

MINISTRY OF SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL RESEARCH

A RAPID APPRAISAL SURVEY OF BANGOLAN
(ALCAM 901, sha pamem)

(NGO KETUNJIA DIVISION, NORTH WEST PROVINCE)

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I. Background

Bangolan is classified under ALCAM 901 shú pamém, along with Bamoun, Bapi, Bamali, Bafanji and Bambalang. Bangolan is further classified in the Ethnologue (Grimes 1992:183) as Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, Bantoid, Southern, Broad Bantu, Wide Grassfields, Narrow Grassfields, Mbam-Nkam, Nun. It is listed as a probable translation need in the 1988 Bible Translation Needs Bulletin (BTNB, Grimes 1988:51).

Bangolan is located near the eastern border of the Ngo Ketunja Division of the North West Province of Cameroon. The village of Bangolan has a population of 6,300 according to the 1987 census (the most current population figures available from the District Officer in Ndop). Members of the traditional council in Bangolan estimated that the total number of Bangolan speakers in Cameroon is about 15,000.

Bangolan's neighbouring languages include Bamoun (901), Bamessi (844), Bambalang (901), Bafanji (901), and Bamunka (842). Pidgin is the primary language of wider communication which is used by Bangolan speakers. We were not able to find any previous linguistic research which has been written on Bangolan and there are no known efforts to date towards standardisation of the language.

The name that the Bangolan people use for themselves is "Ngbangle", and their name for their language is "Songnungbangle" (though "Møndenkie" is the more technical language name they would use). The name for the language that will be used in this report is Bangolan, by which it is most commonly known.

II. The Survey

A. Introduction

A Rapid Appraisal survey was conducted in Bangolan on November 4-5, 1993 by Margaret Griffin, Caroline Grant and Paul Huey of Société Internationale de Linguistique (SIL). Two (1 1/2 - 2 hour) group interviews were conducted, using a sociolinguistic questionnaire. A 120 ALCAM word list was also elicited and recorded. Leaders from the Baptist and Full Gospel churches were also interviewed. The first group interview, conducted by Margaret Griffin, was comprised of over 20 members of the traditional council. The second group interview, conducted by Paul Huey, included 12 Bangolan men and one Bangolan woman. Dr. Henry Tatangan, a mother tongue speaker, served as interpreter for both group interviews.

The goal of the survey was to gather sociolinguistic information to establish the need and attitudes toward the standardisation of the language.

B. Procedures

1. Type of survey

This survey made use of a method known as Rapid Appraisal. This approach is characterised by its limited goal of gaining a general overview of the sociolinguistic situation in a particular area. The primary method of data gathering in Rapid Appraisal is the use of sociolinguistic interviews with traditional and church leaders. The information gathered in the group interview with traditional leaders is usually confirmed by another group interview comprised of other speakers from the community or through individual questionnaires. A 120-item ALCAM word list is also collected in each language or dialect surveyed.

2. Main areas of focus

Throughout the survey, three major areas were considered:

- a) the dialect situation, the level of comprehension of related speech forms, and the corresponding attitudes;
- b) possible bilingualism in languages of wider communication (particularly Pidgin English), including degree of proficiency and domains of use;
- 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.

III. Presentation of Results

A. Dialect Situation and Intercomprehension

There are 9 quarters in Bangolan and each of these reportedly speaks the same dialect of Bangolan. There are said to be no differences in pronunciation or in vocabulary within Bangolan, and therefore no difficulties in intercomprehension. It can therefore be stated that the language spoken in Bangolan appears to be homogenous.

B. Multilingualism

1. Knowledge of neighbouring languages

Though the majority of the people living in Bangolan are Bangolan speakers, there are also some Bamoun residents. Because of this, and the fact that they are Bangolan's neighbours to the east, many Bangolan people have at least a surface knowledge of Bamoun. It appears that any intercomprehension between speakers of Bamoun and

Bangolan is due to comprehension gained through contact rather than inherent intelligibility between the two. This is evidenced by the fact that small children and those who have little contact with Bamoun speakers do not understand Bamoun. The consensus during both group interviews is that relatively few Bangolan speakers have a good enough comprehension of Bamoun in order to be able to communicate deeply in it.

It was noted that of the neighbouring languages, Bambalang (after Bamoun) would be the second-best known language among Bangolan speakers. Elderly Bangolan speakers and fishermen who have had frequent contact with Bambalang speakers are among the few in Bangolan who could be said to have a deep comprehension of Bambalang. The pastor of the Full Gospel Church in Bangolan is from Bambalang. He noted that there are similar words between the 2 languages, but that often the meaning differs. Whenever he spoke to them in Bambalang, Bangolan speakers just laughed and had difficulty understanding him.

When asked whether they would be open to learning to read and write in either Bamoun or Bambalang, the consensus of both group interviews was "no." They said that it is not that these languages are bad, but rather that they would prefer to read and write in Bangolan. Also, as noted above, most Bangolan speakers do not have a good comprehension of these languages.

When speaking with someone from other neighbouring languages, including Bafanji, Bamukumbit, Bamali, Bamessi, and Baba I, the consensus was that most Bangolan speakers use Pidgin. This is because the intercomprehension between Bangolan and its neighbouring languages is not sufficient for communication in the mother tongue. This seems to indicate that Bangolan is not closely related linguistically to its neighbouring languages, which was confirmed in our research among Bafanji, Bamukumbit, Bamali, and Bambalang; each stated that Bangolan is "quite different" from their own language.

2. Knowledge of languages of wider communication

Pidgin English is the language of wider communication which is known and used by most Bangolan speakers, particularly in the market and with non-Bangolan speakers. Older Bangolan men and women are usually not fluent in Pidgin. The segment of the Bangolan population who is said to understand Pidgin deeply are those who have been to school, (up to at least class 7). To determine more accurately the depth and extent of proficiency in Pidgin among Bangolan speakers, further research would be required.

English (Grammar) is the language of education in Bangolan. The proficiency in both English and Pidgin English of Bangolan speakers tends to therefore vary with the level of education attained, since those who attend school tend to have a higher proficiency in English and Pidgin English than those who do not. When the economy was stronger, the majority of Bangolan children attended secondary school. That is no longer the case, and only a minority (approximately 20%) go on to secondary school, and even fewer continue on to high school and beyond. It appears from the interviews that most Bangolan speakers proficiency in Pidgin English is higher than their proficiency in English.

C. Language vitality and viability

1. Language Use

a. Language use in non-religious domains

From the information obtained in both group interviews, it appears that Bangolan is the language used in the home, with family and Bangolan-speaking friends, in the fields, and for traditional gatherings. It is also the language used by children when they play, although school-aged children tend to mix in some Pidgin.

Pidgin is used in the market and in other situations when communicating with non-Bangolan speakers. It is also used by children at school, along with English.

b. Language Use in religious domains

Approximately half of the population of Bangolan are reportedly Muslim and 40% are Christian. Some also practice traditional religion.

There is a mosque in Bangolan village where Arabic is used, but since very few understand Arabic, an interpretation of the Koran and various teaching is made into Bangolan (Arabic prayers are not interpreted, however). The teaching and announcements are in Bangolan.

The largest Protestant church in Bangolan is the Baptist church, with 200-300 adults who regularly attend. The Full Gospel church has about 50 members.

In the Baptist church, the sermon is preached in Pidgin and translated phrase by phrase into Bangolan. (This is because some of the older women and the uneducated young and middle-aged people do not understand Pidgin well enough.) The announcements are made in Pidgin and Bangolan, and the songs are in English, Pidgin and Bangolan (though the latter have not been written down). The Sunday School classes are held in Pidgin, and the adult classes also use Bangolan.

The Bible reading is done in English and is not translated into Pidgin or Bangolan. Many people in the church own an English Bible. The group interviewed from the church felt that the literate members and young people would be interested in having the Bible in Bangolan.

In the Full Gospel church, the preaching is generally in Pidgin and translated phrase by phrase into Bangolan. The songs are in English, French, Pidgin and Bangolan. (The latter have all been translated from English.) Members of the church pray aloud in Bangolan, English, or Pidgin. Children's classes are held in English or Pidgin (since the materials are in English), but Bangolan is also used with the younger children. English is used in the young people's meeting when the pastor is present; otherwise Bangolan is used. The mid-week Bible study is held in English (because this is the easiest language for note-taking) and the women's fellowship is held in Bangolan.

The pastor and the member of the church whom we interviewed felt that it would be good to have the Bible in Bangolan for those who are literate. The pastor noted "when you have the Bible in your own language, it gives an extra weight." He also said that he thought it would be no problem for the Baptists and Catholics to work together since they already have worked together on other projects.

2. Attitudes toward the Mother Tongue

Each of the participants in the two group interviews expressed a positive attitude towards the Bangolan language. In response to the question whether it would be good to use Bangolan as the language of instruction during the first two years of primary school, both groups said that this would be good. The group of village elders stated that it would be good for the children to master Bangolan before mastering English. The response was equally as positive for adult literacy classes in Bangolan. The comment was made, "They would even be dancing!"

3. Language Maintenance and Shift

From indications in the sections on language use and attitudes, Bangolan's vitality seems to be strong. Although the use of and proficiency in Pidgin is increasing in Bangolan (as in most places in the North West), its influence on Bangolan remains to be seen. It was noted that many young people mix Pidgin with Bangolan. The young people in the group interview said that this mixing is a "playful" use of Pidgin and is not due to a lack of knowledge of Bangolan.

Though the village elders expressed a concern that the young are "losing their grip" on Bangolan and that Pidgin is becoming more widespread, they are confident that future generations will still speak Bangolan because of the pride that Bangolan people have in their language.

D. Socioeconomic Factors

1. Openness to change

The Bangolan Development Association (BANDA) has been involved in a number of community development projects, such as SCAN Water, building a meeting hall and building a palace for the Fon. There is a health clinic in Bangolan which is attended by the residents of the village.

2. Middle-aged leadership

The leaders of the village are middle-aged and older. The majority of them live in Bangolan. There is no concern over future leaders as their present Fon is young and when one leader dies his successor is chosen from his family.

3. Homogeneity/social cohesion

Since Bangolan is only spoken in one village and consists of one dialect, it appears that it can be said to be linguistically homogenous. The two groups interviewed also confirmed that the Bangolan people are culturally homogenous.

4. Migration

Many of the young people leave the village in search of employment in larger cities such as Bamenda and Douala. Most of these do not return to the village to stay, but with the current economic crisis, a larger proportion than before are returning to the village to live. For those who no longer live in the village, many come back at least once a year for the Bangolan Development Association (BANDA) meeting.

5. Leaders' attitudes toward language development

The Bangolan leaders appeared to be quite open and enthusiastic regarding the possibility of developing Bangolan. They discussed adding this to BANDA's list of future projects and we told them about the various courses which SIL offers.

IV. Conclusion and recommendations concerning standardisation

Due to the relative linguistic isolation of Bangolan (see section B.1. above) and considering their positive attitudes towards and interest in developing their language, it would seem advisable to standardise.

V. ALCAM Changes

Rather than being listed as part of 901 shw paməm, Bangolan should perhaps have its own classification, since it appears that it is not closely related to Bamoun, Bamali, Bambalang nor Bafanji.

VI. Ethnologue and Bible Translation Needs Bulletin (BTNB) Changes

Remove the statement in Ethnologue "Survey needed" (unless a survey is done to determine the level of proficiency in Pidgin). BTNB: change from "probable need" to "definite need."

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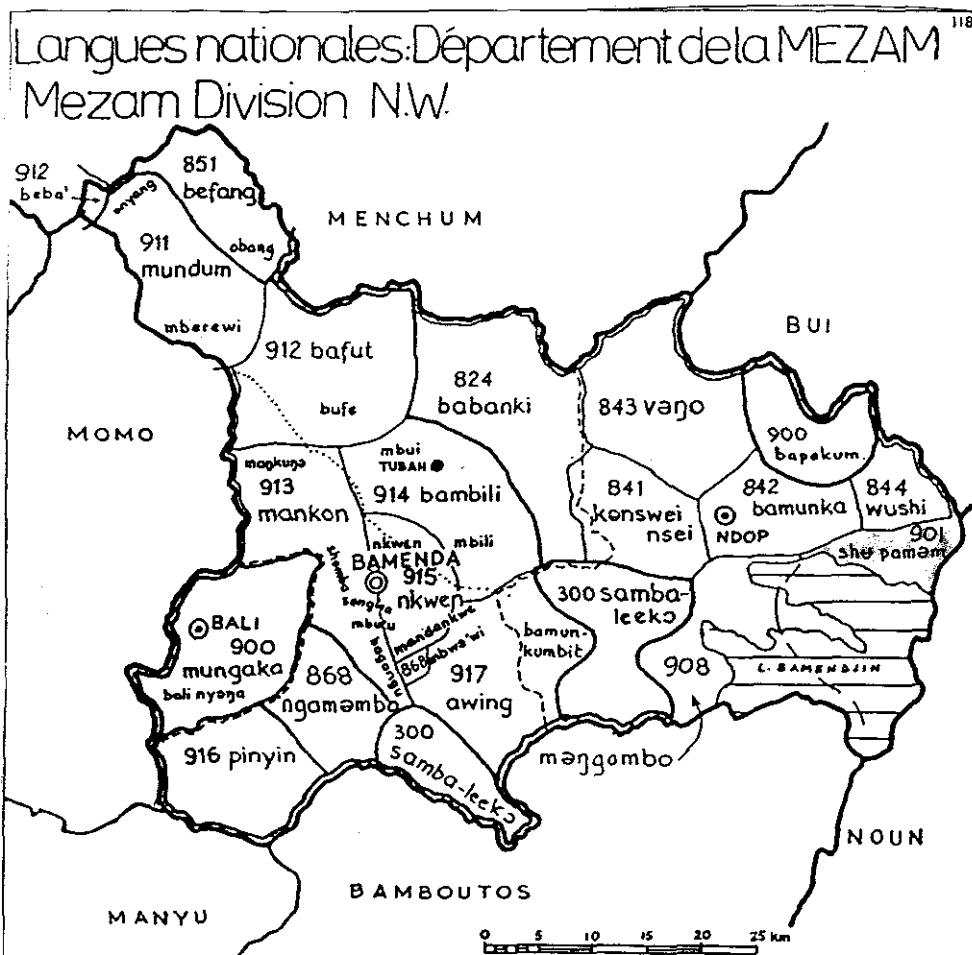
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ANNEXE A

Localisation de l'aire dialectale bangolan
(Source: Breton et Fohtung 1991:133)



ANNEXE B

Carte administrative
(Source: Breton et Fohtung 1991:132)

