

**MINISTRY OF SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL RESEARCH**

**A Rapid Appraisal Language Survey of Akum [707]**

**(Menchum Division, North West Province)**

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of a rapid appraisal research study among the speakers of Akum in the North West Province of Cameroon. This study was carried out with the intention of making a preliminary assessment of the need to develop a written form of the Akum language, and to determine the possible scope of a potential literacy project. Similarly, being preliminary, this study was expected to identify any questions that needed further research before a final recommendation could be made. This research was conducted on February 14, 2001 by AKUMBU Pius WUCHU, SWIRI Roseta ADE, BOLIMA Flora AGEKO, all of the University of Yaounde I, and supervised by Edward and Elizabeth BRYE of SIL.

We are grateful for the hospitality of the regional officials, and the traditional leader, whose cooperation was very vital for the accomplishment of this challenging task. We are especially grateful to the Sub-divisional Officer of Fura-Awa for his prompt understanding.

### 1.1 Names

The people under study refer to themselves as the 'Akum' and to their language variably as 'ákùm' or 'ókùm.'

### 1.2 Locality and Population

The Akum language is spoken in five distinct villages. Three of these villages, Upkack, Izong, and Konkum are found in the Fura-Awa Sub-division, Menchum Division, North West Province of the Republic of Cameroon. Two of them, Ibang and Manga are found in Nigeria.

The paramount ruler of these villages, based in Upkack, Mr. GALADIMA Achipo reports a local population of 7000 speakers. According to his report, the population is distributed as follows:

Upkack	4000
Izong	1000
Konkum	400
Ibang (Nigeria)	1000
Manga (Nigeria)	600
TOTAL	7000

The 1987 Census lists only one figure of 914 for 'Akum' in Furu-Awa Sub-division. The projected figure for 2001 would be a bit under 1400.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> According to the 1987 Census Publication (Demo 87:5), between 1976-1987 Cameroon experienced a 2.9% annual growth. Assuming that the same 2.9% rate of growth has continued over the past 14 years and applies equally throughout the country, we can estimate the 2001 population based on the 1987 figure. There is no way of knowing if there has been significant immigration or emigration of the speech communities since 1987. Also, these figures do not include populations speaking the language outside of the village (in cities) or those villages in Nigeria.

### **1.3 History of the Akum people**

The people report that they were created at Kweyma (in Cameroon). However, during the first World War, they were forced to move, some to Makwe and others to Metsikpan, because of tribal conflicts. They finally settled at their present site.

### **1.4 Linguistic Classification**

Grimes (1996) lists Akum (code AKU) with alternate name "Anyar". The language is spoken near the Nigerian border, Akum village Fura-Awa Subdivision, Menchum Division, North West Province. Three villages in Nigeria (Manga, Ekban, Konkom). Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, Cross River, Unclassified. Not Bendi; may be Jukunoid. Dieu and Renaud (1983) do not mention Akum. It is however numbered [707] in the *Atlas Administratif des langues nationales du Cameroun* (BRETON and FOHTUNG 1991). (See appendices for a linguistic map)

### **1.5 Research Objectives**

This research was done in order to accomplish the following:

- Make a preliminary evaluation, based on village-based speakers' perceptions, of the level of intercomprehension within Akum and between Akum and adjacent languages.
- Identify the attitudes of village residents toward the idea of reading and writing Akum or any adjacent languages.
- Determine the feasibility of developing literacy materials in the Akum language.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

Our team employed the sociolinguistic research approach known as the Rapid Appraisal (BERGMAN 1991; STALDER 1996). This approach involves the utilisation of group interviews and individual questionnaires as well as the elicitation of an ALCAM 126-word list. This research tool provides an overall impression of potential needs through reports from local inhabitants that take a relatively short period of time. A rapid appraisal survey seeks to find out, among other things, information concerning the dialect situation, multilingualism, and the vitality and viability of the language.

## **3. RESEARCH RESULTS**

After meeting and being authorized by the Sub-divisional officer of Fura-Awa, the research team went to the palace of the paramount ruler of Akum at Upkack. He arranged for a group of 9 people (6 men and 3 women) to be interviewed in his palace. While some of the research team members were conducting a group interview, others elicited the word list. An individual interview was administered to the head teacher of the Government Primary School-Upkack, Mr. SARA Anthony. Among those involved in the group interview were members of all the Christian denominations, who answered specific questions related to their various churches.

### 3.1 Dialect Situation

The research team aimed to identify speech varieties within the language and to estimate the degree of intercomprehension between such sub-groups. The group interviewees, however, were unanimous that in all the five villages Akum-speakers perceive themselves as speaking exactly the same.

### 3.2 Akum—reclassified as Jukunoid

The Ethnologue had classified Akum as Benue. But according to Roger Blench's inspection of the Akum wordlist and his comparison of it with other lists of the area, he recognizes Akum as a distinct language most closely resembling Beezen. And he has recently reclassified Akum as follows:<sup>2</sup>

Benue-Congo  
Platoid  
Benue  
Jukunoid  
Yukuben-Kuteb  
Yukuben  
Akum [AKU]  
Beezen [BZN]

### 3.3 Multilingualism

The team examined the aspect of multilingualism in order to obtain a preliminary assessment of the level of understanding and oral competence in languages geographically and linguistically close to the speech variety under study, as well as in the language of wider communication.

#### 3.3.1 Languages Linguistically and Geographically Close

At least six languages are either linguistically or geographically close to Akum. These languages are: Beezen (ALCAM 708), spoken in the Cameroonian village of Kpek; Isu, a dialect of Aghem (ALCAM 810) spoken in the village of Isu; Jukun (listed in ALCAM as Njikum 701), a Nigerian language spoken in Fru Bana; and the three Nigerian languages of Nsi, Lidzi, and Lisa, spoken in villages of the same names. According to the interviewees there is a slight degree of mutual intelligibility between Akum and Lisa, and Akum and Lidzi, but generally speakers of the six villages comfortably use Jukun when they come together.

#### 3.3.2 Languages of Wider Communication -- Jukun, Pidgin English

As indicated above, Jukun is the common language of the region. The interviewees revealed that besides the Akum-speaking villages, a substantial majority in the entire sub-division, particularly the six villages listed above, master Jukun. Everybody in these villages is reported to use Jukun freely whenever they meet someone who is not of their speech variety. The Jukun language of Nigeria spread widely in this area because of geographical proximity and trade contacts. Intermarriage is also frequent with Jukun native speakers. Pidgin English, being the language of wider communication for the entire North West Province of Cameroon,

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<sup>2</sup> P.C.

is also used here as an alternative to Jukun. This means that it is used in cases where the interlocutor does not speak Jukun.

### **3.4 Vitality and Viability**

The team viewed as essential an understanding of language vitality and viability for determining the potential success of a literacy development project. A key indicator of language vitality would be that the mother tongue is used daily in the home among family members and in the village among speakers of the same language.

#### **3.4.1 Languages used at home and with friends**

Akum is the principle language used at home and among friends. As expected, Jukun is used for communicating with speakers of related language groups, and Pidgin English is used when a stranger does not speak Jukun.

#### **3.4.2 Languages used for work**

The interviewees were unanimous that the only language used at work, such as in the farm when there is no stranger present, is Akum.

#### **3.4.3 Languages used at stores and markets**

It should be noted that only small stores exist in this area. Since there are no markets, the people have to go across to Nigeria for their other needs. At the small stores, only the mother tongue is used. Jukun or Pidgin English is used when they travel to the markets.

#### **3.4.4 Language used at the LAP Post**

The only health unit in the region is the Cameroon Baptist Convention LAP Post at Izong. The mother tongue is the language that is used there.

#### **3.4.5 Languages used at school**

English is used most in class, but in the lower classes (1 and 2) Akum is sometimes used when the pupils meet difficulties in understanding. Outside the class, students speak to one another in the mother tongue, Jukun and Pidgin English. The principal of the Government Primary School-Akum said most parents are now conscientious and send many of their children to school. He was particularly positive about the introduction of the mother tongue at the elementary levels. As an Akum-speaker, he said he would not spare any efforts in assisting in such a project. He also said a few of the primary school graduates attend secondary schools. Some of them have to go to Fura-Awa, others to Isu, and yet others to Nigeria.

#### **3.4.6 Languages used at church**

The group interviewees revealed that Akum (A), Pidgin English (P) English (E) and Hausa (H) are widely used in church. Irrespective of denomination—whether Presbyterian, Baptist, Full Gospel or Catholic, Pidgin is used for prayers, and (in the order of their prominence) Akum and English and Hausa are used for singing various songs, and Pidgin is used for delivering the sermon message which is translated into the mother tongue.

Note: where more than one language is used, they are given in order of prominence.

Interviews with church members are relevant in determining whether the Scriptures, if translated, would be used by the church communities within the language group. All the interviewees (members from all the Christian denominations) expressed their willingness to see the Scriptures translated into their mother tongue. They were all willing to work together for translation purposes, just as they have been cooperating in other matters.

### **3.5 Attitudes**

The team carried out an assessment of attitudes held by the community, including the local community leaders and a teacher, toward the possibility and value of a literacy development project.

#### **3.5.1 Mother tongue**

Attitudes toward the mother tongue are very positive. The interviewees stated that, after English and French which are official languages, the next language, in the order of preference, which they should choose to read and write is Akum.

The people interviewed were confident that their language would continue to be spoken indefinitely. In fact, the paramount ruler expressed much disgust with the children who fail to use the mother tongue at home.

#### **3.5.2 Standardisation efforts**

No efforts have been made yet towards the development of the Akum language. Mr. AUGUSTIN, one of the interviewees and a Catholic, said he has been struggling to write Akum with the English alphabet. He says, oftentimes, he writes letters in the Akum language to three of his friends who live outside of Akum.

#### **3.5.3 Migration and intermarriage**

There are many outsiders who come to live in Akum. They often start using Jukun or Pidgin English and eventually learn Akum. Speakers of Akum may marry whomever they want since there are no marital restrictions in this region, but they intermarry most often with people from Jukun, Beezen, Lidzi, and especially Lisa.

#### **3.5.4 Language shift**

As stated in section 3.2.2 above, the majority of Akum speakers master the Jukun language and use it widely. Due to intermarriage, especially with native Jukun speakers, they sometimes use this language even in the home. Despite this reality, however, the group interviewees insisted that Akum youth do not speak Jukun or any other language more than they speak their mother tongue. They said that the youth are not inclined to mix their mother tongue with Pidgin or Jukun either and that the youth feel "happy" about their language. Some interviewees expressed concern that the youth might forget their language, but they then clarified that they were concerned only because of what they had observed happening in other ethnic groups. "We have no problem here now," they said.

### **3.6 Socio-Economic Factors**

Some socio-economic factors have been identified as affecting the nature and development of language programmes. John Watters(1989) mentions the following:

- Homogeneity of the linguistic community (social cohesion).
- Openness of the community to change and to better living conditions.
- Presence at the local level of middle-aged leadership.

Even though with some difficulties, the Akum-speaking community meets these three criteria.

#### **3.6.1 Social cohesion**

As has been mentioned earlier, all the five Akum-speaking villages perceive themselves as forming a linguistic unity. Though there are no motorable roads, the people often trek hours to get to other villages and throughout the year they are able to trek about freely. It should be recalled that this social cohesion is reinforced by trade links, a common culture and intermarriage.

#### **3.6.2 Openness to change**

Those present during the interview expressed the desire to see the young as well as the old read and write in their mother tongue. The Akum Cultural and Development Association is the development committee there and amongst other things, they have been constructing water ponds and roads as well as doing general repairs.

#### **3.6.3 Village based leadership**

The group interviewees revealed that the youngest village leader is 35 years of age. In their opinion, the community will never lack people to replace outgoing leaders. It should be noted that leadership is inherited and that the people would accept whoever is appointed as leader.

## **4. SIL/ CABTAL/ NACALCO PLANS**

Neither SIL, CABTAL, nor NACALCO has plans to work on the Akum language.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Akum is a distinct linguistic unit. Despite the widespread use of Jukun and Pidgin English, the mother tongue continues to display prominence in the daily lives of the Akum community.

According to Roger Blench's reclassification, Akum is now linguistically classified as Benue-Congo, Platoid, Benue, Jukunoid, Yukuben-Kuteb [Nigeria], Yukuben, **Akum [AKU] (Cameroon)**.

A few indicators point to the fact that a programme to develop literature in the Akum language would be a success:

- The village has a development committee that is active.
- People interviewed from all the Christian denominations of Akum show much interest in cooperating with one another to see the Word of God translated into their mother tongue.

- The language is vital. Despite the focus on the English language that is necessary for education, the mother tongue is still a highly favored language, among the youth in particular and the whole community in general.

However, it is very difficult to know whether the people of Akum would use literacy materials in Jukun. Every Akum speaker, according to those interviewed, is comfortable when it comes to using Jukun. Nevertheless, this does not clearly indicate that the people would learn to read and write in Jukun. Also, we do not know which variety of Jukun the Akum people understand. We recommend that comprehension of standard Jukun be tested, and if test results are high, an attempt be made to promote the use of Jukun literature among the Akum.

#### **6. MODIFICATIONS TO ALCAM**

Information should be given about the Akum language as follows:

- The name of the language is 'Akum' or 'Okum.'
- The people refer to themselves as the 'Akum.'
- Blench's reclassification should be followed to reflect that Akum is: Jukunoid, Yukuben-Kuteb [Nigeria], Yukuben, Akum [AKU] (Cameroon).

#### **7. MODIFICATIONS TO THE ETHNOLOGUE**

- Indicate that an alternate name for the language is 'Okum.'
- Change the following:
  - 1) The people refer to themselves as the 'Akum.'
  - 2) Three Akum speaking villages (Upkack, Izong, Konkum) are in Cameroon.
  - 3) The Akum-speaking population in Cameroon totals more than 1400, but there are no estimates for the two villages in Nigeria.
  - 4) That Blench's reclassification be followed to reflect that Akum is: Benue-Congo, Platoid, Benue, Jukunoid, Yukuben-Kuteb [Nigeria], Yukuben, Akum [AKU] (Cameroon).



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## 8. APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: ALCAM lists for Akum and Beezen

Language name: Beezen/Kpep

Informant: Lydia Shimun and Andreas Shita

Age/Age: 35 and 62

Native village: Beezen

Father's group: Beezen

Mother's group: Beezen

Level of education:

Location: Fon's Palace

Date: 14 February 2001

Researchers: Pius Akumbu and Flora Bolima

Language name: Akum

Informants: Mr. Adiku Timothy and Mrs Naomi Meme

Age: 30 and 45

Native village: Akum

Father's group: Akum

Mother's group: Akum

Level of education: ---Diploma in Irrigation Engineering/ -unknown

Location: Fon's Palace

Date: 14 February 2001

Researchers: Flora Bolima and Swiri Roseta

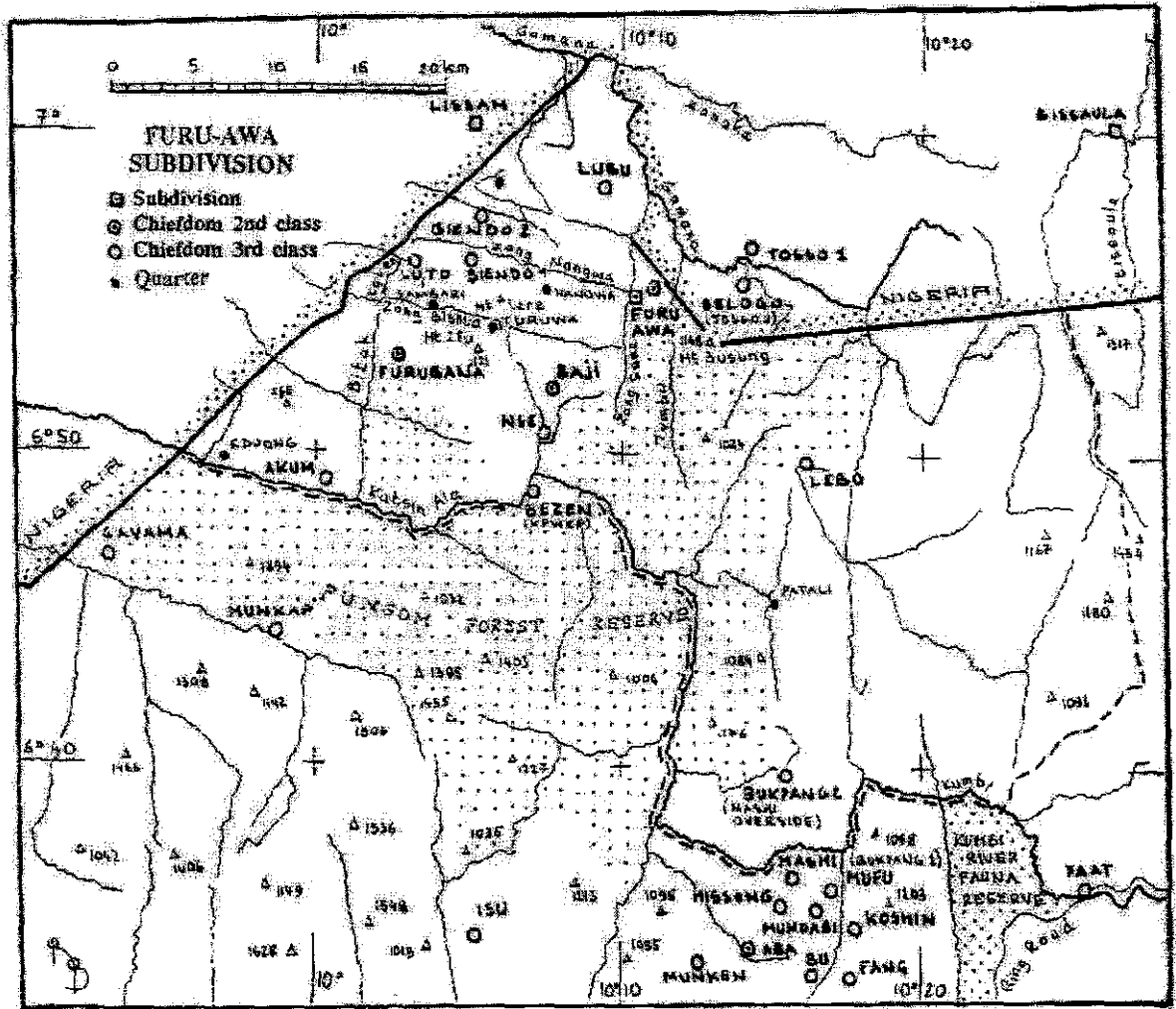
	English	Français	Beezen	Akum
1	Mouth	bouche	úńú	ùńù?
2	Eye	œil	kíyí	íyí
3	Head	tête	kífi	íkí
4	hair (on head)	cheveux	ùsùn	ótsí
5	Tooth	dent	kízín	ídzi
6	Tongue	langue	káńám	úmyám
7	Nose	nez	kén	íwé
8	Ear	oreille	kótón	ótón
9a	Neck	cou	kíkímítsú	ísán
9b	back of neck (nape)	nuque	kàlák	àlák
9c	Throat	gorge	úmínítsú	ógwàrèkwú
10	Breast	sein	kímyám	ímwè
11	arm/hand	bras/main	kíbú	ogbwó
12a	Claw	griffe	ázíp ó guń	ígwàp nu?ki
12b	Nail	ongle	ázíp obú	ígwàp agbo
13a	Leg	jambe	kígún	ífwí
13b	Foot	pied	kíwáróguń	òkí
14	Buttock	fesse	kékú	ítá
15	Belly	ventre	kéwúró	ímbaró
16	Navel	nombril	ùhú	okam
17	intestines/insides	intestins/boyaux	ízím	òlun?kím
18	Blood	sang	béyón	áyàń

19	Urine	urine	bézím	ákyám
20	Bone	os	kíkíp	ókāp
21	Skin	peau	éyóré	úkpwánéŋ
22	Wing	aile	kábáb	ábā
23	feather	plume	éhñ	àtuŋ
24	horn	corne	ókún	úkwě
25	tail	queue	órán	ùtsé
26	human being	être humain	ónú	íngyēró
27	man	homme	ólím	álám
28	woman	femme	ókwóp	ákáp
29	husband	mari	íwàn	úlám
30	child	enfant	ízín	alímfi
31	name	nom	kízín	ídzí
32	sky	ciel	kéb <sup>h</sup> i ìbàm	átārò
33	night	nuit	kélēŋ	okwútàn
34	moon	lune	úgwán	òkán
35	sun	soleil	úrú	osóro
36	wind	vent	úgbán	ofóp
37	cloud	nuage	kèkún	abùŋ
38	dew	rosée	ímín	ímjwe
39	rain	pluie	éwún	abwí
40	ground	terre	ífi	ítsú
41	sand	sable	ífikóγwù	ìsā
42	path	chemin	ùkwán	okəŋ
43	water	eau	bímí	ámwí
44	stream (river)	cours d'eau	úyár	óyàn
45	house	maison	kítšán	ígyá
46	fire	feu	ólú	ùlà
47	firewood	bois a brûler	ókún	úkwé ùlà
48	smoke	fumée	búsún	àtsəŋ
49	ash	cendre	bótsún	àtún
50	knife	couteau	ùkwáp	ùkwóp
51	rope	corde	úlúk	ólók
52	spear	lance, sagaie	útúp	ékpwan
53	war (fight)	guerre (combat)	úmán	ome
54a	animal	animal	ízi	òmòŋ
54b	meat	viande	bízí	òmòŋ
55	dog	chien	ìbóró	égbúrú
56	elephant	éléphant	ìndòrò	èndáró
57	goat	chèvre	émán	émé
58	bird	oiseau	ènènè	ènwè
59	tortoise	tortue	kìkpárákékém	otsap
60	snake	serpent	bíwú	íwú
61	fish	poisson	ísán	íkyá
62	(head) louse	pou (de tete)	élí	ílá
63	egg	œuf	kífi	àtsi
64	Tree	arbre	ótí	úki
65	bark	écorce	kíkwó	íkù?ó
66	Leaf	feuille	ámí	ámwá

67	Root	racine	éhēp	íkóp
68	salt	sel	búmwán	omwá
69	Fat	graisse	ézāp	ádzāp
70a	hunger (general)	faim (général)	úwún	úpón
70b	hunger (for meat)	faim (de viande)	ínón	ákyám ònò
71	Iron (the metal)	fer (le métal)	kísáró	ìnà
72	one	un	óyùnó	áyì
73	Two	deux	éné	áfè
74	Three	trois	ítáró	átà
75	Four	quatre	íjì	ájì
76	five	cinq	ítsón	ákwò
77	six	six	ítsón óyún	ákwò yì
78	seven	sept	tsò	ákwò f è
79	eight	huit	ítsón ítáró	ákwò tà
80	nine	neuf	ítsón íjì	ákwò jì
81	ten	dix	kúwúp	ékùrù
82	come	venir	wú	bá
83	send (someone)	envoyer	átfè	òkyàn
84	walk	marcher	ákáró	ákyáká
85	fall	tomber	áwú	òkpò
86	leave	partir	jìn	onì
87	fly	voler (oiseau)	ówùn	òlìm
88	pour	verser	kún	fàrí
89	strike	frapper	dáp	òbùrí
90	bite	mordre	kúkízím	džím
91	wash (transitive)	laver (transitif)	áyé	ṣwá
92	split (wood)	fendre	báp	oyarí
93	give	donner	nà	ònà
94	steal	voler ( dérober)	búzì	ódzì
95	squeeze	presser	kám	onkà
96	cultivate	cultiver	étjím	ùwò
97	bury (transitive)	enterrer (transitif)	éjì	onè
98	burn (transitive)	brûler (transitif)	éjím	okwì
99	eat	manger	arí	džì
100	drink	boire	amí	ṣwá
101	vomit	vomir	abí	kpwà
102	suck	sucer	mí	ṣwé
103	spit (saliva)	cracher (salive)	tjì	àkyàn
104	blow (on)	souffler (sur)	yìn	sè
105	swell	enfler	ámè	ndàb
106	give birth	engendrer	kíbárá	imbá
107	die	mourir	kùhú	úkpú
108	kill	tuer	ówún	òtsèn
109	push	pousser	gìm	dwok ka
110	pull	tirer	bèrè	gbwí bá
111	sing	chanter	tsì	kwò
112	play (a game)	jouer (un jeu)	ásín	égyè?
113	be afraid	avoir peur	bélíp	àsì
114	want	vouloir	ásón	ífwè

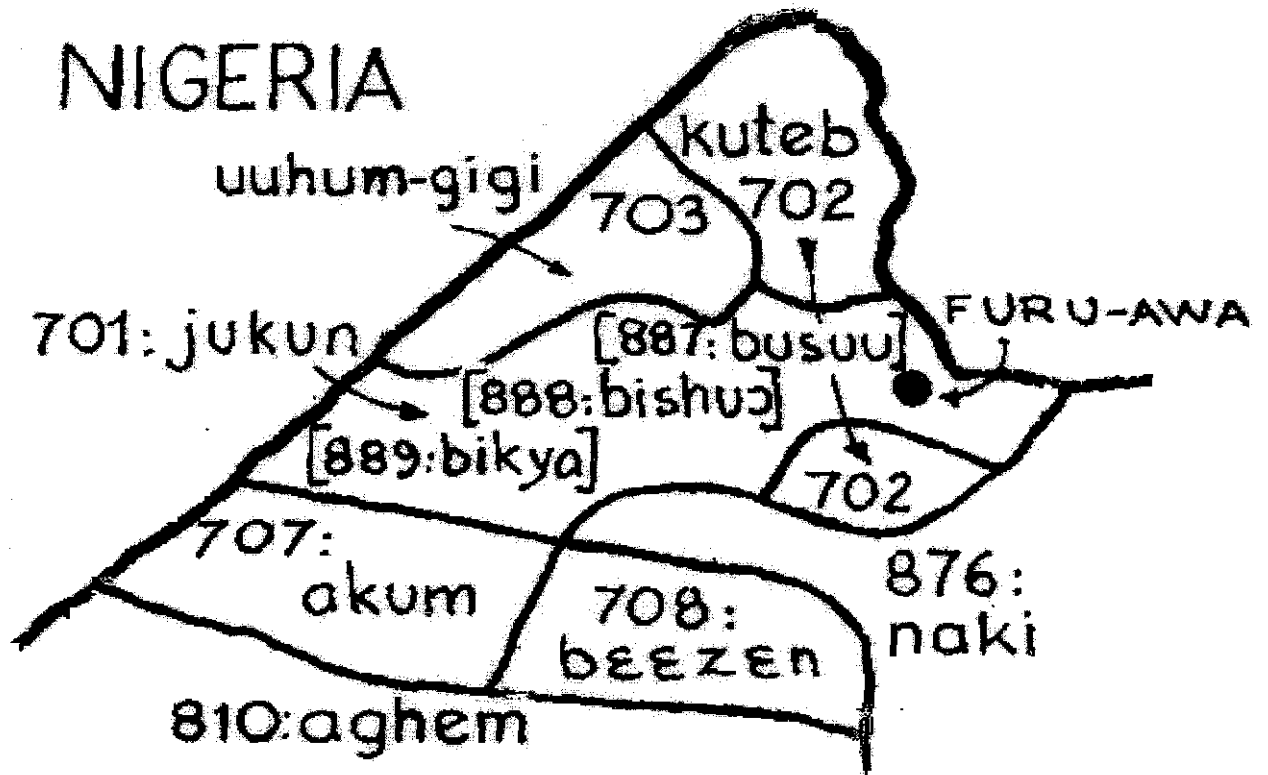
115	say	dire	áryáŋ	òlwó
116	see	voir	rí	̀ndóré
117	show	montrer	tsõk	k <sup>h</sup> wò
118	hear	entendre	óók	wò
119	know	savoir/connaître	ríŋ	sòŋ
120	count	compter	bún	fá

**APPENDIX B: Map of Cameroon's Furu-Awa Subdivision**



**Breton's Furu-Awa Subdivision (Breton 1993:110)**

APPENDIX C: Linguistic Map of Akum and Neighbouring Languages



Source: Breton and Fohtung, 1991:137 modified