



# 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

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# The Akan Language

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# Map of Ghana

Akan, as a language refers to a group of very closely related dialects spoken in the southern half of Ghana.

Speakers of the language are found in Ashanti, BrongAhafo, Central, Eastern, Western and parts of the Volta region.



(No photographer. <http://www.africa-atlas.com>)

# Use of Akan in Social Life

- Akan language is the most widely spoken of all Ghanaian Languages. . Its dialects include: Agona, Akuapem, Akwau, Asante, Akye, Assin, bono (Brong) Fante, Kwahu and Wassa.
- The dialects of Akan tend to be grouped into two broad categories
  - Fante
  - Twi
- It is the language used in church
- It is the language of business transactions
- It covers a wide range of socio-cultural environments
- In areas where it is the primary language, (L1) it is the language used in school & is taught as a school subject
- It is growing in its influence as a national language

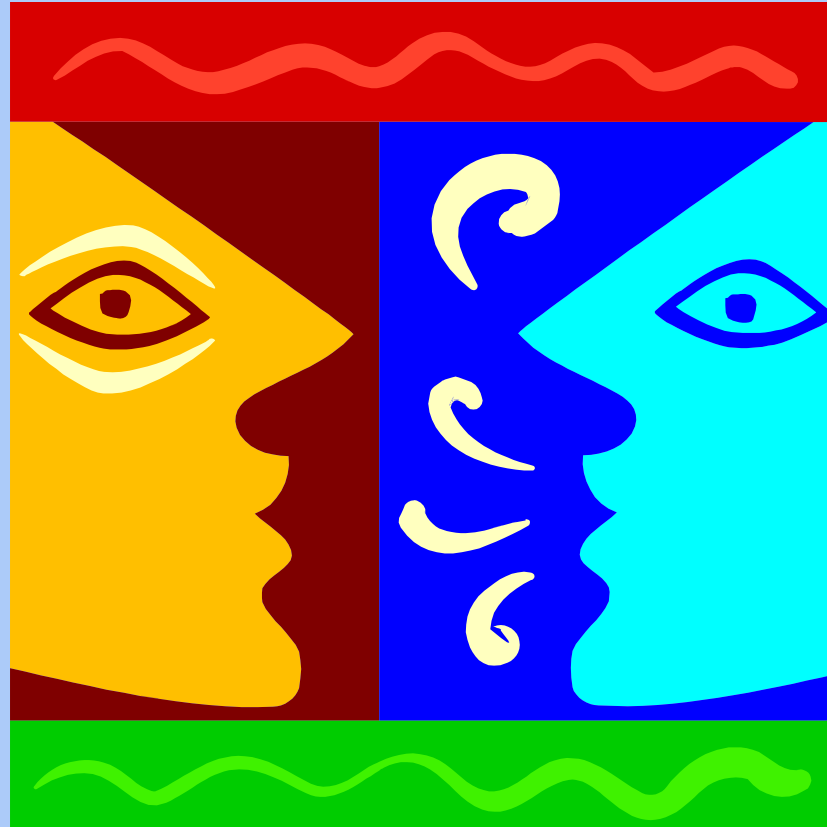
## Dialects of Akan and their number of speakers

- Agona 185,228
- Akuapem 513,561
- Akwamu 97,178
- Akyem 600,282
- Asante 2,578,829
- Agona 238,947
- Ahafo 2,578,829
- Assin 147,114
- Bono 794,526
- Denkyira 89,963
- Fante , 1723,573
- Kwahu 392,241
- Wassa 251,963
- Others 140,425
- TOTAL 7,753,830

- Based on Ghana Statistical Service (2002)

Apart from those who speak Akan as their L1, a sizable number of people speak it as a second language.

# The Akan Language



# The Akan Alphabet

## Vowels

a	e	e	i	o	o	u	ɛ	ɔ
[a]	[i]	[e]	[ɪ]	[ʊ]	[o]	[u]	[ɛ]	[ɔ]

## Consonants

b	d	dw	dwi	f	g	gw	gyi	h	hw	hwi
[b]	[d]	[dʒ]	[dʒʷi]	[f]	[g]	[gʷ]	[dʒi~ɣi]	[h]	[hʷ]	[ɣʷi]
hyi	k	kw	kyi	l	m	n	ng	ngi	nw	nwi
[ɣi]	[kʰ]	[kʷ]	[tɕʰi~cɕʰi]	[l]	[m]	[n, ŋ, ɲ]	[ŋ:]	[ɲĩ]	[ŋŋʷ]	[ɲʷĩ]
nyi/nnyi	p	r	s	t	ti	twi	w	wi		
[ɲĩ]	[pʰ]	[r, ɾ, ɽ]	[s]	[tʰ]	[tɕi]	[tɕʷi]	[w]	[ɣi]		

(<http://www.phonetics.ucla.edu>)

# Akan Pronunciation

## Vowels

a	e	e	i	o	o	u	ɛ	ɔ
[a]	[i]	[e]	[ɪ]	[ʊ]	[o]	[u]	[ɛ]	[ɔ]

## Consonants

b	d	dw	dwi	f	g	gw	gyi	h	hw	hwi
[b]	[d]	[dʒ]	[dʒwi]	[f]	[g]	[gʷ]	[dʒi~ɟi]	[h]	[hʷ]	[ɣwi]
hyi	k	kw	kyi	l	m	n	ng	ngi	nw	nwi
[ɣi]	[kʰ]	[kʷ]	[tɕʰi~cɕʰi]	[l]	[m]	[n, ŋ, ɲ]	[ŋ:]	[ŋi]	[ŋʷ]	[ɲwi]
nyi/nnyi	p	r	s	t	ti	twi	w	wi		
[ɲi:ĩ]	[pʰ]	[ɾ, r, ɽ]	[s]	[tʰ]	[tɕi]	[tɕwi]	[w]	[ɣi]		

(<http://www.phonetics.ucla.edu>)

- Akan languages are tonal with three tones: high, mid and low.
- There are quite complex rules of vowel harmony governing which vowels can appear in the same word.



# Sample texts in Akan languages

## •Akuapem Twi

•Wɔwɔ adesamma nyinaa sɛ nnipa a wɔwɔ ahofadi. Wɔn nyinaa wɔ nidi ne kyɛfa koro. Wɔwɔ adwene ne ahonim, na ɛɛ sɛ wobu wɔn ho wɔn ho sɛ anuanom.

## •Asante

•Nnipa nyinaa yɛ pɛ. Na wɔde adwene ne nyansa na abɔ obiara. Ɛno nti, ɛɛ sɛ obiara dɔ ne yɔnko, bu ne yɔnko, di ne yɔnko ni.

## •Fante

•Wɔwɔ adasa nyina to fahodzi mu, na hɔn nyina yɛ pɛr wɔ enyimnyam na ndzinoa mu. Wɔmaa hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na ɔwɔ dɛ hɔn nkitahodzi mu ndzeyɛ da no edzi dɛ wɔyɛ enuanom.

## •Translation

•All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

*(Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights)*

# Phonology

- West African languages tend to have fewer vowels than English
- West African languages have fewer final consonants and consonant clusters
- Thus many English vowels are not differentiated by West Africans
- Many mid and final consonants sound indistinct
- Most West African languages are both tonal and syllable-timed
- These features tend to give West African English a jerkiness, both in timing and intonation

# Potential Difficulties with English

- Vowels that should be pronounced “weak” are very commonly given the “firm” form implied by the spelling
- Pronunciation faults also affect spelling, especially following the successful use of direct method teacher in primary school

## Rhythm & Stress

West African languages are typically syllable-timed, which strongly affects the rhythm of West African English

Stress-time speech is totally unfamiliar

Contrastive stress as in I did it vs. **I** did it or Did you say the **green** book or the **red** book?

# Intonation

- West African languages are typically tonal (meaning each lexical items, even of a single syllable, will have a fixed tone or sequence of tones, irrespective of its context)
- The intonation of West African English is largely limited to a rise for yes/no questions and or pauses within the sentence, and a final fall for statements and wh-questions.
- Other patterns are rarely heard except amount the highly educated.

# Grammatical Difficulties:

It is difficult for even a specialist to make valid generalizations about the grammar of West African languages but teachers of English in West African notice the recurrence of certain types of mistakes.

- Verbs

1. The regular endings and the use of auxiliaries in the simple present and past cause frequent problem:

She wants to speak English but she don't know how.

He doesn't goes to school.

He didn't came back

2. Mistakes are common when verb phrases are reduced after conjunctions:

I didn't see anything or heard anything.

He made me sit down and told him about it.

- Pronouns

1. He and him are often used for human females and for animals:

I greeted my sister when he came.

2. Reflexive pronouns are often used instead of "each other".

They greeted themselves

In writing, there is a tendency to avoid pronouns in an effort towards completeness and clarity, and the result often sounds wordy and repetitive.

# Social Etiquette

## Communication Style



- . There are several greeting styles in South Africa depending upon the ethnic heritage of the person you are meeting.
- . When dealing with foreigners, most South Africans shake hands while maintaining eye contact and smiling.
- . Some women do not shake hands and merely nod their head, so it is best to wait for a woman to extend her hand.
- . Men may kiss a woman they know well on the cheek in place of a handshake.
- . Greetings are leisurely and include time for social discussion and exchanging pleasantries.

# Social Etiquette

## Communication Style

- People tend to be direct, but polite, in many situations. For example, the compliment, “you look fat today”, is common and should be taken as a positive remark. However, it’s generally not polite to directly ask for something, therefore requests may be implied.
- Safe topics of conversations include family, work, hometown, and sports. It’s best to avoid speaking about politics at a initial meetings.

# Resources

## Articles

Osam, E.K., (2003) *An introduction to the verbal and multi-verbal system of Akan*, Study in Linguistic Science, Linguistics Department, University of Ghana, Trondheim Summer School.

## Books

Dolphyne, F.A. (1988) *The Akan (Twi-Fante) language: It's sound system and tonal structure*, Accra: Ghana universities Press.

Swan, M. & Smith, B. (2001) *Learner English: A teacher's guide to interference and other problems*, Second edition. New York: Cambridge University Press.

## Maps

Geographic guide. (2010). *Ghana map* [Map], Retrieved May, 2011 from:  
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## Images

UCLA Phonetics Lab Data (n.d). [Untitled images of alphabet] [Images], Retrieved May, 2011 from:  
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