1. Introduction

This paper seeks to address two issues. First, it seeks to provide evidence against the claim that “West African languages are generally holding their own in the face of globalization and the homogenizing forces of the twenty-first century” (Blench 2007:156). Secondly, it contributes to the current debate on the issue of whether indigenous languages (Brenzinger, Heine & Sommer 1991, Grenoble & Whaley 1998, Mufwene 2003, Batibo 2005) or ex-colonial languages (Crystal 2000, Adegbija 2001), among others, pose the greatest threat to the continued existence of other indigenous languages in Africa. I examine the language situation in Sierra Leone as a case study and argue that both indigenous languages (Mende, Temne, Limba and Krio) and languages of colonization (English and French) as well as Arabic, equally pose a major threat to the survival of minority languages in Sierra Leone.

The paper is divided into four sections. In section 2, I present an overview of the language situation in Sierra Leone, mapping out languages that are viable, dead or facing threats of extinction. I then discuss the factors that militate against the continued existence of indigenous languages in Sierra Leone in section 3. Section 4 is the conclusion.

2. Languages of Sierra Leone: An overview

Sierra Leone is a multilingual West African country with a relatively small number of languages as compared to other African countries, like Nigeria or Ghana. According to Alie (1988), there are at least 17 ethnic groups (languages) in Sierra Leone. Table 1 illustrates some of these languages and the provinces in which they are predominantly spoken. Representatives of each of these languages are found in nearly all the districts and provinces in the country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predominant language group(s)</th>
<th>Province</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Temne, Limba, Koranka, Susu, Fula, Loko, Madingo, Yalunka</td>
<td>Northern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mende, Sherbro, Krim, Vai, Gola, Gallinas</td>
<td>Southern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kono, Kissi</td>
<td>Eastern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krio</td>
<td>Western area</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of these languages, Mende, Temne, Limba and Krio are the most dominant. According to the 1963 population census, people who speak Mende and Temne constitute the highest proportion of the population, with 30.9% of the population speaking Mende, while 29.8% speak Temne. Closely behind Temne and Mende is Limba, accounting for 8.4% of the population. Even though native speakers of Krio, an English-based Creole, form only 1.9% of the population, it still has sociolinguistic importance over other indigenous languages. It is the language used as lingua franca across the country.

2.1. Endangered vs. viable languages

Three criteria are generally considered when describing a language as endangered. These are: (1) the existing number of speakers of a language, (2) the mean age of native and/or fluent speakers, as well as (3) the percentage of the youngest generation acquiring fluency with the language in question. For the purpose of this paper, I will restrict myself to the criterion of the number of speakers who currently use
the language, since available statistics do not provide clear data about the mean age or percentage of the youngest generation that are acquiring the languages.

2.2 Number of speakers currently living

Table 2 illustrates statistics of the 2005 edition of Ethnologue as well as the 2004 population census, upon which the analyses in this paper are based.\(^1\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Languages</th>
<th>Ethnologue (2005)</th>
<th>2004 Census</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arabic</td>
<td>No estimate</td>
<td>1,402</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bassa</td>
<td>5,000 (1991)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banta</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bom</td>
<td>250 (1991)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullom</td>
<td>500 (1998)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dama</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>No estimate</td>
<td>975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>No estimate</td>
<td>542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fula</td>
<td>178,400 (1991)</td>
<td>180,613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gallinas</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gola</td>
<td>8,000 (1989)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kissi</td>
<td>40,000 (1995)</td>
<td>122,563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klaa</td>
<td>8,000 (1989)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kono</td>
<td>190,000 (1989)</td>
<td>212,562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krim</td>
<td>500 (1990)</td>
<td>7,734</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krio</td>
<td>472,600 (1993)</td>
<td>70,501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuranko</td>
<td>250,000 (1995)</td>
<td>202,699</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limba</td>
<td>335,000 (1989)</td>
<td>407,114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loko</td>
<td>115,000 (1989)</td>
<td>126,506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madingo</td>
<td>90,000 (1989)</td>
<td>117,166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mende</td>
<td>1,460,000 (1987)</td>
<td>158,7230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherbro</td>
<td>135,000 (1989)</td>
<td>111,652</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susu</td>
<td>120,000 (1989)</td>
<td>140,796</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temne</td>
<td>1,200,000 (1989)</td>
<td>1,568,977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vai</td>
<td>15,000 (1991)</td>
<td>2,501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yalunko</td>
<td>30,000 (2002)</td>
<td>34,780</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Blench (2007) states that a language with less than 1000 speakers in Africa is seriously endangered, while any language with over 50,000 speakers is not threatened. Accordingly, Bom (with only 250 speakers), Krim (with 500 speakers) and Bullom (with 500 speakers) are by the statistics of Ethnologue (2005) severely threatened. Gallinas, Banta and Dama are in fact dead. The rest of the languages including Temne, Mende, Kono, Krio and Limba are viable, while Gola (with 8,000 speakers), Klaa (8,000) and Bassa (5,000) have less than 10,000 remaining speakers and face the risk of extinction in the near future.

The 2004 census, which is the most recent population census, indicates that there are no L1 speakers of Bassa, Banta, Bom, Bullom, Dama, Gallinas, Gola, and Klaa. This is evident from the

\(^1\) A national population census is held every ten years in Sierra Leone. Unfortunately, detailed statistics of the 1963 and 1974 census are not accessible. Analysis of the 1985 census is available, but it lacks in-depth statistics on ethnicity. Questions pertaining to language were avoided as this might ignite tribal conflicts.

\(^2\) Statistics of the 2005 edition of Ethnologue were collected before the 2004 population census. The year in which the statistics for each language is collected is marked in the column under ethnologue in Table 2.
statistics of Ethnologue (2005). The dramatic fall in the number of L1 speakers of Gola and Klao strikes a note of concern. According to the statistics of Ethnologue (2005), each language had an L1 speaker population of 8000. The fact that they are extinct by 2004 suggests that the number of the remaining speakers of a language may not be relied upon to determine whether a language is at risk or not. What also matters is the attitude of the speakers towards their language.

A comparison of the number of L1 speakers of Vai based on the statistics of the 2005 edition of Ethnologue and the 2004 census shows a tremendous decline in the number of L1 speakers. By the 2004 census, Vai has only 2,501 remaining speakers. Following Blench (2007), any language with less than 3,000 speakers is potentially threatened. The fact that the majority of the remaining L1 speakers are above 60 years and that an infinitesimal percentage of children acquire it puts the language in a much more vulnerable position. It is likely that the number of people who speak Vai will continue to decrease, particularly when we consider that, like all minority languages, Vai has no or few social or economic opportunities to offer its speakers.

Given that the status of a language is determined by the social and economic opportunities that it offers its speakers (Crystal 2000, Grenoble & Whaley 1998), there is a tendency for speakers of Vai to continue to shift to privileged languages, like Mende in the region. Mende and Vai are in fact similar in structure. In addition, many words cut across the two languages, hence making language shift even easier. The swelling number of people who identify themselves as native speakers of Mende is therefore not a surprise.

So far, we have seen that languages such as Bassa, Banta, Bom, Bullom, Dama, Gola, Gallinas, and Klao are dead, while Vai is facing severe threats of extinction. Earlier researchers, including Brenzinger, Heine and Sommer (1991), Batibo (2005) and Childs (2007), have pointed out the threats looming around some of these languages. For example, in assessing the language situation in Sierra Leone, Batibo (2005:82) states, “there are two endangered languages: Bom and Krim. The extinct or nearly extinct languages are Bullom So, Banta and Dama”. The case of Bullom as a language facing extinction also appeared in Brenzinger (1992).

Languages such as Bassa, Banta, Bom, Bullom, Dama, Gola, Gallinas, Klao, and Vai, among others, share a number of commonalities. In terms of sociolinguistic and demographic importance, they are less significant. Moreover, they have no written tradition and are largely under-studied. In addition, they are not taught in schools, are less prestigious and have little or no social and economic gains to offer their users. Consequently, the percentage of youths learning these languages is usually very low in comparison with those acquiring privileged languages. Such disadvantages, which these languages encounter often, result in L1 speakers shifting to dominant languages in their region. This is exactly what we find in the case of Bassa, Banta, Bom, Bullom, Dama, Gola, Gallinas, Klao, and Vai, whose L1 speakers either are dead or have shifted and been assimilated into Mende, Temne or Krio.

So far we have seen that, contrary to the optimistic conclusion of Blench (2007), West African languages, as the case study from Sierra Leone reveals, are facing global problems of extinction just like any other languages in Africa or the world at large. A question arising from this is what are the forces that threaten the continued existence of these indigenous languages? In the next section, I will address this issue.

3. **Why are some Sierra Leonean languages dying?**

There are many reasons why languages die. According to Crystal (2000), natural disasters such as earthquakes, hurricanes, tsunamis, floods, volcanic eruptions, climatic conditions, droughts, famine, disease, and civil strife are potential causes of language death. Regarding Sierra Leone, there is the possibility that the civil war might have wiped out some of the vulnerable languages. In other words, the few remaining old and fragile speakers of languages like Bom that disappeared within the last ten years are likely to be among the people that lost their lives during the rebel war in the country. However, this is mostly speculative as there is no evidence to ascertain the veracity of this hypothesis.

Many researchers including Grenoble and Whaley (1998), Brenzinger, Heine and Sommer (1991), Batibo (2005) and Mufwene (2007) are of the view that indigenous languages of Africa are in fact the ‘killer languages’ that pose the most immediate threat to the continued existence of other indigenous languages. While this may be true of countries where an indigenous language is also the official
language, the situation in Sierra Leone, where the only official language is English, is quite different. Two forces equally threaten the survival of minority languages in Sierra Leone. The influence of dominant indigenous languages (Mende, Temne, Limba and Krio) as well as the influence of English, Arabic and French collectively impedes the survival of minority languages. In the next section, I will describe the impact that these languages have on minority languages.

3.1 The impact of dominant indigenous languages

As pointed out earlier, among the dominant indigenous languages in Sierra Leone are Mende, Temne, Limba and Krio. These languages enjoy a number of privileges denied to other languages. First, they are the most widely spoken indigenous languages in the country. According to the 2004 population census, 32.1% of the population speaks Mende, 31.8% speak Temne, 8% speak Limba, and 1.9% speak Krio. Thus, native speakers of the four languages alone constitute about 72% of the population of Sierra Leone.

Because of their sociolinguistic and demographic importance over other indigenous languages, the four languages are considered more suitable for use as lingua franca in the various regions in the country. For example, in the South and some parts of the Eastern province, Mende is the lingua franca. In the Northern province, Temne is the language heard in daily conversations, while Krio is the lingua franca in the Western area and the country as a whole.

Furthermore, both national and community radio broadcasts are in Mende, Temne, Limba and Krio. The government radio stations, for example, provide translations of the national news and public announcements only in the four languages. Private and community radio stations in the North, South, East, and in the Western area have programs mostly in Krio or the lingua franca in the region. Hence, FM stations such as Kiss 104 in Bo (South), Radio Maria in Makeni, and Radio Kolenten in Kambia (North), among others, broadcast mostly in Mende and Temne, to the entire exclusion of other languages in the region.

In 1993, the Ministry of Education, Youths and Sports introduced Temne, Mende, Krio and Limba in schools and colleges. The inclusion of these languages in the school curriculum inspired institutions like the Lekon Consultancies to embark on preparing reading materials in these languages. Similarly, the Institute for Sierra Leonean languages (TISLL) and the People Education Association (PEA) embarked on the collection of spoken data, preservation of audio recordings and producing reading materials on folk tales in the four languages. This drive created an avenue for the four languages to be documented and the means to be transmitted to future generations. Minority languages do not have these opportunities.

In addition, introducing languages in formal education makes them even more prestigious than other indigenous languages. Thus, a person who is competent in Krio, for example, is accorded high social status while a person who cannot communicate in the language is considered backward. To overcome the shame and inferiority associated with ignorance in these languages, rural populations that move to cities like Bo (South), Kenema (East), Makeni (North) and Freetown (Western area) often rush into speaking the lingua franca in the region. It soon became less of a surprise that people who speak Mende, Temne, Limba or Krio as a second language often deny any knowledge of their first language. The existence of unfavourable attitudes towards a language and its speakers is therefore a significant reason why members of a speech community abandon their language (Sasse 1992).

Furthermore, the inclusion of the four languages in the curriculum of schools and colleges adds economic momentum on these languages. Hence, for the first time, studying Temne, Mende, Limba or Krio, especially in the colleges, became a guarantee for a teaching career. Similarly, some indigenous language teachers seized the opportunity to boost their economic resources by writing and selling pamphlets and other reading materials in the four languages to complement the few textbooks in the bookstores. The massive influx of students in courses on these Sierra Leonean languages, especially in the teacher training colleges, is therefore not a surprise.

Moreover, Mende, Temne, Limba and Krio are languages upon which political power revolves. For instance, with the exception of the previous President, who is a native speaker of Madingo, all the other Heads of State and Prime Ministers are native speakers of Mende, Temne, Limba or Krio. Thus, people who speak these languages often realize gains such as appointments and promotion in the civil
service or other high positions in government depending on the government that is in power. These ‘incentives’ are not easily accessible to people who speak minority languages that are not languages of political power.

Equally, associations with a bias in a certain dominant language often emerge. One such association is the Akutay, a Limba-oriented association that gained prominence in the late 1980s following the rise to power of late President Joseph Saidu Momoh, who was a native speaker of Limba. People who wanted high political offices had no choice but to identify themselves with this ethnic group and language – a development that did no good to minority languages.

In their quest for social and economic survival, people who speak minority languages such as Vai, Krim, Gola, Bom or Sherbro, for example, often abandon their villages to resettle in communities where Mende is the lingua franca. Hence, Sindlinger and Seyi (1973:4), who visited a region in which they had expected to find 3,300 Gola speakers state:

Our journey into the Makepele Chiefdom of Sierra Leone disclosed some rather surprising facts. Where we had expected to find some 3,300 Gola speakers (according to the 1963 Sierra Leone census) in the general vicinity of a town called Zimi, we found virtually none. The very strong influence of the Mende people in the area has accounted for the assimilation of Gola speakers to Mende. At present, nearly 100% of the people, who once spoke Gola there, are now speaking Mende.

Childs (2007:5)

A similar situation is found in the Northern province where many people who speak Fula and Bullom have shifted to Temne because of the dominant role of Temne in the region. Similarly, many L1 speakers of Loko and Sherbro that live in and around Freetown have shifted to Krio. There is therefore no doubt about the increasing number of people who identify themselves with the Krio, Mende or Temne languages. Thus, language shift is one of the main causes of language death in Sierra Leone.

Nettle and Romaine (2000) identify two types of language shift: the case where the “shift is forced” on the speakers of other languages and “voluntary shift” where a community of people realize that they would be better off if they were to speak a language other than their L1. The shift from Gola, Vai or Sherbro to Mende or Krio is not forced on the people by any higher authority as exemplified in some parts of North America. The ‘force’ is intrinsic in the sense that speakers of these minority languages have considered the shift into the dominant languages in their region as a means through which they can improve their standard of living.

To sum up, the privileges that Mende, Temne, Limba and Krio enjoy partially account for the steady erosion of minority languages in Sierra Leone. Regarding indigenous languages, Krio is the most dominant language, followed by Mende or Temne, which are in turn followed by Limba. However, indigenous languages are not the only obstacle posing a threat to minority languages. The influence of English, French and Arabic is equally important. In the next section, I will describe the impact that these languages have on minority languages in the country.

3.2. The impact of foreign languages

Among the foreign dominant languages in Sierra Leone are English, French and Arabic. Mufwene (2002), who claims that English is not the most immediate threat to indigenous languages in Africa states:

Anyone who claims that the spread of English around the world endangers indigenous languages should explain how this is possible in countries where it is only a lingua franca of an elite minority but is barely spoken by the vast majority, or a large proportion, of the population.

(Mufwene 2002:8)
In what follows, I will describe the socio-economic importance of English in Sierra Leone. To begin with, there is no doubt that English is a lingua franca of only the elite minority in Sierra Leone. Nonetheless, English enjoys a number of privileges that other indigenous languages do not have. It is the language of imperialism and has been the only official language of Sierra Leone since 1808 when Sierra Leone was declared a British crown colony.

As an official language, English is the only language of instruction in schools and colleges. It is compulsory in schools and is generally the only language allowed on school premises. In some schools, students who speak indigenous languages within the school premises are punished. English is also a prerequisite for admission to schools and colleges. Students who have a pass in indigenous languages but a fail in English are often denied admission to colleges, whereas those who have a pass in English, but a fail in indigenous languages are guaranteed admission. Such policies only reinforce the existing notion that English is more important than indigenous languages.

Moreover, English is the only language used in the civil service, courts, parliament and all formal settings. For example, the President’s speeches are always in English, with translations in Mende, Temne, Limba and Krio. This situation seems to cut off people who speak only minority languages from national issues. The Constitution of Sierra Leone, traffic road signs, prescriptions in hospitals, among others, are all in English. It is also the only language used in the print media.

Furthermore, being an international language that is widely spoken in the world, English enjoys more prestige than indigenous languages. At the university in Freetown, studying English is associated with honour and wisdom on the part of the learner whereas studying indigenous languages is not. Similarly, a university degree in English is admired more than a university degree in indigenous languages. Thus, unlike indigenous languages, competence in English is in fact a symbol of high education in Sierra Leone. Thus, the prestige and enviable social status associated with English further strengthen the need for English rather than indigenous languages.

In addition, competence in the English language gives the highest assurance of a better life in Sierra Leone. For example, all appointments in the civil service and other government offices are based on one’s knowledge of English. People who cannot read or write in English are not qualified for standard jobs in society. Such people are either self-employed or take up menial jobs in the civil service that earn them mediocre wages, while those who are literate in English take up well-paid jobs in the civil service or Non-Government Organizations. The ability to travel to countries like the UK or America, where Sierra Leoneans often go to seek greener pastures, is also exclusively determined by one’s ability to read and write in English. Such is the status of English in Sierra Leone that everyone sees it as the surest means to a better life.

Considering the extent to which English has entrenched itself in Sierra Leone, one is of the impression that it will forever remain dominant over all other languages in the country. Oyetade and Fashole-Luke (2007) have expressed a similar view that English is unlikely to disappear completely from use in various formal domains of life given its long history of sociolinguistic importance, international integrity and educational influence. Thus, indigenous languages including Krio, the most widely spoken indigenous language, have lost the competition to English, as it is the surest socio-economic guarantor.

In the homes of many elites in Sierra Leone, English is the only medium of communication. This is because the parents are aware of the opportunities associated with competence in English. Children who grow up in such homes inevitably acquire English as their first language rather than the indigenous languages of their parents. This undermines the acquisition of indigenous languages and their transmission to a future generation of speakers. Similarly, in many grade A primary schools, where such children usually attend, the lessons are exclusively in English rather than the native languages of their parents. Therefore, the children’s knowledge of English is reinforced and the children usually end up speaking only English. Thus, the socio-economic benefits that English offers contribute to the abandonment of indigenous languages.

Equally eating into the fabric of the linguistic spectrum in Sierra Leone is French. Unlike English, French is not an official language, though it is a prestigious language taught in schools and colleges as a second language. Owing to the relatively low number of French instructors in the country, incentives such as higher salaries and better learning opportunities are offered to people in French pedagogy. Such facilities are not open to students studying indigenous languages. This situation puts indigenous
languages at a disadvantage. One should not be surprised at the mass enrolment of students in French classes such as those organized by Alliance Française in Freetown.

To sum up, French and English have overwhelming advantages over indigenous languages in Sierra Leone. The two languages are more prestigious than indigenous languages. In addition, they have snatched an enviable socio-economic position from indigenous languages. In his assessment of the socio-economic impact of ex-colonial languages on indigenous languages, Adegbija (2001:285) states:

The very presence of European languages and the disproportionate prestige associated with them … is a major threat to African languages…. The official dominance of ex-colonial languages is therefore a potent language-shifting trigger constantly pulled by the desire of every individual to rise to the vertical and horizontal social and economic ladder.

African elites, who develop the curriculum of schools and colleges, are in fact aware of the socio-economic importance of ex-colonial languages like English. Hence, as I stated earlier, English is compulsory in schools whereas indigenous languages are optional. Thus, the socio-economic advantage that English has over indigenous languages is an important reason why indigenous languages are being abandoned.

Another language that also threatens the survival of indigenous languages in Sierra Leone is Arabic. Arabic is the official language of Islam, one of the two dominant religions in Sierra Leone. Many Muslims prefer to learn Arabic rather than indigenous languages. This is because they believe that it is the only medium of communication in the world hereafter. Some are convinced that literacy in Arabic is a prerequisite for admission to paradise. Hence, many people prefer to learn Arabic rather than indigenous languages.

In addition, Arabic is a prestigious language in Muslim communities in Sierra Leone. A person who could recite a couple of Kuranic verses or preside over a Friday congregation prayer is accorded more esteem in society than a praise singer in any indigenous language. Sierra Leoneans literate in Arabic carry titles like ‘sheik’, meaning ‘Muslim scholar’ – an enviable honourable title in society.

Moreover, Arabic is important economically. It became a subject in some government schools in the country long before indigenous languages were introduced in schools in 1993. It is compulsory in Muslim schools. In addition to public schools, Arabic is taught privately in Muslim homes as well as in the various Muslim holy places across the country. Therefore, there is an increasing number of people that are literate in Arabic in the country.

Furthermore, there are Arabic colleges in strategic locations in the country where Arabic instructors and Muslim clergy are trained. Scholarships for higher education in Arabic are most often available for people who want to pursue Arabic studies in universities overseas. Returning graduates automatically become well-paid missionaries in the country. These opportunities are not open to speakers of indigenous languages. Hence, as Mufwene (2002) puts it, “…shifting to a particular language is typically associated with particular benefits to be derived from its usage, especially economic benefits” (p. 19). The reason why many people in Sierra Leone choose to learn Arabic instead of minority languages is therefore obvious.

To summarize, in the previous sections I describe the status of dominant indigenous languages and ex-colonial languages, including Arabic in Sierra Leone. I show that the prestige and economic opportunities associated with English, French and Arabic contribute to the desertion of minority languages. In other words, speakers of minority languages already see their languages as inferior to Mende, Temne, Limba and Krio, which are in turn inferior to English, Arabic and French. Thus, minority languages occupy a third class position in Sierra Leone. This situation undermines the need for children to acquire minority languages and the continued survival of indigenous languages in the country.
4. Conclusion

In this paper, I describe the language situation in Sierra Leone with a view to mapping out languages that are dead and those that are facing threats of extinction. I show that languages like Bassa, Banta, Bom, Bullom, Dama, Gola, Gallinas, and Klao are either dead or have no L1 speakers, while Vai is facing severe threats of extinction. I then describe the impact of dominant indigenous languages and ex-colonial languages and conclude that both sets of languages are equally responsible for the death or risk that minority languages encounter.

The death of minority languages in Sierra Leone has far-reaching consequences. Languages like Bom, Krim and Sherbro are spoken only in Sierra Leone. They are similar to what Harmon (2002) refers to as “endemic species”. The death of these languages therefore has more impact than the loss of Vai, Gallinas, Gola, and Klao, which are also spoken in neighbouring Liberia. Given this scenario, the loss of Vai, Gallinas, Gola, and Klao is not absolute if viewed from a global perspective.

The disappearance of languages like Bassa, Banta, Bom, Bullom, Dama, Gola, Gallinas, and Klao is an enormous loss to linguists. These languages have features that attract linguistic research. For example, they are tonal languages, and some of them have a noun class system and rich verbal morphology. Equally important is the fact that some of these languages have features that are rare in other languages. For example, Childs (2007) who has been working on the revitalization of Bom and Krim states that both languages have split predicate structures (Subject-Aux-Object-Verb) – a feature that is rare across languages. However, the situation is not entirely gloomy, as attempts to revitalize some of the languages have begun. One such project is T. Childs’ documentation project (http://www.pdx.edu/childs/), which aims at documenting Bom and Krim. Similar projects to revitalize the other languages can be embarked upon, given the necessary logistic support.

References


