

Wolof Language

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One of the most exciting experiences I have had while here in Senegal has been my study of the Wolof language. In my preparation for visiting this country, I searched various well-known language programs for a study-app so that I could get an early start on understanding Wolof. I was not really surprised, however, that such an app was not available with companies that focus on the Romance languages such as French, Spanish, Italian, or German. Norwich University, however, saved the day with their free app. French is the language of commerce in Senegal, and Wolof is the *language of the people*. Additionally there is a language associated with each of the ethnic groups and Arabic words and phrases are heard throughout the day. A majority of the Senegalese are bilingual and many are multi-lingual. Imagine that!

As a requirements of my studies while here in Senegal, I am required to reach a basic level of proficiency in the language. Initially I was quite anxious about being required to study a language because my experiences in the past with language-learning have been unpleasant. The idea of studying Wolof on a daily basis for a total of 60 hours during my 30-day stay was not at all appealing. To my surprise, however, I have fallen in love with this language! It resonates with me and makes

more sense than any other language I have encountered. It is very logical language composed of words from French, Arabic, and increasingly more and more English words. I am fortunate to be receiving daily instruction in the Wolof language. As I interact with the people of Senegal, many appear surprised and some seem excited when I attempt to speak to them in Wolof. The Wolof phrase... **Nanga Def**, *how are you?* The response may be **Jam Rekk**, meaning *Peace only*. What a wonderful way to greet another, and for an entire country to have this mind-set is simply refreshing! This is much different from having a response such as “ Oh, it has been a rough day”, or “I don’t know if I am going to make it through the day”. During my short stay, I have observed the Senegalese people to be open-minded, flexible and peaceful!

The language itself reminds me of a patois. For example, the verbs are unchangeable and are not conjugated; rather, the pronouns are conjugated. This in itself was exciting because with the Romance languages it is the verb-conjugation that causes me the most problem. In Wolof, tenses like present tense, past tense are not important. Most important is whether the action is finished or still happening. There are other rather interesting aspects to this language, but at this point I am still learning.

Learn more about [Wolof](#).