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A Grammar of Kisi



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A Grammar of Kisi

A Southern Atlantic Language

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'Kisi stone' *piómdó*, a stylized sculpture with magical powers.
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Abbreviations and conventions

Symbols

-, +	Morpheme boundary
*	Ungrammatical
.	Syllable boundary

Tone markings

[´]	High (H)
[`]	Low (L)
[^]	Falling (F)
[ˇ]	Rising (R)
[ʰ]	Extra-high (H+)
[↓]	Downstep
[↑]	Upstep
[↘]	Global fall
[↗]	Global rise

Abbreviations

Adj	Adjective
Adv	Adverb
Assoc	Associative
Aux	Auxiliary
Ben	Benefactive
C	Consonant
Circ	Circumposition
Cond	Conditional
Conj	Conjunction
Cop	Copula
Cs	Causative
Dem	Demonstrative
Dist	Distributive
Dist	Distal
Foc	Focus
Fut	Future

G	Glide
Hab	Habitual
Idph	Ideophone
Imp	Imperative
Imperf	Imperfective
L	Liquid (segmental level)
Mid	Middle
N	Noun
Nam	Name
Neg	Negative
Num	Number
Obj	Object
OP	Object Pronoun
Perf	Perfective
p.c.	Personal communication
Pl	Plural
Post	Postposition
Pref	Prefix
Prep	Preposition
Pro	Pronoun
Prog	Progressive
Prox	Proximal
Prt	Particle
Q	Question particle
Ret	Retinue affix
Sg	Singular
SP	Subject Pronoun
sp	species
St	Stem
Subj	Subject
Suf	Suffix
V	Vowel

1. Introduction

The following names have been given as alternative spellings for the name of the Kisi people and their language: Kisi, Kissi, Kisie, Kisiye, Kissien, Gizi, Gisi, Gissi, and even Kalen¹ (cf. Wycliffe Bible Translators 1978, Grimes 1988). The word for ‘Kisi (language)’ is *kìsìéí* (plural *kìsìóŋ*) and for ‘Kisi person’ *kìsìnòɔ* (plural *kìsìá*), all based on the stem *kìsì-*. In all three countries with large numbers of Kisi, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea, the spelling follows the French rendering “Kissi”. This spelling has won out because Guinea is where most of the Kisi people are found. The spelling “Kisi” is used here because it approximates the phonemic form of the word, because it is the spelling used in recent surveys of Atlantic² and Niger-Congo, and because it represents the spelling of the Kisi Literacy Committee, a missionary-inspired group in Liberia dedicated to developing literacy in Kisi.

1.1. Geographical setting

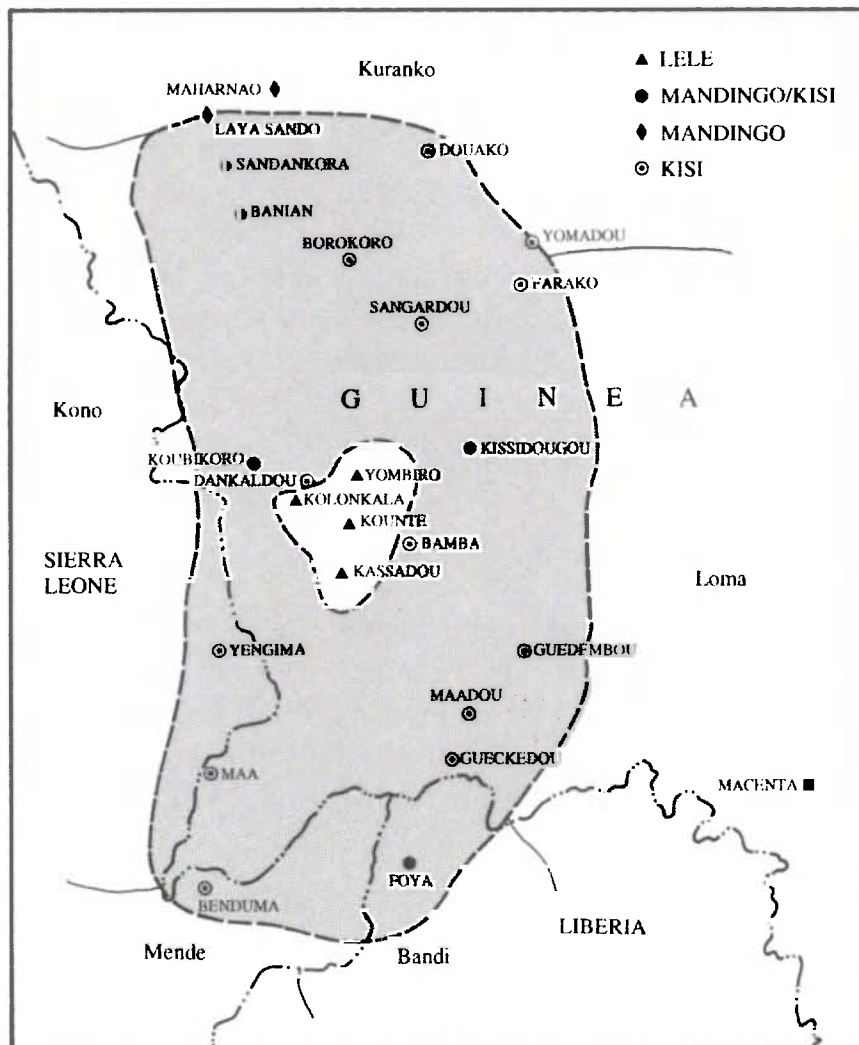
The Kisi language has been reported as being spoken by as many as 441,000 speakers (Grimes 1988) but is likely spoken by many more, over 500,000 (Childs 1993b), a considerable increase over the 250,000 posited in Sapir 1971. Most speakers of Kisi are found in the Republic of Guinea, primarily in the districts of Guéckédou (198,000) and Kissidougou (133,000) (extrapolated from Germaine 1984). Forty percent of the Kisi speakers, in roughly equal numbers, reside in Sierra Leone and Liberia (see Figure 1).

Guinea	266,000	(60.3%)
Liberia	85,000	(19.3%)
Sierra Leone	90,000	(20.4%)
Total	441,000	

Figure 1. Kisi speakers by country (Grimes 1988)

The geographical division of the Kisi people into three different countries is shown in Map 1. What is curious about the shape of the Kisi-speaking area is its discontinuity. In the middle of the central part is a large island of Lele speakers, first represented on language maps by de Lavergne de Tressan 1953. Lele is a dialect of Mandingo,³ albeit with a great number of Kisi words and even some Kouranko elements. The Lele were originally Kouranko according to Germaine

(1984:45). But missionaries who speak both Kisi and Mandingo state unequivocally that the language is a dialect of Mandingo (D. & P. Harvey 1990 p.c.). The Lele number some 9,000 in the Kissidougou district and 4,000 in the Guéckédou district.



Map 1. The location of the Kisi people

Whatever the identity of the Lele, they speak a language belonging to the Mande Group, the language group surrounding the Kisi. The languages to which Kisi is most closely related, the Bulom languages, e.g., Sherbro and Krim, are all far away, spoken in coastal areas of Sierra Leone (see Map 2).

Within the three countries the Kisi occupy, the governments have further divided the Kisi people into administrative units, often ones not conforming to traditional divisions. Liberia has one Kisi “chiefdom” consisting of three clans: Wam, Rankoli, and Tengia. The Kisi in Sierra Leone also have three clans:

Tongi, Kama, and Teng. In Guinea the Kisi people are divided into the circles of Macenta and Kissidougou, which are subdivided into smaller *départements*.

Besides these externally imposed political divisions, there are the traditional ones of familial lineage or clan (*kàáléŋ*). Except for very large villages, the village is the locus of a clan or a major lineage. There are about seventeen clans dispersed over the entire Kisi area [in Liberia]. Members of a clan share the same food and marry exogamously. Within a settlement, members of the same clan also share land which is held under communal tenure (Massing 1982:1).

Massing points out the close similarity of the clan system to that of the Mandingo; it is also found among the Fulani and is likely an areal phenomenon.

1.2. Historical background

Historical movements help to explain the current distribution of the Kisi. Oral history has it among both the Kisi and Gola (an ethnic group speaking a language related to and geographically near the Kisi area) that the original Kisi and Gola came from the Fouta Djallon in northern Guinea (D'Azevedo 1959, Schaeffner 1951; cf. Kup 1961:130). Mande-speaking peoples expanded westward from the area of present-day Mali, forcing the Gola and Kisi into the uninhabited rain forest (D'Azevedo 1959), much in the same way as the Kru were forced into southern Ivory Coast by the Mande peoples (Person 1966).

The situation which seems to emerge from this material is one of a large number of indigenous forest tribes which have been pushed into close proximity along the coastal forests by the westward movement of larger tribes — mainly Mande-speaking — from the interior savanna (D'Azevedo 1959:50).

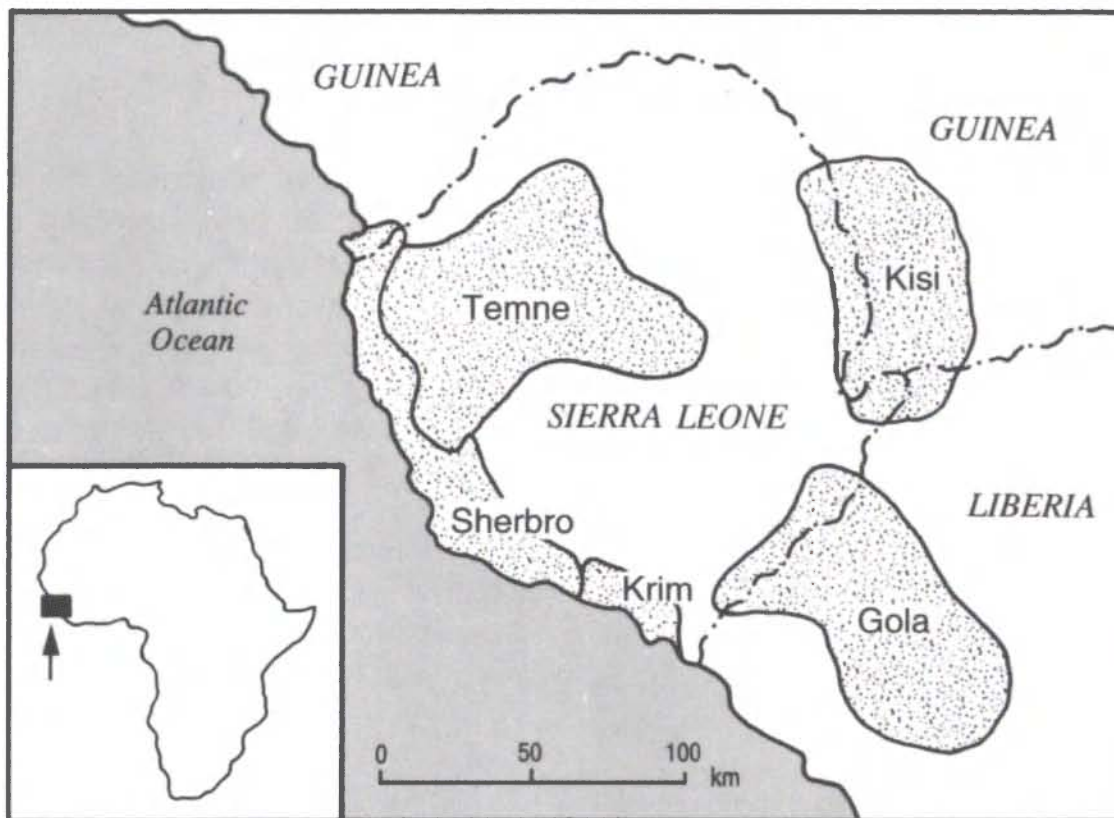
This scenario is also found in the brief history presented by Delafosse (1942:552), recapitulated in Germaine 1984. The time period of these movements is from the 1300s to the 1700s, with the Kisi and the Gola probably reaching present-day Liberia at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Liebenow 1987:31-32).

Recent movements are more certain. The Kisi were once coastal people, emigrating from the area now occupied by speakers of the closely related Bulom languages, e.g., Sherbro and Krim (see Map 2). Other Atlantic languages geographically close to Kisi (Gola and Temne) do not show nearly as many lexical correspondences with Kisi as do these coastal languages. The linguistic facts, then, support the proposed movement from the coast to the interior for the

Kisi. Fyfe (1972) and Person (1961) state this movement took place in the fifteenth century.

... the Kissi, who had left the upper Niger together with the other West Atlantic ("Mel") language groups before 1600, at first only passed through the territory to establish themselves in the western part of Sierra Leone from where they may have migrated to the east about 1700, settling down at their present place in the south of the Makona River [sic] (Schulze 1973:47).

The crossing of the Makona River (the border between Guinea and Liberia) took place around 1850 (Massing 1982:9, fn.1).



Map 2. The Southern Branch languages

In summary, there were two historical movements of the Kisi people. The first is part of a larger migration of people speaking Atlantic languages, the dispersion precipitated by the expansion of the Mande people. The second involves only the Kisi people, the movement away from the coast to the interior. Map 2 represents the location of the Kisi people as well as other languages closely related to Kisi within the Southern Branch of Atlantic. Another important fact about Kisi social and political organization is that there has been little

in the way of group cohesiveness on an extended scale (Bah 1983:120). The largest social unit has commonly been the hamlet or clan (U.S. Army 1961, 1964). The Kisi people comprise a highly decentralized ethnic group, with villages or minor settlements functioning as the most important political, social, and economic units.

The Kisi have remained a truly segmentary society despite a recent history which exposed them to more organized and centralized political units such as chiefdoms and large territorial states. The Kisi habitat, the undulating terrain of the forest edge which is dotted by numerous forested hillocks and watered by many small streams and rivulets, favors the dispersion of population units and social fragmentation (Massing 1982:1).

Speakers of other Bulom languages and Baga languages also possess fragmentary societies. Among speakers of many of the Northern Branch languages of Atlantic, the same situation obtains, e.g., among the Diola languages of the Casamance region of southern Senegal (Diola Survey Group 1990).

Further division necessarily must have taken place when the Kisi people were partitioned into three different countries by (modern) political boundaries. Thus we have a picture of "fragmentation" among the Kisi both locally and globally. This situation replicates the fragmented linguistic situation in Sub-Saharan Africa in general (Dalby 1977).

1.3. Genetic classification

Figure 2 shows the position of Atlantic within Niger-Congo (question marks are from Williamson). Atlantic is not closely related to the rest of the language groups in Atlantic-Congo, nor does it form a cohesive group of its own, e.g., Sapir 1971, as does, for example, Mande, a language separating from Niger-Congo before Atlantic (Bennett & Sterk 1977). Greater cohesiveness for Atlantic has been suggested, however, at least with respect to the three Senegambian languages, Fula, Serer, and Wolof. These three languages have been said to be at the periphery if not outside Atlantic altogether (Mukarovsky 1976-77). Doneux (1978), however, shows close relationships between each of these three languages and other languages considered to form the core of Atlantic, thus suggesting that Atlantic may need reorganization. Subgroups within Atlantic, e.g., Cangin (Pichl 1966, Cangin Survey Group 1989), exhibit a high level of lexical similarity among themselves, and the Mel languages are also very close (Dalby 1966). The general picture within Atlantic, then, is closeness within subgroups but distance between subgroups.

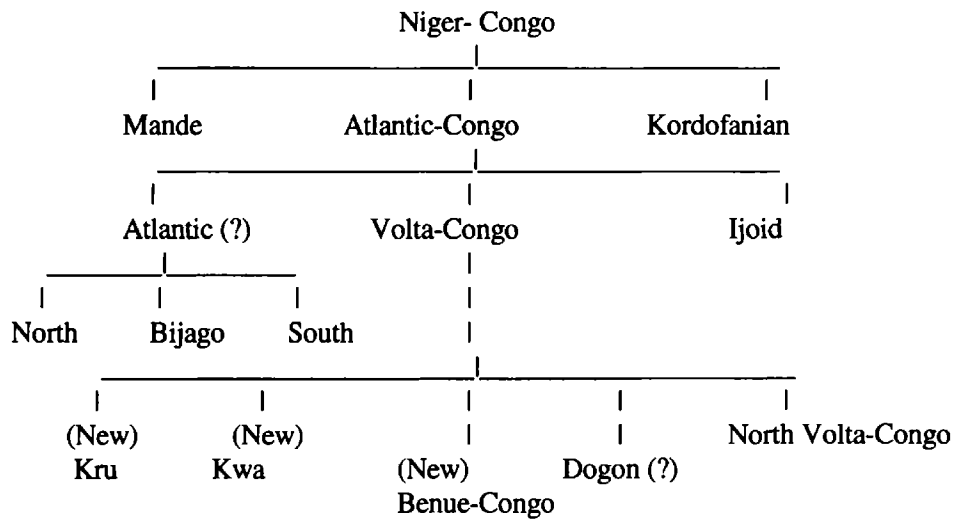


Figure 2. Atlantic within Niger-Congo (Williamson 1989:21)

The lack of correspondences above the subgroup within Atlantic and elsewhere motivates Dalby's proposal to eliminate "intermediate levels of relationship".

There is an important reason for not establishing intermediate levels of relationship between the ultimate level, represented by areas of wider affinity, and the immediate level [subgroup] ... This is the fact that such intermediate levels of linguistic relationship have proved to be much less obvious and more difficult to define than either the ultimate or the immediate levels (Dalby 1977:12).

Before abolishing the intermediate levels, however, "a re-examination of Atlantic appears to be called for" (Williamson 1989:14).

Despite the lack of resemblances among the subgroups of Atlantic, the membership of Atlantic (some fifty languages) has undergone relatively little modification (excepting Mukarovsky 1976-77) over the years, having been seen as consisting of three coordinate branches (see Figures 2 and 3). The Northern Branch is by far the largest, containing more than thirty-two languages (the situation with regard to "Diola Proper" is unsettled); Bijago is an isolate; and the Southern Branch contains eleven or more languages. Kisi and the Bulom languages form a cohesive group within the Mel subdivision of the Southern Branch.

Dalby's proposal of Mel as a subgroup (1966) has been incorporated into all later treatments with little modification (Sapir 1971, Mukarovsky 1976-77,

Dalby 1977, Lacroix 1981, Ruhlen 1987, Wilson 1989). Appendix A contains other classifications of Niger-Congo and Atlantic.

I. Northern Branch

A. Senegambian languages

1. Fula, Serer
2. Wolof

B. Cangin: Lehar, Safen, Non; Ndut, Falor

C. Bak

1. Diola
 - a. Bayot(-Essin)
 - b. Diola Proper
 - 1) Karon, Kwatay
 - 2) Diola-Gusilay: Diola(-Fogny), Gusilay, Kasa
 - 3) Ediamat, Mlomp, Her
2. Manjaku, Mankanya, Papel
3. Balanta

D. Eastern Senegal-Guinea

1. Tenda: Tenda, Tenda Mayo, Basari, Bedik, Konyagi
2. Biafada, Badyara
3. Kobiana, Kasanga; Banyun

E. Nalu

1. Nalu
2. Mbulungish
3. Baga Mboteni

II. Bijago

III. Southern Branch

A. Mansoanka

B. Mel languages

1. Baga: Baga Binari, Baga Maduri, Baga Sitemu, Baga Sobane, Landuma; Temne
2. Bulom: Mmani, Sherbro, Krim, Bom; **KISI**
3. Gola

C. Limba

Figure 3. Kisi within Atlantic

1.4. Status of the language

As is the case with several other Southern Branch languages, the Kisi people are isolated from speakers of related languages (see Map 2). The Kisi are surrounded by speakers of Mande languages: Mende, Loma, Bandi, Kono, Koranko, and Mandingo. A high degree of multilingualism and the imposition of national languages (French in the Republic of Guinea, extended pidgins and varieties of English in Sierra Leone and Liberia) result in Kisi being a language of relatively little importance beyond the local level, despite its recognition as

one of the eight national languages of Guinea in 1962 and despite its being used in radio broadcasts in all three countries (cf. Heine 1990).

Within the Kisi area of Guinea, for example, Mandingo is used within the towns and Kisi in the countryside. Furthermore, the Kisi have culturally and perhaps linguistically assimilated to the Mandingo, especially in Guinea.

The north of the Kisi country is characterized by a high degree of assimilation between the Kisi and the larger Malinke [Mandingo] society and only in the south Kisi language and traditional religion still survive in their original forms. In that respect the Kisi colonies [sic] on Liberian territory seem to represent the most authentic form of traditional Kisi society even though a fair degree of assimilation between them and the Bande [Bandi, another Mande group] has already taken place (Massing 1982:2-3).

Missionaries in Guinea report that even in small Kisi villages most of the men are bilingual in Kisi and Mandingo (D. Harvey 1990 p.c.).

Other findings underscore the undermining of Kisi's position as a socially and politically important language. Intermarriage with the Mende is causing a loss in the total number of Kisi speakers, as Kisi spouses and children use Mende in the home (reported as early as Earthy 1934:159 based on 1930 fieldwork). A missionary working among the Kisi in Liberia feels that the language is losing importance there (Jaschen 1984 p.c.). The language is also losing ground in Guinea (U.S. Army 1961). "[There is a] tendency on the part of the Kissi to identify with their stronger, better organized Manding [Mandingo] neighbors" (Liebenow 1987:37). Other languages closely related to Kisi are undergoing the same fate: Sherbro (Rogers 1967:1); Krim (Pichl 1967:11); Bulom, Bom, and dialects of Temne (Dalby 1962:63-64). The picture for Atlantic as a whole mirrors the situation with Kisi and its closest congeners: language shift and possibly language death is taking place as speakers first become bilingual in a more widely spoken (usually Mande) language. For example, Bapeng / Pe in the Northern Branch has only recently lost all its speakers (Tenda Survey Group 1989). These developments run counter to the assertion that "the rate of extinction of individual languages in Africa appears remarkably low" (Dalby 1977:9).

That other languages are encroaching on the domains of Kisi does not bode well for the future of the language. A particularly unsuccessful attempt to expand the domains of Kisi (and other major languages in Guinea) was the *Alphabétisation* movement in Guinea (See Appendix C for an example of Kisi used in an introductory science and math textbook). This movement formed part of the Africanization of the curriculum and was based on the findings of UNESCO regarding instruction in one's mother tongue (Report of the

UNESCO specialists, 1951. 1968). Until the death of Ahmed Sékou Touré and the 1984 coup in Guinea, children were educated in one of the nation's eight major languages up to the eighth year of instruction, a policy the government planned on extending to higher levels. This plan has since been abandoned, and thus another potential domain for the use of Kisi has been rendered unavailable.

1.5. Dialects

Very little has been published on the different dialects of Kisi, and no systematic survey of the entire Kisi area has been performed. It does seem clear, however, that the fragmentation mentioned above has probably contributed to a high degree of dialect diversity. Pichl reports three different dialects (p.c., as quoted in Sapir 1971:63), and Heydorn (1970:167) discusses northern and southern dialects. Samarin explains,

My informant spoke a Liberian dialect of Kisi. He indicated the existence of considerable local differences in the language by saying that it was possible to tell where a man lived from the way he spoke. The dialect differences are apparently small between Liberia and Sierra Leone, but greater than between Liberia and French Guinea (present-day Republic of Guinea). Davis said that the speakers from French Guinea had a different "accent" and that the speech of a remote dialect was even difficult to understand (Samarin 1950:89).

Keita (1979) identifies two major dialects, a northern dialect *kisiduei* (with many borrowings from Maninka (=Mandingo)) and a southern dialect *kpekeduei*. The second of these can be divided into three separate dialects. Grimes (1988) says only that Northern Kisi and Southern Kisi are "different" from each other, and reports four different dialects for Northern Kisi: Liaro, Kama, Teng, Tung.

	Guinea	Liberia	Sierra Leone	
N Kisi	266,000		15,000	281,000
S Kisi	85,000	75,000		160,000

Figure 4. Speakers of Northern and Southern Kisi by country

Germaine notes that rites of circumcision also vary between the northern and southern areas (1984:179).

On the basis of word lists, an unpublished dialect survey (Bunkowski & Johnson 1973) identified eight different dialects in Sierra Leone and Liberia, and twenty to twenty-five in Guinea, with the latter group divisible into two major dialect areas, *kpekedou* and *duku*. Although *duku* was the most divergent dialect, the rate of cognacy was high at 88%. The survey divides the Kisi language into three major dialect areas: *duku*, *kpekedu* (including the *toli* and *leyi* dialects in Sierra Leone), the third consisting of the six adjacent dialect areas in Liberia and Sierra Leone (see Appendix B). When intelligibility was tested by means of recorded narratives, however, the divergence was much greater than that suggested by shared lexicon. Speakers of the *duku* dialect were not well understood by speakers of the southern dialects. At times speakers of the southern dialects refused to give any rendering of the *duku* narratives.

Anecdotal evidence supports the existence of two different dialects. The Wycliffe Bible Translators found the version of the Bible translated into Northern Kisi to be “not adequate” for Kisi speakers of Liberia and Sierra Leone (Wycliffe Bible Translators 1978:120). For example, Liberians and Sierra Leoneans believed Jesus was a little girl on the basis of the Northern Kisi word for ‘child’. Furthermore, an evangelical broadcasting station in Monrovia, Liberia, has used two different speakers for their Kisi broadcasts, one from Liberia and the other from Guinea. Confusion was avoided in a Guéckédou (Southern Kisi area of Guinea) church by having a translator render a visiting Northern Kisi pastor’s sermon into the Southern Kisi dialect (D. Harvey 1990 p.c.).

My own observations support the claim for at least two different dialects. There are clear lexical differences, e.g., ‘write’ is *sêwàá* in Guinea or Northern Kisi and *pòòpàá* in Liberian or Southern Kisi. There are phonological differences as well, e.g., a phonemic /r/ in the north, and the extent to which a dissimilation rule is operative (see Appendix B). There is also a great deal more mixture with Mandingo in Northern Kisi, as might be expected in light of the cultural assimilation discussed above.

One dialect boundary, then, runs roughly east-west, splitting Kisi into northern and southern dialects, roughly parallel to and slightly north of the division between Guinea and Liberia-Sierra Leone. The Northern Kisi area probably needs to be subdivided into several other dialect areas.

1.6. Other work on Kisi

Mukarovsky 1948 represents the first grammar of Kisi. A possible weakness of this work is that it is based on the unpublished field notes of an American sociologist (Dora Earthy n.d.). A later grammar, Keita 1979, a product of the *alphabétisation* movement in Guinea, is based on more reliable data but

contains only a grammatical sketch, discussing only the northern dialect. A number of articles deal with the language's noun class system, e.g., Heydorn 1970 (based on 1930-39 fieldwork in Liberia).

Much of the other linguistic work on Kisi remains unpublished, for it was undertaken to facilitate translation and literacy efforts. There are a number of publications produced by these efforts, a great number of Bible translations as well as a set of literacy materials. In addition, the *Alphabétisation* effort in Guinea produced some Kisi texts. See Appendices C and E for a list and examples of publications.

1.7. Data base

This description is based on elicitation sessions and taped conversations with native speakers of Kisi in the United States, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, conducted intermittently over a period extending from 1981-84. In addition, a literate Kisi with linguistic training provided me with answers to questions by correspondence after that period. The data are indeed limited for this reason, and further investigation would undoubtedly improve the quality of this work. Its failings can in no way be attributed to a lack of cooperation on the part of the Kisi people. My collaborators in the United States were Neorlu Tumbah, Fallah Tamba, and Maurice Keifa, the last of whom I worked with extensively before travelling to a Kisi-speaking area. In Liberia I received assistance from Paul Fayia B. Tengbeh, Moses D. Ndorbor, Fallah Lambert, and Tamba F. Mayson, and continued assistance from the latter despite the civil war raging in Liberia. (See Appendices for a full description of the relevant linguistic characteristics of the individuals who assisted me.)

2. Typological overview

This section briefly outlines and exemplifies several of the typologically interesting features of the Kisi language. For each feature presented, I note, when possible, whether the feature is areal, genetic, or both.

The question of whether a feature is areal or genetic has often posed problems to the classification of African languages. For example, Mbugu (or Ma'a), classified as a Cushitic language within Afro-Asiatic, has a grammar "borrowed" from neighboring Bantu languages, belonging to Benue-Congo of Niger-Congo (Goodman 1971; Thomason & Kaufman 1988). Greenberg 1983 attempts to evaluate the "areal-ness" of four phenomena which have been claimed to be areal in earlier surveys but turn out to be at least partially genetic. Thus we see that questions as to whether a feature is areal or genetic is a vexed one (cf. Heine 1976).

2.1. Phonological

Although there are no totally unexpected features in the language's phonology, several deserve comment. The reader is referred to "Abbreviations" in the introductory pages for a full presentation of the notational conventions and abbreviations used here.

2.1.1. Segmental

One notable feature of the (phonemic) segmental inventory is the presence of doubly articulated segments, e.g., the voiceless labiovelar stop *kp*. Doubly articulated stops have been shown to be an areal phenomenon of a delimitable distribution, penetrating into contiguous portions of relatively unrelated language families (Welmers 1973:47-48, as quoted in Greenberg 1983:5; see also Greenberg's map p. 21). Labiovelars are found in many unrelated languages, also appearing in two West African pidgins spoken in the area, Liberian English (Singler 1981:23-24) and Krio (Fyle & Jones 1981). Yet the feature also shows evidence of being genetic and the details of its origin and distribution have yet to be fully worked out.⁴

Another notable segmental feature of Kisi is the set of prenasalized stops: *mb nd ŋg (ɲj) ŋmgb*; there are also two segments using the ingressive glottalic speech mechanism, the implosives *b* and *d*, phonetically [ɓ ɗ]. There are still

further unusual sounds found only in ideophones, e.g., an initial voiced labiovelar [gb], as well as unpredictable vowel nasalization.

2.1.2. Prosodic

The most important feature of Kisi's suprasegmental inventory is the use of tone to signal lexical and grammatical differences. Tone can be reconstructed for Proto-Niger-Congo (Hombert 1984a) but also represents an areal phenomenon, as seen in its presence in pidgins and creoles, e.g., Krio (Fyle & Jones 1981). An interesting development within Atlantic is that tone appears only in the (geographically) southern languages and may even be disappearing there (Hanson 1979, Childs 1988a), Kisi being one of the southernmost languages of Atlantic.

The tonal system of Kisi has two level and two contour tones; the latter are, in some cases, transparently derived from level tones. Furthermore, the high tone is the "marked" tone, as is the case with most tonal systems (Maddieson 1978:342). An unusual, but not unknown cross linguistically, feature is an extra-high tone. It is used sparingly in the language, functioning in only a few grammatical contexts. Kisi ideophones, however, exploit a broader span of the available pitch range than the span used by other word categories.

Another suprasegmental feature found in Kisi is contrastive vowel length for all monophthongal vowels. Consonant gemination, on the other hand, appears only in a few morphologically restricted environments. Both long vowels and geminate consonants are found elsewhere in Atlantic. Contrastive vowel length is found throughout West Africa in different language groups, but gemination seems more severely restricted, found primarily in the Northern Branch languages of Atlantic, e.g., Biafada and Pajade (Wilson 1984).

2.1.3. Syllable structure

Although Kisi allows gemination and homorganic nasal-stop sequences, it has no consonant clusters, although a glide may be found in an onset. Somewhat more unusually (for West Africa but not for Atlantic), Kisi allows closed syllables; specifically, several sonorants occur at the end of a syllable.

2.1.4. Phonological rules

Kisi has rules of nasal assimilation, consonantal epenthesis and deletion, as well as a rule of compensatory lengthening. Many of these rules function in concert to produce forms with CV syllable structure. An "unusual" rule of dissimi-

lation, as shown below in (1), can be seen as the residue of a morphological process reinterpreted as a phonological rule,

(1) Dissimilation in Southern Kisi: $l \rightarrow t / l + ___ V$

where “+” represents the morphological boundary between noun stem and noun class suffix. Aside from universal conventions, tone rules are limited in number, consisting of only a few rules of spreading and absorption.

2.2. Morphological

Kisi has the two morphological systems characteristic of Niger-Congo: a noun class (gender) system and a set of verb extensions. Both systems, though fully productive, represent something less than the fullest manifestation of either system in Niger-Congo. For example, Fula has twenty-five noun classes (Arnott 1970) and Swahili has sixteen (Hinnebusch & Mizra 1979); with regard to verb extensions, Fula has nineteen (Arnott 1970) and Swahili eleven (Moshi 1985). Kisi has only seven noun classes and four verb extensions.

All nouns in Kisi are divided into seven mutually exclusive classes, membership in which determines the agreement marker affixed to dependent elements, such as adjectives and low numbers, as shown in (2). Nouns in the *le* class (such as *nìlén* ‘ear’ in (2 a.)) control pronouns (“Pro”) and noun class suffixes (“Suf”) drawn from the same class, namely, *lè* and *lén*, shown in (2 c.). These elements can be contrasted with those (*là* and *lán*) controlled by the plural of the same noun (*nì* ‘ear’ in (b.)), shown in (d.).

- | | | | |
|--------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|
| (2) a. | <i>le</i> class | <i>nì-lén</i>
ear-Suf | ‘ear’ |
| b. | <i>la</i> class | <i>nì-lán</i> | ‘ears’ |
| c. | <i>nì-lè</i>
ear-Pro | <i>bèndù-lén</i>
big-Suf | ‘big ear’ |
| d. | <i>nì-là</i> | <i>bèndù-lán</i> | ‘big ears’ |

In Noun-Adj constructions the noun’s suffix is replaced by the corresponding noun class pronoun, and the suffix appears at the end of the adjective.

Verb extensions are verbal affixes that allow changes in meaning and argument structure. Kisi has four such extensions: Causative, Middle, Bene-

factive, and Plural. The first sentence shows the verb without an extension, and the second sentence shows the same verb extended with the Benefactive.

- (3) *ò ðìmì kìsìèí* 'She speaks Kisi.'
 she speak Kisi
- ò ðìm-ùl yá kìsìèí* 'She speaks Kisi to (with) me.'
 she speak-Ben me Kisi

The addition of the Benefactive morpheme, here represented by *-ul*, allows for the incorporation of an additional argument and a change or "extension" of the verb's meaning.

In terms of marking grammatical relations (Nichols 1986), Kisi marks the dependent (rather than the head). For example, in possessive constructions the possessor dependent noun is marked with the noun class suffix of the possessed noun.

(4) Marking of the dependent in possessive constructions

- pòómbò sàà-ó* 'Saa's son'
 boy Saa-Suf
- dòmà kùmbà-ó* 'Kumba's blouse'
 blouse Kumba-Suf

Modifying adjectives are marked with an element determined by the noun class of the head. Both nouns in (5) belong to the *o* class.

(5) Marking of the dependent in adjectival constructions

- dòmà sàkéí-ó* 'twisted shirt'
 shirt twisted-Suf
- jè sènèí-ó* 'new thing'
 thing new-Suf

Other marking of syntactic relations occurs at the syntactic level where (dependent) relative and subordinate clauses are marked. The noun class suffixes at the end of both relative clauses (*-wó* and *-ndán*, designated "Rel") in the sentences below in (6) illustrate the tendency in Kisi to mark the dependent in syntactic relations.

yéè ò tòsá yè 'What did she do?'
 what she do Q

Yes-no or polar questions are differentiated from statements intonationally by a final rise. Only yes-no questions have a final rise.

Another productive and widely used construction is the focusing of a constituent, accomplished by preposing the item of focus and appending the Focus particle *ní* clause finally.

(8) Focus with *ní*

hòòṅdǎ sòòsìà kòówǎṅ 'Leeches suck blood.'
 leeches suck blood

kòówǎṅ hòòṅdǎ sòòsìà ní 'It's blood leeches suck.'
 blood leeches suck Foc

Left dislocation and stress are other devices used for focus.

Kisi can be evaluated within the typological framework developed in Comrie 1981. Comrie proposes two major types of languages, developing his feature clusters on the basis of Greenberg 1966.

(9) Feature clusters of Comrie (1981:91-92)

1. VO cluster: Verb-Object (VO), Prepositions (Pr), Noun-Genitive (NG), Noun-Adjective (NA).
2. OV cluster: Object-Verb, Postpositions (Po), Genitive-Noun, Adjective-Noun.

Kisi possesses most of the features of the first cluster (VO), as shown in the following paragraphs.

VO: In Kisi, with some exceptions, the object follows the verb. In all cases objects follow the finite verb, which is represented by the auxiliary in compound verbs where the lexical verb comes after objects. For example, in a compound verb form such as the Future, the order is S-Aux-O-V.

(10) SVO *í bǎí ndú* 'I hurt him.'
 I hurt him

SAuxOV *í có ndú bèì* 'I will hurt him.'
 I Aux him hurt

Pr/Po: Kisi has both prepositions and postpositions. Only a few adpositions are allowed before the object, and they are general rather than specific in meaning. After the object a fuller set of possibilities is allowed, including a number of words transparently related to body parts and locatives. The postposition in the first example in (11) is identical to *bèngù*, the noun stem for ‘foot’.

(11) Adpositions in Kisi

Post *béndù kálá kùńó bòó bèngù*
 elder indeed grunt bush beneath (Po)
 ‘An old man grunts loudly behind the shrubbery.’

Prep *mèngdáj ó pèèló ndá mà cò mà tìlǎŋ*
 water to (Pr) waterside there it Cop it round
 ‘The water there at the waterside is full.’

Circ *ò sàànál yá ó pìòó lèélòó*
 he swam me to (Pr) river across (Po)
 ‘He swam across the river for me.’

As the third example in (11) shows, prepositions and postpositions can be used together as circumpositions.

NG: The Noun-Genitive pattern is found in genitive constructions.

- (12) *nì-lè nì-léŋ* ‘my ear’
 ear-Pro my-Suf
- mèŋ-mà sàà-áj* ‘Saa’s water’
 water-Pro Saa-Suf

NA: Adjectives similarly follow the VO cluster pattern, appearing after the nouns they modify.

(13) Noun-adjective constructions

mèŋ-mà béndù-áj ‘a large amount of water’
 water-Pro big-Suf

mèŋ-mà pòmbò-áj ‘a small amount of water’
 water-Pro small-Suf

Besides the primary cluster of characteristics listed above, Comrie gives a number of secondary characteristics associated with each cluster. Kisi again follows the VO pattern.

Post-nominal relative constructions: Relative clauses follow the nouns to which they refer.

(14) Relative clauses

bà ñ ò d'ù-óñ tòśá mbó nàá ní
bitterball Pro [she eat]_S-Rel make Conj-3sg sick Foc
'The bitterball that she ate made her sick.'

mèñ mà ò kòl-áñ tòśá mbó nàá ní
water Pro [she drink]_S-Rel make Conj-she sick Foc
'The water that she drank made her sick.'

Although the language suffixes its noun class markers in most cases, there are traces of a prefixing system.

(15) Affixation of noun class markers

Suffixed: *yòm + ó → yòmndó 'tree'*
tree + Suf
mùèì + áñ → mùèìyáñ 'liquor'
liquor + Suf
Prefixed: *mà-mùèì lé 'not liquor'*
Pro-liquor Neg
là-kò 'going'
Nom-go

Auxiliaries before the main verb: Kisi auxiliaries always appear before the main verb.

(16) Syntax of auxiliaries: Aux (Object) Verb

í có làkò 'I am going.'
I Aux go
ò wá ndú bèìyó 'She was beating him.'
she Aux him beat

Standard after comparative: Kisi follows the VO pattern in locating the standard after the comparative, although there is some variation here.

- (17) *béndú hìòù bé-núm kpààyàá*
 brother pass brother-your strength
 ‘Brother is stronger than your brother.’⁵

ò hìòù yá nàṅḡḡ ‘She’s more handsome than I.’
 she pass me goodness

In sum, Kisi conforms to both the primary and secondary characteristics associated with VO languages. The one exception to the pattern is the suffixing of its noun class markers. According to Comrie’s patterns, the markers should be prefixed. Although no explanation can be advanced for this “aberration”, it is clearly a relatively recent change on the basis of comparative evidence (Childs 1983).

A more local treatment, a typology devoted to African languages (Heine 1976), proposes four different types of languages based on a “dominant-recessive” dichotomy. This dichotomy is based on criteria commonly used for the marked-unmarked distinction, e.g., statistical predominance and distributional facts.⁶ The languages of Atlantic⁷ belong to Heine’s Type A group, a group which is characterized by the presence of exclusively dominant features, the most important of which are given in (18) (since objects always follow subjects in these languages, it is not listed as a feature).

- (18) Typologically dominant features characteristic of Type A languages (Heine 1976:40)

1. the subject precedes the verb
2. the object follows the verb
3. the adverbial phrase follows the object
4. the adposition (preposition) precedes the noun
5. the genitive follows its head noun
6. nominal qualifiers follow the noun
7. the adverb follows the verb and the adjective
8. the subject pronoun precedes the tense/aspect markers, negative particle, the verb, and the object pronoun,
9. tense/aspect markers precede the verb
10. the object pronoun follows the verb

Because so many languages deviate from this pattern (as does Kisi), Heine finds it easier to specify Type A’s defining characteristics negatively:

(19) Type A defining features (Heine 1976:40)

- a. the verb does not precede the subject
- b. the adverbial phrase does not precede the verb
- c. Gen-Nom and N-Post orders do not both occur

Kisi shows no deviations from the negative specifications if one considers only the “dominant” structures of the language, as Heine says one should. Kisi does deviate from several of the positive specifications, ones already mentioned above. Objects can precede the verb in certain environments, and Kisi allows both prepositions and postpositions. Otherwise the language conforms to the pattern of Type A languages.

The question arises as to the source of the deviations from the pattern. Heine suggests that two forces might be at work disturbing the regularity of the pattern, and both are related to the contact phenomena discussed above. The first is what Heine calls an “areal nucleus”. A Mande center located just to the north of the Kisi area (Map 2 in Heine) “emanates” recessive features of the type not found in Type A languages.

The second relevant aspect is Kisi’s proximity to the Senegal-Niger area of convergence. This feature has been remarked upon above with reference to phonological features and also represents a uniformity of syntactic features across genetic boundaries.

In summary, the features of Kisi are those which would be expected on the basis of its genetic affiliation and location. Word order, morphology, and phonology conform to the patterns of Atlantic and Niger-Congo in general, but areal features and influences also play a part in determining the language’s grammatical make-up.

3. Segmental inventory

This chapter presents the segmental inventory with phonetic variants.

3.1. Consonants

Kisi consonants are given in (1).

(1)	Lab	Alv	Pal	Vel	Lab-Vel	Glott
Nasals	<i>m</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>ɲ</i>	<i>ŋ</i>		
Prenas stops	<i>mb</i>	<i>nd</i>	<i>(ɲj)</i>	<i>ŋg</i>	<i>(ŋmgb)</i>	
Voiced stops	<i>b</i>	<i>d</i>				
Voiceless stops	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>		<i>k</i>	<i>kp</i>	
Affricate			<i>c</i>			
Fricatives	<i>f</i>	<i>s</i>				<i>h</i>
Liquid		<i>l</i>				
Glides			<i>y</i>		<i>w</i>	

Allophony in Kisi is due to assimilation, primarily perseveratory but also anticipatory; palatalization, labialization, and nasalization are prominent processes.

3.1.1. Nasals

n The alveolar nasal is somewhat restricted in its distribution. Unlike the other sonorants (*m*, *ŋ*, *l*), the alveolar nasal is not found (syllable) finally. Alternations show a neutralization of the contrast between *n* and *ŋ* in codas in favor of the velar nasal.⁸

- (2) *náá* 'we, us'⁹
nàùwá 'cattle'
nánùŋ 'here'
tàànì 'stand bond (Hab)'

The alveolar nasal is slightly palatalized before [i] and [y] and labialized before [u] and [w], as shown in (3).

- (3) *[nʲ]iculul* 'step on (Ben)'
[nʷ]uaa 'stare'

m The bilabial nasal appears initially, medially, and finally.

- (4) *mààlólŋ* '(uncooked) rice'
màlàá 'helping'
kòmòó 'bearing'
mómóó 'cooked rice'
nùm 'you'
pìm 'fill (Hab)'

ɲ The palatal nasal is found only initially and between vowels, appearing less frequently than the other nasals.

- (5) *ɲòó* 'thing'
ɲùm 'darkness'
tòɲá 'truth'
bàɲà 'palm kernel oil'

ŋ The velar nasal is relatively free in its distribution and is the unmarked nasal in syllable codas.

- (6) *ŋwéénú* 'five'
ŋóóŋŋóóŋ 'bull frog'
tùŋòó 'denying (someone something)'
tuiŋi 'removing from a fire'
húŋ 'Come!'
nìléŋ 'ear'

Word finally it does not contrast with the alveolar nasal. Alternations in verbal paradigms illustrate that a syllable-final velar nasal becomes a syllable-initial alveolar nasal with suffixation and concomitant (re)syllabification.