

A SURVEY (RTT) OF THE BAMBILI-BAMBUI LANGUAGE

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Abstract

In this study the authors report on how well the speakers of Mbuy (known more widely as Bambili-Bambui) can understand and possibly use literature already developed in the Bafut language. Both are languages of the North West Province of Cameroon.

A survey trip was made in June 2002. Based on results of intelligibility testing (Recorded Text Tests) it is concluded that it is unlikely that both groups can use the same literature.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper details the results of a survey of the Bambili-Bambui language [ALCAM 914], which was carried out June 18–20, 2002. The members of the research team were: Roseta Swiri (doctoral student at the University of Yaounde I), Pius Akumbu (doctoral student at the University of Yaoundé I), Elaine Bombay (SIL), and Karyn Crawford (SIL).

We gratefully acknowledge the authorization, kind assistance, and warm welcome we received from regional and local government, traditional leaders and residents of the communities we visited. The authors express their thanks to Pius Akumbu, Rachel Garrett, Jeff Lin, and Brian Parker for their assistance in the writing of this report.

1.1 Purpose

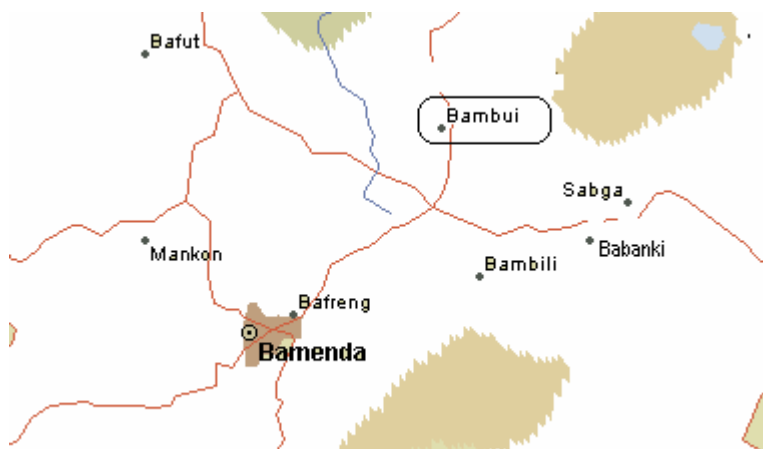
The purpose of this research was to investigate whether or not Bambili-Bambui speakers are able to understand Bafut, a nearby language. If they are able, they may be able to use Bafut literature that has already been produced. The survey was requested by SIL member, Joseph Mfonyam, who is also a mother-tongue speaker of Bafut. It was also recommended in the June 2000 SIL Ngemba Cluster survey.

1.2 Names

The native speakers call their language *Mbuy*. The *Ethnologue* refers to the language as *Bambili (Bambui)*, and in this survey report we will refer to the language as Bambili-Bambui.

1.3 Location

Bambui Town is located in Tubah Sub-division, Mezam Division, North West Province of Cameroon, about 10 km northeast of Bamenda.



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(Microsoft Encarta, 2000. Modified)

1.4 Linguistic Classifications

The *Ethnologue* (Grimes 2000:47) gives the following information and classification:

BAMBILI (BAMBUI) [BAW]
 10,000 or fewer (1984 ALCAM). Bambili and Bambui villages east of Bamenda, along Ring Road, Tuba Subdivision, Mezam Division, North West Province. Linguistic affiliation: Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, Bantoid, Southern, Wide Grassfields, Narrow Grassfields, Mbam-Nkam, Ngemba. Dialects: BAMBILI (MBILI, MBELE, MBOGOE), BAMBUI (MBUI). Inherent intelligibility is low between them and Nkwen and Mendankwe. They associate more with Bafut than with Nkwen and Mendankwe. Grammar. Literacy rate in first language: Below 1 percent. Literacy rate in second language: 15 percent to 25 percent.

We have noted that the Bambui-Bambili speakers live northeast of Bamenda, instead of east as the *Ethnologue* indicates.

The *Atlas Linguistique du Cameroun (ALCAM)*(Dieu and Renaud 1983:123) refers to Bambui as the northern dialect of Bambili.

1.5 Previous Research

A rapid appraisal survey was conducted in June of 2000 by Michael Ayotte and Melinda Lamberty (See Ayotte 2000). The recommendations from that survey were for intelligibility testing of Bafut among Bambili-Bambui speakers. Alfred Ngu, a linguistics student at the University of Yaoundé I, has written a morphology paper on Bambili-Bambui as well.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Intelligibility: Recorded Text Testing (RTT)

2.1.1 Description of Individual RTT Procedure

In order to ascertain the degree to which Bambili-Bambui speakers can comprehend Bafut, the researchers employed the Recorded Text Test described by Casad (1974). In this method, a short, anecdotal story, approximately two minutes in length, is recorded in the language to be tested. The narrator of this story must be a native speaker of that language. The researchers then develop comprehension questions that are recorded and inserted into the text at appropriate places. The researchers administering the test screen the potential test participants based on the following information: place of birth, language(s) spoken in the home, mother's language, father's language, number of years lived outside of the village, and extent of travel.

The Bafut text and comprehension questions used in this survey were tested and used in a 1991 survey (see Sadembouo and Hasselbring 1991). The comprehension questions were translated into Bambili-Bambui, recorded, and inserted into the story.

Another short, one-minute personal story was elicited in Bambui Town, in the Bambili-Bambui language. This story had five questions, also in Bambili-Bambui, inserted throughout it. This story was played for test participants in order to allow them to become familiar with the testing procedure before being tested with the Bafut text.

In both cases (the Bafut and the Bambili-Bambui "hometown" test), the text was played in its entirety once, followed by the version interspersed with questions. After each question, the tape was paused to allow the participant to provide a response. A test participant received one point for each complete and accurate response; respondents were awarded half a point for each partially correct response.

2.1.2 Interpretation of Individual RTT Results

When interpreting the results of the RTT, the *mean* (or *average*) and the *standard deviation* are the two main considerations.

Each participant is given a score based on the number of correct responses to the comprehension questions. This score is converted into a percentage. These percentages are then added together and divided by the number of participants. This provides the mean score for the test. The mean score indicates the group's comprehension of the text. Concerning the interpretation of intelligibility scores, Joseph Grimes states:

At threshold levels high enough to guarantee good communication from the central dialect to the periphery (usually 85 percent or above), it is reasonable to speak of the dialect cluster as a single LANGUAGE from the linguistic point of view. Speech varieties that come together at only 70 percent or below are too distinct to qualify as the same language. In between, 70 percent to 85 percent, is an area of MARGINAL intelligibility where some communication is satisfactory and some is not. The threshold depends on the risk associated with not communicating well; the final criteria are not purely linguistic. (J. Grimes 1995:22)

The standard deviation¹ is a statistical measure of how individual scores differ from the mean. "If the standard deviation of intelligibility scores from various speakers in one community is more than 15 percent, it probably indicates bilingualism. The figure of 15 percent is also a suggestion of a possible maximum difference there may be in true intelligibility" (B. Grimes 1987:50). If the RTT scores vary greatly, it can be attributed to differing degrees of exposure to and opportunity to learn the test language (acquired intelligibility). In the case of inherent intelligibility the standard deviation would be minimal.

Comprehension above 85 percent and a standard deviation of less than 15 percent indicate that the second language is understood well enough that a joint development project, including both language communities, might be possible. An RTT mean score below 70 percent indicates that the tested community's comprehension of the second language is inadequate for the second language to be used for literature.

When the percentage of comprehension falls within the critical range (70–85 percent), then factors such as the standard deviation of scores, community attitudes, and other sociological factors become important considerations for determining the possibility of a single development program for both language communities.

2.1.3 Description of Group RTT Testing

The Group RTT was administered by playing the whole Bafut story through once to a group of Bambili-Bambui speakers. We then played the story again and paused at intervals, asking the group to retell what they had heard. This was a cooperative effort, with all members of the group allowed to participate and state what they had understood. An effort was made to involve all participants and not allow only one person to answer.

Simons (1989:4.2.6) gives a detailed description of Group RTTs. This method uses a qualitative scoring system instead of the quantitative scoring used with individual RTTs. Stalder (1996:26) reevaluates the scores according to the following:

¹ The standard deviation of a set of values is defined as the square root of the variance. Variance is calculated by taking the sum of the squares of the deviance (individual score minus the mean score) values and then dividing by the number of values in the sample minus one.

Level 1: No comprehension. The group is unable to respond even to the general story lines.

Level 2: Partial comprehension. By retelling the different sections, people invent and add to the story. If asked, they are not able to answer details.

Level 3: Good comprehension. That is, the story is retold accurately and the people can give accurate details.

Stalder also notes that it is important to consider the reactions and attitudes of the group, describing the answers and any observations of the behaviour of the group as accurately as possible. In a group setting, participants can assist each other and state what they, as a group, understood. With the possibility of discussing answers in the group, the overall result indicates the best possible level of comprehension of the group as a whole.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

This section will present the results of the RTTs administered to Bambili-Bambui speakers.

3.1 Results of Group RTT Testing

The team carried out a Group RTT test to a small group of four individuals. There were two older men (45 to 60 years old), one woman (35 to 40 years old), and one young man (25 to 30 years old). The test took place at the palace of the Fon of Bambui, and the individuals were brought together from the surrounding area by the representative of the Fon, a retired local school teacher.

All four individuals scored between 2.5 and 3 out of a possible score of 3, thereby demonstrating a good comprehension of the Bafut text. The two older men and the woman seemed to have more accurate responses in summarizing the different segments of the text than the younger male.

3.2 Results of Individual RTT Testing

Individual RTT testing was administered in two different quarters of Bambui Town. Niba was further away from Bafut, while Macha was closer to the Bafut area. All participants were confirmed to be native Bambili-Bambui speakers, as well as children of Bambili-Bambui speakers.

The average RTT score in Niba was 4.6 out of 11 points, for a mean of 42 percent with a standard deviation of 30 percent. In Macha, the average score was 3.3 out of 11 points, for a mean of 30 percent with a standard deviation of 41 percent. The average overall score on the RTT was 4.0 out of 11, for a mean of 36 percent with a standard deviation of 29 percent. Table 1 expresses these results. See appendix 3 for the details of the scores.

Table 1: RTT Scores and Standard Deviations

Niba	Mean	Standard Deviation
Hometown	87%	9%
Bafut	42%	30%

Macha	Mean	Standard Deviation
Hometown	95%	6%
Bafut	30%	41%

Overall	Mean	Standard Deviation
Bafut	36%	29%

3.3 Interpretation of Results

The high standard deviations and low mean scores of the individual RTT tests suggest that there is little inherent intelligibility between Bambili-Bambui and Bafut. Since older people (over 40) tended to score higher on the Bafut text, it is probable that understanding of Bafut is acquired through social interaction. The wide range of scores implies varying levels of social contact with Bafut people within the Bambili-Bambui community. These results seem to indicate that it is unlikely that Bambili-Bambui speakers could use Bafut literature or Scriptures.

Table 2: Mean RTT Scores by Age and Gender

	Up to age 40	Age 41 and over	Age groups combined
Female	Sample size: 4 Mean: 34%	Sample size: 3 Mean: 56%	Sample size: 7 Mean: 44%
Male	Sample size: 10 Mean: 23%	Sample size: 4 Mean: 57%	Sample size: 14 Mean: 33%
Both Genders Combined	Sample size: 14 Mean: 26%	Sample size: 7 Mean: 57%	WHOLE POPULATION Sample size: 21 Mean: 36%

Table 2 shows that the older people (above 40) scored significantly higher (57 percent) than the younger people (26 percent). It could be that Pidgin English has become more widely used in this area; many of the younger test participants reported that they speak in either Pidgin or English when they interact with Bafut speakers. The older test participants said that when they encounter a Bafut speaker, both are able to speak in their mother tongue and be understood.

These RTT results, with a mean of 36 percent, suggest that the Bambili-Bambui people did not have an adequate grasp of the Bafut text. However, the Group RTT results showed a higher level of comprehension. One possible explanation for the differing conclusions is that in the Group RTT, participants have the opportunity to work together and communicate as a whole what the group understands. Thus, the overall comprehension results are often higher than what the test participants would score on individual tests (Simons 1989:4.2.21). Moreover, the individual RTT asks specific details about the text while the Group RTT requires participants to give summaries of different segments of the text. Test evaluators may have better impressions about the degree of demonstrated comprehension when test participants can recall most of a story in good detail, but it is difficult to be sure if the participants have comprehended all of the specific details of the text. In this situation we also realize that the persons tested on the Group RTT in the Fon's palace had been hand-picked in the area of the palace by the Fon's representative. These people may have had more contact with Bafut speakers than the average Bambili-Bambui speaker due to their proximity to the palace, and thus may not represent the average Bambili-Bambui speaker. We therefore give less weight to the Group RTT results than to the individual RTT results, and conclude that, even though some people understand Bafut well, that the Bambili-Bambui people in general do not seem to.

Several test participants of the RTT and Group RTT tests told us that intermarriage with Bafut people is widespread and that this enhances some Bambili-Bambui speakers' ability to understand Bafut.

4. MISCELLANEOUS

There is a translation committee already working in the Bambili-Bambui language. By the end of this year, they will have several pieces of literature in Bambili-Bambui ready to be typed. Mr. Momah said that the Bambili-Bambui speakers would not want to use the Bafut literature but would rather have some pieces translated into Bambili-Bambui.

There was a language committee at one point but it is no longer active. Representatives have approached SIL about sending someone to training courses, but to date they have not been involved in SIL's Foundation Courses. At present there is an orthography that has not been tested or approved.

Mr. Bonu, one of the translation committee members, stated that intercomprehension between Bafut and Bambili-Bambui is high, but that a Bambili-Bambui child of 6 years would not understand Bafut. Bambili-Bambui speakers who live outside of Bambui Town would have difficulty understanding Bafut. Bafut is learned through social interaction in schools, bars, and markets. There is also a great deal of intermarriage between the Bambili-Bambui and Bafut communities.

There is a weekly broadcast in the Bambili-Bambui language on a provincial radio station hosted by Prince Michael Amungwa. This reinforces use of the mother tongue.

According to Mr. Bonu, the soil in the Bafut area is sandy and not as fertile as that of the Bambili-Bambui region. Many Bafut speakers move closer to the Bambili-Bambui area for farming.

While there are twenty-three quarters in Bambui Town, not all of them are populated exclusively by Bambili-Bambui speakers. There has been a lot of migration in the past of people from Santa into the Bambili-Bambui area due to problems of chieftaincy. When the Santa chief died, some of his sons left their traditional homeland with their followers and established themselves in the Bambili-Bambui area.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the RTT scores, it appears that Bambili-Bambui speakers would not likely be able to use Bafut literature. There appears to be a high motivation within certain constituents of the Bambili-Bambui speech community to develop their own language. They have expressed interest in receiving SIL training and may continue to approach SIL to this end.

We also recommend that the *Ethnologue* be changed to indicate that the Bambili-Bambui language is spoken to the northeast instead of to the east of Bamenda.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Bambili-Bambui Hometown Text

At first, there was no market in Bambui. So the Bambui people had to go to Mendankwe to sell plantains.

Q.1. Where did they go to market?

To Mendankwe.

The Mendankwe market was on Sundays. When they had to go to the market on Sundays, they would have their plantains ready on Saturday, so they could go sell them on Sunday.

Q.2. When did they have to have the plantains ready?

On Saturday.

At first cock-crow (3 am) they would get up and start going. They would start to go, and at 7 am they would stop at a small stream called the Santem Misan to drink some fresh water.

Q.3. Why did they stop?

To drink water/ to rest because the load was heavy.

Then they continue, then at 8 am they arrived at the market. A prison warden would come bargain...

Q.4. Who came to bargain?

The prison warden.

...and they would tell him that some bunches cost 3 shillings and some cost 4. Then he would buy them (collect) and take them to the prison yard and call them (the vendors) to come and collect their money.

Q.5. Where did they take the plantains?

To the prison yard/prisoners.

The prison warden wanted to pay one shilling for some, and the vendors refused, so he added 6 pennies. So at one shilling and six pence he took them. After they agreed on the price, the buyer would leave his purchases with the vendor and go into the market to buy other things. When he comes back, he will have the vendor carry his things to his destination.

Appendix B: Bafut Text

(est. date: November 5, 1990)

It is about two years since this happened, in the month of dry season, two months after Christmas. My wife, my child, and I went towards Mbunti (Wum) to prepare a farm.

QUESTION 1: Why did he go to Mbunti?

ANSWER 1: To prepare a farm.

On our way, we had a tire puncture. When the puncture happened, I got someone to go and have it repaired. (We started off going again) and we had a tire puncture again. I didn't know what to do. I asked my wife to go ahead and I would stay to fix the tire. We took off the tire (removed the leg of the moto) and carried it to a tire repairer.

QUESTION 2: Who removed the leg of the moto?

ANSWER 2: The narrator.

He (the tire repairer) said he knew how to drive.

QUESTION 3: What did the man who fixed the moto leg say?

ANSWER 3: That he knew how to drive.

He took the tire that he had earlier repaired and went (to where the car was) to put it on. He put the tire on and asked the boy to get into the car with him, but the boy refused. He said he would stay there and wait for his father to come and take him.

QUESTION 4: Where did the child say he would stand and wait for his father?

ANSWER 4: Where the tire puncture took place.

The repairer entered the car and since he did not know how to drive, he entered the car and was driving very/too fast.

QUESTION 5: How did he drive?

ANSWER 5: Very/too fast.

And when he was about to go around a bend, he went off the road and fell into a ditch. When he fell into the ditch, he came out and he had bruises/scratches on his face.

QUESTION 6: Where was he scratched?

ANSWER 6: On his face.

One side of the car was shattered. The window glasses (windshield) were shattered and the eyes of the moto (= lights) were also shattered.

QUESTION 7: What happened to the eyes of the moto?

ANSWER 7: They were shattered.

He left the car in the ditch and ran and came to me. He said to me, "Father, the brakes of the car do not hold." So I asked, "Where is the car?" He said, "It is lying by the gutter there." I asked him, "How many people should I bring to help push the car (out of the ditch)? He said, "About three people."

QUESTION 8: How many people did he say were needed to push the car?

ANSWER 8: About 3.

I took (three) people and we went to get it. We went for a long distance and stood. And when I stood and I asked, "Where is the car?" He said, "It is there very far away in a ditch. If you lift up your head, you will see that the ditch is very deep."

QUESTION 9: How will he be able to see the car?

ANSWER 9: By lifting up his head.

I asked, "You said I should bring 3 people to bring a car out from such a ditch?!" He stood looking at me, and the people sighed. And they went and looked for many people while I went to look for the chief of the area.

QUESTION 10: What did the people do?

ANSWER: Sighed, or went and looked for many people.

I (or the chief?) sent many people to clear a path toward the pit. I looked for a bigger truck to pull out the car. I looked for a rope and tied it to the car and pulled it.

QUESTION 11: What did they use to come and pull the car out?

ANSWER 11: A rope.

When it was pulled out, we tried it. I went into the car and saw that it was still working. I went in and I was driving without a windshield. A lot of dust came in and covered me all over. My wife and my child took another car, a truck carrying sand. I brought up the car and repaired it.

Appendix C: Bafut RTT Results in Bambili-Bambui

Table 3: Individual Test Results from the RTT in Macha and Niba

#	Sex	Age	Hometown	Bafut
M1	M	55	5/5 (100%)	8/11 (73%)
M2	M	37	4/5 (80%)	7/11 (64%)
M3	F	70	5/5 (100%)	6/11 (55%)
M4	F	18	5/5 (100%)	5/11 (45%)
M5	M	15	5/5 (100%)	2/11 (18%)
M6	F	40	5/5 (100%)	2/11 (18%)
M7	M	50	4/5 (80%)	1/11 (9%)
M8	M	22	5/5 (100%)	1/11 (9%)
M9	M	30	5/5 (100%)	1/11 (9%)
M10	F	31	4.5/5 (90%)	0/11 (0%)
N1	M	47	4/5 (80%)	9/11 (82%)
N2	F	32	4/5 (80%)	8/11 (73%)
N3	M	60	4/5 (80%)	7/11 (64%)
N4	F	58	4/5 (80%)	7/11 (64%)
N5	M	34	4/5 (80%)	6/11 (55%)
N6	F	55	5/5 (100%)	5.5/11 (50%)
N7	M	30	4/5 (80%)	4/11 (36%)
N8	M	35	5/5 (100%)	4/11 (36%)
N9	M	19	4/5 (80%)	0/11 (0%)
N10	M	35	4.5/5 (90%)	0/11 (0%)
N11	M	19	5/5 (100%)	0/11 (0%)

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