A Rapid Appraisal Survey of Jimi,

a Language of Cameroon

(Mayo-Tsanaga Division, Far North Province)

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Contents

1. Introduction

This report describes a sociolinguistic survey (Rapid Appraisal) of the Jimi language conducted February 11–12, 2000 in the Bourrah subdivision of the Mayo-Tsanaga division of the Far North Province of Cameroon. The purpose of the study was to assess the desirability and value of developing a written form for the Jimi language. The research was carried out by Dr. Domche Teko Engelbert, who is the Chairman of the Department of Linguistics and African Languages at the University of Dschang, and Edward and Elizabeth Brye both of SIL.

We gratefully acknowledge the assistance and welcome of regional and local government, religious, and traditional leaders, especially the subdivisional officer at Bourrah.

1.1 Names

The people call themselves *Majimen*. In the Jimi-speaking villages of Mijimi and Mbola, both of which were visited by our sociolinguistic research team, the people refer to their language as either *Jimijimen* or *Jimi.* For the purposes of this report, we will use the name used in the *Ethnologue,* that is, Jimi.

1.2 Locality and Population

The Jimi language is spoken in seven villages in the Bourrah subdivision of the Mayo-Tsanaga division.

Village	1987 Census	2000 Est. Population[1]
Mbola	722	1000
Jimi (and Yumdum, a Bana quarter)	554	750
Zumbudda	225	300
Mijimi	683	950
Dihi (a quarter of Bourrah)	unavailable	unavailable
Wamuko (Bourrah-Wango)	434	600
TOTAL	**2618**	**3600**

(See appendices for a linguistics map from the *Atlas Linguistique du Cameroun* [ALCAM] as well as a road map).

According to the *Ethnologue* (SIL), in 1982 the Jimi-speaking population numbered 3,500. The Catholic priest who lives in Bourrah estimates the present total population to be 2,500. Self-reporting during our group interviews in two villages revealed there to be about 600 residents in Mijimi and 800 in Mbola. Residents in Mbola indicate that their village is the second largest; Jimi is reportedly the largest Jimi-speaking village.

1.3 History of the Jimi-speaking People

According to the interviewees in Mbola, their people came from Sahuda at the foot of the Hud Mountain in Nigeria a long time ago. Those from Mijimi agreed with this account.

1.4 Linguistic Classification

The Jimi language is listed in the *Atlas Linguistique du Cameroun* [ALCAM] (Dieu and Renaud 1983) as Tchadique, Centre, Centre-Ouest, Margi-Gbwata, Gbwata, Nord with the ALCAM code [211].

Grimes (1996) classifies JIMI (code JIM) with alternate names *(DJIMI, JIMJIMEN, 'UM FALIN)* as Afro-Asiatic, Chadic Biu-Mandara, A, A.8 and with dialects of DJIMI, ZUMO (ZUMU, ZOMO, ZAME), JIMO, WADI (WA'I), MALABU. Different from Jimi of Nigeria in Bauchi State.

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[1]The 2000 estimated population figures are based on applying the annual growth rate of 2.9% of the period 1976 to 1987 to the period 1987 to 2000.

1.5 Research Objectives

This survey was conducted as part of an overall goal of assessing the need for literacy development and Bible translation in national languages throughout Cameroon. The research team's objectives were the following:

- Make an evaluation, based on both lexicostatistics and on village-based speakers' perceptions, of the level of comprehension within Jimi and between Jimi and adjacent languages.
- Determine the feasibility of developing literacy materials in the Jimi language. To assess the vitality of these speech forms in terms of the use of other languages, the interest in language development, and other sociolinguistic factors.
- To identify languages understood by speakers within the Jimi-speaking community, and to examine the attitudes toward reading and writing Jimi and/or other languages.

2. Methodology: Rapid Appraisal

The sociolinguistic research approach employed was the *rapid appraisal* survey (see Bergman 1991 and Stalder 1996). This method involves the utilisation of group interviews and individual questionnaires as well as the elicitation of an ALCAM 126-word list. (See Dieu and Renaud 1983:132–133.)[2] The rapid appraisal approach provides an overall impression of potential needs for codification of a language through reports from local inhabitants that take a relatively short period of time. Rapid appraisal survey seeks to find out information with respect to the dialect situation, multilingualism, and the vitality and viability of the language.

3. Research Results

This section contains the results obtained from the group interviews held at Mijimi and Mbola. First, however, we present the results of the lexicostatistical analysis.

3.1 Lexicostatistics

When applying the *apparent cognates* approach, the result is reflected in the following matrix:

JIMI

61**	GUDE		
22	22	TSUVAN	
18	18	36	SHARWA*

** When applying the apparent cognates approach to the CREA (Centre de Recherches ed d'Etudes Anthropologiques) word lists for Gude and Jimi that are available on file at the SIL Survey Office, a 56% similarity emerged.

* Due to the 99% similarity between the Djeki and Duva lists (Djeki and Duva are dialects of Sharwa), only the Djeki list was taken to represent the Sharwa language group during the phonetic analysis applying the apparent cognate method.

3.2 Dialectology

The team aimed to identify variations within the Jimi language. There is no problem of comprehension among the speakers of the various villages listed below.

According to the speakers at Mbola, there are four groupings.

Group 1: Mbola, Jimi, Zumbudda
Group 2: Mijimi, Dihi

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[2]The ALCAM word list we used was a revised version with six additional words. The elicited list can be obtained from Cameroon SIL's Survey Department.

Group 3: Yumbown (a quarter of Jimi), Yumbouor (mixed with Bana)
Group 4: Bourrah-Wamugo

The Mbola interview revealed that the village of Jimi is the dominant, influential, and most populated of the Jimi speaking villages, and that this is also where the language is "best" spoken. A discussion in Mijimi representing group two also indicated this to be so. Although residents of Mijimi speak differently than those of group one, there was agreement during the interview there that the three villages of group one speak "correctly."

3.3 Multilingualism
In this section, we will examine the degree of comprehension reported by Jimi speakers with those of the other languages around them. The subject of multilingualism was examined in order to assess the level of understanding and oral competence in languages geographically or linguistically near to the speech variety under study, as well as in the *languages of wider communication* (LWC).

3.3.1 Languages Linguistically Close
With regard to lexicostatistical similarity, Bergman (1990:9.5.2) and others have referred to the higher percentage (lexical similarity percentage plus margin of error) as the *upper confidence limit* (UCL) of the calculation. 70% lexical similarity UCL is the agreed upon threshold for determining whether two speech forms are separate languages or require intelligibility testing to determine whether they could share a written form. Since the lexical similarity between Jimi and all speech varieties within the linguistic subfamily of which it is a part falls below the 70% (UCL) threshold, intelligibility testing would normally not be required. But, our research team carried it out nevertheless using *recorded text testing* (RTT). The procedures for carrying out intelligibility testing, which came to be called recorded text testing, were documented by Eugene Casad (1974). RTT of a Gude text (see appendix B) that we had elicited in Nigeria was carried out in the major Jimi-speaking village of Jimi (which is also the Jimi village most distant from the Gude area) in order to estimate their understanding of Gude. Test participants responded correctly to 70% of the comprehension questions of this text indicating that they had a marginal understanding of the Gude text (see appendix C).

Jimi speakers do not use their mother tongue when communicating with speakers of adjacent groups or with those who speak one of the languages within the language subfamily. Other than Gude (covered in the next section), Jimi speakers do not learn the vernacular languages of the peoples around them. This indicates that speakers of all neighbouring languages do not adequately understand Jimi, and that Jimi speakers, in turn, do not understand the languages spoken by their neighbours. In order to communicate with those of surrounding languages, Jimi speakers use Fulfulde, a language of wider communication. We conclude that Jimi is a language separate from all others because of the combination of a low percentage of lexical similarity (based on comparisons of word lists); their self-reported patterns of language use; and their marginal understanding of spoken Gude.

3.3.2 Gude
Interviewees of both Mbola and Mijimi say that they learn the Gude language by being in contact with Gude speakers. Interviewees in Mijimi indicate that this ability usually occurs by the age of 11 years.

Jimi speakers share common origins with those of Gude, and they consider themselves to be one people with Gude speakers. They also share in celebrations with Gude speakers and frequently marry Gude speakers. Those interviewed at Mijimi said that its residents most often marry Gude speakers, though they also marry speakers of Sharwa, Bana, and Daba.

Speakers of Jimi and Gude each use their mother tongue when talking with the other, but oral communication is not fluent. Jimi and Gude are not mutually intelligible languages. Interviewees at Mbola said that Gude is the language that its residents understand the best.

In both Mijimi and Mbola, the view was expressed that their residents would like to learn how to read and write the Gude language, but that there are other languages that they would prefer to learn to read and write first. Interviewees from both villages indicated the priorities of their language choices; first they would like to learn to read and write French, then Jimi, and then Fulfulde. It is significant, however, that at the level of oral communication, they would prefer to speak Gude slowly rather than to use Fulfulde.

3.3.3 Languages of Wider Communication (LWC)—Fufulde/Fulani and French

Fulfulde is the major language of wider communication of the Far North Province. At the clinic in Bourrah, Fulfulde is used. In both Mbola and Mijimi, the youth are reported to be the most proficient speakers of this LWC.

Students use French for all aspects of schooling—that is, in-class instruction as well as during times of recreation. Interviewees at Mbola indicate that 160 children (about half the number of children in the village) attend primary school but only to the CM2 level (approximately equivalent to 7th grade). Children from Mijimi also attend only to CM2.

3.4 Language Vitality and Viability

In this section, we will see how mother tongue speakers of Jimi from the villages of Mijimi and Mbola view the extent to which their language is used in daily life.

Jimi is the primary language spoken in the home, during conversations with friends, and at work. It is also used at the markets, although in Mbola, Fulfulde is also needed in order to communicate with strangers. Jimi is the only language reported to be used for public gatherings such as traditional ceremonies, making announcements, and meetings with regional chiefs.

3.5 Religious Affiliation of Jimi Speakers

Language use in the church also centres around Jimi. In both Mbola and Mijimi, it is used for the sermon, songs, and prayers. In Mijimi, the Fulfulde language is used for all three of these when outsiders are present.[3]

3.6 Language Attitudes

Of special interest is the potential of Jimi speakers learning to read and write their own language or a language other than their mother tongue.

3.6.1 Attitudes Toward the Mother Tongue

Attitudes toward Jimi are positive. Interviewees in both Mbola and Mijimi indicated that the people believe that their language will be spoken indefinitely. But when this subject was examined further in Mijimi, the fear was expressed that their language might disappear due to children learning French at school. Despite this fear, interviewees in Mijimi and Mbola village stated that they would prefer to learn to read and write French more than Jimi as this would enable them to communicate when travelling outside of the Jimi-speaking area. One of the participants in the Mbola interview stated it in these words, "French is as a key. Once you know French, you can do anything else." Interviewees from both villages stated that the youth speak Jimi more than any other language. The people are ambivalent about their language choices, indicating that both Jimi and French are vital to the life of the Jimi-speaking community.

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[3]Christians make up the largest religious group in both villages. In the order of their population size there are Catholics, Lutheran Brethren, and Baptists. Adherents to traditional religion comprise the next largest of all religious groups, followed by Muslims.

3.6.2 Standardisation—Efforts and Potential

According to SIL linguist Mona Perrin, who is a translation consultant for the Gude, native speaker and seminary student Gabriel Djibi has written a 1000-word lexicon as well as 12 lessons called "grammar" for helping non-Jimi speakers learn Jimi. He also has gathered much other information about the language

According to the Catholic priest Father Philip Steven, who lives in Bourrah and supports the idea of developing the Jimi language, the mass has been translated into Jimi. He said that he and the Lutheran Brethren pastor in Bourrah are willing to provide encouragement for Jimi translation.

Mona Perrin, after working with Djibi on a folk story written in Jimi, concluded that there are a great number of linguistic similarities between Jimi and Gude.

Although reportedly there is not yet a literacy program in Jimi, the people from the two villages visited expressed interest in learning to read and write their mother tongue and, to this end, would be willing to cooperate with residents of neighbouring Jimi-speaking villages to participate in such a program. Interviewees from both Mbola and Mijimi indicate that the best place for developing the language would be Jimi as this was the first Jimi village.

3.6.3 Migration and Intermarriage

In both Mbola and Mijimi, intermarriage occurs with Gude speakers. In addition, Mijimi residents also marry speakers of Sharwa, Bana, and Daba. Speakers of either village may marry whomever they like, and there are reportedly no marital restrictions imposed on residents of either village. When outsiders come to live in the village of Mbola, their primary motivation is usually to cultivate the earth, which is fertile. There are about 100 Daba speakers who have migrated to Mbola. When they first came to the village, they spoke Fulfulde but eventually learned Jimi although this has required their staying a good while.

3.6.4 Language Shift

When asked if the children mix Jimi with another language, interviewees at Mbola said that certain ones do confuse languages. They went on to add that this is not a good thing since the older people who understand only Jimi are unable to understand what children are saying when they mix up the language by switching words. At Mijimi, the group interview revealed that no such mixing of their mother tongue with other languages is occurring.

Despite a positive attitude toward learning French (and also Fulfulde), the level of schooling is quite low which makes it extremely unlikely that French will overtake Jimi at any time in the near future.

3.7 Language Development Potential: Watters' Socioeconomic Factors

According to Watters (1990:6.7.1), there are three factors in particular that affect the nature and development of language programs: the homogeneity of the linguistic community, their openness to change and development, and the presence of a middle-aged leadership at the local level. We follow with a discussion of these three factors in the context of the villages surveyed.

Residents surveyed perceive themselves as forming a linguistic unity with the speakers of the other Jimi-speaking villages, and interviewees are in agreement about the villages belonging to the Jimi language. Adequate roads connect the Jimi-speaking villages and, in general, the people are not separated from one another. The one exception is during August when the rains are especially heavy and the Mbola River rises to the point that it cuts off the village of Mbola from the other Jimi villages. But this would not significantly affect the overall development of the language.

According to the response at Mbola, there is a development committee responsible for maintaining the school and the nearby road. When ill, people go to the clinic located at Bourrah. This indicates some openness to change and development.

An important factor in determining the viability of a language project is the presence of a middle-aged leadership. Interviewees reported that they have leaders between the ages of 26 and 70. The leaders live in the village and there is confidence that others will become available to take their place when they die.

In general, the Jimi-speaking community thus meets the criteria outlined by Watters as predictive of a successful literacy development project.

3.8 Attitudes Toward Language Development

Those interviewed from both villages are receptive to the idea of learning to read and to write Jimi. In both villages, the languages that residents would prefer to learn in the order of their priority are as follows: French, Jimi, then Fulfulde. In both villages, interviewees say that they would also be willing to learn Gude.

In the village of Mbola, the comment concerning Gude was *C'est proche. On peut apprendre vite*. 'It's a nearby language, so one can learn it quickly'. Residents here would like to learn and would like their children to learn to read and write Gude. The same view was expressed in the village of Mijimi, though residents here would like to learn to read and write Gude if Jimi could not be developed.

4. SIL/CABTAL/NACALCO Activity and Plans

SIL linguist Mona Perrin has reviewed material on the language written by Gabriel Djibi, and she has expressed an interest in working with him on the orthography.

Neither CABTAL (Cameroon Association for Bible Translation and Literacy) nor NACALCO (National Association of Cameroonian Language Committees) has plans to work in the Jimi language. (Jimi does not meet the NACALCO criterion of having at least 10,000 speakers.)

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

In summary, the language is vital despite the limited number of Jimi speakers. Jimi continues to be prominent in the daily lives of speakers. The children continue to use it more than any other language. French is desired as a key to communicating outside of the Jimi language area, but the level of schooling is low. Fulfulde is also a desired and used language. In the face of these LWCs, there is some ambivalence about language choice with the result that the people fear their language could disappear. For this reason, language development in Jimi is seen by them as a means for preserving their mother tongue. The fourth language on their priorities of language choice is Gude, which they also understand to some extent and with whose speakers they have significant contact and cultural identification. Anthropologically, the common culture and origins, their sense that they are "one people" with Gude speakers, and their ability to understand this language all contribute to their positive feeling toward Gude. The lexicostatistical variation between Gude and Jimi means that sufficient linguistic differences exist between these two speech forms so that they are to be considered distinct languages. Gabriel Djibi and the local church leadership are demonstrating the necessary initiative to develop the Jimi language.

An adaptation of language development materials from Gude into Jimi is recommended with SIL consultant Mona Perrin providing technical assistance to encourage the church and Gabriel Djibi continuing to take local initiative and ownership as in the past.

Appendix A: Jimi Hometown Text (in English)

1. *When I had done my first semester of my second year at school, a dog bit me.*
QUESTION: What animal bit me?
ANSWER: a dog.

2. *I was taken to Mokolo, but we were unable to find medication. We returned and left for Bakoli, Nigeria.*
QUESTION: What did we not find in Mokolo?
ANSWER: medication.

3. *There, we found the product for the treatment. When healed, I did not return to school. My parents suggested (that) I (should) care for (guard) the sheep.*
QUESTION: What did my parents suggest I do?
ANSWER: To care for (guard) the sheep.

Appendix B: Gude Text (in English)

1. *I am a merchant.*
QUESTION: What is my profession?
ANSWER: merchant.

2-3. *I sell macabo, banana, manioc, and potatoes*.
QUESTIONS: name two products that I sell.
ANSWERS: (any two of the above four mentioned.)

4. *I buy these products in various villages everywhere.*
QUESTION: Where do I buy these products?
ANSWER: everywhere.

5. *I use my bicycle to carry these products.*
QUESTION: What do I use to transport these products?
ANSWER: bicycle.

6. *I sell these products during the dry season.*
QUESTION: When do I sell these products?
ANSWER: dry season

7. *I cultivate my field during the rainy season.*
QUESTION: What do I do during the rainy season?
ANSWER: cultivate my field.

8. *I have three (3) children.*
QUESTION: How many children do I have?
ANSWER: three (3)

9. *I go to the field with my wife.*
QUESTION: Who comes with me to the field?
ANSWER: my wife

10. *I have been a merchant since I was 25 years of age.*
QUESTION: How old was I when I first became a merchant?
ANSWER: 25 (years of age)

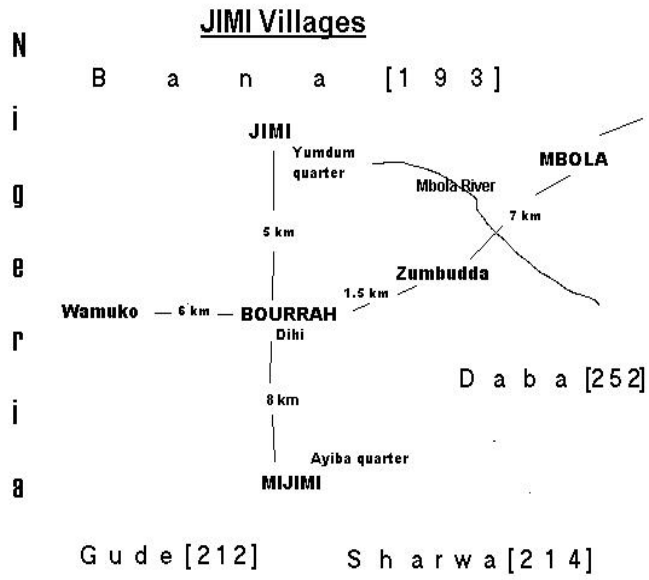# Appendix C: Results of Jimi speakers to the Gude RTT text

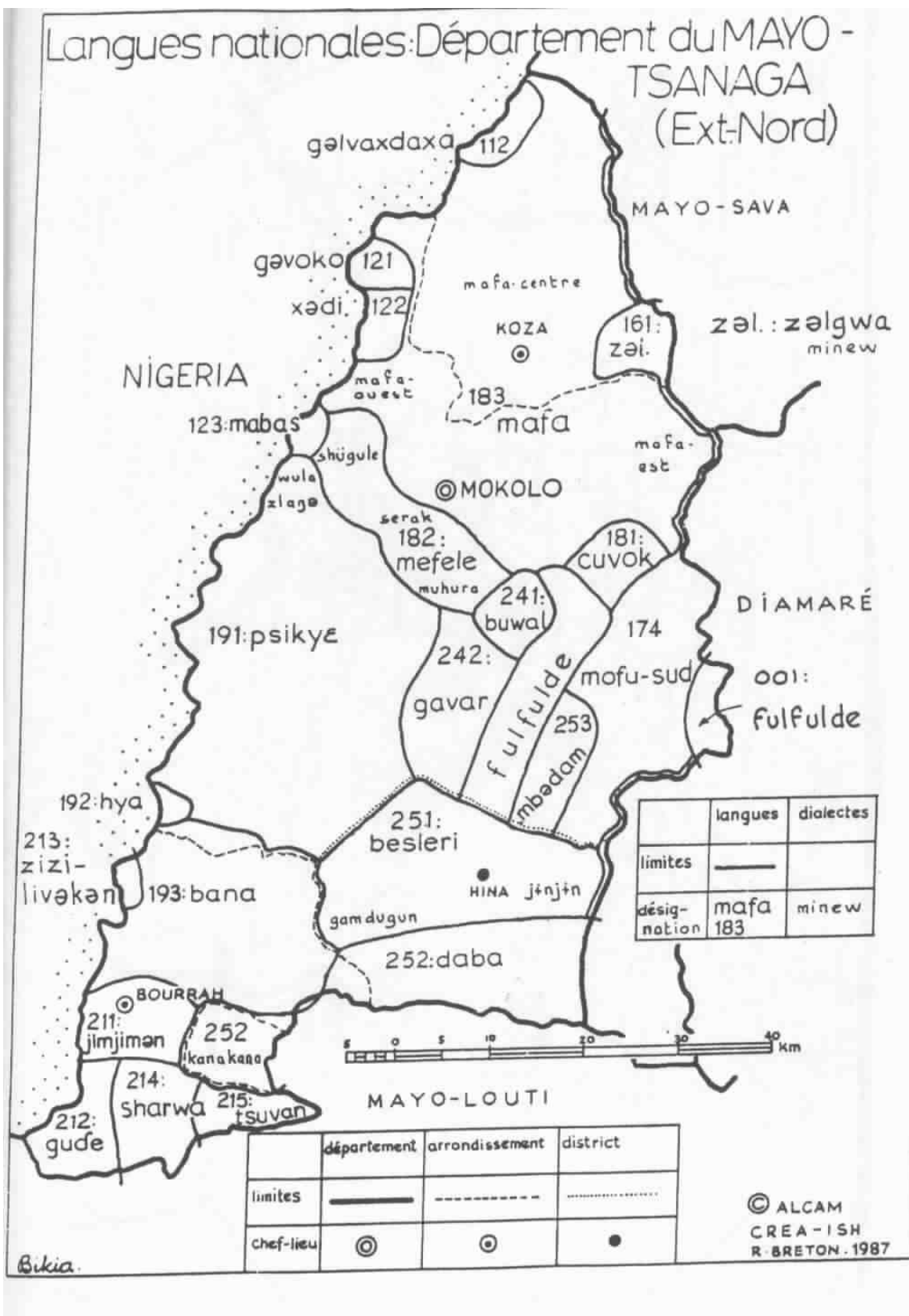| Gender	Age	Hometown	Gude
M	13	3/3	4/10
M	60+	3/3	6/10
F	32	3/3	7/10
M	40	3/3	7/10
F	70	3/3	7/10
F	19	3/3	7/10
M	29	3/3	8/10
F	30	3/3	8/10
M	60	3/3	8/10
F	45+	3/3	8/10

Average (mean) = 70/100 = 70%.
Most frequently occurring scores: 7 (4 times) and 8 (4 times)
The ratios given in the Hometown and Gude columns indicate the number of correctly answered questions out of the number of questions asked.
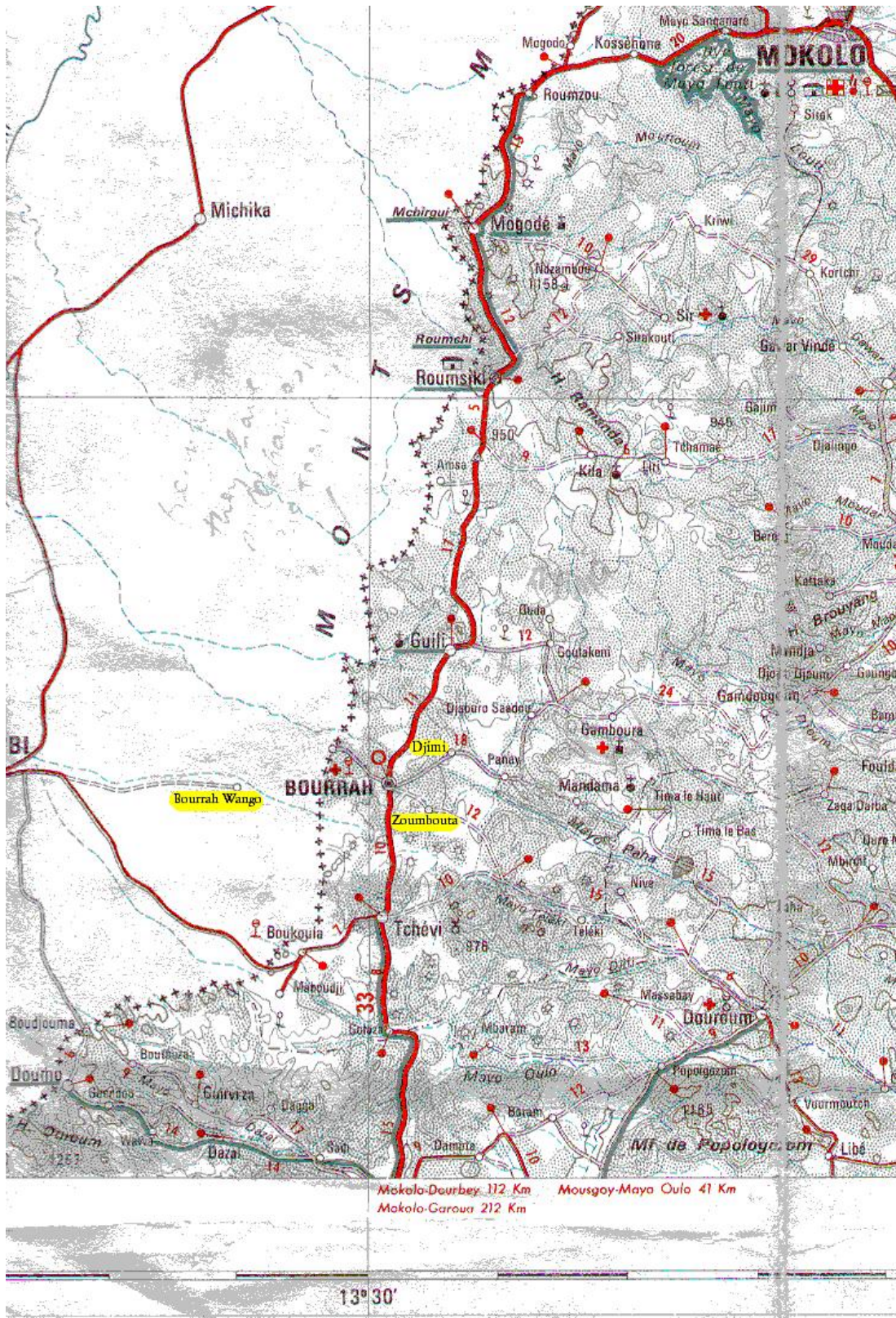
Appendix D: Jimi Villages

JIMI Villages

N

B a n a [1 9 3]

JIMI

Yumdum
quarter

Mbola River

MBOLA

i

g

e

5 km

7 km

Zumbudda

1.5 km

Wamuko — 6 km — **BOURRAH**

Dihi

r

D a b a [2 5 2]

i

8 km

a

Ayiba quarter

MIJIMI

G u d e [2 1 2]   S h a r w a [2 1 4]

Appendix E: ALCAM Map

Langues nationales: Département du MAYO - TSANAGA (Ext-Nord)

Appendix F: Road Map (source unknown)

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