

Boko/Busa language survey report



July-August 1992 - Ross Jones

Doing a linguistic and religious survey of the Borgu area of mid-western Nigeria was quite an adventure. I knew no-one there personally, but the Lord answered prayer and we had great accommodation in the three centres we visited, good health and safe travel. I was accompanied on the survey by Levi and Gabriel, Boko Bible translation team members from Benin Republic, and their motorbikes were our means of transport. We spent two weeks in Kaiama, Kwara State studying the Bokobaru dialect, one week in New Bussa, Niger State studying the Bisa dialect and one week in Illo, Kebbi State studying the Kyenga and Busa dialects. We did a 227 wordlist in 40 villages, 15 each for Bokobaru and Bisa and 5 each for Busa and Kyenga and concluded that there are four dialects of the Boko/Busa language group:

Boko	pop. 90,000	(incl. 60,000 in Benin)
Bokobaru	50,000	
Bisa	40,000	
Busa	5,000	

Kyenga and Shanga proved to be another Mande language which is not mutually intelligible to the Boko/Busa group. There are only 5 villages that speak Kyenga, all west of Illo, with a population of less than 5,000.

The following table shows the percentage of identical and similar words in these dialects according to our 227 wordlist. The 48 means that 48% of Boko words in the wordlist are identical with the Bokobaru words. The 84 means that 84% of words are similar.

	Boko	Bbaru	Bisa	Busa	Kyenga	
Boko	X	48	46	61	14	
Bbaru	84	X	65	54		Identical
Bisa	89	93	X	54		
Busa	82	79	76	X		
Kyenga	38	40			X	
	Lexical similarity					

Dialects with a lexical similarity of less than 70% are different languages. This confirms that while Kyenga is a separate language, the others are all dialects of the one language. Where the percentage is 70% or more, the decision still has to be made as to whether work in a second dialect is necessary.

The Bokobaru/Bisa dialects need their own combined translation, based on the following criteria.

1. Neither the Bisa and Bokobaru people believe that they could use Boko literature.
2. The Bisa and Bokobaru are separated from the Boko by the Borgu game reserve, about 80 km wide.
3. Although the grammar is very similar for all dialects and the number of lexical similar words in the wordlist (all basic words) is above 80%, a test done on 500 Boko Bible vocabulary words showed that only 20% were identical. Add to this the fact that most pronouns (the subject pronouns include the tense) and most affixes are different in Boko to the other dialects and it becomes clear that they do need their own translation.
4. They want their own literature.

The area is Muslim, but the territorial spirits are still in charge. Demon possession, witchcraft, spells and moral depravity are rife. The ruling class resisted Islam until the 1920's when British administration policy encouraged them to embrace it. Although there are numerous churches in Kaiama and New Bussa, they do not relate to the surrounding indigenous people. We found only 7 Bokobaru Christians and 2 Bisas. In Kebbi State south of the Niger river we found only one Yoruba church at Lolo and a small church they have planted in the Boko village of Senji. There

are probably no Kyenga or Busa Christians. They are in desperate need of hearing about the Saviour who died for them. The two main centres Kaoje and Illo have no churches. Bocos at Maje asked for a pastor.

Contact with the Emirs and the local government officials was very positive and encouraging. They were very interested in my proposal to put their languages into writing and prepare booklets for teaching literacy. They offered their full cooperation and said they would teach the children in their primary schools to read and write their own language.

According to the November 1991 census the Borgu local government area has 110,000 people. Details are not yet available but I calculate that 30,000 would be Boko, 20,000 Bisa, another 20,000 who have learnt Bisa and 40,000 Yoruba, Hausa, Kamberi, Laru, Lupa, Nupe, Fulani, Duga etc. The area has 66 primary schools of which 24 are predominantly Boko with a total of 2200 pupils. 27 schools with a total of 7200 pupils have a majority of Bisa. About 1/3 of these pupils are girls. There are also 9 secondary schools in the area. The local government would also teach literacy in their adult education program. There are 35 Boko villages and 21 Bisa villages. New-Bussa and Wawa have estimated populations of 15,000 and 8,000.

The Kaiama local government has a population of 45,000 of which 37,100 are Bokobaru, 2,500 Fulani and 5,400 Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo etc. There are another 4,000 Bokobaru in the Yashikera area. Kaiama local government area has 20 primary schools with a total of 4,936 pupils and one secondary school with about 1,000 students. All but two are predominantly Bokobaru. As in the Borgu area at least half the teachers are locals and so able to teach literacy in their own tongue.

Many of the people in the towns are bilingual in Yoruba, Hausa, English and Bariba, but their knowledge of these languages is generally superficial and not sufficient for evangelistic outreach or Bible reading. Although school students learn in English, only a small percentage can communicate effectively in that language.

Recommendations

The Borgu area of Nigeria is a neglected area and perhaps the least evangelized region of Nigeria. Outreach to the Boko/Busa people needs to be fourfold:

1. Prayer
2. Evangelism
3. Literacy (Borgu and Kaiama local governments)
4. Bible translation (by Bisa and Bokobaru language teams and Bible Society)

The Bokobaru language team presently consists of Rev. Abraham Bata and son Peter Bata. An uneducated man is also needed.

Kyenga/Shanga. Up to 5,000 speakers in the villages of Kasiti, Tondi, Tungan Bage and Sarufu in Kebbi state, Nigeria and Tungan Noma in Benin. No literature in their language and no Christians. Most Kyenga have been absorbed by Hausa or Dendi cultures and they, together with the above need to be evangelized in that context.

Busa. 5,000 speakers in Kali, Baena, Gilanzana, Sambe and four smaller settlements, all SE of Illo in Kebbi state. Their dialect is similar to Boko and evangelization should be accompanied by Boko literacy. Bocos live on the southern border of their area and Christians at Lugu and Genelaga in Benin Republic should be encouraged to reach out to the Busa people.

Boko. 30,000 in 35 villages along the Benin border from Senji in the north to Kenugbe and Kaoje 200 km to the south and Demmo 70 km to the east. Five villages are in Kebbi state with the rest

in Niger state. There are 14 EMS missionaries working in this area as well as some other churches, but response among the Boko has not been significant. Many of the EMS people are concentrating on the Kamberi who are not Muslim and more responsive. Those who are reaching out to the Bocos are doing so in Hausa and have a limited audience. I would ask EMS to find some long-term missionaries who will take the time to learn Boko well and reach out to the Bocos in their own language. The Boko Bible will be available in early 1993 and missionaries to Bocos in Nigeria should make use of it and other Boko literature. Unless Boko literacy is encouraged in the Nigerian churches, a strong Boko church will not be established. The Borgu local government wants Boko literacy to be taught in all schools in the Boko area. The Boko church in Benin should also be encouraged to send workers into Nigeria to evangelize Bocos, Busas and Bokobarus.

Bisa. 40,000 speakers in 30 villages around New-Bussa and as far north as Shagunu, Luma and Kuble, all in Niger state. There are only six places where Bisa people are in the majority, but Bisa is the prestige language in the New Bussa, Wawa and Rafi districts and understood by others who have moved into the area permanently. There are at least 25 churches in New Bussa and 6 in Wawa, but not one Bisa adherent. Outreach to the Bisa people must be done in their own language. Literacy will be taught in schools when books are available. There are EMS missionaries in Luma, Kuble and Sansani, but no Bisa converts. More missionaries are needed in the villages around New Bussa and in Wawa.

Bokobaru. 40,000 speakers live in 30 villages centred around Kaiama in Kwara state. Kaiama has a population of about 10,000 and has 12 churches, none of which reaches out to the indiginous people. Most people are at least nominally Muslim, but there are some villages with Christian leanings because of Methodist outreach 20 years ago. The RC priest told me that because of historical issues, the Bokobaru would never be attracted to churches run by Yorubas. I believe the only way to reach them is through Bokobaru churches where singing, praying and preaching is all in Bokobaru. The Kaiama area is the most promising for translation and evangelism to begin.

Perhaps the most exciting event was meeting up with Methodist minister Rev. Abraham Bata (about 55 years old). He has been ministering to Yoruba Christians in Kaiama, but has long had the desire to translate the Scriptures into his native tongue and evangelize his own people. He has put in his resignation from the Methodist church so that he can work on the Busa translation team. He worked for Wycliffe missionary Klaus Wedekind 20 years ago and did a 3 month linguistic course at Jos. His 21 year old son Peter, a qualified electrician is also keen to do evangelism and translation and has been engaged on the team. They are presently checking Genesis and Mark that I have adapted from Boko.

Recommendation for the Bokobaru area:

1. Evangelism - Abraham and Peter will plant a church at Siigbea, a Bokobaru village where there is a potential following of 70. They need a motorbike for transportation to this village and other villages. I will also encourage the Boko church in Benin to release some men to come and work in the Kaiama area.

2. Literacy - The local government says we have their full co-operation for a literacy program. They are looking to us to produce a Bokobaru orthography, phonology, grammar, dictionary and primers for teaching adults and children in schools. I am in the process of adapting these materials from Boko to Bokobaru. Abraham is forming a Bokobaru Literacy committee which includes the Emir, Mohammed Haliru and representatives from Emirate Council, local government, education department, adult education and primary schools.

3. Translation - Translate the complete Bible into Bokobaru.

As the target group is mainly Muslim, we will begin with Genesis and other important Old Testament books.

Abraham and Peter Bata have been employed on the language team as from 1st September '92. Other personnel will be needed. Because we are not starting from scratch, but adapting the Boko

Bible to Bokobaru, I believe we can produce the linguistic materials and Bible in a fraction of the usual time, perhaps 7-8 years. Bible Society consultants with whom the language team can work include Robert Koops at Jos and Dr Isaac Madugu in Ibadan.

If sufficient funding is available I will make two six week trips to Nigeria each year to work with the language team based in Kaiama, while doing most of my work on computer in Melbourne where my 4 sons are being educated. I have been working successfully in this way with the Boko translation team in Benin since 1985. My wife has poor health and has found my yearly 10 week trips to Africa too long. God willing the next trip to Nigeria early in 1993 will include the dedication of the Boko Bible in neighbouring Benin. It has been printed in South Korea and is due to arrive in Cotonou on December 29th.

Ross Jones

Planned program and budget for Busa language project

- 1992 Linguistics Study Bokobaru phonology and grammar
Work out the orthography
Produce How to read and write Bokobaru book
Literacy Produce pre-literacy posters and stickers
Produce animal book
Prepare trial Boko and Bokobaru primers
Translation Adapt Genesis and Mark from Boko
- 1993 Linguistics Study Bisa phonology and grammar
Finalize Bisa orthography
Write up Boko, Bokobaru and Bisa phonologies
Work on Boko and Busa dictionaries
Produce How to read & write Boko booklet
Produce How to read & write Bisa booklet
Literacy Produce Boko, Bokobaru and Bisa primers
Begin literacy program in schools
Translation Adapt health book and book of fables
Adapt some Psalms, Prov, Eccles, Matthew, Luke
- 1994 Linguistics Produce Boko grammar
Work on Boko, Bokobaru and Bisa dictionaries
Literacy Begin adult literacy programs for men and women
Oversee school literacy programs in Boko, Bokobaru and Bisa
Translation Adapt Heart of man booklet
Adapt Exodus, Joshua, Judges, Ruth,
1 & 2 Samuel, John and Acts
- 1995 Linguistics Produce Bokobaru and Bisa grammars
Work on Boko, Bokobaru and Bisa dictionaries
Literacy Begin monthly newspapers in 3 dialects
Oversee school and adult literacy programs
Translation Adapt Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job,
1 & 2 Kings, Paul's epistles
- 1996 Linguistics Produce Bokobaru/Bisa dictionary
Work on Boko dictionary
Literacy Oversee school and adult literacy
Oversee monthly newspaper

Translation Adapt Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel,
minor prophets, balance of N.T.

1997 Linguistics Produce Boko dictionary
Literacy Overseer programmes in 3 dialects
Translation Adapt Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy,
1 & 2 Chron., Song, Jeremiah and Lamentations

1998-9 Final checking and typesetting of Bokobaru & Bisa Bibles