



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: Wolof
Author: Hilary Greaves

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



WOLOF

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tnEsD_x1x88

Hilary Greaves
Language Group Report
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IMPORTANT INFORMATION

- Spoken in Senegal, Gambia, Mauritania and Mali
 - Also by people in France, Guinea and Guinea-Bissau
- About 7,000,000 speakers
- 3,215,000 speak Wolof as first language
- Part of “Senegambian” language branch (Fula and Seereer also)
 - This is the Northern subgroup of the (West) Atlantic branch of the Atlantic-Congo, which is a member of the Niger-Congo family



<http://www.lmp.ucla.edu/Profile.aspx?menu=004&LangID=20>

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

- Dialect Information:
 - Not many dialects exist in Wolof
 - Most evident in urban vs. conservative of country-side speech
 - Three main dialect regions: Central-North, West and South
 - Dakar's dialect: French influenced
 - Gambia's dialect: English influenced
- Wolof uses a Roman alphabet similar to English
- When written an Arabic script was used- called Wolofal
- History: origins of Wolof unclear
 - Possibly from the Lebu (main ethnic group on Senegal River)
 - Possibly from Lof (the area the Jolof empire established in the 14th century)
waa Lof = "the people of Lof"
 - Socioeconomic integration, urbanization and interethnic marriages rapidly expanded language use in the 20th century

WOLOF PEOPLE

- One of the largest people groups of Senegal
- Live in a large area, from the desert area of the Sahara to the rain forest
- Most are Muslims
- Traditionally lived in small villages ruled by the extended family unit
- Now people move to the cities where they can get jobs
- Known as the “merchants of West Africa”- aggressive traders
- Large involvement in the slave trade- captured people and brought to Dakar port
- Clothing is very important- what a person wears matters
 - Will even go into debt so they can dress elaborately



<http://www.africaguide.com/culture/tribes/wolof.htm>



LINGUISTIC FEATURES

- PHONOLOGY
 - Vowels: less in Wolof
 - This makes it difficult for Wolof speakers to differentiate English vowels in speech
 - Syllable-timed: English is stress-timed, which is unfamiliar
 - Tonal Language: tone for emphasis or attitude is new in English
 - Voiced Final Consonants: Wolof speakers tend to devoice
 - Examples- write for ride, picks for pigs
 - Consonant Clusters: new to Wolof speakers
 - Examples- nest for next, knees for needs



LINGUISTIC FEATURES

- PUNCTUATION
 - confuse English hyphens and dashes
 - Overuse capitals
 - Put unnecessary commas between sentences
- GRAMMAR
 - VERBS: most problems Wolof speakers have is with tenses
 - Problems include: appropriate tenses choice, present perfect and past perfect misused
 - Examples-
 - I was having no money.
 - I have seen him yesterday.
 - In the old days we had traveled on foot.
 - PRONOUNS: Wolof has many pronouns compared to English
 - Problems include: he and him for females and animals, avoid use in writing
 - Examples-
 - I greeted my sister when he came.

LINGUISTIC FEATURES


- GRAMMAR
 - NOUNS
 - Problems include: countable vs. uncountable nouns, definite article usage, expressions of quantity
 - Examples-
 - We had a rain this morning.
 - The South Africa
 - There are a little eggs
 - SUBORDINATE CLAUSES: major problems Wolof speakers have is with tenses
 - Examples
 - If I tell him, he would beat me.
 - I hope you would come.



COMMUNICATION STYLE

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COMMUNICATION STYLE OF THE SENEGALESE PEOPLE INCLUDE:

(based on the people of Senegal because the Wolof are one of the largest
people groups there)

- Indirect communicators
 - Use of many proverbs, sayings, analogies and metaphors during speech (especially when discussing a delicate subject)
 - Passive silence used to avoid conflict
 - Communication remains positive, responses to greetings are always positive even if things are difficult
 - Direct eye contact is seen as arrogant
 - Lower eyes when conversing (especially with someone who is a senior in age or position)
 - Start a conversation with the overall idea then gradually discuss the details
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COMMUNICATION STYLE

- GREETINGS: crucial part of communicating
 - Must be exchanged each time meet someone (even if it's the same day)
 - Lengthy inquiries about the health and well-being of the other person and the other person's family
 - Inquiries occur while exchanging a prolonged handshake (close friends may or kiss three times beginning on the left cheek)
 - Cross-gender touch does occur, except among very religious
 - Should always address a person by their academic, professional or honorific titles in French and surname or first name



WHO CARES?

- 20% of Rhode Island residents reported speaking another language on the 2000 census
- Several “African” languages are spoken in Rhode Island
- These languages have some similar features

LANGUAGE	NUMBER	PERCENT
Population 5 years and over	985,184	100.0
Speak only English	788,560	80.0
Speak a language other than English	196,624	20.0
Speak a language other than English	196,624	20.0
Spanish or Spanish Creole	79,443	8.1
Portuguese or Portuguese Creole	37,437	3.8
French (incl. Patois, Cajun)	19,385	2.0
Italian	13,759	1.4
Mon-Khmer, Cambodian	5,586	0.6
French Creole	4,337	0.4
Chinese	3,882	0.4
Laotian	3,195	0.3
Polish	2,966	0.3
German	2,841	0.3
African languages	2,581	0.3
Arabic	2,086	0.2

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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

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