N'
ɪ	f	ɒ	ʎ	o	^	p	˙	ʌ	ɥ	˙ɥ	ɥ	Δ	ɹ	ɔ	u	ɸ	ʈ	ɓ	ɗ	ɘ	˙ɘ	ɱ	ɲ

Notes

- The writing direction is right-to-left.
- Mostly the transliteration is simply letter-for-letter, but
 - note the digraphs DJ, GB, KH and OU
 - that E and É are different.
- DJ and Z, GB and G, and K and KH form pairs, the second in each case being written as the first followed by a dot ˙.
- GÉ and GI are written GUÉ and GUI.
- the U is not transcribed.
- The syllabic nasal written as N' or M' depending on the following sound, has the same symbol ɲ.