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Sierra Leone: Krio and the Quest for National Integration

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7.1 Introduction

The Republic of Sierra Leone is a smaller country in size, population, and the number of its languages than many other countries on the West African coast such as Ghana, Ivory Coast, and Nigeria. A particularly interesting phenomenon is however present in the configuration of the languages present and used in the country, and how language links up the general population. Though there are two proportionately large indigenous languages spoken in the country, Temne and Mende, it is found that the language which has spread and serves as a universal lingua franca known by as much as 95 per cent of the population of Sierra Leone is in fact an English-based creole known as Krio, which is the mother tongue of a much smaller group of speakers primarily located in and near the capital city Freetown. This chapter examines the growing significance of Krio in Sierra Leone and how it originally developed as a contact language among different groups of resettled emancipated slaves and other indigenous inhabitants of the Freetown area. The implications of the growth of Krio for national language policy and the position of English as the official language are examined, as well as the existence of ambivalent and changing attitudes towards the Krio language. Section 7.2 begins with a brief historical outline of the emergence of Sierra Leone and its special population in Freetown. Section 7.3 then provides an overview of the variety of different languages present in the country and their role in everyday life in Sierra Leone. Section 7.4 focuses heavily on both the Krio people and their language during the colonial period and after independence, and how Krio has come to spread as a common, inter-ethnic language among almost all of the population of Sierra Leone. Section 7.5 concludes the chapter with a re-examination of the issues surrounding language and national identity in the country and whether and how national language(s) might be planned for Sierra Leone.[1]

7.2 The Formation of Sierra Leone

The name Sierra Leone is a derivative of the Portuguese name Sierra Leoya given to the country by the Portuguese navigator Pedro da Cintra when he discovered the land in 1462. Regularized European contacts with Sierra Leone were among the first in West Africa, and in the seventeenth century slaves began to be brought to North America from the area of Sierra Leone to work on the various plantations established in the southern states such as Georgia and South Carolina, this developing into a thriving trade during the course of the eighteenth century. Somewhat later on, when the tide of British public opinion turned strongly against the slave trade, there were various attempts to resettle emancipated slaves in the coastal area which became Freetown. The first group of these 'Liberated Africans' were known as the 'Black Poor' and were brought in 1787 from London to land purchased from local Temne people. However, after just a single year the majority of this initial group of 400 had perished from disease and conflict with the Temne. Five years later in 1792, a second group of 1,100 slaves who had received their freedom in return for agreeing to fight for the British in the American War of Independence was transported to the Freetown area from Nova Scotia, where they had been emancipated but lived in very poor conditions. Protected by the British in Sierra Leone, the 'Nova Scotians' were joined in 1800 by a third group of 500 freed slaves from Jamaica known as the 'Maroons' who brought with them an English pidgin. In 1808 the British Abolition Act outlawed the participation of British citizens in the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the British navy was used to intercept the slave ships of other nations plying between West Africa and the Americas (Cole 2006: 36), resulting in the resettlement of as many as 50,000 slaves in the Freetown area between 1808 and 1864 (Wyse 1989: 1–2; Sengova 2006: 170). These had originally been seized from a wide variety of regions and ethnic groups in West Africa, though they included a significant concentration of Yoruba people and also slaves who originated from the territory of Sierra Leone itself. Formed into a new community and shielded by the British, during the nineteenth century the 'Creoles' or 'Krio', as they became known, established a prosperous trade in Sierra Leone and a new shared identity, while Freetown itself became increasingly important in regional terms, the territories of the Gold Coast (modern Ghana) and the Gambia being administered by the British governor in Freetown, and Freetown also having the only English-language university-level institute of education in all of West Africa for many years, Fourah Bay College, opened in 1827.

In the twentieth century, Sierra Leone gained its independence peaceably in 1961. The new nation was formed from the combination of the comparatively small Crown Colony centred in Freetown, and the much larger hinterland areas which had been made into a British Protectorate in 1896. The result is a territory of approximately 30,000 square miles, bounded to the north by Guinea, to the southeast by Liberia, and to the southwest by the Atlantic ocean, with a coastline of some 265 miles. There are four administrative divisions in the country: the Western Area consisting in the urban area of Freetown and its surrounding countryside, and three (Northern, Southern,

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and Eastern) Provinces. Currently the population of the country is estimated to be around six million and is made up of eighteen indigenous ethnic groups, with no group constituting more than a third of the total population. Several thousand Europeans, Indians, and Lebanese are also present in the country and active in the economy, along with a sizeable number of Nigerians, and a mixture of Gambians, Liberians, and Africans from other regional states.

Between 1991 and 2000, Sierra Leone experienced a destructive decade of civil war in which large-scale loss of life and damage to the country's infrastructure occurred, as well as much internal displacement of people fleeing from the fighting. The population of Freetown in particular was greatly swelled and diversified during this period by refugees arriving from rural areas. Since peace has been restored with the involvement of the United Nations, a considerable amount of foreign assistance and aid has helped in the rebuilding of the country and its shattered economy, which is heavily based on mining. Though clear and encouraging progress has already been made, there is much left to do, and the reconstruction of Sierra Leone will require the positive cooperation of all sectors of society and the nation's ethnic groups.

7.3 The Languages of Sierra Leone

7.3.1 Overview

Sierra Leone is a multilingual country and most of the population is either bilingual or multilingual. English is the official language of the country and is the primary, dominant language in education, government administration, law, written communication, and all other formal domains of life. It is also the language of status and prestige, being a symbol of high education. In addition to English, and though the country is witnessing a gradual dying out of certain of its less spoken languages, no less than sixteen Sierra Leonean languages are regularly used by their L1 (i.e. mother tongue/first language) speakers:[2]

Krio	Mende	Temne	Limba
Kono	Susu	Sherbro	Fula
Yalunka	Krim	Vai	Kissi
Kru	Madingo	Loko	Gola

All of these languages with the exception of Krio belong to the same family, the Niger-Kordofanian family of African languages, which as a family is divided into two groups: (a) the Niger-Congo Branch, and (b) the Kordofanian Branch. The Niger-Congo branch sub-divides into two other groups, one of which is the Mande Group to which Kono, Susu, Yalunka, Vai, and Mende belong. The remaining ones, Temne, Sherbro, Krim, Kissi, Gola, and Limba belong to the West Atlantic (or Atlantic Congo) subfamily. To date, no language or set of languages has been officially declared the national language(s) of Sierra Leone, though four of the sixteen Sierra Leonean languages listed above are seen as more prominent than the others and consequently figure more in the media and recent attempts to introduce mother-tongue education: Mende, Temne, Limba, and Krio, discussed below.

7.3.2 Mende, Temne, and Limba

The Mendes are one of the largest speech communities in Sierra Leone, estimated to be approximately 30 per cent of the population, and as a group wield considerable ethnic political power. The speakers of this language occupy an area of 12,000 square miles in the southern and eastern provinces stretching over major districts such as Bo, Kenema, Kailahun Pujehun, and Moyamba. The Mendes originally arrived in Sierra Leone from Lofa in Liberia and from Guinea. The language evolved from the South

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[2] Quite a few languages that were used in Sierra Leone in the past no longer productively exist as mediums of meaningful and viable communication. Among these are Loma, Fante, Bassa, and Yoruba. Mayinka has been absorbed by Mende and the majority of its speakers now live in Liberia. Loma is essentially now a Liberian language and is hardly spoken in Sierra Leone any more. Fante, Bassa, and Yoruba no longer have a viable speech community in Sierra Leone and the languages are hardly used in regular interpersonal communication, though Yoruba does still exist as a ritualistic language in secret societies and in cultural legacies such as in first or second names (but not in last or family names), names of events, and indigenous associations.

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Western family of Mande languages, which also includes the Loko, Gbandi, Kpelle and Loma languages. Currently there are four principal dialects of Mende, all of which are mutually intelligible: Kappa Mende, Sewama Mende, Kɔɔ Mende, and Wanjama Mende. With regards to their culture and society, the Mendes are largely Muslims, who practise polygamy, and rule according to clans. Their traditional societies are the Poro, Wande, and Kobo for men and the Bondo for women. These traditional societies also serve as final courts of appeal in their communities. The Mendes, like the Temnes and the Limbas, are a people who show strong ethnic loyalty and bonding to each other.

The Temnes, according to history, are also not originally from Sierra Leone, but are believed to have migrated into Sierra Leone from the area of the Futa Jallon Mountains in Guinea. On their initial arrival in Sierra Leone around the fourteenth century, they clashed with the Sosos in the coastal area and were actually driven back to Guinea. Ultimately they entered successfully through the interior of the northern segment of Sierra Leone and settled there, coming to dominate the northern part of the country over time. Quite similar to the Mendes in population size, they are now estimated to make up around 31 per cent of Sierra Leone's population, and occupy a very large area of the country, predominantly in the Kambia, Port Loko, Bombali, and Tonkolilli districts. Spread over this broad area there are five mutually intelligible dialects of Temne: the Western, Yoni, Eastern Koninke, Western Koninke and Bombali dialects. In terms of culture and lifestyle, the Temnes are largely Muslims and divided into different clans. The traditional societies in which their culture and tradition are preserved are the Poro for men and the Ragbenle for women. Young Temne girls and boys are initiated into adulthood through these societies.

The third major indigenous (or 'long-present') ethnic group in Sierra Leone is that of the Limbas. The Limbas figure as an important ethnic group of Sierra Leone mainly because of the role of some members of this group in politics, business, and education. The Limbas represent about 8.7 per cent of the population and occupy an area of 19,000 square miles, predominantly in the north of the country, where there are five dialects: Tonko, Safroko, Biriwa, Sella, and Warawara. Like the Mendes and the Temnes, they rule by clans and have secret societies in which their culture and tradition are preserved and passed on to the younger generation: the Gbangbani, Kofo, and Poro for males, and the Bondo for female Limbas.

Concerning the actual degree to which the above three groups numerically dominate the areas in which they are concentrated, in largely Mende areas of the south and east such as Kailahun, Kono, Bo, Bonthe, and Pujehun, the percentage of L1 speakers of Mende is as high as 74.5, 80.5, 78.6, 87.5 and 94.8 respectively. In Temne areas of the north such as Kambia, Port Loko, and Tonkolili, the percentage of L1 Temne speakers is now estimated to be 54.7, 87.2, and 79 per cent respectively (data from the Statistics Department of Sierra Leone, 2003). In major Limba areas of the north such as Bombali and Koinadugu, the figures are 24 per cent and 20 per cent respectively. From this it can be seen that Bombali is now more dominated by Temne than Limba suggesting that Limba is gradually coming to be overshadowed by Temne. Quite generally, Temne and

Mende are also learned and used by L2 (i.e. second language) speakers for interaction with the Temnes and Mendes in the south and east and in the north, whereas smaller languages such as Soso, Sherbro, Kono, Madingo, Fula, and also Limba are not learned by outsiders and are only heard in interactions among members of these specific ethnic groups. In addition to their presence in predominantly Temne areas, L1 Temne speakers are also found in significant numbers in the Western Area, where the Krio are actually dominant. The following is a breakdown of the ethnic composition of the important Western Urban Area: 39.5 per cent Krio, 37.1 per cent Temne, 7.1 per cent Mende, 8 per cent Madingo, and 3 per cent Limba.[3] Despite the occurrence of many Temne and also other groups in Freetown and its urban environs, the dominant language which seems to be spoken everywhere in the Western Urban Area is very clearly Krio. In the Western Rural Area, the picture is almost the same: 40.6 per cent Krio, 9.4 per cent Mende, 27.3 per cent Temne, and 6.4 per cent Limba, and Krio is again heavily dominant here.

Temne, Mende, Krio, and to a lesser extent Limba also now have a (limited) presence in education. Following a UNESCO report on the potential use of indigenous languages in education published in 1981, Temne, Mende, Krio, and Limba were selected for standardization and the development of orthographies so that they could be used as mediums of education in primary schools and taught as subjects in later years. This is now taking place, and there are also attempts to produce literature in the four languages, with particularly helpful support in the creation of educational materials from the Lekon Consultancies formed by (the late) Professor Clifford Fyle.

7.3.3 Krio

While Temne and Mende are important languages in Sierra Leone with significant populations of L1 speakers forming approximately 60 per cent of the population, as well as certain L2 speakers, the use of Temne and Mende is predominantly local and restricted to the regions where these languages are dominant, and there has been no extension of either Temne or Mende across a broader national domain. Krio, by way of considerable contrast, is a language which is the mother tongue of just 10 per cent of the population (World Bank data, 2004),[4] largely confined to the comparatively

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[3] The versatility of the Temnes can be detected here; more of the Temnes than any of the other ethnic groups have left their original area to live in the city. Concerning the occurrence of ethnic mobility in general, it should be noted that the percentages quoted in the text were taken after the war and contrast with the more homogeneous population of the Western Area prior to 1990. There has consequently been a marked increase in urban relocation as an outcome of the war.

[4] Sengova (1987: 523) suggests that the population and proportion of L1 Krio speakers is considerably less than this, estimating it to be just 100,000 in 1987. The 1993 Ethnologue report for Sierra Leone, by way of contrast, notes a figure of 472,600, which would be around 13 per cent of today's population if correct. As many Krio left for other countries during the course of the civil war in the 1990s, the more recent, post-war, 2004 World Bank estimate of 10 per cent seems quite compatible with the 1993 Ethnologue figure once Krio emigration is taken into account. Whatever the exact percentage of the population made up by L1 Krio speakers actually is, it is clearly small when compared to the extent that Krio is known as an L2 (by almost all of the population).

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small, (though economically very important) Western Area, but which has developed dramatically into the lingua franca of the whole country, known by members of every ethnic group in Sierra Leone and used for inter-ethnic communication by as much as 95 per cent of the population, in trading, local business, and a wide variety of other, informal contexts in everyday life. Krio has now become so popular and commands such importance and significance in Sierra Leone that even foreign nationals regularly attempt to learn it.

Concerning the actual origins of this enormously successful English-based creole, there are three theories that have regularly been put forward and defended in the literature.

The Americo-Caribbean Origin Theory   This theory claims that Krio originated in the Americas as a result of the Atlantic Slave Trade and was transplanted into Freetown when the colony was declared a haven for freed slaves at the end of the eighteenth Century. It is suggested that the Maroons in particular may have developed a pidgin form of English during the period when they developed as a community in Jamaica, prior to being resettled in Sierra Leone, and that their pidgin subsequently developed further into Krio. In support of such a theory, it is pointed out that there are creoles with striking similarities to Krio elsewhere in the Caribbean today.

The Domestic Pre-settlement Theory   This theory suggests that there existed an English-based pidgin along the African coast before the settlement of the colonies, and that such a contact language was taken with slaves to the new world and developed into Krio, prior to being reimported to Sierra Leone. It is believed that the earliest form of Krio was therefore a lingua franca spoken along the Guinea coast between the first European traders and local Africans.

The Domestic Post-settlement Theory   The most commonly held theory of the evolution of Krio suggests that it came into being in Freetown between the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century following the founding of the settlement. It is held that Krio arose first as a pidgin, then as a fully-fledged Creole with mother-tongue speakers due to the pressing need for a common means of communication among the diverse groups of settlers in the colony (as described in section 7.2): the Nova Scotians, the survivors of the Black Poor, the Maroons, the tens of thousands of Liberated Africans, the British colonists, and the Sierra Leonean inhabitants of the Freetown peninsula at the time of the slave resettlements in Freetown. Each of these groups had their peculiar linguistic and socio-cultural identities, and the Liberated Africans in particular were of heterogeneous origin, speaking many different African languages (Spitzer 1974: 11). Krio is suggested to have emerged from this conglomeration of languages due to the necessity for the settlers to interact with each other for simple survival needs.

Certainly, when one considers the Krio lexicon today and in records of the past, one finds borrowings and input from an extremely wide range of sources, with English

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Table 7.1

Regional Varieties	Standard Krio	Standard English
We tu εn in na padi.	In na mi padi.	He is my friend.
Na mi de stⵐdi am.	Na mi de tek an lεsin.	I am his/her tutor.
Mi pεn dↄn kↄt ink.	Mi pεn dↄn tap fↄ rayt.	There is no more ink in my pen.
Sεn fↄ mi rεs, ya.	Briŋ rεs fↄ mi, ya.	Bring me some rice, OK.
Di chↄp dↄn rεdi mek wi chↄp.	Di it dↄn redi, lε wi it.	The food is ready let's eat.

and Yoruba being most present, then Hausa, Wolof, Portuguese, Jamaican Creole, Arabic, Fanti, French, Fula, Mende, Temne, and other African languages. With such a tremendously mixed lexical background and the situation present in Freetown at the turn of the nineteenth century, it seems most likely that Krio did evolve in Freetown among its mixed population, first as a simple pidgin, and then as a more complete Creole as it came to be used by the settlers' children as their mother tongue, eventually metamorphosing into the Krio language that is known today.

In more recent years, efforts have been made conservatively within academic circles to identify a standard form of Krio, which can be used in education and as a model for L2 learners. Though there has been certain success in the description of standard L1 Krio, the properties of standard Krio have at present not been fully adopted by the huge L2 speaking population, and there are actually many different variant L2 forms of Krio which have emerged as a result of the massive spread of the language throughout the country among speakers for whom Krio is a second language. Amongst the Mendes, the Temnes, the Limbas and other groups there are clearly variant forms in syntax, phonology, and the lexicon, and the systematic production of 'dialects' quite different from the variety used at home by L1 speakers. Examples of some of the variation found in non-standard Krio are provided in Table 7.1 where the Regional Varieties are compared with Standard English and Standard Krio varieties.

It is relevant to note that the vast majority of L2 speakers of Krio in Sierra Leone learn Krio not from L1 speakers who are in the minority, but from L2 speakers who essentially dominate the Krio-speaking environment. Most L2 speakers also do not learn the language primarily to communicate with L1 speakers, but rather to communicate with other L2 speakers who have different mother tongues. Many L2 speakers have become extremely confident in their forms of Krio, and ironically are now exerting an influence on the Krio spoken by the L1 population, with various previously non-standard forms creeping into the speech of native speakers of Krio.

In terms of how Krio is added to the linguistic inventory commanded by multilingual Sierra Leoneans, patterns of bi- and multilingualism vary considerably from area to area and person to person. In Freetown where the percentage of the educated and literate is highest, people are frequently bilingual in Krio and English and possibly also know a third language such as Temne, Limba, or Fula (or Lebanese, Arabic, French, etc. in the case of those with ancestry in other countries). As one progresses

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into the interior of the country and away from Freetown, English quickly becomes much less commonly known, and Krio becomes the dominant vehicle of inter-ethnic communication functioning with one or two other local languages.

As Krio has come to be used so extensively by multilingual speakers in different situations, the vocabulary has been enriched and considerably expanded, allowing Krio to be used in almost all of the contexts of everyday life that Sierra Leoneans encounter on a regular basis, outside the very formal, where English still dominates and is spoken by those who have a good level of education (approximately 10 per cent). Given this widespread use of Krio in a broad array of domains and the fact that Krio is known by almost all of the country's population, the question naturally arises whether Krio should be considered for formal elevation to the status of official or national language of Sierra Leone. In order to examine the feasibility of such a potential increase in the official status of Krio in the country, it is necessary to take into account general attitudes towards the language held among both L2 and L1 speakers, along with aspects of the social history of the Krio people and their interactions with the rest of the country's population. A brief description of the sociolinguistic relation of Krio and its speakers to the population of Sierra Leone past and present is now provided in section 7.4.

7.4 The Krio and their Language: Attitudes and History

7.4.1 Negative Issues Concerning the Krio and their Language

Spencer-Walters (2006: 236) points out that the resettlement of emancipated slaves in Sierra Leone was originally conceived of as a 'civilizing project', which it was intended would demonstrate to both Europeans and other African nations the possibility of creating a 'civilized' African society. The 'Sierra Leone Experiment' therefore placed considerable emphasis on providing Western education for the mixed population of resettled Africans, and encouraged the adoption of various aspects of Western culture, including Christian religion. Significant numbers of the Krio took advantage of this opportunity to gain a formal education, and from the mid nineteenth century onwards many used their qualifications to obtain positions as doctors, lawyers, and other professional and clerical appointments in the colonial bureaucracy, out-competing other Sierra Leonean Africans who had not been given access to education by the British (Dixon-Fyle and Cole 2006: 16). The successful and educated among the Krios often chose to adopt western names and keenly absorbed and manifested many trappings of Western culture, to the extent that 'many were proud to call themselves not just Christians but "Black Englishmen" '(ibid: 3). Such a positive response to the exposure to education and Western civilization offered to the Krios was then frequently rewarded in the form of privileged access to a range of resources controlled by the colonial authorities, allowing the Krios to establish themselves with many advantages not readily available to other Sierra Leoneans.

During the course of the nineteenth century, the variety of groups resettled by the British in Freetown increasingly coalesced and came to share an emergent, new identity, cultivated by the common experience and special conditions of life present under direct British rule, and developed as a community with properties distinct from those of other indigenous African groups, including now a largely stabilized creole language used as a means of in-group communication in domains where standard English was not utilized. Importantly, it is reported that the accelerated educational and economic advancement of the Krios, combined with their particular path of development and separation from other groups, also resulted in perceptions of superiority among the Krio, at least among those who strove to imitate a European style of life and considered themselves cultured, educated, and successful. Attitudes of prejudice and contempt from the educated Krio towards other local, indigenous groups seen as backward and uncultured consequently created a significant ethnic division between the Krios and other indigenous peoples in British-administered Sierra Leone. The latter, for their part, felt that the Krios received an unfair share of resources administered and distributed by the British, and in doing so severely inhibited the development of the non-Krio population, hence negative feelings between portions of the Krio and non-Krio population came into existence from the nineteenth century onwards.[5]

A perception that the Krios and other Sierra Leonean groups were quite different in nature and origin grew and was shared by Krio and non-Krios alike through the colonial period, deepening the divide between the two parts of the population. As Cole (2006: 49) notes, as independence approached Sierra Leone in the 1950s: 'Both sides had been socialized into thinking of each other as different and separate', and the potential value that a shared experience of British occupation might have brought to the growth and promotion of an all-inclusive Sierra Leonean national identity was not exploited at independence. Quite the contrary occurred, in fact, and ethnic divisions were manipulated for political ends by extremists on both Krio and non-Krio sides, causing a general increase in mistrust and a negative hardening of ethnic boundaries. In the period since the achievement of independence, Krio relations with other groups have frequently remained less than optimal, with continued economic inequality in the country still being attributed to earlier British favouring of the Krio and stimulating 'animosities [which] have gravely threatened national unity since independence' (Dixon-Fyle and Cole 2006: 15).

Linguistically, it can be noted that Krio as a language was for long perceived as a non-indigenous language, primarily a reduced variety of English, this further embedding the distinct foreign-origin status of its native speakers, the Krios, in the eyes of other Sierra Leoneans. As a 'mixed' language lacking the authority and purity of either English or other indigenous languages, Krio has been viewed by some as less genuine and less worthy of respect than Sierra Leone's larger languages or English, and was

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[5] A violent physical manifestation of anti-Krio feeling surfaced in the Hut Tax War in 1898 when hundreds of Krios were killed by other groups in the (mistaken) belief that the Krios supported a new tax introduced by the British, which threatened to be a major burden for other Sierra Leoneans.

actually banned from use in schools and official domains until quite recently, when 'rehabilitated' along with Temne, Mende, and Limba in the development of indigenous languages in education from the early 1980s (Sengova 2006: 184). Negative attitudes held towards Krio on the grounds of its being a mixed language of foreign origin (or at least perceived as such) may have also translated into prejudices towards its native speakers, according to Bangura (2006: 163), and it is often remarked that the phrase 'Krio nɔto neshɔn' (lit. '(the) Krio (are) not a nation') has been used to disparage the Krio as a mixed collection of people not having the authenticity of a real ethnic group (*'neshɔn* 'nation' here being used in the sense of a distinct ethnic group of Sierra Leone; Spencer-Walters 2006: 226). Both the Krio themselves and their language have therefore occasioned negative reactions from other parts of the population in Sierra Leone, on the grounds of unfair past economic advantage, perceptions of contempt held towards uneducated non-Krio by the Krio, and a language portrayed as impure and foreign in basic origin.

Furthermore, it is not only non-Krios who have voiced criticisms of the Krio language in some form or another. The fact that the Krios were the first to obtain access to (English-medium) education during colonial times may have had negative effects on their own attitude towards Krio, increasing the intensity of an already low estimation of the language. When many Krio availed themselves of education, they neglected their own native language, and passed this legacy of negation on to their children, preferring to use standard English wherever possible. In the 1980s, when there were proposals to formally introduce Krio as a language in schooling alongside Temne, Mende, and Limba, elements of the Krio population were the most vocal in their opposition to the use of Krio as a medium of instruction (Spencer-Walters 2006: 240). Krio as a language can therefore be said to have experienced an 'embarrassing past'. Unlike the situation with other Sierra Leonean languages, whose communities did not inhibit or denigrate use of their native languages, the children of the Krio were in many instances made to feel ashamed of their mother tongue, and even today there are some among the educated Krio who still see the use of Krio as having an essentially negative impact on the cultivation of standard English and so being potentially harmful to the academic development of the young. With this kind of negative inbuilt attitude towards Krio in parts of the Krio community, the present educated generation of Krios have not had much to gain linguistically from their parents, many of whom scarcely used the language at home. Because of this, the average educated native speaker of Krio today may actually have a smaller Krio lexicon than second-language speakers of Krio from the Mende, Temne, or Limba groups, an odd situation indeed.[6]

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[6] In very recent years, further prejudice against Krio in general has been triggered among certain educated elites by the growth of a form of Krio known as 'Savisman Krio' (lit. 'service-man Krio'), which has become particularly popular among drug-taking youths and other elements on the fringe of society, and which is marked by the use of vulgar and violent language. The worry has been expressed that this variety may be coming to displace the use of more mainstream Krio. However, it is actually very unlikely that this form of Krio will somehow replace more commonly spoken Krio, as Savisman Krio is only used by a very restricted section of the population. Nevertheless, concern over the emergence of Savisman Krio has

In highlighting the complications for the future development of Krio that the soci-olinguistic dynamics of the past may bring with it, we should also add the more purely linguistic issue of the lack of a standardized orthography during much of the history of Krio prior to 1980, when a widely accepted writing system for the language was finally established in Fyle and Jones' Krio–English Dictionary. Spencer-Walters (2006: 239) notes that variation in the way that Krio has been written in the past has hindered the creation of a well-respected literature, and even today a good knowledge of stan-dardized Krio orthography may still be poorly spread, even among those engaged in the creation of literature. Furthermore, as this system makes use of various symbols which do not occur in the Roman alphabet, difficulties for its use in typesetting and word processing may sometimes also occur.

7.4.2 Positive Issues Concerning the Krio–non-Krio Ethnic Relations and Krio Language

From the discussion above in section 7.4.1, it is clear that various aspects of the history of Krio and its native speakers might be seen as potential obstacles to the elevation of Krio into a higher official capacity, this stemming principally from negative attitudes to the Krio people on the one hand and Krio as a creolized language on the other. Although such attitudes may exist among segments of the population, a fuller picture of the situation of Krio in Sierra Leone today and in the recent past also reveals many more positive perceptions of Krio and its usefulness for the maintenance of inter-ethnic relations in the country.

First of all, though the most strident dismissal of Krio as a 'broken' or 'bastardized' form of standard English has frequently come from within the Krio elite itself (Spencer-Walters 2006: 240), there are also members of the educated Krio elite who have demonstrated more enlightened views of Krio. A prime example of a quite different attitude to Krio is noted in Spencer-Walters (2006: 247) in the case of the prominent Krio journalist Thomas Decker, who engaged in a wide range of activities designed to promote a more positive awareness of Krio as a valuable and 'genuine' language able to express complex thoughts just as any other language may. This included the writing of plays in Krio, the sustained use of newspaper columns and radio interviews to promote respect for Krio, and the translation of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* into the language (here recalling Joseph Nyerere's translation of Shakespeare into Swahili to promote Swahili as a national language in Tanzania, see Topan, this volume). Decker's actions prompted others to follow suit and resulted in a wave of plays written in Krio through the 1970s and 1980s.

Secondly, just as the Krio elite were not necessarily all negative in their perceptions of Krio, Bangura (2006), Cole (2006), and others stress that the Krio population as a whole was not nearly as monolithic as is sometimes understood, and that in addition

strengthened the attachment that certain L1 Krio speakers have for English and increased their negative views of Krio.

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to the educated elites who may have been largely absorbed in adopting aspects of Western language and culture, there were (and are) also very many among the Krio population who were less educated and belonged to the working-class, and who did not assimilate or attempt to copy British ways of life, often remaining Muslim or animist in religious belief despite strong encouragements to convert to Christianity. This less vocal but numerically significant section of the Krios is not associated with any overt stigmatization of Krio parallel to that exhibited by (many of) the elites.

Third, it is important to recognize that negative attitudes to Krio as a creolized language form may not exist widely outside the Krio elite and certain other educated non-Krios. Among the many in Sierra Leone who have not established an ability to speak standard English, a proficiency in Krio, with its heavily English-sourced lexicon, is in fact considered to be a desirable index of civil exposure, moving an individual closer to being able to speak English at some point, if additional effort is applied to 'convert' knowledge of Krio into knowledge of standard English. Krio is thus seen by many as a positive stepping-stone to education, with the ultimate indicator of having acquired a recognizable standard of education being the ability to understand, speak, and manipulate standard English. An ability to learn and speak Krio, therefore, brings those who aspire to learn English a step further along the path to their intended goal, and the regular use of Krio is not perceived to be an impediment to the proper acquisition of English (quite the contrary, in fact).

A fourth, major point is the simple observation that knowledge and use of Krio has spread massively throughout Sierra Leone among speakers of other languages and is thriving and developing in a strikingly vibrant way. Ironically, while Krio was being stifled in the homes of educated native speakers in Freetown and a rather decayed form of the language was being passed on to their offspring, those in the provinces have expanded Krio considerably and moulded the language further with forms and patterns from their own native languages, resulting in the creation of a number of different sub-varieties: Mende-Krio, Temne-Krio, and other regional forms (Sengova 2006: 180). The widespread adoption and use of Krio as a means of wider communication is a testament to the high degree to which the language is felt to be acceptable as well as practical, and would certainly not have occurred in such an unforced and spontaneous way had there been deeply entrenched negative attitudes to Krio present in the population. Krio is now also taught formally in the educational system, and much popularity is recorded for Krio classes, both in schools and at the teacher training and university levels.

As a further significant part of the ongoing development of Krio in Sierra Leone, a recent research project carried out by one of the authors among various categories of L1 and L2 Krio speakers in the Freetown area observed that there seems to be an interesting increase in the domains in which Krio is coming to be used, and Krio is now beginning to compete with English in certain formal contexts hitherto fully monopolized by English. The study, yet to be published, revealed that Krio is being increasingly

used in certain circles and formal settings where previously only English would have occurred to deliberately facilitate a more informal atmosphere and break down stiff social barriers. Such an innovation again underlines a broad current acceptance of Krio and importantly suggests that use of the language may no longer be seen as restricted to purely informal contexts.

Finally, the uncoerced, extensive adoption of Krio as a lingua franca which is ethnically neutral among the majority non-Krio population has meant that Krio has come to play a highly important role in the negotiation of inter-ethnic relations in Sierra Leone, and it is widely acknowledged that the availability of Krio as a common language has been a major factor helping ease situations of ethnic conflict in the country. Sengova (2006: 172) highlights this critical, binding function of Krio in recent times:

> Many would agree that Krio has not only successfully bridged differences in ethnicity, language, culture, and so forth among Sierra Leone's many groups, it has also become a vital communicative tool creating social harmony, cohesion and collaboration among the population. . . . the *lingua franca* status of Krio in Sierra Leone has also narrowed considerably many socio-cultural and linguistic barriers that might otherwise have created greater political discord than that recently witnessed in our decade-old internecine war and carnage in the country.

Krio is therefore seen by many as having helped lessen conflict and divisions in multi-ethnic Sierra Leone, hence while it may not (yet) occur as a strongly positive national symbol which Sierra Leoneans would overtly express pride about and categorize as prestigious, covertly the language has been of much importance in helping maintain the integrity of the nation. Sengova goes on to express a cautious optimism about the future of Sierra Leone, noting the presence of a new attitude of ethnic accommodation in the nation, and again emphasizes the pivotal role that Krio has played in facilitating this:

> 20th century social and political relations in Sierra Leone, especially that between the Krio and the rest of our putative aborigine population appear to be sometimes marred by tension and mistrust, but more recently, conditions also appear to have improved considerably. In one significant respect, Sierra Leoneans have moved from a myth created and held denying nationhood (indigenous ethnicity) to the Krio and commonly spelled in the widely used expression, 'Krio noto nation', to full acceptance of the nation's global multilingualism and ethnic pluralism. The principal vehicle that has brought this about was language and the use of Krio as a unifying vehicle of communication . . . The nation now appears to have adopted the Krio language and perhaps many aspects of the Krio social lifestyle and practice that were once held in disdain thanks to a familiar package of colonial stigmas inherited from the European progenitor.   (Sengova 2006: 176–7)

Given such developments and the range of other positive properties associated with Krio here, this now leads us back to Krio and the national/official language question, reapproached in section 7.5.

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7.5 Krio: A National Language for Sierra Leone?

Sierra Leone, like many African countries south of the Sahara, is a multilingual, multi-ethnic state which needs to cultivate a notion of national unity in order to assist its future survival as a single territorial entity. As in many other West African states, feelings of national identity were not stimulated during the period of colonial occupation, and Sierra Leone attained independence without having established the clear foundations of a distinct and coherent nation. In recent years, the country has experienced much internal ethnic strife which has threatened the continued stability of Sierra Leone as a country. It is therefore of much concern that all means possible be found to re-establish inter-ethnic harmony and create a feeling of belonging to a single nation among the various groups present in the country. In such a general context, the identification and promotion of a national language for Sierra Leone, which could be used to build up feelings of positive cohesion in the country, would certainly be an important forward step in the pursuit of establishing a broad national identity and encouraging unity among Sierra Leoneans.

In (re)considering the potential options available for such a purpose, these realistically reduce to a choice from the following set of languages spoken in the country: (a) one or more of the major indigenous languages, (b) English, or (c) Krio. With regards to the first possibility, although Sierra Leone possesses regional languages such as Temne and Mende which have long enabled different communities to communicate and do business, these languages do not have the obvious potential to enhance national cohesiveness and form the basis of a true national identity. In fact, such languages have a greater potential to become a source of political divisiveness and social fragmentation if ethnicity is made use of for political means, as has often sadly been the case in Sierra Leone, as in other African countries. This is not to say that there should be any repression of the major indigenous languages as prominent symbols of the ethnic identities they are associated with. Such sub-national identities should not be interfered with and should be allowed to continue to function as useful bonds among different groups in Sierra Leone. However, on top of regional and ethnic identities, there is a need to construct a higher-level national cohesion to enhance Sierra Leonean nationhood and development of the country. What Sierra Leone therefore needs is a language that can hold the people together in a nationalistic bond, one which they can identify and relate with in a safe way, without losing their ethnicity, jeopardizing their cultural heritage, and endangering their traditional values.

Considering the possibility of English being used to potentially fulfil such a role, in Africa in general, there is a common view (which many would call a misconception) that national integration can be achieved through the use of ex-colonial languages such as English, French, and Portuguese to facilitate inter-ethnic communication. In the case of Sierra Leone, English has become entrenched as the only official language of the country and the primary index of higher education. However, many would argue that real integration can never be achieved in this manner. Bamgbose (1991:

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18) summarizes the potential weakness in the use of colonial languages as national languages in African states in the following way:

> The point which is often missed in this approach is that the kind of integration made possible in this way is only horizontal integration which involves a combination of the segment of the educated elites from each of the different ethnic or linguistic groups in the country.

In a situation such as that in Sierra Leone where only 10 per cent of the population is proficient in English, ethnic diversity rather than ethnic integration will be the fundamental outcome. The dangers here are very clear, and a nation that intends to foster true nationalism and ethnic cohesiveness must look for a more inclusive and more embracing approach. This kind of targeted national integration needs to cut across ethnic borders and should result in what Bamgbose (1991) calls genuine 'vertical integration'. In Sierra Leone, current prognostics suggest that it is quite unlikely that English will become known by a much greater percentage of the population in the near future, and therefore English is not a good candidate for selection as national language.

In many sub-Saharan African states, once major indigenous languages and ex-colonial languages are discounted as possible choices for promotion as national languages this often exhausts the linguistic inventory present in a country and conceivable as nationwide means of communication. However, in the case of Sierra Leone, the widely known creole and pidgin language Krio is clearly a further plausible alternative for consideration as the selected national language of the country, and has many positive attributes to support its candidacy in such a role.

As noted earlier, an extremely important property of Krio is the simple fact that it is known by as much as 95 per cent of the population, giving it a combined first and second language population that is proportionately greater in Sierra Leone than that enjoyed by major languages in most other countries of sub-Saharan Africa. This very extensive spread of Krio puts it in a position where promotion of Krio to the status of a national language would result in Sierra Leone having a national language known by almost all of its population, and able to achieve the kind of vertical integration Bamgbose highlights as essential for both the development of democracy and an inclusive national identity. Today Krio is not just a language of the Krio population of Freetown, who have frequently disparaged and rejected it, but a language of the whole country, spoken with enthusiasm by people in all parts of Sierra Leone. It is furthermore a language which most non-Krio Sierra Leoneans have come in contact with almost simultaneously with their mother tongue or very shortly thereafter, making it an intimate and very familiar linguistic system.

Concerning the broad spread of Krio among different groups in Sierra Leone, this has had the effect, already noted in part, that Krio has absorbed various phonological, lexical, and syntactic features of other languages in the country, giving Krio a vibrant multi-ethnic and nationalistic flavour, and resulting in it being a preferred

language in situations of inter-ethnic communication where socio-cultural boundaries are transcended, and differences between Sierra Leoneans are no longer emphasized. Although Krio may in origin be a creole language with a strong English lexical base, it can now be suggested to qualify as Sierra Leonean and at least semi-indigenous due to having been continually developed in the country under the clear influence of local languages, rendering Krio less obviously foreign and unauthentic. Variation and deviation from the Krio of L1 speakers can therefore be seen in a positive light as having helped increase the acceptability of Krio and feelings of identification with the language among the population as a whole.

In virtue of all of the above – the early intimate familiarity with Krio among L2 speakers, its local variation, and its highly widespread nature – Krio can now be seen as the principal cultural bond that holds the people of Sierra Leone together as a single national whole. The language has a unique potential to establish cohesiveness among the population, is the only language that can dissipate inter-ethnic tension and bring Sierra Leoneans together as a single nation, and is able to communicate meaning to (almost) the entire population. Though it may not so far be seen as overtly prestigious (in the sense that overt pride towards the language is not frequently expressed), it has perhaps already become a powerful 'covert' mark of national identity, being highly valued by much of the population in a generally unstated way. Finally, in thinking about how Krio measures up to the current official language of the country, English, it has to be conceded that the latter holds a position of unquestioned importance in many institutions and settings in Sierra Leone and is valued for its use in formal and 'elevated' domains. Krio, it can now be noted, also has a clear potential for use in more 'sober' situations and its occurrence does not necessarily result in any loss of the formality of a situation, though it certainly can be used to heighten feelings of informality. Because of such versatility and the ability to be used in both informal and formal settings, Krio can be seen as a fitting and convenient 'deputy' for English in many situations which might be thought of as requiring the use of an official-type language.

The range of positive properties reviewed here and in section 7.4.2 suggest that Sierra Leone should take advantage of the special opportunity Krio presents for helping stimulate national integration and elevate Krio to some higher nationwide status. We therefore submit the following as a practicable way forward to encourage the further growth of national identity in Sierra Leone at the same time as satisfying requirements of nationism and the maintenance of linguistic links with the outside world. We suggest that Krio be formally recognized as a co-official language of the country along with English, and that Krio also be given the status of Sierra Leone's unique national language, these new roles to be supported by the development of Krio for extended use in education and the media, as well as in national functions such as the national anthem, the military, and public address to national audiences. Promoting Krio as a co-official rather than unique official language of Sierra Leone pragmatically

recognizes the fact that even with heavy promotion of Krio, English is unlikely to fully disappear from use in various formal domains of life given its long-accrued sociolinguistic clout, international integrity, and educational leverage, but is also not likely to become known by a majority of the population in the immediately foreseeable future. However, if Krio is adopted as the national and a co-official language of Sierra Leone, the vast majority of the population who currently have no access to the present official language, English, will automatically have the opportunity to become involved in important national matters, enhancing feelings of belonging to a single national unit. This kind of inclusive participation in the future development of the nation will only occur when an appropriate indigenous (or 'semi-indigenous') language is adequately empowered, and therefore strongly supports the case for adding Krio to English as the official languages of the country. We furthermore suggest that the major regional languages, Temne, Mende, and Limba, be recognized as official languages in the provinces in which they predominantly occur, and be similarly developed for increased use within education and the media. Finally, we support additional increased use of other Sierra Leonean languages in the media, where this is practically possible.

If Krio is promoted in this way to help the growth of Sierra Leonean national identity, it will certainly need to confront and overcome a number of obvious challenges. First of all, if Krio is elevated to the status of national and co-official language, it will be necessary to establish more precisely what is to be considered the standard form of the language, and a careful description of standard Krio will be important so as to ensure consistency in official/formal representations. Secondly, there will most probably be certain negative attitudinal reactions to the official elevation of Krio among various elite sections of the population, and these will have to be addressed if the recommended linguistic resolution is to exercise any lasting vertical effect on development.[7] Thirdly, given the small percentage of native speakers of Krio in comparison to the very large L2 population, there are likely to be increasingly more questions relating to the legitimate 'ownership' of the language and who has the right to determine what should be accepted as the standard forms of the language – the L1 Krio population or the majority L2-speaking population, which makes use of a wide range of variant forms. Despite such obstacles, we confidently believe that Sierra Leoneans have the

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[7] Concerning the issue of how negative aspects of the image of the Krio in the past may be 'rehabilitated' in a more inclusive drive towards Sierra Leonean nationhood, previously there has been an emphasis in histories of the country on the role of non-Sierra Leonean groups in forming the Krio population, and this has clearly stressed the non-indigenous nature of the group. However, recently scholars such as Cole (2006: 33) suggest that more recognition can and should be given to the presence of locally recaptured slaves in building up the Krio group, and that there were also many Sierra Leonean slaves who were emancipated and brought to join the settlement in Freetown, ultimately forming the Krio group. Though the numbers of these locally recaptured slaves were much less than slaves resettled in Freetown from other regions of West Africa, a careful presentation and highlighting of the original local component in the Krio population may well help in further 'authenticating' the current status of the Krio as an indigenous group.

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ability to make a success story from the promotion of Krio to national and official language status, and that if Sierra Leone shows itself able to successfully elevate a creole/pidgin language to national and official language status, this may well serve as an important inspiration for other African countries to attempt similar solutions to the problem of language and national integration where widespread pidgin/creole languages exist.