

## Summary: assessing (a)symmetry in bilingualism

### PRO SYMMETRY:

- Situated language choice, rather than strict dominance;
- Both languages are in certain cases chosen as languages of interethnic communication;
- Symmetric marriage patterns and economic activity;
- Mano see the situation as symmetric;
- Leveling of interference in bilingual children with time.

### CONTRA SYMMETRY:

- (Typically) unreciprocated bilingualism;
- Kpelle see the situation as asymmetric;
- Kpelle is often preferred over Mano;
- Almost exclusively unidirectional contact-induced change.

### WHY?

- Population size matters!

## 1. Linguistic background of Guinea

- Population of 13.000.000;
- Official language: French, used in education and official situations
- > 30 indigenous languages;
- Pular, Maninka: 30% each
- Susu: 20%, the *lingua franca* of Conakry, the capital.

### Situation 0. Susu as Lingua Franca



Speaker A (a Konianke) and B (a Kpelle) both come from Nzérékoré but have both lived in Conakry for a long time. They speak Susu while travelling from Nzérékoré, the Capital of Forest Guinea, to Conakry.

### Forest Guinea

- One of the four regions of Guinea;
- Administrative center: Nzérékoré;
- High level of multilingualism;
- Languages: Kpelle, Mano, Kissi, Looma...
- **Kpelle: 460 000 speakers, Southwestern Mande;**
- **Mano: 95 000 speakers, Southern Mande;**
- Symmetric marriage patterns and economic activity;
- Bilingual villages and households.
- Patrilineal ethnic and linguistic identity.



## 2. Ethnographic study of situated language choice

Rule of thumb: the language of communication is chosen in the real or inferred repertoire of

- The speaker
- The addressee(s)
- (Sometimes) the legitimate overhearer (Goffman 1981).

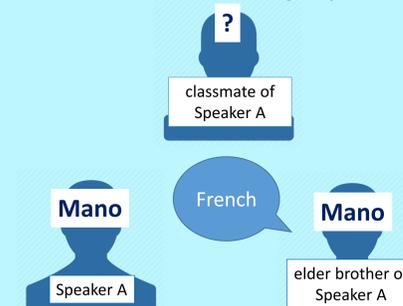
**Kpelle is often chosen over Mano (Situations 4-6).**

### Situation 1. Mano household



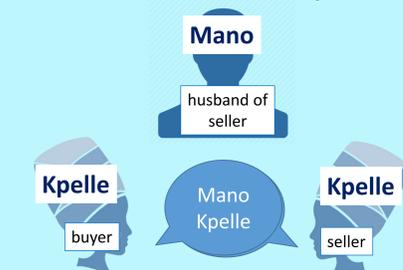
Speaker A speaks Mano with her Kpelle sister-in-law (her brother's wife), but she speaks Kpelle to her Kpelle husband's children.

### Situation 2. French as lingua franca



It was unclear which language the classmate spoke, but he certainly spoke French.

### Situation 3. Mano and Kpelle



Two Kpelle women, a wholesale buyer and a seller, speak Mano when they want the man to understand them, but they plot over the price in Kpelle.

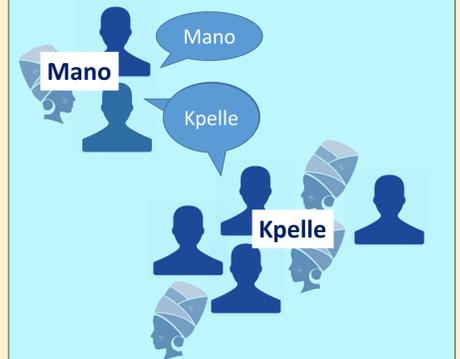
On the same market day the buyer spoke Mano in a Mano household and Kpelle when she was addressed about her family matters.

### Situation 4. Kpelle on the street



The initial question in French may have been prompted by the presence of the researcher, or because French is used as lingua franca in case of uncertainty (sit. 2). Kpelle was chosen next because of the accent in French and the looks of the moto taxi driver. Maninka was not chosen. What would happen with a Mano taxidriver?

### Situation 5. Kpelle at a wedding



A representative of the Mano delegation at a wedding (the relatives of the groom) mostly speaks Kpelle to the Kpelle relatives of the bride.

Only on one occasion he spoke Mano, addressing other Mano in the room, even in the presence of the Kpelle. Traditionally, as we were told, there used to be interpreters in such a situation. What would happen if the bride were Mano and groom Kpelle?

### Situation 6. Kpelle in the neighborhood



A Mano man speaks Kpelle to Kpelle his neighbor, who, as is typical, does not speak Mano.

## 3. Stable contact effects

### Kpelle on Mano:

- Agreement patterns (Konoshenko 2015: 176-177);
- Inclusory construction (Khachatryan 2019);
- Vocabulary, nasalization patterns (Khachatryan 2018).

### Mano on Kpelle:

- Only perhaps the influence of the proto-language of the **Southern Mande** branch on the proto-language of the **Southwestern Mande** branch: e.g., reciprocal marker (*kiè* in Mano, \*ki in Southern Mande; *kée* in Kpelle).

Mano and Kpelle are very close structurally, e.g. word-by-word translations (Khachatryan forthc.):

Kpelle *ḡàá Yáá mēni kílí kólóǰ à tēḡ*  
I.have God problem spirit know with truth  
Mano *māà wáà ḡwò yí dā ḡwánà ká*  
I.have God problem interior know truth with  
'I believe in God (lit.: I have known in truth the problem of God).'

Nevertheless, the languages show distinctive and non-converging prosody and several morphosyntactic parameters, in particular, reflexivity.

## 4. Interference in bilingual language acquisition

- Method: a corpus of spontaneous speech and a picture questionnaire (21 individual).
- Mano distinguishes between a 3sg reflexive (*ē*) and a 3sg basic, non-reflexive pronoun (*à*).
- Kpelle uses a 3sg tonal prefix ambiguous between a free and a bound reading.
- **Monolingual Mano children and adults use predominantly the reflexive pronoun.**
- **Adult L1 Kpelle and L2 Mano speakers and bilingual children use the basic (*à*) pronoun in the reflexive function (= Kpelle interference).**
- Given sufficient exposure to Mano, interference disappears with time, so by age 12, bilingual children perform almost like monolingual Mano speakers.

Mano, L1 *lē ē sǰǰ pélé-pèlè*  
3SG.EXI 3SG.REFL teeth wash-INF  
'She<sub>i</sub> is brushing her<sub>i</sub> teeth'

Mano, L1 *lāā sǰǰ pélé-pèlè*  
3SG.EXI>3SG teeth wash-INF  
'She<sub>i</sub> is brushing her<sub>j</sub> teeth'

Mano, L2 *lāā sǰǰ pélé-pèlè*  
3SG.EXI>3SG teeth wash-INF  
'She<sub>i</sub> is brushing her<sub>i/j</sub> teeth'

Kpelle *gàá niḡ wàá-ì*  
3SG\COP 3SG\teeth wash-PROG  
'She<sub>i</sub> is brushing her<sub>i</sub> teeth'

Kpelle interference in the speech of bilingual Mano – Kpelle individuals: a summary of the reflexive picture questionnaire

	subjects tested	Direct Object		Postpositional Phrase	
		number of tokens	% of basic pronoun	number of tokens	% of basic pronoun
early bilingual children, 8 y.o.	3	11/13	85%	7/7	100%
adult L1 Kpelle speaking Mano as L2	2	6/7	86%	5/5	100%
early bilingual adults	3	2/9	22%	2/3	66%
early bilingual children, 12-14 y.o.	3	0/10	0%	2/7	28%
(quasi-)monolingual Mano children, 8-14 y.o.	9	0/29	0%	1/18	5%
(quasi-)monolingual Mano adults (+ corpus)	1	0/4	0%	0/2 (+ corpus)	+0%

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