A Rapid Appraisal Language Survey of Sharwa, a Language of Cameroon
(Mayo-Tsanaga Division, Far North Province)

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References
1. Introduction

This report describes a sociolinguistic survey (Rapid Appraisal) of the Sharwa language conducted February 9-10, 2000 in the Bourrah subdivision of the Mayo-Tsanaga division of the Far North Province of Cameroon. The purpose of the study was to make an assessment of the desirability of developing a written form for the Sharwa language, and to determine the possible scope of a potential literacy project. The research was carried out by Dr. Domche Teko Engelbert who is the Chairman of the Department of Linguistics and African Languages at the University of Dschang, and Edward and Elizabeth Brye, both of SIL.

We gratefully acknowledge the assistance and welcome received from regional and local government, religious, and traditional leaders, especially the subdivisional officer at Bourrah as well as the chief of the Tchevi canton who recommended we first visit Djeki in order to research the Sharwa language. Without their cooperation, this mission would not have been possible.

1.1 Names

There is some variation in the way the people refer to themselves as a people. In both the villages of Djeki and Duva’, the people refer to their language as Sarwaye. Although the speakers of this language call the language by the same name, they refer to themselves as a people, as below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Villages</th>
<th>Name of People</th>
<th>Name of Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Djeki</td>
<td>Majieke</td>
<td>Sarwaye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duva’</td>
<td>Mofoy (in Fulbe) or Sarwwa</td>
<td>Sarwaye</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We will use the name that the people use to refer to their language: Sarwaye.

1.2 Locality and Population

The Sharwa language is spoken in six villages east of Bourrah in the Tchevi Canton of the Bourrah subdivision of the Mayo-Tsanaga Division. (See appendices for a map of these villages, a linguistic map from the *Atlas Linguistique du Cameroun* [ALCAM], and a road map). The chief of the Tchevi Canton states there to be a total of 3,000 Sharwa speakers from all six villages mentioned above. Based on group interviews, there are six villages:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Village</th>
<th>1987 Population</th>
<th>Population Estimate$^1$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Movoy (a series of quarters)</td>
<td>606</td>
<td>840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Djeki</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duva’</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tchevi (mixed with other languages)</td>
<td>1876</td>
<td>2600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Sedifi (mixed with Gude speakers)</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Guijiguiji (mixed with Daba speakers)</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SHARWA TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>3683</strong></td>
<td><strong>5100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^1$ These villages are located in the Mayo-Oulo District of the Mayo-Louti Department in the North Province.

$^1$ The population estimate for the year 2000 is based on the 2.9% growth, which was the population growth rate from the 1976 census to the 1987 census. Djeki includes the quarters of Popoi and Mburah/Eva. During the Djeki group interview, the village of Tahti was mentioned as no longer existing.
1.3 History of the Sharwa-speaking People
In the villages of Djeki and Duva', those interviewed said that they have the same origins with the speakers of the Gude language.

1.4 Linguistic Classification
Sharwa is listed in the Atlas Linguistique du Cameroun, also referred to as ALCAM, (Dieu and Renaud, 1983) as Tchadique, Centre, Centre-Ouest, Margi-Gbwata, Gbwata, Nord. Dieu and Renaud classify Sharwa under the ALCAM code [214].

1.5 Research Objectives
This survey was conducted as part of an overall goal of assessing the need for literacy development in national languages and Bible translation throughout Cameroon. The research team's objectives were the following:
• Make an evaluation, based on both lexicostatistics and on village-based speakers' perceptions, of the level of intercomprehension within Sharwa and between Sharwa and adjacent languages.
• Determine the feasibility of developing literacy materials in the Sharwa language. To assess the vitality of Sharwa in terms of the use of other languages, the interest in language development, and other sociolinguistic factors.
• To find out which other languages are understood by speakers within the Sharwa-speaking community, and then identify the attitudes toward the idea of reading and writing Sharwa and/or other languages.

2. Methodology
The sociolinguistic research approach employed was the rapid appraisal survey (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). The rapid-appraisal approach provides an overall impression of potential needs for codification through reports from local inhabitants that take a relatively short period of time. A rapid appraisal survey seeks to find out information with respect to the dialect situation, multilingualism, and the vitality and viability of the language.

3. Research Results
This section contains the lexicostatistical results obtained from the two villages of Djeki and Duva' from the elicitation of the ALCAM list.

3.1 Lexicostatistics
When applying the apparent cognates approach (Wimbish 1989: 58) to determining similarity between dialects, the result is as reflected in the following matrix:

2 The ALCAM word list we used was a revised version with six additional words. The elicited list and copies of the questionnaires can be obtained from Cameroon SIL's Survey Department.
All comparisons are well below the 70% threshold discussed in section 3.3.1 below.

3.2 Dialect Situation

The team aimed to identify speech varieties within the language by measuring comprehension between them. A lexicostatistical analysis of the Duva’ and Djeki word lists showed a 99% similarity. The 99% shared vocabulary (based on phonetic similarity) between the two villages indicates they belong to the same speech variety.

In Djeki, 13 men and 3 women (with 20 children looking on) were interviewed as a group in a school classroom. A small group interview with six men present was carried out in the village of Duva’. Also, according to both groups interviewed, residents of Djeki, Duva’, Movoy, and Tchevi speak exactly alike, whereas in Guijiguiji and Sedifi the language is spoken slightly differently. In Guijiguiji, Sharwa speakers live alongside Daba speakers and in Sedifi they are mixed with Gude speakers. The village of Tchevi also has a variety of languages spoken alongside one another.

3.3 Multilingualism

In this section, we will examine the degree of comprehension reported by Sharwa speakers between their language and the languages of the people around them. The subject of multilingualism was examined in order to obtain an assessment of the level of understanding and oral competence in languages geographically and linguistically near to the speech variety under study, as well as in the languages of wider communication.

3.3.1 Languages Linguistically Close

With regard to lexicostatistical similarity, Bergman (1989:9.5.2) and others have referred to the higher percentage (lexical similarity percentage plus margin of error) as the “upper confidence limit (UCL) of the calculation.” 70% lexical similarity UCL is the agreed upon threshold for determining whether two speech forms are separate languages or require intelligibility testing to determine whether they could share a written form. Lexical similarity between Sharwa and all speech varieties surrounding it is well below 70% (UCL).

Sharwa speakers do not use their own language when communicating with speakers of adjacent groups, indicating that speakers of all neighbouring languages do not adequately understand Sharwa. To communicate with speakers of surrounding languages, most people use Fulfulde. We conclude that Sharwa is a language separate from all others based on the combination of a low similarity percentage and the self-reported language use patterns of the people themselves.

3.3.2 Languages of Wider Communication—Fulfulde and French

Fulfulde is the major language of wider communication (LWC) of the Far North Province. For both villages, the youth are reported to be the most proficient speakers of it. French is also a LWC, used in the schools and government offices. But our group interviews conducted in French required translation into Fulfulde, as few people speak French with any degree of proficiency.
3.3.3 Other Languages

Interviewees of both villages say they share no intercomprehension with speakers of non-Sharwa languages. Sharwa speakers do not generally learn the vernacular languages of the peoples around them. Certain ones in Djeki, however, do speak and understand Gude and Jimi. Of three women present for the group interview, one was able to understand both of these languages. In Djeki, Fulfulde is used with Gude speakers though they claim to be one people with them and to share the same origins. Duva’ residents use a mix of both Gude and Fulfulde to speak with Gude speakers. Not surprisingly, speakers from both Djeki and Duva’ state that they understand Gude the best of all the languages surrounding them.

In contrast to Gude, which is the best known non-Sharwa language understood by the residents of Djeki and Duva’, both Bana and Daba are the least understood of all. Teleki (Tsuvan) and Jimi also are not understood.

3.4 Language Vitality and Viability

In this section, we will see how mother tongue speakers of Sharwa from the villages of Duva’ and Djeki view the extent to which their language is used in daily life. In Djeki, Sharwa is used at home and during conversations with friends. In Duva’, Fulfulde is also used alongside Sharwa at home and with strangers who live in the village.

In Djeki, Sharwa is used for work. At Duva’, both Sharwa and Fulfulde are used. Both Sharwa and Fulfulde are used at the markets. Residents of Djeki report that Gude also is used.

Fulfulde and Sharwa are used at the clinic located in Tchevi. Reportedly, children from Duva’ do not attend school, but students from Djeki use French for in-class instruction. Both French and Sharwa are used during times of recreation. All children from Djeki attend elementary school but there are only a few who can afford to continue studies at the secondary level. Students who fall into this category leave the village in order to live in the larger population centres. Children from the primary Sharwa-speaking village of Djeki are in exodus as soon as they finish school, indicating declining village population and transferring these numbers to the “cities,” for example, Tchevi (which is a village with a mix of languages) as well as Bourrah (which is a village in the middle of the Jimi-speaking region).

Interviewees at Djeki report that Sharwa is the only language used for public gatherings such as traditional ceremonies, making announcements, and meetings with regional chiefs. Those at Duva’ say that Sharwa is the only language used for making public announcements but that Sharwa and Fulfulde are used at traditional ceremonies. Fulfulde is the only language used at meetings of regional chiefs. Fulfulde is used when there are outsiders.

3.5 Language Attitudes

Of special interest was the potential of Sharwa-speakers learning to read and write a language other than their mother tongue.

3.5.1 Mother Tongue

Attitudes toward the mother tongue are positive. Both village interviews revealed that the people believe that their language will be spoken indefinitely. That said, interviewees stated that the youth from both villages speak Fulfulde more than the mother tongue. Parents are happy for their children to learn Fulfulde since this will enable them to make the adjustment as they interact with people from non-Sharwa speaking populations. Notwithstanding, group interviews in both villages revealed a
preference to learn to read and write their own language. As expected, residents of each village claimed their respective village to be the best location for learning their language. Those of Djeki stated that it would make sense for Djeki to be the location for language development of Sharwa as it is the centre of the Sharwa-speaking community. Residents of Duva' agreed that Djeki, or perhaps Tchevi, would be preferred.

3.5.2 Standardisation Efforts

Nothing has yet been written in the language, and no literacy program has ever been attempted. Nevertheless, residents of both villages state that they would be willing to cooperate with residents of neighbouring Sharwa-speaking villages in order to participate in such a program.

3.5.3 Migration and Intermarriage

As mentioned above, all children from Djeki attend primary school and, when they eventually lack the means to continue school, usually before reaching the secondary level, they move to the larger population centres. In both villages, intermarriage occurs with Gude-speakers. In addition, Djeki residents also marry Teleki and Daba speakers while those of Duva’ marry Fali speakers. Speakers of either village may marry whomever they like, and there are reportedly no marital restrictions imposed on residents of either village. When outsiders come to live in either village, their primary motivation usually is to cultivate the earth, of which there is too little. There are no outsiders coming to live in Djeki, whereas there are about five or six individuals who have originated from Fali and Matakam (Mokolo) who live in Duva’.

3.5.4 Language Shift

In Djeki, interviewees stated their belief that the young are speaking Fulfulde and French increasingly among themselves and that Sharwa is used third. Those in Duva’ believe that Sharwa and then Fulfulde are being used; no one goes to school where there is the opportunity to learn French. To contrast, all children of Djeki attend school, which gives the opportunity to learn French in the classroom and to meet children of other languages who are using Fulfulde as the LWC.

However, in Djeki the only ones to use French on a daily basis are the children who attend school. At Duva’, only Fulfulde and Sharwa are used daily, though it should be noted that ten Sharwa speakers who know French have recently returned to the village; so this might change.

When asked if the children mix or confuse Sharwa with another language, however, both groups said no. Upon further questioning, the young at Djeki admitted that they do in fact mix-up Sharwa with the Fulfulde and French at times. The adults then said that it is not a good thing to do so.

In both villages, interviewees state that it is a good thing for a young person to speak Fulfulde at home as this is an indication that the child is able to speak with others and to go out into the world to meet people.

In Duva’, there is the belief that Sharwa will be used indefinitely whereas in Djeki the interviewees simply said, “we don’t know.” In either case, both are positive about their language.
The exodus from Djeki to the larger population centres combined with the increasing use of Fula and French among the young are indicators that language shift may already be in process. In Duva', however, Sharwa seems to be more stable. Moreover, since Sharwa speakers are predominantly Muslim and since the shift toward Fula is more predictable among Muslim populations, the shift from Sharwa to Fula may be expected to increase.3

3.6 Language Development Potential

According to Watters (1989:6.7.1), there are three factors in particular that affect the nature and development of language programs: the homogeneity of the linguistic community, their openness to change and development, and the presence of a middle-aged leadership at the local level. We follow with a discussion of these three factors in the context of the villages surveyed.

3.6.1 Homogeneity of the Linguistic Community

Residents of each village perceive themselves as forming a linguistic unity with the speakers of the other Sharwa-speaking villages. Speakers agree that there are six villages: Movoy, Djeki, Duva', Tchevi, Guijiguji, and Sedifi. In Djeki and Duva', those interviewed said that all except the people of Guijiguji and Sedifi speak the same.

Even during heavy rains, the people are not cut off from one another. Acceptable roads connect Sharwa-speaking villages, and although the Mayo River separates Duva' and Guijiguji from the rest of the group during seasons of rain, the people of Duva' say there are no hindrances to travel; people travel by foot and bicycle. According to the response at Djeki, there is a development committee responsible for laying down stones so that people can traverse the Mayo River.

Religiously, Sharwa speakers are almost all Muslim. In Djeki, there are no Christians; all the Djeki Christians have left to go to Tchevi. The remainder is Muslim. Reportedly, no one practices traditional religion. In Duva', Muslims comprise the largest religious group. In addition, there are 30 individuals who practice traditional religion, and there are six Christians. Sixty individuals in Djeki reportedly have no religious preference.

3.6.2 Openness to Change

In Djeki, as already mentioned in the previous section, one of the primary responsibilities of the residents is to ensure that the Mayo River is crossable; this is accomplished by laying down large stones so that people can cross.

3.6.3 Village-Based Leadership

An important factor in determining the viability of a language project is the presence of a middle-aged leadership. Interviewees reported that they have leaders between the ages of 35 and 50. The chief of the village of Djeki lives outside of the village in Tchevi whereas the village chief of Duva' lives right in the village. All were certain that when present leaders are gone, there would be others to take their places, though there does not appear to be a recognition that both of these villages are experiencing a "brain drain" with the more educated ones moving elsewhere, leaving the village-based leadership to those with lesser education.

For the most part, the Sharwa-speaking community meets the criteria outlined by Watters as predictive of successful participation in a literacy development program.

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3 Mona Perrin, personal communication.
3.6.4 Attitudes toward Language Development

Those interviewed from both villages are receptive to the idea of learning to read and to write Sharwa.

In Duva’, the languages that residents would prefer to learn in the order of their priority are as follows: French, Sharwa, then Fulfulde. They say that French and Fulfulde would enable them to relate with other people.

In Djeki, interviewees first voiced that they would not want to learn Gude. They would, however, be interested in learning to read and write Fulfulde and French as this might aid them when they travel to Garoua. When asked to list, in order of preference, which languages besides Sharwa they would like to become literate in, they listed Fulfulde, then French, and then Gude.

4. SIL/CABTAL/NACALCO Activity and Plans

SIL workers, with the exception of those who participated in this survey, have had no contact with the speakers of this language group. Neither CABTAL (Cameroon Association for Bible Translation and Literacy) nor NACALCO (National Association of Cameroonian Language Committees) has plans to work on the Sharwa language.

5. Conclusions

In summary, the language appears to be vital, although there also are signs of language shift.

The fact that they use Fulfulde with speakers of adjacent languages indicates a lack of intelligibility with surrounding speech forms. The evidence suggests that speakers of the Sharwa language form a distinct linguistic unit. Sharwa continues to hold a prominent place in the daily lives of the Sharwa-speaking community, though this may be less likely in three of the six Sharwa villages. In Djeki, there is an exodus of children toward population centres after they have finished whatever level of schooling they have been able to afford. Duva’, in contrast, with its reported population of only about 250, cannot afford to lose any more of its population and, in any case, no one attends school. The three Sharwa villages where there is known to be a “mix” with other languages may well be candidates of language shift, but this remains to be verified. There are two outstanding questions:

1. To what degree are the populations of the Sharwa speaking villages of Tchevi, Gjijiguiji and Sedefi “mixed” with other languages?
2. Is the language becoming mixed or even replaced?

Certain factors should be considered when determining the feasibility of a language development program in the Sharwa language:

- There is no language committee.
- Of the six Sharwa-speaking villages, three have mixed populations and are living alongside speakers of other languages, including Gude and Daba which already have language development projects. Of the remaining three purely Sharwa-speaking villages, the two that we visited do not fit the profile or meet the conditions for a language development program. In Djeki, the largest village, there are significant indicators of language shift.
- The language appears to be vital, but the children are increasingly using Fulfulde.

6. Recommendations

I would recommend the development and testing of a Fulfulde SRT (sentence repetition test), and then carry it out in Sharwa.
Appendix A: Sharwa Villages and Surrounding Languages
Appendix B: ALCAM Map of Mayo-Tsanaga Department

Langues nationales: Département du MAYO-TSANAGA (Ext:Nord)

NIGERIA

MAYO-SAVA

MAYO-LOUTI

NIGERIA

MAYO-SAVA

MAYO-LOUTI

Langues nationales: Département du MAYO-TSANAGA (Ext:Nord)

NIGERIA

MAYO-SAVA

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Langues nationales: Département du MAYO-TSANAGA (Ext:Nord)

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Langues nationales: Département du MAYO-TSANAGA (Ext:Nord)
Appendix C: ALCAM Map of Mayo-Louti Department
Appendix D: Road Map
References


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