

A Rapid Appraisal Language Survey of Akum

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References

Abstract

This report presents the results of a rapid appraisal research study among the speakers of Akum in the North West Province of Cameroon. This study was carried out with the intention of making a preliminary assessment of the need to develop a written form of the Akum language and to determine the possible scope of a literacy project. Similarly, being preliminary, this study was expected to identify any questions that needed further research before a final recommendation could be made. This research was conducted in 2001.

1. Introduction

This report presents the results of a rapid appraisal research study among the speakers of Akum in the North West Province of Cameroon. This study was carried out with the intention of making a preliminary assessment of the need to develop a written form of the Akum language, and to determine the possible scope of a literacy project. Similarly, being preliminary, this study was expected to identify any questions that needed further research before a final recommendation could be made. This research was conducted on February 14, 2001 by Akumbu Pius Wuchu, Swiri Roseta Ade, Bolima Flora Ageko, all of the University of Yaounde I, and supervised by Edward and Elizabeth Brye of SIL.

We are grateful for the hospitality of the regional officials, and the traditional leader, whose cooperation was vital for the accomplishment of this challenging task. We are especially grateful to the subdivisional officer of Fura-Awa for his help.

1.1 Names

The people under study refer to themselves as the “Akum” and to their language variably as ‘aakuem’ or ‘oakuem’.

1.2 Locality and Population

The Akum language is spoken in five distinct villages. Three of these villages, Upkack, Izong, and Konkum are found in the Fura-Awa Subdivision, Menchum Division, North West Province of the Republic of Cameroon, respectively. Two of them, Ibang and Manga are found in Nigeria.

The paramount ruler of these villages, based in Upkack, Mr. Galadima Achipo reports a local population of 7,000 speakers. According to his report, the population is distributed as follows:

Upkack	4,000
Izong	1,000
Konkum	400
Ibang (Nigeria)	1,000
Manga (Nigeria)	600
TOTAL	7,000

The 1987 Census lists only one figure of 914 for Akum in Furu-Awa Sub-division. The projected population for 2001 would be a bit under 1,400.¹

1.3 History of the Akum people

The people report that they were created at Kweyma (in Cameroon). However, during the first World War, they were forced to move, some to Makwe and others to Metsikpan, because of tribal conflicts. They finally settled at their present site.

1.4 Linguistic Classification

Grimes (1996) lists Akum (code AKU) with alternate name “Anyar.” The language is spoken near the Nigerian border, Akum village Fura-Awa Subdivision, Menchum Division, North West Province. Three villages in Nigeria (Manga, Ekban, Konkom). Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, Cross River, Unclassified. Not Bendi; may be Jukunoid. Dieu and Renaud (1983) do not mention Akum. It is however numbered [707] in the *Atlas Administratif des langues nationales du Cameroun* (BRETON and FOHTUNG 1991). (See appendices for a linguistic map.)

1.5 Research Objectives

This research was done in order to accomplish the following:

- Make a preliminary evaluation, based on village-based speakers’ perceptions, of the level of intercomprehension within Akum and between Akum and adjacent languages.
- Identify the attitudes of village residents toward the idea of reading and writing Akum or any adjacent languages.
- Determine the feasibility of developing literacy materials in the Akum language.

2. Methodology

Our team employed the sociolinguistic research approach known as the Rapid Appraisal (BERGMAN 1991; STALDER 1996). This approach involves the utilisation of group interviews and individual questionnaires as well as the elicitation of an ALCAM 126-word list. This research tool provides an overall impression of potential needs. It uses reports from local inhabitants and takes a relatively short period of time. A rapid appraisal survey seeks to find out, among other things, information concerning the dialect situation, multilingualism, and the vitality of the language.

¹ According to the 1987 Census Publication (Demo 87:5), between 1976–1987 Cameroon experienced a 2.9 percent annual growth. Assuming that the same 2.9 percent rate of growth has continued over the past fourteen years and applies equally throughout the country, we can estimate the 2001 population based on the 1987 figure. There is no way of knowing if there has been significant immigration or emigration of the speech communities since 1987. Also, these figures do not include populations speaking the language outside of the village (in cities) or those villages in Nigeria.

3. Research Results

After receiving authorization from the subdivisional officer of Fura-Awa, the research team went to the palace of the paramount ruler of Akum at Upkack. He arranged for a group of nine people (six men and three women) to be interviewed in his palace. While some of the research team members were conducting a group interview, others elicited the wordlist. An individual interview was administered to the head teacher of the Government Primary School-Upkack, Mr. Anthony Sara. Among those involved in the group interview were members of all the Christian denominations, who answered specific questions related to their various communities.

3.1 Dialect Situation

The research team objectives were to identify speech varieties within the language and to estimate the degree of intercomprehension between such subgroups. Those interviewed agreed that the five villages speak exactly the same dialect of Akum.

3.2 Akum—Reclassified as Jukunoid

The *Ethnologue* had classified Akum as Benue. Roger Blench recognizes Akum as a distinct language most closely resembling Beezen and reclassifies Akum as follows (personal communication):

Benue-Congo
 Platoid
 Benue
 Jukunoid
 Yukuben-Kuteb
 Yukuben
Akum [AKU]
 Beezen [BZN]

3.3 Multilingualism

The team examined the aspect of multilingualism to assess of the level understanding and oral competence in languages geographically and linguistically close to the speech variety under study. They made a similar assessment in the language of wider communication as well.

3.3.1 Languages linguistically and geographically close

At least six languages are either linguistically or geographically close to Akum. These languages are: Beezen (ALCAM 708), spoken in the Cameroonian village of Kpek; Isu, a dialect of Aghem (ALCAM 810) spoken in the village of Isu; Jukun (listed in ALCAM as Njikum 701), a Nigerian language spoken in Fru Bana; and the three Nigerian languages of Nsí, Lidzi, and Lisa, spoken in villages of the same names. According to the interviewees there is a slight degree of mutual intelligibility between Akum and Lisa, and Akum and Lidzi, but generally speakers of the six villages comfortably use Jukun, the language of wider communication, when they come together.

3.3.2 Languages of wider communication—Jukun, Pidgin English

As indicated above, Jukun is the common language of the region. The interviewees revealed that besides the Akum-speaking villages, a substantial majority in the entire subdivision, particularly the six villages listed above, speak Jukun. Everybody in these villages is reported to use Jukun freely whenever they meet someone who is not of their speech variety. The Jukun language of Nigeria is spoken widely in this area. They trade and intermarry with Jukun speakers. Pidgin English, the language of wider communication for the entire North West Province of Cameroon, is also used as a lingua franca.

3.4 Vitality and Viability

Language vitality is essential for the success of a literacy development project. A key indicator of language vitality is use of Akum in the home and in the village.

3.4.1 Languages used at home and with friends

Akum is the principle language used at home and among friends. Jukun is used for communicating with speakers of related language groups, and Pidgin English is used when a stranger does not speak Jukun.

3.4.2 Languages used for work

The interviewees were unanimous that the only language used on the farm when there is no stranger present is Akum.

3.4.3 Languages used at stores and markets

It should be noted that only small stores exist in this area. Since there are no markets, the people have to go across to Nigeria for their other needs. At the small stores, only the mother tongue is used. Jukun or Pidgin English is used when they travel to the markets.

3.4.4 Language used at the LAP Post

The only health unit in the region is the Cameroon Baptist Convention LAP (Life Abundant Programme) Post at Izong. The mother tongue is the language that is used there.

3.4.5 Languages used at school

English is used most in class, but in the lower classes (1 and 2) Akum is sometimes used. Outside the class, students speak to one another in the mother tongue, Jukun, and Pidgin English. The principal of the Government Primary School-Akum said most parents send their children to school. He was positive about the introduction of the mother tongue at the elementary levels. As an Akum-speaker, he said he would not spare any efforts in assisting in such a project. He also said a few of the primary school graduates attend secondary schools. Some of them have to go to Fura-Awa, to Isu, and to Nigeria.

3.5 Attitudes

The team carried out an assessment of attitudes held by the community, including the local community leaders and a teacher, toward the possibility and value of a literacy development project.

3.5.1 Mother tongue

Attitudes toward the mother tongue are very positive. The interviewees stated that, after English and French which are official languages, the next language, in the order of preference, which they should choose to read and write is Akum.

The people interviewed were confident that their language would continue to be spoken indefinitely. In fact, the paramount ruler expressed much disgust with the children who fail to use the mother tongue at home.

3.5.2 Standardisation efforts

No efforts have been made yet towards the development of the Akum language. Mr. Augustin, one of the interviewees, said he has been struggling to write Akum with the English alphabet. He says he writes letters in Akum to three of his friends who live outside of Akum.

3.5.3 Migration and intermarriage

There are many outsiders who come to live in Akum. They often start using Jukun or Pidgin English and eventually learn Akum. Speakers of Akum may marry whomever they want since there are no marital restrictions in this region, but they intermarry most often with people from Jukun, Beezen, Lidzi, and Lisa.

3.5.4 Language shift

As stated in section 3.2.2, the majority of Akum speakers master the Jukun language and use it widely. Due to intermarriage, especially with native Jukun speakers, they sometimes use this language even in the home. Despite this reality, however, the interviewees insisted that Akum youth do not speak Jukun or any other language more than they speak their mother tongue. They said that the youth are not inclined to mix their mother tongue with Pidgin or Jukun either and that the youth feel “happy” about their language. Some interviewees expressed concern that the youth might forget their language, but they then clarified that they were concerned only because of what they had observed happening in other ethnic groups. “We have no problem here now,” they said.

3.6 Socioeconomic Factors

Some socioeconomic factors have been identified as affecting the nature and development of language programmes. John Watters (1989) mentions the following:

- Homogeneity of the linguistic community (social cohesion).
- Openness of the community to change and to better living conditions.
- Presence at the local level of middle-aged leadership.

The Akum-speaking community mostly meets these three criteria.

3.6.1 Social cohesion

As has been mentioned earlier, all the five Akum-speaking villages perceive themselves as forming a linguistic unit. Though there are no roads, the people often trek hours to get to other villages. Social cohesion is reinforced by trade links, a common culture, and intermarriage.

3.6.2 Openness to literacy in mother tongue

Those present during the interview expressed the desire to see the young as well as the old read and write in their mother tongue. The Akum Cultural and Development Association has been constructing water ponds and roads as well as doing general repairs.

3.6.3 Village-based leadership

The group interviewees revealed that the youngest village leader is 35 years of age. In their opinion, the community will never lack people to replace outgoing leaders. It should be noted that leadership is inherited and that the people would accept whoever is appointed as leader.

4. SIL/CABTAL/NACALCO Plans

Neither SIL, CABTAL (Cameroonian Association for Bible Translation and Literacy), nor NACALCO (National Association for Cameroonian Language Committees) has plans to work on the Akum language.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Akum is a distinct linguistic unit. Despite the widespread use of Jukun and Pidgin English, the mother tongue continues to display prominence in the daily lives of the Akum community.

According to Roger Blench's reclassification, Akum is now linguistically classified as Benue-Congo, Platoid, Benue, Jukunoid, Yukuben-Kuteb [Nigeria], Yukuben, Akum [AKU] (Cameroon).

A few indicators point to the fact that a programme to develop literature in the Akum language would be a success:

- The village has a development committee that is active.
- People interviewed from the communities of Akum show much interest in cooperating with one another to see literature translated into their mother tongue.
- The language is vital. Despite the focus on the English language that is necessary for education, the mother tongue is still a highly favored language.

It is very difficult to know whether the people of Akum would use literacy materials in Jukun. Every Akum speaker we interviewed was comfortable in speaking Jukun. Nevertheless, this does not clearly indicate that the people would learn to read and write in Jukun. Also, we do not know which variety of Jukun the Akum people understand. We recommend that comprehension of standard Jukun be tested, and if

test results are high, an attempt be made to promote the use of Jukun literature among the Akum.

6. Modifications to ALCAM

Information should be given about the Akum language as follows:

- The name of the language is 'Akum' or 'Okum.'
- The people refer to themselves as the 'Akum.'
- Blench's reclassification should be followed to reflect that Akum is: Jukunoid, Yukuben-Kuteb [Nigeria], Yukuben, Akum [AKU] (Cameroon).

Appendices

Appendix A: ALCAM lists for Akum and Beezen

Language name: Beezen/Kpep

Informant: Lydia Shimun and Andreas Shita

Age/Age: 35 and 62

Native village: Beezen

Father's group: Beezen

Mother's group : Beezen

Level of education:

Location: Fon's Palace

Date: 14 February 2001

Researchers: Pius Akumbu and Flora Bolima

Language name: Akum

Informants: Mr. Adiku Timothy and Mrs. Naomi Meme

Age: 30 and 45

Native village: Akum

Father's group: Akum

Mother's group: Akum

Level of education: ---Diploma in Irrigation Engineering/ --unknown

Location: Fon's Palace

Date: 14 February 2001

Researchers: Flora Bolima and Swiri Roseta

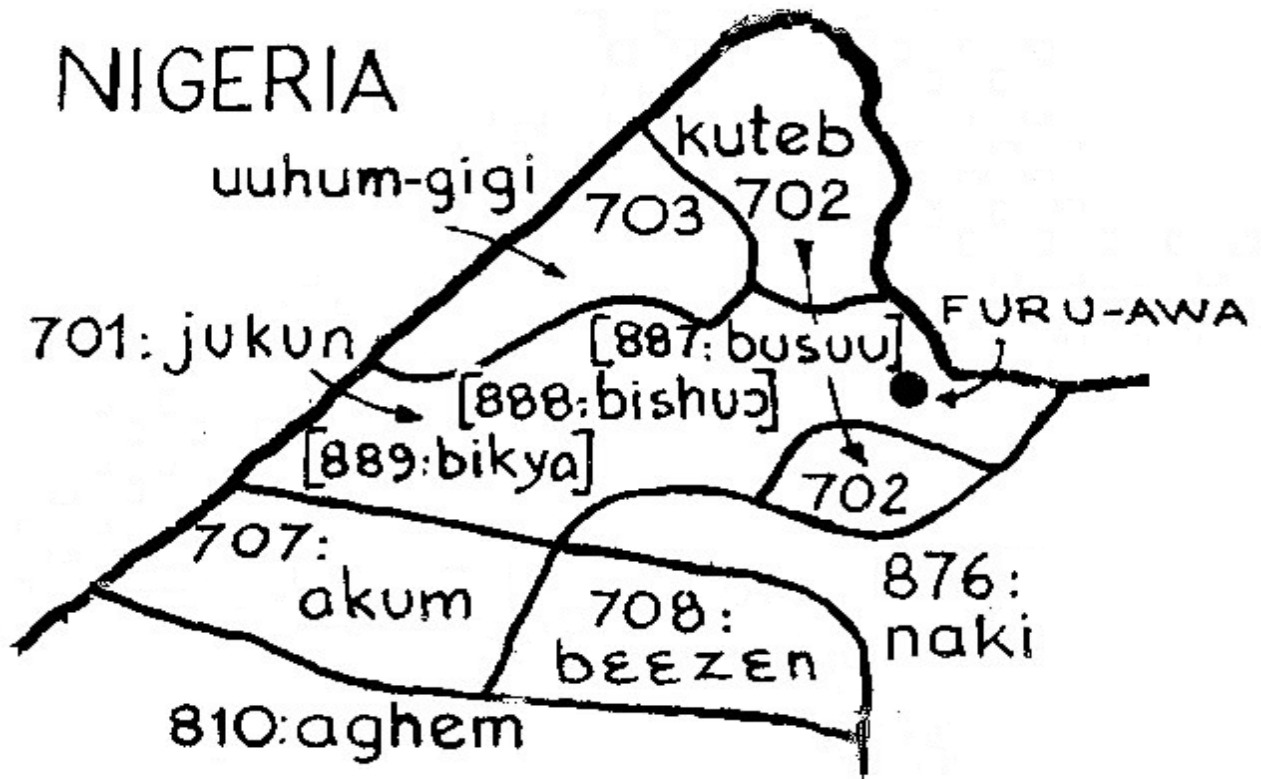
	English	Francais	Beezen	Akum
1	mouth	bouche	úpú	ùnù?
2	eye	œil	kíyí	íyí
3	head	tête	kǎʃí	íkí
4	hair (on head)	cheveux	ùsùn	ótsí
5	tooth	dent	kízíḡ	ídzi
6	tongue	langue	kájám	úmyám
7	nose	nez	kén	íwé
8	ear	oreille	kótóḡ	ótóḡ
9a	neck	cou	kíkímítsú	ísáḡ
9b	back of neck (nape)	nuque	kàlák	àlèk
9c	throat	gorge	úmñínítsú	ógwṛèkwú
10	breast	sein	kímyám	ímwè
11	arm/hand	bras/main	kíbú	ogbwó
12a	claw	griffe	ázíp ó guí	ígwàp nu?ki
12b	nail	ongle	ázíp obú	ígwàp agbo
13a	leg	jambe	kígún	ífwí

13b	foot	pied	kíwáróguń	òkĩ
14	buttock	fesse	kékú	ítá
15	belly	ventre	kéwúró	ímbaró
16	navel	nombril	ùhú	okam
17	intestines/insides	intestins/boyaux	ízíní	òluṅkím
18	blood	sang	béyóṅ	áyòṅ
19	urine	urine	bézím	ákyóm
20	bone	os	kíkíp	òkàp
21	skin	peau	éyóró	úkpwáṅṅé
22	wing	aile	kábáb	ábā
23	feather	plume	éhìṅ	àtuṅ
24	horn	corne	ókún	úkwě
25	tail	queue	órán	ùtsé
26	human being	être humain	óńú	ìṅgyēró
27	man	homme	ólím	álám
28	woman	femme	ókwóp	ákáp
29	husband	mari	íwàn	úlām
30	child	enfant	ízín	alímṣì
31	name	nom	kízín	ídzi
32	sky	ciel	kéb ^h ì ìbèṃ	átārè
33	night	nuit	kélēṅ	okwátàṅ
34	moon	lune	úgwán	òkàṅ
35	sun	soleil	úrú	osóro
36	wind	vent	úgbán	ofóp
37	cloud	nuage	kèkúṅ	abùṅ
38	dew	rosée	ímín	ìṅwe
39	rain	pluie	éwún	abwí
40	ground	terre	íṣì	ìtsú
41	sand	sable	íṣìkóywu	ìsā
42	path	chemin	ùkwáṅ	okàṅ
43	water	eau	bímí	áṅwí
44	stream (river)	cours d'eau	úyár	óyàṅ
45	house	maison	kítjáj	ígyâ
46	fire	feu	ólú	ùlà
47	firewood	bois a brûler	ókún	úkwé ùlà
48	smoke	fumée	búsúṅ	àtsəṅ
49	ash	cendre	bótsúṅ	àtúṅ
50	knife	couteau	ùkwáp	ùkwóp
51	rope	corde	úlúk	ólók

52	spear	lance, sagaie	útúp	ékpwâη
53	war (fight)	guerre (combat)	úmán	ome
54a	animal	animal	ízi	òmòη
54b	meat	viande	bízi	òmòη
55	dog	chien	ìbóró	égbúrí
56	elephant	éléphant	ìndàrè	èndóró
57	goat	chèvre	èmín	èmé
58	bird	oiseau	ènènè	ènwè
59	tortoise	tortue	kìkpórókéhém	otsap
60	snake	serpent	bíwú	íwú
61	fish	poisson	ísán	íkyá
62	(head) louse	pou (de tete)	éíí	ílá
63	egg	œuf	kíjǐ	àtsi
64	tree	arbre	ótjǐ	úkǐ
65	bark	écorce	kíkwó	íkù?ó
66	leaf	feuille	ámí	áηwá
67	root	racine	éhēp	íkóp
68	salt	sel	búmwán	oηwá
69	fat	graisse	ézāp	ádzāp
70a	hunger (general)	faim (général)	úwún	úηòη
70b	hunger (for meat)	faim (de viande)	ínáη	ákyám ònòη
71	Iron (the metal)	fer (le métal)	kísóró	ìnàη
72	one	un	óyùnó	áyǐ
73	two	deux	énó	áfòη
74	three	trois	ítáró	átà
75	four	quatre	ìjǐ	áηi
76	five	cinq	ítsóη	ákwòη
77	six	six	ítsóη óyún	ákwòη yi
78	seven	sept	tsòη én	ákwòη f èη
79	eight	huit	ítsóη ítáró	ákwòη tà
80	nine	neuf	ítsóη ìjǐ	ákwòη jǐ
81	ten	dix	kúwúp	ékùrù
82	come	venir	wú	bá
83	send (someone)	envoyer	átjòm	òkyèn
84	walk	marcher	ákáró	ákyáká
85	fall	tomber	áwú	òkpwò
86	leave	partir	jùn	oηǐ
87	fly	voler (oiseau)	ówùn	òlím
88	pour	verser	kún	fàrí

89	strike	frapper	dáp	òbúrí
90	bite	mordre	kúkízím	džìm
91	wash (transitive)	laver (transitif)	áyó	ɲwíɲ
92	split (wood)	fendre	báp	oyàrí
93	give	donner	nè	ònà
94	steal	voler (derober)	búzí	ódzì
95	squeeze	presser	kám	oɲkà
96	cultivate	cultiver	étjím	ùwò
97	bury (transitive)	enterrer (transitif)	éjì	oɲèɲ
98	burn (transitive)	brûler (transitif)	égím	okwì
99	eat	manger	arí	dží
100	drink	boire	amí	ɲwá
101	vomit	vomir	abí	kpwà
102	suck	sucer	mí	ɲwé
103	spit (saliva)	cracher (salive)	tjì	àkyàɲ
104	blow (on)	souffler (sur)	ÿìn	sê
105	swell	enfler	ámè	ndàb
106	give birth	engendrer	kíbaró	imbâ
107	die	mourir	kùhú	úkpú
108	kill	tuer	ówún	òtsən
109	push	pousser	gĩm	dwok ka
110	pull	tirer	bèrè	gbwí bá
111	sing	chanter	tsì	kwò
112	play (a game)	jouer (un jeu)	ásín	égyà?
113	be afraid	avoir peur	bélíp	àsì
114	want	vouloir	áfóɲ	ífwáɲ
115	say	dire	áryáɲ	òlwó
116	see	voir	rí	ndáró
117	show	montrer	tsōk	k ^h wò
118	hear	entendre	óók	wò
119	know	savoir/connaître	ríɲ	sòɲ
120	count	compter	bún	fá

Appendix C: Linguistic Map of Akum and Neighbouring Languages



Source: Breton and Fohtung, 1991:137 modified

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