

The syntax of mutation in Mande languages

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Authors and researchers agree that Mende, Loko, Kpelle, Loma and Gbandi are distinguishable from other Mande Languages by a system of initial consonant mutation. Oddly enough, mutation has not occurred as a classificatory feature. As a matter of fact, mutation has not been clearly understood or described. This paper will describe the features of mutation as part of linguistic theory.

In the introduction, I will look at the genetic classification of Mande languages. I will review Greenberg, Innes, Sumner, Pemagbi, Welmers and other more recent authors dealing with the subject.

Mutation runs across all structures. The phenomenon has been largely regarded as phonological or phonetic in nature in that it involves the change of the initial consonant sound, or the features of the initial consonant sound. (I will not discuss the mutation rules in this paper.) Mutation also involves in compounding, reduplication and other word formation processes. But we cannot understand the syntax of these Mande languages if we do not describe mutation in terms of its applicability to heads and projections in Phrasal Theory, and case assignment in Government and Binding.