

MERNYANG LANGUAGE AND ITS SPEAKERS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the Mernyang language and its speakers. It also discusses the historical background of the study, the geographical location, cultural and social background, the scope and delimitations of the study, genetic classification, justification and significance of the study vis-à-vis, the research method used.

Mernyang which is pronounced as “Mernyan” is a language spoken in plateau state of Nigeria. It is spoken in the southern part of plateau by small community as a dialect. Mernyang as a language is officially called MERNYANG and it means “nucleus of rebel” The name which the language is generally called “pan”. The community pan are of seven (7) in number but there are just only three (3) major fluent speakers of Mernyang language in Pan chieftom and these are the Kwa district, Kwang district, and Dokan kasuwa district. Each community of pan chieftom varies in pronunciation but they all understand one another. The project work is based on the Mernyang dialect.

In this work, Mernyang morphology is the focus, this work will feature the consonant and vowel chart of Mernyang since the language has no written form, Mernyang word formation processes, word classes, Morphological typologies, morpheme structure, morphemic function and most importantly the morpheme in Mernyang language.

1.1 GENERAL BACKGROUND

THE MERNYANG AND THEIR NEIGHBOURS

The migration of a large group of people believed to be of the same stock has been ascribed to oral tradition as taking its roots from the North East at or around Kanem-Borno. For want of written records some writers link the migration of these large groups to the introduction of Islam while others link it to tribal squabbles. Whatever prompted the movement, the groups sojourned in different locations as they were on the move but the recent populate settlement nodes being Jivi, Gyangang, Wase, Fiemgiji, Kofyar, Asa, etc have been noted orally and writing

A group is said to have moved in the direction of Fyer to Asa through Katul and thereon form the Ron-Kulere-Chakfem-Mushere axis. Its splinter group had branch off to locate at Ndai and Vice-versa. Ndai is another sub-dispersal point located between panyam and Mangu.

Yet another group is said to have moved in the direction of Munok through Langshi into Garram. From Garram Duar settled at chief, Fomter moved to Doemwai and then to Jagatoe (Dokan Tofa) spreading into Koenoem areas, Lekni moved towards the Jelbang in selbang and beyond to found the the Goemai of Muduut and environs. Another group led by Dafyar to Pees and onto Kofyar where they sojourned and later dispersed as shown bellow.

This bring to focus how the Tal Montol, Koenoem, Mernyang and Piapung have carved for themselves the identity “Panshak” meaning “brothers”. By extension and in agreement with language similarity and closeness, the people of the so-called ethnic principalities of the “corn belt” of the Plateau are one and the people with minor differences attributed to contact and prolonged isolation due to migrations.

In the view of Sr. Marie de Paul Neiers (1979:16) these propels of the “corn belt” stem from one group as she reports: As the archaeological evidence patters out, towards the end of first millennium of the Christian era, oral traditions open the second millennium to historians. According to Ames, the Angas were driven from Borno either about 1100 by the Bolewa and others or else by Kanuri about 1350. Having spent some times on the move they eventually scaled the plateau on its eastern side. From there they expanded to the west and south west forming numerous sub groups such as the Tal, Sura (now Mughavul with the Challa as a branch of the family), Mirriam, Chip, Ankwe and others.

Both Ames and Neiers did not know the direction and location of Lekni and Foniter neither did they appraise the relationship between the Knoenoem, Piapung, Monton and present-day Goemai. They could not link the Jelbang–Muduut group then (known as the Jipari) who had retreated from the Lekni group. Both Ames and Neiers did not notice the cultural and language bond between the Tal, Taroh, Pai, Myet group which is in turn linked to the Fier, Mupun, Mughavul, Ron, Kuletre, Chakfem, Mushere and the “Panshak” group. Finally, Ames and Neiers did not know that some present –day Goemai are from the Fomter, Njenand Kwararafa stock other than the Lekni stock.

A major handicap of the early transcribers of oral tradition into written form was their lack of knowledge of the language of the people and their cultural practices which would have enabled them to notice the interwoven, the various groups are to date.

1.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.

Dafyar, from whom the Mernyang and other groups owe their descent is said to have procreated with his sister Nade as they were the only survivors of the cataclysm they viewed as the collapse of the sky attended by fire and brimstone. It is believed that all mankind perished due to sins committed which attracted the wrath of God. Dafyar and Nade had hidden in the cave on a promontory called Chor in Kofubum near present day Kofyar.

A casual study shows that one of the many of the chains of volcanoes in the area (Moelar, Sogom, Pak, Kwanoeng, etc) may have activated causing the cataclysm they viewed as the sky collapsing with fire and brimstone.

The offspring of Dafyar had fanned out into many other sub-groups and sojourned or inter-married thereby producing a much wider cultural mix. The colonial expedition visit on Latok following the demise of her Magestry's Administration officer Mr. Christopher Matthew Barlow in the early 1930s sent many descendants of Dafyar away from home into other communities thereby further widening the cultural mix within the sub-region and thereabouts.

The offspring of Dafyar comprised his sons and grandsons or even great grandsons and so on. Oral tradition has for long maintained the 14 who have been popular due to the settlements that grew in the wake of their earlier locations. This offspring whose locations created urban settlements are as presented below:

S/N	NAME	SETTLEMENT	FOUNDED	APPROXIMATE ROUTE	DISTANCE FROM KOFYAR
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1. Chikirpe Kwang 6 km 2. Dajan Jepjan 23 km 3. Dajin Dum-mak 3 km 4. Dawam Lardang 5 km 5. Jefut Jaknoeng 11 km 6. Jipal Koeper 8 km 7. KoenzuamFujing 6 km 8. Kopgwai Muduut 7 km 9. Longme Bogot 5 km 10. Mugaan Miket 3 km 11. Rundum Zukal 8 km 12. Soekoetko Kwa 3 km 13. Watam Kwanoeng 5 km 14. Yimpang Fungleet, Later to leet, Chim, Njak, etc
12 km

The fountain habitations of the offspring of Dafyar in Dashe's (2002) Monograph

The Mernyang realized early how rain-based agriculture rendered most of the year without farm work. Therefore they engaged in hunting and trade especially in the dry season. They trade with the Hausas in the North and the Tiv, Alago, (keana) Azara, Awe, Igala, Igbira, Nupe, and other tribes in the forest regions. These are trade expeditions that expose them to systems and institutions of other civilizations much earlier than their neighbors in the "Corn belt". Therefore when the early Catholic Missionaries arrived at Shendam in the first decades of 20th century, they later paid visits to Kofyar area with the aims of Christianizing the people. They later settled in Kwa for evangelical work and in that process established primary school in the Kwa parish which covered the present Pan Chiefdom, parts of Mangu local government area, parts of Pankshin local government area, parts of Mikang local government area and parts of Shendam local government area.

1.3 GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION

The Mernyang ethnic group predominantly occupies a sizeable territory of southern part of plateau state which is located in the middle belt of Nigeria. They were formally under Shendam Local Government Area but as a result of population, there is an increment of local government which results in the Mernyang being presently under QUA'AN PAN local government area of plateau state.

1.4 SOCIO-CULTURAL BACKGROUND

The Mernyang speaking people have a mode of life which is peculiar to them as an entity. Perhaps it is right to point out the fact that the people are very much tied to their culture wherever they are seen, their pattern which is almost not easily dispensed with moves with them.

Mernyang is one of the languages spoken in Southern part of Plateau state and the population of its speakers is over (7,000) though the entire Mernyang speakers are over 1.9 million.

The community speaking this particular Mernyang language is called "KWA, KWANG and DOKAN-KASUWA" though there are some other communities under the southern province who speak Mernyang too; except that there are changes in the intonation that is, the tongue of pronouncing word is different.

RELIGION

Christianity is the dominant religion practiced by the Mernyangs. Consequently, majority are Christians although very small percentages are Muslims. Religion plays an important part in the life style of the Mernyangs. The norms and principle of Christianity influence the behavioural pattern of the people. This may be the reason why they are very much dedicated

to their religion.

MARRIAGE

Marriage or wedding according to the Mernyang people is called "dyik". To them there are various ways of getting a partner before a wedding ceremony, these could either be through "matgap"/ "mat ya" (a situation whereby family, most especially the daugo's family, most (man's family) fell in love with another family which could either be because the loved family are in good health, have good blood, good character etc. Then for this reason, the daugo's family will like to marry from the family in the process, both parents will make sure the kids get closer to themselves by trying to make a bond between them.

Another way of getting a partner in Mernyang is through normal courtship. This way of getting a wife happens when a man or woman found the man who loves her dearly she then went ahead to inform her parent about the man and the parent now fixed a date to meet with the man. In other to know if the man is capable and serious with getting married to their daughter. The next step to be taken after daugo has met with the Namat parent is the meeting of the both parent which is then called the introduction. In this process, there is a spokeman from the daugo side, who do all the talking about the love they have for their daughter and the care they will give to her after getting married to their son.

It is important to note that during the wedding introduction in Mernyang and after the marriage the biological parents of the bride will not serve or stand as the parent of the bride but a representative from the father (Nda) side and must be a man i.e. the uncle of the bride who is called "ndadyila" or "ndalarep". It is this ndadyik or ndalarep that takes all the responsibility of the bride's parent and after the wedding. It is this same ndadyik or ndalarep that makes a list of what the groom's family will bring. The list contains items like bene seed (lem), goat (oek he and she), fowl (both he and she), mous, Roll call (money), wrapper (cloth) etc. All these are very important and the quantity depends on the bride's family. Also mous apart from all the items mentioned is the most important and must be brought along by the groom's family and shared between both families during the wedding introduction. Mous is a must to be taken during the special day in Mernyang.

Mernyang wedding ceremony is different from the Yorubas or Igbos who after doing the introduction then proceeds to doing of engagement ceremony and lastly the real wedding, but the Mernyang rather prefer doing introduction with some ceremony such as didiel and diloe goen traditional wedding.

Didiel is a ceremony that takes place during process of wedding and a way of telling the relations to be that she is getting married. In this process all her relations make contribution for her so that she will have things to take along to her husband's house. These contributions could either be money, clothes etc.

Dialoe goen is another ceremony to honor the mother of the girl i.e. the bride to be in the process to wedding. Lastly, after this then a day for the real wedding will be fixed.

FESTIVAL

The Mernyang have quite a number of festivals, each of these festivals has reason and beliefs that support it. For instance, the Shikaam festival which is popularly common among the

Mernyang, which carries several mind robbing folk dances, folk songs, cultural artifacts and several other activities to inform, educate and entertain the entire Mernyang nation, their supporters and neighbors.

DRESSING

A typical Mernyang dressing consist of a wrapper, head tie and shawl thrown over the shoulder for the woman. This is particularly born out of the ethnics of Muslim religion which peaches against any form of exposure of the body of women. In addition to this, a typical Mernyang woman weaves her hair in the local fashion. Due to civilization, a typical man now dress in shirt and trouser forgoing their mode of dressing in traditional way, except if a festival is going on or the celebration of Christmas, Sala ceremony, wedding and naming ceremony took place he then dresses in their traditional way. The same thing is peculiar to women who now dress in skirt and blouse, even wearing of trousers and also making their hair in different kinds of forms.

OCCUPATION

The Mernyang people are engage in a number of professions as evidences in our major towns and villages where they are found. These profession include farming, hunting (such as Moe Nau o those who hunt with bows and arrows. Moe Kwat Teer or those who spend days or even weeks hunting big games) weaving carving of wood, fishing, and host of others. They are also good horse rider.

Generally, the Mernyang are peaceful and rather hospitable people who are usually prepared to socialize with people from other ethnic group

ADMINISTRATION

The Mernyang engaged themselves in a process or act, in organizing the way they are to rule or governed. The Mernyang are ruled or governed by "long pan" (chief of pan) which is the overall traditional head of the whole pan chiefdom and being assisted by the "long" (i.e those who rank are not up long pan which is the head of the Qua'an pan council)

In a nut shell, the Mernyang are not like the Yorubas or Igbos who have the King as their head and the chief as an assistants or helpers to the King in running the kingdom rather, the Mernyang ruling council are all known as "long" (chief). The overall head of the pan, district head, and youth representative etc are regarded as "long" (chief). But it is important to note that in Mernyang, there is no superiority in "long" (chief). In addition to this, the pan council are called and known to be pan chiefdom and not pan kingdom because there administration is based on chief and not king.

ASPECTS OF MERNYANG MORPHOLOGY

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