

**MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION, COMPUTER SERVICES
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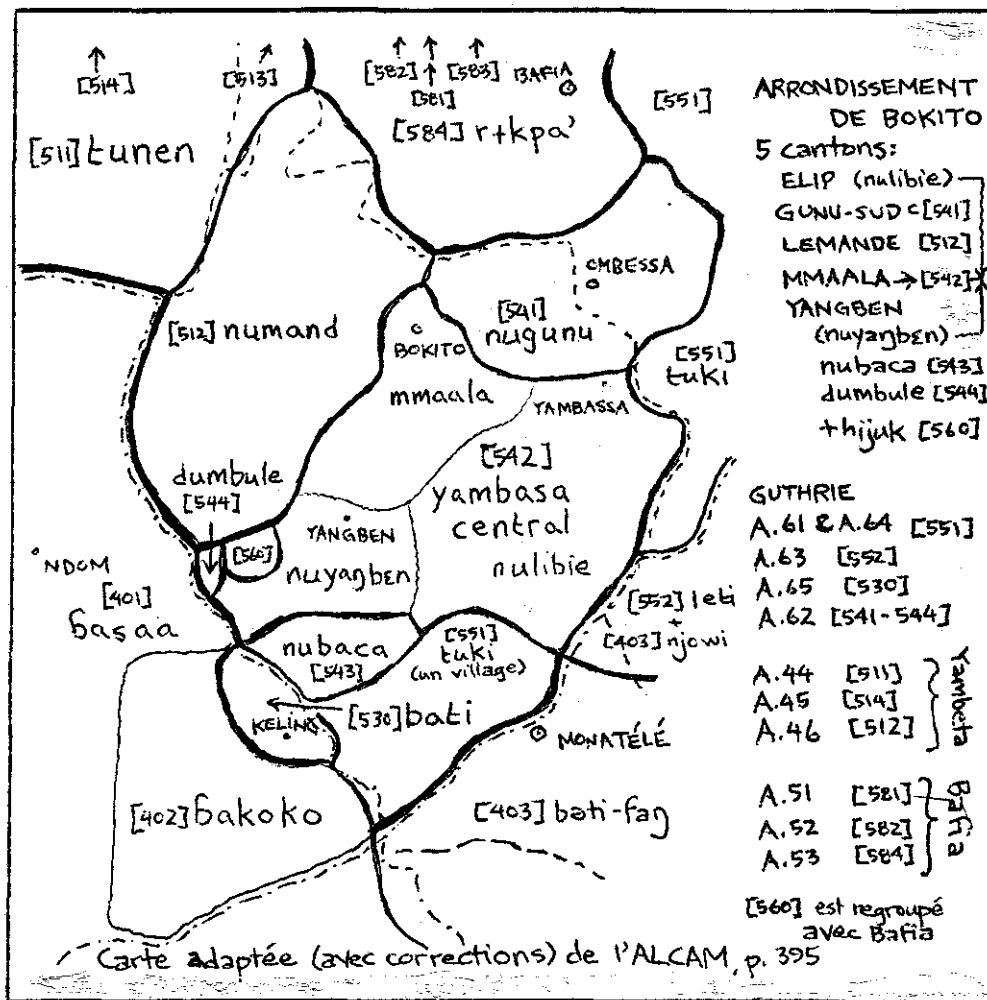
BATI SURVEY REPORT

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Map of the Bati area, showing surrounding languages. This is an adaptation, with corrections, of the map in ALCAM, page 395.



I INTRODUCTION

I.i Purpose of the survey

Bati is listed in SIL's *Ethnologue* as having no Scripture available, and as a "possible" translation need. The goal of this survey was to evaluate the sociolinguistic situation, in order to determine the need for standardisation of Bati and to reclassify it as having at least a "probable" or "unlikely" translation need.

The survey was carried out by M. Domché Engelbert of the University of Yaoundé, and by SIL members Jürg Stalder, Douglas Boone, and Caroline Grant on 27th and 28th January 1992.

I.ii Background

Not much linguistic research has been carried out on the Bati language up to this point. The Linguistic Atlas of Cameroun (ALCAM) makes reference to a wordlist collected by Marie-Anne Boum, and to a longer wordlist collected some years ago by Raymond Boyd, both from Bati speakers. Unfortunately, neither of these wordlists were available to us.

Bati is classified by Guthrie as A65, in the Sanaga (AG0) group of languages, and as number 530 in ALCAM. It is spoken in the canton of Bati which consists of four villages (Kelleng, Mbougué, Nyambat, and Ndokbikim) in the Ndom Sub-Division, Sanaga-Maritime Division, in the Littoral Province of Cameroon. Bati is surrounded by Basaa and Basso (a dialect of Bakoko) to the west, Baca (Bongo) and Mbule (Mbola) and other varieties of Yambassa to the east.

LEXICAL SIMILARITY OF BATI TO NEIGHBOURING SPEECH FORMS

Basaa						
29	Bati					
25	63	Mbule				
20	63	71	Baca			
22	60	68	79	Yangben		
22	59	67	77	87	Mmaala	
23	57	65	75	86	91	Elip

The data in the table represent the approximate percentages of similar lexicon between Bati, Basaa, and five language varieties of the Bokito Subdivision, based on analysis of lists of some 145 lexical items in each variety. The Bati data were extracted from a list collected during the survey by Douglas Boone, who also did the analysis. Because these figures are based on a sample of fewer than 150 glosses, they are subject to a statistical error of about five points. This means that the true percentage of similar vocabulary for any pair of speech forms could be as much as five percentage points higher or lower than calculated with this body of data.

It is evident from the lexical similarity figures that Bati is linguistically much more closely related to Mbule, Baca, and the speech forms called "Central Yambassa" in ALCAM (Yangben, Mmaala, and Elip)

than to Basaa. It is, however, less similar to these than they are to one another.

The Ethnologue (11th edition) gives the number of Bati speakers as 5,500, whereas ALCAM gives a figure of less than 5,000. The present population is estimated by the administration at 7-800.

II PROCEDURES

This survey was carried out using a recently developed method known as "Rapid Appraisal". The procedures were designed to obtain specific information in order to gain a general overview of the area in question, using informal group interviews. Group interviews of this kind were conducted with the Chief of the Bati canton and his guests; with the Bati Presbyterian Church Catechist of Kelleng and his associates, and with the Curé of Logbikoy. A wordlist in Bati was also collected from a middle aged man at Kelleng while at the house of the Chief of the Bati canton.

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

- (a) dialect situation and the level of comprehension of related speech forms, and the corresponding attitudes;
- (b) possible bilingualism with languages of wider communication (particularly with Basaa and French) and the extent of this, as well as corresponding attitudes.
- (c) the viability of the language and the feasibility of a language development project, as indicated by language use and attitudes.

III RESULTS AND EVALUATION

III.1 Dialect situation and inherent intercomprehension

ALCAM provided only very vague information on the geographical location and the extent of the language. The survey revealed that the Bati is spoken in four villages of the Bati Canton, namely, Kelleng, Mbougoué, Nyambat and Ndokbikim. It was confirmed that there is adequate inherent intercomprehension between the speakers of Bati in these four villages. Nevertheless, Bati speakers of Kelleng and Mbougoué suggested that the inhabitants of Nyambat and Ndokbikim do not speak "pure Bati", since it is "mixed" with surrounding languages, which may also indicate a certain attitude.

Because of reported historical ties, we suspected a close linguistic relatedness between Bati and the other Yambassa speech forms, which, later on, was confirmed by Douglas Boone's lexicostsistical analysis.

Group interviews among the Bati as well as group interviews with Baca speakers (Douglas Boone, SIL, 1992) indicated that there is adequate comprehension between speakers of Bati and speakers of the Baca language, who live in the neighbouring village of Bongo (Bokito Sub-Division, Mbam Division). The participants report that even the smallest children from both language groups can understand each other without interpretation. This suggests that there is adequate inherent intercomprehension between both groups.

However, although historically closely related, participants reported that Yangben had to be learned by the Bati.

Attitudes

The Bati said that they and the Baca speaking community share a common ancestry, but that now, longstanding administrative boundaries separate them. In fact, the four Bati villages from the canton of Bati are all found in the Sub-Division of Ndom, in the Sanaga-Maritime Division, whereas the Baca village of Bongo is administered from Bokito in the Mbam Division. In many aspects the Bati are oriented towards the Bakoko, for instance, economically (the main markets are in Logbikoy and Ndokbikim) and medically (there is a hospital/clinic in Logbikoy). The leaders of the Catholic and Protestant churches are in the Bakoko speaking area as well. The above mentioned factors may have reinforced the attitude that the Bati do not have a strong sense of belonging with the Baca speakers.

Although members of Bati as well as Baca suggested that there was a special relationship between them, on further investigation, it was found that this "special" relationship extends also to the surrounding villages where other languages are spoken, for example, to speakers of the Yambassa villages and also to Bakoko and Bassaa villages.

III.ii Bilingualism

As far as bilingualism is concerned, the Bati speak and understand the languages of the neighbouring area well. This includes Basaa, Bakoko, Eton, and three speech forms of Yambassa. French is used as the official language.

It was reported that most older Bati adults have little problem understanding Basaa, since their schooling used to be in this language, and Basaa is used in church. However, the youngest of the Bati children cannot understand Basaa, since it is a language which has to be learned.

Primary education is in French, so that Bati children are constantly exposed to French up to the age of approximately 14 years.

Attitudes

Several times it was expressed that the Bati consider themselves able to understand all the speech forms in their surrounding area because of a "special gift" which they have. On closer examination, it was found that this comprehension is learned by the Bati, since Bati children below the age of 10 years cannot understand any of the surrounding languages, apart from Baca. This acquired or learned comprehension is probably, as mentioned above, a result of frequent contact between the different villages. For example, the main market for the Bati is in the Basso speaking area, as is the local hospital. Nevertheless, the above mentioned statement confirms the positive attitude towards the surrounding languages.

III.iii Language Vitality and Viability

From two days of research in the Bati area, the survey team was able to

gain a general overview of the present language situation (vitality), and to make some tentative projections for the future (viability).

Patterns of language use

Bati is used in the home, in cases where both parents are Bati speakers. However, since there is a high degree of intermarriage with the different surrounding peoples, the language use at home seems not to be restricted to Bati.

The Presbyterian church services proceed in Basaa, which is then not translated. If the Bati Catechist of Kelleng is preaching, Bati is used. The local Catholic services are in Basaa, and are not translated. In both churches, there is no attempt to try to codify Bati for use in church. Although the Presbyterian catechist has introduced some songs in Bati, they are not in written form.

The main markets attended by the Bati people are held in Logbikoy and Nyanon, in the Bakoko speaking area, and in Yangben, which is in the Yambassa speaking area. Bati people are obliged to use the language of the other person in this situation, since speakers of other languages do not understand Bati.

The situation within the Bati community is such that there seems to be a dearth of young or middle-aged adults who might be willing to establish some kind of development organisation specifically for their own language. This is mainly because secondary education is only available outside the Bati speaking area, and the majority of young people usually seek further education or employment in the major cities of Cameroon, rarely returning to the Bati Canton for long periods.

These migration patterns reinforce the use of languages of wider communication amongst the young people.

Attitudes

Although respondents expressed a regret that the Bati language has not been written down, and that the Bible is not available in Bati, there seems, to be little commitment to try to change this situation. For example, there is no local language committee, and no other signs of activity which would facilitate the development of the language.

IV SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of this survey confirm that there is a distinct speech and unified speech form called Bati spoken in the four villages within the Bati Canton. That is, Bati is a speech form separate from Bongo (at least on sociolinguistic grounds), and there is no dialectal variation within Bati. (see Douglas Boone SIL, 1992)

From lexicostatistic analysis reported by Douglas Boone (SIL 1992), there are clear indications that linguistically speaking, Bati is part of the Yambassa cluster.

It is clear that Bati should be considered separately from Baca, because of the sociolinguistic reasons stated above. Further studies on the Baca language have been made by Douglas Boone (SIL 1992).

Although many of those spoken to during the survey indicated that they felt at ease about their comprehension and expression of both French and Basaa. However, it is debateable whether this would be sufficient for understanding the Scriptures in either of these languages. Since the scope of this survey did not include extensive bilingualism testing, it was not possible to determine this precisely.

The Bati number approximately 800 inhabitants, which seems likely to decrease in the future, because of the increasing emigration of the younger generation from the area.

The community seems to demonstrate their acceptance of the use of Basaa in church services, and the Bible is available in both Basaa and French. There seems to be no felt need of Scriptures in the Bati language.

Generally speaking, it seems that there is no apparent felt need for the Bati language to be codified in a standardised form. Bati is only spoken within the Bati Canton itself, Bati speakers seem to be able to communicate in the languages of wider communication as well as in the languages of the surrounding area.

As a result of these factors, the following recommendations can be made:

- (a) The Bible translation need status of Bati (BTC) in the Ethnologue should be changed from "possible" to "unlikely".
- (b) If the Bati language were to be standardised, this could only be done with the full participation of the community leaders, both outside the Bati Canton, and within. Since there seems to be little evidence that standardisation is a felt need at present, it seems improbable that this will take place.

REFERENCES

Atlas Linguistique du Cameroun (ALCAM) 1983

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