

In Niger we have made great strides in learning French, the national language

James McCann
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Hauling water from the river

We have made great strides in learning French, the national language, but we still have a long way to go because the French spoken here is very different than what our books teach. Another complication is the fact that daily conversations are usually carried on in the tribal languages, Djerma or Hausa. We have found some people who speak a little English.

The German brother arrived before me and made friends with several people. He believes, as I do in most cases, that they should be brought to understand the nature of our work gradually. God helped him immediately. He was determined not to stay in a hotel so he stayed one week at the Catholic mission and one month behind a bar. Then, with the help of an African who spoke German (which is about as rare as a man with three legs) he found a very nice three-room house. Our landlord is a jolly father who has given his children both Djerma and Christian names. He is a Catholic.

Since the first night I arrived I've slept inside under the mosquito net; the same is true for our Japanese brother, whereas the German prefers to sleep outside wrapped in his sheet. We got our beds for about \$5 each. They are made entirely of wood and leather strip with branches tied together.

The German is our chef and his meals are great! When I first got here we used to eat at a sidewalk restaurant. The bill of fare was always rice and sauce for 100 francs, la meme chose every day. First we got a kettle for tea and a small stove. Now we have two stoves and we have great variety every night.

I've heard that in Togo someone pumps the water for someone else to shower -- no such luxury here. We have to scoop the water from a big basin into a pail or plastic pouring bottle. There is a boy who brings the water for our basin twice a day; we pay him \$3 a month (600 fr.). The last boy we had bringing water was afraid of us -- inasara (white men) never live this way. One day he just stopped coming. The new boy likes us and always takes a long look at our latest decorative additions.

Most of the water we drink is either filtered or boiled (in tea). But when I am out in another's home I cannot ask them to boil it when they offer water. I've only had a couple of slight cases of dysentery and a cold. Unfortunately, Africans like curry pepper very much. When they offer you rice, you cannot say, "Oh, I've just eaten." No one refuses unless he thinks his host will poison him. Our "fridge" is a small pot in which we submerge a plastic container containing butter, limes, mangoes, etc. It keeps fairly cool.

Children are afraid of *inasara* until you show them that you won't hit them. A white man is a frightful uncertainty; we are the boogeymen that their mothers threaten them with when they're especially bad.

After two months I can finally build a fire. We keep our wood outside except when the rain comes. Wood comes from the sparse forests outside the city. It's brought in by the truckload and sold to some landlord who has it chopped up by one of the woodcutters who roam the streets looking for such work. It is divided and laid out in piles to be sold to neighbors. Most things are sold from sidewalk vendors.

We have so far one serious student whom I met while buying butter in his shop. He works there from 7 a.m. til 11 p.m. Like most people, he takes a midday nap. Most stores are closed from 12:30 until 4 p.m.; he closes from 1 to 3 p.m. Every day I go there to speak to him. He has read the study guide and is now reading the black book in French. He speaks Yoruba, English, French, Djerma, and Hausa. Every Sunday we go together to the only Protestant church in town, l'Eglise Baptiste.

He can agree to most of my ideas. I wish that we could draw him in more but he has little time because of his store. He is the only one who works there.

From him I've learned much about the people of the country. It's funny that the same person who could ask, "How did God create Himself?" could also ask, "Do Koreans have tribal scars?" He is helping me in my language study. I have also taken the initiative to learn some Djerma. I've found that learning the bare essentials of tribal language has helped me gain acceptance more readily.

Gaining acceptance is a major task. There is much residual bitterness left over from the years of French patronization. When we walk through the streets children chant "*Inasara gobi*." (*Gobi* means military man.) Teenagers and men yell after us as we pass them, with unconcealed contempt, "Hello, *mastuh ca-va*."

There is no real parental discipline. Education has been increased 300 percent, but morality -- right and wrong -- must be taught at home. Adults themselves often act like children. When we took a long walk outside the city all people young and old came up to us with their hands out, "*Monsieur, cadeau dix francs*" (Sir, give me a gift of 10 francs). I responded with "I have none." People don't have a chance to grow up. Marriage comes early and children come immediately, one right after another. Infant mortality cannot be blamed exclusively on the lack of rain for crops. Many children die from malnutrition when their mothers don't allow sufficient time for nursing before there's another baby on the way.

The Peace Corps members are just a drop in the bucket. They are, after all, *inasara*. They themselves are often immature, just out of college and easily frustrated. They end up keeping to themselves whenever possible. The same is true for the two missionary organizations in Niger, the Baptist Church and the Sudan Interior Mission. In my opinion, the real outreach is from the Yoruba Baptists and the Yoruba Jehovah Witnesses.

Their outreach is mostly limited though, to the Catholics. These Catholics are Catholic because they were educated at the Catholic Mission school, which was the only form of native education before independence in 1960.