

**The basics of
Soninke Ajami**

ن ر و أَجْمِن خَرْنَع

Read and write Soninke in Arabic script

سوننگنخېن خرنجن د ا سفند ت اربنسگرن ع

29 March 2014

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Read and write Soninke in Arabic script

سوننگنخبڻ خرنبن دَا سَفَنَدِ تِ اَرِينِسِڭڭِن عَ

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Language: Soninke, spoken in Mali, Senegal, Gambia, Mauritania and in the diaspora

Genre: Literacy, transition guide

Course to learn how to read and write Soninke in Arabic script, for those who read English and Soninke in Roman script.

Foreword

This guide is designed for those who read Soninke in Roman script who want to read and write the language in Ajami (Arabic script). This gives access to Ajami literature, and can also help facilitate contact with Soninkes who read Arabic. There are many of them in Soninkara!

This guide contains reading and writing exercises. Separate sheets are also available with the transcriptions and other answers so you can correct your own work. After having completed all the exercises, you will know the basics of Soninke Ajami.

Enjoy learning!

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Introduction

1. The transcription of non-Arabic languages in Arabic characters is called “Ajami”. Ajami has been developed for many West African languages, including Soninke.
2. Ajami is written from right to left.

Read these Soninke words from right to left: *egoon* ← *eyet*.

Write your name here, from right to left:

_____ ←

3. The Soninke consonants are: **b c d f g h j k l m n p ŋ p q r s t w x y**.
The short vowels in Soninke are: **a e i o u**.
4. In Ajami, the consonants are written as letters on the line, and the vowels as small signs above or below their consonant.

Try and work out what is written here in Soninke:

u o a a a a u
sgr ygn knm m | wr
i i i e

5. In Ajami, as in Arabic, there is no difference between majuscules and miniscules.
6. Ajami, like Arab, is written cursively and most consonants in a word are joined.
There are some exceptions to this rule that we will see later.
7. Every Ajami consonant has four forms: initial, middle, final and isolated.
b b_b_b ←
8. This manual presents a provisional orthography for Soninke Ajami. At the end you will find the differences between this and the orthography decided by the Direction for the Promotion of National Languages in Senegal in 2008.
9. Those who follow this course to the end will be able to read and write Soninke in Ajami.

Lesson 1

Three consonants that are similar (b, p, t)

We will learn the vowels later. We will start with the following three consonants.

These consonants are similar to each other:

b	p	t
ب	پ	ت

Each consonant has four forms:

summary	isolated	final	middle	initial	letter
<u>ببب</u>	ب	ب	ب	ب	b
<u>پپپ</u>	پ	پ	پ	پ	p
<u>تتت</u>	ت	ت	ت	ت	t

ببب پپپ تتت

Copy the consonants here:

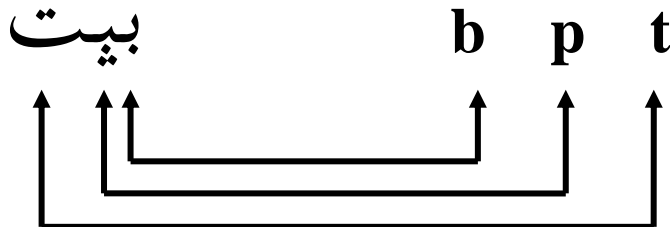
Remember that ...

Ajami is written from right to left



Soninke in Roman script is

written from left to right →



Transcribe in Roman script,
from left to right: →

Transcribe these consonants in Ajami,
← from right to left:

ب _____

_____ t

پ _____

_____ b

ت _____

_____ p

تب _____

بت _____ b t

پت _____

_____ t b

تپ _____

_____ b p t

پت _____

_____ p t b

تپ _____

_____ p b t

پتب _____

_____ t p b

پبت _____

_____ b b t

بتپ _____

_____ b t p

تتب _____

_____ t b p

Lesson 2

The consonants n, ɲ/ñ, y et m

These consonants are similar:

n	ɲ / ñ	y
ن	ي	ي

and also:

m
م

Each consonant has four forms:

summary	isolated	final	middle	initial	letter
ننن ن	م	م	م	م	m
نين ي	ن	ن	ن	ن	n
يبي ي	ي	ي	ي	ي	ɲ / ñ
مم م	ي	ي	ي	ي	y

ننن ن يبي ي نين ي مم م

Write them here:

Remember that ...

Ajami is written from right to left ←

Soninke in Roman script is

written from left to right →



Transcribe these consonants: →

← Transcribe in Ajami:

م _____

_____ m n ɲ

ن _____

_____ n ɲ y

ي _____

_____ ɲ y m

ي _____

_____ y m n

مين _____

_____ m n ɲ y

ني _____

_____ n ɲ y m

نيم _____

_____ ɲ y m n

يمن _____

_____ y m n ɲ

مني _____

_____ ɲ y m n

نيم _____

_____ y t b ɲ

نيمن _____

_____ b m p

يمنن _____

_____ t b y

Lesson 3

The five short vowels (a, e, i, o, u)

In Latin-based alphabets all the consonants and vowels are written on the line. However, in Arab-based alphabets, only the consonants are written on the line. The vowels are written either above or below the consonant. The vowels **a** **o** and **u** are written above a consonant; the vowels **i** and **e** are written below a consonant.

a	e ¹	i	o	u
◌َ	◌ِ	◌ِ	◌ُ	◌ُ

Copy the vowels here:

a	e	i	o	u
◌َ	◌ِ	◌ِ	◌ُ	◌ُ

► Vowels cannot be used alone, without a consonant. For the initial vowels used at the start of a word, or those that make up a word, (for example “a”, “i”, “alimaami”), see lesson 5.

Reading exercise

تِ	يِ يِ يِ	بِ	مِ	نِ	نِ
تِي	مِنِم	بُ	نِنِ	تِي	تِي
نِي	تُب	بُ	مِ	پِ	پِ

¹ According to Senegal Ajami standards the equivalent of the vowel “e” is ◌ِ and not ◌ِ.

Transcribe these words: →

← Transcribe these words in Ajami:

نَ _____

_____ b a

تِمِ _____

_____ n o

مَتِ _____

_____ b i y i

بُتِ _____

_____ t e m u

بِنِ _____

_____ b o n e

بَتِ _____

_____ p a y i

مِي _____

_____ n a m a

مِنِمِ _____

_____ y e t u

نِيمِ _____

_____ b i t a

يَتِ _____

_____ m u n i

Lesson 4

The five nasal vowels and the letter n without a vowel

an	en ¹	in	on	un
نَ	نِ	نِ	نُ	نُ

To indicate a nasal vowel, the letter “n” is added after the consonant that carries the vowel that is nasalised. This letter “n” does not carry a vowel.²

There are also other cases where the letter “n” does not carry a vowel:

- The –n of clarification after a noun or an adjective.

Examples: yaxarenn ri; a laatenn ya ni.

- The word n, used as a personal pronoun or an abbreviation of “nan”

Examples: n ri; o n daga.

- The prenasalisation of a consonant.

Examples: nta, nke, the suffixes –nte (siginte), –nke (Sooninke), –nko (Sabinko).

Reading exercise

ن	نَب	نَت	نَن	نَبُ	نِنْتُ	نَمُ	نِپ
بِنَم	تِنِپت	تِنِم	تِنِت	بِنِت	پِنِت	بِنِتُ	تِنِم
تِپِن يِ نِ		ن تِنَمِن يِ نِ			بِنِتُ نَتَ نِ		

¹ According to Senegal Ajami standards the equivalent of “en” is نِ and not نِ.

² In Soninke Ajami the sukkuun ُ used in Arabic and in other Ajami variants is not used.

Some punctuation signs¹:

Copy the Ajami signs here:

·	∴
?	؟
!	!
,	،

Transcribe these words and phrases: →

← Transcribe in Ajami:

بَنْبُ _____

_____ tonbe

تُنْمُ _____

_____ yanpa

نَبَا! _____

_____ penpe

بُنْتِ _____

_____ yintinte

ن تَنْبِ: _____

_____ N nta bontene.

يَنْكِن يِ نِ بَ ؟ _____

_____ N moton ya ni.

¹ See lesson 13 for a complete table of punctuation signs.






Lesson 5

Initial vowels with alif

As is the case in Arabic, the letter alif in Soninke Ajami is used to carry an initial vowel, either above or below. (An alif that does not carry a vowel elongates the preceding vowel, as we will see in lesson 8.)

The letter alif can be joined to a preceding consonant (on the right) but not with a consonant that follows it (on the left).






Alif is taller than the consonants that we have seen until now.

summary	isolated	final	middle	initial	letter
					alif

Copy here the two forms of the letter alif: ←



The five initial vowels¹

a	e ²	i	o	u
				

Copy them here:

The initial alif is used for many personal pronouns such as (أ), i (إ), an (أن), in (إن) and o (أ).

¹ In Standard Arabic the letter hamza (ء), which indicates a glottal stop, is often used above or below the alif at the start of a word (for example أ for the letter “a” at the start of a word). In Soninke Ajami the hamza is not used with the alif.

² According to Senegal Ajami standards the equivalent of the initial “ee” is إ and not ة .

► In roman script a vowel can be deleted if it is followed by another vowel, and replaced by an apostrophe. For example:

N da a wari.- N d'a wari.

In Ajami **this contraction is never used**, and the **complete form** is always written.

► The letter alif does not join with the following consonant (on the left). Therefore, the consonant after alif takes the initial form, or if it is followed by only one consonant in the word, this consonant is written in its **isolated form** and not in its final form.

Example: **أَن** is written in isolated form **ن** and not final form **نـ** .

► There is a small **distance** between the alif, which does not join on the left, and the following consonant in the same word. This distance is smaller than that between two words. We will see the same thing in lesson 7 for other letters which do not join on the left.

Transcribe these words: ➔	← Transcribe in Ajami:
! ! _____	_____ An bonte ba ?
أَيِ _____	_____ I ma i banbu.
أُم _____	_____ Umu ya ni ba ?
أَمِّي _____	_____ A ni manime yi ?
إِبْنِ _____	_____ A bononten ni.
أَنْ تَنْتِ ! _____	_____ Aminata ya ni !

Lesson 6

The shadda and double consonants

shadda	<p>When a consonant is doubled in Soninke, like “tt”, in Ajami we write ت with a shadda (◌◌◌) above the consonant. Therefore, “bb” is written ب in Ajami.</p> <p>The upper vowel signs (◌◌◌, ◌◌◌, ◌◌◌) are written above the shadda.</p>
◌◌◌	

Examples to copy in Ajami

batte	بِبْ	_____	teppu	تِپْ	_____
banna	بِنْ	_____	bubba	بُبْ	_____

Examples to compare

تِپْ	بُبْ	بُتْ	مِنْ	بِنْ
تِنِپْ	تُبْ	بُتْ	مِنْ	بِنْ

Reading exercise

تِپْ	بِنْ	بِبْ	تِپْ	بِنْ	تِپْ
تِنْمْ	مِنْ	مِنْمْ	تِپْ	بِبْ	مِنْ

Transcribe these phrases:

Transcribe in Ajami:

مَنْ؟

أَمْ نَ مِنْ؟

يَبْنِي نِ؟

أَنْتَ إِبْنِ؟

butte

toppa

annabinyinme

bubba

Lesson 7

Three consonants that do not join
with the following consonant (d, r, w)

d	r	w
د	ر	و

These three consonants **d**, **r** et **w**, like alif, can be joined to a preceding consonant (on the right) but not to a consonant that follows (on the left).¹

summary	letter	letter	letter	letter	letter
د د د د	د	د	د	د	d
ر ر ر ر	ر	ر	ر	ر	r
و و و و	و	و	و	و	w

Look at how certain characters ascend (also like alif), whilst others descend.

Copy them here:

د د ر ر و و

Reading exercise

بَر	رَنِم	بِدِّ	بُدِّ	دِبِّ	دَ	دُ	دُ	دِ
دُو	دَرِّ	تُو	تُو	وُنِّ	وَرِّ	رَنْتَ	رَوَ	

¹ This is also the case for two other consonants in Arabic, that are not used in Soninke Ajami: ج (z) et ذ (dh).

Transcribe these words:

Transcribe in Ajami:

دَنْبِ

demu

دِنْدِ

yide

يَنْدِ

bure

بَرَمِ

toro

يُرِ

wayi

وَنْدِ

newo

تُونِبِ

wure

نَنْبَرِ

nerundi

مَدِّ

warinde

يْتَرْنِمِ

doronme

وَبِّ

An ra w'a yi ?

أَرْبِ

A d'i wari.

أَرِينْدِ

O d'a wutu.

يُورِ

Manmadu Tarawore

Lesson 8

The five long vowels (aa, ee, ii, oo, uu)

When a Soninke word has a long vowel like **oo**, the Ajami form is written by a short vowel sign followed by a letter that does not carry a vowel. For **ee** this is a combination of **ى** (ي without the two dots below) and a small alif: **ىِ**.

Copy the Ajami characters here:

aa	ee ¹	ii	oo	uu
اَ	ىِ	يِ	وُ	وُ

aa	ee	ii	oo	uu
○	○	○	○	○

In Soninke in Roman script long vowels are not used at the start of words. In Ajami this is usually also the case. ²

► In Roman script Soninke a word never ends with a long vowel. In Ajami monosyllabic words are written according to their pronunciation.

Pronunciation	naa	naanu	taa	taanu	tee	teenu	maa	maanu
Roman script	na	naanu	ta	taanu	te	teenu	ma	maanu
Ajami script	نَا	نَانُ	تَا	تَانُ	تِي	تِينُ	مَا	مَانُ

► Attention: there are also some monosyllabic words that are pronounced with a short vowel, for example the word “na” can be written in Ajami in two ways.

نَا وَ نِ:	نَانُ أَوْ نَانُ!
نَا وَ نِ:	نَانُ مَ مَ بْتِ:

¹ According to Senegal Ajami standards the equivalent of “ee” is **ىِ** and not **ىِ**.

² There are some exceptions in Ajami for certain well-known Qur’anic names.

Transcribe: Transcribe in Ajami:

مِرَان	_____	_____	daaru
بِيد	_____	_____	booto
مُود	_____	_____	neene
دُوم	_____	_____	tuure
دِيم	_____	_____	miiri
بُور	_____	_____	tooro
يُوم	_____	_____	diina
يِرَام	_____	_____	ee !
أَمِين	_____	_____	wutaade
بُور	_____	_____	duumante
إِ وَ رِينَ	_____	_____	A ri ten di.
تَانُ تْنِمِ	_____	_____	N ma wa roono.
أَنْ نَنْ رِي !	_____	_____	Naanu tanmi.

Lesson 9

Three tall consonants (g, k, l) and laa

We have already seen the letter alif, which is taller than the others. There are also three other tall letters.

k	g ¹	l
ک	گ	ل

In Ajami, as in Arabic, there is also a special combination:

ل (la) + ا (alif) = لآ (laa).

laa
لآ

summary	isolated	final	middle	initial	letter
کککک	ک	ک	ک	ک	k
گگگگ	گ	گ	گ	گ	g
للل	ل	ل	ل	ل	l
لآلآ	لآ		لآ	لآ	laa

When the consonant ک comes in the final position or isolated position, it can also take this alternative form: ك .

Look at these letters and copy them:

کککک گگگگ للل لآلآ

¹ Selon le standard d'ajami au Sénégal l'équivalent de « g » est گ et non pas گ.

Reading exercise

بَاثَى	كُنْبِي	كِنْبَكَّ	بَمَكْ	كَاوْ
مُلَّ	كِلَّ	وَكَدُّ	لَنْب	كُنْبِكْ
لَاوَر	لَادَ	بَلَّادِ	يَالَ	لَكْرِبْ

Transcribe these words:

Transcribe in Ajami:

كُنْبِي _____

_____ kaagume

دِبِكْمِي _____

_____ mukke

تُنْكِنِيكْ _____

_____ dinka

لَبَلِ _____

_____ kallungoora

كُرْنِكْ _____

_____ luuke

لِكْبِ _____

_____ giilo

دُبِّي _____

_____ tanpille

لَنْبِ _____

_____ wallaana

لَايْدُ _____

_____ labo

كَلَّانَ _____

_____ laato

Lesson 10

Three other consonants that are similar (j, x, ɲ)

j	x	ɲ
ج	خ	غ

summary	isolated	final	middle	initial	letter
ججج ج	ج	ج	ج	ج	j
خخخ خ	خ	خ	خ	خ	x
غغغ غ	غ	غ	غ	غ	ɲ

Copy the letters here:

ججج ج

خخخ خ

غغغ غ

Reading exercise

تَغ	خَوْخ	جِجِين	جَكَّ	جَاجِ
خَلِنَع	جَبَج	پَلِنَع	دُتَع	تَغ

Transcribe:

Transcribe in Ajami:

أَرَجِنِّ

janmu

خَرْبِنَم

yuguxulle

مِزَنَج

tanjikke

خَرَخ

xaaxo

جَلَاخُ

liqe

جَيِّي

waajunde

تَبْلَعَت

balaaxu

جَخْتَنَج

nalinte

مَلْدِرِجَنَم

bajjo

أَوْ خَرَنَج ۞

Ke xoten ya ni !

خَ دَ جِي كِنِ يَخْرِنَ عَ !

A d'a ro benjen di.

Lesson 11

Three other consonants that are similar (f, h, q)

f	q	h
ف	ق	هـ

summary	isolated	final	middle	initial	letter
<u>ففف</u> ف	ف	ف	ف	ف	f
<u>ققق</u> ق	ق	ق	ق	ق	q
<u>ههه</u> هـ	هـ	هـ	هـ	هـ	h

Compare with this consonant that you learned earlier:

م	م	م	م	m
---	---	---	---	---

ففف ققق ههه

Reading exercise

فَابَ	هَاجُ	مَانِ	كَهْتِ	فَرَنْفَرِ	يَقِي	فِلَاءِ
كِرْفِ	خَقِي	دَقُ	بِهْ	نَفَ	فَنَقِي	هَقِي

Transcribe :

فُونِ

هَنِمِ

رَقِ

فِدِّ

يَنْقِ

فُنْبِنِمِ

وُلُهُ

لِفِنْدِ

هِيَجِ

Transcribe in Ajami :

hanu

fo wo fo

noqu

haqile

harafe

hanniye

kafumande

fulaane

follaqe

فَنِّ فَنِّ جِينِ وَ زُونِ فَنَجِنِ دِي

Hari n'a birandi n'a xoorondi !

هَرِنَ وَاتِّ خَلِنَ كِي أَي !

Fatumata, an d'a faamu ?

Lesson 12

Two other consonants that are similar (s, c)

s	c ¹
س	ش

summary	isolée	finale	médiale	initiale	lettre
سسس س	س	س	س	س	s
ششش ش	ش	ش	ش	ش	c

Copiez ici:

سسس س

ششش ش

Reading exercise

سِي	سُنُسُ	سُرُقِ	سُونِنِكِ	سَهَ	كِسِ	سَاسَ
شِيخِ	تَنَشِكِ	شَاجِ	شَخَانِ !	شُشُ	بَشَرِ	شَكَّ
أَشَارِ	بُشِنِ	شَنَسِ	خَرَحَشِ	كَشِ	دِكَشِ	بِشِ

¹ According to Senegal orthography standards the equivalent of “c” is ت and not ش.

In Arabic the letter ش is pronounced as “sh” and not as the Soninke “c”.

Transcribe:

Transcribe in Ajami:

سُنْحَسْ

kososo

بِلِنَج

harisa

شُفُ

cawu

شَكَلِ

wuccu

سَاسِ

kaaca

فَتَنَفَسِي

safa

فِشْ

ceelu

كَشِنَتِ

koccisaga

سَنَسَلْ

caccare

هَرِنَ أَ سَفَنَدِنِ بُونَدِ !

Hari n'o su tanga !

Write your name here in Soninke:

Write your name here in Ajami:

Lesson 13

The punctuation signs

.	,	;	:	?	!
•	،	؛	:	؟	!
-	—	#	*	(...)	
-	—	—	*	(...)	
“...”	‘	’	{...}		
«...»	!	!	⊙...⊙		

Transcribe:

A ti : « N naamu ! »

A ti: « O nan xawa taaxunu Kunbi
ya yi. »

إِ تِ : « جَابِ سِيسِ ! »

إِ تِ : « أَنْنِ خَوَ تَاخُنُ مِنْ »

يِ ؟ «

Lesson 14

Hindu-Arabic numerals (0 to 9)

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
٠	١	٢	٣	٤	٥	٦	٧	٨	٩

Numbers are written from right to left (→), either in Arabic numerals (0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9) or Hindu-Arabic numerals (٠ ١ ٢ ٣ ٤ ٥ ٦ ٧ ٨ ٩), because this is the order in which Arab speakers read their numbers).

Therefore, 1234 is written: ١ ٢ ٣ ٤ and not: ٤ ٣ ٢ ١.

Write today's date here: day _____ month _____ year _____

Write your telephone number here: _____

Transcribe: →	→ Transcribe:
٣٦٠٥٤ _____	_____ 8642
٨٧٥٠٠ _____	_____ 2007
٥٣٩٢ _____	_____ 9753
١٩٢٣ _____	_____ 4150

The Arab calendar is different to the western calendar (Gregorian).

For example the year 2014 corresponds with ١٤٣٦ | ١٤٣٥ in Arabic.

Lesson 15

The Arabic alphabet

Different orders exist for the Arabic alphabet. The traditional order is different to that used today in dictionaries, directories and other alphabet lists.

The traditional order is called “abjad” or “abjada” and starts with

← ا ب ج د

In the modern order similar consonants are grouped together.

Arabic alphabet consonants

خ	ح	ج	ث	ت	ب	ا
kha	haa	jiim	thaa	taa	baa	alif
ص	ش	س	ز	ر	ذ	د
saad	shiin	siin	zaay	raa	thaal	daal
ق	ف	غ	ع	ظ	ط	ض
qaaf	faa	ghayn	ayn	thaa	taa	daad
ي	و	ه	ن	م	ل	ك
yaa	waaw	ha	nuun	miim	laam	kaaf

Exercises

1. Mark on this alphabet chart all the consonants that exist in Soninke Ajami.

N.B. For the letter “kaaf” there are two variants, ك et ك .

2. Which Soninke Ajami consonants do not exist exactly in Arabic?

In Arabic the three short vowels a, i and u can be marked, but often they are not. The long vowels are marked by ا for aa, ي for ii and و for uu, as in Ajami. The vowels e and u are not used in Standard Arabic.

Arabic vowels

The three short vowels and long vowels in Arabic

a	i	u	aa	ii	uu
◌َ	◌ِ	◌ُ	ا◌َ	ي◌ِ	و◌ُ

There are also other signs that exist in Arabic.

We have seen the shadda, which is also used in Soninke Ajami to show a double consonant.

The sukun shows consonants that do not carry a vowel. In Soninke Ajami this is not used.

The hamza shows a glottal stop (phonetic ʔ, transcribed as ‘).

The long aa at the start of a word has a special sign in Arabic. In Soninke Ajami this is not used.

Other signs in Arabic

shadda	sukun	hamza	initial aa
◌ّ	◌◌	ء	آ

Finally, there are grammatical signs in Arabic to show definite nouns. They are pronounced “anne, inne, ounne”, but are different to nasalised vowels.

Grammatical signs in Arabic

an	in	un
◌ّ	◌ّ	◌ّ

Lesson 17 : Summary

The Soninke alphabet and alternative characters

Alternatives*	Soninke Ajami	Soninke	Alternatives*	Soninke Ajami	Soninke
	ببب	b		ووو	w
ت، چ	ششش	c		خخخ	x
ض	ددد	d		ييي	y
ف	ففف	f			
گ، ک، گ	گگگ	g		ا	a
	ههه	h	ه	ه	e
	ججج	j		ي	i
ك (isolated)	ککک	k		و	o
	للل	l		و	u
	لا لا لا	l + alif		ا	aa
	ممم	m	ي	ي	ee
ن	ننن	n		ي	ii
خ	نينن	ɲ / ñ		و	oo
ک	ععع	ŋ		و	uu
پ پ پ	پپپ	p		ا	initial a
	ققق	q	ا	ا	initial e
	ررر	r		ا	initial i
ص	سسس	s		ا	initial o
ط	تتت	t		ا	initial u

* The Senegal Ajami standard for c, g, e and ee, plus old characters.

Transcribe these proverbs:

چي جِخِنِين رَ نَتَ خُورِينِ:

دِگَنَ فَرَنَفَرِنَ دُ تَنُعُنَ فِتِ بَانَ يِ:

جِي كَ تَوُ مَخَ وَ مَخَ، أ مُلْنِ يِ:

Booton duuron ra nta sikki.

Nuxunnen siri yaaxon naxa.

Xaranbalin na bitanbinna xooren ya noxon di.
