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Some Terms From Liberian Speech

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1979

by

Warren L. d'Azevedo

As Revised and Enlarged

by

Michael Evan Gold

1979

Professor d'Azevedo's Introduction

Like many rapidly changing countries in the world, Liberia's unique history and complex society has created a culture of great variety and richness. Since the early 1940's, the program of social development and national unification instituted by President William V. S. Tubman has increased the momentum of internal change and the sharing of many traditions among the peoples of this West African nation.

This book is intended to provide an introduction of Liberian culture for the foreign visitor by means of a survey of certain terms and phrases of Liberian speech which may be unfamiliar. The glossary which follows is far from comprehensive, and the author is fully aware that such a list could be expanded indefinitely and still fail to embrace the profusion of material which might be included. The terms which have been included are those which appear in the spoken and written English of Liberia and in the literature concerning the area. Many of the usages are common to the French, Portuguese, Spaning, and English-speaking regions of Africa and were introduced during different phases of contact between African and European peoples. Others are terms which have emerged from scholarly study and classification of the West African natural and cultural environment. Still others have appeared under the influence of specific American dialects, as well as of the numerous indigenous languages and customs of this section of the West African coast. The colorful and highly expressive idiom which has resulted is as important for the intimate communication of Liberian culture as is the popular idiom of the United States for understanding the nuances of American life.

Orthography

The terms and phrases presented in the glossary of this work . . . are written in the standard spelling of

Liberian usage or of the literature of the area. Where common English words appear, no attempt is made to show dialectic variation in pronunciation unless such variation is common and general. Underlined (or italicized) words are those which may be unfamiliar to the foreign visitor, or whose pronunciation may not be indicated by the spelling of conventional orthography. Where possible, variations in spelling are shown

It must be pointed out here that considerable dialectic variation obtains from section to section in Liberia, and the reader may come upon quite different variations in the course of his own experience. There is as much variation in Liberian speech patterns and usages as there is in the United States or any other ethnically and culturally diverse nation. There is also individual variation of usage that one may not find to be general, but more the effect of creative and expressive manipulation of language much as one will find anywhere in the world. As the author considers the research on which this work is based to be a continuing and long-range project, any criticisms or additional data offered by others would be most welcome.

Acknowledgments

There are a number of persons and sources to which the author is indebted for stimulation and aid in the preparation of this work. An early precursor of the present book was a list of fifty terms entitled "Some Liberian English Usages," prepared by William Welmers and Warren d'Azevedo in 1962 for the first Peace Corps Project in Liberia. An expanded version of this list was prepared by the present author in 1966 for the Peace Corps Training Program through the encouragement of Richard Sovde and other members of the staff of the Peace Corps office in Monrovia. The enthusiastic interest and dedication of John Sills, Director of the Peace Corps in Liberia during 1966 and 1967, and his respect for the culture of the

Liberian peoples did much to provide the author with the incentive for presenting the work contained in these pages. A number of Peace Corps Volunteers also made contributions at that time by sending materials which they had collected in the country during the course of their service. These contributors were Stanley Perelman, Michael Angstreich, Evelyn Prentice, Michael Keller, Peter Baker, James Buehner, Jaki Frey, and Michael Frey.

A special note of acknowledgment is due to the author's close friends and colleagues in Liberia. Bai T. Moore and Jangaba M. Johnson, now of the Liberian Department of Information and Cultural Affairs, have been, throughout the years, a source of inspiration and guidance in the understanding of their country and its peoples. Their own works, as ethnographers and observers of Liberian culture, will stand among the pioneering efforts of Liberian scholarship. There are many others whom the author should like to mention for their friendship and aid, but space does not permit. There is one other, however, who must not be omitted. Isaac J. Karnley has been a most loyal friend and meticulous interpreter of his culture since the author first set foot on African shores, and to him is owed the major part of gratitude.

Particular credit is extended to Mrs. Alma Smith for her careful typing and editing of the manuscript of this work. The Social Science Research Council and the Ford Foundation have supported the research of which this work is a partial product.

The following references have been of special aid to the author as sources of some of the material presented here:

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Dedication

To the future of the vigorous culture of Liberia and its peoples.

Warren L. d'Azevedo
Chairman, Department of
Anthropology
University of Nevada
December, 1967.

Gold's Introduction

I enjoy speaking and listening to Liberian English. It is an active, alive, poetical language. Words that are passive in American English are active in Liberian English. Words that are only specific and concrete in American English are metaphorical in Liberian English. I suppose that part of the reason is that Liberian English makes use of fewer words than American English, so that each word must do as much work as possible, stretch to as many cases as conceivable. Not everyone who comes to Liberia likes its spoken language. Many persons find that it is imprecise, and others resent that their own tongue is changed (they would say abused) by the Liberians. I have no quarrel or criticism for these persons, though I believe that their objections to the way Liberians speak are a disguise for their true feelings about the Liberian people. For if the face is the mirror of the mind, language is the door to it. If one learns to speak a foreign language well, he has also acquired considerable insight into the heart of the people who speak it naturally. There are always idioms that cannot be translated from one language to another; these reflect the points at which cultures diverge from one another, at which one must learn another man's ways or forever remain distant from him. Studying Liberian English is tantamount to studying the Liberian people.

I have undertaken to revise Warren d'Azevedo's Some Terms from Liberian Speech to create a reference work that will help Peace Corps Volunteers break into Liberian life. I hesitate to call my work a dictionary because I have not attempted to include all the words used by Liberians and because I have refused to limit myself merely to recording the meanings of words. Instead, I have been guided by my image of the great lexicographers, men who knew that some words are more valuable than others and that these may need more than a single synonym to define them. I think particularly of Henry Fowler, and occasionally of

Ambrose Bierce. And so I have laced this work with anecdotes. The reader will surely tire of reading of my experiences, but I believe he will find in each tale an accurate usage of the word under which it falls, and a context to which to refer the word. This is the way I learned what I know of Liberian English: I would remember a situation, and the strange word with it, and after enough situations all turning on the same word accumulated in my mind, I had the meaning of the word. See, for example, so-so and the two different situations that taught me its meaning.

Above I wrote that I revised d'Azevedo's dictionary; actually, I have mostly copied and added to it. As I read his entries, I came to one of the following judgments: (1) I have never heard this term before. (2) I have heard the term and d'Azevedo has correctly defined and adequately illustrated it. In these two cases (in the second I include d'Azevedo's anthropological, botanical, historical, political, and zoological entries), I have simply reproduced his entries. (3) I know the term, and d'Azevedo's comment is correct but additional comment might be helpful. (4) I know the term, and in my hearing it was used differently than d'Azevedo indicates. In these cases, I have reproduced d'Azevedo's entries and added my comments below them. (5) I know the term, and I believe that d'Azevedo's entry is wrong or misleading. In this case, I have rewritten the entry entirely and prefaced it with a plus sign, as I have likewise prefaced my comments and my own entries. I regret that I could not consult with Professor d'Azevedo on this work. I met him during my training program in 1967, but during the three years I spent in Liberia, and especially during these last months when I have been at work on this dictionary, I have not spoken to or corresponded with him. I suppose that the second failure could have been remedied, and the fault is mine. At any rate, I trust the reader will understand that this is the unauthorized revision of d'Azevedo's dictionary, and that d'Azevedo himself will recognize that

we have worked towards a common goal, and forgive me.

As the reader goes through the potpourri of my new entries, he may not accept my assertion that I have adhered to certain (or uncertain) editorial principles. First, I have included terms that are present in Liberian but not in American English; to the extent that these are used, Liberian English is a foreign language to Americans. See, for instance, boc-boc. Second, I have included terms that are in form (that is, the word is) present in both languages, but the Liberian meaning differs from the American. See want. Third, I have included terms that are present in both languages, that have the same meaning in both languages, but that Americans have synonyms for and Liberians do not; so that this one word, and not any other, should be used by the speaker. For to the extent that we use synonyms for these words, American English is a foreign language to Liberians. A USAID geologist who frequently worked in the bush once told me that often he would say something to Liberians in the country and get no response, then his driver would tell them the very same thing and they would understand. What actually happened was that the driver acted as an interpreter and translated the geologist's American English into Liberian English; it sounded like the same thing to the geologist because he could understand the words the driver used, but to the Liberians, whose vocabulary was limited to the English words used by the driver, the geologist was speaking gibberish. An example of this kind of word is center. I have made no attempt to list all the words known by a speaker of Liberian English. Nor have I entered expressions that are not used but are immediately recognizable by Americans, for example, "You mu' le' da clo' sleep in da soap water over night." But I have included some terms on sheer whimsy, especially words from American slang.

I have frequently in the above paragraphs spoken of "Liberian English." Is it a different language from American English? It has its own grammar and pronunciations, but it uses, for the most part, the vocabulary of English. The

position of the Liberian government is that there is not a separate language called Liberian English. Surely this is an accurate description of the English spoken by the upper and educated levels of Liberian society, and it approaches accuracy concerning the English spoken by school children. But the government's position may be misleading concerning the English spoken among uneducated tribal persons in the interior. As I have prepared this dictionary, the typical Liberian I have had in mind is living in a town like Zor Zor in the interior; he has not been to more than two or three years of school; he speaks his tribal dialect as often as English. I admit that I have chosen a relatively low common denominator, but if one can communicate with this man, one could communicate with almost any Liberian. A word of caution is in order: Many Liberians who speak correct American English (though perhaps they add tonal inflections that we do not use) will be offended if an American speaks to them in Liberian English, for they would feel that they were being made fun of or condescended to. One should always use his best English unless he notices that he is not being understood. Still, that one travels in high circles is not a reason to ignore words he knows will be understood by any Liberian, so long as the word is acceptable in standard English. If Liberians use breeze instead of wind, one may speak of the breeze to anyone regardless of his social or educational level, since breeze is an acceptable word in standard English.

If learning to speak Liberian English is a matter of choosing words Liberians will understand, learning to understand Liberian English is a matter of exposing one's ear to the Liberian pronunciation of English words. Towards the end of helping learners to hear Liberian English pronunciations, I have included my own phonetic spellings of the Liberian way of speaking. I have not used a standard form of phonetic alphabet, such as the International Phonetic Alphabet, because I am not familiar with any; and I have not tried to learn any because probably most readers are not familiar with any either. Generally, I have used

apostrophies and the standard spellings to convey the Liberian pronunciation, and this has seemed sufficient since Liberians do not so much alter the sounds of English words as, instead, merely omit some of them. For example, the sentence "I want you must eat my rice" would be spoken by a Liberian thus: "I wan' you mu' ea' my ri'." On the occasions that Liberians do change the sounds of English words, I have substituted the appropriate letters. The chief instance of this changing of sounds is words containing th. The th sound in words like this, these, and those is pronounced by Liberians and spelled herein d -- dis, dese, dose. The th sound in words like throw, think, and three is pronounced and spelled t -- trow, tink, tree. However, my spellings will not ordinarily be found in the listings of entries in the left-hand column of the dictionary; there the words are spelled in standard form. Thus, the word finished is listed under finish, and in my comment the reader will find my phonetic spelling "finni'." While on the subject of spelling, I should note that I have omitted d'Azevedo's appendix, a GUIDE TO TRANSCRIPTION AND PRONUNCIATION, because it is long and he did not use it in the text of the dictionary.

The reader will quickly notice that d'Azevedo's style is different from mine. I could have written my entries to conform to his ideas, or rewritten his to conform to mine, but I have decided to respect both of us. Obvious typographical errors I have corrected but, excepting a few minor points, d'Azevedo's entries are as he wrote them. The first point concerns the means of indicating that the word itself, and not its meaning, is being discussed. In the sentence "The boy went to town," boy is the second word. In this example I have underlined boy to show that the word, and not the person, is my subject. Ordinarily d'Azevedo chose to use quotation marks for this purpose. He also used quotation marks to indicate an entry in the dictionary (for example, he would write: "See, also, 'country salt'."), and again I preferred underlining for this purpose. I underlined instead of enclosed in quotation marks because if I had been able to italicize, I would have italicized, as I believe d'Azevedo would have, too. This begs the question. I just think

it looks better.) A third point is that d'Azevedo sometimes underlined the name of a tribe in the comments and sometimes he did not. Underlining is an extra bother when one is typing so I have decided not to underline the names of tribes.

My work is neither complete nor accurate. In some instances, I have recognized my confusion and plainly indicated it, but I have no doubt that the reader will find numerous other instances which I have not recognized. One fact the reader may rely on: that my illustrative sentences are generally more accurate than my definitions. I have tried to use only sentences actually spoken by Liberians within my hearing. When I have listed authoritatively the derivations of words (see, for instance, palaver), I have relied on Merriam's Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary. If it is wrong, so am I. An odd source of error has been the very fervor I have brought to this work of late. I noticed a significant number of entries only during the past few weeks that I have devoted almost exclusively to preparing the final drafts of this dictionary, for my ear has been sharpened to its finest hone. Of course I believe I have correctly defined these words, but I admit that some of them are relatively new to me. A more important source of error must be my reliance on a limited number of informants, and these all in Monrovia. Like any language, and perhaps more than those which are standardized by mass education and communication, Liberian English varies throughout the area in which it is spoken. What is to be said by way of excuse except that one can know only so many persons, one can travel to only so many places, one can work at a project only so many days? I sincerely hope that others will not hesitate to follow in this work, and I welcome them to make fair use of anything I have done.

Michael Evan Gold
Monrovia
June, 1971

I have long wished this lexicon were published in hardcovers, rather than in mimeograph. In the summer of 1979, I therefore asked my patient, long-suffering secretary, Bonnie Hefft, to retype the whole of this dictionary in a format that would lend itself to photocopying and binding. Miss Hefft complied with admirable speed and care, and I thank her. I have taken this opportunity to add a few terms to the text which I had inked in on my copy.

Ithaca, New York
July, 1979

Dedication

Many persons have been kind to the MSEG during the months I have been back in Liberia and working on this dictionary. They have been more than kind, since without them not only could I not have written, but also I could not have stayed in the country. Foremost among them is John, and after him, Dale.

Others have been hospitable, friendly, helpful to us for as long as they have known the MSEG (or as much as then existed). They have made a rough course navigable, and I will always remember them for it. They are Lenore and Sam and the sawbones HVC. As though I were their son, I can never repay these persons except by being as generous to someone else, and I promise that I will try.

To these fine persons, and as always and ever to S and E, I dedicate my work on this dictionary. The revisions are for KC.

Mg

Note

Entries preceded by an asterisk are present in d'Azevedo's dictionary, but they were not personally observed by him. Entries preceded by a plus sign are by Gold. Entries without any mark preceding them are d'Azevedo's own.

A A.B.C./ Aborigine

+A.B.C.

used instead of alphabet.

+able

(1) "You able it" means "You can do it." At the supermarket, a boy may help you carry your groceries outside, and then he may hang around until a taxi comes, put them in the trunk for you, and give you an I-need-small-dash look. To avoid the embarrassment of pointing out that although you have just spent \$25 (the minimum necessary to get the 5% discount for Peace Corps at Abi Joudi's; Sinkor Supermarket gives it for smaller purchases) you are nonetheless a starving PCV and not a rich expatriot, you should say to the boy, either at the checkout counter or as soon as he sets the bags down and you start looking for a taxi: "T'ank you, my man, I able it now." And he will go away.

(2) "You able me" means "You can best, overcome, defeat me; you are a stronger person than I am."

aborigine

where this term appears in government parlance, it has the standard meaning of the original or indigenous inhabitants of Liberia, as distinct from invaders, colonizers, or foreigners. (See, also, native, African, tribal, and country.)

+I recommend that this word be avoided.

+I have heard Africa' sci' used by Liberians who had no education and who took pride in their special powers. (Somehow, though, I felt that they recognized the superiority of Western science and were boasting in retreat.) I appreciated Liberians' tolerance; they did not scoff at my beliefs, however apparent to them the adverse consequences on me might have seemed.

+again

at this time. In American English, again implies that an act is being repeated shortly after it was done before. "If you hit me again, I'll tell Mother on you." But in Liberian English, again carries little of this sense of repetition. Perhaps there is some suggestion of previous similar events, but only just some; the emphasis is on the present. (In this way again is an idiom, representing a concept not indigenous to American minds.) Suppose an American said, "No seat again." If we sought to construct a situation in which it could be uttered, we might imagine that the speaker had gone to the 8:00 showing of a film and found the theater sold out, and when he returned for the 10:30 showing, he found it was also sold out. "No seat again?" he cries. But the situations in which I heard this sentence spoken by a Liberian were quite different.

Once a car boy was telling the driver of a bus that there were no empty seats. "No seat again" meant "No seats at this time," with some hint that such a situation had occurred before. Another bus example: The stop on the Capitol Bypass was moved about fifty feet. As the bus approached the old stop, a passenger called, "Bus stop!" but the bus kept right on. "BUS STOP!!!" bellowed the passenger, to which the car boy responded, "No stopping here again." He did not mean (as an American would have meant) buses had previously been prohibited from using that particular spot; he meant only that buses could not stop there at this time. It is as though again modifies the act of stopping to Liberians, while to Americans it modifies the negation. When a villain on TV took after the son whose father he had just killed, a Liberian exclaimed, "He trying to kill da boy again!" -- but the boy had just come into the story. And when it looked like James Cagney and Ann Sheridan were not going to marry after all, said my happy ending-loving girl friend, "So she can't marry him again?"

+agent

relating to spies, James Bond being widely known. If a small boy has a gismo that can see and hear through walls, he may refer to it

as "my agent t'ing."

+agree

used instead of consent, concur, go along with, but rarely in the sense of "having like minds." Often it means "Will you do it?" as if you asked a boy to wash your clothes for 50¢ and you finished by saying, "You can agree?"

A.L.

(See Merico.)

+all two

both. "Waste all two bucket'." "I wan' all two dress'."

+an

didn't -- but only as the first word of a query. "An you go in town yesterday?" "An I tell you something about it before?" "An he fall down two time'?"

aunt

in some sections of the country, this term refers only to father's sisters, father's female cousins, and sometimes to one's own female cousins on the father's side who are much older than oneself. This English usage is often associated with native kinship terminology which distinguishes father's sister from mother's sister, and father's brother from mother's brother. (See uncle.)

+Liberians use terms of kinship more broadly than do Americans. In addressing someone, Liberians may call any woman Ma, any man Ol' Pa,

any stranger Brodder or Sister. In designating someone, Liberians are a little more definite. My ol' lady -- which is not derogatory, age being respected -- refers to a mature woman who is close to the speaker, but she need not be his natural mother. Similarly, brodder may refer to a cousin, or to nothing closer than a friend, but usually some tie binds the speaker to the person to whom he refers: he may be any blood relation, is probably at least a tribesfellow, but may be only a neighbor or school mate. If a Liberian wanted to be sure you understood that he referred to his natural mother, he would speak of her as his born ma. If he wanted you to know that he referred to his full brother, he would append the phrase one ma, one pa, as in "Dah my brodder, one ma, one pa."

+Liberian usage of kinship terms reflects the pattern of Liberian family life, which is different from the pattern of American family life. The chief differences are the tribe and the extended family. An adult woman of the tribe may exercise much of the authority over a child that his natural mother would, so that calling her aunt or ma is appropriate enough. Likewise, a very distant cousin or tribesfellow may

live in the same house and be treated in much the same way as a brother or close cousin, so that calling him brother is sensible.

+That a person unrelated by blood to the speaker may be referred to and treated as a brother or cousin, suggests to me that the tribe was once the basic social unit of Liberians. I speculate that as communications and travel improved, the tribe began to lose its tight authority and was replaced as the basic unit by the extended family. Even the extended family resembles a tribe more than it does an American family. Relatives have nearly equal authority and responsibility, and enjoy nearly equal respect and love, with natural parents; indeed, parents' older siblings may carry more weight on certain matters than the parents themselves. These facts are mirrored in Liberian speech. My girl friend referred to her father's younger brother as her pa, though fully aware that he was her uncle, for he was the oldest male relative of her father's side of the family living in Monrovia. She generally obeyed this uncle and occasionally received gifts from him.

+But as the tribe is disintegrating, so the extended family shows signs of breaking down. Nuclear families -- father, mother, and only their own children -- are

perhaps increasingly found in Monrovia, and city dwellers are growing reluctant to send their earnings home into the bush and to accept children from the bush. The effect on language may be a stricter use of terms of kinship. One day Liberians may even speak of uncles once removed and fourth cousins. In the meantime, terms of kinship tend to reflect the actual, working relationship between the parties, rather than merely their blood ties.

B ba/ balance

ba

namesake; friend. Possibly derived from Kru. (See, also, bra.)

baboon

chimpanzee. The true baboon does not occur in Liberia. Chimpanzees are sometimes referred to as gorillas.

bachelor girl

unmarried woman on the loose or away from home. Suggest prostitution. (See, also, Hobo Jo.)

Bakwe

a dialect cluster of the Kwa- or Kru-speaking peoples of southeastern Liberia between the Cavally and Sassandra rivers.

+balance

used instead of the rest, the remainder, what's left. When numerous small boys are in your house as you sit down to eat, you may not care to invite them to share your meal. (I rarely saw a Liberian refuse an invitation to eat, and I was laughed at when I foolishly asked a boy if he was hungry -- is the sun hot?) When you finish eating, perhaps some rice will remain that your conscience or compassion will impel you to give to the hooligans. Anticipating your own behavior, and desiring that they dampen the uproar they are making over in the corner, you might say: "Boys, if you quiet now -- becau' da noise too plenty, you hear! -- when I finni' to eat, the balance

of the rice for you. All right?"

Bamana

(See Bambara.)

Bambara

A Mande-speaking peoples widely distributed throughout the savannah region. Alternatively known as Bamana. (See, also, Mandingo.)

band

small groups of musicians who have formed a cooperative association to make money by entertaining. Often, groups of amateurs and friends. The "bands" have numbers, like "crowds" and their signs may be seen in front of small bars or meeting places in Monrovia.

+Nowadays, the bands call themselves by hip names, not numbers, for example "The Moby Dick."

+barber

to cut hair. "Da man barber me." The sentence "I go barber" means the speaker is going to or coming from a haircut.

Bassa

A Kwa-speaking peoples of central and coastal Liberia. Are sometimes distinguished as "Bush" and "Coast" Bassa. The former are apparently referred to in some maps as the Sikon, and the Gwei, Gwei, or Ge. Other sections of the Bassa which appear in some maps and early reports are the Gibi, and the Maaba or Mamba. The former are distributed along the east bank of the

St. Paul River, and the latter along the east bank of the coast east of Monrovia. The Mamba Bassa figured importantly in the early history of the settlement of colonists at Mesurado, and are the reference of the name Mamba Point for the prominence overlooking the sea from Monrovia. (See, also, De.)

+beard-beard

refers both to any person with a beard or mustache, and to a fish with whiskers (Would you believe a cat fish?). The fish might be called a mustache-mustache or a whisker-whisker, of course, except that neither of these words is used in Liberian English. Thus if a male PCV, or an exceptional female, would have a growth of hair on his/her (Liberians dearly love the ungainly expression his/her) upper lip, he/she (they like that one, too -- but if you think that is bad, wait until you get a letter whose envelope says "J. J. Jones ... Addressed") will be said to have a bear' or a beera-beera. Liberians like to say words twice; other cases are small-small, different-different, fine-fine. This doubling does not seem to change the meaning, rather fits English into the rhythms of Liberian speech.

*beat

bested; failed. "Arithmetic

beat me!" (I failed arithmetic).

+A brief acquaintance with Liberia will expose the observer to the more common usage of beat, namely "to strike with the hands." "I never do not'ing, bu' da man bea' me." The sentence "I beat him" would be interpreted to mean that the speaker struck someone, not that he had overcome someone in a contest. To express the thought of victory, a Liberian would say, "I win him."

+One who is opposed to the use of violence in his own society may find his approach changing in the face of Liberian mores (or he may find that his untested opposition was more principled than practicable). If beating, not persuasion, is the chief means of enforcing discipline among one's social inferiors, then even in relationships of some social distance such as teacher-student and bossman-houseboy (perhaps these relationships are less distant for Liberians than for Americans), a friendly "Don't do that again" will not be respected. My authority over the small boys who worked for me on Saturdays increased tenfold the day I picked up a stick. But, of course, the PCV who can withstand such temptations and devote himself to improving, at least by example,

the culture he encounters, will be said to have the true missionary spirit.

+before

before, until, after -- in a special construction only. American sentences often put the second event in a sentence ahead of the first event. For example, "I will give you the radio after you pay me." In fact the paying will come first; in the sentence the giving is spoken of first. But Liberian sentences preserve the same time order in speech as occurred in fact. A Liberian would have said, "You mu' pay me befo' I gi' you da radio." Similarly, an American might say, "I'll go after you come home," and a Liberian would say, "When you come befo' I go." This when ... before construction is the one to which I referred in my definition of before. Here follow three domestic examples of it: "When you call da baby, you gotta go befo' he come." "When he do somet'ing befo' he scare," meaning that experience is his only teacher. "When da pee-pee plenty befo' I change da diaper."

+beg

ask. "I beg you" is a strong pleading to an American, but it is the standard way of saying "please" to Liberians. A truly heart-felt solicitation would be accompanied by I hold your foot.

B-6 behind (to run behind,
 or to be behind one)

behind (to run behind,
 or to be behind one)

nag; keep after; insist.

"I have to be behind you all the time!" (I have to be after you constantly to make you do it).

"He is running behind me to get some money" (He is nagging me for money). "He is running behind that woman" (He is chasing after that woman).

+It also means to be annoying someone.

+ "I ri' behind you" does not mean (though the words suggest) that the speaker is following you or will soon follow you, which I infer because it was often said to me, but not once did the speaker ever come. Perhaps an appropriate idiomatic translation would be, "I'll see you later," which carries no suggestion that the listener should put himself out to wait for the speaker, or "I'll see you soon." A similar expression is "I'll try," which is a polite way to deny a request. We have such expressions in American English as well, forms that say one thing and mean another. For example, if a girl tells you that she does not care to dance this number because she is "a little tired," only a beginner at the game would wait until he thought she had rested and ask her again. Likewise,

a magazine salesman does not return when you tell him, "I'll think about it."

Belle

apparently an isolate Kwa-speaking peoples surrounded by Mande- and West Atlantic-speaking groups (Bandi, Loma, Kpelle, and Gola). Sometimes referred to as the Kwaa or Le. Are considered hostile, mysterious, and cannibalistic by some surrounding groups.

+In Liberia it is common for a tribe to attribute numerous unsavory qualities to its neighbors.

belly

pregnant. "That woman got belly" (That woman is pregnant). Also is standard term for abdomen or stomach.

+To move or spoil the belly means "to abort the fetus."

+bend

to go around. "Da car ben' da corner." If you want to tell a driver to turn right at the next intersection, I advise gesturing prominently with your right hand and, if you like, also saying, "Bend the corner on your right-hand side to the next junction."

benniseed

sesame seed. This term is also common in the American South. Also known elsewhere as Tilseed or Gingelly.

be so!

Let it be as it is! Or, "Is that so?"

B-8 big/ big/small

+The way to say "That's enough" is "Let it be so."

+big used instead of large, vast,
huge, etc.

big man an important man. (See,
also, small boy.)

*Big Rusty Man a blow-hard; one who puts on
airs. (See, also, bluff and
zootin.)

+big shot used instead of important
person, high official, etc. Not
used sarcastically, as it often is
in American English, it refers to a
truly important man.

big/small
(relative) the adjectives big or small
with reference to any relative
usually denote either older or
younger respectively. In one's
own generation (e.g. "big sister")
the terms denote that the person
is older or younger than oneself.
In the parental generation, however,
the system of reference may be more
complex. Usually, big and small
aunt and uncle mean that these rel-
atives of the parent's generation
are either older or younger than
one's mother or father. But, in
some instances, big father may
refer to either father's older
brother or to one's grandfather, or
merely to the head of the house.
Big mother may refer to mother's

older sister, or to father's head wife, or to one's grandmother if she is a woman of importance. Small father may refer to father's younger brother, or, in some cases, to any of father's brothers regardless of age. Small mother may refer to mother's younger sister, mother's sisters generally, or to father's other wives if they are younger than one's own mother. (In many sections of Liberia, the English terms aunt and uncle are very specific designations. See entries for these words.)

biri or bili

a circumcision rite for boys practiced among the Mandingo, but also adopted by certain other peoples such as the Vai of western Liberia. Not necessarily associated with Poro.

+Boys born in hospitals are frequently circumcised before being brought home.

+The reason the word has two spellings is that Liberians do not hear well the difference between r and l (and sometimes do not even hear the sound at all). I have been greeted by "Herro!" and my houseboy has "pless' da clo'." Yet often enough l's and r's are correctly pronounced. I suspect there is a pattern to Liberian's problems, that is that some combinations of sounds are difficult and others easy, but I cannot identify it.

B-10 biscuit/ black-(skinned)

+biscuit

cookie. The British make the same mistake.

bite-and-blow

a colloquial reference to the idea that rats are known to eat the callouses from the feet of sleeping persons by gnawing a little and blowing a little so as not to waken them. Thus, the phrase may be used as follows: "The chief praised my farm today and said he would come tomorrow to collect hut tax -- that man can bite and blow."

black-(skinned)

the word black or black man is most generally used in Liberia as a designation for dark-skinned Africans, or for dark-skinned "Negroes" of other countries. Light-skinned Africans or "Negroes" are often referred to as "bright" or "white," and this in no way implies social, cultural, or biological superiority -- though white or bright might suggest wealth, political power, and other qualities associated with Euroamerican technological dominance and culture. One might frequently hear a light-skinned person referred to as "black," or a dark-skinned person referred to as "white," indicating his cultural rather than his racial background and orientation.

+I have read this comment often, and I cannot see how a

person can be referred to as "bright" or "white," "and this in no way implies social, cultural, or biological superiority," while at the same time "white or bright might suggest wealth, political power, and other qualities associated with Euroamerican technological dominance" (final emphasis added). At any rate, my experience with the words black, Negro, and bright differs from d'Azevedo's.

+In my hearing, Negro referred exclusively to American black persons. Any native African was called a "black man." When shade of skin was the subject of conversation (if most Americans had the same color hair and eyes, we too might pay more attention to the shades of complexion of whites), bright meant the lighter shades of black skin and black meant the darker shades. "Dah man black too much" means that the man has very dark skin. Bright skin is valued more than dark skin. When my class chose for its queen candidate one of its plainer (and of course stupider) creatures, and I speculated cynically on why so many boys had voted for her, a fellow teacher corrected me, saying my theory was wrong since everyone did that, and she had been chosen for her bright skin. Liberians believe that American Negroes are

bright. They also believe that white men prefer bright black men. I was once accused (wrongly) of having a crush on a particular girl (not the queen candidate); said the student, "You crush Mart'a becau' she bright."

+I sometimes heard the expression "white heart," meaning pure motives: "I come to you wi' whi' hear'." I have heard of an offering of a white chicken to prove good intentions. And, of course, white is often used with reference to American techniques and artifacts. They never say it, but many must believe that white is right. But I never heard white or bright used to describe an African in suggestion that he was wealthy, powerful, or skilled, nor did I ever "hear a light-skinned person referred to as 'bright' or 'white,' indicating his cultural rather than his racial background and orientation." Black, bright, and white, within earshot of me, were used strictly to designate skin color. When the Liberians I knew wanted to say that a black man had abandoned the traditional ways in favor of Western habits, they used the word kwi. The single exception was a Liberian boy who was reared by missionaries. He was in high school before he returned to his tribal birthplace and learned to speak his dialect. He

did not fit in with his class mates, and he told me that, in derision and scorn, they called him "white man."

black monkey

Colobus Monkey. Colobus polykomos polykomos. A black monkey with white tail. Figures widely in local myths and tales.

+Who says only Liberians like to say things twice. Polykomos polyshlomos!

+blame

I found it difficult to assign fault to Liberians; their ideas of responsibility are different from ours, though I cannot say exactly how so. Occasionally I heard one person who was going to pay the fare of another on a bus tell the car boy, "I responsible for him," but it was not until I had lived in Liberia three years (and then it was on an army base, where lines of authority are especially clear and the American influence especially strong) that I heard someone say (and even then it was in denial of responsibility), "Of cour', I don't blame you." Of all the English words that ascribe guilt, I believe that blame and responsible are the two which are most likely to be understood.

+block

used instead of be in the way, obstruct, prevent, hinder, close off. "Two car make accident,

B-14 blood tablet/ Boc-boc

so dey blocking da roa'."

+blood tablet

vitamin pill.

+blow

to strike, beat. "Da man blow me" means (any U. S. usage notwithstanding) "The man hit me."

+bluff

to swagger, brag, play the role. If a boy walked about acting like a big shot, the girls might say, "Dah boy ju' like to bluff." Bluffing clothes are the glad rags one dons when going on the prowl. The core of the American usage of bluff, to deceive or frighten by a false showing, is present in the Liberian usage, though Liberians apply it to a context to which we do not. (For discussion of other Liberian usages outside of the American English context, see fine and ugly.)

Bobwa

a Kwa-speaking peoples just east of the Kran area and the Cavally River. Sometimes referred to as Wobe, Waga, Waya, and Waa.

+bobo

a person who cannot speak; often, one who cannot hear as well.

+Boc-boc

ending with a rising tone, Boc-boc? means "May I come in?" Ending with a flat or falling tone, Boc-boc! means "You had better be dressed because I'm already half way through the door!" Persons

who know each other well still use this expression when entering a house or room.

bony

small dried or smoked fish obtainable in most markets. They contain numerous tiny bones and are difficult to eat.

+Boo-goo-man

the Boogie-man. He is genuinely feared by Liberians, and one should not lightly threaten children with him.

book

to know book; literate. "He knows book" (He is literate). Still commonly used in the interior.

+And not uncommonly heard in Monrovia. It means more than being literate; it implies being a good or able student and, probably, having completed several years of school.

+bore

to make a hole in. A girl once told me, "When I new-born baby, da people bore my ear for earring."

born, or borned

genitor; to give birth to. "He is my born-father" (He is my real father, or my true genitor). "She borned a boy child" (She delivered a baby boy). (See, also, real-relative.)

+A bit more surprising to hear is a man who says, "I born him," meaning that he is the

B-16 born-mother/ bring

child's natural father.

born-mother

real mother. "The mother who born me." (See, also, real-relative.)

born-town

birthplace. "Zor Zor is my born town."

+borrow

often used with an indirect object. "You mu' please borrow me your shir'." Lend is also used, but not loan.

+bossman

used instead of employer, supervisor, foreman, boss.

bra

brother; friend; peer. (See, also, ba and brother.)

+breeze

used instead of wind.

+brigade

fire brigade or department. "Da briga' coming!"

bright

light-skinned; pale complexioned (not necessarily "white"). May also be used in the sense of shining (e.g., the sun). See black-(skinned).

bring

take; carry. "Bring me to that place" (Take me there). "Bring me with you" (Take me with you). "Bring this" (Take or carry this). (See, also, carry.)

+I never heard bring in the sense of take; that is, I never

heard bring used as in d'Azevedo's first two examples. Instead, I believe a Liberian would say, "Carry me to dah pla'" and "Carry me wi' you." I did hear and use bring to mean transporting an object from some place to the speaker, as in "Bring me some water" and "Bring me a chair."

brother

may refer to any male relative or ward of the family who is of one's own generation. (See, also, cousin, same-parent, bra, and ba.)

brush farm

(See cut farm and clean farm.)

+bucket

used instead of pail.

+bullshit

baloney.

bugabug

a large white ant or termite, Macrotermes natalensis, which constructs hills as high as eight or ten feet of hard clay or cement. During the mating season villagers often collect the winged ants to toast, winnow, and eat them. These are sometimes referred to as "toasties." Children may dig into the nest to find the large, fatty queen, which is considered a great delicacy. The clay of ant hills is commonly used as a particularly smooth and durable finish for houses.

*buku

plenty; much. Used in some interior sections, and derived from the French beaucoup. (See, also, plenty.)

Bulom

a West Atlantic-speaking peoples along the coast of Sierra Leone from about the Mano River to Sherbro. Are now strongly mixed with the Mende.

burn farm or bush

after cutting the bush -- clearing the undergrowth and cutting down trees -- a standard part of farming in the interior is to burn the dried debris. This is known in the literature on agriculture as "slash-and-burn." It appears that burning off of the previous year's growth destroys the seeds of undesirable plants, discourages harmful insects, and provides a degree of natural fertilization to the soil. (See make, clean, scratch and cut farm or bush.)

burned

bit; stung. "A snake burned him." "He was burned by a bee."

+Liberians, too, are poets; they use words in metaphorical senses. I recall the first time I realized how alive their use of English is: I was sitting in a bus at Waterside waiting to cross the bridge, and the driver was telling a long and sad story of his troubles to a man seated next to him. At one point he said,

B-19 burnt palm oil/ bush cat

with much feeling, "My heart burning!"

burnt palm oil

a clarified oil made by simmering raw palm oil and skimming off refined oil. It does not spoil as quickly, but has less aroma and taste. (See, also, raw palm oil, palm kernal oil, and palm butter.)

bush

forest; secret society groves. "The hunter has gone into the bush" (The hunter is in the forest). "My daughter has just come from the bush" (My daughter has just been released from secret society). (See, also, in the bush and on the road.)

+West Coasters -- those who have lived in West Africa for ten years or more, hence usually Britishers -- would wear a union suit before uttering the word jungle, and they would say rain forest only if they were trying to impress you. The word is bush. Up country and interior both refer to areas outside Monrovia, either on or off the road; bush always refers to areas outside Monrovia and off the road. Educated Liberians use interior.

Bush Bassa

(See Bassa.)

bush cat

a squirrel. Myrsilus aubinnii salae. A brown squirrel with black dorsal stripe and

long tail, which lives in hollow trees. Bush cat may also refer to many kinds of cat-like animals of the forest, as well as to all varieties of wild cats.

bushcow

West African Dwarf Buffalo or Red Buffalo. Syncerus nanus. A small buffalo, with reddish or black color and short horns. Considered extremely ferocious and destructive.

bushcow milk

humorous idiom for an unlikely or impossible task. To tell someone to "go get some bush cow milk" would imply much the same as our "go jump in the lake," "bring me a pail of moonbeams," or "a wild goose chase." (See bushcow.)

bush dog

river otter. A large brown otter with whitish throat and belly -- Lutra maculicollis.

bush goat

Black Duiker. Cephalophus niger. A dark brown or blackish animal with wide distribution in the forest areas.

Bush Grebo

(See Grebo.)

bush hog

the wild pig, or the warthog.

Bush Kru

(See Kru.)

bush school

the term for the period of

seclusion, training, and initiation for children conducted by Poro and Sande. (See, also, Poro bush, Sande bush, and Society bush.)

business

matters; concerns. (E.g., "woman's business," "man's business," "society business," etc.)

+ "If you don' full up da bucket, and the water go, you will cry for water business." Business also means "reason." "Dah da business" means "That's why." "Where's my change?" "Dah da business I late. It lost, so I looking for it."

+Bus stop!

Stop the bus! The advent of regular bus stops in Monrovia (c. 1969) inspired an addition to the language. One used to bellow "Okay!" and the bus would halt wherever it was (the brakes permitting, the driver willing, and excepting the Mechlin St. hill between Ashmun St. and Waterside). This policy not infrequently permitted three or four stoppings in a single block, since neither persons inside the bus getting off, nor persons outside the bus getting on, would walk ten steps extra. (Ten cents buys a cup of rice, which is half the cost of a meal. If I had to pay half the cost of my meals to ride a bus, I would demand such service, too.) Although buses still stop wherever

asked to on Bushrod Island, Camp Johnson Road, and past the Relda in Sinkor, in the central parts of town the proper call is "Bus stop!" and the driver will consider stopping at the next marked spot. But "Okay!" still works, as does the classic "Holdeeya!"

butter pear

avocado (Persea americana). An early introduction from Central America, and thrives in Liberian gardens.

+I have heard it speculated that avocados were named "butter pear" by American Negro soldiers stationed in Liberia during World War II. Coming from the South, they had never seen avocados (California having at that time been unable to transport them widely), and the soldiers thought they were pears with a flavor like butter.

by land

on foot. "He went there by land, because there was no money-bus."

by way

clever strategy; opportunism; knowing the angles (e.g., as a possible answer to the question, "How did you manage to get that job?" or "What makes you so lucky these days?"). It sometimes implies resort to magical powers. (See, also, ways.)

+The chief meaning of by way is "making use of your connections." When my house was rogued and I needed a police report to file with my insurance claim, and I had no success by routine applications to the Police Department, a student advised me "to go by way," that is, ask for the help of persons I knew in or connected with the police. I did as he advised and got the report. Monrovia is a small town, and everyone knows everyone else. Little is done through "normal channels"; most is done by personal contacts. For years the law school could not obtain recent decisions of the Supreme Court, though of course they were generally available to the Bar. No number of letters, applications, entreaties to the Justice Department and the Court brought any success. Then the librarian, who is a sister of the Liberian ambassador to the United States, went and asked her friends for copies of the decisions, and in short order the law school obtained an updated collection.

C camp bed/ carry

+camp bed

cot

can

do; will. "I cannot eat that" (I don't or won't eat that). "I cannot lie" (I do not lie, I'm no liar). I can do that (I will do that).

+Because Liberians drop the final sounds of words, the listener may not know whether the speaker means can or can't. The only clue I can offer is that can't is usually pronounced with emphasis and an elevated tone. My practice was to avoid saying can't; I tried always to say cannot, with a definite stress on not, to be sure my meaning was getting across.

cane juice, or rum

an alcoholic beverage expressed and/or distilled from sugar cane. (See, also, country gin.)

car

bus. "I will go by next car."
+Car also means "car," and the word bus is known.

carry

take; convey. "Carry me" (Take me). (See, also, bring.)

+It is surprising how the most important words get the shortest entries. Carry is one of the first terms one must learn in Liberian English. Like fine and ugly, qq.v., carry represents an idea for whose several aspects Americans have several words, while Liberians have but one word for it

all.

+Take note that Liberians do not carry objects, however. They use the word tote for this purpose. "I be' you, you mu' to' my load."

+ "To carry speed" is to go fast.

+cartoon

a cardboard box. If you want to refer to an animated film, speak of a "Mickey Mouse show."

+coal tar

the substances used to surface Liberia's paved streets.

cassava

the tuber of the sweet manico (Manihot palmata) or the bitter manioc (Manihot utilissima). The former is widely cultivated in Liberia. The latter appears in other parts of Africa, but rarely seen in Liberia. Both varieties are native to South America and are introductions from early European trade with Africa. (See, also, dumboy +and fufu.)

cassava snake

Puff Adder. Small and extremely poisonous vipers of the species Bites gabonica and nasicornis.

+I have heard it called the "five step snake," because after it bites you, you take five steps and fall dead. Fortunately, it is not aggressive; unless you step on it or climb into bed with it, your demise will be attributed to

another cause.

+Speaking of snakes, I have heard that the Kru believe that if a snake bites you, you should race it to the ocean, and if you win, you live. Since a snake is not likely to slither off towards the sea after it bites (unless the victim left a bad taste in its mouth) (and it drank salt water) (but even if it did, the human could probably outrun it) (of course, it would not matter if it had been a cassava snake) (unless it was only four steps away from the water) (even so, what follows would not apply), the human usually wins; and since salt water has power to draw from wounds, the human has a chance of living as well. A Liberian bitten by a snake will probably become hysterical, which is not good because the venom will be spread all the more rapidly by his rapidly coursing blood. I do not know what to suggest that you do with an hysterical person just bitten by a snake. As a matter of fact, I do not know what I would do if I were bitten by a snake, except to get hysterical. But you might like to think about what you would do.

+Do not think about it too much. In over three years in Liberia, I saw only one snake, and that was deep in the bush, and it

was moving away from me at the time. Actually, I did not see it until a Liberian pointed it out to me. Now that I think of it, I wonder how many snakes I did not see.

cauz or cuss

verbally insult; curse. (See, also, abuse.)

+It does not mean, "cast a spell on" or "bring down the wrath of heaven upon." See witch.

+I cannot pronounce curse as Liberians do. (Nor can I pronounce Liberia exactly as they do.) Try "course." (Also try "Libeeeria.")

+Do not curse or abuse persons lightly. How persons speak of and to Liberians is very important to them. They have no saying about sticks and stones, and a hasty insult could father a nasty lawsuit.

+caynoo

a dugout or canoe.

+center

used instead of middle or in between. "I wan' da one to da center." Center also means "the half-way point." (See half-way, which means something else.)

+Charlie

an itinerant salesman of artifacts. Almost everyone buys a few souvenirs in Liberia. I recommend that you stay your hand for the first several months, or at least avoid any major purchases, until you find your own tastes.

Some Volunteers believe they can recognize authentic artifacts and invest substantial sums in them, though most are skeptical of this risky business. I suggest that you never believe a Charlie. Africans are wonderful tellers of tales and, when there is money involved, what you mistake for the emotion produced by a true and stirring tale could well be only the emotion produced by the anticipation of a good sale. Most Charlies are not Liberians but natives of neighboring French-speaking countries. Unfortunately, they are generally Muslim, so that one could not improve his bargaining power by an offer of strong drink. You are expected to bargain, of course. Bargaining is a game between buyer and seller, and the value of the item is secondary to the personalities in determining the final price. Never pay more than 30-40% of the Charlie's initial price, and the higher that first price, the lower the percentage of it you should pay. Unless you are rich, be tough, because there will always be another day. And remember, you have to pay the cost of shipping home your purchases.

+charm

a magical spell; to cast same. "Da man charm me, so I loving to him." Perhaps those

Liberians who use the word charming appreciate its etymology better than we.

+chaz

to search the body or to caress. "Don' chaz me-o!" exclaimed the girl.

+check

to verify, look at. "Go check da water if it boil now." If a visitor thinks he might return to see you again, he may say, "I check you later."

+chicken soup

Maggi cube. Added to the cooking soup towards the end for enhanced flavor.

chief

the term and title for any political leader in traditional tribal authority (e.g. Paramount Chief, Clan Chief, Town Chief, etc.). May also be used as a term of respect for one's patron, employer, or a government official. (See, also, king, headman, elder; chiefdom, clan, and Paramount chiefdom.)

chiefdom

a traditional tribal administrative unit comprising a territory and population controlled by the landowning lineages of the founders. In the traditional system, chieftainships and all positions of authority were filled by recruitment of persons from the ruling lineage, under guidance of

councils of elders. Today, leaders may be appointed by the national government, or are elected in local campaigns of the chiefdoms. The boundaries and political structure of chiefdoms have also been modified by national policy. (See, also, clan, Paramount Chieftaincy, and Tribal Authority.)

*chokla

mixed up. "All my business is chokla."

+It is also the Liberian pronunciation of chocolate.

+chop

meal, food, All meals are chop, as is the food eaten.

christmas

can refer to a special holiday gift. "Give me my christmas" means "Give me the gift due me for serving you or being your friend." A request of this kind may be made at almost any time, but particularly during the Christmas season. One may also hear, "my Easter," "my New Year," "my birthday," etc. The term "Boxing Day" is still used, though rarely, and derives from the custom in former British colonies of setting aside a certain day during the holidays for giving wrapped presents to retainers and associates. (See, also, something and part.)

+Also heard are "Where my somet'ing?" and "Gi' me my

Twenty-six'," the first coming any time (but especially after you have just returned from a noticeable absence; the longer the absence and the closer the tie to the person, the better the gift expected) and the second coming around July 26th, Liberia's national day.

chunk

to throw; to hit. "I will chunk this rock at you!" (I will throw this rock at you'). "I will chunk you!" (I will hit you!). "He chunk me on the head" (He hit my head).

+cinema

movie theater. Many taxi drivers come from Guinea, and they know the French word cinema. Liberians use the term picture house. If you want to go to the Relda tell the driver, "I going to the Relda cinema to Sinkor." A Guinean will take you directly, and a Liberian will at least go in the right direction.

civilized

refers essentially to religion (usually Christianity) and education (Euroamerican). All "kwi" are considered "civilized" in this sense. The terms civilized and uncivilized are used extensively in the hinterland and do not necessarily imply an invidious distinction, but rather a practical cultural distinction.

Occasionally, one may hear an educated and literate Mohammedan referred to as "civilized." Other alternative terms are often used, such as countyman vs. cityman, uneducated vs. educated, rural vs. urban, interior vs. coastal, and tribal vs. non-tribal. References to "traditional culture" and "modern culture" are becoming more frequent. But the problem of terminology is still unresolved and delicate in the rapidly changing structure of Liberian social relations.

+This word is strong medicine. If you were angry enough to say to someone, "My man, you not civili'!" you would acquire an enemy and perhaps a lawsuit. One small boy who lived next door to me and played in my house every day for three years, sometimes became completely unmanageable. Once I called him "wild animal," which cut him to the quick. I tied a string around his neck and led him about like a monkey. Neighbors witnessing this spectacle asked what I was doing, and why, and wrote disapproval into their faces. Any suggestion that Liberians behave like wild men or animals will be received with shock, pain, and anger.

+Civili' woman speaks of a single, usually young woman living a kwi life in town. Her morals

are slightly suspect, and perhaps rightly so, though the judgement of her may not be harsh. (See, also, bachelor girl and Hobo Jo.)

clan, Clanchief

these terms are used loosely in reference to any traditional social unit (e.g., a chiefdom, or other tribal sub-section) in which principles of kinship and descent provided the major criteria for local citizenship. A modern "Clanchief" usually represents an area which was in the past a relatively autonomous political entity -- a chiefdom; but today these areas are grouped into larger administrative units known as Paramount chieftainships. (See, also, chiefdom.)

clean bush

cutting down trees, shrubs, and vines in preparation for burning a farm.

clean, or clear
farm or bush

to clear away underbush and unburned materials from farmland in preparation for planting. (See, also, burn, make, scratch, or cut farm.)

+cloth

As Eskimos have nine words for snow and we have only one, so we often have many words for things and Liberians have only one. Cloth is used by Liberians to apply to any fabric from a lappa wrapped around the waist,

to a covering for a table or bed, to a diaper, towel, handkerchief, or sheet (though these last four words are known and used).

coastal

a reference to the coast-sections of Liberia -- an area about 40 miles wide and 300 miles long -- which comprises the five counties and a few territories, county districts and townships of former Liberian modern administration. In the past few years the former "interior provinces" have been transformed into "counties" and "territories," so that the older designations of "coastal" and "interior" or "hinterland" regions has become moribund. (See, also, interior.)

+Because the saline content of the water is too high, the snails necessary for the spread of schistosomiasis cannot live in coastal areas. The doctors now say the area of safety is twenty-five miles from the coast. In 1968 my group was told the area was forty miles from the coast. I suspect the original designation was fifty miles, and the next generation of doctors reduced it to forty for safety's sake, and the most recent has brought it down to twenty-five. A similar case is how long to boil water. In 1968 we were told that hepatitis germs are the most

stubborn and eight minutes of boiling is necessary to kill them, so ten minutes allows a 25% margin of safety. Now Volunteers are told that a full fifteen minutes is necessary. How long have they told you?

cold water

a gift to soothe ruffled feelings, to appease anger, or to ask forgiveness (e.g., "Here is cold water to cool your heart"). A common expression borrowed from local African languages and custom. (See, also, dash, white heart, etc.)

come

"I'm coming" may mean "I'm going" [+it does if spoken as the person is leaving]. "I'm coming to go" means "I am leaving now." "I go come" means "I will go now and return." "I come to see you" is the equivalent of "Hello." "I come to you" means "I am here." [in which case it is more likely to imply a specific purpose, a request, an expectation].

+Coming often means "going," as in "I coming to eat just now."

+Come down means "to get off" and should be used in its place. "I wan' come down here."

+Come le' ea' is a mandatory invitation which is always extended if one is eating and someone arrives.

company, or komping

a small, informal cooperative group or club involving mutual aid.

(See, also, kuu.)

+Company is used by Liberians to refer to large businesses like USTC and Monrovia Brewery. It is pronounced "coe-p'ee," and since many Liberian sounds are nasal, the final "ee" sound would often be pronounced, as d'Azevedo has it, "ing."

+confuse

to confuse, be confused. This word is well understood by Liberians. A lesson I learned only after two years may be helpful to the reader: If a Liberian does not understand something, he will rarely tell you so. Perhaps he recalls beatings from impatient elders, perhaps he is so befuddled that he does not realize his own confusion, or perhaps (a cynical theory) he hopes to finesse the point. Many times I have said something to a Liberian, something I found out later he had not understood, only to see him act as though I had not spoken. Perhaps one of the tones of voice that mean to an American, "Listen carefully," mean to a Liberian, "Do not mind me, I am talking to myself." Whatever the reason, if you detect an inappropriate or failure of response and you ask, "Do you understand?" you will invariably receive "Yes" for an answer. Therefore -- here follows a cardinal rule widely applicable -- ask your questions so that "No" is the reply

you want. (The true rule is, Ask questions that require a sentence for an answer, or any word other than yes or no, but not I nor anyone I knew had the patience or ingenuity so to construct sentences.) For example, you risk disaster to ask your houseboy, "The fish plenty for six people?" because you will hear "Yes" whether you have a dozen snappers on ice, or none, or he thinks you have asked him if roosters can lay eggs (which Liberians believe). Instead, you should ask, "The fish small for six people?" Similarly, never ask, "The taxi can reach to Robertsfield before 2:00?" If the driver plans to arrive at 1:30, or 3:30, or if he thinks you have asked him if he has two eyes, or -- and especially -- if he has no idea what you have asked, his response will be affirmative. In this situation, try "The taxi can reach before 5:00?" and work backwards. (Actually, this may be a poor example because taxi drivers will promise to get you anywhere at any time that strikes your fancy.) And, of course, the classic blunder, do not waste your breath by asking, "Do you understand?" Your best bet is to have your listener repeat your instructions back to you. But if you are in a hurry, ask "You

confuse'?" and an answer of "Yes" might save the day for you.

Congo

a term originally applied to "recaptured" Africans -- those slaves rescued from slaveships during the period of the British and American blockade of the coast early in the 19th century, and released at Freetown or Monrovia. In that many of them were from the Congo region, this word became a general reference to such persons who were destitute, defranchized, and helpless. During the early years of the Liberian colony, large numbers of refugees of this kind constituted a serious problem for the government. For the most part, they developed into a class of uneducated laborers and tenant farmers, looked down upon by colonists and high-status tribesman alike. Except in some rural areas, their descendants today are indistinguishable from other members of the coastal urban population, and many leading Liberian citizens have "Congo" family backgrounds. In many sections of the country, the term still has a derogatory implication both as an epithet and a snobbish class distinction.

+cook shop

a Liberian-owned restaurant serving chop.

copper

one cent ("a copper"). Or,

any kind of small money (i.e. "small change").

+ "Gi' me coppe'-ya!"

+correct

to do correctly (not to revise an error, as in American English).
"Teach me good so I will correct all."

+cotter

something, usually a piece of cloth twisted into a tight circle, placed on top of one's head under the load which is being toted.
"Len' me your handkerchie' so I will use it for cotte'."

country

tribal, or traditional. This word, in connection with "doctor," "medicine," "science," "person," "thing," etc. is the most common means of referring to native or indigenous customs.

+I do not know what "indigenous customs" are. Indigenous means "something produced, growing, or living naturally in a particular region or environment." With respect to plants and animals, I can see how, at a particular time, cassava, for example, was indigenous to the Americas and nowhere else. But customs are a different matter. Surely habits of persons deep in the bush who have had no contact whatever with anyone born more than fifty miles from their home, may be called indigenous.

The descendants of the black Americans who returned to Africa can trace their Liberian lineage to 150 years. How long must they be here, from the beginnings of history, before their customs are considered indigenous? And when foreigners come to Liberia with their different ways, Liberians adopt the foreigner's ways only after putting them through the fine-meshed African sieve, so that when they come out, they often resemble only in form (that is, carry the same name as) their European or American antecedents. When do these customs become indigenous?

+The word country is often used disparagingly. "Wha' wrong wi' you, you stupi' country woman?" "You eating wi' your han'? Wha' kind o' country b'ne [business]!"

country bread

a flour or meal made from rice. May be eaten in this form, or moistened and flattened into cubes. Sometimes mixed with peanuts. Carried as food to farm work, or on long treks. Has a ceremonial and ritual use, as well, in "sacrifices" and gifts to the ancestors. Newly harvested rice is preferred. (See, also, new rice.)

country chop

indigenous West African cuisine.

country devil

(See devil.)

country doctor

refers to any tribal practitioner of magical and/or healing arts. (See, also, zo.)

country gin/
whiskey

(See cane juice.) Sometimes called "interior gin, or whiskey."

+The Liberians I knew reserved whisky to refer to Western brews, the most common being "Johnny Walker."

country salt

a potash obtained from the ashes of certain swamp grasses and trees (such as palm, plantain, etc.). In some areas, a "soda" is obtained from mineral deposits. It is used as an accent to flavor in cooking food, particularly in areas where sea salt or imported salt is scarce. (See, also, tupogi.)

+Liberians sometimes buy small packets of baking soda and flavor soups with it.

country wife

a tribal woman married to a non-tribal man in accordance with local custom.

+Also a girl friend.

county

a designation for the former administrative divisions of the "Coastal" region involving five "Counties" -- Montserrado, Grand Cape Mount, Grand Bassa, Since, and Maryland. Recently, four new counties have been formed in the

interior, replacing the old "Provinces." These are Loffa, Bong, Nimba, and Grand Gedeh counties. Other counties are being contemplated, and considerable administrative reorganization of these interior sections is under way. Counties are divided into districts, sub-districts, territories, commonwealth districts, and townships. Each county is governed by a County Superintendent who presides over local officials of the sections.

craw-craw

a term used for any bad skin condition.

+craw fish

shrimp.

+credit me

charge it. A man who wanted to buy my TV set said, "I will gi' you \$25, and you mu' credit me da balan' so I will pay you every mon'." Fat chance! You will be hit for loans from the very start. If you are wise, you will lend to persons you cannot refuse about fifty cents or a dollar. You will not be repaid, but that person will never try to borrow from you again because he knows you will say, "Sure, when you pay back what you already owe me."

croo croo gee

(See kroo kroo jii.)

crowd

a group of urban men who went

to school and/or entered professions at about the same period in life. "Crowds" are usually identified by a number (e.g. Crowd 13) and, though they are relatively informal organizations, they once exerted considerable influence in urban Liberian social circles and politics. (See, also, band and society.)

+crush

to have a crush on. If one of your students says to you, "I crush you," do not fear an imminent bear hug, but be wary nonetheless.

cultural societies

a modern term often used in official documents and discourse referring to any of the special religious or secret associations of the tribal peoples of Liberia. (See, also, secret society.)

cup

unit of measurement. Usually about a twelve ounce tin can. (See, also, kanki, tin, and kroo.)

+cupboard

closet. "I mu' pack up da clo' in da cu'bo'?"

+curse

See cauz.

cut

eat; take one's part; divide. "Come let us cut, man" (Come let us eat together, or Come let us share the food). Also may mean broken or split ("My shoe is cut"), or to be wounded ("They cut each other when they were fighting").

C-20 cut farm or/ cycle
bush

+Cut has two additional meanings: (1) to pull into traffic. "Cut!" is a carboy's call, having the opposite effect of "On da si'." (2) to perform the rite in which a young girl's clitoris is amputated in bush school.

cut farm or bush

to cut down the underbush and trees of a farm area prior to burning and clearing. (See, also, burn, clean, scratch, and make farm.)

+cut off

used instead of turn off, switch off, put out, douse. "Cu' o' da li'-ya!"

cutlass

machete. Used to clear bush, chop wood, cut grass, etc. One of the most general and important implements in the interior.

cut rice

to harvest rice.

cycle

bicycle.

D damn/ dash

+damn

a strong curse. Damn fool and damn ass are fighting words.

Dan, or Da

(See Gio.)

*Dandy Jack

Diana Monkey. Cercopithecus diana diana. A small, white-bearded, black and red monkey.

dash

a tip; a gift. Also a verb: to give something to ("Dash me"). Does not imply anything like the word bribe, but rather indicates reciprocity, recognition of a favor or service done, or the worth of the person being "dashed." In some tribal languages the term for such a token gift means, literally, "respect." It is an indication of the esteem or satisfaction one has with regard to a person who has rendered a service or who is being asked to do so.

+The good professor tries hard to justify a custom that may be deserving of scorn. His discussion tells me how an American thinks a Liberian would defend the custom of dash; it does not tell me how a Liberian actually would defend the custom, and it seems a far cry from how a Liberian truly feels about it, particularly one on the disgorging end of the relationship. I can say only how I feel about dash. A dash is often no more than a bribe for a service which an American would expect to

receive routinely. One must learn that when dash is expected, it must be given. As I noted in the comment under by way, everything is personal in this country; a dash quickly establishes a personal relationship. (Perhaps when Americans were less wealthy, we too were more willing to let money underpin a friendship.) An anecdote about a group of Crossroads Africa volunteers may be instructive: They were leaving Liberia by land for the Ivory Coast, and at Toe Town they were held up for several hours by a Liberian customs inspection that reached into every suitcase and handbag. Although such delays are not the norm (especially on the way out of the country), they sometimes occur; Saturdays are worst because a man might be looking for a little extra money for Saturday night. The head of the Crossroads group told me that he realized only afterwards that the Border guard would have waived the inspection (with respect to which his right was dubious but his power absolute) for a small dash. Time is money, and the guard had all day. You will face many such choices. The Lebanese, in whose culture a similar custom exists, handle all this gracefully, and we would do well to observe if not to immitate them.

+Related to dash, in that both

involve putting out money one would perhaps rather keep, is the problem of being a big man. PCVs are not big shots, but they are important enough, respected enough, and rich enough to be expected to part with their coppers now and again, when no service has been rendered in return except perhaps a show of friendship or respect (which is, of course, thereafter suspected). Big shots dash people money: they are big shots because they dash money, and they would not be if they did not. Recently I saw a promising young attorney dash five dollars to the bank clerk who sold him a few hundred dollars' of travellers' checks; she will certainly remember and speak well of him. Big shots also have the power to get money from people, which is the rub since PCVs refrain from exercising this power. The most they generally do is extract a little free labor and accept occasional dashes of food. Every Volunteer is beset with requests that seem to come from the blue. It is his own fault for living in such grand style. If we really lived as Liberians do, had as little cash, clothes, and living space (and consequently went stark raving mad), the requests would be fewer. By the end of three years, I found myself parting with small sums of money that I would have kept

earlier, which was ironic because I needed the money much more at the end than at the beginning. It was not that at first I did not know when I was beseiged; I knew all along, one always knows; it was more that at the end it somehow was not fair, or possible, for me to enjoy my status and horde my change.

+daybreak

used instead of dawn or sunrise. It is more emphatic, and also earlier, than soon in the morning, q.v.

De

a Kwa-speaking peoples of western coastal Liberia, between the Vai and the Bassa. Sometimes referred to as Dewe, Dewoi, Do, or Dei (Dey). These peoples are, today, only a small remnant of a once powerful tribe which dominated the coast and the trade from the Loffa River to the St. Paul River, and far inland to the trading center of Bopolu. They are closely related to the Bassa section known as Mamba, both linguistically and culturally, but they have been strongly influenced by the Vai and the Gola.

+If Harry Balafonte were one of these people and were asked, "What is your tribe?" do you suppose he would answer "Dey-o!"?

dear

expensive.

+used instead of costly or

D-5 deep/ detect

expensive. "I wan' buy dah clo',
bu' it dear too much."

+As a term of affection, use
darling instead.

deep

difficult; profound. "He
speaks deep Gio" or "That is the
deep part of our history."

+deliver

to give birth. "Ma, your
belly too big! Wha' time you will
deliver now?"

Denwoin

(See De.)

+detect

to find out, learn as would a
detective. When someone uprooted
a cabbage plant my girlfriend had
nursed for a month, and our small
boy friends learned, they said,
"Le' detec'!" They checked the scene
of the crime, interrogated everyone
in Fanima and Clara Town, and
narrowed the list of suspects to
fifty. I told them to let it be
known that I had put a special
strong medicine on the cabbage, and
the rogue would get an itch for a
week on his hands unless he came
to me for the antidote. (I would
have attributed greater power to
the imaginary medicine, except if
anything had happened to anyone in
the area in the next few days, I
would have been blamed. Once a
chicken took to greeting the dawn
under my bedroom window. On the
third or fourth day, I took a rope,

made a lariat of it, and pursued that rooster for all he was worth. I failed, but that night a woman who wanted to eat that very chicken asked me what I had done with it. It had disappeared, and I was the obvious suspect. Some clever soul, of course, had seen my escapade and taken his chance to bag a chicken with impunity.) No one came for the antidote to the cabbage itch. The next cabbage we planted was not stolen, but it did not grow well.

*deuce

ace; tops. "He's the deuce of the sixth grade."

devil

any masked dancer or performer, whether for entertainment or ritual. Not to be confused with the Euro-american concept of "devil," "Satanic," or "evil," though this is the way the term was applied by early missionaries and other travellers to Africa. When a Liberian speaks of "devil business," he means something sacred or mysterious connected with tradition. It is still common usage among English-speaking peoples of urban and rural Liberia, but there is an increasing avoidance of such terms by sophisticated Liberians. It is best to learn the specific local names for any ritual figures and to refer to them respectfully by these names. It is also important to know

divide

to pass out; distribute; share. "She divided the papers to the class." "We divided the food."

+If five small boys have helped you, and you wish to reward them equally but have only a quarter, you might give it to one of them with the admonition, "You divi' this, you hear!" -- and if he is not the biggest, he might.

+Also, to go in different directions.

doctor

(See country doctor and zo.)

+To doctor is a verb, means "to apply medicine to." "I be' you, you mu' doctor me."

dollbaby

refers to any kind of figurine or stickdoll.

+done

finished cooking, but usually not applied to having finished anything else. If you said, "I am done" in the wrong company, your listener might start licking his chops. The correct expression to indicate a task completed is, "I finni'."

+Don't mention it

used instead of You're welcome.

dowry

the traditional settlement in gifts which a man's family makes to the family of the bride. The term may be applied to any gifts made in support of a marriage; but it has

come to mean, more specifically, a standard payment in money or goods by the groom in order to establish his legal rights over his bride. It validates the marriage contract between families. Elsewhere, this is known as "bride-price" or "bridewealth." In some sections of Liberia, a man will give a period of servitude to his bride's family rather than money or goods. This is sometimes referred to as "brideservice."

+Forty dollars is the traditional settlement, and making a farm for the bride's mother is the traditional bride's service.

+draw

one draws water instead of pumps or fetches it -- this from a well or spigot.

To draw a picture is often to have traced it.

+drawers

used instead of underpants, underwear, diaper.

dream

among most Liberians of traditional culture, dreams are believed to be the actual experience of the soul which may wander as the body sleeps. Therefore, dreams are a subject of profound concern. A "dreamer" is a person with a particularly acute faculty for dreaming and interpreting dreams, such as a diviner or other person who consorts with spirit powers.

D-10 dress/ drivers

+Dreams are as important to Liberians as they are to psychoanalysts. They are recounted precisely and clearly and with the same affect as waking experience, though they are not remembered so long.

dress

decorate; arrange attractively. "She dressed the house" (She rubbed the house with fresh clay). "All the town roads are dressed" (The roads to town have been decorated with palm fronds and flowers). Another use of this term appears to derive from the military -- e.g. "Will you dress back?" (Will you stand or regroup to the rear?)

+The simple command "Dress small!" means "Move over!" If someone next to you on a bus has unused room near him but is crowding you, you might say, "I be' you, you mu' dre'-ya!"

+drill

to march, as in a parade. Quarterly Drill is a school holiday because the boys must attend in proper uniform.

+drive

(1) to operate a car. (2) to send away. "Don' dri' me-ya!" pleaded the woman as the angry man tossed her clothes out the door.

drivers

Driver Ant. A predatory ant of the genus Anomma which travels in

armies of thousands, devouring any edible organic material in their path.

+One day you will see a column of driver ants crossing a road, and you will be tempted playfully to step on the column. Don't. "Any edible organic material" includes you.

+drop

to let off. "Drop me to the post office."

dry

sickly, undernourished, skinny. ("That child is getting dry.") Also a colloquialism for being without money -- "broke."

dry season

the months of December and January are usually the driest months in the year. This is the time of the year when cutting and burning for farms takes place. A brief dry period, called the "middle dries," occurs for a few weeks in late July and early August. (See, also, rainy season.)

+The dry season begins in October or November and lasts through April or May. During these months, the Southern Hemisphere is receiving the direct rays from the sun. Its warmed air rises, and the vacuum is filled by winds from the north. Before northerly winds reach Liberia, they cross the dry area of North Africa. They contain no moisture, and no rain falls.

The middle dries occur around the time of the equinox, when both hemispheres are about equally warmed by the sun's direct rays, so that there is little movement of wind across the equator.

Du Kor

widely used among peoples of the interior to refer to Monrovia. It derives from old local tribal terms for the St. Paul River and the name for the area around Mamba Point.

dumboy

boiled cassava pounded into a thick, viscous dough. Served in a bowl covered with clear water broth, or squeezed into a ball and dipped into palmoil soup. The term seems to be from the Vai, and the dish is served at the many Vai cookshops in Monrovia. (See, also, cassava.)

+dung pile

garbage can; dumping area.

+duster

used instead of eraser for a blackboard.

eat

E eat

use up; especially wastefully; embezzle. "Did you eat that money?" "The town chief ate the hut taxes."

+I was acquainted with a woman who worked at the British Embassy. She was a straight-laced lady of a type that no one could understand why her husband, a fine bloke, had married her. (Fortunately, their daughter took after her father.) One evening a group of which we were part was discussing Liberian traits, and she remarked that Liberians were so very sensitive, which she illustrated with this story: On a Monday her Liberian secretary asked for some paper clips, and she sent a box. On Wednesday or Thursday, the secretary asked for more paper clips, and the English woman came as close to exclaiming as an English woman can, "What did you do with all those I gave you on Monday, eat them?" And the secretary was so offended that the Ambassador himself had to mediate. Forgive me, I did enjoy defining eat for her; she was unruffled, of course.

+Eating money is not so grave a sin to Liberians as it is to Americans. One of my students owed a dollar to the class collection. When I called on her for it, she said, "I brought it yesterday, but you were absent." "Yes, I was sick. Do you have it today?" asked

I. "No, I ate it," she answered, with neither smile nor shame.

eddo

the tuber of the Colocasia escalenta or Xanthosoma sagittifolium. Known elsewhere as coco-yam, or taro. Cultivated and eaten in Liberia as a "potato."

+A good source of iron.

elder

a term and title of respect for any important older person of traditional tribal culture. Formally, however, it refers to the elder heads of families who represent their descent groups and lineages in official councils. (See, also, old-person.)

*elk

Bongo Antelope. Boocercus euryceros euryceros. A large reddish brown animal with spiral-twisted horns on both sexes.

+embarrass

to be in the way of (not to make self-conscious). "Da chair embarrassing me."

ene? or ene!

"Is that so?" "Well!"
+"My brodder come to you." "I didn't know you had any brothers."
"You mee' him befo', dah ti' whe' he come to my uncle' pla'." "Oh, yes, that was the time we went to see your auntie's new baby, ene?"

+An affirmative response to ene? signifies agreement. "Man wha' go' two wife go' plenty trouble,

ene?" "I swear!" Used as
Canadians use "Ae?"

*equal

peer. "He's not my equal"
(He is not of my age, class, or
group of intimates).

+Equal also means "equal" or
"equally." "You mu' divi' da foo'
equal." "An I do it? Our own two
equal."

every day

always. "I come here every
day."

ever since

some time ago; already. "I
did it ever since" (I have already
done that).

+It also means "for a long time."
"I been knowing dah man ever since."

+excuse

Excuse! is often used in
parting instead of good-bye, though
the latter word (especially in its
diminutive form bye-bye) is also used.

A Liberian may say "Excuse!" and
jump into a line in front of you.
You are free to assert your prior
title but, if you do not, his saying
"Excuse!" has given him the right
to the better position.

F face/ family

+face

"Get out of my fa'-ya"
means "Get out of my sight."

+face-to-face

a manly, potentially violent confrontation. When the hero met the villain, "So day fa'-to-fa' now!"

+faint

used instead of pass out,
become unconscious, knock out.
"Da man blow him, so he fai'."

falling off

coming apart; breaking up.
"Everything is falling off now!"
(Everything is a mess -- I'm
coming apart at the seams.)

+false

used in the sense of "imitation," but not as the opposite of "true." "Dah woma' wearing false hair."

family

there is great variation in what this term may mean either to individuals or to peoples in various sections of the country. It may refer only to one's kin on the father's side. It may refer to only one's close kin on either side, or it may refer to those persons -- regardless of degree of kinship, and including non-kin -- who share a household and close interdependent association with one. (See entries under various kinship terms, such as aunt, uncle, sister, brother, big/small relative, etc.)

Fanti

a Kwa- (or Twi-) speaking peoples, originally from the area of Ghana, who like the Kru, are great seamen and fishers of the sea. They are highly mobile, and small colonies of them occur in Monrovia and elsewhere along the coast. Their magnificently decorated and graceful boats may be seen drawn up on the beaches near their settlements. The term is not to be confused with Fanta, which is the name of popular commercial soft-drink. (See, also, fanti-cloth.)

+Since the matter is on the table, I may as well add that Fanta refers to any and only orange soda pop.

fanti-cloth

has become a reference to all brightly colored commercial cotton yardage with African-inspired designs. The term is derived from the fact that the handmade and handprinted cloth worn by Fanti fishermen from Ghana was much admired by Liberians. (See, also, Fanti.)

+Fanti cloth, which is mostly made in Holland (the Japanese are now turning out material that resembles tie-dye), sells in New York and Chicago for five times its price in Monrovia. Shirts made from Fanti cloth are often called "Vai shirts" or "country shirts." The terms derive from the fact that

people call them "Vai shirts" and "country shirts." Buy them ready-made because tailors always short-cut your cloth and eat what they save.

farm

any owned piece of land used for agricultural purposes and ranging in size from a few acres of rice and vegetables, to a large coffee, cacao, or rubber plantation. Many urban Liberians refer to their country houses as "farms." A small hamlet consisting of a few houses or temporary shelters situated directly on agricultural lands may be referred to as a "farm." (See, also, half-town.)

+If the farm gets small enough, it will be called a "garden."

father, or pa

a term of respect for any older man with whom one has, or hopes to have a dependent relationship. Generally, a term of deference for patrons, employers, older male relatives, etc. In some sections, it applies specifically to older male relatives on the paternal side of the family. (See, also, big/small relative and real-relative.)

+An employer is more likely to be called "bossman," be he black or white, than "pa."

+fear

to frighten, make afraid.
"You fear me" means "You scare me."
"I fear you" means "I frighten

you." Note that fear does not mean "to be afraid," but rather "to make afraid." In American English, fear is a passive verb because the object acts on the subject. When Americans say, "I fear John," they mean that John causes fear in the speaker. In Liberian English, fear is an active verb because the subject acts on the object. "I fear John" means that the speaker causes fear in John. But be wary, because Liberian English is not uniform, and this in two respects: first, an educated Liberian may use fear in the same way as an American would; and, second, Liberians often use a verb both actively and passively, that is, one time the subject acts on the object and the next time the object acts on the subject, so that only the context can reveal the speaker's meaning. Another verb like fear is suffer, q.v.

feel

seem; appear. "Your body no feel good to me" (You do not look so good).

+The idea of "seeming" or "appearing" is more often expressed by the word looking, q.v.

+Feel also has two meanings that match American English: (1) to experience or be in a condition, as in "How are you feeling?" (2) to sense with the hand or other organ, as in "I feel somet'ing strange

insi' my bed" and "I feeling worm
in my stomach."

+fear

to ride with fear means "to
escape without paying one's fare
after taking a bus or taxi."

fine

satisfactory, good, beautiful.
"That one not so fine" (That's not
so good).

+The derivation of fine is the
Latin word for "end," "boundary,"
"limit," and fine still carries this
connotation for Americans. A fine
may end a legal proceeding, a fine
line is as thin as can be, and a fine
distinction reaches the limits of
subtlety. The Federalists intended
the Congress to refine and enlarge
the grossness of popular sentiment.
Often, though, we use fine simply
to mean "excellent" or "good," and
little of its etymology carries
through, as in "I am feeling fine"
and "That is a fine hat you are
wearing." It is in this latter
sense exclusively that Liberians use
fine. It is the single word
Liberians apply when something is
well, happy, in good condition,
satisfactory, or beautiful. To
them it connotes little of niceness
or precision; it means only "good,"
"desirable," "pleasing." "Dah
house fine too much!" "You my fine,
fine boy frien'." In this sense,
fine is like ugly, q.v. It is like
bluff (q.v.) also, though while with

bluff the core of the American meaning is stretched to cases to which we would not apply the word, with fine and ugly only part of the American meaning is used, but it is used broadly and applied to cases for which Americans would use other words.

fine-fine

excellent, wonderful, magnificent.

+Another example of Liberian doubling of English words. The meaning of the word is not affected. A Liberian might say, "Dah fine-fine t'ing," using four quick beats, one for each word; or "Dah fine t'ing," also using four beats, giving fine two beats. See, also, beard-beard.

finish

done; the end; stop; complete. "The meeting finish" (The meeting is done or over). "Finish one time!" (Lay off immediately! or, That is an end to the matter!). "The watch finish" (The watch has stopped, or is broken). "My belt finish breaking" (My belt has worn out at last). "That man was finish drunk" (That man was completely drunk). "She is finish ugly" (She is the ugliest woman I have seen).

+The Liberian pronunciation is "finni'" (or perhaps "finny"), and this word should be used instead of through, over, complete. Done is

F-7 fire coal/ follow, a
follower

reserved for the case of food.
End is understood: "Dah da en' o'
da story?" pleaded the child.

+fire coal

charcoal.

+fire on

used instead of shoot. "Da
hero fire on da ba' man."

+fish cup

a tin of cooked fish, often
mackerel or salmon, weighing from
four to twelve ounces.

+flit

insecticide; to spray a room
with same. Probably derived from
the brand name "Flit," though I
have not seen this brand in Liberia.
"Shelltox" is the best known brand
of flit. Do not waste money on
aerosol cans, but get a sprayer and
a tin of liquid. "Drummer" liquid
is the cheapest and, since nothing
really works unless you catch the
insect full force with a direct
spray, it is as good as the others.

follow, a follower

to be led or dependent; to be
a client. "That man is very rich
with many followers" (The man is a
patron surrounded by dependents).
"My small brother follows me" (He
has made me his leader in all
things). (See, also, something
behind or following.)

+Follow also suggest
imitation. "I follow you" means
"I will do what you do."

F-8 foolish/ for what? and
what for?

+foolish

a mild abuse widely used. "Da foolish woma' los' her money in da market."

+for me, for you,
for him, for her,
for us, for them

mine, yours, his, hers, ours, theirs. Liberians sometimes use possessive adjectives like my and ours, but they do not use possessive pronouns.

American

1. Whose book is this?
2. It's mine.
3. I want one, too.
4. I'm all out of them.
5. Is this one yours?
6. It's Elijah's.

Liberian

1. Dah who' book?
2. It for me.
3. Bring my own.
4. All finni'.
5. Dah one for you?
6. It' fo' Elijah.

for true!

really; actually; a fact. "For true?" (Is that so?)

+for what? and
what for?

(1) For what? as an interrogative particle means "why?" But the word why is not generally understood, and the grammatical construction it requires (reversing the subject and verb and adding a tense of to do) is not used. (For more on questions, see yes/no.) An American would ask, "Why did you take my book?" and a Liberian might ask, "Wha' you carry

F-9 force or/ friend, or
 fosi friendship

my boo' for?" (2) For what! as an exclamation means and is used just as What for! and For what! are in American English. "Please sweep the floor." "Fo' wha'!!"

force or fosi

to compel; persuade. "When I fosi my ma to cook for me, she must!" (When I persuade my ma to cook for me, she will). (See, also, must.)

+I never heard force used to mean merely "persuade"; it always meant "compel" -- and often by physical means. "Da man fo'c' da woman to love him, so she run away."

+foot

may refer to one's calf, knee, or thigh as well.

+free

to release, be released. "Da police people free da man from jail." "When da baby sleeping, I free."

+free gift

used instead of present or gift.

French

Ivory Coast or Guinea. "He walked to French." (Often heard as "Frenchside.")

fresh cold

the common cold; a runny nose.

friend, or friendship

frequently used to imply "lover" or "a love affair," when persons of opposite sex are involved. May also refer to a tutelary of jina of the opposite sex with whom one has formed a mutually advantageous spiritual

pact.

+Friend also indicates "one of the same kind," be it a person or a thing. "When you go school, how you can' wear fi' clo' li' your frien'?" Referring to upper and lower case letters, a student learning to write asked, "Dah da way I can write it, da same way I can do it' frien' der?"

frisky

mischievous; naughty; casually immoral. Some missionaries consider this to be an obscene word, and its meaning varies in different sections of the country. It is widely used.

+Frisky often means merely "active": "Dah small boy frisky too much."

+fuck up

to make a mistake; break down. Liberians have managed to enrich their vocabulary with many American idioms, but we do not always get the credit we deserve. Fearing that I had not understood him, a boy once explained to me that Liberians do not always speak properly, sometimes allowing their own words to creep into English (which is true enough); he then gravely informed me that buck means "one dollar." Etymology often seeming half guess and half humor, let me speculate that the origin of fuck up is the speech of Firestone employees, Liberians who have worked for a

while in the United States (many have gone on ships), and G.I.s who were stationed in Liberia during World War II. The last certainly knew snafu ("situation normal all fucked up"), and Liberians got the idea. At any rate, fuck up need not be restricted to use in monosexual groups. I heard a man in his forties explain to his aged mother that he could not take her picture because "my camera fuck up."

Fuck up is not quite so strong as spoil. Something spoiled is irretrievably discombubulated, while something merely fucked up has yet cause to hope for rescue.

fufu

a thick dough made from pounded and fermented cassava. Usually rolled into balls and dipped into "soup" while eating. Not universally used or liked among Liberian peoples, and is considered a "foreign" African dish, though it is growing in favor. Peoples of the western sections of Liberia refer to it as "rotten cassava" and attribute its use to the "Congo," "Kru," and "so-so mixed tribes." (See, also, dumboy.)

fuss

bother; worry; problems. "He got plenty fuss" (He is very worried; he has problems). "No fuss!" (Don't fret, or Don't bother about it!) Sometimes palaver is used in this sense -- i.e. "Palaver is on him," or "No palaver!"

gamble

a small white shell (sometimes called "kauri," or "cowrie") used extensively for decoration of ritual objects. An important item in the making of "sacrifices" or in token gift-exchange. Along with white kola, silver, or a white animal, it is included as a traditional "white thing" or a formal token of respect. It is said to have been, in the past, one of the many special-purpose trading currencies in West Africa. Also was used for gambling games -- thus, the name.

*gate

mouth. "Shut your gate!"

gazelle

Gray Duiker. Cephalophus maxwelli liberiensis. Small gray-brown animal (about 14 inches high) with small horns.

Gba-Mende(See Kpa-Mende.)Gbandi, or Bandi

a Mande-speaking peoples of northern Liberia. Also referred to as Gbande, or Mambo (Mamboma).

Gbunde(See Loma.)gbo ye!

"Boiled egg!" A street call by venders of boiled eggs.

Ge, or Gema(See Gio.)

German plum

the largest of the Mangoes, green in color, and excellent in

G-2 giant/ Gissi, or Kissi
 pennies

flavor. (See, also, mango plum and
golden plum.)

+giant

a large muscular man, but not
a monster. Also, very large.

Gibi

(See Bassa.)

Gio, or Dan

a Mande-speaking peoples of
central eastern Liberia, closely
associated with the Mano. The large
number of dialectic and geographic
subdivisions of these peoples has
created much confusion in the maps
and literature. In the Ivory Coast
sections, these peoples seem to be
referred to as Dan or Da, while in
Liberia they are known as Gio, Ge,
Gema, or Ngere. The latter word is
rendered "Guere" by the French.
Insufficient linguistic and ethno-
graphic studies have been made of
these groups.

Gissi

a West Atlantic-speaking peoples
of northwestern Liberia, and also of
Sierra Leone and Guinea. An alter-
native rendering of the term, used
mainly in the French-speaking area,
is Kissi.

Gissi, or Kissi
pennies

twisted rods of iron, varying
in length from about 12 to 18 inches,
once used extensively as a currency
for trade in the northwestern
interior of Liberia. They are
attributed originally to the Gisi,

but were and still are made and used by many surrounding peoples. A bundle of twenty of these "pennies" or "irons" was a unit of currency equivalent in value, in the early part of the twentieth century, to about one English shilling. Another unit was "one slave money," or "one head money," which was the number of bundles representing the cost of a slave. This varied in accordance with time, place, and quality of the slave, but a valuable adult slave might bring between 50 to 100 bundles.

+The term I heard used for these pieces of twisted iron was country money.

+glass

shortened form of looking glass, which is used instead of mirror.

+glass bottle

often refers to pieces of broken glass, which are found everywhere. There oughta be a law.

Glebo

(See Grebo.)

+go-come

leave with intent to return soon. "I go-come" means "I'll be right back" or "I'll see you again today."

Gola

a West Atlantic-speaking peoples of western Liberia. Sometimes referred to as Goa, Gala, Gora, or Gula.

Grebo, or Glebo

of the coastal section of south-eastern Liberia. Those on the coast are sometimes referred to as "Beach Grebo" and those to the interior as "Bush Grebo" or "Half-Grebo." There is considerable dialect division which may account for the numerous names which appear on maps or written comment about this area. It is also possible that future linguistic and ethnographic study will show either that there are more distinct languages and peoples in this section or, on the other hand, that there are only many dialects of one language. Jabo and Gweabo have been indicated by certain students (Herzog and Sapir, respectively) as being relatively distinct languages, but others see them as dialects of Grebo. Dialect divisions and subtribes which appear on maps and in reports are Padebu (or Palepo), Gweabo, and Jabo.

greegree

a widespread term in West Africa in reference to secret society organization or activity.

greens

any leafy vegetable used with oil for "soup and rice" (e.g. cassava leaf, potato greens, etc.).

*gripskids

high-topped tennis shoes with rubber treads -- Keds.

grona

urchin; delinquent; orphaned.
(Apparently from the Sierra Leonean Creole meaning "growing up" and refers to children and young people without family, living untended in the city.)

+In my hearing, grona meant "frisky, wild." A grona girl can walk about, tease, bluff, and fail to show proper respect, as well as drink and smoke. A grona child may well be orphaned as d'Azevedo states, but the word was not limited to this class of persons.

ground hog

Cane Rat. Thryonomys swinderianus swinderianus. A small, heavy animal, brown in color, which is a major pest in village farms.

ground pea

peanut; ground nut.

+They are from the ground, not the grinder.

Guinea

apparently a word borrowed by the Portuguese from the Morocco Berber phrase "Akai n-Iguinawen," which means "land of the black men." In modern usage, however, the term has referred to the coastal forest area of West Africa approximately between the Gambia and the Niger Rivers. The new African nation of Guinea retained a portion of the old colonial designation "French

Guinea

Guinea."

guinea fowl

Francolinus shantensis,
Agelastes meleagrides, and Guttera
edouardi pallasii. Varieties of a
 large bird -- about the size of a
 turkey -- with wide distribution in
 West Africa. It roams wild in
 Liberia, but there is occasional
 domestication. The meat is highly
 prized in some sections, but it is
 said to be very difficult to hunt
 because of its shy habits. They are
 difficult to domesticate because of
 their tendency to return to the
 bush and their disinclination to
 attach themselves to households or
 villages, as chickens are wont to
 do. For this reason, one may hear
 a wandering or unattached person
 referred to as "a guinea fowl,"
 very much as Europeans or Americans
 might speak of a "gypsy."

+gunshot

used instead of bullet.

+guy

used instead of fellow, chap,
bloke, s.o.b., etc.Gweabo(See Grebo.)

H half-half/ hardheaded

+half-half

one-fourth. "When da baby sick, gi' hi' half-half teaspoon medicine."

half-town

a small farming hamlet, usually associated with a larger village or town. (See, also, farm.)

+half-way

a little distance towards your destination. "I carry da man half-way" means "I went with the man a little way." To express the notion that you have arrived at the midpoint of your journey, say "I reach to the center now."

+hand

may refer to one's arm as well.

hang head

meeting; private talk. "The men are hanging head" (The men are having a meeting, or are talking private matters). Often used in reference to a palaver, or a special meeting involving important decisions. (See, also, palaver, business, and matters.)

+hard

to be hard to. "Da rice har' to warm." "I har' to sleep." "I har' to ready."

hardheaded

stubborn; aggressive; arrogant. +The expression is often reversed (perhaps in the pattern of adjectives in tribal tongues, where an adjective with two sounds, "a" and "b," will be in the "ab" form

H-1 hard mouth/ having

immediately preceding a noun, and in the "ba" form as a predicate adjective following a noun (with the finite verb omitted): "My son, dah hea'-har' boy." We do it, too: to pass by a by pass; to go around a roundabout; underwear is worn under.

hard mouth

firm, straight-forward talk. "He got hard mouth" (He speaks directly, without formality). "He hardmouth me" (He told me off).

harmattan

very dry winds from the Sahara regions northeast of Liberia, coming during the dry season in the latter part of December.

+As noted in my comment under dry season, from October to April the winds blow across Liberia from the North, and they are dry. In those parts of Africa that are close to the desert, the skies grow dusty and the sun sets a fiery red. But Liberia is far from the desert. The humidity does not drop appreciably along the coast (I cannot say what is the effect in the northern areas above the rain forest), nor is dust visible in the air. It just gets hotter in Monrovia.

+have seat

used instead of sit down, be seated, take a load off your feet, etc.

+having

Been having means "has had,"

as in "Dah man been having trouble ever since." Were having means "had," as in "I were having fine clo' befo' somebody rogue me."

+head down

Put your head down is a verb phrase in Liberian English, while in American English it would be a description. A person puts his head down for various reasons: shame, fear, anger. "I see da boy steal my shoe, so I go to hi' ma to tell her. I talk all. He ju' pu' hi' hea' down."

headman

appears frequently in the older literature of the region, but is not used much today. Refers to the head of a family, or of a small village. Townchiefs or village elders may be spoken of as headmen. (See, also, elder and chief.)

head money

the currency representing the value of one slave. Often called "one slave money" or "one head money." This might be represented by a certain amount of rice, kola nut, cotton cloth, European coin or Gisi pennies, and the amount varied in accordance with time, place, and other conditions of exchange. Among the Gola, during the latter part of the nineteenth century, one healthy adult slave could be bought with a "head money" of four English pounds or four to five bundles of Gisi

pennies. Thus, today, among the older Gola peoples, 12 American or Liberian dollars, or four English or Sierra Leonean pounds, or five bundles of Gisi pennies, are sometimes spoken of as "one head money." (See, also, Gisi Pennies.)

head-tie

the scarves worn by women to bind their hair.

headwife

the first among a man's wives; but may also apply to any wife who is given special trust by her husband in the management of his household and private affairs.

+hear

to understand; to listen. "I can hear Loma to" means "I can understand Loma." "Buy me fi'-cen' pepper and fi'-cen' tomato, den bri' me fifteen cent' chan', bu' don' buy no toffee -- you hear?" means ... well, the you hear? tag at the end can have two meanings: it can mean, "Did the sound waves I just generated get into your ears?" and it can mean, "Did you comprehend my instructions?" Whichever it means is unimportant, of course. The small boy listener will shake his head up and down in either case (see confuse). I can construct no sentence that would clearly use hear in the sense of "apprehend the sound waves" and not, in common speech, also include the idea of

H-4 heart/ heart men, or
hired men

comprehension. Even a man testing a microphone could ask, "Can you hear me?" and receive in reply, "Can't understand a word," though obviously the listener perceived the sounds (and picked up some of the meaning as well). Liberians do not use the word listen, but they do know the word understand. I doubt that a Liberian would catch the sense of the sentence, "I heard, but I did not understand."

heart

liver (usually). Used in metaphor. "His heart lay down" (He was pleased). "His heart is white" (He bears only good will). "His heart is bitter" (He is angry). "He has a good heart" (He is a kind and sympathetic man).

+ "My hear' burning" means "I'm burning up inside" or "I am deeply hurt." "My hear' glad" means "I'm happy." (I wonder if you could have figured those out by yourself.)

heart men, or
hired men

terms referring to the agents of illegal secret societies, or of evil ambitious persons, who are sent to procure parts of human bodies in order to make "sacrifices" or "medicines." Rumors of such activities increase around election time or during the Christmas and New Year season. It is said that ambitious politicians seek luck and power in this way, and that there are many

small secret organizations and practitioners of bad magic who seek human parts for this purpose. Untended children are thought to be the most common victims, and in the interior one hears that "heart men" come at night along the roads in automobiles with only one headlight showing.

+Fortunately for foreigners, we are considered to have no power for these purposes.

helluva

big; bad, overwhelming, mighty.

+"Dah one helluva man" refers to a real Don Juan.

help

to do something specific for a person. "Help me" may mean "Give me something."

+You will never use help more frequently than in relation to the price of something. "You mu' try to help me small" means "You had better reduce your outrageous price."

hero

champion; expert. "He's the checkers hero." "That man is hero for talk."

+The protagonist of a film or story is called The Hero, too. (Some designation is necessary because often Liberians do not understand the characters' speech.) Anti-heroes are not known, and if the leading figure cannot easily be identified, or if he loses, the

audience will be disappointed.

hinterland

an older term, though still in use, for the interior sections of Liberia which were formerly known as the "provinces," and which were inhabited mainly by African tribal peoples. (See, also, provinces and country.)

+hitch

used instead of stick, adhere, cling. A VW fan told me, "Since I buy dis car, it never hitch once in da sand!"

Hobo Jo

prostitute; promiscuous woman. (American idiom from U.S. soldiers in World War II.)

+hold your foot

I hold your foot is to Liberians what I beg of you is to Americans, that is, a very strong pleading. Often please is joined with it: "Don' bea' me, please, I hol' your foo'." Holding someone's foot is also a gesture of sincere apology. We do not join the ideas of request and apology quite so closely in America, but one might say, "Forgive me, I have a request to make."

hold word

defer judgment; keep one's own council. "I hold word" (I will wait a while before I decide).

+holler

used instead of shout, scream, raise your voice. Make noise is

also used.

holy-holy

another term for moneybus.
Derived from the call "Hold it!"
to stop the bus.

+Hold it! is pronounced,
"Holdee-ya!" and when repeated rapidly
sounds something like "holy-holy."
But beware of Christians, with whom
Liberia abounds, particularly of the
fundamentalist varieties, for whom
holy holy will have its own meaning.

Honorable

a special title of respect
applied to any high government
official, such as heads of bureaus,
representatives of the House,
governors of territories, and
important members of the Judiciary
and Legislature. Also used loosely
for important persons connected with
government.

+hot

containing much heat; saturated
with pepper; alcoholic. "I can'
drink it, it too hot" may mean any
of: "It's just off the fire and it's
still boiling," "It's full of pepper,"
"I can't handle that much gin in my
drinks."

hope

to think, or believe. "I hope
he will do it" (I think or believe
that he will).

+house

used to refer to large buildings
as well as homes.

+how far?

Where are you going? If you are in Sinkor and want to take a bus to New Kru Town, and you flag down a Toyoto, you must always ask, "How far?" because some Toyotos stop at Waterside and some go on across Tubman Bridge. If the car boy replies, "Watersi'," say no thanks; if he says, "Insi'," meaning the bus goes inside New Kru Town, climb aboard.

+how ... for?

why? "How you pu' your mou' der for?" translates, "Why did you say that?" or, adding the intended connotation, "Who told you to open your big mouth?" How is the interrogative particle most used, and you will not often hear where, why, or how much. "How you do dah one for?" "How far you going?" "How you selling your ri'?"

humbug

tease; bother; annoy; snafu. "Don't humbug me" (Don't bother me). "He's full of humbug" (He's all mixed up, or He is an annoying or problematic person). "Plenty humbug" (a mess).

hungry rice

refers generally to poor or non-preferred varieties of rice or related grains. Specifically, however, it usually denotes a millet-like grass seed -- Digitaria exilis -- known elsewhere as Fundi, Fonve, and Hungry Millet. It is

H-9 hungry times/ hunter

frequently used as a substitute for rice in times of scarcity.

hungry

a reference to the period before the new rice crop is harvested and when the rice of the previous year's crop is used up. It is during this period that "hungry food" is eaten. (See, also, hungry rice and palm cabbage.)

+A meal is not complete without rice. The people suffer during hungry times. The men may hunt for extra game and the women cook extra greens, so that a meal could be a hunk of meat and some vegetables and fruit, and the people would leave it with a hungry feeling.

+hunter

to hunt; one who does same.

I ice box/ interior

+ice box

used instead of refrigerator.

I'm going now

Goodbye. (See, also, come.)

+Liberians sometimes seem to take their leave abruptly, without the amenities we are accustomed to. They don't turn a conversation back to the topic on which it began, or arrange a time for a future meeting, as signs that they want to break off social intercourse. They simply arise and say, "I going now" or "I go-ya" or "Excuse." They do not intend to be discourteous, and now I find myself using their straight-forward means to flee a tiresome scene.

+in front

straight ahead. To a taxi driver, you might say, "Go in front small."

+inside

used instead of merely in.
"Da woman cooking insi' da kitchen."
Also a car boy's call meaning that the bus will go into New Kru Town.

interior

a general reference to the inland sections of Liberia, but specifically to those areas which formerly comprised the "hinterland" or tribal sections inland from the "coastal region" of "counties" and "territories." The "Interior" was formerly divided into the Western, Central, and Eastern Provinces, each under the administration of Provincial

other issue before a chieftdom, it means that the related heads of the major families of the founding, land-owning lineage have settled a disagreement among themselves without recourse to outside advisement of referees. Today, it has come to mean that government officials or courts have been avoided.

+iron

anything hard or shiny: iron, aluminum, steel, even hard plastic.

I say!

Listen! Do you hear me? Common preface to a question, a pronouncement, or a request for attention. "I say, I will go to Harper tomorrow."

+Also a preface to a remark being repeated. "Blah blah blah." "You say wha'?" "I say, blah blah."

+Bellowing "I say!" is the way to get everyone within earshot to look at you, because it is the Liberian equivalent of "Hey you there!"

J Jabo/ jam

Jabo

(See Grebo.)

*Jack

(See rabbit.)

*Jocko

Mangabey monkey; Cercocebus torquatus atys. A small, sooty-grey monkey with white eyelids and long tail. A common pet.

*jale

kitchen. Used mainly by the Kru, and may derive from the English galley.

+I suspect it derives directly from the Kru language, in which the word for kitchen is jale.

jam

press; force; beset. "Don't jam me!" (Don't nag or pressure me). "I'm jammed!" (I am up against it). "They're jamming me" (They are after me).

+People most commonly get themselves jammed for money. If a Charlie comes to you and says, "I jam," which is probably true since they go to the rich Europeans and Americans before they bother with PCVs, you have a good chance to drive a hard bargain. One of the best techniques is to offer to loan the man a certain sum against a particular piece which he leaves with you; you can then offer a very low sum, and will probably have made a good buy, because I have never heard of a Charlie who came back to redeem his merchandise.

J-2 jar/ jollof rice,
or jala

*jar

large washpan.

+Also any glass container for liquid. A thermos is called a hot water jar. Bottle is used to refer to the type of glass bottle that contains beer and soft drinks.

jina

spirits. Widely used among Liberians to refer to any nature spirit or supernatural entity. Apparently derived from the Arabic jinn. Also refers to familiars or guardian spirits. (See something behind.)

+Since the word is pronounced "gee-nye," it could as easily derive from the English word genie (which, I grant, comes from jinn.)

jollof rice,
or jala

a dish prepared with rice, chopped meat, shell-fish, vegetables, and spices. Similar to the eastern Mediterranean Pilaff, and the Spanish Paella. Another similar dish -- "chicken and rice" -- is known as pela in Liberia.

+The professor describes a fine form of jollof rice; he has evidently dined at Rosaline's. To my houseboy, it was simply rice cooked with tomato paste and onions. As for "chicken and rice," I am sure d'Azevedo has in mind the famous song by the one-and-only Melinda Jackson Parker, "Chicken Is Nice with Palm Butter and Rice," which is available on long-playing records

from the honorable lady herself at her home at the corner of Broad and Lynch streets.

+join to be stuck together. "Da t'ree tree' join together."

+jop to kid, put on, bluff. If your houseboy claims to have lost the change from market, but you are not upset by it, you might ask: "You jopping me? I t'ink you gi' to your girl frien'." The IMF crew on "Mission Impossible" is said to "know jopping business pas' all." The origin of jop may be jape.

Judas a dummy dragged through the streets and whipped by crowds of children during the Easter season.

juke poke, puncture. As with a nail, pin, or stick.

ju ju a fetish; magical practices. Not widely used in Liberia. Another of those terms like devil which is used loosely by uninformed travelers. (See, also, witch, medicine, African science.)

+junction used instead of intersection or corner.

+just like the same as. "My own jus' like da ot'er one." Just like may be used figuratively: "Just like I tire',"

the speaker wondering at his unexpected sensation of fatigue.

just now

right away. "I'm going just now."

+I was talking with a woman when a messenger came for her, saying that her friend was ready to leave at once. The woman said, "Tell her to wait small. No, tell her I'm coming just now." The first message would have indicated that the woman would not be coming for several minutes, suggesting that the friend was free to go on alone if she were in a hurry, while the corrected message meant that she would be coming in a reasonably short time.

kafu

something upon which an oath is sworn, usually a "medicine" prepared by an herbalist or diviner, and used to elicit truthfulness in litigation. "Kafu" is usually placed on the tongue of a witness before testimony is given. It is supposed to harm him should he lie. In some interior courts, the Koran and the Bible are referred to as "kafu" and the witness may choose which he can make his oath on, in keeping with his faith. (See, also, ju ju and sasswood.)

kanki

a standard measurement for rice -- about two "American cups" or one "Liberian cup." (See, also, cup, tin, and kroo.)

+The professor is an anthropologist, not an arithmetician. (I am sorry, I just cannot resist this.) Compare his entry under cup. And while you are at it, check the price of a slave under Gisi pennies and under head money.

keep company

visit. "We come to keep company."

keeping

feeling; doing. "How you keeping?" (How are you getting along? or How are you feeling?)

Kimi

(See Krim.)

king

a term which appears in the old literature of the coast as a reference to any important chief or ruler. It is still used today, in some sections, as a eulogistic reference to the great leaders of the idealized past, particularly those who ruled over autonomous political entities. Occasionally, one might hear a very wealthy and powerful Paramount Chief or important elders who have descended from a lineage of rulers and founders referred to as "Kings." The term is also applied, now and then, to the President of Liberia. (See, also, chief, headman, and elder.)

kinja

a large, make-shift carrying basket made of loosely woven palm fronds with shoulder straps and headband for balancing weight.

Kissi

(See Gisi.)

kitchen

any roofed-over, but open structure used for cooking, or for meetings and receiving visitors. (See palaver-kitchen.)

+I have never heard of visitors' being received in a kitchen. I have seen kitchens which had walls as well as roofs.

knock belly

a colloquialism for doing a favor or giving a gift as an inducement for a requested service. (See,

K-3 knock off/ kola nut

also, dash, satisfy, respect, and scratch back.)

+knock off

used instead of quit working.

+know

An interesting usage of know is "to look good on." When a boy put on a new hat he had just acquired, his sister exclaimed happily, "Jus' li' da ha' know him!"

ko beya!

"Cold beer!" A street call by venders of beer.

+The discontinuation of street sales of cold beer has worked great hardship on the Volunteers of Monrovia. See, also, P.I.O.

ko breya!

"Cornbread!" A street call by venders of cornbread and rools.

+kogoma

a wooden box with a hole played like a drum.

kola nut

the nut of the Cola nitida and other species of kola tree cultivated throughout West Africa. Between five and ten nuts are clustered in the large green pod of the tree. Along with salt, gold, and slaves, the kola nut has been an important part of the ancient trade between the coastal forest areas and the peoples of the high interior savannah. It is highly prized for its taste and stimulating effect. It is chewed during work and on long treks and is

said to diminish appetite and increase energy. Kola nuts also have a ceremonial and ritual significance: white kola nuts are symbols of friendship and purity of intention, and are used in gift-exchange as well as in sacred ritual. A red dye may also be made from them.

Ko-Mende

the Mende people of the eastern and northern sections of Sierra Leone. In Liberia, frequently used as a designation for those Mende who have been strongly influenced by Mandingo religion, language, and customs. (See, also, Kpa-Mende.)

komping

(See company and kuu.)

kondo, or hondo

a term which appears on very old maps and reports for the area around what is now Bopolu in western Liberia. As this was, for centuries, the center of mixed-tribal confederacies and trade, it may or may not be significant that the Vai people as well as the Kono are sometimes known as Kono or Kondo by the Mende and other peoples around them. The Gola word gondo means hiding place or refuge, and the word kundo means raiding or piracy. There was also a great Gola warrior named Kondo who had settled in that area in legendary times. But the origin of the term in early usage is not necessarily connected with

any of these. It seems to be unknown today.

Kono

a Mande-speaking peoples of eastern Sierra Leone, closely related to the Vai. Also known as Kondo.

Koranko

a Mande-speaking peoples widely spread in eastern Sierra Leone and in Guinea. (See, also, Mandingo.)

ko wa!

"Cold water!" A street call by vendors of drinking water. (See, also, cold water.)

Kpa-Mende, or
Gba-Mende

the Mende people of the southwestern part of Sierra Leone. (See, also, Ko-Mende.)

Kpelle

a Mande-speaking peoples of Liberia, and Guinea, mainly along the southeast band of the St. Paul River. Alternatively known as the Kpese, Kpwesi, Pessy, or Pessa in Liberia, and as the Gberese, Gerze, Guerze in Guinea. In old reports and maps they are sometimes designated as Gbalin or Barline.

Kran

a Kwa-speaking peoples of southeastern Liberia and into the Ivory Coast, between the Cess and Cavally rivers. This term has been applied to a highly diverse and scattered congeries of groups inland from the Kru and Grebo, and south of the Gio-Mano. The Kran, proper, are

also referred to as Tie, or Tchien (also Gien or Kien). Other groups who are sometimes included in this cluster are the Tepo (Neabo, Twabo, Tienpo), and the Sapo (Sapa, Sapu, Pudu, Pulu, Putu). However, the actual relations of these peoples, linguistically or ethnographically, is not yet clear.

Krim, or Kimi

a West Atlantic-speaking peoples, related to the Bulum, and inhabiting a small area on the coast around the Krim River in Sierra Leone.

kroo

an older unit of measurement for rice, pepper, coffee beans, etc. About ten "Bunches" of cut rice, or three to five "tins" of thrashed rice. Similar to the European "bushel."

kroo kroo jii

crooked; deceitful; wicked; sneaky. "He play kroo kroo jii."

Kru

a Kwa-speaking peoples along the southern coast of Liberia, between the Bassa and the Grebo. They are frequently referred to as the "Beach" or "Coast" Kru (of the coast) and the "Bush" Kru to the interior. The "Nanna Kru" appear to be a sub-group of the Kru, and have been variously known as the Kra, Krao, or Krawo. The latter group is on the coast, and seems to be distinct from the far inland

Kran or Tchien groups.

kuu

a money cooperative formed among a group of friends and/or relatives for saving and investing. A Kpelle term which is often also used by surrounding peoples. (See, also, company and susu.)

Kwa, or Kru

a division of the Niger Congo family of languages which includes most of the languages of peoples of southeastern Liberia and of the Ivory Coast, etc. (See, also, West Atlantic and Mande.)

Kwaa

(See Belle.)

kwi

a term widely used among tribal peoples to refer to all foreigners, or those who have come from across the sea. It includes the descendents of Liberian colonists as well as Americans and Europeans. It has also come to be applied to all "civilized" or urban people who dress and behave in a non-African manner.

+I define kwi as "Western," "modern," "stylish," "hip."

L lanlaw/ last time

+lanlaw

landlord.

lappa

a piece of cloth about two yards in length. It is also a measurement of length for cloth. It is the common attire for women when wrapped about the waist and tucked in as a long skirt.

lasmo

a fetish or medicine packet made by a "Mole man" as a protection against harm. It is made with Arabic writing on a folded piece of paper and wrapped in leaves to be worn on the person, or placed in a locket.

+late

to be late. "I late too much." Late is a verb. "I late" is stronger than "I am late" in American English. The American form is static, the condition of tardiness. The Liberian form suggests all the speaker's acts that hold him back, as if he were busy making himself late and somehow were capable of acting to alter the situation. "I am late" is a description, while "I late" is an action.

+last price

where the bargaining stops. But, not strangely, both parties often have another "la' pri'" after the first one.

last time

before; the other day. "I gave it to you the last time."

laws

very frequently this term is used to refer to private or family totemic obligations and tabu.

(See, also, secrets, ways, totem, and taboo.)

+I suppose one must be an academician to understand why professors must use phrases like "totemic obligations and tabu." I object not only to the pretentious terminology, I object also to the condescension inherent in the anthropologists' view. A law is one's personal rule of conduct. "I can' eat pig mea', dah my law." Americans have such laws, too. If Liberians tend to relate their personal laws to larger systems of belief, perhaps this reflects that they belong to a more corporate society than ours, or are more aware of their belief systems.

Le(See Belle.)

+leave back

forget, go without. "Don' le' me back!" cried the small boy to his brother going to the movies.

leaves small

almost. "The rice leaves small to finish" (The rice is almost cooked or it is almost gone.)

+"Dah ti' I fall down, I hurt my foo', it le' small I wan' cry."

+lend

used by some Liberians, but borrow (q.v.) is better understood.

leopard

forest leopard. Felis pardus reichenowi. A reddish-brown and fairly large animal, greatly admired and feared. Figures in legend and myth throughout the region. Leopard skins and teeth are symbols of high status and have ritual importance.

let it stay

Forget it! Leave it.

Let's go!

(In the tone of an order) "I'm ready anytime you are." "Please, let us go now."

+lie

to give a false impression but not necessarily intentionally. A Liberian saw a boy dashing pell-mell towards the beach, and she ran outside to see what was drawing the boy's interest. She said when she returned, "Not'ing der. Maybe da boy lie." Another time a car pulled up. My girl friend ran to fix her hair, but to no use since no one knocked. She came to me and said, "I lie."

+like

sometimes used in comparisons in place of -er than. "I old like him" means "I am older than he is."

lion

(See leopard.)

load

baggage; things carried.
"Carry my load."

+Load generally refers to

something carried on one's head.
 "To' my loa'."

Loma

a Mande-speaking peoples of northeastern Liberia, and into Guinea. Known as Toma in Guinea. Also referred to as Buzi or Domar Buzi in Liberia. In some maps and early reports the Gbunde are distinguished from the Loma as a separate tribe. They are considered by themselves and by surrounding peoples as merely sections of the same tribe.

long

tall. "He's too long" (He's very tall).

+Long also refers to a period of time, as in "Don' stay long to cook, I hungry-o!"

+looking

seems like; as though. "It looking like it wan' rain." "Da smell looking like poo-poo." "Da foo' looking like pepper in my mou'."

+looking glass

used instead of mirror.

+loose

to loosen, untie. "I mu' loose your bra?"

+lost

to get lost, be lost, lose. I am going to expound my thoughts on the active principle of Liberian English. Take the sentence "My pencil los' yesterday." What does

it mean, connotations included? Perhaps the finite verb is merely omitted, as it is in many languages (including Semetic tongues, which may have influenced Liberian speech), so that we should understand the sentence to say, "My pencil was lost yesterday." But perhaps lost is actually a verb itself. Liberians do not speak much to white men of spirits which are invisible or which inhabit inanimate objects (though small and not-so-small girls have run in terror when I took a mask off the wall and put it on my head), but their language puts more life into things than ours does. Inanimate objects may be the subjects of verbs for which Americans require human agents. True, we still say, "The tree fell down" and "The clock is running," yet Liberians go even further. "My pencil was lost yesterday" means to an American that the speaker could not find his pencil the previous day; it could be followed by "But I found it today." "My pencil los' yesterday" means to a Liberian that the speaker's pencil somehow got itself out of sight the preceding day; it could be followed by "but it will foun' tomorrow," as though it had decided to come out of hiding. See also late. Similarly, fear and suffer are passive verbs in American English, in that they express something which has happened to

the speaker, while in Liberian English they are active verbs, expressing what the speaker is doing.

+Do not use the verb to lose, meaning to have something get out of your reach, because Liberians will hear lose as loose, q.v. Thus if you said, "I will lose my shoe if I don't stop running," a Liberian might suggest that you put a double knot in the lace, thinking you meant that the lace would come undone. Actually his suggestion would probably save your shoe; the ambiguity is not important here. But what if you had a guest who was wearing the ugliest outfit imaginable, and you proposed to her, "Why don't you lose the lappa?" and she thought you said, "Why don't you loose that lappa?" and she did?

lover

a sexual partner or consort, as distinct from a spouse.

loving to

to be a lover; giving love; an affair. "She is loving to him."

M ma/ make farm

ma (See mother.)

Maa (See Mano.)

magic this term is not widely used in Liberia, though it is fairly common among urban, Western-educated peoples as a general reference to mysterious or occult practices. Among tribal peoples, however, its rare use seems to be limited to the implication of "tricks" or legerdemain (e.g. "magicman" or "magic-player" -- a professional performer of marvelous feats).

+I frequently heard the expression play magic, meaning to do anything supernatural, among tribal persons. It was definitely not limited to magicians' stunts.

+make it

A useful construction is, "Make it so you will ...," meaning "Do what is necessary to" "Make it so you will go now."

"Make it with ..." often means "make it from" Liberians used to (perhaps still do in the bush) make soap from palm oil and caustic soda (lye). I was once told, referring to soap, "We can make it with soda."

make farm

the entire process of preparing a plot of land for farming, and including the planting of potential crops. (See cut, clean, burn,

scratch, and brush farm or bush.)

mala

Malagueta pepper. (See, also, Melegueta.)

Malagueta pepper

(See Melegueta.)

Malinka

a Mande-speaking peoples widely spread in the savannah region. Alternatively designated as Maninka, Mandinka, or Malinka. (See, also, Mandingo.)

Mamba, or Maaba

(See Bassa and De.)

Mamba Point

(See Bassa and De.)

Mampa, or Mampwa

an older designation for the Bulom peoples who live on Sherbro Island in Sierra Leone. (See, also, Sherbro.)

+manage

to be able to. "How da mosquito manage to get insi' my scree'?" This sentence would be understood more easily than "How did the mosquito get inside my screen?" or "How was the mosquito able to get inside my screen?" And if you think you have never seen a mosquito inside a screen, perhaps also you have never arrived anywhere inside of ten minutes.

Mande

the "Mandingo" languages. A division of the Niger-Congo family of Africa. Among the Mande-speaking

Mande

peoples are the Vai, Kpelle, Loma, Gbandi, Gio, Mano, Mende, Maninka, Kono, Bambara, Susu, Yalunka, and Koranko of Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Ivory Coast. The older distinction between "Mande-tan" and "Mande-fu" sub-groupings of the Mande languages, proposed by Dietrich Westermann, is not considered obsolete by modern linguists. (See, also, West Atlantic and Kwa.)

Mande-tan/ Mande-fu

a bipartite classification of the Mande or Mandingo languages proposed by Dietrich Westermann. It is based upon a division into a northern group of Mande languages which use tan, or a similar word, for "ten," and a southern group which uses words similar to fu for that numeral. Though modern linguists consider this classification obsolete, these terms still appear in certain publications and are used by many Liberians. (See, also, Mande.)

Mandingo

refers, formally, to a cluster of languages of the Niger-Congo family, spoken by many of the savannah peoples between the upper Niger and Senegal rivers. In Liberia, it may be a specific reference to the Maninka (or Malinka) from Guinea: but more commonly it refers to any of the Mandingo-speaking peoples who come from beyond the forest section, and

who are Muslims and traders. The Mandingo immigrants who have settled in the area of Bopolu, between the St. Paul and the Loffa rivers, have been at various periods in the past, referred to as Manianka, Manya, or Kondo. (See, also, Mande, Moli, and Ko-Mende.)

mango plum

mango. Sometimes called "golden plum." A wild variety resembles a small green apple and contains a single large flat seed which may be roasted, beaten in a mortar, and boiled into a gravy.

Mani

(See Mandingo.)

Manianka

(See Mandingo.)

Maninka

(See Malinka and Mandingo.)

Mano, or Maa

A Mande-speaking peoples of central eastern Liberia. Closely associated with the Gio; thus the area is often referred to as Mano-Gio in maps and Liberian official parlance.

Manya

(See Mandingo.)

market

to trade; to sell. Usually expressed as "make market." Also refers to any place of selling or trading, or any goods intended for exchange. ("She carries market in her head tie" means "She has things

to sell or trade wrapped in her bandana.")

matters

subjects under consideration. "He has matters" (He is involved in some pressing issues). (See, also, business, palaver, and hang head.)

+mean

to be mean to, to do wrong to. "Dah boy mean me."

+mean it

used instead of intend, did on purpose, etc. "Don' tell me sorry. You mean it to do it."

meat

game; flesh; an animal. "There is a meat!" (There is an animal or game). "Small meat" (small animals). "His meat is dry" (He is thin and sickly).

medicine

an object (fetish) or practice (ritual) intended to control supernatural powers for desired ends. "Medicine" can be "good" or "bad" and can be produced by being or evil agents. (See, also, poison, witch, ju ju, and sasswood.)

Melegueta

the small seeds of the Aframomum melegueta plant which was once a major export from this coast in the trade with Europeans. It was used by the latter as a spice and as a much needed preservative for meats and other foods. Europeans

once called it "Grains of Paradise" and therefore the section of the Guinea Coast which is now Liberia and Sierra Leone was once known as the "Grain Coast" or the "Maleguet Coast." Liberians seldom use this seed as a food spice, but rather as a medicinal tea or ointment. It is generally referred to as "mala" or "mala pepper." Among the Sierra Leonean Creole it is called "aligapepe" (alligator pepper) and this term sometimes is heard in Liberia

Mende

a Mande-speaking peoples of Sierra Leone and western Liberia. Sometimes known as Koso or Kossa. (See, also, Kpa-Mende and Ko-Mende)

Merico

Americo-Liberian; American. A term for the descendants of the Liberian colonists. As the nation becomes more integrated, the use of this term is being discouraged and is thought to imply invidious social distinctions. (Sometimes heard as "A.L.")

Mesurado

the name given to the Cape, on which Monrovia is now placed, by Pedro de Cintra, the first Portuguese to reach this area (in 1461). The anchorage of the point was referred to in early journals and maps as "Mesurado Roads," and the backwater east of Monrovia as the "Mesurado

Lagoon." It was the land south from Cape Mesurado along the coast which was referred to as "Montserrado or Mamba Territory" in the 1825 map of Liberia by Yehudi Ashmun. At this early date, "Mesurado" often appeared as "Montserrado" in written records and maps. Liberians tend to use the word Montserrado (e.g. "Montserrado County") more frequently. (See, also, Mamba.)

+Mickey Mouse

relating to animated films and similar drawings. "I wan' go see Mickey Mouse show to da Roxie."

+mind

look after. "Min' da ri'-ya!" "Dah ti' when you be going in town, dah who will min' da baby?"

+The American expression don't mind, as in "You don't mind if I drink this Coke, do you?" should not be used in Liberia. A Liberian defined don't mind thus: "To us, I ain' got ti', anyt'ing you wan' do."

mistake

accident; involuntary mishap. "He made a mistake" (He fell down and broke his leg, or, He failed his examinations, or, He wasn't to blame). Seldom implies avoidable error or personal responsibility.

Moli

Mandingo; Arabic; Mohammedan. Usually has reference to a Mohammedan scholar or diviner who

who makes use of Arabic script.

+moneybus

a bus that carries paying passengers in or between towns. This word is used more frequently by foreigners than by Liberians, who speak of car and bus.

monkey bird

White-crested Hornbill.
Tropicranus albocristatus
albocristatus. A large bird with white head and long blackish green feathers and tail. Believed to follow monkey troops and warn them of danger by its cry.

*monkey plum,
or peach

the edible fruit of the Parinarium macrophyllum which grows wild in the coastal sections of Liberia.

Montserrado

(See Mesurado.)

*moon

month. "We will go in one moon."

mother, or ma

a term of respect for any older woman with whom one has, or hopes to have, a dependent relationship. May be applied more generally as a deference term for matrons, as with Mrs. or Madam. In some sections "my mother" or "one of my mothers" may refer specifically to the women on the maternal side of one's family (i.e. one's mother's sisters, or one's mother's older female relatives, as well as one's own mother).

M-9 motorcar/ must

(See, also, big/small relative and real-relative.)

motorcar automobile. (The term machine is used occasionally.)

*mountain deer Zebra Antelope. Cephalophus doria. A small animal (about 16 inches high) of light brown color and black stripes.

+move This verb is used more often than others which also suggest that the listener change his coordinates. "Mo' from der!" gets action before "Get away!" "Mo' now!" is better than "Hurry up'."

+move behind to leave alone. "Mo' behi' me" means "Leave me alone." "When da man say I mu' do ba' t'ing, I mo' behi' him."

+music box harmonica.

musket rifle.

must shall; will. "He must come" (He shall come). "You must!" (Will you? or, Please do.)

+I think d'Azevedo's definition is correct (so far as it goes), must does often mean "will," but his examples are poor. I never heard a Liberian say, "You mu!"; some word always follows must. I did hear Liberians say, "He mu' come?" but

d'Azevedo's translation is wrong. The following paragraph gives a better translation. It was in only one type of construction that I heard must mean "will," and it was this one: "I wan' da show mu' not end." "I wan' you mu' change da baby' diaper for me."

+A more common use of must is in the sense of "may," and this in questions. "He mu' come?" (d'Azevedo's sentence) means "May he come?" -- either "May he come in?" or "May he follow you?" "I mu' eat da ri'?" means "May I eat the rice?" I used to be irked by hearing small children throwing must's at me, such as "You mu' gi' me toffee," and I would shout at them, "I must not!" But after a while, the knowledge that must is their way of asking, or perhaps the growth of my feelings for them, soothed my ruffled linguistic sensibility.

+myself

I agree, share your feelings, concur. "I li' plam butter too much!" "Myse'f, I li' it too."

Nanna Kru

(See Kru.)

native

a term which sometimes appears in government parlance as a synonym for tribal or aboriginal. But it is not widely used in general speech and is, in some instances, resented as being condescending. (See, also, African, tribal, and country.)

Negro

black; a term from European languages which, early in the period of European exploration, was applied to all dark-skinned peoples -- particularly those of Africa. The term is seldom heard among English-speaking Liberians, and is being increasingly avoided by other Africans. (See, also, African and black.)

+The word Negro is used uniformly among tribal persons to refer to American black persons.

+never

not. "I never went to the store" does not mean that the speaker has in his life not once set foot inside the store. It means only that he did not go at the one particular moment in question.

new rice

first harvest, or fresh rice. Used for sacrifices and first harvest rites. Highly preferred for eating.

ngo

cousin, brother, or sister. A term of reference and address applied

to any of one's relatives of the same generation used among the Vai, Gola, Mandingo, and Mende. (Probably derived from Mandingo.)

Ngere, or Guere

(See Gio.)

niece/nephew

in some sections of the country these terms refer only to a man's sister's children, or to a woman's brother's children. (See, also, aunt, uncle, cousin, sister, and brother.)

night suit

evening leisure wear -- usually pajamas, or a lounging suit. In the villages, may be worn as acceptable strolling and host attire.

n'mind ya

Don't worry; don't mind; don't fret; I'm sorry.

+When someone has been injured or is sick, the proper term of consolation is No mi'-ya! If he is able to shrug it off, he will answer Yes. If he does not answer, his affliction is serious.

*no play

believe me. "I will do it, no play" (I will do it without wasting time, believe me).

nothing bad

all's well; O.K. A common response to the question, "How are you keeping?" or, "What's the news?" (See, also, keeping.)

N-3 no-way/ no/yes.

+To the questions "How you keeping?" and "What news?" one may answer also, "Not'ing strange" and "No ba' news."

no-way

impasse; trapped; stuck.

"There's no-way, man!"

+"Gi' me fi' cen'!" "No way-o!"

no/yes

(See yes/no.)

o? or o!

a response spoken in a quick falsetto conveying surprise or delight.

+ -o! (suffix)

added to words and phrases for emphasis. "My people-o!" "Da man beating me-o!"

of course

in a narrative may be used as "Well then," "so," or "And then" (e.g. "Of course, when she came to call for me, I was not there.") Also used as a tentative affirmative answer such as "Maybe," "Perhaps," "Well, yes." Seldom used as "Of course!" meaning "Certainly!" or "Sure!"

+I am not satisfied with d'Azevedo's exposition on of course but I have not replaced it with my own because I am not completely satisfied with my own comment, which follows:

+Of course has two meanings in American English, "in the normal manner" and "as might be expected." I cannot construct a sentence illustrating the first meaning alone, since anything which is done in the normal manner is also expectable, but I can construct -- and Liberians always do, too -- a sentence illustrating the second meaning alone, for many things which are expectable are not necessarily done in a normal manner. "John came to see me. Of course, I punched hi

in the nose at once." In Liberian constructions, of course means "as might be expected"; it is followed by a clause beginning with but; and it carries a sense of negation. While witnessing a TV program in which Bad Guy A had just pushed Innocent Victim out of a tall building, a Liberian said of Bad Guy B: "Dah not da man wha' do it. O' cour', he push, bu' da odder man do it." I once heard another Liberian say, "One man ask me fo' col' water. O' cour' I go' plenty, bu' I say No." When I asked what the word digging means, I was told, "O' cour', not'ing bad. It means"

+okay

used liberally.

+olden times

1965. "I like olden ti' recor'."

Old Man Begger

a humorous tramp-clown impersonation, usually masked, by a young boy and a crowd of urchin followers during the Christmas season. These groups are similar to the "Santa Claus" troops, excepting that Old Man Begger and his "Speaker" rove the streets begging for money and bits of food for which they will dance and sing. He is also a wily and disreputable thief. Occasionally, one will see an Old Man Begger with a "White Man" or "Big Shot" mask, and the impersonation is a satire of important persons fallen from grace.

0-3 old (person)/ one-time

+Rubber horror masks are used now, too. The masker is called "Ol' Ma' Baykeh."

old (person)

a term of respect when applied to any older person. Can be used as a formal title (e.g., "Old Man Gotombo" or "Old Lady Hawa"). (See, also, grandparent, father, mother, and elder.)

*one-cent car

on foot; walking. "I went one-cent car."

+one-one

separately; a little bit; a few. "Can you hear Grebo?" "I can hear one-one," meaning that the answerer can understand a few words. "When da school open firs' ti', all da children wan' go. Bu' ti' pass, ju' one-one leave back." All left school but a few. If a teacher said to the class, "Answer da question one-one," he would mean that each student should answer his own question.

one-time

right away; immediately. "Come one-time!" "He went one-time!"
+Every language has its idioms that are not translatable, and one-time is one of these. I agree with d'Azevedo that one-time implies "right away" and "immediately," as in these sentences: A driver to his passenger, "Get down one-time"; a car boy to a rider reluctant to move

P pa/ palm bird

pa (See father.)

Padebu, or Palepo (See Grebo.)

+pack up used instead of stacked, piled, arranged, jammed together. "All da clo' pack up in da cu'bo'." "Taxi driver can pack up da people insi' da ca'."

palaver discussion; argument; trouble (e.g. "money palaver," or "Woman palaver"). Derived from the Spanish word: palabra.

+Since palaver is an English word, whose etymology is listed through not Spanish but Late Latin and Portuguese, I suspect the Liberians learned it from the British in Sierra Leone, perhaps from the Americans in Liberia, or from the Portuguese in Guinea.

+A palaver is not merely a discussion; it is an argument worth witnessing, which people run to do.

palaver-kitchen a roofed, but open structure, usually placed at the administrative center of a village or town, where council meetings, court proceedings, or official receptions take place. (See, also, kitchen.)

palm bird Allied Hornbill. Lophoceros semitasciatus. A common species of hornbill in Liberia. Feeds on palm nuts.

palm bird

Yellow-casque Hornbill.
Ceratogymna elata. Large black and white hornbill which feeds on palm nuts as well as other fruits.

palm butter

the thick, oily gravy strained from the pounded pulp of the palm nut. When mixed with pepper and meat it makes a much relished "soup" to serve on rice. (See, also, palm kernal oil and raw palm oil.)

palm cabbage

the tender inner pulp of the oil and raffia palms -- usually a young tree which must be cut down to get the edible part. Known in the U.S. as the canned delicacy "hearts of palm." It is considered "hungry food" by most Liberian people, however, and is not a preference.

palm kernel oil

oil made from the cracked kernals of the palm nut. A clear, light oil made in small amounts, and used for medicine, anointing, and sometimes for cooking. (See, also, raw palm oil and palm butter.)

palm wine

the sweet sap of the raffia and oil palms. It is drunk both fresh and fermented. Sometimes jokingly referred to as "African tea."

+pamphlet

used instead of magazine, brochure, and leaflet.

Paramount Chiefdom

the largest political unit of "tribal authority," under the leadership of a Paramount Chief who is elected by the lesser chiefs and elders and approved by the President Paramount chieftainships do not necessarily comprise traditionally unified or cooperating tribal sub-sections, but are often the result of national government decree This system is similar to that known in former British colonies as "indirect rule," whereby it is the policy of the governments to administer tribal affairs through tribal chiefs. (See, also, chiefdom, tribal authority, and clan.)

part

that which belongs to someone. "That be my part country" (That is my country). "Give me my part" (Give me my share).

+I heard part used mainly in one construction, and it meant something like "for my money" or "as far as I am concerned." "I don' like re' shir'." "My pa', I like dem too much."

pass

go. "I will pass that way."

passport

common colloquialism among school children for crib sheets. In Monrovia, one may hear "I got a passport to the United States" as a reference to a crib sheet that will bring good grades and maybe a

foreign scholarship.

pass water

urinate.

+past

-er than, more than, better than, faster than, ... than. "My brodder tall pas' me." "Dah boy can run pas' all."

pawpaw

papaya.

+pay one's debt

to return kind for kind, get even. If you tickle your girl friend until she turns blue (or would if she were white), she may threaten to pay her debt. Similarly if you abuse her.

+pee-pee

to urinate. It is not indelicate to indicate your true purpose for leaving a room. Only pubescent girls in the presence of unmarried male PCVs are likely to giggle.

pepper

many varieties of sweet pepper (Capsicum annum) and hot pepper (Capsicum frutescens) are cultivated and almost indispensable to any meal. Hot peppers of many kinds, either fresh or dried, whole or powdered, are used in abundance for many dishes. They are usually distinguished from sweet peppers as "hot-hot pepper."

pepper bird

Common Bulbul. Pycnonotus barbatus inornatus. Olive-brown and

white bird about the size of a Thrush. Liberia is often spoken of as "the land of the Pepper Bird."

- +piazza used instead of porch. "He sleeping to da piazza."
- +pick used instead of choose. "Pick da one you li."
- +picture house movie theater.
- +P.I.O. Pioneer Gin. Early in 1971 its production was discontinued due to lack of quality controls. It was cheap-o!
- +pikeen small child. From pickaninny? (or is pickaninny from pikeen?)
- +pistol used instead of gun and revolver Rifle is used.
- +plank used for any piece of wood that has been through a sawmill, be it 2x4 or a sheet of plywood.
- plaster any adhesive-type tape.
 +I heard plaster used to mean "band-aid" or "bandage," as the British use the word.
- play "a play"; village festivity or celebration involving music and dancing. Any good time, with group participation and entertainment.

plenty

a lot; many; much. "There be plenty people there."

+Plenty may be used to convey the idea of excess: "Da foo' plenty to eat." "Da clo' plenty to wash."

poison

a harmful or bad "medicine" -- either a concoction or a spell. (See, also, medicine.)

+poo-poo

feces; to defecate. The word shit is known and used, but it is less delicate than poo-poo.

Poro

the general term for the compulsory fraternal associations, known as the male secret societies, in many of the tribes of central and Western Liberia, as well as in Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Ivory Coast. Each tribe has its own name for this organization. It should not be confused with many other types of secret society which exist in the region. (See, also, Sande.)

Poro bush

the sacred grove of the men's secret society where boys are trained and initiation rites take place. (See, also, society bush, bush school, etc.)

porter

a carrier. One who is pressed or hired into service for transporting loads in the interior.

Portugee

Portuguese; Lebanese. Older tribal people often refer to Lebanese by this term.

potato

this term includes several varieties of local and introduced tubers, such as sweet potato, yam, the Irish potato, etc. (See, also, eddo.)

+For starch lovers who enjoy garlic bread with their pizza, wait until you eat potato soup over rice.

pound

about four dollars. Occasionally heard in the hinterland as holdover from early use of British money.

+power

strength, energy. "When you gi' me rice, I eat, I will got power." Well, you have heard of black power and Jewish power and people power; now you have heard of rice power.

+primer

kindergarten. Primer I is the first semester, and Primer II the second.

+press

used instead of to iron, but the instrument that does the job is an iron. Liberians press their clothes, and they press their hair as well.

province

until recently, a designation of the three administrative sections of the interior of Liberia (i.e. the

Central, Western, and Eastern Provinces). Over the past few years, these have been replaced by new "Counties" consistent with the administrative organization of the coastal region. (See, also, country and district.)

+P.T.O.

please turn over.

+Puegeot

the sound a bullet makes. "Den da hero gun go, 'puegeot'!"

pull swear

to remove a curse.

+pump

used instead of faucet, spigot.

+put your mouth

talk badly about. "Who say you mu' pu' your mou' on me for?"

Putu

(See Kran.)

quarrel

to scold; to argue. "If the child does not do as he is told, his mother will quarrel with him."

+quick

quickly. Often doubled into quick-quick. Say "Go quick!" instead of "Don't dawdle" or "Get going!" though "Move your ass!" would get results, too.

A quick-service camera is a Polaroid. Liberians even in the bush know Polaroids, and if you are seen pulling out the negative and print of a shot of a Liberian (they love to be photographed), you will be hard-pressed not to give it to him. With an ordinary camera, explain that it is not quick-service and, if you are pushed, promise to send a print. If asked for your name and address, meaning someone has pulled this trick on your subject before, make up something unless you plan to send him his picture (which would be highly virtuous of you if you were shooting slides). Do not worry about his remembering your face because all white men look alike, except that sometimes a Liberian whom you don't know from Patrice Lamumba will claim to remember you from months or years back and be right.

Quick-service is often used, especially in relation to services like dry cleaning and developing photos.

R rabbit/ ragged

rabbit

Pygmy Antelope. Neotragus pygmasus. A small, brown, white-tailed animal seldom more than twelve inches in height. Figures in local tales as the wise and witty character, much as "Er'er Rabbit" of American folklore. In English, this animal is referred to usually as "rabbit," or sometimes as "Jack."

raccoon

Palm Civet. Nandinia binotata. A small grey and spotted tree civet with long, ringed tail.

rainy season

the wettest months of the year are August and September. There is a slow increase of rainfall from February through July, with a slight decrease called the "middle dries," in early August. (See, also, dry season.)

+From April through September, the Northern Hemisphere receives the sun's direct rays, and is warmed. Warm air rises. The subsequent vacuum is filled by air moving up from the South. Southerly winds have crossed the sea when they reach Liberia, and they are wet. A great deal of their moisture they drop on the rain forest.

ragged

worn-out; in disrepair. "I can't sit in that ragged chair."

+See also ugly.

+ra-ra

In Grand Cess and Maryland County, and perhaps elsewhere as well, ra-ra is used in place of boc-boc, q.v., meaning "May I come in?" or "I'm coming in!" If someone comes to your door and says, "Ra-ra," could you resist the temptation to answer, "Sis-boom-ba!"?

+rascal

a scamp; playful or tricky character. Mild villification.

raw, or red palm
oil

the fresh oil skimmed from the soaking pounded pulp of the palm nut. The most common form of "palm oil" used in cooking. (See, also, palm butter, palm kernel oil, burnt palm oil and red rice.)

+reach

to arrive. "I reach' Monrovia yesterday." "Da ti' never reach to go yet?"

real-(relative)

genitors, and actual biological kin, as distinguished from sociological or fictional kin of one's genealogy. "My real pa and my real ma" (My actual or true parents). "My real sister" (My true sibling from same parents), etc. (See, also, born and same-parent.)

red deer

Harnessed Antelope. Tragelaphus scriptus scriptus. A brown animal with black stripe down the back and spiral twisted horns on the male.

red rice

cooked rice mixed with raw red palm oil, and much relished. Has a ritual and ceremonial use in connection with auspicious occasions and "sacrifices" to nature spirits and ancestors.

regions

(See interior and coastal.)

relative

(See family.)

+report

to tell on. Although it would be a waste of breath, a teacher might instruct his class, "I want you to report to me any student who spies on your paper during the test."

+resemble

used instead of look like (which has its own meaning, see looking). When someone asks you if you are not Joe Doaks who was a Volunteer six years ago in Bolahun, and you are not and say as much, the person may say, "You resemble him too much!" or "I swear! White people can resemble!"

respect

a material representation of esteem through favors or gift exchange. "To show respect" or "He gave respect."

+Equally as often, respect means "showing proper regard for one's betters." In a culture with few material possessions and little value placed on (or possibility of) achievement, so that status could not be enhanced by accumulation or

advancement, a proper showing of respect, be it tangible like dash or intangible like posture, inflection, and gesture, can be all important. The rebel, iconoclast, and misfit are not idealized in Liberia. Not change but conservatism, keeping things as they are so they do not get worse, upholding the ancient and proven customs -- these are the hallmark of traditional Liberian culture. Monrovia may be a transitional city, but most people in it, from the most honored to the lowest, are part of this way of life; somehow it is the latter who support it the more. Perhaps change is desirable; even so, it must be promoted with a proper showing of respect.

+responsible

This word in American English has applications in the past and future: "I am responsible for the accident." "I am responsible for closing up the meeting hall." In the past, responsible implies blame for something done or not done; in the future, it implies a job to be done. I never heard a Liberian use responsible with respect to a past event (see blame), but I did sometimes hear someone say, and usually with reference to taking care of a person, "I will be responsible." "I am responsible for X" means the speaker will take care of him, e.g. by paying his bus fare, not that the speaker put X into his present condition.

R-5 rice bird/ right by

+You may be interested to know that Liberians have little idea of negligence in accident cases. Although they enunciate the principles of liability only with proven fault, the cases show that, if the parties are from the same social class, the richer or uninjured person must pay for the other, regardless of who caused the incident.

rice bird

Weaver-bird. Abundant in Liberia, and of many species. Highly destructive to palm trees and rice crops. Live in colonies with characteristic basket-like nests of woven palmleaf fibers.

rice crust

the toasted rice that sticks to the sides of the pot after cooking. Highly prized by children, who stand about the fire waiting for the emptied pots. Very much the same as "pot lickings," or "licking the bowl."

+An entry in a recent Whole Earth Catalog states that the rice crust is the most nutritious part of the pot.

rice dust

(See country bread.)

+right by

used instead of close to or next to. "My brodder living right by da pla' where da bus can be turning to Sinkor." (If this direction does not clearly identify the place, you may soon find that other Liberian directions are equally inexact. I advise that you press for

as much detail as possible, since Liberians often have different designations for places than have the ex-patriots like you and me. For example, while we might speak of the Nigerian Embassy or Department of Agriculture to locate a spot, a Liberian would refer to the Nagbway Bar ("Nahg-bway Ba'"), only the bar has not been there for a long time ("Someti' da man die-o"). When you reach the approximate area of your destination, do not hesitate to ask for directions of several persons. Liberians are usually quite willing to help you find a place, though they are not always accurate; and if sometimes you are sent the wrong way, other times a person will walk you to the very spot you want.)

road

any pathway, as distinct from "motor road" or "train-road."

+I never heard motor road, but often heard car road and coal-tar road.

rogue

thief. Thievery is a major crime among most of the tribal peoples of the interior, and thieves are punished severely. The cry of "rogue" may also be heard frequently in towns and cities, where crowds will follow an apprehended thief to jail shouting abuses and calling attention to his crime.

R-7 rope/ runny stomach
+extra added attraction:
 a pun

+rope used to designate anything
resembling a string, such as shoe
laces, clothes line, belt.

+rotten to spoil. "Da banana wan'
rotten."

*roundneck T-shirt.

rub to smooth; to polish. "She
rubbed the house" (She plastered
the rough mud walls with fine clay).
"He rubbed his knife" (He polished
his knife).

+rubber gun sling shot. In the bush,
Liberians use a sling shot a la
David v. Goliath, but I don't know
what they call it.

+rude unruly. A fairly strong
epithet. When small boys walked
into my house without knocking, I
would throw them out with a flourish
and cry for all to hear, "Go now!
Move from here" I don' wan' no ru'
children in my house!"

runny stomach diarrhea.

+This is not exactly a proper
dictionary entry, but it sort of
falls under "R." Liberians laugh
a lot, but they do not seem to tell
jokes; they do not hear English

rhymes, and many persons say they cannot appreciate a pun. I think the explanation may be that their languages are tonal and ours is not. But I have heard one Liberian pun: If someone says, "You are right," he may be answered by, "And I also soup." (To hear the pun, you must pronounce right as a Liberian would, "ri" -- which is the way he would pronounce rice as well.)

+sack

used instead of to fire, dis-
miss. A newspaper headline recently
proclaimed, "Kru Coast Attorney
Sacked by President Tubman."

sacrifice

a ritual offering. A term
for any "gift" made to propitiate
the nature spirits, the ancestors,
or any other supernatural entity.
Such offerings can be made in the
form of money, food, or other
articles, or even by an act such as
feasting, mutilation, homicide,
etc. Sacrifices must always be made
to some power on the preparation of
effective "medicines" and for the
success of any magical procedure.

+Sacrifices may be controlled
by tribal laws which will be
enforced in court and backed by the
President. My mother-in-law killed
a sheep, her own sheep, contrary
to the laws of the Barrabo clan of
the Grebo tribe, and it cost me
\$40 to get her out of jail.

sand cutter

diviner. Especially a diviner
who uses sand to read his "signs."

Sande

the general term for the
compulsory sororal associations, or
female secret societies, which
exist among many of the tribes of
Liberia as well as in Sierra Leone
and Guinea. The term Bundu is also
heard, but this is used mainly in
Sierra Leone among the Mende.
(See, also, Poru.)

Santa Claus

refers to the masked dancers and their troupes of attendants who perform through the streets of Monrovia and in the interior towns during the weeks before Christmas. The "Santa Claus" is always accompanied by a "Speaker" who will explain his "Old Man's" mission and request a gift for his performance, a custom which is derived from the traditional public stance of the masked tribal performers of ritual and ceremonial roles. Many of the young men who take part in Santa Claus troops are highly skilled dancers, singers, and musicians. Some are university students. A brilliant troop may earn a considerable amount of money during a season. These funds are often accumulated until the end of the season, when a celebration is held to divide them among the participants. This practice is closely related to that of other informal mutual-aid cooperatives. (See susu and kuu. Also see devil.)

same-(parent)

a way of distinguishing siblings from cousins or family wards. "She is my sister, same-mother, same-father" (She is my real sister from the same parents). A half-sister might be designated as "my sister, same father, different mother," or the reverse.

S-3 Sapo, or/ scare
 Sapa

Sapo, or Sapa

(See Kran.)

sasswood, or
sassywood

a concoction made from the bark of the Erythrophlaeum guineensis, and the term may be derived from the English "sauce" (Of. Schwab 1947:427; and Johnston 1906:1065, Vol. 2). Used as an ingredient upon which oaths are sworn, and as an ordeal in cases of litigation. The term has come to be a general reference to all ordeals involving a potion taken internally. (See, also, kafu.)

+Sassywood may be endured by swallowing or being touched with a burning stick. It reminds me of West Indian voodoo, since it seems to work because the people believe in it.

sasswood player

a diviner who uses sasswood "medicine" to find out the truth of a matter. One who administers the potion and interprets the results of an ordeal.

+The verb is to play sassywood, meaning to administer to have administered on oneself the sassywood ordeal.

satisfy

to please; make happy; to treat properly. "I am not satisfy" (I am not pleased, or I have not been treated properly).

+scare

to be afraid, concerned,

anxious. Scare is intransitive; it does not take a direct object. A Liberian will not say, "The devil scared me." He will say either, "Da devil fear me" or "When I spy da devil, I scare."

schnappes

a measurement ... about eight ounces. Refers to the small bottles of Schnappes available from village traders. "Give me one schnappes cane juice" (Give me an amount of cane juice equivalent to a bottle of Schnappes).

+scoobies

tennis shoes.

+scratch

often used to mean to itch. "Da mosquito bite scratching me."

scratch back

giving a favor or a "dash" in order to expedite a service. (See, also, dash and knock belly.)

scratch farm

hoeing; preparing the ground for planting; weeding. (See, also, clean bush, burn bush, cut farm, and make farm.)

+scrub

A Liberian scrubs his teeth (instead of "brushes" them). "Wash the floor" means use a mop; "scrub the floor" means use a brush.

+sea

used instead of ocean.

secret

private knowledge (often referring to sacred oaths, secret

society regulations, or to individual and family totemic beliefs.)

secret society

a general reference, both by Liberians and foreigners, to exclusive tribal associations involving special initiation and secret codes of conduct. (See, also, society, cultural societies, and unlawful societies.)

+Seenyees

Lebanese.

+see you

used more frequently than good-bye.

+self

a shortened form of himself, itself, etc., and used for emphasis. "Gi' me dah one sel'." "I don' know dah him sel'." "Da water col' sel'." "Da door ain' close' sel'." "Wha' ti' he will learn dah one sel?"

+send

to pass, throw. "Sen' me da ball" means that the listener should pass the ball to the speaker.

+sense

wits, intelligence. "I say, you go' sen'!" Use sense as a compliment, instead of intelligent, smart, bright (which the listener would think referred to the shade of his skin), or clever (though this last word is understood). Show me sen' means "Explain to me."

+shadow

may mean reflection in water or mirror as well as shade from the sun.

+sheet

used to refer to a piece of paper. "Gi' me one sheet." In reference to a large white piece of cloth used to cover a mattress, the word used is bedsheet.

Sherbro

the West Atlantic-speaking peoples of Sherbro Island. Has been used as an alternate designation for the Bulom of that area. (See, also, Bulom and Mampa.)

shilling

about twenty cents (sometimes, a quarter). Common usage in certain sections of the hinterland.

+shop

a small dry- and soft-goods establishment operated by a black man, Liberian or (often) Ghanain or Nigerian. A shop is usually smaller than a store, q.v.

+shove

has the same meaning in Liberia English as in American English. I list it because, while Americans often use less graphic expressions, Liberians generally use active words. An American might say, referring to a letter opening in a door, "Is this where I put the mail?" and a Liberian would (did to me, of course) say, "Dah pla' to shove letter?"

+sign board

any sign. Sign boards mark bus stops, buildings, and the like. The word sign used by itself in this sense would not be understood so quickly as "si' bo'."

Sikon

(See Bassa.)

sister

may refer to any female relative or ward of the family who is of one's own generation; though in some sections female cousins on the father's side might be called "sister" while those on the mother's side would be called "cousin" or by name. (See, also, cousin and same-parent.)

sitting down

resting. "I'm just sitting down today."

*skates

tennis shoes -- Keds.

*skids

tennis shoes.

slippers

thongs; sandals.

smallboy

a person of no account; poor person; a servant; non-adult.

small-small

a little; somewhat. "Wait small-small!" (Wait a second!).

so

there; that. "He go so" (He went that way). "He so" (He's over there). "Be so" (Let it be like that). "Be so?" (Is that so?)

society

tribal secret associations, such as Poro and Sande (e.g. "society business" refers to matters having to do with these associations). The term "cultural societies" has come to be the formal reference in Liberian

S-8 Softly, or/ soon
Softly-softly

Government publications to these traditional organizations. (See, also, secret society.) Is also used more generally to refer to any club or group in which membership is somewhat restricted, or requires adherence to a special code or oath.

Softly, or
Softly-softly

a lemur; Perodictius potto.
A very small, reddish-brown lemur. It is believed locally that they have great strength and can choke monkeys to death with their little hands.

+I have heard this creature called "softly, softly, catch monkey." It catches on to the belly of a monkey; the monkey panics and tries to run away, frightening the lemur into holding the monkey all the more tightly. ("It' small finger' can bore da monkey.") The monkey eventually dies, and the lemur too.

something (behind or
following one)

a tutelary; guardian spirit; totemic object or obligation. "There is something behind him," or "Something follows him" (He has an animal or jina as his spiritual friend. Or, there are certain totemic rules or taboos he must obey).

something (my
something)

a thing one wants or needs. "I'm going to Tappita for my something." "Give me my something."

soon

early. "He will come soon in

the morning."

+speed

connections, influence. "Dah man got speed" means "That man has influential friends."

sore

any cut or open wound. "Will you dress my new sore?"

+sorry

sad, pitiful. "Da woman crying sorry way."

+so-so

nothing but; so much; very very. One night when I cooked chop instead of the house boy (actually, I only cooked the house boy on holidays or when the rice was low), he asked (upon seeing two tablespoons of rice and a cup of greens -- which is the way I like it), "How you bring so-so greens for?" Another time I looked at the latrine, which was behind the house I wanted to move into, and noticed it was shallow. Remembering what certain persons had long said of me, I feared that it would soon fill up. When I asked my landlord about it, he replied, "We tri' to dig six fee', bu' whe' we reach' to t'ree fee', dah so-so rock der." Americans should be careful not to import our notion of so-so, which to us means "tolerably," "passably," "almost." The sentence "He is a so-so big man" means in American English, "He is something of a big man," but in Liberian English it means, "He is a very, very big man." But

caveat: Liberians with exposure to Americans may answer "How are you?" with "So-so" and mean the same as we do.

Soso

(See Susu.)

soup

any broth, stew, or gravy used with rice or other starchy staple as the basic dishes of Liberian indigenous cuisine. "Soup" in general implies palm oil with greens, vegetables, meat and pepper, while thin, broth-like soups made with water are sometimes distinguished as "clear-water soup." (See, also, greens, country chop, and dumboy.)

+A soup without greens is called "gravy."

+spirit

a ghost.

spitting snake

cobra. A term frequently used for any of the cobras; for some species (e.g. Naja goldii) seem to be able to eject a venom to some distance.

spoiled

ruined; broken. "She dropped the dish. It is spoiled."

+If a Liberian says that a child is spoiled, he does not mean that it is accustomed to getting its way, but rather that it has suffered some severe, permanent injury.

spy

to cheat. "He spied in the examination."

+Spy also means "to do secret agent business." And in the same vein, it means "to see at a distance," as in "I spy da man coming." What object would be useful to spot a man in the distance? A spying glass, of course. Spying glass may refer to a telephoto lens for a camera or to the small viewer through which slides are seen, as well as to a telescope.

+stay

still; stay. "I wan' go, bu' my stranger stay here, so I can' go now." "I late, so please don' stay long to get ready."

stick

tree. "I been cutting sticks." "That man can carve stick."

+This word is frequently used to refer to wood of any sort after it has been cut. "Stick house," "stick chair." "I looking for stick for my fire." A stick may be anything from a twig to a log. The only word more specific in common use is plank, q.v.

*stink-mouth

abusive, or bad talk. "Move your stinkmouth from me!" (Stop abusing or saying bad things to me).

+store

any dry- and soft-goods establishment run by a Lebanese, Indian, or other white man.

story

a lie; to lie. "He told a story" (He lied). "He story on

me" (He lied about me).

+To convey the idea of the retelling of an event, use tale.

straight

right away; immediately. "I will do it straight" (I will do it right away). Perhaps from the British straight away.

stranger

guest. "I come to meet your stranger."

stranger-father

host; patron. One who has the role of a responsible protector of strangers or other guests of a village.

+stupid

an epithet not to be applied lightly in Liberia.

+style

appearance; fashion. "I li' your style!"

+suffer

to cause pain to. In American English, suffer is an intransitive verb, not followed by a direct object; it means "to feel pain." In Liberian English, suffer is a transitive verb and requires an object, namely the person to whom the subject is causing pain, though that person may be the subject himself (in a reflexive sense). "Why you suffer me so?" "I suffer myself today to pless da clo'." (Compare fear.)

sumangama

a term shared by many peoples

of western and northern Liberia referring to illicit sexual behavior, including incest, and punishable by local traditional law and supernatural sanctions. (See, also, taboo.)

+suppose

used instead of if and what if.
 "Suppo' I change my law, you can agree?"

+supposed to

should, ought, must, had better. Used instead of these. "You suppo' to feed da children now." While in American English supposed to connotes that the matter has already been decided and the listener knows or should know ("I was supposed to arrive before 6:00, but traffic held me up"), in Liberian English this overtone is lost. On your house boy's first day, you could order him to clean the windows once a month by saying, "You suppo' to clean da window' each ti' da new mon' come."

Susu

A Mande-speaking peoples of northwestern Sierra Leone and Guinea. Also known as Soso and Soussou.

susu

a money cooperative. Term possibly derived from the Yoruba word esusu, widely used throughout West Africa. (See, also, kuu and company.)

swear

an oath. "He made a swear" (He swore an oath). "He swear me" (He put me to an oath). Also used in

the exclamation "I swear!" (You don't say! or, I'll be darned!). (See, also, abuse and cauz.)

sweet

good tasting. "That meat be sweet too much" (The meat is very good).

+Do not use sweet to mean "containing sugar or like-tasting substance." Instead, say "Sugar der." Liberians are not big on sweets and candies, except toffees.

*sweet-mouth

nice words; flattery. "I will sweet-mouth that woman" (I will speak sweet nothings to her). "She put sweet mouth on me" (She laid it on thick).

T tablet/ talking

+tablet used instead of pill.

taboo, or tabu a prohibition sanctioned by supernatural agencies, and supported by ritual. This term seldom used in Liberia. (See, instead, secrets, laws, and sumangama.)

+tactics tricks. "When I feeding da baby, I know all hi' tactic'."

+tale used instead of story to refer to an oral review of an event. Tell tale does not mean an informer or an unwanted indication; it means the act of repeating a history.

+take accident have accident. "Two car' take accident."

take time be patient; relax. "Take time in life."

+used instead of "Be careful!" or "Watch out!" in emergencies.

talking characteristic sounds. If the rafters of a house creak, the house may be said to be "talking." A drum or any other musical instrument is "talking" when it is being played. A singing bird may be noted as "talking." The wind, the rain, the lightening "talk." This usage is closely connected to terms in tribal languages for "speech" which are applied to all the regular and recognizable sounds made my things. Each thing has its own sound or

speech; therefore musical sounds of a certain thing, or, in some cases, the "song" or "singing" of a thing.

+Liberian languages are tonal. A drum can produce different tones, it therefore talks. Similiarly with birds and creaking timbers and thunder.

+talk it

to say what is on your mind; to have thought so. "Da man talk it good." "Talk it!" means "Spit it out!" "I talk it" spoken immediately after an unexpected event means "I thought so," "I knew it would happen," or "I told you so."

*tartua man

a porter; carrier. Any man in up-country villages who is called upon to carry baggage for travellers from one town to another. (See, also, porter.)

+taxi

used instead of cab.

Tchien

(See Kran.)

*tedegah

best clothes. "I will wear my tedegah" (I will wear me best clothes).

Temne

a West Atlantic-speaking peoples of central Sierra Leone. Sometimes designated as Timne or Timene.

T-4 that's five/ tie
 months ...

I'm glad; etc. "Thank you for your new lappa." "Thank you for your new baby." "I hear you passed your examinations ... Thank you."

+that's five
months ...

it has been five months since ..
.. "Dah fi' mon' I never witne'
picture."

+think

in one construction, refers to some other mental process, perhaps "want." Although I have heard it used many times, I have only one illustration, but I am sure it is correct and characteristic: I was preparing to go out for the evening when my wife, who was not feeling well, came to me and said, "I t'ink you will change your mind. Please stay to min' da baby so I will rest."

+Tide soap

any detergent.

tie

to engage; to impel by means of a magical spell; to hold another to a promise or an oath. "He gave that woman's father two gamble and ten cents to tie her" (He gave a traditional token to the family of the woman to show his intention of marriage). "I tie him up good" (I have him firmly committed through oaths). "They put tie on him" (He has been put under a spell, he is the target of sorcery).

"I tire' wi' eating."

+titty

may be used in polite company -- both the object and the word. "Da baby sucking titty now."

*toasties

(See bugabug.)

+toffee

any sort of candy, usually small and wrapped in celophane. I found that those actually toffee-flavored were more popular with children than those with sugar coatings.

+toilet

to deficate. I had been in Liberia less than two weeks when I needed to urinate while riding on the mail truck one evening. I said to the driver, "I need to go to the toilet." He said I would have to wait until we reached the next Volunteer's house. Having already seen him stop the truck numerous times to piddle in the bush, I wondered why a higher standard was exacted of me. I suppose if I had said, "I wan' pee-pee," he would have pulled over and that would have been that.

Toma

(See Loma.)

+tomato

often refers to a small tin of tomato paste. "I nee' tomato for da soup."

too, or too much

very. "That one fine too much"

(That is very nice). "It is too big" (It is very big).

+Too much means "plentiful," not "excessive." If a Liberian says, "Da foo' too plenty," he means, "That is a lot of food," with no suggestion that any should be taken away. "I too tire'" means "I am very tired."

+To communicate the idea of excess, use the following construction: "Da foo' plenty to eat." "I lazy to wash dishes." "I tire' to work." "Da water small to bathe."

torch

flashlight.

tote

to carry (a burden). An old American usage.

totem

an object (such as an animal or plant) serving as an emblem to an individual or a group (usually kinsmen) and usually associated with a personal or ancestral myth. Involves ritualized obligations or taboos. (This term is not used generally in Liberia; but see, instead, something behind.)

+tough

means what tough in American slang means (or meant ten of fifteen years ago). "Dis James Brown show wha' be coming will be tough."

Townchief

the headman of a major town or

T-8 tribal/ tribe
authority

village who represents the community in all dealings with the outside, and who presides over all local activities under the guidance of a council of family elders. (See, also, tribal authority.)

tribal authority

the political administrative apparatus of the traditional tribal areas, as distinct from the officials representing central government in the interior. Paramount Chiefs, Clan Chiefs, Town Chiefs, Councils of Elders, and their courts constitute tribal authority; whereas District Commissioners and other agents of central government in the interior represent national authority. The Paramount Chief is the highest official of tribal authority and is responsible to the District Commissioner and to the President.

tribe

a social group sharing a distinctive language (or dialect) and a sufficiently distinctive culture to set it off from other groups. Tribes often have myths concerning the common origin of their members, but they are not necessarily politically centralized. In Liberia many groups referred to as "tribes" are actually subsections of larger tribal entities (e.g. the Mamba Bassa or Mamba; the Gbunde or Gbunde Loma; etc.) The term "tribal" is used to denote all aspects of indigenous African culture in

T-10

This term is also a metaphor for "excellent or tasty food" (e.g. "We have eaten tupogi tonight!"). (See, also, country salt.)

U ugly

ugly

bad; disheveled; in disrepair; repulsive. "My comb is ugly" (My comb is worn out or broken). "That person is ugly" may mean either the person is evil, repulsive in appearance, unkept, frightening, ridiculous, or otherwise unattractive. (See, also, spoiled and ragged.)

+Ugly is the opposite of fine, and like fine, it has a more general meaning in Liberian English than in American English. For Americans, ugly refers to aspects of appearance. It is a strong term, and often suggests that the subject creates some kind of fear. We can tolerate a homely person, but we are repulsed by an ugly one. But for Liberians, ugly is not such a powerful term. It means something like "in poor condition," "not satisfactory," or simply "undesirable." "My comb is ugly" does not mean that it is poorly styled, but rather that it is worn out, broken, or incapable of doing a good job. When I stopped an old Renault clunker on Bushrod Island to carry me and my girl friend into town, she asked, "Why you always take ugly car?" She did not mean that the bus was painted a wretched shade of rusty iron, or that it was styled like an egg crate; she meant that it was uncomfortable to ride in and, lacking windows, would let the wind blow her hair. "My voice ugly" said

a Liberian with a cold. "Da show ugly" said a boy who didn't enjoy the movie.

uncle

in some sections of the country, refers only to mother's brothers and mother's male cousins. (See, also, aunt.)

unlawful
societies

political and terrorist associations such as "The Human Leopard Society, The Neegee Society, Susha, Toya, Keela, Yama-Yama, etc. (Cf. Revised Laws and Administrative Regulations for Governing the Hinterland, R.L. 1949. See, also, G. Schwab, Tribes of the Liberian Hinterland, 1947: 294-314.)

*upstairs

drink; drunk. "Let's go upstairs" (Let's go drink). "That man was finish upstairs!" (That man was really drunk!).

+An upstairs house has two floors.

+used to

did in the past, once or frequently. Liberians sometimes take one aspect of an English term and ignore another. For Americans, the sentence "I used to drink tea" means that the speaker drank tea often in the past and was accustomed to doing so. For Liberians the sentence means merely that the speaker drank tea in the past, but he may have done it only once, or daily for six years, and little

connotation of accustomation is intended.

To convey the American English idea of "used to," use were having.
"I were having fine clo', but all finni' spoil' now."

V vacancy/ vex

no vacancy

no jobs available.

Vai

a Mande-speaking peoples along the western coast of Liberia and into Sierra Leone. Are closely associated with the Kono of Sierra Leone, and the Mandingo. Alternative designations are Vei, Vey, or Kondo.

Vai script

a famous script invented by Dualu Bukele, a Vai man, in 1814, supposedly through a dream. It was widely taught and used in village schools. The script was reported by S. W. Koelle, a German anthropologist and linguist, in 1849. During the first half of the present century, the Vai language and script was studied intensively by August Klingenberg of Hamburg University with the aid of his Vai colleagues Momolu Massaquoi and Elder Zuki Kondokai of Jondu, Liberia. Mr. S. Jangaba Johnson and a committee of Liberian scholars, including Elder Zuki Kondokai, Bai T. Moore, and Madam Fatima M. Fahnbulleh prepared a standardized version of Vai script which was published by the University of Liberia African Studies Program in 1962.

+valice

used instead of suitcase.

+vex

to make angry, to be angry.
"Dah man ve' me too much!" "When you la', I coming to ve' wi' you."

village

any small grouping of residences. "This village is John's farm." Distinct from town, which is a large village or market center. Most tribal languages make precise distinctions between farm residences ("farm"), small hamlets ("half-towns"), and large central villages ("towns"), which give rise to the distinctions in English.

W wait now/ ward

+wait now

Just a cotton-pickin' minute!

walkabout

stroll; wander; promenade.
"I just go walkabout" (I am now going out for a stroll). Can also suggest looking for company of the opposite sex.

+want

(a) to almost do something.
"Da pot wan' fall down" means more than "The pot almost fell"; the American English sentence suggests that the pot really did not fall. But the Liberian English sentence finds a degree beyond "almost" but short of "actually"; the pot may have already moved from its original position without spilling its contents. When a Liberian described a fight to me, in which one boy wielded a cutlass against another, he said, "Da boy wan' cut hi' frien' wi' da cutla'." He meant not, as an American would have, that the boy desired or even tried to cut his enemy; he meant that the cutlass actually struck the opponent, but it was not sharp and did not cut.

(b) "I wan' you" means "Let's go make love." A perfectly acceptable proposition, more subtle forms being less well understood.

ward

a child attached to the household. May be either related or unrelated to its guardian. Sometimes called "foster-child."
(See, also, outside child.)

waste

to throw away, discard,
+empty or spill. "She wasted the
water," or, "He wasted the pencil."

water

any body of water, whether
river, lake, or ocean. "We are
coming to a big water."

+any liquid, e.g. "water from
da orange." "Water from woman'
titty."

water cow

manatee. Once very common in
Liberian coastal waters, and
particularly at the mouths of
rivers. Have been so extensively
hunted that they are extremely
scarce today. In some areas, they
are associated with the water
spirits, just as European seamen
often referred to them as "mermaids."

water deer

Dorcatherium aquaticum
acquaticum. A small animal (about
12 inches high at the shoulders),
dark brown and black with white
lines from throat to rump, and
white throat.

water people

a particularly important class
of nature spirits who figure in the
beliefs and mythology of most of
the tribal peoples of Liberia.
They are sometimes represented as
water snakes, fish, or half-human
creatures with long hair and fish-
tails, like our "mermaids." (See,
also, jina.)

later, I was again using the short cut when I heard someone hail me, turned and saw a soldier in shorts and rifle approaching with a very serious expression on his face and an odd twitch in his palm. Before he could speak again, I said, "Hello-ya! How you keeping, ol' man? I say, I looking for some kinda way to reach down da hill, bu' no ro', so I los'. I t'ink I use' to go so, bu' da ro' move now, so I confuse'. I t'ink you will help me-ya!" The poor fellow was no match for me. He showed me the path I had just turned my back on.)

witch

 sorceror; sorcery. This English term is used very loosely to include all those persons and practices which involve magic with evil intent. But it is used by many tribal peoples with specific reference to equivalent terms in their own languages. The concept of "witch," to most persons in Liberia, connotes a special kind of evil spirit with which certain people are born, or which may enter a person and use him as a host. Such a spirit controls its host and forces him to do destructive things, such as bringing sickness to others, ruining crops, eating unborn babies and human souls. The witch spirit may leave its host while he sleeps and wander about doing terrible deeds. To say

someone is a witch really means that he or she "possesses" or "has" a witch. To "get witch" means to become influenced or possessed by a witch. To "make witch" means that one is using the services or powers of a witch to do harm to others. To "have witch on one" means to be the target of a witch's evil intent. To "catch witch" is to discover and trap a witch through counter-magic. (See, also, medicine.)

+A witch may be male or female.

witness

see. "Did you witness the game?"

Wobe

(See Bobwa.)

woman damages

a fine for illicit intercourse with another man's wife, payable to her legal husband. The fine for adultery involving a "head wife" is considerably greater than for a "secondary" wife. (See, also, woman palaver.)

woman palaver

any disagreement or legal proceeding involving the rights and obligations of individuals or families with reference to the status of a woman.

+And the inevitable result of taking a girl friend or getting married.

wrestling

rough-and-tumble; play-fighting
A mother may say of her baby's active play in her arms, "He is wrestling

W-8

with me." Rough children's
games are "wrestling."

X

No entries.

Y yana boy/ yes/no

yana boy

street peddler. An urban petty trader who carries his wares about the streets.

*yama-yama

much the same meaning as grona. Implies delinquency. (See, also, unlawful societies.)

+yes/no

Liberians use inflection alone or inflection with interrogative particles to indicate that a sentence is a question. They do not alter word order or add to the verb, as do Americans. An American will ask, "Is it raining?" and a Liberian will ask, "It raining?" (He has omitted the finite verb, a practice found in other languages as well.) An American will ask, "Do you want some rice?" and a Liberian will ask, "You wan' some of da ri'?"

Liberians also answer negative questions differently than Americans. Assume it is a fine clear day outside. If you ask an American, "Is it raining?" he will reply, "No." And if you ask him, "Isn't it raining?" he will still reply, "No." The change in the form of the question from affirmative to negative perhaps indicates the state of mind of the questioner (who thought rain was falling or wanted it to fall), but it is purely a matter of emphasis and does not effect the structure of the answer. In a sense, an American answers according to the state of the facts. So if it actually were raining and you ask,

"Isn't it raining?" your answer would be, "Yes." But a Liberian will answer according to the form of the question. Assume it is a sunny day again. Ask, "Is it raining?" and a Liberian will say, "No," but ask him, "Isn't it raining?" and he will say, "Yes." He has listened to the words of your question. You have said (I alter the order of the words), "It is not raining?" His answer is, "Yes, that's right, it is not raining." So, of course, if it were raining and you asked, "Isn't it raining?" he would reply, "No," meaning: "You just said to me, 'It is not raining,' and that is wrong since it is raining."

If a question is posed in the alternative ("Do you want rice or beans?"), a Liberian will answer as though only the latter alternative were given ("No" means "I don't want beans.") but how he feels about the former (i.e. whether in fact he wants rice) is uncertain.

+year

First year is the freshman year of high school, second year the sophomore year, etc.

Year-year means "year after year." "When you go away, I know you will stay year-year."

+yonder

far away. "Look at da bir' way yonder in da sky!"

You best me!

You are right and I am mistaken. An apology, or a polite way to withdraw from an argument.

+your friend

some other person of the same type of category as yourself. "You can rea' Loma book?" "No." "For wha'? Your frien' der can read it." -- meaning that some other white man can read it.

+your one

you alone. "When I ve', I can holler on everyone. Dah no' your one."

+yourur

This is my spelling of the plural form of you used by many Liberians. You is the singular, but they use a plural form that Americans do not. I might as well be spelled "you-ar," which is how it is pronounced. "Wha' ti' yourur will come eat now?" Perhaps it is equivalent to you all.

Z za/ zootin

+za

a person who stares blankly,
a person in a trance. First cousin
to the West Indian zombie.

zo

a title conferred on a highly
skilled practitioner (or magic or
other arts) much as we might use
the terms master or doctor.

zootin

to be all dressed up; showing
off; swaggering. Obviously borrowed
from American idiom.

+Seeing as how this word, and
many others of its ilk, were current
in the American black community
before the rest of us began using
them, I wonder if the flow might not
have been the other way: if, for
example, zootin were not a Liberian
word which Americans learned.