

Learning Twi: Lessons from a Minerva Exploration Grant

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Why Twi

Language learning is integral when doing projects abroad, especially if the first language of the community you are entering is not your first language.

I won the Davis Fellowship for Peace Grant, a national fellowship to implement a project anywhere in the world.

My project is called *Empowering Entrepreneurship*, in which I will teach a vocational school, Stitching Talents, how to start and run their own seamstress businesses. The school is located in Egyam, Ghana.

The town's first language is Twi, a language spoken by almost 20 million people in Ghana and the Ivory Coast. Of Twi speakers, it is spoken as a first or second language.

I wanted to learn the Twi language to help ease the burden of translating, and I was awarded the Minerva Exploration Grant to do just that. Through this funding, I was able to pay for 10 Twi language classes. I pursued these lessons to help me better communicate with the Egyam community and show a respect for their culture as an outsider.

Twi is a beautiful language, rooted in directness, clarity, and complexity. Twi's tonality is the most difficult part for a non-native speaker to grasp, and I hope one day to go to Egyam and develop this fluency.

An Overview of Twi /Tchwee/

ABOUT TWI

Twi is an Akan language spoken in southern and central Ghana and by people in southeastern Côte d'Ivoire.

Twi is the most widely spoken indigenous language of Ghana.

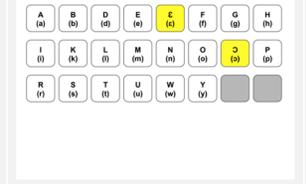
The language is spoken by almost 20 million people.

Half of Ghanaians speak Twi as a first, with millions of others speaking it as a second language.

Twi is a tonal language with 5 tones: high, mid, low, rising, and falling.

ALPHABET

- A is pronounced like the English short A
- E is pronounced like the English long A
- ɛ is pronounced like the English short E
- I is pronounced like the English long E
- O is pronounced like the English word "Oh"
- ɔ is pronounced like the English word "aw"



PHONETIC COMBINATIONS (DIGRAPHS)

Combination	Pronounced
dw	dj
gy	j
hw	wh
hy	sh
kw	qu
ky	ch
nw	nw
ny	ny
tw	tchw

All of the digraphs are pronounced how they are said to be pronounced, except hw and dj.

hw sounds almost like a whistle sound, it is a whistling w with a 'h' for the h at the same time.

dj sound has a soft d sound combined with a French j, where the j is soft like in the word 'jiques'.

GREETINGS

Mema wo akye = Good morning
• /May-mah woah ah-chay/

Mema wo aha = Good afternoon
• /May-mah woah aha/

Mema wo anwummerɛ = Good evening
• /May-mah woah ahn-woo-nm-ay-reh/

Mema wo adwo! = Goodnight
• /May-mah woah ah-dwo/

To respond to these greetings, reply...

- Yaa egya! = greeting back a male
- /yahah eh-iyah/
- Yaa ena! = greeting back a female
- /yahah eh-nah/

ETE SEN? = HOW'S IT GOING? /EH-TAY SEN/





Bɔkɔɔ = Great
/bawk-awaw/

ɛyɛ = Good
/eh-yeh/

ɛnyɛ papa = Bad
/eh-nyeh pah-pah/

ABOUT YOURSELF

Wɔfrɛ wo sɛn?
/waw-freh-woah-sen/
What are you called?
(what is your name?)

Wɔfrɛ me = I am called
/waw-freh may.../

Wo firɛ he?
/woah-fee-ree hay/
Where are you from?

Me firɛ... = I am from...
/May fee-ree.../

WO HO TE SEN? /WOAH-HO-TAY-SEN/ HOW ARE YOU?

Me ho yɛ = I am fine (positive)
/may ho yeh/

Sentence Structure
The pronoun goes first

- Wɔn ho te sɛn? = How are they?
/w-awn ho tay sen/
- Wo maame ho te sɛn? = How is your mother?
/woah mah-ah-may ho tay sen/

To answer:

- ...ho yɛ = [insert pronoun] is fine
/ho yeh/
- Me maame ho yɛ = My mom is fine
/may mah-amay ho yeh/

PRONOUNS (THE SAME PRONOUN IS ALSO POSSESSIVE)

	Singular	Plural
Me /my/	I / My	We / Our
Wo /woah/	You / Your	You / Your All's
Ɔno /aw-no/	He/She / His/Hers	They / Their
ɛno /eh-no/	It / Its	

QUESTIONING

What	ɛdeɛn	/eh-dee-en/
When (time)	Bere bɛn	/bay-ray ben/
When (day)	Da bɛn	/da ben/
Where	Ehe	/ehay/
How	Sɛn	/sen/
How Much	Ahe	/ah-ay/
Why	Adɛn	/ah-den/
Who	Hwan a ; Hena	/h-wan a ; hen-a/

PRESENT TENSE VERB CONJUGATION

	AFFIRMATIVE	ACTION	NEGATIVE
te	Me ka	To feel	nte
te	Menni	To speak / know	nte
wo	Mete	To have	nɛi
di	Mesua Twi	To eat	nɛi
ye		To be	ɛnyɛ
ye		To be good	ɛnyɛ
da		To sleep	nna
ma		To give	mama
ka		To speak	nka
saa		To learn	nsaa
kasa		To talk	nkasa
da ase		To lie down	ɛnna ase
wo		To be at	nɛi
hu		To see	nhu

VERB TENSES

	Pronoun before the verb	Meda	I sleep
Present			I sleep
Continuous	re	Mereda	I am sleeping
Future	bɛ	Mebedɛ	I will sleep
Perfect	a / e	Me ada / M'ada	I am asleep/ have slept
Past	lengthen final vowel	Medaa ennora	I slept yesterday
Past	'e' or 'i'	Ennora, medae	Yesterday, I slept
Negative	nɛ	Mennda	I do not sleep
Imperative	n (pronounced in high tone)	ma ___ n ma yɛnda	Let us sleep

About The Classes

My language courses were taught by a woman named Wendy, a native Twi speaker living in London, England.

Her services were provided through the Ghanaian Language School, an online tutoring service dedicated to increasing the prevalence and fluency of indigenous Ghanaian languages.



My classes were 1 hour in length each, and they were video recorded for my reviewing convenience. I was given handouts and homework to better ensure learning, and Wendy was patient as I stumbled through pronunciation. She helped me craft relevant sentences and language vocabulary that I would need for my *Empowering Entrepreneurship* lessons.

Wendy told me notes on cultural sensitivity, such as what not to ask, how to approach strangers, and how to respond when asked certain questions.

Lastly, she also taught me beautiful linguistic facts, shown below.

LINGUISTIC FUN FACTS

- Nnuaba = Fruits ---- nnuu literally means trees; ba means baby.
- Nnuaba literally = baby of the trees
- Ɔkyena akyi = Day after tomorrow ---- Ɔkyena means tomorrow. Akyi means a human's back.
- Ɔkyena akyi literally = tomorrow's back
- Akokosradeɛ = yellow ---- akoko means chicken. sradeɛ means fat
- Akokosradeɛ literally = chicken fat