

**The Dynamics of Bilingual Adult Literacy in Africa:  
A Case Study of Kom, Cameroon**

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis investigates, describes and analyses adult literacy in local languages in Africa, with a focus on Kom, a rural community situated in the North West province of Cameroon.

The thesis presents the motivations, relevance, importance and aims of the research; then gives an overview of the national and local backgrounds, namely Cameroon and Kom. A detailed description is given of the multilingual landscape and language use in formal education, the development of writing systems for Cameroonian languages, the official literacy activities at the national level, and the Kom language and community. The thesis discusses the philosophical and conceptual frameworks of the research, namely the naturalistic and critical approaches adopted, and the ethnographic approach used in data collection and the theoretical analysis. It also describes key literacy institutions in Cameroon, such as NACALCO and SIL.

Four primary domains are investigated as they pertain to adult literacy: organisational issues, i.e. literacy implementation, didactic materials, literacy teaching, and social meanings and values mediated by literacy. The thesis explores the organisation and implementation of literacy in Kom, examining KLDC's operational life and activities, and the literacy classes and monitors. Local publications, such as pre-primers, primers, post-primers, arithmetic manuals, reading and writing books, various Christian publications, and some functional booklets on agriculture and health are discussed, examining their place and use in the Kom literacy programme. The thesis also examines the socio-cultural meanings and values of literacy in Kom.

The research shows that adult literacy mediates some community identities and values, through local agency and the institutional development of the KLDC. Adult literacy in Kom also mediates new social statuses, and grants new socio-cultural power to neo-literates. For Christian neo-literate church goers, adult literacy mediates spiritual development. Through the written use and promotion of the local language, adult literacy also increases the symbolic capital attached to local languages.

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS<sup>1</sup>

- ALCAM: *Atlas Linguistique du Cameroun* (i.e. Cameroonian Linguistic Atlas)  
AU: African Union  
BA: Bachelor of Arts (or *Licence*)  
BALA: Bafut Language Association  
BASAL: Basic Standardisation of All African Languages  
BOSCUDA: Bororo Social and Cultural Development Association  
BRO: Bamenda Regional Office  
CABTAL: Cameroon Association for Bible Translation and Literacy  
CAL: Centre for Applied Linguistics  
CBC: Cameroon Baptist Convention  
CBM: Cameroon Baptist Mission  
CIDA: Canadian International Development Agency  
CNBC: Cameroon National Baptist Church  
CNU: Cameroon National Union  
CPDM: Cameroon's People Democratic Movement  
CPE: Cameroonian Pidgin English, CamPidgin  
CREN: Centre for Rehabilitation and Education in Njinikom  
CS: Catholic School  
CSS: Community Secondary School  
CTC: Cameroon Training Centre  
EFA: Education For All  
GNRO: Greater North Regional Office  
GS: Government School  
HDR: Human Development Report  
HIPC: Highly Indebted Poor Countries  
ICT: Information and Communication Technology  
IIED: International Institute for Environment and Development  
IPA: International Phonetic Alphabet  
IT: Information Technology  
KBDU: Kom Bum Development Union  
KLDC: Kom Language Development Committee  
km<sup>2</sup>: square kilometre  
L1, L2: First language, second language  
LC: Language Committee  
LWC: Language of wider communication  
MA: Master of Arts (or *Maîtrise*)  
MINEDUB: *Ministère de l'Éducation de base* (i.e. Ministry of Basic Education)  
MINEDUC: Ministry of Education  
MINJES: *Ministère de la Jeunesse et des Sports* (i.e. Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports)  
MINJEUN: *Ministère de la Jeunesse* (i.e. Ministry of Youth Affairs)

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<sup>1</sup> French text is italicised.

MINRESI: *Ministère de la Recherche Scientifique et de l'Innovation* (i.e. Ministry of Scientific Research and Innovation)

MINUH: *Ministère de l'Urbanisme et de l'Habitat* (i.e. Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs)

MT: Mother tongue

MT1, MT2: first mother tongue, second mother tongue

MP: Member of Parliament

NACALCO: National Association of Cameroonian Language Committees

NGO: Non-governmental organisation

NLC: National Literacy Campaign, National Literacy Committee

NLO: Nso' Language Organisation

NLP: National Literacy Programme

NLS: New Literacy Studies

OL: Official language

OL1, OL2: First official language, second official language

PRA: Participatory research and action

PROPELCA: *Programme Opérationnel pour l'Enseignement des Langues au Cameroun* (i.e. Operational programme for the teaching of languages in Cameroon)

REFLECT: Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowerment of Community Techniques

RGPH: *Recensement Général de la Population et de l'Habitat* (i.e. General Population and Housing Census)

SAP: Structural Adjustment Plan

SIL: SIL-International, Summer Institute of Linguistics

SIL-Cameroon: SIL-International/Summer Institute of Linguistics, Cameroon branch.

STA: Supplementary teaching aids

UIS: UNESCO Institute of Statistics

UN: United Nations

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

UNESCO: United Nations' Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

UNICEF: United Nations' Children's (Emergency) Fund

UNLD: United Nations Literacy Decade

UPC: *Union des Populations Camerounaises* (i.e. Union of the Peoples of Cameroon)



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<sup>2</sup> In this thesis, I use pictures I took during my fieldwork in 2006.

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# **Chapter 1: Motivations, Relevance, Importance and Aims**

## **1.1. INTRODUCTION**

The title of this thesis is: *The Dynamics of Bilingual Adult Literacy in Africa: A Case Study of Kom, Cameroon*. This research investigates, describes and analyses adult literacy in local languages in Africa, with a focus on Kom, a rural community situated in the North West province of Cameroon. Cameroon and Kom provide the national and local geographical and socio-political backgrounds of this research.

This chapter introduces the research done in the thesis, using a life history approach, which is also referred to as the biographical method. According to Bryman (2004:540), this is an approach which ‘emphasizes the inner experience of individuals and its connections with changing events and phases throughout the life course’. Such an approach begins with the biography of an individual and expands into a broader discourse connecting the said individual to the larger community and a wider realm of social phenomena. The adequacy of a life history approach is founded on the fact that

‘... it has certain clear strengths from the point of view of the qualitative researcher: its unambiguous emphasis on the point of view of the life in question and a clear commitment to the processual aspects of social life, showing how events unfold and interrelate in people’s lives.’ Bryman (2004:322).

But to maintain focus and clarity, this chapter will only present those remembrances which are directly related to this research, such as memories of my childhood school years. This narrative will represent the clash of linguistic entities and identities that are interwoven with communication practices and the use of languages in education in Cameroon.

One of the reasons why I will discuss my own school experiences in Cameroon is the fact that any student or researcher is a product of a school system, and as such, encompasses a sum of taught values and knowledge systems. Researchers construct their identity and vision of the world from those chosen possibilities available in their social and cultural systems (Bourdieu, 1991). School systems are products of social and cultural systems, whether through

the choice of main actors constituting the society in question, or through the imposition of external powers. As social institutions, schools are producers of social values and norms (Gitlin, et al., 2002). As Gitlin, et al., write:

“... schools help produce a set of attitudes or dispositions, forms of legitimate or high status knowledge, as well as skills which help to structure societal relations. (...) At the same time, schools reflect the type of structured relations found in society, such as those associated with class, race and gender” (Gitlin, et al., 2002:191-210).

The brief life story that follows in the next paragraphs, although personal to me, replicates itself in the stories of many people living in sub-Saharan countries. The main aim of presenting it here is to contextualise and put in focus the situation of language use in educational endeavours at the level of African rural communities. Throughout this thesis, various themes connected to local languages and African rural communities will form the socio-cultural tapestry from which this work is created. Woven into this background are various themes of local agency, education, and cultural preservation.

The second part of the chapter will discuss the motivations, relevance, importance and aims of this research. At the end of this chapter, I will give a brief summary of each of the following chapters of the thesis.

### **1.1.1. From ‘patois interdit’ to bilingual letters**

The idea that colonial times and their questionable mores are long gone is challenged by the experiences of people born after the colonial era. Some of the ghosts these people encounter every day from those days gone by are reminders of the hold the past has on today’s realities. At first this may look like an unavoidable and natural flow of the past into the present towards the building of the future. But the children of my generation who started their formal education in the 1970s are still flabbergasted by some of the contradictions regarding colonisation and national independences that they had to face within the school context.

Like most children, I was born in a socio-cultural environment in which language is a key marker of life interaction. It is shared as a common cultural commodity, possibly the freest of all commodities in general, at least in its primal oral form, since children normally

interact with their parents and family in the language acquired at birth. When a child interacts with familiar people in a given language, his expectation is for the continuity of language use in everyday life. Therefore, it was a shock for me to experience during my first day at school, more than thirty years ago, a blunt severing from the very language into which I was born. And, as I state in the more detailed childhood story in Appendix 1, the shock was bigger because this happened in the local school; a place that at first was still a quasi-familial setting. For I expected naively that the school was there to develop the language skills acquired earlier in my childhood.

On my first day of Catholic primary school in Nkouo – a calm hamlet in Bandjoun, West Cameroon – my teacher, my ‘uncle’ as we all called him, and all the other teachers in the school, began using a language totally alien to us. The language, we later discovered, was French. How could our teacher ask us to speak back to him only in that language, when he knew we had no prior knowledge, let alone mastery of it? It took me time to grasp the complexities of the situation. At that time, I did not yet have any data on issues of language status. I had not understood enough about colonisation, nor had I registered fully the cultural and linguistic devastations brought by colonisation. The first thing that became clear to me was that the school teachers forbade the use of their own language within the school walls. The linguistic interactions in the school made it seem like a foreign island in the middle of the village.

To see people with whom I was previously speaking naturally turn suddenly to a foreign, unknown tongue to speak to me was quite a shock for a 5-year-old. Furthermore, these school teachers were themselves not masters of that foreign tongue. Once I had learned how to read French a bit, I could then read the warning spelled out on a poster hung up high in the classroom: *‘Il est formellement interdit de parler patois en classe’*. In other words, it was *formally and seriously* forbidden to speak the *vernacular* in class. And yet when the school day was finished, and our teacher – a man actually very nice outside school – would meet my grandmother, they would have their conversation as always in Ghomálá’,<sup>3</sup> the local language.

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<sup>3</sup> The apostrophe-like symbol at the end of Ghomálá’ is a glottal stop. In that language, and in most other Grassfields Bantu languages of Cameroon, this glottal stop is a consonant and one of the letters of the alphabet. I will discuss these orthographic issues in detail when I present the Kom language in Chapter 2.

The foreign language we were to use in school was as much a mystery to me as the reason behind forbidding the use of the ‘vernacular’. As I came to learn later, this was our colonial legacy. In fact, in using French we blindly perpetuated the language of colonisation, long after the national independence. The fact that the reasons for this choice were never discussed with us or approved by the ‘locals’, meant that we did not have a critical perception of this issue. We stood trapped by a colonial past that chained our mentalities and our own identities. Thus, I went from a Ghomálá’-speaking early childhood life to a French-speaking primary *school* life.

More than thirty years later, this situation that most people of my background and generation can commonly recall, is not actually just a story of my past: it is still the reality in most African countries south of the Sahara. One consequence of this dire linguistic policy is the isolation of the school from the community. It is like an alien island where mysterious things happen; yet parents seem to accept this without any challenge, sacrificing their children to this institution.

We lived with fears from the minute we went inside the school. The traumas of primary school days were related to the exclusion of the mother tongue and the severe beatings that ensued when the poor children we were – who actually had no other means of communication back then – dared to use the mother tongue in class. A great concern, and at the same time a sad fact is that, as of 2008, not much had changed in that domain in sub-Saharan Africa. Don Osborn, the moderator of the *Multilingual Literacy Group*<sup>4</sup> proposed for adoption within the recent International Year of Languages (2008) a ‘Moratorium on beating kids for speaking mother tongue’. *Multilingual Literacy Group* is an independent online discussion group established after the launch of the United Nations *Literacy Decade* (UNLD) in 2003. The goal of the group as stated on its webpage<sup>5</sup> is

‘... to serve as a forum for discussion and exchange of information about literacy theory, practice, and policy in multilingual contexts worldwide during the Decade, and to facilitate consideration of [multilingual literacy] questions...’

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<sup>4</sup> Many well known academics and literacy practitioners and researchers are either members or contributors to this group. To name just a few: Mahendra Kumar Mishra, Dave Pearson, Maggie Canvin, Barbara Trudell, Tope Omoniyi, Madhukar Gogate, Marie-Luce Bourguet, Andy Carvin, Andrew Cunningham, Sangeeta Bagga-Gupta, Aryel Erden, Sonya Keyser, Chryssafi Mylopoulos, Elsa Auerbach, Irma Lachmund, and Helen Borland.

<sup>5</sup> [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Multilingual\\_Literacy/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Multilingual_Literacy/) Accessed March 30, 2004.

As Osborn writes,<sup>6</sup> the proposal he was putting forward was that

‘... during this Year [2008], there be an absolute prohibition on beating, shaming or otherwise punishing children for speaking their mother tongue at home or at school.’

It should be noted that Osborn’s proposal was a reaction to the information he received regarding the practice of beating children in learning environments within some African contexts. As Osborn aptly writes,

‘...Punishing children for speaking their mother tongue is not new - one can read a lot about this of this sort of thing in biographical accounts (formal and informal) from all over the world, and that is just the tip of the iceberg. *What is surprising is that it still continues even in extreme forms.*<sup>7</sup> For example, I just received an email from someone in Tanzania who mentioned teachers threatening young students with a beating if they spoke their maternal language. Not long ago there was mention in an article of some parents in Uganda beating their kids for speaking something other than English at home. (Those are just two examples from one region.) (...)

... the issue here is that if learning is the object in an obviously multilingual setting, there are better ways to achieve it than by condemning maternal languages as out of place and punishing students who use them in the process of learning.

This is not to say that language in a multilingual classroom or community is not a complex issue, but that negative approaches to children's first languages – which in some places go all the way to corporal punishment – are negative approaches to learning and to various social factors in a child's life’.

These points made by Osborn aptly describe some of the tribulations that I experienced in my school years in the 1970s. The gravity of this issue of corporal punishment is brought to light by Osborn’s closing question: ‘...*can this practice be stopped, at least for just this one year?*’ This seems to imply the quasi-impossibility of such a practice to stop once and for all in the mentioned regions such as Africa.

Despite the many obstacles I faced while attending the Francophone primary school, to my surprise and the joy of my parents, I did well at school. But there were no comparative statistics to remind our parents that we, the successful ones, were only a small minority, at times less than 15% of the children in the class. The class repetition rates and failures were abysmal, but that was due to faults in the school system. The successful ones served at first as

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<sup>6</sup> [M\_L] Digest Number 274, [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Multilingual\\_Literacy/message/488](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Multilingual_Literacy/message/488) Accessed 8 Jan. 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Emphasis mine.

a sign to show that pupils could succeed; yet paradoxically, the statistics became proof that only a few would actually make it. The unsaid belief was that success in school would only be achieved by a small group, and it became only *normal* that a mere few should pass. This reality continues today in primary schools all over sub-Saharan Africa.

### **1.1.2. From 'bilingual letters' to the study of African languages and adult literacy**

The Cameroonian secondary school system exposed me to not just French but also other European languages, namely German and Spanish taught as school subjects; but the system still left no place for the use of the African languages. After the negative conditioning we received from primary school concerning the use of local languages in schools, I did not particularly expect the possibility to use African languages in secondary education either. For the schools, the local languages were not to be used in formal education, while they remained a key part of community life.

I continued secondary school with success, and upon graduating from high school, went to university. At university, I enrolled on a selective programme called Bilingual Letters. The students with the highest marks in their *Baccalauréat*<sup>8</sup> in the subjects of French and English are the ones selected to enrol in the Bilingual Letters series. It is a special undergraduate programme running from Years 1 to 3 and leading to a BA in Bilingual Studies. Among the university's thousands of students, only a few dozen are selected for the Bilingual Letters. One reason for this is the conviction of the programme designers that those pupils who excel in foreign languages are the brightest ones. This conviction can actually be found in the larger academic establishment, and also in the whole education system. Evidence of this can be seen in the high coefficient and the overrated level of esteem attached to the foreign language subjects throughout the education system (as I explained earlier in 1.1.1.). Another factor strengthening such a belief is that most of the students who enrol in the Bilingual Letters series are the youngest by far in the university system, those who didn't repeat any classes throughout their primary and secondary school years and who were always among the

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<sup>8</sup> In the Cameroonian education system, the *Baccalauréat* is the Francophone equivalent of GCE Advanced Levels.



top pupils. Therefore, to show the importance of the BA programme in Bilingual Letters, the university developed a special exchange programme with some French and British universities. Successful Bilingual Letters students were sent to Europe for their final undergraduate year. The programme was designed so that those students coming from the Anglophone regions were sent to France, and those coming from the Francophone provinces<sup>9</sup> were sent to the United Kingdom.

The Bilingual Letters experience I went through at university demonstrates the central importance given to foreign languages in the higher education system in Cameroon. At the same time, it highlights the inconsistencies observable still today in the higher education system as concerns language policy. One such inconsistency is that the academic discourses on the promotion of local languages are used to create a positive vision of local cultures. Yet, such academic discourses are not founded on use of local languages in those very academic circles within which they are created. I will dwell further on this issue in subsequent chapters when discussing in detail the intellectualisation (Alexander, 2005) of African languages.

The undergraduate studies led my student batch into specialisation in French and English languages, literatures and cultures. Therefore, the university degrees we obtained were in Foreign Languages and Cultures, and we were trained to teach English and French languages and literatures, as they had been our main subjects of study. There were a variety of minors that were available to us, such as Translation and Interpretation, Spanish, German, or Economics. But of the 286 Cameroonian languages, none of them was included even as a minor subject for undergraduate studies.

My first university degree provided me with a springboard from which to start professional life. A BA was generally a pre-requisite for advanced professional training for high positions in public administration and the civil service. Most Bilingual Letters graduates could be hired directly into top posts. They could be high school teachers of Foreign Languages, with secure careers as high ranking civil servants in the ministries of national education and vocational training. But the most prestigious domain, and one reserved for

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<sup>9</sup> The distinction is actually between those who graduated from the Francophone school-system and those coming from the Anglophone system, irrespective of the actual ethno-linguistic roots of the pupils. So some Francophones by geographic background but who went through the Anglophone secondary school system – as a choice of their parents or because they lived in an Anglophone area – would end up in the Anglophone side of the Bilingual Letters, and vice versa for some Anglophones.

Bilingual graduates, was Translation and Interpretation, i.e. the prospect to be hired as translators, interpreters and cultural attachés in Cameroonian Consulates and Embassies around the world. By virtue of the overrating of their bilingual capacities in both French and English, the graduates of my calibre were deemed the most qualified to represent the country and to speak appropriately for the country's official linguistic identity anywhere in the world where they could be posted. This was related to the official bilingualism of Cameroon. At that time, I was already having trouble piecing together contradictory perceptions and definitions of bilingualism in the Cameroonian context. I will discuss in depth bilingualism both as a concept and a linguistic reality in Cameroon in Chapters 2 and 3, in relation to the local linguistic landscape and issues of conceptual terminology.

Another post-BA route was to further one's studies through the Masters and PhD. For many reasons, only a few graduates would choose that route: some thought there were already great prospects with a BA, while others didn't have appropriate grades to continue. To the dismay of my family and many close friends, I took an unexpected path after my BA: I chose to do my Masters in Applied Linguistics with a focus on African languages. My practical understanding of Linguistics was its application to local languages. Even though the academic context was not favourable to local languages, I was surprised when no other student in all my graduating class of more than one hundred chose that path. Looking back, more than fifteen years later, I'm still surprised. Consequently, my postgraduate years were marked by solitude and a permanent struggle to explain my choice to others. This is because it was not at all expected that a graduate, among the first in his class, would abandon everything to specialise in African languages.

As I continued with my postgraduate studies, many other practical obstacles stood in my path. Within the university environment, there was no proper academic programme where students could acquire literacy in the local languages in any systematic way. The only chances for learning local languages were personal contacts and very informal exchanges with those who knew how to read and write the local languages. In the capital city, there were occasionally summer classes run by cultural NGOs or churches, but these were outside of the university perimeter and had no formal link with the academic arena.

At the same time that there was some growing disaffection about literacy in local languages which was observable in the capital Yaounde, in the rural areas the synergy on those issues ran a bit contrary: in such communities, people were striving to put together literacy classes. For some rural communities, the literacy component of their non-formal educational activities was a part of Bible translation programmes. As will be discussed in more depth in Chapters 2, 3 and 5, those communities with some adult literacy programmes were still a minority of the 286 linguistic communities spread all over the territory. Yet, their efforts and perseverance were laudable in relation to local language literacy.

As an M.A. student in Yaounde, I resorted to an autodidactic strategy to acquire literacy in a local language, starting with my own mother tongue, Ghomálá'. This autodidactic learning as it happened with me is similar to the process of auto-alphabetisation, promoted by some applied linguistics course leaders within the Department of African Languages and Linguistics, University of Yaounde, in the early 1990s. It was initially an undergraduate teaching module whose main pedagogic focus was to call on students to individually learn to read and write their mother tongue. The class seminars were used to evaluate individual progress, and to guide and help students in their literacy 'self-learning'. I never had the chance to attend any *auto-alphabetisation* modules as a student, since I came into the Department already as a postgraduate. Yet, in terms of local language learning, what I did to prepare for my MA was similar to auto-alphabetisation activities, which I did on my own, without much academic help.

But in my case, to talk of 'learning a local language' is a misnomer, since my focus was to be able to read and write a language I already understood and spoke fluently. As I said earlier, I started with my mother tongue, Ghomálá', a Grassfields Bantu language of my native West province. I was faced with serious obstacles in my learning and yet I didn't have much guidance and orientation. Without having anybody knowledgeable in Ghomálá' literacy to help me in times of need, it was a painstakingly slow task for me. Some key didactic aids to which I resorted, and which were crucial in acquiring literacy in my mother tongue at that time, were the few pedagogic booklets published over the years to help in the learning of the local language. For the case of my language of interest, Ghomálá', some of these booklets dated back to the 1950s and 1960s. Due to the fact that they were published before the late

1970s, those booklets had the unavoidable problem of having used earlier forms of alphabets and writing systems. As concerns the development of writing systems for Cameroonian languages, much had changed over time, especially starting in the late 1970s, as I will discuss in detail in Chapter 2. But despite their old publication dates, the existing Ghomálá' literature did help me a great deal.

After months of self learning/teaching, I was capable of reading and writing my mother tongue, and my literacy proficiency kept on improving with time. This gave me a more solid basis to do my MA, which focused on the teaching of local languages in the PROPELCA Programme, with a focus on the pedagogic content and class use of the post-primer. PROPELCA was then an experimental bilingual programme using local languages as the media of instruction for the early years of primary school. Because of its influence and impact on adult literacy programmes in Cameroon in general and in Kom in particular – the specific topic of this doctoral research – I will discuss the PROPELCA programme in some detail in the next chapter.

When doing my MA research on teaching local languages to children in formal schools, I couldn't avoid thinking about my own primary education. I could see how using the local languages could help pupils to succeed in school by starting their education in a language that they already know natively rather than in a foreign language. I therefore developed an interest in adult literacy because I was also concerned with how adults in the rural communities could learn to read and write the local languages.

Another element which directed my interest to adult literacy was the influence of the PROPELCA heritage on adult literacy efforts. Some elements of this heritage range from the training of monitors to the production and use of pre-primers, primers, post primers and other didactic literature. Each of the following chapters of this thesis will develop some detailed aspects of this PROPELCA heritage in adult literacy in Cameroon. My MA work on the pedagogy of local languages in schools paved the way to my interest in, and subsequent work on, local language adult literacy.

## 1.2. MOTIVATIONS

The motivation for conducting this research is rooted in my experience of going from a primary and secondary education that excluded African languages to my tertiary education<sup>10</sup> where I developed a strong interest in bilingual adult literacy integrating local languages. As discussed earlier, towards the end of my undergraduate studies, I abandoned my French and English educational assets to go back on an individual journey to African languages. This choice opened my eyes to a number of critical linguistic issues that related to some real-life problems in the Cameroonian society. By virtue of my becoming a post-graduate student interested in, and working with, African languages, these issues became my centre of preoccupation. On a daily basis, questions became lodged in my mind about the connection between, on the one hand, the linguistic realities of the communities in the country and, on the other hand, the media, communication and education systems. Although I had no final solutions at hand, I was more aware and concerned than ever with these issues.

From my observations, a number of socio-educational issues that defied the normal expectations, and were contrary to what is observed or read about in many countries in Europe or Asia, were visible in Cameroon. One observation was that there is an intrinsic connection between three major components coming into play in the transmission of knowledge through generations: the family, the languages used in society and the educational systems. The education system, which is the main tool for intergenerational transmission of knowledge, know-how and socio-cultural values and attitudes, should be based on the languages spoken natively by the clients of this very education system. This means the educational system is rooted in the local values and knowledge systems. Not only is this the basis of any socially relevant and community-rooted education system, but it is the pre-requisite for full community participation. As the family is the most basic institution of a community, the family should play a pro-active role in the education system, i.e. formal schooling or adult literacy.

Cameroonian politicians and official lawmakers are quite aware of these issues. In this regard, the *Law of Orientation of the Education System in Cameroon*, promulgated formally in 1998

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<sup>10</sup> One could say that even tertiary education in Cameroon excludes the local languages, in the sense of not using them as media of instruction. But in my case, I became really exposed to written Cameroonian languages, and I developed a scientific interest in them, only at the university level. Thus, in some sense, it is tertiary education which gave me the opportunity to embark on African applied linguistics and on work on local language literacy.

to guide the implementation of the new national education system, urges the family to play an active role in the education of young people. This participation of the family is not perceived as secondary or negotiable, but as necessary for the success of the new education system promoted by the above *Law*.

But over the years following the promulgation of the *Law of Orientation of the Education System in Cameroon*, I observed the incapacity of families in rural areas to contribute to the formal education system. The complementary dynamics between the family and the socio-educational system should be on-going, as the learners necessarily interact permanently in-between family and society. These dynamics in the case of postcolonial Cameroon should not be disrupted as the result of education and public communication systems functioning without due consideration of local languages.

Looking at the *Law of Orientation of the education system in Cameroon*, there is a stated desire on the part of public authorities to involve families in order to improve the education system. But in practice, families, especially in rural areas, are cut off because the education system and the public communication system do not take into account their linguistic identities and intellectual capabilities. In other words, there is a discrepancy between the expectations on both sides and the operating mode of the education system regarding how families can effectively contribute to it. This situation leads to a rampant marginalisation of the rural world (Yetna, 1999).<sup>11</sup> Yetna (1999) demonstrates that the socio-cultural dynamics and the setting of social values and trends are much capitalised upon in the hands of public institutions and government bodies. They represent the institutional inheritors of the colonial administration, but most importantly they are the architects of the new nation. In this process, the creation and validation of public discourse is rooted in the public media, i.e. the press, radio and television. In this social communication enterprise, the establishment of the values attached to languages in Cameroonian society is mainly based on their use in those various spheres of the public media. Yetna (1999) analyses quantitatively and qualitatively the public discourses in the press, the languages used on radio stations, and on television. He observes that the major problem lies in the fact that the marginalisation of the rural world in

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<sup>11</sup> Though the title of the book is *Langues, média, communautés rurales au Cameroun* – translating in English as ‘Languages, media, rural communities in Cameroon’, the book’s sub-title is clearly telling of Yetna’s position and solid analysis: *Essai sur la marginalisation du monde rural*, as the sub-title translates ‘A Treatise on the Marginalisation of the Rural World’.

Cameroon is marked mainly though the exclusion of local languages, though they are the natural and intrinsic identity markers and communication tools of the rural communities. The exclusion of local languages automatically leads to the *de facto* marginalisation of the various villages and communities spread all over the rural areas of the country. Such a situation can only undermine the efficiency of the education system, be it the formal education system or the non formal sector of adult literacy, in a country which is still largely rural (as will be further discussed in Chapters 2 and 5).

The marginalisation of the rural world created by this exclusion of local languages from the education system and the public media leads to another unfortunate situation: the devaluation and subsequent lack of recognition of some key rural synergies. This devaluation functions in regard to the written media and communication. As most of such media and communication are mediated by tools such as books and the press, the adults in the villages are incapable of having access to these discourses. Consequently, when looking at the social distribution of responsibilities, various organised groups in villages are called upon to take control of their regional or local development. These rural groups are deemed capable of doing so when it comes to building, maintaining and running local churches; or developing local agriculture, commerce and economy, for example. But when it comes to issues of political power sharing, and decision making on allocations of public resources, the very people for whom the discourses and literature about such issues are created end up being excluded, because those discourses are produced in the official and foreign languages. Yet, most villagers can't read and write the official languages. Therefore, the illiterate status of most adults in rural areas stands as the cause of their exclusion from current public discourse and decisions made about them. This exclusion, which leads to the silencing of the voice of the rural communities, is in contradiction with the responsibility and empowerment put into the communities for their economic self-reliance and generation of local revenues, as said earlier. But, in terms of the political involvement and decision-making in the affairs of the public and national institutions, two major institutions of communication and information, and consequently of informed decision making, are still the education system and the public media. And within those two areas, the exclusion of local languages appears to be an expression of the wilful desire of political leaders to prevent the emergence of a critical mass of educated people from the rural areas (where the majority of the population lives) capable of

challenging the unfair political status quo, and of bringing about a change in the political institutions inherited from colonial times.

It is an unfortunate contradiction that the educated elite and administrative staff in public institutions are themselves the product of the school system that is in fact supported by rural uneducated adults. To a large extent, one is faced with a pattern where the school system, though economically supported and culturally endorsed by rural communities, is used by the powers that be to reject and educationally 'orphanise' these communities. As earlier discussed, at the heart of this process is the exclusion of the local languages.

This unfortunate situation motivated me to look closely at the complex processes involving local linguistic issues in order to describe them, and to provide some alternatives, such as the promotion of adult literacy in local languages (which is the focus of this thesis). In this endeavour, I have discovered that there is not only much to say in order to shed light on these linguistic and educational issues, but there is also a lot to do in terms of local development of literacy programmes, classes and trained facilitators. I will now turn in the next section to the relevance and aims of my current research.

### **1.3. RELEVANCE AND AIMS**

Sperber and Wilson (1986) have written about relevance, conceiving it as a model of explanation of human cognitive and linguistic behaviour. Here I will extend their conception of relevance to the domain of academic discourse. According to Sperber and Wilson (1986), in order to establish relevance, one has to look at the dynamic connections between sets of actions and/or phenomena in given contexts. Thus, in essence, relevance is context-bound and situation-driven. Sperber and Wilson (1986:118-171) posit that some of the conditions and the operating modes of relevance in a given context are that the action or work in question should be able to have 'some contextual effect in that context'. These authors also state that one of the pre-requisites of any contextual effect is a necessity to 'connect up' or relate to the chosen context. The contextual effect itself can be envisioned at best only in degrees or along a certain continuum, but must exist clearly in terms of some sort of impact or influence.



For Hammersley (1990), relevance is one of the key criteria to make any assessment of social research and to establish social research in terms of some qualitative value. Hammersley (1990:107-108) posits that, especially in ethnographic studies, two aspects of relevance are the importance of the topic and its contribution to knowledge. As concerns the importance, the research must relate, to a certain extent, to an issue of public importance or interest. As concerns contribution, the research must contribute something to the general or specific knowledge of the domain in question. In a nutshell, "... importance and contribution are necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for relevance ...", according to Hammersley (1990:107).

Building on Sperber and Wilson's and Hammersley's approaches to the concept of relevance, I will discuss here the relevance of this work by first connecting it more closely to the context from which it emanates, namely sub-Saharan Africa in general, and Cameroon in particular. Then, I will attempt to show in more detail its importance and some of its intended impact on the situation prevailing in these contexts.

This research is about educational issues and linguistic policies, and as such, it doubly connects to Cameroonian society: in terms of its author and also the phenomena investigated. Therefore, this research can be related to the necessity of '*social relevance*' of linguistic research as advocated by some scholars such as Ayo Bamgbose (2001). I believe that it is important, as Bamgbose aptly writes when discussing language-related research in Africa, to

"... consider the practical application of our work in terms of orthography, literacy, use of language in education, language development and language policy." (Bamgbose, 2001:115-116).

Cameroon is a country where there is no official policy or national programme integrating the local languages to educate adults who do not participate in the formal school system. However there are some grassroots efforts created by local communities to provide literacy skills to these underprivileged groups. Also, some non-official and non formal adult literacy programmes using local languages have been running for years in some Cameroonian villages. Still, most research on these programmes is quantitative, and focuses mainly on their statistical data, diachronic stories and reports of activities. The relationship between local language adult literacy programmes and the array of functions they mediate in rural areas is a rather complex and interesting one. Yet this complex relationship has not so far been studied

seriously. As will be shown in further detail when I present the literature review at the national level (in 4.5.3), studies done to date do not focus on what happens specifically with adults in those literacy programmes, especially as concerns how they acquire reading and writing skills, how they use them, their motivations to attend literacy classes, their perceptions of the literacy enterprise, and the values and meanings that literacy mediates for them. To my knowledge, no major scientific work exists that has focused on describing these various interrelated processes. Consequently, much research is still needed in this area, especially in terms of empirical data coupled with theoretical analyses.

There is thus a need to study in detail what happens in these adult literacy projects. It is this gap that the present research will attempt to fill by gathering empirical and operational data in order to define, describe and analyse the content and delivery of local language literacy programmes, using the Kom programme as a case study. Specific research questions guiding this investigation will be posed in Chapter 3, along with the theoretical framework and research methodology.

It is hoped that this research should help, among other end-results, to build better knowledge towards an operational sustainability of adult literacy programmes using local languages. Operational sustainability is understood here as the capacity of local adult education activities as a whole to continue on their own once the initial promoters – be they exogenous or endogenous – have either stopped directly supporting the programme or left it. These literacy activities should be planned and maintained on a permanent basis. Literacy sustainability should be based on locally motivated and well-trained human resources, an environment that is print-rich in local languages, and strong community commitment and involvement. This research will therefore contribute to descriptive studies of sociolinguistics and applied linguistics, especially the use of African languages for adult education in rural communities. Furthermore, this study will make a contribution to cross-linguistic theories of literacy and human development, with a focus on adults' acquisition of reading and writing skills and the application of acquired skills to improve their living conditions.

In their treatise on relevance, Sperber and Wilson (1986) also discuss that relevance assumes a goal-dependency. The objectives established for an assertion or for any communicational activity – in this case the doctoral thesis – can be a solid basis to determine its relevance. For this purpose, an intrinsic relationship should be established between the

goals and the said work. In this regard, it is worth mentioning other major areas where applications of this research will make significant contributions. As concerns local languages and cultures, this study will help create a better understanding of the use of local languages. In the area of literature production, it will contribute to an improvement in the production of mother tongue literacy manuals. As for the training of educational staff, it will lead to some improvement in the training of adult literacy monitors. In the area of education programme design and development, this research will help contribute to the improvement in the operational sustainability of local language education programmes. In the domain of local agency and community development, it will make a contribution towards community empowerment based on the awareness, response and capacity building of local communities (especially as concerns the importance of locally trained and motivated human resources). This research will also make a contribution to the promotion and creation of African grassroots literate communities through the synergy of endogenous local language literacy programmes.

#### **1.4. IMPORTANCE**

After the end of the Second World War in Europe, African nations and peoples began to struggle for self-determination. This led to a wave of national independences all throughout the 1950s and 1960s in many former European colonies. For those African countries that achieved their independence, a major challenge was social development and the building of viable and prosperous nations. The challenge continues today. One axis where many efforts were oriented in the 1960s was the implementation of macro-economic projects. Huge industrial plants, mega-infrastructures and large para-statal companies were put in place. The stated plan was to make them capable of serving at a nation-wide level, and therefore capable of bringing development to the rural grassroots. Some of these endeavours have yielded useful results in terms of social advancement, such as modern road networks and telecommunications, though this is more visible in urban areas. Other voices and analyses have declared rather that there is a general failure of such macro-economic projects as

concerns real community development in Africa (Atanga, 1987; Ki-Zerbo, 1990; Ela, 1982, 2001; Fonge, 1997; Hazoumê, 1999a; Yetna, 1999).

As a result of this failure (or at best, the questionable outputs) of most macro-economic development schemes in Africa, more interest is now turning to micro-level community development and local synergies of grassroots communities to improve their living conditions. One of the main challenges for Africa in general and Cameroon in particular in these development efforts is the implementation of endogenous development schemes. Adult education programmes are part of such locally rooted endeavours.

At the international level, the United Nations (UN) has expressed its commitment to promote adult education. Illiteracy is a major world issue, with UN statistics<sup>12</sup> claiming that 860 million adults in our world are still illiterate, i.e. incapable of reading and writing. Actually the idea to design and implement literacy activities to improve adult education preoccupied the African governments as early as the 1960s. In this trend, with the support of some inter-governmental organisations such as UNESCO, many countries launched mass literacy campaigns in the 1960s for their citizens who missed out on the opportunity of formal school education. But unfortunately, by the late 1970s, most of these campaigns throughout Africa, with some very few exceptions, were considered to have failed, since they had not achieved the expected results of reaching a significant number of adults in the rural regions. Cameroon was one of the main laboratories for this experiment in mass literacy, and in Chapter 2, I will examine in further detail the specific case of the Cameroonian experience.

The 1990s saw a boost at the international level for adult education through the Education For All (EFA) world programme, spearheaded by a number of international organisations such as UNESCO and UNICEF. The Jomtien EFA Conference in 1990 transformed the policies which had always sustained the education orientations of the United Nations into an operational world-level strategic planning that each participant country, mainly the Third World countries most affected by illiteracy, had to endorse and implement. To do this, significant datelines and expected results in terms of reduction of illiteracy in general were set. A mid-way evaluation of the EFA programme in 2002 clearly showed that in African countries, despite notable efforts, much still remained to be done. Even UNESCO, one

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<sup>12</sup> <http://portal.unesco.org/education/en.html> Accessed 7 November 2007.

of the leading UN institutions spearheading literacy efforts worldwide, is unequivocal on this failure of most literacy campaigns:

‘Literacy efforts have so far failed to reach the poorest and most marginalised groups of people’.<sup>13</sup>

It is not the aim of this thesis to present the exhaustive details of these failures, as they are complex, and they vary in each country and regional situation. But I will provide in-depth details about the case of Cameroon in Chapter 2.

At the international level, a new boost came recently when the UN adopted the *United Nations Literacy Decade: 2003 – 2012*. Information available on the UN webpage<sup>14</sup> about this world-wide UN Literacy Decade (UNLD) is quite telling regarding the breadth and depth of the issue:

‘On February 13, 2003, the United Nations launched the *Literacy Decade – Education for All*. Based under the theme of ‘Literacy as Freedom’, this is a world-level initiative to help close the widening education gap, especially in developing nations. The Secretary-General of the United Nations rightly considered the lack of basic education of the underprivileged as “a fundamental inequality in our globalizing world.” Most countries members of the UN have agreed to this *Decade* and will actively take part in its implementation, under the spearheading of UNESCO. The overall goal of the *Decade* is to increase literacy levels by 50% by 2015’.<sup>15</sup>

Rooting literacy in communities and making it a sustainable enterprise is one of the expected outcomes of the *Decade*, as spelt out in the following:

‘...the outcome of the Decade will be locally sustainable literate environments’.<sup>16</sup>

The plurality of literacy practices is also clearly spelt out, and most importantly the issue of the language of literacy:

‘Literacy is a plural concept, with diverse literacies shaped by their use in particular contexts. The Decade will work to promote literacies across the full range of purposes, contexts, languages, and modes of acquisition with communities of learners’.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> [http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=48712&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=48712&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html) Accessed 22 November 2007

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.un.org/av/photo/subjects/literacy.htm> Accessed 29 December 2007.

<sup>15</sup> op. cit.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.ifla.org/VII/s32/news/no5-03.pdf>. Accessed 24 April 2006.

<sup>17</sup> op. cit.

Many reasons were advanced for the earlier failures of adult literacy campaigns. Two of the most salient among them emerged as the financial constraints and the choice of languages (Richmond, 1983, 1986; Lele, 1987; Bhola, 1994; Bamgbose, 2000; Brock-Utne, 2000, 2001, 2002; Alexander, 2003, 2005; Trudell, 2005). As a matter of consequence, to ensure some success, such adult educational schemes should possess some practical content integrating local cultures and languages, as well as some useful and adequate skills for targeted adult beneficiaries. Actually, following the international commitment of the United Nations to promote adult literacy in general, most countries have improved their governmental policies regarding local languages. In recent decades, there has emerged an international trend in favour of the use of local languages in education. As will be shown in more detail in the following chapters, the vast majority of political decision-makers and education planners in Africa have also learned from recent scientific research and from the lessons of the unsuccessful mass literacy campaigns of the 1960s.

In the case of Cameroon in particular, as mentioned earlier in 1.2 (and as will be further discussed in Chapter 2), the exclusive use of the official languages in public communication and formal education means the exclusion of the local languages spoken by the vast majority of the target learners. This exclusion was pointed out as being among the major reasons for the failure of the National Literacy Campaign (NLC) of the 1960s-70s, as will be examined in more depth in Chapter 2. Throughout the 1980s, many efforts were made to revamp adult literacy in Cameroon, but this time the emphasis was put more and more on the endogenous grassroots communities and organisations and an integration of local cultures and synergies.

Recent literature in the domain of social research in Africa has emphasized that researchers and social scientists have an important role to play and should join hands more than ever before to help achieve the objective of a basic education for all (Ela, 1982, 2001; Robinson, 1995; Chatry-Komarek, 1997; Fonge, 1997; Hazoumê, 1999a, 1999b; Yetna, 1999; Bamgbose, 2000; Brock-Utne, 2000, 2001, 2002; Alexander, 2003, 2005; Trudell, 2005; Paran and Williams, 2007). As any form of education is conveyed through a linguistic medium, one group of these researchers that people turn to most is educationalists and linguists.

In fact, the issue of language of education remains central to the provision of education for illiterate adults. The non- or under-educated social groups will never be reached

if the project of basic education for all is put in practice while forgetting the languages of the target learners. As Brock-Utne (2001:120) aptly puts it,

“... the concept ‘education for all’ becomes a completely empty concept if the linguistic environment of the basic learners is not taken into account.”

It can be noted that in the last two decades the majority of politicians and educational planners in Africa have had to learn from evidence stemming from three trends: (1) recent scientific research on literacy in Africa (Robinson, 1995; Chatry-Komarek, 1997; Fonge, 1997; Yetna, 1999; Bamgbose, 2000; Brock-Utne, 2000, 2001, 2002; Alexander, 2003, 2005; Trudell, 2005; Paran and Williams, 2007), (2) the lessons from the mass literacy campaigns in the 1960s, and (3) the international trends in favour of the use of local languages in education. As a consequence, most of these politicians and educational planners agree in principle on the necessity to use local languages in literacy and basic education. Unfortunately, although there has been some significant progress in recent years in the promotion and use of local languages, most of these languages are still lagging behind in terms of their use in education. Consequently, most local languages are not yet sufficiently present in the efforts for local endogenous community development.

The major problem facing these languages and hindering their more efficient and generalised use in education, especially in adult literacy programmes, is the lack of sound academic research and scientific publications about their concrete use in the teaching context. Paran and Williams (2007) emphasise the importance of research into reading and literacy when they state that

‘... in developing countries, where it might have had most to contribute, fundamental research into reading is relatively rare’ Paran and Williams (2007:2).

There is therefore an urgent need for research focusing on what does take place in concrete on-going local language adult literacy programmes. Of interest are the various pedagogic aspects of the use of local languages and the issues raised by their use, how daily literacy skills are taught, the motivations of adults to take part in literacy classes, and the various identities and socio-cultural positionalities that literacy mediates for them. My present research falls within this preoccupation.

## 1.5. STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This first chapter has introduced the research undertaken for the thesis, using a life history approach. I have also presented the motivations, relevance, importance and aims of this research. In order to give a more complete overview of the overall structure and content of the thesis, I will now give an overview of the contents of the remaining chapters.

Chapter 2 will give more detail regarding the national and local backgrounds of this research, namely Cameroon and Kom. This overview will start with a presentation of the people, geography, history, urbanisation and administrative division of the country. Then there will be a sketch of the multilingual landscape and language use in formal education in which I discuss some statistics on the national educational background, the official language policy, and the PROPELCA programme (a reference MT-OL bilingual education programme). This chapter will also discuss the development of writing systems for Cameroonian languages, and will review the official literacy activities at the national level in recent history. Chapter 2 will also contain a more detailed presentation of the Kom language and community.

Chapter 3 will discuss the philosophical and conceptual frameworks sustaining this research. This chapter will spell out the research questions that give direction to the data collection and the possible results to be gleaned from these questions. Chapter 3 will also clarify the meaning and the domains of use of the specialised terminology and concepts that run through this thesis. A number of institutions, such as NACALCO and SIL, are active in various domains of local language literacy in Cameroon, both at local and national levels. The institutional development, history and functioning of these institutions will be described in this chapter.

Chapter 4 will present the methodological issues, as well as the theoretical framework and approaches. It will first discuss the main research affiliations within which this research intends to fit. It will also give an overview of the scientific domains that have guided and informed the investigational procedures and techniques of this work. Chapter 4 will also present the literature on the subject, looking at various researches that touch on similar areas, including literacy in general, the promotion and the pedagogy of African languages, adult education in Africa, and literacy in African rural contexts using African languages. This chapter will also situate this research in its context, and will discuss its outcomes and scope.



Chapter 5 will give a deeper view of the organisation and implementation of literacy as a social process and educational activity in Kom. It will present the major actors, the main socio-operational elements and the infrastructures in the delivery of literacy in Kom. The main points to be discussed will be the research enterprise as it unfolded through the fieldwork preparation, my arrival in Kom, the negotiation of socio-cultural integration, the organisation of the local research team, and the data collection. It will also touch on some organisational and operational challenges faced during my fieldwork in Kom, and the planning and design of the Kom literacy programme, its logistical aspects, and its timetabling. This chapter will also present more deeply KLDC's operational life and socio-cultural span as the institutional machinery behind adult education in Kom. Chapter 5 will also examine and discuss in detail two intrinsically connected dynamic realities of literacy: the physical spaces and specific settings where literacy takes place, namely the literacy classes; and the human resources at work on a regular basis to provide literacy skills to target groups, namely the literacy monitors.

Chapter 6 will focus on some crucial tools in the literacy enterprise, i.e. local publications in Kom, and didactic materials. It will examine the types of printed materials that are being used in the effort to help learners master reading and writing skills in Kom. This chapter will elaborate on the types of didactic materials available, and their place and use in the Kom literacy programme. It will also examine how KLDC engineers its own socio-cultural agenda, and will present and analyse the dynamics of Kom literature and publications. From a broader, more social perspective, the diffusion, distribution, and financial management of various Kom documents and books will be examined to gauge their sustainability both as cultural and educational products and as markers of a community-rooted and long-term educational enterprise.

Chapter 7 will address the questions relating to the socio-cultural meanings of literacy in Kom, and what literacy brings to its learners in that community. Therefore this chapter will examine these issues and their various facets: the values attached to literacy in Kom; what literacy mediates within the realm of local socio-cultural knowledge and value systems; what literacy is an instrument of; and the significant uses of literacy, from the perspective of the Kom adult learners.

Chapter 8 will conclude this thesis by presenting a brief overview of the research findings, and by elaborating on the arguments put forth in this thesis. The concluding chapter will also discuss the scientific contribution of this work and my scholarly position, closing the thesis with an indication of prospects for future research.

## **1.6. SUMMARY**

In this chapter I set out to introduce the key components of the research done in this thesis. As I am myself both a product of the socio-cultural context of this research, and an insider to the situations and phenomena under investigation, the narrative of my educational trajectory provided a context and background for the research. Starting with my childhood in the Western Grassfields mountains of Cameroon, to the university in the capital city Yaounde where I developed an interest in local language adult literacy, I have explored the problems I faced, and the hurdles I overcame along the road. I have expanded the discussion of my school experiences into a wider context to include issues of cultural identities, linguistic practices and choices in the villages and the school system in Cameroon. I have also touched on the post-colonial problems of language policy in nation-building in Africa. Finally, I have connected these issues to the motivations, importance, relevance and overall aims of this study. The specific content of each chapter has been presented at the end of this chapter to give a general overview of the thesis.

## **Chapter 2: Cameroon and Kom: the national background and the case study**

### **2.1. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter gives a more detailed overview of the national and local backgrounds of this research, namely Cameroon and Kom. It starts with an overview of the people, geography, history, urbanisation and the administrative division of the country. It then follows with a panoramic view of the multilingual landscape and language use in formal education, in which some statistics on the national educational background, and the official language policy and the PROPELCA programme (a reference MT-OL bilingual education programme) are discussed. Given the importance of writing systems for any literacy activities, the development of writing systems for Cameroonian languages is further presented and critiqued.

The Kom language and its literacy activities are part of the broader national picture of adult education in Cameroon. The adult literacy activities as done officially at the national level in recent history, i.e. from the post-Independence 60s onwards, are reviewed. The relationship between the national background and the local Kom background is not only one between a whole and a part, but it is also an operational one, in terms of how the literacy synergies at national and local levels interact with each other. The local literacy practices, are influenced by, and sometimes stem from, practices defined and conceived at the national level, mainly through the political orientations and administrative social organisation of Cameroon. The Kom literacy programme, even within its autonomous synergy as an ultimately endogenous agenda, is better perceived if discussed and incorporated within the national trend of Cameroonian communities as they have been merged first during the colonial administration, then during the post-Independence nation-building enterprise. But also, it should be noted that literacy research at the national level and its applications, as done by some private organisations such as NACALCO and SIL, are directly tapped into by local level literacy NGOs such as KLDC for their daily practices. There is a complementary relationship

between, on the one hand, the national level research and organisations and, on the other, the local literacy practices. In view of the importance of this relationship, further discussion and analysis are continued in detail in Chapters 3 and 5.

The final part of this chapter discusses in more detail the Kom language and community. Regarding the Kom community, I will briefly present its history, administrative situation, and geographic and climatic environments. For the language proper, some of its features such as its phonology and orthography, syllable structure and tonal systems are sketched.

## **2.2. A SOCIOLINGUISTIC PROFILE OF CAMEROON**

### **2.2.1. People and geography**

Cameroon is situated at the heart of Africa, in the Gulf of Guinea (also called Bight of Biafra) in Central Africa. The total area of the country is 475,445 km<sup>2</sup>. Its neighbouring countries are: to the west, Nigeria; to the east, Chad and Central African Republic; to the south, Gabon, Republic of Congo, and Equatorial Guinea. Considered by many as 'Africa in miniature', Cameroon is a country characterised by a high geographical, cultural, linguistic and human diversity. From its coastal Atlantic plain in the south-western parts, to the dense tropical rainforest region with high rainfall in the south-east, through the savannah grassfields and the vast western highlands formed by a large network of mountains and high plateaus in the west, to the dry semi-desertic Sahelian climates and landscapes found in the north, Cameroon stands as a sum of the main geographic characteristics of Africa.

Similarly, Cameroonian cultural and ethnic diversity is striking: there are more than two hundred ethno-linguistic groups that have co-existed relatively in peace, with permanent contact through trade and other alliances, for many centuries. As a result of the above-mentioned special natural features of Cameroon, the country has a unique diversity in which one finds various communities with century-old traditions and socio-economic activities: the fishermen inhabiting the coastal plains bordering the Atlantic ocean; the pygmies in the equatorial rainforest area of the south of the country; peasants in the western mountainous

regions and around other rivers that flow towards the coast from the Adamawa plateau and the Lake Chad area; cattle rearers, tradesmen and businessmen in most parts of the savannah regions and the north around the Sahelian belt; hunters in the forest in the eastern and south-eastern parts of the country. It should be added that growing urbanisation continues to bring together large groups of these various communities into cities with their typical urban ways of life.

### 2.2.2. History

In recent centuries, Cameroon, like most sub-Saharan African countries, underwent colonisation. The Portuguese, led by the explorer Fernando Po, were the first Europeans to reach the coast of the littoral region of what is today Cameroon in 1472. Sailing up the Wouri River, where they saw massive quantities of prawns, the explorers called it *Rio dos Camarões*, i.e. “river of prawns”. It is this appellation ‘*Camarões*’ which later gave the country its name. The Portuguese created large plantations around the Atlantic coastal area, and their main activity for two centuries was the Slave Trade. The Dutch took over from them in the 1600s, and continued the Slave Trade. The British Missionaries arrived in the 1700s, and settled a Christian colony in Victoria (today Limbe). Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the British explorers and settlers were very active, with Alfred Saker, an English missionary and naval engineer, creating schools and churches and pushing forth Christianisation in the coastal regions around Douala and Limbe. In 1884, the German explorer Gustav Nachtigal signed a treaty with the Chiefs of Douala, thus officially making Cameroon a German colony. After World War 1, and the subsequent loss by Germany of its African colonies, the French and the British partitioned Cameroon into two Anglophone and Francophone regions, and ruled the country until 1960. From there was inherited the present division of Cameroon into an Anglophone and a Francophone region. Francophone Cameroon is made up of eight out of the ten provinces, situated mostly in the North and the South of the country, and the two Anglophone provinces situated in the Grand West of the country (See Figure 2.1).

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, there was nationalist resistance to colonial power. But these resistances were all violently crushed by the German, then the British and

French colonial administrations. Cameroon officially gained its independence in 1960 as a federation of the two Anglophone and Francophone states. Yet there was still a strong armed nationalist resistance led by the UPC party, which wanted total freedom and the breaking of ties with colonial powers, namely France and Britain. The new Government took the early years of the 1960s to crush the nationalist rebellion.



The recent political history of Cameroon as an independent republic is marked by the reunification of the two Cameroons in 1972, a change of Head of State in 1982, a failed military coup in 1984, multipartyism in the early 90s, and Commonwealth membership in 1995, among other events. The current socio-political situation is characterised by social frustrations due to the economic crisis and growing poverty, lack of respect for human and civil rights by the public authorities, the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) imposed by the World Bank, democratic complaints, socio-political protestations, and regional disparities in power-sharing at national level.

### **2.2.3. Urbanisation, administrative division and traditional power systems**

#### **2.2.3.1. Administrative division**

In terms of official partition and administrative units, Cameroon is divided into ten provinces, within each of which there are divisions. These divisions are themselves divided into sub-divisions and districts. Each province is headed by a Governor, each division by a Divisional Officer, each subdivision by a Sub-Divisional Officer, and each district by a Chief of District. These administrative rulers who are representatives of the State are all appointed by presidential decree from the capital, Yaounde.

**Table 2.1: Administrative divisions in Cameroon<sup>19</sup>**

<b>Administrative unit</b>	<b>Heading authority</b>	<b>Total</b>
Provinces	Governor	10
Divisions	Senior divisional officer	58
Sub-divisions	Sub-divisional officer	349
District	District head	n/a <sup>20</sup>

According to the Constitution of 1996, which is the one currently in force, the provinces were to be gradually transformed into regions with more autonomous powers. This was to be done through a gradual process of administrative decentralisation, particularly with a

<sup>19</sup> Sources: the official webpage of the Prime Ministry of Cameroon: <http://www.spm.gov.cm/>, and the official webpage of the Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon: <http://www.prc.cm/>. Both accessed June 3, 2007.

<sup>20</sup> In the sources consulted.



significant deconcentration of powers from the central administration in Yaounde. But actually, the process of constitutional application in Cameroon is far more complex.<sup>21</sup>

### **2.2.3.2. *Urbanisation and traditional power systems***

In Chapter 7, I will discuss in detail (in 7.3) how adult literacy mediates new social status for neo-literates and gives them new socio-cultural power, in the context of their grassroots communities. This happens within a complex web of relationships and powers vested both in the traditional hierarchies and in the administrative institutions described earlier. Therefore, it is useful at this point to elaborate on urbanisation and the traditional power systems as they function in Cameroon in general, and particularly in the Western Grassfields of Cameroon where Kom is situated.

Historically, the pre-colonial political division of the various communities was based on ethno-linguistic grouping. Thus, ethno-linguistic communities are the main geographically-based traditional and cultural entities around which the Cameroonian peoples were originally organised. Even today, these ethno-linguistic communities represent the most clearly defined regional and socio-cultural entities to which most Cameroonians would assign their cultural roots and their primal group identity. There are laws regulating the complex yet complementary relationship between the administrative rulers and the traditional local rulers of the various ethno-linguistic groups.

The names of traditional rulers vary according to each local community and language. Traditional local rulers are referred to as 'Chief' in most parts of the South and East provinces, and 'Lamido' or 'Sultan' in the Grand North region. In the Grand West region comprising the

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<sup>21</sup> The Constitution of 1996 was adopted by the Parliament (National Assembly) led by an MP majority from the CPDM, the party in power. Unfortunately, this Constitution is being only partially enforced because some of its provisions intentionally leave room for the non application of certain new articles and the application of older articles from the earlier Constitution. In December 2007, the press reported the creation of a special committee within the CPDM-led National Assembly to revise the Constitution. Though my research doesn't focus on Constitutional reform, it is worth mentioning that the population and most civil society organisations and opposition parties rejected these Constitutional reform plans. These reforms, they claimed, had as their main aim the maintenance of power of the current political regime, in place since 1982. Adding that to a list of other socio-economic and political grievances, the population took to the streets with riots and public demonstrations throughout the major cities of the country from February 24 to early March 2008 (<http://www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=14487>, Accessed 28 March 2008). The violent reaction of the political regime in place led to dozens of civil casualties, many of whom were young school teenagers shot by the police, the anti-riot units and the Army.

South-West, West, and North-West provinces, the traditional paramount rulers are generally referred to as 'Foyñ' (in Kom), 'Fon' (in Bafut, Banson, Bali), or 'Fo' (in Bandjoun, Baham, Bangangte). Across most of the Grassfields Bantu languages, the most current appellation given to paramount traditional rulers tends to be 'Fon', especially in the Anglophone area. 'Fon' is actually an equivalent for 'King'. By extension from 'kingdom', the word Fondom has entered the literature to refer to the various ethno-linguistic entities sharing the attributes of what is known elsewhere as kingdoms: geographic territory, historic roots, cultural practices and paraphernalia, and most importantly, a specific linguistic identity.

To describe the socio-traditional power in Kom, it is useful first to outline the various systems of traditional political organisation that have been observed in sub-Saharan Africa. According to Nkwi (1976:27), African pre-colonial political systems can be classified into three main categories:

- the segmentary system: there is no clear central authority, and power and decisions centres are in the hands of the heads of different segments or lineages. There are hereditary rulers, but only at the level of each group, clan or lineage making up the whole community;
- the acephalous system: it has no hereditary rulers, no well defined traditional titles, and no hereditary offices transmittable to descendants. Decisions are made communally after discussions among all the groups, clans or lineages;
- the centralised system: it has a central authority, an administrative structure and judicial institutions. The kinship-based inheritance system is central to this system, with blood descendants and relatives inheriting material, financial and natural resources, and the spiritual, political and moral powers and statuses of their forebears.

In centralised systems, a key element for coherent social organisation and harmony is the establishment, maintenance and transmission of political power. Most other spiritual and economic values are thus defined in relation to political power. The operational socio-cultural instrument of maintenance and transmission of political power is succession, itself based on descent, and more particularly what anthropologists call the 'dogma of descent' (Nkwi, 1976:29). This dogma expresses:

'... a people's beliefs as to the physical contribution of the father and mother to the formation of the child, and hence the traditional conception of physical continuity

between one generation and the next; and next their beliefs as to the influence of the dead members of each social group over the living, and hence the social identification of a man with the line of his dead ancestors' (Richards, 1940:96).<sup>22</sup>

In the Kom traditional society, power is vested in the traditional hierarchies and the holders of the various nobility seats spread throughout this hierarchy. The traditional administrative structure is organised around a top-bottom structure of decision-makers and title holders who determine the power balance in social life. There is an enormous body of nobility positions between the Fon as the paramount head of the social structure, and the lowest lay person in the community. This titular hierarchy and the levels of power distributed along the social ladder hold together the Kom traditional society. At the bottom, any head of a family who has managed to get a wife and to have children, and subsequently has succeeded in building a home for his family, is holder of primary and nuclear power: he is a *bobe* i.e. 'a head of the homestead'. This primary power is manifested at two intricately related levels: an internal level which is the realm of his relationship with his family, and an external level which is the view and respect received within the social arena. From this basic level, more power is acquired through a combination of personal achievements (such as wealth accumulation) and kin inheritance. Therefore, nobility can be inherited alongside the social power vested in it, but even commoners can acquire social power through their own achievements. A condition of acquiring social power is to share back some of the wealth or honours acquired to the various holders on the power ladder on which one aspires to climb. Gradually, there emerges a hierarchy of powerful people, each of whom has his or her area of jurisdiction and rank: from the local noblemen and other title holders, to members of various secret societies, great hunters and warriors, members of craft societies, as well as arts people, political dignitaries, traditional healers and regional representatives appointed by the Paramount Fon and his ministers.

In pre-colonial Cameroon, especially in the Grand West region with the highly developed and hierarchical Grassfields cultures such as Kom, Fons were real kings with their own armies, their own monetary systems, and even their own writing systems, such as that of King Njoya of Bamun (discussed in detail further in this chapter). The colonial Administration disarmed and dismantled most of the local royal armies, and destroyed most of the historic

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<sup>22</sup> Cited in Nkwi (1976:29).

markers of the sovereignty and vibrant autonomy of these kingdoms. But despite all this, significant portions of local traditions and cultures, namely the languages and artistic customs, have remained resilient. The case of Kom will be examined in further detail in this chapter, and in Chapter 7.

Throughout the colonial era up to national independence in 1960 and afterwards, the local ethnic communities have been integrated into new administrative divisions with the building of Cameroon as a nation and a republic. So even though most of the local communities were already organised over centuries into Fondoms, chiefdoms and ‘villages’, they were all integrated into larger administrative units under the central administration and supreme power of the national government backed up by state army, gendarmerie and police, with headquarters in Yaounde. There is growing urbanisation which continues to bring together large groups of these various rural communities into cities. For 2005, the Cameroonian population was estimated at 17,795,000 by the United Nations,<sup>23</sup> and this number is estimated to reach 19,662,000 by 2010. An estimated 40% of this population lives in the cities; most of these cities being headquarters of provinces.

As previously mentioned, historically, the traditional Fondom, chiefdom or ‘village’ is a cultural and geographically-bound entity. Embedded within the cultures, and also in the minds of Cameroonians, is the idea that it is the most stable and coherent division in rural areas. But because of the colonial drawing of arbitrary national borders, and the equally arbitrary partition of the country into administrative units, it is not presently possible to equate any Fondom, chiefdom or village with any of the official administrative divisions, whether geographically or in terms of the areal onomastics or toponymy. In general, some chiefdoms or ‘villages’ cover a district or a sub-division, and most divisions are made up of more than one chiefdom. Therefore, the urbanisation and the administrative partition of the country have some important implications regarding the implementation and study of adult literacy programmes. The bilingual literacy programmes are organised around the ethno-linguistic communities and are intended to cover all the geographic areas of the chiefdom or village where the local language is spoken. Since all the speakers of the same language are targeted to take part in the programme, the lack of correspondence between the linguistic area and the

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<sup>23</sup> Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, *World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revision and World Urbanization Prospects; The 2005 Revision*, <http://esa.un.org/unpp>. Accessed February 26, 2008.

administrative area sometimes creates major difficulties in the following domains: partnership with public institutions (with the overlapping of their areas of jurisdiction); coordination (with the overlapping or even clashes of responsibilities of state representatives); and allocation of resources from Government institutions to help bilingual literacy activities.

This geographic mismatch between administrative divisions and the traditional boundaries of linguistic communities affects our research in many ways. I will further discuss this in Chapter 5 when looking closely at the field organisation and implementation of the Kom literacy programme.

#### **2.2.4. Multilingual landscape and language use in formal education**

Cameroon is one of the most multilingual countries in the world<sup>24</sup> with 248 indigenous languages (Breton and Bikia Fohung, 1991) or mother tongues (MT), plus French and English as official languages (OL) inherited from colonial times. Arabic is also used in parts of the predominantly Muslim Grand North, while CamPidgin is used as a language of wider communication (LWC) in the Grand South. If one compares the population of Cameroon which is 17,795,000<sup>25</sup> (2005) with the 286 Cameroonian languages<sup>26</sup> (*Ethnologue*, 1996:185), it has one of the highest national language/population ratios in the world. To add to the uniqueness of the linguistic diversity of Cameroon, it is worth noting that 3 of the 4 main linguistic phyla of Africa, namely Afro-Asiatic, Nilo-Saharan, and Niger-Kordofanian (of which Niger-Congo is the largest family) are represented in Cameroonian languages. The only phylum with no member in Cameroon is the Khoisan with its click languages, represented mainly in Southern Africa and some parts of East Africa.

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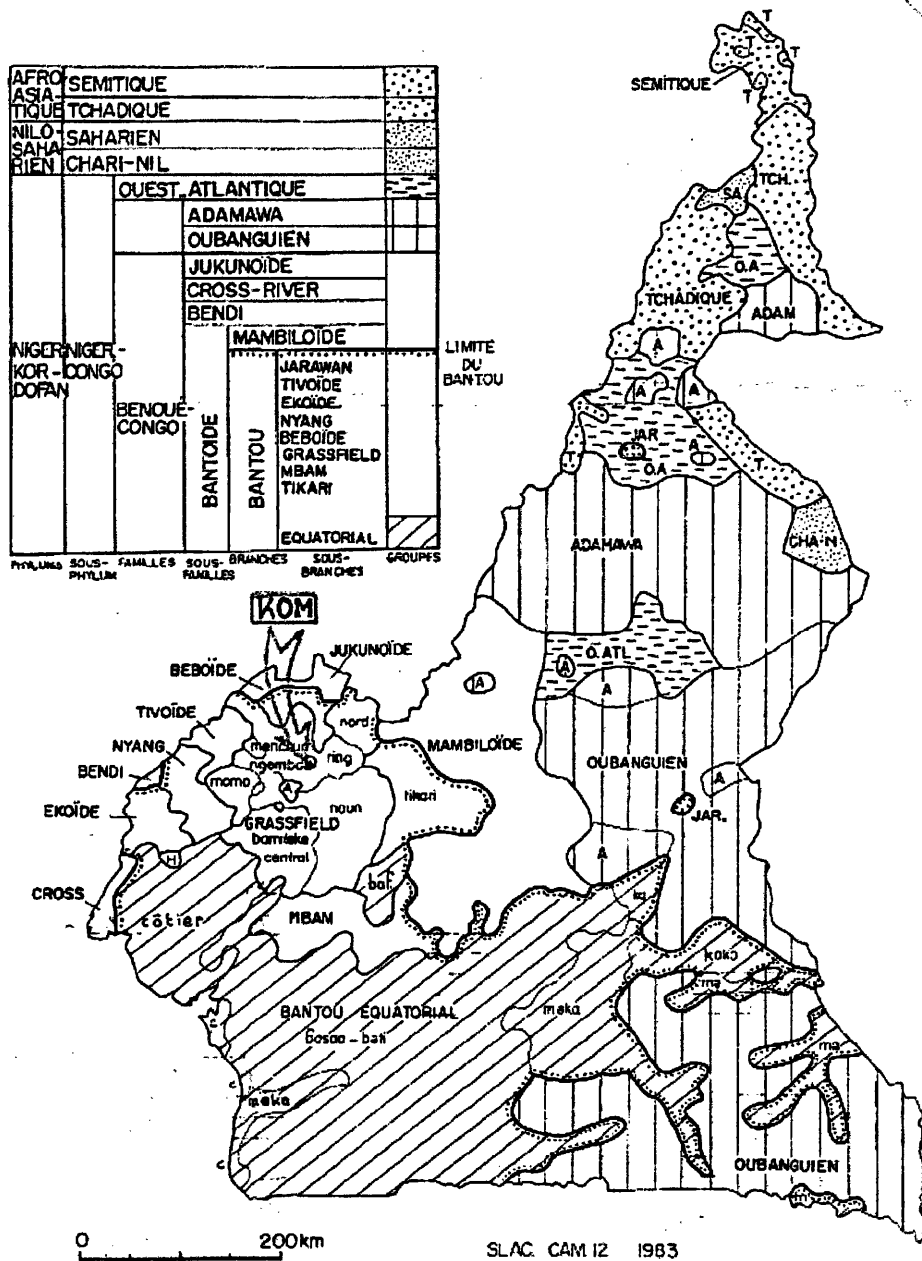
<sup>24</sup> Only Vanuatu, with 109 languages for a population of 200,000; and Papua New Guinea, with 820 languages for a population of around 5,000,000 (*Ethnologue*), show a higher linguistic multiplicity and 'density' than Cameroon.

<sup>25</sup> According to the earlier mentioned United Nations sources.

<sup>26</sup> This figure is the one from the widely consulted reference on world linguistic census and language classification, *Ethnologue* (1996:185). The earlier mentioned 248 Cameroonian languages is a conservative estimate, though rather outdated, aggregated from the *Atlas Linguistique du Cameroun* (ALCAM, 1982).

**Figure 2.2: Linguistic families in Cameroon.**

FAMILLES ET GROUPES LINGUISTIQUES AU CAMEROUN



Source: Breton and Fohtung (1991:18).

(A light green arrow and point have been added to indicate the exact situation of the Kom linguistic area.)

Since colonial times, and despite Independence in 1960, the official policy concerning language use and social roles in public institutions and the administration has

remained the same: none of the local languages has been granted an official status to be used in public education, the administration or the public media. The only two official languages of the country are French and English. They are the languages used in the vast majority of schools, the public administration, the official communications and the media.

However, serious efforts are being made in many areas for the integration of local languages in the formal school system. One of the biggest efforts in this direction is through the PROPELCA, a transition bilingual education programme for primary schools, which will be discussed later in this chapter. Also, a number of local communities such as the Kom community are making significant efforts to promote adult literacy in the mother tongue.

#### ***2.2.4.1. Some statistics<sup>27</sup> on the educational background***

In Cameroon, the life expectancy rate is 54.6 years for men and 58 years for women. 46.2% of the total population are below the age of 16, with a population growth rate of about 2.79 % (1999). The gross enrolment rate for formal education dropped from 96.5% in the 80s to 70.5% in 1995/96 and went up slightly to 77.6% in 1997/98. The gross enrolment rate for pre-school children is low (about 10.8%) and lower in the provinces of Adamawa (5.5%), North (4.4%) and the Far North (0.8%). In 2000, the school age population at the primary level (6-12 years) was about 2.9 million. In 2000/2001, 2.67 million pupils enrolled. This enrolment included children younger than six years old, and especially those aged over 12 years. A good number of school-age children are therefore not attending school. One cause of this is the scarcity of classrooms (20% of which are temporary and improvised structures) and the insufficient number of teachers, with a 1 to 63 teacher-pupil ratio, a ratio which the Ministry of Education plans to reduce to 1 to 47 by 2011. From 1996 to 2001, the number of students in secondary schools rose from 443,651 (45% of which are girls) to 684,583 (46% of which are girls). The number of teachers equally rose from 16,973 to 30,371. The number of schools rose from 894 to 1,113.

The adult literacy rate rose from 47% in 1976, to 61% in 1996 and to 68% in 2001. But wide disparities in literacy rates exist with respect to gender and region of the country. The

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<sup>27</sup> Figures and percentages given here are from statistics and reports from the Ministry of Education: MINEDUC, EFA Unit (1999, 2000, 2001); and the Ministry of Youths and Sports: MINJES, Literacy Service (1999, 2001).

highest illiteracy rates are recorded in the Far North, North and Adamawa provinces; for men respectively at 36%, 32% and 29%, as opposed to 72%, 67% and 61% for the women. This high rate of illiteracy is accounted for by poverty, opportunity costs, negative perceptions of schooling regarding young girls, and also early marriages and pregnancies among girls.

A serious problem noted by many researchers (Tadadjeu, 1991; Robinson, 1995; Echu and Grundstrom, 1999; Gfeller, 2000) is that the official statistics and most publications on literacy do not take into account literacy in local languages; rather, they take into account only literacy in French and English. The operating modes of the production of literacy rates are based on population censuses and educational statistics, as propounded for example in the Human Development Report (HDR, 2005) published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). In this document most referred to by journalists and researchers, the main calculations use data collected by international inter-governmental organisations such as UNESCO, and its branch in charge of statistical collection, the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). UIS data is obtained from individual countries, and in most cases from national censuses and surveys. When discussing the specific issue of adult literacy rates, the authors of the 2005 Human Development Report (HDR), which is based on UIS data and statistics, state that their information is aggregated from country censuses for the period between 2000 and 2004. They also add the cautionary mention that some data comes from as early as 1995-99 (UNDP, 2005:215). These facts raise concerns regarding the statistics provided for Cameroon.<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, there exist the following facts:

- that a general national population census took place in 1987,
- that the last one which ended in 2005-6 had not yet officially published its results by September 2006 (when I was on the field in Cameroon),
- that no other general census exists in a country like Cameroon whose national coverage would allow for any nation-wide extrapolation for statistical calculations,
- that most censuses conducted by government ministries or international institutions are limited, sectoral and modest in scale.

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<sup>28</sup> The UNDP's Human Development Report (2005) gives a literacy figure of 67.9% for Cameroon, without any reference to the language(s) they refer to.



Consequently, there is a serious issue with most statistics relating to literacy rates in Cameroon. As can be observed from the foregoing discussion, the issues of sources and their validity is shaky.

But though it is arguably necessary to aggregate what is available in order to give some indicative figures where possible, the main critique of literacy statistics in Cameroon is the following epistemological and even ethical problem: the postulate of tying statistics to the official languages only, in a country with 286 local languages. As I will elaborate on in more detail in Chapter 3, literacy means primarily that people have the skills of reading and writing in any given language, not just English or French. But as explained earlier, the data relating to statistics in Cameroon are derived only from school attendance, and these formal schools use only the official languages.

To my knowledge, no national survey, even the national population censuses of 1987 and 2005, has ever included any entry or question to record respondents' literacy levels in their local languages. Ironically, some of the respondents actually spoke only a Cameroonian language as their main language. Clearly some efforts have been made in recent decades in the promotion of local language literacy, even though these efforts can still be considered as covering a minority portion of the population. The fact that the vast majority of literacy statistics do not take the local languages into consideration creates a major flaw regarding their validity.

#### ***2.2.4.2. Official language policy***

During the colonial times, there was an official policy of exclusion of local languages in all public activities. This policy continued into the post-colonial era. The various Constitutions adopted since independence in 1960 clearly stipulated that the only official languages of Cameroon were French and English. These were to be used in all public life, namely the Administration, formal education, the public media, the written press, and the production of all literature for national activities. The Cameroonian Law makes it compulsory to use the official languages of Cameroon for any public activity, whereas none of the local languages has been granted official status such that it can be used in public education, the administration and the public media. Thus in most cities and communities, the majority of

written literature such as books, newspapers, public information and signboards use French or English.

However, in 1996, there was a change concerning the official promotion of local languages. A reference to, and the support for, local languages were mentioned for the first time in the new Constitution, promulgated on 18 January 1996. The start of the Preamble reads:

‘We, The People of Cameroon,  
Proud of our linguistic and cultural diversity, an enriching feature of our national identity...’

And further in the Constitution, Part 1, Article 1, section 3, reads:

‘(3) The official languages of the Republic of Cameroon shall be English and French, both languages having the same status. The State shall guarantee the promotion of bilingualism throughout the country. It shall endeavour to protect and promote national languages.’<sup>29</sup>

The bilingualism referred to in the Constitution is the official bilingualism in French and English (that I will analyse in further detail in Chapter 3). But the clear mention in the above article that “The State [of Cameroon]... shall endeavour to protect and promote national languages” was the first official endorsement of the various local language literacy programmes that had been implemented over the years on an experimental basis. In the next section, I will examine the most significant of such programmes, namely the *Programme Opérationnel pour l’Enseignement des Langues au Cameroun* (PROPELCA), i.e. Operational programme for the teaching of languages in Cameroon.

#### **2.2.4.3. The PROPELCA Programme**

PROPELCA is a transition bilingual education programme promoting the integration of local languages in the formal school system. It started in 1978 as an experimental research project in some primary schools (see Table 2.3).

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<sup>29</sup> In Cameroon, a national language refers to any indigenous language. I will dwell on this in detail in Chapter 3.

**Table 2.2: The Phases of PROPELCA**

<b>Periods</b>	<b>Phases</b>
1978 – 1980	Preparatory Phase
1981 – 1988	Experimental phase
1989 – 1995	Extension phase
1996 – present	Generalisation phase

During the implementation of the project, until 1996 when the Constitution officially mentioned the promotion of local languages (as discussed earlier in detail in 2.2.4.), there had been opposition to PROPELCA both by parents and public authorities who repeatedly claimed that the official use of local languages in public activities and formal education had not been stipulated by law. Yet, PROPELCA remains so far the most successful programme in many rural areas for the integration of local languages into the formal school system.

Since the successful experimental (1981-1988) and extension (1989-1995) phases, PROPELCA has now become the *Programme pour l'Enseignement des Langues au Cameroun*, i.e. Program for Language Education in Cameroon. The implementation of the generalisation phase of PROPELCA has been done under the national coordination of the NACALCO Centre for Applied Linguistics. NACALCO is a national NGO working as the federation of Cameroonian language committees. It works in close partnership with the universities, the ministries and the private and denominational schools' bodies. Some statistics on the PROPELCA programme can be found in the Appendices.

PROPELCA covers the primary school years. The languages of instruction used in the programme are the local mother tongue (L1) and the first official language (OL1), that is, French for the Francophone provinces and English for the Anglophone provinces. Both languages (L1 and OL1) are used from the very beginning. But in Class 1, the main language of oral as well as written instruction is the mother tongue, and a primer is used for teaching. The official language is used only orally, through the teaching and practice of dialogues that portray communicational situations that the child might face in his daily life (e.g. basic greetings, social communication, playing, etc.).

In Class 2, the mother tongue remains the main medium of instruction but there is also the introduction of reading and writing of the official language through the transition manual (from MT or L1 to OL1 or L2) and an increase in the time allocated for the official language.

**Table 2.3: Percentage (%) of time allotted for languages in PROPELCA**

	<b>L1</b>	<b>OL1</b>
<b>Class 1</b>	80	20
<b>Class 2</b>	60	40
<b>Class 3</b>	40	60
<b>Class 4</b>	20	80
<b>Class 5</b>	15	85
<b>Class 6</b>	10	90

From Class 3 through Class 6 (the end of primary school), the time allocated for the mother tongue decreases in favour of the official language. The main didactic manual used to teach in the mother tongue at that level is the post-primer. Eventually, any existing literature in the mother tongue (e.g. local newspapers, hymnals, folktales, etc.) can be used to help children practice reading. Chapter 6 will discuss in detail the local literature, providing specific examples and sample pages of some of them, and will offer a deeper analysis of their contents. In Chapter 6, there is also a table detailing all the titles published in Kom, with explanations of their various domains of use.

The PROPELCA programme has enjoyed success and expansion in private schools, mainly the Catholic primary schools as they provided the first experimental schools in the early 80s. The programme has also been successful in many other Christian denominational secondary schools such as those of the Baptist and the Presbyterian churches in the North West province (where this research took place). In public schools, PROPELCA has been implemented only on an experimental basis. But it can be noted that over the years, through the work and sensitization done by linguists, the trend has been reversed in favour of the use of more and more local languages in the formal school system. Now, the attitude of the public authorities towards the use and development of national languages is more positive. But there is still much to do to include a significant number of languages and more schools. Some recent statistics (2000-2001)<sup>30</sup> show that of the 9,832 Cameroon primary schools in total, the number of schools implementing the PROPELCA programme is only 351, representing less than 4% of the total of primary schools in Cameroon.

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<sup>30</sup> Ministry of Education (MINEDUC), Cameroon, 2001. *Annuaire Statistique 2000-2001*. Yaounde: MINEDUC.

The implementation of the generalisation phase of PROPELCA has been done under the national coordination of the National Association of Cameroonian Language Committees (NACALCO). It works in close partnership with the universities, the ministries and the private and denominational schools' bodies. As NACALCO is the federation of Cameroonian language committees, most bilingual adult literacy activities take place under its institutional and technical umbrella, and have borrowed much from the PROPELCA experience. Since the Kom language committee is a statutory member of NACALCO, there is a fruitful and complementary relationship between the Kom literacy programme and the NACALCO national literacy research and its applications. This relationship is a central part of the local dynamics and partnerships around literacy – and this is one of the phenomena that this thesis investigates.

#### **2.2.5. Development of orthographies for local languages**

Written languages exist through their graphic representations with specific symbols on various material supports such as paper, wood, slates, stone tablets, clay slabs, papyri, etc. For those written languages with a phonetic writing system, i.e. based on discreet and distinctive sounds produced in their oral forms, the specific linguistic symbols used for writing are called graphemes. Tadadjeu and Sadembouo (1979, 1984:3) define a grapheme as a letter or a group of letters representing a single sound as part of the alphabet of a language. Depending on the number of letters used to represent it, a grapheme can be a monograph (one letter), a digraph (two) or a trigraph (three). An alphabet is the totality of the graphemes, i.e. all the graphic representations of the individual sounds of a language.

Understandably, some authors, when discussing alphabets, talk in terms of 'letters-sounds'. This applies mainly to recent alphabets designed on a phonemic basis, i.e. when the represented graphemes are only those that account for differences in meaning in the language (Crystal, 2004:470). From the individual letters-sounds to the written language proper, a body of rules and principles of combination must exist: this is generally referred to as the orthography. Though it is sometimes equated with orthography, the term 'writing system' is used to encompass both the alphabet and the orthography. Also because some languages have

developed a complex system of symbols to represent their various sounds, the term 'script' is used by certain authors interchangeably to refer to the alphabet and/or orthography.

### **2.2.5.1. The development of endogenous writing systems**

Most scientific research on adult literacy in Cameroon that touches on the development of orthographies in local languages points out the beginnings of local writing systems with the colonial arrivals and the missionary enterprises (Ntsobe, 1985; Mba, 1986; Lele, 1987; Tadadjeu, 1990; Echu and Grundstrom, 1999; Gfeller, 2000). Yet it is known that

'Africa is not only the 'Cradle of Mankind', it is the 'Cradle of Writing'. [...] In modern times Africa has contributed much to the advance of the art and science of writing. A combination of cultural contacts, men of genius, and rich traditions of plastic and graphic symbolism have led to the development of many new and ingenious systems of writing' (Tuchscherer, 1999: 55-56).

Moreover, today the recognition of endogenous writing systems in Africa goes beyond the mere acceptance of their existence to claim their importance. In this vein, *Inscribing Meaning*, is a worldwide project and art exhibition developed by the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, in association with the Fowler Museum at UCLA, USA, which

'explores the relationships between African art and the communicative powers of language, graphic systems and the written word' (...) recognizes that Africa's long engagement with written and graphic systems is part of the broader, global history of writing and literacy.'<sup>31</sup>

At first, there seems to be a contradiction between such an established writing legacy in Africa and most scientific accounts about the history of writing in Cameroon. Though this research will focus on the orthographies as they have developed from the recent colonial times in terms of their recent application for language development in Cameroon, it is important to produce a brief critique of these accounts of orthographic development in the country. It is worth noting that, as Tuchscherer (1999) writes,

'The story of Africa's impressive contribution to the history of the art and science of writing has gone largely untold in the many volumes on the subject of writing produced by Western scholars' (Tuchscherer, 1999:56).

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<sup>31</sup> <http://africa.si.edu/exhibits/inscribing/index2.html> Accessed 27 June 2007.

Therefore, presenting a brief critique at this point will help shed more light on the simple fact that orthographies, scripts or alphabets in Cameroon pre-existed to the colonial era, and that some of these writing systems have thrived independently of the promotion and support by missionaries. This critique will look into two interrelated domains:

- (a) the existence of truly endogenous scripts or writing systems to Cameroon in recent centuries, and
- (b) the local writing systems as they developed independently of any colonial enterprise.

The first point of my critique concerns the existence of truly endogenous scripts or writing systems in Cameroon in recent centuries. The existence of such scripts has been documented as early as 1917 as exemplified with the Bagam script (Tuchscherer, 1999). The Bagam script which today is in extinction was a system of hieroglyphic writing developed by the Bagam people in the West of present Cameroon. Bagam is still both an ethnonym, a toponym and glossonym in a border area between the present West and North West provinces. But the present evolution of the alphabet of the Bagam language has not followed from the heritage of the Bagam script discovered in the 1910s.

As Tuchscherer (1999) writes, Louis W. G. Malcolm, the young British artillery officer who ‘discovered’ the Bagam script in 1917,

‘noted that *the Bagam referred to the language they spoke as Mengaka*<sup>32</sup> (which he wrote as Munghāka), and a number of writers have corroborated that this is an alternative name of the Bagam language.’ (Tuchscherer, 1999:61).

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<sup>32</sup> Italicisation as per the original.

Figure 2.3: The Bagam script

Symbolic character	Mũnyãka.	English
∩	T'i	a name.
∩	Mve	Outside
∩	Ū'u	You.
∩	a'a!	An exclamation
∩	Gyie	To sleep.
∩	Hã'õh	An exclamation.
∩	i'i	It is so.
∩	Tuagoo	Beam.
∩	Paiap	A grass bag.
∩	muco	To chew
∩	uñ	Now
∩	N'do	Prefixed to an attendant's name.
∩	Uwát	Cut.
∩	shE	Ground.
∩	Mwoko fowiyë	An albino.
∩	N'dzoo	Chest.
∩	N'dzop	Back.
∩	Me. oñ	Bird.
∩	Mnat.	Buffalo.
∩	Ku zĩrĩ	Beans.
∩	To añ	Brass.
∩	Mbop	Body
∩	Nau-ntõ	Beard.
∩	Kiãõ	Bone.
∩	Tuñw	Lobe of ear.
∩	Mii Kwii	Elephantiasis.
∩	Vau seh	To fall down.

Source<sup>33</sup>: Tuchscherer (1999:64-69).

<sup>33</sup> Tuchscherer (1999) mentions the original source as the following: Louis William Gordon Malcolm, 'The Eghap: An Ethnographical and somatological study', Volume III (M.Sc. thesis, Cambridge University, 1922), pp.204-14.



But it is worth noting that the discontinuation of use and the consequent disappearance of this script can be related to the turmoil that many African peoples went through with the colonial invasion and the radical social reorganisation that ensued (as discussed earlier in 2.2.2. and 2.2.3. and further in Chapters 3 and 7).

The other point of this critique concerns the path of indigenous writing systems that began outside of the colonial European influence and have survived until today. The main case in point here is the Shumum writing system and its legacy in the Bamun land and culture (Mafundikwa, 2004). This writing system is referred to in literature with various alternate names such as Shumum, Shü-mom, Shumön, Shumon, Shupamem, Bamun, and Bamum. *Shupaməm*, the name used by the Bamun people to refer to their language, is made up of *Shu-* ‘mouth, language’ and *-Məm* ‘Bamun people/land’ and thus literally means ‘the tongue of the *Məm* people’, with *-pa-* acting as a linking preposition.

Regarding currently used scripts, within the borders of present day Cameroon, the first systematic graphisation of a Cameroonian language started with King Njoya of the Bamun<sup>34</sup> in 1896. At the age of 25, he invented a logographic writing system for the Shumum language (Mafundikwa, 2004). On one of their webpages,<sup>35</sup> the earlier mentioned *Inscribing Meaning* art exhibition discusses the origin and expansion of the Bamum alphabet in the following terms:

‘The first version of Bamum contained more than 400 pictographic and ideographic characters. King Njoya continued to revise the script, and by 1903 he had reduced it to a phonetic syllabary of about 80 signs.

The script was used for administrative purposes and to chronicle Bamum history and culture, as seen in the literary documents still in the palace library and on display in the palace museum in Foumban, the capital city. King Njoya also opened schools to encourage literacy in the Bamum script.’<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> The Bamun area is presently the Noun division in the West province

<sup>35</sup> <http://africa.si.edu/exhibits/inscribing/bamum.html>. Accessed June 11, 2007.

<sup>36</sup> op. cit.

Figure 2.4: The Shumum writing system of the Bamun

ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ  
 ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ  
 ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ  
 ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ  
 ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ ገላጽ

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Source: Mafundikwa (2004:86)

The figure above shows three versions of the Shumum writing system. Starting in 1896, King Njoya and his followers developed 6 versions of the Shumum over a period of 30 years (Mafundikwa, 2004:86).

Unfortunately, as Tuchscherer (1999) writes,

‘Many of the modern African scripts suffered at the hands of colonial officials who did not support their usage or who took less subtle means to repress them.’ (Tuchscherer, 1999:57).

The case of King Njoya epitomises this trend of ‘linguicide’ in colonial times. When the French took over Cameroon after World War I, they dismantled the education system of King Njoya, destroying his palace, his libraries and his printing presses, as well as all the Shumum manuscripts, records and legal codes that they could find. They also burned all the traditional sacred artefacts of the Bamun (Mafundikwa, 2004:83). Then in 1931, they exiled King Njoya to Yaounde where he died in 1933.

Despite this destruction by colonial powers, the heritage of Njoya has survived, and the present Bamun rulers, backed by various researchers and academics, are working hard to preserve and protect it. There is currently in the Bamun land a project to promote literacy in the Shumum language. The promoters of this ambitious linguistic and cultural enterprise are adamant about their objectives, as stated on their webpage:

‘The Bamum Scripts and Archives Project has embarked on a spirited campaign to spread literacy in the Bamum script among children and youth in schools throughout the Bamum kingdom. We believe it is not enough to preserve our priceless manuscripts in our rehabilitated archives. Unless a new generation learns to actually read and write the script, our thousands of documents and vast amount of inscribed material culture – from graves to public king lists – will remain silent. Only through reading the Bamum script can we unlock the doors to our Bamum culture and history of long ago. We must transmit knowledge of the script now or the ability to read the script will perhaps be lost forever.’<sup>37</sup>

As can be seen from the foregoing discussion, Cameroon is a land with writing systems in existence long before colonial times.

But this research investigates the contemporary development of Kom with its present-day writing system. As is the case with many other Cameroonian languages, the Kom orthography is the result of a post-colonial trend in the development of African languages. As stated earlier, this research is about literacy, the main focus of which is the use of the written form of the language.<sup>38</sup> The development of the written form of a language tends to be a community enterprise which depends on the local synergy and the native speakers’ desire to reduce their oral language to writing, and then to use it for literacy. As will be shown in Chapter 7, this local dynamism for literacy is related to the meanings and values that the

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<sup>37</sup> <http://www.bamunscript.org/outreach.php>. Accessed June 21, 2007.

<sup>38</sup> I will dwell in more detail on the various facets and meanings of the concept of literacy in Chapter 3, when discussing in more depth the terminology and categories used in this research.

members of the community attach to their language, and to their vision of the future for their language. The current Kom orthography is the result of the efforts of Cameroonian scholars to develop alphabets for local languages. I will now briefly dwell on the recent development of these Cameroonian alphabets.

#### ***2.2.5.2. The General Alphabet of Cameroonian languages***

As mentioned earlier, the European missionaries introduced writing systems for the African local languages they encountered on the continent. They designed alphabets initially for the purpose of Bible translation. In the case of Cameroon, they used the alphabets of European languages, namely German, then French and English. Each missionary and Church worked more or less independently, and the orthographic systems they designed were related to the religious backgrounds, and the original languages such as French, German and English, from which they stemmed. One of the common denominators of the writing systems designed by the missionaries was that for many decades, they failed to capture appropriately a number of the phonemes and tonemes specific to Cameroonian languages. Therefore it is worth mentioning the orthographic harmonisation<sup>39</sup> that has been of great importance in the promotion and development of the orthographies of Cameroonian languages.

A continental synergy was started in the 60s in sub-Saharan Africa for the design and promotion of phonemic alphabets for African languages. The development of alphabets for languages in Cameroon is directly related to efforts at the continental level. In this regard, three important meetings must be mentioned: the experts' meeting on the West African languages of wider communication, held in 1966 in Bamako, Mali; the meeting on the transcription of Bantu languages of Central Africa, held in 1970 in Yaounde, Cameroon; and the meeting on the establishment of an African reference alphabet, held in June 1978 in Niamey, Niger.

Cameroonian linguists, following the harmonisation efforts done at the continental level for African languages, started working together for a general Cameroonian reference alphabet in the early 70s. After many years of research and fieldwork, a committee of experts was set up on March 10, 1978, to coordinate the unification and harmonization of the

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<sup>39</sup> To my knowledge, the harmonisation of local orthographies in Cameroon has nothing to do, and has never had anything to do, with any linguistic unification or any project of creation of a single alphabet for an eventual unique super national language.

Alphabets of Cameroonian languages. This committee produced a proposal document which was then formally adopted in 1979 by the vast majority of linguists, educationists and language workers in Cameroon as the *General Alphabet of Cameroonian Languages* (Tadadjeu and Sadembouo, 1979, 1984).

This *Alphabet* proposes a vast array of graphemes or letter-sounds<sup>40</sup> to represent most sounds phonemically attested in Cameroonian languages. Most recent orthographies are thus based on this *General Alphabet*. To build up its proper alphabet, each specific language just has to pick those phonemic sounds that are attested in it as phonemes after a phonological study.

This Alphabet follows the principle of bi-univocity for the proposed alphabetic graphemes, that is, one phonemic sound equals one single graphic representation in all Cameroonian languages (Tadadjeu and Sadembouo, 1979, 1984; Wiesemann, et al. 1983). This has an important implication for literacy in local languages as it should make easy the transfer of reading (and consequently writing) skills across Cameroonian languages. For those Cameroonian languages following this Alphabet, each sound has the same graphic representation. This graphic equivalence makes it easier for any Cameroonian child or adult, literate in any local language, to read and write any other Cameroonian language, even if they do not fully understand it.

### **2.3. OFFICIAL ADULT LITERACY IN CAMEROON**

Two influential trends have existed over the last 50 years regarding the promotion of adult education and mass literacy in sub-Saharan Africa. First, in the 1960s there was the World Literacy Programme spearheaded by the United Nations under the auspices of UNESCO. Within that programme, the emphasis was on adult literacy and its use to improve life conditions of illiterate adults in the countries of the South. Though mention was made of the local cultures and their integration both in the implementational strategies and the operational setting of the literacy programme, there was not enough insistence on the importance of the local languages. There is some debate about the factors contributing to the

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<sup>40</sup> Cameroonian linguists and local language developers tend to use the words 'sound-letter' and 'letter-sound' interchangeably to mean exactly the same thing.

failure of this international endeavour, which aimed to help alleviate poverty in the South through the provision of a critical level of education to adults in rural areas. But there is a consensus that the issue of the language used as the medium of education and the inappropriate and exclusive use of European languages inherited from colonial times contributed greatly to the failure of this world literacy programme (Tadadjeu, 1990; UNESCO, 1990; Bhola, 1994; Brock-Utne, 2000, 2002, 2003).

The second trend, which focused on new approaches to adult education, started in the 1990s. The 1990 Jomtien *Education For All* conference was a crucial encounter deemed to shape the direction of this new era. Clearly the new approaches emphasised the necessary integration of local cultures and languages and the provision of quality education for adults. The gender question, namely issues related to male/female parity and quantitative balances, were included. Governments were urged to invest the necessary funds and human resources in adult education to avoid the failures of the earlier programmes.

There is a complex relationship between a country's policy on adult education and local literacy activities, especially in the case of a multilingual country like Cameroon. In the political discourses at the national level, the local literacy programme is regarded as part of a national literacy programme with an organic relationship between that part (locally) and the whole (nationally). But in practice, the reality is different, as will be seen in the following paragraphs.

At this point, it is worth giving an overview of adult literacy activities in Cameroon, especially those under the aegis of official or governmental institutions. This is practical because adult literacy at the community level, as is the case with Kom, has either been influenced or has been slightly conditioned by the heritage of public adult education activities in Cameroon. At the same time, this research has clearly observed in the Kom programme some originality and a real difference in approach from the earlier experiences designed at the national level for nation-wide coverage. The discussion of adult literacy as implemented within the national sphere is equally useful because it sheds light on the distinction between such national initiatives, whose local success has never been clearly established, and the Kom literacy programme, which is considered one of the most vibrant local literacy programmes in Cameroon (Sadembouo, 2002; Trudell, 2005).

In terms of national-level literacy programmes in Cameroon, the two major international trends discussed above translated into the National Literacy Campaign of the 1960s-70s and the National Literacy Program of the 2000s. This latter was preceded by the creation of the National Literacy Committee in the 1990s.

### **2.3.1. The National Literacy Campaign of the 1960s-70s**

When Cameroon gained its independence from the colonial British and French Administrations on January 1, 1960, the new Government was keen to implement programmes that would lead to long-term social development. The provision of education for the masses was among these programmes. The official institutions were brought together to launch the National Literacy Campaign (NLC) as early as the mid-1960s. The implementation of the NLC was under the general coordination of the then General Commissariat of Youth, Sports and Popular Education, later to become the Ministry of Youth and Sports (generally referred to as *MINJES* from its French acronym of '*Ministère de la Jeunesse et des Sports*'). A direction of Popular Education and a Department of Literacy were created within the MINJES to coordinate the NLC.

Cameroon was then a one-party country, and political activities were organised under the aegis of the party in power, the Cameroon National Union (CNU), in order to reach the grassroots. Therefore, the NLC used the channels, equipment, and meeting venues of the ruling party for its deployment in the field. But in most villages, there was a scarcity of properly built meeting venues for the literacy activities. In many villages, adults participating in the literacy classes had to meet under the shade of large trees. In some villages, especially in the Northern dry and semi-Saharan regions, this was actually similar to the traditional practice of large meetings under trees. In other villages, mainly in the Grassfields and the rainforest regions of the Grand South, meetings took place in this way because of lack of alternative places available. It is from this type of meetings under trees that the Literacy Campaign gained its French reference '*l'école sous l'arbre*', meaning literally 'the school under the tree'.

The NLC reached its peak between 1966 and 1968, years which corresponded to the 'generalisation' period as planned in the implementation phases. Statistics on the Campaign in 1966-68 show that with a general population of 5,000,000 for the country, there were 7,500 literacy centres, 4,429 literacy monitors, and 160,000 adult learners<sup>41</sup> (Lele, 1987:12).

Euphoria among the participants and political leaders accompanied this phase of the campaign. Literacy was seen by the political leaders as the most efficient strategy to solve crucial problems of social development. Politicians adhered to the earlier discussed international trend in favour of adult education and mass literacy. The political discourses insisted on bigger community participation in nation-building and economic life. Literacy was seen as the gateway to all that. Literacy participants thought that once people became literate, social problems could easily be solved, and that jobs would become readily available. It was believed that the new Cameroonian citizen produced by the literacy campaign would more than ever be able to voice their opinions, and would contribute more in the nation-building (Lele, 1987; Hazoumê, 1999a). Most of the funding from the Campaign came from UNESCO, as this was a national effort promoted as part of the World Literacy Programme.

The languages used in the NLC, however, were exclusively French and English. There was either not the awareness, or the will, necessary to use the local languages. The then unchallenged postulates regarding exclusive use of French and English was that they were the best languages for such an educational enterprise, and that the nation-building process had to be exclusively rooted in the linguistic heritage of colonial times. Unfortunately, this exclusive use of the official languages is mentioned as one of the main causes of the decline of the Campaign (Lele, 1987; Atanga, 1987).

The decline of the NLC started in the late 1960s and continued throughout early 1970s, though some activities continued in patchy places throughout the country till the mid-1980s.

Other major causes of the decline were:

- the interruption of the financial support of UNESCO,
- people who went through the Campaign ended up very disappointed and disillusioned as they didn't get the jobs dreamed of in the public sector or the big companies,

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<sup>41</sup> It should be noted that this figure was based on names of people who expressed interest to participate and had registered. All of them did not necessarily end up effectively attending the literacy classes.



- most literacy instructors were volunteers and lost their motivation after the euphoria of the beginning,
- the total inadequacy of the pedagogic contents to local realities and cultures,
- the non-application of andragogic principles whereby adults are treated as adults and not as school children,
- the poor infrastructural network and equipment for the provision of adult literacy,
- the lack of rigorous planning in the implementation,
- the total absence of follow-up and post-literacy infrastructures and activities.

In 1987, that is, 20 years after the beginnings of the NLC, and in a nation with a general population that had increased by more than 50%, to reach 8,000,000 inhabitants, the statistics regarding the NLC were appalling (Lele, 1987): there were 336 literacy centres (less than 5% of the figure of 1966-68), 363 literacy monitors (less than 10% of the number in 1966-68), and 11,554 adult learners (less than 10% of the number in 1966-68).

A major change in the political scene in Cameroon was the resignation of the President of the Republic, Ahmadou Ahidjo, in 1982. His successor as head of state was Paul Biya who until then was Prime Minister. The new regime was preoccupied with consolidating its power, but it also tried to revamp some of the national development programmes that targeted the grassroots. Among the revamped programmes was the teaching of adult literacy. But it was claimed that it had to be built on new foundations. In other words, everything had to be redesigned to be more effective. Towards this end, the Cameroonian Government created an official literacy think-tank, the National Literacy Committee, to re-launch adult literacy activities in the country.

### **2.3.2. The National Literacy Committee in the 1990s**

The late 1980s saw the first inter-ministerial consultations for the creation of the National Literacy Committee. These consultations were first informal, then became formal, and took place among a number of concerned ministries, such as the Ministry of Health, the

Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Ministry of Social Welfare. Their consultations culminated in the creation in August 1990 of the National Literacy Committee. It was an inter-institutional body which had as its principal task to reorganise and implement a vast national literacy campaign to help adults in rural areas acquire some basic education to improve their living conditions. The institutional umbrella of the National Literacy Committee was still the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MINJES), and this governmental department was officially in charge of implementing a national literacy programme. Throughout the 1990s, the Literacy Direction within the MINJES worked in close partnership with some national-level NGOs<sup>42</sup> and permanent representatives of other ministries interested in adult literacy, such as Social Welfare, Education and Higher Education, to conceive the National Literacy Programme (NLP).

### **2.3.3. The National Literacy Programme in the 2000s**

The major objectives of the National Literacy Programme remained the same as those of its predecessor of the 1960s, the National Literacy Campaign. But the biggest problem that the NLP had right from the beginning was a lack of adequate funding. An educational activity of such a national dimension needed large amounts of funding to operate successfully. While the conception and design of the Programme were in process throughout the 1990s, human resources and time were also devoted to the search for funds to actually start the NLP. Because of the many bottlenecks and red tape inherent to official business and administration, the NLP was officially 'perceived as feasible and recommended for funding [only] in September 2002'.<sup>43</sup>

At that time, the availability of funds was directly related to the financial outcomes of the Highly Indebted and Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative from the World Bank. The general philosophy behind the HIPC initiative was to help reduce poverty among heavily indebted countries, most of which were in the South, by cancelling their debt burdens and using the

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<sup>42</sup> Some NGOs with expertise and experience in adult literacy such as SIL-Cameroon - the Cameroon branch of the American-based Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), and NACALCO, were involved in the process. But they had more of a consultative role when it came to final decisions.

<sup>43</sup> Information gathered from discussions with some MINJES officials and unpublished reports on the NLP from the General Secretariat, MINJES, Oct. 2005.

accrued financial resources to fund major development projects. These projects could be proposed by governmental institutions, local NGOs or grassroots development associations. After many years of negotiations by local civil society organisations and Cameroonian authorities, the country was finally accepted as a beneficiary of the HIPC initiative. As a consequence, Cameroon was beneficiary of substantial amounts of funds made available by the World Bank to help the HIPC countries improve their 'poor living conditions'.<sup>44</sup>

Unfortunately, due to rampant red tape in the administration, it was only in July 2005 that the first funds arrived in to start the NLP.

The domains of operation of the NLP, according to the government authorities,<sup>45</sup> are the opening of functional literacy centres in all villages, and an active partnership with local communities and organised groups for a national scale delivery of literacy to adults.

When I was on the field in 2006, a dozen NLP literacy centres in the Kom area had officially opened. But their functioning was erratic, and they didn't match the huge needs of the targeted adults. In the next section, I will examine in further detail some of the problems of the NLP.

#### **2.3.4. Some problems of the NLP**

Though the NLP is still in its beginning phase as previously mentioned, it is already facing problems in its implementation. Most of these problems are similar to those of its predecessor NLC of the 1960s. In the Kom area, though it is clear the NLP is active through some literacy centres, its centres do not match in any way the more widespread centres and literacy efforts started long ago and continued by the Kom Literacy Development Committee (KLDC) independently of the NLP.

Among other negative factors that weaken the implementation of the NLP on the field, one can cite administrative red tape and the consequent diversion of much of the allocated funding into the administrative component. The lack of adequate resources, and the low and scarce incentives for the literacy monitors, are the other main problems.

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<sup>44</sup> op. cit.

<sup>45</sup> op. cit.

In September 2006, the NLP was still in the experimental stages, struggling on the one hand to conceive a national literacy curriculum with adequate syllabi and implementational strategies, and on the other hand with problems of adequate and full-scale funding.

As concerns the field expansion of the NLP, there is insufficient communication with the beneficiary communities. Consequently, there is a poor community-level adherence to it. This shows among other things the insufficiencies of a top-bottom approach to community literacy. When government officials sit in central offices in the capital and provincial headquarters, and design community programmes without fully involving the local communities, the expected good results are almost never achieved. This has been observed in the past; yet the NLP is making the same errors, including insufficient planning and preparation, inefficient remote and centralised decision-making, insufficient involvement of grassroots-based and community representatives.

Most of the operational NLP documents available do not take a stand or give clear orientation regarding the use of local languages as the main media of instruction. This is a destructive policy, because the NLP targets people in rural areas who daily use their local languages, far more than they use official languages.

The lack of trained literacy monitors is also a major shortcoming of the NLP. In fact, this falls within the bigger problem of the shortage of adequately trained staff in the country's official institutions. The problem is aggravated by the fact that literacy monitors should normally be well trained, with some basic skills in general pedagogy and adult education. I will discuss in detail issues relating to the teaching of adults in Chapter 5, when describing the field implementation of the Kom literacy programme.

In general, staff in the state institutions is recruited first to fill administrative vacancies, not necessarily technical posts. The strategy copied from colonial times has always been to improve public staff training through in-service and retraining programmes. Within the NLP, there are very few literacy-trained personnel involved. Therefore, the NLP officials on the field resort to semi-volunteers and semi-benevolent trainers, and try as much as possible to pick locals with prior training in teaching who can adapt to teaching literacy classes. These local literacy monitors are promised financial compensation for their work. But in general, this compensation is sparse and irregular. Such a state of affairs doesn't help to stabilise the staff

involved in the NLP in the villages, and reduces the possibilities for expansion of the programme.

Another constraint of the NLP relates to the lack of expertise in the local languages among NLP literacy staff. Actually, this is arguably the reason why the NLP operational documents are not explicit regarding the use of local languages, as this should presuppose the existence of literacy monitors and trained language teachers who are well versed in local language literacy, or at least the necessity to provide such type of personnel. Since only private and grassroots institutions over the years have developed any real expertise in local language literacy, the official institutions are unable to provide expertise on local language literacy with the workforce from their own ranks.

The list of problems hindering the efficient deployment of the NLP in villages also includes the lack of appropriate didactic materials. The main reason for this lack is the fact that the programme has never resolved the issue of producing appropriate didactic materials. The programme relies on pre-existing documentation obtained from either international NGOs, or on didactic materials from formal schools. These materials are pedagogically recycled for the adult literacy classes. This recycling carries with it a series of predictable inadequacies, some of which I will examine in Chapter 7, when discussing the dynamics of local literature in Kom.

Last but not least, the partnership of the NLP with grassroots institutions promoting literacy in local languages is wobbly, with unclear collaboration terms. In Kom, the civil servants responsible for the NLP rely on collaboration with the local KLDC and they try to encompass the KLDC literacy classes in their reports of activities. But this policy of absorption of the local literacy NGOs' efforts is not fair; it is also not well thought through and can not lead to any long term partnership. This is mainly because the NLP resources are not channelled to help the local NGOs, which in turn leads to frustrations on the part of local NGOs, including KLDC. This situation also augurs a grim future for the implementation of the NLP.

In sum, the NLP is designed on the premises of a top-bottom approach. Right from the beginning, such an approach undermines its efficiency as a grassroots-oriented initiative. In all endeavours targeting the local communities, there is a necessity for local involvement and community empowerment. This can be built through awareness raising and the creation of

local motivation to respond positively. But the NLP seems not to be going in the right direction.

## **2.4. KOM**

Social research involves human groups, and necessitates the determination of their identities, or the naming of these identities. Issues involving nomenclature can be complicated. Fortunately, in the case of Kom, the nomenclature is fairly simple, because Kom is an ethnonym, a glossonym and a toponym. Kom is the name by which the Kom people call themselves and identify themselves as an ethnic group. It is also the name by which the Kom people refer to the language they speak. Finally, Kom is also the name of the land and geographic area where the Kom people settled more than a century ago and still live today.

This name is thus fairly consistent in most literature about the Kom area, people and language. Thus there is less ambiguity regarding the seemingly confusing references 'to (the) Kom' (a place and an ethnic group), 'in Kom' (a language and a place), 'at Kom' (a place), and 'by (the) Kom' (an ethnic group).

### **2.4.1. Geographic, climatic and human environments**

The Kom linguistic area is part of the vast geographic region of the Cameroon western highlands formed by a large network of mountains and high plateaus. These highlands are part of the big mountainous belt situated in the northeast region of the African Gulf of Guinea (also called Gulf of Biafra) in Central Africa. Average altitude in the Kom area varies between 1000 and 2000 metres, with some mountains peaking even higher. These high altitudes create a very fresh climate, making this region one of the coldest of all the country.

In Kom, the local economy revolves around farming, small scale animal husbandry, and trade. Most of the farming is done by women, whereas men do most of the house building

and stock keeping. One of the crops cultivated and found almost everywhere is corn maize (*zea mays*), which forms the main staple for food in the Kom community. In the fertile soils of the valleys, there is a wide variety of crops: cocoyams (*colocasia antiquorum*), yams (*dioscorea dumetorum*), potatoes (*ipomoea batatas*); various vegetables, such as cabbage and spinach folong (*solanum nodiflorum*), okra (*hibiscus esculentus*), egusi (*lagenaria vulgaris*); beans, such as red, black beans and soya; and groundnuts (*arachis hypogea*). Some of the tree crops found in Kom are banana and plantains, kola, raphia palm, mangoes and sugar canes.

There are also many coffee farms, introduced in the Western Grassfields of Cameroon by the colonial administration. After the Independence, the Government continued to actively encourage coffee cultivation, and for decades now it has been the major cash crop that has shaped the local agricultural industry. The two varieties cultivated in the Grassfields are *robusta* and *arabica*. Nkwi (1976:16) writes that, in the mid-1970s, the Kom Area Co-operative Union, which coordinated the local production of coffee employed 'over 700 workers in its mill and headquarters at Wombong ...' and that Kom then produced 'over 1,600 tons of coffee for export' per annum. In those days, and as was the case in most of the Grand West region of the country, coffee production contributed immensely to the improvement of the social and economic conditions of the local people.

As for animal husbandry in Kom, goats, sheep, pigs and fowls are the main livestock. Stock keeping is practised mainly at the family level, and almost every compound or household possesses its own range of various domestic animals. As for trading, it is of petty scale. Manufactured goods and articles are bought from the major cities of Bamenda and Douala, while many other goods come from nearby Nigeria. They are then transported by cars and lorries to the Kom hamlets, where they are available in local shops and on open-air stalls during the market days.

There is a vibrant artistic industry of weaving and handicraft, producing, among other articles, traditional handbags, hats and costumes, baskets, sculptures, music instruments such as drums and flutes, and other artistic artefacts. Kom is well-known for its century-old, sacred wooden sculptures. The *Afo-A-Kom*, a sacred royal sculpture of the Kom that is considered one of the totems of the Paramount Fon of Kom, became world famous after it was stolen

from the Laikom palace and smuggled through France to the USA in the 1960s.<sup>46</sup> When it was discovered in the early 1970s, there was an international furore involving art dealers and curators, lawyers, scholars and diplomats. The *Afo-A-Kom* was finally given back to Cameroon where it is now a national treasure and part of the national artistic heritage, having been engraved even on bank notes.

In terms of geography, the Kom land is extremely mountainous. The area is the site of a diverse and rich fauna and flora, typically tropical. The hydrographical network is rich too, with a large number of streams and rivers. In the dormant volcanic mountains, many crater lakes have formed. The terrain comprises many cliffs and waterfalls. Despite the heavy decline in forest areas that is rampant in all the tropical regions of the world, the largest montane rainforest in Africa is still found in Kom. Because of its uniqueness and the presence of many rare and endemic species of plants and animals, a large international rainforest preservation project was launched in the Ijim mountain range in Kom.

There are two main seasons: the dry season running from mid-October to mid-March, and the rainy season covering the remaining seven months of the year. The rainfall is frequent and heavy.

The Western Grassfields of Cameroon, and in particular the Kom community, are also the site of a typical population mix that is observed throughout the Sahelian belt in Africa. Here the population mix is between the Grassfields Bantu and some ethnic groups of Sudano-Saharan stock, mainly cattle rearers and tradesmen. Though they are not native inhabitants of the Western Grassfields, the Sudano-Saharan peoples, mostly Hausa and Fulani (here known as Bororo), and originally nomadic, are settled in the Grassfields Bantu communities. They live generally in the high hills and mountain tops where they move around with their cattle herds. Their interaction with local communities is intense through commerce, and sometimes interethnic marriages. In Kom, the Bororo communities are mainly Muslim, but they do not have their own Koranic school system, as is the case with the Muslim Grand North region of Cameroon where there are proper Koranic schools using Arabic to teach and educate children into the Muslim faith. In Kom, those Bororo children who are sent to receive formal education

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<sup>46</sup> An article of the *Times* (Monday, Nov. 05, 1973), tells the incredible tale of the theft and smuggling of the *Afo-A-Kom*: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,908145,00.html> Accessed 23 Nov. 2006.



attend the local Kom schools. There are two schools in the Kom land, one at Fujua and the other at Bainjong, where a significant number of pupils are Muslim and of Bororo extraction. The school at Fujua is managed by the Bororo Social and Cultural Development Association (BOSCUDA) in close collaboration with the Muslim parents in the area. The school in Bainjong is under the management of the Ministry of Basic Education, the Government ministerial department in charge of primary education. These two schools have Arabic as one of their taught subjects, but their overall curriculum is still the same as most other schools in the Kom area, i.e. a general primary education programme taught mainly in English. The rest of the Muslim children in other areas of Kom attend the local schools. In Kom, most primary schools use English as the main medium of instruction, but there are also many PROPELCA primary schools which use the Kom language as the main medium of instruction.

**Figure 2.5: A view of Aduk, Kom.**



#### 2.4.2. Brief history

Looking at their demographic size, their historic expansion and social vitality, the Kom are among the biggest and quite remarkable ethnic groups of the North West province (Nkwi, 1976; Nkwi and Warnier, 1982; Trudell, 2005). Their brief recent history presented below draws on earlier scholarly research (Nkwi, 1976; Nkwi and Warnier, 1982; Trudell, 2005), my own extensive interviews,<sup>47</sup> and also the oral traditions collected<sup>48</sup> during my fieldwork in Kom (see Chapter 5).

The Kom kingdom or Fondom (as discussed earlier in 2.2.3) is one of the largest of the Tikari-descending fondoms of the North West province of Cameroon. The Kom ancestors are one of the Tikar groups who left northern Nigeria some centuries ago, probably in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, and scattered themselves eastwards all over the north of Cameroon. From Nigeria, they are said to have settled at Ndob<sup>49</sup> around Tibati and Banyo as early as the mid-18<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>50</sup> From Ndob<sup>49</sup> they moved further down westwards to reach Babesi. There, their Fon named Tānankoli<sup>51</sup> concluded a friendship treaty with the Fon of Babesi which permitted them to settle there.

After a long time in Babesi, the Kom people under their Fon named Nandong made their way through Nkar in the Nso land. From there they settled in Ajung for some years, and left there, under Fon Jinabo I, to move to Laikom. In Laikom they found the Ndonali clan and forced them through war to move further westwards and seek a new settlement at Achayn. The Kom finally settled their palace in Laikom, where it has ever been since.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Kom reached the peak of their power through victorious wars of conquests against their neighbouring chiefdoms. Fon Yuh I who reigned from 1860 to 1912 subdued many neighbouring fondoms and incorporated them under his authority. He even strongly resisted the German occupation of his territory.

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<sup>47</sup>For my fieldwork, I lived in the Kom land from March to September 2006. During those months I had extensive interviews and discussions on Kom history with many local figures. But those who directly contributed to the data used in this section are Timnge Augustine Ngwainbi, Diangha Lawrence (from Muteff), Nges Patrick (from Njinikejem) and Francis Ngongbi (from Chua'buh-Aduk).

<sup>48</sup> Depending on the interlocutors and especially their linguistic skills and preferences, I used English, CamPidgin – or Kom, resorting to an interpreter in the latter case. Fieldwork preparation, methodology and operations are discussed in detail in Chapters 3 and 5.

<sup>49</sup> In present days, Ndob<sup>49</sup> is fairly equated with the vast Ndop plains seating at the junction between the Adamawa, the North West and the West provinces of Cameroon.

<sup>50</sup> Kom oral historians in the Fon's Palace at Laikom do trace back their Fons' lineage up to the 1720s.

<sup>51</sup> This story of their origins has inspired Honourable Waingeh Albert, the Chairman of KLDC, who is also a playwright, to write the famous Kom play *The Revenge of Tānankoli*.

As discussed earlier, Cameroon was a German colony in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. When the Germans lost the First World War and their colonies in Africa, Cameroon was partitioned in two, and entrusted by the League of Nations to France and Britain. The Kom fell under the British Cameroon. Through the British colonial *Indirect Rule*, then the gradual nation-building started by the colonial administration and continued by the Cameroonian government since Independence in 1960, the Kom have become gradually integrated as part of the North West province and the national socio-human dynamics of modern Cameroon as a nation.

### 2.4.3. Administrative situation

The Kom area is situated in the North West province of Cameroon. There are 7 divisions in the province. The Kom linguistic area covers primarily the Boyo division. This division covers a surface area of 1557.5 km<sup>2</sup> and has an estimated population of 170,000 inhabitants (Shultz, 1997).<sup>52</sup>

Boyo is the most centrally located of all the divisions in the province, having boundaries with all the other divisions except Momo. In terms of its internal administrative separations, Boyo is made up of four subdivisions, namely Fundong Central, Belo, Njinikom, and Bum. These four subdivisions correspond to four council areas: Fundong, Belo, Njinikom, and Fonfuka.

In the rural council of Fonfuka in the Bum subdivision, the Bum<sup>53</sup> language is spoken by an estimated population of 21,400 (SIL sources, 2001; Lamberty, 2002).

### 2.4.4. Linguistic affiliation and adjacent languages

Kom is a tonal Grassfields Bantu language. Its code in the linguistic atlas of Cameroon (*ALCAM*, 1982) is 822. In the administrative atlas of Cameroonian languages,

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<sup>52</sup> A national population census, the *Recensement General de la Population et de l'Habitat* (RGPH) took place in 1987. This was the penultimate one with results officially published. There was a recent census in 2005-2006. Unfortunately, until 2008, its results were not yet officially published and available. Both censuses were organised and conducted with the official administrative units as geographical bases, so there is no possibility to have the exact demography of any given chiefdom or fondom, or actually any ethnolinguistic group, as these latter preceded the administrative segmentation of Cameroon and they span sometimes beyond or below most administrative units.

<sup>53</sup> SIL sources (*Ethnologue*, 2007) point out that Bum has a lexical similarity of 71% with Kom.

Breton and Fohitung (1991) present the genetic classification of Kom as follows: 822, Ring, Grassfields, Bantu, Bantoid, Benue-Congo, Niger-Congo, Niger-Kordofanian.

Grassfields Bantu languages of the Grand West of Cameroon have many dialects.<sup>54</sup> The criterion of mutual intelligibility allows linguists to regroup various close dialects under single language-units. But Kom shows a strong homogeneity and the Cameroon linguistic atlas (*ALCAM*, 1982) and other Cameroonian reference linguistic atlases (Breton and Fohitung, 1991:13) do not mention any significant dialectal variation in Kom. Randy Jones, an SIL linguist who worked for years in Kom, also confirms this in his introduction to the Kom dictionary<sup>55</sup>:

‘While slight pronunciation differences exist between some of the geographic areas of Kom, the essential unity and intercomprehensibility of the language is attested to by speakers from all areas.’ Jones (2001:3).

This observation in linguistic literature about the Kom linguistic unity tallies with assertions by Kom speakers themselves. The linguistic homogeneity can be a crucial boosting and a sustaining factor in the production and diffusion of local literature and the use of literacy materials (as will be further discussed in Chapters 5, 6 and 7).

As shown in Figure 2.6, Kom is surrounded by the following neighbouring languages, clockwise, starting at 12 o’clock on the map:

- to the north-east, by Bum,
- next, to the north-east, by Nɔɔni,
- to the east, by Kuo,
- to the south-east, by Vejo,
- to the south-west, by Babanki,
- next, to the south-west, by Bafut,
- to the west, by Befan,

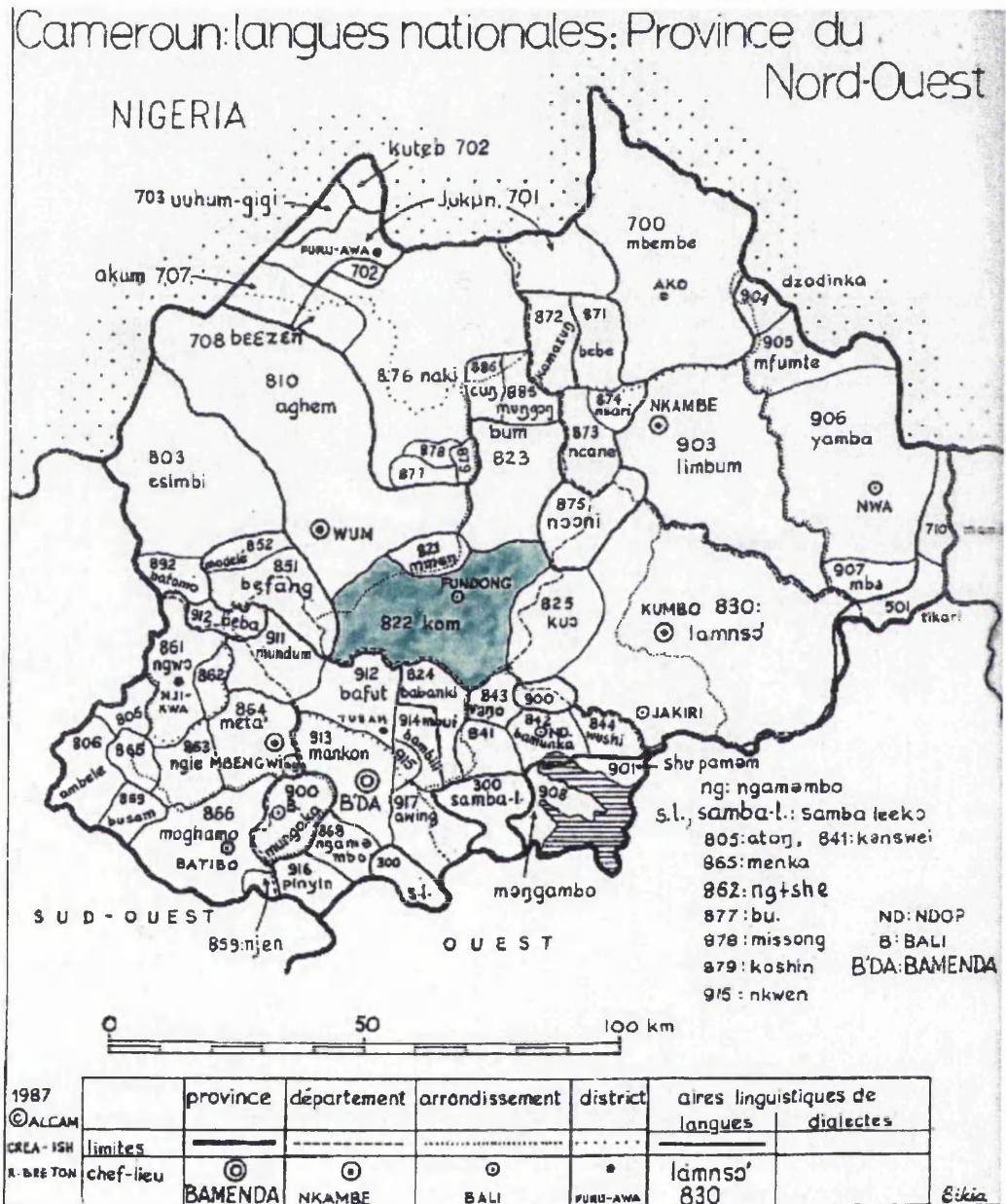
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<sup>54</sup> Ghomálá’, another Grassfields Bantu language from the neighbouring West province, for e.g. has 14 dialects spoken in 14 different villages which are distinct chiefdoms.

<sup>55</sup> The Kom bilingual dictionary was published by the KLDC in 2001 under the title *Provisional Kom-English Lexicon*. In due appreciation for all the work Randy Jones did and coordinated for the dictionary, he was named as its compiler.

- to the north-west, by Aghem,
- lastly, to the north, at 11 o'clock, by Mmen.

Figure 2.6: The Kom linguistic area in the North West province.



Source: Breton and Fohlung (1991:131).

In terms of language contact and interaction between Kom and its neighbouring languages, Kom appears to be the dominant language in the area. As Shultz (1997) writes,

The small surrounding chiefdoms have maintained their own languages, but nearly all the inhabitants are bilingual, also speaking the Kom language. More and more Kom people are learning to speak Pidgin or English but there does not seem to be an interest in speaking neighbouring Cameroonain languages. Some Kom people know a bit of the surrounding languages (...) but do not use those languages in conversation (Shultz, 1997:4).

#### **2.4.5. On the phonology, syllable structure and some orthographic features**

A brief overview of some specific linguistic features of Kom is necessary because this work will later investigate the teaching of the language. As will be seen in Chapter 6, the various didactic units in the pedagogic manuals are organised around specific linguistic features such as phonological segments, vocalic clusters, example words,<sup>56</sup> and tonal structure.

This overview is brief and is limited to only those items deemed useful in this research. A full grammar of Kom would be far more exhaustive and is beyond the scope of this thesis. But some sociolinguists have even pointed out how even the best grammars will still fail to encompass the linguistic wealth and complexities of a given language. As Wardhaugh (1998) writes,

‘... the knowledge that people have of the languages that they speak is extremely hard to describe. It is certainly something different from, and is much more considerable than, the kinds of knowledge that we see described in most of the grammars we find on library shelves, no matter how good those grammars may be. Anyone who knows a language knows much more about that language than is contained in any grammar book that attempts to describe the language.’ (Wardhaugh, 1998:2).

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<sup>56</sup> In a normal lesson in the Kom primer which uses the eclectic approach to language teaching (Gudschinsky, 1973; Barnwell, 1985; Wiesemann, 1983), these example words are also called key words.

### 2.4.5.1. Phonology and orthography

Some basic characteristics of Kom will be given here. The phoneme inventory and the syllable structure will be briefly presented. The alphabet and some orthographic principles will also be discussed, with a sketch of the tonal system.

#### 2.4.5.1.1. Vowel phonemes

Kom has a phonemic nine-vowel system (Chia and Kimbi, 1992; Kimbi, 2008). These vowels are shown in Table 2.5 below.

**Table 2.4: Kom vowel phoneme chart**

	<i>Front</i>	<i>Central</i>	<i>Back</i>
<i>Close</i>	i	ɨ	u
<i>Close-mid</i>	e		ʊ o
<i>Open-mid</i>	æ	œ	
<i>Open</i>	a		

It is worth noting that 3 of these vowels are resulting from the phonological process of vowel coalescence, as Shultz (1997) writes:

‘The sequence /iu/ is realized as [ü] and is written as “ue”; the sequence /io/ is realized as [œ], and the sequence /ia/ is realized as [æ].’ (Shultz, 1997:5).

#### 2.4.5.1.2. Consonant phonemes

The consonant inventory gives 20 consonants (Chia and Kimbi, 1992; Kimbi, 2008).

**Table 2.5: Kom consonant phoneme chart**

	<i>Bilabial</i>	<i>Labio-dental</i>	<i>Dental</i>	<i>Alveolar</i>	<i>Palatal</i>	<i>Velar</i>	<i>Glottal</i>	<i>Labio-velar</i>
<b>Plosive</b>	b			t d	c	k g	ʔ	
<b>Nasal</b>	m			n	ɲ	ŋ		
<b>Fricative</b>		f v		s z	j	g <sup>h</sup>		
<b>Lateral approximant</b>				l				
<b>Approximant</b>					y			w

#### ***2.4.5.1.3. Alphabet and orthographic conventions***

The current orthography of Kom is the result of work started in the early 1980s by some SIL linguists, which was continued by other Kom linguists through the KLDC. It is based on the principles of the *General Alphabet of Cameroonian Languages* (as discussed earlier in 2.2.5). The present orthography is used by the vast majority of current authors and promoters of Kom. Chapter 6 will examine in detail the Kom literature that has over the last 30 years established the permanence of the Kom orthography.

The Kom alphabet has 29 letter-sounds (Chia and Kimbi, 1992; Shultz, 1997; Kimbi, 2008). As discussed earlier, the *General Alphabet of Cameroonian Languages* was conceived with the principle of “bi-univocity”: each sound attested phonemically in any language is represented graphically by a single grapheme or letter-sound. Thus, in all Cameroonian languages following the *General Alphabet*, a letter-sound is based on a single phoneme attested in a language and its unique grapheme in the writing system. Some of the graphemes can be monographs, digraphs or even trigraphs, i.e. a sequence of one, two or three letters combined to represent a sound.

The 29 letter-sounds of Kom (as listed in Table 2.6) are distributed as follows: 9 vowel letter-sounds, 3 of which are represented by digraphs; and 20 consonant letter-sounds, 3 of which are also represented by digraphs.



It is worth noting that the glottal stop in Kom is a full consonant, though its graphic representation is the same as that of an apostrophe in English. As the Kom writing system doesn't actually use the apostrophe, i.e. for any similar use as a punctuation mark or writing connector in English, this convention is in conformity with the rule of consistency in graphisation, which requires that an orthographic representation should not be ambiguous or easily prone to different interpretations in the same language.

Samples of written Kom from pages of published manuals are provided in Chapter 6.

**Table 2.6: Kom alphabet and orthographic conventions**

IPA	Kom alphabet
b	b
m	m
f	f
v	v
t	t
d	d
n	n
s	s
k	k
g <sup>h</sup>	gh
g	g
ɲ	ny
j	j
ŋ	ŋ
z	z
l	l
c	ch
y	y
ʔ	'
w	w
i	i
ɨ	ɨ
u	u
e	e
ʊ	ue
o	o
œ	oe
æ	ae
a	a

#### **2.4.5.2. Syllable structure**

For the description of the Kom syllable structure here, the following conventions are used: C: consonant; V: vowel.

Single syllable words with a V nucleus are found. Polysyllabic words are common and can have the following structure: CV, CVC, CCV and CCVC.

Syllable always bear a tone, carried by the vocalic sound in the syllable. Tone is further discussed below.

### 2.4.5.3. *Tone*

Trask (1996:356) defines tone as “the phenomenon... in which words of different meaning which consist of identical sequences of consonants and vowels are distinguished merely by contrast of pitch.”

In human speech production, vowels and consonants are said to belong to the segmental tier, i.e. the normal speech production tier made up of basic segments or sounds produced in the language. Tones are considered as supra-segmental phenomenon, that is, they superpose themselves to vocalic and consonantal sounds. In non tonal languages, a change in the pitch of the voice when pronouncing a word will not lead to a total semantic or lexical change of the word. But with tonal languages, pitch patterns are used in their lexical capacity, i.e. to build words and morphemes much as consonants and vowels do (Wang, 2002:552).

In tonal languages, tone change can have a grammatical function (when tone is used to mark grammatical relations between morphemes or words) or a lexical function. In their lexical function, tones play a key role in distinguishing different lexical items in the language (as in the Kom Example (1) below).

*Example (1):*

	<i>bo</i>	‘weave’
L:	<i>bò</i>	‘bag’
HL :	<i>abâs</i>	‘a piece’
	<i>abas</i>	‘lizard’

Kom has five phonemic tones, divided into three level tones and two contour tones. The level tones are: High (H), Mid (M), Low (M); and the contour tones are: Rising (LH) and Falling (HL). Some Kom authors have established the existence of up to eight different tones in the language (Chia and Kimbi, 1992:10), though Shultz’s analysis is that the other rare contour tones in the language are actually results of tone modification within the Kom phrase (Shultz, 1997:5).

The orthographic convention in Kom as regards tone is to mark only the Low (L), as in *bò* in Example (1) above, and the High-Low or Falling (HL), as in *abâs* above.

## 2.5. SUMMARY

This chapter has presented the national and local contexts for this study. In these two interwoven backgrounds, it has been important to focus as much as possible on those aspects that relate closely to the subject of this study, namely adult literacy in Kom. At the same time, adult literacy is a learning process that takes place in formal settings; it is also a social practice through its perception and use in society. Therefore, it has been important to include a number of related elements such as the local history and the socio-economic life, as well as information on the education system at the national level. In addition, the issue of the local language is central to this research, as is the focus on literacy. For that reason, this chapter has presented the sociolinguistic environments both at the national and local levels.

This chapter has also discussed the presentation of some features of the Kom language. A good part of the study of literacy in this research looks at the acquisition of literacy skills from the pedagogic standpoint. As such, it was necessary to look briefly at the linguistic features of the tonal Grassfields Bantu language that Kom is. The didactic practices studied throughout this research reflect the structure of the language; this motivated a brief presentation of the phonology and orthographic principles of the language.

The literacy activities as described at the national level show both similarities with, and contrasts to, the local Kom literacy programme. One area of similarity is the aim: both programmes target illiterate adults and are concerned with the well-being of grassroots communities. However, the approaches of the NLP and the Kom literacy programmes are different, as are the end-results, which will be further discussed in subsequent chapters. In terms of their time frames, the two programmes are also diametrically different. The Kom literacy programme as a community-rooted enterprise is designed to be permanent. The NLP, however, seems unstable and likely to be only short-term. The Government has planned the NLP in terms of months, whereas the KLDC views the Kom literacy programme as an enterprise to be fully integrated into other local practices and values in a long-term vision.

## **Chapter 3: Conceptual frameworks, Research questions, and some Categories and Institutions of adult literacy in Cameroon**

### **3.1. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter will discuss the conceptual frameworks sustaining this research. Chapter 1 covered, among other issues, the importance and relevance of the scientific investigation of this thesis. Since these are now stated, research questions must consequently be spelled out to give a direction to the data collection and the possible results to be produced. I will examine these research questions in this chapter.

There is much debate about terminology and concepts in the social sciences in general, and in educational linguistics and literacy studies in particular. Therefore, clarifying the senses and the domains of usage of the specialised words that run through this work is useful. Hammersley (1990:75), when discussing the importance of providing definitions of terms in ethnographic studies, aptly points out that

‘Definitions are not empirical claims about the world but statements about how the author is going to use a term, about what meaning is to be associated with it.’

Following this observation, I will deal in this chapter with issues of terminology and categorial definitions through a discussion of the key concepts and categories used in this research.

As stated in previous chapters, a number of institutions, both at local and national levels, are active in various domains and aspects of local language literacy in Cameroon. The most salient of such institutions are NACALCO and SIL. Their institutional development, their history and functioning are intrinsically connected to the evolution and the functioning of the adult literacy programme in Kom. Accordingly, this chapter will give a detailed presentation of some of the institutions that are active regarding local language adult literacy in Cameroon.

## **3.2. ON THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS**

### **3.2.1. A naturalistic vision**

As noted in Chapter 1, this research involves a researcher rooted in a particular socio-historic background, studying human beings in real life situations. Necessarily, this research will reflect this relationship, and it ensues that a philosophical positioning will underlie it. As Ruddock (1981) aptly points it out,

‘(...) no kind of social science, and therefore no social enquiry, can escape an involvement in philosophical and political issues at every turn.’ (Ruddock, 1981:2).

At this point, I will thus touch on the philosophical standpoint of this research, in which two complementary approaches come together: the scientific approach to the study, and the socio-philosophical approach.

Regarding the scientific stance, this work is positioned within the naturalistic vision, in contrast to a positivistic vision (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2006). As such, this research stands apart from a quantitative vision of social science, which itself stems from the logical positivism school. Positivists are concerned with the testing of theories and have adopted a number of foundational tenets, of which two are central:

- The importance of impersonal experiments: basically, research should be based on ‘...quantitatively measured variables (...) manipulated in order to identify the relationships among them’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2006:4),
- The quest and acceptance of universal laws: these laws should state regular relationship between the studied variables, and these relationships should hold across all circumstances.

In contrast to the positivist school, the naturalistic approach to scientific inquiry stands as a more socio-human vision of social research. Within the naturalistic school, the current trend in terms of research approaches is characterised by the qualitative approach as its ‘dominant approach’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2006:1). Naturalism believes, among other things,

- (a) that the world should be studied in its most natural state – as opposed to an artificial state as in positivistic experiments – and
- (b) that human phenomena should be analysed as they happen in reality. Any research of human related activity should therefore construct its scientific discourse in direct appreciation, ‘fidelity’ and ‘respect’ of the social world.

In other words, naturalism is ‘the philosophical view that remains true to the nature of the phenomenon under study’ (Matza, 1969:5).<sup>57</sup>

For this research, taking the naturalistic vision is not just a random choice of the researcher conducting the investigation. One reason for choosing this approach is the nature of the phenomena and people under study. Humans and social phenomena, such as literacy in Kom which is studied here, are dynamic by essence. Put differently, literacy in Kom is not static, and its evolution and its uses, and the values and functions that it mediates, are not fixed once and for all. Even when this dynamism is gradual, it doesn’t allow any perception of Kom literacy to be frozen for an eventual positivistic vision based on experimental tenets. On the basis of this naturalistic vision, the best methodological way to account for literacy in Kom is through an approach that contains a feature of dynamism and adjustability in its procedure. This has led to the choice of the ethnographic method to conduct research on adult literacy in Kom, as will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, which deals with methodological approaches and research techniques.

This doctoral thesis projects a kind of synchronic discourse on a social phenomenon and a human group. Two characteristics of human groups and social phenomena are their permanent dynamism and relative flexibility. Consequently, any related discourse will have to be faithful to the described reality and its intrinsic qualities, and this research will pick those tenets of naturalism that will inform the investigation. As recent developments have shown in the domain of social sciences (Dooley, 1990; Bailey, 1994; Davies, 1999; Barton, et al. 2000; Bryman, 2004), aspects of the researcher’s reflexivity will also permeate throughout the work.

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<sup>57</sup> Cited in Hammersley and Atkinson (2006:6).

### 3.2.2. A critical approach to literacy research

#### 3.2.2.1. *Towards a holistic view of adult literacy*

On a purely socio-philosophical position, this research takes the stand of a critical vision to research. Such a critical approach to theorising about social phenomenon stems from the trend opened by post-modernism, and in the case of Africa, by post-colonial theory. A new priority is given in this trend to recapturing the importance of the particular. Experiences and activities by actors and institutions from the periphery, from the grassroots, can shed useful light and give a more holistic understanding of the meanings and aspirations of not only the marginalised, but the society as a whole. As will be shown below, this is of special interest when it comes to literacy.

The topic of this study, namely adult literacy, is linked to language, identity and socio-cultural issues such as preservation/loss of local traditions, power sharing in the society, cultural values and historic heritages. Because literacy presupposes by essence literacy 'in a language', the recent and present history of languages in Africa calls for a critical approach to literacy itself. Researching adult literacy in Cameroon accordingly means coming to grips with the issue of adults and their problems and their daily struggles for meanings. A related question is to account for how literacy can be a tool for a number of ends that are among of the expectations of adult participants.

I position my work in a context of crisis,<sup>58</sup> namely the postcolonial context in Africa in general, and Cameroon in particular. This context is characterised by an encounter of various ideologies, power issues and various interests. In this encounter, the social institutions, such as the educational systems, the political structures, and the social vision of the target adults in their present status quo, are consequences of socio-political agendas. Some of these agendas are overt, others are covert. The colonial agendas are among the most overt ones, as discussed earlier in Chapter 2. The African post-colonial social structures and institutions are the direct manufactures of the colonial administration. Today, the various political and socio-cultural constituencies established after the African Independences are still under tension as concerns

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<sup>58</sup> When I talk about contexts in crisis here, I do not mean in any sense of Afro-pessimism as purported by some media and social scientists. It is not about seeing crises in African contexts everywhere and in everything.



political power sharing, allocation of economic resources, public interests, and attention in the media and social communication; and the social arena is marred by these tensions. Adult literacy is at the junction point of all such tensions. As will be further discussed in the next chapters, all the actors in play in local language literacy are marked by their actions and reactions to these various ideologies, interests and tension.

Consequently, the social issues and situations under investigation can not be assumed to be in a balanced and equitable relationship. Stated differently, social research in Africa today can not start on the 'everything being equal' stance. The local languages, the adults as speakers of local languages, and the communities are undergoing changes and pressures that are not necessarily inflicted or engineered by themselves at endogenous levels. External agendas are shaping the evolution of African societies (maybe more than anywhere else in the world). In such a situation, a social research enterprise can not be considered as being a wholly neutral operation in such a post-colonial context, which still bears too many stigmas of the colonial shock: public exclusion of its own languages, cultural discrimination, social identity losses, cultural self-recriminations, and denial of basic rights and values for African peoples and cultures. In the face of all these issues, I find myself and my research in an unavoidable situation of crisis, which therefore calls for a critical vision of literacy research.

A critical vision of literacy research is a bit different from critical literacy itself (in the sense discussed by Paulo Freire (1973, 1976, 1985, 1998) as I shall discuss in detail in Chapter 4). But it shares with critical literacy an 'exhumation agenda' (Holme, 2004). Like the post-modernist and post-colonial frameworks in social research, a critical vision to literacy research believes that the meanings and the powers that lie behind social relationships and practices must be excavated, or at least brought to light (Holme, 2004). Only by assuming a critical approach can this be done, since my research takes an extended view of adult literacy, going beyond the individual skills of reading and writing, to stretch into the social uses and meaning of literacy (These are examined in detail in Chapter 7).

The philosophical and conceptual stances taken in this research have shaped it in three complementary orientations: a central importance given to local languages, a bottom-top direction guiding the investigation, and a positive attitude advocated about African languages. I will next examine these points in detail.

### 3.2.2.2. *Breaking the 'psychic disbelief' in African languages*

My research in this thesis takes the philosophical and conceptual stance of a positive attitude about African languages. One consequence is that this research will attempt to challenge a number of negative beliefs and mental states regarding African languages. One of these beliefs to be challenged is described by Githiora (2008a:250) as a 'psychic disbelief' in African languages, internalised by many Africans.

The erosion and devaluation of African cultures and values as a result of colonisation has been widely discussed in literature (Ela, 1982, 2001; Fonge, 1997; Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1986, 1993; Brock-Utne, 2000, 2001, 20002), among others. But with the large majority of African languages, things are worse, since these languages have not only been devalued, but also systematically excluded from the education systems and media. As a result of such exclusion policies, many Africans have reached a mental state of 'psychic disbelief' about their own languages. As Githiora (2004, p.c.) writes,

'There is no doubt that the emphasis within the educational systems of most African countries on English or French or Portuguese creates a negative context, which serves to undermine the culture of reading and writing in African languages. In the current language situation, African languages are further denied of social prestige in face of the dominant European languages which are the vehicles of upward social mobility par excellence. This contributes to a state of 'psychic disbelief' in the abilities, possibilities and full potential offered by the African languages.'

Psychic disbelief is a major hurdle on the path of development of African languages. The negative influence of this psychic disbelief should not be underestimated at all, since it 'perhaps weighs more heavily than economics in explaining the rudimentary culture of reading and writing in African languages' (Githiora, 2004).

As Ricard (2004:3)<sup>59</sup> points out, linguistic works and publications have tried to improve this negative image of African languages. But the shadow of disbelief is still too present in most African minds and environments, and it is part of the role of linguistic and educational work to help improve the understanding and the value of literacy in African languages. This research modestly hopes to contribute in that direction by working on Kom

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<sup>59</sup> As cited in Githiora (2004:2).

language literacy, whose description and analyses will improve the comprehension of African language grassroots literacy. At the same time, it is expected to help break the ‘psychic disbelief’ about literacy in Cameroonian languages. Showing the Kom language outside of its oral traditional dimension, bringing it into the ‘culture of the book’ (Ricard, 2004:3)<sup>60</sup> will help establish a positive vision of this language. By so doing, the promotion of local African cultures and values will also be improved.

The (mis)conception (which the authors mentioned above have discussed) of relegating African languages to more rudimentary levels has to be challenged by academic research. And this challenge will be reinforced when the use of an African language in reading and writing is investigated and shown in its current evolution. The vibrancy of the Kom literacy programme might not match that of the colonial languages such as French and English. But in its own world, that is, the community environment of the Kom highlands in the West province of Cameroon (where tens of thousands of people use this language as their main tool of communication), the value, vibrancy and respect of Kom literacy are undoubted. They are actually at the foundation of its existence, as I have observed on the field and will discuss in detail in Chapter 5.

### **3.2.3. The centrality of local language literacy**

The focus of this research is literacy in an African language. A number of research publications on literacy in Africa do not focus enough on the languages used as mediums of teaching literacy skills (Lowry, 1979; Lele, 1987; Bhola, 1994; Egbo, 2000). Though mention is always made of the local languages, the insistence of these authors seems to be on the acquisition of literacy as skills of reading and writing. At first sight, one might think that this is rightly so, since literacy is originally about the skills of reading and writing. But one reads and writes in *a* given language. So again, the issue of what language is used in any literacy research in Africa comes to the fore, especially when one has to consider the present socio-cultural fabric of the continent as it has emerged from the colonial experience. To go even further, it is not only about *what* language is used in literacy, but actually *whose* language, as

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<sup>60</sup> As cited in Githiora (2004:2).

Brock-Utne (2001) questions in the telling title of her article ‘*Education For All – in Whose Language?*’<sup>61</sup> And, as discussed earlier, many Africanists have repeatedly pointed out the insufficiencies of any literacy, or study of literacy, in Africa, which doesn’t tackle the place of the local languages (Richmond, 1983, 1986; Tadadjeu, 1990; Robinson, 1995; Ouane, 1997; Yetna, 1999; Gfeller, 2000; Makoni and Meinhof, 2003; Trudell, 2004).

From the foregoing points, it is only natural that my research roots itself in the Kom language as used in the Kom grassroots; this is the focal point of data collection and of the analyses about literacy. Literacy in Kom is ultimately a language issue, for it is the Kom that was for decades only an oral medium that is being discussed and researched. Literacy in English and French existed since colonial times. But as I discuss in more depth in Chapters 2 and 7, literacy in French and English was, and still is, limited to a small elite, painfully extirpated from the grassroots people who all could read and write if they started with a language in which they were already fluent speakers. Therefore, the issue can not be, and is not, only that of literacy; but also an issue of literacy in a local language, namely Kom. Thus, the local language is at the heart of this literacy research. Further implications of this position will be examined in Chapters 5 and 7.

#### **3.2.4. A bottom-top direction**

The combination of (1) the naturalistic vision, (2) a holistic view of literacy, and (3) a primacy given to local languages (all enunciated earlier in this chapter), gives a ‘bottom-top’ direction to this research. It is worth mentioning that such a direction goes contrary to the current practices observed in most cases about literacy in Africa, where the direction is from the top to the bottom. Examples of the top-bottom approach are the programmes conceived outside of the communities and imposed on them without consideration of local realities. As concerns the implementation of literacy programmes, the result of such top-bottom endeavours is like the fiasco of the National Literacy Campaign that I discussed in Chapter 2. As concerns

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<sup>61</sup> Brock-Utne, B. 2001. “ Education For All – in Whose Language ? ” *Oxford Review of Education*, Vol. 27, No 1. pp. 115-134

research about literacy, the cases in point are those studies that have neglected the linguistic realities and the local languages which are used in the grassroots areas studied.

The stance I take to go from the bottom to the top is not therefore just at the discursive or theoretical level. It guides the operationalisation of the research work from the data collection to the writing up. The local values and knowledge systems will be described and analysed in their own capacities; I will follow the literacy processes and activities as they happen in situ on the field, and I will develop my thesis around them. This method will be further explicated when discussing the data collection techniques and the theoretical frameworks in the next chapter.

### **3.3. SOME RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Four main domains are investigated as they pertain to our study of adult literacy in this thesis: (1) organisational issues (literacy implementation), (2) didactic materials, (3) literacy teaching in classes, and (4) social values and meanings mediated by literacy.

As concerns organisational issues, there are a number of important questions related to the delivery of literacy. When considering literacy as an end-product, there is a chain of activities and events that must happen for literacy to be delivered. Therefore, a crucial question is: How is literacy organised? This domain of interest has to do with the community and how literacy is implemented as a local practice. In other words, who are the actors, and what are the elements and infrastructures coming into play in the delivery of literacy? In practice, these are the ‘who, what, when, where, how’ questions. In this domain, it is important to look at the literacy institutions and their operational networks, as well as their technical heritage and practices.

The second area of interest concerns questions relating to the local literature used in literacy, namely the books and other teaching aids used in the literacy classes. What are these materials? How are they designed? How do literacy monitors use them in the classes? What printed materials in the local language are available in the community? What are their contents? In this domain, it is important to also investigate the dynamics and the socio-

economic implications of this local literature: how is it distributed and how is it sustainable; and what is its role in the overall literacy programme?

The third domain of investigation is the teaching of literacy in classes, focusing on the specific ways in which the human interaction between the literacy monitor and the learners leads to the delivery of the literacy skills. How do adults fare when they are learning to read and write? What are the backgrounds of the monitors? What training do they acquire, and from where? For example, it has already been mentioned that there is a close relationship between the PROPELCA tradition and adult literacy. How do the two interchange in the production of dedicated human resources to deliver literacy? What are the teaching environments? What are the pedagogic experiences of the learners? This domain of investigation will cover, among others things, the curricular development, the issues of time-tabling, and the temporal organisation. How long do literacy monitors teach? When do they teach? How much time is spent in the classroom? Still in this domain, I will also describe as much as possible the learners and their backgrounds, and their effective participation.

Once a detailed account regarding the organisation of literacy, didactic materials and teaching in classes has been given, this thesis will attempt to discuss the values attached to literacy in the Kom community. Therefore, a fourth domain of investigation will be to study the attitudes towards literacy, analysing adults' expectations of literacy as they determine their participation in the literacy activities, and as they shape their perceptions and motivations to learn to read and write their local language. Within the realm of the local socio-cultural knowledge and value systems, what does literacy mediate? What else is literacy an instrument of, in the Kom case? And beyond the values attached to literacy in Kom, what are the significant uses of literacy, once literacy skills are acquired? What are the social values and the meanings that literacy mediates in Kom, from the perspective of the adult Kom learners? From a social and broader perspective, what can one observe? How does the KLDC engineer its own socio-cultural agenda?

### **3.4. SOME CATEGORIAL DEFINITIONS**

#### **3.4.1. On concepts and categories**

At this point, it is important to define or clarify some of the concepts and categories that are being used. Bryman (2004:538) defines a concept ‘...as a name given to a category that organizes observations and ideas by virtue of their possessing common features’. More in social sciences than anywhere else, the flexibility and the way concepts are used can determine the transparency or opacity of theories and scientific analyses. Strauss and Corbin (1998) even consider concepts as the ‘building blocks of theory’.<sup>62</sup> Sometimes, the terms ‘category’ and ‘concept’ are used interchangeably to almost mean the same thing, but a distinction can be established between them. According to Bryman (2004), a category is

‘... a concept that has been elaborated so that it is regarded as representing real-world phenomena. (...) A category may subsume two or more concepts. As such, categories are at a higher level of abstraction than concepts.’ Bryman (2004:403).

In this section, I will discuss some of the concepts and categories used in this research. I will also attempt to contextualise them in connection to the sociolinguistic reality of the study.

#### **3.4.2. National language**

Trudgill (2003:91) defines a national language as ‘a language which functions as the main language of a nation state’. Other authors bring more nuances in their definition of national language, looking at national-level usage of the language, but also at issues of official recognition, and at connection to political power and inter-ethnic patriotic identity (Echu and Grundstrom, 1999; Kaplan and Baldauf, 1997<sup>63</sup>). In the literature on Cameroon and its languages, the perception of what is labelled as ‘national language’ differs widely from the above definitions.

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<sup>62</sup> Strauss and Corbin (1998:101), cited in Bryman (2004:403).

<sup>63</sup> As cited in Canvin (2003:2).

In Cameroon, a national language refers to a local language or a mother tongue. The evolution of this term is actually rooted in a political agenda which shaped language labelling in Cameroon, starting after the country's independence in 1960. In those post-independence days, nation building was rife and political integration was the order of the day. Various ethnic groups were fighting to grab the political powers inherited from the colonial masters, and the Government was keen on national unity and integration. It was a time when written documents were scarce, and when the main sources of any public information were the public media and the official written press. Following some parliamentarian and legislative debates, the public authorities wanted to avoid the tendency to put a particular local language over any other in terms of importance or primacy.

Therefore, in the post-independence political discourses around national integration it was initially propounded that a national language should be any local indigenous language spoken natively by any Cameroonian ethnic group. Thus, the Government granted in public discourses equal status to all Cameroonian languages by calling them all 'national languages'. This appellation was officially endorsed in the final recommendations of the National Council for Cultural Affairs held in Yaounde on 18 – 22 December 1974. Henceforth, all Cameroonian languages were to be called 'national languages', and were seen as the heritage of the entire nation of Cameroon; not necessarily only of their original native-speaking ethnic group. The building of the young Cameroon as a modern nation did not validate or nurture the pursuit of having a single national language, but rather saw all Cameroonian languages as of equal status and part of the national cultural heritage. Since the 1970s, this definition of national language has trickled down from official documents and through the media, to enter the common discourses and the research literature (Ntsobe, 1985; Lele, 1987; Tadadjeu and Sadembouo, 1979, 1984; Tadadjeu, 1990; Ela, 1982, 2001; Tabi-Manga, 2000; Echu and Grundstrom, 1999; Gfeller, 2000).

Until today, the defining criterion for a national language in Cameroon is that the language must be spoken natively by people indigenous to the country long before colonial times or even the Arab expansion (in the case of the Grand North of Cameroon). Consequently, 'national language' excludes Arabic, French and English, and other European languages spoken in the country, such as German and Spanish (used in Secondary education as subjects, as discussed in Chapter 1).



### 3.4.3. On literacy

In this section, my objective is to discuss the complexity of literacy, from its basic definition to its more extended perceptions, and to point out the challenges faced by the conceptual development of the word 'literacy'.

#### 3.4.3.1. *Basic literacy*

Most education systems are based on a basic definition of literacy as a learning process involving the acquisition of the two complementary skills of reading and writing. This is what is generally called basic or 'traditional' literacy. According to Bhola (1994:30),<sup>64</sup>

'Traditional *literacy* training has only one *intrinsic* objective, namely, the teaching of reading and writing, accompanied in most cases by elementary arithmetic. It is thus an isolated, extra-curricular operation which is self-justifying and an end in itself'.<sup>65</sup>

In this initial perception of literacy as reading and writing, it is possible to break down the reading and writing components of literacy into an interrelated network of psycho-cognitive and technical processes and features. I have tried to encapsulate them in the following table:

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<sup>64</sup> Bhola mentions that his definition is based on a UNESCO reference document.

<sup>65</sup> Bhola's italics.

**Table 3.1: Basic literacy processes and markers**

<b>Human skill</b>	<b>Reading and writing are the human capacities</b>	
<b>Process/ Activity</b>		<b>to use</b>
<b>Operational tools and actions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- language – as a mentally internalised knowledge, and an abstract communication system, and</li> <li>- physical body – the hands (manual skills) and the senses (organ of vision, and discriminating visual skills, i.e. capable to differentiate and specify similarities and dissemblances in written symbols and signs), and</li> <li>- material supports (i.e. the physical supports such as paper, clay, wood, or any other material surface)</li> </ul>	
<b>Process/ Activity</b>		<b>to produce and/or decipher</b>
<b>Markers/ End-results</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- language – as real-life products and events (reading events and written texts).</li> </ul>	

As illustrated in the table above, the markers or end-results (i.e. the material visible evidence) of literacy are the reading and writing events and products observable in real life. Put differently, if a given person doesn't read something written, or doesn't write something meaningful, it will be difficult to claim their literate capacity. The problem here, which actually is an ontological issue, is that the markers of literacy are just a part of the process. But because they are the measures by which literacy can be discussed or described, they tend to be the main markers of literacy, though they are just the tip of the iceberg. For example, reading, which is one of the basic literacy skills, is a complex mental phenomenon that involves many processes in an organic continuum:

- phonological awareness,
- decoding
- fluency
- comprehension
- and vocabulary (lexical productivity).

My concern is not to question the conceptual assumptions about basic or traditional literacy, since those assumptions are a necessary starting point, but to expand from there into the other conceptual developments of literacy.

#### **3.4.3.2. Functional literacy**

The initial concept of functional literacy implied the capacity for any literate person to 'function' efficiently on a daily basis with the literacy skills of reading and writing. Bhola (1994:2) aptly captures that when he writes:

'One of the forms of adult literacy is called 'functional literacy'. Of course, literacy always comes to find a 'function' in the lives of people who become literate. In that sense, all literacy is 'functional'. However, it so happens that the phrase 'functional literacy' has acquired special meanings. A functional literacy programme is a special kind of a literacy programme for adults. In such a programme, the teaching of literacy is combined with the teaching of 'economic skills'. In functional literacy, the economic function is given a central importance'.

In this regard, the meaning of 'functional literacy' has evolved significantly over the last 50 years. During this period, functional literacy has espoused the successive education programmes implemented at world level under the auspices of UNESCO; this latter having been the main international organisation at the forefront of the promotion of literacy. In the 40s-50s, UNESCO adopted the following definition of a literate person:

"A person is literate who can, with understanding, both read and write a short simple statement on his or her everyday life (UNESCO, 1949)"

On the premises of this conceptual approach, UNESCO embarked on the fight against illiteracy. To this end, the basic skills of reading and writing were taught through adult education programmes carried out through UNESCO-sponsored mass literacy campaigns. It appears that this definition encompassed the basic capacity to use reading and writing for daily communication within the targets person's own society. It was set in order to define standard criteria to assess the level of literacy for the beneficiaries of the campaigns. But as examined earlier, the meaning of 'functional literacy' has expanded significantly, to include especially economic and professional skills in addition to the basic skills of reading, writing, and basic numeracy. This meaning is the most currently used today. Put differently, the primary

meaning of functional literacy above (in the sense of any literacy being functional initially) is now more or less equated with 'basic' or traditional literacy (as defined earlier). The UNESCO economic-oriented definition of functional literacy has been largely adopted and used in most literature on functional literacy in Africa (Asiedu and Oyedeji, 1985; Richmond, 1983, 1986; Lele, 1987; Bhola, 1994). In the African contexts and literature, a functional literacy programme has its contents and objectives geared towards practical impact and benefits related to economic, cultural and daily activities of the beneficiaries. Such a programme's contents and delivery are more related to improvement of professional skills and are of practical use in terms of the real-life economic problems of target groups. Functional literacy programmes in most local communities are thus aimed at not only giving to beneficiaries the basic literacy and numeracy skills, but also more importantly, providing them with functional skills and know-how to improve their professional practices or economic life standards (Richmond, 1983, 1986; Asiedu and Oyedeji, 1985; Lele, 1987; Bhola, 1994; Trudell, 2005).

#### *3.4.3.3. Critical literacy*

Another interesting issue related to defining literacy is its connection to the society in which the literate person lives. In fact, a reminder about the versatility of literacy as a social phenomenon comes from Wagner (1993), who writes that

'When considered as a social phenomenon, literacy[']s (...) functions, meanings, and methods of transmission vary from one cultural group to the next' Wagner (1993:9).

This social dimension means, among other things, that to capture the social essence of literacy, it is necessary to go beyond basic skills (traditional literacy) and economic motivations (functional literacy) to check the empowerment and political awareness brought by literacy. This is the trend that brought about the conceptual development of critical literacy. Therefore, the agenda of critical literacy is a socio-political one. As Bhola (1994) writes,

'Critical literacy enables people to become critical of what they see, of what they hear, of what they get and of what they are asked to give. In other words, they become critically aware of the social, political and economic relationships in which they are caught. Critical literacy comes closest to political education. Critical literacy wants people to do something with their newly acquired literacy skills. It seeks to organize people for political action for transforming the world around them'. Bhola (1994:33).

One of the strongest advocates of critical literacy is Paulo Freire (This will be further discussed in Chapter 4).

I will endeavour to extend the focus of this research to adults' motivations and uses of literacy in Kom. By looking at the community dimension of literacy, I intend to generate a qualitative analysis of adult literacy.

#### ***3.4.3.4. Literacy programme and literacy project***

In Cameroon, the general operational framework of adult education at community level is the adult literacy programme. A literacy programme can be viewed as the set of educational activities aimed at making specific target groups literate. The programmatic nature of these activities lies in the fact that they are organised institutionally and planned chronologically. In other words, a literacy programme can not be a package of random activities.

In its daily implementation, a literacy programme is broken down into sub-parts, namely a series of projects. Literacy projects generally have two main features: intrinsically they are focalised, and extrinsically they are complementary to other projects that make up the whole programme. In terms of their focalisation, literacy projects can be region-based, or content-based. In the Kom literacy programme for example, the literacy activities in the hamlet of Aduk may be called the Aduk project because they are region-focused (in Aduk) and are part of the bigger Kom programme. Though the Kom teaching classes in that area are a replication of the same pedagogical practices going on elsewhere in the Kom land, it is valid to consider the single package of activities in Aduk as one project. Of course, as defined above, the Kom programme is the sum of all these regional projects.

When a project is defined on the basis of its contents rather than its geographic location, it means the type of activity making up the project is the determining factor. For instance, the Kom literacy programme has a sub-part focused on literature production, another one on teaching, another one on training, and so on. Each of these sub-parts can actually be broken down into even smaller and more specific activities. For example, in the training area, there can be a separate training for bilingual school teachers, another one for literacy monitors, another one for agricultural community assistants, and so on. A similar task fragmentation can

be done with literature production. All those sub-areas of activities are considered as projects in the sense that they narrow down to specific domains, which in total combine to make up the literacy programme.

#### ***3.4.3.5. Adult education and adult literacy***

Adult education and adult literacy are close categories. At first, the relationship between the two could be subsumed under the relationship between a whole and a part; literacy being an intrinsic part of education. But things are more complex: in its primary sense, literacy is a set of skills, mainly reading and writing, whereas education is a more holistic process of acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. Literacy tends to be taught and acquired in a more formal way, and is based on established learning settings and practices. Education is an encompassing process whose mediation does not depend exclusively on formal contexts and processes. Social communication, the press and the media, and community interaction can significantly contribute to educating individuals and groups. One can even extend this to claim that the goal of much social communication in its various forms is to educate the members of the society. Even the process of information and sharing of knowledge presupposes an educational agenda in terms of enlarging the bulk of knowledge at hand for those who receive any shared information.

Still, it is worth mentioning that education is also dependent to a great extent on literacy acquisition. It can be argued that since so much knowledge to be acquired tends to be produced and conserved in written material supports and formats, the access to these various materials and formats is possible only through literacy. Thus, literacy can be conceived as a tool par excellence of education. This assertion applies in the advanced contemporary form of education, primarily based on a print-rich environment. In other words, in present day Africa, most access to educational processes is mediated mainly (though not exclusively) by literacy. Accordingly, to be able to read and write can be seen as permitting access to whatever exists as the contents of education, i.e. the written information and knowledge available within the community, since the knowledge, skills and values that education is all about exist in written form. So, being literate implies both possessing the tools to acquire education, and accessing the contents of education in a dynamic way: as one reads or writes, one absorbs and produces

educative contents in the same dual way. This shows the complementary dynamics between adult literacy as a set of reading and writing skills, and education as a socio-institutional process.

#### ***3.4.3.6. Literacy and language learning***

One category omnipresent in this research is literacy in local languages. I would like to establish a distinction between literacy (as it has been discussed so far in its various facets) and language learning.

The process of literacy acquisition is not similar to the process of acquiring one's local language (which is the mother tongue in our case). Even when literacy acquisition is in one's first language, the two processes are different. On the one hand, comprehension and speech form the basis of language acquisition. On the other hand, reading and writing form the basis of literacy acquisition. It can be stated that both literacy and first language acquisition are learning processes, but their operating modes is what makes them different. Every normal child will acquire their mother tongue, through an unconscious learning process. This is one of the most universal behaviours in humans. There is absolutely no need for any planned teaching, from parents or from peers, in first language learning (Gudschinsky, 1951, 1973, 1976; Downing, 1986; Shell and Wiesemann, 1987; Barnwell, 1995; Baker, 1996; Malmkjaer, 2002). But when it comes to literacy, there needs to be a conscious, planned and gradual process of learning. The guidance from others who already know how to read and write is a necessity, and it is quite difficult to totally acquire literacy on one's own without any external help.

#### **3.4.4. Adults**

In this research, as the target group of literacy is adults, I adopt a broad meaning of adults as those aged 20 and beyond. These adults either dropped out of the formal mainstream education system without basic literacy skills, or never attended any formal school system. In

terms of their educational levels and literacy skills, most adults in the case study are typical pre- or semi-literates (Gudschinsky, 1973; Shell and Wiesemann, 1987).

But defining adults in Kom calls for more than just the age criteria mentioned above. Though adults were initially defined as persons aged 20 and above, on the field in Kom, this definition had to be revised slightly. I had to incorporate in this definition some women younger than 20 who were young mothers having one or two, sometimes even more, children. These young mothers were fully responsible for the care and nutrition of their children. Some were lone parents, but ultimately the rather collectivistic social system provided them with some solidarity that helped with the responsibility of educating their children.

#### **3.4.5. Bilingualism and multilingualism**

One concept used in this research is bilingualism, defined as the linguistic skill involving competency in two languages by a given individual or group. Multilingualism can be defined on the same premises, additionally with the extension in the number of languages (beyond two). Some sociolinguists have argued that an analysis of bilingualism and multilingualism should look at the levels of competence (in the languages concerned), the social function of languages in play, and at issues of identification as concerns the individual bilinguals/multilinguals (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1981; Skutnabb-Kangas and Cummins, 1988; Baker, 2002; Malmkjaer, 2002). The question of the level and areas of proficiency in each of the languages leads to the debate on types and degrees of bilingualism and multilingualism. For example, Bloomfield (1933) viewed bilingualism as the ‘native-like control of two languages’.<sup>66</sup> But Baker (2002:64) argues that ‘balanced bilingualism is rare in individuals and is more of an idealized concept’. For now, I will discuss bilingualism and multilingualism more as they have unfolded in the socio-political context of the present study, namely Cameroon.

In Cameroon, the words ‘bilingual’ and ‘bilingualism’ are found everywhere in the official texts and public documents such as the Law, the ministerial statements, the Governmental decrees, the advertisement posters, and the media. But this Cameroonian

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<sup>66</sup> Cited in Malmkjaer (2002:64).



'bilingualism' refers to the official bilingualism of the country in French and English. These two colonial languages are officially adopted and used as vehicles of communication and education. It is generally said that Cameroon is a French-English bilingual country, equating it linguistically with Canada. The school system therefore is planned so that Cameroonians will be exposed to, and taught in, the two official languages. There ensue two educational systems: a British-based system in the Anglophone area where English is the medium of instruction (with French a main subject in the curriculum); and a French-based system using the French language in the Francophone area (with English being a main subject in the curriculum). Cameroonian university students tend to be bilingual in French and English, with various degrees of proficiency in both languages. In Cameroon, official bilingualism therefore belongs to the realm of public media and communication, the formal school system and urban areas.

There are various levels and areas of proficiency in each of the languages of Cameroonian bilinguals, in the official sense. But the study in this thesis focuses on adults in grassroots rural areas. The majority of them did not benefit from any formal education, and their current language of daily communication is neither French nor English. In most Cameroonian rural contexts, the first language (L1) of the target adults (or learners) is generally their mother tongue (MT) and their second language (L2) is either another local language (or MT2) or, in some rare cases, the 1<sup>st</sup> official language (OL1). As stated in Chapter 1, this research lays an emphasis on the target adults' linguistic skills. Of the many patterns of bilingualisms possible among Cameroonians, consideration will be given to the three most common ones that emerge:

1. bilingualism in two local languages: MT1-MT2
2. bilingualism in a local language and an official language: MT1-OL1
3. bilingualism in a local language and a language of wider communication (LWC): MT1-LWC1

When taking into account the languages used as media of instruction and/or for training in the adult literacy programme, the second pattern above represents the situation that best fits Kom. This will be examined in more detail in Chapters 5 and 7.

At national and regional levels, Cameroonians live in highly multilingual contexts. As such, they are conscious of linguistic issues very early in life. Inter-ethnic marriages through exogamy are common between most ethnic groups. Such marriages bring together people from different linguistic backgrounds who end up sharing their languages in the family. They in turn build families with children proficient in the languages of their parents.

There is also much inter-ethnic communication for trade. Most children therefore grow up exposed to more than one language, either in their family, or in community life. As for the education system, the country being officially bilingual with French and English, the formal school system mainly uses French in the francophone area and English in the Anglophone area. This contributes to expand the number of currently used languages for most Cameroonians who attend the formal school system. Consequently, in most cases, Cameroonians are multilingual. The two most current patterns are as follows:

- (1) for Cameroonians who have completed the formal primary school system is a proficiency in their mother tongue (MT), then (an) official language(s) (OL), namely French and/or English: MT-OL1(-OL2);
- (2) for those citizens who did not attend the formal education system, their pattern is generally a proficiency first in their mother tongue, then (an)other neighbouring Cameroonian language(s) and/or the regional lingua franca or language of wider communication (LWC): MT1-MT2(-LWC).

A large majority of Cameroonian adults belong to the second category above (Tadadjeu, 1990; Echu and Grundstrom, 1999; Gfeller, 2000; Sadembouo, 2002) because they never had the chance to attend formal schools.

With this multilingual competency exhibited by most Cameroonians, it is therefore not surprising to observe a regular code-switching in their daily communication. This daily code-switching goes with permanent adjustments of language(s) either to contexts of usage or to interlocutors. Most people daily use for example their native language within the family, and change to a language of wider communication when at the local marketplace, and switch again to the official language when dealing with the public administration or with official business.

### 3.4.6. Local language adult literacy in Cameroon

As noted earlier, the area where the promotion of local languages has consistently lagged behind is in the official and public use of their written<sup>67</sup> forms. At the same time this absence is more marked in urban areas where there is a stronger presence of written French and English. But Cameroon is still a largely rural country with more than 60% of the country living in rural areas (see 2.2.3). In some rural areas there has been a steady promotion and development of writing in the local languages. So some literature in certain local languages does exist, even though it still represents only a tiny portion of the printed literature available in most communities. There are the booklets of Christian literature such as Bibles, Gospels, hymnals, and religious pamphlets, all published by the Christian Churches (as discussed in detail in Chapter 6, which covers local literature). In addition, there are didactic materials published for the experimentation of the PROPELCA programme and for use in the bilingual adult literacy classes. In most of these didactic manuals, lessons are complemented by short texts on folktales and short stories. To these should be added a number of various booklets such as collections of proverbs, poems, riddles, and development pamphlets on agriculture, pesticides, health, and environment preservation. Some diaries, local newsbulletins and pocket calendars are also produced regularly in some local languages such as Mafa, Fulfulde, Bulu, Mekaa, Aghem, Akoose, Ghomálá', Yemba, Mofu-Gudur, Kom, Koonzime, Baka, Ejagham and Podoko.

I have shown earlier in Chapter 2 that adult literacy *per se* in local languages preceded the colonial times. The most well-known example is that of King Njoya and the Shumum language of the Bamun (see Chapter 2). But because Cameroon as a nation-state started with the colonial administration, it can be claimed that literacy activities with a broader national focus actually started with the European missionaries, more than a century ago. By 'broader national focus', I mean literacy activities in different languages that are done by a single institution with coverage and presence at national levels. Starting back in the colonial era, the Churches provided the first institutional framework for most of these literacy

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<sup>67</sup> It should be noted here the emphasis on the written form of the languages both because of the subject of this research, i.e. literacy, and because the oral use of the Cameroonian languages is a permanent reality in intra- and inter-ethnic communication throughout the country.

activities, but their major objective was Bible translation for evangelical purposes. Later on in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, non-formal adult literacy classes sprung up in many rural areas, both within Churches and under the auspices of local community development groups and/or local language committees. Especially during the last 50 years, a growing number of cultural and linguistic associations have emerged and the promotion of local language has been active at the grassroots level in many villages. And for years now in Cameroon some local institutions and people have been working in this direction, developing and implementing bilingual adult literacy programmes. Efforts are currently made by the many language NGOs, known generally as local language committees, to promote and develop adult literacy activities in local languages. In Section 3.5 below, I will examine in more detail these language committees, their organisation, and their activities.

#### **3.4.7. Recent developments in local language urban literacy**

In recent years, there has been some revamping of literacy activities in local languages in many urban cities (Gfeller, 2000; Sadembouo, 2002; Nforgan, 2007)

In many towns, associations made up of natives of various linguistic homelands are striving to promote literacy in their respective languages (Nforgan, 2007). They do this through various pedagogic activities such as evening classes, summer schools, private tuitions, and week-end literacy classes. All these informal experiences have as their common denominator the use of a given Cameroonian language as the main medium of instruction. In many cases, the promoters of these literacy classes in the city are members of their language committee, or at least they work in very close collaboration with the language committees.

Their clientele is mainly made up of youths from urban areas who are interested in learning their home language. Sometimes, these youths are enrolled into these urban literacy classes by their parents, even though some of these parents are totally illiterate in their local languages. Parents involved in these programmes often mention their desire to preserve their linguistic heritage which is being lost with their children born in the city (Gfeller, 2000; Sadembouo, 2002; Nguesso, 2005; Nforgan, 2007). Some urban parents are genuinely interested in fighting this local language attrition in the new generation. Urban literacy

programmes are an appropriate forum where those culturally proud urban parents and children seek to preserve or maintain their linguistic heritage.

### 3.5. SOME INSTITUTIONS OF ADULT LITERACY IN CAMEROON

#### 3.5.1. SIL

The acronym SIL initially stands for Summer Institute of Linguistics, founded more than 70 years ago in the USA. SIL has grown from a small summer linguistics training programme with two students in 1934 to become SIL-International,

‘...one of the key ‘International Organizations’ which was to subsequently shape and influence the direction of applied linguistics in Africa’ (Makoni and Meinhof, 2004:79).

Today, SIL is an international NGO, within which many linguists and educationists, most of them American, have developed over the years a significant body of linguistic research and publications on minority languages.

The mission statement of SIL International is as follows:

‘SIL International is a faith-based organization that studies, documents, and assists in developing the world’s lesser-known languages. (...) SIL is focused on the role of language and culture in effective development. SIL is committed to the empowerment of indigenous communities worldwide through language development efforts. Its members share a Christian commitment to service, academic excellence and professional engagement through literacy, linguistics, translation, and other disciplines. SIL International makes its services available to all without regard to religious belief, political ideology, gender, race or ethnic background.’<sup>68</sup>

In its 2007 annual report,<sup>69</sup> SIL gives the following statistics about its activities worldwide:

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<sup>68</sup> <http://www.sil.org/sil/> Accessed 14 Jan. 2008

<sup>69</sup> <http://www.sil.org/sil/annualreport/2007-sil-update.pdf> Accessed 12 April 2008.

**Table 3.2: Some SIL statistics**

<b>Languages spoken in the world</b> (as cited in the SIL's <i>Ethnologue</i> )	6,912
<b>Total languages researched</b>	2,394 (over 1.7 billion speakers)
<b>Active language projects</b>	1,415 (568 million speakers)
<b>Active literacy programs</b>	over 1,000
<b>Number of readers trained</b>	over 2 million
<b>Published works</b>	29,753
<b>Active personnel</b>	over 6,000
<b>Nationalities of SIL staff</b>	over 60

Source: SIL, 2007.

SIL members arrived in Cameroon in 1969. Since then, SIL-Cameroon has been very active in linguistic research and publications in local languages. Like its mother organisation, the ultimate focus of SIL is Bible translation. But in order to reach that objective, it is a prerequisite to study the local languages, and to develop orthographies for them. SIL-Cameroon members have done much in the area of local language teaching and adult literacy. Today, SIL is involved in over 90 language projects in Cameroon. To do their work, many SIL members settle and live for years in communities. Because of their overt Christian orientation, they see themselves as missionaries, and they work in close collaboration with local Churches. They also work in close partnership with local NGOs, the government ministries, and other international NGOs and UN agencies present in Cameroon. One of their closest partners is the Cameroon Association for Bible Translation and Literacy, CABTAL.

### 3.5.2. CABTAL

CABTAL is considered a sister organisation of SIL because they both are Christian faith-based, and work firstly for the translation of the Bible. CABTAL started as CABTA without any overt agenda for literacy activities. Thus, in its beginning years, the 'L' now standing for 'literacy' was not part of the acronym. But over the years, the necessity to engage

with literacy to enable the communities to read the translated Bibles pushed the organisation to broaden its focus and embark on literacy activities. But still, the programmes run by CABTAL in the communities are mainly Bible translation programmes. To date, CABTAL is working in the following languages:<sup>70</sup>

1. Aghem, 2. Awing, 3. Babanki, 4. Bakossi, 5. Bum, 6. Denya, 7. Kenyang, 8. Kom,
9. Lamnso', 10. Mbembe, 11. Meta, 12. Mundani, 13. Ngiemboon, 14. Nomaande, 15. Ngomba, 16. Ngombale, 17. Oku, 18. Pinyin, 19. Oku, 20. Tunen.

Most of these communities have specific language committees, as will be seen below. CABTAL works in collaboration with them for its literacy component, both at the local level, and at national level, with NACALCO (as will be discussed further in this chapter).

### **3.5.3. Language committees**

As said in Chapter 1, there are 286 languages spoken across Cameroon. These languages correspond to specific geographic areas where they are shared by specific linguistic communities. But the dynamics of literacy in the Cameroonian grassroots is dependent on another key prerequisite: the existence of a group of people dedicated to promoting and working for local literacy. A generic name, used to refer to such specific groups of language specialists and technicians, is 'language committees'. In the Cameroonian context, this name is generic in the sense that it is a cover term for such types of local institutions. In reality, the names by which these 'committees' refer to themselves can vary. An example is that of the 3 local language committees that are most vibrant in the North West province: the Nso' Language Organisation (NLO) in Bansa', the Bafut Language Association (BANLA) in Bafut, and the Kom Language Development Committee (KLDC). As one can see, these three local language institutions officially refer to themselves as 'organisation' (NLO), 'association' (BANLA), and 'development committee' (KLDC).

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<sup>70</sup> <http://www.cabtal.org/> Accessed 12 April 2008.

Throughout this work, I will refer generically to all such local language organisations as language committees (LC). The reason for this choice is that ‘language committee’ is the name by which most of these language organisations are called, and it is also the appellation used for them in their umbrella national federation, namely the National Association of Cameroonian Language Committees (NACALCO). The number of established language committees varies in the literature. But NACALCO is the referential national institution that has helped to regroup them and to give them more visibility and audibility. From NACALCO’s documentation, 74 language committees were formally constituted and recognised during its general assembly in December 2000 (NACALCO, 2001).

The establishment of language committees in recent decades spans from the early 1950s. Before the Independence in 1960, some linguistic communities such as the Ewondo, the Ghomálá’, the Fe’efe’e, the Basaa, and the Duala, just to name a few, had created their respective language study or translation committees. Most of them started within the Christian churches, as will be discussed further in the following paragraphs.

In general, the formation of language committees has followed three major trends:

- a) an emergence from Bible translation groups,
- b) an emergence from sole cultural promoters, and
- c) an emergence from the formal bilingual education initiatives, mainly the PROPELCA experience.

I will discuss now in detail these three trends.

### ***3.5.3.1. Emergence from Bible translation***

The institutional umbrella where the emergence of language committees from Bible translation originated is the Christian churches, historically through the European missionaries. But, as one will see later in this section, it would be an overstatement today to claim that it was one of the missionaries’ ultimate objectives was to create language committees as we know them today. Starting in colonial times, expatriate missionaries pulled together a pool of local converts interested in translating the Bible into the local language. Within the Churches, they worked with the local natives for years to get the Holy Scriptures to the ‘language of the heart’ of their followers. In many cases, the initial team started just with



the foreign missionary (a priest or a pastor) and his local assistant, generally a young and recently converted person. Gradually over time, this initial group of two would expand into a larger Bible translation team or unit. As the team grew, they recruited more personnel, as material and financial means could allow. By the 1960s and 1970s, some Bible translation teams even set up offices with headquarters and permanent administrative staff.

The sole and initial purpose of Bible translation teams was to translate the Bible. But over time, two concurrent phenomena led to their expansion into a broader linguistic institution: the 'nativisation' of the translation personnel and the necessity of literacy. What I term the 'nativisation' of the translation personnel is the fact that the locally born natives gradually became more numerous and influential in many translation teams. They also gained training to the point where they could significantly influence the orientation of the team. Though the influence of the foreign expatriate promoter (generally a European priest or pastor, as in the early colonial times) was still central and necessary, the translation work gradually became more controlled by the local people.

With time, the necessity of adult literacy became more apparent to Bible translators. The necessity of a literacy component related to the fact that translating the Bible was of any real use if and only the potential Bible readers in the community could read the said translated Holy Scriptures. This meant they had to be literate in the language of translation. Consequently, for any translation work to have any impact in the target community, the Bible translation team had to engage also in literacy activities. This was the only way to create a significant body of readers who then could effectively use the Holy Scriptures in their religious life. So, the early translation committees expanded a literacy aspect to their translation activities. But they didn't really engage into some institutional change to fully become language committees, for example with a more lay identity (as most local languages are spoken by people of various religious faiths, many of them non Christian). Moreover, in the majority of Cameroonian linguistic communities, there were various Christian churches with their Bible translation teams.

Yet, in the 1970s, many language committees still were made up of the same people working the Bible translation committee. But, they attempted to differentiate literacy activities from translation to avoid religious discrimination. In most cases, the scope of the linguistic

community and the people targeted by the language committee was larger than the body of people within any specific Church.

### ***3.5.3.2. Emergence from sole cultural promoters***

The second trend in the creation of language committees is that of sole cultural promoters. Generally, sole cultural promoters are native speakers who have some influential position in the community: priests or pastors (in the cases of Ghomálá', Fe'efe'e for example), local traditional noblemen (Ngiemboon), university graduates (Ngombale, Ncane, Mfumte), civil servants and trained teachers (Kom, Lamnsó', Bafut), just to name a few cases.

Some of the sole cultural promoters initially worked with the Bible translation teams. Some common denominators of sole cultural promoters are the following: they obtained formal education, some of them even highly educated, up to university level; they have some influence and respect in the community; they have a lay vision as concerns their linguistic work for the community and the language; and they relentlessly involve their personal time and energy, with the main aim to establish the language committee as an independent and vibrant local institution

The last two denominators above are the main markers of the difference between the sole promoters of language committees and the members of Bible translation committees.

Though they are driven by strong language and cultural enthusiasm, sole cultural promoters differ from ordinary local language enthusiasts. One difference is that they have greater social influence and more impact than any ordinary local language enthusiasts, and have worked to develop socio-cultural institutions that have become language committees.

### ***3.5.3.3. Emergence from the PROPELCA experience***

The emergence of language committees out of the PROPELCA experience is intrinsically connected to the two other trends earlier discussed, though there are specificities as concerns the language committees born out of the PROPELCA experience, as will be shown below.

Two preconditions for the start of the PROPELCA in any community were the availability of experimental schools on the one hand, and of motivated and educated native speakers on the other hand. As stated earlier in Chapter 2, the Churches were the first educational bodies to provide experimental schools for the PROPELCA experience. Within most of these Churches, there existed a Bible translation committee. From these translation committees, there were a number of local people interested in the promotion of local literacy. But, as said earlier, for some of them, the institutional constraints of the Church as an organisation didn't allow them to develop a lay and independent language committee solely dedicated to local language literacy. This hurdle was overcome by the implementation of the PROPELCA, as presented earlier in detail in Chapter 2.

In terms of trained literacy experts, there is one permanent result that PROPELCA has produced in all the communities which have opened bilingual PROPELCA schools: the creation of a local group of well-trained language teachers. Many of them have in turn become staunch adult literacy promoters (This will be examined further, with some examples, in Chapter 5 when I describe the literacy monitors in the Kom literacy programme). This body of trained literacy promoters, with the technical help of the PROPELCA team, have often come together to organise themselves as local language committees. In this endeavour, they have generally assumed the roles of literacy coordinators, supervisors and monitors. I will discuss these roles in the next section.

#### ***3.5.3.4. The role of literacy coordinator***

In the literacy programme, the literacy coordinator is the highest position in the hierarchy of technicians dedicated to literacy activities. As the name states, their main role is to coordinate the literacy activities done by the language committee.

In the Kom case, the literacy coordinator is a key member of the language committee, the KLDC, but his position is not an elective post. This is due to its technical nature: there is the necessity that it be filled rather on the basis of sound competency in literacy issues such as language teaching or literature production. Literacy coordinators are thus appointed by the KLDC, though their appointment is more of a selection process after various consultations

involving all interested parties, namely the key people in the Literacy Committee, the area supervisors, and sometimes even NACALCO and other partners such as SIL.

In Kom, the history and legacy of literacy coordinators is rooted in experience and commitment. In fact, all the literacy coordinators to date have gone through more or less a similar professional pattern: starting as simple literacy monitors, they evolved to become area supervisors and ended up at the top of their literacy profession, as coordinators.

#### ***3.5.3.5. The role of supervisor***

Supervisors are the regional or areal counterparts of the coordinator. Generally, supervisors have the following main duties:

- to make regular visits to the literacy centres in their areas,
- to work closely with their literacy monitors for the success of literacy classes,
- to report regularly to the Coordinator about activities in their area,
- to report to the language committee's hierarchy any eventual difficulties encountered in their area,
- to liaise with the Coordinator and the language committee.

#### ***3.5.3.6. The role of monitor***

In literacy programmes, another name for 'monitor' is 'facilitator'. This appellation tallies with the genuine perception that the role of literacy monitors is to facilitate the emergence of reading and writing skills in adults who already know almost everything else in the language. In practice, monitors are the key persons at the heart of the adult literacy as an educational and grassroots-based socio-cultural process.

Their main role revolves around creating or opening a literacy centre, and ensuring permanent and regular running and teaching in the centre. Other names associated with literacy monitors are literacy workers or volunteers. In all cases, both from the side of those who train literacy monitors and from the monitors themselves, there is a clear avoidance of the word 'teachers'. In reality, most monitors are actual teachers in primary and secondary schools, dealing daily with children. But all the stakeholders in adult literacy do their best to

avoid any vision of adult learners as being like children or school pupils, hence the avoidance of the term 'teachers' to refer to literacy monitors.

### *3.5.3.7. Institutional development of language committees*

Language committees are basically groups of local language enthusiasts and promoters. This is worth remembering, because the ills of colonisation have created dire circumstances where many Africans have turned against their own languages. As discussed earlier in Chapters 1 and 2, many of such 'psychic disbelievers' in local languages refuse to defend and promote their own languages, when they do not overtly fight and denigrate them. Language committee members are those endogenous agents with stated positive attitudes for the local language.

As a technical body, language committees are a group of language experts. In many language committees, one finds the best authors in the local language, the PROPELCA trained teachers, and the qualified literacy monitors. As a cradle where local language expertise is nurtured and developed, the language committee is a central institution in cultural preservation and language maintenance. I will dwell much more on this issue in Chapter 7 when discussing local agency and programme sustainability.

From the institutional standpoint, language committees are NGOs. Their recognition in that status is at two levels: the local and the national levels. At the local level, they are legally recognised<sup>71</sup> by administrative authorities as non profit and cultural organisations. At the national level, the recognition of language committees is through their membership of NACALCO. They become, in that capacity, part of the national synergy for the promotion of local languages and cultures as spearheaded by NACALCO and its partners.

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<sup>71</sup> As with most administrative procedures, this recognition generally takes a long time. In many cases, some language committees have submitted their dossiers for recognition, and have waited for years. But the Law in Cameroon says that the most important thing is for the dossier to be duly submitted and formally received by the authorities. The official receipt of the dossier can thus be legally used as the provisional official recognition document. Such a policy is fair to the local communities, since it allows the administrative authorities to take all their time to examine the dossier, without penalising the local organisation with having to halt their activities and wait until an official decision is made.

### 3.5.4. NACALCO

#### 3.5.4.1. *Organisational structure, objectives, and membership*

The National Association of Cameroonian Language Committees (NACALCO) is a cultural, non-political and non-profit NGO, with headquarters in Yaounde, the capital of Cameroon. It was created to bring together under one national umbrella the various autonomous language committees that were striving all throughout the country. NACALCO was formally created in 1989, the year it received its formal legal recognition by the administrative authorities to function as an organisation. But many negotiations and preparatory meetings took place in the years before. The most significant of them was held in 1987 in Yaounde and brought together all leaders of existing language committees to discuss the statutes and internal regulations of their future umbrella federation (SIL, 1987).

The main objectives of NACALCO are:

- a) the promotion of literature in national languages. This is done by assisting language committees in the production of works and other useful reading materials, the production of literacy materials and the development of local newspapers in national languages;
- b) the promotion of the use of national languages as mediums for mass education;
- c) the coordination of the different literacy activities of language committees;
- d) the active support for the creation of new language committees;
- e) the conception of common programs of activities for language committees;
- f) the translation into national languages of documents and publications useful for community development;
- g) the contribution to the introduction of national languages into the formal education system;
- h) the support for the editing and publication of periodicals and vulgarisation manuals on history, culture, science and technology in national languages.

As concerns its organisational structure, NACALCO has the following main bodies: a general assembly, a national executive board, and the Centre for Applied Linguistics. The

General Assembly is made up of representatives of all the member language committees. It is the highest authority of the organisation, and it is the body that elects the members of the National Executive Board.

The National Executive Board is an elected body of 17 persons, the majority of them coming from the member language committees. Their tasks consist, among other things, of overseeing the administration and the running of NACALCO. Seven of the Executive members work and are based at the central level. The ten others operate as provincial administrative coordinators. The seven members at the central level are the Chairman, the Secretary General, the Public Relations Officer, the Treasurer, and three Advisers.

The Centre for Applied Linguistics (CAL) was adopted and created later on in the life of the organisation. It was launched formally in 1997. This Centre is in charge of all the technical and scientific work of the organisation. Since its creation, the CAL has established itself as a full-fledged linguistic and education research and application centre.

NACALCO is a national confederation of local language committees. Its membership is made up of:

- (a) language committees: they are the active members,
- (b) every individual or institution, be it linguistic, Africanist, educational or religious, that undertakes to commit to help intellectually, morally or materially, the development of Cameroonian languages. Such people or institutions are honorary members.

According to its statutes, the highest decision body with NACALCO is the General Assembly, which normally should meet once every two years. Among other issues, the General Assembly decides on membership. A pre-requisite to becoming an active member of NACALCO is, for the aspiring local community, to formally organise themselves for the promotion of the local language. They then have to create their provisional language committee, with an executive board. They should also adopt a programme of activities. It is only when these are done locally, that they can formally express their interest to become members of NACALCO. To this end, they will submit their complete dossier to the National Executive Board, and endeavour to send a delegation to attend the general assembly. Until their membership is decided upon, such delegates can only be observers with no voting powers.

As can be seen in Table 3.3 below, the geographic representation of NACALCO is national. It has members in all the 10 provinces of the country.

**Table 3.3: List of the Language Committees members of NACALCO (2000/2001)**

Provinces	Language Committees (LC)
Adamawa (9 LCs)	1. Dii, 2. Kwanja, 3. Tikar, 4. *Gbaya ( <i>sub-committee of Meiganga</i> ), 5. Mambila, 6. Vute, 7. Mbum, 8. Pere, 9. Nizaa.
Centre (8 LCs)	1. Basaa, 2. Nomaande, 3. Nugunu, 4. Nulibie+Nuyambeng, 5. Ewondo, 6. Bafia (Rikpa), 7. Tunen, 8. Yambetta.
Est (5 LCs)	1. Kako, 2. Koonzime (2 branches, in Lomié and Somalomo), 3. Mekaa, *Gbaya ( <i>sub-committee of Bertoua</i> ), 4. Mpoumpong, 5. Njyem.
Far North (13 LCs)	1. Giziga, 2. Kéra, 3. Mafa, 4. Mofu-Gudur, 5. Masana, 6. Mundang, 7. Bana, 8. Daba, 9. Hide, 10. Mofu-Nord, 11. Fulfulde ( <i>plus North and Adamaoua</i> ), 12. Matal, 13. Mazagway-Hidi.
Littoral (3 LCs)	1. Mkaa', 2. Bankon, 3. Duala.
North (8 LCs)	1. Gidar, 2. Karang, 3. Kuo, 4. Kolbila, 5. Dowaayo, 6. Laka, 7. Samba/Tchamba, 8. Kompana.
North West (14 LCs)	1. Babungo, 2. Bafut, 3. Kom, 4. Lamnso', 5. Limbum, 6. Meta', 7. Noni, 8. Oku, 9. Aghem, 10. Mankon, 11. Mfumte, 12. Yamba, 13. Nkwen, 14. Mbembe.
West (5 LCs)	1. Fe'efe'e, 2. Ghomálá, 3. Medumba, 4. Ngiemboon, 5. Yemba.
South (1 LC)	1. Bulu
South West (8 LCs)	1. Bafaw, 2. Bakossi, 3. Denya, 4. Ejagham, 5. Kenyang, 6. Mundani, 7. Bakweri, 8. Oroko.
<i>Candidate committees (approved for the waiting list)</i>	1. Ncane ( <i>North-West</i> ), 2. Lakka ( <i>North</i> ), 3. Ngombale ( <i>West</i> ), 4. Fali ( <i>North</i> ).

Source: NACALCO, 2001.

(Extracted from the Report of the 5<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of NACALCO, held on 4-5 December 2000 in Yaounde)

#### 3.5.4.2. Staff and activities of NACALCO

Like most established institutions, NACALCO has an active headquarters where permanent personnel daily perform various administrative activities to run the organisation. But additionally to the centrally located staff, NACALCO has also deployed some administrative and technical personnel in the provinces and the remote villages all over the



country. Field personnel are of three types: the provincial administrative coordinators, the provincial technical coordinators, and the local supervisors.

The provincial administrative coordinators are elected National Board members who are resident in the provinces. They are in charge of the coordination of the activities of language committees in their respective province. It is their duty to ensure greater collaboration and sharing of information between the language committees. They have to do their best to help the literacy programmes to be implemented successfully. Among other activities, they oversee the management of funds received by the language committee. But they must also help the committee in their overall management, as concerns accountability, preparation and submission of reports of activities, and general communication issues.

The provincial scientific coordinators are considered as technical extensions of the CAL in the provinces. They are appointed on the basis of their linguistic and educational expertise. Their tasks are to visit language committees regularly, and to identify any scientific hurdles faced in the implementation of PROPELCA and literacy programmes. It is their duty to then propose viable solutions to problems encountered. Provincial scientific coordinators also oversee the work of local supervisors.

Local supervisors are actually language and education specialists attached to specific language committees. They are chosen by the local language committee, though NACALCO has to endorse their technical capacity to do the job properly. But the real reason behind their being statutory staff of NACALCO is the fact that their wages are partly contributed to by NACALCO. This is dependent on two conditions: (a) availability of adequate funding at central level, (b) efficiency and accountability as regards the local literacy programme. One strategy applied so far is that whatever NACALCO provides for the wages of literacy supervisors can only be seen as matching funds. Consequently, the local community and the language committee must ensure that they complement the money to allow for a final decent payment of literacy supervisors, since they normally work, at least part-time, ideally full time, for the literacy programme. They help in the conception and the production of didactic materials. They select and train the literacy monitors. They supervise the literacy classes. Overall, they coordinate the local literacy programme, and regularly send reports to NACALCO.

#### ***3.5.4.3. Operational programmes of NACALCO***

NACALCO has developed and implemented two types of programmes on the field: formal education programmes, and adult literacy programmes.

Formal education programmes are geared towards the school education systems, mainly the schools at all levels from kindergarten to secondary schools. The main axis of intervention is the integration of local languages as media of instruction in schools. As discussed earlier in Chapter 2, PROPELCA is the flag bearing programme in this domain.

Adult literacy programmes are implemented at the grassroots level by the language committees. Activities within this domain cover, among other things, the support for the creation of literacy centres, the training of literacy monitors, and the regular supervision of literacy classes.

#### ***3.5.4.4. Financial support to literacy activities***

As a private NGO, NACALCO has developed over the years some fruitful partnerships with various organisations: international NGOs such as SIL, foreign international development agencies such as the CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency), government ministries such as the MINJES, the MINEDUC, and UN agencies such as UNICEF, just to name a few. Some of these partnerships have yielded financial support to NACALCO for its various programmes. Through its operational programmes presented above, NACALCO supports the local language committees. The primary area covered by this financial support is the facilitation of the running of literacy and formal education programmes. But because NACALCO's funds, whatever their source, are limited, NACALCO presses the language committee to work hard to attain financial self reliance, and a sustainable level of material autonomy.

Some of the areas explored to reach that goal are income-generating projects, and the sale of literacy materials. I will discuss in detail in Chapter 6 how this has worked in Kom with its local literature.

#### ***3.5.4.5. NACALCO's vision for language committees***

One can not talk of NACALCO and its relationship with language committees without examining NACALCO's vision for language committees. This vision goes beyond the efforts that NACALCO does to promote the creation of language committees; it encapsulates the hopes and the overall institutional objectives that NACALCO expects from its member language committees, and can be summed up in two words: autonomy and academies.

NACALCO sees itself as a facilitating agency, no more, no less. In such a position, it does not want to permanently assume a primary role in designing and conceiving the literacy programmes at the grassroots level. Such an enterprise is ultimately to be left in the competent hands of the community through their local experts. NACALCO will assist and support the local community, provided they are leading their own programme, taking full responsibility of the development of the local language in its written form. In fact, the conditions to become member of NACALCO, as spelt out earlier, are built on the premises that the local language committee is prepared to become autonomous in the long term. Language committees members of NACALCO are expected to need the financial and material help of NACALCO just for their first years before they can embark fully on their own.

NACALCO also has the stated desire to see its active members become full language academies. Even if that has to take years, language committees are encouraged to work in that direction. A language academy is perceived as the highest centre of excellence in all technicalities related to the language, such as language modernisation, terminological developments and adaptations, orthographic conventions, and pedagogical orientations. It should be made of all the technicians and experts who have accumulated experience in the production of local literature, in the teaching of the language, and in various managerial capacities related to literacy. In NACALCO's vision, all its language committees are language academies in the making.

#### **3.5.5. KLDC and NACALCO**

The relationship between NACALCO and its member language committees is an organic one. By this, I mean the fact that the leaders and active personnel of NACALCO at all levels are also leaders and active personnel of their respective language committees. This

dynamic and organic connection is a key element in the success of NACALCO as a truly endogenous and grassroots organisation. It also lays the foundation for its permanent orientation towards the communities and their interests. The KLDC is an active member of NACALCO. It is one of those language committees that have contributed expertise and personnel to the national organisation. KLDC provided some of the leading linguists and researchers who founded and shaped NACALCO; and KLDC also provided two secretary-generals to NACALCO.

The next chapter discusses the implementation of the Kom literacy programme. I will also examine in detail the creation, the evolution and the functioning of KLDC, as these are intrinsically connected to the overall literacy programme.

### **3.6. SUMMARY**

I set out in this chapter to discuss the philosophical and conceptual positioning of this research, and to present the research questions raised. This chapter specifically covered the naturalistic and critical approaches underlying the research. Salient stances that run through the work are a holistic view of literacy, a centrality given to local languages and an operational bottom-top orientation both in data collection and in analysing and theorising.

The rest of the chapter has dwelt on categorical definitions, and on some institutions of adult literacy in Cameroon. I have managed to root these categories and institutions in the context of this research, namely Cameroon and Kom. This procedure of defining, and at the same time contextualising, the concepts provided a way to discuss in detail some key institutions central to local language literacy activities in Cameroon. At the forefront of such pioneering institutions come SIL, CABTAL and NACALCO. As shown in this chapter, KLDC is not only a local branch of NACALCO, but more importantly it is one of its most successful and key members. The local dynamics and evolution of KLDC will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. All the institutions of local language literacy discussed in this chapter have a mutual interdependence, and they work in partnership to bring quality education to underprivileged grassroots communities, and more cultural dignity and empowerment in their aspirations for cultural survival, linguistic maintenance and endogenous education.

## **Chapter 4: Theoretical and methodological approaches, and literature review**

### **4.1. INTRODUCTION**

Chapter Three has presented in detail the conceptual frameworks and the research questions of this thesis, and has also discussed some categories and institutions of adult literacy in Cameroon. This chapter will now dwell on methodological issues, as well as theoretical approaches. I will first present the main research affiliations within which this research intends to fit. I will then give an overview of the scientific domains that have guided and informed the investigational procedures and techniques of this work.

The second part of this chapter will discuss the literature review. It will look at the various researches that touch on similar areas of study. These are, namely, literacy in general; the promotion and the pedagogy of African languages; adult education in Africa; and literacy in African rural contexts using African languages. The chapter closes by situating the research, then discussing its outcomes and expected results. An outline of the scope of the research is also given.

### **4.2. ON THE THEORETICAL APPROACHES**

As I explained in Chapter 3, working on adult literacy in Kom called for a flexible and field-oriented vision. Therefore, this research has been founded on an ethnographic approach. It has also been informed by grounded theory. They both sustain its theoretical structure as a whole.

#### **4.2.1. An ethnographic approach**

In social sciences, many pathways have been developed regarding how to relate the theoretical approaches and constructs of the researcher to the social phenomenon to be studied

in order to build up a scientific account. A central point of preoccupation is the construction of knowledge about social phenomena that can advance both the theoretical systems and the human society. This preoccupation tallies with the necessity for social relevance of research that I discussed earlier in Chapter 1.

One trend in the above-mentioned scientific quest is the experimental method whereby the phenomenon to be studied is re-created under semi-artificial conditions. Though the re-creation tries as much as possible to resemble the real-life phenomenon, it is no longer a natural and almost unpredictable occurrence, and is taken out of its natural context. The researcher thus designs the conditions and contexts for his or her testing, and the subjects involved are there just to help check the validity of a set of established hypotheses. Two key markers of such an enterprise are the control over the variables and the possible manipulation of the tested entities. The independence – in relation to the researcher – of the social elements involved in such experimental or quasi-experimental research is limited, or significantly reduced, for the purpose of the investigation. These investigative procedures are generally modelled on the natural sciences. In such experimental social research, one possible outcome, once the hypothesis has been tested, is that it can even be refuted or found inconsistent with the experiment (Dooley, 1990; Bailey, 1995; Bryman, 2004).

Another route in social research is the participant observation method. The researcher observes real life situations and accounts for what is going on in an interactive way. The researcher takes part in various ways in the social phenomenon to be studied. For this purpose, he or she will have to assume a number of ‘theoretical social roles’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, 2006; Hammersley, 1998). These roles range from complete participant to complete observer, in relation to the social phenomenon under study. At one end of the spectrum, the complete participant researcher takes a full and active part in the phenomenon, totally concealing his or her aim of scientifically studying the phenomenon in which they are taking part. At the other end, the complete observer researcher

‘has no contact at all with those he or she is observing. Observation may take place in a one-way mirror’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983:95).

This second trend in social research which studies the social phenomenon in its natural occurrence is labelled with the term ‘ethnographic approach’. My research here takes this approach. In one of its most comprehensive formulations, the ethnographic approach

‘ ... involves the ethnographer participating, overtly or covertly, in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions – in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2006:1).

Because of its operating mode which is close to the natural way in which humans make sense out of the world around them, the ethnographic approach is considered as ‘the most basic form of social research’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2006:2).

As this research will be informed by the concepts and tenets of the ethnographic approach, it is worth advancing some reasons for this choice. The first reason relates to the object of study, namely literacy. Studying literacy is synonymous with studying language practices, and the best place to do so is in contexts of learning and knowledge transmission in social life. Thus, researching adult literacy in Kom requires positioning the investigation as both an account and an analysis of specific social practices in the Kom society. These social practices are themselves a set of community activities which in their operational setup and implementation are totally independent of my research preoccupation. In other words, my research aimed at producing a narrative about a social phenomena happening independently<sup>72</sup> of me. Literacy activities in Kom existed prior to my arrival in the community, and they continued autonomously after my fieldwork.

Undoubtedly, there is some influence from any external visitor on any social reality he or she is exposed to. But at least my direct influence in the daily running of Kom literacy activities during my fieldwork was very minimal and definitely peripheral, and my presence did not have any impact on the major activities going on. It is worth reiterating that the local dynamics of literacy did not depend on me in any way.

It should also be reiterated that recent trends in social research have questioned the appropriateness of experimental regroupings or quasi-experimental situations for the purpose of accounting scientifically for a social phenomenon which normally happens in real life (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, 2006; Hammersley, 1998; Davies, 1999; Mutua and Swadener, 2004; Bryman, 2004). One possible flaw noted is the fact that human groups or individuals are capable of changing their behavioural patterns when they are put in an artificially constructed setting such as one for the purpose of a social experiment. Such

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<sup>72</sup> It is worth noting also that limitations in time and means equally made it unrealistic and quasi impossible to try any experimental approach, though the aim of the research made such an option already inadequate.

artificially induced changes in behaviour can in turn seriously bias any descriptive or analytical results obtained from observing such situations.

Researchers who are proponents of the ethnographic approach (Hammersley, 1990, 1998; Davies, 1999; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, 2006) have established some of its tenets as the following:

- a) Phenomena are studied in everyday contexts (not in experimental conditions).
- b) Data is gathered from various sources mainly through observations and conversation. In other words, there is flexibility and adaptability in data collection techniques.
- c) There is much specificity and focus with regard to the setting and the target group. Generally, emphasis is on one single setting or a given community.
- d) Analysis of the data aims at theorizing for interpretations and functions. The meanings of phenomena and human actions observed should be investigated and given, mainly through descriptive analyses and explanations.

My study of literacy in Kom went through a number of steps and phases close to the points outlined above. Therefore it sits squarely with most of the basic tenets of ethnographic research, as will be shown in the next paragraphs.

First of all, my work on Kom literacy is not an experimental research. But this is not just because I observed and studied a naturally occurring phenomenon on which I had no influence. The reason goes deeper into the ways I conducted the study as will be shown below. An educational activity such as Kom adult literacy can be perceived by an external researcher as an experimental arena for a carefully pre-conceived hypothesis and/or theory. In such a case, the initial hypothesis or theoretical framework is given a priority over the factual elements gathered on the field when it comes to the scientific account of the whole phenomenon. In other words, such an orientation would build the research around a theory of adult literacy which would tend to be rigid. In such a case, the research would ultimately take from the observations on the field those elements that would help to account for the abstract system initially elaborated. In the case where the field data does not fit a pre-established theoretical system, then the researcher could refute his or her theory of literacy as initially constructed. My research did not take such a route, since it is not mainly about proving or



refuting a well-established theory of literacy. The literacy I describe in this work is based on real-life situations; i.e. the daily practices that are part and parcel of social life in Kom. In other words, the social activities that nourish this research such as the literacy classes, the pedagogic interactions between adult learners and their facilitators, the didactic literature and its use, and the uses of written Kom language, were not set up for any experimental purpose. They were not artificially put together to test any hypotheses or any scientific measurements. Kom and the educational practices geared towards adults in that community were not a testing ground for a rigid theory established prior to going to the field. So all the literacy activities I observed in Kom happened in their natural flow, and I investigated literacy in Kom as a social activity that was part of already well-established practices in the community. The ultimate objective, therefore, is to build a description and an analysis of literacy in Kom that is coherent and faithful as much as possible to the reality that I have observed.

Secondly, my research is data-driven. To write about the literacy practices observed in Kom, I use a number of theoretical approaches and techniques such as the ethnographic method, the field observations, discussions and interviews, to build my scientific discourse. But importantly, all of these theoretical approaches and techniques will remain informed and directly conditioned by the field data – especially in their use for the descriptive accounts and analyses. It is this priority that is given to the data to inform the researcher about the phenomenon observed that also embeds this research in the ethnographic tradition.

Thirdly, throughout the fieldwork I remained flexible when it came to data gathering techniques, using an array of techniques (as discussed in detail below). In collecting the data, I gave precedence to depth, exhaustivity and breadth, rather than to strict methodology. This is not to say that clear methods were not established to collect the data, as this would have made the collection chaotic. But pre-defining these methods was rather a guideline for the fieldwork. Once in Kom, I used an array of collection techniques. They ranged from photography, structured and semi-structured interviews, formal and informal conversations, participant observation and field note taking to literature study and focus groups. As in most ethnographic studies, I ended up with a great deal of data of various types and formats. The major advantage of this wealth of resources from the field is the possibility to develop in-depth analyses, and to have enough empirical information to articulate and expand the various concepts, categories, and explanatory propositions emerging from the investigation.

As concerns the target group, I worked mainly on the Kom community. Concentrating on one community allowed me to go for more depth and more details in my data collection and analyses. This specificity and focus as concerns the setting and the target group is another marker of ethnographic work.

Another feature of the ethnographic approach present in this research is the theorizing mode whereby the theory is built mainly on the description of empirical phenomena. Describing what the Kom background is as a community, and giving an account of what goes on there as literacy activities, sustain the basis of my study. But I go beyond that to provide as much as possible some explanations about the observed activities, and to give some theoretical analyses that could shed light on the functions, roles and meanings of the dynamics behind Kom literacy. Another characteristic of the ethnographic approach is that theoretical analyses and descriptions are important, but they are ultimately geared towards making sense of real life situations.

The discussion above now leads to the theory building approach used in this research, namely grounded theory.

#### **4.2.2. Grounded theory**

A major distinction established in types of social research is between the purely theoretical types and the empirical or data-based types (Bailey, 1995; Gfeller, 1990, 2000; Bryman, 2004; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, 2006). Discussing this, Bailey (1995:52) talks of the 'conceptual-empirical scheme' which 'includes the assumption that each social phenomena being investigated occurs on each level', i.e. at an empirical or concrete social level and at a conceptual or theoretical level. This distinction is important to differentiate the ways in which one builds their theory or their scientific discourses about a studied social phenomenon. When priority is given to the purely conceptual level so that the social phenomenon is just used to test the theoretical construct of it, then this is called the classical approach. In the classical approach, much of the theory is abstract and tentative. But when the theory is generated mainly from the field data, and the priority is given to the resources

gathered from field investigation, the research is considered to be grounded theory. Thus, grounded theory is data-driven in nature.

As stated above, this research belongs to the data-based or data-driven type of social research because it is rooted in the ethnographic approach. As mentioned earlier, much of the data obtained from the fieldwork in Kom derived from numerous interviews and participant observation of literacy classes and other related activities. It ensues that this study is mainly based on qualitative data analysis. Finding an analytical approach that could yield the best possible results in this research was crucial. In the recent literature on social research, grounded theory 'has become by far the most widely used framework for analysing qualitative data' (Bryman, 2004:401). Some major tenets of the grounded theory have informed this research, namely its direct correlation and organic dependency between theory and data, and its iterative or recursive nature (Dooley, 1990; Straus and Corbin, 1998;<sup>73</sup> Bryman, 2004) whereby the analysis is built gradually through processing the data. Therefore this research is embedded within grounded theory (Glazer and Strauss, 1967; Dooley, 1990; Bailey, 1994; Bryman, 2004). Grounded theory has been posited on three major foundations:

- (1) it is generated mainly from the data, i.e. data-driven;
- (2) it is based mainly on description of empirical phenomena;
- (3) its formulation of causal explanations is mainly based on empirical observation.

Looking at the above tenets of grounded theory, going to the field in Kom was an enterprise built on constructing the description of literacy activities based on what the field would yield, not vice versa. That is, though I clearly wanted to collect data on a social domain and a social activity, I had no preconceived mould to force the collected data into. I was open to go along with what I could find, my main preoccupation being to make sense out of the phenomena observed. Any initial hypotheses could only be working hypotheses, susceptible to reformulation or redefinition. Similarly, field observations generated the definitions of a number of concepts, and many categories had to be redefined and included in the core areas of the research to better organise and formulate the descriptions of the data. Some of these concepts and categories were examined in detail in Chapter 3. This analytical approach fell

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<sup>73</sup> Cited in Bryman, 2004:401.

squarably into one of the characteristics of grounded theory, namely the coding of data. The coding of data in grounded theory happens in the process of organising the data collected on the field to make sense out of it. The coding of data yields at first concepts, considered as the ‘building blocks of theory’ (Strauss and Corbin, 1998:101).<sup>74</sup> Then, concepts are organised into categories, which are concepts developed as propositions to represent a real world phenomena, and which flesh out the theoretical analyses and descriptions which will be among the major scientific contributions of social research.

Ultimately, the research, primarily based on observations from the field, is expected to produce a formulation of interpretations, analyses and explanations of the relationships pertaining to Kom literacy. Among these, there are the causal connections and other operational interactions that exist in-between literacy, its acquisition and its uses in the Kom society. All these will be discussed in more depth in Chapter 7.

### **4.3. THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

A first articulation of this research was bibliographical research about the literature existing on literacy and the use of African languages in general, and their use for adult education in particular. This gave a clearer view of the topic, and the various axes where it was important to base a doctoral research.

The field collection of data and analyses was anchored on observation of the target literacy programme on the field. As Hein and Lowry (Lowry, 1979:40) write, when talking about the study of adult education activities, an “observation method, especially in (...) literacy programme should be used”. In this case, it was participant observation of the Kom programme.

A socio-historic approach was used to collect and organise the information on the evolution and the chronological development of the Kom language and its literacy programme.

As this research deals, among other things, with the social uses of languages, sociolinguistic analyses helped define the various contexts of these uses. In themselves, social

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<sup>74</sup> op. cit.

uses of languages exhibit variations both in the linguistic forms and discourses used and in the choices of these forms and discourses, depending on the types of communication and the social contexts. The spaces and the people coming together in any social communication determine the type of language(s) and discourses to be selected. To analyse and account for this linguistic interaction, sociolinguistic descriptions will be used to help specify the domains of usage of the various languages coming into play and sharing the same geo-cultural space.

The analysis of attitudes towards literacy as it is organised and implemented within the communities is also of importance, since these attitudes determine the bottom-top community response and commitment. Therefore, social attitudes towards literacy programmes are also studied, using interviews to gather such information. Participant observation and interaction with various actors are also used, mainly to assess these attitudes, and to draw some interpretations and analyses from them.

The acquisition of literacy skills relates to the specific area of cognitive skills, and the interaction with the linguistic contents and materials used to teach them is essential. In the delivery of literacy, that is, in its operation as 'an educational issue' (Barton, 1994:3), the educational tools used are the didactic materials. Another central issue in adult literacy is its direct relation to the life of learners. Consequently, the contents of didactic materials in a literacy class should ultimately be applicable or useful to the daily lives and problems of the participants. So many authors emphasise that it is always important to 'check *Application*<sup>75</sup> of reading material to life of learner' (Lowry, 1979:44). In this regard, the detailed study of the pedagogic use of Kom literature was useful in assessing the complex relationship between the literacy manuals and the acquisition of reading and writing skills by adults.

Concerning the teaching of literacy *per se*, in-class observation is necessary. As many linguists and educationists<sup>76</sup> have noted,

'any [literacy] programme should aim at life-related functionality: the programme should be related to felt needs or the real needs and interests of the learners and their community' (Lowry, 1979:39).

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<sup>75</sup> Capitalisation and emphasis in original.

<sup>76</sup> This was during an important conference organised in Nairobi and during which educationists and linguists from more than 20 African countries discussed the issue of evaluation of literacy programmes (Lowry, 1979). The report from this seminar, published as a book, contained a lot of corner stone papers on various areas of evaluation of literacy programmes.

Thus, it will be necessary to assess the use of literacy and the real needs of beneficiaries, both as individual learners and as a community. It will also be useful to evaluate the sustainability of the literacy programme, since a long-term approach to education is emphasised in most adult literacy practices.

#### **4.4. A CROSS-DISCIPLINARY RESEARCH**

One of the main subjects of my investigation is the acquisition of literacy skills. In their transmission, reception and uses, these skills are embedded within linguistic practices operationally brought together within a given educational project, i.e. the literacy programme. As an educational project, the literacy programme brings together many complementary domains and people, such as the theories of skills transmission, the social actors with their various lives and backgrounds, the cultural and linguistic practices, and the socio-economic factors influencing the organisation of the programme. Therefore, this research is bound to be cross-disciplinary.

As a study about languages and their social uses, this research falls within the area of sociolinguistics whose main objective is the study of language and its uses in society both by the various human groups interacting and by specific individuals through a multitude of variants, variations and choices (Fishman, 1976, 1989; Holmes, 1992; Robinson, 1995; Wardhaugh, 1998; Gfeller, 2000). The Kom community is a microcosm of the encounters of languages: the local language (Kom) meets daily the official languages (French and English) and the regional lingua franca (CamPidgin). In turn, all these languages meet the other local languages (Nɔɔni, Kuɔ, Veɲo, Babanki, Bafut, Befan, Aghem, and Mmen) spoken in Kom by neighbouring communities and by migrants settled in Kom who interact with the locals. To this should be added some other local Cameroonian languages not indigenous to the Kom area, but brought there by the migrant settlers from other parts of the country. As earlier discussed in Chapter 2, one such language prominent in the Kom area is Fulfulde, spoken by Fulani settlers. Be it at the individual level of each Kom adult, or in-between various local ethnic groups in play, there are a variety of language uses and choices which are adjusted for communicational or pragmatic purposes in daily life. This research accounts as much as

possible for all these sociolinguistic complexities (Chapter 2 has given an overview of such issues, and further details and analyses on these are given in Chapters 5 and 7).

This research also falls within the area of education because it investigates the acquisition of skills by a group of learners in formal contexts. Because the target group here is adults, it deals specifically with adult education. But due to the vastness of the domain of adult education (as discussed earlier in Chapter 3), the pedagogic dimension of this study will be narrowed down to the literacy aspect, i.e. the acquisition of reading and writing. Adults have their own learning constraints and specificities. To take these into account in educational theory, the concept of andragogy has been developed to cover the pedagogic processes and activities in adult teaching and learning (Knowles, 1979, 1984; Wagner, 1993, 1999). Andragogy has been conceptually developed as opposed to pedagogy. Etymologically, pedagogy means the education of children. This research will thus be informed as much as possible by some of the principles of andragogy.

Another important dimension of the cross-disciplinarity of this research is that the literacy skills analysed in the process of their acquisition by adults are embedded mainly within the specific local languages. Because this study deals with language acquisition, it will use some of the theories and methods of applied linguistics. In its broad sense, applied linguistics aims at using the theories, techniques and principles of linguistics to find solutions or answers to concrete and practical linguistic challenges, difficulties and other language-related social issues ranging from communication to cultural identity, education, speech disorders and use of information and communication technologies (ICT) in classroom learning (Davies, 1999; Richards and Rodgers, 2001; McDonough, 2002). Applied linguistics has quite a large breadth. This research will borrow from applied linguistics those concepts and methods that will be useful for it.

The case study language of this research is Kom, an African Grassfields Bantu language. This language has its specific writing system and alphabet. Kom also has prosodic features such as tone. All of these features are integral parts of its structure. Consequently, the teaching of Kom is built around these specific features. For example, in a typical primer or literacy manual, the didactic units are organised around the gradual teaching of the letters of the alphabet and the tonal features. The use of the principles and concepts of applied

linguistics in this study will attempt to focus on those covering language teaching and learning, more specifically the teaching of literacy skills in a particular African language.

The target population of this study is the adult age group in the Kom society, as earlier defined in detail in Chapter 3. Because this study looks at adults in their social life and the place and use of literacy in their daily tasks, it will analyse, among other things, the empowerment of local human resources and community development that are brought about by adult literacy. And since the skills studied have a major life-related dimension, this research will therefore briefly look into the area of socio-economics, mainly at a microeconomic level of the grassroots community studied.

From the foregoing discussion, one can note that this research is informed by a number of disciplines and areas of studies such as sociolinguistics, adult education, applied linguistics and language pedagogy. In all of these, the centrality of language (as a human skill, specifically through its reading and writing capacities) and languages (as socio-cultural systems and codes of communication and expression) is the most common denominator.

#### **4.5. LITERATURE REVIEW**

At this point, it is timely and useful to discuss the literature review, based on articles, doctoral theses and books consulted in the course of this research. Some of these documents did not show a significant level of comprehensiveness towards the topic, i.e. an investigative nature into one given aspect of adult literacy. Consequently, for the elaboration of this literature review, the task of selecting the most significant readings is challenging. The criteria for selection used here range from the nature and the contents of the publications to their pertinence to the research. I had to go along more with the criterion of pertinence, though I had to take into consideration the publication and diffusion modes of any related document. Of these modes, one of specific interest was the fact that it is formally published, and its scientific diffusion and academic distribution have reached the area covered by this research. In all, I focused as much as possible on published works. Yet, some academic theses which were of relevance to my topic and area had to be taken into the picture.



One major reason I focused more on published works is their comprehensive nature, i.e. they raise a specific issue or they study literacy from a relatively well defined perspective from which their significant contribution can be viewed and weighed.

Another useful criterion for literature selection was academic diffusion. For any study of a subject in social science to be established as a significant contribution, it has to be diffused and known, as much as possible, within the discipline. Published works tend to follow this line. Still on the criterion of pertinence, i.e. a focus on the topic of literacy, my study is a research in the domain of applied linguistics. As such, it is basically distant from the more 'traditional' trend of theoretical and descriptive linguistics where the analysis of intra-linguistic features of languages for theoretical purposes is given prominence. As a result of this demarcation, this literature review encompasses primarily the works related to the topic of literacy, even in other languages and geographic areas than Kom or Cameroon. One justification for this encompassment is that it allows for the possibility to draw useful information and scientific insights from these other research publications.

This presentation of the literature review will begin with discussion of general works, and will then focus on more specific ones. I will first give the more global perspective, then the continental level, and finally the national picture. In the very end, I have tried to hone in on research works directly focused (to some extent) on Kom.

#### **4.5.1. At a global level**

Literacy as a domain of research spans from the acquisition of basic skills of reading and writing in a given language to the various uses and practices of these skills, be they social, ideological, or economic. Over the last decades studies about literacy have spanned in all directions related to the various facets of literacy, culminating in a significant number of trends and schools in literacy studies. A core area of these studies is related to the acquisition, within educational settings, of literacy as skills, that is, literacy being viewed first as an 'educational issue' (Barton, 1994:3). Educationists have developed various literacy methods, i.e. pedagogic ways of helping previously illiterate persons to acquire the capacity to read and write. Recent schools and thinkers specialising in literacy have emerged over the last decades,

and I will attempt to go through some of those who have significantly influenced the development of literacy studies.

At a global level, one of the pioneer researchers to focus on literacy acquisition in minority languages and cultures was Sarah Gudschinsky (Gudschinsky, 1951, 1973, 1976; Lee, 1982; Shell and Wiesemann, 1987). Starting in the 1950s, she worked for more than thirty years with grassroots communities in the Australian sub-continent and in Latin America. Working on language pedagogy and acquisition of literacy as reading and writing skills, she put together a comprehensive method to teach adult learners to read and write. The major contribution of her literacy research was that it took into account the local minority non-European languages and their specificities in terms of phonology, prosody (namely the tones), and orthography. Over the decades, she developed a syncretic model of literacy pedagogy known as the Gudschinsky method. It is widely used over the world and its influence today is still present in the conception and design of primers and various other literacy manuals. It is important to note that the Gudschinsky method is the one widely used in adult literacy pedagogy and manuals in Cameroon, and in the Kom primers. This will be discussed in some detail in Chapter 6, which deals with didactic literature in the Kom adult literacy programme.

Another world-level pioneer researcher and theorist in adult literacy was the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. He was a precursor in connecting the acquisition of literacy to social life and in interconnecting adult literacy with issues of power sharing in modern society (Freire, 1970, 1972, 1973, 1976, 1985, 1998; Freire and Macedo, 1987; Freire and Faundez, 1989). He challenged the banking model of education, especially for adults who are already active actors in social life. He posited literacy acquisition as education for freedom, and reading as reading both the word and the real world with all its intricate political connections. His teachings and theories have marked a new trend in adult education, and henceforth adult education has also been viewed as a tool for liberation from oppression. For Freire, literacy should and must be used in a way to liberate the exploited classes from the chains of economic exploitation. He was adamant that 'the adult literacy process must engage the learners in the constant problematising of their existential situations' (Freire, 1994:259). To achieve that, it is important to organise literacy teaching around pertinent themes that will help the learners understand the world around them in all its aspects as a power web in which they are a part. In this line, because political and economic power is embedded in the education system which

reproduces divisions and discriminations, literacy must become a tool for social change. The basic cornerstones on which social divisions and discriminations rest must be deconstructed and challenged, using a critical pedagogy in literacy. Using participatory approaches, Freire has challenged the very hierarchies even in the classroom setting, and he has advocated bringing the learner to the centre of the learning processes. He writes that

‘The literacy process, as cultural action for freedom, is an act of knowing in which the learner assumes the role of knowing subject in dialogue with the educator (...) True dialogue unites subjects together in the cognition of a knowable object which mediates between them. If learning to read and write is to constitute an act of knowing, the learners must assume from the beginning the role of creative subjects’ (Freire, 1994:255-256).

Freire viewed the didactic materials and the teachers as being important, but peripheral to a certain extent, in the literacy learning process. Didactic manuals and teachers should act only as facilitating elements, and they should not be the central providers of knowledge as is the case in the traditional education system. A number of pro-Freirean literacy schools have emerged from the Freirean approach to adult education. The various pro-Freirean schools of thought have either refined the Freirean theories of education or improved upon them for better efficiency. One of them is the Regenerated Freirean Literacy Through Empowerment of Community Techniques (REFLECT). This approach of literacy has been used by many international development organisations working with communities in the grassroots in Africa, Asia and Latin America, such as the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED). The REFLECT method is practised in many community education projects and has proven a practical tool to help organise literacy in many non-Western rural contexts.

Another prominent literacy theorist is Daniel Wagner. He has researched the issue of literacy divide and the variation observed in the social perceptions of literacy. He has extensively written about the versatility of literacy as a social phenomenon (Wagner, 1993). Relating literacy to the social norms and the local customs, he has developed in his writings a comparative and contextualised account of literacy values. Wagner’s research has helped in ‘localising’ and contextualising culturally the values of literacy (Wagner, 1993, 1999).

Another significant trend in the world development of literacy studies is the study of literacy as social practice. Going beyond the view of literacy as a psycho-cognitive and educational process, this trend investigates the various literacy events and their uses in social contexts and situations of everyday life, i.e. outside the classrooms. A major figure in the

domain is Brian Street (Street, 1984, 1993, 1995, 1999, 2004). Influenced by the works of Brian Street, literacy research has expanded to cover and encapsulate the social arena, and to focus more on community practices of literacy. New categories have emerged to mark this evolution: multiliteracies (Hornberger, 1988, 2003; Cope and Kalantzis, 2000), situated literacies (Barton et al., 2000).

In addition, much has been written in the domain of 'situated literacies' by the New Literacy Studies (NLS) school of which one of the established proponents is James Gee (Gee, 1996, 2004). As a literacy theorist, Gee has researched the ideologies that are intrinsically attached to literacy. Within social discourses, he explores many ideologies regarding the validity of literacy in relation to the social system and to other discourses. The NLS also investigates and focuses on the modern versions and forms of literacy related to class variation, such as youth literacy. They have also published extensively on these forms of literacies, looking at how they are now acquired and bound to new media, such as the computer and online gaming worlds. Gee envisions these new trends in literacy acquisition as a sharp critique of traditional schooling which is no longer the reserved sphere of intergenerational transmission of literacy as a socio-cultural value.

Ben Rampton has established himself as another leading expert in the NLS trend. His publications have focused on, among other things, urban multilingualism, language modalities, youth, popular culture, ethnicities and class, language education and classroom discourse (Rampton, 1995, 2005). Rampton's publications have shed new light on urban literacies, and on the ever shifting perspectives in literacy research, showing mainly how the acquisition of literacy in formal and informal settings uses various paths; and sometimes, it uses very different paths from the ones established through policy documents or official educational guidelines on literacy teaching. Literacy research by authors such as Rampton has shifted the focus of literacy investigation back to the contexts of acquisition proper. Rampton has contributed to the de-linking of the operational modes of literacy contexts from a pre-established central matrix containing a holistic discourse on literacy.

Rampton and Gee have thus helped in 'provincialising' literacy research and consequently, knowledge on literacy. The necessity to establish a more varied or localised discourse when it comes to research on literacy tallies with the operating mode of literacy. Literacy happens in a multiplicity of socio-cultural contexts and in many types of languages

coming in play in the literacy process as a context-bound synergy. People's motivations and contexts largely determine their uses of reading and writing. The proponents of the NLS School argue that this must be taken into account if one wants to be close to the diversity of human experiences and challenges in the transmission of literacy.

Along the same lines, the New Literacy Studies intrinsically link together cognitive effects of literacy skills and the social contexts where these skills are used. One of the major contributions of the NLS literacy experts is their demonstration that the level of use of written texts, be it inexistent, high or low, should not be used to classify the levels of development of human cultures spread in various corners of the planet, each with its historic specificities.

David Barton and what could be called the 'Lancaster school' have also worked extensively on literacy as social practice, developing their research around community and local literacies (Barton, 1994; Barton and Ivanic, 1991; Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Barton et al. 2000; Papen, 2005, 2007). Their standpoint is that the social uses of literacy are central to comprehend the complex process of literacy in terms of its practical importance in people's lives. Literacy viewed as a set of social practices is at the end of the continuum analysing the uses attached to literacy and the social and organisational patterns that are tributary of these uses. People who have acquired literacy come from various social backgrounds, and their perception of literacy is related to their social needs; and their uses of the skills acquired will vary accordingly.

One of the other literacy schools established over the recent years is the New London school. It is a group of leading social researchers and education theorists and experts who brought themselves together under the organisational and scientific umbrella known as *The New London Group*<sup>77</sup> (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000:9). Various publications from the New London school have shattered the traditional vision of literacy as one cross-boundary scientific domain which is scientifically accountable and analysable from one single theoretical or

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<sup>77</sup> The New London Group, constituted initially in September 1994 during a scientific gathering in New London to discuss the future of literacy teaching, and reinforced and enlarged through subsequent meetings in various cities (Townsville, Australia, in June-July 1995; London, England, in September 1996; Alice Springs, Australia, in October 1997), comprises the following: Courtney B. Cazden, Bill Cope, Norman Fairclough, James Paul Gee, Mary Kalantzis, Gunther Kress, Joseph Lo Bianco, Carmen Luke, Sarah Michaels, Martin Nakata, David Bond, Denise Newfield, Richard Sohmer, and Pippa Stein (Cope and Kalantzis, 2000).

technical standpoint. The *New London Group* opened up the discourses on literacy to what can be called the provincialisation<sup>78</sup> of literacies.

Jan Blommaert's work on literacy genres and voices has shaped a new understanding regarding ideologies and beliefs rooted in the socio-political and cultural relationships (Blommaert, 1999, 2005). He has worked recently on local historiographies and semi-urban literacies in African cities. Blommaert has researched, among other things, various socio-political and economic fields, looking at how access to literacy and uses of literacy permeate, or mediates the permeation, across these fields. For him, literacy research as a larger domain of research can be broken down into the various investigations about multiple intertwined and cohabiting literacies. Blommaert advocates that it is important to investigate literacy from the many layers of social interconnections and ideological positions where various social groups stand in relationship to each other.

As earlier mentioned in Chapter 2, the development of the concept of andragogy in educational theory has encompassed most of the teaching and learning concerning adults. Scientific contributions to flesh out and expand the domain of andragogy have strongly shaped the evolution of adult literacy, starting in the 1960s. Malcolm Knowles is recognised as the father of modern andragogy, or at least as one of its leading proponents and established theorists. Andragogy is a category developed in contrast to pedagogy to take care of the specificities of the 'neglected species' that the adult learner is (Knowles, 1979). The specificity of adults and their learning problems and their preoccupations in the literacy delivery have been brought to light by andragogists, and they have designed sets of pedagogical principles and methods geared towards adult learners in their literacy acquisition (Knowles, 1979, 1984; Larson and Davis, 1981; Lele, 1987; Trudell, 1993). In the next chapters, some of these principles will be examined in their applications, when discussing the didactic materials, the literacy teaching, and the adult learning contexts.

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<sup>78</sup> This is connected to the established yet challenged dichotomy of the centre and the periphery. In this dichotomy, the centre is perceived as holding the core meanings and it stands as the major reference point. The periphery is a series of dependent satellites that draw their meanings from the centre. Recent history and international relations have made the West and the former colonising powers to be viewed as the centre, and the former colonies or the global South, as the periphery. In a line of view similar to that of Jean-François Lyotard (1984), I understand provincialisation here in the sense of validating and valuing the experiences and the knowledge systems of the periphery. In other words, it is the sum of the various experiences of people in their various specific contexts, both central and peripheral, which gives a better overview of literacy as a human adventure and socio-educational process.

Some specific literacy studies in communities around the world have also consistently nourished the scientific literature on literacy. I would like to mention here as examples the literacy experiments in Latin America, mainly in the Peruvian Amazonia (Larson and Davis, 1981; Trudell, 1993); and also studies of community literacy in Asia, namely the case of functional literacy in marginal Philippine communities (Caniesco-Doronila, 1996). The descriptions and the analyses yielded from these programmes have contributed to a better knowledge and theoretical refinement of the approaches to grassroots literacy. Many of these literacy programmes and their operational tenets have guided the development of literacy programmes in sub-Saharan Africa<sup>79</sup> (Larson and Davis, 1981; Shell and Wiesemann, 1987; Trudell, 1993).

#### **4.5.2. The continental level**

At this point, it should be stated that most researches at world level on literacy assume, or are based on, social contexts with some sort of linguistic coherence. By linguistic coherence, I mean the social and operational situation of the language used for literacy being the language shared by most people in the target community. In other words, there is some linguistic continuity between, on the one hand, the language spoken in the homes and by the learners and, on the other hand, the language spoken in the literacy classes in their acquisition of literacy. Therefore, literacy acquisition for learners in such contexts entails the acquisition of reading and writing skills in the language native to them and commonly shared in the society.

In Africa, the situation is very different in most cases. This is due firstly to the ills of colonisation. The literacy activities for most parts of sub-Saharan Africa, even today, are still enmeshed in a foreign language not shared natively by all the literacy learners. Most of these literacy activities overlook a local language which is not frequently used for literacy purposes.

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<sup>79</sup> A significant transfer of experience in adult education in minority languages has been done over recent decades under the aegis of the SIL-International (formerly known as Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL)). Many of its researchers who worked in Latin America later moved to Africa where they successfully replicated some of the literacy work done in other continents, with some necessary adaptations of course. In many sub-Saharan countries, such as Cameroon, this heritage of SIL has been very instrumental in reversing the trend of stagnation of the development of local language literacy.

The many facets of this exclusion of most African languages have been earlier discussed in detail in Chapters 1, 2 and 3, and this exclusion represents the general pattern in Africa. It is true that some notable exceptions do exist to this pattern. Yet, they remain exceptions because the general trend is the use of European languages to alphabetise people whose native languages are not European. Subsequently, research on literacy in Africa is embedded in the efforts to promote African languages and their use for educational purposes. At the same time, my own research is based on literacy using local languages in Africa and, as explained in Chapter 3, I have chosen to give priority to that type of literacy. A consequence is that the scientific works of interest to my own investigation will touch both on bilingual education in Africa (as it relates to adult literacy as an educational enterprise) and on issues of language planning (as they directly determine the sociolinguistic dynamics and the provision of adult literacy in African languages).

At the continental level, a number of linguists and educationists have produced reference works on the different uses of African languages in education and in social communication. Ayo Bamgbose is one of the leaders in the domain of language planning in Africa and has worked extensively on language policies (Bamgbose, 2000, 2001). In his publications, he shows how most language policies across the continent exclude, more consciously than unconsciously, African languages. He also elaborates on the consequences of these policies, showing that they are negative and should be reverted to achieve any sustainable social development in Africa. He advocates that this should be done through proactive linguistic policies that promote the official use of African languages all across the continent. Bamgbose's position is the concerted establishment by African countries of a consistency between the language policies across the continent and the linguistic realities of African countries.

Kwesi Kwah Prah has also published extensively on the uses of African languages in literacy and communication (Prah, 1995a, 1995b, 1998). His research demonstrates the centrality of African languages in any efficient endeavour for social communication or community development on the continent. But equally important, Prah has mostly contributed in the area of what can be called the rehabilitation of African languages, i.e. helping re-establish them in their full capacity to fulfil their historic role in African development. Two major domains have been of interest to Prah: corpus development of languages, and practical



implementation of language use. For Prah, corpus development – which is geared to improve the very linguistic features of the languages, such as alphabets and writing systems – will impact on status development and language policies. Status development is directly related to, and is even tributary of, the ‘symbolic capital’ (Bourdieu, 1991) attached to the languages in the social arena. In the area of corpus development, Prah has led researches on harmonisation of writing systems and development of alphabets, all this in the larger arena of language standardisation. The rationale developed by Prah is that it is important to reverse the colonial underdevelopment of African languages, since the ‘natural’ development of most African languages was significantly hindered by the imposition of European languages on the continent. This hindrance was most felt in public education and social communication which are the traditional domains of language use and transmission. Through his publications on the codification and standardisation of African languages, Prah has shown the necessity and feasibility of the use of African languages in all aspects of education and scientific development.

Another leading researcher who has contributed significantly to the theories and applications of local language literacy in Africa is Neville Alexander. His publications on the modernisation of African languages have focused on, among other things, their practical and efficient use in education (Alexander, 2003, 2005). He has worked on various aspects of the intellectualization of African languages. For Alexander, the intellectualization of local languages encapsulates all their uses in the higher levels of social life. These range from official business and administrative activities, to the education system, especially the universities and the higher training and vocational colleges. Alexander advocates that one critical social area where the future of African languages must be set is tertiary education. And to reach in an efficient way those high levels of use, there needs to be socio-political and institutional frameworks to spearhead this intellectualisation of African languages. Similarly, specific continental programmes must be initiated to boost and sustain the use of African languages in universities across the continent. One interesting and large part of Alexander’s work is developed around a ‘3Ds frame of reference for the examination of and motivation for the intellectualisation of African languages’ (Alexander, 2005):

- (a) the development argument, which states that any well meaning socio-economic development must be rooted in the linguistic fabric of the target society,

- (b) the diversity argument, whereby the linguistic diversity of the continent must be preserved, among other things, to counteract the current globalisation which tends to alienate, assimilate or destroy local cultures and languages,
- (c) the democracy argument, which posits local languages and their development as a human right and as a socio-political resource to be promoted for the welfare of the populations.

Alexander goes further to look at the African Renaissance enterprise promoted through African inter-governmental organisations such as the African Union (AU) and other African Regional Communities. Alexander posits the African political and cultural Renaissance as an enterprise which can be successful only if well rooted in African languages. His research shows that pushing the reading and writing of African languages into the highest scientific domains of publishing, teaching and political administration will yield the double benefit of modernising the African languages and sustaining their development. This will significantly reverse the present trend of language endangerment and loss in Africa. Most importantly, an African Renaissance based on the promotion of African languages will create in the new generations some cultural pride and a practical vision favourable to an African linguistic regeneration.

Birgit Brock-Utne has also worked on the development of African languages and their use for adult education (Brock-Utne, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003). She conducted a series of studies showing the intimate relationship between linguistic practices and community values such as cultural pride, intergenerational respect, group identities, and citizenship. She questions the simplistic view of an Education For All programme which would ignore the linguistic realities of Africa. Even if such a Promethean project is United Nations based and supported as is the case now, local realities and values still have a key role to play in its success and sustainability. Brock-Utne has written largely to show how any educational enterprise for African communities that doesn't fully take on board local languages will be lacking in consistency and in vision for sustainability.

The specific domain of adult literacy (as defined in Chapters 2 and 3) has also received considerable scientific contribution at the continental level. One leading researcher in this domain is Edmund Richmond. He did a comparative survey of seven sub-Saharan African countries, looking closely at their current policies and programmes of teaching official and

national languages (Richmond, 1983, 1986). These countries were Gambia, Mali, Liberia, Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya, and Seychelles. Richmond's extensive studies investigated the motivations, the linguistic realities and the effective implementation of literacy programmes in the target countries. His writings give a comparative survey focusing on the functional literacy programmes in those countries. He gives interesting insights into various implementational issues encountered in these programmes. He also provides useful orientations and some directions for functional literacy in sub-Saharan Africa. Throughout the present research, I address some of these issues and concerns as they apply to the case of Cameroon and Kom (with more details in Chapter 7).

As I mentioned earlier in Chapter 2, the attitudes and the post-colonial values of Africans themselves play a major role in the promotion and the support of literacy on the continent. In this regard, it is worth noting the work of Ngugi wa Thiong'o on the necessity to promote and to use the African languages in creative arts, mainly in the production of literature and fictional works (Ngugi, 1986, 1993). Ngugi has shown consistently how the preservation, the intergenerational transmission and the internal development of African languages rely heavily on literature production and on creative writing. Being a writer acclaimed all over the world, Ngugi sets himself as an example. He advocates that it is important that the creative arts are written using local languages. Unfortunately, there are strong obstacles, such as the subtle process of cultural assimilation to the West, and the linguistic self-rejection by Africans that have resulted from the colonial times. These obstacles are still present in most parts of Africa, and they are not conducive to the decolonisation of African literature that Ngugi advocates. Yet, Ngugi shows that not only is this cultural decolonisation the major path for the real preservation of African languages, but he also shows that it is a historic necessity to help reverse the deeper colonisation of the African mind and cultures that has been achieved by colonisation and neo-colonisation.

A number of other researchers have worked on literacy in specific cases and contexts in Africa. Their publications provide a useful account of literacy acquisition and uses in communities where the local realities condition and influence the literacy process itself. Such studies are useful as a contribution to the comprehension of adult literacy in Africa where the acquisition of reading and writing is such a localised endeavour. This localised dimension

becomes prominent when literacy is incorporating the languages of beneficiary communities. Without being exhaustive, I will mention here some of these works.

Research conducted by Dumont in Mali has contributed much to a better understanding of adult literacy in Africa (Dumont, 1973). He studied the national-scale adult literacy programme of Mali as it was implemented in the 1960s and 1970s. His analysis covers in detail the various aspects of training in literacy. Dumont's contributions give an insight, and some useful guidelines, about the organisation of in-service training and retraining programmes for literacy facilitators.

Asiedu Kobina and Oyedeji did an extensive study of adult literacy in Nigeria (Asiedu Kobina and Oyedeji, 1985). Their research emphasises the functional aspects of literacy. They look at individual and social uses of reading and writing by adults participating in the various literacy programmes throughout Nigeria. Their study sheds light on the perceptions and uses of literacy in Nigeria.

Bangura conducted an insightful research on community literacy in the Gambia (Bangura, 1986). He studied the Kamakwie functional literacy programme, looking at how adults in a rural village were faring when learning to read and write. The major contribution of his research is its specific evaluative focus. He investigates the meaning of the basic concept of functionality, mapping the local application of such a concept to the more international perception, such as the criteria of functionality as defined by the UNESCO (as I discussed it earlier in Chapters 2 and 3). He shows the striking truth that local perceptions of functionality in literacy do not always tally with the international organisations' definitions. But at the same time, grassroots community literacy persists, and adults build their own motivations and visions of local literacy.

Kuthemba's work on adult literacy in Malawi is also a notable contribution to literacy research (Kuthemba, 1990). It gives an overview of the challenges faced on a national scale by the deployment of an adult literacy enterprise. It surveys some of the obstacles and the necessary changes brought about in education and community habits by a nation-wide literacy campaign. Most importantly, Kuthemba's research provides a thorough evaluation of the impact of the programme at the national and local levels.

Prinsloo and Breier have published on adult literacy in post-apartheid South Africa (Prinsloo and Breier, 1996). South Africa is a society in a fast political and socio-economic

transition. As it is undergoing significant changes in the uses of local languages in education, South Africa epitomizes the struggles of African languages to regain their place in the public spaces and especially in adult literacy activities. Prinsloo and Breier's research lays emphasis on how neo-literates in a post-apartheid South Africa make use of literacy, among other things, for their socio-cultural and political empowerment.

The last two decades has seen a significant deployment of adult literacy programmes in Uganda. Two recent collections of studies survey and analyse these adult literacy programmes (Okech, et al. 2001; Okech, 2004). The various authors contributing to the collections present a series of papers covering the growth, the development, the prospects and the challenges of adult literacy in Uganda. An assessment of operational problems encountered is made throughout the various contributions. Lessons are also drawn from on-going programmes, and some solutions are proposed for better implementation of adult literacy programmes in that country in particular, and in Africa in general.

As I said earlier, it is not possible at this juncture to be exhaustive on all studies of adult literacy in Africa. Many other studies exist on the continent. The sum of these specific national and regional experiences provides the foundation for a larger discourse on adult literacy in Africa. Therefore, at the continental level, it is clear there is an inherent interconnectedness of both human experiences and socio-cultural entities within which adult literacy takes place. As we will see below, both the national level experiences and the research on adult literacy in Cameroon form part of these interconnected experiences.

#### **4.5.3. The national level**

As shown in the first and second chapters, Cameroon is a markedly multilingual country. As at the continental level, researches on literacy in Cameroon are tributary of researches on the promotion of local languages for use in education.

Significant research publications on local languages and adult literacy stem from activities of the Cameroon branch of the SIL-International (formerly the Summer Institute of Linguistics), SIL-Cameroon. SIL members arrived in Cameroon in 1969. The first trend of their work was in the areas of theoretical description of local languages. This laid the

foundation for language standardisation and the further development of writing systems for local languages, following earlier activities by colonial missionaries (as previously examined in Chapter 2). The SIL's first motivations were in the direction of studying and developing local languages in the pursuit of translating the Bible in local languages. But while doing that, they published extensively on the use of local language for literacy, and thus helped develop the bases for adult literacy in Cameroon grassroots. SIL's research and activities continue until today, and much of the scientific literature on Cameroonian languages is made up of contributions from SIL's linguists and educationists.

A foundational publication in the evolution of literacy in Cameroon is the *General Alphabet of Cameroonian Languages* (Tadadjeu and Sadembouo, 1979, 1984). Its origin, conception and national adoption have been extensively presented in Chapter 2. The *General Alphabet* sums together, in an easily accessible format, the results of many years of phonological researches and sociolinguistic surveys on Cameroonian languages. It is the first scientific document to have covered comprehensively most of the phonemes and graphemes for Cameroonian languages. As such, it provided a necessary reference to guide all subsequent efforts to put in writing the many then unwritten Cameroonian languages. As said in Chapter 2, this prompted its large adoption by most of the linguists and educationists working on adult literacy in Cameroonian languages. The earlier efforts of different and sometimes conflicting alphabets have found in the *General Alphabet* a consensual framework for harmonisation and for constructive long-term consistency.

Starting in the 1980s to present, many researchers have published significant studies on the use of Cameroonian languages in education, in communication, and in literacy and community development. Among those studies, Elisabeth Gfeller's work is notable (Gfeller, 1990, 2000). She focused her research on four complementary domains:

- a) language use in bilingual formal education,
- b) community response to bilingual formal education,
- c) the production of didactic materials in local languages,
- d) the training of bilingual teachers.

Gfeller shows throughout her work an ambiguous relationship in the Cameroonian society: most educated Cameroonians do value their linguistic heritage, yet at the same time,

they feel forced to adjust to an educational system which rejects their local languages.<sup>80</sup> Yet, Gfeller's attitudinal studies on sociolinguistic choices and on educational policies in Cameroon show that there is clearly a general orientation within the various social groups to promote the use of local languages. It is only the official decision-making on such issues, both institutionally and operationally, which lies outside of their reach. Gfeller has also consistently contributed to the conception, the implementation and the development of formal educational programmes using local languages. The most prominent of these programmes is the PROPELCA (presented earlier in Chapter 2). She is one of its founding and leading researchers.

Another useful scientific contribution is the work published by Clinton Robinson (Robinson, 1995). He investigates in detail the language use in rural development in Cameroon. Using the case study of a rural community in the Ombessa region, situated in the southern part of the country, Robinson produced a major book which falls squarely within the domain of the ethnography of communication. He describes the various uses of local languages, as they encounter the official languages and other regional lingua franca in the socio-cultural setting of the Nugunu community that he studied extensively. At the same time, he goes further to elaborate on the issue of community development from a rural African perspective. He discusses the relationship between language use and community development to show how any language policies excluding local languages are counter-productive for rural development. For him, there should be a radical change from such policies in order to achieve efficient communication and endogenous development in rural areas of Cameroon.

Ursula Wiesemann and Olive Shell have worked on core areas of language and literacy, namely standardisation and development of writing systems (Wiesemann, 1983; Shell and Wiesemann, 1987). Their research resulted in the publication of scientific and operational guides for the development of writing systems of Cameroonian languages. They also published guides for the training of literacy facilitators. Both these authors drew much from their decades of experiences in other parts of the world such as Latin America. They have studied the use of local languages in all forms of literacy activities, and have written much on the planning and the implementation of adult literacy programmes. They have also contributed

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<sup>80</sup> This rings the bell of the psychic disbelief in African languages (Githiora, 2008a:250), as discussed earlier in Chapter 3.

to research on the conception, design and production techniques of bilingual didactic materials.

It should be noted that Cameroon is blessed with a local vibrant academic community of linguists, some of them expatriates and others locals. But not all Cameroonian linguists have devoted their careers to the promotion of African languages.<sup>81</sup> As concerns those who have worked relentlessly for the promotion of local languages, a leading group is the team of linguists who have followed Maurice Tadadjeu. They are among the truly endogenous agents who have been central in the promotion of local language literacy in Cameroon. Their works span over more than 25 years, starting in the late 70s (Tadadjeu and Sadembouo, 1979, 1984; Tadadjeu, 1987, 1990; Tadadjeu et al., 1991; Mba, 1986; Sadembouo, 2002). Over the last three decades, these Cameroonian linguists have done research on the necessity and the feasibility of the promotion and development of Cameroonian languages. They have consistently and convincingly shown, on the one hand, that the design and the contents of the Cameroonian education systems do not build on local languages and cultures. On the other hand, they have proven that this is counterproductive for the country, and that such systems fail everybody in the long run. Consequently, they argue, as do other African linguists elsewhere, that the present Cameroonian education systems will not achieve any long-term success and true socio-economic development. To reverse this gloomy trend, the local languages must be adequately integrated in the education systems as mediums of instruction. Tadadjeu and his followers have applied their research in the various experimental programmes they have designed and implemented throughout the country. The most successful of these programmes is the above-mentioned PROPELCA. The various publications of Tadadjeu and his team cover five major areas:

- a) linguistic advocacy and general policy documents,
- b) operational guides on multilingual education and language teaching;
- c) academic publications and theoretical guides on status and corpus planning for local languages;
- d) training manuals for bilingual OL/MT teachers and literacy monitors;

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<sup>81</sup> Actually, many Cameroonian linguists stayed for years away from a constructive promotion of the local languages. Though most of them tapped into the local languages for their theoretical researches and publications, many just paid lip service to a genuine promotion of local languages. This situation echoes Ngugi (1986) and the debate on the African elites' mental colonisation.



- e) language-specific publications: primers, arithmetics booklets, post-primers and other literacy didactic literature, post-literacy booklets, transition manuals and even creative literature...

The Kom literacy programme has resorted extensively to these publications for its conception and operational deployment in the community. Consequently, my research on literacy in Kom is embedded within the approaches and linguistic vision of the trend opened by linguists such as Tadadjeu.

One recent research that has looked at literacy in the Kom community is the doctoral thesis of Barbara Trudell (Trudell, 2004). In her work, Kom is one of the three case studies she has used for her comparative sociolinguistic study on 'education choices and language maintenance' (Trudell, 2004) in the North West province of Cameroon. Her research is a comparative study of sociolinguistic choices and community attitudes towards local languages. She shows, among other things, the similarities and dissimilarities in those areas among the three communities studied. Her focus is generally on the school education system. She also investigates in particular the PROPELCA programme as it has been implemented and perceived in the communities under her analysis. She raises interesting questions on local decision-making processes and on endogenous agency for social change.

Looking at all the research on adult literacy in local languages in Cameroon, it is important at this point to situate my present research in relation to the national picture described.

#### **4.6. SITUATING THIS RESEARCH**

Most of the studies done so far on literacy in Cameroon do not focus closely on what happens specifically with adults in bilingual literacy programmes. As I discussed it in Chapter 3, this gap is more visible when it comes to describing and analysing (a) how adults acquire literacy skills, and (b) their perceptions and uses of reading and writing in their daily lives.

My work here investigates the practice of adult literacy with two intrinsic foci:

- a) the pedagogic use of the local language in its written form in literacy programmes, and

- b) the connection between the acquisition of literacy skills and the perception of their social use by learners themselves.

As such, my research is a contribution in the vast array of earlier studies on African language literacy, but has a novel stamp on account of its contents, its focus and its approach. As concerns its contents, the domains of emphasis in the acquisition of skills are the didactic materials and the literacy teaching. As for its focus, the local language is the main thread tying together the literacy activities studied. As concerns its approach, the field is central: it is the data from the field that orientates the construction of the discourse on literacy. In a bottom-top relationship like this one, the bottom (i.e. the community and the local practices) is the reference point from which as a researcher I hope to learn and account for the reality described.

#### **4.7. EXPECTED OUTCOMES AND RESULTS**

The expected and main outcome of this research, or in other words, its material end-product, is a doctoral thesis. Yet, there is another outcome which is I hope to be an end-result: a technical document for practical use in adult literacy classes and programmes; ideally, a literacy operational guide. Its contents would build much on the Kom experience and on the problems encountered and solved successfully in that literacy programme. This eventual literacy operational guide would be a technical document that could help in the conception, design, planning and implementation of adult literacy programmes.

Such a document would depend much on a number of circumstances and on eventual support in Cameroon and in the Kom community. It is true that such future circumstances can not be clearly known at this point, and that they will not be necessarily under my control. But it is worth mentioning this potential guide, to express my preoccupation with a practical side of my research. For literacy programmes already operating, such a guide would help in their qualitative evaluation. It would provide some criteria and principles for a normative assessment, and for the improvement, of the on-going activities. For those literacy classes to be started, such a guide would lay the bases for the design, implementation and follow up of the literacy work.

With the focus on the poorly studied area of bilingual adult literacy in Africa, such a guide would constitute a much needed contribution, especially for people working in the real life contexts of literacy. In fact, extracting a guide from the results of this doctoral research will be most helpful for adult literacy practitioners. From a purely cost-effective view, such a guide could be light in contents and in usability as a document. It could also be affordable, be it in terms of cost or technical application. Also, it is worth noting that this guide would be based on an actual study from the field of a bilingual adult literacy programme. Accordingly, it would be closer and more adapted to local realities within which bilingual adult literacy takes place in Cameroon.

The production of this literacy guide would fall within an attempt to bridge back the research on bilingual adult literacy with its daily practice. In fact, this gap is not only a wide one, but a widening one. This is due to the fact that most researchers and other academics working in the area of adult literacy produce their works generally for the academic and university audience. In many cases, these academic contributions get into scientific journals and other scientific conferences for dissemination. The majority of rural adult literacy practitioners, such as literacy monitors, supervisors and coordinators in various programmes in the grassroots, do not have much access to research on literacy. In fact, most of them do not even know about the recent trends and other developments in adult literacy research. Many factors account for that. Among others, one can cite issues of accessibility and information. Accessibility here concerns specifically the fact that the places where literacy research results (such as memoirs, theses and other scientific articles) are not within physical reach of the villages and other grassroots settlements. Yet, the literacy practitioners mentioned above live and work in these rural grassroots. As for the issue of availability, the communication channels and the referential spaces, such as accessible and decentralised libraries, do not exist where these products can be found by literacy workers who are in need of them. Most often, it is the case that even within some African universities, it is not easy to lay hands on published academic works. Yet, it is clear that literacy workers in African grassroots will benefit from constructive contact with research on literacy.

#### **4.8. SCOPE**

In terms of its scope, this research covers in depth the use of local languages as mediums of instruction in grassroots literacy. But, throughout Cameroon, there are other types of adult literacy programmes, like those exclusively using the official languages, French and English. Some of these literacy programmes are implemented within official institutions or industrial corporations. Though such programmes exist, the focus of this research is on local language literacy, and on Kom in particular as indicated in the title of the thesis.

A possible limitation of this research pertains to the fact that in Cameroon – a linguistic paradise with so many languages – one concern for any linguistic study is the number of languages that can be covered. This study is limited to one language, Kom. Covering a number of languages is difficult for a doctoral research focused on adult literacy, because of the limitations in time and resources. One can claim that Kom is not linguistically, geographically or culturally representative of all Cameroonian languages. But the Kom community has produced one of the most remarkable bilingual literacy programmes in the whole country (Shultz, 1997; NACALCO, 1998, 2001; Sadembouo, 2002; Trudell, 2004).

By focusing my research on Kom, I hope that the descriptions and analyses will provide knowledge about the specific elements and practices that make that programme successful. Ideally, such knowledge could permit the replication elsewhere of the literacy practices and results observed in Kom. Similar researches could also use this study on Kom as a model for further large scale studies.

#### **4.9. SUMMARY**

I set out in this chapter to present, among other things, the theoretical approach of my research. The fieldwork uses an ethnographic approach, and the descriptions and analyses are informed as much as possible by grounded theory. To collect the data from the field, I used a syncretic approach, mixing a number of data gathering techniques, ranging from participant observation and interviews to audio-recording.

I examined the research methodology, and discussed the cross-disciplinary nature of this research. I also gave a detailed literature review, from which it emerges that there is much

written in the area of adult literacy; however there is not enough on adult literacy in Africa, and especially on those programmes using local languages in the rural grassroots.

It is my hope that the descriptions and analyses of this research might be used beyond the academic arena. As discussed earlier, such a development will depend on many factors. Nevertheless, it is legitimate that a community-oriented research like this should lead to applications that might benefit the people in the villages, in particular the main actors of the Kom literacy programme.

## **Chapter 5:**

### **The Kom adult literacy programme: Tales from the field**

#### **5.1. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter aims at giving a clearer view of the organisation and implementation of literacy as a social process and educational activity in Kom. In order to do this, I answer in more detail the questions about the major actors, the main socio-operational elements and the infrastructures in the delivery of literacy in Kom.

Anthropologists and ethnographers have written extensively on the preparation for fieldwork in social research, on the methodologies and techniques for data collection, and on the theoretical issues of research. Yet, as Hammersley and Atkinson (1983:209) write, ‘most authors are all but silent on the activity of writing ethnography.’ It is true that not much has been written about the very process of writing up research and the challenges of writing ethnography, i.e. transforming quasi ineffable field experiences into some coherent and prosaic narratives. A pioneer ethnographer, Radcliffe-Brown (1948), aptly pointed out that it is difficult, and in fact nearly impossible, to convey in any written description the deep communion and the inner understanding one develops as a result of living within a studied community.<sup>82</sup> If there is one rule which seems to prevail about writing ethnographic accounts, it is that no one single writing strategy applies across the board to all research situations. Though in literature there exist some guiding suggestions about conventions and style in reporting and producing narratives, many authors tend to agree that there is always an element of originality in the way researchers finalise their accounts of their field experiences and their empirical data (Dooley, 1990; Davies, 1999; Gfeller, 2000; Bryman, 2004; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, 2006). This originality relates both to the specificity of each research context and group, and to the reflexivity of each researcher in relation to their work (Davies, 1999).

The first part of this chapter will present a brief overview of the research enterprise as it unfolded through the fieldwork preparation, the settlement in Kom, the negotiation of socio-

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<sup>82</sup> As cited in Hammersley and Atkinson (1983:144).

cultural integration, the organisation of the local research team, and the data collection. I will also touch on some organisational and operational challenges faced during the research in Kom. Other issues covered in this chapter that relate to the implementation of adult literacy in Kom include the planning and design of the programme, the logistical aspects, and the issues of time tabling.

Local language literacy in Kom is an adult education enterprise driven by the mother tongue. The Kom Language Development Committee (KLDC) is central to this enterprise. Though Chapters 1 and 2 briefly presented this organisation, this chapter will present more thoroughly KLDC's operational life and socio-cultural span as the institutional machinery behind adult education in Kom.

Literacy as a social phenomenon is based on two intrinsically connected dynamic realities: on the one hand, there are the spaces and specific settings where literacy takes place, namely the literacy classes; and on the other hand, there are the human resources at work on a regular basis to provide literacy skills to target groups, namely the literacy monitors. This chapter will dwell extensively on these two as they happen, interrelate and complement themselves in the Kom community. To better describe in depth these two crucial elements in the dynamics of Kom literacy, I will use a specific route in the writing journey, namely delivering some selected tales from the field. I will provide a number of focused narratives on literacy classes that I visited and observed, in addition to the overall writing of the field tales. I will also provide a few short profiles on some of the monitors. My purpose in so doing is to give a vivid picture of both who they are and how they fit in and interact with the literacy programme. Such an approach to the process of organising data into field narratives is in line with one of the central tenets of ethnographic research, which is 'the naturalistic approach'. Many ethnographers advocate this approach for any social enquiry, since it posits 'fidelity' and 'respect' for the social phenomena as key guides for any research of human social activity' (Matza, 1969:5;<sup>83</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, 2006; Dooley, 1990; Bailey, 1994; Davies, 1999; Gfeller, 2000; Barton, et al. 2000; Bryman, 2004).

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<sup>83</sup> Cited in Hammersley and Atkinson (2006:6).

## **5.2. THE FIELDWORK**

### **5.2.1. Preparation**

Fieldwork in Cameroon was a crucial activity in gathering data. Once the time to spend on the field was arranged, I did much preparatory and logistic work, such as searching for funding, health checks and vaccinations, and other administrative procedures. Arrangements for international travel took time to finalise because of the extended period I would be spending on the field and the distant region I was going to. I also made some preliminary arrangements with contacts in Cameroon: in the capital, Yaounde; in the university of Dschang (in the West province); and in Bamenda, the headquarters of the North West province where Kom is situated.

### **5.2.2. Settlement in the locality and negotiation of socio-cultural integration**

I left London on March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2006 for Cameroon. Upon my arrival, I had to spend some time in Yaounde, the capital city, although the fieldwork proper was planned to take place in the Kom linguistic area. The time spent in Yaounde was used to ensure that all my contacts were still available to work with me, and to update my information about the region I was going to move in. Then I started moving to the Kom area, situated in the Boyo Division, North West Province (see Figures 2.1, 2.2 and 2.6 in Chapter 2). For operational reasons, I had to make two stops on the way: at the university of Dschang and in Bamenda. In Dschang, I met and talked with some linguists and academics<sup>84</sup> who updated me on the linguistic situation both at national and local levels. I also received useful guidance from them about my work and organising my local team of research assistants. In Dschang, I also made contact with a Kom undergraduate student, once a Kom literacy coordinator, who helped me arrange my preparatory meetings and my local contacts in the Kom area.

In Bamenda, I spent time at the regional office of SIL for the Grand West, the Bamenda Regional Office (BRO). As earlier pointed out, SIL is a key partner in the development and implementation of adult literacy programmes in Cameroon. The involvement of SIL linguists has been significant in the initiation and consolidation of the Kom literacy

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<sup>84</sup> Their names and details are provided in Appendix 4.



programme over the last three decades. At the BRO, I did useful networking with administrative staff, linguists and researchers working in the North West province, and gathered useful information. I also conducted bibliographic research and collected updates on the Kom literacy activities and on recent political, socio-economic and cultural developments in the area.

After a road journey of more than 500 kilometres, I finally arrived in Kom. I was based at Fundong, the headquarters of the Boyo division. Fundong was a central location for me since I had to visit literacy centres throughout Kom. But starting the work there was not easy, with the rough local environment and weather.<sup>85</sup> Many public relations and local contacts had to be made before I could embark on work with the local community. I relied on the help of local assistants, one of whom I had written to when still in London, and others that I met and arranged to work with while in Yaounde and Dschang. Once in Kom, I held a number of meetings with key local people to explain my planned research activities. Among the key interlocutors were the local community leaders, the traditional and administrative authorities, and other influential people. Most importantly, I met and talked with executive members of the Kom Language Development Committee (KLDC). A list of names and details of the people I met, discussed and worked with is provided in Appendix 4.

I had to take into account the local politics and the necessary cultural negotiations in order to achieve my effective inclusion in the community. Being an ethnographic researcher, I had to immerse myself as fully as possible in the local culture. I can only say ‘as fully as possible’ on account of an unavoidable fact: I remained entangled in the typical researcher’s positionalities and divides in the highly ‘post-colonial context’ of Cameroon in general, and Kom in particular (as discussed earlier in 2.2.3 and 3.2.2).

In light of discussions made by authors such as Ela (1982), Ngugi (1986, 1993), Davies (1999), Mutua and Swadener (2004), Jankie (2004), the social researcher’s positionalities interact dynamically with the outputs of their social investigations. This is mainly because the action of collecting data and gathering information in a social research enquiry involve contacts, tensions, and interactions with local people and realities. A key operational element in the research endeavour is the relationship that the researcher has, or

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<sup>85</sup> In Chapter 2, I gave an overview of all of these geo-climatic and cultural environments.

builds, with the people and culture she or he is researching. How local people perceive the researcher and how he/she perceives them, both as individuals and as a group, builds a sort of tension and distance whose texture determines his/her access to the local knowledge systems. In other words, the connection to the local reality passes through the sieve of intertwined positionalities. What is told to the researcher, and the doors that are opened or closed to him, are based on how he/she presents him/her-self. At first, the researcher may come invested with the outsider's cape. As the researcher is not a local, she/he is initially seen as a stranger trying to gain access to domains of information and meanings which are normally only within the realm of local insiders. This is why the way the researcher builds his/her place in the community will determine his/her acceptance, and the subsequent sharing of genuine and authentic information with him/her. It is possible at some point that the positionality taken by the researcher can be converted and/or modified through a new interactive positioning. As Jankie (2004:100) noted, re-positioning oneself like a learner of local norms, values and practices, for example, can create confidence and sympathy on the part of the locals, and subsequently generate the positive feeling that the local owners of the researched information are valued and respected. In post-colonial contexts in sub-Saharan Africa, local knowledge systems and values have generally been despised or researched to show covertly that they are either not valid or not the way forward in the so-called 'modern' world. To reverse this misguided trend, African researchers have to negotiate new and constructive relationships and more culturally friendly partnerships with the communities they are working in (as discussed earlier in 3.2.2).

At this point therefore, it is important to briefly discuss the insider/outsider divide as it influenced my fieldwork in Kom. To an extent, this divide determined the levels of information, and the layers of meaning, to which I had access during my stay in Kom. And these levels of information and layers of meaning in turn impacted critically upon my capacity to do analyses of observed literacy activities in Kom. A number of combined characteristics marked me as an outsider: speaking the foreign language, English; coming with a foreign status as a researcher from a European university; and not surprisingly, the very fact of being in Kom to do scientific research. As concerns this latter, it should be noted that, in the last decades, educational and linguistic research of doctoral calibre on Kom have been in most

cases the agendas of expatriates and people not native to Kom. Yet still in me were other characteristics that marked me as an insider, mainly on the cultural and linguistic sides. On the linguistic side, in my favour was the fact that I fluently spoke the regional lingua franca, CamPidgin. Contrary to the francophone provinces of Cameroon where one doesn't have a strong lingua franca running in all the provinces, CamPidgin is widely used in the two Anglophone provinces. It has a strong use in urban areas, but also a fairly high presence in the remotest rural hamlets. As such, this pidgin language is definitely a strong identity and acceptance marker in the Kom area. As concerns my cultural proximity to Kom, I was seen to some extent as a *kontri pikin*, i.e. a son of the soil. Though not from the very Kom land, I was close enough to be seen as somebody who knew well enough the core mores and customs of the Kom people. This cultural insider status was granted to me by transfer: I am from a distant and different Fondom and village (Bandjoun), and a different province since I hail from the West province; but as a Grassfields Bantu myself, I was perceived and accepted by Kom people to be culturally very close to them.

### **5.2.3. Some organisational and operational challenges of the fieldwork**

#### ***5.2.3.1. Organising a team of local assistants***

I needed a group of assistants to help me as messengers, data collectors, relay persons, translators, and intermediaries. After various contacts and negotiations, I set up a local team of such assistants, made up of people who worked within the literacy programme. Most of them were literacy area coordinators and monitors. But even though it took me much time to bring them on board and explain to them my research and my plans, their collaboration with me relied on a voluntary partnership, since I couldn't afford to pay them to work full-time for me. Already in their own lives, they had packed agendas, working more than one job to make ends meet and take care of their families. Even with their intensive involvement in the literacy programme, none of them could work full-time solely for the literacy programme because of the lack of adequate financial resources in the literacy programme (I will discuss this further in section 5.6. which focuses on literacy monitors). In sum, I had to coordinate my involvement with each of them, juggling my schedule to accommodate constraints in their busy lives.

Equally important, I had to accommodate the huge distances that most of them had to cover each time we had things to do, because many of the kilometres to trek, even for a planning meeting, were mostly made on foot. To keep in touch and arrange meetings and visits was a challenge, since we relied on either verbal messages or hand-carried notes via third or fourth parties. Most often, this meant I could only send out a message when somebody would come to Fundong for the weekly big market.

#### ***5.2.3.2. Planning and conducting the observation of literacy classes***

A component of my fieldwork hinged on the visits to literacy centres to observe literacy classes. But planning and making the field visits proved to be one of my biggest challenges. All the literacy classes to be observed had been planned long before my arrival on the field and they ran at their own time and pace, irrespective of any interest from an external person like me. Thus, the onus was on me to arrange to be there when the literacy classes were taking place.

The challenges I faced included team coordination, bad weather, time management, access and transport issues. As concerns time management and team coordination, I needed at least one assistant available to take me from my starting point (generally Fundong) to the area to be visited; and once in that area, we had to be met by one areal contact, generally the area supervisor or a literacy monitor, to guide us to the literacy class to be observed. I had each and every time to coordinate my days and visit hours with at least two other people. I had only a small team of local assistants with whom I could work and I relied on each of them. The most important thing was to arrive for a class at the right time, and not to arrive late, after the class was finished and the learners dispersed.

Access to villages was difficult, due among other things to the rough nature of the land. The hilly terrain of the Kom land is an integral part of the Grassfields mountainous highlands. Not only are distances between hamlets in Kom vast, but travel to most places can only be made on foot. The only stretch of tarred road in the Kom land is the main motorable road linking Fundong to Bamenda through Njinikom and Belo. There were some bush taxis covering the distances in between Fundong, Njinikom and Belo, but most of the literacy classes to visit were in the hinterland away from the main road. What made my local trips very

tough was not just the scarcity of roads, but also the very bad state of the existing roads. A major hurdle throughout my fieldwork was this trekking for many kilometres to remote areas.

**Figure 5.1: A view of the hilly landscapes of Kom**



In addition to the difficulty of trekking for long distances, the weather created difficulties as well. The rainy season came with heavy downpours that resulted in muddy roads and paths. To go to some of the literacy centres necessitated walking for a day to get there, and another to get back. After trekking for hours on steep and muddy paths in the mountains, exhausted and drenched by rain, we sometimes arrived too late and there was nobody left at the literacy centre. The following table charts the distances to get to some literacy centres.

**Table 5.1: Distances to Muteff and Juambum**

<b>Fundong to Muteff</b>		<b>Fundong to Juambum</b>	
<i>Quarters/places traversed</i>	<i>Distance and Time estimates</i>	<i>Quarters/places traversed</i>	<i>Distance and Time estimates</i>
1. Fundong 'Uptown'	2kms, 20mns	1. Juatuf	1km, 10mns
2. Fujua	5kms, 45mns	2. Mbam	2kms, 20mns
3. Chuabuh Ghama	6kms, 1hr	3. Alim	3kms, 30mns
4. Ngwah '3 Corners'	9kms, 1hr15mns	4. Boyni	4kms, 45mns
5. Angu-Aku	10kms, 1hr25mns	5. Ameng	6kms, 1hr
6. Ibami Ngwah	11kms, 1hr40mns	6. Nkoyni	10kms, 1hr20mns
7. Abuh-Atu-Abuh	13kms, 2hrs	7. Atu Nkohni	11kms, 1hr40mns
8. Abuh-Ikwi	14kms, 2hrs15mns	8. Njinikom	12kms, 2hrs
9. Abuh 'Market Square'	15kms, 2hrs30mns	9. Acha'jvia	13kms, 2hrs15mns
10. Ngwah 'River'	17kms, 2hrs45mns	10. Wombong	14kms, 2hrs30mns
11. Achyayoh	18kms, 3hrs	11. Isuchu	15kms, 2hrs45mns
12. Ndaffa	19kms, 3hrs20mns	12. Baingeh	16kms, 3hrs
13. Ighongli	20kms, 3hrs40mns	13. Bobong	17kms, 3hrs15mns
14. Njinakuh Muteff	21kms, 4hrs	14. Kikfini	18kms, 3hrs30mns
		15. Chuabuh-Kikfini	19kms, 3hrs45mns
		16. Sho	20kms, 4hrs
		17. Asheng	21kms, 4hrs20mns
		17. Fuli	22kms, 4hrs45mns
		18. Jvia-Foinsoh	25kms, 5hrs10mns
		19. Ibal Anjin	26kms, 5hrs30mns
		20. Isae'besi	27kms, 6hrs
		21. Anjin	28kms, 6hrs20mns
		22. Juambum	31kms, 7hrs

Table 5.1 describes only the average walking distances to Muteff and Juambum, two of more than 10 literacy centres I managed to visit during my fieldwork.

Many other obstacles had to be overcome daily in order to enter and preserve collected data on any electronic equipment, including the lack of electricity in most localities and rampant power cuts in Fundong where there was electricity. These difficulties significantly reduced the possibilities to work with the computer and other electronic equipment. Communication by phone was difficult because of the erratic network in Fundong, and total lack of coverage in the majority of Kom localities. For internet communication, I had to travel more than 20 kilometres to Belo, the only place in the whole of Kom with an expensive cybercafé that had, unfortunately, unreliable internet connection.

### 5.3. DATA COLLECTION

The bulk of my work in the field consisted of discussions and interviews with people involved in local literacy activities, namely literacy monitors, supervisors, coordinators, adult participants, bilingual teachers, local education authorities and stakeholders, and local Kom authors. This extensive list is not exhaustive. The resource persons I interviewed are listed in Appendix 4.

One of the techniques I used on the field for data collection was unstructured interviews of persons active at different levels in the literacy programme. Bryman (2004) provides a definition of the main characteristics of unstructured interviews as the following:

‘...the interviewer typically has only a list of topics or issues often called an *interview*<sup>86</sup> guide or *aide mémoire*,<sup>87</sup> that are typically covered. The style of questioning is usually informal. The phrasing and sequencing of questions will vary from interview to interview’ (Bryman, 2004: 113).

In social sciences and qualitative research, the unstructured interview has been also labelled as ‘intensive interview’ (Lofland, 1995), or ‘qualitative interview’ (Mason, 1996; Rubin and Rubin, 1995). Spradley (1979) considers it as the type of interview par excellence of ethnographic research and therefore calls it ‘ethnographic interview’.<sup>88</sup>

Another important data collection strategy was participant observation of literacy classes in adult educational settings. It was not possible to visit each and every literacy class, but I managed to visit more than ten literacy classes during my time in Kom. A table is provided in this chapter (in 5.4.3) that gives the details of all the literacy centres.

Another important component of my investigation is related to local literature and its use in adult educational contexts. I collected and studied the existing Kom publications, especially their various uses for literacy activities (see Chapter 6).

I collected tens of pages of field notes in hardcopy and electronic formats, as well as pictorial and audio-visual data depicting the people, classes, places, and the various activities observed. Audio data gathered include recordings of key literacy monitors and area supervisors, as well as important executive members of the KLDC, including the chairman of

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<sup>86</sup> Emphasis by author.

<sup>87</sup> Emphasis by author.

<sup>88</sup> All authors in this paragraph as cited in Bryman (2004:113).

the Literacy Committee, and the KLDC President himself. Transcripts of all these audio recordings are provided in Appendix 5.

## **5.4. THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LOCAL LITERACY PROGRAMME**

### **5.4.1. KLDC: its organisation and activities**

KLDC is the acronym for the Kom Language Development Committee. It was created, and is run, by Kom natives. It functions mainly in the Boyo division, the homeland of the Kom. The headquarters of KLDC is in Fundong, which is the main city in the Kom land and is the administrative headquarters for most main institutions covering the Boyo division. KLDC is the local NGO spearheading the development of the Kom language in various aspects: adult literacy, formal teaching of Kom in schools, production of Kom material, and training of Kom monitors. The organisation started in the mid-80s and led a number of literacy activities, but its constitution was officially ratified in January 1991 at Fundong. As a non-profit, non-denominational and non-political organisation, KLDC's main objectives are scientific, cultural and developmental. Thus, KLDC is not meant to get involved in any official and partisan politics, and is not geared as an institution towards making lucrative profits from its services to the community.

As per its statutes, KLDC's stated main goal is to "promote the development of the Kom language through its written form for the benefit of the Kom people". It is important to note that it is mainly the written form of Kom which is the major concern of the KLDC. Its specific aims as prescribed in its Constitution are:

- a) to produce an alphabet and design and adopt orthographic rules for Kom,
- b) to promote and popularize this standard form of the language and "its use in the largest possible context",
- c) to modernise the language through lexical expansion,
- d) to do various translations from and into Kom as means and necessities would allow,
- e) to specifically promote local literacy and community-wide reading and writing of the language,



- f) to organise training sessions for literacy monitors, translators and authors necessary for the vast task of literacy and language development.

Many NGOs in Cameroon customarily are made up of their general assembly and their executive committee. One characteristic specific of KLDC is its emphasis on technical and pedagogical vocation with the creation of a Literacy Committee as a fully developed component of the organisation. Main players in the Literacy Committee are the Chairman, the Literacy Coordinator, the Publications Coordinator, and Technical Adviser(s). Still, the KLDC Constitution states that other experts with 'skills in linguistics, literacy, and/or literature production' shall be pulled into the committee when necessary.

The two main sources of funding of the KLDC are through donations and from sales of Kom literature. This falls squarely within NACALCO's vision of its member language committees as discussed earlier in 3.5.4. Donations generally come from partner institutions such as SIL and NACALCO, and from various denominations, development unions, constituted groups interested in community development, and individuals. Most of the persons working for the KLDC, such as typists, clerks, linguistic assistants, literacy monitors and supervisors are driven originally by a sense of volunteerism and a commitment to help their community. Yet, in its statutes, KLDC is adamant that all such personnel are eligible to receive payment for their activities and to be considered for compensation as funds allow. Such an approach creates solid grounds for the sustainability of the literacy programme: recognition of personal commitment and benevolence for the greater good; fair and flexible personnel management; and permanent adaptation of resource allocation to support KLDC workers (This will be further discussed in Chapter 7).

#### **5.4.2. Planning and programme design**

In its implementation, literacy can be viewed both as an educational issue and as a management or policy issue (Barton, 1994). As an educational issue, literacy is about teaching and skills' transmission and acquisition. As a management or policy issue, literacy is about planning, design and implementation as a socio-institutional programme. In its conception, planning and implementation, literacy in Kom is part of a larger programme designed at the

national level by leading institutions such as SIL and NACALCO (These two institutions have been discussed in detail in Chapters 2 and 3).

At the beginning stages of the literacy programme lay a constructive partnership between KLDC, and its umbrella institution, NACALCO, and their supportive partner, SIL. This tripartite partnership has been producing adult literacy activities in Cameroon, as earlier described in 3.5.4. Still, partnership for local language literacy is embedded within an even larger web of institutional and educational networks including the local schools and churches. In other words, literacy in Kom emerged from interaction between SIL, NACALCO, and KLDC, all of which relied on educational institutions to provide school premises and teaching staff to support the implementation of adult literacy.

As concerns its technical conception, the KLDC literacy programme is the field implementation of the national literacy programme designed by NACALCO and SIL linguists and researchers. This national programme is rooted in the PROPELCA heritage (as discussed in detail in Chapter 2). But some of the linguists and educationists who designed these programmes were also Kom natives who brought to their native communities the benefits of adult literacy and local language promotion. KLDC has also been for years a key member of NACALCO. As such, the community response in Kom and their strong local ownership of a vibrant literacy programme have carried them further forward than similar programmes in other parts of the country.

As I said earlier when discussing NACALCO (in 3.5.4.3 and 3.5.5), the research and application programmes of NACALCO exist operationally through the activities of member language committees. But beyond the design and planning of literacy programmes, NACALCO's direct contribution to its members such as the KLDC is apparent through the financial support to the Kom programme; the technical and scientific support in the training of literacy monitors; the organisation of other technical trainings (for example, training in administrative management and income generation); and the technical and financial support to publications (This latter will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 6 and 7).

### 5.4.3. Implementation and delivery of literacy classes

#### 5.4.3.1. Literacy centres and classes

The Kom literacy programme started in 1984 with the help of Randy Jones, an SIL linguist. Sociolinguistic surveys and anthropological reports had already shown strong local language dynamics, and a strong community response to cultural preservation (Nkwi, 1978; Nkwi and Warnier, 1982; Koenig, et al. 1983, Loh and Shultz, 1989; Jones, 2001; Sadembouo, 2002; Trudell 2004). Consequently, it is of no surprise that by the year 2000, the Kom literacy programme had expanded to become one of the most vibrant local language literacy programmes in the whole country (Loh and Shultz, 1989; Chia and Kimbi, 1992; Gfeller 2000; Jones, 2001; Sadembouo, 2002; Trudell 2004; Nguesso, 2005). The number of literacy centres in the Kom land has fluctuated over the years, due among other things to the voluntary commitment of literacy monitors.

A literacy centre has an established physical space and a regular teaching session that takes place there. In other words, a literacy centre is meant to function like a school, with premises, classes and teachers. In the Kom literacy programme, each literacy centre is thus attached to a site, with regular classes taking place there. As will be seen in the tales from the field further in this chapter, this physical site can be a church, a school or a private home. Over the years, the regular functioning of literacy centres has varied from place to place. Yet, as mentioned earlier, the overall number of literacy centres in Kom in 2006, as shown in Table 5.2, was one of the highest in the country.

The operational existence of a literacy class has to do with the running of the class as a socio-educational event, with learners and monitors coming together at specific times (see Table 5.3) for a literacy class. During my fieldwork, I focused as much as possible on those literacy centres which were operational. One of the criteria I used to determine which class I would visit was that it met at least once a week. In other words, I didn't gather more information on, or try to visit, those literacy centres which held less than 4 sessions per month. The assumption was that a minimum of a weekly session was necessary in order for adults to achieve any significant learning over an academic year. But this criterion was also the one generally used by NACALCO, SIL and KLDC to validate the existence of a local adult literacy class.

**Table 5.2: Literacy centres in Kom in 2006**

CBC: Cameroon Baptist Church; CNBC: Cameroon National Baptist Church;  
GS: Government School; CS: Catholic School; CSS: Community Secondary School.

Area	Place/Centre
Aduk	GS Ilung CSS Aduk Community School Chuabuh (X) Baptist Church Aduk I (Luh) (X) Baptist Church Aduk II (Tua'muyn) (X) CS Aduk
Anya'jua	Anya'jua Anjinichin Catholic Church Juambum (X) Tumuku GS Isae'besi (X) Anjang
Belo	CBC Belo (X) CNBC Fundeng (X) Muwa (X) Fuli (X) CBC Djichami CBC Ashing CBC Njinikejem (Njang) (X)
Fundong	GS Muteff (X) Baptist Church Abuh Catholic Church Ngwah Tohdum Catholic Church Abuh GS Mbissi (X) CBC Abuh
Njinikom	CBC Tinifoinbi CS Fuanantui (X) Acha'jvia (X) Catholic Church Yang (X)

In the table above, the literacy centres that I managed to visit are marked with a cross (X).

A literacy class is organised according to pedagogic levels of the learners. Since learners in a literacy centre are normally of different skill levels, the pedagogic delivery is planned to be subdivided into various teaching levels: 1, 2 and 3. Level 1 is for the more basic

learners, who often are beginners; Level 2 is for intermediate learners; and Level 3 is normally for advanced learners. Therefore, in the pedagogic planning of the literacy programme, each literacy centre should ultimately run the three levels as three separate classes. Ideally, this should happen gradually, and at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of a centre running successfully, it should have all the 3 levels.

The reality during my observation of literacy centres was that the literacy monitors and supervisors had a desire to split their literacy classes into the various appropriate levels. But there were two major constraints. The first was the lack of available and trained monitors. Actually, most literacy centres had only one regular monitor who was both trained and fully available to run it. Even in the case where there was a team of monitors for a given centre, their availability and competence were not adequate to allow for a permanent running of separate classes, one for each of the three levels. In some centres, another obstacle was the lack of enough separate rooms. This was the case in Juambum, Aduk 1-Luh, and Tua'muyn (see section 5.5.), where the only hall available for the literacy class was the local church.<sup>89</sup>

#### 5.4.3.2. *Time-tabling*

The traditional Kom week runs for eight days<sup>90</sup> and is marked by two days of observance and forbiddance: *Itu' i boli* and *Itu' i iyvinikom* (see Table 5.3). Those two are the days where many traditional activities such as agricultural works and land ploughing, and the use of certain iron tools such as hoes, are all forbidden. They are sacred days in the Kom cultural system and are generally referred to in CamPidgin as *kontri sondei* ('the local Sundays' or 'our own Sundays'). This is important in time-tabling for local adult literacy

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<sup>89</sup> The lack of enough rooms for classes is actually a rampant problem in many formal schools in rural areas all across Africa. To date, in many villages, different permanent classes are still run in one single classroom. I remember that more than 30 years ago, I myself changed classrooms only once for the 4 years I successfully passed from Class 1 to Class 4. This is still the situation in some Kom schools today.

<sup>90</sup> One possible source for this 8-day week in Kom could be connected to the historic rituals of enthronement and royal installation of the Paramount Fon or King. The overall ceremonies and rituals to install a newly chosen king span over many weeks, but a most crucial period is that of the seclusion of the newly chosen king and his enstoolers for 8 days, during which the new King undergoes spiritual purification and ritual transformation to become a totally new being and a paramount leader and guide entrusted with divine powers.

because these two days are the ones generally set aside for literacy activities, since most adults are more available for such an extra activity. Table 5.3 gives an overview of the time-tables of the literacy classes for part of the month of August 2006.

**Table 5.3: A two-week overview of literacy class timetables in August 2006**

CBC: Cameroon Baptist Church; CNBC: Cameroon National Baptist Church; GS: Government School; CS: Catholic School; CSS: Community Secondary School.

Dates		Areas (and start times)				
Gregorian calendar	Kom calendar	Aduk	Fundong	Anya'jua	Njinikom	Belo
Mon., Aug. 14	Itu' i boli	- GS Ilung, 8a.m. - CSS Aduk, 8a.m. - Com. School Chuabuh, 1p.m. - Baptist Church Aduk I, 1p.m. - Baptist Church Aduk II, 1p.m. - CS Aduk, 1p.m.	- GS Muteff, 7a.m. - Baptist Church Abuh, 7a.m. - Cath. Church Ngwah Tohdum, 10a.m.	- Anya'jua, 2p.m. - Anjinichin, 2p.m. - Juabum, 3p.m. - Tumuku, 2p.m. - Isae'besi, 3p.m. - Anjang, 3p.m.		- CNBC Fundeng, 3p.m. - Fuli, 3p.m.
Tues., Aug. 15	Itu' i kom		- GS Muteff, 7a.m.		- Acha'jvia, 7.30a.m.	
Wed., Aug. 16	Itu' a bùm	- GS Ilung, 8a.m.	- GS Muteff, 7a.m.		- Cath. Church Yang, 6.30a.m.	
Thurs., Aug. 17	Itu' i kījèm		- GS Muteff, 7a.m.	- Isae'besi, 3p.m.		
Friday, Aug. 18	Itu' i iyvinikom	- CSS Aduk, 8a.m. - Com. School Chuabuh, 1p.m. - Baptist Church Aduk I, 1p.m. - Baptist Church Aduk II, 1p.m. - CS Aduk, 1p.m.	- GS Muteff, 7a.m. - Baptist Church Abuh, 7a.m. - Cath. Church Abuh, 8a.m.	- Anya'jua, 2p.m. - Anjinichin, 2p.m. - Juabum, 3p.m. - Tumuku, 2p.m. - Isae'besi, 3p.m. - Anjang, 3p.m.	- CBC Tinifoinbi, 7.30a.m. - CS Fuanantui, 3p.m. - Acha'ajvia, 7.30a.m.	- CBC Belo, 8a.m. - Muwa, 8a.m. - CBC Njikejem (Njang), 3p.m.
Sat., Aug. 19	Itu' i iyvisamni		- GS Mbissi, 8a.m.			
Sun., Aug. 20	Itu' i iwe njinikom					- Muwa, 12.30p.m.
Mon., Aug. 21	Itu' i two	- GS Ilung, 8a.m.	- GS Muteff, 7a.m.			
Tues., Aug. 22	Itu' i boli	- CSS Aduk, 8a.m.	- GS Muteff, 7a.m.	- Anya'jua, 2p.m.	- Acha'ajvia,	- CNBC

Wed., Aug. 23	Itu' i kom	- Com. School Chuabuh, <i>1p.m.</i> - Baptist Church Aduk I, <i>1p.m.</i> - Baptist Church Aduk II, <i>1p.m.</i> - CS Aduk, <i>1p.m.</i>  - GS Ilung, <i>8a.m.</i>	- Baptist Church Abuh, <i>7a.m.</i> - Cath. Church Ngwah Tohdum, <i>10a.m.</i> - GS Muteff, <i>7a.m.</i>	- Anjinichin, <i>2p.m.</i> - Juambum, <i>3p.m.</i> - Tumuku, <i>2p.m.</i> - Isae' besi, <i>3p.m.</i> - Anjang, <i>3p.m.</i>	7.30a.m.	- Cath. Church Yang, <i>6.30a.m.</i>	Fundeng, <i>3p.m.</i> - Fuli, <i>3p.m.</i>
Thurs., Aug. 24	Itu' a bùm		- GS Muteff, <i>7a.m.</i>	- Isae' besi, <i>3p.m.</i>			
Friday, Aug. 25	Itu' i kijèm		- GS Muteff, <i>7a.m.</i>		- Acha'ajvia, <i>7.30a.m.</i>		
Sat., Aug. 26	Itu' i iyvini kom	- CSS Aduk, <i>8a.m.</i> - Com. School Chuabuh, <i>1p.m.</i> - Baptist Church Aduk I, <i>1p.m.</i> - Baptist Church Aduk II, <i>1p.m.</i> - CS Aduk, <i>1p.m.</i>	- Baptist Church Abuh, <i>7a.m.</i> - CS Abuh, <i>8a.m.</i> - GS Mbissi, <i>8a.m.</i>	- Anya' jua, <i>2p.m.</i> - Anjinichin, <i>2p.m.</i> - Juambum, <i>3p.m.</i> - Tumuku, <i>2p.m.</i> - Isae' besi, <i>3p.m.</i> - Anjang, <i>3p.m.</i>	- CBC Tinifoinbi, <i>7.30a.m.</i> - CS Fuanantui, <i>3p.m.</i>	- CBC Belo, <i>8a.m.</i> - Muwa, <i>8a.m.</i> - CBC Njinikejem (Njang), <i>3p.m.</i>	
Sun., Aug. 27	Itu' i iyvisamni				- CBC Tinifoinbi, <i>3p.m.</i>	- Muwa, <i>12.30p.m.</i>	
Mon., Aug. 28	Itu' i iwe njinikom	- GS Ilung, <i>8a.m.</i>		- Anya' jua, <i>2p.m.</i> - Anjinichin, <i>2p.m.</i> - Juambum, <i>3p.m.</i> - Tumuku, <i>2p.m.</i> - Isae' besi, <i>3p.m.</i> - Anjang, <i>3p.m.</i>	- Cath. Church Yang, <i>6.30a.m.</i>		
Tues., Aug. 29	Itu' i two		- GS Muteff, <i>7a.m.</i>		- Acha'ajvia, <i>7.30a.m.</i>		



As can be observed in Table 5.3, in Kom, many of the literacy classes take place on the *kontri sondei*. But these days do not correspond each week to the same days on a seven-day week.<sup>91</sup> At the same time, this table illustrates the variation in literacy days during the week in various areas. Some literacy classes are set for specific regular days in the Kom temporal system, whereas some other areas and centres combine both the traditional Kom and the Gregorian calendar systems.

In most literacy classes, the finalisation of timetables was a learner-friendly process. It involved the learners at all levels and it accommodated their constraints, as they were parents and farmers who had families and responsibilities in the community. As will be seen further in this chapter (in 5.5), even the start times of classes remained flexible in order to take into account late arrivals of learners.

## 5.5. TALES FROM THE FIELD

### 5.5.1. Fundeng

**Place and area:** Fundeng, Belo Area

**Site:** The Cameroon National Baptist Convention (CNBC) church compound

**Date and start time:** 11 June 2006, 1.25pm.

**Monitor:** Esther N.

Once one is in the Church compound, it is first necessary to greet and be formally introduced to the leading figures in place, as traditional customs demand. The leaders are namely the Appointed Deacon of CNBC Fundeng, the Vice Appointed Deacon, and another Elder Christian. Independently of the literacy class going on that day, the local Church leaders are on site for one of their planning and evaluation meetings. The introductions are led by Charles K., the Belo Area supervisor, and Patrick N., the Literacy Coordinator, both hailing from that region of Kom and well known in the area as a *kontri pikin* (in CamPidgin, ‘son of the soil’).

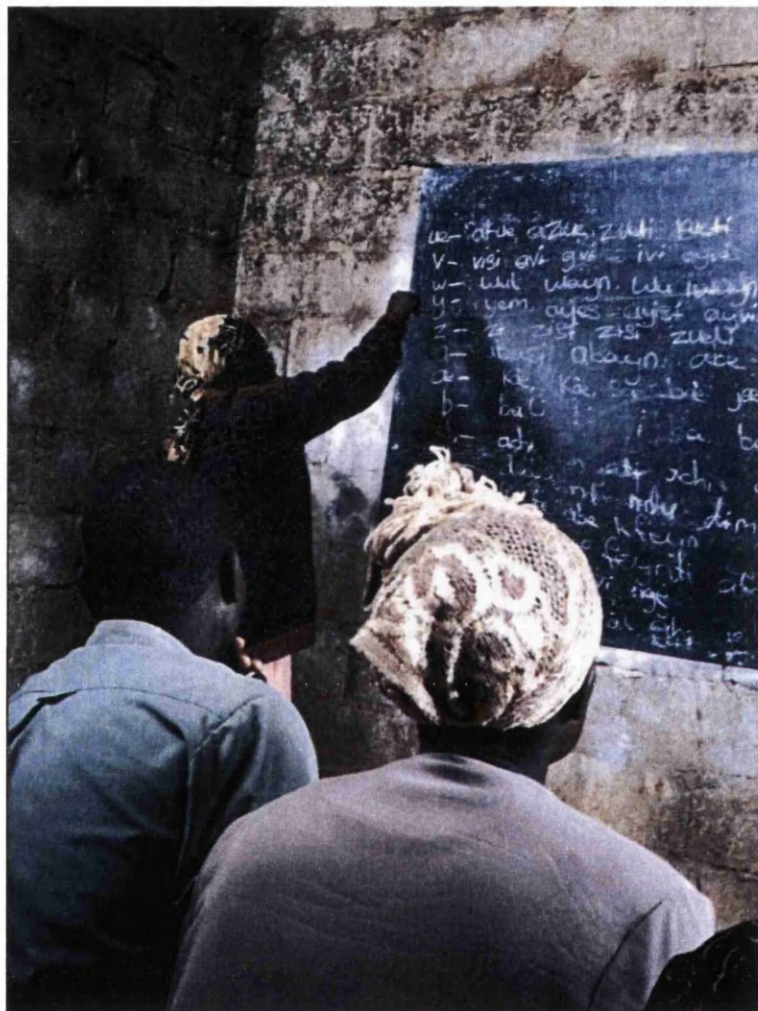
Then we move into the literacy class. It is one of the classrooms of the CNBC School which forms part of the Church compound. After the customary greetings between the learners and the monitor, Charles presents some Kom literature he has brought with him, and briefly explains their importance as didactic materials and reading tools. Then a

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<sup>91</sup> For a better understanding of time-tabling and the temporal organisation of adult literacy classes in Kom, it helps to take some mental distance from the Gregorian calendar with its Monday-to-Sunday week.

Christian prayer follows. The class starts with some revision: copying of short texts from the last class, and a reading practice. Esther, the main facilitator, guides the activities of the class.

**Figure 5.2: A lesson on letter-sounds in Fundeng**



Some additional pedagogic guidance is also given from time to time by Charles, especially to check and correct pronunciation of specific words written on the board for the practice. The reading follows a pattern: there is first a group reading. Then specific rows or columns of learners read, followed by individual readers. This allows for crosschecking, and the avoidance of ‘mass reading’ or parroting without reading for meaning.

After the reading practice, the lesson goes into the detail in writing specific sounds-letters, starting with earlier taught sounds-letters of the alphabet, as given by learners themselves with guidance from the facilitator. Once a sound-letter is provided, example words are asked from learners, who give them quickly and easily. The words are then

written on the board, aligned with their exemplifying sound-letters. Then the learners practise reading the words, thereby learning the use of the sound-letter in specific words of the language. This continues with new words, and constitutes the bulk of the lesson. The learners go in turn to the board to practise reading, using a pointer. They read the specific sound-letter and the example words, and then randomly read the other words written on the board. The reading and writing session continues with an overall revision by the facilitator, who checks for word recognition and their correct reading among the learners. The learners also copy down the lesson in their notebooks.

The lesson comes to an end with further reading and a brief discussion of Biblical extracts. In this case, it is Verse 48 from the Book of Luke, Chapter 7. The verse is written on the board. This part of the class is called 'memory verse', even though, additionally to the class reading and learning the verse in question, there is some discussion of it. The lesson closes with a group exchange between learners and their facilitators about a number of topics, such as the books available for the literacy classes, and which ones are on sale; and how important it is for them to each have their own copies. The learners are given encouragement and words of support by the Literacy Coordinator, Patrick. Most learners are happy to see him visiting and this appreciation is shared all around. The learners also talk about the difficulties that some participants have with their various social and professional responsibilities, and Patrick gives them much praise regarding their commitment to this literacy class, which is one of the most regular in the area.

**Figure 5.3: Reading practice in Fundeng**



One point of interest is the high level of participation by learners in the class. They are the ones to provide the sounds-letters and to give example words. Of course, the focus is more on their capacity and practice of reading the words and writing them, since as native adult speakers, they have the highest mastery of spoken Kom. The reading practice is geared at matching the letters-sounds<sup>92</sup> and words written form on the board with their oral forms, which the learners already know as native speakers. Differences in pronunciation of words are highlighted, to make clear the difference in the way they are written. Interventions and guidance from facilitators are aimed at making sure the learners properly read the written words.

Encouragement and appreciation between facilitators and classmates is very common. Such encouragement gives the adult learners a boost to perform better and improve their skills. The encouragement also serves to alleviate some of the learners' shyness about reading, and helps clear the doubts that some learners have about their

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<sup>92</sup> Cameroonian linguists and local language developers tend to use the words 'sound-letter' and 'letter-sound' interchangeably to mean exactly the same thing.

capacity to read properly. All this creates a relaxed atmosphere, conducive to group learning and individual progress.

**Figure 5.4: Facilitators and learners in the Fundeng literacy class**



As concerns the socio-cultural aspects of the literacy class, many things can be noted. Children outside of the class become, in a sense, part of the class. They watch everything going on, making noise from time to time. There appears to be a sort of socio-cultural symbiosis between the adult learners in the class and ‘their’<sup>93</sup> children outside of the class. From time to time, the children outside even repeat the words after the facilitator in unison with the learners. This connection with community life while the class is going on is also marked by interruptions of children: some of them come in to whisper questions to their parents or get directives, or to take some needed things like a working tool (such as a hoe or a cutlass) which was brought inside the room by one of the adult learners.

The Church Deacon is very supportive of the class. The room is granted by the Church for the literacy class. During the class, the deacon takes time to come into the

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<sup>93</sup> In the Kom society, children have two levels of belonging or root identity: the family level which is the primary one, based on blood relationship and kinship; and the second level which is rather communitary. At this second level, people therefore talk of ‘their’ or ‘our’ children with a community sense of parenthood.

classroom briefly, since his mere presence shows his support and encouragement. Regarding the intrinsic connection of literacy activities and Bible reading, it is worth mentioning that the class has been created as a direct result of the Kom Bible dedication activities: following the launch of the Kom New Testament, the CNBC Church encouraged its members to come together to learn to read some verses of the Bible. Charles took this opportunity to organise this informal gathering into a full and regular literacy class. Later on, when Charles had more responsibility as Area Supervisor and opened another literacy centre in Muwa, Esther took over from him to run the Fundeng literacy centre permanently.

### **5.5.2. Belo**

**Place and region:** Belo, Belo Area

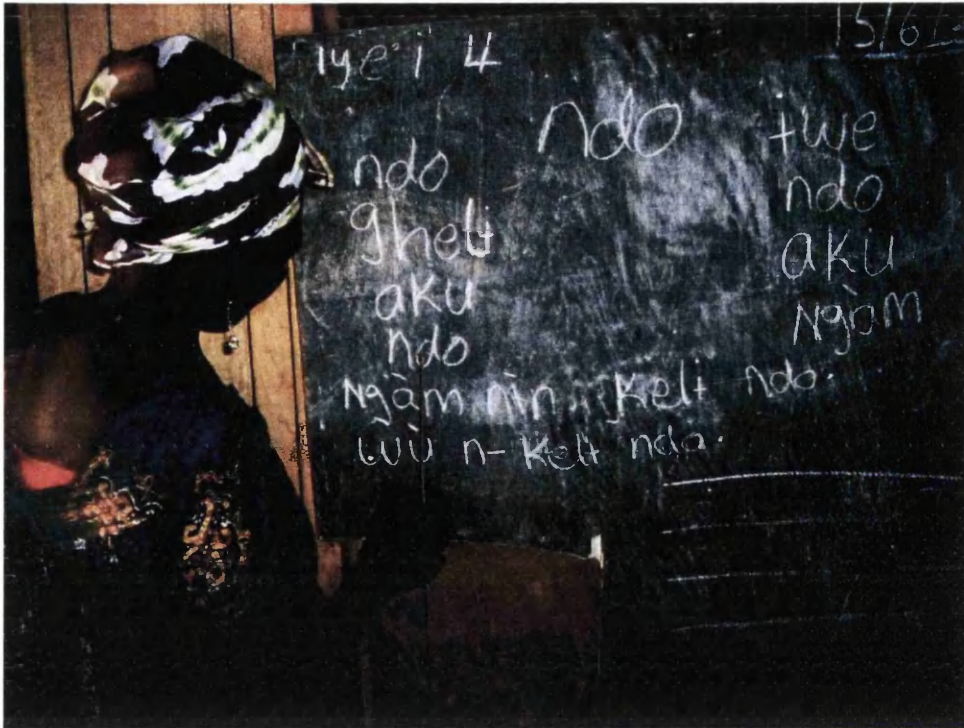
**Site:** In the parlour of Mr Samuel T.'s house

**Date and start time:** 15 June 2006, around 12 noon.

**Monitor:** Mary N (main facilitator)

The Belo class is held in a private residence, using the parlour of Mr Samuel T. as the venue. Mary starts the class with some revision. Learners keenly participate, and are at ease repeating the words written on the board. The main didactic manual used for the lesson is the Kom Primer 1. In addition, there is a series of words from the earlier lesson which are provided by the learners and written on the board to practise reading. The reading practice ensures that the learners are reading effectively: as they either volunteer or are called to read, they are asked to read words randomly picked by the facilitator from the series on the board.

**Figure 5.5: Reading practice at the Belo literacy centre**



After the practice of reading words, sentence building and writing follows. The learners provide short example sentences containing the words they have learnt. Once the sentences are written on the board, there follows extensive reading.

Then there is a methodical usage of the primer. The facilitator goes to the lesson of the day and starts teaching what is called a normal lesson in the Gudschinsky method (This is the pedagogic method in use in the PROPELCA series of didactic literature of which the Kom Primer 1 is part).<sup>94</sup> The lesson is based on a key word, with some new words, and also sentences using mostly the key words. The sequences in the didactic progression go from the writing of words on the board, then their reading (in overall class repetition, in groups, in rows, in lines, in pairs, and by individual learners). Once the series of words and sentences of the lesson are reproduced on the board, the emphasis is on individual reading, and learners either volunteer or are invited to the board where they read using a pointer.

On each instance of reading, the facilitator checks that the learners are reading for meaning, recognising and pointing to the specific words and sentences that they read. The board and the books are used complementarily, as is appropriate, in order to expose each learner to the written material being read in the lesson.

<sup>94</sup> In Chapter 6, I will dwell extensively on Kom literature, with more detailed discussion of the Gudschinsky teaching method and the pedagogy of the primers.

The class closes with learners writing down the lesson in their notebooks. This is a copying exercise, since it is not creative or independent writing. For most of them, it is more arduous than the reading. The facilitator goes around the class to check that they are correctly copying the lesson and the words. She stops and helps as necessary. At one point as she is going round, she sees that some are forgetting to write tones on certain words. She explains the importance of marking the correct tone. She gives examples of tonal minimal pairs, i.e. quasi similar words in Kom which have different meanings depending upon the tone put on them.

**Figure 5.6: Learners and facilitators at the Belo literacy centre**



The bulk of the class is based on teaching a lesson from the primer. Therefore, the facilitator tries to her best to have a gradual and coherent structure for the class. She uses all expertise at focusing on lesson progression. It is worth noting that the facilitator, like most of her colleagues in the Kom programme, has had good training in teaching with the Kom primer.

The usage of the random reading technique is very regular throughout the class: one stated pedagogic objective of this technique is to avoid parroting or meaningless singing of consecutive strings of words.



There is a little footpath going through the compound and passing just by the side of the class venue. During the class, passers-by naturally greet the people in the class, but this doesn't interrupt the flow of the class. This connection with the world outside of the class is even stronger with children. Many of them come in the class to do things with adult learners that are not related to the class at all: asking for information; taking some keys or money to do some errands; or giving some personal information about something happening elsewhere. Each time, the adults concerned manage to interact with these 'outsiders' without disrupting the class much. Some children even pretend to participate in the literacy class. All that is tolerated, though they are clearly more curious than genuinely interested, and most of them don't stay until the end of the session.

It is worth noting also that adult participants who come late, no matter how late, are still welcome to join and catch up as they can, sometimes with the help of their fellow learners or the literacy monitor. Overall, an atmosphere of happiness and relaxation reigns till the very end.

At the end of the class, learners gather outside and perform a little group song, clapping hands, dancing and singing in chorus a traditional tune. The area Literacy Supervisor doesn't miss the occasion to spread words of encouragement, to motivate the learners to continue, and to invite more people to join in. She encourages them to acquire as many of the available books as they can for their literacy activities.

Figure 5.7: Learners singing after their literacy class at Belo



### 5.5.3. Chuabuh

**Place and region:** Chuabuh, Aduk Area

**Site:** In the local Government Secondary School (GSS) at Chuabuh ‘Three-Corners’, Aduk.

**Date and start time:** 18 August 2006, around 11 am.

**Monitors:** Francis N.

The class starts with Francis briefly revising some of the last lesson with the learners, focusing on sounds that were taught earlier. Then he introduces the topic of the day: ‘unfamiliar’ and complex vowels. Their unfamiliarity is related to their novelty as letter-sounds that were not taught earlier, and for learners who are actually native speakers, calling these sounds ‘unfamiliar’ appears to be a misnomer. As concerns their complexity, it is actually their graphic complexity, i.e. most of them are digraphs<sup>95</sup> : iy, oy, uy, ay, ey.

The facilitator uses the *Guide to the Kom Alphabet* as his main didactic guide. But the example words come both from the *Guide* and from the additional words provided by

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<sup>95</sup> This is to some extent similar to English diphthongs.

the learners. The teaching sequence is repeated for all the five complex vowels as follows: a given vowel is first produced orally, then written on the board, then read extensively; the students then give example words containing it, and all the class checks together that the example word is the right one. Then it is written on the board and read by learners in groups, rows, pairs and individually. Some learners are called upon, or they volunteer, to read the words on the board; then the learners copy the whole lesson in their notebooks. During the time they are writing the vowels and example words in their notebooks, the monitor goes round, taking time to check their writing, and to encourage and help them. This writing practice is one of the most arduous and important parts of the whole lesson.

**Figure 5.8: Facilitator helping at the Chuabuh literacy centre**

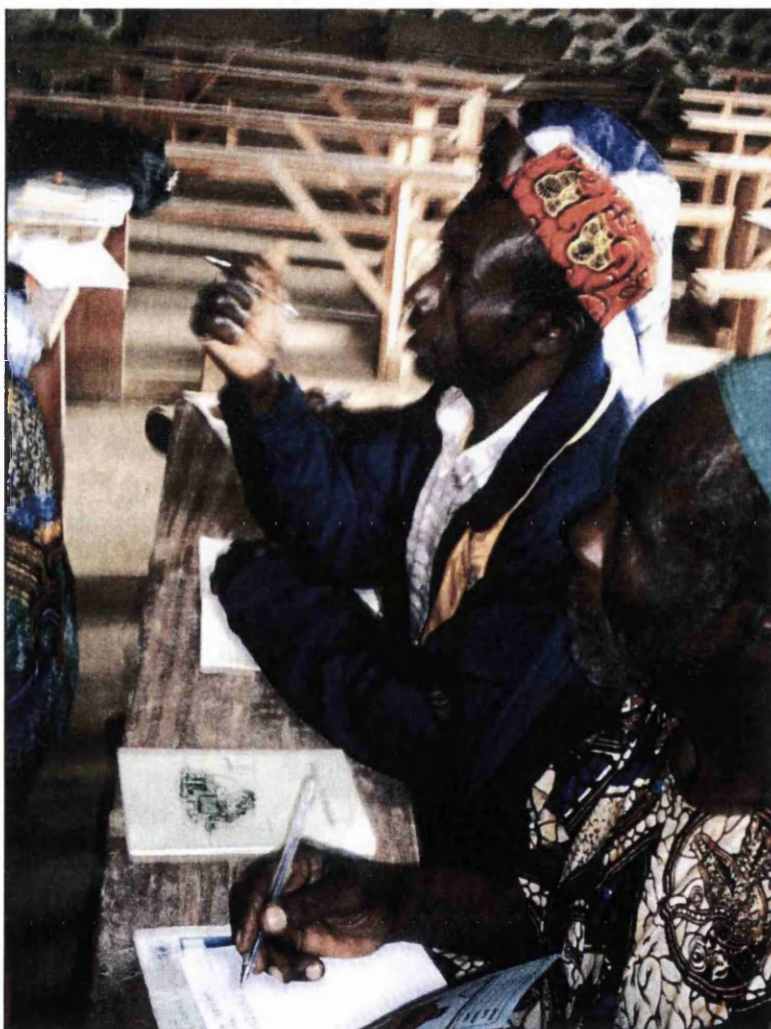


While Francis is interrupted and called outside by a visitor, students discuss the words learned, especially tone marking, as this can change the meaning of the words. Some students also practise aloud their reading of some words from the *Guide*.

When all the taught vowels are word-exemplified, written on the board, and read and copied down by learners, then Francis gives an exercise on sentence writing. Students are asked to write some short and simple sentences using the words taught. It's a class exercise and students set themselves arduously to their task. While they are working, Francis goes around, helping and correcting. After checking that most students have

finished, Francis then asks them each to read their sentences. Each time he goes round checking what they have written in their notebooks, correcting the writing to correspond with the reading. They eventually re-read their sentences aloud to the class. In each instance, as necessary, the words are reproduced on the board for clarity of orthography and tone marking.

**Figure 5.9: Writing practice at the Chuabuh literacy centre**



In terms of class management and organisation, there is an adjustment of beginning and end times of the class, taking into account the learners' constraints and social activities, especially as there are many late arrivals.

The time allotted to the class exercise is flexible and is managed according to the rhythm of the learners. Accordingly, the facilitator always checks first to see if everyone is doing well. He then helps them around as necessary, giving enough time for them to finish.

There is much laughter and a relaxed atmosphere in the class, especially when the facilitator is going around and guiding the learners. They are happily surprised to see the problems with their writing, because they know most of the words perfectly well; it's writing which is their difficulty. As fluent native speakers of Kom, the learners have a great mastery of the oral language. During the class, one instance demonstrating this is when they correct their facilitator, when he forgets to put the right tone on a word, making it mean something else than what he intends.

The closing of the class is an open discussion with learners about the time of the future classes. This shows that, as concerns time tabling, there is a consensual agreement and responsible exchange between facilitator and learners. The learners also ask about Francis acquiring some copies of the *Guide* for them to buy.

#### 5.5.4. Acha'jvia

**Place and region:** Acha'jvia, Njinikom Area

**Site:** In a hall of the Centre for Rehabilitation and Education in Njinikom (CREN)

**Date and start time:** 25 August 2006, 8 a.m.

**Monitor:** *Bobe*<sup>96</sup> Pius L. (main facilitator)

This class is a women-only class. But more striking is the fact that most of the women attending are widows. The general enrolment is 25 but those attending today are just half of the class. The venue is the premises of the CREN centre. The CREN is a local education and community development NGO.

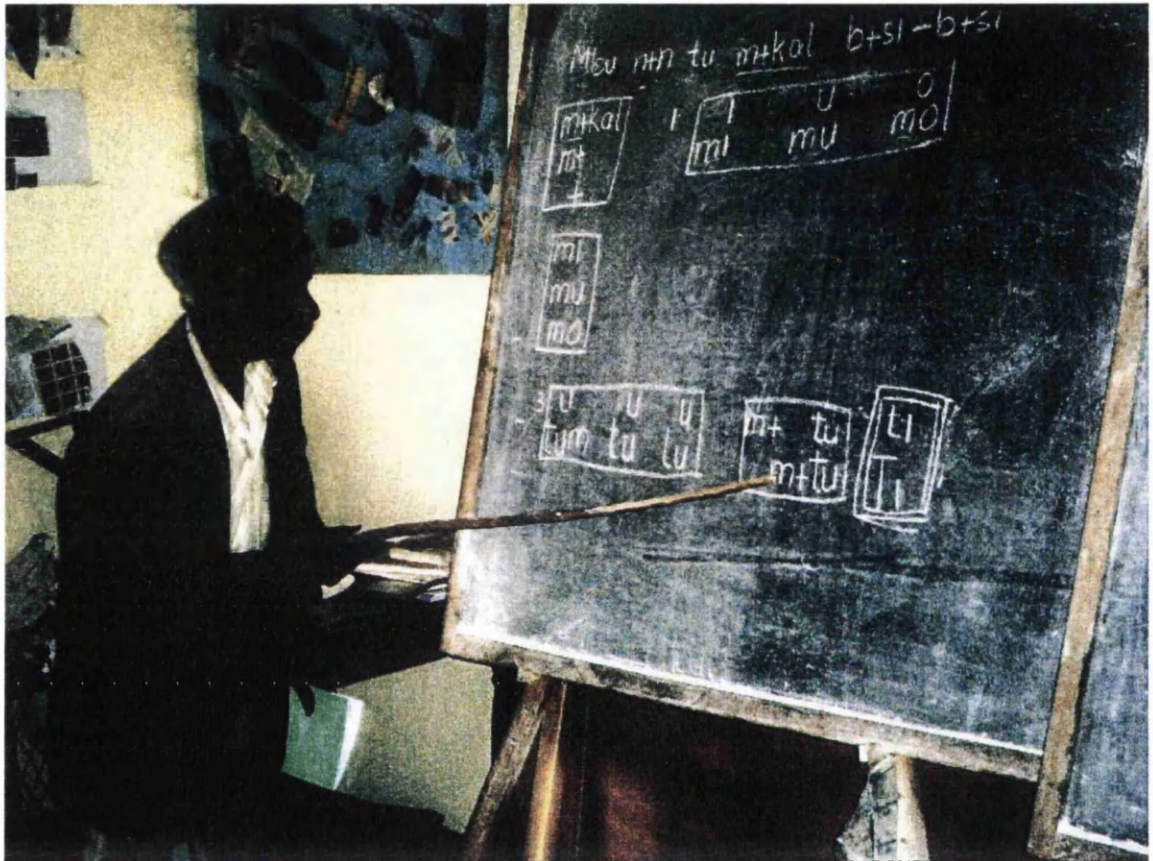
The class starts with a Christian prayer in Kom. Then all the learners do some warm up exercises under the guidance of the literacy monitor: stretching a bit here and there, leaning forwards and backwards, and doing circular bodily movements. The learners seem to enjoy this activity and it creates a very good atmosphere to start the day. Then there is a revision from the last class with some words written on the boards by *Bobe* Pius.

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<sup>96</sup> 'Bobe' in Kom is a title of deferential respect generally given to older men in the community. According to Nkwi (1976), this title was originally given to the man who was 'the head of the homestead'. It could be equated with "Sir" in English.

The learners read the words that are on the board, in rows, in groups, in pairs and individually, with the facilitator pointing randomly at words.

**Figure 5.10: Teaching a primer lesson at Acha'jvia**

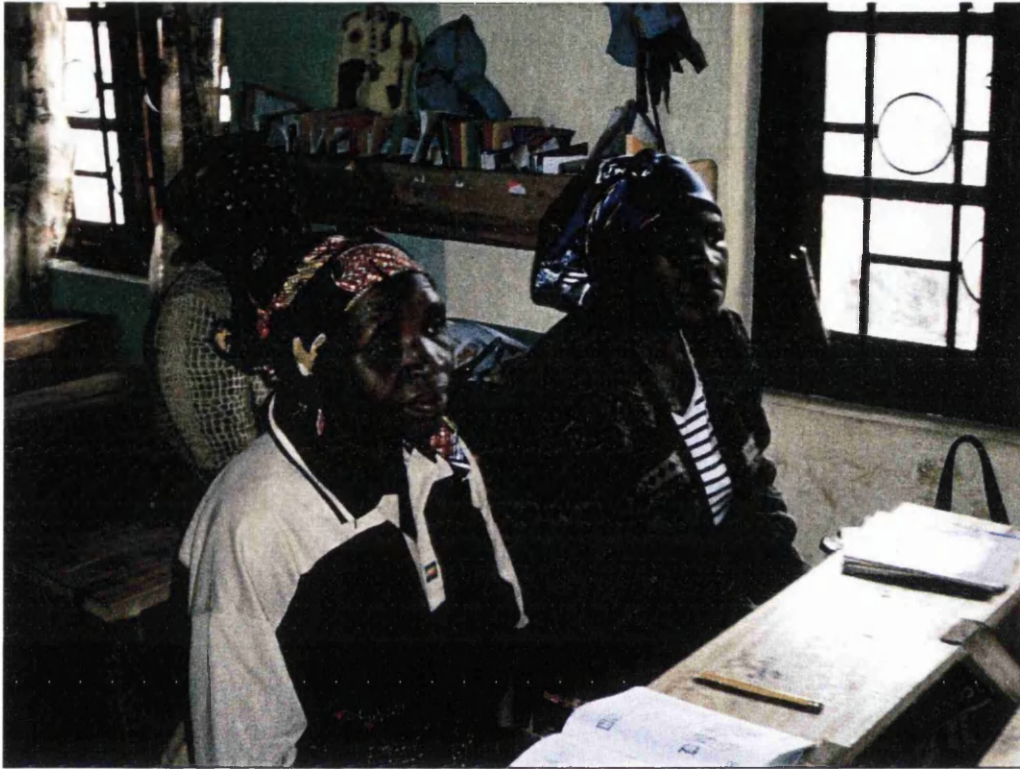


Then *Bobe Pius* starts the lesson proper. It is a normal lesson that he takes from the Kom Primer 1. The lesson begins with the key sentence, which he writes on the board. Then he does the reading practice of the sentence. He follows the basic steps in teaching of a normal lesson,<sup>97</sup> extracting the key word from the key sentence, and then going over all the syllable drills, with the various syllabic boxes. He scrupulously follows the steps in the lesson and the learners who have the Primer 1 are invited to refer to it, sharing with those who don't have a primer. Throughout the lesson, *Bobe Pius* goes around the class to help the learners and check their reading. As it progresses, the lesson is reproduced on the blackboard and the learners are drilled in reading, using a pointer. They are invited to the board to read as much as possible. When they have exhausted the left page of the lesson

<sup>97</sup> The theory of the teaching of the normal lesson in the Gudschinsky primers, such as the Kom primer, is explicated in detail in Chapter 6, which deals with didactic materials and local literature.

with all the boxes covered, the learners are invited to copy the left page down, including even those who have the book. This copying session enables them to practice their writing skills, even though it is more mechanical writing than independent or creative writing.

**Figure 5.11: Learners at the Acha'jvia literacy centre**



Towards the end of the lesson, while students are copying, there is much friendly discussion between the CREN manager and the facilitator about planning the classes and other logistical issues. When the learners are all done copying, they are then given feedback about the results of the discussion between the CREN manager and the facilitator, since it concerns their literacy class. They are asked for their ideas about the management of the class, and if the time arrangements suit them. The beginning time and date of the next class is confirmed by consensual agreement, with the facilitator taking into account the various farming and social activities of the learners. The facilitator reminds them of his total availability, and reiterates that it is the learners' constraints that are important in relation to planning times for future classes.

**Figure 5.12: Facilitators and learners at the Acha'jvia literacy centre**



The Acha'jvia literacy centre is the result of a fruitful partnership between the Kom adult literacy programme and the CREN as a local community development NGO. CREN initially targets women, many of whom are widows, to help them improve their living conditions. Recently, volunteers helped the CREN by providing Bibles for women in the villages. But the women couldn't read the Bible provided to them. Even though the CREN was not initially interested in local language adult literacy, they had to call in help from the KLDC because of the women's interest in reading the Bible in Kom. The CREN knew *Bobe Pius* as the pioneer of Kom literacy (This is discussed further below in 5.6.3.4.). As he was living just some kilometres away from the CREN centre, he was brought in to this centre so that the women could learn to read and write Kom. Consequently, they could make the best use of the Bibles that were donated to them, and otherwise use their newly acquired skills.



### 5.5.5. Juambum

*Place and region:* Juambum, Anya'jua Area

*Site:* In the local Catholic Church hall

*Date and start time:* 26 August 2006, approx. 12 p.m.

*Monitor:* Christopher N

All over Africa and in most parts of the world, and in Cameroon in particular, the images most generally associated with Catholic Church buildings are of the buildings that have impressive edifices. Such buildings generally show the might and power of the Christian missions and priests as they settled in remote regions where they evangelised and brought the Holy Scriptures. But in the remote hamlet of Juambum, the Catholic church is not a gigantic building with stained glass windows and historic murals. There are no big avenues lined with cut flowers and trees. The local church hall is a modest house of mud brick without mortar. The main access is not through a heavy wooden or iron door, but an open entrance. The floor is bare earth; and the church goers and visitors sit on humble wood benches and bamboo stools. But this is not just the local church: Welcome to the Juambum literacy centre.

**Figure 5.13: The Juambum literacy centre**



The beginning of the class here is not based on an established starting time; class starts when a good number of the attendees have managed to make it for that day. Thus, the class starts more than one hour later than the initially planned starting time. But the surprise is that the literacy monitor is patient and confident that a good number of his learners will show up. And according to the local residents, there is a good reason for the learners' lateness: an important burial ceremony is taking place in Juambum today and most of them have to attend. That they can come to the class at all is evidence of their dedication, since the burial ceremony will be in progress all day. When enough of the attendees arrive at the literacy centre, Christopher starts his class.

The first thing is revision and going through some letter-sounds taught in the earlier lesson. After that, the lesson moves on with new letter-sounds: a, ae, b, ch, d, e, f, g, gh. After practicing reading each sound with the learners, the class then proceeds to exemplify each letter-sound with a word. Learners spontaneously give words for each sound, then the facilitator writes the words on the board, reading them many times, with the students in groups, rows, pairs and individually. Some learners go to the board and read with the pointer.

Tonal patterns are discussed with learners. The focus is on tonal patterns in specific words. They also talk about the orthography of some words. In sum, the exchanges revolve around agreeing which words are being talked about, that is, written, because there are many minimal pairs in Kom. Even simple tonal changes or single letter changes create different meanings among many words in Kom. This class debate demonstrates mastery of the lexicon and semantics of the language by most learners; it is also useful to the facilitator in determining their pace of learning and acquiring literacy.

**Figure 5.14: Learners in the Juambum literacy class**



After the reading practice and writing of new words, learners move on to writing practice by copying the lesson that is on the board. Christopher goes around helping them and checking to see that they are copying well.

A deep sense of understanding, solidarity, and adaptability emanates from the hall of this literacy centre. As mentioned earlier, the class starts only with the arrival of a good number of attendees, so the very moment when the facilitator will start shifts to fit the arrival time of the participants. But it is actually a bit more complex: the facilitator is always there at a given time even though this fixed time is tentative for the learners. While he is there, one or two students may arrive, but there is an understanding that they will wait for the others. Even though there is a formal starting time, and even though some students will be there at that time, the class may start up to an hour or an hour and a half later, with the students who arrive first patiently waiting for more students to arrive.

**Figure 5.15: In the Juambum literacy class**



The general principle is that, depending on the day and the weather, different numbers of students manage to be present for the class. Social ceremonies, cultural festivities, heavy rain, or tornadoes compel necessary adjustments. Juambum, like many other Kom hamlets, doesn't have the luxury of motorable roads. Some learners don't even have umbrellas to protect them from the rain. Nevertheless, all the learners walk for kilometres to come to the literacy class, regardless of the fact that all of them are involved in other socio-cultural ceremonies. Therefore the class can wait sometimes for longer than the actual class time to commence. Many of the attendees are breast-feeding mothers bringing their babies tied to their backs in wrappers. Unavoidably, some of the babies disturb the class from time to time with their cries, which are happily tolerated. In such cases, the mother will attend to their babies by feeding them, which generally quiets the babies; if not, they leave the class and walk the babies for a short time outside of the literacy centre.

### 5.5.6. Muteff

**Place and region:** Muteff, Fundong Area

**Site:** In a classroom of the Government Secondary School (GSS) of Muteff

**Date and start time:** 30 August 2006, 10 a.m.

**Monitor:** Augustine N.

The venue is one of the classrooms of the local Government School, a junior secondary education institution owned and run by the Ministry of Education. The school authorities have granted permission for the KLDC area supervisors to use it for a literacy centre.

The class starts with some revisions on earlier taught letter-sounds using some example words. After the revision, the lesson proper starts with the teaching of a story, using a didactic manual called “The Big Book” designed within the framework of the Multi-Strategy Method.<sup>98</sup>

**Figure 5.16: In the literacy class at Muteff**

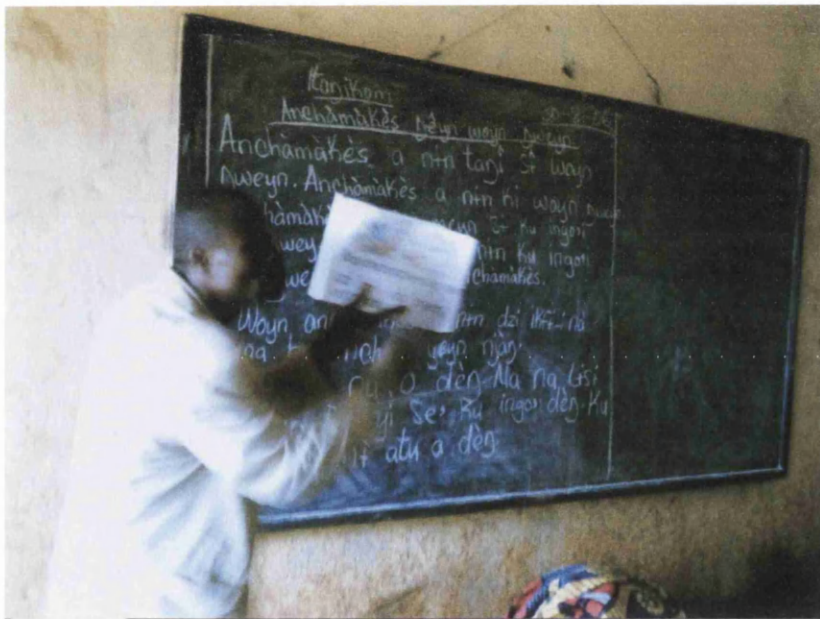


The facilitator shows learners a big drawing of a frog and his froglets, asking guiding questions about what is shown in the drawing. As he gets from the learners the correct words and sentences describing what is in the picture, the facilitator writes them on

<sup>98</sup> The multi-strategy teaching method is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

the board. The strategy is that the learners, guided by the pictures, build the story. The story gradually unfolds as a writing exercise, first on the board, then in the notebooks, as it is later copied by learners, to make a writing lesson. On the successive pages of the Big Book, there are many pictures with key sentences below. The facilitator does his best to guide the learners to produce sentences similar to the key sentences that are in the book. As soon as a learner gives a sentence that is close to the one in the book, the facilitator writes it on the board to build the story. In this way, the lesson is actually the teaching of a story through images with the practical didactic strategy being that the learners re-constitute the story through its successive pictures.

**Figure 5.17: Teaching writing with the Big Book at Muteff**

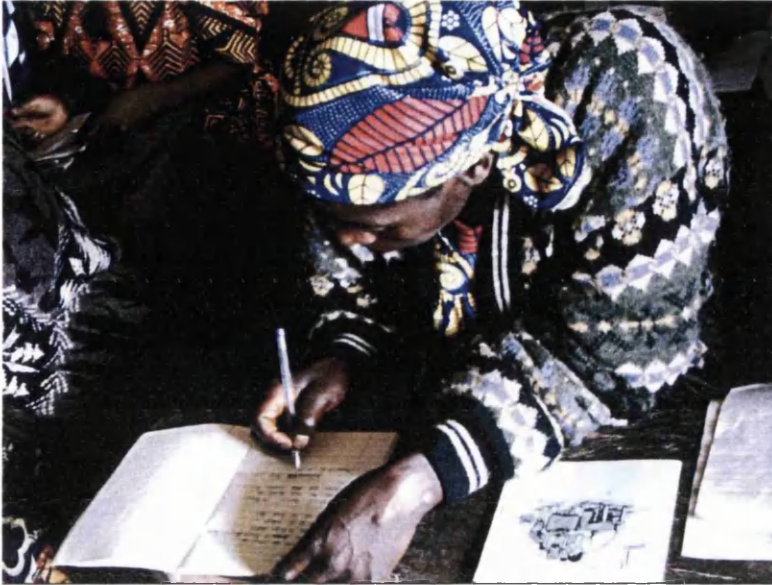


Once all the images in the Big Book are covered with corresponding sentences, the whole story is then read systematically. The class is quite animated and the facilitator engages the learners as he writes the sentences corresponding to the images making up the story. The frog, which is the main character of the story, is called Anchàmàkès.

Once the story is written on the board, there is much reading practice, in rows, in pairs, in groups, and with learners going to the board to practise reading with the help of the facilitator. These are quite systematic reading drills, in terms of bringing every learner to read the sentences. Each reader is corrected politely by the facilitator, who makes sure everyone is reading correctly and not just parroting the story, such that learners simply orally repeating the story without really reading for meaning. After the extensive reading

practices, the learners are given a class exercise to produce some words that contain the syllable “kas”.

**Figure 5.18: Writing time at the Muteff literacy centre**



There is a very relaxed atmosphere as the learners discover the story and, as an interactive group, write it on the board. During the class exercise, the facilitator goes around helping the students to find the appropriate words containing the required syllable. Throughout the lesson, on many occasions, learners and facilitator have much debate about the word they are talking about, in terms of its orthographic representation. As the learners comprehend writing and the relationship or equivalences between what they say orally and how their words should be represented graphically, they are keen to correct themselves and to contribute to the exact spelling of the words they provide. For instance, the Kom language is dominantly mono- and di-syllabic, and as such, has many minimal pairs where tonal change is the only marker of semantic and/or lexical difference. The linguistic expertise exhibited by learners is directly related to their cultural rootedness. For them, literacy is essentially putting to writing a language they already have mastered.

## **5.6. LITERACY MONITORS, SUPERVISORS AND COORDINATORS IN KOM**

### **5.6.1. A closely knitted team**

As discussed in Chapter 3, the monitors, the supervisors and the coordinators are the key trained staff in the delivery and maintenance of the literacy programme. They are operationally connected in their roles and they work as a closely knitted team to ensure the success of the programme.

The literacy coordinator is the contact person between the KLDC and the monitors and supervisors. But this person is also the interface between NACALCO and the KLDC when it comes to literacy (as discussed earlier in Chapter 3). In terms of their direct hierarchical contact point in the KLDC, the literacy coordinator reports to the Chairperson of the Literacy Committee.

The Kom land is divided in regions or areas, and each area has a regional supervisor. There are five supervisors for the five Kom areas: Aduk, Fundong, Anya'jua, Njinikom, and Belo. The necessity to subdivide Kom into literacy areas came with the growing development of the literacy programme and the desire on the part of KLDC for efficiency and proximisation in order to implement the programme.

As explained earlier in Chapter 3, the literacy monitor is the most basic literacy promoter in the villages, and at the same time, the most important person in the teaching chain. In Kom, all literacy coordinators and supervisors are initially literacy facilitators in their area, as can be seen in Table 5.4 below.



**Table 5.4: Literacy facilitators in Kom**

Area	Area supervisor	Facilitators
Belo	Nkwain Charles Nkimbi	Nkwain Charles Nkimbi Mary Ndii Ntam Augustine Kuma Nicoline Itanghi Mary Mbuh Esther Ndimuh Eric Wainfoin Yvua
Njinikom	Chia Marcellus Ndah	Chia Marcellus Ndah Nsom Isaac Chia Emmanuel King Rose Mbih Loh Pius
Aduk	Ngongbi Francis	Ngongbi Francis Ngem Bede Yong Sanctity Ngong Elizabeth Chia Laban Kain Odette
Anya'jua	Yong Francis	Yong Francis Nsom Stephen Nsom Christopher Nih Victorine Joseph Tubuo Bih Margret Kainbzi Kumtain Diamond Ikfeingeh Philip Awosang Hendry
Fundong	Timnge Augustine Ngwainbi	Timnge Augustine Ngwainbi Diangha Emmanuel Ngeh Gerald Kuh Nkuna Charles Nsani Thaddeus Nchindo Gilbert Yong Lucy

### 5.6.2. Training of monitors

In terms of their professional background, most facilitators are teachers from the primary and the secondary education sectors. Many have years of experience teaching in schools. A key linguistic skill they share is that they are Kom literates either through self-learning or as graduates of KLDC literacy classes. The pedagogic training of literacy monitors is done through the PROPELCA programme; therefore they are initially trained to be bilingual Kom teachers. The PROPELCA applied linguists and the KLDC trainers have created a partnership between the PROPELCA training and the adult literacy training. Both pedagogic trainings are combined in such a way that the adult literacy training

component is integrated into the PROPELCA training programme.

As discussed in 3.5.3 earlier, and again in 5.6.3 below, almost all literacy monitors in Kom have thus emerged from the PROPELCA teachers' trainings. The fact that the bulk of literacy monitors are initially PROPELCA trainees epitomizes the mutually beneficial relationship between formal bilingual education and adult literacy in Kom. (I will further elaborate on this constructive relationship in Chapter 7).

### **5.6.3. Some individual profiles**

#### ***5.6.3.1. On the profiles***

As I illustrated earlier with Table 3.1, which gives the basic literacy processes and markers, literacy is both an end-result and the complex process leading to the result. As end-result, it is primarily a set of skills and capacities to read and write in a given language. As a process, it encompasses a series of pedagogic acts whereby a literate person transmits literacy skills to a person not yet literate. Such a transmission relies on trained human resources. Yet, in poor rural contexts such as Kom, the mere professional training to teach literacy is not enough. The adult literacy programme relies on dedication of a core group of people whose desire to help others is key to the success of the educational enterprise. This has to be stressed: contrary to most educational settings where the basic work of teaching would create enough subsistence for any person choosing that path, teaching literacy in Kom and in other remote villages of Cameroon can not feed the literacy monitor. This explains the high rate of drop-outs and abandonment among the trained body of people able to teach literacy in the local language. A positive circumstance coming in play is that a small number of literacy monitors do join without any formal prior training in teaching, and only their duty-consciousness and some in-service training provide them with the high capacity to do their work.

It is therefore important to focus on a few of those men and women without whom the Kom literacy programme would not have become the referential programme it now is, in far less time than it has taken most of the other literacy programmes in Cameroon. Throughout my visits in the Kom mountains and hamlets, and throughout the praises from learners and community leaders, the Kom literacy monitors have shown themselves to be the corner stones of the endeavour of Kom promotion. Most of them work under tough conditions, braving the rain or hot sun, and trekking huge distances to ensure that their

learners can continue their education. Not only are these committed people literacy monitors, but they lay the foundation for the continuation and sustainability of the whole programme. They are role models; as providers of know-how and skills, and as highly respected people in the community. Because of their education, which is rare in rural areas, monitors could have chosen better jobs; ‘better’ meaning more lucrative. Yet, they choose to promote local language literacy.

It is worth mentioning that economically, the picture is harsh: all literacy monitors struggle in the community for their daily survival by doing other jobs, in addition to their teaching of literacy classes. Thus, their work as literacy monitors can be said to be a burden for those who have children, husbands or wives, farms, compounds and homesteads, to take care of on a daily basis.

It is not possible to give an exhaustive profile of all literacy monitors, due to the unavailability of information on some of them, and also the limitation of space in this thesis. Yet, in my selection, I have tried as much as possible to cut across age and gender. The objective of these brief profiles is to shed light on a group of people without whom the Kom literacy programme quite simply would not exist.

### **5.6.3.2. *The committed young lady in Tua’muyn***

Tua’muyn as a literacy centre is organised within the institutional umbrella of the Aduk 1 Baptist Church. Adult literacy might generally be perceived to be for older people, and therefore run or attended by older adults. So, when one enters the Tua’muyn literacy centre in Aduk, one expectation is to see an old *bobe*<sup>99</sup> or *nawayn*<sup>100</sup> struggling to help some other *bobes* or *nawayns* to grapple with the basics of reading Kom. When arriving at the Tua’muyn literacy centre for the first time, one doesn’t expect the happy surprise of meeting Elizabeth there, for she is an exception: a young and vibrant lady standing in front of her class, smiling and candid in her teaching efforts.

Born in 1980, and a mother of two, she is a dedicated literacy monitor. She was not taught literacy in the Kom language during her primary school years, or during her secondary school years. But, keen to read in her mother tongue, she registered for the PROPELCA courses. She worked hard as a PROPELCA trainee every summer holiday

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<sup>99</sup> ‘Bobe’ is a title of deferential respect in Kom. See note in 5.5.4.

<sup>100</sup> ‘Nawayn’ in Kom is a title of deferential respect generally given to older women in the community. It literally means ‘the mother of the child’: ‘na-’ mother, and ‘-wayn’ child; but culturally this title remains rather reserved to older women with some authority and greying wisdom.

from 1994 to 1996 when she graduated. Once fully equipped with Kom literacy and teaching skills, she attempted to open a literacy centre as soon as she could. But local constraints are numerous in Aduk and her life was a hard journey. Going through two pregnancies and raising her children as a single mother, with farm work to do most of the time, she had to wait for a chance to open and run her literacy centre. Her activities in her local church provided her with a chance to plan a literacy centre. In her local Baptist church, where she is well known and liked, she obtained the posts of Church's Secretary and Youths' Secretary. The Bible was first translated into Kom in 2005. In all the Christian churches in the land, it was an event of great importance. A huge social gathering was organised for the dedication of the New Testament. Henceforth, most church goers became very keen to read the Bible. That was the occasion dreamed of by Elizabeth. She approached her pastor and the area KLDC literacy supervisor to get the go-ahead to start a literacy centre in 2005. She started using the Kom primers to teach basic reading and writing. To keep her learners interested and highly motivated, she had to include the literacy activities as an integral part of the activities of Bible reading. And since there is much copying of verses and Bible extracts, she transformed the Bible study classes into an efficient literacy class. Gradually she introduced other didactic literature to diversify the array of reading materials.

With an average enrolment of 50, mostly women, Tua'muyn has become a vibrant literacy centre. Elizabeth has sworn to never let go the literacy work. "I want my people to know about our language and be able to read and write it," she says with pride. With such an agenda, she is committed to see more local residents come and learn in her Tua'muyn literacy centre.

### ***5.6.3.3. Charles N or the literacy activist across languages and generations***

Charles N. is a secondary school teacher at the prestigious St Bedes Catholic College at Ashing, Belo. But his family compound, where he was born and raised, is kilometres away from Belo. It is in Fundong, where he has built his own house and lives with his wife and children.

He graduated from the University of Yaounde in the 1980s. As part of his university education, he spent time in France to study French language and culture. He is presently one of those rare Kom people with a high mastery of the French language. But after many years teaching French and English to secondary school pupils, and having built his

teaching career on those two foreign languages, he became determined to participate more actively in the promotion of Kom.

In the 1990s, he embarked on self-training to read and write Kom, and then applied to take part in the PROPELCA training for formal school teachers. He graduated as a PROPELCA bilingual Kom-English teacher for secondary schools. But he had more interest in adult literacy. He was already very active with KLDC and became appointed to the post of Publications Coordinator. But to fully use his linguistic and pedagogical expertise to help his preliterate adult compatriots, he felt he needed to run an adult literacy centre. Most of the week during term times, he would be away in Ashing where he taught. He would always be home in Fundong during the weekends, and during holidays. A literacy centre where he could be a monitor needed to be close to home, since he could then hold his classes on Saturdays or Sundays.

Mbissi is a hamlet neighbouring Fundong, where Charles is based. He knew that men and women were gathering at the Mbissi Government School on Saturdays and Sundays for meetings and social activities. He set out to meet them, and did the necessary public relations work to create a literacy class in Mbissi. Since he was also very close to the school's authorities, he was able to negotiate their approval to run a literacy centre there. At the beginning of 2006, he started his first literacy classes in Mbissi. Courses were held once every week end, for an average of two to three hours.

As a high school teacher, Charles teaches teenagers. Some of his female pupils, though a minority, are already parents and their school life is marked by their responsibilities as parents. This gives Charles an in-depth knowledge of the problems that adults can face in learning at school, and in their involvement with educational settings. As a result, he has developed some general guidelines to better help his older adult learners. As much as possible, he connects his teaching with adult life and preoccupations, to generate more interest and participation from his learners. He generally asks his learners to contribute words in the class from their various daily activities. In other words, the vocabulary that is in the didactic materials he is using is expanded to include more words from the realm of daily activities of adults.<sup>101</sup> He has noticed that many adults are 'happily surprised' when the words they use daily are written and read in class.

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<sup>101</sup> As I further discuss it in Chapter 6, many of the didactic materials used in literacy classes, especially the primers and post-primers, were initially developed for the formal primary schools in the PROPELCA programme. Their best use in adult literacy requires some adaptations, which in most cases only happen with daily creativity and adjustments by literacy monitors.

Charles has also introduced some subtle but crucial rules to create an adequate and adult-friendly atmosphere in his classes. There is no formal greeting with learners standing up as is customary in formal schools. He always creates time during the class for learners to talk and share their stories, as adults like to express themselves and talk to others (far more than many children would do in a formal educational setting). There is flexibility with learners who are late, letting them come in without having to wait outside or ask permission to come in, and especially allowing as much as possible other learners, and even himself, to help them catch up with what they missed. He never scolds any learner for wrong answers or errors. For Charles, this last rule is important: the literacy class should mirror the reality of Kom life where adults are normally never shouted at or scolded in public.

#### **5.6.3.4. 'Bobe' Pius, the vibrant old pioneer**

Born in 1924, *Bobe* Pius was eighty-two years old in 2006. In the Kom land, a person of this age is considered to have advanced wisdom and is given due respect. But this is also an age of well deserved rest. *Bobe* Pius, as he is affectionately called, is a unique case. Not only is he still teaching at the age of 82, but he is one of the leading pioneers of the Kom literacy programme. In addition, he is still running one of the most interesting literacy centres in the KLDC programme.

With the help of SIL linguists, he started the adult literacy programme in Kom in the mid-1980s. He began from scratch and single-handedly brought the programme to be one of the most vibrant programmes in the whole country. But his love and connection with reading and writing in his native tongue dates back to colonial times. He belongs to that unique generation of Cameroonians who, in the 1920s and 1930s, actually started their education in local languages in denominational schools. Following the First World War, Cameroon had been freed from the former German empire, but was partitioned and given to the new colonisers, France and England. The missionaries, especially the British Christian priests and pastors, started primary education in the hamlets of the Grassfields using the local languages. Thus, in 1938, *Bobe* Pius attended a Catholic traditional school that taught in the Kom language, at Njinikom. Even though the classes in the local language started as separate experimental classes, it was for him an unforgettable experience.

Father McDermott, the missionary father who started this experimental mother tongue education, became so impressed by the high achievement and grades of the pupils in the experimental classes that he started a process of generalizing it to the whole Catholic school. But the colonial administrators who didn't want to see the emergence of a school system using the local language were on the watch: in 1941, after three years of experimentally using Kom as the medium of instruction, Father McDermott received instructions directly from the colonial administration in England to stop any formal teaching using the local language. Bobe Pius knew then that the bell had tolled for the first teaching experiment using the local language.

It would take close to half a century for things to start again in the mid-1980s, and to see formal education using the local languages be re-launched on a large scale. For Kom, it would be led by Bobe Pius, who didn't have a chance as a child to continue the education he had begun in his own mother tongue. His main career as a primary school teacher spanned from the mid-1960s until 1990. He lived and taught throughout the Kom land, teaching mainly in Catholic schools, but he taught in the English language.

When the SIL members started to work on the Kom language in the early 1980s, Bobe Pius seized the chance to go back to his dream of promoting the Kom language in education. For twelve years, uninterrupted, he was the literacy coordinator for Kom. He has co-authored, authored, or edited about half of the existing literature<sup>102</sup> in the Kom language. He started by training as a formal PROPELCA teacher, and then continued to run literacy centres all over the Njinikom area. Once he graduated as a PROPELCA trainee, he became involved as a trainer of new literacy monitors and bilingual teachers in the Kom language. This makes him a pillar in the Kom literacy programme. In 2005, he was called in at Acha'jvia to run the literacy centre because of his long-standing experience in Kom literacy.

## 5.7. SUMMARY

The main aim of this chapter was to give an ethnographic account of the literacy practices in Kom. To do this, I began by describing the journey from my starting point, London, to the Kom land in Cameroon, with stops on the way in Yaounde, Dschang and Bamenda. Details about my settlement and the operational organisation of my research in

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<sup>102</sup> Details about all the books making up the existing Kom literatures are provided in Table 6.2 in Chapter 6.

Kom have been provided, with an emphasis on the socio-cultural negotiations and the human, material and climatic challenges that I faced when working in Kom. Despite the difficulties, data of good quality and quantity was collected during the six-month fieldwork. A broader exploration of adult literacy in Kom called for presentation of the institutional and human resources involved. Therefore, an overview of the institutional framework sustaining the Kom literacy, namely the KLDC, has been given in the foregoing pages.

I also dwelt in detail in this chapter on two key elements that are of prior importance in my study of the dynamics of literacy in Kom, namely the literacy classes as places and as events on the one hand, and on the other hand, the human resources delivering literacy. As concerns the literacy classes, I have described as vividly as possible the ongoing activities of the KLDC literacy programme. The narratives of the literacy pedagogic events as they take place are interwoven with contextualising descriptions and analyses, with an aim to show how these literacy activities intertwine with the larger Kom socio-cultural microcosm, and how they weave themselves in the fabric of local activities, values and community life. From Juambum to Belo, through Fundeng, Chuabuh, Acha'jvia, and Muteff, I have described how the commitment and belief in the local language carry adult learners and their fellow monitors in a common journey of learning. As for literacy monitors, supervisors and coordinators, I have presented their professional synergy, and their role in the programme. I have included profiles of selected monitors who, I believe, epitomise the backgrounds and socio-educational importance of literacy monitors.

The two complementary writing techniques used, namely the production of some field narratives and individual literacy monitors' profiles, provide the most expressive way to account for the unfolding dynamics of literacy practices as I observed and lived them in Kom.



## **Chapter 6: Local publications and didactic materials, and the dynamics of local literature**

### **6.1. INTRODUCTION**

The preceding chapters have given the sociolinguistic background and the operational details of literacy activities in Kom. I focus in this chapter on some crucial tools in the literacy enterprise, namely local publications and the didactic materials used in the Kom literacy programme. I also analyse in this chapter the dynamics of local literature, in terms of its production; its financial sustainability; and its contribution to the institutional development of the literacy programme and the local agency of the Kom language committee.

### **6.2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

One of the aims of this chapter is to address as exhaustively as possible the main research domain of local literature. Because local literature and its use extends far beyond the literacy classes, a broader description and analysis of the didactic materials beyond the cases of usage observed in the literacy classes is necessary. I will now dwell briefly on the methodological approach in writing this chapter.

In face of the diversity of the local literature in Kom, I have taken the view that it is important to be as exhaustive as possible in describing and analysing the Kom publications. I have focused on their use in the literacy classes, and have also gone a step further in studying them as they are designed initially for their various purposes. This approach falls along the lines of the study of documents in ethnographic research as discussed by Hammersley and Atkinson (1983:127-143) and Bryman (2004:381-397). The position of these authors, which I have espoused here, is that there is much to be learned by describing and analysing the documents found in any studied community, as these documents can shed significant light on local and institutional practices and values. In the Kom case, my focus was on literature and documents in the Kom language.

A first step in the fieldwork was to collect copies of all the existing literature that I could lay hands on with the help of the KLDC publications co-ordinator, my research

assistants, and the literacy co-ordinator and area supervisors.<sup>103</sup> I took time to study the local literature, first making an exhaustive list of the titles and what they are, as presented in Table 6.2. Two broad types of documents exist in Kom. On the one hand, there are language teaching manuals, i.e. documents that were initially intended for pedagogic use in formal classrooms. On the other hand, one has non-pedagogic publications, i.e. the religious literature such as Christian booklets and Biblical translations, traditional literature, functional booklets and others.

In this chapter, I will present all the non-pedagogic literature, and will describe in detail as much as possible their thematic contents. As concerns the didactic materials initially intended for use in literacy classes, namely, the primer, the pre-primer, and the post-primers, I have read through the various literacy teaching manuals and other PROPELCA pedagogic guides that have been published (Gudschinsky, 1951, 1973, 1976; Lee, 1982; Barnwell, 1985; Mba, 1986; Shell and Wiesemann, 1987; Stringer and Faraclas, 1987; Tadadjeu, 1990; Tadadjeu, et al. 1991; Dutcher, 1982, 2004). The exploitation of this literature has allowed me to build an analytical presentation of the pedagogy of these didactic materials. I have also discussed with the literacy monitors the use of these materials in literacy classes, to understand how monitors use the manuals in their teaching practice. The overall result of this document study and discussions of the pedagogic use of documents make up the first main part of this chapter.

It should be noted that in many parts of this chapter I have taken an expanded view of 'didactic materials' to encompass all printed documents that are used in the literacy classes. Primacy is given to use in literacy because the initial use of many printed documents in Kom might not be for teaching purposes, as will be discussed further in this chapter. But if these documents, whatever is their initial function, end up being used for teaching purposes either ad hoc or on a regular basis, then they are considered as didactic material in this pedagogic use. This approach is the best I believe to account as systematically as possible for the vast array of printed materials that end up being used in the effort to help learners master the reading and writing skills in Kom.

The other source of research that has fed this chapter is observation of the use of the documents in the adult literacy classes. But those observations could only be supplementary, in the sense that the visits that I did to some of the literacy classes showed only a quite limited view of the use of didactic materials in the literacy programme.

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<sup>103</sup> All their names, professional details and geographic location are listed in Appendix 4 which gives the details of local resource persons I worked with during my fieldwork in Kom.

Chapter 5, which deals with the visits to the literacy classes, was presented before this chapter mainly because the overall study of the local literature was not only based on observation of literacy classes. I combined an exhaustive study of the existing didactic literature with detailed description of other non-didactic publications. I complemented this exhaustive study with observed instances of practical classroom use of some of this literature. I believe that this all-encompassing approach has given a broader and more exhaustive view of this literature and its use in the literacy programme, and in the Kom community in general.

### 6.3. THE PRE-LITERACY PHASE

Good preparation is first among the many factors which are necessary for a learner in order to learn to read and write. The preparatory phase for any preliterate person is considered crucial to the success of the literacy acquisition *per se* (Gudschinsky, 1951, 1973, 1976; Barnwell, 1985; Lee, 1982; Shell and Wiesemann, 1987; Dutcher, 1982, 2004). A set of carefully planned didactic exercises prepares the pre-literates to first embark on deciphering, then later producing, writing. The first stage of preparation is psycho-cognitive: the learners must become familiar with the print, but not in any complex way. They are exposed to writing and told how they will gradually make sense out of it, through careful work. This is to reduce the psychological barriers that most pre-literates have towards literacy. As discussed by Shell and Wiesemann (1987:83), these barriers are not related to levels of intelligence,<sup>104</sup> but to the disconnection of the past experiences and daily practices of pre-literates from reading and writing. This disconnection in general creates a high sense of challenge in the early phases of literacy acquisition for them, as reading and writing practices are still alien to their experiential realm.

At the same time, reading and writing are essentially about combining or deconstructing strings of linguistic units, be they phonetic and phonemic segments, or letter-sounds, syllables and words. An important starting point is to encourage the learners to start identifying these units as discrete elements to be consciously recognised and re-organised as necessary. Therefore, during this preparatory period, most learning activities revolve around pre-reading and pre-writing activities, and are generally referred to as the

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<sup>104</sup> This is one of the reasons why most educationists do not consider these barriers as psycho-cognitive, but merely psychological, as far as adult learners are concerned.

pre-literacy phase. The main manual used for this period is the pre-primer, as shown in Table 6.1 below.

**Table 6.1: The place of the pre-primer in the literacy phases**

<i>Literacy Phases</i>	<i>Pedagogic activities</i>	<i>Main didactic manual</i>
Pre-literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Preparation</li> <li>- Pre-reading</li> <li>- Pre-writing</li> </ul>	Pre-primer
Literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Guided reading</li> <li>- Mechanical writing</li> </ul>	Primer
Post-literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Independent reading</li> <li>- Creative writing</li> </ul>	Post-primer

Enabling the learners to be psychologically motivated to read effectively is crucial, and this motivational interaction must run through the pre-literacy phase. As adults, it is their own motivation which ultimately brings them into the literacy class. Yet, it's necessary to explain to them the importance and technical applications of reading, such as reading newspapers, manuals, the Bible, health and agricultural booklets. To assume that because they have come to the literacy class is in itself enough and that they know all this already is not always pedagogically practical to help them learn. The repetition and emphasis on the importance and application of learning and writing reinforces the assurance of learners, both in their choice to attend literacy classes, and in their confidence in their capacity to learn to read and write. Exemplification of reading events and discussion of writing exercises as interesting and useful are among the many ways to develop learners' motivation in the pre-literacy phase.

At this phase, a pedagogic groundwork is created by discussing with learners the arbitrariness and conventionality of the linguistic sign, as developed in the Saussurian structuralist theory of language. As a system and a code of communication, a language is made up of signs that are conventional, that is, adopted independently by any given linguistic community. They are also arbitrary, as they do not bear any natural or rational connection with the referent. The referent is the actual object in the real world, to which the sign refers to. The linguistic signs are composed of two intrinsically bound parts: the signifier (this is the letter-sounds that we hear through our ears or that we put together on a material support when writing), and the signified (this is the conceptual equivalent that

appears in the brain when we read or hear the signifier). The operating mode of this process is that the signified is a mental product (in Kom, for example ‘the picture of a lizard’) that is generated when a person hears or reads the signifier (in Kom, ‘*abas*’). The lizard as an actual living animal in the world is the referent.

Another important bit of groundwork to cover is the conscious perception of the structure of the written language by learners. They must have explained to them – or rather they must be made conscious of the fact – that the language that they know very well and speak perfectly is written through a combination of units that are put together into larger units which constitute the various utterances. Put differently, learners are exposed to the fact that a sentence spoken or written is basically made up of words, themselves made up of syllables, which are in turn made up of letter-sounds. At this stage, it is important to remind learners of their prior knowledge of all these units, and to make every effort to prevent them from seeing these as alien, or as totally new information. In this process, to see the learners as *tabula rasa* is to be avoided. For such a traditional vision of learners as empty vessels into which the teacher or literacy monitor pours knowledge – termed the ‘banking model’ of education – has proven not efficient in adult education.

In Kom adult literacy classes, the local language is the main medium of instruction. The preliterate adult participants are involved in the class by being the providers of sentences and words used for exemplification purposes. Their mastery of spoken language and oral skills is near perfect, far higher than that of most of their younger literacy monitors, as has been shown repeatedly in the observation of literacy classes in Chapter 5. The verbal interactions between the literacy monitor and learners are reinforced in turn through the various lessons of the pre-primer.

The lessons in the pre-primer fall within two main domains, as concerns the types of skills aimed at: the visual abilities and the manual skills. Visual abilities concern the capacity to follow the reading direction with the eyes, and to stay focused throughout the process. The eyes must be able to discern the written graphemes and to articulate them verbally, or reproduce them in writing. For this purpose, since reading and writing basically function in a bi-dimensional universe, the eyes are trained to read from left to right and from top to bottom, on any given plane surface. Other visual exercises help learners discern resemblances and dissemblances of various linguistic units. Different sentences and meanings are marked through different word orders and lexical units used in a sentence. The learner must be able to see these differences, as different orientations in writing can lead to different letter-sounds: ‘u’ and ‘n’, ‘p’ and ‘b’, ‘d’ and ‘b’, ‘u’ and ‘n’,

etc. Meaningful distinctions between words are sometimes based on one single segment; therefore two words differentiated only by one segment are 'minimal pairs'. To see these differences and grasp the various words successfully, the learners must pinpoint the specific different segments that make the specificity of each linguistic element. This is even more crucial in Grassfields Bantu languages, including Kom, in which many words are monosyllabic or disyllabic.

The manual skills cover among other things the handling of printed material, the grip on writing tools such as pencils and pens, the straightness of the writing line in a notebook, and the manipulation of a book when opening the pages.

The Kom literacy programme uses a pre-primer entitled *Look, Think, Do* published in the 1980s by Olive Shell, an SIL applied linguist. This manual was initially developed for the PROPELCA classes, and is used by extension in the literacy classes. Its use with adults has been successful. One reason for this is the fact that the pre-primer is not really language-specific. Rather, its contents is cross-linguistic – within the Cameroonian context – to prepare any pre-literate for the learning of reading and writing. To this extent the technical orientations about the work to be done in each exercise are given in small letters in both the two official languages,<sup>105</sup> French and English, generally at the bottom of each exercise. In fact, it can be considered as a trilingual teaching manual. The pre-primer can work for both adults and children, though this manual was initially designed in a series intended for young children in bilingual formal schools. Nevertheless, its use for adult literacy has not raised any major problem brought to my attention.

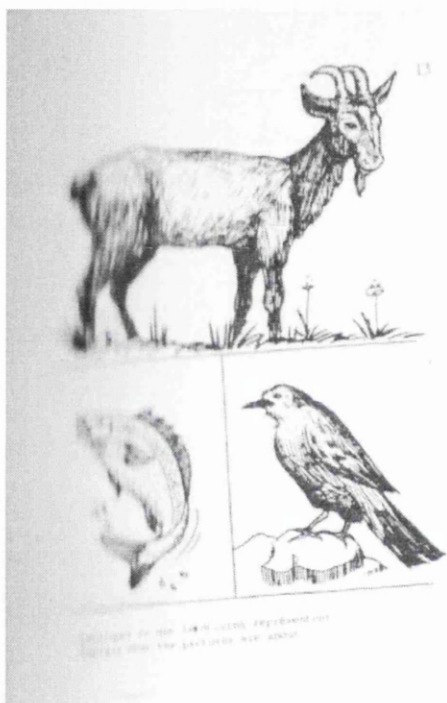
Lessons in the pre-primer are organised to progressively help learners acquire the pre-reading and pre-writing skills mentioned above. The first lessons teach them about the basic fact that reality can be re-presented in drawings and symbols. The relationship between the drawings in most of these first lessons is a direct one; i.e. drawings are about items in the immediate environment of learners: animals, trees, houses, and familiar daily items. The underlying principle is that the pictorial image must have a clear reference to the immediate reality, since the aim is to build in the learner's mind the awareness that

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<sup>105</sup> Another similarly important reason is economical. To avoid this peculiar situation of incorporating OL texts in the pre-primer, two concomitant conditions needed to be met: that each primer be produced for each specific language so that these indications are fully written in the local language, and that these technical orientations be given in a pre-primer teacher's manual, for the sake of literacy monitors' pedagogic training at regional and national levels. These two conditions, though strongly wished by the promoters of local language literature such as SIL and PROPELCA's applied linguists, did not materialise, due among other things to lack of funding.

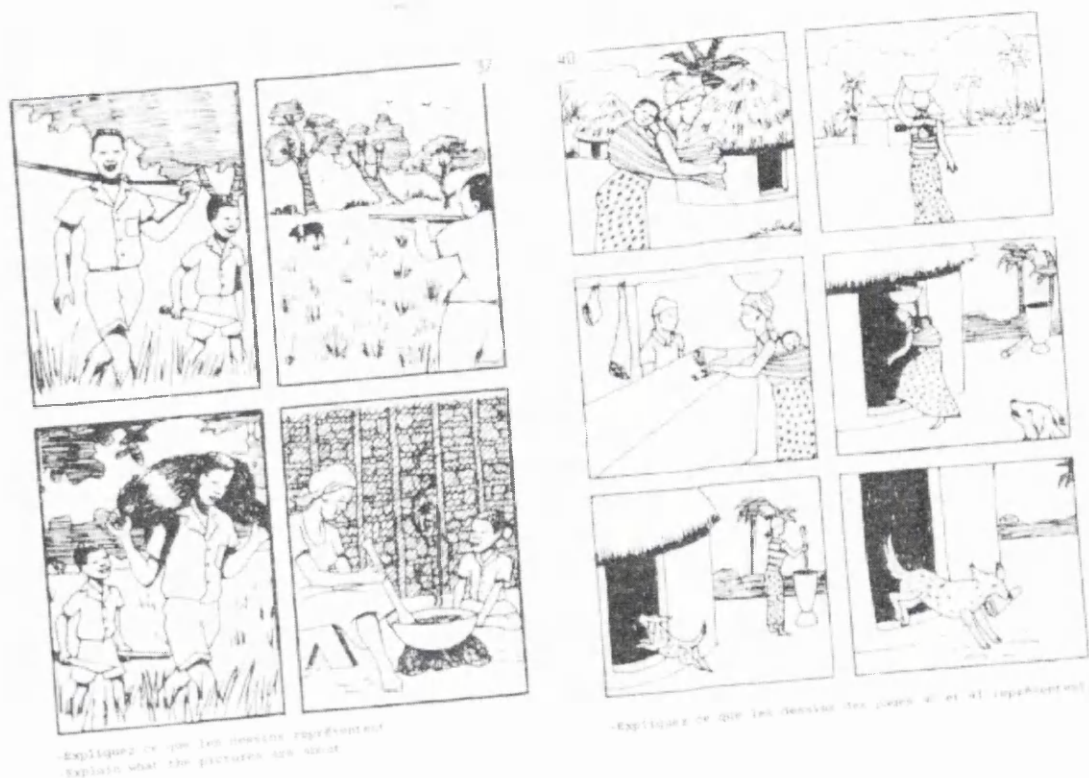
reality can be represented through pictures, drawings and symbols. Gradually from there, a less direct representation and more abstract image will be brought to the grasp of learners to ultimately lead them to 'see' the sounds of the language represented in writing symbols. Some of the early pictures in the pre-primer represent a hen with its chicks, or a local bird, or a goat, all domestic animals common to the immediate Kom environment, as can be seen in Figure 6.1.

**Figure 6.1: Drawings in the pre-primer, p. 13.**



Another series of exercises tell stories in a succession of pictures. These exercises both show the directionality in reading – left to right, and top to bottom – and accumulation of information to make a story, similar to the flow of successive sentences that make a narration (as is shown in Figure 6.2). These stories in pictures are very similar to the story teaching as presented in the pedagogy of the Big Book in Chapter 5. But the two crucial differences are that in the pre-primer, many pictures run on a single A5 page (in the Big Book, it's generally one big picture per one A4 page) and most importantly, the pictures in the pre-primer are not matched with a key sentence, as they are in the Big Book.

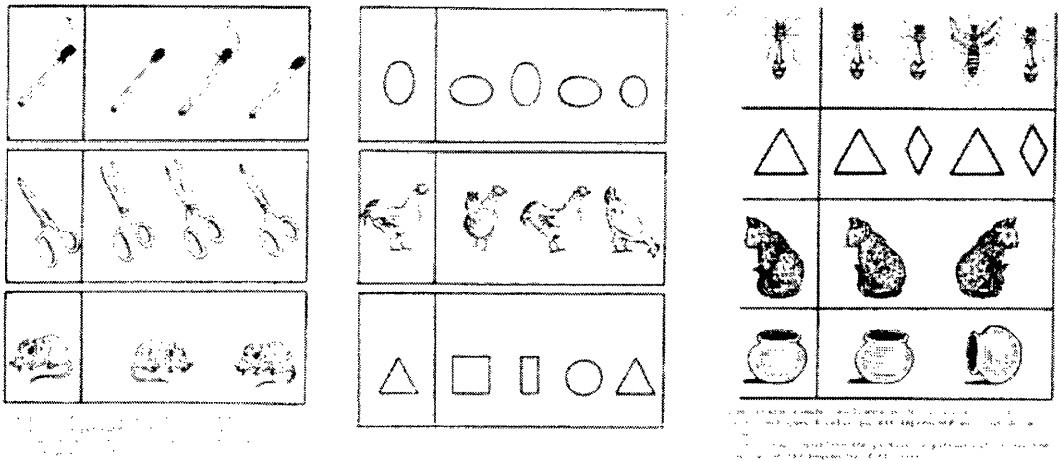
Figure 6.2: Stories in pictures in the pre-primer, pp. 37 and 40



The most numerous exercises in the *Look, Think, Do* pre-primer are the ones drilling the learners on similarities and differences of shapes and graphemes or letter-sounds. At this stage, specific words are not yet taught. This would be very premature on account of the fact that the whole approach of the pre-primer is to prepare the learners to reach the fuller stage of reading words in the primer with success. The emphasis is on shapes and signs, which are presented as distinctive units.

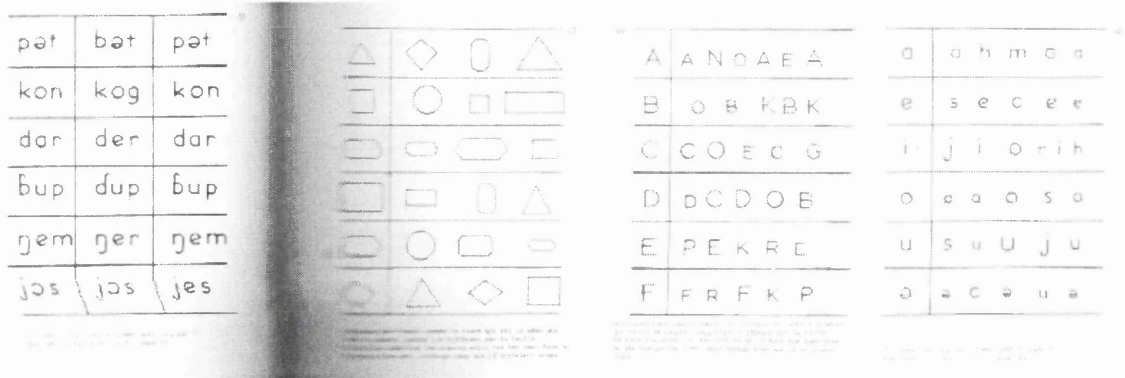


**Figure 6.3: Lessons on similarities and differences in the pre-primer, pp.16, 17 and 22.**



In the learning process about similarities and differences in shapes and forms, significant subtleties relate to orientation and direction, as can be seen with Figure 6.3 above. Learners' awareness of such visual issues is important, since the orientation of a shape can determine its difference and meaning in the print world. The learners in most of these exercises have to see which shape is similar or different when compared to others. This is the moment when the basis of any independent reading or writing is put in place: to read and write successfully, the key is the discrete identification and written reproduction of linguistic signs. Starting with pictures to make things easier (as can be seen in Figure 6.3), then moving to shapes and figures (as in Figure 6.4 below), these series of exercises enable participants to differentiate sound graphemes, and be able to pick exactly each in any series, be they individual sound-letters, or groups of them forming a digraph or a trigraph (as in Figure 6.4).

**Figure 6.4: Advanced lessons on similarities and differences in the pre-primer, pp. 35, 43, 44 and 45**

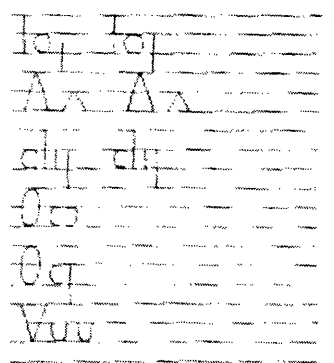
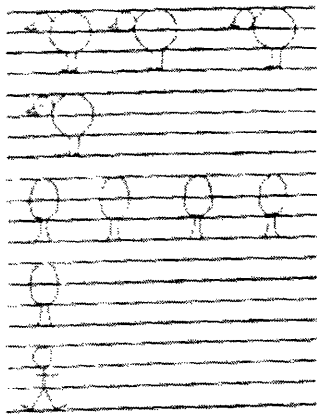
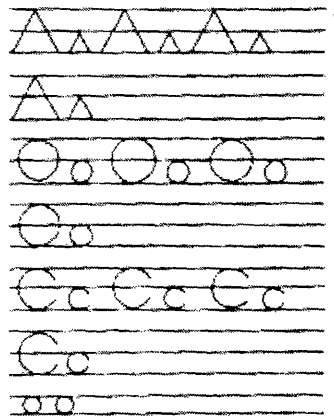
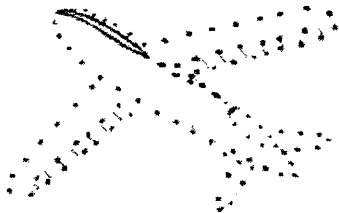
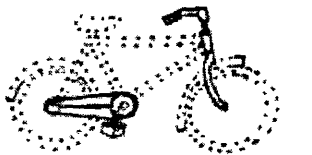
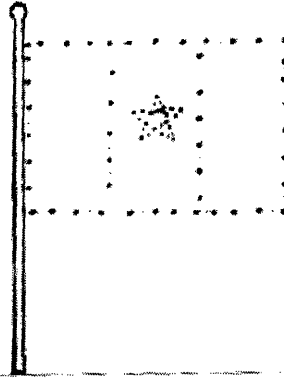


As concerns the manual abilities, another series of exercises is designed to train the learners into drawing and reproducing images. Most exercises are about reproducing simple drawings, and completing unfinished ones, like dot joining to make up a whole image, as can be seen in Figure 6.5.

There are also drills on repetitive copying of simple shapes and forms. Most of them are actually sound-letters, and learners are drilled to be able to write them properly in due course, though at the stage of the pre-primer, emphasis is not yet given to learning shapes and forms as meaningful letters and words. The copying insists on exactitude of shape, direction of form, reproducing equal height and width of forms, and so on, since these elements form the basis for good writing of letters and words.

Figure 6.5: Some drawing and shape-copying lessons in the pre-  
 primer, pp.11, 12, 19, 25, 36 and 39.

COPIES



The pre-literacy phase and the primer together form the foundation of the literacy programme. Once they are taught successfully, then the literacy participants may fully embark on learning to read and write properly.

#### **6.4. THE ALPHABET CHART**

The alphabet chart is another foundational tool in the literacy programme. The Kom alphabet chart is a big poster on which all the letter-sounds in the language are exemplified through sight words. Sight words are specific words with a concrete meaning and which contain a specific letter of the alphabet. In general they represent an easily identifiable local entity such as a tree, a handicraft, a house, a piece of clothing, a domestic animal or a bird. The principle of sight-words in an alphabet chart is to show the link between local realities and specific words, and consequently specific sounds-letters, of the language. From there, learners will associate the graphemes to words and their meanings, and gradually master the alphabet.

The advantages of the alphabet chart are its completeness, simplicity in presentation, and versatility. As a complete didactic aid, it covers its entire topic, namely the alphabet. Its use by literacy monitors and learners encompasses all the letter-sounds that will ever be encountered by learners in written communication. As a one-page poster, it can be hung on any vertical support, or spread on any plane surface to be used for teaching. As concerns its versatility, it can be used both in the pre-literacy phase to teach the shapes of words and to show their differences, and also as a practical tool to teach specific meaningful words. The key words and their illustrative drawings can be used to initiate the participants into manual shape formation and word writing. Figure 6.6 shows the Kom alphabet chart.

Figure 6.6: The Kom alphabet chart



## 6.5. PRIMERS

### 6.5.1. Goal and structure

Literacy is mainly a print-based enterprise, which is to say that written materials are at its heart. Yet there is debate within literacy studies about the centrality of the primer as the key learning tool in literacy acquisition. Certain literacy approaches such as the REFLECT or PRA techniques which have successfully been implemented in some parts of the world such as Latin America, and South East Asia, point to the possibility of achieving literacy acquisition without the teachings being wholly based on the primer. But at the same time, the Cameroonian experience over more than three decades now has been based on primers. This experience shows the success of a primer-based approach, both as appropriate to the structure of Cameroonian languages and as feasible in terms of trained human resources available to carry out such an approach.

In Cameroon, adult literacy has inherited much from the PROPELCA experience of teaching local languages in experimental bilingual classes in formal education.

Consequently the typical primer used in most adult literacy classes is the PROPELCA primer. This literacy manual is generally conceived using an eclectic approach called the Gudschinsky method (Gudschinsky, 1973; Barnwell, 1985; Mba, 1986; Shell and Wieseemann, 1987).

The Kom literacy programme all throughout the years has remained a primer-based approach. The primer is an important pedagogic document without which the enterprise might be difficult or impossible. It is the reference document used to achieve the literacy teaching. The generic title of the Kom primer and post-primer series is ‘Ghesına Ye’i ItajiKom’ – which translates in English as ‘Let’s learn to read and write Kom’. The primer and post-primers in the Kom literacy programme are a series of didactic manuals made up of four booklets, numbered from 1 to 4 after the generic title GhesınaÈ Ye’i ItajiKom; 1 and 2 being the primers collection, and 3 and 4 being the post-primers collection. I will examine further in this chapter the post-primers. The subtitle to the Primer 1 given in its page 2 is thus ‘A first primer in the Kom language’.

As concerns the goal of the primer in a literacy programme, Barnwell (1985) states that:

‘The goal of the primer itself (as distinct from the pre-primer or alphabet book) is to help students to learn to break down and sound out the words of the language, so that they can read or write any word in the language, even one which they have never seen written before. They also learn to read stories and anything written in the language with fluency and understanding’ (Barnwell, 1985:4).

There are generally four types of lessons in the primer:

- the pre-lessons: they teach sight words and the basic notion of letters and their combinations into meaningful words;
- the main lessons, so called because being the most important: they form the large majority of lessons found in the primer. They are also called the normal lessons;
- the tone lessons: they teach the reading and writing of supra-segmental elements that are tones;<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> The majority of Cameroonian languages are tonal languages, and so is Kom.

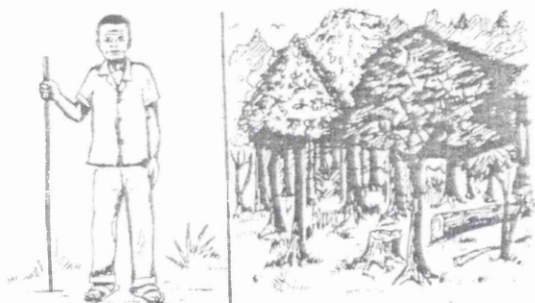
- the revision lessons: they come generally after every series of 4 to 5 main lessons.

### 6.5.2. The pre-lessons

Pre-lessons, at the very beginning of the primers, are constituted around sight-words, i.e. key words that are taught globally without being broken into their constitutive parts of syllables and letter-sounds. In most cases, sight-words are presented with equivalent illustrative pictures, as in Figure 6.7.

**Figure 6.7: Some sight-words from Lesson 1 in Kom Primer 1, p.5.**

Iye'i 1



Ngàm	aku
Ngàm	aku
aku	Ngàm
Ngàm	aku
Ngàm	Ngàm

Ngàm nìn ghi akù.

5

The main objective of pre-lesson is to illustrate the correlation that can exist between a picture of a concrete object or person and the word or noun referring to that. Put differently, learners have to use these lessons to associate meaningful words, taught as a whole, with images generally drawn from their immediate environment. Pre-lessons in the primer serve the function of making a smooth transition from the pre-primer to the primer

proper. They build on the skills participants should have acquired during the pre-literacy phase.

### **6.5.3. The main lessons**

As said earlier (in 6.5.1), in the specific terminology and elaboration techniques of literacy materials, a ‘normal’ lesson is understood as the typical didactic unit in the teaching strategy, and as such, it is the most regular or current type of lesson in the primer (Gudschinsky, 1973; Barnwell, 1985; Mba, 1986; Shell and Wiesemann, 1987).

Normal lessons are generally presented on two (left and right) pages facing each other. On the left page, the lesson starts by introducing, on the top-right of the page, the main letter-sound taught in that lesson. This sound-letter which is the main topic of the lesson is also called the sound of the day. This is followed directly by a key sentence in which the sound-letter of the day is present. In most cases the requirement is to have in the key sentence a key word, i.e. a word containing the letter-sound of the day. The key sentence itself is generally associated with an illustrative drawing that helps contextualise the sentence through describing the action, process or situation that the sentence is about. The strategy is to exemplify the main letter-sound, i.e. put it in concrete use in a sentence. A complex series of syllable boxes follows the key sentence.



Figure 6.8: A left page of a normal lesson in the Kom Primer 1, p.18

Iye'i 13

b



Wī Ngàm nin se' iwe nì bolèŋ.

1. 

bolèŋ
bo
o

      1. 

o	i	i	a
bo	bi	bi	ba

2. 

bo
bi
bi
ba

3. 

i	bi
ibi	

ò
bò

i
bi

a
ba

bi
Bi

The discovery box helps ‘discover’ the sound of the day by breaking down the key word to show it. The guidelines for the elaboration of lessons in the primer are spelt out in detail in the Gudschinsky method of primer design (Gudschinsky, 1973; Barnwell, 1985; Mba, 1986; Shell and Wiesemann, 1987). This method is the technical framework of the conception of most literacy manuals in the Kom literacy programme. One of its foundational tenets is that the syllable, being the most basic unit of pronunciation, is also one of the basic units of literacy learning. As such, the learner should process the composition of sentences, the words, and their re-presentation in writing, through basic syllable drills. These should be the foundation of readers’ awareness of simple monosyllabic words as they are built using the various individual sounds of the language – such as the case of words made up of one single vocalic sound. Syllables are also the building blocks of words, as syllables can be composed together to make polysyllabic words.

A basic guideline, following pronunciation principles in articulatory phonetics and phonology of Grassfields Bantu languages, is that the only sound to be isolated alone is a vocalic sound – since a consonant can not be properly pronounced alone without a vowel sound. In other words, a consonant should not be the last item on a word breakdown in a discovery box. As can be seen in Figure 6.8 above where the discovery box (the first top left one) is about ‘bolèn’, the sound of the day ‘b’ is extracted in this contrastive way in such a way that the only isolated element at the bottom of the box is the vocalic sound ‘o’.

Other syllables boxes found in normal lessons are:

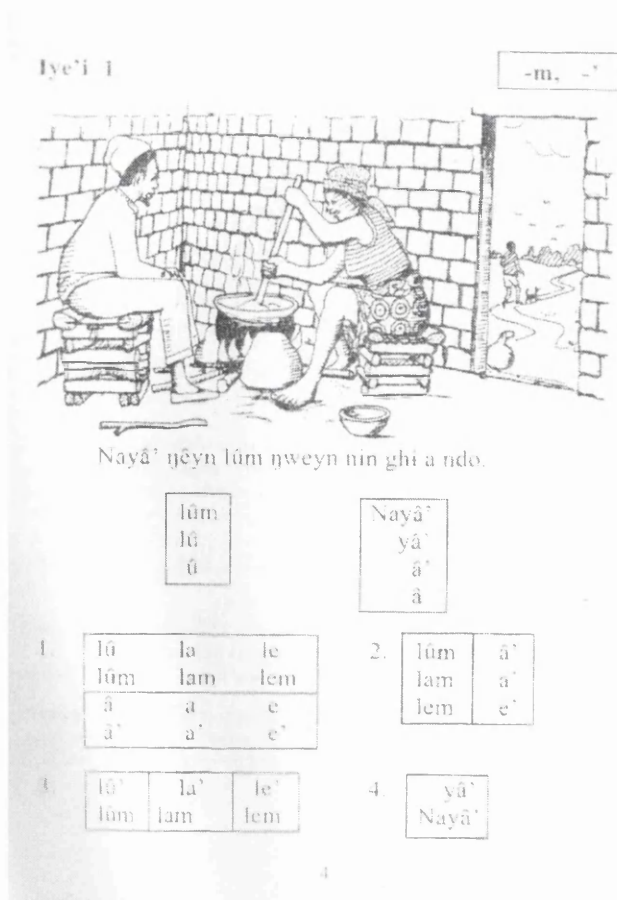
- the analogy box (box labelled 1. in Figure 6.8);
- the comparison box (box labelled 2. in Figure 6.8);
- the opposition or contrast box (box labelled 3. in Figure 6.9);
- the synthesis box, also called the built-word box (labelled 3. in Figure 6.8);
- the capital box (in Figure 6.8, it is the box with double borders at the very right bottom).

As Barnwell puts it,

‘... syllable drills help the students to recognize the parts of which words are made, focusing especially on the new letter which is being taught in that lesson.’ (Barnwell, 1985:5)

As can be observed in Figures 6.8 and 6.9, not all syllable boxes are found in one single lesson. The various syllable boxes provide the tools used to drill the learners in various syllable combinations such as composition, decomposition, analogy, contrast and similarity, and other techniques to help found reading skills and teach learners the identification of previously known and unknown syllables. The organisation and teaching of these syllable drills is very methodical. The capital box, generally at the bottom right of the page, is used for the teaching of capital forms of letters taught earlier in the syllable drills.

Figure 6.9: A left page of a normal lesson in the Kom Primer 2, p.4.



The right page of a normal lesson generally focuses on grammar drills, reading and writing practice.

At the very top of the page there is a series of sentences generally enclosed in a large box. They are used to teach the functors or grammatical elements.

Barnwell defines functors as

‘...those words in the language which link other words together so that they make sense and form a natural sentence. A functor does not have any meaning by itself. Its function is to relate other words together’ (Barnwell, 1985:13).

Functors<sup>107</sup> are typically bound or free grammatical morphemes whose teaching necessitates their presentation in actual sentential use. One technique adopted to emphasize the functors is to present them in bold characters within the illustrative sentences, as with ‘ngùŋ’ (in the first two sentences in the top box) in Figure 6.10.

<sup>107</sup> From the view of their syntactic role, functors are similar to what Crystal calls ‘function words’ such as prepositions, articles, pronouns and conjunctions (Crystal, 2003:194).

After the functor box, there is always a reading text, whose length and level of complexity grows proportionally to the progression in the lessons. The text serves to lead readers to practice their reading. Right pages may sometimes contain one or two sight words, when these are necessary to create a better understanding of the reading text.

At the bottom of the right page comes the writing exercise, made of quasi handwritten forms,<sup>108</sup> used to help the learners practice their manual skills of writing the letter-sounds, syllables and words learned in the previous lessons.

**Figure 6.10: A right page of a normal lesson in the Kom Primer 2, p.5.**

Atem a nin ghi a ngũṅ ndo.  
 Bi nin ghi a ngũṅ ndo.  
 Wù n-lam ábayn ta ka wù yi.  
 Ghi n-tùm Nya' ta ka wù si inká'.  
 Nya' li bi ḡweyn bóm ta wù n-kõṅ bisi.  
 Nayá' nin yúm ásaṅ bóm ta wù n-kõṅ si bey'li.

Nayá' nin ghi a ndo. Wù n-ghi ḡeyn lúm ḡweyn.  
 I lúm ḡweyn nin ghi Yó'. Wávu ḡena nin ghi Nya'.  
 Áḡena nin bési áwo.  
 Áḡena tum meyn Nya' na wù se' si inká' akú. Wù  
 li meyn bí ḡweyn bóm ta wù n-kõṅ nyeyn.  
 Nà ḡweyn nin lam ábayn a ntòyn sí lém sí ḡweyn  
 ta ka wù kfa' i yi. Atem a nin ghi a ḡweyn a ngũṅ.

Lúm Nayá' n+n bést áwo.

<sup>108</sup> Historically in Cameroonian schools, two handwriting forms are taught: the cursive or joint writing, i.e. writing in a flowing style with the letters joined together, taught mainly in the Francophone area; and the script or block-letter form, i.e. writing the letters separately and not joined, like in a typewritten text, taught mainly in the Anglophone area. But the recommendations and conventions of the *General Alphabet of Cameroonian Languages* have recommended the script form as the one to be used in the teaching of all Cameroonian languages.

#### **6.5.4. The revision lessons**

Revision lessons are helpful to teachers in the evaluation of taught skills. In the progressive order of lessons, they are used to recap the main features of the lessons taught previously. In Primers 1 and 2, revision lessons come after a series of 5 to 8 lessons. One characteristic of revision lessons is that they focus only on previously taught letters-sounds and grammatical features.

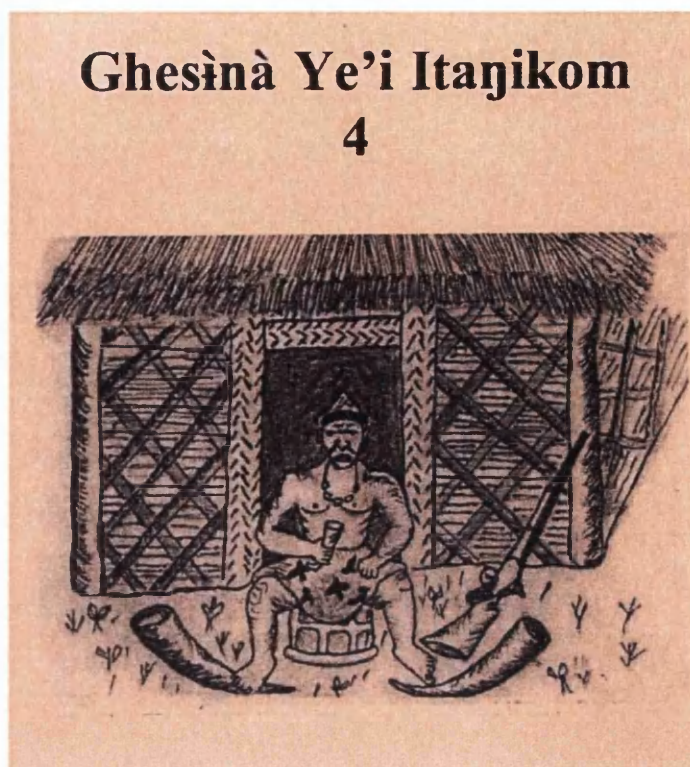
#### **6.5.5. The tone lessons**

As discussed earlier in Chapter 2, most Grassfields Bantu languages are tonal languages, as is Kom. With tonal languages, ‘... tones behave much like consonants and vowels in their contribution to building words’ (Wang, 2002:558). Learning to read and write will thus necessarily incorporate teaching tone representation. Since adults in Kom are native speakers of the language, teaching them tone does not involve bringing them to tone awareness or guiding them into ‘hearing’ or ‘distinguishing’ tone, as would be the case with non native speakers. The focus is directly on writing tone. Stated differently, on account of the fact that adults already make use of tone in their daily speech, tone lessons in the primers serve to teach them how to mark this in their writing, following the Kom orthographic conventions concerning tone (as discussed earlier in 2.4.5. in Chapter 2).

### **6.6. THE POST-PRIMERS**

The post-primers are designed for the post-literacy phase (as shown in Table 6.1). A small caveat about the term ‘post-literacy’ is necessary: the post-literacy phase focuses on the pedagogic steps in the learning procedures. In other words, post-literacy here covers the learning steps in the adult literacy class proper. Another wider meaning of post-literacy as propounded in adult literacy literature (Richmond, 1983, 1986; Bhola, 1994; Hazoumê, 1999b; Dutcher, 2004) is socially oriented and covers a broad arena whereby the local print-rich environment, and the reading opportunities in social life are considered. I will discuss this socio-educational aspect of post-literacy in detail in Chapter 7. But be it in the restricted sense in which I’m discussing post-primers here, or in the broader sense enunciated by some authors, there is a common concern about the use and practice of basic reading and writing skills the adults have acquired in their initial literacy learning.

Figure 6.11: Cover page of the second Kom post-primer



Once the learners have successfully gone through the first literacy phase and exhausted the lessons in Primers 1 and 2, the post-primers provide texts for the practice of reading and writing.

An extract of the preface of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Kom post-primer, *Ghesinà Ye'i Itanjikom'4*, spells out the goal of this reading manual:

'... Its aim is to sustain the student's interest and love for more independent reading, help him to learn more about the grammatical structure of his own language and expose him to stories of his own culture in written form.'

The post-primer doesn't contain different types of lessons as do the pre-primer and primer. Consequently, lessons in the post-primer are all very similar in their structure. It should also be noted that in the post-primer the left-right page dichotomy of the primer no longer holds. Lessons run consecutively from page to page in a normal flow and each new lesson starts on the page where the preceding one ended.

The contents of a lesson are the following, in their gradual progression as taught: some preliminary questions; a main text, generally with an illustrative picture; some comprehension questions; some grammar drills; and a redaction exercise.

The preliminary questions, sometimes called vocabulary questions, generally come just before the main text. They are used for guidance and orientation to the contents of the text to be read. Another of the aims is to alert the learners to the centre of interest of the main text. The main text is the main staple of the lesson. It is a long text – compared to the set of short sentences in a primer – spanning a page or even two. It is followed by comprehension questions covering various aspects of the story narrated in the text. Whereas preliminary questions before the text are just two to three in most cases, ‘comprehension’ questions to test for the understanding of the text are numerous, sometimes ranging from half a dozen to a dozen questions.

Grammar drills generally cover two domains: advanced use and knowledge of vocabulary and word structure, and sentence construction. For the latter, gap filling exercises abound. But there are also drills on verbal conjugations, word explanations, tonal marking, and orderly rearrangement of broken sentences. They help to check the learners’ skills on syntactic order, lexical mastery and use, and other semantic complexities.

In some lessons, there are small redaction exercises. These are guided questions leading the learners to produce some short texts on their own. This is useful as learners are normally in the independent reading and writing phase, and should be able to write on their own.

## **6.7. ARITHMETIC BOOKS**

The generic title of the Kom arithmetic book series is *Dwà’lì Àkòyn*. The arithmetic manuals are in a series made up of two booklets, numbered 1 and 2 after the generic title. The subtitle to the Arithmetic Book 1 as given in its page 1 is thus ‘A first book of Arithmetic in the Kom language’. Arithmetic Book 1 focuses on numbers and basic operations, whereas Book 2 goes further into length and distance representation and more complex numerical operations.

The arithmetic book used in adult literacy classes was initially designed for the PROPELCA in formal bilingual schools. Its use with adults follows certain adaptations in its contents delivery and pedagogic approach. One principle is that adults are not taught about basic calculation and elementary knowledge of numbers, as is the case with young children. Adults are not drilled about how to subtract or multiply. They already know how to do such operations efficiently. Rather they need to learn how to write down their

knowledge in terms of mathematical symbols and operations. Thus, the pedagogic emphasis is on teaching adults how to write and read arithmetical calculations and mathematical signs.

## 6.8. TRANSITION MANUALS

Transition manuals are used for the linguistics transition from the mother tongue to the official language, i.e. the change in the primary language of teaching. The official language of the region, i.e. English, is gradually introduced to learners. This is part of the adopted teaching model, which plans for this introduction in the later stages of literacy teaching. In terms of the conception of didactic literature, the motivation for a bilingual orientation lies within the MT-OL bilingual policy sustaining the programme, as discussed earlier in 3.4.5. In the planning of literacy programmes and the publication of necessary manuals (as examined earlier in 5.4.2), the adult literacy promoters wanted to bring in the official language at a later stage in the literacy programme. But this should only be done after the basic literacy skills in the mother tongue have been taught. Thus, the transition is built around a transmission of skills across languages. Therefore, the transition manual, as it is intended to help literacy learners gain a grasp on reading and writing in English, is not a book written specifically in the Kom language. It is actually a generic manual used in many languages of the Anglophone Cameroon.

Consequently, the manual used for the transition has a self-explanatory title: *From Mother Tongue to English*. Its design shares some similarities with the primer: each lesson in the book contains the sound(s) of the day, a key sentence and key word, various syllables boxes, functor boxes, sight words, reading texts, other grammar drills, and various writing exercises.

Lessons are based on the learners' prior knowledge and know-how, going from letters-sounds similar in both English and the local language, and gradually focusing more on unknown letters-sounds proper to the official language.

In those adult literacy classes I visited during my fieldwork (as described through the tales from the field in Chapter 5), the use of the transition manual was not current. One reason is because the transition manual is intended for the advanced levels of literacy, as far as adults are concerned, and many of the learners I observed had not yet reached that level.



Another type of transition book which exists in the general array of local language literature in Cameroon is the 'Reading and Writing Books'.<sup>109</sup> They target those native speakers already literate in the official languages, namely French and English, depending on the region of the country. They are often used in teaching adult literacy in urban centres. The lessons in the Reading and Writing Books are designed to be used as bridge between official languages and the mother tongues.

But the choice of didactic materials to be used in literacy classes is also sometimes based on other factors, including availability of books and time constraints of literacy monitors. I observed in the field that the booklet entitled 'Guide to the Kom Alphabet' is the Kom version of the reading and writing book, and its wide usage among literacy monitors is as a teacher's guide. In practice, the monitors often resort to this booklet when preparing for lessons in adult literacy classes, though learners rarely have their own copies. Many monitors consider the 'Guide' as a useful preparation tool because it is full of simple grammatical exercises that enable monitors to drill the learners according to the particular problems they encounter in class.

## **6.9. OTHER DIDACTIC LITERATURE AND TEACHING AIDS**

### **6.9.1. Teaching aids**

In literacy classes, literacy monitors use an array of teaching aids, ranging from pointers, posters and large drawings, to big letters carved in local materials such as wood or bamboo. Barnwell (1985) groups these aids under the term 'supplementary teaching aids (STA)' and writes that they

'...include all teaching materials which the teacher prepares to help him teach the lessons, excluding the primers series itself' (Barnwell, 1985:49, App.)

Flashcards are one of the most used and interesting members of this category. They are made from large pieces of paper, cardboard or other materials such as dry banana skins or tree barks, on which words are written, generally in large characters. The monitor uses them to teach word recognition and pronunciation. Flashcards are practical in that they are specific and can fully direct the attention to the taught words. Sometimes flashcards are also made of short sentences. Flashcards have a great pedagogic importance which should

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<sup>109</sup> A reason for discussing Reading and Writing books here is because the term 'transition book' also generally refers to them in most literature on adult literacy in Cameroon.

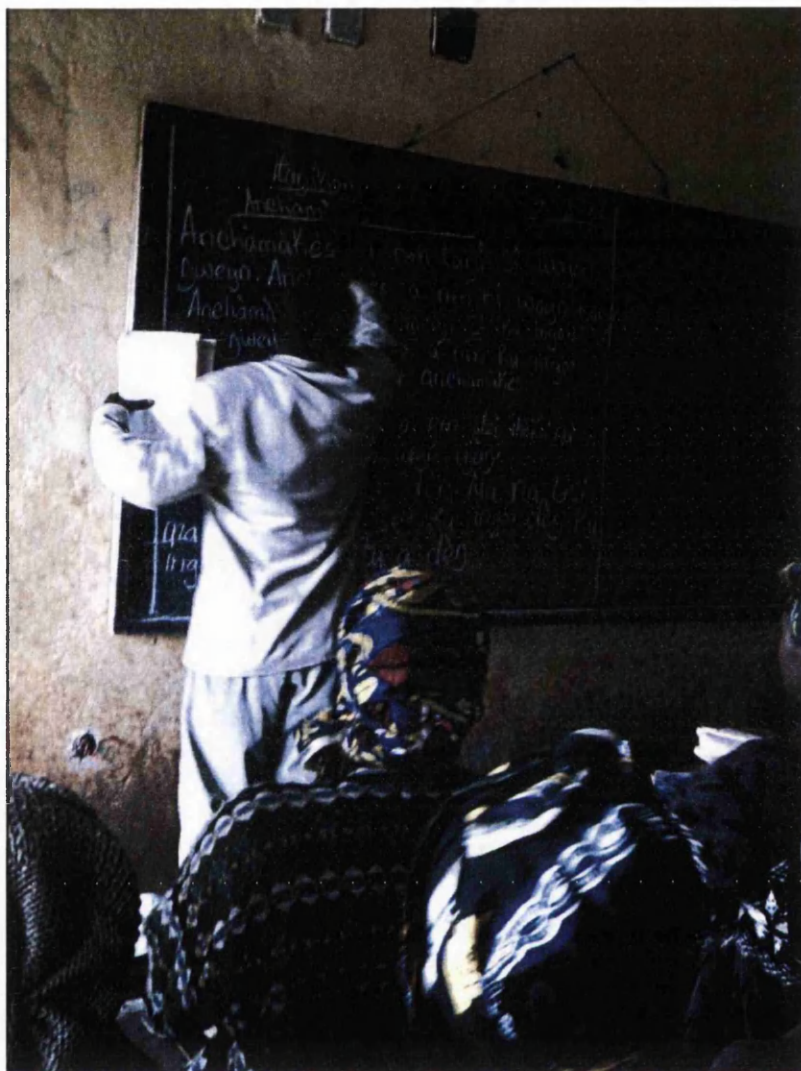
not be underestimated. They ‘force’ learners to achieve effective reading. It has been observed that many struggling first time readers tend to memorise audio strings read in class, or use some clues in the books to memorize rather than actually learn the words or sentences. When they are ‘reading’, they are not effectively deciphering words, but mnemo-technically repeating ‘mental sounds’ they have arranged in their heads based on various cues and contexts. Because a flashcard is unpredictable and is shown outside of the book ‘context’, readers have to effectively recognize what is written on the flashcard to be able to read it. Another usefulness of flashcards relates to the scarcity of books in most literacy classes. When learners do not have their own books, flashcards provide some pre-written texts to be used in reading practices.

### **6.9.2. The Big Book**

Another interesting type of teaching manual found in some Kom adult literacy classes is the Big Book. During this research, I observed a story teaching lesson using the Big Book. This interesting lesson, which I observed at the Muteff literacy centre, was described in detail earlier in 5.5.6.

The Big Book stems from the Story track of the Multi-Strategy literacy method propounded by Mary Stringer (Stringer and Faraclas, 1987). During the fieldwork, I was told by the Kom literacy coordinator that, some years before 2006, Kom literacy monitors attended SIL training sessions on the Multi-Strategy method, where they learned about making and using Big Books.

**Figure 6.12: Teaching of a Big Book story at the Muteff literacy centre**



Presented summarily, the Multi-Strategy method is a complex literacy approach which is made of two tracks to be implemented alongside in the teaching steps: the Workbook track, which is similar to some extent to the primer approach; and the Story track, which is the novel approach in the method. The Story track is based on a story created by the learners with their monitors. This story is written together in situ, i.e. as the lesson goes. The result is that the sentences of the story are produced by the learners in the class and written with accompanying pictures. At the end, a big book is obtained with large pages and simple drawings. The same group work approach is used for the material production of the book, including colouring the pictures, and putting the book together by sewing, gluing or stapling the pages together (as can be seen in Figure 6.13).

Figure 6.13: Cover page of the Ànchàmàkès Big Book

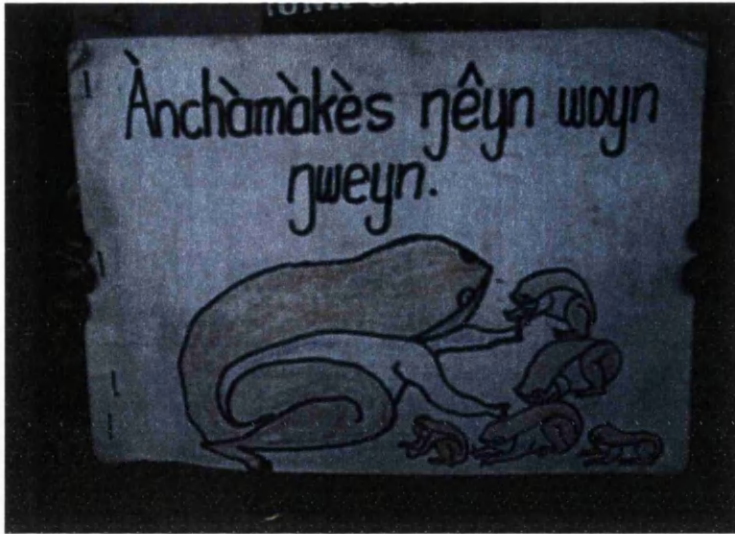
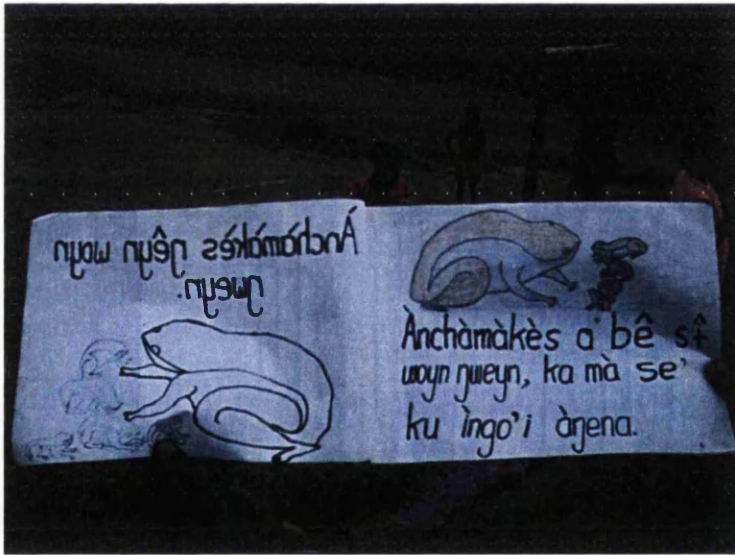


Figure 6.14: A page of the Ànchàmàkès Big Book



My observations in classes and discussions with literacy monitors revealed the Big Book to be the only heritage from the Multi-Strategy training that is used in literacy classes. The many aspects of this complex method are generally not found in literacy classes. But, using the Big Book complements the practice of using the primer-based Gudschinsky method.

## 6.10. THE KOM NEWSBULLETIN

The KLDC publishes an internal information letter entitled *Sa' Gha Kòm* – translating in English as ‘Kom news’, because it fulfils the role of a little local news letter. It is a very modest publication, printed on one single A4 sheet bent to make four A5 pages. Many Kom people are proud of it, even those who are not literate in Kom, and lament that it is not published more regularly. Its periodicity is not as regular as it used to be, as the initial intention was to publish it at least quarterly. When I was on fieldwork, the only copies available were dated months before. The KLDC Publications Secretary and Literacy Coordinator vowed to re-launch it as soon as they could get some funding, since texts and stories could be easily put together for an issue.

Figure 6.15: Cover page of the Kom newsletter, Issue 23.

# SA' GHA KÒM

## NJON FISÙ AKÒYN 23 25F

Month of September

Itu awovzi a wu n-ghi antéyni Sa' gha Kòm:


1. Aziyn a ghél ghi a ghi tí chwò àsámèyn a PROPELCA
2. Bò Ngàyn tí lèrn ngàyn i Bozue
3. Achi a gha'ni-a ni gheli ghi jagni ni ghi nya'ni.
4. Gòmniè fu meyn 'GSS' sí ifyayn i Belo.
5. "Ma kæ kfi a bò wom zue ma."

na yi n-jóf na ghi yi achi ná kéynà a bèn afèyn a Findon fi yi a i Njinikom fi yi a i Belo kámi a michi 8 a njón Fisù afèyn.

Yi ti n-dyéyn na và vzi a wà n-kyá si nyà' sí fi si jàn nó mi itañi iká nèn keli sí ba'ti sí lèrn achi ná ki-à na ki na gha' chwò míchi in jàm antéyni Kòm afèyn. Sí va vzi a wà bú yè'i sí ná nya'á fi jañ keli sí læ sí fvi sí yi achi ná kéynà sí fi sí yeyn njún zì a yi n-ghi kúm áchi ná kéynà.

**Achi a gha'ni-a ni gheli ghi jagni ni ghi nya'ni keyn ko' gví.**

A n-læ ná ghi a njon afèyn a bèn i chwoni a michi nfama ghi



chiynti yi achi a ghañni-a ni gheli ghi a ghi nya' fi jañ a Findon. Miti, kfan ti meyn yeyn

**Aziyn a gheli ghi a ghi tí chwò àsámèyn a PROPELCA**

Aziyn kéynà nin ghi ká a mbaní ghè a àñena tí chwò ateyn. Woyñ ghi a ghi chwò nin ghi 54, ighí a ghi fe i ghi 7. Yi ti n-dyéyn na àñena momsí meyn.

Akeynà nin ghi àziyn a woyñ bèn imò' :-

1. Ghang Titus M.
2. Glory Cha-ah Y.
3. Promise Ndongsah
4. Nkwain Roseline Sanctily Nange

ifvè 1

## 6.11. FUNCTIONAL LITERATURE

The booklets labelled ‘functional literature’ in Cameroon are the result of efforts by development NGOs and other Government bodies to help alleviate poverty and improve living conditions for underprivileged populations. There has been much development in social welfare, public health and community agriculture that has helped to combat social ills, including AIDS, which has become a special focus in view of the devastation it has caused throughout sub-Saharan Africa. In their efforts to eradicate these ills, development agencies have printed and distributed simple, affordable booklets based on themes of crucial interest for villagers and needy populations. These booklets in the local languages were produced, covering among other topics, diarrhoea prevention, AIDS, domestic hygiene, and use of pesticides to protect cash crops and improve yields (as can be seen in Figure 6.16). Because the stated educational strategy of these manuals is to help target adults and contain useful socio-economic content, these booklets fall into the category of ‘functional’ literature. This tallies with the earlier discussion (in Chapter 3) regarding literacy endeavours throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Some development agencies have also called these documents ‘How to’ booklets, since their main purpose can be summed up in showing learners how to do certain practical and technical activities.

Figure 6.16: Page 18 of the Kom pesticides booklet.



14) Wà se si bvisi afi na ki ndu ifwo wa  
timi nô sa aghaf i kœ ziti si bvisi afi ateyn,  
ta ka nô mi àlê' iwùyn fikà' à kà keli afi ki  
ighel-ighel.

Keep the vaporizer (spray) in a good distance from the object to  
be sprayed in order to get uniform treatment.

18

An economical production technique used for many functional booklets is the 'shell books' technique. The initial copy of the book is generally written in the official language, in this case English. A series of related pictures is adopted. An effort is made to have standard or cross-cultural pictures appropriate to most rural grassroots communities, at least at the regional level. The text content is reduced to essential information, both to cut down the costs and to make learning easier for neo-literates. Many of the development agencies active in Cameroon cover large and various linguistic communities. The technique is therefore to keep the pictures of the book, and to change for each targeted language the written text, translating it into the local language. For this reason, many books are produced with much the same editing format and illustrations. The initial copy in the official language is therefore like a sort of 'shell', which can be emptied, and into which new textual contents can be 'poured in' as necessary. The 'shell book' technique is also

used by many Christian and Bible translation agencies in their production of Biblical extracts and Gospels in local languages.

## **6.12. TRADITIONAL AND CULTURAL LITERATURE**

When discussing the array of Kom publications, I have attempted to draw a distinction between traditional and cultural literature, and what can be termed fictional literature. The distinction is rooted in the socio-cultural background from which each is inspired. Traditional and cultural literature covers those publications presenting the oral culture, which is part of the artistic and linguistic traditions of Kom. In this domain are riddles, proverbs, folktales, local myths and legends. Fictional literature covers the writings stemming from the creativity of a particular author, but which are not part of the long standing oral literature of the community. Traditional and cultural literature thus existed before it was written, whereas fictional literature is created by an author and becomes part of the public domain through their publication. Short stories and poetry also fall within the realm of fictional literature.

In Table 6.2 below, I have listed the various Kom publications with their titles, contents and domains of usage. In that table, when listing a publication under traditional and cultural literature, I'm accounting for the cultural rooting of the publications, whether or not they are published by specific authors.

## **6.13. KOM LITERATURE AND DOMAINS OF USAGE**

### **6.13.1. English in Kom books**

The vast majority of written literature found in the Kom land is not in the Kom language. While mainstream literature in English or French found in the Kom environment is not part of my present research, it is worth noting that literature in Kom language contains some official language, mainly English. This is found in three forms:

- a) introductory information, such as sub-titles, indication of authorship, series and publisher's references, preface, introduction to the book contents, sometimes a summary of the contents;



- b) didactic guidance notes: they are engrained as necessary in some lessons in pedagogic manuals. This applies mainly to the pre-primer and the first arithmetic book. They are originally for the exclusive attention of the literacy monitors;<sup>110</sup>
- c) full translations of lessons and stories at the end of most booklets.

Translations in the official language are not an integral part of those manuals, in the sense that the translated content is not necessary for teaching purposes. With the exception of guidance notes,<sup>111</sup> English found in Kom books can be treated as secondary and of less significance for the purpose of each book. This applies also to non pedagogic publications, some of which do not have any English translation.

Most of the titles presented in Table 6.2 are those publications whose main language of writing is Kom. Two notable exceptions are the *Guide to the Kom Alphabet* and the *Kom-English Lexicon*, both of which are OL-MT bilingual publications.

### 6.13.2. Religious literature

Table 6.2 presents in some detail various Biblical extracts and other Christian pamphlets. As their goal is evangelisation, the production of their contents doesn't fall within the remit of KLDC, since it is statutorily a lay organisation.<sup>112</sup> Christian churches and other Christian-related bodies such as CABTAL spearhead the translation of such religious literature, but KLDC has much control of these documents as they fall within local language publications. In fact, KLDC actually lends its institutional umbrella to their publication. This is perceived locally as a sign of the control KLDC has on most literature in Kom.

The Bible itself and various religious pamphlets published within the Christian circles also play an important role in the promotion of literacy. Many literacy participants claim that their motivation to attend literacy classes is to be able to read by themselves the

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<sup>110</sup> It is worth mentioning that all literacy monitors are perfectly bilingual in Kom and English. Most of them were actually first educated in the official school system using exclusively English.

<sup>111</sup> The guidance notes engrained in English in many lessons in the pre-primers and the arithmetic books were actually kept in English because of economic constraints. There was not enough funding to produce separate teachers' pedagogic guides for each of these manuals, as should have been the case with sufficient financial means.

<sup>112</sup> One reason for this is the necessity to interest and cover all speakers of the Kom language irrespective of their religious and political orientations and denominations.

Holy Scriptures and the various religious pamphlets published in Kom. Historically, the Christian Churches and missionaries are a strong driving force behind literacy promotion in Kom. This influence of the Church as an institution on local literacy, and the complex synergy between Christian literature and adult literacy, will be further analysed in Chapter 7.

### **6.13.3. On domains of usage**

As concerns the domains of usage of local language literature, my interviews and discussions as well as my class observations while I was on the field demonstrate that most literature in the Kom language, though initially intended for specific purpose (as stated in the titles and subtitles) end up being used in other domains. One interesting instance of this situation is the case of primers initially written for the primary schools, most of which end up being used in adult literacy classes. The local Kom newsbulletin sometimes is used in literacy classes, as is cultural literature such as collections of riddles and proverbs, or creative literature such as books of poems and short stories. These documents are extensively used in higher classes of the primary schools, and in adult literacy classes. Because this research gives primacy to usage, the domains of usage in Table 6.2 are defined in relation both to the areas where the documents listed are used, and to their original intended purpose.

**Table 6.2: Kom literature<sup>113</sup> and domains of usage**

Title (and subtitle)	Type / Content	Domains of usage							
		Church	Formal education (Primary school)	Social communication / General information	Adult literacy	Agriculture	Hygiene and Public health	Cultural and traditional literature	Fictional literature
Ghesinà Ye' i Itanjikom 1	Primer 1		X		X				
Ghesinà Ye' i Itanjikom 2	Primer 2		X		X				
Ghesinà Ye' i Itanjikom 3	Post-Primer 1		X		X				
Ghesinà Ye' i Itanjikom 4	Post-Primer 2		X		X				
Ŋwà'li Aköyn 1	Arithmetic Book 1		X		X				
Ŋwà'li Aköyn 2	Arithmetic Book 2		X		X				
Itanjikom i Timlini-i 1	Kom Proverbs 1		X		X			X	
Itanjikom i Timlini-i 2	Kom Proverbs 2		X		X			X	
Itanjikom i Timlini-i 3	Kom Proverbs 3		X		X			X	
Isisi i TaŊnankoli (The Revenge of Tangnankoli)	Play (Drama)		X		X			X	
Ngäyn kùm bô Gvèyn	The Parable of the Sower (Bible extract)	X			X				
Fiyiniifi i fayti Mbzi	How the World Began (Biblical pamphlet)	X			X				
Ŋwà'li Lùk	The Gospel of Luke (Bible extract)	X			X				
Jesus i Làli si Ikfi	The Easter Story (Bible extract)	X			X				
Guide to the Kom Alphabet	Transition Manual (Reading and Writing Book)				X				
Afi a Gvéynsi	Safety Rules for Using Pesticides			X	X		X		
Si ná lémm ngéŋ Zyá yi ghi ná ilayn i	Personal Hygiene (Personal and public health)			X	X			X	
Kom-English Lexicon	Bilingual OL-MT Dictionary (Provisional)			X	X				
Nehni Itu' i Ŋwà'li Fiyini	Daily Life in the Bible Times (Biblical pamphlet)	X			X				

<sup>113</sup> Based on data available when I was on the field in 2006. To produce the table I worked closely with Patrick Nges, the then Kom Literacy Coordinator, and later on with Francis Ngongbi, the then Aduk Area Literacy Supervisor.

Ngâyñ kûm wùl ì Sámáliyá ì Jùj	Parable of the Good Samaritan (Bible extract)	X				X			
Ŋwà'ì Fiyini, Mikây i n Fi	New Testament	X				X			
Chùè nì nì mu mi Layn Kfeyni-à	The Sun Purifies Water (Water purification)					X			
Ŋwà'ì Michi mi Kòm	Kom Diary				X				X
Asi a Ŋwà'ì Itanjikom	Alphabet of the Kom Language (Alphabet chart)			X		X			
Ibzi-i i Jesus	The Birth of Jesus (Bible extract, from the Gospel of Luke)	X				X			
Agvii Ato-a	About Malaria (Public health)					X			X
Ŋwà'ì Ruth	The Book of Ruth (Bible extract)	X							
Sa' Gha Kòm	Kom News (News bulletin)					X			
Ŋwà'ì Gheli Nnum ni ifèl i Gheli Nnum	Gospels and Acts of the Apostles (Collection of Bible extracts)	X				X			
Anchwòti Ikuñ (The Bachelor)	A Short Story			X		X			X
Jesus nin kel ádyá' Si Boesi Ghesinà	Jesus Has the Power to Save Us (Biblical pamphlet, from the Gospel of Mark)	X				X			
Ngâyñ Kûm nji ta yi n-lè Tisa' ti Nchinti Iba'li Itanjikom	Parable of the Lost Sheep (Bible extract) Constitution <sup>114</sup> of the KLDC	X				X		X	
Ngâyñ kûm wùl ì Falási ñeyn wùl ì Táks	Parable of the Tax Collector (Bible extract)	X				X			
Ngâyñ kûm Wáyn ì Lèyni	Parable of the Prodigal Son (Bible extract)	X				X			

<sup>114</sup> The Constitution of the KLDC is included here because all KLDC members themselves consider it as part of the Kom literature. But this foundational document is written in English. One constraint that initially led to that was legal. It is a legal requirement that in order to be recognised as a NGO by the public authorities, key institutional documents such as the Constitution, the internal statutes and the report of the first constitutive meeting must be submitted in one of the two official languages, i.e. French or English.

## **6.14. ADULT LITERACY IN SOCIAL PRACTICES: THE DYNAMICS OF LOCAL LITERATURE**

In order to give a thorough analysis of Kom literature, I will now discuss the dynamics of the Kom literature and publications. It is important to tie the local literature to the institutional development of KLDC, with its interesting links including the institutional connections, the social rooting of the authorship, and the socio-economic ramifications regarding the diffusion and distribution of the local literature. Therefore under ‘the dynamics of local literature’, I will discuss the local synergy that animates local literature. Intrinsically related to these issues are two other dimensions, financial management and sustainability. When discussing sustainability, I will look at the long-term existence of Kom local literature as a permanent feature of the Kom socio-cultural landscape, and I will weigh its sustainability both as cultural and educational products and as markers of a community-rooted and long-term educational enterprise.

### **6.14.1. Partnership in literature production**

Literature production encompasses contents conception, design and authorship. The mastery and control of literature production are key areas for local ownership of the said literature as it is dependent on locally based and well trained human resources. The mechanical process of printing or material mass production is directly related to financial issues and requires less intellectual work. As such, it is dealt with further in this chapter, under financial issues.

The vibrancy of the literacy programme is dependent on the capacity of the KLDC to nurture, to interest and to maintain local authors. Once the pool of authors is developed, technical skills in authorship are sought through various partnerships, especially research and linguistic organisations such as NACALCO and SIL. The following extract from the first preface of Primer 1 – written in 1984 by Mbeh George Ngong and Emmanuel Chia<sup>115</sup> – is very telling about this strong institutional networking in Kom literature production:

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<sup>115</sup> Dr George Mbeh is today a renowned social scientist, linguist and anthropologist. He was one the first young Kom literates and trained authors. As a strong promoter of national language development, he was the first National Secretary-General of NACALCO. Emmanuel Chia is Professor of African Linguistics, and was Vice-Rector of the University of Buea after a long career at the University of Yaounde. One of the leading expert linguists on Kom language, he has remained a strong promoter of Kom literacy.

‘...This publication is a result of work done during the linguistic courses offered by the Societe Internationale de Linguistique (S.I.L.) in Yaounde. These courses were attended by Joseph Kimbi and Thomas Nchamcham (summer of 1982) and by Mbeh George Ngong (summer of 1983) who is the co-author of this primer. It is also the result of painstaking analysis of the Kom language carried out under the supervision of Prof. Ulla Wieseemann. It is thanks to the devotedness of Dr. Olive Shell that this publication has been made possible. The completion of this work was made possible by the first commitment, deep interest and moral assistance of the Kom Bum Development Union, (Yaounde). This primer is based upon the “Revised Guide to the Kom Alphabet,” itself inspired by the General alphabet of Cameroonian Languages. ...’

Also related to inter-institutional partnership in literature production, it is worth noting the additional sub-preface in the second edition of the same primer, in 1996:

‘... This 1996 revision was made by the Kom Language Development Committee, in particular by Pius Loh, the Literacy coordinator, technical assistance was provided by Randy Jones George Shultz, S.I.L. advisors to the K.L.D.C.’

The above statements epitomize the complex network of individual and institutional partners in literature production in Kom. With the case of the first Kom primer, one can observe a multi-tiered network interweaving the local, the national and the international levels:

- at the international level, the help of SIL provided KLDC with a technical training necessary for budding Kom authors;
- at national level, NACALCO, KLDC and the Yaounde-based KBDU (Kom Bum Development Union) partnered and worked hand in hand to help produce the primer,
- more locally, KLDC and specific Kom natives put their energy, dedication and time together to make the publication of Primer 1 come true.

A key operational partner which is both beneficiary and co-agent in this network is KLDC. It functions on a dual status, i.e. both institutionally as a local NGO, and individually through specific Kom natives who have a personal commitment to the development of literacy. In this realm of activities for the production of local literature, KLDC stands at one end of the chain as a beneficiary of technical and financial help from SIL and NACALCO. At the other end, it is a benefactor to itself and the local community as a provider and promoter of local authorship. Another notable element running through the technical development of Kom literature and which stems from national-level efforts is

the conformity of the Kom alphabet to the General Alphabet of Cameroon Languages, as the authors of the primer rightly stated in the above-mentioned preface.

As I will discuss further in this chapter, this institutional development of KLDC specifically in the production of local literature is crucial to the local ownership, management and sustainability of local literature as a staple of local literacy. But before I discuss this, I will first examine the issue of diffusion of local literature.

#### **6.14.2. Diffusion**

Diffusion here is not used in the traditional sense of lexical diffusion as propounded in historical linguistics, similar to the wave theory about how speech variations spread (Crystal, 2003:138, 498). I discuss diffusion in terms of information to improve access and use. Access and use of local literature are dependent on availability, which itself is related to demand from potential target beneficiaries. This in turn is based on knowledge of existence of the said products. A prerequisite to any good use of various titles produced in the Kom language is diffusion of information about the local literature.

In fact, Kom literature authorship starts within the circles of Kom trainee teachers and literacy monitors. Either during the training or after it, neo-literates are encouraged to produce texts of various lengths which in turn are used to compile specific literature. This is a local production axis for a number of the didactic materials.

However, one problem is that the public is not directly part of these trainings, and is not initially aware of the production of local literature. It thus becomes important to design a system to keep the public informed. Any attempt to do this has to be based on existing channels of communication within the society. In other words, information must be made available in domains where people interact and collect other information in their daily lives. The main channel developed by KLDC to diffuse information about its literature is through locally organised groups. They are generally of three types, based on the regrouping factor inherent to each:

- regional: people originating from a same area or hamlet, and living outside of their main homeland tend to come together to reinforce their unity as people from the same geographic area;
- religious: within the Churches, various groups are created according to specific domains of interest within the Churches, and thus meet regularly to implement

their specific activities;

- cultural: a vast array of cultural organisations and societies abounds in the land. The main motive of their regrouping is to maintain or perform some cultural activities such as traditional dances or professional activities;
- political: many political parties are present and active in Kom. Though their partisan political coverage is national, Kom is a miniature version of the national stage with local branches of political parties waging their political battles earnestly.

KLDC has developed within its executive board some specific posts such as Publications Secretary and Area Representatives. Among their duties are public relations, that is, making contacts and disseminating information among the various organised groups that are active in different corners of the land. In the name of KLDC, they attend local meetings in their geographic or socio-cultural areas and make personal contacts to let both leaders of various meetings and members know about new titles and their availability for purchase. One operational technique used is information relay through contact persons known as multiplying agents. They are key people such as groups' leaders, who will 'multiply' the information to others. Because of their social positions, these group leaders bring together individuals who might not otherwise easily meet. Thus, a larger number of people will be informed both about the titles published and their significance.

Efforts to inform as many people as possible are coupled with a large diffusion within the various literacy classes themselves. One of the KLDC's stated goals is that even those who are not in a literacy class should know about the books and purchase them in order to gain interest to come to literacy classes. Connected to this is another related issue, i.e. the distribution of the local literature.

### **6.14.3. Distribution**

Distribution concerns the availability of published materials. But since those materials are generally printed outside of the Kom land, prerequisites for good distribution are firstly safe transport of publications to Kom, and secondly efficient storage once they



reach their destination. KLDC has an office in Fundong within the premises of the divisional delegation of the Ministry of Youths Affairs and Sports.<sup>116</sup>

A small proportion of books are made available outside of the Kom land especially in major cities where there are some urban literacy activities in Kom. Also, in the cities, urban dwellers who are natives of Kom do purchase some titles either to read or learn from them, or to keep proudly as markers of their linguistic and cultural identity. This is another marker of the cultural pride I discussed earlier.

As for the large bulk of books received by KLDC, they are kept in various quantities at different local geographic points. It is worth mentioning the most established points: the KLDC office in Fundong, the Chairman's residence, the CABTAL office, and the Publications Secretary's residence. There are also specific bookshops in the major sub-divisional headquarters and regional markets places, namely Belo, Njinikom, and Fundong. Finally there are some key KLDC Executive members who also have substantial quantities of books: the Literacy Committee Chairman, the General Treasurer, and the Literacy Coordinator. It is worth mentioning that the Churches also are major distribution points, especially when it comes to the many Christian titles published in the language (as listed in Table 6.2).

Transport in the Kom land is a major issue. This is due to long distances among different Kom quarters – estimated in tens of kilometres for many areas; the very mountainous nature of the landscape; and the scarcity of motorable roads and public transport vehicles (as can be seen in Table 5.1 as concerns distances to Muteff and Juambum). Many hamlets of Kom do not have public transport. In view of all these factors, efforts are made to ensure a balanced geographical distribution of publications. In some cases, copies are left with Area Literacy Coordinators as they are the closest to the people in each of their regions.

One major challenge attached to distribution is the follow up of various titles and their sales. This duty falls within the remit of the Publications Secretary, who relies much on colleagues and partners in the literacy programme, since his is a rather arduous task. Book inventories are produced to allow follow up and accountability, as can be seen in

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<sup>116</sup> This ministry's name (Ministry of Youths Affairs and Sports) is a misnomer because it hides the fact that this department is also in charge of adult literacy. In fact, at the creation of this ministry in the 1960s, the name contained also '...and of popular education'. So, this is actually the government department within which adult literacy activities are coordinated. This is one of the main reasons why KLDC applied to them for an office, as a local partner NGO helping this ministry achieve its proclaimed goals. Yet another key reason was public image and social 'respect' attached to being housed in a government ministerial department.

Figure 6.17 below. Consequently, one could state that there is an established system of distribution of local literature in Kom.

Figure 6.17: Kom book inventory in 2004.

**KOM BOOK INVENTORY 2004**

	Registration Cards	Transition	Alpha Charts	Guide to Kom Alpha ✓	Pre-Primer	Primer 1	Primer 2	Old Primer 2	Primer 3 ✓	Math 1 ✓	Les Ikon	Koth	Lake	Bible Times	Creation	Birth of Christ Book	Birth of Christ Tale	Easter Story Book	Easter Story Tale	Parables of Jesus	Proverbs 1	Proverbs 2	Proverbs 3	Hygiene	Maris	Peasdale Book ✓	Peasdale Poster	Sun pantsa Wact	Natle 2	Primer 4	
Quantity	556		78	97	12	1523	40	290	10	17	151	75	18	57	167	1				113	58	77	174	56	207	69	38	180	640	981	
Price	200	750	300	500	750	300	600		700	500	2000	500	800	200	200	100				100	600	600	600	200	300	200	75	100	2000		
SIL Bds					2									3						10		2									
SIL Yds				10																10											
Pv				1	1	8		1	1				3		29												4	23	5	5	
Bookshop Funding																															
Ngoni French	05	4	2		0	2							1	10	10					15	3	3		3			3	8			
Marvel Nds	10	5	1		1	1		1							5					12								17			
French Karamani Anzi			7		8	4					3				5						2	4	4					9	5		
Yong French		4	2		1	1								2	5					3	1		6				8	3			
Monograph Ngoni			5		1	1					5		6	3	10	1				5	1	1	3			10	30	5	5		
CARTAL BK Dep. Bds	472	62	43	12	1	11	290		4	118	75	3	50	61						25	27	38	150	37	207	31	14	51	5		
Ngn Patrick			3		3	2		3				1			17													26	8		
Bob Linnu A Bds			4		8	6		1			2		1	1										5	3			5		8	
Ngoni Charles	69	83	19		1416	7		4	8				2	8	25					3	15	22	5	10			614		948		
Not sold			3		83						3																			13	
David	556		78	97		1440	40		10	13	130	75	18	57	167	1				81	49	71	172	54		69	38	180	633	969	
Revenue from sales less than 10%			1350F		4500F						1800																			7500F	

TOTAL SALES = 56.610F  
TURN OVER

Source: KLDC Archives, obtained in 2006 from the Publications Coordinator, Charles Nkuna in Fundong.

6.14.4. Financial issues and the revolving fund principle

Financial costs are a major hurdle faced by literature promoters and authors in the Kom language. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the commitment of local authors, and of KLDC as their institutional umbrella, is the driving force that has helped in the production of most manuscripts, many of which took years to be in editable format. From there, the next hurdle is that of electronic editing, then finalisation of the manuscript into a format ready to be printed. Both SIL and NACALCO have helped much over the years in those areas. In addition, KLDC managed to get a computer with appropriate fonts for

publishing in Kom. Over the last years, there has been the problem of permanent staff to run the Kom literacy office, but at least they manage to be as active as they can.

One strategy put in place over the years to tackle the financial issues as they directly relate to literature production is the creation of a revolving fund for local publications. Instigated mainly by NACALCO and its funding partners, the idea is to fund the publication of local literature as a free loan whose general conditionality is its internal sustainability. To do this, the local language committee receives a given amount of money for each manual submitted and approved for funding. The booklets produced are sold at a very low price, since their production is subsidised. They are not made for profit in the primary sense of recovering initial investment, production costs, and making financial profits. The retail price is calculated basically to help cover the printing costs and other necessary charges incurred by the local language committee. Still, these low prices ensure more socio-economic justice as they attempt to match the low purchasing power of inhabitants in rural communities. The number of copies produced and their prices are estimated in such a way that if all the printed copies were sold out, then the language committee would in theory be able to pay back the money they received (as a pseudo loan for publication – this money being a pseudo loan since it is actually a grant). Consequently, the revolving fund principle is designed so that the money coming back into the local language committee's coffers is kept there with the sole aim to publish further manuals. In other words, the sales monies constitute the revolving fund which can later help the institution face the costs of further publications. In this way, it is hoped that after receiving external funding to publish a number of titles, and to sell them, the local language committee should then be able to manage its own publication funding with revenues obtained from earlier sales. This is a key step towards the sustainable development of the KLDC as a local institution. The system in theory is well thought out and the KLDC has tried over the years to abide by the rules to maintain a revolving fund for its publications.

The managerial and financial stumbling block on the way to success is the fact that the overall resources of the KLDC are scarce. As a consequence, its Executive Board has to resort to cuts and redistribution of the literature monies in their possession for other areas equally important as publications, such as training of monitors and token allowances to literacy monitors. In the end, it is very difficult to keep publications' resources just for the future publications as would be required in the revolving fund principle. But the idea is still maintained as a key guiding principle to create the possibility to continue to publish independently of external funding.

#### **6.14.5. Sustainability**

In the Kom literacy programme, sustainability operates around the interrelated issues of local agency, institutional development and contents control over didactic materials.

Embedding literacy within social networks and meanings calls attention to the need for social change. The target beneficiaries of adult literacy are adults whose lives are enmeshed in existential necessities. Their instrumentalisation of literacy for asserting their cultural and linguistic identities, or challenging the hegemonic system of values orphanising them, is legitimate, and worthy of promotion. In such a social change agenda, major actors are both the locals and their indigenous institutions, and external agents such as international NGOs and development bodies.

For many NGOs in rural communities, economic dependency has conditioned the provision of reading materials. Since many NGOs lack the financial resources to produce the various written materials they need, they tend to resort to external agents such as international development agencies or international private NGOs. Within this binary relationship, the external agents in most cases own the resources to produce the reading materials for literacy and other written communication in the communities. Thus, they end up having broad control over the nature and contents of the literature available in the communities.

Sen (1999) describes agency as the human capacity to act and bring about change, the results of which may be judged in terms of the agent's own values and objectives regardless of their assessment in terms of external criteria. Pertinent changes in the power structures and in the values are dependent on the control of the available literature as a source of information and/or education. Local agents, because of their status as insiders, be they individuals or institutions, are interested in carrying out an agenda which fits with the aspirations of their communities (actually themselves, as they are integral parts of the community). But the agenda of external agents does not always match or equate with the preoccupations of the local agents. The situation encountered daily in African rural areas is characterised by the dependency syndrome, whereby local efforts are annihilated through a vicious circle of dependency in terms of economic means, which in turn impedes any sort of cultural autonomy. In practice, local community organisations mean well to defend and promote values and activities that could directly benefit local people. Unfortunately, they

lack the financial means to implement their various projects. Turning to the readily available funds from various external agents named above puts them in a 'beggar' position with no possibility to control the products that they receive. Most often they can neither condition nor significantly influence the manufacture and delivery of these products. The resulting pattern is an appalling situation of cultural consumerism and dependency. It is marked by the provision of inadequate equipment and various development materials that in the end do not contribute much to real needs of local populations. Throughout Cameroon and Africa, examples abound of thousands of various booklets produced outside of the continent in European languages, which are dumped in African villages to needy populations that actually can not make proper use of these publications. Yet, as Sen (1999) writes,

'With adequate social opportunities, individuals can effectively shape their own destiny and help each other. They need not be seen primarily as passive recipients of the benefits of cunning development programs. There is indeed a strong rationale for recognizing the positive role of free and sustainable agency (...).' Sen (1999: 11).

The entire writing process of such otherwise needed documents and the centrality of their language of production are of major importance. Directly related to this is the issue of control of the contents of the literature. In general, one observes a pattern of an agreement to help rural communities, but a divergence in implementational methodologies of the agents in play. What ensues is a clash of agendas as each institution in play tends to focus on its specific agenda. The case of KLDC and the production of relevant literature for its adult literacy programme provide a challenge to these unfruitful relationships. In other words, the KLDC strives to implement its cultural agenda despite its financial dependence on external agents to produce the various booklets used in some literacy classes. One key to the success of its strategy lies in its mastery of the contents of the produced literature. This mastery itself is rooted in the fact that the materials are produced in the local language.

The external agents, such as missionaries and other researchers from international NGOs such as SIL or intergovernmental institutions present in the Kom community, do have some mastery of the Kom language, but they do not in any way match the expertise acquired over the years within the KLDC by its members. Therefore, when the KLDC members meet to establish their publications agenda, they try their best to give priority to those materials that carry their cultural interests and are worthy of use in various literacy classes and the local community. They select for example to publish a collection of

folktales, basing their judgement solely on their desire to preserve the local traditions and oral literature. They may choose to produce a booklet on local history so that the intergenerational transmission of local history is maintained. They are the best placed to produce draft manuscripts of these various documents. Once they have prepared the manuscripts, they then seek funding from the various external agents active in the community for development purposes. As these agents provide the technical and material means to help in the production chain, they do not have a real possibility to modify or change the contents of the materials that are submitted to them for funding. Not only are those materials well written in the Kom language that most external agents do not have mastery of, but the contents of these materials reflect the desire of the local KLDC acting in the name of the whole community. KLDC aims therefore to produce literature that is relevant both for their own endogenous systems of values and for their educational activities in the literacy classes. As a case in point, the SIL members sometimes provide the equipment to process and edit the manuscripts, and give some funding to get them printed. But because the KLDC shows the capacity to control the contents of the literature, the KLDC's cultural agenda then prevails. Therefore, even though they initially seek external assistance in the production of local literature, KLDC and its members ensure that they end up receiving printed documents that fit with their expressed needs, and that help in their local community development. An extract of the preface of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Kom post-primer, *Ghesìnà Ye'i Itaṅikom 4*, is very telling of this operational framework:

‘... The texts of these [post-primer's] stories have been written by various teachers of the Kom language, during the training courses from 1990 – 1999, and from the Kom newsletter writers. The Kom literature producer, LOH Pius, selected (...) them (...) and wrote the accompanying exercises. We would like to thank these authors whose names are mentioned after the title of each story.’

Based on the foregoing discussion, the KLDC makes the case that local language institutions with trained, well-organised and motivated human resources can struggle to put forth their local agenda despite the dependency which reduces their operational capacities. By ensuring that their literature production agenda is implemented under their own control, grassroots institutions such as the KLDC can ensure that the results delivered are efficient and useful to the target community.

Actually in a number of local language NGOs, as in the case of the KLDC, the application of the principle of a revolving fund, coupled with meticulous management, could ensure that financial dependency is gradually overcome.

## 6.15. SUMMARY

I set out in this chapter to give a panoramic view of books and documents produced in the Kom language. As my research focuses on literacy, it was necessary to start with those documents initially intended for use in literacy. This is the case for pre-primers, primers, post-primers, arithmetic manuals, and reading and writing books. But, there are also many other publications which play a significant role in the literacy programme, even though their initial function is not for the teaching of reading and writing in the language. Among such publications are the Bible in Kom and its various published Gospels and other extracts, and some functional booklets on agriculture and health. The importance of these other documents in the overall dynamics of literacy in Kom can not be stressed enough: as seen in this chapter, the social values and uses of literacy in Kom are mediated and sustained through all such literature.

In sum, the Kom literature in its variety and vibrancy goes farther than the literacy manuals. Globally viewed, this literature therefore performs at the same time two major functions; first, the purely didactic function of helping learners in literacy classes; and second, a socio-cultural function as it is the product of an endogenous cultural agenda. Concerning the second function, the impact and use of the local literature in the community extend beyond the literacy programme.

## **Chapter 7.**

# **Literacy in social practices, and in relationship with identities and social values**

### **7.1. INTRODUCTION**

My research on adult literacy in Kom was initially an empirical project, first because it was grassroots-driven, observing a natural and social phenomenon. As Dunleavy (2003) writes about empirical doctoral research, I was ‘conducting a case study in a locality or organization not previously or recently studied’ (Dunleavy, 2003:27). It was empirical also because the research was aimed at collecting and analysing data from the field, and presenting a naturalistic and operational picture of literacy practices as they unfold in the Kom language and community.<sup>117</sup>

In the preceding chapters, I have provided sociolinguistic information and the national and local backgrounds of the research; and the questions on the ‘where, what, who, when, and how’ have been answered as extensively as possible. All this has thus provided a detailed account of the institutional organisation of literacy, the didactic materials, and literacy teaching in classes. But there is far more to literacy, and it is necessary to encompass what Bhola calls ‘an expanded understanding of literacy’ (Bhola, 1994:10). He writes:

Literacy is not merely (...) the skill of reading and writing. It is a powerful potential – a quality with many uses – given to individual men and women (...) who become literate.

Literacy makes it possible for individuals to use their minds in new and different ways. (...)

Literacy is a social process. It brings the literate person new respect and social status (Bhola, 1994:10-11).

In view of this expanded understanding of literacy, interesting questions now come into play, relating to the socio-cultural meanings of literacy in Kom, and what literacy mediates in that community. Therefore this chapter will examine these issues and their various facets: the values attached to literacy in Kom; what literacy mediates within the realm of the local socio-cultural knowledge and value systems; what literacy is an instrument of; the significant uses of literacy, from the perspective of the Kom adult

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<sup>117</sup> I have discussed earlier in Chapter 2 (2.4) the polymorphic semantics of Kom as an ethnonym, a glossonym and a toponym.



learners; and from a more social and broader perspective, how KLDC engineers its own socio-cultural agenda.

## **7.2. ADULT LITERACY MEDIATING COMMUNITY IDENTITIES AND VALUES: LOCAL AGENCY AND INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE KLDC**

I have discussed in detail in Chapters 2, 3 and 5 the KLDC's history, its institutional networking, its situation in the national framework of literacy programmes, and its implementation and delivery of literacy classes in the Kom area. Therefore, my discussion of KLDC in the following paragraphs will expand more on issues of its institutional identity, its socio-cultural meanings and what in Bourdieusian discourse (Bourdieu, 1991) falls within the symbolic roles and values of literacy.

### **7.2.1. Centrality of local agency and creative action**

Agency as a concept describes the capacity of humans, either as individuals or as organised groups, to make choices, and to impose those choices through actions on the world around them. Agency is thus achieved through actors or agents who perform the necessary actions for social change (Sen, 1999; Trudell, 2005). A key feature of local agency is that the local community is its original and main sphere of operation. A focus in my research is on local agency as a key feature of social change in the African grassroots in general, and in Kom in particular.

Any form of group action is driven by a synergy that determines the existence of the group identity in relation to its actions. By way of consequence, the meaning of the group actions can be analysed with Bergson's theory of 'creative action' (Bergson, 1911). The renowned French philosopher writes:

Every human work in which there is invention, every voluntary act in which there is freedom, every movement of an organism that manifests spontaneity, brings something new into the world (Bergson, 1911:239).

According to Bergson, the creative action is not only the driving force behind every group synergy, but it is also a demiurgic matrix within which and by which new meanings and values are created and maintained. Bergson captured the idea of ‘creative action’ with the French locution *‘faire et se faire en ce faisant’*,<sup>118</sup> in other words, ‘to do and be by so doing’. This encapsulates an intrinsic aspect of local agency which can be observed in the institutional and endogenous agenda of the literacy activities of the KLDC. As an institution, the KLDC was born amidst a socio-cultural system of educational meanings and values constructed from the colonial experience. As discussed earlier in Chapter 3, one feature of this experience was the demise of the vibrancy and centrality of local language for communication and intergenerational transmission of knowledge and know-how. But the KLDC, through its literacy programme, endeavours to recapture a new educational identity for Kom. By so doing, there is a new construction of meaning whereby one observes a clear emergence of *‘a reality which is making itself in a reality which is unmaking itself’*<sup>119</sup> (Bergson, 1911:239).

By taking a leading role in local agency for literacy, the KLDC ascribes new meaning to local literacy in Kom: it becomes a tool for a novel approach to education for the ordinary Kom adult who was excluded from access to reading and writing. For the KLDC itself as an organisation, this creates a new meaning to its own institutional development and permanence, as it becomes the main agent and the flag bearer for the preservation of the local language. It does this through the development and use of the written form of Kom. Such an operational orientation is similar to what some socio-cultural theorists have posed as social constructionism, i.e. ‘an ontological position that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors’ (Bryman, 2004:538). Therefore, the social and cultural dimension of the whole Kom literacy enterprise can be perceived as fitting within a constructionist orientation.

The socio-cultural agenda of the KLDC is to reinstate the Kom language at the centre of an educational process. At first, this agenda seems to mainly target adults, but observing it closely, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 6, it applies also to children, as the vitality of PROPELCA in that community is more than telling of this trend. It is worth remembering that such an agenda takes place in a situation where the same local language was for long excluded and even claimed incapable of mediating any long-term

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<sup>118</sup> Italicisation mine.

<sup>119</sup> Italicisation as per original.

transmission of knowledge. In such a situation, using the local language as a medium of literacy instruction becomes a cultural quest. Consequently, its success gives the actors in play, namely the KLDC literacy monitors and learners, new meanings to their identities, and rebuilds their self-esteem and cultural dignity. The recapture of the helm by the local community, in terms of making decisions concerning community education – fully for adults, and as said earlier, partially but significantly for school children – gives new hope for the institutional development of KLDC and its sustainability in terms of its socio-cultural usefulness and community support.

### **7.2.2. Cultural pride**

Another motivation that sustains literacy in Kom is cultural pride. Normally people already educated in English are not the main target of local literacy endeavours. But many Kom people already literate in English have regained some cultural consciousness; and their cultural pride in their local language caught my attention. Even though such people represent a minority in most literacy classes, many of them still attend.

A similar interest is manifest among urban dwellers who are involved in promoting and participating in adult literacy in Kom. Actually, urban literacy has gained some renewed interest in recent years in Cameroonian cities, and I briefly discussed the recent developments in urban literacy in Chapters 2 and 3. In those cities where the language committees have active branches, and where they run regular literacy centres, many urban residents literate in the official languages send their children, and even go themselves, to literacy classes. In cities such as Douala and Yaounde, some of the most vibrant literacy centres using local languages are the Kom centres. Such a development is a result of the Kom cultural pride noted above. My study does not focus much on urban literacy. Yet, as argued consistently by many other authors who have studied literacy in Cameroon, the urban literacy trend indicates there is a case to be made that many Africans who are literate in the languages of the colonizing countries still retain pride in their own language and in perpetuating literacy in these languages (Robinson, 1995; Gfeller, 2000; Sadembouo, 2002; Nguesso, 2005; Trudell, 2005; Nforgan, 2007).

### 7.2.3. Remuneration of monitors and sustainability of the literacy programme

In the implementation of local agency for literacy, I discussed in Chapter 5 how literacy monitors are among the key local agents of the enterprise. They are the people with educational power whose transmission can lead to change in the life of learners. Their role is thus central in the planned expansion of a Kom literate community. As I will discuss further in this chapter, the contribution of literacy monitors is crucial in the increase of symbolic capital attached to the local language in terms of local attitudes and pride and preservation of local cultures.

But a problem in the Kom literacy programme is the low financial incentives available to literacy monitors. This issue is important to the future of the programme as the literacy monitors are the cornerstones of the literacy enterprise. Matters of finances are complex to solve, especially when monetary resources are scarce in rural areas such as Kom. But again, as mentioned earlier in Chapter 5, the commitment of most literacy monitors has not only to with earning money; it is more about a network of social values and commitments to preserve the Kom language, which they perceive as a local treasure. It is useful to examine briefly the various connections regarding the financial contributions to literacy monitors.

In Chapter 3, I showed the close connection between the formal school institutions where adult literacy monitors teach, and the various adult literacy centres. Most literacy monitors are volunteers in their adult literacy work, but earn a small salary from their formal teaching positions. This gives the adult literacy programme a lifeline. As a result, there exists a permanent body of trained monitors who maintain the literacy programme while continuing to improve their learning and teaching skills through another paid job. Their jobs as formal teachers require nearly the same skills as literacy monitors, and such a connection supports the synergy of the local literacy programme in terms of local personnel. Such a connection is not totally unique to Kom, but it is perhaps the strongest so far throughout the whole country (Gfeller, 2000; Sadembouo, 2002; Ngueffo, 2005; Trudell, 2005). This strength has developed from the success of the formal PROPELCA programme (as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3). According to NACALCO statistics (NACALCO, 2001), Kom is the community with the highest number of bilingual PROPELCA schools. Actually, Kom is not only the most vibrant community in the whole country as concerns the formal bilingual education, but it is also one of the local communities where the large majority of schools are privately owned. In addition, lay

private and Christian schools in Kom introduced the PROPELCA bilingual teacher training certificate as a precondition for recruitment in any teaching position.

#### **7.2.4. Quality effectiveness versus cost-effectiveness in education and adult literacy**

The financial issues briefly outlined above with regard to the remuneration of literacy monitors relate to cost effectiveness, that is, the relationship between the financial investment put into an enterprise and the benefits brought by the said enterprise. Beyond cost-effectiveness, another important dimension is quality effectiveness which relates to the moral, human and socio-cultural benefits brought about by an enterprise.

Social researchers have discussed the issue of cost-effectiveness of education, in other words, 'how money invested in an education project is directly proportional or related to the quantitative benefits of the said project' (Ruddock, 1981). Yet, researchers, like Ruddock (1981), Fonge (1997), Ela (1982, 2001), are critical of any approach which tends to overrate cost-effectiveness, and where money invested is given priority over the qualitative results aimed at. Put differently, the money to be invested in a project should be considered rather in relation to the values and quality of the results to gain, not their quantity. Ruddock (1981) therefore advocates giving priority to quality-effectiveness, and not cost-effectiveness in the quantitative sense of the term. He writes:

' (...) we can not allow cost-effectiveness to become the ruling criterion. That would be to place money values above all the personal and human values that must have first place in education' (Ruddock, 1981:5).

Such an approach is laudable, and the Kom literacy programme is a typical example of this approach, as there is awareness among many literacy workers of their socio-cultural role. Kom literacy monitors are conscious that no financial rewards will ever replace the satisfaction of working for the greater community good. As Bhola (1994) aptly writes, and this applies in praise to the tremendous contribution of Kom literacy monitors,

Literacy teachers may not receive great financial rewards. But there is no limit to non monetary rewards. They shape individual lives. They shape communities. Bhola (1994:24).

### **7.3. ADULT LITERACY MEDIATING NEW STATUS AND SOCIO-CULTURAL POWER: THE POWER OF READING AND WRITING**

It is of interest to look at the relationship between literacy and socio-cultural power in Kom. This can help account for some of the motivations and interests manifested by adult learners to be involved in learning to read and write.

From a socio-historical perspective, the initial system of socio-cultural power in Kom is a local manifestation of the larger system of traditional social power in the Grassfields Fondoms of West Cameroon, as examined earlier in Chapter 2 (in 2.2.3.2). As in many other African grassroots communities, colonisation and nation building have shaken this system without totally destroying it, and the resilience and vibrancy of the traditional values and social hierarchies are striking in the Kom society (Nkwi, 1976, 1989; Shultz, 1997; Trudell, 2004, 2005). But, as discussed earlier in Chapter 2, it is clear that there have been significant changes, not in the traditional system as a whole, but in the creation of new centres of social power resulting from colonial and post-colonial social evolution. And one of the instruments of these changes has been literacy.

#### **7.3.1. Literacy, Western education and new socio-cultural powers**

In sub-Saharan Africa, a significant change to the traditional system of power accompanied colonisation and the advent of the formal Western-style schools. The first schools were created by Christian missionaries who had an evangelisation agenda. At first, many traditional dignitaries were reluctant to send their children to the schools. In the Kom land, this school system was perceived as alien, brought by the Westerners to subvert the old social order. So, for a number of decades, the children who went to the schools were from poor or traditionally powerless backgrounds:<sup>120</sup> orphans and children of commoners. Most of the time, those commoners were converted to Christianity. Western education and colonisation ensured a gradual dismantling of some of the traditional powers vested in the

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<sup>120</sup> It is true that the first social groups to interact with Western colonisers, and to be exposed to formal schools, were the local traditional rulers and subsequently their families and children. Still, it is very common in sub-Saharan Africa that many of the first Africans who acceded to non traditional power through Western schooling and who landed jobs in the Administration were children of commoners and poor peasants, or even orphans. Be it with the colonial Administration or the public civil service of newly independent African states, the social power and the financial resources that their new positions gave them brought them far higher up on the social ladder. Also, the new areas and domains of exertion of their power extended far beyond their initial ethnic group to encompass a national level.

local dignitaries and their networks. The advent of a supra-ethnic power system through the centralised colonial Administration and the nation-building after the Independences brought in major changes to the traditional power system. Though it was far from reversing things totally, it introduced a new social class: the civil servants and all those who were working in public offices based on recruiting criteria that were quite independent from the traditional hierarchy and values. The basis for accessing to the new system of power was the ability to read and write. One consequence was that the resistance to the school system upon the arrival of the colonising Westerners died out, with many parents eventually agreeing to send their children to the new school system.

This constituted a shift in the socio-cultural perception of what was considered as ‘the foreign school’, which was not rooted in the local traditions and indigenous systems of values, but changed the distribution of powers in the traditional society. Civil servants and the newly educated elite were given much more respect, sometimes more than local noblemen and title holders; and staff from the administrative institutions representing the Government began taking key decisions affecting the community. The most solid tools, evident in their communications and exertion of their powers, were their writing and reading skills, and were used to express the power vested in them. The perception grew that reading and writing could give new access to these social powers. One factor which strengthened this perception was that various forms of cultural resistance to the new social order were fought and eventually brought down by the people working for the Administration and whose social position was mainly marked by their education and their daily use of their literacy skills and written documents. Official decrees, orders, letters, newspapers, public posters, and books were all new markers and means of expression of administrative procedures to which everybody had to conform. Even the oral practices in the rural communities had to adapt to the new terminology stemming from written documents.

This was a new perception of literacy as a vehicle by which common people could gain power in society. Not all those who obtained literacy obtained the same levels of power, but it was certain that nobody who obtained the new powers could be illiterate. From this point onwards, there evolved the belief that literacy was a gateway to power, social dignity and respect.

### 7.3.2. The ultimate power of literacy

The shift in the perception about the power of literacy goes still further. When I was on the field in Kom, many women participating in adult literacy classes mentioned to me that they believed the capacity to read and write would make them happier and more fulfilled in their daily duties. One area mentioned most often was the reading of their Bible by themselves (as observed in Chapter 5). It is interesting that their assertion related more to the access of the written script than to spiritual betterment in the purely religious sense. Therefore, they were convinced that a deeper spiritual enlightenment would result from their capacity to read by themselves. For them, reading gives a new power, one which is intellectual. Deciphering writing thus mediates an access to knowledge hidden in written texts. The power to read *per se* is tremendously valued in that it mediates the attainment of the status of reader, rather than in relationship to the written contents proper. In other words, it is not what one reads which matters ultimately; it is rather the capacity to read which creates the fulfilment.

It is certainly possible that for highly educated people outside of this Kom traditional setting, the contents of what is read would matter more. In such cases, some readings are valued more in regard to the information or knowledge they contain. But for many women in the Kom adult literacy classes, for example the widows who were learners at the Acha'jvia literacy centre, reading mediates a new status embedded with power: the power of being literate, of being a reader capable of grappling successfully with writing. These women believe that their self-image, and the vision their peers will have of them as new readers, will be highly positive. And in public ceremonies – be it Church masses or socio-cultural meetings – the fact that they can stand, open a book, and read from the book gives them a real power and also respect from the group. Even some traditional rulers and dignitaries sitting in the public have to bow to this new power the women have acquired through being able to read and write. In such contexts, the person holding the podium and catching all the attention is the reader. Consequently, becoming a reader means one gains social status. The commoner who can attain the position of a reader becomes a star, the focus of interest and respect. Nobody else can rank higher at that specific moment when the reading is taking place. It is fascinating how even the title-holding men who on most other social occasions would treat the female readers with very little respect (especially as they are poor widows with no man in their lives) have to nod their heads with due respect. Some illiterate traditional 'powerfuls', too highly placed socially to come and sit with



women in literacy classes, are embarrassed that they can not reach the level of power given by literacy.

#### **7.4. ADULT LITERACY MEDIATING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT**

The impact of Western Christian churches on re-shaping African societies and cultural values has been debated in the last decades by many African sociologists and anthropologists (Nkwi, 1976, 1989; Nkwi and Warnier, 1982; Ela, 1982; Minfoc, 1985; Sikounmo, 1995; Fonge, 1997). For the case of Kom, Nkwi (1976) has shown the historic challenges faced by the introduction of Christianity in Kom and the gradual absorption of the Churches into the local social fabric of values and practices. But most discourses on Churches in rural areas describe a socio-cultural reality the written Holy Scriptures are unattainable for most members of the local congregations. The Holy Scriptures initially were unattainable because most Bibles were written in the European languages of the Missionaries. In the last three decades, a new mutually beneficial synergy has been established in some communities between the Christian religious practices and adult literacy in local languages. First, excerpts of the Bible were translated into local languages; and later there were translations of the whole Bible. I attempt to account for this synergy in the next paragraphs, as regards the Kom community.

Nkwi (1976) has written extensively on the importance of Christian churches in Kom, presenting their historic implantation in Kom following the colonial evangelisation campaigns by the Missionaries. He also discusses the initial rejections of this foreign faith by most Kom people, then the ensuing struggles that after decades resulted in acceptance of the Christian denominations by a large portion of the Kom community. By the 1960s, when Cameroon gained independence, the Christian Churches in Kom were solidly established in the community, having built many schools, and provided formal education. As discussed earlier in this chapter, they contributed significantly in the building of a new elite, and they especially restructured the spiritual values and religious practices in the Kom community.

As shown earlier, in Chapters 3 and 5, the Churches in Kom are important for the Kom literacy programme at an institutional level. First, Churches provide the premises for many of the literacy classes. Second, they provide trained human resources to teach in the adult literacy programme, since many literacy monitors are also teaching staff in

denominational schools owned by the Churches. But there is far more to the importance of Churches for adult literacy in Kom: on a spiritual and psycho-social level, Christian practices have proven to be central in the development of literacy activities in Kom. Throughout this research, it was evident that there is a complex connection between literacy practices and uses on the one hand, and Christian life and spiritual beliefs attached to those on the other hand.

When looking at the place of writing in the Christian churches, it is noteworthy that Christianity is a faith based on a Holy Book, a sacred document from which spiritual practices are tapped. This holy book is an absolute reference; its teachings are final. In this spiritual system, the masters of the Holy Book – masters in the sense of those who have access to and can comprehend the contents – are the guides endowed with spiritual enlightenment and power. The focus here is on the socio-cultural aspect of spiritual power, that is, the power consensually consecrated through the communal practices of the Christian religion. In this regard, the priests and pastors are duly respected because they ‘know’ the Word of God, i.e. the Bible. They are usually consulted for guidance in all aspects of social life and individual activities, because of their knowledge of the Bible. In the socio-cultural system of beliefs and values, the capacity to read the Holy Scriptures means access to this Biblical knowledge. Consequently, Bible reading will help one acquire enlightenment and the ability to lead others, and to provide them with sound advice on various issues.

The institutional identity of the Church, therefore, is heavily based on the Bible. But this identity is socially operationalised through the spiritual Christian practices in the society. From the initial institutional identity, there ensues an identification process in the life of each Christian as a member of the Church. This identification process in turn is operationalised through an empowerment in reading the Holy Scriptures. In view of the intimate relationship between the Bible and the Church, every Christian ultimately may find the highest fulfilment of their identification with their church and religion through a deeper access to their Holy Book. Stated in a relational way, to be a Christian, one needs to accept and revere the teachings of the Bible. But to be a good Christian, or a better Christian, it is better to have one’s own copy of the Bible, and ultimately use the Bible regularly in one’s spiritual practices. To use the Bible means reading it, learning everyday from it and referring to it each time one needs guidance and solutions to daily problems. So in the end, there is a sense of spiritual fulfilment and development in every Christian when

they can read their Bible. This spiritual fulfilment takes place through an increased connection and a deeper obedience to the Biblical teachings.

The spiritual development discussed above includes a key process of spiritual re-appropriation of the Biblical contents. For example, the group of widows in the Acha'jvia literacy centre (as described in detail in Chapter 5) is earnestly involved in the Kom literacy programme as learners, and they do not have material motivations in terms of direct economic gains. But rather they are interested in spiritual concerns such as reading the newly translated Bible in Kom. This intellectual objective of accessing the written Bible leads them in turn to re-appropriate Christianity for themselves in a new way, and thus to gain pride in “reading the Gospel” by themselves. Thus, literacy – in this case the capacity to read the Bible – directly mediates their spiritual development.

Concerning the mutually beneficial relationship between the Christian churches and adult literacy, two other operational elements come into play, namely status and acceptability, in a dynamic and mutually enhancing relationship (Openjuru and Lyster, 2007:97-112). Acceptability deals with the fact that the use of the local language for Christian purposes is generally accepted and even promoted. This is rooted in the very origins of the Evangelising missions of the first Christian promoters, priests and pastors. So within the religious organisations, the current observation and practices are based on the promotion and use of the local language in its written form. In a society where the local language in public life, especially in administration and formal education, has been relegated to oral use, the Churches provide a unique haven for the written use of the local language. This acceptability and the promotion of the use of local language create in the minds of the adult Christian believers a rise in status of the language. As it is a marker of a good Christian life to promote the written local language – be it in the Bible and various Gospel's extracts widely used, or in the various hymnals and religious pamphlets used for the mass ceremonies – the local language is perceived within the Churches in a different way than in the general community outside. With the importance of Church membership as an identity marker charged with pride, and Church life as an integral part of social life, this acceptability and the high status of the written local language in the Christian circles are the basis on which adult literacy strengthens and sustains itself. Such a connection between the Churches and adult literacy can shed light on the resilience and success of the Kom literacy programme, in relation to similar programmes in other parts of the country. In fact, a print-rich environment abounding in Christian publications (as listed exhaustively in Table 6.2, Chapter 6) contributes to earnestness among Christians – the vast majority of

whom are women – to decipher the local available literature. This sort of dynamic relationship between religious literature and the engagement of adults into reading practices has been studied and documented elsewhere (for example, in Papua New Guinea, Kulick and Stroud, 1993:36; and in the Bweyale community in Uganda, Openjuru and Lyster, 2007: 97-112).

## **7.5. ADULT LITERACY AS AN INCREASER OF THE SYMBOLIC CAPITAL OF LOCAL LANGUAGES**

In the Kom community, adult literacy in the local language acts as an increaser of the symbolic capital of the local language. Such an observation is made within Bourdieu's theory of 'fields' and 'capitals' which posits social contexts as fields of action, also called markets or games (Bourdieu, 1991). In the Bourdieusian theory, a field in its essence is any social arena, inhabited by human beings involved in various activities in order to gain various types of resources they either desire or need. These fields or social arenas are structured spaces of positions in which the positions and their interrelations are determined by the distribution of different kinds of resources or 'capitals'. Capitals are generally of three types:

- economic capital, such as material resources, money, wealth;
- cultural capital, such as knowledge, skills and cultural acquisitions, educational qualifications;
- symbolic capital, such as prestige, respect, honour, dignity.

One important property of fields is the way in which they allow one form of capital to be converted into another. An example is how certain cultural capitals such as educational qualifications can lead to certain economic capitals such as jobs and wealth. Yet for Bourdieu, symbolic capital is the most important capital since it is a crucial source of power and social status. Symbolic capital is essentially perceived through socially constructed and established classificatory strategies and schemes. In other words, symbolic capital is related to the actions and perceptions of social actors. It can be conditioned and modified by these actions, even though the social systems tend to put much resistance into the modifications or redistribution of various symbolic capitals. But in social interactions and relationships, any person, situation or entity holding a strong symbolic capital

possesses significant power over any other person, situation or entity with less of it; consequently this person, situation or entity can use this power against anybody or any situation with less of it.

When one looks at the Cameroonian pre- and post-colonial contexts (as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2), one observes that a very low symbolic capital has been attached to local languages, in terms of their uses in education, and even in social communication, as analysed by Yetna (1999) for example. Such a low symbolic capital was the result of a conscious political and educational suppression whereby the official languages were given more symbolic capital through the fact that their knowledge and use could be traded for more economic capital and more cultural capital. It is useful at this point to note that, as Bourdieu argues, languages are not just means of communication, they are also strong tools to exert mechanisms of power. Linguistic choices, uses and interactions are manifestations and instantiations of social participants' relationships to each other. Social positionalities and power distributions are mirrored by linguistic practices and identities. Therefore, as I earlier discussed in Chapters 1 and 3, and the languages that people speak natively, the languages that are used in social communication and education, determine a whole fabric of power structures and connections as well as a distribution or redistribution, in real life, of various symbolic, economic and cultural capitals.

I have shown earlier in Chapter 1 that in Cameroon, the education system was initially set up to use exclusively the European and foreign languages. Consequently, only the people literate in those languages could access some of the best social positions in terms of qualifications and jobs. Still, it is worth noting that the indigenous knowledge systems vested in the local languages are actually immense. Some prominent people in rural communities, such as traditional healers, do have some real powers and respect in their community, since they are regularly consulted. But a major problem remains the domain of exertion of their power, for this latter is restricted at the micro or single community level. Put differently, a traditional healer in Kom has much prestige in the Kom community, but can not carry this same prestige if moved out of his or her local community. This situation contrasts with the respect enjoyed by a teacher of English for example who can easily claim a good position, and consequently, a high symbolic capital, in any community of the Anglophone North West province, or for that matter anywhere in the country.

One of the possible rationales behind the posting of civil servants away from their home communities – which continues to date in Cameroon – would be to show the national-level coverage of the symbolic capital attached to the positions of educated people fluent in the official languages. Thus, if we look at the political field, only those having competence in the official languages could trade in their linguistic abilities to gain political powers and a position in the administration with economic advantages. Though the same political leaders or public service officials had native competence in local languages, this competence was not validated in such a way that they could gain economic or symbolic capital at the national level. The main use of their native language competence was to assert their ethnic identity and, occasionally, to negotiate some cultural or regional ‘peculiarity’ in the national political arena. But this was in turn to be traded for more political power within the same political field, and any claim relating to their mother tongue was instrumentalised to renegotiate a better position in the political domain.

Coming back to the official languages and their use in various social fields, French and English were actually only taught to, and learnt by, locals in Cameroon. In reality – and this is valid even today – the locals have never had native proficiency in English or French. Consequently, the major operational mode to show the acquisition of official languages has been literacy. Only through attaining reading and writing skills could Cameroonians succeed in the educational system. Actually, the school system spent – and continues to spend – an incredible amount of time teaching reading and writing, and it gives high coefficients to these capacities in the evaluation of pupils (as I discussed extensively in Chapter 1). Thus, the capacity to read and write became vested with a very high capital as a marker of educational achievement, than the acquisition of knowledge, and practical and technical skills.

Until the local languages were standardised and graphised, it was generally (and wrongly) understood that literacy had to mean literacy *in the official languages* (as I earlier mentioned when analysing the postulates at the basis of literacy statistics in Chapter 2, and conceptual issues relating to literacy in Chapter 3). Thus, in popular beliefs, the literacy that could enable an educated Cameroonian to achieve high social positions such as being a doctor, an army officer, or a civil engineer, was literacy in French or English only. But over the decades, the local languages were gradually graphised, and as a consequence, literacy in those languages also became valued. This happened, though, first in limited circles such as Bible readings in Church and song and hymnal readings in choirs during the Church masses. In the same trend, some development booklets were produced and could

be only used in certain villages by those capable of reading and writing in the languages in which they were produced (as I discussed in detail in Chapter 6, when examining the local literature). In such cases, irrespective of the contents proper of the written materials in question, literacy in the local language was valued on those social occasions when useful information was written in the local languages.

My observations from the field in Kom suggest that the capacity to read and write in Kom has been vested with some new symbolic capital. However, this is limited to only intra-community occasions – which actually is only logical, in view of the fact that the total field of the social interaction embedded in any given local language is bound to encompass at first that community. The very low symbolic capital attached to the Kom language has been significantly increased through the mediation of literacy as skills. As I showed earlier in this chapter, the people who can read and write in those social contexts where the local written language is used become carriers of much more respect, dignity and attention than those who are literate in the official languages. This symbolic capital is valued in the community. It is worth reiterating that such a situation was not imaginable just three decades ago.

In Kom, there is actually more symbolic capital given to the local language than can be analysed here. Actually, in many confessional schools (and as I said earlier in Chapter 2, they form the majority of formal schools in the Kom region), there has been in recent years a reverse in the earlier trend where official languages served as only mediators to attain some jobs and resources. Many schools in the Kom area have been recruiting teachers who are literate in Kom and have had some PROPELCA training in the bilingual Kom/English pedagogy. This demonstrates an instance where more than just the symbolic capital of Kom has heavily increased, and where literacy in Kom can even be traded for some real economic and cultural capitals vested in the local language.

## **7.6. POST-LITERACY, PRINT-RICH ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY OF READING PRACTICES**

Once people have learnt to read and write, a major challenge is to be able to continue to use those skills in their daily life beyond the classroom. The post-literacy phase is a crucial dimension of any adult literacy programme, as discussed earlier in Chapter 6. Bhola (1994:56) captures this when he writes that ‘creating conditions in which new literates can put their literacy to use in their daily lives will further help sustainability’.

Two areas account for continuation into a successful post-literacy phase, namely exposure of neo-learners to reading materials, and the practice of writing. Stated differently, to practice reading, there need to be written materials available to read. This seems quite simple at first, but in rural areas like Kom, finding reading materials can be a struggle. But as I have established in my presentation of literature published in Kom (in Chapter 6), the problem is not a total lack of literature to read, since there are available reading materials in the society. Another hurdle concerning the reading materials is their affordability in terms of cost.

In the Kom community, there exists a mutually beneficial relationship between available literature and the interest to read. In many homes, there are Church-related documents, starting with Biblical extracts and various Gospels translated into Kom. This creates an impetus for adults to engage in reading, especially as most learners tend to be regular Church goers.

Generally, there is far less literature and reading materials available in Kom, compared to what is available in Bamenda, Yaounde or Douala, all of which are big cities. But in Kom, there are quite some reading materials in the local language in the community. And ultimately, the existence of English-based literature in the Kom community can also help the learners in the practice of their reading skills. Actually, it has been observed on the field that learners of Kom tend to gradually develop skills in reading the official language. This is not surprising in view of the complex and daily intertwining of English language use and the learning of reading and writing in Kom. It is worth also remembering that ultimately the Kom programme is a bilingual programme, in the sense that it aims also, in its advanced stages, to help learners improve their learning of the official language. This bilingual orientation is postulated on the basis of a natural transmission of bilingual skills, once the learners have mastered literacy in Kom. (My research did not explore this issue because there was not enough data, and also because of the focus on the local language, as I explained earlier in Chapter 3).

It could be argued that one factor enabling Kom literates to tap into any available literature in English is the fact that the Kom writing system is based on a Roman alphabet, and thus can more easily allow learners to make use of available materials in English or even French. In this sense, to a certain extent, the existence of more English-based written literature in the community can help the neo-literates in Kom to practise their reading skills a bit more.



As concerns the local print-rich environment in Kom per se, a number of factors work favourably for the Kom neo-literates to keep and practise their skills. These include the Church practices with Bible reading (as examined in detail earlier in this chapter); the strong community response to formal PROPELCA, and consequently the availability of formal school reading materials (as examined in detail in Chapters 2, 3 and 6); and the existence of a Kom news-bulletin (though, as I observed earlier in Chapter 6, it is no longer as regularly published as in the beginnings). Finally, there exists in Kom a sense of renewed interest in Kom literacy through the organisation of reading clubs and meetings in many areas, and the use of Kom in some *njangi* (traditional cultural societies) whereby Kom is used to take down notes and brief records of meetings.

## 7.7. SUMMARY

I started this chapter discussing a broad vision of literacy, exploring questions that relate to the socio-cultural meanings and functions of literacy in Kom. As much as possible, I posited my analysis from the point of view of the adult learners involved in the programme. My emerging conclusions are that adult literacy mediates a number of community identities and values. This is done through local agency and the institutional development of the KLDC. Adult literacy in Kom also mediates new social statuses and grants some new socio-cultural power to learners, as they become vested with more dignity and respect through becoming readers. Within the Christian circles, adult literacy also mediates spiritual development for church goers. Furthermore, adult literacy is an increaser of the symbolic capital attached to local languages, since symbolic capital increases with the written use and promotion of the local language.

## **Chapter 8: Conclusion**

In this concluding chapter, I will briefly summarise my research findings, and will connect them to the questions that motivated me initially to engage in this research. I will also discuss my scholarly position and the contribution of my research to literacy studies, with a focus on the African context in general, and Cameroon in particular. To close the chapter I will discuss how future research might be expanded, based on the work started in this thesis.

### **8.1. FROM THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The comprehensive work done in this thesis about the dynamics of adult literacy in Kom demonstrates that literacy as a community enterprise involves a wide range of activities, institutions and people. Beyond the teaching and learning of literacy, there is a large web of connections with other socio-cultural issues, socio-linguistic perspectives and local institutions and practices.

My aims were to describe and analyse literacy in the Kom language, but also to understand its meanings and operational connections to the wider rural community that Kom is. I was born and raised myself in a rural community similar in many ways to Kom, and this gave me an insider's view into the complex dynamics of the Kom literacy programme. But at the same time there was much to discover about the dynamics of Kom literacy. My fieldwork in Kom entailed getting to know the committed team of literacy workers, the local executive members of the KLDC, the participants in various literacy centres, and the rich local literature.

Four inter-related research domains were selected to be the foci of my investigation into Kom literacy: the organisation of literacy, the didactic materials, the literacy teaching in classes, and the values and meanings mediated by literacy. As concerns the organisation of literacy activities, I looked at issues relating to the delivery of literacy in the community:

institutions, events and practices that were active in making the teaching and learning of Kom language a daily reality in Kom. Important areas to investigate in this domain were the main institutions and actors, and the infrastructures. In short it was important to investigate the basic questions of ‘who, what, when, where and how’, and the temporal organisation of activities. Another domain of investigation concerned the local literature and the didactic materials, that is, the body of printed documents and teaching aids used at various levels in the literacy enterprise. Studying this local literature was also crucial in shedding light on the dynamics of Kom adult literacy. A third domain of investigation was the teaching as it happens in literacy classes on a daily basis. In this domain I studied some of the learners in literacy classes and their monitors, as well as some of their teaching sessions. This gave me a better picture of adult literacy as an educational enterprise.

There is a social institution at the foundation of any literacy programme, supporting the organisation of literacy as a socio-educational endeavour. This social institution is itself a product of the community creating, and benefiting from, the literacy enterprise as a whole. Thus, there emerged the fourth domain of investigation which was to look into the socio-cultural dimension of literacy in Kom. Therefore, the teaching environment, the institutional support, the synergy of literacy as a body of practices and events organised by members of the community were to shed light on the questions of ‘why’ and ‘what for’ concerning literacy in Kom, and on the value people attach to literacy. The socio-cultural values and meanings that reading and writing in their own local language could mediate for the literacy participants were of major interest to my research. Therefore, I had to account for what literacy mediates in Kom, or was perceived to mediate; what Kom literacy is an instrument of; the set of values and beliefs attached to the use of written Kom in the community.

As I said earlier, the above research domains do not flow successively one after the other, but are intertwined and inter-related. Therefore I had to investigate all four areas while conducting my fieldwork.

## **8.2. AN OVERVIEW OF THE FINDINGS**

This research has shown how the Kom literacy programme fits into the bigger national enterprise of adult education using local languages. In terms of the institutional organisation and the delivery of literacy, the Kom programme is thus part and parcel of the

post-colonial, linguistic and educational policy of Cameroon. This connection between the local and the national was inevitable as the local Kom programme is a result of a national-level literacy programme spearheaded by NACALCO. In terms of this national connection, the PROPELCA pedagogic heritage of bilingual education in formal schools using the local and official languages has been crucial in the technical development of the Kom literacy programme. The main areas where the PROPELCA heritage is foundational to the Kom literacy programme are in the provision of Kom literacy monitors – as most of them are formal PROPELCA trainee teachers in the bilingual programme – and in the didactic materials (mainly the primer series), initially designed for the PROPELCA primary schools. Literacy in Kom is delivered within the framework of the KLDC, the local language committee. The KLDC runs the literacy programme, recruiting the monitors and finding money for their allowances. The KLDC interacts with the community locally and nationally to campaign for the local language activities.

In the domain of local literature, there is a wide array of books produced in Kom, as discussed in Chapter 6. This local literature is important and interesting both on account of the significant body of books produced, and on account of their versatility in terms of use. I observed that the local literature was under-used due to some problems of access and availability. It should be noted that beyond the didactic usage of local literature, efforts are made by KLDC and local authors to expand the domains of use and the thematic breadth of local publications (as shown earlier in detail in Table 6.2). Among other issues in this area, I observed significant resilience in terms of the KLDC's efforts to keep its publications going and to produce more literature, both pedagogic and non pedagogic titles. By describing and analysing the authorship of local literature in Kom and the connected network of support in terms of their distribution and financial returns, I have shown how the local literature is the end product of Kom language promotion and development. I have shown how, at the same time, the local literature is also an instrument of the maintenance and sustainability of Kom literacy as a community enterprise of education. In this sense, the revolving principle, which was described in Chapter 6, shows how the survival of the KLDC as a local institution relies on the successful economic distribution and return of its local literature. As discussed in Chapter 6, the local authors are all native speakers of Kom. They are also active members of the community who are central to the synergy of local agency, as well as ownership of the educational enterprise of adult literacy, which has an agenda to empower and re-appropriate the adult education system in Kom.

Teaching adult literacy in Kom is an endeavour that connects the local institutions, the literacy monitors and their learners. As shown throughout Chapters 5 and 6, adult literacy teaching is quite participant-oriented, and it is rooted in culture and society. The teaching in most literacy centres is as user-friendly as possible, basing time-tabling and even practical yet crucial issues, such as class start and end times, on adult learners' daily constraints and life schedules. The premises of most literacy centres are schools and churches, and this shows the operational connection between literacy teaching and local religious and educational institutions. As concerns the literacy personnel, the tightly knit team of the literacy coordinator, the area supervisors and the literacy monitors running the centres are the primary human resources enabling the growth of literacy in the community. As discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, the teaching of literacy itself is technically and pedagogically rooted in the PROPELCA experience of formal bilingual MT/OL education. Most literacy monitors are born and raised in the area where they live and teach. As the profiles of some literacy monitors show, this socio-cultural and endogenous rooting creates unique proximity and solidarity between learners and monitors. These two factors contribute to the cohesion and resilience I observed in the literacy classes, and together they contribute to a foundation for long-term sustainability of adult literacy in Kom.

A number of socio-cultural values and meanings are also mediated by adult literacy in Kom. I have shown in this research (mainly in Chapter 7) that local agency and the institutional development of Kom are mediated by the Kom literacy programme. There is also a lot of cultural pride vested in the promotion of literacy in Kom. The spiritual development of individual learners and religious groups is enhanced through literacy, and neo-literates acquire some new power and respect in the society through their capacity to read and write. The Kom language itself gains symbolic capital through its new use as a written medium of education and communication.

### **8.3. CONTRIBUTION**

This research has attempted to study the Kom adult literacy programme in as much detail as possible. The gathering and analysis of field data has enabled me to define, describe, and analyse the contents and delivery of local language literacy in Cameroon, using the Kom literacy programme as a case study.

The basis for the promotion of literacy in Kom is a positive social attitude and

strong institutional support through the KLDC, which creates educational opportunities for underprivileged Kom adults. As stated earlier, the local literature in Kom is the main staple of adult literacy. But more importantly, it performs a central function of serving as a flag bearer for the institutional identity and dynamics of the KLDC. In this latter capacity, local literature functions in the literacy programme as the material marker of the social presence and evolution of the Kom language. As the discussion of the dynamics of local literature in Chapter 6 has shown, the operational issues of local literature, in terms of management, sustainability and distribution, epitomise the struggles of the Kom language for its socio-economic expansion.

Though the supportive dynamics of literacy found in Kom are not yet found in many communities in Cameroon, they provide an inspiring example of local language development and use. As the study of adult literacy in Kom has shown, the micro-level of community life and values is where the future of adult literacy and local language promotion is to be played out.

My research is a contribution to Cameroonian sociolinguistics because it looks at the uses and socio-cultural interactions between languages in Cameroonian rural contexts. It is also a contribution to applied linguistics because it focuses on the use of African languages for adult education. This study will contribute to better knowledge regarding the operational realities of adult literacy programmes in African languages. Such knowledge can help towards building the operational sustainability of adult literacy programmes.

A locally rooted approach to literacy research can advance the knowledge of adult education in rural contexts. This is especially important in Africa where, as I discussed in Chapter 3, a critical perception of post-colonial social relationships and community experiences and practices is necessary in order to avoid perpetuating in literacy research a legacy of exclusion of local realities, cultures and peoples. Throughout this research, I listened more to the grassroots voices from the villages, than to my own theoretical presumptions about literacy acquisition and practices. During my fieldwork and the writing of this research, the intrinsic validity of indigenous knowledges, constituting a system of meanings and values, was kept as a starting point from which to draw my own interpretations and analyses of observed phenomena. Therefore, I argue that research into adult literacy, because of the cultural and human specificities of learners and contexts in African grassroots, will benefit from what I call an inclusive provincialisation of knowledge which is a break of the centre/periphery divide discussed earlier. The provincialisation of knowledge will bring a complementary perspective to our

understanding of the synergies and dynamics of African rural communities. Therefore, I follow the line of what other researchers have called a “developing world approach to our understanding of the modern world” (Ela, 1982, 2001; Tadadjeu, 1990; Sikounmo, 1992; Prah, 1995a, 1995b; Bamgbose, 2000; Mutua and Swadener, 2004). In this approach, the developing world is studied and analysed first in its own capacity as site of phenomena with their own meanings. These may be connected to more global meanings, yet still retain their specificities as contribution to knowledge.

My study contributes to research on adult literacy in a number of areas which so far have been under-researched in sub-Saharan Africa. First, there is the area of adult literacy in local African languages; and particularly, literacy in small minority languages, i.e. languages spoken in rural areas by just some tens of thousands of speakers. Secondly, there is the area of adult learners and literacy skills acquisition; particularly, studying learners who are masters of the language they are learning to read and write. A third area to which my study contributes is local agency and institutional development of community organisations brought about by literacy programmes. Finally, a fourth area my research contributes to is local language literature and the empowerment of rural people in the management of adult literacy as an organisational and technical enterprise, with connected issues of cultural re-appropriation and ownership.

The study of adult literacy must incorporate the primary experiences of adults from the rural areas. Ideally, this should be done from an operational angle, that is, as part of the meaning-making and knowledge-contributing experience regarding the theory and planning of literacy in Africa. Novel research and theories of literacy should be more inclusive, and will benefit from learning from the rural grassroots in Africa, and from accepting that there is a deeper set of meanings and values, and socio-cultural dynamics attached not only to literacy in general, but especially to literacy using local African languages as their main medium of instruction.

My position is that research based on literacy activities in African rural areas contributes to an enriched theoretical debate on adult education. As shown throughout this thesis, two areas of interest are local agency and empowerment through institutional development and technical reappropriation as mediated through adult literacy programmes; and new socio-cultural meanings in individual lives and social practices as mediated through adult literacy in local languages.

Studies of literacy in the rural areas are critical to our understanding of literacy issues. More specific studies of adult literacy programmes provide a necessary contribution to theoretical debates on adult literacy. This thesis offers one such contribution towards creating a broader theory of adult literacy grounded on the rural adult education experiences and daily practices of literacy. The Kom case provides an example of local agency that is strengthened through networking and support among the members of local community and other stakeholders at both the national and international levels.

#### **8.4. TOWARDS EXPANDING THE LITERACY RESEARCH AGENDA IN AFRICA**

Current theories and the planning of literacy in Africa are grounded on the postulate that adult literacy is part of continuing education. A tenet of this approach is that adults learners involved in literacy classes will be motivated by becoming, through literacy, part of the post-colonial market economy – marked by salaried jobs in the public administration and the para-statal and private companies. In this economic-oriented vision of adult literacy, adult learners are perceived as learning with some economic gain as the main motivation for their engagement in literacy activities. Literacy is envisioned therefore as a tool for professional skills improvement, or for some other enhancement of the participation of citizens in the national building enterprise (UNESCO, 1949, 1969, 1972, 1982, 1990; Dumont, 1973; Richmond, 1983, 1986; Asiedu and Oyedeji, 1985; Ntsobe, 1985; Atanga, 1987; Bholá, 1994; World Bank, 1995; Echu and Grundstrom, 1999; Hazoumê, 1999a; Egbo, 2000; Biloa, 2003).

As shown throughout this thesis, the reality regarding adult literacy and learners in Kom is quite different: the majority of learners are pre-literates who have never gone through any formal education system. But most importantly, they are not part of the market economy and the trained labour force living on remunerated work acquired through their prior education skills. Many of them have never had a salaried job, and many are not planning to have one in the future. Therefore their motivations for attending literacy classes are different and complex. Because of limitations in terms of time and resources, my present research does not completely account for their motivations, expectations and beliefs about literacy. There is still a lot to learn from those adult men and women in their rural hamlets who trek for kilometres under rain and shine to learn to read and write in



their mother tongue, yet for no direct economic benefit. Further research in this area is necessary to map their various understandings of literacy with their aspirations, to produce their psychological and socio-cultural profiles, and to build a theory about their backgrounds and motivations. Such studies will shed light on their worldview as literacy participants.

Another direction towards which current research on literacy in Africa has been moving is what I term the second language acquisition approach. In this approach, adult learners are viewed as acquiring a language which is not their first language; consequently learners do not have native proficiency in the main medium of their literacy, as this medium is generally not part of their daily linguistic tool of communication. This approach follows the post-colonial experience of most education systems in sub-Saharan Africa where the schools and the communication systems have ex-colonial European languages as their main media of transmission. The analytical techniques and theories nourishing this trend in the literature are founded on scientific discourses on second language acquisition.

Again, my research in Kom points in a rather different direction as it concerns adult learners and their linguistic proficiency: Kom learners are native speakers and masters of their language, especially as adults versed in the complexities of oral Kom. Therefore, an area that would benefit immensely from further research is the area of adult learners' acquisition of literacy skills per se, that is, a research focusing on these adults' acquisition of reading and writing. This is different from the overall acquisition of language skills in the four domains of comprehension, listening, reading and writing. My research in Kom did not go far in this complex area of literacy acquisition, and in fact could only touch on it. There is no doubt much to be learned regarding literacy acquisition. Therefore, further research into this area is necessary, not only in Kom, but in other Cameroonian languages in which native speakers are learning literacy skills.

One difficulty in the use of African languages in education is the fact that so many of the 2000+ African languages are not yet developed into their written form. But then, for African languages that are written, there is a paucity of research on their use in education, be it in formal schools, or in adult literacy. In the case of Cameroon, with 286 languages, only approximately half of these languages have a developed writing system, and again only half of those have an active literacy programme where the local language is effectively used in adult literacy (Tadadjeu, 1987, 1990, 2004; ANACLAC, 1996; NACALCO, 1998, 2001; Sadembouo, 2002; Nguesso, 2005). As I argued earlier, given the

current trend of language endangerment and disappearance in Africa, literacy in African languages is a crucial tool for language maintenance and preservation. As my research on the Kom literacy programme shows, the promotion of local languages must be rooted in daily community life. In the case of Kom, a supportive community synergy is essential to help reverse the whirling current causing minority languages to die out and disappear. There is thus need for research on adult literacy programmes in local languages in Cameroon, and more generally, throughout Africa. My present research aims to stand as a pioneering example for similar studies on bilingual adult literacy in other African languages – in Cameroon in particular, and in sub-Saharan Africa in general. Thus, the aim of my thesis is to contribute to a larger series of similar studies with a comparative research agenda. This thesis and other such studies will in turn contribute to a broader understanding of local language maintenance and the sustainability of community literacy programmes.

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## APPENDICES

## **Appendix 1:**

### **An encounter with a foreign tongue: A childhood story**

Pa' Tala was a good man. He would play with me when he came to visit my grandmother. On the many occasions when he visited us, he would let me accompany him, which meant me pacing quickly, following with my tiny legs after him for some distance before waving him goodbye and coming back to our compound. He would hold my hand sometimes and tell me some stories on the way. I called him 'Uncle' like most children would call close and senior male family friends, irrespective of the real kinship relationship. I knew he was a teacher. He certainly knew everything. I never remembered when he didn't have a satisfying answer to the thirsty questions of the young 5-year old I was then.

And it was exactly when I was at that tender age of five that one of the biggest events of my life happened. That year I went to school for the first time. But it was not going to school which was the shock; it was what happened on my first day inside the school. Before that ominous day, like most kids of the area, I knew about the school, but it was a place 'very far away'. 'Far away' actually in a sense other than physical distance. Despite the fact that we could touch it, it was another world. On weekends, on our way to our endless childhood errands or on the way back from some of our hunting expeditions, we could stop to play in the large front yard of the school. It was deserted and empty, the classes so silent, as if nobody ever entered there. The church was on the same premises as the school and every Sunday we would go to church near the school. But before the age of five, most of my mates and I had no idea what happened inside the classes. We had no real experiential representation whatsoever of what a class in daily life stood for.

On my first day at school, I was to learn violently about the light years between the world outside and the well-encompassed bubble of the school. As we got into the class, my happiness to see Pa' Tala as our teacher was instantly killed when he opened his mouth in class. For at that very moment, he lost his tongue. Nobody seemed able to understand him or even keep in contact with him. As the class started and was painfully progressing, he seemed to be drifting away, far from us. His voice and face were getting more and more distant, frightfully alien in a way, though we could see clearly that he was trying his best at times to shout his orders. And the silence and the fears I felt around me and in me could only mean that something terrible was happening.

Appendix 2:

Research authorisation

**NCHIYNTI IBA'LI ITANJIKOM  
KOM LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE  
(K.L.D.C.)**

*Headquarters: Boyo Division, North West Province, Cameroon.*

**RESEARCH AUTHORISATION**

**To: Whom It May Concern**

**Mr. J.S. Kamdem** is hereby granted permission to collect data and do research on Kom literacy activities from April to September 2006.



**NDIM Albert VIANGEH**

**Hon. Wangeh Albert Ndim**  
Chairman of the K. L. D. C.

*10/04/2006*

### Appendix 3:

#### Some PROPELCA statistics

### PROPELCA STATISTICS<sup>121</sup>, NURSERY AND PRIMARY SCHOOLS (2000/2001)

*G* = Government Schools; *D* = Denominational Schools; *LP* = Lay Private Schools.

PROVINCE	LANGUAGES	SCHOOLS				CLASSES	PROPELCA TYPE		PUPILS		
		<i>G</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>LP</i>	Total		<i>Formal</i>	<i>Informal</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	Total
Centre (and Littoral)	Ewondo	-	02	-	02		+				
	Nugunu	04	-	02	06				418	351	769
	Basaa	-	10	-	10	15	+	+	384	346	730
East	Kako				5	24		+	559	446	1005
	Koonzime	04						+			00
	Mekaa	02						+			00
Far North	Mafa		6		6	10	+		375	196	568
	Mofu-Nord		4		4	12	+				757
	Mofu-Sud										00
Littoral	Duala	-	03	-	03	10	+	+	336	305	641
	Fe'efe'e										00
North West	Bafut	05	02	-	07	17	+	+	460	431	891
	Kom	14	30	01	45	115	+	+			4592
	Lamnso'	-	38	-	38	64	+	+	1039	1069	2108
	Limbum	-	02	-	02	03	+	+	68	53	121
	Meta'	07	02	-	09	18		+	291	278	569
	Nooni	02	06	-	08	22		+	365	361	726
	Oku	06	02	-	08	16		+	377	347	724
South West	Ejagham				(22) 06			+			2650
	Kenyan							+			00
West	Medumba	-	04	-	04	04		+	50	42	92
	Ghomála'	-	04	-	03	03	+	+	65	61	126
	Yémba	1	6	-	07	12	+	+	312	308	620
	Fe'efe'e	-	04	-	04	06	+		171	134	305
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>44+</b>	<b>126+</b>	<b>03+</b>	<b>177+</b>	<b>351+</b>			<b>5087</b>	<b>4676+</b>	<b>17759+</b>

<sup>121</sup>Source : NACALCO Annual Report of Activities (2000/2001)

## Appendix 4:

### Resource persons

#### *Note:*

The resource persons in the following list are those people with whom I discussed various issues relating to the Kom language and history, the literacy programme, and local community life. Yet, this list is not exhaustive, because during my six-month fieldwork in Kom, I met and talked to far more people, and sometimes, due to circumstances there was no opportunity to take down any names.

Regarding those whose names are on the list, I talked with them on many occasions, and in various formats, ranging from recorded and unstructured interviews, formal exchanges during meetings and visits, to informal conversations and brief chats on various encounters.

Name	Professional details and/or geographical location
Aloysius Ngam	Former Headmaster, Njinikejem Primary School, Belo; and Literacy monitor, Belo I
Honourable Ndim Albert Waingeh	Former Member of Parliament, Njinikom College Principal, Chairman of the KLDC, and Kom author and playwright
Timnge Augustine	Primary school teacher, Muteff; and KLDC literacy area supervisor, Fundong
Dr Joseph Mfonyam	SIL Linguist, Bamenda
Kufoin Anthony	Former Headmaster, Catholic School Fuanantui; and Literacy participant, Njinikom
Attah Attah	Headmaster, GS Belo, and PROPELCA graduate and trainer
Mercy Attah	Headmistress, CS Belo; Secretary of the CBC Women Association, Belo; and PROPELCA Trainer
Dr Domche-Teko Engelbert	University Professor, Head of Department of African Studies, University of Dschang; Member of the Executive Board of NACALCO
Waingeh Junior	High school teacher, Njinikom
Naboh Veronica Njong	Former Headmistress, GS Njichami; and Literacy monitor and PROPELCA trainer, Belo
Aloysius Ngam	Former Headmaster, Njinikejem Primary School; former KLDC literacy area supervisor; and PROPELCA trainer
Charles Kuna	Secondary school teacher, St Bede's College of Ashing; PROPELCA graduate; and Literacy monitor, Mbisi, Fundong; and KLDC Publications Coordinator
Clement Nsani	Literacy participant, Muteff
Ngum Theresa	Operations officer, Fundong Cooperative Credit Union Ltd, Fundong
Bongile Promise Fokeng	Head Driver, Amour Mezam Transport company, Fundong
Fointein Joseph	KLDC Executive Area Representative for Fundong, Fundong
Patrick Nges	Secondary School Teacher, and KLDC Literacy Coordinator

Tohnain Samson	Appointed Deacon of the CNBC Church, Fundeng
Kimbi Rudolph	Vice Appointed Deacon of the CNBC Church, Fundeng
Yong Ramothy	Literacy participant, CNBC Fundeng
Gopti Ikfingei Philip	KLDC Executive Area Representative for Anya'jua
Chindo Celine	High School teacher; and Former MINEDUC Divisional Delegate for Boyo, Fundong
Godfrey Kain Chuo	Former KLDC Literacy Coordinator, Fundong
Yong Martin	Secretary of the Teachers Association, Njinikom; and PROPELCA trainer
Sulem Stephen	Literacy monitor, Isae'be'si
Theresia Kuna	Literacy participant, Mbisi, Fundong
Nyam Aaron Ntoh	Teacher, GS Baichu; and Literacy monitor, Mbisi, Fundong
Ndichia Jonathan	Primary School teacher, and Literacy monitor, Abuh
Mom Raphael	Literacy participant, Chua'buh, Aduk
Ndong Peter	High School teacher of Physics, Bamenda; and Chairman, Aduk Development Association, Aduk
Mary Mbuh	Literacy monitor, Djichami, Belo
Nkamto Francis Ndifor	Civil Administrator, and Senior Divisional Officer, Fundong
Chiamoh Lawrence	Businessman, and CEO of Ets Chiamoh Lawrence, Fundong
Chiwo Joseph	KLDC Treasurer, Njinikom
Afor Victorine	Literacy participant, Mbisi, Fundong
Nsom Isaac	Literacy facilitator, Njinikom
Loh Pius	Literacy facilitator, Acha'jvia, Njinikom; former KLDC Literacy coordinator, and Kom author
Chia Marcellus Ndah	Literacy facilitator, and Literacy area Supervisor, Njinikom
King Rose Mbih	Literacy facilitator, Fuanantui, Njinikom
Nih Victorine	Literacy facilitator, Anjinichin
Mary Mbuh	Literacy facilitator, Belo
Esther Ndimuh	Literacy facilitator, Fundeng, Belo
Eric Wainfoin Yvua	Literacy facilitator, Fuli, Belo
Nkwain Charles Nkimbi	Literacy facilitator, Muwa; and KLDC Literacy area Supervisor, Belo
Kuma Nicoline Itanghi	Literacy facilitator, Njang, Belo
Nsom Samuel Kuma	Teacher, CBC Belo; an Literacy monitor, Belo II
Mary Ndi	Literacy facilitator, Belo
Ngongbi Francis	Literacy facilitator, Chuabuh, Aduk; and KLDC Literacy area supervisor, Aduk
Ngem Bede	Nurse; Chief-of-post of the Aduk Community Health Centre; and Literacy monitor, CSS-Aduk
Helmina Ful	Literacy participant, Acha'jvia, Njinikom
Lydia Ngong	Literacy participant, Acha'jvia, Njinikom
Chia Laban	Luh CBC Church Pastor, and Literacy Monitor, Luh, Aduk
Induh Joseph Eseh	Divisional Delegate of the MINJES; Regional Coordinator of the NLP
Benedicta Ngong	Literacy participant, Acha'jvia, Njinikom
Helen Chiato	Literacy participant, Acha'jvia, Njinikom
Ngong Elizabeth	Aduk-I CBC Church & Youths Secretary, and Literacy monitor, Tua'muyn, Aduk
Prudencia Makain	Literacy participant, Acha'jvia, Njinikom

Rose Njang	Literacy participant, Acha'jvia, Njinikom
Mary Njang	Literacy participant, Acha'jvia, Njinikom
Yisa Esther Ngiah	Literacy participant, Muwa, Belo
Awosang Hendy	Literacy monitor, Fuanantui
Bih Margret	Literacy monitor, Anya'jua
Komalua Anna	Programme Director, CREN, Njinikom; and Literacy participant, Acha'jvia, Njinikom
Nsom Stephen	Literacy Monitor, Anya'jua
Yong Francis	Primary School teacher, Isae'be'si; KLDC Literacy area supervisor, Anya'jua; and Literacy Monitor, Isae'be'si
Nsom Christopher	Literacy facilitator, Juambum
Diangha Emmanuel	Chairperson of the KLDC Literacy Committee; and Literacy monitor, Abuh
Nchenyieh Fidoline	Literacy participant, Muwa, Belo
Nkwain Promise	Literacy participant, Muwa, Belo



## Appendix 5:

### Recorded interviews

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*31 August 2006, Fundong.*

#### **Interview with Marcellus Ndah, Area Literacy Supervisor for NJINIKOM**

[Intro]:

*Within this research I am trying to talk with him about the various literacy activities that he does, in his double capacity both as an Area Supervisor for the KLDC programme and as a Literacy Monitor himself, running a Literacy Centre.*

Seraphin: (So yes) Good afternoon, Marcellus.

Marcellus: Good afternoon

S: As you see, we are trying to talk about the things you do on a daily basis. Let me start with some of this sort of personal information. Give us some information about yourself: when did you start, who are you and how did you really get involved in the literacy activities of KLDC?

M: Ok., I started this Kom Language in 1995. Then I graduated in 1997. By 1998 I was elected to teach in the PROPELCA course. When I taught that year I did very well. Then by 1999 I was appointed the Literacy Supervisor of Njinikom. Up to the present I am still the Literacy Supervisor. And I also help in some primary school as a board teacher and I have adult literacy classes in that my area and I am also a Literacy Monitor. Yeah.

S: Yeah that's it. That's interesting information. So you actually teach in a literacy centre at Yam?

M: Yes.

S: And what's your attendance? Just a beginning question like that. What's the number of people you have on average. Because you know sometimes you have high numbers but people who come regularly?

M: In my centre?

S: Yes, the regulars.

M: Those who are coming I have 10. Those regular ones.

S: And most of them are adults, female, male? Or is it a mix?

M: It's a mix of female and male.

S: And what's their age range? I mean how old are they?

M: From 20 to 30 years, and above.

S: Aha, and most of these people are pre-literature, I mean...

M: ... Yes...

S: ... people who really don't know at all how to read and write in any language before they come to your literacy class?

M: Most of them are pre-literate.

S: oh great, and umm, how long have you been running the Young Literacy Centre?

M: Since 2001.

S: So you've actually had a batch of graduates. People who have gone through the primary [stage] and are now literate.

M: Exactly.

S: Oh yes, because uuh. And I want to look at two things that are very interesting and important for this research. It's the didactic materials that you use, the books that you use to teach those people. Listening in Kom and also how you teach them in class. So let's start with the didactic material. What do you have as books you use in class?

M: No, we have Primer 1.

S: Hmm, Primer 1, is that uhh, what's the title of Primer 1? Itanjikom ?

M: That's Ye'i Itanjikom . Then the Guide. Uhh, the Guide to the Kom language. We use mostly the Guide to teach.

S: Hmm.

M: Then uhh, some other books like Primer 2...

S: Hmm.

M: Primer 3,

S: Hmm.

M: and Primer 4 now.

S: Hmm. Those are the post-primers actually.

M: Yes.

S: For those who already know how to read...

M: How to read

S: Independently.

M: Yes.

S: And you have some other literature that you use? Do you still have things like Sa' gha Kom that you use or Bible extracts, because there's much that has been published in Kom.

M: Yes, uhh we, we were using uhh, we had the Sa'gha Kom. Then unfortunately the machine which they were using got bad, and they are no longer producing these Sa'as. So, but, uhh, for now, the Kom.

S: The newsletter?

M: The Kom newsletter, yes.

S: Aha.

M. We now, what we are trying to do now, we only uhh, use the ones we have like the primers and so on.

S: Aha.

M: To teach, and then to lead them to read.

S: Yes.

M: And then, thank God, we have to Bible now.

S. Aha.

M: ...which has been translated.

S: Aha.

M: Then we use, when we are teaching we also bring in that aspect and then we train them how to read the Bible.

S: Aha.

M: In our class.

S: Does that create, uhh does that create much interest in the adults? Does that really, is that a key factor in them attending the literacy class? Their interest to read the Bible and other literature?

M: Mostly, some of them, uuh most of them are Christians, and they see then, launch the Bible,

S: Aha,

M: and they are ??, most of them want to read the Bible and they say they cannot be reading other books and their own Bible in their own dialect they are unable to read.

S: Aha.

M: So most of them want to know how to read the language because of the Bible.

S: Ahaaaa, that's uhh, that's very interesting. Now when you come to the class you know that some of the books like the Primer 1, Primer 2, Primer 3, were designed for PROPELCA classes, that is, formal PROPELCA classes for children in bilingual schools. How do you adapt or adjust their contents to fit the adults because their ways of learning are different from those of children? How, how do you, tell me more about that.

M: Yes, first of all when you come now, when you start the language now and listen, we show to them that these are the books we are using. Especially for those who are unable to read, who don't know anything, at least you present these books to them.

S: Hmm.

M: That is, because we are teaching them, so that they can also teach other people.

S: Hmm.

M: So when we teach and they are able to teach, they can even teach those who have never gone to school.

S: Hmm.

M: So when you start with those ones, so that they also know how to use those books, so that at the end they can also teach those who are unable to read, then ? we come into the guide now. We just start with the, uhh, the, the letters of the alphabet now.

S: Hmm.

M: and to use them.

S: Hmm.

M: Then we start going.

S: And, and, about how you organise your classes. Ah, I mean the way you organise your classes when you are dealing with adults. What, what, what do you do specifically to create their interest, to keep them in class learning because adults have other problems so that motivation, uhh, other difficulties, uhh, don't they?

M: Yes, uhh with the adults, when you are teaching them, at least you don't, uhh, have to take them as you're taking children. You have to respect them, then tell them that you want them to know how to read and write their language.

S: Aha.

M: though they are already, uhh, grown out, then they should only concentrate and then get what we are teaching them because it will help them tomorrow or anytime, anytime.

S: Hmm

M: Yes.

S: And when it comes to, like the times and the venue of the class, when are you, what are, what's the periodicity of your literacy classes as at Yang?

M: We, uhh, at least we take two hours a day when we teach.

S: Hmm.

M: Only two hours because with adults you don't need to sot for long and, uhh, for the learning and so on.

S: And is it every week?

M: It's weekly.

S: Aha, two hours every week?

M: Two hours every week.

S: And when is it? Do you adjust the time according to their time?

M: Yes, you know that in the villages most of them have occasions and so on, and when they are all committed in some activities, then we may adjust and then say that since we are committed today, we can put our class maybe on a different day.

S: Oh.

M: A day that is suitable to them.

S: Like when it's a market day?

M: Market day, country Sunday, and so on.

S: Oh, oh so you have to adjust this time according to the needs of the adults all the time.

M: Yes.

S: Even the moment you are holding the class.

M: Exactly.

S: Yes, now, when it comes to the contents of the pedagogic books, like you've talked about the primers. When you are using them with adults, do you try to adjust these contents somehow, so that the adults feel that it is closer to them.

M: No, at least you have to adjust it. Because if you don't adjust it, they would be feeling bored.

S: Hmm.

M: They don't like it.

S: And how do you do that?

M: Ah, with some aspect in the primers, you have to select those ones that will suit them.

S: Aha.

M: Then, mostly these things, because in the primers these are some things which, ah, they are the ones, they are doing it, then they want to really know how to read, how to write it, yes, that's it.

S: Aha, like when it describes farming activities.

M: and so on.

S: or building a house.

M: building a house and so on.

S: That's very interesting for them.

M: Yes.

S: And that's the type of lessons that they are interested in.

M: they are interested in.

S; Yes, oh, that's extremely. Now, is there. I still want you to tell me more in terms of, am, the relationship. Do those who have already been literate through your classes there at Yang, to ? on those ones. Aha, they keep on reading. What do they read once they know how to read? Those who were there reading, even before the Bible was published?

M: Ok.

S: You must observe them, I mean you live with them, you know about their habits.

M: Yeah, most of them, they (feel well?) because they say, they thought they know much but the learning of the Kom language they have discovered that they did not know anything. Because there are certain things in the Kom language which they did not know how they are called in English. So when you teach them, because we teach, and then explain certain things in English.

S: Aha.

M: Yes, there are things in the Kom language which they use in their houses and they don't know the names in English.

S: Aha, so you are saying that there's some sort of a transition also to English.

M: To English, yes.

S: So that, a very good bilingualism.

M: bilingualism.

S: bilingualism at least within the, that's very interesting.

M: Yes.

S: Yes, and, uhh, if you are looking, what are the other major problems that you face in managing like literacy classes?

M: Like.

S: Especially because you are dealing with adults.

M: Yes, my problem is, most of them, you know in the village, this, uhh, death celebration and so on.

S: Aha.

M: Because, just of ?, like last week I had a class and there was a death celebration in my area and most of them did not come.

S: Hmm.

M: They complain that they slept at the death celebration and there was no way.

S: Aha.

M: I stood there for a long time, nobody came.

S: laughs.

M: So I was, uhh.

S: Oh sorry, aha, oh.

M: M: laughs.

S: Oh yes, so yes, I mean it's really interesting to see the efforts you are doing and I see that you continue because actually I have seen that you are doing so much in your area to keep on with this literacy class. Do you intend to stop one day ever to try to do your best in your area to continue your literacy centre?

M: No, I don't intend to stop, I want to continue with it, because I want everybody in my area at least to know how to read and write in their language.

S: In Itanjikom ?

M: Yes, in Itanjikom .

S: Oh yes, thank you very much for this interview, Marcelus.

M: Thank you too.

S: Ok.

M: Ok.

-----

**31 August 2006, 4.30pm.**  
**Njinikejem, Belo Area,**  
**Boyo Division, North West Province, Cameroon.**

[Intro]:  
*This is the interview with Bobe Ngam Aloysius, who is one of the pioneer promoters of the Itanjikom literacy.*  
*He was very active in the area of PROPELCA all throughout his professional years and even now he's retired he's still very active in promoting the local language programme.*  
*So, uhh, I'll try to gather some information from him.*

Seraphin: Ah, good afternoon, Bobe Ngam.  
 Bobe Ngam: Good afternoon, Mr. Kamdem.  
 Seraphin: Hmm, yes, uh, we will start with something very important which is, just tell us more about yourself. I mean who are you? I mean we know you in the programme for all those years. Can you briefly tell us a bit more about your background and who you are before we get into what you've done for Itanjikom .

Bobe Ngam: Well, I'm a professionally trained teacher with one certificate. I started teaching in 1961 as a provisional teacher, then I did my teacher training course for seven years and I got my certificate finally as a good one.

S: Aha.

B: I taught in many schools, hmm, in the North West Province.

S: Hmm.

B: In the Widikum area, I taught in Nso' area for 18 years, and probably... Always teaching class seven.

S: Hmm.

B: And later on, in 1997, I was referred to Kom area where I have been headmaster for five schools and a parish.

S: Hmm.

B: And 1985, since I developed interest in the mother tongue, in Itanjikom ...

S: Hmm.

B: ...my manager asked me to go for a training course in secondary college in Mankon...

S: Hmm.

B: ...where we started the, where we started the Itanjikom programme...

S: Hmm.

B: ...in 1985, along with some others from Kom

S: Hmm.

B: Notably among them Pius Loh, yes, then we moved to Lus on the same programme and then, where I got my PROPELCA certificate as a mother tongue teacher in the Kom language, bilingual series, in English and Kom.

S: Hmm.

B: Then the programme became congested and that was the 1<sup>st</sup> phase, and we had to..., we came down to Kom, and we, our first centre in the Kom country was St. Kitts. After four years of that, we had to spread. The centre is now in Belo in the Itanjikom programme, and PROPELCA, and Anya'jua, and Fundong and Njinikom, too.

S: Hmm.

B: Then, after this, all these years I was, uhh, the chief instructor for Belo centre in the mother tongue.

S: Oh, that is the first name, because later on what is now Literacy Supervisor.

B: Hmm, Literacy Supervisor.

S: Area Literacy Supervisor.

B: Yes, exactly.

S: Aha, that was even before Nawayn Naboh?

B: Before Nawayn Naboh, yes.

S: So she took over from you?

B: Yes, and she is my assistant, that is, I trained her. I've trained very many supervisors now.

S: Yes.

B: All supervisors from the Kom area were trained by me.

S: Hmm.

B: In the PROPELCA course.

S: Hmm.

B: Then, uhh, even back, in the school, uhh, I was sent to Anjin to open an Itanjikom school there. I was the manager. I did it there for three years. Then I was sent to Njinikom, where I continued...

S: Yes, that's when you were headmaster.

B: Headmaster, yes.

- S: Now, if we can have your view, I mean you, uhh, how do you see the involvement of adults in the literacy component because that's also part of a very active, uhh, component.
- B: Yes.
- S: of the programme of the KLDC, so I want you to give us your view about what, what brings the adults in the literacy classes. What's, you've been seeing all this over the years. What's their motivation and how do they manage?
- B: They are interested in the programme, notably because their children who are in school are able to read Itanjikom and they cannot read. So a lot of them ... so they are dying to come and learn the language in the mother tongue. And, and, of late, because the Bible has been translated into Kom language, most of them now want to read the Bible in their mother tongue. And in trying to read it, they see it's not easy and therefore they go into literacy classes to learn how to read and write in Kom.
- S: That's very very interesting. What do you think of that, because much literature has been published in Kom and what do you see in the relationship between this literature and the adult literacy classes?
- B: The adult literacy classes which was in English, uhh, they they don't, they are not impressed as much as they are impressed with the mother tongue.
- S: Hmm.
- B: Because they see its immediate use, of the mother tongue,
- S: Hmm.
- B: and then us, we will learn that a language cannot have way if you cannot read and write. And that's the challenge that they are facing.
- S: They want to go now and really have their mother tongue completed, so that the Kom people they can read and write and speak Kom.
- S: Hmm.
- B: That's why they are interested very much in the mother tongue classes.
- S: Hmm.
- B: Nevertheless, when you, uhh, establish a, uhh, a literacy class, they want to, also to know the English part of it.
- S: Hmm, because that is, they are interested in seeing a bilingual aspect.
- B: Yes.
- S: So that they can transit to English.
- B: To English, yes.
- S: Oh, that's very interesting.
- B: So these year that you were, that they were called instructors, which is now roughly the equivalent of the literacy supervisor, which actually you were doing...
- B: Yeah.
- S: Because you were working in the literacy activities.
- B: Yes.
- S: Ah, what has been the evolution of adult literacy over the years? I mean, uhh, are more people getting involved now and what is the use they are making of all the books that now are very much in the local language?
- B: Yeah.
- S: Which was not the case until 15 years ago.
- B: Yes, 15 years ago it was very scarce.
- S: Aha.
- B: To see a Kom adult even trying to hold a literacy book im Kom. They were not even there.
- S: Hmm.

B: Till they have been published and they, they, most of them now see the material for reading.

S: Hmm.

B: Though I think now to... to my own knowledge, it's still inadequate for the reading population of Kom.

S: Hmm, the quantities.

B: Quantities yeah.

S: Are inadequate.

B: Are inadequate. And ah, also they are not being re-edited because the Kom language is a growing language and developing.

S: Hmm.

B: So we need to revise it every, after every five years at least.

S: Hmm.

B: because you, you see spellings and all the like and changing certain things.

S: Yeah, modernising the language.

B: The language, yes.

S: For the evolution of the society and the community.

B: So the, the number of people who are reading the Kom language is expanding.

S: Hmm.

B: I think, according to me, to what I see everyday, it is getting larger than the material that is available. Because they are still using the primers to read, and of late it's only the Bible that has come out, to increase the...

S: the reading?

B: the... the... the library of the language.

S: Aha.

B: Then, ah, then also, the Kom, the people who, live in Kom, they are slow to write.

S: Hmm.

B: They are not.

S: Why? Why are they slow to write? Because that's a good observation.

B: Yes, it's a good observation. Ah, they are slow to write because you see, there is no motivation.

S: Aha.

B: There, there, there are no reasons.

S: Because, uhh, you may write a work and you don't know where to develop, where you can get help to develop that, ah, what they have written.

S: Aha.

B: To print it and then publish it in small booklets or pamphlets so that people can read.

S: Hmm.

B: The, the, the handicap there is financing

S: Hmm.

B: of a production

S: Hmm.

B: Uhh, for example, I have a series of stories which I have written, uhh, of proverbs, with me. They are just there in my manuscript but I don't know where I can go to get somebody to help me print and then develop it into a booklet or small pamphlet so that I can spread for reading, which is good material.

S: Mm, aha, that's interesting news.

B: That, that is like the old stories, which are being forgotten.

S: Hmm.

B: By..., by...



- S: And this is part of the cultural heritage and...
- B: ...part of the cultural heritage, yes.
- S: and it's getting lost.
- B: Lost, and, uhh, there are certain songs which children were singing in the evening and in the beginning... Those things are gone. And, uhh, and we thought that we should put it down in writing so that the new children, the new generation can know that this work used to happen.
- S: Hmm.
- B: It is very, very good.
- S: Hmm.
- B: Yeah, so the problem is how we will do the writing. It is only related to your library, because there is no way we would know finances to help you, uhh, maybe this is print and develop this, uhh, what we have produced.
- S: Aha.
- B: Because these colleges, they go from writing. Because they see no reason of writing a thing, and putting it in the, the cupboard, uhh, because there are no resources for them.
- S: You mean publishing things.
- B: Yes.
- S: Because writing as just the ability that you are carried through literacy, people try, but you are talking of, like, publishing literature.
- B: Publishing literature, yes.
- S: Itanikom literature.
- B: Literature yes, apply it, to make the number of people who are not literate in the language, to read.
- S: Hmm.
- B: So the, reading material for the Kom language is still inadequate.
- S: Hmm.
- B: It is not much.
- S: Hmm.
- B: And, uhh, this could be pushed if only of the KLDC or any other person who can come in to help, can make the publish, publications, uhh, wider...
- S: Yeah and if we go back to all the years that you have observed the literary practices, I mean teaching, in classes, as somebody who has had a very wide experience in teaching in the formal settings, how can you comment on how pedagogy has, or is adapted to suit the adults? What you've observed around, in the adult literacy classes, adjusting the pedagogy so that the adults will really feel that they are treated as adults first.
- B: Yes.
- S: and also, that the way pedagogy is adjusted helps them in the acquisition of literacy.
- B: Yes.
- S: What's your, your, your analysis?
- B: Yeah, my analysis is that, uhh, when you get, you get people who don't even know the English language.
- S: Hmm.
- They've never, they've never been touched with the, the alphabet of any language.
- S: Aha.
- B: If you go into a class now and get, uhh, and get, uhh, 15 or 20 of them, and put, they don't know how to read anything. And to use them with the Kom alphabet and the Kom reading, and you are carrying them from there to the English, ah, ah, alphabet and reading, they catch it faster and they are happier.

S: Aha.

B: So if you compare, because to bring them from there to the English language is very easy because they know the alphabet, the Kom alphabet has 29 letters, and the English language has 26 alphabets

S: 26 letters.

B: 26 letters of the alphabet. So when you introduce those 26 letters, the English, the Kom language has 29, English has 26 letters of the alphabet, the individual is already there.

S: Hmm.

B: So moving them from the mother tongue, uhh, literacy, to the English, or any other language, it is very easy for them.

S: Hmm.

B: And this has been done

S: Hmm.

B: Because when you go with them in the, the adult literacy, and teach them the letters of the alphabet in Kom, then when you are saying that, when you are writing even English, or any language, it's still easy, it's, most of this, ah, alphabet, they, they pick up the reading very easy and they can combine and then compare.

S: Hmm.

B: And in no time they can also be reading in English, and also in their language.

S: Hmm.

B: Because the, the simple explanation and it's for those who are interested in the language.

S: Ok, yeah, that's very, very good information and thank you very, very much for this, uhh, conversation.

B: Yeah.

S: And I hope that we'll have more of this sort of things to tap from your, very, uhh, extensive knowledge...

B: Yes.

S: ...of the Kom language programme over the years.

B: Yes.

S: Thank you very much.

B: Yeah.

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**31 August 2006.**

**Baptist School, Belo, Boyo Division, North West Province, Cameroon.**

**5.47pm**

[Intro]:

*Interview with Mr. Yong Francis, who is Literacy Supervisor for the Anya'jua Area and who has been active over many years in the Itanjikom Literacy Programme.*

S: So, uhh, good afternoon Francis.

F: Good afternoon.

S: Amh, we will be talking mainly in the form of a conversation, as a Literacy Supervisor, as a Literacy Monitor, in Isae'be'si where I was the other day. I would like to first know about yourself before we even move into more detail about the literacy activities, so, can you tell us briefly, who are you? We know you but we want you to say it again, so that people understand where you come from before being even in this programme.

F: Thank you very much. Uhh, my name is Yong Francis. I am the supervisor for Anya'jua area. Umh, that this, mainly, my introduction.

S: But what's your professional background, where did you come from in terms of what you've been doing over the years, before even getting into being the Literacy Supervisor.

F: Well, I am from Anya'jua, and where I first started my adult literacy, uhh, my education, was in, was at Njinikom.

S: Hmm

F: That was in 1992. Then, from 1992 we ended the course. Secondly I took the second course of the PROPELCA, it was at Belo CBC School where we are now sitting, and that was in 1993/1994. Then, from 1995 I ended my year 3 at Anya'jua when it was created as a centre.

S: Hmm.

F: Before this, uhh, Anya'jua was created as a centre, I've just ended as early as I ended my adult literacy at Njinikom in 1992. Then I started my work in Anya'jua area as first as facilitator, that is, uhh, to carry out the Kom language, uhh, classes. Then I opened three centres. One was at Anya'jua . The second one was at Juambum and the third one at Anjininchin. Uhh, then I used to carry out these classes every *kontri sondei* [Country Sundays]. Every morning when I get off from my bed, I'd begin classes at Anya'jua .

S: Hmm, what time?

F: From 8 o'clock to 10 o'clock. Then I leave from Anya'jua to Juambum. I start classes from 10 o'clock to 1 o'clock.

S: Oh, how can you, ok?

F: The same day. Then I leave from Juambum there to Anjininchin. I would start classes from 3 o'clock to 6 o'clock. That is, how I started up to when it was in 1996, when I was, Hmm, appointed as, uhh, supervisor.

S: Let's see, yeah. Hmm, let's go back to the issue of teaching practices in the literacy classes. I mean I've been in a number of your classes and I've observed a number of things but can you tell us more about how you handle the adults, because you know adults as we know are different from children.

F: Yes.

S: What it is is how do you organise the teaching of adults, to help them, uhh, learn Itajikom ?

F: Well, usually, the question you have asked is very true. With the adults it's quite a different method of teaching them. Then with the adults, then you have to make a situation known to the public. Your move first...

S: Hmm.

F: ...is you talk to the headquarters.

S: Hmm.

F: When you have to operate the centre.

S: Hmm.

F: After they have known that this is the programme you want to carry out in his village,

S: Hmm.

F: it is from now you will then write some public notice.

S: Hmm.

F: that such and such a literacy class will start on such and such a day.

S: Hmm.

F: on such a month

S: Hmm.

F: at this place. Then to inform the public to know.

S: Hmm.

F: Then from there you also see those who are the head leaders of churches.

S: Hmm.

F: Then it is from there you lead this information in death celebrations...

S: Hmm

F: ... and market places. Then from there before the day of the class you are to start.

S: Hmm, and in class, how do you deal with the adults?

F: Well, in the class you first of all you have to put them very simply way of understanding, that now the world is changed. And we don't, the government itself and even the community wants that people should skip from the other step to the next step.

S: Hmm.

F: Then you have to tell them that it is normal if you don't know how to read in English, is it is normal that you can't even read in your own language? Then after you have introduced when you have said all these things in their hearings, it is from there you will start now to bring them following your lesson or plan, how you are going to carry out your lesson with them to make them be suitable or understandable of the lessons you are going to carry out with them

S: Hmm.

F: as mother tongue is concerned.

S: Hmm. So, so, roughly if we go back to the motivations of the learners in your area, why do adults come to the literacy classes?

F: Well, normally they come because they know that in the absence of early days, when their parents were not well educated to send them to English schools, then, normally, it is normal for one to learn. Not only to learn how to write and read the English, also you can also fail to learn to write the English language but you can also learn your mother tongue that you speak, same.

S: Thank you

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**31 August 2006**

**Fundong, Boyo Division, North West Cameroon**

**7.20 a.m.**

[Intro]:

*Uhh, this is, amh, the beginning of the interview with, ah, Bobe Diangha Emmanuel. He's been for many years one of the many pioneers in the Kom Literacy programme. He's been in the PROPELCA trainings, he's been heavily involved in literacy and today, uhh, he's the, uhh, Literacy Committee Chairman with the KLDC, the Kom Language Development Committee. So, uhh, I, during the research, I am collecting some information through this interview with him. So we'll just set off.*

Seraphin: Yes, uhh, good morning, Bobe Diangha.

Diangha: Good morning Mr. Kamdem.

Seraphin: Yes, I am really happy that we are having this conversation. I would, I would like us to start with knowing about your background, even before you went into the Itanjikom Literacy Programme, could you tell us more about yourself, the person, who is Bobe Diangha Emmanuel.

Diangha: Amh, I am a man born in Abuh.

S: Hmm.

D: Then I went to school in 1939, possibly.

S: Hmm.

D: And, amh, went through the CBM school.

S: Hmm, what's CBM?

D: CBM meaning Cameroon Baptist Mission.

S: Aha.

D: In Belo.

S: Aha.

D: So I went through that

S: Aha.

D: and completed in 1955.

S: Aha.

D: Then I went to training in 1959.

S: Training?

D: Teacher training.

S: Aha.

D: So I completed in 1960.

S: Aha.

D: Since then I have been a teacher throughout.

S: Aha.

D: And, uhh, in fact, I retired.

S: Aha, when did you retire?

D: In 1995.

S: Aha, aha.

D: Yes, before then I had done the PROPELCA courses in Itanjikom .

S: Aha.

D: And I am a teacher in Itanjikom really.

S: Aha, so when did you start the literacy activities in Itanjikom exactly? When I mean start I mean when did you start teaching and running a literacy centre?

D: Amh, when I went to the PROPELCA course, that time it was in Bamenda.

S: Aha.

D: So it was in 1990, when I really started to read and write Kom

S: Aha.

D: And, uhh, I did it for three years.

S: Yes, yes, amh.

D: Then I started teaching, I was made a PROPELCA teacher also.

S: Hmm.

D: For some time. Then before I stopped when others knew it and were coming in to help.

S: Hmm. Now you have a Literacy Centre in Abuh.

D: Yes.

S: Yes, and, uhh, we would like to go more into what's going on there. I mean, uhh, what's your, the attendance, I mean, tell me more about the Literacy Centre.

D: Really, we have two classes.

S: Aha.

D: The class which is Year 1, for Year 1, those who are still, especially those who do not know how to read.

S: Aha.

D: Then there is another class for those who are able to read English.

S: Aha

D: Yes, those who are able to read English are reading and writing Kom.

S: Hmm.

D: Those...

S: That's like more of a transition class...

D: Yes, fine

S: ...to the mother tongue.

D: Fine.

S: but it's class 1 which is mainly for Itanjikom ?

D: Class 1 which is mostly for Itanjikom .

S: Aha.

D: Because the people are not literate yet.

S: Hmm, so what, what are didactic materials, I mean the books that you use in class?

D: Aha.

S: What do you generally use, amh, in Abuh, uhh, there in your literacy centre?

D: There is the Guide.

S: The Guide to the Kom Alphabet.

D: Guide to the Kom Alphabet, that's one. And, uhh, we have, amh, the Book 1.

S: Aha.

D: There is a Book 1.

S: Aha, is that the Ye'i Itanjikom 1?

D: Yes, it's now Ye'i Itanjikom 1. There's now Ye'i Itanjikom 2 and 3.

S: Aha.

D: And there is a fourth one now.

S: Aha.

D: That's now Ye'i Itanjikom 4.

S: Aha, which is actually a post primer.

D: Yes.

S: Aha.

D: It's a post primer.  
S: Actually even Book 3 is already a post-primer.  
D: Yes.  
S: Yes.  
D: Amh, correct.  
S: So now, I want to look, at these adults, who come in. What is their..., I mean what motivates them? I mean what is generally their motivation to come in?  
D: Most of them, most of them this time they say that they want to do it because they have never read, they have not been readers before.  
S: Aha.  
D: They have not been educated before.  
S: Aha.  
D: So they have found a chance.  
S: Aha.  
D: You see.  
S: Aha.  
D: They want also to read.  
S: Aha, so they believe that education is to read and write and that that will help them.  
D: That, that, yes, it's a very, it's a gateway to, to, uhh, many things.  
S: Like?  
D: Reading and writing.  
S: Aha.  
D: It's the gateway, and so, if they know it they can be able to read other, other pamphlets, news...  
S: Aha.  
D: and so on.  
S: Aha, maybe the new Bible in Itanjikom , and others.  
D: The new Bible in Itanjikom is one, plus other story books.  
S: Aha.  
D: Yes.  
S: What are the other problems that they have, I mean, in terms of their acquisition of literacy? You are with them in class everyday, so what are the specific problems they have in the process of their learning?  
D: Yes, the specific problems are many. One: they want to be able to write their names.  
S: Aha.  
D: They want to be able to read something, even figures in the market so that they are not always fooled.  
S: Aha.  
D: Yes.  
S: And when you are teaching them, I mean, amh, what motivates them, I mean how do they deal with the didactic material that you have. I mean, like, uhh, since they cannot easily read and write. What do they try to read in class for example?  
D: Uhh, uhh, now, they read sentences, they read names.  
S: Aha.  
D: Which to them is very important, to read their name and other people's names.  
S: Hmm.  
D: Yes.  
S: And what about the, hmm, how do you manage, because adults are different, very different from kids as we all know in the basic pedagogy.  
D: Yeah.

- S: Now we are teaching them like andragogy, how to teach with adults. Can you just comment briefly how you manage them in class, as adults, be it how you organise the class, how you handle everything with them?
- D: First of all, uhh, adults, as you say, are not like children.
- S: Aha.
- D: They can easily listen, they, they say what they like but they have to be controlled in a way.
- S: Hmm.
- D: So that if you bring things which they like and you always bring in a new thing the adults would like, but if you continue bringing in the same thing for about two days, three days, they are, they become...
- S: bored?
- D: Aha. They are not ready again to continue listening. You may find some of them move out just to stroll and later people are coming back in.
- S: Aha.
- D: But if there is a new thing it retains them in the classroom.
- S: Aha, and like the organisation of your classes, do you adjust it, uhh, so that you take into account the fact that adults have many social activities.
- D: Well, sometimes we can even get them, we get them, to answer questions or ask questions...
- S: Aha.
- D: ...relating to social life.
- S: Aha.
- D: Yes, they ask questions, they answer questions from the teacher and by so doing they, too, are discussing problems of their life..
- S: Hmm.
- D: Yes.
- S: Hmm. And, and the fact that they already know to speak perfectly and they understand perfectly in Itanjikom, how does that help in class?
- D: Oh.
- S: For those who are just, ah, I think it should be normally a big advantage so that they learn how to read and write because they already know how the language is, the words, and everything.
- D: They know the language and they discuss in class, they are interested in learning and writing some words. Some words will become important and special, so that our people would like to write such words on the board and read them.
- S: Hmm.
- D: You see just speaking a language you may get about three words and you think it's allright. But, but when they get specifically to some words they see that this word is a single word and this one letter nearer it is a word in itself.
- S: Hmm.
- D: Yes, this is what happens.
- S: Hmm, and, and in class, do you use, uhh, because we've mentioned Primer 1, 2, 3 that you use but do you also use other books like a collection of proverbs or other books because there is a large variety of literature produced in Kom.
- D: Yes we use them because this, uhh, is, what I think you have, uhh, some, some sentences, well... or you say, they are spoken in class. As long as we discuss things, they become, they easily come into play.
- S: Aha.
- D: You see, and the people are using the same proverbs.



S: Aha.

D: Not merely because they are written but because they have been the proverbs, they'll be used in many years to come.

S: Aha, so because they have the cultural background then it's easy for them to...

D: ...correct.

S: And to get to the language that you are teaching them.

D: Yes.

S: Yes, uhh, uhh, and now I would like us to go back briefly to the, amh, the Literacy Committee of which you are the chairman now. How is it organised? Can you tell us more about that?

D: Well with the Literacy Committee which I am chairman, amh, we have the chairman itself, we have a Secretary.

S: Hmm.

D: Of the Committee.

S: And who is the secretary?

D: The secretary is Mr. Yong Francis?

S: Hmm?

D: Am I forgetting his name?

S: Ngongbi?

D: Ngongbi Francis, correct. So he's the one who writes. But I am sorry to say that, uhh, the Literacy Committee this time has kind of failed.

S: Hmm?

D: Because you know that it's made up of these supervisors.

S: Aha.

D: The supervisors were receiving some remuneration.

S: Aha

D: At the end of every month.

S: Aha.

D: Later, nothing came again and my friends just went back.

S: I have seen it, and it's convinced me that things, just get harder. It is true, it is true, I am sorry to say this. It is true that the matter these days is to pay transport from Belo to Anya'jua to Fundong. And so, with those who come from there and someone like Ngongbi Francis and, amh, Timnge, they have to trek?

D: And they have no transport.

S: Yeah, I know what it means, I've been to all these places and it's taken me hours to get there, I mean it's really tough.

D: That's it.

S: And it costs so much. Sometimes even if you have money it's not always easy to find transport.

D: Yes.

S: There's no vehicle on those roads.

D: And so this is where the thing began failing.

S: Yeah. But theoretically, in the organisation of the literacy committee, so we have the chairman, we have a secretary?

D: Yes.

S: Then we have a Literacy Coordinator.

D: Literacy Coordinator.

S: And the Literacy Supervisors.

D: Yes, the supervisors.

S: Ok, and, uhh, they have regular meetings.

D: They have regular meetings.

S: Yes, hmm, so, when is the next General Assembly of KLDC?

D: I think I cannot say it because it has not functioned for some time.

S: Ah, yeah?

D: I cannot say. Mr. Waingeh may be able to say something about it.

S: Yes I'll be meeting him soon. We'll have a talk about that then. Thank you.

**31 August 2006**

**Alim, near Fundong, in the Kom land, North West Province, Cameroon.**

[Intro]:

*And, uhh, I am going to talk with Honourable Waingeh. He's, uhh, one of the pioneers of the Kom Literacy Programme. He's been working relentlessly over the years to promote the language in many positions. He's been published in the language. But mostly he's the person who has been chairing the KLDC, the Kom Language Development Committee, for quite a number of years now. So I'll be discussing with him a number of issues related to the adult literacy which is the interest of this study.*

Seraphin. So, uhh, good morning, Honourable Waingeh.

Honourable Waingeh: Morning.

Seraphin: Uhh, maybe I will just start with something that maybe is for others but which is still important to be recorded. Uhh, can you tell us briefly about yourself? Because there are many things that I know personally about yourself but it's good also that you tell others about yourself briefly. There's so much to say I know.

Honourable Waingeh: Well as you say I am Wange Ndim Albert, and Honourable because I've been to Parliament. I spent 10 years there.

S: Hmm.

HW: That's two mandates. Between 1988 and, uhh, uhh, 1997. But basically I am a teacher by profession. I've been teaching since 1972.

S: Hmm.

HW: And I'm a teacher of English language and it's because of my experience as a language teacher that I became interested in the Kom language being taught as well. So, I don't think I can say more about myself than that I am a teacher.

S: Hmm. And your involvement in the Itajikom programme. I mean, can you just briefly tell us about just how you came into it actually?

HW: Uhh, the Kom language has been spoken for years but nobody thought of writing it. I am really wrong when I say that nobody thought of writing it: when Christianity started in Kom and that was about 1926, there was, uhh, some interest in being able to translate particularly prayers, portions of the Bible and, uhh, those who translated needed to put them in writing and, uhh, everybody whoever could speak Kom, the way he felt he could write, so you had many versions of the Kom language.

S: Hmm.

HW: Many songs were sung in Kom but written in various ways, depending on who was writing and and, uhh, most of us who were interested in the language, in the Kom language, wanted to arrive at one way of writing the Kom language and, uhh, in the 80s, SIL came our aid, uhh, when they chose here and sent an advisor on linguistics.

S: Hmm.

HW: And it is actually with him that we started establishing an alphabet for the Kom language and we are working, using that alphabet up to today. We have worked, we've been able to translate the New Testament...

S: Hmm.

HW: ...into the Kom language and publish it.

S: Hmm

HW: As well as various other texts that have been produced, and hymnals in the Kom language.

S: Yeah I know there is a huge variety of literature and then

HW: Yes.

S: There's even some of your own publications.

HW: Such as 'The Revenge Tangnangkoli which is, uh, the, the legend that, uh, that relates how the Kom people came to be where they are...

S: Aha.

HW: ...presently. And so we learn that and we published that in the Kom language.

S: Aha. And in general because you have an overview of these the literacy activities, mainly the adult literacy activities, what, what's the motivations of adults to come to literacy classes? What brings them in, what's usually their needs, I mean.

HW: There's a general, uhh, hmm, interest in the adults to be able to read and write.

S: Aha.

HW: And, uhh, they find that we have more people who are more volunteers in the Kom who can teach in the Kom language.

S: Hmm.

HW: And, uhh, they also find that it is faster for them to learn to read and write what they already know.

S: Hmm.

HW: Then to read and write at the same time to learn to read, to write and also to understand a language that they do not already know.

S: Yes, you are talking about the difference of coming just directly into the Kom programme and someone who is using, like, English. Is that what it means?

HW: Precisely.

S: Aha.

HW: Aha.

S: And, and, what other motivations do they have? What other, I mean from your observations over the years?

HW: Hmm. The, the greater part of the motivation is that, uhh, the Kom people are heavily religious.

S: Aha.

HW: And most of them are church goers.

S: Hmm.

HW: And, uhh, most of the activities in church they like to be able to, to refer...

S: Hmm.

HW: ...somewhere, and that is the Bible. The records, the hymns, uhh, most of them would like to be able to record theirs, what they have, I mean the songs they learn.

S: Hmm.

HW: Then there is also commerce...

S: Hmm.

HW: ...which, uhh, is very important.

S: Hmm.

HW: And, uhh, particularly for women, because if you attend most of these adult literacy classes, it's mostly women who attend.

S: Hmm.

HW: Not really that the men are not interested but, uhh, men are a little bit, uhh, I would say, ashamed to be found struggling to learn at an old age where the women, uhh, feel quite free and most of them are engaged in business. Even if it is just selling their beans because they would like to record what they do, uhh, uhh.

S: You mean to record that in writing?

HW: In it, yeah.

S: Hmm.

HW: What they are doing, and I think, uhh, it's part of this motivation.

S: Aha.

HW: Also there are most of them participating in meetings.

S: Aha.

HW: Social groups and uhh, most businesses they, is run in groups, and anyone, woman, any adult, would feel cheated if he cannot, he or she cannot refer to documents to be sure that what they are talking about is, uhh, is exact.

S: Hmm.

HW: And this pushes them to be, uhh, to attend adult literacy centres and then, how to read and write.

S: Yeah, yeah and, uhh, what about the, I'm talking about the pedagogic practices here, I mean you have observed in the literacy classes. Does it play an important role the way the adults are taught because we all know that they are very different from the children, I mean they way they are handled in the literacy classes. What can you tell us about that?

HW: Uhh, I think that, uhh, the method which is more or less direct discussion and dealing with things that the adults already know.

S: Hmm.

HW: It makes it easier for them to learn to grasp just the ability to read now and to write, so I think that, uhh, the adult literacy classes are more or less discussion classes

S: Aha.

HW: which are suitable for adults.

S: Aha.

HW: So that they are not under the pressure that little kids...

S: Hmm.

HW: ...are under when they are attending the, the normal classes that they have. Also the timing of the classes...

S: Hmm.

HW: ...is determined by the adults...

S: Hmm.

HW: ...based on the availability of time.

S: Hmm.

HW: So it makes it all easier for them to work out their studies.

S: Hmm. And, and about the literature: there's a vast, a vast array of books that have been published in Kom. Do you see them widely used in literacy classes as it should be?

HW: Uhh, the, I would say are widely, those that are available.

S: Aha.

HW: Because even though they have been published, they cost money.

S: Hmm.

HW: And a factor is the ability to acquire those, uhh, papers.

S: Aha.

HW: I mean those books in the various classes.

S: Hmm.

HW: I've had experience with, uhh, adult literacy classes where the teachers concentrate on, uhh, getting the students, let's call them that, to read the Kom newsletter.

S: Aha.

HW: Uhh, which we used to publish and we are not financially able to publish now.

S: Hmm.

HW: And, uhh, they see the stories that, uhh, were published in these newsletters were so interesting that, uhh, the adults, once one person could read, they will, felt like learning all of them to be able to read, to have direct access...

S: Hmm.

HW: ...in books and in the newspapers and in other books.

S: Hmm.

HW: Yes but, uhh, the limit there is this limiting factor of money.

S: Hmm.

HW: Yeah.

S: Hmm.

HW: There's always that, uhh, if those documents were available and free.

S: Hmm.

HW: You would find more people crowding to use them.

S: Hmm.

HW: But the publication is difficult, and expensive.

S: Hmm.

HW: And so the documents come to the market expensive.

S: Hmm.

HW: So sometimes they lie there in our archives and shops for years. People admire them but, uhh, they are not able to pick them up.

S: Aha, but there is definitely interest.

HW: There is.

S: To read all of this literature. Economic limitations. And those who can afford it do buy them.

HW: They do buy them, that is it.

S: Ah, recently there, there was the Bible. They say it was quite bought.

HW: Oh yes.

S: By those who are attending? So there's an interest in reading.

HW: That is it.

S: Yes, and how is the situation of the Literacy Committee within KLDC these days, I mean, are they really coping?

HW: Uhh, again, I am afraid they, they, I am afraid they are falling to pieces.

S: Aha.

HW: I am afraid, I'm sorry I have to say that because, uhh, again there is lack of enthusiasm because of lack of encouragement.

S: Aha.

HW: Yes, uhh.

S. Thank you.

**31 August 2006**

**Djichami, near Belo, Kom**

[Intro]:

*Continuation of the interview with, uuh, Mrs. Naboh Veronica, former Literacy Supervisor for the Belo area in the Itaŋikom Literacy Programme.*

Seraphin: Yes, I was just talking about the adaptation that you had to do. From a book initially designed for PROPELCA students in primary school to adults. So how did you manage to adjust the contents so that it will be closer or it will fit the adults?

Veronica: With, ah, the English section we had to write some, say if we went to teach them words, we wrote them on papers. Then, take for granted the alphabet. Yeah, we just had to write them on paper, for, just as an example, the A.

S: Hmm.

V: We wrote it down.

S: Hmm.

V: And we wrote 'abayn'. 'Abayn' is 'fufu' in Kom.

S: Hmm.

V: That is, where they cook fufu. Then, the 'a', under it, we indicate the first letter of the word 'abayn'.

S: Hmm.

V: Aha, so when, when the person sounds 'a, a, a', and...

S: Hmm.

V: ...and that is way we taught the letters...

S: Hmm.

V: ...of the alphabet.

S: Hmm.

V: Yes, coming back to things like, ah, like a word itself

S: Hmm.

V: That is, a word itself

S: Hmm.

V: You have to draw just a..., take for example, a ball.

S: Hmm.

V: You just draw a ball.

S: Hmm.

V: And then the person will know that this, this is a ball and will know come to realise that for his or herself that the letters under it is the spelling of the ball.

S: Hmm.

V: And I will continue to call it ball, ball.

S: Hmm.

V: Ball, ball, following the picture.

S: Hmm. Now if we look at this: there was that very famous project, or was it rabbit-rearing, by women in those days...

V: Yes.

S: ...where there was some sort of a functional literacy.

V: Actually.

S: Which was very, very, very much known in the Kom area and beyond.

V: Hmm.

S: Can you tell us more about how you came to put together the library, in helping women in their rabbit rearing?

V: Ok, yes, you know, hmm, we used to even visit some of them because the rabbit rearing was quite a common thing. Just we visited even the nearest compound and then we saw the rabbits. In bringing in, say, you know, mathematics...

S: Hmm.

V: Aha. They counted the rabbits.

S: Hmm.

V: To know the number.

S: Hmm.

V: They counted those that were white.

S: Hmm.

V: They counted those that were red.

S: Hmm.

V: They knew the numbers and so on.

S: Hmm.

V: Then they took note of them, of so many of them that were there altogether.

S: Hmm.

V: The much that were white, those that were red, those that were black, and so on.

S: Hmm.

V: So these are some of the ways that were brought in that work to the people.

S: Hmm.

V: Now baskets too that are being made by the women.

S: Hmm.

V: Well, they also had, to, had to see which materials were used in making baskets.

S: Hmm.

V: Like, ah, those ones that are harvested from there, from the hills.

S: Hmm.

V: Those, ah, small things...

S: Hmm.

V: ...that are harvested from the hills and then the other grass that is, that is just uprooted.

S: Hmm.

V: The one that's being rolled around and then fastened together with the other ones that are harvested in the forest.

S: Hmm.

V: Aha, so all these things, we brought them together and then women were able to learn faster and more.

S: Hmm aha.

V: Yeah. Even coming back just to working in the farm they were able to count the different things that they usually plant.

S: Aha.

V: And those that were harvested earlier and those that were harvested late, and so on.

S: Hmm

V: So all these things help them to assimilate faster.

S: So you had like, so you were building up the words through the activities the women were doing.

V: That they did, exactly.

S: And you wrote them down.

V: Yes, we wrote them down.

S: So did you have a booklet helping them in that, I mean, in Itanjikom ?



V: Of course. I think we had. They themselves wrote down all these things and then I myself wrote them down and so on.

S: Hmm.

V: Helping them to, because if you can, if you do not write them down, it will be difficult to follow up on them.

S: Hmm, and how is the project now? Is it continuing after all these years?

V: Well, after I had, ah, retired as a supervisor and, ah, one other class came up because presently the English adult literacy is also going on here.

S: Aha.

V: And we have assimilated all the students.

S: Hmm.

V: You know the students as Itanjikom children, ah, students, ah, adult members, they were interested in learning the English.

S: Hmm.

V: So that's why I relaxed for that.

S: Hmm, and if I come back to, all the issues of, ah, adults in class, I mean if you remember in those years, how, how, were the adults learning? What were the problems that they were encountering in their learning of Itanjikom reading and writing.

V: Yeah.

S: Some of the problems that they encountered because of their adult. They actually encountered problems because of their adult.

V: They actually encountered problems because since they were not literate when you started teaching them a thing, it would take quite a long time, even a letter. It will take them quite some time before they assimilate it.

S: Hmm.

V: because they were not used to English and anything whatsoever, they were only used to the Itanjikom and so it was a little bit difficult to follow up with them because, hmm, they did not know the letters neither did they know the different things in the, to be pronounced in English and so on.

S: Hmm.

V: Whereas if it is a, in a cosmopolitan town, it will be easy because when you teach, they already know the different things that they have to call in English, or in vernacular that, ah, with them, we call them, we taught them. Of course we brought in English very very casually.

S: Hmm.

T: Since they themselves were only used to the Itanjikom .

S: Hmm.

V: So, eventually you brought in some English words so that they also know how to call them because eventually they, they were so much inclined to learning English, despite the fact that I was teaching them the vernacular, they told me that they would love to learn English because meeting a stranger it would be difficult for them even to greet the stranger. And so, when there was time I brought in English, just to help them, and then I saw that that was actually what they were very much interested in.

S: Hmm.

V: So I brought it into them very casually.

S: Ok, and how do you see the literacy programme these days from what you hear and what you see? Do you see it as vibrant as it used to be and what do you think as somebody now who looks back comparing with those years when things were so active?

V: I think there's a difference today because ah, well in those days adults, especially women, knew the vernacular but now they are beginning to understand actually, even, ah,

pidgin, they can even understand how even to say, in the market, I think right now, as they love learning in English now. I think they know better, better.

S: Ok, thank you very much for this interview, Nawayn, and I hope we have some other chance some other time to talk more about your vast experience.

V: Thank you very much, thank you for coming too.

S: Aha, thank you.

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