

WHY STUDY BAMANA?

Bamana, called "Bamanankan" by the native speakers is no doubt one of the most spoken languages in West Africa. It is spoken in Burkina Faso, in Guinea-Conakry, in Northern Cote-d'Ivoire, in Senegal, but especially in Mali where it is the first or second language of 80 % of the population.

There are many reasons for studying Bamana. These include personal interest in the culture of the Bamana people, research interests and fulfillment of foreign language requirements.

The knowledge of Bamana language will be very helpful to students in Linguistics, Anthropology, Sociology, History as well as to linguists who plan to conduct research in one of the countries mentioned above. International workers, Peace Corps volunteers, diplomats, and missionaries will find it essential to learn Bamana in order to communicate and collaborate with the local populations.

The artistic tradition of the Bamana people is rich, filled with pottery, sculptures, beautiful bokolanfini cloth, and wrought iron figures fashioned by blacksmiths. They also have extensive masking traditions, which are used as a form of social control and community education.

In the field of linguistics, Bamana is one of the most written languages in West Africa. European and American linguists have written it since the end of the 19th century. Today, we find interesting documentation on the Bamama language particularly in German. For students in comparative linguistics, Bamana could be an interesting language. It has borrowed many words from French, Arabic and a smaller number of words from English. As a result of long cohabitation, Bamana and some languages of the Mande group have many common words.

As regards the names "Bamana" and "Bambara", there is no difference. Both names are used for the same language.

"Bambara" is the French name for the variety of Bamana spoken in Mali. Actually, the name "Bambara" is more popular in Europe whereas "Bamana" is more used in the United States.

WHO SPEAKS BAMANA?

PEOPLE AND HISTORY

Today, Bamana is spoken by more than 26 million speakers as first or second language across the western part of Africa. In Linguistics, when you speak about "Manding", you mean generally the following dialects: Bambara in Mali and in Senegal, Diula in Cote-d'Ivoire, in Burkina Faso and Malinke in Guinea-Conakry, etc.

In American universities, the name Bamana is used for these three varieties: Bambara, Diula and Malinke. The three dialects are very close. They designate not only varieties of the same language but also ethnic groups that speak them. Bambara, Diula and Malinke show a large homogeneity in vocabulary and grammar. The different speakers understand one another very well.

Majority of Bamana speakers live in Mali. There are also many Bamana speakers in Guinea-Conakry, in Cote-d'Ivoire, in Burkina Faso and in Senegal. There are smaller groups of speakers in Sierra Leone and Liberia.

The Bamana language is today one of the biggest language of communication in the countries named above. For that reason, it has become an important language in the media in particular in the radio and on the television. Official newspapers are even published in Bamana in some countries. Because of the importance of Bamana as a national language, the governments of some countries such as Mali and Guinea now try to teach elementary students in Bamana parallel to French, which is the official language.

Bamana has become an important language of communication in the western part of Africa because it is very easy to learn and easy to understand. For that reason, speakers of many other ethnic groups understand it and speak it very well. This is why, in some Bamana speaking countries, Bamana plays the role of social cohesion and understanding between different ethnic groups.

Nowadays, another reason for the spread of Bamana is due to the Manding Music. Some examples of famous Manding-Musicians are, Aicha Kone, Ami Koita, Alpha Blondy, Oumou Sangare, Salif Keita, Sori Kandja Kouyate, etc.



Bamana drummers performing.



Weavers at work.



Bamana hunters also serve as guards of the community.