

**Rapid Appraisal of Beezen**

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## Abstract

This report describes a sociolinguistic survey of the Beezen language conducted February 14, 2001 in the North West Province of Cameroon. The Beezen language is spoken in only one village called either Beezen or Kpep. The purpose for the survey was to assess the need for literature development, with language shift and bilingual proficiency in particular focus.

It was found that children master the neighboring language, Jukun, quite early. Jukun serves as a language of wider communication for them although the Beezen people use their mother tongue in the home and throughout their village.

## 1. Introduction

This report describes a sociolinguistic survey of the Beezen language conducted February 14, 2001 in the Furu-Awa Subdivision of the Menchum Division of the North West Province of Cameroon. The research team consisted of Edward and Elizabeth Brye, both of SIL, as well as Akumbu Pius, Bolima Flora, and Swiri Roseta—all doctoral students from the Department of African Languages and Linguistics at the University of Yaounde I.

We gratefully acknowledge the assistance and welcome received from regional and local government, religious, and traditional leaders. Special thanks go to Mbako Martin, the sub-divisional officer at Furu-Awa; Omaaïma Lucas, the chief of the village of Beezen, and Kitch Gregory, the headmaster and sole schoolteacher of GS-Kpep.

### *Names*

In the village of Beezen (also called Kpep), the people refer to themselves by the name Beezen (pronounced “bɛɛzɛn”), and their language by the same name.

### *Locality and population*

The Beezen language is spoken in only one village, Beezen (also called Kpep), with a reported population of 750 inhabitants. Population census information indicates that the population of Kpep village was 315 residents in 1987. According to the 1987 Census Publication (Demo 87:5), during 1976–1987 Cameroon experienced a 2.9 percent annual growth. If the same 2.9 percent population growth continued over the past fifteen years in the village, Kpep’s population today could be more than 450. (See appendix A for map of the Furu-Awa Subdivision.)

### *Origins of the Beezen-speaking people*

According to the oral history, Beezen-speaking community came from Takpea in Nigeria, then settled in what is now called the village of Akum, and after World War II migrated to their present location. After they left, others from Nigeria came and occupied that village.

### *Linguistic classification*

The Beezen language is not found in the *Atlas linguistique du Cameroun* [ALCAM] (Dieu and Renaud, 1983) but was later assigned an ALCAM code of [708] in *Atlas administratif des langues nationales du Cameroun* (Breton and Fohitung 1991). Beezen was considered to be a part of the Jukunoid language family, along with Akum [707], Uuhum-Gigi [703], Kuteb [702], and Jukun [701]. (See appendix B for linguistic map.)

Grimes in the *Ethnologue* (2000) classifies Beezen with a code of BZN and as belonging to Niger-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Volta-Congo, Benue-Congo, unclassified.

### *Research objectives*

This survey was conducted as part of an overall goal of assessing the need for literacy development and literature translation in national languages throughout Cameroon. The research team’s objectives were the following:

- Make an evaluation, based both on village-based speakers' perceptions of the level of intercomprehension Beezen-speakers have with adjacent languages.
- To assess the vitality of this speech community in terms of its use of other languages, interest in language development, and other sociolinguistic factors, and to determine the feasibility and possible scope of a language development and literacy project that would reach the Beezen speech variety and language community.
- To identify languages understood by Beezen-speakers, and to examine their attitudes toward reading and writing Beezen and other languages.

## 2. Methodology

The sociolinguistic research approach employed was the Rapid Appraisal (see Bergman 1991 and Stalder 1996). This method involves the utilization of group interviews and individual questionnaires as well as the elicitation of an ALCAM 126-word list (see Dieu and Renaud 1983:132–133). The rapid appraisal approach provides an overall impression of the potential need for codification by the means of reports from the local inhabitants of a language group. The process usually requires only a few hours per village. A rapid appraisal survey seeks to find out information with respect to the dialect situation, multilingualism, and the vitality and viability of the language.

## 3. Research results

This section contains the results of the survey, including the group interview, the individual interviews, and a lexicostatistical analysis. In Beezen, the village chief was the primary individual to respond during the group interview, although there were over forty others also present. The research team also held individual interviews with the headmaster from the local primary school, as well as with two representatives of local churches.

First, we present the results of the lexicostatistical analysis.

### 3.1 Lexicostatistics

Doctoral students Akumba Pius and Bolima Flora elicited the word list at Beezen. Applying the “shared apparent cognates” approach of comparing word lists, there is a 43–47% similarity<sup>1</sup> between the Beezen and Akum word lists.

### 3.2 Dialectology

Those interviewed in Beezen village indicate that their language is spoken without variation in the village's four quarters of Buhim, Kang, Ahan, and Kunashin. There are no dialects.

### 3.3 Beezen—reclassified as Jukunoid

The *Ethnologue* had classified Beezen as Benue, unclassified. According to Roger Blench's inspection of Beezen and Akum word lists and their comparison with other lists of the area available to him, Beezen and Akum are distinct languages more closely related to each other with their next nearest relative being Oohum (Yukuben) which forms a subgroup of Jukunoid with Kuteb and Kapya but very remote from Jukun proper.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> With regard to lexicostatistical similarity, Bergman (1989:9.5.2) and others have referred to 70 percent lexical similarity UCL as the agreed upon threshold for determining whether two speech forms are separate languages or whether they require intelligibility testing in order to determine their potential to share a written form.

<sup>2</sup> Personal communication dated July 29, 2002.

Benue-Congo  
 Platoid  
 Benue  
 Jukunoid  
 Yukuben-Kuteb  
 Yukuben  
**Beezen [BZN]**  
 Akum [AKU]

### 3.4 Multilingualism

In this section, we will examine the degree of intercomprehension which Beezen-speakers report exists within their language community. The subject of multilingualism was studied to estimate the level of understanding and oral competence Beezen-speakers might have of the languages of wider communication (LWCs) and others geographically and linguistically near their own.

#### *Languages geographically close*

Beezen-speakers do not use their mother tongue to communicate with speakers of adjacent language groups—that is, Lutu, Akum, and Baji. Beezen village residents must use Jukun to communicate with speakers of all surrounding languages, since they neither understand these languages nor are understood by speakers of the surrounding language groups.

Beezen is a language separate from all others, based on the low percentage (43–47%) of lexicostatistical similarity with the nearest related speech variety (Akum).

#### *Languages of wider communication—Jukun and Pidgin*

The principle language of wider communication (LWC) is Jukun. Reportedly, everyone in Beezen village is a proficient speaker of it. Although this language is acquired, children from age six are reportedly able to understand Jukun and eventually become fluent in it.

### 3.5 Language vitality and viability

In this section, we will see how mother–tongue speakers of Beezen view the extent to which their language is used in their daily lives.

#### *Languages used at home and with friends*

Beezen is reportedly the only language used at home and during conversations with friends.

#### *Languages for work*

Residents use only Beezen when at work in their fields.

#### *Language use at the market*

Beezen and Pidgin are used at the local market in the village. At the large market in Isu, Pidgin is the language spoken by Beezen-speakers. (Beezen appears to be a southernmost language within the region where Jukun is the primary language of wider communication.)

#### *Language use at the dispensary*

When ill, and if they are able, Beezen residents go to the dispensary at Isu or Wum, where they must speak Pidgin to be understood.

#### *Language use at official events*

Interviewees report that Beezen is the only language spoken at traditional ceremonies and local council meetings, and for making public announcements. Jukun is spoken as well at regional council meetings.

### *Language use at school*

English is used for in-class instruction, but children who understand both English and Beezen are called upon to explain things to any fellow students who do not adequately grasp what has been said in English. During recreation times, students can be heard speaking Beezen and, to a lesser extent, also Jukun.

In addition to the group interview, the research team carried out an individual interview of the headmaster and sole teacher of GS-Kpep. The headmaster, whose mother tongue is Bum, said, "Teaching is difficult, since the children barely understand English." He indicated that the largest language group represented in the student body is that of Beezen followed far behind by Jukun-speakers, and lastly by Pidgin-speakers.

Students come from a distance of at most 2 kilometers. What follows is the enrollment of students at GS-Kpep:

Class 1: 20; Class 2: 8; Class 3: 6; Class 4: 7; Class 5: 5; Class 6: 2; Class 7: 0

What these figures suggest is that in time students eventually drop out of school as they progress to the higher levels of primary school. During the past four years that the headmaster has been at the school, only one student has graduated from the GS-Kpep primary school and left to continue studies at a secondary school level.

The headmaster stated that he does not object to the idea that students might learn to read and write their mother tongue as part of their studies, and he would be willing to help coordinate this.

### **3.6 Language attitudes**

Of special interest to us was the potential of Beezen-speakers to learn to read and write either their mother tongue or another language.

#### *Attitudes toward the mother tongue*

Beezen-speakers, young and old alike, seem to have a positive attitude toward their language. They believe that their language will be spoken indefinitely and that the young people speak no language more than they speak Beezen.

#### *Standardization efforts*

Interviewees were unaware of any material written in or translated into the language.

#### *Migration and intermarriage*

Beezen-speakers may marry whomever they like. No marital restrictions are imposed on them. Intermarriage occurs primarily with Jukun, Akum, and Baji speakers.

Outsiders usually come from either Wum (the major town of the Aghem language region) or Nigeria. They come to engage in business, such as the sale of soap or Maggi cubes. When they come to stay and live in Beezen, they do not learn the language but continue to use Pidgin.

#### *Language shift*

Interviewees reported that their children do not mix or confuse Beezen with any other language.

Since Beezen cannot be used outside of the village, it is considered good to learn Jukun and Pidgin as this will "favor the child" and enable the next generation to interact with outsiders. English is desired as this enables people to "speak it anywhere in the world."

Although intermarriage patterns, the value to learn a language other than their mother tongue such as Jukun or Pidgin may indicate that language shift may occur, for now Beezen-speakers use the mother tongue as the principal language in their homes and throughout their village.

### **3.7 Other development considerations**

There are two other considerations that should be mentioned; these pertain to health and the lack of infrastructure for transportation.

#### *Health*

According to the chief of this small village, during the past year no less than thirty adults and four of ten children under the age of one died. Children are often ill, suffering from chicken pox, smallpox, malaria, and “the cough.” Some have fevers. Vaccinations for polio were obtained this year from the government health center in Isu.

#### *Transportation*

There is no longer any road leading to this isolated area. There used to be a road from Isu to Kpep, but it fell into disrepair after it was made known that the forest would suffer from the traffic resulting from people using the road. Starting sometime this year (2001), the European Union would build a road. We were told that all the meetings and paperwork have been completed, the financial assistance approved, and a contractor identified.

### **3.8 Language development potential: Watters’ Socioeconomic factors**

According to Watters (1989), three factors in particular affect the nature and development of language programs and, as such, are predictive of successful participation in a language development program: the homogeneity of the linguistic community, the people’s openness to change and development, and the presence of a middle-aged leadership at the local level. We follow with a discussion of these three factors in the context of the villages surveyed.

#### *Homogeneity of the linguistic community: Social cohesion*

Beezen is spoken in only one village with four quarters. Residents of all these quarters speak alike. Speakers are never cut off from one another, even during times of heavy rains.

#### *Openness to change*

There is no development committee.

#### *Village-based leadership*

An important factor in determining the viability of a language project is the presence of a middle-aged leadership. The Beezen group interview revealed that they have fifteen leaders who are middle-aged and reside in the village, and the people are confident that there will be others to replace the present leaders once they are gone. Do people leave and then return to the village?

In summary, the Beezen-speaking community meets a few of the criteria outlined by Watters.

#### *Attitudes toward language development*

Those interviewed are receptive to the idea of learning to read and write Beezen. The primary motivation for wanting to learn to read and write their mother tongue is the preservation of their language and culture.

The languages that residents would prefer to learn in the order of their priority are as follows: Beezen, English, then Jukun. The value of learning English is that it is a world language and, as such, can open doors of opportunity.

#### 4. SIL/CABTAL/NACALCO Activity and plans

None of these organizations has plans to work on the Beezen language.

#### 5. Conclusions

Certain factors suggest that a language development and literacy program is not feasible in the Beezen language:

- Children are reportedly able to understand Jukun from the age of six and eventually become fluent in this LWC. The extensive use of Jukun in order to communicate with speakers of neighboring languages suggests that relating to their neighbors is important. But speakers of the neighboring languages do not understand Beezen, requiring that communication occur in Jukun, a phenomenon that may indicate shifting language use, however subtly, from the mother tongue to the LWC.
- The reported desire to learn to read and write English even at the elementary level may remain unfulfilled so long as the headmaster is the only instructor at the primary school. It may be that English is not immediately practical to the Beezen speaking people who do not need this language to interact with any of their neighbors. But if given a chance, the people might take to learning to read and write Jukun, though perhaps at the risk of losing their mother tongue.

#### 6. Recommendations

Consider scheduling recorded text testing of Jukun in conjunction with other language survey trips in Furu-Awa Sub-division.

#### 7. Modifications

##### 7.1 To *ALCAM*

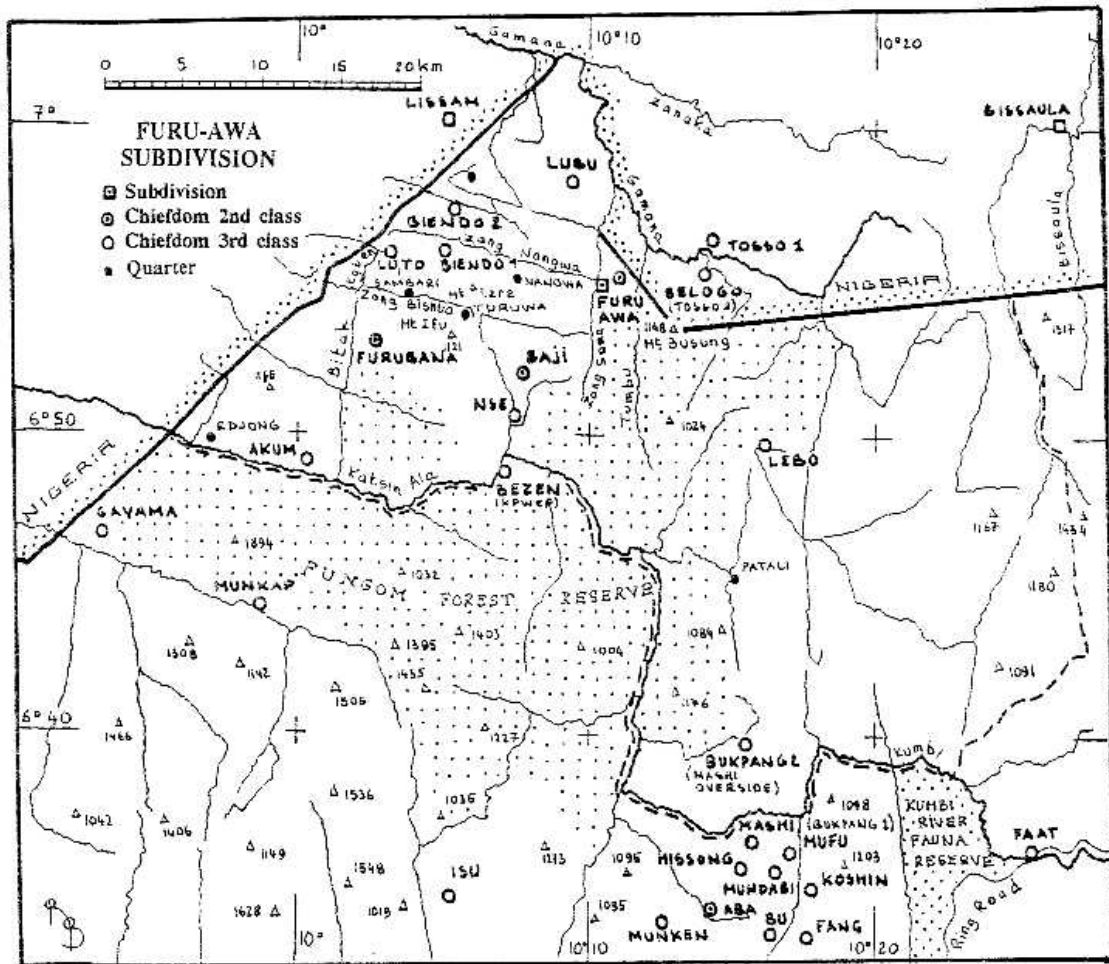
Include this as a one-village language. Blench's reclassification should be followed to reflect that Beezen is: Jukunoid, Yukuben-Kuteb [Nigeria], Yukuben, Beezen [BZN] (Cameroon).

##### 7.2 To the *Ethnologue*

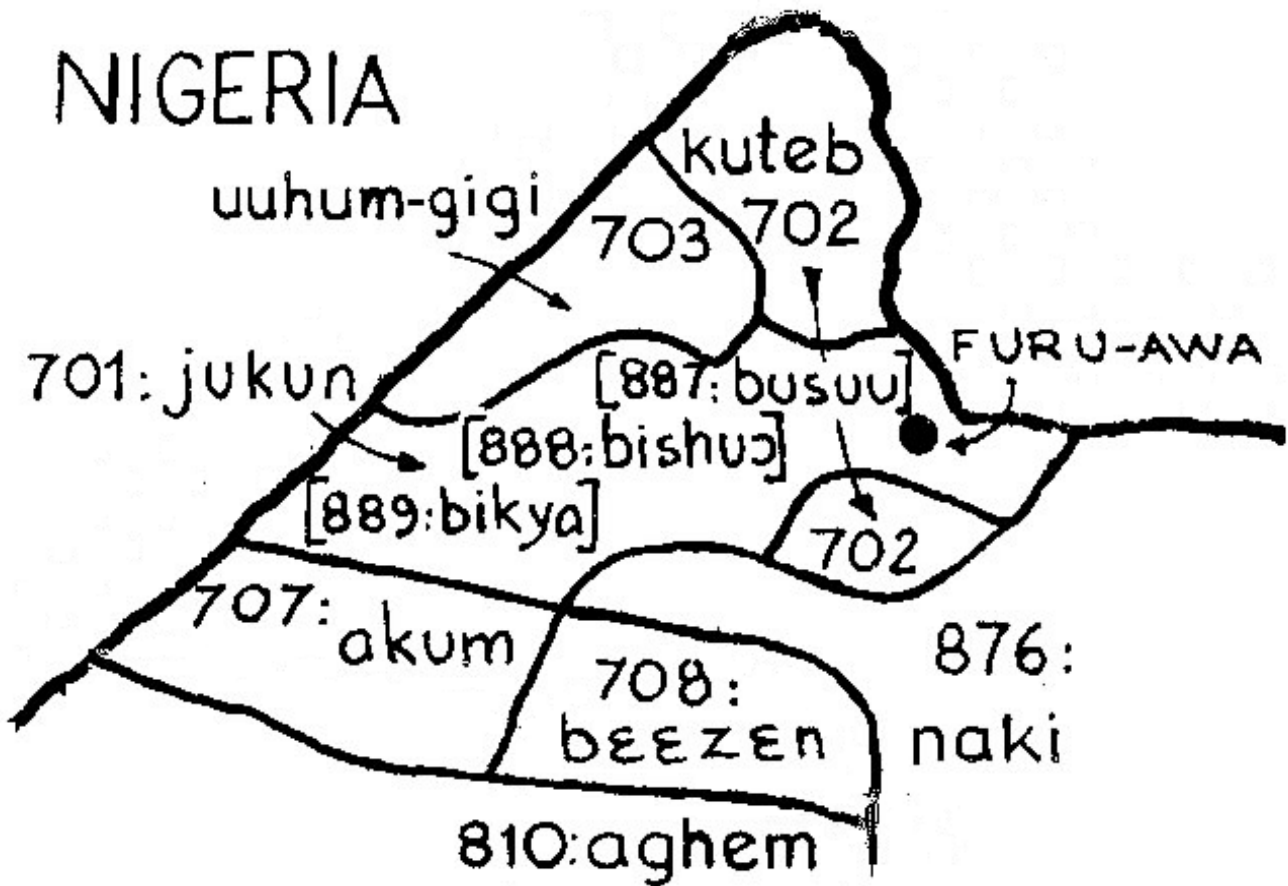
- Add that "Beezen," which is a term to refer to the name of the language, is also used by the respective speakers to refer to their village.
- Note that the spelling of the village may also be Kpep.
- Change population from 400 to a reported population size of 450.
- Revise that Beezen is located on a plain/flat area between mountain slopes.
- Reclassify Beezen as: Benue-Congo, Platoid, Benue, Jukunoid, Yukuben-Kuteb [Nigeria], Yukuben, Beezen [BZN] (Cameroon).



**Appendix A:**  
**Breton's Furu-Awa Subdivision**  
 (Breton 1993:110)



Appendix B:  
 Beezen and Neighboring Languages, including nearby Jukunoid  
 (Breton and Fohtung 1991:137)



### Appendix C: ALCAM lists for Beezen and Akum

L1: Language name: Beezen/Kpep  
 Informant: Lydia Shimun and Andreas Shita  
 Age/Age: 35 and 62  
 Native village: Beezen  
 Father's group: Beezen  
 Mother's group: Beezen  
 Level of education:  
 Location: Fon's Palace  
 Date: 14 February 2001  
 Researchers: Pius Akumbu and Flora Bolima

L2: Language name: Akum  
 Informants: Mr. Adiku Timothy and Mrs. Naomi Meme  
 Age: 30 and 45  
 Native village: Akum  
 Father's group: Akum  
 Mother's group: Akum  
 Level of education: -Diploma in Irrigation Engineering/ -unknown  
 Location: Fon's Palace  
 Date: 14 February 2001  
 Researchers: Flora Bolima and Swiri Roseta

	English	Francais	Beezen	Akum
1	mouth	bouche	úńú	ùńù?
2	eye	œil	kíyí	íyí
3	head	tête	kǎʃɪ	íkí
4	hair (on head)	cheveux	ùsùn	ótsí
5	tooth	dent	kízíṅ	ídzi
6	tongue	langue	kánám	úmyám
7	nose	nez	kén	íwé
8	ear	oreille	kótóṅ	ótóṅ
9a	neck	cou	kíkímítsú	ísáṅ
9b	back of neck (nape)	nuque	kàlák	àlèk
9c	throat	gorge	úmìnítsú	ógwèrèkwú
10	breast	sein	kímyám	ímwè
11	arm/hand	bras/main	kíbú	ogbwó
12a	claw	griffe	ázíp ó guń	ígwàp nu?ki
12b	nail	ongle	ázíp obú	ígwàp agbo
13a	leg	jambe	kígún	ífwí
13b	foot	pied	kíwáróguń	òkí

14	buttock	fesse	kékú	ítá
15	belly	ventre	kéwúró	ímbārḗ
16	navel	nombril	ùhú	okam
17	intestines/insides	intestins/boyaux	ízíní	òluṅkím
18	blood	sang	béyóṅ	áyèṅ
19	urine	urine	bézím	ákyóm
20	bone	os	kíkíp	òkḗp
21	skin	peau	éyórḗ	úkpwáṅḗṅ
22	wing	aile	kábáb	ábā
23	feather	plume	éhḥṅ	àtuṅ
24	horn	corne	ókún	úkwě
25	tail	queue	órán	ùtsé
26	human being	être humain	óṅú	ìṅgyērḗ
27	man	homme	ólím	álám
28	woman	femme	ókwóp	ákáp
29	husband	mari	íwàn	úlám
30	child	enfant	ízín	alímḥí
31	name	nom	kízín	ídzí
32	sky	ciel	kéb <sup>h</sup> i ìbàm	átārḗ
33	night	nuit	kélēṅ	okwútàṅ
34	moon	lune	úgwán	òkáj
35	sun	soleil	úrú	osóro
36	wind	vent	úgbón	ofóp
37	cloud	nuage	kèkúṅ	abùṅ
38	dew	rosée	ímín	ìṅwē
39	rain	pluie	éwún	abwí
40	ground	terre	íḥí	ítsú
41	sand	sable	íḥíkóywù	ìsā
42	path	chemin	ùkwáj	okḗṅ
43	water	eau	bímí	áṅwí
44	stream (river)	cours d'eau	úyár	óyàṅ
45	house	maison	kítḥáj	ígyâ
46	fire	feu	ólú	ùlà
47	firewood	bois a brûler	ókún	úkwé ùlà
48	smoke	fumée	búsúṅ	àtsḗṅ
49	ash	cendre	bótsúṅ	àtúṅ
50	knife	couteau	ùkwáp	ùkwóp
51	rope	corde	úlúk	ólák
52	spear	lance, sagaie	útúp	ékpwàṅ

53	war (fight)	guerre (combat)	úmán	ome
54a	animal	animal	ízi	òmòḡ
54b	meat	viande	bízi	òmòḡ
55	dog	chien	ìbóró	égbúrú
56	elephant	éléphant	ìndàrè	èndóró
57	goat	chèvre	èmín	èmé
58	bird	oiseau	ènènè	ènwè
59	tortoise	tortue	kìkpórókéhém	otsap
60	snake	serpent	bíwú	íwú
61	fish	poisson	ísán	íkyá
62	(head) louse	pou (de tete)	éfi	ílá
63	egg	œuf	kíji	àtsi
64	tree	arbre	ótji	úkí
65	bark	écorce	kíkwó	íkù?ó
66	leaf	feuille	ámí	ámwá
67	root	racine	éhēp	íkóp
68	salt	sel	búmwán	omwá
69	fat	graisse	ézāp	ádzāp
70a	hunger (general)	faim (général)	úwún	úròḡ
70b	hunger (for meat)	faim (de viande)	ínáḡ	ákyám ònòḡ
71	iron (the metal)	fer (le métal)	kísóró	ìnàḡ
72	one	un	óyùnó	áyí
73	two	deux	énó	áfèḡ
74	three	trois	ítáró	átà
75	four	quatre	ìjì	ájì
76	five	cinq	ítsóḡ	ákwòḡ
77	six	six	ítsóḡ óyún	ákwòḡ yi
78	seven	sept	tsòḡ én	ákwòḡ f èḡ
79	eight	huit	ítsóḡ ítáró	ákwòḡ tà
80	nine	neuf	ítsóḡ ìjì	ákwòḡ jì
81	ten	dix	kúwúp	ékùrù
82	come	venir	wú	bá
83	send (someone)	envoyer	átʃəm	òkyèḡ
84	walk	marcher	ákáró	ákyâká
85	fall	tomber	áwú	òkpwò
86	leave	partir	jìn	ojí
87	fly	voler (oiseau)	ówùn	òfím
88	pour	verser	kún	fàrí
89	strike	frapper	dáp	òbúrí

90	bite	mordre	kúkízím	džim
91	wash (transitive)	laver (transitif)	áyó	ɲwíŋ
92	split (wood)	fendre	báp	oyàrí
93	give	donner	nè	òná
94	steal	voler ( dérober)	búzí	ódzì
95	squeeze	presser	kám	oŋkà
96	cultivate	cultiver	étjim	ùwò
97	bury (transitive)	enterrer (transitif)	éjñ	oŋèŋ
98	burn (transitive)	brûler (transitif)	égím	okwì
99	eat	manger	arí	dzì
100	drink	boire	amí	ɲwá
101	vomit	vomir	abí	kpwà
102	suck	sucer	mí	ɲwé
103	spit (saliva)	cracher (salive)	tʃi	àkyàŋ
104	blow (on)	souffler (sur)	ɣin	sê
105	swell	enfler	ámè	ndàb
106	give birth	engendrer	kíbaró	ímbâ
107	die	mourir	kùhú	úkpú
108	kill	tuer	ówún	òtsèn
109	push	pousser	gim	dwok ka
110	pull	tirer	bèrè	gbwí bá
111	sing	chanter	tsi	kwò
112	play (a game)	jouer (un jeu)	ásín	égyè?
113	be afraid	avoir peur	bélíp	àsì
114	want	vouloir	áfóŋ	ífwáŋ
115	say	dire	áryáŋ	òlwó
116	see	voir	rí	ndáré
117	show	montrer	tsɔk	k <sup>h</sup> wɔ
118	hear	entendre	ók	wò
119	know	savoir/ connaître	ríŋ	sòŋ
120	count	compter	bún	fá

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