

Final Report on the 1ST WORKSHOP ON WEST KAINJI LANGUAGES

Safara Motel, Kontagora, 10-12th March, 2008

Sponsored by: KAY WILLIAMSON EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION

Organised by

Roger Blench
Stuart McGill

1. The West Kainji languages constitute a group of some sixteen or more languages, spoken principally in northwest Nigeria. As language and literacy projects exist for some ten of these languages, with more being proposed, the Kay Williamson Educational Foundation (KWEF) considered it helpful to sponsor a workshop to bring together the various local teams in a central location, both to present their projects and to work on individual problems in language analysis. This is the final report on that workshop. The programme is appended to this report. This report, images of the workshop, as well as Powerpoints and other associated documents, will be posted on the KWEF website in due course.

2. The organisers were Roger Blench, representing KWEF, and Stuart McGill, SOAS. The workshop was held at the Safara Motel in Kontagora, between the 10th and 12th March, 2008. The full list of participants is appended to this report.

Individual presentations

Roger Blench began the workshop with an overview of the West Kainji languages, based on extensive collection and collation of data over the years. He noted the concentration of projects in these languages, and the benefits of collaboration and exchange of experiences. He highlighted some of the gaps in our knowledge, in particular the Kamuku languages, Lopa and Laru, and the Baushi-Gurmana languages. He ended by paying tribute to Clark Regnier, who began the survey of these languages in the 1980s and died in an unfortunate road accident in 1992.

Steve Dettweiler, who with his wife Sonia, undertook many of the preliminary surveys of West Kainji languages, discussed the evolution of the C'Lela language project and its relevance to wider themes in the study of related languages. C'Lela (Dakarkari) is spoken around Zuru in Niger State and has some history language analysis going back to the 1960s. Despite many achievements, including a dictionary and extensive literacy materials, the talk highlighted a continuing lack of commitment to indigenous literacy on the part of some elements in the community. On technical issues, the issue of tone-marking was discussed, as well as the writing of long vowels and consonants.

Selbut Longtau, representing NBTT, attended the workshop to present NBTT's general approach to language development. NBTT supervises over fifty language projects in Nigeria, and has recently been trying to institute a more comprehensive process for language analysis, orthography development and translation. An innovation has been the holding of community-funded language workshops intended to develop very preliminary alphabet charts and reading and writing books.

Stuart McGill presented a preliminary survey of the Cicipu language based on his fieldwork since September 2006. Cicipu (previously known as Western Acipa) is spoken on the border of Kebbi and Niger States around Sakaba. He discussed a number of issues that any potential orthography of the language will have to address, including the marking of grammatical tone, nasalised vowels, and lengthened consonants.

James Macdonell gave an overview of the Pongu [tə́rɪ́] language project based on fieldwork started in 2003, but beginning permanently in 2005. Pongu is spoken near Kagara in Niger State. Alphabet charts, a suggested orthography and preliminary literacy materials are all available for Pongu. As with many other languages, tone-marking is an issue in the orthography and the present decision is not to mark lexical tone and to try and find an acceptable system of marking grammatical tone. Some alternative orthographic

options in this area were presented.

Apollos Agamalafiya talked about the development of the Reshe language, spoken near Bin Yauri in Kebbi State. The Reshe community are probably 95% Islamised, and there is some resistance to non-Hausa literacy. Indeed in many households, a switch to Hausa is under way, with children only having a poor or no command of the language. However, there have been recent indications of official interest in vernacular literacy and language revival. Studies of the language have been under way since 1996, but there are still problems with language analysis, in particular the number of vowels and the writing of tone. Literacy and audio materials for the language have been developed and the project looks set to develop further. Rev. Agamalafiya also mentioned the Lopa and Laru peoples; there has recently been an official request from the Governor of Kebbi State for further information about the Lopa.

Subsequent to this presentation, certain orthographic issues were discussed; the initial writing systems for Kambari are 'simplified' and do not mark many phonological distinctions present in these languages. Somewhat ad hoc decisions are being made when problematic words come up in translation, leading to a difference between the published dictionaries and the printed literacy materials.

Niffer Davey discussed the Hungwɔryɛ language, spoken near Kagara in Niger State. Work first began in 2003 and was instituted permanently in 2005. Janneke Verhaar is working together with Niffer on literacy. Language analysis is still under way and important orthographic problems remain, especially with respect to tone, vowel length and nasal spreading.

Gareth Mort gave a brief presentation on general issues in language development, and presented the history and strategy of work on the Kamuku cluster of languages spoken around and to the west of Kagara.

Katharine Spencer reported on two surveys of the Kamuku languages conducted in July and November 2007. The principal object was to establish the status of the Kuki/Regi/Cinda cluster. However, the surveys also came up with evidence for 'new' Kamuku languages, notably Zubazuba, spoken at Iguama, as well as Waderi. Generally speaking, Cinda and Regi are very close to one another and Kuki is only slightly more distant. It seems likely that materials prepared for one lect could serve the others.

Katharine Spencer also described current work on Regi, which had been under way for about a month when the presentation was given. Contact has been made with principal stakeholders. Basic phonological analysis is underway and some tonal issues have already been identified, but much work remains to be done. A major issue is dialect mixing, as it seems that mixed marriages have created numerous interdialectal speech forms. Further survey in villages is required to establish what would be regarded as 'correct' Rege.

David and Jan Dykgraaf and Hussaini Magaji gave informal presentations on the TsuVadi language project. TsuVadi is also one of the Kambari group of languages, though literacy has been developed separately from the KLP described above. Work on the language has been underway since the late 1980s, initially through David Lovelace and later Jan Camburn. Literacy materials were printed in 2005, but uptake has been discouraging, apparently due to large-scale migration into the area and a switch to the use of Hausa as the prestige language. TsuVadi is considered, even by its speakers, to be low-status. The system of writing is somewhat informal, never having been backed up by linguistic analysis.

Wakaso Mamman Salka presented a paper on language development in three of the Kambari languages (Tsishingini, Tsikimba and Cishingini) spoken in Niger and Kebbi States. The Kambari Literacy Project (KLP) project is somewhat unusual in that three related languages were developed together and have been largely funded externally. The first studies of Kambari were undertaken by Carl Hoffmann in the 1960s, and subsequently by David Crozier in the 1980s. The current project began in 1992, and is still continuing, with a wide variety of literacy materials, dictionaries and draft New Testaments. A particularly striking development is the enthusiasm for local song-writing in the Kambari languages. An important challenge for the future will be sustainability; developing a local funding base to ensure the KLP can carry forward.

Sunday John gave a presentation on the ut-Ma'in (Fakai) project, which was begun as part of 'cluster' with Dukanci. Ut-Ma'in is a cluster of some seven dialects, with development taking place in the central one, Ror. It is estimated that the majority of the population (65%) are Muslims. Language analysis was begun

with the work of David Heath in 2000, and carried on through the studies of Becky Smith in 2006. Nonetheless, there appear to be orthographic issues, such as the writing of [l:], which is an alternant for [r+r], and the initial schwa, i, in the prefixes, which is presently being written 'u'. The Ma'in team also reported a lack of community support and reduced funding. However, literacy and translation work is proceeding.

Luka Isa presented for the Dukanci¹ (tHun) Language project, based in Tungan Magajiya. It is estimated that the majority of the population are Muslims. Work began on the language in the 1960s with Donna Skitch and Esther Cressman, continued (briefly) with the Duddles in the 1980s and began in earnest with the Heaths in 1992. Literacy and audio materials have been prepared and some sections of the New Testament printed. Maintaining personnel has been a problem for the literacy team and the reduction of external funding has so far not met with an adequate response from within the community.

Most of the second day of the workshop was given over to a number of independent smaller discussions on individual languages involving project team leaders, native-speaker language helpers, and linguistic consultants.

On the final day, the various teams gave a short view of their perspective on the workshop, and a summary of what they had learnt and what they might like to see as part of future development.

Roger Blench closed the workshop with a short presentation highlighting some of the conclusions presented below, and thanked the participants for their attendance.

Some conclusions

The general purpose and format of the workshop

1. All the participants agreed that the workshop had been a valuable experience, both in terms of networking, learning what other teams are up to and exposing their language and orthography problems to experienced fieldworkers for further discussion. Participants appreciated the fact that the workshop was held locally in Kontagora rather than requiring travel to Jos.
2. It was suggested that any further workshop would benefit from some more formal presentations. This may add to the gravitas of the workshop but would perhaps turn it more towards a conference format.
3. Due to overrunning of presentations, the time available for discussions with language helpers was eaten into on the second day. This should be addressed in any further workshops.
4. Some presenters felt they had not been adequately briefed; this was in part because some only signed up quite late, and skills in report writing and presentation are quite variable. However, the organisers agreed that a more structured report outline would perhaps be helpful in future.

Technical problems in language analysis

1. If any single point came out of the workshop, it was that many teams felt that language analysis, and therefore phonology and orthographies, were weak. Often little or no documentation existed to justify the orthographies in use and the teams were ill-prepared to defend the way of writing against objections from newly-literate readers. Changes in personnel and a failure to ensure proper hand-over were often responsible for this situation.
2. Some teams clearly benefited from having more experienced phonologists on hand during Day 2. Listening to tone was a particular challenge and Barau Kato was able to assist several teams in this area.

¹ Some local opinion wishes to replace the Hausa name Dukanci with the vernacular name tHun, although this would not include the other major dialect, sSaare.

Such a short period will not solve all outstanding problems, but it may well be useful in giving the teams a method for proceeding and seeking help. This may act as a stimulus to develop further linguistic consultancy on a short term basis – but at the moment this need for linguistic consultants with experience of African languages is not being met.

3. Some language projects are facing quite marked technical problems, such as being unsure of the number of vowels in their language, or the operation of the tonal system. It is strongly recommended that such issues are resolved before proceeding with major investments, such as printing of translations.

Organisational problems

1. Different language projects are at different stages of development, but it is fair to say that some are facing organisational problems. These can be constant changes in personnel and lack of commitment of literacy committees. The C'Lela presentation highlighted 'lack of moral support from pastors and denominational leaders' often growing from a commitment to the Hausa language.

2. Fund-raising. All language and literacy projects should ideally be self-funding through community contributions. In reality, many have been supported from external funds, and making a transition to local support is clearly problematic. Reports that funds are being cut off completely, when the proposal is to switch to matching funding, highlights a lack of clear understanding of the situation. But it is very clear that many teams have limited skills in the area of presenting their projects to the community, and this is not helped by the lack of a positive case-study of a self-funding West Kainji project. Given the ability of some pastors to raise funds for other enterprises, however, there is clearly not an underlying lack of money.

3. Re-orientation and training are key needs in this area. Language project staff need an orientation towards self-supporting projects and training in presentation to the community.

Literacy issues

1. Most projects report a growing interest in reading and writing vernacular languages as opposed to Hausa and English. The Kambari language project in particular has produced numerous vernacular publications which have been widely sold. The exception to this is TsuVadi, where interest in local literacy has dropped as more migrants have come to the area and Hausa has taken over as the main language in churches. C'Lela, where literacy is relatively well-developed, reports a 'lack of ownership' among the Lelna people.

2. However, there still appear to be numerous orthography issues unresolved. The ut-Ma'in (Fakai) project in particular, reports local objections to some orthography conventions which they have not been able to resolve. Almost all projects have problems with the writing of tone and vowel length; objections to tone-marking appear to be based on non-linguistic factors. This is related to some of the analysis problems mentioned above.

3. One of the more surprising problems is that of competing orthographies. A number of languages, in particular C'Lela, have materials printed in different orthographies, often as a result of different religious adherence. Given the small audiences and limited resources, this seems unfortunate, especially as some of the competing orthographies are not well-founded in linguistic analysis. An attempt during the workshop to meet with the Bishop of Kontagora to discuss these issues was unsuccessful, but further efforts to try and agree on unified orthographies will be pursued.

4. Several presentations raised the concern that literacy was being too strongly identified with Christianity and even with particular persuasions. Throughout much of the West Kainji area, traditional religion is still very strong and Islam is important in some areas (and predominant in Reshe and ut-Ma'in). It was emphasised that as far as possible literacy should be neutral in religious terms and that every effort should be made to involve the whole community, whatever their beliefs, in reading and writing.

5. It is strongly recommended that a more comprehensive and systematic programme of language analysis,

orthography devising and testing in the community be developed and adhered to.

West Kainji languages discussion group

Stuart McGill has set up an Internet discussion group (<http://groups.google.com/group/west-kainji-languages>) to provide an informal forum for anything relating to West Kainji languages. The aim is to help communication between the various individuals and teams involved. This group was set up on 25th March 2008.

Further workshops?

Roger Blench expressed a willingness on the part of KWEF to fund further workshops of this type, and the participants showed considerable interest. A highly tentative date of January 2009 was put forward. Any subsequent workshops would be organised further in advance to ensure participants have time to prepare fully worked out papers.

Final Programme

March 10th

- 10.00 Opening of Workshop, General Announcements
- 10.15 Roger Blench. Overview of the West Kainji languages
- 11.00 Steve Dettweiler. The cLela project and general issues in regional languages

11.30 Coffee

- 12.00 Selbut Longtau. General approaches to language development in Nigeria.
- 12.15 Stuart McGill. Some orthographic challenges for Cicipu

1.00 Lunch

- 2.00 James Macdonell. Pongu
- 2.45 Apollos Agamalafiya. Development of the Reshe language

3.30 Tea

- 4.00 Niffer Davey. Hungwəryə

March 11th

- 8.30 Gareth Mort. General issues in language development in West Kainji
- 8.45 Katharine Spencer. Kamuku languages survey report
- 9.00 Katharine Spencer. Current Kamuku work
- 9.15 Wakaso Mamman Salka. Language development in three Kambari languages.
- 10.00 General discussion and planning of workshop sessions on the 11th.

Sessions on individual languages with language helpers for the remainder of the day

- 2.00 David and Jan Dykgraaf and Hussaini Magaji. TsuVadi project.

March 12th

- 8.30 Sunday John. Ma'in (Fakai)
- 9.00 Luka Isa. tHun (Dukanci)

- 1.00 Presentation of results of workshop sessions. General discussions of the way forward, priority setting, possible further meetings.

Contact details

The contact details supplied by workshop participants were as follows:

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Appendix – Format of papers

The following information was sent to participants beforehand as to the structure of presentations/papers:

We are trying to ensure that each project or study has an opportunity to present its history, achievements, problems and agenda for the future. It is entirely up to you how technical you make your paper. We are hoping to have as many papers in Powerpoint form as possible, but we would also like to have a handout which can be copied in Kontagora, giving the main points of your talk. Here are some suggestions for a possible layout for talks on specific languages.

1. Introduction. Name and location of language and people
2. History of work on the language, information about the language
3. History of current project.
4. What has been achieved, what has been published
5. Problems you face, both technical and institutional
6. Where would you like to go next?

Please bring examples of readers, cassettes and anything else published in the language.