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Seraphin Kamdem

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FROM DIALECTAL VARIATION TO STANDARDISATION, PRODUCTION OF LITERATURE, AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Revisiting the case of Ghòmálá', a Grassfields-Bantu language from Cameroon

Seraphin KAMDEM

Department of Languages and Cultures of Africa/School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS)/
University of London

INTRODUCTION

Cameroon is officially a French-English bilingual country, but it is actually highly multilingual with 286 local languages, all at various levels of standardisation. But from colonial times, and despite the Independence in 1960, none of the local languages has been granted an official status to be used in education, the administration or the public media. The two official languages of the country are still French and English, inherited from colonial times. These two languages are the ones mainly used in schools, the public administration, the official communication and the media.

Local languages in Cameroon therefore stand at a crossroads of contradictions in the 21st century: whereas the majority of Cameroonian communities still use them daily in their linguistic interactions and socio-cultural communication primarily in the oral realm, those same languages paradoxically are absent in those key areas of community life that matter most, namely the educational arena, and the public administration and official discourses. To add to the contradictions and paradoxes, the vast majority of Cameroonians do not have any native fluency or mastery of those official languages that are ubiquitous in education and public communication.

This paper will examine the case of Ghòmálá', a Grassfields-Bantu language from the West region of Cameroon, Africa, building its discussion on document analyses, field notes, and some data collected on the current teaching of Ghòmálá' within the local speech community in the West of Cameroon. Ghòmálá', which was adopted by UNESCO in the 1960s as one

of nine languages of wider communication for Cameroon, is considered to be one of those Cameroonian languages that are thriving¹ in comparison to the majority of the Cameroonian languages, and in terms of its print-richness and use in formal education, i.e. schools and literacy classes.

Ghómálá' IN THE WEST REGION

The Ghómálá' linguistic area is situated in the West region of Cameroon (see Figure 1 below). Within this region, the Ghómálá' linguistic area partially covers 5 of the 8 administrative divisions of the region, also referred to as "préfectures." The Ghómálá' linguistic community *per se* is made up of the following 14 chiefdoms: Bafounda, Baleng, Bandjoun, Bamougoum, Bansa, Bafoussam, Bameka, Bamendjou, Bahouan, Batie, Baham, Bapa, Badenkop and Bayangam. These chiefdoms are part and parcel of the larger family of Bamileke chiefdoms of the West of Cameroon (Domche-Teko, 1991; Kamdem, 1996; Lecoq, 1953).

The administrative divisions covered by the Ghómálá' linguistic area are:

- Bamboutos, with the Bafounda chiefdom ;
- Menoua, with the Bansa chiefdom ;
- Hauts Plateaux, with the Bameka, Bamendjou, Bahouan, Baham, Batie, Bapa and Badenkop chiefdoms ;
- Khoung Khi, with the Bandjoun and Bayangam chiefdoms ;
- Mifi, with the Baleng, Bamougoum and Bafoussam chiefdoms.

1. In the current world of globalisation, and with much of post-colonial nation-building still unfolding in the Global South, where smaller languages have become very invisible and are struggling to survive, the debate remains open about the application of various criteria designed by linguists and sociolinguists to assess the vitality of small and minority languages. As this chapter will show, the little vitality shown by Ghómálá' may even remain less visible until one goes deeper into the community to find it.



Figure 1

The Ghomálá' linguistic area

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Ghomálá' is classified in the *Linguistic Atlas of Cameroon, ALCAM* as: [960], Central Bamileke, East Grassfields, Grassfields, Bantu, Bantoid, Benue-Congo, Niger-Congo, Niger-Kordofanian (ALAC, 1983, p. 77). The *Ethnologue* (Grimes, 1996, p. 201) classifies Ghomálá' as: [BBJ], Bamileke, Mbam-Nkam, Narrow Grassfields, Wide Grassfields, Southern, Bantoid, Benue-Congo, Volta-Congo, Atlantic-Congo, Niger-Congo.

DIALECTAL VARIATION IN GHOMÁLÁ'

As seen earlier, Ghomálá' is spoken in 14 chiefdoms and villages which are historically distinct and fully separate socio-political entities, each of them having a dialectal variety which has developed over the last centuries with specific structural features and sociolinguistic dynamics (Nissim, 1972, 1975, 1977, 1981; Toukam, 2008; Kayum Fokoue, 2011).

Therefore, the Ghòmálá’ language, like many languages, is actually a language-unit and a dialectal complex of mutually intelligible varieties. The dialectal varieties of Ghòmálá’, as can be seen from Figure 1, are subdivided into 4 dialectal sub-areas, as follows:

- The Ghòmálá’-Central dialectal sub-area, with the following varieties: Həm spoken mainly in Baham, Jo spoken in Bandjoun, Wε in Bahouan, Yɔgam in Bayangam;
- Ghòmálá’-North, with the following varieties: Fu’sap spoken in Bafoussam, and Lan in Baleng,
- Ghòmálá’-South, with Denkwop in Bandenkop, Pa’ in Bapa, Te’ in Batie,
- Ghòmálá’-West—also called Ngəmba, with the varieties Mənjɔ spoken in Bamendjou, Fu’da spoken in Bafounda, Meka spoken in Bameka, Mugum spoken in Bamougoum, and Sa’ spoken in Bansoa.

Out of the four dialectal sub-areas of Ghòmálá’, the Ghòmálá’-Central area is of special interest, as it is the sub-area from which the reference standard dialect (Sadembouo, 1989; Sadembouo & Watters, 1987) has emerged for the development of written Ghòmálá’, as will be discussed in more detail in the following pages.

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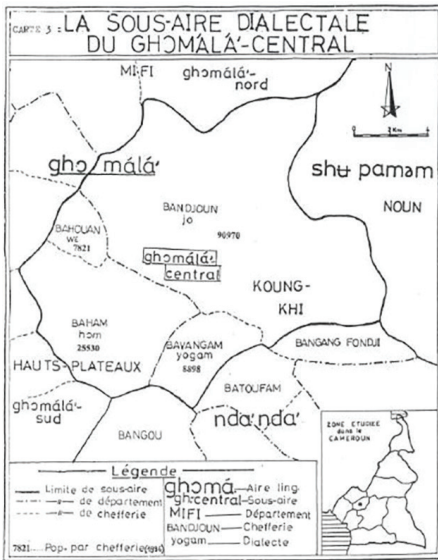


Figure 2

The Ghòmálá’-Central dialectal sub-area
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**BANDJOUN AND GHOMÁLÁ’²:
WHAT’S IN THE NAME?**

About the preceding syllabic cluster “Ba” in most Ghòmálá’ villages, and actually in almost all Bamileke villages or chiefdoms—there are dozens of Bamileke villages in the West of Cameroon: “Ba” in many Bantu languages is a class marker, but in the Bamileke land, it also means “the people

2. The apostrophe-looking symbol (’) at the end of the word Ghòmálá’ and found in many other words in the language is actually a glottal stop which is a full consonant in the language, and is consequently one of the letters of the Ghòmálá’ alphabet.

of.” In Ghòmálá’, strictly speaking it would be “pa-”, but the meaning is the same because the alternation of the preceding consonant “p” which is voiced and the “b”, voiceless, does not generally alter the meaning of the lexical stem, only its phono-syntactic context of use and collocation. So the village Bandjoun would read like “ba(n) – djoun”=“pa – (n)joun”=“pa – (n)jo”. Here the long rules’ explanation and the morphophonological processes have been oversimplified. So “ban-djoun” means “the people of njo”. The name of the village Bandjoun in Ghòmálá’ is “Jo”. So “the Bandjoun” are “the people of ‘Jo’”. A similar lexico-semantic analysis would apply to the names of all the other 14 Ghòmálá’ chiefdoms.

LANGUAGE PLANNING ON GHÒMÁLÁ’: CORPUS PLANNING AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Language planning unfolds through changes in structure (corpus) and functions (status) of languages and their dialectal varieties, and covers all conscious and planned activities by public and private institutions and organised groups and communities to manage and change or reorganise not just the relationship between the languages in a given territory, country or nation, but the relative status of these languages in terms of their use in public spaces and discourses, especially in the education system and public administration (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997; Liddicoat & Baldauf, 2008).

Like with many dozens of other Cameroonian languages, some key aspects of the socio-educational evolution of Ghòmálá’ over the last 30 years will fit in the socio-political activities of status planning at national level in Cameroon that will be discussed further in this chapter. But it should be pointed out that within the local Ghòmálá’ community over the last 60 years there has been equally some status planning regarding the selection and development of the Ghòmálá’-Jo dialectal variety as the reference standard dialect. At the heart of the efforts toward standardisation and literacy activism is the Ghòmálá’ language committee.

THE CASE OF THE GHÒMÁLÁ’ LANGUAGE COMMITTEE THROUGHOUT THE YEARS

The Ghòmálá’ language committee (in French, *Comité de langue Ghòmálá’*) has existed over the last 60 years or so in many institutional shapes and sizes. Essentially it has been an evolving group of Ghòmálá’ native speakers, most of whom are highly educated in French and English, and who have decided at various moments to work as a private ethnolinguistic organization leading research on, and promoting, the development of literacy activities in Ghòmálá’.

During each decade since the 1950s, different language experts have emerged to be leaders of the language committee. The language committee itself has even taken different names. Two notable names of pioneers and promoters of written Ghòmálá', and who have contributed more than a dozen publications in Ghòmálá, are the late Sebastien Ntagne and the French Father Gabriel Nissim—this latter remaining to date a key figure among linguistic researchers of Ghòmálá' (Nissim, 1972, 1975, 1977, 1981; Ntagne & Sop, 1975).

The Ghòmálá' language committee has also functioned in its first years under the aegis of some Christian Churches and, from the 1990s, as an independent lay NGO, instituted under the Law on associations guiding the creation and functioning of the most generic type of civil society organisations in Cameroon, namely the local private and community associations.

From the 1990s, with the Law on associations, the Ghòmálá' language committee became the APROCLAGh (an acronym from its French full name: *Association pour la promotion de la culture et langue Ghòmálá'*) and started an improved organization of both awareness raising on the importance of the language, and of training of literacy monitors, as well as some Ghòmálá' teaching activities.

From the seventies throughout the nineties, and still today, a number of established linguists have been active with and in the Ghòmálá' language committee. Many of them who are Ghòmálá native speakers are today university professors, and they have been spearheading both the didactic production of literature in Ghòmálá' and the actual teaching and training of literacy monitors in the language. Among them are researchers and university academics such as Gabriel Mba, Engelbert Domche-Teko, and Noe Nguesso (Domche-Teko, 2012; Mba & Domche-Téko, 1984; Mba, 2000).

DIALECTAL VARIATION AND THE CHOICE OF A STANDARD REFERENCE DIALECT: SADEMBOUO'S FRAMEWORK

In the area of dialectological studies, one of the leading African linguists to work on theoretical frameworks for the choice of a reference dialect for the standardization of African languages was Etienne Sadembouo (Sadembouo, 1989; Sadembouo & Watters, 1987). In the 1980s, and following extensive sociolinguistic fieldwork in Cameroon, many studies of the emergence of language committees, and extensive review of many local language literacy programmes, Sadembouo developed a set of criteria to be used in the development of hitherto unwritten African languages through a careful selection of one of the varieties most suitable for the written development of the languages in question. As Sadembouo had observed, the multi-dialectal

situation of many African languages still in their oral form had become a hindrance to their standardization. Whereas in oral communication the mutual intelligibility among dialectal varieties makes ample room for satisfactory inter-variety communication, when a language needs to be used for literacy, it is not practical nor efficient if every speaker is attempting to write in their variety as they speak it. For the sake of language standardisation, the issue of the selection of a variety arises, and the one chosen should be the most adequate to become the reference standard for writing.

Many language promoters all over Africa have chosen different routes to find a standard reference dialect for the written development of local languages: there are those who choose to create a new language through some form of structural synthesis between the existing dialects, and those who just go for an arbitrary choice of any dialect, most often on the basis of covert and subjective criteria. Sadembou chose what he called “the logical, non-subjective choice based on criteria, on objective grounds” (Sadembou, 1989, p. 13).

Notably, the necessity for a reference dialect is not to be born out of any supposed structural superiority of a given dialectal variety, but is to stem from an operational necessity in language planning for the sake of cost-benefit, efficiency and practicality. As Sadembou put it:

At the writing level, a language should have one common pattern, recognised and accepted by all speakers and users of the language. The reference dialect is therefore, the language variety which has been chosen by the language standardization and modernization agents to defy all the other challenging dialects. The reference dialect is not frozen; its written form is perfectible in the development process of the language. (Sadembou, 1989, pp. 12-13)

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Out of the criteria elaborated in Sadembou’s model for the selection and development of a reference dialect within any language-unit formed of many mutually intelligible dialectal varieties, let’s first look at the *fundamental* criteria.

Regarding criteria deemed fundamental, Sadembou posits that the following should be applicable:

- A high degree of declared understanding of the dialects to be chosen;
- A high degree of predicted understanding of the dialect to be chosen;
- A numerical importance of the dialect speakers;
- An advantageous geographical position of the dialect;
- A location of the dialect at the centre of community activity;
- A high prestige of the dialect;

- The pureness³ of the dialect;
- The vehicularity of the dialect.

Regarding the secondary or “important but not sufficient” criteria in the framework, there are 6 in total: the attitude of the government and public administration to the dialect in question, the religious influence of the dialect, its socio-economic importance, the written documents already existing in the dialect, the historical expansion of the language in terms of migratory movement of the speakers, and the expressed feeling on the ease of understanding and speaking of the dialect (Sadembouo & Watters, 1987; Sadembouo, 1989). There are also a number of *marginal* criteria⁴.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A REFERENCE DIALECT FOR GHŌMÁLÁ’: FROM PRACTICE TO THEORY

In the case of Ghŏmálá’, the development of the reference standard dialect was historically built from practice that actually later on aligned itself with Sadembouo’s theoretical framework discussed above. In other words, a lot of the guidance criteria elaborated on by Sadembouo had already been followed and implemented through the evolution of the Ghŏmálá’ language well before the 1980s. It could even be argued that the scientific work on the standardisation of Cameroonian languages as led by linguists and sociolinguists like Domche-Teko, Sadembouo, Tadadjeu, and Watters, emerged from the practical experience of local language programmes such as Ghŏmálá’ and neighbouring Fe’efe’e; this latter being the case study language on which much of the model built by Sadembouo was based.

Among the authors who specialised on Ghŏmálá’ and published academic work in the 1970s on its phonology and lexical morphology is Gabriel Nissim (Nissim, 1972, 1975, 1977, 1981). His work led the way and established the foundation for much of the structural description of Ghŏmálá’.

Historically, one can claim that an application by various promoters of the standardisation of Ghŏmálá’ of at least some of the key criteria in Sadembouo’s framework for the choice of a reference standard dialect led to the emergence of Ghŏmálá’-Jo as the reference standard dialect for that language.

In this vein, some key aspects of the emergence of Ghŏmálá’-Jo as reference dialect were right in line with some of the fundamental and also the secondary

3. Sadembouo recognized right away that this criterion was controversial in the sociolinguistic field, but took the stance of still according it some value in his model, clarifying that pureness in his view was “taken to mean that language speakers feel that a dialect has genuineness due to the fact that the said dialect is much safer from external contacts”, SADEMOUO, 1989, pp. 16-17.

4. Due to their minor relevance to the current discussion, the *marginal* criteria are not covered here.

criteria elaborated later by Sadembouo. Compared to all the other villages and chiefdoms, Bandjoun had by far the highest numbers of native speakers. The chiefdom is definitely situated at an advantageous geographical position in the whole Ghòmálá' linguistic area; and equally the village is a vibrant centre of economic activity and intra-regional trade. With the history of Bandjoun as the most powerful Ghòmálá' chiefdom, the Jo dialect has gained a lot of prestige over the decades, and the dialect has also gained a high level of vehicularity.

A lot has to be said about the demographic size and the political might of Bandjoun as more or less the de facto leading village among the Ghòmálá' chiefdoms but also the fact that a lot of the first local language promoters, educationists, linguists, and researchers from the Ghòmálá' community who published and put Ghòmálá' on the academic and literacy maps from the 1950s through the 1960s and 1970s were mainly from the village of Bandjoun. Somehow that has also influenced significantly the emergence of Ghòmálá'-Jo as the reference standard dialect. Even though this is not overtly validated in the discussion and literature on the choice of a reference dialect of Ghòmálá', the dominance of people from Bandjoun within the larger and evolving team of promoters and researchers, writers and teachers and literacy monitors of Ghòmálá' definitely did contribute to the emergence of that variety as the written standard.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE GHÒMÁLÁ' ALPHABET AND ORTHOGRAPHY

The early orthographies of Ghòmálá' were developed in the 1920s-1940s. Unfortunately, until the 1950s, all these earlier orthographies were based mainly on the writing systems of colonial languages, namely German, French and English, and therefore, the early Ghòmálá' authors exclusively using the graphemes from those European languages were not able to write many sounds specific to Ghòmálá'.

Since 1979, there has been an irreversible trend in the development of writing systems for most Cameroonian languages, as their recent orthographies are based mainly on the *General Alphabet of Cameroonian Languages* (GACL) adopted by the vast majority of linguists, educationists and language workers in 1979 (Tadadjeu & Sadembouo, 1984). The GACL proposes a vast array of graphemes or letter-sounds where most sounds attested in Cameroonian languages can be found. Each specific language just has to pick those that are attested in it after a scientific phonological study and to build up its alphabet.

One of the "revolutions" of the GACL is that it 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. This consistent predictability of pronunciation of all graphemes in

Cameroonian languages following this principle makes for easier reading and writing in those languages. The current Ghomálá’ orthography is based on the principles of the *GACL* and is accepted and used by all the current authors and promoters of Ghomálá’.

MNYƏ DJWA'NYƏ GIGHI				MNYƏ DJWA'NYƏ TƏGI				
MONOGRAPHESES	DIGRAPHESES	PRONONCIATION FRANÇAISE	EXEMPLES	MONOGRAPHESES	DIGRAPHESES	PRONONCIATION FRANÇAISE	EXEMPLES	
A		A	Tá, Má, Ká	B		B	Bap, Búm, Bàn	
	Λə		Gao, Ntsaa	Bh, Bv		Bh	Bhá, Bvá, Bvú	
E		éole	Pé, Ké, Lé	C		Tch	Cám, Cè, Co'	
		(e muet)		D		D	Dáp, Dəg, Dəp	
Ə		əg, ɛg	Myá, Thá, Sá	Dh, Dz		D	Dhá, Dzám, Dzə	
É		Léve		G		G (gars)	Gá, Gə, Gu'ú	
I		Djre	Pí, Sí, Tí	Gh		Gh	Gho, Ghóm, Ghé	
O		Pgt	Mó, Só, Só	Dj		Dj	Jap, Jam, Jú	
Ɔ		Pgrte, pgrtme	Sók, Sók, P5	K		K	Ká, Kə', Kè	
U		Ou	Pú, mú, kú'	Kh		Kh	Kha, Khwə, Khukhúm	
Ɔ		Sans Equivalent	Dá, Fu', Kúf	L		L	Lá, Lé, Ləm	
W		Ou (oui, jouet)	Nwə, Pwá	M		M	Mú, Mə, M5	
Y		i	Shyə, Myə	N		N	Nəp, Nəm, Nwə	
Wy		U dans huit / buis	Wyá	Ij		Ng(anglais: sing)	Ijəm, Ijə, Ijə'	
				P		P	Páp, Pəp, Pí	
				Pf, Ph			Píə, Píə, Phə	
				Q		Inexistent		
				R		Rare	R	Cereret, Guré, Wútré
				S		Sourd	Sá, Sé, Səp	
				Sh		Ch (chaud)	Shám, She, Shúp	
				T		T	Tá, Tú', Təp	
				Th, Ts			Thá, Thə, Tsú, Tsə	
				V		V	Vám, Və, Vúm	
				X		Inexistent		
				Z		Z	Zə, Zə'	
				Zh		J(jea)	Zhəm, Zhəzhə, Zhəzhək	
						Coup de glotte	Pá', Əwá'nyə	

Mots repères ou mots clés				
Tá	Fə	Sim	Sí	Tə
Ton haut	Ton bas	Ton moyen	Ton montant	Ton descendant
Ordre du jour (Model)				
(séance d'1h 30mn)				
		Chants (10 mn), vocabulaire complémentaire (10 mn)		
		Proverbes, contes, rites et rituels, devinettes (10 mn chacun)		
		Grammaire et lecture (30 mn)		

B, D, F, H, K, L, M, N, P, T, V, Z (se prononcent comme en français)
W, Y, Wy = glides (Míryə; djwa'nyə tɛjɛm).

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Figure 3
An overview of the Ghomálá’ alphabet
© Tagne Melele, online.

The above⁵ Figure 3 provides the following:

- The letter-symbols of the Ghomálá’ alphabet in the columns entitled “Monographs” and “Digraphes”;
- Some guidance with their pronunciation in the column entitled “Prononciation française”, using mostly some French⁶ letter and words;
- And some example words (in the column “Exemples”) in Ghomálá’ containing the Ghomálá’ key letter in that row.

5. Tagne Melele, *Alphabet du Ghomálá’* - CC BY-SA 3.0, Available online at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=29035611> (Accessed 25.03.2017).

6. French remains the official language used in the Ghomálá-speaking area in Cameroon.

THE PRODUCTION OF LITERATURE IN GHOMÁLÁ': BETWEEN CHRISTIAN LITERATURE AND PEDAGOGICAL MATERIALS

As early as the 1950s, the formal writing of Ghomálá' started within the Christian Churches. *Mjuopshye Po Kristo*, a collection of Christian songs and liturgical hymns, and other Christian booklets were published by some Christian Churches at the time. In the 1960s-70s, partly as a consequence from the publication of Christian literature, the publication of lay literature and other pedagogic materials for literacy (still under the aegis of the Christian Churches), and the organisation of first formal literacy classes in Ghomálá', started and continued into the 1980s. The 1980s, 1990s and 2000s saw a massive effort in the promotion of literacy in Ghomálá', with the development and expansion of the Ghomálá' language committee, and the production of various titles in the language.

It is worth noting that, compared to French as the official language of the region, written literature in Ghomálá' still represents only a tiny portion of the overall printed literature available in the community. Almost all written literature such as books, newspapers, public information and sign boards and others use French in the Ghomálá' area.

Yet many publications exist in the language. Some of the publications in Ghomálá' are:

- The booklets of Christian literature such as translated Bibles, Christian Gospel, hymnals, prayer booklets, and other religious pamphlets; all published by the Christian Churches;
- Didactic materials published for the experimentation of the PROPELCA⁷ (acronym from the French full name of this programme: *Programme de recherche opérationnelle pour l'enseignement des langues au Cameroun*) 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;
- Various "oral literature" booklets such as collections of proverbs, poems, riddles;
- Development pamphlets on agriculture, pesticides, health, and environment preservation;
- Pocket diaries;
- Local newsbulletins;
- Pocket and wall calendars.

7. After the PROPELCA finished the experimental phase, by the 1990s, it became a full bilingual education programme (using mother tongues and official languages in schools) and became the *Programme pour l'enseignement des langues au Cameroun*.

GHOMÁLÁ' OUT OF THE SCHOOLS: A HISTORY OF ABSENCE FROM THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

In terms of language use in the Cameroonian education system, Ghomálá' as a local language is still struggling for its proper place in the Education system. As with the 286 local languages, more than 60 years after the African Independences, many minority African languages are still struggling with their exclusion or quasi-exclusion from the education system of their speakers and their ensuing marginalisation as mediums of instruction in the schools and the literacy classes. Even for those languages that are becoming standardised and developing a solid writing system, leading to their usability in education, a major challenge remains regarding the actual adoption of this standard to be used in education and in a wider production of literature.

Another key aspect is connected to the status given to Ghomálá' by the powers that are in place and in control of the education system in Cameroon. The status and use of Ghomálá' in the education system, or putting it more acutely, the non-status and lack of use of the language in the overall education system, mirrors similar cases found in many parts of the world where minority languages are struggling in face of more dominant languages, often imposed through the might of military fights and political invasion—in sub-Sahara Africa, European colonisation. It can be observed in this vein that one major enemy to the growth, expansion and intergenerational transmission of a local language such as Ghomálá' is actually the school system which has functioned as a key tool for its exclusion in the very place where it should have been promoted and preserved. Not only are pupils natively and fluently speaking Ghomálá' by the age of 5 more or less forbidden to speak it or use it in schools, but they are further cut off from their linguistic roots as they grow and evolve through education systems where their own mother tongues are very absent.

In the context of Cameroon, local languages including Ghomálá' are actually literally excluded from the mainstream education system in terms of being used as languages of instruction in classrooms. In other words, the use of Ghomálá' in education is extremely marginal in relation to the overall institutional system of schools, educational opportunities, didactic materials, teacher training, and all the key markers of intergenerational transmission of knowledge and values, and the socio-educational instruments that are used to maintain that. In this regard, the Cameroonian education systems are predominately using the two official languages, French and English, from the primary through the secondary up to the tertiary sectors of education. The socio-educational instances where Ghomálá' is actually used as a tool of education or a subject of educational activities, are very limited overall. And this then posits Ghomálá' right within

the definition of a minority language or marginal language in terms of its presence and use in the national education system as a whole.

Therefore one can look at two levels of complexity in relation to the education system: Ghòmálá' as a local language struggling in relation to the official language French which dominates the education system within the Ghòmálá' community; and secondly, the internal variation within the dialects of Ghòmálá'—as discussed earlier.

LANGUAGE STATUS PLANNING AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL AND ITS TRICKLE-DOWN EFFECT ON GHÒMÁLÁ'

Another important aspect of language planning regarding Ghòmálá' is related to status planning at the national level in Cameroon. In this regard, Cameroon, like many sub-Saharan countries has gone through many phases where the intervention of the public Administration and the changes to the legal system have influenced the role and status of the languages found in the country (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997; Liddicoat & Baldauf, 2008).

As indicated earlier, in the 1960s after independence, the constitution of Cameroon as a young republic did not give any room to local languages and only indicated that the official languages of the country would be French and English inherited from colonial times. It would take almost thirty years for the situation to change and even then, things are still extremely hard for local languages. It is only in 1995 that during the National Forum on Education (in French: *États généraux de l'éducation*) that the vast majority of all the educationists, linguists, and sociolinguists had a ground-breaking national conference where one of the major outcomes through its recommendations was that there should be a massive overhaul of the education system, especially regarding the use of local languages in the education system. In that vein, one of those recommendations was that the local languages should become part and parcel of a new education system taking into account not just the linguistic proficiencies of the majority of Cameroonians, but the sociolinguistic realities of the country—which essentially were marked by the Cameroonian high multilingualism discussed earlier. But these were recommendations by experts and scientists, and were therefore promoted and sent round to the political establishment, namely the government institutions, the parliamentarians at the National Assembly, as key policy documents to change the education system. These efforts from the 1995 National Forum on Education paved the way to the constitutional reforms of 1996, when Cameroon adopted a new constitution.

This constitution was revolutionary regarding the local languages, because, for the first time after almost forty years, the Constitution—was not only recognizing the importance of local languages but was actually tasking the

Cameroonian Republic to support and promote them. French and English remained the official language of Cameroon, but it was significant that the support and promotion of local languages became part of the political duties of government institutions and the Administration.

Following the 1996 Constitution, the Law n° 98/004 of April 4, 1998 on the Orientation of National Education stipulated in its Article 11 that the new education system should make sure that there are adequate adaptation to local socio-cultural realities and their integration in the education system, especially regarding the teaching of national⁸ languages. This 1998 Law was paramount in creating a favourable environment for the promotion and use of local languages in the education system either as a medium of instruction or as just subjects.

Since then, there has been from the part of public institutions—namely the ministries of education, and of culture—clear efforts to implement the Law and use some local languages. All these efforts have led to an important change of attitudes about local languages in many local communities all over the country.

But it should equally be pointed out that there are still many hurdles in the promotion of local languages in education. The current legal frameworks are not clear on the specific languages to be used in any specific school environment, and always have a caveat that the use of any local language should only happen if there are appropriately trained teachers and adequate didactic materials for the effective teaching of the said language. And the majority of the 286 Cameroonian languages do not have enough trained teachers nor adequate and sufficient teaching materials; worse, many of them have still not been standardized into their written form for use in formal education. In other words, there is still so much to be done in terms of training local language monitors, and even more in standardizing so many local languages into their written form through a selection of a reference standard dialect and its written development.

But comparatively to many Cameroonian languages, the case of Ghómálá' has been far better since over the years, and even before the change in the bigger national landscape as indicated earlier, it has had a decent body of trained literacy monitors and language teachers, and some didactic material for its teaching in the primary and secondary sectors.

8. In the Cameroonian literature and public discourses, the term “national language” is equated with “local mother tongue” or “local language”, mainly in contrast to the two official languages of European origin and other non-Cameroonian languages found as compulsory subjects in the education system, such as Spanish, Chinese, and German.

TRAINING OF GHOMÁLÁ' TEACHERS AND LITERACY MONITORS

In general, the formation of local language teachers and literacy monitors in Ghomálá' has followed three major pathways:

- From the Churches and Bible translation groups: historically, starting from colonial times, the Christian Churches in their evangelisation campaigns and Bible translation efforts started training locals to read and write in the local languages and in turn to be able to train more locals in the same vein;
- From lay cultural promoters: at many points in the Ghomálá' history, some visionary cultural leaders took on themselves, and outside of their religious affiliation, to promote the local language and work for the training of Ghomálá' speakers to be able to read and write in the language and in turn train others to be able to do the same;
- From the formal bilingual education initiatives, mainly the PROPELCA experience. As this has been over the last 30 years the strongest pathway that has produced most of the current generation of Ghomálá' teachers and literacy monitors, I will dwell in more detail on that.

GHOMÁLÁ' TEACHERS AND LITERACY MONITORS FROM THE PROPELCA EXPERIENCE

Many current teachers and literacy monitors of Ghomálá' are trainees from the PROPELCA training and retraining programmes over the last 30 years or so. Historically, 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. 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 training programme solely dedicated to local language literacy. This hurdle was overcome by the implementation of the PROPELCA.

Consequently, in terms of trained literacy experts, there is one permanent result that PROPELCA has produced in the Ghomálá' community as it is one of the local Cameroonian communities which have opened bilingual PROPELCA schools: the creation of a group of well-trained local language teachers. Many of them have in turn become staunch local language literacy

promoters. This body of trained literacy promoters, with the technical help of the PROPELCA team, have often come together to organise themselves more retraining programmes. In this endeavour, they have generally assumed the roles of literacy coordinators, supervisors and monitors.

THE TEACHING OF GHŌMÁLÁ' TODAY

As discussed earlier, Ghŏmálá' started to be taught formally to adults since the early 1950s, but that was limited within Christian churches and their denominational schools. More recently, the language has been taught formally in some Roman Catholic schools since 1995, within the experimental bilingual Mother Tongue/Official (MT/OL) language programme in the Ghŏmálá' area. Therefore, today in a number of experimental schools, Ghŏmálá is being used as the main medium of instruction, but the most recent information obtained mentions only up to 6 schools in Bandjoun and Baham where the teaching is effectively taking place with some regularity.

In the secondary education, things are moving at a different pace as the official curricula of education for the secondary schools are now enforcing and requesting the teaching of local languages as compulsory subjects for all the classes—again with the proviso of the availability of trained teachers. The national curriculum stipulates that the local language should be taught as a subject from form 1 (in French: *Classe de 6^e*) throughout the Secondary classes. More recently and equally more importantly, starting with the academic year 2016-2017, new official orientations are adamant that the local languages that are standardised and have trained teachers and pedagogic manuals such as Ghŏmálá' should be taught as compulsory subject on par with German and Spanish which have always been compulsory subjects from the class of Form 3 (in French: *Classe de 4^e*) in Francophone Secondary schools since the 1960s. This is important for the local language as this means the public schools and trained teachers will become an integral part of a permanent educational environment offering Ghŏmálá' as one of the subjects taught in the secondary schools.

GHŌMÁLÁ': DIALECTAL VARIATION, PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

Some final points to address relate to the connection between dialectal variation in Ghŏmálá and the implications in teaching the language.

THE ADOPTION OF A WRITTEN REFERENCE STANDARD AND
THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PEDAGOGY OF THE LANGUAGE

As postulated by Sadembouo and other dialectologists (Sadembouo & Watters, 1987; Sadembouo, 1989; Bergman, 1989, 1990; Watters, 1990), many advantages exist with the choice of a reference standard dialect. At the pedagogic level, this choice leads to coherence and economy in learning, in terms of harmonised and consistent literacy teaching and didactic materials to read and write in the language.

Another advantage of choosing a reference dialect out of existing varieties of a language lies at the linguistic level in that

[...] the choice of an already existing language variety as the basis for standardization brings to light a form of language which is probably much more natural than a standard worked out through an artificial synthesis of dialect. This choice, nevertheless does not imply the rejection of other language varieties because harmony needs to be established with the other dialects in phonology, lexicon and grammar. (Sadembouo 1989, p. 14)

From a sociolinguistic and community development perspective, the reference dialect brings the advantage of dialectal unification,⁹ whereby the written form of the language is established and developed and adopted for use through the whole linguistic community without any geographical distinction. As Sadembouo put it, “the choice of a reference dialect helps to avoid the existence of different standard patterns within the same language” (Sadembouo, 1989, p. 14).

An important question at this closing juncture would be about the connection between the variation in Ghòmálá’ and the emergence of Ghòmálá’-Jo as the reference dialect for the standardization of Ghòmálá’ on the one hand, and the pedagogic activities and the use of Ghòmálá’ in education on the other hand. An important element that clearly seems to have contributed to what could be seen as a consensus around the written Ghòmálá’ in terms of the acceptance of the Ghòmálá’-Jo as the reference dialect has to do with a key pedagogic guidance that has always been maintained within the PROPELCA training sessions and all the retraining programmes for Ghòmálá’ literacy monitors: that learners be they pupils in classrooms or adult learners in literacy classes should be taught basic literacy—that is to read and write—using the pedagogic manuals existing and based on the reference standard dialect, but that they should not be expected nor required to speak exclusively or necessarily

9. Dialectal unification, in Sadembouo’s framework, is exclusively for the written, not the oral, form of the language.

the reference dialect. In other words, this reduces significantly the frustration that may arise from learners being forbidden or prevented from speaking their dialectal variety, except when reading in classes from pedagogic manuals, and any feeling of marginalization or exclusion due to pronunciation differences from the reference dialect.

This principle is actually at the heart of the fact that the promotion of Ghòmálá' in education has not actually sought to enforce any sort of rejection of all the other varieties as oral forms that learners do use on a daily basis. It is only when learners move into the phase of reading and writing that actually there is the pedagogic necessity to use the Ghòmálá'-Jo which is the reference dialect. In other words, all learners will always continue to speak their dialectal varieties, and they only learn to read or write using the reference standard dialect.

AN UPHILL BATTLE: COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR GHÒMÁLÁ' LITERACY ACTIVITIES

The attitudes of the speakers of the other varieties of Ghòmálá' towards the Ghòmálá'-Jo as the reference dialect lean more solidly towards acceptance and support than any opposition and open divergence. Observations over the years¹⁰ has shown a tendency towards some clear form of consensus around the written standard on the language. Concretely, and also possibly due to the lack of adequate scientific and economic resources, the focus of most of the promoters of the language for literacy and for use in the education system has not been at any significant point about divergences in any conflicting written standards; therefore there has not been much debate in anything that could seriously be considered the development of written forms for other dialectal varieties of the language.

It should be noted that within the Ghòmálá community today, the promoters of literacy activities in the language are facing an uphill battle: with very limited resources as well as scarce material and financial support from local institutions and other government bodies, there is still a lot to be done to raise more awareness about the importance of the reading and writing of the language in the community and in educational contexts.

The dynamics of the use of written Ghòmálá' is slightly different in the religious domain in terms of the translation of the Bible and its use in Evangelization campaigns and in the various denominational churches that abound in the Ghòmálá' linguistic area. It should be noted equally in that regard that a lot of the denominational churches also own school institutions and the various socio-educational platforms where some teaching and

10. The author of this chapter has been directly involved in research, fieldwork, and literacy activities in Ghòmálá' for more than 30 years now.

other intergenerational transmission of knowledge and values do happen: some community schools, some evening classes, adult literacy programmes, community development projects, etc.

But when focusing on the three main traditional sectors of education, namely the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors, it is clear that the current reference dialect that has been used for the development of written Ghómálá' has been quite widely accepted and adopted. In many meetings of the APROCLAGH, in the 1990s and early 2000s, there were debates about certain words used in the various pedagogic manuals not being exactly the same for some speakers. But it is important to point out that there was never enough contention for this to lead, as with many other languages, to the development of divergent or different written forms of the language.

APPENDIX: A TEXT IN GHÓMÁLÁ'

<p><i>Texte No (E) :</i> GUŊ GWYÓ (UN GRAND VILLAGE)</p> <p>Fók a b́ ĺ ĺ pý ñkú! Ŋkú kú t́ pú ṕ sha't́ mo gaš ẽ ywók ý kí ĺ. Mo ṕ jwók ḿk f́kdzú, ba m ewa ya b́ñ ẃ d́ ĺ, jwók nam ń sh́ mkyá' dzú.</p> <p>Ée, f́k ĺ ñkú! Tsu' mím, t́ sh́ ṕmsakú ṕ nt́m dý b́ ǵ m sákú, ǵ á t́ ewa mzhòñ ...</p> <p>T́ f́k ĺ fa' ṕ tsý f́, ṕ á ĺ ṕ fa' tsáp t́ mo ĺ zhý gaá ywá ghò.</p> <p>Ée, ko' ĺ ń t́ñ ḿf́kdzú, ḿṕmdzú, ṕjwí ṕ pé, b́ ẃ ñkéný d́ m ǵ cón ywótsú. Ḿ ṕ pyáp yáp t́ dzú śt́ t́ wáp ghò ń máp mf́'...</p> <p>F́, pú ĺ b́ ẃ pý jwók f́'fa', dí f́'fa', dá' f́'fa', guñ mtyš' dzú h́m awé.</p> <p>Ée, mtyš'dzú ĺ b́ h́m (Dzòdzò, Nt́mdzò, Sésú, Gósuš, Dzòmtš, Nt́mgó, Tyš'pfó, Shyòñku'ú), b́ fa' ń b́ búñ m̀nòñ.</p> <p>Ée, pú ĺ d́ fa' dzó wáp, d́ fa' ñkím wáp, d́ fa' ñkwý wáp. Yáp pápúñ ĺ b́ nt́m f́, fa' bú, fa' cá'.</p> <p>Ée, pú ĺ d́ fa' dzó wáp, wáp tí d́ fa' mpfú. Kwa' nyóný wáp ĺ b́ ḿf́kkhuó, ṕjwí f́, b́ mpu' f́.</p> <p>Kuñya yáp ĺ b́ kuñya ḿf́kkhuó, sh́ yáp ṕ ý ḿf́kkhuó.</p> <p>Wáp ĺ ṕjwí ta' mo le! A ĺ m ṕ'o, yap cwé ṕ ñkwí, b́ wáp ghò ñkwí mà, máp mko ṕ d́.</p> <p>A ĺ b́ ĺ' gwyó, gẽ, guñ gwyó, gẽ, da' wáp ń ĺ b́ ðem ca'á!...</p> <p>Extrait et adapté de: SOFO S.N., 1979; <i>Gi Ghómálá', Grammatologie du Ghómálá'</i>, (1ère éd.) Yaounde. pp. 53-54.</p>	251
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