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MULTILINGUALISM AND LANGUAGE POLICY IN SIERRA LEONE

The Sierra Leone Multilingual Situation

This situation is best understood against a background of the ethnic/linguistic spread of the Sierra Leone population, the distribution of languages and the political-administrative divisions of the country. Sierra Leone is divided into four administrative regions, the Northern, Southern and Eastern Provinces and the Western Area. The three provinces contain twelve districts: five in the North, Port Loko and Kambia to the west and north-west, Bonamali and Tonkolili in the north-central and Koinadugu to the north-east; four in the South, Moyamba, Bo, Bonthe, and Pujehun; and three in the East, Kambia, Kailahun and Kono. There is a fairly even spread of population over these twelve districts and the Western Area.

The 1974 census gives a total population of approximately 2,73 million and shows the distribution of tribal/ethnic groups in the various districts. In the absence of a language and language use survey, these tribal/ethnic groups are taken here as coterminous with language groups. An unqualified use of tribal/ethnic groups as suggested would however give an erroneous picture of both societal and individual multilingualism. This is particularly so with respect to the major languages and even more so for some minor languages as the following discussion shows. The census recognizes eighteen Sierra Leonian languages, a number of West African languages, English, French, Arabic and a few European languages. The Sierra Leonian languages are the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Number of Speakers</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Temne</td>
<td>816,248</td>
<td>30.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mende</td>
<td>799,905</td>
<td>30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Population</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limba</td>
<td>231,545</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kono</td>
<td>127,127</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuranko</td>
<td>106,790</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foulah</td>
<td>106,135</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susu</td>
<td>87,190</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherbro</td>
<td>78,118</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lokko</td>
<td>78,105</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandingo</td>
<td>69,908</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kisi</td>
<td>56,617</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krio</td>
<td>50,119</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yalunka</td>
<td>19,030</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirim</td>
<td>6,087</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vai/Gallinas</td>
<td>4,442</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kru</td>
<td>4,105</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gola</td>
<td>2,322</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three major languages can be indentified using the composite criteria of numerical strength of native speakers, widespread use as second language and use as lingua franca. These are Mende, Temne and Krio, and they show a distinctive geographical distribution. Temne, West Atlantic, sub-group Mel, is located in the North in a wide belt stretching eastwards from Port Loko and Kambia into southern Bombali and Tonkolili. It takes in the major urban areas in the North and there are some large concentrations of Temne speakers in the South and East, especially in Kono, Moyamba, Kenema and Bo, and in the Western Area. It is also used as a second language by contiguous minor language groups in the North, particularly the Limba, Lokko, Bullom (Sherbro), Foulah and Mandingo in Temne areas, and, to a lesser extent, the Susu whose area it overlaps in the north-west.

Mende, South-West Mende, occupies most of the South and East where it is dominant in six of the seven districts, Kenema Bo, Kailahun, Moyamba, Pujehun and Bomba. The larger minor language groups in this area, Sherbro, Kono and Kisi, use Mende very extensively as a second language (12). The smaller
minor language groups, Krim, Vai and Gola, show a high degree of bilingual competence in Mende and an even greater readiness to use it as an L2. It has extended south and east at the expense of these minor groups and continues to gain ground steadily as an L2. Unlike Temne, there are smaller concentrations of Mende native speakers in the Western Area, the North and Kono district. There are larger and, economically and demographically, more significant urban areas in the South and East which would appear to imply a higher incidence of individual bi- and multilingualism in such areas. The need for a language survey is most strongly felt when languages are categorised into major and minor groups. Nevertheless the practical and reliable alternative is a composite strategy consisting of a relevant and experienced exposure to the linguistic situation, a discriminating observation and a variety of records and supervised studies.

The acceptance of Krio, a Creole language, as a major language is incontestable in spite of its numerical strength of only 50,119 native speakers concentrated in Freetown and the Western Area, 92.0% of all Krios. Krio is used as an L2, a lingua franca and a trade language throughout Sierra Leone. The numerical strength of this body of users is difficult to estimate with any accuracy in the absence of a language use survey, but some informed projections could be made. It would not be inaccurate to assert that over 90% of the Western Area population of some 294,255 are competent in Krio due to the composite factors of urbanization, education, cosmopolitanism and de-ethnicization. There are also large urban and administrative centres in the North, South and East like Makeni, Bo and Kenema and heterogeneous, cosmopolitan mining and commercial areas such as Kono and Kenema which are multilingual and where Krio is widely known and used. In all these areas, and in other urban centres, knowledge of Krio comes with education, social and commercial mobility and with age-young people in the educational system. Bi-
and multilingual competence including Krio in the individual’s verbal repertoire are very common in these areas, but as one moves further into the rural areas, its incidence diminishes as individuals retreat into monolingualism or bilingualism in their native language (L1) and a non-creole L2. Though with native speakers accounting for only 1.6% of the population, we may reasonably make a conservative estimate of at least 30% of Sierra Leoneans with knowledge of Krio and who use it as a lingua franca and trade language. Observations of function and distribution would confirm the recognition of Krio as a major language. Given this spectrum of use the language presents a range of forms; from the acolectal through the basilectal to the pidginized varieties which are used as lingua francas and trade language.

All other languages are minor languages, for apart from our criteria for recognizing major languages, there are not additional demographic or sociolinguistic reasons for treating them otherwise. Limba, West Atlantic, the largest minor language with 8.7% of the population, is located further north than Temne in Bombali, Koinadugu, Kambia and Tonkolili districts. For sociological reasons, it is insignificant as an L2 among native speakers of the other languages in the Northern Province, especially among the Temne. In spite of this rather restricted character of the language, it is used with the major languages as a “national” language in the media. Nevertheless, the classification as a minor language using the above criteria is retained and its de facto promotion as a putative major language noted.

In the Northern Province, the other five minor languages are Kuranko, Susu, Lokko, Kandingo and Yalunka. These minor languages are either regionally restricted, numerically unimportant or are dominated by the major languages. They also show a certain characteristic distribution which has implications for personal bi- and multilingualism, language use and language in education.
This distribution presents a pattern of area concentration and group relatedness. Kuranko, Mandingo and Yalunka are located mainly in the north-east in Koinadugu with the first two showing some mutual intelligibility since they are Mande languages. Kuranko is contiguous with Limba and, to a lesser extent, Temne areas. Susu and Lokko are in the west of the Northern Province; the former is found mainly in Kambia, Freetown and Bombali whereas Lokko has its highest concentration in Bombali. There is some mutual intelligibility between Susu and Yalunka, both south-west Mande languages, although they are separated by the Limba dialect-continuum. These languages provide L2 users of Temne in varying degrees; my informants indicate a widespread knowledge of and real willingness among the Lokkos, for example, to use Temne.

In the Southern and Eastern Provinces only three minor languages show any significance in numbers and distribution; Sherbro in the south-west, 42.9 and 35.3% of all ethnic Sherbros in Moyamba and Bonthe districts respectively; Kono, with 93.5% Konos in Kono district; and Kissi, 62.9 and 26.7% respectively in Kailahun and Kono districts, in the East. Among the Sherbros, Kono is widely known and readily used as an L2. The same is true, though to a lesser degree, of Kono and Kissi. The smallest three, Krio, Wai/Gallinas and Gola, have declined in number of native speakers as a comparison of the 1963 and 1974 census figures will show,11 and Mende remains dominant as L2 among them.

These demographic and sociolinguistic data invite four basic conclusions. Temne and Mande are regional linguae francae in the North and South/East respectively. Krio is an L2 and lingua franca in the cosmopolitan Western Area and, more significant, it is a national lingua franca, L2 and trade language and its continued growth is tied to factors discussed earlier and below. Second, the Southern and Eastern Provinces are more linguistically
homogeneous than the Northern Province, having, as they do, only three of the larger minor languages, and the dominance of Mende as a regional lingua franca is more complete than Temne in the north. Third, individual bi- and multilingualism and societal multilingualism are significant in all three provinces and the Western Area, with far-reaching implications for language policy and language in education. Fourth, whether he is educated or illiterate, individual multilingualism is the normal language characteristic of the average Sierra Leonean; where not multilingual, he is as a rule bilingual except where he may be extremely parochial and has had no exposure to some of the many SL languages.

This multilingual situation is further complicated by the existence of dialects, especially among the major languages.\textsuperscript{12} Mende has at least five dialects, Kp Mende, Kpa Mende, Sherbro Mende, Sewana Mende and Wanjama (Gollinas) Mende. The same dialects include Yoni, Bombali, Sanda (Western dialect in Port Loko and Kambia), Western Kuniike and Eastern or 'Deep' Kunike. Limba has at least five dialects, Tonko, Sela, Warawara, Safoko and Briwa Limba; some would add Keleng and Kamanke (Ke). Krio too exhibits a bi-dialectical character with native speakers and other de-ethnicized Sierra Leoneans constituting the standard K1 and non-native L2 Krio speakers the dialect K2; the bulk of users are in this second category. The dialect status of K2 is linked to native language influence and interference on all linguistic levels with some Sierra Leonean language affecting those more than others, for example, Foulah on phonology. These and other geographical correlates are reinforced by factors of a socio-economic kind to define Krio dialects.

Temne and Mende dialects do not present problems of intelligibility. The Wanjama dialect has been influenced by Gola and Vai as it is in these areas in the south-east. Kp and Kpa Mende are in the Bo and Taiama areas
respectively. With Temne, it is the Eastern Kunika, in eastern Tonkolili around Makali, Yele and Masingbi, which is the most distinctive and unintelligible and is in fact fast becoming absorbed through dialect mixing. Substantial differences between Limba dialects present the only serious problem of intelligibility among the Sierra Leonean languages, especially between Saffroko Limba and the other dialects.

These seventeen languages co-exist with English, Arabic and French which are, respectively, the second language, a language of religion and the most important foreign language. English is the official language, the language of instruction in the educational system, the language of international communication in diplomatic relations and business, of written internal official communication, of science and technology, a language of prestige and upward social mobility serving a social function and needed for a meaningful participation in a modern nation state.

Ernan (1978:14-18) presents a detailed identification of some nine domains in terms of which he considers the functional allocation of the four European exlects in the West African region. These are home, farm, school, worship, play, market, office, court and factory. His examination shows a very limited role for these exlects in parts of a few of these domains; for example, English is used in the classroom in schools, in written communication in offices and for most written transactions in these other domains. This typology can with some modification be applied to Sierra Leone to indicate the comparative relative importance and roles of English and the Sierra Leonean languages in this multilingual setting. While English shows essentially the same role specialization as indicated in Ernan 1978, the Sierra Leonean languages are dominant in almost all these domains in which they have important intra-group and wider communications functions. The lingua franca Krio is an important inter-group medium especially in the work,
school, neighbourhood and market domains and for oral middle level official communication. The regional lingua francae Themne and Mende also have a role in these domains, particularly in those areas where they are dominant.

Various sociolinguistic factors come into play to determine the choice of a particular lingua franca in specific contexts in the different areas of the country.

Bamgbose (1978:62) notes that at state level the system of communication in multilingual states must be capable of involving the whole population. He identifies the unilingual and multilingual models of communication, the latter involving two or more languages whether foreign (exoglossic) or indigenous (endoglossic) with these languages having equal status at national level. Because none of the three major Sierra Leonean languages by itself reaches the entire population, Sierra Leone operates a de facto multilingual model with Mende, Themne, Krio and Limba being described as "national languages" and treated as equal in the media.

There is no consistent usage here since other minor languages are similarly described as "national"; the term would therefore imply or mean "Sierra-Leonean." From a practical point of view, the three major languages and Limba would therefore appear to satisfy two points on a scale of recognition for official status of languages.¹³ Though they do not have a de jure status as official national languages because they are not necessarily an officially selected and legislated list the result of an overt announced policy decision, nevertheless they do appear to have a de facto "official" status. None of those endolects has as yet emerged to supersede the others and all have acquired official national roles.¹⁴
A functional equilibrium has been established in the Sierra Leone multilingual situation but it is one which has neither been reflected in a national language policy nor in a use of the SL languages in the educational system. Yet, even in the absence of such formal roles, these languages have a composite role in social and economic development and in political and cultural activities in the society at large. These functions are comparable to those listed in Bangbose (1982:2-6). In spite of these actual and potential uses of the SL languages in a stabilized multilingual situation, they are in the educational system only in a marginal way and English continues to have a disproportionate emphasis even in the face of its irrelevance to the linguistic experience of the masses. Until these languages receive further linguistic development and their roles are made more formal and popularly promoted, the configuration of the SL multilingual setting would continue to have no relevance to SL languages in education.

where language status and prestige are a function of the composite variables of (i) codification and literary resources (ii) prestige of speakers, especially their socio-cultural and socio-political standing (iii) role in wider internal communication, particularly use within a broad range of formal and semi-formal domains (Kloss 1966:15-16), and where one considers number of users and distribution, Krio, Mende and Temne have the highest prestige among Sierra Leonean languages apart from English. Krio possibly has a marginal edge over the other two due to the socio-cultural standing of its native speakers, literary resources and codification, use in wider internal communication and the need for it as a national lingua franca. Though all languages are prestigious to their native speakers and in their region of dominance, the other Sierra Leonean languages do not satisfy these criteria for overarching societal prestige. Limba has acquired an artificial
the masses. This situation is analogous to the position of Nigerian pidgin English and it is significant that the last APC National Convention (the ruling party) conducted its proceedings in Krio. Its growth is therefore tied closer to the developmental and modernisation process.

A National Language Policy

The sociolinguistic configuration of this SL multilingual setting invites one to expect a language policy that would reflect these linguistic realities whilst also representing an enlightened approach to the integrative and catalytic role of the indigenous languages in socio-economic development and promoting the cultural enrichment of the diverse ethnic groups which make up the national entity.

The objectives of such a policy are contained in the 1970 White Paper, the 1975 Education Review and the Delby Report. If realized, they would be expected to contribute to social and economic development, political stability and national integration. Other objectives which we subscribe to were identified in a similar context though with a different emphasis by Bangbose (1976a:7) as “nationalism and nationism, mass-elite integration and acceptability,” the three factors one has to consider in “determining which language or languages to adopt for conscious integration.” Fyle (1975:9) was aware of these factors when he asserted that such a policy should guarantee easy access to the outside world whilst helping internal development and the preservation of local community identities.

These complex objectives in a multilingual Sierra Leonean setting exert conflicting pressure in the direction of both national endoglossic languages and an international exoglossic language, here English. This tension would appear to partly determine the complexion of a national language policy. The
compromise required here, the multilingual model of communication, though seen as an interim measure, would be expected to last into the foreseeable future in the case of Sierra Leone.\textsuperscript{16}

Mass-elite integration as an objective is even more urgent since only 15% of the Sierra Leonean population is literate in all languages. The objective of 50% literacy by 1990 is still an impossibility and anything beyond the present 15% could best be achieved if the indigenous languages have both some actual role in education and a national language status.\textsuperscript{17} But the problem of acceptability is crucial here since unless the languages chosen are widely acceptable, they would neither enhance political stability nor national integration but would, instead, be divisive. No amount of promotion would win support for an inequitable policy or break the barrier of strong beliefs and fears however unfounded.

Considering these objectives and the sociolinguistic and demographic configuration outlined earlier, only Mende, Temne and Krio have legitimate claims to national language status. Between them they reach some 70% to 90% of the population and already have equal de facto status at national level. But none, apart from Krio, can be used for inter-group communication by a significant proportion of the population. The concentration of Temne and Mende in the Northern, and Southern and Eastern Provinces respectively presents a situation of extensive dominance at provincial level in a multilingual situation where the dominant languages are, to an extent, regional langue francs and the other languages are used only for intra-group communication. The dominance of Mende in the South and East and the language and group-loyalty of native Mende speakers cannot be matched to the same degree by Temne in the North. On another level, and superimposed on this pattern, is the regional (Western Area) and national dominance of Krio
which, being neutral between Mende and Temne and the language of a small and increasingly politically insignificant ethnic group, could perhaps be considered acceptable to other minor groups.

On the face of it, therefore, selection would appear to involve no serious problem. However, the question of acceptability looms large again for in the absence of a language attitude and language use survey, no empirical data exists on the community's consensus on a national indigenous languages policy. In spite of the failure to act between 1970 and 1978, there are enough pointers to the Government's slant towards such a policy, the most immediate being the Ministry of Education's recent initiatives and the Dalby Report. Nevertheless, recent and contemporary socio-political experiences have demonstrated certain implicit and overt attitudes to specific language/ethnic groups which would no doubt become very overt and explicit if the question of choice is raised.

The language or languages chosen should have certain positive advantages consistent with the objectives identified earlier. These include political neutrality; geographical spread, vitality and therefore easy acquisition; codification and literary resources; and mass and elitist acceptability. None of the major languages by itself has all these features.

Though related to Lokko in the North and with enormous vitality, Mende lacks political neutrality as it is still identified with the defunct SLPP 20 whose loss of political power in 1967 still rankles with many. Selection of Mende will signal a revival of these forces and will be opposed, especially by the Temne and Krio. Temne is also not politically neutral as the ruling party is Temne and Northern dominated, and the political divide before the One Party State has always been between the North and the South. In spite of its own geographical spread and growth, its choice will be final confirmation of
fears of total Thiones domination. By all objective demographic and socio-linguistic indicators, especially its literary resources and codification, widespread use as lingua franca and ease of learning, Krio may be thought the ideal choice. But Krio still suffers from its identification with the English in the colonial administration, the historical accident of the political, professional and socio-cultural domination of its native speakers in the colonial and post-independence period and past uncomplimentary Krio attitudes to other groups. Although a significant socio-cultural group which cannot hope to regain political power, deep-seated suspicions and strong tribalistic antipathy would make it unacceptable as a sole choice. Indeed, the contemporary ambivalent attitude, especially among the provincial elite, which both denies its linguistic autonomy yet accepts its usefulness as a lingua franca, is the clearest indication of this.

Given these very serious socio-political constraints associated with the individual major languages, we would propose as a realistic language policy the following trio of arrangements:

a. make a distinction between an official language, national languages and languages of education and retain English as the official language.

b. as a possible nationalistic, integrative and widely acceptable solution, give the three major languages a collective national language status.

c. most of the minor languages which do not satisfy the basic demographic and socio-linguistic criteria for national language status are accommodated, protected and their continued development guaranteed by making them languages of education with roles as media of instruction and subject of study/research in the educational system in addition to English and the national languages,
This would neutralize major-language-group opposition to the choice of a single national language, reach the majority of the population and secure our objectives, but the possibility of minority-group-elite agitation would still remain. Furthermore, due to the concentration of most minor language groups in specific areas, their promotion in the educational system should not be too difficult, given the resources.

The mechanics of implementation would be delicate and therefore need to be carefully managed. Legislation or dramatic declarations could be destabilising and invite non-integrative agitation. Perhaps the most tactful strategy would be a quiet gradualist promotion in the media and the educational system. An important reason for this suggested unobtrusive approach is the difficulty, for the average citizen, of making the proposed distinctions between official, national and languages of education and between different language roles and status. Practical stops which emphasise their function and potential and enhance their resources could lead to an apparently natural emergence of these major languages into national dominance. But with three national languages, one official language and a host of languages in education, implementation would be very expensive and some very untidy situations would arise. For example, would the major languages not have to be taught in areas where they are not dominant, say Mende and Temne in the Western Area or Krio and Temne in Mende areas? What then of the minor language areas; would, for example, the Sherbro not have to learn Temne, Krio, Mende plus Sherbro as medium and subject?

Apart from these of selection, acceptability and codification, these problems of implementation show how difficult it is to operate an equitable national language policy and integrate the local languages in the educational system in a way which would reflect the demographic, sociolinguistic characteristics and multilingualism of the state, and at the same time satisfy the legitimate
aspirations and objectives of a specific educational policy and the needs of a modern nation state. Though it may be considered premature, potentially divisive and best left alone, it is our conviction that a national language policy ought not to be allowed to drift and that the outlines of one should be available when the issue is faced.

The Sierra Leone Languages in Education

It is expected that this linguistic and sociolinguistic situation would present some problems but also offer opportunities for use and experimentation with these languages in the educational system. The Sierra Leonean languages in education could be examined from three perspectives: the levels at which they can be used; the de facto practical approaches to their use; the official and semi-official pronouncements on their role in education.

At the three levels of use, primary, secondary and tertiary, including adult education, their roles vary. They are and can be media in early primary level, subjects for study in late primary and secondary levels, and both subjects for study and objects of research as well as vehicles for adult education at tertiary level.

On the second perspective, Fyle (1976:47-49) observes that though English is the official language of instruction, the Sierra Leonean languages are used unofficially in three main situations: very frequently in beginning classes to facilitate communication i.e. in early primary; rather infrequently to develop self-expression and creativity i.e. in early primary but diminishing into late primary; and, at later stages, contrastively in English language teaching. The local language is therefore both a first and a last resort medium, receives tacit approval and has no legislation for or against such use.

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Regarding the third perspective, some of the statements of intent which form a background to this unofficial use and recognition of the place of these languages in education may be outlined here. Two relevant documents here are the Government 1970 White Paper on Educational Policy and the University of Sierra Leone's 1976 Sierra Leone Educational Review. The White Paper states that it is not proposed to change the present policy of using English as the medium of instruction as soon as possible after the start of the primary school course. (1970:3)

This is consistent with the position of English as the official and unifying language, a recognition of its dominance in written communication and education, and of the country's unpreparedness for a local languages education policy. Specifically on the role of Sierra Leonian languages, it affirms that

the policy of Government is to introduce the teaching of Sierra Leonian languages in all schools. (1970:9)

The Sierra Leone Education Review outlines a more comprehensive and varied role for the Sierra Leonian languages. It predicts

a more active role for local languages particularly at initial stages in learning and further advocates that a language policy be formulated as a guide to future studies and plans. (1976:1)

This active role is envisaged in the Educational Base, a redefined primary level, where for reading and writing

the use of the national languages will be essential for literacy training or adolescents and adults who have never been to school. (1976:5)
In an apparent reference to the need for organised research in this area, the review calls for "a scientific investigation... into the use of vernacular languages within the educational base." On the secondary level it proposes the establishment of a national policy with respect to the utilization of Sierra Leonean languages, the identification of the languages to be taught ... the style and content of the associated teaching courses and the potential need for textual resources for that teaching. (1976:25)

While the gradualist approach of the 1970 White Paper is sound, little practical steps have been taken to implement its proposals. Professor Fyle's 1973 proposals for a Sierra Leone Languages Project inspired by the 1970 White Paper did not receive the necessary institutional and financial support. Neither have the specific ideas in the Education Review been included in any consistently and publicly articulated policy. No Sierra Leonean language is taught as a subject at any level or used officially as medium of instruction. There has however been a tradition of research into the Sierra Leonean languages at Fourah Bay College 22 and more recently, Mjala University College, and the newly established Sub-Department of Linguistics (within the English Department) at Fourah Bay College, though initially launched in October 1981 without the expected injection of funds and other resources, promises to reinvigorate this tradition, especially as it now has a few basic established positions. Perhaps the Education Review's recommendations were too recent for one to have expected action; however, the Ministry of Education has embarked on certain initiatives since 1978.

Reasons for the inertia between 1970 and 1978 lie in a failure to appreciate the importance of an early start in local language education, the institutionalized attachment to English, especially in the pre-independence period, the absence in the late 1960s of a core of local sociolinguists who could have both shaped opinion in the formulation of an equitable language
policy and produced the linguistic resources on which an educational programme could be based, the consequent concomitant unpreparedness of the country for such a programme and the almost perennial financial constraints on institutional expansion the University has lived with.

Recent Developments

Since 1978 there have been two interrelated developments which have far-reaching implications for Sierra Leonean languages in education and national language policy:

a. the launching of an Indigenous Languages Education Project by the Ministry of Education.

b. the presentation of a Consultants Report on National Languages in Education.

The Indigenous Languages Education Project (ILEP) has the components and has undertaken the activities listed:

c. initiated the use of Mende, Temne and Limba as media of instruction for classes 1 to 3 in 25 Pilot Primary Schools in September 1979; 11, 9 and 6 schools respectively were identified in these areas.

d. in 1978/79 a random linguistic survey was conducted by the Ministry of Education and the Institute for Sierra Leonean Languages (ISLL) and preceded the identification of these schools.

e. seminar/workshops to train serving teachers, for the production of materials, texts and aids for the pilot schools and on orthography standardization and harmonization have been held at intervals since July 197823 under the direction of the ISLL and the Ministry of Education.

f. the Ministry of Education and the ISLL have produced readers 1 to 4 for Limba and 1 to 3 for Temne and Mende.
a National Planning Committee (NPC) with an advisory role was set up; initially comprising experienced individuals from the various language groups, it is now being reconstituted to include more participation by local linguists.

three committees for Linguistic Survey, Language Policy and Orthography Standardization were set up by the NPC to service specialized aspects of the project.

g a UNESCO Consultancy directly related to the ILEP was commissioned by the Ministry of Education.

Some basic problems attended the project at its inception. From a practical point of view, serious financial and human resource problems hampered the materials preparation, the expansion of the project, including additional workshops to train teachers, and even the provision of transport facilities for effective supervision of the pilot schools.

Apart from these problems, some pertinent observations in the context of this study are in order. Though welcome, the project does not appear to have been conceived within a coherent, consistent and equitable sociolinguistic, language policy and language planning framework. This is reflected in the significantly curious omission of Krio both from the pilot schools phase and from the orthography coordination exercises which were specifically for Mende, Temne and Limba. This was inexplicable both within the context of the 1970 White Paper and the 1976 Education Review and, more importantly, in relation to the sociolinguistic realities of the Sierra Leone situation outlined above. It has been suggested in extenuation that the initial choice of languages was an arbitrary selection, that materials and other inputs were not available and that there are special problems associated with the inclusion of Krio in such a project. Since this is implausible, some felt
justified in seeing this choice as a covert national language policy decision designed to reverse the de facto policy allowed so far. However, though Krio has now been included in the project on the advice of the NFC, which apparently sensed the implications of its exclusion, and an orthography workshop held in November 1981, no pilot schools have been selected although it has been intimated that these would eventually be located in Greater Freetown and certain urban provincial centres.24

Secondly, the necessary research inputs and close technical and professional supervision which could be provided jointly by a Linguistics Department, a University Education Department and the Ministry of Education appear to be lacking. The ISLL seems to have a crucial and central role in this area. Since 1982 there has however been more involvement of linguists at FBC and Njala in the professional aspects of the various workshop sessions. Related to this is the vital role of the other two committees which have not yet done anything significant but which have to be carefully and professionally staffed. A significant omission is the inoperative State of the Linguistic Survey Committee which should have provided empirical data on which the ILEP and language policy could be based. Similarly, the Language Policy Committee has barely started to function though a White Paper on this and related matters seems imminent. Only the Orthography Standardization Committee through its workshops has made some progress.

Thirdly, while it would be conceded that ideal conditions need not obtain before launching such a project, it should be obvious to the Ministry's inspectorate/supervision services that the extension, even if staggered or phased, of this applied language policy to the entire educational system under the present conditions would create serious problems.25 Recent research findings in the West African area may be extrapolated to the Sierra Leone situation, but all such findings underline the need for adequate
preparation. Furthermore, such an applied policy becomes more meaningful in the context of an agreed, clearly articulated, though quietly promoted and unlegislated national language policy which then becomes its justification.

The second crucial recent development was the presentation of a consultant’s report on policy with regard to national languages in education prepared by Dr. David Dalby after a short visit to Sierra Leone (October 16-31, 1980) and twenty years experience in and contact with the country. Of immediate relevance to this study are the following specific proposals under four particular headings:

Sierra Leone Institute of African Languages

2. That a SIERRA LEONE INSTITUTE OF AFRICAN LANGUAGES be established in Freetown. (p.3)

Mother tongues and official languages

16. That the most widely spoken mother tongues of Sierra Leone, Mende and Temne, be declared official languages alongside English, and be introduced progressively into national administration, government and parliament, including the use of Mende and English as official languages of the Southern and Eastern Provinces, and of Temne and English as official languages of the Northern Province. (p.6)

17. That Krio, although not having the status of an official language be recognized as having a special role in the Western Area and as being the most widely spoken language throughout Sierra Leone as a whole. (p.6)

18. That all other mother tongues in Sierra Leone be regarded as educational media within their own areas. (p.6)

Vehicles for languages of education

20. That approximately equal broadcasting time on SLBS and SLTV be allocated to Mende, Temne and English; and that Krio be used frequently to provide
translations and summaries of broadcasts in other languages, as well as for its proportionate share of broadcasting time as a mother tongue.

Teaching of languages

22. That Fourah Bay College be requested to reconsider the structure and nomenclature of its language departments ... consideration be given by Fourah Bay College to the establishment of a single department of languages and linguistics, including African languages, English and French. (p.7)

A detailed critical examination of this wide ranging report would be out of place here but its recommendations are centrally relevant to our theme and they deserve comment. Coming from a UNESCO consultant with such a long association with the country and having the double weight of this prestige behind them, they are very likely to be taken as definitive and objective.

Unfortunately, some aspects of this report are surprising and could be seriously misleading to policy makers who may be inadequately briefed on the sociolinguistic situation of the country and, even more so, to politicians who may harbour specific linguistic prejudices. 28

In appearing to confirm the original thrust of the ILEP, proposals 16 and 17, and other parts of this report, overlook or ignore the significant position of Krio in the linguistic and sociolinguistic situation in Sierra Leone which justifies its legitimate claims to official/national language status. It is not clear how the undefined "special role in the Western Area" for Krio would complement the three official languages, but this seems more like a tacit recognition of the official/national language status of Krio (implicit indeed in proposal 17) but an unwillingness to acknowledge it. Assuming the acceptance of Mende and Temne as official languages as proposed, it is doubtful whether this would work efficiently, given the degree of heterogeneity and personnel mobility in the national administration. More
seriously, these proposals, if implemented, might accentuate the latent tribal divisiveness which recent socio-political experience could confirm. This would be particularly so without the mass-elite bridging role which Krio could so effectively play but which English can barely hope to perform and only at the cost of promoting elitism.

Proposal 2 supports the proliferation of institutions in a resource-starved setting where existing institutions can barely be maintained, when one would have expected the consolidation and expansion of the FBC Linguistics Department and an extension of its role, as well as a more effective and efficient collaboration between it and the Ministry in support of the ILEP and the development of Sierra Leonean languages in education.

Proposal 18 is reasonable in the context of the ILEP, though 20, continuing the bias of 16 and 17, compromises the usefulness of the media as a vehicle for local languages in education. Proposal 22 clearly ignores the practical and widely accepted distinctions between a Department of English Language and Literature, a Department of Linguistics and Sierra Leonean Languages and a Department of Modern Languages (i.e., modern European Languages). Such an amalgamation can only obscure the different but no less vital objectives and contributions of each of these departments to the educational system and to the ILEP in national development. Generally, though the report does make some helpful suggestions, its failure to advise a correction in the imbalance of the ILEP and its explicit but doubtful national language policy stance compromise its usefulness.

Though the SL languages still have no institutionalized role in education, the situation is not stagnant. With the development and expansion of the ILEP, further professional inputs to it including an evaluation of this project, and a covertly promoted but also equitable emphasis on all major SL
languages, their role in the educational system would eventually be made to match their place in society. The initial steps of the IIEP would appear to demonstrate the importance of a carefully thought out policy as a framework for initiatives in a multilingual setting.

Notes

1) An earlier version of this paper was first presented at a Linguistisches Kolloquium in the Winter Semester of 1983/84 at the Universität Bayreuth where the writer was on sabbatical leave.

2) According to Thomas (1983:59, 192-193) 97.2% or 2,659,074 are ethnic Sierra Leoneans and 2.8% or 76,085 foreigners. Most population data are from this source.

3) Seventeen languages are listed here since there are no significant linguistic reasons for recognizing Vai and Gallinas as separate languages. They are however treated as different languages in the census and in its analysis in Thomas 1983. The percentages here are of ethnic Sierra Leoneans.

4) Themne constitute 85.3, 57.3, 39.8 and 82.0% respectively of the total population of each of these districts.

5) Mendes make up 78.1, 82.8, 70.0, 52.4, 87.5 and 62.1% respectively of the total population of these districts.

6) For example, Mende native speakers make up 6.6% of the population of Kono district, 11.0% of the Western Area and only 3.4% of the entire Northern Province. In sharp contrast, Temne native speakers constitute 31.6% of the population of the Western Area, 13.4% of Kono district and 20.1% of the South and East excluding Kono and Moyamba districts.

7) Only Makeni 26,781 and Lunsar 16,723 are of any significance in the North whereas in the South and East, Koidu/New Sembehun 75,846, Bo 39,371, Kenema 31,458 and Yengema 14,793 are bigger due to mining and commercial activities.
8) Student informants from all regions of Sierra Leone and a range of short research projects on a number of Krio-related sociolinguistic topics supervised by the writer over the years confirm these conclusions.

9) These districts have respectively 26.6, 13.4, 12.0 and 7.3% of all ethnic Limbas with another 19.9% in the Western Area.

10) The following percentages of each of the ethnic groups are in the provinces indicated; 56.1 Korankos in Koinadugu, 35.4 Susus in Kambia, 53.8 Lokkos in Bombali, 35.3 Mendingeas in Kono and 77.4 Yalunkas in Koinadugu.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1961</th>
<th>1974</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Krim</td>
<td>8,700</td>
<td>6,047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vai</td>
<td>5,800</td>
<td>4,442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gallinas</td>
<td>2,200</td>
<td>2,322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gola</td>
<td>4,900</td>
<td>3,222</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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12) Complicated not because dialects are identified as languages but because of the need for language standardization, especially for Limba, and the harmonization of orthographic representation.

13) Kloss (1966:15) lists five points: status as an official language; official status within a region only; official promotion through use in schools, notices, governmental activities, and so on; tolerance in the private sphere (newspapers, private schools, and cultural events); proscription of the language. The four SL languages have satisfied the second and third points as they have semi-official status and are receiving de facto promotion in the spheres indicated.

14) This situation would appear to invite a label borrowed from the binary opposition, "high degree of official status" vs "low degree of official status," made in Ngag (1982:17) with reference to English in ESL, EFL, ESL and ENL situations. Thus the four have a "low degree of official status" though, in spite of this, Krio is still in a grey area whereas
Limba is not, because its promotion in the school system has still to be clarified. Moag (1982:11-12) presents the ESL (English as a basal language) category for the first time.

15) Fyle (1976:46-47) sees the prestige/status factor in these terms - "At present, socially speaking there is a hierarchy of languages in the country, with English the most prestigious, Krio following as a close second, Mende and Temne, third, and all others - headed by Limba - in fourth place. This hierarchy of prestige is also, of course, a hierarchy in terms of need, and need is always a very powerful factor. But needs might change - certainly the need for grass roots development and thus for a common means of communication is now so great Krio is becoming (or perhaps has already become) a much more important language, generally speaking, than English."

16) One should allow for some degree of mutual acquisition by these two groups. Temne is said to be spreading in Limba and Kono areas. (Data from informants)

17) This analysis of the integrative might perhaps either be rejected by many or be reluctantly accepted.

18) Bambose (1976a:8 + 1978:63) calls this model "a transitional arrangement which will be a compromise" and points out that "in spite of the disadvantages of the multilingual model, it seems that it will have to be an interim policy for most multilingual African nations."

19) 50% literacy by 1980 was government policy for some time.

20) The Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) took the country to Independence and was abolished by law when the country became a One Party State.

21) Fyle (1975:6-9) proposes such an approach and reports that the basic ingredients of this policy are already de facto practice. It is also the multilingual model of Bambose 1976. Considerations of resource-availability might make it necessary to omit the declining three, Krim, Gola, Vai/Gallinas, from the educational system.
22) In addition to postgraduate student and staff research, final year students at FBC complete linguistic and socio-linguistic language projects which relate these languages to English.

23) These include one each in 1978 and 1979, two in 1981 and 1982 and three in 1983, including one for the harmonization of the orthographies of Limba, Kono, Temne and Mand in April 1983.

24) Since 1983 Krio has been brought into the project with the identification of pilot schools in the Western Area, the harmonization of its orthography with those of the other SL languages already prepared, the training of teachers and the holding of a writer's workshop in 1984 which prepared two readers.

25) The educational system would have to be improved at all levels and careful preparation made before this experimental project becomes actual official policy. 60% of all primary level teachers are untrained, low morale and motivation exist among teachers and unavailability of physical and material resources and other environmental disincentives to teaching are significant factors.

26) See Afolayan (1976:113-134) and Fafunwa in ms.

27) Dalby (1981:1); though a restricted technical report, it is in wide circulation, solicited and volunteered reactions have been sent to the Ministry and it is relevant to the theme of this study.

28) See Anare 1975 for a discussion of the importance of the informed contribution to be provided by linguists in language policy formulation and the contribution of language to national development.

References


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