

MINISTRY OF SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL RESEARCH

A RAPID APPRAISAL SURVEY OF BAMBALANG
[NGO KEFUNJIA DIVISION, NORTH WEST PROVINCE]

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A Rapid Appraisal Survey of Bambalang.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report describes a rapid appraisal survey of the Bambalang language, which was carried out in November 1993, by Caroline Grant, Peggy Griffin and Paul Huey of the Société Internationale de Linguistique (SIL).

1.1 Background

The Bambalang language is spoken in Bambalang village, which is found southeast of Ndop town, Ngo Ketunjia Division, North West Province of Cameroon. Population figures vary with the source of information consulted. ALCAM (*Atlas Linguistique du Cameroun*, Dieu and Renaud, 1983), groups this speech form with Sh̄ Pam̄, and gives the overall population of mother tongue speakers as being over 10,000.

Ethnologue (Grimes, 1992), gives a 1982 population figure of 14,500. However, the local government census figures from the 1987 census give the total village population as 11,000, the majority of whom are mother tongue speakers of Bambalang. This most recent figure does not include those Bambalang speakers who live outside the language area, i.e., in the larger cities.

ALCAM gives the following linguistic classification for Bambalang: Benoué-Congo, Bantoide, Bantou du Grassfield, Est-Grassfield, Noun, Sh̄ Pam̄.

Ethnologue gives the linguistic description as: Benue-Congo, Bantoid, Southern, Broad Bantu, Wide Grassfields, Narrow Grassfields, Mbam-Nkam, Nun. Ethnologue also states that Bambalang is related to Bafanji, Bamun, Bamali and Bangolan.

The speakers of this language refer to it as: "tsrambo", but the name Bambalang will be used in this report, for the sake of easy identification. During the survey it was discovered that the Bambalang speech form is not the same language as that which is normally referred to as Sh̄ Pam̄ in ALCAM, since this term refers to the Bamoun language (ALCAM code: 901).

Languages which border on the Bambalang-speaking area include: Bamunka, Bamali, Samba Leeko, Sh̄ Pam̄, Bafanji and Bangolan.

1.2 Purpose of the Survey

This survey was carried out in order to: establish the linguistic relationship (if any) of Bambalang to the languages surrounding it; and to investigate the potential need for the codification and standardisation of the Bambalang speech form, and the feasibility of a language development project in the Ndop Plain area.

2.0 PROCEDURES

2.1 Type of survey:

This survey made use of a method known as Rapid Appraisal. This approach is characterised by its limited goals (to gain a general overview of the sociolinguistic situation in a particular area), and by its specific, non-technical procedures (usually limited to informal interviews with administrative and traditional authorities, church and mission leaders, and group and individual questionnaires, where deemed necessary). Other data may also be collected where relevant, such as: additional linguistic data, and information on the community's felt needs for development.

2.2 Main areas of focus:

Throughout the survey, three major areas were kept under consideration:

- (a) the dialect situation and the level of comprehension of related speech forms, and the corresponding attitudes;
- (b) possible bilingualism with languages of wider communication (particularly Pidgin English) and with neighbouring languages: its extent, as well as corresponding attitudes;
- (c) the viability of the language and the feasibility of a language development project, as revealed in overall language attitudes and reported patterns of language use.

The following two diagnostic questions were used for determining how well related languages are understood, and whether comprehension seems to be based on inherent intelligibility (due to linguistic similarity) or on acquired intelligibility (due to contact with speakers of the language):

(1) "If you are in that place, where language X is spoken, what language do you use, what language do they use, and how well do you understand each other?"

(2) "Can even a young child from this place understand someone from that place? (If not, how old must the child be before he understands?)"

2.3 Methodology

Two group interviews were held in Bambalang village, both in the quarter of the Fon's palace. One of these interviews was conducted in the presence of His Highness Fon Fosi Yakum-Ntaw of Bambalang, and about twenty specially chosen traditional community leaders.

The second group interview was conducted with about eight mother tongue speakers from Bambalang, with one woman present.

Individual questionnaires (see Appendix) were administered with ten

Bambalang speakers. The main areas focussed on pertained to multilingualism, and attitudes to the potential use of written materials in other languages.

A wordlist of 120 words was collected in the Bambalang language.

3.0 RESULTS AND EVALUATION

3.1 Dialect Situation and Inherent Intercomprehension

There are twenty-two quarters in Bambalang village. Linguistic information sources (ie. Ethnologue, ALCAM) give no indication that there is more than one dialect spoken in this language community. This was confirmed during both of the group interviews, and also in the individual questionnaires. It was stated that all Bambalang speakers speak exactly the same form of the mother tongue, and there are no differences in pronunciation of the mother tongue between any of the quarters. Even in those quarters which are separated from the other villages by the Nun Reservoir, there is apparently no difference in dialect or pronunciation. All of the quarters of Bambalang are accessible at all times of the year: those situated on islands in the reservoir are reached by boat. All of the other quarters are linked by road. It is therefore possible to conclude that Bambalang is a linguistically homogenous community.

3.2.0 Multilingualism

The Bambalang-speaking community is bordered by the following languages.

- Bamoun [shu pamem] (ALCAM code: 901)
- Bali [Chamba Leeko] (ALCAM code: 300)
- Babungo (ALCAM code: 843)
- Bamunka (ALCAM code: 842)
- Bangolan (ALCAM code: 901)
- Bamali (ALCAM code: 901)
- Bamukumbit (ALCAM code: 901)
- Babessi (ALCAM code: 844)
- Bafanji (ALCAM code: 901)
- Bagam (ALCAM code: 930)

3.2.1 Knowledge of Neighbouring Languages:

As mentioned above, the Bambalang quarters border with several other languages. However, comprehension of these is affected by the proximity of the quarter to the neighbouring language, and also the degree of contact between them. For example, the Bambalang quarters of Mbankesie and Mbashie are not too distant from Bagam village (Bamboutos Division, West Province), and some Bambalang speakers in these quarters can understand Bagam. It was found then, that those Bambalang speakers who have frequent contact with speakers of surrounding speech forms often have a working comprehension of them, which is acquired through exposure and thereby learned.

When asked to give the names of the languages which were best understood by Bambalang speakers in general, the following were given, by the two interview groups:

The group in the Fon's palace placed the languages in the following order of comprehension: (i) Bamoun (ALCAM code: 901); (ii) Bafanji, (iii) Bamali and (iv) Bamukumbit, which are all classified in ALCAM as 901.

The second group interview gave a slightly different order of comprehension, however:

(i) Bamoun, (ii) Bafanji, (iii) Bamali, and (iv) Bamukumbit. Each of these is dealt with below.

Bamoun (also known as *shu pamam*)

It was reported that several of the quarters in Bambalang village have considerable contact with the Bamoun-speaking community, either because of trade and business, or fishing. In the Fon's quarter, there are reportedly many people who understand and speak Bamoun.

Also, there are quite a number of Bamoun speakers who have settled in the Bambalang community. A Bambalang person who knows Bamoun will use it with Bamoun speakers. Conversation is usually limited, however, to trade and preliminary greetings, and comprehension is reportedly not "deep". Also, the Bamoun speaker is obliged to accommodate his speech by speaking slowly, so that his Bambalang counterpart can understand.

Bambalang children cannot understand Bamoun, until the age of 13 - 15 years, and only if they have had considerable contact with speakers from that community. Pidgin English is used by those who are not proficient in Bamoun.

Bamali, Bafanji, Bamukumbit and Bamunka

Pidgin English is the language of wider communication which is usually used by Bambalang speakers when communicating with speakers of the above-named languages. There are some Bambalang speakers who are able to communicate in one or more of these languages, if they have had sufficient contact with the respective language community concerned.

While interviewing traditional leaders, the Fon of Bambalang informed the research team that Bambalang is linked by tradition with other language groups in the same ethnic (but not necessarily linguistic) family. This is known in the region as the "mangc" family or clan, and comprises speakers of the following language groups: Bambalang, Bamunka, Bafanji, Bamali, and Bamukumbit.

Pidgin English

Pidgin is used by the Bambalang-speaking community whenever the speakers are not able to communicate adequately by using either Bambalang, or another language which has been acquired. Bambalang speakers are usually

exposed to Pidgin from a very young age, ie. pre-primary school, because of contact with children from other language groups, their parents' trading contacts, and at school, contact with non-mother tongue speakers of Bambalang.

Attitudes to neighbouring languages

Generally, from the two group interviews conducted, and also from the individual questionnaires completed, it seems that Bambalang speakers have positive attitudes towards using other neighbouring languages when needed, at least in the oral domain. This depends, of course, on the person's knowledge of that particular language. When asked if they would be prepared to learn to read and write in a language other than their mother tongue, there was a general acceptance and willingness towards the use of either Bamoun, or Bamali in written form, second to their own mother tongue.

When, during the two group interviews, it was asked which language, after Bambalang, would be most acceptable to the population to use as a written language, there was a mixed response. However, Bamoun was chosen by both groups in first place; Bamali was placed in second position; Bamukumbit as either third or fourth choice. It should be noted that both group interviews were conducted in the quarter where the Fon is resident: this may have had some influence on the responses of the interviewees. Nevertheless, in none of the responses given was there any indication that materials in other languages were preferable to written materials in Bambalang.

3.3.0 Language Vitality and Viability

3.3.1 Language Use and Attitudes to the Mother Tongue

The speech form Bambalang is employed in all domestic domains, as well as in contact with other mother tongue speakers, in village situations. Pidgin English is used with non-mother tongue speakers, and also when the Bambalang person is outside of his language area. In local markets, Pidgin and Bamoun are both used as languages of wider communication by those Bambalang speakers who are familiar with them.

There seems to be a widespread positive attitude to the mother tongue within the Bambalang community, and a great enthusiasm for development of the mother tongue as a standardised language.

Most of those interviewed in a group situation, and also those interviewed individually indicated that they would like their own children to be taught how to read and write in Bambalang. However, some people indicated that they would prefer their children to be taught in English first of all, and then to be helped in Bambalang, if they had difficulties. They would not be willing for them to learn literacy skills in Bamoun, or in any other language.

Use of Bambalang for religious purposes

Religious groups within the Bambalang community include the Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Baptist and Full Gospel churches, and a Moslem Mosque. During one of the group interviews, it was reported that many Bambalang people do not have any specific religious affiliation, and follow traditional practices. Approximately 40% of the population are either church attenders, or attend Mosque services.

Presbyterian Church

In the Presbyterian churches, of which there are five, interpretation into the mother tongue is made for the Bible Readings from English, for the sermon, from Pidgin English, and for the children's Sunday School. The liturgical prayers are said in English and in Mungaka (the former, "official" church language), hymns are sung in English from the Presbyterian hymnal, and other songs are sung in Pidgin English and in Bambalang. Apparently one Bambalang person has written several songs in his mother tongue, and these are taught orally by him to the congregations. Although one of the Presbyterian churches is mixed linguistically, all of the churches reportedly need to interpret into Bambalang, because many of the older women do not understand Pidgin English, or English, whereas there are few non-mother tongue speakers in the church who do not understand any Bambalang at all.

Baptist Church

There are seven Baptist churches in the Bambalang-speaking area, the largest of which has roughly 150 people in attendance at Sunday services. The mother tongue is used for all aspects of church life, including: Bible reading and Sunday School (interpreted from English); prayers are said in Pidgin and in the mother tongue, and the sermon is given in the mother tongue unless the Pastor (a non-Bambalang speaker) preaches, in which case, interpretation is given into the mother tongue.

According to both the Presbyterian and Baptist church leaders, literacy materials in the mother tongue would be extremely useful, particularly if this included translation of religious materials, such as songs, prayers, and the Bible. Apparently, there are some church members who are able to understand Bamoun well enough to use the Bamoun Bible, but these are a very small minority.

Catholic Church

There are three small Catholic churches in the Bambalang area, of about fifteen members in each congregation. Bible readings, sermons and prayers are all conducted in Pidgin English. The catechism is said in English and then translated into Pidgin. There are some songs which have been translated into Bambalang from English. Announcements are made in Pidgin English, and then interpreted into Bambalang, so that everyone can understand. Meetings for young people and for leaders are held in Pidgin and Bambalang. The representative of the Catholic congregations who was interviewed with other church leaders said that in her opinion, she did not think that a Bible translation would be useful for Catholic

people, since there were many who could not read, and so would be unable to use it.

Islamic Mosques

There is one central Mosque, located in the Fon's quarter. Apparently there is a meeting place for Moslems within most Bambalang quarters, although these may not be very large. Generally, the Koran is read in Arabic, and then interpreted into Bambalang, Koranic studies are given in the mother tongue and also in Pidgin, and prayers are said in the mother tongue.

3.3.2 Language Maintenance and shift

It seems likely, from the information obtained, that the speech form known as Bambalang is not in any immediate danger of dying out or of being replaced by other languages or speech forms.

Marriage and Migration Patterns

Women from Bambalang tend to marry outside the area, although usually not from too far distant, and probably from the Ndop Plain, or from the Bamoun-speaking area. Although women often leave the language area in order to get married, Bambalang men eventually set up their homes in Bambalang, and do not move away permanently from the language area.

Bambalang speakers who have received a good level of education usually move away to look for employment in the bigger towns and cities. These include professional workers, and civil servants. Most of these return at retirement age, and build their house in their home village. However, because of financial constraints and the current economic situation, many of those who have worked for some time in other cities and towns return to the Bambalang area before retirement age. This means that there is a fairly stable community of Bambalang speakers at all times, who speak their mother tongue.

Education

There are five Primary Schools in the Bambalang area, where the language of instruction is English. Bambalang children attend secondary school in Bamunka, Ndop. Most children complete Primary School, and the majority of these continue on to Secondary School. Although children begin to speak Pidgin when attending school, this is only to enable them to communicate with non-Bambalang speakers.

According to both groups interviewed, there does not seem to be any encroachment onto the use of the mother tongue by either Pidgin English or by another language. Although several of the surrounding languages are known by Bambalang speakers in different quarters, these are mostly known only by those who have had considerable contact with the respective neighbouring groups. None of the neighbouring languages is, as yet, spoken sufficiently well by any large section of the community as to constitute a threat to the vitality of the mother tongue.

Those interviewed both in a group situation, and individually, said that they felt that Bambalang would still be spoken in the future, in the same way as it is now.

Existing written materials in Bambalang

There are no published written materials in the Bambalang language, as far as the survey team was able to ascertain. There has been a calendar printed with the Bambalang market days on it.

3.3.3 Socio-economic Factors

Culturally, the Bambalang-speaking community seems to be homogenous, this is also apparent linguistically. Economically, the twenty two different quarters of Bambalang village are linked by different local markets, and by local trading. Although some of the quarters are separated from the others by the reservoir, this does not seem to restrict contact with the rest of the Bambalang community.

The community of Bambalang speakers seems to be open to development being carried out in the area, and the activities of its development committee serve to confirm this.

There seems to be a fairly stable leadership within the community, based on nine of the most important traditional leaders, who are all resident in the village. Leaders are not necessarily those who are the eldest, and although there are at present two who live outside the village, most live within. The group felt that there would always be leaders.

In the Bambalang area, there is an active development association, known as MYDU, the Mboyakun Development Union, which also has branches in many larger towns outside of the Ndop Plain area. MYDU has been involved in development projects such as the construction of local health centres and clinics, the water system, local roads, schools, and similar projects.

It is clear, then, that Bambalang is a community currently in the process of change, and that this should be taken into account if the Bambalang language is to be developed.

4.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Taking into account each of the three areas under consideration in this survey, our conclusions are the following:

4.1 Summary

Findings from two informal group interviews, and ten individual questionnaires indicate that Bambalang speakers all speak the same speech form, with no apparent difference of pronunciation. The main language of wider communication is Pidgin English, which is used whenever Bambalang cannot be understood.

Comprehension and use of neighbouring languages is limited to those who have had considerable exposure to them, and is also limited to those parts of the village which border with these neighbouring speech forms.

The Bambalang language is used in all domestic domains, and all aspects of everyday life. This indicates that there is at present no danger of the mother tongue dying out, nor of its being replaced by other languages. This should be re-evaluated at some point in future years, as the language community inevitably undergoes natural change.

Use of Bambalang for religious purposes demonstrates that there is a perceived need to translate or to interpret into the mother tongue for adequate communication to take place. Attitudes to the development of the mother tongue are positive, although there has not, as yet, been much local initiative in attempting to write the language.

4.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

It seems, from the information gathered, that the Bambalang speech form has probable need for standardisation and language development. It is highly recommended that a strategy for the development of languages in the whole of the Ndop Plain area be drawn up, and that Bambalang should be integrated, in some way, into this plan.

4.3 ALCAM Changes

In the current (1983) edition of ALCAM, and also in the Atlas Administratif des langues nationales du Cameroun (1991 ACCT), Bamabalang is subsumed under the speech form known as shɔ̃ pɔ̃m (ALCAM code 901), known locally as Bamoun. However, it was reported that this speech form is not the same as Bambalang, and that children and adults from Bambalang do not understand Bamoun at all, unless the latter have had considerable contact with Bamoun speakers. Thus, it seems that there is no inherent comprehension of Bamoun by Bambalang speakers, which indicates that they are probably separate languages. We would therefore suggest that a thorough comparison be made between these two languages, and that a separate entry in ALCAM be inserted for Bambalang.

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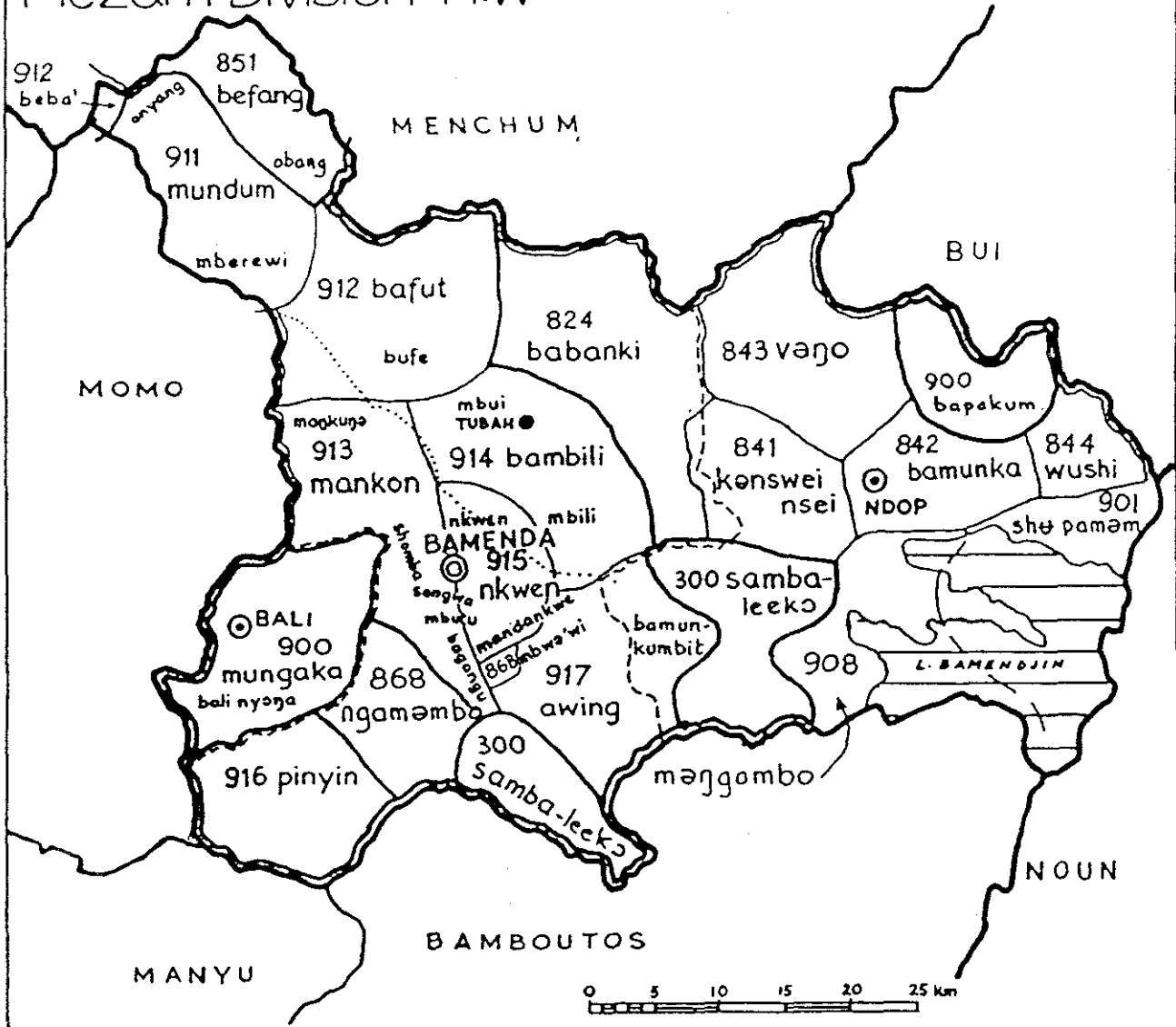
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Appendix A:

Map showing the extent of the Bamalang-speaking area, and surrounding languages. Source: ALCAM, Breton and Fohtung, 1992, page 133.

Langues nationales: Département de la MEZAM
Mezam Division N.W.



	département	arrondissement	district
limites	————	-----
chef-lieu	⊙	⊙	⊙

	langues	dialectes
limites	————	
désignation	mungaka 900	nkwen

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Bikia

Appendix B:

Administrative map showing location of the principal villages referred to in this report. Source: ALCAM, Breton and Fohtung, 1992, page 132.



⊙	chief town of division
⊙	chief town of subdivision
⊙	chief town of district
•	chiefdom

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—	divisional boundary
—	sub divisional boundary
- - -	district boundary
—	limits of chiefdom