

## West African languages

There are many different languages in West Africa. It is a very multilingual part of the world. The millions of people who live in West Africa speak hundreds of different languages. Let's find out about some of these languages.

### Senegal:

Senegal is a multilingual country. It has 38 languages, and Wolof is the biggest. It has 5 million native speakers and millions more who can speak it as a second language.

A 'native speaker' is a person who learns that language from their parents, so it is their first language, their mother language.

Wolof is the 'lingua franca' – most people can speak Wolof even if it is not their mother language. Wolof is also one of the languages in Mauritania and in the Gambia. Wolof is also the name of a group of people who live in these 3 countries.

It is not an easy language to learn. So perhaps the best phrase to learn in Wolof is 'Degguma Wolof'. This means 'I don't speak any Wolof'.

Some of the other languages in Senegal are called 'national languages' – a language that many people speak. The national languages are Wolof, Pulaar, Serer, Mandinka, Soninke and a few others.

Some of these languages, like Serer and Pulaar, are part of the same language family as Wolof. This group of languages is called the Senegambian family.

### Mali:

Mali is a multilingual country. It has 80 languages, and Bambara is the biggest.

It has about 5 million native speakers and about 10 million more people who can speak it as a second language. It is not very difficult to learn a little Bambara. You can say 'Good Morning' to someone like this – say 'i ni sógóma'.

Some of the languages in Mali are called 'national languages' – a language that many people speak. The national languages include Bambara, Fulafulde, Dogon, Malinke, Songhay, Soninke and Tamasheq.

Bambara is the 'lingua franca' – most people can speak Bambara even if it is not their mother language.

Soninke and Fulafulde also have a large number of speakers – over 1 million people each speak these languages.

When children go to school, they learn at first in one of the national languages, but later they study in French as well.

### Cote d'Ivoire:

Cote d'Ivoire is a multilingual country. It has about 70 languages, and Dioula is the biggest. It has about 2 million native speakers and many millions more speak it in Cote d'Ivoire, Mali and Burkina Faso.

Some of the languages in Cote d'Ivoire are called 'national languages' – a language that many people speak. The national languages include Baoule, Anyin, Dan, Senari,

### Dioula

Dioula and French are the 'lingua franca' languages – most people can speak French and many people speak Dioula even if it is not their mother language. Dioula is also similar to Bambara in Mali, and speakers of each language can understand each other. Sometimes the words are the same: Good Morning in Dioula is also 'i ni sógóma'.

When children go to school, they learn at first in one of the national languages, but later they study in French as well, so they can be multilingual people.

#### New words for this article -

|   |                |  |
|---|----------------|--|
| 1 | lingua franca  | language for speaking to people who have a different language    |
| 2 | multilingual   | able to speak more than one language                             |
| 3 | native speaker | a person born with a language, who learned it from their parents |

#### Comprehension questions

- Which is the biggest language in Senegal?
- How many languages are spoken in Senegal?
- What is the name of the family of languages in Senegal?
- What is the 'lingua franca' in Mali?
- What is the 'lingua franca' in Cote d'Ivoire?

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 5 | languages                                 |
| 4 | Dioula and French are the 'lingua franca' |
| 3 | Bambara is the 'lingua franca'            |
| 2 | the Senegambian language family           |
| 1 | Senegal has 38 languages                  |
|   | Wolof is the biggest language             |

Questions de compréhension en lecture

#### Comprehension questions -

Answers