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
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WOLOF

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

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Language Group Report
TESL 539
Spring 2009
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.africaquide.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
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

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<tr>
<th>LANGUAGE</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population 5 years and over</td>
<td>985,184</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Speak only English</td>
<td>788,560</td>
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<td>Speak a language other than English</td>
<td>196,624</td>
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<td>Spanish or Spanish Creole</td>
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<td>Portuguese or Portuguese Creole</td>
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<td>French (incl. Patois, Cajun)</td>
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<td>Italian</td>
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<td>Mon-Khmer, Cambodian</td>
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<td>Arabic</td>
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