

Ministry of Higher Education, Computer Services,
and Scientific Research

HIJUK SURVEY REPORT

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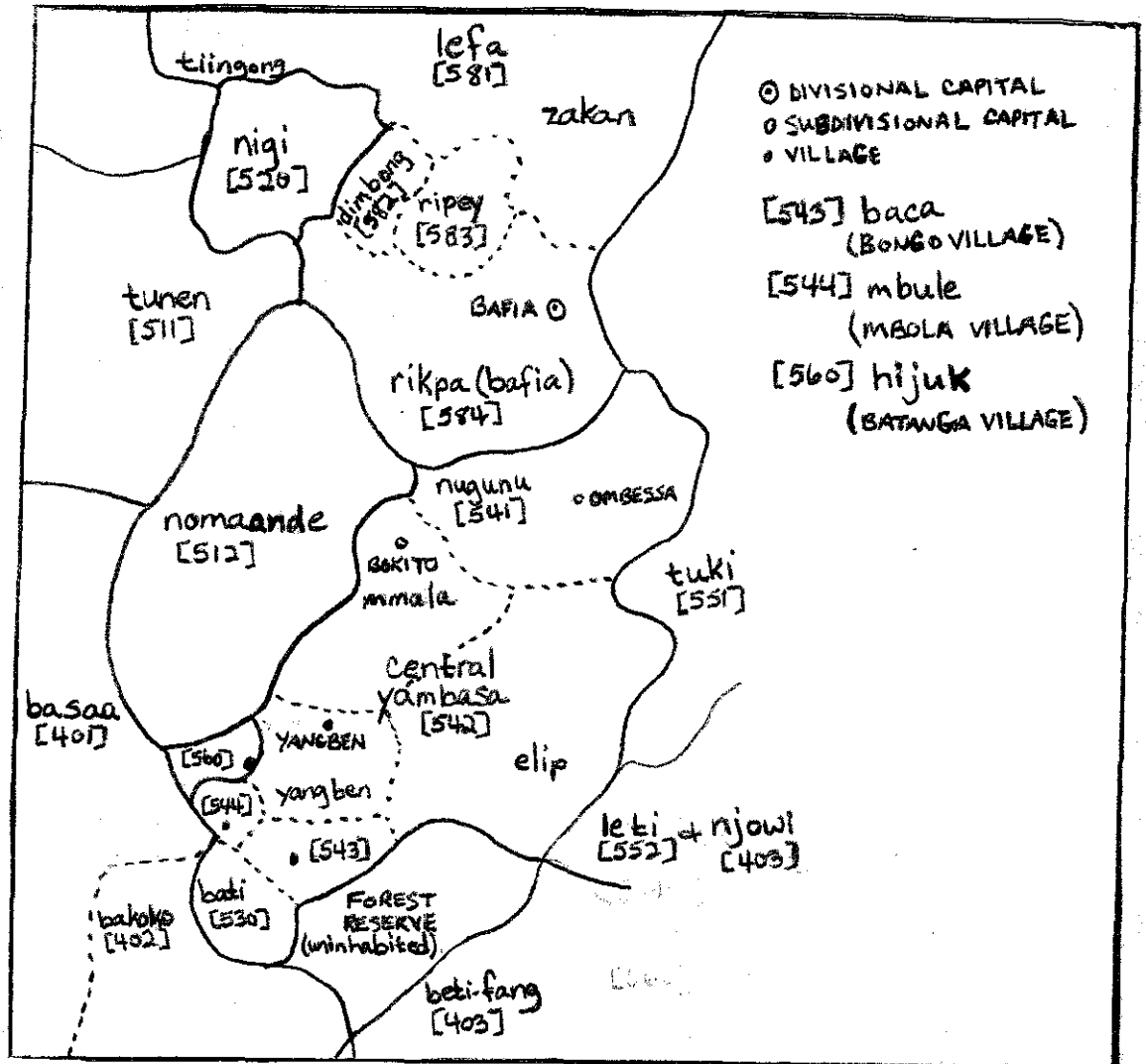
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Hijuk is a speech form spoken in Batanga village, which is located in Yangben canton of the Bokito Subdivision, Mbam Division, Centre Province of Cameroon. There are about 700 inhabitants of the entire village, of whom about 400, who live in the Niki and Meke quarters, are mother tongue Hijuk speakers.

Neighboring languages include Yangben, which is spoken by about 300 people in the other five quarters of Batanga village. It is the most extensive speech form in Yangben canton and is one of the forms of 'Central Yambasa' (1) (see Boone et al. 1992). Other large language groups are Nomaande, spoken to the north, and Basaa to the west and northwest. Smaller languages include Bati (Grant 1992) which is spoken in 3 or 4 villages to the south, Mbule (Boone 1992b), spoken in Mbola, the neighboring village to the southwest, and Baca (Boone 1992a), spoken in Bongo village, to the southeast.



Map of the Hijuk area (Batanga village) and surrounding areas adapted (with modifications) from ALCAM, p. 395

Although it is not included in Guthrie's classification of Bantu languages, the Linguistic Atlas of Cameroon (ALCAM, Dieu 1983) classifies Hijuk in its zone 5, as number 560. The Ethnologue (Grimes 1988a) gives it the three letter code HIJ. ALCAM claims that, based on lexical and morphological correspondences, it is much more closely related to the Bafia group (Guthrie's A50's) than to any other languages in zone 5. However, it appears to be related, at least lexically, moreso to Basaa (ALCAM's 401) than to anything in the Bafia group, as shown by the following matrix of lexical similarity:

Basaa											
87		HIJUK									
31	34	Bati									
35	40	68	Mbule								
31	36	69	77	Baca							
28	30	60	74	88	Yangben						
35	37	62	70	80	87	Mmala					
28	30	56	69	82	84	90	Elip				

27	31	43	42	47	46	49	47	Nomaande			

30	31	23	27	25	23	28	23	23	Bafia		
35	36	24	23	22	24	24	24	23	83	Tiingong	
31	31	22	23	20	21	23	20	18	80	79	Ripey
34	34	27	25	25	28	28	28	23	80	85	85 Zakan

Table 1. Lexical similarity percentages for Hijuk and neighboring languages (including some in the Bafia group)

The number of items on the lists from which this analysis is derived varies considerably. The final three languages, which belong to the Bafia group, were missing many items which were included on the other lists. The corresponding margins of error are, therefore, significantly higher. These figures are based on a sample of data and are estimates of the "true" proportion, which may actually be several percentage points higher or lower than the estimate.

Based on these figures, it would appear that Hijuk and Basaa are much more closely related, lexically, to each other than either is to any of the others listed. This figure is based on a comparison of 177 items and has a 2.5% margin of error, that is, the actual lexical similarity might be as much as 2.5% higher or lower than the estimate of 87%. So Hijuk and Basaa would be at least 84% similar to each other but less than 45% similar to any of the others.

It would also appear that the next six speech forms, Bati, Mbule, Baca, Yangben, Mmala and Elip group together to varying degrees of proximity. Nomaande seems to group together with these moreso than with any of the others, although it is obviously more distant than the rest. These are all based on at least 132 comparisons, and the margins of error are between 2.4% and 7.6%.

Bafia groups quite closely with the final three speech forms, but not very closely with any of the others, including Hijuk. The comparisons between Bafia and the first nine speech forms include at least 129 items and range in error from 4.6% to 8.0%. Comparisons between Bafia and the final three lists, which represent other speech forms in the Bafia group, include fewer than 100 items and the margin of error ranges between 9.0% and 15.5%. However, these figures are similar to those for Bafia so we can be confident that they are reasonably accurate. Even allowing for the maximum sampling error, these are at least 65% similar to each other. They are probably less than 40% similar to Hijuk and Basaa, and probably less than 35% similar to the others.

1.2 The Survey

This report is based on information gathered during two trips to Niki quarter. The first, conducted by SIL members Douglas Boone, Dave Bradley, and Caroline Grant, occurred in late February 1992 during a survey of the Yambasa area. The second was by Boone and Bradley in mid-March 1992 in conjunction with the Mbule survey.

1.3 Purpose of the Survey

Hijuk is listed in the Bible Translation Needs Bulletin 1 (Grimes 1988b:53) as a possible translation need, which is to say that little was known about the need of Hijuk speakers for local-language Scriptures. Accordingly, the purpose of this survey was to revise this status to (at least) either "probable translation need" or "unlikely translation need" by means of a rapid appraisal of the sociolinguistic situation of the Hijuk-speaking area. More broadly, the goal of the survey was to evaluate the need for codification (development of a standard written form) and Bible translation in Hijuk.

2 PROCEDURES

Rapid appraisal surveys attempt to gain a general overview of the sociolinguistic situation of a particular language area, in view of the possible need for codification of the local language. The procedures were designed to obtain the appropriate information in a short time (usually less than one week) using individual and group interviews, as well as individual questionnaires.

This report is based on several individual interviews, one with the chief of Batanga village (a Hijuk speaker), one with the director of the public school (a native of one of the Yangben-speaking quarters of Batanga village), and one with the representative of the chief (also a Hijuk speaker). Three other individuals responded to the questionnaire form.

The survey team pursued the research with the following three aspects of the sociolinguistic situation in mind:

- a) closely related speech forms - dialect situation and the level of comprehension of related languages as well as the attitudes toward these related forms,
- b) bilingualism - the extent of proficiency in languages of wider communication, particularly with respect to French, as well as the corresponding attitudes, and

c) viability - the feasibility of a language development project in the local language, as revealed by attitudes toward the mother tongue and by reported patterns of language use.

A wordlist of 183 items was also collected for lexicostatistic comparison with the neighboring languages as shown above.

3 RESULTS AND EVALUATION

3.1 Related Speech Forms

Hijuk is spoken in two of the quarters of Batanga village. As expected, there is no appreciable dialectal variation and no difficulty in comprehension between people from the two quarters.

Linguistically, Hijuk appears to be closely related to Basaa, at least in the area of lexicon. It is about 87% similar (2.5% margin of error) with standard Basaa for a list of 177 glosses. In the interviews it was reported to be like Basaa, or "almost Basaa". It was also claimed that Basaa speakers understand Hijuk very well and vice versa, and that even young Hijuk children of about five years of age could easily understand a Basaa speaker. Evidently, however, Hijuk speakers feel no special ethnic affinity with the Basaa people.

On the contrary, it seems that Hijuk speakers consider themselves to be ethnically Yambasa. There are about 300 people in the other five quarters of the village, who speak Yangben (=Yambasa) as mother tongue, and since contact is very frequent, everyone in the village is said to understand both languages. Apparently, children at play will use Hijuk with Yangben-speaking children and the Yangben children will use their own mother tongue in response. Even from the age of about 6 years there is said to be little difficulty in terms of intercomprehension.

It seems that the Hijuk would be adequately served by the Basaa scriptures, from the standpoint of comprehension. However, it is not clear whether they would all be willing to learn to read Basaa. On the other hand, the attitude towards Yangben (=Yambasa) seems to be much more positive. The Hijuk might be more disposed to learning to read Yambasa if a translation project were to be undertaken in that language, particularly if the form chosen for standardisation were the Yangben variety.

3.2 Languages of Wider Communication

The level of proficiency in French for the general population is reportedly very high. It is said that everyone except the elderly speak French very well. Evidently all school-aged children attend the local primary school, which is located in Niki quarter, and it seems that they learn French quite well. It is reportedly very well accepted not only for oral use, but also as a means of written communication.

3.3 Feasibility of a Language Project

The Hijuk people are evidently quite open to change and interested in development. A combined development committee for the villages of Batanga and Mbola exists, which is composed of some people who live locally as well as some who have moved to the cities. They have already sponsored the

construction of a chapel building. However, to this point there have been no attempts to deal with the issue of language development. This is evidently not a felt need for the people.

There is a Catholic chapel in the village, but no other religious institutions. In the services, the scriptures are read in French and then interpreted into local language. The preaching is normally in Yangben, without the use of an interpreter because everyone is said to understand Yangben. There are no (church) songs in Hijuk so all the singing is in either Yangben or French. The announcements are made in local language. There is also a Bible study in French, which is led by one of the sisters from the Catholic mission in Yangben village.

Given the reported language use patterns in church and that there is no evident felt need for language development, it seems questionable whether such a project in Hijuk would be successful.

4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This survey confirmed that there is a unified and relatively distinct speech form called Hijuk, spoken by about 400 people in two quarters of Batanga village. Lexically, it seems to be quite closely related to Basaa. The Hijuk people recognize this linguistic proximity and evidently have no difficulty understanding Basaa, but they don't feel any particular ethnic kinship with them. Rather, they identify with and claim to be part of the Yambasa people. Since almost half of the inhabitants of the village are mother tongue Yambasa speakers, the Hijuk learn, at least to understand, the language at a very early age.

French seems to be very well accepted and the general level of proficiency is reportedly very high, except among the elderly.

The Hijuk people live in a multi-lingual community, but it seems that they maintain use of the mother tongue in the home and within the village context. In the domain of the church, however, Yangben is used primarily as well as some French. Although they are interested in development and already have a functioning development committee, they have not yet made any efforts in the area of language development.

The Hijuk can probably be adequately served by the existing Basaa scriptures, for those who would be willing to learn to read in Basaa, as well as by the French scriptures for those who would be unwilling to read Basaa. Yambasa is already considered a "probable translation need" (see Boone et al. 1992) and if/when that project is taken up, it would probably also adequately serve the needs of the Hijuk. It is likely that this would be the most acceptable of the three languages to the Hijuk, especially if the Yangben variety of Yambasa were the form chosen for standardisation.

Considering these factors, the situation does not seem to justify the development of the local language, and it seems reasonable to recommend that the Bible translation status of Hijuk be revised to "unlikely translation need".

NOTES

(1) Yambasa is actually a term of ethnic identification and is not, strictly speaking, the name of any language. ALCAM uses 'Central Yambasa' as a cover term including the speech forms Yangben, Elip and Mmala, which are very closely related linguistically as well as ethnically. Since the "Central Yambasa Survey Report" recommends a single development/translation project for these three speech forms, it is convenient in this report to refer to them simply as Yambasa.

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