RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE

M.Ed. In TESL Program
Language Group Specific Informational Reports

Produced by Graduate Students in the M.Ed. In TESL Program
In the Feinstein School of Education and Human Development

Language Group: Fulah
Author: Francine Paradis

Program Contact Person: Nancy Cloud (ncloud@ric.edu)

FULAH LANGUAGE GROUP

Francine L. Paradis
TESL 539
Summer 2011

What is Fulah?

➢ Fulah is a family of languages spoken by the Fula people of west Africa in the sub-Sahara regions from Senegal to Chad.

➢ It is the best known of the West African Niger-Congo languages, classified in the west Atlantic branch of this language family.

➢ It is spoken in Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon, Gambia, Chad, Sierra Leone, Benin, Guinea-Bissau, Sudan, Central African Republic, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Liberia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon.

➢ Fulah is known by different names in different locations. These include Fula, Fulfulde, Pula and Pulaar.

Fulah is a macrolanguage of Senegal

❖In Senegal the language is called Pulaar and in Guinea it is called Pular.

❖Seventeen African countries, stretching from Senegal in the west to Sudan in the east are home to speakers of Fulah.

❖Speakers of Fulah dialects are designated by many names, including Haalpulaar'n, Fula, Fulbe, Peul, Fulani and Fellata.

❖It is spoken as a first language by the Fula people (also known as Fulbe or Fulani) and related groups such as the Tukulor (Senegal River Valley) from the Senegambia and Guinea area to Cameroon and the Sundan.

❖It is also spoken as a second language by many different ethnic and cultural groups in various parts of the west African and subsaharan regions.

❖Among its more widely spoken dialects are:

Adamawa Fulfulde – Cameroon, Chad, Sudan
Bagirmi Fulfulde – Chad, Central African Republic, Sudan
Borgu Fulfulde - Benin, Togo, Nigeria
Central-Eastern Niger Fulfulde – Niger
Maasina Fulfulde – Mali, Ghana, Sudan
Nigerian Fulfulde – Nigeria, Sudan
Western Niger Fulfulde – Niger
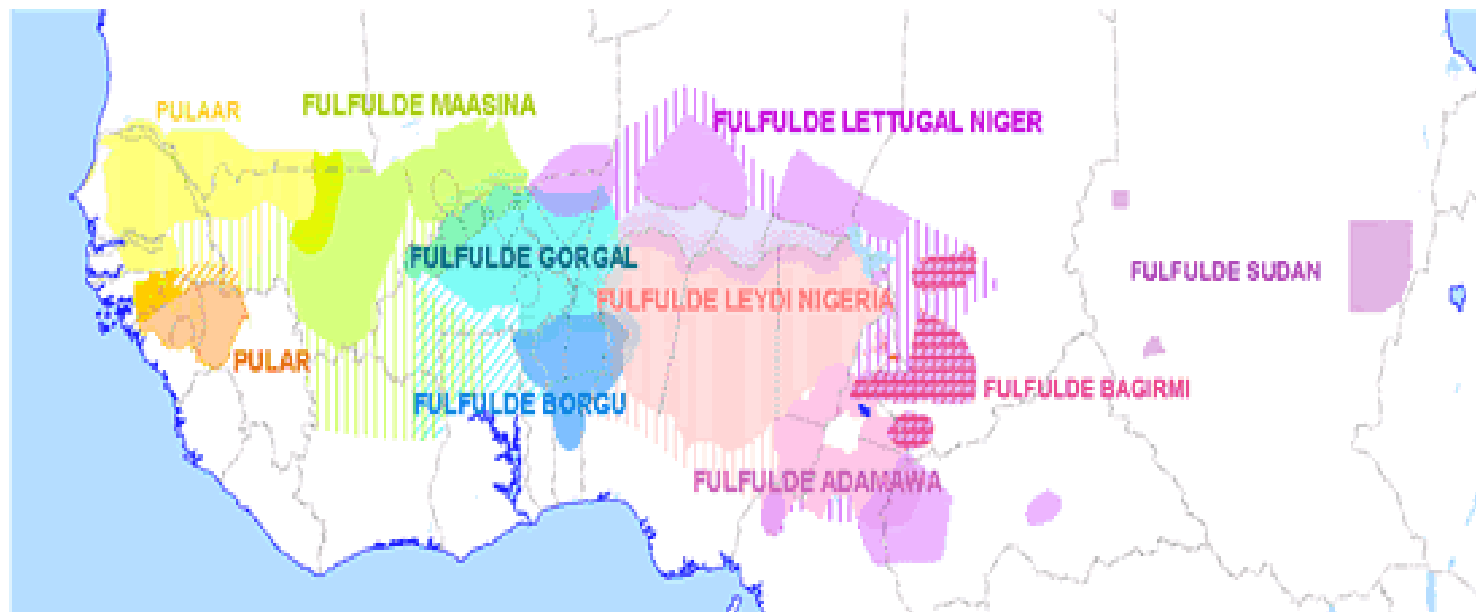Pulaar – Senegal, Mauritania, Gambia
Pular – Guinea, Mali, Senegal, Sierra Leone

❖It is estimated that 45-60 million people speak a dialect of Fulah.

Written Language

➤ Fulah has developed with two systems of writing: a Latin-based alphabet and an Arabic script that pre-dates the Latin alphabets.

➤ The Latin-based alphabets vary from dialect to dialect and region to region because they were introduced by Europeans during the period of colonization.

➤ Often the Europeans used various and creative ways to use their alphabet to represent unfamiliar sounds.

Problems with Written Language

➢Native speakers of Fulah who utilize the Arabic script as their written form of language will experience problems with written English in regard to both written symbols (letters) and directionality.

➢Directionality: Arabic scripts are read from right to left; English from left to right. Written English would be read "backwards" compared to their first language.

➢Script: The Arabic alphabet is cursive with connected letters and a symbol system that differs from the Latin alphabet used in English.

More Problems with Written Language

➢In written Fulah, long vowels are doubled and two different vowels are never used together. The English rules governing the use of vowels, both for spelling and pronunciation when reading out loud, would result in confusion for speakers of Fulah as it would seem that "the rules do not apply."

➢Quotation marks in English writing would also be a source of confusion. In Fulah writing ", ', " are used to signify accentuation of a consonant.

➢Double consonants in Fulah also signify accentuation of the consonant, unlike English where double consonants are often at the end/beginning of syllables and are pronounced separately.

Problems With Phonology

❖Fulah is primarily a tonal language, sometimes used to represent grammatical categories and at others to differentiate between two identical words.

❖English expresses most grammatical information through word order and auxillaries with far less use of intonation.

Problems with Phonology Continued

❖Another feature of the language is initial consonant mutation between singular and plural forms of nouns and of verbs. Examples of this are:

w ↔ b ↔ mb
r ↔ d ↔ nd
y ↔ j ↔ nj
w ↔ g ↔ ng
f ↔ p
s ↔ c
h ↔ k

Consonant mutation occurs when a consonant in a word is changed according to its morphological and/or syntactic environment.

❖The English use of "s" to denote plurals would differ from the grammatical rules for plurals familiar to speakers of Fulah.

❖Consonant clusters are nearly non-existent in Fulah, presenting another source of confusion when faced with the common consonant combinations found in English (i.e., "ch", "str", "ck").

More Problems With Phonology

❖Most dialects of Fulah have two sets of vowels. Only one set can occur in any given word; this is called vowel harmony,

❖In English many words contain combinations of long, short and silent vowels; this would be confusing to a native speaker of Fulah whose language does not allow for such combinations.

❖Verbs in Fulah dialects are highly inflected. Many ideas that are expressed by words in English are instead realized as prefixes and suffixes. Niger-Congo verbs use various prefixes and suffixes to mark person, tense, aspect, and mood. Suffixes are also used to derive passive, causative, reciprocal, and prepositional forms.

Cross Cultural Communication

➢ There are many taboos in Fulani culture. One important taboo which might be misunderstood by an English speaker is thata married woman never allowed to speak the name of her husband, her in-laws or her first born child. If another person has the same name, she is forbidden to call them by their name.

➢ There is a very high rate of illiteracy among the Fulani and because of this a strong tradition of oral story telling exists.

➢ The Fulani believe that their language is one of the essential elements that determine what a person is, along with their physical ties to their community and their profession. To lose all three of of these qualities to lose membership in one's ethnic group. The Fulani place a high value on maintaining their native language. Teachers of English must be sensitive to this belief.

Cross Cultural Communication Continued

➢ Children are to speak to adults only when given permission and are very restricted as to what topics they may discuss. This could present problems in an English-speaking classroom where students are expected to ask questions, give opinions and present varying viewpoints.

➢ As a sign of respect men often lower their head and avert their eyes when greeting someone superior to them in age or position.

➢ Women tend not to look the other person in the eye even if it is another woman.

➢ It is considered offensive to use the left hand to offer food or gifts to another person.

Bibliography

Internet Sites

By His Grace. (1999). The people of Burkina Faso and the Republic of Niger: The Fulani people.
Retrieved May 15, 2011 from: http://www.byhisgrace.cc/fulani/profile.htm

Diop, A. H. (n.d.). A discussion of Grice's conversational maxims with reference to Pulaar culture
[PDF]. Retrieved May 15, 2011, from:
http://www.gse.upenn.edu/wpel/sites/gse.upenn.edu.wpel/files/archives/v3/v3n2Diop.pdf

Fula Orthographies. (December 2010). In Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.
Retrieved May 14, 2011 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fula_orthographies

Kwintessential. (n.d.). Cameroon: Language, culture, customs and etiquette. Kwintessential.
Retrieved May 15, 2011 from:
http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/globaletiquette/cameroon.html

Lewis, M. Paul (ed.), 2009. Ethnologue: Languages of the world, Sixteenth edition, Dallas, Texas:
SIL. International. Online version: Retrieved May 14, 2011, from:
http://www.ethnologue.com/

The Technology Development Group. (2008). Niger-Congo language family. *About world languages.* 2008. Retrieved May 14, 2011, from:
http://www.aboutworldlanguages.com/NigerCongoLanguageFamily/

Map

SIL International. (2002). Fulfulde language family report. *Fulfulde language continuum.* Retrieved on May 14, 2011 from http://www.sil.org/silesr/2003/silesr2003-009.htm

M.Ed. in TESL Program
Nancy Cloud, Director
Educational Studies Department
Rhode Island College, HBS 206 #5
600 Mt. Pleasant Avenue
Providence, RI 02908
Phone (401) 456-8789
Fax (401) 456-8284
ncloud@ric.edu

The M.Ed. in TESL Program at Rhode Island College
is Nationally Recognized by TESOL and NCATE

REACH
INSPIRE
CONNECT