

## TOWARD A MENDE LEXICON

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0.0. Mende, a Mande Language spoken in Sierra Leone, has been the subject of some 33 works listed by P. E. H. Hair in his *BIBLIOGRAPHY OF THE MENDE LANGUAGE*.<sup>1</sup> Among the various works cited are a number of vocabularies and word lists varying greatly in relative worth, both as to their usefulness and their linguistic merit. The most important of these works in terms of the number of words presented or in terms of linguistic analysis are those by Migeod, Sumner, Aginsky, Crosby and Innes. These will be discussed below in chronological order.

0.1. F. W. H. Migeod devoted a sizeable portion of his *THE MENDE LANGUAGE* (London, 1908) to a number of useful vocabularies. Tone is not marked in the book and practically no comment relating to tone is made save 'The accent in the definite is on the last syllable' (p. 127).<sup>2</sup> The transcription does not represent the contrasts between i, e, ε and u, o, ɔ with very great accuracy. Mende words are assigned the appropriate 'part of speech' term from their English translations. Words that do not undergo consonant mutation (i.e. words that are already mutated and those which are not subject to mutation) are so marked in the word lists. There are a number of words with more than one 'part of speech' indicated, and the following combinations of two classes can be observed: (1) transitive and intransitive verb, (2) adjective and verb, (3) noun and transitive verb, (4) adverb and preposition, (5) preposition and conjunction, (6) intransitive verb and noun. Although the 'parts of speech' used do not all apply to Mende (adjective can be discarded and preposition changed to postposition) and Migeod did not list any form as being more than two different 'parts of speech', he has shown to some degree the necessity for cross-classification of words in Mende.

0.2. Sumner<sup>3</sup> gives a Mende-English and an English-Mende vocabulary. The tone markings are helpful when they are used and ε/e, ɔ/o are distinguished accurately in the transcription. 'Parts of speech' are indicated but in nearly every case only one is assigned to each word.

0.3. Ethel Aginsky wrote *A GRAMMAR OF THE MENDE LANGUAGE*<sup>4</sup> after working with one informant in the United States during the spring and summer of 1933. One who knows Mende grammar including tone would never suspect that such an extensive study grew out of such a short period. The transcription used is quite accurate and her comments on tone were not to be improved upon for 30 years. The only word lists presented in the work are solely of a tonal nature consisting of groupings of words with the same tone pattern.

0.4. *AN INTRODUCTION OF THE STUDY OF MENDE* was published in 1944 by K. H. Crosby.<sup>5</sup> Long the standard for persons with an interest in Mende, this work contains word lists

<sup>1</sup> *SIERRA LEONE LANGUAGE REVIEW*, no. 1 (1962). *THE STRUCTURE OF SENTENCES IN MENDE* (1963) by Gordon Innes should be added to this work.

<sup>2</sup> Occasionally the definite marker i has the only high tone in a nominal, but this is all I can find to support this comment.

<sup>3</sup> *A HAND-BOOK OF THE MENDE LANGUAGE* (Government Printing Office, Freetown, 1917).

<sup>4</sup> Language Dissertation no. 20, Linguistic Society of America (1935).

<sup>5</sup> Cambridge (1944), with an introduction by Ida C. Ward.

