

SIERRA LEONE SPEAKS ENGLISH?

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In 2011 it will be 50 years since the liberation of Sierra Leone from the colonial rule of Britain. More than 170 years the country was dominated by the British Crown. Colonial history has left a strong imprint on Sierra Leone. English language, administrative and legal framework created in the image of the UK were imported into the now independent republic.

Sierra Leone is a country in West Africa. It is bordered by Guinea to the north and east, Liberia to the southeast, and is washed by the Atlantic Ocean to the west and southwest. Sierra Leone covers a total area of 71,740 square km and has a population estimated at 6.5 million. The capital of Sierra Leone is a Freetown.

The first Portuguese sailors as far back as 15 century discovered a peninsula which was named Sierra Leone (in translation "Lion Mountain"). This name is then spread throughout the country. The birth of the colony is referred to 1788, when a local leader Nyambana ceded part of its territory to Capitan of the British Royal Navy John Taylor, who acted on behalf of the community of free settlers, their heirs and successors, newly arrived from England and were protected by the British Government. In 1896, all the internal parts of the country, adjacent to the colony of Sierra Leone, were declared the British protectorate. Only on April 27th 1961 Sierra Leone was declared an independent state within the British Commonwealth. Freetown is the West African center for the dissemination British culture since the 19 century to this day. Modern culture in Sierra Leone dates back to the time of the first English settlement which had a significant influence on the formation of a national language – Krio.

Krio is the most widely spoken language in Sierra Leone and is native to the Creoles who are freed slaves from Britain. It is mainly derived from English, but has influences from different African languages (Yuroba for example), European languages (such as French) and also contains some expressions found in the West Indies.

In Sierra Leone, the educated people refer to the Krio language condescendingly as a "patois", or broken English. Throughout the nation, as education spreads, people use the official language, English, more and more and Krio continues to reflect an increasing English content.

Linguistic features, borrowed from the English

1. Orthography and phonetics.

Krio uses the Latin alphabet as used in English but without Qq and Xx and with three letters from the African alphabet, EE (open E), $\text{D}\eta$ (eng), and OO (open O).

The vowel sounds of Krio are similar to English, although they are generally tenser and shorter than English vowels.

Krio has 7 pure vowel system – i, e, E, a, O, o, u. It also has 3 diphthongs (combinations of vowels) – ay, aw, Oy. Hence there is usually no distinction in the pronunciation of some minimal pairs of English words. For example: **bit** for **beat/bit**; **pul** for **pool/pull**; **kOp** for **cup/cop**.

Some combinations of consonants in English words are reduced in the corresponding Krio words. For example:

Krio word	English meaning
wes	waste
fas	fast
trit	street
tap	stop
tret	straight
prEd	spread
pit	spit
plit	split
ton	stone.

Some unaccented syllables in English words are dropped in Krio words: **bOt** – 'about'; **fred** – 'afraid'; **blant** – 'belong to'. In some words, different sounds are substituted. They include:

- **v** → **b**: drEb - 'drive'; ebi - 'heavy'; dEbul - 'devil'.
- **th** → **t/d**: tit - 'teeth'; tEnki - 'thanks'; wit - 'with'; dEm - 'them'; brOda – 'brother'.
- **ay** → **E**: nEt - 'night'; fEt - 'fight'; rEs - 'rice'; blEn - 'blind'.
- **Oy** → **wE**: bwEl - 'boil'; pwEl - 'spoil'.

Some Krio words sound familiar, but they differ from English in meaning, part of speech or tense:

Lohng – tall
 Swit – delicious
 Wohndaful – amazing
 Marid – to marry
 Behteh – good
 Sing – song etc.

Krio is a tonal language. This means that whether the pitch of different syllables of the word is high or low can make a difference in meaning. The tonal indications (H for high, L for low) follow each word:

soso (HH) - 'only'; 'nothing but'	soso (HL) – 'so-so; not too good, not too bad'
bebi (LH) - 'a baby'; 'A doll'	soso (LH) - 'Susu' (one of the dialects of Sierra Leone); 'a native speaker of Susu'
brOda (HL) - 'brother'	bebi (HL) – 'girlfriend'; 'an attractive yong woman'
fada (HH) – 'God'	brOda (LH) - 'an elder brother or older male relative'
kOntri (HL) – 'a country'	fada (HL) – 'father'
sista (HL) – 'sister'	kOntri (LH) – 'someone who hails from the countryside'
skwaya (HL) - 'a square' (shape)	sista (LH) – 'an elder sister or older female relative'
tEnki (HL) – 'thank you'	skwaya (LH) - 'a dull and inexperienced person'
	tEnki (LH) – 'gratitude'

2. Grammar.

Like in English there is no grammatical gender. However, there are the hints of nominative, accusative and genitive cases. Verbs do not conjugate according to person or number but reflect their tense.

Pronouns

There is no distinction between masculine and feminine in any person and unlike English there is a 2nd person plural form:

	Singular form – English analogue	Plural form – English analogue
1st	Ah - I	Wi – we
2st	Yu - you	Una - you
3st	I – he, she, it	Dehn/dehm (Dɛn/dɛm) - they

Types of pronouns:

1) Subject pronouns

Ah – I
 Yu – you
 I – he, she, it
 Wi – we
 Una – you (plural form)
 Dehn/dehm (Dɛn/dɛm) – they

2) Object pronouns

Mi - me
 Yu - you
 Im – him, her, it
 Wi - us
 Una - you
 Dehn/dehm (Dɛn/dɛm) – them

3) Possessive pronouns

Mi – my
 Yu – your
 In – his, her, its
 Una – your (plural form)
 Dehn/dehm (Dɛn/dɛm) – their

4) Interrogative pronouns

Udat – who
 Uswan – which
 Wetin – what
 We – where/what
 Uspat – Which part
 Ustehm – when
 Wetin du – why
 Aw – how
 Ohmohs – How many/ how much

Examples:

- **Ah** cam tich – **I** have come to teach
- Na **udat**? – **Who** is there?
- **Mi** nem Jack, **we** yusehf? – **My** name is Jack, **what** about yourself?
- **Uswan yu** want? - **Which** one do **you** want?
- **Aw** di work? – **How** is the work?
- **Dehn** de lan Krio – **They** is learning Krio
- **Ohmohs I** want? – **How much** does **he** want?

3. Language samples.

Below is a sample of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* in Krio:

Krio	English
Atikul Wan ɛvri bɔdi bɔn fri ɛn gɛt in yon rayt, nɔn wan nɔ pas in kɔmpin. Wi ɔl ebul fɔ tink ɛn fɛnɔt wetin rayt ɛn rɔŋ pantap dat wi fɔ sabi aw fɔ liv lɛk wan big famili.	Article 1 All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Below are some samples of sentences in Krio:

Wetin na yu nem?	-	"What is your name?"
Usai yu kɔmɔt?	-	"Where do you come from?"
A kɔmɔt Estinz.	-	"I come from Hastings."
Us wok yu de du?	-	"What work do you do?"
Mi na ticha.	-	"I am a teacher."
Na us skul yu de tich?	-	"At what school do you teach?"
I de tich na Prins ɔv Welz.	-	"I teach at Prince of Wales."
Mi gladi fɔ mit yu.	-	"Glad to meet you."
OK, a de go naw.	-	"OK, I am going now."
ɔrayt, wi go tok bak.	-	"Alright, we will talk again."

Some Krio proverbs:

- 'FISH Nɔ GɛT NATIN Fɔ DU WIT RENKOT' – 'A fish has nothing to do with a raincoat'.
- 'U DU MI, A DU YU: MOSES' LAW' – 'You do unto me, I do unto you: Moses' Law' (*'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth'*).
- 'BEGA-BEGA Nɔ DE PIK ɛN CHUZ' – 'A beggar can't pick and choose'.

During the period of colonial rule, Sierra Leoneans (particularly among the upper class) were discouraged from speaking Krio, but after independence from Great Britain in 1961, writers and educators began promoting its use. In the 1960s, Thomas Decker translated some of Shakespeare's plays into Krio, and composed original poetry in this language. In the 1980s the New Testament was translated into Krio.

While English is Sierra Leone's official language, the Ministry of Education began using Krio as the medium of instruction in some primary schools in Freetown in the 1990s. Radio stations now broadcast a wide variety of programs in Krio. Sierra Leonean politicians also give public speeches in this language.

The New York City Public School system recently recognized Krio as a "home language" allowing children to be recognized as speaking Krio rather than other African languages.

Thus, even after independence, the country continues to develop in accordance with British standards, preserving and passing language of a conqueror to generations.