

# The Standardisation and Modernisation of Kenyang

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In this case study of Kenyang, the author advances the concept that once a language has been documented and a corpus of literature produced so that the language can be studied in the community speaking it, the language is undergoing the process of development or (for short) that it is being developed. Once a language has a large amount of literature sufficiently documented, he considers the language to be developed. Those that still have little published materials that can be studied in their communities are said to be developing. A language that has no written literature is said to be underdeveloped.

## Introduction

It is on the basis of the above definition of development that we are going to examine the historical development of the Kenyang language. We are going to look at the development of the writing system, the standardisation of the language and the modernisation of the lexicon which helps to enrich the language so that it can be widely used for communication. Before we start though, it is important that we situate the language on the linguistic map of Cameroon.

## Location and classification of the Kenyang language

The Kenyang language is spoken in the Manyu and Meme Divisions of the South West Province, Republic of Cameroon. Speakers of the language are called Banyangi or Banyang. The natives call themselves Manyang. They number about 60,628 inhabitants (1987 estimate from the Mamfe Rural Council office). They occupy 53 villages in the Mamfe Central Sub-Division and the Upper Banyang Sub-Division. There are ten other Kenyang-speaking villages in the Meme Division.

The Kenyang language is made up of three main dialects; Upper Kenyang, Lower Kenyang, and Kitwii. Upper Kenyang is spoken in the Upper Banyang Sub-Division, Lower Kenyang is spoken in Eyumojock and the Mamfe Central Sub-Division. Kitwii is spoken in the Meme Division. The Upper Kenyang and Lower Kenyang dialects are more closely related to each other than to Kitwii. Today, a large portion of the population is living and working in other urban centres of the country.

Kenyang is classified as Southern Bantoid, a group that counts the (narrow) Bantu family as one of its members. It belongs to the Mamfe Nyang sub-group and is related to Denya and Kendem.

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## ***Brief history of the development of Kenyang***

The development of the Kenyang language started when German missionaries arrived in Cameroon. What the missionaries found was a highly multilingual country with no less than 275 languages. Faced with this situation, only six of these languages were selected to be developed and used as languages of primary education for the first three years; German taking over for the rest of the school system. The languages were chosen because of the strategic positions they occupied in the country. The languages were distributed as shown in table 1.

Table 1. Language distribution

Douala	Littoral and South West Provinces
Mungaka	North West Province
Basaa	Centre and Littoral Provinces
Ewondo	Centre and East Provinces
Bulu	South Province
Fulfulde/Arab	Adamawa, North, and Far North Provinces
Bamoum/Bangante	Western Province

Kenyang is based in the South West Province and so the inhabitants were taught in the Douala language. Inspired by exposure to Douala, native speakers started writing Kenyang church songs using the Douala alphabet.

In 1935/1936 Itmann, a German missionary, analysed Kenyang grammar and phonology, and collected proverbs and folktales. His book, however, was never used since the German colonial administration in Cameroon did not last much beyond that period.

In 1983, Jim Tyhurst, a member of the NGO SIL International (Cameroon Branch), worked on the phonology and sociolinguistics of Kenyang and Denya. His background work motivated the local population to create an umbrella organisation known as the Society for Kenyang Literature (SKL) in 1986. The goal of this organisation was to see that Kenyang was taught in primary schools and within the community.

In 1990, Dennis Panches (another SIL member) and I published the Kenyang orthography and alphabet chart. The following year, a transitional primer and a folk story book were published. These two publications were then used as a stepping stone to launch the first teachers' training course in 1991 financed by SIL. The planning of the course was organised by the SKL which handles all the affairs concerning the Kenyang language. It was the SKL that financed the publication of the alphabet chart and the folk story book. When SIL saw that there was much enthusiasm among the local population, they helped the community in financing the publication of the Kenyang transitional primer. Activities carried out by the language committee include:

- Creation of zonal committees to oversee the work of literacy from the grass roots. For literacy purposes, the language area was divided into four zones. This meant that decisions taken at the central executive committee of the SKL could easily get to the grass roots. Each zone is made up of seven to ten villages. Each village sends a representative to the zonal committee. The zonal committee is headed by the chief and his councilors and a women's representative. Each zone has a zonal supervisor who coordinates activities in that zone.
- The opening of a literacy centre in Mamfe which handles literacy activities. This centre is presently financed by the Cameroon Association for Bible Translation and Literacy (CABTAL). The centre organises teachers' training seminars and translation courses.
- The creation of a translation subcommittee to oversee the work of Bible Translation.
- The creation of a publication subcommittee to oversee the publication of materials in Kenyang.

- Encouraging the local population to use the mother tongue in community schools.
- Financing the publication of literacy materials.
- Encouraging the urban elite to support the development of the Kenyang language in cash and kind.

The coordination of this work is carried out by the project coordinator. He works in collaboration with zonal supervisors who send him reports about literacy activities in the various zones. The project coordinator presents these reports to the Cameroon Association for Bible Translation and Literacy.

### ***Participants involved in the development of Kenyang***

The Society for Kenyang Literature (SKL) is not the only organisation that is involved in the standardisation and modernisation of Kenyang. There are other institutions that have played a significant role. The Department of Linguistics, University of Yaounde I, for example, was instrumental in the production of the first *General Alphabet of Cameroonian Languages* edited in 1979 by Professor Maurice Tadadjeu and Professor Etienne Sadembouo. This book has been crucial for harmonising the alphabets of Cameroonian languages. Based on this work, the first alphabet and orthography statement was published for Kenyang in 1990.

That same year, the Cameroon Association for Bible Translation and Literacy (CABTAL) decided to sponsor the development of the Kenyang language. In 1990, the post of project coordinator was proposed by the language committee and the holder of the post was employed by CABTAL. Since 1990, CABTAL has been training and publishing literacy materials in the language project. In 1992, fieldworkers were selected by the language committee and CABTAL pays them. This has helped to sustain the language project.

In addition, the National Association of Cameroonian Language Committees (NACALCO) has contributed greatly to the development of the Kenyang language by giving technical advice to the language committee and financing the publication of literature materials in Kenyang. It has also employed a literacy supervisor to help facilitate the work of literacy. NACALCO also organises literacy seminars where mother tongue teachers are trained. Many of these teachers are teaching in their respective communities.

Finally, SIL has played a major role in the promotion of the Kenyang language. At the regional level, SIL has been carrying out research and training literacy workers. Before materials are published in Kenyang, they are checked by SIL consultants.

## **Modernisation of Kenyang**

Two major issues will be discussed here: the choice of a reference dialect and the elaboration of orthography principles.

### ***The choice of a reference dialect***

Sadembouo (1980) described in detail some of the processes for choosing a reference dialect. The various criteria were applied to three dialects of Kenyang to choose a reference dialect. The establishment of a standard form of Kenyang did not meet as much opposition as has been encountered in other languages. It was Lower Kenyang which was chosen as the standard reference dialect. If the choice of a reference dialect did not meet much opposition, it was because sociolinguistic factors were taken into consideration and presented to the SKL general assembly in 1989. The facts were so convincing that the speakers of the other two dialects (Upper Kenyang and Kitwii) were forced to accept them. Table 2 summarises the discussion of a reference dialect. Each of the criteria considered is listed in the left-hand column. Then there is a column for each of the dialects. If the choice of a particular dialect is favoured by a criterion, a "1" is entered in the table. If the dialect is not favoured

by a criterion, then “0” is marked. When we calculate the total of each dialect, we realise that Lower Kenyang was favoured because it had the highest score. The various criteria (from [Sadembou 1980](#)) are shown below:

Table 2. Criteria to determine choice of a reference dialect

	Lower Kenyang	Upper Kenyang	Kitwii
<b>Primary Criteria</b>			
1. Degree of Intercomprehension based on linguistic data	1	0	0
2. Degree of Intercomprehension claimed by speakers	1	1	0
3. Number of Speakers	1	1	0
4. Geographic location	1	0	0
5. Location of important population centres	1	0	0
6. Social prestige	1	1	1
7. Purity of dialect	1	1	1
<b>Secondary Criteria</b>			
8. Regards for one's own dialect	1	1	1
9. Ease of access	1	0	0
10. Attitude of government	0	0	0
11. Religious influence	1	1	0
12. previous work	0	1	0
13. Socioeconomic importance	1	0	0
14. Historical dialect expansion	1	1	0
15. Attitude about ease of understanding	1	1	0
16. Wide spread use of dialect	0	0	0
TOTAL	12	8	3

Based on these results, the SKL second annual general conference delegates acknowledged that Lower Kenyang should be the standard reference dialect.

### ***Elaboration of orthography principles***

In the 1990 Kenyang orthography, the following tones were marked: high tone [ˊ], rising tone [ˊ̃], falling tone [ˆ], and downstep [ˉ]. The low tone was left unmarked because it has the highest frequency of occurrence.

The subject marker was initially written separately from the verb. Similarly, elements such as negation, hortative marker, and future markers were also written separately from the subject marker. No attempt was made at that time to determine the shape of an orthographic word in Kenyang from the native speaker's point of view.

Between 1990 and 1991, the alphabet chart, a folk story book, and a transitional primer were published. These books were used in a teacher training programme that was organised that same year. A total of 55 teachers were trained to teach Kenyang in their communities. In 1995, complaints concerning the orthography started to appear. Many of the teachers complained that they did not hear the

difference between a high tone and a downstep tone or between a low tone and a falling tone. They claimed that the falling tone should be left unmarked just as the low tone is and that the downstepped tone should be marked as high.

In 1998, a new orthography proposal for marking tone was prepared by the Linguistics Department of SIL and me. Some of the changes were as follows:

- Instead of marking four tones, only two were marked in the orthography, the high [´] and rising [ˆ] tone.
- The subject marker and other prefixal elements such as negatives and hortatives were written in the new orthography as a single word with the verb.

I will illustrate below both the old and new orthographies:

Table 3. Orthography comparison

Old Orthography	New Orthography	Gloss
Má ń twó ɛɔk. 3P HORT come village	Mántwó ɛɔk.	Let them come to the village.
Sé pú nyé nenyé. 2P NEG eat food	Sépú nyé nenyé.	We are not eating food.
A bhíki kɔ ne bɛkak. 3S NEG walk on foot	Abhíkí kɔ ne bɛkak.	He did not trek.
Ǿ rɔŋ a nnyén. 2S go INF stream	Ǿrɔŋ annyén.	You are going to the stream.

## Guidelines for deciding on terms

Age-old strategies have been used by native speakers to enrich their language. These strategies existed in Kenyang and many other languages before they were formalised by the Society for Kenyang Literature (SKL). The various processes used in expanding the lexicon are as follows:

- Borrowing
- Compounding
- Extension of meaning
- Derivation

The Kenyang language has borrowed words from other cultures which came into Kenyang either directly or indirectly that is through another language. For instance, all words of Efik origin have found their way into Kenyang through Ejagham. Some loan words in Kenyang are as follows:

## ***Borrowing***

<b>Loan</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Source language</b>
móto	motor	English
ékpémé	bottle	Efik
erónó	lamp	Efik
akpara	prostitute	Efik
ńkóp	cup	English
wíndo	window	English
kápa	coin (penny)	English
fóto	photo	English
ti	tea	English
ákpú	cassava fufu	Igbo
érikán	match	Efik

## ***Compounding***

In the development of the Kenyang language, there are certain words that are formed in the language. It is the most diffused in its morphemic, syntactic, and semantic aspects. This class is perhaps the most original in its linguistic process of lexical innovation. The examples below illustrate Kenyang patterns of associative (genitive) constructions:

ńkú mana	garment + legs	trousers
mmũ ntó	person + message	messenger
mmu mpap	person + hatred	enemy
ntí ntọ	head + teacher	headmaster (principal)
ntí kepi	head + talk	lesson
mmu esyé	person + market	trader

## ***Extension of meaning***

These are old word extended in meaning or changed to express new concepts. The following examples illustrate this:

<b>Word</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Extended Meaning</b>
nkwo	skin	leather
nnywop	day	a wrist watch
ményíńí	dirt	manure
nembe	star	torch
mbi	clay	chalk
míbyabhán	needle	injection

## ***Derivation***

It is one of the most productive processes for forming new words in Bantu languages. This is a process that was in existence before the language was reduced to writing. Nouns can be derived from verbs as seen below:

/tó/ to send	ntó	message
/tém/ to shoot	kentémé	hunting
/tɔŋ/ to show	ntɔŋ	teacher
/dak/ to tear	nɛdak	tearing
/nisí/ to refuse	menisi	refusal

## Conclusion

Our preoccupation in this paper has been to show how the Kenyang language is being standardised and modernised. This is being achieved partly internally through the maximisation of the semantic content of indigenous words and partly externally through the process of borrowing.

However, the development of the Kenyang language is still in its infancy. Not much literature has been produced in the language. Insofar as the development of technical terms is concerned, most of the work is still left in the hands of Bible translators. A technical committee has recently been set up to expand the vocabulary. It is our hope that as the Kenyang language is taught in schools, there will be a lot of intellectual changes which will help to further the standardisation and modernisation of the language.

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