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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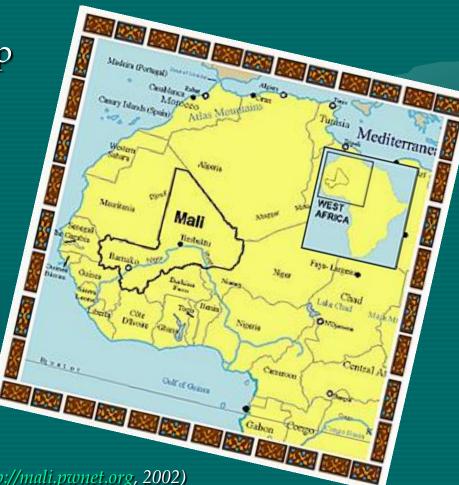# Bambara (Bamanankan)

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Bambara?

- Also called Bamanankan, Bambara

- Is a member of the Mande group of the Niger-Congo language family.

- It is the Lingua Franca in Mali and it's also spoken in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, and Gambia, Among other.

- It is the mother tongue of the Bambara ethnic group (2.7 million people) and it is spoken by 80% of Mali's population.

(*No author, http://mali.pwnet.org, 2002*)

Who speaks Bambara?

- Including speakers of Bambara as a second language, it is spoken by 6 million people.
- It is the most widely used and understood language in the country.
  - In Mali, Bambara is used in mass communication, adult education, and in everyday communication.
  - **French** has been the official language of Mali since 1890.
    - French is used for education and governmental administration and it is seen as the **language of the "educated"**.

Bambara's Sound System

It has a relatively small inventory of sounds.
It's typical syllable structure is Consonant + Vowel.
There are no final consonants and no consonant clusters.

Vowels

Bambara has seven vowel phonemes.
a, e, ɛ, i, o, ɔ and u (the letters approximate their IPA equivalents).
Vowels can be short or long and their length makes a difference in word meaning.
Vowels can also be oral or nasal.

Consonants

Bambara has 21 consonants
p t k b d g f s h z tʃ ʃ dʒ m n ɲ ŋ l r w j

To listen to the vowel and consonant sounds, click here.

Tones

Bambara is a tonal language.
There are two basic tones:
1) A high tone (H), marked with an acute accent.
2) A low tone (L), marked with a grave accent.

Example: bá = mother
bà = goat

(About World Languages, 2008)

These tones can appear in different patterns and there are some constraints on sequencing.

Possible errors in *Phonology*

Tonality

Because Bambara is a tonal language, speakers use a low and a high tone to differentiate words. This often leads to a jerkiness in intonation because speakers produce some ups and downs but they do not produce overall patterns.

Vowels

This is an area that might cause great difficulty for Bambara learners of English. Bambara has a simpler vowel system than English with seven vowel phonemes compared to the 22 vowel sounds of English.

Although many of the consonants in English have an exact equivalent in Bambara, the vowels only have approximate sounds.

(Swan and Smith, 2001.)

Consonants

The Bambara consonant "r" is produced by tapping the tip of the tongue against the ridge area of the front of the palate. There is no true equivalent for this sound in English or in French. It is close to the "r" produced by Spanish speakers.

There are fewer final consonants and consonant clusters used in Bambara (and other West African Languages) than in English. Thus, final consonants might be indistinct to a Bambara speaker. *(Swan and Smith, 2001.)*

Grammar

Linguistic typology

- SOV language
- Bambara uses postpositions in (same manner as English and French use prepositions). These postpositions are found after the verb and are used to express direction, location, and in some cases, possession.

Nouns

- Number is marked by attaching the suffix *–w* to words.
- Nouns are not inflected for gender: Gender can be specified by adding a suffix, *-cɛ* or *-kɛ* for male and *-muso* for female.
- Nouns are not inflected for case.

Verbs

- There is no overt making of subject - verb agreement.
- Verbs are not marked for person.
- Transitive and intransitive verbs are conjugated differently.

Possible errors in Syntax

- Because Bambara linguistic typology is SOV (Subject – Auxiliary – Object – Verb), Bambara speakers might find it challenging to **order the constituents** of the sentence structure in an SVO order.
- Adjectives and other modifiers follow the nouns they modify.

negeso nyu-man: Bicycle good.

(http://www.mun.ca/linguistics/nico/ch3.pdf)

- There are no definite articles in Bambara. This might make it challenging for students to include them in English.

Muso: Woman/ The woman

(http:/en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Bambara, 2010)

- Because Bambara doesn't have a possessive pronoun, learners might use the subject pronouns to indicate possession. Possession is formed using the ka particle.

ne ka mobili (my car).

né means: me, I, my, mine

(http://www.mun.ca/linguistics/nico/ch3.pdf)

Possible errors in Morphology

In Bambara there is no agreement of subject-verb. It might be difficult for students to get used to matching the different subjects with the corresponding verbs when learning English.

Unlike in English, tense is always marked by auxiliaries (always separate words from the verb).

Languages in contact (contact linguistics)

As a result of the French occupation (from 1880 to 1960):

- Bambara orthography and lexicon have been significantly influenced by French.

- English tends to be spoken with a French accent.

- Code-switching: Several Bambara conjunctions have been replaced in everyday use by French borrowings. This is characteristic of Bambara spoken in the urban areas.

- Bambara uses many French loan words. Example:

I ka kulosi ye jauni ye

"Your skirt is yellow" (using a derivation of the French word for yellow, jaune.)

- Most French loan words are suffixed with the sound 'i'. Example:

Niegei

Snow (based on the French word for snow: neige)

As there has never been snow in Mali, there has not been a traditional meaning for the word and thus no unique word in Bambara to describe it.

Writing

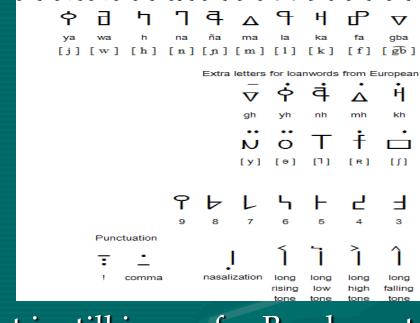- The N'Ko ("I say") alphabet is a script that was created in 1949 as a writing system for the Mande languages of West Africa.

- It is still used for writing Bambara.

- Shows the influence of both Roman and Arabic writing systems.

- Direction of Writing is right to left in horizontal lines

- Diacritics placed below a vowel indicate nasalization

- Diacritics placed over a vowel of syllabic indicate length or tone

N'Ko Alphabet

Vowels and consonants

da	ca	ja	ta	pa	ba	ɛn	ɔ	o	u	ɛ	i	e	a
[d]	[tɕ]	[dʑ]	[t]	[p]	[b]	[n]	[ɔ]	[o]	[u]	[ɛ]	[i]	[e]	[a]

ya	wa	h	na	ña	ma	la	ka	fa	gba	sa	ɽa	ra
[j]	[w]	[h]	[n]	[ɲ]	[m]	[l]	[k]	[f]	[g͡b]	[s; ɕ]	[r]	[r]

Extra letters for loanwords from European languages and Arabic

gh	yh	nh	mh	kh	[v]	[k͡p]	[g]
[y]	[ə]	[ʔ]	[ʁ]	[ʃ]	[ʒ]	[z]	bh

Numerals

9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0

Punctuation

!	comma	nasalization

Tone indication

long rising tone	long low tone	long high tone	long falling tone	short rising tone	short low tone	short high tone

Although the N'Ko alphabet is still in use for Bambara, today, Bambara is mostly written in the Latin alphabet. Some phonetic characters were borrowed from the <u>International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)</u>: *ɛ, ɲ, ŋ, ɔ,*

A a	B b	C c	D d	E e	Ɛ ɛ	F f	G g	H h	I i
a	be	ce	de	e	ɛ	ɛf	ge	ha	i
[a]	[b]	[tɕ]	[d]	[e]	[ɛ]	[f]	[g]	[h]	[i]

J j	K k	kh	L l	M m	N n	-n	Ɲ ɲ	Ŋ ŋ	O o
je	ka		ɛl	ɛm	ɛn		ɲe	ɛŋ	o
[dʑ]	[k]	[x]	[l]	[m]	[n]	[˜-]	[ɲ]	[ŋ]	[o]

Ɔ ɔ	P p	R r	S s	sh	T t	U u	W w	Y y	Z z
ɔ	pe	ɛr	ɛs	she	te	u	wa	je	ze
[ɔ]	[p]	[r]	[s]	[ɕ]	[t]	[u]	[w]	[j]	[z]

Dialects

Bambara has many dialects. These are mutually intelligible and they differ mainly in pronunciation.

The main division:

Standard Bambara

A variety of rural dialects

- Somono
- Segou
- San, Beledugu
- Ganadugu
- Wasulu
- Sikasso

(Cheal, V. http://www.africaguide.com/country/mali/culture.htm, 1996-2011).

Communication Styles

- Greeting: asking how they and their family members are doing is considered important.
- Kissing people is appropriate only among people who know each other really well.
- Pointing at people is considered rude.
- Burping is considered a compliment to the person who prepared a meal.
- Physical contact is only appropriate between good friends.
- It is OK to maintain eye contact with people who are at the same ranking. Otherwise, eye contact should be fleeting to avoid showing defiance to authority. (*Center for Intercultural Learning, 2009*).

Resources

Books

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