

# MANINKA-BAMBARA-DYULA

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**Language Name:** Bambara, Dyula, Maninka, and Khasonke (Xasonke) are considered dialects of Mandekan, or Manding. The people who make up the majority of the population in the core area where the language is spoken are called the Bambara in the northeastern section, Dyula in the southern and southeastern sections, and Maninka, Malinke, or Mandinka in the western section of the core. Basically the same language is spoken and understood by all of these peoples, and the language area is often referred to as the Maninka-Bambara-Dyula complex.

The linguistic descriptions in this entry are based on Bambara, which is considered the standard. **Autonym for Bambara:** *Bamanakan*. **Alternate:** *Mandekalu* 'people of the Mande; from where all dialects have stemmed'.

**Location:** Mali, in West Africa, but also in an area from Senegal extending north to the Mauritanian border, south through central Guinea to northwestern corner of Ivory Coast, and east to Burkina Faso. The core area extends from Ségou, Mali, in the north, and into the Ivory Coast.

**Family:** East Mandekan subgroup of the Northern Mande group of the Niger-Congo branch of the Niger-Kordofanian family.

**Related Languages:** Soninke. Susu. Yalunka. Vai. Kono. Hwela- Numu. Khasonke. Western Malinke.

**Dialects:** Some of the differences between Bambara, Maninka, Dyula, and Khasonke lie in variation in pronunciation. For example, the word 'five' is *duuru* in Bambara, *loolu* in Maninka and Dyula, and *lohu* in Khasonke. There are several other examples of this /d/-/l/ variation.

The plural marker in the official Malian orthography is represented by n; but it is pronounced as /u/. In most southern Maninka dialects, the plural marker is pronounced as /i/, and in some western dialects, the plural marker is /u/: Bambara: *muson*; Southern Maninka: *muso*i**; Gambian Mandinka: *musolu* 'women'.

**Number of Speakers:** 8-10 million, the vast majority of whom live in Mali (80% of Mali's population, which was 9.82 million in 1992).

## Origin and History

Arabic chronicles which go back to the eleventh century refer to two antagonist empires, the Ghana empire and the Mali empire, which most likely spoke Soninke and Mandingo, respectively. The Mali empire was concentrated around its initial area, Upper Niger, between what is now Mali and Guinea. Over the centuries this empire expanded and contracted. At the beginning of the fifteenth century it began to decline, especially in the east and north. In the early sixteenth century the Songhai or Gao empire gained power and limited the power of the Mali empire on the east side, as did the Fulani kingdom of Macina. Through the centuries the Mandingo fragmented due to war and other factors.

Before the colonial period, Mandingo-speaking people experienced a political and territorial spread, which led to non-Mandingo-speaking people speaking the language. After colonization, although Mandingo was denied use at the administrative and educational levels in favor of French, it was recognized by the colonial administration as a vehicular language, and thus was recognized as the most useful intermediate language between French and local languages.

## Orthography and Basic Phonology

Bambara is written in the Latin alphabet, with some modifica-

tion. The spelling used here was adopted in 1967 by the members of the Commission Technique du Bambara for use in functional literacy programs in the Republic of Mali.

Table 1: Consonants

	Labial	Dental	Alveo-Palatal	Velar	Glottal
<b>Stops</b>					
Voiceless	p	t		k	
Voiced	b	d		g	
<b>Fricatives</b>					
Voiceless	f	s	sh [ʃ]		h
Voiced		z			
<b>Affricates</b>					
Voiceless			c [tʃ]		
Voiced			j [tʃ]		
<b>Nasals</b>	m	n	ny [ɲ]	ŋ	
<b>Resonants</b>		l, r [ʀ]			
<b>Glides</b>	w		j		

In addition, Bambara has a series of prenasalized consonants *np, nb, nf, nt, nd, ns, nk, ng*; in these consonants, the nasal assimilates in place of articulation to the oral component. [The affricates *j* and *c* are phonetically [tʃ] and [tʃ] respectively.]

(Perhaps this last sentence should be deleted.)

Switch: [ʃ] and [ʃ] or [tʃ] and [tʃ]

dz  
ŋ  
ɲ (tap)  
Glides

Table 2: Vowels

	Front	Central	Back
High	i		u
Mid-High	e		o
Mid-Low	è [ɛ]		ò [ɔ]
Low		a	

Insert:  
Vowels can be short, long, or nasalized.

Contraction of juxtaposed vowels is obligatory. Generally, it is the first of the two vowels that drops out. In the orthography, it is replaced by an apostrophe.

Bambara is a tone language, so words can be distinguished from each other not only by consonants and vowels but also by relative pitch of the voice. A word can have one of two tones, high or low. In writing, words associated with low tones are represented by underlining the first vowel of the word. High tones are not marked.

The basic tones associated with words can be modified by the tones in adjacent words.

If a high tone word follows another high tone word, they will have the same level of pitch. A low tone word following a high tone word will occur on a lower level of pitch. A high tone word following a low tone word will rise slightly in pitch.

A low tone word followed by another low tone word will rise in pitch so that a one syllable word (with a low tone) will have a rising tone, a two syllable word will be low-high, and a three syllable word will be low-low-high.

In a sequence of three tones high-low-high, the second tone will not be as high as the first. This phenomenon is called downdrift.

When a vowel is contracted with another vowel, the tone of the contracted vowel will remain. If the first vowel is high and the second one is low, the contracted vowel will be high, but the following high tone words will be pronounced on a slightly lower level of pitch.

### Basic Morphology

Bambara does not have noun classes or any other sort of grammatical gender. There are two numbers (singular and plural). The singular is not specifically marked, but the plural is formed by a suffix on the last element in the noun phrase: muso 'woman', musow 'women', muso dôw 'some women'.

The definite article is expressed by a low tone following the noun and its modifiers. Definite low tone nouns will rise in tone. With definite high tone nouns, following high tone words will occur on a slightly lower pitch.

<u>muso</u> tè	<u>muso</u> _tè
woman is-not	woman-the-is not
'it's not a woman'	'it's not the woman'

Neither nouns nor pronouns are inflected for case. The personal pronouns are:

	Singular	Plural
1st	n'/ne	anw
2nd	i/e	aw
3rd	a/ale	u/olu

Bambara distinguishes two kinds of possession, alienable (separable) and inalienable (inseparable). For example, *n'fɔ* 'my father' is an example of inalienable possession, while *n'ka mobili* 'my car' is an example of alienable possession. As illustrated by these examples, alienable possession is indicated by the particle *ka* between the pronoun and the possessed noun.

Bambara verbs do not agree with their subjects in any way. Most tense and aspect marking is provided by auxiliaries which occur as separate words from the verb. The tenses are past, present, and future, and the aspects are imperfect, habitual, perfect, progressive, conditional, and hortative. Passives are formed by placing the object in subject position in the sentence and suffixing *-len* to the verb. Causatives are formed by adding the prefix *la-* to any verb.

Verbs can be formed from nouns by using the action nominal form (indicated by the suffix *-li*) with the verb *kè* 'do': *fɔli* 'greeting', *fɔli\_kè* 'to greet'.

### Basic Syntax

The order of major constituents in Bambara is subject-auxiliary-object-verb:

N'-bè baara\_kè  
1SG-AUX work-do  
'I work'

Adjectives and other modifiers follow the nouns they modify:

nègèso nyu-man  
bicycle good-ADJ  
'good bicycle'

The suffix *-man* indicates that the adjective is used as a modifier rather than as a predicate.

Relative clause formation in Bambara is unusual and is often cited in typological studies. The morpheme *min* occurs in the interior of the relative clause and serves either as a relative clause marker or as a relative pronoun.

[i ye Fanta min ye kunun] taara Bamako]  
[2SG AUX Fanta REL see yesterday] go.PAST Bamako] *ye*-PAST  
'Fanta, whom you saw yesterday, went to Bamako.'

Bambara, like most OV languages, has postpositions. Many of the postpositions are identical to words for body parts, and are considered to be homophones with them:

kun	'head' or 'on'
kônò	'stomach' or 'in'
nyè	'eye' or 'before, in front'

Negation in Bambara is expressed by using one of the specifically negative auxiliaries *tè*, *ma*, *man*, or *kana*.

Karamògò\_bè bamanakan\_sèbèn tabulo \_la  
teacher AUX Bambara write blackboard on  
'The teacher writes on the blackboard.'

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Karamògò\_tè bamanakan\_sèbèn tabulo \_la  
 teacher AUX-NEG Bambara write blackboard on  
 'The teacher does not write on the blackboard.'

### Contact With Other Languages

Bambara has had much borrowing from French, Arabic, and Wolof.

From French: *ambasadi* 'embassy', *anglopu* 'envelope', *dute* 'tea', *iqbali* 'table'

From Arabic: *san* 'year', *famu* 'understand', *hakili* 'thought, memory, mind, spirit', *kitabu* 'book'

From Wolof: *tubabu* 'White, European, French', *tubabukan* 'French language', *alikati* 'police agent', *kudu* 'spoon'

### Common Words

man:	cè
woman:	muso
water:	ji
sun:	tjle
three:	saba
fish:	jègè
big:	bòn/belebele
long:	jan/jamanjan
small:	misèn/misèman
yes:	awò/òwò/ònhòn
no:	ayi
good:	di/duman
bird:	kònò
dog:	wulu
tree:	jiri

### Example Sentences

REL (1) I tun bè yòrò min n tun bè yèn.  
 you PAST AUX place rel I PAST AUX there  
 'I was at the place that you were.'

(2) I bè mun kè?  
 you AUX what do  
 'What are you doing?'

(3) N'ye kītabu di Safi ma.  
 I-AUX book give Safi to  
 'I gave the book to Safi.'

### Efforts to Preserve, Protect, and Promote the Language

Since Mali's independence in 1960, attempts have been made to promote literacy for adults. The variety of Bambara spoken around the city of Bamako was chosen by the Malian government to be used in their literacy program which is being implemented by the Ministry of Education. This dialect is the most widely understood throughout the area; it is also a trade language for several million people in the surrounding area.

The policy of functional literacy was an effort to impart literacy to people in their mother tongue and also to give them technical training in that language within the framework of a national development campaign. Of four languages that were selected for this program—Bambara, Fulani, Tamashek (Tuareg), and Songhai—only in Bambara has there been a system of large-scale literacy training.

In addition to promoting literacy in national languages, Mali also chose to keep French as the national language and impose it in education and government. Senegal and the Ivory Coast also maintained French as the national language, while Guinea favored African languages for the national languages. There are newspapers, books, and magazines written in Bambara, as well as Bambara television stations.

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