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CLASSIFICATION OF MOLOKO

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ABSTRACT:

Before allocating to the Moloko language project in the Far North province of Cameroon, I collected data from the SIL library in Yaoundé on the Moloko language and people. Specific references were hard to come by: the SIL survey report (Bradley 1992) was the only monograph on this language. In this article I survey the bibliographic references on Chadic languages in order to specify the classification of Moloko¹ (ALCAM ref number [154]²).

LANGUAGE FAMILIES IN AFRICA/CAMEROON

Of the four generally accepted groupings of languages in Africa proposed by Greenberg (1966), three are represented in the North and Far North provinces of Cameroon (only Khoisan of the Bushmen and Hottentots is not represented). Each of these phylums (equivalent in scope to Indo-European) can be further sub-divided into language families. The following chart shows their distribution in the area under consideration:

PHYLUM	FAMILIES		LANGUAGES REPRESENTED	
	<i>total number in Africa</i>	<i>of which in Cameroon</i>	<i>in Cameroon</i>	<i>in Northern Cameroon</i>
AFRO-ASIATIC	5	Semitic	Arabic	Arabic
		Chadic	more than 50	all except Kotoko & Lame
NILO-SAHARAN	6	Saharan	Kanuri	Kanuri
NIGER-KORDOFANIAN	6	West-Atlantic	Fulani	Fulani
		Adamawa-Ubangian	around 30	- Fali group - Mundang, Tupuri, Mambay
		Benue-Congo	around 80	none
TOTALS	17	6	around 160	58

TABLE 1: *Phylums, language families and languages*
(taken from Barreteau et al. 1984:165)

CHADIC

It is necessary to make the terminological distinction between Chadic languages ('les langues tchadiques') spoken around the Lake Chad basin, principally in northern Nigeria, northern Cameroon, and both eastern and western Chad, and Chadian languages ('les langues tchadiennes') which encompasses all languages spoken in the Republic of Chad. The Chadic language Hausa, besides its importance in Nigeria, is also spoken in Niger, Sudan, northern Ghana and Benin, and some other parts of West Africa (Barreteau & Newman 1978:291).

The Chadic language family is numerically the most important linguistic family in northern Cameroon, and also the most diverse, with 54 languages identified in this area, including certain languages which cross borders into Nigeria or Chad.

¹ In the references the name of the language appears as Melokwo, Məlokwo, Molko, Mokyö, Moloko, Molkwo, Molokwo, Molkoa, etc. I will retain this spelling throughout.

² A map of the area from the ALCAM (1983:391) is appended to this document.

According to the classification given by Newman (1977), Chadic languages can be divided into four branches, all of which are represented in northern Cameroon, however the western and eastern branches are only represented by one language each (Hausa and Kera) (Barreateau et al.1984:166). The branch on which our attention is focussed is known as either Biu-Mandara (Newman 1977) or Central (Barreateau et al.1984:166), and comprises the great majority of languages of northern Cameroon, including Moloko.³

MOLOKO - LINGUISTIC CLASSIFICATION

The following classification of Moloko is taken from Barreateau & Newman (1978:303):⁴

- II Biu-Mandara branch
 - IIA Sub-branch Biu-Mandara A
 - IIA 4/5/6 Combined group Wandala/Mafa/Sukur
 - 5 Mafa group
 - (82) Moloko

with a footnote that the Mafa group could be divided into three subgroups: Mafa, Mofu and Mada. This distinction has been taken up by several authors, such as de Colombel (1979:115),⁵ Barreateau & Sadembouo (1981) and Barreateau et al. (1984:168), all of whom sub-divide Mafa group into:

- Sub-group South
 - a) Wuzlam, Muyang, Mada, Moloko
 - b) Zulgo, Dugwor, Meri
 - c) Giziga-N, Giziga-S, Mofu-N, Mofu-S
 - d) Cuvok, Mefe, Mafa

This is consistent with the lexicostatistical information presented by Barreateau and Sadembouo (1981) in their "Matrice de ressemblance lexicale: groupe Mafa" which shows Moloko with the following percentages of lexical similarity with closely-related languages:

Mbreme 49%	Wuzlam 60%	Zulgo 52.5%	Giziga-N 55%	Cuvok 51%
Mbukwo 51%	Muyang 65.5%	Dugwor 63%	Giziga-S 55.5%	Mefe 50%
Matal 51%	Mada 51%	Meri 53%	Mofu-N 54.5%	Mafa 47%
			Mofu-S 54.5%	

TABLE 2: *Lexical resemblances matrix: Mafa group*
(taken from Barreateau & Sadembouo 1981)

Barreateau et al.(1984:168) use the following notation for this language:⁶

- [15] mələkwo = "glossonyme standard proposé"
- molkwō = standard international orthography (for standard keyboards)
- mokyo-molkoa = names given by administrators, authors, missions, etc.

³ Barreateau and Newman (1978:299-300) give a schematic outline of the progression of classification of Chadic languages from the 1920s to the 1970s.

⁴ The ALCAM (Dieu & Renaud1983:357) follows this classification (without the Mafa distinction), but changes the name of the sub-branch from Biu-Mandara A to Central-West.

⁵ It should be noted that Moloko does not figure in de Colombel's survey, and she qualifies her classification of this language with a question mark.

⁶ No dialects are listed for this entry, however in the appendix "Lexique des noms de langues et d'ethnies" in the same volume, there is a listing for Mokyo with a footnote suggesting that this could be a slightly different dialect of Moloko (1984:538).

Tchari Blama (1980:65) also uses the names molko, molkwa and mukwol, however he considers Mikiri a dialect of Moloko, while both ALCAM (1983:357) and Barreteau et al. (1984:168) consider Mikiri a dialect of Dugwor, and Barreteau & Newman call it Mofu of Mikiri as a distinct language in the Mafa group (1978:303).⁷

According to the ALCAM (1983:89), "the Melokwo traditionally live on and around the mountain of the same name, isolated in the plains east of the Mandara Mountains, between the Mayo-Mangafé and the Mayo-Ranéó rivers, in the village of Mokyo and the surrounding areas (Makalingay canton, Tokombere sub-division, Mayo-Sava division)" (my translation).

ANTHROPOLOGICAL CLASSIFICATION

While linguistically Moloko is grouped with the Mafa languages, anthropologically the situation is more complex. They are often included in the term Kirdi, an Arab Choa word meaning 'infidel' or 'pagan' with a somewhat pejorative connotation (Pontié 1984:203). This term is applied to many of the mountain people of northern Cameroon, and distinguishes them from the islamised groups, such as the dominant Fulani.⁸ Because of their geographic situation, they are often grouped with the various people of the Mandara mountains.

More specifically, anthropologists tend to group the Moloko with the Mofu people. Lembezat (1961:7-8) writes of the Mandara people, which he groups into three categories, the Matakam (including Mafa), the Kapsiki, and the Mofu. Under Mofu he includes Moloko, Mikiri, Tthere, Dugwor, Zulgo, Meri and Douvangar.

J-F Vincent (1981:273) speaks of the 11 Mofu mountain ranges representing three different ensembles which include around 40,000 people, which she divides in the following way:

- Duvangar, Durum and Wazan (popn 13000) all speaking Mofu-north
- Zulgo, Gemzek, Meri, Mbuko (popn 15500) speaking four different languages
- Moloko, Tsere, Mikiri, Dugwor (popn 10500) speaking two different languages.⁹

However Boutrais (1973:36-42) counts 15 ethnic groups of the Mandara mountains, and 4 groups in the 'massifs-îles' or 'inselbergs' (island mountains), isolated in the plains several kilometres from the main mountain range. These last four he lists as Wurza, Muyang, Mokyo/Molko (Moloko) and Mbuko. Of the Moloko he says "in spite of their very diverse origins, they speak one language, but the occupation of the one mountain did not succeed in forging a political unity, with each group looking inward" (1973:42 my translation).

CONCLUSION

Linguistically the Moloko language is clearly part of the Central or Biu-Mandara branch of the Chadic language family. It's closest related languages are Wuzlam (Ouldémé) and Muyang, while showing a high percentage of lexical similarities with other languages of the sub-group south of the Mafa group. Anthropologically the ethnic group which we will also call Moloko, belongs more to the Mofu group of the Kirdi people of the Mandara mountains.

⁷ Blama's thesis does not clearly distinguish between his appellation of Moloko and Mokyo as people group or language or region or a combination of these (1980:117-8).

⁸ 'Fulani' is the English name for both the people group and the language, corresponding to the French word 'peul'. Speakers of the language itself use the term 'fulfuldé' for the language, and 'fulbé' for the ethnic group (Barreteau, Breton, Dieu 1984:172)

⁹ Presumably the languages spoken are Moloko and Dugwor, though this is not specified in the article. Census figures are from 1966-7 (Vincent 1981:273).

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