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Thesis

**INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES AND THE WRITTEN EXPRESSION IN SIERRA
LEONE: A COMPARISON WITH ENGLISH**

By

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Introduction:

There are approximately 23 indigenous languages in my parents' home country Sierra Leone, but the official language is English. The most widely spoken (or major languages) are Mende, Temne, Limba, and Krio. Currently, roughly only 16 of the 23 are in use, while the remaining 7 or so have become dead or sleeping languages. Krio is the most widely spoken language, used by around 97% of the population, while it is only spoken by 10% of the population as their primary language. This makes Krio a lingua franca, a language that has been adopted as a common language between speakers whose native languages are different. Krio is an English based creole language, with multiple influences including but not limited to Jamaican Maroons, African Recaptives, Nova Scotian settlers, the Portuguese language, as well as multiple African languages like Nigerian Yoruba and Igbo. It is also often described as the “de facto official language”. The second and third most widely spoken languages are Mende with 32% usage and Temne with 30% usage. This data is based on the 2004 Census of Sierra Leone. Alongside language usage Britannica.com shares the following information about ethnic composition as of 2013: Temne is the largest group at 35.5%, followed by Mende with 33.2%, then Limba with 6.4%, Kono with 4.4%, Fullah with 3.4%, Loko with 2.9% and a last category of other representing 14.2% of the population. It is of interest to note that the Krio ethnic group is assumedly included in this other section. More recent data from Worldbank.org includes a 2021 population of 8,420,641 people.

Despite this abundance of valid indigenous languages available and a clear normalcy of multilingualism, English is the official language of the country. English is the main language spoken in spaces like schools, government administration, and in the public media. In order to understand this complicated hierarchy surrounding English and indigenous languages, as well as

the many reasons for the depletion of indigenous languages, the history of Sierra Leone must first be acknowledged and understood. It is within this history that answers around linguistic expression, linguistic stigmatization, academic standards, socioeconomic status, colonial legacies, creolization begin to come to light. As a descendant and carrier of Sierra Leone's legacy myself, as well as a researcher passionate about language, it is clear to me that these other topics are inseparably interwoven in my investigative journey.

Many authors, Sierra Leonean and not, have come before me. I fully acknowledge that this thesis will only contain a short summary of the history of Sierra Leone, focusing on the elements that impact language and my research questions. While my research focuses on this specific lens of language, it also draws on these preliminary historical resources. It is my hope that what makes my work unique, is the revolution of current circumstances. My data collection, explained later in a later methodology portion of this thesis, is conducted with Sierra Leonean academics and students currently in Sierra Leone. Getting this perspective, directly from those whom it impacts, was and is of incredible importance to me. I believe that gathering information this way enables me to avoid narratives that are hyper-focused or unfortunately saturated in unflattering or demeaning language when talking about the Sierra Leonean people, especially in the periods of enslavement and civil war. The main sources that buttress the argument of this thesis maintain a narrative that balances the constructive and lamentable sides of history without exclusion. In my studies, I have noticed this hyperfocus that skews the starting point of a historical retelling as well as the way current understandings of Sierra Leone are now formed. For example, narratives encapsulating Sierra Leone as a country gone through “a devastating civil war” will only generate images of violence, conflict, and bloodshed. While this information is an important part of history, if readers only receive this lens of Sierra Leonean history, investigations around holistic matters

such as culture, the arts, language, etc., would habitually be placed to the side. Assumptions about linguistic stigmatization and expression may also come from places of negative generalizations. This hyperfocus may suggest that Sierra Leoneans are constrained to ignorance, trauma and simplicity regarding linguistic expressions. This thesis also hopes to be included in literature that maintains restorative methods of investigation and examination in Sierra Leone as the later representation writing section will expand upon.

In summary, the history that will be included in this thesis serves to understand how language is being used, and not used today within academia, specifically through the rise of self-determination by means of higher education in Sierra Leone. To answer this question we must know what, for example, what indigenous languages sounded like, who they were used by, and their placements in society, etc., before British colonial influences. This, of course, is where history comes in.

For the purpose of this thesis, Krio will be the main language analyzed. Since it is the most widely spoken language in Sierra Leone, I believe that gathering information on Krio first, will be foundational in assessing other indigenous languages. It must be noted here that Krio is also the native language with the most developed orthography, enabling many sources to be written about its history. Krio is a Creole language, which opens this thesis up to discuss issues surrounding creolization and the validity, authenticity, and privilege of languages mixed with English, although that is not the focus. For the purpose of this thesis Krio will be referred to as a native language, in order to set it apart from indigenous languages of the country due to its mixed history and development in Sierra Leone. I am to explore how identity and language coexist in Sierra Leone's specific academic context today.

Hypotheses and Research Approach:

C. Magbaily Fyle's *The History of Sierra Leone* was a crucial text supporting my thesis and research. This text analysis aided in my ability to suggest several hypotheses and methodological strategies regarding the linguistic stigmatization and expression of native and indigenous languages in Sierra Leone today. Insight into societal, economic, and cultural hierarchies often permeate and coincide with those of linguistic nature. The crux of my thesis centers around how the history Fyle explains, focusing on unification of multiple identities and a real-life application of the phrase "knowledge is power", exist and effect linguistic expression and stigmatization in Sierra Leonean spaces of academia today. Fyle's text suggests to me that the creation of the Krio ethnic group initiated Sierra Leone's ability to establish themselves as leaders in higher education. Breaking down the formation of the Krio ethnic group will be substantial in understanding how Krio as a language is also utilized today. Krio as a language holds a unique category within Sierra Leone holding a middle ground position of not being a fully imported language of a colonizer, while also being composed of multiple linguistic roots. Through my own research, later detailed in the methodology and research analysis section, I will attempt to understand how the delineations between ethnic groups and identity designations and language ideologies of said groups, may muddy Fyle's utopian vision of how academia functions today in Sierra Leone.

A few other questions stemming from this that my research also inevitably explores include: How have the legacies of Sierra Leonean history impacted citizens' language usage today? How do language and language capabilities allow for socioeconomic upward mobility? What language would have the potential to become equivalent to English locally without creating internal tensions between ethnic groups? Which languages are used in public, private, and

professional spaces? How do the ties between indigenous languages and the ethnic group which they are from, influence expression? What language is seen as important and advantageous to know and speak? How does language usage impact Sierra Leone's place in a global hierarchy considering social media, music, culture, etc.?

My curiosities about the linguistic discrepancies of usage and ideological value between English, the official language, and the other native and indigenous languages, like Krio, Mende, Temne, and Limba in the linguistic structure and cultural expressions in Sierra Leone would be well supported within the fields of Cultural and Linguistic Anthropology. My emerging work draws upon issues of creolization, indigeneity, pre- and post-colonial ideologies, language, identity, and nationalism which can be found within African Cultural Studies. It draws upon issues of policy making, implications of power, higher education, and more within Higher Education or Education Studies. It also contains Political Science or Public Policy significance found as I inquired into issues of language nationality, and governance impacting education.

Comprehensively, the theoretical fundamentals of Linguistic and Cultural Anthropology, including the transcriptional and linguistic relativity ideologies of linguistic anthropologist Edward Sapir, the cultural relativism theory of anthropologist Franz Boas, along with many more, are foundational to my work constituting the reason for categorizing it within the field of Anthropology. Additional examples of recent publications I also found to be useful in understanding the roles, benefits, and cautions of cultural and linguistic anthropology include linguist Robert M. W. Dixon's work *A Method of Semantic Description*, published in 1971, anthropologist Asif Agha's *Language and Social Relations* published in 2007, and linguist Michael Silverstein's *Shifters, Linguistic Categories, and Cultural Description* published in 1976.

Dixon's *A Method of Semantic Description* is an insightful paper on the North Queensland language Dyirbal, as a "special mother-in-law language" compared to the unmarked "everyday" language Guwal. The content of the paper discusses the word correspondences between the two through the semantic description. Dixon notes that "two well-known approaches to semantic description - the componential method and the definitional method - each provides certain insights, but each also has rather serious drawbacks" (Dixon 1982, 436). Having an unbiased awareness and stance like this is instrumental in gathering research on languages that may not fit into already established frameworks.

Agha's *Language and Social Relations* were very significant to me as a put together the composition of this research. Agha's introduction says "Social relations vary across human societies in ways that are limitlessly varied, endlessly susceptible to reanalysis, periodic stabilization, and change. Yet they are highly systematic in each locale for persons who recognize themselves as so related" (Agha 2006, 1). Although seemingly obvious, this perspective is foundational when navigating how people from various ethnic groups could have opposing and even clashing social, cultural, economic, etc. experiences with language, despite being from the same country. This recognition opens me up, as a researcher, to the diversity in my interlocutors, who will be discussed in detail later in this thesis, as they each have their own interests and stakes in using, manipulating, privileging, or abandoning various languages in Sierra Leone. Agha calls this process, metalinguistic activity (Agha 2006, 17). Agha's book thoughtfully aims to give an "adequate conception of the role of language in human affairs" (Agha 2006, 1).

Silverstein's *Shifters, Linguistic Categories, and Cultural Description* aims to give a more substantive explanation of the statement "speech is meaningful social behavior" which he claims is "used to ensure minimal trade relations in the contact community of linguist and social

anthropologist” (Silverstein 1976, 11). Silverstein writes that the aim of this paper is to buttress this statement with analytic and descriptive power. Here again, in this source, we see members of the anthropology field willing to critique and improve already established conclusions. As this source is “For Roman Jakobson,” known for being a pioneer of structural linguistics, Silverstein delves into the communicative factors of social behavior, such as speech events, semantics, performative speech, pragmatic meanings of linguistic signs, and more. These three sources focus on revealing meaning in social practice. Altogether, they substantiate the assertion that language, speech, linguistic expressions, etc. all have meaning and value in social behavior and status.

These cross-departmental sources are incredibly influential and resourceful for studying the usage of native and indigenous languages in academia. I plan to further break down their relevance to my understanding of how the hierarchical construct found in Sierra Leone distinguishes and ranks different socially and politically standardized and non-standardized languages and ascribes power and status to speakers on the basis of the rankings given to the languages spoken throughout this thesis. It would be remiss not to mention Judith Irvine’s work *The Family Romance of Colonial Linguistics: Gender and Family in the Nineteenth Century Representations of African Languages* published in 1995, which is in a similar vein of my research in regard to social conditions of language speakers in a hierarchical construct. Irvine’s paper is derived from earlier sources including Lynn Hunt’s 1992 book, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*, which explores “the ways people collectively imagine the operation of power through their understanding of family relations” (Irvine 1995, 13). Irvine carries these threads of inquiry into texts concerning sub-Saharan Africa through linguistic analyses, “claims about those languages speakers, their social and moral condition, and their place in a global community” (Irvine 1995, 14). Cohesively, Irvine asks several questions about language exclusion including

“What of the languages of the colonized or soon-to-be colonized peoples? How did the idea of ‘family’ apply to them? And how was it affected by the complex Ideas about race, sexuality, differences, and domination inherent in the construction of colonial power? (Irvine 1995, 14). In addition to these questions being of a similar theme as those my research aims to answer, Irvine is also acknowledging the discriminatory roots of researching and disseminating information, either through anthropological methods or not, that have historically plagued African linguistic studies.

Within the corresponding fields of linguistics, sociolinguistics, cultural anthropology, and linguistic anthropology, there are multitudes of examples of work being done on Creole and Pidgin languages globally, Krio being one type of Creole. This situates my research in a larger body of existing scholarly literature about the revival and importance of native languages which I believe is exceptionally done with anthropological tools. A selection of these exemplary sources is briefly annotated in the following sections of this writing. Through my research path, I have taken an anthropological approach because it strengthens my interventions and methodology in answering the question of whether Sierra Leoneans can reclaim value and a sense of identity and dignity in their use of native and indigenous languages plays a role in my research. Due to my positionality, I am acutely aware of the implications of the use of native and indigenous languages and the position of their speakers in society. To answer questions surrounding linguistic expression specifically for Sierra Leoneans in Sierra Leone, it is crucial to collect information directly from the mouths of those experiencing the issues I aim to better understand. The ethnographic focus central to anthropology is also an additional influence and tool as I use my research as a buttress to actualize and advance this academic undertaking. I acknowledge that while my research has not been entirely ethnographic, I made sure to forefront a holistic approach of analysis to produce this narrative account, especially through taking a reflexive role during interviews.

Representational Writing:

While situating my research amongst the already existing information has been daunting at times, it has also been a process of confirmation and reinforcement of best methodological practices. The existing scholarly research on the question of the language and identity of Sierra Leone specifically, is sufficient in some areas and sparse in others, especially through a contemporary lens. Through readings of modern examples of language study, I noticed that there is a better blending of historical context and current understandings of the language in question. The concept of representational writing has also been pushed to the forefront of my work as I develop my linguistic investigations. This current motion of modernity and representation is what I aim to become a part of with my emerging research on African languages as native and indigenous in the colonial aftermath and its effects on the social life of Africans.

Many of the sources I found discussing Krio, for example, were published in the late 1900s to early 2000s and are written phonetic and academic scripts that prove inaccessible to the average reader and limit comprehension, especially those who are not familiar with linguistic terminology. A few of the authors that may fit into this category include Ian Francis Hancock, a linguist, and Jacqueline Knorr, an anthropologist. I encountered both Hancock's *A study of the sources and development of the lexicon of Sierra Leone Krio* and Knorr's *Contemporary Creoleness; or, The World in Pidginization?* through my early rudimentary research of keywords like "Sierra Leone", "linguistics", "Creole", etc. These two examples created a foundation for understanding native and indigenous languages through history.

Hancock's work is split into sections, of which I found the following incredibly valuable: Part I deals with European-African contacts from the 15th to the 19th century, and with creolization as a linguistic process developing from this contact. Part II examines European material in Krio,

the most important of sources being English. Parts III and IV deal with the African-derived items in Krio. These first four chapters discuss the complex multilingual situation of 19th century Freetown, Sierra Leone, and comparatively position Krio with other African languages that also have linguistic impacts on the lexicon. Knorr's text focuses on postcolonial societies, not just Sierra Leone. In the abstract of her work Knorr writes, "Normative assumptions concerning categories of race, origin, and culture as well as emic labeling have had a strong impact on who and what was labeled as creole. I argue for a more concise and contextualized understanding of the term "creole" to warrant its usefulness for comparative cultural analysis." (Knorr 2010, 731). Further connecting her research to that of my own Knorr continues to say, "Examining the social and historical context of creolization and tracing the etymology of "creole" and its meanings over time show that creolization has been distinct in involving indigenization and to varying degrees - ethnicization of diverse and in large part foreign populations" (Knorr 2010, 731). Understandably, Sierra Leone would be an appropriate and well qualified setting for this inquisition. Within this framework, Knorr researches the semantics of "Creolization and Creoleness" with specific sociolinguistic approaches in order to distinguish between global Creoles and Pidgin variants. This source also critically focuses on the impacts of culture and identity.

While these examples came up as pioneer sources, and rightfully so, I found myself wondering about how issues of positionality and time of publication, especially considering the development of research in the fields of anthropology, affect the context of their work. This became the burden of my concern of creating a contact list of interlocutors from and based in Sierra Leone. Considering how the passage of time affects content, I was interested to see notable sources like *A Krio-English Dictionary* by Philip Baker, Clifford. N. Fyle, and Edward D Jones published in 1980, get a sort of refreshing reiteration through *Krio Dictionary and Phrasebook* by Hanne-

Ruth Thompson and Momoh Taziff Koroma, published in 2014. The late Koroma was a Sierra Leonean linguist also educated at Fourah Bay College. The University of Pittsburgh in an obituary calls him, “A true son of Sierra Leone.” This revitalization of a dictionary, buttressed by the discernment of a Sierra Leonean, makes this source a noteworthy citation. The source contains over 4,000 dictionary entries, a phonetic transcription section geared towards English speakers, an overview of Krio grammar, contextual examples of Krio like proverbs and a short story as well as essential phrases on topics such as medical terms, health, transportation, dining and business. It is evident that Thompson, who currently lives in Sierra Leone, and Koroma were adamant about producing a tool that reflects language usage of a contemporary time frame.

This inclination towards representational writing also exposes me to information outside of just the Krio language in Sierra Leone, which is the sole language and ethnic group that many canon texts and sources focus on. The more current supplementary sources I have encountered, whether about Sierra Leone or not, exposed me to methodologies that are more socio-culturally sensitive in collecting information about the language and are generally more reader-friendly. History is, of course, still acknowledged as it is important, but it is not the main focus in discussing the status of lesser-known or native languages. These sources will act as guides for my own further research in Krio, Temne, Mende, and Limba, especially as I interact with interlocutors from said ethnic groups.

In line with more complementary sources surrounding identity, indigeneity, and language in one form or another, including the book *Creole Indigeneity: Between Myth and Nation in the Caribbean (First Peoples: New Directions in Indigenous Studies)* by Shona N. Jackson published in 2012. Jackson, does the work of understanding nativity and indigeneity through colonial attitudes and policies through the descendants of enslaved Africans and indentured Indians, now

collectively called Creoles in the South American country of Guyana. Linguist Salikoko S. Mufwene alongside Cecile B. Vigouroux's, book *Colonization, Globalization and Language Vitality in Africa: An Introduction*, published in 2008, does the work of arousing further discussion around the complexities of language varieties, for example through hybridization. In line with my research interpretations, Mufwene and Vigouroux argue that globalization cannot be understood without connecting it to colonization. Anthropologist Sabrina Billings comes to mind as another source. Her book *Language, Globalization and the Making of a Tanzanian Beauty Queen*, published in 2013, discusses the intersection of language with globalization, nationalism, and inequality in urban East Africa. Specifically, Billings works to understand the real-life effects of language policy, education, and gender dynamics on the female interlocutors, the beauty queens, encounter. Here again, we see how writers from different fields have advantageous perspectives on similar themes.

Here lies the beauty I find in this research that fuels my passion for it: language development is an ever-growing and developing field, continuously being influenced by other fields and lenses for the better. The abundance of topics that stem from this countering issues of legitimacy and accessibility can be communicated and advocated for in so many ways, Sheikh Umar Kamarah and Marjorie Jones's *Beg Sol Nɔba Kuk Sup: An Anthology of Krio Poetry* as one captivating example. Interestingly, Ian Hancock, previously discussed in this thesis, wrote a review of this source on a literature blog website, Vitabu Book, in 2013. In his review Hancock shares that the title is a Krio proverb in itself literally meaning "If you must borrow salt from a neighbor to finish preparing your stew, you'll never have enough to do the job properly." Hancock contextualizes this title choice and entirety of the text calling it a "comment on the value of independence and self-sufficiency".

This is an esteemed recognition that “contemporary poets” producing a collection of poetry like this is symbolic of the beauty that emerges when the linguistic expression of the language it is written in, is allowed for and encouraged. As mentioned before, I aim to expand this work throughout West Africa and participate in current anthropological discussions of Creole languages in a new, personal, and pragmatic way. I view having a personal connection with my work as another positive driving factor and motivator. I am very invested in becoming a part of the Sierra Leonean generation that has a say in what is written about our country, outside of the purely historic colonial narratives that create dismal and hopeless images of the country. Instead, I aim to use history to bridge the dissonance between Sierra Leone's contemporary methods of written and verbal expression.

Creolization:

Before talking about Sierra Leone's history specifically, it would be helpful to have a general understanding of what creolization means in global contexts. There are numerous discussions being had about creole languages, many with disagreeing viewpoints. Thomas Hylland Eriksen, a Norwegian anthropologist, takes a positive stance on creole societies and languages. He is quoted defining them saying, “A Creole society, in my understanding, is based wholly or partly on the mass displacement of people who were, often involuntarily, uprooted from their original home, shedding the main features of their social and political organizations on the way, brought into sustained contact with people from other linguistic and cultural areas and obliged to develop, in creative and improvisational ways, new social and cultural forms in the new land, drawing simultaneously on traditions from their respective places of origin and on impulses resulting from the encounter.” This explanation is true regarding the history of Sierra Leone as Freetown and its

inhabitants were repeatedly subjugated to being put in contact with multiple outside linguistic and cultural influences.

Eriksen expands on this narrative in his journal article “Creolisation as a Recipe for Conviviality”. In this source, Eriksen writes about how seemingly in this generation, many aspects of life are made available to the rest of the world, allowing for amalgamations. He writes, “‘exotic places’ no longer exist; there are no longer peoples who are untouched by the white man, capitalism, and mass consumption” (44). Interestingly, he sources Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* as an example of academia’s “preoccupation with cultural flows and mixing” and calls it a book that “may be read retrospectively as a bittersweet celebration of creolisation.” This disposition around shared humanity, interested in exploration and communication is the foundation of how Eriksen subsequently writes about language contact.

In the following section entitled “celebrating impurity” Eriksen acknowledges that this almost utopian view on creole languages, particularly found in the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean, had not always been the main narrative. He writes, “For years, they were held in low esteem by anthropologists—they were created by miscegenation and contamination, they had evolved under the bright floodlights of modernity, and were deemed mundane and unexciting under the strong, if understated, exoticising gaze of anthropology” (45). This change in perspective is extremely interesting to be aware of, especially as most of my initial training in this topic came from multiple linguistic anthropology courses taught here at the University of Michigan.

While Eriksen’s stance is quite optimistic and complimentary, there are many other arguments for understanding creole languages. Salikoko Mufwene, a linguist from the Democratic Republic of the Congo takes a less sentimental approach, and in fact, talks about the harsh and unfair realities creole languages are charged against. Mufwene’s 2001 publication, *The Ecology of*

Language Evolution, discusses how Creole languages had been calculatedly excluded from narratives of language formation and development, specifically in regard to the conceptual and methodological issues raised in genetic linguistics. Mufwene argues for the structure, function, and vitality of creole languages, comparing their language evolution to other accepted languages. He writes, “Why should creoles not be genetically classifiable at all, if the following ecological conditions show that they cannot be distinguished from other languages?” and included six supporting clauses including, “Contact played similar roles in the development of English and Romance languages as of creoles”. Mufwene’s exploration of the theory of evolution in a language is extremely facilitative for my own research comparing Sierra Leonean languages and English based on the language's inherent significance. In the conclusion section of *The Ecology of Language Evolution*, Mufwene writes “As we focus on language spread and speciation, let us analogize language to a stream flowing down into a delta and splitting into several other streams whose colors and sand contents come to differ from one another. ... Let us also think of a stream whose water merges with that of another to form a shared course” (Mufwene 2001, 143). This discussion of “language spread and speciation” is the bud of understanding the Krio language in Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leonean History:

C. Magbaily Fyle’s *The History of Sierra Leone* published in 1992 does a fantastic job of summarizing different formational histories of Sierra Leone. Fyle a native Sierra Leonean, is a retired Professor with associations in African Studies, African American Studies, and History from both the Ohio State University and Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone. His ties to the country also include the forward of this text being written by Abdul Karim Komora, the Minister

of Education of Sierra Leone at the time (1977–1982). These strong affiliations with the country aid in the understanding and writing of its history.

According to google scholar *The History of Sierra Leone* has been cited nearly 100 times. Due to the historical format of Fyle’s text, it has become a foundational citation to many texts on Sierra Leone in multiple topics including reconstructions of histories of the slave trade, religion, women and gender studies, environmental sustainability, and more. These multiple sources include *Memories of the Slave Trade: Ritual and the Historical Imagination in Sierra Leone* by Rosalind Shaw published in 2020, *Traditionalists, Muslims, and Christians in Africa: Interreligious Encounters and Dialogue* by Prince Sorie Conteh published in 2009, *Gender and Power in Sierra Leone: Women Chiefs of the Last Two Centuries* by Lynda Day published in 2012, and *Ethnobotany and Sustainable Utilization of Natural Dye Plants in Sierra Leone* by Cyrus MacFoy, published in 2004. Fyle’s text has also begotten more recent texts branching from similar topics including linguistics, and identity formation including *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783-1870* by James W. St. G. Walker originally published in 1992 and *Subjected Words: African Linguistics and the Colonial Encounter* by Judith Irvine published in 2008.

Fyle is also the author or co-author of over 600 publications including his text *Historical Dictionary of Sierra Leone* published in 2006 and his co-authorship of *The Yoruba Diaspora in Sierra Leone's Krio Society* published in 2004 that further the conversation rendered in this thesis. With each rendition or citation of Fyle’s work, modern authors are reflecting on how Leonean history changes overtime and the implications of those changes on this generation. As this thesis is being written over 30 years after Fyle’s publication, I am adding to the legacy of

narratives of Sierra Leone, grounding my work in it while aiming to pinpoint its significance on language usage today.

A few of the chapters of *The History of Sierra Leone* include “Earliest Societies,” “Early European Contact”, “Founding of the Sierra Leone Colony”, and “Krio Culture” to name a few, will be of great informative importance to this thesis. It is notable to mention that Fyle’s book also makes sure to include histories of the other majority and lesser-known ethnic groups in Sierra Leone. For example, the *Political organization in the early nineteenth-century* chapter discusses the *Mende movement into Sierra Leone, Kono country, Temne States, The Yalunka of Solimana, The Koranko, The Limba, The Soso, The coast-Bullom, Sgerbo, and Gallinas*. Similar to the academic holes my work is attempting to fill, Fyle encapsulates the struggle of specificity writing in his introduction, “Very little had been written on the economic and social history of the country. Much research had been done in Sierra Leone in the past decade or so which had not found its way into books. On the other hand, more recent books have been published on isolated aspects of Sierra Leon's past” (Fyle 1992, vii). To reiterate, Fyle is clearly aware that while the history of Sierra Leone needs to be documented, it must not be isolated. It is from this breadth of history that I will pull data on native and indigenous languages.

To “set the scene” of Sierra Leone Fyle addresses geography, political divisions, ethnic groups, and ‘Sierra Leone’ as a term. In the discussion on ethnic groups Fyle details, “Attempts have been made to study some of these African languages so as to identify similarities and differences. The conclusion is that a long time ago, probably thousands of years ago, there may have only been one or two parent languages. But as populations increased and people moved to new areas and mingled with others, some of these languages changed slightly, some drastically” (Fyle 1992, 5). Here already we begin to understand how the languages of today, even before

European contact, derived through processes of contact and separation. In relation to Krio specifically, Fyle writes, “The Krio language is now classed with the West Atlantic group. It developed out of a mixture of words derived primarily from English, but its structures and intonations are based on the local languages of Sierra Leone”(Fyle 1992, 5). This history of Krio will be crucial in this thesis’s discussion on the usage, validity, and privilege of the language today.

“Earliest Societies”:

In chapter two of his text, Fyle breaks down the inhabitants of the country by region, time period, and “discovery”. While the history of Sierra Leone before the fifteen hundreds is not easy to trace, information about the people who lived there at least 2,500 years before Christ is noted (Fyle 1992, 7). These original people lived on the coast of the country and were called the Sapes by Portuguese explorers. The Sapes can be further broken down into smaller groups, the major group being the Bullom, which “shared similar languages and customs” (Fyle 1992, 7). The Sapes were later joined by the Temne, who had migrated from the interior lands of the country. Impressively, Fyle is able to give insight into the life and customs, religion, and social institutions of these original peoples before continuing the overall historic account. The next and oldest ethnic group described is the Limba, who lived further inland in the north. Over time the Limba spread out and encountered other peoples including the Soso who later, through this contact, became a subgroup of the Sela.

Fyle continues to share examples of regional and language contact creating other ethnic groups like the Vai, the Kono, the Koranko, and the Yalunka. Evidently, contact is a crucial factor in the development of Sierra Leone, its many ethnic groups, and thus its native and indigenous languages. To conclude this chapter Fyle writes, “We can therefore say that, in the earliest periods

of Sierra Leone's history that can be reconstructed, there was a sort of division in ethnic terms between the north and the south. The north was predominantly Mende-speaking, while in the south there were a number of culturally similar groups usually lumped together by name as West Atlantic” (Fyle 1992, 13). This sets up the framework for how future invasions of Sierra Leone further alter this north and south language dynamic. Establishing the earliest societies as Temne and Limba and descendants of the Temne and Limba also points to the future creation of Krio.

“Early European Contact”:

Chapter four of the text details the earliest Europeans to reach the coast of Sierra Leone around the mid-15th century: the Portuguese. As the earliest foreign influences, the Portuguese had a formative impact on the country, including giving it its name. Fyle writes, “On reaching the peninsula of Sierra Leone they were impressed by the high mountains, the shapes of which resembled lions. Because of this, they called the area *Serra Lyoa* meaning lion mountains, and this name over the centuries became Sierra Leone” (Fyle 1992, 18). The Portuguese mostly interacted with the coastal people, the Bullom and the Temne. At first, the Portuguese were welcomed leading to a business system of trade. This trade started with fresh fruits and water, developed into gold ivory, and eventually enslaved people. (Fyle 1992, 18) By the sixteenth century Sierra Leone became a major area for obtaining slaves. Fyle illustrates this development by writing, “In 1562 the earliest known cargo slaves were taken from Sierra Leone by an Englishman John Hawkins. Europeans then started visiting the coast more frequently to obtain slaves in return for the goods they brought” (Fyle 1992, 19). These interactions additionally brought missionary activity and European settlement where culture and language began to blend.

Opposing the common misrepresentation of immediate colonization, Fyle familiarizes readers with more details about the business structure between the Bullom and Temne. The

settlement issue was buttressed by systems of African landlords ruling over the building of European trading houses and factories, as they slowly crept further inland (Fyle 1992, 19-20). “They (Europeans) could not interfere in the politics of the area, and the landlord was responsible for any crime done to, or by Europeans, who were regarded as his strangers” (Fyle 1992, 20). Perceptively, the blending of African and Portuguese relations to create language started through these examples.

Another aspect of this blending was the marriage between the Portuguese and African women. Some traders even married daughters of local rulers, who would later claim rights to rule. These generations brought significant consequences as they became powerful agents of trade. But ultimately Fyle recapitulates, “In this way, European contact had varied effects on the coast, the most devastating of which was the trade and human slaves, which caused much suffering and loss of life” (Fyle 1992, 21).

In the next chapter, five, Fyle also makes note of what was happening inland, while Europeans continued interactions with coastal Sierra Leoneans. He discusses the inland Temne expansion towards the east and northeast. “Towards the north, they (Temne) encountered the Loko people and gradually started pushing the Loko northwards. Before the eighteenth century, they had taken over the thriving centre of Bake Loko (a trading port the Portuguese called Port Loko) from the Loko” (Fyle 1992, 22). Amalgamations of people continue to be a major theme in this narrative. The Temne that moved east would later become Yoni (which would later integrate with the Fula) and those that moved northeast encountered the Koranko. (Fyle 1992, 22) This chapter further discusses the breakdown and multiplication of ethnic tribes. This process is noteworthy as the Krio has yet to be established.

“Founding of the Sierra Leone Colony”:

After the Portuguese came many other groups made their way to and settled in Sierra Leone. The British, in particular, had major ties and an impact on this process. In a brief summary, Fyle shares that “By the late eighteenth century, a few people in England had spoken out against slavery and the slave trade” (Fyle 1992, 34). One specific example of this change in view involved a court case where a Judge, James Somerset, ruled that “slavery was not part of English law” (Fyle 1992, 34). The American War of Revolution of 1775 also aided in this disavowal of slavery process as the British influenced formerly enslaved people to flee American masters and join British armies in order to obtain their freedom. These two means, both connected to Britain, became the main contributors to the growing population of free men known as the Black Poor. After becoming free many Black Poor moved to London and Nova Scotia until they were eventually sent to Sierra Leone. Fyle details this movement from and within England in four main groups.

The first group was led by Granville Sharp. Sharp was one of history’s most notable people in England who stood against slavery and the slave trade, also responsible for the first wave of relocation. Sharp and his supporters convinced the British Government that the freed people, the Black Poor, should be sent back to the original continent. In this effort, Sharp, William Wilberforce, Thomas Clarkson, and other supporters created the Sierra Leone Company in 1791 with the goal of creating a “Province of Freedom” (Fyle 1992, 34). Through several trials and settlements involving slight location changes, Granville Town became Freetown, the current capital of Sierra Leone.

The next group of 1,190 people to settle after the Black Poor and their British supporters were more Black Nova Scotian settlers in 1792. After settling in Nova Scotia after the American War, this group had been promised land that was never given to them, becoming the main grievance

pushing them to relocate to Freetown. (Fyle 1992, 35) Then came the arrival of the Maroons, former slaves in Jamaica that were mainly descendants of the Ashanti in Ghana in the 1800s. The Maroons, also dissatisfied with failed promises and mistreatment from authoritative figures, agreed to join the Sierra Leone Company movement.

The fourth main group of settlers to Sierra Leone was the recaptives. The British parliament officially declared the slave trade illegal in 1807 and notably in January of 1808, the British government took over the Sierra Leone Colony. As a result of these two changes, enslaved people that were captured on board the slave ships were set free in Freetown. Fyle explains that “They were called recaptives since after being captured the first time and enslaved, they had been recaptured and freed by the British Navy. There were many of them chiefly Yoruba from Nigeria, but also from different areas in West Africa, like the Congo, Senegal, and even the interior of Sierra Leone” (Fyle 1992, 38). I am especially proud to note that I am a descendant of these Sierra Leonean people brought back to their homelands. This lineage can be seen in modern populations of the Krio ethnic group as Fyle writes “The recaptives gradually took on western culture in addition to the Christian names many of them had adopted” (Fyle 1992, 39).

Notably, this chapter also incorporated information about how the early interactions between these four groups of newcomers and original inhabitants were not always smooth. One major example, occurring severally, was between the Sierra Leone Company and the Temne ethnic group. Originally over misunderstandings of traditional customs leading to the breaking of treaties, the Temne and the Company attacked each other until “Finally, in 1807, the Koya Temne accepted a new treaty by which they lost almost the entire peninsula to the Company” (Fyle 1992, 37). Issues similar to this led to mistreatment and groups looking down on others. In spite of this, factors

like acquiring wealth, westernization, education, and missionary influences would continuously blur the lines of “us versus them”.

In summary, the Black Poor’s and their British supporters, Nova Scotian freed people, Jamaican Maroons, and African Recaptives, all came together settling in villages in and around Freetown, Sierra Leone. While this conglomeration of peoples, including their beliefs, dissatisfactions, and of course languages, was not always a peaceful and endearing existence, this history would forever implicate the history of Sierra Leone, eventually marking it as a settlement for freed slaves. Explaining how this conglomeration came to be historically is essential to the main purpose of this paper: to understand the evolution of language, specifically the evolution of the Krio, and how it is implicated in Sierra Leone today.

“Krio Culture”:

Chapter twelve of Fyle’s text finally gives readers specific insight into the process of creating the Krio. This process is an exemplary tale of cultural and linguistic adaptation and inclusion where multiple ethnic groups endeavored to equalize their experiences. This is undoubtedly a romantic take on Creolization, and it must be acknowledged that the process was not without obstacles and disputes. To introduce the chapter Fyle writes “The Colony peninsula became the home of settlers and recaptives. Gradually, in the nineteenth century, they developed a new society with their own identity. Settlers and recaptives were fused into a single group called the Krio’s before the end of the century” (Fyle 1992, 71). Language is a key element in concatenating the identity of a group. This new society was able to develop into such through the powers of commonality in speech, actions, ideals, morals, etc. Interestingly, this fusion involved Western influences, the degree of which could be argued. Fyle reminds readers that “This Krio

society drew chiefly from the experience of the settlers in the New World (that is Western influence) but also from that of the recaptives who had never been to the New World. These latter brought in many African values into the Krio culture” (Fyle 1992, 71). Fyle’s note of this is a reminder of all the many blended ways being Sierra Leonean came into fruition today.

Along with the fighting between incoming groups and the Temne, Fyle discusses other examples of the complications from initial tensions. One main instance of this struggle was based on perceptions of education and class. Fyle writes, “The settlers, who had had contact with western education and could speak some English initially lived apart from the recaptives and considered the latter as *krut* (unpolished). But the recaptives soon began receiving western influences themselves” (Fyle 1992, 71). For unification to be achieved, the recaptives underwent social changes that raised their hierarchical standing. These social changes can be generally summarized as assimilation.

Fyle highlights cultural shifts, either in regression or adaption writing, “While some recaptives abandoned most of their old customs as they were converted to Christianity, others kept their all the way of life, much to the dismay of the missionaries. Many of the recaptives were Yoruba and were called *Aku*, from a Yoruba term of greeting. Some were Muslims and retained their religion. Today there’s a sizable *Aku* Muslim Krio community in Foulah town and Fourah Bay in Freetown” (Fyle 1992, 71). This citation demonstrates how outside of language, religion was also something undergoing a process of renegotiation. Another aspect of the recaptives' rise was conducted through economics. The recaptives quickly became important to society, shedding their initial placements of being “snubbed” as “many had taken to petty trading and soon, built up some income, and entered into business on a larger scale” (Fyle 1992, 72). Their wealth grew,

enabling them to build houses in Freetown. In other instances of refusal of integration, the recaptives championed themselves.

When it came to religion, settlers “snubbed them in church” (Fyle 1992, 72) so they founded their own church, the West African Methodist Church, in 1844. As their affluence grew through religion and wealth, they also seized the opportunity to enhance their and their children’s education. Education and religion went hand in hand. The role of the church was crucial, permeated by British influence, as sermons and scriptures were conducted in English. Although instruction in schools was also conducted in English over indigenous languages, education became a primary focus and accolade of the Krio people. Yet another addition to the process of settler and recaptive unity was through policy. Fyle outlines that in 1853 the British government declared recaptives British subjects which was formally a distinction for only settlers. (Fyle 1992, 72) This recognition added to the recaptives' recognition within the colony society. With all these factors compiling overtime Fyle writes, “Very soon settlers could not stop their sons and daughters marrying recaptives. In fact, some supported it” (Fyle 1992, 72-73). It is clear that despite these frictions described, the reality of different people sharing a space stood firm. It was ultimately understood by all groups that for the sake of the country's progress and establishment, unification was necessary. Fyle also reiterates the simple fact of the matter: for a community to be built, those who make up the community must be able to communicate.

In discussions about the Krio language, Fyle brings up two unique points about the contribution of African influences. He notes, “Krio language and culture had much English in western influence with Christianity and education being important measures of achievement. But what has often been overlooked is that it had many African aspects as well. The language had many words from Yoruba and other languages from the Sierra Leone interior. Even the English

words changed meanings as they fit it into sentence patterns that were entirely African” (Fyle 1992, 73). Some examples of this include. This discussion of the origin of words also includes debate around the word “Krio” itself. Fyle postulates this argument by saying, “There are different ideas about how the word Krio came about. Some say it came from the English Creole meaning Sierra Leoneans were not indigenous to the colony. But new evidence has suggested that it came from the Yoruba *akiriyo* signifying people who walk about from place to place, a strong tendency of the Krio” (Fyle 1992, 73). Again, we see a sort of rewriting or reclamation of African influences over the language and identity.

The excerpt entitled “A specific note on Indigenous writing” is especially thought provoking when considering who exactly is credited for the linguistic achievements.

“While Europeans brought widespread literary education to Africa, Arabic clerics had long been in operation in the interior. But also in some African societies, new forms of writing had been invented by the Africans themselves. About the 1830s a Vai syllabic script was invented by a Vai man named Momolus Dawalu Bukele. This was widely used in Vai country and attracted much interest among Europeans on the coast in the nineteenth century. About a century later from Potoru in the Barri Chiefdom, a new Mende script appeared using symbols to depict sounds. Kisimi Kamara, the inventor, declared that he traveled widely in Liberia and then shut himself in his house for two months and fifteen days before he developed the complete alphabet. It was used in the 1940s by tailors, carpenters, etc. to note down measurements. Although colonial rule spread literacy in the English alphabet, there are people who still remember these old scripts” (Fyle 1992, 70).

Through concrete examples like this one, readers can see the conceptualization and evolution processes from their origins of heritage, outside of the narratives creole languages often bare the weight of.

This discourse about definitions and translations leads comprehensively into the topic of education and its importance in Krio culture. Fyle writes about the strong emphasis on education within Krio society. This emphasis was closely tied with religion, due to most of the early schools being started by missionary bodies. This meant that “to be a practicing Christian at the time involved learning of at least some English words versus or phrases” (Fyle 1992, 74). This also meant that education became a mark of achievement, tied to a sign of being civilized.

Fyle shares the context of these first schools including the fact that only primary schools were initially set up in the colony. It was not until 1845 that the Church Mission Society (CMS) set up the first secondary school in Freetown. This school, the CMS Grammar School, was the first secondary school in all of West Africa. Four years after the CMS Grammar School was built, the same society founded the Annie Walsh Memorial Secondary School for girls. Undoubtedly, the notoriety of these establishments added to the distinction and prestige of Sierra Leone holistically. In fact, Fyle notes that “As the century progressed more trading connections begin to be established with other areas along the West African coast where the British had an influence. More and more men from places like the Gold Coast and Lagos sent their sons to the grammar school in Freetown” (Fyle 1992, 74). Through education developing earlier in the Sierra Leone colony compared to other British colonies in West Africa, the Krio, originally snubbed, became the leaders of academia.

It was not long before higher education also became important to Sierra Leone. In 1827 the CMS set up an institution that was meant to train local teachers and missionaries in Fourah Bay.

This institution eventually became known as Fourah Bay College. It is interesting to note that my father, several family members, and friends attended and graduated from Fourah Bay College. To shed light on the momentousness of this college Fyle writes, “In 1876 Fourah Bay College was affiliated to Durham University in England and students at Fourah Bay began to take degrees from that university. The first degrees were conferred on Sierra Leoneans in 1879” (Fyle 1992, 75). The only thing Fourah Bay seemed to be missing at this time was subjects in medicine and law but even then, the Krio managed to overcome through the global connections and economic wealth they had built. Fyle writes, “Thus, those Krio’s who could afford it sent their sons to England to train for these professions. And so many young Krio doctors, lawyers and clergymen began to take important positions, not only in Sierra Leone but along the West African coast as well” (Fyle 1992, 75). Fyle mentions a few notable Krio people including Africanus Horton and William Broughton Davies who were the two first Krio doctors and Samuel Lewis who was the first African to receive a knighthood from the Queen of England which was “then an extraordinary honour” (Fyle 1992, 75).

While Fyle’s *The History of Sierra Leone* was published in 1981, the knowledge it imparts is foundational in understanding the process the country underwent to become what it is today. His text succinctly breaks down momentous instances where decisions made would impact the trajectory of Sierra Leone’s establishment. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, the purpose of tracing those circumstances, mediated by an unlikely assortment of the Black Poor and their British supporters, Nova Scotian freed people, Jamaican Maroons, and African Recaptives through alliance and unity, buttress the creation, preservation, and strength of Krio as a language. Knowing the disorder, intolerance, and adversities that were overcome adds a layer of cultural contextualization that will also influence social considerations, i.e., questions about prestige, self-

image, ethnic pride, etc. Altogether his text is especially foundational in my efforts to hypothesize how linguistic expression and stigmatization function in today's contemporary context.

Conclusively, I would be remiss to not mention the importance of Fyle's identity as the author of this text. Another aspect of this thesis and my research that is essential is gathering information about Sierra Leoneans from Sierra Leoneans themselves. Histories of African countries have often been summarized through the racist lenses that Anthropology was rooted in as a tool of colonialism. Reinforcing my own work with sources that avoid these negative stereotypes and perspectives, that at times African writers themselves fell victim to, aids in the process of interpreting Sierra Leonean history.

Methodology and Research Analysis:

In terms of methodology, thus far I have had the pleasure and privilege of conducting research through the creation of Qualtrics surveys followed up with virtual interviews. Despite traveling obstructions due to the Covid pandemic, both portions of this work were done with Sierra Leonean academics either currently in Sierra Leone country or abroad (Cape Verde). I gathered insightful information from highly qualified linguistics professors, English professors, published authors, and academic administrators who were all multilingual. I am grateful to Dr. Saidu Bangura of the English Studies (Sociolinguistics) Department of Universidade de Cabo Verde, Dr. Wallon-Jallow of the Linguistics Department at Fourah Bay College, the University of Sierra Leone, and Professor Elizabeth Kamara of the English Department in Fourah Bay College, the University of Sierra Leone for their participation in the subset of my research.

I also recognize that while anthropologists traditionally anonymize interlocutors and consultants, those involved in my work, through an informed consent notice, clearly expressed

their approval of their names being references. Each survey met several requirements. First, they must be of Sierra Leonean descent and identity as Sierra Leonean. Second, they must be affiliated professionally in some capacity with education and language. Each interview interlocutor indicated that they would like to be interviewed after completing the initial survey. I am cognizant of this positionality affecting the results of questions asked of interlocutors and plan to widen the selection in future surveys to avoid data bias. I acknowledge that in this first phase of data collection, these interlocutors' answers to my hypothesis will be within the framework of being well educated. While each of their discernments was knowledgeable, the slight variations in their places of work, within Sierra Leone and in Cape Verde, as well as their departmental focuses, were evident and brought distinctive views to the research. Again, this is another reason I aim to draw from the previously mentioned four corresponding fields (linguistics, sociolinguistics, cultural anthropology, and linguistic anthropology).

The first phase of my research, the survey, served as a means to gather general information from a wide group of Sierra Leonean academics. This survey design fed into my ability to answer some of the questions posed earlier in this thesis as interlocutors, principal figures within academia, gave insight to how they taught their classes for example, setting into students reality how language should be expressed or stigmatized. Within the survey was a set of introductory questions asking for their name, occupation, and linguistic background. The bulk of the survey was slightly more personal and individualized, instancing a variety of statements: “English should be the official language in Sierra Leone.”, “I speak mostly English in professional settings.”, “It is culturally important to be able to communicate in an indigenous language.”, “Sierra Leone should have a second official language.”, and “I support the translation of canon literature into Krio and other indigenous languages.” for example. These statements provided a basic

understanding of my interlocutor's beliefs about the written and verbal expressions and academic implications of the variety of languages being spoken simultaneously in Sierra Leone.

Another subset of these statements revolved around social and ethnic structures within Sierra Leone, still connected to language and academics: “The choice of indigenous languages as official languages can be divisive.”, “Low or non-competence in English leads to feelings of inadequacy and indicates lack of education.”, “Elevating an indigenous language to official status can create tribal conflict.”, and “Krio is the most linguistically appropriate indigenous language in Sierra Leone.” for example. These statements, and the interlocutor's responses to them, gave illumination to how identity places a deeply intertwined role with language use. In the case of Sierra Leone, this work has directed my attention to other topics of contestation of ethnic groups found in existing scholarly literature. *The Mende Language: Containing Useful Phrases, Elementary Grammar, Short Vocabularies, Reading Materials* by Frederick William Hugh Migeod originally published in 1908 represented Mende. *Generative - Transformational Analysis of the Plots of Limba (West Africa) Dilemma Tales (Folktales, Text Grammars, Sierra Leone)* by Gary Gugelchuk in 1985 represented Limba. and *Sierra Leone Temne Language Manuel* written by the United States Peace Corps served as sources to create a base understanding of the cultural and linguistic aspects of these three ethnic groups. Noticeably, these three sources are antiquated and traditionally linguistically focused, there is little to no mention of identity, which I argue is an inseparable theme. As a member of the Krio ethnic group myself, these discussions allowed an open space for a change of perspectives and reevaluation. The survey portion of my research was also purposefully sent to members of a variety of ethnic groups to ensure a diversity of results and fair unbiased representation of groups like the Mende and Temne. This experience also created curiosity in me about autoethnographic work and its possible advantages and prejudices.

A third subset of these statements dealt with the more political structures of academics: “Indigenous languages should be taught in schools.”, “It should be a required language policy to learn at least 1 indigenous language in school.”, and “Higher education textbooks should be written in indigenous languages.”, for example. These questions gave me insight into the political history of Sierra Leone and the far-reaching consequences and impact of British civilization on education in the country. Each of my interlocutors, as academics themselves, had shared their personal perspectives but these frameworks also shed light on the university or school's rules they must abide by and adjust to. For example, interlocutors working or teaching outside of Sierra Leone may have experienced external forces that influence their opinions. Political structures around language that may have been subversive in Sierra Leone may be more conventional and accommodating elsewhere. It is also important to note that a linguist, with possibly more extensive knowledge of the problem of orthography regarding Sierra Leonean languages, may have a more rigorous standpoint when considering whether or not native and indigenous languages should be taught in schools.

To give an instance of how a physical setting can influence attitudes, one interlocutor, Mrs. Kamara the English professor, during the interview phase shared a story of how a student called her and started speaking Krio over the phone. She interrupted the conversation to tell the student that since the communicative context is official and of an academic nature, English must be spoken. Previously, in the survey portion of my research, this interlocutor had repeatedly aligned with the uses of native languages but also seemed to have a separate philosophy surrounding professionalism within academia, or relatively, a separate understanding concerning student expectations. This example could be a lingering result of colonial structures set up in Sierra Leone that prohibited native and indigenous languages in schools and colleges.

Each subset of these statements in the survey was strategically given the range of possible answers: strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree, and strongly disagree. This allowed for space to discuss when I followed up with them for the personal interviews. This setup of responses also generates a thoughtful process to distinguish between a strong or somewhat response. I was eager and grateful as these questions, through the second interview phase of my research, inclined my interlocutors to share intimate accounts of their lives including family histories that shaped “cultural importance” depending on the ethnic tribe each interlocutor identified with.

These interviews were extremely helpful in framing my research questions and revisiting goals and expectations and I could not have foreseen what they would provide my work content-wise until they were held and completed. My process was to start by asking for clarifications from the survey where interlocutors would stray from the majority of their responses in one direction for example, strongly agree, to the other, strongly disagree. After this, I moved to a separate set of layered questions and statements specifically cultivated to produce longer responses. A few examples of these interview questions include: What are the national implications of making a language official? On what basis would the choice be made? (Cultural, political, linguistic?) What’s the implication for representation in terms of the users of the language? (Exclusion? Marginalization? Resistance?) I had anticipated interviews lasting for a minimum of thirty minutes but made sure to allow time for them to go over, in light of interview timing being unpredictable depending on how much interlocutors are willing to share. This foresight and flexibility became beneficial as my shortest interview lasted just over thirty minutes, and my longest lasted just over fifty-two minutes.

Due to the physical distance, each interview was done through virtual means, either through zoom or due to technical issues, through WhatsApp. With each interlocutor's permission, I recorded the discussions in order to later be transcribed along with permission to use their names in both my completed thesis, this writing sample included, and further discussions of my research. Before commencing the interview process with each interlocutor I made sure to read them an Informed Consent form which stated several important parameters of participation: the fact that they are not obliged to participate or answer any questions they preferred not to, the fact that they are free to ask any questions surrounding the purpose of the study, what I would require of them, the possible risks or benefits, or anything else they would like to ask, and my purpose in gathering interviewee responses, along with my University affiliations. Lastly, I informed them that it was my hope that after going through my consent form together, they would agree to participate in it.

From being referred to as “you people” in a discussion about the Krio ethnic group to the benefits of being a part of it to the phonetic difference in the way a Krio person might say “milk” versus how a Temne person might say the same word but pronounced “mi-lek”, the interview portion was truly essential. This pronunciation difference is a perfect example of academic research, for example, Roman Jakobson’s *The Concept of Phoneme*, published in 1942, or Edward Sapir’s *The Psychological Reality of the Phoneme*, published in 1949, playing out practically in my ethnographic research.

Jakobson’s *The Concept of Phoneme* breaks down the importance of words to their phonological sound. He writes “It is said that every word, and more generally every linguistic sign, is an entity with two sides. Every linguistic sign is a unity of sound and meaning, or in other words, of signifier and signified” (Jakobson 1990, 218). This would mean that “milk” depending on how it is pronounced would come with multiple sets of signs potentially derived from how

ethnic groups were first delighted as articulated by Fyle's history. Sapir's *The Psychological Reality of the Phoneme* is another example of a text highly influential to my research. Known as one of the most important figures in the development of the discipline of linguistics, Sapir is very transparent in his writing about his own personal discovery process regarding transcription. He writes that when many linguists, himself included, would transcribe, they would do so with a heavy focus on phonetic accuracy. Sapir's introspective thinking allows him to differentiate between a phoneme and a phonetic element. His research process also included unexpected assistance from an informant, Tony Tillohash, who was able to understand the language being transcribed, Southern Paiute. Tillohash exposed Samir to what was "theoretically real" to him, insider indigenous information. This source was crucial to me in implementing first-hand perspectives and considerations in my research to defy concepts of native naivety.

Being able to converse with interlocutors in a face-to-face format and get in-depth responses and clarifications was invaluable. Although I had established questions for each interview, the fluidity of the mode of discussion allowed for unplanned discussions as well. One moment that stood out to me, outside of my interests in language and identity ideologies affecting academia, centered around how language loss can occur generationally. For example, both Dr. Bangura and Professor Kamara discussed the languages their parents and families speak, in correlation to the differences between their own, and their children's speech patterns due to changes in location, lack of speech community, and even lack of interest in passing down native and indigenous languages alongside English. This is a curious unexpected response as Dr. Bangura lives outside of Sierra Leone, where a lack of speech community would be anticipated, while Professor Kamara lives within the state. Professor Kamara bringing this issue up is reflective of her speaking an indigenous language as a native language, and having Krio be a second or third

language learned for social, cultural and academic rationales. Lack of interest is also a topic that will be discussed later in this thesis in the Next Generation Krio's section.

The following section is dedicated to the empirical side of my research and will specifically analyze 5 questions represented by figures pulled from my survey. The first figure I include is of question 3 which prompts: "list languages you speak". Question 1 and 2 have been intentionally left out of this analysis as they ask for the interlocutor's name and whether or not they are multilingual. A few notable details of question 3 include the fact that each response includes English and Krio. Two responses include only these two languages. The other responses including Krio and English, also seem to include languages influenced by location for example Cape Verdean Creole comes from the interlocutor currently living in Cape Verde. This range of results may allude to the fact that Krio and English are seen as languages fit for professional settings whereas a speaker of an indigenous language like Temne or Limba may feel it necessary to additionally learn English and Krio.

Default Report

Indigenous Languages in Sierra Leone
March 14, 2023 11:02 AM EDT

Q3 - List languages you speak:

List languages you speak:

English and Krio

Temne, Krio, English

Krio and English

English, Krio, French

Fula, Krio, Ka-Themne, and English.

Temne, Krio, English, Cape Verdean Creole, Portuguese, Spanish

English, Krio, Limba, and Temne

End of Report

Figure 1: Survey responses from interlocutors being asked to list the languages they speak. Responses include English, Krio, Temne, Limba, French, Ka-Themne, Cape-Verdean Creole, Portuguese, and Spanish.

The next figure included, figure 2, represents question 6 of the survey: “which tribes do you identify with?”. Question 4 which asks, “Which of the following best describes your current occupation?” and question 5 which asks, “How much does the study of linguistics impact your work?” have not been included. Question 6 includes 12 various responses including 2 responses of other and 1 written response in Korankoh. This question is of note paralleled to question 3, and of course the purpose of this thesis regarding identity and language ideologies. With a total of 12 responses, 4 interlocutors selected Krio as the tribe or ethnic group they identify with, and the remaining 8 interlocutors selected other. It is vital to again notice how with these self-prescribed identifications; Krio is still a language all interlocutors know how to speak. The prefer

not to answer option to this question was also not utilized which may allude to a sense of pride interlocutors have in their tribe or ethnic group, aside from language usage. Additionally, these responses allude to a separation between ethnic pride and national pride in Sierra Leone that negate visions of unity.

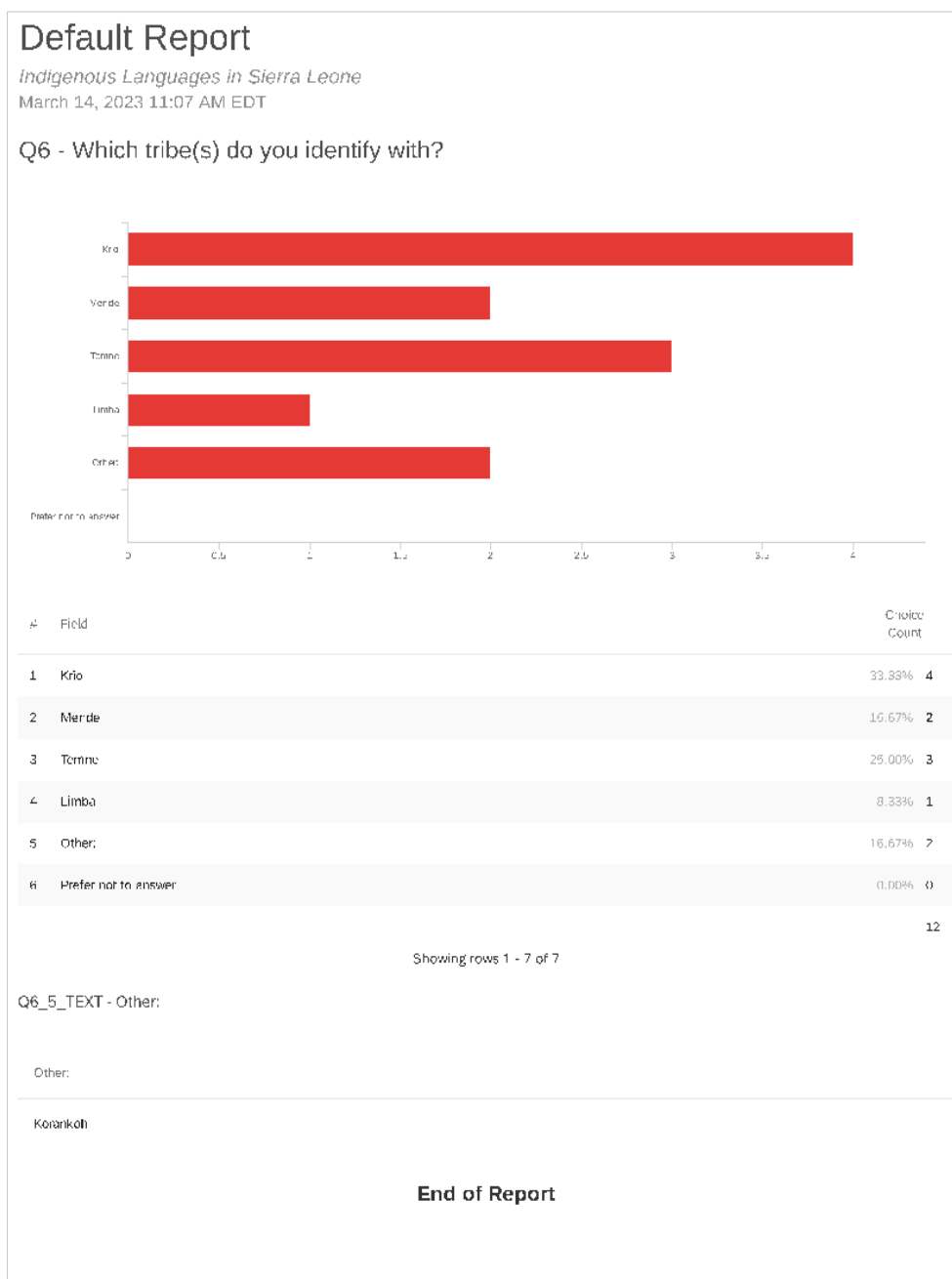


Figure 2: Survey responses from interlocutors being asked which ethnic group/tribe they identify with. Responses in descending order include Krio (33.33%), Temne (25%), Mende (16.67%), Other (16.67%), Limba (8.33%) and a write in response of Korankoh.

The third figure included in this thesis represents questions 8. It prompts “I speak mostly English in a professional setting.” Question 7 with the prompt of “English should be the official language in Sierra Leone” is not included in this analysis as the responses were mainly unanimous with 57.14% responses as strongly agree and 42.86% of responses as somewhat agree. Question 8 received 7 total responses, 4 less than question 6 which begins to show interlocutors lessening comfort in responding to questions about identity and language as they progress. While these responses are also generally unanimous, this question confirms that between Krio and the indigenous languages of Sierra Leone, English, as a colonial legacy, is still determinedly equated with professionalism. This data can be used to answer questions asked in the introduction of this thesis about which languages are seen as important and advantageous to know and speak, allow for socioeconomic upward mobility, and used in public, private, and professional spaces.

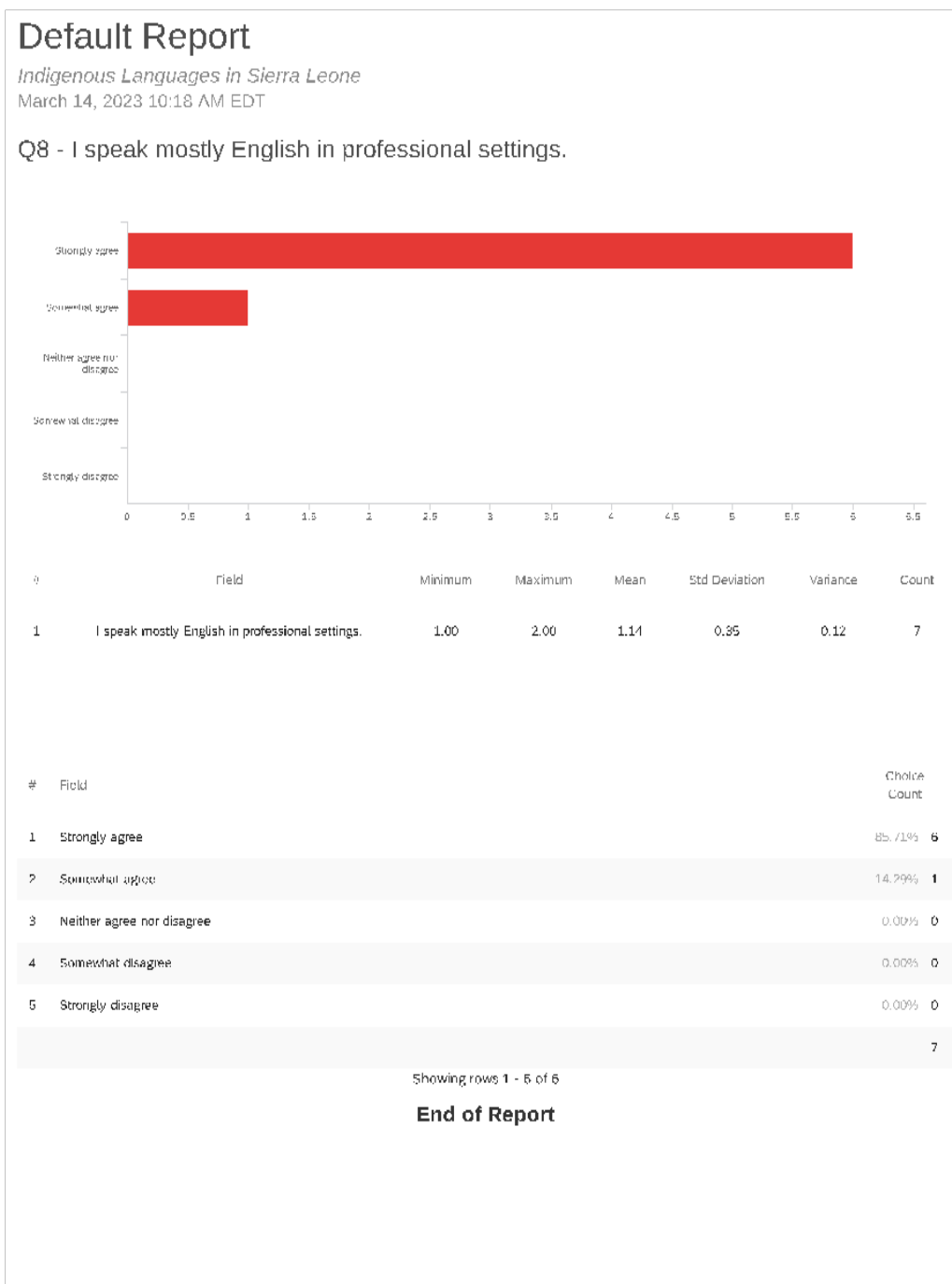


Figure 3: Survey responses from interlocutors posed with the statement ‘I speak mostly English in professional settings.’ Responses in descending order include strongly agree (85.71%) and somewhat agree (14.29%).

The fourth figure representing question 15 prompts, “higher education textbooks should be written in indigenous languages.” Questions 9-14 of the survey have not been included for the sake of abridging this analysis. Question 15 specifically is included due to the variation of responses selected by interlocutors. While the majority of interlocutors, 4 in total, selected somewhat agree, there were also selections of strongly agree, 1 in total, and neither agree nor disagree, 2 in total. Here again, identity and language ideologies can be used in an attempt to account for these differences. While a Krio identified interlocutor who speaks Krio may find it reasonable or straightforward to write a higher education textbook in Krio, a Mende identified interlocutor who speaks Mende natively, may have more apprehensiveness towards this question. This question and its more undecided responses reveal underlying tensions about how academia has set boundaries of what could and could not be plausible for certain members of Sierra Leonean society.

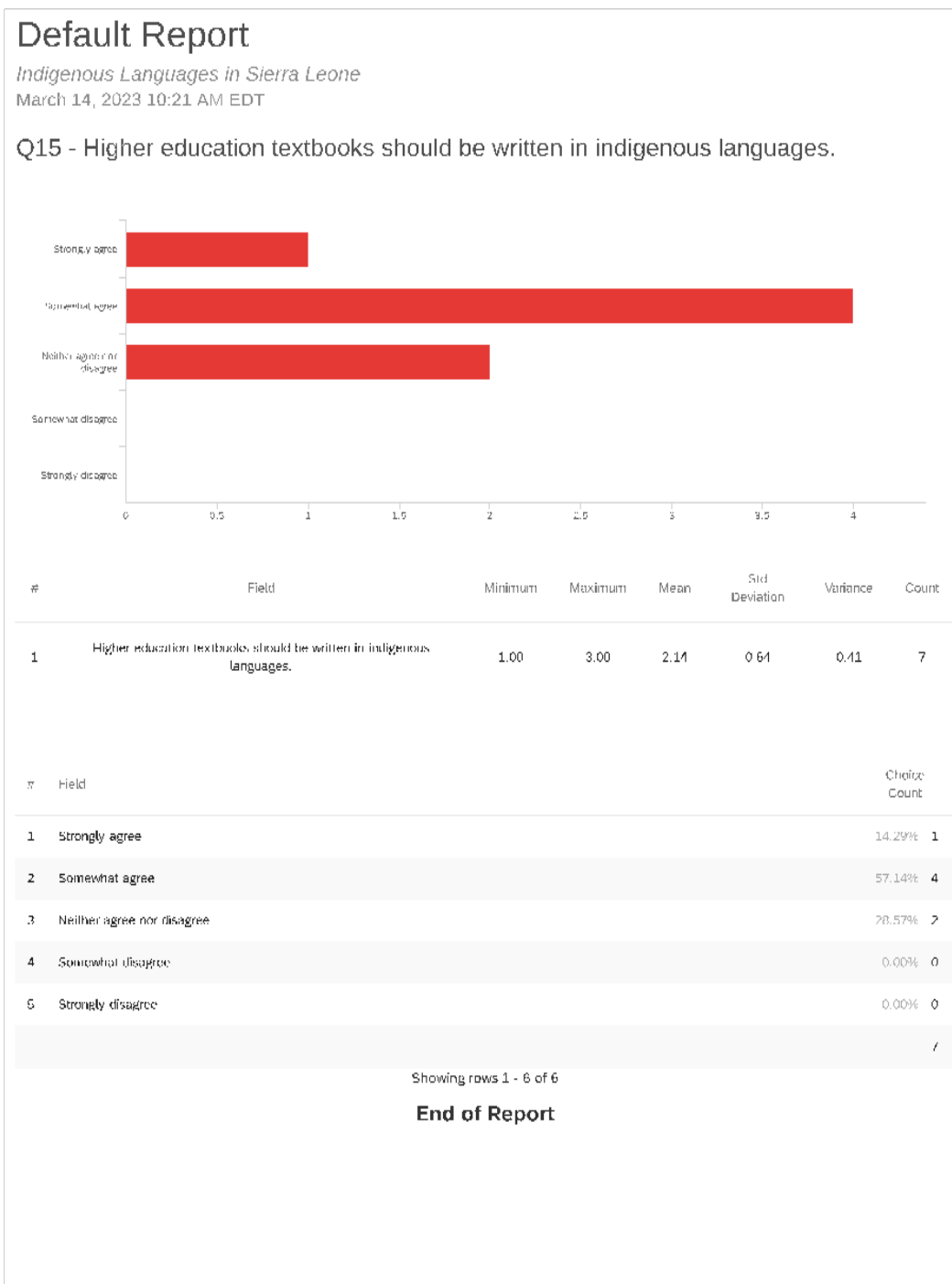


Figure 4: Survey responses from interlocutors posed with the statement “Higher education textbooks should be written in indigenous languages”. Responses in descending order include somewhat agree (57.14%), neither agree nor disagree (28.57%), and strongly agree (14.29%).

The last figure included in this thesis is figure 5 which represents questions 21 of the survey. It prompts “Elevating an indigenous language to official status can create tribal conflict.” Questions 16-20 are also not included for the sake of abridging this analysis. Question 21 directly addresses the principal goal of this thesis and consideration of Fyle’s *The History of Sierra Leone*. The wide range of responses demonstrate that the role of ethnic identity and language usage to buttress education in Sierra Leone, and more specifically, the Krio ethnic groups’ formative years is not applicable in today’s context. The consolidation of identities into a national one may not have accounted for the fact that people still speak and will continue to speak various additional languages tied to other groups. This question received responses ranging in strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither disagree or agree and the highest response being somewhat disagree. The two widest positions, stronger agree and somewhat disagree are indicative of the uncertainty of elevating an indigenous language to the status that English has in Sierra Leone. Once another language is elevated, the ethnic group connected to that language would be expected to surely feel a sense of elevation in societal, political, economic, etc. importance.

Through this analysis of the survey, it is evident that language and identity are tied and that even when interlocutors come from a privileged background of being well educated, underlying tensions are revealed as responses become progressively limited.



Figure 5: Survey responses from interlocutors posed with the statement “Elevating an indigenous language to official status can create tribal conflict”. Responses in descending order include somewhat disagree (42.86%), strongly agree (28.57%), somewhat agree (14.29%) and neither agree nor disagree (14.29%).

Expansion of Current Research:

As I continue this work, one possible direction I would like to explore involves gathering information from Sierra Leonean students. Their participation as another set of interlocutors would give another layer of depth to what is important and what is not, depending on who is asked within Sierra Leone. The students themselves are the group being directly influenced by linguistic rules being made in academia, so their responses in either a survey or interview would be of great importance. I believe they would also posit a unique lens on how their senses of identity and language play out within school as well as outside in everyday life, and which setting is best suited for self-expression. Through this work, I have been able to build substantive data on the perceptions of English and various native and indigenous languages in Sierra Leone, directly from the mouths of Sierra Leoneans themselves.

When gathering information from student interlocutors, I would use the same research structure: an initial survey, followed by an optional interview where interlocutors could expand on survey answers. Introductory questions would gather personal information about each student's age, the year of school they are in, the school they are currently attending, the ethnic group they belong to, whether they are multilingual, and which languages they speak. The bulk of the survey would aim to specifically address their viewpoints on linguistic expression and stigmatization from the lens of a young person participating in academia, instead of working within it. This bulk would include questions such as:

What academic track are you on?

What is your major?

What language is primarily spoken in your department?

What language(s) do you speak in that class?

What language(s) does your professor speak?

Can you read or write in indigenous languages?

What languages do you speak at home?

What languages do you speak with your friends in and out of school?

What is your favorite language to communicate with?

This survey would also include many of the same statements from the current survey that student interlocutors could agree or disagree with on a scaled range. It is my hope that these questions and this subject group would give more insight into the cultural aspects of language usage. I would also aim to ensure that the student interlocutors being asked are in either English or Linguistics courses. For the sake of continuity, the student interlocutors would also be from Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone, while acknowledging that due to this college being located in Freetown, the capital of the country, this may have economic and ethnic group diversity implications to the subject group.

Next Generation Krio's:

In addition to gathering information from a student perspective to further this research, there is also the possibility of collaborating with existing Sierra Leone-focused groups with objectives similar to mine. One group I have had the opportunity to interview is Young Krios, branded as Next Generation Krios. Based in the United Kingdom and with a mission of "Engaging young Krios and promoting Krio culture, history and language", the Next Generation Krios team exemplifies the ideals of unification to preserve and utilize native and indigenous languages, in this case, Krio. The group is currently led by Malvia Coomber and Rhian Milton-Cole, whom I had the pleasure of conversing with. Rhian shared with me that the group was originally founded in 2007, as a social group. It came about through the idea that while there are a few groups or

chapters where the promotion of Krio culture, history, and language is being upheld, the majority of them consist of group members generally 50 years of age or older. Existing Sierra Leone chapters, usually made up of high school or college alumni, can be found in Maryland, Washington, DC, London, and of course Sierra Leone. Rhian explained that when members of these existing groups talked about younger generations, the conversations included discontent and disapproval of young people who did not care about Krio culture and were letting it die. Due to distance, age divisions, and a sense of needing a revival, Next Generation Krios was born. It has recently been officially registered as a company in 2019.

The social element of the group is still a crucial element today as preservation through diaspora becomes a central focus, differing from the original chapters. For example, Rhian shared that while she feels very connected to her Sierra Leonean identity including speaking Krio fluently, she has only been to Sierra Leone twice and thus gains most of her knowledge about the country through her parents' stories, experiences, and perspectives. This construction is what many second-generation Sierra Leoneans can attest to, myself included. Through social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp young Sierra Leoneans can communicate and share modern applications of Next Generation Krio's mission. While current generations' connections to the country are restricted, their experiences are not less valid and in fact, are crucial members of stabilizing the future and stability of native and indigenous languages. Next Generation Krios has created new spaces of education where identity and mobilization both thrive. Their Instagram account, @next_gen_krios, is a wonderful example of modern engagement through posting Sierra Leonean memes, collaborations with other accounts, promotions of Sierra Leonean businesses, word-of-the-day translations, and most impressively, promotion of the group's first major publication, the *Next Gen Krios Krio-English Dictionary*.

During our conversation, Rhian also shared the process of creating this dictionary. Nine members of the group, out of a rough total of 15-20 members, spearheaded the compilation of words to be translated through weekly meetings over a period of 2 years. The inspiration for this project was to update Magbaily Fyle's *Historical Dictionary of Sierra Leone* which Rhian explained contained words that are either only used by her parents' generation or not used at all. It is also of note that a new copy of the Fyle dictionary is available on Amazon for 97 dollars while the Next Gen dictionary is available for 30 dollars, making it much more affordable. This dictionary contains an English-to-Krio translation as well as a Krio-to-English translation. It also includes sections on grammatical structure, the history of the Krio language, and summaries of the language theories behind this information. Rhian proudly stated that this dictionary is for young people who want to learn Krio and may have zero knowledge about how to speak it. With this goal in mind, she also shared that the group has a new project, soon to be announced, focused on promoting and preserving language in a non-oral way through this digital age.

Finally, our conversation also acknowledged that of course, Krio is not the only language option in Sierra Leone and touched on how, in connection with the results of this thesis, there is a cognizant effort to make sure that not only Krio is being promoted, overshadowing other languages like Mende, Temne, Limba, etc. While this is acknowledged by Next Generation Krios, the focus of their organization is the Krio language and ethnic group. In light of this, Rhian directed me to similar organizations focused on the other ethnic groups in Sierra Leone. While language-based accounts exist, they currently focus more on putting Sierra Leone, as a whole, on the map through the promotion of poetry, singers, film, media, etc. instead of dictionary or acquisition-based work.

Ultimately, there seems to be a focus from current generations to spotlight Sierra Leone as a whole. Rhian noted that when Sierra Leone is mentioned, the immediate reaction is to ask where

the country is. Many people outside of West Africa or Africa-related studies do not know about Sierra Leone so community organization accounts like Young Salone have a brand line of “A creative hub for Sierra Leoneans interested in making a difference.” followed by “Singular, because we are one!” Two other organizations discussed include Salone Link-Up, based on mentorship, and Famble.com, a database of Sierra Leonean-owned businesses, brands, and organizations. These emerging accounts, as well as my interview with Next Generation Krios is proof that native and indigenous languages and indignity matter. While this group may not have a distinct solution for warding off tensions between ethnic groups, the fact that language revitalization is happening remains, and when achieved in one group, can effectively spread to all that remain.

Concluding Relevance and Results:

This topic and research are significant to the existing works surrounding written expression and diglossia. I believe what makes my contributions consequential to the field is my unique positionality paired with the almost personal incentive to continue the revival and strengthening of native and indigenous language work in Sierra Leone. It is a linguistically and culturally rich country that needs to be tapped into, a country I am and will continue to tap into. The history of Sierra Leone in terms of its founding by the freed slaves from Nova Scotia, the Maroons from Jamaica, and the Recaptives from the West Coast of Africa accounts for the conglomeration of languages in the country. The founding of the Province of Freedom brought together languages such as Igbo, Yoruba, Wolof, and English into Freetown, which in combination with the indigenous languages led to the development of Sierra Leone Krio as the lingua franca. The conglomeration of these languages and culture makes Sierra Leone a linguistically and culturally rich tapestry of languages for academic research.

These facts, supported by Fyle's *The History of Sierra Leone*, along with my survey and interview data collection guide me to believe that the same structures that delineated ethnic groups in the era Fyle writes about, are still perpetuating issues surrounding native and indigenous language usage today. While the chapters highlighted from Fyle's narrative in this thesis depict a unification of multiple groups uplifting themselves and their culture through education, my research has pinpointed how education can also be a space of shrouded tensions and uncertainty concerning language expression and stigmatization. Historical consequences determine which languages are used, tied to prestige, wealth, and culture and those which are disregarded.

This imparted knowledge foregrounds the statements posed to my interlocutors as well as the discussions I had later in interviews. From my data, it is clear that language usage is tied to pride, but ethnic pride and national pride can be two different issues. As seen in the survey responses posed earlier in this thesis, there is a generally positive trend in supporting the use of native and indigenous languages. Regarding the questions posed in the introduction of this thesis, my informed answers are as follows. Undoubtedly this thesis demonstrates the legacies of Sierra Leonean history impacting citizens' language usage today. There are language dilutions between ethnic groups but also between public, professional and private spaces based around academia. I have found that the people in positions of authority over students tend to set a specific precedent of language expression, while they themselves may uphold different personal beliefs. English being accepted as most important and advantageous establishes a hierarchy native and indigenous language must fall in line with. This hierarchy becomes convoluted as a use of, or official labeling of a language inevitably raises the perceived importance of the ethnic group tied to that language.

Using this data sample, again admittedly small and sourced from highly educated interlocutors, I find that, in line with my theoretical expectations, an allegiance to any specific

ethnic group has a correlation to a language a Sierra Leonean privileges which thus alters feelings about nonaffiliated groups and languages. For example, while responses and discussion around higher education textbooks being published in indigenous languages is supported, the possibility of apprehensiveness or antagonism over a focus of Krio over Limba for example remains. This is shown by the split survey responses from this prompt receiving the following responses of somewhat agree at 57.14%, neither agree nor disagree at 28.57%, and strongly agree at 14.29%. This national versus ethnic support demarcation matter is shown most evidently in question 21, figure 3. This prompt, “Elevating an indigenous language to official status can create tribal conflict” received the following responses of somewhat disagree (42.86%), strongly agree (28.57%), somewhat agree (14.29%) and neither agree nor disagree (14.29%). The split in responses, especially between only somewhat disagreeing and strongly agreeing, is indicative of the uncertain nature of the repercussions that may follow the uplifting of languages over others. Ultimately this leads me to believe that making Krio or any other indigenous language official, regardless of the linguistic strengths and popularity it may have as a lingua franca, would be representatively positive but on ground level could compound and exacerbate historical fractions between groups due to the connection between ethnic groups and language usage.

Questions that remain include those surrounding socioeconomic mobility and global recognition within social media, music and culture broadly. Future specified research, perhaps in collaboration with Next Generation Krio’s for cultural data, focused on these topics will be crucial in forming more substantial answers backed by data collection.

While Sierra Leone originally had up to twenty-two indigenous languages, there are now only around sixteen actively being used and accounted for. This is due to many of them solely being oral languages, with no standardized orthography. The issue of disappearing languages, and

thus disappearing identities and cultures, is pressing and needs to be addressed immediately. Interviews with interlocutors revealed that despite their want to continue the usage of their mother tongue, especially generationally, these issues are major impediments. It is clear that expression becomes limited as languages become stigmatized either through academic policies or social constraints. While this difficulty is evident, my belief in the power of self-expression, through native and indigenous languages, outside of the colonial dominance of English, remains in the Sierra Leonean people. I believe that progress towards solving this issue will be slow and cause friction if the ultimate goal of validating all languages to the level of English is not kept central to the movement. There is not only one way of speaking, writing, learning, or expressing oneself, and so congruently there should not be only one language elevated as a sole tool. I assert that other forms should continuously be affirmed as my work aims to justify.

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