

Note on current use of Manding and Mande ethnonyms and linguonyms

There is a lot of variation in use of terminology for Mande peoples and languages in scholarly publications which causes a serious nuisance in any branch of knowledge and leading to all kind of misunderstandings. I would like to take advantage of the forum provided by the MANSA Newsletter to discuss this problem in what concerns particularly the name for the cluster Mandinka-Maninka-Bamana-Jula-Dafin.

The actual situation in the use of terms is as follows. There are (at least) two main traditions – European and North-American.

The principal difference is that in Europe, "Manden" (or, in French spelling, Manding, Mandingue) is used for the group including Bamana-Maninka-Mandinka-Jula-Dafin, and "Mande" – for the larger family (i.e. , Manden + all other groups: South-Western Mande, Soninke-Bozo, Susu-Jalonke, Eastern Mande). The term "Manden/Manding" is by origin the name of the core zone of cultural orientation for all ethnic groups speaking mutually intelligible (or almost so) languages and having, at the same time, the idea of descent from the Ancient Mali. "Mande" is an artificial creation of European scholars; it was first used in mid-19th century by Siegismund Koelle and fixed in its today's "European" meaning by Maurice Delafosse. This form is obtained by the dropping off the final nasal of the word "Manden"¹; it is not used by speakers of these languages – except for some Bamana or Jula-Konya dialects where the final nasal can be omitted in the citation form, but not in combined words. In fact, this terminology reflects the "monocentric" (from the socio-linguistic point of view) vision of the Mande family: Manden/Manding group is considered as "central" within the family, and all other languages are "peripheral", "tributaries", "not quite Manding, but still Mande". However imperfect, this usage allows distinguishing between two notions, as long as the small final nasal is not disregarded.

In the "American tradition", the "core group" of the Mande language family (Bamana-Maninka-Jula-Mandinka-Dafin) is named "Mandekan". This term was introduced by Charles Bird (for the first time in his 1968 article in "Journal of West African Languages; I am grateful to Joseph Lauer for this and other references). In fact, the word "Mandekan" is an artificial creation: in any language of the group, a nasal cannot be omitted within a complex word, and before *-kan* the stem in question is obligatorily pronounced as *Manden*. "Mandekan" combines a real morpheme *-kan* "language" and an artificial word "Mande".

This would not be worthy discussing (there are lots of artificial ethno- and linguonyms in Africa), unless this dropping of the final nasal element would not lead to all sort of confusion. Now, American authors, especially non-linguists, tend to omit *-kan* (because they are know that this means "language") and to use just "Mande" for the entity Maninka-Bamana-Jula-Mandinka-Dafin; when they have to mention other languages of the broader family (or ethnic groups speaking these languages), they look for something else, and often enough it is "Manden" or "Manding" which they find. So, we can observe uses which are inverse to the practice long-established in the Europe. Or, sometimes, "Mande" or "Mandekan" is used for the languages, and "Manding" for their speakers, which creates an illusion that the final nasal in this stem is a sort of noun-class marker, something like *ba-* or *wa-* in Bantu languages.

I repeat: this situation is especially detrimental for non-linguists who use to be lost in the multitude of resembling terms which are employed in different (sometimes inverse) ways – the more so that this confusion is added to a real confusion existing in ethno- and linguonyms in the Mande area. An effort is necessary to unify the usage before we definitively stop understanding each other.

It is not a question of "who is right and who is wrong", but of pure convention: specialists should just agree between themselves, use terms in a uniform way, and stop confusing each other with eccentricities in this sphere. I see three possible ways of such unification:

1. Americans embrace the European usage: "Manden/Manding" (probably, the form Manding is preferable for the reason of the French priority) – for the branch Maninka-Bamana-Jula-Mandinka-Dafin, "Mande" for the whole family (including Manding).

2. Europeans embrace the American usage: "Mandekan" for the branch Maninka-Bamana-Jula-Maninka-Dafin, and something like "Greater Mande" (?) for the whole family. However, Americans should agree first between themselves on the exact meaning of each term.

3. The term "Manden" with all imaginable phonetic/dialectal variants (Manding, Mandingue, Mandingo, Mandekan, Mande...) is reserved for the branch Maninka-Bamana-Jula-Mandinka-Dafin, and another term is invented for the entire family.

To my mind, the best solution would be the third one: it allows to avoid confusion caused by presence or absence of the final nasal, and, on the other hand, subdues the "monocentrism" which has rather socio-historic than linguistic background: from the linguogenetic point of view, the branch Maninka-Bamana etc. has a status comparable to that of the South-Western Mande subgroup or the San language/dialect cluster (the latter seems to be even more internally divergent than Manding). In fact, the use of the term "Mande" for the whole family is something like if Indo-European family would be named "Germanoid" or "Celtoid" family. However, this choice is hardly realistic: the term "Mande" is well implanted, and it would be hardly possible to convince everybody to accept a completely new one.

¹ It is a result of an erroneous segmentation of the form *Mandenka* 'inhabitant of the Manden region' by S. Koelle – *Mande-nka* instead of *Manden-ka*. *-ka* (and not **-nka!*) is a suffix meaning "inhabitant, dweller".

Therefore, the first solution seems to me the most sound ("Manding" for the continuum Bamana-Maninka-Mandinka-Jula-Dafin and Mande for the whole family; the term "Mandingo" should be avoided in scholarly publications because of its polysemy, see below). I opt for this not because I am a European myself, but for several other reasons.

First, the European usage is more ancient – and in such questions as the use of terms this factor is primordial, unless the new terminology is more harmonious and easy to handle (which, it seems to me, not the case of the American usage under discussion).

Second, we have to recognize that even if we do not care much about languages and are interested exclusively in historical processes and cultural phenomena, – anyway, the ethnonyms and the most currently used classifications of ethnic groups are linguistically-based. Therefore, in this field linguists' opinion (and more precisely, the opinion of specialists in comparative Mande linguistics) cannot be disregarded. Unfortunately, it is a sad truth that today in the US and Canada, research work in the Mande linguistics is in decline: most of scholars of the first generation of American Mande linguists are now retired, and younger researchers specialize mainly in history and verbal art. (I do not speak here about missionaries and other Americans working practically in the Mande area – however valuable is their contribution into Mande studies, it lies most often aside the academic tradition and cannot substitute it). In Europe, though a certain decline is also visible, it is not so pronounced as in North America. To the point: the only periodical on Mande linguistics, "Mandenkan", is being published in Paris.²

To conclude, I shall draw a list of Manding languages and adjacent Northern Mande languages with some comments concerning dangerous points where confusion is possible because of similar or even identical names for different languages.

Manding is, from the genetic point of view, a small sub-branch within the Western (in some classifications, Northern) group of the Mande language family. It is a linguistic continuum with linguistic distance between its extreme representatives slightly overpassing the limit of mutual intelligibility of around 90 common words in the 100-word list of Swadesh.³ There are no clear-cut limits within this continuum, so the traditionally distinguished languages (or dialects) "Bambara, Malinke, Dioula", etc. are in fact subcontinua smoothly flowing into each other. In the contact areas of these subcontinua, linguonyms and ethnonyms often lack stability and are sometimes interchangeable. Let us overview, without too many detail, the five subcontinua constituting Manding, and consider current linguonyms used for them.

1.1. Bamana (Bambara in the French tradition; for the current use and etymology of this term see the *bàmanà* entry in my "Manding-English Dictionary: Maninka, Bamana. Vol. 1"). According to the "Ethnologue-13" reference book, it is spoken as the first language by ca. 3 million people, mainly in Mali; the number of its second-language speakers can be roughly estimated at 4 million.⁴ Within Bamana, the main difference lies today between the "urban Bamana", serving the basis for "standard Bamana" and pretty close to the "interethnic Jula" of Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina, and rural dialects, which are very diverse.

1.2. The Maninka of Guinea-Conakry and Mali (Manding region, Siby, etc.). In fact, the Maninka dialect of the Manding region is in many points closer to the "Standard Bamana" than to Maninka-Mori (Manenka) of Guinea (Bamako being placed on the boundary between Bamana and Maninka areas, its dialect is strongly influenced by the neighbouring Maninka dialects), and there is a tendency among Malian Maninka to identify themselves with Bamana. The most visible distinctive features of Maninka-Mori (which is growing to be a sort of "Standard Maninka" for Guinea) are: dropping of intervocalic velars (*-g- or *-k-); existence of the sound *gb*; intervocalic *-d-* (in variation with *-r-*) corresponding to *-t-* in Mandinka and *-r-* in Bamana. The number of speakers is estimated by the "Ethnologue" to be more than 3.4 millions (in that reference book Maninka are divided into "Maninka" and "Malinke"; this division does not seem to be appropriate), of these about two millions live in Guinea and the rest are mainly in Mali, although there is a visible Maninka presence in Sierra Leone, Liberia. There is also a considerable number of second-language speakers of Maninka in Guinea, but their number is difficult to evaluate.

² 1. A great deal of linguistic work on Mande languages is being done actually by African scholars in Mali, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire, etc., but their priorities lie in more practical spheres (elaboration of vocabulary, perfecting of orthography, synchronic description of languages and dialects), and their publications concerning the whole linguistic family, over the state boundaries, are yet to come.

³ In dissertations by K. Bimson (1978) and R. Long (1971), which are most often referred to in what concerns lexicostatistics for Mande, this figure ranges about 80 words for Manding ("Mandekan"), but their figures (especially that of Long) are always heavily understated. So, for the pair of languages "Bambara-Vai" Long provides the figure of 57 words, Bimson – 75 words (my tentative calculation: 78–79 words); for "Bamana – Maninka" Long has 94 cognates (no calculation by Bimson; my calculation for the pair "Maninka-Mori – Bamana-Bamako" gives 98 cognates), etc. This underestimation of closeness between Mande languages derives, on one hand, from unreliability of data used by these authors, and, on the other, from well-known deficiencies of the Maurice Swadesh's lexicostatistical method, of which most serious is the lack of clearness in treatment of synonyms. More sophisticated lexicostatistical methods (e.g., that of Sergei Starostin or by Konstantin Pozdniakov) are yet to be applied to Mande.

⁴ Being the principal local language in Mali, it is spoken by not less than 70% of the population of the country. Unfortunately, the census figures are not to be relied upon; it is evident that in many regions they are systematically 25–50% below the real number of population. Therefore, when the 1998 census gives 9,790,492 for the population of Mali, in reality it can exceed 12 millions. The number of Bamana speakers should be modified correspondingly.

1.3. The North-Western subcontinuum includes Mandinka (also Mandinko, Mandingo – in Gambia-Senegal-Guinea-Bissau. NB: this term is used in a different meaning in Sierra Leone and Liberia!), Jahanka, Kagoro, Khassonka, Maninka of Eastern Senegal and Mali to the North-West of Kita. The main distinctive feature of this subbranch is a 5-vowel system (there is no opposition between open and closed *e* and *o*) – while in most other Manding languages and dialects there are 7 vowels. It should be added that the main criterion for grouping these languages into a distinct subcontinuum lies at the phonological level: e.g., Khassonka is close to Mandinka in its phonology, while its vocabulary is closer to Bamana. The number of Mandinka speakers totals 914,000 ("Ethnologue-13"), of these 350,000 live in Gambia, 450,000 in Senegal, 120,000 in Guinea-Bissau. The number of Khassonke speakers is estimated by the "Ethnologue-13" in 120 000 (cf. my estimation: between 150,000 and 200,000 in the First Region of Mali and Bamako). The number of Kagoro must be close to 30,000, of these hardly a half speak their mother tongue. The number of the "5-vowel Maninka" speakers is difficult to establish; in censuses they are not distinguished from speakers of the "7-vowel Maninka".

1.4. The term Julia (Dioula) covers several realities.

1.4.1. There is an "interethnic Julia" (tagbusi-kan) of Côte-d'Ivoire and Burkina, only slightly different from the "Standard Bamana" and absolutely mutually intelligible with it. In fact, it can be considered a "regional variant" of Bamana (like American or Australian variants of English).

1.4.2. There are about 25 local idioms in Côte-d'Ivoire (Julia of Kong, Mauka, Nigbikan, Worodugukan, Koyagakan, Korokan...); very variable and representing a continuum, they are generally also referred to as "Julia". This dialect continuum disrespects state boundaries and stretches to the Forest Guinea (Konyanka) and Liberia (Manya).

The number of first-language speakers of "Julia" is estimated by the "Ethnologue" to be 1 million in Burkina Faso and about 1.5 millions in Côte-d'Ivoire; the number of second-language speakers is estimated to be between 3 and 4 millions in Burkina only. There are indications that about a half of the total population of Côte-d'Ivoire understands interethnic Julia to some degree; therefore, the number of second-language speakers in this country can be estimated to be 3.5 millions. Therefore, the total number of Julia speakers in these two countries may total 10 millions, including 2.5 millions for whom it is the mother tongue.

1.4.3. In Côte-d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso, a speaker of any Manding language is currently called "Julia", and any Manding language is regarded as "Julia".

1.5. Marka-Dafin of the frontier region of Mali and Burkina is a dialect/language cluster including such idioms as Bon/Bolon, Marka, Dafin, Meeka, and also "Maninka" (NB: it is not at all the same thing as Maninka of Guinea or of the Manding region!). The number of Marka-Dafin speakers is estimated at about 200,000 in Burkina and 25,000 in Mali.

The total number of speakers of Manding languages must be well over 20 million, of which about half are mother-tongue speakers.

When dealing with the Manding languages and peoples, one should pay special attention to the correct use of ethnonyms and linguonyms. **One aspect** of this problem lies in coincidence and similarity of names for different entities. Some of these cases have already been mentioned: different meanings of "Julia"; different meanings of "Maninka" (including the "Maninka" dialect belonging to the Marka-Dafin cluster); different meanings of "Bamana/Bambara". There are some other cases worthy mentioning.

The term "Mandingo" is currently used in Liberia and Sierra Leone just in the same way as "Julia" in Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina, i.e., it is applied to any Manding language and Manding-speaker. It can be easily confused with Mandinka (or *Màndinkoo*, *Màndingoo*, if used with the article), the principal language of the North-West Manding subbranch.⁵

"Marka" is a current Manding word for Soninke people and language, and in the area to the east of Segou it is also used for Bozo. Together with Marka-Dafin, it makes three homonymic ethnonyms.

The closest to Manding within the Northern (Western) group is the branch Kuranko-Lele-Mogofin-Kakabe, next to them being Vai-Kono; one of main criteria setting these language aside Manden are correspondences "*k* in Vai-Kuranko – *s* in Manding", like in *nika* – *nisi* 'cow', *kila* – *sila/sira* 'road', and "initial *s* in Vai-Kuranko – *l* in Maninka-Mandinka-Jula, *d* in Bamana", like in *sa* – *la/da* 'to put' (Kuranko-Lele are inconsequent in this relation). Besides, Vai-Kono and Kuranko-Lele etc. have noun morpheme *-e/-i*, which is not attested in the Manding languages. Another branch of Northern (Western) Mande which is close enough to Manding but distinct from it is the Jogo cluster (known also as Ligbi, Numu, Hwela) in Côte-d'Ivoire and Western Ghana. As for other Northern (Western) Mande languages, there seems to be no question of assimilating them to Manding, so I am not going to discuss them here: of them, only Mende is sometimes erroneously attached in non-linguistic publications to the Manding because of its sounding, though it is a language of South-Western Mande group (other members of this group are: Looma/Toma, Kpelle/Guerze, Loko, Bandi).

⁵ Most probably, the term "Mandingo" was transmitted to Sierra Leone and Liberia by Englishmen from Gambia (or by Portuguese from Senegambia at more ancient period), so it comes back to the same origin.