MINISTRY OF SCIENTIFIC
AND TECHNICAL RESEARCH

FIELD NOTES:

STUDIES TOWARDS THE SEGMENTAL

PORTION OF AN ALPHABET PROPOSAL

FOR MOGHAMO

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1997

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1. INTRODUCTORY NOTES

Moghamo is spoken in the Batibo Subdivision of the Momo Division in the N.W. Province of Cameroon. Its ALCAM No. is [866]. It is a geographical neighbour of Meta', and there is widespread agreement in the population that Meta' and Moghamo are mutually intelligible. This conclusion was reached also by a sociolinguistic survey of the Momo languages, conducted by a SIL team in November 1989 (Chesley, William & Starr, Allan, 1990, "Linguistic and Sociolinguistic Survey in the Momo Division", ms SIL, Yaounde).

Some elites of the Moghamo population approached me with the request for help in taking the necessary steps to teach the reading and writing of their dialect in the primary schools of the Batibo Subdivision. Knowing of these desires within the Moghamo speaking population, I started some comparative phonological studies of Meta'/Moghamo while in Yaounde during January 1997.

Since one of the first steps a future Moghamo Language Committee would have to undertake would be to experiment with reading and writing their language, and since this would involve adults who are already well literate in English, I aimed at finding out whether the reading and writing book which is in existence for Meta' could perhaps be used as training tool for Moghamo speakers. They could perhaps base their experiments on the reading and writing system which is in use for Meta'.

The Moghamo data were supplied by John Mbo NDAM of Batibo, age 28 years, graduate of the University of Yaounde in the subjects History and Economics.

In August 1997, a meeting was held with some Moghamo elites living in Bamenda. My wife and I gave a report on the preliminary findings of Moghamo phonology, made a first tentative proposal for an experimental alphabet, and advised on the formation of a language committee. Members of the meeting pointed out that some of the differences found between Meta' and Moghamo were not true of all sub-dialects of Moghamo. I therefore stressed the need to make a closer investigation of the various sub-dialects, before deciding on an alphabet.

In section 2, some of the phonological differences between Meta' and the sub-dialect of Moghamo spoken by Mr. Ndam are listed together with some hypotheses which need to be tested with more data and in the light of the different sub-dialects of Moghamo.

In section 3, examples of the vowels of Meta' and illustrative Meta' words compared with their cognates in Moghamo are listed, indicating how the written forms of these Moghamo words could be written with a practical orthography, assuming that the hypotheses formulated in section 2 were found to be correct.

The Meta' and the Moghamo examples in the following sections are written with tone marks, using the system which is at present in use for Meta' linguistic notation. However, no systematic study of the tonal system of Moghamo has so far been made. It is, of course, necessary to carry out such a study before an orthography for Moghamo can be proposed for wider use.

2.   SOME PHONOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN META' AND MOGHAMO

Some phonological differences between Meta' and Moghamo were observed, which will be briefly commented on here below:

2.1 NASALIZED VOWELS

Some nasalization of vowels was found in Moghamo, while Meta' has no nasalized vowels. The hypothesis is that nasalization of vowel is predictable on the basis of nasal consonants in the environment and that therefore in a practical alphabet nasalization does not need to be marked. The following examples are instances of nasalized vowels im Moghamo. The conditioning factor could be the following nasal consonant.

Phonetic	Proposed orthographic	Meaning
ibǫ́n	ibón	*farm*
Átǫ́n	atə́n	*chair*
Áfę́ní	aféní	*lock*

There is however an example in the limited sample which indicates that a preceding nasal noun class prefix could also constitute the conditioning environment for the nasalisation of the stem vowel (see the following example).

Phonetic	Proposed orthographic	Meaning
mbę̀b	mbə̀b	*k.o. vegetable (huckleberry)*

2.2 VOWEL GLIDES

Moghamo exhibits vowel glides, which do not exist in Meta'. The data so far investigated justify the hypothesis, that there is no contrast between gliding and non-gliding vowels, and that in a practical alphabet the two types of vowels do not need to be distinguished. Members of the meeting observed that the use of vowel glides is different in the various sub-dialects. Examples of Moghamo vowel glides are:

Phonetics	Proposed orthographic	Meaning
bɔ́g ~ bɔ́ᵘg ~ bɔ́ᵘg	bɔ́g	*dog*
fɛ̄g ~ fɛ̄ⁱg	fɛ̄g	*finger, toe*

2.3   SIBILANTS ARE ALVEOPALATAL INSTEAD OF ALVEOLAR, AS IN META'

Since no contrast was found between alveopalatal sibilants and their alveolar counterparts the hypothesis is formulated, that the alveopalatal sibilants can be represented in the practical alphabet by the alveolar counterparts.

Meta'	Moghamo		Meaning
	phonetic	orthography	
sī	ʃɛ̄g	sēg	*soil, ground, earth*
jǐ	dʒɛ́g	jég	*k.o. seeds used for soup*
ɫ zòŋ	ī ʒɔ̰̀ŋ	ī zòŋ	*to fight*

2.4   SUMMARY

Should these hypotheses prove to be correct it can be assumed that Moghamo can be written unambigously using the same practical alphabet as Meta'.

3   COMPARISON OF SOME MATERIAL IN META' AND MOGHAMO

In the following examples illustrating the eight vowels of the Meta' vowel system. They are compared to the corresponding Moghamo words written in the practical alphabet as proposed for Moghamo, as well as in IPA phonetic script.

a

No.	Meta'	*English*	Moghamo	
			Proposed	Phonetics
1	ká	*cashew*	ká	ká
2	kàn	*nest*	kàn	kàn
3	já	*dry leaves*	já	já
4	wán	*child*	ŋwán	ŋwä̰́n

e

No.	Meta'	English	Moghamo	
			Proposed	Phonetics
5	té !	*kick!*	té !	tɛ́
6	ndèd	*climbing hoop*	ndèd	ndɛ̀d
7	béd	*chip (of wood)*		
8	nyê	*bitter cola*	nyê	ɲê

i

	Meta'	English	Moghamo	
			Proposed	Phonetics
9	fī	*finger, toe*	fēg	fɛ̄g
10	tìd	*lice*	tìd	tìd
11	sī	*soil, ground, earth*	sēg	ʃɛ̄g
12	jí	*k.o. seeds used for soup*	jég	dʒɛ́g

o

No.	Meta'	English	Moghamo	
			Proposed	Phonetics
13	gôb	*skin*	gɔ̂b	gɔ̂b
14	mbòb	*k.o. vegetable*	mbàb	mbə̀b
15	mbōm	*cowries*	mbə̄m	mbə̄m
16	mbǒm	*chalk*	mbə̌m	mbə̌m

u

No.	Meta'	English	Moghamo Proposed	Phonetics
17	bú	*dog*	bɔ́g	bɔ́g
18	mbùm°	*seed*	mbùm°	mbùm
19	jú	*bee, honey*	jɔ́g	dʒɔ́g
20	kūb	*k.o. basket*	kūb	kūb

The following are some example sentences, containing the vowels so far listed. Each time the top row is given in the current Meta' orthography, the row below using the proposed Moghamo alphabet.

1) Meta'   Bá   ā   wán !   *Carry our Baby!*
   Moghamo   Bá   wā   ŋwán !

2) Meta'   À   pè   fèn   tê   mbān   tē?   *Did you reach there and sell your nails?*
   Moghamo   À   pè   fèn   te   mbān   tē?

3) Meta'   Ā   wán   wǐ ?   *Where is our child?*
   Moghamo   Wā   ŋwán   wèg ?

4) Meta'   Kúd   ká   zē !   *Eat the cashew nut!*
   Moghamo   Kúd   ká   zē !

5) Meta'   À   nǒm   fī   fúm.   *You bite my finger.*
   Moghamo   À   nɔ̌m   fúm   fēd.

ɨ

No.	Meta'	English	Moghamo Proposed	Phonetics
1	vɨ́	*oilpalm nut*	bɨ́	bɨ́
2	ɨjɨ̵	*thief*	ɨjɨ́	ɨjɨ́

No.	Meta'	English	Moghamo Proposed	Phonetics
3	ɨví	death	iwú	íwú
4	ɨtígɨ	filaria	itígí	ítɨ́gɨ́
5	ɨbígɨ	hole	ibígí	íbɨ́gɨ́
6	ɨmíg	moon	imə́g	ímə́g
7	ɨzíg	witch	izə́g	íʒə́g
8	fɨ̀jɨ̀	fly	fə̀jì	fə̀jì

ə

No.	Meta'	English	Moghamo Proposed	Phonetics
1	bə̂d	people	bə̂d	bə̂d
2	ətə̄b	cocoyam leaves	atə̄b	ʌ́tə̄b
3	əbə́n	farm	ibɔ́n	íbɔ̃́n
4	ətə́n	chair	atə́n	ʌ́tə̃́n
5	əkə́n	trench	ìkə̄ŋ	ìkə̃̄ŋ
6	əfə̂n	lock	afə́ní	ʌ́fə̃́nɨ́
7	sə̄n	elephant	sə̄n	ʃə̃̄n
8	əzə̂	sweeping instrument	azə̂n	ʌ́ʒə̃̂n
9	njə̀m	dream	njə̀m	njə̃̀m
10	ənə́m	blood	anə́m	ʌ́nə̃́m
11	ətə̄d	mad person	atə̄d	ʌ́tə̄d
12	ətə́m	calabash	fìŋgwè'ɨ	fìŋgʷè'ɨ

ɔ

No.	Meta'	English	Moghamo Proposed	Phonetics
1	ɨ̄ bɔ̄	to fear	ɨ̄ bɔ̄	ɨ̄ bɔ̄
2	bɔ́n	children	bɔ́n	bɔ́n

3	ifɔ̂n	*chief*	ifɔ̂n	ífɔ̰̂n
4	ɨ̄ nɔ̄	*to drink*	ī nɔ̄	ī nɔ̄
5	ɨ̄ bɔ̄m	*to mould*	ī bɔ̄m	ī bɔ̰m
6	ɨ̄ zɔ̀ŋ	*to fight*	ī zɔ̀ŋ	ī ʒɔ̰̀ŋ
7	ɨ̄ tɔ̄	*to bore a hole*	ī tɔ̄	ī tɔ̄
8	ɨ̄ tɔ̀n	*to roast; to burn*	ī tɔ̀n	ī tɔ̰̀n
9	ɨ̄ kɔ̄m	*to clean; to scrub*	ī kɔ̀m	ī kɔ̰m
10	ndɔ̀n	*ill luck*	ndɔ̀n	ndɔ̰̀n
11	ɨ̄ nɔ̄n	*to beg*	ī nɔ̄n	ī nɔ̰n
12	jɔ́	*snake*	jɔ́	dʒɔ̰́

4   CONCLUSION

This first brief comparison of Meta' and Moghamo indicates that there is a high probability that both dialects can be written with the same segments, without including further special characters for the one or the other. It needs to be stressed, however, that the hypotheses formulated in section 2 need thorough testing. The tonal system of Moghamo also needs to be compared with that of Meta'. A decision needs to be made too, as to which of the sub-dialects of Moghamo is to be the basis for the alphabet and orthography.