THE DEVELOPMENT OF KABIYE AND ITS STATUS AS ONE OF THE "NATIONAL" LANGUAGES OF TOGO

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Introduction

This chapter aims to demonstrate that the development of the written form of Kabiye since its earliest days can only be understood in the Togolese political context. It proceeds chronologically, tracing the path of the development of Kabiye from the early pioneers up to the present time. At a given point in this process, it will be necessary to trace parallel lines because, as we shall see, two quite dissimilar government policies have been adopted, one for formal education and the other for non-formal education. Arriving at the present day, I will assess the different factors that I believe hamper the development of Kabiye, and also those which encourage it. It is in the context of this discussion that I will voice certain reservations concerning the status of Kabiye as one of Togo's "national" languages, arguing that this status should be awarded to all Togolese languages, which number about forty (Gordon 2005).

Data comes from three sources. Firstly, I conducted semi-structured interviews with nine key stakeholders.[8] Secondly, I consulted the archives of the Kabiye National Language Committee (Comité de Langue Nationale Kabiyè, henceforth CLNK).[9] Thirdly, I referred to the unpublished research of two Togolese opinion leaders: the head of linguistics at Lomé University (Afeli 2003), and the national director of non-formal education (Direction de l'Alphabétisation et de l'Education des Adultes, henceforth DAEA; Yentcharé 1999, 2001, 2002, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c).[10]

[8] The interviews took place between 5 November 2004 and 28 June 2007 in Kara and Lomé. I am indebted to all those who participated: Pastor Alou Kpatcha (ex-president of the CLNK), Mr Batchati Baoubadi (vice-president of the CLNK), Dr Simtaro Dadja (secretary of the CLNK), Dr Aritiba Adji (member of the CLNK), Rev. Adjola Raphaël (ex-vice-president of the CLNK), Mr Abina Essobiyou (head of the literacy and adult education department at the Kara Social Affairs Centre), Mr Thomas Marmor (ex-director of language programmes, SIL Togo), Ms. JeDene Reeder (ex-literacy coordinator, SIL Togo) and Ms. Léa Kolani Yentcharé (national director of non-formal education). The opinions expressed in this chapter are not necessarily shared by all the interviewees.

[9] I would like to thank Dr Simtaro Dadja (secretary of the CLNK) for giving me access to the CLNK archives.

[10] The DAEA is one of the technical departments of the *Direction Générale du Développement Sociale* (DGDS), which is under the authority of the *Ministère des Affaires Sociales et de la Promotion de la Femme*. For a summary of its mission, see Yentcharé (2002; 2007b: 33-35).

The Kabiye people and their language

Kabiye is one of the languages of the eastern Gurunsi branch of the Gur family, which is part of the great Niger-Congo phylum (Bendor-Samuel 1989). The name of the language is written in several ways (Kabye, Kabre, Cabrai, Cabrais...) in the early research. The Kabiye homeland consists of two mountain ranges to the north of the city of Kara in the Kozah and Binah prefectures of northern Togo. However, two thirds of the Kabiye population has spread to the Central, the Maritime and the Plateau regions, mainly in the prefectures of Sotouboua, Blitta, Kloto, Ogou, Amlamé, Wawa and Haho. There has been considerable emigration to Ghana and there are also a few Kabiye villages in Benin. According to the Lomé statistics office, Kabiye speakers make up over 23% of the Togolese population (Lébikaza 1999: 33). Ethnologue (Gordon 2005), basing itself on a 1998 SIL report, estimates the Kabiye population to be 700,000 resident in Togo and 30,000 abroad. Adding the annual estimated growth rate for Togo, which is 3.2% (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; Alexandratos 1995),[11] the Kabiye population will easily reach one million during the second decade of the 21st century.

During the colonial period (1932-1959)

Apart from one early reference which is purely linguistic (Koelle 1854), the source of Kabiye language development can be traced back to the 1930s. At that time, Togo was under French colonial rule, the language policy of which, quite simply, was to make francophones of the entire population (Afeli 2003: 5, 352-3, 431; Komlan 1982; Lange 1991a: 10-11, who in turn cites the League of Nations 1922 and 1928; 1998: 108; Yentcharé 2002: 21). That this policy occasionally provoked strong reactions is not entirely surprising (Kpizing Kpelimiha, then president of the CLNK, in CLNK 1986a: 2):[12]

> School in colonial times did us more harm than good. Inevitably, it sought to depersonalise us [...] Once enrolled in school, whether we wanted it or not, we were forced to bury our own language [...]

That this should be the *perception* of those who were subjected to such a policy is not in question (Yentcharé 2001: 16). But what was the true motivation of the colonisers? To say that school *"...sought to deper-*

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[11] http://www.fao.org/docrep/v4200e/V4200E1q.htm accessed 12 January 2011.
[12] All quotations in this chapter are my own translations of the original French.

sonalise us" is at least partially inaccurate. Certain educators of that era certainly did not set out to depersonalise anyone. It was rather that the colonisers were themselves saturated in the quintessentially French political ideology of Equality. Rightly or wrongly, they saw the exclusive use of French as a way of avoiding double standards. They arrived in Africa with a socialist perception of education that was itself a legacy of the French Revolution. They believed that all citizens were equal, therefore they should all receive the same education. To be truly Republican, schools had to be identical, whether in Paris, Brittany or Kabiyeland. The French disdain for local languages, both in France and her colonies, stemmed from this philosophy. It is surely one of the great ironies of history that linguistic imperialism was a negative consequence of an ideology of Equality.[13] Kabiye was a victim of this ideology, being almost entirely neglected by the colonial authorities. The few individual initiatives that date from this period are all the more remarkable given the extremely unfavourable language policy.

The first publication in Kabiye appears to be a primer (1932) developed by the true pioneer of Kabiye language development, Antoine Brungard, a missionary priest of the *Société des Missions Africaines*. However, on the last page of this book there is a list of "new letters" alongside "old letters", suggesting that this document had at least one predecessor (published or not, we may never know...). Brungard's primer was followed by a modest grammar and dictionary of Kabiye (1937) and a Kabiye Catechism (1950).

In the 1930s, written Kabiye was taught in at least two kindergartens, in Landa Evangelical Presbyterian church and Tchitchao Catholic church. It was in this latter institution, founded by Brungard himself, that a six year old boy, Raphaël Adjola, who was later to become such a great promoter of the development of Kabiye, learned to read and write Kabiye in 1932, before attending French school.[14] And initiatives such as Brungard's were not solely confined to the church. Here and there, written Kabiye had a place within state structures. In the 1940s, it was included in the curriculum of the Ecole Normale in Lomé, the state institution responsible for teacher training.

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[13] My thanks to Jacques Nicole for pointing this out.

[14] Adjola's orthography, which does not conform to the standard, is beyond the scope of this chapter. I have treated it elsewhere (Roberts 2008).

It was also during this period that Jacques Delord,[15] the French missionary linguist who so profoundly influenced the work of the CLNK, first appeared. At the time when he was director of Atakpamé Evangelical Presbyterian Bible College, he became interested in Kabiye through his contact with some keen students who, at the beginning of term, hailed from the north of Togo having hiked for three days. By the 1940s, Delord had instigated the *petit diplôme kabiyè* to encourage the use of written Kabiye in the Evangelical Presbyterian schools.

All in all then, Kabiye language development during this period was limited and patchy. The efforts of the few highly motivated individuals who did have the foresight to put their hands to the plough are even more impressive when one remembers that they predate any systematic study of the language.

The period of independence (1960 - 1967)

The Act of Independence of 27 April 1960 did not break with the French heritage. The first post-independence government continued on the path traced by the colonisers as though by default (Afeli 2003: 431-2). It was not that the government was necessarily opposed to the development of local languages, but it took a rather passive position. It was familiar with only one model: education *à la française* or nothing at all. English was introduced as a subject in primary schools, but an attempt to incorporate Hausa never came to fruition (Afeli 2003: 5).

However, this was not to be the case for very long. Soon the winds of change began to blow in the international arena. In a pan-African awakening, Africans began clamouring for an educational policy that would correspond with the real needs of the continent. The heart-cry was to recover the dignity of African languages. In 1965 the World Congress of Ministers of Education on the Eradication of Illiteracy in Tehran made:

> [...a] unanimous appeal to the United Nations, its specialised agencies and in particular UNESCO, the regional bodies, non-governmental organisations and foundations both public and private, to procure the necessary financial aid to bring about the elimination of illiteracy .[16]

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[15] Jacques Delord was present in Togo from 1939 to 1960. He worked at the French CNRS (Centre National de Recherche Scientifique) from 1960 to 1975 and was in correspondence with the CLNK (Delord 2000) until his death in 2004.

[16] www.unesco.org/education/nfsunesco/brochure/F_18.PDF Accessed 12 January 2011.

A more discrete development, but no less important for that, was that linguists began to mention "Kabre" in various studies of Gur languages (Bendor-Samuel 1965; Manessy 1969). It was a small sign that the outside world had started to become interested in this hitherto little-known language. This interest was to accumulate rapidly in the years ahead.

But first we must return to the political arena. The first military coup on the African continent in 1963, led by a young lieutenant colonel named Gnassingbé Eyadema Etienne, marks the beginning of a new era in Togo's history. Appointed General in the aftermath of the coup, Eyadema assumed power in 1967. Such would be the imprint left by this one man, himself a Kabiye, throughout the four decades of his reign, that Togolese politics began to take a quasi-religious dimension, as Stamm has pointed out (1995: 122-123):

> [...] The Eyadema Cult in Togo borrows elements from ancestral religions (voodoo, sorcery, ancestor veneration), Christianity, Freemasonry and Rosicrucianism, whose language it adopts. General Eyadema dreams of building a nation where peace and solidarity prevail, and where tribalism is banished. Conceiving national unity as an earthly paradise, he desires to introduce ecumenism among all religions [...]

Clearly, from the moment that the "Grand Apostle of Peace" moves centre stage, everything to do with Kabiye language development must be understood from the angle of politics. And the ever-present figure of the Head of State goes beyond mere symbolism. In the coming years he was to take a particular interest in the work of the CLNK. Committee members became used to him personally intervening in the discussions. On one occasion, he offered his own opinion about the orthography of a noun class suffix, brandishing his own *petit diplôme kabiyè,* which he had been awarded at primary school, as proof of his credentials.

This anecdote is not irrelevant, because it reminds us that even in the corridors of power, a human element often lies hidden. Eyadema was a former pupil of Jacques Delord, instigator of the *petit diplôme kabiyè*. He even regarded Delord as something of a spiritual father. This relationship lasted throughout their lives until they both passed away within months of each other (Delord in 2004, Eyadema in 2005). The friendship thus forged between Head of State and missionary linguist stands as a kind of a microcosm of the relationship between national education policy and Kabiye language development in Togo.

Now let us review this national education policy as it took shape during the last three decades of the twentieth century. It is from this point onwards that we need to trace two lines in parallel. First, I will discuss

non-formal education, defined as literacy amongst those who have not had the chance to go to school or who have prematurely abandoned it. Then I will discuss formal education in public and private schools.

Political strategies (1968 - 1975)

Non-formal education: four "privileged" languages

Goaded into action by the Call of Tehran, UNESCO launched an Experimental Programme of World Literacy (1967-1973). Togo participated, and it was a golden opportunity for the first ever implementation of an explicit language policy. In 1970, the *Ministère des Affaires Sociales* chose four Togolese languages for promotion in non-formal education: Ewe, Kabiye, Tem and Moba (Afeli 2003: 6-7, 128; Yentcharé 2001: 8; 2002: 36-37; 2007b).[17]

The status granted to these languages has no official name, but for the purposes of clarity I will call them the four "privileged" languages. The choice was based on two criteria: a population in excess of 100,000 and the prior existence of linguistic research. Kabiye, although it amply met the first criterion, did not come anywhere near meeting the second at the time when the choice was made. True, Delord was already at work on his descriptive grammar, but this did not appear until six years later (1976).

To be fair, this language policy did show a certain largesse towards adult literacy in other Togolese languages (Yentcharé 2002: 37):

> [...] provided that [these languages] are transcribed, have been the focus of lexicological research, have alphabets and appropriate pedagogical materials, published literature and qualified personnel in the field.

From 1970, again with the support of UNESCO, the DAEA created the first experimental centres in Kabiyeland. They targeted young people and unschooled adults from the age of fifteen, with priority given to girls and women from rural communities. It is also as a result of these initiatives that the first Kabiye language academy was born, the forerunner of today's CLNK.

That briefly summarises the institutional provisions made to ensure the development of literacy among unschooled young people and adults from 1970 onwards. The government then turned its attention to formal

[17] The most recent official text is Decree n° 92/031/PMRT, 5 February 1992. It repeats the policies as defined in 1970.

education. These policies were ultimately to have a much more forceful impact on the development of Kabiye and of the country in general.

Formal education: two "national" languages

The Education Reform

In 1975, the *Ministère de l'Education Nationale* promulgated a Reform of formal education (MEN 1975),[18] the first of its kind since independence. This Reform, like the policy promulgated a few years previously by the *Ministère des Affaires Sociales*, had its roots in the Call of Tehran of 1965. Optimism was in the air. The reformers wanted nothing less than a "New School". That meant one which would offer opportunities for all citizens, treating girls on an equal footing with boys (Yentcharé 2002: 22). The reformers dreamed of "forming a new citizen profile". They envisaged a Reform that was to be *"comprehensive, fundamental and profound"* (Balouki in CLNK 1986a: no. 2, p.4). Afeli (2003: 6) evens calls the Reform *"a profession of faith which was, in those days, a rare and even revolutionary event [...] in sub-Saharan francophone Africa."*

The choice of "national" languages

The aspect of the Reform that concerns us here, of course, is the choice of language (Afeli 2003: 6, 128, 237-8; Kozelka 1984; Lange 1991b). In 1972, a national linguistic consultation took place, which was funded by UNESCO and organised under the auspices of the Togolese government. The resulting report (Anson 1974) recommended the adoption of five national languages, Ewe, Kabiye, Ncam, Tem and Moba (Afeli 2003: 233-237, 432-3, 451-2). However, the government chose to retain only two, Ewe and Kabiye.

These languages were chosen with a view to unifying the country and sealing the concept of national identity (Gnon-Samya 1988: cited by Afeli, 2003: 238). They were destined, in the eyes of the reformers, to become *"authentic symbols of what defines our citizenship"* (Balouki in CLNK 1986a: 5). Yentcharé (2001: 9) explains how the reformers envisaged putting the policy into practice (See also Afeli 2003: 240, 388; and Balouki in CLNK 1986b: 5).

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[18] Made law on 6th May 1975 (cf. Balouki, then general secretary of the CLNK, in CLNK 1986b: 4-6; 1987: 9).

> It was envisaged that these two languages would be taught from primary school upwards in two stages. In stage one, French would remain the language of instruction, and the two national languages would be taught as subjects. In stage two, French would have the status of a foreign language subject, and the national languages would be the language of instruction. In secondary school, the national languages would be introduced as subjects with optional exams at BEPC [Brevet d'Études du Premier Cycle] level. Both languages would be taught with the following geographical delimitations: the Ewe-speaking zone in the south, from Lomé to Blitta; the Kabiye-speaking zone in the north, from Blitta to Dapaong. Ewe and Kabiye would both be taught as second languages in the Kabiye-speaking zone and the Ewe-speaking zone respectively.

However, it is a little known fact that at its conception in 1973, the reformers did not choose Kabiye, but Tem as the national language of the north:

> [...T]ogo is by nature Ewe-speaking and Tem-speaking, because these two languages represent large populations and in principle are spoken from Lomé to Blitta and from Blitta to Dapaong respectively." (MEN 1973: 32, cited in Lange 1991a)

It is only after a period of two years, during the enactment of the Reform, that Kabiye receives a mention for the first time (see also Afeli 2003: 237, 247-8, 435):

> Of course, the ideal would be to teach all local languages from beginning of school to the end, but the desire for national unity requires us to choose these two languages: Ewe and Tem (Kabre). (MEN 1975: 33, cited in Lange 1991a: 15)

On this point Lange raises the pertinent question:

> Did the architects of the Reform fear displeasing the head of state by proposing the language of the Kotokoli people, who had been privileged military allies of the German colonisers in their attempts to subdue the Kabiye population?

Another factor that influenced the choice is that numerically, Kabiye is not only the second largest ethnic group in Togo (after Ewe), but also the largest population with their origins in the north, considerably larger than Tem. But it is not by any stretch of the imagination a language of wider communication, whereas Tem goes some way to fulfilling this function in the limited domain of commerce. It goes without saying that

Kabiye gained the status of “national” language at least partly because President Eyadema was himself Kabiye.

The choice of reference dialect

The choice of a Kabiye reference dialect, too, was closely linked in the minds of reformers with the need to forge a national identity (Balouki in CLNK 1986a: no.2 p.9):

> A national language can never be made up of multiple dialects. It is united and promotes national unity. It can no longer belong to a single group or a single clan. It belongs henceforth to the entire nation, to humanity [...]

Kabiye consists of a necklace of dialects encircling two mountain ranges. So one of the first tasks of the CLNK was to choose a reference dialect, and the committee did not waver long over the decision (Balouki in CLNK 1986a: no.4, p.7):

> [...] Linguists, educators and researchers across the board, after much study and analysis, are unanimous in recommending, from the moment when the teaching of Kabiye officially begins, a single reference dialect: the dialect of Piya.

On the one hand, the choice is not surprising, because Piya is the home canton of President Eyadema (Afeli 2003: 242). As Lange, in ironic mood, admits (1991b: 15) *"[...] one cannot fail to perceive this decision as being a 'fait du prince'."* But on the other hand, it would be too simplistic an analysis of the problem to suggest that the CLNK were forced into this choice. An impartial analysis reveals other sociolinguistic factors at play. Historically, the *petit diplôme kabiyè* was based on the Piya dialect as far back as the 1940s. Geographically, the canton of Piya is central and others perceive the speech variety as being fairly neutral. And linguistically, Jacques Delord based his monumental Kabiye grammar on the dialect of Piya (Delord 1976: 2). Of course, it is a moot point whether Delord did not choose the Piya dialect precisely because it was shrewder given the political circumstances...

Whatever the truth, the adoption of the Piya dialect has never posed serious problems for those who had the task of standardising the orthography. And in any case, nowadays, the CLNK has a more flexible stance. In the bilingual dictionary (Marmor 1999), the main entry cites the refer-

ence dialect, but this often cross-references to tolerated secondary entries representing other dialects variants.

A period of growth (1976 - 1989)

The Education Reform inaugurated a period that Lange (1998: 137) describes as "*those famous consensual and euphoric years*". It coincides with the surfacing of the main North - South road, and an economy boosted by the discovery of phosphate. The whole country was enjoying a new dynamism and everything seemed possible. The promoters of Kabiye were swept along by this optimism and launched into a period of flourishing activity.

One of the most tangible and durable aspects of the Reform was the birth in 1977 of the CLNK (Afeli 2003: 158-159, 249).[19] Working under the auspices of the *Ministère de l'Education Nationale*, it received the mandate to standardise the written form of the language. As in any committee, there were opposing voices, radical and conservative. But despite many ups and downs, the CLNK eventually succeeded in its first task: the standardisation of the Kabiye orthography.

Not content with just digging the foundations, the CLNK embarked on a dictionary project in collaboration with SIL (Marmor 1999). In the media, from 1977 onwards, the national daily paper Togo-Presse began to devote a half-page to Kabiye under the title *Ɖɛ-ɛjaɖɛ*,[20] meaning "Our country" (Afeli 2003: 7, 330-6). Already before the enactment of the Reform, national television and radio had begun, in 1973 and 1975 respectively, to reserve daily 15 minute slots for news bulletins in Kabiye (Afeli 2003: 8, 336-7, 349; Yentcharé 2001).[21] Other programmes were also developed in Kabiye (Afeli 2003: 338-344). A regional radio, Radio Kara, was inaugurated in 1974 (Afeli 2003: 345-346).

These years also saw the appearance of three major scientific works. Delord's descriptive grammar (1976) was the cornerstone of the CLNK's work. Raymond Verdier's ethnography (1982), too, quickly became the

[19] The committee was originally called the "groupe d'étude de langue nationale Kabiyè" (Decision no.163 MEN/RS, 18 May 1977). It was later on (Decision no. 72 METQD/RS of 19 April 1983) that it was renamed CLNK (CLNK 1986a: 3; 1987: 9; 1988: 3).

[20] Before spelling was standardised, the title was *Dɛcadɛ*.

[21] In fact, daily Kabiye news bulletins had begun as far back as 1965, but with only minimal airtime (Afeli 2003: 336).

reference work in the field of anthropology. Not long after, in 1985, Lébikaza Kézié defended his doctoral thesis on Kabiye grammar.[22]

In the non-formal sector, the DAEA also put its hand to the plough, thanks to grants from UNESCO. It worked with partners, including the Togolese Cotton Company (*Société Togolaise du Coton*, henceforth SOTOCO), as well as humanitarian organisations that had recently arrived in the region (Action Aid, Børne Fonden, Don Bosco and SIL). They collaborated on training, technical support, monitoring and evaluation (Yentcharé 2001: 8-10).

Various associations began to engage in literature production too, producing primers, calendars, health booklets, folk-tales and proverbs, not to mention Scripture portions as Bible translation efforts progressed. Several Kabiye newspapers also appeared at this time (Afeli 2003: 7). One, entitled *Tɛʋ Fema*, was published by the DAEA (1977-1992: see also Afeli, 2003: 318, 335-6). Another, entitled *Da Difezi* was published by SOTOCO (dates unknown). A third, entitled *Tebiye* (Club-Kabiye 1977) was the journal of the Lomé University Kabiye Club (Afeli 2003: 273-4). To this list we can add *Ɛbɛ Laba ?* the journal of the CLNK (CLNK 1986 - 2008: see also Afeli, 2003: 287) which still continues biannually to this day. All in all, Kabiye literature during this period was being published on a scale hitherto unseen (for overviews, see CLNK 1987: 10-11; Pouwili 1999).

As for the classroom, the picture is no less impressive. The government entrusted the task of implementing the formal education language policy to the *Direction de la Formation Permanente de l'Action et de la Recherche Pédagogique* (DIFOP).[23] The official launch of Kabiye teaching in a few pilot classes took place in Kara in 1978, followed immediately by its dissemination in primary schools. A seminar that brought together the CLNK and various educators was held in Kara in 1980. Teaching Kabiye at secondary school level began in 1982, which meant that those in their final year of secondary school could choose to take Kabiye as an exam at BEPC level in 1983. The first national language competition with awards was started two years later, in 1985. The same year saw the introduction of evening classes in the two national languages to train primary and secondary school teachers. And finally, 1986 marks the beginning of national languages as an optional subject in professional secondary

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[22] Lébikaza defended his doctoral thesis in German and published it in French fourteen years later (Lébikaza 1999).

[23] Created by decree no. 79-126, 5 April 1979. DIFOP is a department of the Ministère de l'Education et de la Recherche. Its precursor, created in 1968, was called l'Institut Pédagogique National (IPN).

school exams (Balouki in CLNK 1987: 9-10). Evidently it was during this period that Kabiye language development enjoyed its biggest ever boom. However, Lange takes a more nuanced position (1991b: 16):

> Currently, French remains the medium of instruction, Ewe and Kabiye still have only the status of subjects. Officially, the first national language in each zone should be taught from the 1st grade, and both languages (Ewe and Kabiye) from class 7th to 11th grade. In fact, the second language has never been introduced and the teaching of the first happens only in a limited number of primary schools classes [...] In the Kabiye speaking zone, Kabiye is learned almost exclusively in grades 1 and 2, and even then there are significant disparities between the different prefectures [...]

One interviewee described the same period as "sixteen years of uncertainty", doubtful about the long-term prospects for the language policy of the Reform. Could Kabiye really succeed in becoming a language of wider communication for the north of Togo? How should the two dissimilar policies, one for non-formal and the other for formal education, be successfully integrated? How should fieldworkers respond to complaints from other ethnic groups whose motivation for literacy in the mother tongue sometimes exceeded that of the Kabiye population for theirs? In short, how should literacy workers act so as not to upset the political establishment? In the late 1980s, all these questions and many others were hanging in the balance.

The political crisis (1990 - 1992)

In any case, the pace and optimism that characterised those early days was not to last for long. Already as far back as the 1980s the Togolese government had to adopt a more austere budget (Lange 1987: 77, 81). This forced those who were struggling to keep local languages high on the agenda to reduce their activities to a strict minimum. Very early on, teacher training in the two national languages came to a standstill. Good initiatives failed for lack of funding; others never saw the light of day. No one knew it at the time, but this unfavourable climate was only the precursor to a shock that the entire country would soon sustain, and which would have profound repercussions in all sectors, not least the government's language policies.

In 1990, pro-democracy uprisings shook Togo. Demonstrators nearly succeeded in their attempt to overthrow the government (Iwata 2000; JAI 2003; Toulabor 1996). The urban Togolese began claiming freedom of

speech and openly voicing their complaints about the economic decline. Among the southern population, an anti-Eyadema (and by extension anti-Kabiye) opposition took root. The diaspora, of which Kabiye was the largest single ethnic group, fled north and took refuge in their various homelands.

Next, a general strike exacerbated the economic crisis and this affected all sectors. The State was compelled to cut off its financial assistance to the CLNK, the DIFOP and the DAEA. For these three bodies, the early 1990s are a dead period in which almost no activity was possible. As far as the CLNK was concerned, the only exceptions were the calendar and the biannual journal[24] which continued to appear on a regular basis, thanks to a handful of motivated individuals. They wanted to demonstrate that their efforts went beyond the political arena: Kabiye language development existed before the time of Eyadema, so why could it not survive him?

Eyadema himself physically survived the crisis and somehow maintained his position, despite the efforts of the opposition, supported by France, who tried to wrest power from him at the National Conference of 12 June 1991. This unexpected survival earned Eyadema the reputation of a man who could overcome anything and everything, if only through the support of the Kabiye dominated military. This reputation was sealed by presidential elections in 1993 and 1998.

However, the validity of these elections was challenged, both within the country and beyond its borders. In 1993, the European Union withdrew its aid. Several major bilateral and multilateral donors followed suite. Under intense pressure from all sides, internally and externally, the government was obliged to adapt and make concessions.

Following the political crisis, Kabiye did not lose its status as a "national" language; indeed, it maintains it to this day. But writers no longer use the type of highly patriotic language which was so typical of the 1970s and 1980s. For example, the editorials in the CLNK journals of this period, acutely sensitive to the climate, no longer refer to Kabiye as a "cement of national unity". Rather, they address the topics of reconciliation, forgiveness and peace (CLNK 1993a: 5-8; 1993b: 3-4).

[24] It was later on, between 1999 and 2005, that the publication of this journal was interrupted for six years. Three issues have appeared more recently (CLNK 2006a, 2006b, 2008).

On the threshold of the third millennium (1993 - 2010

By any measure, Kabiye language development was not in good shape by the turn of the millenium. This was the unanimous view of all the interviewees without exception (see also Afeli 2003: 9-10). In formal education, Kabiye has only a very limited place, usually being introduced as an optional subject in the last two years of secondary school (Yentcharé 2001: 16-17). In the area of non-formal education, numerous literacy programs are dormant, and some NGOs have withdrawn altogether from the Kozah Prefecture, the Kabiye homeland. As for the CLNK, it has resumed its activities, but with a very modest budget which does not allow the same level of activity as in the past.

There are notable exceptions to this state of affairs. The creation in 1996 of the NGO *l'Association des Femmes pour l'Alphabétisation, la Santé et les Activités génératrices de revenus* (AFASA) is a bright light in the non-formal sector. This initiative deserves to be cited precisely because it was born in such an unfavourable socio-political context. Neither can the publication of Kabiye literature be said to have dried up. It is during this period that a range of new titles appeared as diverse as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Blanzoua 1993), the Bible in two versions (ABT 1997; Adjola 1997), two books of proverbs (Batchati 1997, 2003), a history of the Kabiye people (Blanzoua 1998), a bilingual dictionary (Marmor 1999), a bilingual lexicon of anatomical terminology (Karabou 2007) and a short novel (Azoti 2008). What is clear is that written Kabiye has now reached a critical crossroads, with some factors impeding and others favouring its development.

Factors impeding Kabiye language development

The magnitude of the phenomenon is such that it cannot be ignored: Kabiye is perceived by many urban mother-tongue speakers as representing a rural farming world that offers few opportunities. As Yentcharé puts it (2001: 16-17):

> It is clear that written Kabiye is used very little or not at all in professional activities, administration, justice and political life because of its dominance in oral rather than written communication. Literate people have very few opportunities to use what they have learned, which is limited to being able to read a few documents. They wonder what purpose

> Kabiye literacy serves when French is so predominant in mass communication and in commerce, and whether French acquisition is the only valid criterion for social advancement. French appears to them as a language of prestige and opportunity, playing a role in national and international communication, culture, access to modern knowledge, dialogue with other civilizations and cultures.

Manifestly, the revitalisation of written Kabiye requires convincing the younger generation that the two worlds, French-speaking and Kabiye-speaking, are not in opposition to each other, but complementary (Yentcharé 2001: 22). Opening up to the outside world is crucial, but the Kabiye young person must first put down cultural roots in order to avoid destabilisation or even the complete loss of cultural identity.

The twin phenomena of mobility and urbanisation have important consequences. As far as mobility is concerned, most Kabiye feel a strong attachment to their homeland. But two thirds of the population resides in a diaspora that stretches to the south and across the border into Ghana. There is nothing new here. The colonial powers (German in 1902 and 1906, then French in 1922 and 1939) had imposed forced displacements on the population to serve as labour in the rail and road construction and also to populate the relatively unexploited Central region. Today's younger generation is heir to these early 20th century demographic movements. Comings and goings are numerous between homeland and diaspora (Piot 1999). As for urbanisation, this phenomenon is common to both worlds. The Kabiye diaspora in the capital city of Lomé is deeply affected by it. And in the Kabiye homeland too, the town of Kara is mushrooming as a result of Eyadema's policy that it should become Togo's second city.

Whatever the causes, mobility or urbanisation, the effect is the same: young Kabiye people mix far more with people of other language groups than previous generations did. In the home, many children are the offspring of mixed marriages. At urban schools, classes are often composed of a mixture of ethnic groups. Both environments have a detrimental effect on the use of the mother tongue.

Added to this, Togo is currently in a period of political transition. The death of General Gnassingbé Eyadema in 2005 marked the end of an era. The new government, with his son Gnassingbé Faure at its head, has not yet made any formal statement concerning language policy. This leaves a degree of uncertainty about the future. As one interviewee wryly noted "For the moment, we don't know which foot we should be dancing on".

The development of Kabiye has always been hampered by a limited budget (Afeli 2003: 358-360). Since the early days, literacy in both sectors

has always advanced in piecemeal fashion. The reformers had all the best intentions of training an army of employed teachers. But the fact is that they had to curtail training quite soon after the launch of the Reform for lack of funding (Yentcharé 2001: 17). Moreover, the quality of training was not equal to the circumstances (Afeli 2003: 9, 249, 378, 477; Lange 1991b: 17). Today, Kabiye teaching in state schools often remains in the hands of volunteers (whose high motivation should be viewed, admittedly, as a encouraging sign).

To take another example, the Education Reform of 1975 specifically mentions the need to create an *Institut des Langues Nationales* (Afeli 2003: 9, 248 , 357-8, 380-1). Twelve years later, the *Ministère du Plan et des Mines* developed a project to establish such an institute, hoping to inject some fresh air into the language policies of the Reform (MPM 1989). But this initiative has remained on paper for lack of financial support. University staff were confronted with the same kind of inertia. A detailed plan by the linguistics department at Lomé University to introduce the two national languages as optional subjects for the academic year 1983-4 was turned down without explanation (Afeli 2003: 303-306).

We should also not underestimate the enormity and complexity of basic linguistic research as a prerequisite for the development of the written form of a language. If Kabiye had more trouble than Ewe implementing the requirements of the 1970 and 1975 language policies, it is partly because it was a relative latecomer. It was not until the 1980s that the foundations were laid (linguistic research, orthography standardisation, dictionary building...) Ewe language development, in contrast, dates back to the 1840s. Books and newspapers were already being sold on the streets of Lome in 1910 (Lawrance 2000). Ewe had a head start of almost a century (Afeli 2003: 353-4, 386).

After basic linguistic research comes the need to generate a literature sufficiently voluminous, diverse and interesting for readers to be motivated to access it (Afeli 2003: 379-80, 387, 426-9, 477). But so far, there exists no publishing house dedicated to the promotion of Kabiye, no editor who goes in search of new authors, no structures to handle the typing, the editing, the marketing and the sale of new titles. Consequently, teachers simply do not have access to published resources. All too often a Kabiye lesson in a state school unfolds like a feeble parody of a linguistics lecture. Pupils are expected to learn the litany of vowel harmony rules, without ever experiencing the simple pleasure of holding a book in their laps and reading it.

There is also a need to take stock and evaluate (Afeli 2003: 244-246, 355). It is true that several recent works have taken the temperature of

Togolese schools in general (Koudjoulma 2002; Lange 1998; Tchatakora 1994). But the most recent - and arguably the most authoritative - report (Worldbank 2003) never so much as mentions the choice of language as a factor in Togolese education policy. What is lacking is a national investigation that focuses only on written Kabiye. If such a study was undertaken, it would need to be synthetic, providing statistical information that is currently missing both in the formal sector (Lange 1991b: 16) and in the non-formal sector (Yentcharé 2007a: 3). Any team undertaking such a study would have their work cut out for them. In how many primary schools, secondary schools, lycées and adult literacy programs is Kabiye currently being taught? Among these, what is the balance between the kabiye homeland and the diaspora, or between urban centres and the countryside? Are the teachers employees or volunteers? In the case of formal education, is Kabiye an obligatory or optional subject? How many schools have published resources at their disposal? There is a long list of unanswered questions.

Factors favouring Kabiye Language development

Often, after a period of great political instability such as that which Togo experienced in the early 1990s, it takes several years before fieldworkers, national or expatriate, find the confidence to resume their activities. But once out of the tunnel, they found themselves in different world.

The political crisis was a painful experience of confrontation between opponents of the government (who were mainly from the South) and its supporters (which included most Kabiye speakers). Paradoxically, it caused a new awareness of ethnic identity among the Kabiye, especially in the diaspora where the confrontation took place. This may be one reason why, to this day, adult literacy enjoys more success in the Central and Plateau regions than it does in the Kabiye homeland.

In addition, the government, wiser as a result of the crisis, began to exercise considerably more flexibility and openness. The *de jure* non-formal education policy has always stated that in addition to the four “privileged” languages, any Togolese language that meets certain criteria may be taught. But the *de facto* language policy of the 1980s was that nobody wanted to take advantage of this provision for fear of upsetting the political establishment. The difference now is that the political climate is milder and less intimidating.

SOTOCO is a case in point. It realised that some people groups whose language has never received special status, for example Ifè, are far more

motivated and active in literacy than others, like Kabiyè, whose language enjoys both “privileged” and “national” status. So in 2001, SOTOCO changed its adult literacy strategy, opening the way for literacy in all languages. The irony is that SOTOCO's new *de facto* strategy is merely aligning itself with the *de jure* government policy that had already been in place for over thirty years. Moreover, if fieldworkers in the non-formal sector feel greater freedom to teach in any language, the flip side is also true: Kabiye could be dismissed as a subject in formal education in those regions where pupils are never likely to hear it spoken.

The DAEA did not remain passive in the face of these winds of change. On two occasions it organised consultations leading to plans of action. The emphasis was on collaboration among all stakeholders working in the sector with a view to improving methods of intervention and seeking lasting solutions to common challenges (Yentcharé 1999; 2007a: 4).

While some objectives of the Reform have never been operational, it is partly due to lack of structures for co-operation between the two ministries concerned, the *Ministère des Affaires Sociales* and the *Ministère de l'Education Nationale* (Afeli 2003: 9; Yentcharé 2001: 17; 2007a). However, as recently as March 2008, the government has closed this gap by creating a single government ministry whose portfolio covers formal and non-formal education: the *Ministère des enseignements primaire, secondaire, de l'enseignement technique, de la formation professionnelle et de l'alphabétisation*.

Still more recently, in March 2009, SIL organised a multilingual education seminar at the University of Lomé, which was attended by all leading national level stakeholders. This seminar was held under the auspices of the *Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de la Recherche*, a tangible sign of greater openness on the part of the government.

Along with all these changes within the country come others from the exterior. There is a change of agenda at international level. UN agencies and international NGOs have begun to place a greater emphasis on the importance of the mother tongue, however small the population. This no longer favours Kabiye at the expense of other Togolese languages; it places all local languages on the same footing. In parallel, international donors have begun to bypass governments. These days, funding is likely to go directly to benefit of the project without being channelled through a national institution. Good governance is *de rigueur*. These same donors support the new emphasis on the importance of all minority languages. Finally, the IT revolution has already had, and will certainly continue to have, a staggering influence in the workplace.

Computers facilitate the writing, editing and layout of documents. Publishing is both cheaper and of a higher quality. With the advent of Unicode, special characters are no longer the barrier that they once were. Communication continues to accelerate thanks to the widespread use of the internet, email and mobile phones on the African continent. These new technologies can be harnessed to foster the development of minority languages.

Kabiye and its status as a "National" language

Since the 1970s, two Togolese languages, Ewe and Kabiye, have enjoyed the status of "national" languages and are taught in formal education. In addition to these, Tem and Moba were given "privileged" status in the non-formal sector. Why has this dual language policy never borne the fruit expected, in spite of so much effort? I concede that one should not seek to find in the language policies introduced in the 1970s the direct cause of the political crisis of the 1990s. And if this is true, it follows that one should not attribute to the crisis of the 1990s the malaise that written Kabiye experiences today. Nevertheless there are two indirect links.

First, the political crisis was triggered primarily by a desire for freedom of expression. Now this is by definition linked to speech, and therefore to the languages spoken by the person claiming this right, including the mother tongue (Toulabor 1996). As long as it is not valued, the cultural identity of the mother tongue speaker is being eroded. Second, popular thinking had somehow equated with the Man with the Language. The logic went like this: Eyadema is a Kabiye speaker. Since Eyadema is a dictator, it follows that his language is also dictatorial. This way of looking at things, as unreasonable as it may be, certainly contributed to a quiet but steadily growing bitterness in the population that in the long run could not fail to ignite.

Taking the impact of the political crisis into account in this way, let us return to the question asked at the outset. Why has the choice of Kabiye as a "national" language failed? This question hides another one, namely: What exactly is a national language? Baker (1997: 138) considers that:

> [In the 1950s], 'national language' had two distinct definitions (i) 'officially declared to be the national language of a state' and (ii) 'language of a nation'. In the colonial era, (i) was frequently and not always accurately interpreted as meaning 'the indigenous language spoken by the majority of the population', in contrast to the 'official language' of the colonial

> power. The meaning of (ii) varied according to one's definition of the word 'nation'. In more recent times, in Africa at least, 'national language' has come to be applied to any indigenous language in which literacy is encouraged by the government.

Other authorities in the field (Afeli 2003: 13-108; Fasold 1984: 303-304) concur with this analysis. Now, since Kabiye is not an indigenous language spoken by the majority of the Togolese population, it does not correspond with Baker's first definition. And since the Togolese government was seeking to nurture national unity rather than making the Kabiye people a nation in its own right, Kabiye does not correspond to the second definition either. This leaves only the third definition "any indigenous language in which literacy is encouraged by the government".

And here is the Achilles heel of the language policy of the 1975 Reform. To take a language that is not spoken by the majority of the population and to impose it on that majority as a "national" language in the first sense of the term, was destined to fail from the outset. It represents a politic of confusion that has underestimated two forces, one from inside Togo and the other from the exterior.

First, the reformers severely underestimated the strength of cultural identity inherent in the other ethnic groups of the North. For all that the reformers paid lip service to the value of every Togolese language, the reality is that the teaching of any Togolese language besides Kabiye and Ewe was relegated only to kindergartens in the formal sector (Balouki in CLNK 1986b: 5). A language policy that imposed Kabiye on Moba children sitting at their desks in the primary schools of Dapaong, miles from any possibility of contact with Kabiye speakers, was doomed to certain failure. The notion of a Kabiye-speaking zone from Blitta to Dapaong is fabulously far from reality. Kabiye could never become a language of wider communication for the north of Togo. Even if it could, it would not have necessarily been appreciated. In the south where Ewe is indeed a language of wider communication, other people groups have often resisted the imposition of Ewe in schools. The granting to Kabiye and Ewe the status of "national" language in turn excludes all other languages from having the same status (Afeli 2003: 436-7). On this point Yentchare's (2001: 13-14) position is worth quoting in full:

> The difficulties faced by the policy of promoting national languages are related to non-involvement of the population in the choice of those languages and the lack of status of these languages. Speakers of other languages perceived the choice of Kabiye and Ewe by political decree as an

> imposition. They have been declared national languages and imposed on citizens without any awareness building or involvement of the peoples concerned. Such an approach may eventually lead to conflict. Moreover, the imposition of the language on a community leads to more or less long term negative implications both for the said community and for speakers of this language. These include: feelings of disgust and reluctance to learn on the part of the groups whose languages have not been chosen; a superiority complex on the part of those who speak the languages which have been decreed national; risk of seclusion and of degeneration of minority cultures; trends towards the imposition of the cultures of dominant languages; cultural mimicry of the privileged group if their language is accepted. In the specific case of the choice of Kabiye and Ewe, the consequences have not been small. In formal education, pupils and parents were wary of the introduction of these languages in education. And in non-formal education too, communities who are forced to become literate in a language other than their own, are pleading for the recognition of their own language.

Secondly, the reformers never anticipated (perhaps they could not have done so) the proportions that the external forces of globalisation would soon take. The government had sought to nurture three levels of language skills: mother tongue, "national" language and international language. For the Kabiye pupil, the first two are identical but for all other northern people groups, this meant embracing trilingualism. Clearly, the brave new world of the 21st century requires young Togolese to learn French, the only language among the three that is a truly international language. The younger generation throughout the north of Togo have made their choice, and it is in favour of bilingualism rather than trilingualism. On the one hand non-Kabiye northerners cherish their respective mother tongues for reasons of cultural identity; on the other hand they make huge investments in learning French to give them access to the outside world. Given this pressing dual need, Kabiye as a "national" language does not even appear on their agenda.

It is deeply unfortunate that the lesson had to be learned so painfully. It is quite possible to promote a language threatened by outside forces within the population to which it belongs, but it is impossible to impose that same language on surrounding populations, when such an imposition goes against the flow of major global movements in history.

A similar dynamic operates in the non-formal sector. The choice of four "privileged" languages in 1970 was not without consequences for other Togolese ethnic groups. The positive side was that, unlike the national languages promoted in schools, non-formal education had always been intended only for native speakers. No majority language has

ever been imposed on minority populations who do not speak them, and the teaching of no language was prohibited. But the downside was that, at the same time, speakers of non-privileged languages have been ignored because no policy was established to actively promote their development.

More recently, as we have seen, fieldworkers in the non-formal education sector feel a greater freedom to work in their respective mother tongues. However, this development, for all that it is favourable, begs another question. If these languages are spoken on Togolese national territory, and if they have been approved (or at least enjoyed an absence of disapproval) by the Togolese government, why not grant them all the status of national languages, along with Kabiye and Ewe? Such a policy would fall in line with Baker's third definition, namely “any indigenous language in which literacy is encouraged by the government”.

It is entirely possible to support the development of written Kabiye and honour its status as a national language, while hoping that one day all Togolese languages might enjoy that same status. Such a viewpoint has nothing original to commend it. It is the view of international agencies such as UNESCO. It is also the official policy in several of the surrounding Francophone countries. And it is the view of certain influential opinion leaders in Togo (Afeli 2003: 97, 106; Yentcharé 2001: 15-16; 2002: 62-63).

Kabiye language development now spans eighty years. The fact that this period roughly corresponds to that of a human life prompts some thought-provoking questions about the future. What is on the horizon for child born in the north of Togo today? Will she witness, over the span of her lifetime, the ongoing development of her mother tongue, irrespective of whether or not it is Kabiye? Will she grow up enjoying the benefits of a coherent language policy which intentionally places linguistic diversity at its heart? Will the government value her language as much in the next thirty years as it has valued Kabiye in the last thirty? The answer to these questions must be 'yes' if that child is to face a globalised world securely rooted in her own cultural identity.

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