

A Survey of the Tenda Languages in SE Senegal*

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*This survey report was written in 1994.

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Abstract

A survey was completed of the Tenda languages of Senegal. The two goals of the survey were to determine the degree of lexical difference between Tenda varieties and to determine how the people feel about their language and culture. The mother tongue remains the most used, and preserving it in written form appears important to all. Still, in certain domains the mother tongue gives way, almost entirely, to other languages for trade or for reasons of prestige. The strength of other languages in these domains does not, however, seem to diminish the overall use of and the preference for the mother tongue on a day-to-day basis. The lexical comparison concludes that the lexical similarity of the Tenda varieties is much less than 60 percent; thus, each of the four varieties is a language in its own right. The recommendation is to establish a language development program in each Tenda language.

1. Introduction*

A survey of the Tenda varieties was done in Senegal in February 1988. The regions covered were those in the *arrondissements* ‘province’ surrounding Salimata and Kedougou in the southeastern part of the country. JoLynn Eller Amdahl and Susan Goddard Jenkins conducted the survey for the Summer Institute of Linguistics. A Konyagui man who spoke Peul served as an interpreter.

2. Objectives

The aim in doing this survey was two-fold. First, the varieties of the Tenda group were examined in an effort to determine the degree of lexical difference between them. Second, with the help of a sociolinguistic questionnaire, we attempted to identify how the people feel about their mother tongue and culture and how the different Tenda varieties compare with one another in those areas. Based on the data, recommendations will be made concerning vernacular literature and literacy needs among these people. The possible need for more extensive survey work will also be discussed.

3. Background information on the Tenda languages and people

While *Tenda* technically only refers to the name given some of these languages—Bassari (Tendanke), Bedik (Tenda Bande), and Tenda Mayo (not found in Senegal)—because of their linguistic relatedness we will refer to the entire grouping (Bassari, Bedik, Boin, Konyagui, and Badiaranke) as Tenda.

3.1 Bassari

The Bassaris are of Guinean origin. They live primarily in Guinea, where their language has been counted among the national languages since 1958. According to an article written by Marie-Paule Ferry in 1969, of the approximate ten thousand Bassaris, six thousand live in Guinea. Because they use laterite for constructing their houses, they settle in areas where this type of soil is abundant. The name *Bassari* comes from the Peuls. They refer to themselves as *Belians* and to their language as *Oniyan*. The Bassaris are predominantly Christian, but traditional African beliefs are important to their daily lifestyle.

*This survey has not been peer reviewed.

3.2 Boin

There still exists a small representation of the Boins in Senegal, but the language is scarcely spoken there. The Boins of Senegal identify with the Peuls. They speak Peul fluently. The name *Boin* comes from a Peul word meaning "God keep you" because they are basically Bassaris who have converted to Islam.

According to an article written by Rosine Santos in 1985, Boin was still spoken in Guinea as a mother tongue, with Peul serving as the second language. For the two-day survey, two men from Oubadji who spoke Boin, and a young man, probably passing through from Guinea, helped her as language assistants. Today, the Tenda-Boins in Oubadji say that only those over age 30 speak the language—and then only in Guinea. In 1988 only two elderly Boin speakers remained in Oubadji, and they estimated a total of ten families, comprising one hundred people, who still speak the language at all.

3.3 Konyagui

The Konyaguis (pop. approximately 18,000) come from the region of Youkounkoun in Guinea. All but four thousand are now estimated to live in Senegal. The majority are concentrated between the towns of Koungheul and Tambacounda, while a minority are settled in villages between Kolda and Velingara. The Konyaguis traditionally migrated from Guinea to work the bamboo belt in Senegal, and many chose not to return to Guinea.

The name *Konyagui* comes from a Peul word meaning "bee." The Konyagui earned this designation during the war, when they chased the French from Guinea with bees. They refer to themselves as *Mey* and their language as *Wamey*.

There are two Konyagui dialects spoken to the north and south of Youkounkoun. The majority of the Konyaguis live to the south of Youkounkoun.

As is common among these language groups, the Konyaguis hold strongly to their African traditions. However, many are Catholic and a small group belongs to a Protestant church.

3.4 Bedik

While the Bedik call their language *Manik*, the Peuls refer to them as the Tanda-Bande who speak Tandanke. *Manik* comes from their word for dolerite, from which they build their houses (much like the Bassaris).

The Bedik split themselves into three groups: the Biwol, the Banapas, and the Nyolo. However, the three groups together total only 1,500 speakers. The Biwol and the Banapas live in the regions immediately to the west and north of Kedougou respectively. The Nyolo reside in the middle and a little to the northwest, forming a triangle between them.

The Biwol represent the largest group of the three, followed by the Banapas and finally, the Nyolo.

The three groups are semi-nomadic, in that they consider themselves inhabitants of a village which is more or less centrally located to their given area. During planting and harvesting seasons they live in temporary "encampments" (i.e., huts made of woven bamboo) in the surrounding area. The Biwol say they are from Iwol, while the Banapas say they are from Bantata, and the Nyolo say they are from Oussonkala (a village abandoned for some years now).

The reason behind this division into three groups is not clear. Few linguistic differences can be found between them. Apparently the Nyolo were one people with the Biwol, but during a war against the Peuls, they fled to hide in the mountains to the north and have been there ever since.

The majority of the Bedik are Catholic.

3.5 Badiaranke

The Badiaranke are inhabitants of Senegal and Guinea. In Senegal they live to the west of the Niokolo Koba Park: 30 kilometers north of the Guinea border to 100 kilometers farther west. In Guinea they are found in the region to the west of Youkounkoun reaching as far as the Guinea-Bissau border and covering 40 kilometers to the south of the Senegal border.

The Badiaranke refer to themselves as *Bejaad* and to their region as *Pajaad*. Gisele Ducos (1971) numbered them at 5,500 in her paper on "Structure du Badiaranke de Guinee et du Senegal."

Some linguists link Badiaranke more closely with Biafada and languages in Guinea-Bissau than with the Tenda group. Ducos (1971) places them with the Tenda due to the similarities in their noun class systems and consonant alternations.

4. Mapping Questionnaire

4.1 Explanation and methodology

In order to determine which village would give the most accurate sampling of a perceived dialect area, short questionnaires (see appendix A) were administered. These questionnaires proved especially useful in choosing a Bassari village in which to do the 170-word wordlist, as there seem to be several different dialects of Bassari—the other Tenda languages being more homogeneous.

A 30-word wordlist (see appendix B) was also used to help discern dialectical differences between Bassari villages and between Bedik villages.

4.2 Conclusions

According to responses we gathered from the questionnaires, it appears that the Bassari villages divide into two distinct dialect groups. Yet, short wordlists elicited in selected villages from each "dialect" revealed little or no lexical differences and minor pronunciation differences. For this reason, the Bassari village of Edale was randomly chosen as the place to elicit the 170-word wordlist.

Mapping questionnaires combined with short wordlists showed little or no difference between the three Bedik dialects: Banapas, Biwol, and Nyolo. Logistical reasons led us to choose Thiobo (Banapas) for our survey.

Only one village was visited each for Konyagui and Badiaranke, because homogeneous Konyagui and Badiaranke villages are hard to find in Senegal. Short questionnaires didn't point to any one prestigious center for either language within Senegal's borders.

5. Wordlist

5.1 Explanation and methodology

The standard 170-word wordlist used by SIL in Africa was used for elicitation in each of the four languages we surveyed: Bassari, Bedik, Konyagi, and Badiaranke. Each word was given in French to a group of villagers. Then they reached a consensus on its equivalent in their language before we transcribed it phonetically. Following the transcription of all 170 words, the list was recorded on cassette, each word being repeated three times. If the French word given was not recognized, our assistant gave the word in Peul. Each word was transcribed by both team members, and the transcriptions were compared and discussed until a consensus was reached.

5.2 Analysis

While tone was noted during the elicitation of each wordlist, it was not considered in the lexicostatistical analysis. Suffixes and prefixes were also ignored. Finally, some words were eliminated from each wordlist if they were homonyms or doublets (i.e., sharing the same root) with another word elicited from the same list.

The following table shows the number of words compared in each of the four languages.

Table 1. Number of compared words

| | | | |
|------------|---------|-------|---------|
| Badiaranke | | | |
| 158 | Konyagi | | |
| 158 | 164 | Bedik | |
| 158 | 164 | 163 | Bassari |

Table 2 gives the percentage of lexically similar words found between languages. "Cognates" were determined by comparative analysis of all four elicitations from any given wordlist entry. When any two words were determined to be phonetically similar and to have come from the same root, they were assigned to the same lexical group. Blair's rules (see appendix C) for identifying synchronically cognate roots were applied in combination with the linguists' knowledge of the set of consonant alternations in each language and other consistent phonetic differences between the languages (see appendix D).

Table 2. Percentages Matrix of Lexically Similar Words

| | | | | |
|------------|---------|-------|---------|--|
| Badiaranke | | | | |
| 7 | Konyagi | | | |
| 8 | 10 | Bedik | | |
| 3 | 21 | 31 | Bassari | |

5.3 Conclusions

Languages with 60 percent–100 percent lexical similarity are considered possible dialects of the same language, and therefore may be mutually intelligible. When this standard is applied to a lexical comparison of the Tenda languages, whose lexical similarity is much less than 60 percent, we have to conclude that each of these four languages is indeed a language in its own right. They would be able to communicate in complex situations only through extended exposure to the other languages.

6. Sociolinguistic questionnaire

6.1 Explanation and methodology

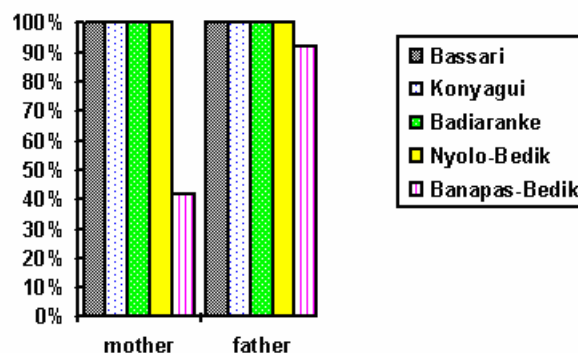
Our sociolinguistic questionnaire was administered to five languages. We chose in each instance (except in Konyagui) a sampling of twelve people: six women and six men. From each group we interviewed, three were under age 30, and three were over age 30. All had been born in the same village or dialectical center (as perceived by the villagers) of the language in question. In the Konyagui village of Bakbak, we were only able to complete five of the twelve questionnaires from two males and two females under age 30 and one female over age 30.

The questionnaire consisted of four sections: (1) personal information, (2) attitudes toward the language, (3) the use of the language, and (4) sociolinguistic tendencies. All of the thirteen questions were written in English and translated into French on the spot for the person being interviewed. Our assistant sometimes translated questions into Peul or the mother tongue of the interviewee. A sample questionnaire is included in appendix E.

6.2 Analysis

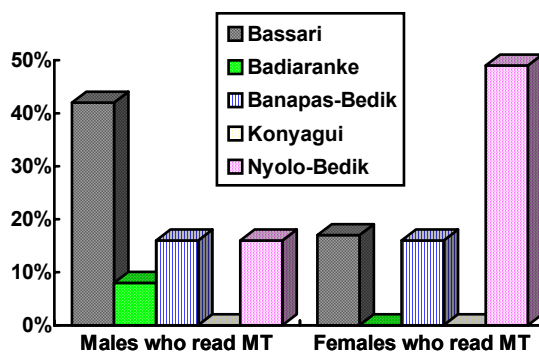
Upon examining the answers to the questions, we chose to highlight one or two in each of the four categories that stood out as strongly revealing the people's perspective and attitude, among other things. A summary of the responses to these questions appears for the following in bar graphs. The question numbers correspond to the Sociolinguistic Questionnaire in appendix E.

Question 1 “*What is your mother’s tongue? What is your father’s mother tongue? (Is it the same mother tongue that you speak?)*”



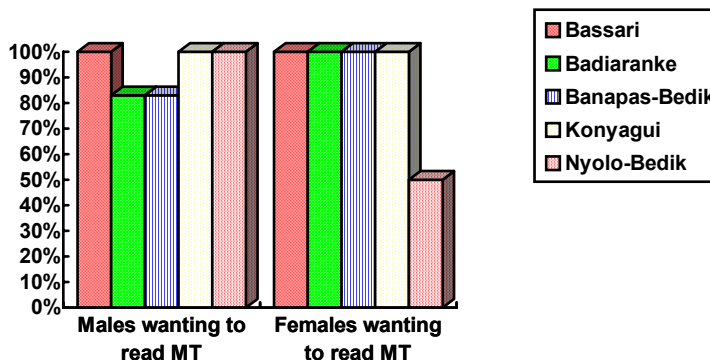
This graph shows that for the most part language groups don't intermarry. Only the Banapas-Bedik mix dialects. It is likely that their pattern of marrying within their language group will support the continued use of the mother tongue.

Question 2 “*Can you read your own language?*”



Due to the efforts of the Catholic and Protestant church, literature exists in all three of the following mother tongues: Bassari, Banapas, and Nyolo.

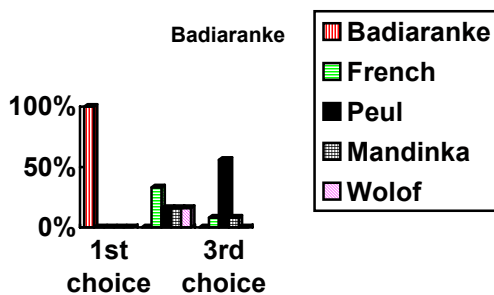
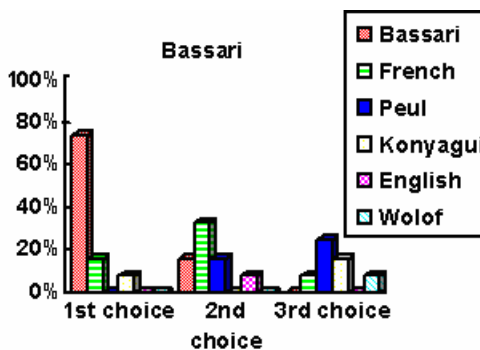
Question 3 “*Would you like to learn to read books written in your own language?*”

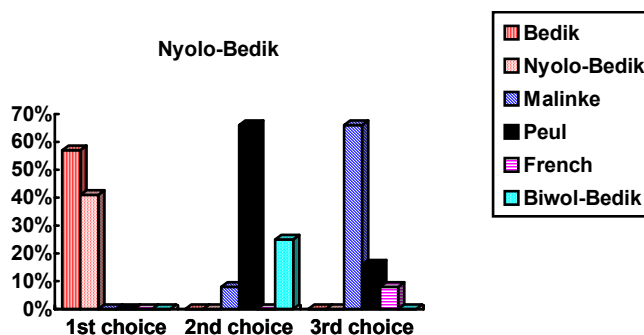
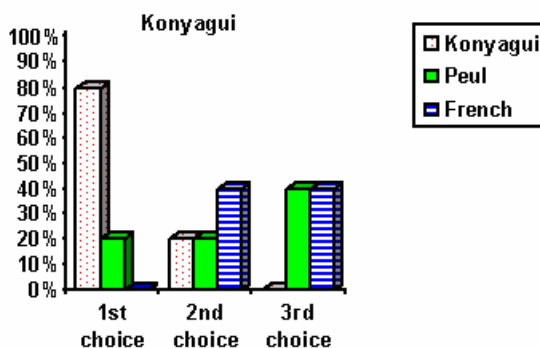


Almost everyone we interviewed expressed an interest in learning to read in their own language, men and women alike.

Among the Nyolo we noticed a slight indifference or indecision in this area, perhaps because of the relative newness of the idea in their region, a Catholic school having just been established there in 1985.

Question 4 “*What are the three important languages (in descending order of importance) for your people/children to know?*”





These graphs show, for each village, the other languages that are spoken in that village (apart from the mother tongue) and their perceived order of importance. The mother tongue almost always occupies the primary position, which tells us that it is not in the least scorned. It is the preferred language of the people. (Sometimes a distinction was made by the respondent between Nyolo and Biwol; other times Bedik was used as a generic name covering both languages.)

French, the language of prestige, is not highly regarded among any of the groups except the Bassaris. This is perhaps explained by their unique location, right at the exit from the National Park where large numbers of French-speakers spend their vacation, and come into regular contact with the Bassari people.

Question 5–7 “*What do you speak in the following situations?*”

Responses were, almost invariably, the mother tongue. In summary, Peul is used as the *trade language*, while French is used *in the schools*. Peul, French, or Malinke are used when communicating *with government officials*. In Konyagui and Bassari villages, the mother tongue was often used in the schools along with French.

Question #11 “*Are there people in the village who speak only your language?*”

Question #13 “*Do your children learn another language before starting school?*”

The purpose of these two questions was to determine the exact role of the mother tongue in each language group. Is it being replaced by another language? Is it losing its importance in the culture? Among the Nyolo-speakers, apparently all the children are bilingual in Peul or Malinke, without exception. The Banapas-speakers varied in their responses. The men claimed that there were some monolingual children and elderly people, yet they also said that children often learn Peul or Malinke before starting school. The women claim that no one is monolingual, but most said that the children don't learn another language before starting school. This doesn't give us a very clear picture! Bassari-speakers pointed to the elderly (sometimes specifying the women) as being monolingual. The children either learn Pulaar or nothing at all before starting school. The Badiaranke women often remain monolingual. The children sometimes learn Pulaar. In the Konyagui village we surveyed, there were monolingual individuals in every age group, and the children rarely learned another language before starting school.

6.3 Conclusions

It is evident that these Tenda languages have kept their deep roots in the culture in spite of the influence of other languages in their midst. The mother tongue remains the most used. Preserving it in written form is important to all.

In certain domains the mother tongue gives way, almost exclusively, to other languages for trade or reasons of prestige. Those domains are the market, the school, and the government. The strength of other languages in these domains does not, however, seem to diminish the overall use of, and preference for, the mother tongue on a day-to-day basis.

7. Recommendations

7.1 Language Development / Literature Development

Since lexicostatistical percentages between all four languages fall well below the 50% cutoff, they should each be viewed as needing their own language development program. The sociolinguistic study done in each language supports that conclusion by the positive attitudes expressed toward the use and preservation of the mother tongue.

7.2 Literacy

An interest in learning to read in the mother tongue was also widely expressed. Piggy-backed on the literacy initiatives being taken by the Catholic church in French, mother-tongue literacy classes should prove successful.

7.3 for further survey work

Nothing in the survey findings indicated the existence of any significant differences between the Tenda languages spoken in Senegal and Guinea. However, we recommend further survey work in Guinea to provide clear evidence of this.

Appendix A: Village Mapping Questionnaire

Village _____ Administrator _____
 Chief _____ Date _____

1. What do you call yourselves? _____ Your language? _____

What do others call you? _____ Your language? _____

2. What local villages speak the same as you do? _____

What local villages speak differently than you do? _____

3. Does language group X speak the same as you do or differently? _____

4. What is the best village to live in to learn to speak like you do? _____

Second-best? _____

5. Where do you hold your major ceremonies? _____

What villages come to these ceremonies? _____

6. Are there people here who do not speak your language? _____

What language(s) do they speak? _____

7. Are there people in the village who speak only your language? _____

Which ones? _____

8. What language do children in this village use for play? _____

Demographic notes:

Number of houses _____ School(s) _____

Families (fires) _____ Religion _____

Appendix B: Short Wordlist

- | | |
|---------------|-------------|
| 1. oeil | 17. corne |
| 2. langue | 18. queue |
| 3. nez | 19. oeuf |
| 4. citrouille | 20. lait |
| 5. cheveux | 21. mortier |
| 6. soleil | 22. dent |
| 7. lune | 23. village |
| 8. nuage | 24. couteau |
| 9. sel | 25. pierre |
| 10. sable | 26. il dit |
| 11. poulet | 27. eau |
| 12. chien | 28. feu |
| 13. chevre | 29. arbre |
| 14. poisson | 30. feuille |
| 15. vache | (31. homme) |
| 16. plume | (32. femme) |

Appendix C: Lexicostatistic Analysis Guidelines: Criteria for Determining Phonetic Similarity (Quoted from Blair 1990:30–33)

Analysis of word lists consists of grouping similar words together and then counting what percentage of [the words from] two word lists have been grouped together...Decisions about similarity groupings...are lexicostatistical in nature, and a set of criteria for these decisions is desirable in order to ensure a degree of uniformity among the similarity percentages calculated by different researchers. According to...[the following standard], all pairs of phones in two words being compared are classified into one of three categories.

CATEGORY ONE includes the following possibilities:

- a. Exact matches (e.g., [b] occurs in the same position in each word).
- b. Vowels which differ by only one phonological feature (e.g., [i] and [e] occur in the same position in each word).
- c. Phonetically similar segments which occur consistently in the same position in three or more word pairs...[See appendix D.]

CATEGORY TWO consists of the following:

- a. Those phonetically similar nonvocalic segments which are not attested in three pairs...
- b. Vowels which differ by two or more phonological features (e.g., [a] and [u]).

CATEGORY THREE includes the following possibilities:

- a. All corresponding segments which are not phonetically similar.
- b. A segment which corresponds to nothing in the second word of the pair...

Each pair of corresponding phones in each pair of words is classified according to one of these three categories. The number of phones in a word as well as the categories to which different phones belong determines whether two words are to be considered similar...If two words have a different number of phones, the length of the longer of the two is taken. The various permissible categories of similar words are summarized [below:]

Word Length and Linguistic Similarity

| Word Length | | Category One | Category Two | Category Three |
|-------------|---|--------------|--------------|----------------|
| 2 | = | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| 3 | = | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| 4 | = | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| 5 | = | 3 | 1 | 1 |
| 6 | = | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 7 | = | 4 | 2 | 1 |
| 8 | = | 4 | 2 | 2 |
| 9 | = | 5 | 2 | 2 |
| 10 | = | 5 | 3 | 2 |
| 11 | = | 6 | 3 | 2 |
| 12 | = | 6 | 3 | 3 |

In other words, if each pair of words has two phones, both pairs of phones have to be in category one in order for the two words to be considered similar. If each of a pair of words is three phones in length, either all the phones must be in category one or two of them must be in category one and one of them may be in category two. If each of a pair of words is four phones in length, either all of the corresponding pairs of phones must be in category one, or three pairs of phones can be in category one and one pair may be in category two or three, or two pairs of phones may be in category one and one pair of phones may be in category two and one pair in category three. These criteria set the lower threshold for similarity; a pair of words may be more similar than the criteria described here, but they may not be less similar and still be considered [phonetically] similar.

Appendix D: Consonant Alternation Tables

Bedik

f s sy x w bh r l y dhy yn
 p t ty k b bh d dh dy dhy n,
 p t ty k mb m nd n dny ny n,

Bassari

f s sy x sw w wn r l y yn yn yh yhn
 p t ty k kw b bh d dh dy dhy n, g -
 p t ty k,ng ngw mb m nd n ndy ny n, ng n,

Badiaranke

f s s - - r - -,w b d j m
 pp tt cc kk p t c k bbbh dhdh y mm
 pp tt cc kk p nt nc nk mb nd nj mm

Konyagi

f w v wn r l ry rn s y yn x w,y wn,yn
 p b bh m t d dh n c yh ny k g n,
 p mp mb m t nt nd n c nj ny k nk n,

Consistent variations in consonants between languages were as follows:

Bedik/Konyagi

l → ry

r → l

s → r

sy → s

Bedik/Bassari

dh → l

c → sy

l → n

Appendix E: Sociolinguistic Questionnaire

Village _____ Language _____ Administrator _____
 Language group _____ Date _____

Personal information:

1. Name _____ Age _____ Sex _____
2. Birthplace of mother _____ Her mother tongue _____
 Birthplace of father _____ His mother tongue _____
3. Can you read: a. mother tongue _____ b. French _____ c. Arabic _____

Language attitude:

4. Would you (like to learn to) read books written in your language? _____
5. What are the most important languages for your people/children to know?
 a. _____ b. _____ c. _____
6. Would it be a good idea to use your own language to teach your children to speak/read French? _____

Language use:

7. What do you speak in the following situations?
 a. market _____ e. school (teacher/student) _____
 b. work _____ f. major celebrations _____
 c. religious inst. _____ g. government officials _____
 d. boutique _____
8. What do you speak to the following people:
 a. spouse _____ e. friends _____
 b. parents _____ f. chief _____
 c. siblings _____ g. government officials _____
 d. children _____
9. What language do you use for:
 a. praying _____ c. counting money _____
 b. arguing _____ d. counting items _____

Sociolinguistic trends:

10. If a man marries someone from a different village, where they speak differently from you,
 a. where does the couple live? _____
 b. what language do the children speak? _____
11. Are there people in the village who speak only your language? _____
 Which ones? _____
12. What language do children in this village use for play? _____
13. Do your children learn another language before starting school? _____
 Which one(s)? _____

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