

MINISTRY OF SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL RESEARCH

A RAPID APPRAISAL SURVEY OF BAMALI
[NGO KETUNJIA DIVISION, NORTH WEST PROVINCE]

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

This report describes the findings of a Rapid Appraisal survey of the speech form found in Bamali village and its quarters. The survey was carried out on 2nd, 3rd and 8th November 1993, by Caroline Grant, Peggy Griffin and Paul Huey of the Société Internationale de Linguistique (SIL).

Bamali village is situated about 10 kilometres from Ndop, Ngo Ketunjia Division, North West Province Cameroon.

Population figures for this village vary with the information source: Ethnologue (Grimes, 1992) gives a figure of 5,300 speakers of the Bamali speech form. ALCAM (Atlas Linguistique du Cameroun, Dieu and Renaud 1993) includes Bamali's population with the speakers of shɛ pamɛn, and gives the total number of speakers as being over 10,000. However, during the survey, it was found that this speech form should not be grouped together with the shɛ pamɛn language, therefore the 1987 government census figure, obtained from the Ngo Ketunjia Divisional Office, is probably the most accurate. These figures show a population of 4,500 for Bamali village itself, and we assume that most of those polled are probably speakers of Bamali speech form.

Previous linguistic studies on Bamali include a thesis by Mr Mbondap Mathias Wanki, at the University of Yaoundé in June 1990. Apart from this specialised study, there do not seem to have been any other studies specifically on the Bamali language.

1.1 Linguistic description:

As already stated above, ALCAM gives the name of the speech form spoken in this village as shɛ pamɛn, otherwise known as Bamoun. According to this description, shɛ pamɛn is classified as "Bénoué-Congo, Bantoide, Bantou, Grassfield, Grassfield-Est, Noun". The ALCAM code for shɛ pamɛn is 901. However, the Atlas administratif des langues nationales du Cameroun (Breton and Fohung 1991) describes this language as part of the mɛngambo-speaking community (mɛngambo, ALCAM code 908).

Ethnologue classifies the Bamali speech form as follows, under a separate heading: Benue-Congo, Bantoid, Southern, Broad Bantu, Wide Grassfields, Narrow Grassfields, Mbam-Nkam, Nun. Ethnologue also states that this speech form is related to Bafanji (Ethnologue code: BFJ), Bamun (BAX), Bambalang (BMO) and Bangolan (BGJ). The Ethnologue code for Bamali is BEQ.

The speakers of this language call their speech form "ɔpɔɔp". However, for the sake of clarity, the term Bamali will be used in all references to the language, as this is the name of the village where it is principally spoken.

Neighbouring Languages:

Languages which border with Bamali are as follows: Balikumbat (under Samba Leeko, ALCAM code 300), and Bamukumbit (subsumed under Awing, code: 917) to the south west, Bambalang to the south east, Bafanji to the south (all under ALCAM code 908), Bamunka (842) to the north, and Bamessing (Kenswei Nsei: 841) to the north west

1.2 PURPOSE OF THIS SURVEY

The purpose of this survey was to establish the linguistic relationship (if any) of Bamali with languages surrounding it. Also a preliminary investigation was made concerning potential need and the feasibility of a language development and standardisation project in the Ndog Plain area.

2.0 PROCEDURES

This survey made use of 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 by its specific, non-technical procedures (usually limited to informal interviews with administrative and traditional authorities, church and mission leaders, and more formal individual questionnaires, where deemed necessary). Other data may also be collected where relevant, such as: additional linguistic data, and information on the community's 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 Pidgin English), 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 tentatively determining how well related languages are understood, and whether comprehension seems to be based on inherent intelligibility (due to linguistic similarity) or on acquired intelligibility (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?)"

One group interview was conducted at the Fon's palace, with the Fon of Bamali, His Highness Fon Sa Fwa Saf Bamali, and also eight to ten community leaders participating. Ten individual questionnaires were also completed with Bamali speakers, in order to confirm the findings of the group interview. Leaders from the community's Catholic and Presbyterian churches were also interviewed, concerning the use of Bamali in church activities.

A wordlist of 120 items was also taken, with the help of three Bamali community leaders.

3.0 RESULTS AND EVALUATION:

3.1 Dialect Situation

There are fourteen quarters which make up Bamali village, and the approximate population of Bamali speakers was 4,500 in the 1987 government census. The group interviewed reported that all Bamali speakers in each of the quarters speak in exactly the same way, and that there are no problems of comprehension between any of the quarters. Those interviewed expressed no preference of where the "best" Bamali might be spoken: all "speak the same". This is a strong indication that the dialect situation in Bamali is homogenous.

3.2.0 Multilingualism

3.2.1 Knowledge of neighbouring languages

As stated in the introductory section, the Bamali-speaking area is surrounded by several other villages, each of which has its own speech form or language, as follows: Balikumbat, Bamukumbit, Bambalang, Bafanji, Bamunka, and Bamessing. In addition to these languages, Bamali speakers also have some contact with speakers from other language groups, such as Bamenyam.

Most of those interviewed, both in a group situation and individually, reported that they did not understand any of the above languages, unless they had had considerable contact with speakers from these areas. This suggests that comprehension, when it does occur, is acquired and not inherent. Those interviewed indicated that there is a certain "hierarchy" of comprehension of the neighbouring languages described below. The order in which these are described below indicates how well each is reportedly understood by Bamali speakers.

(i) Bamenyam (ALCAM code: 908)

According to the group interviewed in the Fon's palace in Bamali village, the language spoken in Bamenyam village is "quite close" to Bamali, and "all Bamali adults understand it". However, Bamenyam speakers have to speak more slowly than normal so that Bamali speakers can understand them. Intercomprehension between the two groups was

given as starting at around the age of 10-15 years. In individual questionnaires, however, the response to this question was not so clear. Out of ten individuals interviewed, four people claimed that they would speak Bamali to a Bamenyam speaker, who would then reply in Bamenyam. Both speakers would have to speak more slowly than normal.

One person said that he would speak Bamenyam to a Bamenyam speaker, with some accommodation to a slower speed.

Four people out of ten said that they would use Pidgin English with Bamenyam speakers, and one said that he would use French, since the Bamenyam community is in West Province, in the Francophone zone.

Thus it is not clear from the mixed responses of the small number of Bamali speakers interviewed, that the majority of the Bamali-speaking community understand Bamenyam.

(ii) Bamukumbit

Most people participating in the group interview expressed the feeling that "all adults understand" Bamukumbit, from about the age of fifteen years, and Bamukumbit speakers understand Bamali. However, some accommodation (ie. slower speech) is required for mutual comprehension of any depth to take place.

Responses to Individual Questionnaires seemed to confirm this view, showing that ten out of eleven individuals would speak Bamali with a Bamukumbit speaker, and that they would understand Bamukumbit conversation in return. Eight of the ten felt that some slowing of speed was necessary, while the remaining two said that they would speak at normal speed, and the Bamukumbit person would also speak at normal speed. The remaining individual, when asked, said that she had never met anyone from Bamukumbit village, so did not know what she would speak.

Overall, most of those interviewed individually felt that a small child could not understand a speaker of Bamukumbit, before reaching the age of at least ten years or above. Only two people thought that Bamali children could understand Bamukumbit below the age of seven years.

(iii) Bambalang

It was claimed, by traditional community leaders, that there is intercomprehension between Bamali speakers and Bambalang speakers, to the extent that each could express himself in his mother tongue, and be understood by the other. The leaders qualified this statement further by saying that this intercomprehension is not possible until the age of approximately fifteen years, and that both speakers must accommodate each other by speaking more slowly than their normal pace.

Individuals interviewed tended to confirm this view. Ten out of eleven people said they would speak in their mother tongue, and that Bambalang speakers would communicate in their own mother tongue. Three of the ten said that no accommodation of speed was necessary, while seven said that it was. Five Bamali speakers felt that Bamali children could understand Bambalang at or before the age of ten years, while six said that

comprehension was insufficient until the age of between twelve to twenty years.

(iv) Bafanji

Those interviewed in the group expressed the view that although Bafanji was quite different from the Bamali language, "all adults understand" this language, after the age of about fifteen years. Slower speech is needed, however, to facilitate comprehension. This view was confirmed by those who participated in individual questionnaires. Ten individuals said that they would be able to communicate with Bafanji speakers, each in his/her mother tongue. Nine of the ten reported that there was a need for a slowing down of speech rate required.

In general, it may be concluded that Bamali speakers do not have inherent comprehension of any other language, but that their understanding of other languages is acquired through contact. The language communities of Bamenyam, Bamukumbit and Bafanji are all situated along the same road which links the town of Mbouda (Bamboutos Division, West Province) with Ndop town, thus facilitating the frequent contact between them, and the exchange of market activities. Bambalang village is on another branch of the same road which connects Bamali with Ndop town. However, there may be some linguistic proximity of these neighbouring speech forms to Bamali, so that learning them may be fairly easy, once contact is made and continued.

Attitudes to neighbouring languages

The ten individuals who were interviewed seemed to have a positive attitude towards the possibility of using written materials in certain neighbouring languages. The most popular was Bambalang, with nine out of ten people expressing a willingness to use literature materials in this speech form.

When the traditional leaders were asked about their view of learning to read and write in a language other than Bamali, the response was mixed. At first, they expressed a willingness to acquire literacy skills in Bamenyam, followed by Bamukumbit, then Bambalang. However, later in the interview, the group expressed the opinion that Bamali people would NOT want to learn to read and write in any language other than their mother tongue. Of those interviewed individually, several expressed a willingness to learn to read and write in another language if Bamali were not developed. Of these, Bamukumbit was the most preferred followed by Bambalang, and finally by Bafanji.

3.2.2 Language of Wider Communication

Pidgin English is the language of wider communication (LWC) for the villages in the Ndop Plain area. It is used by Bamali speakers where there is inadequate understanding of a second language. Pidgin is also used by children under the age of fifteen years, who have not yet had

sufficient contact with speakers of a neighbouring second language to understand it.

Bamali speakers begin to understand and speak Pidgin at an early age, around the age of five to seven years when they begin school. Once Primary education is started, Bamali schoolchildren have considerable contact with children from neighbouring language groups whose speech forms they have not yet learned. Therefore, often the best way for them to communicate effectively is to use Pidgin English.

3.3.0 LANGUAGE VITALITY AND VIABILITY

3.3.1 Language Use within the Community

The mother tongue is always used in all domestic domains and by all age groups, ie. within the home, within the local community with contemporaries, and in the fields working. The only exceptions to this pattern occur when Bamali speakers encounter non-mother tongue speakers, or when the head of the household is not a mother tongue speaker.

Bamali is used between mother tongue speakers in the local market, and in the main market of Ndop town. Pidgin is used with speakers of other languages in these contexts.

3.3.2 Church Use of the mother tongue in the Bamali community:

Presbyterian Church

In the five Presbyterian churches, approximately half of the congregants are Bamali speakers, and the others are from neighbouring language groups. The services are conducted in English, with Bible readings interpreted from English into Pidgin. Preaching is done in English or Pidgin. Not everyone, however, understands Pidgin or English, particularly the older members of the congregation.

Songs and hymns are sung in English, Mungaka (the former official "church" language), and some in Bamali. Announcements are usually made in Pidgin English, and are occasionally interpreted into Bamali. All other church activities are conducted primarily in Pidgin, apart from the weekly Session meeting, which is held in Pidgin and in Bamali. The Presbyterian Pastor is not a mother tongue speaker of Bamali, and comes from outside the language area. As yet, there are no written materials in Bamali for church use. The number of church attenders is small. According to the Pastor of the Presbyterian church, the young people would appreciate using a Bible in both English and Pidgin. He told us that no-one has yet asked for a Bible in Bamali, but the members would appreciate it if it were made available.

Roman Catholic Church

In the two Roman Catholic Churches in Bamali, the entire service is conducted in Pidgin English, including the liturgy and the lectionary

Bible readings. The announcements are made in Pidgin. This is because many people in the congregation do not understand Bamali, since they are from outside the area. The Catechist, who is from the Bamali area himself, felt that the Bamali young people would be enthusiastic about having Bible translation materials in Pidgin and in English, and was uncertain whether they would appreciate a mother tongue Bible.

3.3.3 Attitudes to Development of the Mother Tongue

Overall, attitudes seem to be positive to the development of literature in the mother tongue. However, there seems to have been no local initiative in attempting to write down the language. For example, there are no hymns or songs or prayers which have been written. From the comments made by the Presbyterian Pastor, the need for Bible translation in the mother tongue was not apparent. This needs to be examined further.

There was generally a hesitation expressed to using written materials in any other language than Bamali.

3.3.4 Language Maintenance and Shift

It seems, from the limited scope of the survey, that the Bamali language is not in any immediate danger of dying out, nor of being replaced by another speech form. The mother tongue is used in all domestic domains, except in situations where it would not be understood by speakers of other languages.

Education is available up to Primary School level within the village, and children can also go to a privately run technical school in Bamali village. Apart from this, the nearest secondary school is in Bamunka, Ndop. This means that from secondary school age, schoolchildren are exposed to other neighbouring languages and speech forms.

However, it was not felt that children are speaking more of another language than their own mother tongue. There are some occurrences of Bamali children mixing Bamali with Pidgin English, but this only happens among children of secondary school age, who have lived for some time outside the language area. Children who have been brought up in Bamali village do not apparently mix Bamali with, nor substitute it for, another language.

Those adults interviewed in a group situation felt that their language was in no danger of dying out, and that their grandchildren would still be speaking the language in the long term future. There was, however, some concern expressed by several of those interviewed individually, who felt that the future of the language may be threatened.

Marriage and Migration patterns

Bamali speakers can marry people from any and all other villages and language groups. In general, the young people stay in the village after they have completed their studies, and do not move away except to get

married (the young women) and to seek employment. However, many of the young people do not complete their secondary school education.

There seems to be a significant number of non-Bamali people living within the village itself, who come to farm the very fertile land in the area. This fact consequently adds to the number of languages to which Bamali adults and children are exposed.

3.3.5 Socio-economic Factors

The Bamali community seems to be linguistically and sociologically homogenous within the language area itself. There are no quarters of Bamali which are cut off during rainy season, and all quarters are reachable by foot, which means that the language area is geographically homogenous. There are a number of Bamali speakers who are professional workers living in the major cities and towns of Cameroon, but apart from this, most influential mother tongue speakers live within the language area.

There is an active development committee in the area, previous projects of which include the construction of a Health Centre, and currently involved in the provision of piped water to the village.

Most of those interviewed felt that there would definitely be leaders both old and young, for the community in the future.

To date, nothing has been written in the language, although there is a student, Mr Tammui Michael Nuna, currently at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Yaoundé, who has been working on writing down the alphabet in Bamali.

Generally, there is an apparent openness to development, as indicated by the community's acceptance and use of the health centre, and also the contact which Bamali people have with the surrounding area: there is transport available on passing vehicles from Bamali to the neighbouring villages.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Summary

It seems that Bamali can be described in terms of being a "changing community", in other words, it is a traditional village, which is in the process of being influenced by outside development and change. Overall, there is a positive attitude towards language development, although this is not necessarily perceived as essential by the church leaders to whom we spoke. There is a stable language community of approximately 4,500 speakers, who feel that they would benefit from the development of their language. Leadership within the local community seems assured for the immediate and short term future, and the Development Committee, which is active, could possibly become interested in helping foster interest in language development. The Bamali people could probably benefit from having their language developed and written down, but initiative to

doing this needs to come from within the language community itself, to ensure that such efforts would be supported by the community at large.

4.2 Recommendations

Surveys were also conducted in other Ndop Plain languages at the same time as the Bamali survey, partly to see whether one standardised form could be used by all of the Ndop Plain language groups. If Bamali were not developed as a standardised language, then perhaps Bamali speakers could be served by a language development project in one of the neighbouring languages. If this is envisaged, then a more in-depth study should be made of the attitudes of Bamali speakers to using literacy materials in neighbouring languages, and also of the degree and extent of comprehension of such a language within the Bamali-speaking community.

Recommended changes to ALCAM:

Bamali is described in ALCAM as being a dialect of shɛ paməm (ALCAM code 901). However, it was discovered, through information gained via individual questionnaires and group interviews, that shɛ paməm should not be used as a term to describe the Bamali speech form, since, according to those interviewed, it seems to be entirely different from shɛ paməm (which is known locally as Bamoun). We recommend that study be made of shɛ paməm, and that Bamali be encoded and described separately from it.

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Appendix A:

Map showing the extent of the Bamali-speaking area, and surrounding languages.

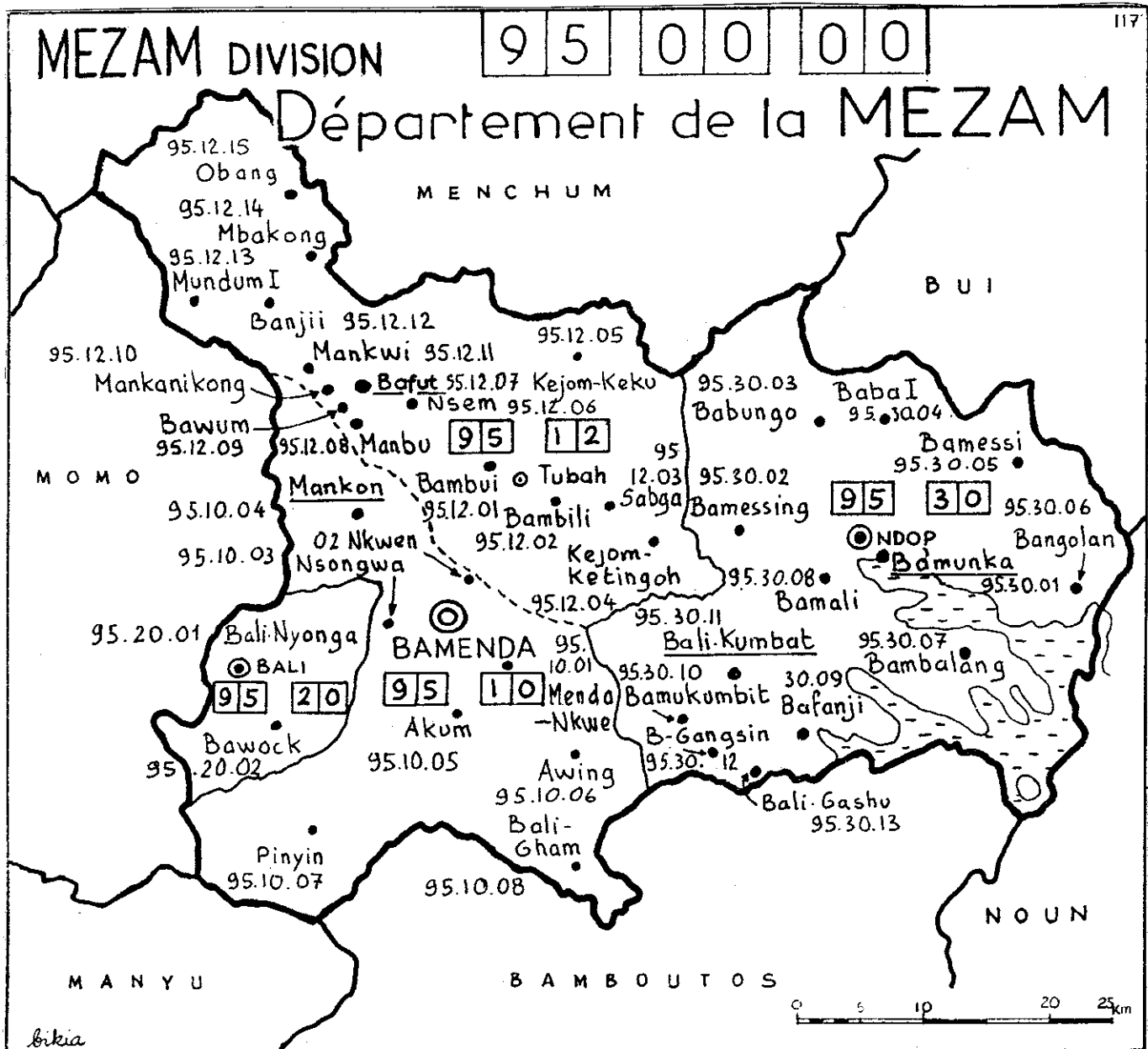
Source: ALCAM, Breton and Fohtung, 1992, page 133.



Bikia

Appendix B:

Administrative map showing location of main villages referred to in this report. Source: ALCAM, Breton and Fohtung, 1992, page 132.



⊙	chief town of division
⊙	chief town of sub division
⊙	chief town of district
•	chiefdom

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—	divisional boundary
—	sub divisional boundary
- - -	district boundary
—	limits of chiefdom