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: Akan
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The Akan Language

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TESL 539
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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.
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dialect</th>
<th>Number of Speakers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agona</td>
<td>185,228</td>
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<tr>
<td>Akuapem</td>
<td>513,561</td>
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<td>Akwamu</td>
<td>97,178</td>
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<tr>
<td>Akyem</td>
<td>600,282</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asante</td>
<td>2,578,829</td>
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<td>Agona</td>
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<td>Bono</td>
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<td>Denkyira</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fante</td>
<td>1723,573</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kwahu</td>
<td>392,241</td>
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<td>Wassa</td>
<td>251,963</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>140,425</td>
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<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>7,753,830</td>
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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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vowels</th>
<th>a</th>
<th>e</th>
<th>e</th>
<th>i</th>
<th>o</th>
<th>o</th>
<th>u</th>
<th>e</th>
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<td>[a]</td>
<td>[i]</td>
<td>[e]</td>
<td>[i]</td>
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<td>[o]</td>
<td>[u]</td>
<td>[e]</td>
<td>[o]</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consonants</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>d</th>
<th>dw</th>
<th>dwi</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>g</th>
<th>gw</th>
<th>gyi</th>
<th>h</th>
<th>hw</th>
<th>hwi</th>
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<tr>
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<td>[d]</td>
<td>[dʒ]</td>
<td>[dʒwi]</td>
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<td>[g]</td>
<td>[gʷ]</td>
<td>[dʒi]</td>
<td>[h]</td>
<td>[hʷ]</td>
<td>[ʒi]</td>
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<td>m</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>ng</td>
<td>ni</td>
<td>ngi</td>
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<td>[kʰ]</td>
<td>[kʷ]</td>
<td>[tʃi~tʃʰi]</td>
<td>[l]</td>
<td>[m]</td>
<td>[n, n̥, ñ]</td>
<td>[ŋː]</td>
<td>[ŋːi]</td>
<td>[ŋ̃ː]</td>
<td>[ŋ̃ːi]</td>
</tr>
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<td>p</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>s</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>ti</td>
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<tr>
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<td>[tʃi]</td>
<td>[tʃwi]</td>
<td>[w]</td>
<td>[yi]</td>
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</table>

([http://www.phonetics.ucla.edu](http://www.phonetics.ucla.edu))
Akan Pronunciation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vowels</th>
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<th>e</th>
<th>i</th>
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<td>[u]</td>
<td>[ɛ]</td>
<td>[ɔ]</td>
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<th>h</th>
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<td>[d]</td>
<td>[dʒ]</td>
<td>[dʒʷ]</td>
<td>[f]</td>
<td>[ɡ]</td>
<td>[ɡʷ]</td>
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<td>[h]</td>
<td>[hʷ]</td>
<td>[ɡʷɪ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hyi/kw/kyi</td>
<td>[ɡɬi]</td>
<td>[kʰ]</td>
<td>[kʷ]</td>
<td>[tʃɪ~ɡʃɪ]</td>
<td>[l]</td>
<td>[m]</td>
<td>[n, ɳ, ɲ]</td>
<td>[ŋɬ]</td>
<td>[ŋɬʷ]</td>
<td>[ŋɬʷɪ]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nyi/nnyi</td>
<td>[ɲɬɬɪ]</td>
<td>[pʰ]</td>
<td>[ʃ, ɾ, ɽ]</td>
<td>[s]</td>
<td>[tʰ]</td>
<td>[tʃɪ]</td>
<td>[tʃɪʷ]</td>
<td>[w]</td>
<td>[ɣɪ]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(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
  • Wɔawo adesamma nyinaa sε nniapa a wɔwɔ ahofadi. Wɔn nyinaa wɔ nidi ne kyɛfa koro. Wɔwɔ adwene ne ahoim, na εsε sε wɔm wɔm nɔw sε ho wɔm ho nɔw nɔw sε ho nɔw ahonim, na εsε sε wɔwɔ ahofadi. Wɔn nyinaa wɔ nidi ne kyɛfa koro. Wɔwɔ adwene ne ahoim, na εsε sε wɔm wɔm nɔw sε ho nɔw ahonim, na εsε sε wɔwɔ ahofadi.

• Asante
  • Nnipa nyinaa ye pe. Na wɔde adwene ne nyansa na abɔ obiara. Eno nti, εsε sε obiara dɔ ne yɔnko, bu ne yɔnko, di ne yɔnko ni.

• Fante
  • Wɔwo adasa nyina to fahodzi mu, na hɔn nyina ye pe rɛ wɔ enyimnyam na ndzinoo ma. Wɔmaa hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa, na hɔn nyina adwen na tsibowa.

• 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.
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


Books


Maps


Images

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