How can SIL Cameroon support sustainable language development?

This is a question that we asked a year ago. It is important for the language communities themselves to answer this question. We have trained some of our staff in the Participatory Methods for Engaging Communities (PMEC). These staff have met with a number of communities to help them understand the value of language development, to define some of their dreams and priorities, to see what resources they have, to determine what outside assistance they need, etc. This has helped us in better serving communities in Cameroon.

A second area of focus for 2015 was to re-examine our long-term vision, role, and strategy. We all know that the world is changing rapidly, and the context in Cameroon has changed and continues to change. There are many more organisations involved in language development than ever before. Language communities are more aware of the benefits of developing their language and have more capacity to participate. SIL Cameroon desires to offer its services to build the capacity of others in all domains of language development.

SIL Cameroon will, of course, need to align our identity and role with that of SIL International. And the appointment of Dr Michel Kenmogne is a great honour for Cameroon!

We continue to be thankful to the government of Cameroon for the opportunity to serve in language development, and for all of its assistance. As you read this report, I hope that you will enjoy getting to know a little bit more about language development and SIL.

In 2016, SIL International will be discussing its identity and role. This discussion is being led by Dr Michel Kenmogne, a Cameroonian who is the new Executive Director (May 2016) for SIL International.
INTRODUCTION
Linguistic research for local development

SIL is known worldwide for the quality of its linguistic research on minority and endangered languages. SIL linguistics work in Cameroon has helped other researchers by providing the training and feedback necessary to produce high standard research on the languages of Cameroon.

Introducing national languages into our schools will help Cameroonians to be interested in the political life of their country. For instance, explaining to populations the necessity of a political party or its programme will help many to better understand the political life in their country. During political meetings, the majority is there for formality sake. But they don't understand anything.

Antoine OWONA. Thèse de doctorat sur le thème « L'insertion des langues camerounaises dans le système éducatif : enjeux, perspectives et coûts. » Université de Yaoundé I, 2012

Linguistics
The essential foundation for language development

Linguistic research is the basis of all language development. Without it, written communication can be very difficult, if not impossible.

There are usually three products of linguistic research that developed languages have which open the way for anyone to use the language in writing. The products are an alphabet (orthography), a grammar description, and a dictionary. A study of the sounds and tones of the language (phonology) is the basis for the alphabet. It is with this foundation that appropriate letters can be chosen to spell words. Often an understanding of the morphology and syntax of a language is necessary for adequate use of the language in writing. Grammar descriptions not only enlighten linguists of the ways in which a particular language is organised, but they empower speakers of the language to teach literacy effectively for their own people, and give translators the tools to adapt texts from one language to another. Finally, dictionaries are an essential tool to literacy teachers, and anyone concerned with following the conventions of a written system of communication. They contain the essential words and expressions used in any communication and serve as a standard for spelling and usage. It takes hard work to collect, analyse, and transform language data into such products, but they open the doors for anyone to use the written language for further development, be it mother tongue literacy, or translation of the Bible or other literature.
Training
Serving beyond national boundaries

In order to make its research more usable, SIL is training more Cameroonians in the management of their own language development programme.

During the year 2015, SIL Cameroon training opportunities went beyond the national boundaries. Besides hosting international and sub-regional courses, SIL Cameroon expanded its expertise covering West African countries. During these programmes, hundreds of people from different language groups, and from different countries including non-African countries, attended training workshops organised or hosted by SIL. To this data, it should be added that mentoring, training and personal follow-up were given by certain SIL personnel to a good number of Cameroonians. Also, much training and mentoring occurs at the community level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Courses/Workshops</th>
<th>1 in Linguistics</th>
<th>5 in Literacy</th>
<th>6 in Translation</th>
<th>3 in Scripture Use</th>
<th>3 in Training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language groups represented</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants:</td>
<td>260</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the chart above, the number given is the actual number of participants attending a given category of course or workshop. The number of languages, however, includes those that may have been represented in more than one course or workshop.

Engaging local communities

Many development agencies consciously or unconsciously think they know what is good for a given community. They come in with their ideas and their methods, doing things for the people. At times, SIL has found itself doing things this way.

SIL Cameroon has realised that sustainable change or the success of a development project depends largely on how well the community is engaged. To make advances on this in our context, SIL Cameroon organised two courses on Participatory Methods for Engaging Communities (PMEC), one in English and the other one in French. An SIL Cameroon staff also led another PMEC course in Bamako, Mali.

According to Martin BEYALA, SIL Cameroon PMEC Head facilitator “using a participatory approach helps people to think and talk together in order to describe and analyse their situation, decide what to do, plan how to do it and evaluate what has been done. A participatory approach helps those who will benefit from activities to have a key role in all aspects of those activities.” The insights and tools gained from these courses have been successfully implemented by people working cross-culturally in many locations and contexts around the world. Using them in our context has proven their effectiveness. At the end of the training, one participant said, “I think SIL and the Wycliffe family, before engaging WITH any community, must do this with a listening attitude from this community. Help them to state their own needs in the domain, and to see that the community is the central key actor in the project from the beginning and for any decision making level. The coordination should be done locally.” He concluded that “our role should be that of serving and facilitating.”

SIL Cameroon is focusing on serving. Serving other organisations and communities to build capacity for the language development and Bible translation movement in Cameroon and beyond.
A consistent advocacy for mother languages

Since 1934, date of its creation, SIL stood in favour of the education in mother languages and their role in developing indigenous people communities. The concern over threats endangering these languages was then expressed.

Following this, UNESCO, a United Nations specialised structure was able to demonstrate the central role of local languages in transmitting indigenous knowledge and their outstanding contribution in scientific research as well as the recognition of fundamental rights of those who speak them.

According to UNESCO, “languages are the most powerful instruments of preserving and developing our tangible and intangible heritage. All moves to promote the dissemination of mother tongues will serve not only to encourage linguistic diversity and multilingual education but also to develop fuller awareness of linguistic and cultural traditions throughout the world and to inspire solidarity based on understanding, tolerance and dialogue.” In the same line, Mrs. Irina Bokova, UNESCO Director General states that “mother languages in a multilingual approach are essential components of quality education, which is itself the foundation for empowering women and men and their societies.”

UNESCO’s position in favour of national languages support SIL’s work. A task whose activities cover linguistic research, literacy, translation, training, and reading materials production in diverse regions and localities of Cameroon since 1969. SIL Cameroon wants to see that language development work is managed by local communities. It is therefore important to integrate language development work inside the global framework of the community development.

That requires the involvement of all the development partners working within a given community. With that, language development stops being the responsibility of NGOs and other international partners in development, but that of the entire community from the beginning till the implementation projects designed for their development.
Since 1998, SIL has been using linguistics with the Council of Scientific and Technological Research and with Equatorial Guinea (EG) language communities to open doors through the research and development of EG languages. In 2015, SIL partnered with the Christian Association of Bible Translation (CABT) to offer a literacy course in Fang. After CABT printed the Fang New Testament, we produced an audio version and a smartphone application, allowing people to read and listen simultaneously to the New Testament. SIL assisted CABT to produce a four-hour Fang video, Acts of the Apostles. We hosted a song-writer workshop, with 13 participants from five language communities. And we are now partnering with the Casa de la Palabra Seminary to offer a translation emphasis in the first accredited Master's degree programme to be offered in EG.

From 1998, la SIL ha colaborado con el Consejo de Investigaciones Científicas y Tecnológicas, y con las comunidades lingüísticas del país, para abrir puertas a través de la investigación y el desarrollo de lenguas nacionales. En 2015 la SIL colaboró con la Asociación Cristiana de Traducciones Bíblicas (ACTB) para ofrecer un curso de alfabetización en lengua Fang. Después de que ACTB publicó el Nuevo Testamento en Fang, SIL produjo una versión audio y una aplicación para teléfonos Android, que permite a la gente escuchar el Nuevo Testamento mientras lo lean línea por línea. SIL y ACTB produjeron un video de cuatro horas en Fang, Los hechos de los apóstoles. Organizamos un taller para 13 escritores de música en cinco lenguas nacionales. Y colaboramos ahora con el seminario Casa de la Palabra, para ofrecer una énfasis en traducción en lo que parece ser el primer programa acreditado de Master enseñado en el país.

Ajani went to school only until Class 5. His desire of contributing to the wellbeing of his community pushed him to join an adult literacy class. While there, he learned how to read and write in his mother tongue. His good results in class singled him out and he was selected as one of the literacy teachers. He started receiving training. After one training course held in Yaoundé for literacy teachers, he said, "I was not expecting such a comprehensive training. I have been trained in all aspects of literacy programme management. I can do accounting."

I can produce books or didactic materials for literacy learners in my community. Henceforth, I know how to bring about development in my community."

Similar to Ajani's case, SIL Cameroon contributed in helping many communities in literacy and in the production of reading materials. Trained speakers of these communities are able to work in developing their own mother tongues and the safeguarding of their linguistic and cultural heritage, thus, reinforcing their own capacities and implementing their own development based on the mastering of their language.
In the sphere of translation, linguistic research contributes essential knowledge necessary for producing a translation that is clear, natural and faithful. Here are two examples from two of our translation consultants:

A team of translators asked me to verify their draft of a translated Bible story. Together we noticed that the Far Past verb tense was the tense used the most in the whole story. We decided to study some of their village stories that they had already recorded and transcribed in order to see how natural texts use tenses, especially the Far Past. In these transcribed texts, we found another tense used more often. This tense was used to move ahead the story line in a way that the passé simple is used in French. In addition, it was not found among the tenses used in their translation, so we decided to do an experiment with the translation. The experiment consisted of substituting the new tense for some of the Far Past tenses in the text. The team agreed to try this and read the text with substitutions out loud, listening to see how it sounded. They were quite pleased to discover that with this new tense, the Bible story made much more sense than before. They had simply gotten used to hearing lots of Far Past verbs in translations and thought it was normal for those texts! More research in their village texts led them to the discovery that the Far Past is used at the beginning of a story or those places which give details of the background. Using it elsewhere is not normal because it never moves the story along!

One day, I was reading some village texts with a local speaker of a language. These texts had been recorded and then transcribed in his language. Together we were identifying the verb tenses of each verb. You should know that in this language there are two different tenses that are said the same way except for their melody. The high tone tense is used for a succession of events that advance the story line. The other tense is used for background details instead of tracing the events of the story. Because the spelling of these two tenses in the texts was the same, it was difficult to know what melody to read. My friend was we realized how important it is to write these verb tenses well so that they make sense to the reader. If not, it is likely that readers will become annoyed and give up before understanding clearly the intended message.

Publications by SIL Cameroon in 2015

Technical Manuscripts

Ipulo


Ngomba

Ncane

Nsari (Saari)

Yasa
SHAIN, Cory. 2014. Basic Elements of Iyasa Morphophonology: A Preliminary Description. 16 pp.
Leading in Multilingual Education

Many international initiatives are in favour of education for all. The Cameroon Government has ratified many of the texts related to education.

For many years, those speaking only local languages were excluded from many development projects. Education was available only in official languages. Those speaking Cameroon languages could not enjoy the benefits of good education. In the meantime, the use of national languages was seen as jeopardising the national unity and even when certain efforts were made towards that direction, there were many obstacles, such as the non-standardisation of languages and the lack of a writing system.

Serving under such a context, SIL has been able to work closely with the government and many other partners to develop Cameroon languages. The didactic materials were also developed and today, many Cameroon children are receiving their education in their mother language. In 2015, school books developed by SIL in partnership with Plan International were accessed by the Ministry of Basic Education and were qualified to be used in the Baka schools. This follows the many other multilingual education projects SIL has assisted in all over the nation.

Languages SIL served in 2015

Language names are according to the 17th edition of the Ethnologue published by SIL International. (Name)= Other common name [Name]=Dialect name

During 2015, SIL gave consultation, training and/or logistic support to language development in many languages throughout Cameroon, including the following:

- **Far North Region**
  - Bana
  - Dowayo
  - Fulfule
  - Gemzek (Guemzek)
  - Gidar
  - Giziga-North
  - Hdi
  - Mada
  - Mafa
  - Mambai (Mambay)
  - Matal
  - Mazagway-Hidi

- **North Region**
  - Daba
  - Fali

- **Adamawa Region**
  - Mambila
  - Cameroon

- **South West Region**
  - Icwe-Maci [Oliti]
  - Iputo

- **East Region**
  - Baka
  - Kako
  - Makaa (Mekaa)

- **North West Region**
  - Bafang
  - Bafut
  - Bamali
  - Bambalang
  - Bamukumbit
  - Bamunka
  - Bangolan
  - Cung (Chung)
  - Dzodinka
  - Fulfule
  - Kemedzung

- **Littoral Region**

- **West Region**
  - Ghomalá’

- **South Region**
  - Batanga
  - Kwasiso
  - Yasa (Iyasa)

- **Centre Region**
Check the latest news: www.silcam.org

Administration in Cameroon in December 2015

General Director:
Bert Visser

Director of Administration and Finance:
Fabienne Freeland

Director of Language Services:
Lawrence M. Seguin

Director of Human Resources:
Bianca van den Berg

Director of Bamenda Region:
Joe Rider

Entity Committee:
Chair: Dr. Melanie Viljoen

Vice-Chair: Chris Smoes

Members:
Andreas Ernst
Gédéon T. Noussi
Dr. George Shultz
Daryl Young

Nationalities of SIL Cameroon Personnel

Australia
Chile
Ireland
Switzerland

Bahamas
Costa Rica
Peru
The Netherlands

Cameroon
Finland
Romania
The United Kingdom

Canada
Hungary
Sweden
The United States of America

SIL International Administration:
President: Dr. John Watters
Executive Director: Freddy Boswell
Area Director for Francophone Africa: Nelis van den Berg