As has already been mentioned before, nearly all of the natives tribes have their own language, which is only partially, or not at all, intelligible to the members of the neighbouring tribe. Although there is a range of words that are similar within these various languages, the overall differences are so pronounced that one is sometimes tempted to doubt whether related idioms should be regarded as belonging to a particular language
group. According to J. G. Christaller,\(^1\) an authority in the field of west African linguistics, the languages of the Liberian natives may currently be classified within two groups: the Mande and the Kru languages.\(^2\) To the Mande group belongs the Vey language, which is spoken from the Gallinas River to the Little Cape Mount [Lofa] River and for up to two days’ travel inland, as well as the languages of the Kosso and the Pessy [Kpelle]. Christaller ranks the Deh, Bassa, Kru and Grebo languages among the Kru group. The Bassa language is indeed very closely related to the Kru language, and I have been able to ascertain this by means of producing a glossary of these two idioms. Unfortunately, I wasn’t able to complete this. The Golah language seems to belong to neither of these groups. The Golah, Bassa and Kru languages are spoken in harsh-sounding tones which are difficult to master; it is well-nigh impossible to correctly represent these sounds with our Latin characters. However, the Vey language has a certain melodious sound; it contains many vowels and is therefore easier to master than most other Negro languages. The consonants \(r\) and \(l\) are often mixed up in the languages of all tribes.\(^3\)

The high extent to which various languages differ from each other, but are related to certain others, is the most readily demonstrated by the method of counting from 1–100. Here, I must start by noting that all of the Liberian tribes which I know of, have a quinary numbering system, so that

---

\(^1\) Die sprachen in dem Negerfreistaat Liberia. Zeitschrift für afrikanische sprachen. Berlin, 1889, p. 315–20. See also Koelle, Polyglotta africana [S. W. Koelle, Polyglotta Africana, or a Comparative Vocabulary of Nearly Three Hundred Words and Phrases, in More Than One Hundred Distinct African Languages (London, Church Missionary House, 1854).]

\(^2\) [Johann Gottlieb Christaller (1827–1895) was a German missionary and an accomplished comparative linguist who travelled to the Gold Coast in 1853 under the auspices of the Basel Missionary Board (Switzerland) to study the Twi language, ultimately producing a New Testament Bible in Twi.]

\(^3\) In order to achieve a somewhat correct rendering of the pronunciation and accentuation of native words, the following rules need to be observed:

- \(a, e, i, o, u\) are pronounced as short vowels, as in ‘and’, ‘bed’, ‘litre’, ‘top’, ‘put’.
- A stretched vowel is annotated by adding an \(h\) to it.
- ‘ĕ’ = a short, silent \(e\), as in ‘larger’.
- ‘ɪ’ = an \(i\) that tends towards \(e\), as in ‘involved’.
- ‘ʊ’ = a \(u\) that tends toward \(o\), as in ‘hunger’.
- ‘ ŋ’ = French nasal sound, as in \(vin, bon\).
- ‘ ň’ = German and Dutch \(nj\), French \(gn\), as in \(Allemagne\).
- Double vowels are pronounced as two separate sounds, as in ‘Cain’. I have used the English spelling of place names, which is the commonly accepted one in Liberia, on both the maps and in the text. In these, one often encounters \(jah\) (home) as the final syllable. It is pronounced as ‘dzjäh’. The place name \(Weahjah\) should therefore be pronounced as ‘Wheeadzjäh’. In all other contexts, the syllable \(jah\) is pronounced as the German ‘ja’. Strongly accented syllables are notated with an \(accent aigu\) on the vowel.