

Dear participants of the International Symposium on Africa,

As Secretary of the Nko USA INC in New York, I am honored to share with you the riches of African literature. These literatures, of exceptional diversity and richness, unfold across a range of stories, styles, genres and traditions. They are subdivided into several branches, reflecting the vast cultural and linguistic mosaic of our continent. Allow me to introduce you to the main branches:

Oral literature: The Foundation of our heritage, this branch includes traditional tales, myths, legends, proverbs and oral poetry, transmitted from generation to generation and bearers of cultural, historical and moral values.

Written literature. Precolonial: written literature consists of works from ancient civilizations, such as those of Egypt and Ethiopia, including the famous *Kebra Nagast*. Colonial and postcolonial writings reflect colonial periods and their consequences, exploring resistance, identity and the quest for liberation.

Modern and contemporary literature: This category brings together modern fiction, poetry, theater and essays, addressing current themes such as contemporary life in Africa, the diaspora, the repercussions of colonialism, globalization and social challenges.

Literature of the African Diaspora consists of literary expressions of Africans in the diaspora, particularly in America and Europe, articulating experiences around identity, migration and cultural integration.

French/English/portuguese-speaking African literature:

Works by authors from African nations with these languages, often marked by the colonial imprint, the search for cultural identity and the historical and social realities specific to these regions. These works deal with subjects such as colonialism, independence and cultural hybridity. Works of each of these countries reflect unique perspectives on their cultural and historical contexts.

African literature in indigenous languages: Creations in the continent's indigenous languages, such as Nko(Mandenkan), Swahili, Yoruba, Zulu, etc., testifying to the linguistic richness of Africa.

Each of these branches demonstrates the complexity and plurality of African literatures, with their distinctive characteristics and cultural importance.

We will focus today mainly on The Nko Language and literature. The Nko language and literature is broken up into 10 components.

The first component: (Koumaman sanda) - Is a specific type of proverb meant to pass a message which is structured as 1 statement composed of 3 phrases through what lessons are given through.

Example: All religions speak of 3 things: To do good, To say good, and to avoid sin/wrong.

The second component (Sanda) which are Proverbs: A short, traditional saying that compresses long lessons/sayings to express a piece of common wisdom and truth about life.

Example: A tree on top of a mountain believes itself to be the tallest of all trees, but it is only because of its location.

The third component: (Sanda Mounoun) equivalent to Idiom in English: is similar to a proverb, but it's not a compression of any saying. An idiom is a phrase or expression that has a figurative meaning different from the literal meaning of its individual words.

Example: He shoved me as I leaned forward.

Meaning. The person was betrayed.

The fourth component: (Sanda Korobo) equivalent to Riddle in English: is often presented as a statement or description, that requires creative thinking to solve. This typically involves wordplay, or clever use of language to present a situation or scenario that has a hidden meaning or solution.

Example: I visited a tribe where everyone wore white, and I alone wore red. (Answer: Teeth and tongue)

The fifth literary component of Nko is (Toly) similar to a Tale in English: is a story, often fictional, that recounts events, adventures, or experiences. This can be short or long. In the Nko literature, there are 2 types of tales.

The first, (kanfo) which are Folktales: These are stories to serve the purpose of entertainment, education, cultural preservation, and the transmission of values and beliefs.

The second, (burututu) which are Fables: These stories in particular include animals or inanimate objects as characters, and conveys a moral lesson or truth about human behavior.

The sixth component of Nko language and Literature is (Sirin) similar to Legend/myths: These are traditional narratives or stories, based on real events or people but sometimes exaggerated with fictional elements and supernatural or extraordinary details. The purpose of these are to convey cultural values, beliefs, or ideals and often to explain natural phenomena, and justify social customs.

The seventh component (sigui fili) which is a form of Boasting: These are self-boasts and intimidations exchanged between opposing forces prior to battle, a confrontation that may prompt fear and lead one side to surrender, therefore preventing bloodshed.

The eighth component (La n'gnoma) which is Comparisons: This is a process of comparing the features of 1 thing to another that is known for that same distinct characteristic.

Example: He is as quick as lightning

The ninth component (donkili ni soukou) are Songs/poems: A fundamental form of expression for various purposes such as entertainment, storytelling, and cultural expression.

The final component (Dofo) is History: These are interpretations of past events, societies, and cultures of those who came before us. Its purpose is to provide insights into the causes and consequences of significant events and movements, and plays a critical role in influencing future decisions and actions.

The purpose of N'Ko is to provide a writing system that reflects the phonetics and linguistic complexities of Manding languages, enabling speakers to preserve and transmit their cultural heritage through literature, education, and communication. Before the development of N'Ko, these languages were primarily transmitted orally, limiting their accessibility and preservation. N'Ko has been significant in promoting literacy and linguistic diversity in West Africa. Moreover, N'Ko serves as a symbol of cultural identity and empowerment for speakers of Manding languages. By having their own writing, speakers can assert their linguistic heritage and distinguish themselves from other linguistic communities. This sense of cultural pride and ownership has contributed to the widespread adoption of N'Ko among Manding speakers.

In recent years, A lot of work has gone toward digitizing N'Ko and integrating it into modern technologies, such as computers and mobile devices. This will offer significant benefits in terms of accessibility and usability. But the script's unique character set and writing direction present challenges for digital implementation. Nonetheless, the continued development and use of N'Ko demonstrates its significance as a tool for linguistic preservation and cultural expression in West Africa.

The need for development in digitizing N'Ko is a result of the growing demand for digital literacy and communication tools among Manding speakers, as well as the larger goal of preserving and promoting linguistic diversity in the digital age. By overcoming the technical challenges associated with digitization, N'Ko can continue to serve as a vital medium for cultural expression, education, and community empowerment in West Africa and beyond.

I remain at your disposal to delve deeper into any of these branches or to provide more specific examples and details