

A Rapid Appraisal Language Survey  
of the Baldemu Language  
(Diamare Division, Far North Province)

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# CONTENTS

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 NAMES

### 1.2 LOCALITY, POPULATION SIZE

### 1.3 LINGUISTIC CLASSIFICATION

### 1.4 STANDARDISATION EFFORTS

## 2 METHODOLOGY

## 3 RESULTS

### 3.1 PRESENT DAY BALDEMU SPEAKERS

### 3.2 POSSIBLE EXPLANATION FOR THE DECLINE OF THE BALDEMU-SPEAKING COMMUNITY

### 3.3 HYPOTHESES TO VERIFY, I.E., “FOR FURTHER INFORMATION”

### 3.4 ATTITUDES

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

## APPENDIX A—MAP

## APPENDIX B—BALDEMU WORD LIST

## REFERENCES

# 1 INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of a rapid appraisal survey of the Baldemu language located in the Diamare Division of the Far North Province of Cameroon. The survey was carried out on February 15, 2000 by Dr. Domché-Teko Engelbert, Chairman of the Department of African Languages and Linguistics at the University of Dschang, Mr. Edward Brye and Mrs. Elizabeth Brye of SIL.

The primary purpose of the research was to estimate the viability and vitality of this language. A key indicator of language vitality would be that the mother tongue is used daily in the home among family members and in the village among speakers of the same language.

We are grateful for the welcome that we received from regional and local government and traditional leaders. The research team first stopped at the Bogo subdivisional headquarters and met the mayor of the village of Balda who had been in this role for the past thirty years. It is he who gave us most of the information about the Baldemu-speaking community and referred us to others.

## 1.1 Names

The people surveyed call, or at one time called, their language "Baldemu" or "Baldare".

## 1.2 Locality, Population Size

At the time of our research, there was no estimate or available background information about the population of this language group. Our attempt to find such information brought us to two locations. The first was the Tagambre Quarter in the village of Balda. The second was in the village of Guingley.

## 1.3 Linguistic Classification

Grimes (1996) classifies this language as Afro-Asiatic, Chadic, Biu-Mandara, A, A.5. Dieu and Renaud (1983) classify Baldemu under the ALCAM code [175] as follows: Afro-Asiatique, Tchadique, Centre-Ouest, Wandala, Mafa-Sud, Mbazla.

## 1.4 Standardisation Efforts

Nothing is known to exist in writing in Baldemu, but those interviewed at Guingley state that archives with more information about the Baldemu language might be available at Kaele through the lamido at Lara (see map in appendix).

# 2 METHODOLOGY

The sociolinguistic research approach employed was the "rapid appraisal" (see Bergman 1991 and Stalder 1996). This method involves the utilisation of group interviews and individual questionnaires as well as the elicitation of an ALCAM 126-word list (See Dieu and Renaud 1983:132–133).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The ALCAM word list we used was a revised version with six additional words. The elicited list can be obtained from Cameroon SIL's Survey Department. Copies of the questionnaires also may be found at SIL.

### **3 RESULTS**

Due to the nature of the results obtained, this section covers the topics of present day speakers of the language and explanations of why the language is near death. Also included is a paragraph about how more information about this language might be obtained by those whose primary interest is in the study of endangered languages.

Results were obtained at Tagambre, which is a quarter of Balda, and at the palace of the chief of the village of Guingley. Both the chief of Balda and the lamido of Tagambre Quarter accompanied us.

#### **3.1 Present Day Baldemu Speakers**

Results from small group interviews in the two villages revealed that the Baldemu language is now reportedly spoken by at least three individuals living in these two villages. The speakers from Balda were born in Balda but their parents came from Lara Canton in Kaele to the south. At first they said that there were more Baldemu speakers in Lara, where the lamido, Mr. Zwa Amadhou, is Baldemu. However, they revised this statement to say that there are no longer any real speakers of Baldemu in Lara, only archives about the language, including a book written in French of unknown authorship, owned by the lamido. The Baldemu language in Lara has been replaced by Mundang.

According to non-Baldemu speakers who reside in the Tagambre Quarter of Balda, Baldemu is used only when the chief of the quarter and his 90-year old mother (who is a mother-tongue speaker of it) use it to converse with one another. The Tagambre Quarter chief's mother was unable to meet us and, since the chief of the quarter was away at the time of our visit, we could inquire no further into the actual level of communication the two share with each other when using the language.

Baldemu is also spoken by a man who is about 85 years old in the village of Guingley. Until recently, he spoke Baldemu with a friend, but this practice ended when this friend died. Three other men present for the group interview had Baldemu-speaking parents who had spoken Fulfulde to them since birth. It was difficult for them to recall even basic words until the 85-year old man arrived. This man, who had recently lost his friend, was able to readily give us a full 126-word ALCAM list in Baldemu.

#### **3.2 Possible Explanation for the Decline of the Baldemu-Speaking Community**

It is the understanding of the 51-year old chief of Balda that the language died in the course of mother-tongue speakers making their descent down the nearby mountains over a few generations in order to settle primarily in the village of Balda. As their contact with non-Baldemu speakers became more regular, they learned Fulfulde while their own mother tongue of Baldemu was used less frequently. Since Fulfulde was used for so much of daily life outside of the home and was also viewed as an easier language to learn, Baldemu eventually ceased to be spoken and, in time, Fulfulde became the mother tongue of the descendants of Baldemu speakers.

As mentioned previously in section 3.1, in Lara the Baldemu descendants now speak Mundang, probably due to similar reasons.

### **3.3 Hypotheses to Verify, i.e., “For Further Information”**

During the Guingley interview, we learned that the Baldemu language was believed to come from Egypt, though no one in the group interview was able to elaborate further on this point or could trace any subsequent historical development from these origins.

A visit to Lara (Kaele) to talk with the lamido and any other Baldemu descendants and to see the archives would likely reveal more valuable information about the language. Our research team did not attempt to go to Kaele for lack of time.

### **3.4 Attitudes**

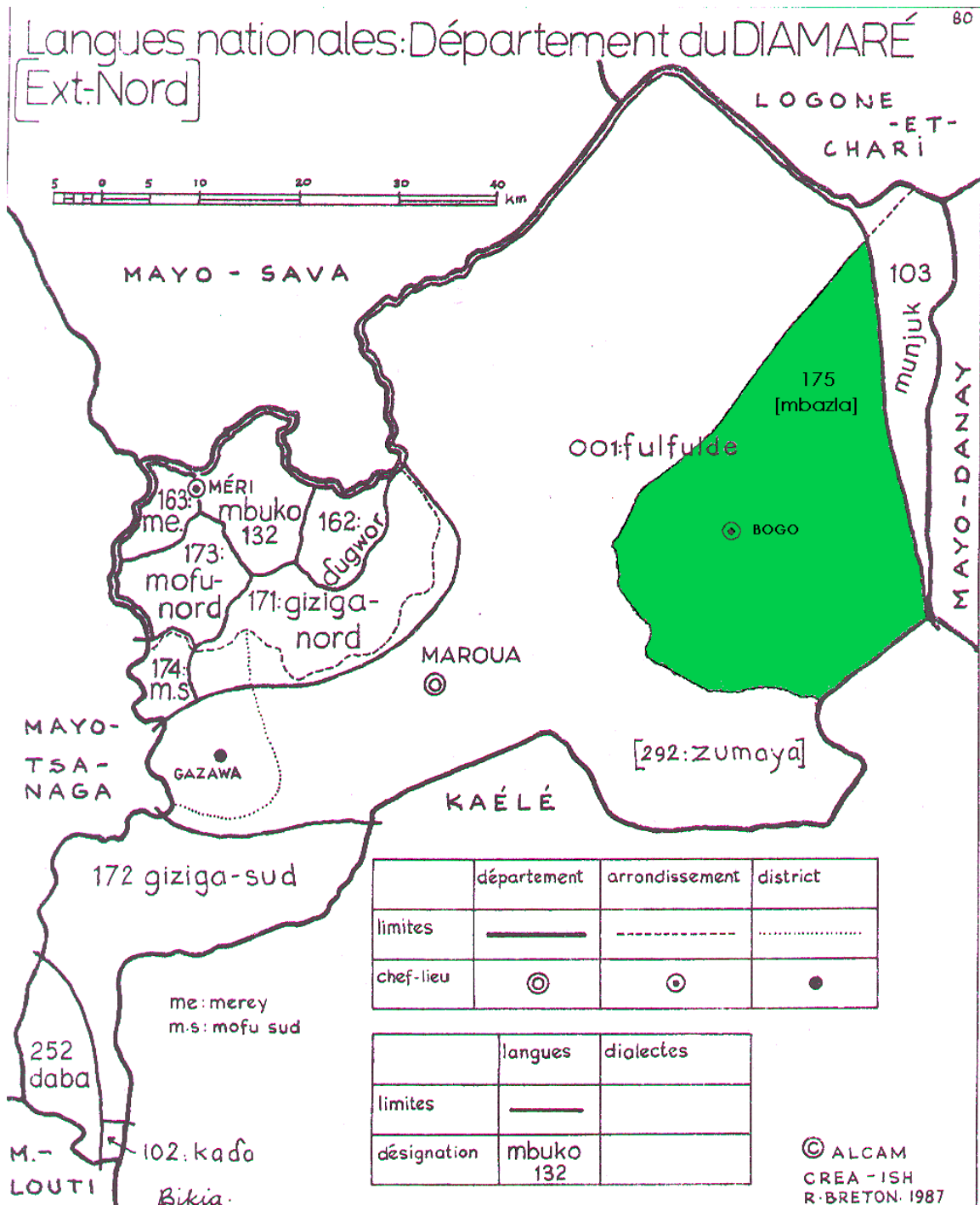
Baldemu is not used for daily communication contexts such as speaking with neighbours, for work, in the market, at the dispensary, or at the mosque. There is the assumption that the language will die. The next generation (which is already 60+ years of age) uses Fulfulde as their mother tongue.

## **4 CONCLUSIONS**

Baldemu is a critically endangered language. The mother tongue has long ceased to hold a prominent place in the daily lives of the Baldemu-speaking community. The children of the last of the Baldemu mother-tongue speakers are now in their sixties, and these have learned Fulfulde rather than Baldemu as their mother tongue. Only a few elderly people use Baldemu, and the only known relationship in which the language is being used is that shared by the Tagambre Quarter chief and his 90-year old mother. Opportunities for surviving speakers to continue using the language with one another are fast diminishing. Baldemu is certain to suffer from disuse until it declines to the point of extinction within the next few years.

No village or quarter has been identified where Baldemu is the primary language spoken, though someone interested in dying languages could go to Kaele to find the archives believed to exist about the Baldemu/Baldare language in order to carry on further research.

# APPENDIX A—Map



## APPENDIX B—Baldemu Word List

English/French	Baldemu	Researched by: Domché-Teko
1. bouche mouth	me'	
2. oeil eye	àráy	
3. tête head	áyū'	
4. cheveux (chevelure) hair (on head)	ηgùzó'	
5. dent tooth	híη	
6. langue tongue	né'	
7. nez nose	kítīη	
8. oreille ear	shímē'	
9a. cou (nuque et gorge) neck (front and back)	āyī'	
9b. nuque back of neck	tòηglòk	
9c. gorge throat	mūbūrlòk	
10. sein breast	wā'	
11. bras / main arm / hand	hāη	
12a. griffe claw	likíη	
12b. ongle nail (of hand)	likíηàbùrmù	
13a. jambe leg	séηgélēη	
13b. pied foot	wúrsēr	
14. fesse buttock	kwíyé'	
15. ventre belly	àwúrù	
16. nombril navel	mámái'	
17. intestins/boyaux intestines / insides	agíá'	

18. sang blood	ǎmbūs
19. urine urine	kúnaí'
20. os bone	àá'f
21. peau skin	gàrák
22. aile wing	kərgrás
23. plume feather	gùzòdéíŋ
24. corne horn	dùrūm
25. queue tail	kútkúl
26. être humain human being	bùlùmúŋ
27. homme (mâle) man (male)	zəl
28. femme woman	ŋgāsā
29. mari husband	zəlāgās
30. enfant child	nzíl
31. nom name	səmái
32. ciel sky	āgāl
33. nuit night	āvūt
34. lune moon	kíyáh
35. soleil sun	pās
36. vent wind	vúvúrū'
37. nuage cloud	galtabāí
38. rosée dew	wúdí
39. pluie rain	yàmyátét
40. terre ground	hàyàbayín

41. sable sand	wùyán
42. chemin path	dīví'
43. eau water	yàmàsí'
44. cours d'eau stream (river)	yàmàhúrhái
45. maison house	gái
46. feu fire	àwú
47. bois à brûler firewood	hàdúm
48. fumée smoke	dīyîŋ
49. cendre ash	púcú'
50. couteau knife	shùú'
51. corde rope	˘zwíwiŋ
52. lance, sagaie spear	zúwit
53. guerre (combat) war (fight)	tùláí'
54a. animal animal	shá'
54b. viande meat	nē'
55. chien dog	kré'
56. éléphant elephant	trògó'
57. chèvre goat	áwū'
58. oiseau bird	gxíáwú'
59. tortue tortoise	kàkàyák
60. serpent snake	gúgāí'
61. poisson fish	kiliv
62. pou (de tête) (head) louse	àndēc

63. oeuf egg	àfái'
64. arbre tree	àdúm
65. écorce bark	˘zwíŋ
66. feuille leaf	smáílār
67. racine root	hìlíki'
68. sel salt	mázái'
69. graisse fat	màgíl
70a. faim (général) hunger (general)	omái'
70b. faim (de viande) hunger (for meat)	nəburnê'
71. fer (le métal) iron (the metal)	āríá'
72. un one	ḅúlā'
73. deux two	tíáw
74. trois three	màkāŋ
75. quatre four	mòfót
76. cinq five	lídāmu'
77. six six	mèrké'
78. sept seven	tùrnú'
79. huit eight	sàbúr
80. neuf nine	zábólá'
81. dix ten	˘kúru'
82. venir come	sáwgà
83. envoyer send (someone)	nàcúmúlŋkó'
84. marcher walk	kòskó'

85. tomber fall	kàditàzà
86. partir leave	súdúbùrú'
87. voler (oiseau) fly	yiafûn
88. verser pour	pévrā'
89. frapper strike	dèdúhí'
90. mordre bite	ceîln
91. laver (transitif) wash (transitive)	bìhízèné'
92. fendre split (wood)	dúkúlí
93. donner give	vìlí'
94. voler (dérober) steal	àlāí'
95. presser squeeze	bídíhān
96. cultiver cultivate	àpūrs
97. enterrer (transitif) bury (transitive)	kìrì'
98. brûler (transitif) burn (transitive)	dílí
99. manger eat	zìmí'
100. boire drink	sìí'
101. vomir vomit	jiōt
102. sucer suck	súsúbí'
103. cracher (salive) spit (saliva)	píshét
104. souffler (sur) blow (on)	bìi'
105. enfler swell	káhàt
106. engendrer give birth	yéyi'
107. mourir die	múic

108. tuer kill	kidí'
109. pousser push	húkí
110. tirer pull	dídí'
111. chanter sing	dăwûr
112. jouer (un jeu) play (a game)	gwáí'
113. avoir peur be afraid	láv'
114. vouloir want	nàbìrí'
115. dire say	nàlúpáwú'
116. voir see	nàhí'
117. montrer show	nìfíí'
118. entendre hear	nàcîn
119. savoir, connaître know	nàzíní'
120. compter count	níí'

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