MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION, COMPUTER SERVICES
AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

DIMBONG SURVEY REPORT

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Dimbong is a speech form found in the Centre Province of Cameroon, Mbam Division, Bafia Sub-Division. It is spoken in the Mbong quarter of the village of Kalong and in the village of Dii in the Yambeta canton (traditional chiefdom). According to the village chiefs, the present resident population is less than 200 persons, about one hundred in Dii and forty in Mbong.

It is a Bantu language, classed by Guthrie as A.52 in the Bafia group. It is also listed in the Linguistic Atlas of Cameroon (ALCAM; Dieu 1983) and the Ethnologue (Grimes 1988a,b). The Bafia group consists of as many as seven speech forms, as listed in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guthrie</th>
<th>ALCAM</th>
<th>Ethnologue</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fa', or Balom</td>
<td>A.51</td>
<td>lafa' 581</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maja</td>
<td>maja</td>
<td>Bafia (Lefa')</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zakan</td>
<td>zakan</td>
<td>--</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tingong</td>
<td>tingong</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mbong</td>
<td>A.52</td>
<td>dimbong 582</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ripe', or Bape</td>
<td>A.53</td>
<td>ripey 583</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kpa, or Bafia</td>
<td>A.53</td>
<td>rikpa 584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ti'bea, or Djanti</td>
<td>A.54</td>
<td>tibea 570</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 "Bafia group" speech forms.

The seven varieties (Maja, Zakan, Tingong, Mbong, Ripe', Kpa, Ti'bea) are classified as five ALCAM entries (the first three listed as dialects of lafa'), four items on Guthrie's classification (where Bafia consists of Ripe' and Rikpa), and three Ethnologue entries (where Bafia includes Kpa, Ripey, and Balom, whose "dialects" are not listed). Although there are Ethnologue entries for Tibea (or Ngayaba) and Dimbong (codes NGY and DII), the Bafia entry (KSF) lists Kalong=Mbong and Ngayaba as dialects (and, in fact, Bape is given as an alternate name for Kalong=Mbong).

Apparently the centres for the Balom varieties are the villages of Goufé (for Maja), Zakan (for Zakan) and Bangong (for Tingong). As the speakers of Dimbong use the word "Bangong" to refer to the latter speech variety, this is term used in the present report.

Guarisma (1973:15) concurs with Guthrie and the Ethnologue: "Actuellement, on emploie le terme "Bafia" au sens large pour désigner les Bekpa', les Bapé (Bape')... et même les Balom." She cites an earlier author, Tessmann, who reported that the Balom are closely related to the Bafia from the linguistic point of view. Though she refers to Guthrie to reinforce this point, she does not discuss Dimbong or Tibea, only mentioning them in a later section (1973:22-23). In an article co-authored with Christiane Paulian
(1986) she verifies that Rikpa, Maja and Tingong are closely related. Her published studies of "Bafia" are based on Rikpa.

Tibea (Njanti, Djanti, Ngayaba) is clearly a separate language from the other languages listed here (see Bradley 1992b). Although according to ALCAM, Hijuk (spoken in southwestern Bokito Sub-Division, Mbam Division) is also somewhat related to Bafia, it is better attached to Basaa (see Bradley 1992a).

There is a fair amount of linguistic variation among Maja, Zakan, Tingong, Ripay, and Rikpa. (An indication of the amount of shared similar lexicon can be found in Table 2.) Investigating the relationships of these five speech varieties, however, was not within the scope of the present survey.
According to ALCAM and the people interviewed in the course of the present survey, the following speech varieties are spoken in villages near to Dii and Kalong (Mbong):

1. Nigi in several villages to the west, north and south, including Bébis, a quarter of Kalong, and in fact in most of the villages of Yambeta canton (people in Dii said that sometimes distinctions are made within Nigi: Nigi itself in Edop, Bégui, Bébis, and Kon; Timin in Bayomen, Bamoko and Yambeta; and "Nigi of Kiboum", making three main variants in all.)

2. Tunen-mese in Ninguessen to the southwest

3. Tuotomp in Bonek to the west, apparently as an enclave in the Nigi-speaking area (ALCAM says Bonek is a quarter of a village called Bayamba, while people at Dii said Bayamba was a quarter of Bonek)

4. Balom-Bangong in Bangong to the northwest, across the Noun river, and possibly in Mpane and/or Nyanzom, to the north across the Mbam river

5. other Balom (Maja/Goufè and Zakan) to the northeast, also across the Mbam in the Deuk District

6. Bapé (Ripey) in Gaa (chef-lieu), Denk, Diodaré, and Lakpang to the east on the main road, about half-way between Kalong and the centre of Bafia

7. Rikpa is spoken in the area around and to the south of Bafia town, beyond Bapé

The first three of these are supposed to be related to Tunen. Their Guthrie codes are A.46b, A.46c, and A.44b, respectively, where Tunen is A.44a; their ALCAM numbers are 520, 511, and 513, where Tunen is 511. No effort was made to verify the exact interrelationships of these. The others are in the Bafia group, as described above.

1.2 Previous Work

No Scripture has been prepared in Dimbong. Apparently a small amount of linguistic research has been published on Dimbong, as Guarisma (1973:24) indicates that Guthrie (1953) listed its noun classes. An unpublished word list, taken by Daniel Barreteau in the village of Kalong, was available to the survey team, as well as lists in Ripey and the three forms of Lafa'; all of these were taken by Gladys Guarisma and/or Michka Sachnine with Corinne Venot. In the course of the present survey, a wordlist was taken in Dii, and three other lists were taken in Rikpa, Tibea, and Nigi. (Although at least two lists had previously been collected in Nigi and at least one in Tibea (by these same linguists), these lists were not available to the survey team.)
Lexicostatistical analysis was done on the nine lists just mentioned; unfortunately, the lists varied in length from 76 to 175 items, and the similarity figures are not always comparable. Table 2 gives the probable similarity figures for the seven "Bafia" speech forms. For the actual (uninterpreted) similarity matrices for the various list lengths, on which this matrix is based, see the appendix.

\[
\begin{array}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
& 85\% & 80\% & 75\% & 70\% & 60\% & 50\% \\
\hline
\text{Bangong} & 85\% & 80\% & 83\% & 83\% & 83\% & 85\% \\
\text{Ripey} & 80\% & 83\% & 83\% & 83\% & 85\% & 88\% \\
\text{Rikpa} & 75\% & 83\% & 83\% & 83\% & 83\% & 88\% \\
\text{Maja} & 75\% & 80\% & 88\% & 90\% & 90\% & 90\% \\
\text{Zakan} & 80\% & 80\% & 85\% & 85\% & 90\% & 90\% \\
\text{Tibe} & 40\% & 40\% & 38\% & 38\% & 40\% & 40\% \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]

Table 2 Estimated lexical similarity percentages for Dimbong and related tongues.

Because these figures are based on a sample of the lexicon (most of them on fewer than 120 comparisons, some of them on only 60 or 80 comparisons), sampling error must be taken into account. The "true" proportion of similar lexicon in each case is probably somewhere in the range given. The Rikpa-Tibe figure is based on twice as many comparisons as the Zakan-Tibe figure, which is probably why it is slightly lower and certainly why the error associated with it is lower.

As a relative measure, they confirm the classification of the first six speech varieties as one cluster (the "Bafia" cluster), at least in the area of lexicon. However, one cannot on this basis guess how well speakers of each tongue understand speakers of the others, nor whether they consider themselves to be one people. Comprehension is a function of sociolinguistic as well as linguistic factors, and lexicon is only one linguistic factor. Sentiments of ethnic identity and solidarity, also, are a sociolinguistic phenomenon.

It is possible that of the "Balom dialects", Maja and Zakan are more like Rikpa (and Ripey) than like Dimbong, while Bangong is more like Dimbong than it is to the others. This would be in line with the perception of the people of Dii and Mbong, as we shall see. However, the figure of, say, "80% similar" falls within most of the ranges given, and the internal relationships between these six varieties cannot be determined from this corpus of data. Each is probably between 70% and 90% similar to each of the other five. Also, each is about 40% similar to Tibe.

For the purpose of linguistic classification, it would be interesting to study these relationships with a view to reconciling Guthrie, ALCAM, and the Ethnologue. Furthermore, for the purpose of standardisation and Bible translation, it might be necessary to establish which dialects can be served by written materials.
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(including Scripture) in Bafia (Rikpa), that is, which people are willing and able to learn to read Rikpa.

For comparison with other nearby Bantu languages, the lists in Dii, Rikpa, Tibea, and Nigi were compared with three other lists, each consisting of at least 165 items. Two of these lists were recently elicited: one in Hijuk and one in Bati (Bati is spoken in southeastern Ndom Sub-Division, Sanaga-Maritime Division, see Grant 1992). The other is a Gunu word list compiled by conflating data from Christiane Paulian and Terri Scruggs (see Boone et al. 1992 for details) and a Gunu lexicon (GULICO 1979). Nigi has been classed as A.40 by Guthrie and 520 by ALCAM; Gunu is a Yambasa language, Guthrie A.60, ALCAM 541; Bati is Guthrie A.60, ALCAM 530, somewhat related to the Yambasa languages; Hijuk was not in Guthrie's classification and was placed by ALCAM among the Mbam languages (560), but is probably best considered a variety of Basaa (Guthrie A.40, ALCAM 401).

Nigi
48±6 Gunu
35±7\% 56±5\% Bati
25±8 31±7 35±7 Hijuk
22±7 24±6\% 20±7 31±6\% Dimbong
23±7 27±6\% 23±7 31±6\% 76±3\% Rikpa
17±8\% 17±8 14±8\% 22±8 38±6\% 38±6\% Tibea

Table 3 Lexical similarity percentages for selected Bantu tongues in southwestern Mbam.

Some tentative classificatory conclusions can be drawn from these figures. Looking for clusters at the 50% level or higher, we find that Bati groups with Gunu (and with the other Yambasa varieties, Mmala, Elip, Yangben, Baca, and Mbule, each of which has at least 60% similar vocabulary with the others), while Dimbong groups with Rikpa (and with the other "Bafia" varieties, apart from Tibea).

Nigi groups with "Yambasa" next, with at least one-third similar vocabulary, i.e. nearly as closely as Tibea groups with Bafia. Hijuk does not group very well with either Yambasa or Bafia; it is in fact nearly 90% similar to Basaa. Practically speaking, however, apart from these speculations, it seems that the only two pairs of obviously related languages in this set are Gunu-Bati and Rikpa-Dimbong.

It is evident from these figures that any intercomprehension between speakers of Nigi and Dimbong must be acquired, that is, one can safely conclude that because at least three-quarters of core vocabulary of these two tongues are quite dissimilar, they are not inherently interintelligible(1).
1.3 The Present Survey

The Dimbong Rapid Appraisal Survey was carried out in March 1992 by SIL members Douglas Boone and Dave Bradley. Actual data collection took place on 17 and 18 March in Dii and Kalong (Mbong) villages, and an additional conversation with the chief of Kalong took place in Bafia on 18 March.

1.4 Purpose of the Survey

Dimbong is listed in the Bible Translation Needs Bulletin 1 (Grimes 1988b:52) as a possible translation need, which is to say, little or nothing was known about the need of the people of Mbong and Dii for local-language Scriptures. Accordingly, the purpose of the present survey was to revise this status to either "probable translation need" or "unlikely translation need" by means of a rapid appraisal of the sociolinguistic situation in these villages.

More broadly, the goal of the Dimbong survey was to evaluate the need for codification (development of a standard written form) and Bible translation in Dimbong.

2.0 PROCEDURES

The Dimbong survey was conducted using a recently-developed approach known as "rapid appraisal". This approach is characterised by its limited goals (to gain a general overview of the sociolinguistic situation in a particular area) and specific, non-technical procedures (usually limited to conversations with politico-administrative authorities and church and mission leaders, informal interviews, and group and individual questionnaires(2)). Other information, such as additional linguistic data (where this is lacking) or felt needs for development, may also be collected if time allows and as this information is seen to be helpful.

Group interviews were conducted in each village. Participating in each interview were the village chief, some of the leading citizens of the village, and others who were on the chiefs' compounds at the time. The survey coincided with the start of the rainy season; unfortunately, this meant that many people were in their fields during most of the daylight hours. Given the additional facts that each village has no more than one hundred residents and that some of these are wives taken from other language groups, it was difficult to interview a large number of speakers of Dimbong.

The survey team pursued the research with three aspects of the sociolinguistic situation in mind. They are:
(a) the dialect situation, the level of comprehension of related speech forms and the reason for this comprehension, and the degree of feeling of solidarity with the people who speak them. (Solidarity is a factor in assessing the possibility that one of these speech forms could be used as the standard form for written materials, including Scripture).

(b) The extent of familiarity with other speech forms, both those spoken in neighbouring areas or languages of wider communication (LWCs), such as French or Ewondo, and the attitudes toward these speech forms.

(c) The feasibility of a language development project in the local language, as revealed in overall language attitudes and reported patterns of language use.

For determining how well related languages are understood and whether comprehension is based on inherent intelligibility (due to linguistic similarity) or to language learning (due to contact with speakers of the language), two diagnostic questions were used.

"If you are in that place, what language do you use, what language do they use, and how well do you understand each other?"

"Can even a young child from this place understand someone from that place? (If not,) How old must the child be?"

A word list (approximately 175 items) was elicited in Dii; some of it was checked the following day in Mbong. Quantitative lexicostatistical analysis is found in the introduction; some qualitative comments are made in the next section.

3.0 RESULTS AND EVALUATION

3.1 Dialect situation and linguistic relationship to other speech forms

3.1.1 Homogeneity of Dimbong

Dimbong is spoken in two villages approximately twenty kilometers west of Bafia: Kalong and Dii. Kalong consists of two quarters, Mbong and Bébis. According to the people of Dii, these were once three villages which shared a common tongue, which was called "Lemekou" (in their spelling), from the words "lea" (three) and "mikuu" (plural of "likuu", village). The ancestors of these people are said to have come from a place to the north called "Liten"; knowledge of the location of this place has since been lost.

It would appear that the ancestors of the villagers of Bangong and Mpane were also from Liten. Not everyone agreed as to what other
people might also trace their origins to Liten. The group interviewed in Dii said that the people of Nyanzom village were also originally from Liten. The people of Mbong, however, said that the people of Nyanzom were true Balom (not from Liten) whose speech resembles Bangong. Later, the chief of Kalong said that Kalong used to include not just Mbong, Dii, and Bébis, but also three other villages which now comprise the Rikpa-speaking village of Moken, to the southeast.

Whatever the history, the people of Mbong and Dii recognise an affinity with the people of Bangong and Mpane, possibly more so than with the Yambeta people with whom they intermarr (and in whose canton they live) or with the speakers of Rikpa who live around Bafia. (The survey team's impression was that at the time of the interviews, those in Dii were emphasising their ties to Bangong and Mpane and distancing themselves from Bafia-Rikpa, while those in Mbong emphasised the status of Bafia. However, the opinions of a small group on a particular occasion do not necessarily indicate all the subtleties of the attitudes in their village; the same views may be held in both villages.)

Today, the people of Bébis speak Nigi, and the people of Mbong and Dii are the only ones who still speak the language. The explanation offered in Dii for this was that a woman from Edop (a Nigi-speaking village) came to Bébis and taught the people there her language. The village of Bébis then adopted Nigi "in order to hide things from their brothers in Dii and Kalong".

The people of Mbong did not accept Leamikuu as the name of the language, although they agreed that it was a name for the three villages, seen as a group. Contrary to appearances, "Dimbong" is not a contraction of Dii and Mbong. The expression "dimbong" means "I speak (the speech of) Mbong"; a person from Dii would say "d-dii". There is apparently no word for the shared speech of Mbong and Dii. Rather than to introduce the term "Leamiku" as a glossonym or to list Dimbong and Dii as two languages (!), the term "Dimbong" will be used to refer to the speech of both villages, in spite of the reported minor variations.

Kalong is located on the Bafia-Ndikinimeki road, and Dii a few kilometers to the south by dirt road. There are apparently a few differences of vocabulary and pronunciation between the two villages. Of nearly 120 items on Barretheau's list taken in Mbong, a different word was found in Dii for only one item, "buttocks". This was also the only item for which it was found that the people of Mbong had a different word from those of Dii. That is, three dissimilar terms were found: one by Barretheau in Mbong, one by the present team in Mbong, and one by the present team in Dii.

In the matrices presented in the appendix, another difference between the "Dii" and "Mbong" lists was also counted. The two words for "river" on Barretheau's list were entered into two records of the database: "fleuve" and "rivière" (French words corresponding to two kinds of "river"). The wordlist respondents in Dii had the same
word for "rivière", but said that the word for "fleuve" on Barretteau's list was a Bafia word. This difference (on the word for "fleuve") was counted even though the other word was the same.

A few differences of pronunciation were encountered as well; for example, the word for "knee" is apparently pronounced "didu" in Mbong and "dilu" in Dii, and it seems that the word for "moon" has a different vowel sound in each village.

3.1.2 Intercomprehension among related speech forms

It would seem that there is no difficulty of intercomprehension between speakers of the speech of Mbong and of Dii.

As to which speech variety is next most easily understood, there is a difference between people's perceptions of inherent intelligibility and their own self-evaluation of comprehension.

Two-thirds of the people questioned thought that even a little child from their villages could understand Balom (six of nine, and four of six asked about Bangong). The rest supposed that the child would have to be between ten and fifteen years old before understanding Balom well.

About as many (seven of ten) thought that even a little child from their villages could understand Bapé (Ripey), and the other three people estimated that a child of eight, ten, or twelve years of age would already be able to understand Bapé. This could mean that they consider Bapé inherently easier to understand than Balom; alternatively, it could mean that they expect that by age twelve a child will have heard Bapé enough times that he has "caught on", but has not yet heard Balom often enough to follow what people say in it.

Half the people interviewed thought that a little child could understand Bafia (Rikpa); the others differed on how old a child would need to be to understand it. However, a closer look at the responses shows that the four people interviewed in Dii said a child from Dii would need to be 10-14, 12-14, 14, or 14-15 years old to understand Bafia; the six people interviewed in Mbong said that by age five or seven a child from their village would understand Bafia. It is surely no coincidence that the people in Dii all heard it said in the group interview that fourteen was the age by which a young person would be understand Bafia; in Mbong, on the other hand, it was said that even young children could understand Bafia since it is the "national language of the Mbam". For this reason, they said, children would come to understand Bafia earlier than they would the (more closely related) speech of Bangong.

The responses from the residents of Dii may be evidence that practical comprehension of Rikpa is acquired, although this is doubtless made easier by the fact that there is a relatively high degree of linguistic similarity between Rikpa and Dimbong. The reason given in the group interview in Mbong for young children's
understanding of Bafia is not that it is easy to understand or just like their speech but rather in light of its status.

It appears from the self-evaluation questions that in the respondent’s own experience, the speech variety they understand best apart from the mother tongue (and French) is Bangong, or Balom in general. All ten Dimbong speakers interviewed said they could understand Balom; of six questioned further, five said they could always understand speakers of Balom, even their jokes and proverbs. One of these indicated that he could understand jokes and proverbs in Balom but not in Bangong. The sixth one questioned on the subject said he understood Balom well but not well enough to understand the jokes and proverbs.

Two of the ten people interviewed did not specifically say they could understand Bapé (Ripay); as they were among the seven who said that even a little child from their village could understand Bapé, this omission does not necessarily mean that they are unable to understand it. Of six questioned further, only three said they could even understand jokes and proverbs in Bapé; two said they could understand most everything except jokes and proverbs; one said he could not understand everything he heard in Bapé.

Nine of the ten respondents said they could understand Bafia (Rikpa); eight said they could speak it. However, the one who did not list it either among the languages he speaks nor among those he understands later said that he used it when speaking to a Bafia person.

Of those who said they understood it, all said they could understand everything said to them in Bafia, but only three reported being able to understand proverbs and jokes.

3.1.3 Ability to speak related speech forms

Of the ten people interviewed, six indicated that they could speak Bapé and Balom (none listed one without listing the other). For each speech form, about half these six respondents said they could say everything they wanted to say in the speech form.

Of the eight people who said they were able to speak Bafia, two said they could not say everything they wanted to when they spoke it, another said he could say what he wanted but not to the point of being able to make a public speech, and five claimed to be able to give a speech in Bafia. This is notably higher than the number who said they spoke Balom or Bapé well enough to be able to give a speech.

When interpreting self-reports of speaking ability, it is important to remember that they may reflect the actual ability of the respondent or they may merely indicate the level of desire to be able to speak a given speech variety. In either case, the importance of Bafia (Rikpa) stands out. Apparently all those interviewed understand it to some degree and half of them claim not
only to be able to speak it but to control it well enough to be able to use it to give a speech.

3.1.4 Attitudes: the added dimension

There is nothing remarkable in what people said about Bangong and Bapé. It is likely that there is a fair amount of immediate comprehension of these speech varieties but continued exposure to speakers of these tongues is required to acquire the ability both to understand them well and to speak them.

Two remarkable things have already been noted concerning what people said about Bafia (Rikpa). Although the people of Mbiom said that even children can understand it, they attributed this to the status of the language, not to inherent (linguistic) factors. Curiously, the question did not seem to isolate the factor of inherent intelligibility. On the other hand, the estimated average age of fourteen years quoted in Dii as the age at which people understand Bafia could be a little high. Immediately after giving this figure, the chief said that he suspected the Bafia understood more of the Dimbong speech form than they let on, but were too proud to admit it.

In the second place, most people said they understood it themselves, but only a third said they could understand even the more difficult bits. At the same time, more than half supposed they knew Bafia well enough to give a speech in it. This also could reflect people's esteem for the speech of the city: it is an important language to understand but not easy to understand fully, a language in which one should be able to make a public address if necessary.

Another indicator of sociolinguistic dynamics is how well people say their speech form is understood. The group interviewed at Dii said that a Dii husband and Bape wife can understand each other in their respective mother tongues, and that all the Balom people can understand Dii as well. The group interviewed at Mbiom agreed that young Bape children can understand Mbiom, though children from Balom or Bangong must be at least ten years old before they can understand Dimbong. The groups said that "children from Bafia do not understand" Mbiom and that the Bafia people have difficulties understanding Dii, just as the Nigi/Timin people do (people who speak a distantly-related language).

People were also asked what speech form they usually take to speak to people of these related tongues. Most of the answers were one of the following: we both use their variety, we use their variety and French, we each use our own variety (and understand each other), or I prefer to use French.
Table 4 Speech forms used when talking with people from other groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other person's speech form</th>
<th>Both use theirs</th>
<th>Theirs &amp; French</th>
<th>Mutual I use French</th>
<th>No answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bafia</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bapé</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balom</td>
<td>3½</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2½</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangong</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The person who said he would use French with a Bapé speaker said he thought that would be easier. In the other three cases where a respondent said he'd use French, he said the other person would respond in his own mother tongue (Bafia or Balom). The "one-half" value in two columns for Balom indicates a person who said he might use his own speech form or Balom in such a case.

Again, it is the unequal relationship with Bafia which is most striking. While some people would use Dimbong with a Bapé or Balom speaker, none would use Dimbong with a Bafia speaker. All but one person would use either Bafia or Bafia and French in that situation. In no case, moreover, did anyone say that the other person would respond in Dimbong. This is not surprising considering that the populations of these other groups are all somewhat larger than that of Dimbong. (Guarisma (1973:16) reports the 1971 populations of Rikpa and Ripiy as approximately 23,000 and 1800, respectively.)

3.2 Other speech forms: comprehension, ability and attitudes

There is no market in Mbong or Dii; people from these villages must go to markets in Bafia (weekly), Bapé/Denk (every ten days), or Diomo in the Balom-speaking area, across the Noun river (also held every ten days). There is no one predominant market language: French, Pidgin, and the various local tongues are all used.

Throughout the area, Bulu and Ewondo were previously promoted by the churches for the purpose of schooling and worship. The oldest citizens might still be familiar with these languages, but as they are no longer being promoted there, these would not meet the needs for written communication in the Bafia area.

French is the medium of instruction in the schools and is also used in the pre-schools. There is a pre-school in Dii, but many people in Kalong and Dii do not have the opportunity to go to school. The chief of Kalong estimated that of the forty residents in Mbong, ten are quite proficient in French and the others speak it to varying degrees, making themselves understood as they are able.

Nine of the ten Dimbong speakers interviewed understood French, and all of these said they could even understand proverbs and jokes in
French. (The tenth respondent was interviewed through an interpreter.) Eight of the nine who said they spoke French said they would be able to give a speech in French if necessary; the ninth had difficulty answering the interview questions posed in French and so was not questioned on how well she thought she spoke French. Here is an area where it is granted that the respondents were not representative. Clearly, however, among these people at least, French is valued.

At Mpong, people said they understand Yambeta/Nigi, but not Kiboum. They reported that they cannot understand speech of Ponek or Ninguessen, which they said are varieties of Banen. This was in keeping with the information given by the people at Dii.

All ten people claimed to be able to understand at least a little Nigi or Yambeta, and five said they could speak it. Eight were questioned in more detail. One said he did not understand everything people said to him in Nigi, and another said he understood everything fairly well. Two reported being able to understand Nigi, but not always to understand proverbs and jokes. The remaining four said they could understand even proverbs and jokes in Nigi or Yambeta; one who said he did not understand these difficult bits in Nigi per se said that he did understand them in Timin. However, all five people who listed Nigi among the languages they spoke said that they knew it well enough to be able to give a speech in it.

Of ten people interviewed, three people each said they knew Pidgin and Duala. Two people said they understood some Ewondo. There were several languages which one person said he spoke. The languages claimed by more than three people each have already been treated: French, Bafia, Balom/Bangong, Bapê, and Nigi.

There is apparently a lot of intermarriage with the Nigi people (see section 3.3.2), which is no doubt a factor in how well people in Mpong and Dii know it.

One person said he would rather read French than Bafia or Nigi. This could mean any of a number of things: he already knows how to read French, more books are available in French, French is the national language, etc. Even if this indicates an attitude inhibiting his learning to read Bafia (Rikpa), he is not necessarily representative.

3.3 Feasibility of a language project: Overall language use and attitudes

At Kalong, some songs in Dimbong have been composed and apparently even written down so the members of the choir can have copies. In the group interview, it was said that these were translated from French. Later, in a separate interview, the village chief said that historically songs were translated from Bulu or Ewondo into Bafia, later from Bafia into Nigi, and now from Nigi into Dimbong.
At Dii, the people said "We're not composers, and our wives are Nigi, so our songs are in Nigi." One of the individuals interviewed in Dii did, however, show interest in taking part in codifying Dimbong.

3.3.1 Language use in the churches

According to the group in Dii, a priest comes from Bafia about once a month. He preaches in French, and it is translated into local speech. Another priest prays in Nigi; his ability to speak Nigi is attributed to the fact that his mother tongue is a Yambasa language, which they perceive as being similar to Yambeta, that is, Nigi.

According to the group in Mbong, Scripture is read in French and interpreted. Preaching is often in Dimbong, but apparently could be in Nigi. The priest uses French, which is then interpreted into the local tongue. Announcements are in French and Dimbong, and are never given in French without also doing them in Dimbong. The prayers are in Dimbong.

There are apparently no regular Bible studies, but catechism classes in both villages reportedly are conducted (orally) in Dimbong.

When the priest comes to Mbong to conduct a mass, the people of Dii come; when the priest comes to Dii, the people of Mbong come too. At Mbong they said that they had the same arrangement with the people of Bayomen (a Timin/Nigi village).

Neither Mbong nor Dii has a protestant chapel. The Presbyterian church has work in the Rikpa and Ripey-speaking area; the closest parish is centred in Denk, in the Bape canton. The pastor there uses French, since he is from a Yambasa-speaking place.

3.3.2 Language dynamics: sociolinguistic status of Dimbong

There is a very high rate of intermarriage. All ten interviewees had a father from Dii or Kalong and a mother from outside; only one of the seven married men had a wife from Dii or Mbong. One man was not married. One woman from Mbong had a husband from Bafia, and the other's husband was from Dii. (Two other women were interviewed, but one interview, with another woman whose husband was from Bafia, was cut short; the other interviewee was Yambeta (Nigi) married to a man from Mbong.) In all, the survey team heard of twenty-two marriages (not counting the parents of the Yambeta woman), which can be classified as follows:

[3.3.2]
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Husband from</th>
<th>Wife from</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DII</td>
<td>MBONG</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBONG</td>
<td>DII</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>tongue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bafia</td>
<td>MBONG</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3 with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBONG</td>
<td>Bafia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Bafia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DII</td>
<td>Nigi, Timin</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10 Nigi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DII</td>
<td>Bapé</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5 Balom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBONG</td>
<td>Balom, Bangong</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2 Bapé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBONG</td>
<td>Nigi, Yambeta</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of the wives in both villages, then, come from outside, but it is said that they get "used to" the village speech and use it with the children. It would appear, however, that few people learn Dimbong who do not live in one of these villages. On the other hand, a number of Dimbong speakers learn one or more of the surrounding speech forms.

Children use Dimbong in play, and it is said that the young people do speak the language correctly. In the group interview at Dii, it was reported that even children born outside the area to parents from Dii could speak the mother tongue. This was confirmed in Mbong, but it was noted that this is not universal.

3.3.3 Level of education

There is a sort of school at Mbong. It was built with local effort, using the proceeds of a community field. It is staffed by a local woman, and, according to the villagers interviewed, the pupils come from Kalong, Dii, and Bayomen. The group interview at Dii had not revealed the existence of this school. The people at Dii said that those of their children who went to primary school went to Kon, Bape, Bafia, or even Ndikiminéki. They mentioned that there is also a primary school at Bégui, seven kilometers to the south of Dii, but that no one from Dii studied there since "there are no ties with that village". It is clear, however, that any young people who want to continue their education beyond the primary level must go to Bafia or to Ndikiminéki.

The chief of Mbong indicated that there were no residents of his village with a secondary education, and that, in general, the children born in the village were not "lettered". He maintains a residence in Bafia so that his own children can be educated; he would not move entirely to Mbong unless there were a full primary school in Mbong (or, presumably, Dii). He said that the educated children would be those born of people who had become functionaries or military men and left the village.

Most of the elite (well-educated people with leadership potential) from each of these villages live in the large cities of Cameroon and even outside the country. Although the city-dwellers return to the
village for short visits, they do not return to stay. One person said that these people "invest elsewhere".

At the moment when the group at Mbong was saying that development associations meet as often as four times a year in the cities for the purpose of development projects in Kalong, the village chief arrived. The subject was dropped and it was not shown that these associations had as yet done something for the village. In any case, there does not appear to be a large amount of interest on the part of these people in developing the Dimbong speech form.

3.3.4 Point of view of the church and local leaders

A leader at Dii thought it would be good to codify the speech of his village, for example, to write fables, tales, and proverbs. It seems that in his view, this was dependent on knowing how to read another language, namely, French, but he admitted that once an alphabet was devised, a person could learn to read Dimbong without learning to read French first.

The Roman Catholic curate of Bafia explained that each week since the end of 1991 the three lectionary readings have been translated into Nigi. He said that the gospel lesson is typed and distributed throughout the Yambeta canton, including in the villages of Kalong, Dii, and Nyambay (the last one is a LeMande village). When the survey team talked with the chief of Kalong about issues of codifying local languages, he looked favourably on the development of Nigi, but said he had not heard of the lectionary project. Thinking realistically, he said that it was a good idea to start in Nigi, and Dimbong might be developed later if there were educated personnel to do it.

It should be noted of this chief that his wife is Yambeta-speaking, and his children do not speak Mbong (although they understand it). French is the language used in their home. They live in Bafia, and the children apparently do not visit the village.

3.3.5 Population

Finally, the number of total speakers of Dimbong is fewer than three hundred persons, and many of the young people have left for the cities, or even for other countries. There are now fewer than 150 resident speakers (in two villages). These facts make it unlikely that a language development project in Dimbong could be successful.

4.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The present survey confirmed that there is a distinct and relatively unified speech form called Dimbong. That is, Dimbong is linguistically and sociolinguistically separate from Rikpa (Bafia), Ripay, Lefa', and Tibea (related speech forms) and from Nigi (neighbouring speech form), and there are no major differences in the way people speak in Mbong and Dii.
In services of the Roman Catholic church (the only one with chapels in the villages of Kalong and Dii, where Dimbong is spoken), Dimbong is used as much as possible (with the apparent exception of church singing in the village of Dii, where Nigi is used instead). Whenever French is used in church meetings (public reading of Scripture, sermons, announcements), there is interpretation into Dimbong.

Although many of the residents of these villages are not first-language speakers of Dimbong, it is said that those who moved there from other villages, especially women who married Dimbong-speaking men, have learned it and use it in the home.

The local language, therefore, appears to be vital and not in danger of falling into disuse. The total number of speakers, however, is quite small. Not only do many adults understand related speech forms (Rikpa, Ripa, and Bangong) but there is also considerable knowledge of Nigi, a largely unrelated speech variety from the linguistic point of view. Interestingly, the greatest level of immediate comprehension seems to be of unstandardised speech varieties.

Two recommendations follow from these observations:

(1) The Bible translation need status of Dimbong (Ethnologue code DII) can be changed from "possible" to "unlikely". This recommendation is based on evidence that Dimbong speakers may be able to use Scriptures in either Bafia (Rikpa) or Nigi (Yambeta). Other corrections for the Ethnologue entry are: remove "related to Yambeta and Tunen" since the relation is social and not linguistic; classification of A.50 is Bantu Northwest, not Central. The latter applies to the Bafia entry as well.

(2) When more written materials have been produced in Yambeta/Nigi and in Bafia/Rikpa, these materials could be tested in Mbong and Dii for acceptibility, and the feasibility situation could be reevaluated at the same time.

NOTES

1 In this report, "immediate" comprehension means comprehension based on inherent intelligibility; "acquired" comprehension means comprehension based on having learned the speech form, at least passively.

2 Usually the surveyor poses the questions orally, reading from the form, and then notes the responses. Strictly speaking, the survey instrument so used is not a questionnaire but an interview schedule, since the term "questionnaire" is often reserved for a form submitted to the respondent to read and to complete in writing.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX: Actual (uninterpreted) lexical similarity matrices

In this section are presented six lexical similarity matrices, representing six different subsets of the data. The figures in each matrix are calculated based on the data for the maximal set of glosses which the speech forms compared have in common. Comments are offered after each matrix.

The eight lists have only about 60 glosses in common, as the Ripey list is missing several items at the beginning, the Zakan list is missing several at the end, and about twenty items are missing on the Bangong, Ripey, Maja, and Zakan lists. For the sixty items in common, we have the following matrix:

\[
\begin{array}{cccccccc}
\text{Dii} & 98 & 85 & 83 & 80 & 78 & 36 \\
\text{Mbong} & & 87 & 85 & 82 & 80 & 37 \\
\text{Bangong} & 85 & 85 & 84 & 82 & 79 & 41 \\
\text{Ripey} & 83 & 84 & 87 & 85 & 85 & 39 \\
\text{Rikpa} & 80 & 82 & 92 & 88 & 45 & 40 \\
\text{Maja} & 78 & 92 & 92 & 88 & 44 & 10 \\
\text{Zakan} & 36 & 79 & 85 & 44 & 42 & \\
\text{Tibea} & & & & & & 100 \\
\end{array}
\]

Except for the Dii-Mbong figure and all the figures for Tibea, the possible sampling error is give or take seven to ten percentage points. That is, the "true" proportions of similar vocabulary of which the figures between 75 and 95 are estimates could each be seven or ten points higher or lower than the estimate. The following tree is an attempt to illustrate the relationship of similarity among these lists (not necessarily the genetic tree of the speech forms they represent):

\[
\begin{array}{cccccccc}
\text{Dii} & \text{Mbong} & \text{Bangong} & \text{Ripey} & \text{Rikpa} & \text{Maja} & \text{Zakan} & \text{Tibea} \\
100 & 90\pm10 & 85\pm10 & 80\pm10 & 40\pm15 \\
\end{array}
\]

Note the degree of uncertainty about the node labels between 75 and 95. Based on these data, we cannot conclude with reasonable certainty that the Dii/Mbong-Bangong node should be higher than the Dii/Mbong-Rikpa node, or that the Ripey-Ripka node should be higher than the Ripey-Bangong node. A more conservative drawing would have Dii/Mbong, Bangong, Ripey, Rikpa, Maja, and Zakan all joining at about 85\pm10.
If we exclude Ripey, the other seven lists have about 75 glosses in common. The proportion of lexical similarity of these seven lists for those 75 glosses are displayed in the following matrix:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dii</th>
<th>Mbong</th>
<th>Bangong</th>
<th>Rikpa</th>
<th>Maja</th>
<th>Zakan</th>
<th>Tibea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>99</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>41</td>
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<td>43</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Rikpa-Maja figure has decreased by 3 points, and some of the figures for Tibea comparisons have actually increased. Otherwise, these figures are within 2 percentage points of the figures above.

If, on the other hand, we exclude Zakan, the other seven lists have about 84 glosses in common. The proportion of lexical similarity of these seven lists for those 84 glosses are displayed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dii</th>
<th>Mbong</th>
<th>Bangong</th>
<th>Ripey</th>
<th>Rikpa</th>
<th>Maja</th>
<th>Tibea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>99</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>40</td>
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<td>82</td>
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<td>79</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>74</td>
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<td>74</td>
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<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>41</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Except for Ripey-Tibea, the Ripey figures are quite different from those in the first matrix. Most of the others are slightly lower than before.

If we exclude both Ripey and Zakan, the other six lists have about 100 glosses in common. The proportion of lexical similarity of these six lists for those 100 glosses are displayed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dii</th>
<th>Mbong</th>
<th>Bangong</th>
<th>Rikpa</th>
<th>Maja</th>
<th>Tibea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>99</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>74</td>
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<td>41</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>40</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The figures in this matrix is virtually the same as those in the last matrix, suggesting that they are fairly accurate. The margin of error for the figures between 70 and 90 points is now between five and nine points; the margin of error for the Tibea figures is about eleven points.

Finally, if we exclude all of Bangong, Ripey, Maja and Zakan, the other four lists have about 120 glosses in common. The proportion
of lexical similarity of these four lists for those 120 glosses, as well as the margins of error, are displayed below:

Dii
98±1½ Mbong
76±4  78±5½ Rikpa
41±7½  41±10  42±7½ Tibea

With some confidence, we can say that Dii and Mbong have practically the same core vocabulary (possibly with some differences of pronunciation or morphology) and that their speech is much more like Rikpa than either is like Tibea. Referring to the matrices above (summarised in the single matrix which follows), we can add that Ripey and the three "Balom" or "Fa" varieties are about equally similar to Dimbong and Rikpa, and as similar to each as they are to each other.

The differences in the lexical similarity figures among these six speech forms are so small that it is not possible to use the figures to prove a claim that some of them are dialects of a single language (e.g. that "Bangong/Maja/Zakan = Balom" or that "Bafia = Rikpa/Ripey/Balom"). One cannot reliably predict even the relative degrees of intercomprehension among the speakers of these six varieties; some people might understand a "less similar" variety better than a "more similar" one due to non-linguistic factors. Similarly, there is no way to guess from these linguistic relationships which groups feel a greater affinity with which others. Speakers of two slightly "less similar" tongues might in fact feel a solidarity which speakers of two "more similar" tongues do not. Perhaps the people of Bangong, Maja and Zakan consider themselves one people in distinction from the other groups; perhaps not. Perhaps speakers of Maja and Zakan think of themselves as "northern Bafia" but speakers of Bangong do not. Such things cannot be determined based on linguistic factors alone.
The figures given in each cell are for 60, 75; 84, 100; 120, and 165 data, respectively. The last figure given in any cell is based on the largest corpus of data and is therefore the most reliable. There is a fairly consistent but usually minor downward trend as more data are considered (more data => lower figure). One list gives very different results for 60 and 84 data, namely the Ripley list.

Since most of the figures do not change much when more data are taken into consideration, it may be asked why it the researcher should bother use lists of more than 100 to 120 items. One answer is that the margin of error decreases as more data are taken into consideration, assuming that one can be as confident of one's data for the additional glosses as for the first hundred. (With core vocabulary, there may be a lesser chance of eliciting synonyms; then again, a longer elicitation list that helps one probe for finer distinctions such as "whole leg" vs "thigh" vs "calf" vs "foot", or "fleuve" vs "rivière" vs "marigot", may help prevent the analyst from comparing one person's word for "thigh" with another one's word for "foot"). If there were good 175-word lists for Bangong, Maja, Zakan, and Ripley, as well as for Dimbong and Rikpa, it might be possible to determine if Bangong really is more similar to Dimbong than to Maja and Zakan. With the range of error inherent in the present samples, this is not possible.

Another reason to take longer lists is to be more sure of regular sound correspondences (phonetic and phonological), as longer lists give more examples of the various correspondences. A third reason
is so that when the data are compared with data taken in other speech variety using a different elicitation list, there is an increased likelihood of having more comparable data.