Ministry of Higher Education, Computer Services, and Scientific Research

TIBEA SURVEY REPORT

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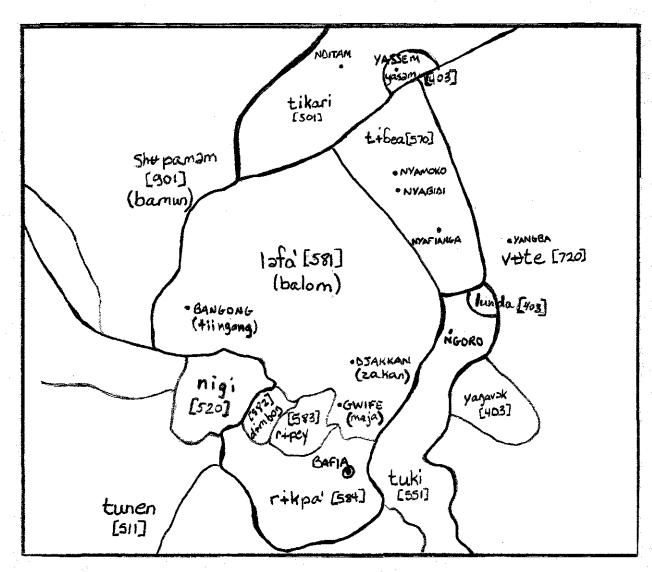
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Tibea is a speech form found in the Centre Province of Cameroon, the Mbam Division, at the northern limit of the Ngoro Subdivision. It is reportedly spoken by about 1400 people in three villages: Nyamoko, Nyabidi, and Nyafianga. Tibea is the term which the people themselves use in referring to their language. Throughout this report it will also be used to refer to the people as an ethnic group. The administrative term is Djanti or Njanti.

There are a number of large language groups which border the Tibea area: Tikar to the north, Vute to the east and southeast, Ngoro (Tuki) to the south, Balom (Bafia) to the west and southwest, and Bamun to the northwest. Two smaller groups are Lunda to the southeast and Yasem to the northeast, reportedly forms of Ewondo.



Map of the Tibea and surrounding areas adapted (with modifications) from ALCAM, p. 395

The villages of Nyamoko and Nyafianga each consist of several quarters, and Nyabidi village is reported to be the administrative center of the Tibea area. The Tibea people are quite isolated geographically, and by and large, they have limited contact with people from outside the region. For all practical purposes there is no transportation or communication to the east or west of the Tibea area. There are no roads in those directions, and the closest villages are nearly 20 kilometers distant. There is one road to the south (toward Ngoro) and two leading north (toward the Tikar and Yasem areas).

Tibea is a Bantu language classified by Guthrie in the Bafia Group as Ngayaba or Djanti (A54). The Linguistic Atlas of Cameroon (ALCAM; Dieu 1983) lists Tibea as number 570. In the Ethnologue (Grimes 1988a) it is given the three letter code NGY, which appears to derive from Guthrie's term "Ngayaba", which is also one of the alternate names listed by the Ethnologue. Guthrie's Bafia Group also includes Balom (A51), Dimbong (A52), and Bafia (A53). ALCAM lists Balom as lafa' (581), Dimbong by the same name (582), and splits Bafia into two entries, ripey (583) and rikpa (584). Ethnologue treats lafa', ripey, and rikpa as dialects of Bafia. This is illustrated by the following table:

Guthrie	ALCAM	Ethnologue
Balom (A51)	lafa' (581)	KSF DII
Dimbong (A52) Bafia (A53)	dimbong (582) ripey (583)	KSF
Bafia (A53)	rikpa (584)	KSF
Djanti (A54)	tibea (570)	NGY

Table 1. Guthrie's Bafia Group (A50s) with corresponding ALCAM and Ethnologue identification

Evidently, none of the neighboring languages are very closely related linguistically to Tibea. In the literature they are classified quite distinctly. Vute is a Northern Bantoid language (Bendor-Samuel 1989:421) listed in ALCAM's zone 7 (number 720). Bendor-Samuel subdivides Southern Bantoid into narrow Bantu and wide Bantu, which includes Tikar, classified by ALCAM in zone 5 (number 501), Tuki (Guthrie's A61 (Ngoro), 551 in ALCAM), and Bamun, a Grassfields Bantu language listed in ALCAM's zone 9 (number 901). Tibea and the remaining languages of interest are considered as narrow Bantu, including Ewondo, Guthrie's A72 and ALCAM's 403. The following table illustrates these classifications.

Language	Guthrie	ALCAM
Tibea Balom	Djanti (A54) Balom (A51)	tibea (570) lafa' (581)
Dimbong Bape	Dimbong (A52) Bafia (A53)	dimbong (582) ripey (583)
Bafia	Bafia (A53)	rikpa (584)
Tuki Ewondo	Ngoro (A61) Ewondo (A72)	tuki (551) beti-fang (403)
	Tikar	tikari (501)
Vute Bamun		vute (720) shu pamam (901)

Table 2. Tibea and neighboring languages, with corresponding Guthrie and ALCAM classification

According to the classifications found in the literature, the most closely related of these speech forms to Tibea would appear to be Guthrie's A50s: Balom, Dimbong and Bafia (ALCAM's 580s). However, the similarity percentages for Tibea and some of the surrounding languages are quite low according to an article by Guarisma and Paulian (Guarisma and Möhlig 1986:93-176). In this study they were able to incorporate an analysis of the noun class and phonological systems in addition to the comparison of lexical items. Their results are as follows:

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tibea
291
    maja (Balom-Gwife)
    723
         tiingong (Balom-Bangong)
              rikpa (Bafia)
326
    871
         739
              277
158
    228
          223
                   tunen
    226
          204
               257
                    235
                         tuki
181
    228
         228
                   130
                         173
271
              240
                              lunda
278
    220
          231
               222
                    136
                         134
                              385
                                  asem
242
    285
         263
              275
                   194
                         184
                              394
                                  434
                                       ewondo
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Table 3. Similarity percentages for Tibea and some neighboring languages (data taken from Guarisma, p. 131)

Guarisma and Paulian note that Tibea appears to be more closely related to Bafia than to any of the other languages considered in the study. However, at 32.6% similarity, this relationship would appear to be quite distant and one would expect that intercomprehension would require a significant amount of acquisition of the other language. (For more on Tibea's relationship to the Bafia languages see Boone 1992.)

Using data from another article by Guarisma (Guarisma and Möhlig 1986:281-329), it is possible to compare about 90 lexical items from Tibea with the corresponding items from the forms of Vute spoken in Yangba and Ngoro. A cursory inspection of these wordlists shows less than 10 similar items out of 90, so Tibea and Vute are evidently quite dissimilar lexically.

The same is true for a comparison of Tibea with Tikar, where less than 20 items out of 86 were found to be similar. It would appear then, that Tibea is quite unlike any of these surrounding languages, at least in terms of lexical similarity.

1.2 The Survey

The Tibea rapid appraisal survey was conducted in March of 1992 by SIL member Dave Bradley with the assistance of Douglas Boone. The original intention was to conduct the survey on site, but this was not possible due to mechanical breakdown of the ferry at the Mbam River crossing. The ferry was broken down for the entire week during which the survey team was in the area, thus preventing the trip from being made. However, a school teacher named Nicolas NGANG, who is a native son of Nyamoko village, was located in Bafia, and he was able to provide the data upon which this report is based. There were no opportunities to verify this information with any other sources.

1.3 Purpose of the Survey

Tibea is listed in the Bible Translation Needs Bulletin 1 (Grimes 1988b:57) as a "possible translation need". This is to say that little or nothing was known about the need of the Tibea people for local-language Scriptures. The purpose of this survey was to revise this status at least to either "probable translation need" or "unlikely translation need" by means of a rapid appraisal of the sociolinguistic situation in the Tibea-speaking area. More broadly, the purpose was to evaluate the need for codification (development of a standard written form) and for Bible translation in Tibea.

2 PROCEDURES

Rapid appraisal surveys attempt to gain a general overview of the sociolinguistic situation of a particular language area, in view of the possible need for codification of the local language. The procedures were designed to obtain the appropriate information in a short time (usually less than one week) using informal interviews, as well as individual and group questionnaires.

Because there was only one person available for questioning, the methods were modified for this survey. Two interviews were held with this man, during which three major areas were kept under consideration:

- (a) dialect situation distribution and comprehension of related speech forms, as well as the corresponding attitudes,
- (b) bilingualism extent of proficiency in French and/or any other languages widely used in the area, as well as the corresponding attitudes, and
- (c) viability the prospect of a successful language development project in the local language as shown by attitudes toward the mother tongue and by reported patterns of language use.

A list of about 170 words was also elicited for lexicostatistic comparison with the neighboring languages.

3 RESULTS AND EVALUATION

3.1 Dialect Situation

There is reportedly very little, if any, variation ("pas de distinctions quelconques") in terms of vocabulary, pronunciation, tone, etc., between the three Tibea villages. However, Yangba quarter of Nyafianga village is said to have a fairly significant proportion of Vute women brought in for marriage. Consequently, there is some use of Vute in this quarter, although this is reportedly quite limited with respect to the use of Tibea. There is also a Vute village, Ngila, situated between Nyafianga and Nyabidi villages. Other than these two exceptions, the speech throughout the area is said to be very homogeneous.

The surrounding languages are evidently not very closely related to Tibea. It is said that there are only isolated instances of people who understand any of these languages to a reasonable degree. This comprehension is based on fairly extensive contact with speakers of the neighboring languages, something which is apparently not a common occurrence among the Tibea. Evidently, then, there is no generalized comprehension of any of the surrounding languages.

Comments

To all appearances, none of the neighboring speech forms are closely related to Tibea. Furthermore, Tibea speakers do not generally understand the speech of any of these neighbors, possibly because of their relative isolation. The question of attitude towards them is therefore a moot point; even if there were a very positive attitude toward reading and writing one of the surrounding languages, it would evidently not serve the general population in terms of comprehensibility.

3.2 Bilingualism

French is beginning to spread throughout the area, particularly among the younger generation, through the medium of public education. Each village has its own primary school, two of which have opened within the last three years. Any children who continue on to secondary school would reportedly go to Ngoro. Evidently, in the past, the advantages of education were not perceived, and consequently there are said to be many people over the age of 35 or 40 who cannot read or write and who are very weak in terms of proficiency in French. It seems that the present generation of parents view school as being beneficial to their children, with the result that the younger generation is growing up with increased exposure to French and a significantly higher proficiency in the language.

Comments

The older generation (above 35 or 40 years of age) represents a significant segment of the population. It would appear that the use of French, in either written or oral form, is not a viable option for this group. While the younger generation is gaining increasing proficiency in French, it is not clear whether they would be well served by only French literature and Scriptures. Answering this question would require further research.

3.3 Viability

The language is reportedly in vigorous use in the domains of church, market, and home. It seems that none of the neighboring languages are encroaching on the Tibea area (with the possible exception of the Vute village mentioned previously).

There are Roman Catholic chapels in two of the villages and one is in the process of being built in the third. The catechists are local people and the services are conducted almost entirely in Tibea. Prayers, songs, and announcements are all in the local language. (Songs are even accompanied by local musical instruments.) The Bible reading is interpreted directly into Tibea, meaning that the French Bible is used but not read orally before the interpretation. The preaching is in the local language unless it is by the priest, who preaches in French with interpretation into Tibea.

A "permanent" market is held in Nyamoko every Sunday, which apparently serves the people for all their normal everyday needs. To purchase large-scale items such as furniture or roofing tin, they tend to go to Ngoro.

It is reported that the Tibea generally tend to live with difficulty outside the area; "ils sont enracines". Some people do leave to go to school or to find work, but this is evidently not very common. Those who have left return often for their holidays or for retirement. Apparently, all of the village leadership, at every age level, live locally. In fact, non-residents are reportedly not allowed to stand for election to any leadership position.

Comments

It seems that the Tibea people are basically self sufficient in the sense that they can apparently meet their basic needs locally. Since they are relatively isolated geographically, they have maintained vigorous use of the local language with little influence from outside languages. This is starting to change with the use of French in the schools, but it is too early to tell whether, or to what extent, any language shift might take place.

4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This survey confirmed that there is a distinct and unified speech form called Tibea, spoken in the villages of Nyamoko, Nyabidi, and Nyafianga. There are apparently no appreciable dialectal variations among them, and no difficulties of intercomprehension.

The Tibea people are relatively self-sufficient and seem to have fairly limited contact with the neighboring languages. French is increasing in importance and stature, but at this point its use is limited to the younger generation (below about 35 years of age). Although Tibea is a relatively small language group, about 1400 speakers, the people do not seem to have adopted any other particular language for generalized use in wider communication.

The Tibea are surrounded by a number of large language groups, but apparently none of these have caused the local language to diminish in importance or use. The local language is reportedly used almost exclusively in the critical domains of home and church. Few people leave the area, and those who do leave return often.

Based on these factors, it seems reasonable to recommend that the Bible translation status for Tibea be revised to "probable translation need". Further revision of this status would require verification of the data presented in this report with other knowledgeable sources in the Tibea area.

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