

PLATE 2 Mande languages

2 Mande

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2.0 INTRODUCTION

The Mande languages are spoken by about 10 million speakers in 15 West African countries. They represent a large part of the population in Mali, Ivory Coast, Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. They are also well represented in Burkina Faso, Senegal, Gambia, and Guinea Bissau, and are found in isolated groups in Mauritania, Benin, Togo, Niger, Nigeria, and Ghana. The Mande languages map, based on Platiel (1978), provides the most accurate statement to date of the distribution of Mande languages.¹

The stem **mande** with variants **mane**, **mani**, and **mali** and the suffix **-ka/-kan** provide not only the basis for many of the Northern Mande language names but the various names of the language family as well: Mandenga (Koelle 1854a), Mandingo (Greenberg 1955), and finally Mandé or Mande (first used by Steinthal 1867). Attempts to name this family with more neutral geographic terms, Northwestern High Sudan (Koelle 1854a) or better Nigero-Senegalais (Delafosse 1924) have not come into common use.

2.1 EARLY SCHOLARSHIP

Comparative study of Mande languages began with the collection of word lists by travelers. Hair (1968) reports that the earliest known word list (including Mandekan and Soninke) was collected (author unknown) sometime between 1680 and 1700. Other early collections include Moore (1738), Oldendorp (1777), Park (1800), Winterbottom (1803), Bowdich (1819), Clarke (1848/9), Kilham (1828), and Wilson (1847).

¹ I wish to acknowledge the helpful comments and criticisms received from John Singler, Roger Blench, and Kay Williamson on earlier drafts of this chapter.

Prior to Koelle's *Polyglotta Africana* (1854), several cursory reports of the continuity of the Mande group had been given. From the work of Hair (1967, 1968), we know of Vater (1812) who, using short word lists collected by Mungo Park, identified the relatedness of several Northern Mande languages. Hair (1967) also mentions the *Atlas ethnographique* by Balbi, in which the basis of a Northern group is reported, and Latham (1845) who makes a similar report but includes the (West) Atlantic languages of Temne and Bullom. But with Koelle (1854a) we see ample documentation for both the distinctiveness and coherence of the Mande group.

Individual descriptions of the Mande languages began with Brunton (1802), followed by Koelle's (1854b) grammar of Vai. Sumner's (1917) grammar was the first written by a native speaker of a Mande language. Important survey grammars of the twenties and thirties provide fairly thorough treatments of the phonology and morphology with some attention to syntax. With the advent in the fifties of lexicostatistics and transformational/generative grammar, attention moved away from general grammars toward shorter articles dealing with one aspect of the language, or comparative lexicostatistics and the collection of word lists. One of the major concerns of the fifties and sixties was consonant mutation and the distinction between alienable and inalienable possession. A notable exception was Welmers, who produced grammars of both Kpelle (1959) and Vai (1970). Interestingly, during the period of decline of full analytic grammars, there arose in the fifties and sixties, in response to a renewed interest in Africa, the development of a large number of pedagogical grammars, such as Kendall et al. (1980), Spears (1965), and Sadler (1951).

As a result, there is currently available, in the form of either an analytic/descriptive or pedagogical grammar, fairly detailed accounts including tonal and syntactic treatments of both the Southwestern Mande and Northern Mande languages, with some notable exceptions.

I also mention the considerable work done by scholars on the indigenous Vai syllabary which has been in use continuously since the 1830s, especially Hair (1963), Dalby (1967), G. Stewart (1976), Stewart and Hair (1969), and Scribner and Cole (1981).

Delafosse (1901) appears to be the first to have proposed common properties beyond lexical similarities for the Mande languages:

- 1) affixing: composes words by adding radicals or affixes,
- 2) flexative: time, number, and mode are expressed by affixes,

- 3) no genders,
- 4) no use of tone.

Non-usage of tone (4) was added subsequently by Delafosse and now appears odd in view of the considerable work done more recently on Mande tone. Using these criteria along with other considerations, Delafosse (1924) suggested that Songhai and Dyerma might also belong to this group. The proposal was not immediately accepted and in fact was sharply criticized by Welmers (1971).

The study of Mande has contributed to the development of linguistic theory, notably in the area of tone. Historically, the first tonal treatment of a Mande language was by Sumner (1917), closely followed by Westermann and Melzian's (1930) grammar of Kpelle. Aginsky's (1935) descriptive grammar of Mende followed, in which she attempted to incorporate the phonetic manifestation of downdrift and downstep by using a four-tone scheme. After Aginsky, we find that each of the following also contributed to the analysis of Mende tone: Crosby and Ward, Innes, Spears, Dwyer, Leben, Goldsmith, Singler, Clark, and Churma. The tonal behavior of Mende has provided a fruitful area in which to test various theoretical tonal frameworks: segmental, suprasegmental, and auto-segmental.

One cannot discuss the evolution of the treatment of tone without mentioning the seminal work of Welmers (1949). His paper is the first phonemic treatment of a Mande tone language, but in addition he makes a strong pre-generative argument for a more abstract phonemic representation based on speaker intuition and formal analysis.

Other topics to receive attention include the distinction between alienable and inalienable possession (Innes 1967; Manessy 1964a), relative clauses (Bird 1968; Bokamba and Dramé 1978; Grégoire 1980; Schachter 1973) and ergativity (Rude 1983).

2.2 CLASSIFICATION

Westermann (1927) suggested the existence of a language family, 'West Sudanic', of which Mende was a branch and which included the Bantu languages. Greenberg (1963) offered a different methodology which relied primarily on 'sound-meaning resemblances' of lexical items and grammatical particles. He placed Mande as one of six equally distinct branches of Niger-Congo. However, Mande's precarious position in Niger-Congo soon became apparent. Mukarovsky (1966) argued that it did not

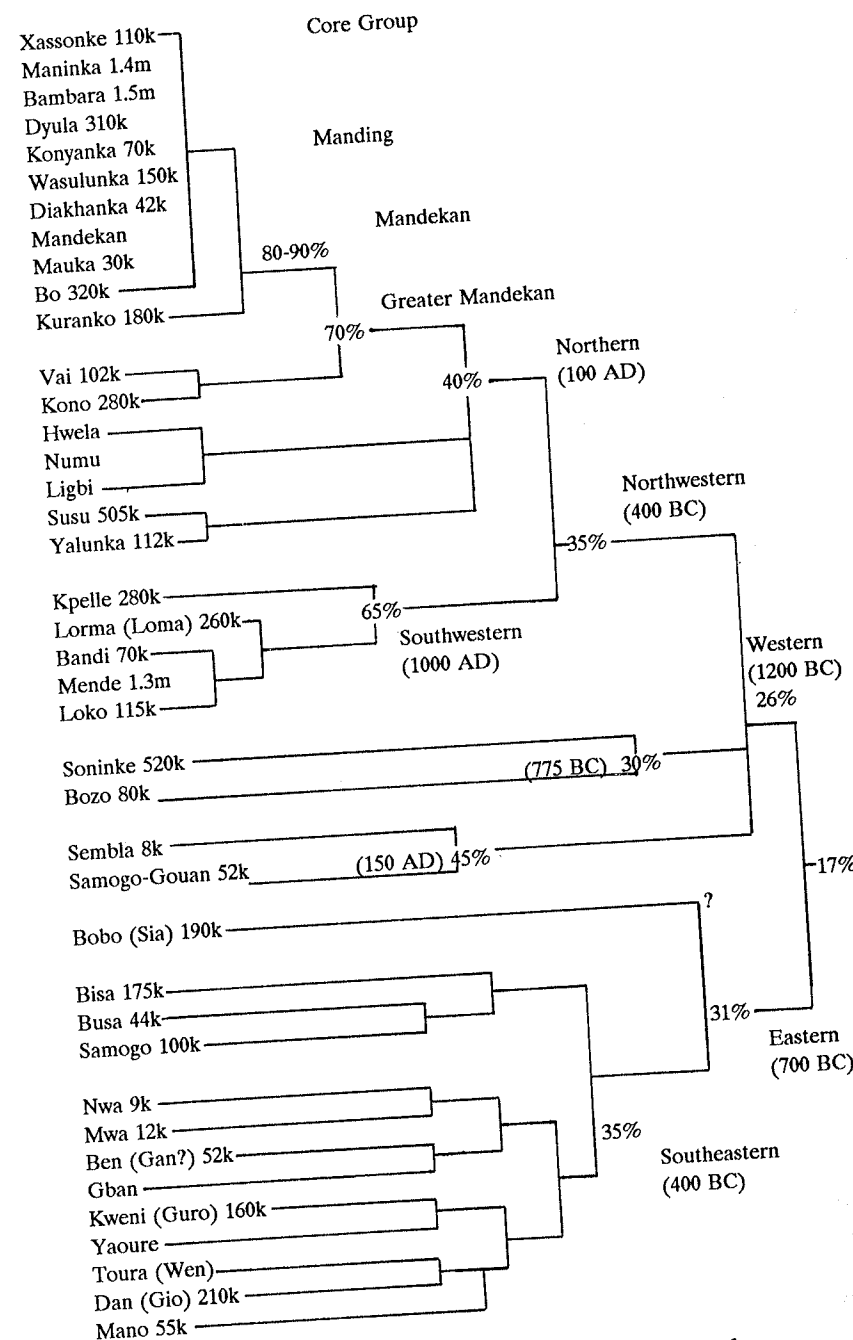


FIGURE 2.1. Classification of Mande

belong at all while Welmers (1971) proposed that Mande was the first group to split off from the rest of Niger-Congo. The distinctness of Mande led to the Bennett and Sterk (1977) proposal that Mande be accorded equal status with Niger-Congo and Kordofanian.

Caquot (1952) and Mukarovsky (1976/77) have, following Delafosse, suggested a relationship between Mande and Songhai which led Mukarovsky to place Mande outside of Niger-Kordofanian and Gregersen (1972) to unite Niger-Kordofanian and Nilo-Saharan, an hypothesis also supported by Boyd (1978), Creissels (1981), and Bender (1981), and increasing in acceptability.

Figure 2.1 is based primarily on Bimson (1978) for the Western Mande languages and Prost (1953) for the Eastern Mande languages. The numbers following each language represent the number of speakers (Platiel 1978). The percentages are from Bimson along with his glottochronological calculations for time depth.

Koelle (1854a) grouped the limited number of Mande languages available to him into three branches that reflect the current Northwestern, Southwestern, and Southeastern groups.

Thus the first real subcategorization was offered by Delafosse (1901). The fourth part of his book (1901:213-95) focuses mainly on vocabulary, but also presents morphological and syntactic data, with individual chapters on Malinka, Wasulunke, Bambara (Bamana), Vai, Sidianka, Manianka, and Soninke along with a seventy-item word list comparing Malinke, Susu, (D)yalonke, Loko, Mende, Lorma, Kpelle, Mano, Gio, Mwa, Kweni (Guro), and Dyula. On the basis of these data, Delafosse was led to posit a primary branching between Mande-*'tan'* which is essentially the northern group minus Susu-Yalonke and Mande-*'fou'*, which includes both Southwestern and Southeastern Mande (1901:218).

Geographically this classification yields an east-west band of Mande-*'fou'* in a transitional zone between the forest and the savannah with the Mande-*'tan'* languages to the north and the Atlantic, Kru, and Kwa languages to the south (and) west. In this regard, Delafosse took the Mande-*'tan'* languages to represent the Mande prototype and considered the Mande-*'fou'* languages to have undergone considerable change as a result of contact with these other Niger-Congo languages. In 1904, on the basis of new vocabularies, Delafosse added Numu, Ligbi, Hwela, and Bozo to Mande-*'tan'* and consigned Soninke to a third branch and Bobo-fing (Sya) to Mande-*'fou'*.

Between the time of Delafosse and Welmers' (1958) reclassification, several individuals, Tauxier (1924), Westermann (1927), de Lavergne de Tressan (1953), and Westermann and Bryan (1952), refined the subclassification within the tan/fou framework, but with little import.

The tan/fou dichotomy appears to have persisted for several reasons. First, there were cultural differences between the savannah (tan) peoples, and the forest border (fou) peoples. Second, there were areal influences which Kpelle (Southwestern Mande) shared with neighboring Southeastern languages (Dwyer 1974b). Finally, until the time of Prost (1953), no one had a thorough knowledge of both a Southwestern and a Southeastern language.

In 1953 Prost published a comparative study of Southeastern Mande languages in which he provided a short grammatical sketch of nine of the languages and a 430-item comparative vocabulary of 17 Mande languages. With his knowledge of both Southwestern (Kpelle) and Southeastern Mande, Prost suggested that the tan/fou dichotomy was suspect (Prost 1953:14).

Houis (1959) also critiqued the Delafosse tan/fou classification on the basis of insufficient data. Relying largely on grammatical criteria, he proposed four branches of Mande, which do not include the Southeastern Mande languages.

I. Mande-tan (Manding) Bambara Diula (Dyula) Malinké Malinké (Eastern) Malinké (Western)	II. Manding archaïque Soninke Soso Dialonke Bozo
III. Group 3 Mendi (Mende) Toma (Lorma) Kpèlè (Kpelle)	IV. Group 4 Bobo (Sya)

FIGURE 2.2. Mande classification
(Houis 1959)

Welmers (1958) presented the first modern classification of Mande. Here, the tan/fou dichotomy is rejected. Instead, Welmers juxtaposed Southeastern (fou) to a Western branch consisting of Southwestern Mande (fou) and Northern Mande (tan). Importantly, Susu,

a fou language was assigned to the northern (formerly tan group) group. Welmers, following an inexplicit classification by Prost (1953), postulated a subdivision between Southern Mande (Mano, Dan (Yakuba), Toura, Mwa, Nwa, Gan, and Kweni) and Eastern (S. Samo, N. Samo, Bisa, and Busa). Although this has not been followed either by Long (1971) or by Bimson (1978) because of a 38% cognate rate, Welmers' classification is supported on the basis of shared innovations. Greenberg (1963) so accepted Welmers' classification that he copied the misprint (Mande instead of Mende) from the Welmers (1958) article.

Welmers, and subsequently Morse (Welmers 1971), concluded that Bobo represented a third major Mande branch, something confirmed by Long (1971). Bimson (1978) considers it a branch of Eastern Mande. The issue has yet to be resolved.

Welmers' paper marks another important change in Mande comparative studies in its use of Swadesh's lexicostatistical approach. Although previous studies had considered cognate comparisons in determining genetic relatedness, Welmers' classification relied on them primarily.

Until this point, comparative statements were based on incomplete word lists gathered by explorers, administrators, missionaries, and occasionally by trained linguists. Long (1971) provided a full set of basic vocabularies for Western Mande languages for an adapted version of the Swadesh 100-word list. He worked closely with Welmers, but was led to reject the Welmers proposal of an eastern/western split within Southeastern Mande and proposed his own classification (1971).

Despite general acceptance of the refinements in classification since Welmers, there are those who remain suspicious of basing a theory of Mande divergence on a purely lexical comparison. Houis (1981:68) argues that many more synchronic descriptions of these languages are needed. The bibliography shows however, that most Mande languages are represented by a substantial descriptive statement. These lexicostatistical surveys need to be followed with comparative studies that show development from a common proto-language lexically, phonologically, morphologically, and syntactically.

Delafosse (1901, 1904) relied primarily on vocabulary comparisons, but showed concern for syntax and morphology by arranging his lexical comparisons within parts of speech. Delafosse noted some regular sound correspondences between languages, but attempted no lexical reconstruction.

2.3 PHONOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Typically a Mande language has seven vowels, dropping to five in northern areas and increasing to nine and acquiring vowel harmony in southern regions. This gives them a structural resemblance to neighboring Kwa and Kru languages.

The consonant system usually includes labiovelar stops and voiceless/voiced obstruent pairing. Typically, Mande words have a CVCV pattern with the medial consonant tending to be a glide or a liquid. Frequently the second vowel is the same as the first.

Consonant mutation is another topic of theoretical interest. Although variants of consonant mutation occur in all branches of Mande, the system itself is most developed in Southwestern Mande. This alternation of initial consonants conditioned by what are now grammatical environments has invited considerable comment - Eberl-Elber (1937), Hintze (1948), Welmers (1950), Manessy (1964b), Meeussen (1965), Bird (1971), and Dwyer (1978). Meeussen deserves credit for demonstrating the phonetic basis for this alternation; Dwyer (1974a) provides details and an historical development.

Most Mande languages have two opposing tones, though Kpelle and Mano (Welmers 1971) have three, and Sembla (Prost 1971), four level tones. For many Mande languages (e.g., Mandekan), tone is a property of the morpheme, while for others (e.g., Mende and Kpelle) it appears to be a property of the syllable. Contour tones (short rising and falling) occur in many Mande languages but with restricted distribution. In a noun + attribute construction, the attribute tones are erased and replaced with a new pattern, which is often influenced by the tones of the head noun.

In 1973, Dwyer presented descriptive tonal statements of the Southwestern Mande languages and an analysis of the diachronic development of tone by tracing the development of lexical tonal patterns as well as the tonal rules that applied to them.

Five tone classes can be traced throughout Southwestern Mande. Of these, classes 1 and 2 are consistently cognate with the Northern Mande languages.

LEXICAL RECONSTRUCTION

Westermann (1927) was the first to attempt a phonological reconstruction. Using his own data as well as that from Delafosse, Steintal,

and others, he presented a phoneme by phoneme comparison of initial and medial consonants. He presented diachronic rules and where possible reconstructed proto-forms. A few examples are given in figure 2.3.

	head	moon	bird	hoe	bow	health
STEM	*kun		*kuani			
Bambara	ku(n)	kalo	kono		kala	kene
Mandingo	kun	karu	kono		kala	kende
Xasson	kuju					
Wasulu	ku(n)	katu				
Soninke		xaso				
Vai	wu	karɔ	konde	kali	kara	kende
Kpelle	wu(n)	yalon	ngweni	kaali	kalan	kene
Mende	wu	yalu	nwani	kali	kala	kene
Susu	xuni		xoni	keri	xali	

FIGURE 2.3. Comparative word list
(from Westermann 1927:181-85)

Prost (1953) also discussed possible sound changes when he presented his comparative study and vocabulary of Eastern Mande.

Welmers (1958) supported his classification by showing regular sound correspondences within Mande. Most notably, the set of changes in Western Mande: *g > y > x > k which resulted in the merging in Mandekan of *k and *g.

Shafer (1959) presented a similar, but more exemplified comparison of almost 90 cognate sets from 26 Mande languages, including representatives from all major branches. He posited proto-Mande consonants, but because of the degree of vocalic, consonantal, and affixal variation across these languages, felt that limited data prevented going beyond a crude postulation.

Long (1971), using a 100-word cognate set from 23 Mande languages, put forth some tentative reconstructions for proto-Mandekan.

Bimson (1978) proposed a reconstruction of the basic vocabulary of Northwestern Mande using the 100-word lists published earlier by Long (1971) and supplemented by additional data. He then began to reconstruct the intermediate vocabulary of the most closely related language clusters: group A (Susu-Yalunka), group B (Hwela-Numu-Ligbi), group C (Vai-Kono), and the Mandekan core group (excluding Kuranko). He then compared these proto-vocabularies in order to reconstruct even

more ancestral proto-vocabularies until he arrived at proto-Northwestern Mande.

On the basis of this reconstruction, Bimson posited the phoneme system in figure 2.4 for proto-Western Mande.

initial	medial	final	vowels
p t	k kp?		i u
b d	g gb?	g	e? o
f s?			ε ɔ
			a
m n y?	l r		
	n ɲ?		

FIGURE 2.4. Proto-Western Mande
(from Bimson 1978:272-73)

It is interesting that reconstructions often lead to impoverished proto-phoneme systems. In this case proto-Mande has no initial liquids and only one questionable glide. The system of strong/weak consonant alternation in Mande may have resulted in several mergers that would be difficult to recover through comparative reconstruction.

My current comparative Mande research involves (1) expanding the collection of potential Mande cognates beyond the 100 basic vocabulary list and (2) including the Eastern Mande languages. This work has led to a tentative reconstruction of the proto-Mande consonant system (figure 2.5).

	labial	dental	palatal	velar	labiovelar
stop	p	t		k	kp
		(t')		(k')	(kp')
	b	d		g	gb
fricative		s			
		z			
nasal	m	n	ɲ		
liquid/glide		l	y	w	

FIGURE 2.5. Proto-Mande consonants expanded

Because of the eccentric, but relatively consistent bimodal patterning of the voiceless stops, I have very hesitantly suggested the possibility of two series of voiceless stops, one fortis and one lenis (or the like). Interestingly, this dual series of voiceless stops is analogous to that postulated for Upper Cross by Dimmendaal (1978) and Sterk (1979) and

for Volta-Congo, J. Stewart (1976). Figure 2.6 contains representative velar cognate sets illustrating this phenomenon.

GLOSS	+k*	+k	+k	+k'	+k'	+g	+g	+g
Proto	+kashe	+ko	+kuntu	+k'ele	+k'uri	+gure	+ga	+gaN
Mandekan	siyen	so	suru	kɛ	kuru	sen-de	sa	sen
Kono-Vai	kase	ku	kundi	kɔ	kuru	(sen)	---	ken
Susu	kije	koN	[dunke]	[nyina]	xan-bi	[geme]	(xabu)	(san-yi)
SWM	kase	[pere]	kuntu	kɛ	ko	kuntun	[sa]	kɔwɔ
Soninke	kaga	ka	[tu-gune]	[nya]	[sege]	gul-la	[kara]	[ta]
Sembla	---	koɲ	[kpunu]	[ba]	[bo]	kunun	[sege]	cen
Bobo	kurso	kon	[tii-gu]	[ta]	[timi]	yulu	kore	kan
San	koko	cu	kuna	[ba]	co	jer	gaN	gisi
Busa	kurso	[kpeN]	ku-ti	[ba--]	[kpe]	[gbele]	ga	[gbada]
Mano	ko	ka	[kpu]	ke	kotey	gele	ga	gaN
Dan	---	ko	kloen	ke	[to]	gwa	gu	geN
Guro	koN	koN	[telerene]	kere	kori	gure	ga	gan
Mwa	ka	---	[kpu]	kle	[zoNda]	[vie]	gaN	gaN

To emphasize the highly tentative nature of these reconstructions, I have marked them with a /+/- instead of the more traditional //. Also note the use of round brackets to mark possible but apparently unconforming cognates and square brackets to mark presumed noncognates.

FIGURE 2.6. Mande velar correspondences

2.4 MORPHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS

One of the most striking facts about the Mande languages is the structural unity of the group, and its distinctiveness from other Niger-Congo languages. Syntactically, the Mande languages have an SOV word order with oblique objects being marked as the objects of specialized postpositions. Quite possibly because of this SOV pattern, relative clauses have received much attention (Bird 1968; Bokamba and Dramé 1978; Schachter 1973; Dwyer 1981).

None of the Mande languages use serial verbs. Many distinguish between alienable and inalienable possession.

Tense and aspect are generally marked through a combination of verb suffixes and post-subject formatives.

Definite articles, demonstratives, and plurals tend to follow the noun or noun + attribute while possessive pronouns precede.

Research in the area of comparative morphology and syntax is beginning to emerge. Creissels (1980) charted the distribution of four verbal particles in his Mandekan dialects with the conclusion that these data no clear evolutionary sequence could be ascertained. Grégoire (1980) compared the rather unique properties of Mande relative clauses from all of its major branches: Northern, Southwestern, Southeastern, and Bobo. Dwyer (1985) has traced the evolution of the definite articles in Northwestern Mande.

Comparative reconstruction is a far more challenging task than lexicostatistical analysis, but promises more interesting results, not only in the study of the development of the language, but also in the area of cultural history and in understanding the relationship between synchronic and diachronic rules.

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