

# KRIO

## LANGUAGE & CULTURE

Krio is an English-based creole language. The word Krio comes from the word creole. It is thought that Krio might have developed as a pidgin language when the liberated slaves of various African language groups tried to communicate with each other. But later it has become nativized when descendants of the first settlement group claimed Krio as their first language. Krio also has lots of second language speakers. Even though the official language is English, Krio is the formal language for the majority of Sierra Leoneans who cannot speak English.

A striking feature of Krio is that at least 80 percent of its vocabulary is derived from a single language, English. For example, *no* means “know,” *gud* means “good” and *redi* means “be ready” in Krio. Although it shares lots of characteristics with English in phonology, syntax, and semantics, it has some differences as well. One of them is that Krio is an aspect-oriented language in contrast with English, which is a tense-oriented language. That is, the most important grammatical distinction in the Krio is between what appear to be the perfective and imperfective aspects. Unlike English, the tense is a secondary distinction in Krio.

Since Krio and English are very similar and differ from each other at the same time, some teachers are concerned that Krio interferes with the children’s learning of English. Children, especially those in urban areas, are caught up in a situation in which outside the classroom they speak Krio, while inside the classroom they speak English because it is the medium of instruction at all levels of the educational system. When linguistic difficulties arise in the classroom, however, teachers sometimes resort to the use of the Krio language to bring notions “down-to-earth.”

## STUDYING KRIO IN THE U.S.

Below is a list of some of the universities in the United States that currently offer Krio. For more information, please contact the National African Language Resource Center, or check the NALRC web site, located at <http://www.nalrc.indiana.edu>

Michigan State University



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MINSTREL PLAYING INSTRUMENT

NATIONAL AFRICAN LANGUAGE  
RESOURCE CENTER (NALRC)

## WHY STUDY KRIO?

Krio is one of the major languages spoken in Sierra Leone, which is in western Africa bordering the Atlantic Ocean and between Guinea and Liberia. In Sierra Leone, English is an official language, but its regular use is limited to a literate minority. Krio is widely used as the main language of the people who are not English-literate. As a result, you need to speak Krio in order to communicate with the large majority of people in Sierra Leone.

Krio is very interesting for academic scholars as well as for travelers. For example, it provides valuable insights to the linguists who study pidgins and creoles. For the purpose of communicating with the people of various ethnic groups, Krio was first created by the repatriated slaves who settled down in Freetown. As their children acquired it as their first language, Krio developed into a creole.

Sociolinguists may be interested in the usage of Krio as well. In Sierra Leone, several indigenous languages such as Mende and Temne are spoken together with Krio. Most of Sierra Leones, however, choose which language they are going to use depending on the situation.

Finally, the history of the Krios may attract the historians who are interested in African history, especially, African slave history. As already mentioned, their history is unique in that the Krios are the descendants of the liberated slaves across the African countries. If you want to collect the historical data from them, you will need to learn their language, Krio.

## WHO SPEAKS KRIO?

### PEOPLE AND HISTORY

Krio is spoken in Sierra Leone and also around Banjul in the Bambia as well as on the island of Ngueyma Byogo in Equatorial Guinea. Of the 4,000,000 Krio speakers, only 10% are first language speakers and the remainder speak it as their second language. The first language speakers are mainly descendents of repatriated slaves from Jamaica. They primarily live in Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, so Krio is used as a lingua franca around Freetown.

Sierra Leone was one of the first African countries that had contacts with Europe, and one of the first West African British colonies. In 1787, the British made Freetown a refuge for freed slaves. 400 freed men came from Great Britain to Freetown with a hope that they could have their home but disease and hostility from the indigenous people eliminated the first group of the freed men. A new settlement was attempted by around 1000 slaves in 1792. Later 500 free blacks from Jamaica joined them. This new colony had been controlled by the Sierra Leone Company, but in 1808 the British government took over Freetown from the company. Between 1808 and 1864, almost 50,000 liberated slaves settled at Freetown.

When the freed men first settled in Freetown, they started imitating British styles of life cut off from their homes and traditions. As they differentiated themselves from Europeans, however, they started to feel more empathy with other black Africans. They also questioned their previous assimilation of European ways and tried to reexamine their own selves and search for their own cultural identity. Now the Krio people are developing their own culture just as they created their own language, Krio.



Memorial Celebration.



Krio woman in traditional clothes.



Thatched shelter.