MINISTRY OF SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL RESEARCH

Rapid Appraisal of Beezen [708]

(Furu-Awa Sub-division; Menchum Division; Northwest Province)

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report describes a sociolinguistic survey of the Beezen language conducted February 14, 2001 in the Furu-Awa Sub-division of the Menchum Division of the North West Province of Cameroon. The research team consisted of Edward and Elizabeth BRYE, both of SIL, as well as AKUMBU Pius, BOLIMA Flora, and SWIRI Roseta—all doctoral students from the Department of African Languages and Linguistics at the University of Yaounde I.

We gratefully acknowledge the assistance and welcome received from regional and local government, religious, and traditional leaders. Special thanks go to MBAKO Martin, the subdivisional officer at Furu-Awa; OMAAJMA Lucas, the chief of the village of Beezen; and KITEH Gregory, the headmaster and sole schoolteacher of GS-Kpep.

1.1 Names

In the village of Beezen (also called Kpep), the people refer to themselves by the name Beezen (pronounced "bɛɛzɛn"), and their language by the same name.

1.2 Locality and Population

The Beezen language is spoken in only one village, Beezen (also called Kpep), with a reported population of 750 inhabitants. Population census information indicates that the population of Kpep village was 315 residents in 1987. According to the 1987 Census Publication (Demo 87:5), during 1976 - 1987 Cameroon experienced a 2.9% annual growth. If the same 2.9% population growth continued over the past 15 years in the village, Kpep's population today could be more than 450. (See appendix for map of the Furu-Awa Subdivision.)

1.3 Origins of the Beezen-speaking people

According to the oral history, Beezen-speaking community came from Takpea in Nigeria, then settled in what is now called the village of Akum, and after World War II migrated to their present location. After they left, others from Nigeria came and occupied that village.

1.4 Linguistic Classification

The Beezen language is not found in the Atlas Linguistique du Cameroun [ALCAM] (Dieu and Renaud, 1983) but was later assigned an ALCAM code of [708] in Atlas Administratif des langues nationales du Cameroun (Breton and Fohtung 1991). Beezen was considered to be a part of the Jukunoid language family, along with Akum [707], Uuhum-Gigi [703], Kuteb [702] and Jukun [701]. (See appendix for linguistic map.)

Grimes (2000 Ethnologue) classifies BEEZEN with a code of BZN and as belonging to Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, unclassified.

1.5 Research Objectives

This survey was conducted as part of an overall goal of assessing the need for literacy development and Bible translation in national languages throughout Cameroon. The research team's objectives were the following:

- Make an evaluation, based both on village-based speakers' perceptions of the level of intercomprehension Beezen-speakers have with adjacent languages.
- To assess the vitality of this speech community in terms of its use of other languages, interest
 in language development, and other sociolinguistic factors, and to determine the feasibility and
 possible scope of a language development and literacy project that would reach the Beezen
 speech variety and language community.
- To identify languages understood by Beezen-speakers, and to examine their attitudes toward reading and writing Beezen and other languages.

2. METHODOLOGY

The sociolinguistic research approach employed was the Rapid Appraisal (see Bergman 1991 and Stalder 1996). This method involves the utilization 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 the potential need for codification by the means of reports from the local inhabitants of a language group. The process usually requires only a few hours per village. 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 results of the survey, including the group interview, the individual interviews, and a lexicostatistical analysis. In Beezen, the village chief was the primary individual to respond during the group interview, although there were over 40 others also present. The research team also held individual interviews with the headmaster from the local primary school, as well as with two representatives of local churches.

First, we present the results of the lexicostatistical analysis.

3.1 Lexicostatistics

Doctoral students AKUMBA Pius and BOLIMA Flora elicited the word list at Beezen. Applying the "shared apparent cognates" approach of comparing word lists, there is a 43-47% similarity between the Beezen and Akum word lists.

3.2 Dialectology

Those interviewed in Beezen village indicate that their language is spoken without variation in the village's four quarters of Buhim, Kang, Ahan, and Kunashin. There are no dialects.

3.3 Beezen—reclassified as Jukunoid

The Ethnologue had classified Beezen as Benue, unclassified. According to Roger Blench's inspection of Beezen and Akum wordlists and their comparision with other lists of the area available to him, Beezen and Akum are distinct languages more closely related to each other with their next nearest relative being Oohum (Yukuben) which forms a subgroup of Jukunoid with Kuteb and Kapya but very remote from Jukun proper.²

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Benue-Congo
Platoid
Benue
Jukunoid
Yukuben-Kuteb
Yukuben
Beezen [BZN]
Akum [AKU]
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3.3 Multilingualism

In this section, we will examine the degree of intercomprehension which Beezen-speakers report exists within their language community. The subject of multilingualism was studied to estimate the level of understanding and oral competence Beezen-speakers might have of the languages of wider communication (LWCs) and others geographically and linguistically near their own.

¹ With regard to lexicostatistical similarity, Bergman (1989:9.5.2) and others have referred to 70% lexical similarity UCL as the agreed upon threshold for determining whether two speech forms are separate languages or whether they require intelligibility testing in order to determine their potential to share a written form.

² Personal communication dated July 29, 2002.

3.3.1 Languages Geographically Close

Beezen-speakers do not use their mother tongue to communicate with speakers of adjacent language groups--that is, Lutu, Akum, and Baji. Beezen village residents must use Jukun to communicate with speakers of all surrounding languages, since they neither understand these languages nor are understood by speakers of the surrounding language groups.

Beezen is a language separate from all others, based on the low percentage (43 - 47%) of lexicostatistical similarity with the nearest related speech variety (Akum).

3.3.2 Languages of Wider Communication-Jukun and Pidgin

The principle language of wider communication (LWC) is Jukun. Reportedly, everyone in Beezen village is a proficient speaker of it. Although this language is acquired, children from age six are reportedly able to understand Jukun and eventually become fluent in it.

3.4 Language Vitality and Viability

In this section, we will see how mother tongue speakers of Beezen view the extent to which their language is used in their daily lives.

3.4.1 Languages used at Home and with Friends

Beezen is reportedly the only language used at home and during conversations with friends.

3.4.2 Languages for Work

Residents use only Beezen when at work in their fields.

3.4.3 Language use at the Market

Beezen and Pidgin are used at the local market in the village. At the large market in Isu, Pidgin is the language spoken by Beezen-speakers. (Beezen appears to be a southernmost language within the region where Jukun is the primary language of wider communication.

3.4.4 Language Use at the Dispensary

When ill, and if they are able, Beezen residents go to the dispensary at Isu or Wum, where they must speak Pidgin to be understood.

3.4.5 Language Use at Official Events

Interviewees report that Beezen is the only language spoken at traditional ceremonies and local council meetings, and for making public announcements. Jukun is spoken as well as regional council meetings.

3.4.6 Language Use at School

English is used for in-class instruction, but children who understand both English and Beezen are called upon to explain things to any fellow students who do not adequately grasp what has been said in English. During recreation times, students can be heard speaking Beezen and, to a lesser extent, also Jukun.

In addition to the group interview, the research team carried out an individual interview of the headmaster and sole teacher of GS-Kpep. The headmaster, whose mother tongue is Bum, said, "Teaching is difficult, since the children barely understand English." He indicated that the largest language group represented in the student body is that of Beezen followed far behind by Jukunspeakers, and lastly by Pidgin-speakers.

Students come from a distance of at most 2 kilometers. What follows is the enrollment of students at GS-Kpep:

Class 1: 20; Class 2: 8; Class 3: 6; Class 4: 7; Class 5: 5; Class 6: 2; Class 7: 0

What these figure suggest is that in time students eventually drop out of school as they progress to the higher levels of primary school. During the past four years that the headmaster has been at the school, only one student has graduated from the GS-Kpep primary school and left to continue studies at a secondary school level.

The headmaster stated that he does not object to the idea that students might learn to read and write their mother tongue as part of their studies, and he would be willing to help coordinate this.

3.4.7 Languages Used at Church

Most of the Beezen speech community follows African traditional religion. Small groups of Presbyterians and Catholics are also part of the community. During the group interview, a representative was present from each of the two Christian denominations.

According to the Presbyterian representative, 50 individuals attend the meeting each week. Pidgin is the primary language used for all functions, but prayers and sermons are translated into Beezen and singing is done in both Pidgin and Beezen. Meetings to study doctrine or the Bible are carried out only in Pidgin.

The Catholic representative by the name of AMA Stephen, an Igbo speaker from Nigeria, is a helper in the Catholic group that numbers no more than 15. According to him, prayers are in the Beezen language and sermons are presented in Pidgin and translated into Beezen.

3.5 Language Attitudes

Of special interest to us was the potential of Beezen-speakers to learn to read and write either their mother tongue or another language.

3.5.1 Attitudes toward the Mother Tongue

Beezen-speakers, young and old alike, seem to have a positive attitude toward their language. They believe that their language will be spoken indefinitely and that the young people speak no language more than they speak Beezen.

3.5.2 Standardization Efforts

Interviewees were unaware of any material written in or translated into the language.

3.5.3 Migration and Intermarriage

Beezen-speakers may marry whomever they like. No marital restrictions are imposed on them. Intermarriage occurs primarily with Jukun, Akum, and Baji speakers.

Outsiders usually come from either Wum (the major town of the Aghem language region) or Nigeria. They come to engage in business, such as the sale of soap or Maggi cubes. When they come to stay and live in Beezen, they do not learn the language but continue to use Pidgin.

3.5.4 Language Shift

Interviewees reported that their children do not mix or confuse Beezen with any other language.

Since Beezen cannot be used outside of the village, it is considered good to learn Jukun and Pidgin as this will "favor the child" and enable the next generation to interact with outsiders. English is desired as this enables people to "speak it anywhere in the world."

Although intermarriage patterns, the value to learn a language other than their mother tongue such as Jukun or Pidgin may indicate that language shift may occur, for now Beezen-speakers use the mother tongue as the principal language in their homes and throughout their village.

3.6 Other Development Considerations

There are two other considerations that should be mentioned; these pertain to health and the lack of infrastructure for transportation.

3.6.1 Health

According to the chief of this small village, during the past year no less than 30 adults and four of 10 children under the age of one died. Children are often ill, suffering from chicken pox, smallpox, malaria, and "the cough." Some have fevers. Vaccinations for polio were obtained this year from the government health center in Isu.

3.6.2 Transportation

There are no longer any road leading to this isolated area. There used to be a road from Isu to Kpep, but it fell into disrepair after was made that the forest would suffer from the traffic resulting from people using the road. Starting sometime this year (2001), the European Union would build a road. We were told that all the meetings and paperwork have been completed, the financial assistance approved, and a contractor identified.

3.7 Language Development Potential: Watters' Socio-economic Factors

According to Watters (in Bergman 1990:6.7.1), three factors in particular affect the nature and development of language programs and, as such, are predictive of successful participation in a language development program: the homogeneity of the linguistic community, the people's 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.

3.7.1 Homogeneity of the Linguistic Community: Social Cohesion

Beezen is spoken in only one village with four quarters. Residents of all these quarters speak alike. Speakers are never cut off from one another, even during times of heavy rains.

3.7.2 Openness to change

There is no development committee.

3.7.3 Village-Based Leadership

An important factor in determining the viability of a language project, is the presence of a middle-aged leadership. The Beezen group interview revealed that they have 15 leaders who are middle-aged and reside in the village, and the people are confident that there will be others to replace the present leaders once they are gone. -- Do people leave and then return to the village?

In summary, the Beezen-speaking community meets a few of the criteria outlined by Watters.

3.7.4 Attitudes toward Language Development

Those interviewed are receptive to the idea of learning to read and write Beezen. The primary motivation for wanting to learn to read and write their mother tongue is the preservation of their language and culture.

The languages that residents would prefer to learn in the order of their priority are as follows: Beezen, English, then Jukun. The value of learning English is that it is a world language and, as such, can open doors of opportunity.

4. SIL/CABTAL/NACALCO ACTIVITY AND PLANS

None of these organizations has plans to work on the Beezen language.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Certain factors suggest that a language development and literacy program is not feasible in the Beezen language:

Children are reportedly able to understand Jukun from the age of six and eventually become
fluent in this LWC. The extensive use of Jukun in order to communicate with speakers of
neighboring languages suggests that relating to their neighbors is important. But speakers of
the neighboring languages do not understand Beezen, requiring that communication occur in

- Jukun, a phenomenon that may indicate shifting language use, however subtly, from the mother tongue to the LWC.
- The reported desire to learn to read and write English even at the elementary level may remain unfulfilled so long as the headmaster is the only instructor at the primary school. It may be that English is not immediately practical to the Beezen speaking people who don't need this language to interact with any of their neighbors. But if given a chance, the people might take to learning to read and write Jukun, though perhaps at the risk of losing their mother tongue.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

• Consider scheduling recorded text testing of Jukun in conjunction with other language survey trips in Furu-Awa Sub-division.

7. MODIFICATIONS TO BIBLE TRANSLATION BULLETIN

• Change from "possible" to "unlikely" translation need.

8. MODIFICATIONS TO ALCAM

- Include this as a one-village language.
- Blench's reclassification should be followed to reflect that Beezen is: Jukunoid, Yukuben-Kuteb [Nigeria], Yukuben, Beezen [BZN] (Cameroon).

9. MODIFICATIONS TO THE ETHNOLOGUE

- Add that "Beezen" which is a term to refer to the name of the language, is also used by the respective speakers to refer to their village.
- Note that the spelling of the village may also be Kpep. Change population from 400 to a reported population size of 450.
- Revise Ethnolog that Beezen is located on a plain/flat area between mountain slopes.
- Reclassify Beezen as: Benue-Congo, Platoid, Benue, Jukunoid, Yukuben-Kuteb [Nigeria], Yukuben, Beezen [BZN] (Cameroon).

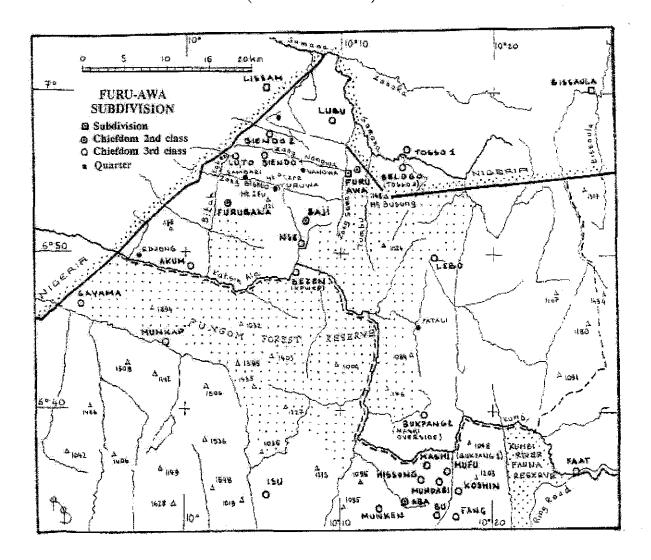
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APPENDIX A:

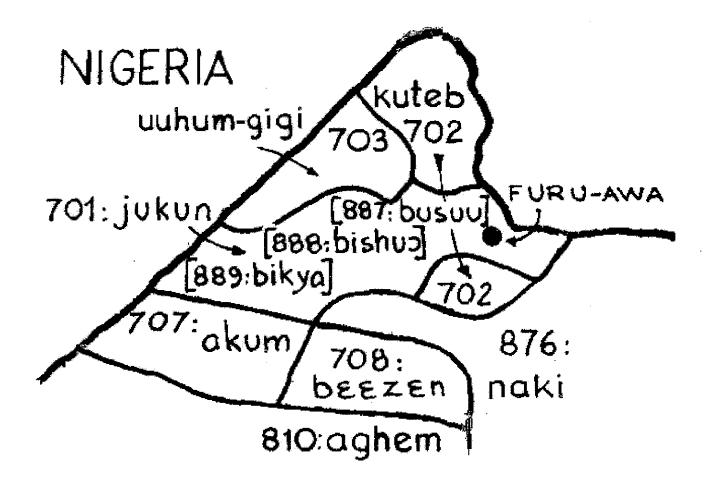
Breton's Furu-Awa Subdivision

(Breton 1993:110)



APPENDIX B:

Beezen and Neighboring Languages, including nearby Jukunoid (Breton and Fohtung, 1991: 137)



APPENDIX C: ALCAM lists for Beezen and Akum

L1: Language name: Beezen/Kpep

Informant: Lydia Shimun and Andreas Shita

Age/Age: 35 and 62 Native village: Beezen Father's group: Beezen Mother's group: Beezen Level of education:

Location: Fon's Palace Date: 14 February 2001

Researchers: Pius Akumbu and Flora Bolima

L2: Language name; Akum

Informants: Mr. Adiku Timothy and Mrs Noami Meme

Age: 30 and 45 Native village: Akum Father's group: Akum Mother's group: Akum

Level of education: ---Diploma in Irrigation Engineering/ --unknown

Location: Fon's Palace Date: 14 February 2001

Researchers: Flora Bolima and Swiri Roseta

	English	Francais	Beezen	Akum
1	Mouth	bouche	únú	ùnù?
2	Eye	œil	kíyí	íyí
3	head	tête	kijî	íkí
4	hair (on head)	cheveux	ùsùn	ótsí
5	tooth	dent	kízíŋ	ídzi
6	tongue	langue	kánám	úmyám
7	nose	nez	kén	íwé
8	ear	oreille	kótóŋ	ótáŋ
9a	neck	cou	kikimitsú	ísáŋ
9b	back of neck	nuque	kàlák	àlàk
	(nape)			
9c	throat	gorge	úm i nítsú	ógwāràkwú
10	breast	sein	kimyám	ímwè
11	arm/hand	bras/main	kíbú	ogbwś
12a	claw	griffe	ázíp ó guń	ígwáp nu?ki
12b	nail	ongle	ázíp obú	ígwàp agbo
13a	leg	jambe	kigún	ífwí
13b	foot	pied	kíwáróguń	òkì
14	buttock	fesse	kékú	ítá
15	belly	ventre	kéwúrá	ímbārá
16	navel	nombril	ùhú	okam
17	intestines/insides	intestins/boyaux	íz i m	òluŋkɨm
18	blood	sang	béyáŋ	áyàŋ
19	urine	urine	bézim	ákyém

20	bone	OS	kikip	ōkāp
21	skin	peau	éyéré	úkpwánán
22	wing	aile	kábáb	ábā
23	feather	plume	éhin	àtuń
24	horn	corne	ókún	úkwě
25	tail	queue	órán	ùtsé
26	human being	être humain	όμú	íŋgyēré
			ólím	álám
27	man	homme		ákáp
28	woman	femme	ókwóp	úlām
29	husband	mari	íwàn	
30	child	enfant	ízín	alimfi ídzí
31	name	nom	kízín	átārà
32	sky	ciel	kéb ^h í ìbàm	okw ú tàn
33	night	nuit	kélēŋ	
34	moon	lune	úgwán	òkáŋ
35	sun	soleil	úrú	osóro
36	wind	vent	úgbán	o∫óp
37	cloud	nuage	kèkúŋ	abùŋ
38	dew	rosée	ímín	ímωε
39	rain	pluie	éwún	abwí
40	ground	terre	íſĭ	itsú
41	sand	sable	íʃikóγwù	řsā
42	path	chemin	ùkwáŋ	okəŋ
43	water	eau	bímí	ámwi
44	stream (river)	cours d'eau	úyár	óyàŋ
45	house	maison	kít∫áŋ	ígyâ
46	fire	feu	ólú	ùlà
47	firewood	bois a brûler	ókún	úkwé ùlà
48	smoke	fumée	búsúŋ	àtsəŋ
49	ash	cendre	bótsúŋ	àtúŋ
50	knife	couteau	ùkwáp	ùkwóp
51	rope	corde	úlúk	ólák
52	spear	lance, sagale	útúp	ékpwâŋ
53	war (fight)	guerre (combat)	úmán	ome
54a	animal	animal	13 1	òmòŋ
54b	meat	viande	bízí	òmòŋ
55	dog	chien	ìbśrś	égbúrú
56	elephant	éléphant	ìndòrò	èndárá
57	goat	chèvre .	èmin	èmé
58	bird	oiseau	ènènè	ènwè
59	tortoise	tortue	kikpárákéhém	otsap
60	snake	serpent	bíwú	íwú
61	fish	poisson	ísán	îkyá
62	(head) louse	pou (de tete)	élí	ílá
63	egg	œuf	kiji	àtsì
64	tree	arbre	ót∫í	úki
65	bark	écorce	kikwó	íkù?á
66	leaf	feuille	ámí	áŋwá

67	root	racine	éhēp	îkóp
68	salt	sel	búmwán	omwá
69	fat	graisse	ézāp	ádzāp
70a	hunger (general)	faim (général)	úwún	únóŋ
70b	hunger (for meat)	faim (de viande)	ináŋ	ákyám dndŋ
71	iron (the metal)	fer (le métal)	kísárá	inàŋ
72	one	un	óyùná	áyì
73	two	deux	έná	áfèŋ
74	three	trois	ítárá	átà
75	four	quatre	íní	áni
76	five	cinq	ítsóŋ	ákwòŋ
77	six	six	ítsóŋ óyún	ákwòŋ yi
78	seven	sept	tsòŋ én	ákwòŋ f èŋ
79	eight	huit	ítsóŋ ítáró	ákwòŋ tà
80	nine	neuf	ítsóŋ îɲî	ákwòŋ ni
81	ten	dix	kúwúp	ékùrù
82	come	venir	wú	bá
83	send (someone)	envoyer	át∫èm	òkyàn
84	walk	marcher	ákárá	ákyâká
85	fall	tomber	áwú	òkpwò
86	leave	partir	றin	oni
87	fly	voler (oiseau)	ówùn	òlim
88	pour	verser	kún	fàrí
89	strike	frapper	dáp	òbúr í
90	bite	mordre	kúkízím	dʒim
91	wash (transitive)	laver (transitif)	άγέ	ŋwiŋ
92	split (wood)	fendre	báp	oyàrí
93	give	donner	nè	ònà
94	steal	voler (derober)	búz í	ódzí
95	squeeze	presser	kám	oŋkà
96	cultivate	cultiver	ét∫ i m	ùwò
97	bury (transitive)	enterrer (transitif)	éŋĭ	opèŋ
98	burn (transitive)	brûler (transitif)	ég í m	okwi
99	eat	manger	ar í	d3í
100	drink	boire	am í	mwá
101	vomit	vomir	ab í	kpwà
102	suck	sucer	m í	ŋwé
103	spit (saliva)	cracher (salive)	tʃi	àkyàŋ
104	blow (on)	souffler (sur)	γ ì n	sê
105	swell	enfler	ámè	ndèb
106	give birth	engendrer	kíbáré	ímbâ
107	die	mourir	kùhú	úkpú
108	kill	tuer	ówún	òtsèn
109	push	pousser	gim	dwok ka
110	pull	tirer	bàrà	gbwí bá

111	sing	chanter	tsì	kwò
112	play (a game)	jouer (un jeu)	ásín	égyà?
113	be afraid	avoir peur	bélíp	àsi
114	want	vouloir	á∫áŋ	í∫wáŋ
115	say	dire	áryáŋ	òlwó
116	see	voir	rí	ndárá
117	show	montrer	ts5k	k ^h wɔ
118	hear	entendre	55k	wò
119	know	savoir/connaître	ríŋ	sòŋ
120	count	compter	bún	fá