

MINISTRY OF SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL RESEARCH

A RAPID APPRAISAL SURVEY IN BAMENYAM VILLAGE
(BAMBOUTOS DIVISION, WEST PROVINCE)

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

This report covers a preliminary linguistic and sociolinguistic survey conducted on 18 May 1993 in Bamenyam village, Galim Subdivision, Bamboutos Division, West Province. The research was carried out by Dr Domche-Téko Engelbert, of the University of Yaoundé I, Department of African Languages and Linguistics, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, and Miss Caroline Grant, of the Société Internationale de Linguistique (SIL).

Research in a number of sources prior to the survey provided varying information as to which language is spoken in Bamenyam. According to the *Atlas linguistique du Cameroun (ALCAM)* (Dieu and Renaud 1983), the language spoken there is "Mamənyan," and it is assigned code 908. ALCAM more specifically states:

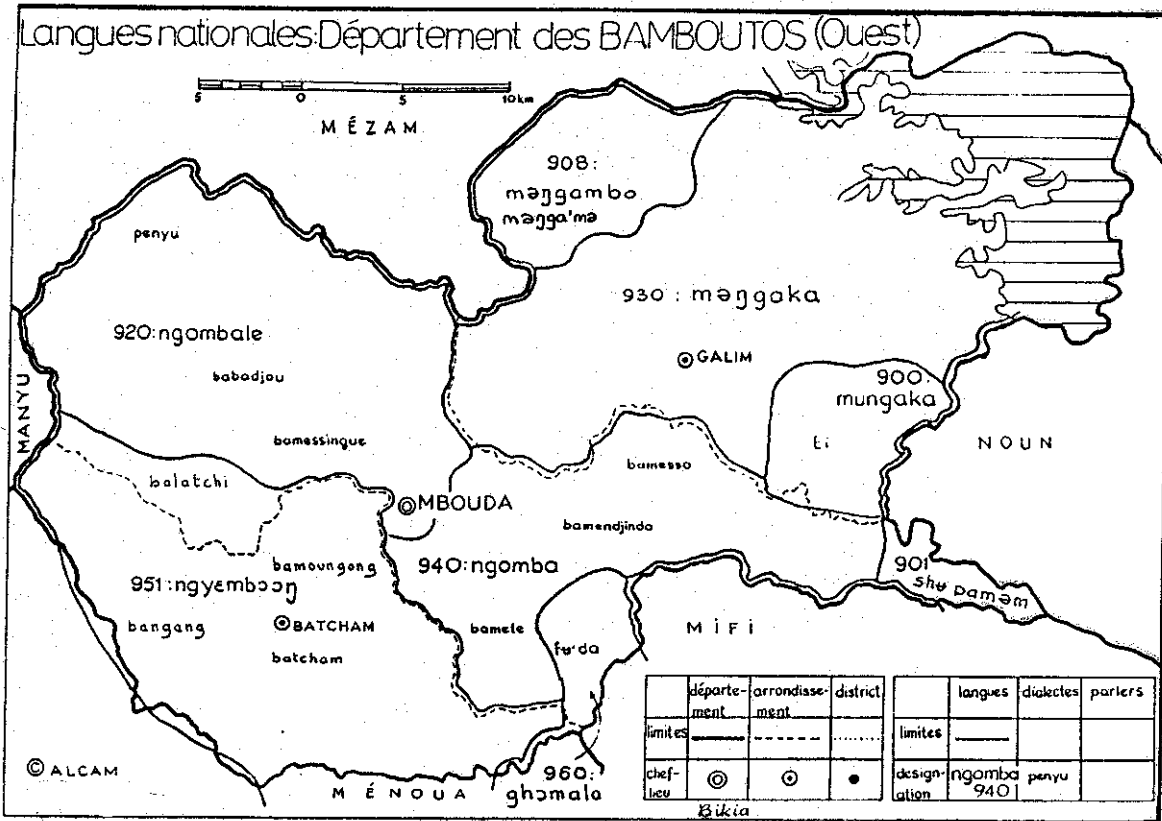
Dans le village de Bamenyan (*sic*) (...) se parle, en plus du shu pamən, une langue résiduelle bien distincte, le mamənyan (Dieu and Renaud 1983:122).

It is not clear why this language was called "résiduelle." In Breton and Fohtung (1991:111), the language spoken in Bamenyam is referred to as "Məngambo," whereas in the *Ethnologue* (Grimes 1992), it is called "Bamenyam" (code BCE). Alternate names gleaned from all three sources are Pamənyan and Bamenyan. The linguistic classification given by ALCAM and *Ethnologue* for the language is as follows:

Ethnologue: Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, Bantoid, Southern, Broad Bantu, Wide Grassfields, Narrow Grassfields, Mbam-Nkam, Nun.

ALCAM: Niger-Kordofan, Niger-Congo, Benoue-Congo, Bantoid, Bantu, Grassfields, East, Noun.

The map below shows the location of Bamenyam with respect to surrounding languages:



Acknowledgement for map to ALCAM, Breton and Fohitung, 1992.

Contrary to the information found in the above sources, the inhabitants of Bamenyam interviewed during the survey said that they preferred to use the name "Məngá'mə" for their language, which means "I say that." The people call themselves "Pənê."

Concerning the names "Mamənyan" and "Məngambo," the following notes were taken by researcher Domche-Teko:

"Mamənyan désigne le pays d'origine du peuple Bamenyam, appelé Mānyām, situé dans les montagnes du sud-ouest. Le mamənyam qui désigne et le pays et la langue était parlée dans le bamoun. Elle est maintenant éteinte à cause de l'hégémonie bamoun. Personne non plus ne la parle actuellement à Bamenyam.

"Məngambo est le nom qu'utilisaient les Bali qui accompagnaient les colons. Il en est de même pour Bamenyam."

It therefore appears that neither "Mamənyan" or "Məngambo" should be used to designate the language spoken in Bamenyam, either because it refers to an apparently extinct language or to the name used by outsiders. For this reason, the term "Məngá'mə" shall be used in this report.

1.2 Purpose of the Survey

The survey was carried out in order to clarify the existing linguistic and sociolinguistic situation of Bamenyam village, with a view towards establishing more definitely the need for codification and standardisation of the local language. There does not seem to have been any previous study made of the Məngá'mə language.

2.0 PROCEDURES

2.1 Rapid Appraisal

This survey made use of a recently developed method known as "rapid appraisal," which 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. Interviews are conducted with administrative and traditional authorities, both individually and in a group setting, where appropriate.

During this 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 neighbouring languages and languages of wider communication (particularly with French and Pidgin English), and 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 estimating how well related languages are understood, and whether comprehension is based on inherent intelligibility (due to linguistic similarity) or to language learning (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?)"

A group of 6 to 8 community and traditional leaders, aged from 50 to 65 years, was interviewed as part of this survey's procedures. The group included the village chief, and also the mayor of Galim town. All members of the group were from Bamenyam village. As well as a group interview, a standard 120-item ALCAM word list was taken.

3.0 RESULTS AND EVALUATION

3.1 Dialect Situation and Inherent Intercomprehension

As was mentioned in section 1.1, the language spoken in Bamenyam is called "Məngá'mə." There are sixteen quarters of Bamenyam village, the inhabitants of which all speak the same language. There seem to be no major differences of pronunciation, nor problems of comprehension between them. Thus, it seems that there is a homogenous dialect situation among all the quarters of Bamenyam village.

Outside of the quarters belonging to Bamenyam village there are four other villages where the Məngá'mə language was reported by the interview group to be spoken: Bamali, Bambalang, Bamukumbit, and Batchandé (or "Chandé"), the latter being a quarter of Awing village, where the population consists of speakers of both Məngá'mə and Awing (ALCAM code 917).

Historically speaking, it seems that the Məngá'mə-speaking community originally included the above-mentioned four villages. However, since partition by the French and British of the former German colony of Kamerun after World War I, Bamenyam has been under Francophone administration as part of West Province, whereas these other four villages have been under Anglophone administration as part of North-West Province of Cameroon.

According to those interviewed, there are no problems of comprehension between the inhabitants of the four villages mentioned above on the one hand, and Məngá'mə speakers in Bamenyam village on the other. Even young children from Bamenyam can understand speakers from these villages, and vice versa. Community leaders in Bamenyam said that although there were some differences of pronunciation, and "nuances" of expression, the language was the same. However, since this survey did not include a study of the language situation in the other four locations, it was not possible to confirm the above opinion.

3.2 Multilingualism

3.2.1. Knowledge of neighbouring languages

The Mə̀ngá'mè speaking area is surrounded by Mə̀ngaka (ALCAM code 930) to the south and east, Awing (917) to the north and west, and Samba-Leekɔ (300) to the north and northeast. Shu Paməm (Bamun, 901) is spoken to the east, beyond the Noun River.

Community leaders in Bamenyam said that they could not understand people from the Mə̀ngaka-speaking villages of Bagam, Bamendjing, and Galim, and that both groups would be obliged to communicate in French or in Pidgin English because of this difficulty.

It was generally felt that most adults would be able to understand Nda'a (i.e. Ngomba, ALCAM code: 940), since it seems that both communities have considerable contact with each other. It was not felt, however, that small children would be able to understand Ngomba, until they had reached the age of 15 or so. This is a strong indication that comprehension of Nda'a is acquired by contact, rather than inherent. This is not surprising, since the Bamenyam community depends on Mbouda, the main town in the Nda'a-speaking area.

Mə̀ngá'mè speakers in Bamenyam need to communicate in Pidgin English with inhabitants of Awing, Balikumbat and Baligam, and their children do not understand the languages spoken in these villages. This also applies to those nearby villages where Samba-Leekɔ is spoken.

The group interviewed said that Bamenyam villagers tend to orient themselves more towards towns and villages in the French-speaking zone (of which they are a part), rather than towards those towns and villages in the English-speaking North-West Province.

Contrary to what is written in ALCAM (cf. section 1.1), there was no indication given during the interview that general bilingualism exists with Shu Paməm.

3.2.2 Languages of wider communication:

French:

French is used in communication with non-Mə̀ngá'mè speakers from the Francophone area. It is also the language of instruction in the village's primary schools, and also in the secondary school in Galim, which Bamenyam children attend.

Pidgin English:

Pidgin English is used by Mə̀ngá'mè speakers when communicating with non-Mə̀ngá'mè speakers from the Anglophone zone.

No comment on the preference between usage of either French or English was expressed. Neither was the level or extent of proficiency in either language for this language community assessed during this survey.

3.3 LANGUAGE VITALITY AND VIABILITY

3.3.1 Language Use

Məngá'mə is spoken in all domestic domains, such as the home and fields, as well as during contact with friends and family. This is a strong indication that the language is not in danger of dying out.

French and Pidgin English seem to be used in more public domains, such as at markets, at the subdivisional office, and at the dispensaries.

In the Catholic church in Bamenyam, Ngyamboon and Pidgin English are used during the services, but sometimes interpreted into Məngá'mə especially when the priest is a Mamənyam speaker. This is the same in the protestant Eglise Evangélique du Cameroun (EEC).

It cannot be said that the entire Məngá'mə-speaking population are church-goers, however. It seems that the majority follow traditional practices while at the same time many attend church. There is also a small community of Muslim cattle herders in the hills surrounding Bamenyam, which, from a linguistic standpoint, does not seem to be particularly assimilated into the Məngá'mə community.

3.3.2 Attitudes to the Mother Tongue

Attitudes toward the mother tongue seemed very positive, on the whole. There was an enthusiastic response from the group interviewed to the idea of possible use of Məngá'mə in the first years of primary school, if the language were ever developed. The group expressed a willingness to learn to read in their mother tongue, and felt that other adults in the community would also be willing to attend adult literacy classes.

As far as attitudes to using literacy materials in other languages are concerned, Məngá'mə speakers would prefer, as expected, to use materials in their own mother tongue. However, if these were unavailable, but materials in another language were, the Məngá'mə speakers said that they would be willing to use, in order of preference, Ngomba, Ngyamboon, Mədəmba, and finally, Shə Paməm (Bamun) literacy materials. The opinion expressed was, "si c'est adopté, on va accepter," rather than any positive attraction to using materials in other languages. Apart from these four languages, Məngá'mə speakers expressed unwillingness to use literacy materials in any other language.

According to the group interviewed, there is a Məngá'mə speaker who has already begun to teach children how to read and write their mother tongue during the long school holidays. It is not clear, however, which orthographical system is employed, since an orthography has not yet been officially drawn up for Məngá'mə. Unfortunately, the survey team was unable to meet with this person.

3.3.3 Language Maintenance and Shift

It seems likely, from the somewhat limited information obtained, that the Məngá'mə language is not in any immediate danger of dying out, or of being replaced by another language. However, anxiety was expressed that those Məngá'mə speakers who have settled outside the language area tend to mix their

mother tongue with French, so that when they come back to the home area they may "pollute" the language. Outsiders who have settled in Bamenyam mix their adopted host language with French.

On the whole, the feeling was that the language will still be spoken, as it is now, in twenty years' time: "Cela ne va pas évoluer!"

Mângá'mè speakers marry within Bamenyam village, as well as outside it, with any other language or ethnic group. Where there is a linguistically mixed marriage, the children will be able to understand and probably speak the languages of both parents, although the wife will normally be expected to learn the mother tongue of her husband.

Primary education is available, in the medium of French, within the Bamenyam area, and it was reported that ninety per cent of school age children attend primary school. However, only half of them are able to continue into their secondary education at the secondary school in Galim, because of financial constraints. Those who do attend are mostly boys. This means that few people attain a high level of oral or written French.

Most young people, whether able to complete secondary education or not, seem to leave Bamenyam in order to search for employment in the larger towns and cities. They tend to return for family visits, but do not return to settle in Bamenyam until retirement age.

3.4 Socio-economic Factors

Three areas are examined in this section, which, according to John Watters' (1990) description, are significant factors which would probably affect the development and success of a language programme. He writes:

The basic hypothesis runs as follows: the greater the community's homogeneity, openness to the outside, and resident middle-aged leadership, the greater is the possibility for a widespread community participation in the development and implementation of a language program. Furthermore, the greater the community participation in the program, the greater is the potential success and survivability of the use of the language in written form.

The three socioeconomic factors to be examined are as follows:

- (i) the homogeneity/social cohesion of the linguistic community;
- (ii) the openness of the community to change / openness towards development;
- (iii) the presence at the local level of a middle-aged leadership.

Although there is a continuum between the polar values which can be assigned to each of these factors for any given community, it is useful in language programme planning for a positive or negative value to be given, in order to help define at what state of change the community finds itself. This, then, helps the programme planner to anticipate whether or not a language development

and literacy programme would be well received and adopted by the local community in question.

3.4.1 Social Cohesion

As far as the Məngá'mə community of Bamenyam village is concerned, it seems that the language community is homogenous, and that there is a positive degree of social cohesion. None of the quarters of Bamenyam are separated from each other, and the people all regard themselves as sharing the same language and culture.

However, if, as reported in Bamenyam, there are other Məngá'mə communities in other villages (cf. 3.1) then the question must be raised over the degree, if any, of social cohesion of the language group as a whole. We were told that the peoples of Bamali, Bambalang and Bamukumbit villages as well as the Batchandé quarter of Awing do not consider themselves as being "one people" with the villagers of Bamenyam. This suggests that a separate language development programme may have to be considered, even if, after further study, it is found that the four villages of the North-West Province do speak the same language as that spoken in Bamenyam village.

3.4.2 Openness to Change and Development

There is a development committee in Bamenyam, although it has not met for some time. It has been active in the past, promoting such projects as construction of a youth centre, construction on the chief's palace, and plans for the provision of electricity supply to the area. A meeting to reactivate the committee was planned for September 1993.

There are primary schools in the Bamenyam area, and most of the children are able to complete their primary education. There are dispensaries in Bamenyam village, although more serious medical cases have to be treated in Mbouda.

Communications with major towns are facilitated by the village's proximity to the Bafoussam-Bamenda surfaced road, although the village itself is on a good unsurfaced road.

The group which we interviewed expressed a willingness to participate in a literacy project, if their language were ever developed.

All of these factors lead to the conclusion that the Məngá'mə-speaking community is open to development, and to change, within the context of consultation.

3.4.3 Presence of Middle-Aged Leadership

It was reported that most of the community's young people leave the Bamenyam area in order to seek employment, or (for a small number) to pursue their education. Most settle in their adopted towns, although many attempt to build a family house in Bamenyam during their working years, in order to prepare for their return to the village at retirement age. Thus, according to the discussion among the group being interviewed, it would seem that those men who are most likely to be able to lead the community in participation and promotion of a language project are not resident in the village until they have retired.

However, the approximate ages of those present at the interview indicated that there is some kind of "older" middle-aged male leadership in existence already, even if it is on an informal level. This is the type of group whose help Watters recommends should be enlisted to promote language development.

From examining the above three socioeconomic factors, we may tentatively assign the following values:

Social cohesion: positive;

Openness to change and development: positive;

Presence of middle-aged leadership: uncertain.

According to Watter's definitions, we may say that the Mamənyam-speaking community in Bamenyam is a changed one. That is, the community is culturally, linguistically, geographically and socially homogenous, open to development and change, but that the presence of middle-aged leadership within the community is uncertain. In the absence of a strong local leadership, it would probably be difficult to motivate a language development programme on a large scale. The present situation should be re-examined in the future to see if there are any changes occurring which are pertinent for language programme development.

4.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Taking into account each of the three main areas of investigation in this survey, our conclusions on the Məngá'mə speech form are the following:

In the village of Bamenyam, there is one homogenous language spoken, with no apparent differences of dialect or pronunciation. The languages of wider communication are French and Pidgin English, spoken whenever Məngá'mə is not understood. However, further study needs to be made of the extent of possible intercomprehension between Bamenyam villagers and the inhabitants of the four villages in the North-West Province mentioned above, since this may have implications for a language development programme in Mamənyam. This study could be included in an initial rapid-appraisal survey of the four villages.

The Məngá'mə language is spoken in all domestic domains, and in most aspects of daily life. Use of the mother tongue in these various domains seems to indicate that there is not an immediate danger of the Məngá'mə language dying out or of it being replaced by another speech form, including either French or Pidgin English. However, further study in the future should be carried out, as the language situation may change.

There is an expressed preference, among those interviewed in Bamenyam, to use literacy materials in their mother tongue, rather than in any other language, if ever these were to be developed.

There is at least one person active in the community who is motivated towards the development of his language. This is an encouraging sign, particularly since he helps motivate other people towards the reading of their own language.

Some use is made of the language in the various churches of the community, which suggests that other languages employed (Pidgin, French, Ngyemboon) may cause problems of comprehension for at least part of the congregation.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

There is potential for codifying and/or standardising the speech variety used in Bamenyam. However, before a development programme is embarked upon, further study needs to be made of the language situation in the four villages of the North-West Province said to be linguistically related to Bamenyam village. If this were confirmed, then it may be possible that a language development programme may cater to the needs of a larger community, rather than just Bamenyam village.

It may also be advisable to investigate the question of bilingualism with Shw Pamam, given the influence of the Bamoun people and their language in Galim Subdivision.

It is recommended that the ALCAM entry be changed to include "Màngá'mè," in the main entry, as the locally used name of the language. Use of the name Mamenyan should remain in the main entry of ALCAM for this language.

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