

MINISTRY OF SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL RESEARCH

A RAPID-APPRAISAL SURVEY OF MMEN (ALCAM 821)  
AND AGHEM DIALECTS (ALCAM 810)  
MENCHUM DIVISION, NORTHWEST PROVINCE

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This report was conducted as part of S.I.L.'s goal to assess the need for Bible Translation in the national languages found throughout Cameroon. This particular survey represents a follow-up of an earlier survey conducted in Wum area from 26 January to 10 February 1993 (1993 Aghem survey).

This report describes a preliminary rapid-appraisal survey of the villages Zhoa, Kung, Kuk, Kumfutu, Bafumeng, Cha' and Nyos; carried out from 31 October to 11 November 1994 by Duane Troyer and Paul Huey of SIL (Societe Internationale de Linguistique) and Joseph Mbongue of CABTA (Cameroon Bible Translation Association). Approximately one half day was spent in each of the listed villages collecting data.

The actual sites of the interviews for Cha' and Nyos were Yemgeh and Ipalim, respectively. In 1986 a disaster at Lake Nyos killed much of the population in Cha' and Nyos villages. The survivors were relocated to different sites, Cha' survivors to Yemgeh and Nyos survivors to Ipalim. In this report, Cha'-Yemgeh and Nyos-Ipalim are used to refer to these displaced people. All of these villages are in the Fungom Subdivision, Menchum Division, Northwest Province, Cameroon.

### 1.1 Linguistic Background

Mmen is listed as code [821] in the *Atlas Linguistique du Cameroun (ALCAM)* (Dieu and Renaud, 1983) and code [BFM] in the *Ethnologue* (Grimes 1992: 198). In *ALCAM*, Kuk, Kumfutu, Kung, Zhoa, Cha', and Nyos are listed as dialects of Aghem, [810], *Ethnologue*, [AGQ]. Their linguistic classification given in *ALCAM* and *Ethnologue* is as follows:<sup>1</sup>

#### Mmen:

*ALCAM*[821]: (Bafmen, Bafmeng<sup>2</sup>, Bafoumeng, Mme) Niger-Kordofan, Niger-Congo, Bənouə-Congo, Bantoid, Bantou, Grassfield, Menchum, Ring-Centre.

*Ethnologue*[BFM]:(Bafmen, Bafumen, Bafmeng, Bafoumeng, Mme) Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, Bantoid, Southern, Broad Bantu, Wide Grassfields, Narrow Grassfields, Ring, Center.

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the classification in the *Ethnologue* is actually based on classifications given in *The Niger Congo Languages*, 1989, editors J. Bendor Samuel and R. Hartell pp. 21, 261, 412, 433, 435.

<sup>2</sup> Bafumeng, Bafoumeng, Bafmen, Bafmeng are all alternate spelling for the same group/village.

**Aghem:**

*ALCAM*[810]: (Aghem, Weh-Isu, Zoa, Kuk, Kung, Kumfutu, Cha', Nyos, Fungom)Niger-Kordofan, Niger-Congo, Benoue-Congo, Bantoide, Bantou, Grassfield, Menchum, Ring-Ouest.

*Ethnologue*[AGQ]: (Wum, Yum) Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, Bantoid, Southern, Broad Bantu, Wide Grassfields, Narrow Grassfields Ring, West.  
Dialects: (Aghem, Weh-Isu, Zoa, Kuk, Kung, Kumfutu, Cha', Nyos, Fungom)

The estimated population of each village in this survey and the villages from the 1993 Aghem survey that will be included in the analysis of the data are as follows:

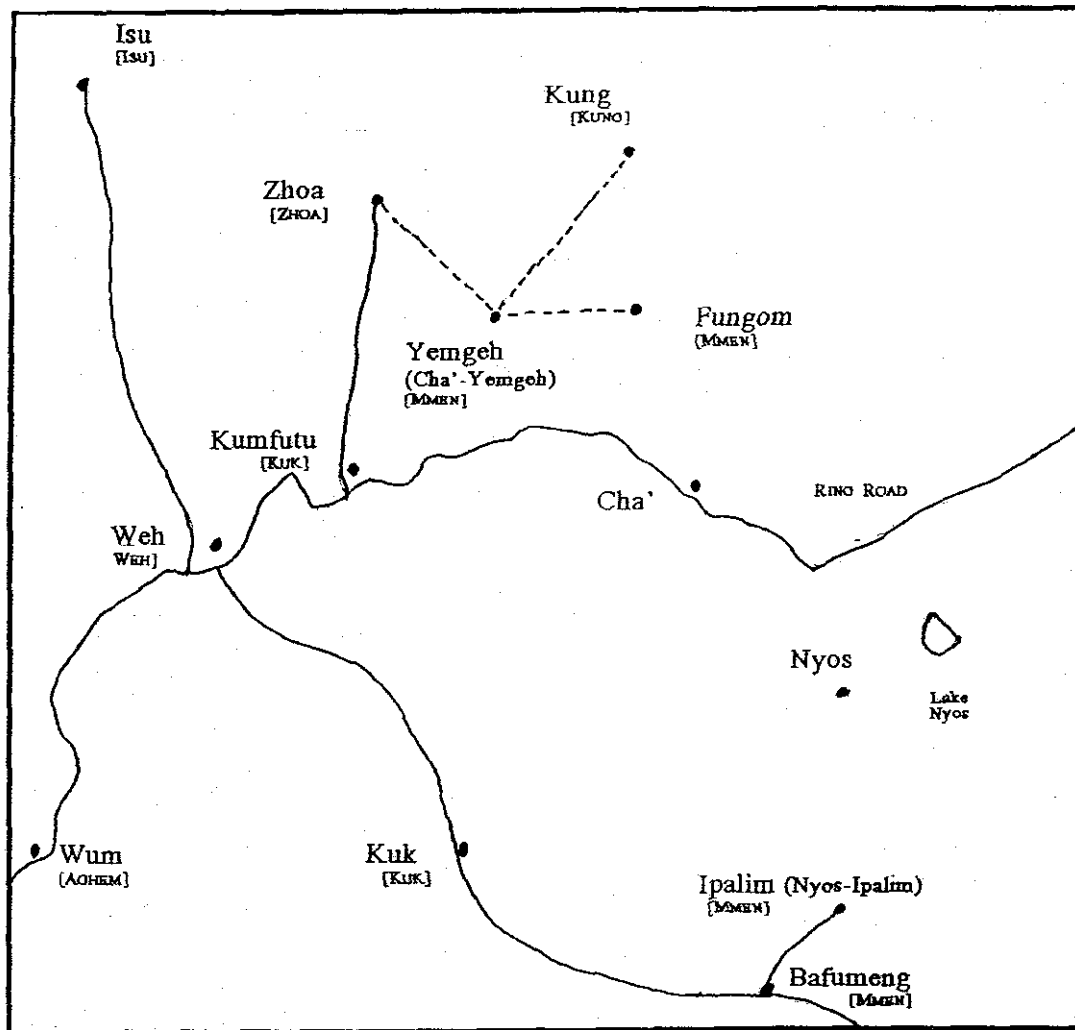
**Figure 1: Estimated Populations**

1994 Mmen Survey		1993 Aghem Survey	
Bafumen	30,000	Aghem	40,000
g			
Kuk	2,000	Isu	15,000
Zhoa	2,000	Weh	8,000
Kung	1,300	Fungom	1,000
Kumfutu	1,000		
Cha'	200		
Nyos	150		

## 1.2 Geographic location

Below is a map showing the speech variety areas represented in the Mmen and Aghem surveys. Village names are listed along with the corresponding speech variety spoken there [in brackets]. Additional village names used in this report appear in parenthesis.

Figure 2: Area Surveyed



### 1.3 Survey

#### 1.3.1 Goals

A rapid-appraisal survey was carried out to clarify the language classification and the need for literacy development in the villages of Zhoa, Kung, Kuk, Kumfutu, Mmen, Cha' and Nyos. As it was possible that the villages were speaking related speech forms, information was gathered regarding the interviewees attitudes toward the use of neighbouring speech forms in place of their own for use in education and literacy.

#### 1.3.2 Overview

Rapid-appraisal survey is based on the use of specific, non-technical means that take relatively little time. They consist primarily of interviews with groups and

individuals. Thus, useful information can generally be acquired in one or two days per village visited. Rapid-appraisal methods provide an overall impression of potential needs for literacy development through limited subjective reports from local inhabitants, and this may be sufficient for ascertaining need. In-depth linguistic and sociolinguistic research would yield a more comprehensive picture if unanswered questions were left after the survey.

Three major areas are considered in a rapid-appraisal survey:

**Dialect situation:** What dialects do native speakers of a language think exist? The perceived level of intercomprehension between those dialects. It is assumed that two speech varieties may be dialects of the same language if 1) speakers perceive them as such, and/or 2) children are reported to already understand the other speech variety by age five or six. Otherwise, it is possible that the other speech variety is a separate language, comprehension of which is more or less easily acquired depending on linguistic similarity and the speaker's exposure to it.

- **Multilingualism:** What is the level of oral and comprehension proficiency in languages of wider communication (LWCs) as well as geographically and linguistically related languages?
- **Language vitality and viability:** What is the potential for success of a language development project in the given language, as indicated by reported patterns of language use? A key indicator of vitality is that the mother tongue (MT) is actively used in those domains where transmission from one generation to the next is crucial. Besides the three areas of concern described previously, questions were asked concerning migration patterns, intermarriage, and local development, where relevant to the viability of the MT and the potential success of a language development project.

Consideration is also given to the attitudes of the community under study towards the MT, other dialects, related languages, or LWCs with which they have contact. Attitudes help predict the acceptability of literature.

Owing to SIL and CABTA's specific interest in Bible translation, interviews were also held with leaders of Christian churches in the communities surveyed. The pertinence of church use of local languages to future language development lies in the fact that, in other communities, churches have been the primary users of materials written in the local language.

The specific procedures used during this survey were as follows:

**Word list:** One 120-item ALCAM word list was collected in each village visited for lexicostatistic analysis.

Group interviews: One standard rapid-appraisal group interview was conducted with leaders of each of the villages in the survey.

## 2. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

### 2.1 Lexicostatistics

As this is the first foray into this language situation, the linguistic relationships that exist between the speech varieties surveyed are not well defined. For the purposes of this report, speech forms will be grouped together as dialects with a potential of high mutual intelligibility when their possible cognate counts are 75% or higher and speakers of both villages report that a small child of five years can understand the speech form. All other cases will be treated as separate or related "languages." This convention has been adopted in order to facilitate the writing of this report and is not meant to be the final word as to what constitutes a dialect. The 75% minimal lexicostatistic threshold is a guide line (Simons, 1983:p94).

Figure 3 below shows a synchronic analysis of the word lists collected in the form of a matrix of percents of lexical similarity. Fungom, Aghem, Weh and Isu are included in the matrix since they contribute to the greater linguistic picture. The actual transcriptions of the collected wordlist are filed under Mmen and Aghem in the SIL Survey Department and are available upon request.

Figure 3: Percents of Lexical Similarity

Mmen																			
82	Fungom																		
84	85	Cha'-Yemgeh																	
70	65	69	Nyos-Ipalim																
60	63	67	62	Kung															
48	49	54	53	68	Kuk														
46	47	52	51	66	90	Kumfutu													
44	47	52	47	56	61	61	Zhoa												
35	38	43	40	47	58	57	60	Isu											
36	38	43	43	54	65	61	69	65	Weh										
38	38	43	39	51	57	56	59	60	74	Aghem									

\*Margin of error (avg.): 8.7

Possible cognate counts were obtained using WordSurv, an S.I.L. program designed to compare and analysis word lists using the COMPASS algorithm (for more information on the Comparative Method, see Baldi and Werth, 1978). The Preliminary Language Grouping listed in Figure 4 below take into account the possible or "apparent" cognate percentage and the self-reports data (See appendix for a summary table of the self-reported incomprehension responses from the group interviews). The following groupings are proposed and used throughout this report:

**Figure 4: Preliminary Language Groupings**

Speech variety	Villages
Mmen	Bafumeng, Cha'- Yemgeh, Nyos-Ipalim
Kuk	Kuk, Kumfutu
Zhoa	Zhoa
Kung	Kung

Nyos-Ipalim is listed under Mmen even though the possible cognate percentages are below 75% as compared with the rest of the group. This was due to the language shift which was reported to be occurring amongst the Nyos speakers. The younger generation of Nyos people are adopting the Bafumeng speech variety. This was evidenced by the difficulty the survey team had in finding speakers of the Nyos speech variety in order to record a wordlist. At the time of our interview in Nyos-Ipalim only one speaker could be found, an older woman.

## 2.2 Self-Reported Intercomprehension (Dialectology)

### MMEN

According to the group interviews at Bafumeng, Cha'-Yemgeh, and Nyos-Ipalim, the Mmen language is spoken in the following villages: Bafumeng, Cha'-Yemgeh, Fungom, Nyos-Ipalim, Isse, Mbonge, Ewo, Acha', Bwabwa, Fom, Bulom, Bonge, Mtaf, Epange, Kam-Nyos and Cha'-Mmen. All three group interviews stated that the purest Mmen is spoken at Bafumeng.

**Bafumeng:** Bafumeng is the center of the Mmen speaking community, being the seat of the fon and having the largest concentration of Mmen speakers—over 30,000. The group that was interviewed indicated that except for Kam-Nyos, Cha'-Yemgeh and Fungom, all the villages speak exactly the same. These three villages speak Mmen with a slight accent, however, intelligibility appears to remain high.

**Cha'-Yemgeh:** There are approximately 1000 displaced Cha' people of which 200 are located at Yemgeh. Cha'-Yemgeh people claim to originally be from Fungom and to have moved to the original Cha' site to farm the land (below Lake Nyos). They also indicated that Nyos people speak the same language as they do though different from the language spoken in villages like Bafumeng, Isse, and Fungom.

**Nyos-Ipalim:** Nyos people claim to speak the Mmen language. The original Nyos language is only spoken by a few of the older people. One individual reported that the shift between speaking Nyos and Mmen started taking place many years before the Lake Nyos disaster. Currently there are about 150 Nyos people, the most of which are found in a relocation camp at Ipalim. The Nyos word list showed Nyos as 70% possible cognate with Mmen (margin of error:  $\pm 6.8\%$ ). In their opinion, all the Mmen speaking villages speak exactly the same.



**Fungom:** One of the goals of this survey was to confirm the reported close relationship between Fungom and Bafumeng. It was confirmed through interviews at Bafumeng, Cha'-Yemgeh, and Nyos-Ipalim, that Bafumeng and Fungom speak the Mmen language and consider themselves to be one people. Historically, Fungom and Bafumeng have alternated as seats of the fon. At present, the fon is at Bafumeng while his brother is chief over Fungom. The 1993 Aghem survey report states that a small child from Fungom could understand the language at Cha' and Nyos.

#### ZHOA

Zhoa is a community of less than 2,000 speakers and hosts the headquarters of the new Fungom subdivision. Given that there are no other villages which speak the Zhoa language and given that within Zhoa everyone speaks the same speech variety, it can be said that Zhoa is linguistically homogeneous. On the 1993 Aghem survey, the group that was interviewed at Weh claimed that Zhoa was settled by Weh speakers; this was confirmed during our survey by an old man at Yemgeh. Lexicostatistically, it also appears Zhoa is more closely related to Weh.

#### KUNG

Kung is a village located on a mountain near Yemgeh and Fungom. There are four quarters of Kung with a population of about 1,750. The main Kung quarter and a Kung encampment at Yemgeh both speak exactly the same speech form. According to the group interview, each of the other three quarters has its own dialect or accent. Those interviewed reported that the Kung people in the various quarters have no problem understanding each other. These responses would tend to confirm their linguistic homogeneity.

#### KUK

Kuk, the name of the people and their language, is spoken by approximately 2,000 to 3,000 people in six villages, all located near the road between Weh and Bafumeng. All speakers are reported to speak Kuk in the same way; Kuk is linguistically homogeneous. According to the group interviews at Kuk and Kumfutu (a quarter of Kuk), the Kuk language is spoken at Kuk, Kumfutu, Achaf, Nzela, Echuapo, and Ebo.

The village of Kuk has a population of 1,000 to 2,000 people. The group interview at Kuk reported that all the villages speak exactly the same though Kuk is spoken best at Achaf, which is the family name of their chief and where he lives. The group at Kumfutu said Kuk is spoken purest at both Kuk and Kumfutu.

#### RESIDUE

According to an elderly man at the Cha'-Yemgeh interview, during a tribal conflict between Fungom and Kung, Fungom drove the Kung people out of their land and the Kung people went to settle with the Lung people, on a nearby

mountain. Because of the rivalries, the Kung people subsequently wiped out the Lung people and today only a few Lung speakers are still alive, he among them. There was no way to confirm this historical information however.

## 2.3 Self-Reported Multilingual Comprehension

### 2.3.1 Knowledge of Neighbouring Languages

The seven villages surveyed are not from one homogeneous language or ethnic group; therefore the definition of what is a "neighbouring" language changes slightly from village to village. Questions were asked about intercomprehension with Pidgin, Aghem, Weh, Isu, Kom, Laimbue, Kong, Fang, Bum Mekaf and Missong. To simplify this report, comments will only be made about neighbouring languages in which there is some reported comprehension. If a neighbouring language is not mentioned then it should be assumed that there is no reported intercomprehension and that an LWC is used for communication.

Hausa and Fulani, two potential neighbouring languages, were not covered by this report. During the survey it was discovered that cultural differences have created negative attitudes between Hausa/Fulani (grazers) and the rest of the groups surveyed (farmers). As happens among other cultures, farmers and ranchers are in conflict with each other over the use and ownership of land.

#### MMEN

Mmen speakers reported that from among the neighbouring languages only Kom, Aghem, Weh and Isu could be understood. All three Mmen villages indicated that contact is required to understand any of the neighbouring languages. Although there was some comprehension of Aghem, most Mmen speakers are not interested in learning to read or write Aghem.

**Cha'-Yemgeh:** The Yemgeh camp is about a 30 minutes walk from Fungom. Kung village is also very close. The only road that provides access to Yemgeh comes from Weh, via Kumfutu and Zhoa. After Yemgeh the road passes on to Kung. Cha' people have a great deal of interaction with the Aghem, Weh and Isu areas due to easy access using the road and footpaths. Cha' people reported that Aghem, Weh and Isu are understood by small children (3-5 yrs.) if they have had contact. They also reported that a small child (3 yrs.) can understand Kung. In order for children to understand Kom, however, they need to be much older (14 or more yrs.).

**Nyos-Ipalim and Bafumeng:** These villages are closer to the Kom area. The Nyos-Ipalim people felt that a child of five to ten years could understand Kom well, while Bafumeng speakers felt that full understanding did not occur until a child was 12 or more years old. For Aghem, Weh or Isu the age of comprehension ranges from 10 to 20 years with contact required. Comprehension of Aghem and Weh is surface level, such as required for market settings (buying and selling).

## ZHOA

Zhoa village is located close to Weh. Due to the system of markets there appears to be much interaction between people from Zhoa and speakers of Aghem, Weh and Isu. Zhoa Interviewees reported that even a child of five years could fully understand these languages, however for the Kuk, Kung and Mmen languages they felt that a child would need to be between 10 and 15 years of age in order to fully understand. Pidgin needs to be used in order to communicate with people of the other neighbouring languages, even for adults. The group interviewed preferred their MT over Pidgin and Aghem as a potential written language if given the choice.

## KUNG

Kung village is located the furthest north of the villages interviewed. Except for the villages of Fungom and Cha'-Yemgch, Kung speakers have easiest access to Zhoa, Kumfutu, Aghem, Weh and Isu markets, via the road and footpaths. Currently there is conflict between the Kung and Fungom leaderships and this most likely affects attitudes toward Mmen. Unfortunately this relationship was not known during the Kung interview and no explicit responses were solicited.

Kung interviewees said that small children (five or more yrs.) could understand Aghem, Weh, Isu, Kuk, Mmen, Zhoa and Bu very deeply and that a 12-year old child would be able to understand Kom. For the other neighbouring languages, Pidgin would be required for communication. There was evidence of possible comprehension between Kung and Weh speech forms. The clerk of the Fungom subdivision, a speaker of Weh who had been out of the area many years, accompanied the survey team to Kung. He reported that he was able to understand Kung speakers even though, as far as he knew, he had never been to Kung or spoken to a Kung speaker.

## KUK

Kuk village is located between Kumfutu and Bafumeng. It is about 11 kilometers from Bafumeng. Those interviewed in Kuk reported the same comprehension relationships as did those in Kumfutu except in regard to communicating with speakers of Zhoa, Weh and Isu. In Kumfutu interviewees said that they would be able to understand the other MTs and use their MT which Kuk interviewees said that Pidgin would have to be used to communicate. One of the catechists, a Mmen speaker from Bafumeng, accompanied the survey team acting as guide. During the interview he spoke his dialect with the interviewees and appeared to have no problem being understood or understanding their dialect.

Kumfutu village is located on the Ring road between Weh and Zhoa about half way between the Aghem-Weh-Isu area and the Mmen area. Zhoa is a short distance to the north. Those interviewed indicated that a small child (five or more yrs.) could understand Mmen, Zhoa, Aghem, Weh, Isu, Kung and Kom. This

reported deep comprehension level, when contrasted with the low possible cognate counts, may be evidence that much acquired comprehension is taking place. In addition, Mekaf could be understood by a 15 year old while with speakers of all other languages they would use Pidgin. The interviewees stated that they would like to be taught (learn to read and write) in any language that they understand.

### 2.3.2 Knowledge of Languages of Wider Communication (LWC)

*Pidgin:* Pidgin is probably the most widely used LWC. It appears that everyone uses Pidgin to some extent to interact with people in the market or when they are outside their home area. Though it is widely used orally, it is difficult to conceive of Pidgin becoming the primary means of written communication. This is because no standard written form of Pidgin exists and there are mixed feelings among those interviewed concerning its use as a written language; some were positive, however, some were strongly negative including thoughts that Pidgin is "bad" English. This opinion is reported to be held by one of the area's influential religious leaders.

*English:* There is a positive attitude towards the use of English because of its prestige as an international language. It is used and taught in the educational system. Currently, usage is more by the younger educated generation in a limited number of domains. These include in the classroom and "English club" activities. The level of comprehension appears to be growing but currently is not very high among the general population.

## 2.4 Linguistic Vitality And Viability

### 2.4.1 Attitudes Toward Mother Tongue Use

The overall attitude towards MT development is positive. Each group interviewed indicated that they would like to see their children learn to read and write their MT. They also agreed it would be a good thing if their MT was taught and used as a language of instruction during the first two years of primary school. Each group indicated that even the adults would be willing to learn to read and write their MT.

Many felt this would be a good way to preserve the language. Though the interviews expressed very positive views toward developing the MT, this has not yet resulted in any self-initiated language development activity. There are currently no language committees and the only examples of written materials are calendars produced in Zhoa, Cha'-Yemgeh, and Bafumeng.

### 2.4.2 Language Use General Community

#### *MMEN*

Mmen speakers use their MT in daily life at home, with friends and at work in the fields. Among the Nyos people, the survey team only met one woman who was a

native speaker of the Nyos language. As mentioned previously it was reported that the Nyos people started to use the Bafumeng speech form as their MT years prior to the 1968 Lake Nyos disaster.

The official school policy is that students are not to speak any language except English while at school. It was reported, however, that in the primary school, children from Bafumeng and Cha'-Yemgeh use their MTs during the recreation time and those from Nyos-Ipalim use both their MTs and Pidgin for class conversation.

The MTs are used in the local and main market, as well as in the clinic. Pidgin is used for conversation with non-native speakers and among the Cha'-Yemgeh people in the fields, in the local and main market and in the clinic.

### ***KUK***

According to Kuk speakers, their MT is used at home, with friends, in the fields, in the clinic, and in the local and main market. Children from Kuk use Pidgin or English during the recreation time at school, whereas those from Kumfutu use their MT.

### ***KUNG***

Kung speakers use their MT at home, with friends, at work in the fields, at the local market, and in the clinic. They also use Pidgin in the local and main market. Children speak their MT during the recreation time at school.

### ***ZHOA***

Zhoa speakers use their MT at home, with friends, in the fields, and in the local and main market; at times, Pidgin is used. At school, however, children are only allowed to speak English, though some do speak their MT, especially during recreation.

## **2.4.3 Language Use in Religious Domains**

Church usage was investigated, as often churches are the primary users of MT literature. The main denominations present in the area are the Roman Catholic Church, the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, and the Cameroon Baptist Convention. The Catholic church appears to be the most dominate denomination.

### ***Roman Catholic Church***

Generally speaking, the Roman Catholic church makes use of the MT, Pidgin, English, and Kom during the church services. The MT and Pidgin are used for prayers except in Cha'-Yemgeh and Zhoa where only Pidgin is used. The MT and Pidgin are used for singing except in Cha'-Yemgeh where it is also done in English and at Bafumeng in the Kom language. The liturgy is in Pidgin and an interpretation is given in the MT, except in Kuk and Kumfutu where it is only

done in MT. The announcements are made in the MT and Pidgin except in Kuk where they are only given in the MT.

### *Presbyterian Church*

In the Presbyterian Church, Pidgin, English, and Mungaka are used during the services. The exact combination of languages used, however, may differ from church to church. English and Mungaka are used for prayers in Bafumeng, Pidgin and Mungaka in Cha'-Yemgeh, the MT, English, and Mungaka in Kung, the MT in Kumfutu, and Pidgin in Zhoa. The MT, Pidgin and Mungaka are used for singing and Kom is also used in Bafumeng. In Cha'-Yemgeh and Zhoa, singing is in English. The sermon is generally done in Pidgin and with an interpretation in the MT, except in Kung and Cha'-Yemgeh where it is also done in Mungaka. The announcements are made in the MT and Pidgin. It appears that use of Mungaka in the church was brought in by PCC leadership from the outside. Those interviewed have memorized Mungaka prayers and songs but do not understand the language itself. In Kung and Cha'-Yemgeh where non MT pastors use Mungaka, it must be interpreted into the local language because only a few understand Mungaka.

### *Baptist Church*

In the Baptist church at Bafumeng, English, Kom, and Pidgin are used during church services. English and Kom are used for prayers, songs, and the sermon (interpreted into the MT) and announcements are given in Kom, Pidgin and the MT.

#### 2.4.4 Language Maintenance and Shift

Mmen speakers from Cha'-Yemgeh, Nyos-Ipalim, and Bafumeng all confirmed that Mmen will be spoken for generations to come. It was also reported in the 1993 Aghem survey that Fungom is not in immediate danger of being replaced by another language. Kung speakers claim that their MT will be spoken even when children are married and old. Kuk speakers emphasised that the youth speak their MT more than another language and that they will continue to speak it. Zhoa and Kumfutu speakers also confirmed that their MTs are spoken more than any other language.

Apart from the Nyos-Ipalim language which has been replaced by Mmen, none of the other people interviewed expressed fear that his MT is being or will be replaced by another language or speech form.

#### 2.5 Choices Of Standard for Literacy Development

The following figure lists the responses given by interviewees who were asked to pick one language to be used for all of their people.

Figure 5: Responses to Choice of Standard Question

Village	Choices for Standard		
	First	Second	Third
Bafumeng	Mmen	English	French
Nyos-Ipalim	Mmen	Pidgin	Fulani
Cha'-Yemgeh	Mmen	Kung	Kuk
Kuk	Kuk	Mmen	Aghem
Kumfutu	Kuk	Mmen/Aghem	Kung
Kung	Kung	Aghem	Weh
Zhoa	Zhoa	Weh/Isu	Aghem

Interviewees were not only asked to choose one language as a standard but were also asked concerning their attitudes towards the use of various languages (including their MT) for teaching in Class 1 and 2. The group was also asked whether they would like to see their children, as well as themselves, learn to read and write their MT.

Interestingly, there appear to be some differences in what was preferred as a standard and the attitudes expressed toward its use. For example, Kuk interviewees said that it would not be good to learn to read and write in Mmen or Aghem although they choose them as second and third standard choices. In Nyos-Ipalim, English was not chosen as a standard though it was said to be preferred over Pidgin in the answers to the questions. It is strange that Fulani was chosen (by Nyos-Ipalim) as a standard considering the adverse relationship with Fulani speakers. It is possible that there was some confusion regarding the question and/or response during these interviews.

## 2.6 Social Factors Affecting Language Development

According to Watters (1990:6.7.1) there are three factors that affect the nature and development of language programs and reflect the viability of a language. They are the homogeneity of the linguistic community, their openness to change and development, and the presence at the local level of a middle-aged leadership. The following section includes discussion of these three factors in the context of the villages surveyed.

### 2.6.1 Homogeneity of the Linguistic Community

Politically, all these villages are under the administration of the Fungom subdivision. With respect to religious cohesion, though most people are reported to belong to Christian denominations, the majority of the population continues to follow traditional practices.

*Mmen*: Mmen speakers appear for the most part to be homogeneous and socially cohesive. The four Mmen-speaking villages surveyed consider themselves as

"one people." Linguistically, there are accent differences but these do not appear to impede comprehension.

**Kuk:** The Kuk speaking community appears homogeneous, ethnically, linguistically and geographically. Those interviewed in Kuk and Kumfutu reported that they consider themselves "one people" who speak the same language and have the same chief. During rainy season some of the "Kuk" villages like Ntom, Mbo, Ebo, Nzela, and Achaf are accessible only on foot.

**Kung, Zhoa:** The Kung and Zhoa communities appear to be homogeneous communities, linguistically and socially.

## 2.6.2 Openness to Change and Development

### **MMEN:**

There appears to be an openness to change and development. Evidence of this is seen in the presence of educational facilities, the use and high regard of English, the functioning of community development committees and the keen interest by the Fon (also headmaster of the government school) to improve his people's living conditions.

At Bafumeng, about 60% of the children attend the primary school, and 30% attend the secondary school. The Bafumeng people have formed a development committee called "Mmen Cultural Development Association," which has built schools, a hospital, put in a water supply and constructed roads. They are now clearing trees by the road to put in electricity.

Almost all Nyos-Ipalim children attend primary school in their village, though only nine attend the secondary school also in their village. According to people interviewed, the development committee is ready to start.

At Cha'-Yemgeh, according to the people interviewed, about 40% of the children go to the primary school and 5% to the secondary school in Wum or in Bafumeng. There are no community development committees of any kind. Apparently Nyos-Ipalim and Cha'-Yemgeh village have still not recovered from the 1968 Lake Nyos disaster which devastated their populations. They continue to look to the Mmen fon in Bafumeng to provide leadership in the area of development.

### **KUNG:**

It was reported that about 80% of youth attend the primary school at Kung and that less than 25% attend the secondary school in Wum. Kung people are concerned with the development of their area. The committee has so far built a primary school, a maternity hall, a water supply, done road maintenance and is presently working on a new school building.



**KUK:**

Of the two villages, Kuk and Kumfutu, Kuk is the more developed. It has an active community development committee which has contributed materials and labor to the building of a Catholic school, a water supply, and a health center. The committee is currently trying to build a government primary school as well as to maintain roads. About 75% of Kuk children attend primary school in Kuk with less than 10% continuing on to secondary school.

In Kumfutu, their committee is planning to start a road project between Kuk and Kumfutu, and to construct a water supply. About 50% of Kumfutu children attend primary school in their village with probably less than 10% going on to attend secondary school.

**ZHOA:**

About 80% of the youth of Zhoa attend the primary school there and 50% are said to attend secondary schools in Wum or Bafumeng. It appears that community development in Zhoa is expanding as a result of having the headquarters of the new Fungom subdivision located there. To date the development committee has built a school, an aid post, a council hall and renovated the District Officer's bureau. It is also trying to maintain the road from Zhoa to Kumfutu.

### 2.6.3 Middle-aged Leadership

**MMEN:**

The largest village, Bafumeng, has 26 quarter chiefs which report to the Fon. As a result of the Lake Nyos disaster which killed most of the leadership in Cha' and Nyos they continue to rely heavily on the Fon. It is not known why this is, as it appeared, during interviews, that there was an adequate number of local middle-aged people from which to draw leadership. Overall it appears that there is adequate leadership now and in the future.

**KUK:**

The Kuk interviewees reported that there was adequate local leadership which was evidenced by the number of people attending the interview and the composition of the group. Those interviewed in Kumfutu reported that currently they have a quarter chief with many middle-aged elders and there would be no problem with present or future leadership.

**KUNG:**

Kung has a chief and some elders. The group interviewed said that there would always be an adequate number of middle-aged leaders.

**ZHOA:**

Even though the Zhoa people have suffered the recent death of their chief, there is a council of elders who are already in the process of choosing a successor. It

appears that there will be no problem with an adequate amount of middle-aged leadership at Zhoa.

### 3. SUMMARY

Based on self-reports and word list analysis, it appears that the seven villages surveyed represent four different, though related, languages: Mmen is spoken at Bafumeng, Nyos-Ipalim, and Cha'-Yemgeh, Kuk at Kuk and Kumfutu, Zhoa at Zhoa and Kung at Kung village. Each language area appears linguistically homogenous. Word list analysis showed Bafumeng, Nyos-Ipalim and Cha'-Yemgeh as having many differences, however, speakers see themselves as all speaking the same. The Nyos people once spoke the Nyos language however now they speak Mmen.

Most of the language areas are very small, with fewer than 2,000 speakers; Mmen is the exception, with over 30,000 speakers. The attitude towards MT development is positive. The people claim that children and adults would be eager learn to read and write their MT.

Reviewing the responses from the questionnaires, it appears neighbouring languages do not dominate the MTs of any of the villages interviewed. Multilingualism varies with location but is predominately in the Kom, Aghem, Weh, Isu and Mmen speech forms. It is reported that the average person in the surveyed groups can understand a number of their neighbouring languages but not with much depth of comprehension unless its acquired through contact. When communicating with speakers of Fang, Bum, Mekaf, Missong or Laimbue, all of the speakers surveyed said that they used Pidgin. Some speakers are able to understand these neighbouring languages as a result of contact but they do not use them except when necessary.

Apart from the Nyos language which has been replaced by Mmen, all the languages appear to have linguistic vitality. Each language is used in the most important domains of daily life: at home, with friends of the same age, at work in the fields, in the local and main market, in the clinic, and in the church. In addition, there is no fear that one language will be replaced by another despite the wide spread use of Pidgin.

Concerning viability of a language development project, each language group appears to exhibit the important characteristics of social cohesion and homogeneity, openness to change and development and an adequate presence of middle-aged leadership. In addition, the attitudes towards MT literacy development are positive though no significant effort has been taken by any of villages to develop its own MT literacy.

## 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

### 4.1 Mmen Literacy Development

The Mmen language group appears to meet the criteria for a language standardisation project: No translation materials in other languages appear to be adequate for Mmen speakers to use in place of MT literacy materials. All the Mmen groups interviewed reported that their language is in daily use, that no other language is replacing it on a wide scale. Everyone interviewed express a positive attitude toward MT literacy development and the use of MT in primary education.

The Mmen population (30,000+) is located for the most part around the village of Bafumeng which would be a prime candidate as location for a language development team. In addition to being a large town, it is the cultural and political center of the Mmen community. The local Catholic priest even expressed an interest in providing office space for a language development team.

### 4.2 ALCAM Changes

Aghem[810]: Remove Cha', Nyos, Fungom, Zoa, Kuk, Kumfutu and Kung.

Mmen[821]: Add Cha', Nyos, Fungom

Create separate listings for Zhoa, Kung and Kuk.

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