

A RAPID APPRAISAL SURVEY OF GBETE

Bertoua Division, East Province

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1 INTRODUCTION

This report describes a preliminary sociolinguistic survey (Rapid Appraisal) conducted June 30–July 6, 1999 concerning the Gbete language spoken in the Belabo Subdivision of the Bertoua Division of the East Province of Cameroon. Kari Jordan-Diller and Jason Diller of SIL, Dr. Engelbert Domché-Teko and Gerald Ngwa of the University of Yaoundé I conducted the research.

Previous research in this language includes two word lists in the dialects of Gbete as defined by the *Atlas Linguistique du Cameroun* (referred to as ALCAM): Kepere Voutchaba and Kepere Dengdeng. There is no information as to who collected the lists or where they were collected, but they were most likely taken by researchers from CREA (Centre de Recherches et d’Etudes Anthropologiques). Hagege (1970) classifies Gbete with Mbum and Mbere, saying that the people refer to themselves as Vana.

We gratefully acknowledge the assistance and welcome received from regional and local government, church, and traditional leaders. Without their cooperation this mission would not have been possible.

1.1 Linguistic Classification

The language is listed as Gbete [355] in ALCAM (Dieu and Renaud 1983). The linguistic classification is as follows: Niger-Kordofan, Niger-Congo, Adamawa-Oubanguien, Adamawa, Mbum, Mbum South, Kpere, Pono, Gbete (Kepere de Voutchaba), Vana (Kepere de Deng-Deng).

In the *Ethnologue*, Grimes (1996) classifies Gbete as a dialect of Mbum. The Mbum entry is as follows: Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, North, Adamawa-Ubangi, Adamawa, Mbum-Day, Mbum, Southern. Dialects: Mboum (West Mbum, Bum), Gbete (Kepere, Kpere, Pere, Ripere, Byrre, Pono, Vana).

1.2 Names

The people in the villages of Dengdeng and Woutchaba call themselves the Gbete people and they call their language the “Gbete” language. People outside their language group call the Gbete people and their language “Kepere”. The name Kepere comes from the word ‘tomorrow’ in the Gbete language. The name is reportedly the result of a misunderstanding that occurred when a foreigner asked a Gbete man the name of his people. The Gbete man thought the foreigner was asking if he could come to visit, and he replied, “Kepere.”

1.3 Location

The Gbete people who speak the Gbete language are located in the Belabo Subdivision of the Bertoua Division. The team drove from Yaoundé to Bertoua on route #10. Then they took route #18 to Belabo. Route #10 is paved until the town of Ayos, and route #18 is a paved road.

There are two closely related dialects of the Gbete language with the Sanaga River as the division between the two. Eight villages on the east side of the Sanaga River speak the dialect known as Gbete Vana. Dengdeng, located fifty km northeast of Belabo, is the center of the Vana dialect. Eleven villages on the west side of the river speak the Gbete Woutchaba dialect. Woutchaba, which is forty-five km from the west bank of the Sanaga River, is the center of the Woutchaba dialect. (See map 2 in appendix A).

The team interviewed people from the villages of Woutchaba, Dengdeng, Goyaum, and Haman. Haman is seven km north of Dengdeng. Goyaum is located between Woutchaba and Dengdeng on the east side of the Sanaga River. Dengdeng and Goyaum are easily accessible in the dry season by a dirt road. Woutchaba is very difficult to reach as there is no functioning ferry. The only way to cross the river is by canoe, and there is no transportation on the other side.

Because the Gbete people have migrated far from their original location, they are surrounded by unrelated languages. These languages include the following: Vute, Pol, Bobili, Gbaya, and Ewondo. [See map 3 in appendix A.]

1.4 Population

The people from Dengdeng say their village has an interior population of four hundred people and an exterior population of three hundred. Haman has a village population of less than fifty people. The village of Goyaum has an interior population of six hundred and an exterior population of one hundred. Woutchaba has an interior population of 3,500 and an exterior population of 1,500. The figures for Woutchaba include all the Gbete villages on the west side of the river. It is difficult to estimate the combined population of all Gbete speakers. We guess there are between six thousand and ten thousand speakers.

1.5 Livelihood

The Gbete men are hunters and fishers, and the women farm small plantations of maize, manioc, and plantains. Buyers come to the villages to purchase dried meat and fish, which they resell in the nearby towns of Belabo and Bertoua. Hunters from the Gbete villages close to these towns often bring fresh meat to sell in the markets. The people in Goyaum sell their meat, fish, and produce at the train station in their village.

1.6 History of the People

The Gbete people can trace their history back to Egypt. Victor Mvotoung tells us that the Egyptian pharaoh chased them to Sudan from where they migrated to Cameroon. The people split into two groups when their chief died. One group moved to Banki and a second group separated to Bambun. The Gbete people come from the Bambun group. From Bambun they moved to Bawa (Ngoundere) and later to Tibati. In Tibati they were known as the Mbum people.

The Mbum people were semi-nomadic hunters, and the village of Woutchaba was originally a large elephant hunting party that migrated from Tibati. The Berber War¹ prevented their return to Tibati. Later a group broke off from Woutchaba and crossed the Sanaga River to create Dengdeng.

Victor Mvotoung from Woutchaba gave us the most complete history. Other accounts have similar themes. The chief of Goyaum says that the Berbers chased the Gbete people to Belabo area. The people from Dengdeng tell us that they came to the area to hunt elephants. The chief of Haman says that they come from north of Ngaoundere and that they were pushed south by the Germans during World War II.

All of the histories agree that the Gbete are one people with the Mbum people of Ngaoundere. Also the different sources concur that the Vana speakers of Dengdeng were a part of Woutchaba in recent history.

2 SURVEY

2.1 Purpose of the Survey

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

- (1) To make a preliminary assessment of the intercomprehension and attitudes of the people using the speech forms currently classified under Gbete [355] in ALCAM and Gbete in the *Ethnologue*.
- (2) To assess the vitality of Gbete and the peoples' interest in language development.
- (3) To find out which other languages the people understand and use.
- (4) To find out which variety of Gbete could be used as a reference dialect.
- (5) To verify the classification of Gbete as Mbum West and to rate their comprehension of Mbum Mbere and Karang languages.

2.2 Methodology

The research team employed the method referred to as "Rapid Appraisal" (see Bergman 1991). The team conducted group and individual interviews using prepared questionnaires and verified the existing ALCAM word list of 120 words from Dengdeng and Woutchaba. In addition, the team conducted a Rapid Appraisal Recorded Text Test (RA-RTT) (see Stalder 1996).

2.2.1 Rapid Appraisal

A Rapid Appraisal Survey is based on the use of specific, nontechnical means that take relatively little time. Interviews with groups and individuals are the primary source of information. In this way, useful information can be acquired in a relatively short period of time (the average is two days per dialect group). Rapid appraisal methods provide an overall impression of potential needs for codification through limited subjective reports from local inhabitants. In-depth linguistic and sociolinguistic research would yield a more comprehensive picture but would take

¹Almost certainly, the Fulani *Jihad* of the nineteenth century.

more time. If unanswered questions remain at the end of a survey, a more thorough investigation may be needed.

A rapid appraisal survey seeks to find out information in the following three areas:

- (1) **Dialect situation.** What are the dialects of the languages being studied and what is their degree of intercomprehension? Two speech varieties may be dialects of the same language if:
 - the speakers perceive them as such and/or
 - the speakers indicate that children as young as 5–6 years old understand the other variety.
 If not, the two varieties may be separate languages for which comprehension is acquired due to linguistic similarity and/or the degree of contact speakers of one language variety have with the second language variety. A word list comparison using lexicostatistical analysis also helps predict the degree of intercomprehension based on lexical similarity or dissimilarity.
- (2) **Multilingualism.** What is the approximate level of comprehension and oral competence in the languages of wider communication, as well as in languages geographically or linguistically close?
- (3) **Vitality and viability of the language.** What would be the potential for success of a language development project in the vernacular? This may be revealed by the speakers' own indications of which languages they use in what domains. For example, a key indicator of the vitality of the mother tongue (MT) is whether or not it is actively used in the home (between parents and children, as well as between siblings) and in the village (in conversations between speakers of the MT, as well as during traditional meetings). It is also very important to obtain an idea of the attitudes members of the community, including church and school officials, hold toward the idea of developing the MT.

Group Interviews

The survey team conducted group interviews in Dengdeng, Goyaum, and Belabo. We chose Belabo to interview the people from Woutchaba since Woutchaba is very difficult to access, and a large percentage of the Woutchaba population (including the chief) resides in Belabo. Ideally, a group interview should have 15–20 people including elders and an equal number of men and women both old and young. We encourage the people present to discuss the questions until a consensus is reached, but there is not always a consensus, and some people are hesitant to express their views. It is often difficult to have an equal number of women present in these interviews. Women represented 1/3 of the group in the Dengdeng, Goyaum, and Woutchaba group interviews and were hesitant to participate in the discussion. Only the women from the Woutchaba group interview contributed to the exchange.

Individual Questionnaires

In addition to the group interview, we interviewed individuals from both dialects using a short sociolinguistic questionnaire. [See appendix B.] The individual questionnaires were designed to help us understand the differences between Gbete Vana and Gbete Woutchaba and to aid us in determining which of the two dialects could most likely be developed for standardization. The individual questionnaires were not the main focus of our study, and we interviewed just six individuals—four from Gbete Vana and two from Gbete Woutchaba.

To assess the possibility of using the MT during the first years of primary school, the team interviewed individually a teacher from the Government Primary School in Dengdeng and a teacher in the Government Primary School of Woutchaba.

Because of CABTAL's and SIL's interest in translation, the team interviewed local church leaders. These included the catechist of the Catholic church in Dengdeng, the pastor of the Adventist church in Dengdeng, and an elder of the Presbyterian church in Belabo.

2.2.2 Word Lists

We checked the existing word lists to verify the data. The team verified the Vana word list in Dengdeng and in Goyaum. The Woutchaba word list was checked in Belabo. We confirmed the accuracy of both of the word lists, and we did not note any changes. [See appendix C.]

2.2.3 Rapid Appraisal Recorded Text Test (RA-RTT)

To verify the classification of the Gbete language as Mbum West, the team administered a RA-RTT after the group interviews. This test also helped us in determining the language attitudes of the Gbete people toward Mbum West languages. We played two short recorded texts to the group—one in Mbere (an Mbum West language) and one in Karang (an Mbum East language). After the first hearing, we played the tapes a second time pausing them after each paragraph to see if the listeners could translate the portion of text they just heard. The team gave the listeners either a level one, level two, or level three rating for each text, depending on how well they understood the text. Then, we asked them three questions after each text regarding their perceived comprehension. Finally, we asked three more questions to compare their comprehension of the two tapes. Jurg Stalder (1996) describes this type of test in more detail in his article *Update on Rapid Appraisal*.

Ideally, we would have liked to use a recorded text from Mbum-Ngaoundere, but there was no prerecorded text available to us.

3 PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

3.1 Dialectology

Our survey results agree with prior work that there are two dialects of the Gbete language: Vana and Woutchaba. These dialects are inherently intelligible. This means that each variety understands the other because they are linguistically very similar. Both groups state that a child of six can easily understand the other dialect. During the group interviews, people indicated that the dialect distinctions are a recent historical event. The people of Goyaum consider themselves and three other villages to be a separate dialect, but people from Woutchaba and Dengdeng classified Goyaum as part of the Vana dialect.

From the individual questionnaires, we found that the differences between the two dialects are perceived to be very slight. It does not impede comprehension or communication in any way. People from the Gbete Vana dialect say that people who speak Gbete Woutchaba speak more slowly. One woman added that they have a few differences in vocabulary. People from Gbete

Woutchaba say that people who speak Gbete Vana use different tones and speak with a slightly different accent.

3.1.1 Inherent Intelligibility

As stated in the previous section, Gbete Vana and Gbete Woutchaba are inherently intelligible. The people from Woutchaba and Dengdeng believe Mbum Ngaoundere (referred to as Mbum) to be inherently intelligible as well. They say that communication always takes place in each group's MT at a normal conversational speed and that a six-year-old child could understand Mbum. Although people from Goyaum say they speak Gbete to Mbum speakers and Mbum speakers respond in Mbum, they do not think that the two languages are close enough for a child of six to understand without contact. Everyone agrees that the Gbete people and the Mbum people share the same origins.

People from Dengdeng think that like Mbum, Mbere is inherently intelligible. They say that conversation takes place in each group's mother tongue, and they believe that a child of six can understand Mbere. Woutchaba initially agreed with the people from Dengdeng; however, after hearing the Mbere tape, the listeners stated that a child of six could not understand Mbere. Gbete people agree that they are linked with the Mbere people historically; however, they claim to share a more recent history with the Mbum people than with the Mbere people.

3.1.2 Lexicostatistical Analysis

A synchronic analysis of the word lists was conducted with the aid of a lexicostatic program, WORDSURV (Wimbish 1989). This word list analysis serves only as an initial indicator of the existing relationship between speech forms.

In grouping words together into apparent cognates, we have followed the inspection method. This means that we examine the words, and if they look like they could have come from the same root word, we group them together.

As we can expect from the group interview, Gbete Vana and Gbete Woutchaba show a very high degree of lexical similarity. The lower percentages of lexical similarity between the Gbete varieties and Karang than between Gbete and the two Mbum West languages confirm our analysis that Gbete is a Mbum West language.

We did not anticipate that the Gbete varieties would exhibit approximately the same degree of lexical similarity to Mbum-Ngaoundere as to Mbum-Mbere. Because Gbete speakers say their language is closer to Mbum-Ngaoundere, we expected Gbete to be lexically much closer to Mbum-Ngaoundere.

WORDSURV RESULTS

Percentages Matrix

Gbete Woutchaba

92 Gbete Vana (Dengdeng)

82 80 Mbum-Mbere

79 78 89 Mbum-Ngaoundere

62 62 66 69 Karang

Variance Matrix

Gbete Woutchaba

5.8 Gbete Dengdeng

9.2 9.4 Mbum-Mbere

9.5 9.7 7.4 Mbum-Ngaoundere

11.6 11.6 11.4 11.1 Karang

3.1.3 Choice of Reference Dialects

The individual questionnaire gives us the most insight in helping us choose a reference dialect. When we asked the question, “Where do people speak the best Gbete?”, the responses were mixed. Two elders from Gbete Vana, the chieftain and her brother, who is second to the chief, feel that people from Woutchaba speak the best Gbete. They say it is purer and closer to the original Gbete language. This is significant because people from one dialect rarely admit that people from another dialect speak better than they do. A young man from Dengdeng thinks that the best Gbete is spoken in Dengdeng, and the chief of Haman says that Gbete is spoken in the same manner everywhere.

The two people we interviewed individually who speak Gbete Woutchaba think that people from Woutchaba speak the best Gbete because the differences in Gbete Vana are a result of borrowing words from other languages. They say that before the people on the east side of the river separated from Woutchaba, they all spoke Gbete Woutchaba. Since representatives of the majority of the population agree that Woutchaba is the center of the Gbete language, we feel that Woutchaba should be the reference dialect for the Gbete language.

3.2 Multilingualism

3.2.1 Comprehension and Use

In this section we will discuss the languages of which the Gbete people have acquired intelligibility. Acquired intelligibility refers to a language that is learned through extensive contact as opposed to a language that is understood due to linguistic similarity.

The acquired intelligibility among the Gbete people varies according to intermarriage patterns and geographical proximity. Gbete people from the west side of the Sanaga River are more

isolated than the Gbete people who live on the east side of the river because the river cuts them off from the towns of Belabo and Bertoua. In our group interview with people from Woutchaba who live in Belabo, the people from Woutchaba say that they understand and speak Vute. They say that they intermarry most often with Vute people and that the majority of the foreigners (although only a small number) living in their villages are Vute speakers. Because of their intermarriage and contact with the Vute people, the majority of Gbete speakers from Woutchaba speak and understand some Vute.

People from Dengdeng and the villages on the same side of the river have contact with Gbaya, Pol, Vute, and Ewondo speakers. In the Dengdeng and Goyaum group interviews, people said that they speak and understand these languages. Pol and Vute are the languages that they acquire with a certain degree of proficiency. People from Goyaum learn Ewondo-Mongo well enough to speak it in the market. People from Dengdeng say they most often intermarry with the Gbaya people. We met many Gbaya women in Dengdeng, and some of the children speak Gbaya as well as Gbete in the home.

3.2.2 Languages of Wider Communication

French is the most predominant language of wider communication (LWC). Gbete speakers most often use French with people who do not speak a language they know. Even when Gbete speakers understand and speak another language, they often prefer to communicate in French. For example, people from Goyaum village who speak Gbaya, Pol, and Ewondo usually speak French when they meet speakers of these languages.

In some situations Mbum also functions as a LWC. For example, when speaking with Mbere speakers, Gbete and Mbere speakers use Mbum. Prior to our survey, we thought that Fulfulde may be a LWC, but this is not true.

3.2.3 Language Attitudes

Speakers of Gbete Woutchaba and Gbete Vana have very positive attitudes toward each other. People from each dialect feel that people from the other dialect are honest, and they would be happy for their children to marry a person from the other dialect.

Attitudes toward Mbum and Mbere are very positive as well. In all the villages where we conducted group interviews, people are open and very willing to learn Mbum. Every village considers Mbum as the best language to learn to read and write after their own language. On more than one occasion we heard the statement, "It would be just like learning our own language." Another person said that the Mbum language is the origin of the Gbete language so, of course, they want to learn to read and write it.

Gbete people like the languages of the people with whom they have contact. The second choice in every village is an unrelated language with which the people have extensive contact. In Dengdeng, people choose Gbaya after Mbum to learn to read and write. In Goyaum, Fulfulde is the second choice, and people from Woutchaba choose Vute after Mbum. There is no consensus on the second choice of a language for literacy since each village interacts with different people.

3.3 Rapid Appraisal Recorded Text Test Results

Following is an evaluation of how well the Gbete people understand Karang and Mbere, based on their response to a recorded text in each of these languages.

3.3.1 Listener Response

We watched each group to note their initial responses as they listened to the texts. When they heard the Mbere tape, every group identified the language as Mbum Mbere right away. The listeners were attentive and smiled as they listened. They laughed at appropriate places and whispered excitedly to their neighbors.

The response to the Karang tape was different. Everyone shook his or her head. There was some discussion as to the region where this language is spoken, but only the men from Goyaum could identify the place (Touboro) where people speak Karang. Most people said they understand some of the words but not enough to catch the gist of the story.

3.3.2 Level of Comprehension

To better find out how well they understood the texts, we asked the listeners to translate the text paragraph by paragraph. Everyone could summarize the main events of the Mbere story, and they understood some of the details. Sometimes they misunderstood the meaning of a phrase. For example, when the speaker on the tape was describing the noise of his heart beating in fear, people from Woutchaba thought he was describing the sound of someone knocking at the door. And sometimes, they made up events that did not actually happen in the story.

According to Stalder's ranking system (1996:26), we rate the Gbete people as having a level two or partial comprehension of Mbum Mbere. Men from Goyaum understood the text better than the other groups but not well enough to achieve a level three. When we asked how they rate their own understanding of the text, they said they understand it but not well. They say that the Mbere speech is somewhat like their own, but that a young child could not understand it. According to Stalder this means that, "There is a low probability for the use of translation in the test language if the attitude is positive, probable translation need." (1996:26).

3.4 Language Vitality and Viability

The chief concern of this section of the report is to describe the vitality and viability of Gbete in the presence of French, the official language of the East province. French is used as the language of education and as LWC. With this in mind, it is important to determine whether Gbete will continue to be used alongside French.

Decker (1993:1) provides the following definition of language vitality:

Language vitality can be defined as: the presence of factors that maintain a language community as a separate and united social group, who perceive of their language as an important part of their identity. When a group has linguistic vitality, the individuals in the group behave in a manner that maintains group linguistic unity and distinction as separate from other linguistic groups.

Following is a summary of how those interviewed report their language use in different domains of life (3.4.1), their attitudes toward and use of French (3.4.2), and their expressed attitudes toward their language and its potential for development (3.4.3).

3.4.1 Language Use

General Community

In all of the villages, which the survey team visited, Gbete is the language of choice in the home, with friends of the same age, and in the field. People from Goyaum and Dengdeng speak French as well as Gbete in the fields and with friends of the same age. In the chief's home where we stayed for two days, we heard children speaking French to each other and with their mothers. One man told us that when the mother of a family is from another language group, she often uses French with her children until she learns to speak Gbete proficiently.

Within the schools French is the language of the classroom and of instruction. Teachers try to enforce the French-only rule during recess, but parents tell us that when their children are out of the teacher's earshot, they prefer to speak Gbete.

Gbete speakers use their MT for all traditional ceremonies, announcements, and local council meetings where only Gbete chiefs are present.

Religious Domains

There are a number of different Christian denominations present in this area. All of the villages also have a Muslim presence.

One denomination uses French, Ewondo, and Gbete for prayers. Attendants sing in French, Ewondo, Gbete, and Pol. The leader most often preaches in French while someone translates into Gbete. In another denomination people pray and sing in the MT, French, Ewondo, and Bulu. The leader most often preaches in French while someone translates into the MT. One kind of service is entirely French, but members feel free to pray in their own languages.

The three villages we visited have a Muslim community. Most of the Muslim prayers and religious services are entirely in Arabic, but sometimes the leader will translate parts of the service into Gbete.

In summary, the Gbete language plays a vital part in the daily lives of its speakers. People speak their MT in the home, at the farm, and among friends of the same age. Gbete people speak French most often when interacting with people from another language group although some of the youth (particularly those who grow up in Belabo and in homes where the mother is not a native Gbete speaker), use French alongside Gbete. Gbete is also alive and well in the public domains of village life. This shows that Gbete people have pride in their own language. Although French is the predominate language of the churches, the sermon is nearly always translated into Gbete.

3.4.2 Language Maintenance and Shift

To evaluate the language maintenance or shift of the MT in the Gbete community, we examined the peoples' attitudes toward their MT and their patterns of language use. As stated in the previous section, people from every village say they are eager to read and write their language. We want to know if this positive attitude carries on to their children and if the Gbete language will continue to be spoken for generations to come.

One way to answer this question is to try and find out if the youth are speaking a language of wider communication (in this case French) more than their MT. We also want to know if the youth are mixing French with Gbete. If so, it is important to find out how parents view these practices, and whether they encourage or discourage the use of another language in addition to Gbete.

When we asked the question, "Do your children speak another language more than Gbete?", we found that the responses were mixed. People from Dengdeng replied that their children are increasing their use of French to the extent that they speak French as much as their MT. People from Goyaum feel that their children speak Gbete more than French. People from Woutchaba say that in the village, children mostly speak Gbete, but the children who live in town (more children live in town than in the village) speak more French than Gbete on a daily basis.

The adults from all three villages report that their children mix French with Gbete. Some of the younger men in Dengdeng disagree, but the elders say that more French words are becoming accepted into Gbete speech. No one thinks that this is a positive development. The elders of Goyaum are worried about the language losing its purity, and the elders from the Woutchaba community are concerned that some of their vocabulary is already lost due to the influence of French.

When we asked whether parents are happy to hear their children using French in the home, people from Goyaum and Woutchaba say that it makes parents very unhappy. They worry that by using French instead of Gbete in the home, children will give away family secrets to outsiders. In addition, they fear that their children will forget Gbete if they only practice French. Finally, speaking French in the home shows disrespect to the elderly who do not speak French fluently. However, the people from Dengdeng like to hear their children speak French because it shows that they are educated.

Despite the fact that the youth are using more French, everyone feels that the youth are proud of Gbete. People from Woutchaba think that even the children in town value their MT. Everyone believes that Gbete will continue to be spoken for a long time.

From our observations, language shift in the Gbete community is in the beginning stages. Many Gbete people from the west side of the Sanaga River are migrating to Belabo where there is a health clinic and better education opportunities for their children. In Belabo, they have to rely on French more than their MT. Mixed marriages add to the increased use of French in Gbete villages.

Despite the fact that language shift is taking place, Gbete is still the most important language for the Gbete people. In the villages we heard mostly Gbete even among the children. The Gbete people who live in Belabo have their own quarter, which helps to reinforce the use of the MT among the youth. Most parents encourage the use of Gbete in the home, and it is the predominant language of the Gbete community.

3.4.3 Attitudes Toward the Mother Tongue

Attitudes toward the MT are very positive. When we examine the domains of language choice, only Gbete speakers from Goyaum say they use some French in the fields and in the home. It is the youth who use French with their friends while working in the fields. In every Gbete village we visited, people are enthusiastic about learning to read and write in their own language and want their children to read and write in Gbete. After the group interview in Belabo with people from Woutchaba, the elders of the community chose two men from the community to send to the “Decouvre Ta Langue” (DTL) course in Yaoundé. This shows that Gbete people are not only verbally enthusiastic, but that they have enough interest in MT literacy to invest time and money in it.

The teachers we interviewed said that they would choose Gbete for the language of instruction in the classroom after French. They think that it would benefit students to learn to read and write in their own language, and the teachers are willing to participate in teaching Gbete in the schools.

All of the church leaders feel that the use of Gbete is encouraged in the churches. All of them expressed a desire to have the Bible in their own language. They mentioned that not everyone has adequate comprehension of the French Bible. The elder of the Presbyterian church of Belabo thinks that the Mbum Bible could benefit the Gbete church as well.

Some of the church leaders are very willing to actively participate in a translation project, or at least willing to help facilitate a project, especially if there are personal financial benefits.

4 LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT POTENTIAL

According to Watters (1990:105), there are three factors that affect the nature and development of language programs: the homogeneity of the linguistic community, their openness to change and development, and the presence at the local level of a middle-aged leadership. We follow with a discussion of these three factors in the context of the villages surveyed.

4.1 *Homogeneity of the Linguistic Community*

Watters (1990:106) writes: “The more homogeneous a given community is, the more chance there is for success in motivating broad based participation in the development of the language...in that community.” There are several aspects of social cohesion that contribute to overall solidarity: the linguistic, cultural, geographic, economic, and religious elements.

From our observations and questions, the Gbete community is linguistically homogenous. The people from all the villages we visited say that they all speak Gbete. The distinctions in dialect are so minimal that they do not divide the community.

Culturally, the Gbete speakers consider themselves one people and are aware of their shared history. Most of the men share an interest in fishing and hunting, and nearly all of the women are farmers. In all the villages we visited, Gbete speakers make up an overwhelming majority of the population. Their strong cultural identity is exhibited by the fact that they have their own quarter in Belabo with a political representative from the community.

Geographically speaking, the two dialects are cut off from each other by the Sanaga River. Two years ago when the ferry was functioning, contact between the two groups was much more frequent. Now, it is still possible to cross in canoes, but there is no transportation on the other side of the river. Good dirt roads connect all the Gbete Vana villages. Since most of the Woutchaba population resides in Belabo, the two dialect groups still have contact.

Belabo is the economic center for the Gbete region. The villages all seem to be at the same economic level (we did not have the chance to visit the villages on the west side of the river).

Religion could be a divisive factor because most people from Woutchaba and its surrounding villages are Muslim while most people who live on the other side of the river claim to be Christian, but we did not sense any religious tension between the Christians and the Muslims. Although we did not interview enough church leaders to be certain, there is indication that some tension exists among the different denominations.

Overall, we feel that the Gbete people are socially cohesive since they share a common language, culture, and history. Belabo is a point of contact for the Gbete people from both sides of the river, and their religious differences do not appear to divide the community.

4.2 Openness to Change

The Gbete community seems open to change. This attitude is reflected in their responses to health, education, and community development.

None of the villages we visited has a functioning clinic. There is a clinic in Dengdeng, but it is currently closed due to lack of personnel. When someone is seriously ill, he/she goes to the hospital in Belabo or Bertoua. Nearly all the women go to these towns to have their babies.

In the villages of Goyaum and Woutchaba most of the Gbete children attend primary school and some of them attend secondary school as well. More than half of the children in Dengdeng attend primary school and some of them continue their education. Students go to Bertoua or Belabo for a secondary school education. Children from other Gbete villages attend the primary schools of Dengdeng, Goyaum, and Woutchaba, but there are few students from other language groups. All of the Gbete children who live in town attend primary school. A greater percentage of them than children who live in the villages have the opportunity for secondary education

Dengdeng and Woutchaba have development committees. In Dengdeng, the committee raised funds for an administrative building and recruits volunteers for construction projects. The Woutchaba committee for development raises funds to finance a bridge, a health clinic, and to fix the ferry. The Woutchaba committee is willing to help raise funds to send two men to DTL courses in Yaoundé next year.

4.3 Middle-aged Leadership

An important factor in determining the viability of a language project is the presence of middle-aged leadership. In Goyaum the leaders are in their 40s and 50s, in Dengdeng they are between 26 and 55 years old, and in Woutchaba they are between 45 and 82. All of the leaders stay in the village, but the chief of Woutchaba divides his time between Belabo and the village. The chief of Dengdeng also spends time in Bertoua, but his wives say he spends most of his time in the village. Everyone feels that there will be leaders to take the place of the present leaders in the future.

It is important to note that most of the young people from Dengdeng and Woutchaba remain in Bertoua and Belabo after they finish their education. A minority returns to their villages to hunt and farm. If the trend of leaving the village for work in the towns continues, it is doubtful whether there will be people to take over for the current leaders of these villages.

The village population of Goyaum is more stable than the villages of Dengdeng and Woutchaba. The majority of their youth return to the village after they finish school. This may be due in part to the fact that the village has a train station, which gives them a place to sell meat and produce.

Of the four types of communities defined by Watters (traditional, changing, changed, and disintegrating), the Gbete people are in the process of becoming a changed community. This means that “the community is not only open to change, but is well into the process of change” (1990:110). Changed communities are characterized by openness to change, a lack of middle-aged leadership, and the movement of the youth to urban centers. Unlike a disintegrating community, cultural identity is still strong and the MT is used in most domains. Some of the villages like Goyaum, where the youth are still returning to the village and Dengdeng where there is a strong middle-aged leadership presence, are still in the process of changing. However, if the youth continue to live in towns after finishing their education, it will not be long before the Gbete community as a whole will be a changed community.

5 SUMMARY

- (1) Findings from the present survey indicate a straightforward social and linguistic situation in the Gbete community. In every Gbete village, people say they speak the same language and share a social identity. They do not consider the differences between the two Gbete dialects great enough to impede intercomprehension, and they do not express a negative attitude toward learning to read and write in the other dialect.

- (2) The MT is used in all domestic domains and in most aspects of everyday life. Even though some of the youth mix French with Gbete and speak French to their friends, the older people do not feel like they are abandoning their own language.

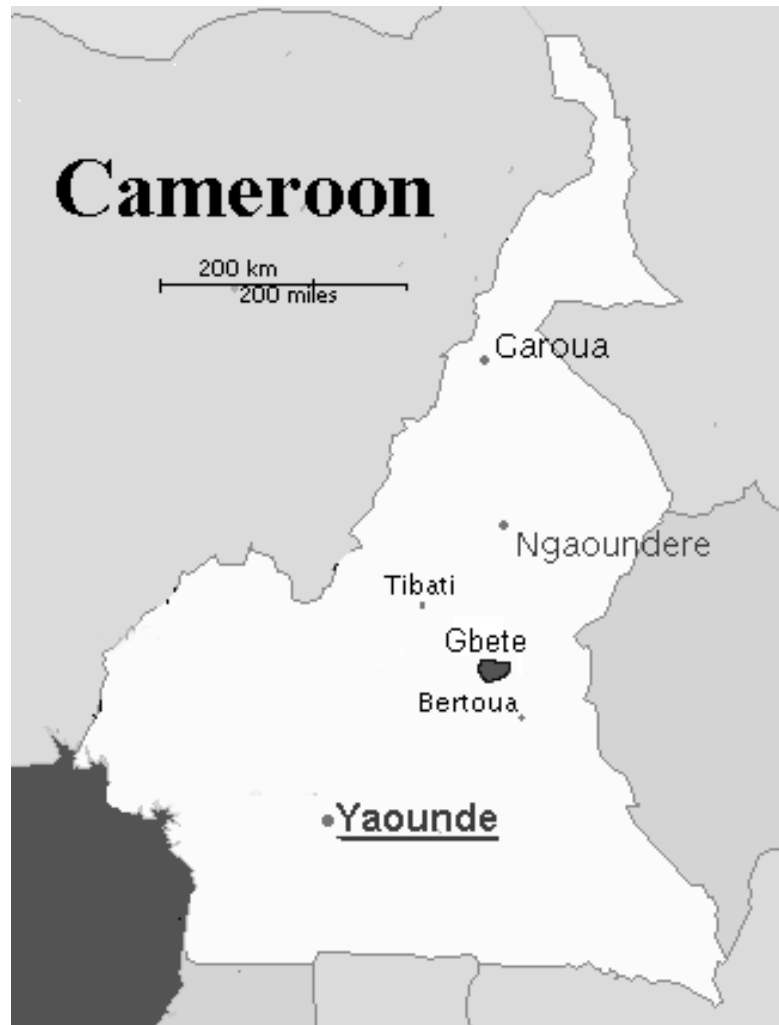
Attitudes toward MT development are very positive. Gbete people who live in Belabo are aware of the Vute language development project and would like to see something similar in their own language. People want to see their own language written, and the Woutchaba development committee is willing to fund Gbete language development.

- (3) Where there is intermarriage and frequent contact, there is a high level of acquired intelligibility. People from Dengdeng learn Gbaya and Vute, people from Woutchaba learn Vute, and people from Goyaum learn Ewondo-Mongo. Even when Gbete people understand and speak another language, they often prefer to use French which is the main LWC.
- (4) The individual questionnaire was the tool designed to help us in choosing a reference dialect for the Gbete language. We chose Gbete Woutchaba because elders from Dengdeng say that it is closest to the original Gbete speech, and residents of Woutchaba agree and add that the Gbete Vana dialect borrows words from other languages.
- (5) The RA-RTT test helped us to verify the classification of the Gbete language as a Mbum West language. The results show us that Gbete speakers have a much better comprehension of Mbere (a Mbum West language) than of Karang (a Mbum East language). Their history confirms a shared past with Mbum speakers. Gbete people show interest in reading and writing the Mbum language.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

According to David Bendor-Samuel's summary of obstacles to ongoing MT literacy (1988:9.6.2), the Gbete community meets some of the criteria for the success of a MT literacy and translation project. That is, they have a strong cultural and demographic cohesion, a strong ethnic identity, a "natural framework for the use of MT literature" (churches), and a willingness to be involved as a community. Factors working against the Gbete community are their extensive contact with French, their use of the national language for literature, and the fact that language shift is in the beginning stages.

Because the Gbete people also show an interest in sharing literature with Mbum-Ngaoundere and the percentage of lexical similarity of these two languages is above seventy percent, we recommend Recorded Test Testing between them to see if Gbete people comprehend Mbum-Ngaoundere well enough to share their New Testament and other written materials.

Appendix A: Map 1

Appendix B Individual Questionnaire for Gbete

Nom: _____ Nom de l'Enquêteur: _____

Age: _____ Sexe: _____ Date: _____ Lieu de l'interview: _____

Citez les endroits où vous avez habité pendant au moins un an de votre vie. Pendant combien de temps? Quelles langues y parliez-vous?

Endroit	Temps passé	Langues parlées

DIALECTOLOGIE

Quelle est la première langue que vous avez parlée chez vous étant enfant?

Quelle est la langue de votre mère? Et de votre père?

Quelles langues parlez-vous? Bien (+) Peu (-)

Quelles langues comprenez-vous? Bien (+) Peu (-)

Avez-vous rencontré des gens qui viennent d'ailleurs qui parlent une langue qui ressemble à la vôtre? (Ngaoundere, Bele, Touboro)

Etes-vous déjà allé à (variété proche: Woutchaba ou Dengdeng)?

Quelle langue parlez-vous avec eux? Dans quelle langue vous répondent-ils?

Comprenez-vous toujours les gens de RV? o / n
Même des plaisanteries et des proverbes? o / n

Est-ce qu'un enfant de 6 ans la comprend toujours?

Pouvez-vous toujours dire tout ce que vous voulez en (Woutchaba / Dengdeng)?

ATTITUDES

Comment voulez-vous décrire la façon de parler de (Woutchaba / Dengdeng)?

Si vous perdiez votre carte d'identité avec de l'argent dans un marché d'un village de (W / D); est-ce que quelqu'un essaierait de vous la rendre?

Aimeriez-vous que votre enfant se marie avec quelqu'un de (Woutchaba / Dengdeng)?

Où parle-t-on mieux le Gbete, le vrai Gbete? Pourquoi?
 Si je veux apprendre le vrai Gbete, qui est clair, où est-ce que je dois m'installer?

LA CASSETTE

I. Listener Response: Are reactions positive or negative?

Mbere:

Karang:

How well did they retell the story?

Level 1: No comprehension

Level 2: Partial comprehension

Level 3: Good comprehension

II. Questions a demande:

1. Comprennez-vous l'histoire sur la cassette?

Mbere: bien un peu pas du tout

Karang: bien un peu pas du tout

2. Est-ce que la personne a parlé sur la cassette:

Mbere: très différentment un peu pareille exactement comme vous

Karang: très différentment un peu pareille exactement comme vous

3. Avez-vous déjà rencontré quelqu'un qui parle comme lui?

Mbere o / n Ou?

Karang o / n Ou?

III. Faites la comparaison entre les deux cassettes:

1. Quelle parleur était plus clair à comprendre? Mbere Karang

2. Quelle langue est plus familière que la votre? Mbere Karang

3. Si vous devez apprendre une de ces langues, Quelle langue choisiriez-vous?

Mbere Karang

Et pourquoi?

Appendix C

Sociolinguistique Interview de Groupe

Notes prises par: _____ Date: _____
 Interviewer: _____ # de personnes present: _____
 Autres chercheurs présents: _____ H: _____ F: _____

Informations générales:
 Village: _____ Population donné: _____
 Département: _____ intérieur: _____
 arrondissement: _____ extérieur: _____

(1) DIALECTOLOGIE

- Nom du peuple _____ - Nom de la langue _____

Quelles sont les origines du peuple?

- regroupement des villages selon leurs dialectes:

Exactement le même langue	Difference d'accents ou lexicales	Difficile mais vous comprenez	Empêchent la compréhension

- villages appartenant à la langue ou la majorite des gens parle Gbete:

*[Demande pour chaque village qu'ils n'ont pas dit au dessus sur la carte]
 La carte de region est attache.*

(2) Parlers linguistiquement apparentés: INTERCOMPRÉHENSION

LANGUE	Vous parlez	Ils parlent	Lentem ^t normalm'	Est-ce qu'un enfant de 6 ans comprend?	Un peuple?	Meme origins?
Mbum - Ngaoundere			l n			
Kuo [ko]			l n			
Mbere			l n			
Kali			l n			
Karang			l n			
			l n			
			l n			
			l n			
			l n			
			l n			

(3) Parlers linguistiquement non apparentés: MULTILINGUISME

LANGUE	Vous parlez	Ils parlent	Lentem ^t normalm'	Est-ce qu'un enfant de 6 ans comprend?	Un peuple?	Meme origins?
Fulfulde			l n	O / N		
Vute			l n			
Gbaya			l n			
Bobilis			l n			
			l n			
			l n			
			l n			
			l n			

Laquelle de ces langues comprenez-vous le mieux? _____

le pire? _____

VITALITE ET VIABILITE

(4) Migration et intermariage

-intermariage? (entre qui) _____

-restrictions? _____

JEUNES:

- les enfants vont-ils à l'école primaire?	Tous	La plupart	Quelques uns	Tres peu
à l'école secondaire?	Tous	La plupart	Quelques uns	Tres peu

- y a-t-il des enfants qui viennent de l'extérieur pour fréquenter l'école ici?

Est-ce qu'ils sont nombreux?

- Est-ce que les jeunes preferent vivre en ville ou dans le village apres avoir fini l'école?
- Pourquoi?

ETRANGERS:

- Y a-t-il des étrangers qui viennent ici s'installer? Pourquoi?

D'ou? sont-ils nombreux?

- S'ils restent dans votre village, quelle langue parlent-ils avec vous? _____

(5) Usage des langues

Au village, quelles langues utilise-t-on le plus souvent:

	LM	Français			
DOMESTIQUE					
Au foyer					
Avec amis (même âge)					
Au champ					
Au marché local					
Au grand marché					
A la clinique					
ECOLE					
Pendant la récréation					
En classe					
Instruction					
PUBLIQUE					
Ceremonies traditionales					
Des Annonces					
Des reunions des chefs du region					

[Pour le suivant: LM = langue maternelle F = Français]

EGLISES:					
Prières					
Chants					
Sermon					

Y a-t-il *beaucoup / peu* de Chrétiens dans votre village?

beaucoup / peu de Muslims dans votre village?

beaucoup / peu de pratiquants de la religion traditionnelle dans votre village?

Lesquels de ces groupes est le plus grand? _____

(6) “Language Shift”: Indices

Pensez-vous que les jeunes d’ici parlent une autre langue plus qu’ils parlent leur LM? o / n

Laquelle ou lesquelles?

Parlez-vous le fulfulde/français tous les jours ici au village? Oui / Non

Lesquels des groupes suivants le parle mieux: les jeunes les hommes adultes les femmes adultes

Pensez-vous que les jeunes mélangent la langue maternelle avec fulfulde / français?

Si oui est-ce que c'est une bonne chose? pourquoi?

Lorsqu’un jeune parle le français à la maison, est-ce que les parents sont contents?

Si non pourquoi?

Pensez-vous qu’on continuera à parler la langue maternelle quand les enfants seront vieux?

Est-ce que les jeunes sont fiers de leur langue maternelle? o / n

(7) Efforts de standardisation

Existe-t-il quelque chose d’écrit dans votre langue? (Par exemple, des chants, des prières, des portions de la Bible ou d'autres livres?)

Aimeriez-vous apprendre à lire et écrire votre langue maternelle? o / n

Existe t-il un programme d’alphabétisation en langue maternelle? o / n

S’il y avait un tel programme dans ce village, accepteriez-vous de participer? o / n

Accepteriez-vous travailler en collaboration avec les autres dialectes? o / n

ATTITUDES LINGUISTIQUES

Si quelqu'un voulait apprendre votre langue d'avoir le respect de tout le monde, dans quel village habiterait-il?

Où parle-t-on le mieux votre langue?

Quelle dialect (apres la votre) est-ce que vous choisiriez a apprendre a ecrire et a lire?

	LM	Mbum (Ngoundere)	Fulfulde
Aimeriez-vous que vos enfants apprennent à lire/écrire en...			
Aimeriez-vous apprendre à lire/écrire			
Pourquoi?			

A part de votre langue, Quelles langues aimeriez-vous apprendre à lire/écrire?

1 ^{er}	2 ^{ème}	3 ^{ème}
-----------------	------------------	------------------

(8) Les trois facteurs sociolinguistiques de Watters

(a) Homogénéité de la communauté linguistique (cohésion sociale)

Y-a-t-il des villages qui sont coupés des autres, pendant la saison des pluies, de sorte qu'on ne peut pas y aller au marché ou participer aux fêtes?

(b) Attitude positive à l'égard du changement

Est-ce que beaucoup de gens vont au dispensaire quand ils sont gravement malades? (si non) pourquoi?

Y a-t-il un comité de développement?

Quelles sont leurs activités principales à l'heure actuelle?

(c) Présence au niveau local de notables âgés de 35 à 50 ans

- Où habitent la plupart des notables du village?
- Quel âge ont-ils environ?
- Y aura-t-il des gens pour prendre la relève des notables dans 50 ans?

Appendix D

Questionnaire Pour les Dirigeants D'Eglises

Interviewer: _____ Date: _____
 Nom d'Eglise/Denomination : _____ Langue d'etude: _____
 Nom de pasteur: _____ Village: _____

Information generale:

Quelle est votre langue maternelle? Parlez-vous la LM? non un peu bien

La majorite de gens du village sont: Chretien Muslim Praticants de la religion traditionnelle
 D'autre

Existe-t-il d'autre denominations chretien? Si Oui Lesquelles? Laquelle est plus grande?

Quand est-ce que cette eglise a ete etabli dans ce village?

Combien de gens frequent votre culte régulièrement?

Usage de Langues dans l'Eglise:

Combien de peuple ont leur propre Bible dans votre congregation?
 Combien? La plupart La Moitie Tres peu
 Ils la lisent dans quelle langue?

Quelle langue est utilise pour:

- Chants? Est-il interprete dans la LM? o/n Pourquoi?
- Lisent la Bible? Est-il interprete dans la LM? o/n Pourquoi?
- Annonces? Est-il interprete dans la LM? o/n Pourquoi?
- La predication? Comment? prepare en avance? phrase par phrase resume?

Existe-t-il des reunions des jeunes? o / n Quelle langue utilise-t-on?
 Existe-t-il des etudes biblique? o / n Quelle langue utilise-t-on?

La présence d'étrangers vous recommande-t-elle l'utilisation d'une autre langue? Laquelle?

Y a-t-il des gens qui ne comprennent pas la langue utilise dans l'eglise? o / n Qui?

Existe-t-il quelque chose religieux d'ecrit dans la LM?

Attitudes:

Qu'est-ce que vous pensez de l'usage de francais dans votre eglise?

Est-ce que l'usage de la LM encourage par le dirigeants de cette eglise? pour la culte? o / n
 D'autre rencontres o / n
 Lesquelles?

Est-ce que les membres de cette eglise vous montrent une desire

De Lire et Ecrire dans leur LM? o / n

D'avoir les livres religious dans leur LM? o / n

Une traduction de la Bible, serait-elle cruciale? Pourquoi?

Aimeriez-Vous travailler avec d'autres denominations sur un project de traduction de la Bible?

Que pensez-vous de l'utilisation (actuelle et éventuelle) de la langue maternelle dans l'église?

Quel pourrait être votre contribution dans ce projet?

Appendix E

Questionnaire Pour les Maitres D'Ecoles

Interviewer: _____ Date: _____
 Nom d'Ecole: _____ Langue d'etude: _____
 Nom de Instructeur: _____ Village: _____

Information generale:

Quelle est votre langue maternelle? Parlez-vous la LM? non un peu bien

Jusqu'à quel niveau les cours sont-ils dispensés dans cette école?

Quel est l'effectif de chaque classe?

SIL:	CP 2:
CM 1:	CE 1:
CM 2:	CE 2:
	Collège:

Combien d'élèves qui appartiennent au LM?

La plupart Plus que la moitié Moins que la moitié Un peu

Quelle groupe linguistique est la plus grande dans cette ecole?

Est-ce que vous avez l'impression que la plupart des enfants de la LM viennent à l'école?

Dans un rayon de combien de kilomètres les enfants viennent-ils à l'école?

Combien d'enfants continuent leur scolarité après avoir terminé l'école ici?
 Où doivent-ils se rendre?

Usage de Langue:

Quelle langue utilisez-vous le plus souvent en classe?
 Quelle langue utilisez-vous si les enfants ne vous comprennent pas?
 Est-ce que vous utilisez aussi parfois la LM?

Quelle(s) langue(s) utilisez-vous le plus souvent pendant la récréation pour parler avec les enfants?

Quelle langue les enfants se parlent-ils le plus souvent pendant la récréation?

Attitudes:

Pensez-vous que ca sera utile pour les enfants de savoir lire et ecrire dans leur LM?

Aimeriez-vous qu'on introduise l'enseignement de la LM à l'école?

Est-ce que vous seriez intéressé dans un programme d'enseignement de LM ?

Après le français, quelle langue choisiriez-vous pour langue d'instruction d'école dans ce village?

Quel serait votre apport dans le développement de la langue maternelle?

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