

The Effects of Migration Patterns on the Language Ecology of Quan-Pan and Mikang Local Government Areas of Plateau State, Nigeria.

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Abstract

This paper outlines the relationship between oral traditions of migration in Quan-Pan and Mikang Local Government Areas of the Jos-Plateau region of Nigeria. With the help of local informants, oral traditional accounts of pre-colonial population movements were elicited, scrutinized, and synthesized, placing these side by side with the accounts of present-day socio-linguistic situation of population settlements and language usage in these two LGAs. Particular attention was given to a close survey and outlining of the current linguistic geography of the two areas vis-a-vis past traditional accounts of settlement history. Our survey revealed a few cases whereby speech varieties separated by difficult topography are found to share considerable measure of asymmetrical intelligibility. The survey also revealed the necessity to differentiate between intelligibility of two types, namely (a) intra-Local Government Area intelligibility, and (b) inter-Local Government Area intelligibility. Medium -to- high measures of bi-lateral intelligibility and comprehension were established between some minor languages within the borders of both Local Government Areas, irrespective of the particular native tongues used within respective home environments. Goemai and Hausa were reported and observed to be common languages of wider communication between groups of speakers without a first language in common, especially within the Local Government Area headquarters and other important commercial centers.

Key Terms: Oral Traditions; Migration Patterns; Dialect Variants; Language Intelligibility; Intercommunal Relations.

Introduction

Carrying out this survey study is partly informed and motivated by the need to empirically verify the widely variable figures often quoted in available documentary sources for the number of language varieties spoken within the Jos Plateau region (cf. Ames, 1934; Gunn, 1953; Okwudishu, 1990; Miri, 1992; Crozier & Blench, 1992). The failure to agree on definitive language figures, in our view, stems from the fact that previous studies have not taken into full consideration the obvious distinctions between and interpretations often given to the concepts of dialect, language and ethnic affiliation by different scholars. In addition, not much significance had, in the immediate past, been placed on the key role played by the historical antecedents of the different peoples resident within a specific geographical area at a given point in time. For example, it is a well known historical fact that many ethno-linguistic groups in the Jos-Plateau area had been forced to migrate from one location to another (often covering vast distances) for a wide variety of reasons,

carrying along with them their own unique language, customary practices and ethnic beliefs. While striving to maintain their own original (and often preferred) names for their languages and ethnic groupings on one hand, many of these groups were however assigned (often without their consent) additional names/labels on the other hand. In order to either portray the origins, behavior patterns or other socio-cultural traits that are peculiar to the people in question, their immediate neighbors, frequently coined many of such names. It is for this, and other related reasons, that the task of conducting a 'reliable' linguistic survey within such a socio-culturally complex locale as the Jos-Plateau region is both a fascinating as well as a delicate one. This fact had been aptly highlighted in such old documentary sources as Greenberg (1956:1963), Bouquiaux (1970), Hansford, *et al* (1976), among others.

Virtually all of these sources have attributed the extreme linguistic diversity of this particular region to the well-recognized, historical fact that, for many centuries past, it had served as a land of refuge for numerous groups of people who were either running away from invasion, searching for alternative settlement and agricultural sites, or trying to escape from the domineering influence of other larger and, often, more politically powerful neighbours.

It is against such a socio-historical background that this survey deliberately chose to focus on "minority-status" ethno-linguistic groups found within the borders of two specific Local Government Areas, namely *Quan-Pan* and *Mikang*, that inhabit the south-western escarpment margins of the Jos-Plateau.

The present-day Local Government Area set-up in Plateau State (like other states in Nigeria) was first inaugurated in the late 1970s, and is being currently used for delineating boundaries at the lowest level of political administration in the country. As at the date of the conclusion of the present study survey (i.e. September, 2012), Plateau State is made up of a total of 17 Local Government Areas, listed as follows and shown in Figure 1 below:

- | | | | | |
|----------------|------------|--------------|-------------------|-----|
| 1. Barkin Ladi | 2. Bassa | 3. Bokkos | 4. Jos-North | 5. |
| Jos-South | | | | |
| 6. Jos-East | 7. Kanam | 8. Kanke | 9. Langtang-North | 10. |
| Langtang-South | | | | |
| 11. Mangu | 12. Mikang | 13. Pankshin | 14. Quan-Pan | 15. |
| Riyom | | | | |
| 16. Shendam | 17. Wase | | | |

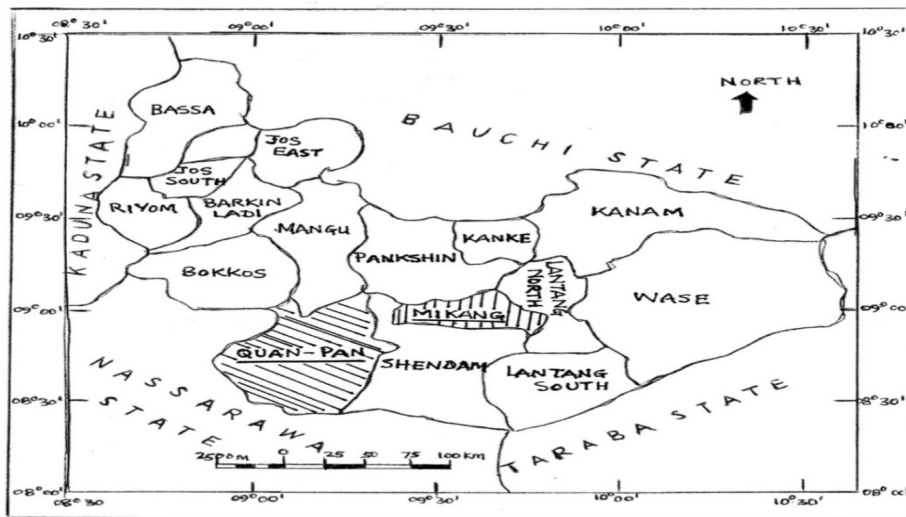


Figure 1: The Seventeen Local Government Areas of Plateau State.

Source: Plateau State Ministry of Lands and Survey, Jos.

In drawing an approximate linguistic map of languages found in the two selected Local Government Areas, namely Quan-Pan and Mikang, attention was paid to political, geographical, historical, sociological and cultural factors all of which have played equally important roles as purely “linguistic” considerations in determining what is or is not an autonomous language entity. This basic consideration has strongly influenced the research methodology adopted in carrying out the study. The final decision about which language group to classify as major or minor, in the course of the survey, was ultimately influenced by available population figures, in addition to other relevant demographic, educational, social and historical factors, as earlier mentioned.

Distributional Pattern of Languages/Dialectal Variants within Quan-Pan Local Government Area (LGA)

Our field investigation in this Local Government Area has confirmed the existence of the following language groupings, with accompanying population figures wherever it had been possible to get accurate estimates from either old or current census data (See Table 1 below):

Table 1: List and Demographic Distribution and Size of Language Groupings

Language Name	Language Status	National Census (2006) (3.4% annual projections)
1. Goemai (inter-LGA with Shendam, Quan-Pan LGAs) (Dialect variants-3)	Major	159, 296 (GT)

2. <i>Njak</i> (intra-LGA) (Dialect variants-1)	Minor	14, 400 (GT)
3. <i>Teng</i> (intra-LGA) (Dialect variants-1)	Minor	11, 40(GT)
4. <i>Pan</i> (language cluster) (Dialect variants-5, <i>Doemak</i> , <i>Kofyar</i> , <i>Kwalla</i> , <i>Bwal</i> , <i>Mernyang</i>).	Major	61,200(GT)

Distributional Pattern of Languages/Dialects/Variants in Mikang Local Government Area (LGA)

The following language groupings were found in the LGA, with population figures as shown in Table 2 below: -

Table 2: List and Demographic Distribution and Size of Language Groupings:

Language Name	Language Status	National Census (2006) (3.4% annual projections)
1. <i>Goemai</i> (inter-LGA with Shendam, Quan-Pan LGAs) (Dialect Variants-3)	Major	152, 296 (GT)
2. <i>Montol</i> (intra-LGA) (Dialectal variants-1)	Major	28, 218 (GT)
3. <i>Youm</i> (intra-LGA) (Dialectal variants-1)	Major	15, 082 (GT)
4. <i>Tal</i> (inter-LGA with Kanke LGA) (Dialectal variants-1)	Minor	9, 920 (GT)
5. <i>Piapung</i> (intra-LGA) (Dialectal variants-1)	Minor	7, 184 (GT)
6. <i>Koenoem</i> (inter-LGA with Quan-Pan LGA) (Dialectal variants-1)	Minor	4, 608 (GT)
7. <i>Jogatoe</i> (intra-LGA) (Dialectal variants-1)	Minor	5, 947 (GT)

Occurrences of Speech Islands

In the study, the term, “Speech Island” is used to describe a topographically small, but solid social community, speaking a language, which is different from the dominant language of an area. A number of such communities were reported by some of our field informants to live within the borders of Quan-

Pan and Mikang Local Government Areas. The following were specifically reported, for instance, in Quan-Pan: *Mada, Eggon, Gwandara, Alago, Hausa, Mwaghavul, Ngas, Yoruba, Igbo, and Tiv*. *Mada, Eggon and Gwandara*: Speakers of these languages are found in such locations as Aningo and Pandam, operating mostly as settled farmers. They trace their origins to Akwanga, Nassarawa-Eggon and Lafia Local Government Areas respectively, in neighboring Nassarawa State.

Tiv: Speakers of this language are found in Pandam, Hancin Kare, Kune, Janta, Takumbure, Kwari, Lankaku, Kundum and a few other settlements, operating mainly as farmers, fisher-men, hunters and palm-wine tappers. They trace their origins to different locations in parts of neighboring Benue and Nassarawa states.

Alago: Speakers of this language are mostly found in Namu, and operate as petty commodity hawkers and manual laborers for food vendors. They mostly originate from Obi, Doma, Keana and Awe Local Government Areas in neighboring Nassarawa State.

Mwaghavul: A large population found in such locations as Mararaban Demshin, Pandam, Hanchin Kare, Lankaku, Janta, Bakin Ciyawa, Namu, Kurgwi and Shindai, speaks this language. In these places, they tend to form concentrated farming settlements. They trace their origins to Mangu Local Government Area, a neighboring Local Government Area to Quan-Pan Local Government Area.

Ngas: Mostly small farming groups found in such places as Bakin Ciyawa and Namu speak this language, and they are found living among other larger language communities around. They trace their origins to Pankshin and Kanke Local Government Areas.

Yoruba: Speakers of this language are mostly concentrated in Kurgwi, operating as traders and transport operators. Over time, they had invariably migrated into this town from their home states in western Nigeria, via Shendam town, in nearby Shendam Local Government Area.

Igbo: Speakers of this language are found scattered in all the main settlements in Quan-Pan Local Government Area, operating as traders, mechanics, medicine sellers, hoteliers and food vendors. They moved into their present places of settlement from various places in Eastern Nigeria, via Lafia town, in neighboring Nassarawa State.

Hausa: This language is spoken by groups of traders, fishermen and local craftsmen, concentrated in such settlements as Kurgwi, Namu, Pandam, and sparsely settled also in Kwande, Kwalla, Doemak and Bakin Ciyawa,. (Field interviews: Kevin Daboer & Dalen Datong; 20/3/2010)

Levels of Mutual Intelligibility within and Across Language Boundaries

On the basis of the widely used concept of “mutual intelligibility”, it is tempting to conclude that all mutually intelligible speech varieties are necessarily dialects of one language. However, our field investigation has

revealed that cases exist within our areas of research whereby obviously separate language varieties share very high degree of mutual intelligibility. From the information we gathered so far, it is useful to highlight two sub-types of intelligibility, namely (a) intra- Local Government Area and (b) inter- Local Government Area. Concerning the first sub-type, our informants reported very high degree of intelligibility between, for example, *Doemak* (a member of the *Pan*-language cluster), *Njak* and *Goemai* (all located within close proximity of each other in Quan-Pan Local Government Area). Similarly, some considerable measure of intelligibility also exists between *Youm* (Garkawa) and *Goemai* within Mikang Local Government Area (Field interviews: Nden Kumtur & Timsar Gusen; 14/6/2010). With regards to the second sub-type of intelligibility, our investigation revealed that *Goemai* has the status of a dominant, “majority” language in both Quan-Pan and Mikang Local Government Areas (i.e. it is spoken by substantial numbers of speakers). In these areas, virtually all of our informants confirmed the influential role played by *Goemai* as a common medium of communication between groups of speakers who do not share the first language (or mother tongue).

In these two Local Government Areas, *Goemai* was in strong competition with *Hausa* as a common language (or lingua franca) routinely used for cross-ethnic interaction, especially within the various Local Government Area headquarters and other important commercial centers (Field interviews: Temlong Christopher, Fetur Yernap & Kumzhi Ntung; 14/6/2010).

Nature and Level of Inter-Communal Relations in Quan-Pan and Mikang Local Government Areas

Having already established the distributional patterns of both majority and minority language groups within Quan-Pan and Mikang Local Government Areas, it is significant to note that most of our field informants confirm the very close level of social and cultural interaction among the various language groupings so far identified. In general, such close ties were most notable amongst members of the *Pan*-language cluster, comprising *Doemak*, *Kwalla*, *Bwal*, *Mernyang* and *Kofyar*. According to speakers belonging to these communities, their close communal ties arise out of long-standing historical linkages, especially their legend of common descent from the Kofyar Hills, a geographical site, widely regarded as the primordial centre of dispersal for all *Pan*-speaking peoples of Quan-Pan Local Government Area and elsewhere. The oral traditions of the *Pan* group, as recorded in available historical documents, trace their origins to the descendants of a single progenitor- Kofyar who, sometime in the distant past, migrated down from the hilly terrain of their ancestors into the areas around present-day Baap and Namu, all in search of more fertile lands for agriculture and a semi-forested terrain for hunting.

The present-day speakers of the *Njak* language, although they readily acknowledge having close social and cultural ties with members of the other

Pan sub-groups, still lay claim to a separate identity, owing to their historical *Jukun* antecedents and extensive traces of Goemai acculturation. Thus, most Njak- speakers are able to understand and speak some of the Pan-related language varieties, especially those of *Doemak* and *Bwal*, in addition to *Goemai*, which is a language of wider communication within the borders of Quan-Pan Local Government Area in general (Field interviews: Robert Daru & Fwentar Peter; 24/9/2012).

In sharp contrast however, most speakers of the Pan-related languages are not able to easily understand and speak the *Njak* language. This is also the situation, which applies to Pan-speakers, relative to *Teng*, a minority language spoken in very close geographical proximity to *Bwal*. Here, *Teng* native speakers understand and speak the *Bwal* dialect of Pan fluently, but *Bwal*-speakers are unable to reciprocate, i.e. understand and speak *Teng* in return.

On the whole, taking the entire Quan-Pan Local Government Area into consideration, it was confirmed by our field informants that very high levels of social and cultural interaction had existed in the past and still continues to exist between the different ethno-linguistic groups found within the borders of the Local Government Area. Such widespread interaction, in the general opinion of informants, had been brought about by inter-ethnic marriages, common agricultural practices, cross-communal trading ties and other related socio-economic activities, which serve to link these groups together. In all of these cross-communal relations, our informants also reported the widespread and increasing dominance of the Goemai language and culture over those of most neighboring groups. Such pervading Goemai influence, especially among the Pan-related language cluster in Mikang Local Government Area, is evidenced in the widespread adoption of traditional practices with obvious Goemai origins.

For example, Pan-speaking communities in Quan-Pan Local Government Area have such traditional (political) titles as *Kassum*, *Goebon* and *Kangloe*, which are virtually synonymous with those found among Goemai communities in neighboring Shendam Local Government Area. Culturally, parallels also exist in the naming of traditional masquerades between Goemai and Pan-speaking communities in both Shendam and Quan-Pan Local Government Areas. The following names of masquerades occur in both areas- *Mangap*, *Komtoeng*, *Dabong* and *Dajit* (Field interview: Daloeng Dakulung; 24/9/2012).

The Contemporary Situation and Future Prospects of Identified Minority Linguistic Groups

Language is arguably the most important vehicle for the projection and consolidation of a people's culture. All of the informants who provided our core research data readily acknowledge the key social role of language in their immediate communities. They were all unanimous in asserting their pride in, and preference for their respective native languages as a key means

of promoting and preserving their cultural heritage. Unfortunately, underlying the overtly assertive posture of these informants, it was quite obvious to us that some of the language communities we had earlier identified and documented in the course of our survey actually operated within clearly “disadvantaged” or, worse still, “endangered” environments vis-à-vis more dominant neighboring communities.

In a real sense, the concept of ethno-linguistic disadvantage, as it applies to our study, relates not merely to the relative numerical size of a community, but perhaps more importantly, to the condition of being either psychologically, politically or culturally ‘subordinate’ to a more dominant neighboring community. To the extent that members of a minority community have access to, and control of, the language-cum-culture of the dominant community; to that extent will they also be able to gain access to the resources of political power and social status prevalent in such a dominant community. Accordingly, the linguistic and psychological aspects of ‘disadvantage’ derive from mainly the comparisons drawn between a minority group and other larger, more dominant groups.

Such comparisons often severely depreciate the social status (or prestige) of the minority vis-à-vis that of the majority community or group. As has been reported in many past survey studies conducted in Nigeria (since the early 1950s), substantial evidence exists to show that many small (minority) languages are gradually disappearing, their speakers being systematically submerged by larger linguistic groups. For example, informants from our own field study reported on the inherent prospects of extinction faced by the Njak, a tiny minority linguistic group within Quan-Pan Local Government Area. Although speakers of Njak aggressively lay claims to possessing a separate language form from their more numerous Doemak-speaking neighbors, their neighbors overwhelmingly dominate them in both cultural and linguistic terms. The overall implication of this fact is that while the relatively ‘dominant’ Doemak language is getting stronger and more influential, the weaker (or subordinate) Njak group is increasingly becoming more restricted in scope, and may even become so weakened to the point of possible extinction in the next 20 years.

It is foreseeable that as more speakers of Njak get educated or move out of their immediate local environments in order to live and work elsewhere, they would naturally have fewer occasions to use their own native language and, by extension, their own children may have even fewer ‘natural’ opportunities of learning to use such a language. The cumulative effect of such limited usage is bound to be a systematic abandonment of their ‘restricted’ mother tongue in favor of a more dominant, “other” language within the environment. (Field interview: Daloeng Dakulung; 24/9/2012).

It is quite obvious from the overall information collated in our field investigations that demographic strength is an important and decisive factor in the favorable social identity of one ethno-linguistic group vis-à-vis a

neighboring one. This is clearly the situation that exists in the specific case of Njak and Doemak in Quan-Pan Local Government Area.

Within the borders of Mikang Local Government Area, our informants also reported the “endangered” status of both the Koenom and Jogatoe languages, whose speakers are being systematically absorbed, in linguistic as well as cultural terms, by such relatively “more dominant” neighboring groups as the Montol and the Goemai, to varying degrees. It is therefore not surprising to encounter instances in which speakers of the former languages, especially youths below the age of 30 years, abandon their own native language and cultural values, in favour of the more dominant and pervasive languages and cultures of their immediate neighbors. The cumulative effect of such language-cum-cultural shifts is that modern societal pressures, especially from their more dominant Montol and Goemai neighbors, are compelling young speakers of both Jogatoe and Koenom in Mikang Local Government Area to assume new ‘social and linguistic’ identities that are increasingly at variance with those of their parents. Such progressive shifts in language loyalty obviously have far-reaching consequences for the nature of the linguistic geography of such areas as Mikang and Quan-Pan Local Government Areas in particular, and the Jos-Plateau sub-region in general.

Conclusion

It would certainly be an interesting research undertaking, for future ethno-linguistic scholars to explore further the social, psychological and linguistic implications of the twin phenomena of language shift and displacement as reported in the present survey and attested to by many of our informants. This is, of course, contingent upon adequate financial and logistic support being given to deserving scholars to undertake such urgently needed research endeavors in the immediate future.

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A: List of Key Field Respondents

1. Kevin Daboer- 52 years --.Namu town --20/3/2010
2. Dalen Datong; 42 years --Gidan Dabat village --20/3/2010
3. Daloeng Dakulung; 56 years ---Kwande town -- 24/9/2012
4. Robert Daru; 57 years --Kurgwi town --24/9/2012
5. Fwentar Peter; 64 years --Doemak town -- 24/9/2012
6. Temlong Christopher; 38 years --Tunkus town --14/6/2010
7. Fetur Yernap; 49 years -- Lalin village --14/6/2010
8. Kumzhi Ntung; 54 years --Gerkawa village --14/6/2010

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