



Beng Survey Report

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Côte d'Ivoire

(1) INTRODUCTION

The Beng language, which is otherwise known by its Baoulé name Ngain, is a Southern Mandé language spoken by c.16,000 speakers in the sous-préfectures of M'bahiakro and Prikro (see attached map). S.I.L. have had a team in the Beng project for the last 11 years. Recently, doubts have arisen as to the viability of the language: there has been long-standing influence from Baoulé, and more recently from Dioula. Specifically, there are 5 villages in the Beng area where the people do not speak Beng, but Baoulé. There seems to be one other village which is in the process of switching over. These are indicated on the map.

With limited time for this survey (7-10 days), extensive bilingualism/comprehension testing of Baoulé and Dioula was clearly not feasible. The aim was to concentrate on language displacement, i.e. to see if the fact that Baoulé is the language of at least five villages indicates that Beng is being replaced by Baoulé. The specific aim was to answer the questions:

-is Beng being replaced by Baoulé?

-if so, what is the rate of replacement?

with a supplementary question concerning attitude:

-how do people feel about this apparent replacement?

In order to obtain an overall view of the situation two questionnaires were developed, based on previous sociolinguistic work by S.I.L., one to be used with a group and the other with individuals. An initial list of 11 villages to be visited was drawn up: the 5 "Baoulé" ones, 5 Beng, and the one that appears to be changing over. With the information from the 11 group questionnaires and a reasonable number of individual questionnaires (4 from each village, representing older and younger men and women) we expected to be able to give a satisfactory reply to our questions.

(2) PROCEDURE

The survey was carried out between the 11th and the 17th of November 1992 by Phil Davison and Wolfgang Paesler of S.I.L. (the Paesler family being the S.I.L. members responsible for the Beng project) and Kouadio Kouadio Destin, co-worker in the project. We would also like to acknowledge the help of many people in the Beng area. As the survey progressed we found our original plans being somewhat modified. For one thing, it was not always easy to obtain individual questionnaires: in some villages there was some reluctance to allow us to question individuals at all, and in others some (often the women) were otherwise occupied. Towards the end we began to form the conclusion that the vital information was contained in the group questionnaires, so the 26 individual questionnaires we filled in (instead of the projected 44) does not represent a significant lack.

The other change came about when it was pointed out to us that more than one village appears to be in some kind of interim phase between Beng and Baoulé. We finished the survey having visited all 5 "Baoulé" villages, 3 Beng, and 2 of the "changing" ones. Our feeling was that this has given us a perfectly adequate feel for the situation.

(3) RESULTS

Rather than present all the data en masse, it would seem more helpful to use the data to answer specific questions.

(a) The "Baoulé" villages.

The question which is most revealing here is the first one on the group questionnaire. We added to it somewhat in that we also asked specifically about the founder of the village. In two villages (Kouakou-dougou-Bédara and Anzandougou) the prompt reply was: this is a Baoulé village, founded by a Baoulé: the main language has always been Baoulé. In the remaining three villages there was some noticeable hesitation in giving the answer. Initially, and in all three, the answer was: this is a Beng village, founded by a Beng. In two of the villages (Krohounkro and Bonédougou) some rather heated group discussion ensued, until an amended answer was given: the founder was Ando, not Beng. (We did not return to the question of whether this was an Ando or a Beng village.) In Konguidougou we were given to understand that the founder there was Beng, but, (the group added): "we have always spoken Baoulé". This being the case, and with the initial reaction in all three being so similar, it seems permissible to hypothesise that the same answer (i.e. that the founder was Ando) would eventually have been given in Konguidougou as well, if we had persisted in asking. Thus, all (except possibly one) of the "Baoulé" villages were founded by non-Beng, and the language would never at any time have been 100% Beng. It is also worth noting that speakers of Ando (a dialect of Agni, closely related to Baoulé, both being Kwa languages) would have found adapting to Baoulé significantly easier than learning Beng.

One other striking, not to say unexpected, phenomenon was the amount of Beng that we encountered in three of the "Baoulé" villages, and most specifically Anzandougou. This latter is not so surprising when its location is considered: it is almost contiguous with the neighbouring Beng village (Totodougou). We were able to ask all of our questions in Beng in these three villages. Beng was spoken not only by Beng people who had married into these villages, but also by Baoulé speakers, the chief of Anzandougou being a case in point. The claim (especially in Anzandougou and Konguidougou) was that everyone understood Beng, and, in the former, that all children spoke Beng as well as Baoulé, a fact that we could verify just by listening to children playing. This was something that our pre-survey hypothesis had not led us to expect.

(b) The Beng villages.

In the 5 other villages we visited, there were no surprises in the replies to the first question of the group questionnaire: they were all Beng villages, with Beng founders. We can most usefully divide Beng villages into two groups:

(1) those where Baoulé is in evidence (Koffidougou, Koumadougou);

(2) those where Baoulé is not much in evidence (Kossandougou and others (we assume) of that dialect area, along with Bonguéra).

In the two villages of the first group, the question to be answered was; is Beng being replaced by Baoulé here? i.e. are these villages following what seems to be a pattern of language loss evident in the "Baoulé" villages. The groups in both places said that the first language learnt by the children was Beng, and this was borne out by replies to questions on the individual questionnaire. All respondents in these two places said that children used Beng when playing, and that they themselves would use Beng to address anyone in the village. People seemed particularly amused by the question as to what the older people would say if a Beng young person started speaking Baoulé in the village: their replies were all along the lines of: they would make fun of him, or tell him to speak Beng, or that it just wouldn't happen anyway.

A further significant point here, as well as in villages where Baoulé is not so much in evidence, is that it is claimed that Baoulé speakers who move into the village learn Beng. We were able to verify this, finding and speaking to Baoulés who had learnt Beng. Two individuals from Koumadougou even said that they speak Beng to a Baoulé parent. This is certainly not what would be expected if Beng was actually being replaced by Baoulé.

In the second group of Beng villages, the number of Baoulé speakers is small. In Kossandougou it was claimed that people understood Baoulé, although none of the 4 individuals we spoke to did. It should be noted that Kossandougou is a "village sacré", and this means, amongst other things, that no "foreigners" are allowed to settle there.

So, are there Beng people who no longer speak Beng? (This is the last question of the group questionnaire.) The consistent answer in all the Beng villages was "no". The group in Ouassadougou added: "Beng people speak Beng: those who are Baoulé speakers have come from elsewhere".

(4) BENG VIABILITY

The question as to whether Beng is being replaced by Baoulé is essentially a question about the viability of the Beng language. There is plenty of evidence in both the group and the individual questionnaires which has a bearing on this.

In the group questionnaires, it is questions 7 and 8 that are particularly relevant here. In all of the villages of Beng origin, the group response to both was "yes"; i.e. the young people speak good Beng, and they are proud of their language. This is further reinforced by looking at answers to certain individual questions: we have already mentioned the Beng speakers' exclusive use of Beng to address anyone in their villages, and also the strong response to the hypothetical Beng individual who begins to speak Baoulé. In addition, all Beng speakers noted that the language of children at play was Beng, and that these children (and their children after them) would still speak Beng as adults. Whether this actually becomes the case or not, it indicates a positive feeling about Beng at this time.

Writers on the subject of language loss point out the crucial role played by language use in the family: if the language is being passed on to children, then it can be considered vital. All of our married Beng respondents stated that they use Beng with their children, something we were able to observe happening. Moreover, one Baoulé-speaking respondent with a Beng wife speaks Beng with wife and children, and this in a mainly Baoulé-speaking village. Beng is undoubtedly being passed on within the family, and cannot be considered as a dying language.

(5) CONCLUSION

The data we have been examining were collected to help us answer the questions posed at the beginning of this report. There seems to be no doubt that at the present time Beng is not being replaced by Baoulé. This being the case, the two subsequent questions become irrelevant. At our original starting point it was thought that there were three types of Beng village: those where Beng is still spoken, those where Baoulé has replaced Beng, and those in the process of changing over. It has become clearer that it would be better to divide the villages of the Beng area into 4 types:

(a) those where Beng is the dominant (exclusive?) language:

(b) those where Beng is the primary language, but with considerable influence from Baoulé:

(c) those where Baoulé is the primary language, but with considerable influence from Beng:

(d) those where Baoulé is the dominant (exclusive?) language.

This list in no way implies a automatic progression from villages of type (a) to those of type (d): there is no noticeable tendency towards Beng loss, but rather towards bilingualism. It must be noted that this tendency works both ways: Baoulé speakers in villages of type (b) seem just as likely to learn Beng as Beng speakers in type (c) villages to learn Baoulé. We even observed that some Baoulé speakers in (c) villages learn Beng. This does not indicate an active generalised shift towards Baoulé away from Beng.

The presence of Baoulé in the area is largely due to two factors: the original founding of some villages by outsiders, and the fact that there is considerable intermarriage between the two communities. It would be interesting to investigate the patterns of contact of each of the villages, i.e. where are the marriage connections, which other villages are visited and for what reasons etc. We touched on this in our group questions 9-16, with a supplementary question about which villages are visited for funerals. The signs are that the more contacts there are with villages speaking the other language, the greater the likely degree of bilingualism. A large number of young people are reported to leave the villages for work, and although not all spend this time in Baoulé areas it is still likely that knowledge of Baoulé will increase in the Beng area. For the moment, however, by no means all Beng speakers also speak Baoulé: in the individual questionnaire, 7 out of 18 Beng speakers said they spoke no Baoulé, and two more said they only spoke a little. Knowledge of Baoulé is likely to be minimal in villages of type (a).

Certain questions still remain, i.e. just how widespread is the knowledge of Baoulé? And (perhaps even more pertinent) how widespread is knowledge of Dioula? (This latter is reportedly even greater than for Baoulé.) However, one thing is clear: for the present, the Beng language is alive and well and living in Kossandougou...and Ouassadougou...and Koumadougou...

QUESTIONNAIRE DE GROUPE: ENQUETE BENG, Nov. 1992.

Date: _____ Lieu de l'enquête: _____

1. Est-ce que ce village est un village beng ou baoulé? Est-ce que c'était toujours pareil? (si non) Pourquoi ce changement? Quand cela s'est-il passé?

2. Quelle est la première langue que les enfants de ce village apprennent?

3. Quelle était la première langue de leurs parents qui ont grandi dans ce village?

4. Et des vieux du village?

5. Est-ce qu'il y a des gens dans ce village qui parlent le {beng/baoulé}? Beaucoup? Plus que ceux qui parlent le {baoulé/beng}? (n.b. choix ici dépend des réponses données ci-dessus)

6. Est-ce que c'était toujours le cas? Sinon, pourquoi le changement? Est-ce que ce changement est une bonne chose?

7. Est-ce que les jeunes sont fiers de leur langue?

8. (dans les villages beng) Est-ce que les jeunes parlent le beng de la bonne façon?

9. Les femmes d'ici viennent de quels villages?

10. Y-a-t-il des villages qui viennent chercher leurs femmes ici?

11. Si un homme baoulé se marie avec une femme beng, où habitent-ils? Et quelle est la langue de leurs enfants?

12. Si une femme baoulé se marie avec un homme beng, où habitent-ils? Et quelle est la langue de leurs enfants?

13. Est-ce que c'est une bonne chose quand un homme beng se marie avec une femme baoulé?...quand une femme beng se marie avec un homme baoulé?

14. Est-ce qu'il y a des gens qui quittent le village pour travailler ailleurs? Qui? Où est-ce qu'ils vont?

15. Est-ce que ces gens reviennent souvent?

16. Est-ce que c'est une bonne chose de travailler ailleurs? de quitter le village pour toujours? Pourquoi (pas)?

17. Est-ce qu'il y a des gens beng qui ne parlent plus la langue beng? Beaucoup? Où habitent-ils?

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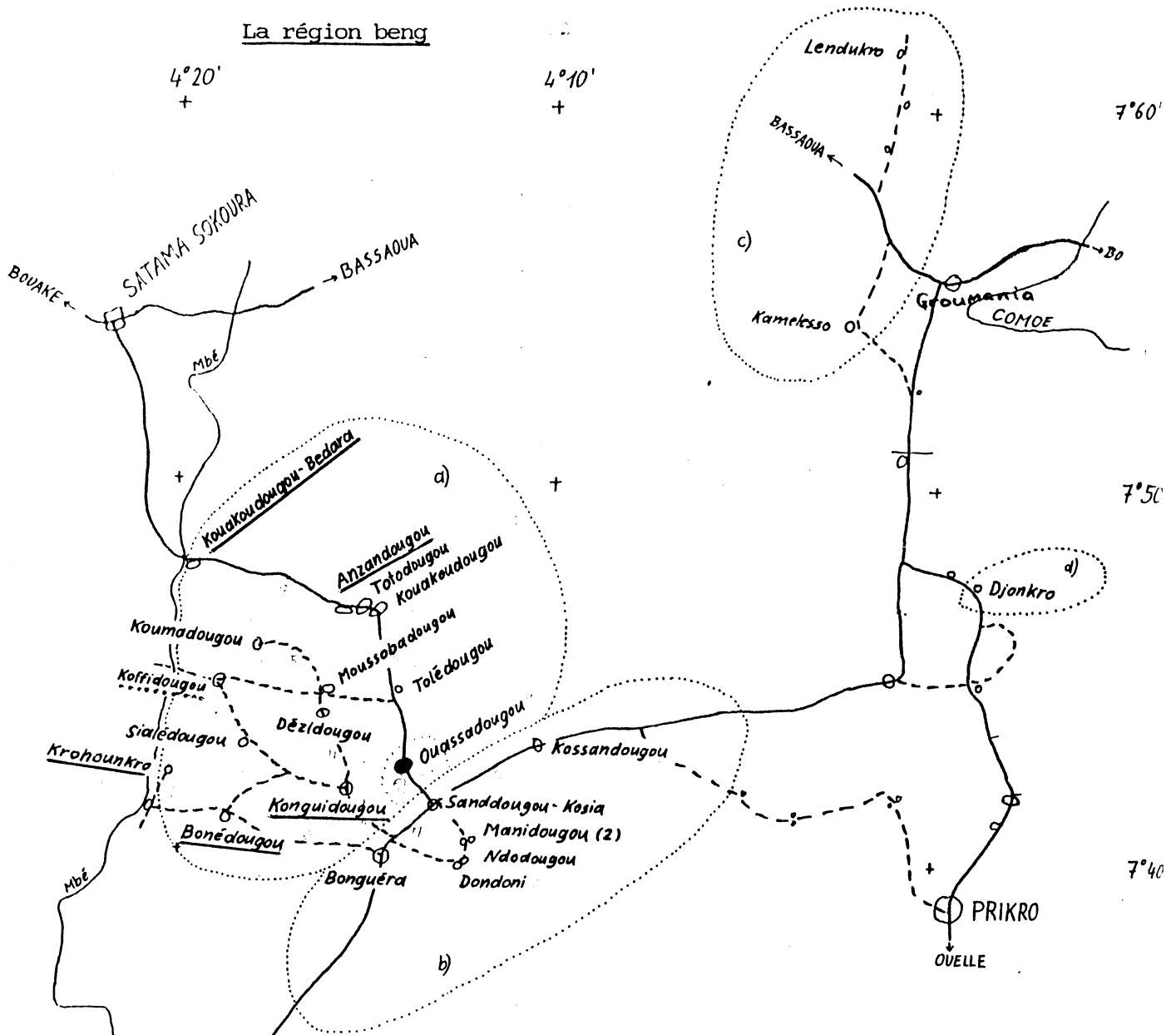
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villages soulignés: baoulé parlé

Koffidougou: beng et baoulé parlés

La région beng



Légende

- route goudronnée
- - - route de bonne viabilité
- Mbé - route de viabilité temporaire
- ~ rivière
- frontière dialectale
- a)-d) régions dialectales
- + 7°40' degré de latitude
- + 4°10' degré de longitude
- Échelle: 0 5 10 15 20 km