

MINISTRY OF SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL RESEARCH

**REPORT OF THE LITERACY SURVEY
CONDUCTED IN JANUARY 1991
IN THE LANGUAGE AREA OF
MOFU-GUDUR**

James N. POHLIG

1993

Société Internationale de Linguistique
B.P. 1299, Yaoundé
Republic of Cameroon

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This paper reports on the background study performed to evaluate the possibility of a mother tongue adult literacy programme among the Mofu-Gudur people in the Département of the Mayo Tsanaga, the Far North Province. This operation took place under the theme of reorganization of functional literacy among the Mofu-Gudur.

- 1.0 Objectives of the study
- 2.0 Development of the language
- 3.0 The local population
- 4.0 The development agencies
- 5.0 Proposal for an adult mother tongue literacy programme among the Mofu-Gudur.

1.0 Objectives of the study I quote from the "Scientific Report on Literacy Surveys:"

- "collect data with regards to potential community-integrated literacy programs giving insights on:
- (a) local infrastructures for
 - (i) adult literacy classes
 - (ii) development activities
 - (b) degree of cooperation
 - (c) potential personnel"

This accords well with the objective which I had written in my research proposal in December of 1990:

"...It is necessary to identify those institutions in the society which might have interest in the teaching of the language and which might provide the means to do so. One would hope that these institutions--or at least some of them--would try to engage in the literacy education of their constituents. Certainly the challenge should be presented to them."

2.0 Development of the language This heading covers progress to date on the language's orthography, on literature production, on the availability of literacy workers, and on the existence of local leadership in the language development and its activities.

Although there remain several questions in the orthography of Mofu-Gudur, none of them poses a serious problem to the viability of the writing system. The orthography conforms to that of the Cameroon languages.

The inventory of published literature in Mofu-Gudur is small and needs to be enlarged. Primers I and II exist, as do two volumes of folk stories. A postprimer is almost ready to be published, which should aid the new reader. There are about six portions of the Bible

published, including the Gospel of Luke. Several functional pieces of literary materials have been published on health and farming.

As only two local authors have been identified, the language project should be concerned with the development of more. There is now a duplicating machine in Mokong, which affords the opportunity for the production of simple books on the spot.

Because of local demand for mother tongue literacy classes, there has been a steady interest in training courses for literacy workers. There are probably twenty workers who have received at least one week of training in the use of the primers, many of whom are actually leading classes. Experience shows the desirability of further training for most of these workers--but they do have already a base on which to build.

There are currently at least 20 literacy classes being held in the Mofu-Gudur community. It is a continuing challenge to discover all the classes which being given at any one time; we continue to discover untrained men and women who are teaching them. The classes consist almost entirely of adolescents and young men and women. Most of these classes are held in churches, many of them being led by local evangelists and catechists. While these conditions may seem "messy," they are also encouraging, in that they show the interest of some of the Mofu-Gudur community in their mother tongue. In October 1992, over 500 individuals were attending classes in the Mofu-Gudur area.

A language committee exists in name, with elected officers, but there are no regular meetings and no constitution as yet. A subcommittee exists in Yaounde. So far it has not contributed financially to any literacy activity, except to publish occasional numbers of a newsletter.

3.0 The local population A questionnaire was administered to twenty individuals living in various villages: sixteen men and four women. The answers tabulated may be summarized as follows.

3.1 Condition of the respondents Eight of them were under thirty years of age, five between thirty and forty, three between forty and fifty, and four over fifty years of age. Sixteen of them had had no formal schooling at all, two had been to several years of primary school, and two had completed primary school.

In terms of language ability, almost all men regard themselves as being able to speak at least a little Fulfulde. Men in Zidim tend to know a considerable amount of Guiziga. Mofu-Gudur is generally spoken at home.

Fifteen were evaluated as completely illiterate in any language, three as functionally literate in French, one of these three as also literate in Mofu-Gudur, and another of these three as semi-literate in Mofu-Gudur. Two others were judged as semi-literate in Mofu-Gudur, with one of these being semi-literate as well in Fulfulde. Almost half said that they read newspapers and magazines and/or looked at the pictures from time to time. Only two said they ever received official documents in French, but twelve said that they received

personal letters from time to time, either in French or in Fulfulde. Most of the respondents solicited the aid of someone literate in order to have the letters read to them.

All the respondents farmed for their principal living and dwelled in traditional housing.

3.2 Felt needs of the local population revealed in the questionnaire We may say that the questionnaires reveal the following felt needs:

Having enough food (attendant problems in farming: lack of farmland, not enough productivity of the soil that is available, inconsistent rainfall, and the need for more family and community cooperation in farmwork. People often see participation in the development agencies' "classes" as restricted to younger men who are literate; on the whole, the development agencies are not seen as giving very much practical help.

Health problems (too much sickness; widespread ignorance of what causes various illnesses--perhaps here the questionnaire was too "western" in its bias, concerning itself with physical causes of illness instead of "spiritual" or agential causes; health clinics and dispensaries are often seen as charging too much money for their services).

Housing concerns (villagers want durable housing--i.e., houses not subject to the ravages of termites and to the wearing action of rainwater; more modern features in housing--metal roofing, concrete floors, plaster and whitewash).

3.3 Villagers' view of the development agencies in the area The villagers admit to often having extensive contact with these agencies. About one half of the villagers questioned say they have participated in development courses, either with SODECOTON, with the Baptist Church's Section Rurale, or with clinic nutrition or health classes. Topics treated include the following: water hygiene, other health matters, how to cultivate, how to market cotton, and family money management.

The agencies are perceived as not uncommonly showing literature to the villagers and often making it for sale. However, one may say that for the ordinary villager, the practicality of buying such literature, as indeed the prospect of becoming literate so as to make any use of it, remains a very distant thought.

Many villagers perceive the agencies as operating mainly in Fulfulde. It would appear that Mofu-Gudur is the medium of interaction only in the rare cases where the extension worker himself is Mofu-Gudur.

In sum, agencies are often perceived as giving only marginal help to the villagers. Real help is seen as coming from family and neighbours.

4.0 The development agencies Representatives of the following seven development agencies were interviewed: European Baptist Mission, working under the Union of Baptist Churches of Cameroon; Developpement Communautaire, under the Ministry of Agriculture; La Maison de la Femme, under MINASCOF, Bureau National of the RDPC;

SODECOTON; Save the Children, MINJES, and the Section Rurale of the European Baptist Mission. Of these seven agencies, four currently have work among the Mofu-Gudur: the Baptist Mission, Developpement Communautaire, SODECOTON, and the Section Rurale of the Baptist Mission.

Without wishing to discount the future possibility of the other three agencies to become involved in functional literacy among the Mofu-Gudur, we will concentrate in this part of the report on the potential of these four.

4.1 Activities Roughly speaking, these four agencies work in two domains, those of Health and Rural Development. More specifically, their local activities include work in the following areas: raising of livestock, preventative medicine, training of workers in primary health care, maternity instruction and services, agricultural methods, reforestation, well projects, literacy in Fulfulde, tree cultivation, soil reclamation, researching better seeds, the farming of marshes, discussions on divers topics regarding rural economy, and a community granary programme.

4.2 Modes of contacts and methods of communication with villagers Typically these agencies employ the following means of contact: contact with individual villagers, contact with informal groups of villagers, and contact with formal groups in a classroom-type situation.

Generally, the means of lecture and discussion is employed in groups. Not uncommonly written materials are shown, as are posters and other visual aids. More rarely are used drama and story telling.

4.3 Difficulties experienced in communication and hoped-for response The respondents for the development agencies generally admitted to a multitude of problems. More often than not, it appears that the lectures must be translated from Fulfulde into Mofu-Gudur, especially if women are involved. At other times, the interpretation is done from French. Information gets lost in interpretation. One respondent observed that he was on fairly safe ground if abstract or philosophical-type subjects were avoided in Fulfulde. He suggested that the majority of the local population might not be accustomed to thinking in such terms.

On perhaps a deeper level, respondents reported a seeming lack of participation and motivation. Some of the interactive methods used--e.g., meetings of both men and women together--run against custom. Some of the programs which are promoted--e.g., soil reclamation and community granaries--often run against local tradition, and so are not as successful as is hoped.

4.4 Interest in the proposed model of functional literacy

4.4.1 Proposed model A specific model of functional literacy was proposed to the representatives of the development agencies who were interviewed. Essentially, the model is as follows: literacy centers would be established in various villages. Traditional literacy classes would be held in them, and they would be the base of activity

for local instructors. In addition, functional literacy would be carried on there, i.e., reading material in the local language would be available which would illustrate or reinforce the development theme provided by the various development agencies. During the time the extension agent meets with a group of villagers, one activity would be the reading of the appropriate material. In this way the process of becoming literate would be seen in its true context of utility.

SIL would volunteer to provide the consultant help necessary in translating such literature. The development agency in question would provide the actual content.

4.4.2 Reaction to the proposed model on the part of the development agencies We believe that the survey results show widespread agreement on the part of local representatives of development agencies as to the importance of communication in the mother tongue. Most could immediately suggest many subjects upon which they would like to see mother tongue literature produced. Most could also make available personnel to consult on material production. A more difficult matter would seem to be finding Mofu-Gudur-speaking extension workers. While some agencies may have a few of them, for the most part the extension workers come from outside the area. But in general, the representatives were all positive toward the model.

5.0 Proposal for an adult mother tongue literacy programme among the Mofu-Gudur Taking into account the summary of this survey's results, we would like to propose the following adult mother tongue literacy programme for the Mofu-Gudur. It is particularly to be noted that the proposal utilizes the already existing factor of church involvement in literacy, which is the principal context in which Mofu-Gudur literacy is currently being carried on.

It is envisioned that an adult literacy programme among the Mofu-Gudur would rest upon two pillars: the churches (their involvement exists already and should be encouraged continuously) and the activities of the development agencies already at work among the Mofu-Gudur. The success of literacy activity in the context of the churches should be used to encourage literacy elsewhere.

We would envision village or regional literacy centers, which would become the centers of extension work carried on by the development organizations. The problem of a lack of Mofu-Gudur-speaking extension workers would be met by volunteer literacy instructors from the Mofu-Gudur community, who volunteer in any case to lead classes in the context of the church.

It should not be expected that all adults who regularly frequent the animation sessions held by the development agencies would want to participate in these literacy activities. But one should remember that on the whole those who already benefit from the development agencies tend to be the younger adults in the community. We would expect that it would also be the younger ones who would be the most motivated to engage in literacy activities.

As noted in the model presented during the literacy survey, the SIL workers in the area, backed by SIL Cameroon, would stand ready to assist in the linguistic and technical aspects of producing functional literacy material in the mother tongue, and would expect to

collaborate with the development agencies in developing the choice and content of material.

James N. POHLIG
Yaoundé, the 30th of April 1993

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GREBE, Karl. 1991. "Scientific report on literacy surveys." Yaoundé:
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