LANGUAGE MOVEMENT AND CIVIL WAR IN WEST AFRICA

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Introduction

The headline caught my eye: "Children so traumatized, they forgot their names." The article, describing Cameroonian boys rescued from a Boko Haram camp in Nigeria, went on to explain that after years in the camp, "the children had forgotten their native language…[the boys] appeared to be speaking broken Arabic, rather than one of the many languages native to Cameroon."[1] This related to my larger query about how languages spread and die. I want to interrogate the role of war and violence in altering language capabilities among people exposed to it.

Language maps of Africa usually depict state borders and boundaries between ethnolinguistic groups. What is hidden, however, is multilingualism and the overlapping borders this implies. Members of groups communicate with those in neighboring regions, and many towns are intermingled. We do not have a very good sense of people's linguistic mobility or the reach of lingua francas across mother tongue boundaries. Even as Western country censuses disaggregate respondents' ethnic and linguistic identities and domains of language use, Censuses in Africa continue to bluntly classify by "tribe" or mother tongue. This is unfortunate, as it perpetuates a picture of fragmentation. I want to understand how people may be *linked* linguistically.

I approach the question through the lens of political science, with frequent borrowings from other disciplines. Political scientists study the allocation of power and resources. They look at individual choices, mediated through social rules and formal institutions, as well as at actions taken by the state. Groups are often a focus of study, since what group one belongs to often determines what one gets. Language has typically been subsumed under the heading of ethnicity, as both are commonly seen as encompassing discrete groups. Much scholarly work insists, however, that groups are not in fact distinct, but multilayered and situational. The following literature survey will discuss this tension and identify theoretical ideas about causes of shifts in language capacity. It will then move into a preliminary study of such shifts in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Cote d'Ivoire. Finally, it will ask what this might mean for citizen participation in democracy.

Literature

Ethnolinguistic Diversity

Ethnic diversity, commonly equated with linguistic diversity, generally is seen as problematic for many valued outcomes, such as economic growth, democratic stability, and lack of violence. Africa's tremendous ethnolinguistic fragmentation has been blamed for its poor growth, multiple groups assumed to make agreement over public goods more difficult.[2] Theorists since John Stuart Mill have warned of trying to forge democracy among different nationalities: "Among a people

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[1] Kevin Sieff, "Children Rescued from Boko Haram."
[2] Easterly and Levine 1997; Alesina, Baqir, and Easterly 1999; Collier and Gunning 1999; Rodrik 1999; Keefer and Knack 2002. Even studies using more nuanced fractionalization measures concur that linguistic fractionalization (Alesina *et al* 2003: 167) and politicized ethnic diversity (Posner 2004) harm growth.

without fellow-feeling, especially if they read and speak different languages, the united public opinion necessary to the working of representative government can not exist" (1861, 310). Political scientists Rabushka and Shepsle (1972/2009, 92) argued in a similar vein: "The plural society… does not provide fertile soil for democratic values or stability." Politics being about distribution, democratic institutions encourage preference for fellow group members and ethnic outbidding, leading politicians to manipulate symbols, resulting in democratic breakdown and often violence (*ibid,* 82). Others argue that the transition to democracy itself can induce ethnic violence (Snyder 2000, Chua 2002).

These last ideas point not to ethnolinguistic divisions themselves as the culprits, but rather to ethnic entrepreneurs, economic contexts, and faulty institutions. The heart of the recent literature has therefore grappled with the constructed nature of groups and the institutional arrangements that may alter their composition and how they act. Drawing from anthropology, sociology, and psychology, a much more fluid picture of ethnic identities has become dominant.

Early anthropologist Fredrik Barth (1969) set the foundation for much of this work, with his insight that ethnic groups were not static clusters of cultural content, but instead emerged and were reinforced when groups in contact classified themselves and others. Building on this, Rogers Brubaker (2002) challenges a fixation on "groups," wanting instead to account for when "groupness" crystallizes into intense activity, and when it does not. He and coauthors (Brubaker, Loveman and Stamatov 2004) identify a 'cognitive turn' in the study of ethnicity, which explicitly incorporates anthropological and psychological insights. Drawing on Foucault's notion of governmentality (Burchell *et al* 1991) and Bourdieu's (1991) ideas of symbolic power, they attribute power to authorities, particularly the state, to classify and categorize groups (2004: 33). They also point to the everyday practices of classification, framing, and interpretation by individuals, focusing on stereotyping, social categorization and processing of information.

The borrowing from psychology in fact was evident earlier in political scientist Donald Horowitz's *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (1985/2000), as he identified general psychological tendencies to cleave and to compare, the stereotypes that are reinforced by authoritative affirmation, and the depth of feeling that accompanies the striving for recognition and esteem. This nuanced understanding of ethnicity's fluidity yet potential intensity infuses much diverse work on Africa (Laitin 1986, Newbury 1988, Vail 1989, Malkki 1995, Mamdani 1996, Posner 2003).

Interestingly, this convergence on a constructivist account of ethnic identity was not matched by innovative experimentation with political institutions that expected change. Since the democratic wave arrived in Africa at the same time as several conflicts escalated, many experiments in democracy were forged in post-conflict situations. Popular accounts attributed conflicts to deep ethnic divisions, and institutional solutions seemed to follow this narrative. Achieving peace seemed to require guarantees. Lijphart's influential model of consociationalism (1977), an alternative to majoritarian democracy, which explicitly recognized major groups in society, appeared attractive to those long marginalized from power. Across Africa, national conferences in the 1990s were predicated on the participation of all parties and social groups, and virtually all post-conflict settlements in Africa in the following decade contained provisions for power sharing (Mehler 2009, 471). Lijphart's ideal type of power sharing included cultural autonomy and group recognition, recommendations that dovetailed nicely with the concern of international organizations and activists with cultural and linguistic rights. These scholars questioned the presumption that homogeneous nations were a natural end-point toward which states should aspire.

A prominent scholar of language rights, Will Kymlicka (2001, 2) argued that "we cannot simply take for granted that it is legitimate for a liberal-democratic state to pressure minorities into operating in the majority language." Stephen May (2012, 187) more accusingly equated the "'philosophical matrix' of a common language and culture that underlies nation-state formation" with a "longstanding 'ideology of contempt' toward minority languages." Linguistic rights were championed uncompromisingly (Skutnabb Kangas and Phillipson 1994), as well as more cautiously by advocates of territorial segregation to preserve some linguistic diversity (Laponce 1987, 2001; Van Parijs 2011). Many of these scholars were Europeans or Canadians focusing on the "glottophagie" (Calvet 1979) or "linguicide" (Phillipson 2008) brought about by the global spread of English. This concern seems most relevant to long-established western democracies. It is not entirely clear that the debate resonates similarly in the relatively new states of Africa.

The wave of democracy in Africa crested around 2005, and since then, democratic quality has receded (Diamond 2008, Gyimah-Boadi 2015). It is a renewed concern with civic cohesion and social integration that prompts a careful look at language and its relationship with democracy. This concern hearkens back to an earlier body of work subsumed under the much-maligned "modernization paradigm," a conception of societies as moving along a similar trajectory, in which urbanization, industrialization, and education naturally leads to greater political participation and national cohesion.

Influential scholars such as Karl Deutsch drew on the European model when envisioning the beneficial nationalism that would derive from increased social communication through higher levels of education (Deutsch 1953/1966). Daniel Lerner predicted that the combined forces of urbanization, literacy, and media growth would propel the transition to an integrated, participative society (Lerner 1958, 60).

Africanists such as James Coleman also contemplated the socializing and integrative roles of education. He noted in 1963 that the "knotty problem of how to create nations out of heterogeneous cultural materials" (Coleman 1963, 409) was similar in Africa as in other regions. Though initially it might intensify divisions among ethnic, regional, or parochial groups, he concluded that in the "long run it will be education and the changes it stimulates which will bridge or reduce these gaps" (Coleman 1965, 30). Education systems "can be powerful instruments in forging national unity, in developing a common language of political communication, and in providing exposure to, if not inculcating a positive affect for, national symbols and goals" (Coleman 1965, 227). Clearly, for these scholars, the language of education was naturally to be a single, unifying one. William Safran (2010, 51) summarizes the scholarly view of ethnic groups, each with their own languages: "it was believed…that these languages would ultimately disappear as the ethnic or tribal subcommunities in which they were spoken were dissolved into the transethnic nations that would be built."

A different vision arose among early sociolinguists (e.g. Fishman, Ferguson and Das Gupta, 1968) who instead aimed to *preserve* or resurrect threatened languages. A major point of agreement they had with modernization scholars was the inherent changeability of languages and their use, and thus the potential for altering outcomes through planning. Though these scholars conceded that much language change is not planned, they were confident that deliberate attempts to influence the social use and status of language would be successful (Ferguson 1977, 9). As they readily admitted, the new states of Africa and Asia became a laboratory for language planning.[3] All of these early

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[3] "The language problems of developing nations present sociolinguistics with a virtually inexhaustible and untouched field for the exploration of its central hypotheses and concerns" (Fishman 1968, 13).

scholars had "primordial" perceptions of societies being based naturally in groups, joined with a very "constructivist" confidence in the ability of social engineering to alter loyalties. It seems current scholarship has this reversed: a very constructivist view of how identities arise, joined with a more primordial desire to maintain them in their current form.

Causes of Language Shift

Most linguists, understandably, are concerned about language shift, as it implies the death of smaller languages. A dominant debate concerns the natural expansion versus imperial conspiracy to advance English globally (e.g. Crystal 2003 vs. Phillipson 2008). To curb language decline, the solution is often to insist on territorial separation. This may be justified in a European setting, where English threatens long-established national languages. In a situation of tremendous personal and societal multilingualism, such as in Africa, the alternative might be more nuanced. The very possibility of protecting languages in certain territories only arose because those languages conquered others in the past and were promoted by governments as national languages. To arrest current movement elsewhere seems very much to privilege the present by attempting to halt the process of language change that has a long historical precedent.

Languages are not static. Their reach over speakers expands and contracts; they absorb neighboring languages and are in turn absorbed. Conquest, colonization, and migration generate linguistic pluralism (Brubaker 2015, 91). Popular historian Ostler's 2005 *Empires of the Word* explains that languages can expand organically, simply by the growth of their populations. More commonly, however, they move through migration, diffusion, or infiltration. The main catalysts he identifies, though always with exceptions, are military conquest and settlement, control of trade, or association with religious prestige. Writing and other technologies often propel language expansion, and underlying conditions such as favorable geography provide advantages as well. Many forces influence the reach of languages, and these might be classified as top-down or bottom-up mechanisms.[4] The top-down mechanisms typically preoccupy political scientists. As a political scientist studying language, I find myself bridging a divided literature, where one side uses normative human rights arguments and the other talks in terms of incentives and preferences. My own tendency is to try to understand government motivations and explain empirical outcomes.

"TOP DOWN" – *Administration, Conscription, Taxation, Education*

Top-down mechanisms are usually associated with governments attempting to achieve orderly administration. A common language is a crucial ingredient of "rationalization" in Weber's (1968, 809) terms. It facilitates record-keeping, court decisions, and taxation, reducing a ruler's transaction costs. Language increases in importance the more a government requires of and offers its citizens. From a game-theoretic perspective, Laitin (1994) and de Swaan (1988) elaborate the preferences of rulers and regional elites. Abram de Swaan discusses the desire of rulers to break the mediation privilege of local gentry or church leaders over local populations. Rulers preferred a standard language so that their own bureaucrats could communicate directly with citizens, without relying on the translation of local leaders.

These top-down efforts were associated explicitly with state-building. Charles Tilly (1991, Ch. 2) reminds us that before the era of the French Revolution, all states used some sort of indirect rule. The transition to direct rule gave rulers direct access to citizens and the resources they controlled through household taxation, mass conscription, censuses, and police systems. A

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[4] Philippe Van Parijs uses this terminology in his brief discussion of language extinction (2011: 142-143), but I expand the categories here.

segmented, heterogeneous population posed less likelihood of large-scale rebellion, but more difficulty imposing uniform administration. When the benefits of this uniform administration outweighed its costs, governments opted for homogeneity. "In the period of movement from tribute to tax, from indirect to direct rule, from subordination to assimilation, states generally worked to homogenize their populations and break down their segmentation by imposing common languages, religions, currencies, and legal systems, as well as promoting the construction of connected systems of trade, transportation, and communication" (Tilly 1991, 100). This knowledge and connectedness also allowed *services* to citizens.

The eighteenth century began the transformation across Europe from mercenary to standing armies (Tilly 1991, 29). This followed a change in military technology: a shift toward the proliferation of gunpowder weapons, which disadvantaged smaller fighting units and advantaged large standing armies. Large armies required discipline, control, and logistical coordination. Raising more troops also required greater coercion and stronger justification for manpower demands. As the century went on, troops became permanent across Europe, and absolutist states spent 80-90 percent of their revenues on funding the army, requiring unprecedented levels of taxation (Porter 1994, 110). Reaching deep into rural areas, bypassing reluctant nobles, the king had to convince the masses in his language.

The French Revolution was caused in part by the difficulty raising enough funds to pay this growing military. During the revolution and after, France continued to wage war on neighbors, and the Convention introduced the *levée en masse* (Porter 1994, 130). The army became a center of nationalism, where a common language, myths, and symbols could spread.

Universal education gained acceptance in Prussia similarly, as the state viewed it as a tool to gain direct access to the lower ranks as taxpayers, recruits, and later voters. De Swaan describes Prussia's efforts to educate civic mindedness and loyalty and to improve tax flows by promoting trade and industry. As rural lords were not always forthcoming with military recruits for the king's army, breaking their mediating position gave rulers more direct access to these fighting resources (de Swaan 1988: 89-91).

Improving tax flows depended on industrialization. Gellner (1997) notes that industrial society relies on sustained, perpetual growth. This in turn requires social mobility that rests on standardized training gained with a national education system (27). The result is a shared, literate culture. Gellner's main argument is that the homogeneity imposed by the imperative of industrial society eventually appears on the surface in the form of nationalism (38). Nationalism "is not the awakening of an old, latent, dormant force…It is in reality the consequence of a new form of social organization, based on deeply internalized, education-dependent high cultures, each protected by its own state" (46).

A national education system is crucial to this process. Eugen Weber (1976) chronicles the transformation of peasants into Frenchmen through the school system. In France, the rationalization of eighty-eight patois into one single, standard language was a long-term process of creating French citizens. Weber argues that "patriotic feelings on the national level, far from instinctive, had to be learned" (Weber 1976, 114). Schools became much more effective after the 1880s with the Jules Ferry Laws, accompanied by the practical improvements in roads and increase in teachers and facilities. By 1881, most classrooms had wall maps – a physical image of the national hexagon. Public schools ultimately achieved integration around national symbols, history, and a standard language (Weber 1976, 337).

The ideology of the Revolution, of course, was central. France's state-organized schools intended to form new citizens of the republic. The Convention speech in 1792 emphasized the importance of linguistic unity. Weber (1976, 72) summarizes:

> Linguistic diversity had been irrelevant to administrative unity. But it became significant when it was perceived as a threat to political – that is, ideological – unity. All citizens had to understand what the interests of the Republic were and what the Republic was up to…Otherwise, they could not participate, were not equipped to participate in it...

Of course, such a broad, national education requires a shared, printed language. Benedict Anderson in his account of the role of print capitalism in binding citizens in common identity, argues provocatively that the modern nation was "conceived in language, not in blood" (1991: 145).

Less obvious, but just as powerful as other top-down efforts is *stigmatization* of languages, particularly evident in the colonial context (Ngugi 1986). Phillipson (1992) wrestles with the apparent liberal attitude of the British, compared with the French, regarding native languages in their colonial possessions. British rule, though it did make allowances for local languages, treated them as inferior. French direct rule deemed them unsuitable in any capacity. In both cases, the effect was to have psychological consequences. Linguistic imperialism is achieved when, after "careful consideration of the options, the dominant ideology of the 'priority' of [the colonial language] is affirmed" (Phillipson 1992: 123). This resulted in a devaluation of African languages, making them invisible.

As Africa's colonization occurred during the apex of state-building efforts in Europe, such strategies were transferred to the African continent. Colonial policy replicated the first two mechanisms to a much lesser degree, while the stigmatization was much more forceful.

Because of the strong influence of the European experience on our understanding of state formation, there is an expectation that state-builders will indeed want to rationalize their populations. But in fact, leaders in Africa have been remarkably lax in this regard. Official languages have not spread far. Furnival (1938) observed that the existence of many languages was part of a plural society that prevented collective mobilization against imperial rule. A cynical observer could suggest this continues in the present (Albaugh 2014, Ch. 5). As many states have not expanded their taxable realm, direct interaction with citizens has not been necessary, and therefore deliberately spreading an official language has not been a high priority. Many African languages, however, have spread. Therefore, we need to look beyond top-down mechanisms for why this has occurred.

"BOTTOM UP" – *Migration, Urbanization, Individual Choice*

Calvet's (1981) work on vehicular languages identifies several factors that make languages more likely to expand as lingua francas: use in pre-colonial trade, association with religion, proximity to colonial-built communications links. There is nothing internal to a language's structure that enhances the likelihood of it spreading, but it hinges on the range of *functions* it performs. Expansion is essentially in response to need.

This resonates with the broad, historical work of Ostler (2005) as well as more specific studies, such as the work on the expansion of Sango in the Central African Republic by Karan (2001). In the latter study, Karan emphasizes the individual choices to learn a lingua franca – e.g. people living along old trade routes much more likely to speak lingua franca – as well as the role of urbanization (Karan 2001, 63-69). This expands on older insights by Deutsch (1953) about the communication generated by contact.

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Mufwene (2001) describes language as a parasitic species, rather than an organism, which survives when its host survives. Languages die when speakers choose not to speak them. A major point is the importance of social or regional integration or segregation as factors in language evolution. Social isolation preserves languages, while integration alters them. "In exploitation colonies, the colonial languages adopted as elite lingua francas have not endangered the indigenous languages. Rather it is indigenous lingua francas like Swahili, Lingala, and Hausa which have gained more and more speakers at the expense of ethnic vernaculars. An important reason for this is that these lingua francas are ethnographically integrative, whereas European colonial languages have been segregative…bridging has only been at the level of the elite and has excluded the majorities of the populations of those regions" (206). Nathan Nunn (2012) looks at the geographic aspects that segregated language groups – mountainous regions with rough terrain seem to have preserved more language groups (protected from slave raiding) than flat geography.

Generally, individuals learn languages with higher value, in economic terms and prestige. The linguist Edwards (1985) highlighted the desire for social mobility inducing people to learn certain languages, while sociologist de Swaan (2001: 21) categorized languages by their "q-value," which is how widely the language is spoken as a mother tongue or second language, and therefore determines the utility to be gained by learning it [in rational choice vein]. Philosopher and political economist Van Parijs (2011) identifies a "maxi-min" dynamic, wherein people in groups tend to use the language known minimally by the maximum number of others. This serves to expand a language. Bourdieu (1982) talked in terms of a linguistic market, where capabilities in different languages hold higher value and prestige. While certainly material advancement is crucial, the power and status associated with a language plays a central role. Such status is determined by what is socially valued, which brings us back to the influence of stigmatization.

"MIDDLE-OUT" – *Exposure to Civil War*

Different from deliberate, top-down government efforts, as well as from individual choices is the exposure to language that comes through contact with its speakers in the course of a civil war. The contact is not voluntary, as, say, a choice made by individuals migrating an urban setting, nor is it centrally planned by the state. But it is an individual choice to participate for survival, and it has linguistic consequences.

A famous quip defines a language as a dialect with an army.[5] When we think of war's impact on language in Africa, we might think of the Sokoto Caliphate or the Ashanti Empire, whose expansion through subjugation and incorporation brought people in surrounding areas into their orbit, thereby expanding the reach of the dominant group's language. Historically, this was a rather uncalculated, even if violent, by-product of expansion. Herbst (2000) limits the "productive" nation-building outcomes of war to those conducted between rival states, but it is not obvious why this should be true. While few Africa's states have built capable bureaucracies through external war, the process of *internal* war has had appreciable effects. In particular, it appears to induce language shifts. Though inter-state war happened rarely since independence, the continent has seen much civil conflict, particularly in the last two decades, and it appears that this civil conflict has had a discernible effect on language spread. In areas most touched by war, common languages have progressed faster than what would be expected through "natural" processes.

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[5] Attributed to French army general Louis-Hubert Lyautey (1854-1934), cited in Safran (2010: 55), referring to Laponce (2006): Jean A. Laponce. *Loi de Babel et autres régularités des rapports entre langue et politique.* Lévis, PQ, Canada: Presses de l'Université de Laval.

African states are among the most diverse in the world and retaining a 'neutral' European language in education has been the practical policy solution of most governments.[6] It is easy to blame colonialism in much of the damage seen in Africa. Missionaries are often implicated in the destruction of local culture. And yet when speaking of languages, the record has been mixed [see Albaugh 2014, Ch. 2]. Regardless of the methods used (e.g. mother tongue en route to European-language acquisition or exclusive European language education), deliberate efforts at achieving a linguistically homogeneous population have borne little fruit; official language spread has been minimal. Overall, no European language has penetrated widely across the African continent. A majority of states boast less than 20 percent of their population speaking the official language (Albaugh 2014, 221).

This comes as no surprise to many scholars, who bemoan the poor quality and contrived atmosphere of African school systems: "The very artificial technique of transmitting a language through the school system rather than through daily interactions with native or fluent speakers contributed to spreading the European colonial languages as elite lingua francas rather than as vernaculars" (Vigouroux and Mufwene 2008, 5). Despite the ineffectiveness of most education systems at spreading an official language throughout the entire population, other languages *have* spread. While it is true that African states are fractionalized in terms of mother tongue speakers, they show much more cohesiveness when considering the capacity of individuals to speak a lingua franca. Figure 1 approximates the spread of non-European languages in Africa.

FIGURE 1

Portion of the Population Speaking an African Lingua Franca
Dark bars indicate language taught in school before 2000

In fact, most people exhibit tremendous multilingualism, and most can communicate with the majority of their fellow citizens through a lingua franca. Nearly all states – 46 out of 49– have a lingua franca spoken by 50 percent or more of the population. In more than half of states, a lingua franca is spoken by 70 percent or more; and in nearly a third, it is spoken by 90 percent or more. Languages indeed are spreading. Many of the high proportions of lingua-franca speakers occur in

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[6] Certainly, there are exceptions – Tanzania, notably, as well as Madagascar and Algeria. But even Tanzania aims for English acquisition at the upper levels, and Madagascar and Algeria reintroduced French after rejecting it for a time.

states where there is a single dominant group (say, more than 70 percent of the population). Language spread in these settings – Lesotho, Botswana, Comoros, Somalia – seems "natural." In many other places, however, a language is spreading where its group is much smaller. We find very dominant lingua francas in Senegal and Mali, whose largest languages are spoken as mother tongues by only 40 percent and 30 percent of the population, respectively, but they are used by more than 80 percent of the population. And we find widespread lingua francas in Sierra Leone and Tanzania – Krio and Swahili – languages that are not spoken by any but a tiny group as a mother tongue. In the first case (Tanzania), the colonial and independence government deliberately harnessed the historical dominance of Swahili, while in Sierra Leone, Krio was expressly not included in education. The spread of many African languages has occurred without the help or hindrance of governments. The light bars in Figure 1 show that more than half of these states have *not* used the dominant language in education. This hints at the relative weakness of education compared to other forces propelling language spread in the African setting.

If many of them are spreading without the top-down efforts, we should look more closely at what the alternative means are. We saw above the "bottom up" factors being terrain, placement on a trade route, or migration to a capital dominated by a particular group. None of these factors is legislated by government policy, but they greatly influence whether individuals will learn to speak a language. A factor that sits uncomfortably between the top-down and bottom-up distinction is that of civil war. It may arise from the provocation or rebellion of a few, but it affects many more in its wake. I argue that civil war has a homogenizing effect on language. The following section will probe the cases of Sierra Leone and Liberia, two neighboring countries that each experienced more than a decade of violence. Then it will turn to Cote d'Ivoire.

Foundational Research: Sierra Leone and Liberia

Sierra Leone: Spread of Krio through Civil War

A small coastal country in West Africa, Sierra Leone experienced a brutal civil war from 1991 to 2002. I suggest that this war stunted the already restricted spread of English, the official administrative and educational language, but it hastened the spread of Krio. I will first explore the limited spread of English and touch on Sierra Leone's linguistic and geographic terrain. I will begin to outline the actors and evolution of Sierra Leone's war and suggest that this process led to the expansion of the Krio language across the majority of the population. The tools available are the 1963 Census, 2004 Census, and survey from 2003 entitled, "What the Fighters Say."

Sierra Leone's 1963 Census reported that 5.37 percent of its total was *literate* in English. The country's 2004 Census, revealed that only 3.8 percent of respondents said they could *speak* English. Part of this is the disruption caused by the war. But even before this, English was not making strong headway. In 1960, 14 percent of the school-aged population was attending school. Enrollment rates grew for the next 15 years at a yearly rate of about 6.5 percent. From 1985 to 1990, growth in enrollment fell to only 2 percent a year, and the war made schooling thereafter even more challenging. The 2004 Census indicated that 37 percent of respondents had been to some school, and 27 percent had completed four years or more. But again, only 3.8 percent of respondents claimed to speak English. Clearly, the official school system did not spread English widely.

FIGURES 2 & 3 – Stagnation of English in Sierra Leone (1963 and 2004 Census)
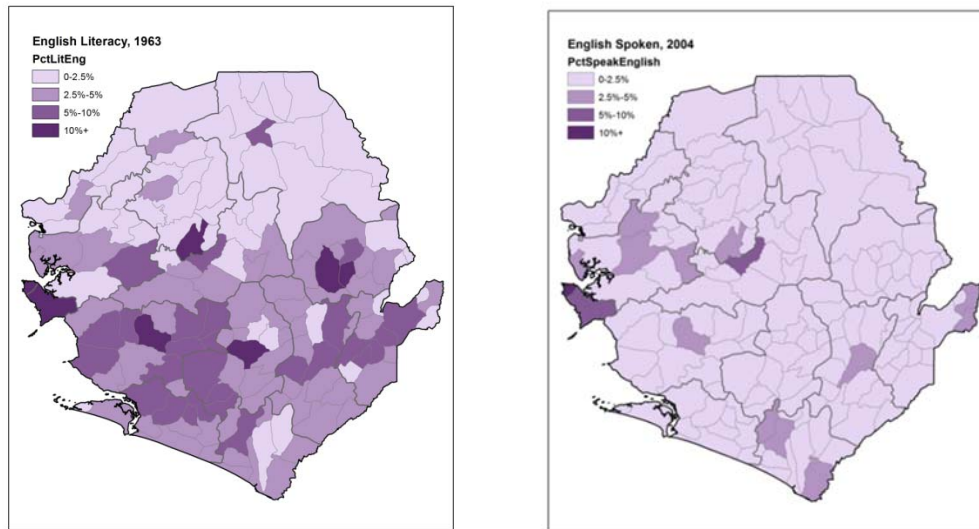
Though Sierra Leone is an extreme, it reveals a stagnation of a European language and its surprising lack of effective spread through the education system. These figures and statistics point to a weak government commitment to spreading an official language – a motivation we take from the European experience as axiomatic. Nonetheless, a non-European language *has* spread in Krio. While some of the explanation is growing urbanization – particularly the growth of Freetown – the strongest factor is the civil war.

Sierra Leone has several language groups, the largest in terms of mother tongue speakers being Mende (28 percent), and Temne (23 percent), according to Ethnologue figures[7]. Though small in terms of first-language speakers (12.5 percent), the most widely spoken language is Krio, a language originating in the coastal capital of Freetown and now spoken by the overwhelming majority of the population. The question is why it has become so widely spoken.

FIGURE 4: Languages in Sierra Leone

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[7] Calculated from the 2009 edition of *Ethnologue,* which lists mother tongue speakers for each language. Census dates are usually dated, so figures have been modified to account for population growth. The percentage is calculated from the sums of all mother tongue speakers in the country.

SIERRA LEONE

Source: Ethnologue

We typically think of the school setting playing a central role in language spread, but as we saw above, the school system in Sierra Leone has been very weak. And it cannot be implicated in the spread of Krio, since the language of instruction has always been English. Nonetheless, Krio *has* spread quite dramatically over the last two decades.

The language Krio was formerly associated with the Creoles of Freetown. In 1831, the population of Freetown was 30,000 "of whom somewhat more than half were Creoles" (Banton 1965, 135). These were descendants of freed slaves settled by the British in the 18th and 19th centuries. After 1918, however, the population balance changed: of 44,000 inhabitants in the city, less than 16,000 were Creoles (Banton 1965, 137). The population shift was accompanied by a shift in political power after 1957 against the dominant Creole and toward 'tribal' groups – Temne, Mende, Limba migrants, who kept in close touch with their districts of origin (*ibid*).

Tabouret-Keller (1971, 193) claimed that the language most spoken in capital was Temne, which had in 1948 at least 250,000 speakers in northern Sierra Leone. The Mende-speaking group covering the southern part of country was about the same size. "Together Temne and Mende represent about 60% of the total population of the country, and about 60% also of the population of the capital" (Tabouret-Keller 1971, 194). Though she acknowledged that the high-status Creoles in the capital spoke Krio, "in this case…the capital's former first language has not spread out over the rest of the country; rather, the most widely spoken African languages have invaded the capital" (Tabouret-Keller 1971, 194). This observer saw the interior languages coming into the capital, rather than Krio moving outward. This is the baseline condition to which we compare the subsequent change.

The 1963 Population Census identified 41,783 Creoles in Sierra Leone.[8] This represented less than 2% of the total population, and 90% were concentrated in the Western Province, primarily Freetown. There were no figures in this census for actual *speakers* of the language. Eldred Jones suggested at that time that most of the residents of the Western Province had a working knowledge of Krio, and said that the language was dispersed over the whole country in urban and semi-urban areas outside the Western Area. He claimed that a reasonable estimate would be 500,000 speakers of Krio (Jones 1971, 67), or 23 percent of a total population in Sierra Leone of 2.2 million. Fifteen years later, Johnson (1986, 118) reported that 50,119 people spoke Krio as a mother tongue (still about 2%) and estimated that **30 percent** of Sierra Leoneans had a knowledge of the language. The 2004 Census indicates that 9.6 percent speak Krio as a mother tongue and 50.9 percent use it as a second language, but this does not count those who might use it as a third or fourth language. In 2008, it was estimated that **95 percent** of Sierra Leoneans could speak Krio (Oyètádé and Luke,

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[8] 1963 Population Census of Sierra Leone, Table 3 "Tribal Affiliation for the Provinces, Districts, Chiefdoms, Western Rural Areas and Freetown: 1963", p. 13. Central Statistics Office, Freetown, 1965.

2008, 122). The change from the mid-80s to the mid-2000s seems dramatic. The following figures demonstrate this growth in Krio speakers:

FIGURE 5: Speakers of English and Krio in Sierra Leone
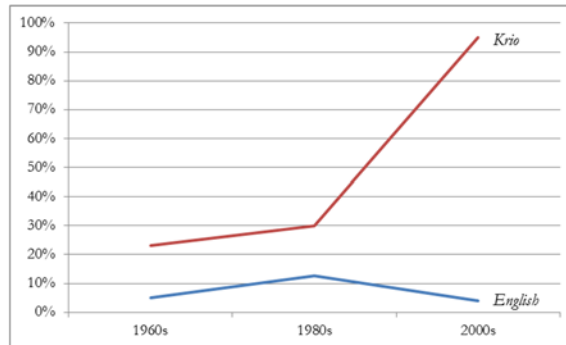
FIGURES 6[9] and 7 – Spread of Krio in Sierra Leone
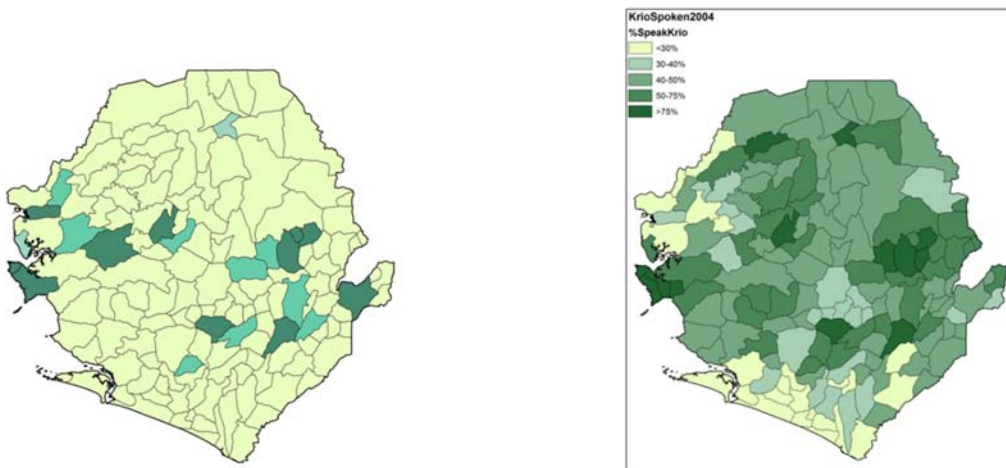
Urbanization is a prime motor of language spread. With high levels of in-migration, the language of a capital city will naturally gain speakers. But urbanization is not the central factor spreading Krio in Sierra Leone. In 1910, Sierra Leone had an urbanization percentage of only 3.8 percent. In 1963, the urban population had risen to 18.9 percent, and by 2004, it was 36.7 percent urban (Sesay et al, 2006, 43). Currently Freetown holds 15.5 of the entire population (*ibid*, 12). Yet this is actually a relatively low percentage, compared to other capital cities in Africa, such as Dakar, Senegal, which holds nearly half of its population. In Sierra Leone, two-thirds of the population continues to live in rural areas. And significantly, even this population speaks Krio. The 2004 census shows that of *rural* respondents, a full 46 percent spoke Krio as a first or second language, and likely many more as a third or fourth.

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[9] Urban areas, calculated from the 1963 census, which gives the population for each chiefdom and size of all towns with more than 1000 people. I designated as urban and semi-urban areas those chiefdoms which achieved a certain threshold (40%) of their population living in cities. This is not a precise measurement of Krio-speakers, but it is the only available.

I submit that the major mechanism dramatically spreading Krio in Sierra Leone is civil war. To observe whether this is actually the case, we would want to look at a rural area that was linguistically homogeneous, whose population would presumably not need to learn a different lingua franca for communication. This is precisely what we see in the eastern districts of Sierra Leone. In Malema Chiefdom, for example, 88 percent of the population speaks Mende as a mother tongue. This chiefdom is completely rural, with no major cities, and yet 48 percent of its population speaks Krio as a second language, and likely many more as a third or fourth. Similarly, Mongo district in the north, bordering francophone Guinea, is a rural area, home to people who are 93 percent Kuranko-speaking, who would have no reason to learn an Anglophone lingua franca. Yet 46 percent claim to speak Krio as a second language, and likely more as a third or fourth.

Civil war has spread this language. This is not only through the mechanism of raising armies from civilian populations, as is the typical mechanism in historical state-building accounts. It follows the path of rebels who interact with civilians as they move through the country. Sierra Leone's conflict was intimately connected to the conflict in Liberia and its major protagonist, Charles Taylor, head of the NPFL (National Patriotic Front of Liberia). The central rebel group in Sierra Leone's war – the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) – contained many NPFL fighters. Most of its initial members were Sierra Leonean residents in Liberia. These fighters had trained at a camp near Charles Taylor's base camp in Gbargna, Bong County, Liberia (Richards 1996, 5, 18). This initial group numbered only a few hundred and included a few Burkinabes and Libyan mercenaries as well. They were led by Foday Sankoh, who had trained with Charles Taylor in Libya. Sankoh was from a central province of Sierra Leone (Tonkolili) and, according to observers, spoke with a thick Temne accent (Richards 1996, 5). Though he certainly would have the ability to speak English, given his early training in Nigeria and in the UK for the Sierra Leonean army, the lingua franca of the military had always been Krio. This is likely what he used to communicate with a diversity of recruits.

FIGURE 8 – Administrative Districts in Sierra Leone

The RUF entered Bomaru (Kailahun) from Liberia in March 1991. A second flank entered over the bridge into Pujehon. Only a few months after entering, by July 1991, the RUF held large portions of the East and the South. But government forces on one side and ULIMO (Liberian) forces on the other pushed them out of those areas to the center and north of the country. Therefore, the war raged over the whole of the country.

Sierra Leone's 2004 Census is better than most, in that it asks second-language proficiency. But it does not ask all of the languages spoken by the population. There is, however, a survey conducted by Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy Weinstein in 2003, just after the war had ended. This survey interviewed more than 1000 ex-combatants and nearly 200 non-combatants in every region of the country, and it shows beyond any doubt that Krio had spread to every corner of the country. Overall, 90 percent of ex-combatants claimed

13

to speak Krio and 94 percent of non-combatants. The survey of ex-combatants over-sampled Mende-speakers,[10] which may explain the slightly lower proficiency, as members of this largest group may have had less need to learn a lingua franca than members of smaller groups. But the results are striking. It confirms the mechanisms that are believed to spread a lingua franca via war.

First is the basic role of conscription and participation in the fighting. In Sierra Leone's conflict, the major government factions were the Sierra Leone Army (SLA) and the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) from 1997 onward. The major rebel group was the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), along with the Civil Defense Forces (CDF) an umbrella group encompassing a wide array of local militias. Importantly, while the civil war was characterized as an "ethnic war," all of these factions were multi-ethnic. The survey among ex-combatants showed that most participants did not actively participate until 1997 or 1998, and that while Mende made up the majority of the RUF for duration of the conflict, the SLA and AFRC had very diverse membership, and even the RUF grew more diverse in later years. Remember that this survey over-sampled Mende participants, and so they look even more dominant than they likely were.

FIGURE 9 – COMPOSITION OF FIGHTING FACTIONS ("WHAT THE FIGHTERS SAY")

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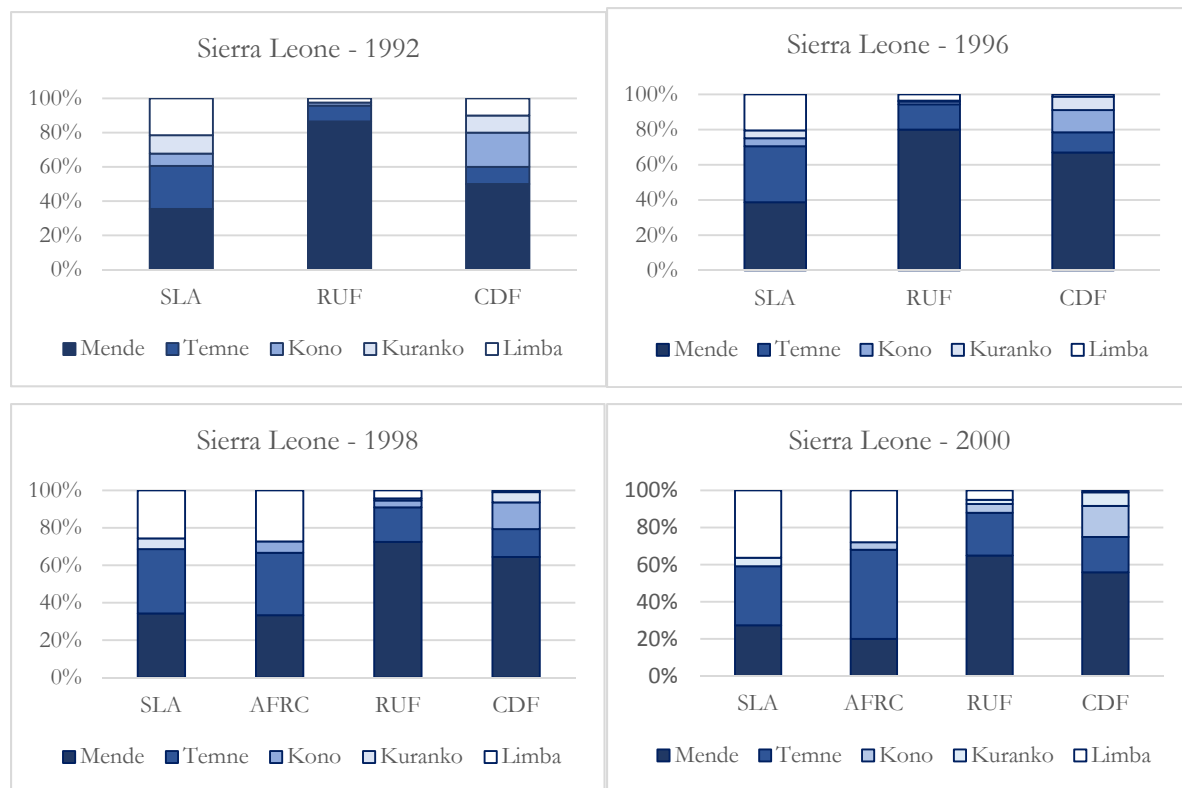
[10] The survey sample recorded 53% who claimed Mende as their "tribe," 20% who claimed Temne, 10% Kono, and 4% each Limba and Kuranko. This can be compared with both *Ethnologue* estimates and the 2004 Population census. The *Ethnologue* estimates 28 percent of the population speaks Mende as a mother tongue, compared to 23 percent Temne. The 2004 Census reveals that larger and virtually equal percentages of the population claim Mende and Temne ethnicity: 32.2% vs. 31.7%, respectively. Limba is claimed by 8.2%, with Kono claimed by 4.4% and Koranko by 4.1%. Mother tongue figures are almost identical. These indicate that *Ethnologue* figures underestimate the larger language group percentages, but that Mende-speakers are still heavily oversampled in the "What the Fighters Say" survey.

14

The RUF, while containing many Mende speakers, was actually led by Temne-speaker Foday Sankoh. As mentioned above, as an army-veteran, he likely used Krio.

The CDF also fluctuated in membership quite widely over time, but it differed from the other factions. According to a careful study by Danny Hoffman (2007), the CDF were originally ethnically-based militias known by their localized names (e.g. the Kuranko *tamaboro,* Temne *goethis* and Kono *donsos,* with the largest being the Mende *kamajoisia,* or Kamajors – Hoffman 642). The other groups eventually began adopting the more general Kamajor title, but they continued to see themselves as community defense mobilizations. "Unlike, for example, the RUF, combatants with the CDF did not necessarily see themselves as outsiders to their social landscape (Hoffman 647). They did not have a centralized military structure, and operated through networks of patronage and clientship. This is important, as it meant that these local defense forces likely maintained more homogeneous local membership.

The 2003 survey asked ex-combatants which factions they fought with in different periods. Of those who were Mende, a maximum of 40 percent said they fought with the RUF in any given period, while for the CDF forces it was about 48 percent. Among Temne, the affiliations were slightly less but similar. Many more of the Kono and Kuranko were members of the CDF than the RUF. And the Limba reported much higher membership in government factions than other groups. A snapshot of the 1999 period shows wide diversity in faction participation.

FIGURE 10 – Participation in Fighting Factions, Sierra Leone
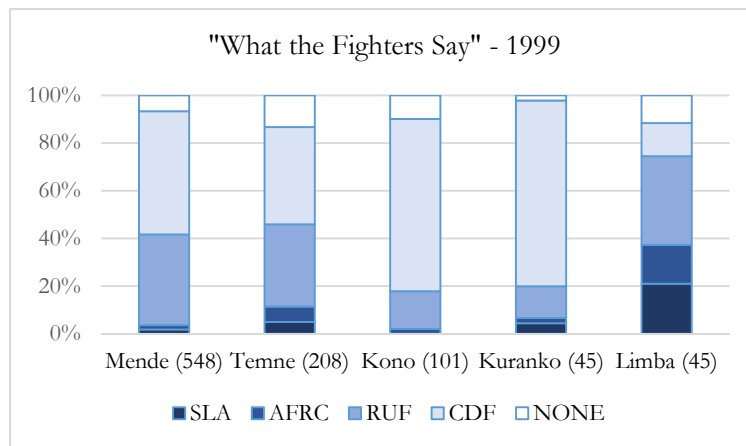
All of the factions were diverse. Krio was certainly used in the SLA and AFRC. While the RUF had a majority of Mende-speakers, it also used Krio because of its diverse membership. The CDF was unique in that it was only loosely networked, and its local militias maintained close contact with the communities that produced them. This meant that these groups were much more likely to use local languages than Krio with the civilians among whom they interacted.

Among the combatants, only 10% claimed not to speak Krio. These non-Krio speakers showed higher affiliation with the CDF than with the RUF (Fig. 11), which is consistent with their lower Krio proficiency. Other associated factors were a higher percentage with no schooling and higher Muslim affiliation.

FIGURE 11 – Affiliation with Fighting Factions, Sierra Leone

"What the Fighters Say" - 1999

Krio-Speakers (936) Non-Krio Speakers (107)

■SLA ■AFRC ■RUF □CDF □None
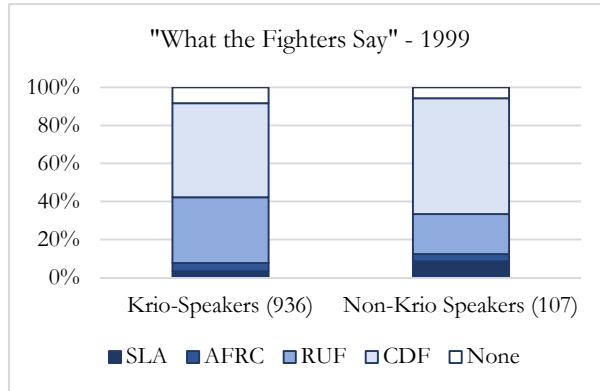
The second mechanism is not conscription or fighting, but *exposure* to war. Fortunately, the Humphreys and Weinstein project also surveyed non-combatants, to whom one can compare ex-combatants. This survey of non-combatants was much smaller: only 183 people. The sample was less overrepresented by Mende[11], and there was more of a gender balance: 65 percent male to 34 percent female. Even more in this group than among the combatants claimed to speak Krio: 94 percent.

Only 6 percent of the non-combatants said they could not speak Krio; this was only 11 people out of 183. They were similar[12] to the non-combatants who did speak Krio in all but one respect. The only distinguishing feature among these 11 people was the contact they had with the various factions. The Krio-speakers claimed greatest contact with the RUF (42%), followed by the CDF (30%) and the SLA or AFRC (25%). In contrast, the 11 *non-Krio* speakers had most contact with the CDF (64%), followed by the RUF (36%). None of these non-Krio speakers claimed exposure to the SLA or AFRC. While a small sample, this supports the mechanism that contact with speakers of Krio likely spread the language. The government forces were most likely to use Krio as was the RUF. The CDF were usually local to their areas and would likely have used local languages to interact with civilians.

Sierra Leone was a vastly different place after 2003. Its nearly five million citizens had endured dramatic displacement and interaction with violent rebels. While the war had shattered the lives of most of them, it had also left a population that could communicate in its rebuilding. Even in areas at the rural periphery, a common language has spread.

Liberia: Spread of English through Civil War

Liberia presents a much more complicated task for comparison, since its administrative boundaries have shifted over time. Furthermore, its 1984 census was never completed, and unfortunately, neither the 1974 nor the 2008 census asked questions of language proficiency. Nevertheless, we can try to piece together some trends in language use.

Flanked by Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia is similar in its diversity of languages and geographic terrain, but different in its population size from Sierra Leone. At the start of the war, its borders held only two million people, compared to more than 3.5 million in Sierra

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[11] 39% Mende, 34% Temne, 9% Kono, 3% Limba, and 2% Kuranko.
[12] Half rural, half urban; half men, half women; similar in age; similar ethnic distribution.

Leone. It also started with a higher English proficiency and higher concentration of citizens in its capital city of Monrovia. The language of the capital was English, rather than Liberia's "Krio," called Simple Liberian English. Yet, I argue, standard English could only have spread in the way it did – to citizens with no school exposure and far outside urban areas – with the war.

In the 1974 Census,[13] more than two-thirds – 68 percent – of the Liberian population reported no exposure to education at all. Only 12 percent had four years or more of education. Literacy rates were reported at 16 percent, with 69 percent claiming illiteracy and 15 percent giving a response of neither literate nor illiterate ("not in the universe").

A decade later, in 1985, UNESCO reported literacy rates of 32 percent in Liberia, much higher than Sierra Leone's 13 percent. By 2008,[14] 39 percent claimed literacy, but the remainder was unusual: evenly split between those who were illiterate (31 percent) and responses of "not in the universe" (30 percent). With nearly a third of the population unable to claim literacy or illiteracy, clearly this was a large grey area. I believe this has to do with language proficiency.

Before the war, Simple Liberian English was estimated to be spoken by more than 70 percent of the population.[15] Unfortunately, the 2008 Census does not ask language proficiency. As a substitute, I consulted the Afrobarometer survey of 2008, which asked respondents what language(s) they spoke well. This survey also records the language in which the interview was conducted. Interestingly, despite the wide spread of Simple Liberian English, only 31 percent of the sample indicated they spoke this language well or used it as the language of the interview. This may have been underreporting, or it may be that this is being replaced by English. Unfortunately, we do not have a number of individuals who spoke English in 1984, though the literacy rate is generally used as a proxy. UNESCO estimated literacy rates of 32 percent in 1985 and 33.5 percent in 1990. From 1990 to the 2008 Census, literacy rates only increased by a little more than five percentage points – to 39 percent – perhaps not surprising given the disruption of war during this time. And yet in 2008, **85 percent** of those surveyed for the Afrobarometer claimed to speak English or used English as the language of their interview. This is more than twice the literacy rate.

One might wonder at whether these languages – English and Simple Liberian English – are even distinct. In fact, they were the two discrete choices of language in which to administer the Afrobarometer survey. Even if we assume that some respondents' claims to English proficiency are exaggerated, and use a more conservative measure of people who actually took the survey in English, we find that 70 percent were able to do so. This seems remarkable in a country in which only 30 percent of the population had four years or more of education. Clearly, this English was not gleaned entirely from school. And in fact, we find that of the population that took the Afrobarometer survey in English, 12 percent had been to no school, and an additional 14 percent had not completed primary school. It is these types respondents, I believe, who answered "not in universe" in the 2008 census. They spoke English, associated with literacy, but they had not learned it in school. I suggest that the war must have contributed to the spread of English.

Like Sierra Leone, Liberia is a multilingual state. It has several large languages, including Kpelle (23 percent) and Bassa (13 percent). As in Sierra Leone, the spread of a single language in Liberia is not helped by the terrain, which has dense forested regions and hills separating the interior from the coastal regions.

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[13] Census of Liberia 1974: 150,256 individuals surveyed; total population = 1,503,368.

[14] Census of Liberia 2008: 348,057 individuals surveyed; total population = 3,476,608.

[15] A census in 1984 (unavailable but cited in *Ethnologue*) claimed that 1,500,000 people spoke Simple Liberian English, out of a population of 2,101,628.

FIGURE 12 – Language Groups in Liberia

Liberia is, however, relatively more urbanized than is Sierra Leone. Overall urbanization increased from 29 percent in 1974 to 47 percent in 2008.[16] The capital city of Monrovia in 1974 contained just over 200,000 people (14 percent of the population), whereas in 2008 it contained over a million, which made up nearly 30 percent of the population. This is significant, as the dominant language of the capital is English. While urbanization generally and the growth of Monrovia in particular certainly contributed to the spread of English, it was the civil war that induced the dramatic migration toward the capital.

Beginning in 1990, armed factions affected civilian populations in Liberia. The first was NPFL, led by Charles Taylor. This group at first was only 100-200 members from twelve different ethnic groups: Gios and Manos from Nimba County,[17] former soldiers and other Liberians who were disaffected with President Doe. There were also individuals from Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, and Cote d'Ivoire, some of whom had received training with Charles Taylor in Libya. Taylor had graduated from college in Boston and spent years outside of Liberia, making connections and building support. He was known to speak "clear and dramatic English" (Richards 1996, 3). Several of the other NPFL leaders also had American college degrees. Once in Liberia, they quickly recruited youth in Nimba County, who were eager to avenge the viciousness of Doe's army. While leaders may have used more standard English, the new recruits likely used the local languages or Simple Liberian English.

In only six months – by June 1990 – NPFL had come to the edge of Monrovia and controlled about 90 percent of the country. By August, a 4,000-strong ECOWAS monitoring group

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[16] Urbanization figures for 1962 and 1974 from Campbell 1982, 21; for 1984 from the World Bank, and for 2008 from the Census (locations > 2000 people = urban). Size of Monrovia and second city in 1962 and 1974 came from Campbell 1982, 22 and in 1984 and 2008 from www.citypopulation.de/Liberia. The largest second city in 1962 was Harbell, in 1974 was Buchanan [also est. 1984], and in 2008 was Gbargna.

[17] Many Gios and Manos had fled to Burkina Faso when Doe sent the army to exact revenge on the home region of Thomas Quiwonkpa, an Army General who had attempted a coup (Richards 1996, 2).

(ECOMOG) was deployed to keep NPFL from taking over Monrovia. There were initially 4,000 men, mostly from Nigeria in this force, but it grew to more than 10,000. While widely criticized, ECOMOG did secure the port and airport and assisted in police patrols in the capital (Scott 1998, 105).   A small United Nations observer mission (UNOMIL) assisted ECOMOG. For the next six years, various groups attempted to cut into NPFL's control over greater Liberia. A huge portion of the population fled across the border to refugee camps – nearly 700,000 at the height. Many internally displaced Liberians came to camps around Monrovia, particularly after the Taylor's 1992 offensive, which brought 200,000 more people to the capital. The "security zone" was said to contain about 1 million people in the mid-90s (Scott 1998, 114), roughly doubling the population of 10 years prior.

FIGURE 13 – Administrative Regions of Liberia

The war had different effects in different regions: Some, like Lofa County, were effectively deserted; others, like Bong and Nimba, were heavily depopulated, and the capital region of Montserrado was swollen (Scott 1998, 114). This is the region in which many people learned English, as they confronted or were protected by ECOMOG and later UNOMIL forces. Humanitarian aid could only operate around the secure zone; after mid-1990, the "internally displaced [outside Monrovia] were effectively without any international protection" (Scott 1998, 120). An NGO official reported in 1992 there were 120 UN vehicles in Monrovia and only five in 'greater Liberia' (Scott 1998, 124).

The active fighting ended in 1997, after Taylor assumed the presidency, but it broke out again in 2002. Anti-Taylor remnants had regrouped in Guinea, and recruited from refugee camps in the areas just over the border from Liberia. LURD was "reported to have placed family members in [refugee camp] Kouankan…where it maintained an openly armed presence, and continued to return there for rest and recreation, stocks and new recruits" (Jorgel and Utas, 2007, 89-90).

We see, then, that war pushed people in two directions: either outside of Liberia if they were in border regions, or toward the capital. This movement is reflected in language abilities. Unfortunately, Liberia's censuses do not ask about Simple Liberian English or English proficiency. A rough approximation is to look at the Afrobarometer survey from 2008. While the sample size

does not permit firm conclusions, the findings are suggestive. If we look only at individuals who had no education – so no exposure to English-medium teaching – we find that a good number of them took the survey in English, rather than Simple Liberian English. This seems surprising, as one wonders where they acquired this proficiency. The most notable groups who did this were the Kpelle and Gola, where more than half of non-educated respondents took the survey in English (.5 and .55, respectively). These groups were in the path of the NPFL or ULIMO-J; individuals in these groups fled to Monrovia's safe havens and interacted with peacekeepers or humanitarian workers in refugee camps. The groups whose non-educated members had the least proficiency in English were the Lorma (.19), the Grebo (.23), the Kru (.25), and the Bassa (.29). These groups were more at the periphery and had differing interactions with fighting groups.[18]

FIGURE 14 – Fighting in Liberia and English Proficiency

Legend

District

PctSpkEng

	0%-50%
	50%-60%
	60%-70%
	70%-80%
	80%-90%
	90%-100%

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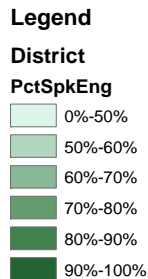
[18] We can see these distinctions in three different areas: Lofa County, in the Northwest, Grand Bassa County in the Southcenter, and Nimba County in the Northcenter. Details are available on each but not included for space.

Finally, war has a gender dimension. It was said that in Liberia, to avoid recruitment or death, many men hid from oncoming rebel groups, while women were left to provide for their families. They also became victims. I would predict that women in Liberia were actually exposed to more interaction with rebels and soldiers, thereby widening their language capabilities.

To see how Liberia compared to its neighbors that had not undergone war, I calculated the difference in proportion of men and women who speak multiple languages (Figure 15). In Benin and Ghana, and to a lesser extent Nigeria, women are much more likely than men only to speak one language, by a large margin. Nigeria shows less of a gap, but it still follows the pattern. Liberia, however, breaks the mold. Not only is there virtually no difference between the number of women who can speak only one language and the number of men, women are actually more likely to speak *two* languages in Liberia, and they are almost at parity with men in speaking three or four.

FIGURE 15 – Effect of War on Women's Language Capacities

Difference in Proportion of Women Compared to Men who speak Multiple Languages (Afrobarometer 2008)
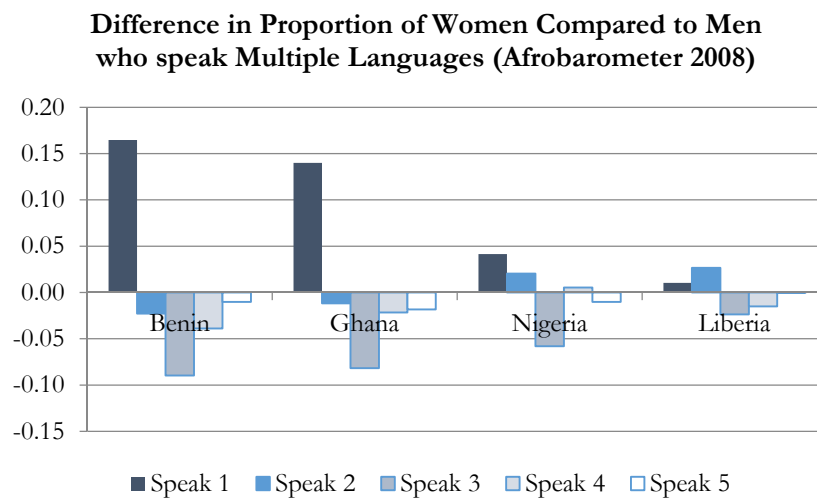
Ghana is a typical country in the region, and demonstrates a common situation where many more women are monolingual and in each subsequent comparison, more men know a greater number of languages.
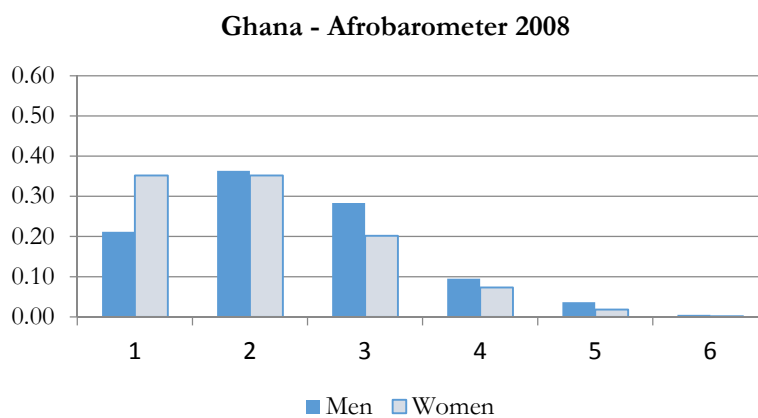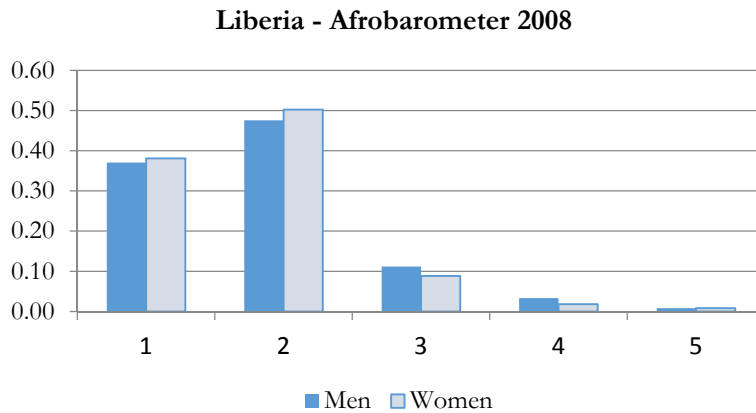
FIGURE 16 – Number of Languages People Speak in Ghana

Ghana - Afrobarometer 2008

FIGURE 17 – Number of Languages People Speak in Liberia

Liberia - Afrobarometer 2008

In Liberia, however, people overall speak fewer languages, and women are almost identical to men in their proficiency in two languages. It seems this can only be explained by women's tremendous exposure to fighting during the war.

This portion of the paper has tried to gauge the impact of war on language proficiency in Sierra Leone and Liberia. In both cases, urbanization happened alongside language shift. But even when looking at rural areas in Sierra Leone and Liberia, it appears that citizens exhibit more ability in common languages than would be expected in relatively homogeneous settings. Interestingly, Sierra Leone's civil war spread Krio, while Liberia's civil war spread more standard English. I think this is for three reasons:

First, Liberia demonstrated a higher baseline literacy in English than did Sierra Leone before each were affected by war; more than 30 percent of the population was estimated to be literate in Liberia, versus less than 15 percent in Sierra Leone. Second, the urbanization rate was higher in Liberia, and, importantly, the city of Monrovia had grown much faster than did Freetown in Sierra Leone. It held about 30 percent of the population, versus Freetown's 15 percent. And, importantly, the language of Monrovia was English, and this was reinforced by the heavy presence of English-speaking peacekeeping troops and humanitarian workers in refugee camps. Third, we see regional variation, with urban areas and those closer to the capital revealing greater language acquisition. In rural areas that raised self-defense forces, proficiency in these wider languages is reduced. But even in rural Sierra Leone and among populations not exposed to formal education in Liberia, we see some surprising facility in Krio and English, respectively, that can only be explained by the path of war. These wars entrapped citizens into violence they did not desire, but it also served to bind them to their fellow countrymen in a common language. This is evident particularly among women, who in countries not affected by war typically have lower capacity in multiple languages than men. In Liberia, however, they are almost equally multilingual, showing the gender dimension of civil war and language acquisition.

*Preliminary Research: Cote d'Ivoire – French and Dyula in Conflict*

Like Sierra Leone and Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire experienced a civil war. It was very different, however, in that a line of demarcation was enforced between north and south, in a sense restricting the combatants to zones of influence. Cote d'Ivoire experienced explosive growth in its capital city after independence. The composition of that capital city, however, was unusual. And while French

had an early foothold and Dyula emerged quickly as a viable contender, a stalemate civil war bifurcated the linguistic landscape of the country.

Figures for Cote d'Ivoire in general are difficult to establish, since there was no nation-wide census before 1975, and the most recent available is from 1998 because of the civil war.[19] Helpfully, there is an Afrobarometer survey from 2013, and one can assess the language of the interview. UNESCO gives a figure of 5 percent French literacy in 1962, the World Bank estimated 34 percent literacy in the late 1990s. Around this time, Adegbija (1994, 11) estimated 35 percent of the population spoke French as a second language, while the OIF (2003, 16) estimated more conservatively that 22 percent of the population spoke French. But the Afrobarometer survey of 2013 indicates that 96 percent of the population could use French well enough to take the survey in this language. How did this happen? I suggest the civil war played a part.

Abidjan was a tiny town at the onset of colonization, a capital wholly constructed to serve the export needs of the metropole. In 1921, it had only 5,364 people, growing to 112,000 by 1955. Migrants to the capital came for their association with the French colonizers. This was demonstrated with the remarkable French proficiency evoked by a 1955 census of Abidjan. Of the domiciled population, 59 percent of men and 19 percent of women, or 44 percent overall, reported being able to speak, read or write French.[20] In the same year, of the small population "de passage" 14 or older living in Abidjan, 45 percent of the men and 21 percent of the women reported they could speak, read or write French.[21] Even in important cities in the interior, French was surprisingly vigorous: in Bouake, 55 percent of resident adult males and 12 percent of females, or 36 percent total could speak or read/write French.[22]

FIGURE 18
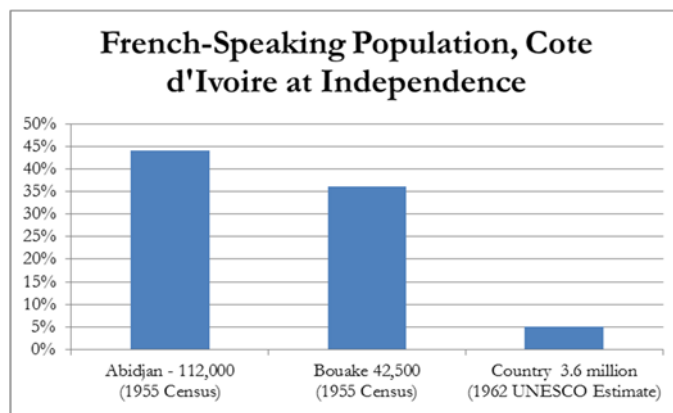
Figures beneath the bars are the total population of Abidjan, Bouake and Senegal. Bars show the portion of that population estimated to speak French.

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[19] The civil war involved open fighting from 2002-04; stalemate from 2004-2010; re-emergence of violence in 2011 after disputed elections; official end with foreign support of Ouattara in 2012. A new census was conducted in 2014, but results are not yet available.

[20] Recensement d'Abidjan 1955, Republique de la Cote d'Ivoire, Ministere des Finances, des Affaires Economiques et du Plan. Population (over age 14) living in Abidjan who speak French (Table AR 5, p. 69)

[21] These literacy figures are remarkably similar to the figures given for religious affiliation. In 1955, 43% of Abidjan's population reported being Christian (34% Catholic), while 37% reported being Muslim. Recensement d'Abidjan 1955, Republique de la Cote d'Ivoire, Ministere des Finances, des Affaires Economiques et du Plan, (p. 49 and Table AR 2, p. 67). *Literacy likely had something to do with the high exposure to Catholic education.*

[22] Ibid, Table 2.6 Population domiciliée de 15 ans et plus selon le degre d'instruction et le sexe, p. 38

In 1960, a remarkable 23 percent of the school-aged population was enrolled in school, a much higher percentage than any other country in West Africa. French was therefore poised to spread through the country. But it had a competitor – not in the form of a large group, but in an existing lingua franca. Abidjan did not have an obvious dominant language group. Partly, this was because only 62 percent of the city's population was actually from Cote d'Ivoire: 13 percent came from Upper Volta [Burkina Faso], 16 percent from other Francophone African countries, and 8 percent from Anglophone African countries. This meant that 37 percent of the capital city originated elsewhere.[23] No group held majority status. The largest grouping in the city's 1955 census was "Eburneo-Beniniens," but this was a motley continuum of groups with different languages: Attie, Abidji, Ebriee, Abouri, Akan, Baoule, Adja, Yoruba.[24] "Voltaics" and West Atlantic groups made up 20 percent each, and 15 percent were from Soudan (Mali). It is noteworthy that as early as 1955, census documents were classifying "stranger" vs. "national" populations. This became dangerously significant when resources and election outcomes were at stake.

Just after independence, Cote d'Ivoire's and Upper Volta's "Manpower bureaus" made an agreement with "aim of continuing the flow of Voltaic workers formerly organized by the colonial authorities" (Cutolo 2010, 543). Abidjan's large foreign contingent, then, was not accidental, and migrants would contribute to the 'Ivoirian miracle'. This had two effects: 1) the spread of Dyula as a lingua franca; and 2) the assimilation of all northerners into the ethnic category of Dyula. "As a social category, the Dyula encompassed all Ivorians coming from the northern regions, in spite of their ethnic diversity (Senufo, Malinke, Lobi, etc), as well as immigrants from countries like Mali, Burkina Faso and Guinea" (Cutolo 2010, 543). The Dyula language was used among them.

The 1955 Census reported about 47,000 male workers in Abidjan; of these, Mossi was the largest single ethnic category of the male labor force.[25] The Mossi would not have spoken Dyula as a first language, but Moore. Yet they learned Dyula, as did others, as the most practical lingua franca. Tabouret-Keller wrote that Dyula meant merchant as well as member of Dyula tribe (citing Delafosse 1901, Tabouret-Keller, 197). The 'tribe' has no precise geographical location. At the beginning of century and certainly still today [1971], "Dyula is the principal language of the market-place and hence the most important lingua franca of the country" (Tabouret-Keller 1971, 197). It spread not only in the northern part of the country but all along the trade routes and in all the southern markets… "basic Dyula is the most spoken language in various non-formal situations of social life, particularly those with a traditional aspect e.g. in the markets" (*Ibid,* 197).

So while Abidjan indeed grew dramatically – from 5 percent to 18 percent of the country's total population – the speakers within this city were diverse. Urbanization did not homogenize the population in a single language. Instead, there was competition between French and Dyula.

Among laborers, Dyula dominated, and among the elite, it was French. While surveys in Abidjan in 1974 and 1985 showed that Dyula was spoken by 74 percent and 85 percent, respectively, of the respondents as a first or second language (Djité 1988, 219), Tabouret-Keller focused on the pervasiveness of French in the capital: "In a shop in Abidjan, or even on the street, one is possibly more likely to be answered in French than in any of the indigenous languages. There is certainly a marked trend towards the use of French in dealing with the administration" (Tabouret-Keller, 197).

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[23] Recensement d'Abidjan 1955, Republique de la Cote d'Ivoire, Ministere des Finances, des Affaires Economiques et du Plan

[24] Recensement d'Abidjan 1955, Table AR 1, 63-66.

[25] Recensement d'Abidjan 1955, Table AR 13, p. 79

But outside Abidjan, particularly in the north, she agreed that Dyula *was* dominant. "Dyula is otherwise the lingua franca of the whole of the Ivory Coast" (Tabouret-Keller, 195).

Cote d'Ivoire remains diverse linguistically. The largest single grouping is Baoule (24 percent), but typically the country is described in terms of language "families." The 2013 Afrobarometer polled 1200 individuals, finding 39 percent claiming Akan [Kwa in map below], 31 percent Mande (Northern and Southern), 20 percent Kru, and 6 percent Gur.

FIGURE 19 – Cote d'Ivoire's Language Groups
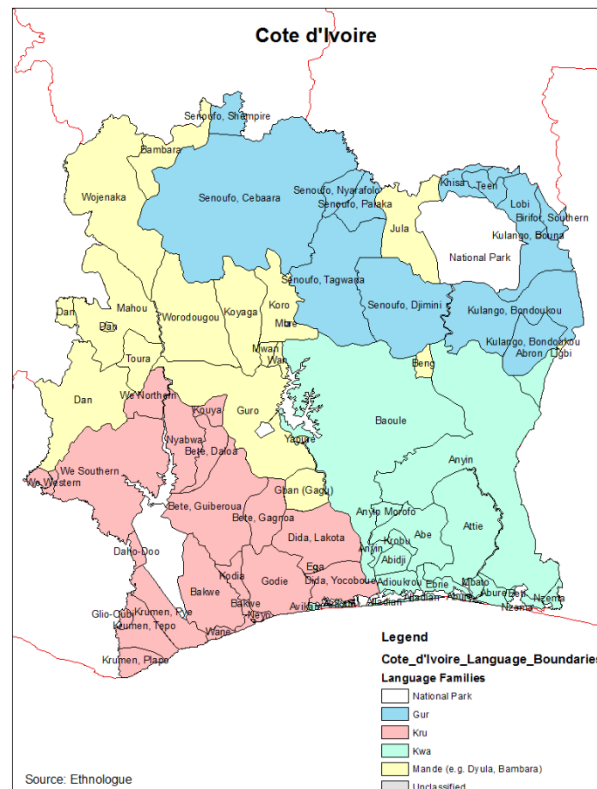
With Cote d'Ivoire's diversity and the lack of dominant group, Dyula might have taken over. It did not, however, stopped by the "first-mover" status of French in the capital. And then came war. War actually might have diffused Dyula even more deeply within the capital city and through the South. Hellweg (2004) explains that as the state's security apparatus deteriorated with economic decline, northerners took security into their own hands. Dyula and Senufo hunters (*dozos*) became urban security agents across Cote d'Ivoire in the 1990s. They used "Benkadi procedures" of agreement, dispute resolution and patrols. As state security forces struggled to contain violence, Benkadi methods spread further. These traditional hunter groups began dealing with armed robberies on a busy stretch of highway. "When dozos succeeded at discouraging bandits along this artery, they gained public approval, national notoriety, and enthusiastic support from local administrators. Soon the movement moved southward to the rest of the country" (Hellweg 2004, 6-7).

But the national climate changed after the death of President Houphouet-Boigny, when successor Bedie's government began to portray dozos along with all northerners as enemies of the state. Dyula quartiers in Abidjan were referred to as *quartiers criminogenes, nids de malfrats* (robbers' dens). They were associated with increase in street crime and insecurity in Abidjan (Cutolo 2010, 545). "In public discourse the Dyula language… historically the lingua franca of the markets in this part of West

Africa, was depicted as the language of the street, of illiterate strangers who could not speak French, of shantytowns" (Cutolo 2010, 545). The government characterized dozo hunters as them as an illegal 'parallel police force' (Hellweg 2004, 9) and called on them to put down their arms and end their patrols. In 1998, the Interior Minister declared an end to dozo patrols below the northern half of the country, thus restoring "the primacy of state police in the south while leaving open the possibility that dozos continue their security patrols in the north" (Hellweg 2004, 9). Cote d'Ivoire experienced open conflict from 2002-2004, followed by an uneasy stalemate that broke the country in two until flawed elections in 2010 and renewed fighting, which ended only in 2012. The French military had been intimately involved with Cote d'Ivoire's security since independence, and its peacekeepers patrolled a line of demarcation that bisected the country.

French held its ground in Abidjan much more firmly than in other capitals, certainly because there was no competing prestige language. Outside Abidjan, however, Dyula had dominated as a lingua franca. The war might have deepened Dyula's hold, even in the capital, but because the war ended in a stalemate, with Dyula-speakers expelled from the south and contained to the north, its reach slowed. Today, we see few people choosing to speak what was once progressing as a lingua franca.

The following maps show the language used in the interview for Cote d'Ivoire's 2013 Afrobarometer survey. Even though 18 percent of respondents identified Dyula as their "tribe," only four percent of the population chose to take the survey in the Dyula language. In a country where more than 40 percent of adult respondents had no schooling, this is remarkable.

FIGURE 20 – Language of Interview in Cote d'Ivoire (Afrobarometer 2013)
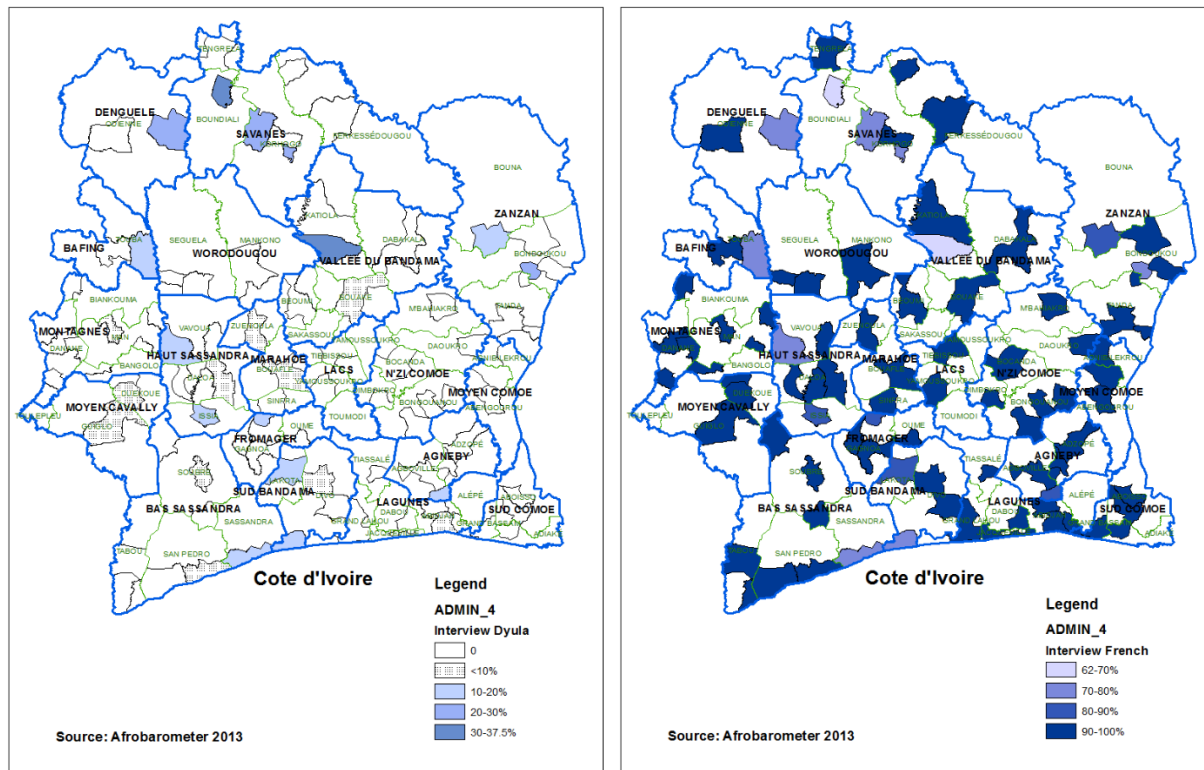
Of the 1200 respondents in the survey, 250 had no education or informal education only. These people should not be able to speak French. But 87 percent of them took the survey in French. Many of these may have learned French through migration to urban areas. But more than half of these respondents were rural, and 60 percent were women. I believe many of these individuals were exposed to French during the civil war, as they faced government soldiers, and during the stalemate as they faced French-speaking foreign forces. Figure 21 selects from the respondents only those in rural areas who had no education exposure. It overlays the "Zone of Confidence" that divided the country during the civil war. There seems some unusually high proficiency in French along the line of demarcation, near military bases (e.g. Korhogo in the north), and where fighting was heavy (near the capital of Abidjan and San Pedro in the southwest).

Figure 21 – Rural Respondents with No Education:
Percent Surveyed in French
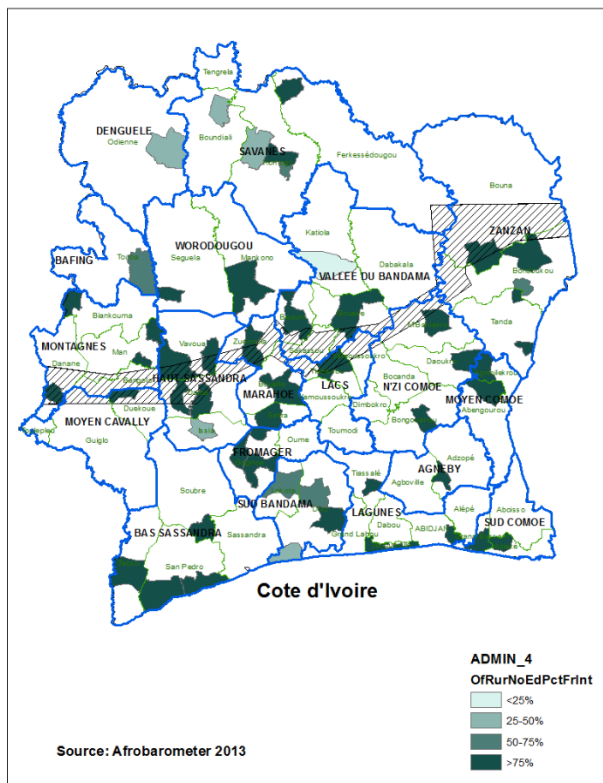
I am still gathering and assessing data from Cote d'Ivoire. Surely part of the decrease in Dyula proficiency resulted from the expulsion of many people back to Burkina Faso and Mali during and after the violence. It will be important to look at population changes between the 1998 Census and the 2014 Census, which has not yet been released. But it also seems clear that many Ivoirians chose not to use Dyula, even if they were capable. And clearly, many people used French who had not had any education. More information is needed on the population's participation in the Ivoirian military and the Forces Nouvelles, as well as exposure to French soldiers and other peacekeeping forces.

So, to conclude this section: war moved languages in all three countries. Participation in fighting and exposure to factions influenced individuals' language capacities. Also important, however, is the prestige or stigma attached to certain languages, and the languages individuals choose to employ will obviously be more restricted than those they are capable of using.

Why it Matters: Conflict, Participation, and Social Cohesion

Why should we care so much about the spread of lingua francas in African states? I think it is important for three reasons: its influence on the potential for violent conflict, its role in democracy, and its contribution to national identity and social cohesion.

First, on **violent conflict:** Does having a common language make a society less likely to fall into conflict? Clearly not always, as the case of Rwanda so tragically demonstrates. But whether a language is imposed or "simply" spreads seems to have consequences. Some of my earlier findings show that violent mobilization over language has to do with the potential permanent inequality that can arise if one group's language is chosen and others are not (see also Horowitz 1985/2000, 37-38

and Bates 1999, 26). The imposition of a majority language may produce more resentment because it is associated with domination, while the spread of a lingua franca may be less threatening. It may provide an intermediate alternative between assimilation (giving up one's mother tongue for a dominant language) and separation (keeping one's mother tongue in lieu of the dominant language). It is a more hyphenated equilibrium, broadening the scope of a potential community.

Second, on **democracy:** Democracy-promotion has replaced nation-building as the mantra for African states. But democratic experiments in Africa continue to hit against authoritarian barriers. Plaguing democratic quality in Africa as elsewhere is *lack of participation, exclusion, and inequality.* No matter how elections are structured, rulers tend to manipulate them. One remedy is to focus on the quality of leadership (Rotberg 2015). Alternatively, one could focus on society and its capacity to demand good governance.

A common language is central to providing the communicative resources that allow citizens to participate and to hold their rulers accountable. Hobsbawm notes that a national language only became important when ordinary citizens became a significant component of the state: "The original case for a standard language was entirely democratic, not cultural. How could citizens understand, let alone take part in, the government of their country if it was conducted in an incomprehensible language?" (1996, 1067). Kymlicka had said "democratic politics is politics in the vernacular. The average citizen only feels comfortable debating political issues in their own tongue" (2001: 213). For many, this requires territorial separation of ethnic groups. Kymlicka proposes multination states, "each with their own historic territories, language rights, and powers of self-government, including their own schools" (Kymlicka 2001, 313). He admits this does not promote horizontal connectedness: "the almost inevitable result is to make democratic co-operation between the members of distinct nation groups more difficult" (313).

Van Parijs argues that democracy does not require a common *ethnos* with a homogeneous culture, but it does require a *demos* "with a shared forum, a common space for deliberation and mobilization" (Van Parijs 2011, 30). In contrast to Kymlicka, he says that people actually can become very good at debating things in a language other than their mother tongue.

Daniele Archibugi (2005) distinguishes between two conceptions of democracy. One conceives of politics as simply the aggregation of citizen preferences, where direct participation is at minimum, and representatives can speak for the masses. However, a deeper conception of democracy is a deliberative model, which requires a capacity to understand the reasons of others and expound one's own (546). If deliberation is an important part of the democratic process, language becomes critical. Van Parijs (2011) agrees that linguistic diversity makes communication more laborious; it is harder to persuade, or be exposed to arguments of others (194).

Aside from deliberating with each other, it seems crucially important that citizens be able to to criticize government. As Ngugi (1986) argued, learning the colonizers language facilitated *elites'* participation, as it allowed them to join national or international conversations. The "masses," however, were still excluded. Alternative visions are not available to the audience that matters. Whereas Ngugi proposes the use of mother tongues to mobilize the masses, it seems that access to a lingua franca might also open this possibility.

Kymlicka (2001) suggests that one of the virtues distinctive to a liberal order is public spiritedness – ability and willingness to engage in public discourse about matters of public policy and to question authority – which distinguishes democratic 'citizens' from authoritarian 'subjects'. There is an important responsibility to monitor officials and judge their conduct. He believes this happens primarily through schools, which teach children how to engage in critical reasoning and moral

perspective. Citizenship education historically discouraged, rather than encouraged autonomy. "The aim of citizenship education, in the past, was to promote an unreflective patriotism, one which glorifies the past history and current political system of the country and which vilifies opponents of that political system, whether they be internal dissidents or external enemies" (Kymlicka 2001: 310). It promoted passivity and deference. Kymlicka instead champions a civic education that promotes personal autonomy, a questioning of authority.

And yet, seeing that the school system has been so poor in Africa, it seems a more efficient way of advancing such monitoring is to allow the spread of lingua francas, where citizens might speak among themselves about the failings of government.

Third, on **national identity and social cohesion:** Does having a lingua franca produce more national loyalty (versus ethnic)? Tanzania has consistently demonstrated the highest levels of national sentiment among the Afrobarometer surveys, and it has a lingua franca in Swahili.

"Assimilation" has acquired a bad name, since it is associated with forced homogeneity or wholesale incorporation of immigrants into a host society. Brubaker (2001, 534) gives some nuance, as he argues that when considered in a more general sense – the sense of becoming more similar – the act of previously marginalized groups achieving more similar educational and occupational status to majority groups can be seen in a more positive light. One might look at intermarriage patterns, incorporation into the labor market, educational achievement, lack of residential segregation – "civic integration." Language repertoires are central to the determination of one's life chances (Brubaker 2015: 32). As the spreading of a useful language broadens ones networks and life chances, it contributes to equalizing opportunities for work as well as political participation. "Opportunities – not just for education and employment but also, even more fundamentally, for the formation of broad and strong social ties and for full participation in a broad spectrum of collective activities – are systematically limited for those who lack proficiency in the prevailing language" (Brubaker 2015: 33).

I mentioned earlier that Frederik Barth (1969) had argued that contact between ethnic groups re-affirms and sustains divisions, as cultural features that the actors regard as significant are expressed and validated with interaction. And yet, languages in contact do not stay static. It may be that languages merge more quickly than do identities. If a lingua franca reduces the significance of language as a marker of difference, there may be more of a possibility for a broader national versus narrow ethnic identity to emerge.

Conclusion

This paper tried to do several things – probably too many!

First, it wanted to question how we map languages in Africa, asking that we move from discrete groupings of mother tongue speakers to observing where and how far lingua francas are spreading.

Second, it tried to show the theoretical tension between a scholarly understanding of the fluid and constructed nature of identities and the efforts of language rights advocates to protect against language shift.

Third, it attempted to investigate a particular mechanism that I believe spreads languages more widely than has been acknowledged, and that is civil war. I looked at three countries that had experienced civil war: Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Cote d'Ivoire. The first two experienced a decade

of conflict raging across the entirety of their territories, with their populations experiencing displacement, conscription into and exposure to multiple factions. This resulted in citizens with high capabilities in lingua francas that were not learned in the school system. Cote d'Ivoire is different in that its war stalemated for several years. It also differed in the stigmatization of a lingua franca (Dyula) that had been spreading widely through bottom-up mechanisms. The expulsion of many northerners, devaluation of Dyula and exposure to French interveners and humanitarian workers seems to have spread French in unexpected ways. We see unschooled, rural respondents near fighting zones answering surveys in French.

Finally, the paper concluded with some observations about why lingua francas *should* matter, arguing that they may reduce the likelihood of violent conflict, increase prospects for democratic participation, and strengthen social cohesion. I think we should pay more attention to them.

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