

Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur, de l'Informatique  
et de la Recherche Scientifique

Institut des Sciences Humaines

Centre de Recherches et d'Etudes Anthropologiques

**BATANGA SURVEY REPORT**

**Phil Davison**

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# I INTRODUCTION

## -1.1 Background

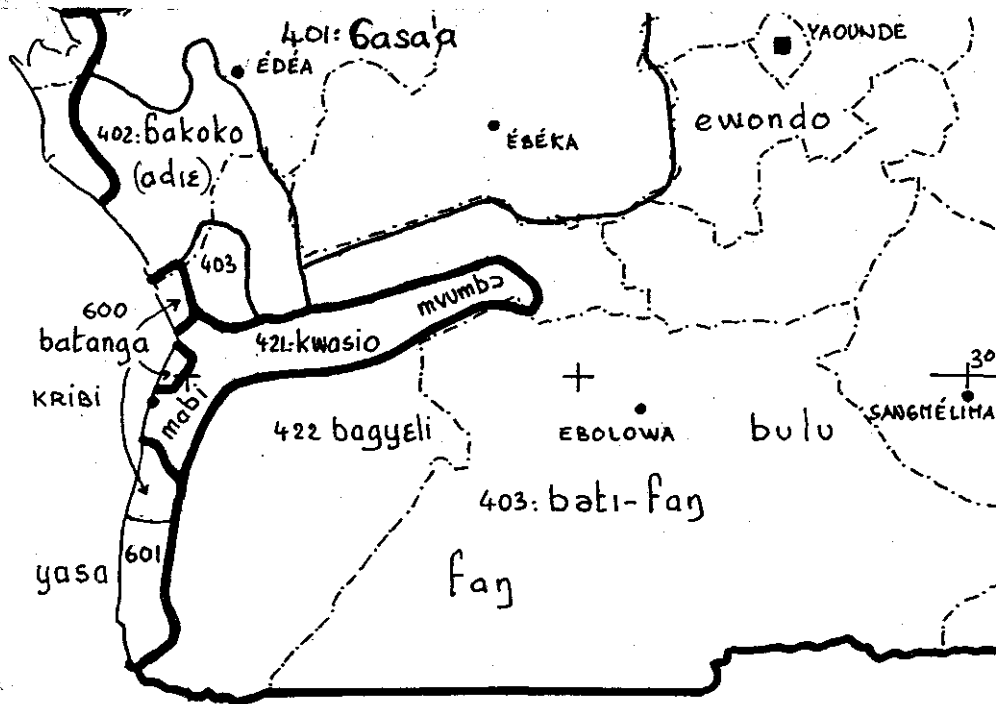
Batanga is spoken along the coast either side of Kribi (Ocean division, South province of Cameroon).

Approximate population: S.I.L. Ethnologue has a figure of 6,000 (from a 1982 survey), whereas ALCAM's estimate is over 10,000.

Batanga is a Bantu language: Guthrie's classification is A.30. The ALCAM no. is 600, and there are 3 dialects listed, Batanga, Bano'o and Bapuku. ALCAM notes that they are very close, and also that the general language name is in fact that of the smallest dialect, the name Batanga being widely known because of its administrative use. (However, to avoid confusion, the term Batanga in this report will refer to the language as a whole, and the Batanga dialect will henceforth be referred to as "Banda", a term which the people themselves use.)

Ethnologue's information is very similar, noting also the three dialects. There is additional information about translation status: Scripture portions were published in 1953 (the Gospels and Acts, in Bano'o), and there is a "possible translation need".

Map of Batanga area with surrounding languages



The preceding map (taken from ALCAM p.381) shows the presence of several other languages in the area. Apart from Yasa to the south, these others belong to ALCAM's gp. 4 (i.e. Bantou Equatorial nord-est). Batanga and Yasa are gp. 6 (Bantou-Côtier).

ALCAM notes some written tradition (probably the above-mentioned portions), but also that there has been relatively little linguistic work. ALCAM's map on p.415 reveals the presence of phonology and morphology sketches only. In addition, we know of some fairly extensive lexicostatistic work done by Carl Ebobisse which includes the Batanga area.

#### -1.2 Purpose of the survey

As has been mentioned, the Ethnologue status of Batanga is "possible translation need", which really means that we don't know. It was primarily to revise this status that the survey was undertaken. We were also interested in the intercomprehension between the dialects and the corresponding attitudes in view of a possible future standardisation.

The survey was carried out by S.I.L. members Juerg Stalder and Phil Davison in the last week of July 1991.

## 2 PROCEDURES

This survey gave us the first opportunity to put into practice a recently developed approach known as "rapid appraisal". The procedures are designed to be as specific as possible so as to gain a broad general overview in as short a time as possible (one week), using informal interviews, and individual and group questionnaires. Initial interviews in Kribi helped us to establish the villages to visit for each dialect:

Banda: Dikobe  
Bano'o: Bwambe  
Bapuku: Louma (or Grand Batanga 1)

Subsequently, informal interviews were conducted in all dialect areas with a variety of people. These proved to be very valuable.

#### Questionnaires used:

-Questionnaire about the geographical location of the language, with particular reference to the dialect situation. This was only used to confirm the impressions gained from previous research.

-Sociolinguistic questionnaire on attitudes and language viability, addressed to a specific sample of the population in all 3 dialect areas. This is S.I.L. Cameroon's questionnaire no. 3, and will be referred to as such from now on.

Categories: -age (young v. old; i.e. up to 20 v. over 35)  
-sex (male v. female)

Sample size: -Dikobe: 16 (N.B. In all dialect areas  
-Bwambe: 14 respondents came from each of  
-Louma: 13 the 4 possible categories)

-Self evaluation bilingualism questionnaire addressed to individuals. This was used in one dialect area, but it became apparent that there are a number of difficulties in using it, and therefore it was not administered elsewhere. Instead, we used the informal interviews to look for indicators of generalised bilingualism.

The entirety of our research was carried out with three major areas under consideration:

- (a) the dialect situation (intercomprehension and attitudes);
- (b) possible bilingualism and corresponding attitudes (especially toward French);
- (c) the viability of the language as shown by these attitudes and also in the reported language use.

One additional feature of the rapid appraisal strategy is that evaluation of the information should be done as the survey progresses: this was carried out, and proved very useful.

### 3 RESULTS AND EVALUATION

#### -3.1 Dialect situation

The impression gained beforehand from the available literature was that the 3 dialects were very close, so no problems of intercomprehension were expected. This was largely borne out in the survey, with some reservations.

##### 3.1.1 Intercomprehension

The information reported here comes from questionnaire 3, qus. 2.9 and 2.10.

##### Bano'ò-Bapuku:

This is the simplest case to report. For both dialects, all people asked said that they would continue to speak their dialect with members of the other group, and these others would do likewise. Several people stressed that there would be no problem of understanding at all: the usual comment was, "il n'y a pas d'interprète". In addition, all respondents said that even a young child would have no trouble with understanding, which points clearly to inherent intelligibility.

##### Banda-Bano'ò and Banda-Bapuku:

The situation as regards the Banda dialect is less clear-cut. All Banda respondents reported that they would use their dialect with speakers of Bano'ò (and vice versa), but when it came to Bapuku, one young Banda speaker said French would be used. The general feeling is that a young child would understand Bano'ò, but the age given for understanding Bapuku is in most cases appreciably higher. Bano'ò and Bapuku respondents' feelings as regards Banda are alike. One or two older

people, and rather more younger ones, stated that French is necessary to communicate with Bandas. Some Bano'os, but nearly all Bapukus (both young and old), said that some contact is necessary with Bandas before there can be intercomprehension: i.e. there is a marginal or even inadequate level of inherent intelligibility. It is important to note that a number of younger people didn't know where Dikobe was, and had never had contact (knowingly) with Bandas. Whatever the situation in the past, Banda is now a rather peripheral dialect.

The fact that ALCAM notes Yasa as a closely related language led us to ask about its intelligibility with Batanga. However, it is clear that for all Batanga dialects there is no inherent intelligibility.

### 3.1.2 Attitudes

The information given here comes from questionnaire 3, qus. 3.1-3.4, and 3.6.

Our feeling beforehand was that Bano'o was likely to be the "central" or the most likely reference dialect, (being that of the geographical and administrative centre, Kribi; and having already had some material published in it). It was also reported (in informal interviews) to have the greatest number of speakers. Our questions were thus asked with this in mind.

Bano'os themselves were unanimously positive towards their dialect: all asked would want to read and write it, and 9 (of 14) would like it to be taught in schools. A large majority from the other two dialects (all but 2 in both cases) would be prepared to read and write Bano'o, and several in both areas would give it first choice (over French) as the first taught language.

It was noticeable that there was no widespread strong feeling that any one dialect was better than any other: most people said that all 3 were Batanga.

### Comments

Both intercomprehension and attitudes seem to confirm our initial impression that Bano'o is the central dialect: understanding of it by the other two groups is generally good, whereas the greatest problems in intercomprehension are between Banda and Bapuku. The positive attitudes towards Bano'o indicate that it could serve as a dialect of standardisation for Batanga.

## -3.2 Bilingualism

### 3.2.1 Second languages

The information presented here comes essentially from questionnaire 3, qus. 1.7 and 2.3-2.6. Some additional points were obtained from informal interviews.

Among the other languages spoken by Batangas, mention should be made of Douala and Bakoko, as these have a more important role. Minor second languages (L2s) include Bulu, Basaa and Pidgin, but by far the most important L2 is French (this for a number of reasons).

Douala as a major centre exerts its influence into the Batanga area. Historically, the Douala language was used as a medium of instruction, at least in the Banda area, and a number of young people spend time in the big city (jobs and education). The majority of Bandas and Bano'os interviewed speak it to some extent (10 of 16, and 9 of 14 respectively), but only 5 of 13 Bapukus. This may be because Bapukus, as the southern dialect, have been traditionally more oriented towards the south.

Bakoko is an L2 spoken by all Banda respondents. This is due to the location of the Banda region (just across the river from the Bakokos), and the large degree of intermarriage between the 2 groups. However, Bakoko is spoken by virtually none of the Bano'os or Bapukus.

As for those who speak French, the figures are as follows:-

Banda: 13 out of 16 (10 of these as 1st or equal 1st L2)  
Bapuku: 11 out of 13 (10 as 1st L2)  
Bano'o: 13 out of 14 (11 as 1st L2)

Those who have no French are older people (50 and over). It certainly seems that French influence has grown over the years, and there is no real reason to believe this trend is not continuing (see below, section on viability).

### 3.2.2 Attitudes

This information comes from qus. 3.3 and 3.4.

All respondents who speak French would be prepared to read and write it (many obviously already do). If this is not indicative of a widespread positive attitude to French, then at least there is a general acceptance of its importance for Batangas: several people, when asked to choose among various L2s as means of instruction, actually left French out. When questioned about this, the reply was along the lines of, "oh, French goes without saying, that is automatically 1st choice". In Louma and Dikobe, an almost equal number of people chose French as chose Bano'o as the language of instruction in the first school years. In Bwambe, where the choice was between French and other L2s, only 2 of 14 would not have chosen it.

### Comments

French obviously is, and will continue to be, of great importance to people in this area. How this reflects on the future for Batanga will be considered below.

### -3.3 Language Vitality/Viability

This is not an easy matter to decide upon, especially with the limited insights of just one week in the area. However, certain questionnaire responses have a bearing on this (2.7, 2.8, 3.1, 3.2, 3.6 & 3.7), along with much of the information gained during the informal interviews. In

addition, a number of different articles give insights which will be of interest in our reflections.

### 3.3.1 Attitude towards M.T. (Information from questions 3.1, 3.2 & 3.7)

There is considerable evidence of a strong positive attitude to the M.T. Everyone asked would be willing to read and write their dialect, some very much so. All but a small minority in each area feel that it would be good to have the local language as the means of instruction in the first years of school. In response to the question, "do you think your language is being replaced by another?" a large majority said no (some quite strongly). Of those that said yes (with French as the intruder) all but one said this was a Bad Thing. (It is perhaps worth noting at this point that there was more recognition of French influence in the Banda area than the other two.)

### 3.3.2 Language use (Information from questions 2.7 & 2.8)

The above evidence must be placed alongside that concerning actual language use; this provides another angle. Talking about the language(s) that children speak when playing, it is a minority who report use of Batanga alone. In fact, although eight Bandas do not mention use of French among children, only one Bapuku respondent and none from the Bano's area replied this way. For the rest, children use both French and Batanga.

It is less easy to give an idea of language use in the family. Generally speaking, Batanga is used with Batanga-speaking parents and spouses, although there are 6 instances (out of 18 total such cases) of Batanga and French in use among Batanga spouses. There is even more reported French usage with children: many parents seem concerned to prepare their children for school. However, the rare cases where the language used with children is exclusively French occur when one spouse is not Batanga.

It is most difficult of all to interpret the responses to the question, "what language do you use among friends of the same age?" A total of 15 out of all respondents reported using both French and Batanga with friends: most (not all) of these are young (teens/twenties), but all live elsewhere (or have done so in the past, for a considerable time). It is not unlikely that these people are primarily referring to their use of French with non-Batangas. (N.B. This indicates a weakness in the questionnaire.) However this may be, an increase in the use of French among younger people seems undeniable.

### 3.3.3 Language maintenance and shift

Another interesting approach to the Batanga situation is that discussed by Ralph Fasold in a chapter dealing with language maintenance and shift (with our concern being the increasing use of French). We are justified in asking the questions, "will French take over?", and "if so, how soon?" One of Fasold's points is that language shift will occur only if, and to the extent that, a community desires to give up its identity as an identifiable sociocultural group in favour of an identity as part of some other community. It is our feeling that there is no such desire

among the great majority of Batangas, or at least that they feel there is no conflict between their identity as Batangas and their identity as francophone Cameroonians. Thus it is not likely, in the foreseeable future, that French will replace Batanga.

Fasold also mentions that a virtual prerequisite for language shift is bilingualism. Late signs of such a shift would be a negative feeling about the M.T., religious activity in the new language, and bilingual parents passing on only the new language to children, none of which factors are at all prevalent in the Batanga area. It is also "à propos" to note another of Fasold's points, i.e. that the existence of societal bilingualism does not mean that shift will automatically take place (p. 217). Other factors have to be present.

Among such factors he talks about certain socioeconomic conditions which can favour (but do not guarantee) language shift. If the group is geographically isolated, for example, there is more likelihood of language maintenance: the Batangas, centred around Kribi, cannot be thought of as isolated. They will be even less so if the Grand Batanga port project is carried through. This is bound to mean even greater influence from outside, and an improvement in transport and communication (another of Fasold's factors which encourages shift). However, in practice such a shift is not inevitable. It must also be pointed out that Cameroon is a rather different case than those discussed by Fasold, in that Batanga is not resisting (or giving in to) pressure from a uniformly French-speaking environment: there are numerous other linguistic communities in the area, all with their own complex of linguistic and sociolinguistic factors.

#### 3.3.4 Nature and development of a potential language program

Decisions about potential language programs should not be based on linguistic information alone, nor yet on reported attitudes and usage. In a stimulating paper, John Watters points out the vital role played by three socio-economic factors. His basic hypothesis is as follows: the greater (1) the community's homogeneity, (2) its openness to outside influence and change, and (3) the presence, locally, of middle-aged leadership, the greater will be the possibility for a widespread community participation in the development and implementation of a language program. Also, the greater such participation, the greater the potential current and future use of the language in written form. Some important insights were gained into the way these factors affect the Batanga community. Despite the relative remoteness of the Banda community (both geographically and dialectally), and the presence of three distinct christian denominations, we feel justified in speaking of a basically homogeneous group. Equally, there is much evidence of openness to change; if a proposed government scheme for a new port based at Grand Batanga becomes a reality (as people hope), then the changes will be enormous.

It is in the matter of leadership where there is more cause for thought. The present leaders are mostly drawn from among those who are educated, and have in most cases spent their working lives outside the area. Younger people are increasingly leaving the area (for education and employment); the feeling was that this applies to the majority, so this leadership trend is more than likely to continue. This points to Watters' third condition not being fulfilled (i.e. there is no real local middle-aged leadership). In his view, this kind of community (his type C) is exemplified by most of the languages of southern Cameroon,



and he suggests that a mass literacy program is unlikely to succeed. The best type of program would be one which focusses on special interest groups (he mentions churches, cultural associations etc.). Later, he does indicate the possibility of leaders returning to the local area on retirement, which is certainly the case for the Batangas. This may counterbalance the lack of middle-aged leaders (although it bears pointing out that such "returnees" are more likely to be more fluent in French than Batanga, as even they themselves admitted). One further factor that Watters mentions at the end of his paper is the attitude of the national government towards minority languages. In our case (thinking specifically of Batanga and Cameroon) we can be encouraged as we think about a potential project.

### 3.3.5 Language use and local churches

The prevailing attitudes among the churches of the area were found to be uniformly positive to the prospect of language work and translation. Indeed, in each of the three denominations, some translation has either been or is being done: someone from the Adventist church (found among the Bapukus) is reported to have translated the whole Bible into Bapuku (from French). The Catholics have (or used to) regular get-togethers to discuss and translate passages from week to week, and whereas their interest is likely to be primarily in passages from the lectionary, their enthusiasm could be harnessed. As for the E.P.C., the 1953 gospels and Acts are still used (even though felt to be difficult and literal), and the two pastors we spoke to (neither of them Batangas themselves) would very much welcome renewed work in Bible translation.

## 4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

It seems that our three areas of research (dialects, bilingualism, and viability) provide us with progressively greater difficulties. As regards the dialect situation, intercomprehension is generally clear. It seems that Bang'o could serve as a standard dialect (although any such decision would of course need to be made in conjunction with the whole community). In terms of bilingualism, we have noted the great importance of French. Although it is widely known among the younger generation, it would be unwise at this stage to make any statement about the precise level and extent of French usage. As to our third point, language viability, the situation is undoubtedly complex, and questions that we may like to ask do not have easy answers. However, as mentioned above, it seems clear that the Batanga language is not about to disappear, the strong positive attitude serving to maintain it despite the increase of French.

Now we come to the final question: how should we proceed from here? If we were to leave the churches' attitudes out of account, we would find it hard to know what to suggest. However, in view of the factors mentioned under 3.3.5. above, we feel that it is right to recommend an upgrading of the Ethnologue status of Batanga to "probable translation need", and further to suggest, if any action is to be taken, that it should be sooner rather than later. With Watters' comments in mind, we feel that a mass literacy campaign would not be appropriate. A team going to the Batanga area would not find it easy to reconcile dialect and denominational difficulties, but we are sure they would be warmly

received. The Kribi area has additional "attractions": can we not find a team willing to consider this "hardship location"?

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