

MINISTRY OF SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL RESEARCH

A RAPID APPRAISAL SURVEY OF MUBAKO
(ALCAM 300 Samba leek)

(NGO KETUNJIA DIVISION, NORTH WEST PROVINCE)

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Rapid Appraisal Report of Mubako (Ndop Plain Balis)

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report describes a rapid appraisal survey of the Mubako language, which was carried out in November 1993 by Caroline Grant, Margaret Griffin and Paul Huey of the Société Internationale de Linguistique (SIL).

1.1 Background

The Mubako language is found in the Ndop Plain, in the Ngo-Ketunja Division, east of Bamenda. It originated in the North Province of Cameroon, as well as across the border in Nigeria. A group of Chamba people migrated from the north to the West Province, and then to the Ndop Plain in the North West Province about 150 years ago. They established 5 different villages: Bali Kumbat, Bali Gashu, Bali Gansin, Bali Gham, and Bali Nyonga. The first 4 speak Mubako, which is related to the Chamba (or Samba Leko) language which is spoken in the north. Bali Nyonga speaks primarily the Bali Nyonga dialect of Mungaka [900], which they learned from the local population when they settled in their present location. They are, however, still considered (both by themselves as well as by the other Bali peoples) ethnically and culturally part of the Bali or Chamba people, and they continue to practice the same traditions as the other Bali groups.

The Ethnologue (Grimes 1992:204) entry for Samba Leko is as follows:

SAMBA LEKO (CHAMBA LEEKO, SAMBA) (NDI) 42,000 total, including 10,000 Samba Leko and 22,000 Samba Bali. West of Poli and south of Beka Subdivision along the Nigerian border, approximately between Chamba and the Mayo-Oulti River, Faro Division, North province. Daganyonga dialect near Ndop Plain in the villages of Bali Kumbat, Bali Gansin, and Bali Gashu (Ndop Subdivision) and in Bali Gham (Bamenda Subdivision), Mezam Division, North West Province. Also in Nigeria. Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, North, Adamawa-Ubangi, Adamawa, Leko-Nimbari, Leko. Dialects: ...Samba Bali (Ndagam, Daganonga)...Daganyonga.

ALCAM (Atlas Linguistique du Cameroun, Dieu and Renaud 1983:94) classifies this speech form as the Daganyonga dialect of Samba Leeko (ALCAM code [300]) language. It also states that the 25,000 speakers of this dialect are found in the four villages of Bali Kumbat, Bali Gansin, Bali Gashu and Bali Gham.

The speakers themselves and those from neighbouring languages call the dialect Mubako, which is the name which will be used in this report. Another name which is sometimes used by the speakers for their speech form is Daganyonga.

The population figures from the 1987 census as given by the Divisional Officer in Ndop for the Bali villages located in the Ndop Subdivision are as follows:

Bali Kumbat 14,000
Bali Gashu 1,500
Bali Gansin 1,000

2.0 The Survey

A. Introduction

A rapid appraisal group interview was done in three of the four villages which speak Mubako: Bali Kumbat, Bali Gansin and Bali Gashu (Bali Gham, which is situated in the Mezam Division, was not visited). A church interview with 2 Dutch priests of the Roman Catholic church was also conducted in Bali Kumbat. A 120 ALCAM word list was taken in Bali Kumbat and Bali Gansin. The surveys were performed from November 9-10, 1993 by two SIL survey teams: Caroline Grant, Peggy Griffin and Paul Huey, and Lawrence Seguin and Joseph Mbongué.

The goals of this survey included determining the homogeneity between the Mubako speakers of the Ndop Plain with the Samba (Chamba) Leko dialect spoken in the North Province.

B. Procedures

Type of survey

This survey made use of a method known as Rapid Appraisal. This approach is characterised by its limited goal of gaining a general overview of the sociolinguistic situation in a particular area. The primary method of data gathering in Rapid Appraisal is the use of sociolinguistic interviews with traditional and church leaders. The information gathered in the group interview with traditional leaders is usually confirmed by another group interview comprised of other speakers from the community or through individual questionnaires. A 120-item ALCAM word list is also collected in each language or dialect surveyed

Main areas of focus

Throughout the survey, three major areas were considered:

- a) the dialect situation, the level of comprehension of related speech forms, and the corresponding attitudes;
- b) possible bilingualism in languages of wider communication (particularly Pidgin English), including degree of proficiency and domains of use;

c) the viability of the language and the feasibility of a language development project, as revealed in overall language attitudes and reported patterns of language use.

3.0 Presentation of Results

A. Dialect Situation and Intercomprehension

The groups interviewed in Bali Gansin and Bali Gashu stated that there is no difference between the way people speak Mubako in the 4 above-mentioned Bali villages. The Bali Kumbat elders stated that though the difference is only slight, the Bali Kumbat dialect is a bit different from the other three.

They gave the example that for the phrase "let us go" the Bali Kumbat dialect is "fada ka" and the other dialect is "fada dika." They also stated that their own (Nekobi) dialect is closer to the original, but that the two dialects are so close that even a child of 5-6 years old who hears the dialect (which is not his own) for the first time would immediately comprehend it.

When asked which dialect should be used if Mubako were used as the language of instruction in the first two years of primary school, the elders of Bali Kumbat said it does not matter since they are really the same.

Therefore, while the dialect situation may not be completely homogenous, it appears that the differences between the two dialects are small and there are positive attitudes towards the other dialect on the part of those (Bali Kumbat) who noted the difference.

B. Multilingualism

1. Knowledge of neighboring languages

Since Mubako (or Samba-Leeko as it is identified in ALCAM) is quite distinct linguistically from its neighboring languages (300 vs. 800's and 900's), it is not surprising to discover that none of the neighbouring languages are understood by Mubako speakers, with the exception of Mungaka, which is understood by some of the older members of the villages. This is due to the relationship with the Mungaka speakers of Bali Nyonga, who are still considered Chamba people.

The language which is much closer to Mubako is the Chamba (Samba Leko) language of the north. According to the interview groups, since there has not been much contact with these speakers in recent years, it is difficult for them to comment on intercomprehension between the dialects. A visit organized by Pastor Gana (from Bali Kumbat) of the Presbyterian church included some men from the Chamba in the north.

In 1982 or 1983, Edward Mueller of LBT, together with two northern Samba men, visited the Bali villages of the Ndop Plain. They took a basic 200+ wordlist and did some recorded story testing. Although they found an overall 85%+ percentage of lexical similarity, Mueller

reported one of the two men as saying that "the people there talked like the people of the old days here in the north" (letter from Mueller to Seguin, October 30, 1993).

Concerning using the northern translation in the south, Mueller wrote that "it is probably not very realistic. Even though the people there can communicate well with each other orally, there are major differences (...) I guess one can expect these sort of changes after around 160 years of separation between dialects. They have incorporated many words there from the surrounding languages, but they complained extensively about our people here incorporating so many Fulani words."

While the Bali villages of the Ndop Plain consider themselves to be one people with the Chamba of the north, their respective speech forms have changed sufficiently over the years that their intercomprehension is difficult. Older people are said to have been able to communicate more easily with the Chamba speakers than younger people. It would be advisable to contact Pastor Gana in Bamenda in order to ascertain his perspective on the mutual intelligibility of Chamba with Mubako.

2. Knowledge of languages of wider communication

The main language of wider communication which is used among the Bali villages is Pidgin English. In Bali Kumbat, most of the young people are said to be fluent in Pidgin, while the older people are not. They said that even the young people's understanding of Pidgin is "not deep", and not as profound as Mubako.

C. Language vitality and viability

1. Language Use

a. Language Use in non-religious domains

Mubako is the language which is used in the home, in the fields and for traditional activities. Children do not generally learn Pidgin until they go to school, unless they have outsiders living in their compound. Young people tend to mix English and Pidgin words with Mubako. Otherwise, Pidgin is generally spoken when communicating with non-Mubako speakers.

b. Language Use in religious domains

The two Dutch Catholic priests resident in Bali Kumbat told us that the Presbyterian church there has about 50 members and no church building. A pastor from Bafanji visits them occasionally. The priests did not know what language is used in the Presbyterian church service.

There are 2500 members of the Catholic church in Bali Kumbat and about half of these are practising. There are more than 10 quarters in Bali Kumbat village, though some of these are uninhabited. There are about 500 Muslims in Bali Kumbat, though there are no mosques. The Fon recently married a Muslim woman and converted to Islam.

The Catholic mass in Bali Kumbat is held mostly in Pidgin, except for the Lord's Prayer, which is in English. Some of the announcements (rarely) are in Mubako, but most are given in Pidgin. The children also speak Mubako outside of the church service.

The priests said that they did not think the people would be interested in reading the Bible or other materials, were they to be translated into Mubako, because the people do not seem to be interested in spiritual things nor in reading.

2. Attitudes toward the Mother Tongue

The attitudes toward Mubako seemed to be quite positive in each of the three villages which were surveyed. Each of the groups that were interviewed had a positive response to the question regarding using Mubako as the language of instruction for the first two years of primary school. The groups in Bali Kumbat and Bali Gansin also expressed a positive attitude towards using Chamba (Samba Leko) written materials if they could be adapted and understood by Mubako speakers. The Bali Gashu group said that they would not accept written materials in Chamba, and felt that they would not be able to understand them.

All three groups were interested in having literacy classes for adults (as well as for children) in Mubako. The Bali Kumbat elders said that they are very interested in developing the Mubako language. They stated that they would need to check with the Fon regarding possible Bali Kumbat linguists or other scholars who could be trained in linguistics/translation principles, or otherwise involved in a Mubako language development project.

3. Language Maintenance and Shift

The Mubako language seems to be quite vital. It is the language of the home and of most other domains of daily life in the Bali villages. There was no indication from the villages visited that other languages were encroaching on the use of Mubako, even over the next 50 years.

D. Socioeconomic Factors

1. Openness to change

Though development projects are currently limited by lack of funds due to economic constraints, the development committees in Bali Kumbat (BAKDU) and Bali Gansin have been fairly active in various projects, such as building the Fon's palace, a school and a health center (Bali Kumbat).

2. Middle-aged leadership

Leaders are chosen by succession in each of the Bali villages, and range in age from middle aged to older. Those living outside the village will come to the village when summoned to take positions of leadership. There seems to be no concern regarding future leadership in any of the Bali villages surveyed.

3. Homogeneity/social cohesion

There seems to be quite a bit of ethnic and linguistic homogeneity among the Bali villages of the Ndop Plain. Even the Bali Nyonga people are considered the same people with the other Bali villages, though they primarily speak Mungaka, rather than Mubako. The tie with the Chamba in the North is not quite so strong due to limited contact because of the geographic and linguistic distance which separates the Chamba from the Bali villages.

4. Leaders' attitudes toward language standardisation

The leaders attitudes in each of the Bali villages surveyed seemed to be quite positive towards standardising Mubako.

4.0 Recommendations concerning standardisation

Before beginning work on standardising Mubako, further studies should be made regarding the possibility of using (or at least adapting) Chamba written materials among Mubako speakers. There seem to be positive attitudes towards this possibility (except in Bali Gashu). Perhaps a program such as SIL's CARLA (computer aided related languages adaptation) could be used in adapting books, such as the New Testament, which will be ready for publication in Chamba in the next year or two.

5.0 ALCAM/Ethnologue/Bible Translation Needs Bulletin Changes

- ALCAM: No changes.

- Ethnologue: Add "(also known as Mubako)" after "Daganyonga dialect near Ndop Plain..." and "Bible portions 1987? (First Draft - BTNB)."

- BTNB: Add under Samba Leko entry: "Daganyonga (Mubako) - Probable translation need."

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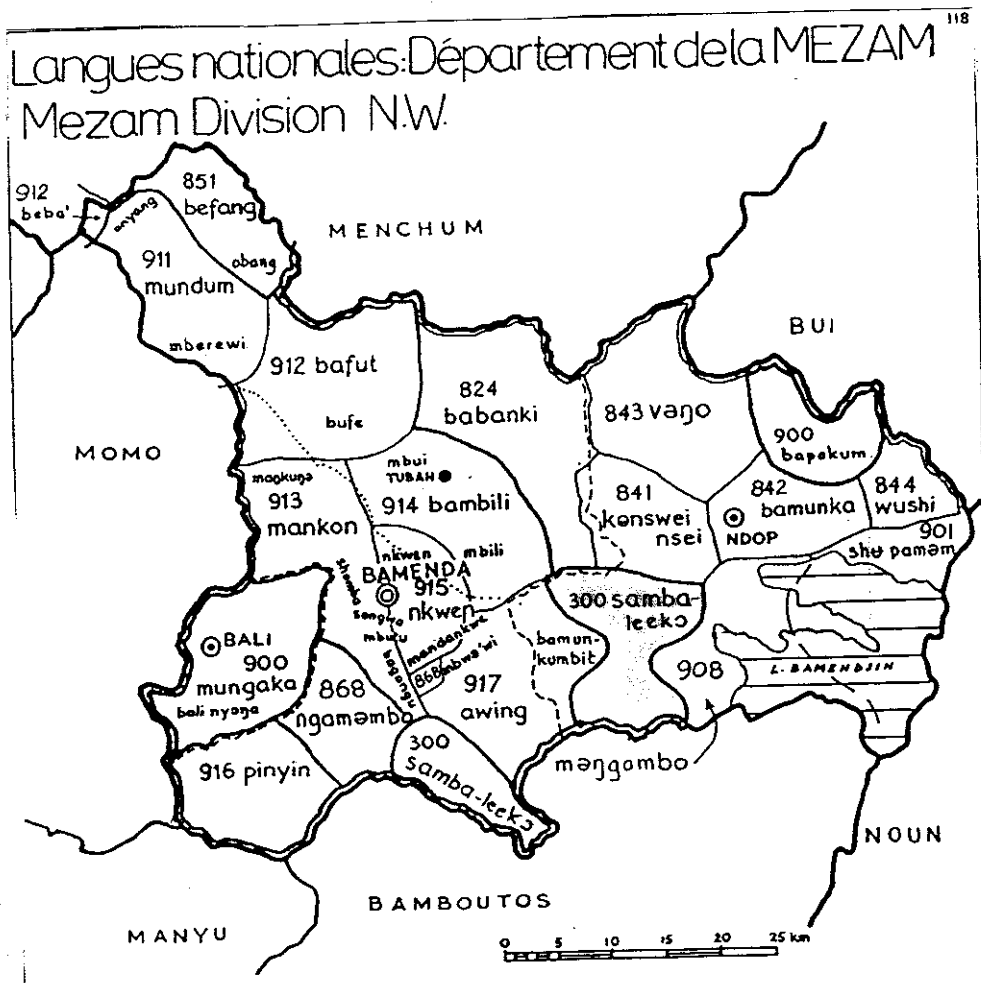
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ANNEXE A

Localisation de l'aire dialectale mubako (samba leeko)
 (Source: Breton et Fohtung 1991:133)



ANNEXE B

Carte administrative
(Source: Breton et Fohtung 1991:132)

