

## Dialect conflict resolution and choice of standard variety for Mankon dialect cluster

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*The dialect cluster of Ngemba, (Grassfield Bantu, Cameroon- Ethnologue 2005) made up of Mankon, Akum, Mbatu, Nsongwa, Chomba and Njong dialects has not yet been standardized, despite its strategic importance as principal language of Bamenda, the provincial capital of North West Province of Cameroon. This is due to dialectal conflicts of an ethno-historical and social nature that seem to polarize attitudes negatively towards Mankon, the potential reference dialect for standardization as recommended by Williamson (1971), Leroy (1977, 2007), ALCAM (1983), Seguin (1989, 1994), Sadembouo & Hasselbring (1991), Chibaka (2008) etc. There is an urgent need to resolve the conflict and proceed with the standardisation process in response to government's recent call for the need to use this and other languages in education. This paper presents the results of a study to this effect that seeks (i) to verify attitudes of speakers of the five dialects towards Mankon (ii) to evaluate the adequacy, centrality and suitability of Mankon as a reference dialect in terms of standard criteria (intelligibility, demographic factor, historicity, prestige, status etc.). With respect to methodology, we adapted the SIL **sociolinguistic survey questionnaires**. Twelve groups and sixty individual questionnaires were administered, and the **Recorded Text Test (RTT)** was administered to ten speakers from each of the five dialect varieties of the languages. The results of the research show, inter alia, that all the dialects are relatively mutually intelligible with an intelligibility index of at least 80%. Also, apart from Akum, all the other dialects are favourable in varying degrees to the use of Mankon as the reference dialect. This leads to the recommendation that Mankon should serve as reference dialect in the standardization process, while efforts are made to reconcile the linguistic community in line with the attitudinal and intelligibility findings, with particular sensitization of the Akum group via principles of '**Attitude Engineering**' (Chumbow 2008:16) to enhance community-wide acceptability of the standardised product.*