

MINISTRY OF SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL RESEARCH

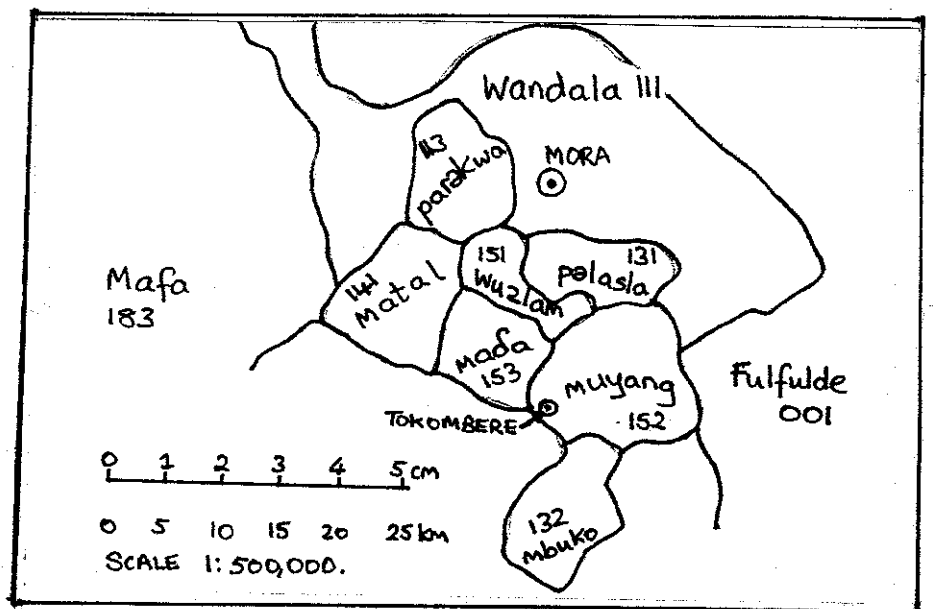
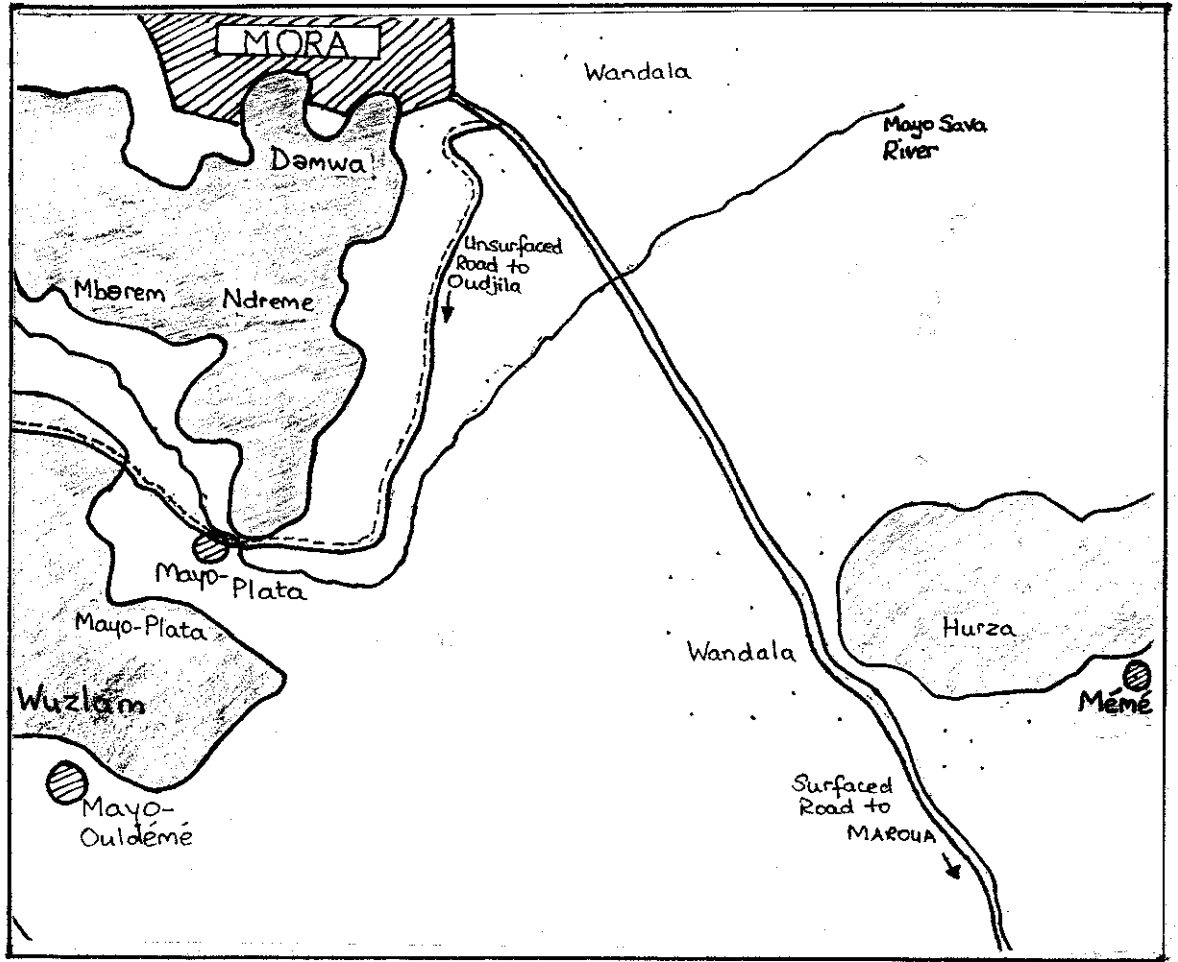
A SOCIOLINGUISTIC SURVEY OF PƏLASLA
(RAPID APPRAISAL)

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Maps showing area where Pelasla is spoken.



SOCIOLINGUISTIC SURVEY OF PƏLASLA

I.0 INTRODUCTION

I.1 Background

The Pəlasla language is spoken in the southern Mora massif south of Mora, in the Mora and Tokombéré Sub-Divisions, Mayo-Sava Division, Extreme North Province of Cameroon. The population of speakers of the Pəlasla speech forms is given by the Ethnologue (Grimes 1988a: 186) as 7,500 (in 1982), and by the Atlas Linguistique du Cameroun (ALCAM), (Dieu and Renaud 1983: 160) as more than 10,000. The Office de la recherche scientifique et technique outre-mer (ORSTOM) gives a population of 8,500, based on recent unpublished demographic surveys.

ALCAM gives the names of five dialects which make up Pəlasla as follows:

- (i) Dəmwa;
- (ii) Ndreme; all spoken in the south of the Mora-Massif
- (iii) Mbərem; Canton, Mora Sub-Division.

- (iv) Pəlasla, spoken in the Mayo-Ouldémé Canton, Tokombéré Sub-Division;

- (v) Hurza, spoken in the Mémé Canton, Mora Sub-Division.

The Ethnologue also names the same five dialects, and gives alternative pronunciations for each.

ALCAM classifies Pəlasla as a group of intercomprehensible dialects in the Mafa sub-group of the Wandala-Mafa group of languages, and gives the code number 131.

The designation "Pəlasla" for the entire group of speech forms was chosen by the authors of ALCAM because, "the market of Mayo-Plata (where Pəlasla is spoken) acts as a centre for the whole area." (Dieu and Renaud 1983: 88 [our translation])

In this report, we will employ the same term Pəlasla, to describe the five speech forms collectively. However, in order to avoid confusion, we will give the name "Mayo-Plata" to the speech variety known locally as "Pəlasla," since Mayo-Plata is the name of the main village where this is spoken.

1.2 Geographical Position

The speech forms of Pəlasla are spoken mostly in the area known as the "Mora Massif," which is made up of several large hills connected by a ridge. Each of these hills has a name, and the speech form which is spoken in the villages on the summit of each of these hills takes its name from there, e.g. Ndreme, named after Ndreme mountain, and Dəmwa, named after Dəmwa mountain. There are two speech forms of Pəlasla which are found elsewhere: the Hurza-speaking communities, surrounding the base of Hurza mountain, and the Mayo-Plata speakers who inhabit both Ouldémé mountain and one village at its base.

Languages which immediately neighbour with Pəlasla are: Wandala (ALCAM code: 111) to the north; Muyang (152) and Wuzlam (151) to the south and southwest; and Fulfuldé (001) to the east. Nearby languages include: Matal (141), Mada (153), Mbuko (132), Məlokwo (154), and Parekwa (113).

I.3 Previous Studies

Little research seems to have been completed on this language, apart from wordlists in four of the Pəlasla speech forms, ie., Mbərem, Hurza, Mayo-Plata, and Gwendele, an alternative name for Mayo-Plata when it is spoken on the plain.

II.0 PROCEDURES

The survey was carried out by David and Karen Bradley, and Caroline Grant, of the Société Internationale de Linguistique, on the 7th May, then from the 11th to the 23rd May 1992.

This survey was carried out using a recently developed method known as "Rapid Appraisal." This approach is characterised by its limited goals (to gain a general overview of the sociolinguistic situation in a particular area), and specific, non-technical procedures (usually limited to informal interviews with administrative and traditional authorities, church and mission leaders, and group and individual questionnaires). Other data may also be collected where relevant, such as: additional linguistic data, or felt needs for development.

Throughout the survey, three major areas were kept under consideration:

- (a) the dialect situation and the level of comprehension of related speech forms, and the corresponding attitudes;

- (b) possible bilingualism with languages of wider communication (particularly with Wandala and Fulfulde), and its extent, as well as corresponding attitudes.
- (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.

The following two diagnostic questions were used for determining how well related languages are understood, and whether comprehension is based on inherent intelligibility (due to linguistic similarity) or to language learning (due to contact with speakers of the language):

- (1) "If you are in that place, where language X is spoken, what language do you use, what language do they use, and how well do you understand each other?"
- (2) "Can even a young child from this place understand someone from that place? (If not, how old must the child be before he understands?)"

III.0 RESULTS AND EVALUATION

III.1. Dialect Situation and Inherent Intercomprehension

As already noted above, three of the five speech forms recognised by ALCAM and Ethnologue are situated around the Mora massif. The other two speech forms are: Hurza, whose speakers are found at the base of Mount Hurza, and Mayo-Plata, found on and at the base of Mount Ouldémé.

Group interviews conducted in all five of the speech forms gave a strong indication that there is a homogenous dialect situation. There are no problems of intercomprehension among the varieties of Pəlasla, and small children from each group can understand speakers from every other group. This indicates that there is adequate inherent intercomprehension between all the Pəlasla speech forms. This is examined in detail below.

It was claimed by some people that the two most diverse of all these varieties (when compared with the others) are Hurza and Mayo-Plata. This is not surprising, since Hurza is at some 3 to 4 km distance from the other Pəlasla-speaking groups, and Mayo-Plata is the furthest distant from the main town (Mora), and located the closest to another language (Ouldémé). However, none of the twenty-four individuals interviewed, nor any of those spoken to in a group situation, said that comprehension was

hindered because of these diversities. Each speech variety of Pəlasla is now examined individually.

III.1.1 Dəmwa

Dəmwa speakers, in both group interview situations and from conversations with individuals, claimed that their language is the same as that spoken in the communities of Ndreme, Mbərem, Hurza, and Mayo-Plata. Even small children from Dəmwa can understand all the other variants.

It was said that the name of the language is "Mindreme" for language variants Ndreme and Mbərem, but that it is called "Hurza" amongst the Hurza people and "Mayo-Plata" amongst the Mayo-Plata community, although the language is exactly the same. Some people thought that there is a difference in "tone" between Hurza and Dəmwa, and others felt that there is a "difference in voice" between Mayo-Plata and Dəmwa.

Although most people can identify which village a person is from simply by the way he talks, there are no problems whatsoever in comprehension, which does NOT have to be acquired through exposure.

Dəmwa speakers expressed a readiness to use reading and writing materials in Ndreme, Mbərem, Mayo-Plata and Hurza, thus confirming further that these variants are acceptable.

Several Mayo-Plata speakers said that there were slight differences between the speech form of Dəmwa and their own, but that most of these were due to a "difference in tone," and that the language was essentially the same.

Hurza speakers also claimed that the tone of Dəmwa differed from that of Hurza, again, not enough to disturb comprehension, since small children would still be able to understand completely.

Ndreme and Mbərem speakers felt that Dəmwa was the same language as theirs, and also said that it was called "Mindreme."

III.1.2 Ndreme

Ndreme speakers, both in group interviews and in individual questionnaires, said that they considered the other four variants the same language as their own. There seems to be no problem of comprehension with the other variants, and small children from Ndreme can understand other Pəlasla speakers without problem, and vice-versa. Ndreme speakers would also be willing to learn how to read and write using materials in any of the other Pəlasla speech forms.

III.1.3 Mbørem

Speakers of the Mbørem variant of Pølasla said that the name of their language was Mindreme, and that it was spoken by the Hurza, Mayo-Plata, Dømwā and Ndreme communities. They seem to see themselves as "one single people," and speakers of "one single language." Mbørem speakers who spoke to the surveyors expressed that they would be willing to use literacy materials in any of the other Pølasla varieties.

Generally, Mbørem was seen as an identical speech form to Ndreme and Dømwā. All three of these communities live next to each other along the base of the Mora massif.

III.1.4 Hurza

In a group setting and in individual conversations, Hurza speakers felt that Mindreme (which encompassed Dømwā, Ndreme, and Mbørem) was the same language as their own, with differences only "in tone" in Dømwā. There seem to be no problems of comprehension between Hurza speakers and speakers of the other speech variants, and even small children from the Hurza community can understand speakers from the other groups.

III.1.5 Mayo-Plata

Members of the Mayo-Plata-speaking community expressed the feeling that their language was "the same thing" as that spoken in Dømwā, Ndreme, Mbørem, and Hurza, and that there is no difference between Mayo-Plata and these other four speech varieties. One person said that he would have to "change the tone" if he were speaking with someone from one of the above groups, and another individual claimed that he would understand only if other Pølasla speakers spoke very slowly. However, the majority of those spoken to expressed that they would have no problems of comprehension, and that even small children would be able to understand other forms of Pølasla.

Mayo-Plata speakers said that they would be willing to learn to read and write using materials produced in any of the speech forms.

III.1.6 Comments

There is good reason to suggest, from the limited information gathered, that there is adequate inherent intercomprehension between the speakers of all the varieties of Pølasla. The attitudes of each community seem to be very positive towards using materials produced in any of the

other varieties. One Hurza speaker, when asked whether he would be willing to use reading materials in another Pəlasla speech variant, said: "But we have the Bible in our own language already!" This was later discovered to be the four Gospels of the New Testament, which have been translated into Mayo-Plata. This emphasised to the survey team the extent to which Hurza speakers feel that their language is the same as Mayo-Plata.

In a group interview held in the Mindreme-speaking village of Afam, the village chief, when asked where else his language (Afam, named after his village) was spoken, listed the other four Pəlasla-speaking communities by name, ie. Dəmwa, Mbərem, Mayo-Plata, and Hurza. This confirmed very clearly what the other communities had expressed: that the language spoken by the Pəlasla, while having slight variations, is essentially felt to be the same in all communities.

III.2. MULTILINGUALISM

The information presented in this section comes mainly from responses to the Questionnaire (see Appendix), questions 1.7 and 2.1 to 2.10, as well as from responses given in group interviews.

III.2.1. Knowledge of neighbouring languages

The area where the Pəlasla speech forms are found is surrounded by the following related and non-related languages. They are: Wandala (ALCAM code: 111) to the north; Muyang (152) and Wuzlam (151) to the south and southwest; and Fulfulde (001) to the east. Mafa (183), Parəkwa (113), Muyang (152), and Mada (153) are languages which are nearby, but not directly bordering with Pəlasla.

As a result of group interviews and answers to individual questionnaires, the overall impression gained was that there is no generalised bilingualism among Pəlasla speakers, that is, there is no one language or speech form which is used uniformly by all of the Pəlasla-speaking communities as a second language for the purpose of wider communication. In Pəlasla-speaking communities which border with other language groups ("transition zones") there is a greater occurrence of learned acquisition of other related and non-related languages; the degree of acquisition varies according to the geographical position of the particular community concerned.

(a) Wandala

Wandala forms part of one of these "transition zones," particularly in Dəmwa and Hurza villages. In the Dəmwa villages closest to Mora, Wandala is used in the local markets and in the main market of Mora, in some church services, and at the local dispensary. Wandala is also used by the Hurza community in similar domains. In contrast to the age at which the various Pəlasla speech forms are learned (ie. from infancy onwards), it is generally considered that Wandala is not learned until a child is at least 7 to 8 years old in the Hurza community, and at least 10 to 15 years old in the Dəmwa community.

However, villages in the Ndreme, Mbərem, and Mayo-Plata communities have very few Wandala speakers, and very little understanding of Wandala, beyond that which is needed for trading at the local market.

There was a general consensus, among those who were interviewed in the above-mentioned communities, that Wandala is not used extensively by all of the Pəlasla communities. One member of a Mbərem-speaking village expressed: "There is only one person here who can speak Wandala."

(b) Fulfulde

Fulfulde is another language which would act as a language of wider communication, if it were spoken extensively throughout the Pəlasla-speaking area. Fulfulde is employed for trading purposes only, and by those who travel regularly outside the Pəlasla area. In the Hurza and Mayo-Plata communities, Fulfulde is used in some church services, and in situations where the mother tongue is not understood by a visitor, e.g. in a market situation. Apart from this, none of the respondents, either in a group situation or individually, said that Fulfulde was widely spoken in any of the Pəlasla communities.

(c) Wuzlam

Wuzlam is often spoken as a second language by inhabitants of the Mayo-Plata-speaking villages. This is mainly because the inhabitants of this area which borders with the Wuzlam-speaking communities have considerable contact with them, often intermarry with Wuzlam speakers, and attend the same markets as Wuzlam speakers. Wuzlam is not widely spoken by Pəlasla speakers from other communities.

(d) Other languages

According to the information obtained, other languages such as Pərekwa, Matal, Mada, Muyang, and Mbuko, are only spoken

or understood by Pəlasla speakers if there is already some close family tie. None of these languages is otherwise immediately understood by Pəlasla speakers, without some form of learning having to take place first. Of these, Parəkwa, Matal and Mada have either already been standardised, or are in the process of being standardised.

(e) French

Although French is one of Cameroon's two official languages, it was generally reported that French is mostly spoken by schoolchildren, and by those adults who have been to school, or had significant contact with French speakers, since it is the language of instruction in government schools in this area. There were indications, at the time of the survey, that the minority of children attended school and learned French there.

In conclusion, from the limited data obtained, it seems apparent that there is no single language or speech form which could act as a language of wider communication for the Pəlasla-speaking peoples, apart from their own mother tongue.

III.3.0 LANGUAGE VITALITY AND VIABILITY

This section is based on responses obtained from questions 2.7 and 2.8, which elicit language use patterns in various domains, and also questions 3.1 and 3.2, which are designed to uncover attitudes towards use of the vernacular in school and as a written form. Question 3.6 gives insight into the perceived viability of the language and the possible encroachment of other languages on the people's communication habits.

III.3.1 Language Use

The general view from information gathered in group interview situations was that the mother tongue is always used in domestic circumstances, and by all age groups.

According to information obtained from individual questionnaires, 22 of the 24 respondents interviewed indicated that they would speak only their mother tongue in all domestic situations, ie. within the family home, within the local community with contemporaries, and in the fields working. The exceptions to this pattern occurred when people were likely to meet non-Pəlasla speakers (at main markets in Mora and Tokombéré), or where the head of the household (husband or father) is not a mother-tongue speaker of Pəlasla.

Of twelve respondents who had children, eight said that

their own children spoke Wandala as well as their mother tongue, and two said that their children spoke Wuzlam as well as their mother tongue. When asked which language the village children spoke when playing, all of those interviewed said that the mother tongue was used. Eight of the ten respondents from the Mayo-Plata communities said that local children would also use Wuzlam, and three other respondents said that village children would also speak to each other in Wandala as well as their own speech form.

Church use of Pēlasla

Pēlasla is used in church services in three of the five communities, the exceptions being Dēmwa and Mbārem. In the Dēmwa Protestant churches, the services are conducted in Fulfulde and translated into Wandala, and in Mbārem, there are no churches at all. The Seventh Day Adventist church of Zwulé village also uses Fulfuldé in church, but this is interpreted into the mother tongue, Ndreme. Catholic churches in the Hurza community use both Wandala and Fulfulde, but this is always translated into Hurza, and Pēlasla materials (the four Gospels) are often used in the services. Catholic churches in the Mayo-Plata community use French, which is then translated into Mayo-Plata. Similarly, Fulfulde and Wuzlam are used in the Protestant churches of the Mayo-Plata-speaking area, and translation is always given into the mother tongue.

Attitudes to the Mother Tongue

All twenty-four of the respondents interviewed individually expressed a positive attitude to their language. This was also borne out in group interviews. In neither case did speakers of Pēlasla feel that their language was in danger of being replaced by another language or speech form. All would prefer to learn to read and write their own speech form if it were written down, compared to using another language such as Wandala.

In those communities where Wandala is used, there is already significant interest in developing the language, if not actual use of it in written form. In the Dēmwa-speaking community, for example, a language development committee has recently been formed, with the aim of developing an orthography for the language, and eventually translating the New Testament into this particular speech variety. In the Hurza and Mayo-Plata communities, the Catholic churches are using portions of the Bible (the four Gospels) which were translated between ten to twelve years ago by a French priest who is still resident in the area. There is also a Mayo-Plata speaker who is currently involved in translating Catholic church liturgical materials into Mayo-Plata. These

local initiatives indicate a very positive attitude to using, developing, and preserving the Pəlasla language.

Language Maintenance and Shift

It seems likely, from the information obtained, that the different varieties of Pəlasla are not in immediate danger of dying out or of being replaced by other languages or speech forms. The only two locations where there is the possibility of this happening are in the communities of Dəmwa and Hurza speakers, since Wandala is used in several domains. However, Wandala has not made any inroads into the home situation, and does not seem likely to, in the near future. As has already been stated, in these same two "transition zones" there is already some use of the mother tongue in written form (the Hurza Catholic Church's use of Mayo-Plata Scriptures), or considerable active commitment to developing the language still further.

Pəlasla speakers have been migrating from their mountain villages in order to live on the plain. As a result of this, those who settle in plains villages become more exposed to other speech forms, such as Wandala or Wuzlam within their adopted communities. Nevertheless, there seems to be no indication that this will cause a rapid cessation of Pəlasla usage in the area.

The Pəlasla-speaking peoples do not marry within their own communities, which suggests that these communities were originally built up from family clans. They intermarry with the other Pəlasla groups, and also with women from other language groups, such as Wuzlam, Mada, Podoko, etc. Pəlasla women generally leave their villages when they marry, and traditionally adopt the language of their husband.

Education is available to all of the Pəlasla-speaking groups, but is, at this point in time, not yet very popular.

Overall, the migration pattern of the Pəlasla is as follows: most young people seem to stay within the local community, and of those who leave, most return regularly to their home village, since they do not usually live long distances away.

Socio-economic factors

Culturally, the Pəlasla-speaking communities are homogenous; in other words, there are few elements of culture which separate them as being markedly different from each other, although there are slight differences. Sociologically, the communities see themselves as speaking the same language, and identify themselves as being the same people.

The various communities depend on different centres for

their main market, ie. either Tokombéré or Mora. Children's primary education is available in Mayo-Plata, Mora, Tokombéré, and secondary education in Mora and Tokombéré. Politically, the communities are not all in the same administrative area. Mayo-Plata-speaking villages are administered as part of the Canton of Mayo-Ouldémé, in Tokombéré Sub-Division; whereas Dəmwa, Mbərem, and Ndreme villages are in the Canton of Mora Massif, Mora Sub-Division, and Hurza villages are considered as part of the Mémé Canton, Mora Sub-Division.

It is not clear how much difference these administrative divisions will make to any attempts to standardise the language. However, judging from the extremely positive attitudes of people in each of the different speech varieties towards each other, and towards development of their mother tongue, it seems unlikely that these political boundaries will cause great hindrances in this respect.

IV.0 CONCLUSION

Taking into account each of the three areas under examination in this survey, our conclusions are the following:

Findings from both group interviews, as well as individual questionnaires gave strong indications that people consider themselves to speak the same language, even though there are some minor differences. People from the communities of Dəmwa, Ndreme, Mbərem, Afam, Mayo-Plata and Hurza seem to see themselves as one people, sharing a common culture.

From both group interviews and after speaking with individuals, it seems that there is no obviously strong preference for using one speech variety of Pəlasla over another. As has been observed, there are other languages in use, such as Wandala, Fulfulde, and Wuzlam, but these are not uniformly used by all speakers across the range of groups examined. Thus, there is no generalised use of one particular language in this sense.

There seems, at the present time, to be little bilingualism, although if bilingualism were ever to develop, it would most likely be with Wandala, amongst the speakers of the Dəmwa and Hurza, since these communities immediately neighbour the Wandala-speaking area.

The fact that there is already some language development work which has begun in two of the language varieties could be an indication that other languages or speech forms are considered insufficient for adequate comprehension.

The Pəlasla language is used in the home, in the fields, and in most aspects of everyday life. It is also used in conjunction with neighbouring languages, in situations where there are likely to be those who would not understand the language, e.g. the main markets in Mora, in Mayo-Plata, and in Tokombéré. Use of the mother tongue in these various domains seems to indicate that it is not in danger of dying out or being replaced by another speech form, either now, or in the foreseeable future.

The various varieties of Pəlasla are used in church services in many cases, thus demonstrating that there is a need to use the language in church, which may also indicate a need for Bible translation in the mother tongue.

Recommendations

It seems, from the information gathered, that the group of speech forms referred to as Pəlasla constitutes a "probable translation need." However, consideration may need to be made of the slight differences in pronunciation between the different varieties when an orthography is drawn up. It is probable that the same orthography would be acceptable to all groups, so that a standard reference "dialect" would need to be decided upon by representatives of the various groups concerned. From our limited perspective of one week spent in the area, it seems that the speech form known as Mindreme may well prove to be the most acceptable to the other groups to be put into written form. Nevertheless, further in-depth analysis of the situation needs to be made, and local people consulted, before a decision can be made in relation to this.

We recommend that the "translation needs status" for Pəlasla be revised to read as follows:

"PƏLASLA. Probable translation need. Some unpublished Scripture portions available in one speech form."

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QUESTIONNAIRE III (rév. 4.92)

Questionnaire Sociolinguistique

(A utiliser auprès d'un échantillon représentatif de la population)

Rempli le _____ à _____ par _____

1 Présentation de l'enquêté(e)

1.1 Nom et prénom: _____ 1.2 Age: _____

1.3 Métier: _____ 1.4 Sexe: _____ Religion: _____

1.5 Jusqu'à quelle classe êtes-vous allé(e) à l'école? _____

1.6 Quelle est la première langue que vous avez apprise étant enfant? _____

1.7a Quelles langues parlez-vous maintenant?

Indiquez-les par ordre de compétence.

("Parlez-vous mieux le (x) que le (y),
mieux le (y) que le (x),
ou les deux également?")

1.7b Quelles langues comprenez-vous seulement (sans pouvoir les parler)? _____

1.8 Dans quels endroits avez-vous habité pendant au moins un an?

Endroit	Combien de temps?	Quelle langue parlent les gens là-bas?	Quelle langue y parliez-vous?
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1.9 Quelle est la langue maternelle de votre père? _____

1.10 Quelle est la langue maternelle de votre mère? _____

1.11 Votre père et votre mère parl(ai)ent quelle(s) langue(s) entre eux? _____

1.12 Quelle est la langue maternelle de votre mari/(vos) femme(s)? _____

2 Multilinguisme

2.1 Quelle(s) langue(s) parlent vos enfants? _____

2.2 A quel âge vos enfants ont-ils appris (les langues citées dans 2.1)

le _____ ? _____ ans le _____ ? _____ ans

le _____ ? _____ ans le _____ ? _____ ans

ADDENDUM TO THE PELASLA SURVEY REPORT

Lawrence M. Seguin

At the Cameroon Language Assessment Committee (CAMLAC) meeting held in Yaoundé on October 15, 1992, it was decided that sufficient information was available to classify Pelasla as a "definite translation need."