Sociolinguistic Language Survey of Dama, Mono, Pam, Ndai, and Oblo

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SIL International
2002
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1 Introduction

1.1 General Information
This report is a synthesis of the data from a preliminary survey accomplished during the week of June 2–5, 2001. The sociolinguistic survey team did research, completing group interview questionnaires and collecting word lists of the languages of Dama, Mono, Pam, Ndai, and Oblo located in the Rey-Bouba and Tcholliré Subdivisions, Mayo Rey Division, North Province, Cameroon. The team consisted of Michael and Charlene Ayotte of SIL and Scott and Annette Westermann of Lutheran Bible Translators.

1.2 Acknowledgements
We would like to thank all those who were involved in the research and helped us to accomplish our goals. We gratefully acknowledge the assistance and welcome that we received from regional and local government officials, school representatives, church leaders, and traditional rulers, without whose cooperation this mission would not have been possible.

1.3 Research Objectives
The primary goal of this survey was to get an overview of the language situation of Dama, Mono, Pam, Ndai, and Oblo. These languages are listed as “Survey Needed” in the Ethnologue as well as in the Survey Department database of SIL Cameroon. We sought to answer the following questions:
1. Where exactly are the speakers of these languages located?
2. How many people still speak these languages?
3. What is the current status of these languages?

1.4 Previous Research
Previous linguistic research on most of these languages is meager, and little was known of the small populations that speak these languages. Furthermore, sociolinguistic research is nonexistent. Until this study, no work had been carried out by SIL or LBT on these languages.

Cameroonian historian Eldridge Mohammadou (personal communication, Ngaoundéré, June 6, 2001) has done extensive historical reconstruction of northern Cameroon, focusing specifically on the migration and settlement of the Fulani.1 His writings examine the origins of indigenous peoples and their contact with the Fulani. His research relies mainly upon archival accounts by Fulani leaders. He supplements these with previously gathered linguistic data, accumulated by people such as Kurt Strümpell and personal interviews with representatives of these ethnic groups.

P. F. LaCroix (1962) briefly surveyed the Galke (Ndai) language in October 1960 with two mother-tongue speakers. In his article he also mentions Dama and Mono. As early as the time of his research, the Galke community was a small group in the process of disappearing. They were losing their ethnic and linguistic identity, as they were being absorbed by other, larger indigenous groups around them. Then, with the invasion of the Fulani, Fufulde began to replace Galke.

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1The Fulani are nomadic African Muslims who speak Fulfulde. French speakers refer to them and their language as Peul and Fulbe. Southern Cameroonians often refer to the people and the language as Hausa. The Fulani in the southern and western parts of Cameroon refer to their language as Mbororo.
1.5 Linguistic Classification

*ALCAM*

Dieu and Renaud (1983:352, 359) classify these languages, Dama, Mono, Pam, Ndai, in the following manner: Niger-Congo, Adamawa-Ubangian, Adamawa, Mbum South. Oblo has been grouped with these Adamawa languages solely on the basis of geographic proximity to them but otherwise remains unclassified.

*Ethnologue*

Grimes (2000:29, 45) classifies them as follows: Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, North, Adamawa-Ubangi, Adamawa, Mbum-Day, Mbum, Northern, Damagalke. Pam is identified as Mbum, but is not further classified, and Oblo is listed as Adamawa, unclassified.

2 Methodology

2.1 Level 1 Language Survey: Rapid Appraisal

We employed the sociolinguistic research approach known as the “Rapid Appraisal” (Bergman 1991, Stalder 1996), which utilises group and individual interviews of mother-tongue speakers. Informant responses reveal the patterns of contact among the various speech varieties being studied, the degree of multilingualism between them, and the language attitudes held by the community and its political, religious, and educational leaders. This method relies on mother-tongue speakers’ perceptions to provide an overall view of the sociolinguistic situation. Survival of the language determines the potential success and value of a language development project, whether or not Scriptures and other books in the language could be used.

2.2 Word List Collection

For each language we elicited 126-word *CREA* word lists (Dieu and Renaud 1983: 132–133), collected a written transcription, and recorded the words in order to document their existence in the event of their eventual disappearance. These word lists can later be evaluated for those interested in knowing their lexical relatedness.

3 Research Results

The sections below contain the results from the interviews we conducted of one or two elderly men from each language group in Tcholliré and Rey-Bouba.

3.1 Demographic Situation

3.1.1 Locality

Members of these language groups live mainly in the floodplains along major rivers. The rainy season begins in late May, but roads are passable until the heavy rains start in mid-June. The junction of the dirt road leading to Tcholliré and the primary paved route linking Ngaoundéré and Garoua is located midway between these two cities, two hours in either direction. Tcholliré is a two-hour drive east of this junction. Rey-Bouba is one hour north of Tcholliré on another gravel road in fairly good driving condition. The *Ethnologue* suggests that the Oblo can be found around Tcholliré, but Mohammadou (personal communication) located them around Bé, at the confluence of the Benue and Kebi Rivers, in the Bibémi Subdivision.
3.1.2 Historical Background

The Dama, Mono, Ndai, and Pam trace their origins back to the same ancestors but say they are no longer one people. They most recently migrated from other locations within the same region. All four groups in Mayo Rey Division profess to be linguistically and ethnically related. Mono and Dama are most closely related to one another, while Ndai and Pam are also another more closely related pair, based on native speakers’ opinions and the numbers assigned by ALCAM.

3.2 Linguistic Situation

Being Muslims, the Dama, Mono, Ndai, and Pam are inclined to use Fulfulde. Adults speak Fulfulde almost exclusively. Except for the few who speak the mother tongue, older adults primarily speak Fulfulde. The younger people, according to those interviewed, are favoring French over Fulfulde, since French is the language of education. However, the rate of schooling is unknown. Only a few adults over age 50 can speak some French. The young people enjoy being able to talk without the older adults understanding.

Every one of the adults interviewed said that they are proud of their language and would like the younger people to speak it. The younger people, however, are ashamed to speak the language of their ethnic group. There is a lot of pressure on the young people to use Fulfulde with most other inhabitants of the area. They must learn French at school and speak it with outsiders.

Residents of the area frequent the markets located in Tcholliré, Rey-Bouba, and Kongrong. At these markets there are always people who speak a variety of languages. The most predominant language used in this context is Fulfulde, the language in which nearly all business transactions are carried out. It is, therefore, a necessity to know Fulfulde.

To date, no standardization program or language committee has been established in any of these languages. In fact, the interviewees laughed hysterically at the idea that we even asked such a question. Since they are the sole speakers of their respective mother tongues and they are neither literate in Fulfulde nor in French, the point is moot.

3.2.1 Dama

There are three Dama clans: Dama Godi, Dama Aray, and Dama Ndoro. The Dama hail from the area south of the Mayo Rey River. Our interviewee estimated that there are approximately five hundred ethnic Dama remaining. In contrast, the latest edition of the Ethnologue (2000) still lists a population of 1,100 provided by SIL in 1982 (appendix A). The question remains as to how to reconcile these vastly contrasting figures. Either the population is declining quickly, there is rapid language shift, or the previous data is inflated.

About fifty Dama persons still speak their mother tongue, all of them over the age of 60. All are friends who speak Dama with one another in casual encounters and at local council meetings. They state that they use Fulfulde with all others, including the Mono, Ndai, and Pam. They intermarry with the Mono and Pam but not with the Fulani. The young people speak French every day. If a young person speaks French at home, older adults are not happy because none of them has learned French. Children and young adults use Fulfulde on a less frequent basis. Adult interviewees stated that the younger Dama are ashamed of their language, and they no longer learn to speak the language.

When asked about their opinions on language preferences for literacy, the respondents said that they would like to see the development of a written standard for Dama so that it does not disappear. After the mother tongue, they would choose to learn to read and write French. As their third choice, they would want to learn Fulfulde.
3.2.2 Mono
The Mono originate from the villages of Liporo and Kongrong, ten kilometers north of Rey-Bouba along the Mayo Godi River. They currently live in Kongrong as well as the Mono Rey quarter of Rey-Bouba. Data from the 1987 census shows a population of 238 for the village quarter of Kongrong Mono. The 2001 projection is three hundred persons, which matches the estimate given during the interview.

They share the same origins as the Dama and Pam, with whom they intermarry, but say they are not one people. They claim that the Pam and Ndai can speak Mono, while Mono speakers say that they understand only a little of these two languages. After their own language, they understand Fulfulde best. Yet they are not permitted to marry Fulani people.

Adults over age 55 are the sole speakers of Mono. They speak Mono among friends, during casual conversations, and at local council meetings but use Fulfulde in the home to communicate with members of the younger generations. Even in Kongrong, where most Mono speakers live, public announcements are given in Fulfulde.

The interview claims that young people speak French more than they speak Fulfulde but never confuse the two. The adults do not like it; however, when children speak French at home, since most older adults do not understand it at all. These are grandparents who would prefer that the young people speak Mono, but the young people are uninterested in learning the language of their ancestors.

Our interviewee chose the following languages in order of preference, as those the people would want to learn to read and write: Mono, Fulfulde, then French. Their children, on the other hand, would place them in the opposite order.

3.2.3 Ndai
Ndai is the original name of the people and language, supposedly the word for cow. This name is used by most linguistic publications to refer to the language. They are presently called Galke, the name given them by the Fulfulde. There are no other Galke living outside of Tcholliré. The Ndai lived on the east side of the mountain of Tcholliré. They later moved to a place east of there by the river and founded the village of Mayo Galke, where the Ndai no longer live, but it still bears their Fulfulde name.

The Ndai people have the ability to speak the mother tongue reciprocally with the Pam, Dama, and Kali,2 a language group east of Ngaoundéré. However, they use Fulfulde the most with people from these and other groups. They say that they are cousins to the Pam. Originally they intermarried only with the Dama and Kali, with whom they share the same culture. In fact, the Ndai consider themselves one people with the Dama and Kali. Now they intermarry with all except the Fulani.

Of the Ndai community, only three men and two women, all between the ages of 60 and 80, speak the mother tongue “properly.” Two individuals, age 50, are learning Ndai but do not currently speak it. They continue to use it for private conversations. Traditional, non-Islamic ceremonies are the only domain where the Ndai continue to speak the mother tongue. Most of the ethnic Ndai speak Fulfulde with one another. The young people, on the other hand, speak and understand French better than Fulfulde and often use it among themselves when they do not want the older people to understand them. Most of the elderly cannot understand French at all.

3.2.4 Pam
Our Pam informant said that the Pam have always been located in Landou, a village southeast of Rey-Bouba 20–25 kilometers by road, or northeast of Tcholliré forty-two

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2ALCAM [353], known as Kare in the Ethnologue.
kilometers by road. He said that there are approximately forty-five Pam living in Landou, another twenty living in Tcholliré, and one family living in Rey-Bouba, but he did not know how many people are still speaking the language. They intermarry only with the Mono and Dama.

Among the four groups, Pam and Ndai speakers have the ability to speak more easily together in their mother tongue than the Dama and Mono speakers. However, the language that they have mastered best is Fulfulde, which they use more often with one another. Despite frequent intermarriage among these four groups, the Pam maintain that they continue to speak distinctly different languages.

Pam friends age 50 and above speak the mother tongue among themselves casually and together in local council meetings, otherwise, they speak Fulfulde. Young people speak French with each other more than they speak Fulfulde, even in the presence of older people who do not understand French. These same adults do not mind if young people speak French but would prefer that they speak Fulfulde so that they can understand what the young people are saying. The young people have mixed emotions about the Pam language—they are both proud and ashamed of it. They also disdain Fulfulde, referring to it as a language of peasants.

Our Pam informant wishes that future generations would continue to speak the mother tongue. He would even recommend Pam as a language of instruction in school to the same extent that teachers presently use French. He believes that the adults who still speak Pam would choose it as the first language to learn to read and write. They would choose Fulfulde second and French third.

Despite the stated interest, there is no initiative to form a language development committee. On the other hand, they have shown initiative in collecting money to pay for wells that the government has dug for them. Likewise, parents set aside savings to send their children to school.

3.2.5 Oblo

The Ethnologue states that Oblo is found around the town of Tcholliré. For that reason, we have included it in this report with the other languages of Tcholliré and Rey-Bouba. However, during our research in this area we were unable to find anyone who could recognize the name of this language group or identify its location. We then concluded that they are either extinct or are known by a different name.

At the end of our research we gained some clues as to their existence and their whereabouts from a discussion with Mohammadou. He identified the Oblo as one clan within the Nyam-nyam³ ethnic group, which he also states in one of his published books (1983:157). He says further that the Oblo are a pure race of Nyam-nyam whose territory is situated on the right banks of the Kabi (Kébi) River between Mbadjouma and Mambay country, especially Gobtikéré. Their real name is Wobolo or Boorigi (1983:269), and they formed the base of the Mambay people.

Mohammadou relied on oral accounts from individuals he encountered around Bé in 1972. He was unable to gather any linguistic data, as the people he met failed to remember their language. The only record of their language was a list of eight words collected by the German military officer Kurt Strümpell in Garoua, who took an interest in cataloguing area languages he encountered during the years 1905–1907. This list is the sole foundation for Greenberg’s classification of Oblo among the Adamawan languages.

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³This is the Nyam-nyam often referred to as Nimbari of the Benoue and Mayo Louti divisions, to be differentiated from that called Suga around Galim of the Faro-et-Déo Divison and Sambolabbo of Mayo Banyo Divisions.
Dieu and Renaud (1983:44) list Nyam-nyam as an alternate but synonymous name for the Nimbari\(^4\) people group with no connection to Oblo. They classify Oblo with the other Adamawa languages based solely on geographical proximity (1983:98). Of the five groups, Oblo is the only one requiring further survey in order to verify their status, though their existence is in doubt. According to a personal conversation (Garoua, May 29, 2001) with Pastor Wanman of the Lutheran Brethren who helped translate the New Testament into Fali-Ram, the Nyam-nyam Kébi experienced complete language shift to Fulfulde. All are Muslims, most of whom may no longer preserve their ethnic identity.

3.3 Sociolinguistic Overview

The table below summarizes the demographic data derived from this research. The first column lists the five language groups. The second column gives the number of people who identify themselves ethnically with the particular people. Column three shows the number of speakers in the ethnic group who still speak the mother tongue of their ethnic group. The last column shows the ages of the youngest speakers of those languages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People/Language</th>
<th>Ethnic Population</th>
<th>Number of Speakers</th>
<th>Age of Speakers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dama</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>60+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mono</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>55+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ndai</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pam</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>50+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oblo</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 Summary

The languages of Mono, Dama, Pam, and Ndai are situated in the areas of Tcholliré and Rey-Bouba. Each of these languages is dying and on the verge of extinction. There are no mother-tongue speakers under the age of 50 years. Those who speak their mother tongue use Fulfulde more. None of them is literate in any language, and only a few understand any French at all. All the members of these groups maintain their ethnic identity distinct from the Fulani, even though everyone follows Islam, and succeeding generations have adopted Fulfulde as the mother tongue. To this day, these indigenous groups, with the exception of Oblo, intermarry with each other but not with the Fulani. The status of Oblo is unknown, but the people may still be located in the environs of Bé east of Garoua.

4.1 Conclusions

In one generation these languages will most likely be extinct. There is no need for translation or literacy in the mother tongue. The older generation could be reached with Fulfulde Scriptures. Future generations of young people may benefit more from the French Scriptures.

4.2 Recommendations

No further language survey needs to be done for Dama, Mono, Ndai, and Pam. We suggest another trip in the Pitoa and Bibémi subdivisions to try to locate the Oblo language.

\(^4\)The clan retaining the name Nimbari joined other Fali ethnic groups forming the Kangu language group in the plains north of Pitoa and around Golombé.
group, starting especially with the villages of Gobtikéré, Mbadjouma, and Ouro Bé, which can be found east of Garoua on the road running southeast from Pitoa.

4.3 Modifications to the Ethnologue

Change the listings for these language groups from “Survey needed” to “No survey needed, nearly extinct. Language shift to Fulfulde.” Add the following to the appropriate entry:

Dama—“50 speakers remaining, all over age 60.”
Mono—“Population 300; no speakers under age 55.”
Ndai—“Five elderly speakers left, at least 50 years old.”
Pam—“30 speakers remaining, none younger than 50 years.”
Oblo—modify location to “Possibly around Gobtikéré, Ouro Bé, and Ouro Badjouma, in Pitoa Subdivision, Benoue Division.”
Appendix A: Ethnologue and ALCAM Entries

Ethnologue (selected listings pp. 34, 46, 48, 50, 51)

DAMA [DMM] Small group in Rey-Bouba Subdivision, Benoue Division, North Province.
Linguistic affiliation: Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, North, Adamawa-Ubangi,
Adamawa, Mbum-Day, Mbum, Northern, Dama-Galke. May be a dialect of Mono.

MONO (MON-NON) [MRU] 1,100 (1982 SIL). North of Rey-Bouba around Kongrong
along the Mayo-Godi River, Mayo-Rey Division, North Province. Linguistic affiliation:
Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, North, Adamawa-Ubangi, Adamawa, Mbum-
Day, Mbum, Northern, Dama-Galke. Related to Dama. Distinct from Mono in DRC in Banda
group.

NDAI (GALKE, PORMI) [GKE]
Only a few speakers left. Tchollire, Mayo-Rey Division, North Province. Linguistic
affiliation: Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, North, Adamawa-Ubangi,

OBLO [OBL] Near Tchollire, Mayo-Rey Division, North Province. Linguistic affiliation:
Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, North, Adamawa-Ubangi, Adamawa,
Unclassified.

PAM [PMN] Near Tchollire, Mayo-Rey Division, North Province. Linguistic affiliation:
Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, North, Adamawa-Ubangi, Adamawa,
Mbumb-Day, Mbum, Unclassified.

ALCAM (pp. 95, 97, 98)
[307] [308] Le dama et le mono ne sont plus représentés que par les petits îlots dans
l’arrondissement de Rey-Bouba (dép. de la Bénoué). Le mono est localisé au Nord de Rey-
Bouba, autour de Kongrong, le long du Mayo-Godi.

[361] [362] Sont deux langues de très faible extension parlées aux environs de Tcholliré.
L’équivalence ndai = galke est reprise de P. F. Lacroix cité dans LSSA.

[394] Le oblo ne nous est connue que par une liste de huit mots recueillies par E.
Mohammadou, qui ne fournissent guère de lumière sur ses relations avec les langues
voisines. C’est donc uniquement sur une base géographique que nous mettons cette langue
avec les langues adamawa.
Appendix B: Maps
References


Other Sources/Additional Resources


