The Mende Problem
David Dwyer, Michigan State University


1. Background

The Mende problem arises from the observation by Hair (1968:54), that unlike the other ethnolinguistic groups in Sierra Leone, "the Mende cannot be identified decisively in the pre-1700 sources." Although the term Mende was employed before 1700, "it was not yet the name of a single ethnolinguistic unit" (Hair, 1968:54-5). Moreover, the oral histories of the Mende chiefdoms collected by Abraham (1971) suggest a recent occupation of the present Mende homeland. They reveal that no Mende chiefdom appears to have been founded more than five

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generations prior to European contact. And although the data are not clear, genealogies seem to end with the first European contact in the hinterland, around 1880 during the signing of the "friendly treaties." The Mende problem is simply where did the Mende come from and how did their language arise?

The Upper Bambara chiefdom provides an interesting example. "Four or five generations after Ndimoh, the British arrived in the hinterland to sign friendly treaties" (Abraham 1971:39). Abraham uses the term "generation" to mean the period of the reign of a chief, which he estimates to be around 40 years. Allowing forty years per generation, the foundation of the Upper Bambara Chiefdom would have taken place around 1680, about one hundred years after the Mane invasions, but consistent with the earliest published accounts of the presence of the Mende in the area.

These histories further reveal a consistent pattern of settlement which Abraham (1971:27) summarizes below:

In fact, the traditions seem to follow a broad general pattern. A warrior or hunter establishes a settlement. A few, perhaps isolated hunters in search of game, or traders on their way to the coast, or just adventurers, are attracted to the settlement for a variety of reasons.... Then, perchance, some Muslim happens to sojourn in the settlement.... Somehow, he finally settles himself. He is given a good status, and also probably a wife. He may also send for his own relatives.
grows, it surely gets mixed. Interestingly, none of these oral traditions reveals any indication that the territory now inhabited by the Mende was previously occupied. This raises the questions: were there any earlier inhabitants? Who were they? And what happened to them?

Person (1961) claims as that these earlier inhabitants were the manufacturers of the mysterious Nomoli, carved soapstone figurines found throughout the area now inhabited by the Mende, Kíssi and Bullom (see figure 1). This contention is supported by limited reports of oral traditions of the Bullom (Sherbro, Bullom, Krim, etc.) which state that they once occupied much of the present day territory of the Mende, but that they were pushed coastward.

Person (1961) also claims, as does Rodney (1967), that the displacement of the Bullom was the result of the Mane invasion of the mid sixteenth century and that these invasions led to the emergence of the Mende people. Actually, the evidence indicates two separate Mane intrusions into Sierra Leone from Liberia. Rodney (1967) suggests that while these invasions took place at approximately the same time, they may not have been coordinated. The coastal Karu-Quoija a invasion, following a migration from further east, was launched from the Cape Mount area of Liberia (see figure 1) and resulted in the political subjugation, but not the geographic displacement of the costal Bullom.

Sources from 1500 do make it clear that the Bullom occupied the coastal zone almost continuously from near the Scarcies river, past the Sierra Leone peninsula to Sherbro Island and

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2Rodney equates this term (Karu) with Kru but gives no explanation. Hair (1968) disputes this as Karu is Mende name for Vai, and, I might add, the Bandi name as well. In section 2.5 I suggest that the term Quoija (phonetically something like koya or even kuya may have been Ko-ya 'the descendants of Ko.
the Kittam River.... Today, the Bullom stretch from north of the Scarcies (but not as far north as the Iles do Los) to the Kittam River, but only in pockets, their line being broken by Temne and Mende intrusions, apparently made since 1800" (Hair, 1967:254).

Further inland, another invasion, launched from northern Liberia, swept westward to the Rokel River and Port Loko. This inland invasion is the one that Person claimed separated the Bullom from the Kissi peoples.

Each of the invasion forces consisted largely of locally conscripted (Liberian) troops. However, the organizers of this force are reported to be a small, ruling elite originating according to Rodney (1967) "in the southern section of the Mande world of the Western Sudan." 3 Along the coast, according to Rodney, the Mane conscripted the Vai and attacked northward along the coast. In the hinterland, the Mane conscripted the Bandi 4 and possibly the Loma 5 and attacked westward

3 Appendix A contains a map showing the distribution of the Mande speaking people.

4 The term Gbandi is an older form of Bandi, phonetically bandi. Within the last 300 years, the name of this language underwent a number of sound changes (Dwyer 1973). Among them the labio-velar gb became b, an implosive b. Thus the historically older term gbandi became bandi, usually written as Bandi.

5 The name Loma (phonetically loma) also appears in the literature as Lorma, with the letter r being an orthographical device to represent the vowel å.

stopping at what is now Port Loko, so named because once Loko people lived there. 6 Rodney then proposed that the Mende culture and language arose from some sort of linguistic mixing of the language of the Mane invaders and other languages in Sierra Leone.

... the Mendes represent the Mane fusion with the Bulloms and the Kissis, while the Lokos represent the same Mane elements fused with the Temne (Rodney, 1967:237).

I take up this contention in section 4.

According to Dornealas' account of the oral history of the coastal elite (in Rodney, 1967), they left the western upper Niger River basin and traveled south to the coast, where they encountered the Portuguese fortress of Mina (in present day Ghana). After being discouraged by Portuguese artillery, a segment of the Mane forces, as mentioned earlier, continued along the coast to the Cape Mount area of Liberia, where in 1545 they encountered the Bullom and began their invasion of Sierra Leone.

This oral history of the Manes who initiated the coastal invasion says nothing of the inland Mane. Person believes that the inland Mane elite were representatives of the Kamara clan, who also claim to have come from the western upper Niger basin. These Kamara further claim to have

6 Since this time, the Loko have ceded some of their southern territory including, oddly enough, Port Loko to the Temne as a consequence of war. There is also a small island of Loko speakers just east of the Sierra Leone peninsula.
moved to what is now northeastern Liberia and then attacked what is now Sierra Leone.

These oral histories suggest two independent Mane invasions. Yet, the Mane elite of these two invasions appear to belong to the same clan, the Kamara. Rodney has pointed out that the Kamara clan has an alternative name, *shere* or *sere*. The *shere* variant, as in Sherbro Island, is found almost exclusively in the areas subjugated by the coastal Mande, while the *Kamara* variant is predominant in other parts of Southern Sierra Leone.

2. Basis of the Mane Invasion. The 16th century, the time of the Mani wars, corresponds to a number of significant events in the area: the growth of trade with Europe, the end of the Mali Empire (800—1550); and the introduction of iron tools. Rodney (1967) attributes the introduction of iron in this area to the Manes.

This strategic location of the empires of Ghana (700-1100), Mali (800-1550), and Songhai (1300-1600) enabled the control of the transaharan trade. But with the arrival of the Europeans on the Guinea coast, this situation began to change, for now trade with Europe became far easier via the trading outposts on the Guinea coast than across the Sahara. This economic change may have been a contributing factor to the decline of the Mali Empire. At any rate, its demise coincides almost exactly with the Mani invasions of Sierra Leone. Whatever the reason, it is clear that the Mani elite are identified as speakers of a northern Mande language, most likely that spoken in the Mali empire.

At about this time, iron tools, associated with the Mali Empire became available for weapons and for agriculture. Along the forest-savannah border, between the Mali Empire and the rainforest, and roughly the Sierra Leone-Guinea and Liberia-Guinea border, stood several groups, the Kono, the Kissi, the Hondo, the Loma, the Kpelle, and the Mano. The Loma, Kpelle, and the Mano began to enter the Liberian forest, most likely because of iron tree-felling tools that enabled them to practice their swidden agriculture. At about this time, dry rice was developed in the Guinea Highlands and rice agriculture is clearly associated with these groups. This new iron-rice technology replaced a less-productive agriculture and enabled much higher population densities and most likely absorbing the original inhabitants. Thus during the 16th century, this area experienced two “invasions”, one military, associated with the Mani and the other agricultural, associated with the introduction of rice and iron.

3. Hair's Interpretation. Hair (1968) rejects Rodney's views of language mixing and the hypothesis

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7 Rodney (1967) attributes the introduction of iron in this area to the Manes.

8 The Hondo, a term suggested by Hair (1968) are the ancestors of the current speakers of Bandi, Loko and Mende and who at this time resided in the area currently occupied by the Bandi.

9 Hair’s mention of iron and agriculture.
that the Mane invasions were in anyway involved with the emergence of the Mende. Hair's argument is that the involvement of the Mane in the hinterlands as mentioned by Rodney is based on Person's "highly speculative interpretation of hinterland traditions" (Hair 1968: footnote 54). Yet Hair would also have to agree that there is no evidence, oral or otherwise which would show that the Loma and the Bandi were not involved.

After rejecting Rodney’s invasion hypothesis, Hair (1968) "very tentatively" advances his own hypothesis, that the ancestors of the modern Loko, Mende, Bandi, and Loma peoples were the Hondo who correspond to what Dwyer (1973) has termed Proto-Central SWM (see figure 2). Although offering no linguistic evidence for his Hondo hypothesis,

Hair states that the geographic distribution of the Hondo roughly coincides with that of its supposed descendants. Hair's suggestion in no way conflicts with the existing facts and is consistent with the iron tool-rice hypothesis advanced above, however, until we learn more about the Hondo, especially their language, but also their geographical location prior to the Mane invasions, the role of the Hondo in the development of the Southwestern Mande will remain uncertain.

4. Linguistic Background. The Mende problem then is a matter of reconciling the different interpretations of Rodney and Hair. And while some of their differences arise from different attitudes concerning the reliability and interpretation of oral traditions, a great deal concerns the interpretation afforded the available linguistic facts. In this section, I attempt to clarify the linguistic issues as raised by Rodney and Hair from the standpoint of a Southwestern Mande comparative linguist as well as to present additional facts of which both Hair and Rodney were unaware at the time of their writing.

4.1 Dialect Archipelagos. Surprisingly, Sierra Leone contains three dialect archipelagos: Kissi/Bullom; Kono/Vai; and Bandi/Loko. By “dialect archipelago’ I mean a situation in which two closely related languages or dialects (the islands) are separated by an third less closely related language (the sea). In all three cases, these archipelagos are separated by the same “sea”, Mende. Kissi and Bullom islands, described by Person, are considered distinct languages, because of their separation, but they border on mutual intelligibility. Likewise, Vai and Kono and Loko and Bandi form two other archipelagos and these two sets would be considered dialects of the same

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10Speakers of Bullom are now found in two separate places along the coast, one in the vicinity of Bonthe island and another further north to the west of the Susu.
language were they adjacent to one another. As mentioned above, all three archipelagos are separated by a Mende sea. We need to point out that, on the basis of mutual intelligibility, Mende can be considered a dialect of Bandi and Loko, though Bandi and Loko are more similar to each other than either is to Mende.

Hair criticizes Person for resorting to massive population movements to explain events in this area. However, such population movements are the most likely explanation for the presence of three dialect pairs in Sierra Leone, each separated by over 100 miles.

4.2 The language of the Mane elite. While most scholars recognize two 'invasions' of Sierra Leone, only limited oral traditions suggest that these bodies were lead by the same elite. Therefore, any conclusions concerning the identity of the language and ethnicity of the Mane of the coastal invasions cannot be applied automatically to those of the hinterland invasion.

Several references support the contention that the coastal Mane spoke a northern Mande language. DeAlmada (in Rodney 1967:221) noted that the Mane's spoke the same language or nearly the same language as the “Mandingos” (this is a term used even today to refer to speakers of Bambara, Malinke and Dyula). While modern Kono and Vai are now distinct from Manding, the language of the Mandingos, Hair (1968) points out that this may not have been so three hundred years ago.

The name given to one of the leaders of the Mane was Mandimansa. The modern Vai version of this term is Mandimanka while the modern Manding versions of this term are either Manimansa or Mandimansa, depending on the dialect. The etymology in all three cases is the same 'chief mansa' of the Manes.\footnote{In reading Rodney (1967) it was unclear whether the term Mane referred to the leadership or the entire invasion force.}

The Mane were also known as the Mendi-ko. Hair suggests the word mendi means 'lord.' The founder of the Upper Bambara Chiefdom was from Koh (probably $k\sigma$ phonetically) which is according to Abraham (1971:37) "apparently in either the present day republic of Guinea or that of Senegal. Thus Mendi-ko could represent the Mane from Koh.

The term rendered as Quoiija could be phonetically $k\sigma$-ya. Hair, identifying ya as meaning 'place' analyzes this as 'sea-place.' Heydorn (1948) analyzes this as a compound of mane\footnote{Throughout western Mande, one finds alternations between n, nd and j in the same word. Thus the forms mani, mali and mandi could represent different variations of the same word. Likewise, given the similarity of the vowels i and e, the variants mane, male and mante might also represent variants.} and ya 'descendent of'; thus the Manya are the descendants of the Mane. Thus, 'ya' can also mean

\footnote{The variations mani and mane can be attributed to a number of possible sources: 1) Errors in Europeans transcribing the name; 2) the interference of a definite suffix –i in some of these languages; or 3) a variation in the language themselves.}
'people' so that this could also mean the 'descendants of Koh'.

The etymology of the term *Comendi* poses a greater challenge, though we note that the present day Manya, found along the Guinea/Liberian border are also known as the *Komendi*. It is possible that the term *komendi* is a rearrangement of the terms *k* and *mendi* so that the term *mendi* is in the modifier position and *k* is the head. In this case, the meaning would be something like 'the lordly Koh.'

### 4.3 Language Mixing

Rodney's views of language mixing as an explanation of the origin of the Loko and Mende have been strongly attacked, and rightly so, by Hair (1971) on linguistic grounds. Linguists are very reluctant to accept the occurrence of a 'mixed language' (one showing generous proportions of two or more distinct parent languages) as a common, natural phenomenon. Welmers (1970:5) for example states:

> We should look to external influence and particularly to anything like language "mixture" only as a last resort... Even if we were to admit to the term "mixed language" for Mbugu - which I am by no means prepared to do - it is hardly fair to claim that similar developments may be common.

Languages are extremely resistant to gross change brought about through contact with other languages. In these situations, either one language replaces the other, or both remain relatively unchanged. While gross changes in situations of contact are rare, minor modifications such as the acquisition of new words, new phonological and syntactic rules from a neighboring are not.

Apparently, much of the need to explain the evolution of the Mende and Loko languages as a product of language mixing can be traced to the following statement by Kup who claims that both Loko and Mende were mixed languages:

> Consequently, as we shall see, the Lokos knew and traded with the Temnes at a much earlier date than the Mendes and thereby acquired in their speech a marked Temne influence which today distinguishes if from pure Mende (Kup, 1961:124).

Kup does not provide a source for this observation, so it is likely his own. My own investigations of Loko and Mende (Dwyer, 1973) as well as those of Innes (1967) show that the Loko language has no marked Temne influence. Furthermore, Loko and Bandi are mutually intelligible and as pointed out above, they were adjacent to each other, they would be considered dialects of the same language. Thus, even with its purported lexical borrowings, the basic form of modern Loko can be traced, for the most part, to Loko's Southwestern Mande heritage. This claim does not deny the possibility that the Temne have exerted a heavy cultural influence on the Loko people, nor does it deny the possibility that the Temne language has completely replaced the Loko language in certain areas. What is suggested here is that the hypothesis of language mixing is not necessary to explain the known facts.

### 4.4 The Development of Southwestern Mande
Breaking from the older tradition of Westermann (1927) and other who divided the Mande languages into a **Fu** branch and a **Tan** branch based on whether the reflex of the number 'ten' appears is cognate with **fu** or **tan**, Welmers (1957) established the first modern classification of the Mande languages. Using lexicostatistics and a 100-word basic vocabulary list, Welmers established the first cleavage between Northern-Western Mande (figure 2) and Southern Mande (not shown). As figure 2 illustrates, Northern-Western Mande breaks down into Northern and Southwestern. Welmers further reported that within Southwestern Mande, the major division is between Kpelle and the other SWM languages, and that within this group, Loma is the most distinct. As mentioned earlier the remaining languages: Loko, Bandi and Mende could be under other circumstances considered distinct dialects of the same language. Loko and Bandi are mutually intelligible; for example, several Loko people have pointed out to me that after a short period of adjustment they could understand Bandi newscasts transmitted on Liberian Radio. However, because of their geographic separation and political autonomy, they have been treated as separate languages. Mende, while definitely more similar to Loko than Bandi, shows some important differences as well.

On lexicostatistical grounds, Welmers (1958) dates the separation of Northern-Western Mande into Northern Mande and SWM from around the fifth century A.D.

4.5 Mende as a lingua franca. While the Loko language appears to have been the result of normal divergent development following migration, the Mende language appears to have emerged as a lingua franca. The settlement of the Mende territory by peoples of diverse linguistic backgrounds suggests the need for such a language, and of those available, Dogo, the language of the inland Mane army, would be the most likely candidate. Mende still functions today as a lingua franca in the southern part of Sierra Leone and reportedly has replaced Vai and Krim as the mother tongue in some areas.

The development of a lingua franca is frequently characterized by a form of language change known as linguistic simplification, the loss of some of the morphological complexities of a languages surface structure. When compared with its Southwestern Mande neighbors, Mende shows considerable linguistic simplification, strong evidence that Mende developed as a lingua franca. Some of more dramatic examples of Mende linguistic simplification include:

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14 By *lingua franca*, I mean a language which is used by people whose mother tongues are different. The class of linguae francae includes both natural languages such as English, Swahili, Hausa and, as proposed here, Mende and pidgins and creoles. All lingua francae have a tendency to undergo linguistic simplification, though some conditions warrant more of this than others. The claim that Mende arose as a lingua franca should not be taken to mean that it is now or ever was a pidgin language; rather, it should be taken to mean that in its evolution it experienced the pressures typical of linguae francae.
1. Loss of first plural inclusive and exclusive distinction. Except for Mende, all the Central SWM languages distinguish between two types of first person plural: inclusive (listener included) and exclusive (listener excluded). Both Bandi and Loko have the exclusive pronoun ni and the inclusive pronoun mu. Mende, however, uses the pronoun mu for both of these functions.

2. Loss of distinction among possessive pronoun sets. Mende, Loko, and Bandi all distinguish between possession of body parts (my leg) and family members (my mother). Both Bandi and Loko use separate pronoun sets for each type of possession, while Mende uses only one.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Pronoun</th>
<th>my brother</th>
<th>my belly</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bandi</td>
<td>ni-/n-</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H H H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ni-deye</td>
<td></td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loko</td>
<td>ni-/nya-</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H H H</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ni-ndewe</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nya-nya</td>
<td></td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mende</td>
<td>nya</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H H H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nya-ndewe</td>
<td></td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>nya-goo-i</td>
<td></td>
<td>H</td>
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The letters above the vowels represent the tones H(igh) and L(ow). The tonal differences between Lorma and the other SWM languages reflect an historical process of tonal inversion (Dwyer 1982) in which SWM highs became lows and lows became high in Loma. Interestingly, Manya, when compared to other northern Mande languages, also has inverted tones.

3. The loss of the 0 - N class distinction. Loko, Bandi and Loma possess two morphological noun classes; Mende has lost this distinction. Morphemes of the zero class permit the weakening of the initial consonant of the following morpheme, while those of the N class do not. In the following examples, the k of kutu 'short' represents a strong initial consonant while the g (gutu) and w (wutu) represent weak initial consonants for Mende and Loko respectively. Historically, this class distinction derives from the presence or absence of a morpheme final nasal

<table>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loko</td>
<td>nika+wutu-na</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H H H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>maha+kutu-na</td>
<td></td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mende</td>
<td>nika+gutu-i</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H H H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>maha+gutu-i</td>
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<td>H</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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For a further discussion of the historical development of this phenomenon see Dwyer 1982).
4. The lost of the velar softening rule. The velar softening rule results in the alternation of \( k \) (via \( g \)) to \( w \) as in the Loko examples above. Mende no longer has this rule as part of its synchronic grammar, though vestiges of this rule appear in fossilized compounds such as \( nje+wulo \) 'aunt' (< \( nje \) 'mother' and \( kulo \) 'small').\(^{17}\) Examples such as this suggest that the rule was once present and subsequently lost in all but fossilized forms.

While these changes could be viewed as separate innovations in the other Central Southwestern Mande languages following the divergence of Mende, it is much more reasonable to assume that certain features were present in Proto-Central SWM and were retained in all the descendant languages but Mende. Seen as such, these linguistic simplifications provide strong support for the hypothesis that Mende developed as a lingua franca.

Finally, in comparison to the Bandi, Loko and Kpelle, which are dialectally rich, Mende admits only to minor dialectal variations. This fact suggests that the spread of Mende in this area is recent and possibly, that Mende is a lingua franca since one of the characteristics of a lingua franca is its relative uniformity throughout the area where it is spoken.

5.0 A reinterpretation of the Mende problem. With these additional linguistic facts, we can now undertake a reinterpretation and refinement of the Mende problem. To begin with, let us review the following points.

5.1 The linguistic homogeneity of Kissi and Bullom strongly support the idea that the area was split by some sort of invasion or migration. This point is further supported by Person's point about the distribution of the *nomoli* and reports by the Temne and Bullom that they once occupied larger portions of the hinterland now occupied by the Mende.

5.2 The linguistic homogeneity of Kono and Vai suggest another recent separation. Other evidence, as cited by both Rodney and Hair indicate that Vai speakers were involved in the coastal invasion also known as the Kru-Quoija invasion. Hair correctly points out that Rodney's equation of the Kru of Kru-Quoija with the Kru speaking people in southern Liberia. More likely the term Kru is to be equated with the Vai who are still known as the *Kalu* or *Karu* by the Mende and Bandi.\(^{18}\) Also, Rodney (1967:229) observes that "no writer on Sierra Leone or the Malaguetta Coast [Liberia] in the sixteenth or early seventeenth century appears to have heard of the tribe under that [Karo] name." This further supports the recentness of these people to the area. The implication of these observations is that the separation of the Vai and the Kono may also have been

\(^{17}\) Without the softening rule, this form would be \( nje+gulo \).

\(^{18}\) The distinctiveness of \( r \) and \( l \) is minimal in this area. In addition, the loss of \( \mathcal{V} \) between \( \mathcal{C} \) and a liquid is also common (eg., *karu* ---* kru*).
related to the Mane invasions, but that rather than being the victims of the invasions as were the Kissi-Bullom, they may have been the instigators.

5.3 The question of Loma involvement is immaterial to the question of Mende origins. According to the family tree, as shown in Figure 2, the languages of concern are the Northern SWM languages of which Loma is not a member. This, however, should not be taken to preclude the Loma from some sort of involvement, only that their presence is not needed linguistically to explain the emergence of the Mende.

5.4 The Loko did depart from the Bandi, settling in what is now known as the Port Loko area of Sierra Leone. Furthermore, the Loko were identified with the Mane's as Rodney (1967:237) observes, "they [the Portuguese] also made it clear that the region around Port Loko (or Logos, as it was then called) was one of the most important centres of Mane power within Sierra Leone."

In addition to linguistic evidence, various oral traditions support this historical relatedness of the Southwestern Mande peoples. Both the Loko and Bandi (Person 1961) claim that the Loko departed from Bandi country to fight a war in the west. According to Abraham (1971:24-5), "the Limba, reputedly the oldest inhabitants in the country [Sierra Leone], still call the Loko Gbandimbe, presumably because the Loko had a Gbandi ancestor somehow..." Hair (1968:55) citing evidence from Dapper, reports that in the western part of the Hondo area, "a separate land called Dogo" existed. Hair has suggested that the people living in this area, also called Dogo, are the ancestors of the modern Loko people by reasoning that the Loko are the western-most SWM people, and the terms Dogo and Loko are very probably related forms.

Despite the lack of an accurate phonetic transcription, the terms Dogo may be phonetically ndɔgə and, as such, appears to be related to the term Loko. Actually, the term Loko (phonetically lokɔ) is the Temne pronunciation of loŋgɔ or laŋgɔ, the name the Loko people give to themselves. The phonological alternation of nd, d and l is a common characteristic of all the Central Southwestern Mande languages and strongly suggests that ndɔgɔ and loŋgɔ are variants of the same form. Incidentally, ndɔgɔ, a morphological component of landɔgɔ (lan-dɔgɔ), is the name of one of the subdivisions of the Loko people. Further, loŋhɔ may be related to Loma (phonetically lɔŋɔ-ma or lɔŋ-ma with the dropping of the weak consonant). The -ma of these two examples is a suffix meaning 'on' and a suffix frequently used in naming Southwestern Mande towns:

- Mende: tee-ya-ma  black-water-on 'town name'
- Loma: voın-ja-mа pus-water-on 'town name'

As ndɔgɔ is related to la-ndɔgɔ, ndɔ (possibly ndɔɔ or even ndɔgɔ phonetically) may be related to Hondo (possibly ho-ndɔ or even ho-ndɔgɔ phonetically). Consequently, ndo may be related to ndɔgɔ.

Thus, Hair's identification of the Dogo as ancestors of the modern Loko people is plausible.
Furthermore, the militancy ascribed to the Dogo would link them with the Mane invasion forces. Thus, the above argumentation suggests that the original homeland of the Proto-Central Southwestern Mande (Hondo?) people was probably the area now occupied by the Bandi and possibly the Loma. Secondly, the dogo, the putative ancestors of the modern Loko represent that segment of Proto Central Southwestern Mande recruited by the Mane elite to form the inland Mane army. This army then attacked westward and advanced to the coast stopping roughly where there descendants are now located.\(^\text{19}\)

5.5 Mende oral histories imply that after the Mane invasions the current Mende-speaking area was unoccupied and was resettled by peoples of different linguistic backgrounds. It is not clear whether this territory had been depopulated by the hinterland invasion or simply one of low population. In any event, these histories describe a situation in need of a lingua franca. Thus, given this linguistic and historical evidence we propose that Mende developed as a lingua franca based on Dogo, the hypothesized language of the inland Mane army and the ancestral language of Mende and Loko. In its development as a lingua franca, it underwent several linguistic simplifications, typical of lingua francas to become Modern Mende.

Loko, on the other hand, shows little evidence of the sort of linguistic restructuring evidence by Mende. This reflects the likelihood that Loko represents a variety of Dogo that did not undergo simplification. Unlike Mende, Loko shows normal divergent development and no evidence of linguistic simplification. Loko is not likely to have undergone simplification since it did not function as a lingua franca.

6. Summary. In this paper, I have suggested the following scenario. Three major 16th century events, the increasing importance of European coastal trade, the decline of the Mali empire and the introduction of iron tools contributed to the transformation of this area. Although the language of the Mane had little structural influence on the SWM languages, the Mane invasions of Sierra Leone did cause the emergence of the Loko and Mende languages. The Loko are the descendants of the inland Mane army recruited from among the Central SWM speakers (Dogo?) in northeastern Liberia. Since its separation, Loko has undergone remarkably few linguistic changes (no more than what would be expected from normal language change over a period of three hundred years) and could even today be considered a dialect of Bandi. Mende, on the other hand developed as a lingua franca based on Dogo in the (re-) settlement of its present-day area in the wake of the inland Mane invasion. Rodney suggests that The costal Mane invasion had even less of a linguistic impact. While possibly responsible for the presence of the Vai in their present-day area, and possibly for the spread of the poro society, their linguistic impact on the Bullom and Krim was negligible.

\(^{19}\)Without the weakening rule, nje+wulo 'aunt' would be nje+gulo.
This account of the origins of the Mende and Loko differs from previous ones primarily on linguistic grounds. These earlier hypotheses have assumed that Loko, Mende and Bandi to be decidedly different linguistically and hence inferred, by way of explanation, the mixing of the Mane and Temne languages to produce Loko. These treatments, however, ignore the form and history of the Bullom language as well as the other Southwestern Mande languages: Loma and Kpelle.

The present analysis is consistent with the fact that the Northern SWM languages are so similar that under other conditions they could be considered to be dialects of the same language, and in so doing, eliminates the need to resort to unlikely hypothesis of language mixing to explain these developments.

Appendix A: The Distribution of the Mande languages
References Cited


Dapper, O. 1688. **Naukeurige Beschrijvinge der Afrikaenshe Gewestern...** Amsterdam (from Hair 1968).


