

SIL LANGUAGE FAMILY SERIES

International Sociolinguistics Department

Beboid Language Family of Cameroon and Nigeria: Location and Genetic Classification

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Beboid languages are a group of understudied Niger-Congo languages from the Benue-Congo branch in the Bantoid (non-Bantu) family. Previous research includes a study of noun classes in Beboid languages by Jean-Marie Hombert (1980), a dissertation by Russell Richards (1991) concerning three Eastern Beboid languages (Noni, Ncane, and Nsari), and Roland Breton's survey of languages in the Furu-Awa District of Northwest Cameroon (1993).

The purpose of this presentation is to give a detailed set of maps showing the location of the homeland where each variety is spoken and the linguistic relationship of one to the other, according to our present state of knowledge.

Data for this presentation was gathered during the course of two sociolinguistic surveys in February 1999² by SIL-Cameroon. Eastern Beboid languages were researched by Edward Brye, Elizabeth Brye, and Domche-Teko Engelbert. Western Beboid languages were researched by Joseph Mbongue, Ferdinand Assako, Jason Diller, Kari Jordan-Diller, and Cameron Hamm.

The data gathered from these surveys indicate that there should be some changes from previous classifications (eg. Bendor-Samuel, ed. 1989; Greenberg 1963). First, Naki should be included in the Eastern group as it clearly shows more affinity to other Eastern group languages rather than Western. Second, two more languages may be added to the Western group: Koshin may be split into two different languages, Koshin and Fang; and Mbu' has been documented for the first time. The people of Fang can understand Koshin, but the language spoken at Fang village is quite different from that of Koshin, so different in fact, that intercomprehension is impossible except for those who have learned it. The village of Mbu' has a distinct language, and the word list shows highest similarity with Western Beboid languages.

Many of the sites visited did not have a collective name for their language, so the name of the principal village is given.

The tree diagram shows villages that speak each particular variety of the Beboid languages. In view of the preliminary nature of this presentation, no distinctions are made on the tree between language and dialect but rather refer to varieties

Language boundaries on the map reflect some of those made by Breton 1993 and Hombert 1980.

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² Further sociolinguistic information is available in Hamm et al. Forth., and Brye and Brye. Forth.

References

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BEBOID SPEECH FORMS

