

Introduction

0.1 Aims and objectives

This book explores some of the many facets of the narrative genre contained in the Nweh language of the Republic of Cameroon. The study, which is based on the author's-guided collections of Nweh narratives, draws insight from the basic principles of Discourse Analysis (DA) to describe the nature and function of the Nweh narratives. The relevance of such knowledge to meaning-based translation as a useful pedagogic device in the contexts of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), is also depicted in the study.

0.2 Linguistic situation of Cameroon

Language is one of man's major assets; it serves as a mark of communal and individual identity. Before the colonial era, Africa enjoyed an integral and coherent traditional society. Yet, this socio-

Map 1: Cameroon (Administrative Regions)



(Source: www.mapsofworld.com)

cultural serenity of the continent was seriously upset during the colonial decades. Cameroon, one of the Sub Saharan African nations, suffered a grievous linguistic setback. The country, which adopts at least 250 indigenous languages, (Tadadjeu 1975), was exposed to three different colonial administrations (the German, the English and the French) with dissimilar linguistic contacts and policies. These varied colonial administrations resulted to the institution of two official languages (French and English) after independence (1960/1961), with Cameroon Pidgin English as a Lingua Franca.

The complex linguistic policies and practices, which have lasted over 50 years, generating several forms of language shift phenomena (Keonig et al 1993, Bitjaa 2001, Njika 2006), have been an impediment to the development of indigenous languages. Against this

background, private initiative groups, (PROPELCA¹ 1979 -1889, NACALCO² 1989 till date), global search (SIL³, CABTAL⁴) and the government of Cameroon have, in recent times, embarked on different fronts to revive and protect the heritage languages from the risk of extinction.

¹ PROPELCA: Projet de Recherche Opérationnelle pour l'Enseignement des Langues au Cameroun

² NACALCO: National Association of Cameroon Languages Committees

³ SIL: Summer Institute of Linguistics

⁴ CABTAL: Cameroon Association for Bible Translation and Literacy

To shield the endangered national languages, the government is gradually tilting her language policy towards trilingual education (Tadadjeu 1988, 2004). There is a growing awareness that most children come to school already speaking one or more indigenous languages; that such languages ought to constitute the foundation of child education; and that it does not suffice limiting the learners to the confines of French and English. To this effect, the Department of Cameroon Languages and Culture was created at the Postgraduate Teacher Training College (Ecole Normale Supérieure – ENS) of the University of Yaounde 1 in 2008. This department trains local language and culture teachers for Cameroon secondary schools.

The official introduction of mother tongue in the national education curriculum therefore necessitates a more robust development and documentation of the local languages. This work, consequently, sets out to correlate language and culture, using the Nweh narrative genre as case study.

0.3 Nweh: Geographical location

Fontem Central and Alou Sub Divisions, located in the southern portion of Lebialem Division, constitute the nine chiefdoms of the Nweh area. It is bounded to the North-West by Mundani, to the North-East by the Bambotous, to the South and South-East by Mbos and to the West by the Banyangs (cf. map 3). Lebialem Division (cf. maps 2, 3, 4) is found in the South-West Region of the Republic of Cameroon. It lays between the high savannah plains of the North -West and Western Regions and the low forest zones of Manyu and Kupe Manenguba Divisions, respectively.

0.4 Nweh: The people

The Nweh people live in the Fontem Central and Alou Sub Divisions of the South West Region of the Republic Cameroon. There are approximately 76,000 (3rd RGPH 2010) speakers, with varied stories of origins, depending on the tribe or subgroup concerned.

Apart from Brain's (1967) document and few others that exist on the history of Nweh, there remains for the most part, only oral tradition, which recounts several versions of the origin of the Nweh people. Of the many versions, the story of a 'hunter and his nine servants' seems to be the most popular. It is held that a hunter and his nine servants descended from the Bamilike area called '*Lèkhu*' and settled in the mountainous forest known as Nweh. While some purport that the hunter migrated from the Mbo area, others believe that he came from the Bayang region. But the most plausible origin seems to be his descent from the Bamileke region, owing to the linguistic and cultural similarities that exist between the two groups.

Prior to the arrival of the hunter and his servants, the area was said to have been inhabited by the "Bèkètsè". But due to the fragile communal structure of the latter, they were defeated and suppressed by the hunter in tribal wars, which led to the division of the Nweh land amongst these classical nine servants. Historically, this accounts for the existence of nine autonomous chiefdoms and dialects in the area. This notwithstanding, there exist persistent controversies among the nine chiefdoms. While some chiefdoms claim to be descendants of the "Bèkètsè", others claim to have hailed from elsewhere, as tabulated below. It is in line with these inconsistencies that Brain (ibid) sums that: "The track of the origin of the Nweh people seems to be lost in the dim past."

Table 0.1: Origin of the Nweh people

Chiefdom	Dialect/variant of Nweh	Claimed Origin
Njoa?gwi	Njoa'gwi	Essòh - Attàh
Essò? - Attàh	Essò' - Attàh	Mbo and Banyang connections
Lèbàṅ	Lèbàṅ	Nketse - the home of Bèkètsè
Lèwòh	Lèwòh	Ndùṅgatet (sic)
Ndùṅgatet	Ndùṅgatet	A small Banyang hamlet of Fumbe near Bamenda

Chiefdom	Dialect/variant of Nweh	Claimed Origin
Dwametaw	Dwametaw	Same as above
Dwanḡonḡ	Dwanḡonḡ	Fossung Wentchem in the East
Mmōckmbiḡ	Mmōckmbiḡ	Fondong - Bafou (Fondong Afou) of the West
Mmōckḡie	Mmōckḡie	Same as above

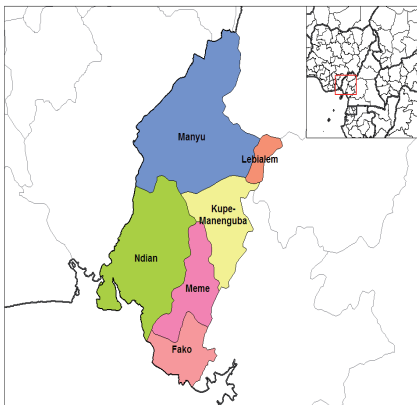
In the past, the main economic activities of the people were hunting and subsistence farming. Some of the important cash crops cultivated today are coffee, cocoa, cocoyam, cassava and palms.

Many Nweh speakers have moved and settled in the coastal regions, some as farmers and others as workers in the public administration or private sector. A good number of them live and work in the USA, Europe and other parts of the world. The commonest language of communication used by these coastal dwellers and a chunk of the rural population is Pidgin English, English or French and sparingly Nweh. The younger generation is therefore not given the deserved opportunity to acquire their heritage language. In church, as well as in market centres, the use of Pidgin English predominates. The Nweh language, like some of the indigenous languages in Cameroon, is facing a stiff trend of language shift, inclining to Pidgin, English and French respectively.

0.5 Nweh: Language location and classification

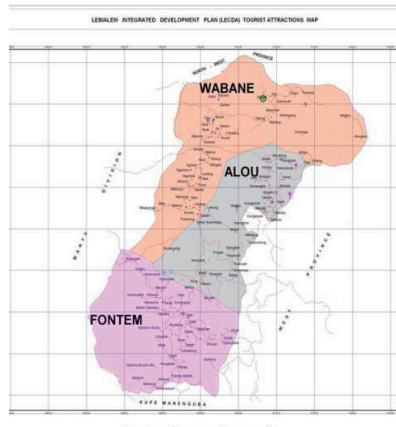
Nweh is one of the two main languages (Nweh and Mundani) spoken in the Fontem Central and Alou Subdivisions of Lebialem Division of the South-West Region of the Republic of Cameroon. (cf. Maps 2, 3 and 4)

Map 2 and 3: South-West Region



(Source: www.mapsofworld.com)

Lebialem Division



(Source: LECD, USA)

The term “Nweh” is the anglicized administrative spelling which is used to refer to both the language and the “country or the land”. It is used for all administrative transactions and in works written on the language. The spelling has however varied from author to author who variously spell it as Nweh, Dwe, Nwe and Ngwe.

What we wish to point out is that the word Nweh is disyllabic. The first syllable is a syllabic consonant N̩ , while the second syllable consists of a velar nasal ŋ , a glide w , and a mid-low front vowel e : N̩we . These two syllables put together, give the appropriate spelling as N̩-ŋwe . There is actually no absurdity in this spelling because syllabic nasals largely dominate in the language and they do occur with other nasals as illustrated below.

N̩-ŋwe - the language
 m̩-mé - to throw

N̩-nyĩ - a cutlass
 ŋ-ŋó'ē - to bend

The native speaker refers to both the area and the language as D-ɲwe, and the speakers as Mbə-ɲwe (sg. Gə-ɲwe). The Pidgin rendition of the language by non-Nweh speakers is -"Bangwa" which is used to refer to the language, the area and the people.

Nweh has nine dialects, spoken in the nine chiefdoms, as shown on Table 0.1 above. The differences amongst these dialects are mainly at the level of vowels, consonants and words. There is generally a high degree of mutual intelligibility in seven of the nine varieties. The Mmǒckmbiɲ and Mmǒckɲgie varieties (above) and the Mmǒkletet variety in Wabane Subdivision have limited mutual intelligibility with the rest of the Nweh dialects. A sociolinguistic study conducted by Akamin (1985), identified Lebang as the reference dialect, from which the data analyzed in this study have been collected.

Nweh is a Bantu language of the Eastern Grass-fields family (ALCAM 1993). The Bantu languages constitute a section of the Niger Kordofanian main language family, which occupies the southern portion of the African continent. *Atlas Linguistique du Cameroun* (ALCAM) classifies Nweh under code no. 953 of zone nine, which comprises languages of the Eastern Grass-fields Bantu, specifically the Bamileke group. Below is the location of Nweh in Cameroon and its classification by the world language mapping system.

Main Country: Cameroon
Spoken in: Regions: Africa
ISO 639-3 Code: Nwe

Classification Taxonomy

All Languages

Niger-Congo Group

Atlantic-Congo Group

Volta-Congo Group

Benue-Congo Group

Bantoid Group

Southern Bantoid Group

Wide Grass fields Group

Narrow Grass fields Group

Mbam-Nkam Group

Bamileke Group

Ngombale Language

Nda'nda' Language

Ngiemboon Language

Ngomba Language

Ngwe (Nweh) Language

Mengkaka Language

Medumba Language

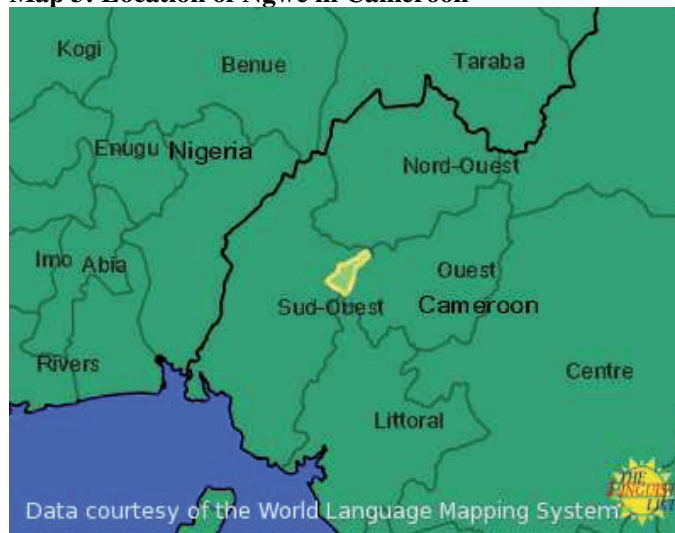
Fe'fe' Language

Ghomálá' Language

Kwa' Language

Yemba Language

Map 3: Location of Ngwe in Cameroon



(Source: www.mapsofworld.com)

0.6 Nweh: Linguistic works

A few linguistic publications exist on the language. The first was that of Dunstan's (1966) PhD thesis on "Tones and concord system in Ngwe nominals". Akamin (1985) carried out a comparative study of Nweh dialects with focus on mutual intelligibility and came up with the Lèbàɲ variety as

the reference dialect. In 1995, he did theoretical analyses on the DP structure in Nweh, using the Minimalist approach in a PhD study. Njika (1991) elaborated the phonology of Nweh and proposed the orthography. Formin (1993) worked on the Nweh Noun Phrase. In 2003, Njika published the Nweh alphabet chart and collected over 50 Nweh Narrative texts which she used Discourse Analysis perspectives to analyse their internal structure for her PhD project. In 2006, Njika et al. published. *Efəŋ Ɔweh mà mɔ' bələsən anyiet Ɔweh* (Nweh Alphabet booklet and other lessons). Since 2004, development and documentation efforts as well as the teaching of the language are being done by the Nweh Language Initiative Group (NWELIG).

0.7 Nweh: Phonology

Njika's (1991, 2003) proposed orthography has been used in this book. This writing system conforms to the General Alphabet of Cameroon Languages [Tadadjeu and Sadembouo (1984)] and with the Alphabets of Africa (1993). In all, the language consists of 27 consonants and 9 vowels, presented below on Tables 0.2 and 0.3 respectively. The graphemes and their position of occurrence in words are illustrated on Table 0.4.

Table 0.2: Nweh consonant graphemes

Place of Art.		Manner of Art.					
		Labials	Alveolars	Palatals	Velars	Glottals	Labio-Velars
Stops	Vless	p	t		k	'	kp
	Ved	b	d		g		gp
Affricates	Vless	pf	ts		kh		
	Ved			J			
Fricatives	Vless	f	s			h	
	Ved	v	z		gh		
Nasals		m	n	ny	ŋ		
Lateral			l				
Vibrant		br	r	dr			
Glides		w		Y			

Table 0.3: Nweh vowel graphemes

Height of the tongue	Position of the tongue			
	Front Unrounded	Central Rounded	Central Unrounded	Back Rounded
High	i	ʊ		ɯ
Mid-High	e		ə	o
Mid-Low	ɛ			ɔ
Low			a	

Table 0.4: Nweh phonemes, allophones, and graphemes

Phoneme	Allophone	Grapheme	Word Initial – Gloss	Word Medial-Gloss	Word Final-Gloss
p	p	p	pèe - argue!	lèpè - argument	m̀pàp - wings
b	b	b	bàŋ - red cocoyam	àbàŋ -ripe plantains	
t	t	t	toŋ - basket	àtèm - a hut	bətat – three
k	k	k	kəma-dismantle!	akəm - a stump	bəkak-happiness