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Modern Beng and the Linguistic Materials of Tauxier and Delafosse

0. Overview

Like many other idioms of Côte-d'Ivoire, the Beng language was first described by Maurice Delafosse (1904). Twenty years later, Louis Tauxier studied the area of Bondoukou in greater depth; among other things, he published an extensive list of Beng words and phrases (1921 : pp. 658-683).

Since Delafosse and through the 1980-es, Beng was known under the names *N'Gain*, *Gan*, (these are transcribing, correspondingly, the Baule and the Dioula name of the Beng people) and the combination of the two *N'Gan*; sometimes –*né*, reflecting probably the plural marker *ŋe* of some Beng dialects (see below), was added to refer to the Beng people. New data were published in recent decades where the native name *Beng* is used (Paesler 1989; Paesler 1992; Gottlieb, Murphy 1994; Paperno 2005).
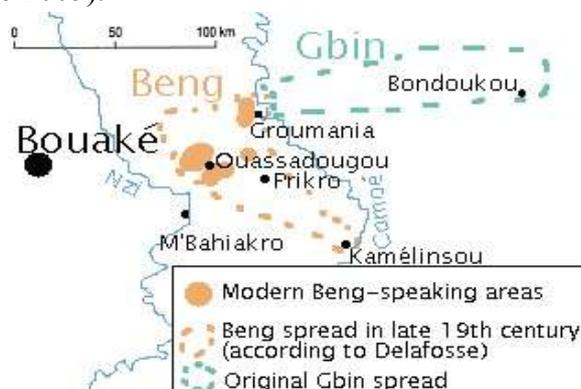
Map: The area of Beng and of a closely related language Gbin (now extinct)

In fact, not only the name changed. Works of Paesler, of Gottlieb and Murphy, and of myself, represent a different dialect than those described by Tauxier and Delafosse, a dialect spoken in the prefecture of M'Bahiakro, in the area centered around the village of Ouassadougou. This area is divided into two socio-geographic units, "Forest" and "Savanna", each of the two having (or at least each used to have) its own "king". The literature (e.g. Paesler 1992) even speaks of two dialects, the dialect of the forest and the dialect of the savanna, but this distinction has never been justified by linguistic data. All the idioms of the area of Ouassadougou are mutually understandable; the only isogloss within this area that I know of does not exactly divide the two regions. Namely, the subject pronoun of 3rd person singular has two forms, /e/ and /o/, which have dialectal distribution. I did not have the opportunity to study this question in detail, but, as my Beng consultant reported[1], 3rd person singular pronoun form /e/ is found in parlances of some "savanna" villages[2], and /o/ in "forest" villages. But, at the same time, /o/ was the predominant 3rd singular pronominal form used by two of my Beng assistants, Kouadio Kouadio Destin and Kouadio Kouadio Patrice, natives of Ouassadougou, the village which is also unequivocally attributed to the "savanna" zone. This evidence suggests that the isogloss separating the zones of /e/ and /o/ as the 3rd person singular pronoun does not correspond to the cultural border of the Forest and the Savanna, which in its turn is known to correspond only

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[1] I am inclined to rely on this report by Kouadio Kouadio Destin since, as Gottlieb and Murphy witness (1995), Beng are quite aware of their dialectal differences. Destin is no exception; sometimes he was able to attribute particular words to an individual village where they are used.

[2] The Savanna region includes the village of Totodougou. I worked with one speaker from Totodougou, Augustin Yao Kouakou, (he happens to be the first native Beng who worked on his own language as a linguist) and /e/ is indeed the form he uses.

approximately to the brousse and the savanna defined in geographical terms. Unfortunately, I do not possess more precise information about dialectal distribution of these pronoun forms. In any event, I am not going to distinguish here the idioms of Ouassadougou area. Since there is no uniform term for this dialect, I will write « Modern Ouassadougou Beng », abbreviating it as *MOB*.[3]

Now that MOB is relatively well studied, we are in the position to interpret the data that Tauxier and Delafosse had published in their relation to MOB facts. It turns out that the parlances described by Delafosse and Tauxier are quite different from MOB. Delafosse documented the variety of Beng spoken in the 1890-s in the village of Kamélinsou near the Comoé river (see the map above); I was unable to find this settlement on modern maps. L. Tauxier left a rather extensive record of the data that he had gathered "dans le village gan de Pattakoro, situé sur la route de Bouaké à Bondoukou, entre Kongodian et Groumania," and also later from "des Gans des villages environnants [de Groumania]" (Tauxier 1921: 372). It follows that data from more than one Beng dialect could make a way into Tauxier's book, and it is impossible to reliably separate them without external evidence on modern varieties of these dialects. However, no data on currently spoken dialects of Beng exist, except for MOB. Presumably, though, most of Tauxier's data are drawn from the idiom of the neighborhood of Groumania: he qualifies his records from Pattakoro as "notes succinctes," 'scarce notes,' which probably formed a small part of what he published. If this is correct, Tauxier's data may represent the idiom of modern Lendoukro or Bénidougou, villages situated in the proximity of Groumania, west from the Comoé river (see the map above), where Beng is still spoken. To the best of my knowledge, there is no scholarship of these parlances, and Tauxier's notes remain the only source. I will make reference to the idioms documented by Delafosse and Tauxier by abbreviations *BK* (Beng of Kamélinsou) and *BG* (Beng of Groumania neighborhood), correspondingly.

1. Delafosse: Beng of Kamélinsou

Delafosse was the first to publish any Beng data; his records, however, are very scarce. They consist of a list on numerals from one through ten provided to him by Dr. Maclaud, "qui l'a recueillie sur place durant son voyage de 1893-1894" (Delafosse 1904: 149). The list is not very informative, other than that it reliably identifies the idiom as being very close to MOB. Two peculiarities, however, deserve a comment. First, the parlance of Kamélinsou maintained the form /ya/ for 'trois' in *ya* 'trois' and *so-ya* 'huit' (< '5 + 3'), as opposed to /ŋa/, /wa/ in MOB *ŋā̰-ŋ̄*, BG *n'gan* [ŋa̰] 'trois', MOB *sɔ-wà*, BG *sowoua* [sɔ-wa] 'huit,' cf. the numeral '3' in related languages: Gouro *yaá*, Gban *yïä.*, Mwan *yāgā*.

Second, BK added the formative *-N* in the numerals *syĩ* [sie-ŋ] 'quatre' and *sõ* [sɔ-ŋ] 'cinq,' like in MOB (*síéŋ́, sɔ́ŋ́*), cf. *syé* [sie], *so* [sɔ] in a closely related language Gbin (Delafosse 1904: 149), which had never added such a suffix. The formative *-N*, however, did not expand to the numerals *pla* 'deux' and *ya* 'trois', cf. MOB *plā-ŋ̄, ŋā̰-ŋ̄*. For numerals `8' and `10' two forms are known in MOB but only one of them is attested in BK and BG; this probably does not reflect a real linguistic difference. In MOB, the two forms for `8' are functionally differenciated: the basic form is *sɔwà*, while *kēŋēsíéŋ* is used in compound numerals (`18,' `28,' etc.). Only the former will be attested if a native speaker is asked to list of the first ten numerals. Here is the list of the first ten numerals in the three dialects of Beng discussed here. Forms of BK and BG are reproduced as they appear in the publications of Delafosse and Tauxier, accompanied with a tentative phonetic transcription. For comparison, I included the same numerals from the extinct language Gbin, closely related to Beng.

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[3]   This is intended as a purely geographical label (Ouassadougou is the center of the area) distinguishing this variety of Beng from other dialects. It does not imply any political overtones.

BK	BG	MOB	Gbin (Delafosse)	
do [do]	dô [do]	dō	do	'1'
pla [pla]	para [pala]	plāŋ	paa	'2'
ya [ya]	n'gan [ŋa̰]	ŋā̰ŋ	ñga, ña	'3'
syĩ [sieŋ]	syé [sie]	síéɳ	sye	'4'
sõ [sɔŋ]	sôn [soŋ]	sɔ́ɳ	sōo	'5'
so-do [sɔdo]	so-do [sɔdo]	sɔ́dō	sōrŭ-do	'6'
so-pla [sɔpla]	so-fala [sɔfala]⁴	sɔ́plā	sosowa	'7'
so-ya [sɔya]	sowoua [sɔwa]	sɔ́wà, kēŋēsíéɳ	kyenze	'8'
sisi [sisi]	sisi [sisi]	sīsí	sisi	'9'
ebu [ebu]	bou [bu]	bū, èbū⁵	bu	'10'

Table 1. Numerals from 1 through 10 in Beng dialects and Gbin

2. Tauxier: Beng of Groumania neighbourhood

Tauxier performed a far more profound study of Beng, publishing a list of around 800 words. Here is no place for an extended commentary to his data, but I will highlight some features of BG that distinguish it from other Beng dialects.

2.1. Phonological peculiarities of BG

There are minimal phonological differences that can be established. First, the syncope of a vowel before /l/ had hardly ever happened in BG, so that etymological CVLV feet are consistently transcribed with two vowels. Examples include BG *pala* 'deux', cf. BK *pla*, MOB *plāŋ*; BG *iri* 'arbre', cf. MOB *yrí*; BG *sara* 'tabac à priser,' cf. MOB *sra* 'poudre de tabac;' BG *zini* [zḭlḭ] 'maïs,' cf. MOB *zrḭŋ*; BG *diawafila* 'oignon,' cf. MOB *jàflá*; BG *balanda* [balana] 'banane,' cf. MOB *blàná*; NG *poro-iri* 'baobab,' cf. MOB *plɔ̆ yrí*; BG *méné* [mɛlɛ] 'poulet,' cf. MOB *mlɛ̆*; BG *kélennzô* 'buffle,' cf. MOB *klɛ́ŋ zŏ* 'boeuf de la brousse'; BG *béré* 'biche-cochon,' cf. MOB *blɛ□* 'sorte de biche' ('duiker' in biological classification), and many more.

Another characteristic trait of BG is the systematic prenasalization of /z/,⁶ as exemplified by words like BG *n'zô* 'boeuf,' cf. MOB *zŏ*; *n'zo* 'arbre (à fou),' cf. MOB *zɔ̂* 'espèce d'arbre;' BG *n'zie* 'fromager,' cf. MOB *zīē*; BG *n'zamm* [ⁿzaŋ] 'rônier,' cf. MOB *zàŋ*; BG *n'zi* 'poisson,' cf. MOB *zḭŋ*; BG *n'zanalignn* 'jeune fille,' cf. MOB *zā̰nā̰ŋ lēŋ*; BG *n'zomana* [ⁿza̰mala̰] 'savon,' cf.

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⁴   [f] in this numeral is probably the result of lenition of intervocalic /p/; there are no other examples that would support such a phonological process in BG.

⁵   Both *bū* and *èbū* exist in MOB, but have a different function: *bū* is a numeral and *èbū* is used in counting ("1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10"). It is possible that the fixation of only *bū* for BG and only *èbū* for BK is accidental, while in reality these two dialects could have both forms, like MOB.

⁶   There are occasional instances of prenasalization of other voiced consonants in Tauxier's data: BG *n'dèré* 'grimper,' cf. MOB *drēŋ*; BG *n'deïnggn* 'colline, montagne,' cf. MOB *dèŋ*; BG *n'dioté* 'argent,' cf. MOB *jɛtɛ*; BG *m'bésé, bésé* 'matchette,' cf. MOB *bèsé*; BG *m'bié* 'sel,' cf. MOB *bīē*.

MOB z̯ə̀mlə̂; BG n'zan [ⁿzaŋ] 'marigot,' cf. MOB záŋ; BG n'zéré 'sentier,' cf. MOB zrë 'route;' BG n'zié 'funérailles,' cf. MOB zīē; BG n'zéli 'puissant, vainqueur,' cf. MOB z̄ēlí 'vainqueur'; BG n'zoro 'se laver,' MOB zrö; BG yigbénzouya [yigbeⁿzuya] 'ouest,' cf. MOB yīgbíé zūyà[7]. However, some words in Tauxier's list do not show prenasalization; these are BG zini 'maïs,' cf. MOB zr̯ɨ̀ŋ; BG zonzon 'moustique,' cf. MOB zɔ́zɔ̀; BG zoumounou 'fourmi magnan,' cf. MOB z̯ʉ̄mlʉ̄ŋ̄; BG azara 'jeter,' cf. MOB à zrä 'le jeter;' BG azon 'piler,' cf. MOB à zɔ̄ 'le piler;' BG azou 'lancer,' cf. MOB à zū 'le lancer;' BG zazalè 'disputer (se),' cf. MOB zázálɛ̀. Interestingly, the same morpheme [zu] appears in prenazalized form in [yigbe-ⁿzu-ya] 'ouest,' and in the original form in [a-zu] 'lancer.' The absense of prenazalization of /z/ in some words may reflect dialectal differences (e.g. between Pattakoro and villages next to Groumania), as well as irregularity of prenasalization or mere transcription errors. But in case of verbs (set aside zazalè 'se disputer') the distribution may be non-random: it is probable that in case of transitive verbs azon 'piler,' azara 'jeter,' and azou 'lancer,' the presence of the 3rd person singular pronoun a- blocked prenasalization. Perhaps some sort of phonological break is a condition for prenasalization, and the pronoun forms a prosodic unit with the verb without such a break.

Final nasal sonant /N/ tended to reduce in BG, often escaping from fixation, cf. varying transcription of lɛŋ 'enfant' in BG n'zô-lè 'veau,' banngo-lè 'cheval, poulain,' babalé // babalegnn 'mouton, agneau,' ouolé // ouoleignn 'doigt' (lit. 'hand's child'), ninn, né 'enfant' (MOB ŋ̄ lɛ́ŋ [nɛ́ń] 'mon enfant'), or variation in BG dowoué, dowouégnn 'gombo'. This variation also may or may not reflect real dialectal differences.

Vowels before the final /N/ tended to change their quality, usually heightening or developing a heightening diphthong; these effects persisted even when the final /N/ was reduced, e.g. in BG n'zaon, n'zamm ṛônier,' n'zaommbéï 'fruit du rônier' (MOB zàŋ bɛ̄ŋ), ouolé, ou̯oleignn 'doigt' (MOB wɔ̄lɛŋ); BG̩ bahoum 'épaule' (MOB bàŋ); BG beïgnn 'menton' (MOB gbɛŋ); BG youm 'visage' (MOB yōŋ); BG lignn, li 'femme' (MOB lēŋ); n'zoulé 'grande soeur' (MOB zúlēŋ); BG pégnn // pain 'mortier' (MOB pɛŋ), BG̩ sarapoum 'tabatière,' cf. MOB sra kpōŋ 'calebasse à tabac,' BG pèlou 'voler (dans l'air)' (MOB pɛlōŋ). Like the reduction of /N/, the diphthongization/ heightening of the vowel was not regular, cf. absence of diphthongization in BG lignn'gala 'pagne de gemme,' MOB lēŋ glāŋ; BG galanké 'tisser,' MOB glāŋ cɨ̯ (?) 'créer la pagne'; BG zini 'maïs,' cf. MOB zr̯ɨ̀ŋ; BG irikôm 'écorce,' MOB yrí kóŋ; BG irinni 'racine,' MOB yrí nɨ̯̄ŋ; BG béhian 'chévre,' MOB béyàŋ; BG béha-sia 'bouc, ' MOB béyàŋ síá; BG sômm [soŋ] 'animal sauvage,' MOB sōŋ; etc.

1.2. Morphological peculiarities of BG

Few morphological characteristics differentiate the Beng dialect described by Tauxier from MOB; I will first make some remarks about personal pronouns that are in some respects more archaic than in MOB. BG maintained at least traces of inclusivity distinction in 1st person plural[8], as testified by alternate BG ṭranslations kasisi and asisi for the French 'nous' (cf. Mwan 1st person plural inclusive pronoun kɔɔ, exclusive ó; the nature of the final element sisi is unclear). 3rd

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[7]   The expression for 'west' has a clear synchronic etymology in Beng, dividing into yīgbíé 'sun' + zū 'trow' + locative suffix -ya, providing the literal meaning of 'the place where the sun is thrown,' as opposed to yīgbíé bɔ̄yà 'east' = yīgbíé 'sun' + bɔ̄ 'come' + yà, 'the place from which the sun comes'

[8]   MOB, unlike all other South Mande languages, uses a uniform 1st person plural pronoun ə̀ŋ regardless of clusivity.

person plural form in BG preserves the original initial /w/[9], compare BG *Ouomisipo?* 'Comment t'appelles-tu?' and BG *ouonion go parana* 'leur chien' with their MOB counterparts:

BG	Ouo	mi	si	po?
MOB	ŋò	m̄ī	sì	pɔ́?
gloss	3PL	2SG	call	what

'What is your name?' (lit. 'What do they call thee?')

BG	Ouo	nion go [ɲa̰ŋɔ < ɲa̰ŋ + wɔ]		parana
MOB	ŋò	ɲa̰ŋ̀	ŋò[10]	kpláŋ́-ná̰
gloss	3PL	EMPH	3PL	flea-possessor

'their dog' (lit. 'their possessor of fleas').

BG is also relatively conservative in introducing the numeral formative -*N* only in *sôn* [soŋ] '5;' see discussion of BK and examples above; however, the the absense of fixation of -*N* in numerals '2' till '5' is ambiguous due to the reduction of -*N* in BG (see above).

One morphological innovation of BK is the plural marker. The original marker *nṵ* is only preserved after the final /N/, while after a vowel a new plural marker *ŋe* is used:

BG	MOB	meaning	BG plural form
Stems ending in a vowel			
Pilana.	kpláŋ́ ná̰	Chien	pilanangué = /pilana + ŋe/
soro.	sɔ́ɔ́	musulman	soronngué = /sɔlɔ + ŋe/
méné	ml̰ɛ̰̄	serpent	ménennngué = /mɛ̰lɛ̰ + ŋe/
méné	ml̰ɛ̰̌	poulet	ménennngué = /mɛ̰lɛ̰ + ŋe/
iri	yrí	arbre	irigué = /yili + ŋe/
Agni.		Agni	Agnigné = /aɲḭ + ŋe/
Baoulé		Baoulé	Baoulenngué, baoulégné = /baule + ŋe/
Soron.	sɔ́ɔ́	Dyoula	Sorongué = /sɔlɔ + ŋe/
Stems ending in -N			
n'zi.	z̰ḭŋ́	poisson	n'zinoungué = /ⁿzḭŋ + nṵ + ŋe/
G'Beïgnn	bɛ̰ŋ́	Gan	G'Beïgnnou // gbénou = /bɛŋ + nṵ/

2. Conclusion

We established several isoglosses that relate the well-studied Modern Ouassadougou Beng to dialects documented in the earliest literature. The dialect of Kamélinsou is characterized by an archaism (the form of numeral '3'), and shares two innovations with MOB, syncope and wider spread of -*N* in numerals. The dialect of Groumania neighbourhood has several archaic features such as the absence of syncope, moderate use of -*N* in numerals, and the structure of the pronominal system. Tauxier's data also allow to establish some innovations unique to BG, both

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[9]   Compare 3rd person plural pronouns in three related languages: Mwan *wóō*, Gouro *wò*, Gban *ɔ́* (with loss of /w/).

[10]   In MOB like in GB the second (non-subject) pronoun accompanies (doubles) the noun phrase expressed by the emphatic pronominal form in -ɲa̰ŋ.

phonological and grammatical. MOB turns out to be the most innovative, which corresponds to its relatively central geographical position.

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