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# The history of Beng studies

Section 3

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# The history of Beng studies

## Section 3

Denis Paperno

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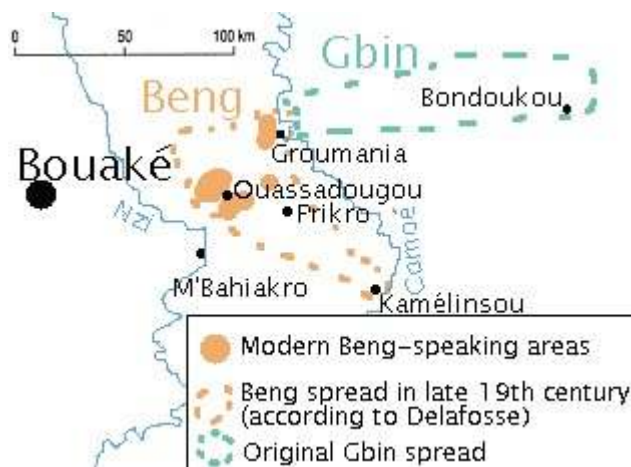
### 3.1. Students of the Beng language and society

- 1 The first publications to report on Beng language and people were motivated by the urge to systematize the languages and peoples of West Africa. Like many other varieties of Côte d'Ivoire, the Beng and the neighboring South Mande Gbin languages were first described by the French colonial administrative officer Maurice Delafosse (1904). His account of the Beng language included just a list of the first ten numerals. Twenty years later, another scholar and colonial administrator Louis Tauxier studied the area of Bondoukou more deeply, both as a linguist and as an ethnographer. Among other things, Tauxier published an extensive list of Beng words and phrases (Tauxier 1921: 658-683), along with a very detailed ethnographic and sociological study of the Beng people. Now, 100 years after these first publications, we are in the position to look back at their data and interpret it building on the progress in African linguistics made over the last decades. In section 3.2, I describe Delafosse and Tauxier's Beng data and remark on what they are telling us about Beng dialects.
- 2 Beng's position within the genetic classification was further scrutinized in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with the development of wider comparative studies (Prost 1953; Welmers 1958; Greenberg 1966). The last work mistakenly attributes Beng (referred to as Gan) to Voltaic languages.
- 3 Systematic study of Beng did not resume until the late 1970-es, when SIL-associated scholars produced preliminary grammatical notes (Bearth 1979), description of the tonal system (Flick 1979) and a phonological sketch (Ory 1981).
- 4 In 1979-1980 the then-PhD-student Alma Gottlieb spent fourteen months in Côte d'Ivoire doing anthropological fieldwork among the Beng. After another field trip to the Beng land in 1985, Gottlieb eventually published a monograph on Beng anthropology (Gottlieb 1992) and a Beng-English dictionary (Gottlieb, Murphy 1995). After her dissertation work, Gottlieb conducted further research among the Beng,

focusing on the anthropology of childhood, which resulted in the monograph *The Afterlife Is Where We Come From: The Culture of Infancy in West Africa* (Gottlieb 2004). Gottlieb's collaboration with her husband, writer Phillip Graham, produced two well-written popular accounts of their encounters with the Beng (Gottlieb and Graham 1994, 2012).

- 5 An SIL member Wolfgang Paesler started studying Beng in 1981. Within a few years he gained a deep understanding of many aspects of the structure of Beng language. Paesler published the first morphological description of some aspects of verb morphology of Beng (Paesler 1989), which covered the properties of the base form, the low tone form, nominalization, and the progressive. Paesler gave the first account of personal pronouns and TAM expression in his orthographic manual (Paesler 1991), was the first to publish a phonological description of Beng (Paesler 1992), and, last but not least, collected a vast amount of unpublished texts and lexicographic data (Paesler ms.).

Map 2.



**BENG AND CLOSELY RELATED GBIN, NOW EXTINCT, ACCORDING TO DELAFOSSE (1904).**

### 3.2. Beng dialects according to reports from the early 1900s

- 6 This section reproduces the content of (Paperno 2008a). I focus on the aspects of historical phonetics that Beng data from (Delafosse 1904) and (Tauxier 1921) seem to reflect and, for the dialect documented by Tauxier, on morphological features they exhibit. Tauxier's data also contains some information for a deeper grammatical analysis, but that would require more research on modern Beng dialects.
- 7 The present work, as well as the research of Wolfgang Paesler and of Alma Gottlieb and M. Lynne Murphy, represent a different dialect than those described by Tauxier and Delafosse, spoken in the prefecture of M'Bahiakro, in the area centered around the village of Ouassadouougou. As mentioned above, this area is divided into two socio-geographic units, "Forest» and "Savanna», and the literature (e.g. Paesler 1992) even speaks of two dialects, dialect of the forest and dialect of the savanna, but this distinction has never been justified by linguistic data. All the varieties of the area of Ouassadouougou are mutually understandable; the only certain isogloss I know of does

not strictly divide the two regions: the subject pronoun of 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular has the form /e/ in varieties of some “Savanna» villages, e.g. Totodougou, and /o/ in some “Forest” villages, but also in the variety of Ouassadougou, which is generally attributed to the “Savanna” zone. Unfortunately, more precise information about dialectal distribution of these pronoun forms is not available. Therefore, I am not going to distinguish here the varieties of Ouassadougou area (the “Forest” and the “Savanna” dialects). Since a uniform term for this dialect does not exist, I will write “Modern Ouassadougou Beng ”, abbreviating it as MOB.<sup>1</sup>

- 8 Now that MOB is relatively well studied, we are in the position to interpret the data Tauxier and Delafosse had published in their relation to MOB facts. It turns out that the dialects described by Delafosse and Tauxier are substantially different from MOB. Delafosse documented the variety of Beng spoken in the 1890-s in the village of Kamélinsou near the Comoé river (see Maps 1, 2), which one might tentatively identify with the present-day Kamelesso. L. Tauxier, on the other hand, 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 (those have never been studied to date). Presumably, though, most of Tauxier’s data rely on the variety of the neighbourhood of Groumania (he qualifies his records from Pattakoro as “notes succinctes”). If this is correct, Tauxier’s data may represent a variety of modern Lendoukro or Bénidougou, villages situated in the proximity of Groumania, west from the Comoé river, where Beng is still spoken. To the best of my knowledge, there is no scholarship of these dialects, and Tauxier’s notes remain the only source. I will make reference to the varieties documented by Delafosse and Tauxier by abbreviations BK (Beng of Kamélinsou) and BG (Beng of Groumania neighbourhood), correspondingly.

### 3.2.1. Delafosse: Beng of Kamélinsou

- 9 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 variety as being close to MOB.

**Table 1.1. Numerals from 1 through 10 in Beng dialects and Gbin**

BK	BG	MOB	Gbin (Delafosse)	
do [do]	dô [do]	dō	do	one
pla [pla]	para [pala]	plāṛ	paa	two
ya [ya]	n’gan [ɲḡ]	ɲḡṛ	ṛga, ṛna	three
syĩ [sieŋ]	syé [sie]	síéṛ	sye	four

sõ [sɔŋ]	sôn [soŋ]	sóŋ	sõo	five
so-do [sɔdo]	so-do [sɔdo]	sódô	sörü-do	six
so-pla [sɔpla]	so-fala [sɔfala] <sup>2</sup>	sóplā	sosowa	seven
so-ya [sɔya]	sowoua [sɔwa]	sówà, kējēsíéj	kyenze	eight
sisi [sisi]	sisi [sisi]	sīsí	sisi	nine
ebu [ebu]	bou [bu]	bū, èbū	bu	ten

- 10 Two peculiarities of BK deserve a comment. First, the Beng of Kamélinsou maintained the Proto-South-Mande form /ya/ for ‘three’ in *ya* ‘three’ and *so-ya* ‘eight’ (< ‘5 + 3’), as opposed to the innovative form /wa/, /ŋa/ in MOB *ŋā-ŋ*, BG *n’gan* [ŋa] ‘three’, MOB *sówà*, BG *sowoua* [sɔ-wa] ‘eight’.
- 11 Second, BK added the final -N in the numerals *sī* [sie-ŋ] ‘quatre’ and *sõ* [sɔ-ŋ] ‘cinq’, like in MOB (*síéŋ*, *sóŋ*), cf. *syé* [sie], *so* [sɔ] in a closely related language Gbin (Delafosse 1904: 149). The -N, however, has not expanded to the numerals *pla* ‘deux’ and *ya* ‘trois’, cf. MOB *plā-ŋ* ‘two’, *ŋā-ŋ* ‘three’.

### 3.2.2. Tauxier: Beng of Groumania neighbourhood

- 12 Tauxier performed a far more profound study of Beng than Delafosse did, publishing a list of around 800 words and phrases. I will now highlight some features of BG that distinguish it from other dialects.
- 13 Minimal phonetic differences can be established between BG and MOB. First, the syncope of a vowel before /l/ had hardly ever happened in BG; etymological CVLV feet are consistently transcribed with two vowels. Examples include BG *pala* ‘deux’, cf. BK *pla*, MOB *plāŋ*; BG *iri* ‘arbre’, cf. MOB *yri*; BG *sara* ‘tabac à priser’, cf. MOB *sra* ‘poudre de tabac’, BG *zini* [zili] ‘maïs’, cf. MOB *zriŋ*; BG *diawafila* ‘oignon’, cf. MOB *jàflá*; BG *balanda* [balana] ‘banane’, cf. MOB *bláná*; NG *poro-iri* ‘baobab’, cf. MOB *plǒ yri*; BG *méné* ‘poulet’, cf. MOB *mlě*; BG *kélenzô* ‘buffle’, cf. MOB *kléŋ zô* ‘boeuf de la brousse’; BG *béré* ‘biche-cochon’, cf. MOB *blé* ‘duiker’, and many more.
- 14 Final nasal sonant /N/ tended to reduce phonetically in BG, often escaping from fixation, cf. the varying transcription of *lɛŋ* ‘enfant’ in BG *n’zô-lè* ‘veau’, *banngo-lè* ‘cheval, poulain’, *babalé* // *babaleggn* ‘mouton, agneau’, *ouolé* // *ouoleiggn* ‘doigt’, *ninn*, *né* ‘enfant’ (MOB *ŋ léŋ* [néŋ] ‘mon enfant’), or variation in BG *dowoué*, *dowouéggn* ‘gombo’. This variation may or may not reflect real dialectal differences.
- 15 Vowels before the final /N/ tended to change in 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* ‘rônier’, *n’zaombéi* ‘fruit du rônier’ (MOB *zàŋ bēŋ*), *ouolé*, *ouoleiggn* ‘doigt’ (MOB *wōléŋ*); BG *bahoum* ‘épaule’ (MOB *bàŋ*); BG *bēiggn* ‘menton’ (MOB *gbèŋ*); BG *youm* ‘visage’ (MOB *yōŋ*); BG *liggn*, *li* ‘femme’ (MOB *lēŋ*); *n’zoulé* ‘grande soeur’ (MOB *zúlēŋ*); BG *péggn* // *pain* ‘mortier’ (MOB *péŋ*), BG *sarapoum* ‘tabatière’, cf. MOB *sra kpōŋ* ‘calebasse à tabac’, BG *pèlou* ‘voler (dans l’air)’ (MOB *pèlōŋ*). Not all of Tauxier’s transcriptions show the diphthongization/heightening of the

vowel, so it was likely not regular, cf. the absence of diphthongization in BG *lignn'gala* 'pagne de femme', MOB *lēj glāj*; BG *galanké* 'tisser', MOB *glāj ć* (?) 'créer le pagne'; BG *zini* 'maïs', cf. MOB *zrij*; BG *irikôm* 'écorce', MOB *yri kój*; BG *irinni* 'racine', MOB *yri nīj*; BG *béhian* 'chèvre', MOB *béyàj*; BG *béha-sia* 'bouc', MOB *béyàj síá*; BG *sômm* [soj] 'animal sauvage', MOB *sōj*; etc.

- 16 One consonantal phenomenon present in BG could have been prenasalization of [z] after a pause, compare BG *n'zaon*, *n'zamm* 'rônier' (MOB *zàj*), *n'zoulé* 'grande soeur' (MOB *zúlēj*), BG *n'zié* 'funérailles' (MOB *zīē*), although Tauxier's transcriptions don't show it consistently, cf. BG *zonzon* 'moustique', MOB *zǒzǒ*, *zoumounou* 'magnan', MOB *zūmlūj*, BG *zazalé* 'disputer (se)', MOB *zázá*.
- 17 Few morphological characteristics differentiate the Beng dialect described by Tauxier from MOB. We note in particular that personal pronouns are in some respects more archaic in BG than in MOB. BG maintained at least traces of inclusivity distinction in 1<sup>st</sup> person plural<sup>3</sup>, as testified by alternate BG translations *kasisi* and *asisi* for the French 'nous' (cf. Mwan 1<sup>st</sup> person plural inclusive pronoun *kǒǒ*, exclusive *ó*; the final element *sisi* can be tentatively related to MOB *sēsē* 'all'). The 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural pronoun, which features an innovative initial nasal in MOB (see 9.1 on the spread of plural *ŋ* in Beng), in BG preserves the original /w/<sup>4</sup>, compare BG *Ouomisipo?* 'Comment t'appelles-tu?' and BG *ouonion go parana* 'leur chien' with their MOB counterparts:

(1a)	BG	<i>Ouo</i>	<i>mi</i>	<i>si</i>	<i>po?</i>
	MOB	<i>ŋò</i>	<i>mī</i>	<i>sì</i>	<i>pǒ?</i>
		3PL: Hab+	2SG	call: L	what
'What is your name?' (literally 'What do they call you?')					

(1b)	BG	<i>Ouo</i>	<i>nion go</i> [ <i>ŋaŋo &lt; ŋaŋ + wo</i> ]		<i>parana</i>
	MOB	<i>ŋò</i>	<i>ŋāŋ</i>	<i>ŋò<sup>5</sup></i>	<i>kpláj-ná</i>
		3PL	EMPH	3PL	flea-ATR
'their dog' (literally 'their possessor of fleas').					

- 18 BG is also relatively conservative in introducing the numeral formative -N only in *sôn* [soj] 'five'; see discussion of BK and examples in 3.2.1.
- 19 One morphological innovation of BG is the plural marker. The original marker *nū* (MOB *nū*, see 9.1 for the discussion of number marking in MOB) is only preserved after the final /N/; after a vowel a novel plural marker *ŋe* is used:

Table 1.2. Plural forms of nouns in Beng of Groumania neighborhood

BG	MOB	French	BG plural form
<b>Stems ending in a vowel</b>			

<i>pilana</i>	<i>kpláj nǎ</i>	chien	<i>pilanangué</i> = /pilana + ŋe/
<i>soro</i>	<i>sóó</i>	musulman	<i>soronngué</i> = /sɔɔ + ŋe/
<i>méné</i>	<i>mlē</i>	serpent	<i>ménenngué</i> = /mɛ̃ɛ + ŋe/
<i>méné</i>	<i>mlǎ</i>	poulet	<i>ménenngué</i> = /mɛ̃ɛ + ŋe/
<i>iri</i>	<i>yri</i>	arbre	<i>irigué</i> = /yili + ŋe/
<i>Agni</i>		Agni	<i>Agnigné</i> = /aŋɪ + ŋe/
<i>Baoulé</i>		Baoulé	<i>Baoulenngué, baoulégné</i> = /baule + ŋe/
<i>Soron</i>	<i>sóó</i>	Dyoula	<i>Sorongué</i> = /sɔɔ + ŋe/
<b>Stems ending in -N</b>			
<i>n'zi</i>	<i>zǐŋ</i>	poisson	<i>n'zinoungué</i> = / <sup>n</sup> zɪŋ + nɥ + ŋe/
<i>G'Beïgnn</i>	<i>bēŋ</i>	Gan	<i>G'Beïgnnou // gbénou</i> = /bɛŋ + nɥ/

- 20 To summarize, this section establishes several features that characterize the Beng dialects documented in the earliest literature in comparison to the well-studied Modern Ouassadoungou Beng. The dialect of Kamélinso has an archaic form of numeral 'three', 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 us to establish some innovations unique to BG, both phonological and grammatical. MOB in turn shows more structural innovations than BG, corresponding to its central geographical position.

## NOTES

1. This is intended as a purely geographical label (Ouassadoungou is the center of the area) distinguishing this variety of Beng from the dialects of Djonkro, Kamalesso, and Lendoukro.
2. [f] in this numeral is the result of lenition of intervocalic /p/; unfortunately there are no other examples that would support such a phonological process in BG, except for the similar but non-identical development in *bouala* 'twenty', cf. MOB *būwlā* 'twenty' (< *bū* 'ten' + *\*plā* 'two').
3. MOB, unlike most South Mande languages, uses a uniform 1<sup>st</sup> person plural pronoun *ɔŋ* regardless of clusivity. Besides Beng, clusivity distinction has also been lost in Gban (Vydrin 2006) and in the newly recognized South Mande language Goo (Vydrine 2013).
4. Compare 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural pronouns in three related languages: Mwan *wóó*, Gouro *wò*, Gban *ó* (with loss of /w/); Vydrin (2006) reconstructs 3PL stem *\*wo* for Proto-South Mande.

5. In MOB like in GB the second (non-subject) pronoun accompanies the noun phrase expressed by the 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural emphatic pronoun.

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