

A Grammar of Mani

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A Grammar of Mani

by

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A Mani lament¹

pelo mfoko ka, lomo konya?
If you leave from here, where will you go?

fo n ponun wog ko nyele,
Unless you jump into the sea,

le biyen fere.
there is no other place to go.

mani dilan lei pe ke ki le yema den.
The Mani culture that you see here will disappear.
(mb 5/15/05; jd 8/10/06)

If you do escape, where will you go? You have to plunge into the sea! You have no other recourse. The Mani culture is doomed to disappear.

– Morlaye Boyo Keita; Palatougou, Guinea (15 May 2005)

This quote comes from a history of the Mani people, as recounted by the renowned Mani historian Morlaye Boyo Keita. He was talking about the way in which the Mani people were forced off their ancestral lands by the advancing Soso interlopers (a parallel situation existed further south with pressure from the Temne). At this point the Mani could go no further – their backs were up against the sea and they were being overrun even there.

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The work could not, of course, be accomplished without the members of the project research team, as well as a great number of native speakers, most of whom are listed below. Others who contributed were the *responsables à l'Université de Conakry*, *University Gamal Abdel Nasser de Conakry*: Dr. Ousmane Sylla, Recteur; Dr. Alpha Mamadou Diallo, *Vice Recteur Charge de la Recherche*; Dr. N'Fally Kouyaté, *Directeur des Relations Extérieures et Transport*, Mamadi Douno, *Directeur adjoint des Relations Extérieures et Transport*, et An-soumane Camara, *Doyenne de la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines*.² Particularly helpful were members of the *Centre d'Étude des Langues Guinéennes*: Djibril Batchily, Salilou Diallo, and Morlaye Camara.

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I am also thankful for the support of my family, who just barely tolerated my long absences.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to Tony Traill (1938–2007), the renowned phonetician and expert on Khoisan and other languages of southern Africa, and to Foday J. D. Kamara (1962–2007), far and away the most dedicated worker on the Mani Documentation Project. Foday would often remark, “I love my language. I love speaking it. Whenever I find someone who speaks it, I will stop and chat with him.”

Preface

This book provides a complete grammar of the Mani language spoken in the Samu (alternate French spelling “Samou”) region of Sierra Leone and Guinea. The book’s degree of completeness must be qualified with the reservations imposed by the limitations of time and data, as well as by the fact that the language is spoken by only a few hundred people in only a limited number of contexts if at all. The data come from a short pilot study conducted during July and August of 2000, and a larger study taking place over two years (the Mani Documentation Project or MDP, 2004–06, and two brief return trips in April 2009 and February 2010). That the Mani language will soon disappear is certain; just as certain is that this grammar will be the only one ever written.

The audience for this book will be primarily linguists but more specifically those from the following areas: historical-comparative linguistics, especially those interested in the classification of African languages; language typology; and likely theoretical linguistics, for the language presents some structures of considerable complexity. It will also appeal to those interested in language change, language shift, and language death. In addition, interest will come from non-mainstream linguists such as language planners, especially in Sierra Leone where there is some interest in and support for the indigenous languages. Ethnographers and other fieldworkers investigating the Mani language or people will also find the book useful.

The book also has considerable symbolic value for the Mani people. It is regrettable that few Mani speakers will ever read this grammar, although they may become familiar with a reduced, locally available version provided by the project. Nonetheless, just the fact that a book has been written about their language has great significance for the Mani people. Readers may also want to inspect a primer-like text distributed among the Mani people and available from the author.

Childs, G. Tucker. 2007. *Hin som sek! oma, si fɔ mfɔ mmani!* Portland, OR: Real Estate Publishers, Inc.

The translation of the title is, ‘Let’s eat mullet! or, let’s speak the Mani language!’ This question, ‘Do you eat mullet?’ has a special meaning for Mani speakers; it is said to be a “secret” way of asking strangers if they speak Mani (of asking whether they are truly Mani?). Some excerpts from the primer can be found in Appendix 2: Pedagogical materials (p. 250).

The theoretical approach adopted by this book is a relatively neutral one versed in what has been called the “language of observation” (Greenberg 1970). By this term is meant a pre-theoretical language accessible to all linguists and to relatively sophisticated non-linguists. Linguists use this language to make their data accessible to other linguists, and the grammar employs only accepted and well-established jargon and formalisms. In terms of organizing and presenting the data, it is probably closest to the “slot-and-filler” approach of the American structuralists (see Fischer-Jørgensen 1975). It is the language and system, for example, that introduces the facts of a more theoretically oriented paper before the theory is introduced. If any approach may be ascribed to this grammar, it is functional-typological, for the facts are often set in a typological framework and explained through reference to language functions. Finally, there is occasional reference to sociolinguistic factors most of which make reference to the precarious state of the language. The fact that Mani is dying has had some noticeable repercussions on its linguistic form. It should also be noted that the description here tends more towards “language documentation” in the sense of Himmelmann 1998 than to more traditional, strictly linguistic descriptions.

Because the author is familiar with other languages from the group formerly known as (West) Atlantic, the group of Niger-Congo to which Mani belongs, comparative comments are introduced as known and appropriate. Atlantic, however, has now been (rightly) divided into North Atlantic, South Atlantic, and the isolate Bijogo (Blench 2006). Mani is situated within the Bullom sub-group of South Atlantic, and some close comparisons are made to Kisi, a language that the author speaks and has presented in a grammar (Childs 1995), a dictionary (Childs 2000), and a number of articles. There are also some comparisons to other languages in the sub-group, including Kim and Bom, two other dying languages from the sub-group that represent the subject of current research (2007–10). With regard to the other member of the Bullom sub-group, Sherbro, there is other published work available for comparative purposes, the most important being Hanson 1979; Pichl 1963; Rogers 1967; Sumner 1921, as well as a thesis in progress (Corcoran To appear).

Several comments need to be made on the quality and quantity of the data. The most important fact affecting the data is that the language is in the last throes of language death. The relatively few speakers had limited proficiency in the language and even fewer spoke English or French. For example, morphological systems were not completely controlled (tense-mood-aspect-polarity, the noun class system, and verb extensions). It was also true that the time allotted to formally investigating the grammar itself was limited; the focus was more on language documentation (videotaping, photography, and recording). Because of this orientation, the data were collected intermittently over the period of the grant (2004–06) and not all of the two-year period was spent in the field by all mem-

bers of the team. Nonetheless, all of the examples have been checked with at least two informants or with a key informant at separate times.

Those wishing to examine the original data may do so through the archives at the HRELP's Endangered Languages Archive (ELAR) at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, or from the author at Portland State University, Portland, OR (USA). Comparable materials are also available at the University of Conakry, Guinea, and at Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

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Conventions, abbreviations and symbols used

Conventions

The standard format for examples given in the text is as follows:

(0) ù lát kò dipàlà
ù lát kò dì-pàl-à
3SG spread.PERF to NCM-sun-in
'He spread the rice (on the ground) in the sun.' (jd 1/28/06, 3/3/07; tc 7/9/08)

In the first line is a unique sequential number for the example. What follows is the way the utterance was originally transcribed with minor changes, oftentimes without tones. In the second line appears a phonemicized morpheme-by-morpheme analysis, regularized as necessary. In the third line appear aligned abbreviated English glosses of the individual morphemes. When glosses appear with a period between the English words, it indicates that distinct morphemes cannot be separated. The sequence "spread.PERF", for example, represents the Perfective form of the verb 'spread' (the Perfective is here realized as a high tone). Hyphens in the second and third lines represent separable morphemes. The last line represents a relatively free translation, usually designed to correspond more to the Mani sense than to idiomatic English when the languages are demonstrably different. Material in parentheses is added to clarify the meaning but is not directly represented in the Mani utterance.

The final item in parentheses after the gloss is the speaker and the date of the utterance when known. Different speakers are represented by different initials and a semicolon between them; different dates by the same speaker are separated by a comma. The first indicated speaker originally provided the utterance; other dates and speakers represent revisions. When more than one Mani sequence occurs in an example and only one speaker is credited in the last line, the speaker is responsible for the last example and for any preceding ones.

There are small variations in this format when the omitted information is not essential to the point being made. For example, a close phonetic transcription may not be necessary when discussing syntactic structure.

English glosses, other than those appearing in the morpheme-gloss line, are enclosed in single quotation marks, both within examples and within the text itself. Mani words and those from other non-English languages are italicized in the text and within such glosses.

Abbreviations

N.B. Abbreviations in small caps refer to language-particular grammatical glosses, as discussed in the text.

1SG	First singular	lit.	Literally
2SG	Second singular	LOC	Locative
3SG	3 rd singular, etc.	MDP	Mani Documentation Project
ADJ	Adjective	MID	Middle verb extension
ADP	Adposition	misc.	Miscellaneous
ADV	Adverb	N	Noun
AdpP	Adpositional phrase	N	Nasal
ANIM	Animate	N/A	Not available
ATR	Advanced tongue root	NCM	Noun class marker
BEN	Benefactive	NCP	Noun class pronoun
C	Consonant	NGO	Non-govt. organization
CIT	Citation form	NP	Noun phrase
COL	Collective	PERF	Perfective
CPD	Compound	PL	Plural, Pluraational
CS	Causative verb extension	POST	Postposition
DEM	Demonstrative	PRE	Prefix
DEP	Dependent element	PREP	Preposition
DFT	Default	PRO	Pronoun
DIST	Distributive	PROX	Proximal
DIST	Distal	Q	Question particle
DKB	Documenting Kim and Bom	RECIP	Reciprocal
EMPH	Emphatic	REDUP	Reduplicated, reduplication
Eng	English	REFL	Reflexive
EV	Extra vowel	rev.	Revised, reviewed
Fr	French	SG	Singular
G	Guinea	SL	Sierra Leone
G	Glide	So	Soso (Susu)
HORT	Hortative	s.t.	Something
<i>i</i>	Morpheme <i>-i</i>	SUF	Suffix
IDPH	Ideophone	tbu	Tone-bearing unit
IPF	Imperfective	TMA	Tense mood aspect
INANIM	Inanimate	TMAP	Tense mood aspect polarity
INDEF	Indefinite	V	Verb
INSTR	Instrumental	V	Vowel
L	Liquid /l/ or /r/	VP	Verb phrase

The phonological symbols in this book all come from the International Phonetic Association, except “ny” for the palatal nasal [ɲ] and “y” for the palatal glide [j]. In most cases the spelling used for Mani is phonemic, and IPA symbols have been used which represent the most prominent allophone. Less well-known IPA symbols used in this book are: [↓, ↑] for lowered register or downstep and raised register or upstep.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Speakers of the Mani language today occupy scattered, remote, and isolated pockets in the Samu (spelled “Samou” in Guinea) region straddling the border on the coastal plain of Sierra Leone and Guinea.³ No villages in Guinea can be found in which Mani is the dominant language, although distinct sections and sometimes entire towns are ethnically Mani. In Sierra Leone, however, Mani remains a sometimes daily language in a small collection of geographically close villages around Moribaya in Kambia District. These are the remnants of a Mani kingdom which once held suzerainty over the entire Samu region, stretching inland from the sea in a coastal band from Freetown to Conakry (north beyond Conakry to Baga country according to Moity 1957). Over time, however, the kingdom dissolved and contracted. The Mani lost ground in successive generations to more powerful neighbors and retreated to peripheral and isolated enclaves.

The geography of the area is coastal tidelands, consisting of an extensive low-lying sandy littoral, tidal estuaries, and mangrove swamps. The characteristic tree is the oil palm but other trees are plentiful as well, including the coconut, bamboo, and various other palms. The climate is tropical with a dry season (roughly November through May) and a wet season (June through October), although there have recently been instances of an early second rainy season. The heaviest rainfall of the rainy season occurs in June, but recently it has been preceded by a shorter set of rains in March, according to several farmers in Guinea. It was experienced in the second year of the study (2005), as well as further down the coast in Sierra Leone in 2007. The climate is generally hot and humid throughout the year (rarely below 30°C / 80°F) with sea breezes from the afternoon on.

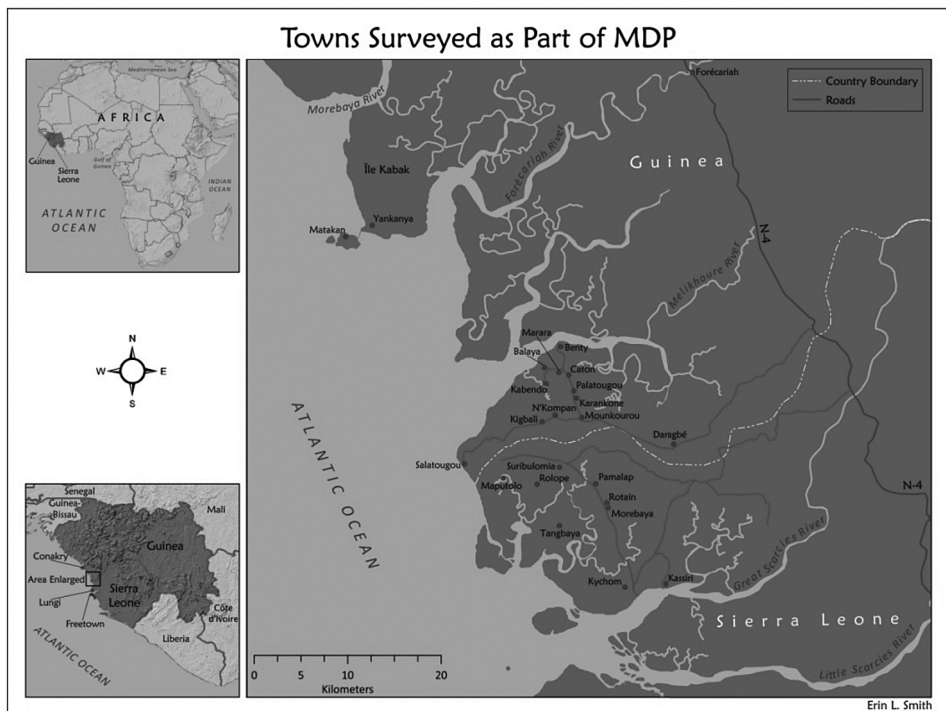
Local economies are based on fishing and farming. Fishing includes freshwater, tidal, and open sea fishing with boats constructed from both single tree trunks and sawn planks; the latter type of boat is used on the open sea. Farming focuses on rice but also involves the cultivation of cassava, peppers, and other vegetables. Coconut and palm products figure prominently in the local cuisine. Another significant activity is salt extraction through the processing of saltwater from the ocean during the dry season; in Mani the process is known as *yàr nyèl* or ‘salt cooking’. Charcoal production is a less common activity, one of the few not tied to a subsistence existence. Large-scale agriculture includes cooperatives, e.g., rice-growing on the island of Kabak, and a number of large plantations, e.g., oil palms, pineapple, bananas. In Guinea most of these plantations are the

2 Introduction

legacy of colonial (French) banana plantations depending on impressed labor and still controlled, for the most part, by community outsiders. In fact, the Forécariah *préfecture*, within which the Guinea Mani area is located, was once devoted entirely to banana plantations, much of it worked with impressed labor. Near the Guinea research site in Caton were the relics of an abandoned town known as “Kissidougou”, lit. ‘town of the Kisi’ in Malinké and other related languages. The town once belonged to impressed Kisi laborers brought down from the interior Forest Region of Guinea.⁴

1. Project location

Map 1 shows the towns surveyed as part of the MDP. The pilot study surveyed the Island of Kabak in the northeastern quadrant of the map. Although there were many who wanted to speak Mani, we found only a few residents who could actually do so, all of them fairly elderly (see section 1.3); there were a few others, fishermen or travelers from Sierra Leone.



Map 1. Major towns and locations of the research area

The study proper was based in Caton, Benty District, Forécariah Prefecture in the center of the map, but the main concentration of Mani speakers was found across the Sierra Leone border around the town of Moribaya. On the Guinea side we found only a few elderly people scattered in many towns, even though the district numbered some 22,542 souls as of 2003 after the “Rebels” had ceased operations (Réf - RGPH 1996 (*Resencement Général de la Population de l'Habitat*, réactualisé en 2003 par le Secrétaire Communautaire M. M. Conté).

But in Moribaya and especially on the island of Tangbaya we found a much more vital Mani culture including several Mani dance troupes and children who actually grew up speaking the language.

An area we were not able to investigate was the southern part of the Samu, especially the town of Kychom, where Mani chiefs are traditionally invested (see footnote 5). There were also some elderly speakers called to the Lungi paramount chief's quarters in 2006, but I was not able to reach there in time for their visit.

This grammar describes the Mani spoken by citizens of both Guinea and Sierra Leone. The only substantive work on Mani consists of dated missionary grammar Nyländer 1814. The time depth is wonderful for comparative purposes, but unfortunately the data and analysis are unreliable when compared to the data collected here. The grammar is based on a Latinate model looking for number and case declensions!

Koelle 1854 (republished as Koelle 1963) represents a more reliable source (see discussion in Childs 2003a), but he provides only limited word lists, and his informant comes from the very southern portion of the historical Mani area (Lungi Chiefdom, the destination of my ill-fated excursion in 2006 described above), which the Temne had already overrun by the middle of the 19th century. In fact Koelle's “informant”, “Fúre Kába”, had a Temne father. At three years old, however, he was

brought to the Bulom [Mani] shore, opposite Freetown [Lungi Chiefdom], where he grew up in the hamlet of Túlun; and in about his twenty-fourth year came over to Freetown, where he has now been earning his bread as a seaman for about fifteen years” (Koelle 1963 (1854):2).

Thus, Fúre Kába was not a Recaptive, as were many other of Koelle's language consultants, but an actual resident of Freetown. Koelle writes further,

The Bulom country, opposite Sierra Leone [= Freetown], borders on the Timne country in the east and north. Túlun is situate [sic] on the western part of the Búlom shore [a town *Tolung* is stated as having some thirty inhabitants by Nyländer], which is inhabited by Búloms only, whereas in the eastern part the Búloms and Tímne are mixed. The Búloms of the Búlom shore call those of the Sherbro country Mámpe [= Sherbro]. These two Búlom countries are separated from each other by the Tímne territory, which extends right down to the end of Sierra Leone” (Koelle 1963 (1854):2)

Koelle's vocabulary remained the only material known to be published on what was called "NB" or "Northern Bullom" but was in fact Mani. Dalby said it could be compared only with Nyländer's vocabulary, published some forty years before the *Polyglotta* (Dalby 1966:140), but in fact there was research being done on the other side of the border by a French anthropologist.

In addition to the early English and German work, there are some more contemporary brief linguistic notes (Moity 1948) and a brief ethnographic sketch (Moity 1957) containing some linguistic material, likely based on the earlier notes. At the time of this research, Moity felt the death of Mani to be imminent: he commented directly on the linguistic and cultural shift of the Mani to Temne and Soso, a process now virtually complete.

The Samu is a relatively small region, where movement back and forth across the border is fairly fluid, especially for those involved in fishing and with access to boats. Strong family ties bind the people of the area, despite differences in nationality. During the two research periods of this study (2000, 2004–06), Sierra Leone refugees could be found living in Guinea, having fled the civil war and having yet to return, despite the cross-border trip being a short one. A brief incursion by rebel forces from Sierra Leone immediately after the pilot study of 2000 was the last sign of unrest, but it was a fatal one. Villages were bombed and several people killed. One disabled old man in Mounkouro, unable to walk, could not come out of the house at the Rebels' command; they burned him alive in the house. Many villages that we visited were both burnt and shelled by the Sierra Leone rebels, and people in these towns were killed. There was nowhere near the death and destruction elsewhere in Sierra Leone, but what happened in the Samu was enough to create a significantly traumatized and displaced population.

Freetown, the capital city of Sierra Leone, bustled with NGOs and donations from abroad at the time of the study. Few of those resources, however, have reached the people of the Samu. A comparable state of affairs exists in Guinea. Promises were once made to develop the Samu on the Guinea side of the border as a tourist destination – a few roundels were built in nearby Benty (where we stayed before our house was refurbished) and a section of the road graded as the first stage of a development effort. Little was done, however, beyond these initial efforts, and already several of the rondels have collapsed. This endeavor has since been replaced by a new plan (2006), which sees the port of Benty as a major export center, but little action had been taken at the time of the project's completion.

In all interviews where the question was asked, subjects felt that things were worse today than they were in the past, perhaps a universal sentiment, but one certainly accurate in the Samu.

kà kàtón lò cén nyùè kékécò kén kácè lábilà

kà kàtón lò cè-én nùè kékécò kén kácè lábilà
in Caton PRO COP-NEG nice present like PAST thus

‘It is not as enjoyable in Caton today as it was in the past.’ (Yaye Camara, 18 Nov 04, Caton, Guinea)

In this narrative, Yaye Camara characterizes the festivals, the dancing, and the extensive social interchanges that took place when she was a child (she was over sixty at the time of the interview). None are so robust today. Along with this cultural attenuation has been the ongoing disappearance of the language.

2. Mani nomenclature

A few remarks need to be made on nomenclature. All of the following are possible names for what the Ethnologue (Gordon 2005) calls “Bullom So” (ISO reference “buy”) and what will be here referred to as “Mani”.

Mmani (Moity 1948; Moity 1957)

Búlom or North Búlom (Koelle 1854; Koelle 1963 (1854))

Bullom So (Iverson and Cameron 1986)

Bullom So, Northern Bullom, Bolom, Bulem, Bullun, Bullin, Mmani (Grimes 1996, Gordon 2005, Lewis 2009)

Mandingi (Mmani), Bullom (Dalby 1962)

Mandenyi, Mandeng (the names used by Soso speakers and by ethnic Mani in the Soso area of Guinea and Sierra Leone, 2006)

Bullom (Williams 1988:88, Footnote 2; popular Sierra Leone name, 2006)

The name in the literature closest to the name used by speakers (“Mani” [màní]) is “Mmani”, with what looks like a syllabic nasal prefix (no tone markings have ever been used in other works). Syllabic nasals are widely used in Mani, usually as prefixes homorganic to a following consonant (see 2). When people refer to the language they call it *m̃f̃ ñmànì* ‘the Mani language’. The word for ‘language’ is *m̃f̃*, using the stem for ‘speech, speak’ preceded by the nasal noun class marker (/ñ-f̃/ NCM-speak) with assimilation of the nasal to the following labiodental. It is thus likely that *ñmànì* represents an adjectival form agreeing with the noun ‘language’, used for the language itself. Native speakers themselves provided no single form for ‘the Mani language’, and thus the simple stem for the ethnonym ‘Mani’ will be used for both the language and the people.

The most widely used name in Guinea, “Mandenyi” is that used by the Soso and by the Mani themselves in Guinea, featuring the Soso suffix *-i*, a definite marker. The Soso have generally used their own names for such (smaller) groups rather than the names the people themselves use (e.g., Baga “Kobé” for

“Pukur” (Voeltz 1996)). “Bullom” is the most widely used name for the variety and confusedly for several others in Sierra Leone.

The name “Bullom So” itself has an interesting provenance and reveals something of how the language is perceived. The additional “So” was used by Lutheran Bible Translators (TISLL) workers in Sierra Leone and has been adopted by SIL (Summer Institute of Linguistics) International as the standard reference name for the language. The name “Bullom So” relates Mani to the other Bullom languages to which it is genetically close (Bom, Sherbro (Sherbro is confusingly also known as “Bullom”), Kim, and Kisi). It also indicates the extent to which it has been influenced by the southwestern Mande language, Soso, the source of “So” (Iverson and Cameron 1986). An earlier researcher attempted a compromise by including all of the more prominent names in his discussion, labeling the variety variously as “Mandingi (Mmani)” and “Bullom” (Dalby 1962:63).

3. Demographics

It is uncertain how many speakers of Mani there are today, but there are not more than a few hundred. Part of the difficulty in reaching such an estimate is identifying speakers, for there are many more ethnic Mani than there are speakers of Mani. Ethnic Mani will graciously state that they speak the language, especially when they are made aware that the investigator is keen on finding speakers of the language. Later, more intensive investigation will often show that their knowledge of Mani is rudimentary at best. Thus a significant problem in a survey is determining in an expeditious manner whether (self-) identified speakers actually speak the language, and no such systematic survey was performed.

The best (generous) estimate is that one can find a few score speakers in Guinea (some of whom came from Sierra Leone as either spouses or refugees) and several hundred in Sierra Leone. In Sierra Leone the language is decidedly more vital than in Guinea. The district center of Moribaya is a partially Mani town, and is surrounded by several other towns with a strong Mani presence: Rotain, adjacent to Moribaya across a rainy-season stream; Pamalap, roughly a mile away (there is also, confusedly, a Pamalap in nearby Guinea); and the town of Tangbaya, a small and almost exclusively Mani town on an island of the same name (formerly a seasonal fishing and salt-cooking village). Other small towns where Mani is spoken in Sierra Leone are: Kibanka, Rolope, and Ky-chom, the last being the site of the present-day paramount chieftaincy of the Sierra Leone Samu.⁵ In Guinea no such towns exist; Mani is spoken by only a few old men and women in all towns we visited.

Both the Guinea variety and the Sierra Leone varieties are heavily influenced by Soso, a Mande language belonging to the Mandeng sub-group; further south in Sierra Leone, away from the border beyond the Soso area, Temne dominates as a second language. A month-long survey of Guinea conducted in 2000 by myself and several colleagues from the University of Conakry found very few fluent speakers in Guinea. We traversed the islands of Kabak (and Matakan) and traveled along the frontier road to Benty in the Forécariah *préfecture* of Guinea (see section 1.6 of this chapter for a summary of that study). We found the same situation everywhere: only a few older women and fewer men could speak the language. We were told many times that in the next village, one which we had not yet visited, we would be sure to find a sizeable community of speakers, an assurance nearly always found to be inaccurate. A brief inquiry (2006) into Mani speakers at the southern end of the former range of the Mani Kingdom on the Lungi Peninsula north of Freetown turned up just three elderly speakers.

4. Classification

Figure 1 shows the generally accepted early brachiation of Niger-Congo. Although Kordofanian is the earliest branching group, Mande and Atlantic are shown as separating later simultaneously, also very early on; the Mande separation has been put at 2,000 BC (Dwyer 1989:50); Blench puts the date of Mande “expansion”, based on an evaluation of internal diversity, much earlier at 6000 BP and Atlantic much earlier than that at 8000 BP (Blench 2006:133).

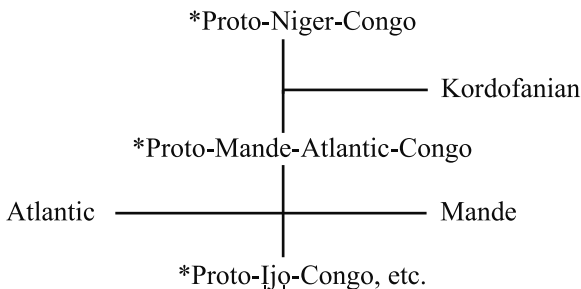


Figure 1. Niger-Congo (Williamson and Blench 2000)

At the level of Atlantic, however, the larger family to which Mani and its congeners have traditionally been assigned, there is more controversy. It is certain that Atlantic does not form a genetically coherent group; virtually all investigators agree on this point. Nonetheless, “Atlantic” has served a convenient referential function as the category for languages that are not Mande, a Niger-Congo

group with some considerable coherence, spoken in areas of West Africa shared with the Atlantic Group (see *Map 2*).

Typological arguments have been advanced for seeing the Atlantic languages as constituting an entity. In fact, the only features typically adduced are the presence of noun classes and verb extensions (Mani has both in attenuated form), features widely attested in Niger-Congo in general. A recent proposal gives the features as stated in *Table 1*, yet these features are also not shared throughout Atlantic. Typological distinctions thus fail to characterize Atlantic as a coherent group.

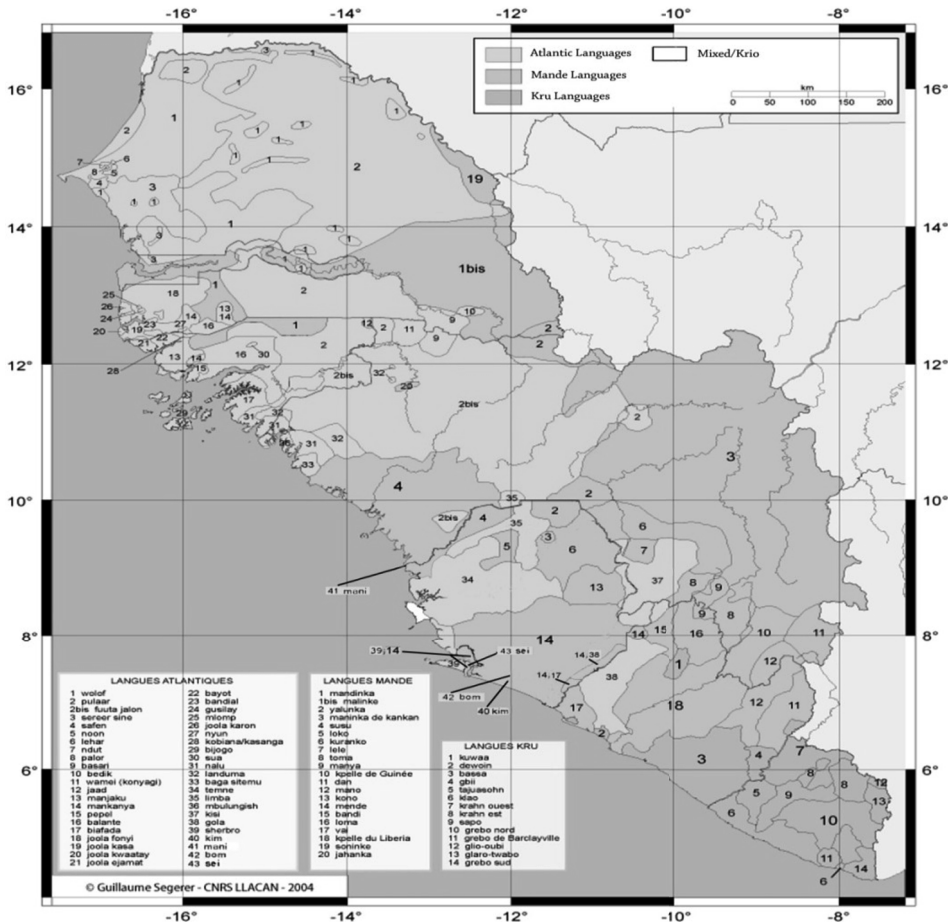
Table 1. Atlantic features (from Table 2.3 in Williamson and Blench 2000:22)

Domain	Atlantic realization
Noun classes	Full, original prefixes; weakened, renewed by suffixes, or augments
Verb extensions	Widespread
Pronouns	Inclusive/exclusive common
Sentence order	SVOA; Prepositions
Noun phrase	N+Gen (Gen+N in Sua); N+Num; N+Dem

Geographical considerations also enter in to the classification, especially since the Atlantic languages are far from the Benue-Congo heartland, where the most widely known class languages occur. Thus, it is only a combination of typology (weakly) and geography that can distinguish the group: “The two features that make Atlantic a meaningful entity are typology and geographical distribution” (Wilson 1989:81).

Part of the explanation for the lack of coherence to Atlantic may be historical, particularly with respect to the less widely spoken languages. The people who speak such languages (including Mani) have been subject to various waves of immigration and conquest, including Islamic jihads. The most per-vasive influence, however, has been the so-called “Mande Expansion”, e.g., Murdock 1959, Brooks 1993, only part of which involved Muslim proselytizers. The first phase was peaceable and consisted of traders and Islamic missionaries; the second phase was considerably more warlike following the collapse of the Mail Empire in the sixteenth century.

Map 2 shows how Mande has divided and isolated Atlantic languages, invading them, pushing them to the coast, or forcing them into highland areas. The Mande Expansion has been the main threat to the vitality of the less widely spoken Atlantic languages (Childs 2010). This is dramatically the case with Mani, completely surrounded by Soso and their Atlantic counterpart, the Temne.



Sénégal, Gambie, Guinée-Bissau, Guinée, Sierra Leone, Liberia

Map 2. The Atlantic and Mande languages

One later problem for the coherence of individual Atlantic languages was the imposition of political boundaries by European colonists (see Reader 1998, Diamond 1997). The Mani have been divided by a modern political boundary, that between Sierra Leone and Guinea. In earlier times the division was imposed by the colonial powers, England in Sierra Leone and France in Guinea. How arbitrary and how volatile such borders can be is seen in the fact that the lower reaches of the Great Scarcies (a.k.a. Kolente) River, have been part of both colonies because of a shifting border, having been set definitively only in the late nineteenth century (Alie 1990).

Atlantic thus is not a unified group, certainly from a linguistic perspective. Bijogo is a language with closer links outside than within Atlantic and thus should be considered an isolate (Seeger 2000; Seeger 2001). Other languages in North Atlantic have similarly been argued to be more closely related to languages outside Atlantic (Doneux 1975). My own work has shown that South Atlantic forms no genetic unity with North Atlantic, even on the geographic and typological criteria typically used to unify the group (Childs 2001b; Childs 2003c). These findings have recently been integrated into a single representation, as shown in *Figure 2*. I have included only the top part of the figure down to just beyond Bijogo. The figure shows North Atlantic and South Atlantic as independent branches separating from the Niger-Congo stock at approximately the same time, but Bijogo separating much later.

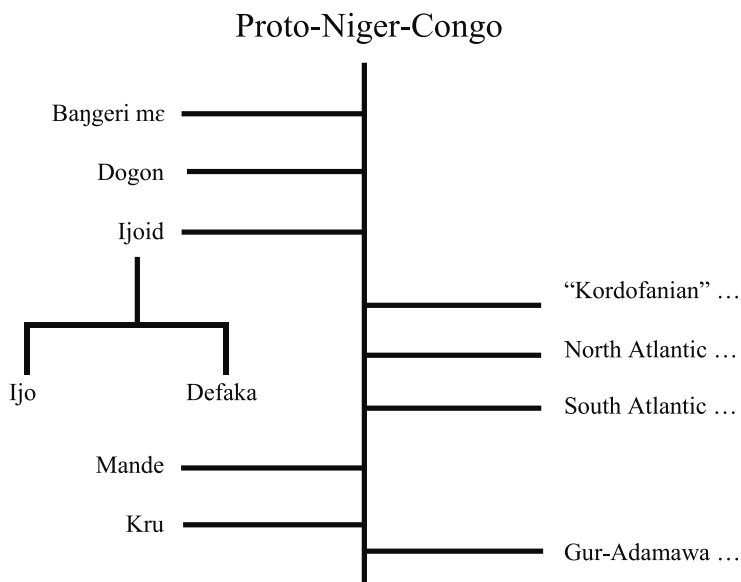


Figure 2. Niger-Congo (Blench 2006:118)

The genetic classification of Mani at lower levels is not controversial. Mani's closest relatives are the coastal Mel languages (Dalby 1965; Dalby 1962; Iverson and Cameron 1986; Pichl 1972, and Wilson 1989.) The Bulom sub-group within Mel contains Sherbro, Kim, Bom, and Kisi. Closely related to Mani within the Mel sub-group is Kisi, a language spoken primarily in the Forest Region of Guinea but spilling over into both Sierra Leone and Liberia. Kisi was separated from the other Bulom languages in historical times, during the 16th century Mane invasions (Rodney 1967; Rodney 1970) when the Kisi fled into the rain forest.